

Past and Present Economic Status of West Bengal: A Review

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Abstract - Economic development is the process through which a country transformed from one position to another. Economic progress, therefore, covers almost all aspects of a socio-cultural segment of a country. Various economic parameters influence the growth of the state, West Bengal. Among them, agriculture and industrial development play a crucial role. West Bengal ensures its position as the sixth-largest state economy in India. From agriculture to software, this state makes remarkable progress. The target of this development is people-centric. The focal issue is to give a better living standard to the people.

Keywords: West Bengal, Human Development Report, Economy, Agriculture, Mineral, Industry, Transport, Tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

An economic condition is one of the most crucial elements, through which the quality of life of a nation, region or local community can be improved. Economic circumstances are measured to be positive or negative, based on its expansion. An economy can be achieved sustainable development if it brings a growth of production in an environment-friendly way. Moreover, it should also maintain a balance between the growth of production and the growth of population. The economy aims to utilize resources optimally to ensure a better standard of living for the people. In 2017-18 West Bengal's Gross State Domestic Product was about Rs 10.21 trillion, which was remarkably high in comparison to the country (About West Bengal State: Tourism, Industries, Agriculture, Economy & Geography, 2018). This state is primarily dependent on agricultural products and medium scale industries along with some large scale industries in some pockets (Rising Bengal: The land of opportunities, 2011). The basic scenarios of economic sectors are discussed below:

II. AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Agriculture occupies an essential place in the economy of West Bengal. It provides not only food to the large and fast-growing population but also supply raw materials to numerous agro-based industries within the state and outside the state (Sarkar, S. & Ghosh, T.K., 2017). Mainly 70 per cent of the working population is directly or indirectly engaged in agricultural sectors in this state. In the initial stage this state practiced subsistence agricultural pattern. However in last three decades the position is shifted toward commercialization pattern (Aktar, N., 2015).

Due to the deposition of large alluvium, this state is considered one of the most fertile regions in the country. So there is enormous scope for the improvement of agricultural productivity per hectare (Soil science, 2015).

Small and marginal agro-based farms also increased their income levels in rural as well as the urban sectors (Ghosh, JK. *et al.*, 2009). Since 1985, the state faced a turnaround in productivity of agriculture. These were caused by technological and institutional change.

Successful implementation of land ownership ('Operation Barga') and access to institutional credit help to expand the agricultural segment in global arena also. The 1980s marked as a decade where high productivity was seen; however, the growth stimulus did not globally encourage agricultural diversification (Bardhan. P & Mookherjee. D, 2003).

Based on temperature, humidity and precipitation, West Bengal can be divided into six agro-climatic zones.

TABLE I AGRO-CLIMATIC ZONE

Agroclimatic Zone (Cultivable Area in Ha.)	Comprising Districts / Part Of District	Name of The Block
Northern Hill (167054)	Darjeeling (Excepting Siliguri Sub-Div.)	Darjeeling-Pulbazar, Rangali-Rangliot, Sukhiapokhri, Kalimpong-I, Kalimpong-II, Garubathan, Mirik, Kurseong
Terrai- Tista Alluvial (657754)	Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Siliguri Sub-Div. of Darjeeling, Islampur Sub Div. of U/Dinajpur	Siliguri-Matigara, Naxalbari, Kharibari, Rajganj, Malbazar, Metiali, Nagrakata, Moynaguri, Dhupguri, Falakata, Madharihat, Kalchini, Alipurduar-I, Alipurduar-II, Kumargram, Haldibari, Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga-I, Mathabhanga-II, Coochbehar-I, Coochbehar-II, Tufanganj-I, Tufanganj-II, Dinhata-I, Dinhata-II, Sitai, Sitalkuchi, Chopra, Islampur, Goalpukur-I, Goalpukur-II, Karandighi

<p>Gangetic Alluvial (1739644)</p>	<p>Western Part of Malda, Southern part of U/Dinajpur, Eastern Parts of Murshidabad, Hoogly, Burdwan, North-Eastern Part of Howrah, Parts of Birbhum, Bankura, Two Medinipur, Northern Parts of Two 24 Parganas</p>	<p>Raiganj, Kaliaganj, Hemtabad, Itahar, Ratua-I, Ratua-II, Harishchandrapur-I, Harishchandrapur-II, Chanchal-I, Chanchal-II, Manikchak, old Malda, English Bazar, Kaliachak-I, Kaliachak-II, Kaliachak-III, Farakka, Samserganj, Suti-II, Raghunathganj-I, Raghunathganj-II, Sagardighi, Nabagram, Lalgola, Bhagawangola-I, Bhagawangola-II, Murshidabad-Jiaganj, Berhampur, Hariharpara, Raninagar-I, Raninagar-II, Jalangi, Domkal, Naoda, Beldanga-I, Beldanga-II, Santipur, Chakdah, Hanskhali, Ranaghat-I, Ranaghat-II, Haringhata, Kaliaganj, Krishnaganj, Karimpur, Nakashipara, Nabadwip, Chopra, Tehatta-I, Tehatta-II, Krishnanagar-I, Krishnanagar-II, Bagdah, Bongaon, Gaighata, Baduria, Habra-I, Habra-II, Barasat-I, Barasat-II, Amdanga, Deganga, Rajarhat, Bashirhat, Barrackpore, Baruipore, Bhangore-I, Bhangore-II, Bishnupur-I, Bishnupur-II, Sonarpur, Budge-budge-I, Budge-budge-II, Mahestala-Metiabaruz, Jadavpur-Behala, Ketugram-II, Katwa-I, Katwa-II, Purbasthali-I, Purbasthali-II, Kalna-I, Balagarh, Chinsurah-Mongra, Serampore-Uttar Para, Chanditala-I, Chanditala-II, Domjur, Jagatballavpur, Bali-Jagacha, Sankrail, Panchla</p>
<p>Vindhya Alluvial Zone (&60781)</p>	<p>Western Part of Murshidabad, Eastern Part of Birbhum and D/Dinajpur, Central Parts of Burdwan and two Medinipur, Northern Parts of Howrah, Eastern Fringe Of Bankura and Malda</p>	<p>Gazole, Habibpur, Bamongola, Banshihari, KushmandiGangarampur, Kumargram, Tapan, Balughat, Hilli, Kandi, Bharatpur-I, Bharatpur-II, Burdwan, Khargram, Burdwan, Ausgram-I, Bhatar, Memari-I, Memari-II, Jamalpur, Raina-I, Raina-II, Khandaghosh, Galsi-I, Galsi-II, Kalna-II, Manteswar, Mangalkote, Ketugram-I, Arambagh, Khanakul-I, Khanakul-II, Purshurah, Goghat, Jangipara, Polba-Dadpur, Dhaniakhali, Pandua, Singur, Haripal, Tarakeswar, UdayNarayanpur, Amta-I, Amta-II, Labpur, Nanoor, Mayruswar-II, Nalhati-II, Rampurhat-II, Patrasayar, Kotolpur, Indus, Ghatal, Daspur-I, Daspur-II, Potashpur, Panskura-I, Panskura-II, Mayna, Debra, Pingla, Dantan-I, Dantan-II, Narayangarh, Mohanpur, Sabong,</p>
<p>Coastal Saline Zone (874438)</p>	<p>Southern Parts of Two 24-Parganas, South-Eastern Parts Of PurbaMedinipur, Southern Part of Howrah</p>	<p>Haroa, Minakhan, Swarupnagar, Hansabad, Hingalganj, Sandeshkhali-I, Sandashkhali-II, Bashirhat-II, Jaynagar-I, Jaynagar-II, Kultali, Canning-I, Canning-II, Basanti, Sagar, Falta, Magrahat-I, Magrahat-II, Kakdwip, Namkhana, Diamond-Harbour-I, Diamond-Harbour-II, Mathurapur-I, Mathurapur-II, Patharpratima, Mandirbazar, Kupli, Goshaba, Shyampur-I, Shayampur-II, Bagnan-I, Bagnan-II, Uluberia-I, Uluberia-II, Khejuri, Bhagabanpur-I, Bhagabanpur-II, Ramnagar-I, Ramnagar-II, Egra-I, Egra-II, Contai-I, Contai-II, Contai-III, Tamluk-I, Tamluk-II, Mahishadal-I, Mahishadal-II, Nandigram-I, Nandigram-III, Sutahata-I, Sutahata-II</p>
<p>Undulating Red & Lateritic Zone</p>	<p>Purulia, Bankura, Western Parts of Birbhum, Burdwan and Two Medinipur</p>	<p>Faridpur, Kanksa, Hirapur, Andal, Salanpur, Barabani, Raniganj, Kulti, Asansol, Jamuria-I, Jamuria-II, Aushgram-II, Nalhati-I, Muraroi-I, Muraroi-II, Mayureswar-I, Rampurhat-I, Mahamad Bazar, Sainthia, Bolpur, Dubrajpur, Nilambazar, Rajnagar, Suri-I, Suri-II, Khoyrasal, Hura, Pancha, Manbazar-I, Manbazar-II, Raghunathpur-I, Raghunathpur-II, Bagmundi, Arsha, Bunwan, Jhalda-I, Jhalda-II, Neturia, Kashipur, Sanpuri, Para, Purulia-I, Purulia-II, Balarampur, Jaipur, Barabazar, Sonamukhi, Jaipur, Bishnupur, Ranibandh, Gangajalhati, Barjora, Saltora, Onda, Taldangra, Simlipal, Mejhina, Raipur-I, Raipur-II, Chhatna, Indpur, Bankura-I, Bankura-II, Khatra-I, Khatra-II, Chandrakona-I, Chandrakona-II, Jhargram, Binpur-I, Binpur-II, Jambani, Nayagram, Sankrail, Gopiballavpur-I, Gopiballavpur-II, Keshiary, Salboni, Keshpur, Garbeta-I, Garbeta-II, Garbeta-III, Medinipur, Kharagpur-I, Kharagpur-II</p>

Source (West Bengal Agriculture: An Overview, 2016

III. MINERALS

West Bengal is an abundant mineral based state. Mineral resources are very important for industrial development. The mineral resources are mainly found in Duars in the northern part of the region which includes Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts and in the western part consisting of the districts like Purulia, Bankura, Bardhaman, Birbhum, and Medinipur districts in the southwest part of the state (Mineral-Based Industries, 2014). Coal is the essential mineral of the region as it is one of the primary sources of power and raw material.

Due to its large coal deposits, Raniganj coalfield in Bardhaman in West Bengal ranks 2nd among the coalfield of India. Mainly Bituminous type of coal is available there. In 1920, the first Indian coal industry was opened in this area at Sitarampur. The Raniganj coal belt extends beyond the border of West Bengal into the Chotanagpur plateau region of Bihar. The other mineral ores, like iron, copper, lead, zinc, etc. are also available here in a large amount (Indian Coal and Lignite Resources, 2017).

This region is connected to Kolkata by a well-developed network of roadways and railways. The proximity to Kolkata has helped in establishing mineral-based large scale industries around Asansol in Bardhaman district (Brief Industrial Profile of Burdwan District West Bengal).

One of the most sophisticated industrial complexes developed near Durgapur (State industrial profile of west Bengal, 2019). Large deposits of limestone are found in Jhalda of Purulia district. Jhilimili in Bankura districts is famous for limestone and dolomite deposits (Mahato, S. & Josh.B.B., 2013). Dolomite also extensively found in the foothills of Himalaya (Baidya, T.K., 2015). Manganese ore has been quarried in Belpahar near Gidni, Medinipur (Bhadra, S., 2014). The mineral resources of West Bengal provide rich sources of industrial raw materials for the growth of highly developed industrial belts in this state.

IV. INDUSTRIES

In the era of post independent period industrial development was mostly flourished in this state. Industrial development can be divided into certain phases:

1. **The Era of Pre-1950s:** Bengal has experienced a very long industrial history since ancient time. Sector-wise industrial development was a widespread scenario along with the cottage industries. Silk weaving in the rural areas of Murshidabad and Malda, metalwork of Bishnupur, embroidered clothes of Dacca, conch-shell bangles and pearl button of Kharagpur and rural area of Dacca were significant examples of ancient industries of Bengal. When the British arrived first in India, Bengal was the wealthiest province. Cotton handloom industry of Bengal was the most flourished industry at that time (Saini, A. *et al.*, 2015). However,

its decline was started in the early nineteenth century due to some economic and political causes. De-industrialization was started in the mid-19th century, and Bengal was passed through the worst condition (Nandi.B, 2015). During the colonial era, Bengal was the leading industrial province in British India (Census Reports, 1931).

2. **The Era of 1950 to 1970:** The era of 1951 was essential for the initiation of the 'First Five Year Plan.' The annual report showed a compound growth rate of industries within the state which is 5.7 per cent of the country. It increased to 7.2 per cent in the 2nd Plan and further rose to 9.0 per cent during the 3rd Plan. During the period 1951-65, West Bengal's industries also prospered keeping pace with the all-India industrial growth rate (Problems of West Bengal Industries, 1955). In the period 1951-65, the value of industrial output in West Bengal increased by 28.7 per cent. Registered factory employment in West Bengal during this period increased by about 35.02 per cent (Lahiri. A, 2016).
3. **The Era of 1970 to 1980:** During this period, India faced an industrial recession. Several significant reasons can be drawn to indicate the reason for the recession. First, due to the Indo-Pak war (1965 and 1971), public investment was put to unproductive uses which lead to the decline in the growth of the industrial sector. Secondly, successive draughts (1965-66 and 1966-67 and later 1971-72 and 1972-73) reduced the growth of agricultural production and adversely affected the industrial development. Thirdly, the oil crisis (1973) led to a significant imbalance in an industrial region. These entire situations created an industrial recession in the economy of West Bengal (Ray, S.C, 2011).
4. **The Era of 1980 to 1990:** A relatively buoyant situation has prevailed during this era in West Bengal. Lack of interest was shown among the big investors to invest in the large scale industrial sector in the state (Chaudhuri, B. *et al.*, 2014).
5. **The Era of 1990 to 1996:** From 1990- 96 a positive industrial growth was knocked at the doorstep of West Bengal. There were two phases of industrial growth in the above mentioned period. The first four years of this period were faced with a prolonged recession. In the second phase (1992-96), steady industrial growth had been seen after a prolonged industrial deceleration (Karak .A, 2017).
6. **The Era of 1997 and Onwards:** 1997 was a year which was signified as a noticeable positive changing year for industrial development. In this year, the State Government announced an investor-friendly industrial policy. This friendly attitude of the leftist government built confidence in the minds of private investors. This situation opened the private capital investment in the economic backdrop of the state (Sen. R, 2009). In addition to these, the state government has taken up a scheme for developing the infrastructural segment as well such as road transports, development of the

power sectors etc. (Power for all, Government of West Bengal. (2016). As a result, industrial output in West Bengal increased quite satisfactorily. It got further momentum from the year 2002. For additional development, the state government has taken many steps for development in another potential sector, i.e. Information Technology (I.T.). In this context, it is a remarkable decision for the state for its future (Burange. L.G. & Yamini. S, 2011).

V. DEVELOPMENT IN THE POWER SECTOR

In the power sector, West Bengal has made extensive development in recent years. Purulia Pumped Storage Project, Teesta Canal Fall Hydro Electric Project, Gouripore Thermal Power Project added advantages to the power generation capacity of the state.

These projects have made West Bengal self-sufficient in electricity. According to data published by Central Electricity Authority, 9984.4 MW power capacity compared to 303.083 GW of the country was ensured in this state. 8523.83 MW was installed, and 1,328.3 MW was contributed by hydropower and renewable power (2016) together in West Bengal, which was very much notable (All India Installed Capacity (In Mw) Of Power Stations, 2016).

West Bengal alone contributed 13826 MW in the power supply section in March 2016, which was very high compared to the whole country. According to the state report, 37449 out of 37463 villages in the state were cumulatively electrified (Progress Report on Village Electrification, 2016).

VI. DEVELOPMENT IN THE HOUSING SECTOR

The State Government has been constructing a large number of houses and flats in different locations to overcome the rapid demand. The West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO) is playing a vital role in this field. With the financial assistance from HUDCO and National Housing Board, several housing projects have been completed in recent years to meet up the requirement. The West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (WBIDFC) is also providing finance for the development of the housing sector in remote areas (Roy, A., & Siddique, G., 2018).

VII. TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Transport System in West Bengal may be considered as relevant for carrying out various research works because of its faster development. The function performed by the transport department of West Bengal can be discussed as followed:

1. Control of transport vehicles through the State Transport Authority (STA) and the Regional

Transport Authorities (RTA) constituted under the Motor Vehicles Act.

2. Supervise and control the function of Calcutta State Transport Corporation (CSTC), North Bengal State Transport Corporation (NBSTC), South Bengal State Transport Corporation (SBSTC), 21 Calcutta Tramways Company (CTC) Ltd. and Inland Water Transport Corporation (IWTC) in this section.
3. Enforcement of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act (MVA)/ Rules and West Bengal M.V. Tax Act, Road Transport Workers' Act and other Acts.
4. Development and maintenance of the Inland Waterways through Indian Vessels Act is also stated.
5. Registration of Motor Vehicles.
6. Collection of motor vehicles tax under the West Bengal Motor Vehicles Tax Act, and collect fees and fines under the Motor Vehicles Rules (MVR).
7. Generation of licence for the Drivers and Conductors.
8. Adding the administration vehicles in Kolkata and at district headquarters
9. Deployment of vehicles for State Guests and VIPs and mobilization and deployment of vehicles on special occasions like election, flood, etc. also maintained.
10. Operation and maintenance of the state governmental helicopters for the use of VIPs and meeting emergencies must be checked.
11. Imparting training for obtaining private pilot licenses and commercial pilot licenses and administration of the Flying Training Institute, Behala.
12. Checking of Transportation planning and traffic engineering
13. Setting up transfer and transit depots in bus stands and passenger shelters.
14. Liaison functions in respect of passenger transport by railways.
15. Compilation of motor vehicles statistics.
16. Financing and planning of programmes for the improvement of the transport operation, coordination and monitoring also included.
17. Sponsoring of movements of goods by rail on both Govt, and private accounts and liaison with Ministry of Railways in this regard.
18. Advising the State Government on planning procedures and significant policy issues relating to transport (Transport Department: Government of West Bengal., 2016). Mode of the transport scenario is connected with economic uprising for this state. In this state, the total length of National Highways was 2,908 km till May 2014, and in 2018, the total length of N.H. including principle National Highways had reached 3,565 km (West Bengal: Connects To Progress). Headquarter of South-Eastern railway is situated at Garden Reach, Kolkata (South-eastern Railway). The railway on the north side of the state is under the Northeast Frontier Railway section. Kolkata Metro is considered India's first underground metro rail service (Kolkata Metro). On the other hand, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, part of

the Northeast Frontier Railway, has secured its position in the UNESCO World Heritage Site (Mountain Railways of India).

VIII. TOURISM INDUSTRY

West Bengal is a gifted state with all tourism ingredients to address the needs of all type of tourists. With the Himalayan range on the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south, lush green forest and wide range of historical evidence and with pilgrim destinations. Tourism is one of the significant contributing industries. Its sustainable development is paramount for the economic growth for the state (Jana, N. and Tarafdar, S.,2012).

To promote the tourism industry in West Bengal government has taken various steps as follows.

1. Encourage sustainable development in tourism sectors.
2. Promote the local tradition
3. Endorse various activities in tourist spot to attract tourists
4. Identify particular tourism area and promote them.
5. Build collaboration in the public-private sector to sponsor tourism (West Bengal Tourism policy, 2019).

IX. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

Special economic zones (SEZ) were formally approved in West Bengal along with various policies(Special Economic Zones in India). The State Govt. has identified the Information Technology Sector as a priority sector. Sector-V of Salt Lake City recognized as the hub of I.T. units.

The I.T. hub at Sector-V of Salt Lake is India's first fully-integrated Electronic Complex spread over 150 acres of a green pollution-free area near Airport.

The Govt. has also evolved a package of fiscal incentives and regulatory support for encouraging the development of high-end technology in the hardware and software sectors. Research and development relating sectors are also encouraged (State industrial profile of west Bengal, 2015-2016).

X. INVESTMENT AND TRADING CONDITION

In West Bengal, Foreign direct investment (West Bengal, 2010) has mostly come in the manufacturing and telecommunication sectors (Mazumdar.R, 2012). Industrial Policy and Promotion department, Government of India circulated the cumulative FDI inflow in Kolkata from April 2000 to September 2016 (West Bengal: Investment Destination). West Bengal is one of the country's leading exporters of finished leather goods, dried flower, shrimps and tea etc. However, the rapid industrialization process has

given rise to a debate over land acquisition for the industry in this agrarian state (Pal.P, 2013).

XI. DISCUSSION

West Bengal is a significant state of eastern India with its agricultural potentiality to technological advancement. In recent time this state mainly focused towards the reduction of fiscal, and revenue deficit which indicates some positive developments in the present situation. However, the presence of a considerable debt is a burden for the state which needs to be tackled proactively.

On the other hand, increasing social sector expenditure is threading for this state. This situation can be overcome either by extending the government's budget envelope or by rationalizing such expenditure.

Therefore the economy of this state gives a picture of paradox, where one side is underdeveloped, and the other side is highly developed. Backward areas are waiting for exploitation through the promotion of industries, incredibly small scale industries. This situation leads to stagnation and associated civic and economic problems.

The agricultural sector is of fundamental importance issue for this state which is undergoing a process of transition from the subsistence nature to commercial farming over the last few decades. The state has also undertaken numerous industry-specific development programmes which make a silent economic revolution in Bengal. However, taking all factors into account, people are cautiously optimistic about the continuation of the current fiscal trends in this state.

XII. CONCLUSION

West Bengal has enormous diversity in geographic, economic and ethno-cultural aspect. The agricultural sector is an important domain in this region. Majority of the people is attached to this sector for their bread and butter. In the past, this segment of land was the central point for business, but presently it lost its glory. However, a proper scientific decision may uplift the business environment in this region.

In post COVID condition, many people of the different sector will lose their jobs as predicted by the experts. In this backdrop, West Bengal should be self-sufficient in all the economic sectors to re-engage them according to their skills again. These will only be possible if specific economic policies can be established, at various levels.

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