CHAPTER - XII

POWER RESOURCES AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction:

12.0 In Bangladesh, as also in the Lower Tista Basin, the main constraint in the large scale development of Industry and Transport is the practical absence of traditional fuels e.g. coal, oil, water, power etc. There is only one viable hydel producing river project (Kaptai) of the Karnapully river in the Chittagong district of south Bangladesh. Metallurgical coal is totally absent, so also is fuel oil. Moreover the Lower Tista valley being far removed from the worth mentioned power producing pockets, is doubly inconvenienced for the development of modern industries. The country's railways are run by imported diesel or coal. The hydro-electricity from the extreme south can not serve effectively the northern sector. Bangladesh Biman (airways) is also entirely dependent on imported oil. But an overwhelmingly poor country can not much afford to pay the import bills required for meeting the full domestic demand.

Power Supply in the Lower Tista Basin:

12.1 The only salvage is the considerable domestic supply of natural gas from a few individual pockets. Although urban domestic requirement is being met at present by the supply of this gas through pipe lines and filled-in cylinders, it is a far-cry to meet the industrial fuel demand from this source alone. The gas supply for the
Lower Tista Basin's urban elite, mainly comes filled in cylinders from the nearest Sylhet fields e.g. Kailastilla and Haripur.

Energy from unorganised sector:

12.2 So the country, as well as the Lower Tista Basin, is mainly dependent for rural domestic and small cottage industrial requirements on traditional fuels in the unorganised sector e.g. cowdung, jute stick, rice straw, rice husk, bagasse, firewood, twigs, leaves and other wastes. In addition to the above mentioned unorganised sources of energy, human and animal muscle powers are still a mainstay for agriculture, industry and transport. Although power tillers and tractors are very slowly being introduced (Plate 8.3) in farming, ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing etc. are still being mainly done with animal and human muscle power (Plates 12.0 to 12.3). Bulls are also used in thrashing the paddy (Plate 8.2) and to draw the carts (Plate 12.4). Man in many areas lift groundwater manually by using lattha (lever) and foot pumps (Plates 2.1 and 2.3). Even when motor boats are being used in ferry services, ore boats are still very common (Plate 12.5). Power-looms are being used quite frequently now-a-days, but hand-looms are still quite common. Bidi (country smoke) making industry is entirely manual. There are innumerable other cases where muscle power is the main source of energy. In Bangladesh the factory industries are primarily concentrated in the Dhaka-Narayanganj and Chittagang sectors. The nominal growth of factory industries in Lower Tista Basin has created as yet a negligible demand for commercial fuel. Here in this basin both the Railway and Road transport facilities are
very little developed compared to other areas of the country and even to the neighbourhood areas of Rangpur Sader, Rajshahi and Saidpur.

12.3 Incidentally, some mention is needed to be made of the small segment of Mekliganj subdivision of the Koch Bihar district in West Bengal (India). This part of the Lower Tista Basin is fairly well linked up with the rest of India and enjoys the necessary supplies required for its reasonable existence. Of course, the Chhitmahals or enclaves of both the countries in this part of the basin suffers equally for lack of supply of most of the consumer goods.

**Industries:**

12.4 Agriculturally, as the Lower Tista Basin is very rich paddy growing region, as also the reachest tobacco and sugarcane producer, the tobacco and sugar industries have made some progress here. Of course, both domestic (bidi) and urban (cigarette) varieties of tobacco products along with cigars, snuff etc. are made primarily at the cottage industrial level (Plate 12.6). In case of sugar the bagasse is used as fuel for making Jaggery (gurh) rather than refined white sugar. There are large number of hand-looms for making coarse textile products and village towels (gamchha). There are only two smaller cotton textile mills at Kurigram and Nilphamari. The Lalmanirhat district has a railway assembly and repairing unit (Plate 10.0). There are also many brick fields (Plate 10.1) to meet the increasing urban building construction demand. The existence of a medium size vegetable oil-mill may also be mentioned here.
12.5 In the entire Lower Tista Basin there are a large number of cottage industrial units producing various consumer goods, such as, huller (for paddy), Jute and Cotton handlooms, bidi factory, boat and furniture making, tannery and leather, utensils and culinary, pottery, gold and silversmith etc.

12.6 For urban domestic lighting the local diesel thermal power units supply electricity, but most of the rural households are still dependent on lamps and lanterns lighted by imported Kerosene oil. Road transport vehicles such as buses, trucks, cars etc. and water vessels e.g. launches, power ferries etc. are universally dependent on imported oil. A few power tiller or tractors in the agricultural field along with pumps for irrigation (Plate 2.2) are also run with imported diesel. With government patronisation some cowdung-gas (bio-gas) plants are being maintained.

12.7 Last but not the least is the point to be mentioned here that along with various item of food products, many manufactured items are being smuggled in, which may have been required to a great extent for developing local cottage industries in this part of Bangladesh. The Chhitmahals are the rich hunting grounds.