INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study in economic geography of a selected district in West Bengal with special reference to its industrial potential based on the resources available in the district and also with reference to the changing industrial landscape of the surrounding areas. Special emphasis has been laid on the growth potential of the manufacturing industry of the district.

The district of Purulia is located on the Eastern slopes of the Chotanagpur plateau. It was a part of Manbhum district of Bihar, but has since been included in West Bengal consequent on State boundary reorganisation in 1956.

The district has a population of 1.6 million approx (1971). There are seven towns covering an area of 55 Sq Km; 2459 inhabited villages and 228 abandoned villages, covering an area of 6204 Sq Km out of a total area of 6259 Sq Km area of the whole district. Mostly the population is rural, the density being 237 persons per Sq Km. The scheduled castes and tribes form about 17% of the population. In the last decade the rate of increase of population has been 17.86%. As a result of this increase the number of landless workers have increased many times. Broadly, the ratio of workers to non-workers works out to 1:2 i.e. for every person employed there are two without any occupation.

About 22% of the population is literate. A bulk of the unemployed belong to the illiterate category. The number of...

Cont'd...
cultivators is 223,853 and of agricultural labourers 168,089. Because of general infertility of soil, due to erosion and deforestation, the pressure on land is fast increasing. The population is largely dependent upon single crop of rice and the district lacks adequate irrigational facilities. Whenever drought conditions prevail people live a hand-to-mouth existence.

The district has the unique feature of being located in the mineral belt of the eastern region. Important mineral resources like coal, apatite, limestone, china clay felspar, fire clay, fluorite and copper ore found in the district. The proximity to important mineral and industrial centres is an advantage for the industrial development of the district. Purulia town is at a distance of 56, 75, 52 & 94 miles to Tatanagar, Ranchi, Dhanbad and Asansol respectively. Bokaro Steel city, the emerging gigantic industrial township is only 35 miles from Purulia and 7 miles from Purulia and 7 miles from the border of the district. The district can avail of the important developments taking place in the adjacent districts and plan for its developments. The potential will not only lie in the development of horticulture and commercial crops to feed the neighbouring districts, it can also result in the springing up of consumer goods and ancillary industries.

Though the district is self-sufficient in food grains, food and commercial crops have not given rise to industrial activities so far. This is largely due to low level of agricultural development and in some measure to unawareness of the entrepreneurs about the industrial possibilities. The district is traditionally noted for cottage and small scale industries like cutlery and handtools, shellac, brass, and bell metal,
tassar weaving and bidi. The traditional industries have had their ups and downs. Hence, industrialists are on the look out for more stable and lucrative industrial ventures.

From the angle of the exploitation of resource, industrial ventures started so far in the district, literacy, urbanisation and the contribution of income from the secondary and tertiary sectors, the district has been categorised as a backward one, along with seven other districts in the State. The underdeveloped nature of the district's economy has attracted a number of developmental programme and incentives for development. To give a boost to the primary sector, the Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers' Project has been commissioned in the Western Part of the district. A crash programme of rural electrification is planned to be commissioned in the North-Eastern and Western parts of the district very soon. The Santaldih Thermal Power Station have gone into production in the North-East. The important developments in agriculture and industries in the adjoining district of West Bengal and Bihar extend their sphere of influence to this district. The entrepreneurs of the region have to be made alive to the opportunities they have before them. In this direction, the incentives offered for backward areas by the Planning Commission, the Industrial Development Bank of India and Industrial Finance Corporation are very timely. With proper guidance and initial help the prospective entrepreneurs can rise to the occasion and endeavour to transform the locational advantages and resource potential into industrial opportunities.

It has now been accepted that for meeting the aims of planned development with social justice, it would be necessary to lay emphasis on setting up of small and medium scale industries,
apart from large scale ventures. The small and medium scale industries could be planned in such a way that they become complementary to the large scale units around Purulia. That would lead to diffusion of industrial activities in different parts of the State, and help in promotion of centres of economic growth. If that could be done, it would help dual objectives of decentralisation of industrial activities and widening of the scope of employment.

In any scheme of industrialisation, the need for optimum utilisation of available raw materials and setting up of industrial units based on industrial rocks and minerals, would obviously have to be given due priority of attention.

As industries are likely to be attracted or to migrate towards industrial metropolis, because of availability of infrastructural facilities, skilled manpower, existence of market for finished products, it would be necessary to evolve a suitable strategy for solving the problems likely to be faced in the setting up of mineral based industries in this industrially backward district. Constraints which come in the way of setting up of industries based on locally available raw materials will have to be removed.

Purulia is located at the centre of industrial activities. In fact it is already in the vortex of the industrial cyclone raging around. But still it is an industrially backward spot. By sheer merit of geographical location, it is an ideal site for setting up of such industries which could interact with the major industries around the district. Viable small and medium scale industries, if properly planned to be complementary and ancillary to the major industries, can transform the district from a backward to an industrially advanced one.