

Changing Course of Rivers in Murshidabad Effecting Growth of Development and Features of Some Principal Towns and Socio- Political outlook.

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Abstract - Murshidabad district of West Bengal is one of such backward districts identified in Human Development Report (HDI-0.46, 2004) and it belongs to the huge diversity in terms of geographic phenomena. Agriculture is the predominant economic activities followed by cottage and small industries in the form of Biri, ivory and woodcraft, Indian cork (SHOLA PITH), bell metal (KANSA) and well known silk industry. Having a Muslim population of 63.67 percent, Murshidabad considered itself as the highest Muslim minority concentrated district not only in West Bengal but also in India, Bhagirathi was the main flow of Ganga, hundreds of years ago. The present channel of the Bhagirathi, with its sacred traditions and ruined cities, marks the ancient course of the river Ganga. It was the main trading link between north India and the south Asian countries through the Bay of Bengal, Sir William Willcock said, "The Bhagirathi, The Jalangi and the Mathabhanga as the 'overflow irrigation system' in Ancient Bengal." Gradually sitting of Bhagirathi caused it to change its course. International status of these articles is very important because many ships came to India by River and relate to foreign trade. To study how rivers cause of destruction at the same time construction of village and town and it changes the centre of peoples hope and aspiration and brings social change.

Keywords: *Murshidabad, Bhagirathi, Development, Changes, overflow. Socio-political*

I. INTRODUCTION

The present study area Murshidabad district lies between 23°43'30" and 24°50'20" north latitude and 87° 49'17" and 88° 46' east longitudes, covering an area of about 5324 sq. km. With district headquarter at Berhampore there are five subdivisions and twenty six blocks in Murshidabad. It has the population of 5866569, among them 3005000 are male and 2861569 are female (Sex Ratio-952). The district is characterized with very high density of population (1102 / sq.km.). The overall literacy of the district is 54.30 percent, among which male literacy is 60.70 percent and female is 47.60 percent (Census of India-2001). Agriculture is the predominant economic activities followed by cottage and small industries in the form of Biri, ivory and woodcraft, Indian cork (SHOLA PITH), bell metal (KANSA) and well known silk industry. Having a Muslim population of 63.67 percent, Murshidabad considered itself as the highest Muslim minority concentrated district not only in West Bengal but also in India. The river Bhagirathi, flowing from north to south through the district, divides it into two almost equal portions which in their geology, their characteristics, their agriculture and even the religion of their inhabitants form a striking contrast to each other. The tract to the west of river is locally known as 'Rarh' and the tract to the east as 'Bagri'.¹ Murshidabad is truly an historical place, replete with historical & tourist spots.

Bhagirathi was the main flow of Ganga, hundreds of years ago. The present channel of the Bhagirathi, with its sacred traditions and ruined cities, marks the ancient course of the river Ganga. It was the main trading link between north India and the south Asian countries through the Bay of Bengal, Sir William Willcock said, "The Bhagirathi, The Jalangi and the Mathabhanga as the 'overflow irrigation system' in Ancient Bengal." Gradually sitting of Bhagirathi caused it to change its course. Captain Sherrill saw the mouth of Bhagirathi by boat, closed by sand. In 1683 AD William Hedges travelled on a palki on his way to Cossimbazar from Mahula, because of shallow water on the river. The common name for the Bhagirathi in English records down to the early of the nineteenth century was the Cossimbazar river. Large island or chars continually appeared in the river channel, some of them many miles in length. Within a year, they were covered with grass known as moonj and tamarisk (Jhau) Jungle higher than an elephant. Captain Sherwill, states that he was seen many such island, "become inhabit declared and cultivated; the population increases, large villages start up; the land revenue is collected for ten or twelve year; and then the whole island disappear within one rainy season."²

In Murshidabad the oldest known channel of Bhagirathi was through Moti Jheel lake situated on the north of Murshidabad town. According to James Rannell this was an oxbow lake of Bhagirathi. This channel originated from the

east of MotiJheel and passing through the north of Ayesbagh, it turned south. A portion of this channel is presently known as 'Basbari Bill'. Turning south from Tiktikipara this channel flowed to 'Boalia Bill', passing through east of chunakhali, west of Hatinagar and Madapur. The Boalia Bill is around 4 miles or 6.4 kilometers in length. From Boalia Bill this channel flowed towards mahula. The Boalia Bill is connected with the Bhandardaha Bill through the putijol Bill, south of Madapur. The Bhandardaha Bill was once an old channel of Bhagirathi. The ancient town of Bholla is located on the eastern banks of Putijol. The Nikileshwar temple of Bholla built during the Sene era, states that this channel of Bhagirathi might have existed around 12th century³. International status of these articles is very important because many ship are came to India by River and relate to foreign trade.

The present study has the following objectives:-

To discover the new towns formed on the bank of Bhagirathi River while some heritage towns are destroyed by the change rivers flow in Murshidabad district. To collect information of many villages in this district which are now on the bed of river of Murshidabad district? To focus on the frequent flood faced by the district as the Bhagirathi flow is decreasing day by day is faced by flood with huge loss. To highlight the problem of the farmers of Murshidabad face as the Jalangi River flow has been collapsed. To study how the river of murshidabad had been used for commercial purpose in the very beginning of modern era, but now it has been stopped and how this commercial use of rivers are stopped and affected the normal life of the people of Murshidabad. To focus on how Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers influence the development of the economic condition of the people of Murshidabad district. To collect information how many heritage palace and buildings have been destroyed by the change of flow of the river Bhagirathi. To study how rivers cause of destruction at the same time construction of village and town and it changes the centre of peoples hope and aspiration and brings social change.

In Murshidabad, the rural population has increased to 5133825 in 2001 from 12, 46,578 in 1901 registered an increase of above 300 percent. The significant fact is that though there is constant increase in rural population from 1901 to 2001 in the district but the percentage share of rural population have shown a constant decrease.⁴ At the same time, there is constant increase in percentage share of urban population to total population of the district from 1901 to 2001. On the whole, there exists a high positive correlation ship between the linear regression and the actual growth trend of urban population. A closer study of the area of different towns of Murshidabad reveals that Berhampore town has the highest geographical coverage with a figure of 16.91 square kilometer and lowest area recorded as 2.23 square kilometer by Beldanga in 1971. Berhampore, the only class-I town of the district continued to be the biggest

among the towns. There is no very meaningful change in geographical area in two successive inter-censal years of 1971 and 1981. But, the total population in the urban area has successively increased. This signifies the fact of gradual increase in population density. In 2001, only two towns recorded a slight increase in their geographical area. But, as far as total urban area is concerned, there is gradual increase of total urban area in the district from 86.9 sq. km. in 1971 to 128.89 sq.km. in 2001, indicating an increase of 48 percent. There is a net addition of 41.91 sq.km. to total urban area of the district due to addition of 11 new urban centers in 2001.⁵

Urbanization as a process is the result of the concomitant growth of many demographic components because the urban population is heterogeneous in character. The urban population as a percentage of total population of Murshidabad records a figure of 12.49 Percent in 2001; it 60 was 8.45 percent in 1971. There is a steady increase in percentage share of urban population to total population from 1971 to 2001. The figure of 12.49 percent in 2001 is not really indicative of a phenomenal growth rate in urban population but undoubtedly points to a sizeable growth that would be supported by other indicators. The absolute number of urban population of Murshidabad in 2001 was 7, 32,734 as against 2,48,425 in 1971. It registered an increase over 194 percent in 30 years.⁶ It would be interesting to note that the increase in urban population of Murshidabad in absolute number during last three decades has been quite substantive. Highest absolute urban population is recorded a figure of 72605 in Berhampore whereas, the lowest urban population is recorded a figure of 6304 in Kasim Bazar in 1971. A close study of total urban population throughout three successive decades indicates the steady increase in urban population of each town of Murshidabad from 1971 to 2001.

A study of urban population ratio of the individual towns to the total urban population of the district reveals that the contribution of individual towns of Murshidabad is decreasing over the decades starting from 1971 to 2001. In 1971, there was 11 towns in Murshidabad and Berhampore made the highest share of population with figure of 29.23 percent and lowest was Kasimbazar with a figure of 2.54 percent.⁷ The decrease in share of individual towns to total urban population of the district due to increasing number of towns is a meaningful indicator of urbanization in the context of Murshidbad.

Urbanization and urbanism interchangeably used carry more or less the same meaning. Urbanism indicates the social behavior, how people have adopted themselves to the existing city condition. Urbanism is a goal and objective, a way of life in terms of culture and socio-economic conditions and a state of technique and civilization to be attained through processes of development of socio-economy and technological change moving towards a new balance of human activities and settlement pattern.⁸ Seen in

this context even rural development in terms of social change is a step towards urbanism. The spatial analysis of the degree of urbanism has been made with the help of hypothetical extent of influence exercised by each town in the region. The interaction of one or more towns in a particular area has been the basis of determining the degree of urbanism. The spatial distribution of degree of urbanism clearly brings out three types of areas of influence (1) Areas of single city influence (2) Areas of double city (3) Areas of Municipality.⁹ The major areas are dominated by single city influence. Area under influences is increased over the decades due to addition of new towns in the urban landscape of the district. Amongst the 5 sub-divisions Lalbagh is the most prominent place where most of the tourist objects are located. Most of the tourist places are lying within 4-5 km. except a few. Here is the palace of last Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad. It is the most conspicuous & imposing building in the city of Murshidabad widely known as Hazarduari i.e. the house with thousand doors.¹⁰ It stands on the eastern bank of river Bhagirathi. The foundation stone of palace was laid in 1829 A.D. and completed in 1837 A.D. during the time of Nazim Humayun Jar. Its plan was conceived by General McLeod Dancan. The palace contains artistic treasures, rare pictures, costly jewellery, old arms and many valuable books etc. The Imambara, on the north of the Palace, built in 1847-1848 A.D. is the largest Imambara in the West Bengal. Both Hazarduari & Imambara are under Indian Govt. of Archaeological Deptt. by now.¹¹ Madina is situated inside Imambara- probably built in 1755 A.D. by Siraj-ud-daulla. There is a watch Tower built in 1824-38 A.D. in front of Hazarduari. Nawab Wasef Ali Merza built New Palace or Wasef Manzil in 1904-1906 A.D. after the design of western sculpture of 19-20 centuries. At present it is taken over by Govt. of West Bengal. Murshid Kuli Khan built Khatra Masjid in 1723-24 A.D.. He was buried there after his death 1725 A.D. Now it is taken over by Archaeological Deptt., Govt. of India.¹²

Kherur Mosque is 2 km. away from Bhumisar. Beautiful works of terracotta art raises admiration & wonder of this building. It is now taken over by Archaeological Deptt., Govt. of India. Residence of Zamindar of Nimtita is 5 km away from Bajitpur where Satyajit Roy has made shooting for his famous films 'Jalshaghar' & 'Debi'. Manindra Narayan in 1897 A.D. made Nimtita Hindu theatre where Sisir Bhaduri acted. Farakka Barrage, situated at North-Western of Murshidabad, is a wonderful construction of modern India – 2 km 65 meter long this barrage is the longest barrage of world.¹³ Farakka Thermal project here is made. These, in short, are the most conspicuous tourist spots in this distinct. Besides these, there are hundreds of historically important tourist places which are equally important and sometimes even more to the tourist. This town is one of the most historically enriched places of West Bengal, yet from bad communication roads to pathetic lodging is all what it has got as a reward from our State.¹⁴ I

can bet that if Murshidabad was situated in any other state, it would have had three to four star hotels and an altogether different ambiance.

II. CONCLUSION

Generally a city grows with time. Murshidabad with its past glory seems to going down, which pains me a lot. The lanes are narrow and crowded. Getting a car with skilled driver is a rare scenario. Locating an ATM is not easy. If you have to buy some Murshidabad silk sarees, you have to travel quite a distance inside the main city through narrow lanes. It seems unbelievable but despite going to Murshidabad and Baronagar thrice, I have never been to Berhampore. Even I have taken a single exclusive tour to Bhattbati, but some way I am yet to visit this historical town. Berhampore was essentially a British Cantonment area, especially after the battle of Plassey in 1757. Cossimbazar was a fortified area for some time. Both British and Dutch had established their factory by the middle of the 17th century at Berhampore. ut of the places to see at Berhampore, Cossimbazar Choto Rajbari is the star attraction. Ticketed tour of the premises is allowed as well as photography. The Cossimbazar Boro Rajbari was in a bad shape but has been renovated in recent times. Other interesting places to visit are the Dutch and English cemetery, Byaspur Shiva Temple, Dayamayi Kali Temple and Satidaha Ghat. If time permits take a stroll in the Krishna Nath college, which is somewhat similar to the Oxford University Museum of Natural history.

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