

Changing Course of Rivers in Murshidabad Affecting Growth and Development of Some Principal Towns

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Abstract: *Murshidabad is in the middle of West Bengal lying between 23°43'N and 24°52'N latitude and 87°49'E and 88°44'E longitude with HQ at Berhampur. It has a total area of 5316.11 sq. km. Padma River flows through the entire eastern boundary, separating the district from the districts of Malda and Rajshahi (Bangladesh). Burdwan and Nadia are on the Southern side and Birbhum and the Pakur (Jharkhand) are on the western side of the District. The main river Bhagirathi divides the district into two parts namely 'BAGRI' on the eastern side and 'RARH' on the western side. The district has an international border with Bangladesh covering a distance of 125.35 km of which 42.35 km is on land and the remaining is riverine running along 11 blocks. Murshidabad has 254 Gram Panchayats, 26 blocks, 5 Subdivisions and 7 Municipalities. Total population of Murshidabad has (as per census 2011) male-36,29,595 and female-34,72,835 and literacy rate male 61.25%, female 55.04%. Murshidabad is truly a 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. The international status of these articles is very important because many ships are coming to India by River and relate to foreign trade. I focus on my article on 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

Murshidabad is in the middle of West Bengal lying between 23°43'N and 24°52'N latitude and 87°49'E and 88°44'E longitude with HQ at Berhampur. It has a total area of 5316.11 sq. km. Padma River flows through the entire eastern boundary, separating the district from the districts of Malda and Rajshahi (Bangladesh). Burdwan and Nadia are on the Southern side and Birbhum and the Pakur (Jharkhand) are on the western side of the District. The main river Bhagirathi divides the district into two parts namely 'BAGRI' on the eastern side and 'RARH' on the western side. The district has an international border with Bangladesh covering a distance of 125.35 km of which 42.35 km is on land and the remaining is riverine running along 11 blocks. Murshidabad has 254 Gram Panchayats, 26 blocks, 5 Subdivisions and 7 Municipalities. Total population of Murshidabad has (as per census 2011) male-36,29,595 and female-34,72,835 and literacy rate male 61.25%, female 55.04%. 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 track to the west of the river is locally known as 'Rarh' and the track to the east as 'Bagri'.¹ Murshidabad is truly a 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 Sherwill

saw the mouth of Bhagirathi by boat, closed by sand. In 1683 AD William Hedges traveled on a palki on his way to Cossimbazer from Mahula, because of the shallow water on the river. The common name for the Bhagirathi in English records down to the early of the nineteenth century was the Cossimbazer 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) Jungal higher than an elephant. Captain Sherwill, states that he was seen many such islands, "become inhabit declared and cultivated; the population increases, large villages start-up; the land revenue is collected for ten or twelve years; 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 Ayeshabagh, 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 the 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 the 12th century³. The international status of these articles is very important because many ships are coming to India by River and relate to foreign trade.

The present article has the following objectives:

1. 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.
2. To collect information of many villages in this district which are now on the bed of the river of Murshidabad district?
3. To focus on the frequent flood faced by the district as the Bhagirathi flow is decreasing day by day is faced by flood with a huge loss.
4. To highlight the problem the farmers of Murshidabad face as the Jalangi River flow has been collapsed.
5. To study how the river of Murshidabad had been used for commercial purposes in the very beginning of the modern era, but now it has been stopped and how this commercial use of rivers is stopped and affected the normal life of the people of Murshidabad.
6. To focus on how Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers influence the development of the economic condition of the people of Murshidabad district.
7. To collect information on how many heritage palaces and buildings have been destroyed by the change of flow of the river Bhagirathi.
8. 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 a constant increase in a rural population from 1901 to 2001 in the district the percentage share of the rural population has shown a constant decrease. ⁴ At the same time, there is a constant increase in percentage share of urban

population to the total population of the district from 1901 to 2001 (Table 3). On the whole, there exists a high positive correlation ship between the linear regression and the actual growth trend of the 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 kilometers and the lowest area recorded as 2.23 square kilometers 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 the 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 a 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 are a net addition of 41.91 sq. km. to the total urban area of the district due to the 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. The urban population as a percentage of the 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 the percentage share of urban population to the total population from 1971 to 2001. The figure of 12.49 percent in 2001 is not indicative of a phenomenal growth rate in the urban population but undoubtedly points to a sizeable growth that would be supported by other indicators. The absolute number of urban populations of Murshidabad in 2001 was 7,32,734 as against 2,48,425 in 1971. It registered an increase of over 194 percent in 30 years.⁶ It would be interesting to note that the increase in the urban population of Murshidabad in absolute number during the last three decades has been quite substantive. The highest absolute urban population has 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 the total urban population (Appendix, 3) throughout three successive decades indicates the steady increase in the urban population of each town of Murshidabad from 1971 to 2001.

A study of the 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 were 11 towns in Murshidabad and Berhampore made the highest share of the population with a figure of 29.23 percent and the lowest was Cossimbazar with a figure of 2.54 percent.⁷ The decrease in the share of individual towns to the total urban population of the district due to the increasing number of towns is a meaningful indicator of urbanization in the context of Murshidabad.

Urbanization and urbanism interchangeably used carry more or less the same meaning. Urbanism indicates the social behavior, how people have adapted 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.⁸Seen 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 the 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 the degree of urbanism brings out three types of areas of influence (1) Areas of single city influence (2) Areas of the double city (3) Areas

of Municipality.⁹ The major areas are dominated by single city influence. The area under influence is increased over the decades due to the 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 the 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 the river Bhagirathi. The foundation stone of the 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 Duncan. The palace contains artistic treasures, rare pictures, costly jewelry, old arms and many valuable books, etc. The Imambara, on the north of the Palace, built-in 1847-1848 A.D. is the largest in West Bengal. Both Hazarduari & Imambara are under the 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 Katra Masjid in 1723-24 A.D. He was buried there after his death in 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 raise admiration & wonder of this building. It is now taken over by Archaeological Deptt., Govt. of India. The 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 that 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 that 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.

Jiaganj and Azimganj- the two towns located on opposite sides of the Bhagirathi River, Jiaganj (Ziaganj) on the east bank and Azimganj on the west bank. Baluchar is the original ancestral name of Jiaganj. The name was changed to Jiaganj after the Mughal Empire conquered Bengal, and came to power of Murshidabad. Begamganj is a very old locality in Jiaganj. The main marketplace in Jiaganj (e.g. SabjiMandi) is within this locality. The Boro Govinda Bari is a place of religious interest. The Sarbajanani Durga Puja in Baroaritala and Saraswatitala is the famous and old one. Shibtalaghat is a locality in iaganj near the Bhagirathi river. Bikki Khela Ghar, Anjali Villa, an ancient Shiva temple, etc are located here. Debipur a small neighborhood situated on the banks of the Bhāgirathi-Hooghly river, traditionally known as 'Ganga'. Debipur constitutes ward number 8 of Jiaganj-Azimganj Municipality.

Conclusion:

Generally, a city grows with time. Murshidabad with its past glory seems to go down, which pains me a lot. The lanes are narrow and crowded. Getting a car with a 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 somehow 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. Out 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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