



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI FEDERICO II

Dipartimento di Conservazione dei Beni Architettonici ed Ambientali

Title : Integrated Approaches for Urban Transformation in Dhaka

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23rd Cycle

Integrated Approaches for Urban Transformation in Dhaka

1. Preamble:

Dhaka has become one of the most populous mega-cities in the world due to the growth rush of the last sixty years. During the preparation of the Master Plan for Dhaka in 1959, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) area's population was a fraction over one million (1,025,000 persons).¹ The population of Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area in 1981 became 4.4 million² that rose to 6.9 million in 1991,³ 9.7 million in 2001 and 14.6 million in 2011.⁴ Migration accounted for 60% of the population growth in Dhaka that alone received 40% of the total urban migration of the country.⁵

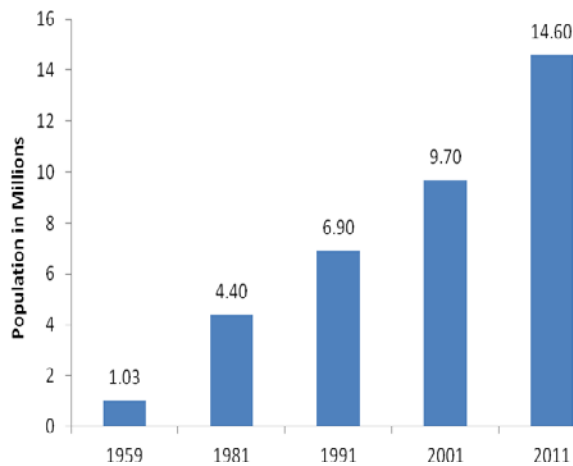


Fig. 1: Growth of Population in Dhaka (1959-2011)

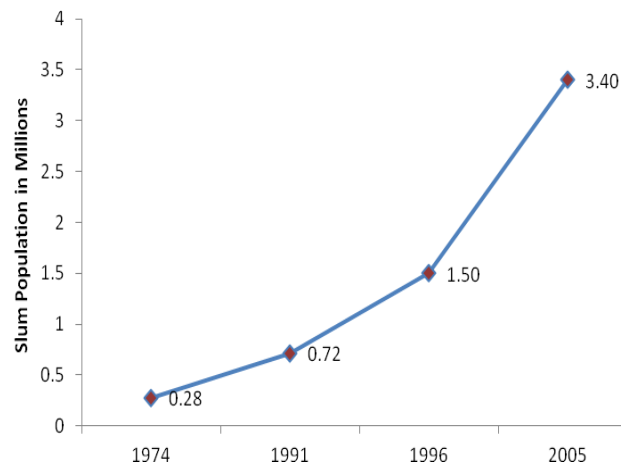


Fig. 2: Slum Population in Dhaka (1974-2005)

The main determinant of the pattern of spatial growth was the location of flood free land where the planned areas developed by the public sector became the preserve of the upper and the upper-middle class. The option remaining for the rest who depended largely on the economy of central Dhaka became limited to accommodating within the existing built-up area or spreading in the high flood risk locations

¹ Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *Strategic Growth Options-Dhaka 2016* (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, Dhaka 1993), p. 06.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (1995-2015), Volume I-*Dhaka Structure Plan* (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, Dhaka 1995), p. 25.

⁴ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh-2013* (Dhaka 2014), pp. 107; 116-19.

⁵ Between 1981 and 1991, migration accounted for 64% of Dhaka's population growth. Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *op. cit.*, pp. 08-10; 43.

adjacent to the existing city core. Contrary to planners' assumption, majority of the population increase was absorbed via densification rather than dispersal. New land absorbed only 32% of the population increase while 68% was accommodated via densification within the already built-up area.⁶

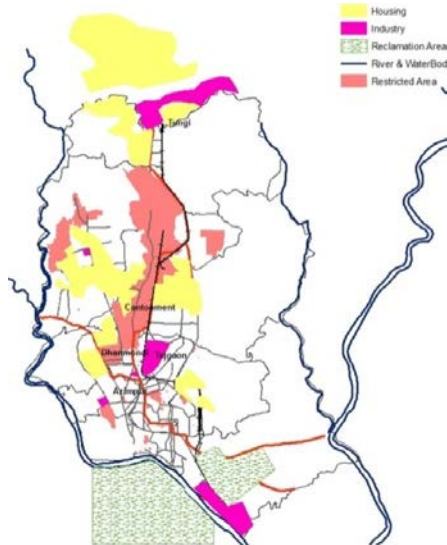


Fig. 3: Proposed Land use for Dhaka⁷ (1959 Master Plan)

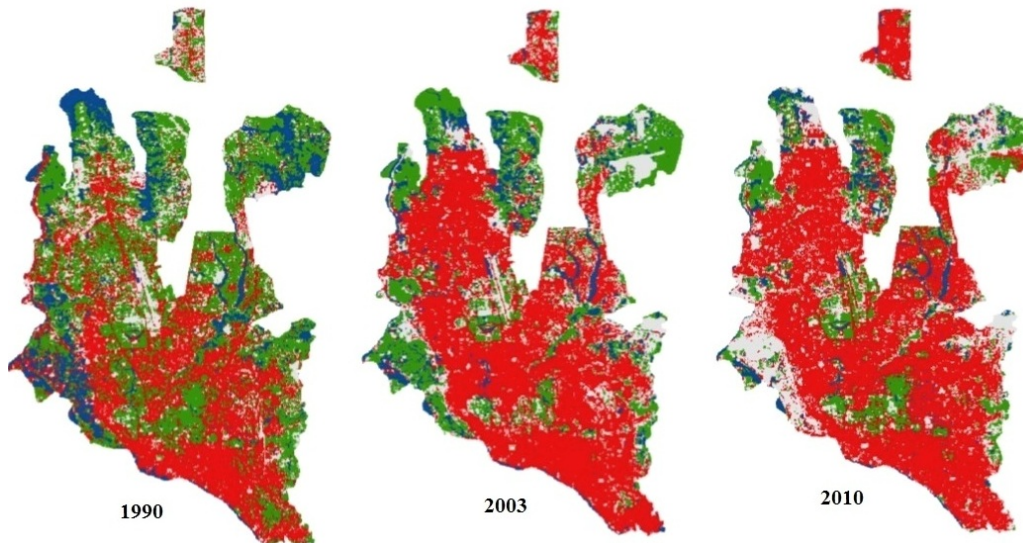


Fig. 3: Actual Growth of Dhaka⁸

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁷ Ahsanul Kabir and Bruno Parolin, 'Planning and Development in Dhaka- A Story of 400 Years' in *15th International Planning History Society Conference*.

⁸ Abdullah Al Mamun et.al. (2013), 'Identification and Monitoring the Change of Land Use Pattern using Remote Sensing and GIS: A Case Study of Dhaka City' in *IOSR-JMCE Vol.6 , Issue 2*.

A large portion of the population especially who arrived in the city due to distress migration found accommodation in squatters and slums. In 2005, 37% of Dhaka's population lived in slums where population density was 2200/ha while the overall gross density in Dhaka was 299/ha. Most of the slum households occupied living units as small as 76-100 sq. ft.⁹

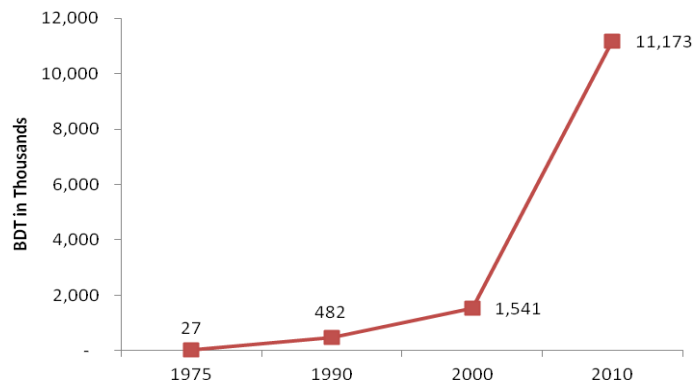


Fig. 3: Rise of per Katha (720 sq ft) land price in Dhaka

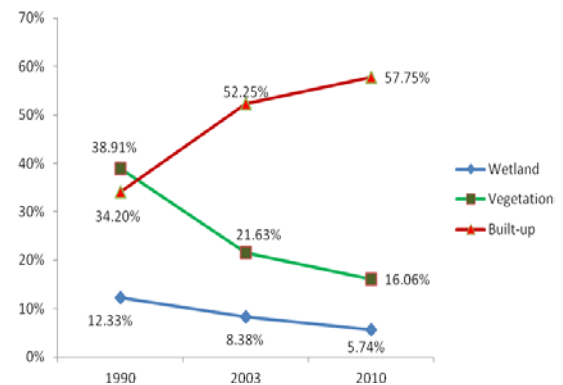


Fig. 4: Change of Dhaka's Landscape Character

2. Problem Statement

In the process of urbanization in Dhaka which has a stretch of high land surrounded by low lying marshes at an average elevation of 1-14 meters at the centre of three major river systems of the Bengal Delta, land has become the most coveted commodity. Average land price in Dhaka rose from BDT 27,000/*katha*¹⁰ in 1975 to 11, 173,000/*katha* in 2010 and created following environmental and socio-cultural externalities.

- i. Conversion of land for urban uses particularly in locations adjacent to the developed and developing areas by filling large tracts of low-lying marshes and agricultural land;
- ii. Encroachment upon natural waterways, canals, land reserved for public infrastructure and resulting imbalance between the interest of individual enterprises and public welfare;
- iii. Deletion of historical city by demolition and transformation with regard to density, urban fabric and historical buildings.

⁹ Nazrul Islam et al., *Slums of Urban Bangladesh Mapping and Census 2005* (Centre for Urban Studies, Dhaka 2006), pp. 12; 20; 40-41.

¹⁰ One *katha* measures 720 sq. ft.; 60 *kathas* make an acre.

2.1. Integration and Disparity

Dhaka represents dysfunctional statutory planning system and an inappropriate institutional setup for governance.¹¹ Bureaucratic and national political priorities dictated Dhaka's growth after Dhaka had lost its middle class and nobility within a decade of Indian Subcontinent's partition in 1947. Dhaka had to bear the impacts of growth rush in an ambience marked by declining nobility, exile of civil society and bureaucratic apathy. The mass exodus and entrance after partition overhauled residents' belongingness while integration became a critical issue as migration accounted for 60% of Dhaka's population.¹²

Dhaka neither had the economic structure to receive the growth rush that instigated the emergence of a large informal sector. Readymade Garments Industry (RMG) emerged as the largest industrial sector taking advantage of the huge pool of unemployed youth who were ready to work for longer hours in low wages.¹³ RMG export from Bangladesh in 2013 stood at 21,515.73 million US dollars.¹⁴ Seventy percent of RMGs are located in and around Dhaka¹⁵ where 28% of the population was classified as poor according to the poverty line set by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank in 2002.

Accessibility to land in Dhaka demonstrates this inequality which is higher than the country average. While 30% of the population belonging to upper layers of socioeconomic hierarchy owned 80% of land, 37% of population occupied only 5% of the city area.¹⁶

2.2. Cultural Confusion

The modifiers of cultural matrix of Dhaka cannot be understood in isolation; it must be correlated to that of East Bengal, which for long was controlled by foreign rulers and traders who spoke different language

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

¹² Sixty percent of Dhaka's population in 1981 was first generation; 81 percent of all household heads were migrants. Nazrul Islam, *Dhaka: From City to Mega City* cited in Elisa T. Bertuzzo, 'Dhaka in its Dwellers' Mind-What Mental Maps Tell about City Life' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, pp. 115; 135.

¹³ Anu Muhammad, 'Wealth and Deprivation: Ready-made Garments Industry in Bangladesh' in *Economic and Political WEEKLY* Vol XLVI No 34 (Mumbai, August 11 2011), pp. 23-24.

¹⁴ BGMEA 2014, <http://bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/TradeInformation#.Uxfu28KPLIU>

¹⁵ Anu Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Nazrul Islam (1986; 2006).

and professed different faith than the majority of the inhabitants. Bengal was included in the Magadhan Empire in the fifth-fourth century BC. The religious and mythical views of the middle Ganges plain influenced and modified worldviews in Bengal but did not include its landscape in the Ganges plain mythical space. The segregation of pragmatic and mythical space marked the beginning of alienation of the upper layers of the social hierarchy from the landscape. The Muslims, who came later believed in the centrality of the Ka'aba and denied localized religious significance of place.

The politico-religious ambience of the Magadhan Empire had fostered simultaneous growth of urbanism and Buddhism in Bengal. Urbanism in Bengal reached its peak during the Kusanas (AD 78-fourth century AD); the democratic representation of important socioeconomic stakeholders of cities especially of the guilds and merchants in administration portrayed the advanced urbanism of the fifth-sixth century AD. However, continuous political struggles and consequent warfare in the middle Ganges plain from the seventh century severed westward trading connections and Bengal entered into an era of localized economy. After the fall of Buddhist Pala kings (AD 1097), foreign rulers ruled Bengal for more than 800 years. Except the period of the independent Sultanates (AD 1342-1538), foreign hegemony dominated Bengal's culture.

Ascent of the locals to important positions in the landed aristocracy and gentry (service holders and professionals) during the British Rule stimulated their appetite for political influence. As they grew in political ambition after the success of the peasant uprisings of the 1870s, they tried to stimulate peasant support for middle class interest e.g. freedom of press, native representation on the legislative council and civil service reform. Mass meetings on civil liberties exposed the abuses of the British and accelerated the cycle of alienation and militancy without questioning the forms of property. At this point, the apprehension of popular uprisings led to the introduction of a religious nationalism allowing the gentry to control and lead a mass movement that might otherwise sweep them away; a radical anti-British feeling cloaked in the symbols of Hindu revivalism emerged.¹⁷ Hindu revivalism tore the society that was characterized by the economic dominance of Hindu landlords over a predominantly Muslim peasantry¹⁸

¹⁷ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, 'Politics and Culture in Bengal' in *New Left Review*, I/79, May-June (London 1973), pp. 88-9.

¹⁸ Badruddin Umar, 'Beesh Shotoker Chiroshthayee Bandabosta' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 199.

and the backwardness of the Muslim gentry who had refused to recognize the British rule on the ground of illegitimacy and refrained from English education or any association with the English culture.¹⁹

The British tactical response to the nationalist uprising was "*divide and rule*". In July 1905, the scheme for partition of Bengal that would create a separate administration, a separate High Court and a separate university at Dacca to provide opportunities for the Muslims to emerge from their backwardness was announced; reaction of the Hindu gentry was electrifying and violent. On the day of partition, October 16, 1905, masses of Hindus ritually bathed themselves in the Ganges River and vowed to dedicate themselves to the anti-partition struggle in front of goddess *Sakti*.²⁰ Muslim groups in East Bengal soon clashed with Hindu anti-partition demonstrators; there were communal riots in different places in 1907. Mass demonstration and political terrorism shook British confidence and in 1911, partition of Bengal was annulled. Annulment of Bengal's partition marked the first success of Indian Nationalism but at the high price of distorting national consciousness through religion.²¹ Bengal was eventually divided into East Pakistan and West Bengal that became parts of Pakistan and India respectively in 1947.

The partition aroused one of the largest religion based population migration in the modern history and the impact on Dhaka, which was a Hindu majority city, was severe. Dhaka lost majority of its middle class and the Hindu nobility. The East Bengal Tenancy Acquisition Act in 1950 abolished the permanent settlement of land revenue and destroyed the structural basis of Dhaka's landed Muslim nobility. The traditional neighbourhoods were ruthlessly altered and in course of time, a part of the riverfront erstwhile lined with noble mansions was converted into a wholesale distribution centre for Dhaka's kitchen markets.

2.3. Summary

The shift in cultural matrix distorted the historic city while Dhaka lost its topographical and hydrological character due to the increasing demand for transformation of land for urban uses. Instead of safeguarding, the politico-bureaucracy distorted and closed Dhaka's major public open spaces to erase the associated historical meanings and restricted access to urban space for the majority who struggle to survive along the poverty line. As the state of adventurer's capitalism marked by the impulse of acquisition through

¹⁹ Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective', pp. 15-6.

²⁰ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²¹ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

exploitation of political or bureaucratic opportunities degraded land into mere property accessible to a few; Dhaka failed to transform into a place of opportunity for all.

Thus, Dhaka failed to address the issues of social integration and to create a visible structure of its cultural identity. Instead of clearing the confusions intrinsic of long foreign rules and reestablishing a cultural identity that belongs to the land and its people, the political parties preferred to exploit the distortions inflicted by separation of pragmatic and mythical space and continued use of religious symbols to their benefit.

3. Objectives

The broad objective of the thesis is to formulate guidelines and evaluation criteria for new projects so that they might help Dhaka to transform into a city that

- i. concretizes shared values and understandings,
- ii. makes communal life possible and meaningful, and
- iii. is inclusive and creates opportunities for growth and prosperity for the common people

The more coveted land became as a commodity in Dhaka, access to natural and historic spaces became more restricted. It aggravated socio-cultural situation in the city which grew largely due to migration and is vulnerable to alienation. Hence, creation of public spaces especially outside, and engagement became the major considerations based on the following premises.

- i. Access to shared public spaces compensates the lack of private space.²²
- ii. Public outsides help people to identify with places and communities.²³
- iii. Negotiation and conflicts that require engagement and arbitration help generate urban communities.²⁴
- iv. Public outsides create opportunities of income generation for the urban poor.
- v. Institutional growth in public domains increases capabilities for growth and mobilization.

²² Charles Correa, *The New Landscape: Urbanisation in the Third World* (Concept Media Ltd. Singapore 1989), pp. 32-35.

²³ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Rizzoli, New York 1980).

²⁴ Jamel Akbar, *Crisis in the Built Environment: the Case of the Muslim City* (Concept Media Pte Ltd, Singapore 1988), pp. 94-104.

As confusions resulting from long foreign hegemony have generated conflicting views, creating a cultural identity is apparently difficult. However, if culture is understood as concretization and abstraction of meanings that are not produced by given economic, social or political conditions but are inherent in the world and to high extent are derived from the locality,²⁵ it becomes simple. Thus, creation of cultural identity in new projects is possible if they gather the properties of place and bring them closer to men.

4. Example of Urban Transformation: Hamburg

Since the 1980s, industrial sites by the northern bank of the Elbe have gradually been integrated to the city of Hamburg. The area today is almost entirely given to working, living, shopping, strolling and socializing. The development began with the extension of the historic Alster arcades and continued into the Hamburg Altona docklands and Hafekrone. The resulting high quality architectures that helped create a new image for Hamburg's waterfront are known as the "String of Pearls". HafenCity farther extended the waterfront of Hamburg. It grew at the heart of the city and reversed the land use pattern of recent trends in development i.e. away from suburban sprawl towards the city centre.

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, a state owned Development Company manages clearance, preparation of land, development of infrastructure, marketing and public relations of HafenCity, which is primarily intended for a diverse mix of uses; offices, retail, gastronomy, culture and entertainment. Award of land does not depend on highest bidding; the final decision often goes in favour of the most convincing usage concept.²⁶ Instead of shopping malls, open-air retail and leisure streets integrate with parks, squares, promenades and the urban spaces on the waterfront; ground floors are set aside mostly for publicly accessible retail and gastronomical uses. Approximately 22% of the new district is water surface, 20% of the rest is public open space and a further 20% are public rights of way.

HafenCity has a cultural focus. Beside the Elbphilharmonie Concert Hall and the International Maritime Museum, the Science Centre designed by architect Rem Koolhaas is going to be the third large cultural institute. The development of HafenCity helped Hamburg to grow inwards by urbanizing former industrial and harbour areas within the city. In the process, HafenCity engaged local and international corporate bodies and involved the nearby residents. It linked the economic growth with new social and

²⁵ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²⁶ HafenCity Hamburg GmbH (ed.), *The Birth of a City: HafenCity, Hamburg* (Langebartels & Jürgens, Hamburg 2009).

cultural demands, reinterpreted the nautical focus of the city and provided the residents with a place for identifying with their hometown.

5. Integrated Approaches for Dhaka

Hamburg provides with helpful guidelines that cities including Dhaka may emulate for urban transformation through new projects. They are,

- i. Greater impact of inner city transformations in comparison with suburban development;
- ii. Importance of open spaces and their relation with built forms;
- iii. Integration of large urban projects with rest of the city
- iv. Override of usage concepts;
- v. Provision of public access and facilities in private properties;
- vi. Foundation of cultural institutes.

Dhaka represents a much larger population and complexities with lesser resource and discontinued tradition of urbanism. The underutilized old airport, the relocation of central jail from old Dhaka and the government decision to change land use pattern of Dhaka's old industrial area are opportunities for transforming these inner city areas where the experiences of HafenCity are useful. However, the challenges to integration of these new projects with rest of Dhaka are more complicated. In absence of an effective institutional framework for governance and the presence of resource constraints, the attitude of new projects in individual plots, however small the size or impact need to change as well. As Louis Kahn put it, *'the street is dedicated by each house owner to the city'*, when individual projects at different parts of the city will combine efforts to create meaningful streets, extend space to pedestrians, facilitate access and opportunities for growth of others, the city start to transform in a real sense.

Another critical issue for Dhaka remains the modalities for transformation of land for urban uses. As long as, creative ideas for generation of social capital are not combined with the geographical expansion of Dhaka, deficiency of social cohesion cannot be overcome. Thus, Dhaka requires an integrated three pronged action plan with each having its own sets of criteria and evaluation indicators. From this consideration, the following models for transformation were developed.

- i. Imparting social responsibility on buildings in the Construction Act.
- ii. Renewal of inner city areas as Corporate Social Responsibility
- iii. Urban transformation as private-public partnership with would be owners' participation

i. Imparting social responsibility on buildings in the Construction Act:

As change in land ownership pattern and access to land in Dhaka is not supposed to change in future, the city should adopt a socially responsive building policy. It requires an addition of a social responsibility clause for different types of buildings classified in the Building Construction Act. Adherence to social responsibility may be rewarded with increased Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and Social Responsive Certification like LEED certified buildings. As the guidelines require spatial providence to users who are not owners or tenants of the property, conflicts are likely to arise which will eventually necessitate formation of communities for arbitration. A proposed social responsibility guideline for buildings in Dhaka is given below.

Building type	Use	Socially Responsive Indicator	Measurement	Reward
A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5	Residential	i. Contribution to increasing pedestrian width	Area	Equal FAR
		ii. Unobstructed green contribution to sidewalk	Area	10% to FAR
B	Educational Institute	i. As of above and	Area X duration	Extra resource
		ii. Accessible playground iii. After hour community use	Area X duration	As of above
C-1, C-3	Institutional	As of Above		
D-1	Health Facilities	i. Free beds	number	
		ii. Free outpatient and medication	hours + cost	
		iii. Community counseling	hours X number	
E	Congregation	i. Contribution to increasing pedestrian width	Area	FAR 20% to FAR
		ii. Unobstructed green contribution to city	Area	
		iii. Outdoor space dedicated to public domain	Area	
		iv. Access for community use	Hours	
		v. Use by local clubs, women and children groups	Hours X area	

Building type	Use	Socially Responsive Indicator	Measurement	Reward
		vi. Thoroughfares vii. Increase of urban accessibility	Reduced travel time X trip nos Provision of nodal facility	Reduced Utility 50% to FAR
F	Commercial	As of above and i. Employment of locals ii. SMEs of local proprietors iii. Promotion of local crafts and artisans	% of employee number; area as of above	Tax benefits Reduced utility
G; H; J	Industrial; Warehouse and Hazardous	i. Recycling of community waste and waste water	Volume	Tax benefits

Apart from the areas mentioned above, the Urban Development Committee may bestow on buildings deemed appropriate the responsibility of spatial allocation for specific purposes such as city transit, urban landscape or special gatherings.

ii. Development of inner city areas as Corporate Social Responsibility

Transformation of underutilized inner city areas into places as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) derived from the need of integrating economic growth with the social and cultural needs. In addition to helping Dhaka's residents to identify with the city, creation of place as CSR could also become a visible example for imparting responsibility in the corporate sector that presently operates in the milieu of appropriation and encroachment. Land will be allotted to private entrepreneurs for development not on the basis of highest bidding but on the merit of proposals for creative transformation and usage.

The primary areas of evaluation are the gathering of place in the transformation that includes built form, and the creation of shared values to provide people the opportunity to evolve as community. The evaluation encompasses the issues related to typical inner city transformations such as employment, improved community health and wellbeing, heritage and cultural conservation, environmental benefits,

market transformation, introduction of advanced knowledge and understanding etc. A schematic framework for evaluation is given below.

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Measurement
ob.1. Help man to regain his place	c.1. Gathering of the natural and manmade things of the deltaic landscape in the act of building	I.1.a. Concretization of deltaic topographic and hydrological characters	Grading based on collective expert and community discretion
		I.1.b. Indigenous plants and vegetations	no. of species; % of vegetation
		I.1.c. Climatic responsiveness i.e. reduced energy dependence	Megawatts; CO ₂ emission
		I.1.d. Local building materials	% of materials of same category
		I.1.e. Traditional spatial network based on socially accepted norms of privacy	Expert and community discretion
		I.1.f. Representation of heritage	Expert and community discretion
ob.2. Reestablish land as community	c.2. Conceiving land as territory instead of property	I.2.a. Public access	in % of total built area
		I.2.b. Space dedicated to public domain	Area (m ²), % of total area
		I.2.c. Opportunity for community uses of facility	hours x area
ob.3. Integrate people into communities	c.3.a. Economic integration	I.3.a1. Employment opportunity for locals	% of senior management hired from local community
		I.3.a2. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) run by local proprietors	Proportion of locals against total involved in SMEs
	c.3.b. Cultural integration	I.3.b1. Festivals, exhibitions and events	no. of events and participants
		I.3.b2. Promotion of local crafts and artisans	no. of enterprise; area of space allocated

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Measurement
ob.4. Create examples of responsible environmental, social and cultural practice by corporate sector	c.4.a. Improve accessibility	I.4.a1. Increase accessibility across city	Provision for transport nodes
		I.4.a2. Reduce vehicular dependence	Reduction in trip x length
	c.4.b. Contribute to community wellbeing	I.4.b1. Provision of healthcare, sports and educational facilities	no. of beneficiaries; area dedicated
		I.4.b2. Opportunity of use by local children and women groups	hours x area
	c.4.c. Cultural sensitivity	I.4.c1. Preservation of historic assets	no.; financial contribution
		I.4.c2. Showcase local cultural heritage	no. of events; area dedicated
	c.4.d. Showcase advancements in technology and sustainability	I.4.d1. Recycling of community waste	Volume (tons)
		I.4.d2. Recycling of community wastewater	Volume (liters)
		I.4.d3. Renewable energy generation	Megawatts
	c.4.e. Contribute to the emergence of a civil society	I.4.e1. Collective bargaining	Trade union, workers assembly (no.; coverage)
		I.4.e2. Community consultation committees	Scope and extent (community discretion)

iii. Urban transformation as private-public partnership with would be owners' participation

The approach was developed to increase belongingness and sense of community through would be owners' participation in urban land transformation for residential use. It proposed an alternative to the large scale apartment development projects that the government had conceived on public land to be constructed by private developers in 2008. Instead of allocating government land to individuals or large developers, it proposed allotment of plots sized at 3600 square ft. to five persons belonging to a same profession to build a homogenous group as homogenous groups helped accrual of social glue.

Owners of Five to Seven such parcels all of whom belong to a same profession will be assigned a private developer and all the mandatory open spaces will be contributed to formulate a central courtyard. The developer will invest for the cost of construction and will be given the right of 50% floor area that he may sell to outsiders disregarding professional homogeneity. This ownership sharing system is adopted from contemporary practice that facilitates middle class participation in building industry. Thus, a little community of 250-350 persons will develop. Among them, at least half of the owners will have a homogenous background and participate with the developer in all phases of design and construction. The later entries from other professions will bring in heterogeneity so that community does not become closed. The success criteria may be listed as below.

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Unit of Measurement	Preferred Direction
ob.1. Ensure allotment to parties with actual housing need	c.1.a. direct allotment	no.(%) of units having direct allotment	no. /(%)	↑
	c.1.b. reduced opportunity of luxury against utility	Floor Area available to individual unit	m ²	↓
ob.2. Increase affordability on part of the target group	c.2.a. construction finance	investment required by the user until moving to a unit	€	↓
ob.3. Reduce transfer of property rights	c.3.a. availability of units for sale	no.of units available after occupancy by primary owners	no. /(%)	↓
	c.3.b. allotment-construction time lag	time required to arrange for construction finance	years	↓
ob.4. Encourage mixed use development	c.4.a. small and medium enterprise	space available for small and medium enterprise	m ²	↑
ob.5 Community-Place co-evolution	c.5.a. duration of spatial relation	no. of owners present as organized groups during project inception	no. /(%)	↑
	c.5.b. participation in design-construction process	no. of owners able to participate in the design-construction process	no. /(%)	↑
	c.5.c. competition-negotiation during design-construction phase	proportion of space to be developed through mutual negotiations	m ²	↑
	c.5.d. competition-negotiation over use of space	number of access to shared space/unit	no.	↑
ob.6. Development of better human capital	c.6.a. parental supervision	availability of parents' free time	hours	↑

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Unit of Measurement	Preferred Direction
	c.6.b. social network with closure	children using shared vehicles to school	no. /(%)	↑
		adults availing shared trips to workplace	no. /(%)	↑
		peer encounters within neighbourhood	no.	↑
ob.7. Enhance social interaction	c.7.a. social time within neighbourhood	outdoor games; children (8-14 yrs.)	hours	↑
		TV/computer obsession; children (8-14 yrs.)	hours	↓
		group activity within neighbourhood; adults	hours	↑
ob.8. Increase social security	c.8.a. crime and violence	requirement of escorts for children outdoor movement	no.	↓
		unescorted female movement after evening	no.	↑
	c.8.b. community overseeing	street front enterprise owned by residents	no.	↑
		thoroughfares	no.	↓
ob.9. Reduce vehicle dependence	c.9.a. proximity	sleep-work distance	km	↓
		trips to kitchen market outside neighbourhood	no.	↓
	c.9.b. shared/ mass transportation	individual trips to workplace by car/taxi	no.	↓
	c.9.c. pedestrian links	vehicle dependence for school trips	no.	↓
ob.10. Reduce energy consumption	c.10.a. reduce electro-mechanical dependence	units beyond walk-up range	no.	↓
	c.10.b. shared use of electro-mechanical gadgets	units served by an elevator	no.	↑
ob. 11. Increase ground water retention	c.11.a. monitoring of open space	amount of open space with public access	m ²	↑

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Indigenous Terms

<i>Bhadralok</i>	Gentry; refers here particularly to the nineteenth century gentry of Bengal; a socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents, and professional and clerical employment
<i>Diwan</i>	Head of Mughal provincial revenue administration
<i>Jotedar</i>	A tenant of an arable land that was large enough to be parcelled out as under tenures.
<i>Mahajan</i>	Moneylender; usurer
<i>Marwari</i>	Trading castes from the Marwar area of Jodhpur region in southwest Rajasthan, India.
<i>Panchayat</i>	The social organization of the neighbourhood through which community leaders regulated the social and religious life of their members. Each neighbourhood had its own panchayat that consisted of five wise elders.
<i>Raiyat</i>	Tenant farmer
<i>Subahdar</i>	Head of Mughal provincial administration
<i>Zamindar</i>	Large land rentier who used to act as an intermediary between the state and tenant farmers
<i>Zamindari</i>	Tenure of large rural landed estates.

Chapter I

Dhaka: Poverty of Place

*The city stands upon the northern bank of the Boorigonga (Buriganga), about eight miles above its confluence with the Dullaserry (Dhaleshwari). The river, which is here deep and navigable by large boats, expands in the season of inundation to a considerable breadth, and gives to Dacca (Dhaka) with its minarets and spacious buildings, the appearance, like that of Venice in the west, of a city rising from the surface of the water.*¹

1. Preamble

Laments and frustrations were the emotions drawn by the condition of Dhaka's architectural, urban and environmental assets in the deliberations by scholars who gathered from home and abroad in February 2010 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Dhaka's becoming the capital of the Mughal province *Subah-i-Banglah*. Their statements of despair were summarized as: Influx of migrants in the last decades helped Dhaka to rank among the most populous mega-cities in the world but at the cost of becoming overcrowded with inadequate facilities for housing, transport, sanitation and education while slum settlements and slack law and order further deteriorated living conditions. From governance perspective, Dhaka has become an entity of haphazard growth with no recognizable guardian and all norms of planned developments are being continuously violated.² A review of their articles from the multi-volume series published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh to commemorate the celebration articulated the following:

- i. Destruction of Dhaka's topographic and hydrological characters due to the spread of settlements by filling up low-lying areas.³

¹ James Taylor, *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca* (first published, Calcutta 1840; Asiatic Society of Bangladesh edition, Dhaka 2010), p. 65. Spellings within parentheses indicate current usage.

² Sharif uddin Ahmed, 'Chief Editor's Note' in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds.), *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III: *Urbanization and Urban Development* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2011), pp. 08-9.

³ Abdul Momin Chowdhuri and Sahidul Hasan, 'Growth of Capital Dhaka: 1608-2010' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, pp. 30-38.



Fig. 1.1. Dhaka 1861, Frederick William Alexander de Fabeck (watercolour)

ii. Encroaching upon land reserved for public infrastructure and resulting imbalance between the interest of individual households and enterprises on one hand and public welfare on the other. This happens often because of high land price, which in some areas is comparable to New York suburbs and threatens the right of the commons especially the urban poor to the city. Consequently, social justice emerges as a critical issue.⁴

iii. A dysfunctional statutory planning system and an inappropriate institutional setup together with serious resource constraints leading to inefficient urban management.⁵

iv. Deletion of historical city by demolition and transformation with regard to density, urban fabric and historical buildings.⁶ A major reason behind this abrupt alteration of historical city and vertical transformation of neighbourhoods that grew only 60 years back⁷ is high demand for land that has made real estate one of the most lucrative businesses in Dhaka. The number of members of Real Estate and Housing Association shot up from 11 in 1991 to 589 in 2009.⁸

⁴ Sabine Baumgart, 'The Mega-City Dhaka: Confronting Mega-Challenges' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, pp. 53-54.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷ Abdul Momin Chowdhuri and Sahidul Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁸ Toufiq M. Seraj, 'Real Estate Development in Dhaka' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 89.

- v. Though Dhaka was preferred as the Mughal capital of *Subah-i-Banglah* over Rajmahal because of the geo-strategic advantage provided by its location in relation to the Bengal Delta, the ecological setting of the delta no longer informs Dhaka's spatial growth.⁹ Dhaka, founded on the bank of Buriganga gradually expanded up to the Turag River on the northwest and the Balu River on the east. Pollution of Buriganga's water by unregulated factory waste has pushed chromium level at some points of the river to 28 ppm while the allowable limit by World Health Organization's standard is less than one ppm.¹⁰
- vi. Among the many canals that crisscrossed Dhaka, Sir Patrick Geddes recommended Dholai *Khal* for development as the major artery for water transport inside the city after necessary cleaning and deepening. He advised improvement of all of Dhaka's canals and construction of small canal ports at convenient points.¹¹ However, Dholai *Khal* was eventually filled up and converted into a street; many other canals were also filled up or were encroached upon. The rests were covered by box culverts and people gradually forgot their existence.¹²
- vii. Encroachment of rivers, filling up wetlands, buying off agricultural lands and wholesale transformation of a precious ecological system (in the name of housing societies) is taking place at the edges of Dhaka.¹³
- viii. Land appears as the protagonist in the battle of Dhaka where land is a coveted commodity and creates environmental externalities such as land piracy, land poaching and wet land filling.¹⁴

⁹ Iftekhar Iqbal, 'Environmental History of Dhaka: An Outline' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 405.

¹⁰ Roxana Hafiz, 'Urban Hazards in Dhaka' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 225.

¹¹ Robert Gallagher, 'Evolution of Transport in Dhaka since 1947' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 108.

¹² Roxana Hafiz, 'Conservation in Dhaka' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 429.

¹³ Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, 'Designing Dhaka: History of a Future' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 451.

¹⁴ Shayer Ghafur, 'Imprints of the Changing Doctrines on Housing in Dhaka' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III, p. 166.

2. Problem Statement: *Place, People and Dhaka*

A place is a concentration of value; it is an organized world of meaning in which one can dwell.¹⁵ Meaning is a psychic function and depends on identification. It is a fundamental human need; man needs to experience his existence as meaningful.¹⁶ One dwells when he can orientate within and identify himself with an environment. Identification is the basis for man's sense of belonging to a place i.e. the existential foothold. Belongingness or existential foothold is essentially subconscious and is a different kind of experience from having a sense of place. Belongingness means identifying with a particular locality, to feel that it is one's home and the home of his ancestors. It does not evolve from scientific understanding alone; it needs symbols. Symbols and meanings help man to know how he is a certain place.¹⁷ Symbols and meanings remain embedded in both natural and manmade things of the cultural landscape. Creative human participation in the form of manmade things of various scales such as houses and farms to villages and towns gradually transform nature into a cultural landscape; human identity to a high extent is a function of the cultural landscape.¹⁸ When man fails to identify with the manmade and natural things that constitute the cultural landscape, alienation occurs.¹⁹

The city is a place, a centre of meaning, par excellence. It has many highly visible symbols. More importantly, the city itself is a symbol.²⁰ The traditional city manifested what the community had managed to make out of its existence i.e. its culture. As Shakespeare had put it, "*What is the Citie, but the People? True, the People are the Citie*" (*Coriolanus* act three, scene 1), the ideal city and its people are inseparable. Unfortunately, alienation occurs in cities. It occurs when people cannot identify with the natural and manmade things in the city; things become mere objects of consumption.

¹⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press sixth printing, Minneapolis 2008), pp. 12; 179.

¹⁶ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Rizzoli, New York 1980), pp. 23; 166.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 05; 19; 22-23; Yi-Fu Tuan, *op. cit.*, pp. 194; 198.

¹⁸ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, pp. 10; 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

Abrupt modifications of Dhaka's cultural landscape represent extreme alienation, which is visible in,

i. Erasure of Dhaka's landscape character;²¹

ii. Destruction of values e.g. symbols and meanings through demolition of historic buildings and distortion of the historic city.

The alienation is not a benign self-isolating psychic process. Besides inflicting upon Dhaka pollution and poverty in both ecological and cultural terms, it deprives the commons especially the urban poor of the rights of public spaces and natural resources. Most regrettably, it has degraded land into a commodity.



Fig. 1.2. Erasure of landscape character



Fig. 1.3. Distortion of the historic city

The loss of community and place while land became a mere commodity in Dhaka is usually attributed to the growth rush that the city experienced in the last sixty years. During the preparation of the Master Plan for Dhaka in 1959, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) area's population was a fraction over one million (1,025,000 persons).²² The population of Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area in 1981 became 4.4 million²³ that rose to 6.9 million in 1991,²⁴ 9.7 million in 2001 and 14.6 million in 2011.²⁵ Migration accounted for 60% of the population growth in Dhaka that alone received 40% of the total urban migration of the country.²⁶

²¹ The material and formal constitution of a place determine its landscape character.

²² Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *Strategic Growth Options-Dhaka 2016* (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, Dhaka 1993), p. 06.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁴ Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (1995-2015), Volume I-Dhaka Structure Plan (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, Dhaka 1995), p. 25.

²⁵ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh-2013* (Dhaka 2014), pp. 107; 116-19.

²⁶ The 1991 Task Force on Bangladesh Development Strategies confirmed Dhaka Metropolitan Area Integrated Urban Development Project planners' projection

The planners of both the 1959 Master Plan and the 1981 Strategic Plan had assumed that Dhaka would grow northward along the stretch of the higher flood free land. The expansion areas that would be developed under public sector initiatives as new towns or satellites were expected to receive all the new growth i.e. the then urbanized area would absorb no or very few additional people.²⁷ The main determinant of the pattern of spatial growth was the location of flood free land where the planned areas developed by the public sector became the preserve of the upper and the upper-middle class. The option remaining for the rest who depended largely on the economy of central Dhaka became limited to accommodating within the existing built-up area or spreading in the high flood risk locations adjacent to the existing city core. Contrary to planners' assumption, majority of the population increase was absorbed via densification rather than dispersal. New land absorbed only 32% of the population increase while 68% was accommodated via densification within the already built-up area.²⁸ Conversion of land for urban uses particularly in locations adjacent to the developed and developing areas was attained by filling large tracts of low-lying marshes and by encroaching upon natural waterways and canals that flanked and often crept into the heart of the stretch of Dhaka's high land.²⁹

Alienation and consequent poverty of place in Dhaka, which is a city of migrants,³⁰ is not surprising. The erasure of landscape character and destruction of historic values i.e. meanings and symbols in Dhaka during densification and conversion of land can easily be ascribed to migration that renders identification with a place difficult.³¹ However, Dhaka's landscape character was not an opposed abstraction of that of

of 1979 (for the 1981 Strategic Plan) that migration would account for 60% of the population growth in the following two decades as valid and added that Dhaka received 40% of the country's total rural-urban migration. Between 1981 and 1991, migration accounted for 64% of Dhaka's population growth. Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *op. cit.*, pp. 08-10; 43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 06-9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

²⁹ Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (1995-2015), *op. cit.*, pp. 26; 37; A. M. Chowdhury and Shabnam Faruqui, 'Physical Growth of Dhaka City' in Sharif uddin Ahmed (ed.), *Dhaka Past Present Future* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh second edition, Dhaka 2009), p. 57.

³⁰ Nazrul Islam, 'Dhaka in 2050' in *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond-* Volume III, p. 476.

³¹ A native citizen identifies with his city more easily than someone who has grown up elsewhere because experienced spans of time at different stages in

its hinterland namely, the Eastern Bengal Delta from where the people gathered. On the contrary, Dhaka is located at the center of the three major river systems of the delta i.e. the Ganges (Padma), the Brahmaputra and the Meghna and is connected to them through three rivers namely, the Buriganga, the Dhaleswari and the Shitalakshya. Numerous canals that branched off the rivers of Dhaka's vicinity crisscrossed the city. The Dholai canal that used to flow south-west through Dhaka before joining the Buriganga once represented the lower course of the Balu River. A branch of the Dholai used to flow north-west as the Pandu River that fell into the Turag River. Pandu sent back two southward branches to connect to the Dholai.³² The rivers and canals that ran across and around the city and the low-lying marshes that surrounded the stretch of the high land concretized the landscape character of the Eastern Bengal Delta in Dhaka. The continuation and convergence of the deltaic characters in Dhaka negates conceiving of its alienation with the people as a consequence of the rural-urban migration only. It raises the question whether alienation was prevalent between the people of the eastern Bengal Delta and its landscape. Though such alienation of a large ecosystem from its people is not common and hence difficult to conceive, it may evolve under exceptional socioeconomic and religiopolitical circumstances, and should be checked.

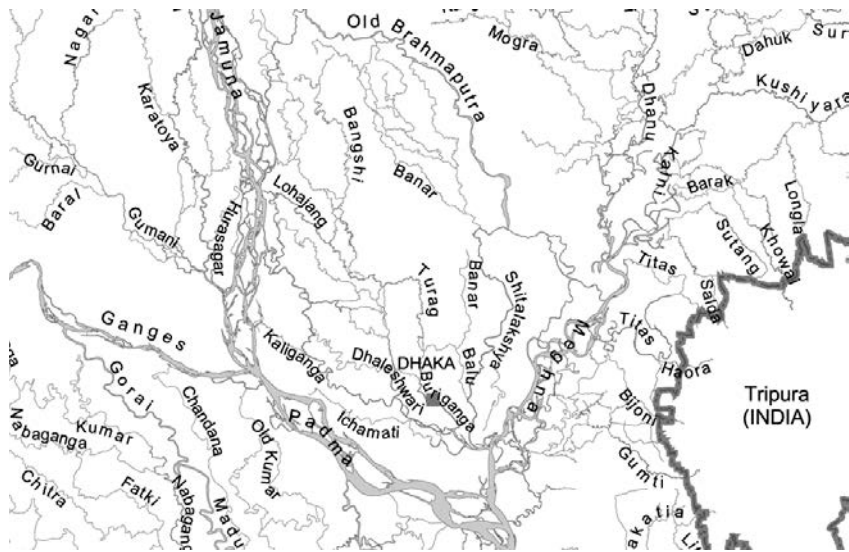


Fig. 1.4. Dhaka among the major river systems of the Eastern Bengal Delta

life are not commensurable. An adult cannot know a place as a child knows it; the child knows the world more sensuously. Hence, ten years in childhood are not the same as ten years in youth or manhood. Yi-Fu Tuan, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-86.

³² Abdul Karim, *Dacca The Mughal Capital* (Bengali translation by Mohammad Mohibullah Siddiquee, Jatiya Grontha Prokashan, Dhaka 2012), p. 04.

The ruthless destruction of place especially the manmade things such as historic buildings implies that the cultural matrix of Dhaka in which these things had been created went through radical shifts that are usually inflicted by political and socioeconomic upheavals. An enquiry into Dhaka's social evolution is essential to elucidate the reasons behind the changes in cultural context and to clarify the mystery of the unabated destruction of urban values. This should explain the predicament of governance and planning as well.

3. Objective: *Recovery of Place*

Alienation to place makes man fugitive on the earth. Architects' responsibility is to help man regain his lost place so that he may dwell again. Man dwells when he is able to concretize the world in buildings and things.³³ The purpose of architecture is to gather the properties of the place and bring them closer to man through the act of building so that he is able to identify with the natural and manmade meanings of his environment.

As Aldo Leopold put it, "*We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.*" (Foreword to *A Sand County Almanac*, New York 1949), conceiving one's environment as a community is crucial for its conservation. Developing belongingness with the place and the community is the precondition for restricting the destruction of the manmade and natural things that constitute them. When man is able to identify with the public outside that concretizes the shared understandings, which make communal life possible and meaningful in a city,³⁴ it becomes a place to him and he becomes a part of the urban community where he may dwell. Recovery of place in the public outside is therefore the primary objective in Dhaka so that the people who gathered here are able to identify with places and communities. Architects should help people establish themselves as integral parts of the urban environment through the recovery of place so that people need not roam around the city like ghosts.

4. Opportunity: *Place as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*

Recovery of place in Dhaka where modification of cultural landscape is blotched with abrupt distortion of topographical and hydrological characters, encroachment of public spaces and natural wetlands, and

³³ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

deletion of the historic city³⁵ is ambitious. Apart from the existential question, which underlies the impoverishment of place in Dhaka, equity and ethics are two major challenges in its recovery.

Government agencies such as, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT, presently RAJUK i.e. Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha) adhered single-mindedly to the strategy of the 1959 Master Plan for northward urban expansion along the flood free land. They maintained high space standards in developing the areas that became the preserves of a privileged few i.e. the influential upper and upper-middle class income groups from bureaucracy, business and politics. Development of these areas simultaneously alienated most of the dry land areas lying farther north from the majority of Dhaka's population. The low income and low influence group had to access urban land in Dhaka through informal, unplanned processes.³⁶ The public sector interventions not only lacked equity but were also inadequate, which inevitably attracted large-scale private involvement in Dhaka's urban expansion.

The accusation of unethical practices i.e. buying off agricultural land for urban conversion, filling up wetlands and wholesale transformation of the ecological system³⁷ against private developers is rooted in the state of entrepreneurship in Bangladesh where impulse of acquisition through exploitation of political or bureaucratic opportunities is common in private sector that often engage in unregulated transaction with politico-bureaucracy. The state of adventurer's capitalism,³⁸ which is manifest in the prevalence of

³⁵ *Supra*, FN 3-4; 6.

³⁶ Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *op. cit.*, pp. 09; 25-26; 29.

³⁷ *Supra*, FN 13.

³⁸ According to Max Weber, the impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money has in itself nothing to do with capitalism. Capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise and is in sharp contrast to the hand to mouth existence of the peasant, to the privileged traditionalism of the guild craftsman and of the adventurer's capitalism oriented to the exploitation of political opportunities and irrational speculation. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, English translation by Talcott Parsons (George Allen & Unwin Ltd. third impression, London 1950), pp. 17-24; 76.

black money³⁹ and in the corruption perception index,⁴⁰ had a damaging impact on Dhaka. Investment of undeclared and illegal income⁴¹ inflated Dhaka's real estate. Earmarking of real estate as a priority sector by government for investing undeclared money upon payment of 10% penalty aggravated the situation. Scarce opportunity for secured investment in capital market that is often manipulated by speculators diverted 20-30% of the total volume of remittance (total volume was worth 14,461.14 million US Dollars in 2012-13)⁴² to land market;⁴³ a large portion was invested in Dhaka. Overinvestment in Dhaka's land even attracted bank loans originally sanctioned for industrialization in private sector.⁴⁴ The limited area of urban land against inflated demand prompted private housing sector to engage in land piracy, poaching and encroachment⁴⁵ for profiteering.

The theoretical premise for restricting this dismal trend of urbanization in Dhaka is limiting growth by checking in-migration and prohibiting private sector interventions. A national urban strategy for limiting the growth of metropolitan cities by developing growth poles and fostering transformation of medium sized cities into economic engines for diverting rural out-migration are also options. Nevertheless, the natural growth of Dhaka's current population would continue. Implementation of growth limitation policy is difficult in Dhaka, which is the focus of country's non-agricultural economy. Availability of labour, infrastructure and services exceeding other locations make Dhaka the preferred destination for growth of existing firms and establishment of new enterprises. Reinforced by government employment, it is the

³⁹ Black money equals about 40% of country's GDP. Rahman Jahangir, 'Whitening black money: A lingering controversy' in *The Financial Express* Vol. 20 No 157 (International Publications Limited, Dhaka June 2013).

⁴⁰ Bangladesh had ranked 13th from the bottom among 176 countries in 2012. Transparency International Bangladesh, *Annual Report 2012*, p. 17.

⁴¹ Leo Vashkor Dewri et al., *A Comprehensive Study on the Real Estate Sector of Bangladesh* (Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh sponsored report, Dhaka 2012), p. 74.

⁴² Bangladesh Bank 2014, <http://www.bb.org.bd/econdata/wageremittance.php>

⁴³ Mike Davis, 'Planet of Slums' (Verso, New York 2007), p. 93 cited in Sabine Baumgart, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴⁴ A. Abdullah (ed.), 'Modernisation at Bay: Structure and Change in Bangladesh' (Dhaka 1991), p. 26 cited in Shayer Ghafur, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁴⁵ *Supra*, FN 14.

centre of non-agricultural job creation. The realistic projection of 1993⁴⁶ that extension of the city would continue into the peripheral higher flood risk areas while densities in the existing urbanized areas would rise faster proved correct and is still valid for the coming future. Unfortunately, the accompanying assumptions that land would continue to be available to the rich at the cost of degraded living condition and alienation of the lower income groups is valid as well.

How could then the barriers of unethical inequity that prevent people in Dhaka from integrating to place and community be removed? Expulsion of the private actors from a city that grew by 50% in each of the last three decades despite a dysfunctional planning system, inappropriate institutional setup and public resource constraints⁴⁷ is a utopia. Instead of denial, recognizing the activities of the private sector and individuals, and limiting public intervention to facilitation of development by the private sector is more pragmatic. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) could be the key to this reversal of perspective that would enable the visualization of the private sectors not as obstacles among man, place and community, but as unifiers. If creation of place is conceived as a corporate social responsibility, it might dissolve conflicts and unify the interests of the community, ecology and the corporate. Minor modifications to building acts and institutional capacity building for implementation can establish place as a corporate social responsibility and help the city to regain its people.

As place serves as the basis of our education,⁴⁸ its creation as a corporate social responsibility in Dhaka may become a visible example for imparting responsibility in the country's corporate sectors. Place; which is a manifestation of man's culture and his identity may become a driver of equity and rationality in economic sectors such as trading, service and industry.

5. Methodology

The research involves inquiries in the following areas.

- Evolution of existential contents that may explain the distortion of landscape character in Dhaka;

⁴⁶ For strategic options for Dhaka: Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *op. cit.*, pp. 51-73.

⁴⁷ *Supra*, FN 5.

⁴⁸ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

- Evolution of Dhaka's society to evaluate the impact of socio-economic and cultural shifts on the historic city and buildings;
- Identification of the things (manmade and natural) and means for recovery of place in Dhaka.

Landscape is personal and collective history made visible. Man finds recorded in his land the ancient history of the lives and deeds of the beings from whom he descended and whom he reveres; it is his family tree. Landscape has structure and it embodies meaning. These structures and meanings gave rise to mythologies that formed the basis of dwelling in many societies. The myths became as real as the things man can see and touch and man identified with his place in the total scheme of these things.⁴⁹ However, the economic, social, political and cultural forces had the prerogative of selection among possible meanings that shaped man's identity; the selection depended on actual conditions that prevailed in history. The existential dimension thus becomes manifest in history, but its meanings are metaphysical and transcend historical situations.⁵⁰

Dhaka is not only located at the center of the three major river systems of the Eastern Bengal Delta i.e. the Ganges (Padma), the Brahmaputra and the Meghna but it also gathers and represents the natural forces of the delta; it is the centre of the East Bengal microcosmos.⁵¹ As the following historic overview of Dhaka will reveal, the evolution of Dhaka's society, economy, politics and culture i.e. the modifiers of existential contents cannot be understood in isolation; it must be correlated to that of East Bengal. As landscape bears metaphysical meanings, origin of alienation of place and landscape in Dhaka will be explored in the evolution of the cultural landscape in history as well as in mythology. Understanding the evolution of socioeconomic forces and their impact on existential contents in East Bengal including Dhaka warrants utmost caution because for long, foreign rulers and traders who spoke different language and professed different faith than the majority of the inhabitants controlled the region.

Bengal, located on the eastern fringe of the Ganges plain was included in the Magadhan Empire in the fifth-fourth century BC. Henceforth, the religious and mythical views of the middle Ganges plain

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23; Yi-Fu Tuan, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58.

⁵⁰ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, pp. 06; 170.

⁵¹ Dhaka's relation to East Bengal is analogous to that of Prague and Bohemia as elucidated by Christian Norberg-Schulz. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99.

influenced and modified worldviews in Bengal. That is why, it is important to study the metaphysical contents of East Bengal's landscape in relation to the middle Ganges plain. Benares, one of the oldest living cities on earth is the prime example of the overlap of historical and mythological elements in the Ganges plain. It is the middle place in the mythological space of the Ganges plain and was studied to understand the importance of mythical contents in conservation of place.

Though not particularly as corporate social responsibility, there are many recent examples of collaboration among cities and corporate sectors for creation of place. Hafencity in Hamburg stands apart as an example of engaging corporate sector in creation of a coordinated public domain for recovery of place and community by enacting necessary legislations and establishing appropriate institutional setup. HafenCity also gathered the port city of Hamburg in its nautical disposition and was studied as an example of the best practices in the field. Louis I Kahn understood architecture in terms of place and gathered the landscape character of the Eastern Bengal delta and rebuilt them in his works in Dhaka that provides example of architecture capable of recovering place in the delta.

Chapter II

Dhaka as the Centre of East Bengal¹: A Historic Overview

1. Pre-Mughal Dhaka

Dr. D. C. Sircar suggested that the name Dhaka was a *Prakrit* corruption of Sanskrit *Dhakka* that meant watch-station. He explained that this site, which is situated on a high ground, might have served as a watch station to the neighbouring pre-Muslim capitals at Vikrampur and Sonargaon.² Discovery of Gupta gold imitation coins datable to c.7th century AD and the image of Hari-Shankara ascribed to the 11th-12th century AD proved the antiquity of the site but gave no details of the settlement. However, the stone inscription dated AD 1457 above the door of Binat Bibi Mosque and the Naswallagali Mosque inscription dated AD 1459 provided references for determining the extent of Dhaka in the era of Bengal Sultanate. Dhaka was frequently mentioned in *Akbarnama* in the narrative of the Mughal campaigns (AD 1583-1606) against the eastern *zamindars* (feudal lords/ petty kings). The Mughals first established a *thana* (fortified post) in Dhaka during the reign of Akbar to guard the imperial positions against the incursions of the independent or semi independent eastern *zamindars* (the *Bhuiyan* chiefs).³

¹ Bengal here refers approximately to the present day state of West Bengal in India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. East Bengal refers to the present day Bangladesh. An introduction to the evolution of definition and boundary of Bengal here would be banal because of the availability and wide circulation of various works of authority such as R. C. Majumder (ed.), *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I (first published, Dhaka 1943); Niharranjan Roy, *Bangaleer Itihas: Aadi Parba*, (in Bengali, first published, Kolkata 1949); Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal: Down to A.D. 1538* (first published, Dhaka 1959); Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal: 1494-1538 A.D. A Socio Political Study* (first Published, Dhaka 1965); Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760* (first Indian Edition, New Delhi 1994); Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I (first published, Dhaka 1992).

² Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Dhaka: A Record of its Changing Fortunes* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third revised edition, Dhaka 2009), p. 14.

³ For Pre-Mughal Dhaka: James Taylor, *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh edition, Dhaka 2010), pp. 47-51; Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-21; Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital* (Bengali translation by Mohammad Mohibullah Siddiquee, Jatiya Grontha Prokashan, Dhaka 2012), pp. 22-23.

2. The Mughals in Bengal

The Mughal campaign to the East brought Dhaka under limelight. The Afghans had replaced the Turks in Delhi but in AD 1526, they were ousted by Babur who established the Indo-Timurid Mughal Dynasty. The Afghans flocked eastward and established themselves as warrior chieftains in the Ganges Plain. When Afghan chieftain Sher Khan Sur (Sher Shah) terminated the independent sultanate of Bengal in AD 1538 and converted it into a tributary state, Bengal's fate depended on the outcome of Afghan-Mughal contest.⁴ Sher Shah eventually chased Mughal Emperor Humayun out of India to establish a short Suri rule (AD 1540-54) in Delhi.

Humayun re-ascended the throne of Delhi in AD 1555 after a triumphant return from Persia but died shortly afterwards. His son Akbar consolidated the Mughal Empire. He personally led an eastward campaign with a large army down the Ganges plain to Patna in AD 1574 and completely routed the Afghan defenders en route. The Afghan governors of Bengal did not instantly submit; Akbar's general Munim Khan intimidated Daud Khan Karrani, the last afghan ruler of Bengal who shrugged off his loyalty as soon as Munim Khan died. Daud was terminally defeated by another Mughal general Khan Jahan who established Mughal supremacy over Tanda, the Afghan capital of Bengal in AD 1576. Thousands of Afghans spread farther eastward to the swampy delta of East Bengal where along with a host of Muslim and Hindu *zamindars*, Portuguese renegades and tribal chieftains, they continued the resistance against the Mughal Empire for the next forty years. The main force of the anti-Mughal resistance in Bengal were the twelve chieftains (*Baro Bhuiyan*) united under the leadership of Isa Khan whose major strength was the geographical advantage of the delta's eastern riverine tracts, largely unsuitable for Mughal cavalry. In September 1584, Isa Khan delivered a crushing naval defeat to the Mughals and for the next fifteen years, he ruled the eastern delta virtually unchecked.

Akbar in AD 1594, sent to Bengal one of his most renowned commanders, Raja Man Singh who established his headquarters in Rajmahal. His campaign to the eastern delta proper was resisted successfully by the Bengal war boats in AD 1597 under Isa Khan's command. However, the death of Isa Khan within two years of this naval battle left the Bengal resistance in disarray and Man Singh's prudent decision of establishing at Dhaka a centre for his eastern military expedition in AD 1602 yielded

⁴ For Afghan-Mughal contest in Bengal: Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Oxford University Press seventh impression, New Delhi 2011), pp. 137-150.

immediate success for the Mughals. Isa Khan's son Daud was pushed back to Sonargaon and another important chieftain, Kedar Rai was defeated and killed. Man Singh could not however subjugate Uthman Khan who was the most powerful among the remaining Afghans because of his return to Agra to attend the ailing emperor Akbar who died in AD 1605.

Akbar's son Jahangir sent Islam Khan to Bengal in AD 1608 to finish the cleansing of the eastern front. Islam Khan's quick assessment that the Afghan chiefs as well as the independent and rebellious *zamindars* and prince lings of the marshy eastern delta could not be brought under control from the northwest of Bengal prompted his move towards east at the head of his army and a huge flotilla of war boats. The civil administration including the head of revenue i.e. the *diwan* also followed. Islam Khan stopped wherever military or revenue actions were required and settled his camp in Dhaka in AD 1610. Dhaka, renamed Jahangirnagar after Emperor Jahangir became the Mughal provincial capital of *Subah-i-Banglah*.⁵

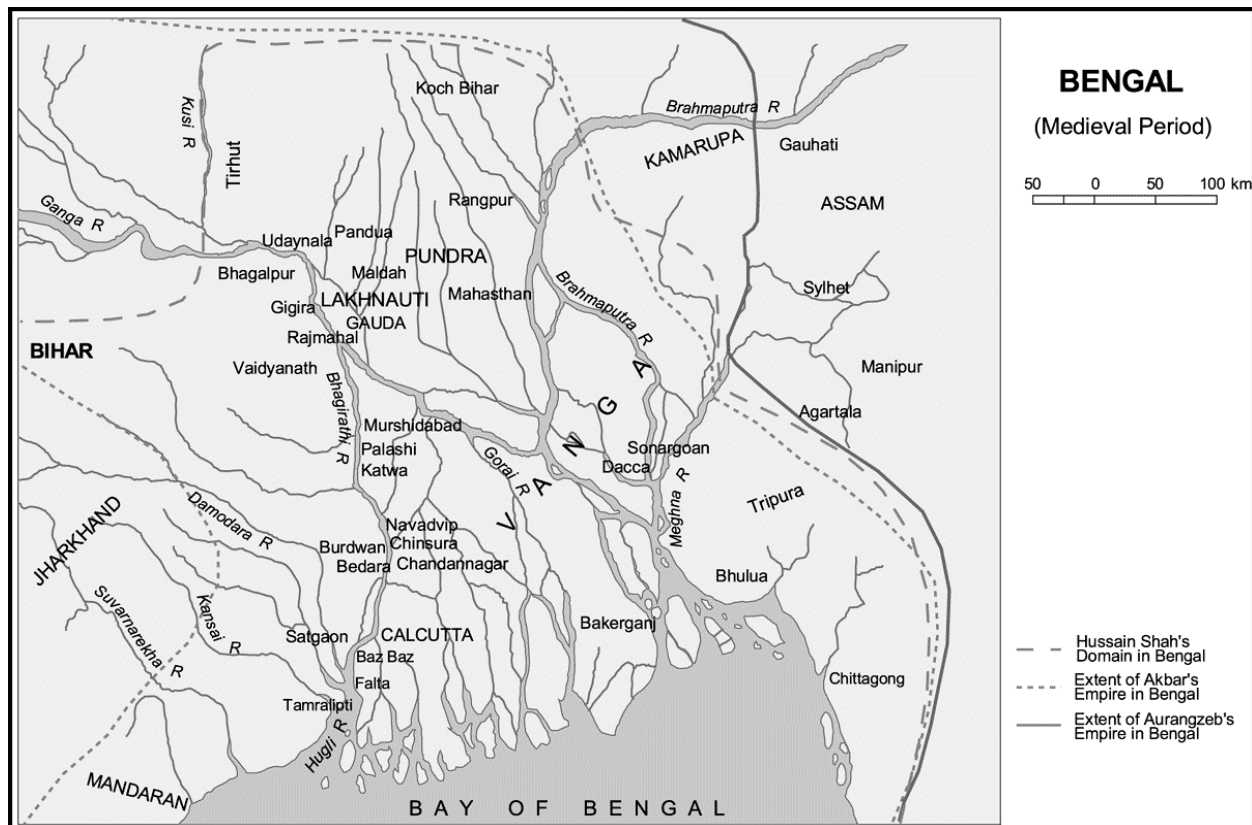


Fig. 2.1.⁶ The Mughal province, *Subah-i-Banglah*

⁵ Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital*, pp. 07-10.

⁶ *Banglapedia*

2.1. Dhaka: Emporium of East Bengal

The geographical location at the southern brink of the higher Pleistocene tract between the rivers namely, the Buriganga and the Shitalakshya that were connected with the Brahmaputra and the Meghna and through Dhaleshwari with the Padma placed Dhaka in a commanding position over the low lying regions of the Padma-Meghna basin and also the regions on the northeast of Brahmaputra. Unlike the previous Muslim capitals in the northwest Bengal e.g. Lakhnauti, Gauda (Gaur) and Pandua, Dhaka was located deep in the Bengal hinterland and provided immense strategic advantage to the Mughals. Regions that had hitherto remained beyond their reach were directly exposed and consequently conquered. Islam Khan in the battle of Sylhet in AD 1612 defeated and killed Uthman Khan; later *subahdars* led campaigns to farther east e.g. Kamrup, Assam, Tippera and Arakan. The most notable Mughal campaigns from Dhaka were led by Mir Jumla who annexed Assam and Kuchbihar to the empire and by Shaista Khan who established Mughal control over Chittagong.⁷

As the headquarters of the eastern fleet of Mughal Navy (*Amla i Nawara*) and the eastern unit of Mughal Artillery (*Amla i Assam*), the major function of Mughal capital Dhaka was to facilitate eastward expansion of Mughal Empire and to protect the already occupied eastern territories from rebellion and external threats. Revenue was inseparable from the purpose of military expeditions of an expanding empire like the Mughals and Dhaka became the centre for collecting land tax (*mal*), customs and excise duties (*sair*) from the occupied territories. The *zamindars* themselves started to live in the capital or sent their agents to look after their landed interests; inferior *zamindars* joined in groups and deputed one agent to represent all of them in the capital.⁸ The Mughals also established the Dhaka *Shahbandar* (customs house) to collect tax from the merchants who engaged in trading in the eastern districts of Bengal.⁹ They had to report to the *Shahbandar* for clearance and collecting *rawanas* (permits).

Dhaka was ideally connected with the major river systems of Bengal at a point midway between the Bay of Bengal and the older seats of Muslim power in the Gaur-Tanda region to become an entrepôt for riverine trade with West Bengal, upper India, and the wider world beyond the Bay. The construction of three river forts by the Mughals in the mid-seventeenth century on the Shitalakshya and the Meghna

⁷ Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital*, pp. 41-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

rivers transformed Dhaka into a secured manufacturing and trading centre. Neighbourhoods in the Mughal Dhaka evolved as specialized localities for different types of crafts e.g. Tantibazar (weavers workshops), Patuatuli (textile printmakers' area), Banianagar (area of gold and silversmiths), Shankharibazar (shell-workers workshops), Kagazitola (papermakers area) etc. The Mughal rulers encouraged the settlement of the artisans in Dhaka by granting them rent-free land.¹⁰

The most prominent among Dhaka's products was the Muslin. East Bengal had long been famous for its manufacture of cotton and silk products, especially the delicate Muslin. Bengal Muslin constituted the *serioe vestes*, highly prized in imperial Rome in the first century AD; Pliny in enumerating the imports from Egypt and Arabia mentioned Bengal Muslin.¹¹ Apart from the city proper where the Mughals established state owned Muslin *karkhanas* (factories), important places of Muslin manufacture were Sonargaon, Dhamrai, Teetabari, Jangalbari, Bajitpur and Vikrampur; all in the vicinity of Dhaka. French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier who visited Dhaka in AD 1666 mentioned of Dhaka's muslin, silk, cotton, and embroidered fabrics being exported to Provence, Italy, Languedoc and Spain.¹² Besides the products and produces of Dhaka and its surrounding areas, jute, sugar, mustard seed, oil, honey, wax, ivory, shell lack, betel nut, butter oil, linseed, cheese, turmeric, mats were imported and distributed through the *Shahbandar* (Dhaka customs house).

Growth of Dhaka as a thriving manufacturing and trading center attracted foreign merchants from Arab, Persia, Armenia, Rajasthan and other parts of Asia. A number of *Katras* (caravan *sarais*) were constructed in AD 1644-1663 near the *Badshahi Bazaar* (imperial market, known as Chawkbazaar) to accommodate the visiting merchants. Portuguese priest Fray Sebastiao Manrique, who had visited Dhaka in AD 1640, described it as a Gangetic emporium with a population of over two hundred thousand. Manrique was especially impressed with the city's wealth and wrote, "*Many strange nations resort to this city on account of its vast trade and commerce in a great variety of commodities, which are produced in profusion in the rich and fertile lands of this region. These have raised the city to an eminence of wealth,*

¹⁰ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *Dhaka: A Study in Urban History and Development, 1840-1921* (Academic Press and Publishers Library third revised edition, Dhaka 2010), p. 13.

¹¹ James Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 121.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

*which is actually stupefying.....so extensive is the trade that over one hundred vessels are yearly loaded up in the ports of Bengala with only rice , sugar, fat, oil, wax and other similar articles".*¹³

The overland ascendancy of Mughal influence in Bengal's eastern hinterland had coincided with the Portuguese, Dutch, French and English commercial interests in the region and Dhaka became the eastern centre for integrating two cosmopolitan and expanding political economies, the Mughal and the European.¹⁴ The Dutch were the first among the Europeans to have established a factory in Dhaka in AD 1663. The French also had a modest presence in Dhaka's commerce since 1682 to 1774 but the major stakeholder was the English East India Company who established their business house in Dhaka in 1669.¹⁵ The population of Dhaka at its founding as Mughal capital in AD 1610 was between 100,000 and 125,000, half of which constituted the Mughal military-administrative structure.¹⁶ By the early eighteenth century, Dhaka's population rose to about half a million.¹⁷

Dhaka enjoyed the status of Mughal provincial capital for about a century except a break between AD 1639 and 1659 when the then Mughal *subahdar* (head of provincial administration), Prince Shah Shuja shifted his residence to Rajmahal for his own personal and political reasons.¹⁸ When Murshid Quli Khan was appointed the *diwan* (head of revenue administration) of Bengal in 1702, he shifted the *diwani* headquarter to Makhsudabad, later named Murshidabad after him in 1704. Murshid Quli Khan became the *subahdar* of Bengal in 1716 and formally moved the capital of *Subah-i-Banglah* to Murshidabad. Dhaka was relegated to a seat of *Naib-Nazim* (deputy governor). However, commercial activities in Dhaka increased and particularly the business of European companies expanded manifold. Export of European companies from Dhaka increased enormously and they attracted many people who were

¹³ Cited in Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴ Richard M. Eaton, *op. cit.*, p. 150-51.

¹⁵ Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital*, pp. 57-59.

¹⁶ Mehedi Hasan Khan, 'Population Growth in Dhaka City: 1610-1947' in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds.), *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond- Volume III: Urbanization and Urban Development* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2011), p. 299.

¹⁷ Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital*, p. 73.

¹⁸ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

connected with manufacture, trade and banking. Thus, in spite of the shift of capital from Dhaka, it did not dwindle much as a city though its physical growth and development were definitely checked.¹⁹

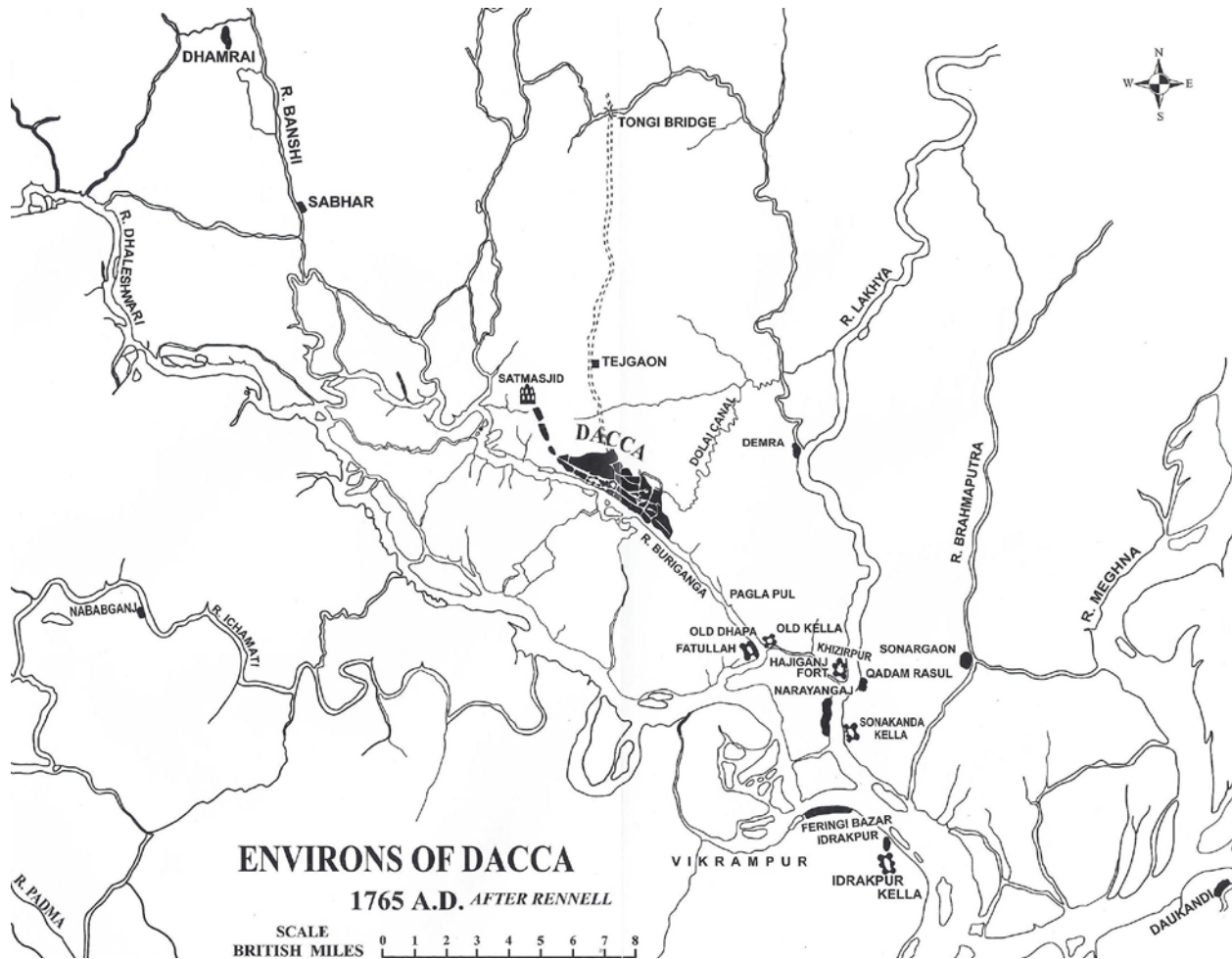


Fig. 2.2. Environs of Dhaka, 1765

3. Decline and Desertion

After Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah had succumbed in AD 1757, the taking over of Bengal's *diwani* (revenue administration) by the English East India Company in 1765 had a devastating impact on Dhaka. As trade and commerce increasingly gravitated around Kolkata where the political and administrative center had shifted to, both Dhaka and Murshidabad declined rapidly. Dhaka gradually lost many of its administrative functions; the *Amla i Nawara* (eastern fleet of the Mughal Navy) was abolished in 1768-69 and starting

¹⁹ Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital*, pp 10-12; 30.

from 1787, several smaller districts were gradually carved out of Dhaka's revenue and administrative jurisdictions. Dhaka was reduced to a mere district headquarter.²⁰

James Rennell in AD 1765 reported that contemporary Dhaka had an estimated population of 450,000 and with a breadth of two and half miles, the city stretched about four miles along the river. By 1801, Dhaka's population declined to 200,000 while the area of the city shrunk to three and half miles by one and a quarter.²¹ According to the census of 1838, there were only 68,038 inhabitants in Dhaka. Poverty increased in a far greater ratio than population had decreased. Many families that had formerly been in a state of affluence were reduced to comparative poverty. A great number of houses were deserted and were in a state of ruin while the suburbs were overrun with jungle.²²

Unscrupulous feudal extraction along with the collection of manufactured products for export at rates lower than usual created tremendous economic drain in the new colony while it provided the primary capital for industrial revolution in England. Dhaka's decline was attributed predominantly to the slump of its textile industry. Weaving of Muslin in Britain commenced in AD 1781 and with the introduction of the mule twist in 1785 in which year no less than 500,000 pieces of muslin were produced in England, it attained great perfection there. The simultaneous growth of textile industries in Britain under the magic influence of steam and imposition of 75% duty on textile products from Dhaka acting virtually as a prohibition on their import destroyed the weavers of East Bengal. Export of Dhaka's Muslin to England in 1787 amounted in value to 3,000,000 rupees; it rapidly dwindled to rupees 850,000 in 1807 and 350,000 in 1813. Export of Muslin to England completely stopped in 1817 and the commercial residency of the company in Dhaka was abolished. The manufacture of thread i.e. spinning, which was the occupation of many families in Dhaka district, had to be abandoned owing to the comparative cheapness of imported British thread. The import of thread from Britain in 1827 amounted to 3,063,556 lbs that rose to 6,624,823 lbs in 1831 and almost eliminated the local thread.²³

²⁰ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² For Dhaka's decline: James Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-43; 266-68.

²³ *Ibid.*

4. Resurrection as Regional Headquarters

The advantageous location of Dhaka saved it from becoming, like Murshidabad, a fading relic of Mughal grandeur.²⁴ During the permanent settlement of land revenue in AD 1793, Dhaka Collectorate consisted of Dhaka and Dhaka-Jalalpur districts. Sixteen thousand landed proprietors paid in their land revenue at Dhaka Collectorate in 1803.²⁵ The collector's office had the authority to put land holdings on auction in case of default and the collector who was the executive officer for settling the interests of tenants and landholders had the authority and responsibility to investigate for resumption of tax-free (*la-kharaj*) land. The land revenue system after permanent settlement thus led *zamindars*, revenue farmers, tenure holders and ordinary peasants to look to the city as the place where their fortunes were bound up.

Dhaka became the headquarters of Dhaka division consisting of the districts of Dhaka, Dhaka-Jalalpur, Tippera, Sherpur and Mymensingh in AD 1829. The new commissioner of revenue was empowered with police and judicial authorities. The presence of the commissioner of revenue added further weight and importance to Dhaka for those with landed interests. Many *zamindars* moved into the city leaving the management of their estates to *naibs* (deputies). Because of the commercial stagnation caused by the colonial economic policy, many of Dhaka's leading Armenian, Greek, Kashmiri and local merchants had given up trade and invested in *zamindari* after permanent settlement; they together with the incoming *zamindars* transformed Dhaka into a stronghold of landed class interest.²⁶

New civil and criminal courts centered in Dhaka with jurisdiction over the eastern districts of Bengal propagated a body of legal practitioners who thrived on the increasing land related disputes. Dhaka became an examination center for pleadership certificate as well.²⁷ Appointments of locals in the government offices let the English educated natives assume a position of considerable influence alongside the landed class in the society of Dhaka. The overwhelming majority of these new civil servant and professional elites were Hindus who had adapted themselves more readily to the change of official

²⁴ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²⁵ James Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

²⁶ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-32; 92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

language from Persian to English than their Muslim compeers who were psychologically less inclined to accept the reality of British rule.²⁸

4.1. Ascent to Cerebral Centrality

Dhaka emerged as the main centre for English education in East Bengal by the mid-nineteenth century. The first government English school of Bengal presidency was established in Dhaka in AD 1835; a collegiate section was introduced in 1841. The Dhaka College reinforced the centrality of the city by attracting outsiders and bestowed on the city the cultural, social and intellectual leadership of East Bengal. Scholarships were introduced so that students from other districts could afford enrollments in Dhaka College. The earliest information of students joining the college from other districts relates to 1843. Jagannath College with affiliation from the Kolkata University was established in Dhaka in 1884. It became the largest private college in East Bengal drawing students from all over the region. By 1885, no less than 5,000 students were attending schools and colleges in Dhaka, among them were many who came from distant places as Chittagong, Sylhet, Barisal and Rajshahi.²⁹

Spread in education and emergence of the English educated middle class led to the growth of a vernacular press in Dhaka where the first Bengali printing machine was founded in 1860. Some of the most famous literary works of the nineteenth century Bengal were printed and published in Dhaka, publication of newspapers quickly followed. Introduction of western education and the accompanying social changes transformed Dhaka into the focal point of political and cultural life of East Bengal.³⁰

The establishment of Dhaka University in AD 1921, the first university of East Bengal further strengthened the cerebral centrality of Dhaka with respect to the East Bengal microcosmos. The Dhaka University was conceived as a residential university and became the prime destination for higher education in East Bengal. The door of higher education opened up for the Muslims of East Bengal after Dhaka University started functioning.³¹ The university received large number of Muslim students coming

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-63; 67-68; 82.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

³¹ Syed Abul Maksud, 'Bangla Literature in the Twentieth Century' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), p. 262.

from the villages and residing in the halls.³² By 1937, half of the Muslim students came from the villages of the eastern delta; sons of petty landlords and well to do peasants. Many students from the urban middle and lower middle class also attended Dhaka University. As the new western educated elites, they replaced the landed nobility in time³³ and in many cases provided the leadership to bring the Bengal Muslim community out of its orthodoxy.³⁴

5. Capital of East Bengal and Assam

East Bengal regained economical vitality in the period following the Crimean war and the growth of the Australian colonies. As Russian flax was no longer available to Britain, jute rose as the substitute. Jute was a minor item of export until AD 1853 but after 1855, demand of jute increased geometrically. The humid and marshy land of the districts of Dhaka, Faridpur, Mymensingh and Tippera were ideal for cultivation of jute and inevitably, Dhaka became a major jute-exporting centre. Opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 drew Bengal closer to England and commercial crops such as, tea, indigo, rice, opium, sugarcane were added to the export basket. The demand for rice from Bengal to the Australian colonies also sprung up.³⁵

Assam also prospered during this period owing to its emerging tea industry. With the worldwide increase of demand for jute and tea, East Bengal and Assam required better administration to match their economic reality. The new province of East Bengal and Assam that brought the majority of the Muslim population of Bengal and a greater portion of the tea and jute producing areas under one administration was carved out of the Bengal Presidency on October 16, 1905; Dhaka befittingly became the capital of the new province. With improved communication with Kolkata by steamer and rail routes after 1871, central location in relation to rest of the proposed province and prominence as an education centre owing to the rich cultural heritage of its hinterland, Dhaka deservingly ascended to this socio-political importance. The

³² Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

³³ For social evolution in Dhaka in the mid-twentieth century: *Infra*, Chapter VII.

³⁴ Zaheda Ahmad, 'State and Education' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III, pp. 95-103.

³⁵ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.

selection of Dhaka as the capital of East Bengal and Assam was an official recognition of Dhaka's centrality.³⁶



Source: Ahmad, Nafis (1958)

Fig. 2.3. East Bengal and later Bangladesh

The Muslims of East Bengal in general welcomed the partition of Bengal that gave them a territorial identity. However, the anti-partition agitations of the Hindu gentry who considered the partition as detrimental to their own class interest led to the revocation of the partition of Bengal in 1911.³⁷ Consequently, Dhaka was no longer a capital. Though deprived for the time being, ascent to the capital of the Bengal province (East Pakistan) of the newly independent Pakistan in 1947 and later of the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971 affirmed that Dhaka was the centre and concretization of East Bengal microcosmos.

³⁶ Shirin Akhtar, 'On the Selection of Dhaka as the Capital of Eastern Bengal and Assam 1905-1911' in Sharif uddin Ahmed (ed.) *Dhaka Past Present Future* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh second edition, Dhaka 2009), pp. 211-13; 217.

³⁷ For partition of Bengal and subsequent developments: *Infra*, Chapter VI.

Chapter III

Ganges Plain as Mythical Space

1. Mythical Space

The primeval experience of nature as a multitude of living forces and the need of traditional societies to understand man's place in nature in a holistic way gave rise to mythical spaces that formed the basis of dwelling. Mythical space is a conceptual schema, but it is also pragmatic space in the sense that within the schema, a large number of practical activities such as planting and harvesting of crops are ordered.¹ Two principal kinds of mythical space may be distinguished. In the first, mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other, it is the spatial component of a worldview or cosmology, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities. Both kinds of mythical space persist in the modern world because for individuals as well as for societies, there will always be areas of the hazily known and of the unknown, and because it is likely that some people will always be driven to understand man's place in nature in a holistic way.²

To be livable, nature and society must show order and display a harmonious relationship. Oriented mythical space organizes the forces of nature and society by associating them with significant locations or places within the spatial system. It attempts to make sense of the universe by classifying its components and suggesting that mutual influence exist among them. It imputes personality to space, thus transforming space in effect into place.³ The concept of space as a system of places has its origin in traditional man's quest for understanding the nature. In the mythical space of traditional societies, the sacred places function as "centres". The conception of centre or the "middle place" is very important because they serve as objects of man's orientation and identification, and constitute a spatial structure.⁴

¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press sixth printing, Minneapolis 2008), pp. 17; 86; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Rizzoli, New York 1980), p. 23.

² Yi-Fu Tuan, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88; 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, p. 28

Religion could either bind a people to the place or free them from it. The worship of local gods binds a people to place whereas universal religions give freedom; in a universal religion, no locality is necessarily more sacred than another is.⁵

2. Early Historic Ganges Plain

Almost a thousand years after the decline of Indus valley cities in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, urban culture emerged in the Ganges Plain about the eighth century BC. Eastward movement in the late Harappan phase i.e. in the second quarter of the second millennium BC in two directions, one from the upper Doab towards the Gangetic Valley and the other from Gujarat towards Malwa and Maharashtra introduced a higher productive system based on plough agriculture to the agriculturists and hunter-gatherers of the inner regions. Plough agriculture and the inclusion of iron in the Ganges plain agricultural technology by c.1500 BC gradually incorporated the regional hunter-gatherers within the framework of a higher social and productive organization that eventually led to the early historic urban growth in the region.⁶ By c.1000 BC, the Ganges Plain had deep agricultural roots, a wide range of crafts and industries, an extensive network of trade and many interacting geographical orbits. Advancement in trade and commerce was manifest in the use of accurately weighed punch-marked silver coins and cast copper coins from the eighth century BC; knowledge of writing that marked the beginning of the early historic period in the region also developed by the seventh-eighth century BC.⁷

Urban centres that eventually would grow into important cities emerged in the eighth century BC along important trading routes and junctions. The first settlement in Benares (Varanasi), which was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kasi and a major river port on the Ganges River, dated back to 800 BC.⁸ Among the numerous urban centres that flourished in the Ganges Plain in the early historic period, many e.g. Prayag at the junction of the River Ganges and Yamuna; Kausambi, the capital of Vatsa and a Ganges

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁶ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Oxford Companion to Indian Archeology* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2006), pp. 212; 283-84; 299.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 310; 313; 418.

⁸ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD second reprint, New Delhi 2005), p. 115.

Plain terminal point of a major section of the routes from the Deccan; Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala on the bank of the Sarju River emerged in the eighth century BC.⁹

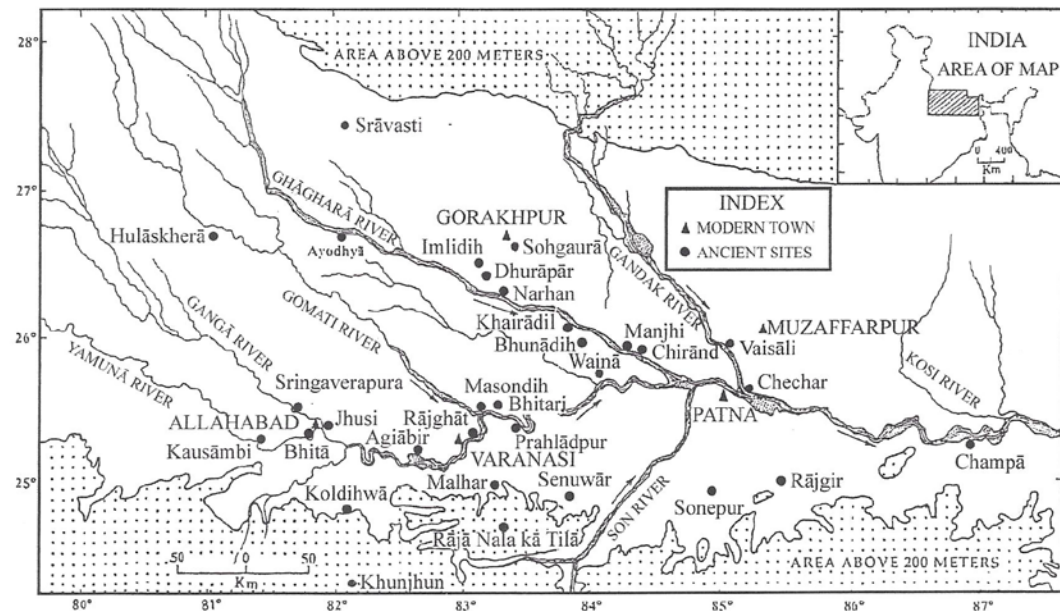


Fig. 3.1.¹⁰ Early historic urban centres of Middle Ganges Plain

3. Advance of Aryan Traditions

By the seventh century BC, settlements heterogeneous in population or degree of advancement but with enough of a common language and tradition that facilitated considerable trade and cultural intercourse extended from Punjab to Bihar. Linguistic and cultural homogeneity over such a vast geographical area owed much to the spread of Aryan language and traditions along with the superior mode of production. There is strong possibility that some of the Indus people had migrated eastward and spread the advanced technique and culture there, but it was the Aryans in general. It does not mean that a corresponding physical migration also took place; what spread was a new way of living.¹¹

⁹ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

¹¹ For the Aryan advance towards east: D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. reprint, Mumbai 2008), pp. 97-153.

The Aryan priests (*Brahmans*) played a significant role behind the emergence of agrarian societies with cultural similarities. This was not a conscious and planned action, but the result of hunger; the sole aim was to make a livelihood. Often adventurous Aryans or poor Aryan priests in small groups would penetrate into non-Aryan eastern tribes with their own cattle or as individuals with no arms but with seeds, knowledge of plough agriculture and information of distant markets helping food gathering tribes transform into food producers. Their harmlessness was obvious which made living in friendly terms with the food gathering tribes possible; their sole protection was their poverty.

The *Brahman* tradition of study required each acolyte to serve a celibate resident apprenticeship of twelve years under a preceptor (*guru*) in an isolated grove. The training included tending the *guru's* cattle, mastering the unwritten Vedas by heart and perfecting the rituals. Neither hunting nor agriculture was practiced in the study colony that made the priest unfit to handle the plough or the bow. Hence, conjoining rituals with agricultural actions such as blessing seeds while sowing, propitiating evil stars, placating angry gods etc. were essential for his livelihood. As the priest and his rituals became essential prelude to every agricultural operation, Aryan language and rites became indistinguishable to the tribal commons from the new mode of production. As soon as the priest managed to come in terms with the warrior class, his precepts and the warriors' arms would combine to expropriate the surplus produced by others. The tribe as a whole would turn into a peasant caste group, generally ranked as *Sudras* while the *Brahman* would discover some respectable genealogy for the tribal chiefs or the oligarchy to rank them as *Ksatriyas* (the warrior caste). The advancement to an agrarian society implied the development of a class structure within the tribe that eventually would place an absolute kingship over it. Such a king had no tribal restrictions to his rule and depended upon the armed *Ksatriyas* who subsisted upon tribute gathered from the surplus produced by others and collected revenue for the king. They along with the associated priests and merchants designated as *pauras* (citizen) lived in the tribal headquarters that gradually transformed into the capital cities of the emerging kingdoms.

The Aryan priest with his knowledge of calendar and medicinal plants, huge repertoire of hymns (*mantras*) and rituals was the most suitable person to replace the medicine man of the tribe for whom rituals were essential preludes to productive activities. The oldest source of the priest's hymn was the Rig-Veda, which was probably prepared about 1500-1200 BC¹² when the Rivers Ganges and Yamuna were barely known. Many scholars believe that the picture of the society as depicted in the Rig-Veda was

¹² D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, p. 73.

related to the Indus civilization.¹³ However, it is always difficult to separate the Vedic myths from possible historic reality.¹⁴ The principal Vedic god is Agni, the god of fire. Next in importance is Indra who was praised repeatedly for freeing the rivers that were brought to standstill by the demon Vritra who like a great snake lying across the hill slope obstructed the water. The killing of the demon by Indra i.e. the destruction of the dams has been taken as a metaphorical explanation of the decline of Indus agriculture. The Rig-Veda said nothing of fixed settlements or of reading, writing, art and architecture. Music was restricted to chants for ritual and technology amounted mostly to the construction of chariots, tools and weapons of war. The priestly function was not specialized to any caste and the only difference was of colour between the light-skinned Aryans and their darker enemies.¹⁵ The later Yajurveda, dated at about 800 BC, dealt with regular settlements. The growing importance of agriculture and metal became clear in the prayer recital of Yajurveda that recorded the development of four castes within the tribe i.e. the *Brahman*, the *Ksatriya*, the *Vaisya* and the *Sudra*. The principle ritual was the blood sacrifice (*Yajna*) made to other Vedic gods besides Agni (fire), though always in the presence of the sacred fire. The *Vaisyas* and the *Sudras* were enclosed between the two upper castes during the sacrificial processions to keep them submissive. The number and variety of animals sacrificed were incredible; the highest-ranking sacrificial beasts were men, bulls and stallions.¹⁶

4. Historic Cities in Mythical Space

Absorption of some local traditions and gods into his canon eased the *Brahman's* job of integrating the food gathering tribes into the new society. The patriarch Aryan idols gained acceptability among the matriarchal native tribes through marriages. Mother goddesses were won over as wives of some male gods e.g. Durga became wife to Siva and Lakshmi for Vishnu. New places of pilgrimages were also introduced with suitable myths to make them respectable. The final and a much rewarding task of the *Brahman* priest was to discover some respectable genealogy for the tribal chief in the epics or in the Puranas, and writing such ancestries into record. The Puranas were primarily semi-historic cosmogonical texts dealing with a variety of themes including dynastic genealogies and traditional histories of creations

¹³ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁴ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, p. 79.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

and the early kings.¹⁷ The Puranas were edited and re-edited, both incorporating new materials and giving up old ones from the need of keeping the dynastic accounts up to date and accommodating the new additions.¹⁸

The Vedic hymns were memorized syllable by syllable. In comparison, the post-Vedic epics i.e. the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, both conceived in the geographical setting of the Ganges-Yamuna plain and its hinterland were flexible and suited the *Brahman* priest's purpose of assimilation better. The Ramayana narrated the abduction of Sita, wife of King Rama of Ayodhya who was on self-exile. The villain was the ten-headed demon Ravana, the King of Lanka (Sri Lanka) who was defeated and killed by the army of Rama and his brother Lakshmana who set out to rescue Sita. The epic hero Rama gradually became a god; he is revered as an incarnation of Vishnu. The Mahabharata narrated a battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas for an empire that stretched from Taxila to Bengal. The neighbouring kingdoms fought a battle of annihilation that was represented as having been fought by millions for the mastery of the whole world. Counting the traditional number of dynastic names down to historical kings, the battle could take place about 850 BC but such an empire was never a possibility before the fourth century BC.¹⁹ The composition of the Mahabharata was perfect for the *Brahmans* who prefaced the singing of any episode with a sacred Vedic hymn and the genealogy of the patron with a panegyric. The Mahabharata originally had 24,000 stanzas but was inflated to over 80,000 verses at a date between 200 BC-AD 200.²⁰

The later additions to Mahabharata became religious in character but different from the Vedic ideals that were soon becoming impertinent to the new society. The most brilliant of these additions was the Bhagavad-Gita, a discourse supposedly uttered by god Krishna before the fighting. The legend of Krishna is that he was a hero and a demigod of the Yadu tribe. In Mahabharata, he became the charioteer to Arjuna and counsel to the Pandava brothers. The tribes that were transforming to agrarian societies from pastoral life had started to consider the fire sacrifices as wastage of their cattle and preferred Krishna as

¹⁷ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

¹⁸ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 168-72.

¹⁹ D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* p. 116-17.

²⁰ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 92-3.

their god for his supposed act of protecting the cattle from the Vedic Indra. Krishna's dark skin and his habit of marrying mother goddesses also eased assimilation of the matriarchal native tribes.²¹

As the epic heroes became religious deities or incarnations of Vedic gods while gods indulged in marriages, the kings and oligarchies in a rapidly transforming society aspired to rise above other humans through claims of mythical lineage. This explains the inflation of the Mahabharata and the Puranas that blurred the boundary between history and mythology in the Ganges Plain. The only concrete thing was the geographical setting that the mortal humans shared with their gods and heroes; the Ganges Plain became a vast space of reverence. The cities and the settlements that the epics and the Puranas portrayed as their settings were real; the Ramayana focused on Ayodhya as its epicenter of power while the Mahabharata concentrated on the Indo-Gangetic divide (Indraprastha and Kurukshetra), the upper Doab (Hastinapura) and later also the lower Doab (Kausambi).²² Rama's mother was a princess of Kosala, a historic kingdom extending from the Himalaya to the Ganges while his wife Sita was the princess of Videha. Krishna was born in Mathura, the capital of the Surasenas in the sixth century BC (present Uttar Pradesh of India). These cities with their existence in the real world made the pilgrimages, and the other rituals associated with the order of different gods and heroes possible while the cities themselves became sacred places of orientation for the heterogeneous people of the vast and mythical Ganges Plain.

5. Benares (Varanasi): the Middle Place

Although Mark Twain put the following sarcastically, *"Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together.....Benares is thus the center of the earth.....it is unspeakably sacred in Hindu eyes.....Benares is the sacredest of sacred cities."* (Following the Equator, 1897), the material importance of Benares during the period when urban culture had flourished in the Ganges Plain inevitably made the city the centre of sanctity for Hinduism. The preeminence of Benares as a place in Indian culture has continued right from its mention in the Vedic literature to the present day. Its foundation at the beginning of the first millennium BC is attributed to still earlier navigation along the Ganges River.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²² Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

²³ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, p. 90.



Fig. 3.2 and 3.3. Benares and the River Ganges are inseparable

The importance of Benares as a city had a lot to do with its location on a network of both regional and sub-continental routes. Very few cities of ancient India were as important in the route network as Benares and this must partly accounted for its preeminence as a holy city.²⁴ Benares was the centre of a cluster of cities and gave access to various segments of the Ganges plain both overland and by the river. It was a major river port on the Ganges River and the terminal point of the route, which came from the Deccan. Merchants sailed up to Southeast Asia from Benares that had overland connection with Ayodhya and Sravasti, and both overland and riverine connection with Pataliputra and the area of ancient Prayag. The Buddhist *Jatakas* underscored the importance of Benares as an economic hub; it became a major centre of trade and industry. Its cloths especially cotton and silk, sandalwoods and orange dye that later gave the first colour to the Buddhist robes had great reputation. Buddha preached his first sermon at Sarnath in its outskirts. There are references of specialist artisans living in the city as organized guilds. Benares, also known as Kasi was strategically so important for commanding the Ganges that after Kosala had established control over the city following a long series of battles in the seventh century BC, the name of the kingdom was hyphenated Kasi-Kosala.²⁵

Ancient Benares lay on the bank of the Ganges River in the modern Rajghat locality and to the south and west of its Varuna tributary, which joined it at Sarai *Mohana* (confluence). Period I of archeological

²⁴ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 331; 496.

²⁵ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 122-23; Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

discoveries at Benares²⁶ is marked by pre-NBP (northern black polished ware) black and red ware. Period II is the NBP layer dated between 600-200 BC and earlier. A mud rampart was built during this period and apart from the sides protected by the Ganges and Varuna, there was a moat, which was widened up to 37.22 m in the second phase. The rampart was protected with wooden planks from the erosion of rivers. A 2.65 m wide road of period II built of well-pressed earth with a base of potsherds, gravel and rammed clay has been detected. Period III (c.200 BC-AD c.300) revealed burnt brick houses with bricks laid in mud mortars. The rooms, often two or more were arranged in rows associated with drains, wells, and soak-pits. Some drains were made of burnt-bricks and care was taken to ensure that they were not clogged by dirt. An important feature of the period IV corresponding to AD c.300-700 is a non-residential area of roughly 4,000 m². The structural complex that had a central cell surrounded by rooms on all sides has been identified as a trade-warehouse. A number of associated underground brick-built structures have been interpreted as underground pits for storing grain.

5.1. Emancipation in Benares

The myths of Benares and Ganges are intertwined. In Hinduism, the Ganges River is sacred and personified as the goddess Ganga. According to Bhagavata Purana, Lord Vishnu extended his left foot to the end of the universe and pierced a hole in its covering with the nail of his big toe. Through the hole, the pure water of the causal ocean i.e. the divine *Brahm*-water entered this universe as the Ganges River. It



Fig. 3.4 (left). Shiva bearing the descent of the Ganges, watercolour (AD c.1740)

Fig. 3.5 (right). The evening prayer and ritual dedicated to Goddess Ganga (River Ganges)

²⁶ For archeological references on Benares: Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-50.

settled in Brahmaloka or Brahmapura, abode of Lord Brahma before descending to planet Earth at the request of Bhagiratha and is held safely by Lord Shiva on his head to prevent destruction of the Earth. The Ganges River was released from Lord Shiva's hair to meet the needs of the country.

According to Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva founded Benares. The legend is that Shiva once becoming angry at Brahma's slanders had taken the form of Bhairava (god of annihilation) and cut off one of Brahma's five heads. The skull of Brahma, the evidence of the worst of sins i.e. killing a *Brahman* stuck to Bhairava's hand. Bhairava wandered all over India, the skull clinging to his hand, until Vishnu directed him to come back to Benares where the skull dropped off and Bhairava became free from the sin. Because Bhairava was released from his sin here, Benares is revered as the place where Hindus can have their sins of a lifetime washed away. As the Hindus believe that a bath in the Ganges at Benares would wash away their sins, the great stone steps (*ghats*) that provide access to the river along the bank of the River Ganges become the symbols of expiation and emancipation. Apart from 84 *ghats*, there are approximately 23,000 temples in Benares; the most important is obviously, the Vishvanatha Temple of Lord Shiva.



Fig. 3.6. The Dhamek Stupa on the site of Buddha's first sermon

Unlike the Hindu mythical sanctity, the Buddhist importance of Benares is historic as Buddha was both human and historic. Buddha, born as Goutama in 563 BC in the small *Kshatriya* tribe of the Sakyans preached his first sermons at Sarnath near Benares to his former disciples who had left him in disillusionment when he gave up rigid austerities.²⁷ The Dhamek Stupa was built in AD c.500 to replace an earlier Asokan structure that commemorated Buddha's first sermon on this site, which is a place of Buddhist pilgrimage.

²⁷ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 108-10.

5.2. Conservation in the Sacred City

According to archeological evidences found at Benares, the structural activities did not decline up to AD c.700.²⁸ The city expanded in the Gupta period and the Vishvanatha Temple of Lord Shiva was built by AD 490. Benares became the most popular sacred place of the Hindus under the Gahadvalas who continued until AD 1197. During this period, various deities and their images were established and traders and migrants belonging to various linguistic and cultural groups from different parts of India settled here. After Benares had succumbed to the Turkish ruler Qutb-ud-din Aibak in AD 1194, the city declined for over three centuries.

There was a cultural revival during the rule of Mughal emperor Akbar who invested in the city and built two large temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu; the 200 metres long Akbari Bridge was also completed during this period. Much of modern Benares was rebuilt in the eighteenth century under the patronage of the Maratha and the Peshwa kings; most of the important buildings in the city belong to this period. Bajirao Peshwa (AD 1720-1740) patronized the construction of the Manikarnika and the Dashashvamedh Ghats and the nearby residential quarters. A number of *ghats*, water pools and temples were rebuilt under Maratha patronage.

Benares no longer holds the economic importance that it did in the early historic period. However, it retains its religious distinction. The legend of Lord Shiva's expiation has made it the place of emancipation. As the place that is capable of mediating between the mundane and the cosmic, Benares has become the city of orientation in the intricate worldview of this region and received generous endowments from its patrons in the past. As long as the concept of purity and sanctity will prevail, Benares will continue occupying the middle place in the schema of Gangetic mind.

²⁸ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

East Bengal¹: Outcast in Ganges Plain Mythical Space

1. Bengal in Ancient Literature

Bengal was not included in the Vedic hymns. The first reference of Bengal is found in the *Aitareya Brahmana* (dated between ninth-seventh century BC) where the Pundras were ranked as *dasyus* (criminals). *Bodhayana Dharmasutra* (c.500 BC) divided the known land into three ethno-cultural belts, regarded with varying degrees of esteem. The holiest was the *Aryavarta* (the Aryan domain) lying between the Himalayas and the Western Vindhya i.e. the Yamuna and the upper-middle Ganges plain. The Pundras and the Vangas of Bengal were placed in the outermost belt that was considered completely outside the pale of Vedic culture. Individuals living amongst these people even for a temporary period were required to go through expiatory rites.²

Mahabharata (composed in second century BC-second century AD) described the coastal areas of Bengal as populated by *mlechehhas* (barbarians) and referred to the subjugation and humiliation of Bengal imparted by Karna, Krishna and Bhimasena. Karna had vanquished the Suhmas, the Pundras and the Vangas, and constituted Vanga and Anga into one *vishaya* (district) of which he was the *adhyaksha* (ruler). The Pandavas had humiliated Vasudeva, the lord of Pundras before Krishna defeated him. Krishna defeated both the Pundras and the Vangas. Bhimasena advanced up to the Lauhitya (Brahmaputra River), subdued all the local princes of Bengal including that of Pundra, Vanga and Tamralipti, and extracted tributes from the coastal *mlechehhas*. The Vangas and the Pundras were compelled to bring tribute to the court of Yudisthira.

¹ Bengal here refers approximately to the present day state of West Bengal in India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. East Bengal refers to the present day Bangladesh. References such as Bengal of Maurya or Gupta era do not imply that the entire geographical area was a political entity under these rulers. Rather, they only indicate to the conditions and events of this area that were contemporary of those periods, be it under their control or beyond. For bibliographical reference on the evolution of definition and boundary of Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter II, FN 1.

² For Bengal in ancient literature: R.C. Majumder (ed.), *The History of Bengal*, Vol.I (The University of Dhaka fourth impression, Dhaka 2006), pp. 07-10; 35-40; Niharranjan Roy, *Bangaleer Itihas: Aadi Parba* (in Bengali, Dey's Publishing seventh edition, Kolkata 2010), pp. 109-10; 115; 117-18; 121; 217-19.

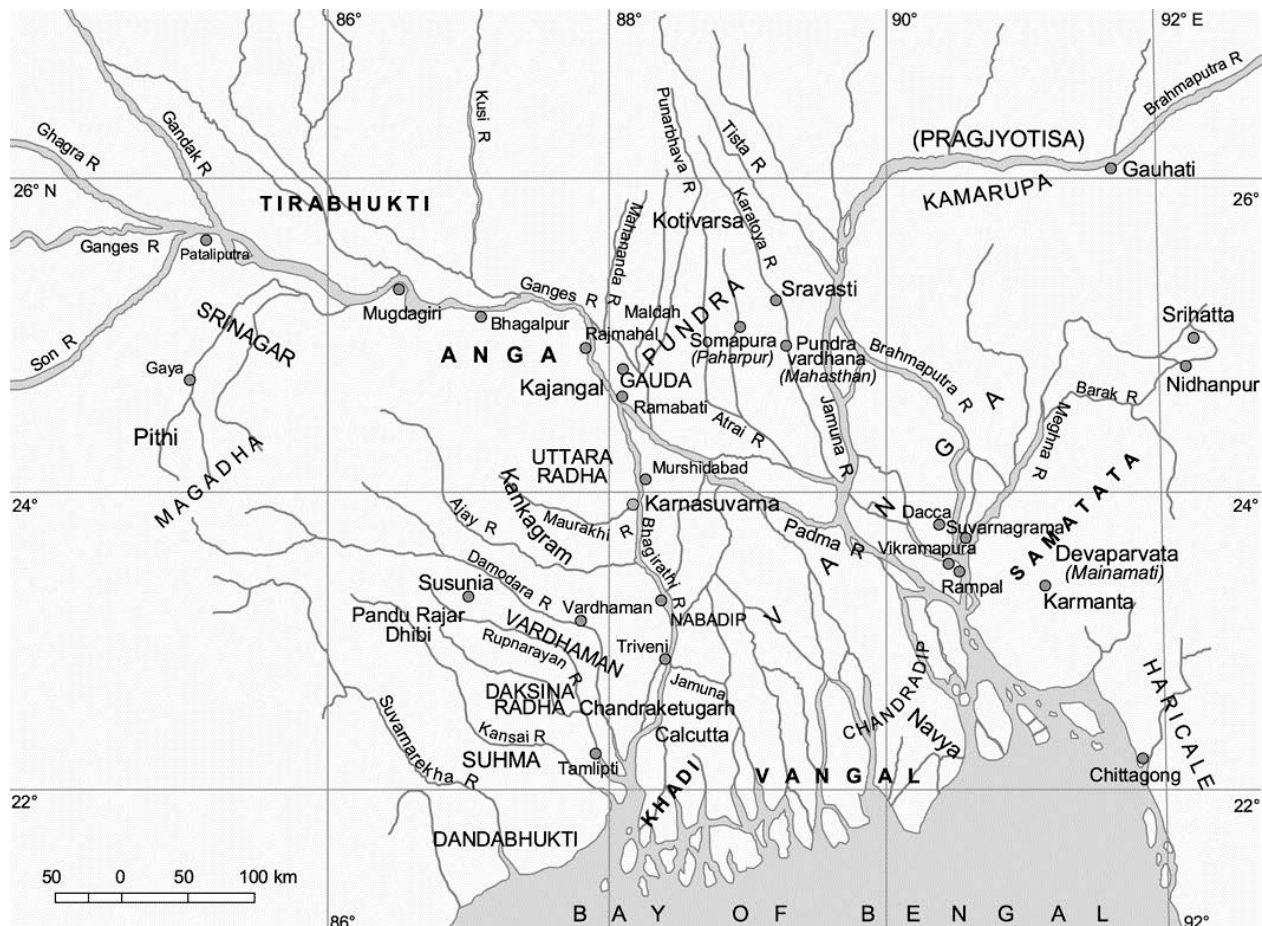


Fig. 4.1.³ Territories and Urban Centres of Bengal (from the early historic through the early medieval period)

The Bengal kings duly availed the Kuru-Pandava strife as an opportunity to wreak vengeance on their tormentors and accordingly, the king of Vangas appeared at the battle scene of *Mahabharata* on his elephant that towered like a mountain, to fight against the Pandavas in support of Duryodhana. Bengal received some respectability in *Ramayana* (composed in fourth century BC-second century AD); the Vangas and the Pundras were included among peoples who had intimate political and matrimonial relations with the Ayodhyan aristocracy.

2. Sacred and Profane

Ganges divided itself into two branches upon entering Bengal. The Bhagirathi ran almost due south while the Padma flew in a southeasterly direction. The Padma at present carries the enormous volume of the Ganges water while the upper part of Bhagirathi has shrunk to a shallow stream. The Hindus attach great

³ *Banglapedia* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2003).

sanctity to the River Bhagirathi and to its confluence with the Bay of Bengal, which was a place of Yudishthira's pilgrimage as mentioned in the *Tirtha-yatra* (pilgrimage) section of *Mahabharata*. The Padma is not looked upon with veneration, nor does it claim any religious sanctity. On the contrary, the mighty Padma terrifies;⁴ it is profane. Opposite conceptions of two rivers that carry the same holy water of the Ganges is ascribed to the former importance of Bhagirathi, which probably was the major channel in the past.⁵ Although it is difficult to ascertain when the shift in status took place, Padma certainly was the main stream of the Ganges by the beginning of the sixteenth century AD.

The Brahmaputra changed its course after the earthquake of AD 1762 to flow along the Jamuna but religious sanctity as in the case of Bhagirathi still attaches to the older course; thousands of pilgrims take their bath at the muddy pools of the old riverbed near Langalbandh. Karatoya was the other river of Eastern Bengal that made it to the mythical space. *Kar* (hand) and *Toa* (water) signifies that the water that poured on the hands of Shiva, when he had married the mountain goddess Parvati formed the river.⁶ According to the *Tirtha-yatra* (pilgrimage) section of *Mahabharata*, a man could acquire the merit of horse-sacrifice by fasting for three nights at the bank of Karatoya.

3. Existential Consequence of Exclusion

Discovery of the numerous copper plate inscriptions have revealed that land was awarded to *Brahmans* (Hindu priest caste) in Bengal in the fifth century AD (Dhanaidaha copper plate, AD 433; Sultanpur copper plate, AD 439; Damodarpur copper plate nos. II and III, AD 447-482 etc.). Land awards continued in the following centuries in different parts of Bengal such as in Burdwan (Mallasarul copper plate, 6th century AD); Faridpur (Kotalipara copper plate, 6th century AD); Comilla (Tippera copper plate, AD 664) and Sylhet (Paschimbhag copper plate, AD 930).⁷ Bengal was included in the Gupta Empire by the mid-fourth century AD. The Guptas brought a large tract of land in Bengal under cultivation, which was

⁴ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 03.

⁵ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁶ Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Banglapedia* Vol. 6 (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2003, hereafter referred to as *Banglapedia*), p. 15.

⁷ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-221. For copper plates and inscriptions: Afroz Akmam, *Early Urban Centres in Bangladesh: An Archeological Study, 3rd Century B.C. to mid 13th Century A.D.* (Shahitya Prakash, Dhaka 2011), pp. 187-191.

previously fallow and uncultivable.⁸ It is rational to infer from the abundance of land grants made to *Brahmans* that the diffusion of Aryan traditions became an integral part of the agricultural expansion in Bengal. There was no dearth of *Brahmans* in Bengal since the fifth century AD; by the eighth century AD, *Vedic Brahmans* were common in most places of Bengal.⁹

Damodarpur copperplates (AD c.448-544) IV and V, and Baigram copperplate (AD c.448) recorded that by the fifth century AD, both Shiva and Vishnu worship had started in Bengal. According to the Gunaigarh copperplate (AD 506), the order of Vishnu had spread even to the easternmost parts e.g. up to Tripura. The Bhagalpur copperplate of Narayanpala (AD 861-917) recorded a gift of the king to the worshippers of Shiva.¹⁰ Discoveries of numerous Vishnu and Shiva idols and images of Gupta and post Gupta era especially of the period starting in the eighth century AD and onward testify that their worship had spread all over Bengal.¹¹ The great epics of the Ganges Plain i.e. the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* had already become commonplace in Bengal's cultural life and were lucidly portrayed in the terracotta plaques of the Somapura *Mahavihara* (Buddhist monastery) of the eighth century AD. In the process of mutual assimilation, the *Brahmans* gradually absorbed in their canon the mother goddesses of Bengal; *Shakti* appeared beside *Shiva* and *Radha* beside *Krishna*. By the twelfth century AD, *Radha-Krishna* cult had become the special feature of Bengal's Vaishnavism; *Radha* probably was a Bengal innovation.¹²

Aryan traditions in Bengal had reached an advanced stage by the twelfth century AD. *Sanskrit* was not only the state language; Bengal became the centre of excellence for *Sanskrit* literature. Bard Jayadeva of the Sena royal court composed the *Gita-Govinda*, a musical poem in dramatic form about the mystical union of Krishna with his inner love Radha. *Gita-Govinda* rose above all works on the similar theme and became the supreme *Sanskrit* literature of the period.¹³ *Gita-Govinda* did not remain confined to the limits

⁸ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁹ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁰ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 405.

¹¹ For idols and images: *Ibid.*, pp. 430-449; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 498-501; 511-16; 547-552; 653.

¹² R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 403-404.

¹³ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD second reprint, New Delhi 2005), p. 204.

of Bengal; it spread in other provinces and had more than a dozen imitations. Cited extensively in the anthologies, it was regarded as not only a great poem but also a great religious work of medieval Vaishnavism.¹⁴ By the twelfth century AD, the Aryan traditions in Bengal had reached such an advance state that new genres of supreme *Sanskrit* literature and a new form of Vaishnavism later to be embraced by other regions evolved here.¹⁵

Aryan traditions had established a caste based class structure in the middle Ganges Plain society. The absorption of local gods and traditions in the *Brahmans'* canon, and assigning mythical and religious importance to local places thus integrating them in the network of the mythical space were inseparable from the assimilation of local people in the Aryan traditions.¹⁶ The mother goddesses of Bengal found place beside the Vedic Shiva and Vishnu but caste structure in Bengal did not assume a formal structure before the twelfth century AD.¹⁷ The non-assignment of local places to religious sanctity is the conspicuous absence that alienated the majority of the people who had embraced Hindu traditions, from their native land. The crisis became critical in East Bengal where the major flow of the Ganges River was deprived of any sanctity. Padma carried large portion of the Ganges holy water, washed and inundated the Eastern Bengal Delta on a regular basis and provided the fertility that eventually turned it into one of the most densely populated place on earth. The people who toiled for freedom from hunger and prosperity in the pragmatic space of the Eastern Bengal Delta had to look westward i.e. to Bhagirathi in West Bengal or farther west e.g. the Ganges at Benares¹⁸ (Varanasi) for eternal emancipation. This segregation of pragmatic and mythical space marked the beginning of metaphysical alienation of East Bengal landscape from its people. As the alienation continues onto the present and threatens our cultural landscape, the reasons behind the origin of alienation are worth inquiring in the context in which the middle Ganges Plain worldviews entered Bengal.

¹⁴ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 368-69.

¹⁵ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 627-28.

¹⁶ *Supra*, Chapter III, pp. 29-32.

¹⁷ The *Brihad-dharma Purana* and the *Brahma-vaivarta Purana* that structured the Bengal society into two castes i.e. the *Brahman* and the *Sudra* were composed between the twelfth-fourteenth centuries AD. R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 567; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁸ *Supra*, Chapter III, pp. 32-35.

4. Monks and Merchants before *Brahmans*

Between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal, traversed by numerous rivers and tributaries, Bengal assumed the typical attributes of a delta where thick swampy forests made settlements difficult. Absence of Chalcolithic and Iron Age black-and-red ware profile in the modern territory of Bangladesh (i.e. East Bengal)¹⁹ and delimitation of Bengal's early historic settlements along the caravan routes²⁰ imply that agricultural settlements had not spread extensively in the pre-early historic East Bengal. Agricultural settlements for the first time penetrated the inner areas away from the major caravan routes during the Gupta period (AD c.300-550).²¹ *Brahmans* were introduced in the new inner settlements as important modifiers of society with endowments i.e. land grants. The earliest evidence of land endowments to *Brahmans* in Bengal is dated in the fifth century AD.²²

According to the epigraphic record of the third century BC known as the Mahasthan *Brahmi* Inscription (discovered at Mahasthan of Bogra district, Bangladesh in AD 1930), which was an order issued to the *Mahamatra* (head of administration) stationed at Pundranagara to relieve the distress of a group of people, Pundravardhana was a part of the Maurya Empire (c.321-185 BC).²³ The gradual appearance of Bengal in the great epics and in the Buddhist and Jaina literature indicate that Bengal was connected to the middle Ganges Plain culture by the fourth century BC.²⁴ Two votive inscriptions at Sanchi Stupa that recorded the gifts of two inhabitants of Pundravardhana documented the spread of Buddha's ideals by the second century BC in eastern Bengal.²⁵

Absence of extensive agricultural settlements and emergence of urban societies by the fifth-fourth century BC²⁶ along the caravan routes where the early historic settlements were delimited indicate that

¹⁹ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Oxford Companion to Indian Archeology* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2006), p. 266.

²⁰ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

²¹ D.D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

²² Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-191.

²³ *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, p. 350.

²⁴ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 395.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

²⁶ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

settlements in Bengal had an urban focus in the beginning. The glowing description of the wealthy merchants and Buddhist monastic establishments in the early historic cities of Bengal²⁷ indicates that merchants and monks had arrived in Bengal before the *Brahmans*. The earliest cities of Bengal had appeared on the old alluvium i.e. the *Barind* and the flood free Pleistocene formation. The calibrated C-14 date of Wari-Bateshwar is c.500 BC and the earliest available C-14 date of Pundranagara is the third century BC.²⁸ It can be inferred from the calibrated dates of the early East Bengal cities that regular commercial and cultural contacts with the middle Ganges Plain were established in the fifth century BC at the earliest. By that time, the middle Ganges Plain society had advanced in many ways, which determined the kind of influence it would exert on Bengal's society.

4.1. Reforms in Ganges Plain

The Buddhist *Jatakas* painted a vivid picture of the production and distribution in the Ganges Plain e.g. large-scale cultivation of rice, a detailed network of craft production and both internal and external trade. Bullock-carts and/or pack bullocks traditionally moved grains, cotton and textile, salt, spices and precious wood from one part to another.²⁹ Advent of new economic classes in the Ganges plain of the sixth century BC was also undeniable.³⁰ The *grihapati*, literally 'lord of the house' who commanded respect primarily because of his wealth, whether gained by trade, manufacture or farming represented the new propertied class; no longer bound by tribal regulations. The free peasants and the farmers constituted a new class; artisans were organized in guilds. Traders became so wealthy that the most important person in an eastern town was the *sresthi*, the word meaning superior or preeminent. The *sresthi* was actually a financier or banker, sometimes the head of a trade guild. Even despotic kings treated *sreshthis* with respect.

Accurately weighed silver punch marked coins were in use from about 700 BC.³¹ Traders themselves issued coins as silver blanks; their guilds checked the quality and punched codes as guild marks of guaranty for weight and purity. These punch marked coins extended beyond the *Uttarapatha* trade into

²⁷ *Infra*, Chapter V, pp. 50-57.

²⁸ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 359; 361-62.

³⁰ For Ganges Plain Society in the sixth century BC: D.D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-04.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Afghanistan and Iran.³² Traders had to maintain networks beyond their immediate territories and needed safe trade routes free from robbers. This demand could be satisfied by the growth of a universal monarchy, a single state that would end petty warfare and police the entire countryside. A universal government was thus an essential counterpart in politics of the new way of production and its distribution. The monarchies of the sixth century BC that culminated in the Magadhan Empire during the Mauryas, evolved to complement a completely new socioeconomic paradigm.³³

The exact parallel to the development of a universal monarchy would have been a single exclusive religion as the new ways of production and its distribution demanded reforms of the Aryan traditions especially the Vedic rituals and customs. The main Vedic ritual was *yajna* (fire sacrifice),³⁴ contrived in a pastoral age when large herds were collectively owned. The sacrifice of cattle inflicted heavy drain upon resources in the new society; the strain on agriculture was intolerable. Cattle were now privately owned rather than by tribes and became more valuable to agriculturists than had been to herdsmen; their acquisition without compensation meant a heavy tax upon the peasants. In the early *Upanishads* belonging to this period, *Yajna* no longer meant blood sacrifice; it became a mystical philosophy. However, no direct acknowledgement of any reform befitting the socioeconomic evolution was made in the *Upanishads*. The new eastern teachers, who understood their society well, therefore rose above rituals. *Ahimsa* or non-killing became the guiding principle for Jainism and Buddhism.

4.1.1. Rise of Buddhism

The Buddhist morality such as truth, justice, non-stealing and non-encroaching upon the possession of others were the most suitable ideals for the new concept of private property that had arisen. Without such a morality, further growth of wealth and its distribution would have been impossible and naturally, traders and their guilds became Buddhism's most ardent followers.³⁵ The Magadhan Empire was generous to Buddhism. Asoka assumed the throne of Magadha in 270 BC and after the Kalinga campaign in the eighth year of his coronation; he famously became a Buddhist himself and consequently the legendary patron of Buddhism. Buddhism did not become a state religion in the sense of Islam or Christianity but

³² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 101; 121.

³⁴ *Supra*, Chapter III, p. 30.

³⁵ D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. reprint, Mumbai 2008), pp. 165-67.

the state support that Asoka had given, continued. Monks also made significant endowments, as they had to forfeit personal worldly possessions before entering the order. However, the most consistent patrons of Buddhism and the *Samgha* (order of the monks; the monastic community) were the free peasants, artisan guilds and traders. Traders carried the faith along the caravan routes and offshore voyages as well; the first Buddhist missionaries who went to China were associated with overland merchants.³⁶ Among the name of the donors inscribed in the monastery of Karle were the merchants' union, individual merchants, bankers, guilds of bamboo workers, braziers and potters.³⁷

The monasteries were able to accumulate huge wealth because of the austere lifestyle of the monks in contrast to the huge endowments received from the patrons. The fort like inward looking alignment of cells implies that security and safeguarding of the wealth were major considerations during conceiving the plans for monasteries. Beside the civilizing influence, the monastic community was able to perform important economic functions. They were important customers of imported cloths, incense, perfumes, metal images and lamps in large quantity while the accumulated monastic wealth often provided capital for caravan trade.³⁸ The monasteries simultaneously were resting places, customers and banking houses for the caravaneers. This mutual patronization helped both the traders and the monasteries to assume important position in the cities along caravan routes.

4.2. Impact on Bengal Society

Early historic cities of Bengal grew along caravan routes and their hinterlands became producers of commodities that could be traded along these routes. *Kautilya* (fourth-third century BC) described four varieties of cloths produced in Bengal. Sugar of Pundravardhana, which was processed from a special variety of sugarcane known as Paundraka, was exported.³⁹ Rice was so plentiful that it could be stored in the state granary for distribution in times of need.⁴⁰ Precondition for ascent to such advanced stage of

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

³⁸ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 182; 185.

³⁹ For produces of Early Historic Bengal: R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 654-658.

⁴⁰ *Mahasthan Brahmi Inscription* (third century BC, discovered at Mahasthan of Bogra district, Bangladesh in 1930 AD), *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, p. 350.

commodity production in the middle Ganges valley was the mutual assimilation of Vedic and mythical traditions that had accompanied the advanced mode of production.⁴¹ Bengal could arrive at such an advanced stage of commerce and commodity production without the concomitant Vedic or mythical induction because the traders and monks acted as the agents of advancement. They also brought with them the Buddha's principle of *Karma* i.e. man's action throughout his life. Instead of the *Brahman's* hymns and sacrificial rituals, Jainism and Buddhism were the first upper Ganges Plain ideologies that had entered Bengal. The politico-religious ambience that evolved out of the socio-economic advancement made in the middle Ganges Plain in the sixth century BC fostered simultaneous growth of trade and Buddhism in Bengal.

The necessity of opening the eastward passage for expanding both terrestrial and maritime trade was the catalyst for the traders' pioneering role in exploring Bengal. Two important terrestrial links were opened through the north Bengal i.e. Pundravardhana. The eastward route, which was noted by Chang-kien, the Chinese ambassador to Yue-chi country in 126 BC, reached South China through Assam, Manipur and upper Burma. The other line of trade advanced northward from Pundravardhana through the narrow passes of the Himalayas and connected Bhutan, Tibet and China through the Chumbi valley.⁴² The river port of this region was Wari-Bateshwar, which was also connected with Assam by the Brahmaputra.⁴³

5. Incomplete Assimilation

The Damodarpur copperplates (nos. II, IV and V) inscribed in AD 448-544 informed that among the top five persons of the administration (*adhikarana*) of Kotivarsa *visaya* (district) under Pundravardhana *bhukti* (province), three were representatives of the business associations. Besides *visayapati* (district governor) and *prathama kayastha* (chief scribe), the board of administration for the district consisted of the *nagara sresthi* (chief guild president), the *prathama sarthavaha* (chief merchant) and the *prathama kulika* (head of the artisans).⁴⁴ The traders, merchants and artisans were organized as associations or

⁴¹ *Supra*, Chapter III, pp 28-29.

⁴² For trade routes through Early Historic Bengal: R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 659-663; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-98.

⁴³ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

⁴⁴ *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, pp. 128-9.

guilds (*nigama*) and elected presidents of *nigamas* were ex-officio members of the *adhikarana*.⁴⁵ A number of copper plate inscriptions of land grant from Gupta era informed that democratic governance was the prevailing trait also in villages. Dhanaidaha copper plate of AD c.433 for donation of a land to a *Vedic Brahman* in a village under Pundravardhana *bhukti* recorded that the *mahattaras* (headmen of locality), *kutumbins* (villagers) and *gramikas* (village headmen) assumed important roles in purchase, disposal and administration of land.⁴⁶ Sultanpur copper plate of AD 440, Jagadishpur copper plate of AD 447, Baigram copper plate of AD 447-48 and Damodarpur copper plate III of AD 482 recorded⁴⁷ similar influential roles of the villagers in land administration. Involvement of locals in land management and rural administration confirm that Bengal during the Gupta era was still following the participatory principles of tribal assemblies; Bengal society had not adopted cast based vertical hierarchy yet. It implies that the Hindu priest caste i.e. *Brahmans* who were instrumental in introducing caste system were not able to exert considerable influence on Bengal society until the fifth century AD. The earliest evidence of land endowments to *Brahmans* in Bengal, which is dated in the fifth century AD,⁴⁸ confirms that the inflow of *Brahmans* in large scale had just begun.

However, *Vedic Brahman*s became common in most places of Bengal by the eighth century AD and worship of Vishnu and Shiva spread all over Bengal.⁴⁹ The *Brahman* was preferred as the civilizing agent in expansion of agricultural settlements because the individual *Brahman* was inexpensive in comparison with the huge Buddhist monastic establishments who were quite inefficient in this process because they had not developed any intricate system of rituals. They were also unable to accommodate the local cult gods, as Buddhism was not a religion proper.

The *Brahmans* gradually ascended to influential positions of the state. *Brahman* Garga was appointed Dharmapala's (AD 775-810) minister and his descendants enjoyed hereditary occupation of the ministry

⁴⁵ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 266-70; 658; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁴⁶ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 268-9.

⁴⁷ Nupur Dasgupta, 'Settlements in Ancient Bengal: Some Observations' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Golden Jubilee Volume, (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2005).

⁴⁸ *Supra*, FN 22.

⁴⁹ *Supra*, FN 9; 11.

for at least four generations.⁵⁰ Establishing cast as the official basis for social hierarchy in Bengal was not possible yet because of the long rule of the Pala emperors (AD c.750-1161) and the eastern Khadga, Deva and Chandra kings (AD c.625-1050) who were ardent followers and patrons of Buddhism that denied of caste being any permanent attribute to humans. However, the liberal attitude of the Buddhist rulers towards *Brahmans* allowed the inner transformation of the society; the Palas even generously donated land to *Brahmans* on numerous occasions.⁵¹ Srichandra of Buddhist Chandra dynasty that ruled Vanga and Samatata in the tenth-eleventh century AD also awarded land to a large number of *Brahmans* so that they could settle in the present Sylhet area.⁵²

The Buddhist rulers did not claim mythical lineage of Vedic legends or epic heroes. Accordingly, the need for composing Puranas⁵³ emphasizing the context of Bengal did not arise during their rule. Consequently, the Bengal landscape was not integrated with the Ganges Plain mythical space. Vedic ideals ascended to the guiding principles of the state when Varmans⁵⁴ supplanted Chandras in Samatata and Senas⁵⁵ ended the rule of Palas in Bengal. Vallalasena's avowal that he was born to annihilate the Buddhists⁵⁶ and setting fire to Somapura *Mahavihara* (Buddhist monastery) by Varman soldiers in the eleventh century AD⁵⁷ revealed the underlying tone of their rule. *Brahmans* adorned Varman and Sena courts and held consequential positions e.g. Bhatta Bhavadeva was the minister of war and peace of Harivarman and Halayudha Misra was the chief minister and chief judge of Laksmanasena. Unfortunately, their attitude represented hegemony instead of assimilation, as was manifest in Halayudha

⁵⁰ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 232.

⁵² *Paschimbhag copper plate*, 930 AD (discovered in Moulvibazar), *Banglapedia* Vol. 2, pp. 424-5.

⁵³ For the role of Puranas: *Supra*, Chapter III, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁴ Varmans ruled southeast of Bengal from AD 1080 to 1150. They were *Vaisnavas* and claimed descents from Yadava dynasty of Kalinga; were ousted by Senas. *Banglapedia* Vol. 10, pp. 302-3.

⁵⁵ Senas supplanted Palas and ruled Bengal from AD 1097 to 1225. Senas were *Brahma-Ksatriyas* (those who were *Brahmans* first and became *Ksatriyas* later). Vijayasena and Vallalasena were worshippers of Siva but their successor Laksmanasena was a *Vaisnava*. *Banglapedia* Vol. 9, pp. 159-162.

⁵⁶ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 552-3.

⁵⁷ *Banglapedia*, Vol. 9, p. 374.

Misra's allegation of inadequate Vedic knowledge of the local *Brahmans*.⁵⁸ Varmans and Senas who claimed foreign descents (from Kalinga and Karnataka respectively), terminated the tolerant coexistence of Vedic and Prakrit languages and officially established Sanskrit's dominance in rituals and state affairs; appointment in state bureaucracy became conditional to the knowledge of Sanskrit.⁵⁹ The attitude might have changed with time, allowing assimilation of vernacular culture with that of the court and local landscape with the mythical space of the sacred middle Ganges Plain. Before that could materialize, the Turks had arrived. In the winter of AD 1204-05, Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji ousted Laksmansena off his capital Nadiya. The *Brihad-dharma* Purana and the *Brahma-vaivarta* Purana that represented Bengal was composed between the twelfth-fourteenth centuries AD but the geo-political overture that had serious religious consequences shattered possibilities of East Bengal's integration in the Ganges Plain mythical space.

Sanctity of place acquired in the Buddhist schema from its association with Buddha who had never travelled to Bengal. He travelled in the areas presently known as South Bihar, but no farther towards east.⁶⁰ Bengal's landscape neither bore any sacred meaning for the Muslims who believed in the centrality of the Ka'aba and denied localized religious significance of place. For the Muslims, no place on earth is closer to heaven than Mecca and the Ka'aba is the naval of the world.⁶¹ Devoid of any mythical privilege, the relation of Bengal's landscape with its people therefore depended on the evolution of historic modifiers of existential contents.

⁵⁸ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-4; 545.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

⁶¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press sixth printing, Minneapolis 2008), p. 40.

Chapter V

Rise of a Land-based Society

1. Prelude: Early Urbanism¹

Alexander's raid of the last frontier of the Achaemenid Empire i.e. the Indus River had weakened the indomitable tribes of the western Punjab and hastened the Mauryan conquest up to Taxila.² As north Bengal (Pundravardhana) became a part of the Maurya Empire (c.321-185 BC),³ that had consolidated control over the eastern ends of the major caravan routes i.e. the *Uttarapatha* and the *Daksinapatha*, trade routes passing through Bengal could reach territories stretching from the Far East to Central Asia. Urban centres in Bengal emerged along the trade routes that connected the eastern ends of the *Uttarapatha* and the *Daksinapatha* in Magadha with Burma, Suvarnabhumi (present day Thailand), Malay Peninsula and the Far East, Ceylon, Kamrupa (present day state of Assam and Manipur in India), Sikkim, Tibet and China in the fifth-fourth century BC.

From the mid Ganges Valley i.e. Benares and Magadha, the most convenient overland and riverine access to sea was the northwest coast of the Bay of Bengal i.e. Tamralipti, which became the most important port in eastern India in the fifth-fourth century BC. Greek geographer and historian Strabo's (first century BC) reference to the "*ascent of vessels from the sea by the Ganges to Palibothra* (via Tamralipti to Pataliputra)" probably derived from Megasthenes'⁴ account. Two important terrestrial links were opened through Pundravardhana. The eastward route, which was noted by Chang-kien, the Chinese ambassador to Yue-chi country in 126 BC, reached South China through Assam, Manipur and upper Burma. The other line of trade advanced northward through the narrow passes of the Himalayas and connected Bhutan, Tibet and China through Chumbi valley. Pundranagara, the capital of Pundravardhana was

¹ For the territories and urban centres of Bengal from the early historic period through the early medieval period: *Supra*, Chapter IV, Fig. 4.1, p. 38.

² D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD second reprint, New Delhi 2005), pp. 134-39.

³ *Mahasthan Brahmi Inscription* (third century BC, discovered at Mahasthan of Bogra district, Bangladesh in 1930 AD), Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Banglapedia* Vol. 6 (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2003, hereafter referred to as *Banglapedia*), p. 350.

⁴ Greek ambassador (of Seleukos) to the Mauryan court at Pataliputra.

accessible from Pataliputra along the northern bank of the Ganges River and then via Kotivarsa. Wari-Bateshwar, located between Pundravardhana and Samatata, was the river port of the region. Devaparvata, located centrally on the caravan route that ran across the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal passing through the emerging port of Samandar, was the capital of Samatata in the seventh-ninth century AD. The route conveniently connected Devaparvata with Pagan and Arakan.⁵

Bengal became famous for its merchandise. Kautilya in *Arthasastra* mentioned varieties of clothes produced in Bengal. Kautilya also mentioned fine qualities of Bengal elephants; ivory was a precious item of export. *The Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* listed malabathrum, gangetic spikenard, pearls and fine Muslin among export items that were shipped from *Gange*; sugar was another major export commodity.⁶ Rouletted wares were probably manufactured in Tamralipti-Chandraketugarh region and then were carried by Buddhist monks and merchants to south India and Southeast Asia.⁷ Wari-Bateshwar was a manufacturing centre of semi-precious stone beads and most importantly was an iron-smelting center; glass beads were manufactured in Pundranagara and Chandraketugarh.⁸ Capability of commodity production of fine quality such as Muslin and opportunity of value addition to agricultural produces by transportation along trade routes enabled merchants of Bengal to participate with considerable influence in both terrestrial trade and maritime expeditions across the sea. Bengal merchants' participation in long distance trading is evident in the donation of the votive inscriptions in Sanchi Stupa by two traders from Bengal in the second century BC. An inscription of the fourth-fifth century AD found in the Malay Peninsula recorded the gift of *Mahabanika* (merchant) Buddha Gupta from Bengal.⁹

⁵ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *The History of Bengal* Vol. I (The University of Dhaka fourth impression, Dhaka 2006), pp. 659-663; Niharranjan Roy, *Bangaleer Itihas: Aadi Parba*, (in Bengali, Dey's Publishing seventh edition, Kolkata 2010), pp. 90-98; 168-9; 433-4; Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Oxford Companion to Indian Archeology* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2006), pp. 324-25; 362; 365; Afroz Akmam, *Early Urban Centres in Bangladesh: An Archeological Study, 3rd Century B.C. to mid 13th Century A.D.* (Shahitya Prakash, Dhaka 2011), pp. 113; 128.

⁶ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 654-661.

⁷ Mostafizur Rahman and Muhammad Habibullah Pathan, *Wari-Bateshwar: Shekarer Sandhane* (in Bengali, Prothoma Prokashan, Dhaka 2012), p. 115.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

⁹ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-6.

Use of currency in trading and its wide circulation have been confirmed by discoveries of silver and copper punch marked coins, and cast copper coin coffers belonging to the fourth–first century BC.¹⁰ Discovery of gold coins issued by Samatata king Balabhata of the late seventh century AD and a large number of Harikela¹¹ silver coins of AD c.1000 indicate that the easternmost Bengal of that period had a thriving economy.

1.1. Guilds in Governance

Damodarpur copperplates (AD 448-544) that referred to Kotivarsa as a *visaya* (district) under Pundravardhana *bhukti* revealed that besides *visayapati* (district governor) and the *prathama kayastha* (chief scribe), the five-member board for administration of the district consisted of the *nagara sresthi* (chief guild president), the *prathama sarthavaha* (chief merchant) and the *prathama kulika* (head of the artisans).¹² Paharpur copperplate of AD 479 (found at Paharpur of Naogaon district, Bangladesh) informed that the *nagara sresthi* was not only a member but also was the head of the *adhikarana* (apex board of administration) of Pundravardhana. The urban traders and artisans were organized as *nigamas* (associations or guilds) and elected presidents of *nigamas* were ex-officio members of the *adhikarana*.¹³ The cities of Bengal in the fifth century AD clearly demonstrated attributes of the 'free cities' noted by Megasthenes a few centuries earlier.¹⁴

1.2. Art and Artifacts

Discovery of high quality potteries including northern black polished wares (NBPW); beads made of semiprecious stone, glass, crystal and metal; combs made of bones; ornaments like rings, bangles and ear

¹⁰ *Banglapedia* Vol. 3, pp. 59-60.

¹¹ Identified with Chittagong region.

¹² *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, pp. 128-9.

¹³ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 266-70; 658; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹⁴ Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus to Mauryan court at Pataliputra mentioned the Mauryan free cities that had substantial wealth and accompanying rights to issue coins of their own. The free cities were self-governed; ministers and officials of such city councils were recruited from amongst the local citizens. D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. reprint, Mumbai 2008), pp. 195; 223-25.

stud made of copper; ivory objects etc.¹⁵ from the early historic cities of Bengal hint at an urban lifestyle of affluence and luxury. Intricate ornaments of gold and silver bedecked with precious stones on both male and female figurines imply that luxurious metal works and their artisans were available. Vatsyayana (contemporaneous of Gupta era) wrote about the leisure and passion of *nagaraka* (urbanite) men and women of Gauda (western Bengal).¹⁶

Though very few stone images of early historic period were discovered, large number of stone images of early medieval period depicting Buddhist and Hindu ideals demonstrated that Bengal artisans had not only become apt in the classical Gupta style of iconography but also developed a regional style of their own.¹⁷ While stonework mostly inherited iconographic norms of Gupta style, the vitality of subjects, fluidity of artistic expression and most importantly, representation of common people engaged in daily activities on terracotta works found in large number confirmed that terracotta was Bengal's prerogative.¹⁸ Terracotta figurines of secular theme unearthed at Tamralipti and Chandraketugarh undoubtedly reflected sophisticated urban aesthetics befitting of the *sresthis*.¹⁹ About the seventh century AD, a tradition of bronze cast idols sprouted in Bengal;²⁰ source of both material and stylistic inspiration may be traced to eastward trading and cultural links such as that with Arakan²¹ (Burma; present day Myanmar).

The most outstanding achievement of Bengal in the early medieval period was in the field of Architecture. Monumental yet simple, somber and elegant, rigid in geometry but artistically fluid surface of the Buddhist monastic complexes were impossible without a sophisticated urban frame of mind. Conceiving of such colossal themes and executing them all at once (not incrementally)²² required a combination of imagination, rationality, organization and above all resource. Presence of skilled

¹⁵ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69; 84.

¹⁶ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

¹⁷ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87; 134-39.

¹⁸ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 636; 652-4;

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 686. Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁰ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-3.

²¹ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 688.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 677-8; 683.

architects, artisans and most importantly patrons who could put all of them together into functionality testified of a sophisticated and well-structured urban community.

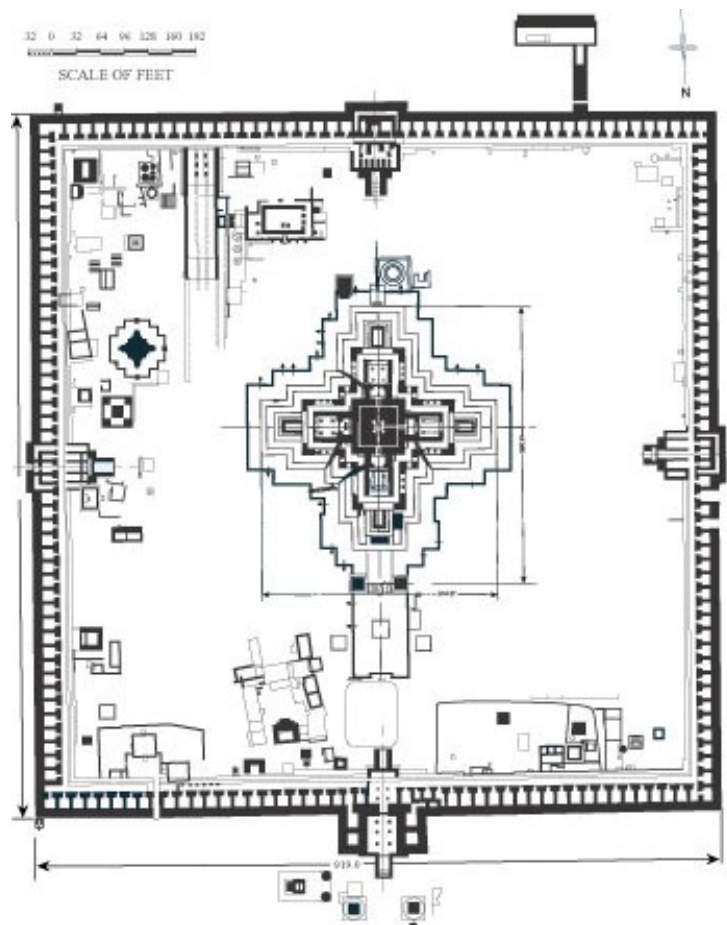


Fig. 5.1. Sompura Mahavihara (eighth century AD), presently a World Heritage Site (photo: Khan Tanvir)

Fig. 5.2. Sompura Mahavihara with central temple (Banglapedia), archetype of cruciform Buddhist temples

1.3. Merchants and Monasteries

Pundravardhana was annexed to the Magadhan Empire that was not only a major patron of Buddhism but also took up the role of emissary of Buddhism. The politico-religious ambience of Maurya period along with the prevalence of monks and merchants who too were ardent followers of Buddhism fostered simultaneous growth of trade and Buddhism along the caravan routes in Bengal.²³ Urbanism in Bengal reached its peak during the Kusanas²⁴ (AD 78-fourth century AD), who had control over their central Asian homelands as well as the northwest India and continued unabated after Bengal became a part of the Gupta Empire in the mid-fourth century AD. The democratic representation of important socioeconomic stakeholders of cities especially of the guilds and merchants in administration portrayed the advanced urbanism of the fifth-sixth century AD Bengal.²⁵ Archeological discoveries have revealed that under the patronization of the Buddhist Pala emperors, the Buddhist monastic complexes reached a new high in the eighth century AD. Contemporary accounts glowingly described the prosperous merchants alongside Buddhist monastic establishments of the early historic and early medieval cities of Bengal.

Chinese scholar Hiuen-Tsang who had arrived at the Nalanda University just after AD c.630 for perfecting his knowledge of Sanskrit and Indian Buddhism portrayed Pundranagara as a picturesque city comprising orchards, parks and pools. According to him, the city that stretched beyond its rampart to occupy an area, which was six miles (approx. ten kilometers) in perimeter had twenty Buddhist monasteries in and around the city proper.²⁶ Pundranagara was the administrative headquarter of Pundravardhana in Maurya period (c.321-185 BC) and the capital of Pundravardhana *bhukti* (province) under Gupta rule (AD c.300-550). The eastern gateway and many Buddhist establishments surrounding the city were built during the Pala era (AD c.750-1161).²⁷

Ptolemy of Alexandria (second century AD) mentioned Tamralipti, which was an ancient copper port as *Tamalities* in *Geography*. Famous Buddhist monk Fa-hien had reached Tamralipti between AD 405-11 after travelling through the Buddhist sites of Magadha and spent two years copying Buddhist sacred

²³ For the mutual patronage of monks and merchants: *Supra*, Chapter IV, p. 45.

²⁴ Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁵ *Supra*, FN 13.

²⁶ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 300; 503.

²⁷ *Banglapedia*, pp. Vol. 6, 346-350; Vol. 8, 251.

books and images in Tamralipti where he saw twenty four Buddhist monasteries and many monks before leaving for Ceylon. He described Tamralipti as a thriving port city.²⁸ Hiuen-Tsang in the seventh century AD reported of the wealthy merchants of Tamralipti.²⁹

Kotivarsa with its wide brick rampart, drainage and cesspits, and large residential buildings made of burnt bricks dating back to c.200 BC-AD c.300 was a thriving city in Pundravardhana. Kotivarsa was still prospering during the Pala era when Buddhist temples with enclosed ambulatory path and damn proof granaries were constructed.³⁰ Chandraketugarh, an inland port city during the fourth century BC to the sixth century AD located 35 kilometers northeast of present day Kolkata was possibly the ancient *Gange* mentioned by both Ptolemy and the unknown author of *the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (first century AD).³¹ Wari-Bateshwar, located 70 km northeast of Dhaka was a river port and a major trading centre in the fifth century BC having maritime links with Southeast Asia. After the Roman ships had begun to travel to Southeast Asia and China, it became a centre for trade with Roman domain.³²

Devaparvata became the capital of Samatata during the reign of Khadga King Balabhatta in the seventh century AD.³³ Pattikera, the later capital of Samatata between the eleventh-thirteenth centuries AD was located nearby. Devaparvata went through a golden period under the Deva Kings during the eighth-ninth century AD when a number of Buddhist monasteries with central cruciform temples were built. Adoption of cruciform temple form that originated in Bengal for construction of numerous Buddhist temples in Pagan³⁴ and in other Southeast Asian countries confirmed the importance of Devaparvata and Pattikera as cultural centers for eastward diffusion of Buddhist ideals.

²⁸ *Banglapedia* Vol. 4, p. 37.

²⁹ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³⁰ *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, pp. 128-9.

³¹ *Banglapedia* Vol. 2, p. 427; Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³² Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

³³ *Banglapedia* Vol. 3, pp. 286-7.

³⁴ Royal families of Pattikera and Pagan had matrimonial relations and a terrestrial route that facilitated economic and cultural exchanges linked two cities (Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 433-4).



Fig. 5.3. Temple city of Pagan (Burma, presently Myanmar) that followed the Bengal cruciform Buddhist temple form

Apart from the cities mentioned above, by chance discoveries of numerous early historic and early medieval urban centers³⁵ indicate, had there been sufficient systematic excavations, an urbanized face of ancient Bengal would have surfaced. Unfortunately, none of them continued their journey of prosperity into the modern era to pass on this tradition of urban life. Tamralipti was not heard of after the eighth century AD,³⁶ Pundranagara continued as the administrative headquarter of Pundravardhana in Pala period but was stagnant if not crumbling during the Senas³⁷ who supplanted the Palas. The last sign of economic activity that could be traced in the excavation site of Mainamati (identified with Devaparvata and Pattikera) was some gold and silver coins of the Abbasid Caliphs of the thirteenth century AD.³⁸ Physical remains of Bengal's urban centres were gradually swallowed up by agricultural fields or were weathered into mounds.

³⁵ A comprehensive list and descriptions have been compiled by Afroz Akmam in *Early Urban Centres in Bangladesh: An Archeological Study, 3rd Century B.C. to mid 13th Century A.D.* (Shahitya Prakash, Dhaka 2011).

³⁶ Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 164; 381.

³⁷ Archeological excavations in Pundranagara since 1928 have unearthed no significant find that corresponds to the Sena period (AD 1097-1225). *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, pp. 346-350.

³⁸ *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, p. 366.

2. Agricultural Expansion: Localized Economy

The Guptas brought a large tract of land under cultivation, which was previously fallow and uncultivable;³⁹ all the copperplates inscribed for transfer of land in the fifth century AD mentioned the attributes of the land to be transferred as *aprada*, *aprahata* and *khila* (unsettled, uncultivated and fallow).⁴⁰ The fact that these copperplate inscriptions referred to lands in northern Bengal, which was a part of the Magadhan Empire since the fourth-third century BC implies that until the Gupta period, settlements in Bengal were confined along the caravan routes and their hinterlands.

Circulation of currency underlined the significant difference between the Maurya and the Gupta rules. The Maurya Empire functioned on a powerful cash economy where everyone related to state affairs ranging from the chief queen, queen mother and crown prince to menial or drudge labourer received salaries in cash.⁴¹ The strength of Magadhan cash economy was based on state enterprises and taxation from private traders. The state controlled all mining in its domain and used to sell metal to traders, to artisans' guild, goldsmiths and to individual manufacturers. Mining operations, timber, elephant forests, fisheries, reservoirs etc. were royal monopolies.⁴² The state would set up trade routes and market centres; tax was levied in lieu of securing trade routes by neutralizing the tribes. The Mauryas not only secured trading routes but also planted shady groves and fruit orchards, dug wells with steps leading down to the water and built resting places on all major trade routes; doctors and veterinaries were available at many stations.⁴³ The Gupta period was marked by the phenomenal growth of agriculture in terms of both production and area accompanied by a progressive disappearance of silver coins. The simultaneous expansion of empire and shrinkage of currency meant that a central bureaucracy could not be maintained over so large a territory with cash salary. The Guptas were compelled to pay their officials through allotment of fixed plots of land instead of cash salaries. Although not in hereditary grants yet, the system bore the seeds of feudalism. Later officials acquired new titles such as *Samanta* i.e. Baron. As the central bureaucracy had become unrealistic, the Guptas resorted to the policy of restoring the defeated kings and

³⁹ Afroz Akmal, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴⁰ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 649; Niharrajan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁴¹ D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 220-21.

⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 229-30; D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 149-50.

⁴³ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 160-61.

chiefs to their thrones had they acquiesced to pay tributes. It helped to exert their control over a large area that consisted of tributary states. Accordingly, Chandragupta I assumed the title, 'great king of kings'.⁴⁴

Disappearance of silver coinage signalled the fading out of external caravan trade; powerful guilds could no longer sustain. Introduction of Gupta gold coins implied that northern trade was increasingly in the costlier luxuries such as silk, saffron, jewels, wines and other articles for the nobles.⁴⁵ On the contrary, agricultural expansion had increased demand of commodities produced by artisans in the new rural settlements. The total amount of currency in circulation was not sufficient to support the distribution of commodities produced in urban centres on a scale consonant with the increased demand of the rural settlements. Inevitably, the peasant had to manage locally by barter and the powerful guilds gradually dissolved into village artisans. Later inscriptions recorded that artisans were living in villages and not in towns.⁴⁶ Each village now had its blacksmith, carpenter, potter, priest, skinner of dead cattle, tanner, barber and so on. Each of them was assigned a plot of land to till in his spare time; in addition, each was to receive a small share of the harvest from the peasant families.⁴⁷

3. Ascent of Land

The Guptas were busy defending their northwest territories from the Huns since AD 458; persistent Hun campaigns gradually weakened the empire. Hun conquest of AD 510 was transient but their occupation of Gandhara and Punjab continued from AD 515 to 528. The uprising of Huns in the northwest and their aggressive campaigns shattered trade links with central Asia and the Roman Empire. Even drastic was the political upheaval: as the Guptas deployed more resource and military forces to counteract the Huns, they gradually lost control of the petty kings and feudal chiefs. By the sixth century AD in Bengal emerged a number of petty kings and chiefs who were former Gupta feudatories (*samantas* and *mahasamantas*). The Gunaigarh copper plate inscribed in AD c.507 informed of Vainya Gupta who was an independent ruler

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-95; D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 300-01.

⁴⁵ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 189-90.

⁴⁶ Md. Akhtaruzzaman, *Society and Urbanization in Medieval Bengal* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2009), p. 132.

⁴⁷ D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 300-01; *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, pp. 194-97.

of Samatata.⁴⁸ Five copperplates found in Kotalipara of Gopalganj district in Bangladesh and one in Mallasarul of Burdwan district in West Bengal state of India, all inscribed between AD c.525-575 revealed the names of Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva; all of them assumed the title of *Maharajadhiraj* (great king of kings).⁴⁹ Petty kings of Bengal were already in contest for territorial expansions while vassal chiefs changed their allegiance according to shift of power. The feuds were subdued for a while by the advent of Sasanka sometime before AD 606. Himself a former feudatory chief, Sasanka not only established his control over Bengal with the exception of Samatata but also extended his kingdom to Utkala and Magadha. After his death in AD c.637, parts of Bengal were taken over by Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa while Magadha was annexed to Harshavardhana's empire in AD 641. The death of Harshavardhana in AD c.647 marked the beginning of political chaos and confusion in eastern India that continued for about a hundred years. The situation in Bengal was particularly grave and was known as *Matsyanyaya* that denoted the absence of a central ruling authority resulting into a chaotic state where every local chief assumed royal authority.⁵⁰

After enough of blood and resource had been spent over the chaos that lasted for more than 100 years and left the region vulnerable to even feeble attacks by outsiders, the chiefs of Bengal coalesced to elect Gopala as their supreme leader in AD c.756.⁵¹ Gopala, who himself was a feudal chief founded a dynasty that exerted considerable influence for almost 400 years; Dharmapala (AD c.775-810) and his son Devapala (AD c.810-47) led ambitious westward campaigns. The defeated chiefs and kings often retained positions and titles on condition of obedience and tributes and thus were transformed into feudatory lords or tributary kings. The repeated struggle over the control of middle Ganges plain (*madhyadesa*) involving three parties i.e. the Palas of Bengal, the Pratihars of Malwa and the Rashtrakutas of Deccan continued for more than two centuries making revolts and uprisings of petty kings and feudal chiefs easier who usually took advantage of chaotic situations.

Commerce and cities of Bengal had withstood the closure of western trading routes by the Huns because business with South and Southeast Asian countries such as Java, Malay, China and Ceylon along

⁴⁸ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2; Afroz Akmam, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁵⁰ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 89; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.* pp. 368-371.

⁵¹ *Banglapedia* Vol. 4, p. 424.

maritime and eastward terrestrial routes continued but could not survive the long period of *Matsyanyaya*. The chaos and confusion in the heartland of Bengal severed communication of Tamralipti with its hinterland and consequently the port city declined. Tamralipti was not heard of after the eighth century AD.⁵² Continuous political struggles and consequent warfare in the middle Ganges plain made reopening of westward trading routes impossible. Pundranagara and Kotivarsa no longer thrived on commerce; they survived as centers of administration and Buddhist learning. Buddhism too would have disappeared with the traders and guilds had it not received an extension of life for another 350 years owing to the Buddhist Pala kings. The far-eastern part of Bengal i.e. Samatata was able to remain outside the political chaos of the Ganges valley and prospered largely because of the new caravan route that ran along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal and connected both Pagan and Arakan with the emerging port of Samandar.

Closure of the caravan routes and absence of coins in Pala period confirmed that Bengal had entered into an era of localized economy; gold coins (*denarius aureus*) that were abundant in the fifth-sixth century AD were almost extinct.⁵³ In a completely localized economy, the merchants lost importance in social hierarchy to the feudal lords. Diminishing importance of merchants, artisans and guilds after seventh century AD was reflected in their absence in the deeds of land transfers that used to acknowledge them with high regards earlier.⁵⁴ From the election of Gopala, the feudal lords were crucial in every juncture of Pala history; their uprising disintegrated the empire after the death of Devapala, their revolt overthrew Mahipala II and later their support helped Ramapala to regain Varendri.⁵⁵ Proliferation of feudal chiefs and their importance in politics while merchants and artisans disappeared imply that land and agriculture had assumed the primary role in Bengal economy by the eighth century AD.⁵⁶ The localization of economy and dominance of land continued in the following periods. During the Senas who supplanted the Palas, no coins were issued and transactions were made in *cowries* (sea snails).⁵⁷

⁵² Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 164; 381.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-165.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-278.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

4. Layers in Land Management

The end of caravan trade and absence of currency do not necessarily imply a lean period of productivity. Actually, agricultural production increased to a level of considerable surplus after the Gupta agricultural expansion. Had there not been enough food surpluses, the kings and feudal lords could not afford to engage in numerous battles that led to the hundred years of anarchy. Without substantial surplus, expensive westward campaigns of the Pala kings in the eighth-ninth century AD were not possible. The handicap was the absence of long distance trading and currency; the surplus could not transform into commodity production.

The political importance of feudal lords all along the Pala period derived from their acquisition of surplus. Feudal acquisition indicates that land was managed in layers. Physical labour was not obligatory in this form of feudalism, which was characterized by tribute that was considered a collective responsibility of the village-community.⁵⁸ The feudatories were hereditary tax collectors⁵⁹ while the sovereign remained the proprietor.⁶⁰ Apart from the feudal administration, huge land endowments to Buddhist monastic establishments and Hindu *Brahmans* also segregated land ownership and cultivation as neither the monks nor the *Brahmans* ploughed their land. By the end of the seventh century AD, Bengal's society assumed a class structure according to the relation with land. Ashrafpur copper plates issued by the Khadga kings in AD c.671 described three tiers of society comprising *Krsyamanakas* (mere agricultural labourers devoid of any right on land), *bhujiyamanakas* (beneficiaries who enjoyed the land), and the real owners i.e. lords/sovereign.⁶¹

Archeological discoveries of numerous magnificent monastic structures and temples clad with artworks and rich urban layers belonging to the Pala period⁶² indicate that a part of the accumulated agricultural surplus used to support the architects, artisans and workers. However, the archeological vacuum of Sena

⁵⁸ Afsan Chowdhury, 'Madhya-Yuge Banglar Bhumi-Shashon Byabostha' in Muntashir Mamoon (ed.), *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society* (in Bengali, Mowla Brothers revised new edition second reprint, Dhaka 2009), p. 35.

⁵⁹ Sirajul Islam, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboste Zamindarder Pratikriya' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 72.

⁶⁰ Mahbub Ahmed, 'Bangladesher Bhumi Byabostha' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 43-7.

⁶¹ *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, p. 48.

⁶² *Supra*, FN 27; 30.

period and the literary description of the extravagance of Sena Royal Court imply that during this period, the surplus did not circulate back into the society; it was wasted in luxury. Indulgence in luxury and consequent moral degradation clarify the en masse desertion of Nadiya by its inhabitants at the mere apprehension of the advent of advancing Khalji warriors who found both the Sena capital and the king helplessly unprotected.⁶³

During the period of Muslim Sultanate, Hindu feudal chiefs and petty kings retained both their properties and positions on condition of regular tributes in forms of cash and kinds along with military services to the sovereign in time of wars. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, direct Muslim administration was concentrated in urban areas while rest of the regions remained under the local administration of Hindu petty kings.⁶⁴ *Khalisa* (crown land) was under jurisdiction of the state and the tax levied on it was collected through *aumils* or *ijaradars* (tax contractors) who gradually evolved as *zamindars* (feudal lords). They used to collect revenue from peasants on behalf of the state treasury that in return paid them a commission. The *zamindars* were mostly Hindu *kayasthas* and like other positions in government were inherited unless terminated by the sovereign because of failures and delinquencies. *Zamindars* in addition to collection of tax were also responsible for maintaining law and order in the area under their control. Beside the emerging *kayasthas*, the incoming nobles and gentry were also assimilated in land administration through *mansabi*. The awardees of *mansabi* i.e. *Mansabdars* received *jagirs* (lease of holdings) for meeting personal expenses and fulfilling the requirements of their appointments through its revenue. Each *mansabdar* had to maintain a militia force in proportion to the resources of the *jagir* (holding) to serve the sovereign in time of wars.⁶⁵

Officers and persons of distinction were granted *la-kharaj* (tax-free) land in lieu of or in supplement of salaries and stipends in various forms such as, *jagirs*, *al-tamgha*, *aima* and *madadi-ma'ash*. *Jagirs* and *al-tamgha* were usually granted to civil and military officers while *aima* and *madadi-ma'ash* to learned men, spiritual leaders and persons of noble descents. *Jagirs* were granted nominally for life but as most state appointments were hereditary, *jagirs* became hereditary as well; *Aima* and *madadi-ma'ash* were granted

⁶³ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 243; 252.

⁶⁴ Md. Akhtaruzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁶⁵ Khondkar Fuzli Rubbee, *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal* (Thacker, Spink and Co. Calcutta 1895), pp. 78-79.

in perpetuity.⁶⁶ Majority of the officials and aristocracy who were granted tax-free land were migrants or descendants of migrants who had left central Asia at the eruption of Mongol invasion in the early thirteenth century.⁶⁷

The multi-layered management of land continued throughout the rules of the Turks, the Afghans and the Mughals. The role of tax collection of the earlier *zamindars* continued while many from amongst the central Asian migrants joined their folds. Endowments to monastic establishments and *Brahmans* were replaced by *aima* and *madadi-ma'ash* to learned men and spiritual leaders; Bengal society in terms of man-land relation did not change much.

5. Royal Encampments and Land-rent Cities

Pundranagara received fresh impetus during the Pala period when the brick rampart along with the eastern gateway were rebuilt and a large number of Buddhist establishments e.g. monasteries and temples were founded outside the city wall.⁶⁸ Excavated layers corresponding to Pala period in Kotivarsa indicated efflorescence through remains of rampart walls, residential quarters and temples with enclosed ambulatory path, damp proof granaries, bathrooms, drains and ring wells.⁶⁹ However, no archeological trace of the rows of palaces that were full of pomp and grandeurs befitting of the city that has been glowingly described in Ramacharita of Sandhyakara Nandi i.e. Ramavati, the adobe of the Pala king and his court could be discovered. The archeological vacuum has led to the assertion that Ramavati was a royal encampment (*skandhavana*).⁷⁰ The volatile political ambience of Pala Empire where acquiescence of regional chiefs was precondition to empire's stability, a royal camp with mobile court and army suited the overlord's purpose most. Every trade and profession was carried out in the camp with as much regularity as in a city. Goldsmiths, jewellers, bankers, drapers, druggists, confectioners, carpenters, tailors, tent makers and corn grinders found full employment and with its women, children, servants,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-82.

⁶⁷ Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal* (Third Edition, Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, Dhaka 2001), p. 225.

⁶⁸ *Banglapedia* Vol. 6, p. 424.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁷⁰ For Pala and Sena encampments: R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 31-33; 251-52; 617-18; 644; Niharranjan Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-09; 314-15.

merchants and artisans, the camp became a city the moment it ceased moving.⁷¹ Reference of three different Sena capitals i.e. Vikramapura, Lakshmanavati and Vijayapura during the short stint of Sena rule that lasted only three generations and the dearth of substantial archeological remains imply that all of them were actually ephemeral royal encampments; not cities.

During the Senas, the old cities lost administrative importance and became economically stagnant.⁷² The state patronization of the Buddhist institutions located in and around the cities stopped.⁷³ Cities in Bengal gradually became venues for indulgence in merry making with dancing girls and for squandering money in useless entertainments that were vividly described in *Kamasutra*, *Ramacharita* and *Pavana-duta*.⁷⁴ The cities no longer were economic engines or centre of excellence for Buddhist learning. They had become typical land-rent cities that ate up the regional agricultural surplus acquired by means of economic or non-economic coercion.

5.1. Khalji Camps

Bakhtiyar Khalji captured Nadiya, the Sena capital in the winter of AD 1204-5. He camped in Lakhnauti for a while and then shifted his camp to Devikot, which was advantageously located to be the base camp for his planned Tibet campaign that he launched in AD 1206. Before he could cross the foothills of the Himalayas, he sustained heavy losses at a battle with local tribes and retreated. Back in Devikot, he fell seriously ill and was stabbed to death by Ali Mardan Khalji in AD 1206.⁷⁵

Eastward campaign of the Khaljis was an attempt to create a niche for themselves as they hardly had any place in the Delhi Sultanate where the Ilbari Turks already had established their supremacy. The Khaljis subsisted on recurring raiding expeditions and their wealth increased by capturing of booty and imposition of taxes on neighbouring territories.⁷⁶ Their political intention and method of economic

⁷¹ D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 387.

⁷² *Supra*, FN 37.

⁷³ Vallalasena's avowal that he was born to annihilate the Buddhists proclaimed the state attitude to Buddhism. Niharmanjan Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 552-53.

⁷⁴ R.C. Majumder (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 618-19.

⁷⁵ *Banglapedia* Vol. 1, pp. 387-88.

⁷⁶ Abdul Karim, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

extraction kept them busy in defense of their conquered territory not only from the neighbouring kings but also from the Delhi Sultanate. Nature of Khalji military engagements, internal rivalry and their dependence on cavalry for economic extraction indicate that neither Lakhnauti nor Devikot had evolved to any advanced urban stage by AD 1227 when Nasiruddin Mahmud, the son of Sultan Shams-ud-din Iltutmish of Delhi attacked Lakhnauti. Persistence of Khaljis to cling to the eastern territory led to the killing of Nasiruddin Mahmud and Sultan Iltutmish was compelled to lead in person a retaliation that terminated the Khaljis and initiated Delhi's rule in Lakhnauti through governors.

5.2. Capitals of Sultanate

Lakhnauti became synonymous with rebellion because of its distance and difficult access from Delhi. The governors appointed to Lakhnauti revolted so frequently that contemporary historian Zia-ud-din Barani called it *Balghakpur* (the place of strife).⁷⁷ The termination of the house of Balban in Delhi in AD 1290 at the hand of the Khaljis reversed the scenario of the early part of the century i.e. the Khaljis captured the crown of Delhi while Ilbari Turks were controlling Lakhnauti. The Ilbari Turks of Lakhnauti severed connection with Delhi and established an independent Sultanate. Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, who captured the throne in AD 1342, brought all of Bengal under the sultanate. The rule of the independent sultans of Bengal continued until AD 1538.

The western frontier remained most important throughout this period because of the struggle with Delhi. Bengal was attacked by Firuz Shah Tughlak of Delhi twice but was successfully retaliated by Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah in AD 1353 and by his son Sikander Shah in AD 1359.⁷⁸ Later, Alauddin Hossain Shah also had to repulse an attack of Sikander Lodi; Alauddin's son Nusrat Shah avoided a direct confrontation with Babur by pledging neutrality in Babur's campaign against the Afghans.⁷⁹ Any intruding army had to enter Bengal along the bank of the Ganges River through Teliagarhi pass or from further north through the territory of Tirhut. As the intention of the Bengal sultans was to isolate Bengal from North Indian political influence, the Sultans tried to regulate the western approaches of Bengal that covered the strip of land stretching on either side of the Ganges.⁸⁰ Gaur (Gauda) and Pandua were strategically located⁸¹ to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-55.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

⁸⁰ M. R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal: 1494-1538 A.D. A Socio Political Study* (University of Dhaka second revised edition, Dhaka 1999), p. 05.

provide vigilance over trans-Gangetic region, which was essential in the defense against domineering Delhi Sultans and other western threats.

The society of the Bengal sultanate capital was well represented in the *farman* (proclamation) of Firuz Shah Tughluq seeking support in his war against Shams-ud-din Ilyas Shah. He addressed the following people of Pandua⁸²:

- i. The *Saadat*, *Ulama*, *Mashaikh* and others of similar nature;
- ii. The *Khans*, *Maliks*, *Umara*, *Sadrs*, *Akaber* and *Maarif*;
- iii. The 'train and suit' of no (ii)
- iv. *Zamindars*, *Muqaddams*, *Mafruzman*, *Madkan* and such like;
- v. Hermits, Saints and *Gabrs*.

According to the *farman*, which was an official confirmation, the contemporary society of Pandua consisted of three classes of people:⁸³

- i. The religious group: *Ulamas*, *Mashaikhs* including Hindu saints;
- ii. The officials both civil and military: *Khan*, *Malik*, *Umara* etc. including Hindu landed proprietors and local chiefs and
- iii. The masses

Absence of merchants and traders in the upper stratum of social hierarchy is not surprising as Bengal had just reentered the league of maritime commerce at the beginning of the century⁸⁴ and more over, concentration of influential merchants were supposed to be in the emporiums and port cities i.e. Satgaon, Sonargaon and Chittagong. Apart from the Hindu landed elites and saints, the nobility were descendants of migrants who were absorbed in the state bureaucracy at positions like *wazir*, *sadr*, *qazi*, *akaber*, *maarif* etc. while majority were enrolled in the legion⁸⁵ as *sar-i-khalil*, *sipah-salar*, *amir*, *malik* or *khan* according to their competency and were deployed in defense or expansion of territory. They received

⁸¹ *Supra*, Chapter II, Fig. 2.1, p. 16.

⁸² Abdul Karim, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁸³ Md. Akhtaruzzaman, *Society and Urbanization in Medieval Bengal*, p. 196.

⁸⁴ *Infra*, p. 68.

⁸⁵ Abdul Karim, *op. cit.*, pp. 50; 53.

salaries, villages and lands (fiefs); *Ulamas* and other learned people received stipends or land grants.⁸⁶ Major economic impetus of the capital used to come from salaries and wages, stipends and fiefs.⁸⁷ Main source of salaries, wages and stipends was the state while both types of fiefs i.e. *kharaj* and *la-kharaj* (taxable and tax-free) depended also on the discretion of the state. Thus, the society of the sultanate's capital subsisted on state's revenue or its distribution of benevolence and hence, an urban society that could continue to thrive after the shift or removal of state support did not evolve. Archeological remains of Gaur (Gauda) and Pandua are awe inspiring in their scale and magnificence but because of the economic vulnerability, the cities succumbed with the fall of the sultanate.

6. Dominance of Foreign Merchants

During the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (AD 1301-1322), extension of sultanate's territory in the southwestern direction to include the regions on either side of the Bhagirathi River was a strategy not only for checking the advance of the powerful Orissan rulers but also to control the maritime commerce that Bengal was trying to build up along the Ganges River through the port of Satgaon. Similar considerations influenced the inclusion of Sonargaon, Sylhet and Chittagong region within the boundary of sultanate whose immediate concerns were the growing power of the Ahom, Tippera and Arakan kings and the trade route along the Meghna-Padma and Chittagong leading to the Bay of Bengal.⁸⁸ Consequently, Bengal was connected to the thriving Cambay-Malacca maritime trade and Satgaon on the west and Sonargaon on the east emerged as important emporiums.

The remarkable influx of silver coins in the Sultanate period was closely connected with the considerable increase of Bengal's maritime trade. However, local merchants and traders held weak positions of connecting links between producers and foreign traders.⁸⁹ Apart from the few *karkhanas* (factories) established to cater the royal needs especially to accouter the army with swords, bows and spears,⁹⁰ foreign merchants' capital used to control domestic industry, which had hardly any scope for independent growth. The artisans were placed very low in social hierarchy living at the bare subsistence level and

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

⁸⁸ M. R. Tarafdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 165; 171.

⁹⁰ Md. Akhtaruzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

without any improvement in their production technology were going through a process of professional stagnation.⁹¹

The Arab, Persian, Gujarati and Coromandel merchants dominated Bengal's maritime trade. Shipbuilding and shipping were mostly at the hands of Gujarati and Coromandel merchants who accordingly controlled the navigation and trading in Bengal.⁹² The fourteenth century explorer, Ibn Battuta's reference to Chinese junks plying to Chittagong and even to Sonargaon implied that Chinese merchants also controlled a part of Bengal's trading and navigation.⁹³ The ships used in trade were either dhows of Arabian origin or heavier Chinese junks.⁹⁴

The merchants of Gujarat, Coromandel and Arab were gradually overpowered by the Portuguese and later by other European traders. In AD 1536, Sultan Ghiyath-ud-din Mahmud Shah allowed the Portuguese, Martim Affonso de Mello to build factories in Chittagong and Satgaon and to control customhouses of these ports.⁹⁵ The Europeans monopolized maritime trade within a century.

⁹¹ M. R. Tarafdar, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2; 165.

⁹³ Abdul Karim, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁹⁴ M. R. Tarafdar, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Coevolution of Man-land Relation and Society in Bengal¹ since AD 1765

1. Land: Community to Commodity

Acquisition of Bengal's *diwani* (revenue administration) by English East India Company in AD 1765 after Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah had succumbed in 1757, radically changed man-land relation in Bengal. Although feudal control over land in Bengal was common since the sixth century AD, state remained the proprietor;² feudal lords (*zamindars*) were only hereditary tax collectors.³ Physical labour was not obligatory in this form of feudalism, which was characterized by tribute that was considered a collective responsibility of the village-community.⁴ The landlord used to collect one-third of the harvest as revenue from village communities and passed the proceed to his overlord after retaining one-tenth of the collection as his commission.⁵ Although land right was not mutually transferable,⁶ rights of the landholding tenants (*rai-yats*) were generally respected.⁷ During the middle age e.g. in the Mughal period, revenue of crown land was collected in cash either directly or through revenue contractors who collected revenue from a designated area on condition of depositing a stipulated amount in the state exchequer. Large tributary estates and petty kings, who had retained their former statuses on condition of regular

¹ Bengal here refers approximately to the present day state of West Bengal in India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. East Bengal refers to the present day Bangladesh. For bibliographical reference on the evolution of definition and boundary of Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter II, FN 1.

² Mahbub Ahmed, 'Bangladesher Bhumi Byabostha' in Muntashir Mamoon (ed.), *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society* (in Bengali, Mowla Brothers revised new edition second reprint, Dhaka 2009), pp. 43-7.

³ Sirajul Islam, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboste Zamindarder Pratikriya' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 72.

⁴ Afsan Chowdhury, 'Madhya-Yuge Banglar Bhumi-Shashon Byabostha' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 35.

⁵ Suprakash Roy, 'Bhumi-Rajoshyer "Chiroshthayee-Bandabosta" (1793)' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 63.

⁶ Sirajul Islam, 'Social and Cultural History in Perspective' in Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), p. 17.

⁷ Shirin Akhtar, 'Land Control and Landed Society During the Nawabi Regime' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III, p. 46.

tributes and military service,⁸ contributed a major share.⁹ The large estates retained their dominance until the end of the eighteenth century when (as in 1790) half of Bengal's total land revenue came through eight such estates.¹⁰ The *zamindari sanad* (charter) had made police duties obligatory; principal *zamindars* also had judicial powers.¹¹ With both fiscal and political power at their disposal, the *zamindars* exercised enormous influence within the bounds of their little kingdoms; the glamour of urban life did not entice them.¹²

Award of Orissa, Bihar and Bengal's *diwani* to East India Company by Emperor Shah Alam in 1765 for an annual tribute of Rs. 2,600,000¹³ marked the replacement of a traditional revenue administration of hereditary monarchies and feudatories by a foreign joint stock charter company that was obligated to make regular profit and to distribute the proceed among its shareholders. After the first attempt of 1772 to maximize land revenue through appointment of short-term revenue contactors for five years had backfired with oppression, famine and flight of peasants deserting holdings, long tenures were conceived for encouraging landlords to invest in land and agriculture.¹⁴ In March 1793, Permanent Settlement Act was enacted conferring upon the erstwhile landlords and revenue contractors proprietorships for as long as they would regularly deposit revenue in the company's exchequer at a fixed rate; they could also sell, grant and mortgage land. The hereditary collective right of village-peasants over their territory of arable

⁸ They had to supply a fixed quota of accoutered troops in conformity with their status and the strategic position of their estates. Shirin Akhtar, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁹ Afsan Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-9; Mahbub Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁰ Sirajul Islam, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboster Uddeshya o Phalaphal' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 145-6.

¹¹ Shirin Akhtar, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-51.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

¹⁴ For the background of permanent settlement: Sirajul Islam, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboster Patabhumi' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 50-60.

land conditional of cultivating and paying state tax was replaced by individual proprietorship of landlords;¹⁵ the *raiyats* (peasants) became tenants at will of the *zamindars* (landlords).¹⁶

The apprehension that the large estates might revolt against the company led to the seizure of policing power from landlords, introduction of a civil judicial system further weakened the landlords who earlier along with the right to collect revenue also enjoyed the prerogative of maintaining law and order in their territories. Pressure of making regular profit, which is intrinsic of a company, compelled it to be stringent regarding revenue disregarding natural calamities like draught, flood or famine. In case of failure to deposit any installment of the revenue in time would result in to loss of proprietorship, which used to be transferred through market auctions; land became a commodity.

Fixation of revenue at high rates and strict deadlines for realizing it after permanent settlement came heavily upon the large estates who simultaneously lost authority of arresting or confiscating property of *raiyats* in case they failed to pay land-rent after the introduction of judicial arbitration. Imposition of tax at high rates had created resent among landlords of Dhaka, Comilla and Rangpur regions who initially declined to accept the settlement but later acquiesced. There was also dissatisfaction especially among petty kings of large estates regarding prohibition on arrest or confiscation of *raiyats'* property as they deemed these measures essential for realizing land-rent. The prohibition was lifted through the seventh regulation in 1799; however, all the large estates except the one of Bardhaman had already declined and were auctioned into smaller estates.¹⁷ Due to gradual subinfeudations and auctions of disintegrated estates, apart from numerous smaller holdings, there were 533 comparatively larger (more than 8,000 hectares) and 15,747 medium (between 200 to 8,000 hectares) estates in Bengal by 1872.¹⁸ In most cases, the buyers were former rent collectors, usurers and a band of urban *nouveau riche* who had acquired

¹⁵ Suprakash Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁶ Sirajul Islam, 'Social and Cultural History in Perspective', p. 20.

¹⁷ For landlords' reaction to permanent settlement: Sirajul Islam, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboste Zamindarder Pratikriya' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 72-86.

¹⁸ Binoy Ghosh, 'Grammya-Shomajer Paribartaner Goti' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 97-100.

surplus wealth from government and professional services, trading and brokerage.¹⁹ Unearned income and profit, and associated social status allured investment in land.

Growth of population gradually shifted the demographic balance against the peasantry and transformed Bengal into a labour-abundant economy.²⁰ The new landlords who were mostly non-resident in their holdings, lived in cities and seldom invested in agricultural infrastructures such as, irrigation canals and fencing as instead of productivity of land, population density and consequent scarcity determined land rent.²¹ The absentee proprietors were content if rent and more rent could be extracted through an intricate mechanism of intermediaries, who and obviously the *zamindars* derived their incomes from the payment by the *raiya*s who were burdened with repeated enhancement of land rent. Though it is difficult to ascertain the escalation of land rent at the peasants' end in the nineteenth century, they certainly had to bear the burden of urban consumption of proprietors and parasitic growth of intermediaries in villages; between 1914 and 1940, land rent increased by 40%.²²

There was a series of peasant uprisings protesting increase of land rent e.g. in Tushkhali (Sundarbans, 1872-75), Chhagalnaiya (Noakhali, 1874), Mymensingh (1874-82), Munshiganj (Dhaka, 1880-81) and Mehendiganj (1880-81); the most formidable was the largely nonviolent and highly organized protest of *raiya*s in Pabna in 1873. The nonresident Pabna *zamindars* who acquired control over land as auction purchasers, besides enhancing rent periodically were also collecting *abwabs* (circumstantial tax) of all sorts. When appeals for desisting from frequent rent rise and illegal *abwabs* went in vain, the *raiya*s burst into open disobedience. Because of peasants' resistance, a new tenancy law modifying the constitution of permanent settlement was enacted in 1885. The objective of the Bengal Tenancy Act was to create an ambience for accumulation of capital at the hand of peasants who were recognized by the act as settled or occupancy tenants had they occupied their holdings for more than twelve years. They would have the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94; Sirajul Islam, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboste Zamindarder Pratikriya', p. 84.

²⁰ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, 'Politics and Culture in Bengal' in *New Left Review*, I/79, May-June (London 1973), p. 84.

²¹ In 1921, 77% of Bengal's population was dependent on agriculture against 6% in contemporary England where an average peasant family cultivated 4.4 hectares of land while it was less than 1.6 hectares per peasant family in Bengal. M. Mofakharul Islam, 'Banglar Krishi o Zamindarsreni' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 137.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

right to transfer holdings on payment of transfer *salami* (cash gift) had the landlords permitted the transfer. The Tenancy Amendment Act of 1928 conferred upon the *raiya*t the right to transfer holdings without prior permission from landlords; they were still required to pay *salami*. The right of *raiya*t further improved after the amendment of the act in 1938 that abolished *salami* and recognized the *raiya*t as the virtual proprietor of his land.²³

The right to transfer holdings by *raiya*ts created a rural land market that led to the concentration of landed property in the hands of those who were socially and financially influential in the rural power structure.²⁴ The circulation of peasants' surplus in the rural land market took a dramatic turn in the periods of great depression (1929-33) and during the Bengal Famine (1943) when rich peasants and *mahajans* (moneylenders) took advantage of the collapse of credit markets and grabbed the lands of the needy *raiya*ts. The first 'Plot to Plot Survey' in 1944-45 found that only 16% of rural households had more than two hectares of land; the rests were small and marginal farmers, sharecroppers or landless day labourers.²⁵

1.1. Cash Crops

Bengal supplied much of Europe's demand of indigo, growth of Bengal's indigo export was striking; it rose from 4,952 factory *maunds* (185 metric tons) in 1788-89 to 132,946 factory *maunds* (4,962 metric tons) in 1829-30. The economic depression in England after 1826 adversely affected the market of indigo. It recovered from the long depression but could not reinvigorate largely due to the falling price in international market particularly since 1845-46 when compared to 1841-42, price fell by 20.4%.²⁶ After the indigo revolt in 1859-60, European indigo planters withdrew from Bengal and regrouped in Bihar.²⁷ Poppy was exclusively under government control and its cultivation seldom exceeded 320,000 acres

²³ Sirajul Islam, 'Permanent Settlement and Peasant Economy' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), p. 236-37.

²⁴ Sirajul Islam, 'Economic History in Perspective' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 19.

²⁵ H. S. M. Ishaque, *Agricultural Statistics by Plot to Plot Enumeration in Bengal, 1944-45*, Part-1 (Alipur 1946), pp. 49-50 cited in Sirajul Islam, 'Permanent Settlement and Peasant Economy', p. 237.

²⁶ Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, 'Commercialization of Agriculture' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, pp. 249-251.

²⁷ Sugata Bose, 'General Economic Conditions, 1857-1947' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 84.

while jute on an average covered 2,040,000 acres annually between 1891-92 and 1900-1901.²⁸ Tea was a plantation crop exclusively under European control and was concentrated mostly in north Bengal and Assam.²⁹ Tea plantations depended on waged labour and recruited bulk of the labourers from tribal populations in West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.³⁰ It had little impact on local peasants.

Entrance of Bengal's agricultural produces into European market eased after the opening of Suez Canal, growth of steam navigation and telegraphic communication; Eastern Bengal Railway was open to traffic as well by 1862.³¹ After the Crimean War (1854-56) had cut off the supply of Russian hemp and flax, demand of Bengal's jute increased manifold and it assumed an important role in the evolution of agrarian economy in Bengal society for the following hundred years. Rapid growth of worldwide grain trade in the final quarter of the nineteenth century provided another stimulus for Bengal jute. The most vigorous and sustained period of boom started in 1906 and lasted until the outbreak of First World War; the long-term upward trend continued until the worldwide depression struck in 1930.³²

The wide gap between the export price of gunny bags and the import price of jute from countryside into Kolkata exposed the huge profits made by manufacturers and exporters at the expense of cultivators. There was a significant differential between average Kolkata prices and harvest prices in Bengal districts; 32%, 31% and 33% in 1910s, 1920s and 1930s respectively.³³ Peasants with very smallholdings,³⁴ widely scattered over the country and unacquainted with uncertainties of world market were unable to decide the size of optimum cultivation under fluctuating demand of jute and often produced excessive supplies. The jute mills fully exploited this opportunity of buying cheap jute and stocking it. The resultant fall in

²⁸ Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 245; 259-60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

³⁰ Willem Van Schendel, 'Economy of Working Classes' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 514.

³¹ Sunil Kumar Munsi, 'Transportation and Communication' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 508.

³² Sugata Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 83-5.

³³ Amiya Bagchi, *Private Investment in India* (Cambridge 1969), p. 287 cited in Sugata Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

³⁴ About half of the population of jute growing districts lived on holdings of an acre (0.4 hectare) or less. *Report of the Land Revenue Administration in Bengal, 1930-31* (Calcutta annual), 5 cited in Sugata Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

demand for raw jute in the next manufacturing season would depress its price in the next harvest. Cultivators being usually of limited resources were unable to postpone marketing of their produces for long periods and were in a disadvantaged position compared with the resourceful and organized jute interest groups. The Europeans who headed the marketing structure, jute mill owners and the intricate system of intermediaries comprising of the traditionally dominant groups in villages, particularly the rural moneylenders and rural middleclass who were engaged in trading of agricultural produces took full advantage of the vulnerability of peasants.

Embracing jute was peasants' desperate move to a cash crop to meet the immediate cash requirement for their subsistence needs such as, payment of land rent and repayment of debt; proliferation of under tenures (*madhyasvatvas*) as a consequence of absentee landlordism had inevitably inflated peasants' rent burden that compelled him to borrow.³⁵ Jute cultivation had its specific cash requirement as it was more labour intensive and part of the labour had to be directly paid for. Indebtedness increased mostly during the periods of abrupt fall in jute prices that necessitated distress sale of crops i.e. immediately after harvest. As peasants engaged in short term switching between jute and autumn rice in response to relative prices, consequent depletion of food stock obliged them to buy food from the market in the lean months of the year. This cycle of distress buying and selling blurred the distinction between a subsistence crop and the cash crop.³⁶

1.2. Depeasantization

The peak year for jute price was 1925 when it rose to Rs. 16 per *maund* (37.3 kg) while in 1933; jute price fell as low as Rs. three per *maund*. Price of rice also dropped; in 1937, it was lower by 43% than that in 1929.³⁷ This drastic reduction in peasants' income meant their interests for old debts piled up and new debts incurred. The increase of indebtedness resulted into general decrease of net income of peasants leading to corresponding decrease in their capacity to repay debts; they were compelled to transfer land rights to creditors. Statistics for the years 1924-1936 indicates that considerable amount of land was transferred to non-agriculturists who were mostly creditors.³⁸

³⁵ Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, 'Rural Indebtedness' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 444-45.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 441-44.

Contraction of credit due to the rise of bad debts during the recession of 1930s polarized Bengal's agrarian economy; mortgages were quickly replaced by distress sell of land. Rich peasants and moneylenders (*mahajans*) availed this opportunity of declining prices and grabbed the best plots. As cultivation became unprofitable due to recession, in most cases the transferred land was leased back to the peasant for sharecropping (*bargadari*); the depression brought down the proprietor-cultivator to the rank of sharecropper whose position both socially and economically was inferior to that of a peasant. The debtors were compelled to accept sharecropping in absence of any alternative opportunity to stay as cultivators. During the famine of 1943, peasants were forced to sell the remaining holdings, as they had no other sources left open to them than to dispose their properties for subsistence need. This resulted into proliferation of landless labourers on one hand and concentration of agricultural land to non-agriculturists on the other.³⁹ The peasant proprietor as a productive entrepreneur became almost extinct in Bengal.

Agrarian producers' progressive loss of control of land reached to the extent of depeasantization and the rural society became polarized into a small but powerful class of large landholders/moneylenders/traders and a much larger class of more or less dispossessed sharecroppers/labourers. Depeasantization in Bengal consisted of three interrelated processes:⁴⁰

- i. Increase in rural indebtedness,
- ii. Escalation of land transfers after enacting the Bengal Tenancy Act, and
- iii. Extension of sharecropping.

The main contradiction in the mid-twentieth century in man-land relation of Bengal remained the same as it had been after the introduction of permanent settlement in 1793 except the relative decline of *zamindars* and intermediate rent receivers who appropriated rural surplus by means of taxation and land rent. The rise of an affluent rural middle class who exploited new ways of accumulation by means of trade and credit created new patterns of rural differentiation.⁴¹ Those who were actually involved in the process of agricultural production were generally divested of ownership and control over land while those who owned and exercised control over land were generally divorced from the risk and responsibility of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 454-55.

⁴⁰ Willem Van Schendel, *op. cit.*, p. 525-27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

cultivation.⁴² The Master Survey of Agriculture in 1967-68 revealed that 27.5 % of the rural population was landless; 30% of the population controlled 77% of the arable land while the majority i.e. 42.5% had only 23% of the land.⁴³

2. Society after Permanent Settlement

The fall of large estates and extensive transfer of other *zamindari* estates had thoroughly restructured the landed aristocracy; thousands of new landholders hitherto never connected with land management and otherwise engaged in trade and commerce, government and professional services emerged within a decade.⁴⁴ The local collaborators of European commercial houses, known as *banians* composed mostly of Hindu *Brahmans*, *Vaidyas* and *Kayasthas* had first gained the cash incomes and legal knowledge necessary to capture the land market when the large estates broke down; they established their control over land.⁴⁵ The entry of the leading *banian* families such as, the Debs, Mallicks, Nandis, Tagores and many others into land control were the obvious examples.⁴⁶

Replacement of Persian by English and the vernaculars in the courts and offices and the decision to give preference while recruiting employees for government services to English educated persons⁴⁷ modified the face of urban gentry. Discontinuation of Persian in judicial and revenue proceedings since 1837 threw out of employment a considerable body of Muslim⁴⁸ subordinate government officers.⁴⁹ The *Brahmans*,

⁴² Kamal Siddiqui, 'Land Reforms since 1950' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 589.

⁴³ Burhanuddin Khan Jahangir, 'Chiroshthayee Bandaboste Shomajbinnyas (1907-1970)' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 166-7.

⁴⁴ Sirajul Islam, 'Permanent Settlement and Peasant Economy', p. 227.

⁴⁵ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

⁴⁶ Sirajul Islam, 'Economic History in Perspective', p. 12.

⁴⁷ Zaheda Ahmad, 'State and Education' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III, p. 87.

⁴⁸ Mostly Muslims of foreign descents occupied military and judicial positions in the pre-colonial period. Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), p. 13.

⁴⁹ Mohammad Shah, 'Social and Cultural Basis of Bengali Nationalism' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III, p. 581.

the *Vaidyas* and the *Kayasthas* who were apt in collaboration with foreign rules mainly through their mastery of alien languages had served in the administration of the Mughals and now switched quickly from Persian to English to perform the bureaucratic and professional functions necessary for the British rule. Thus, they established control over both: the permanent settlement land system and also the offices, judiciary, schools and professions opened up by the colonial administration.

Europeans and non-Bengalis such as, English, Armenians, Greeks and Marwari merchants controlled internal and international commerce; Muslim merchants of Iranian and Kashmiri descents also prospered well. By 1850s, prominent Armenian, Iranian and Kashmiri merchants had invested in rural estates. The trend had started at the beginning of the nineteenth century when due to the commercial stagnation created by British colonial monopolistic policy; leading merchants had given up trade and invested in landed estates.⁵⁰

2.1. Early Associations, Assembly and Councils

The important role of the landed aristocracy and the gentry (*bhadralok*)⁵¹ comprising mostly of service holders and professionals in the British Rule stimulated their appetite for political influence but their dependence on colonial land system and state employment strictly compromised their politics and ideology. They accepted the colonial order while agitating for reforms to allow a wider native middleclass participation in the power it created; their role was that of enlightened collaborators.⁵² Their socioeconomic interests motivated the early associations. The *Zamindari* Association (latter renamed as Landholders' Society in 1838) was established in 1837 to organize the ventilation of landholders'

⁵⁰ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *Dhaka: A Study in Urban History and Development; 1840-1921* (Academic Press and Publishers Library third revised edition, Dhaka 2010), pp. 92; 96-7; 105.

⁵¹ Broomfield described the *bhadralok* as, "a socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and clerical employment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high-caste proscriptions and its command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture, and its history; and maintaining its communal integration through a fairly complex institutional structure that it had proved remarkably ready to adapt and augment to extend its social power and political opportunities" in *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal* (Berkeley 1968), pp 12-13 cited in J. H. Broomfield, 'Social and Institutional Bases of Politics 1906-1947' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 191.

⁵² Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-83.

grievances against the resumption policy after the government in 1820s and '30s had decided to resume the erstwhile *la-kharaj* (tax-free) land to rental in order to increase revenue.⁵³ A petition arguing the resumption proceedings as unlawful and that the countryside was oppressed by young and unqualified government officials i.e. deputy collectors who were allegedly misusing their authority and fleecing the gentry was sent to the British Parliament by the society in 1839; this persuaded the authority to make a reappraisal of the resumption question.⁵⁴ The British Indian Association, established in 1851 was the first organization to have demanded a share in the administration for native Indians; one of their demands in the charter sent to British Parliament in 1853 was the establishment of a representative legislative assembly in Bengal.⁵⁵ The *bhadraloks* (gentry) had become conscious of their own rights but remained loyal to the British; the British government observed with great satisfaction that the *zamindars* (landlords), the educated class and the newspapers of Bengal were very vocal against the *Sepoy* (soldier) Mutiny of 1857⁵⁶ and decided to nourish constitutionalism by setting up representative bodies with limited powers.⁵⁷

Bengal Legislative Assembly originated from the Indian Council Act of 1861 that did not provide for any elected representative or for a respectable number of Bengalis; the real power lay in the hands of the Governor General. The first council that had its inaugural session on February 1, 1862 comprised of 12 nominated members: four government officials, four non-government foreigners and four Bengalis of whom three were influential *zamindars*; they were all loyal *bhadraloks* and played a subservient role to the government by remaining silent regarding anti-people amendments.⁵⁸ For the first fifty to sixty years, the assembly served the interest mainly of the feudal class and the foreign ruling coterie; there were sporadic oppositions to bills that were against the interest of the members.⁵⁹ Bengal Legislative Assembly

⁵³ Sirajul Islam, 'Resistance Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, pp. 111-2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵⁵ Syed Serajul Islam, 'Bengal Legislative Assembly and Constitutional Development' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 221.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵⁸ Syed Serajul Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

on April 6, 1885 passed the Local Self-Government Act that introduced a three tier local administration i.e. a District Board for the whole district, a Local Board for every subdivision and a Union Committee for every union. The landed aristocracy constituted 51% of Bengal's local board members in 1886. Among the 184 members of seven local boards in East Bengal, 86 were landlords;⁶⁰ they were at the pinnacle of local society in the nineteenth century.

2.2. Revivalism

The politics surrounding the major peasant movements of nineteenth century i.e. the *Fara'idi* (1810-30), the Indigo Riots (1859-60), and the Pabna Rent Revolt (1872-73) clearly exposed the relation among various communal, social and political blocs centered upon the issue of land rent.⁶¹ The urban gentry remained indifferent towards the *Fara'idi* agitation but coalesced with local landlords to support the peasants against the oppression by indigo planters because the indigo planters became rivals of native landlords and moneylenders after the European planters had been allowed to own *zamindari* tenures (rural estates). However, when the predominantly Muslim peasantry of Pabna revolted against the non-resident *zamindars* (natives; no European was involved), who besides enhancing rent periodically, were collecting *abwabs* (circumstantial taxes) of all sorts, the British Indian Association vigorously opposed any government intervention in tenants relations styling that as violation of the covenant between government and the landlords established by the permanent settlement. The *bhadralok* newspapers namely, the *Hindoo Patriot*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Halishahar Patrika* went further to claim the peasant agitations as nothing more than communalism of Muslim peasants bent on the plunder of their Hindu neighbours.⁶²

The Indian Association that split with the British Indian Association in 1876 turned to rural areas of Bengal for its social base after the success of the peasant movements of 1870s had consolidated in the Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885. Its leaders travelled throughout the hinterland and addressed the peasants on classically urban and *bhadralok* concern of the freedom of press, native representation on the legislative council and civil service reform; the strategy was to stimulate peasant support for middle class interest.

⁶⁰ Muntashir Mamoon, 'Chiroshthayee Bandabostattor PurbaBanger Shomajkatham O Srenibinnyas' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, pp. 111-2; 129.

⁶¹ Sirajul Islam, 'Resistance Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', pp. 120-4; Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-7.

⁶² Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-6.

Mass meetings on civil liberties exposed the abuses of the British and accelerated the cycle of alienation and militancy without questioning the forms of property i.e. the rent structure of rural society as it threatened the socioeconomic authority of the *bhadralok* (gentry) themselves. At this point, the apprehension of popular uprisings led to the introduction of a religious nationalism allowing the *bhadralok* to control and lead a mass movement that might otherwise sweep them away; a radical anti-British feeling cloaked in the symbols of Hindu revivalism emerged.⁶³ The *Zamindari Association* (1837), *Bengal British India Society* (1843), *Society for the Promotion of National Feeling* (1866), *Hindu Mela* (1875) and *Indian Association* (1876) organized mainly by the Hindus of Bengal converged with nationalists from other areas and in 1885 established the Indian National Congress that over time became the platform for Indian nationalist movement.⁶⁴ Hindu revivalism tore the society that was characterized by the economic dominance of Hindu landlords over a predominantly Muslim peasantry⁶⁵ and the backwardness of the Muslim gentry who had refused to recognize the British rule on the ground of illegitimacy and refrained from English education or any association with the English culture.⁶⁶

3. Partition of Bengal

The British tactical response to the nationalist uprising was "*divide and rule*". In July 1905, the scheme for partition of Bengal that would create a separate administration, a separate High Court and a separate university at Dacca to provide opportunities for the Muslims to emerge from their backwardness⁶⁷ was announced; reaction of the Hindu gentry was electrifying and violent. On the day of partition, October 16, 1905, protests charged with religious overtones took place. Masses of Hindus ritually bathed themselves

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9.

⁶⁴ Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective' p. 21; Syed Serajul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁶⁵ Badruddin Umar, 'Beesh Shotoker Chiroshthayee Bandabosta' in *Permanent Settlement and Bengali Society*, p. 199.

⁶⁶ Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective', pp. 15-6.

⁶⁷ In 1905, only 188 were Muslims among the 3,021 students who passed Entrance Examination that was the minimum qualification to enter intermediate level job market. In the eastern Bengal range where Muslims were 59 percent of the population, they held four of the 54 police inspectorships, 60 of the 484 sub-inspectorships, 45 of the 450 head constabships and 1,027 of the 4,594 constabships; Muslims held less than one-sixth of the ministerial posts in government offices. Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective', p. 19; John R. Mclane, 'Partition of Bengal 1905: A Political Analysis' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 134.

in the Ganges River and vowed to dedicate themselves to the anti-partition struggle in front of goddess *Sakti*.⁶⁸ The Hindu *bhadralok* foresaw in the partition great material loss especially the Kolkata Bar and the Kolkata Press. The likelihood of a new high court in Dhaka spelt the loss of the fees that the litigants from East Bengal used to spend in Kolkata while a rival press growing up in Dhaka meant financial loss to Kolkata press.⁶⁹



Fig. 6.1.⁷⁰ Bengal Presidency during British colonial rule

The Muslim leaders regarded the partition as beneficial for the uplift of educational and economic condition of the Muslims in East Bengal. The *Swadeshi* movement (boycott British and buy Indian goods) launched to force the British government to revoke the partition was considered by them as a major blow upon the Muslim socioeconomic and political interests. In this context, the Muslim associations and *anjumans* hitherto formed in the nineteenth century politically culminated in the formation of Muslim League on December 30, 1906 under the leadership of Agha Khan and Nawab Salimullah, the most influential landlord of East Bengal.⁷¹ Muslim groups in East Bengal soon clashed with Hindu *Swadeshi* demonstrators and there were communal riots in different places in 1907. Mass demonstration, *Swadeshi*

⁶⁸ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁶⁹ Mohammad Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 591.

⁷⁰ *Banglapedia* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2003).

⁷¹ Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective', p. 21.

campaigns and political terrorism shook British confidence and in 1911, partition of Bengal was annulled. The *Swadeshi* movement and the demonstrations were mostly urban and middle class phenomena; most members of the terrorist groups were Bengali *bhadraloks* belonging to *Brahman*, *Baidya* and *Kayastha* castes.⁷² Annulment of Bengal's partition marked the first success of Indian Nationalism but at the high price of distorting national consciousness through religion.⁷³

Unequal communal distribution of jobs and services, which was a problem of the Muslim middle class and the relatively opposite position of two communities in the rural rent structure were the areas where separatism struck its deep root and politically, Bengal society became divided on communal lines. Hindu members of the legislative council voted in favour of *zamindari* interests e.g. *zamindari* exactions (*salami*) when amendments to the Bengal Tenancy Act were proposed in 1925 and 1928, Muslim members voted against *salami*. Hindu members opposed the Dhaka University Bill (1925) which was intended to ensure a fixed grant to keep the university going and the Bengal Primary Education Bill (1930) which was intended to educate the villagers; in case of the Moneylenders Bill (1940), they supported the usurers (*mahajans*).⁷⁴ This 'they' and 'we' pattern of politics finally led to the second partition of Bengal in 1947⁷⁵ along the communal line, which divided Bengal into East Pakistan and West Bengal that became parts of Pakistan and India respectively.

4. Emergence of the Bengali Muslims

Predominance of Muslims in East Bengal was discovered only after the first census of Bengal in 1872; 62.6% of the population of 21,626,445 in the districts of East Bengal were Muslims while 37% were Hindus, 48.76% of Bengal's total population of 36,111,228 were Muslims.⁷⁶ The most interesting fact revealed by the census of 1872 was the enormous host of Muhammadans resident in lower Bengal, not

⁷² Peter Heehs, 'Revolutionary Terrorism' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 170.

⁷³ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁷⁴ Mohammad Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 593; Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective', pp. 18-23.

⁷⁵ J. H. Broomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁷⁶ H. Beverley, *Report on the Census of Bengal 1872* (The Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta 1872), pp. 12-18.

massed around the old capitals, but in the alluvial plains of the delta.⁷⁷ The Bengali speaking Muslims were almost invisible during the pre-colonial Muslim *nawabi* regimes when Hindu merchants and *zamindars*, and the administrative aristocracy of high caste Hindus and Muslims of foreign descents dominated the socioeconomic hierarchy.⁷⁸ It was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that a part of the Bengali Muslims rose to some socioeconomic prominence. Commercialization of agriculture especially in the eastern districts of Bengal led to the accrual of surplus at the hand of rural intermediaries and rich peasants in forms other than rent i.e. from commodity market and expanding credit. Although the traditionally organized moneylenders (*mahajans*) in most parts of Bengal were the Hindu *Sahas* and the *Suvarna Vanikas*, by the late nineteenth century, a new group of financiers emerged from among the rich peasants who took up money lending as a supplementary source of income. Majority of wholesale jute traders who forwarded cash advances to cultivators were Muslims.⁷⁹

As most of the *zamindars* (landlords) had become absentees, their linkage with the villages was progressively weakening with the corresponding rise of the rich and powerful *jotedars*⁸⁰ (rich peasants). After the Bengal Tenancy act (1885), the peasant society became fluid enough for upward and downward mobility as agricultural land was getting concentrated in the hands of a few *jotedars* and the dispossessed *raiya*s (peasants) were turning into sharecroppers or landless cultivators; the village became a multi-tiered production and social unit. The *jotedars* soon began to compete with the older *zamindari* elites.⁸¹ Their political influence derived from their powerful economic patronage networks vis-a-vis wage labourers, sharecroppers, marginal farmers and creditors in the countryside and placed them in suitable positions to take advantage of the devolution of power to the district and local boards as of the enlargement of the provincial legislature and the extension of franchise.⁸²

⁷⁷ James Wise, 'The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal,' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 63(1894), p. 28 cited in Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Oxford University Press seventh impression, New Delhi 2011), p. 120.

⁷⁸ Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective', p. 13.

⁷⁹ Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Samayik Patre Jivan O Janamat, 1901-1930* (in Bengali, Dhaka 1977), pp 298-99 cited in Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

⁸⁰ A *jotedar* was a tenant of an arable land that was large enough to be parcelled out as under tenures.

⁸¹ Willem Van Schendel, *op. cit.*, p. 526.

⁸² J. H. Broomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

The Bengal Legislative Council had remained a small consultative body under tight British control until the Act of 1919 introduced Dyarchy⁸³ in the provinces of India. A million new voters from the urban lower middle class and prosperous peasants, many of whom were Muslims⁸⁴ were enfranchised to elect representatives to Bengal Legislative Council; Four million additional peasants were enfranchised in 1935.⁸⁵ While only three percent of Bengal's population had been voters in 1919, ratio of voters increased to 14% in 1935; number of members of the assembly also rose from 139 to 250.⁸⁶ As the enfranchisement gradually increased, the *zamindari* class correspondingly lost power and the *jotedars* started to send their representatives to local boards, district boards and to the legislative assembly, and made their influence felt nationally.⁸⁷

The emergence of a Muslim *jotedar* class,⁸⁸ the prosperity of Muslim jute traders (*paikars*) who also forwarded cash advances to cultivators,⁸⁹ and well to do Muslim peasants who thrived on jute in the prewar years⁹⁰ enabled the Bengali Muslims to assume an important role in the restructuring of society as well as in the national politics. They could afford to send their children to nearby towns for English education that was the passport for entry to professions, jobs and government services. There was a substantial rise in the number of Muslim students in primary and secondary schools in East Bengal, the total rising to 575,700 in 1911-12.⁹¹ The door of higher education also opened up for the Muslims of East

⁸³ The provincial subjects were divided into two categories namely, reserved and transferred. The ministers of reserved subjects reported to the governor while the ministers of transferred subjects reported to the legislature. Syed Serajul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁸⁴ Zaheda Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁸⁵ J. H. Broomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁸⁶ Harun-or-Rashid, 'Bengal Ministries 1937-1947' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 195.

⁸⁷ Sirajul Islam, 'Social and Cultural History in Perspective', p. 21.

⁸⁸ Rehman Sobhan, 'Economic Basis of Bengali Nationalism' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 593-94.

⁸⁹ *Supra*, FN 79.

⁹⁰ Zaheda Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Bengal especially after the founding of Dhaka University⁹² in 1921 to make the reunification of Bengal a little more palatable to the Bengali Muslims.⁹³ The number of students at Dhaka University Muslim Hall increased steadily; they formed the backbone of the emerging Muslim middle class in East Bengal. A major portion of them came from villages, the sons of petty landlords, *jotedars* and well to do peasants⁹⁴ who retained their establishments in villages in order to monopolize rural resources and power while their offspring tended to move to towns.⁹⁵

5. End of Landed Elites

As the *jotedars*, rich peasants and rural intermediaries who exploited new ways of accumulation through trade and credit ascended in economic and later in political importance, their rivalry with the *zamindars* (landlords), who had thrived on extra-economic modes of surplus appropriation, i.e. land taxation and *abwabs* intensified with peasant support into the demand for the abolition of the *zamindari* system. Peasant movements for the abolition of *zamindari* system were going on in different parts of Bengal in 1925.

Land rent had become the guiding issue for the Bengali Muslim movements and political alienations since the peasant uprisings of the 1870s that were actually contests between the non-resident *zamindars* and the *jotedars* supported by the general tenantry.⁹⁶ The Swarajya Party suffered a miserable defeat in the 1926 election of Bengal Legislative Assembly after its members had opposed the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill placed in support of the peasants in 1925.⁹⁷ The pledge of 'abolition of *zamindari* system without compensation' helped Krishak Praja Party to win in 36 constituencies in the 1937 election of Bengal Legislative Assembly, preceded only by Congress and Muslim League. Although Krishak Praja Party that formed a coalition government with Muslim League could not implement it, a land revenue commission

⁹² Syed Abul Maksud, 'Bangla Literature in the Twentieth Century' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. III, p. 262.

⁹³ Zaheda Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁹⁵ Sirajul Islam, 'Social and Cultural History in Perspective', p. 27.

⁹⁶ Sirajul Islam, 'Resistance Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', p. 123.

⁹⁷ Syed Serajul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

was established; the commission known as the Floud Commission recommended the abolition of *zamindari* on payment of compensation to the *zamindars*.

Muslim League's Lahore Resolution of 1940 to establish separate states for the Muslims of India helped it to draw massive support from the Bengali Muslims of East Bengal who considered themselves as a deprived community and correlated the deprivation with their alienation from political power and control over economic resources that were controlled by communities other than their own. Land ownership was largely held by Hindu landlords;⁹⁸ Bengali Hindus also dominated financial intermediation and trade, bureaucracy, teaching and legal professions while Marwaris controlled the upper reaches of commerce. As the Muslim *jotedars*, wealthy peasants and jute traders had gained in economic and political importance and the proportion of Muslims in education and government services had increased, they aspired to assume control over the title of land and sought a politically commanding position in the state machinery to advance themselves in education, government services and professions. From such a perspective, they mobilized the Bengali Muslim tenant farmers who voted for Pakistan in 1946 to elect a legislature that would erase the Hindu *zamindars* (landlords) and *mahajans* (moneylenders) from their daily life;⁹⁹ abolition of *zamindari* remained an underlying condition for their support to Muslim League. Although Khawaja Nazimuddin of Dhaka Nawab Family that owned the largest *zamindari* in East Bengal¹⁰⁰ took charge of East Pakistan Government after partition in 1947, the Muslim league government was compelled to abolish *zamindari* system as its leadership had publicly committed to its abolition.¹⁰¹ The assembly of the new province in Pakistan passed the East Bengal Tenancy Acquisition Act in 1950 for the abolition of the *zamindari* system.¹⁰² However, during the era of depression and famine, the *jotedars* and other intermediaries had already established their dominance over East Bengal's agrarian economy and society.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ In 1947, out of 2237 large landholders in Bengal, only 358 were Muslims. Ahmed Kamal, 'East Bengal at Independence' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 344.

⁹⁹ Rehman Sobhan, *op. cit.*, 593-94.

¹⁰⁰ Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.*, p. 212; Harun-or-Rashid, 'A Move for United Independent Bengal' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 315.

¹⁰¹ Ahmed Kamal, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

¹⁰² Harun-or-Rashid, 'Bengal Ministries 1937-1947', p. 198-99.

¹⁰³ Sirajul Islam, 'Permanent Settlement and Peasant Economy,' p. 241.

Dhaka after Partition: Social Upheaval and Plight of Place

1. Society in the 19th Century

Occupationally, Dhaka's inhabitants in the nineteenth century fell broadly into following categories:¹

- i. *Zamindars* (landed aristocracy);
- ii. Traders, merchants and bankers;
- iii. Service people and professionals;
- iv. Manufacturers and artisans;
- v. Labourers and other wage earners.

Permanent settlement of landed estates had brought about a radical change in the established social order.² Many merchants, traders and influential *amlas* (native government officials) who had thrived on their close association with the European companies converted their wealth into social status through investment in landed estates. The Hindu *baniyas* (also *banians* meaning merchants, intermediaries, bankers and moneylenders) and *amlas* who had first advanced to collaborate with the European commercial houses gained the cash income and legal knowledge necessary to capture the land market after permanent settlement and established their control over landed estates.³ Due to the commercial stagnation created by the British colonial monopolistic policy, many leading businesspersons of Dhaka including the Armenian, Greek and Kashmiri merchants had given up trade and invested their capital in landed estates in the early nineteenth century.⁴ Gravitation of surplus accumulated by the top three occupational groups of social hierarchy towards landed estates had given Dhaka the face of a land-rent city⁵ by the middle of the

¹ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *Dhaka: A Study in Urban History and Development, 1840-1921* (Academic Press and Publishers Library third revised edition, Dhaka 2010), p. 120.

² For the impact of permanent settlement on Bengal Society: *Supra*, Chapter VI. pp. 78-79.

³ Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, 'Politics and Culture in Bengal' in *New Left Review*, I/79, May-June (London 1973), pp. 75-76.

⁴ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁵ Moscow before the suspension of serfdom was a land-rent city. Max Weber, *The City*, English translation by Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth (The Free Press first edition, New York 1966), p. 68.

nineteenth century, which was clearly manifest when the Dhaka Municipality was founded in AD 1864. Of the first twenty-one commissioners of Dhaka Municipality chaired by the district magistrate, eight were ex-officio (six Europeans and two Indians) members while among the other thirteen, eleven were big *zamindars* (landlords) accompanied by a merchant and a banker. This ratio prevailed until the introduction of an elective system.⁶

However, the *zamindars* had established themselves as leaders of Dhaka's society long before the foundation of the municipality. Gradual migration of Muslim population from northern India after the Mughal conquest provided the foundation for Dhaka's Muslim nobility. A large number of *Shia* families migrated to Dhaka in the mid-seventeenth century and introduced Persian scholarship, manners and customs in the city.⁷ The Mughal aristocracy and associated institutions declined after the English East Company had taken over Bengal and on the ruins of the old social order emerged a new society led by the Muslim *zamindars* who too came mostly from outside Bengal.⁸ The shift was led by Khawaja Alimullah who came forward to bear the expenses of *Ashura*⁹ after the death of Ghaziuddin Haider, the last *naib nazim* (deputy governor) of Dhaka in AD 1843. The government bestowed on Alimullah the *mutawalliship* (trustee) of the *imambara* (*Shia* shrine), namely the *Husaini Dalan* the following year and his family rose to the premier position among Dhaka's Muslims.¹⁰ The Khawaja family¹¹ became the owner of the largest *zamindari* estate in East Bengal and their economic affluence and prosperity against the appalling backwardness of the Muslims in all respects made them the natural leaders of the community. Like the majority of Dhaka's Muslim elites, Khawajas of Kashmiri descents spoke Urdu at home while Persian was their language for culture. Ironically, during the mid nineteenth century, the

⁶ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-73.

⁷ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Dhaka: A Record of Its Changing Fortunes* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third revised edition, Dhaka 2009), pp. 50; 53.

⁸ Sirajul Islam, 'Social Life in Dhaka, 1763-1800' in Sharif uddin Ahmed (ed.) *Dhaka Past Present Future* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh second edition, Dhaka 2009), p. 97.

⁹ The tenth day of Arabic month Muharram, on which is mourned the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, the grandson of Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh).

¹⁰ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹¹ For Khawaja family: Harun-or-Rashid, 'The Dhaka Nawab Family in Bengal Politics' in Sharif uddin Ahmed (ed.) *Dhaka Past Present Future* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh second edition, Dhaka 2009), pp. 153-171.

dominant spoken language of Dhaka was not Bengali but Hindustani: a mixture of Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Arabic;¹² the cross language communication between the Hindustani elements and the rustic Bengalis led to the growth of a hybrid dialect known as the *kutti* language.¹³

Alimullah's son, Khawaja Abdul Ghani founded the new *nawabi* line of Dhaka, which through wealth, influence, patronage and linguistic affinity with the Muslim elites and the large immigrant Muslim labour force who migrated to Dhaka from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh established control over Dhaka's Muslim community through the *panchayats*.¹⁴ The major role of the *panchayat* was that of the 'court of arbitration'; the British magistrates of Dhaka often encouraged the *panchayats* to settle small disputes while the Ahsan Manzil, the family headquarters of the Khawajas was the final court of arbitration in case of disputes among *panchayats*. As the owner of the largest *zamindari* in East Bengal, the Khawajas had political clients spread over half of the province and during the turbulent days of the partition of Bengal that aroused political tension among the Hindus and the Muslims,¹⁵ Nawab Khawaja Salimullah became prominent in pan-Indian politics. He initiated the foundation of the All-India Muslim League in Dhaka in AD 1906 as a platform of the Indian Muslim community, himself becoming one of its vice-presidents.¹⁶

The role of the Hindu *zamindars* (landlords) got visible expression at the time of their great religious festival i.e. the *Durga Puja*. The success of most Hindu festivals depended largely on the support by the wealthy *zamindars* while the Hindu moneylenders generously supported the *Kartik Puja*.¹⁷ As the English educated employees and professionals grew in number and influence in the latter half of the nineteenth century, their contests and collaboration with the landed aristocracy shaped the politics of Dhaka

¹² Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹³ Sirajul Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.

¹⁴ *Panchayat* was the social organization of the neighbourhood (*mahalla*) through which Muslim community leaders regulated the social and religious life of their members. Each neighbourhood had its own *panchayat* that consisted of five wise elders (*panch laeq beradar*) under the guidance of a *sardar* (also *mir-i-mahalla* meaning leader of the neighbourhood). The position of the *sardar* was hereditary until 1890s when the system of election was introduced. Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20.

¹⁵ For partition of Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter VI, pp. 82-84.

¹⁶ Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-56.

¹⁷ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Municipality. The new English educated middle class was almost exclusively Hindu, as the Muslims generally had kept themselves aloof from the new education system.¹⁸ The secular and liberal framework within which the British introduced the new learning, it was open not only to the traditional service castes i.e. the *Brahmans*, the *Baidyas* and the *Kayasthas* but also to lower caste Hindus such as the *Nandis* and the *Basaks*. Their enthusiasm for English education resulted into their monopoly in the ranks of government services, teaching and legal professions.¹⁹ A significant immigration of this new English educated class to the city gradually changed Dhaka's communal composition. The number of Muslims within the city in 1838 was 32,463 and that of Hindus was 28,154; the census of 1872 numerated in Dhaka 34,433 Hindus as against 34,275 Muslims. The number of Hindus rose to 51,247 in 1901 when the Muslims numbered 41,278. The leadership of the large Hindu community was shared between the English educated middle class and the leading bankers, traders, merchants and *zamindars* (landlords). Backed by the wealthy Hindus and the favourable demographic composition, the new English educated elites were able to bid for a controlling influence over the city as early as the first municipal election in AD 1884.²⁰

1.1. Dhaka Municipality

The Bengal Government Act III of 1884 provided for the election of two-thirds of municipal commissioners including the chairman and the vice-chairman. In Dhaka where there were twenty-one municipal commissioners of whom fourteen were to be elected by a franchise based mainly on property qualification; some educated groups who were not strictly ratepayers were allowed to vote.²¹ Most of the elected candidates in the first municipal election of Dhaka were men of property, wealth and rank; seven

¹⁸ The attendance of Muslim students in the various new educational institutes at Dhaka was pathetically low e.g. in 1873 out of 319 students of Dhaka Collegiate School, 290 were Hindus and 14 were Muslims. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-31.

²¹ All adult males, resident in the municipality for at least a year prior to the election, who personally or through property owners paid at least one rupee eight annas a year in municipal taxes, were qualified to vote. In addition, any university graduate or licentiate, any pleader or *mooktar* or any other person who earned from any employment more than fifty rupees per month or who lived as a member of the joint family, one of the members of which had paid the necessary municipal tax, was also entitled to vote. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

were leading *zamindars*, two were members of the Khawaja family, two were leading merchants and two were lawyers. The seven nominated members included high government officials, distinguished academics, *zamindars* and community leaders.

The Khawajas, the Dases and the Basaks who between them owned and controlled majority of the businesses and properties of Dhaka could no longer expect to have an assured place in the municipality as their seats had to be won and held against the increasingly skillful challenges of the new English educated class of lawyers and professional men. However, the provision of seven nominated members kept the backdoor of the municipality open to them.²² Although the middle class could not make a significant breakthrough in the first election, as their hold on the society was not yet firm, Ananda Chandra Roy, the leading lawyer of Dhaka emerged as the first elected chairman of Dhaka Municipality. After the introduction of the elective system, the educated professionals especially the lawyers made every effort to gain control over the municipality. However, the Khawajas with the help of the provision for nominated members and through the British patronage that they achieved by means of donations and charities were able to hold their power in the municipality for a long period. During the era of the elected municipal councils between 1884 and 1947, the Hindu gentry (*bhadraloks*) was able to occupy the post of municipal chairman for 38 years while the members of Khawaja family who were all nominated commissioners adorned it for 20 years.²³

The partition of Bengal that came into effect from 16 October 1905 with Dhaka becoming the capital of the new province of East Bengal and Assam had a detrimental impact on Dhaka Municipality. Most of the Hindu commissioners joined the anti-partition movements. Similarly, the annulment of partition in 1911 dealt a severe blow to the morale of the Muslim commissioners.²⁴ The politics of Dhaka Municipality henceforth could not come out of Hindu-Muslim factionalism. Like the national front, the influential and educated Hindus formed a strong alliance within the municipality opposing the European officials and their Muslim supporters.²⁵

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 234-35.

²³ *Roll of Honour, Dhaka Municipality (British Period)*, <http://www.dncc.gov.bd/mayor-administrator/roll-of-honer.html>

²⁴ Nazia Khanum, *Aspects of the Urban History-Social, Administrative and Institutional of Dacca City, 1921-1947* (PhD Dissertation) cited in Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

²⁵ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

2. Middle Class in Exile

The gentry in the colonial Bengal owed its wealth and social power almost exclusively to land rents of permanent settlement system and to their position in the bureaucracy and professions within the colonial administrative structure. This restricted field of opportunity for upward mobility in socioeconomic ladder made scramble for positions inevitable. The appearance of a politically conscious English educated Muslim middle class towards the end of the nineteenth century, and a group of Muslim aristocrats and wealthy landholders intensified this competition, which was exposed by the partition of Bengal in 1905 that provided the Muslims of East Bengal a territorial identity. The newly educated Muslims, who in the years preceding the partition were becoming conscious of their backwardness, welcomed the partition because it expanded their educational, economic and political opportunities.²⁶ The use of rituals and religious symbols in the tradition of Hindu revivalism²⁷ in the anti-partition reaction of the Hindu gentry (*bhadraloks*) who considered partition of Bengal as contrary to their own class interests further alienated the Muslim community. Although the partition was short lived, the territorial-communal separateness it created remained alive in the mind of the East Bengal Muslims.²⁸

The foundation of All India Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906 at the initiation of Khawaja Salimullah was an immediate response to the Hindu threat to Bengal partition. However, it also marked the beginning of Muslim separatist politics. The parvenu rural Muslims who had emerged²⁹ out of the combination of the Bengal Tenancy Act and the jute economy, and their offspring who were able to migrate to towns to pursue English education supported the non-Bengali urban Muslim elites in Muslim League's separatist politics because, it pledged the erasure of the Hindu *mahajans* (moneylenders), landlords and *bhadraloks* (gentry) from the rural hierarchy and the urban job market. Eventually, the boundary drawn between India and Pakistan in 1947 divided Bengal roughly along the communal territory set during the partition of Bengal in 1905.

²⁶ John R. McLane, 'Partition of Bengal 1905: A Political Analysis' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), pp. 127-29.

²⁷ For Hindu revivalism: *Supra*, Chapter VI, pp. 81-84.

²⁸ Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

²⁹ For the emergence of Bengal Muslims: *Supra*, Chapter VI, pp. 84-87.

The partition of Indian subcontinent aroused one of the largest religion based population migration in the modern history and its impact on Dhaka, which was a Hindu majority city was severe. Due to the rise of the Hindu middle class in Dhaka, proportion of Hindu population that was 49.75 % in 1872 had increased to 60.61% in 1941 while that of the Muslims decreased from 49.52% to 38.78%, though the proportion of Muslim population in East Bengal had increased throughout.³⁰ Pakistan was unacceptable to the Hindu Gentry right from the beginning; almost all the Hindu government employees left East Pakistan. At some places, the reaction of Hindu professionals and officials was so bitter that they plundered government property before leaving the country.³¹ According to the census of 1951, only 15.6% of Dhaka's population was Hindu;³² the majority of Dhaka's middle class had left.

3. Fall of Patriciates

The rise of a portion of Bengali Muslims who had long been under the shadow of the caste Hindus and non-Bengali Muslims of foreign descent and the extension of franchise accompanied by the expansion of legislative council in the 1930s had made politics of Bengal relatively competitive and popularly based. The Muslims of East Bengal considered themselves as a deprived community because of their alienation from political power and economic resources. Land ownership was largely held by Hindu *zamindars* (landlords) with Muslims being in the position of tenant farmers or small holders.³³ Financial intermediation, trade, commerce and rural industry were largely controlled by Bengali Hindus. The Bengali Muslims expected to assume control over title to land, to use the machinery of the state to advance themselves in education, government services and professions, and hence, sought a politically commanding position. As the Muslim political separatism propounded by the Muslim league was

³⁰ Mehedi Hasan Khan, 'Population Growth in Dhaka City 1610-1947' in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds), *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond-* Volume III: *Urbanization and Urban Development* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2011), pp. 307-09.

³¹ Ahmed Kamal, 'East Bengal at Independence' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 339.

³² Mehedi Hasan Khan, *op. cit.*

³³ In 1947, out of 2237 large landholders in Bengal, only 358 were Muslims. Ahmed Kamal, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

benefitting for both the non-Bengali Muslim aristocracy and the rising Bengali Muslims, the popular elements collaborated with the elitist objectives.³⁴

In the 1937 election of the Bengal Legislative Council, as many as 10 members of Dhaka's Khawaja family were elected. After the partition in 1947, the leadership of Pakistan part of Bengal i.e. East Bengal went to the hand of the Khawajas as their inner party opponents from West Bengal were easily outnumbered in the election for parliamentary leadership; Khawaja Nazimuddin became the chief minister of East Pakistan. He assumed the position of the governor general in 1951 and later stepped down to become the prime minister (1951-53) of Pakistan. However, his ascension to these positions was attained not by virtue of popular support but under the patronage of the central leadership of Pakistan, mostly from the western wing. The popular base of the Khawajas had declined sharply after the partition regarding the state language issue that exposed the cultural difference between the Urdu speaking Muslim nobility and the majority of East Bengal's Muslims who were predominantly a Bengali speaking peasant population. The pre-partition Muslim nobility who had kept on to the old social etiquettes and mannerism based on Urdu³⁵ had an aversion to Bengali³⁶ and Khawaja Nazimuddin, the prime minister strongly pressed in 1952 that Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan.³⁷ The English educated offspring of the prosperous cultivators were rapidly transforming into an urban middle class who considered the imposition of Urdu as an obstacle in the path of advancement to their aspirations. A blood-drenched language movement in 1952 soon overtook the concept of Pakistan and led the people of East Bengal to seek a new identity: Bengali Nationalism.³⁸ By 1954, when the first legislative election was held, the Muslim League in East Pakistan had lost its popular base. It no longer had any relevance to the aspiration of the emerging Bengali speaking Muslim middle class and managed to return with only nine seats. The election of 1954 signalled the end of the old Urdu speaking Muslim nobility.³⁹ The abolition of

³⁴ Rehman Sobhan, 'Economic Basis of Bengali Nationalism' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971, Vol. II* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), pp. 593-595.

³⁵ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

³⁶ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

³⁷ Badruddin Umar, 'Language Movement' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 371.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

³⁹ Kamal Uddin Ahmed, 'Quest for Autonomy' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, pp. 389-91.

*zamindari*⁴⁰ (permanent settlement of land revenue) system under the East Bengal Tenancy Acquisition Act, 1950 had weakened the structural basis of Dhaka's patriciates and the election of 1954 marked their political defeat to the emerging Bengali speaking Muslim middle class.

4. Bureaucratic Override

The foundation of All India Muslim league in 1906 may be interpreted as a political culmination of the Muslim associations and *anjumans* hitherto formed in the nineteenth century; but in reality, these associations including the Muslim League were merely the accomplishments of individuals rather than of any collective ventures.⁴¹ Bengal Muslim politics up to 1937 lacked organizational structure. The organizational backwardness is attributed to a very small size of the educated Muslim middle class and the elitist character of Muslim leaders who were mostly non-Bengalis and considered themselves socially and otherwise superior to Bengali Muslims. Their minority status and aristocratic interest prompted them not to support and strengthen the representative institutions.⁴² Attempts to convert Bengal Muslim League into a broad democratic organization were initiated after the 1937 election of Bengal Legislative Assembly under the secretaryship of Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim respectively; every branch was directed to hold elections on regular basis. The elitist Khawaja leadership felt threatened by the process of democratization. In order to counteract the Suhrawardy-Hashim group, they raised the East Bengal-West Bengal issue as both Suhrawardy and Hashim hailed from West Bengal. Since when the emergence of Pakistan seemed inevitable, the Bengal provincial Muslim League had been plagued with the Kolkata vs. Dhaka cliques. The Khawaja group of East Bengal allegedly favoured Bengal partition in order to put down the other group.⁴³ When Bengal was eventually partitioned, the leadership of the Pakistan part of Bengal i.e. East Bengal went to the hand of the Khawajas; Khawaja Nazimuddin assumed parliamentary leadership defeating Suhrawardy by polling 75 votes as against 39.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ For the abolition of *zamindari* system: *Supra*, Chapter VI, pp 87-88.

⁴¹ Sirajul Islam, 'Political History in Perspective' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴³ Harun-or-Rashid, 'A Move for United Independent Bengal' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, pp. 321-22.

⁴⁴ Harun-or-Rashid, 'Bengal Ministries 1937-1947' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 218.

The triumph of the individualistic elites over the organization-based politicians at the onset of Pakistan made the dominance of bureaucracy in the state mechanism inevitable. Jinnah, who chose to become the governor-general of Pakistan instead of prime minister in a parliamentary system of government, set the tone at the center. He placed the British and other civil servants in important positions and received advice directly from them. This trend, set in the formative phase of the state, had a far-reaching impact that undermined the position of the elected representatives in the ensuing years.⁴⁵ The bureaucratic override over elected representatives became visible when the political government that was formed after the election of 1954 was dismissed in the same year and East Pakistan was put under governor's rule. Eventually, political process was abandoned for more than a decade on October 7, 1958 when countrywide martial law was imposed.

4.1. Impact on Dhaka's Urban Governance

In the ambience of restricted political activity and dominant civil and military bureaucracy, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) was founded in 1956 under the provision of Town Improvement Act 1953. DIT became the supreme body for planning, implementing urban development plans and controlling development activities within its jurisdiction that covered Dhaka and Narayanganj. The prerogatives of DIT were,

- preparation of master plans and other development plans,
- area development; providing urban facilities and services for public uses,
- planning for better traffic circulation,
- widening and construction of roads for reducing congestions,
- providing open spaces for recreation,
- demolishing or constructing buildings, bridges and culverts etc.

Among the nine members of the board of trustee, which was the apex body of DIT, the chairman and three others were appointed by the government while others were ex-officio members. DIT was later transformed into the *Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkhya* (Capital City Development Authority; abbreviated as RAJUK) under the Town Improvement (amendment) Act 1987.⁴⁶ RAJUK is governed by a board

⁴⁵ Syed Giasuddin Ahmed, 'Public Administration 1947-71', in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 276.

⁴⁶ For DIT and RAJUK: Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Banglapedia* Vol. 8 (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2003, hereafter referred to as *Banglapedia*), p. 342; <http://www.rajukdhaka.gov.bd/rajuk/aboutusHome>

comprising a chairman and five other members who are full time government officials. The chairman is the chief executive of RAJUK; a government officer at additional secretary level under the Ministry of Housing and Public Affairs. Accordingly, the organization is allegedly interested in developing projects that cater more towards elitist i.e. political and bureaucratic interests than public welfare. RAJUK is also infested with corruption and lack of interdepartmental coordination.⁴⁷

While the Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) grew in importance, the Dhaka Municipality gradually plunged into disarray. Election of the municipal commissioners, chairman and vice-chairman could not be held after partition in 1947 because of the huge change in the electoral roll. After the imposition of Martial Law in 1958, Dhaka Municipality along with other municipal and local bodies was suspended; civil servants started to run municipalities. The promulgation of the Basic Democracies Order in 1959 and the Municipal Administration Ordinance in 1960 repealed all laws relating to the local bodies.⁴⁸ Commissioners were not elected before 1977 when the Pourashava Ordinance was enacted. The commissioners elected one amongst them as chairman of the municipality. Dhaka Municipality was upgraded to a municipal corporation in 1978 and the existing chairman became the mayor. However, the imposition of Martial Law in 1982 suspended the municipal corporation which in 1983 was renamed Dhaka City Corporation; the government appointed administrators or mayors until 1994. In 1993, the city was divided into 90 wards to elect one commissioner from each; for the first time in Dhaka's history, the voters directly elected a mayor along with the commissioners in 1994.⁴⁹ However, since the Local Govt. (City Corporation) Act 2009 (Amendment-2011, Gazette notification on February 01, 2012) dissolved Dhaka City Corporation and divided it into Dhaka South City Corporation and Dhaka North City Corporation,⁵⁰ administrators appointed by the government from the civil service have taken over Dhaka's urban governance.

⁴⁷ *Banglapedia* Vol. 8, p. 342; For the role of urban development authorities in Bangladesh: Mejbahuddin Ahmed, 'A Critical Evaluation of Approaches to Urban Development in Bangladesh: Case Study of Khulna' in Luigi Fusco Girard et al. (eds.), *The Human Sustainable City: Challenges and Perspective from the Habitat Agenda* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot 2003), pp. 297-311.

⁴⁸ Dalem Chandra Barman, 'Local Self-Government' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, pp. 414-15.

⁴⁹ *Banglapedia* Vol. 3, pp. 315-18.

⁵⁰ <http://www.dncc.gov.bd/dncc-setup/chronological-development-of-dncc.html>



Fig. 7.1. Dhaka 1961, old Dhaka is shaded on the south and west of the rail line (Ahmad Hasan Dani)

5. Diminishing Belongingness

The rate of annual population growth in Dhaka during 1941-51 was 1.3% that soared to 5.2% during 1951-61 with the total population reaching 557,000 in 1961. During the 1961-1974 intercensal period, population of Dhaka Metropolitan Area grew by more than 10% per annum reaching slightly more than 2,000,000 in 1974; it continued to grow rapidly and the population of Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area reached 3,459,000 in 1981 at an annual growth rate of eight percent during 1974-81.⁵¹ The seed of Dhaka's growth into a megacity in the 21st century germinated in the first two-three decades following the partition in 1947. Until the 1950s, Dhaka's population grew at a moderate rate e.g. 1.3% per annum during 1901-31 and 1941-51.⁵² Neither the physical growth of colonial Dhaka had surpassed the Mughal Dhaka to any considerable extent.⁵³ Dhaka started to grow towards its present stretch in the 1950s when the length of the city was about five miles. Dhanmondi residential area and the New Market developed as fashionable zones for the elites. The Mughal suburbs namely, Muhammadpur and Mirpur were developed at low cost and with maximum speed in site and service concept to rehabilitate the non-Bengali refugees arriving from India. Beyond the Karwan Bazaar grew the industrial area of Tejgaon with its railway station; still further emerged the garden city of Gulshan. Away from the old Dhaka, perched like an island within a mass of low land, Gulshan would be the next luxurious destination for the aristocrats.

Garden city movements and American suburban trends influenced the growth of Dhanmondi Residential Area, Gulshan Model Town and Banani Model Town.⁵⁴ Oversimplified interpretations of public health and hygiene concerns led to an urban pattern of parallel and perpendicular streets giving access to rectangular plots that replaced the traditional spatial sequence derived from the socially approved norms of privacy.⁵⁵ In the traditional city, the inhabitants used to control not only the private properties but also

⁵¹ Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Growth and Policies in Mega Cities: Dhaka* (United Nations, New York 1987), p. 04.

⁵² The growth rate was rapid during 1931-41 i.e. 4.2% per annum. It is suspected that the population recorded in 1941 census was infested with overstatements by both Hindus and Muslims, who had vested interest in exaggerating their numbers in the decade of confusion marked by communal tensions. *Ibid.*

⁵³ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 02-4.

⁵⁴ Qazi Azizul Mowla, *Evolution of Dhaka's Urban Morphology* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, The University of Liverpool 1997), p. 52.

⁵⁵ Mejbahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-307.

the access roads and outdoor spaces within the neighbourhoods. The access to one's property, the exit of rainwater and sewage, opening of a door or window without hampering some others' privacy required tremendous effort for negotiation and conflict resolution.⁵⁶ Human relations and social networks played vital roles in the evolution of architecture and urban form. If arbitrations were required, the apex neighbourhood body i.e. the *panchayat*⁵⁷ used to intervene. The new development paradigm introduced authoritarian urban intervention through land use regulations, zoning and building by-laws; the Town Improvement Act (TIA) and the Building Construction Act (BCA) replaced social engagement. Urban community did not evolve in the perfect neighbourhoods that became terrible places.

As the public sector engaged all its energy in developing a modern Dhaka with broad roads and sparsely laid elitist areas like Dhanmondi and Gulshan, the major influx of population sought accommodation in the narrow alleys of the old neighborhoods. Communities in the old neighbourhoods changed rapidly due to the exodus of the Hindu gentry and the huge inward rural-urban migration that compelled Dhaka's population to grow at a decadal rate of more than 50%;⁵⁸ migration accounted for 60% of the growth.⁵⁹ The mass exodus and entrance overhauled residents' belongingness, which means identifying with a particular locality, to feel that it is one's home and the home of his ancestors. Belongingness depends on the duration of man-place relation, occupancy history e.g. ancestral/ first generation and type of occupancy. The fact that someone who has grown up elsewhere cannot identify with a city as a native citizen does because experienced spans of time at different stages in life are not commensurable⁶⁰ drastically reduced Dhaka's resident belongingness. Wholesale modification of the historic city by

⁵⁶ Jamel Akbar, *Crisis in the Built Environment: the Case of the Muslim City* (Concept Media Pte Ltd, Singapore 1988), pp. 94-104.

⁵⁷ *Supra*, FN 14.

⁵⁸ Mott MacDonald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd., *Strategic Growth Options-Dhaka 2016* (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, Dhaka 1993), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Sixty percent of Dhaka's population in 1981 was first generation; 81 percent of all household heads were migrants. Nazrul Islam, *Dhaka: From City to Mega City* cited in Elisa T. Bertuzzo, 'Dhaka in its Dwellers' Mind-What Mental Maps Tell about City Life' in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 115; 135.

⁶⁰ An adult cannot know a place as a child knows it; the child knows the world more sensuously. Hence, ten years in childhood are not the same as ten years in youth or manhood. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press sixth printing, Minneapolis 2008), pp. 185-86.

alteration of urban fabric and demolition of historic buildings in Dhaka is to some extent correlated to the reduced level of resident belongingness.⁶¹

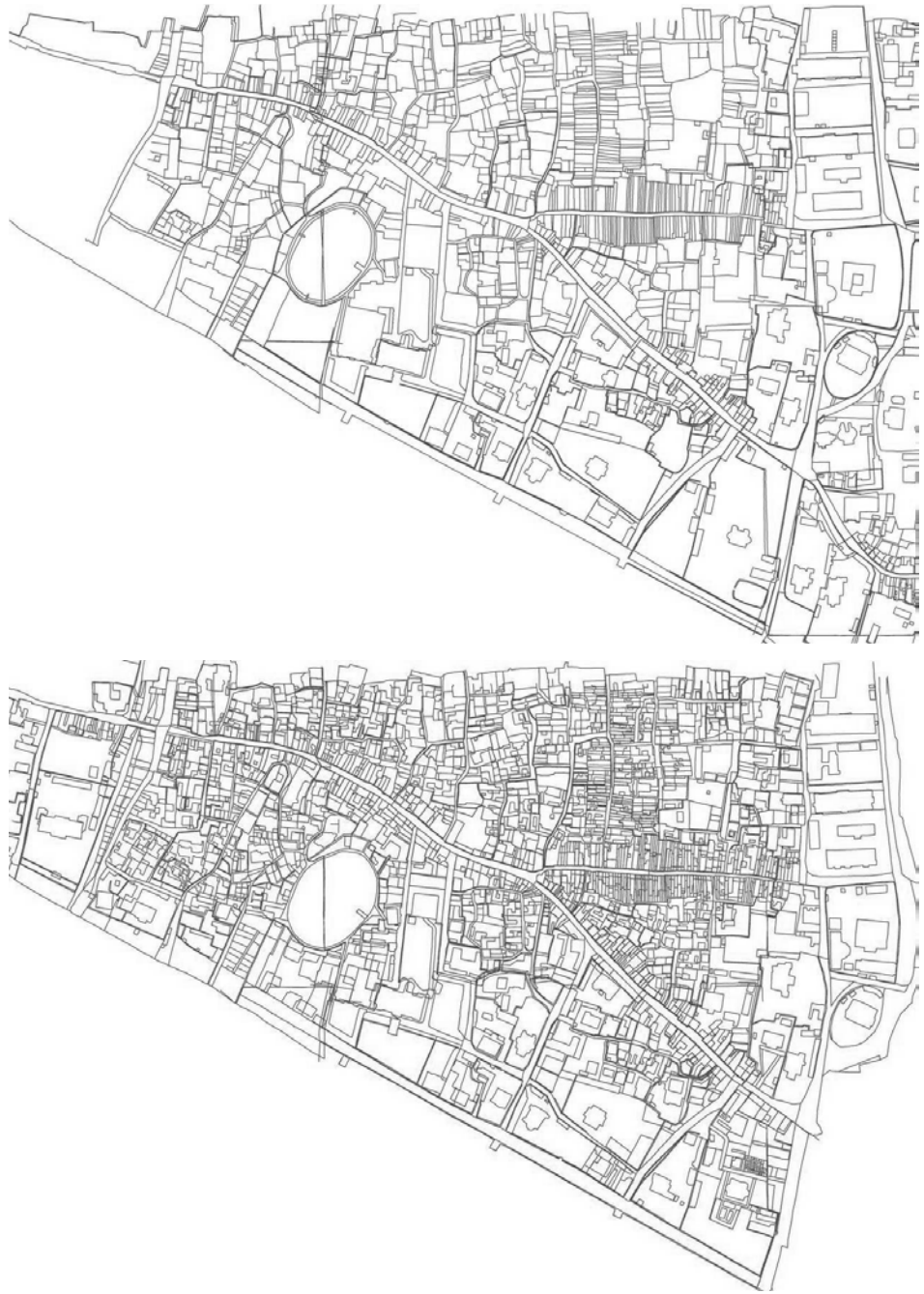


Fig. 7.2. Densification in old neighborhoods; the area around Islampur in 1910 (top) and in 1970 (bottom)

⁶¹ Destruction of Dhaka's topographic and hydrological characters, which is more visible in the green field developments than in the historic city correlates with the metaphysical and historical evolution of the existential contents; discussed in Chapters III-VI.

6. Old Dhaka in Oblivion

They are still alive, in the dark corners, mysterious alleys, the blind windows, dirty courtyards, noisy taverns, secretive inns and us. We walk about the broad streets of the new town but our steps and looks are uncertain. We tremble inwardly as we used to do in the old miserable lanes. Our hearts know nothing yet of any clearance. The unsanitary old ghetto is much more real to us than our new, hygienic surroundings. We walk about us in a dream, and are ourselves only a ghost of past times. Franz Kafka.⁶²

Unlike Prague, where the new residential neighbourhoods' people go to old Prague to get a confirmation of their identity,⁶³ the residents of new Dhaka in the 1950s looked upon old Dhaka with suspicion. The old faces i.e. most of the Hindu gentry had disappeared from the streets of Dhaka. Senior civil servants from up-country filled in the higher offices in absence of Bengali Muslim officials while the big businesses attracted the business class of Muslims from Delhi, Gujarat, Kathiawar and West Pakistan. The *Agakhanis*, the *Bohras*, the *Delhiwalas* and the *Chinotias* established themselves in industries and higher trade; petty shops were left at the hands of the local Muslims. Education brought forward a large number of young Bengali Muslims who had come to the city from different parts of Bengal, mostly from the villages and had been almost ignorant of the ways of urban life that old Dhaka had nurtured for centuries. In the first meeting with this rising rustic blood, the old nobility showed a patronizing attitude but they were soon outnumbered and superseded by the new ideas and idealism of the newcomers.⁶⁴ The newly educated Bengali Muslims gradually entered the bureaucracy, police service and professions, and constituted the new urban middle class. They had looked upon old Dhaka as the stronghold of the Hindu gentry who used to domineer over them and their ancestors in land ownership, service, professions and business. Their difference with the Muslim nobility of old Dhaka who preferred Urdu to Bengali was exposed over Pakistan's state language issue. The cleavage widened as the *Kutti*⁶⁵ speaking locals of old Dhaka opposed the demand for recognition of Bengali as one of Pakistan's state language. Some areas of old Dhaka became de facto prohibited to Bengali supporting students and their convener was attacked by the old Dhaka locals; the office of *Tamaddun Majlish* that had first raised the issue of Bengali as a state

⁶² Cited in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Rizzoli, New York 1980), pp. 109-10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 122; 138-39.

⁶⁵ *Supra*, FN 13.

language was ransacked.⁶⁶ The rising Bengali Muslim middle class considered the imposition of Urdu as a violation of their basic rights and an obstacle to their aspirations; the language movement turned into a blood-drenched agitation in 1952. When a number of agitating students died of police firing, the attitude of the *Kutti* speaking old Dhaka locals changed⁶⁷ but, the Bengali Muslim students and the emerging middle class had already conceived the physical boundary of the old railway tracks between the old and the new Dhaka as a cultural demarcation.

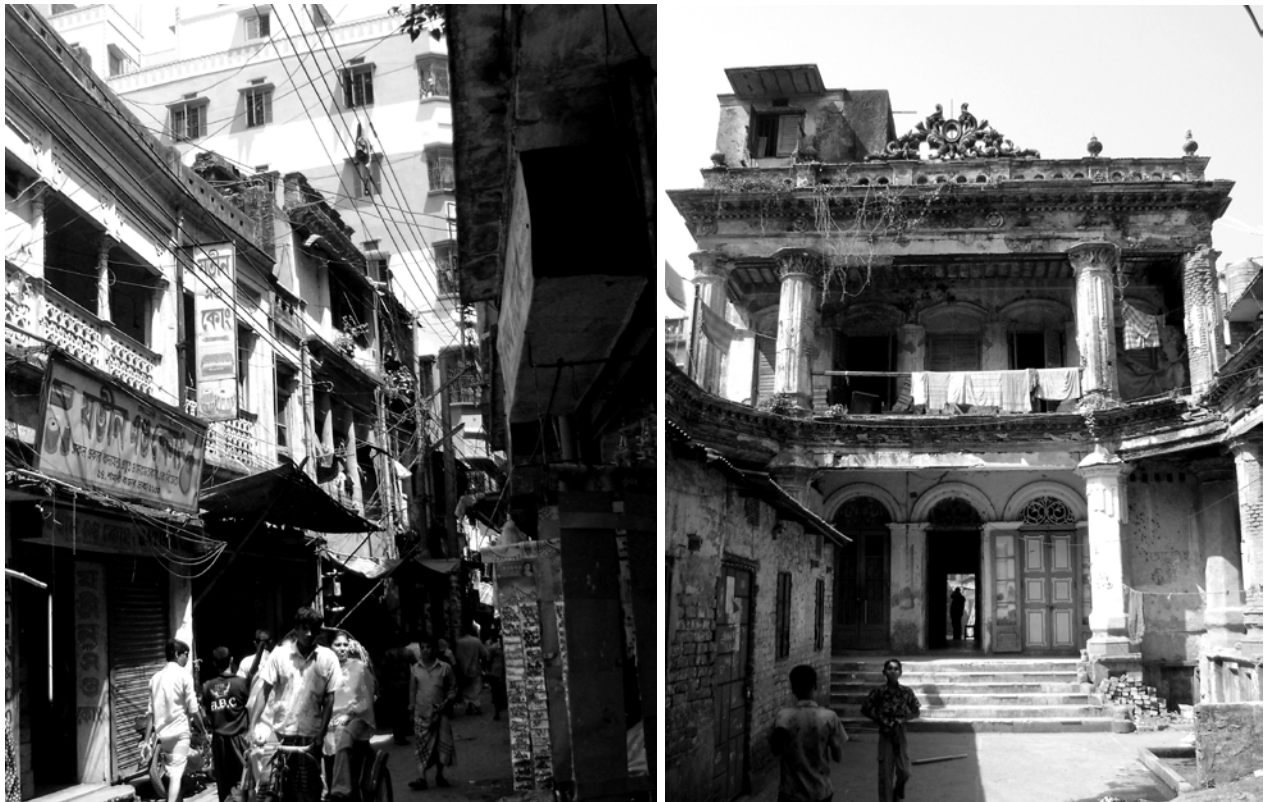


Fig. 7.3. (left) Transformation; Fig. 7.4. (right) Mansion in historic neighbourhood; deserted and encroached

Within a decade, the overhaul of Dhaka's society was complete. The middle class and the nobility of the earlier days had completely vanished. The main business class consisted of new comers who found accommodation in the newly built Ispahani Colony and Bilalabad.⁶⁸ The Bengali Muslims by 1962 were

⁶⁶ Badruddin Umar, *Language Movement and Contemporary Politics of East Bengal* Vol. I (in Bengali, Jatiya Grantha Prokashan Fourth edition, Dhaka 1995), pp. 34; 51-52.

⁶⁷ Ahmad Rafique, *Bhasha Andowlon* (in Bengali, Prothoma Prokashan, Dhaka 2009), p. 50-51.

⁶⁸ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-38.

securely placed in government offices and happily followed the northward expansions undertaken by Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) along the stretch of Dhaka's high land.⁶⁹ Old Dhaka had to bear the impacts of densification in an ambience marked by declining nobility, exile of civil society and bureaucratic apathy. The traditional neighbourhoods were altered through demolition of historic buildings and urban fabric, and distortion of occupational pattern. In course of time, a part of the riverfront erstwhile lined with noble mansions was converted into a wholesale distribution centre for Dhaka's kitchen markets. The family residence of the Khawajas namely, the Ahsan Manjil was left in shambles only to be recovered and reused as a museum much later in the 1990s. However, the other most beautiful palace of the colonial Dhaka i.e. the Ruplal House of the Dases, the leading banking family of colonial Dhaka was encroached upon to accommodate a wholesale spice market.



Fig. 7.5. (left) The waterfront promenade in front of Ahsan Manjil, converted into a wholesale kitchen market

Fig. 7.6. (right) Ruplal House in derelict condition; encroached upon to make room for a spice market

7. Thwarted Public Domain

Thirty seven percent of Dhaka's population occupies only five percent of city area.⁷⁰ As most activities in the tropical settlement can take place outdoors, provision of open space might compensate the lack of enclosed private space e.g. large community spaces could compensate small dwellings.⁷¹ The public open

⁶⁹ For Dhaka's growth in the 1960s: *Supra*, Chapter I, p. 06.

⁷⁰ Sabine Baumgart, 'The Mega-City Dhaka: Confronting Mega-Challenges' in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁷¹ Charles Correa, *The New Landscape: Urbanisation in the Third World* (Concept Media Ltd. Singapore 1989), pp. 32-35.

space is also a resource to urban poor to expand their livelihood opportunities; often their livelihood related activities expand to public spaces. The potential of public open space to transform into economic benefits and its short supply in Dhaka's crowded old neighbourhoods are manifest in the competition for establishing control over them. Because of the abolition of the traditional bodies for arbitration, the sphere of negotiation is generally not transparent to the poor and the outcome that depends on networks and personal agreements⁷² often tilts in favour of the influential.

In the cultural-political background of Dhaka, large public spaces took diverse forms. The major pre-colonial urban space was the *Chouk* (square), the meeting point of economic forces, political power and religious patronage. Open spaces during colonial period emerged away from the urban core out of the need for recreation and leisure. Ramna Racecourse became a recreational site for the elites and the construction of an embankment with patronization from the local nobility created a promenade for pedestrian walk along the Buriganga River. After the cantonment (*paltan*), situated at the outskirts of the city had been shifted, the site was converted into a *maidan* (large open green) that became the venue for ceremonial parades, park and cricket ground. As Dhaka grew northward after partition, the colonial recreational spaces especially the racecourse and the *paltan maidan* became important for transition and linkage between the Mughal and the new Dhaka. In the postcolonial period, these open spaces became critical for negotiation and contestation between the military backed governments and citizens; they became loaded with socio-cultural and national-political symbols.⁷³ *Paltan Maidan* that had become a major site for political activism and rallies was blocked with the construction of a second stadium on the site. The adjacent plaza of *Baitul Mukarram* (the national mosque) was redesigned and closed off to restrict political gatherings. Ramna Racecourse was first thickly planted and then was converted into a children amusement park.⁷⁴ Dhaka's major public open spaces were distorted and closed to erase the associated historical meanings and to exclude the people who used to identify with them. This vested policy of the politico-bureaucracy adopted for ruling with convenience destroyed the opportunity for unification of the old and the new Dhaka through shared public domains and values.

⁷² Sabine Baumgart, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-58.

⁷³ Kishwar Habib and Bruno De Meulder, 'Representation and Public Contestation: The Post-colonial Public Spaces of Dhaka', in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 264-267.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-69.

Chapter VIII

Place as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

What is called composition is the patient re-creation of that landscape, stone by stone, tree by tree.

Will the cities of the Third World survive the next few decades?

The answer may well depend on whether or not we have the perceptiveness to search out and recognise the stones and trees . . . as they gradually coalesce into the new landscape.¹

1. Dhaka: Roots of Poverty

Poverty of place in Dhaka is rooted in the following:

- i. Exclusion from the mythical space
- ii. Degradation of land to a commodity
- iii. Reduced belongingness

Exclusion from the mythical space: The people of Dhaka's hinterland namely East Bengal,² who constitutes Dhaka's population today, went through long periods of economic and cultural hegemony that had serious spatial consequences. For long, foreign rulers and traders who spoke different language and professed different faith than the majority of the inhabitants controlled the region. Apart from Buddhism, which was not a religion proper, other worldviews that later modified the existential contents in East Bengal had introduced distant sacred places. Exclusion of the local landscape from religious sanctity segregated pragmatic and mythical space, and initiated the metaphysical alienation of East Bengal's landscape from its people.³

Degradation of land to a commodity: After agriculture had assumed the primary economic role in the post-Gupta period (after AD c.550), a multitier land-based society emerged in Bengal which did not change much during the rules of the Turks, the Afghans and the Mughals (AD c.1204-1757).⁴ The land-based differentiation of society became acute with the introduction of permanent settlement of land

¹ Charles Correa, *The New Landscape: Urbanisation in the Third World* (Concept Media Ltd. Singapore 1989), pp. 118-19.

² For the relation between Dhaka and East Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter II.

³ For mythical space and East Bengal's exclusion: *Supra*, Chapter III, IV.

⁴ For the emergence of land-based society in Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter V.

revenue by the English East India Company in AD 1793; land became a commodity concentrated at the hand of a few beneficiaries of the colonial rule.⁵ Those who were involved in cultivation were divested of land ownership while those who exerted control over land were generally divorced from the risk and responsibility of agriculture.

Reduced belongingness: Partition of Indian subcontinent that divided Bengal between Pakistan and India on communal basis in 1947 aroused one of the largest religion based population migration in the modern history. The impact on Dhaka, which was a Hindu majority city, was severe. Dhaka lost majority of its middle class and the Hindu nobility. Population of Dhaka had increased at a rate of 1.3% until 1951. In the first three decades following partition, Dhaka's population grew at annual rates of 5.2%, 10% and eight percent respectively. The mass exodus of the Hindu gentry and the huge inward rural-urban migration overhauled Dhaka's society and reduced resident belongingness drastically.⁶

The abolition of permanent settlement of land revenue i.e. the *zamindari* system by the East Bengal Tenancy Acquisition Act in 1950 destroyed the structural basis of Dhaka's landed Muslim nobility. Dhaka lost the upper and middle strata of its social hierarchy within a decade; bureaucratic and national political priorities started to dictate Dhaka's growth.⁷ Dhaka neither had the economic structure to receive the growth rush that instigated the emergence of a large informal sector, which was intrinsically amorphous and unregulated. The impact is manifest in the destruction of Dhaka's landscape character.

2. Responsibility of Architects

The responsibility of the architects in Dhaka is threefold. They are,

- i. Regaining the place
- ii. Conceiving visible structures for community
- iii. Providing framework for engaging stakeholders

⁵ For the co-evolution of man-land relation and society in colonial Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter VI.

⁶ For the impact of partition on Dhaka's society and place: *Supra*, Chapter VII.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Regaining the place: Architects should help people regain the place by bringing its properties closer to them through the act of building. Architecture that concretizes the place becomes a symbol through which people may identify with the natural and manmade meanings of the cultural landscape. If architecture is able to manifest the place, it might become the metaphysical link between man and his environment. Louis Kahn understood architecture in terms of place. As he gathered nature, e.g. light and made it visible through building, his architecture made metaphysical union of man and nature possible. Louis Kahn's works in Dhaka provide directions for gathering its landscape and bringing the people closer to place.

Conceiving visible structures for community: Urban community in Dhaka does not have any visible structure yet. The public outside concretizes shared understanding and helps communities to become perceptible. Architects must gather place in the public domain so that people gradually see themselves and the things that constitute their environment as belonging to one community. Thus, land, water and historic buildings in Dhaka might ascend to belongingness rather than being mere commodity or resource. As enhanced cohesion and belongingness are prime objectives, the public outsides must evolve in the inner city, not annexed. The shift of the central prison from old Dhaka, the underutilized old airport and the plan for relocating the derelict old industrial zone are opportunities for creating shared values and meanings in the inner city areas.

Providing framework for engaging stakeholders: HafenCity of Hamburg provides an example for transforming derelict inner-city areas into new urban landmarks and symbols for identification. HafenCity gathered the port city of Hamburg through its nautical disposition and demonstrated how the corporate sector could be involved in creation of public domains and shared values. Dhaka lags far behind the hanseatic city in terms of rationalization of capital and the state of corporate sector. However, the creation of place can become an opportunity for Dhaka's corporate sector to come out of the pseudo-capitalistic milieu in which it operates and move towards responsibility. The architects' responsibility is to assemble a creative framework in which Dhaka's emerging corporate sector besides developing property and accumulating wealth might engage in creation of shared meanings in the public domain; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an option. Gradual engagement of corporate sector in the creation of places for communities is supposed to reverse the conception of land from commodity i.e. personal property to shared territory, and to provide a structural basis for the growth of a responsible civil society in Dhaka in course of time. Thus, in addition to creating places, it also provides a realistic opportunity to free Dhaka from the clutch of bureaucratic and national political dominance.

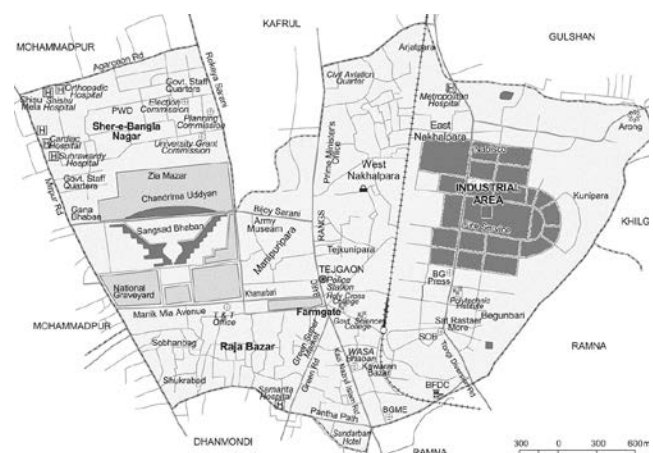
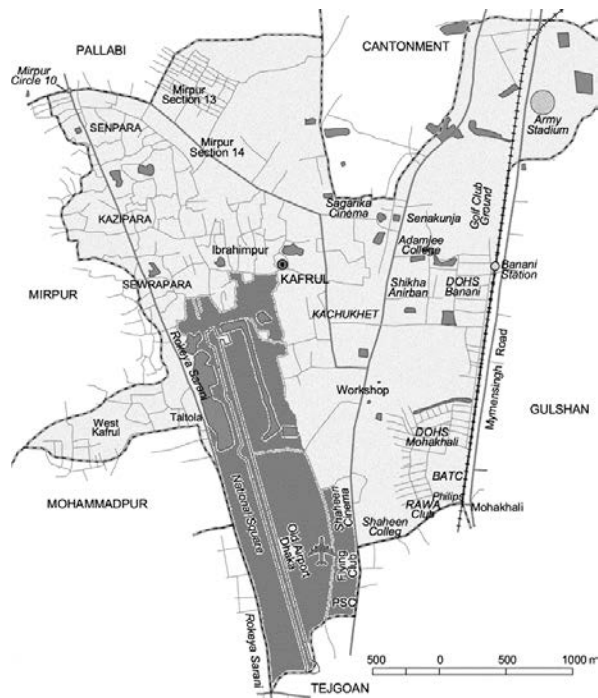


Fig. 8.1. Opportunities in inner city areas, anti-clockwise from top left: old airport, central jail and Tejgaon industrial area

3. Louis Kahn and Place in Delta

Louis Kahn gathered the Bengal Delta and recreated it in the second capital complex in Dhaka. He transformed the clay, which characterizes deltaic landscape into bricks that later became arch. The moist plain that had risen only a few meters from the Bay of Bengal to constitute the delta concretized in the vast green on the south of the capital complex proper; the green is also the *maidan*, the open urban space of south Asian cities. The raised south plaza articulated the parliament building that did not detach itself from the ground and simultaneously unified it with the green. The plaza symbolizes Dhaka, the city standing on the southern brink of the higher Pleistocene alluvium surrounded by low-lying deltaic marshes that often creep into its heart. Likewise, water reaches at the feet of the plaza and brings all the natural and manmade things together. The way Kahn conceived the union of people and place is sublime. For gathering of people, he dedicated the south plaza, which is metaphorically Dhaka, the symbolic and the real place of gathering and growing for the people of the East Bengal Delta.

From the year 2000, public access was closed on the south plaza and the greens. The wide promenade i.e. the Manik Mia Avenue that used to complement the grand scale in which Louis Kahn conceived the parliament building was divided into lanes by planting prickly vegetation in the middle so that political gatherings or other congregations could not take place. The state revealed its understanding of public spaces with respect to power relations.⁸

4. HafenCity

The free and hanseatic city of Hamburg prospered on the confluence of the Alster and the Elbe rivers. The Elbe through the North Sea connects Hamburg with the world while the Alster maintains communication within the city. The port that has the second highest throughput volume in the whole of Europe has been the driving force behind Hamburg's economic success. Beside port and trading, the civil aircraft industry is a further engine of growth; the world's largest civilian airline, the A380 is delivered from here. Stability and continuity are the hallmarks of Hamburg's economy; even in today's high-powered world of supercorporations, numerous family owned enterprises play important roles.⁹

⁸ Kishwar Habib and Bruno De Meulder, 'Representation and Public Contestation: The Post-colonial Public Spaces of Dhaka', in Roxana Hafiz and A K M Golam Rabbani (eds.), *400 years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond*-Volume III: *Urbanization and Urban Development* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2011), p. 268.

⁹ HafenCity Hamburg GmbH (ed.), *The Birth of a City: HafenCity, Hamburg* (Langebartels & Jürgens, Hamburg 2009), pp. 18-20.



Fig. 8.2.(top) Bengal Delta; Fig. 8.3.(bottom) Kahn's gathering of delta

Since the 1980s, industrial sites by the northern bank of the Elbe have gradually been integrated to the city. The area today is almost entirely given to working, living, shopping, strolling and socializing. HafenCity farther extended the waterfront of Hamburg. It grew at the heart of the city and reversed the land use pattern of recent trends in development i.e. away from suburban sprawl towards the city centre.¹⁰ The project was conceived to comprise homes for 12,000 residents, workplaces for more than 40,000 people, a university for 1,500 students and a diversity of retail establishments along with recreational and cultural facilities for 60,000-80,000 day visitors on 157 hectares of typical dockland topography.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 05; 29.

HafenCity not only extends Hamburg's city centre by 40 percent, it represents a blueprint for future metropolitan development.¹¹

4.1. Background

The first river port evolved where the Alster meets the Elbe shortly after Emperor Barbarossa in AD 1189 had given the young town of Hamburg exemption from customs duties.¹² Hamburg profited from its duty-free status, whereby goods imported through the port could be stored or refined anywhere in the city and then exported without levies. By the fourteenth century, the port was already the premier German transshipment centre between the North and the Baltic seas. In those early days, Hamburg and its harbour were intertwined. The classic merchants' houses combined storage, business and living areas and were built right on the water's edge. It was not until the nineteenth century that the harbour and the residential areas were physically separated.

With the many technical advances in the era of industrialization, Hamburg became an exceptionally fast port. The construction of a bridge across the River Elbe in 1872 and a railroad to central and southern Germany guaranteed speedy onward transport. After the foundation of the German Reich in 1871, the duty free status was revoked in the city area and was restricted to a defined area of the port. This required centralization of the port facility and the warehouses in the free trade zone that necessitated grand scale constructions. The 20,000 people who were living in the port area were evicted and the area was separated from rest of the city by a canal; crossing was subject to customs control. The site of the HafenCity experienced unprecedented commercial growth until the First World War. However, during the Second World War, it became a setting for the Nazi crimes; at least 7,112 Jews, Sinti and Roma people were deported from its railway station to ghettos, concentration camps and extermination camps where 6,000 of them died. It became a target for the allied bombing and 70 percent of the warehouses and 90 percent of the dockside storages were destroyed.

Rebuilding began after 1945; but the harbour basins were too small and too shallow for the container ships that started to arrive after the invention of shipping containers in 1956. Deep, wide water was needed for dedicated container terminals that were built on the southern bank of the Elbe. Although the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹² For history of Hamburg port: *Ibid.*, pp. 38-45.

conventional ships still used the older facilities, the area declined in commercial importance. Finally, in 1997, the senate decided the creation of HafenCity.

4.2. The Vision

History was the inspiration behind HafenCity's planning and architectural visions. The old brick-built warehouse ensemble became the connecting element and the entrance portal; it accommodated new occupants such as museums, goods storage, multimedia agencies and creative businesses. The quay walls and cranes were restored; some other historic buildings have been retained and combined with fascinating new structures such as in the Elbphilharmonie Concert Hall. Old and new met in many parts of the district with the possibility of stimulating dialogue between them.

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, a state owned development company manages clearance and preparation of land including purchasing and sales, development of infrastructure, marketing and public relations. Award of land does not depend on highest bidding; the final decision often goes in favour of the most convincing usage concept.¹³ HafenCity is primarily intended for a diverse mix of uses; offices, retail, gastronomy, culture and entertainment. Luxury apartments were built, but so were low rent co-operative apartments. Besides headquarters of international corporations, office space is available for smaller agencies and young self-employed people. Ground floors were set aside mostly for publicly accessible retail and gastronomical uses. Instead of shopping malls, open-air retail and leisure streets integrate with parks, squares, promenades and the urban spaces on the waterfront. Approximately 22% of the new district is water surface, 20% of the rest is public open space and a further 20% are public rights of way. Sweeping footpaths constantly change their morphology as they vary in width, opening out into squares from time to time. There are nine kilometers of cycle ways and footpaths against five kilometers of roads.¹⁴ Apart from making the area pedestrian and cycling friendly, public space also plays vital social functions. The school in HafenCity serves the community after school hours and functions as an important social interface.

HafenCity has a cultural focus. Beside the Elbphilharmonie Concert Hall designed by Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, the International Maritime Museum that exhibits the seagoing history of three thousand years spread over a total area of 11,500 m² is located here. The Science Centre designed by architect Rem

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 52; 77; 90.

Koolhaas is going to be the third large cultural institute. The waterfront terraces have become commonplaces for Sunday events and festivals attracting thousands of people.



Fig. 8.4. (top) HafenCity; Fig. 8.5. (bottom) The Marco Polo Terrace

The development of HafenCity helped Hamburg to grow inwards by urbanizing former industrial and harbour areas within the city (brownfield development). New public parks, plazas, squares and walkways emerged in places of derelict docklands and the ecology as well as the society was rebalanced. In the process, HafenCity engaged local and international corporate bodies and involved the nearby residents. It linked the economic growth with new social and cultural demands, reinterpreted the city centre for the 21st century, and provided the residents with a place for identifying with their hometown.

5. Dhaka: Corporate Background

After Dhaka had become the capital of Mughal province *Subah-i-Banglah* in AD 1610, it became the centre for integrating two cosmopolitan and expanding political economies namely, the Mughal and the European.¹⁵ The common thread was provided by its textile industry, especially the famous muslin. The textile industry attracted foreign merchants to Dhaka. However, its overdependence on foreign capital became its weakness. The chain of production in textile industry usually started with forwarding of an advance, usually 75% of the eventual value in favour of a broker who contracted wholesalers for the supply. The wholesalers engaged weavers with advances and collected the product for the brokers once the production was complete. To complete such a cycle i.e. from the first advance to the supply of the product by the broker to foreign commercial houses usually took four to six months.¹⁶ Local participation in the textile industry was limited to artisans, wholesalers and brokers. Dhaka's textile export declined due to the prohibitive colonial monopolistic policy, export of muslin to England stopped in 1817.¹⁷

Colonial commercial interests gradually reduced Bengal from a major manufacturer of textile products to a raw material producing country and Dhaka was relegated to an entrepôt between its hinterlands and Kolkata. Among the produces, jute rose to prominence after Crimean war, as Russian flax was no longer available. Export of cow and buffalo hides and goatskins also increased as British shoemakers preferred light and cheap east India hides to expensive and difficult to work with Russian hides. Opening of Suez Canal in 1869 drew Bengal closer to England and commercial crops such as, tea, indigo, rice, opium, sugarcane entered the export basket, the demand for rice from Bengal to the Australian colonies also sprung up.¹⁸

Foreign merchants assumed the pivotal role in jute trading as well; the first were the Armenians followed by the James Finlay and Company. The Greek firm, Rally Brothers started jute business in Dhaka in 1875 and soon became one of the biggest jute companies. As jute trading became a high profit venture, the

¹⁵ For a historic overview of Dhaka: *Supra*, Chapter II.

¹⁶ Abdul Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital* (Bengali translation by Mohammad Mohibullah Siddiquee, Jatiya Grontha Prokashan, Dhaka 2012), pp. 60-61.

¹⁷ For Dhaka's decline in the early colonial period: *Supra*, Chapter II, pp. 20-21.

¹⁸ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *Dhaka: A Study in Urban History and Development, 1840-1921* (Academic Press and Publishers Library third revised edition, Dhaka 2010), pp. 98-9.

Marwari merchants established firms at Narayanganj and in Dhaka where they founded jute pressing and bailing mills. In course of time, Marwaris almost monopolized the jute trade of Dhaka; local involvement could not go beyond the level of wholesalers and brokers.¹⁹ Armenians, Iranians and Kashmiris controlled the hide and skin trade that was about purchase and curing of rawhides in tanneries before shipping them to Kolkata for export. The establishment of a shoe industry was just a few steps away but the hide merchants chose to invest their profit in *zamindaris* (large rural land holdings) that offered secure returns and social respectability.²⁰

By 1850s, most prominent Armenian, Iranian and Kashmiri merchants had invested in landed estates; a trend that had started at the beginning of the nineteenth century when due to the commercial stagnation created by colonial monopolistic policy, Dhaka's leading merchants had given up trade and invested their capital in *zamindaris*.²¹ The gravitation of the proceeds accumulated from trading, banking, profession and even government service towards landed estates between permanent settlement and partition of Bengal²² (AD 1793-1947) i.e. agrarianization of capital adversely affected development of capitalistic enterprises and industries in Dhaka.²³ Prominent jute traders such as Madan Mohan Basak, leading local banking house namely the Das family and influential lawyers like Ananda Chandra Roy, all purchased rural landed estates.²⁴ In absence of capitalistic intervention, Dhaka's fine flowered muslin (*jamdani*) and shell-bracelets (*shankha*) remained stagnant as cottage industries; jute could not proceed beyond pressing and bailing.

5.1. Industrialization after Partition

At partition in 1947, East Bengal inherited only ten cotton mills of 400 in India, not a single iron or steel plant, paper mill or chemical work. It was left with 49 seasonal jute bailing press, 58 small rice mills, three sugar mills and a cement factory. Despite being the traditional home of jute that produced roughly

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-07.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²² For permanent settlement and partition of Bengal: *Supra*, Chapter VI.

²³ Binayak Sen, 'Industrial Entrepreneurship' in Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh third edition, Dhaka 2007), p. 373.

²⁴ Sharif uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104; 113; 120.

75% of the total world output, none of Bengal's 106 jute mills was in East Bengal. Of the total industrial enterprises in undivided Bengal, only 12% came to the share of present Bangladesh; large-scale industries contributed only half a percent of GDP.²⁵

The East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (EPIDC) was the pioneer in fostering industrial growth in the private sector in what was then East Pakistan (East Bengal, present Bangladesh). Industries such as the Karnaphully Paper Mill were first established in the public sector under the ownership of EPIDC and were later sold to private entrepreneurs. Since its inception in 1952 to the independence of Bangladesh, EPIDC established 74 large industrial units either by itself or in partnership with the private sector. EPIDC projects covered diverse range of manufacturing activities such as, jute, textile, paper, fertilizer, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding, sugar refining, electrical machineries etc. The share of manufacturing in GDP increased from 3.9% in 1949-50 to 8.9% in 1969-70.²⁶

The weak entrepreneurial capabilities and backwardness of Bengali Muslims and the exodus of the Hindus after partition let the émigré non-Bengali Muslim business communities control much of the private investment and economic activity in East Pakistan.²⁷ On the eve of the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, the non-Bengali entrepreneurs completely dominated East Pakistan's urban economy. In the industrial sector, they controlled 47% of assets compared to 34% controlled by EPIDC and 23% by Bengalis; in the private industrial sector, non-Bengalis controlled 72% of industrial assets. In trading, 93% of the large import category holders were non-Bengalis, 70% of deposits in East Pakistan were located in non-Bengali banks. The sense of relative deprivation vis-a-vis the non-Bengali business sector became acute in the mind of Bengali middle class who considered the democratic power of the Bengalis, full regional autonomy and finally an independent Bangladesh as the opportunity to escape from the shadows of the non-Bengali dominance.²⁸

²⁵ Momtaz Uddin Ahmed, 'Industries and Industrial Relations since 1947' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, p. 465; Ahmed Kamal, 'East Bengal at Independence' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. I, p. 333.

²⁶ Momtaz Uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 469-70; 484.

²⁷ Rehman Sobhan, 'Economic Basis of Nationalism' in *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, pp. 602-3; 617.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 620- 24.

5.2. Ambivalence after Independence

Bangladesh inherited the large public sector industrial enterprises; the industries abandoned by the Pakistani business houses after independence of Bangladesh in December 1971 were nationalized in early 1972. These enterprises formed the industrial core of the newly independent country. The government took over all the jute mills and nationalized even the ones owned by Bangladeshi citizens. However, the nationalization policy reversed within a decade under pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Increasing influence of neo-liberal policy compelled successive governments to privatize state-owned enterprises and to close down loss-making ones, eventually leading to deindustrialization. The reforms destroyed trade unions that were workers' strongholds and created a large pool of labour who were disorganized and unable to assert their rights, and hence, vulnerable to work in low wages. The emergence of export oriented Readymade Garments Industry (RMG) in Bangladesh coincided with these reforms. Though RMG enjoyed policy and material support from government and quotas under multi-fibre agreement that ensured an international market, it mainly thrived on the huge pool of unemployed youth who were ready to work for longer hours in very low wages.²⁹

5.3. Corporate Sector in Dhaka Today

Readymade Garments Industry (RMG) is the mainstay of Dhaka's corporate sector. While 19% of country's GDP comes from manufacturing sector,³⁰ RMG alone contributes more than 10%.³¹ Seventy percent of RMGs are located in and around Dhaka;³² it is the major contributor to Dhaka's economy.

From a modest 30 enterprises in 1980, the number of garment industries increased to 5,700 in 2011-12 and Bangladesh became the second largest apparel exporter in the world after China; almost four million workers are presently employed in this sector.³³ RMG export from Bangladesh in 2013 stood at 21,515.73

²⁹ For neo-liberal policy and the growth of Readymade Garments in Bangladesh: Anu Muhammad, 'Wealth and Deprivation: Ready-made Garments Industry in Bangladesh' in *Economic and Political WEEKLY* Vol XLVI No 34 (Mumbai, August 11 2011), pp. 23-24.

³⁰ Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh (GoB), *Bangladesh Economic Review 2012* (Ministry of Finance, Dhaka 2012), p. 22.

³¹ BGMEA 2014, <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/Strengths#.UxkxCcKPLIU>

³² Anu Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³³ BGMEA 2014, <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/aboutus#.UxfrptGPLIU>

million US dollars that accounted for 79.63% of the country's total export.³⁴ Despite this tremendous growth and colossal turnover, RMG could not advance to the state of formal industry yet. An array of government incentives that included duty free import of capital machinery, an export promotion fund (EPF) for product development and promotion of new items, exemption from payment of 50% of income tax on income derived from export, exemption from payment of import license fees by exporters who bring in raw materials exclusively for export production etc.³⁵ could not inspire RMGs to attain physical and social compliances befitting of the growth of the sector. The signs of RMG's failure to mature are as follow:

- i. Failure to develop adequate backward linkages resulting into high dependence on imported materials including cloth;³⁶
- ii. Failure to provide safe workplace, which was exposed by numerous fire-hazards and stampedes causing hundreds of worker casualties;
- iii. Deprivation of trade union rights on part of the RMG workers³⁷

There are only 32 listed companies from the textile sector in Dhaka Stock Exchange.³⁸ Simultaneous reluctance to enroll in regulated capital market and strong solicitation for incentives, unwillingness to comply with safe work place standards and syndicated effort to prevent trade unions imply that the industry is still in the state of adventurers' capitalism. Unfortunately, other industries also demonstrate similar traits; there are 5,700 enterprises alone in RMG sector whereas the number of total listed companies from all sectors of industry and service in Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) is only 531.³⁹ As of 2013, only 157 RMGs had trade unions; 40-50 of them were active.⁴⁰ This exposed a picture of deprivation for more than two million garment workers living in Dhaka. The absence of trade unions not

³⁴ BGMEA 2014, <http://bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/TradeInformation#.Uxfu28KPLIU>

³⁵ Anu Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁸ Dhaka Stock Exchange(DSE) 2014, http://www.dsebd.org/by_industrylisting1.php

³⁹ DSE 2014, <http://www.dsebd.org/companypercent20listing.php>

⁴⁰ Sadid Nure Mowla et al., *The Readymade Garment Sector: Governance Problem and Way Forward* (Transparency International Bangladesh, Dhaka 2013), pp. 06; 08.

only thwarted their right as workers but also left them disorganized and devoid of any collective strength that could be put together to assert their rights as citizens e.g. right to public spaces, pedestrian walkways, safe commuting, leisure and other urban amenities.

6. Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the way firms integrate social, environmental and economic concerns into their values, strategies and operations in a transparent and accountable manner and thereby establish better practices within the firm, create wealth and improve society.⁴¹ The aim is to create higher standards of sustainable living while preserving the profitability of the corporation. The key is how profits are made, not the pursuit of profits at any cost. As suspicion regarding the negative externalities on society and environment of the large profits made by corporations, especially the conglomerates grew in the 1980s, firms adhered to CSR to become more responsive to the stakeholders. The idea spread in the 1990s and in the 2000s, CSR definitively became an important strategic issue.

In recent times, some concepts that are often confused with CSR have emerged. Some of these concepts such as social enterprise and social innovation are relevant for implementation of CSR but should not be mixed up with CSR itself. According to the Social Enterprise UK, a social enterprise is a business that trades for a social and/or environmental purpose having a clear sense of its social mission i.e. what difference it is trying to make, who it aims to help, and how it plans to do it. Social enterprises create community impacts and social values, and they limit or do not distribute profits and assets to individual shareholders. A leading example is BRAC that comprises of a collaborative network of social enterprises, development programmes and investments, all of which together serve the comprehensive vision and objective of BRAC i.e. to empower the poor, alleviate social/environmental imbalance and enhance financial sustainability. The BRAC enterprises such as BRAC dairy, poultry, fisheries, solar power are mostly support mechanisms to make BRAC's development programmes in Bangladesh sustainable.⁴² A social innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, and sustainable than present solutions; the created value accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than to private individuals.⁴³ Some social innovations permanently alter the perceptions, behaviours, and structures that

⁴¹ Paul Hohnen, *Corporate Social Responsibility, an Implementation Guide for Business* (International Institute for Sustainable Development, Manitoba 2007), p. 04.

⁴² <http://enterprises.brac.net/>

⁴³ <http://csi.gsb.stanford.edu/social-innovation>

previously gave rise to these challenges. The Early Infant Diagnosis (EID) project uses HP (Hewlett-Packard) technology to automate the HIV testing process for infants, significantly speeding up the reporting of test results from several months to less than 30 days and helping to save lives.⁴⁴

6.1. Global Scenario

Many countries have already enforced the inclusion of community and social issues in corporate strategies. The United Kingdom Companies Act 2006 requires that the annual report must contain a business review that encompasses social and community issues. The Grenelle II Act 2012 in France requires that all public and private companies with more than 500 employees report on the social and environmental consequences of its activities in their annual management reports. Denmark in 2008 passed a bill requiring that effective 2010, large Danish companies, investors and state-owned companies include the following information on corporate social responsibility in their annual financial reports:

- company policy for corporate social responsibility
- how such policies are implemented in practice
- results obtained so far and managements' expectations for the future

India through legislation effective from April 2014 has made CSR mandatory for companies that meet certain criteria to set aside two per cent of their net profits for undertaking and promoting socially beneficial activities and projects. Companies that meet any of the following financial conditions during a financial year must comply with the law.

- companies that have a net worth of INR 10,000 million (US \$ 160 million) or more
- companies that have turnovers of INR 5,000 million (US \$ 80 million) or more
- companies that have a net profit of INR 50 million (US \$800,000) or more

The UN Global Compact,⁴⁵ launched in 2000 is the world's largest voluntary corporate sustainability initiative with over 12,000 signatories from business and key stakeholder groups based in 145 countries for the development, implementation and disclosure of responsible corporate policies and practices. It is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

⁴⁴ <http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/globalcitizenship/society/social.html>

⁴⁵ <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/>

The Global Compact Cities Programme⁴⁶ is the urban component of the United Nations Global Compact. The Cities Programme is dedicated to the promotion and adoption of Global Compact's ten principles by cities and focuses on collaboration among all levels of government, business and civil society to enhance sustainability, resilience, diversity and adaptation within cities and in the face of complex urban challenges. The Cities Programme supports a holistic approach to sustainability that considers, plans for and measures impact across four social domains: the economic; ecological; political and cultural.

6.1.1. Evaluation and Reporting

Some countries have developed their own reporting policies and standards; many follow the format provided by the Global Reporting Initiative⁴⁷ (GRI) cofounded by UNEP in 1997. GRI's mission is to make sustainability reporting a standard practice that will help to promote and manage change towards a sustainable global economy. It provides a comprehensive sustainability-reporting framework to enable greater organizational transparency. The framework including the reporting guidelines sets out the principles and indicators that organizations can use to measure and report their economic, environmental, and social performances.

ISO 26000 provides guidance on how businesses and organizations can operate in an ethical and transparent way that contributes to the health and welfare of society and helps businesses and organizations to translate principles into effective actions. It addresses 37 issues under seven core subjects namely, organizational governance, human rights, labour practices, environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, community involvement and development. The standard, launched in 2010 following five years of negotiations between many different stakeholders such as governments, NGOs, industries, consumer groups and labour organizations across the world⁴⁸ provides guidance rather than requirements and unlike some other well-known ISO standards, cannot be certified.

7. Place as CSR in Dhaka

The objective of creating place in Dhaka as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is to integrate economic growth with the social and cultural needs. In addition to helping Dhaka's residents to identify

⁴⁶ <http://citiesprogramme.com/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.globalreporting.org/information/about-gri/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴⁸ <http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards/iso26000.htm>

with the city, creation of place as CSR may also become a visible example for imparting responsibility in the corporate sector that presently operates in the milieu of appropriation and encroachment.

The underutilized old airport, the relocation of central jail from old Dhaka and the government decision to change land use pattern of Dhaka's old industrial area (brown field) are opportunities for transforming these inner city areas⁴⁹ into public territories that may elevate land from commodity to community again and instill belongingness among the residents. Land will be allotted to private entrepreneurs for development not on the basis of highest bidding but on the merit of proposals for creative transformation and usage. Besides the professionals, the community consulting committees will assume major role in setting objectives and criteria for evaluation of proposals. The trends of transformation set in these sites will provide guidelines for future engagement of private entrepreneurs in urban development.

7.1. Role of Evaluation

The role of evaluation is not only to select the best proposals but also to develop a framework for making the abstract issues e.g. place, territory and belongingness tangible and concrete. The primary areas of evaluation are the gathering of place in the transformation that includes built form, and the creation of shared values to provide people the opportunity to evolve as community. Some of the methods for achieving these objectives are measurable in monetary, demographic or spatial terms while those cannot be measured can also be assessed by collective discretion of experts and community. The evaluation also encompasses the issues related to typical inner city transformations such as employment, improved community health and wellbeing, heritage and cultural conservation, environmental benefits, market transformation, introduction of advanced knowledge and understanding etc. A schematic framework for evaluation is given below.

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Measurement
ob.1. Help man to regain his place	c.1. Gathering of the natural and manmade things of the deltaic landscape in the act of building	I.1.a. Concretization of deltaic topographic and hydrological characters	Grading based on collective expert and community discretion
		I.1.b. Indigenous plants and vegetations	no. of species; % of vegetation

⁴⁹ *Supra*, p. 111.

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Measurement
		I.1.c. Climatic responsiveness i.e. reduced energy dependence	Megawatts; CO ₂ emission
		I.1.d. Local building materials	% of materials of same category
		I.1.e. Traditional spatial network based on socially accepted norms of privacy	Expert and community discretion
		I.1.f. Representation of heritage	Expert and community discretion
ob.2. Reestablish land as community	c.2. Conceiving land as territory instead of property	I.2.a. Public access	in % of total built area
		I.2.b. Space dedicated to public domain	Area (m ²), % of total area
		I.2.c. Opportunity for community uses of facility	hours x area
ob.3. Integrate people into communities	c.3.a. Economic integration	I.3.a1. Employment opportunity for locals	% of senior management hired from local community
		I.3.a2. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) run by local proprietors	Proportion of locals against total involved in SMEs
	c.3.b. Cultural integration	I.3.b1. Festivals, exhibitions and events	no. of events and participants
		I.3.b2. Promotion of local crafts and artisans	no. of enterprise; area of space allocated
ob.4. Create examples of responsible environmental, social and cultural practice by corporate sector	c.4.a. Improve accessibility	I.4.a1. Increase accessibility across city	Provision for transport nodes
		I.4.a2. Reduce vehicular dependence	Reduction in trip x length
	c.4.b. Contribute to community wellbeing	I.4.b1. Provision of healthcare, sports and educational facilities	no. of beneficiaries; area dedicated
		I.4.b2. Opportunity of use by local children and women groups	hours x area

Objectives	Criteria	Indicators	Measurement
	c.4.c. Cultural sensitivity	I.4.c1. Preservation of historic assets	no.; financial contribution
		I.4.c2. Showcase local cultural heritage	no. of events; area dedicated
	c.4.d. Showcase advancements in technology and sustainability	I.4.d1. Recycling of community waste	Volume (tons)
		I.4.d2. Recycling of community wastewater	Volume (liters)
		I.4.d3. Renewable energy generation	Megawatts
	c.4.e. Contribute to the emergence of a civil society	I.4.e1. Collective bargaining	Trade union, workers assembly (no.; coverage)
		I.4.e2. Community consultation committees	Scope and extent (community discretion)

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