CHAPTER V

PATNA: THE CITY IN TRANSITION

Politically, the city of Patna was imperial capital of the suba Bihar under the Mughals, the Nawab and the East India Company. Economically, it was an important trade mart which facilitated vital trade link between the upper provinces of Allahabad and Awadh on one side and Bengal on the other. The river Ganges connected the city to Hugli in Bengal. Besides, the rich hinterland around Patna produced many commercially high valued articles such as saltpetre, opium and textiles which had attracted not only the native traders but also the Europeans. The arrival of the Europeans enhanced its commercial activities and it became an international centre for trade and commerce. The articles from Patna were exported to Europe, China and other countries which made it equally competent as any other commercial cities of India.¹

The volatile politics in the wake of the decaying Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century certainly reached Patna and influenced the fate of the city. Political forces while pulling in different directions had already altered the fate of suba Bihar which was put under the supervision of the Nawab of Bengal in 1733 A.D. The life and peace of the city of Patna, however, did not experience any change as such but during the 1750s the situation became complicated due to continuous attacks by Prince Ali Gauhar. Patna had become a battle ground where the Mughal Prince, Bengal Nawabs and forces of the East India Company settled scores among themselves. The primary cause behind the involvement of Patna in any conflict was its politically strategic

position which meant that Mughal forces would attempt to take control of it. Second, since 1733 A.D. the revenue of Bihar was under direct control of the Nawab of Bengal so it was necessary for him to be vigilant about its security, and last but not least the commercial importance of the city regularly made the Europeans, specifically the English, compete aggressively for its economic resources. The city of Patna experienced many ups and downs over the long past, beginning with its origin as Pataliputra and continuing with its subsequent rebirth as Patna and Azimabad never faded from the limelight.²

This chapter takes a look at the life and existence of the city under the changing political context of the eighteenth century. How did the changing political scenario mould the entire status of this city? What were the basic changes and developments under early colonial rule? How did the contending political and commercial forces try to build the city according to their requirements? These are few questions which this chapter would try to answer against the larger frame of change and continuity.

CHANGING PERCEPTION OF THE CITY

In seventeenth century travelogues³ Patna emerges as highly commercial town for mercantile activities and human habitation. Patna was considered one of the most populous and biggest cities in the Mughal Empire. The availability of a large range of merchandise such as high quality saltpetre, fine cloths, ‘drugs’ and several grocery

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items frequently attracted traders from all over the world. There was a considerably good climate\(^4\), spacious markets and an important river-way link to the eastern sea which made the city a thriving business hub attracting traders from almost all over the world. Salpetre was one of the most sought after articles besides silk and cotton piece goods.

In eighteenth century accounts we find Patna growing commercially and also reflecting political complications in the court of the Mughals as well as Murshidabad in the first half of the century. *Siyar-ul-Mutakharin* by Syed Gholam Husain Khan\(^5\) and narratives of many English East India Company officials such as William Bolt,\(^6\) Luke Scrafton,\(^7\) Henry Vansittart\(^8\) and Harry Verelst,\(^9\) viewed Patna as a politically contested region. In these accounts we find Patna being viewed as an extension of the political troubles between the imperial court of Delhi and court of the Nawab of Bengal during the first half of the eighteenth century. The grant of Diwani in 1765 placed Bihar under the rule of the English East India Company. The city of Patna was made headquarters for the Company’s trade in Bihar. The important factor in these writings was the central character of Patna in both political as well as commercial sphere of Bihar. We find very scanty information on the social aspects of the city in these writings. It is, however, Luke Scrafton who sees the society of that period in two

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\(^8\) Henry Vansittart, *A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal from the Year 1760 to the Year 1764*, 3 vols., London, 1766.

water tight compartments i.e. Hindu and Muslim, and regulated by their respective religions.\textsuperscript{10}

In early nineteenth century accounts, Syed Ahmad Behbahani\textsuperscript{11} and Francis Buchanan\textsuperscript{12} came with socio-religious and civic aspects of Patna. Syed Ahmad Behbahani found that the city had decayed; he noticed many dilapidated buildings without proper care and maintenance. He also noted that there were many renowned people residing in the city. However, he was disappointed that many notable Muslim families were Shia and followed strange practices, particularly beating of chests at Muharram. Buchanan saw Patna as an irregularly laid out city which caused him much trouble in determining its exact boundary during his survey. The social composition of the city was however considered remarkable due to the peaceful co-existence of religious communities such as Muslims and Hindus.

THE CITY AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

Peter Mundy, the English traveller, visited Patna during 1632. He recorded that,

\begin{quote}
The cittie lyes alongst on the river Ganges, which, with the suburbs, may conteyne in length about 3 miles; a very long Bazare with trees on each side. It hath above 200 of grocers or Druggists. It is the greatest Mart of all this Countrie, from whence they repaire to Bengala that way to the sea side, and from Indostan and other Inland Countries round about, Plentiful in provisons, abounding with sundrie commodities...\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

The Portuguese missionary Fray Sebastian Manrique (1629-1643) in the seventeenth century observed that,

\textsuperscript{11} Ahmad Behbahani, \textit{Mir'at ul-Ahwal-I Jahan Numa}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{12} Francis Buchanan, \textit{An Account of the District of Bihar and Patna in 1811-1812}, Patna, 1986, (first Published 1934), pp. 57-71.
\textsuperscript{13} Peter Mundy, \textit{Travels in Europe and Asia}, p. 157.
Patna is a populous city having a population of 200,000 men. Many tradesmen including six hundred brokers and middlemen, who are very wealthy, inhabit it.\footnote{Fray Sebastian Manrique, \textit{Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique}, pp. 139-141.}

In his description he rated Patna as one of the biggest towns in the Mughal Empire. ‘It was the meeting place of merchants of different nationalities, the Portuguese, the Armenians, the Mughals, the Pathans, the Persians and the East Bengal traders.’ He remarked that,

If the opinions of the false Heathendom of old were more founded on fact than on high-sounding tales, we might, with good reason, suppose that the God who was the son of Jupiter and Maya used to live most of his days in the city of Patna and... occupied with the enormous quantity and variety of merchandise in the town...\footnote{Ibid.}

Tavernier in the 1640s observed that Patna was one of the largest towns in India. It was not less than ‘two coss’ [koss] in length.\footnote{Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, \textit{Travels in India}, Vol. II, (tr.) V. Ball, London, 1889, p. 100.} He informs that the Dutch had an establishment there. They had a saltpetre refinery at Chapra, situated on the right bank of the Ganges, 10 coss [koss] above the Patna.\footnote{Ibid., p. 122} He remarked that the people of this region had no celebration but ‘perfect liberty’.

...arriving at Patna with M. Bernier, we encountered some Dutchmen in the street who were returning to Chapra, but who halted their carriages in order to salute us. We did not separate before we had emptied together two bottles of Shiraz wine in the open street regarding which there is nothing to remark upon in this country, where one lives without ceremony, and perfect liberty.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the second half of the seventeenth century Manucci recorded that,

...by land I arrived in four days at Patnah, a very large city with bazars, the greater part thatched, inhabited by many merchants. For here is prepared much white cloth of fine quality. In this city were two factories one of the
English and the other of the Dutch, seeing that here, besides cloth of cotton, much fine silk cloth is woven and a huge quality of saltpetre produced, which goes to be stored in Bengal, and is there loaded on ships for various parts of Europe.\textsuperscript{19}

Early nineteenth century observers had almost the same description of the city as it was told by seventeenth century travellers. Ahmad Behbahani, an Iranian traveller visited Patna in the first decade of the nineteenth century. He wrote about the different aspects of the city and its political, social and religious practices. He informs that,

On the 7th day of the month of Zilqad of the same year (A.H. 1221/January A.D. 1807), I arrived at Azimabad. This is the chief city of the province of Bihar and its name had been Patna. Azimushshan, a grandson of emperor Alamgir had resolved to get a city laid out here after his name at an estimate cost of exceeding over a crore of rupees. The emperor named the city after him and hence it came to be known as Azimabad.\textsuperscript{20}

His information is remarkably good but once he remarks that after these changes (in the nomenclature of the city and its administration) ‘the (new) city thrived and the original town of Bihar has reduced to the status of a village.’ He also informed in the same tone that,

It is presently known as Patna. This is ...extremely picturesque and of fine climate. All sorts of cloth-pieces and edibles after being bartered here are trafficked to other neighbouring regions. In the whole of Bangala, nay, in India a city of such a totality is very few. It is apt to call it the “paradise of India”.\textsuperscript{21}

In his account there are good details about the city’s layout and various structures in it. He recorded that,


\textsuperscript{20} Ahmad Behbahani, \textit{Mir’at ul-Akwal-1 Jahan Numa}, p. 130.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
It is one and half farsakh (league\textsuperscript{22}) long and half a farsakh wide and is situated on the bank of the Ganges, which is famous for the purity and sweetness of its water. It is replete with bazaars and magnificent buildings. On the bank of the Ganges, there stand a mosque and a Madrasa which were built times ago at the expense of one of the Qizilbash nobles and the (Mughal) governors, named Saif Khan Bahadur, who had also endowed properties for their maintenance. The letters of the holy verse: “and the places of worship are for God (alone): So invoke not anyone along with God” reckoned according to the system of “adad-e-jummal” give the date of the foundation of the mosque. Till date it is strong and firm; but due to lack of repairs signs of wear and tear are discernible. At present some of the wicked and silly descendants of the martyred Nawab Sirajuddowala have usurped the endowments of the Madrasa and its annexments, and have erected buildings upon it. The poor believers are too weak even to protest.\textsuperscript{23}

Ahmad Behbahani was an Islamic cleric and had come to Patna to preach on religion. It was justified on his part to see the city from his own perspective. Francis Buchanan also carried out an extensive survey of the city for the management of the British government. He records that he had ‘a good deal of difficulty in ascertaining the boundaries of Patna.’ His main hurdle in ascertaining the boundary was that if he excluded those places which were ‘without the walls’ then the dimensions of the city was reduced to a very small area. He reports that,

while the suburbs are built in a very straggling ill defined manner. I find it most suitable for my purpose to include in this section the whole of that part of Patna Pergunnah, or Havelli Azimabad, that is under the jurisdiction of a Kotwal and 15 Darogahs, who are appointed to superintend the police of the 16 wards (Mahallas), into which the above mentioned extent is divided. Each ward includes part of the town, but several of them also include an adjacent part of the country, consisting chiefly however, of garden land with some low marshy ground that intervenes.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} A unit of distance equal to 3.0 miles (4.8 kilometres).
\textsuperscript{23} Ahmad Behbahani, \textit{Mir'at ul-Ahwai-I Jahan Numa}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{24} Francis Buchanan, \textit{An Account of the District of Bihar and Patna in 1811-1812}, p. 57.
The length of the city was somewhere between 2.5 to 3.5 miles. Azimushan attempted to bring changes in housing patterns and civic organisations but under the Company rule there was no such attempt. Behabahani remarked that it was not properly cared. The irregular pattern of housing also troubled Buchanan in determining the exact boundary of the city. The population recorded by Manrique as 200,000 in the seventeenth century had considerably increased in the early nineteenth century and was 624,000 as recorded by Buchanan in his survey.\(^{25}\) The shift in the direction of river Punpun led to the shift of habitation, particularly that of the English, from west to east. They reasoned that Muslim habitation was not hygienic and very congested which forced them to shift to the eastern side of the city.\(^{26}\)

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PATNA

The city of Patna in the eighteenth century was a true reflection of the changing political scenario in India. After the death of Aurangzeb the quick succession and dethronement of several rulers in Delhi saw the appointment and dismissal of six subadars in Patna in a very short period of time. It ended in the transfer of guardianship of Bihar to Bengal in 1733 A.D. on the pretext of better management.\(^{27}\) The virtual rule over Patna went under the court of Murshidabad which was not about changing but restoring and maintaining many things, particularly revenue. The change of political guardianship from Delhi to Bengal in fact provided same security and support which was earlier enjoyed by the city. The only difference it caused was the changing political equation and the political position of Delhi vis-a-vis Bengal over the question of Bihar. The central position of Patna in the political context of Bihar

\(^{25}\) Ibid, 723.

\(^{26}\) NAI, HPP, SC, OC, 27th February 1788, No. 17.

remained intact but its fate was decided by Bengal which added another dimension to its existence as an extension of Murshidabad politics. The rule of Murshidabad over Patna had serious repercussions on the life and existence of Patna after its subordination. The policies of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula had equally affected the interest of Patna merchants along with Calcutta, which instigated them to be a part of the Plassey conspiracy along with Bengal merchants and bankers.

Immediately after Plassey though nothing substantially happened in Patna but during the raids of Prince Ali Gauhar it again became a battle ground and remained so till the end of the battle of Buxar (1764). Prince Ali Gauhar attacked Patna from 1759-61 A.D.28 During these military conflicts Patna turned into a battle ground for three contending forces: the Nawab of Bengal, the Mughal Prince and the East India Company on behalf of the Nawab. Earlier, Patna was a buffer region but now it was playing the role of a frontier region, which had borne the burden of attacks to save Bengal. The Prince was on his way to assert his claim over the throne of Delhi and Mir Qasim around this time placed his candidature as the next Nawab of Bengal with the help of English East India Company. 29 The city of Patna during this period became a political stage. It was again reenacted when Mir Qasim refused to agree to the terms of the East India Company in 1763-64 A.D. He first tried to capture Patna for making a strategic base but when he realized his incapacity of doing so he sneaked to Awadh. In Awadh after making some quick military arrangements, he re-appeared at Buxar with two other allies, the Nawab of Awadh and Mughal King Shah Alam II.

The historical defeat at the battle of Buxar finally sealed the fate of these rulers

against the English forces and consequently the right to Diwani was granted to the
Company of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765 A.D. 30

Patna remained central to the administration of Bihar and acted as headquarters for the
administrative and commercial purpose in the post-Diwani phase. Commercial
developments in the city of Patna moved alongside the polity of the region. The
political changes or more appropriately the change of political control over Patna in
fact added a different dynamism to it. Patna was, however, one of the highly
commercialised cities in eighteenth century India besides, Agra, Allahabad and
Calcutta. Merchants from all over the world visited Patna. Thomas Bowery observed
that it was,

a country of very great Trafficke and Commerce, and is really the great gate
that openeth into Bengal and Orissa, and consequently into most parts of
India viz. from the Northern Kingdom or Empires (by land), namely Persia,
Carmania, Georgia, Tartaria etc. The commodities of those countries are
transported hither by Caffila who also export the Commodities brought hither
by the English and the Dutch as also of this Kingdom. 31

Patna had been an important centre for local, regional and international trade in
Eastern India. The city of Patna emerged as one of the thriving centres of
manufacturing, marketing, banking and entrepreneurial activities during the
eighteenth century. 32 Traders from different corners of the globe were largely attracted
to Patna for its cotton, silk piece-goods and saltpetre. It had also brisk inter-provincial
trade in food-grains and other commodities. The geographical setting of Patna on the
right bank of the river Ganges and a confluence point of three rivers, Ganges, Punpun
and Gandak, paved the way for its commercial prominence. Two important features:

31 Thomas Bowery, A Geographical Account, p. 221
32 Kumkum Chaatterjee, ‘Collaboration and conflict: Bankers and early Colonial Rule in India’ p. 287.
first, the river Ganges was navigable throughout the year, and second, its midway position between the capital cities and the rich doab on the west and Bengal possessing a convenient sea outlet in the east, made it an ideal centre of trade and commerce.\textsuperscript{33} The river Ganges with its main tributaries and channels helped in the movement of bulky and heavy goods and merchants used it extensively in reaching the most interior areas of eastern India. Patna was linked by the river route with Bengal, Benares, Delhi and Agra. The current of the river from Patna towards the south-east was so strong that it could carry down frigates in five to six days, while the up-coming voyages took thrice the time.\textsuperscript{34} Patna being a thriving trade emporium attracted merchants and travellers of European countries, who successfully tried their luck in commercial transaction. Among them the Dutch, French and English trading companies were mainly active in and around Patna during the eighteenth century.

The initial decades of the eighteenth century were highly competitive for these Europeans companies but from the year 1750 onwards different waves engulfed the commerce of the region. There was cut throat competition among the European traders to grab the monopoly right over the saltpetre trade. As discussed in Chapter I, the English managed to get it and easily outclassed the others.

The local and regional trade were mainly carried out by local merchants though in the export trade the Company successfully established its control, first in saltpetre and then on opium. The Company exercised monopoly on these two commodities but was unable to do so in the textiles trade. The initial competition in the trade of the city,

\textsuperscript{33} Hamida Khatoon Naqvi, \textit{Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India (1556-1803)}, Calcutta, 1968, pp. 97-98.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 98.
however, lessened when the English East India Company started its political rule in the province.

Patna was one of the main distributing centres for local goods and was a major transit point between Bengal and upper India.\textsuperscript{35} There was conglomeration of local, regional and international markets. In its local and regional markets such as haat, gunjes and bazaars, several commodities such as oil seeds, leather, tobacco, rice, wheat, pulses, wood, opium, sugar, fruits, vegetables, fishes etc. catered to the needs of local people and people from other provinces.\textsuperscript{36} The areas around Patna like Sighiya, Chapra, Bihar-Sharif, Lakhwar and Baikatpur etc. provided a rich hinterland for supplying saltpetre, cotton and silk piece-goods.\textsuperscript{37} The silk cloth was sent from Baikunthpur to Patna and cotton clothes were delivered from Lakhwar, Bihar-Sharif and other towns.\textsuperscript{38} The localities around Patna were important centres and markets of textile manufactures, particularly \textit{amirti} and other fine and coarse variety of calicoes. Merchants used to buy these raw calicoes in huge quantities and after bleaching them sent to other markets. The whole area from Patna to Mokameh was famous for cotton and silk, jasmine oil, paper and fine earthen wares. Patna, Fatuha, Baikunthpur and Qadiriganj were important towns for silk manufacturing.\textsuperscript{39} These were considered very valuable and profit making articles by the English factors.\textsuperscript{40} The region around Patna within a radius of nearly fifty miles had important centres and markets of cotton

\begin{footnotesize}
\\textsuperscript{36} Upendra Thakur, \textit{Aspects of Society and Economy of Medieval Mithila}, Patna, p. 112.
\\textsuperscript{37} Kumkum Chaatterjee, \textit{Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India Bihar}, pp. 152-4.
\\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\\textsuperscript{40} \textit{EFI}, 1618-21, p. 306.
\end{footnotesize}
manufactures. Manucci observed that ‘fine white cloth’ was manufactured at Patna and was ‘very plentiful’ in the province.\footnote{Manucci, \textit{Storia Do Mogor}, Vol. II, p. 141.}

While Gujarat and Bengal were known for exquisite clothes, the city of Patna was known for its coarse variety of cloth though it also exported fine varieties of calicoes to Bengal, Agra, Lahore and other parts of India. Throughout the eighteenth century there was a great traffic in products like amirti, Rasis, Zafarkhani, Jahangiris, Rahmoutes, kaamsukha, etc.\footnote{Kumkum Chaatterjee, \textit{Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India Bihar}, pp. 152-4.} As an entrepot Patna also received fine silk products of Gujarat for the Bengal markets. Apart from these finished goods, it also received unfinished goods for bleaching, dyeing and printing by the weavers of Lakhwar leading to considerable amount of traffic in unfinished textiles such as amirtis and other types of calicoes. Often unfinished products of Bengal were also brought in for further treatment to Patna and other places.\footnote{Ibid.}

Patna also had commercial links with Tirhut, Singhiya, Chapra etc., which were main suppliers of saltpetre. The European venture in saltpetre particularly made Patna saltpetre internationally famous, earlier it was generally used for local purposes.\footnote{Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, ‘The Saltpetre Industry of India in the seventeenth century with Special Reference to Bihar’ in \textit{Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society} (hereafter \textit{JBORS}), 1937, p. 71.} The saltpetre trade of Patna in the eighteenth century had given a considerable edge to the commerce of the city. The Dutch and English had factories nearly ten miles outside the city where they used to refine saltpetre and send it down to Hugli for export.\footnote{Aniruddha Ray, \textit{Transformation of Bihar}, p. 29.} A boat building industry emerged in the region in the wake of heavy transactions of saltpetre. The necessities of saltpetre trade served as an incentive to boat construction
under the patronage of the English East India Company and also determined the type of inland and coastal boats used. We come across varieties of boats from the reference made by travellers during their visit to the region. The Patella was a flat bottomed boat used to carry saltpetre; the Boora was a very light boat rowed with 20 or 30 oars which carried saltpetre and other goods from Hugli downwards; the Purgoo, was probably a frigate used between Hugli, Pipli and Balasore. The Hugli-Patna saltpetre boats were 'over 50 yards long and 5 yards broad and 2 ½ deep and had a capacity of over 200 tonnes'. Finally Pulwar were small boats of about 12 to 15 tonnes sometimes carrying saltpetre from Patna down the river. Patna was not only an important centre of production but also a thriving emporium of inland or inter-provincial trade. Besides the articles imported into Patna from other parts of India, various miscellaneous goods were also imported from different parts of India like Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, Bengal, Orissa, Agra, Surat etc.

Patna also had brisk inter-local trade in food grains. As a chief rice producing area, Patna received a substantial quantity from adjoining areas like Tirhut, Monghyr, Purneah. Different varieties of pulses like arhar, mung and khesari used to be imported to Patna from Champaran, Bihar-Sharif and Bhagalpur. Not only food-grains, dairy products too used to reach the local markets of Patna. Besides catering to the needs of local customers, wholesalers and retailers Patna also acted as an emporium where dealers from other places collected their supplies. It was a regional

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48 Askari and Ahmad (eds.), *CHB*, p. 429.
trading centre with extremely lively and well established trade links both by land and water with most regions of the country. 50

Patna was also hit hard by the famine of 1769-70. Approximately fifty to sixty men died of hunger everyday in the streets of the city during the peak of the calamity. 51 Yet 80,000 maunds of rice were sent out of the district for consumption of troops at Berhampur and Calcutta. 52 Rajmahal and Bhagalpur also suffered greatly because of constant movement of troops to and from Calcutta. The yield of food-grains in Rajmahal was reduced to half. 53

In the inter-provincial trade, Patna had a peculiar importance as the meeting place for merchants who exchanged their cargo and money for western and eastern India. A wide variety of commodities ranging from goods for mass consumption to high luxury goods like silken goods, musk, furs, corals, etc., were exchanged in Patna by the merchants and traders of different regions. The most important components of inter-regional trade in Patna were trade in food stuff, textile products and saltpetre. Patna supplied food grains to various parts of India. It used to export wheat to Agra, Delhi and other parts on the western coast of India. It supplied food stuff not only to the deficit areas along the western coast but also to the rich province like Bengal. Patna as the main transit station between eastern and other parts of India also regulated the movement of food stuff that came from Bengal. According to Bernier, Bengal rice

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50 Ibid.
51 NAI, HPP, SC. 29th September to 13th November 1770, Letter from Patna to Calcutta, 3rd October 1770.
53 Ibid.
was carried up the Ganges to Patna and from there it was sent to Agra, Masulipatnam and Coromandel coast.\textsuperscript{54}

The emergence of Patna as a major centre of banking along with Agra, Ahmedabad, Tatta and Burhanpur was a significant development in the mid-seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{55} The Central Asian as well as European merchants brought large quantities of bullion with them to Patna.\textsuperscript{56} Hiranand Sahu, the founder of the famous banking firm of Jagat Seth, had set up his firm in Patna.\textsuperscript{57} The commercial growth in the city of Patna necessitated development of a community of bankers who were important channels of finance in the export trade.\textsuperscript{58} In the 1740s the English Company borrowed about Rs. 50,000 siccas from Patna’s bankers.\textsuperscript{59} The emergence of Benares as an important banking centre also helped Patna grow and many branches of Benares house were opened in Patna.\textsuperscript{60} The post-Plassey scenario in the banking sector was not very favourable. The house of Jagat Seth received much damage in that period but few banking firms of Patna were not affected to that extent. There were banking houses of Gopaldas-Manihardas, Ramchand-Gopalchand Shahu, Kishen Deo Tewari, Premraj-Manikchand and others in Patna in the late eighteenth century. These banking houses were based either in Benares or Patna and had very strong networks in other cities and towns.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{56} Bolts, Consideration on Indian affairs, vol. 1, p.200.
\textsuperscript{58} Kumkum Chaatterjee, \textit{Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India Bihar}, p. 180.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p.181.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF PATNA

Eighteenth century society in Patna was a cultural conglomeration of people from variety of religions, faiths and professions. In his survey Buchanan recorded 97,500 Muslims and 214,500 Hindus. Patna being a commercial town, had all type of people practicing different professions. There were 30,000 traders, 78,000 artificers and 66,000 labourers working in the ‘field’ and other places. Society was composed of different classes primarily based on their professions. Buchanan points out that the general categorisation in other districts were limited to three divisions, i.e. Sukhbas, Khoshbash, and Chasas but in Patna there were four distinct categories namely, Ashraf, Bukals, Pauniyas and Jotiyas. The Ashraf was a kind of gentry and it consisted of high castes Muslims and Hindus like Saiyeds, Pathans, Moguls, Brahmans, Kshatris, Rajputs and Kayasthas. There were merchants who belonged to the lower castes but were rich and claimed to be Ashraf. However, it was not justifiably accepted by the society and ‘considered illegal.’ People who belonged to the Ashraf group took pride in not doing any manual labour. They generally had large tracts of land which they got cultivated from ‘servants or slaves.’ It was, however, the ‘poor Ashrafs’ who ‘hoe, weed, sow, transplant, water, and reap their own fields, and hire men to plough.’ There was a general dislike among certain Hindus and even Muslims to use the ‘sacred ox’ for ploughing.

The traders particularly from ‘low birth’ were ‘Bukals’ who ‘abstain altogether from rural labour.’ The Pauniyas were artificers. They had farms and most of them did their cultivation on their own. Buchanan reports that,

63 Ibid., pp. 57-71.
64 Ibid.
when they do not find employment at their trade, one brother cultivates the farm, while another follows the duties of his profession. They often act as day labourers.

The Jotiyas were mainly ploughmen. They had no lands and these people ‘partly act as servants and partly as day labourers.’ The day labourers, porters, servants and other labouring classes were considered Jotiyas. \(^\text{65}\)

The eighteenth century society of Patna was basically a mixed society where rich and poor from both high and low castes lived according to their social as well as economic capacity. There were domestic servants of all classes, ‘and even pure Brahmans are occasionally employed as such by persons of low birth.’ The general health was certainly good and Buchanan remarked that they were quite fit for labour. There was however general superstition among people when somebody caught certain illnesses and they would pray to ward of the evil. \(^\text{66}\)

**Houses**

The housing pattern in Patna was first organised by the Mughal Prince Azim-us-Shan, when he became Subadar of the province in the early eighteenth century. He wanted to make Patna like Delhi. \(^\text{67}\) Azim-us-Shan reorganised the pattern of social habitation and established colonies to settle people such as Lodikatra, Mughalpura, Zargartola (embroidery workers) and Mir Shikar Toli (Bird-hunters) according to their caste or professional affiliations. \(^\text{68}\) The quality of housing was considered to be very poor by Buchanan. The houses were generally built with brick or stone ‘with stairs, floors, windows, and chambers miserably small and awkward’ and clay was used as mortar.

\(^{65}\) Ibid, pp. 265-70.

\(^{66}\) Ibid.


\(^{68}\) Ibid.
Buchanan remarked that it was 'a clear proof of extreme poverty.' The houses with double storey were called Kothas. In these Kothas two apartments were placed one above the other and were generally tiled or thatched. These houses were fitted with 'wooden doors and window-shutters; but these are to the last degree rude, and are seldom if ever painted.' These houses, however, were comfortable in both the cold and rainy season.69

The residential areas expanded after the shift of river Pumpun and particularly English population started settling in the eastern side of the city. Since the area west of the western gate was already inhabited, the building activities of the English began in the area around the Gol ghar, granary built in 1786 to store food-grains. Thus, the city witnessed expansion towards west and grew in length.70

Buchanan's map reveals that Patna was very sparsely populated from the Company's opium godown to Golghar along the river bank. There was a compact block of European quarters on the river from Golghar down the Company Bagh. The walled city was very thickly populated. Even Buchanan was constrained to admit that hardly a vacant plot was available for construction and hence land-prices had doubled during the last fifteen years.71 The English were by now the most numerous European group in the city. The Dutch and the Danes, who had their establishments at the turn of the century had ceased to exist.

69 Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Bihar and Patna*, pp. 277-78
A decade later, when Bishop Heber arrived in Patna in 1824, the English had almost fixed the future guidelines for the city's development. The race course, known as the lawn or the present Gandhi Maidan had been established. The traveller was taken around it by his hostess Lady d'Oyley for a drive. The lawn was built by Metcalf, then Commissioner of Patna. The Europeans had decided to settle down around this area and the administrative offices were to be housed here. Until the end of the century, this was the nucleus around which the city was developed. The river bank was dotted either by godowns or by the bungalows of the Company officials in the present Sabjibagh Mohallas. Bishop Heber stayed there with the Opium Agent during his visit to the city.

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