CHAPTER – I

GEOGRAPHICAL PERSONALITY OF THE STUDY AREA

Murshidabad district is the northern most district of the presidency division in the state of West Bengal in India. The district is bounded by 23° 43' 30`` N to 24° 50' 20`` N latitude and 87° 49'E to 88° 46' E longitude. There are 26 CD blocks covering 2210 villages, 7 statutory towns and 22-census town in the district.

1.1 Boundaries

In shape, the district resembles an isosceles triangle with its apex pointing to the North-West. It borders Malda district to the north, Birbhum to the west, Bardhaman to the south-west and Nadia district due south. The international border with Bangladesh's Rajshahi division is on the east.

1.2 Natural Divisions

The triangle shaped district is bifurcated by the river Bhagirathi into two broad geographical regions of almost equal area and having a striking difference in their geology, in the agricultural and habitational pattern and even in the religions of their inhabitants.

a) The Rarh Area – This is the area to the west of the Bhagirathi having the pre-dominant geographical character of a plateau. It is substantially a continuation of the Sub-Vindhyan region of laterite clay and nodular ghating. The land is high, slightly undulating, but is interspersed with numerous swamps and beds of old rivers. The soil is greyish and reddish, rich in lime and iron oxide. The rivers in this part originate from hill torrents and they are prone to overflowing during sudden rain. Hijal is a tract within Rarh, situated in the south-west of the district near the confluence of the Mor and Dwarka, is about 50 sq. miles in area. During the rains, this area is widely inundated with water. Again, it becomes dry in the winter and a large portion of it is cultivated with Rabi crops.

b) The Bagri Area – This is the area to the east of the Bhagirathi formed by Gangetic alluvial deposit. This area was formed later than the Rarh Area. It lies entirely between the Ganga, the Bhagirathi and the Jalangi River. The area is low, is therefore, exposed to annual inundations resulting in fresh silt deposits, and hence it is very fertile.

1.3 Geology

The tract of Bagri, lying east of Bhagirathi is covered with recent alluvium, consisting of sandy clay and sand along the course of the rivers, and fine silt consolidating into clay in the flatter parts of the plain; sometimes the areas form saucer-like depressions. A bank of stiff
clay, gravels and calcareous nodules called ghuting forms the junction of the alluvium and higher grounds on the west of Bhagirathi. In the north-west of the district are some isolated clay hillocks (O’Mally, 1997).
1.4 Climate
Murshidabad has a tropical wet-and-dry climate (Koppen climate classification). The annual mean temperature is approximately 27 °C; monthly mean temperatures range from 17° C to 35° C (approximate figures). Summers are hot and humid with temperatures in the low 30° C
and during dry spells the maximum temperatures often exceed 40° C during May and June. Winter tends to last for only about two and a half months, with seasonal lows dropping to 9° C – 11° C between December and January. On an average, May is the hottest month with daily average temperatures ranging from a low of 27° C to a maximum of 40° C, while January the coldest month has temperatures varying from a low of 12 °C to a maximum of 23° C. Often during early summer, dusty squalls followed by spells of thunderstorm or hailstorms and heavy rains cum hail storms lash the district, bringing relief from the humid heat. Rains brought by the Bay of Bengal branch of South-West monsoon lash the city between June and September and supplies the district with most of its annual rainfall of approx 1,600 mm (62 in). The highest rainfall occurs during the monsoon in August approx 300 mm (12 in). Floods are common during Monsoon, causing loss of life, destruction of property, and loss of crops (O’ Mally, 1997).

1.5 Lines of Drainage

The general slope of the district west of the Baghirathi is from north -west to south -east; but in the tract east of Bhagirathi, the lines of drainage are somewhat irregular as the main rivers do not uniformly takes this direction. The river has a historyof frequent shifting (O’ Mally, 1997).

Though, the western half of the district slopes eastwards toward the Baghirathi, a number of the hill streams do not find their way directly into that river; they are intercepted by bils or marshes and for the most part are carried off to the south by the Dwarka. The two chief drainage basins in this part of the district are that of the Bansloi in the north and that of the Dwarka with its confluents, in the south. The large bils act as reservoirs during the flood by absorbing some of the excess water carried down by these streams, and also drain the excess water through the streams, emanating out of them.

The eastern half of the district may be described as an isosceles triangle. The Ganga (Padma) and the Bhagirathi forms the two equal sides; The Jalangi forms almost the entire base (Map 4). However, the line of drainage is not along any of these rivers. The local rainfalls in this part of the district do not run off either into the Ganga or the Bhagirathi. It may be roughly stated that the greater part of the surplus water ultimately falls into the Jalangi by means of the Gobranalah, the Bhairab and the Sialmari.

1.6 Flora and Fauna

Flora

There is hardly any forest covering in the district. Most of it has trees common to the deltaic regions of the State. In the west and the north regions of the district, one gets to see plants similar to the plateau regions of the State. The common crops are also similar to that of
the deltaic Bengal. There are fruit bearing trees of various types; but what the district boasts of is its varieties of mango delicacies.

Fauna

One, who has visited the district recently, would find it very hard to believe that tigers, rhinoceroses, and wild buffaloes roamed here till the mid-nineteenth century. Leopards and wild boars were found even much later. But now the only wild animals found are perhaps a few jackals. The black-faced monkey is however found in abundance. Though there is no forest coverage, there are many water bodies like rivers, canals, lakes and ponds and an abundance of trees and shrubs in the district. Therefore, here one finds birds of many species including some migratory birds. The area is attractive for the bird-lovers.

1.7 Agriculture

Murshidabad is mainly an agricultural district. The main source of livelihood of the people is cultivation. The principal agricultural crops of the district are paddy, wheat, mustard, and jute (District Census Hand Book, 1991).

1.8 Trade and Commerce

Silk, Brass and Bell metal and Ivory products are exported to different parts of the country. Besides them, jute is also an important item of the district which is also exported to the places outside the jurisdiction of the state. Wheat and paddy are imported into the district as and when required. There is no big and modern industry in the district except one Thermal Power Plant at Farakka. The district has only some Small Scale & Cottage industries such as Brick klin, Bidi making, Silk Weaving etc. (District Census Hand Book, 1991).

1.9 Transport

Two section of the Eastern Railway are located on both sides of the river Ganga. Sealdah – Lalgora, a section is located on the western side of the river and Sealdah-Katwa-Ajimganj section is located on the eastern side of the river (Map 4). Ajimganj – Nalhati line is the oldest line in the district. The National Highway No.34 passes through the district along with a number of state Highways. The rail cum road at Farakka Bridge is important communications point in the connection both the northern and southern parts of the state. The district is provided with a well managed transport system both private and public, connecting the different parts of the district.
1.10 Demography

In 2001, the total population of the district is recorded as 5,866,569. Out of which 87.51 percent (5,133,835) is rural population and remaining 12.49 percent (7,32,734) is urban population. The total area of the district as supplied by Surveyor General of India as 5324 Km², which accounts 6.00 percent of the total area of West Bengal (88,752 sq.km.). Thus, the
density of population is worked out as 1,102 persons per square kilometer in 2001. The ratio of male and female to total population is 51.22 and 48.78 percent respectively. Percentage of total workers and non-workers to total population is 34.18 and 65.82 percent respectively. (District Census Handbook, 2001).

REFERENCES:

District Census Hand Book, 1991: Census of India, Murshidabad, Directorate of Census Operation, Govt. of West Bengal.

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