CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF URBANIZATION

Urbanization is not merely an increase in the proportion of urban population, but it is a continuing process which encompasses all factors underlying the process of economic growth and socio-cultural change. The emergence, spatial spread, growth and decline of cities and towns are very much related to the processes of urbanization. These processes are triggered due to different contributing factors on different instants of time. Thus one can’t assess the present without proper understanding the factors responsible for the development and growth of urban centers in the past. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to explore the history of urbanization in Murshidabad district from prehistoric period to present time along with the discussion on the main processes involved in the historical periods. It also aims to point out the spatial and temporal discontinuities in urbanization which has been an important aspect of urbanization from past to present time.

PERIODIZATION IN URBAN HISTORY

Nations, cultures, families, and even individuals, each with their different remembered histories, are constantly engaged in imposing, overlapping, often unsystematized, schemes of temporal periodization; periodizing levels are continually challenged and redefined. However, in order to describe the history of urbanization of Murshidabad district in a meaningful fashion, we have divided the urban history into five time periods. The time spans are as follows;

1. The prehistoric period (2350 to 1800 B.C.)
2. The early historical period (600 B.C. – AD 500.)
3. The Medieval Period (AD 600 to 1800), including Mughal period (AD 1526.to1800).
4. The British Period (AD 1800 – 1947.).

3.1 PREHISTORIC PERIOD (2300 B.C.-1800 B.C.)

The lower Ganga Valley of which the district of Murshidabad is an integral part was a zone of cultural contacts and admixture of various races since pre-historic times. Most of the deltaic region according to Majumdar (Majumdar R.C and Pusalkar A.D., 1951) became firm and dry enough to be habitable for man only some five thousand to seven thousand years ago. The area lies almost entirely between Ganges, Bhagirathi, and Jalangi rivers seems to have remained uninhabited even after the lapse of centuries of the Aryanisation in Bengal. This region was definitely inhospitable for human settlements because of the presence of numerous
swamps, creeks and forests which were the habitat of wild animals (Walter T, 1961). Moreover, the frequency of floods restricted human infiltration in this region.

3.2 EARLY HISTORICAL PERIOD (600 B.C.-A.D.500)

The early historical period of urban history covers nearly a thousand years. This period may be divided into three time blocks consisting of Post Vedic period, the Mauryan Period and Post Mauryan Period.

The cultivation of Virgin soil and agricultural prosperity helped in providing greater stimulus for industrial and trade activities which in turn helped in widening the areas of settlements. Many places which started acting as market centers were gradually developed into town or cities. In spite of a predominantly rural character, it appears that there were few settlements with urban status of considerable size in ancient time which served as centre of administration or pilgrimage or seats of commercial activities. These places developed possibly due to suitable location, facilities for transport and communication. As a nucleus of Hindu settlement *Kiritshari* flourished under the Gupta King. It is the place of great antiquity (Majumdar R.C., 1943) where crown of *sati*, consort of *shiva*, had dropped here.

Ashoka established a few stupas and some Viharas (Monasteries) (Walter, T. 1961) in Pancha-Stupas, Kantagram, and Karn Suvarna which became important foci of the human activities during that time.

In the first half of the 7th century A.D. Sasanka became the King of Gauda. His capital was at Karnasuvarna which has been identified with “Rangamati” in the district (Majumdar RC, 1943). The fame of Karnasuvarna reached far and wide as a military, political, commercial and religious centre as well as place of wealth and luxury. But by no means was it unconnected with the rural economy (Bhattacharya, N.D., 1959). The copper inscription of Vidhanpur and evidence of coins throw sufficient light on the very existence of prosperous urban landscape.

The process of urbanization again slowed down in the study area until the glorious reign of Mahipal of Bengal (988 – 1030 A.D.) when the foundation of Mahipalnagar became a centre of social, political and religious activities (Fig. 2).

3.3 MEDIEVAL PERIOD (AD600-1800)

From the 5th century AD and onward i.e. from the time of Gupta period there was a slow progress of urbanization. This was brought about by many factors such as political disintegration of the larger empires and the emergence of the regimes of unstable dynasties. A number of administrative officers were posted by the Pathan ruler for collection of revenues at various places which later formed the nuclei of urban habitations. Sultan Gayesuddin I (1202AD) laid the foundation of Gayesabad, a prosperous capital city on the West Bank of Bhagirathi(Map6).
FIG. 2: TIME EVENT DIAGRAM ON PERIODIZATION OF URBAN HISTORY, MURSHIDABAD, 600 BC – 1947

Dynasty - Gupta King
Urban center - Kiritshari
Ruler - Ashoke
Urban center - Pacha Stupas, Kantagram
Ruler - Sasanka
Urban center - Karnasuvvarna
Ruler - Kayangala
Urban center - Kagram
Ruler - Aditya Syra, Anu Sura
Urban center - Singeswar, Anup Pur
Ruler - Mahipal
Urban center - Mahipal Nagar
Ruler - King Kusumeshwar
Urban center - Kushum Khola
Total Number of Towns - 09

Ruler - Sultan Gayesuddin
Urban center - Gayesbad
Ruler - Shah Jahan
Urban center - Baliaghat, Cossimbazar, Kalikapur, Anniganj, Farasidanga
Ruler - Akbar
Urban center - Maksusubad
Ruler - Alivardi Khan
Urban center - Bhagwangola
Ruler - Murshid Kuli Khan
Urban center - Murshidabad
Ruler - Aurangzeb
Urban center - Aurangabad, Saida bad
Ruler - Alivardi Khan
Urban center - Jiaganj
Ruler - Emperor Jahangir
Urban center - Jangipur
Ruler - Prince Azimushan
Urban center - Azimganj
Total Number of Towns - 14

Ruler - British
Urban Centers
Lalgola,
Nashipur,
Kandi,
Panchthupi,
Dhulian,
Beldanga,
Cossimbazar
Murshidabad
Bhagwangola
Berham pore
Gokarna,
Goas,
Sherpur
Daltabazar,
Jangipur
Lalbagh
Total Number of Towns - 17

Urban Centers
Dhulian
Jangipur
Jiaganj - Azimganj
Murshidabad
Berhampore
Kandi
Beldanga
Farakka
Anupnagar
Dhusuripara
Uttar Mahamadpur
Kankuria
Chachanda
Serpu r Serpur
Jagat
Arungabad
Dafahat
Paschim Purnapara
Ghorsala
Char ka
Jatkanal
Srikantabati
Sahajadpur
Khodarampur
Harthiachak
Kasimbazar
Goaljan
Gorabazar
Srimantapur

600 B.C - AD 500,
Early Historical

A.D. 600-1800
Medieval Period

1800 A.D., British
Period

1947, Present
Period

Source: Compiled by researcher
MAP 5: URBAN CENTERS OF EARLY HISTORICAL PERIOD

Source:
Old Kips - Settlement Reports 1921-41
Census - 2001, SOI & Local Municipality
It is interesting to note that Saraihat, Gopalhat, Hookarhat, Bhadurihat, Dastoorhat, Baganhat all market centers were developed around the city of Gayesabad which became the stronghold of the Pathan rulers for a short time.

### 3.4 MUGHUL PERIOD (AD1526-1800)

After the breakup of the Sultan Period of the Bengal (1553 – 1575), a confused state prevailed which subdued the growth of urban settlements. After 1576, somewhat better pictures of economic and administrative condition of Murshidabad enhanced the origin and growth of urban settlements. The tolerant policy of the Emperor Akbar stimulated the establishment of new settlements.

Some important settlements originated under the Emperor Shah Jahan (1628 – 1659). The European traders viz. the Dutch, Portuguese, French and English were allowed for trades in the district. They established *Kuthis or trade centers* along the Bhagirathi which continued to be the main line of communication up to the second half of the 18th century. Even long before the shifting of capital from Dacca to Maksusabad on the Banks of Bhagirathi, Maksusabad became center of commercial activities. Baliahat, Maksusabad, Cossimbazar, Kalikapur, Saidabad, Amaniganj, Farasdanga, were notable commercial marts (O’ Mally, 1997).

The name of “Maksusabad” flourished primarily as a “mint town” even twenty five years before the arrival of Murshidkuli Khan in the year 1701. In 1697, the town was taken and plundered by the Afghan insurgents and their rising during that time is commonly known as Subha Singh’s rebellion and in 1701, Murshid Kuli Khan, the then Diwan (Revenue Administrator) of Bengal made it the headquarters of the Diwani in place of Dacca. In 1704, Murshidkuli Khan who had, in the mean time, been appointed Deputy Nazim (Military Governor) and really exercising all powers of Nazim, called “Maksusabad” after him Murshidabad, and thenceforth it was acknowledged as the capital of Bengal. After the battle of Plassey (1757), Lord Clive Wrote “The city of Murshidabad is as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London” (O’ Mally, 1997). The urban sprawl was conspicuous not only on the east bank of the Bhagirathi but also on its western side. Some Jain Colonies viz. Mahimpur, Jiaganj came into existence. Besides Aurangabad named after Emperor Aurangzeb and Azimganj (named after Azim-us-Salan, grandson of Aurangzeb who was Governor of Bengal) also came into being during that period. In the later periods, both later developed as commercial hubs of the district.
MAP 6: URBAN CENTERS OF MEDIEVAL PERIOD
3.5 BRITISH PERIOD (1800-1947)

The consolidation of British power in India, guaranteeing peace and security of life naturally created a better congenial atmosphere for urban centers to function.

The decline of Murshidabad began in 1757 when Sirajudulla, the Nawab of Bengal was defeated by the English, and the city never recovered from its old position. With the installation of British Power in India, a devastating change in the entire economy took place to serve the needs of the ruling power. The towns and cities had to fit into that changing pattern and most of the important towns and cities were converted into administrative headquarters of the British India. Lalgola, Nashipur, Kandi, Panchthupi, Dhulian, Beldanga, Cossimbazar etc. became the seats of residence-cum-administration of the loyal Rajas or Zamindars. The then metropolitan city of Murshidabad, however, continued to be on arena of political events up to 1793 when the remnants of the sovereign authority completely disappeared and Calcutta became a strong hold of the East India Company as military, political, and commercial centre.

With the introduction of indigo and lac cultivation, several important settlements of urban characteristic sprung up such as Waliganj, Jangipur, Domkol. Whereas, Nimtita, Aurangabad, Jagtaj, Kanchantala (Dhulian) flourished as centre of lac cultivation. Chunakhali and Dhulian were noted for handmade papers (Chatterjee S, 1961).

Major Rennell’s map (J. Rennell, 1780) of the Cossimbazar Island (1780) reveals that most of the human settlements both rural and urban were developed along the curve of the Bhagirathi and Padma, Murshidabad, Cossimbazar, Bernagar, Bogwangola, etc. were the chief centers of business activities even during the second half of the 18th century

The British period added much to the growth of settlements in the district by way of introducing railways and metalled roads. Great changes were marked when the Nalhati – Azimganj loop Railway (1901) were opened.

While, Murshidabad and Cossimbazar continued to decline as urban centers, the newly founded town of Berhampore was slowly but steadily becoming an urban centre. Subsequent to the establishment of the Cantonment (1870), the place became the head quarters of the district administration. Till 1875, it was also the headquarters of the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division. Berhampore grew into a garrison town and administrative town. Due to establishment of district, sub-division and thana headquarters (Police Station Circle) rapid extension of road which were needed to contact the administrative centers led to urban development in the district. Many thana station or tehsil (Block Headquarters) like Gokurruna, Burroa, Sherpoor, Goas, Dualtabazar grew as towns in the early 19th century with bazaar and market (Table 2).
MAP 7: URBAN CENTERS OF BRITISH PERIOD
### TABLE 2: URBAN CENTERS AND THEIR STATUS, MURSHIDABAD (600 B.C. TO 1947)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Name of the urban centers</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Historical 600 BC-AD 500.</td>
<td>Kiritshari</td>
<td>Religious center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pancha-Stupas, Kantagram, Karnasuvarna</td>
<td>Religious center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kagram</td>
<td>Religious center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sigheswar, Anup pur</td>
<td>Residential and Place of administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahipal Nagar</td>
<td>Social political and religious center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kushum Khola</td>
<td>Seat of Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval period AD 600-1800.</td>
<td>Gayesabad</td>
<td>Capital city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baliaghat, Cossimbazar, Kalikapur, Amniganj, Farasdanga</td>
<td>Commercial Mart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maksusabad</td>
<td>Trade especially foreign trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bhagwangola</td>
<td>Center of river mart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>Capital city and Administrative headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aurangabad, Saidabad</td>
<td>Commercial hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jiaganj</td>
<td>Commercial hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jangipur</td>
<td>Silk trade center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Azimganj</td>
<td>Commercial hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British period 1800-1947</td>
<td>Lalgola, Nashipur, Kandi, Panchthupi, Dhulian, Beldanga, Cossimbazar</td>
<td>Seats of residence cum administration of Loyal Raja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murshidabad, Cossimbazar, Bhagwangola</td>
<td>Center of business activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berhampore</td>
<td>Garrison and administrative town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gokarna, Burroa, Goas, Sherpur, Daultabazar,</td>
<td>Bazar and market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jangipur</td>
<td>Silk trade center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lalbagh</td>
<td>Administrative headquarters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Alam, I., Nandi, P. and Malik, U.S., 2010*

### 3.6 PRESENT PERIOD (1947-2001)

In the period, immediately following independence, urbanization has entered a new and more important and complex phase. The proportion of urban population to total population has increased at a slower pace from 7.8 percent in 1951 to 12.4 percent in 2001. But, there is constant increase in percentage share of urban population to total population. The growth rate of urban population during last 50 years has been the order of 8.9 percent per year. It is noted that the population of town and cities of above 20,000 (I+II+III category town) are growing more rapidly than the small town (IV-V). A study of distribution of urban population in different class size reveals that more than 50 percent of urban population prefers to live in
medium size towns of class II and IV category. The class–nomenclature of the towns is changing rapidly from preceding to next census year. Administrative and political development played an important role in urbanization in the past and they continued to be relevant even today.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Murshidabad has a continuous history of urbanization since 600 B.C. Over this period the country as well as the study area witnessed major cultural influences which have shaped the character of its urban societies. The urban centers in Murshidabad acquired an entirely new social and cultural dimension with the change of dynasties and political orders. The major socio-cultural processes namely Aryanisation, persianization and westernization have had an overwhelming impact on emergence of new social relationship among people living in towns and villages.

From 5th century B.C. to 18th century AD, Urban centers emerged, declined, or even vanished with the rise and fall of Kingdom and empires. During British rule in Murshidabad district administrative factor played an important role in the process of urbanization. The provincial capitals, the district headquarters and the tehsil town grew in importance. Clearly therefore administrative and political developments have played an important role in urbanization in the past and these processes are still present in the area till date.

In Murshidabad, many towns or city developed as a commercial center and trade center. In early historical period most of the urban centers were religious center. So, centers of pilgrimage and religious activity had played a role in the urbanization process of the district. Migration or changes of location of residence of people especially from rural to urban also have an immense impact on the urbanization process, though the role is not so significant one. It is clear from the history of urbanization in the district that the process of urbanization in district relating to past as well as present are highly varied and complex in nature. It is seen from the discussion on periodization that the seeds of the urban phenomenon were sown during the prehistoric period. The processes achieved its height during medieval period and British periods. It is also seen that the configuration of the urban phenomenon in the district reflects the same spatial bearing on urbanization and its spread effects, though directed by new sets of factors and process.

REFERENCES:


O’ Mally, (1997): Bengal District Gazetteers, Murshidabad, Govt. of West Bengal.