CHAPTER VII
REGIONAL URBAN FOCI

7.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses the nature and role of three important urban centres of the study region - Burdwan, Guskara and Memari. Of the three, Burdwan is the oldest and largest; it is also located at a central point thereby conferring on it certain additional advantages as a regional centre for collection and distribution of agricultural produce and for the concentration of a large number of services for the surrounding region. Consequently the chapter gives greater attention to Burdwan and its role as a regional urban focus.

Burdwan town is located at the central point of our study region. This focal location of the town is an important geographical factor that has helped in developing the physical linkages more or less uniformly with the surrounding rural areas. The historical development of the town is also closely linked with the development of rural economy of its surroundings. The present prosperity of Burdwan town is related to the agricultural development of its rural hinterland. The landuse pattern, density characteristics, occupational structure and social life style of the town bear a high degree of association with the rural economy. On the other hand, the marketing infrastructure provided by the central town has a significant impact on the development of agricultural economy of the region. Its central location as an urban market has made Burdwan accessible from all parts of the region thus enhancing the smooth use of urban market to the farmers.

Therefore, we shall discuss Burdwan town in its historical context, its population growth, its demographic characteristics and its present landuse in the context of Burdwan's role as a regional urban focus. The objective is to understand how, imprinted on its land and functional characteristics, its past and present urban roles for the regional rural economy have attributed a distinctiveness to the town.

Two other, much smaller in terms of size and influence, urban centres are also discussed in this chapter as they too play significant roles for their surrounding areas. We expect that some light on Memari and Guskara will help us understand the urbanization process operating in the region.
7.2. Role of Burdwan Town as a Regional Urban Focus

7.2.1. Geographical Location

Burdwan is located in the midst of a rich alluvial plain on the left (north) bank of the river Damodar and is the administrative centre of Burdwan district. The municipal town occupying an area of 23.20 square kilometres extends between 23°12' N and 23°15' N latitudes and 87°49' E and 87°53' E longitudes. The Banka - at one time a spill channel of the Damodar - flows from west to east through the central part of the town. It was a navigable river in the past, but has now become a municipal sewerage channel due to lack of maintenance by the municipal authority. The town is surrounded by rural mouzas on east, north and west and the river Damodar on the south.

Burdwan has been an important urban centre at various points in history. Its locational advantages are obvious: at the margin of upland terrain of the plateau fringe of Chotanagpur, along navigable rivers such as the Damodar and close enough to the Hooghly (till about Mughal times the town was reachable from Kalna and Dainhat through river channels), on the main road and rail lines, and in the middle of a prosperous agricultural region. We will now see how with time the role of Burdwan has changed as the regional economy prospered or declined relatively.

7.2.2. Historical Antecedent

The advantageous location of Burdwan had made it a seat of urban civilization since the ancient times. Oldham, (1894) assumed that it could have been the royal city of Gangarides, a separate state outside the Mourya empire, (B.C. 324 – B.C. 187). This sovereign state had flourished in trade and commerce; it used to export fine cotton and other textiles by inland and overseas water-routes to various countries of Europe and Southeast Asia (Smith, 1961).

The whole district formed a part of Gupta Kingdom with Burdwan town as the centre of activity (Sen and Chaudhury, 1973). Afterwards it came successively under small-time tribal kings and chiefs, Gopachandra, Harsha and the Senas (Stewart, 1971). In the ancient period, the urban focus of Burdwan was confined on the south of Banka nala (a lesser drainage channel) along the banks of Damodar because of the flourishing river-borne trade (Lahiri, 1994). This oldest part of Burdwan town is known as Kanchannagar. Kanchannagar was the earliest nucleus or focal point for urban growth in Burdwan.
The town began to grow rapidly after the Mohammedan invasion in the latter part of the 12th century. Particularly considerable physical extension of the town took place during the Mughal period (Sen and Chaudhuri, 1973). The Muslim rulers set up various administrative centres and military camps in the district. These centres later took the shape of trading centres and market towns. Burdwan, the oldest among these urban centres began to develop quite rapidly because of its locational advantages. (Lahiri, 1985). It became a major centre of Afghan power when Sher Afghan was ruling as a zamindar of Burdwan. Although, the oldest nucleus was at Kanchannagar, the Muslim rulers preferred to settle on the north bank of Banka nala. Burdwan became more important when in 1576 A.D. Pir Baharam Shakka, a nobleman from the court of Akbar, shifted his residence here (Mukherjee, 1910).

Burdwan came to be a part of the Mughal empire in 1610 A.D. when Kutb-Uddin, the foster-brother of Emperor Jehangir, killed Sher Afgan. Meherunnissa, the wife of Sher Afgan was sent to Delhi to later became the famous Nur Jahan. This event made Burdwan an important point on the political horizon of India. Aurangzeb's Governor of Bengal, Sultan Azam, also stayed for some time in Alamganj area of Burdwan town to suppress the Hindu rebellion (Stewart, 1971). This period was marked by a great improvement of the town as a whole. Its importance also rose due to the establishment of Burdwan Raj (Mukherjee, 1910). So far Burdwan had mainly four focal points of urban growth, namely, Kanchannagar, Pir Baharam, Alamganj and Khaja Anwar Berh - all of which were located on the banks of the Banka nala.

After the battle of Plassey in 1757 A.D., the East India Company established many kuthis (centres to organize trade locally) (Wilson, 1895). These centres stimulated further urban development. Burdwan experienced a new stimulus for urban growth after a kuthi was set up in the town. The company also set up an administrative centre near Radhanagar, north of the Banka. Soon this new centre of Radhanagar got connected with the older parts of the town through linear growth along Banka nala.

In the later part of the 18th century Burdwan became the administrative headquarter of Burdwan district, which included the present district of Hooghly as well (Ganguly, 1987). In this period, roads were constructed connecting Kalna and Katwa with Burdwan. This helped the agricultural products to reach Burdwan easily. Gradually Burdwan emerged as an important collecting centre of agricultural products of a large region.

In 1823, a flood of the Damodar forced the urban settlement to move northeastward away from banks of the Damodar. This was helped when Maharaja Mahatab Chand constructed the 'Mahatab Manjil' or the Rajbati (the palace) of Burdwan in the middle of the
town in the year 1832. This was the most important nucleus to be established in the whole urban history of Burdwan. Soon new construction - both houses of local elite and business-related buildings were initiated around the Rajhati. New areas such as Nutanganj, Borehat, Bhatchhala were added in the urban areas. Barabazar and Tentultala Bazaar developed as retail commercial centres. Nutanganj, Borehat and Alamganj also developed as centres for wholesale trade of agricultural products. The area around the Rajhati still bears the ambience of traditional commercial zones.

Another important nucleus developed in the south of Sadhanpur and Bajepratappur after coming of the railways in the latter part of 1854. North of railway line along the Katwa Road to Bajepratappur developed a railway colony, supported by small commercial establishments (Guha, 1989).

7.2.3. Development of the Town under Royal Patronage

The immense contribution of Burdwan raj family in the development of the town has been well documented (Samad, 1980). The Burdwan raj was one of the most important zamindari estates in the country. In 1657, Abu Rai, a merchant and banker originally from Lahore, was appointed the kotwal (law-keeper) and chowdhury (landlord) of Rekabi Bazar and Mughaltuli in Burdwan. Abu Rai's son Babu Rai acquired the pargana (pre-British administrative unit equivalent to a district) of Burdwan and three other estates. He was succeeded by his son Ghanashyam Rai. In 1689, Krishnaram Rai, the son of Ghanashyam Rai, was conferred, by an imperial farman (circular) of Aurangzeb, the titles of zamindar and chaudhuri of Burdwan Pargana. The real transformation from an ordinary zamindari into a strong local power, however, began in the early 18th century, when Kirtichand Rai was able to annex several parganas, his conquests being duly confirmed by an imperial farman of 1706. To these, Chitrasen Rai, who was the first member of the family to have received the title of Raja from Delhi, added 57 parganas from Gopbhum in 1744. Under an imperial farman, the Burdwan Raj came to combine the powers of fauzdar and zamindar and had become an almost independent power; and the time was not far off when an ailing Delhi would further accord the head of the family the title of Maharajadhiraj in 1768.

Burdwan town had gradually become a famous centre of activity (both administration and trade) in the Mughal period, and got mentioned in both Akbarnama and Ain-E-Akbari. But the real development-cum-prosperity of the town was initiated in the period of Burdwan raj that is from the latter part of the 17th century. Ghanashyam Rai was the pioneer among the rajas who contributed highly to the development of Burdwan town. He dug a large tank,
named Shyamsayar to meet the crisis of water for the resident of Burdwan town. Krishnaram Rai, the son of Ghanashyam Rai excavated another large tank called Krishnasayar surrounding which an ecological garden named 'Krishna Sayar Park' has recently been developed by the Municipality. These water tanks provided effective relief and water security in stressful times such as drought years. They now add to the tourist attraction of the town too.

Kirti Chandra, the successor of Jagatram Rai, founded the town of Kanchannagar, which is a part of present municipality area of Burdwan town. He also excavated the tank Rantisayar in the name of his mother in the year of 1708. Kritichand Rai constructed a fort at Talit in the northwestern periphery of the town to protect the town from Maratha invasion in the year of 1742.

All these early developments of the town took place just for the town only. Before the period of Tejchandra (1770-1832) no attempt was taken place by the rajas of Burdwan to make it a regional urban focus by integrating it with the agricultural economy of the surrounding region. Maharaj Tejchandra first planned to develop the town as a regional seat of trade and commerce at the heart of the prosperous agricultural hinterland (Chaudhuri, 1994). He developed a whole sale trade centre at Nutanganj area near his palace at Rajbati where businessmen were financed by the royal exchequer with six month’s interest-free loan to carry on trade on various agro-products of the rural areas (Chaudhuri, 1994). To save the town from the devastating floods of Damodar, Tejchandra disconnected the Banka nala from Damodar with the help of embankment (Choudhuri, 1994). He also made 23 roads in the town (Dawn, 1992).

After the battle of Plassey, the East India Company established the office of the collector and District Judge in the town of Burdwan. This step can be considered as the beginning of the development of modern Burdwan town. The various administrative and judiciary functions of the town turned it into a regional urban focus to which people from the surrounding rural areas began to come on a daily basis. In the first half of the 19th century the educational and medical infrastructure of the town started to develop when Mohatab Chand established one English School (C.M.S Higher Secondary School at present) and one health centre in the town around 1834. He contributed highly to combat malaria in the region with assured supply of medicine. The town began to beautify itself from his period.

Burdwan was constituted a municipality with an area of 8.75 sq. miles in 1865. In 1872, at the time of the first official Indian Census, the total population of the municipality was only 32,321. This was less than what was recorded in the previous census of 1814. The
main cause of this decline was the outbreak of famous ‘Burdwan fever’. The construction of water-purifying plant as a measure to combat the fever was taken up in 1881 by the Maharaja of Burdwan.

Maharaja Vijay Chand (1902 - 1941), the successor of Aftab Chand, contributed a lot in the development of medical and educational infrastructure of the town. He established the technical school, medical school and the hostel, Vijay Chand Hospital, Harisabha Girls' School, Raj College, Sahitya Parishad and so on. He also did beautification of the town with the construction of Curzon Gate, Ramnath Udyan (garden), Vijay Behar, Clock Tower, Vijay Theatre and renovation of Pirbaharam. After the construction of Vijay Toran popularly known as Curzon Gate in 1904 the B.C. Road connecting Rajbati with Vijay Toran became the busy commercial retail centre of the town because of its nearness to the railway station and bus terminal of the town. People from the surrounding and even distant areas started to use this urban market because of its high degree of accessibility and Burdwan town began to take the shape of a regional market centre.

Maharaj Vijay Chand was also the first person in the raj family who realized the necessity of the development of surrounding rural areas to make the Burdwan town a prosperous regional urban focus. For the development of infrastructure like health, education, drinking water and transport in the rural areas he established Union Board by elected members of tax-paying class. After the abolition of the zamindari system in (1953 – '54) Maharaja Uday Chand handed over all his landed property in the town to the Municipal authority for the development of infrastructure, especially educational including University and Women's college.

In brief, it can be said that the development of Burdwan town as the regional urban focus has taken place gradually over the historic period specially under royal patronage which can be considered as a significant factor in the development of smooth rural-urban integration in the region.

7.2.4. The Changing Urban Foci of Burdwan

The focus of urban activities in Burdwan town has changed several times (Lahiri-Dutt, 1994). Initially Kanchannagar (on the southwestern part of the town) was the main focus of urban activities (Figure 7.1). The reason behind the growth of this focus was the location of Kanchannagar on the bank of Damodar, which was the important means of
CHANGING NUCLEUS FOR URBAN GROWTH

BURDWAN TOWN

Source: Burdwan District Gazetteer

Figure No.: 7.1
communication of the then popular river-borne trade. Damodar was an important trade route and Kanchannagar was an important node along it.

During the Mughal period Puratan Chawk area was developed as the major residential area of the town. Later on, better off residences moved in the Radhanagar area near Vijay Toran because of the establishment of kuthis (centres for revenue collection) there.

The Raj family of Burdwan built their court and residential palace in the central part of the city. At present this area is known as the Rajbati-Uttarphatak and is occupied mainly by non-bengalee business families relate to or brought in by the royal family. The wholesale market of the town serving the whole region was developed by Maharaja Tejchandra in Alamganj area near the Rajbati which is still the main centre of trading activities of the town. With this development Kanchannagar started to lose its prosperity.

As railways were introduced in the later part of 1854, another important nucleus developed in the northeastern part of the city. After the construction of Vijay Toran in 1903, the intervening areas of Rajbati and Vijay Toran known as B.C. Road started to develop as a busy commercial retail area supporting/servicing both the urban and rural consumers from the surrounding areas. Later on, district administrative offices were developed on the eastern side of Vijay Toran. The central bus terminus of the town was also constructed near the Vijay Toran making it the most accessible point of the town from the rural surroundings. It has remained the central business district (CBD) of the town till now. Some smaller centres like Golapbag, Nilpur, College more, Sadarghat, Keshabganj Chatti, Bajepratappur etc. have developed recently in the outside areas away from the CBD with the physical expansion of the town.

7.2.5. Growth of Burdwan

Following the discussion on the historical development of the town we can now look at the growth of Burdwan in late 19th and 20th century from the demographic point of view. The first experimental census of the town was done in 1869 after the establishment of Municipality in 1865. According to this experimental census the then population of the town was 46,121. The population size of the town declined to 30,522 in 1901 because of the outbreak of Burdwan fever, which was estimated to have killed about five thousand inhabitants within six months (Paterson, 1910) besides large-scale emigration. In the 20th century Burdwan town grew steadily and ultimately the population size reached 2,45,079 in 1991. The town presently has approximately 3,00,000 population.
Table 7.1: Growth of Burdwan Town: 1901-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Decadal variation</th>
<th>Growth rate (%)</th>
<th>Rank among towns of W.B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>30,522</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>35,921</td>
<td>5,399</td>
<td>17.69</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>34,616</td>
<td>-1,305</td>
<td>-3.63</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>39,618</td>
<td>5,002</td>
<td>14.45</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>62,910</td>
<td>23,292</td>
<td>58.79</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>75,376</td>
<td>12,466</td>
<td>19.82</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1,07,881</td>
<td>32,505</td>
<td>43.12</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,43,318</td>
<td>35,437</td>
<td>32.85</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1,67,364</td>
<td>24,049</td>
<td>16.78</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2,45,079</td>
<td>77,715</td>
<td>46.44</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 7.1, it is quite clear that Burdwan experienced a steady growth of population in the 20th century. The growth of population was very slow up to 1931. The decade of 1911-21 even experienced negative growth of population due to the occurrence of epidemics, malaria and influenza in 1919-20. After 1931 Burdwan experienced rapid growth of population up to 1991. Therefore, we can identify the year of 1931 as the major 'demographic divide' of Burdwan. The rapid growth of population in the post-independence period can be explained both by the huge immigration from the rural surrounds followed by the development of transport network, and the expanded economic activities of the town. Immigration of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, due to partition of the country, has also helped the population of the town to grow rapidly.

However, the Table 7.1 also shows that in spite of the steady rise in the population, Burdwan gradually lost its size rank among the urban centres of West Bengal. At the beginning of the century it was the fourth largest urban centre in West Bengal just after Calcutta, Howrah and Serampur. Since the decade of 30s, especially in the post-independence period, Burdwan has been displaced gradually by the industrial towns like Durgapur, Asansol, Bhatpara, Panihati etc. Ultimately in 1991 it became the eighth ranking town of West Bengal. Thus, while it is true that the town has grown rapidly, it is also true that it has not grown quite as rapidly as some other towns of the state. This is possible a good sign, in view of the agricultural development experienced by its surrounding region. It is possible that some of the surpluses were locally absorbed within the agricultural region to give rise to large villages, rural market centres and smaller urban units.
Burdwan experienced rather fluctuating growth rates of population in the 20th century (Table 7.1). The highest rate of growth (58.79 percent) was experienced during the decade of 1931-'41. The growth rate was also high, that is, well above 40 per cent in the decades of 1950s and 1980s. Below 20 per cent of growth rate was also noted in the decades of 1901-'10, 1921-'30, 1941-'50 and 1971-'80. The town, though of very low level (3.63 per cent), also experienced negative growth rate, in 1910s. This negative growth of population took place because of four consecutive floods of Damodar river in 1913, 1914, 1917 and 1918 causing heavy loss of lives and property in the town.

In a nutshell it can be said that Burdwan experienced very slow rate of growth up to 1931 and after that the growth rate increased but with high fluctuations between 16.78 per cent and 58.79 per cent (Table 7.1). Such fluctuations can again be correlated with the agricultural fortunes of the immediate hinterland of Burdwan. During the two decades of 1960s and 1970s, when the seed-fertilizer technology along with canalized irrigation raised agricultural productivity manifold, then the growth of Burdwan town slackened. Agricultural growth reaches a peak and then became stagnant in 1980s, and Burdwan's population began to grow rapidly.

7.2.6. Present Demographic Character

Demographic characteristics, in the form of density of population, female-male ratio, literacy etc. are significant social indicators in understanding the nature and the process of development of any urban centre. To analyze the role of Burdwan as the regional urban focus, we examine these demographic characteristics with the expectation that they will throw some light on the nature of rural-urban relationship in our study region.

Population Density Pattern

The expression of urban population density is referred to as gross density (GD) of population and is derived according to the equation GD = P/GA, where the number of people comprising the population (P) is divided by the total area (GA). Here the unit of area is taken without considering whether the area is devoted to residential uses. Densities differ in residential, industrial and commercial land use zones, vary from city to city, and from one point of time to another. It depends largely on the intensity of use. The intensity of use of a specific type changes for a variety of causes, including changes in lifestyles and living preferences, changes in the means of production of urban enterprises, changes in the use of urban space etc. (Reddy, 1989).
Density of population is an important demographic aspect in studying any urban centre. The overall population density of Burdwan is much higher than the required threshold density (400 persons/square kilometre) of urban functions. According to the 1991 census the density of population for the town was 14,364 which is significantly higher than that of 1971 (6,325 persons/square kilometre) and 1981 (7,386 persons/square kilometre). The remarkable increase in the density of population between 1981 and 1991 (6,978 persons/square kilometre) can be explained by the high degree of immigration from the surrounding rural areas because of better amenities than the rural counterparts. The development of agriculture made sizeable surplus to provide the landowning classes the necessary capital for funding their residential move to the town.

To understand the pattern of density distribution within the town we can take the help of wardwise population density distribution map (Figure 7.2). The map shows that vast intra-urban differences in density exist, with some areas having more than 25,000 persons per square kilometre as well as some areas having below 5,000 persons per square kilometre. From the density distribution pattern it is found that the highest density zone of the town occupies the central areas of the town (Figure 7.2) from where the densities start to decline to the peripheral areas in all directions except the northeast. The northeastern periphery of the town is densely populated because of the location of railway station, railway staff colonies and a busy wholesale market of rice-trading activity.

From the density distribution pattern another significant feature of the town arises. The density of population is higher in areas of busy and flourishing economic activities. The central parts of the town carry both high trading activities as well as a dense residential population. This reveals a compact nature of the town, which is unlike the western cities. The suburbanization process is still in its infancy in towns like Burdwan. Here we have only a few residential areas of lower density, characterized by the lack of vertical use of land, developed recently in the peripheral areas of the town. Motorized, private transport is yet beyond the reach of lower and middle classes, and the roads too are not wide enough to accommodate cars. As a result, the attraction of living near the central areas has not yet waned and Burdwan has remained a compact city.

**Density Gradient**

The distribution of population within any city is complex when seen in detail, but it is believed that in most urban settlements the population density declines with distance from the central or inner parts of the cities to their peripheries (Johnson, 1972). The decline in
DENSITY OF POPULATION
BURDWAN TOWN
1991

Persons per Km²

Above 25000
20001-25000
15001-20000
10001-15000
5001-10000
5000 & below

DENSITY GRADIENT
BURDWAN TOWN
1991

Density per sq. km. in '000

Distance from city centre (in Km)

Figure No. - 7.2
density usually follows a regular pattern. Colin Clark (1951) has shown that in a wide range of cities, with a variety of locations and at different times in the past, population density decreases at a constant rate with increasing distance from the city centre.

Although a variety of population density functions have since been tested (for example see McDonald and Bowman, 1976; Zielinski, 1980) Clark (1951) had first provided convincing empirical evidence to suggest that population density tends to decline in an exponential fashion with increasing distance from the central business district (CBD). That is, if population density is plotted in a graph against distance from the CBD, the resulting curve drops quite steeply at first, and then more gradually (Cadwallader, 1985).

The gradient of density decline in any urban centre depends on the spatial pattern of the intensity of landuse, which is usually less towards the peripheries. The intensity of landuse is again dependent on the land values. Therefore, the density-decline profile resembles the land value model quite strongly (Hartshorn, 1980). The most desirable and hence most expensive sites for all urban land uses lie close to the city centre where maximum accessibility is provided by converging transport routes. The further a site is from the city centre, the lower is its land value because of higher transport cost. These lower land values encourage lower intensity of use away from the centre and this lower intensity of use, specially residential landuse, produces lower densities of population towards the peripheries of cities (Johnson, 1981).

Most of the earlier works on the gradient of population density had been concerned with the Western cities. Berry, Simmons and Tennant (1963) first made an attempt to compare the density gradients found in Western and non-Western cities. According to their view, while both types of city show a negative exponential relationship between density and distance from the city centre, the manner in which their gradients have developed has been different. In Western cities population density gradients become flatter over time (Newling, 1966; Mills and Ohetak, 1976) whereas in non-Western cities, the central density continues to rise through time.

Now, in the context of the above theoretical discussion we can justify the density-decline pattern of Burdwan town. In this study we have selected the geometric centre of Burdwan town as the city centre because of its nearness to the busiest commercial centre of the town that is, Vijay Toran (formerly called Curzon Gate) and B.C. Road area. In selecting the city centres of India, Brush (1968) had suggested that the central point should be identified by well-informed advice of the local officials, planning studies and resident scholars, supplemented by field reconnaissance. There is no uniform criterion and, therefore,
the selection involved a subjective element (Reddy, 1989). Our selection of city centre is also not free from subjectivity. Being born and brought up in the town we have identified the geometric centre as the city centre easily because of its location near the commercial centre.

Like most of the non-Western urban centres Burdwan also represents a very steep density gradient with a central area density of above 30,000 persons per square kilometre to less than 5,000 persons per square kilometre in the peripheral areas (Figure 7.2). Hartshorn (1980) justified that usually smaller cities are generally more compact than the larger metropolitan areas thus having steeper density-decline gradients and greater population densities at the city centre because of less specialized non-residential functions in the core area. The CBD area of Burdwan town is intensively used both for commercial and residential uses, because of which the density of population is much higher in the core areas. Household density is also very high in this central part for its higher land values. The most prosperous residential area of the town (Radhanagar) is also located near the city centre. All these factors together helped to increase the central area density of the town. On the other hand, areal expansion, reorganization of the municipal boundary and the development of low-density residential areas by the immigrants from surrounding rural counterparts have helped the density gradient to fall sharply towards the peripheral areas.

According to Berry and Horton (1970) in most of the urban centres both in developed and underdeveloped countries, the density gradient varies considerably from the centre to different direction. Detailed analysis of density gradient for the Burdwan town also highlights that the gradient of density decline is not uniform in all direction from the central part. From the density distribution map (Figure 7.2) it can be found that the peripheral density is very low in the western part thus giving the density decline a steeper gradient. The western periphery has low density because of the low importance of urban activities in the southwest and the institutional use of land (University, Rural Technology Centre, Eco-park, Science Centre, Water Works etc.). On the other hand, towards the eastern, southern and northern peripheries the density gradient is gentler as these areas are occupied by residential housing. Towards the northeast the rate of density decline is very low (Figure 7.2) because of its busy commercial activities and multi-storied residential uses like housing colonies of the Railways. Taking all the directions together the rate of density decline is very high in Burdwan thus bearing the character of non-Western cities.

Another important aspect of the density gradient for Burdwan is its constancy. Over the period from 1971 to 1991, the density gradient remained more or less unchanged with a
constant rate of density decline from the centre to the periphery (Samanta, 1991). This is also another important characteristics of non-Western urban centres.

**Female-Male Ratio (FMR)**

Female-male ratio (FMR) is an important demographic characteristic throwing light on the migration pattern of an urban centre. The functional nature of an urban centre is also indicated by the female-male ratio as it is directly related to the in and out migration with family for residential purposes.

Female-male ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males which is liable to a remarkable change in an urban centre experiencing both in-migration and out-migration. The female-male ratio of Burdwan between 1901 and 1991 has undergone a remarkable change. In immigration chain first takes place the in-migration of male working population from the surrounding areas, predominantly adults, to serve the expanding secondary and tertiary occupations of the urban area. Later on, these male migrants shift their families to the urban centre from their original place of residence and thus female-male ratio increases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male population</th>
<th>Female population</th>
<th>Females per 1,000 males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1901</td>
<td>19,413</td>
<td>15,609</td>
<td>804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>20,527</td>
<td>15,394</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>19,583</td>
<td>15,033</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>23,485</td>
<td>16,133</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>38,050</td>
<td>24,860</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>43,101</td>
<td>32,275</td>
<td>749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>60,286</td>
<td>47,595</td>
<td>790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>79,322</td>
<td>63,996</td>
<td>807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>88,677</td>
<td>78,687</td>
<td>887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,28,651</td>
<td>1,16,428</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is quite clear that the female-male ratio of Burdwan town experienced a declining trend from 1901 to 1941. In 1901 the ratio was 804 which decreased steadily to 653 in 1941. During this period the general population growth rate was also very low (Table 7.1). Whatever immigration took place during this period consisted predominantly of male workers. Most of them originated from the surrounding areas. In
general the residential environment of the town was also deteriorating during this period due to the frequent occurrence of epidemic, malaria, influenza and also annual floods of the Banka and the Damodar. As a consequence the immigration pattern was dominated by male migrants pushing down the female-male ratio.

Since 1941 the female-male ratio experienced a steady rise due to the influx of refugees with families after the partition. Later on, some improvements of residential infrastructure especially of the transportation network of roads connecting Burdwan with its hinterland made it the most accessible nodal point of the region. The tertiary sector workers of both the town and its surrounding areas began to choose the Burdwan town as their place of residence because of its amenities and the high degree of accessibility with both industrial regions of Calcutta-Hooghly and Durgapur-Asansol belts as well as the surrounding rural areas. The increasing female-male ratio from 653 in 1941 to 905 in 1991 essentially bears the flourishing residential character of the town.

From the spatial pattern of female-male ratio (Samanta, 1991) it is also found that the ratio is highest in the peripheral areas which gradually declines towards the central areas. This feature also explains that the peripheral areas of the town are rapidly changing into residential districts to accommodate the migrants from the surrounding rural areas. The infrastructural gap between the town and its surrounding rural counterpart is facilitating the development of residential blocks in the peripheral areas of the town. Sometimes, even the rich farmers with productive agricultural land in villages prefer to keep a residence in the town and commute to his place of work in villages. This fact is reflected in the census data, helping to improve the female-male ratio. The improving FMR of Burdwan, therefore, indicates a more intensive rural-urban linkage.

7.2.7. Urban Economy

Since the historical past Burdwan town has functioned as a successful regional urban market in the midst of a vast stretch of prosperous agricultural hinterland. Burdwan is the largest agricultural trading centre of entire radh Bengal (western bank of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly till the plateaus, roughly) besides providing numerous other services. The distribution pattern of workforce among different sectors of the economy offers some idea of the economic bases and function of any urban centre. Though the relative importance of different sectors of the economy has changed over time, the tertiary sector activities have continued to remain the predominant functional base of Burdwan since 1961 (Table 7.3). This is not uncommon for similar urban centres. Raza (1980) noted that tertiарization of
economy is the most outstanding feature of most of the present day third world cities. In this section we have seen the changes in the proportion of workforce in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors over the period of 1961 to 1991. Work participation data was made available from 1961 only, and hence we could not go back further in time.

Table 7.3: Sectoral Distribution of Workforce of Burdwan Town (in Percentage), 1961 to 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>21.14</td>
<td>77.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>19.69</td>
<td>69.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>84.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>90.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table we can analyze the changes in the relative importance of different sectors of economy in providing the functional basis of the town. In 1961 the share of primary sector was only 1.76 per cent which increased to 11.07 per cent in 1971 and then again started to decline reaching 7.28 per cent in 1991. The increasing importance of primary sector economy between 1961 and 1971 was mainly due to the physical expansion of municipal boundaries that included rural stretches of peripheral land. Even now, the major contribution to the primary sector of the town comes from the peripheral areas (Samanta, 1991). The secondary sector includes the workers in agro-processing units of rice, oil and chira (pressed rice) mills. Not much expansion has taken place in this sector of the economy since 1961. As a result, the secondary sector has lost its relative share of the workforce gradually from 21.14 per cent in 1961 to only 2.25 per cent in 1991 (Table 7.3).

Tertiary sector economy in the form of trade and commerce, and services has now come to dominate the functional bases of town. The relative importance of this sector has continuously increased from 77.10 per cent in 1961 to as much as 90.67 per cent in 1991. Trading of agricultural products especially rice from the prosperous rural hinterland is an important activity of the town. There are several wholesale markets (such as Alamganj, Bajepratappur etc.) in the town dealing with wholesale trading of agricultural produce. Retail business of both consumer and capital goods is significantly flourishing with growing demand from both expanding urban and rural demands. Several multi-storied business complexes have come up in the 90's along the main commercial thoroughfares like B.C. Road, and the road connecting Vijay Toran to railway station via central bus terminus. These complexes house a large number of shops dealing with various kinds of durable and non-
durable consumer goods. Present-day agricultural development is dependent on technology, and shops near the central bus stand meet that technological demand especially of agricultural machinery and fertilizer-insecticide inputs. In addition, cultivators from the surrounding hinterland use the urban market to sell their surplus agricultural products. This trade and commercial economy of the town is almost entirely run by informal workers coming mainly from the rural areas. In this way, trade and commerce of the town also integrates the rural economy with the urban leading to a high degree of rural-urban interaction.

The service sector of the economy of Burdwan includes various aspects of infrastructure and district administration. Infrastructural services include a higher level of health infrastructure (District Hospital, mushrooming nursing homes, private medical practitioners etc.), educational infrastructure (three degree colleges, one medical college, two polytechnic colleges, the university etc.), and banking infrastructure which together comprise 27.84 per cent of total workforce of the town. The transportation sector, consisting 13.78 per cent of the workforce, is also an important element of the tertiary sector because of the locational advantage of Burdwan as an important transportation node.

The tertiary sector economy of Burdwan is expanding at a high rate but this expansion is mainly informal in nature. Except the railway, banking and administrative services, the entire tertiary economy of the town is run by informal type of workforce (see Chapter 8). Some of these informal sector workers are from the surrounding rural areas. Tertiarization is a significant characteristic of urbanization all over the world, but the basic difference between the developed and developing world lies in its nature. In the developing world, tertiarization is taking place mostly in the informal sector of economy (Mukherjee, 2000). Burdwan town also bears the characteristic of an expanding informal tertiary economy. The informal activities of Burdwan requiring more or less no skill and no capital (such as rickshaw pulling) are dominated by migrants from the poverty-stricken rural areas of adjacent states. However, a large section of rural unemployed youth, mostly from the middle class families, living in rural areas within the region rush to Burdwan town in search of jobs either in the formal or in the informal sectors.

### 7.2.8. Quality of Life and its Spatial Pattern

An urban community is not a homogeneous mass. Within the confines of an urban society, both spatial and temporal variations occur in respect of the quality or standards of life of its residents (Timms, 1971). Review of the present literature reveals three possible
social patterns that have emerged during the history of urban civilization. The socio-economic indicators on an intra-urban scale, may: (a) be uniformly distributed; (b) have their greatest concentration at the core; and (c) be spread out into the peripheral areas.

While the first case is almost a theoretical 'optimum' which have and will never exist in reality, the second is viewed by some authors (Herbert and Thomas, 1982) to be a transitional phase between a pre-industrial and a post-industrial economy. According to them, in the early stages of city development rudimentary versions of most of the urban services emerged near the city centre in order to serve the relatively compact urban area. With continued urban growth there was a concomitant growth in the scale, degree of specialization of range of services provided. The third case is found in the developed countries of the world where the 'compact city' has become a matter of the past and people have moved out of the central congested parts of the city. As a result, the outer parts of the city are perceived to be qualitatively better than the inner parts.

Intra-urban distribution of social well-being was for a long time considered as a function of physical conditions. Cullingworth (1972), however, pointed out that identical physical environments might be associated with quite different social conditions.

The quality of urban population is usually manifested through attributes which may be presented numerically only with difficulty (Knox, 1975). 'Quality of life' studies are usually done with the help of economic activities and their efficiency. In some cases social and demographic indicators are also used.

In view of above discussion we have analyzed the spatial pattern of the quality of life in Burdwan town. According to a prior study (Samanta, 1992) done with the help of demographic parameters (backward population, agricultural labourers, non-workers, marginal workers and illiterates) indicating poor quality of life, there is a strong intra-urban variation in the quality of life (Figure 7.3) with Burdwan.

The wide range of multivariate score values (+2.1 to -0.81) supports the existing pattern of spatial variation in the quality of urban population in Burdwan. As all the socio-economic parameters taken in this study are related to the poor quality of life, the positive score values indicate poor quality of urban life whereas negative scores indicate good quality on the other hand. We have identified urban people with better quality of life as 'privileged' and those with poor quality as 'deprived'.

From the figure (Figure 7.3) it is clear that the quality of life is higher in the central part of the town. On the other hand, peripheral areas have poor qualities of life. The highest
VARIATIONS IN THE QUALITY OF URBAN POPULATION

BURDWAN TOWN, 1981

Source: Samanta, 1991
degree of deprivation in the quality of life is found in areas like Kanchannagar, Udaypalli, Rathtala which formed the oldest nuclei of the town in the southwestern part on the bank of river Damodar. The area is far away from the present nuclei. Lack of proper accessibility is another factor limiting the quality of life in that area. Other deprived parts of the town are also found in the northeastern and southern peripheries. In these areas the low quality of life is mainly due to the incidence of lower literacy, lower work participation rate, higher level of backward population and marginal workers. On the other hand, people of central areas of the town are privileged owing to higher literacy rate, high incidence of job opportunities and lower occurrence of agricultural labourers, backward population and marginal workers.

Intra-urban inequality is a common phenomenon in the present world, especially the third world urban centres. Burdwan, being no exception, also represents the same picture. We can justify whether from this spatial pattern of the quality of life emerges any core-periphery pattern between the inner and outer parts of the city.

Before justifying the spatial pattern of urban quality of life with core-periphery model, let us explain both the model and the meaning of the terms 'core' and 'periphery' in the context of a single urban centre. The core-periphery model is a generalization of spatial structure of an economic system, based on the unequal distribution of power in economy and society, consisting of two major components: a centre or core region and a periphery (Goodball, 1987). Core-periphery relations were first observed by John Friedmann (1966), with whom the core-periphery models is most closely associated, as the second stage in a four-stage sequence of the development of the space economy. The 'core' is defined as the area exhibiting the most intensive landuse characterized by the concentration of consumer services, offices and entertainment facilities (Herbert and Thomas, 1982). The periphery in contrast is less intensively developed and comprises a mixture of functions. The differences are much more than those allowed by traditional CBD boundaries and often comprise socio-economic characteristics of the people per se. In Burdwan the quality of population is markedly different between the inner and outer parts. Privileged people inhabit the core, whereas deprived people characterized the peripheral areas. Therefore, a strong core-periphery pattern, the essential character of third world urban centres, exist in the quality of life of the residents in Burdwan.

Such a polarized pattern of development leads to economic dualism, in which the deprived areas co-exist with the privileged ones within the city. Existence of such polarity in the quality of population forming distinctive belts has considerable policy implication. In most cases Indian urban planners take a city to be a homogeneous mass which is farthest
from reality. However, while making policy prescriptions planners must pay considerable
attention to the deprived areas of a city. The planning process may be successful only if such
deprived areas are taken into consideration and given special attention in times of planning.

7.3. The Other Urban Foci of the Region

Except Burdwan there are two other lower order urban centres in our study region:
Guskara and Memari (Figure 6.5). They are medium sized towns placed at a lower level in
the urban hierarchy of the region. The census of India defines towns with a size category
varying between 20,000 to less than 1,00,000 as medium towns (Singh and Krishnan, 1997).
Again the Government of India covers towns with a size range between 20,000 and 3,00,000
under its Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns Programme (Wishwakarma
and Jha, 1983). Researchers (Diddee and Octania, 1993; Singh and Krishnan, 1997), for the
time being have taken the wide range of 20,000 to 3,00,000 population size to define
'medium towns' and the size of less than 20,000 as 'small towns' (Mallick, 1979). In 1991,
Guskara and Memari had population sizes of 26,995 and 20,690 respectively. Therefore, we
prefer to define Guskara and Memari as medium towns of the region as their present sizes are
well above 20,000.

In the study of rural-urban interaction these two medium towns deserve special
attention because of their crucial roles in integrating urban and rural areas of the region.
Whatever criteria or limits are to be taken, medium and small towns may always be
perceived as a linkage or bridge between an essentially rural-based society and space at the
lower end, and the urbanized space having big cities at the upper end (Bose, 1972). In this
way they play a significant role in controlling the flow in the settlement hierarchy, up and
down reciprocally (Singh and Singh, 1979). They serve as catalysts for the economic
integration between rural and urban areas besides performing the social role with providing
several services for their surrounding areas (Singh and Krishnan, 1997). Planners and Policy
makers conceive medium towns as an instrument for quickening the rate of growth,
development and transformation of any region (Singh and Singh, 1979, p. 23). They are also
treated as growth centres especially in the developing world (UNO, 1978, Sundaram, 1978).
Johnson (1972) highlighted that these smaller towns have greater potential capacity to utilize
rural manpower and elicit human creativity than the large urban centres.

K. R. Dikshit (1997) has identified large cities as 'problem areas' and medium towns
as 'growth centres of the future'. He has excellently explained the significant role of medium
towns in the integration of rural and urban areas played since the historic period. In his words, medium towns usually occupy focal points in the vast rural hinterland. These focal points have a genuine symbiotic relationship with the countryside. They originated as central places in the pre-industrial phase of economy and have largely retained their character as weekly market places, administrative headquarters of a district or tehsil or as specialized trade centres for certain commodities, with some high level medical and educational facilities and a few financial institutions like banks and co-operative societies (Mishra, 1979). However, basically they have remained centres of trade over the centuries. The modern development of transport has made them more accessible and they have retained their agricultural economic base. They have at the same time grown in importance as regional markets and have acquired new functions like industries. They also represent regional culture and extend social interaction between the town and its surrounding rural region (Sinha, 1990).

Researchers and planners have identified medium towns as diversion centres to decentralize urban development (Despande and Arunachalam, 1980). These settlements would be facilitated to grow into 'service centres' which would service the rural hinterland and would also act as 'growth poles' to diffuse development into rural areas (Benninger, 1997). Wanmali (1988) suggested that the prevailing dichotomy in rural and urban development in developing countries can be reduced through the spatial planning in which the development of medium and small towns should get priority as service centres or growth centres of the future. The Government of India introduced the Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT) programme in 1979-80 to reduce the primacy of large cities and develop small and medium towns for effective and balanced regional development. It was hoped that dispersal of industries and other economic activities to medium towns will partly redeem the overcrowding of large cities, and conform to the development of effective nodes in the urban system that is more conductive to development (Dikshit, 1997). However, the IDSMT did not prove to be very successful (GOI, 1988).

Rondinelli (1983) defined medium towns as 'secondary cities'. He suggests that to achieve widespread development, in both social and spatial terms, a geographically dispersed pattern of investment should be devised. This, he argued, can be materialized through the promotion of integrated system of secondary cities which provides potential access to markets for people living in any part of the country or region (Rondinelli, 1983). Phadke (1997) suggested that these medium towns would be multifunctional in character with industry, trade and commerce and services at the core. Manufacturing activity would be
primarily oriented to regional resource potentialities. raw materials or skills. Agriculture would be the ubiquitous source of local material input. A few might be based on external sources of raw materials but their final products might find a market in the region. These would provide necessary inputs to regional economy and there would thus develop spatial linkages between the town and the country ensuring their complementary development (Phadke, 1997).

In the national urban policy, medium towns have been recognized as centres for regional development and their proposed roles are as follows: they would be multifunctional in character with industry, trade and commerce and services at the core. Manufacturing activity would be primarily oriented to regional resource potentialities, raw materials or skills. Agriculture would be the ubiquitous source of local raw material input. A few might be based on external sources of raw materials but their final products might find a market in the region. These would provide necessary inputs to regional economy and there would thus develop spatial linkage between the town and the country ensuring their complementarity (Phadke, 1997).

Thus, we find that small urban centres have generated a lively debate in the urban literature in India. From the point of view action/planning, not much result has been achieved in spite of various programmes (GOI, 1988). The larger cities continue to hog the limelight of academic/administrative attention, while the vital roles played by smaller towns in bringing the rural and urban closer continue to remain relatively unacknowledged.

7.3.1. Memari

Memari, covering an area of 19.80 square kilometre, is an important medium-sized market town located in the eastern part of the region. It is located 25 km east of Burdwan and is connected with Burdwan by both the Howrah-Burdwan main line of Eastern Railway and the G.T. road (NH 2). The population size of 20,690 in 1991 has become 35 thousands approximately by mid-90s (Konar, 1996). Because of its locational advantages, the town has become an important centre of trade and commerce with the development of agriculture in the region especially since 1960s. Since 1950s, the expansion of metalled road and automobile transport took place between Calcutta on the east and Durgapur-Asansol industrial belt on the west, putting Memari in a more advantageous position. The monopoly of traders of this centre over railway transport began to be challenged by road transport and the former began to lose its ground. The affluent peasants from the rich agricultural area of Raina, Jamalpur and Memari police stations started to invest their surplus capital in
commercial activities of consumer goods and trading activities of different agro-inputs and agricultural products (rice, potato, jute etc.) by building trading centres and shops by the roadside.

With the development of irrigation (both D.V.C. canals and private shallow tube wells) and storage facilities of agro-products, drastic improvement took place in potato cultivation of the region by mid-fifties. The region's first cold storage was constructed in Memari in the co-operative sector. Private capital rushed into potato cultivation, storage and trading activities of the surrounding rural areas of which Memari became the nodal market. The rush towards potato cultivation indicates the transformation of agricultural economy of the region into cash-earning commercial one in which Memari played a significant role by providing storage and marketing facilities. At present Memari-I block has 18 cold storages (largest concentration in West Bengal) of which nine are located within Memari town, itself.

Since 1960s small and medium sized manufacturing units started to develop in Memari most of them being agro-processing in nature utilizing agricultural products of the region as raw material. Agro processing units of the towns are composed of two modernized rice mills, two bran oil mills, two chira mills and seven mustard oil mills. Small manufacturing units employing 5 to 20 or more workers includes five screw factories, one paper mill, five soap factories, four ice cream factories, six mustard crushers, six shaw mills, one aluminium factory, four steel furniture factories, four elastic tape production centres, one mosaic tiles factory, one coal briquette factory besides a good number of mechanical and electrical workshops with lathe, drilling, welding and grinding developed as ancillary units.

Electification of railways put Memari in an even better position by reducing its travel distance to two hours to reach Calcutta (state capital) and half an hour to Burdwan (district headquarter). Various state and central government departments of administration including the sub-divisional office of the D.V.C. were set up in Memari because of its improved locational advantages. Hundreds of middle class people working in Calcutta, Burdwan, Asansol, Durgapur and several other place on the Calcutta-Asansol section of the Eastern Railway, started to choose Memari as their residence because of its high degree of accessibility and urban municipal amenities. Besides railways, 35 bus routes originate from or terminate here and more than 150 inter-district or inter-state buses ply through Memari at present. People from lower middle class families selected Memari over Burdwan because of its nearness to their village property, cheaper land value and lower cost of living than Burdwan.
Following the prosperity of trading activities of the town, the infrastructural development also took place but at a slower rate. Due to the slower rate of infrastructural development and the nearness of the town to Burdwan (a large Class-I urban centre) Memari could not prosper as a residential town up to the last decade. This is indicated by the poor female-male ratio (885 females per 1000 males) of the town in 1991 census. In the present decade Memari started to develop its residential character because of the improvements, in infrastructure. A section of affluent landowning class from the rural surroundings also began to shift their families to Memari simply for its better amenities including health, education and communication facilities.

The educational infrastructure of the town is constituted by one degree college, two higher secondary schools, one high school and one high madrasa and eleven primary schools which have together improved the literacy rate from 34.8 per cent in 1951 to 65 per cent in 1991. The setting up of the degree college has added a new dimension in the education infrastructure of Memari since 1980s.

Health infrastructure of Memari consists of a primary health centre with 100 beds and eleven doctors posted there and around twenty private practitioners. The trading and commercial activities of the town are supported by three commercial and three co-operative banks. There are two branch offices of Life Insurance Corporation and General Insurance Corporation in Memari. Three cinema halls are also providing the entertainment facilities.

7.3.2. Guskara

Guskara is another lower order urban centre of the region functioning as a subsidiary to Burdwan. It is located in the northwestern part of the region 32 kilometres away from Burdwan (Figure 6. 5). Since 1961 it has been designated as a non-municipal town. The municipality came into being in 1988. Situated on Burdwan-Sahebganj loop line of the Eastern Railway, it is the headquarter of both Ausgram police station and Ausgram-I block. Initially the municipality had nine wards, which have become 16 in number at present by both areal expansion and ward-boundary reorganization.

Physiographically Guskara is located on a low-lying area and as a consequence suffers from water-logging, flood and allied drainage related problems causing hardship to its residents and its economy, greatly impeding its uniform growth. About 67 per cent of Guskara’s population is concentrated in 33 per cent of the municipality area. The Kunur river passes through it and a kandor (narrow natural drainage lines) girdles its southeastern edge. The Ajay river flows through 11 km north of Guskara which sometimes puts great trouble...
during the rainy season by creating flood. Water bodies dot all over the town occupying 1.9 per cent of the total municipal area, and act as valuable storage ponds for monsoon rains.

In the historic past Guskara was part of the kingdom of the Sadgops (cattle-herders turned cultivators) of Gopbhum. The construction of Burdwan-Sahebganj Loop line across the Ajay river through Guskara around 1869 increased its locational importance. In the latter part of the 20th century Guskara has grown as an urban market centre in the midst of a predominantly agro-forest and animal-rich hinterland dominated by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities comprising 33.67 per cent and 5.29 per cent of total population respectively. The development of secondary sector in Guskara has been slow due to the absence of processing units of its hinterland's produce. This takes away the incentive for further increasing the production of such raw materials. Guskara’s urban functions are still based mainly on trade and service activities fulfilling its hinterland's requirements.

The secondary sector activities of the town are limited with only a few processing industries. There are nine rice mills, twenty oil mills and three chira mills within the municipality area. Being an important collection and distribution centre of potato, Guskara has three cold storages. Rice trading is an important commercial activity of the town. Commercial landuse occupy 10 per cent of the built-up area of the municipality. Trading and commercial activities comprise 18 per cent of the workforce occupying the second rank after agricultural labourer (28 per cent) among the occupational categories of the urban workers.

Agricultural activities still dominate the economic scenario of the town employing 41 per cent of the workforce (cultivators 13 per cent and agricultural labourer 28 per cent) in it. Collection, storage and distribution of agricultural products especially paddy and potato are important activities thus giving Guskara an identity of market town. The service sector is also another flourishing side of its economy providing educational, banking and commercial infrastructure both for people of Guskara town as well as of the surrounding rural areas. This sector comprises 14.68 per cent of the main workforce basically engaged in administration, education, banking, communication and other service sector activities.

This higher level of infrastructural facilities of Guskara town has helped in the development of a residential nature of the town. Nearly 40 per cent of the total area is used for residential purposes besides 45 per cent lying still vacant. Residential buildings are increasingly occupying the vacant areas. The educational facilities of the town consist of one degree college, two higher secondary schools, four secondary schools and sixteen primary schools. The establishment of the degree college in the sixties was an important landmark in the history of growth of the town. At present the college is running in two shifts (both
morning and day) catering to the increasing desire for higher studies of the people from surrounding rural hinterland. Medical infrastructure is still limited with one block level primary health centre set up in the public sector, and a few private practitioners and nursing homes. Guskara has four bank branches providing financial services to the residents of both the urban centre and rural surroundings.

To create an ‘integrated system’ with the surrounding rural areas through the establishment of backward and forward linkages, an ‘outline master plan’ of Guskara has been prepared in 1998 with the help of the Calcutta-based consultancy group, Society For Holistic Approach To Planned Development (SHAPE). This master plan has outlined both the municipality planning area for further extension of the town systematically, and influence area for integrated development of rural-urban linkages. The influence area of the town covers an area of 72,220 hectares including 21 gram panchayats of four rural development blocks (Mongalkote, Bhatar, Ausgram - I and Ausgram - II) and a population of 3,02,392. On the other hand, the smaller municipality planning area spreads over 43 rural mouzas, covering fully or partly nine gram panchayats in Ausgram - I, Bhatar and Mongalkote blocks.

7.4. Summary

In conclusion, we note that there are more intensive and varied interaction between the rural and urban sectors of the region under study. Our examination of Burdwan, Memari and Guskara as individual urban nodes has proven that they serve different purposes for the rural residents. Urban planners now should note these facts.

The development of Memari and Guskara as medium towns of the region should get high priority because of their immense economic potentiality. Further improvements of their infrastructure can pull some of the rural migrants to relieve the increasing population pressure on Burdwan. The dominance of Burdwan town may be reduced with the infrastructural development of such medium towns to lead to an even better rural-urban interaction.

We shall re-focus our attention on Burdwan town and examine its informal sector in search of traces of rural-urban migration. For this, we have chosen the rickshaw-pullers of Burdwan town.