PART - II

URBAN GEOGRAPHY
Location of the town:— Gauhati is located at the converging point of highways where roads meet with river crossing, thus facilitating both river-borne and land borne trade. The South Assam Trunk Road which runs from Goalpara to Dibrugarh passes through the heart of Gauhati town. The N.F. Railways also connect it with Calcutta through Amingaon and other parts of Upper Assam through Lumdin. Such location affords easy access to raw materials, sources of power and market. Since urban function of any region is not accidental, Gauhati profits from this locational advantage. An excellent metalled road connects Gauhati with Shillong, the Capital of Assam and this road serves the main thoroughfare for the southern hills. The Brahmaputra acts as the chief artery of trade and commerce. This situation in the plain area at the foot of the hills and on the banks of the Brahmaputra is at once both commercial and political importance. So Gauhati may be called the commercial capital of the state and at the same time serves as the gateway for the whole of Assam south of the Brahmaputra river.

It is very difficult to underestimate the importance of sacred spots in the location of the town and its growth. Sacred spots are found there in and around Gauhati. Kamakhya temple is on the Nilachala Hills, which is on the north-west of Gauhati. Umananda temple is situated on the peacock island in the middle of the Brahmaputra and Navagraha or the temple of nine planets.
is on the crest of the Chitrachala hills (Navagraha) to the east while the others are scattered all over the town. This factor possibly explains the location of the early settlement. This is also mentioned by Gait who states "From its commanding position on the Brahmaputra and its proximity and the sacred temple of Kamakhya, it is probable that may other kings also made this town their capital."

**Stages of Growth**: According to Taylor every town or city during its history of development, passes through successive stages. The stages are - infantile, juvenile, adolescent, mature and senile stage. These stages of Growth of a city is something like the way a young tree grows. Its trunk and branches increase by a sort of expansion, while quite new characters such as flowers and fruits appear as it reaches maturity. In the earliest stage (infantile) of a city there is no clear differentiation between industrial, commercial, or residential areas. As the time goes on we see the separation of the shops from the houses and then the development of a few scattered factories. These are juvenile conditions. Considering these stages Gauhati may be said to be in the juvenile stage. There is a fairly clearly segregation of an extensive commercial quarter towards the centre of the town with a number of streets solely occupied by shops and business firms. But shops, offices and small industries are rather still mixed. A definite zone of better class houses fringes the town wherever there is any scope of further expansion as for example towards the south-east (Uzanbazar to Chenikuthi area), south (Ulubari to Rehabari area) and south-western extremity of the town.
These areas are the latest to be settled by fairly rich people while the poorer folk live near the centre.

It is noted in the introduction that Gauhati has grown on the ruins of the ancient city of Pragjyotishpura, the capital of the king Bhagadatta, who is mentioned in Mahabharata, and when Kamrupa was conquered by the Ahoms it became the residence of the viceroy of Lower Assam. "The extensive earthworks which protect it on the landslide, the numerous large tanks and the brick and masonry remains which are found in every direction beneath the soil, all clearly show that the place was originally an important city with considerable population, which occupied both banks of the Brahmaputra." (3)

From 1826, when Assam was ceded to the British, till 1874, when the province was separated from Bengal, Gauhati was the seat of the local administration, and here in still are located the offices of district administration apart from the Assam High Court. The most noteworthy events in its recent history was the earthquake of 1897, which destroyed all the government offices and wrecked every masonry building in the place. The town has since been rebuilt and hardly any traces are now to be seen of this great catastrophe.

Gauhati was constituted as a Municipality, under Act(BC) of 1878; and Act III(BC) of 1884 was subsequently introduced in 1887. Upto 1900 the town had an area of about 2.5 sq. miles(Fig.16) and in addition to Shillong-Gauhati Cart Road, which was maintained by the Public Works Department, there was 14 miles of road kept by the Municipality of which 9½ miles were metalled. There are ten members in the Municipal Committee, six of whom
were elected and the Deputy Commissioner had always filled the post of Chairman. Gauhati was then a Class IV town with a population of 11,661 (1901).

Throughout the last century the growth of the town was very slow. The Assam-Bengal Railway line was constructed through stages in 1897 connecting Gauhati with Upper Assam, and with Sylhet through Lumding. The Eastern Bengal Railway was constructed in the first decade of this century connecting Amingaon, a north bank village near North Gauhati directly with Calcutta. Moreover good road systems like Assam Trunk Road and Gauhati-Shillong Road constructed in the last part of the 19th century. All these routes gave impetus to its growth. With the development of communication network and establishment of Provincial institutions and Divisional offices, it has begun to assume commercial, educational and to some extent administrative importance in Assam, attracting more and more people every year. Due to this increase in population and subsequent spatial growth, the Gauhati Municipality extended its boundary by including 3 more wards in addition to its former 8 wards in 3rd October, 1940 (Fig.17). The total number of wards during this year was 11 and the area of the town increased from 2.5 sq. miles in 1878 to 3 sq. miles in 1940. Gauhati attained the position of a Class III town in 1931 with a population of 21,797.

During these stages of development the town has gradually advanced from river bank to southward, eastward and westward in a semi-circular fashion. As its eastern and western expansion has already been checked by the hillranges, its only scope for further expansion remains on the southern and southeastern sides.
The rapid growth of the town is due to the fact that Gauhati held a vital position during the World War II being one of the army headquarters of Northeastern India warfront. This was followed by the independence of our country and our national government have been trying to develop the town to a fullfledge city. This phenomenal growth of the town has lead the Municipality to extend its boundary by including another three wards and its present area has risen to 4.45 sq. miles with 14 wards. At present Gauhati attains the honour of a Class I City with a population of 1,00,702 (1961 Census).

(A) **Old Built up Areas** :- Fancy Bazar, Pan Bazar and Uzan Bazar.

(B) **Recently Built up Areas** :- Paltan Bazar, Machkhowas, Chenikuthi and Silpukhuri.

(C) **Partly Built up Areas** :- Santipur, Bharalumukh, Rehabari, Ujubari, Sarania, Chandmari etc. have recently been merged within the town. These areas are now developing fast, and the people generally purchased land and settled in these areas newly due to relative cheapness of the land and availability of space for expansion.

All these built up areas are discussed in the functional zones of Gauhati Town.

**FUNCTIONAL ZONES OF GAUHATI TOWN**

Gauhati is roughly 3 miles in length along with the bank of the Brahmaputra and 2 miles in breadth. This is rebuilt upon an old site in an unplanned manner. Gauhati town proper may be divided into 4 contiguous parts - (1) Fancy Bazar to the West (2) Panbazar at the Centre (3) Uzan Bazar to the east and (4) Paltan Bazar to the south. Apart from these there are other
A busy shopping centre at Fancy Bazar

The commercial hub of the town - Fancy Bazar with narrow Lane.

A view of Fancy Bazar Daily Market

Kamakhya Temple

The State Museum

A view of T.R. Phoolkan Park
urban and sub-urban areas on all sides except north. Due to unplanned nature of the town the functional zones are neither compact nor clearly be well defined. However, an attempt to study it from functional point of view the following facts are revealed.

(1) The business and commercial centre: The business and commercial centres are found at Fancy Bazar, Pan Bazar and Paltan Bazar area. The premier business area of the city - Fancy Bazar is characterised by the presence of large numbers of shops, commercial concerns, banks, godowns etc. This is the oldest nucleus of the city with narrow winding streets. Here the plan is much more irregular. Much of it has old dwelling houses dating from 1897 although it has been invaded by the modern buildings.

The undesirable element of Fancy Bazar is the location of ware houses where trucks, pony carts and loading and unloading activities interferes with the leisurely movement of the shoppers. Most of the ware houses are located along the Strand Road facing the Brahmaputra river. Here shops do mostly wholesale grain trade, so Fancy Bazar area may be called the "Wholesale Grain Zone". Apart from the wholesale trade, grocery goods, motor selling firms etc. are found here. Taxis, busses, trucks, rickshaws crowd the streets. Pan Bazar which is one of the old built up areas and Paltan Bazar which is one of the recent built up areas are also characterised by large number of banks, shops, along with luxury goods.

Apart from this, smaller isolated but compact business areas exist within the general manufacturing and residential areas and throughout all parts of the city. Combination of shops and residences seem to flanking almost all the principal streets and many
of the secondary ones as well.

Daily markets (Bazar) are seen at Fancy Bazar, Uzanbazar, Silpukhuri, Chenikuthi (Navagraha), Ulubari, Paltan Bazar and Rehabari. Among these markets Fancy Bazar is the biggest and busiest market. It comprises an area of about 0.5 acres of land. All the essential food commodities, such as vegetables, potatoes, bringal, eggs, fishes, meat etc. are found in this market. This market has a commandable position in supplying vegetables and other necessary commodities over the other markets of the town mentioned above.

Export and import activities are found along the bank of the river Brahmaputra particularly at the Steamerghat of Uzan Bazar and that of Fancy Bazar. In these areas one finds cargo boats and vessels being loaded and unloaded and lorries and carts run to and from them with huge quantity of loads.

Goods which are sent from Calcutta or other part of Northern India by steamer to the districts of Kamrup, United K & J Hills and Nowgong are unloaded here. On the other hand jute, coal, tea, fruits and other raw commodities that are sent either to Upper Assam or to the other states of India or outside India from these areas are loaded here. The commercial areas of Guwahati remain very busy with whistles of the trains, steamers, and horns of automobile or unintelligible shouts of the stevedores.

Other commercial areas found at the Guwahati Railway Station and Guwahati Shillong Bus Stand. Unloaded activities of a few commodities such as coal, oil, rice bags are found in the Railway Station. Guwahati Shillong Bus Stand is busy with both import and export activities. Generally raw materials such as various kinds of fruits namely oranges, pine apples etc. and other vegetables
coming from Shillong are unloaded here. On the other hand, consumers goods such as groceries, goats, pig, poultry etc. are loaded here and send to Shillong.

(2) Administrative Centre: Gauhati is more or less a Govt. town with vast number of persons are employed in the public sector. The main Government offices are situated on the North Blocks i.e. Pan Bazar, Uzan Bazar and Silpukhuri area. The administrative buildings such as Deputy Commissioner's Office, High Court, Municipal Office, S.P. Office etc. are invariably located on the picturesque bank of the Brahmaputra river. Other administrative offices scattered all over the town.

Many Government Offices are still in temporary quarters, waiting to be rehoused. At the same time new departments are continuously springing up and clamouring up of space. In its programme for new government offices the plan follows the principles of decentralization. It recommends the scattering of government offices rather than their concentration at a few focal points and the provision of staff housing close by. Such arrangement has a two-fold advantage. In distributing the functions and government offices in different parts of the city, it integrates them closely with the rest of the population instead of setting them apart; and in providing housing for its staff closely, it takes the strain off streets and prevents that avalanche of bicycle converging on or from one central place of work.

Now the construction of new government quarters are going to start on the Navagraha hill area and recently built govt. quarters are seen at Chandmari and old quarters are found at old Pan Bazar area.
CIVIL ORGANISATION

(3) Educational Institution: - Gauhati is a seat of learning and indeed a cultural centre of the state. Location of University and almost all the institutions of higher technical and non-technical studies have given impetus its growth as a cultural nucleus.

There are at present 20 Primary Schools in Gauhati with 4000 students, average being 200 pupils per school. The total number of Middle English Schools are 8 with about 1,200 students, the average being 150 pupils per school. There are 12 High Schools with about 6,300 students with an average of 525 students per school. Normally the percentage of children in the age group 6-12 years for which the compulsory education can be provided is about 11 percent of the total population.

At present there are nine colleges in Gauhati with about 4,500 students in roll. All these institutions are scattered throughout the town. The famous Cotton College with its hostels covered nearly half the area of Panbazar. This college was established in 1901 and is now the premier college of Assam with about 1,600 students.

The Handique Girl's College is situated in a very picturesque setting on the bank of the Dighali tank. This is the only Girl's college of Gauhati. While Cotton College and Handique Girl's College are situated in the heart of the town other colleges such as B.Borooah College, Arjuna Bidyapith, Pragjyotish College are on the southeast, south and western margin of the city respectively. The site for the Gauhati Medical College which is now functioning at the Assam Ayurvedic College, Jalukbari is
selected at Kalapahar side.

The Gauhati University has been established at Jalukbari in the year 1948. There is enough land for its development and future expansion and also for the location of other technical and non-technical institutions. After completion of the Brahmaputra Bridge will give impetus to the development of the area. The surroundings of the University therefore require to be closely guarded against undesirable that will rapidly take place.

(4) Hospitals :- There are ten hospitals in Gauhati and out of which the following 4 are most important.

1) Civil Hospital - Panbazar
2) Chatribari Mission Hospital
3) Maternity - Ulubari
4) T.B. Hospital - Kalapahar.

The Civil Hospital is situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra at Panbazar. The Mission Bunglow compound to the west of Civil Hospital has been earmarked for the expansion of Civil Hospital. In fact a 350 bedded hospital has been designed for this site. The existing Civil Hospital and the site of the present hospital are enough for the development of a much larger hospital of catering needs of a larger city.

T.B. Hospital - which is better known as Lokapriya Bordoloi Hospital, is situated near Kalapahar. Here ample of land has been earmarked for its future expansion around the present site.

Apart from these some private dispensaries are found in the residential and industrial areas.

(5) Recreational area :- For spending leisure time of urban community or any individual life is an essential need. The role
of recreational function of any city is the crying need for healthy living both mentally and physically in urban agglomeration.

The surroundings of Gauhati have a decent parklike character. The balanced landscape, existing evergreen hills, blue rivers, flat low areas etc. provide Gauhati one of the most picturesque settings and makes it an unique city in the country. So the landscape of Gauhati needs to be preserved. While the surrounding of Gauhati is most charming the city proper is devoid of decent parks. A city needs ornamental parks for giving it a decent appearance. A city should have larger parks for passive recreation for elders, play grounds for children, play fields for youth.

There is only one decent ornamental park in Gauhati is the Tarun Ram Phukan Park which is recently developed. Gauhati should have more park like this. But there are virtually absence of local play-grounds of children and younger boys which should be distributed in the midst of residential areas, wherever open lands in the heart of residential areas are available, these lands should be acquired and converted as children play-grounds.

There are at present 3 play grounds namely Judge's Field, Union Field, New Field and Stadium which is now under construction. These are considered to be adequate to meet the needs of organised games by the youths.

The site at Japarigog where the zoo is being established is most ideal for recreational purpose. Over and above this there is a good theatre hall at Uzanbazar known as Kumar Bhaskar Natva Mandir. Besides these there are 5 Cinema Halls found in the central region of the town.
(6) Cultural Institution:

The State Museum - The museum established in 1940, has four main divisions, archaeological, anthropological, natural history and arts. The museum is located on the south bank of Dighali Tank.

District Library - This was established in 1958 by the side of the State Museum. It has a vast stock of books and is probably the biggest library in Assam.

Lalit Kala Academy - This institution is located at Panbazar and has achieved national importance and attracted artists from all over the land. Students learn drawing, painting, sculpture and commercial art.

(7) Residential Zone:

The residential zone of Guwahati does not form a compact functional unit. Because most of the residential houses are scattered all over the city in the midst of varied functional zones such as business, educational and small scale industrial units.

Most of the first grade residences of well-to-do persons are found in old built up area of Uzanbazar and recently built up area—Chenikuthi, Rehabari and Machkhowa. Comparatively these areas seem to be neat and clean than other areas of the town. This is mainly due to the absence of business and industrial activities in these areas. The roads in these areas are more or less spacious and the atmosphere is far from congestion. Second Class residential houses of lower middle class people are found all over the town.

The third grade residences of the poorer folk are generally found near railway station, Athgaon, Chandmari and also in the outskirts of the town.

The house of type of the town both residential or commer-
(8) **Industrial Zone** :- Though not an industrial town, Gauhati has a great number of industries, which are remarkable not for their size but for their variety. But there is no any industrial zone. The main industry is that of Rice, Oil and Jute processing mills, Brassrolling, bell metal and iron foundry, Soap Factories, Printing, Light & Engineering, and Handloom and handicrafts. All these industries are scattered all over the town. There is practically no place within the city where something is not being made. The various industries including their zonal distribution are already described in the Chapter-VIII"-'Industries'.

(9) **Religious Centre** :- Temple, Mosque, Church and other religious places are scattered all over the town. Tanks of mediaeval age are found in every temple. They are now used as fisheries. The chief among the temples in and near Gauhati are Kamakhya, Umananda, Navagraha, Ugratara, Aswaklanta and Sukleswar Janardan.

i) **Kamakhya Temple** - Off Pandu Railway Station, Kamakhya is the chief centre of Sakti Cult in India. The main temple, named after the Mother Goddess Kamakhya, stands on the southern face of the Nilachal Hills.

ii) **Navagraha Temple** - To the immediate east of the town there is a temple on the crest of the Chitrachala Hill (Navagraha) and this temple is dedicated to the Navagrahas or the nine planets. At one time it was the seat of study of astronomy and astrology. Now a days every year a Jajna (religious festival) is held by the local public in this temple.

iii) **Janardan** - Janardan Temple is located on a small hillock named Sukleswar (Janardan) on the river bank in the heart of the
town. Apart from other images related to God, a carved image of Buddha is seen here which shows that at one time there existed an assimilation of Hindu and Buddhist culture. At present there is a reputed Sanskrit School where students were taught religion and Sanskrit literature and thus the temple is regarded as a centre of religion and culture.

iv) Umananda - The temple of Umananda is situated on the peacock Island in the midst of the Brahmaputra, seen from the Deputy Commissioner's Court Building. The deity of temple is Lord Shiva. Every year a most important festival is held here on the occasion of Shivaratri.

v) Aswaklanta - The temple is situated on the crest of the Aswaklanta hill on the North bank of the river. The temple has various images of Lord Bisnu and Lord Krishna. A footprint of Lord Bisnu is seen here on the rocky edge of the Brahmaputra.

Apart from this temple there is another famous religious place off the Shillong Gauhati Road about seven miles from Gauhati is the Bashistha Asram. The temple is located on the confluence of three sacred tributaries- Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta of the Bharalu river. The temple is named according to sage Bashistha who is now believed to establish this religious spot. Apart from its religious sanctity the place offers an ideal picnic spot.

TYPE

The functions of Gauhati are many and varied. So it is very difficult to frame out a class-distinction for a small town like Gauhati. Moreover several classes merge almost imperceptibly. So such a town or city may often be classed variously,
with almost equal correctness.

Gauhati may be termed as a Commercial-Cum-Administrative town. On the one hand the State Government has established headquarters of various administrative and political sets of functions which are the machineries of the state. Again on the other hand it is the main commercial centre of the state. Being located at the focus of transportation lines, Gauhati receives directly all the merchandise from outside Assam. The raw materials flowing from all over Assam find a direct route through Gauhati for other industrial places of India. For this, the river Brahmaputra serves as a main thoroughfare, furnishing cheapest transportation. Any material, raw or finished, whether it is shipped, air-borne, or carried by railway, has to pass through here Gauhati. So trade and commerce have become dominant economic activities.

PATTERN OF THE TOWN

Generally the major outlines of cities are influenced by the size and shape of the areas available for urban development. Topographical factors also play an important role in this respect. In this respect so far Gauhati is concerned, the general shape and size and the plan of the important streets have been influenced by the river flowing to the north and the hills to the east, south-west and west.

Gauhati town is more or less crescent-shaped. Here waterfront is on the north and the growth proceeds paralleled with the waterfront streets. Due to presence of waterfront Gauhati achieves a maximum width opposite the midpoint of the waterfrontage and dies away in two lateral points resembling the horns of a crescent.
The main existing roads viz. Strand Road, Machkhowa Rd., Assam Trunk Road, etc. lie in the direction of the river, while other roads like Kali Ram Barua Road, Fancy Bazar Road, Shillong Road etc. are at right angles to this direction. These latter roads converge towards the south. The other minor roads are not entirely haphazard. They are more or less at right angles to one of the above two directions. In some places they form almost squares. The Scamper Down Road is more or less parallel to the Bharalu river.

In Panbazar and Fancy Bazar area the roads are more congested. In these areas we find large number of shops, godowns, and brickhouses where wholesale as well as retail sale trade is done. This congested atmosphere in these areas is perhaps due to the earlier settlement from where the city would have grown in different directions. Now the town is expanding mostly towards the south with less congested roads.

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