2.1 Origin of The Name of The District:

There are several opinions on the origin of the name of the district. W.W. Hunter's *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, there is mentioned how once the Raja of Bishenpur while going in pursuit of herons with the help of hawks in the hilly district of his kingdom witnessed an unusual spectacle of a house being pursued by a heron with great fury and ultimately the latter coming off victorious. This incident led the Raja to ascribe some mysterious quality of the soil. He thought it was *virmati* (i.e. vigorous soil) and whatever is brought forth by that soil would be endowed with heroic courage and power. Hence the Raja named this tract of land as *virbhumi*. Hunter, however, thinks that Birbhum, derived its name from the Santali word 'Bir' meaning jungle in which the tract abounded in early days. In the introduction to *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, Hunter writes: 'This well-watered land, rich in noble scenery, and enjoy during five months of the year, an exquisite climate, formed the theatre of one of the primitive struggles of Indian history. It stood as the outpost of the Sanskrit race on the west of lower Bengal, and had to bear the collisions of Aryan civilisation with the ruder types prevailing among the aborigines. On its inhabitations developed, during three thousand years, the duty of holding the passes between the highlands and the valley of the Ganges. (To this day they are a manlier race than their kinsmen of the plains, and from the beginning of history one of the two kingdoms has borne the name of the Malla-bhumi, the country of the wrestlers, - the other the appellation of vir-bhumi, the Hero Land.

From historical records it is fairly clear that the district included in Rarh was mainly under different Hindu rulers. But it was also under Muslim sway at different periods of history. For many centuries, however, the Muslim rule in this district was nominal and the real rulers had been the Hindu chiefs called Bir Rajas. Bir was the title borne by the Hindu chiefs who ruled the district just as *Man, Singh* and *Dhal* were the titles of the chiefs of Manbhum, Singhbhum and Dhalbhum respectively. It is quite possible, therefore, that the district was named 'Birbhum' to indicate simply the territory of the *Bir* Rajas.
2.2 History of Birbhum District:

Birbhum was formerly held as a military fief by the Pathan Rajas to guard the plains of Bengal against the hilly tribes of Chotanagpur. This district was held by a tenure different to any other known in the country.

In some respects it corresponded with the ancient military fiefs of Europe, in as much as certain lands were held lakhiraj or exempted from the payment of rent, and solely appropriated for maintenance of troops. In view of Mr. I. Grant, “Birbhum with all its ascertained dimensions from the year 1760, contains, according to the Rennell, 3,858 British square miles and is the fourth in magnitude of all the single zamindaris of Bengal, being, next to Burdwan, in superficial measures the most extensive.”

During this period the Company managed its business in two distinct systems: by covenanted servants who received regular pay, and invested the money entrusted to them without making any private profit, and by unsalaried agents, who contracted to supply goods at a certain rate, and might make what they could in the bargain. The first class bore the titles of residents, senior merchants, junior merchants, factors, and sub-factors. Their posts formed the most lucrative in the company’s gift, and attracted its best men. Even after the grant of Diwani in 1765, the Company continued this system of double administration till 1769, when English Supervisors were appointed to each of the great divisions of the province.

The Board of Revenue the Governor-General Cornwallis, addressed a letter on 5th February 1787, urging that revenue matters be settled in a way which be of mutual advantage to the Government as also the inhabitants of the land. He recommended that special care should be taken to ensure that zamindaries remained undivided under one authority and, secondly, while setting several parganas into a collectorship their contiguity should be considered. On the basis of these recommendations, John Shore submitted his well-known plan to the Board of Revenue on the 13th March, 1787, under which the different establishments for the collection of revenue were brought down to 24.

These changes affected Birbhum in the following manner. It appears that sometime prior to 1785, Vishnupur and Birbhum had been included within the district of Murshidabad. On 18th April 1786, the Committee of Revenue determined to form two separate collectorships for Birbhum and Vishnupur and accordingly. Foley was placed in charge of Birbhum and Pye in charge of Vishnupur. But with the implementation of shore’s plan, Vishnupur and Birbhum were united into a compact district according to a notification published in the Calcutta Gazette in March 1787. Bankura continued to form
one district with Birbhum until 1793 when it was transferred to the Burdwan collectorate. In a letter of October 8, 1793, the collector of Birbhum informed the secretary to the Board of Revenue that Vishnupur had already been separated from Birbhum and annexed to the ‘Zilla Burdwan’.

In 1793 Vishnupur was transferred to Burdwan. Under Governor-General’s order dated 27th October 1793, 250 villages were transferred from Murshidabad to Birbhum for administrative convenience. A few years later the zamindari of Patkum, Sarhat and Deoghar were added to Birbhum.

In 1854 thana Bharatpur was transferred to Murshidabad. Birbhum was formerly held as a military fief by the Pathan Rajas to guard the plain of Bengal against hill, tribes of Chotanagpur.

In 1793 Birbhum district constituted of 26 Parganas divided into ten thanas, Afzalpur (Now Khayrasol), Soorie (Suri), Nangilia (now Rajnagar), Kissennagar, Kusbah, Labhpur, Mayureswar, Deoghar, Uparbandha and Shapara. In 1799, Panchet and Jhalda were transferred from Ramgarh Zila. This was done due to the contumacy of the old Zamidars and raids of chuars in 1795-98. Sixteen Jungle Mahals, Pachet, Begmundy, Bogan, Katlas, Habila, Kaoden, Taraf Bahapur, Jhalda, Jharria, Jayapur, Mukundapur, Kismat Nawagarh, Kismat Chaontly, Taorang, Tong, Nagar-kiari and Patkum were transferred from Birbhum to the new district of Jungle Mahal under regulation XVIII of 1805 as a consequence of the violent disturbances in an area and the raids of Chuars on settled tracts.

River Ajoy was made the southern boundary of the district on 9th October 1806. But under orders dated 1st October 1806, the Mahal panra was transferred to Jungle Mahal. Under regulation I of 1806, the part of Murshidabad, west of the Bhagirathi comprising Six thanas, Shakulpore, Panchtopee (now Burdwan), Doongram, Palsa, Nalhati and Kahrun was transferred to Birbhum. Under the same regulation thana ketugram was transferred from Burdwan to Birbhum.

In 1809 Birbhum, Collectorate was abolished and it was administered from Murshidabad again, an Assistant Collector remaining in charge at Suri. Revenue Collections of Vishnupur and Jungle Mahal were transferred to Burdwan under an Assistant Collector at Bankura.

In the same year the greater part of Murshidabad was transferred to Birbhum Judge. In 1820 again, Birbhum of 1809, with the exception of a few estates which were transferred to the Jungle Mahal was recreated as a separate Collectorship. Pressure of
heavy work and public inconvenience were the main causes behind it. In 1834, Palsa was retransferred to Murshidabad but Bharatpur was included in Birbhum.

In 1839 Palsa again came back to Birbhum. Three thanas; Ukrah, Churulia and Sanipahari; were transferred in 1838 from Bankura to Birbhum. In 1846 - 47 these three thanas were reverted to Bankura.

In 1849-52 the district covered 37 parganas with a total area of approximately 3,142 sq. miles. After Santal Rebellion in 1855 the upland tracts to the west which had been a rallying point for the rebels, were transferred to newly constituted district of Santal Parganas. Thus four parganas Sarhat Deoghar, Pubbia, Kundapit Karayea, Muhammadabad and part of the fifth, Darin Mouleswar were detached from Birbhum and the area of Birbhum was reduced to 1,344 sq. miles. In 1859 thana Ketugram was retransferred to Burdwan. In 1872 thanas Rampurhat, Nalhati and Palsa were transferred to Murshidabad, but returned to Birbhum in 1879, in which year thana Burdwan with an area of 108 sq. miles was transferred to Murshidabad. In 1881 the area of the district was 1,756 sq. miles.

In 1901 the district comprised of nine Police stations, five, viz, Suri, Dubrajpur, Bolpur, Sakulipur and Labhpur under sadar subdivision and four, viz, Rampurhat, Nalhati, Murarai and Mayureswar under Rampurhat subdivision. There was no change during the next decade. But during 1911-21, Suri Police station was divided into four Police stations viz Suri, Mahammad Bazar, Rajnagar and Sainthia; Dubrajpur was divided into three, viz, Dubrajpur, Khayrasol and Shahapur; and Bolpur also was divided into three police stations, viz. Bolpur, Ilambazar and Ahmadpur. Nanur was designated as a Police Station in Place of Sakulipur.

In course of the next decade of 1921-31, Ahmadpur and Sainthia were merged as one Police station of Sainthia. Similar is the case of Dubrajpur and Shahpur. Since 1931 the district has only fourteen Police stations.

The district constitute of two subdivisions namely, Sadar and Rampurhat, Suri is the head quarters of the district and of the Sadar subdivision as well. Rampurhat town is the head quarters of the only outlying subdivision. The Sadar subdivision is constituted of ten police stations namely, Suri, Rajnagar, Muhammad Bazar, Sainthia, Dubrajpur, Khayrasole, Ilambazar, Bolpur, Labhpur and Nanur. The Rampurhat subdivision covers the Police stations of Mayureswar, Rampurhat, Nalhati and Murarai.

The district has six towns, three administered by the Boards of Municipal commissioners and the other three are non Municipal urban areas. The Sadar subdivision
have two municipal towns, Suri and Bolpur and two non-municipal towns of Sainthia and Dubrajpur. The Rampurhat subdivision has one municipal town of Rampurhat and the other non-municipal town of Nalhati. Nalhati town has been declared as an urban area for the first time in 1961 census. “In the district the total number of mouzas borne in the jurisdiction lists is 2,486, of which 239 are uninhabited. The total number of inhabited mouzas is 2,234 and a number of 13 mouzas are included fully in the urban areas of the district.”

At present there are three sub-divisions in the district of Birbhum such as –

i) Suri Sub-division: The name of the blocks which are under this sub-division, Suri - I, Suri - II, Muhammad Bazar, Sainthia, Dubrajpur, Rajnagar and Khoyrasole.

ii) Bolpur Sub-division: The name of the blocks which are under this subdivision, Ilambazar, Bolpur-Sriniketan, Nanur and Labhpur.
iii) Rampurhat Sub-division: The name of the blocks which are under this subdivision, Mayureswar-I, Mayureswa-II, Rampurhat-I, Rampurhat-II, Nalhati-I, Nalhati-II, Murari-I and Murari-II.


There are 169 Gram Panchayats and 2,467 villages (Six Municipalities such as Suri, Dubrajpur, Bolpur, Rampurhat, Nalhati and Sainthia). Nine towns and 18 police station are their.

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