JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

Vol. LX No. 1. 2018

THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
1 PARK STREET ● KOLKATA 700 016

COUNCIL
OF
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
(2016-2018)

Professor Isha Mahammad
President

Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick
Vice-President

Professor Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty
Vice-President

Professor Alok Kanti Bhaumik
Vice-President

Professor Aparajita Basu
Vice-President

Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti
General Secretary

Professor Sujit Kumar Das
Treasurer

Professor Biplab Chakrabarti
Library Secretary

Dr. Ramkrishna Chatterjee
Publication Secretary

Sri Shyam Sundar Bhattacharya
Philological Secretary

Dr. M. Firoze
Joint Philological Secretary

Professor Ranjana Ray
Anthropological Secretary

Dr. Subir Kumar Datta
Medical Science Secretary

Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal
Biological Science Secretary

Professor Rajkumar Roy Choudhury
Physical Science Secretary

Professor Arun Kumar Bandyopadhyay
Historical and Archaeological Secretary

Professor Shahnaz Nabi
Member of the Council

Professor Nabanarayan Bandyopadhyay
Member of the Council

Professor Krishnapada Majumder
Member of the Council

Professor Somnath Mukhopadhyay
Member of the Council

Joint Secretary
Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India
Representative of Government of India

The Director General
National Council of Science Museums
Representative of Government of India

The Secretary & Curator
Victoria Memorial Hall
Representative of Government of India

The Director
Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre
Representative of Government of India

Professor Nemai Chandra Saha
D.P.I.
Department of Higher Education
Government of West Bengal
Representative of Govt. of West Bengal

Professor Pradip Bhattacharya
Representative of the Asiatic Society
Employees' Union
Member of Parliament, Rajyasabha

JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

VOLUME LX No. 1 2018

THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
1 PARK STREET ❐ KOLKATA

© The Asiatic Society

ISSN 0368-3308

Edited and published by
Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti
General Secretary
The Asiatic Society
1 Park Street
Kolkata 700 016

Published in April 2018

Printed at
Desktop Printers
3A, Garstin Place, 4th Floor
Kolkata 700 001

Price : ₹ 400 (Complete vol. of four nos.)

CONTENTS

FOUNDATION-DAY ORATION

Technology and State Formations in Precolonial Northeast India
J. B. Bhattacharjee ... 1

ARTICLES

Whither 'Early Medieval' Settlement Archaeology : A Case Study of the Varendra Region
Sheena Panja ... 27

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad : A Historical Perception
Ranjit Sen ... 63

The Second World War in Bengal, 1939-1945 : New Tasks of the Bureaucracy
Bikramjit De ... 71

COMMUNICATION

Introduction to the Asiatic Society's Forthcoming Comprehensive History of Modern Bengal, 1700-1950, Volume I to III
Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ... 97

GLEANINGS FROM THE PAST

Plant and Animal Designs in the Mural Decoration of an Uriya Village
N. Annandale ... 111

An Observation on the article on 'Plant and Animal Designs in the Mural Decoration of an Uriya Village'
Somnath Mukherjee ... 119

BOOK REVIEW

Mau Das Gupta, *Women Seers of the Ṛgveda*
Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti ... 123

TECHNOLOGY AND STATE FORMATIONS IN PRECOLONIAL NORTHEAST INDIA*

J. B. BHATTACHARJEE

Introduction

The study of state formations is a developing research field that generally draws theoretical inputs from the works of Friedrich Engels who initiated his enquiry in state origins on the basis of historical and anthropological data on ancient societies in the work of Lewis Henri Morgan and later on added supplementary information and insights from the works of Karl Marx. Engels's basic formulation was that the state formation began with the emergence of private property and he consistently maintained that the state came into existence only when the necessity arose to protect a developing private property. The scholars have thereafter added 'conquest', 'population', 'irrigation' and several other theories on the basis of empirical evidence, which acknowledged the linkage of technology with development of economy and property in the formation of states. Karl A. Wittfogel, for example, inducted the concepts of 'hydraulic economy' and 'hydraulic state' characterized by division of labour, intensive cultivation and massive cooperation, while Robert Cohen made significant theoretical contribution on role of technology in 'further development' of 'early states'. However, the points that deserve attention are (i) that the 'further development' was possible only when the state was already in inexistence and (ii) that to come into existence it must have gained enough control over the natural wealth through some tools and techniques to (a) boost productivity for surplus generation and (b) put the basic apparatus of sustenance and governance in place. Moreover, the state formation study, as formatted by Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, is essentially a study of an 'early state' which is different from a 'modern state'. This oration suggests that 'technology' deserves a place in theories of state origins and it examines

* Foundation-day Oration delivered on January 15, 2017 at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

the role of technology in formation, consolidation and sustenance of early states in precolonial Northeast India, particularly during 13th to 18th centuries when several local kingdoms emerged in the region from ethnic tribal societies.

Technology and State – Conceptualizing a Framework

The 'early state', according to Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, "is the organization for the regulation of social relations in a society that is divided into two emergent social classes, the rulers and the ruled."[1] Of the seven main characteristics (viz. territory, population, sovereignty, citizenship, productivity, hierarchy, and legitimacy) of the early states,[2] the productivity (for surplus generation) is seen as immensely critical for emergence and sustenance of such states. It is said that for the rise of a state the 'productivity', or level of development of productive forces, in the given society must have "developed to such a degree that there is a regular surplus which is used for the maintenance of the state organization."[3] The global experience scripted in *The Early State* (edited by Claessen and Skalnik) suggests that the early states emerged as centralized polities through a process of social stratification due to several factors, and these factors included the geographic location, environment, ecology, demography and socio-cultural growth, population pressure, linkages of pre-state and state polities, short and long distance inter-polity trade, warfare, alliances and hegemony, symbiotic relationship between social groups, tributary or client formations, besides stratification, hierarchy and bureaucratization of the ethnic societies. However, the single common factor identified as critical in the formation of early states is the economic factor.[4] What is also important to note is that the enhanced productivity for economic growth must have been possible only through technological innovations and improvisations to ensure generation, extraction and redistribution of surplus. The labour process, surplus generation and social differentiation, which are critical issues in state formation studies, are inescapably linked with technological changes.

The technology-economy interface in state origins are well acknowledged in theoretical discourses. Lewis Henri Morgan considered the state 'as a political organization founded upon territory

and upon property',[5] while Friedrich Engels observed that "at a definite stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the cleavage of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this cleavage."[6] This 'property' - or personalized economic development - could not have been attained without some tools as well as the technology of manufacturing and using such tools. Indeed, the state formation studies consider the emergence of early states as a historical process and draw theoretical inputs for such studies from Engels who, by his analysis of the historical and anthropological data on ancient societies documented by Lewis Henri Morgan and, later on, adding more supplementary inputs and insights from the works of Karl Marx, was convinced that state formation began with the emergence of private property and consistently maintained through his seminal works that the state came into existence only when necessity arose to protect a developing private property.[7]

The social science theories that came in much later than the works of Marx and Engels also ultimately and independently contributed to justify the position of Marx and Engels on property, class and state. The sociologists like L. Gumplowicz[8] and Franz Oppenheimer,[9] for example, developed the 'conquest theory' which emphasized that the pastoral groups combined their own organizational strength and striking power to defeat and subjugate the more sluggish agricultural communities and forced them to accept subordination and pay tributes to the conquerors. This strength and power they must have derived from their improved tools and methods of productive pursuits. Those who lacked initiative and improvements remained sluggish and were vulnerable to obliteration. The scholars, like Robert H. Lowie,[10] severely critiqued Gumplowicz and Oppenheimer, but there were others, like Richard Thurnwald[11] and D. Westermann,[12] to elaborate and improve upon the 'conquest theory' by adding the role of technology. In fact, Engels had also talked about social inequality and the oppressions and exploitations of the subjects and the subjugated in which technology played a dominant role. In any case, the organizational strength and striking power were essential consequences of technological changes, the rudiments of which began in the hunting and food gathering societies and eventually made some groups more resourceful than others.

Another theory that became popular in mid-twentieth century is the 'irrigation theory'. An evolutionist in his framework, Julian H. Steward constructed a sequence of developments to the rise of a state, viz. (i) hunting and gathering, (ii) incipient agriculture, (iii) formative period of state, (iv) regional florescence, (v) initial conquests, (vi) dark ages, and (vii) cyclical conquests, but he focused more on 'irrigation' as a major factor for population concentration in certain areas and the rise of states.[13] The role of irrigation in enhanced productivity was further sophisticated by Karl A. Wittfogel who introduced the concepts of 'hydraulic economy' and 'hydraulic state' which were characterized by the division of labour, intensive cultivation and massive cooperation, and argued that an effective management of the large volume of water required an efficient organization and once that 'efficient organization' came in place the state was also formed.[14] Wittfogel's work influenced the studies of the scholars, like M. Estellie Smith,[15] T. E. Downing and McGuire Gibson,[16] and W. P. Mitchell,[17] who explained how the organization and control of irrigation system led to an intensification of despotic and bureaucratic managerial tendencies on the part of political leadership. Be that as it may, irrigation boosted agricultural productivity but it required appropriate technology, and archeological evidence across the world do suggest that the human-made embankments, wells and canals propelled irrigation even in early times.

Like 'conquest' and 'irrigation', the 'population theory' became popular in third quarter of the twentieth century. The well known evolutionist, Morton H. Fried[18] identified (i) egalitarian, (ii) rank, (iii) stratified, and (iv) regulated as stages of development of a society towards evolution of a state. He argued that the stratification appeared once the communal property was replaced by private ownership and unequal access to basic resources and that the growing population pressure on resources was the most important factor responsible for this transition. Indeed, Issac Schapera[19] had already shown that population pressure was responsible for the rise of a more complex and more powerful political system in South Africa. Thereafter, Robert F. Stevenson[20] also reflected on a causal relationship between density of population and degree of stratification. These arguments were taken forward by a host of scholars, like Jack Stauder,[21] M. J. Harner[22] and M. A. Bakel,[23] who observed that when population increase caused

pressure on resources certain groups attained more favourable position than others by using their advantages and the social stratification became more pronounced when the scope to expand the territory was exhausted. C. P. Kottak[24] also found that the increase in population, changes in means of subsistence and the progress of market economy went hand in hand in the development of states in Africa. However, Fried's position on impact of population growth on the development of states was endorsed with modifications by Robert L. Carneiro,[25] Marshal D. Sahlins,[26] Elman R. Service,[27] Steven Polgar,[28] and many others, who particularly highlighted the role of technology in resolving the problem of population pressure on resources by augmenting productivity within limited territorial space of the respective states, but these formulations are about those states which were already in existence and in no way alter the basic position of Marx and Engels as to the origin of the states.

Henri J M Claessen and Peter Skalnik's *The Early State*, on the basis of twenty-one case studies covering most of the major regions of the world, further vindicated the theory of Marx and Engels and argued that the enhanced production, surplus, tributes and affluence were the major factors that triggered the development of pre-state socio-political institutions into statehood in almost all cases.[29] This seminal work of a global dimension critically reviewed the current theories of state formations and enumerated a large number of factors for the rise, growth and sustenance of states and it established reasonably beyond doubt that there had been regional variations under specific conditions at different points of time, but the economic roots of states remained unaltered. In an excellent contribution in this collection, Robert Cohen observed that the further growth of early states followed in an invariant way the development of 'improved technology'. This improved technology, according to him, provided the ways and means of achieving higher goals through reduced amounts of per capita human effort for development. He also made an observation that the statehood boosts production, transportation, information processing, architecture and scientific knowledge, and, with the possible exception of warfare capability, most of these improvements did not occur prior to the founding of the state.[30] This makes a distinction between the pre-state and the statehood conditions in matters of technological development and it underlines that the development of technology

vis-à-vis economy beyond a limit could not have been possible without the initiative of the state power. Such an observation may call for a 'technology theory' of state formation to examine specifically the role of technology in origin and rise of the states, which may incorporate many other theories, like conquest, irrigation, and population, and also the use of tools and devices that caused the transition from shifting to sedentary cultivation and many other developments, including useful art and crafts, each one of which is inescapably linked to the development of technology at least to a certain level to be capable of generating surplus for the rise of states in the ethnic societies, particularly in a region like Northeast India.

Early States in Northeast India

The geographical space popularly called 'Northeast India' and looked upon as a 'region' in contemporary development perspectives, is located on periphery of the mainland Indian subcontinent between the Bengal delta and the Himalayan mountain system. The larger part of the region consists of the hills that are offshoots or splinters of the Himalayas, while the plains areas consisting of (i) the Brahmaputra valley, (ii) the Barak-Surma valley and the Tripura plains, and (iii) the Trans-Barak Manipur valley are connected with the Gangetic plains by a continuity of the plains and valleys. The human migrations in the region took place in several waves since pre-historic times. The Indo-Aryan settlements extended to the valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak as well as the Manipur valley from the mainland subcontinent in their eastward march to the farthest limits of the ploughable fertile plains, while the Indo-Mongoloids came from various parts of Southeast Asia through the Tibetan, Chinese and the Burmese routes which were also used for trade between India, China and Southeast Asia. The hill areas were entirely inhabited by the Indo-Mongoloids, while in the plains the Indo-Mongoloids and the Indo-Aryans lived side by side and a process of cultural assimilation spontaneously began much before the British colonial interventions. The people of the hills and the plains interacted in the foothills through barter trade and contributed to each other's culture and means of livelihood. In course of time, several culture zones emerged around the settlements of ethnic groups which significantly impacted social and polity formations in the region. The rise of chieftaincies or pre-state polities

and early states from indigenous as well as immigrant societies was indeed a significant development in pre-colonial history of the region, which was arrested by the colonial interventions in the19th century.

The earliest recorded state or kingdom in Northeast India was probably *Pragjyotisa* which was founded by Naraka, a Kshatriya prince from Videha, who established the kingdom by vanquishing Mahiranga, a *Danava* or non-Aryan (possibly Indo-Mongoloid) tribal chief. Naraka is said to have brought a large number of people belonging to different *varnas* (castes) and settled them in *Pragjyotisa*. *Pragjyotisapura* was his capital and a part of the Brahmaputra Valley or the Assam proper was the mainland of his kingdom. The legends associate Naraka with the shrine of *Kamakhya* in the Nilachal hill near Guwahati. According to some *Puranas*, as well as eulogies in some of the local inscriptions, Naraka was born of *Bhumi* (earth) and Visnu and, therefore, the dynasty founded by him came to be known as Bhauma-Naraka, while according to *Mahabharata* Naraka's son Bhagadatta participated in the Kurukshetra War on behalf of the Kauravas with his Indo-Mongoloid (Kirata, Cina, etc.) soldiers. The successors of Naraka ruled in *Pragjyotisa* for many generations, and thereafter, the territory came to be known as *Kamarupa*.[31] However, at least three historically well known dynasties, namely, Varman, Salastambha and Pala, ruled in *Kamarupa* from c. 4th century to 12th century CE and history of these dynasties can be reconstructed from the conventional source material like the epigraphic records.[32] The Varman dynasty, founded by Pusyavarman, was succeeded, with some interregnum, by the Salastambhas and then by the Palas. The Varman dynasty was founded by Pusyavarman in 4th century and the last known ruler of the dynasty (Bhaskaravarman) reigned in the 7th century. The Salastambha founded his dynasty in the 8th century and Vanamalavarman of the dynasty reigned till 9th century. The Pala dynasty was founded by Brahmapala in 10th century and the last ruler, Jayapala, reigned in 12th century. Kamarupa reached the zenith of its glory under Bhaskaravarman, who made an alliance with Harsavardhana of Kanouj against Sasanka of Gauda. Kamarupa as a state declined after the fall of the Palas in 12th century.[33]

In Barak-Surma Valley, which is geographically an extension of the Bengal plains, the social and polity formation processes were

influenced by the developments in adjoining Samatata-Harikela-Vanga region. The earliest literary reference to a rudimentary political organization in this valley is in Panini's A*stadhyayi* (c.6th century BCE), which mentioned Pundra and Suramasa as among the early *janapadas* in the east, and V. S. Agarwala identified Pundra with northern Bengal and Suramasa with the valley of Surma.[34] However, the framework of a political history of the Barak-Surma valley emerges only since 5th century CE through copper-plate inscriptions which show that parts of the valley from time to time were included in Samatata, Kamarupa, Harikela and Vanga till the rise of Srihattarajya in 10th-11th century. The Faridpur Copper-plates of Dharmaditya and Gopacandra (5-6th century) mention Varakamandala as a *visaya* (district) within the realm of the kings of eastern Bengal.[35] The Tipperah Copper-plate of the Samatata king Lokanatha (7th century) mentions a land-grant in Subbunga-*visaya* (identified by N.K. Bhattashali in Cachar) for maintenance of a temple of Anantanarayana and settlement of more than one hundred Brahmins.[36] The Kalapur Copper-plate (7th century) of Marundanatha shows that this ruler of Samatata donated land in a village in Maulavibazar area for maintenance of another temple of the same deity.[37] The Nidhanpur Copper-plates of Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa recorded the renewal of a land-grant which was originally gifted to a group of Brahmins by his great grandfather Bhutivarman (6th century).[38] The literary and numismatic sources suggest the inclusion of Sylhet in Harikela from time to time during 7th- 13th centuries,[39] but a single political structure for the entire Barak-Surma valley is found in the 10th century Paschimbhag Copper-plate of Sricandra which recorded the grant of land to nine *mathas* and for settlement of six thousand Brahmins in three *visayas* (namely, Chandrapura, Garala and Pogara), within Srihatta-*mandala* of Pundravardhana-*bhukti*.[40] However, the existence of Srihattarajya as a local kingdom is known from two Bhatera copper-plates (11th century) of the Deva kings, namely, Govindakesavadeva and Isanadeva.[41] The disintegration of Srihatta kingdom led to the rise Gaud, Laur and Jayantia in lower region of the valley, when the upper region (Cachar plains) passed under control of the kings of Tripura.[42]

The decline of Kamarupa in Brahmaputra valley and Srihattaraya in the Barak-Surma valley in 12th-13th century created conditions for

emergence of early states from the Hinduized indigenous as well as immigrant ethnic societies. The Meitei (Manipur), Tripuri (Tripura), Koch (Cooch Behar), Dimasa (Kachari) and Jaintia (Jayantia) kingdoms, which survived till British colonial intervention in the 19th century, were among these states. The royal chronicles of Tripura and Manipur claim ancient origin for their respective kingdoms but they bloomed into statehood in the medieval period, while others emerged during 13th to 15th century. In Brahmaputra valley, the political disintegration facilitated the rise of ethnic principalities of the Koch, Kachari, Moran, Barahi, Chutia and such other entities. In case of Barak-Surma valley, the Jaintias and the Tripuris from neighbouring hills gradually extended their sway. The Ahoms, a branch of the Tai race, who made their advent in Upper Assam in the 13th century, subjugated the Moran, Barahi and Chutia groups and pushed the Dimasa-Kacharis to North Cachar hills and thereafter to Barak valley. The Ahoms had already experienced the processes of state formation before their advent in the Brahmaputra valley and they built the most powerful state in the region by military conquest. The hydraulic culture and superior war technology which they brought with them were the secrets of their success in generating surplus and establishing authority over the indigenous tribes and communities. However, the Ahoms were also gradually Hinduized and the state they ultimately crafted belonged to the pan-Indian Brahmanical model of states. The Koch rulers possessed the extensive and fertile plain lands in western Assam-northern Bengal region and controlled important river channels and the trade routes. The Tripuris experimented with state craft in the Barak-Surma valley since 6th century CE, and moved to modern Tripura in 15th century. The Jaintia, Dimasa and Tripuri rulers commanded control over parts of fertile plough cultivating rice lands in the Sylhet-Cachar-Tripura plains. The Meitei state in Manipur, which has been identified for our case study in this oration, was primarily the product of inter-clan feuds within the Meitei ethnic groups in Manipur valley for the occupation of more fertile agricultural land and the state was established when the Ningthouja chief was proclaimed as king of the Meiteis in the 13th century.[43]

The process of state formation among the indigenous ethnic groups in the region seems to have begun when the notables at clan or village

levels emerged as chiefs or rulers and extended their sphere of influence and control by subduing other clans, tribes and communities. The main factor of state formation was social stratification that was going on for a long time in those societies on the basis of differentiated landholding and individualized income. The pan-Indian Brahmanical influence was a critical input that formalized social stratification and legitimized royal supremacy. In the final forms, these states were able to develop elaborate apparatus for sustenance and surveillance on the strength of material and human resources at command of the rulers. Besides taxing land and other resources, the states generated income by regulating trade and through tributes from subordinate chiefs. The agricultural plains segments were principal economic zones of the states. The skilful peasants, artisans and traders from neighbouring areas were induced by the rulers to immigrate and settle in their territories subject to regular payment of rents and taxes. They also encouraged the artisans to develop specialized crafts and the traders from outside to visit the trade centres and collected export and import duty at the transit stations and markets. The rulers generally did not disturb the norms of self-regulation of the tribal ethnic groups, particularly in hilly segments of the states and accepted from the tribes only nominal tributes. However, the rulers and their subordinate chiefs redistributed, though partially, the regenerated wealth through organization of feasts and festivals, building of temples, construction of tanks and dams, and various other measures of public welfare in specific cases.[44]

As a matter of fact, the state formation processes in early or pre-colonial Northeast India by and large conformed to the global historical experience, because the basics in historical processes are generally similar in contents in similar conditions and they do repeat in similar circumstances.[45] The early states in the region were built on surplus generated through technological innovations and improvisations and by encouraging the artisans and ploughmen from neighbouring states to immigrate and settle permanently. The cattle-powered ploughshare was the common instrument of cultivation between the states in the plains segments, which became the geographical space for the rise of early states, and enhancing the agricultural productivity was achieved by skilful water management by constructing dykes, digging canals and even changing the course of rivers. The remnants and ruins of

palaces, temples, forts and other buildings, roads and megalithic bridges, coinage in gold, silver, bell-metal or copper, and the weaponries, war-materials and war-boats found across the plains and foothills of the region are the specimens of technologies which enabled the states to attain wealth, power, pomp and grandeur.[46]

Surajit Sinha's *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*,[47] which included six case studies (namely, Ahom, Dimasa, Meitei, Jaintia, Khasi and Mizo) from the Northeast, identified 'Surplus Generation, Extraction and Redistribution' as governing factor in the precolonial state formations in the region. As Sinha said, "From the cases presented and discussed in the volume we find significant correlation between the degree of surplus generated through appropriate technological innovations and the level of functional differentiation, stratification and centralization of a polity."[48] He then said :

> The Mizo chieftaincies provide a case where polities could not develop beyond the level of petty chiefdoms by depending only on shifting cultivation in the rugged and steeply inclined terrains of Mizoram. In the case of the Siyem chiefdoms in the Khasi hills we do not find either settled plough cultivation or extensive animal herding. The small scale chiefdoms or principalities (of the Siyems) were sustained by horticulture, intensive hoe cultivation, some shifting cultivation, development of metal-crafts, mineral extraction and trade with the people of the plains. It is important to observe that only when originally shifting cultivator groups like the Jaintia or the Dimasa could command control over the plough cultivating rice lands in Sylhet and in the Cachar plains that they were able to develop states of elaborate scale like the Jaintia state of Meghalaya and Sylhet and the Dimasa state of Cachar.[49]

The fact of surplus generation and concomitant impact on the state organization has been elaborately discussed by Amalendu Guha in his "The Ahom Political System: An Enquiry into State Formation in Medieval Assam: 1228-1800", in the same volume edited by Sinha.[50] In this seminal paper, Guha reflected on the origin of states in the following words:

> No tribe leaped to statehood while it was still at its pristine stage. Before that it needed a sedentary agricultural population, with a

> degree of division of labour and social stratification, as the starting point. Statehood emerged only when a community was itself capable of yielding a surplus sufficient for the maintenance of a non-producing public authority, or of systematically appropriating such a surplus in the form of tribute from a neighbouring community. Smaller the surplus, less elaborate was its public authority structure. In the North East Indian context, tribal state formations, early or medieval, were also expected to be based on either their own or others' surplus-yielding wet rice cultivation, rain-fed or irrigated. Such wet rice cultivation was possible with or without the use of cattle-powered ploughs. However, in India it was mostly the plough that ensured a relatively large surplus and therefore, also a higher form of political organization. Larger the surplus, more developed was the state.[51]

The observation of Guha makes it abundantly clear that the generation, extraction, redistribution and enlargement of surplus was inherently linked with technological innovations and improvisations. The statehood could emerge only when the community was capable of yielding a surplus, and the surplus could be generated only by using appropriate technology. The sustenance and further development of the state required more advanced technology to generate enlarged surplus for the maintenance of public authority and for its whims and fancies.

Case Study of the Meitei State of Manipur

The role of technology in formation of early states in Northeast India can be gleaned from a case study of the Meitei state in Manipur. This state emerged from the proto-Meitei ethnic society that consisted of seven clans, namely, Ningthouja, Angom, Luwang, Khuman, Khaba-Aganba, Chenglei and Moirang. These clans are believed to have migrated to Manipur valley in batches from the Southeast and each batch laid a new settlement under its chief or leader of migration. The autochthonous groups in the valley, like Loi, Chakpa and others, were subjugated by the Meiteis and they merged into one group, called Loi. However, the pre-Meitei autochthonous groups and all other groups who immigrated into the valley till about the 15th century CE became integrated into a common Meitei lineage structure through a process of Metei-ization under leadership of the chiefs of Ningthouja

principality which was the oldest and most powerful among seven clan-principalities of the Meiteis. *Cheithorol Kumbaba*, chronicle of the Meitei kings, informs that the Ningthouja chief Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the son of god *Sidabamapu*, was the first Meitei king. This legend deified the Ningthouja chiefs and legitimized their pre-eminence. They defeated the chiefs of other clans in wars that continued for centuries, and the Ningthouja chief was proclaimed as the king of the Meiteis in the 13th century. Only the Moirang chiefs guarded their clan-principality till 18th century when this last principality also merged into the Meitei kingdom. Kangla, the original seat of the Ningthouja chiefs, became the capital of the unified kingdom.[52]

The most significant development towards state formation was the integration of all the Meitei clans, pre-Meitei autochthonous inhabitants as well as the later immigrants into one common lineage structure. The Loi and its kindred autochthonous groups were originally in possession of the most fertile portion of the central valley, but the Ningthoujas gradually subdued the Lois and pushed them to the less fertile foothill peripheries and, thereafter, structurally integrated them in Meitei society and assigned them manorial role in the society. The settlements of Yaithibi, who are believed to be degraded Meiteis, grew in neighbourhood of the Lois. The Brahmins, Bishnupriyas and Pangans (Muslim), who immigrated into the valley across Cachar borders around 15th century, were also integrated in Meitei social structure and adopted Meitei language and culture making the society unilingual and unicultural. Hinduization of the Meiteis, which shortly followed, required the services of Brahmins as priests, preceptors and educators, and they were dispersed to Meitei villages throughout the valley. The kings generously gifted land to the Brahmins and the temples. The Bishnupriyas were settled in the marshy lowlands, while the Pangans, who were mostly prisoners of war from Cachar, were settled in the riverbanks as they were expert agriculturists and were required to teach the Meiteis the method of paddy transplantation. The Kuki and Naga groups, who descended down to the plains from neighbouring hills, were recruited in police force and allotted land in the marshy lowlands. This policy of settlement of the immigrants in marshy lowlands facilitated land reclamation and expansion of agriculture for development of the state. The chief of a clan was

traditionally considered custodian of the land under control of that clan or community, but after the establishment of kingship the king became the theoretical owner of all land within the state.[53]

The Meitei state in its final form was a kingdom of the subcontinental model, but its emergence was a case of internal growth from the clan-level social institutions to chieftaincy in which the traditional Meitei religion (*Laining/Sanamahi*) played a role in endowing divine origin to the ancestor of the Ningthouja royalty through the legend of God King Pakhangba legitimizing the authority of the king. However, the external cultural and religious influences reinforced the state-building processes. A copper-plate inscription of King Khongtekcha (8th century CE) mentioned the worship of *Hari*, *Siva* and *Durga*'. King Kyaamba (15th century) built a temple of *Visnu* at Bishenpur, King Charairongba (16th century) was the first Meitei king to be initiated to Vaisnavism, and King Gareeb Niwaz (1709-48) took steps to make Vaisnavism the state religion. Maharaja Jai Singh (1759-98) formally declared Gaudiya Vaisnavism to be the state religion and the Meiteis were *en masse* initiated to this religion. This brought about significant changes in the Meitei society and structure of the state as the ecclesiastical authority moved to the hands of the immigrant Brahmins who were, of course, Metei-ized. Nevertheless, the Meiteis continued to practice their traditional rites and rituals alongside Vaisnavism. The ancestor worship never lost its popularity and the rulers found in this ritual the legitimacy of the lineage structure that justified the rule of the Ningthouja chiefs. The *lai haraoba*, which signified hierarchy in the state and society, became the annual state festival. Although the Meitei state formation actually occurred in the valley, the kings established their control over the surrounding hills which were inhabited by as many as twenty-nine tribal groups belonging either to the Naga or the Kuki-Mizo origins. The kings, like Charairongba and Gareeb Niwaz, consolidated their authority by maintaining peaceful relationship with the hill chiefs. The dance performance (*haochongba*) by the tribes in the palace became an annual festival, like *lai haraoba* of the Meiteis. The sustenance of authority over the hill chiefs required adjustments and accommodation which the kings internalized in the Meitei political system. Trade and political relations with bordering states and principalities, like Cachar, Tripura,

Bengal and Assam to the west and the Shan states to the east, externally impacted the state formation.[54]

The technological inventions, innovations and improvisations enabled the Ningthouja chiefs to ensure economic growth, to establish control over fertile portion of the Manipur valley and to subjugate the ethnic groups and to assimilate them into the Meitei social structure. The Meiteis are said to have indigenously invented and improvised technologies according to exigencies of time and circumstances and the challenges of adjustment with environment for sustainable development.[55] It is known from *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal chronicle of Manipur, that the early Meitei kings had to make several technological inventions, including water management, because a large chunk of the valley was then submerged in stranded water.[56] Queen Laisna, consort of the first Meitei king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, is said to have introduced the architecture of Meitei huts made of weeds and reeds of thatch. The reign of the second king Khuyoi Tompok is credited with inventions of musical instruments made of wood and animal skin, besides bronze smelting and bell-metal casting, weaving, textile designs, dying, silk rearing, boat making, and exploration of minerals, and his queen Nongmainu discovered mulberry worms which boosted the proverbial silk culture of Manipur. The reign of the third king Taothingmang is memorable for draining out stagnant water from the valley by digging canals and river channels, dredging of the rivers and lakes, and also reclamation of land for expansion of agriculture and settlement of the immigrant Meitei clans who were still arriving in batches from the Shan states in the east. The chronicle puts the reign of the first three kings to the period between the first and third centuries CE.[57] The same chronicle further informs that the work of land reclamation continued for a long time and that the use of ploughshare and wet rice cultivation were introduced during the reign of the later kings.[58]

The early Meitei immigrants occupied the fertile portion of the valley by pushing the autochthones to the peripheries which resulted in the reclamation of those foothill areas, while the later immigrants were settled in marshy lowlands to develop those areas for agriculture. The kings took initiative in developing the marshy lowlands by draining out excess water through excavated canals and by constructing dykes and dams for irrigation and watering the

agricultural fields. The kingdom in its final form included the valley and the hills, but the valley dwellers were more affluent than the hill tribes as the valley was more fertile and more suitable for sedentary agriculture. The dwellers in the hills depended on horticulture and shifting cultivation, whereas the more productive sedentary cultivation was practiced only in the valley. The introduction of paddy transplantation by the immigrant Muslims resulted in a green revolution. However, within the valley also there was social stratification on the basis of economic disparity resulting from yielding capacity of land under occupation. The Meiteis and the Brahmins, who lived in the most fertile northern plains and central valley, were wealthier than any other group. The Meiteis established their domination over others mainly due to their control over the surplus yielding valley which constituted the prime economic zone of the state. The dominant status of the Ningthouja principality among the seven clan-principalities also emerged from the fact that they controlled the larger portion of the fertile valley. In addition to agriculture, handloom was almost a household occupation for the Meiteis and the tribal groups, and it was considered as a respectable craft. It is said that every Manipuri household had a loom. They also specialized in sericulture and in growing cotton and fiber plants. The cocoanut and betel-nut were grown almost in every kitchen garden, besides vegetables and fruits. The Pangans, who lived in the riverbanks and practiced multi-crop agriculture, were also skilful growers of vegetables. The foothills region, occupied by the Lois and the Yaithibis, was least fertile and often inundated by flash floods. As the agricultural yield of this region was not enough for subsistence, the people resorted to growing pineapples in the hill slopes, rearing goats, fowls and swine, liquor distillation, poultry farming, pot-making and manufacturing salt and charcoal. They also worked as palanquin bearers for the members of royal family and aristocracy. However, the ecology of the foothill region favoured certain crafts and industries. The salt-manufacturing, for example, became an important industry for the Lois as the salt wells were situated in that region. Similarly, the availability of best quality clay made the Loi area the pottery belt of Manipur. The Bishnupriyas, Yaithibis and other dwellers of the marshy lowlands supplemented their agricultural income by fishing, carpentry and basketry, salt-manufacturing, lime-making, iron-work, pottery and

such other professions which the high status Meiteis would refuse to perform. There were also some designated villages in the less fertile region which were obliged to render manorial service to the king and high officials. Theoretically, the king was the owner of land and the subjects were users at pleasure of the king. In fact, the king was the head of the state as well as the society, because accommodation of various ethnic groups in a pan-Meitei lineage system had structurally integrated all the ethnic groups in a way that acknowledged the supremacy of the chief of the Ningthouja clan. The success of the Meitei chiefs in developing agriculture and containing floods and draining out water from the marshes by constructing dams and dykes, digging canals and other methods of water management legitimized this supremacy. The sedentary cultivation and use of ploughshare, almost similar in technique to neighbouring Cachar plains to the west of Manipur, ensured higher agricultural productivity and enhancement of wealth of the state.[59]

The ethnic and social groups attained professional specialization in useful art and crafts by hereditary occupations, though agriculture and handloom were common occupations. King Loiyamba (1074-1112) accorded formal recognition to the occupations of certain groups and families by issuing a *Shinyen* or royal decree[60] which assigned social and economic functions to different families (*yumnak*/ surname). It held fifty-five families responsible for maintenance of religious shrines and worship of various deities (*umanglai*). One hundred and one families of priests and priestesses were assigned the responsibility of curing diseases by administering herbal medicines and performing rituals and a state department was created for propitiating guardian spirits for protection of the king. The management of land was assigned to ten state officials. The traditional weavers were divided into two categories, viz. weavers and dyers, and thirty families were identified for weaving different types of clothes and eight families were given the duty of dying yarns. Indeed, this royal decree of specific functions and duties for families with common surnames inducted the system of specialization on hereditary basis and the division of labour. The social status became identical with one's occupation and profession and the type of service one was capable or bound to render to the king and his subjects. The king was entitled to three types of services, viz. *fandom* (honourable/prestigious services), *lalup* (essential

services) and *laipot* (manorial services). The chiefs, priests and favourites of the king, particularly his relatives in high offices, formed the aristocracy and served the king by 'non-laborious prestigious services'. They enjoyed the privileges of personal servants (*loi-il*), and the services of the families assigned to work as servants (*yuj-tinnaba*) and the villagers engaged to carry luggage while on tour (*pothang*). The decree divided the commoners into four *panas* and they were required to provide *lalup* service to the king. In fact, every able-bodied male between the age of 16 and 60 were enrolled as soldier (*lalmee*), and in peace time they were to serve the king for ten out of every forty days by rotation for reclamation of wastelands and extension of cultivation. The peace time *lalup* service included those of personal attendants, cultivation of land under direct control of the king, construction of houses and roads and bridges, collection of construction materials, and looking after the horses, ponies and cattle. In fact, the *lalup* system ensured regular supply of labour and became the backbone of the state's economy. The war captives were also used as slaves by the kings and high officials and they were asked to manufacture silk-thread, reap iron from the ore, distill liquor, fish in lakes, make wooden posts, beams and canoes, collect grass for royal stable, and do gardening in the palace compound.[61]

The artisans like goldsmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters and the brass and bell-metal workers emerged from ranks of the Meitei society. The weaponry, including cannons, mortars and shells, swords and shields, and bows and arrows, were locally manufactured. The locally minted coinage in gold, silver and bell-metals are remarkable for craftsmanship. Trade with neighbouring areas influenced technological innovations and refinements. One of the chronicles mentioned that a person visited Tripura to learn iron technology and after his return the iron-manufactures remarkably bloomed in Manipur. The artisans among the immigrants brought in new crafts. The ploughshare for cultivation was also possibly manufactured by the early immigrants. Weaving was more or less a household occupation in the Meitei society as well as tribal communities. The elephant-catching (*khedah* or lassoing) has been repeatedly mentioned in the chronicles. The horse and boat races were important components of the state festivals. The boat-building was possibly an important industry, because canoes or country boats were widely used in local lakes and streams and the boat race was a popular

sport. The martial art was very popular, along with horse and boat races. Manipur is also known as the homeland of polo game. Some of the *yumnaks* or sub-clans are known to have specialized in tailoring different types of garments. However, the kings exercised control over crafts and manufacturers and there were restrictions on the use of specified garments and jewelry by the commoners.[62]

The wealthy character of the Meitei state is evident from the palaces, buildings, temples and works of art and architecture, and the pomp and grandeur of the palace life are recorded in the chronicles. The policy of landholding, agriculture, manufacture and trade boosted surplus, and the kings extracted wealth in the form of labour and taxes and tributes. The king was the owner of all land in the kingdom and he could grant land to the priests, temples, officials and other favourites either permanently or for specified periods, but the commoners were only users of the land on payment of taxes. One-third of the total land was under his direct control, another one-third in possession of the members of ruling family, brahmins and soldiers, and remaining one-third was allotted to the commoners. The royal land was cultivated for the king by *lalup kabas* and in return of this service an individual was entitled to cultivate for his own family one *pari* (2.5 acres) of land. The king allowed the Meiteis to establish new villages in reclaimed lands on payment of taxes, but this privilege was not extended to others. The Lois, Yaithibis and other non-Meiteis rendered manorial *laipot* services, but they were required to pay a portion of all produces to the king for the land they cultivated for themselves. The king also collected a portion of the manufactured salt. The fishermen paid him taxes for fishing in lakes and ponds. The hill chiefs paid tributes in clothes and other products of the hills. The regulation of markets and external trade also fetched income for the king.[63] Nonetheless, behind the wealth were the productivity and manufacture which the Meitei kings continuously augmented by appropriate technology and training for primary producers and manufacturers among the subjects.

Résumé

The dearth of source-material has always been a problem of historical research in Northeast India, while the extant empirical evidence on origin and growth of early states are indeed very few and

far between. Nonetheless, it can be observed from available sources that the early states like Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa and Srihatta in the ancient period and the Meitei, Tripuri, Dimasa, Jaintia, Koch, Ahom and other states in the medieval period, were based on surplus extracted by the ruling coterie consisting of the kings and the aristocracy and that technology played a significant role in generation, extraction and redistribution of surplus by empowering the rulers to explore and exploit the available resources. The rulers had the advantage of favourable ecology, abundant natural resources and sparse population to offer settlements to such immigrants who would reclaim land and expand agriculture, introduce new technology, participate in manufacturing, trade and commerce, and assist in governance. The growth of settlements propelled revenue maximization, generation and extraction of surplus and accumulation of wealth. It can be presumed that the conditions were more favourable in the ancient period when fallow lands were abundantly available and there were waves of immigration from the mainland of the subcontinent as well as the Southeast Asian region. The epigraphic data suggest that the rulers encouraged new settlements by liberally granting land to Brahmins and temples on perpetual basis. The settlers included peasants and artisans, besides the priestly and other castes. The technology brought by the immigrants along with them as well as those indigenously developed were used for exploration and exploitation of natural resources, reclamation of land, expansion of agriculture, crafts and manufactures, and production of weaponry and war-materials. The technology thus played a significant role for surplus generation towards state formation.

The period from thirteenth to fifteenth century CE witnessed the rise and growth of local kingdoms from indigenous ethnic societies which had been significantly impacted by pan-India cultural influences in earlier periods. The stratification in Meitei, Tripuri, Koch, Dimasa and Jaintia societies was further augmented by differentiated landholding and individualized income. The process started when the notables at the clan and village levels emerged as chiefs and their accomplices and they expanded their sphere of influence and control by subduing other clans, tribes and communities. The political vacuum caused by the decline of Kamarupa and Srihatta facilitated the rise of

new states. The Southeast Asian roots of the Ahoms played a critical role in articulating state policy and raising a well-equipped powerful army and they eventually built the most powerful state in the region which covered almost the whole of Brahmaputra valley. The Jaintia, Dimasa and Tripuri rulers exercised control over the fertile plough cultivating rice lands in adjoining areas in the Barak-Surma valley. The Meitei state was primarily the product of inter-clan feuds among Meitei groups for occupation of more fertile agricultural land in the Manipur valley and the state was established when the Ningthouja chiefs gained control over the most fertile rice lands in northern plains by subjugating the chiefs of other clans. The Koch rulers possessed extensive and fertile plain lands in western Assam-northern Bengal region and controlled important river channels and trade routes. The pan-Indian cultural influence formalized social stratification and legitimized royal supremacy. Eventually, the states were able to develop elaborate apparatus for sustenance and surveillance and to generate income from land, forest, agriculture, manufacture, trade and markets and by collecting taxes and tributes from the subjects and feudatories.

The role technology played in the entire process of rise, consolidation and sustenance of the states was indeed significant. The use of cattle-powered ploughshare for sedentary cultivation was a common development in the plains and valley segments of all the states. The success in water management was phenomenal in case of the Ahoms and the Meiteis. The Meitei and the Ahom states, in particular, experienced multiple technological innovations and improvisations in agricultural and manufacturing sectors, while the *lalup* system of the Meiteis and *Paik* system of the Ahoms formalized and guaranteed regular supply of labour for various activities associated with state craft. The Tripuri, Dimasa, Jaintia and Koch kings also developed irrigation facility for agriculture. The evidence of construction of dams and dykes, digging of canals and even changing course of rivers are available from almost all the states. Surplus generated by technological innovations boosted agricultural and industrial productivity and the state extracted surplus through labour, taxes and tributes. The rulers did not disturb the norms of self-regulation of the tribal groups, particularly in the hilly segments, and accepted nominal tributes from the tribes as token of acknowledgement of authority. Consequently, the plains segments were

the principal economic zones of the respective states. The peasants, artisans and traders from outside were induced by the rulers to emigrate and settle permanently. They also encouraged the artisans to develop new crafts and the traders to use the trade centres established and managed by the rulers. However, the rulers and their subordinate chiefs partially redistributed the accumulated wealth through organization of feasts and festivals, building of temples, construction of tanks and dams, and various other public utility measures. The states exercised control over crafts and manufactures and certain sections of the subjects were not allowed to use palanquin, umbrella, and such jewelry and costumes which were meant absolutely for the royalty and aristocracy. Besides social segmentations, these practices were not without economic implications. In all the states there were tribes or clans or communities who were obliged to compulsorily serve the king and the aristocracy without any remuneration. Surplus was generated mainly through new or improvised technology and unpaid labour of those groups. The physical remains of the palaces and temples, art and architecture, roads and bridges, dykes and embankments, ponds and lakes, forts, weaponry and coinage are the extant specimens of wealth and technological development in the erstwhile early states.

Notes

[1] Henri J. M. Claessen & Peter Skalnik, The Early State, Mouton Press, The Hague, 1978. p. 7.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 21.

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 23.

[5] Lewis H. Morgan, *The Ancient Society*, (1st edn. Cleveland, 1877) Indian reprint by K. P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1986, p. 138.

[6] Friedrich Engels, *The origin of the family, private property and the state*, Indian reprint People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972 p. 232.

[7] *Ibid*, pp. 147-73.

[8] L. Gumplowicz, *The Outlines of Sociology*, American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia, 1899.

[9] Franz Oppenheimer, *Der Staat, Frankfurt*, 1909, cited in Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, p. 8.

[10] Robert H. Lowie, *The Origin of the State*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1927.

[11] Richard Thurnwald, "Die menschliche Gesellschaft" (1935), cited in Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, p. 8,

[12] D. Westermann, Geschichie Afrikas etc (1952), cited in Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, p. 9.
[13] Julian H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1955.
[14] Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism : A Comparative Study of Total Power*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1957
[15] M. Estellie Smith, "Technology and Social Control" (1969), cited in Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, p. 9.
[16] T. E. Downing & Gibson McGuire (eds.), *Irrigation's Impact on Society*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1974.
[17] W. P. Mitchell, "The Hydraulic Hypothesis : A Reappraisal", *Current Anthropology* 14, 1973.
[18] Morton H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society*, Random House, New York, 1967.
[19] Issac Schapera, *Government and Politics in Tribal Society*, Watts, London, 1956.
[20] Robert F. Stevenson, *Population and Political Systems in Tropical Africa*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1968.
[21] Jack Stauder, "Anarchy and Ecology : Political Society among the Majangir", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 28, 1972, pp. 153-68.
[22] M. J. Harner, "Scarcity, the Factors of Production, and Social Evolution" in Steven Polgar (ed.), *Population, Ecology and Social Evolution,* The Hague, 1975, pp, 123-38.
[23] M. A. Bakel, *Population Pressure and Cultural Evolution* (1976), cited in Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, p. 11.
[24] C.P. Kottak, "Ecological Variables in the Origin and Evolution of African States", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 14, 1972, pp. 351-80.
[25] Robert L. Carneiro, "A Theory of the Origin of the State", *Science*, 169, 1970, pp. 733-38.
[26] Marshal D. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Chicago, 1972.
[27] Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization*, New York, 1974.
[28] Steven Polgar, "Population, Evolution, and Theoretical Paradigms" in Steven Polgar (ed), *Population, Ecology and Social Evolution,* The Hague, 1975, pp. 1-25.
[29] Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, pp. 603-06.
[30] Robert Cohen, "State Origin: A Reappraisal" in Claessen & Skalnik, *op.cit*, pp. 61-62.
[31] For an analysis of the Puranic and epigraphic sources see J B Bhattacharjee, *Bhauma-Naraka Legend and State Formation in Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa*, NEIHA, Shillong, 2004 pp. 18-30; Nirode Boruah, *Early Assam,* DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2007, pp. 25-92; Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, London, 1906, pp. 14-15.
[32] Nayanjot Lahiri, *Pre-Ahom Assam : Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Centuries AD*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1991; Mukunda Madhava Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Gauhati

University Publication, 1978, pp.20-24, 50, 91, 11, 121-22, 133-34, 162-63, 185-86, 213-14, 230-31, 262-63.

[33] J. B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit*, pp. 31-65.

[34] V. S. Agarwala, *India as known to Panini,* Bharatiya Publishing House, Varanasi, 1963, pp. 65-66, 432.

[35] For details see Sarbani Bhattacharjee, "Epigraphic Records on Political Framework of Early Barak-Surma Valley", *Northeast Researches*, Vol. VI, 2015, pp. 14-36.

[33] N. K. Bhattasali, "New Light on the History of Assam", *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol. xx (1945), pp. 19-28.

[37] Kamalakanta Gupta, *Copper-plates of Sylhet*, Lipika Enterprise, Sylhet, 1967, pp. 52-56.

[38] *Ibid*, pp. 31-50; *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, pp. 23-36.

[39] Nihar Ranjan Roy, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, Book Emporium, Kalikata, 1949, p. 140; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *Bānglādesher Itihās*, vol. 1, General Printers & Publishers, Kalikata, 1971, pp. 26-41; D C Sircar, "Money in Pre-Ahom Assam and its Neighbourhood", in J P Singh & Nissar Ahmed (ed), *Coinage and Economy of North-Eastern States of India,* Numismatic Society of India, Varanasi, 1978, pp. 2-3; B N Mukherjee, *External Trade of Early North-Eastern India*, Har-Anand Publishers, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 39-46; J B Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North East India*, Har-Anand Publishers, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 9-27; Sujit Choudhury, *Śrihatta-Cāchārer Prāchin Itihās*, Dinkal Press, Silchar, 2006, pp. 50-67.

[40] Kamalakanta Gupta, *Copper-plates of Sylhet*, *op.cit*, pp. 101-23.

[41] *Ibid*, pp. 123-41; Rajendralal Mitra, "Copper-plate Inscriptions from Sylhet", *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, no. viii, August 1880, pp. 141-53; K. M. Gupta, "Bhatera Copper-plates", *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. ix (1936), p. 356; Achyutcharan Choudhury, *Śrihatter Itivritta*, Śrihatta (Sylhet), 1317 BS, pp. 13-16; R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, G. Bharadwaj & Co., Calcutta, 1973, p. 341; K.K. Gupta, *Copper-plates of Sylhet*, *op.cit*, p. 101; J B Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North East India*, *op.cit*, pp. 9-27.

[42] For details see J B Bhattacharjee, "The Pre-Colonial Political Structure of Barak Valley" in M.S. Sangma (ed.), *Essays on North East India*, Indus Publications, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 37-52.

[43] For details see J.B. Bhattacharjee, *State and Wealth: The Early States in Northeast India*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati/New Delhi, 2010; J.B. Bhattacharjee & D.R. Syiemlieh (eds.), *Early States in North East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2013.

[44] J.B. Bhattacharjee, *State and Wealth: The Early States in Northeast India*, *ibid*.

[45] J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Lectures in Applied History*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2013.

[46] For details see Surajit Sinha (ed.), *op.cit*; J. B. Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North East India*, *op.cit*; *idem*, "Economic Dimension

of the Meitei State Formation" in F. A. Qadri (ed), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, Vol. 2, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 58-76; *idem*, *State and Wealth: The Early States in Northeast India*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2010.

[47] Surajit Sinha (ed.), *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1986.

[48] *Ibid*, p. xiv.

[49] *Ibid*, p. xv.

[50] *Ibid*, pp. 143-76.

[51] *Ibid*, p. 144.

[52] Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt (tr. & ed.), *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur : The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Routledge, New York/London, 2005; L. Joychandra Singh, *The Lost Kingdom*, Prajatantra Publishing House, Imphal, 1995; R. K. Saha, "State Formation Among the Meiteis of Manipur" in Surajit Sinha (ed), *op.cit*, pp. 213-42; S. Amal Singh, "Technology, Occupational Distribution and Settlement Pattern in Early Manipur" in J.B. Bhattacharjee (ed.), *State and Economy in Pre-Colonial Manipur*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 83-119; J. Roy, *History of Manipur*, Eastlight Book House, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 15-43; L. I. Singh, *Introduction to History of Manipur*, O.K. Stores, Imphal, 1963, pp. 23-65.

[53] Amal Sanasam, "Sociology of Settlement Pattern in Manipur Valley", *The Insight*, Vol. I, No. I, January-June 2006, pp. 71-90; L. I. Singh & K. N. Singh (eds.), *Chaitarol Kumbaba*, Imphal, 1967; R Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*, (London, 1907), reprint D.K. Publishers, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 39-55; E W Dunn, *Gazetteer of Manipur*, (London, 1875), reprint D.K. Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 63-115; T. C. Hudson, *The Meiteis*, (London, 1911), reprint D.K. Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 37-49; L. Basanti Devi, "Ancient Meitei Military Organization", *Proceedings of North East India History Association* (hereafter *PNEIHA*), 11th session, Imphal, 1990, pp. 128-29; Gangmumei Kabui, "Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and the Establishment of the Ningthouja Dynasty of Manipur", *PNEIHA*, 9th session, Guwahati, 1988, pp. 33-34; L Kunjeswori Devi, "Ancient Discoveries in Sekta, a village in Manipur", *PNEIHA*, 12th session, Jagiroad, 1991, pp. 120-23.

[54] J. Roy, *op.cit*, pp. 78-112; R. K. Jalajit Singh, *A Short History of Manipur*, Published by Telem Abhir Singh, Imphal, 1965, pp. 67-96

[55] For some details of technology see J.B. Bhattacharjee (ed.), *State and Economy in Pre-Colonial Manipur*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010, particularly "Archaeology of Early State in Manipur" by L. Kunjeswori Devi, pp. 43-47; "Coinage and Economy of the Meitei State' by Nicholas Rhodes & S.K. Bose, pp. 58-82; "Technology, Occupational Distribution and Settlement Pattern in Early Manipur" by S. Amal Singh, pp. 83-119; "Indigenous Weaving Technology of Manipur" by L. Basanti Devi, pp. 120-133.

[56] Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt (tr. & ed.), *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Rutledge, London/New York, 2005. The book is a translation of the royal chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. For another

translation of *Cheitharol Kumbaba* by a group of Meitei scholars, see L. Joychandra Singh (ed.), *The Lost Kingdom – Royal Chronicle of Manipur*, Prajatantra Publishing House, Imphal, 1995. For the text of chronicle in original Meitei language in modern Manipuri script (Bengali), see M. Ibungohal Singh & N. Khelchandra Singh (ed.), *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1967.

[57] Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt (tr. & ed.), *ibid*, pp. 27-36.

[58] *Ibid*, pp. 43-86.

[59] R. K. Saha, *op.cit*, pp. 214-24; Amal Sanasam, *op.cit*, pp. 71-86; R Brown, *op.cit*, pp. 39-55; E W Dunn, *op.cit* , pp. 63-85; Gangmumei Kabui, *op.cit*, pp. 33-34; L. Basanti Devi, "Origin, Growth and Fall of the Moirang Principality in South Manipur Valley", *PNEIHA*, 9th session, Guwahati, 1988, pp. 45-91; L Kunjeswori Devi, *op.cit*, pp. 120-23; M Shantirani Devi, "Relics of Kangla (Old Palace)", *PNEIHA*, 12th session, Jagiroad, 1991, pp. 124-28; Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt (tr. & ed.), *op.cit*; Gangmumei Kabui, *History of Manipur*, Volume One (Pre-Colonial Period), National Book House, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 95-146; Quazi Hamid Ali, *The Manipur Muslims*, Published by author, Banskandi, 1979.

[60] Gangmumei Kabui, "A brief note on Layiyamba Shinyen : A royal edict on social distribution of economic and administrative functions", *PNEIHA*, 3rd session Imphal, 1982, pp. 31-36; J.B. Bhattacharjee, "Loiyamba Shinyen : A Landmark in Meitei State Formation in Manipur", *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Mysore, 64th session, December, 2003, pp 123-32.

[61] R. K. Saha, *op.cit*; M. Jitendra Singh, "Slavery in Pre-British Manpur ; A Historical Survey", *PNEIHA*, 5th session, Aizawl, 1984, pp. 79-84; J. Roy, *op.cit*, pp. 67-135; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, *op.cit*, pp. 67-96.

[62] R. K. Jhalajit Singh, *ibid*, pp. 231-36; R. Brown, *op.cit*, pp. 10-13.

[63] H. Nilkant Singh, "Meitei Village Community"', *PNEIHA*, 16th session, Silchar, 1995, pp. 85-89; R K Jhalajit Singh, *op.cit*, pp. 59-60 ; R. Brown, *op.cit*, p. 14; R. B. Pamberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Bengal Govt. Press, Calcutta, 1835, pp. 136-49; K. Ratan, "Myths and Rituals in Laiharaoba", *PNEIHA*, 16th session, Silchar, 1995, pp. 90-97; K. Ratankumar Singh, "Genesis of the Lai Haraoba in Meitei Society", *PNEIHA*, Shillong, 1992, pp. 136-40; M. Jitendra Singh, "Famines in the Valley of Manipur as recorded in *Chaitharol Kumbaba*", *PNEIHA*, 7th session, Pasighat, 1986, pp. 48-52; E. W. Dunn, *op.cit*, p. 10; T. C. Hudson, *The Meiteis*, *op.cit*, pp. 107-10; L. Kunjeswori Devi, *op.cit*, pp. 120-23; M. Shantirani Devi, *op.cit*, pp. 124-28; Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt (tr. & ed.), *op.cit*; L. Joychandra Singh, *op.cit*.; Gangmumei Kabui, *History of Manipur*, *op.cit*, pp. 95-146.

WHITHER 'EARLY MEDIEVAL' SETTLEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY : A CASE STUDY OF THE VARENDRA REGION

SHEENA PANJA

Introduction

The 'early medieval'[1] period has been roughly identified with the post-Gupta era (after 600 CE) which presented a fragmented system with the emergence of many smaller short-lived regional kingdoms as well as larger long-lived ones like the Cholas, Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas. This phenomenon has initiated one of the most animated debates in ancient Indian history in recent decades with the idea of 'feudalism' at the core of the controversy. However now it has been argued that these states emerged from a process of agrarian expansion and political integration from the areas which were in the periphery or outside the core areas of ancient state formations[2]. The study of settlements has been linked within this discussion on polity with the debate on the nature of 'urbanism' in this period. The 'feudal' thesis argued for a decline of cities and towns exemplified with the nature of 'poor' material remains as evident from a number of archaeological sites[3]. The critique of this view has mostly used epigraphic and literary data to analyse 'urban' centres in the post- Gupta period as archaeological data has been meagre and insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of settlements. This argument states that after an initial lull in the urban process after the second urbanization in post-Kusana and Gupta periods, there was again a burst of urban centres in the early medieval periods. There is ample evidence of 'cities' both in north and south India which can question the notion of 'urban' decline decisively. Urban centres are present in epigraphs and also in literary texts as space or spatial units which can be distinguished from 'rural' spaces. The towns of Siyadoni, near Lalitpur in Jhansi district, UP and Ahar, identified with Tattanandapura near

Bulandshahar in UP are amongst the many which portray a developed 'urban' settlement. This view though stressing the link between the earlier urban centres of the historical period with the early medieval does mention that these new cities unlike their predecessors did not have an epicentre and were far more rooted in their regional contexts. The early medieval urban centres were primarily nodal points in local exchange networks unlike the early historical centres which were directly linked with centres of authority with supra-regional loci[4].

Archaeological study of settlements

Archaeological remains of this period can be divided into religious structures like monastic complexes or temples, secular architecture, habitation zones as well as isolated discoveries of sculptural pieces some which are inscribed, architectural fragments, pottery, seals and sealings. Sculpture and architecture form the major source of material evidence of this period.

The archaeology of this period remains a problem due to the lack of extensive excavations or explorations as the concentration has been mostly on the study of 'ancient' cultures neglecting the more 'recent' aspects of the past. Inscriptions and texts have mainly provided the input for the analysis of settlements. Research on the material remains has concentrated primarily on religious structures, either a monastic or temple complex along with the study of sculptures which have been found in great numbers all over the country. The study of sculptures is not conducive for understanding past settlements as most of these are found in secondary contexts in isolation from other material remains. Structural remains inform us about architecture, mostly religious, but fail to give us any information on human settlements of the time. In most archaeological works, the material record especially with habitation sites has been ignored or dismissed as unimportant by researchers[5]. Moreover in the absence of any diagnostic archaeological criteria like pottery, it has often been difficult to define an archaeological site of this period where sculptures or architecture are not present which is mostly the case with habitation sites. Thus a vast area of the archaeological record has remained outside the purview of academic work. Moreover archaeological work

has concentrated mainly on identifying the larger settlements with structures while smaller settlements have been overlooked thus giving us an incomplete picture of past human life.

There is no doubt that we find a large proliferation of settlements in different parts of the country in this period. The study of settlements has been primarily directed at understanding the 'urban' and 'rural' divide. 'Urban' centres have been mentioned in many inscriptions and literature of the post Gupta period but archaeology has yielded very meagre information on the topic. This is an aspect which distinguishes this from the earlier urbanization dating from sixth century BCE where archaeological data albeit limited gives us a picture of settlements of the time. It is true that many of the 'historical' period sites which represented 'urban'[6] centres in the Ganga plains often have evidence of disturbed archaeological remains which has led to the theory of the 'urban' decline[7]. However 'urban' like elements are present in many of the sites like Rajghat[8] and Rupar[9] in north India, Chirand[10] and Bangarh in eastern India[11] and Yelleswaram[12], and Sirpur[13] in western and central India although whether these criteria can be used to classify these as 'urban' settlements is open to debate. Survey around sites like Paharpur in Bangladesh[14] which are known for their imposing monastic structure have also shown evidence of habitation activity indicating that even religious complexes did not exist in isolation. This is seen even with the temple complexes of south India where survey in Talakad[15] and Aihole[16] have identified extensive habitation areas around the temples. The problem remains however as to how to relate this habitation zone around a religious complex with an 'urban' formation. Here the concept of 'temple urbanism'[17] applied to understand the growth of urban processes in south India is a useful starting point. It has been argued that the sites that grew around temples during the Chola period exhibit a variety of traits that classify them as 'cities'. Monumental architecture, occupational specialization, trading networks, interaction with a wider hinterland all characteristics of urban growth were present in these temple cities. But the problem remains as to whether these aspects were geared only towards the temple or formed part of a wider multifunctional society which

would be more commensurate with an 'urban' centre. Temple settlements with a monofunctional character could not be labelled as 'urban'. The archaeology of these sites around religious complexes present a similar problem of identification and further work is required to understand whether the presence of habitation zones around a sacred centre can be characterised as a 'city'.

Despite the presence of 'urban' elements it is difficult to designate these sites as purely 'urban' settlements and distinguish it from the 'rural' in the archaeological record of this period. A review of the archaeological evidence indicates that unlike the historical period these sites were not compact with a central core region and no post Gupta settlement can be compared with a Kausambi or Hastinapur. Post Gupta settlements were more dispersed in nature being a complex of sites rather than a complex of mounds as in the historical period. This complex was a conglomeration of diverse elements, 'cities' and 'villages' comprising both 'religious' and 'secular' aspects. The nature of a settlement in the early medieval period has now to move away from this dichotomy of 'urban' and 'rural' and understand the nature of a site or settlement in its specific context.

Archaeological sites in the northern part of West Bengal and adjoining Bangladesh which fall within the ancient region of Varendra (Fig. 1) has been taken up to examine these basic characteristics of settlements in this period and analyse the problems with recent work on this subject. This area has attracted the attention of archaeologists working in the early medieval period due to the rich material record of this region.

Review of previous research

The Varendra region encompassing north Bengal and Bangladesh has been the focus of attention since the 19th century. However the emphasis has been on understanding religious structures like the excavations at Jagjivanpur[18] in West Bengal or Paharpur in Bangladesh. Even in large habitation sites like Bangarh or Mahasthangarh, concentration has been on clearing and exposing structures and not exposing the pattern of a settlement. A review of the archaeological work carried out with settlement sites in this period in both West

Bengal and Bangladesh brings forth this lacuna in the understanding of sites of the post Gupta period.

Bangarh

The site of Bangarh in South Dinajpur district was the first excavated site solely carried out by an academic institution in India, a marked change from earlier archaeological work which was the monopoly of the official organ, the Archaeological Survey of India.[19] Work carried out on the main mound revealed structural activities the most prominent of which is evident during the early medieval period. Subsequently recent excavations were carried out in the fortified zone.[20] Here again the concentration was on the main mound and emphasis was given to uncovering structural remains. Survey carried out around this region to ascertain the entire complex revealed that the main fortified complex is surrounded by a habitation zone the extent of which is difficult to ascertain.[21] However there has been no effort to understand human settlement in this complex apart from the structural remains.

Mahasthangarh

This very important settlement complex has been worked on since many years but here again the emphasis have been more on uncovering the structural remains. Recent work in the Mazar area within the citadel dated to the early medieval period concentrated more on the rampart and associated structures.[22] A survey conducted linking the fortified core with the hinterland was attempted[23] but even that was limited to surface survey and the documentation of structural mounds. Surface survey in this zone where artifact visibility is poor cannot be an adequate method to understand the entire complex. Mahasthan is a huge site complex but the emphasis has been to excavate the mounds and uncover structural remains while there has been no attempt to understand the nature of habitation or settlement plan both within and outside the fortified zone.

Birampur complex

One of the most extensive and exhaustive works has been carried out in north Bangladesh in Dinajpur district. These works exemplify

the current lacunae inherent in the study of settlements of this period. Zakariah's description remains an invaluable description of the material remains of this region but the chronology and patterning remain unclear[24]. The problem persists in the subsequent works[25] where a picture of a settlement does not emerge. Excavations even though emphasising a contextual approach against the monument centric method remains an uncovering of structures in a broader geomorphic context. The excavations at Bowalar Mandap[26], emphasised that this was a part of a settlement complex, but the nature and pattern of this settlement is yet to be understood by the researchers. The explanation is limited to the nature of the structure and its relationship with the growth of Brahmanism as exemplified in the epigraphic records. Work carried out at Domile-Khairguni area[27] identifies settlement complexes but there is no effort to understand the nature of a habitation zone. Surface pottery is often erroneous and mixed in nature in this region which makes it difficult to denote a 'habitation' area from exploratory surveys. The researchers have denoted habitations on the basis of structural mounds and pottery dumps. The work carried out at Tileshwarir Aara[28] also remains an uncovering of structural remains and postulates the understanding of religious structures as a part of settlement rather than an isolated element in the system. Exploratory surveys in the Varendra region by the Bangladesh team identifies settlements based on surface pottery and structural mounds. These do give a tentative idea of the clusters but do not help us understand the nature of a habitation settlement in this zone due to the problems of visibility as well as an inadequate pottery reference.[29] The habitation deposits are difficult to ascertain from the surface survey due to the nature of the sites and its formation history in an alluvial terrain. The problems of Zakariah's approach remains : the issue of assigning a rough chronology due to the lack of a pottery sequence for this region and the unclear pattern of a habitation. To presume that the entire habitation has been washed away by fluvial activity is premature as sites are preserved according to its context. Alluvial archaeology in very dynamic settings are not well understood in this region and habitation sites could well be buried like the site of Balupur which we discuss below. It has been argued

that buried settlements can be found in a floodplain zone but not in the terrace based on the extensive survey in diverse areas in north Bangladesh.[30] But an excavation of a structure cannot be used to generalize on settlement history.

Balupur

This limited study of a site in Malda district is significant for two aspects, the understanding of the formation of a habitation site in an alluvial context (floodplain) and the creation of a pottery index which can provide a starting point to identify habitations in this region. This work shows that habitation sites need not be always washed away but can survive as buried sites depending on the context and duration of habitation. These buried sites are sometimes invisible on the surface but are very well preserved entities. However the methodology of understanding the formation of these sites is still to be fully worked out. This work did not throw any light on the nature of a settlement as it was more a vertical excavation understanding the link between humans, floods and the creation of a material record in a dynamic fluvial setting.[31]

Budhura

In South Dinajpur district Budhura has been the subject of a recent interesting work which tries to incorporate epigraphic and archaeological work in understanding a settlement[32]. A preliminary survey in this area based on the information of a village mentioned in the Rajibpur copper plate inscription revealed dispersed material roughly dated to the 11th-12th century CE. The archaeological remains are mostly structural mounds, dispersed scatters of pottery, sculptural and architectural fragments, with clustered areas in four zones. The problem arises from the initial aspect of how to define the area of a habitation in this context. The pottery assemblage is far from convincing to give any adequate chronology to these dispersed scatters. Ascribing a diagnostic ware on a basis of a few sherds is also an erroneous way to interpret habitation scatters. Moreover bricks cannot be taken as a criteria for designating a cultural period as reuse of earlier material has not been taken into account.

Paharpur complex

Work carried out at the Paharpur complex has shown that contrary to the view that Somapura Vihara was an isolated monument, this Mahavihara had associated structures and habitation nearby. However the survey work carried out concentrated more on structural mounds to denote a habitation area.[33] Surface collection of pottery remains a problem in this region due to disturbance processes and more so the lack of a pottery index to demarcate the various cultural levels.

The lacunae of previous work remains in the inability to identify habitation zones and the pattern of settlements in this area. Researchers concentrating on prominent structural complexes and sculptural remains have ignored the often invisible habitation deposits which remain an elusive concept in the archaeology of this region. The formation of a habitation site in this terrain is still not understood by researchers. Excavations and explorations have sought to unravel the nature of structural complexes but have failed to provide an understanding of the human settlement and its character and formation.

Character of settlements of Varendra region

Despite the limitations of earlier research in this region certain characteristics of early medieval settlements can be analysed from these works. The 'settlement' here seems to be a dispersed one hence it is difficult to use the terms 'urban' or 'rural' to describe the sites in this region. These settlements can be called a complex rather than a site even when there is a fortified area within the broader settlement. But the exact boundary of a settlement or the nature of it i.e. religious/secular, 'rural'/'urban' is open to scrutiny.

The complex is an amalgamation of religious cum secular structures, habitation areas and in some instances a fortified core. The mounds here are mostly remains of structures and thus have attracted the attention of most archaeologists working in this region. Habitation zones/areas like at Balupur can be buried or shallow scatters but their preservation is yet to be understood adequately. The preservation of Balupur is a clear instance of the survival of a habitation zone in a buried context, which is fairly well preserved.

An analysis of Bangarh and Mahasthan,[34] (Fig. 2) reveals the existence of blurred boundaries and the difficulty of designating the exact area of the site as there are so many dispersed material remains outside the fortified core which could be an integral portion of the settlement. The case of Birampur in Dinajpur also portrays this point clearly. There is no doubt that the clusters referred to by both these researchers are large ones but the remains are dispersed and scattered, a characteristic of this period and region. The spatial patterning of a cluster like Garhpinglai - Chandipur which covers an area of almost 310.62 hectares[35] (Fig 3) presents a dispersed picture with structural mounds, habitation scatters as denoted by pottery and other artifacts enclosed within a broad zone. It is often difficult to demarcate the exact boundary of a settlement and estimate its size as the borders are often fuzzy and ambiguous. If we look at the map (Fig. 3)[36] we find that we have two or three complexes within a bigger area which cannot be designated as separate settlement complexes. Garh-Pinghlai, Charkai-Birampur and Mirzapur are all situated close to each other without definite boundaries. This has prompted Zakariah to classify Charkai-Birampur as the Panchanagari or five cities.[37] This does define the dispersed nature of the clusters in the entire settlement complex. At Budhura too one can surmise that the settlement pattern here was a dispersed one; there is no real 'core' area nor is there a definite boundary to the settlement(s) nor is there any criteria by which this complex can be labelled as 'urban' or 'rural' in nature.

A brief survey conducted in February 2016 along the Cheeramati river in South Dinajpur district, West Bengal also revealed this pattern.

A Case Study - Bairhatta and the settlement complex along the Cheeramati River

Earlier geoarchaeological work in this area has established that the habitation along the river is situated on the Younger Baikunthapur formation on a palaeofloodplain surface (middle - late Holocene) a part of the Tista Megafan. The Cheeramati river is the nearest river and a study of a section near Jagdalla[38] showed that the channel has not shifted to a great extent. To the east, north and south of this area covering the modern day village of Bairhatta are patches of Older Baikunthapur. Terrain evolution wise one may conceive that a vast

flat flood basin, the Older Baikunthapur formation gradually dried up, was traversed by streams, became undulatory and received younger Baikunthapur deposits.[39] This complex comprises the main area of the modern villages of Bairhatta, Kasba, Hatidoba as well as structural mounds in many areas along the river Cheeramati (Fig 4). This zone has been surveyed in the 1930's by S.K. Saraswati who reported many archaeological remains along this river. He connected it with the prevalent theory that the city of Ekdala was in this zone, in the area of Bairhatta. He found many mounds and sculptures at Dehaband, Patiraj, Adhyakhanda (which he identified as the earliest city of Ekdala), Jagdalla, Surohor and Mahendra which resembled a well planned city.[40] A map of 1932 (Fig. 5) indicates the vast nature of the complex with a moat which however is difficult to trace now. Other accounts identify this zone as that of the famous but unidentified Jagaddala Mahavihara.[41] As is the character of most of ancient Varendra this area is also dotted with numerous large and small tanks.

This area was surveyed by the author in 2000 and a re-survey of the site of Bairhatta and its adjoining area around the Cheeramati (Sreemati) river was undertaken in 2016-17. Unfortunately many of the remains are partially or completely destroyed. This preliminary work of the site of Bairhatta and its adjoining area around the Cheeramati (Sreemati) river revealed a pattern which is again dispersed in nature. (Plate 1, Fig 4). Amongst the sites include structural mounds at Doldanga - Binandabati where the bricks are not visible on the surface and Dehaband with large bricks the size of which are 36 x 29 x 6 cm. This site has been completely devastated by villagers and there is very little of the mound remaining. The site of Kansadighi, east of Dehaband with a series of structural mounds was also visited. Another site discovered was Bhelagachi, again a large complex, vastly devastated, but with a large amount of stone quite unlike other sites. A huge structural complex covering about half a km was discovered here, with bricks the size of which are 39 x 31 x 6 cm and 29 x 24 x 6 cm attesting to its antiquity. There was evidence of stone cutting debris in a part of the area with half-finished blocks of stone, grinding grooves, flakes and chunks. The presence of broken sculptural pieces, architectural fragments led one to postulate that this could have been

a manufacturing zone for stone artifacts. The area has a fortified zone locally known as Garh encircled by smaller structural mounds. Other structural mounds were also found at Sandilya (Plate 2), Adhykahanda (almost destroyed completely) and Jagdalla (Dhumpara). At Sandilya an intact Shiv Linga has been recovered from the mound debris along with pillars which could indicate a religious structure which has unfortunately been destroyed by local inhabitants. At Jagdalla structural mounds and architectural fragments seen in an earlier trip were not visible in 2016. Structural mounds reported from Mahendra, Pathiraj and Deokhanda by earlier researchers were also not visible anymore. Survey to the north of Bairhatta revealed a large settlement complex at Sarala over a 1 km radius with structural mounds some which has now been levelled by villagers. The structural complex is surrounded by a flat area where pottery and brickbats are found by villagers while digging. Survey to the south of Bairhatta revealed two structural mounds at Golagram as well as a large mound at Raynagar with sculptures (Plate 3) which are again now being destroyed. A structural mound together with sculptural remains including an inscribed sculpture has also been found at Dolgram[42]. Remnants of sculptures are found in many areas and villagers attest to the huge number of large bricks and artifacts which are now lost. This limited survey around the Bairhatta zone does portray the existence of many settlements or satellite settlements with brick structures, tanks and evidence of sculptures and architectural fragments.

The Site of Bairhatta

The site of Bairhatta has attracted attention from the 19th century CE in the writings of Buchanan-Hamilton, Westmacott and Saraswati.[43] Local accounts of the areas also testify to the rich material remains that are found in this area. Buchanan-Hamilton mentions that the area called Borohata is full of mounds, walls and even chambers. He mentions a small fort (Qasba) with bricks and stones everywhere[44] indicating that this had undergone destruction even during the 1820's. Westmacott and Saraswati identify this as the site of Ekdala. Local accounts link this to the city and palace of Birat Raja of the Mahabharata. Even now a fair is held every April near a tree known as the *Shomibriksha* where legends trace its beginnings to the Mahabharata.

The main feature which strikes us about Bairhatta is the presence of three large tanks *(dighis)* (Plate 4) and an innumerable number of ponds. The site like most archaeological remains in this zone has been subjected to extensive reuse by the local inhabitants. Buchanan Hamilton and even Saraswati mention extensive mounds, but now there are very few, mostly being levelled by the villagers to procure bricks for house constructions. The entire habitation is characterized by large (30 x 24 x 6-7 cm) as well as smaller bricks.

The area is rich in sculptures, coins, terracotta plaques and architectural fragments. The few samples discovered as part of the survey reveals the diversity of the material remains of this zone. This includes an inscribed sculptural fragment (Plate 5) identified as that of the deity Candi. This fragment has a figure of Ganesa on the right, Karttikeya on the left, a lizard *(godha* or *godhika)* below and a donor family on the right and left of the animal. It is inscribed, Śrī-lakś (ṣ) maṇasiṁhaḥ //Śrī-jāmukāḥ, translating as (The image is dedicated by) the donors, the illustrious Lakṣmaṇasiṁha (and) illustrious Jāmuka.[45] Palaeographically the script can be dated to the 10-11th century CE.

Many coins have been found from this area including a silver tanka of Sher Shah Suri, (Plate 6) around 11 gms in weight. The language is Arabic and the script is Nashq though one single line is in Sanskrit and written in Devnagari script, *Sri Sher Shahi*.[46]

A seal (Plate 7) discovered from the Hatidoba area which is too worn out to be read clearly has an inscription in the Siddhamatrika script on one side and on the reverse side, a script which is difficult to decipher. Some of the letters (very provisionally) look like Proto-Bengali *la, na, pa, ja* etc. of the seventeenth-nineteenth century CE horizon. Identical tablets have been seen in private collections in Gangasagar and Bardhaman. Several specimens are also preserved in local collections at Chandraketugarh. This particular class of artifacts probably had a wide distribution in Bengal, though the palaeography is very difficult to decode. Most interesting is that many of them are reused specimens. This seal from Bairhatta is also reused like the rest of the specimens observed.[47]

An interesting sculptural piece has been found from this village (Plate 8). This is the figure of a Saivacharya, a Saiva ascetic. Examples of such figures have been found and reported from Hooghly and Midnapur and also from the site of Bangarh. It is significant that there is also an inscription of Nayapala from Bangarh which talks of the Saiva sect, the Durvasas who belonged to the monastic order of Golagimahamatha at Bangarh and also mentions its prominent preceptor. A monastery was built for this sect by Mahipala the Pala ruler at Bangarh. Icons of acharyas of this sect with names have found in Nadia and an unknown regi on and lodged in museums in Chicago and Kolkata. Sculptures of acharyas and disciples have also been recovered from Danton in Midnapore.[48]

It is interesting to note that there are innumerable ring wells in this area. The surface remains yielded no pottery except in dump like features along the ponds. This pottery was mostly of the late medieval period (18-19th century CE).[49] Conversations with the local inhabitants revealed that the larger bricks and pottery are found 5ft below the surface. It seems the structures of large bricks visible on the surface is reused material a very common feature in this region.

The area in Bairhatta comprises a fortified 'Rajbari' area (Fig 6) with habitation deposits stretching beyond the walls. The tentative measurement of the wall, which seems to be of medieval origin from the surface (as indicated by the size of the bricks) is 2300ft (700m) east-west and 1400 ft (420m) north-south and is situated between the two large dighis, *Altadighi* and *Gourdighi*. The wall has many chronological phases as the digging of the villagers reveals various sizes of bricks, larger ones coming from greater depths. The width of the walls according to local villagers is 3.5-4.0 m. Inside the fortified complex is the main habitation zone which has been disturbed by local villagers to a great extent. Many sculptures and a seal were recovered from this zone. This area called Hatidoba (Fig. 6) has many structural mounds most of which has been levelled by the villagers. Large bricks (30 length and 7cm width) have been used for constructing modern day houses by the inhabitants. A structural mound in this zone. has yielded many terracotta plaques (Plate 9) and other antiquities may be testifying to the presence of a monastic or temple

complex stylistically dated to the 10th-12th century CE.

The habitation outside the northern wall of the fortified complex, at Kasba (Fig. 6) consists of bathing platform *(ghats)* with bricks of the medieval period as well as many structural mounds. Near Alta Dighi (Fig 6) ponds with *ghats* are found at Kanyadubi and Kakadighi as well as small structural mounds. The area south of the boundary wall has many structural mounds and pillars, the bricks visible in the pond sections seem to be medieval in nature, but certain areas like Shibpokora (Fig. 6) has evidence of large bricks, 6-8 cm thick. Mounds are found at areas like Champatoli (Fig. 6) with bathing platforms *(ghats);* coins belonging to Sher Shah have been found from this area.

The main site of Bairhatta though disturbed has evidence of a large habitation zone from the post-Gupta to the medieval period, but the occupation of the earlier period seems to have primarily within the fortified complex of Hatidoba where large bricks, sculptures, architectural fragments, seals and other antiquities have been found. The area covered both within and outside the fortified core could be around 6-8 sq km or more.

The Bairhatta complex covering almost 25-30 sq km, which includes the main area of Bairhatta, the adjoining settlements along the Cheeramati and the area east of the site is a very large zone comparable or even larger than the famous complex at Bangarh near Gangarampur. This zone has not been subjected to very detailed research but the presence of numerous sculptures, coins, seals, plaques, different types of bricks and the large mounds, much of which is destroyed now testifies to a huge settlement complex within the ancient region of Varendra, which stretched from the post- Gupta to the 'medieval' period (approx. 6th century CE to the 18th century CE). This complex incorporates religious structures, stone manufacturing centres as well as large habitations. The presence of diagnostic iconographic remains at some of the locations also denote the importance of this zone as an area of Saivism.

An analysis of this preliminary survey brings forth many of the conclusions derived from the study of settlements in this zone. Like most settlements in Varendra, the main site of Bairhatta cannot be seen in isolation from the entire complex of sites along the Cheeramati,

it can be labelled more as a settlement complex comprising habitations large and small, structural remains both secular and religious together forming a composite whole. It is difficult to assign terms such as 'urban' or 'rural' to these settlement complexes but rather to see it as a combination of multiple elements. The area and size of the entire habitation is difficult to demarcate accurately as the boundaries are ambiguous. It is best characterized as a dispersed settlement cluster (Figs 4 and 6) with a concentration in the core Bairhatta area.

Moreover similar to other site complexes discovered in this zone, most of the mounds seem to be structural remains; the habitation remains as ever an elusive entity to the archaeologist working in this zone. Pottery is scarce on the surface and seems to be of the 16-17th centuries and cannot indicate any cultural chrononology during a survey. It is significant however that archaeological material is found well below the surface substantiating the earlier hypothesis that habitations could well have been buried entities in certain zones of the landscape. The surface mounds or the archaeological material found on the surface represent only a portion of the past archaeological record of this zone, and surface survey cannot reveal the true nature of a habitation.

Problems and prospects for the study of 'early medieval' archaeology - Implications from the Varendra region

Archaeological settlements of the early medieval period in the Varendra region can be characterised as dispersed site complexes characterised by large structures, exchange networks, industrial activity, religious monuments, sculptures and other aspects of material culture, unlike the compact settlements of the earlier phase. It is true that at many sites like Bangarh or Mahasthangarh there was a fortified core area but it was not present in other sites like the Birampur or Cheeramati complex which was a constellation of sites encompassing both religious, political and social dimensions. The site of Paharpur also portrays this link between religion and the settlement system as a whole. It is prudent therefore to speak of complexes rather than sites to understand the settlements in a holistic perspective.

This is also the characteristic of most of the settlements across the country. Variation and diversity is the key to understanding the nature and formation of sites in this period. The evolution of these settlements was not a uniform phenomenon but should be understood as encompassing diverse formation processes with a distinct regional and sub-regional character.

The elusive habitation

The main problem with early medieval archaeology is the 'invisible' habitation which seems to elude the archaeologist working in this terrain. Inadequate understanding of the nature of site formation in this region has deluded archaeologists from developing a plausible methodology to understand human settlements in such a dynamic fluvial terrain. It is surmised that the prominent features on this landscape, the mounds only encompass structures both religious and secular, while the habitations are either buried or flimsy in character. Archaeologists comfortable with a 'mound' centric archaeology have thus concentrated on these remains hereby only uncovering structures, ignoring the 'hidden' habitation. The excavations at Balupur enabled us further to visualize the creation and preservation of habitations in such a setting.[50] Settlements could very often be buried entities rather than large mounds, often invisible to the surface observer. The evidence from the excavations at Balupur revealed however that structures and artifacts, including pottery and organic remains were mostly well-preserved in a context 7m below the surface, that witnessed rapid burial of archaeological remains. At this site, areas with the least surface visibility of artifacts, yielded the most extensive remains below the surface. Discussions with local inhabitants in many other surveyed regions also revealed that large bricks and remnants of earlier cultures lie 3-5ft or even deeper. This has been seen also at Bairhatta where bricks and pottery are visible 5ft below the surface. Surface survey may not yield any significant information on habitations as surface visibility is low in this area.

Formation of sites in this area whether a floodplain or a terrace or the elevated area is not yet understood. Contrary to arguments that habitation zones are not preserved in the elevated areas but only in

the floodplains, buried structures and habitations have been found as part of a preliminary survey carried out in Malda and South Dinajpur districts.[51] Within the elevated Barind zone of Kandaran (Fig. 1), buried structures was found at Sanjib, while buried remains were also recovered at a site called Elahabad, in a similar upland area near the site of Bangarh near Gangarampur (Fig. 1). The most extensive surveys carried out by the Bangladesh team have also failed to understand this problem. Settlement zones have been identified on the basis of surface pottery scatters most of which have been dumps.

Excavations and explorations have to take into account the formation of sites in this terrain and avoid a mound centred approach. Settlements in this region are complexes rather than compact 'urban' sites or small 'rural' entities. Scatters of artifacts do occur on larger sites like Balupur, but settlements occupied for brief periods of time would often be too ephemeral or even non-existent on the ground. Thus standard methods of archaeological survey would not be useful in this context. Here excavation techniques have to take into account the entire complex; merely exposing mounds will reveal only structural remains missing the habitation area of the site. Sub-surface sampled trial digs on areas (often flat and without surface evidence) between structures, as well as trenches connecting the main centre with the associated settlements are necessary to understand the character of the settlement structure in this zone and help identify habitation sites in this alluvial setting.

Pottery sequence

The lack of a pottery sequence remains a major drawback to identifying the chronological layers within this complex. Literary and epigraphic evidence show that the 'urban' like early medieval settlements were more rooted in their regional and local contexts than their earlier counterparts.[52] Archaeology seems to indicate this regional and sub-regional character of settlements during this period. It has been surmised that historical cities had an epicentre from which it expanded to different parts of the subcontinent. This probably resulted in some sort of uniformity in archaeological material in most of the sites of this period. Post-Gupta cities on the other hand did not have

an epicentre and hence they were more regional in character thus portraying a greater variety of material remains.[53] There is a great amount of variability present both in material culture (for example pottery) as well as in the urban process itself during this period. For example we do not have any diagnostic ware like the Northern Black Polished ware (and its variations) found during the historical period in many parts of the country.[54] The pottery sequence is divergent 'and a single pottery index is insufficient to categorise sites in an entire zone like the Varendra region. The work at Balupur and the unpublished work at Mahasthangarh remain a preliminary attempt to characterize the disparate pottery assemblage of this period.

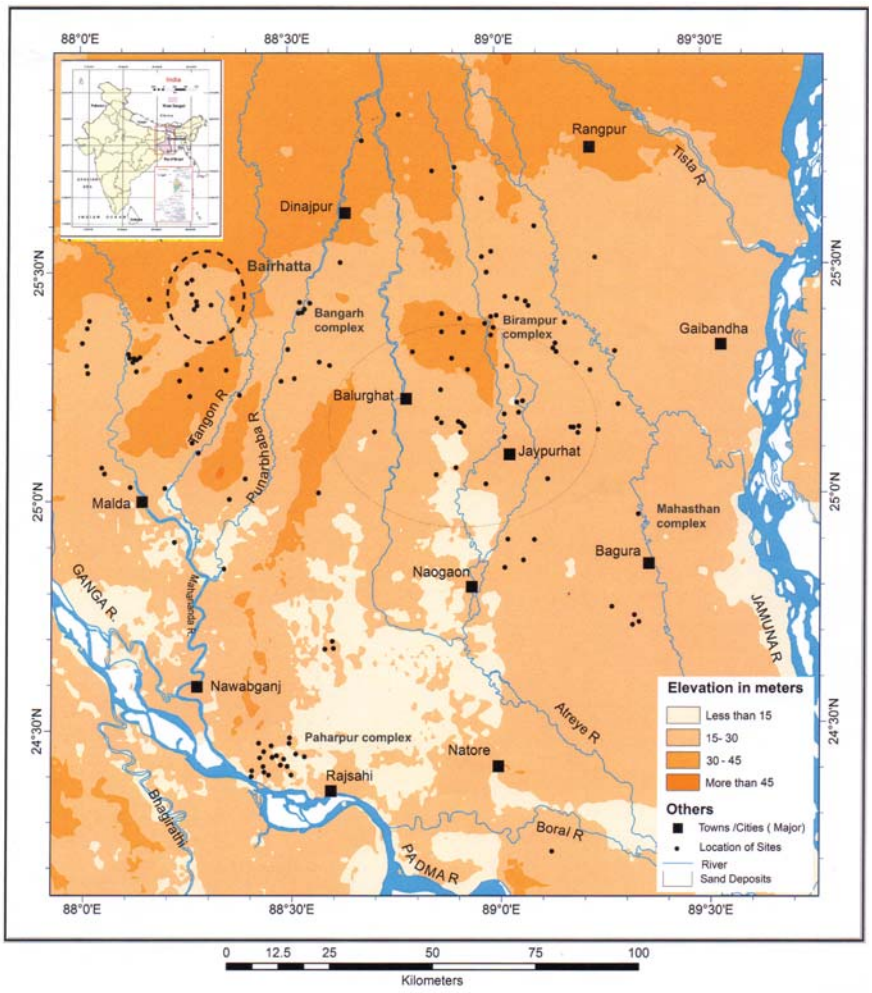
Zones of Isolation

Another characteristic of this period is that we see the growth of settlements in many new areas which came into the fold, like many parts of north Bengal which do not have a rich historical material record except at a few sites. Outlying regions were also brought into the system with areas like the semi-arid western part of West Bengal (districts of Purulia and Bankura) where we find an increase of settlements and architecture of this period. An important zone is the Himalayan region where there is evidence of the emergence of states with political centres and nodes of exchange. The Chamba state is an important example in this respect where the Mushana dynasty founded the city of Champaka (Chamba) or the city of Karttikeyapura in Kumaun district.[55] Archaeological evidence of habitations is however scarce in these areas and the emphasis has been on religious structures and monuments. An effort has to be made to understand the entire gamut of material culture in these 'zones of isolation' encompassing structural remains and habitations.

Conclusion - Whither 'early medieval' settlement archaeology

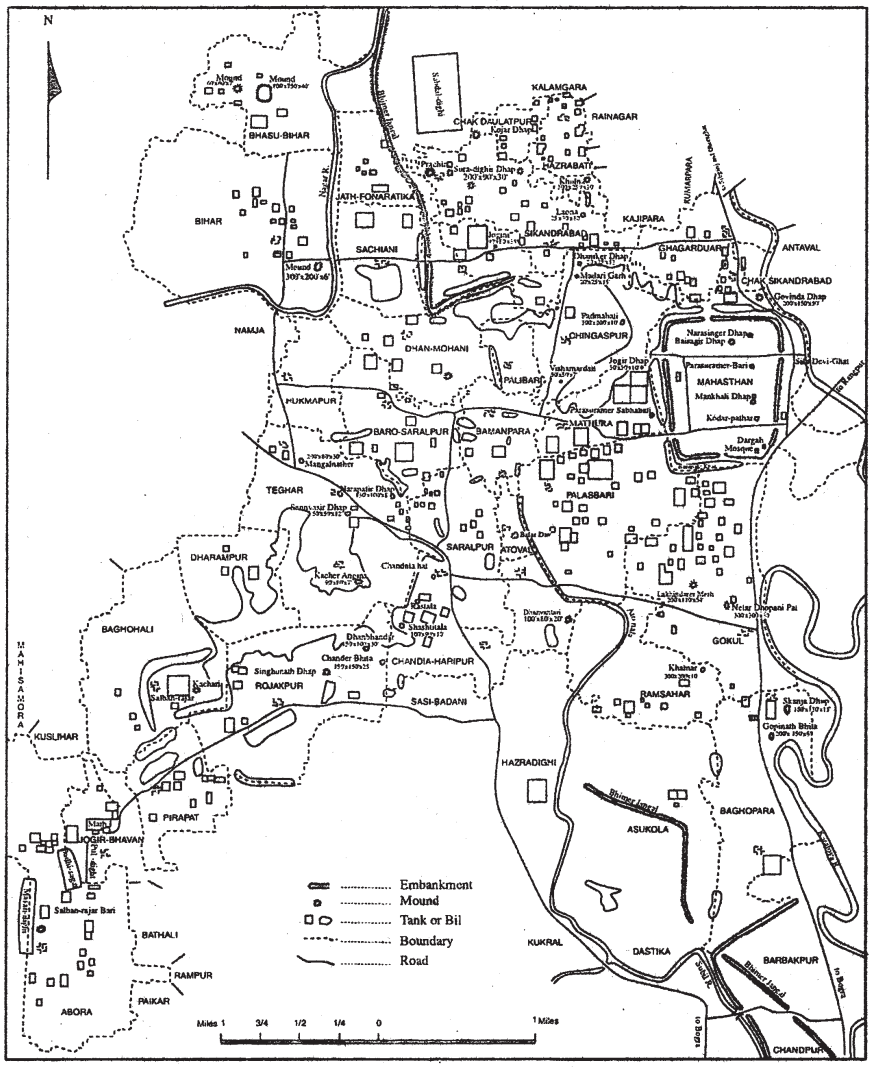
Settlement archaeology of the early medieval period is still in an 'age of innocence' where a study of the nature and formation of sites and a holistic study of material culture is necessary to understand the complexity of the habitations of the people of the last 1200-1500 years. Future archaeological work needs to move away from the art/ architecture centred approach and understand a settlement from a

Fig. 1



Map of Varendra region

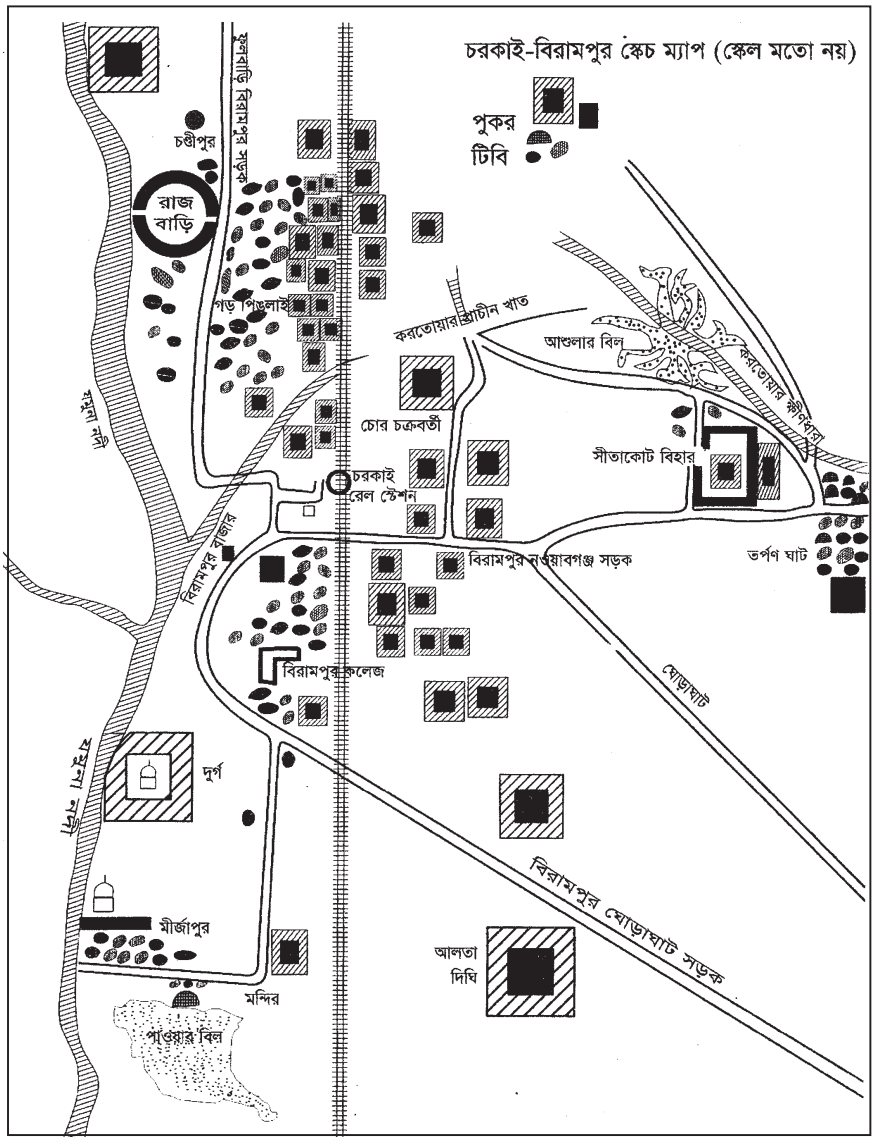
Fig. 2



Mahasthan complex

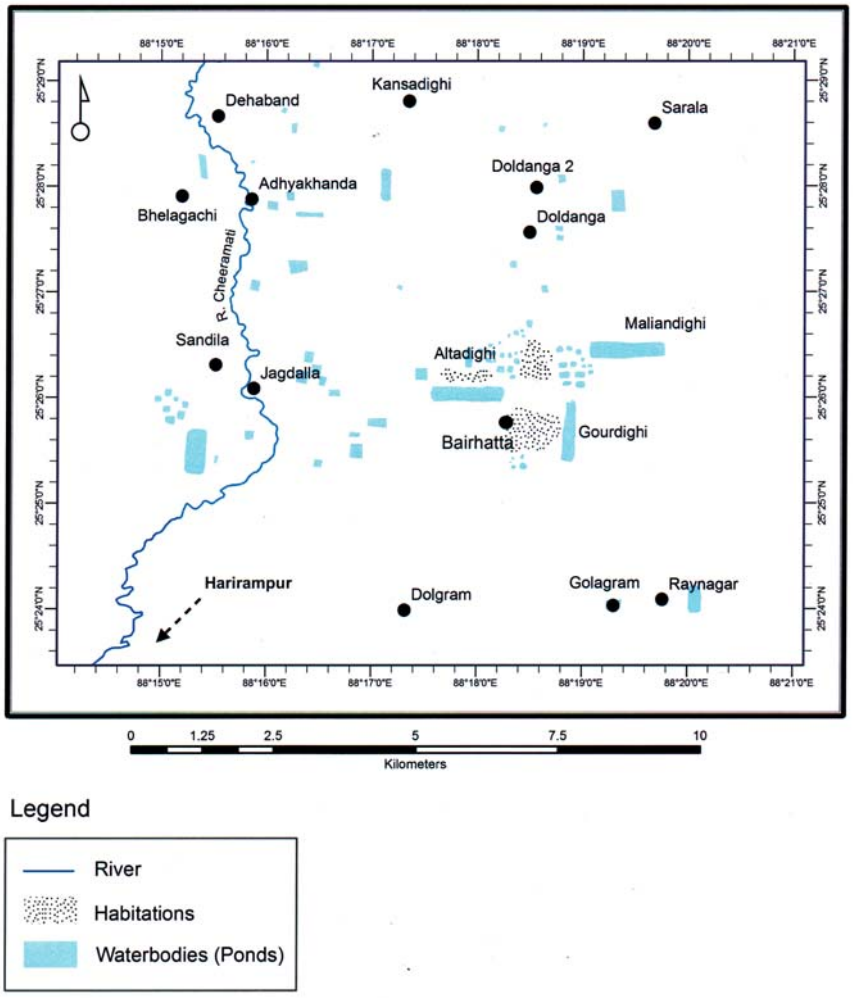
Source: P. C. Sen, Mahasthan and its Environs, Varendra Research Society Monograph No. 2, *Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi,* 1929.

Fig. 3



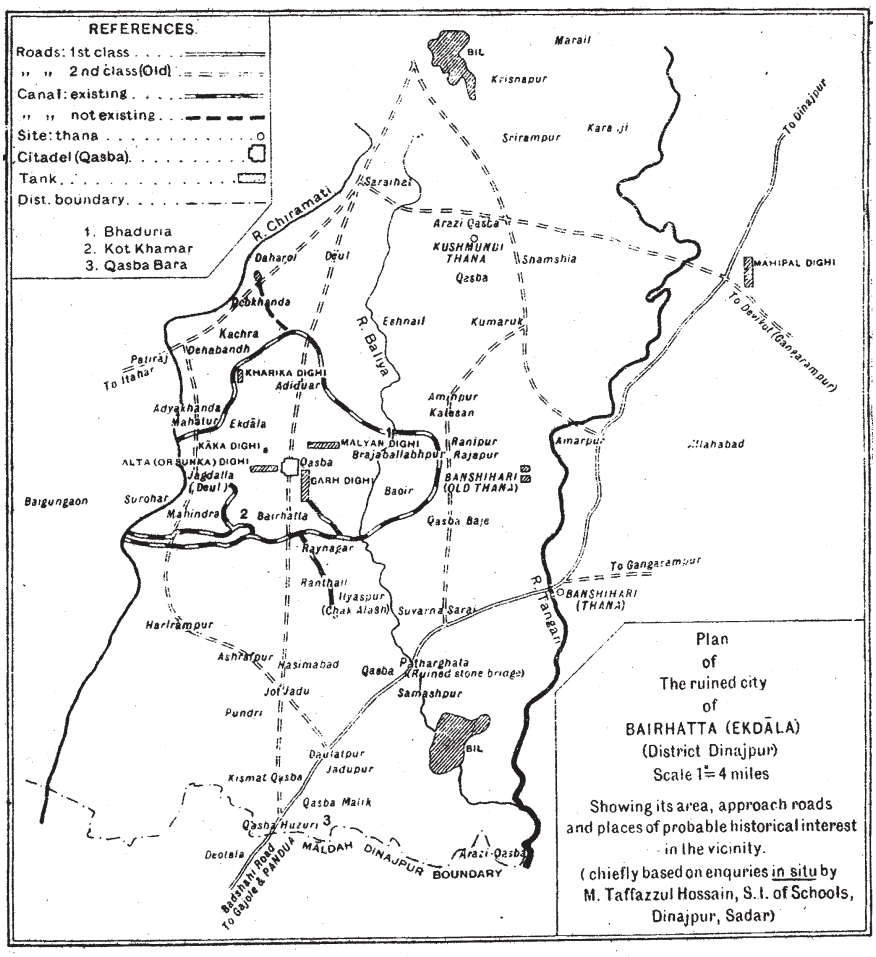
Zakariah's Map of Birampur
Source : From A.K.M Zakariah, *Bangladesher Pratnasampad,* Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, 1984 repr., Dibyaprakash, Dhaka, 2007, p. 96.

Fig. 4



Bairhatta and surroundings

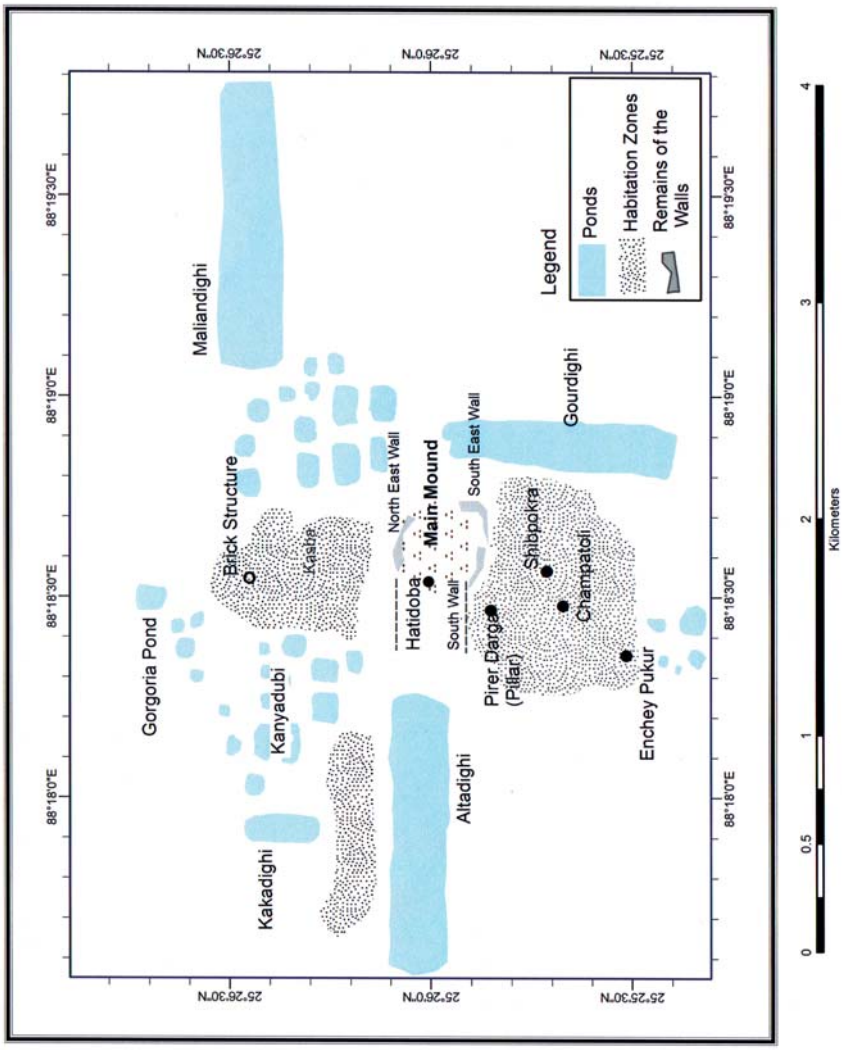
Fig. 5



1932 Map of Bairhatta

Source: After H. E. Stapleton, 'Note on the Historical and Archaeological Results of a Tour in the Districts of Maldah and Dinajpur, December 24-31', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 28, 1932, pp. 151-71. Plate 4.

Fig. 6



The Site of Bairhatta

Plate - 1

Cheeramati river and landscape

Plate - 2.

Sculptural fragment at Raynagar

Plate - 3

Shiv Linga from destroyed mound at Sandilya

Plate - 4

Ponds at Bairhatta

Plate - 5

Inscribed sculpture at Bairhatta

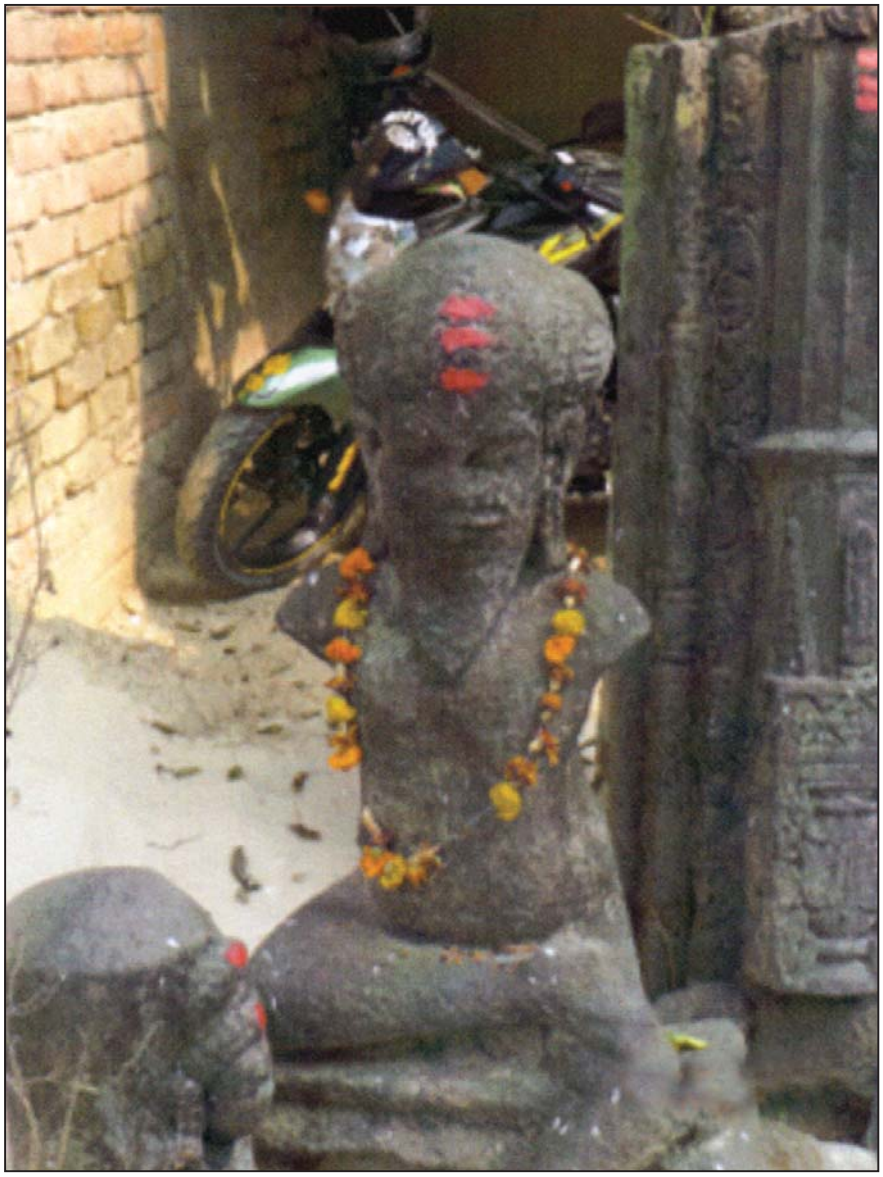
Plate - 6

Coin of Sher Shah

Plate - 7

Seal

Plate - 8



Sculpture in Bairhatta

Plate - 9

Terracotta Plaque

holistic perspective encompassing social, political, religious and economic dimensions. Epigraphic information can merely give a guideline but cannot really help us to understand the formation and character of an early medieval settlement in this zone. There is a need to discard the dichotomoy of the 'urban' and the 'rural' in the characterization of sites and understand settlements as a complex, the boundaries of which were often ambiguous and not well defined. The emphasis on mound and structure based archaeology has to be expanded to understand the formation and nature of habitation settlements. Methodological changes in archaeological field surveys and excavations are necessary to comprehend the early medieval habitation. It is also at regional and sub-regional level that research has to be directed to unravel the variability of the habitation pattern. It is through this approach that one can move away from the prevailing model of a 'historical city', and understand the diversity and regional character of the post-Gupta settlement complex.

Acknowledgements

I have greatly benefitted from discussions and an unpublished paper of Arun Nag on the nature of settlements in this region. Swadhin Sen generously sent me copies of all his papers which were invaluable in this analysis. I wish to thank the people of Bairhatta, Joydeb Sarkar and Jogesh Sarkar as well as my enthusiastic assistant Achinto Mahato whose untiring help enabled me to carry out work in this difficult terrain. I am very grateful to Manab Bandyopadhyay who assisted in every possible way during my survey.

List of Sites

No	Site	Coordinates
1	Bairhatta (Hatidoba area)	25° 26' 0.36" N
		88° 18' 38.16" E
2	Doldanga	25° 27' 33.58" N
		88° 18' 29.95" E
3	Doldanga2	25° 27' 58.98"N
		88° 18' 33.85" E

4	Dehaband	25° 28' 39.70"N 88° 15' 32.48" E
5	Adhyakhanda	25° 27' 52.54" N 88° 15' 51.82" E
6	Bhelagachi	25° 27' 54.30"N 88° 15' 12.15" E
7	Sandila	25° 26' 18.33 "N 88° 15' 31.61" E
8	Jagdalla	25° 26' 4.86" N 88° 15' 53.20" E
9	Raynagar	25° 24' 5.17" N 88° 19' 46.05" E
10	Golagram	25° 24' 1.70" N 88° 19' 18.20" E
11	Kansadighi	25° 28' 41.92" N 88° 17' 7.34" E
12	Dolgram	25° 23' 59.18" N 88° 17' 19.28" E

Notes

[1] The term 'early medieval' and its relationship with the 'medieval' is a debatable one and in this context it is used to refer to the post Gupta period which saw a transformation in social formation as argued by scholars like B D Chattopadhyaya and others. There has also often been a debate to strictly demarcate the 'early medieval' from the 'medieval' with a change in archaeological remains like pottery (Supriya Varma, and Jaya Menon, "Archaeology and the Construction of Identities in Medieval North India", *Studies in History,* Vol. 24 (2), 2008, 173-93). However it is prudent to contextualize the evidence on the basis of the site, the type of excavation and the exact stratigraphic context of the material in order to adequately understand cultural/political change and its relationship with the archaeological record.

[2] Herman Kulke, "The Early and the Imperial Kingdom" in Herman Kulke (ed.) *The State in India 1000-1700,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, 233-262; Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, "Introduction : The Making of Early Medieval India" in Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997a, 1-37.

[3] R.S.Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1987.

[4] Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, "Urban Centres in Early Medieval India" in Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997b, 155-182.

[5] This is present in most excavations of which a few can be mentioned like Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, Kausambi. (B.B. Lal, "Excavation at Hastinapur and Other Explorations in the Upper Ganga and Sutlej Basins 1950-52", *Ancient India,* Vol. 10-11, 1954, 5-151;. R.C. Gaur, *Excavations at Atranjikhera,* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1983; G.R. Sharma, *Excavations at Kausambi,* University of Allahabad, Allahabad, 1960.)

[6] As far as 'urban' centres are concerned, the first aspect to discuss is how do we define 'urban' space. Epigraphy provides us with a definition of a space which can be distinguished from 'rural' space where aspects of cultivable land or pasture are mentioned. Size cannot always be a criteria, for example large complexes like Nalanda cannot be really called an 'urban' settlement (Chattopadhyay 1997b op. cit). Other criteria like moats, fortifications, large size of houses, specialized craft activity, presence of trade have to be treated with caution in analysing settlements of the past as these are not features present in all 'urban' sites. The size and type of houses cannot be a criteria always as in many terrains like a flood prone zone domestic houses are usually built with impermanent material while more 'public' structures are permanent due to the unstable region where river shifting and floods wash away all traces of habitation. The space which speaks of exchange and manufacturing areas can also be considered as 'urban'. The presence of a plethora of sculptural remains often carved out of non-local stone do demonstrate some organised exchange network which is not commensurate with a 'rural' exchange network. Therefore an archeological site or a complex of sites is designated 'urban' on the basis of size, type of structures, industrial and trading activity.

[7] Sharma 1987 op. cit.

[8] B. P. Singh, *Life in Ancient Varanasi: An Account Based on Archaeological Evidence,* Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 1985.

[9] Y. D. Sharma, "Exploration of Historical Sites" *Ancient India,* Vol. 9, 1953, 116-169.

[10] B.S. Verma, *Chirand Excavations Report:* 1961-64 *and 1967-70,* Directorate of Archaeology, Department of Youth and Culture, Government of Bihar, Patna, 2007.

[11] K.G. Goswarni., *Excavations at Bangarh (1938-41),* Asutosh Museum, Memoir No.1, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1948.

[12] Mohammad Abdul Waheed Khan, *A Monograph on Yeleswaram Excavations,* Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, 1963.

[13] A.K. Sharma, *Ancient Temples of Shirpur;* B. R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2012.

[14] Swadhin Sen, K. M. Syfur Rahman and S. M. K. Ahsan, "Crossing the Boundaries of The Archaeology of Somapura Mahavihara: Alternative Approaches and Propositions" *Pratnatattva,* Vol. 20, 2014, 49-79.

[15] D. V. Devaraj, *Excavations at Talkad 1992-93* Vol. 1, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums in Karnataka, Mysore, 1996.

[16] Hemanth Kadambi, *Sacred Landscapes in Early Medieval South India: the Chalukya state and society (ca. AD 550-750),* A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology), The University of Michigan, Michigan, 2011.

[17] James Heitzman, "Temple Urbanism in Medieval South India", *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 46, (4), 1987, 791-826; R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996.

[18] Amal Roy, *Jagjivanpur 1996-2005 Excavation Report,* Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, 2012.

[19] Goswami 1948 op. cit.

[20] T. J. Baidya, and Shantanu Maity, "Excavation at Bangarh 2008-2009." *Pratna Samiksha,* New Series 1, 2010, 35-37.

[21] Sheena Panja, "Understanding early Medieval Settlements of North Bengal" in Gautam Sengupta and Sheena Panja (eds). *Archaeology of Eastern India, New Perspectives,* Centre for Archaeological Studies and Training, Kolkata, 2002,225-76

[22] E. Berliet and B. Faticoni, *From the Mauryas to the Mughals: the Imperial History of Mahasthan,* forthcoming.

[23] Monica L. Smith, "The archaeology hinterlands of Mahasthangarh : Observations and potential for future research", in *Mahasthangarh,* ed. Md. Shafiqul A1am and Jean Francois Salles, Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2001, 61-73.

[24] A.K.M. Zakariah, *Bangladesher Pratnasampad,* Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, 1984 repr., Dibyaprakash, Dhaka, 2007.

[25] Swadhin Sen, "The Transformative Context of a Temple in Early Medieval Varendri: Report of the Excavation at Tileshwarir Aara in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh", *South Asian Studies,* Vol 31(1), 2015a, 71-110; S. Sen, "Settlements in the changing alluvial landscape in Early Medieval Varendri: Survey and Excavation at Domile-Khairghuni in Dinajpur, Bangladesh", *Man and Environment,* Vol. 40 (2), 2015b, 33-64.

[26] S. Sen, "Interpreting Transformation of Material Culture with Reference to Stratigraphy: Report on the Excavation at Bowalar Mandap Mound, Birampur, Dinajpur, Bangladesh", *Pratna Samiksha,* New Series 5, 2014, 13-37.

[27] Sen 2015b op. cit.

[28] Sen 2015a op. cit

[29] F. Ferdousi, S. Sen, A. K. M. Syfur Rahman and S. M. K. Ahsan "Report of

the Microregional Survey at Panchbibi", *Pratnatattva,* Vol. 18, 2012, 1-15.

[30] Swadhin Sen personal communication.

[31] Sheena Panja, Arun K. Nag and Sunando Bandyopadhyay, *Living with Floods: Archaeology of a Settlement in the Lower Ganga Plains*, c *600-1800 CE,* Primus Publications, Delhi, 2015.

[32] Rajat Sanyal, "Beyond Explorations: A Case Study on Early Medieval Archaeology from Epigraphic Perspectives", *Pratna Samiksha,* New Series 4, 2013, 33-51.

[33] Sen et al. 2014 op. cit.

[34] Panja 2002 op. cit.

[35] Sen 2015a op. cit.

[36] Zakariah 1984; Sen 2015a op. cit.

[37] Zakariah 1984 ibid

[38] Panja 2002 op. cit.

[39] Arunabha Das personal communication

[40] S. K. Saraswati, "Notes on Two Tours in the Districts of Maldah and Dinajpur", *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* vol. 28, 1932, 173-83.; S.K. Saraswati, "Notes on a Third Tour in the District of Dinajpur, chiefly along the Chiramati River", *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* vol. 28, 1932a, 185-95.

[41] Himagshu K. Sarkar, "Jagaddala Mahavihara", *Bulletin of the Akshaya Kumar Maitreya Museum,* Vol.4 (1), 2004.

[42] Sanyal 2013 op. cit.

[43] F. Buchanan-Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of the District, or Zila of Dinajpur in the Province, or Soubah of Bengal,* Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1833; E. V. Westmacott, "Note on the site of Fort Ekdalah, District Dinajpur", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* vol. 3, 1874, 244-5; Saraswati 1932; 1932a op cit.

[44] Buchanan- Hamilton op. cit

[45] R. Ghosh, "Unread inscriptions from Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur districts", *Monthly Bulletin of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* Vol 46 (5), 2017, 11-14; Arun K. Nag personal communication.

[46] Sutapa Sinha personal communication.

[47] Rajat Sanyal personal communication.

[48] Ranjushree Ghosh personal communication; R.K. Chattopadhyay, S. Ray and S. Majumder, "The Kingdom of Śaivācāryas", *Berliner Indologische Studien Berlin Indological Studies,* Vol: 21, 2013, 173-256.; R. Ghosh, "Image of a Śaiva Teacher and an Inscription on Pedestal: New Evidence for Bangarh Śaivism", *Pratna Samiksha: A Journal of Archaeology,* New Series 1 2010, 135-139.

[49] The pottery identification even though tentative is based on the pottery sequence carried out at the site of Balupur, Malda district (Panja et. al. 2015).

[50] Panja et. al 2015 op. cit.

[51] Panja 2002 op. cit.

[52] Chattopadhyay 1997b op. cit.

[53] Chattopadhyaya 1997b op. cit.

[54] However the knife edged bowl is found from many early medieval sites and can be considered as a common ware but not a diagnostic one.

[55] R. C. Majumdar, (ed.) *Age of Imperial Kanauj, History and Culture of the Indian People.* Vol, 4 2nd ed., Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1964; Mahesh Sharma, "State Formation and Cultural Complex in Western Himalaya: Chamba Genealogy and Epigraphs-700-1650 AD", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 41(4), 2004, 387-432.

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD : A HISTORICAL PERCEPTION*

RANJIT SEN

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is one leader whom it is difficult to position in history. He was a poet and a fine prose writer, a musician, a journalist, a philosopher, a theologian, a commentator of the holy Quran and above all an educationist, a nationalist and a born leader of mankind. Two very opposite things were very native to him. He was rooted in Islam but he was propelled by a desire to move out of the traditional peripheries of Islam. One such periphery set in Islamic tradition was the concept of *ummah*.[1] A clustered people articulated into a community with directions to a global formation were called an *ummah*. Thus *umma* was both a demographic entity at one end while on the other it was sect and a community with latent universal orientations. From this Abul Kalam emerged into a kind of modern entity - territorial nationality. Thus from the shelter of faith his journey was predominantly toward a more modern, tangible and earthly abode called nation. His deeper sensibilities were tuned with Islam. His pragmatic wisdom took him to the realities of life where at one end it was strife and at the other end it was collaboration. His strife was against oppression, against domination, against coercion and finally against any effort to blow him off his roots in his faith. To this end he targeted the British Empire as his enemy and launched a battle against it. His collaborations were with his fellow-sufferers - the mass of the India people irrespective of caste, creed and religion - with whom he desired to bond himself into a brotherhood.

This propensity to bond with his fellow countrymen, even if they were non-believers, came from two factors one of which was enlightenment, the most outstanding trait of modern civilization. This enlightenment factor I shall explain now. The second factor I shall discuss a little later.

---

* Key-note address delivered in the seminer on "The Life and Activities of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad" held at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata on February 16, 2015.

Enlightenment: A Stimulus for Change

Abul Kalam Azad's tryst with enlightenment began when the Islamic reform movement in the east had almost come to an end. The reading of the past in the Muslim way in the light of the Quran, so endemic in the *Wahabi* and its associate movements, had almost been relegated to history by the time Azad was born. Reason, the essence of enlightenment, which taught men to define imperialism as their enemy, had triumphed over and eventually bypassed trends toward reform and revivalism.[2] With the rise of Aligarh's first generation[3] in India the Muslim intelligentsia had entered into a new intellectual engagement with the West. Azad was not an output of the Aligarh school and not even an outcome of the Aligarh generation. He was, therefore, outside the western glow with which the modern Muslim mind found itself beaming. This meant that he was free of the dichotomy which the reformist Muslims of the Aligarh school and outside, in a word the entire westernized Muslim intelligentsia, had suffered. They took a double stand — one on defence of Muslim beliefs and practices against European criticism and the other on an attack on the same beliefs and practices of their own religion defined in terms of European criticism.[4] In arranging a compromise with the West and a dialogue with modernity the Aligarh school had gone too far. Azad was not with the Aligarh school in outstretching himself. Sir Syed Ahmed argued that "Mohammedans are bound to obey an infidel ruler as long as he does not interfere with their rellgion."[5] Azad, with all allegiance to Sir Syed Ahmed, was not prepared to go so far. To him tolerance could not be a trait in subjection for Islam knew no subjection. Sir Syed's practical wisdom had no value to Azad for his stand was ethical backed by support from scriptures. Freedom was man's birth right, Azad argued, a Providential gift, which could not be robbed of him. The British Empire, no question what its character was, had imposed subjection on Indians and hence it had to be fought against. So 'upholding loyalty to the colonial government as religiously obligatory on the Muslims'[6] - a dictum so assiduously put forward by Sir Syed — failed to reach home with Azad. To Azad freedom was first, freedom was last and freedom was final and there could be no compromise with any system that curbed freedom. Sir Syed had no obsession with freedom because in identifying the destiny of the Muslims through the storms of transforming modern

age what, he thought was most needed, was a religion- friendly modern system that would provide adequate security to the Muslims - to their home and worship both. That system, he believed, the British Empire really was. Sir Syed Ahmed was entertaining progressive European ideals of governance and allegiance in a desperate Indian situation. There was an upsurge of neo- Hinduism all over India. The Indian National Congress was a Hindu-dominated platform for politics. In upper India Urdu, the language of the Muslim mass, was locked in a bitter completion with Hindi for survival. After the decline of Delhi, Lahore and Lucknow, the greatest centres of Indo-Islamic culture, in the immediate aftermath of the revolt of 1857, a profound sense of defeatism had gripped the Muslim mind. Galib, the poet sitting in Delhi, had expressed the melancholy into which the Muslim psyche had fallen. In this violent distemper Sir Syed was advocating conciliation in place of conflict, adaptation in place of rejection and change in place of tradition. His approach to the British Empire emerged out of this. Azad growing in a different age and finding himself more exposed than Sir Syed to the winds of global Muslim upsurge against the West could not find himself sailing on the same boat as his mentor.

In reconciling himself with the British Empire Sir Syed found himself in the company of one of the greatest Wahabi leaders of the time, Ismail Shahid. Sir Syed argued that in preaching the Wahabi manifesto throughout his long career, "he [Ismail Shahid] did not utter a single word to incite the feelings of his co-religionists against the English. Once at Calcutta, while preaching the jihad against the Sikhs, he was interrogated as to reason for not proclaiming a religious war against the British, who were infidels. In reply he said that under the English rule Mohammedans were not persecuted, and as they were the subject of that Government, they were bound by their religion not to join a jihad against it."[7] Banning *jihad* against the British Empire was one point on which the post-mutiny elders of the Muslim society had agreed. This was how the Muslim leadership looked at the British rule in an age when the impending necessity for the Muslims was to come out of the depression of the post-mutiny years and revive the soil under their feet. Toward this end Sir Syed found himself in the role of a social reformer. From religious reform Sir Syed turned to social reform. Taking faith as a major inspiration Sir Syed was anchoring on time. But reform was his main thrust.

This age of reform was over when Azad matured. The age of politics had set in for the Indian Muslims and Azad found himself saddled in the role of a political activist in an age when freedom shaped the mood and set the goal for a nation. The first Aligarh generation while maturing with time realized that in their tryst with modernity they needed one parameter without which they would otherwise be trailing in their existence. They needed to have a political party. In this they had two options before them - either to join the Indian National Congress or to create their own political party. To stop the young generation from joining the National Congress the Muslim League was hastily formed in 1906. Muslim aspirations were now being institutionalized in political terms. Azad opened his eyes in the dawn of this new era of politicization of Muslim mind. As a matter of fact the first major attempt to institutionalize Muslim aspirations on a modern line was made by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan when he founded the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College in 1875. That was the time when the need of the hour was to adapt the Muslim mind to new education in which knowledge would be based on reason and science would be projected outside the trajectories of faith. Thirty years later — across the time span of one generation — two major things happened. The first Bengal partition had come into effect in 1905 and the political organ of the Muslim community, the Muslim League, had come into being. While the anti-partition movement in Bengal took the form of agitation a new age of separatism was ushered in by the colonial rulers when under the garb of Reforms in 1909 the Muslims were provided with separate constituencies. At the end of agitation partition was annulled but the centre of agitation, Calcutta, ceased to be capital. The centre stage of Indian politics was shifted to Delhi. It was in this hour of transformation Azad found himself in Calcutta. The reemergence of Delhi as the capital synchronized with the moment when Azad had shown his first promise of leadership with the publication of *Al Hilal* in the middle of 1912.

Al Hilal was basically an intellectual paper[8] with deep romantic overtone. In this paper Azad wrote in fine prose that had sweep for the pan-Islamic identity. It is said that at one point its circulation reached 25000.[9] This had initiated a new intellectual movement grounded both in religion and politics. The intellectual movement which Sir Syed had started was in a sense continued by Maulana Azad. Sir Syed's deep

social and academic overtone was now replaced by a deep sense of global attachment of Islam with specific nationalistic direction. Sir Syed applied enlightenment as a tool only to inculcate modern knowledge in the Muslim mind. Azad applied it to build up a political ideology of resistance. Both of them had based their interpretations on faith. Sir Syed making it subserve as the philosophy of social reform while Azad giving it a thrust toward political motivation of the community. There were three major political trends among Indian Muslims during the first half of the twentieth century: Pan Islamism, Separatist nationalism and synthetic nationalism.[10] *Al Hilal* did not ensure a straight journey to politics. In a charged romantic purview it had at the outset postulated the foundation of a divine kingdom where maintenance of peace, order and good governance would function as the parameters of the divine end - the supremacy of truth. This was unmistakably a theological approach to politics very similar to what Gandhi sought to preach in all his political strivings. One may say that till the end of the World War I Azad preached divine ordination in pan-Islamic unity. In this sense he was a champion of, what Moin Shakir would say, synthetic nationalism. Till then he was an unseasoned amateur in the domain of politics. Clear-cut ideology of secular synthesis had not dawned in him. One should note that throughout his life he was an apostle of unity and syncretism but never a champion of secularism in the western sense of the term. He declared unhesitatingly that he was anchored in the faith of a divine dispensation as manifested in the holy Quran. Inspiration of Quran was necessary for the Indian Muslims to dispel their skepticism and fear. He wrote:

> "In fact from the beginning the disagreement between the time-servers and myself is not in the form but in the substance. The basic question before us is whether the case of the Indian Muslims should be based upon determination and faith or on fear and doubt; the main point of disagreement lies herein. What is working beneath the surface is not merely political, but something more. The Principles and belief, which, from the very beginning I have kept before me, are based on the spirit of the teachings of the Quran. *I do not build up my arguments only on logical grounds but on my religious faith and conviction. I cannot admit for a moment that Muslims can move ahead in any direction carrying the gloom of fear and skepticism in their minds.*

The light of religious faith and conviction is always available to them. But some time-servers are not aware of these fundamental beliefs: owing to this it is very difficult for them to agree with me to any point."[11] [Italics ours]

Rooted in his personal faith Maulana Abul Kalam Azad throughout the first phase of the *Al Hilal i.e.* till his whole-hearted plunge into politics at the advent of both the Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movements, remained to be the herbinger of Muslim emancipation from fear, skepticism, bondage and gloom. His intellectual acumen that had absorbed enlightenment as rays of new culture was manifested in efforts to promote the cause of the Muslims and rescue the community from gloom and despair. In this he was absolutely in line with his mentor Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. In the application of enlightenment for both the purpose was rescue of the community from gloom and maintenance of Islamic heritage that had developed over the experiences of the millennium. As late as 1940 the Maulana said :

"I am a Muslim and I am proud to feel that am a Muslim, and have inherited the glorious traditions of the last Thirteen Hundred years of Islam. I am not ready to allow even the smallest part of it to become dead: its education, its history, its arts and sciences and its culture is my wealth; it is my duty to safeguard it. As a Muslim I possess a special entity within the limits of my religion and culture and cannot tolerate any interference in this regard. But along with these feelings I have one more feeling which the spirit of Islam allows me to have, and more than this, it shows me light in this respect: I proudly feel that I am an Indian; and I am a part of *the indivisible composite nationalism of India; I am a significant element of this composite nationalism without which the structure of the greatness of India remains incomplete;* I am an inevitable element of its constitution and I can never renounce this claim of mine."[12] [Italics ours]

This concept of *composite nationalism* was somewhat a new induction in Muslim political culture. It was essentially the outcome of Azadian enlightenment. Sir Syed who had pronounced Indian unity as a hallmark of Indian culture sank this approach after the Hindi-Urdu conflict in northern India. The glory of Azad lies in this that in spite of great separatist provocations he did not succumb to any idea of dividing India her integrity and polity. In a plural society the unity of the people could

be safeguarded not only by apparent social cohesion and political collaboration but by an inner bond of absorption. Composite culture was an absorbed formation on the basis of which history had moulded the Indian society. Azad's enlightenment expounded this genius which India had carried in the inner core of her spirit over ages. To those who were imbued with the two-nation theory composite nationalism was a riddle wrapped with enigma. To Azad it was not. Equipped with the instrument of enlightenment he could look through the mist of history and place his gaze at the truth beyond the present and at the back of the apparent. The truth of composite nationalism was the real message of the Maulana. It defined very well the Muslim tryst with destiny. A present day Muslim thinker had said: "The Muslims committed a great blunder during the pre-partition days by ignoring the Maulana's message and suffered greatly. Now when again communalism has been raising its ugly head, should the Muslims again commit the same mistake?"[13] The question flies at large awaiting a reply from the composite nation.

Notes

[1] *Umma* means a people. It was a term which was clearly undefined in the holy Quran. In that holy text we have such expressions as *Ummatu Ibrahim,* the people of Abraham, *Ummatu 'Isa,* the people of Jesus and *Ummatu Muhammad,* the people of Muhammad. In the Quran it meant the whole community of global Muslimeen. All Muslims of the world form one *umma.* Originally *umma* meant a community. Later on in the twentieth century, after the World War I it came to mean a nation.

[2] The new colonial states which had emerged in different part of the world since the 18th and 19th century unleashed an era of oppressive rule everywhere. The trajectory of this oppression found expression in the social, political and economic life of those under subjection. Eventually it gave rise to widespread protest, resentment and revolt in the colonial world. Western imperialism, Esposito argued, had precipitated a religious and political crisis in the Muslim world from North Africa to South East via South Asia. The Muslims in these regions thought of their subjection in terms of their lack of religiosity. Hence their early attempt was to mend their religious ways. From these emerged the reformist and revivalist movements in all parts of the Muslim world. By the beginning of the twentieth century these reformist-revivalist movements had already given way to a new search for identity on more secular terms. This search for identity incorporated in it many traits of nationalism. See John L. Esposito, *Islam The Straight Path,* expanded edition, O.U.P., New York, 1991, p.125.

[3] See David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India,* 1978. The book explores the nature of Muslim cultural identity and its changes in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its thrust is to show how the first modern Muslim institution, *The Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College,* with its founders and early students mediated these changes in the transforming era when the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth. It also shows how the Muslim mind adapted itself to the challenges of colonialism and nationalism.

[4] For detailed exposition see Faisal Devji, "Apologetic Modernity", in Shruti Kapilq ed. *An Intellectual History for India,* Cambridge University, Delhi, 2010, pp. 52-67.

[5] Shan Mohammad ed. & compiled, *writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan,* Nachiketa Publication Ltd., Bombay, 1972, p. 69.

[6] Safoora Razeq uses these expressions as defining Sir Syed's version of allegiance to the state — Safoora Razeq, "Muslim Nationalism in India and the Age of Reason" in *Souvenir on State Level Seminar on Men and Moments as interactive forces in Indian History,* Department of History, Aliah University, Kolkata, 11 february, 2015, p 16.

[7] Cited from *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* by Safoora Razeq, *op.cit.,* p.16. She informs us that 'Ismail Shahid was the grandson of Shah Waliullah, who along with Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Barailley continued long years of jihad in the frontier province.' - Safoora Razeq, *op.cit.,* p. 16 note.

[8] *Al Hilal* was by motivations anti-British and its overtone was anti-imperial in directions. The Government took a serious note of the paper and warned him in a letter which is noted below:

"To Maulana Azad, Sir I am directed to draw your attention to the articles which appeared in the issues dated 9th and 16th April of the Al Hilal newspaper of which you are the publisher and which were printed at the Hilal Press of which you are the keeper on the subject of the assassination of the 1st king of Greece.

I am to warn you that government is advised that the articles in question contain words or expressions amounting to an offence under section 153A of the Indian Penal Code." - I. B. File4 No. 598/13 West Bengal State Archives.

[9] Prof. Md. Sulaiman Khurshid, "Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Islam and the Indian Muslim", an unpublished paper read at the State Level Sminar on "Men and Moments as interactive forces in History" held in the Department of History, Aliah University, Kolkata on Feb. ll, 2015. For the particular issue noted above in note 8 the government record gives it as 30000. *Ibid.*

[10] For details see Moin Shakir, *Khilafat* to *Partition,* Delhi, 1983, chpt. On Azad.

[11] Cited in Md. Sulaiman Khurshid, *op.cit.*

[12] Cited *Ibid*

[13] Md. Sulaiman Khurshid, *op.cit.*

THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN BENGAL, 1939-1945 : NEW TASKS OF THE BUREAUCRACY

BIKRAMJIT DE

I. Introduction

The last decade of British Rule in India witnessed certain significant events that changed the course of the subcontinent's destiny. With the entry of the United States of America in the Second World War after the Axis attack on Pearl Harbour, the war not only came to the Pacific Theatre, but in due course of time arrived also in Bengal, then an eastern province of British India. This made the colonial government in Bengal begin to seriously consider the need to prosecute a war-effort in Calcutta along the lines of the one that was being prosecuted in London. The legendary nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose's famous escape from Calcutta to Berlin in 1941, his breathtaking adventure in a German submarine from Europe to East Asia and his and the Indian National Army's (INA) soldiers' entry into Burma and then Manipur in India made it mandatory for the colonial government, both in Calcutta and Delhi, to plan a future course of action that could not only match the dynamism of Bose's leadership, but also build a successful wartime machinery to deal with the popularity of the INA. Although the Japanese war planners never really wanted to invade India,[1] the officials in Bengal were thoroughly concerned with the imminent threat of a Japanese invasion, spurred by the prospects of the seizure of rich reserves of tin and rubber in Southeast Asia.[2] What was of particular concern to the Bengal officials was the real threat of the Japanese armed forces entering mainland Bengal and Assam by the sea, air and land routes, an operation that was codenamed Operation 21 and slated to take place between January-September, 1942.[3] This threat, backed by a few non-incendiary bombings of Calcutta, especially Chowringhee, Esplanade and the docks,[4] as well as Chittagong, Tippera and Noakhali between December, 1942 and December, 1943,[5] indeed became a potent tool for the officials to put in place a war- effort that had become, in official

perception, absolutely necessary for coping with the challenges of the world war in its China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre.

This war-effort implied that the officials had to perform quite a few new tasks to convert Bengal into a frontline zone. Re-garrisoning Bengal could strengthen the wartime resources of a province, which due to its centrality to the CBI Theatre, had to be included in the wartime planning of both Britain and the United States. Re-garrisoning had another purpose: since the province was utterly central to the Home government's overall wartime planning, the government in Bengal was now required to mobilize manpower and materials directly needed for the prosecution of the war-effort in South East Asia and the Middle East.[6] There was close coordination between the different military commands in India, such as the South East Asia Command (SEAC), then under the leadership of Lord Louis Mountbatten, and the American, British, Dutch and Australian Commands (ABDA) for the success of their joint Burma campaign.[7]

In this article, I will evaluate the colonial officials' many successes in performing the extremely engaging new wartime tasks in Bengal during the Second World War years. The calm and confidence with which the colonial officials succeeded in managing their wartime responsibilities, that successfully turned a British bridgehead to the east into a frontline province for not only British soldiers but also American troops posted in the region, will be addressed to trace the development of an well maintained law abiding society in the absence of which Bengal may have fallen into complete chaos. The officials had a few major tasks, the success of which revealed the depth of official determination to cope with a difficult war-effort in Bengal. The efficiency with which these tasks were performed reveals an official resolve to keep the management of civil administration on the ground light non-intrusive in nature which was indeed an evolved administrative approach, especially at a time when the war in the CBI Theatre was placing excessive amount of pressure on the civil duties of a late imperial administrative machinery. A third implication of official success at performing these new wartime tasks in Bengal was both the civil and military officials' genuine concern for the humane management of both human and material manpower and resources of the province.

The four new tasks of the colonial bureaucracy in Bengal included firstly, the conceiving, planning and execution of a sound and

aggressive propaganda policy meant not only to keep an eye on any possibility of a Japanese invasion of Bengal, but also the real and present danger of the infiltration of fifth column activists owing allegiance mostly to the Forward Bloc and also to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Congress, members of which participated and/or sympathized with the Quit India movement. Censorship and surveillance were the two other dimensions in the overall management of information by the colonial state during the war years, but they were more aimed at coping with the political opponents of the Raj rather being treated as new tasks of the bureaucracy in the war years.

Secondly, the officials were charged with the responsibility of building an efficient network of roads, rails and river communication in Bengal during the war years befitting a strong and well-staffed war machinery that could re-strengthen a weakening apparatus of empire. The war generated new demands for the building of public works, for instance, aerodrome to facilitate the movements of troops and storing of military supplies.

Thirdly, with a new enemy at the gates, steps had to be taken to sustain public morale and mobilise opinion in support of the Allied war-effort. For this purpose building a strong network of civil defence organization, such as the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) units, Civic Guards, Coastal Guards and Home Guards, became a practical necessity.

Fourthly and finally, the administration had to cope with the rising volume of incoming refugees from Burma who had been uprooted from their adopted homes by the massive bombardment of Rangoon and other cities in that country by the Japanese air force. The bureaucracy had to take adequate steps to provide necessary transport to these poor people to reach their respective destinations. The officials also had to cope with demands placed on the government's transport system in western Bengal caused by the panic evacuation of several families from Calcutta to district headquarters due to the fear of Japanese bombing.

2. Building an aggressive propaganda policy of the Government of Bengal

The half-hearted responses of the Indian people to the war-effort in Bengal and the adverse impact of the anti-war speeches and

meetings given and held by the Indian politicians in the middle of the war years convinced the officials of the Bengal government of the urgent need to step up information and broadcasting, which included mainly the launching of an active war-propaganda policy. During the four years of the First World War the central government in Delhi had established a publicity board to garner popular support throughout India. Pat Lovett, the editor of *Capital* later commented that "The bureaucracy for the first time in all its history went out of its way to propitiate this 'great instrument of propagandism' ". Subsequently, in the inter-war years, i.e. from 1919-1939, the central government established an effective information system as wel1.[8] In 1919, the Central Bureau of Information (CBI) under the supervision of the home department in Delhi was established to publicize the launching of the government's propaganda machinery. As the Second World War drew closer, through the thirties, these institutions acquired newer and far more direct role in the management of information that was seen as being central to the rebuilding and re-strengthening of Britain's imperial interests in India.[9]

The government carried out its propaganda work through official notices in a few selected magazines, such as the *Indian Newsletter,* signaling the importance of the print media in information management. This journal, printed simultaneously in English, Bengali and Hindi, was made accessible to the non-English speaking inhabitants of Bengal.[10] Other newspapers, authorized to spread the success of the government's war-propaganda, included the *South East Asia Command,* an inter-services daily newspaper, which the officials preferred to even the other English language dailies that were found to be unsuitable for the creation of a strong war-morale. Distributed in the forward areas of Bengal to British residents, *SEAC* was meant to maintain a steady flow of information on the SEAC's and the other Allied forces' advances in the CBI Theatre.[11] The officials used all possible means of institutional support for the success of their propaganda policy during the war years. The pro-government institutional framework of the province was used to the hilt by the officials for the propagation of its wartime objectives, which included the spread of Britain's and America's rapid strides against Germany and Japan not only in the Pacific Theatre but also in the European Theatre of the war.

The government's effort to win public support through war-propaganda, focusing on the requirements of active civil defence measure, was multifaceted. The government screened officially sponsored films and sent messages to the public on the radio as part of its propaganda work to reach out to various segments of the Bengali society.[12] A film, produced for labourers, proved to be so successful that P.N. Thapar, a senior official in the labour department in Delhi wrote to J.P. Blair, then the chief secretary of Bengal, asking him to lend a copy of the film to the central government for viewing in all other parts of the country.[13] The government's war-propaganda included a corpus of English war films also, such as *In Which We Serve,* which had strong pro-imperialist sentiments. Screened in Calcutta as well as in the remote villages of Bengal, these movies succeeded in evoking very mixed feelings, ranging from pro-British to pro-Axis sentiments,[14] but the bulk of the known responses of the local people to these screenings were not unsympathetic to the government's war-effort. To protect war-morale in the army, especially at a time when the Axis powers were making significant advances through South East Asia the officials had to keep nationalist newspapers carrying irrelevant but irksome war-rumours as well as exaggerated stories about food scarcity out of the reach of the army officers.[15]

The definitive role of war-propaganda in the making of public opinion in Bengal, inhibited as it was by the limited reach of technologically primitive wireless sets, however did not demonstrate the absence of either official determination to make this measure successful or its social acceptance in Calcutta and the countryside.[16] The decision of the officials in Delhi to opt for medium-wave frequency radios, believed to be more well suited than short-wave frequency radios for the purpose of 'community listening' revealed their determination to keep their propaganda out of the reach of fifth column activists.[17] This decision paid rich dividends since the government succeeded in shutting out the fifth columnists from their war-propaganda, but had the officials accepted the advice of American engineers, who displayed a superior knowledge or broadcasting technology, in comprehending better the science of frequency waves, then perhaps even short-wave transmissions without their attendant dangers as well as a wider social reach could have been possible in Bengal in the war years. With suitable American technological knowhow

the government's propaganda measures in the first half of the forties would have certainly enabled the officials to cope better with their persistent difficulties against all anti-imperialist forces in the country, especially the fifth column and the bulk of the Congress activists who participated in large measure in the ongoing Quit India movement without necessary American technological intervention, the colonial state's policy of manpower mobilization through a slightly outdated propaganda policy was checkmated by sharp counter-propaganda carried out by dissident groups that had links with the INA.

3. The rebuilding of wartime infrastructure as an administrative response

Wartime requirements led the bureaucracy in Bengal to embark on its second task of the early forties, i.e. assuming unprecedented control over the movement of transport in the province. Under the new rules and regulations guaranteed in the provisions of the Defence of India Rules and Acts (DIR&A) of 1939, the central government could demand from the Indian railways the immediate use of wagons at their disposal for the easy movement of the troops stationed in Bengal as well as military supplies stored inside the province. The officials in Bengal now had the responsibility of blocking the use of railway stations, ports and aerodromes for lengthy periods by the public for the benefit of the armed forces. The officials were asked to ensure that if anybody contravened these restrictions, then he/she could be arrested.[18] To ensure the smooth running of the railways by the railway officials and guaranteeing of their absolute allegiance to the colonial state most of them were given temporary commissions, in the rank of Major and Lieutenant Colonel, in the army. These officials' collective roles in the performance of the new tasks of the bureaucracy were no less significant than those of their British and American colleagues both in the railways as well as in the civil services and the army.

For maintaining law and order in Bengal, the officials sometimes had to prevent the use of public transport by the civil population. Readjustment of transport facilities for public benefit was one the major priorities of the Bengal officials during the war years. For instance, the central government blocked shipping or unshipping of persons, animals and/or goods at the major ports of the country. Calcutta being one of India's most important port cities - Bombay and Madras being the other two - came directly under the application of

this rule.[19] However, nobody was unfairly stopped from using trains and long distance buses, especially in an emergency. This measure was a necessary wartime initiative taken to ensure that transport was not misused in the province at a time when there was a real danger of its invasion by an external power. Also, growing public anger at the Bengal government, due to the implementation of these so-called draconian measures, was missing in the early forties.

The sudden demand for reprioritizing of transport during the war years may have taken considerable amount of time to be completed had the war not arrived at the doorsteps of Bengal and Assam from the end of 1941. Until July 1940 the United States government was still keen on viewing Japan as a strong bilateral trade partner contributing considerably to the growth of America's national income. But after the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the entire geometry of Allied action underwent a sea-change. Hostilities between Washington, London and Tokyo began in full earnest once East and Southeast Asia came directly in the line of both Allied and Axis fire, with Japan increasingly showing an eagerness to exert complete control over these two geopolitical and strategic zones. In three distinct phase the Japanese arm sought to occupy large segments of these zones, which their military planner called the Co-prosperity Sphere or the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere *(Dai Toa Kyozonken).*

In the first phase, the Japanese army made preliminary moves to spell out the boundaries of their co-prosperity sphere which included mainly the Pacific islands, thus declaring war on America.[21] In the second phase, launched to consolidate Japan's consolidation of the co-prosperity zone, Japanese war planners, mostly based outside Tokyo, and belonging to the navy, seriously contemplated the proposal to expand their sphere of influence to the Indian Ocean, which brought them closer to a direct conflict with the British in India.[22] The third and final phase witnessed the actual fighting along the Bengal, Assam and Burma borders between the Japanese and the INA on one side and the British on the other. The Battle of the Admin Box in 1942 brought the war to Imphal in Manipur, witnessing a series of battles that lasted for more than five months, stretching from the banks of the Chindwin to the road on the Indian side of Kohima.[23] From the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, the Japanese air force made a few temporarily successful forays in to Indian territory, bombing the

Chittagong docks, situated at the mouth of the Karnaphuli River, and entering Assam as well. However, this campaign, under the leadership of Mutaguchi, was doomed to fail because of his troops' eventual shortage of food and British success at holding on to their own supplies of ration. In April, 1944, the Japanese army once again arrived in Manipur, now within a radius of four miles from the main airfield there. It was at this point that Mountbatten's military genius became very evident: his decision to fly to Imphal to meet the Japanese attack, as well as his decision to divert the China-bound American aircrafts to the Burma front, gave the British the decisive edge of victory over the Japanese in the Pacific War.

Snatching victory from the jaws of defeat gave the much needed boost to the sagging morale of British troops and military planners in India. For two years, between 1942 and 1944, the fate of the empire, at least in eastern India, had looked uncertain. The morale of the colonial state too was probably at its lowest ebbs in its long history, mainly because of logistical difficulties faced by the bureaucracy on the eastern front. However, deft handling of meagre wartime resources by American and British military planners, led by Mountbatten, turned the tide in favour of the Allied forces in the CBI Theatre. The fortunes of the colonial state were indeed revived considerably after this victory. The British in India, especially those in Bengal, could once again breathe easier.

Increased Japanese naval presence in the Bay of Bengal, throughout the second and third phases of the Japanese campaign in Southeast Asia, led the British and American military planners in India to embark on one its foremost tasks in the war years. i.e. the conversion of the whole of eastern India, not only Bengal, into a war zone, the manpower and material resources of which had to be primarily directed towards fighting on the Bengal-Burma border. As a preliminary measure, the South East Asia Command (SEAC), formed in Washington in May 1943, commanding Burma, Malaya, Sumatra, Ceylon, Siam and French Indo-China, as well as the Eastern Command of the Indian army were set up. Bengal and Assam almost immediately became bases for Allied military operations against the Japanese forces after the fall of Malaya and Burma. The military cantonment in Barrackpore in Bengal was overnight turned into the SEAC's headquarter, of which Mountbatten, then the vice-admiral of the British navy, was appointed as the Supreme

Commander. Kandy in Ceylon was the other headquarter of the SEAC, but under Mountbatten's directions, guided as they were by Bengal's strategic proximity to the CBI Theatre, much of the work of the Kandy office was shifted to the Flagstaff House in Barrackpore until the middle of 1944,[24] after which the apparatus for planning was shifted back to Kandy.[25]

The other objective of this wartime task was to reposition the eastern army's headquarter in Ranchi in Bihar, which was made responsible to the general headquarter in Delhi. The headquarter in Ranchi had to maintain internal security and the defence of all of eastern India. To safeguard strategic railways and support various provincial civil administrations, a number of small garrisons of troops from Europe and Africa were scattered at great distances from one another. Two corps were deployed to hold the Burma frontier as well as safeguard the Bengal-Orissa coastline. Four corps were headquartered in Imphal which included the newly arrived 23rd Indian division and what was still left of the debilitating 17th Indian Division just out of Burma.[26] Other regions in eastern India where the Allied forces established their military installations were Comilla, where a large air station was built and Jessore, where a night bomber station was built. Mountbatten even planned to open an Advanced Headquarter in Calcutta in January 1945 in order to direct combined operations against the Japanese in Akyab, although the unexpected capitulation of the Japanese army in Burma at this time brought a quick end to his plan.[27]

Another important wartime priority of the officials was to step up its commitments to the rebuilding of the civic infrastructure of a frontline province. Building roads and declaring public buildings as protected places were two important programmes in the war-effort. Roads and highways, built at strategic points in Bengal, Bihar and Assam, was evident from the sharp rise in the central engineering department's expenditure for this purpose. Whereas in 1939 the central government spent Rs. 40 millions for road building, expense for the same purpose in 1944 had risen sharply to Rs. 1,000 million.[28] Also, to strengthen the law and order situation in Calcutta, the officials declared a number of premises in Calcutta as 'protected places', since the city was perceived to be "an air bomber's dream".[29] Personnel had to be provided for the protection of these premises, for which a corps of volunteers, with a distinctive character, was established and trained.[30]

The carrying out of these wartime imperatives did not lead to disruption of the civic needs of the large majority of the local people. On the contrary the management of public spaces in pre-independence India, especially in the last decade of the Raj, was much better than in the post-independence period.

The possibility of a Japanese invasion of the lower Gangetic delta meant that the government had to fortify the seaboard districts of Bengal, such as Chittagong, Bakarganj and Midnapore, by repositioning its troops there with the help of the military authorities. John Herbert wrote to Lord Wavell in April 1942 that he was "anxious to create a coordinated administration" to increase Allied military presence in Bengal.[31] District magistrates were instructed to liaise with local military commanders posted in their respective districts. In the absence of a senior army officer in the district, the magistrate himself was made responsible for ordering the withdrawal of the local population and the government's installations there. The district officials were expected to protect government properties, such as arms and ammunition depots, hospital stores and stamps and records.[32] These responsibilities revealed the military planners' and officials' determination to make the whole of Bengal a major centre of wartime activity in the CBI Theatre.

4. The creation of civil defence preparedness to strengthen the government's war-effort

Yet another wartime responsibility of the provincial government in Bengal was to create an institutional framework for the establishment of civil defence organisations to generate pro-Allies sentiments among the local people. These organizations were meant to discharge functions that could not be left entirely in the hands of the army. The government built Air Raid Precaution units, Home, Civic and Coastal Guards, House Protection Fire Parties and Women's Auxiliary Force as part of its extensive civil defence programme. The government also built air raid shelters, units for the purpose of fire-fighting, as well as first aid posts, and ambulance services. Official bureaus for the dissemination of information to relatives of citizens, affected by Japanese bombing, were also established.[33] A chief secretary's report claimed that there was a demand for the "formation of Anglo-Indian and Bengali units for defence purposes".[34] These civic defence parties,

which were mostly voluntary organizations, comprising British civilians, domiciled non-official Europeans and Indians employed by the government,[35] were primarily meant to create a sense of urgency among the urban people.[36] The voluntary character of these organizations is evident from the nature of their work, which included participation in civic duties such as the institution of sanitation measures in Calcutta.[37] Strategy played an important part in the drive to make the war-effort work. And such a strategy, based on the assumption of the need to encourage state formative tendencies in Bengal through the prosecution of the war-effort, sought to once again reinstate the authority of the colonial state in Bengal, whose interests and preservation of the basic structure once again began to play an all important role in the war years.

As a preliminary measure the government divided Calcutta into separate wards to be guarded mainly by ARP wardens recruited from the native population. From the end of 1941 the government started digging trenches throughout the city to provide bunkers for army personnel and the civil population in the event of surprise air attacks by the Japanese.[38] One unfortunate consequence of this particular measure was that during the monsoon seasons for three to four consecutive years, i.e. the last years of the war, the trenches became reservoirs for stagnant rainwater. Calcutta, which before the war was an elegant city to live in, may have lost some of its old colonial luster due to the taking of these measures. But a war-effort of the magnitude witnessed in Calcutta, which was however much less in magnitude than the one prosecuted in London during the second Great War, was bound to have an adverse impact on the civic amenities of the second capital of the British Empire. But these piecemeal measures certainly did not damage the apparatus of empire. On the contrary they convinced the officials of the immediate need to repair the apparatus of empire.

As a second measure to beef up security in the province, the government organized training camps in Calcutta, Dacca and Barrackpore. Demonstrations were held for the recruitment of ARP wardens, with an ARP scheme under preparation in Midnapore. The chief secretary, attaching considerable amount of importance to ARP training in his report of March 1941, suggested that there was "further evidence of impetus given to the organization in Howrah by His

Excellency, the Governor's visit".[39] Howrah, like many other districts in Bengal, witnessed organized and urgent civil defence measures that contributed to the growth of a war morale, the credit for which indeed went to the officials. Calcutta, of course, being the capital of the province was witness to the heaviest civil defence preparedness during the war years. ARP units, led by their wardens, were responsible for patrolling the entire city.[40] Bomb alarms were sent out and blackout tests were carried out in both Dacca and Calcutta. The importance attached to these measures is evident from the official decision to requisition even premises belonging to British managing agency houses for ARP work. These buildings, such as the one belonging to Mackinnon Mackenzie, were temporarily taken over to meet the need for additional space for the setting up of makeshift wartime hospitals.[41]

A third measure for the success of the government's civil defence preparedness was the organization of donation camps and recruitment drives to mobilise public support for the war-effort. Collection of donation was flagged off with the governor himself donating Rs. 21,000/-, the sub-divisional officer of Barrackpore instituting a *two-anna* fund on behalf of the government and the government recruiting 136 members into the Civic Guards.[42] This fund raising drive, which was a symbolic gesture with limited appeal, mostly among the official classes and the businessmen of Calcutta, was meant to generate widespread public support for the government's war-effort and also build up public morale. Perhaps the donation camps were restricted to those segments of the Bengali society that could afford to raise such large sums of money, but war preparedness, which was uppermost in the minds of the officials, was necessary for the success of the war-effort.

A fourth civil defence measure of the government included the widespread activities of the Coastal Guards and Home Guards which were expected to protect the seaboard districts that came in the direct line of Japanese attack after 7 December, 1942. The Home Guards and the Coastal Guards patrolled all the coastal areas of Bengal. The government recruited local inhabitants into these organisations as volunteers who now had to carry out war propaganda on behalf of these organisations. After the Japanese navy established their control over the Bay of Bengal, the government used the Coastal Guards and the Home Guards to effectively implement its Denial Policy, i.e. the

seizure of rice, boats and cycles in Midnapore and Bakarganj, so that the enemy could gain no access to essential supplies of foodstuff and transport in case of an invasion. This Denial Policy, much derided by the local intelligentsia, was however, a necessary measure in a frontline province such as Bengal which did run the risk of external invasion for the first few years of the war. In addition, the House Protection Fire Parties carried out relief work among slum dwellers.[43] The officials did not shy away from using their civil defence organizations for offering relief and rehabilitation to the socially and economically challenged segments of the Bengali society. In the Women's Auxiliary Corp, derided by the nationalists as Dad's Army, women were recruited to shoulder the responsibilities of intelligence and communication. The volunteers of this corp were told to watch parachute landings in case of a Japanese invasion in Bengal. Even though the British faced a few reverses in South East Asia between 1942 and 1944 which merely started to break the illusion of permanence among the official classes, the colonial state was neither prepared to nor could it be forced to relinquish power in India.

A fifth wartime measure of the colonial government was to collect war-funds by the government. Absentee landlords, normally known for their loyalty to the British, were probably among the chief donors who gave money to these funds. Most of the significant collections took place between 1939 and 1941, the total collection for the whole province by the middle of 1941 being Rs.75 lakhs, of which approximately one-third was earmarked for the Bengal War Funds and two-thirds for East India War Funds.[44] The scale of these initiatives suggests that the purpose was not only to muster resources for the massive financial requirements of the war but also for mobilizing public support for the war-effort. These fund-raising activities, accompanied by official lunches and charities held by the governor, in district headquarters such as Krishnanagar, were marked by austerity measures, such as reduced government spending, which were meant to underscore the seriousness of the war-effort.[45] Inspection of the Civic Guards by the Bengal governor in Burdwan in 1941 and the holding of variety carnivals in aid of Women's War Fund visited by the governor's wife may have suggested that these gatherings were meant to attract members of Calcutta's affluent segments,[46] but the seriousness of the efforts, derided by the ministers as mere *tamasha*,

cannot be denied. The ministers may not have approved of the presence of Noel Coward, who was specially flown into Calcutta in July 1944 to sing and entertain tired and disgruntled European and American troops stationed in the city and elsewhere in the province, but his presence did help the officials to continue to boost the morale of not only the soldiers stationed in Bengal, but also several other civilians in Calcutta, including some Indians who identified themselves with the fluctuating fortunes of the colonial state in India.[47]

Finally, a sixth wartime measure of the officials in Bengal was to use these civil defence organizations to increase employment of high school and college graduates who had not found adequate employment until this time. The House Protection Fire Parties served as ideal recruitment grounds for these youth. Even though the over-all composition of all these civil defence organizations during the war years revealed the old imperial engagement with the strategy of establishing separate electorates, the British civilians who were posted in these bodies did contribute significantly to the inclusion of a large proportion of Indians in semi-governmental organizations during the war years. An ICS officer, appointed as the head of the ARP, was charged with the responsibility of appointing Indians in middle level and lower bureaucratic posts, which did increase employment among the native population. British officials, such as Richard Symonds, a special officer for relief and rehabilitation and Coralie May Taylor, the founder of the Women's Auxiliary Corp, acted efficiently as administrators of their respective organizations. Both of them were given the duty of converting these organizations into socially inclusive bodies dedicated to the success of the government's war- effort. Even after the government appointed a Public Service Commission, which was given the work of reserving senior posts in these bodies for Muslim candidates, a promise of the home government that dated back to the Communal Award of 1932, the civil defence organisations remained completely committed to the work of the war-effort with the help of not only Muslims, but all other communities of the province, including the Hindus, Christians and Eurasians. Of the 20 posts available in the House Protection Fire Parties, 10 were reserved for Muslims, as many 8 for Hindus and 2 for any other community, subject to the candidate's merit. Christians were appointed in the miscellaneous category.

The successive elected cabinets of A.K. Fazlul Huq, Khwaja Nazimuddin and H.S. Suhrawardy contributed to the officials' efforts to increase employment in civil defence organizations. With the growing relevance of the war-effort in eastern India, the ministers began to realize that they could no longer remain aloof to the immediate daily administrative needs of these bodies, thus beginning to participate in extensive war work. However, Bidhan Chandra Ray's contribution to the Bengal Civil Protection Committee notwithstanding,[48] ministerial contribution to the government's war-effort remained marginal compared to the official initiative as well as the collective contribution of the former Indian ruler and officers of the army, bureaucracy and judiciary. The colonial state did reveal in this period a desire to emerge as an inclusive and participatory body, representing the interests of not only British official and non- official groups, but also those of the educated Indians who had earned for themselves a rightful place in the overall framework of the imperial apparatus.[49]

5. Coping with the problems of both external and internal wartime migrations

Japan's attack on Britain's colonial possessions in Southeast Asia led to a sudden outbreak of two major demographical problems that placed severe strains on the apparatus of empire, especially the transport system in Bengal. Initially, the officials found it hard to cope with two major migrations of Indian, especially Bengali people throughout eastern India in the middle of the war years. The surge of Indian refugees from Burma to Bengal as well as the panic migration of Bengali families from Calcutta to the district headquarters in the province due to the real and perceived threats of Axis bombings of Burma and Bengal, especially Calcutta, not only affected the logistical support system of the Bengal province for the efficient prosecution of the war-effort there but also impaired the war morale. Even though both the migrations eventually turned out to be temporary in nature, taken together they amounted to the largest recorded migration that took place within Britain's Asian possessions in the first half of the twentieth century.[50]

The arrival of the Japanese air force over Burma and her navy in the Bay of the Bengal made it necessary for the war planners in Whitehall and Delhi to start their prolonged planning of the withdrawal

of the British people from that country from the middle of the war years. The British and Indians then living in Burma had to immediately leave the country, resigning their jobs and forsaking all their belongings, mainly immovable properties. This did not very significantly damage the financial interests of the vast majority of the British people since they could return home to Great Britain. But a vaster majority of Indians living in Burma at this time, most of whom were Burmese citizens, and whose grandfathers or great-grandfathers had gone to Burma in the middle of the nineteenth century from India in search of profit and employment, found themselves robbed off practically all their possessions and were forced to come to India. The impact of the war in Southeast Asia on the fortunes and lives of most of these Burmese Indian people was nothing short of disastrous: suddenly a comfortably placed community with homes and lands were rendered completely homeless and overnight turned into refugees.

The story of the hardships of these Indian refugees is, indeed, a harrowing one. The migration of these families started abruptly in the last week of December 1941 and continued well until the middle of 1942. Initially, most of the refugees, who could afford sea travel, took the sea- route, catching government steamers from Akyab or Tanugup via Prome and Moulmein,[51] to return to India. But with the Japanese navy increasing their control over the Bay of Bengal from February 1942, the sea-route was closed.[52] The refugees were now forced to take the land route, widely considered to be unsafe, to walk back to India. There were three land routes: Arakan Road, which passed through Chittagong, Manipur Road, which stretched from Wintha in Burma to Manipur in India and Hukong Valley Road which connected Hopin in Burma to Digboi in Assam. The volume of refugees walking down these three roads rose sharply over a short period of only six months: in December, 1941, 175 persons walked back to India, while in January, 1942, 1,366 persons took one of these three roads. Once the option of taking the sea-route was closed, as many as 6, 795 persons were reported to have taken the Manipur Road, the most frequented road, to come to India.[53]

The physical conditions of these three roads were extremely poor, which made the walk back to India extremely difficult for the refugees. Unfortunately, due to official preoccupation with the exigencies of

war, officials of neither the government of Bengal and nor the government of Burma could always pay much attention to the plight of the refugees. Two Bengal officials, Herbert Beaumont and R.R. Langham Carter, expressing their sympathies for the pitiable condition of the refugees, admitted that it was indeed traumatic for the Indians to walk back through the Daru Pass, which was filled with leeches, or down the Hukong Valley Road, which was submerged in deep mud, with holes made by elephants, mules and ponies,[54] or through villages falling on all the three land routes that were completely flooded.[55] Due to these pathetic conditions, the rate of mortality on the land routes remained very high throughout the period of the exodus. According to the Central Overseas Department in Delhi over four-and-a-half lakhs of people died on the Arakan Road alone. Another camp census carried out by the same department suggested that nearly four lakhs of British Asiatic people arrived in India from Burma as the exodus was in full swing. This official figure did not include the 7 lakhs of Indians who left Burma by the sea route alone before the fall of Rangoon. Out of these staggering numbers, well over one lakh of people died of various diseases, such as cholera, malaria, typhoid, and *kalaazar,* that affected the Indian refugees on the land route.[56] Heaps of deadbodies greeted the refugees as they walked back to India.[57]

Official concern for the welfare of the refugees was evident in the extensive medical measures taken to check the spread of these diseases in the embarkation camps set up in Bengal and Assam. The government stocked these camps, to the extent possible, with medicines, food and water. Soon cholera and malaria epidemics broke out in and around these camps too, but the officials did control the spread of these diseases in these camps by shipping consignments of quinines and other medicines to the army cantonments in the hill tracts of Bengal, Assam and Burma. Interestingly, the refugees who were sent to these camps later suggested that sanitation in the government camps were much better than the sanitary conditions prevailing in the non-governmental *dharamsalas* and *musafirkhanas* in Calcutta at that time.[58] P. Burnside of the Overseas Department was given the responsibility of ensuring not only the refugees' safe passage to the camps, but also had to look after their feeding, clothing and medical needs.[59] The Bengal officials also had the responsibility of

helping the refugees, once they had been lodged in the camps, reach their final destinations as soon as possible. Major General E. Wood, the administrator-general of the Eastern Frontier Communications of the Corps of Indian Engineers with the assistance of the American Voluntary Units, then operating on the Tiddim Road in Burma,[60] arranged for the requisitioning and running of 90 trucks, belonging to the army motor transport department in Calcutta, which were to be plied between Dimapur and Imphal to carry back some of the refugees from Burma to the Bengal border.[61]

Help for the refugees came from non-governmental organizations too, such as the Congress and the Marwari Associations as well as individuals who could afford to give generous donations. The Congress organized various civil defence parties, such as ARP units, in Khulna and Chittagong,[62] to assist the refugees to settle down. The secretary of the party, ruing the lack of funds, however, appreciated the individual efforts made by the district committees in this respect.[63] The Marwari Relief Society, with the help of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha, carried out extensive relief work for the refugees not only in Calcutta, but also in Chittagong, Chandpur and Kharagpur. Generous donations were raised and hospitals, such as the Bagla Hospital, were set up for the welfare of the refugees and the Society's volunteers were sent to railway stations in Calcutta from where they escorted the refugees to Babughat on the Hooghly River, where food and refreshments were available. Later the refugees were lodged at nearby guesthouses.[64] In addition to these charitable organizations, professionals, such businessmen, senior company officials and doctors based all over India donated money for buying and maintaining medical units and relief work established for the refugees.[65]

Another area where official initiative in Bengal during the war year revealed the depth of the government's commitment to the welfare of the local people was its management of a second wave of migration, mostly from Calcutta to the district headquarters. This migration took place after it became evident that the Japanese air force was intent on placing Calcutta firmly in the Second World War map. The threat of Japanese bombing of Calcutta, and alleged stories of Japanese excesses in Burma, spread by the incoming Indian refugees from Burma, led to the panic evacuation of middle class families from most major Bengali cities, especially Calcutta, to smaller towns, such as

Krishnanagar, Darjeeling and Kalimpong as well as towns in Nadia, Hooghly, Faridpur and Khulna. The magnitude of these two migrations as well as measures adopted by the Bengal government to cope with this new situation indicated the high level of upheaval in the lives of the local people that the bureaucracy had to cope with, which they did with measured but considerable success.

The social groups that were adversely affected by this second exodus included the city's business people, especially shopkeepers, who lost a lot of their regular customers in just a few days. As a result of this upheaval, many traders had to leave Calcutta temporarily. The exodus severely damaged the functioning of most of the market in the province, which may have had a role to play in the outbreak of the Bengal famine of 1943. L.G. Pinnell, the civil supplies director in Bengal between 1942 and 1943, said in his testimony to the Nanavati Commission that he witnessed with horror the considerable dislocation in the lives of Calcutta's middle class families during these years.[66] This dislocation was caused by mainly two factors: the spiraling of prices of almost every commodity in the market and overcrowding of the district headquarters due to the arrival of families from Calcutta. Asok Mita, an Indian official in the provincial government, suggested that as a result of the sudden arrival of affluent families from Calcutta to Krishnanagar, house-rents as well as the prices of food rose sharply there during the war years. Offering an interesting dimension to the government's reluctance to intervene in the spiralling of prices in Krishnanagar, Mitra suggests that since the refugees were often better off than the local inhabitants, and were prepared to buy food at exorbitant rates, the government was quick to make that extra bit of profit. Another Indian official in Bengal, Saibal Gupta, notes that ironically the overcrowding of Krishnanagar did not affect the living standards of the officials or other affluent segments of the Bengali society.[67] These claims demonstrate that the often repeated charge that inflation and overcrowding did not affect only the Europeans in the province is an incorrect one.[68] While the officials, especially of the Special Branch of the Calcutta police, were rightly concerned about the danger of increased lawlessness due to an abnormally large concentration of jute mill labourers and dockworkers at the railway stations in Calcutta[69] and the infiltration of these workers with 'fifth column' activists,[70] measures adopted by the ministers to provide relief

to the families that were forced to leave Calcutta in the middle of the war years were impressive, although their efforts could not exceed the hard work of the officials. The revenue minister, Pramatha Nath Banerjee, recommended to the officials the establishment of seven relief centres with adequate food and water supply, with nine more to be established by September, 1942, including two exclusively meant for women and orphaned children. Under the directives of both Fazlul Huq and his finance minister, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the law and commerce minister was asked to provide, under the provisions of the War Injuries Ordinance department, full hospitalisation or first aid to persons who may have been injured by the bombing of Calcutta. The cabinet also started a scheme for providing insurance of moveable properties against war risks.[71] However, the involvement of the ministers in the success of the officials' civil defence measures did not go much further than this, not the least because the high commands of most of the political parties, especially of the Congress, determinedly held on to the view that the war-effort was irrelevant to the cause of the national movement.

6. Conclusion

The responses of the Bengal government to the new demands for administrative action due to the exigencies of war included a determined and successful official propaganda and the establishment of civil defence organisations to sustain wartime public morale. The officials also had to cope with the massive influx of refugees from Burma as well as the panic exodus from Calcutta that did place strains on an ageing imperial war machinery, but that did not damage the imperial apparatus very considerably. Senior officials, acting efficiently, were firmly in control of the government machinery during the war years. The ministers played only a marginal role in the success of the war-effort, except in fund raising affairs, a responsibility that they jointly shared with the officials. Their efforts to provide relief to the Bengali migrants during the war years, especially those who arrived from Burma, was received well by the bureaucracy, but these efforts did not match either the financial or administrative support that the officials provided to the local people in this period.

The government's war propaganda appealed in principal to empire loyalists. But more importantly this measure proved to be an absolutely necessary tool for the creation of a sense of allegiance to a late colonial

state that was having to face up to the challenges of a global war. Even if nationalist segments in the local population did not, due to their own political preoccupations, become ardent supporters of the Allied cause, the war-effort did manage to create a sense of urgency among even the most anti-imperialist quarters in the province, which was quite a significant achievement for the officials. The success of these civil defence organizations, which were both highly-functional and symbolic, does demonstrate the seriousness with which the bureaucracy took the war-effort.

The manner in which the refugees from Burma and other internal migrants in Bengal were treated does reveal official determination to provide them with adequate relief and rehabilitation as and where required. Initially, the administration may have lacked the resources to cope adequately with the overpowering challenge of half-starving and ill people walking into Bengal and Assam, but the alacrity with which the officials responded to the refugees' privations at a time when the Raj was having to fight for its own survival, does show the depth of British concern for not only their own people, but also the Indian people. Clearly, the fabled steel frame was ageing and creaking, but was indeed rising to the challenges of the war. The officials did succeed in temporarily creating a sense of permanence that may have started to wane in the immediately pre-war years. The apparatus of empire did hold on in the first half of the forties to the many challenges of both a global war and internal political disturbances.

Even though the beginning of decolonization in Asia may be traced to the six years of the Second World War, temporary reverses in Britain's military fortunes in South East Asia did not indicate that the end of the colonial state had begun in the early forties.[72] On the contrary the colonial state converted a light non-intrusive administration into a more responsible one that could perform its new tasks efficiently. The Burma campaign indicated that the guardians of the Raj were prepared to sacrifice their diminishing financial means to defend one of its prize territories and to deliver Burma back to its legitimate inhabitants. Despite their best efforts, the officials may not have always been successful in providing the most advanced medical facilities to their subjects, but the officials did make a very serious attempt to save as many lives as they could. The colonial state in the first half of the forties may have been a fatigued state, but it was caring nevertheless.

Notes

[1] "Plan for Acceleration of the End of the War with America and Britain", 15 November 1941, in Nobukata Ike, *Japan's Decision for War.* p. 247; see also Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy : Germany, Japan and India Nationalists in the Second World War,* Stuttgart, 1981.

[2] Letter from Mao Tse-Tung, 24/5/1939 in Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters, Written Mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and Some Written by Him,* Delhi, 1988, p. 385-386.

[3] 'General Outline of Policy of Future War Guidance', 7 March, 1942 in Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy,* p. 398; see also S. Hayashi and A.D. Coox, *Kogun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War,* Quantico, 1959, p. 41 and J. Menzel Meskill, *Hitler and Japan: The Hollow Alliance,* New York, 1966, p. 78.

[4] August Hanson was a customs inspector posted in Calcutta in the early forties, who in his memoir, narrates the first incidence of Japanese bombing of Calcutta in December, 1942. He mentions localities in central Calcutta, such as the courtyard of St. James Church on Upper Circular Road, Brick Lane and Mango Lane in Chowringhee, that were adversely affected by the bombing. Hanson claims that the air attack on Calcutta did not lead to significant mortality, although public property, including doors and windows of houses, were damaged. For further details please see August Peter Hanson, *Memoirs of an Adventurous Dane in India, 1904-1947,* London, BACSA, 1999, pp. 207-208; for details on the Bengal Governor and his wife's visit to a Air Raid Precaution unit office in Calcutta, as well as the visit paid to that office by Lord Archibald WaveII after the bombing of the city on 24 December, 1943 see Susan Primer Foster, 'A Calcutta Experience during World War II' at *BBC WWII People's War* at http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/oct2006.

[5] Chief Secretary's fortnightly reports, second half of March 1943, Home Political Confidential files, National Archives of India (NAI), Government of India (GOI).

[6] See John A. Gallagher, 'The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire', pp.73-153, for the demands made on India.

[7] Letter from Lord Mountbatten to Edward Benthall, 7 May 1945, no. SC5/950/B, *Edward Benthall Papers,* Box No. XXII, Centre for South Asian Studies Archives, Cambridge (CSASC).

[8] Pat Lovett, *Journalism in India,* Calcutta, 1928, p. 39.

[9] Milton Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-47,* Cambridge, 1994, p. 30.

[10] John Herbert to Linlithgow, June 1940, p. 116, *Linlithgow Papers,* File No. Mss.Eur.F 125/108, Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC), British Library (BL).

[11] Vice-Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia, 1943—45,* London, 1951, p. 17.

[12] Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India,* Richmond, Surrey, 2001, p. 65.

[13] P.N. Thapar, ICS to J.P. Blair, ICS, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal (GOB), 23 May, 1942, File No. 273/42, 1942, Home (Confidential) Department, West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).

[14] Home Department Notification, File No. 22/23/41-Poll (1),1941, Home (Confidential) Department, GOI, NAI; see also Philip Zeigler, *Personal Diary of Admiral The Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia.* 1943-1946, London, 1988, pp. 4 & 6.

[15] War Office Notification, File No. *LIWS/1433,* WIS (II), 20 August 1943, *War Staff Papers.* OIOC, BL.

[16] J.A. Thorne, *Confidential Report on the Control during War of the Press, Broadcasting and Films; and on Publicity for Purposes of the War,* New Delhi, 1939, p. 11; I&B Department Notification, File No. L/I/1/1136, I & B Department, India Office Records (IOR), OIOC, BL.

[17] Fredrick H. Puckle. secretary, 1 & B Department, GOI, to R. W. Brock, 11 February 1943, File No. L/1/1/1970, Information & Broadcasting Department (I&B Department), Government of Britain (GOBr), OIOC, BL.

[18] Speech given in the Bengal Legislative Assembly by Shyamaprasad Mookerjee, in *Bengal Legislative Assembly Papers (BLAP),* Vol. LXIV, No. 1, 12 February 1943, p. 29; restrictions on free movement were imposed under rules 85 (1) and 85 B (1) of the Defence of India Rules. 85 B (1) stated that the governments in Delhi and Calcutta had to "require that any specified person or class of persons proposing to travel to specified destinations shall not be carried on a railway, and ... prohibit the travelling by railway of any specified person or class of persons".

[19] The measures to restrict or prohibit shipping were guaranteed under rule 86 (1) of the DIRs, *Ibid,* p.104.

[20] Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and Isolationists, 1932-1945,* Lincoln, 1983, pp. 346-348.

[21] Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific,* New York, 1987, p. 107.

[22] Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan and Indian Nationalists in Second World War,* Stuttgart, 1981, p. 391.

[23] Louis Allen, *Burma: the Longest War,* 1941-1945, London, 1984, pp. 192-193.

[24] Philip Zeigler, *Personal Diary of Lord Louis Mountbatten, South East Asia,* 1939-1946, London, 1988, p. 19, 89 & 199.

[25] Lord Mountbatten, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia.* 1943-1945, London, 1951, pp.213-214.

[26] Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory,* London, 1986, p. 126.

[27] Philip Zeigler, *Personal Diary,* p.19 & 165.

[28] 'War History of the Department of Works, Mines and Power', n.d., File No. L/R15/298; "Secret Review of War Legislation in the Courts", n.d., pp. 15-16, L/R/5/292, OIOC, BL.

[29] R. G. Casey, *Personal Experience,* 1939-1946, London, 1962, p.236.

[30] Conran Smith, Secretary to the GOI to O.M. Martin, Chief Secretary to the GOB, 7 June 1940, 1741/30/39-Police, File No. W-412/40, Home (Political) Department, GOB, WBSA.

[31] Herbert to Lord Wavell, April 20, 1942, Defence of Eastern Bengal and Calcutta: plans and proposals, 1941-2, Coll. No.1, File No. 48, File No. R 1312/27, IOR, OIOC, BL.

[32] GOB Memo., Home (Political) Department, 404 P.D., Calcutta, 9 April 1942, the plans and proposals for the defence of Eastern Bengal and Calcutta, 1941-2, Coll. No.1, File No. 48, File No. R 13/2/27, IOR, OIOC, BL.

[33] Chief Secretary's fortnightly report, first half of September 1939, Home (Confidential) Department, GOI, NAI.

[34] Chief Secretary's fortnightly report, second half of September 1939, NAI, GOI.

[35] Interview with Richard Symonds, Cassette No.1, Mss. Eur. R. 207/1, OIOC, BL.

[36] Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Das,* Calcutta, 1993, p. 168.

[37] E. W.R. Lumby to Linlithgow, 7 February 1942, in *TOP,* Vol. 1, London, 1970, p. 130.

[38] Bhabatosh Datta, *Aat Dasak, (Eight Decades),* Calcutta, 1991, p. 116.

[39] Chief Secretary's Fortnightly Reports, first half of March 1941, Home (Confidential) Department, GOI, NAI.

[40] Leela Majumdar, *Pakdandi, (Hill Towpath),* Calcutta, 1982, (in Bengali).

[41] Official of Bird & Co. to Edward Benthall, 11 March 1942, *Edward Benthall Papers,* Box No. XVIII, CSAS, Cambridge.

[42] Chief Secretary's fortnightly reports, first half of May 1941, Home (Confidential) Department, NAI, GOI.

[43] Interview with Coralie May Taylor, No.1, Reel No. 2, MSS. EUR. 142, OIOC, BL.

[44] Chief Secretary's fortnightly reports, first half of November 1940, NAI, GOI; Chief Secretary's fortnightly reports, first half of April 1941, NAI, Gal; in November 1940 the amount collected totalled Rs.49, 000; from a single district, the 24 *Parganas,* the government collected Rs.8, 000. Burdwan contributed Rs.5,800; while nearly Rs.5, 500 and Rs.3, 400 respectively were raised from Tippera and Noakhali. Collections in 1941 were relatively brisk. The districts of Burdwan and Midnapore made contributions of Rs. 1,66,000 and Rs. 1,00,500 respectively by the end of April 1941. The contributions from Chittagong, Tippera and Noakhali had also crossed the Rs. 10,000 mark by that date. By April, apart from Calcutta and Chittagong, the total amount of donations for the war effort in the province stood at more than Rs. 1,44,000.

[45] Ashok Mitra, *Towards Independence 1940-47: Memoirs of an Indian Civil Servant,* Bombay, 1991, p. 38.

[46] See the travel diary of E.B.H. Baker, ICS, April 1941 - August 1947, *E.B.H. Baker Papers,* Box No.6, CSAS, Cambridge. See also a report of *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* for details on Mary Herbert's stewardship of the Women's War Fund. News report of 7 December, 1941, in *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

[47] R.G. Casey, *Personal Experience,* 1939-1946, London, 1962, p. 227.

[48] Richard Symonds, *In the Margins of Independence: A Relief Worker in India and Pakistan* (1942-7), Oxford, 2001, p. 12-16.

[49] Chief Secretary's fortnightly reports, second half of December 1940, Home (Confidential) Department, NAI, GOI.

[50] Bisheswar Prasad, *The Retreat from Burma, 1941-1942*: *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War,* 1939-1945, Bombay, 1959; Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Romanthan Athaba Bhimratiprapter Paracharit Charcha, (Nostalgia Or Criticisms of Others By One Who Has Fits of Fancy)* Calcutta, 1992.

[51] Prasad, *The Retreat from Burma.*

[52] Overseas Department Notifications, File No. 126-10/42, 1942, Indian Overseas Department, (hereafter IOD), GOI, NAI.

[53] File No. 0-31 (Part I), 1942, *All India Congress Committee Papers (AICC Papers),* NMML.

[54] Memoir of R.R. Longhand Carter in manuscript form, p. 87, *R.R. Langham Carter Papers,* Mss.Eur.D 975, IOR, OIOC, BL.

[55] Herbert Beaumont's diary, May-June 1942, *Herbert Beaumont Papers,* Mss.Eur.A. 202, IOR, OIOC, BL.

[56] Gautarn Chattopadhyaya, *Burma's Fight for Freedom and the Unforgettable Indian Comrades,* (n.p, n.d.), pp.3-4.

[57] Overseas Department Notification, file No. 126-10/42, IOD, IOR, GOI, NAI.

[58] Umapada Nandy, Secretary, Jaipurhat Bazla Relief Society, Bogra, 29 May 1942 to General Secretary, AICC, Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad, G-31 (Part I), *AICC Papers,* NMML.

[59] G.S. Bozman, Secretary. GOI to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy, 14 May 1942. IOD, GOI, NAI.

[60] Philip Zeigler, *Personal Diary,* p. 64.

[61] Arthur Clow to Linlithgow, 11 June 1942; Linlithgow to Secretary of State for India, 29 May 1942, in Hugh Tinker, 'The Indian Exodus from Burma', p.11.

[62] Jnanedranath Bhowmik, Secretary, Khulna District Congress Committee to General Secretary, AlCC, Swaraj Bhawan, AICC, Allahabad, 11 February 1942, File No. G-10/1942 (Part I), *AICC Papers,* NMML.

[63] Nagendra Bhattacharya, President, Bakarganj District Congress Civil Defence Committee, Barisal to Secretary, AICC, Swaraj Bhawan Allahabad, 11 May 1942, GIO, *1942,AICC Papers,* NMML.

[64] Marwari Relief Society, Chitpur, Calcutta, Bulletin Nos. I and 2, G-31 (Part I), 1942, *AlCC Papers,* NMML. Chandpur is the river-rail junction transhipment point on the Padma between Dacca and Calcutta.

[65] Sri Chand Doneria, Managing Director, Swadeshi Bima, Company, Ltd., Agra to Secretary, AICC, Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad, 30 April 1942, A.P. Shroff, an eye specialist based in Simla, M.N. Dastur, Imperial Dairy Research Institute, Bangalore, 2 May 1942 to secretary, AICC, Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad, Nehru to J.B. Kripalani, Anand Bhawan, Allahabad, 5 May 1942, File No. F-18, *AICC Papers, NMML.*

[66] Testimony of L.G. Pinnell, ICS, Director of Civil Supplies, GOB, 1942-3, p. 547, *Nanavati Papers,* GOI, NAI.

[67] Saibal Gupta, *Kichu Smriti, Kichu Katha, (Some Memories, Somethings to Say),* (Calcutta, 1994) (in Bengali).

[68] Asok Mitra, *Towards Independence,* p.122.

[69] Bijoy Banerjee, Howrah to the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, 16 December 1941, file No. PM757/41, SB, GOB.

[70] S.D. Gordon's note, Hare School, 20 December 1941, *Ibid.*

[71] Statement by Fazlul Huq, in *BLAP,* Vol. LXIII, No. I, 15 February 1942, pp. 35-36.

[72] Indivar Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942', in Kaushik Roy (ed.), *War and Society in Colonial India, 1805-1945*, New Delhi, 2006.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ASIATIC SOCIETY'S FORTHCOMING COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF MODERN BENGAL, 1700-1950, VOLUME I TO III*

SABYASACHI BHATTACHARYA

At the first conference on the present series of volumes as I rose to speak in the august hall of the Asiatic Society, I recalled the brilliant minds who had spoken to us from that podium from the beginning of the nineteenth century. This hall had witnessed some of the events that led to the creation of modern Bengal. I also recalled the earliest expositions of the history of Bengal, e.g. the translation into Bengali of J.C.Marshman's history of Bengal in 1848 by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a companion volume published by Ramgati Nyayaratna in 1859, and a relatively independent work, far from being a translation, written by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay between 1865 to 1869.[1] Needless to say, one should also recall another parallel tradition of historiography represented by the works of historians like Gulam Hussain, a derivative of the tradition of Mughal or Indo-Persian historiography.

My intention is not to just recall the glorious days of Bengal's scholarship and to celebrate the past. Our object is to bring to mind the confluence of three literary traditions and cultures. We had the indigenous tradition of Indo-Persian historical scholarship. The other tradition sprang from Europe's discovery of Asia's ancient past, particularly the development of a whole new discipline of indology, and ultimately by the end of nineteenth century a vast enterprise to construct a colonial system of knowledge which was "indology". And then there was another stream that sprang from the search for civilizational identity in modern Bengal, e.g. that represented by Akshay Kumar Moitra and Rabindranath Tagore.[2]

Given such diverse constitutive elements in historicizing Bengal's past in modern times, it is not surprising that the historical literature

* Presented in the Authors' conference on "Comprehensive History of Modern Bengal : 1700-1950, 3 volumes" held on February 7-9, 2018 at the Asiatic Society.

we encounter is a complex discourse which has never been free of controversies. To attempt to write history beyond controversy is universally admitted to be an impossible task today, and our attempt will be no exception. However, to the extent an enquiry comprehending hitherto known outlines of contemporary and generally accepted modern knowledge and by the scholarly world, may allow us to form some idea of the location of a consensus amongst scholars who differ. The principle we have relied upon is to identify the recognized authorities in their field of specialization who may belong to different schools, ideologies, methodological categories, etc. and to allow them each the freedom to formulate their view of the consensus amongst scholars. Hence the apparently unexciting and unambitious request sent out to scholars contributing to the projected volumes that the objective is to provide an evaluation of the present state of knowledge.

Structuration of the present volumes: Periodization

I should add that much thought was given to periodization implicit in the structuration of the three volumes. When a comprehensive history of Bengal was attempted by editors R.C.Majumder and Sir J.N.Sarkar in 1943-48 in the Dhaka University's history of Bengal, and in 1961-1967 by editor N.K.Sinha of Calcutta University in a follow-up volume, these three volumes covered the then state of knowledge on ancient and medieval Bengal and modern Bengal 1757-1905. The Asiatic Society Calcutta has now undertaken a project to prepare and publish in three volumes a Comprehensive History of Modern Bengal, since it has been widely felt that, given the advance of research since 1967 and some changes in the approach to history, a new endeavour is needed to survey the present state of knowledge of the history of modern Bengal in the period 1700-1950. In the present scheme volumes I and II will cover the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and volume III the early twentieth century. Sarkar and Majumdar took 1757 as a landmark ("end of Muslim rule") and N.K.Sinha accepted that as the initial year for his volume on modern Bengal, while he decided on 1905 as an end-point; instead, we have posited the eighteenth century as a distinct period in the history of modern Bengal. In 1992 the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh published a set of volumes on *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*,[3] here it was said "From regional point of view

the shifting of the capital of suba Bangla from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1704 was surely an event of great historical significance. Dhaka and Eastern Bengal gradually languished and Murshidabad, as an administrative centre, had emerged as the new imperial metropolis for Eastern India. East Bengal by default turned into a hinterland of Murshidabad and later Calcutta and it remained ever since, so far as imperial interests and politics were concerned, as an entity of peripheral importance…. Therefore, the year 1704 appears to be a crucial landmark for fixing it as an opening terminal for this general study. It terminates in 1971, a momentous date which marks the end of the imperial and colonial eras of Bengal on the one hand and inaugurates the Bangladesh Revolution and the rise of Bangladesh as an independent nation state, on the other. This study begins from 1704 when the capital of Suba Bangla was transferred from Dhaka to Murshidabad and when the foundation of the autonomous Nawabi rule was laid. The book closes in 1971 when the Bangladesh War of Liberation began."[4]

As regards the strategy of approaching the task, as any practitioner of the art of history writing would surmise, the strategy differed in the present volume from author to author, from theme to theme, and from one level of generalization to another. When one is dealing with the basic and long term trends such as demography, or man and nature relationship, or the vast planetary perspective of inter oceanic trade, or of environment development over centuries, our authors have been compelled to adopt a strategy different from that of other authors who deal with issues such as those one encounters in bread and butter histories of politics and administration. Our historians of literary creativity, economic transactions, and sociological formations display a perspective that is attuned to their theme, and indeed some of them do not belong to the conventionally defined discipline of history. It is possible that the failure of our historians to respond to the need for specialization discipline-wise, in other words our failure to be sufficiently multidisciplinary, made it difficult to repeat the "comprehensive" exercises earlier undertaken by R.C.Majumdar and Jadunath Sarkar (1948) and by N.K.Sinha of Calcutta University (1967). Perhaps the use of the term "comprehensive" by us is intended to capture the multidisciplinary dimensions of many scholars' historical research represented in the present volume.

As I look upon the agenda of our project today, I realize on the one hand the potentials of the project, and at the same time I realize that we are still in a half-way house in our journey towards our ultimate objective.

Periodization and Chapters in this work

In full awareness of that, the following plan emerged from the discussions between the General Editor, the Editorial Committee and most of the authors contributing to the volume now before the readers. In the first place, we decided to break away from the tradition set not only in the volumes edited by J.N.Sarkar and R.C.Mazumdar and N.K.Sinha, but also the majority of books published before or after independence. Earlier it was taken for granted that Bengal History can be divided into three periods, Ancient, Medieval and Modern, corresponding to what are known in European History as the ancient, medieval and modern periods. This tripartite division of history is derived from James Mill's *History of India* which left a deep impression on Indian colonial historiography. Other colonial historians who came after James Mill followed his example. This is generally considered by us today as inappropriate for periodization, because there is an inherent communal approach in identifying a period as Hindu or Muslim. Further, that mode of periodisation is questionable because it takes for granted an equivalence between the British period and modernity. Instead, we decided to begin our history of modern Bengal from the beginning of the eighteenth century because a number of important historical landmarks occurred about that time – because of the transfer of capital of Bengal from Dhaka to Murshidabad by the Nawabi regime, the rise of Murshid Quli Khan, the death of Emperor Aurangzeb, etc. In contrast to the turmoil in most other parts of India, this period in Bengal was marked by the neat succession of Nawabs (Murshid Quli Khan, Subedar, 1717-1727; Sujauddin Muhammad Khan, 1727-1739; Sarfaraz 1739-1740; Aliwardi Khan 1740-1756; Siraj-ud-Daula 1756-1757). Further, we consider the eighteenth century as an important historical category or a distinct period in Indian history which is now the subject of controversies initiated by the so-called revisionist historians of the Cambridge school, Christopher Bayly and his followers. As regards the termination of Volume I on the eighteenth century, we have chosen

the date 1793. That is, of course, as arbitrary as any other choice we might have made, but our choice is on the ground that the Permanent zamindari settlement in Bengal in 1793 marked the culmination of the trends towards settlement after a period of experimentation in revenue and in other aspects of administration by the East India Company. The middle period 1793 to 1905 has the much acclaimed Bengal Renaissance at its core, i.e., the story revolving around Rammohun Roy, the Derozians, the Tagores, and other iconic figures. We break off with the Partition of Bengal of 1905 and the main theme of Volume III will be the anti-imperialist struggle from the Swadeshi movement onwards. The foundation of the Indian Republic and the adoption of the Constitution may be considered an appropriate landmark to conclude our last volume. To sum up, we have divided our historical framework to form three thematically distinct periods, the themes being the decline and fall of the Nawabi regime in Bengal and the remaking of Bengal's polity (1700 -1793), the reawakening of Bengal in volume II (1793-1905), and the freedom struggle against British Raj (1905-1950).

In volume I there are some chapters which aim to cross periods. Environmental history obviously needs to cross centuries to lay down the basic parameters. Again, how was Bengal conceived and what were the territorial landmarks and limits as it was imagined in the eighteenth century and earlier? In the inter-oceanic trade beyond the borders of Bengal how was Bengal situated in the inter-oceanic trade network? And how do historians situate Bengal in the overall history of European ascendancy in South Asia in the eighteenth century and the role of military power of the Indian and foreign players in Bengal politics? At the level of specialized studies of some aspects of Bengal in this volume we have a set of essays on European companies. Another set of essays in this volume focuses upon trade and urbanization, the development of Calcutta as a commercial metropolis and the wide ranging theme of East India Company's external trade.

The core of Volume II is the story of the Renaissance which begins with chapters on Rammohun Roy, on the Derozians, and on the Tagores, topped up by a comprehensive chapter on religious thought and social reform in nineteenth century Bengal. In keeping with the

practice in recent historical writings on modern Bengal, volume II is rich in social and cultural history highlighting the spread of urbanization and the growth of Calcutta as a metropolis, a wide ranging survey of the growth and development of the middle class intelligentsia, and the examination of popular culture at the level of the subaltern classes. The relatively new area of enquiry in social history is gender history and we have a very wide ranging essay on that theme in volume II which will be followed by more detailed studies in the next volume by other scholars. We have seen in earlier histories of Bengal by Sarkar and Mazumdar and by N.K.Sinha a rather cursory treatment of literature, but in the present volume we have extended accounts of Bengali journalism in the early nineteenth century and then so-called high literature, and yet we feel that not enough space has been given to literature.

We have occasionally broken away elsewhere from the periodization of the above scheme. In volume II we have placed three chapters which may be said to be like *bridge chapters*. One of them is on the impact of the Uprising of 1857 on Bengal, which so to speak takes us back to the armed resistance against the English and other East India Companies. It is possible to look at the events of 1857 as carryover from the eighteenth century. The other bridge chapters are covering both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the history of art and architecture, areas where the political factors in periodisation are not relevant, and thus we have a seamless web that unites both the centuries.

A separate series of chapters were designed to address the socio-economic basis of the agrarian economy that produced the surplus expended upon military ventures and foreign trade expansion. These chapters cover important themes such as politics and economics of land legislation in the early twentieth century, the "Peasant question" in middle class consciousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, agrarian relationship in Bengal in the crucially important phase of the Great World Depression and the police and surveillance system in the twentieth century, generally politics and civil society of early twentieth century Bengal and the idea of justice and evolution of the Calcutta High Court, 1861-1950. A glance at these chapters will

immediately show to the readers the difference between the earlier approach emphasizing administrative history and the question addressed by a new generation of younger scholars in recent times. That is equally true of a whole genre of political history represented here by chapters on Bengal politics in relation to communalism, the caste system and caste movements to gain power, and tribal and marginal communities. In many of these chapters we get close to the question of the location of political power, the relationship between social structure and access to exercise of political power and the notions concerning legal sovereignty and political hegemony.

A departure from the earlier pattern of comprehensive history edited by Sarkar and Majumdar volumes (1943, 1947, reprint 1973) and N.K.Sinha (1967), is that there is in the present volumes emphasis on ideology and ideational history in the chapters on Science and technology, Medicinal knowledge systems and Public Health in Modern Bengal, entrepreneurship in twentieth century Bengal, literary trends, art movements and nationalism and trends in Bengal school at Santiniketan, ideology and identity issues in the writings of Muslim intelligentsia, print culture and Bengali literary nationalism, and a general survey of the idea of modernity in Bengal. Needless to say the gender historians have also made their presence felt in a number of chapters on women's participation in industrial work, women in the Muslim community in Bengal 1880-1947, and a general survey of the status of women in Society and Politics in the early twentieth century.

Regionalization

Apart from the issue of periodization, we need to address some conceptual questions relating to regionalization. What was the concept of Bengal in the imagination of the traditional Bengali mind? And what sort of unity was attributed to Bengal, other than the obvious one, the language? Mukundaram Chakrabarti's poetic narrative *Chandi Mangal* of the early seventeenth century was prefaced by the praise of various gods and goddesses; as a routine, like other poetic texts of those times, Mukundaram begins with a *dik-bandana* (literally, worship of quarters of the compass) which is as follows.[5] He mentions the presiding deity at each major pilgrimage centre or smaller temple sites in different directions; there are a greater number of the examples

in the south of Bengal because when he wrote he was in the present district of Midnapore, having migrated from his native village in Burdwan. He begins with major centres beyond Bengal: Neelachal in Orissa, Vrindaban, Ayodhya (*'Ayodhyae bandibo thakur Sri Ram'*), Gaya, Prayag, Dwaraka, Hastinapur, and Varanasi. Then the poet mentions serially the temples and deities within his knowledge in Bengal, ranging from major centres like Kaleeghat to lesser temples and sites of pilgrimage like those in Bikrampur, Kharagpur, Teotia, Damanya, Chandrakona, Tamralipta etc.[6] Similarly *Ray Mangal*, written in 1723 A.D. by the poet Hari Deb Sharma of the present district of Howrah, has a *dik-bandana* listing places of pilgrimage; this has a more limited range not going beyond Puri and Vrindaban. What is interesting here is the inclusion of *peers* (holy men) revered by Moslems: Thus along with Mahamaya or Jagannath, you have Dafar Khan Gazi of Tribeni or Sarenga Saheb.[7]

In fact it is doubtful whether in our contemporary discourse the older notions of region have any relevance, judging by the regionalization followed by Bengal history scholars in the following pages. The old perception of regionalization of Bengal into *rarha*, *Banga*, etc. appeared to be irrelevant to them. They also pay little attention to the pre-1971 sub-regional identities, except in moments of nostalgia and there is no serious academic study on that basis.

The cultivation of local and regional history was important from the point of view of local patriotism. We see plenty of evidence of that in local history writing in the Bengali speaking region in the early twentieth century, but the question that remains to be addressed is, how do we define regional history? I will begin with the proposition that historians talk about regions all the time but usually they do not give any thought to region as a concept. I have in mind here academic historians in the sphere of professional historiography, as distinct from some writers who use history to build regional sentiments for political purposes.

Regional categories show diversity in the criteria of regionalization. Sometimes the criterion is linguistic, sometimes political-administrative, sometimes communal, and so on. Joseph Schwartzberg, long before he attained his present fame on account of his historical atlas of India, wrote a perceptive paper in 1967 on the question in a collection of essays edited by R. G. Fox.[8] As a social geographer

Schwartzberg distinguished three types of regionalization: (a) denoted, (b) instituted, (c) 'naively given'. By 'denoted' region Schwartzberg meant regions which are distinguished and delimited with a particular purpose in view (of a linguist, or a historian, or an anthropologist) unrelated to existing units created for administrative purpose. The 'instituted' region, on the other hand, arises out of administrative function, in order to facilitate the performance of and to define the spatial limits of such functions. Finally, the 'naively given' region is "recognized as a meaningful territorial unity by the people who live there or by other people to whom it is of some concern", as for example Saurashtra or Jharkhand or Telengana.

This scheme helps us to think systematically about criteria of regionalization. It is, of course, quite possible that a region may satisfy more than one criterion or purpose of regional delineation. (e.g. Burdwan as a region). For example, a 'naively given' region that is perceived as a unit by itself and others, may also be an administrative unit and / or be denoted as a unit in linguistic or ethnic or communal terms. Evidently, in India linguistic re-organization and re-organization, since its acceptance by the Congress even in the pre-independence period, promoted trends towards the congruence of 'instituted' with 'naively given' regional boundaries. But the epistemological status of the 'naively given', instituted, and denoted regions should be recognized to be different.

Which of these types of regionalization schemes the historian would use would obviously depend upon his theme of research. For example, the instituted region will be appropriate if you were in the political - administrative area of research (e.g. 24 Parganas), and your business will be with the so-called 'naively given' region if you were into 'social and cultural history'. It is, however, the 'denoted' region which is the construct of scholarly work. The historian may begin with given regions according to folk perception or administrative fiat, but he arrives at a pattern of regionalization on the basis of his empirical findings and theoretical understanding.

Regional and National

As noted earlier, regional identity consciousness and a kind of local patriotism played an important role in the development of regional history. I now turn to the question, how does that regional

identity consciousness relate with national consciousness, how does regional history of Bengal, Punjab or Maharashtra, relate with the history of the larger entity of which it is a part? The point that needs to be made is that the term 'regional history' posits or assumes a larger entity, called 'national history'. This, incidentally, means logically that before there was national history there was no such thing as regional history. Almost all history was in spatial coverage regional. Such histories were limited spatially but epistemologically they were not limited, because regional history occupied the whole notional space, 'history'. We need not pursue here this train of logic. All that needs to be stated is that at one time almost all history was about regions, without being conceived as 'regional history'. It was the notion of a 'nation' with territoriality which created, in some societies, the notion of a 'region' as a part of that larger territory. This leads us to the nationalist discourse of Indian civilization. It was this discursive tradition which moulds a new conception of the relationship between the regional and national histories. As regards regional identity consciousness, there is no need to argue elaborately the point about multiplicity of identities - a point which Amartya Sen has made already.[9] Regional is one of the many identities struggling for priority.

The nationalist ideologues in the twentieth century developed a discourse of civilization which makes the conceptual leap from regional histories to a national history thinkable. Thanks to government propaganda and the political exploitation of the idea of "Indian civilization" we tend today to take it for granted. However, the idea that the civilization of India unites diversities, including various regional differences, played in important role from about the beginning of the last century.

Some reflections on projects to narrativize Bengal History

We have mentioned in the beginning of this 'Introduction' the early efforts of Vidyasagar and his contemporaries to present a comprehensive history of modern Bengal, particularly in their writings in the Bengali language. Among the contemporaries was Gobinda Chandra Sen who first translated Marshman's book on Bengal History (1840). Sen was a member of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge organized by the Derozians. Among the students of Hindu college from 1817 and particularly from 1826 when Henry Louis Vivian

Derozio began to teach, there developed a new intellectual movement in Calcutta. A group of young middle class alumni of the college, known as the 'Young Bengal' group, formed an association known as Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge; they wrote extensively on history and took up the task of responding to foreign critics of Indian history and civilization. Consider, for instance, the presentation made by Baboo Peary Chand Mitra at the meeting of this association on 8 September 1841 on 'the State of Hindoostan under the Hindoos'.[10] Mitra cites against James Mill's ill-informed generalizations about Hindoo institutions and laws, the authority of H.H.Wilson (in his recent critical edition of Mill's *History of India*) and Mountstuart Elphinstone, as well as original documents of the East India Company to contest the view that the monarch in India possessed all the land, an error replicated from Francois Bernier through James Mill to Karl Marx. Or consider Gobinda Chandra Sen[11] writing about the 'History of India'. The author writes: "In this country ….we do not have any books narrating the events of history. But now people want to know the history of our own native land and that is why we urgently need today books on history".[12]

This spate of publications ended with the Bengali translation of the Presidency College teacher Roper Lethbridge's *Easy Introduction to the History and Geography of Bengal* (published in 1874-1875). In the meanwhile more significant advance of historical knowledge was being made: Akshay Kumar Maitra published *Siraj-ud-daula* (1897), and his historical journal *Aitihashic Chitra* (1899) was restarted by Nikhilnath Ray (1904-1907); the *Riaz-us-salatin* was translated by Rampran Gupta (1905), the Barendra Anusandhan Samity to cultivate regional history was founded (1910), and they published Rama Prasad Chandra's *Gauda Rajmala* and Akshay Maitra's *Gauda Lekhamala* (1911-12).

In the early decades of the twentieth century regional history flourished. As Prabodh Chandra Sen has remarked, "in the field of history writing in Bengal there appeared suddenly a galaxy of authors Rajanikanta (Gupta), Haraprasad (Shastri), Akshay Kumar (Maitra), Roma Prasad (Chandra), Rakhaldas (Bandyopadhyay)"[13]. Further a new genre of sub-regional history expanded Bengal history into detailed studies of Murshidabad, Jessore, Khulna, Dhaka, Varendrabhumi, Gauda, Pabna, Vishnupur, Rajshahi, Tripura (notably the annotated edition of *Tripura Rajmala* by Kaliprasad Sen), etc. This drive to recover sub-regional history, i.e. history at the district level or

below, ran parallel to the early twentieth century Regional Records Survey and associated efforts to enrich local histories by the Indian Historical Records Commission. There developed an active intellectual community of regional historians to support these efforts. In contrast to Sarkar's and N.K.Sinha's volumes (1948 and 1967) you find that at the end of this volume we have appended a bibliography in two parts, one covering books published from 1840-1947 and the other publications from 1947-2000.

R. C. Majumdar, J.N.Sarkar and N.K.Sinha all complained of lack of support they received from prospective contributors and this, they say, forced them to take a larger part in writing their volumes. For example, Sarkar writes that after chapters had been allotted to different scholars "some of them after wavering declined the task and others were found to be habitually incapable of writing their promised chapters within the time limit, or indeed ever at all. So at last the painful truth dawned upon the mind of the editor that he must personally shoulder the burden of writing the major portion, if this volume was to be completed within his lifetime[14]. N.K.Sinha's experience was not much better with authors because some of them declined to contribute "three or four years after they had agreed to write" since they "perhaps thought of the project as my personal venture"[15].

My experience was just the reverse. I have not intruded in this volume as an author compelled to contribute by such circumstances. I must record my deep gratitude to my professional colleagues in many countries and across generations who contributed to this volume at my request. Perhaps it was being generally felt that a new comprehensive history of Bengal was called for when in September 2005 the Council of the Asiatic Society has considered a proposal by the member of the Council, nominated by the government of India, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya. A preliminary discussion on the proposal took place at the meeting of the Council of the Asiatic Society on 22 September 2005 and upon its acceptance by the concerned Committees it was suggested that an outline of the plans for a comprehensive history of modern Bengal be prepared. However, certain internal problems arising from the then posture of affairs in that institution, as well as the appointment of the author of the proposal, i.e. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, to the position of Chairman ICHR, did not allow the

Asiatic Society to pursue the project at that time, despite consensus in the Council in favour of the project. The Council, having approved of the project, postponed execution of its resolution, until at the request of Sabyasachi Bhattacharya they revived the project and on 25 November 2016 the Council set up a committee comprising Sabyasachi Bhattacharya as General Editor, S.B.Chakraborti, General Secretary of the Asiatic Society, and as other members Professor Ramkrishna Chatterjee, Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Arun Bandyopadhyay, Sujit Das. Further an Advisory Committee for this project was also formed (members are listed in the acknowledgement page in this volume). Sabyasachi Bhattacharya declined to accept any remuneration and a token honorarium is being paid to about sixty distinguished contributors. Thus this project is, so far as the authors and editor are concerned is a labour of love. My own humble contribution to the History of Bengal has appeared in my earlier publications. My contribution to this volume has been by way of emphasizing certain themes of research in focusing the agenda of the three volumes.

Every generation of scholars looks at the work of the previous generation with a critical eye and no doubt there will be a very worthwhile critique of the present work as well. The achievement of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, R.C.Majumdar and N.K.Sinha in 1948 and in 1967 was tremendous considering the constraints under which they worked. At the same time historical scholarship has evolved since then. While the Bengal historian community was somewhat parochial, it has ceased to be so today; it is more open now to stimulus of theoretical discourse of our times; members of the community have an international profile now, having served in many academic institutions abroad; compared to earlier times many more of the younger generation are counted among the leaders of the profession; the composition of the community has radically changed with a greater degree of gender equality and consequently less gender bias in their outlook (while not a single contributor to volumes edited by Sarkar, Majumdar and Sinha was a woman, we have now a great many of them). We have in India a tradition of valuing *Guru-Shishya* parampara and we believe that the work done by the earlier generation has enabled the present generation of scholars to reach the level of scholarship evinced the writings in the present volume. And we look forward to the work of the coming generations of scholars who will join the intellectual community devoted to the history of Bengal.

Notes

[1] The text of some of these works have recently been collected and reprinted from the original editions by Kamal Choudhuri, *Banglar Itihas: Prachin Jug theke Ingrej Amol*, Kolkata, 2006, pp. 55-349. I may add here that in the present 'Introduction' in order to present to the general reader a reader-friendly style, I have reduced the number of footnotes and other paraphernalia we professional historians depend upon.

[2] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Talking Back: The Idea of Civilization in the Indian Nationalist Discourse*, OUP, Delhi.

[3] Sirajul Islam edited, *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Dhaka, 1992.

[4] Sirajul Islam, ed. *History of Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1992, pp. vii-viii.

[5] Kabikankan Mukundaram Chakrabarti probably wrote his *Chandi Mangal* around 1603-04 A.D.; Sukumar Sen attributed it to mid-16th century; according to the latest view, this wrong dating was due to a misplaced *pushpika* (Colophon); See Khudiram Das, *Kabikankan Chandi* (Calcutta, 1987) pp.xxii-xxiv; 'Dik Devata Bandana', *ibid*., pp.275-276.

[6] It appears from Das, *op. cit*. edited text that 'Dik Bandana' does not occur in some manuscripts, although it is part of the major manuscripts collated; it is also possible that 'Dik Bandana' was added by another contemporary poet or copyist, but that leaves my argument unaffected.

[7] Hari Deb Sharma, *Ray Mangal* (MS in Visva Bharati, Santiniketan) ed. by Panchanan Mandal in *Sahitya Prabeshika* (Visva Bharati, 1960), pp.7-8, and 'Introduction'.

[8] R.G.Fox, ed. *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, Durham, 1967, pp. 197-223.

[9] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, London, 2005; also Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's review, 'The Acquiescent Indian' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 41, 8 October 2005 and Sen's reply, Vol. 41, No. 47, 25 November 2006.

[10] Gautam Chattopadhyay, "Awakening in Bengal in early 19th century: selected documents", cited hereafter as A.B. : selected documents, progressive publishers, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 246-262

[11] A.B.:selected documents, pp. 198-239, circa 1840.

[12] ibid, p. 198.

[13] Prabodh Chandra Sen, *Banglar Itihash Sadhana*, Calcutta, 1970, p. 42.

[14] Sarkar, 1973, p. VIII.

[15] N.K.Sinha, 1967, p. VI.

PLANT AND ANIMAL DESIGNS IN THE MURAL DECORATION OF AN URIYA VILLAGE.

By N. ANNANDALE, *D.Sc., F.R.S., F.A.S.B., C.I.E.*

The object of this paper is to put on record some examples of a primitive but none the less effective form of art which seems to be rapidly disappearing. Within the last ten years it has almost gone in several villages on the shores of the Chilka Lake in which it formerly flourished, but it still flourishes on the large island or peninsula of Samal, remote from direct intercourse with the outer world though actually within half a mile of the main railway-line between Calcutta and Madras. All my illustrations are drawn from the village on this island and were obtained in the year 1922.

I must express my great indebtedness to Babu D. N. Bagchi, one of the artists of the Zoological Survey of India, for his assistance in not only taking the beautiful photographs and making the accurate sketches with which this paper is illustrated, but also for acting as interpreter and for obtaining much interesting information. His knowledge of the Uriya language and his status as a Brahmin enabled him to gain the confidence of the people and to enter their houses freely in a way which would have been impossible for myself.

Samal island is situated on the northern shore of the Chilka Lake in the north-east corner of the Ganjam district of the Madras Presidency. When the water is very low in the dry season it ceases to be an island and is joined to the adjacent shore by a narrow sand-spit.

The people of Samal are Uryias in so far that they speak the Uryia language, but physically they are of very mixed type. The curly hair, flat noses, short sturdy figures and other primitive characters of many of them proclaim aboriginal blood, while to others their prominent cheek-bones, square faces and somewhat yellowish complexion give a Mongoloid appearance by no means uncommon in Orissa. In a third type the legs are long and the body is very slender, while the features are those common among Uryias in districts where the race is apparently purer.

The culture of these people seems to be primitive, but ignorance of their language has prevented my obtaining satisfactory information about their social system. Nominally, at any rate, they are Vishnuvite Hindus and mostly of the Goala or cowherd caste.

This village consists of about thirty houses arranged in a single long street, which has its back on one side to the lake. The road between the houses is broad and fairly smooth and the whole village has an air of neatness somewhat unusual in India.

Some of the houses are composite and shelter several families under a single

roof. A plan of such a house prepared by Babu D. N. Bagchi and Mr. R. Hodgart of the Zoological Survey of India is given in text-figure 1. As will be seen from this plan, however, there was no communication between the quarters of the three families which occupied the particular house on which the plan was based, and each family had its own front door.

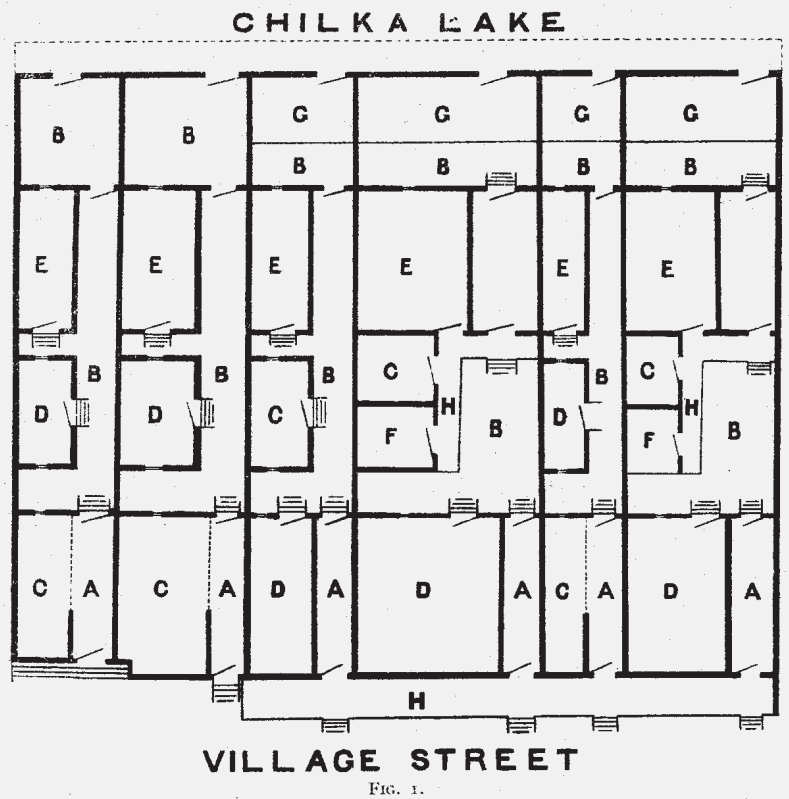


FIG. 1.

Plan of composite house on Samal Island. A = covered passage. B = open space. C = kitchen. D = bedroom. E = store-room. F = sitting-room. G = cow-byre. H = open verandah. The series of fine transverse lines represent steps.

The houses are built mainly of clay from the bed of the lake, but the inner partitions are strengthened inside by hurdles of bamboos and thin sticks. They have sloping roofs, the rafters of which are made of sticks or bamboos, and are thatched with rice-straw. There are as a rule no windows outside, but there is often a small platform (fig. 1—) under the eaves of the house. This is sometimes made of

rough stones but more commonly of clay. In some houses a part or the whole of the platform is enclosed with a low clay wall to form a small box-like verandah in which the men play cards, mend their fishing-nets or otherwise occupy themselves in the evening.

Rice and millet, of which a large amount is grown on Samal, are spread out to dry on mats in the village street, while the large baskets in which grain is transported on bullock-carts are kept under the eaves of the houses (plate I, fig. 1).

Down the middle of the street, or rather in front of different houses to one side, there is a series of cones or pillars on the top of which a bush of *tulsi (Ocimum sanctum* Linn.) is planted for religious purposes. Some of these cones are quite plain and are constructed merely of clay, others are much more elaborate and are built of carved stone-work (plate IV, fig. 3).

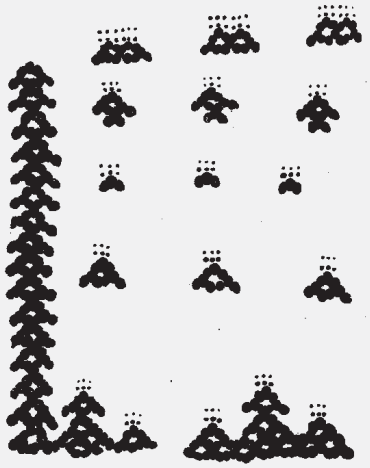


FIG. 2.
"Three-finger" pattern on outer wall of house, reproduced in negative.

The walls of the houses, both external and internal, are neatly smoothed and uniformly covered with a wash of red earth, which is brought from a quarry some miles away. This forms the background for the decorations I will now describe.

At seasons when neither fisheries nor agriculture are exacting both the men and the women of the village spend a considerable part of their leisure in painting their houses and in decorating the clay *tulsi* pillars to which I have already referred. The simplest form of decoration of both (plate I, fig. 3) consists of what is called the "three-finger" pattern. This is produced by dipping the three middle fingers into a mixture of chalk and water and appiying them, in different ways to the red earth on the walls or pillars. The plate to which I have alluded gives a good example of the manner in which small and large dots thus produced can be combined to form a pattern. Text-figure 2 is from a sketch by Babu D. N. Bagchi of a panel

on a wall of a house: the white dots, for purposes of reproduction, are represented black. In other villages near Samal the groups of three white dots are often placed at the end of long streaks made by drawing a single finger down the wall, and then have much the appearance of conventional figures of either flowers or fireworks; but I have no information that the imitation is conscious. It is otherwise with the patterns now to be considered.

Figure 1, plate II gives a good idea of the two commonest of these patterns on the outer side of the house-walls. Variations of these two main types far outnumber all others. They are lettered A and B on the figure. The name given me for pattern A is *janar*, the name of a kind of maize or Indian corn (*Zea mays* Linn.). The general form of the pattern is that of a plant of this

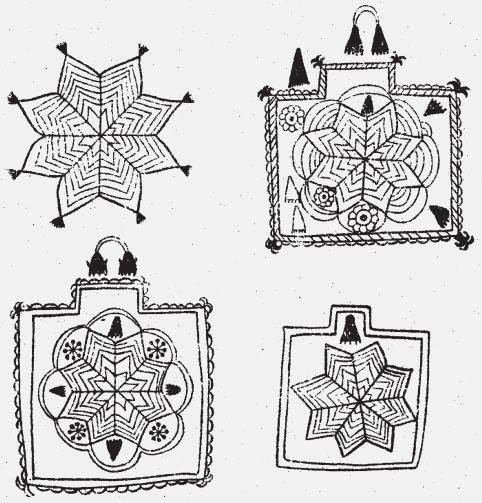


FIG. 3.
Designs painted in white on the ground in front of houses, reproduced in negative.

cereal growing up from an ornamental base. The tips of the leaves or blades may be either turned down in the natural position or turned upwards, and various other leaves, said to be those of the *pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*), are added between those of the plant itself. It will be noted in all the figures that at any rate some of the maize leaves end in a comblike figure. This has often the appearance of a hand, but I believe it represents rather a human foot-print. Text-figure 3 shows a series of designs drawn in chalk on the ground in Samal village on the occasion of a visit of the local zemindar. These designs were made in front of different houses and on each, in accordance with a well-known Bengali and Uryia custom, a decorated pot of water supporting a cocoanut was placed to bring good luck. Here the foot-prints are much clearer and all doubt is removed when they are compared with

the conscious figures of Krishna's foot-prints commonly painted by women on the doorsteps of houses, especially on Thursdays and on certain festivals, in many parts of Bengal, Orissa and Madras.

The origin of the other of the two commonest patterns (plate II, fig. 1B) is less obvious at first sight but my informants agree that it represents a bunch of cocoanuts. The pattern is called *punjha pareda*, which means "four cocoanuts." The outlines of only three of the cocoanuts can as a rule be distinguished in each repetition of the figure, which is usually arranged in vertical pairs or series. As a rule there is a small ornamental base and leaves of the *pipal* are variously introduced.

Patterns like those I have called A and B are as a rule executed by men. They are painted direct on the red walls by means of a wisp of cocoanut-fibre dipped in a mixture of chalk and water. As will be seen from fig. 1, plate I they are arranged in a series of horizontal panels framed in a pattern of horizontal and vertical lines and each occupying the greater part of the depth of the available wall-space.

On some houses, however, the decoration is of a much more elaborate kind, though executed in the same way but I believe by women. In 1922 I offered a small prize for the best decorated house in the village and awarded it to the house from which the photographs on plate III were drawn. Text figure 4 is also from the same house. The patterns in their reduced size are of course much less effective than they were in the originals *in situ*.

On the walls of this house each vertical panel was divided into two and the framework was of a very elaborate nature, comprising not only straight lines in various combinations but also plant and animal designs. I will describe first the central part of the lower division of each panel; the upper division of all contained the conventional maize figure referred to above as A. This figure is also represented on the lower part of the panel reproduced in fig. 1 of plate III. Only the central blade bears the foot-print at its top, the others terminating in what may be meant either for young cocoanuts or pipal leaves. The whole is outlined with a series of dots and the base is filled in with crossed lines.

In another panel (pl. III. fig. 2) the centre is occupied by a conventional representation of the *gua* or betel pepper (*Piper bettle* Linn.) surrounded by flowers of the *kadamba* tree (*Nauclea Kadamba*). The former is very rarely represented but the latter is not uncommon, especially in the decoration of the inner walls of the houses. A more elaborate pattern in which it takes the chief place will be discussed later (pl. IV, fig. 1).

A third panel (pl. III. fig. 3) is said to represent various parts of the lotus plant (*Nelumbum speciosum*), including the young shoots under water and the flowers, with three *kadamba* flowers above. In a fourth (pl. III. fig. 4) the central figure is a lotus flower, with two ducks above, while the four sprays of foliage are those of the *sola* plant (*Aeschynomene aspera* Linn.) Representations of this latter water-plant are not uncommon.

The framework of these panels is, as I have said, elaborate. Its details will be

best understood by a reference to the figures, but I may note that they are to some extent appropriate to the central design of each panel. In the first panel the swimming ducks above and below the maize plant have no particular connection with it, but the highly conventionalized peacocks below the upper division of the panel are perhaps more appropriate. In the second panel, with the betel vine in the centre, the figures at the side represent a clever adaptation of the same plant terminating in the lucky foot-prints and with the swimming ducks again above and below. In the third, with the lotus plant, the sides are occupied by vertical series of double fishes, a very common symbol in India and other eastern countries, used by Buddhists and even Mahommedans as well as Hindus. This figure appears frequently on the houses of Samal. Above and below the lotus plant are designs representing lotus flowers floating on the water, which is represented by wavy lines. The same design appears above and below the other figures of water-plants on the fourth panel.

Fig. 4.
Panel on outer wall of house, reproduced in negative.

In the paintings on some houses or some panels purely conventional designs play a larger part than in the panels I have already discussed. Text-figure 4 represents the outline of part of the panel on a narrow strip of wall beside the door of the same house as that on which the four panels just described were drawn. The upper design represents a decorated cocoanut on a jar of water displayed for good luck as already explained. Above it are duck and two (?) *kadamba* flowers. Below there are two ducks and below them again a somewhat elaborate design with a conventional lotus and four double fishes. In the figure white marks are again reproduced black.

Figure 3, pl. II represents a set of still more elaborate panels on the outside of a verandah. Unlike the others yet discussed it was painted specially for my edification and the artist, a woman, has attempted to introduce numerous different designs, thus producing a crowded and unsatisfactory whole. In addition to the designs already mentioned, *viz.*, those of the maize plant, the bunch of cocoanuts, the lotus, the *sola* plant, the swimming duck, the peacock and the double fish, figures of parrots and standing geese may be noted.

These designs, of which a few additional variations perhaps appear occasionally, exhaust the number of those ordinarily painted on the outside of the houses of Samal. I must now consider those on the inner walls and particularly those on the covered passage-way that leads into the houses from the door (fig. 1 A, p. 242).

Most of these interior decorations are painted in several colours, often on a background of white chalk laid on mixed with water by means of a piece of cloth. This is not always the case, however, and I will first describe two designs in or practically in monochrome painted direct on the red wall.

The first of these (pl. IV, fig. 2) has very little to do with plant or animal designs, but appears to represent *tulsi* pillars interspersed with purely geometrical figures. My figure is from a very accurate sketch by Babu D. N. Bagchi.

The second panel (pl. IV, fig. 1) is more germane to our subject, for it represents the *kadamba* tree in full flower, with a frieze of swimming ducks below. Although mostly in white chalk, the design is enlivened by touches of bright red on the stalks of the flowers, the bodies of the ducks and the triangles of the upper line of the frame. It may be noted how very skilfully the artist has adapted his design to the space to be filled and it should be remarked that the *kadamba* is a tree and not a creeper as he has made it appear to be.

The colours used in the more elaborate interior panels are few and simple. The pigments are mostly bought in a powdered state in the bazaar at Rambha, the nearest large village, and mixed with water in a half-cocoanut shell. The colours purchased are white chalk, an Indian red, a chrome yellow and a vermillion. In addition, charcoal and a bluish green pigment, said to be made locally from bean leaves, are used. They are mixed in the same way. The brush is a whisk of cocoanut fibre like that used in the simpler designs.

The unfinished design reproduced in fig. 4, pl. IV is interesting as showing the technique employed in painting in colour direct on the red wall. It represents three parrots sitting on *pipal* leaves rising from an imaginary erection of bowls or pillars. The artist had not been able to attain complete symmetry in his design and had apparently abandoned it in despair. It remained unfinished for at least a year. It will be noted that the figures have first been outlined in chalk, which was laid on with a brush. The lower pillars are black below, with a yellow centre and a red upper part; the uppermost pillar is black both above and below, but the side-pillars on which the two parrots are sitting are green above. The *pipal* leaves are red, the parrots green with yellow breasts outlined in white and black wings. Their heads were still in outline.

The photograph reproduced in pl. II, fig. 3 represents a painting actually on the outer wall of a house but executed specially for me and of a type usually reserved for interior decoration. It was in colours on a white background. Most of the designs already discussed are represented on it. In one panel the central figure is a decorated cocoanut and water-pot, in the other a lotus plant.

The paintings on the internal passages of the houses are often of a somewhat different character from those I have figured. Sometimes they are mythological, consisting of figures of Hanuman and the like, sometimes would-be naturalistic with human figures, elephants, etc., often purely geometrical; but none of these types of paintings have the interest of those I have illustrated.

The latter are, so far as my experience goes, unique in their skilful adaptation

of plant and animal forms in recurring designs of the nature of patterns. They differ greatly from the diagrams and signs commonly painted on the walls of houses in Bengal on special festivals. These have been figured by Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore in a Bengali work current in Calcutta,[1] but, so far as can be judged from this work, have not the purely decorative effect of the paintings on Samal island and seem to have more of a direct symbolic significance.

In this connection a word should be said as to the object of the Uriya decorations. They include certain lucky signs, such as the double fish and the foot-prints; but, so far as I can ascertain, their main object is purely æsthetic. Whether they are beautiful or not may be a matter of dispute, but that they are striking and effective is proved by the photos reproduced, particularly by the views of the village given on plate I. The only explanation I could get of them from the people was that they were painted to give people pleasure and especially to please any great man who might pass through the village.

[1] "Banglar Brata" (বাংলার ব্রত): Calcutta.

AN OBSERVATION ON THE ARTICLE ON 'PLANT AND ANIMAL DESIGNS IN THE MURAL DECORATION OF AN URIYA VILLAGE'

SOMNATH MUKHERJEE

The paper was published in the *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. –VIII, no. 4, pp. 239-56 by N. Anandale, D. Sc., F.A. S.B., F.R.S., C.I.E. (1876-1924), a Scottist Zoologist and Anthropologist who came to Calcutta in 1904 as Deputy Superintendent of the Natural History Section of the Indian Museum. In 1907 he became the Director of Indian Museum, succeeding John Anderson. He started preserving the records and Memoirs of Indian Museum Journals, and became the first director of Zoological Survey of India and widely travelled in different parts of India. In 1921 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, with which he was associated during his service in India as Anthropological Secretary, Vice-President and President in 1923 instituted a triennial Annadale Memorial Medal for contribution to anthropology in Asia.

This paper transcends the animal designs and decoration and enter to the field of social anthropology, thus providing an insight into the versatility of an officer and proves his exceptional capabilities to move around different related field of investigations.

N. Annandale surveyed Samal island which was situated on the northern shore of the Chilka lake in the north-east corner of the Ganjam district in Orissa. There are 427 tribes, including the sub-groups as listed by the Census records, distributed through north-eastern, eastern, northern, western, central and southern regions and the Bay-Islands zone. (H. Mondal, 2002 : 105-106). Here we are to keep in mind that the eastern region comprising West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa have made a distinctive mark in the art of painting.

While elaborating its history of folk tribal art we cannot ignore a large number of motifs and designs which appeared on the walls of their villages. Wall paintings are called murals, and the term is generally extended to include painting on ceilings, pillars and other architectural units. These paintings have not survived because of the fragile nature of the materials used for construction of the huts for dwellings purpose.

It is difficult to establish exactly when painting on mud walls of huts had begun. But it has been an established tradition since the 17th Century. Murals depict the religious themes found in the folk and tribal communities. The Osakothi ritual paintings of the Ganjam district of Orissa (E. Fischer and D. Pathy, 1998) are very much akin to Samal village which was noticed by the author long time back.

Folk-art is invariably connected with folk-religion — its rites and rituals. In India it started with theriomorphism. Strangely enough, it is still surviving amongst us. The multitudes of crafts-women and the thousands of caste-craftsmen are interspersed within the society not merely to serve the people as their commercial manufacturers and suppliers of house-hold commodities, but as the spiritual guides and creator priests of the nation too, around whom the social and cultural life of all people of the land revolves. Both the people and the creator-priests are spiritually bound up with the traditional rites and rituals of *Brata* and *Puja*. *Bratas* are performed exclusively by womenfolk with a view fulfilling their aspirations by means of magical rites. (*Benglar Brata*)

The cultural life of the Samal village is an isolated tradition of wall murals painted by non-professional painters in Chilka district of Orissa. We can compare with Osakothi tradition which is prevalent now-a-days in Orissa. They are four groups of painters who work on Osakothi murals. They are professional *chitrakaras*, painters from the priestly communities of the underprivileged Bauri group. Their shrines are also called 'gramadevati' the village guardian. The worshippers of these shrines are from the lower castes, with no Brahmin priest. The

iconography of the painted themes includes nine forms of Goddess Mother, Mangala, a benevolent village diety, Navagunjara, Kamadhenu and Hanuman, the minor legendary character and several motifs.

The designs and Mural decorations of the Samal village define folk art by five distinctive characteristics :

1. Preference for simple outlines, choice of typically representational lines;
2. A Simplification of volume and colours to eliminate shading;
3. Exaggeration of gestures for dramatic expression;
4. Stylization of motifs to create decorative elements;
5. The repetition of lines, entire figures and dots for intensive or rhythimical purposes.

Creation of art among the tribal and folk communities in India, was never indulged in purely for pleasure. Its purpose was equally to pacify the malevolent deities and to pay homage and express gratitude to the benevolent ones. Festivals are linked to the two agricultural crop cycles of sowing, reaping, harvesting and storing; festivities are also related to event such as birth, puberty, marriage etc.

The lucid, analytical style of the paper is to be noted. The author has successfully brought out the overall nature and life-style of the village community especially of the women-folk. The transformation of the particular village society has been excellently dealt with as they are applicable to the particular region. The paper provides a comprehensive study that is applicable to many disciplines especially art-history and Anthropology.

Reference

Abanindra Nath Thakur, *Banglar Brata*, Visva Bharati.
Verrier Elwin, *Tribal Art of Middle India*, 1951, OUP.
Mildred Archer, *Indian Popular Paintings*, 1977, London.
E. Fischer and Dinanath Pathy, *Ritual Paintings of Orissa*, 1996, New Delhi.
H. Mandal and S. Mukherjee, *An Illustrated Atlas of the Tribal World*, 2002, A.S.I., Calcutta.
K.S. Singh (ed.), *People of India*, Anthropological Survey of India
S. K. Ray, *The Folk-Art of India*, 1967, Calcutta.

Jasleen Dhamija, *Indian Folk Arts and Crafts*, 1970, N. B. T.
Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *India's Craft Tradition*, Publication Division, 1980.
Kalyan K. Ganguli, *Desings in Traditional Arts of Bengal*, 1975, Calcutta.
Devaprasad Ghosh, *Orissan Painting*, 1970, AMIA, Calcutta.
Geetika Guha, *Orissar Loka-silpa*, 1970, AMIA, CU, Calcutta.
Durga Mukherjee, *Alimpan*, 1969, Calcutta.
Kajal Das beck, *Nava Alpana*, 2012.
H. Elgood, *Hinduism and the Religious Art*, 1999, London.
S. P. Huyyler, *Women's Art in Village India*, 1994, New York.

Mau Das Gupta, *Women Seers of the Ṛgveda*, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 2017, xiv + 316 pages. Rs. 1150.00

That women as a subject of investigation "has largely remained unexplored in the male-dominated society" prompted the present author to take up the present work as the subject of her doctoral dissertation approved by Jadavpur University in 2008. Often, the most famous figures of ancient times, seers, teachers, or kings, were mostly men, but our tradition has also recorded names and some activities of women seers. The subject was not totally neglected. The important publications on the subject have been listed by Das Gupta herself and a few may be added, e.g. Clarisse Bader's *La Femme dans l'inde antique* (1864), trans. into English by Mary Martin, *Women in Ancient India* (1925), M.W. Pinkham's *Women in the Sacred Scriptures of Hinduism* (1941), are such books dealing exclusively with women. Besides, there are many other contributions dealing with individual female seers (e.g. Ram Gopal, "A Non-Legendary Interpretation of the Apālā-Sūkta," VIJ 2.1, 1964) or various aspects concerning women in ancient India. The present volume is the latest addition, containing a detailed study of the contributions of the female seers of the *Ṛgveda*, traditionally called *Brahmavādinī*s. Though the main thrust area is women seers of the *Ṛgveda*, occasionally later authorities have also been referred to.

The book under review consists of seven chapters. The main body is followed by an epilogue and bibliography (the primary source texts are missing in bibliography), index of English terms and that of Sanskrit terms.

The extent and the nature of the contributions of the female Vedic seers are already known in the main from the original texts and previous publications. The Introduction summarises these contributions. The first sentence of the Introduction is not fully correct, which speaks of "27 women seers from the Ṛgveda, who were authors of hymns (p. 1)." Some of them have only a small number of verses ascribed to them, e.g. a single verse is ascribed to each of Śaśvatī and Agastyasvasṛ, one and a half to Godhā.

The author has dealt with the subject following the sequence of the hymns concerned in the *Ṛgveda*. But in the *Bṛhaddevatā*, the names of the female seers are listed and also classified in three groups in three verses (2.82-84). Classification is indeed an important feature of a critical study. The first group consists of the names of nine female seers, who were the composers of some Vedic hymns or verses; the second group consists of the nine female seers who participated in the dialogue hymns; and the

third group consists of the remaining nine female seers of some philosophical and various other hymns. The hymns of this group are mainly concerned with mythological beings, deities or abstract concepts like Śraddhā and Medhā.

Controversy rages over the question whether some of the names are really proper names or adjectives, or whether they denote real women, etc. Without contending them, the author says, "it can be presumed that there were at least some female seers who were the women of this earth and soil" (p.35).

Since some of the female seers appear to have been mythical personalities, the author says, "one finds only a few poetesses who can be considered to be women in flesh and blood; they are Romaśā, Lopāmudrā, Viśvavārā, Apālā, the sister of Agastya, the wife named Śaśvatī, Ghoṣā, Godhā and to some extent Yamī of X.10 and Indrāṇī of X.145,159" (p.1). Elsewhere she opines that among the twentyseven women seers mentioned in *Bṛhaddevatā* and four others not mentioned there, "seventeen alone can be accepted as women in flesh and blood who can be brought under the purview of a socio-cultural study" (p. 206), but in case of liturgical and literary studies, this criterion has not been followed.

There are only two hymns in the family books (II - VII) ascribed to two female seers, Aditi and Viśvavārā, of whom, according to the author, Viśvavārā was "indeed a woman of this earth" (p. 5). I fail to reconcile this with the assertion that the "majority of the seers of the few ṛṣikā-hymns to be found in the *vaṁśa-maṇḍalas* are not human beings but mythical figures" (p.35).

The second chapter deals with the differences between the traditional interpretations found in Yāska's *Nirukta, Bṛhaddevatā, Sarvānukramaṇī,* commentaries of Veṅkaṭa-mādhava, Sāyaṇa, etc. and the modern interpretations offered by Ludwig, Bergaigne, Wilson, Griffith, Geldner, Jamison and Brereton, *et al.* S. A. Dange's views (in his *Vedic Concept of "Field" and the Divine Fructification,* Bombay Univ. 1971), are missing, where Indrāṇī is identified with the Earth (Dange, 16), Romaśā regarded as an epithet (Dange, 147), Mudgalānī identified with Field, not regarded as proper noun (Dange, 71). Expressions were variously understood by commentators and modern scholars. The differences have been discussed, but the author has often not given her own view. There is a reference (p.81, fn 42) to Lāṭyāyana Brāhmaṇa: is there any such text?

Though the third chapter has "Socio-Cultural Aspects of the Select

Hymns and the World-view of the Women Seers" for its title, we find here rather the modern academic world's view of the Vedic women. As the author herself has found, the hymns or verses ascribed to the female seers are not much concerned about world-view, the seers were concerned mainly with a happy and secure family life, "as is the universal desire of women" (pp.142-143). In the context of woman in her role as mother, the author refers (p.135) to *Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra* 1.40.48-49; but the 1st chapter of this text ends with Kaṇḍikā 25, nor is there a suitable context. Some female seers are regarded by the author as "Transcendental in nature," p.116, "Transcendent female seer," p.117, "transcendental woman," p.120, and "transcendental poetesses," p.121. Most probably, "mythical" is the intended expression.

The fourth chapter deals with "Mythological Aspects of the Select Texts," and involves repetition of many things already told. The author is never tired of repetitions. As regards identity of Viśvavārā, we find: Viśvavārā of the family of Atri (p.5), Atri's daughter (p.56), of seer Atri's family (p. 160), a female seer of Atri's family (p. 208), the daughter of Atri (p.215). Repetition of some details could have been avoided by cross references, as the usual practice goes. The contents of the Mantras / hymns, their traditional background etc. have often been repeated unnecessarily. Some sentences have been almost verbatim repeated, for example, regarding Apālā pp. 8-10 and 162-163; Agastyasvasṛ 16-17 and 171-172; Indrāṇī 19 and 179; Saramā 22 and 184-185; Godhā 26 and 192-193.

Das Gupta seems to be sometimes wavering between conflicting views; e.g. as regards the doubt whether Romaśā in *RV* 1.126 was the wife of Svanaya, as maintained by *Bṛhaddevatā*, she observes, I think correctly, that the dialogue in *RV* 1.126 is "between two lovers who can hardly be assumed to be husband and wife" (p.127), but later on says hesitatingly: "If Romaśā is accepted as the wife of the man she converses with" (p.133), and still later, she becomes probably sure that the "dialogue between the husband and wife is contained" in *RV* 1.126.

The matter of chapters 1-4 is mostly known from previous publications. The chapters 4-6 deal with new themes and are, therefore, more interesting. The fifth chapter is devoted to liturgical peculiarities / ritual application of the mantras/ hymns ascribed to the female seers. Since ritual was a matter of central importance in the Vedas, participation of women in rites and is an index of the position of women in the Vedic society. The author has found the contributions of female seers "as

important in ritualistic application as those of the male seers" (p.288).

What is *brahma-śāstra* (pp.202-203)? *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 5.1.1 prescribes that the Brāhmaṇācchaṁsin should insert *īṅkhayantīr apasyuvaḥ* after *surūpokṛtnum ūtaye.*

The sixth chapter deals with literary appreciation of the select texts with special emphasis on the poetic imageries found therein. Attempts have been made to trace some figures of speech in the texts concerned. *śrutyanuprāsa* and *vṛttyanuprāsa* are the correct names of the figures of speech, not *śrutyānuprāsa* and *vṛttyānuprāsa,* pp. 216, 223. The study leads to the conclusion that there was "parity in the poetic bend of mind" of male and female seers of the *Ṛgveda* (p.288).

The seventh chapter is devoted to a linguistic study of select texts in three sections, (i) analysis of word order, (ii) analysis of negative sentences, and (iii) analysis of interrogative sentences in some verses ascribed to male and female seers. The author finds that "the female seers were more innovative in structuring interrogative sentences than their male counterpart, whereas the male seers were keen in telling "no" in every possible way (p.288). The author is aware that it "may not be proper to come to a conclusion on the basis of such a limited data about the general trends of the language style in literature of both groups of seers" (p.285). Even then, further studies in this line may be fruitful.

The Epilogue summarises the results obtained. I doubt whether it is "generally held that women in early Vedic age enjoyed almost equal rights with men "(p.106, 287). Nor is it expected in a patriarchal society. Against the view that the Ṛgvedic women "enjoyed equal rights with men," the author is most probably correct in concluding that "the Ṛgvedic women lived a life with less social bindings" than those in later period.

The quality of production and paper is good. That a book containing so many diacritical marks and marks of accentuation is mostly free from printing errors indicates the author's laudable care and attention in reading the proofs. A very small number of printing mistakes came to my notice; e.g. read vāṇnāmnī for *vāṇnāmni,* p.24; hemistich for hernistich, p.55; Rathavīti for Rathabīti, p. 113; *atipravasataḥ* for *atipravāsataḥ.* p.196; *sadhastha* for *sadhasthā,* p.217.

In course of translating *avikṣata ni padvanto ni pakṣiṇaḥ,* the author writes, "all animals with legs, all birds with wings ... take rest (at night)" (p.223). I wonder what the animals without legs and birds without wings were doing at the dead of night.

Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti

CONTRIBUTORS

Bikramjit De
Associate Professor, West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata

J. B. Bhattacharjee
Former Vice-Chancellor, Assam University

Ranjit Sen
Former Professor, Department of Islamic History and Culture, Calcutta University, Kolkata

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya
Former Vice-Chancellor, Visva Bharati and former Chairman Indian Council of Historical Research

Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti
Former Director and Professor,
School of Vedic Studies,
Rabindra Bharati University
Kolkata

Shina Panja
Independent Researcher
Kolkata

Somnath Mukherjee
Council Member, The Asiatic Society,
Kolkata

1. *JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY* is published by the Asiatic Society in April, July, October and January. The articles in the Journal reflect the best of scholarship. **The Society welcomes such research articles based on the discovery of new facts or new interpretations of or relationships between already discovered facts.** The Society also welcomes short descriptive articles on little or unknown facts or factual accounts of them.
2. It is the policy of the *JOURNAL* that all contributions will be submitted to referees (specialists in respective fields) for expert evaluation. Any change suggested by them will then be referred to the contributor. The Society reserves the right to make final alterations in the text, on linguistic and stylistic grounds, so that the entry conforms to the uniform standard required for the Journal.
3. Manuscripts should follow the standard format of the concerned discipline. All scripts should be in **duplicate** along with soft copy and typed double-spaced, including the quotations, notes, references and all other matters. The format should have ample margins on left and right, and top and bottom. Contributors must provide their affiliations and complete mailing addresses along with their articles. Please send all correspondence to the General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, 1 Park Street, Kolkata–700016, Telephone: 033-2229 0779/ 7251, 2249-7250, 2226-8242, Fax : 033-2217 2355, e-mail: asiaticsocietypublications1788@gmail.com, gs.asiatic@gmail.com, Website: https://asiaticsocietycal.com.
4. Length of the article may be restricted between 5000 and 8000 words. Each article should be accompanied by an abstract not exceeding 100 words.
5. Concise Oxford Dictionary or Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (latest edn.) should be followed in spelling, punctuation and hyphenation. Where two spellings exist, use the British style not the American; for example, 'programme', not 'program' and 'colour', not 'color'.
6. Diacritical marks should be used wherever necessary. Where diacritical marks are not used, the word should be spelt phonetically, e.g., *bhut* and *bhoot* (unless in a quotation, where the original spelling should be used).
7. a. Quotation is expected to be identical *verbatim et litteratum* with the original; b. To indicate ellipsis three single space dots are to be used; c. Long quotations consisting of five or more lines do not need inverted commas but are to be indicated by indenting the extract three spaces from the left margin; d. Shorter quotations should be

within double inverted commas, while quotations within quotations should be within single inverted commas.

8. For all copyright materials the writer should seek and have the permission from appropriate authorities.

9. All references and notes should be numbered consecutively throughout the article and typed on a separate sheet at the end. All references are to be given generally in the following order : the name or initials of the author followed by surname, the title of the work (in italics), the publisher, the place of publication and the page no/s (vide examples below).

Books :
Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India,* London, 1933, 7.

Articles in Books :
H.V. Trivedi, "The Geography of Kautilya", *Indian Culture,* Vol. 1, 202ff.

Edited Volumes :
C.W. Troll, ed. *Muslim Shrines in India : Their Character, History and Significance,* Delhi, 1989.

Articles in Journals :
G. Hambly, "A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (hereafter *JAOS*), Vol. 94(1), 1974, 125-29.

Articles in Edited Volumes
P. Gaeffke, "Alexander and the Bengal Sufis", in Alan W. Entwistle and Francoise Mallison, eds, *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature, Research Papers, 1988-1991,* New Delhi/Paris, 1994, 278-84.

10. Book Reviews must contain name of the author/editor and the book reviewed, place of publication and publisher, year of publication, number of pages and price.

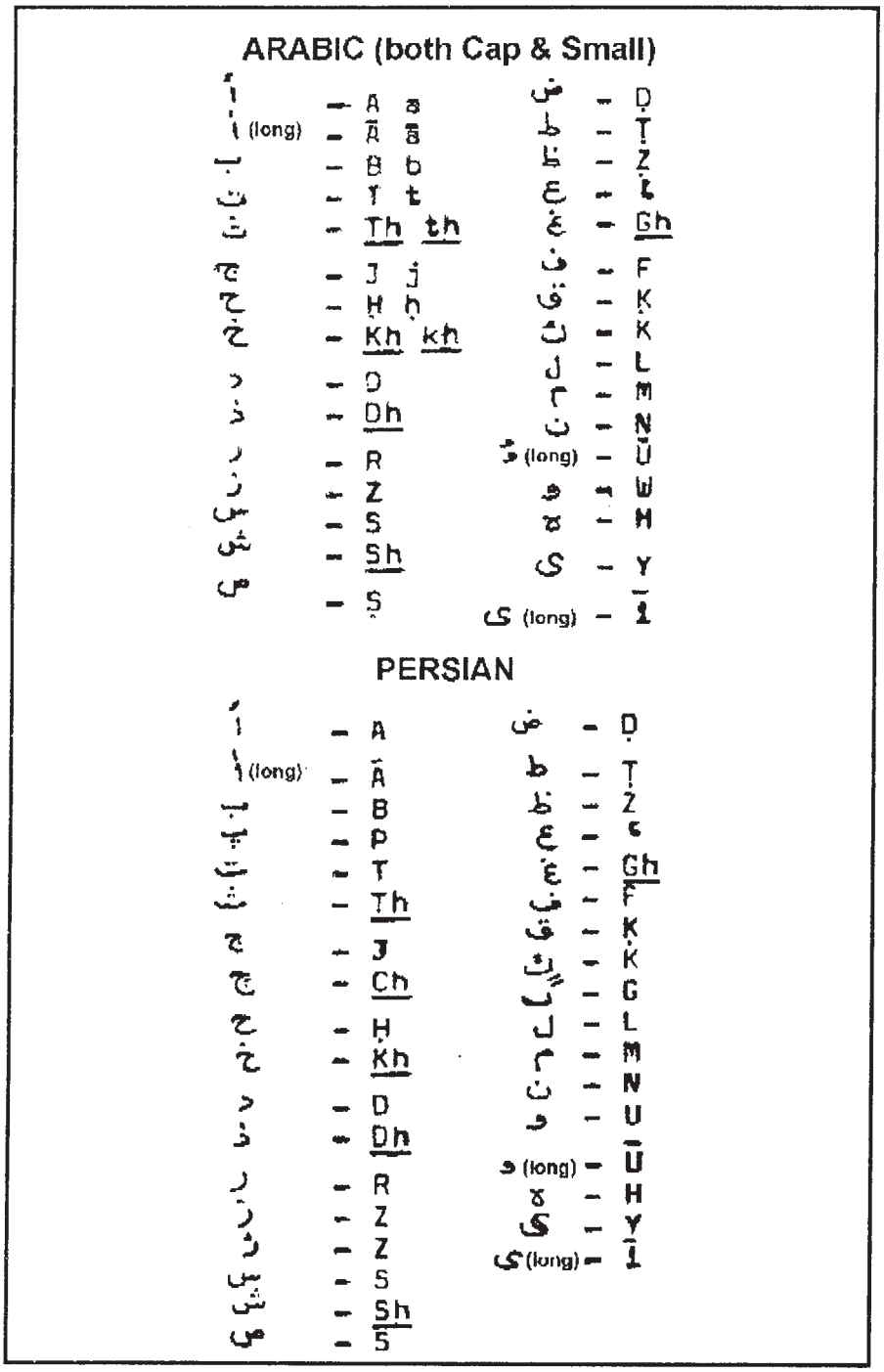
SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

SANSKRIT

आ = ā	ई = ī
ऊ = ū	ऋ = ṛ
ङ = ṅa	च = ca
छ = cha	ञ = ña
ट = ṭa	ठ = ṭha
ड = ḍa	ढ = ḍha
ण = ṇa	श = śa
ष = ṣa	ं = ṁ

TIBETAN

ཀ = ka	ཁ = kha	ག = ga	ང = ṅa/nga
ཅ = ca	ཆ = cha	ཇ = ja	ཉ = ña/nya
ཏ = ta	ཐ = tha	ད = da	ན = na
པ = pa	ཕ = pha	བ = ba	མ = ma
ཙ = tsa	ཚ = tsha	ཛ = dza	ཝ = wa
ཞ = zha	ཟ = za	འ = 'a	ཡ = ya
ར = ra	ལ = la	ཤ = śa/sha	ས = sa
ཧ = ha	ཨ = a		


ARABIC (both Cap & Small)
PERSIAN

Recent Publications of the Asiatic Society

Chinese Sources of South Asian History in Translation, Vol. V: Socio-Econo-Political Relations between South India and China, AD 502-1610 : With Emphasis on the Fifteenth Century
by Haraprasad Ray ₹ **375**

Chinese Sources of South Asian History in Translation, Vol. VI: From Religion to Commerce : The Maritime Rendezvous between India and China, Tenth to Thirteenth Century AD
by Haraprasad Ray ₹ **225**

Chinese Sources of South Asian History in Translation, Vol. VII: From Nationalism to Foreign Occupation : The Mongol Interlude
by Haraprasad Ray ₹ **375**

Subversive Sovereigns across the Seas : Indian Ocean Ports-of-Trade from Early Historic Times to Late Colonialism
ed. by Kenneth R. Hall, Rila Mukherjee and Suchandra Ghosh ₹ **900**

Inscriptions and Agrarian Issues in Indian History : Essays in Memory of D. C. Sircar
ed. by B. D. Chattopadhyay, Suchandra Ghosh and Bishnupriya Basak ₹ **900**

Birhor : Ekti Banachari Adim Adibasi
by Bimalendu Majumdar ₹ **800**

Māthurī, Jāgadīśī and Kāṇādī on Gaṅgeśa's Avayavacintāmaṇi
critically ed. by Subuddhi Charan Goswami ₹ **360**

An Enquiry into the Status of Lepcha
by Satarupa Dattamajumdar ₹ **1000**

Towards Naiṣkarmya : Sureśvarācārya on the Method of Vedānta
by Alexander Pereverzev ₹ **480**

Hindu Deities in Thailand : An Iconographic Study
by A K Bhattacharya ₹ **1250**

Buddhadevaḥ
tr. into Sanskrit by Kalpika Mukhopadhyay ₹ **140**

Persian Studies under the Sultans of Bengal (1204-1576)
by Gholam Sarwar ₹ **550**

Selected Correspondence of The Asiatic Society (1851-1899)
comp. by Manjula Chowdhury ₹ **300**

The Paippalāda Saṁhitā of the Atharvaveda, Vol. I, Revised Edition
ed. by Dipak Bhattacharya ₹ **1400**

Heritage Papers of Early Leading Indian Psychologists, Vol. I & II
ed. by Maya Deb, Amal Kumar Mallick & Utpala Bose **(set)** ₹ **1200**

THE ASIATIC SOCIETY e-mail : asiaticsocietypublications1788@gmail.com

It will flourish, if naturalists, chemists, antiquaries, philologers and men of science, in different parts of Asia, will commit their observations to writing, and send them to the Asiatick Society at Calcutta; it will languish, if such communications shall be long intermitted; and it will die away, if they shall entirely cease.

Sir William Jones
on the publication of the Asiatic Society

ISSN : 0368-3308