Urbanisation in the Pre-colonial Bengal

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Preface

This paper is an offshoot of my forthcoming book on pre-colonial Bengal and examines urbanisation in four periods in pre-colonial Bengal's history. The first is an open-ended period up to 1204, the year the Turk-Afghans led by Bhaktiar Khilji invaded Bengal, which is followed by the Turko-Afghan period (1204-1576), and two other periods overlapping one another - Mogol period (1576-1757) and the period under the economic domination of the Europeans (1530s –1757). The paper has four parts dealing with the four periods mentioned above.

In the first part, dealing the period upto 1204, bits of information from various sources are pieced together to prepare a coherent outline of the history of the evolution of the urban settlements in what are now known as West Bengal and Bangladesh. The second part discusses how after the take over of Bengal by Turko-Afgans the trade prospect of Bengal increased significantly and its impact in term of growth of major port cities. The part three delineates the cities built by the Mogols after they conclusively took over Bengal in 1576, while the part four discusses the European trade and urban development in Bengal during 1530s to 1757.

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This paper studies the urbanisation in the pre-colonial Bengal. We have divided this paper into four parts, corresponding to the four periods in Pre-colonial Bengal's history. We begin with the open-ended period up to 1204, the year the Turk-Afghans led by Bhaktiar Khilji invaded Bengal. This is followed by the Turko-Afghan period (1204-1576), and two other periods overlapping one another - Mogol period (1576-1757) and the period under the economic domination of the Europeans (1530s –1757).

PART I : UPTO 1204

I. INTRODUCTION

Pre-colonial Bengal lived in the villages. But we know more about the urban settlements of that period than about the villages. That also is a comparative statement, since our knowledge of the urban societies is also extremely limited.

'City' or 'urban' is not easy to define, in terms of the territory or population covered. There is a tendency, both in official accounts and in the literature, to exaggerate the territory and the population of a city. Since 1872, the year of the first Census in India, Indian scholars have mainly followed the Indian Census definition of 'urban' in terms of density (400 per square kilometer), occupation (three-fourth non-agricultural) and number (of 5000). These figures are far from sacrosanct, excepting that these are cut-off points to operationalise the definition in terms of major urban features. Various countries follow their own, varying cut-off points, as defined by their own census needs.

Here we are dealing with a period that pre-dates census by many centuries. Let us also caution the reader that here we are using 'city' loosely as a

synonym for 'urban', and not following the Indian Census authorities' definition of 'city' as an urban area with 100000 or more people. Most of the cities we are dealing with here were quite small by the standards of today, and contained many rural features, including cultivated land.

Cities, no matter how defined, played an economic, social and political role that was distinct from that of a village. It was a nodal point that was linked with a network of hierarchically ordered settlements. The size and importance of a city and its relationship with the hinterland were not static, as they evolved over time and had many ups and downs within a continuity of developments [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 173, 183-184].

Most such cities being located on river banks, these tended to shift with shifts in the course of river. In some cases, e.g., Gaur, its ruins area were spread over a large area, carrying the remnants of the city bearing the same name, over many centuries, but its location varying with the course of the river. The boundaries of these cities were never delineated properly, and, thus, its population varied according to the territorial definition used. It was not easy to determine, as it is not even now, where a city began or ended, or where town was demarcated from the surrounding village.

To make matters worse, a thriving city of some substance, can easily be pushed into obscurity, in a few decades, as the trading fortune changes, on many occasions with the dying of the river on the bank of which it was once located. Saptagram, a city that dominated western Bengal for several centuries, did not take long to be reduced to an insignificant village. The Collector of Murshidabad, a few decades after the battle of Palashi, found it difficult to believe that the settlement that looked like an overgrown village was once capital of Bengal. Who would believe today that Dantan, a small settlement in Medinipur, was once upon a time the centre of a Bhukti, a province that probably included the city port, Tamralipta? Or that Tamluk of today was once a sea port, Tamralipta, which was noticed by the Greeks at the time of the Maurya dynasty, may be 2300 years ago.

In this part we are trying to piece together various bits of information in order to prepare at least a coherent, though brief, outline of the history of the evolution of the urban settlements in what are now known as West Bengal and Bangladesh. We are beginning with an outline of urban development in the All India context, to set the background for an examination of urbanisation at the Bengal level, in Section II. In Section III we are examining the overall pattern of urbanisation in Bengal, including issues relating to governance, as derived from inscriptions in copperplates. In Section IV we are examining results from some of the archaeological sites to infer from what remains of the ruins of the cities what they were like when in full glory. In Section V we are briefly looking at large scale, durable, architecture in Bengal during this period. Section VI summarises our conclusions.

II. Urbanisation at the All India level

Urbanisation, minerals and agricultural surplus

Any account of urbanisation in India has to begin with Harappa and Mahenjodaro, the two cities on the Indus river valley that rose to prominence before the pastoral Aryans, with no urban heritage, arrived in the country. Such a city civilisation was possible because the Harappans knew the use of plough, and of rice and cotton seeds, and produced an agricultural surplus that made urban life possible [Ghosh, A: 1973: 7].[1] Despite the evidence of town planning "of a truly astonishing nature", hinterland development, and trade with countries as far as Bahrain and Mesopotamia, the Indus people did not practice canal irrigation nor did they have heavy plough [Kosambi, D.D., 1965: 54-62]. According to some interpretations, the Indus cities had a rich merchant class, who were disliked by the Aryans, and that, of the two major cities of this civilization, the Aryans destroyed one of these, Harappa, while fire destroyed the other, Mahenjodero [Kosambi, D D, 1965: 79-80; Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 41].

The Aryans took a long time to settle down, almost a millennium, to take to agriculture, then to replace hoe with plough, and thus to create the material basis for the production of a surplus and for the growth of towns [Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 58]. Hastinapura of Mahabharata was a town of the Kurus, as the suffix *pura* indicates, but there are many references in the epic Mahabharata to cattle raids, the amount of time spent in the forests , and simple food habits, mainly based on fruits gathered and meats of animals hunted but without major cereals, that indicate their pastoral ties and the lack of development of agriculture. Neither rice nor wheat or cotton were known to them, nor was the use of plough [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 31].

In the next stage, one finds many references to the development of agriculture. By the time of Panini, may be around 6th century B.C, 102 varieties of cereals were listed, Sali among them. The boiled rice was called *bhakta,* some thing very close to the modern equivalent of rice (*bhat)*. Six varieties of boiled rice were mentioned in Panini [Agrawal, V.S, 1953: 102]. By the time of Arthasastra, not only agriculture was well organised, a great deal of effort underwent in pushing settlements to hitherto virgin areas [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 64].

We know from these something about the pattern of land use in those days; for instance, that the village land was divided between residential areas (*bastu)*, cultivated land (*kshetra*) and pasture (*gochara)*, apart from the surrounding forests (*bon).* One of the major factors inhibiting the extension of settlements in the dense forest areas, particularly those in Bengal and Assam, was the absence of strong metallic tools with which forest could be cleared. The Indus valley civilisation, highly advanced in many other aspects, had no knowledge of iron, and, therefore, could not make much progress in terms of colonisation of new areas by clearing forests. The Aryans used fire for forest clearance in the early stage of extension of settlement, but came to know of iron in the latter vedic age, and then developed bellows to allow for its fuller use to make tools [Ghosh, A, 1973: 5,9; Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 62-64].

With the development of private rights and the emergence of the state, it was a matter of scale before the city came into being as a part of the process of evolution may be from the second half of the first millennium B.C. [Thapar, Romila, 1978: 158]. Baked bricks reappeared since the days of Harappa, as also punch mark coins, while northern polished grey ware (NPW) was the distinctive ceramic of that period. The headquarters came to be converted into cities, while more of the countries, till then known by names of the people they contained, came to have distinct names, such as Champa, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saket, or Kausambi. The Pali literature of the period mentions sixty such towns [Ghosh, A, 1973:14-16]. Evidently, the number of towns was quite small, even during this heyday of urbanisation [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981:96-134, 139].

The iron industry of some sort came into being from 1000 B.C., more particularly, from the middle of the first millennium B.C. [Thapar, Romila, 1978:158]. That now the locus of Indian political power shifted from the Northwest and Madhyadesha, to the east, near Chotanagpur Plateau, where iron and other minerals were found, was not an accident [Kosambi, 1975:155]. Patuliputra, the capital of Magadh, grew into a very big town, by far the largest of towns in those days,

The third phase of urbanisation, after the Harappan and 6th century BC phases, was during and after the Maurya empire (322-187 BC). Urbanisation deepened during the post-Maurya kings, under Sungas and Kusans, and architecture flourished [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981:77-78, 80]. Kautilya's Arthasastra, one of the oldest treatises on political economy anywhere in the world, was a product of this period, and was written with the city of Patuliputra as its base. Arthasastra even mentioned a superintendent of irons, *Lohadhyaksa*, as one of the key officials and worked out various rules for governing the mines and for taxing their income. Though iron had been put round the edge of the wheel, both black and gold smiths operated, a large part of its energy was spent unproductively in the armament industry [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981:96-134, 139].

The development of metallurgy and extensive urbanisation also required more of agricultural surplus. Hence, the rules of Varnasram were relaxed to expand participation of Brahmans and Sudras in agriculture, along with the Vaishyas, whose caste occupation it was. Brahmans were permitted to soil their hands with cultivation, but more in managerial capacities, while the ploughing was done by hired agricultural labourers. We know from the Greek accounts that agriculture became highly respectable as an occupation during this period. Even in a war situation, the agriculturist was allowed by both of the combatant parties to continue his task unmolested [McCrindle, J.W, 1960: 39].[2]

Why Cities?

There are several ways that a city grew. Rarely a city was planned by a government and built accordingly by an architect. (According to Mahabharata, the great non-Aryan architect, Moydanava, built a new planned city, Indraprasth, for the Pandavas, which became an eyesore for their rivals, the Kauravas.) In vast majority of the cases, a city grew out of a humble rural origin, a single or an aggregation of villages evolving into something as sizable enough to be called a city. Why some villages grew to become a city but others did not, is a matter of conjecture. In some cases, these villages enjoyed the advantage of location, e.g., located near a place of pilgrimage, or at the confluence of two rivers. In some others, it could even be the economic strength of those villages, based on the skills of its artisans or cultivators or traders, that allowed these to grow. But in many other cases, these became cities because of their role as places of political or military importance, e.g., *skandavaras* (victory camps).

A major function of the city was to provide protection. In a general sense, it provided protection to the people of the country as a whole against external aggression. In those days, conquest was almost invariably followed by plunder and rape, slavery and degradation, and it was in the interests of the people concerned to help the king in his role as the protector against external

threats. This function was highlighted by its high walls, moat, and citadel, made of mud or stone, mixed with other materials, features almost universally associated with cities all over the world. In many instances the city was built around the fort, Tamralipta or Karnasuvarna being major exceptions as cities with no walls [Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960:91; Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 182, 186]. Though the cities were not as large as some of the poets who wrote about them imagined those to be, nor were the walls and palaces as high as almost touching the sky; but features like walls, ramparts and citadels, as also shrines, were invariably present in almost all the major towns [Ghosh, A, 1973: 48-51]. Some of the walls were quite impressive, though coming nowhere near the great walls of China: a 12 feet by 10 feet wall at Rajagraha, constructed by king Ajatsatru, that extended for 25 miles [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981:96-134, 139].

The citadel was the main area of activity in the city. Inside it, were located such activities as the principal seat of the government, royal kitchen, royal store house, royal workshop and the camp for the forced labourers. Similarly, a large part of the expenses for the upkeep of the army was incurred in the cities, such as those involving the keeping of horses, elephants and chariots [Ghosal, U. N, 1972: 205-206]. The military needs led to the development of many urban crafts, e.g., weapons. As Cohen pointed out, all pre-state formations had an inherent tendency to "break up and form similar units across the landscape." [Cohen, Ronald, 1978: 35]. The state kept these fissiparous tendencies in check. The army had the dual function of both protecting the country from the outside aggressors, and also of protecting the ruling small minority of the privileged from the wrath of its own people [Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 67, 88]. In this second function, it was a necessary ingredient of *danda*, the coercive arm of the state, discussed in details elsewhere, along with the spies whose job it was to assess the popular mood. The citadel was also identified as the major area of taxation [Ghosal, U.N, 1972: 35].

Manufacture

Wall was symbolic of the separation of the town from the village. Urban was not merely a multiple of rural, a simple aggregation of villages, but something more. Not all its functions could be duplicated at a lower level; every nodal point in the administration was no longer an exact replica of what existed at the core [Cohen, 1978: 35-36]. Town represented a new stage in the social division of labour.[3]

Apart from its protective function, as the abode of the ruling class, town provided the villages with an economics of scale. As the villages grew and their economies expanded, activities became varied and called for specialisation. Agriculture was the main source of livelihood, but along with agriculture some specialisation was needed for meeting non-food needs, e.g. for clothing, pottery, iron and silver utensils, woodwork, and so on. New demand gave rise to new crafts, new specialisations and professionalism specific to that craft. Those fashioning textile, wood, leather, or metal, or processing forest products like oil seeds or honey, were probably working part-time in their crafts, while cultivating some land for meeting their food needs; as only a very large village could make full use of their time. It is also possible that several villages grouped together and used the same set of craftsmen. More likely, activities that were needed by the villages, but could not be afforded by villages individually, could now be located in the cities and accessed by all the villages around these. It provided the surrounding villages with the economics of scale. What no single village could afford was now available in the market place of the city, e.g., masonry, carpentry, smithy of various sorts. This unity of agriculture and craft made the village economy self-sufficient. In some cases, as Jataka stories tell us, the cities were surrounded by villages where artisans and craftsmen lived; in this case the artisan probably worked in the town but lived in the villages [Ghosh, A, 1973: 54]. More likely, the artisans catered to both the poor village

consumers with limited purchasing power and the urban rich interested in jewellery made of gold and precious metals.

Along with the agriculturist and the craftsman, as also the fisherman and the pastorals working with cattle, the growing village also required a large number of village servants, with the priest at the top, performing rituals, and the *Dom* at the bottom, helping with the burning of the dead-bodies. There were others with varying skills and specialisation between them, such as accountants, washer-men, barbers, village guards, and many others. It can be presumed that at the beginning the village community allocated land to these craftsmen and village servants as a reward or compensation for performing various services in the overall interest of the village. Along with these land grants, and some times as a substitute for those, they were also paid annual or periodic dues, by each family, for their year-long services. Over time, as the economy became more monetised, the exchanges more widespread and the culture of private property drilling deeper into the village life, the craftsmen and servants were paid for specific services performed, by the individual families.

. At the beginning the artisans both produced and sold their manufacture. In time, in the cities, as specialisation progressed, these two activities were separated, while a chain of intermediaries looked after the trading of their goods: giving rise to another division of labour, between commerce and industry.

Trading

The process of state formation took the village settlements to the city stage. Cities were where the rich and the powerful lived, and extensive trading took place, largely based on the surplus collected from the countryside in the form of taxes. The surpluses moved from the actual producer at the bottom to the king at the top, through a chain of intermediate level rulers each of whom took a share of the crop. This upward movement of surplus, from the village to the capital city, therefore, required places where the surplus could be stored, a

part of it distributed to local level rulers and other consumers, and a part moved upwards towards the capital city.

Many of these places eventually developed into larger villages and cities. The city market provided the opportunity for the exchange of a wide variety of items between producers [Ghosh, A, 1973: 52]. The early *jataka* stories tell about caravans of 500-1000 each, trading in sugar, cloth and other items. Even allowing for usual exaggerations, trading seems to have been of quite high order. Silver coins were in use from the Vedic days [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 69-70, 73]. The market flourished also because the city's market places also traded information that was not available in the secluded villages.

Trading began inside the city, but since the wall was located where the city met the village, more and more of the trade moved towards the edge of the city, and eventually overflowed the perimeters of the city. The market just outside the wall of the city eventually became more important than that within, and was as closely linked with the economy of the city as any other part inside. This inevitably led to the redrawing of the city boundary, including the part outside the wall as well. This process was repeated as market moved closer to the new boundary and that outside the boundary became more important than one within, which led to fresh redrawing of the city boundary. The city grew in this fashion almost everywhere in the world.

Greater differentiation

It needs to be underlined that the process of state formation, until then, had not yet reached a stage where towns were sharply demarcated from the surrounding villages. The villages flowed into towns and cities as easily as the cities projected themselves into its hinterland. The forest, the village and the town, were three separate stages of development, no doubt; but these were not as discrete and watertight entities as they had become later. Comparatively, towns were more differentiated by class than the villages, and more of private property was in evidence. Merchants emerged as a distinct community, since

trading was the main activity of a town. The city attracted new crafts and professions. Bureaucracy was another major component of the population. The most powerful among them, called Raja or by other names, lived, surrounded by their advisers, priests, police and soldiers, in the cities.

A large proportion of the population must have been the urban poor, unorganised rabbles that had escaped their landlords and were engaged in odd jobs. Some crafts developed exclusively in the towns, as they catered to the special consumption needs of the elite, e.g., goldsmiths and quality weavers. Probably more of the craftsmen, of inferior quality, were located in the villages, but they were a part of the village community, while craftsmen in the town were private producers and traders in their produce.

Rural-Urban Relationship

The animosity between the town and the village is as old as the town itself.[4] The city was a place where people with power and wealth lived. In most cases, a country was known by its principal city. To the fortified city was brought the agricultural surplus from the countryside for consumption and trading. The city collected taxes and land revenues from the villages as a way of mobilising this surplus. As we have already noted, a hierarchy of cities came into existence for the storing and distribution of surplus. The people living in the village considered the city people oppressive, while the latter returned the compliment by describing them as rustic and vulgar [Ghosh, A, 1973: 55]. Brahmans were almost as a rule opposed to the urban society, largely because its rival religion, Buddhism, was dominant in the towns [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 69-70. 73, 190-192].

Essentially, it meant that the villages produced while the towns consumed. The relationship was exploitative and of dominance-dependence, no matter whether it was Mahasthana in North Bengal operating with a very small hinterland or Rome in relation to its vast hinterland that included parts of North Africa. The population in the city had their roots in the villages, but after several

generations of living in a city the ties within the city became stronger than those with the ancestral home. Only the fresh entrants to the citizenry, the rural migrants, had stronger ties with their roots.

Consumption was an important function of the city life, as it had people who could afford good food and luxuries. Art and culture flourished in the city because, thanks to surplus production in the villages, the urban elite had the leisure to pursue those [Ghosh, A, 1973: 55]. The latter could afford to follow a life style that was distinct from the rural, and created demands for new objects that were far outside the reach of the village masses, and even of the village rich, e.g., work with ivory and sandal wood, precious stones.[5]

Even erotic art, immortalised by Vatsayana in his Kamasutra- an unashamed and candid treatise on sex, requiring the prostitutes to be trained in dancing, singing, acting, writing, painting and playing on instruments - would be unthinkable in the context of a small village. The fact that this lady of a certain kind of repute also needed to learn archery and fencing, gymnastics, logic and chemistry, among 64 arts listed by Vatsayana, makes one wonder why, after learning all these, she had no option other than prostitution as a profession [Iyenger, K. R, 1921:19-25]. There is reference to Bengal in Kamasutra, indicating that its urban elite had acquired a taste for a varied and vigorous sex life [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 168-169; Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 319, 361; Iyenger, K.R, 1921:72]. All these revealed the emergence of a new class of urban wealthy, mainly merchants and bureaucrats, that could afford such luxuries [Ghosal, U.N, 1972: 125]. Within the city, people were differentiated by income, caste and other categories. Accent and language, *a la* Pygmalion of George Bernard Shaw, distinguished the urban elite from the run of the mill common masses [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 213-214; Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 125-127].

In his urban planning, Kautilya kept space for the prostitutes as also for slaughter-houses, indicating that meat consumption was high. As the society became more urbanised and sophisticated, the rulers acquired many new tastes.

Sanctuaries for birds, reptiles and wild and domesticated animals were among those [Kangle, R.P, 1963; Ghosal, U.N, 1972: 205-206]. Patuliputra palace had both stone and wood carving. There were evidences of the existence of bone and ivory working, wood and carpentry, leather and clay working, perfume making, the use of both alkaline and acid for cleansing gold and silver, and liquor and oil industry. All these further indicate the existence of a rich urban class of good taste and purchasing power [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981:96-134, 139][6].

Secular and Impersonal Urban Life

The city was a settlement where people of diverse origin and pursuing diverse professions met. Religion, festivities, rituals provided means for bringing them together and forging a more integrated citizenry. Monuments, victory arches and architectural masterpieces also served the same purpose, of giving city people some identity, something to be proud about. Space had to be allocated for all these, as also for sports and entertainment.

The elaborate vertical structures, monuments, stadiums, roads and drainage systems, all these presupposed some knowledge of engineering, geometry and mathematics, and some advance in technology. Further, there had to be also a certain development in communications to make this transition to cities possible; so came language and other means of recording [Childe, V Gordon, 1965: 3-17; Ghosh, A, 1973: 23-24; Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 27-31, 39].

By definition, comparatively speaking, urban life was largely impersonal and secular, in contrast with rural societies based on kinship. Residence was the key factor for qualifying as a citizen. It consisted of the ruling elite, the priests and the administrative personnel, but also widely respected professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, clerks and accountants, and the common labouring masses. For instance, the work of the doctors, based on diagnosis and appropriate medicine rivalled the Brahmans who claimed mythical healing powers. Perhaps, it was because of the challenge presented by the doctors, they

were at loggerheads with the Brahmans who despised their nature of work, with blood, stool, sputum as also their professional association with the poorest in the city. There was always this keen rivalry between those who practiced secular professions needed by the city economy and society, and those who wished to retain some sort of a voodoo culture even in the urban setting [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 184, 149-159].

The development of mathematics, with all its abstraction, and in which the Indians were ahead of the world, could not but be secular. Aryabhatta, the great mathematician, worked out the right numerical measure of 'pie', and Indian numerals with digit 'zero' eventually became universal, routed through Arabs to reach Europe in time. Chemistry first developed as a science of medicine, but then, during the period of Arthasastra, its development was distorted as a science of poison [Kosambi, D. D, 1965: 175]. Terracotta was completely urban in origin [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 197-205, 215-216].

What has just been said should not be taken to mean that religion played no role in urban life. On the contrary, as we have noted already, despite the overall secular nature of the urban society and its citizenry, shrine was as important a feature of city life as moat or wall was. Astrology was more in demand than astronomy. Mass culture was superstitious and grew out of the rural roots of the common masses as the direction of flow of culture in this primary phase of urbanisation was from rural to urban. Geometry grew out of needs for temple construction and was, therefore, religious in origin [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 197-205, 215-216]. The feudal framework within which these cities and their economy and society operated, required religion for its survival, as we have discussed in the previous chapter. A great deal of royal expenses relating to temples and other religious institutions, was actually incurred in the urban areas. However, the Indian rulers, while worshipping the ancestors, did not exhibit the reverence for the dead to the extent one finds it in the ancient societies in Egypt, West Africa and Latin America. Nothing like the

great pyramids of Saqara, the city of the dead located about 25 miles away from Cairo along the Nile, existed in the Indian cities.

Civic Needs and Civic Institutions

The specific civic needs of drinking water, drainage, and garbage disposal had to be addressed by whoever was running the city administration. The problem of drinking water was less acute in a place like Bengal where rain was plenty and specially maintained ponds gave water of good quality. It was in contrast to cities like Rome, which had to procure water from mountain springs or streams many miles away and divert those to the city by way aqueduct. Ingress of water into the city required corresponding arrangements for their egress, in order to avoid flooding. Here again, the amount of water coming in being less than in areas with low rainfall and having no perennial tanks, the problem of drainage in Bengal cities was less associated with water imported for drinking purposes than with seasonal monsoon rains. In any case, some arrangement for drainage had to be an integral part of city planning and management in Bengal too. However, as in Rome and several other cities, garbage disposal, an important activity, was not usually given the attention it deserved. This task was assigned to some of the lowest castes who themselves were required to leave at the periphery of a settlement, because their presence was polluting. A space had to be reserved, usually on the bank of the river that formed one of the sides of the city, for the cremation of the dead.

And there had to be a city administration looking specifically into those needs of city life. In almost all the ancient cities of India, there was a structure of administration that worked more or less autonomously [Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 69, 73]. The autonomous authority, *adhikarana*, consisted of the main components of the city population, such as the artisans, the merchants and the bureaucrats, and carried both civil and judicial authority. Those settled criminal offences and disputes relating to land, and their approval was sought when land was transferred. The famous Sanskrit drama, Mrichhakatik, by Sudraka, depicts

the guild president and the leading scribe as assisting the *adhikaranas*. Several inscriptions also mention leading artisan, leading merchant, guild president and the chief scribe as members of *Adhikarana* [Ghosal, U N, 1972: 268-269]. The autonomy was fuller in larger towns [Altekar, A S, 1972: 135]. Several cities of Punjab were governed by their own courts and magistrates, according to the Greek sources [Altekar, A S, 1972: 323]. Such autonomy by no means indicated the existence of an egalitarian society, except in tribal republics, but signified some devolution of power from the royalty. Over time, tribes became integrated into the caste system, no less in the urban areas [Ghosh, A, 1973: 28, 34].

As monarchy was established and strengthened, the importance of these autonomous institutions declined, while that of bureaucracy increased, something similar to what happened with the autonomous rural institutions, as discussed elsewhere.

Guilds of Artisans and Merchants

An important component of the city administration was the guilds of artisans. The guilds operated autonomously, in relation to the state, and democratically, with *Sabhas* and *Samitis*, within. The proceedings of the general assembly of the guild were conducted democratically. Those speaking loudly or not letting others speak could be penalised. The actual day to day work of the guild was vested in the hands of an executive of 3-5. The guilds also took part in banking activities, credit and money lending. Profits from guild activities were shared according to contributions made [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 135-137].

There were many different types of guild, for the artisans and merchants, but each more or less had the same objective of protecting its members by way of rules that would be respected by all. Some of these rules related to the way the professional training were given to the apprentices, or the way they were treated by senior members during the course of the training. Some others had the objective of controlling competition among members in terms of prices

offered to consumers and wages offered to journeymen, and of setting standards, regarding weight and quality among others.[7] Still others guided the relationship with those outside the guild and so on.[8] The craftsman's capital consisted of a house, his skills, his tools and the hereditary customers. It was inseparable from the craftsman himself, unlike modern day capital, and his skill and knowledge, along with his tools and house, was handed down to his sons when he retired or died [Marx, K and Frederick Engels, 1979: 44].

Guilds, however, reflected a low degree of specialisation. Some specialisation took place when the craftsman opted out from trading his own wares and left it in the hands of the professional traders. But still "every workman had to be versed in a whole round of tasks" and even make his own tools. A positive side, compared with the drabness and monotony of the work of the modern day factory workers, was his love for, and commitment to, his craft, with all its details [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 44-45]

The guilds also exposed another kind of contradiction, that is seldom mentioned: between the unskilled rural migrant, the rabble with no base, no strength or bargaining power, who had entered the city individually and were strangers to one another, and various sections of the organised privileged classes, who were immensely more powerful. The rural migrant, during his time in the village was probably a low caste agriculturist who was subjected to the tyranny of the landlord and the caste system. In the towns he fared no better, not having skill and not being organised. He had closer relationship with his own master than with other journeymen working with other masters, and he also nurtured the hope of becoming a master craftsman himself one day which made him reluctant to join hands with other journeymen. The rabble remained unorganised and powerless because of the position that he was in [Marx and Engels, 1979: 43-44]. The only other identity, apart from the one he had with his master, was probably that of his village caste origin, that probably enabled him to interact with at least some people in the towns.

Patanjali classified the settlements into *grama, ghosa, nagara* and *samvaha*. Gramas were villages, and Ghosas were pastoral settlements with cowpens. *Nagaras* were towns, while *Samvahas* were *nigams* or market towns, probably some intermediate form between *nagara* proper and *grama,* to use the terminology of today, *peri*-urban areas. The towns were less isolated, had less homogeneity, involved more complex division of labour, and more secular professional specialisation, greater development of money economy, less organised kinship, less strident social control and greater dependence on impersonal control-institutions, feebler affiliation to religion and superstitious beliefs and greater individual freedom [Ghosh, A, 1973: 38].

Guilds ceased to be mentioned in the literature after the 6th century A.D, as the process of urbanisation itself faced a downturn. Many of these got transformed from professionals organisations to rigid, hereditary, castes, as artisans fell back on land for survival [Kosambi, D D, 1965: 196; Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 164].

Urbanisation in Buddhist Literature

The Buddhist literature, relating to the period before the formation of states, described small towns or intermediate settlements between the village and the town, as *nigams* and the larger ones as *nagara*, while the citadels were *puras*. Compared with the vast countryside, *nagaras* were few in number - in one example, there was only one *nagara* to 16000 *gramas*, indicating a very low level of urbanisation. In Buddhist literature only 6 *maha-nagaras* (major cities) were named: Savitthi, Champa, Rajagaha, Saketa, Kosambi, and Benaras. Kusinara, that became prominent in later years, was described as a jungle townlet (*nagaraka*). [9] This account antedates the emergence of Patuliputra as a major urban settlement [Rhys Davids, C A F, 1962: 178-179].

The three major components of the urban population were merchants, artisans and government officials. The Buddhist literature of North India also informs us of 18 guilds in the towns of which four were formed by

woodworkers, smiths, the leather dressers, the painters; but the remaining 14 were not mentioned. A president (pamukha) or alderman (jetthaka) headed each guild. There was also a supreme headship over all the guilds, coupled with a treasurer (bhandagarika) who monitored the stock of goods of the *Sangha* (guild). [10] *Sethis*, that is merchants, occupied an important position in the civic life; the chief among them was called *maha-sethi*, who was assisted by anu-*sethi*.

There was a tendency for the occupations to become hereditary, e.g., the blacksmith's son also becoming blacksmith, and there were restrictions regarding inter-dinning, say between the Brahmana and Chandala, in several cases. But, leaving aside these cases, on the whole the *Varnashram* was taken as no more than class divisions. Princes, Brahmans and merchants formed friendships, sending their sons to the same teacher, eating together, inter-marrying, without incurring any social displeasure. Social divisions and economic occupations were very far from coinciding, and both labour and capital were quite mobile. [Rhys Davids, C A F, 1962: 183-187].

Trade was a major theme of many Jataka stories, including journeys across deserts or watercourses. The items covered practically anything, from silk, muslin, gems, cutlery, armour, brocades, embroideries, rugs, perfumes, drugs, ivory work, jewelry and gold. Among many routes one was to Sri Lanka via Patuliputra and Tamlitti (Tamralipta). [11]Areas in a major town were earmarked for given items, e.g., fishmongers, green grocers, while slaughterhouses were located outside the perimeters of the city. Textile fabrics, groceries, oil, green groceries, grains, perfumes, flowers, gold and jewelry were among items sold in the bazars according to Jataka stories, and even taverns selling liquor, but there is no mention of village markets (*hatt*), which must have been a latter day invention. Haggling was not unknown, and there was an official, named *Agghakaraka* (court valuer) whose job it was to ascertain fair price for an item. He also imposed *octroi* on the goods brought into the town, at one-tenth plus a sample, following the rules laid down by Manu. Most of the

transactions were in exchange of coin, though barters were not unknown. Usury was prevalent, as also pledging of signet ring, and of wives and children. Such was the state of the Indian city republics between 7th and 4th century BC, as revealed by the Buddhist literature [Rhys Davids, C A F, 1962: 193-195]

Merchants and traders figure prominently in jataka stories, partly because Buddhism was perceived as an urban religion. It emerged as a protest movement against the Brahmanic ritual killing of animals and ostentatious life style, and advocated simplicity and thrift. Buddha recommended that one-fourth of one's income should be saved, one-fourth should be used as living expense, while half should be invested in expanding business [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 193]. The fact that guilds were, once upon a time, important institutions, is confirmed by other accounts too. In a town called Siyadoni, in upper Ganga valley, merchants of all types are recorded, including those specialising in oil-processing, pottery, salt, liquor, betel leaf, stone-cutting and blacksmithy and so on. Guilds integrated a whole range of activities, including the religious ones, and cut across caste and regional boundaries. One of their major activities was to build temples and maintain those, and a major task of the authority in the guild was to collect levies from merchants for this purpose. A part of the levy was invested as loans to merchants in order to earn interests [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 142-145].

Urban Decay and Consequent Ruralisation

This period of urban prosperity was followed by one of decay. Reports of urban decline began pouring in from the last years of the first millennium B.C. In the fifth century, the Chinese traveller Fa Hien (405-411 A.D.) mentioned some specific cases of urban deterioration, that were corroborated by Yuan Choang (630-644 A.D.) two and half centuries later [12] [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 261].

Then, from the 6th century A.D for six and seven centuries there was virtually no urban growth. One explanation for the decay is the fall of the Kusan

empire, that had the effect of substantially snapping trade ties with Europe. Whatever still remained eroded with the collapse of the Roman empire and the subsequent attack of the Hunas [Kosambi, D D, 1965: 185; Sharma, R S, 1987: 135-136]. The discovery of many Roman coins in different parts of the country corroborate the view that once upon a time India had well established trade relations with Rome and its constituents.. Similarly, the disappearance of those coins almost from the time of the collapse of the empire and the resulting chaos in Europe for several centuries, indicate the negative consequences of such collapse for the Indian economy.[13] In fact not only Roman coins, but coins of all types came to be in short supply[14].

No gold coin had been found for more than three centuries, and when these reappeared in 1000 A.D., these were debased with a low gold content. The Gupta empire, one of the two major empires of the period before Turko-Afghan invasion, had no mint town, seals mainly served religious and ceremonial purposes, and cowries became the medium of exchange [Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 317; Sharma, R S, 1987: 124-125, 132, 136].

The impact of the collapse of the Roman empire was partly stalled by the fact that the succeeding Byzantine Empire continued to buy silk from the Indian sources. But that source of demand for Indian goods too dried up when the latter learnt from the Chinese the technology of cultivating silk worms [Sharma, R S, 1987: 136-137; Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 318]. Apart from the collapse of the Roman empire, and the Byzantine switching to indigenous silk-worm cultivation, another factor was, perhaps, a succession of invasions from the Northwest, from the 5th century A.D. onwards, beginning with the Hunas, and followed by Gurjars and Ahirs in their wake, that choked the trade extending to Europe along that route.[15] [Thapar, Romila, 1978: 170; Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 263, 308]. The Arab takeover of a vast territory also affected trade with Europe. The decline of Buddhism, the religion most closely identified with urban development, could also have been a contributory factor,

[Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 313] as also the collapse of kingdoms like Satavahanas, Kusans and Guptas [Sharma, R S, 1987: 132].

The decay of the urban areas, and the shrinkage of trade – both internal and external – led to ruralisation of the society, as more and more artisans and other specialists fell back on land. The emergence of feudalism, the making of land grants and of self-sufficient village communities, were logical consequences of this development. Urban guilds were frozen into castes. The new urban phenomenon was marked by garrisons, palaces, pilgrim centres and temple establishments. [Sharma, R S, 1987: 167-177; Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 130-131; Thakur, Vijay Kumar, 1981: 314-316].

III. The Patttern of Urbanisation in Bengal: evidence from copper plates

Urbanisation in Bengal, as we have noted already, began quite late in the day, several centuries behind most of North and Central India. The Bengal towns we know of during the rule of the Mauryas were few, e.g., Tamralipta in the south and Mahasthana in the North. Bengal, and were not integrated with the rest of the country. In pre-iron age India, dense forests formed a formidable barrier. Still, one finds that many goods were traded through a coastal port that was known to the Greeks. Textile from Pundra in North Bengal was considered to be among the best imports by an authority no less than Kauytilya in his Arthasastra.

By the time Bengal became integrated with the Gupta empire, several centuries later, urbanisation in Bengal was still at a very low level. This was followed by a period when, we know from inscriptions and other sources, some more towns came into being. But this was also the period when urbanisation was in decline in the country as a whole. Bengal's economy and trade were not strong enough to withstand this overwhelming all India current and its towns declined too, mainly from the 6th century onwards, when trade stagnated, currency in circulation fell to a lowest possible level, and the merchants

experienced a heavy loss of social status. There was a fall in both internal and external trade and a decline in metallic money in circulation, particularly from the seventh century. The ruling classes and the people fell back on land for their livelihood, and this decline coincided with a spurt in land grants, and various incentives for opening up new land for cultivation. Urban decay and the drop in the level of trade and exchange also forced the villages to strive for self-sufficiency [Sharma, R.S., 1987: 167, 177].

One of the most important sources for an understanding of the pattern of urbanisation in Bengal is, as almost always during this period, the land grant copper plates. Seventyone inscribed copper plates are available, covering the period between 433 A.D. and 1285 A.D., detailing property transfers, mainly gifts. While inscribing on the copper plates, the Bengal dynasties followed the all India tradition in the way of writing these plates, following the sastras of Brihaspati, Yajnavalka, Vyaas, and the models of Guptas and Pahllavas. Usually such copper plates were divided into four parts -

(a) declaring the authority of the administrative agency which, while sanctioning such transfer; acknowledged the supremacy of the paramount sovereign,

(b) describing the property that was being transferred, its boundaries, the name of the recipient and conditions under which property could be enjoyed by the recipient,

(c) mentioning persons who were entrusted with the execution of transfer, with an appeal to government officials to respect this transfer, and

(d) adding the date, place of issue, and some form of authentication of the issuing agency [Morrison, 1969: 3].

The distribution of these copper plates over the territory of Bengal provides some indication of the relative importance of various regions. The region with the highest concentration is the *Barendra* area - east of Jamuna, west of Mahananda and north of Ganga - also known as Pundravardhanvukti, which covers the present day districts of Rajsahi, Bagura and Dinajpore in

Bagladesh. A second region of concentration is in the west, *Radha* or *Sumha*, along the channel of Bhagirathi, found mostly in 24 Parganas and Midnapore - known as Kankagrambhukti, Vardhamanbhukti and Dandabhukti. The third region is located in the coastal areas of the East, known as *Samatata*, in the present day Bangladesh districts of Comilla, Noakhali, Srihatta and Bakherganj, that included the historical areas such as Harikela [Lalmai-Moinamati area of Comilla] and Pattikera. The fourth region of concentration was in modern Dhaka and Faridpur, also known in the ancient days as *Vanga*. All the major centres of administration in Bengal were located in these four regions [Morrison, B.M, 1969: 3].

The plates from the Barendra region, close to Bihar, confirm that it was a part of the Gupta empire during the fifth and the sixth century. However, plates from sixth century onwards did not bear the name of the Gupta rulers, and were mostly issued from Bikrampur, Banga. Rarh or Bhagirathi area plates were found in Karnasuvarna, Tavira (Midnapore) and Vardhamana, and, as in the Barendra region, plates from 10th century mentioned Bikrampur, Banga. Obviously, this area was ruled by Banga, and, in the latter days by the Sen dynasty; while two of the plates mentioned the Pal dynasty [Morrison, B.M., 1969: 3-4]. In Samatata too the later day plates mentioned Bikrampur. Banga, with its main urban centre Bikrampur, was more independent than others, as all the copper plates found in this region originated within the region. On the other hand, Banga came to dominate other areas, particularly after the disintegration of the Gupta empire. Samatata, among the regions, enjoyed autonomy for a longer period, particularly under the Chandra kings, but latter, from 10th century, came under the control of Bikrampur. Chandra, Pal and Sen were the three main dynasties in pre-1204 Bengal [Morrison, B.M., 1969: 4-8].

. The copper plates usually described land grants to Brahmans and others for setting up religious institutions. Of these only in Samatata does one find mention of grants to Buddhist monasteries - in 6 out of 17 plates [Morrison, B.M., 1969: 9-11]. We have noted already, such land gifts and transfers were

probably confined to urban and semi-urban areas where land in privileged position was scarce, while land was in abundance in rural areas, the greater part of which were forests. In some cases villages were sold, and what was transferred in such transactions was the right to collect revenue, and not land as such [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 179-204, 264].

On the whole, these plates confirm the pattern of urbanisation deduced from various other sources. These plates also give some idea of the urban classes. As we have already noted, in the previous chapter, bureaucracy was quite elaborate and extensive during the reign of the Pals and the Sens [Eaton, R.M, 1993: 15; Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 263, 270]. All of the plates describe in some form or another the basis of the authority of the agency which issued the grant, and the structure of authority and its hierarchy to which it is related [Morrison, B.M., 1970: 125]. For instance, the plate of Paharpur was for the purchase of a dwelling site and wasteland - a Brahman couple addressing the petition to the Mayor of Pundrabardhan. After receiving the petition, the Council (*Adhikarana*) consulted the Record keeper (*Pustapala*). The application having been accepted, land was transferred against the receipt of a stipulated sum of money, and the *Adhikarana* ordered the village elders to demarcate the land and boundaries. [Morrison, B.M.,1970: 125].

In Kotivarasa, the task of transferring land was delegated by *Uparikarmahraja* to *uparika* who was administering the town, "in the company of *nagara-sresthin* Ribhupala, the merchant Vasumittra, the chief *kulika* (artisan) Varadatta, and the chief scribe Viparapala." The kotivarsha plate shows that waste field land, which was revenue free, was transferred against the payment of 2 dinaras. [Morrison, B.M., 1970: 129]

In the early years there were frequent references to the local bodies and their role in transferring land in copper plates. In the later years such local bodies were seldom mentioned in the copper plates, nor were their approval sought. Along with the decline in the autonomy of the local bodies, the bureaucracy expanded. The copper plates gave details of the hierarchy in the

administration. In case of the plates issued by the Chandra kings, Gopachandra was mentioned as the Maharajadhiraja. Below whom were officers of Bardhamanabhukti, and below him were: kartakritika, kumaramatya (prime minister), cauroddharanika (high police official), uparika (provincial governor), Audrangika (collector of Udranga, a tax on permanent tenants), agraharika (superviser of agrahara land), Auranasthanika (supewrvier of woolen articles), Bhogapatika, Vishayapati, Tadayuktaka (or Ayuktaka), Hiranyasamudayika (Collector of taxes paid in cashs), Pattalaka (officer icharge of som smaller teritorial units), Avasathika (supervisor of government buildings), an officers entrusted with Devodroni (that is immersion of images). Officers at Bhukti level were important and saluted by Maharaja Vijaysena, but they played no role in the transaction. In case of the Tavira plate it was said that, " the administrative office of Tavira, full of eminent Brahmanas, situated within". In Dandabhukti (that is Dantan) the office only received the money and completed the transaction, but otherwise the local administration was virtually bypassed [Morrison, B.M, 1970:139; Sharma, R.S, 1987: 108-109].[16]

The towns described above were the bigger ones during that period - Pundra (and also Karna-Suvarna for some time, and Gaur later) in the North, Bikrampur in the east and Tamralipta in the South - but none of these could be compared with the very big cities in other parts of the country, such as Patuliputra, Sravasti, Ujjain, Ajodhya, Saket or Varanasi [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 293]. The names of many other cities are referred by various documents, and copper plates.[17] But there is no way of knowing how large they were, what their population was, or how the people lived in those, or even for how long they maintained their prominence.

IV.   Evidence from Archaeological Sites and Travelogues

Archaeology in Bengal was motivated by two factors. First, the references to a variety of towns and places in Sanskrit, Greek and other texts,

presented a challenge to find those, in ruins, on the ground, taking the written text as the guide. Second, inspiring activities by scholars by Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, who visited many of the ruins and gave graphic accounts of those [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 1]. The identification of Mahasthanagarh with Pundrabardhan, by Alexander Cunningham, was made on the basis of Yuang Choang's travelogue [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 5]. However, our architectural collections so far are no more than "chance finds from tanks and ditches of the latest period and from the upper stratum of earth and the old sites have yet to be systematically explored." The fact remains that "much of our premises are still based on very meagre data." [Sengupta, Gautam, 1996; 293-294]. We are now giving below a summary of major archaeological findings in Bengal that corroborate accounts obtained from other sources, including travelogues.

Tamralipta

Leaving aside Gange or Parthalis or Ganges mentioned by the Greek sources, whose identity is not established, Tamralipta is probably the oldest Bengal town to which we find references in several sources. In those days Tamralipta[18] was probably nearer the sea[19]. Of the two great Chinese travellers who brought Tamralipta's great past to our knowledge, Fa Hien, came in the early part of the fifth century, while Yuang Choang, came about two and a quarter century latter (635 AD). Talking about Tamralipta, Fa Hien describes it as a place where "the river empties itself into the sea", which confirms that it was very close to the sea at that time. What excited Fa Hien, a devout Buddhist, was that: "There are twenty-four Sangharamas in this country, all of them have resident priests, and the Law of Buddha is generally respected." Fa Hien remained here for two years, writing out copies of sacred books (*Sutras*), and taking impression of the figures [Beal, Samuel, 1964: 139]. Unfortunately, there is precious little about this port city beyond what we have just reproduced in a substantial book of 200 pages that covered many other Buddhist centres India.

The impression one gets is that he was more interested in Buddhism than in people in that city and the city itself did not merit any longer exposition.

We know somewhat more from the account by Yuang Choang, of the city that he described as Tan-Mo-Lih-Ti. Visiting the city about two and half centuries after Fa -Hien, he also described it as a place that was " near an inlet of the sea". He also added that: "The country formed a bay where land and water communication met" We also get some description of its ecology: the land was low and moist, farming was good, fruits and flowers abounded, and the climate was hot. . He then pointed to two aspects of the local people: One, that, "the customs of the people were rude", in other words, not very civilised, and, two, which was complimentary and totally at variance with the observations made by the foreign travellers who visited after 1204, " the inhabitants were courageous". What counted most to Yuang Choang, above anything else, like Fa Hien, was that: "they were believers in Buddhism and other systems." He counted more than 50 'Deva temples', meaning Hindu temples (the word 'Hindu' not being in vogue at that time), and added that the Buddhists and non-Buddhists lived together 'pell-mell', that is in a disorderly fashion, whatever that meant. He also counted ten Buddhist Monasteries, where more than 1000 'brethren' (monks- BD) lived. Yuong Choang never used the term 'port' or 'city', but described this 'country', where land met water, as one where "rare valuables were collected in it and so its inhabitants were generally prosperous." [Watters, Thomas, 1961: 189]. Like Fa Hien, Yuang Choang also had very little to add to what we have reproduced above, largely because he was more busy in counting the number of Buddhist Bihars and monks working therein [Watters, Thomas, 1961: Vol. II, 180-181].

These accounts do not give any idea about the scale of trading undertaken at Tamralipta; nor does it provide any information about the composition or direction of trade. [20] But the fact, that two foreign travellers, with more than two centuries between their visits, took note of this port, says something about its importance. Today's Tamluk bears little of the testimony of

that important port that was, according to some accounts, about 8 miles in length, and had a stone pillar of Asoke that was 200 feet high. The temple of Barga Bhima or Kali, which is an important landmark in the current Tamluk city, located on a high ground, was probably established on the site of a Buddhist Bihar. This may or may not be the only trace of Buddhism left in that city now, after Buddhism declined and then disappeared [Hunter, W.W, 1876, Vol. III: 63]

The excavations in Tamralipta reveal " burnt floor, terracotta figurines and cast copper coins". In the NBP period, and the post-NBP period comprising Sunga and Kusan phases the sites are " marked by typical Sunga bowls, rouletted ware, sprinkler, and a stepped tank of brick." Gupta period seals have also been found, but "the site has been practically abandoned after the third century AD." Though Fa Hien mentioned about monasteries, he said nothing about the port town. He took boat from an unnamed 'sea-mouth' [Sharma, R.S., 1987: 57]. Archaeological finds have been generally disappointing, both in quantity and quality, despite various references to this ancient port town in the early Buddhist and classical literature [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 8; Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 177-178].

It is not clear to which kingdom Tamralipta belonged, or whether it was an autonomous republic and not part of any region. There was no evidence of usual features of a city- moat, wall, tower, fort. Geographically it was closest to Dandabhukti, the present day Dantan located today in the same district, Medinipur, at that time representing a province of Bengal, that was probably a part of another Bhukti, Bardhaman. Being located in the coastal region, it could even be a part of Samatata, which in turn was probably overlapped with both Banga and Sumha, in those days. The Jain *Upangas* also mention *Tamalitta* and *Bangas* as Aryan lands as opposed to lands of *Mlechhas* like Saka, Yabana others [Chattopadhyay, Suniti Kumar: 76]. During Panini's time   Tamralipta was among the great cities through which the main highways in India passed, around seventh to fourth century BC[21] [Agrawal, V.S, 1953: 245, 456]

Several theories attempt to explain the decline of the Tamralipta. One is that the river that linked the port city with the inland up to North India decayed.[22] [Roy, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 77-78, 381]. Another is that its prosperity was associated with the Roman empire, as revealed by some Roman coins found in the locality; and it collapsed with the fall of the Roman empire, and the dislocation of the sea route to Europe following its take over by the Arabs.[23] [Major, R.H,1857: x]. This was followed by a period in the Bengal history, as we have already noted, when the supply of silver and gold coins sharply declined, leading to a corresponding drop in commerce and trade [Ray, Nihar Ranjan,1993: 704-705]

Pundrabardhan

Perhaps more important than Tamralipta, was the North Bengal city of Pundrabardhan, in the Pundra or Barendra region of the north, that lay to the north of Ganga and between two other major rivers of the region - Mahananda in the West and Karotoya in the East[24]. Fa Hien found Pundra-Vardhana thickly populated, and met many men of learning. He was also glad to note that both Buddhism and Jainism were flourishing in that country [Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, 1970: 77]. Slightly more than two centuries later, in what he described as Pun-Na-Fa-Tan-Na (Pundrabardhan or Punnyavardhana), Yuang Choang noted a flourishing population, many tanks and flowery groves. Here land was moist, crop was abundant, and people relished jackfruit. That the people respected learning was confirmed by the presence of 20 Buddhist monasteries and 3000 'brethren' following Hinayana or Mahayana cults. He also noticed 100 Deva temples. Here, according to Asokavandana, "Asoke put to death a great multitude of naked sectarians for doing despite to Buddhist worship", probably confirming that the transformation of 'Chandasoke' into 'Drarmasoke', did not instantly follow his conversion to Buddhism. [Watters, Thomas, 1961: Vol. II, 182-188]

Pundrabardhan, located near today's Bagura, in Bangladesh, was the biggest town of North Bengal. Located on the bank of the river Karotoa, it was more than 6 miles in perimeter, and complete with a wall, a moat, and towers in the four corners[25]. The bigger part of the city was, however, located outside the wall. This city was the urban core of an area that probably covered contemporary Rajsahi, Pabna as well as Bagura, three major districts of East-North Bengal, all belonging to Bangladesh now, and was, at least for some of the time, synonymous with Barendra or Pundra [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 216-217]

The ruins at the site comprise a 5000 feet by 4000 feet oblong mound and a few other isolated ones, covering about 185 hectares [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 216-217]. It was ruled by a feudal chieftain who worked under the Magadh kings at the time of the Maurya dynasty. A copper plate inscription, located at Damodarpur, of the time of Kumargupta I, dated around 444 A.D., mentions Pundrabardhan[26] as a domain of Kumargupta. It was also the centre of Bengal during the Gupta dynasty of Magadh, that is, up to middle sixth century.[27] [Pandey, Raj Bali, 1962: 82-84]. There is evidence that coins were used for buying land and property at this town. The city reached its pinnacle of glory during the Pal dynasty, and maintained its prominence until the 13th century, according to some accounts [Ray, Nihar Ranjan,1993: 116, 298-300, 361; Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 216-217; Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 171-175].

Such an important city remained unknown to modern day scholars until 1875, when E.V. Westmacott discovered " a tall brick mound which was once a Buddhist *Stup*" at Paharpur, Rajsahi. This mound was later identified as Sompura, one of the four major Buddhist monasteries during the Pal period. In 1878, H Beveridge discovered the citadel at Mahasthana, Bagura, but it was Alexander Cunningnham who identified it with Pundrabardhan by a careful reading of accounts given by Yuang Choang. This was further confirmed in 1931, by the discovery of an inscription at Mahasthanagarh that was written in

Maurya *Brahm*i script [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 4, 6, 8]. Archaeological findings suggest that a compact settlement existed in Mahasthan from 3rd century B.C. onwards, and the city reached its height of glory during Gupta and Pal periods. This urban centre had a granary (kothagala) that was looked after by a designated official, and many religious establishments [Akmam, Afroz, 1996:535-544]

Karnasuvarna

Karnasuvarna in the northern part of Murshidabad, was the capital of Raja Sasanka, the King of Gaur. Yuang Choang, though critical of Sasanka, had some good things to say about Karnasuvarna (Kie-ka-lo-na-su-fa-la-na). "The country was well inhabited and the people were very rich. The land was low and moist, farming operations were regular, flowers and fruits were abundant; the climate was temperate, and people were of good character and were patrons of learning." He counted more than 10 Buddhist monasteries, 2000 brethren, 50 Deva temples, and added "and the followers of the various religions were very numerous".

He told a story about a South Indian challenging Buddhism. "This bullying braggart had come to the city and strutted about with his stomach protected by copper sheathing to prevent him bursting with excessive learning, and bearing on his head a light to enlighten the ignorant and stupid." He lost the debate with a Buddhist stranger sramana, and so the king, highly pleased with the outcome of the debate, allowed the latter to set up a monastery [Watters, Thomas, 1961: Vol. II, 189].

That sramana was probably no other than, Silabhadra, who was a member of a royal family from Samatata in Bengal. In search of learning he went to Nalanda, where he met Dharma Pal Pusa, who ordained him as a *bhiksu*. His fame spread to foreign countries. After he defeated the Brahman from the south in a debate, he declined the gift the king offered to him as a reward. But latter he was induced to accept the city as gift and agreed to build a

monastery, and to use the revenue of the city for the upkeep of the monastery. This story appears in two different parts of the travelogue, and one of those did not name him. *Bhavisya purana* mentions Gaur, the country of which Karna-Subarna was the capital, that stretched between Burdwan in the west to the river Padma in the east. Most probably Karna-Suvarna later came to be known as Rangamati (or Rakta-Mrittika) of Murshidabad [Chatterjee, Anjali, 1967: 1-2]. Archaeological excavations have found the remains of a *Stup* that could have been the Rakta-Mrittika Bihar mentioned by Yuang Choang [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 9].

The hinterland of this city was agriculturally prosperous, as the charred remains of paddy in Rajbadidanga and other archaeological sites in this area indicate. There are also indications of a fair representation of Brahmanical settlements in the area and of surplus grains. The burnt grains also include wheat; but it is not established whether wheat was cultivated in the area or was imported from Northern India [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 184-185]

Kajangala and Kotivarsha

In Yuang Choang's account there is reference to a place called Kajangala, where he went from Champa, that is East Bihar. It is likely to be Rajmahal, not far from Champa, which he described as Ka-Chu-Wen-Ki-Lo. His account shows that this place was: "low, moist, yielding good crops; the climate was warm and the people were straight forward; they esteemed superior abilities and held learning in respect. There were six or seven Buddhist Monasteries and about 800 breathren; the Deva-Temples were ten in number and the various systems lived pell-mell." Again, the word 'pell-mell' appears, suggesting some sort of disorder. The descriptions he gave to various cities, as the readers must have noted already, were repetitive, suggesting that the traveller was not a keen observer, or it could even be that his mind was fully absorbed in matters religious, other things did not count. In the northern part of the city, not far from Ganga, "was a lofty belvedere built of stones and bricks,

its base broad and high, and its artistic ornamentation was exquisite; on each of its sides were carved images of holy beings, the Buddhas and the devas being made different in appearances." Kajangala is also mentioned in Buddhist Pali texts [Watters, Thomas, 1961, Vol. 2: 181].

According to Nihar Ranjan Roy, Kajangal was, perhaps, the Damodar-Ajay area, then covered with forests, that is *jangal* [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 100]. He did not give any justification for this view. But if one follows the sequence of travel by the Chinese traveller, entering Kajangal from Champa, that is East Bihar, Rajmahal is more likely to be the place, more so, because of its location near the bifurcation of the river Ganga, that led to its becoming Bengal's capital for a brief time during the middle ages. Most other accounts conclusively place Kajangal in North Bengal [Chatterjee, Bhaskar, 1987:52-53].

Kotibarsha was a major *visaya* of the Pundrabardhan *bhukti*. It was probably also the name of a major city, mentioned by Hemchandra, author of *Abhidhan Chintamani*, and Purusottamdas, author of *Trikandasesh*, which later was known as Bangarh of Dinajpur, some times described as the city of Banasur, the son of Bali. It contained the remains of a Buddhist *Stup*, that was 1800 feet in length and 1530 feet in width, and had moat and wall along three sides and river Punarbhaba on the fourth [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 293, 301; Martin, M, 1976: 661-662; quoted in Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 3]. Its brick-built rampart was 10 feet and eight inches wide. The ruins suggest, particularly its black and read wares, that the city was quite old and thrived during the 2nd and the 1st century BC [Chakarabarti. Dilip, K, 1997: 217; Sarkar, Himansu Kumar: 49].

The principal city of Kotivarsha *visaya* or district was probably Devakot[28], while the country it represented probably covered the present day western Dinjapur [Chakrabarti,. Atul Chandra: 32]. The citadel at Devakot was 2000 feet square but was covered with thick jungle when Alexander Cunningham, who established the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861, found it. T Bloch, in 1900-01 established that Devakot was one of several forts

where the suffix part was an abbreviation of Laxanavati, the name given to the main city of Gaur by King Laxman Sen. In the sense of being a country, it probably corresponded to an area that covered today's Malda, Murshidabad, as also parts of Burdwan and Birbhum put together [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 121-122].

Gaur must have been an important port of Bengal, even during the pre-1204 days, located as it was close to the point of bifurcation of the river Ganga into Padma and Bhagirathi. It is not an accident that quite a number of capitals of Bengal in the past had been near about this point of bifurcation: Gaur, Pandua, Tanda, Rajmahal and Karna-Subarna. It is even mentioned in the work of Panini, the great expert on Sanskrit grammar, as Gaurapura, but he did not identify its location [Agrawal, V.S, 1953: 71].

It was said to be 12 and half miles in length along the river and about two miles in breadth, with broad and straight streets with rows of trees planted along the wall. But one should be careful about this and other statements quoted above regarding the length of a city [Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 28-29]. In most cases the perimeters of the city were not defined, and the author's tended to exaggerate. Even when such length is established by examining the ruins or brickwork spread over a large area, that does not take into account the possibility that, over time, the city perimeters continued to shift because of the changes in the course of the river, its lifeline, or because, following an epidemic, it was abandoned and shifted to a new location nearby. In this situation, such ruins accumulate over a long period of time and do not give any idea of the size of a city at a particular point of time.[29] Again, judging by the level of development of the economy and commerce at that time, it would not have been possible for a city to have a size that remotely resembled such a territory.

James Fegusson was highly impressed by its pre-1204 edifices, mostly of brick and partly of black marble that took a good polish, whose style was purely indigenous, and which must have influenced the Mohammedan style that

or military outposts that were maintained by the Muslim rulers in the eastern frontier region [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 5-6].

The excavations reveal specimens of NBP, a ring well, terracotas, punch marked Silver and copper coins ascribed to pre-Sunga times. The same coins continue in Sunga times, marked by prosperous buildings, drains, cesspits, and a brick built rampart wall. Excavations relate the Gupta period to terracota beads, copper and ivory sticks, iron implements . During the Pal time the rampart wall was raised, and excavations have found a lotus- shaped small tank, and some carved bricks and stone sculptures. No coins have been found relating the site to the Gupta period or since [Sharma, R.S., 1987: 58-59].

One can discern a hierarchy of towns in North Bengal, with Mahasthana or Pundrabardhan at the node and towns like Bangarh performing subsidiary functions in the network of settlements. These towns had their ups and downs, as illustrated by five phases of the evolution of Bangarh. During the Maurya period the wall around it was probably made of earthen material. It gained in prosperity during the Sunga-Kushana period (200 BC to 300AD) when the wall around the rampart was brick built, and it had drains, cesspits and a cluster of residential buildings. The objects found relating to this period indicate extensive trade and other economic activities. In comparison with this phase, the Gupta period was one of decadence, while the city prospered again under the Pals [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 175-176].

Gaur

The name 'Gaur' creates a great deal of confusion. This is partly because in some cases it denoted the name of the country (Gaur or Gaur-Bangla), but some other times only a city by that name was implied. The foreign travellers, identified the main city of the country with the name of that country. The Pal dynasty described themselves as Gaureswar, i.e., the king of Gaur [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 123]. In other words, Gaur could be Pandua, Rajmahal or Tanda too. Some of the foreigners described it as Laknauti or Gaur-Laknauti,

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succeeded it [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 4]. Very little of pre-1204 Gaur remains, excepting some non-Muslim names: Sagar Dighi, Rambhita, Ballalbari, and the practice of worshipping the patron saint, Goureswari Devi [Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 27].

Bikrampur, Chandradwip & Lalmai-Moinamati

An important urban centre of Banga, Bikrampur had been known long before Laxman Sen, the last of the Sen Kings, took shelter in that town after being thrown out of Gaur by Bakhtiar Khilji [Ray, Aniruddha, 1998: 26]. Many of the old, copper, gift deeds of that period had their origin in that city, and the spread of such plates over a large area of Banga and Radha indicates its dominating role in that period [Morrison, 1969 : 4-9]. In fact, from 6th century onwards, there were more copper plates of Bengal with origin in Bikrampur, than in Magadh under Gupta dynasty [Morrison, B.L, 1969: 4]. It was the seat of many kings, particularly of the Burman kings.[30] As Pundrabardhan was the largest city in the north, Bikrampur was the largest in Eastern Bengal [Ray, Nihar Ranjan,1993: 305]. Located near Dhaka, this settlement also played a leading role during the British colonial period as a budding ground of the incipient middle class. One of its most illustrious sons was Srigyan Atish Dipankar, who was born in 980 AD in a royal family, latter became Buddhist monk, and was the first to cross over to Tibet in order to preach Budhhism [Ray, Nihar Ranjan,1993: 595]. Despite its obvious historical importance, Bikrampur does not carry the aura of Punbardhan or Tamralipta in the historical studies, for reasons not known to the author.

Chandradwip, located in the Barisal area near the coast, was another major urban centre of eastern (Banga) and coastal (Samatat) Bengal, which was ruled by the Buddhist Chandra kings - Purnachandra, Subarnachandra, Troilokyachandra, Srichandra [Ray, Nihar Ranjan,1993: 389-390; Hunter, Vol. V: 70].
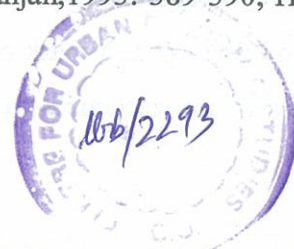
Lalmai in Comilla area was probably the third major urban centre in the eastern part of Bengal, and was a part of a bigger regional agglomeration that also included Harikel and Moinamati. The ruins were accidentally discovered during the Second World War, and revealed many, more than twenty mounds containing Buddhist relics of *Stup*s, monasteries and shrines [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 10].

Other smaller towns

Our account so far does not indicate the role of the towns that were smaller in size, and probably worked below district or sub-divisional (*bhukti* or *mandal)* levels of administration. Much information about these is found from the ruins. Some of the small cities were planned and well laid out, but some others just grew. Many of them were fortified, e.g., Chandraketugarh [Ghosh, A, 1973: 63-33]. We are yet to find ruins of a city that comes anywhere near Pompei in its plan, architecture and beauty.

Ruins have also been found in Diahr, on the bank of the Darukeswar river, near Bishnupur, in district Birbhum, which cover 15-20 acres or 8 hectares, that have revealed the use of iron and Sunga and Kusana pottery, stone beads, terracota objects, cast copper and silver coins. It seems that that this urban centre was abandoned after the second century AD [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 219; Sharma, R.S., 1987: 58-59].

The ruins of Pokharna in Bankura district cover about one square mile. This must have been an important settlement once upon a time [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 219; Sharma, R.S., 1987: 58-59]. It was probably identical with Pushkarana, mentioned in the Susnia Hill inscriptions of Chandravarmana [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 179-180].

The area near the old course of the river Brahmaputra and its confluence with the river Meghna, near Narasingdi in modern Bangladesh, has yielded thousands of silver punch-mark coins and semi-precious stone heads, indicating that it was a major settlement in the third century BC. It is being inferred that

the area was a major trade centre which was linked with Assam, South East Asia and as far as Rome [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 217].

Chandraketugarh

Chandraketugarh ruins at Berachampa, North 24 Parganas, were first surveyed by A.H. Longhurst, in 1906-07. He found a rising mound of broken brick, earth and debris, overgrown with grass and jungle, located at 30 feet above the ground at its highest, some trace of a brick wall, the image of *garuda* from some broken pottery pieces, and some indication that perhaps it was once upon a time a Buddhist *Stup* [Goswami, Niranjan, 1994: 6-7]. Further excavation, on the banks of a dried up course of river, named Vidyadhari, revealed that the fortified area covered one square miles, protected by a rampart. The ruins gave evidence of houses made of mud, bamboo and timber, some terracotta ring wells, and drain pipes [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997:218; Chatopadhyay, Brajadualal, 1994a: 175-177].

Habitation started here with the NBP ware, which occur along with silver and copper punch mark coins, and stone and terracota beads. The Sunga and Kusan phases show house-complexes of rammed *surkhi* floor with wattle and daub walls, tile roofs, grain storage rooms and terracotta ring wells. Ivory objects, copper punch mark coins with ship motif appear along with a brick temple, a Surya plate and a bust of Vishnu in sandstone [Sharma, R.S., 1987: 57-58]. Some scholars believe that Chandraketugarh was the Genga of Ptolemy, though there is no hard evidence in favour of this view. However, excavation work is yet to be properly done in this site; only further work can establish or refute this claim [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 177].

Some other Sites

The ruins near Mangalkot in Burdwan, spread on the bank of river Kunur, near its confluence with river Ajay, cover about 30-40 hectares. The most important mound - Vikramadityer Dhibi - has revealed extensive burnt

brick structure from years earlier than the Gupta period [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 219]. The settlements here had a long antiquity, and was a continuation of the culture of the Ganga valley, in terms of coins, terracotta and pottery, extending from Karnasuvarna to Tamralipta, on the east of Bhagirathi. It also contains thick deposits of charred rice, indicating its agricultural base [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 180]. Kotasur, on the bank of the Mayurakshi river in Birbhum, had a mud fortification wall, 1 kilometer in circuit.

One finds names of other towns and ports that are mentioned in inscriptions but have not been identified at the ground level from the ruins. One such town, a port town, was Vangasagara- Sambhandariyaka, which was mentioned in a Chandra dynasty inscription of the 10th century, and which was probably located near Dhaka. Its urban character is revealed by its description Sambhandariyaka, which meant a 'proper store house'. Its location must have been not far from Bikrampur, from which the plate had been issued., and Sabar, 15 miles away from Dhaka, where it had been found. Vanga-Sagara meant somewhere near the coastline of Banga; it was probably a name of Sabar. This copper plate underlined the maritime connections of this area [Chakravarti, Ranabir, 1996, 558-565]. Devaparvata, located in Mainamati-Lalmai area of Comilla, was another riverine port of east Bengal, along the bank of Kshirode river, that figures in another copper plate inscription. It was even a jayaskandhavara, a victory camp, at the time of Troilokyachandra, Srichandra's father, located at Samatata. After Sri Chandra's accession, Vikrampura, at the heart of Vanga, became the jayaskandhavara, or seat of power of the Chandras, in place of Devaparvata. Sabar, near Vikrampura came to prominence again, after the 6th century, as a riverine port [Chakravarti, Ranabir, 1996: 566-568].

V. City Architecture

By all accounts very little of the ruins of city architecture remains till today. What remains, shows that Bengal towns were poor in architecture. One

major reason, why so little has been found so far is that the material with which these were built was weak - consisting of bamboo, wood, and thatched roofs. Work on stone, allowing for some stray exceptions, was conspicuous by its absence.[31] Of the hundreds of *Bihars* and *Stups* and *Deva* temples mentioned by the Chinese travellers, nearly all, excepting a few in Paharpur, Rajsahi and Bankura, have disappeared without trace.[32] What remain - whether of the highly acclaimed old Buddhist monastery of Somepur, a brick *Stup* at Paharpur, Rajsahi, the *Stup* at Bahalura, Bankura, the temples of Paharpur and other places of the pre-1204 period, [Saraswati, S.K., 1971: 486-493] or the ruins of Chandraketugarh - bear no comparison with the temple art and architecture of Orissa, Kanchi or Khajuraoh [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 673-674, 681, 685-688; Eaton, R.M, 1993: 12].

What could have happened to the monasteries and *Stups* detailed by the Chinese travellers? There was even reference in one verse, written at the time of Rajyapala, to a temple, that was as 'high as mountain peak' or as 'obstructing the very course of the sun with its lofty and imposing towers capped by golden *kalasas*' [Saraswati, S K, 1971: 480]. This was more likely to be a product of the fertile imagination of the poet, because references to massive architecture are conspicuous by their absence in the folk literature. Rain could not be the explanation, because massive architecture survives heavier rain in some other parts of the world, e.g., Borobudor in Jog-Jakarta,Java. For the same reason, tropical weather alone could not be a serious explanation for the absence of large-scale architecture. It is true that vandalism, conversion - of *Stups* into temples and temples into mosques - and the use of building material from ruins for constructing new buildings in Calcutta, Murshidabad, and Gaur itself, were important explanations for their virtual absence [Ray, Anirudha, 1986: xviii; Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 31]. But the main explanation lay in their lack of use of

durable material, such as stone, which could withstand the ravages of centuries [Saraswati, S K, 1971: 481-482].

This, again, begs the question, why stone was not used. Until a few decades ago the hope was that, with further excavation, sooner or latter stone sculpture would be found. However, the discovery of one stone plaque at Mangalkot, or another, a stone image of Buddha from Mainamati, can not hide "the almost total absence of stone sculptures in early sites" as "merely accidental" [Sengupta, Gautam, 1996: 294; Roy, Nihar Ranjan: 685]. One weak explanation is that most of Bengal, being alluvial plain, is bereft of stone; this being available only near Rajmahal and the northern fringes on the slopes of Himalayas.

The stronger explanation is that Bengal did not have a strong, and centralised rule, continuing for a very long time, with a large enough territorial coverage and strong military might. Such ruler could procure the stones from distant areas and mobilise massive labour power, for decades, to build structures similar to those of Khajuraho, Konarak, or Meenakshi temples. This is not to speak of the impressive pyramids in Giza and Saquara, located in alluvial Egypt and desert fringes along Nile bearing no stone but having powerful rulers presiding over centralised administration, who brought stones from a very long distance.

Obviously, the Pals continued for four centuries, long enough for the construction of many such monuments, but they were probably not as powerful as our historians portray them to be. Leaving aside the rule of Dharmapal, apart from Magadh, their control over territories outside Bengal was at best tenuous, meaning no more than formal allegiance by kings who ruled practically independently. Within Bengal also, the fiat of the Pals did not extend to the eastern and coastal parts, and, in the north and west, they were contend to leave the administration in the hands of powerful Mahasamantas. Rampal, when fighting the Kaivartya king, Bhim, had to beg these regional samantas for support, and to construct a confederacy of chiefs to wrest state power. The Sen

kings were probably more deeply entrenched in power in the territories they controlled, but did not rule long enough to produce masterly architecture.

In absence of stone, terracotta emerged as the natural medium of art in clay. Beginning with votive offerings representing magical images in the pre-historic period to more sophisticated rendering of mother goddesses or *yakshis* in more modern times, terracotta figures have been found in all parts of Bengal. The remarkable uniformity of these objects all over Bengal – whether Mahasthan, Chandraketugarh or Tamralipta - and a large part of India, particularly the Kushna-Sunga terracottas, probably indicate that these were widely traded after their manufacture in centralized workshops. A large number of them, found in various archaeological sites, were individual figures, mostly from the upper class, some being foreigners. Some were mask-like grotesque busts and faces. Then there were various types of cult images, and narration of stories, of Ramayana in particular, by temple terracotta [Ray, Amita, 1996: 277-292].

VI. Conclusions

Rural-Urban divide

The impression one gets from various accounts is that, in those days, rural and urban were not seen as separate and separable identities. The city, along with the adjacent countryside, from which it drew food and other supplies, was probably a single economic unit. Villages flowed into towns as easily as towns extended to the villages. The territorial division was blurred, no one probably knew where a town ended and the countryside began. One does not know what "contemporary perceptions regarding the differential characters and typologies of the settlements" were. Most probably, *grama* and *pura/nagara*, "were two opposite points on a continuum" [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 162- 182].

From the details of land grants it was sometimes possible to identify a town. Unfortunately, even when epigraphic records mention a city, its chronology of growth is not mentioned. The *puras* and *nagaras* had industries and commercial activities, while *bastu*, *kshetra* and *gochara* (pasture) distinctions indicated the pattern of village land use. Only from the early ninth century one hears of more fully developed urban centres in some parts of India with fair, religious activities, commercial activities around ports and bestowal of urban status on rural settlements. One can infer that the separation of town from village never took place in ancient India [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 162-182].

On balance, these look similar to the city-states that emerged in Sub-Saharan Africa in the early part of the next, second, millennium, e.g., Kano, Kaduna, and Timbaktu. These were located in the savannah land between the great Sahara desert and the dense tropical forests in the south. In the latter, the small scale, rural, economy was mainly based on agriculture, embroidered by a variety of crafts. But where the difference lies with those African cities is in the importance of trade. Where the Savannah cities of Africa acted as a conduit through which the tropical forest products reached the Mediterranean coast towns across Sahara, the cities in pre-1204 Bengal, along with their adjacent rural areas, had a self-contained, largely autarchic, existence.

Trade: decay and growth in Bengal

There was, indeed, a time in Bengal too, when trade flourished and the merchants were a very prominent urban class. But we have also noted that, this period was followed by one where trade declined and merchants lost their status. If some of the major towns continued to flourish even after this, that was largely based on the agricultural surplus derived from the countryside and not on the basis of commerce. The very character of these towns had changed by then, by the replacement of commerce by bureaucratic control, by the substitution of merchants by officials.

It seems that Bengal's urban decay more or less coincided with the urban decline at the All India level, from 6th century onwards. All the symptoms of decay at the national level were in evidence in the Bengal level too - such as low circulation of money, vanishing gold and silver coins, wide use of cowries as *kapardakas* for exchange, diminishing importance of trade, the loss of status of the merchants, rise of the bureaucracy, decline in the city autonomy and virtual disappearance of guilds, and rise in ruralisation of the economy and the society.

The shortage of metallic coins had a severe impact on Bengal, which had no known source of gold or silver, though some copper was produced in the Chotanagpur plateau. Small village level transactions were settled by cowries, and a large part of that too had to be imported [Roy, Nihar Ranjan: 161, 196-197]. In his travelogue, Ibn Battuta, the great traveller from Morocco, talked about a heavy demand for cowries of Maldives in Bengal, which was used as money for settling small economic transactions - the rate being 40000 cowries for one gold *dinar*. The Bengali traders usually settled their account with rice [Battuta, Ibn, 1929: 243, 249].

At some point in the first half of the first century, merchants were well organised; particularly when Budhgupta was operating in Rangamati. They even had some sort of a rudimentary representative municipal government consisting of five people - two from government, others representing merchants, artisans and traders, and they, as a class, dominated the society [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 361]. We just do not know in which parts of Bengal such rudimentary municipal form arose and continued for how long, or, even, how hard the evidence is what corroborates their existence at that point of time. According to Ray, the merchants were dominant between 5th and 8th century, but from the 8th century the country fell back on agriculture.

We definitely know, the rank and the status of the merchants went on a decline as trading slumped from 8th century onwards, culminating in the demotion of the *baniks* to a lowly position in caste hierarchy at the time of

Ballal Sen [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 274-277]. The fact that their caste rank was, and could be, brought down, whatever the reason, was an indication of their diminishing importance in the society. Despite the predominance of agriculture, and the low level of importance of trade, even in that period, there is some evidence of high development in crafts that fashioned diamond, ivory, iron or pottery were known; iron deposits being located in western Rahr (Radha) areas [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 144-151]. Bengal textiles were known for their quality.[33] In other words, there was some broad division of labour between agricultural and craft; the former located in predominantly rural areas and the latter in predominantly urban areas.

Some scholars have questioned the applicability of the 'urban decay' hypothesis in Bengal' According to them, Bengal experienced accelerated urbanisation from the Gupta period onwards [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994a: 183]. The fact is that both large scale Aryanisation and urbanisation began in Bengal during the Gupta dynasty, when decay had set in in the rest of the country. But most of the impact of the decay was felt, for reasons given above, after 6th century, both in India and in Bengal, after the discovery of silk worm cultivation in Byzantine and a series of invasions from the Northwest.

Class Formation in the cities

In this part, we have attempted to focus on the growth of the cities, as an outcome of the processes of state and class formation. Cities were also seen as evidence of a new social division labour, being distinct from the villages in terms of their functions and having some classes that had no rural parallel. While a hierarchy of parasitic feudatories sitting on the back of the agricultural producers dominated the rural scene, merchants, officials and artisans were the key players in the cities. The specialisation worked further when commerce and industry were separated, the activities of the trader and the artisan were no longer combined into one individual or family. The artisans had their guilds, a

representative organisation, which protected the interests of the members against the state, the other influential sections, the purchasers, merchants, the officials, as also the unorganised rubble a part of which also worked as their journeymen. A new urban rich class (or classes) was in evidence in the varied and elaborate, artistic and high-valued objects that were in demand in the towns.

The autonomy of the town declined as monarchy grew and consolidated itself, until a stage was reached when the autonomous institutions were, more or less throttled, bypassed, or pushed to oblivion, while the officials became all powerful. The merchants lost their glory, after the 6th century, as trade shrank, money in circulation fell, cowries became the medium of exchange. Reasons for the urban decay are a matter controversy- how much of it was due to the collapse of the Roman empire, a succession of invasions from the north-west of India, or a consequence of the growth of feudalism. Or was it itself a cause for the growth of feudalism? Some even ask, was there indeed an urban decay? Some would identify this decline of urban areas with that of Buddhism, an urban religion of merchants, trades and artisans. These and some other issues have been discussed in detail in Section II, at the All India level, that sets the background for a more specific discussion of urbanisation in Bengal in following sections.

Urbanisation arrived in Bengal several centuries behind Bihar and many other parts of northern and central India. During the Maurya period there were references to Tamralipta as a port in the Greek documents, and to Pundrabardhan in Arthasastra and other documents; the latter being a feudatory of the Mauryas. The major expansion took place during the Gupta period, in the early years of the first millennium AD. Section III describes, on the basis of copper plates inscribing land grants, the pattern of urbanisation that developed, with several clusters. North Bengal with Pundrabardhan was the leading town in the region, followed by the area along the Bhagirathi river, on the western side of Bengal, with Bardhama as its core. But the most important urban centre in the whole of Bengal was Vikrampura in east-central Bengal, with Bakla-

Chandradwip on its west and Rangamati-Lalmai on its east. Reference to Chittagong and its surrounding islands and areas began appearing in Arab and other documents.

The period up to 1204, discussed in Sections III and IV, was one where, along with states and classes, cities were being formed in Bengal. These were small entities, by today's standards, and were not clearly demarcated from the villages around them. But the autonomy the cities enjoyed declined as the monarchs consolidated their powers. This is confirmed by evidence collected from copper plate inscriptions. Eventually, the urban decay set in in Bengal too, and village-based feudalism grew, as rural settlements became stationary and more of forests were cleared to create new settlements. One of the important questions posed in this study is - why architectural masterpieces were conspicuous by their absence? Several possible explanations have been stated including the one that the use of stone was rare, which also was explained by a lack of centralised authority that could mobilise surpluses and man power for procuring stone from a distance and establishing massive edifices.

Part II: Turk – Afghan Period

I. INTRODUCTION

While a decline in trade characterised the earlier period, particularly since the sixth century, the take over of Bengal by Turko-Afghans brought about significant increases in trade prospects in two ways. First, what was one of the main reasons for the decline - the interruption caused to traditional sea and land trade by the Arab take over of the area around Gulf – now became a factor in promoting trade. The new rulers, sharing the same religion, found it easier to deal with the traders from Arabia, who had been in control of the waters around India within one hundred years of the death of the Pygambar. Through them trade ties were established with countries from the Indonesian

archipelago in the east and the Gulf and the East African ports in the west. Secondly, it established a link between Bengal and Delhi and made Bengal more of a part of the overall Indian reality than it was hitherto. Trade that carried goods by boat, along the river Ganga, to far away markets in northern and western India expanded, as also that around the coastline and across the mountains by silk route to reach the markets in Europe.

This expanded trade opportunity brought a new set of port towns to the fore. Gaur, now called Gaur-Laknauti or Laknauti, taking advantage of its location near the point where Ganga gets divided between Padma and Bhagirathi, emerged as an import riverine port for carrying goods to the Indian interior. At the other end, the major coastal port, Chittagong, flourished with growing Arab contact. Along with these two, emerged two major ports on the east (Sonargaon) and the west (Saptagram), that maintained regular contact between the primarily sea trade through Chittagong and the primarily riverine trade through Gaur.

Gaur, Chittagong, Sonargaon and Saptagram, these four trade centres formed a unique quadrangle of trade and political power. Towards the end of this period Dhaka emerged, as a substitute for Sonargaon, which was located nearby. Saptagram acted as the feeder port of Gaur, and later, after Portuguese arrival, also as a feeder of Chittagong.

Trade brought revenue to the state, and also, by boosting the economy, created greater opportunities for revenue generation. While the life in the town was dominated by the migrant ruling class, trade brought a wide variety of people from all corners of the country, Gujaratis, Marwaris, Parsis, Khetris, and also those from outside, such as the Armenians and the Greeks. The city economy was no longer isolated and autarchic and the merchants were no longer a class that could be ignored by the powers that be.

The state was also much stronger and coercive as an entity. All the accounts on cities, whether by foreign travellers or others, gave details of the military prowess of the city: the numbers of infantrymen and cavalry, as also of

war-elephants and, in later years, of guns. Compared with the pre-1204 set, these cities were more likely to be anything between rudimentary fortifications to major forts. The ruling class lived within the city perimeters, and from there, spread out, when needed, to quell rebellion in the countryside or to ensure better extraction of surplus from the rural areas. One of the primary functions of many of these towns was as army camps, but that in turn, created demand for goods for the consumption of soldiers and brought traders and their workers to the towns to satisfy that need. The role of the city, for defence and for trading, now surpassed other functions.

As a consequence, the towns and cities emerged as entities that were clearly demarcated, territorially and economically, from the surrounding villages. While the erstwhile ruling class had strong rural ties and many of them were self-cultivators too, the new ruling class had no such link with land. Villages were there for the collection of revenue, and, thus, for sustaining their ostentatious life style. City and village were no longer two essential parts of the unity, but distinct entities with a clear division of labour between them.

The migrant ruling class and its hangers on brought with them many technical skills, and gave rise to a certain range of urban crafts that were hitherto unknown, e.g., stitching and tailoring, masonry. However, there was no evidence of a guild system like what prevailed until the 6th century or in Europe in the middle ages. Crafts were now identified with castes, in cases of both Hindus and Muslims. Such crafts eventually percolated down to the villages, but the mode of training and apprenticeship followed more or less traditional relationships between the *guru* and the *chela*, imposing strict loyalty, and almost servile obligations, on the part of the latter; until of course, the *chela* married his daughter, graduated into an independent craftsman himself, and, after becoming a senior craftsman, in turn, treated his own apprentices as abominably as his *guru*. More possibly, these crafts remained an integral part of the family economy, as distinct from tribal forest economy or village communities. This, again, was a new development.

The separation of city from village, the primacy of military and trading functions, the emergence of crafts, are among the major features of urban Bengal during that period. No less significant was the repeated reference to 'slaves' and 'eunuchs' in various accounts relating to Bengal. Slavery, even if it was existent earlier, was a very minor element in the totality. Now slaves, many of them brought from Ethiopia to work as guards of the palace and of the rich households, particularly to guard the wives of merchants away in foreign land, became a feature of urban life. As far as it could be established, it was mainly 'chattel slavery', the slave being a sort of life-time personal servant, but he also had some rights and some autonomy with regard to his own life.

A major function of an important urban-trading centre was minting of coins. During the period between the capture of Bengal by Bhaktiar Khilji in 1204 and the Mogol take over in 1575, the inscriptions in coins list the following 23 as mint towns: Lakhnauti, Firuzabad, Satgaon, Sonargaon, Muazzamabad, Share-Nau, Ghiyaspur, Fathabad, Husainabad, Khalifatabad, Muzaffarabad, Chatgaon, Mahmudabad, Muhammadabad, Arkan, Tanda, Rohtaspur, Jannatabad, Nasratabad, Barbakabad, Awwalistan, Chandrabad, Bang. Not all of these were distinct entities, and the same town was known in the records by more than one name. For example, Share-nau meant new city, which could be Pandua in the outskirts of old Gaur, and Firuzabad was also another name of Pandua [Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 3; Dutt, Chinmoy, 1986: xxvi]. In many cases coins were issued for ceremonial purposes, e.g., the victory in a memorable battle, and less for economic transactions.[34]

II. The Trading Quadrangle

Trading was mainly undertaken by four major cities of the period. These together formed a quadrangle. Gaur was the most important of them all, being also the capital city. We begin with an account of Gaur and its associated cities, to be followed by the accounts of the other three major cities - ports.

Gaur

    As we have noted already, in the context of pre-1204 urbanisation in Bengal, the word 'Gaur' meant, in many cases, both the country and its capital according to many travellers, in line with an established Arab custom [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 141n]. As country it was also called Gaur-Bangla or simply Bangla, and the latter was spelt as diversely as there were foreign travellers - as Banghelle, Bangala, Benguala and so on.[35] So, some times, more often than not, the city called Gaur also came to be described by those names, and that led to serious problems of identification of localities mentioned in their accounts. Gaur figured in Catalan map of 1375 as the 'city of Bangala', and for this reason was widely known by this name among the foreign travellers [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 141n]. Things described in relation to Gaur might have been occurring in Pandua and Tanda, the adjacent cities, which were also known as Gaur during the brief periods these acted as capital.

    Saufa, the Portuguese historian, knew what the name was. He said: "The principal city *Gauro* seated on the Banks of *Ganges*, three leagues in length, containing one million and two hundred thousand families, and well fortified; along the streets, which are wide and straight, Rows of Trees to shade the People, which sometimes is in such numbers that some are trod to death." [Soufa, Manuel de Faria Y, 1694: 416-417]. While he made no mistake about the name of the city, his estimate of its population went completely out of gear. A figure of 1.2 million families in the population, with 5 as the average number in a family, would give a minimum figure of 6 million people, which was perhaps more than the entire population of the country at that time. Without taking these figures seriously, one can say that he was making a valid point, that Gaur was a large city.

    He also knew of the locations of other major towns: "On the mouth of Ganges to the east is the city of Chatigam, to the west is Satigam. Bengala is divided by Ganges into two parts. To the west of the river is Cospetir" [what is

that? -BD]. He also noted that the plains of Bengal were overflowed by the river Ganges, as the river Nile overflowed Egypt.

Barbossa described the city as Bangala: "Going well into the north a right great city of the Moors, which they call Bangala". Then he added that it was "a very excellent sea-haven; it has its own independent Moorish King. The inhabitants thereof are white men, well-built; and there dwell there as well strangers from many lands, such as Arabs, Persians, Abexis [Abyssinia? – BD] and Indians. And this reason that this land is large, fruitful, and healthy. All of these are great merchants and they possess great ships after the fashion of Meca" [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 135-142].

There are some obvious inaccuracies in this account. How can Gaur, located deep inland, be an "excellent sea haven"? Was he referring to some other town such as Saptagram[36] or Sonargaon? Or even Chittagong, but in this case how it could tally with the earlier statement: "going well into the north"? Was it a simple slip, and he meant something else? Further, who these 'white Men' were? Could they be the Armenian traders, or fresh arrival of Iranians or Afghans? These questions can never be satisfactorily resolved.

It did not escape his notice that the city population was highly differentiated, and the ruling elite dressed differently from the common masses: "The respectable Moors walk about clad in white cotton smocks, very thin, which come down to their ankles, and beneath these they have girdles of cloth, and over them silk scarves, they carry in their girdles daggers garnished with silver and gold, according to the rank of the person carrying them; on their finger many rings set with rich jewels, and cotton turbans on their heads. They are luxurious, eat well and spend freely, and have many other extravagancies as well." In contrast, the lower castes of this town "wear short white shifts, which come halfway down their thighs." [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 148].

He was impressed that people took bath regularly, and not so impressed that they practised polygamy; that "every one has three or four wives or as many as they can maintain." Festivities, drinking mainly of palm-sugar, and

other related activities took their time. In those festivities he observed "cunning performers on musical instruments of diverse kinds" [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 148].

The name Gaur Bangala appears in the list of four gold mint towns of the empire, in the Ain-I-Akbari of Abul Fazl [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 141n]. Vsarthema noted that, in 1537, the population of Gaur was of 1.2 million families, more or less repeating the figure of Barbossa. He observed that the environment of Gaur was far from healthy. The capital of Bengal had to be shifted to nearby Tanda, a few miles up the river, because of what he described as 'bad air' [Vartthema, Ludovico Di, 1863: 211].

By the time Vartthema visited the city, no part of it had spread less than four and half miles, some 12 miles further, from the river [Vartthema, Ludovico Di, 1863: 211]. But he was highly impressed by it: "we left this city, which I believe is the best in the world, that is, for living in. In which city the kinds of stuffs you have heard of before are not woven by women, but the men weave them" [Vartthema, Ludovico Di, 1863: 214]. In other part of his book Vartthema added: "The city was one of the best that I had hitherro seen, and has a great realm. Moor ruler has 200,000 men on foot and horseback [Vartthema, Ludovico Di, 1863: 211].[37]

De Barros, the Portuguese traveller, described Gaur as a heavily crowded town of 200000 people, which is likely to be nearer the truth. The city had wide straight roads and shops on both sides. Le Blanc, the French traveller whose book was published in the middle of seventeenth century but was based on his experience from 1567, noted many foreign merchants, including Greeks, Abyssinians, Russian, Turks, Moors, Jews, Chinese, and Georgian. But, Le Blanc described it as a 'Moorish town' and was more impressed by Khambaj and Kalikut, cities in other parts of India. He counted 40000 'hearths' in the town and added, "the king had frequently made it his residence in a beautiful and well-united palace built of bricks with artificial gardens." He noted that water was around three meters height around the city. One could buy a young

slave for a low price. Contrary to many other accounts, Le Blanc praised Bengal weather [Ray, Aniruddha, 1992: 63, 84; Ray, Aniruddha, 1986: xvii-xviii; Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 29].

Buchanan-Hamilton did not agree with this story that pestilence was followed by the desertion of the town, and said that, as late as in 1639, Prince Suja Shah, Governor, added buildings to the city, though he shifted the capital to Rajmahal. Further, there were reports that the ruins of this once imposing town had been taken as query for the brick-built houses of the nearby towns and the palace of Murshidabad; and even the commercial residency of the East India Company, and little care was taken even to protect its mosques. Buchanan Hamilton found in the ruins a square of 400 yards surrounded by ditches. It was like the quadrant of a circle with a radius of 6000 yards. The citadel, when in its full glory, on the bank of Bhagirathi, was one mile in length in North-South direction, and 600-800 yards broad. The city itself was 13 square miles in size and was thickly populated. The ruins also contained Sagar Dighi, 'the most celebrated artificial piece of water in Bengal', a Hindu structure [Hunter, W.W., Vol. VII: 54-56; Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 31].

Tome Pires had a modest view about the capital of Bengal: 40000 people, living mostly in palm leaf huts, though the king's abode was well built [Pires, Tome, 1944: 90].

Pandua

Like Tanda after it, the name Gaur was often applied to Pandua, not far from Laknauti-Gaur. It was Bengals' capital for quite some time, from 1352, when Shams Al din Iliyas Shah declared independence from Delhi until it was shifted to Tanda [Eaton, Richrad M, 1993: 40]. All the three coins of Ilias Shah and Sikandar Shah discovered so far originated in 'Share-now', the new city, which is how Pandua was described at that time [Biswas, Dilip Kumar & Amitava Bhattacharya, 1993: 384]. It is located at a distance of 20 miles from Gaur, and six miles from Malda. At one stage in its history the town was located

on the northern bank of the river Bhagirathi, near its confluence with the Mahananda river, only three miles away from the Adina mosque. The river linked it with Sonargaon in East Bengal [Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: xiv]. Also known as Firozabad, five monarchs ruled from here. It was covered with thick jungle, which was one of the reasons for locating the capital here, hidden from the prying eyes of the raiding Mogols. The period when Pandua was capital was one of the best in the pre-Mogol period, particularly at the time of the Hussain Sahi dynasty, when art and literature flourished (1493-1519 and 1519-32). It was the seat of Daud Khan, the last independent king of Bengal, who fought with, and was killed by, the Mogols. When Munim Khan, the victorious Mogol general, took over in 1575, and transferred the capital from Tanda to Gaur-Laknauti, a pestilence broke out, killing many of his soldiers. The capital was then shifted back to Tanda since when Gaur-Lakhnauti remained deserted.

Pandua contains the 500-year old, largest architectural structure in Bengal, Adina mosque. It is said, that when Pandua was made capital, a large part of its bricks were taken from old, including Hindu, ruins, and that explains why Pandua ruins, including the Adina Mosque, contain Hindu sculpture [Hunter, W.W., Vol. VII: 51-59]. Sikandar Shah completed the Adina mosque in 1375, and adapted late Pal-Sen art forms in its architecture. Measuring 565 feet by 317 feet, with an immense courtyard of 445 by 168 feet, surrounded by a screen of arches and 370 domed bays, this was the largest mosque ever built in the Indian subcontinent [Roy, Nirod Bhusan, 1973: 112-113; Eaton, R.M, 1993; Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 113-131].

Ma Huan, traveller from China, who visited Chittagong and Sonargaon, also visited "the country of Pang-ko-la" [Bengal -BD] and mentioned a major urban centre, a walled city that he claimed to be its capital. Though he did not name the capital, Feng Fei Shin, another Chinese traveller, who visited Bengal during 1412-1414 AD and again during 1415-1418, described it as Pan-tu-wa, probably a distortion of Pandua. Since there were two Panduas at that time, it is not clear which one he was referring to. Was it Pandua, near Gaur, or was it

Pandua not very far from the Hooghly port that was a major urban centre too, located in the southwest part of Bengal. Of the two, the Pandua of Malda is the more likely candidate because it was indeed the capital of Bengal for some time, and also because of reference to silk production in his account.

But the location suggested by Ma Huan - south west of Sonargaon - points to the one located at the present day Hooghly district, unless he moved south-west by Meghna river to reach the confluence with Ganga, and then moved north-west along Ganga (which is not mentioned) to reach the Pandua of Gaur [Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-Lan, 1970: 159-160]. The Pandua of Hooghly had a fort with a wall, a 120 feet tower, and a trench that was five miles in circumference, and despite ravages of weather, still contains some traces of the past glory [Hunter, W.W., 1876, Vol. III: 312].

In the capital, wherever it was located, the market streets were lined with a variety of shops - "bathing establishments, wine-shops, food-shops, sweetmeat-shops, and other such shops. They maintained a hierarchy of officials, and the army controlled the rations, and the city also had physicians, diviners, astrologers and experts in every art and craft." [Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-Lan, 1970: 1 Ma Huan, Ying-Yai Sheng -Lan, 1970: 60].

Tanda

The capital was shifted to Tanda, (sometimes spelt as Tandan or Tonda or Tangra), near Gaur, down the river, in 1564, when the environment was severely degraded in Gaur [Hunter, W.W., Vol. VII: 64]. Fitch, the first British traveller, however, gave another reason for the shift of the capital: the change in the course of the river [Foster, William, 1921: 24]. Frequent changes in the course of the river left large pools of water in the old channel, which probably led to the growth of mosquitoes. Double embankment was erected to protect the city against drain water moving back into the city [Sarkar, Jadunath, 1973: 144]. Munim Khan transferred the capital from Tanda to Gaur, in 1575, but it was soon reverted to Tanda as a pestillence broke out in the old capital. In 1595,

capital was transferred to Rajmahal on the other side of the river, which led to Tanda's losing importance in the political map of India. From 1612, capital was shifted again to Dhaka. Still, the fact that Tanda retained some importance even in 1660 is known when Suja Shah, the rebel prince, hard pressed by the Emperor's army, retreated from Rajmahal to Tanda and restored its fortification. But, after Shah Suja's retreat and the victory of Mir Jumla, the latter, as Governor, transferred the capital back to Dhaka; and Tanda was destroyed by a flood in 1826 [Hunter, W.W., Vol. VII: 64-65; Khan, Abid Ali, 1986: 4].

Fitch was quite impressed by Tanda as a city: "Tanda standeth from the river Ganges a league, because in times past the river, flowing over the bankes, in time of raine did drowne the countrey and many villages, and so they do remaine. And the old way, which the river Ganges was wont to run, remaineth drie, which is the occasion that the citie doeth stand so farre from the water. From Agra downe the river Jemena, and down the river Ganges, I was five moneths comming to Bengala; but it may be sailed in much shorter time." He also noted: "Great trade and traffique is here of cotton and of cloth of cotton.... It standeth in the country of Bengala. Here may be tigers, wild bufs and a great store of wilde foule" [Foster, William, 1921: 24].

Chittagong

Chittagong was, from the very early days, the major sea-port of Bengal. It was not always under the rule of the Bengal kings; for a long time it was under Arakan occupation, until the 1670s, when the Mogol Nawab, Sayestha Khan, after a battle with the king of Arakan, took it over. The Portuguese described it as *porto grande*, the great port, and dominated its life for a large part of the seventeenth century. It also operated as a base from which they made frequent raids in the countryside, along the rivers, for capturing slaves. The area around this great city was known to be infested by pirates.

One of the earliest accounts of the port is given by Battuta, which he described as Sudkawan. There was for a time a great deal of controversy as to

which port Battuta was talking about; even the possibility of Sudakawan being Satagaon was not ruled out. But a close reading of his book would make it clear that he was referring to a coastal town: "The first city in Bengal that we entered was Sudkawan, a large town on the coast of the great sea. Close by it the river Ganges, to which the Hindus go on pilgrimage, and the river Jun [Jamuna-BD] unite and discharge together into the sea. They have a large fleet on the river, with which they make war on the inhabitants of the land of Laknawti." [Battuta, Ibn, 1929: 267-268].

The reference to Ganges obviously meant the river Padma that joined with the river Jamuna in eastern Bengal. The last line underlines the fact that it was not a part of Gaur-Lakhnawti, then the capital of Bengal. This is followed by an account that refers to Sultan Fakr-ad-Din, the first independent ruler of eastern Bengal, which rules out Satgaon as its possible identity [Battuta, Ibn, 1929: 267-268].[38] The only puzzle is that, during the period Battuta was visiting it, Bengal, was not under Sultan Fakruddin. But such historical inaccuracies are a part of tales by foreigners; more so, as Battuta never wrote any thing down during his epic journeys, and dictated his travels, after many years, to the scribes, when he returned to his native Morocco. In fact, the very mention of Sultan Fakr-Uddin suggests that the port city he visited could not be Satgaon, as his rule did not extend to that city.

The name of the port might have originated from Sut-al-Ganga, 'Sut-al' indicating delta [Rahim, M A, 1982, Vol. I: 9-10], indicating an Arab connection. In fact, that had been references to Chittagong even in the earlier Arab literature. The earliest reference to Samandar, the port city in the kingdom of Ruhmi, in Arab geographers' writings, was as: "a large town, commercial and rich, where there are good profits to be made." There were also references to the "cotton stuff" from Chittagong (Ruhmi) in Arab literature from 9th to 12th century [Rahim, M A, 1982, p5; quoted in Tarafdar, M R, 1965: 17]. Ibne Khurdadba (10th century) mentioned Samandar as a port from which rice and (Ghritakumari variety of) woods were procured. Al Idrisi (towards the end of

the 11th century} mentioned Samandar as a more centre of trade and a porsperous big city. It also mentioned that trade in this port was dependent on supplies from Kanuaj (which was then under the Pal kings) and Kashmir. Both of them commented on the proximity of this city from Kamrup (Assam). By all accounts, Samandar was the Chittagong port, and its country was known as Ruhmi[39], which rose to prominence between the delcline of Tamralipta and the formation of the Pal dynasty [Mukherjee, B N, 1982: 67], though Rahim takes Sandwip nearby, and not Chittagong, as Samandar [Rahim, M A, 1982, Vol. I: 32-33].

Ma Huan also visited Chiitagong [Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-Lan, 1970: 159-160]. Frederick, Cesar, 1588 described Chittagong as "the great port of Bengala" [Frederick, Cesar, 1588: 36]. From the early part of the sixteenth century, this port was under the control of the Portuguese, and operated as their base for slave trading operations.

Saptagram

After the decline of Tamralipta, Saptagram emerged as the major port of Western Bengal. The name Saptagram means seven villages and is derived from a story in the *puranas* that one raja of Kanauj had seven sons who lived in Satgaon and were settled in seven villages [Hunter, W.W., Vol. III: 309]. When Gaur ceased to be the capital of Bengal, a part of its trade also was diverted to Saptagram. Located on the river Saraswati, which carried most of the water of the river of Hooghly until the middle of the 16th century, when the later day town of Hooghly was probably no more than a mere collection of huts.

Abul Fazal wrote: "the Ganges after dividing into thousand channels joins the sea at Satgaon." Perhaps sea was nearer at that time. It had a royal mint at the time of Muhammad bin Tughlak, and also coined for the independent kings of the 14th and 15th century. After 1418, the mint fell into disuse, Sher Shah revived it, and it was used in this capacity by his son Islam Shah. However, it stopped minting after the conquest of Akbar [Barbossa,

Duarte, 1518: 140n]. Warwick, a Dutch admiral, noticed, in 1667, that it was a city for great trade of the Portuguese [Hunter, W. W, 1876, Vol. III: 310].

The river decayed in the latter part of the 16th century, as the water of the river now flowed through the Hooghly channel, and its trade was shifted to Hooghly, which in time became one of the largest urban centres of Bengal, the largest until Calcutta was founded. In 1660 Van den Broucke described Satgaon as a village, and by 1870 only 11 huts remained [Hunter, W.W., Vol.1: 361; Campos, J J A, 1919: 21]. As Hunter, W.W. lamented, writing in the 1870s: "Nothing now remains to indicate the former grandeur of the town except a ruined mosque; the present village consists of a few miserable huts." [Hunter, W.W., Vol. III: 308]. Reverend J Long wrote in Calcutta Review and was quote by Hunter: "Satgaon, the royal emporium of Bengal from the time of Pliny down to the arrival of the Portuguese in this country, has now scarcely a memorial of its ancient greatness left."

By the time Cesar Frederick visited Satgaon, already the process of decay has set in. Frederick, having seen the city, paid only a back-handed compliment to it: "The city of Satagan is a reasonable faire citie for a citie of the Moors" [Frederick, Cesar, 1588: 22]. At that time, following the decay of the river Saraswati, Hooghly was emerging from the shadow of Satgaon as one of the two major ports of the Portuguese, "which is the place where the Portugals keep in the country of Bengala, which standeth in 23 degrees of northerly latitude and standeth a league from Satagan" [Foster, William, 1921: 26]. This state of decay is confirmed by the following comment from De Barros: "Satgaon is a great and novel city, though less frequented than Chittagong, on account of the port not being so convenient for the entrance and departure of chips." Purchas states, "a fair cities for a citie of the Moores, and very plentiful, but sometimes subject to Patnaw." [Patna] [Hunter, W.W., Vol. III: 309]. According to *Shahjahannama,* the Portuguese who settled in Hooghly, "drew in a short time all the trade from Satgaon, which soon sunk into ruin." Mogols deepened the present channel of Hooghly, which reduced flow of water to

Satgaon [Hunter, W.W., Vol. III: 309-310]. Though Satgaon was allocated a factory and a customs house by the government, the fact that Frederick, Cesar, 1588 did not mention those in his account probably indicates that, by the time of his visit, in 1565, these had ceased to exist [Campos, J J A, 1919: 50].

Sonargaon

Sonargaon, located near present day Dhaka, was the main centre of the textile trade of Bengal. One of the earliest references to it was in the 1230s, when a king called Danuj Roy, who ruled Sonargaon, met Sultan Balban when he came to Bengal to defeat the rebellion of Togral Khan [Biswas, Dilip Kumar & Amitava Bhattacharya, 1993: 293n; Elliot, vol 3: 116]. It became the capital of the first independent king of eastern Bengal, Fakaruddin Mobarak Shah, in 1338. [Ahmed, Kamaruddin, 1967: xxiii].

Fitch observed that, though many rich people lived in the city "the houses are, as they be in the most part of India, very little, and covered with strawe, and have a few mats round about the walls, and the doore to keepe out the tygers and the foxes." At the time of his visit, Sonargaon was ruled by Isa Khan, one of the *baro bhuniyas* who fought against Emperor Akbar. The rebel, Isa Khan, was helped by the terrain: "for here are so many rivers and islands, that they flee from one to another, whereby his [i.e. Emperor's - BD] horsemen cannot prevaile against them." This was also the time when, like Satgaon, Sonargaon was being replaced by Sripur, which too was visited by Fitch, as the major port of the region [Foster, William, 1921: 28]. Fitch found most of the countryside empty, the wilderness filled with long grasses and animals [Foster, William, 1921: 26].

Sonargaon, by the time Manrique visited it, was two miles inland from Brahmaputra creek. There were only two narrow streets of straw huts, and some brick-built houses, and some evidence of a moat and a gate. The creek, which was the main channel, was silted, probably towards the end of the sixteenth century, almost at the same time when Saptagram died. The city opposite the

river Meghna, six leagues away from Sonargoan, Sripur, that replaced Sonargaon as a major centre for textile production, too was destroyed by its lifeline, Kirtinasa river which swallowed it. Kirtinasha means destroyer of achievements. There was no pretension of architectural grandeur in the city [Hunter, W.W., Vol. V: 71-72; Tarafdar, M R, 1965: 145]

When Fitch went to Sripur, he noted that, Sripur was located "where there is the best and finest cloth made of cotton that is in all India. Great stores of Cotton cloth goeth from hence and much Rice, wherewith they serve all India, Ceilon, Pegu, Malacca, Sumatra and many other places." [Foster, William, 1921, p28].

Part III: Cities built by the Mogols

After the Mogols conclusively took over Bengal in 1576, they built two major cities, both of which, in course of time, became Bengal's capital - Dhaka and Murshidabad. In both the European trading companies, particularly the British and the Dutch, when they arrived in Bengal, had strong influence on their economies, especially the trade in textiles.

Dhaka

The city of Dhaka came into prominence in 1608-1612, when the capital of Bengal shifted from Rajmahal, in the north, to the marshes of Eastern Bengal. The ostensible explanation for this shift, by Islam Khan, was to be nearer the place of rebellions and mutinies [Karim, Abdul, 1964: 9-10]. Given its terrain, with its intricate network of rivers and streams, that made cavalry less effective as an instrument of war, it was thought that the physical location of the capital in that area itself would make the military task easier [Hunter, W.W., Vol. V: 67; Ray, Aniruddha, 1992: 61]. Another reason could be, though never stated publicly, to be nearer the sea and the textile trade. It was located close to

Sonargaon, once a capital of independent Eastern Bengal, but more importantly, the main producing area of the world renowned Dhaka muslin.

Soon a fort was erected and the population expanded to around 200000 [Manrique, Fray Sebastien, 1927: 44-45]. The city was not far from the old city of Bikrampur, and had Narayanganj and Manikganj as two subsidiary trade-centres [Hunter, W.W., Vol. V: 67]. The English as well as the Dutch established factories there [Bowrey, Thomas, 1805: 150]. New migrant flows continued to come and augment the population and labour supply in the city. In the 1660s, at the time of the battle of the Mogols with the king of Arakan on Chittagong, all the Portuguese living in the later were transferred to Dhaka, and were located in what came to be known later as Firingipara [Hunter, W.W., Vol. V: 45]. An important feature of the life in this city was the existence of the 'karkhanas', which produced high quality clothing for the elite.

While Bowrey was eloquent about Dhaka and its buildings, - "magnificent buildings and multitude of inhabitants" [Bowrey, Thomas, 1805: 150], Tavernier was not so pleased with it. Describing it as a "great town, that extends itself only in length", he commented on its linear growth along the river for about two leagues - "there is but one continued row of houses" - and every one coveting to have a house by the river-side. He also noted the flourishing industry for building galleys and other small vessels, but the houses where the carpenters lived were "no more than paltry huts built up with [bamboos], and daubed over with fat earth" [Tavernier, John Baptista, 1684: 55].

Nor those in Dhaka proper were any better, even the palace of the Governor was "a place enclosed with high walls, in the midst whereof is a pitiful house, built only of wood". The Governor himself lived in a tent within a great court of that enclosure. "The Hollanders, finding that their goods were not safe in the ordinary houses of Daca, have built them a very fair house; and the English have another, which is reasonably handsome. The church of the Austin-friars is all of Brick, and is very comely pile." [Tavernier, John Baptista, 1684: 55]. Tavernier was echoing the observation of another foreign traveller

Manucci, who visited Dhaka in 1663 and noticed that it had many inhabitants, but most of the houses were made of straw [Karim, Abdul, 1964: 36].

The city bursted into activities soon after Manucci and Tavernier had departed, under Governor Sayestha Khan, who captured Chittagong and brought the Portuguese to Firinghi Bazar, in the outskirts of Dhaka. His successor, Azam Shah, built the Lalbagh fort. Both of them engaged themselves in construction activities, including those of mosques [Karim, Abdul, 1964: 39]. The importance of the city as a centre for administration waned when Murshid Kuli Khan established Dewani at Murshidabad, in 1704 [Hunter, W.W., Vol. IX: 65] but its importance as a centre of textile production and supply, as a successor city to Sonargaon, continued undiminished.

Murshidabad

Murshid Kuli Khan, following a dispute with the Governor, when he was the favourite Dewan of emperor Aurangzeeb, shifted his centre of revenue administration to Murshidabad, on the bank of the river Bhagirathi, [Hunter, W.W, Vol. IX: 26] in 1704, when it was no more than a small village called Makshudabad [Hunter, W.W, Vol. IX: 65]. When Murshid also became the Governor (Nawab) of the province, in addition to being its Dewan, Murshidabad became the capital of Bengal. The mint was located here as also some of the major business houses, such as the House of Jagat Seth.

Here we do not need to go into various details regarding political developments that eventually led to the battle of Palashi, excepting that quite a few of the Maratha raids of the 1640s brought them to Murshidabad and caused a great deal of dislocation to the life in the capital. Murshidabad's political importance declined with the battle of Palashi, but it formally remained Bengal's capital for some more decades, until the 1790s. Murshidabad also became an important source of textile production and supply, along with the nearby town of Kashimbazar.

It should be noted that the textile trade played an important role in the growth of the urban areas. Though founded by the Mogol emperors, both Dhaka and Murshidabad were indebted to the textile trade controlled by the European companies. With the textile trade booming, a part of the surplus generated from trade and agriculture went to the construction of these two capitals. In both, population grew at a pace unthinkable earlier, largely due to the attraction of the textile trade. The European traders, living in style in segregated areas, also became a part of the landscape.

Part IV: European Trade and Urban Development

The entry of the large, multinational trading companies of European origin, brought about a qualitative change in the pattern of textile trade, by creating a market for the quality textile products, and at the same time brought profound changes in the urban scenario too. Textile trade, under their umbrella, reached a new height, and led to the emergence of many new towns.[40]

Two of these, Dhaka and Murshidabad, had been established by the Mogol rulers themselves. In the establishment of several others, the European traders played an active role - Hooghly by the Portuguese and Calcutta by the British, as also Chandannagore by the French, Chunchurah by the Dutch and Srirampur by the Danes. Some others, while already in existence, rose to prominence because of European trading, such as Kasim Bazar in Murshidabad and Chittagong till the departure of the Portuguese. In all these towns, the main economic activity .was textile trade.

These were the big ones, but a large number of small ones also sprang up in localities around Hooghly. Bator, a minor halt of the ships going to Hooghly, and Thana, a fort nearby, created the complex around which the modern city of Howrah, across the river from Calcutta, was built. Baranagar, now a part of Suburban Calcutta, was once the location of a pig (*baraha*) factory owned by the Dutch [Wilson, C R, 1895: 54]. Many of the towns listed

in Bipradas' Manasa Mangal[41] were later day inclusions by the village *kathaks* or storytellers, but were indications of the way urban areas grew in various parts of Bengal. English Bazar, an integral part of the city of Malda now, earned its prominence due mainly to silk trading by the local English factory.

Such urbanisation brought about significant changes in the lives in the cities. Migrants, drawn from all over the country, as also those from many other countries, were often the overwhelming majority of the male dominated population of these major towns. Some of the European cities, formed around their factories, were divided into 'white' and 'native' parts; while the former was well organised and well preserved, the growth of the latter was unplanned and the maintenance was poor. The social life was dominated by money and contact with Europeans was highly valued. The urban Indian elite were mainly traders and merchants connected with the textile trade, while we do not know much about the urban poor or how they lived.

The arrival and departure of ships regulated the life in these times. The time between the departure of one and the arrival of another was spent in procuring and storing supplies, in distributing advances, and in undertaking activities that minimised the 'turn around time' of the ships. The local money market was heavily involved in lending to the Europeans - both the companies and the individuals working in those, some of whom had their own separate private trade interests - so that they in turn could lend to traders for procuring textile, saltpetre and other items.

In the towns, the textile trade by the Europeans received good support from the indigenous bankers and moneylenders. Their main requirement was for the bridging loan between the time a ship left, and when the next one arrived. This was the time for making purchases and storing textiles in their warehouses, so that the ship, when it came, could be quickly loaded and sent off, thus reducing the 'turn around' time to the minimum. The way they organised the trade, they had to make advance payments to the Chief Agent or to *gomosthas*, who in turn made advance payments to the intermediaries, and so on down the

hierarchy of intermediaries, until the level of the actual user was reached.[42] The companies were always short of money to pay for those advances, and the Sarafs, who controlled the banks, and in effect controlled the indigenous fiscal and monetary system, and advanced the necessary credit [Choudhury, Sushil, 1995: 65-67; Roy, Indrani, 1992: 118-120]. Mogols had a highly developed system of mints that helped them to standardise weights [Prakash, Om, 1998: 4]. The Dutch, to make the relationship smooth between them and the suppliers, suggested the formation of a joint stock company by the latter, but the idea did not find much enthusiastic support [Prakash, Om, 1998: 5, 277]. The relationship with the Chief agent was far from smooth [Choudhury, Sushil: 49-60, 103-107], and both the British and the Dutch tried, latter, to deal, directly with the *gomosthas,* after getting rid of the Chief agent [Prakash, Om, 1998: 5, 278]. The intermediaries were variously known as *paikars, dalals, foreys,* and were usually paid 2% as commission [Prakash, Om, 1998: 168].

The following is an account of the development of Chittagong, Hooghly, Calcutta and Kashim Bazar, as important urban centres specialising in textile trade, under the European trading influence.

Chittagong

Chittagong was the first place in Bengal where the Portuguese landed, and throughout their history in Bengal, until the 1670's when they were forcibly thrown out by the Mogol Nawab, they maintained a special relationship with this port-city. It was their *porto grande*, the great port they held in affection [Barbossa, Duarte, MCMXVIII: 139; Campos, J.J.A, 1919: 21]. De Barros, writing in 1532, commented that this was the wealthiest port of Bengal [Campos, J.J.A, 1919: 113].

A part of its attraction was its location. That it was right on the sea the Portuguese loved like hell. Partly it was also because Chittagong, for most of its history, was a 'no man's land', on which, from time to time, the king of Arakan,

an ally of the Portuguese, exercised his suzerainty, while it was virtually outside the control of the king or Nawab of Bengal. Here, the Portuguese could do practically what they liked. They used this port to extract protection money from the passing vessels, to organise blockades on the mouth of Ganga whenever they were displeased with whoever was in power in Bengal, and for 'hunting raids' on villages along the waterways in coastal Bengal, to capture men in order to sell them later as slaves, almost at will [Marshall, P.J, 1987: 21].

Located on a vast sea of inter-linked marshes alongside Karnafuli river, Chittagong was, from its very early days, the major sea-port of Bengal. Still, the settlement that grew alongside the port remained quite small, whatever could the possible reasons be. One reason could be the fact that for most of its history it was not a part of Bengal, and therefore carried a small part of the trade of that province. It was heavily contested between Arakan, Tripura and Bengal, with the king of Arakan being the main claimant. Even in the late nineteenth century this port was no more than an agglomeration of villages, and not very healthy because of the marshes [Hunter, W.W., 1876, Vol. VI: 150, 191]. The first Portuguese (or European) factory was set up in Bengal, by John de Silveira, at Chitagong, in 1517. The first Portuguese settlement was located at Dianga (Dakshindanga or Bramaodanga), a port island that needed 14 days of journey by boat from Hooghly.

Hooghly

Initially, Saptagram or Satgaon, was the port that was affectionately described by the Portuguese as 'porto piqueno', or small port, while Chittagong was always the big port or Porto Grande. After Satgaon decayed, the business was transferred to Hooghly, which was the creation of the Portuguese, who now described this new port, equally affectionately, as *porto piqueno*. The founder was one Tavers, who got the *firman* from Emperor Akbar [Campos, J.J.A., 1919: 45].

The name, Hooghly, was derived either from 'gola', or storehouse, or 'hogla', the elephant grass, which dominated the landscape of the countryside. Even the name of the river Hooghly was of recent origin, and did not figure in the Chandimangal of poet Mukundaram, in 1577 [Manrique, Fray Sebastian, 1927: 27n; Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 64-65]. Its importance grew after the decay of Satgaon in 1537 [Manrique, Fray Sebastian, 1927 : 27n; Hunter, W.W, 1976, Vol. III: 299; Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 299]. The imperial *firman* probably came later, in 1579-80. In 1588, Fitch found the whole town of Hooghly in Portuguese hands. According to Campos, the date of birth of this city was 1537, and it continued more or less under Portuguese control until the 1632 conflict [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 299].

Cabral described it as the common emporium of Indian and inter-Asiatic trade. Initially, the local rulers did not allow the traders to erect brick building, not to speak of a fort. Even in 1632, when they engaged themselves in a violent battle with the Mogol emperor, the Portuguese had no walls or fort, though they had by then built big houses.

There is some dispute about the extent of building permitted by the authorities or constructed by the Portuguese. According to Abdul Lahori's *Badshanama* on Akbar, the Portuguese, coming from Sandwip, "under the pretence that a building was necessary for their transactions in buying and selling, ... erected several houses in Bengali style. In course of time, through the ignorance or negligence of the rulers of Bengal, these Europeans increased in number, and erected large substantial buildings, which they fortified with cannons, muskets, and other implements of war. In due course a considerable place grew up which was known by the name of port Hugli." Lahori's statement, according to Campos, was an absurdity. He quoted Friar Hosten as follows: "Until that time (that is when they got a *firman* - BD) they had not been allowed when coming up the river to do more than build godowns in bamboo and thatch which were burnt down regularly every year when they returned to Goa." [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 48-49; Hosten: 42-43].

Though initially the Portuguese who built it took it as no more than a temporary halt, over time, many decided to stay on longer and became friendly with the local Siqdar [Manrique, Fray Sebastian, 1927: 28n]. In course of time, the local authorities allowed their priests to come. The trading covered a wide range of articles from a large number of countries: cowrie from Maldive, *chanquo* from Tuticorin, worked silks, brocades, satin from Southern India, pepper from Malabar and cinnamon from Ceylon, nutmegs and mace from Malacca, camphor from Borneo, and porcelain, pearl and jewel, writing desk, tables, bedstead etc. from China. Eventually their activities came to the notice of the emperor [Manrique, Fray Sebastian, 1927: 28-29]. At one stage there were about 5000 Portuguese living in this city [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 59]. As the fame of the settlement spread, Portuguese from all over the country came. Not all them were nice and good. As Manrique commented: "But these people were generally indigent, most of the Portuguese being highway robbers and men of loose lives." But they all worked together to make Hoogly "one of the richest towns in the East". But, the "Portuguese here were under no one's control, not even Goa, chose their own captains" [Manrique, Fray Sebastian, 1927:41]

In time, the Portuguese asserted their autonomy over the town, and the Mogol rulers conceded because they were benefiting, in terms of revenue, from its high volume of trade. However, stone or brick buildings were rare in the city. Most were straw thatched huts, with wood, bamboo and earth as the material. The style of architecture was *chauchals, bangala* (Bunglow) or *jaltungi*, the last named built on a raised platform in the middle of water tanks.

After the 1632 conflict, Hooghly was declared as a royal city, and *firmans* were given to the British and the Dutch East India Companies. Around Hooghly, other European trading nations built their own urban settlements. Eventually, an English (1650-51) factory was set up. They also built many fine structures and gardens [Bowrey, Thomas, 1905: 166-169]. A British visitor, William Finch, who visited Bengal some time during 1608-11, took note of this city too: "On the sea coast of Bengala this King hath two chiefe ports, Ougolee

(tyrannised by the Portugals) and Pipilee." [Foster, William, 1921: 182]. Hooghly remained the main centre of trade in Bengal, until the rise of Calcutta, founded in 1690 by Job Charnock.

The Chunchurah end of the city was established by the Dutch, who held the place till 1825, when it was ceded in exchange of Java. Bandel (in the outskirts of Hooghly) was established in 1633, a year after the siege of Hooghly. An old convent, built by the Augustinians in 1599, [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 44, 56] still holds the memory of a once large Portuguese settlement. Incidentally, the English meaning of the word 'bandel' was 'a settlement' [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 46; Roy, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 673-690]. Srirampore, now the headquarters of the district named as Hooghly, remained a Danish settlement until 1845, when it was transferred to the East India Company under a settlement. Baidyabati, Bansberia, Badreswar, Kotrang, Uluberia, Bali, Uttarpara, Champdani, Konnanagore, Mahesh, and Tarakeswar are some of the other major settlements that had a European origin. Chandannagar, built by the French company, was taken over by the British on the eve of Palashi, in 1757. It was returned to them in 1763, taken again in 1794, and returned again in 1816 [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 301- 307].

In 1687, Hooghly witnessed another major armed conflict, this time between the English and the Mogols, that led to the expulsion of the British too from this city [Campos, J.J.A.,1919: 299-300]. During that battle the weaknesses of Hooghly, as a base for the operation of the British became cruelly exposed. Apart from anything else, it was far away from the sea, linked by a long treacherous river, wherefore it could not be defended from the sea. It was located on the west bank of the river, and was, therefore, easily accessible by land by the Mogol army. The major sertlements of their rivals - the Dutch and the French - were also nearby [Wilson, C.R, 1895: 61].

Bator, Howrah and other small settlements

In the book by Frederick, there is an interesting reference to Bator, which is now a part of Howrah, Calcutta's twin city across the Hooghly river. It

was a temporary port and settlement that came to life when a boat came, and was folded up and burnt down as soon as the boat left: "They make and unmake a village, with houses and shops, made of straw and all things necessary... and the village standeth as long as the ships ride there, and depart for the Indies, and when they are departed, every man goeth to his plot of houses, and there setteth fier on them." [Frederick, Caesar, 1588: 23]. This shows two aspects. First, that the influence of the port of Hooghly extended to neighbouring areas that benefited from trade. Second, these confirmed the view that, initially, the authorities were unwilling to allow the Portuguese to build buildings.

Outside Hooghly, there were several other settlements in operation, working under Portuguese influence, such as Hijli in Medinipur or Chandekhan near Sripur [Manrique, Fray Sebastian, 1927: xxv].

Calcutta

One of the reasons for building Calcutta, in 1690, on the 'wrong', eastern, side of the river was the fear of attack by the Mogols from the western side. The British also had the confidence that, with a pool of water between them and the Mogols, they could protect their city. Another was the importance of the village called Sutanuti as a major centre of textile trade[43], as its name also implied, *suta* meaning thread. The fact that Sutanuti had among its inhabitants two well-known and wealthy weaver families - Seths and Basaks- counted in favour of Sutanuti. Originally residents of Saptagram, they arrived in Sutanuti when Saptagram decayed. After arriving they opened a market for cotton bales at what came to be known as Sutanuti. In their decision they were certainly influenced by the foreign trade in Bator, on the opposite bank, at that time sponsored by the Portuguese [Wilson, C.R, 1895: 135]. In time, the name of Bator was changed into Thana, forts were established on both banks to combat Potuguese piracy, and the foreign trade flourished in Sutanuti, particularly with the English trading company.

We have discussed elsewhere how the decision to built Calcutta was taken by Job Charnock, despite strong opposition from the London court of the East India Company. The choice of Calcutta was one of the four options that the court in London toyed with, the other three being Hooghly, Uluberia and Hijli. "The first two were completely exposed to the attack of an enemy advancing from the west ... Hijli, being an island, seemed suitable enough at first sight, but it was not really more defensible, for the river, which cut it off from the mainland, was so narrow that it could be easily swept by the enemy's guns. It was besides a malarial swamp. The fourth place, which Charnock had tried, was Sutanuti, a position as secure for a naval power as the others were insecure.... It was strategically safe." [Wilson, C.R, 1895: 116]. The British, particularly Hedges, also had Sagar island, opposite Hijli, in mind, and the Court in London also tried to launch an expedition, in 1687, to make Chittagong its base in Bengal.

Initially, the Company grabbed as much of wasteland as it could. The first settlement at Sutanuti consisted of mud and straw hovels, and a few masonry building, protected by a flotilla of boats in the river. Over time, more and more masonry buildings were erected. The letters patent granted by the Governor in 1698 gave the British settlement a proper, legal status, at an annual rent of Rs 1200, over the three villages; the company was free to tax and govern these [Firminger, Walter Kelly, 1917:lxv].

A survey of Company's land made in 1706 estimated Calcutta's population to be 10000-12000. Another estimate by Holwell, that assumed a certain density (20 persons per bigha) uniformly spread over 5243 bighas, would give a figure of 105000 in1756, probably a grossly exaggerated figure. The figures could have been higher, but for the high mortality rate; about a third of the population died in a year [Wilson, C R, 1895: 192-193, 208]. The city was built largely around the fort, and contained many nationalities, from Europe, Asia and within India. Between 1690 and 1741, more than five decades of peace, more or less made what Calcutta became later, as the largest centre of

trade in India, dwarfing other centres including Dhaka and Murshidabad. The town they built, Calcutta, grew as the trade grew, became prosperous and beautiful, and drew migrants as a magnet. Within it, from the beginning, the town was divided into well-demarcated white and native areas; the Europeans lived in great style and ostentation in palatial buildings surrounded by gardens [Edwards, Michael, 1963: 26].

The fort, whose defence capabilities were under question, formed the nucleus of the city. To quote Orme: "The river forms a crescent between two points, the one called Perrin's Garden, the other Surman's Garden. The distance between these, measuring along the bank of the river, is about three miles and a half. In the deepest part of the crescent, about the middle between the two points, is situated Fort William, a building which many an old house in this country exceeds in defence." [Edwards, Michael, 1963: 27]. This proved to be the case when Siraj easily took it over in 1756, and about a year latter Clive took it back from the Indian hands as easily.

Kashim Bazar

Kashim Bazar, an old urban settlement, described by Tavernier as "a village in Bengala", became a major centre of silk trade. He also noted that, from here, silk of Bengal went to Gujarat for making carpets. Its raw silk was yellowish, but they whitened it with dye made of ashes of a tree, which they called Adam's fig tree [Tavernier, John Baptista, 1684: 57, 126]. Bowrey, also noted it as a very famous and pleasant town, where both the English and the Dutch had factories. He described the town of Kashim Bazar as being about 2 miles long, and in some parts the streets were so narrow that a Palnquin could not pass. He noted that the Dutch factory here, as in Dhaka, was large, made of brick, and had a garden [Bowrey, Thomas, 1905: 213, 213n].

The Dutch reeled more than 83% of their raw silk at Kashim Bazar, by employing more than 1000 people in a factory [Prakash, Om, 1985: 221]. Kashim Bazar was older and more important than Murshidabad as a trade

centre. The first English agency was set up in 1658; Job Charnock was its chief in 1881, and at that time more than half of company's investment was sent to Kashim Bazar [Hunter, W.W., Vol. IX: 87-88]. One Jain poet, Nihal, who visited Kashim Bazar, in 1720s, noticed many nationalities with head covered in hats: Arab, Armenian, English, Parsi, Habsi, Sindhi, French, German, Pathan, Mogol, and others. He also noted that the company was transacting business in many goods and articles in a building with many compounds. He was most impressed by trade in silk [Sen, Sukumar, 1975, Vol. II: 306]. In later years, as noted in 1813 by Hunter, the river, also called Kashim Bazar, changed its course and left only a pool of water and a collection of marshes [Hunter, W.W., Vol. IX: 87-88].

In case of all these four towns, the basis of the economy was textile trade. Important urban centres like Dhaka, Santipur, Murshidabad, and Malda played an important role in organising production, trade and in supplying to the weavers in village raw material and other means of production. In case of Dhaka, some *karkhanas* came into being to meet the needs of the elite. However, production in the villages far outstripped production in those towns.

Alavi's argument, that there was no particular economic advantage in locating the cotton industry in the villages, misses the point that much depended on the location of the village vis-à-vis the centres of consumption/export [Alavi, Hamza, 1982: 49]. While the rural areas specialised in production, the towns undertook trading and organising of exports. As a consequence, with so many intermediaries involved in production, transport and export, there was a jump in the urban population too, particularly in Dhaka and Murshidabad and, after 1690, in Calcutta.

In Bengal it was easier to get the production decentralised because of the existence of an elaborate and cheap water transport system [Prakash, Om, 1998: 164-165]. The artisan used cotton yarn produced within the household or the village, and absorbed the risk of production. He exercised formal control over the output until he handed it in to one of the intermediary traders, and took a

part of the final value as advance that was a part of an agreement that contained price, quantity and the delivery date [Prakash, Om, 1998: 166]. Whether from this point Bengal could move towards industrialisation via the familiar textile route, had the battle of Palalashi produced an opposite outcome, is a question that we have discussed elsewhere. But the fact is that these towns collapsed with textile, when this industry was repressed by the colonial power.

Notes

[1] A citadel on the western edge, a wall, unpaved straight 20-30 feet wide main streets, multi-storied buildings constructed by fired bricks, baths, a complex drainage system "that far outshone any similar venture in the early Mesopotamian and Nile cities" were some of the features of Harappa [Sjoberg, Gideon, 1960: 42].

[2] Interestingly, agriculturist was the second named (not necessarily second ranked) among the seven listed by the Greeks, after the priests.

[3] "The most important division of material and mental labour is the separation of town and country." [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 41]

[4] "The contradiction between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilisation, from tribe to state, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilisation to the present day." [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 41]

[5] As Marx and Engels commented: " The town is in actual fact already the concentration of the population, of the instruments of production, of capital, of pleasures, of needs, while the country demonstrates just the opposite fact, isolation and separation." [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 42]

[6] "The separation of town and country can also be understood as the separation of capital and landed property, as the beginning of the existence and development of capital independent of landed property." as Marx and Engels observed [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 42]. Even in those heydays of feudalism, they found in the towns, seeds of capital that, after some centuries, matured into sturdy plants.

[7] In a situation of a stable number of guild members facing growing population and swarms of journeymen coming from the countryside, the guild required in the interests of its members to frame rules that would guide the relationship between the master craftsmen investing some capital, and their journeymen who could only contribute their labour. The craftsman-journeyman relationship in the towns was analogous to landlord-serf relationship in the village [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 40].

[8] Marx and Engels gave following reasons for the creation of guilds by craftsmen: (a) the competition of serfs constantly escaping into the town, (b) the constant war of the country against the town and thus the necessity of an organised military municipal force, (c) the bond of common ownership in a particular kind of labour, (d) the necessity of common buildings for the sale of their wares at a time when craftsmen were also traders, and the consequent exclusion of the unauthorised from these buildings, (e) the conflict among the interests of various crafts, (f) the necessity of protecting their laboriously acquired skill and the feudal organisation of the whole of the country [Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, 1979: 42-43].

[9] In time, many Buddhist centres emerged in Bengal, some of them quite large and some no more than an overgrown village: Tamralipta, Mrigasthapana, Devaparvata, Somepur, Vikramsila, Odantapura, Jagaddala, Mainamati, Pandita, Vikrampure, Bharatpur (near Panagarh), Trikutaka (in Rahr) [Mohapatra, Bimal Chandra, 1995: 61-67].

[10] Various occupations mentioned in the Buddhist literature were as follows: ivory-working, weaving, confectionery, jewellery and work in precious metals, bow and arrow making, pottery, garland making, head dressing, hunters, trappers, fishermen, butchers, tanners, snake charmers, actors, dancers and musicians, rush weavers, chariot makers, seamen, pilots (iyyamaka), garland makers, caravan traders and guards. There is also reference to a gamin of 500 families that specialised in robbery. Most such occupations were to be found in urban areas; but often they were shared by a number of gamins [Rhys Davids, C A F, 1962: 183-185].

[11] Fa Shin, Chinese traveller, reached Sri Lanka from Tamralipta by boat [Mukherjee, B.N., 2000:13].

[12] There is a view that the decline of some towns was coupled with the emergence of new ones in Yuan Choang's account [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 150-151].

[13] According to one view, however, almost all the Roman coins discovered relate to the first century AD or earlier, thus suggesting that the decline of trade pre-dated the fall of the Roman empire itself [Chattopadhyay, Brajadulal, 1994: 146-147].

[14] This view is contested by B.N. Mukherjee, who does not believe that there was any direct maritime contact of lower Bengal (Gangaridai) with the Roman empire. Nor is he convinced that there were contacts with the Greeks, despite the discovery of rouleted ware and amphora of Mediterranean origin or of Greek inscriptions. These could have been imported in Bengal from the Northwest or Southern states, according to Mukherjee. He further adds that Periplus also, while referring to some items available in the country, does not indicate that these were exported or imported [Mukherjee, B.N, 1994: 164-167].

[15] However, excavations show that most towns were deserted by the 3rd century AD, when no foreign invasion took place [Sharma, R.S., 1987: 133].

[16] Even Baraha Samhita predicted the destruction of cities, and bad days ahead of the merchants and traders [Sharma, R.S., 1987: 109-111, 139].

[17] Among the other prominent towns were as follows: Sompur (now Paharpur), Tribeni (religious centre), Chandraburmankot (a fort near Kotalipara of Faridpur), Pattikera (Mainabati of Tripura), Subarnatithi (in Faridpur), Meherkul (in Chattogram) Puskaran, Rangamati (Rakta-Mrityika) in Murshidabad, Bijaypur (the main capital of the Sen dynasty near the confluence of Jamuna and Bhagirathi, about seven miles from the present day Rajsahi). It is not clear where Nadiya was, from where Laxman Sen retreated, when the army of Bakhtiar Khilji arrived. It could be the Nabadwip of today, or even the Bijaypur mentioned above. Pals had several bijayskandhabars, not one capital. In any case, we know the names of the towns from various sources but not much beyond to establish their location in current day terms, excepting in a tentative way [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 294-298, 301-305, 361, 410]. There is a reference to Navanagara in Panini, which is taken by some as the present day Nabadwip [Agrawal, V.S, 1953: 65, 75]. Ramavati, built by Rampal at the confluence of Ganga with Karatoa, was one of the most beautiful cities of the period [Sastri, 1910: xxx, 71-72]. According to D C Sircar, it was located close to latter day Laxanavati or Gaur [Ray, Aniruddha, 1994: 245].

[18] The name has its origin in tamra (copper) found along the nearby Subarnarekha river, in Medinipur and nearby districts of Chota Nagpur plateau [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 144; Chakrabarti, 1994: 157].

[19] The archaeological findings confirm that it was active as a city several centuries - may be third and second centuries - before Christ was born [Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, 1997: 218].

[20] Trade links of Tamralipta with the Roman world is not established, according to one view [Mukherjee, B N, 2000:12].

[21] However, Panini does not list any one of the three or four major areas in Bengal among the major Janapadas of the East (Prachya), which were Kosala, Kasi, Magadh, Kalinga and Suramasa; the last named were located in Surma valley and hill districts of Assam; the latter are now separate states. According to Patanjali, the proper Prachaya country lay outside the sphere of the Bharatas [Agrawal, V S, 1953: 37-38, 60].

[22] Accoding to Nihar Ranjan Ray, the river Saraswati was the original route that linked Tamralipta with Bhagirathi. But after the 8th century, the confluence of Saraswati with Bhagirathi dried up, that effectively destroyed Tamralipta [Ray, Nihar Ranjan: 77-78]. There is no doubt that there had been many changes in the river system of the area over the years. Matsya Puran says Ganga flowed through Tamralipta [Mukherjee, B.N, 2000:10].

[23] In Bengal, Ganga bandar and Tamralipta used to receive gold from Rome. Buying and selling of land was often done with gold coins, in North and South Bengal, during the 5th and the 6th centuries. With the collapse of the Roman Empire in 475, and the ascendance of Arabs since 606 A.D, the oceanic trade tie with Europe was snapped. Within one century, Arabs came to control West Indian trade in Sindh (710 AD) [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 704].

[24] Karatoya, arising from Bhutan mountains, meets Padma-Dhaleswari, after traversing Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Bagura and Pabna, and its upper part was known as Tista (tri-srota, or three streams) [Rahim, M.A, 1982, Vol. I: 11-12].

[25] The most important parts of the city, according to Panini, were moat, rampart and gates, needed for defence, while there also existed royal storehouse, council hall, and other 'sala's or buildings for dance, music, concerts, sports etc [Agrawal, V.S, 1953: 141].

[26] The Poundrakas are mentioned, along with the Vnagas and Kiratas, in Sabha Parva (XIII, 58, 4) and with Utkala, Mekala, Kalingas and Andhras in Ban Parva (LI, 1988), Bisma Parva (IX, 365), and Drona Parva (IV, 122). Cuningham has identified Pundrabardhan with Mahasthan or Mahastangarh of Bogra; Karotoya separated Pundra from Kamrup [Pandey, Raj Bali, 1962: 82-

84]. A pre-Maurya (4th century B.C.), fragmentary stone plaque inscription was found at Mahasthan, Bogra, that mentions people of Banga [Pandey, Raj Bali, 1962: 2-3].

27 There are also several other copper plates that have been found at Damodarpur, Dinajpur, dating from the time of Buddhagupta: one dated around 482 A.D. and the other, dated 476-495 A.D [Pandey, Raj Bali, 1962: 104-108].

28 Devakot was quite an important city at the time of Bhaktiyar's invasion. In Minhaju-S_siraj's account there are several references to Devkot, to which Bhaktiar returned after the failure of his invasion in Tibet [Minhaju-S Siraj, 1969:313-314].

29 According to Pires, Gaur was a kingdom of 40000 people [Pires, Tome, 1944: 90].

30 The Burman kings of Banga came from Kalinga's singhapur, who brought Vedic Brahmans. Bikrampur was their capital [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 397].

31 This could be partly because of the environment, the recurrence of floods, and the need for ventilation. Some of the accounts are full of praise about the Bengali style of building. Abul-Fazl commented that some of the bamboo-built houses, even in those days, would cost Rupees five thousand. Mirza-nathan talked of a three-storied building he made for himself out of areca nut tree wood [Rahim, M.A, 1982, Vol. I: 24].

32 The 9th century Buddha *Stup* in Panagarh is worth seeing as also the Salban Bihar of Lalmai (Devaparvata), and some metal work of Mainamati.

33 In 851AD, the Arab Geographer, Khurdadhbih wrote that he had personally seen samples of the cotton textiles produced in Pal domains, which he praised for their unparalleled beauty and fineness. A century latter, another Arab geographer, Masudi, in 956 AD, recorded the earliest known notice of muslins in Bengal. The Chandra dynasty (825-1035) of Samatat was probably more involved in oceanic trade than the Pals, and used silver coinage (not cowries) [Eaton, R.M, 1993: 11].

34 Thomas has mentioned the following names of mint towns in Bengal – Lakhnati, Firozabad (Pandua), Satgaon, Sahr I Nau, Ghyaspur, Sonargaon, Muzammabad. Blochman added three: Fathabad, Khilafatabad, Husainabad [Blochmann, H, 1968: 6].

35 Various spellings of the name were as follows: Baracura, Baratulla, Batacouta, Bagdala, Bagnela, Bogla, Bengella, Vaculia, Bacalia, Balkhada, Batecala, Bakla, based on various maps from 1490 to 1593 [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 144n].

36 The editor of Barbossa's volume took the view that it was more likely that Bangala was Satgaon. Ramusio, in his preface to the account of Barbosa, in the first edition in 1553, appended to Barbosa's version the following: Of the ports of the kingdom the principal is at the city of Bengala, from which the kingdom has taken its name. It is two day's journey from the mouth of the river Ganges to the city, and in the greatest ebb of the tide there is a depth of three fathoms of water. The city contains forty thousand hearths, where the king has his residence constantly. This alone is roofed with tiles and built of good brick masonry." It shows, the editor claims, that the city was near the mouth of the river [Barbossa, Duarte, 1518: 143n-144n].

37 According to Badger, the editor of his book, the kingdom of Banghella Vartthema, mentioned was located near the eastern mouth of Ganga, which makes Sonargaon a more likely candidate, though Badger thought it was more likely to be Gaur, despite its distance from the mouth of the river. Colonel Yule took the view that the city of Banghella, being a seaport according to Varthema, could not be Gaur, while Chitagong or Satgaon were more likely candidates [Vartthema, Ludovico Di, 1863: lxxii-lxxxi]. Rahim asks whether this, as also Barbossa's Benghalla, could be Sandwip, or a port between two islands in the Bay of Bengal - Hatia and Sandwip - that has since disappeared [Rahim, M A, 1982, Vol. I: 15].

38 "The Sultan of Bengal is Sultan Fakhr ad-Din, an excellent ruler with a partiality for strangers, especially *darwishes* and *sufis*. The kingship of this land belonged to Sultan Nasir ad-Din, whose grandson was taken prisoner by the Sultan of Delhi, and released by Sultan Muhammad when he became king, on condition of his sharing sovereignty with him. He broke his promise and Sultan Muhammad went to war with him, put him to death, and appointed a relative by marriage of his own as governor of that country. This man was put to death by the troops and the kingdom was seized by Ali-Shah', who was then in Lakanawti. When Fakr ad-Din saw that the kingship had passed out of the hands of Nasir ad-Din's descendants (he was a client of theirs), he revolted in Sudkawan and Bengal and made himself an independent ruler." [Battuta, Ibn, 1929: 267-268].

39 The name Rahumi could have come from Ramu Chattogram, a part of Coxbazar area in Chittagong. Another view is that the name came from Shat-ta-Going, an Arakanese expression, which means that it is wrong to engage in war.

It is said that one Arakanese king stopped getting into war after conquering this place [Rahim, M A, 1982, Vol. I: 34, 36]. R C Majumdar, however, takes the view that by Ruhmi they were referring to the Pal kingdom [Majumdar, R C, 1971: 122].

[40] The folklore of the time reflected in verses the prosperity of the areas, and the growth of towns, because of European trading. One Jain poet, Nihal, who visited Bengal in the 1720s, described in his 'Bangladesh-ki-ghazal', beautiful temples, mosques with minarets, Palaces and *dharmasalas*, holymen of all denominations, markets for brass utensils, weavers and so on. In particular he noticed, at Kashim Bazar, many nationalities with head covered in hats: Arab, Armenian, English, Parsi, Habsi, Sindhi, French, German, Pathan, Mogol, and others. The company was transacting business in many goods and articles in a building with many compounds. He was most impressed by trade in silk [Sen, Sukumar, 1975, Vol. II: 306].

[41] Bipradas Piplai, in his Manasa Mangal, written around 15th century, gives a complete list of towns from the western part of Bengal to the Sea, while describing the voyage of Chand Saudagar, the villain merchant of that epic: Bipradas (15th century) mentions in the course of Chand Saudagar's journey to the sea, Katwa, Indraghat, Nadia, Fulia, Guptipara, Mirjapur, Tribeni, Saptagram, Kumarhat, Hooghly, Bhatpara, Boro, Kankinara, Mulajora, Garulia, Paikpara, Bhadreswar, Champdani, Ichapur, Banibazar, Nemaitirtha (Baidyabati), Chanak, Mahesh, Khardah, Sreepat, Rishra, Sukhchar, Konnagar, Kotrang, Kamarhati, Ariadaha, Ghusuri, Chitrapur, Kalikata, Bator, Kalighat, Churaghat, Baruipur, Chatrabhog, and Sagar, among others. His account was the first among the Mangalkabyas that mentioned Kalikata and Hooghly [Ray, Nihar Ranjan, 1993: 75-76]. The difficulty with this list is that, given the time of writing, it was more appropriate for the next period. Further, there is no way of knowing how many of these towns existed even during the early period after European entry; there is suspicion that quite a few of the names had been added latter.

[42] Based on the 1737 records of the Dhaka Factory of the East India Company, Karim has found the following that give some idea about the way the trade was conducted. The Company made advances for Khassas and Malmals in January. The brokers (dalals) usually took four months to make the delivery of goods to the Company. In six months they brought the brown (unbleached) from the weavers. The brown pieces were delivered after their prices were agreed upon. The names of the brokers - Ramnarain, Netoo, Sunamony, Muktagolab, Hafizullah, Bishnudas, Joykissen, or Conul - were mostly Bengalis, but they played a subservient role vis-à-vis the Company [Karim, 1964: 77-78]. The

brokers usually received a 3% commission on all transactions [Wilson, C.R, 1895: 63].

[43] Suta meant thread or yarn in Bengal. The name implied that already there was a market in yarn in existence when Charnock arrived. His decision to locate the great city, Calcutta, in this place, was probably influenced by this factor, though, as we have discussed it elsewhere, his bosses in London were opposed to it.

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