

CHAPTER ONE

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

The district of Malda situated in the north-west corner of pre-1947 Bengal. It was bounded on the north by Purnia and Dinajpur districts, on the east by Dinajpur and Rajshahi, on the south by Rajshahi and Murshidabad, and on the west by Murshidabad, the Santal Parganas and Purnia¹. In 1947, under the Radcliff Award, the five police stations of Sibganj, Bholahat, Nachol, Gomastapur and Nababganj went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and remaining ten police stations of Englishbazar, Kaliachak, Old Malda, Gajol, Habibpur, Bamongola, Manikchak, Ratua, Kharba and Harishchandrapur came to India².

It needs to be mentioned here that the partition of Malda in 1947 had far-reaching politico-economic consequences for the district as a whole. Apart from the influx of displaced people from East Pakistan, the partition meant for the loss of a large fertile tract as well as centres of silk manufacture and lac cultivation. All the five police stations mentioned above were rice-producing zones. Nababganj, Sibganj and Bholahat were large centres for rice-trade³. Sibganj was famous for its silk cloths, probably the best produced in Bengal⁴. Bholahat was a large centre for silk reeling. Nababganj, a Municipal township, was noted for bell metal and brassware⁵. It is thus evident that the loss of these tracts was destined to affect the politico-economic scenario of the district in significant ways.

In the perspective of administrative history of the Bengal Presidency, Malda was one of the oldest districts of present North Bengal⁶. Until 1813, the district formed part of the Purnia and Dinajpur districts, the Mahananda being the boundary. In February 1813, the Superintendent of Police of the Lower Province informed the administration about the deterioration of law and order in some of the areas of Dinajpur and Purnia. In his report, it was stated that theft, looting and other criminal activities at Kaliachak, Sibganj, Bholahat and Gargariba of Purnia and Malda and Kaliachak P.S. of Dinajpur were on the rampant. The reason for this, according to him, was the extreme distance of these outlying areas from their district headquarters. As for instance, the distance of Kaliachak from Purnia was about hundred miles⁷.

Considering the justification of the report, the company Government set up a new district of Malda in 1813. The new district was consisted of Sibganj, Kaliachak, Bholahat and Gargariba police station of Purnia, Malda and Bamongola police stations of Dinajpur and Rohanpur and Chapai police station of Rajshahi⁸. Kharba and Harischandrapur Police Stations were added to the district in 1896⁹. A Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector was appointed at Englishbazar with jurisdiction over there police stations. In 1832 a separate treasury was opened. Malda formally became an independent administrative unit in 1859 when the district was placed in charge of a Magistrate and Collector¹⁰.

The district boundary was published by notification in 1875. Later minor transfers were made, the most important of which was the transfer in 1929 of Bhutni '*diara*', a large island '*char*' in the Ganges from Santal Parganas to Malda¹¹. Up to 1876, the district of Malda formed part of the Rajshahi Division and between 1876 and 1905, it formed part of the Bhagalpur Division. In

1905, again the district was transferred from the Bhagalpur Division to the Rajshahi Division on the formation of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam¹². The district was included in the Rajshahi Division until August 1947.

POLITICAL HISTORY PRIOR TO BRITISH CONQUEST

The district of Malda possesses a rich historical heritage. A greater part of present Malda was the centre of civilization and culture in ancient times. The region had the privilege of having many famous capital cities such as Gour, Pandua, Ramabati, Lakhanauti and Tanda¹³. Besides, Deokot (Devikot), the earliest Muslim capital of Bengal and Rajmahal were also adjacent to Malda¹⁴. These royal courts greatly helped to develop the well-known silk industry of Malda because the dresses of the Imperial Courts were mostly made of Malda silk¹⁵. Haridas Palit, a renowned scholar and historian of Malda, once opined that a large part of Rajmahal was included in greater Malda¹⁶.

The oldest reference of the name 'Malda' is found in an inscription at the tomb of Pir Sahagada dated 19 shaban 859 Hizri (August 4, 1455) during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Muhammad Shah¹⁷. The name was again mentioned in some of the inscriptions of Sultan Hussain Shah dated 899 to 938 Hizri¹⁸. In his '*Ain-i-Akbari*', Abul Fazal also mentioned the name 'Maldah'¹⁹. However, the '*Akbar-nama*', for the first time, mentioned Malda as one of the important trade and commercial centers of Bengal²⁰. Tavernier, the Italian traveler, mentioned the name of Malda in his description²¹. Alexander Hamilton wrote, 'Malda was a large town, well inhabited and frequented by merchants of the different nations'²². Rennel informs, 'Malda is a pretty, neat city. This, as well as Cossimbazar, is a place of trade'²³.

It is thus evident that prior to the coming of the English Company, Malda emerged as a flourishing trade centre of Bengal. Rivers, in fact, played a significant role in the rise of Malda as a centre for trade and commercial activities²⁴. The main rivers of the district are all of Himalayan or sub-Himalayan origin and flowed in a southerly direction, their rise being controlled by the Ganges, which formed two-thirds of the western and the whole of the southwestern boundary of the district. Next to the Ganges, the most important were the Mahananda, Kalindri, Tangan and Purnabhaha²⁵.

Thus, location and communicational advantage made Malda the pivot of the entire North Bengal and the surrounding areas for trade and commerce. The district, in fact, emerged during the early phase of colonial rule as the centre for the control of the whole of North Eastern Indian trade²⁶. It commanded the routes that ran in different directions across Ghoraghat to Kamrup and Tibet over Kajangoi and Bagdi, to Cuttuck and down the Ganges to Dacca while on the west it opened the doors to the cities of Northern India²⁷. Contemporary accounts inform that merchants from Agra, Gujrat, Benares and Kashmir came to Malda every year for trading and commercial transactions. The English merchant and traveler Streynsham Master has given a vivid description of the trade of Malda town. He stated that in the 1660s the merchants from Agra, Gujrat and Benares purchased and shipped cotton and silk fabrics to the value of Rs. 15, 00, 00 – 25,00,000²⁸. Besides this inter-provincial trade, the region also had commercial transactions with other towns of Bengal, such as Dacca, Murshidabad, and Rajmahal. It is also recorded that in 1577 Sheik Bhiku, a merchant of Malda, set sail for Russia with three ships laden with Maldahi silk clothes, and that two of his ships were wrecked somewhere in the neighborhood of the Persian Gulf²⁹.

So prior to the coming of the English Company, Malda was already established as a thriving centre of trade and commerce. In this historical backdrop, the English East India Company established a trade connection with the district in 1676³⁰. In 1686, the company established its first factory at Old Malda, but it was seized and plundered by Nawab Shaista Khan, Subadar of Bengal³¹. Although this quarrel was settled for the time being, allegations of ill-treatment by the Nawab's officials were often made by the merchant gomastas of the company at Malda. It was only after the grant of Diwani, a fortified commercial residency was built in 1771 at Englishbazar under George Henschman³². In 1813, the Headquarter of the newly formed district was set up at Englishbazar³³.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT UNDER THE BRITISH

At the time of its formation in 1813, the district of Malda was placed under the charge of a Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector³⁴. The powers of the Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector were of an anomalous character. He was, to a certain extent, under the control of the Collectors both of Purnia and Dinajpur³⁵. All communications from the Board of Revenue were transmitted to him through one or other of these treasuries. In 1832, a treasury was, for the first time, established at Englishbazar and from that year the separate entity of the district of Malda was recognised³⁶. In 1859, the district was placed in charge of a Magistrate and Collector³⁷.

The revenue administration of the district was in charge of the Collector, under the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. The Collector was assisted by a staff of three or four Deputy Collectors and one Sub-Deputy Collector³⁸.

The civil and criminal administration was carried on from the district headquarters at Englishbazar. Judicially, Malda was under the jurisdiction of the District Judge of Rajshahi³⁹. Civil cases were tried by the District Judge of Rajshahi, two *munsifs* at Englishbazar and one *munsif* at Nababganj. Criminal justice was administered by the Sessions Judge of Rajshahi with the help of the District Magistrate and the Deputy and Sub-Deputy Magistrates. There were benches of Honorary Magistrate at Englishbazar (four members), Nababganj (five members) and Mathurapur (one member)⁴⁰.

GEO-PHYSICAL ASPECTS

The river Mahananda flowing from north to south roughly divided the district into two equal parts, corresponding by local tradition to the old boundary line of the *Rarh* and *Barendra*⁴¹. The region to the east of the Mahananda was called Barind. The name 'Barind' was derived from the word 'Barendra'. It stretched into Dinajpur and Rajshahi and formed a marked contrast to the other half of the district⁴². The Barind sub-region of Malda was relatively high agricultural land of red clay soil of the old alluviums. It is a least fertile land⁴³.

During the time of the Mughal rule, the Barind was thickly populated and prosperous. It lay within a day's journey of the capital of Gour and Pandua⁴⁴. However, after the removal of the capital to Murshidabad, and the decay of Gour, the Barind must have gradually become depopulated and overgrown with jungle. By the time of the revenue survey in 1880 much of the northern portion, including the whole of Habibpur p.s. and most of Bamongola p.s. was covered with forest and *jungle*, though the southern portion was largely under cultivation⁴⁵. In the 1870s, Hunter noticed the cultivation of winter rice in the region from Kalindri river to the borders of the *jungle*. The remainder of the

tract was entirely occupied by thorny tree *jungle* called '*katal*'⁴⁶. However, by the time of survey and settlement operations in the 1930s the Barind was transformed into a developed agricultural zone mainly due to the efforts of the migrant *santals* from the neighboring district of Santal Parganas⁴⁷. The *santals*, employed by the zamindars of Barind, had cleaned up *jungles*, terraced the slopes and transformed the region into flourishing agricultural zone. The package offered to *santals* was land on extremely low rent, common rights of hunting, fishing, and so on⁴⁸.

To the west of the Mahananda, the region was again divided into two well-defined parts by the Kalindri River flowing west and east from the Ganges. North of the Kalindri the distinguishing natural feature was the '*tal*' land, the name applied to the land which flooded deeply as the rivers rise, and drained by meandering streams into swamps or into the Kalindri⁴⁹. '*Tal*' area covered approximately Harishchandrapur and Ratua p.s. between the Mahananda in the north and the Kalindri river in the south. It is a low-lying area; the water comes in from the Ganges by the Kalindri in the south and from the Mahananda in the north⁵⁰. The '*tal*' area was almost entirely under cultivations. In its northern part, the principal crops were jute and paddy. Mango gardens were fairly common in Harishchandrapur and Ratua. Further south in Ratua, paddy and '*rabi crops*' were chiefly grown. In the south-west of Harishchandrapur, there were still patches of uncultivated land, covered by low jungle and coarse grass. This area was completely under jungle at the time of the revenue survey of 1840⁵¹. The most fertile and populous portion of the district was known as '*diara*'. It consisted of a strip roughly eight miles in width along the western and southern tracts of the district⁵². Its formation was the result of centuries of alluvial formation by the Ganges. The eastern side of

the 'diara' strip was the older alluvial area. The soil was of a light variety, with a sandy appearance. Mango gardens were common and some mulberry was grown⁵³. Further west towards the Ganges, the soil is sandier. The principal crops in the 'diara' were 'aus' paddy, wheat, barley, oats and mustard⁵⁴.

The island 'char' of Bhutni diara lies in the bed of the Ganges. Its southernmost point was just below Rajmahal, from where it extended northwards for eight miles and its area thirty-two square miles⁵⁵. On the higher land, 'aus' paddy and pulses were the principal crops. The soil was sandy and not very fertile on the higher ground, while on the lower 'chars' it generally consisted of a thin deposit of a silt over the sand in which 'rabi' crops such as *kalai* and mustard was grown⁵⁶.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Since the first census of 1872, the population of the district has shown a regular increase, with the exception of the decade 1911 – 22, when there was a small decrease. At the time of 1872 census, the total population of the district was 6, 76,426 with a density of just 357 persons per square mile.

Table 1.1 Population Growths in Malda District, 1872 – 1951

census Year	Malda district Population	% Increase / Decrease
1872	6,76,426	—
1881	7,10,448	+5.00
1891	8,14,919	+14.4

1901	8,84,030	+8.5
1911	10,01,159	+13.5
1921	10,12,109	-1.3
1931	10,53,766	+4.1
1941		
1951	9,37,580	
Source : Calculated from the census reports of different years.		

The table 1.1 shows that there was a remarkable increase of population between 1881 and 1911. This growth was primarily due to the steady migration of Santals into the barind from the Santal Parganas and 'Shershabadia' Muslims from adjacent Murshidabad⁵⁷. The Santal population was returned in 1901 census as fifty two thousand, compared with twenty one thousand at the previous census. The following decade saw a further increase of over fourteen thousand, but thereafter the movement slowed down. The inflow of *Shershabadia* Muslims continued steadily up until the 1911 census. The Ganges had been moving westward and southward at the expense of Murshidabad and the alluvial formations on the Malda side attracted large number of *Shershabadias*. They settled mainly in the '*diara*' tracts⁵⁸.

The density of the population according to the census of 1911 was 29 per square mile, being greatest in the '*diara*' thanas⁵⁹. The general decrease shown by the 1921 census was due to malaria, which broke out in epidemic form during several years, and was particularly severe in the central part of

the district. In the census of 1931, the only remarkable variation was in the southeast corner of the district, where Nababganj and Nachol showed a considerable increase. This increase was perhaps due to the construction of the new railway route from Nababganj to Abdulpur. Nababganj had a large exporting centre and it was not unlikely that the facilities for transport had developed trade in that area. This might be the reason for the increase of 25 percent in the population of the town⁶⁰.

At this stage, it needs to be mentioned that the population of the district was not a homogenous one. The society was composed of numerous and diverse social groups, of several historically evolved and evolving social collectivities. The population belonged to different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, to various castes and religious communities. Malda is the land of several tribals like *santals* and *oraons* as well as autochthonous groups like Rajbansis, Koch and Polias. Most of these groups went through important social, religious and economic changes during the period of our study.

SANTALS

Of the agricultural population of Malda, the most numerous among non-Muslims were the *santals*⁶¹. The census of 1931 mentioned that almost the entire *santal* population concentrated in the p.s. of Bamongola, Gajol, Habibpur, Old Malda, Gomastapur, Nachol and Nababganj. It gives the number of Santal population as 72,145⁶². There are two distinct hypotheses for the *santal* migration in Malda. One states that in the first half of the

nineteenth century the indigo planters engaged them in plantation works of the district. The second mentions that a great number of *santals* crossed the Ganges after their great insurrection of 1885 to escape administrative torture. Consequently, local zamindars employed them for clearing of *jungle* lands of *barind*. Stiff red clay of *barind* was another consideration, which needed sturdy *santal* peasants for cultivation⁶³. We assume that the second hypothesis is more close to truth as the *barind*, the seat of *santal* migrants, was never noted for indigo plantation.

The *santals* of Malda were divided into four sects – Christian, Hindu, Kheroars and the *santals* proper who followed the aboriginal customs⁶⁴.

The Christian *santals* were comparatively few in number and were the converts of Protestant or Catholic missionaries. There were a few churches in the area where the Christian *santals* resided. The Hindu *santals* were commonly identified with the Satyam Sibam sect. Kasishwar Chakraborty, a pleader of Dinajpur who was also a local leader of the Congress, formed the sect in or around 1905. its object was to conduct the process of Sanskritisation⁶⁵ among the *santals* or bringing them into the fold of Hinduism⁶⁶. The *santals* belonging to Satyam Sibam sect gave up eating pigs, fowls and other 'forbidden' food⁶⁷. In marriage and social customs, this sect had nothing to distinguish it from ordinary *santals*⁶⁸.

The Kheroars were followers of a Hindu religious leader from Bihar who visited *barind* at regular intervals. They were generally fairer in complexion than the ordinary *santals*, and did not eat any flesh, or drink toddy or '*pachai*'. In other respects, there was no appreciable difference between them and the ordinary *santals*⁶⁹.

The *santals* proper were divided into twelve castes: Murmu, Kisku, Hemrom, Hansda, Soren, Mardi, Tudu, Besra, Baske, Chore, Bedea and Pauria. Their legend was that the first two human beings, Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Burhi, sprang from two eggs laid by a wild goose (hasdak)⁷⁰. They had seven sons and seven daughters. The sons were given the first seven names of the castes mentioned above, and married the seven daughters. Seven castes thus arose, and later five others were added⁷¹. The eighth caste, Baske, at first belonged to the seven, but by reason of their offering their breakfast (baske) to the Gods while the *santals* were still in Champa⁷³, they were formed into a separate caste under the name of baske. The Besras were separated on account of the immoral behaviour of their eponym, who was called Besra, the licentious one. The tenth sect Pauria, were called after the pigeon, and the eleventh, Chore, after the lizard. The story was that on the occasion of a tribal hunting party the members of these two sects failed to kill anything but pigeons and lizards, so they were called after the names of these animals. The twelve sects, the Bedea, was left behind and lost when the *santals* went up out of Champa. They had no farther, so the story goes, at least the mother of their first ancestor could not say who his father was, and for this reason they were deemed of lower rank than the other sects⁷².

RAJBANSIS

The Rajbansis were numerically the next largest community⁷³. The Rajbansis⁷⁴ were a Hindu social group spread over a vast tract extending from the districts of Malda and Purnia to Goalpara in Assam⁷⁵. The Rajbansi population of the district were concentrated mainly in Gajol, Habibpur, Bamongola p.s.⁷⁶.

The precise origin of the Rajbansis, their status and folk history in detail remain obscure⁷⁷. The basic debate is around the question of their association

with the Koches. Whatever may have been their actual origin, there is no dispute about the fact that the Rajbansis were one of the early settlers in North Bengal as well as in Malda⁷⁶. Their religio-cultural practices were simple and free from Brahmanical rigidities. Economically agriculture was their basic occupation and their representation in other professions was not very significant⁷⁹.

In Malda, the Rajbansis were known as Bangals and the part of the village in which they reside, as the Bangalpara. The name was derived from their indigenous origin, as distinguished from the *santals* and others who were immigrants⁸⁰. Family was the basic unit of the Rajbansi community. They normally lived in joint families. The head of the family was generally the eldest male member⁸¹. They were a socially homogenous community, in the sense that there was no sub-caste among them. The Rajbansis were not divided into exogamous clans or *gotra*, but constituted a single endogamous group. They had only one *gotra*, i.e. *Kasyap*. Marriages within the same *gotra* was therefore a common practice⁸². Both Saivism and Vaishnavism were popular among the Rajbansis, though the latter was adhered to by more people⁸³. The language in which the Rajbansis generally spoke was a local dialect of Bengali, which Grierson has described as the 'Rajbansi dialect'⁸⁴.

PALIAS, DESHIS AND KOCHES

The Palias, Deshis and Koches were ethnically allied to the Rajbansis. Buchanan Hamilton considered that though they were distinguishable castes, they came from the same origin⁸⁵. Their claim to *kshatriya* status was not admitted by the Rajbansis who consider themselves a superior caste⁸⁶.

Among the Palias there were two subdivisions — the Babu Palias and the Sadhu Palias. The Babu Palias are akin to the Rajbansis in manners and customs. The Sadhu Palias tried to follow the manners of higher caste Hindu. They claimed themselves as *kshatriyas* and wore the sacred thread. The Palias were concentrated mainly at Gazole- Bamongola-Habibpur region⁸⁷.

The Deshis called themselves Gaur Deshis. It was not unlikely, M.O carter stated, that after the abandonment of the capital of Gaur they settled in the

surrounding region and continued to call themselves Gour Deshis. Their customs and habits were similar to those of the Rajbansis⁸⁸. The Deshis were found in large numbers at Bamongola, Habibpur and Old Malda⁸⁹.

The Koches were described by the Colonial scholar-administrators as the most backward of all the castes which were of Mangolian origin. They were worshipper of Shiva. Polyandry was prevalent among them⁹⁰.

OTHER HINDU CASTE

The other Hindu caste or castes of semi-aboriginal origin within the district were many and varied. Therefore, reference has only been made to those castes whose custom contain any interesting and noteworthy features.

Of the indigenous Hindus, the weavers-Tanti and Ganesh- were one of the most populous communities. The Ganesh caste was slowly decreasing in numbers, largely owing to its own custom that the marriage dowry had to be paid by the bridegroom. For this reason, the number of unmarried person was high. Widow remarriage was also forbidden among them⁹¹.

The milkmen, Goalas and Gopes, were another fairly large community. They were mainly concentrated in Old Malda and Englishbazar areas. The Gopes were divided into four classes- Majrote, Kishnota, Maghaia and Kanoje. There was no intermarriage between these subdivisions⁹².

The same division into sub-castes was found among the Mandals and Telis also. The Mandals were divided as follows:

- I. Nagar Mandals--again subdivided into a) Deb Nagar b) Kanhai Nagar c) Palas (Paras) Nagar and d) Bholahatia Nagar.
- II. Chasi Mandals, III. Gangat Mandals, IV. Chasat Mandals

Similarly the Telis were subdivided into Maghaia, Tirhtia, Barkapia and Bhatia Telis⁹³.

There was no intermarriage between the sub-castes of Nagars or Telis. The first three Teli sub-castes could dine at each other's house, but even this was

not permitted among the Nagar Mandals. The Tirhatia Telis allowed widow marriage⁹⁴.

Another interesting Mandal caste were the Chain Mandals who were found mostly at Kaliachak, Manikchak, Ratua and Englishbazar. They were engaged mainly in agriculture and fishing⁹⁵.

The Binds were another caste who were found at Manikchak, Ratua, Englishbazar and Kaliachak region of the district⁹⁶. They were a non-Aryan caste originating from Bihar and Upper India. They were employed in agriculture, fishing, making saltpetre and collecting medicinal herbs⁹⁷.

Among the castes of semi-aboriginal origin, the Mushahars were found in large numbers in Malda than in any other district of Bengal. They came from Santal Parganas and were employed mainly as earth cutters and day labourers⁹⁸.

ISLAM AND THE LOCAL PEOPLE

The second largest component in the population of the district was composed of Muslims. With the exception of a few high-class families of Saiyids, Mughals and Pathans all the Muslims were *Sheikhs*. Almost all of them were Sunnis, and with the exception of the Shersabadias, of the Hanafi persuasion⁹⁹. Amongst the cultivators, however, the Shersabadias form a distinct group; there was also a small endogamous body known as the Darbhanga *Sheikhs*, who migrated from the district of Darbhanga¹⁰⁰. In local dialect they were called 'Darbhagaiya' who were found at Englishbazar, Manikchak and Ratua p.s. They considered themselves as *ashrafs* or aristocratic Muslims¹⁰¹. Of the functional groups, mention may be made of *jolahs* (weavers), *dhuniyas* (carders), *naluas* (reed sellers), *nikaris* (fisherman) and *kunjras* (vegetable sellers)¹⁰².

SHERSABADIAS

Among the Muslim agriculturists, the most noteworthy people were those known as the Shersabadias, or more generally as the Badias. The name is derived from Shersabad Pargana of Murshidabad district, from which they were forced to emigrate owing to the erosion of the Ganges. They were found mostly at Kaliachak, Manikchak and Ratusa p.s.¹⁰³.

There were several theories about the origin of the Shersabadias. One was that they were originally Marathas, who came to Bengal with the Maratha invaders. It was said that a number of them were made prisoners and forced to accept Islam. Their physical appearance, however, was unlike that of the typical Marathas. It seems more likely that they were descendants of the army of Sher Shah who came to Bengal to defeat and oust Humayun from Gour¹⁰⁴. Physically they were very strong and robust and were extremely hard-working¹⁰⁵.

The Shersabadias were very good agriculturists and spent much time and labour on the reclamation of land which the ordinary cultivator were prone to avoid¹⁰⁶. Most of the Tal area in Ratusa and Harishchandrapur p.s. was brought under cultivation by them. In cultivating methods, they were superior in every respect to their neighbours. They seemed to understand better the nature and properties of the soil and how to get the best results from it¹⁰⁷.

The Shersabadias were often considered by their Hindu neighbour as people prone to criminal activities¹⁰⁸. However, as Asok Mitra stated, this was rather oversimplification. As their main profession was agriculture, they sometimes got indulged in land crimes¹⁰⁹. The Shersabadias, as M.O. Carter comments, were land grabbers and frequently encroached on their neighbour's land especially if he was a weaker part. In this way, they sometimes forced neighbour to sell his land to them. In fact, it was a regular practice of some zamindars to employ Shersabadias to oust certain tenants¹¹⁰. But in no way the Shersabadia Muslims could be considered criminal as a class¹¹¹.

In social matters, their unity was remarkable. They obeyed the orders of their village headman with almost military precision¹¹². In religious matters, they were pious and orthodox. Marriage with any other Muslim sect was prohibited,

which was possibly one reason why their social unity and fine physique had been preserved¹¹³.

THE NADEGUSTIS

Another peculiar Muslim sect, who lived in the Mirataluk area of Englishbazar p.s., and along the western bank of the Mahananda towards the south of the district, were known as Nadegustis¹¹⁴. They were said to have been Hindus of Nadia district who were converted to Islam centuries ago, and migrated to the Natore Subdivision of Rajshahi district. Being unable to get land there, they came to Malda district in the second half of the 19th century, hearing from the travellers to Gaur and Pandua that there was land available for settlement¹¹⁵.

Since then they had increased in numbers and spread over a wide area. They had still retained some of their Hindu customs; for example, they wore new clothes and decorated the walls of their house with *alpana* on festive occasions¹¹⁶. They also respected Hindu Gods. In the month of Baisakh, hundreds of them went to Dal Dali village to offer puja to the Goddess *Burima*. Like the Shersabadias they did not allow marriage with any other Muslim sect¹¹⁷.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M. O. Carter, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Malda 1928-35*, B.G.Press, Alipore, 1939, p.1
2. J. C. Sengupta, *West Bengal District Gazetteers : Malda*, Calcutta, 1969, p.3
3. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. VII*, London, 1876, Indian reprint 1974, pp.50-51
4. G. E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers : Malda*, Calcutta, 1918, Indian Reprint 2004, p.108
5. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. VII, op.cit.*, pp.28-29
6. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, *Malda Zilla Gathaner Aitihāsik O Bhougolik Patabhumika*, in Gopal Laha ed. *Madhuparni, Malda Zilla Sankhya*, Balurghat, 1985, p.17
7. Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of the District, or Zilla, of Dinajpur in the Province or Subha, of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1833, p.XXII
8. M. O. Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35, op.cit.*, p.1
9. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918, op.cit.*, p.26
10. M. O. Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35, op.cit.*, p.1
11. *Ibid.*, p.2

12. Anandagopal Ghosh, *op.cit.*, p.2
13. *Ibid.*
14. S. M. Karimi, *Changing Capitals of Medieval Bengal*, IGC (21st session), p.399
15. A. C. Roy, *History of Bengal 1526-1756*, Calcutta, p.346
16. Haridas Palit, *Rajmahaler Sahit Pandua Kshetrer Sambandha, Bharatbarsha, Prathambarsha, Dwitiya Sankhya*, 1320 BS, p.42
17. Abid Ali Khan, *Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*, ed., and Revised by H. E. Stapleton, Calcutta, 1930, p.146
18. *Ibid.*, p.147
19. Abul Fazal Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, trans. By Jarret, corrected and further annotated by Jadunath Sarkar, vol. II, p.144
20. Abid Ai Khan, *Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*, *op.cit.*, p.146
21. Tavernier came to Mada in 1666. See Tavernier, trans. By V. Ball, *Travels in India*, vol. II, p.254
22. Alexander Hamilton, *A new Account of the East Indies*, Vol. II, London, p.20
23. James Rennel, *Memoir of a Man of Hindoostan or the Mughal Empire*, London, 1782, p. 60
24. R.K. Mukherjee, *Changing Face of Bengal : A Study of Riverine Economy*, Calcutta University Press, Calcutta, 1938, p.62
25. *Ibid.*, p.63
26. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, *The Factory of the English East India Company at Malda 1757-1833*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of North Bengal, p.16

27. *Ibid.*, p.18
28. Richard Carnac Temple ed., *The Diaries of Streynsham Master 1675-1680*, vol.I, London, 1911, pp.339-401
29. W.W.Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VII, *op.coit.*, p.18
30. W.K. Firminger, *The Malda Diary and Consultations 1680-82*, Jaurnal of Asiatic Society, vol. XIV, 1918, pp. 31-82
31. G.E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918*, *op.cit.*, p.25
32. Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *op.cit.*, p.69
33. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VII, *op.cit.*, p.18
34. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918*, *op.cit.*, p.78
35. *Ibid.*
36. W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VII, *op.cit.*, p.20
37. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.1
38. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918*, *op.cit.*, p.81
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p.83
41. S. C. Maumdar, *Rivers of the Bengal Delta*, B.G.Press, Alipore, Calcutta, 1941, p.43
42. *Ibid.*
43. A. Mitra, *Malda Census 1951*, Calcutta, 1953, p.4
44. F. J. Monaham, *Verendra*, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1914, pp. 97-98

45. W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VII, *op.cit.*, p.22
46. *Ibid.*, p.23
47. K. C. Barman, *Report on the Conditions of the Santals in Malda*, Calcutta, 1934, p.2
48. *Ibid.*
49. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918*, *op.cit.*, p.2
50. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.3
51. *Ibid.*
52. The *diara* is the low bank of a river and *karasa* the high bank. By extension these terms are commonly used to mean land below and above flood level.
53. R. K. Mookherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal*, *op.cit.*, p.64
54. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.4
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*
57. Haraprasad Chottopadhyaya, *Internal Migration in India : A Case Study of Bengal*, K. P. Bagchi and Company, Calcutta, 1987, pp.512-13
58. GB, Gen. Dept. Misc. Br. Annual General Report, Bhagalpur Division for September 1882, File No. 101- ½, cited in *Ibid.*, p.66
59. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918*, *op.cit.*, p.28
60. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.37

61. *Ibid.*, p.40
62. Cited in Asok Mitra ed., *Malda Census 1951, op.cit.*, p.20
63. Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Internal Migration in India, op.cit.*, pp. 515-16
64. Chittabrata Palit, *Six Lectures on Santal Society, op.cit.*, p.72
65. M. N. Srinivas describes Sanskritisation as the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally connected to the claimant caste by the local community. See M. N. Srinivas, *Social Changes in Modern India, Bombay, 1977*, p.6
66. Asok Mitra ed., *Malda Census 1951, op.cit.*, p.22
67. Chittabrata Palit, *Six Lectures on Santal Society, op.cit.*, p.76
68. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35, op.cit.*, p.40
69. *Ibid.*
70. H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, vol. II*, B. G. Press, Calcutta, 1891, p.225
71. *Ibid.*, p.227
72. *Ibid.*
73. J. C. Sengupta, *Malda District Gazetteer 1968, Calcutta, 1969*, p.71
74. For a general account of the Rajbansis, see Charu Chandra Sanyal, *The Rajbansis of North Bengal : A Study of a Hindu Social Group, Calcutta, 1965*

75. Sibsankar Mukherjee, *The Social Role of a Caste Association : A Study of a Hindu Social Group*, *Indian Economical and Social History Review*, 1994, 31; 89, p.91, downloaded from <http://ier.sagepub.com> on 17 May, 2009
76. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918*, *op.cit.*, p.30
77. This issue has been discussed in *Chapter four* of the present dissertation.
78. Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a caste Movement : The Rajbansis of North Bengal 1910-1947*, Manohar, new Delhi, p.15
79. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.43
80. Asok Mitra ed., *Malda Census 1951*, *op.cit.*, p.23
81. Charu Chandra Sanyal, *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*, *op.cit.*, p.124
82. H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and castes of Bengal*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p.494
83. J.C. Sengupta, *Malda District Gazetteer 1968*, *op.cit.*, p.71
84. G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. V, pt. I, Calcutta, 1903, p.163
85. Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *op.cit.*, p.81
86. Asok Mitra ed., *Malda Census 1951*, *op.cit.*, p.23
87. Dhananjay Roy, *Bangadesher Uttarprantiya Sanskritik Itihaser Dhara*, Amar Bharati, Kolkata, 2008, p.229
88. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.44
89. J. C. Sengupta, *Malda District Gazetteer 1968*, Calcutta, 1969, p.61
90. W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VII, *op.cit.*, p.46

91. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35, op.cit.*, p.44
92. H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and castes of Bengal, vol. I, op.cit.*, p.135
93. *Ibid.*, p.138
94. *Ibid.*, p.140
95. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash*, vol. III, Calcutta, 1993, pp.27-28
96. *Ibid.*, p.29
97. H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, vol. I, op.cit.*, p.130
98. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35, op.cit.*, p.44
99. G. E. Lambourn, *Malda District Gazetteer 1918, op.cit.*, p.30-31
100. Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Internal Migration in India, op.cit.*, p.64
101. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash, op.cit.*, p.29
102. Abdur Rahaman Siddiqi, *Barendrabhumir Chirayata Basinda : Nritattiyik Anusandhan*, in Saifuddin Choudhuri et. al., *Barendra Anchaler Itihas, Gatidhara*, Dhaka, 1998, p.119
103. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash, op.cit.*, p.27
104. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35, op.cit.*, p.46
105. Abdus Samad, *Shersabadiader Kathalekhya*, Badia Barta Prakashana, Malda, 1987, p.11
106. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash, op.cit.*, p.27
107. *Ibid.*, p.28
108. Abdus Samad, *Shersabadiader Kathalekhya, op.cit.*, p.119

109. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash*, *op.cit.*, p.43
110. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.46
111. Ambika Charan Bose, *A Hand Book of Criminology*, Calcutta, 1971, p.230
112. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.45
113. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash*, *op.cit.*, p.27
114. M.O.Carter, *Malda Survey and Settlement Operations 1928-35*, *op.cit.*, p.45
115. Abdur Rahaman Siddiqi, *Barendrabhumir Chirayata Basinda*, *op.cit.*, p.121
116. Abdus Samad, *Maldaha Zillar Janajati, Itihas, Nritattawa, Bhasa O Sanskriti*, Badia Barta Prakashana, Malda, 2003, p.69
117. Asok Mitra ed., *Malda Census 1951*, *op.cit.*, p.56