

Chapter-IV

A Detailed Study of the urban administration of English Bazar town from 1813 till the establishment of the English Bazar Municipality in 1869.

I

Before going into the urban administration of English Bazar town it is pertinent to have a look into the circumstances leading to the formation of Malda district and the selection of English Bazar as the district headquarter which in turn accelerated the process of urbanization of English Bazar.

One of the most important contributions made by the British in the field of administration was the introduction of district administration. The district administrations were quintessential products and key sites of colonial provincial administration. After the granting of diwani or rights of revenue collection of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company by the Mughal emperor in 1765, the 'District' or spatial unit for revenue collection came to be one of the most significant components of the colonial administrative machinery. The district was then the focal point for revenue administration and the Collector was made the key person in charge of it. In 1787, the Collectors were also vested with magisterial powers. In 1833 and 1843 respectively, the posts of deputy collectors and deputy magistrates were created to provide participation to the Indians.¹ The Collector's role before the first war of Independence in 1857 is best described by George Chesney that the Collector was the fiscal representative of the government for receiving various type of revenue. He was the government treasurer in charge of local funds. As magistrate, he was responsible for the maintenance of law and order, the superintendence of the police and the management of the jails² all in one. Later on, after the British crown assumed direct rule over India in 1858, it also served as the basic political-administrative unit for imperial governance itself.³ Thus, the present structure of district administration is largely a legacy of the British rule in India. The various structural and functional aspects of district administration such as recruitment, training, office procedure, local administration, budgeting, auditing, police administration, revenue administration and so on, have their roots in the

colonial rule. The main objective of the district administration was to govern the country with a strong hand and also to an extent, keep in touch with the opinion and feelings of the local people.⁴ Though it was from the time of Lord Cornwallis, the modern administrative system started but the necessity of district administration was realized long before it was officially recognized.⁵ Cornwallis was the first among the Englishman who can be properly regarded as an administrator in true sense of the term. It was due to his effort and benevolent mind that the district administration in India took shape and consistency and entire management of the administration was regulated by a code of written laws.⁶ The district administrative system passed through various stages of improvements owing to the sustained efforts of the people until it was completely fashioned. And now the district administration in India is one of the most important administrative units as it is an appropriate geographical unit prepared with practical technique of management to deal with public affairs. Barring a few exceptions it has a common pattern in all over India.⁷

II

Prior to the formation of the district the charge of the administration and the responsibility of maintenance of law and order of Malda region were under the charge of the District of Purnia and Rajshahi. It was in the year 1813 a separate district was formed cutting the border line area of the above mentioned districts.

III

But the question is why a separate district was fashioned by the British out of the outlying portion of the Purnia and Rajshahi district. The reason behind the formation of the district was mainly for the maintenance of law and order of this area and to secure the life and property of the people who were associated with the extensive commercial network of the company. During the second half of the eighteenth century and early part of the nineteenth century there was constant threat to the life and property of the people of this area specially the officers and servant of the East India Company stationed at the various commercial and indigo factory there. The route of transaction of commercial goods from surrounding area to the factory scattered within the region was not safe. There was frequent loot of property of the company's merchants by the robbers and dacoits which was a matter of concern to the Company and created a serious problem to them. It is evident from the various

report and official correspondence of the company's officer engaged in various commercial activities that the increasing plunder of the company's property and servant of the company and of the agent of the company produced a serious trouble to commercial residencies of this region. Though the principal factory was well protected and well guarded by company's own police but the additional establishment outside the protected area was under constant threat. There was no proper arrangement of security as such. Moreover, before 1765, the company had no legal authority to look after the administration because the maintenance of law and order and ensuring security to the people was in the hands of local zamindar and the other officers of the Nawab's administration. Therefore, the company had to depend on the officers of local zamindars and other local arrangements.⁸

The problem was further aggravated by the thought of the Resident of the company that it was unsafe to depend on the local zamindars for their security because sometimes the zamindars were themselves involved in those illegal activities and they were the enemies of the company. Sometimes the company provides his own police force to the extensive network of commercial activities which they built up throughout the year but it was not sufficient to protect the interest of the company with a very little arrangement of their own. It was evident from the report sent by Thomas Hatchman to the controlling council of revenue of Murshidabad in May 1771 that frequent robberies were committed by the dacoits upon the weavers of those villages which were dependent on the Resident of the factory and a complaint was made by the weavers that their property was looted by the dacoits. Their numbers were numerous and there were no sufficient arrangements on the spot to prevent those activities of the dacoits. Not only that the Gomiothas whose responsibility was to maintain the law and order and to give security to the life and property of the people, were under constant threat. Thomas Henschman, the Resident of Malda, reported to the then Nawab of Bengal, Reza Khan in January 1778 that a boat was plundered by the gang of dacoits carrying Rs 39,500 from Dinajpur to Malda. In spite of all necessary arrangement the dacoits killed three men and looted the rest. It appears that this robbery had been somehow supported by the village officers.⁹ The village watchmen and other village menials joined dacoits (gang robbery) bands and pillaged affluent houses after the company suspended zamindary police power.¹⁰ Another proof of connection of the zamindars and local officers with

the gang robbers was revealed in the cross questioning made by the then Resident of Malda Mr. Charles Grant with the robbers captured after the robbery of Jagannathpur factory in 1783, a subordinate to Malda factory. On questioning the robbers disclose their connection with the relative of the zamindars. In February, 1793, George Udny, Resident of Malda made another similar report of robbery to the board of trade in which Rs. 18,000 was plundered by the robbers on the way from Malda to Nischindapur and Buddel aurungs.¹¹

In Malda region, the situation was further worsened by the activities of Sanyasi and Fakir raiders. Taking advantage of the collapse of the Nawabs administration and the non-assumption of the real control by the East India Company bands of armed Hindu Sanyasis from Bihar and upper India intruded into the fertile districts of north Bengal like Rangpur, Dinajpur, Malda etc and systematically plundered anything they could lay in their hands on¹² and rocked this part of Bengal and adjacent area of Bihar between 1763 to 1800.¹³ They established terrorism a 'horrid ascendancy' throughout north Bengal, mostly Purnia, Dinajpur, Malda, Rongpur Bogora and Rajshahi and became a constant threat to the life and property of the people and the administration of that part of the country. In December, 1772, Capt. Thomas who was stationed at Rangpur was attacked and murdered by these bands. Majnu Shah was the leader of these Fakirs whose one of the headquarters was at Madargunge near Goail, 12 miles south of Bogra town. The others were at Buddel and Mahastan where he stayed with a greater force.¹⁴ The Malda region was totally disturbed by the raids of Sanayasi and armed Fakirs. Grant, stationed at Malda, sent a report to the Collector of Bhagalpur in 8th March, 1783 that "the country in the neighborhood of Malda was being infested by several large body of Fakirs who have committed many depredation".¹⁵ It is also reported that a public katchery was robbed by a bands of Fakirs consisting of 600 to 700 persons about six coss away from Malda. This was the situation of law and order of Malda region at the end of the eighteenth century. Actuated by the situation Grant appealed to the council-in-charge of the company's military station nearest to Malda for military detachment to protect the countryside from the raiders. The Collector of Bhagulpore accordingly informed to the Resident of Malda that six companies of sepoy's headed by Mr. Buchan were proceeding towards Malda to crush the raiders.¹⁶ But it was not sufficient enough to

handle the situation of lawlessness of the region which prompted East India Company to take an administrative step to control the above mentioned situation.

III

It is clear from the above discussion that the state of administration was totally broken down. This state of condition was due to the collapse of Nawabi administration and also for the non-existence of British control over that part of the country. It was in this background the superintendent of police of lower province sent an unfavorable report to the government on 18th February, 1813, on the state of crime in this tract of country. To understand the immediate cause of the formation of a new district we have to quote the exact report sent by the Superintendent of police of lower provinces on which the Government responded and the District of Malda was shaped. In his report he stated that the "The crime of gang robbery is of very rare occurrence in any other quarter of this district, but the number of burglaries reported to have been committed in the last six month is enormous. These offences have mostly occurred in the south eastern thanas of the district, and in the vicinity of Malda. The distance of the thana of Seebgunge from the station of Purniah is about 120 miles, and the thanas of kullea Chuk, Bholahat and Gurgureebah which adjoin the former thana, are also so distant from the station, that it is scarcely possible for the Magistrate to exercise a sufficient control over the officers of the police" He further stated that "It appears, therefore, less a matter of surprise that burglaries and minor offences should prevail to the extent noticed, than that this part of the country which adjoins the two district of this division, in which dacoity has prevailed, should have continued free from occurrence of that evil. I am of opinion that if in any part of the country an arrangement similar to that, which has been adopted at Monghyr, be necessary or expedient, it is peculiarly so in the vicinity of Maldah at which place the service of an able Assistant to the Magistrate, either of Dinajpur or Purniah, vested with the power of joint Magistrate, extending over the jurisdiction of the thanas of Purniah above noticed also thanas of Maldah and Bamungola of Dinajpur, and of Rhanpur and Chappye of Rajsaahee, would be productive of the greatest benefits to the police of those districts. Aware however of the objections which may exist, to the adoption of this arrangement, it is merely suggested, for the consideration of Government". Within a month from the date of this report sent by the Superintendent of police of Lower provinces produced their effect and government at once showed

expedient of what the Superintendent of police had recommended.¹⁷ Accordingly, in March 1813, the border line thanas of Purnia, Dinajpur and Rajshahi district which was situated in long distance from the respective headquarters and within the vicinity of Malda separated from the above district and a new district was formed given the name Malda with its headquarter at English Bazar. The thanas of Sibganj, Kaliachak, Bholahat, and Gargariba from Purnia District, and Malda and Bamongola from Dinajpur district and Rampur and Chapai from Rajshahi district were included in Malda district.¹⁸ Primarily the district starts its administrative journey with these eight thanas which was mentioned above but with the passes of time some other area also included to the district. It was in the year 1869, the first remarkable changes in the border line was made and 50 villages belonging to pargana Badaur, 132 belonging to Hatanda, 101 to Mahinagar, 23 to Kasimpur, 14 to Kharba, 41 to Dilwarpur, 75 to Kankjol, 3 to Akbarpur, 2 to Maldawar, 1 to Kholra and 22 to Samalpur, covering a total area of 174,407 acres, or 272.51 square miles, were transferred to Malda district. At the same time 64 villages belonging to pargana Sujainagar, 11 to Akbarpur, 2 Kholra occupying a total area of 32634 acres, or 50.99 square miles, were transferred to Purnia district¹⁹ In 1875, 65 villages of Murshidabad district and 237 villages from Dinajpur district were included to Malda district. The most important inclusion to the district was the inclusion of 401 square miles area from Bhutni Diara region. In The year 1875, the boundary of the district was notified²⁰ and the newly formed district was bounded in the north by the district of Purnia and Dinajpur, in the east it was bordered by Rajshahi, towards the south it was bounded by the river Ganges and Murshidabad and in the western side it was surrounded by the river Ganges and Bhagulpur district.²¹ There is no Sub-divisional system of administration in Malda and for administrative convenience the entire district was subdivided into five divisions. The town English Bazar belongs to division five.²² From 1813 to 1876 the district belonged to Rajshahi division but after the formation of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam it was transferred to Bhagulpur division and in 1905 it was again re-transferred to previous division i.e. in Rajshahi division.²³

It is pertinent here to discuss why the district was renamed as Malda and also why English Bazar was selected as the district headquarter instead of Malda which was later known as Old Malda. It was probable that long before the establishment of

the district the administrative records especially in the records of revenue administration contain the name Malda. That is why the British authority thinks to be better to rename the newly formed district as Malda for the sake of their administrative convenience. Secondly, it was the general policy of the British government to create new center instead of old one and that's why they selected English Bazar as the district headquarter instead of Malda which has a long history as center of trade and ports town.²⁴

IV

After the formation, the district was placed under the charge of an officer exercising the powers of a Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector. A registrar was also appointed. Though the district was formed and the administration of the district was placed under the charge of a Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector. but the powers of the Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector was of an anomalous character. The administrative jurisdiction of Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector were not properly defined.²⁵ This state of condition continued long and produced confusion which for a long time overhung the criminal, revenue, and civil jurisdiction of Malda. At the early stage of administration the Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector to some extent controlled and directed by the two collectors of the district of Purnia and Dinajpur, all official correspondence from the Board of Revenue being transmitted to him through one or the other of their treasuries. However the power of the Joint-Magistrate is more or less independent and he was by no means controlled by the Magistrate of any District. He was practically independent to discharge his duty which is under his authority. In the year 1832, to remove the confusion and smooth transaction of revenue administration a separate treasury was established at Malda and was placed under a Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector and was finally constituted a regular collectorship.²⁶ From that time the independence of the district of Malda was practically started. It was not, however, till 1859 the title of Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector was changed into that of Magistrate and Collector, and the District of Malda was placed on equal footings in all respect with its neighbors.²⁷ The administration of the district was catered from the district headquarter i.e., from English Bazar town. The Magistrate-Collector is assisted at English Bazar, the headquarters, by a staff of three Deputy-Collectors and one Sub-deputy-Collector.²⁸ Though the civil and revenue administration of the district of

Malda obtained her independence from 1859 but the judicial administration was still performed by the judge of Purnia, Dinajpur and Mursidabad. This arrangement sometime creates great confusion and for this in 1870, the Collector of the district of Malda reported that there was much intermingling and confusion between the criminal, civil and revenue administration. Some portions of the District lay within the civil jurisdiction of Dinajpur, Purnia and Mushidabad while for criminal and revenue proposes they belong to Malda. In other portions, only the criminal jurisdiction rested with Malda, and both the civil and revenue jurisdictions were with one or other of the three above-mentioned Districts. The Collector also stress that those anomalies were shortly to be amended and accordingly old boundaries of the District had been greatly simplified. With this judicial amendment the District gained judicial independence. It covers the area of 1806.64 square miles, exclusive of river area, as returned by the Boundary Commission in September 1874.²⁹ With the above mentioned development, English Bazar became the headquarter of the district of the same name and its importance as a centre of administration increased.

V

Malda district is one of the earliest districts of present day North Bengal, which came into existence in the year 1813. With the establishment of the district and by the selection of English Bazar as the district headquarter the urbanization of the town received new dimension. Before the establishment of the district the town survived and sustained only due to the commercial importance. After the withdrawal of commercial factory the economic importance of the town gradually diminished and the town temporarily stagnated but with the formation of the district and the selection of English Bazar as the district headquarter hastened the process of urbanization. It is obvious when a place assumed the status of district headquarter it gained some administrative infrastructural development like magisterial offices and other subordinate offices with its large administrative machinery which somehow gave impetus to the development of the town. It was also applicable to English Bazar town.

Though, due to meagerness of source material relating to town administration, it is quite impossible to furnish a detailed description of gradual development of general administration of the town before the establishment of the English Bazar Municipality in 1869. Yet it is obvious that with the establishment of

the district the administrative establishment gradually took shape and this showed the sign of urbanization. But it is not definitely known that whether the town was administered by a separate body of administration. The town English Bazar may show changes of stability and the colonial government might be interested in developing it at least for the sake of their own convenience. The primary administrative measures undertaken in the various wings of administration, such as roads, bridges, ferries, dispensaries, sanitation, water-supply, and education provided infrastructural facilities in English Bazar town. A Magistrate, with his contingent and staff were there to maintain peace and order in and around the town. For the residence of European officers the administration constructed well-protected bungalows. At a distance from the residential houses of the Europeans, other building works, for instance, courts, bazaars, wells, and other construction works for public interest were undertaken. With the gradual expansion and development of the town the system of communication linking with other villages and towns of surrounding areas started improving. The administration provided the town dwellers with facilities to increase the amenities and commercial dealings. The town gradually extended their settlement under the available resources. With the passage of time, the important features of urbanization, such as administration, business, population, revenue, education, health services and judiciary became prominent. Thus at the middle of the nineteenth century English Bazar had emerged as a commercial to administrative town obviously, bearing the features of a colonial town.

The first annual report of the sanitary commission for Bengal during the year 1868 help us to get a clear picture of the town administration especially in terms of public health of the town before the establishment of English Bazar Municipality. Though the report was mainly connected with the previous year but it may help us to understand the general condition of the urban administration of the town. According to the report though the district of Malda is healthier in comparison to the district of northern parts of Bengal, the town English Bazar was not healthy so far. The report furnished that it was because of thick jungle, and marshy jheels on every side of the town. The sanitary condition of the town is not what it ought to be. The European compound of the town was properly drained but there was no proper drainage system in the native quarter of the town. The existing drainage system of the town was not impressive. The depth of the drains when originally made, cannot now be

ascertained, they are not kept clean regularly, and hence have filled up in places and rarely serve the purposes for which they are intended. Such drains cannot but overflow after any heavy shower of rain, and, thus making the surrounding ground soft and muddy, cause disease in the locality. There is no underground drainage system in any parts of the town. The defect lies in the embankment, which is placed on the east, to prevent the submersion of the town from the overflowing of the river during the rains. To rectify this evil, all along the bund a number of under-ground drains being opened at a regular intervals, having valvular doors on the river-side, so constructed and placed, as to allow free exit of water from the town but at the same time prevent the river water from getting in through them. The filth and refuse of every private dwelling are collected in certain parts of each compound and stored on the one side of the lanes, behind or in front of the house and allowed to lie and decompose. The lane of native quarter are generally low, mostly kutchra, and quite impassable during the rains. The well water was very unhealthy and was fruitful sources of disease among those who were using it for drinking or cooking purposes. The center of the town is thickly populated and the houses were close to each other. The houses mostly made from the bricks of Gour and utterly wanting in ventilation. The drains nearly filled up with filth and heaps of refuse and the organic matter in almost every compound in different stages of decay. The outer side of the town is comparatively an open place and sparsely populated and the houses generally built of straw and bamboo.³⁰

There are two native bazaars or market in the town where people assemble to sell their goods and buy fish and vegetables. Here rotten refuse of vegetables and fish are generally allowed to accumulate for days and when one has occasion to pass through them, the bad smell evolved from the mixed organic substances in various stages of decomposition was unbearable. There was only one place where the slaughter of animals was effected, and that was in the heart of the town near the government charitable hospital and dispensary and at a very short distance from the court house. A number of native houses were only separated from it by a street running between. There was a drain close behind the slaughter house. The offal of the slaughter-yard was thrown into the drain which was gradually decomposed or eaten up by dogs and vultures. This slaughter house is a great nuisance in the locality, especially to the inmates of the hospital. There was no provision for

collection of night-soil till the year of this report. Apart from the principal roads, such as the one leading from the court to the jail and few others were metalled and clean but these in the native quarters were kucha and during the rains mostly impassable. The district officer was responsible for the sanitation and conservancy of the town. But it is doubtful that the responsible officer hardly takes any interest to improve the sanitary condition of the town as far as the native settlement was concern. The atmosphere of the sudder station of the district was tainted with emanations from neglected drains and sewers especially in the lanes of the native quarters. The reports however, were silent about the public latrines and public urinals of the native quarters and also about the sanitary condition of the European compound of the town.³¹ Malda was less advanced in vaccination operation because till date the district was not within the circle of vaccine operation. In the year 23rd April 1883, the then District Magistrate of Malda, Mr. R. Porch receipts the letter of approval for the extension of Vaccination Act to the English Bazar municipality.³² Before that within the town few vaccine operations were performed either by the district medical officers or by the staff of the Suddar hospital but still then outside the town there was no arrangement of vaccination. In this report the district medical officer gives some suggestion for the improvement of the sanitary condition of the town which were as follows.

1st. The lane or pathway between every two rows of native houses should be made higher, with pucca surface drains on either side. These should be made to communicate with the main drains which empty into river.

2nd. Every private compound should also have its own drains to communicate with the main drains, or their feeders.

3rd. Privies in private compounds should be made in such a style as to admit of their being cleaned daily, and every occupant of a private dwelling compelled to engage mehters to clean them daily.

4th. The poorer classes of the residents, public latrines on the dry-earth system should be constructed; and the system carried out and supervised by the District Municipal Committee, the expenses being met by the funds collected under the District Municipal and Conservancy Act.³³

Municipal Police or Town Police was responsible for the protection of the life and property of the residents of the town. The report of the Police of the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency, for the Year 1869, shows that the municipal police force of the English Bazar town consisted of one Head Constable and 28 constables. The salary of the police force was paid from municipal funds amounted Rs. 2,143 per year.³⁴ The annual cost of the town police, as compared with the population protected, amounted in 1872 to 2 annas 5pies per head of the population. The only jail of the district is at the Sudder Station of the town i, e., English Bazar. According to the report of the Inspector-General of Jail for the year 1872 that the only district jail was a small, brick-walled, tiled building along with a cook sheds and work sheds. It was bounded by wall. The total accommodation was not as far the criminal wants of the district. The average daily number of prisoners in the jail was 57.³⁵

Notes and References

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