

Chapter-V-(d)

Public health

I

After taking stock of the educational facilities available in the town, let us now turn to see the general condition of public health of the district in general and the town of English Bazar in particular, and also the institutions which took care of health services of the town during the period of our study. It is difficult to review in a precise manner of the miscellaneous works of public health done by the Municipality over a period because it involves multidimensional activities. Before going into a discussion of the municipal administration in connection with the public health it would be pertinent here to have a look on the overall environmental condition of the district. According to Hunter “the district of Malda is considered less unhealthy than the district of Purnia, Dinajpur, and Rajshahi.....and the population of this region is comparatively small, and consequently the total amount of sickness is less than might be expected. The banks of the Mahananda and the greater portion of the tract that lies between the river and the Ganges are favoured by healthier condition of soil and climate and are probably less obnoxious to disease than the average of Bengal”.¹ Asok Mitra reiterates the same things and states that “the health of the district in the Diara tract is probably the best in the whole of the state”.² Hunter further said “there are no diseases in Malda district of a strictly epidemic type. The outbreak of malarious fever, cholera, and small-pox recur with regularity at certain seasons of the year, but none of these.....as to be probably classed with epidemics”.³ Apart from the above description, it is pertinent to mention that a report submitted by Mr. J. M. Coater, the M. D. of the then Sanitary Commission of Bengal to the Magistrate of Malda in 11th August, 1874 provides a graphic picture of the general health conditions of Malda at that time. In his report he addressed to the then district Magistrate and said that “having gone through your district from Chachal to Nawabganj thana, found the people healthier than Dinajpor and ROUNGPOR”. He further added that “much of the interior of Malda was under water and therefore I was confined to river-side villages chiefly. I had the advantage of seeing a large number of school boys from the district schools. The average health of 10 villages was 18 percent, with spleen enlarged, 12 percent anomic, 2 percent emaciated, 4 percent aged and 64 percent in normal health. In looking through the registration of

deaths in Maldah, I find for the 2nd quarter of 1873, the urban death-rates to be under 20 per 1000 per annum, while that for the rural area is 38 per mile".⁴ This was the general condition of public health of the district which is far better as compared to the whole of Bengal presidency.

II

However, what is more important in terms of public health of the town of English Bazar is the administration and contribution made by the municipality in this direction which was more intimately concerned to make the town healthier. The municipality had to performed several duties relating to public health which did not fully understand its strict line of responsibility. Its multifarious duties included water-supply, sanitation-conservancy including the disposal of night-soil, registration of births and deaths, maintenance of hospitals and dispensary, clearing of garbage from markets and many other small but important tasks. Now it would be wise to have a look on the municipal administration of the town with a focus on the phenomenon of public health.

III

A reasonable arrangement has been made by the English Bazar Municipality in connection with the water-supply in every wards of the town. A statistics of sources of water-supply as shown by the table no. 8 reveals that the main sources of water-supply of the town were river, tanks and wells.⁵ The town of English Bazar has the advantage of being on the side of a hill stream which therefore gives good drinking water.⁶ Initially, the four wards namely Mukdumpur, English Bazar, Purakully and Fulbari get their water from the above sources. Gradually it extended to the newly included wards. The river water which was used for drinking as well as for domestic purposes was the natural source of water for the towns' people. Apart from river the tanks or wells were constructed by the municipality and by private individuals to meet the needs of the increasing demand of water of the town. During the year 1897-98, there were five tanks at Mukdampur, five at English Bazar, and one at Fulbari, and in total there were 11 tanks. In the ward named Purakally there was no tank as such. The water of tanks was more or less healthier than the wells. During the period under review there were a large number of wells. In the word Mukdampur one healthy and 157 unhealthy well were there and in English Bazar

there were 203 wells and in Purakali 88, and in Fulbari 58 wells. It is documented that most of the wells were unhealthy. All the above mentioned tanks and wells within the limits of English Bazar Municipality were not controlled or maintained by the municipality. There were only one tank and five wells that were controlled by the municipal authority; and 4 tanks, five wells maintained by the Government, and so the rest were private.⁷ Even if the sweepers kept them clean evidently⁸, the native people not only had a preference for river water for drinking purpose but also actively discouraged others regarding the use of tanks and wells. It is interesting to note that once the Magistrate of Midnapore made the remarks on this direction which was equally true for in any town of Bengal: "in the matter of water-supply as of sanitary measures adopted-indeed the measures passable-are and must be inadequate, unless the people help themselves and entertain less primitive ideas on the subject than they now do; it is useless securing three or four tanks in a town with an area of two or three square mile; only those living close by well go to them; the others will insist on drinking from the puddle or horse pond nearest to their house, however filthy it may be: much ill-feeling has ever been caused by the attempt to reserves tanks to for drinking water; the people live near- the only people benefited-have objected, and even petitioned against the reservation of the tanks; they look upon it as a cruel grievance if they are not allowed to bathe and wash their clothes in the water which they afterwards drink"⁹ Following table will show the clear picture of water-supply arrangement of the town in an early date which was obvious developed as time rolled on.

Table-1

General Register of Water – Supply of the English Bazaar Municipality for the Year 1897-98									
Name of the Municipality	Name of Ward & No.	Sources of Water Supply		Ownership or Control					
		Tanks	Wells	Govt.		Municipal		Private	
				Tanks	Wells	Tanks	Wells	Tanks	Wells
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
English Bazaar Municipality	Makdumpur (I)	5	158	3	4	-	3	2	151
	English Bazaar (II)	5	203	1	-	1	2	3	201
	Purkully (III)	-	88	-	-	-	-	-	88
	Fulbari (IV)	1	58	-	1	-	-	1	58

Source: Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal Presidency, for the year 1897-98, Municipal Department, Calcutta, 3rd January, 1899, General Register of water-supply of the Municipality in the Province for the year 1897-98, Appendix-M, 68.

But whatever might be the attitude of the people it is the duty of municipality to continue these efforts not only to improve the existing sources of water-supply, but to create new ones, and thus to educate the people regarding this. As a result, various plans had been undertaken to improve the condition of the existing sources of water-supply within the town. A report on the working of municipality of Bengal for the year 1935-36 shows that a plan was estimated to increase the sources of water-supply of the town. The report said that “the water of the tube-well which formed the source of supply in the English Bazaar Municipality turned out to be hard and this led

many people to take their supply of drinking water from the river or even from dirty ponds. The Public Health Department recommended the installation of a softening plant at an estimated cost of Rs. 22,000¹⁰ but nothing was done in this direction during the year under review.

The drainage system is another aspect of public health. From the very beginning, the English Bazar town had a well planned drainage system¹¹ which was more or less satisfactory and was getting improved day by day. A report submitted by J. M. Coater, the M. D. of Sanitary Commission of Bengal to the Magistrate of Malda in 11th August, 1874 is also important in this connection. In this report Mr. Coater states, "the streets of the town are wide and well drained the bund to the north-west preventing influx of water from above. The ditches are kept free from weeds and there are fewer hollows and ditches full of refuse and offensive rotting vegetation than in most towns of similar size."¹² The amount spent on this head is regular but not encouraging as well as not sufficient to substitute pucca drains of existing kutcha drains. Sometimes the total amount spent on this head decreased as compared to the preceding year which is a sign of stagnation in terms of the gradual development of the town. The following represents the annual cost on drainage system of the municipality. It was the view of many European Commissioners of rural town that instead of transforming the kutcha drain it is more important to a rural municipality to be careful about levels of such kutcha drains with a view to preventing them from becoming water-logged because the kutcha drains have always the great advantage of the surrounding earth being brought into play as a deodorizer and absorbent, but these side are lost as soon as a kutcha drain is transformed into a water-tight component.¹³

Table-2

Annual Expenditure on Drainage System	
Year	Annual Cost in rupees
1891-1892	128
1897-1898	549
1900-1901	1213
1901-1902	1300
1902-1903	1285
1903-1904	1026
1935-1936	2235

Source: Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal for the year 1891-1892, 1897-98, 1900-01, 1901-02, 1902-1903, 1903-04, 1935-36.

In English Bazar a well maintained hospital cum dispensary was there, which came into being in 1861 and later in 1872 the entire hospital was rebuilt.¹⁴ It was in the category of Class-III hospital.¹⁵ The hospital and the dispensary were chiefly maintained by the fund provided by the municipality and the grants received from the Government. But sometimes contribution from Europeans as well as Indians also facilitated to its smooth running. One of such contribution was a modern operation room made by Mr. Hennessy of Mathurapur¹⁶ The table below shows the yearly contributions made by the municipality to the charitable hospital of the town. The amount spent under this head rose from 1960 in 1892-93 to 2861 in 1897-98 it was further increased to 3385 in 1901-02 but it was decreased to 2315 in 1935-36.

Table-3

Annual Cost of Hospitals and Dispensaries	
Year	Annual Cost in rupees
1892-93	1960
1897-98	2861
1900-01	2864
1901-02	3385
1902-03	3602
1903-04	3260
1935-36	2315

Source: Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal for the year 1892-1893, 1897-98, 1900-01, 1901-02, 1902-1903, 1903-04, 1935-36.

A native doctor was in-charge of the hospital who received his salary and free accommodation from the Government.¹⁷ The hospital was periodically visited by the commissioners and other district officers. The hospital also provided services of surgical operation. The Government supplied free surgical instruments and European medicines. The annual expenditure and number of patient treated in Indoor and Outdoor are given in table no. 4.

Table-4

Statistics of English Bazar Charitable Dispensary			
Year	Number of patients		Annual expenditure in Rs.
	Indoor	outdoor	
1890-91	205	10777	1591
1891-92	477	8507	2324
1911	389	12894	4916
1920	592	13473	8345

Source: Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal for the year 1890-91, 1891-92, *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda, B. Volume, Statistics, 1911-1912 to 1920-1921*, Table-25, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Dept, 1913), 29.

Hunter's report reveals that the high rate of mortality was due to sickness from Cholera, fever, etc. caused by the heavy rain falls and floods. It is clear from the various records that the common diseases were Cholera, small-pox, and fever which caused several deaths in the town throughout the year.¹⁸ The above source of statistics shows that there was a gradual increase in the number of patients both in indoor and outdoor, though there were some exceptional years when the number decreased. It means that the people were breaking down their traditional style of treatments and slowly but steadily getting attracted to modern or to correctly say to European nature of treatments. The Charitable Hospital of English Bazar received regular grants from the Municipality, District Board, Government and other private individuals which are shown by the following table.

Table-5

Statements showing the share of contribution to the English bazaar charitable hospital								
Year	Number of beds	Municipal grants	District grants	Government grants	Private grants	Other sources	Total	Annual expenditure
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1911	28	1611	1200	1244	420	15	4490	4916
1920	34	2250	2200	2342	852	970	8614	8345

Source: *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda, B. Volume, Statistics, 1900-1901 to 1910-1911*, Table-26, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Dept, 1913), 29. 1913. & *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda, B. Volume, Statistics, 1911-1912 to 1920-1921*, Table-25, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Dept, 1913), 29.

The English Bazar charitable dispensary is the only dispensary in the district where indoor patient were treated.¹⁹ In 1892 the total accommodation of the hospital was 22, of which 18 for males and 4 females.²⁰ In 1911, it increased to 28, of which 22 for males and 6 females. In 1920 it was 34. Except few, most of the patients treated into this hospital were Indians of the town and those who came from the surrounding villages for better treatment.²¹ In the year 1873, the average death rate of the town was 30.32 percent.²² Probably most of the death occurred due to the reluctance of the local people who displayed their dislike to entering into the hospital and frequently came into it in the last stage of disease. As no records of this hospital are kept in details so it is impossible to make any comprehensive description. To keep the record of births and deaths a new system of registration was adopted in 1873²³ and it was seriously maintained by the municipality but no amount has been spent on this head separately in any statistics at least which I have gone through. The English Bazar Municipality organized a health exhibition during the Silver Jubilee celebration in May 1935, at which demonstrations on maternity, child welfare, school hygiene, cholera, small-pox and other preventable diseases were given.²⁴

Notes & References

¹ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Voll-VII, (Delhi: D. K. Pub. House, 1974), 145.

² Asok Mitra, ed. *Census 1951, District Handbook Malda*, (Calcutta: Thackers's Press, 1954), Appendix-III, 41.

³ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.* 145.

⁴ Proceedings of Bengal Government, General Dept. Part-II, (Calcutta: 1874, Bengal Secretarial office), 745-46.

⁵ Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal Presidency, for the year 1897-98, Municipal Department, Calcutta, 3rd January, 1899, General Register of water-supply of the Municipality in the Province for the year 1897-98, Appendix-M, 68.

⁶ Proceedings of Bengal Government, General Dept. Part-II, (Calcutta: 1874, Bengal Secretarial office), 745-46.

⁷ Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal Presidency, for the year 1897-98, *op.cit.* 68.

⁸ Proceedings of Bengal Government, General Dept. Part-II, *op.cit.* 745.

⁹ Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal Presidency, for the year 1897-98, *op.cit.* 14.

¹⁰ Resolution reviewing the Reports on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal during the year 1935-36, Department of Public Health and Local-Self-Government, Government of Bengal, (Calcutta: Bengal Government Press, 1937), 8

¹¹ G.E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Malda*, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918), 42.

¹² Proceedings of Bengal Government, General Dept. Part-II, (Calcutta: 1874, Bengal Secretarial office), 745-46.

¹³ Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal Presidency, for the year 1897-98, *op.cit.* 15.

¹⁴ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.* 152.

¹⁵ *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda, B. Volume, Statistics, 1911-1912 to 1920-1921*, Table-25, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Deport, 1913) 29.

¹⁶ G.E. Lambourn, *op.cit.* 42-43.

¹⁷ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.* 152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 152 and 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 152.

²⁰ Administrative Report on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal during the year 1891-92, Municipal Department, Calcutta, 1893, Appendix-J, 68

²¹ *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda, B. Volume, Statistics, 1900-1901 to 1910-1911*, Table-26, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Deport, 1913), 29. 1913. & *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda, B. Volume, Statistics, 1911-1912 to 1920-1921*, Table-25, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Deport, 1913), 29.

²² W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.* 152.

²³ *Ibid.* 152.

²⁴ Resolution reviewing the Reports on the Working of Municipalities in Bengal during the year 1935-36, Department of Public Health and Local-Self-Government, Government of Bengal, (Calcutta: Bengal Government Press, 1937), 11.