

CONCLUSION

Students of urban studies have viewed their subject in two perspectives: the inclusive and the specific. The inclusive and broader view encompasses the more extensive social system or total culture in which a given city takes shape. The historians who study the urban centres in this broader perspective takes account not only of activities within the urban territory but also of components of the social system located outside. The broad, cultural concept of the urban areas transcends the range of phenomena that the observer may directly encounter in an urban area. The student who takes this inclusive, cultural view assumes that it is only the social system as a whole which explains the behaviour of its parts: Max Weber's translated essay on the city furnishes an excellent example of such a macrocosmic study. Weber maps three historical types of urban corporations in ancient and medieval Mediterranean society. The categories with which he construed his urban types include kinship, power structure, military organization, foreign trade, agriculture, and taxation-concerns which in the given instances are not predominantly urban. A large portion of urban research has been devoted to the discovery of characteristic relationships between two or more variables of city life. In short, these sub-cultural explorations were designed to map urban institutions or dislocations and to predict their behaviours concerning one another rather than to trace their configuration within the more extensive social system.

Braudel remarks, "Towns cities are turning points, Watersheds of human history when they first appeared, bringing with them the written word, they opened the door to what we now called history. Their revival in Europe in the eleventh century marked the beginning of the continent's

rise to eminence. When they flourished in Italy, they brought the age of the Renaissance so it has been since the city-states, the poleis of ancient Greece, the medina of Muslim conquest to our own times. All major bursts of growth are expressed by an urban explosion.” An Urban Centre is not merely a “diachronic assemblage of buildings. It has a structure it has its own dynamism and it is differentiated in a particular time and space

The urban centers of 18th and 19th century India have attracted the attention of the scholars. The (Indian) historians of the medieval period sing in Chorus that the Mughal cities contained a large population; there were many well developed Kharkhanas and also a well-developed Banking System. This Chorus follows with the ruinous reflection of towns and Urban Centers during the age of later Mughals (an outcome of the intervention of the Europeans). This argument of ‘Town Decline’ was spearheaded by Irfan Habib and the argument was further carried on by other Indian Marxist historians. A solitary flaw with these types of work is the projection of a mundane scenario of the 18th century and early 19th-century urban centers is well deduced in the works of C.A. Baylay. Baylay argues that the younger Marxist historians follow the old nationalist interpretation because they wish to treat the Indian economy as a whole and argue from general premises concerning the ‘triumphant march of the British Bourgeoisie through History’. He further says that western historians and some Indian historians have come to make a distinction between the degree of change induced in the Coastal economics on the one hand and inland cities and their hinterland on the other. For inland India, they adhere to what is essentially Weber’s model of the camp city founded by a peripatetic political authority and the main argument is that any urban growth induced by early British rule was not dissimilar to that induced under the Mughals and their successor regimes says Baylay. Coming back to Bengal, one can find a classic example of Inland Towns, Coastal Towns and also Hill towns. The

occupation of Bengal played a crucial role in the consolidation of British power in India since the granting of the Diwani in 1765. Warren Hastings, transferred the Diwani [civil] offices from Murshidabad (till the capital of Bengal) to Calcutta in 1773, the latter gradually emerged as the capital of British India. In effect, it was from Bengal that the British ruled India and it also served as the vital site for setting up and experimenting with the district administration system itself, the learning from which was subsequently actively harnessed for the administration of other areas of India. Culturally, too, Bengal represented a region in which there were continuous attempts – both by the British colonists and the local population – to forge a hybrid identity. The title of the thesis includes ‘provincial Bengal’, in a strict sense, it corresponds to the Subha Bengal of the pre-colonial era. The territorial demarcation has been used flexibly because Bengal itself did not remain a fixed description or had fixed boundaries throughout British rule thus the thesis is based primarily on the province of Bengal in its strictest sense, but occasionally includes parts of Bihar and Orissa as per the research demand. Thus these many more prepositions forms the basis of chapter 1 where statement of the research problem, the site of enquiry, the time period of study along with the conceptual theories in understanding urbanization and urbanism, the literature reviews of post-colonial discourses and the colonial urban forms in India is comprehensively discussed so as to justify the introductory perplexity.

Chapter 2 entitled ‘The spatial geography of provincial administrative towns in early colonial Bengal’ looks into the provincial urbanism that took place in the nineteenth century Bengal mainly around colonial, commercial or administrative enterprise. This chapter focuses on the provincial administrative towns called *Zilla Sadar* which evolved as centers for the collection and distribution of revenue from hinterland regions. The *Zilla Sadars* were actually administrative units carved out by the English East India Company in order to facilitate and

mobilize the revenue collection. After defeating the Nawab of Bengal in the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the English East India Company, formerly operating predominantly as a trading agency, got from the Moghul emperor in Delhi the Diwani or rights to collect taxes from agricultural land in the province of Bengal in 1765. In order to mobilise this, the territory was divided into revenue districts. In and around 1786, the post of the District Collector was created, with substantial administrative power delegated to this level, and headquarter towns for each district were also clearly designated. It was this very territorial and operational framework of revenue administration, in fact, that later morphed into the political-administrative apparatus of the imperial government after 1858. The colonial office (called the *cutcherry*)—consisting of the revenue office, judicial and magisterial courthouses, land record rooms, treasury and sometimes other buildings such as district jails and police headquarters—formed the nerve center of each provincial town around which the spaces of everyday life grew.

In this chapter the settlements is broadly categorised under three heads, which facilitated the base for the development of *zilla Sadar* towns. Firstly, most of these *Sadar* towns were based on existing zamindari establishments. *Sadar* establishments like Krishnanagar and Burdwan are classic examples of *Sadar* towns existing over the zamindari settlements. The second type of settlements that acted as a base for other towns were the existing native settlements hyphenated with a port and market. Towns of Barisal, Bankura or Jessore existed on a well-established pre-existing native settlement with a port and a developed market. The proximity to port was always looked into as an important pre-existing context because it facilitated the movement of goods for trading purposes. The third type of settlements that were counted as preexisting context, were independent of the above two. The towns like Suri, Khulna or Berhampur are examples for these third types of settlements. The *Sadar* was a far more complex, heterogeneous and nuanced urban

landscape than can be understood through such blanket categories as city/town/country, or in terms of binary oppositions like “black-town/white-town”, “dominant/dependent” and “native/sahib” areas. The *Zilla Sadar* acted as an intermediate domain between different hierarchies of British colonial administration like *Cutecherry* and *Mofussil*. Thus, the *Zilla Sadar* is situated within larger administrative geography of colonial provincial governance in Bengal and as part of a city-town-country constellation.

Chapter 3 focusses on the growth and evolution of administrative space in provincial Bengal between circa 1757 to 1857. The English East India Company operated primarily as a trading agency in India up to the mid-eighteenth century. After this, following continuing frictions with Nawab Siraj-ud-daula (the provincial governor of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa), the Company finally won a decisive victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 under the leadership of Colonel Robert Clive. In 1764, the further ground was gained by the East India Company with another victory over the rebellious Nawab Mir Qasim at the Battle of Buxar. These developments ensured a colossal strengthening of the Company’s position in the region. In 1765, the East India Company was granted the ‘Diwani’, or the sole rights of agricultural revenue collection, for the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam. This chapter discusses how for the logistics of revenue collection and administering justice in this vast tract of land, the territory was divided into revenue districts by the Company. The allocation of power underwent numerous shifts between 1772 and 1786, continuously moving between attempts to centralise and decentralise revenue administration. It was not until 1786 that the administrative apparatus was finally substantially decentralised and the Collector invested with a huge amount of administrative power. It was also in 1786 that a large number of districts – 24 in all – were delineated again, based on earlier Collectorships invested with a considerable amount of

administrative power. The 'District' thus became one of the most significant territorial units of British revenue administration machinery, and later on – after the assumption of full governance of India by the British Crown in 1858 – it also served as the basic political-administrative unit for imperial governance itself. This chapter also points out how the domain of governance, along with spaces directly or indirectly related to it, clearly one of the key instruments through which the principles enjoying formal authority attempted to establish mechanisms of controlling the other.

Thus in retrospect, after the granting of Diwani in 1765, the first twenty years of the East India Company's administration was marked by a continuous dilemma as to whether administrative power should be largely placed in the Company headquarters in Calcutta, or whether it should be dispersed more at the district level. As a result of the reforms of 1786, a number of districts were formally constituted out of the former Collectorships (i.e. the territorial revenue-units formed in 1772) and the post of the District Collector was revived with a substantial allocation of power to him. By 1793, through a fresh set of reforms, provincial governance was shaped into a more decentralised, yet oligarchic form of district administration, with two crucial centres of power – the District Collector (in charge of revenue matters) and the District Judge (in charge of civil justice) – in every District. Magisterial power for the administration of criminal justice was at different periods of time combined either with the Collector's or the Judge's duties. However, even after this degree of decentralisation, the very nature of colonial administration – arranged hierarchically from the headquarters at Calcutta to the district headquarter and sub-divisional towns, and then down to the tax collection estates in the countryside, entailed continuous movement of people between city, town and country. The apparatus of British colonial governance was actively harnessed in attempts to manage, reshape and indeed 'reform' Indian

society. However, while the overall power equations may have been tilted in favour of the colonisers, the process was hardly just black-and-white – instead, it involved many negotiations and ‘gives and takes’. Governmental and other related spaces in the domestic and public domain provided the physical ground in which these operations and power structures of governance and societal functioning were encoded and sometimes institutionalised.

Chapter 4 converses about the negotiated physical spaces and the economic landscapes of early colonial Bengal. It discusses the four focal features like the important urban centers and market places, the Communication (land and water), Manufactories and industries, and the emergent economic space. Cotton and silk industries were by far the most important of all industries. The decline of these industries, once so famous, is indeed is a tragic story in the economic history of the Bengal Province. It did not commence or end at any definite day but was a long process continuing through many years much has already been said on this subject. The influence of the Maratha invasions on the manufactures of Bengal remained highly catastrophic.

Thus, in the light of these foregoing facts, it may be affirmed that the economic degeneration of Bengal began since the days of Alivardi (if not earlier, from Murshid Quli’s time) to hold that the oppression of the company’s servants and *gomastas* were alone responsible for the decline of Bengal manufacturers and industries and that this began closely after Plassey, is to see from only one side of it. Nobody will deny that their oppression increased as a result of the power gained by them by then after Plassey. But this also is to be acknowledged that there were already certain cankers eating into Bengal's economic vitality. Her capital manufactures, and agriculture had been disturbed and had lost respectively, their original, strength purity and productivity when the horrible storm of the Maratha incursions had blustered over her soil. The company’s servants only passed this bad state of things to a worse by their unjust and cruel conduct to the native

traders, manufacturers, and weavers. It may be fairly asserted that the economic decline was a natural sequel to the general political disorders which had begun many years before 1757 but which were certainly aggravated later due to the intercession of the East India Company. Mentioning about the commercial decline of Dacca, Rennel remarked in August 1765 – “we may effortlessly account for its deterioration, by the continual wars which have of late years wasted the whole country, and in the fomenting of which we have had too large a share.”¹

Chapter 5, entitled urbanism, social body and the *babu* culture in early colonial Bengal tries to point out how the establishment of the British Empire had a profound impact on the emergence of new Bengal. The new ambiance in Bengal was a reflection of archetype European society, and the emanation of *Babu* Culture was an example of this new prototype urbanism. The *Babu* culture had a significant impact on the domestic life of the new urban bourgeois of the provincial towns of Bengal. Tapan Raychaudhuri writes that the *Babus* were the ‘first Asian social group’ of any size whose mental world was transformed through its interactions with the West. A ‘close contact between two entirely different cultures of which one was perceived to be dominant,’ and this supremacy proved the catalyst that prompted a segment of young Bengali men to mimic their colonizers which, in turn, contributed to the rise of the *Babus*. The literature on the *Babus* also uses both primary texts and historical accounts. The primary texts are all written in Bengali, the *Babus*’ native language. The *Babu* was a social type, and he was a real figure in nineteenth-century Bengali society. Chhatu *Babu*, Lattu *Babu*, Ramtanu Datta, Nabakrishna Deb, and Nimlani Haldar, just to name a few, were famous *Babus* of their days of whom Chitra Deb writes in her essay “The ‘Great Houses’ of Old Calcutta.”²

This chapter uses contemporary textual sources along with the narratives regarding *Babus* published in *Samachar Darpan* and *Samachar Chandrika* while trying to project in what manner

urbanism gave rise to the third culture exemplified in the new *Babu* culture and how this had a huge impact on domesticity which inadvertently paved the way for new 'Body social' enigma in Bengal.

This social phenomenon gave rise to a literary tradition for *Babus* such as those in *Nobo Babu Bilash* or *The Drolleries of the New Babu* (1825) and *Nobo Bibi Bilash* (bibi meaning prostitute) or *The Drolleries of the New Bibi* (1831), Motilal in *Alaler Ghorer Dulal* or *The Spoilt Child of Rich Parents* (1858), and *Nobo in Ekei Ki Bole Sobhota?* or *Is this Civilization?* Social satirists of the day such as Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay, Tekchand Thakur, and Michael Madhusudan Dutt used social facts in their writings to give a well-developed and detailed picture of the prevailing atmosphere of the time; hence, as Sudhosotto Basu and Jotindra Dasgupta, editors of Dutt's *Ekei Ki Bole Sobhota?* point out, "historians agree that such literature can be taken as very authentic social documents."³

It is evident that in all the above Works, the author has directed his attack against those people of the Calcutta Hindu society who were rich and indifferent to the traditional practices of Hinduism. The *Babus* not only frequented brothels, they even cohabited with non-Hindu prostitutes. Khalipa advised *jagaddurllabh Babu* to consort especially with Muslim prostitutes. And consequently, *Babu* defied the sastric instructions and even dined with the Muslim prostitutes. When someone objected to it, the high priest of the *Babu's* family retorted that it was quite in conformity with the tantric practices and, therefore, not opposed to Sastra.⁴ In *Nababibilas*, the husband of *nababibi* was rebuked by his relatives for consorting with prostitutes of various religions and nationalities. While living with the *dakoyala*, *nababibi* also reportedly took Muslim dishes and drank English brandy. Her circumstances deteriorated and she even went to the extent of soliciting Muslim customers. The growing love for Muslim food

and dress was attacked first by Bhabanicaran in *Kalikata Kamalalay*; but it was not long before the attack was transferred from the habits of Muslims to the community itself. In Nababibilas, Bhabanicaran described Bengali Muslims as *patinere*.⁵ The language also enters into consideration at this point. There was a mixed language, i.e., a language in which words of Sanskrit origin and terms of Perso-Arabic origin were both used. This language was current among the lower class people in Calcutta and was also used by Bengali Muslims. This mixed language probably contained more Perso-Arabic elements than did the accepted colloquial speech of Calcutta, and in referring to it, the author is suggesting that Bengali Muslims speak a form of Bengali, which is different from that used by Bengali Hindus. From this point, it is not a long step to a further suggestion that in respect of their food and way of life, and in respect also of their language Muslims were alien to Bengal and that the Hindus alone were true Bengalis. It is important to notice this discrimination at the language level between Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus at such an early date in view of the fact that the cleavage between the two communities became wider within the next few decades. Bankimcandra Chattopadhyay develops this point of view by using the term 'Hindu' and the term '*Inian*' as synonyms.⁶

In retrospect this research focuses on the subjective ways regarding the physical, spatial, institutional, symbolic and bodily representation of the colonizers and their relations with the occupants of provincial Bengal. The continuation and development of Urban Centers in early British India is a unique resultant outcome that can be understood only in terms of its values, behaviour, institutions and distribution of social and political power. This research provides an understanding to the differentiation of urbanism within the ambit of three tiers of manifestations in the form of economic space, physical space, social space and how the synthesis gave birth to colonial third culture. Historicizing the body offers an ideal tool for understanding the spatial

significance of urban centers in dealing with the domesticity and power in provincial Bengal. The bodily manifestation in this study comprehends the duality between the physical and the mental aspect of modernity and space functioning as the vector through which the materiality of the urban environment gained mental significance and shaped understandings of the self and society.

¹ An unpublished letter of Major James Rennel, Bengal, August 31, 1765, printed in *Bengal Past and Present*, July-September, 1933.

² Deb, Chitra. "The 'Great Houses' of Old Calcutta." Chaudhuri 56-63

³ Dutt, Michael Madhusudan. *Ekei Ki Bole Sobhota?* Eds. Sudhosotto Basu and Jotindra Dasgupta, Calcutta: Biswas Book Stall, 2002, p. 42

⁴ *Nabababubilas.*, p. 38.

⁵ Glossed by Carey as 'a Moosooman (in contempt)' in *A Dictionary of the Bengalee Language*, vol. I., (abridged) Serampore, 1827, p. 340.

⁶ Clark, T.W., *The Role of Bankimcandra in the Development of Nationalism*, published in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, (edited by C.H. Philips), London, 1961, p.439.