

Market places and its transformation of undivided Dinajpur in Colonial India with special reference to Kamarpara Hat

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***Abstract:**The North Bengal was formed with Undivided Dinajpur, Pabna, Bagura, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Kuch Bihar, Malda, Darjeeling and some other parts of northern part of Bengal in Colonial India. This district is almost entirely agricultural area of Bengal before partition or Independence. So, we have seen the market places were emerged on the basis of the agricultural production along with the local demand. The most important market places of Undivided Dinajpur were Pulhat, Parbatipur, Nithpur, Balurghat, Nayabazar, Kumarganj, Raiganj, Kaliyaganj, Lahirihat, Dhankoil, Patiram and another most important hat was Kamarpara Hat which had played a vital role for the development of trade and commerce of the concerned area in very well. Some factors like-the presence of Hili Railway Station, Hili-Balurghat pukka road, Kishanganj Road, Purnea Road, Rangpur Road, Bagura Road etc. had shaped the way of commercial activities in Undivided Dinajpur in Colonial India.*

***Keywords:** Census,Ganjas,Factory Act, Hinterland, Hat Bazars,Ijaradar, Zaminder*

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Introduction

The North Bengal was formed with undivided Dinajpur, Pabna, Bagura, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Kuch Bihar, Malda, Darjeeling and some of the parts of Purnea, undivided Nadiya, Gowalpara, Kamrup in Colonial India.¹ In this connection, we have to discuss the market places and its transformation of undivided Dinajpur special reference with the Kamarparahat in Colonial India. The district is almost entirely agricultural. In the census of 1911, it was found that no less than 1,538, 033 or 91% of the total population were dependent on agriculture.² Of these 34 percent are actual workers. The fact that the proportion of rent payers to rent receivers is as 150 to 1 indicates that estates are large and landlords few in number.³ Industries are of little importance and only 3 percent of the population are supported by them, while only 34,000 persons all told are engaged in commerce.⁴ Under one percent of the population belong to the professional classes. So, we have seen some of the *hats*, *bazars*, *ganjas* as well as market places on the basis of agricultural production in the different parts of undivided Dinajpur in colonial India. The study analyses these market places towards an explanation of their origin, growth and development from small *hats*, *bazars*, *ganjas* to important centers of trade and commerce.

The case study of undivided Dinajpur has taken here which was one of the most agricultural areas of Bengal before partition or Independence. The socio- economic condition of this district was made on the basis of agriculture base village economy and production in between 1801 and 1857.⁵ So, we have seen the market places were emerged on the basis of the agricultural production. But the transportation system was not so good either railway system, road or in river base communication system. Some of the roads like Rangpur Road, Malda Road, Bagura Road, Purnea Road, Kishanganj Road, Balurghat Road, Hili-Balurghat Road, Hili centric Railway System had played a vital role in the trade and commerce of this district. But it was not sufficient according to the demand of the production or time. Because most of the roads were not *pukka*, the railway system within the district was not available and the river base transport system was so costly. So, we have seen the market places were originated and played a vital role locally on the basis of local transportation system as well as

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bullock carts, horse drawn carts in the trade and commerce of Dinajpur. Although the establishment of the PWD Department, some industries as well as local finance system gave a definite shape to these market places in colonial period. It is in this historical backdrop we have to discuss the rise, growth and development of the market places of undivided Dinajpur in colonial India.

The name of the market places of undivided Dinajpur were Pulhat, Parbatipur, Nithpur, Balurghat, Naya Bazar, Samjhia, Biraganj, Pirganj, Chandganj, Fakirganj, Kumarganj, Patiram, Dangirhat, Rangamati, Patherghat, Ghoraghat, Raiganj, Lahirihat, Kaliyaganj, Binnakuri, Bochaganj, Bindole, Dinajpur, Railbazar, Dhankoil, Darail, Durgapur, Gareya, Harirampur, Kharole, Maharajahat, Pakerhat, Patiram, Shibganj, Sapahar and Kamarparahat which had greatly affected the socio-economic, political and cultural life of undivided Dinajpur.

Most of the internal trade of the district is carried on at the local markets or hats situated in central spots at a distance of a few miles from each other.⁶ The market usually consists of several permanent shops and on open space close to them, where vendors from neighbouring village and petty traders from a distance sit to dispose of their wares.⁷ The markets belong to the local *zamindars* who had charge a small fee for sell there.

Sometimes this fee is collected by the *zamindars*, *amlas* and sometimes the right of collecting it is leased out to middleman called *Ijaradars* or *Thikadars*. It is the duty of the proprietor or *Ijaradar* to see that the surroundings of the market are kept reasonably clean, well-drained and that order is preserved. This system is continued in the early company's rule but in some cases the incapability of the *Ijaradars* the markets were deserted. As a consequence of this, Lord Cornwallis passed an order declaring the markets free and for bidding the *zamindars* to levy-tolls from the vendors using them. The markets were placed under the protection of the daroga of the police division in which they were held. The latter or some responsible member of his staff was supposed to attend the markets under his charge on every market day. But this arrangement did not prove the capability of the *darogas* than the *Ijaradars* and the hats were not smoothly runed, the tolls levied are excessive in some cases the people has fallen out of the frying pan into the fire. So, the old system has long since been

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reverted to and seems to work well enough. The markets are commonly held twice in a week. A visitor to one of them will see a large variety of country produce such as rice, fish, various preparations of milk, *gur*, tobacco, mats, earthen pots etc exported for sale as well as imported goods such as salt, cotton piece goods and cheap cutlery. Besides a visit to any market in the interior will show that the majority of the vendors are women of agricultural and allied castes, amongst them whom Rajbanshi women will generally be found to predominate. Besides the cultivators of the surrounding villages came to village markets (when not too busy) to meet to the people and to chat with their neighbors about the prospects of the next harvest, character of the *patwaris*, methods of the *daroga*, local interests etc. So, the weekly or bi-weekly market besides being a place where trade is carried on is an essential part of the social life of the people. Moreover, more or less than 47 melas are held annually according to the recognition of the Government and also the activity of the *zamindars* which had played a vital role for the cultural assimilation of the people of undivided Dinajpur.⁸

The *hats*, *bazar*, *ganjas* as well as market places had played a vital role in the trade and commerce of undivided Dinajpur. At that time, some of the small size agriculture base Industries were emerged in the different parts of this district which gave a unique phenomenon to the market places in colonial period. The rice husking was at one time a fairly important industry when large quantities of cleaned rice were prepared by local grain dealers at the principal grain marts for export to Calcutta and elsewhere. The raw materials of rice husking i. e. paddy was sold in the *hats or bazars or ganjas* like at Dhankoil, Patiram, Balurghat, Kamarparahat, Nithpur, Samjhia. In later times the principal centers at which these industries still carried on to only extents are Nithpur, Balurghat, Nayabazar, Samjhia. There is only one factory according to the 'Factory Act' namely 'jute press' owned by rally brothers at Raiganj which is worked by an oil engine of small power and turns out kaccha bales 3 ½ mounds in weight for Calcutta market. Besides there were two oil presses for the manufacture of mustard oil, one at Pulhut and other one at Parbatipur. Besides a candle and pencil industry was started in the town and the candles were sold in the local hats and markets. Another agricultural item i. e. sugar canes were used to make the juggery or *gur*, made on a

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commercial scale in Birganj, Pirganj, Patnitola thanas and is exported by boat to Faridpur, Dacca and other eastern districts and by cart to Rajshahi and Malda. Besides, the malo, Namasudra and Hari castes people were engaged in fisheries and sold their fishes in Durgapur market during the inquiry made in 1908 showed that the annual catch of the fish in the district might be some 7000 or 8000 mounds.⁹ So, the market namely Durgapur had played a vital role for the development of the Malo, Namasudra and Hari castes people of this district. The principal weaving centres namely Baliyadangi and Chirirbandar out- post also developed the socio-economic life of the *tantis* (Hindus) and *jolahas* (Muhammadan) by exporting the principal products to another districts. Besides, Baliyadangi and Atwari out- post also exported coarse gunny cloth woven from jute in the form of bags to Calcutta. Another market Ranisankail thana developed the Dom, Santhal people by giving them the chance to sell their *mora*, *chhai* of making bamboo in a considerable scale in colonial period. So, we can say that, the market places rapidly changed the socio-economic life of the people of this district. The chief articles of trade are rice husked and unhusked and jute. For example, in 1909-10 nearly 4 lakhs of mounds of unhusked and 1.78 lakhs mounds husked rice were exported by rail.¹⁰ If we take the export by boat to have been say, two thirds of this, we bring the total exports of rice in the husk in that year up to some 6 ½ lakhs of mounds and of rice not in the husk to some 3 lakhs of mounds, or a total of 9 ½ lakhs of mounds altogether. The chief rice selling markets were Chandganj, Samjhia, Fakirganj, Kumarganj, Patiram, Balurghat, Dangirhat, Rangamati on the atrai, patherghat, Naya bazar, Nithpur on the Punarbhaba and Ghoraghat on the Karotoya from which the husked and unhusked rice have exported to Calcutta via Ganga and Hooghly. So, the Undivided Dinajpur got the opportunity to export her rice to Burma, Bihar, United provinces and to the eastern districts, Faridpur, Dacca, Maymensingha. Otherwise Raiganj, Gareya, Khansama, Lahirihat are the main marts from which jute is exported to Calcutta. Jute from Gareya is carried by cart to Nilphamari and Darwani railway station in the Rangpur district, that from Khansama to Darwani, that from Lahirihat to Kishenganj in the Purnea district. While Raiganj is itself a railway station. The annual export of jute is 3.72 lakhs maunds in 1909-10 year. The other exporting goods were rape and mustard seed (25000 maunds), raw hides (25000 maunds) and

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tobacco (20000 maunds), the mustard seed is exported by road and railway from Raiganj and Kaliyaganj hides from Chirirbandar, Pakerhat and Khansama of Rangpur district to Calcutta in the economic year of 1909-10. Otherwise, in 1909-10, 2 lakhs of maunds Burma rice were imported and other noticeable imports were salt (17000 maunds), Kerosene oil (48,000 maunds), refined sugar (23,000 maunds), iron and steel (27,000 maunds), betel nuts (14,000 maunds), European piece goods (21,000 maunds) from Calcutta. The export and import as well as trade and commerce were gradually developed in later times through the market places and also greatly influenced the socio economic and cultural life of the people of this district.

Another most important market place or hat is Kamarparahat became one import internal trading centre of South Dinajpur.¹¹ The oral tradition or public opinion stated that it was one of the oldest hat or market place of undivided Dinajpur. Some factors like the presence of the Hili railway station, the construction of Hili- Balurghat pukka road by the Dinajpur District Board, establishment of the bridge over Jamuna River (1917), establishment of the PWD Department (1910), establishment of Hili-Balurghat Bus Syndicate (1926), the transportation in between Hili and Balurghat by cart, horse drawn carriges, palanguine till 1930 and starting of old taxi communication from 1922 in between Balurghat and Calcutta had played a vital role for the rise, growth and development of this small hat to a big market place in colonial period. The hinterland of this hat was Balurghat, Patiram, Parbatipur, Dhamoirhat, Dangir hat, Rangpur, Gopalganj, Samjhia, Jalgharhat, Hili, Gangarampur, Kumarganj etc. So, we have seen that, this hat played a vital role due to agricultural and cattle hat in colonial period. A vast land or places had the closer contact (trade and commercial) with this hat. The total area of this hat was more than 17 bighas and commonly held twice in a week (Sunday and Thursday).¹² The agricultural crops like paddy, jute mustard seed, rape and some animals like cow, goat, sheep, camel were sold in this market. This *hat* was one of the middle as well as meeting point of the different parts of this district. So naturally we have seen a huge amount of business was taken place here. The *Zamindars* of Eastern Bengal (public opinion) were the actual owner of this hat. Then it was sold to Sulochana Devi and Majitulla Chowdhury.¹³ At that time, it took a new phenomenon

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in the trade and commerce sector of Dinajpur. The different types of shops like permanent and temporary existed here along with one separate grain and cattle markets. Besides the different types of people like Bhatiyas , Bangals , Malo, Murmu, Santhal, Rajbanshi etc also gathered here for the trade and commercial purpose. So, a cultural variety was seen here which was one of the unique features of the hat and this tradition is continuing till now. The present owners of this hat are Amullya Ratan Biswas, Bangaranta by Government of west Bengal (68-70 percent) and Hasan Ali Mondal, Dulal Mondal, Rabi Kanta Mondal, Maniklal Vagat, Dhanapati Devi, Devnarayan Vagat (30 percent).¹⁴ The total income from this hat in a week almost 10 crores now and it is now situated at 10 no. Amritakhanda gram- panchayat under Balurghat panchayat samity and it has a closer contact with Bangladesh via Hili , Balurghat Patiram Gangarampur , Raiganj , Buniyadpur by road.¹⁵ So, this hat has a great importancy in the field of trade and commerce of Dakshin Dinajpur, Moreover, the reopening of Balurghat -Kolkata Railway system via Malda, well road connection with the different parts of the district or outside district, Hili- Balurghat High road, reopening of Bengal – Bangladesh export and import, population, local and external demands of food grains, jute, mustard seed and animals are playing a vital role for the development of Kamarparahat as well as market economy or as an important trading centre of the district.

Conclusion

The *hats*, *bazars*, *ganjas* as well as market places had played a vital role in the field of trade and commerce of undivided Dinajpur. Not only that, the markets also become the Centre of national movements and the meeting point or place for the national leaders and also the Centre for national a wakening. For example, Balurghat, an important market place had the important role of cotton weaving or *khadi* related activities in the Swadeshi Movement and it

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had a great role in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Colonial India. Otherwise, the small *hats*, *bazars*, *ganjas* as well as market places had played a vital role for the socio economic and political development in this period. Although, the absence of *pukka* road, communication gap, communal riots, absence of capitalist classes, railway communication gap (after 1947), migration problem, involvement of India in East and West Pakistan war also greatly affected the growth of trade and commerce. Instead of all, the immigration from Eastern Bengal, establishment of British institutions like hospitals, railway system, *bandars*, out- posts, offices, and schools had transformed this market place to a new dimension and effected on the economy, polity and social life of the people of the area concerned. The study will help us to understand the change in society economy and culture of the area.

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