

SYNOPSIS

**GEO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-
ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN THREE
EARLY URBAN CENTRES OF SOUTH BENGAL,
EASTERN INDIA**

**Synopsis submitted to Vidyasagar University for the
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GEO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN THREE EARLY URBAN CENTRES OF SOUTH BENGAL, EASTERN INDIA

Geo-history is the study of geographies of past times, involving the reconstruction of a wide range of phenomena and processes central to geographical understanding of the dynamism of physical and human affairs, such as transformation in socio-economic components. The concept of 'geo-history' outlined by Braudel and he had given the term broader meaning, embracing both the spatial environmental context of human activities. Geo-history should be, first and foremost, an open platform for interdisciplinary discussion and cooperation. The aim of geo-history is to analyze in details the development of selected landscape elements for a particular area during different points of time in history and to understand the complexity and the functioning of the past landscapes and landscapes spheres during pre-historic, historic and proto-historic period. Geo-history of urban centres in India, within the framework of geographical disciplines, is just over ten decades old. Interest in towns and cities as initially stimulated among Indian geographers and town planners by Patrick Geddes in the University of Bombay in 1915. The more purposeful intellectual attempts to understand the geo-history of urban centres in India were based mainly on the literary evidences and archaeological excavations. Tamluk, Contai and Midnapore, the three selected early urban centres of Eastern India for the present research work, are located in three distinctly different geographical zones and originated as urban centres at different points of time in history. Origin of those urban centres can be attributed to different bases which are economically, socially, politically related to the evolutionary history of the landscape as a whole. Functionally all these three towns had operated as a centre of opulence and thus

assumed great significance at the time of their culmination. These three selected urban centres lost their economic significance due to geophysical changes of the landscape. In spite of the fact that the urban centres have lost their past glory but they still exist as three important urban centres of South Bengal as well as Eastern India. All the above interesting facts require explanation in geo-historical perspectives. Such reconstructions of the urban geo-history of the three urban centres may lead to arrive into planning decision that may be important in promoting urbanization of these three early urban centres for overall regional development. The present research work is a humble attempt to explore the geographical evolution of the landscape over which the three urban centres originated, economic history, morphological analysis of three early urban centres where built heritage and innovation design of space have become the competitive facets of the urban centre in terms of metamorphosis of urban structure under the influence of processes like urban redevelopment, gentrification, sprawling and intra-urban competition in economic and social context, sphere of influence and future growth trends from geo-historical point of view.

Data and Information are mainly obtained from concerning literatures and maps. Other data and information sources include People's words, actions and interactions. The data and information have been derived from Patachitra (Scroll painting) with mythical stories and contemporary events, manuscripts in palm leaf and handmade paper, a number of antiquities mainly terracotta plaques and figures (Terracotta Buddha Head, Egyptian Harpoon, Roman Amphora, Toy Cart), coins and beads of precious and semi-precious stones. The local people were interviewed for their experiences and ancestor's lives. Intensive survey has been conducted taking homogeneous building block as the basic unit of study for present

condition. All the collected data and information for the present research work has been analyzed by geo-historical method in five separate component based sections.

Component I deals with the geographical evolution of the landscape of the three early urban centres. During the period of initiation, Tamluk was characterized by low lying marshy land and due to depositional reworking of river Hoogly and Rupnarayan it came into existence as an elevated land surface where port activities began to be carried out. After 8th Century A.D., the river mouth of Hoogly and Rupnarayan ceased functioning due to siltation and the port Tamluk got a huge set back. Hijili emerged as a new port in the coast of Bay of Bengal with trading potentialities. Based on Hijili port, Contai urban centre has emerged as a dune based urban centre after shoreline declination. Sea level fall and consequent isostatic adjustment led Midnapore urban centre to rise as an upland over which laterization process became dominant to shape its geomorphology.

Component II is the economic history of Tamluk, Contai and Midnapore urban centres. Tamluk became a renowned port by 700 B.C. Eastern India maintained trading of copper and horse through Tamluk port upto 8th Century A.D. After that Tamluk port lost its importance and became a slave market. After 8th Century A.D., Hijili port emerged. Silk, linen and cotton fabrics were produced in Midnapore during medieval period and pre-colonial period. During colonial period, piece goods and white cloths from Midnapore and salt from Contai were main produced articles. European trade of these articles appears to have flourished around Contai but during post colonial period, overseas trade was on decline as European merchants became vulnerable to Indian freedom movement. Obviously, all the manufacturing industries failed to retain its viability as before. Till 2002, Midnapore was the headquarters of Midnapore district and after 2002 Midnapore district was divided into two and consequently

Tamluk and Midnapore became the headquarters of Purba and Paschim Midnapore district. And Contai became the headquarters of Contai sub-division. Presently, along with their administrative functions these urban centres exist as local commercial centres with five types of economic activities. Four or five types of economic activities are in the core of these urban centres and two or three types are in the periphery.

Component III analyzes the urban morphological pattern, landscape view and formulates a model urban morphology. The study shows that ten types of morphological components are found in these three early urban centres, with an exception of two new morphological components, namely historical landscape and restricted residential areas. As these three are historical urban centres, history is mirrored in the morphological features. These urban centres have been comprised of mainly square shaped architectures along with different historical architectural design like arched, arched with curving works, dome with curving works, square with curving works etc. Sometimes mixed special type of architectures has been also found like Bargabhma temple (Hindu, Buddhist and Oriya type of architecture) in Tamluk urban centre. The core building blocks have historical architectures and it is mirrored in the new buildings associated or nearer to it. They sometime follow the old architectural designs. But the shadow is totally absent in case of the new building in the periphery building blocks of these urban centres.

Component IV deals with the analysis of socio-economic facilities by total population and composite functional score, and delineation of sphere of urban influence. These three urban centres maintained trade relations through Tamluk port upto 8th Century A.D. and through

Hijili port after 8th Century A.D., with Singhal, Maldives, Bali, Lambok, Sumatra, Enam, China, Europe countries, African countries, Singhbhum etc. But the present sphere of influence is positively related to their functional weightage which leads to socio-economic development. Quantitatively, an urban centre with higher functional weightage exerts an influence upon the larger area of its surrounding. Presently, these three urban centres exist as local commercial centres with grossly reduced their zone of influence.

Component V focuses on the future growth trend along with the identification of potential residential areas. One direction for Tamluk urban centre has been towards Nimtouri through Hospital crossing and Dharinda. And another growth can be seen towards Tamluk station area through DM office area and Vivekananda nagar. In future, Tamluk and Nimtouri may be merged together and considerable growth in that direction has already taken place. The growth of Contai urban centre has been in the all directions i.e. towards Kalikapur through Hospital area, towards Contai railway station area through Padmapukuria, towards Kharagpur bypass through Canal parh and Contai bazaar and along Digha road through Banamalipur, Jhalkabarh and Bankaberiya. The growth of Midnapore urban centre has been towards Keranichati and Hosnabad through Golkua chak and Dharma in the east. Another growth can be seen towards the Khairulla chak through Ashoknagar and Tantigeria. In future, Midnapore and Kharagpur may be merged together and considerable growth in that direction has already taken place.

Therefore, geo-history of the three early urban centres in practice has offered only solution of historical transformations of socio-economic elements, complexity and functioning which

precede not only different time scales but also at different spatial scales since pre-historic period. Without analyzing the past, it is ineffective to enter into the present and estimate the future. Therefore, the advantage of geo-historical analysis of Tamluk, Contai and Midnapore urban centres is that this analysis simulates the future of these urban centres by analyzing the Pre-historic, Historic and Proto-historic data and information with the present context.