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ANALYSIS OF URBAN TOPONYMY AND GEOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CITIES: STUDY OF SELECTED URBAN CENTRES OF WEST BENGAL

Tarun Saha

Assistant Teacher, Metekona High School, Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, India.

ABSTRACT

The study of names is called Onomastics and the specific study of place names is called Toponymy. Place names are the fossilized representation of past culture, social structure, migration-pattern, economic activities, the colonial influence of that place or region. The science of toponymy located at the intersection of several acknowledged disciplines: notably linguistics, geography, and cartography but also historical and cultural research. India is a land of diversified cultures, religions, and languages. Almost 200 years Mughal dynasty and almost 250 years of British ruling have enormous influence on urban toponymy. Bengal, in particular, has a rich cultural, religious, economic and political history and it exerts great influence on nature of urban development and urban naming. The influencing factors of urban naming vary regionally, socially, culturally and ethnically. This paper aims to examine various factors and its influence on urban naming as well as socio-cultural characteristics through the urban toponyms in the selected cities of West Bengal based on historical literature.

KEYWORDS :Onomastics, Toponymy, Urban development, Urban naming, Urban toponyms.

INTRODUCTION

The science that studies names is known as onomastics, usually divided into the studies of personal names (anthroponomastics) and place names (toponomastics). In more popular usage, however, the term onomastics is used for the former and toponymy for the later. The study of place-naming, or toponymy, has recently undergone a critical reformulation. According to



Encyclopedia of Britannica, toponymy means the taxonomic study of place-names, based on the etymological, historical and geographical information. Place-names are further divided into two broad categories: 1) Habitation names and 2) Feature names. A habitation names denote a locality that is inhabited, such as streets, hamlets, villages, towns or cities and usually dates from the locality's inception. Feature names refer to natural or physical features of the landscape and are subdivided into hydronyms (water feature), oronyms (relief feature), and places of natural vegetation growth (meadows, glades, groves). Urban place names are a chronicle of the history of a given territory and its inhabitants. In-depth analysis can uncover important

historical as well as geographical information about a place. Toponyms can help us identify socio-cultural elements, linguistic development of original inhabitants, the process of urbanization, in and out-migration pattern and ethno-religious composition of the population.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There are some research questions: what are the influencing factors of urban naming and how it throws lights on city's socio-economic characteristics dates back to its time of origin? Is there any change or shifting of character through time?

Generally, the question arises what is interesting about geographical research can analysis of geographical names offer? Is there any sense in analyzing urban toponymy? Toponyms can help us identify geographical elements such as physical set up, cultural and social structure, economic participation, the process of urbanization and ethno-religious composition of the population.

URBAN TOPONYMY: INDIAN CONTEXT

Analysis of Indian onomastics shows that Indians are very serious about their names. In case of personal names, choices are made from the God, Goddesses, Hero, Heroine, Mythological character, King, Queen, and National Leader etc. In case of place naming the following characteristics are noticeable:-

- + Migrated population takes the name of their place of origin with them (C.R. Park in New Delhi).
- + Influence of famous pilgrimage and religious places (e.g. Kashipur);
- + Influence of God and Goddesses names (e.g. Ramnagar, Bishnupur etc.);
- + Influence of National leader, Former Prime Ministers or Chief Ministers (e.g. Gandhinagar, Bidhannagar);
- + Influence of economic activities, periodic village fair, trade and transport characteristics (e.g. Rajabazar, Rampurhat etc.)
- + Establishment of fort or military base camp has influence on urban naming (e.g. Aligarh, Barrackpur, Panagarh etc.)

India's leading English newspaper 'The Indian Express' went through the names of all 6, 77,459 villages in India. Lord Ram ranks way up there, with 3,626 villages named after him while Lord Krishna is close second at 3,309. Other Ramayana characters too figure among the names, Hanuman has 367 villages in his name, Bharat, Laxman and Sita has 187, 160 and 85 villages respectively. Interestingly, Ravana (villain of Ramayana) has 6 villages and 3 in the name of his father Ahiravan (all in Bihar). Ayodhya is also a common name found all over the northern and southern India especially Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

While studying the influence of Mahabharata in settlement naming, Lord Krishna is the most popular choice by far. There are 385 villages named after Bhim and 259 villages named after Arjuna. Interesting to note that, only 2 villages are named after Yudhisthira, 1 village bears the name of Bhishma (is in Orissa's Ganjam district) and there is no Kurukshetra (except Haryana's original Kurukshetra) village in the country.

Among the Mughal emperors, Akbar tops the list at 234 villages. His grandfather Babur has 62 villages in his name while father Humayun has only 30. Interesting to note that Shahjahan has 51 villages named after him while his son Aurangzeb has only 8 villages named after him (all in Bijnore district of Uttar Pradesh).

Apart from this, regional ruler (as Indians are very obedient to their 'King' and 'Queen'), local Zamindars, Leaders of Modern India exerts great influence on settlement naming. There are 117 villages named after Mahatma Gandhi, 72 villages after Jawaharlal Nehru and 13 are in the named after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Indira Gandhi (first woman Prime Minister of India) has 36 villages in her name while 19 villages are named after her son Rajiv Gandhi.

URBAN TOPONYMY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL NATURE OF SELECTED CITIES OF WEST BENGAL

Analysis of Urban toponymy generally means the study of streets name, but in this paper researcher tried to explain the relationship between cities name and historical development of cities especially their socio-economic characteristics. Specific attention is given to city's name and existing relationship with socio-economic or topographic characteristic of that area. Urban centers are selected on the basis of their long settlement history, evolved as a dynasty's power hub, long colonial influence, and international recognition for its cultural status. Although there are so many cities in West Bengal with such type of criteria, I selected only six cities with unique characteristics.

1. KOLKATA (22o34'North, 88o22' East): Kolkata is the capital of West Bengal and one of the largest cities in India. Kolkata, formerly known as 'Calcutta' was established in 1690 by Job Charnock, an agent of the British East India Company. He bought three villages, Gobindapur, Sutanati and Kalikata and combined them to build a city what was then known as 'London of the East'. Kolkata or Calcutta has a very unique etymology. The term Kalikata comprises two Bengali words 'kali' (the Goddess Kali) and 'kata' (place); may have been derived from 'Kalikhetra' (Bengali), a variation of 'Kalikshetra' (Sanskrit) meaning 'the area of Goddess Kali'. The famous Kali temple of Kalighat strongly supports this explanation. According to another explanation, the name may have been derived from the 'Khal' (Bengali) meaning 'Canal', followed by 'Kata' (Bengali) which may mean 'Dug'. As the British wrongly pronounced the term (Kalikata as Calcutta), 'Calcutta' evolved as a city's official name. British selected for the site of their first settlement in Calcutta the highest level of ground on the riverside. The port facilities nearby offer an easy way to import finished goods and export raw materials since the main purpose of the British were to expand trading opportunities. Fort Willam was established in the year 1773, for protection of the site from external enemy attacks. Thus Kolkata started growing around the harbour and port and three existing villages. The Asiatic Society, the Town Hall and the Public Library (the Metcalfe Hall) had been taking shape from the late 18th to mid-19th century. The establishment of jute and cotton factories attracted the rural poor to Calcutta in search of jobs. With the opening of railway and other new lines of communications, so many labourers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh are attracted and reside here. Since communication facilities are not so good, they had to live in the city in unsanitary condition which gives birth to so-called slums. Calcutta under British rule produced generations of robust Bengali middle class of professionals like lawyers, teachers and medical practitioners asserting themselves in newspapers, cultural activities, political organizations and other sectors. English-educated Bengalis (some of them often called Anglicized) were quick to adapt themselves to the contemporary Western discourse of political participation and cultural accommodation, which, to a large extent, shaped the social life and culture of the city. It remained as the capital of British India till the year 1911. After Independence in 1947, Calcutta Metropolitan Area started to expand and huge rural population migrated here to obtain jobs and other facilities. Calcutta renamed as 'Kolkata' in the year 2001 in order to match Bengali pronunciation by the State Government. British influence is deeply rooted in almost every winding lane of the city of Kolkata. British styled architectural buildings are still dotting the streets of Kolkata with Churches, official and apartment buildings. Discussion will remain incomplete without mentioning the Victoria Memorial

Hall, and St. Paul's Cathedral. Various streets and urban points still bear the British name such as Esplanade, Lindsay Street, Camac Street, Grey Street, Minto Park etc. So many streets name have changed after the independence but the glorious past and British influence are still there.

2. SERAMPUR (22°75'North, 88° 34' East): In 1753 A.D., Raja Monahar Chandra Roy, the Zaminder of Sheoraphuly, took possession of Sreepur, Mohanpur and Gopinathpur. After that he named the entire area 'Srirampur' after Lord ShriRamchandra, the Avataar of Lord Vishnu. The settlement is several centuries old. It has witnessed the Danish rule, cultural renaissance, and British rule, construction of railway lines and consequent industrial development. The Danes in Bengal ruled over Serampore for long 90 (ninety) years from 1755 to 1845 A.D. In India, Danish East India Company (Estd. 1612 A.D.) had three centres at Tranquabar, Baleswar and Serampore, but it was Serampore that flourished remarkably under Danish rule. The Danish Govt. named the town 'Fredrick Nagar' after the name of their King Frederick the Fifth. During the reign of the Danes at Serampore, Danish East India Company had its flourishing activities, established bazaar, godowns or warehouses and gradually the town developed. Trade and commercial activities developed and local as well as foreign merchants began to arrive and live here. Cotton and silk is the prime object of trades. Three English Missionary- William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward established Serampore Mission, started spreading education, established schools and colleges, and made social reforms. A glorious chapter started to begin may be termed as 'Renaissance'. Serampore was further sold out to British East India Company in 1845 A.D. in lieu of Rs. 12.5 lakh. With the passage of time the city gets its modern shape but the remarkable structures like Danish Government House (1771), St. Olav Church (1806), the Catholic Church (1776) and Serampur College (1823) reminded us about its glorious past.

3. CHANDANNAGAR (22°87' North, 88°38' East): Chandannagar or Chandernagore was established as a French colony in 1673, obtaining permission from Ibrahim Khan, the then Nawab of Bengal. Chandernagore changed hands throughout the 18th century, with several periods of English occupation: 1757–63; 1778–1783; 1793–1802. It was only from 1816 onwards that it enjoyed continuous French rule till November 1947. Unlike other European colonies, Chandannagar was well known for its prosperous trade even before the advent of foreigners. The town is mentioned in 'ManasaMangal'. The town got its name from sandal wood (chandana) as the place was the major hub of the trade of sandal wood (Bengali- Chandan). Urbanization of Chandannagar started centering round the three localities Khalisani, BoroKishanganj and Gondalpara. The largest concentration of colonial buildings is along the river Hooghly and is known as The Strand. The northern and southern entry point to Chandannagar is marked with two entry gates. The northern gate is no longer exists, but the southern gate is there, with two square pillars topped with urns. The gate contains the slogan of French Revolution "Liberte, Egalite and Fratarnite" (Liberty, Equality and Fraternity); inaguarated on 14 July 1937 in memory of the fall of Bastille. The city still have French architecture, Buildings, Church, Street names and settlement units names (e.g. Farashdanga, derived from two Bengali words 'Farash' means 'French' and 'Danga' means 'High Land').

4.CHINSURAH (22°90'North, 88°39' East): Chinsura or Chuchura has a very interesting etymology. According to some sources the word derived from a special cane called Chinchira while others opined the word was derived from Bengali word Chura (Spire). Between 17th and 19th centuries, Chinsura was a prosperous trading post of the Dutch East India Company, the VereenigdeOostindischeCompagnie (VOC). They built a huge fort known as Fort Gustavus in between 1635-1645. Since then, the city started

to develop under the Dutch influence. Dutch, Armenian and native Bengali Merchants lived there in this period, trading in saltpeter, spices, cotton and indigo. For hundreds of years Chinsurah was dominated by merchants. The Portuguese, Armenians, Bengalis, and Persians, lived here and traded happily together. Chinsurah Tower Clock, which is situated at the heart of the town (Ghorir More), increases the beauty of the place. This steel made piece was shipped to Chinsurah by the British in 1914 to memorialize Albert Edward alias King Edward VII. That is why it is also known as Edwardian Clock. The remnants of Dutch architecture is scattered all over the town.

5.BISHNUPUR (23°08'North, 87°32' East): Bishnupur derived from two words 'Vishnu' and 'Pur'; literally mean 'city of lord Vishnu'. This may be derived from the fact that the Malla Kings of Bishnupur were followers of Visnavism. The Malla kingdom was established by AdiMalla in 7th century. After about 300 years the 10thMalla King JagatMalla decided to shift his kingdom to Bishnupur. Political stability developed a city and social system based on Hindu (Vaisnavism) philosophy. The Malla Kings have invited upper castes Brahmins to Bishnupur to spread religious activity. They also brought master craftsman, skilled weavers, expert potters etc. to provide basic amenities. Bishnupur is famous for silk weaving, Baluchari, Swarnachari and Benarashi-Balucharisarees are still bearing legacy of legendary craftsmanship. Over the next 800 years Malla Kings built several temples and structures (both of brick and stone) turning Bishnupur into a temple town; the temples with beautiful terracotta design and various types of art and craft items. Bishnupur was also once famous for its lantern industry and its own brand of music (BishnupurGharana).

6.MURSHIDABAD (24°18' North, 88°27' East): Ancient manuscripts and coins tell us about the Pala (Buddhism) and Sena (Brahmanism) dynasties ruled during 11th- 14th century AD at Gour, comprising present Malda and Murshidabad district of Bengal. Gour was captured by Islamic rulers (Sultani and Mughal emperors of India) during 14th- 18th century AD. In 1704, then Diwan of Bengal MurshidKuli Khan (Jafar Khan) shifted the capital from Dhaka to this place and named after his own name. Its former name was Mukhsusabad means the 'Select City'. The Persian 'abadkarna' (to cultivate, to settle) is the origin of 'abadi' (small settlement, population) and of the suffix 'abad' attached to the name of the town's founder. Islamic rulers brought skilled weavers, master craftsman with them. The city was traditionally famous for silk weaving in Bengal. Murshidabad, the forgotten capital of Bengal, was the center of all political moves in Bengal till 1757, when the last independent nawab of Bengal was vanquished in the Battle of Plassey. The ruling power of Islam was replaced by the colonial British. After Plassey, the political importance of Murshidabad began to wane.

CONCLUSION

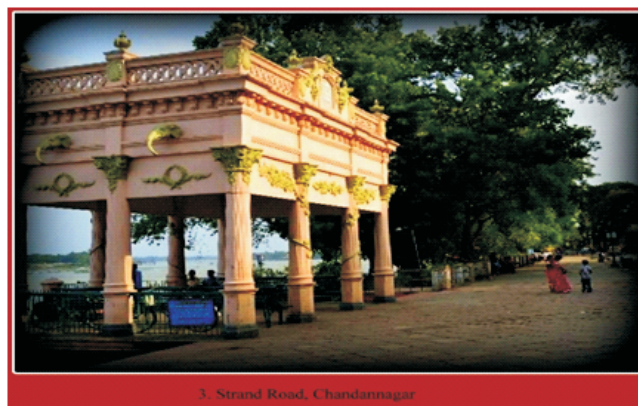
Settlement names are born when cultural advancement shaping up the topography. A 'culture' is the present status of humans' social, technological, scientific, religious, linguistic, political advancement. It will have some specific reasons (habitative or topographic elements) to set up human settlements on that particular area and to give that specific name. Each of these cities bears witness, in its own way, to the periods and styles characteristics of urban history. The study of urban naming can be used as an accurate indicator of the historical-geographical development of an area. More and more research in this field will unfold new dimension in geographic investigation of urban toponymy.

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LIST OF PHOTO PLATES



3. Strand Road, Chandannagar



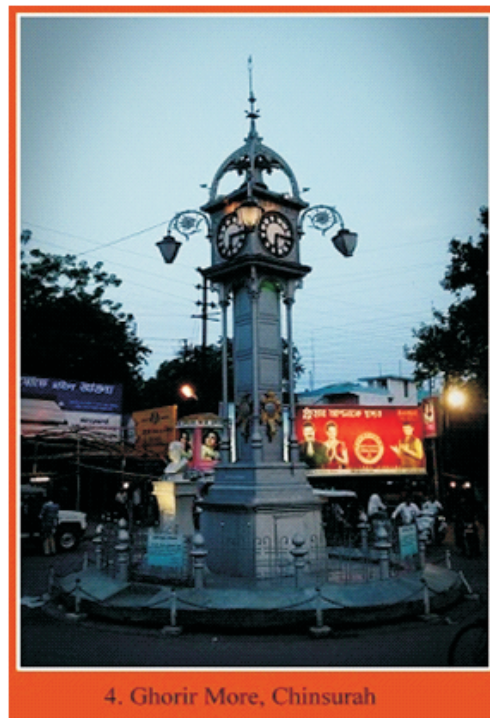
6. Hazarduari Palace, Murshidabad



1. Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata



5. Rashmancha, Bishnupur



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