Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Both the extent and the rate of 'urbanization' are significant indices of development (Glass, 1964, p.7) as urbanization, an essential element in the process of modernization of traditional economies, plays an important role in accelerating social change and economic growth. The cities in the developing countries, do not, however, seem to have played a similar role. The UNESCO Seminar on urbanization in Asia and the Far East (Bangkok Report,1956, p.87) observed that the 'great cities of Asia', although they had 'large size, high density and heterogeneous populations' did not show any 'basic changes in interpersonal relations, the nature of human beings and the social institutions as in the Western context'. Mainly for these reasons some apprehension was expressed in the seminar that the cities in Asia will not play the dynamic role that is generally attributed to urbanization in the West. The persistence of the caste and the joint family (Sovani, 1966, p.84) as well as parochial outlook and attitude expressed in terms of close ties with the ancestral place or the native village that the urban dwellers maintain and their closed value system (Hoselitz,1955,p.537) are the very core of this state of affairs.

An important aspect of urbanism in developed societies
is the development of a new value system expressed by stressing
the presence of 'universalist, achievement-oriented norms' *
wherein there is greater differentiation and specialization
of economic roles which ultimately leads to higher productivity.
Whereas in less developed societies there is a predominance of
'particularistic, ascription-oriented norms' which not only
restricts interpersonal relations but also determines the
pattern of distribution of economic roles and functions. This
in term, to a degree, puts constraints on differentiation of
economic roles and functions.

Again, in the developed societies of the West, the
city dwellers as well as the later migrants get emotionally
integrated and absorbed in the urban milieu rather rapidly
and develop what Hoselitz calls (p.540) 'city consciousness'
with attitudes and objectives quite distinct from those of the
countryside. In the underdeveloped countries, on the other hand,
not only the new migrants but also a large section of the
resident urban dwellers exhibit parochialism expressed in terms
of their regional affiliation and attachment to their place of
origin, the village, Their 'loyalties' therefore, are 'frequently
to groups whose centre of gravity is outside the city'(Hoselitz,
p.546). This nature of the urban population, particularly of

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* The original definition of these variables was given by
Talcott Parsons, The Social System, (Glencoe,1951). They were
applied to the analysis of economic growth in general by
Bert F.Hoselitz, "Social Structure and Economic Growth",
Sociological Aspects of Economic Growth,New York,Free Press,
1965, pp 30ff.

industrial labour, creates a major problem for urbanization
and industrilization as they fail to get emotionally integra-
ted with the urban milieu or get fully committed to industry.

Much of this is true of the Indian urban social situation.
During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century there was
very little industrialization in India and the social structure
and economic pattern of the country with agriculture as its
pivot 'had protected the rural parts against wholesale disinte-
gration' (Majumdar, 1947, p.134). As more than three-fourths
of the Indian population lives in villages, urbanization played
a limited role. Again, the colonial power also did not encourage
industrialization and urbanization except in cases where it
served their interests. The cities and towns that were estab-
lished during the colonial period were mostly centres of aministra-
tive control and of export of raw materials. These urban centres
also performed numerous central city functions such as providing
mainly different kinds of services. Economic growth has been
more halting - traditions lingering longer - and on the whole
their influence had often been on the conservative side. Thus,
speaking generally, urbanization in India during the later part
of the previous century did not have a direct relationship with
industrialization (Mukhopadhyaya, 1969, p.84), as contrasted
with the long history of industrial urbanism in the West. It,
therefore, cannot be expected that the cities in India, in the
'throes of urbanization', will display all the features of

cities in the developed societies of the West. Nevertheless,
the impact of historical, political, technological and socio-
logical factors has influenced the tradition-bound and folk-
conditioned social structure of India in many significant
ways. This in turn has affected the structure, organization
and life-style of the urban communities to a great extent.
The value of industrialization which is just getting under
way is generally admitted and the cities are moving away from
the pre-industrial stage and they are, broadly speaking, in
the 'outer fringe of industrial type' (Sovani, 1966, p.86).
It is natural, therefore, that industrialization will go a
long way in moulding the attitudes of the people in a number
of ways such as making them more receptive to progressive
ideas and increasing their resourcefulness. To be sure, certain
differences between the urban social situation in India and
that of the West are likely to persist as the roots of some
social institutions like caste, lie in the social philosophy
and culture of the Indian people. Sovani, however, concludes,
that there is little ground to apprehend that cities in India
'will not play a dynamic role in social political and economic
transformation' (p.86) of the country.

The Problem

It will be wrong to assume that every 'urban' area,
irrespective of its size and type has the necessary features

to act as a lever of social change and economic development.
The urban identity of big cities is unmistakable as their
very size which produces particular physical and social traits,
gives them certain common characteristics (Glass, p.3). They
play a significant role in the process of development as they
have distinct advantages in terms of communications, markets
and financial facilities over small towns. Many of these small
and medium-sized urban centres are either administrative
headquarters of districts or subdivisions, or market-places
or merely residential towns and have, more often than not,
'quasi-urban' characteristics or the familiar features of 'swollen'
or 'enlarged' villages. Their urban identity is sometimes
doubtful as there is very little of typical city life.

As a limited number of studies are known to have been
conducted on small and medium sizedtowns, very little is known
about their social and economic characteristics, their develop-
ment potential and their connectivity with their hinterland and
larger urban centres. In many cases the origin, characteristics
and functions of these localities vary greatly. Glass,therefore,
emphasises the necessity to identify those small towns and study
the range of their features before special importance can legiti-
mately be attached to them (or some of them) in the development
process.(p.9)

During colonial rule some railway colonies (with the
rail depot, yards, the railway company offices, the extensive

WEST BENGAL
SHOWING DISTRICTS WITH
SUBDIVISION OF MIDNAPORE DISTRICT

DARJEELING

JALPAIGURI

COOCH-
BEHAR

WEST
DINAJPUR

MALDA

MURSHIDABAD

BIRBHUM

PURULIA

BURDWAN

NADIA

BANKURA

HOOGLY

Midnapore

MIDNAPORE

CALCUTTA

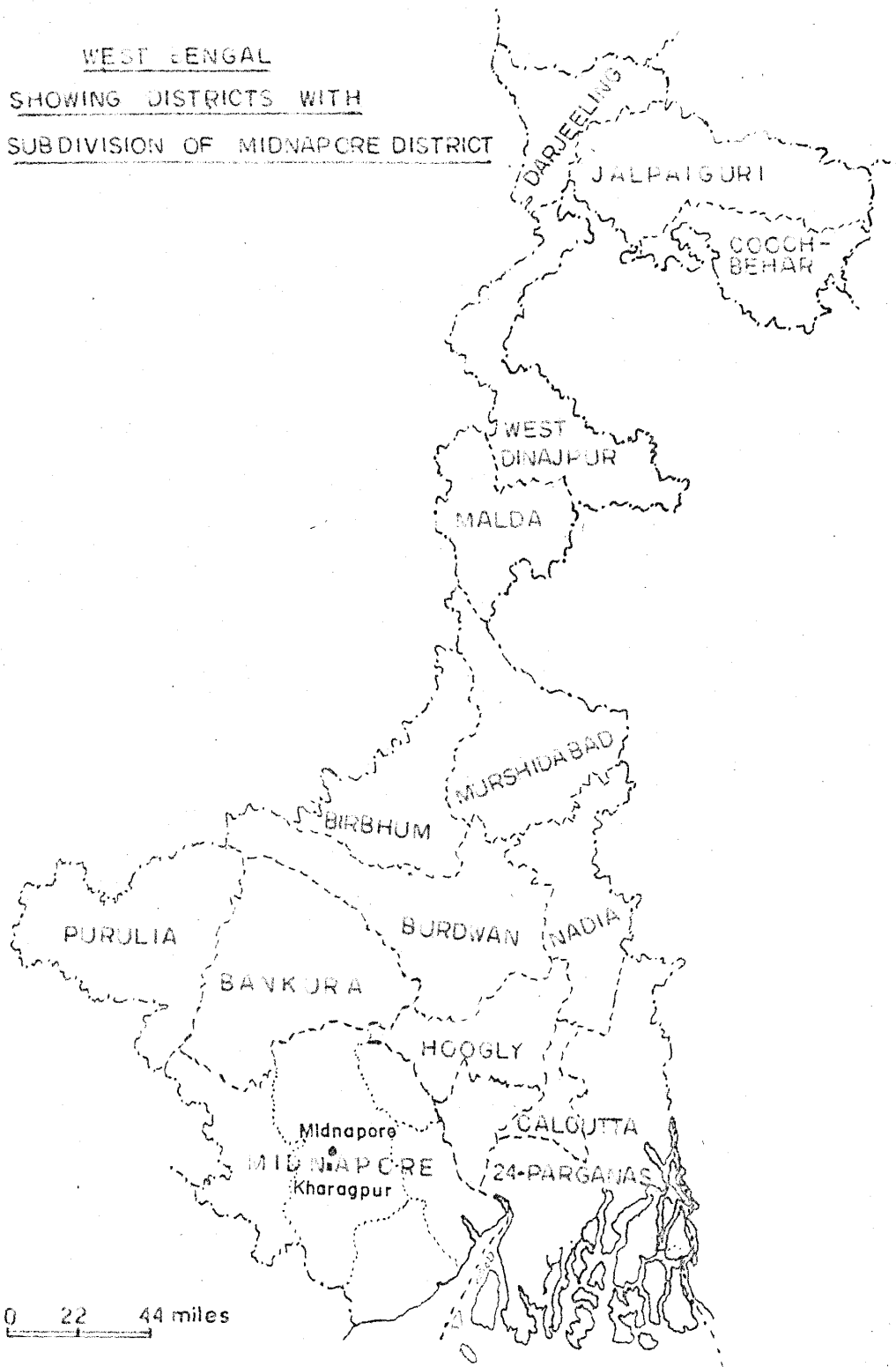24-PARGANAS

Kharagpur

0   22   44 miles

Fig-1

gradually 26 villages around the railway junction were brought under the Railway Settlement. A police station was established for Kharagpur town and in 1911 the Railway Settlement emerged as a class IV town from its original rural setting. It had then a population of only 18,457. A rapid growth of population, chiefly due to the expansion of the Railway Workshop, took place during the following decades and finally Kharagpur attained the status of a class I city (Census 1951).

Kharagpur Municipality came into existence in 1954 and the city now has three constituent urban units with the Railway Settlement at the core and the municipal and non-municipal (urban) areas surrounding this core. The Indian Institute of Technology was founded at Hijli (about 3 km. south of the Kharagpur city) and this led to the development of a number of smaller units on the periphery of the I.I.T. Campus. The non-municipal areas also developed with the growth of the town and a part of non-municipal area has now been brought under the municipal administration. The process of areal expansion of the city is still continuing.

The administration of the Railway Settlement is under the Railway Town Committee.* The non-municipal area is divided into two parts - urban and rural - both of which are administered

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* After Independence, the Railways in India have been nationa-
  lised and all properties of earlier companies, including
  railway colonies are under the administrative control of the
  Ministry of Railways, Government of India.

by the Block Development Office.

Geographically Kharagpur is situated nearly at the centre of Midnapore district, which according to 1971 Census, is the second largest and second most populous district of West Bengal with agriculture as its dominant sector of economy. 77 per cent of the workers are in the primary sector of economy. 92.21 per cent of the district's population live in rural areas. Except the Railway Workshop at Kharagpur there are no large or even medium size industries in the district. Thus, it is evident that industrially it is an underdeveloped district with a low level of urbanization.

The Design

The study, after making a descriptive survey of the city of Kharagpur, focusses attention on some of the objectively ascertainable characteristics in the social structure of the city which indicate a departure from the assumed characteristics of the Indian social structure. The investigation was carried out on the following lines :

1. The general demographic characteristics of the population.

2. The general social situation, - adherence to caste-system as indicated by hierarchical distinctions,

observance of customs and taboos and continuance
of caste occupation, - the family structure, -
the degree and extent of parochialism in outlook
and behaviour as indicated by attachment to the
place of birth or origin.

3. The existing infra-structural facilities of the
city and its urban field, that is, its relation-
ships with different urban localities within the
district region as well as important and larger
urban centres.

4. A comparative analysis of the relative social and
physical characteristics of different urban centres
of Midnapore district on a number of important
variables.

5. An assessment of the character of the city by means
of quantitative comparison with six industrial
towns (of West Bengal but outside Midnapore dist-
rict) on the same set of variables.

The main purpose of the socio-economic studies of urban
areas sponsored by the Research Planning Committee(RPC) of the
Planning Commission was to understand those aspects of urban
growth which had a special bearing on rural-urban migration and
development of employment opportunities (Second Five Year Plan,
1956, p.568).

The present study of Kharagpur city is a departure
from the routine type of socio-economic surveys of urban
centres insofar as it makes a survey and analysis of the
social structure, a survey and analysis of the physical
characteristics, and also makes use of statistical tools to
corroborate the logically derived conclusions. It analyses
not only the social situation of a community which presents
a great diversity and range in its ethnic composition, but
also the position, function and character of a city vis-a-vis
other urban centres in the district region. In so doing, it
indicates a method to identify urban centres in terms of
their potentialities, both social and physical, before special
importance can legitimately be attached to them in planning
the development of a region.

Since the present investigation is based on a single
case study, the results reached here are valid only for this
particular urban centre. But there is no good reason to believe
that cities in India have failed to play their role as vehicles
of change, however rudimentary it may be in some cases, Again,
the strategy suggested here - that an analysis of the social and
physical conditions of different urban centres is a prior nece-
ssity for determining their potentialities to play the dynamic
role in development planning - may be viewed as a valid general
principle.