

## South 24 Parganas: An Overview

### 1.1 South 24 Parganas: An Overview

The district of South 24 Parganas came into existence on March 1, 1986. Prior to that date, it was a part of undivided 24 Parganas. The large undivided district of 24 Parganas was bordered by the Bhagirathi channel in the West, Bangladesh in the East, the district of Nadia in the North and the Bay of Bengal in the South. This huge and populous landmass was under the same administrative jurisdiction from the beginning of the British rule in Bengal. After the fall of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, Mir Jafar, the new Nawab, concluded a treaty with the English East India Company on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1757, by which the former ceded to the Company the Zamindari rights of 24 mahals. It was recorded that ‘all the land lying to the south of Calcutta as far as *Kulpi*, shall be under the Zamindari of the English company; and all the officers of this Zamindari shall be under their jurisdiction.’ These 24-mahals, or 24 parts, were given the name 24 Parganas. By the time of the Permanent Settlement in 1793, the Sundarbans had been included

in the 24 Parganas’ administration. Finally, in 1986, the district of 24 Parganas was divided into two separate parts mainly for reducing the administrative burden. The southern part came to be known as South 24 Parganas.

South 24 Parganas encompasses the moribund, mature as well as the active parts of the Gangetic delta. The rich arable lands of the South 24 parganas district consists of the southern plains to the south of Calcutta between the old and present courses of the Hooghly. Due to its peculiar geographical location and the dictates of geography, the means of transport and communication in this region are not well developed, with all the attendant consequences. Lack of irrigation has meant mono-cropped agriculture. Breaches in earthen embankments and cyclonic storms mean loss of life and destruction of crops and property on a regular basis. Any development strategy in this ecologically fragile environment must be carefully designed and implemented.

## 1.2 South 24 Parganas in Historical Perspective

The present South 24-Parganas district forms the southern-most part of the deltaic plains of Bengal. This is a relatively new land, emerged from the alluvial deposits of the Ganges and its various tributaries. In the very recent period, the archaeologists have found some pre-historic artifacts from the surface of this region. But these evidences are still not sufficient to write a definite pre-history of this particular area. This is also true for the early historical period of this region. From the first century B.C. we have found some foreign literary accounts about this region, which indicate the existence of a land of prosperous people in this part of Bengal. But this is a land where there have been constant shifts in the courses of rivers. Therefore, it is unlikely to find the supportive detailed archaeological evidences, in absence of which the early history of this part of Bengal remains speculative.

The Greek writers, from the first century B.C. onward, mentioned the people of this region, often referred to as the *Gangaridae*, *Gangaridai*, and *Gangaridi* etc. According to Ptolemy, the famous second century geographer, the country near the mouth of the Ganges was occupied by the *Gangaridai*. He also mentioned that they were different from the people of the

territory of *Tamrolipta*, called Tamalites. It may be assumed that the whole deltaic Bengal between the Bhagirathi-Hooghly in the west, the Padma-Meghna in the east and the Ganga-Padma in the north became the land of the *Gangaridai* people. The district of South 24 Parganas as of now falls within these limits.

From the Greek sources, we know that the country of the *Gangaridai* was a prosperous one and this prosperity was largely depended upon its profitable foreign trade. There was a famous port-city, called Ganges. This city was situated on the confluence of the Ganges with the sea. Through this port, according to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a travelogue written by an anonymous Greek sailor of the first century A.D., a considerable amount of trade used to be carried out in betel, spikenard, pearl and *maslin*. In this profitable foreign trade, gold coins were used as the medium of exchange.

Where was the city of Ganges located? Historians are confused. It might have been in the present Sagar island, or at Chandraketugarh of Deganga (Deganga means *dwi* or *dwitya* Ganga, second mouth of Ganges) which presently is in the district of North 24 Parganas. Another possible place is Atghara near Baruipur, situated on

the east bank of the old course of the Bhagirathi, called Adiganga.

The establishment of the Gupta Empire marks the end of the political isolation of the various independent states that flourished in Bengal. This part of Bengal, also, got incorporated in the Gupta Empire, though the actual effectiveness of their rule in this area remains uncertain. From indirect archaeological evidence it seems that the Gupta rule made a deep cultural impact on the district. The imperial Guptas were the patrons of Puranic Brahmanism. Through them Puranic Brahmanism and its associated culture spread over this region. A large number of terracotta icons of Puranic Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses have been found from the Berachampa-Deganga-Chandraketugarh region and from Atghara. Some Buddhist icons have also been found.

This part of Bengal remained outside the effective hegemony of the Gauda kingdom of Sasanka. It was under the sway of the Pala Empire. During the reign of Gopala II and Vigrahapala II (circa A.D. 940-988) the Palas lost a large portion of their territory in Vanga to the Chandras, who started their career as a feudatory of the former. There is still a brick temple, popularly known as *Jatar Deul*, standing at the village of Uttar Jata of Mathurapur, which was constructed by a certain king

named Jayanachandra in 975 A.D., which confirmed the fact that this area was under the sway of the Chandra rulers. It is interesting to note that all the remnants found from the surrounding area represent Puranic Brahmanical tradition, not Mahayani Buddhist tradition, which indicates that the Palas were unable to imprint their own image onto the culture of this region. In the Sena period this tradition is not only continued, but strengthened. It is well known that the Senas were the patrons of Brahmanism. By issuing land grant to the Brahmanas, they wanted to extend their hegemony over the rural folk. This kind of activities from the part of Senas had other consequences also. As a result of the regular settlements in the Sundarban regions, the agricultural economy was spreading more and more towards the south.

From the ancient times till the sixteenth century at least, there were many *janapadas* which emerged on the banks of old Bhagirathi channel. Kalighat, Boral, Rajpur, Mahinagar, Baruipur, Bahadu, Joynagar, Majilpur, Chatrabhog were some among them. Bipradasa Pipalai's *Manasavijaya*, composed in A.D. 1495, provides us with a list of names of some important villages and towns of this region. Baruipur was a populous city in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Chandsadagar, a merchant character of *Manasavijaya*, reached

Baruipur, from Kalighat, through the old Bhagirathi channel. From there he proceeded towards Chatrabhog, and then traveling through Hatigarh pargana reached the open sea. Chaitanyadeva (1486-1534), according to his contemporary biographies, also went through this route. In his journey towards Puri, through the Bhagirathi channel, he halted at the village of Atisara, near Baruipur. His last stoppage in 24 Parganas was at Chatrabhog, now a village within the jurisdiction of Mathurapur police station. Chatrabhog seems to have been an important river-port on the old Bhagirathi Channel. The zamindar of Chatrabhog, Rama Chandra Khan, helped Chaitanyadeva in his onward journey to Orissa. Chaitanya's journey along the east bank of Bhagirathi, and this kind of association with the influential landlords boosted the spread of *Gaudiya Vaisnava Bhakti* movement, at least on the riparian tracts of the 24 Parganas district.

A retrogressive process might have been started from the middle of the sixteenth century onward. These hitherto burgeoning centres of northern Sundarban areas and the Bhagirathi-Hooghly received setbacks. There were two reasons. The first was the rampant activities of the Portuguese free-booters and others. The second was geographic, the eastward trend of the Ganges dramatically intensified after the

late sixteenth century, and hence it gradually abandoned the old Bhagirathi channel, presently known as Adiganga. So long as the river flowed smoothly, the life of the surrounding areas also flowed. When the river became moribund, the thriving centres of life were affected by the diseases associated with the stagnant water.

In 1538, the Portuguese had obtained from Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mahmud, the last Ilyas Shahi king of Gaur, the permission to build settlement in Santgaon on the confluence of the river Saraswati and Bhagirathi-Hooghly. From this time onwards, the Portuguese slowly but steadily became the masters of the water of these riparian tracts. They had a secondary naval station at Tardaha on the confluence of Bidyadhari in South 24-Parganas. In this period Bengal's political geography was dominated by the so-called *Baaro Bhuniyas* (twelve landed Chiefs). The Portuguese free-booters became the allies of these independent *Bhuniyas* against the Mughals and in return got freedom of action in this lower part of Bengal. They went on with their business of piracy with impunity. For nearly a century or so this part of region remained under the effective control of the Portuguese pirates and free-booters. As a consequence, the hitherto populated centres of this region of Bengal got depopulated and jungles of the Sundarbans extended.

The present district of South 24-Parganas was within the kingdom of Pratapaditya (1590-1612), one of the most powerful Bhuniyas of Bengal. In 1612 he was defeated by the Mughal army. The Mughals established a fauzdari at Jessore and the present district of South 24-Parganas came under this jurisdiction. Now, the Mughal Subadar of Bengal turned their attention towards the problems created by the Portuguese. They sacked Hooghly in 1632. It is not clear when the Portuguese were forced to give up *Tardah*. But, with the waning of the power of the Bhuniyas the Portuguese had lost an important source of patronage.

By this time the Portuguese menace was controlled, but not finally ended, especially in the areas of the southern-most part of Bengal, which were full of rivers, creeks and tiger-infested jungles. The arms of the Mughal Emperor or of the Nawab of Bengal did not effectively reach these areas. Besides the Portuguese, there were Magh or Arakanese pirates operating in the same areas. They would come all of a sudden and swoop down on a river side mart on a market day and looted the merchandise brought for sale. This lawlessness, uncertainties and insecurities became the part of everyday life of the people living in this area throughout the eighteenth and for the better part of the

nineteenth centuries.

Then the English appeared. The 24-Parganas were one of the earliest places of their colonial subjugation. The treaty of 1757 between Mir Jafar and the East India Company ceded to the Company the Zamindari rights of 24 Parganas. The British colonial rule continued uninterrupted till India's independence in 1947.

As the present district of the South 24 Parganas is adjacent to Calcutta, the capital of early colonial rule in India, it had received some enlightening touches of the British rule, like the spread and extension of modern education, and social and religious reform movements etc. However, it has to be remembered, the present South 24-Parganas has a rich cultural heritage. There were many renowned centres of Sanskrit learning in the *medieval* and late *medieval* periods. Majilpur was called the 'second Navadvip' for its profound studies and culture of the Hindu *sastras*. Harinavi, Rajpur, all were famous centres of learning. So, when in the nineteenth century the modern western education was beginning to penetrate in this region, a complex interaction was going on between the old and the new.

According to the Annual report on the Public Instruction for 1871-72 by Mr. Woodrow, Inspector of Schools, quoted in W. W. Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal*: 'Nine-tenths of the education given in this

district are found on the banks of the old Ganges. The country thus favoured with schools extends from Halisahar to Rajpur, Baruipur, Boral, Govindapur, Bahru, and Joynagar, all populous villages with flourishing English schools under Hindu management.' There were many important journals published within the district in the nineteenth century. Dwarakanath Vidyabhusan's *Somprokas* held the foremost place among them. This weekly journal, published regularly on the morning of every Monday, first appeared from Calcutta in 1858 and from April 1862 from Harinavi. Mohanlal Vidyabagish and Sibnath Sastri also edited the journal for some times respectively between 1865 and 1874. The journal discussed literature, philosophy, science, politics and social matters. It agitated on the cause of the peasants and expressed itself boldly against the zamindars, and indigo-planters.

Many of the stalwarts and leading men of nineteenth-century Bengal were either born or had worked in this district at one time or the other. Rajnarayan Basu was born in Basu family of Boral. He was one of the leading figures of the *Brahmo* movement and was the forerunner of the *swadesi* movement of later days. Rajnarayan formed a secret society on the Italian Carbonary model also, although nothing much came out of it till his grandsons Arabinda and

Barin Ghose and nephew Satyen Bose appeared on the scene.

Sibnath Sastri had his ancestral home at Majilpur, but was born in the maternal home at Changripota (now Subhasgram). At an early age he joined the social reform movements. He formally joined in Keshab Sen's *Brahmo Samaj* in 1869. From 1873 he shifted his centre of activities to Calcutta. In 1878 Sibnath Sastri parted ways from Keshabchandra and established *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj*. One of his compatriots, Umesh Chandra Dutta had established *Harinavi Brahmo Samaj*, and the big figures of the Brahmo movement, like Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Keshabchandra Sen, Rajnarayan Basu, Dr. Protap Majumder, had frequent contacts with this Samaj.

South 24-Parganas was one of the active centres of *Hindu Mela* also. The first ever Hindu Mela in rural Bengal, was held in Baruipur in 1870. The concept of *Swadeshi* was an outcome of the activities of Hindu Mela, though the ideas of *Swadeshi* attained a commanding height at the time of the Anti-Partition movement in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. During this time secret revolutionary movements gained momentum as well.

The present district of South 24-Parganas was a fertile soil of the revolutionary nationalist movement. The

*Jugantar Party* had a strong base in the district. In 1907, two *swadeshi* dacoities were held at railway stations on Sealdah Divisional Southern Section line. The first was at *Netra* station and the second was in *Changripota*, now called Subhasgram station. Some of the members of the *Jugantar Party* were involved in these incidents. Narendranath Bhattacharjee, later earned world-wide fame under the pseudonym - Manabendranath Roy - as a member of the *Jugantar Party*, were involved in these dacoities. Among the others members, there were Kuntal Chakravarti of Joynagar, Saileshwar Basu, Bholanath Chattopadhyay, Makhan Chakravarti and Alope Chakravarti of *Changripota*. All of them were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. The *Jugantar Party* continued its hold on the locality. Satkari Bandyopadhyay, Harikumar Chakravarty and Aswini Ganguly were the prominent figures of the revolutionary activities in this region. During the First World War, they were involved in the arms deal with the Germans, under the leadership of Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin). But the plan was not successful. Satkari Bandyopadhyay and Harikumar Chakravarty had good organizing skills. In the middle of the 1920s, they formed a new group called *Sadhan Sangha* in this

district. Openly, they began to establish gymnasia and libraries, and from the users of gymnasia and libraries they secretly recruited the political activists, giving them special training in use of arms and ammunitions. They established gymnasia and libraries at Baruipur, Kalyanpur, Boral, Garia, Dhakuria, Diamond Harbour, Sarisha, Joynagar, Majilpur, Barisha, Behala and Bashirhat. Another group, the *Bengal Volunteers*, had its centres at Kotalia, Mahinagar and Malancha. Dinesh Majumder, the martyr, had a close link with these groups and it is noteworthy that his main area of operation was South 24-Parganas.

It needs to be mentioned that Subhas Chandra Bose and Sarat Chandra Bose's ancestral home was at Kotalia in the present South 24-Parganas district. Both of them were the members of the first 24-Parganas District Committee of the Congress, which was formed in 1921. This district took an active part in the first Non-Co-operation Movement and later in Civil Disobedience Movement, led by the Congress.

In general, the revolutionary activists and the leftists of the Congress dominated the field of politics in South 24-Parganas. Although their social base was extending significantly, it did not reach the peasantry. That turning point came in the 1940s, but not through the people of the Congress organization. It was the workers of the

Communist Party of India (CPI), who established the link with the peasantry of the Sundarban area in the 1940s. The peasant movement that broke out in Kakdwip, Sonarpur, Bhangar and Canning areas of the Sundarbans in 1946 and continued till 1950 was qualitatively different in character. It was guided by an all-India Party. During the famine of 1943, the functionaries of the CPI had rendered the relief work to the peasantry of this area and established a firm hold in the region. After the famine, they started to organize the peasant masses. The *jotedari* system had taken roots in the area, and the sharecroppers, marginal peasants and the landless labourers were the worst sufferers. In September 1946, the *Bangiya Pradeshi Kishan Sabha* (BPKS) decided to launch the *Tebhaga Movement*, the aim of which was to secure for the sharecropping peasants a better position within the existing land relation structure.

Kakdwip and Namkhana were the storm-centres of the movement. The movement saw the forging of a remarkable unity between the Hindu and Muslim sharecroppers and small peasants, quite contrary to the general mood of that time. The prominent leaders of BPKS, who were taking the active part to organize the peasantry, were Kangsari Haldar, Asoke Bose and Ras Behari Ghosh; and among

participating peasants leaders like Gajen Mali, Manik Hazra, Jatin Maity, Bijoy Mondal and others rose to prominence.

By January 1950, the *Tebhaga* and its following peasant movements had come to an end. The direct consequence of the movements was the enactment of *Bargadari Act* of 1950, which later got incorporated as the Chapter III of the *West Bengal Land Reform Act 1956*. The act recognized the sharecropper's right to two-thirds of the produce where he supplies usual necessary inputs. The actual realization of the rights granted by the Act was still a far cry. So, another wave from the part of the deprived section of the peasantry was needed. And, this started in the 1960s.

In 1967, the whole of West Bengal saw a peasant uprising on an unprecedented scale. The epicentre of the movement – essentially an organized and militant protest against the non-implementation of land reform legislation – was the *Kheyadaha Gram Panchayat* of the *Sonarpur block*. Despite the proliferation of land reform legislations in the post independence period, property relations in rural West Bengal remained virtually unchanged until 1967. Large tracts of agricultural land in excess of ceiling had been either kept by the large landlords in the name of others or had been transformed into illegal fisheries to avoid the land

ceiling act. Led by the local leftist leaders, the peasants and landless agricultural labourers in Sonarpur forcibly occupied the land illegally kept by the landlords and distributed them among the poor peasants. The movement brought into focus the almost semi-feudal land relations of the rural West Bengal and kept the promise of implementation of land reform legislation on leftist agenda. This paved the way for successful land reform in West Bengal after the Left Front came to power in 1977.

Before ending this section, an observation on the cultural heritage of South 24 Parganas may be of particular interest. South 24 Parganas comprises an area which was mostly covered by dense forest in not so distant past. For survival, the settlers had to fight with Nature day

in and day out. The same goes on in the Sundarbans even at present time. The hardships of daily existence have given rise to fraternal feelings and non-communal traditions. Members of both Hindu and Muslim communities worship the same Gods and Goddesses, Gazis and Pirs. The two most famous among them are *Dakshin Ray* and *Banabibi*. *Dakshin Ray* is worshiped as the God of tiger and all those who enter the forests for subsistence worship *Dakshin Ray* irrespective of their caste, creed and religion. *Banabibi*, on the other hand, is considered as the protector of the inhabitants of the forests. She is popular both amongst Hindus and Muslims. These Gods and Goddesses are not recognised by either religion, but are local deities created and worshipped by local people.

### 1.3 The Topography

Spreading over an area of 8165 sq. km with a population of 69.09 lakhs in 2001, the district of South 24 Parganas covers almost 9 per cent of the total landmass of the state of West Bengal. Located between latitudes 20°20' N and 20°06' N and longitudes 88°20' E and 88°60' E, the district is bounded to its due south by the Bay of Bengal, by Bangladesh across the

Raimangal and Kalindi rivers to its east, by Kolkata and North 24 Parganas districts to its north-west and north-east respectively and by the districts of Howrah and East Medinipur across the Bhagirathi river to its west.

Two distinct physiographic zones are discernible in the terrain presently known as South 24 Parganas. The northern part of the

district bordering Kolkata and North 24 Parganas belongs to what is known as *the Marine-riverine Delta*. In the sub-recent geological period, the sea receded southwards. As a result, a large area as plain land of very low altitude covered with fine clay of variable thickness and subjected to tidal ingresses got exposed. This required the then existing rivers to extend their courses to meet the receded sea.

The recession of the sea face was due to upliftment of the basement complex. To regain their profiles of equilibrium, the earlier river channels started getting exhumed afresh. However, the deepening of the channels proceeded faster along the course of the Padma river, because of higher volume of water flow, than its western distributaries. Land building activity through these fluvial channels further south also dwindled away. This became pronounced in the early decades of the current century. As a consequence, the physiographic zone under discussion continues to experience the joint impacts of fluvial and marine geomorphological processes, since the rate of land building by the rivers declined. All rivers in this zone experience tidal surges.

Presently this exposed continental shelf is getting covered by sediments carried by tidal inflows as well as by the rivers. These are forms of sediments brought by the tides

and the rivers. The tracts between the river channels continued to contain brackish water wetlands until filled up by sediments arriving through the collapse of the natural levees. Such collapses take place periodically as the channel beds rise due to confined sedimentation. Man-made flood jacketing embankments laid close to the tidal channels also collapse periodically with every reduction of the channel cross section. The inflowing sediments through the collapsed structures fill up the depressions containing the brackish water wetlands. This process is now manifesting with many parts of the Wetland of the North Eastern part of the district of South 24 Parganas. Some parts of this wetland are still preserved to raise fish. But these are gradually changing their brackish nature.

Filling up of the inter-fluvial brackish water wetland progressed more extensively in the northern part of this physiographic zone than in the south. The reason is easy to comprehend. Sedimentation from flowing water happens faster with the reduction of water velocity.

In the southern part of the District of South 24 Parganas, *the Marine Delta* zone is formed of inter-lacing tidal channels. The source of sedimentation is the tidal influx, which is scouring the shallow continental shelf. On the sea face, sand dunes have formed.

Under normal circumstance, the sediments get deposited between the inter-lacing river channels. But this condition has been largely altered by human action. To expand agriculture on this newly forming land mass, embankments have been created along the banks of the channels to prevent incursions of saline tidal water. These embankments enclose a tract to permit cultivation of rice with the help of rain water. As a result, features of the geomorphic processes have been altered.

In the first instance, sedimentation has been confined within the river channels. This is raising the levels of the river beds, requiring periodic strengthening of the enclosing embankments. Once the embankment collapses, tidal incursions extend into the protected agricultural land and expand the area under sediment accumulation. Until such disasters happen, the agricultural fields lose their nutrients. The accumulated rain water enhances leaching process. When the water is drained out during low tide, loss of nutrients also happens.

Rains constitute the major source of potable water. The non-saline aquifers occur at great depth, which is expensive to tap for the generally poor farmers. Shallow tube-wells accelerate the penetration of saline prisms into the so

exploited sweet water aquifers. This remains one of the most important reasons behind the backwardness of agriculture of the district. For a vast part of the district, the sources of non-saline water required for irrigation are few and very expensive to tap making agriculture mostly monsoon dependent.

Most parts of this zone have been brought under agriculture by destroying the mangrove vegetation. In the south-eastern part of this zone, some of the mangroves have been preserved, which has been declared as a Bio-sphere Reserve and is used for preserving tigers.

The district of South 24 Parganas can be divided into two distinct agro-ecological zones. The northern part of the district belongs to the *hot moist sub-humid agro-ecological sub region*. The soils have been formed from the alluvium deposited by Ganga and its tributaries and sub tributaries. The soils are intensively cultivated for rice, potato and oilseed crops. Frequent inundation of low lying areas result in stagnation of water for certain times of the year. Besides, flood hazards also affect the normal dry land crop yields. The soils of this sub-region have high nutrient content and mineral resource with a high potential for a large variety of agricultural and horticultural crops.

The coastal parts of the districts of South



24 Parganas comprising mostly Sundarban areas belong to *moist sub-humid agro-ecological sub-region*. The alluvium deposited by the rivers have gradually developed into deep, fine loamy to fine textured soils, by and large salt impregnated due to tidal flow of sea water

through creeks and sub-tributaries. These soils are imperfectly to poorly drained with moderate to very high salinity hazards. The soils remain wet and saline for considerable period of the year and are suitable particularly for salt resistant crops.

## 1.4 The Administrative Profile

From its inception in 1986, the district of South 24 Parganas has its district headquarters in Alipore which itself is in Kolkata<sup>1</sup>. It then comprised of two sub divisions—Alipore(Sadar) and Diamond Harbour consisting of 30 blocks. Presently there are five sub divisions Alipore(Sadar), Baruipur, Canning, Diamond Harbour and Kakdwip, 29 blocks consisting of 312 Gram Panchayats and 7 Municipalities. South 24 Parganas is, indeed, a complex district, stretching from the metropolitan Kolkata to the remote riverine villages in the south upto the mouth of Bay of Bengal. The Alipore(Sadar) sub division lies very close to the Kolkata metropolis, with a well connected network of roads and railway link with Kolkata. The locational advantage of

the Alipore(Sadar) subdivision has translated into the development of the region so that the level of development in the Sadar subdivision far outweighs the development of any other region of the district. In the other end of the spectrum are Kakdwip and Canning subdivisions. Some of the blocks in these subdivisions are remote island blocks with very bad transportation facilities and connectivity to mainland. These obstacles definitely proved to be hindrance in development of these areas.

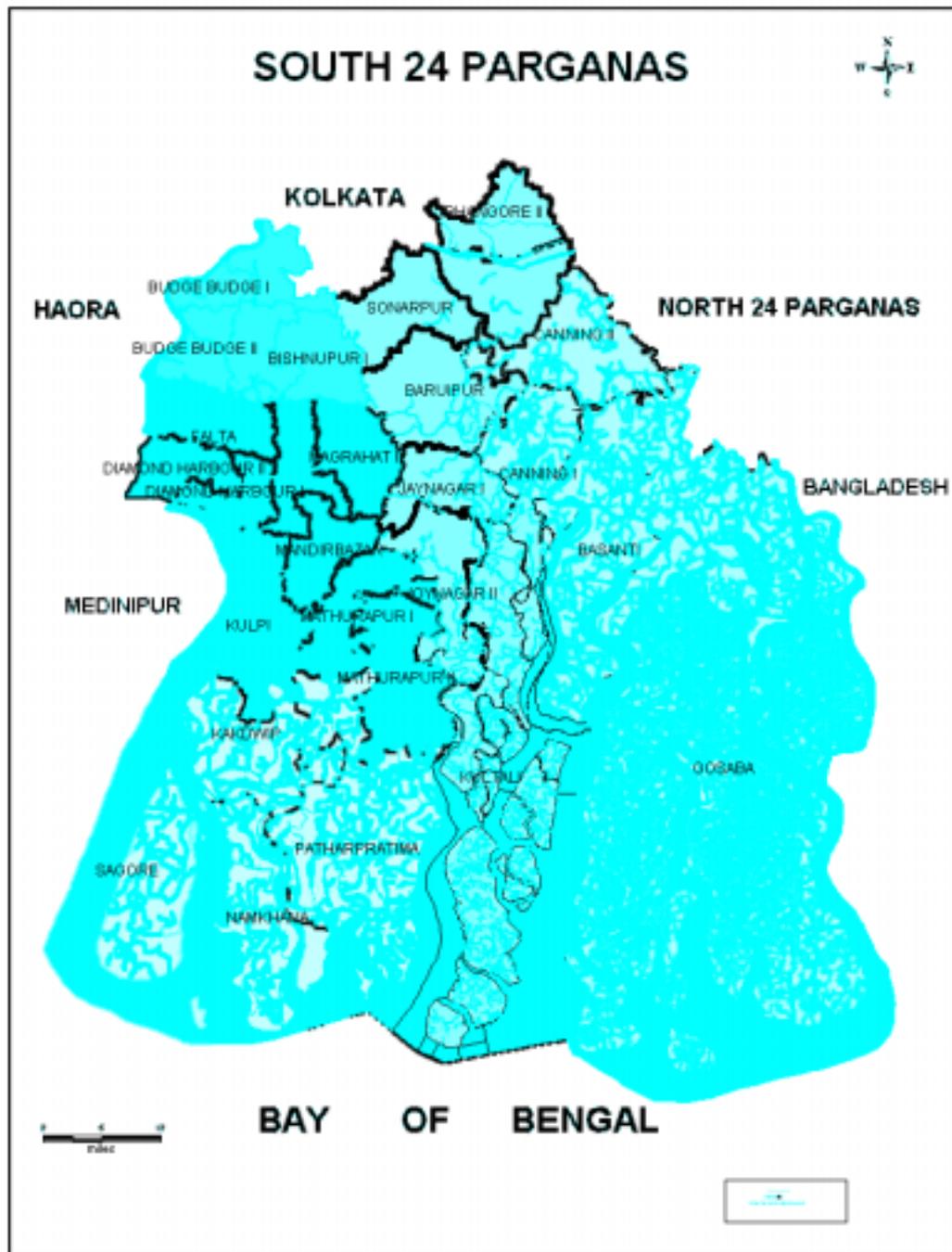
At the helm of the district administration is the District Magistrate who is responsible for the overall governance of the district including law and order. The District Magistrate is assisted by five

1. A decision has been taken to relocate the district headquarter to Baruipur – a more or less centrally located town of the district. The process of land acquisition has started and foundation stone for the district headquarter has been laid at the proposed spot.

Additional District Magistrates and a number of district level officers in discharging the responsibility towards the management of the administration. At the sub divisional level, this responsibility lies with the Sub Divisional Officer. At the

lowest rung of administrative ladder, each of the twenty nine blocks has a Block Development Officer who is assisted by block level officers and staffs for smooth running of block level administration.

Figure 1.1: South 24 Parganas (Administrative)



CH1

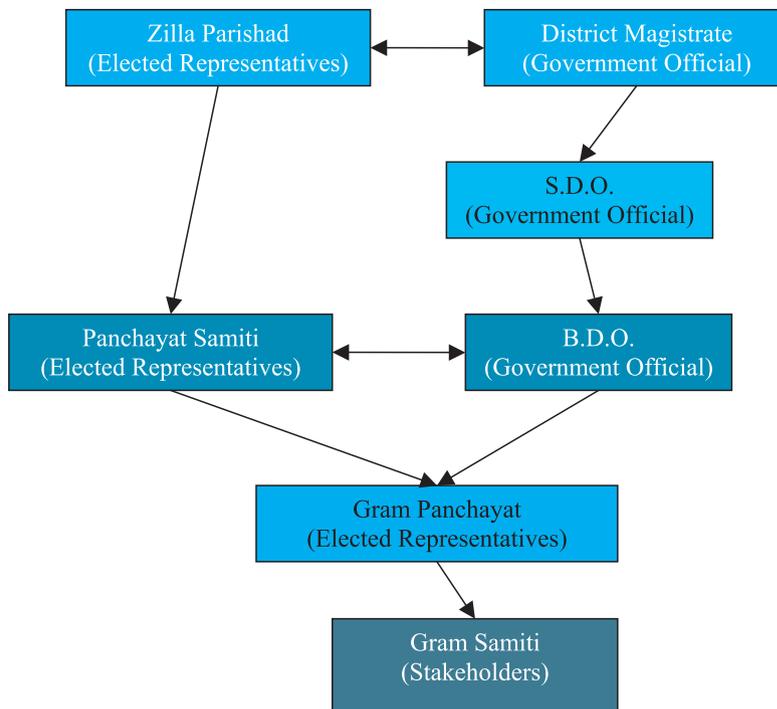
In the spirit of the decentralized governance, as elsewhere in West Bengal, any policy decision regarding the development of an area of the district is taken by the relevant elected representatives. The responsibility for implementing the decisions and overseeing the progress of the project rests

Table 1.1: Administrative Profile: South 24 Parganas

Sl.	Name of the Sub-division	Blocks	No. of GPs	Name of Municipalities
1	Alipore (Sadar)	Bishnupur-I	11	Budge Budge, Pujali, Maheshtala.
		Bishnupur-II	11	
		Budge Budge-I	6	
		Budge Budge-II	11	
		Thakurpukur-Maheshtala	6	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	
2	Baruipur	Baruipur	19	Baruipur, Rajpur - Sonarpur, Joynagar - Majilpur.
		Bhangar-I	9	
		Bhangar-II	10	
		Joynagar-I	12	
		Joynagar-II	10	
		Kultali	9	
		Sonarpur.	11	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	
3	Diamond Harbour	Diamond Harbour-I	8	Diamond Harbour.
		Diamond Harbour-II	8	
		Falta	13	
		Kulpi	14	
		Mograhata-I	11	
		Mograhata-II	14	
		Mandirbazar	10	
		Mathurapur-I	10	
		Mathurapur-II	11	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	
3	Kakdwip	Kakdwip	11	Nil
		Namkhana	7	
		Patharpratima	15	
		Sagar.	9	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	
4	Canning	Canning-I	10	Nil
		Canning-II	9	
		Basanti	13	
		Gosaba.	14	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	

with the administration of the relevant level. The apex institution for local governance of the district is the Zilla Parishad (District Council). For each of the 29 development blocks, the corresponding local governance institution is the respective Panchayat

Figure 1.2: The Administrative Setup



Samiti, the jurisdiction of which is similar to that of the block authority. At grassroots level, there are 312 Gram Panchayats, covering areas that fall within the jurisdiction of the Zilla Parishad. Urban governance rests upon the municipal authorities at seven municipalities and Kolkata Municipal Corporation for part of the area adjacent to Kolkata.

The three-tier Panchayat system in the district has a decentralized mechanism for drawing up and implementing development plans. The central elected council of the Zilla Parishad headed by the Sabhadhipati is assisted in its working by some *Sthayee Samitis* or standing committees that supervise the development programmes of the Zilla Parishad. The Sabhadhipati and

Sahakari Sabhadhipati of the Zilla Parishad are ex-officio members of all *Sthayee Samitis*, each Samiti being headed by the designated Karmadhyaksha. All plans and programmes initiated by the respective *Sthayee Samitis* and approved by the majority of their members at a formal meeting of the Zilla Parishad are considered as decisions of the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad sanctions funds for the

developmental schemes that are taken up at block level by the Panchayat Samitis within its jurisdiction. All block level schemes sent up by the Panchayat Samitis that require larger funding support as well as any works that may need to be implemented jointly by more than one Panchayat Samiti are also taken up by the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad also arranges for technical assistance of the schemes executed by the Panchayat Samitis. Additionally, the Zilla Parishad may also directly execute developmental schemes through its own machinery in the block areas.

The District Magistrate functions as the ex-officio Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad. Like the Zilla Parishad at the district's helm, each Panchayat Samiti at the

second tier of the panchayat system in the district also has *Sthayee Samitis* led by designated Karmadhyakshas. The Sabhapati and Sahakari Sabhapati who preside over the functioning of each Panchayat Samiti are also ex-officio members of all Sthayee Samitis at block-level. In each development block, the Block Development Officer [BDO] functions as the ex-officio Executive Officer of the concerned Panchayat Samiti. All schemes and decisions approved by the Panchayat Samiti are implemented by these Executive Officers.

At the third level within the panchayat system, each Gram Panchayat is headed by the respective Panchayat Pradhan. The Panchayat Samiti allots periodic funding for various development schemes to the Gram Panchayats under its jurisdiction, and also monitors and evaluates the functioning of these Gram Panchayats through the Executive Officer and other Panchayat Samiti members and officials. Within the 3 tier panchayat system, involvement from the local people in the developmental initiatives is drawn through their

participation in public hearings, consultations and meetings. At village level, the local stakeholders also attend Gram Sansad or village council meetings and participate actively in the activities of *Gram Unnayan Samitis*.

In the municipal areas of the district, elected Municipal Boards oversee the overall development of urban areas through several municipal committees. The main functions of each Municipality is to secure potable drinking water, arrange for the lighting of streets and public places, as well as to supervise the development and maintenance of civic drainage systems, provide urban conservancy services, and to develop market and commercial institutions within the urban limits. Each Municipality is led by an elected Chairperson, who is assisted by the elected Municipal Councillors in implementing various urban development works within the Municipality. At the urban grassroots level, each municipal ward has a Ward Committee that formulates urban development schemes for the ward and supervises and monitors their execution.

## 1.5 The Demography

The district of South 24 Parganas had a population of more than 69 lakhs in 2001.

The decadal growth rate of population between 1991 and 2001 had been 20.85

**Table 1.2: Population in South 24 Parganas (2001)**

	Total Population	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
RURAL	5820469	2997270	2823199	942
URBAN	1086220	567723	518497	913
TOTAL	6906689	3564993	3341696	937
Density of Population (2001)				694

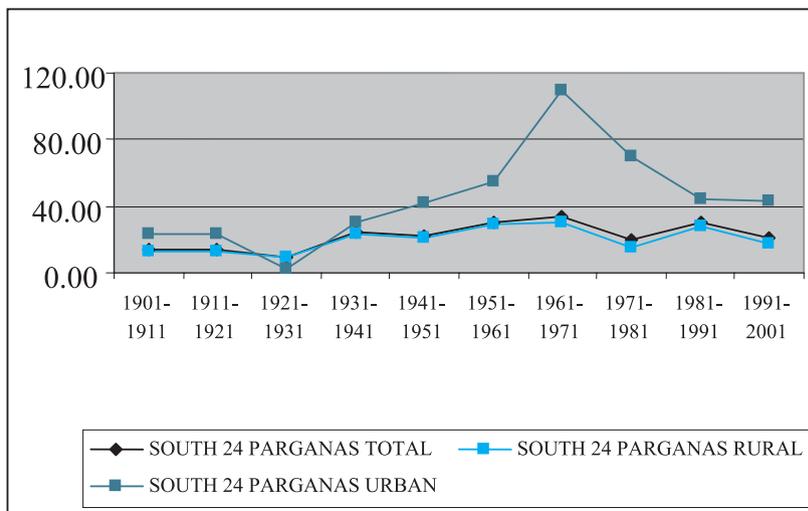
Source: Census (2001)

per cent which is higher than the state average of 17.77 per cent. Historically, the population growth in the district had been higher than the state average. In the last century, except in the decades of 1950s and 1970s, the population growth in South 24 Parganas had always exceeded the state average.

Though the district is still largely rural

metropolis in Eastern India-is largely responsible for this phenomenon. This has created a unique problem for the district administration. The aspirations and demand of the people living close to Kolkata and commuting each day for their livelihoods are very different from those people living in rural areas or even in distant mufassil cities. Thus, apart from the staggering size

**Figure 1.3: Long-term Population Growth in South 24 Parganas**



with 84 per cent of the population living in rural areas, the rate of urbanization in South 24 Parganas has been very high, particularly after independence. The decadal growth rate of urban population

communication facilities and weak delivery systems.

South 24 Parganas is a district with varying population density. Though a large part of landmass of the district is classified as

during 1991-2001 had been 42.85 per cent which is more than double of the state average of 19.88 per cent. The proximity to Kolkata –the largest

and population of the district, the administration has to contend with problems typical of metropolitan living in the urban area — such as high population density and overloaded civic infrastructure — and in complete contrast, in the rural areas the lack of

transport and



Table 1.3: Demographic Profile of the District, 2001

Sub Division/ Municipality/Block	AREA (in sq. km.)	Population			Scheduled Caste Population			Scheduled Tribe Population			Population Density (popn per sq. km.)
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	
<b>Alipore (Sadar) S.D.</b>	<b>427.43</b>	<b>1301955</b>	<b>678692</b>	<b>623263</b>	<b>307890</b>	<b>158902</b>	<b>148988</b>	<b>3366</b>	<b>1747</b>	<b>1619</b>	<b>3046</b>
Maheshtala (M)	44.18	385266	202304	182962	56964	29336	27628	2131	1122	1009	8720
Budge Budge (M)	9.06	75531	41165	34366	6577	3479	3098	63	29	34	8337
Pujali (M)	8.49	33858	17665	16193	5936	3081	2855	509	238	271	3988
Thakurpukur Maheshtala	63.08	136903	70517	66386	53027	27300	25727	110	57	53	2170
Budge Budge – I	26.55	99945	52332	47613	20760	10794	9966	45	26	19	3764
Budge Budge – II	78.00	173446	89998	83448	35551	18232	17319	369	189	180	2224
Bishnupur – I	116.36	206370	106680	99690	98828	51107	47721	36	24	12	1774
Bishnupur – II	81.71	190636	98031	92605	30247	15573	14674	103	62	41	2333
<b>Baruipur S.D.</b>	<b>1355.43</b>	<b>1951966</b>	<b>1008172</b>	<b>943794</b>	<b>688018</b>	<b>355969</b>	<b>332049</b>	<b>17317</b>	<b>8833</b>	<b>8484</b>	<b>1440</b>
Rajpur Sonarpur (M)	55.30	336707	174140	162567	77518	40147	37371	2358	1206	1152	6089
Baruipur (M)	9.07	44913	23025	21888	11161	5632	5529	209	100	109	4952
Joynagar Mazilpur (M)	5.18	23315	12024	11291	4250	2203	2047	29	15	14	4501
Sonarpur	120.63	167408	86078	81330	97036	49833	47203	2683	1351	1332	1388
Joynagar – I	131.01	219090	113352	105738	89739	46773	42966	145	74	71	1672
Joynagar – II	186.25	209145	108294	100851	76761	39849	36912	974	537	437	1123
Kultali	306.18	187989	97356	90633	88851	46368	42483	4844	2488	2356	614
Baruipur	226.16	351439	181636	169803	150338	77614	72724	843	458	385	1554
Bhangar – I	153.62	204380	104584	99796	46360	23927	22433	3124	1560	1564	1330
Bhangar – II	162.04	207580	107683	99897	46004	23623	22381	2108	1044	1064	1281
<b>Canning S.D.</b>	<b>1103.72</b>	<b>942008</b>	<b>482112</b>	<b>459896</b>	<b>422932</b>	<b>218045</b>	<b>204887</b>	<b>52751</b>	<b>26725</b>	<b>26026</b>	<b>853</b>
Canning – I	187.86	244627	125097	119530	123936	63868	60068	3075	1536	1539	1302
Canning – II	214.93	195967	100397	95570	48173	24911	23262	11654	5900	5754	912
Basanti	404.21	278592	142705	135887	107602	55820	51782	17462	8973	8489	689
Gosaba	296.73	222822	113913	108909	143221	73446	69775	20560	10316	10244	751
<b>Diamond Harbour S.D.</b>	<b>1264.68</b>	<b>1836769</b>	<b>947702</b>	<b>889067</b>	<b>551798</b>	<b>285423</b>	<b>266375</b>	<b>5156</b>	<b>2640</b>	<b>2516</b>	<b>1452</b>
Diamond Harbour (M)	10.36	37234	19209	18025	4176	2195	1981	209	123	86	3594
Magrahat – I	119.04	228335	117870	110465	49704	25772	23932	103	57	46	1918
Magrahat – II	136.93	262092	135194	126898	94748	49015	45733	59	31	28	1914
Mandirbazar	118.07	183131	94620	88511	79504	41197	38307	274	143	131	1551
Kulpi	210.83	242752	124836	117916	77380	39915	37465	141	88	53	1151
Falta	130.68	221695	114232	107463	54897	28275	26622	73	24	49	1696
Diamond Harbour – I	68.43	133366	69094	64272	27048	13990	13058	133	50	83	1949
Diamond Harbour – II	95.59	165233	84722	80511	44709	22776	21933	267	122	145	1729
Mathurapur – I	147.30	164650	84894	79756	60904	31685	29219	589	317	272	1118
Mathurapur – II	227.45	198281	103031	95250	58728	30603	28125	3308	1685	1623	872
<b>Kakdwip S.D.</b>	<b>1389.94</b>	<b>873991</b>	<b>448315</b>	<b>425676</b>	<b>247738</b>	<b>126971</b>	<b>120767</b>	<b>6176</b>	<b>3156</b>	<b>3020</b>	<b>629</b>
Kakdwip	252.74	239326	122815	116511	86042	44404	41638	1941	1028	913	947
Namkhana	370.61	160627	82301	78326	41797	21303	20494	710	357	353	433
Sagar	282.11	185644	95547	90097	51588	26543	25045	691	383	308	658
Patharpratima	484.47	288394	147652	140742	68311	34721	33590	2834	1388	1446	595
<b>South 24 Parganas</b>	<b>9960.00</b>	<b>6906689</b>	<b>3564993</b>	<b>3341696</b>	<b>2218376</b>	<b>1145310</b>	<b>1073066</b>	<b>84766</b>	<b>43101</b>	<b>41665</b>	<b>693</b>

**Table 1.4: Literacy (7+ persons) and Work Participation Rates by Religious Communities**

Religious Community	Percentage of population	Literacy Rate	Work Participation Rate
Hindus	65.86	73.81	34.86
Muslims	33.24	59.83	27.71
Christians	0.76	76.05	33.84
Sikhs	0.02	82.64	33.69
Buddhists	0.03	88.90	30.35
Jains	0.00	87.70	30.52
Others	0.02	62.64	39.05
Religion not stated	0.07	68.15	29.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>69.45</b>	<b>32.47</b>

Source: Census of India, 2001

forest area and falls under the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, the population density is staggeringly high in Sadar, Diamond Harbour and Baruipur subdivisions with the highest concentration expectedly in Sadar Sub Division and the lowest in Kakdwip Sub Division. Among the blocks, Budge Budge-I has the highest population density at 3764 per square kilometre while Namkhana has the lowest at 433. The high population pressure in most areas of the district puts enormous burden on the amount of land available for cultivation and existing infrastructure, and thus adversely affects the quality of life in the district.

Almost 33 per cent of population in the district belong to the Scheduled Caste and another 1 per cent belong to the Scheduled Tribe communities. More than 50 per cent of the people living in Canning Subdivision belong to the Scheduled Caste

or Scheduled Tribe communities. Among the blocks, Canning-I, Sonarpur and Gosaba have a majority of the population belonging to these communities. Interestingly, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Caste population in the district is almost at par with the overall literacy rate and far exceeds the literacy rate among the Scheduled Caste population in the state.

A significant portion of the population in district belongs to the minority communities. While 65.86 per cent of the population adhere to Hinduism as their religious belief, another 33.24 are Muslims. Unfortunately, the literacy and work participation rates among the Muslims are lower than the district average, though the numbers are indicative of a better performance of the district in terms of development of minority communities than elsewhere in the state.