

Bihar District Gazetteers

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# PURNEA

By

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district. I was posted to the district in 1933. Since then I have had the opportunity of re-visiting the district in various official capacity. Some of the older generation who are permanent residents of Purnea like Raja P. C. Lal of Nazarganj, Mr. Sarkari Dey, Advocate, the late Mr. Johnstone, H. M. Weatherall, etc., have helped me considerably in my work. Old Records in Purnea Collectorate were looked into by me and some of the materials collected on them were utilised. Institutions like National Archives, New Delhi, National Library, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal have continued giving me their valuable help as before. They have ungrudgingly allowed me loan of rare books and study in their Archives. For the later events I have had help from various books, Census reports, manuscripts and data collected from collaborators, personal investigations and research.

It is only by the pooling of resources, personal contacts, extensive tours, observation and study that a book of this type could be compiled. I am particularly grateful to Pandit Binodanand Jha, Chief Minister of Bihar, Shri Mahesh Prasad Sinha, Revenue Minister, and Shri S. J. Mazumdar, I.C.S., Chief Secretary. They have always taken keen interest in this work and have given me all possible help and encouragement. My thanks are due to the Central Gazetteer Unit in the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs for giving some valuable suggestions on the texts. Shri Bhola Shastri, Minister in the Bihar Government comes from Purnea district and the Editor had some very helpful discussions with him.

I have tried to provide an objective book for a wide range of readers, politicians, writers, scholars, administrators, tourists and by no means the least, the interested man in the street. It will be a privilege if the book is of some help to the readers of the present and coming generation.

PATNA:

*The 1st October 1962*

P. C. ROY CHAUDHURY.

*Water-supply.*—There is copious water-supply from the streams and sinking tube-wells may be attended with success.

*Economics.*—The district is very poor in mineral resources. Only *kankar* is available in the northern portion of the district and it may be used for burning lime and road metal.

*Earthquake.*—During the Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934, the district suffered very adversely. West of the Purnea town there was a good lot of subsidence of land surface, fracturing in the alluvium through which sand and water were ejected. Away from the town in the other directions the area experienced oblique shocks that could shatter buildings. Near Purnea the devastating movements were from east to west.

The cause of the earthquake was supposed to be the sudden relief to strain set up by the upward movement of the country north of a line containing Purnea and downward movement south of it. This line of strain extends to Motihari on the Champaran district, through Sitamarhi in the Muzaffarpur district.

The epicentral tract of the earthquake where maximum damage was done was situated in the Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts.\*

#### FAUNA—ZOOLOGY.

Purnea, from time immemorial has been known to be a paradise for the *shikari*. At one time there was an abundance of big game and birds for the *shikari*. About a century before herds of wild elephants were quite common damaging the paddy-fields of the district. The jungles of the Nepal *Terai* of Purnea border were their abode.

Rhinos used to be shot in the district about half a century before. The biggest rhino that stands stuffed in a standing position in the Museum of Calcutta was shot in Purnea district by Joe Shillingford, a well-known sportsman and Indigo-planter of Purnea.

Tigers were quite common. Their usual haunts were the jungles on the banks of the big Kosi and the high-grass jungles in

\*Reference—*The Economic Geology and Mineral Resources of Bihar Province* by J. A. Dunn, Mem., G. S. I., Vol. 78, 1941.  
*The Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934*—Mem., G.S.I., Vol. 73.

the *tappus* to the north of the district. Leopards are still common especially in the jungles in the Kishanganj subdivision. They occasionally carried off lambs and goats from the villages.

Wolves and hyaenas were also abundant. Wild buffaloes used to move about in herds in the northern part of the district. The last herds were in the Bhowa and Mohanpur jungles to the south.

Deer of various varieties were abundant on the banks of the different tributaries of the Kosi. The ordinary hog-deers were so very abundant that the famous *shikari* Raja Kirtyanand Sinha of Banaili Raj had remarked (1916) that one could get a hundred hog-deer a day if he wished though it would be cruelty to shoot so many. Other types of deer like black-buck and spotted-deer (*cheetal*) were common. Pigs at one time were abundant.

Crocodiles were found in almost all the rivers and stagnant pools of water in Purnea district. Game birds were also plentiful. Raja Kirtyanand Sinha in his book 'Purnea a Shikar Land' (1916) has observed: "Those generally met with can be easily classed under two different heads. The first is the class that breeds in the district, and the other, the migratory class. Under the former come the black and the grey partridges, pea-fowls, the floricans, cotton and whistling teals, button quails, the black and white ibis, golden and red-breasted plovers, green and blue rock pigeons, blue-fowls and other common birds like curlews, etc. Among the migratory birds of the winter are the geese of the two varieties (the bar-headed and the grey), the ducks (pin-tail, spotted bill, tufted pochard, grey and Brahmini), the jack and the painted snipe, wagtails, quail, and ortolans. Ortolans come in at the beginning of March and stay here for a couple of months and go away as soon as the summer heat becomes unbearable to them. They are found in thousands, like swarms of locusts, on the high waste land—the 'maidan'—which is the prominent feature of the district. Though I have shot a few American black geese too, I cannot say if they are birds that are generally found in the district".

Another quotation from the same book will show what Purnea was as a *shikar* land before: "In short it would not be an exaggeration to say that Purnea is pre-eminently a *shikar*-land—a land where one can get all sorts of game from a tiger down to a snipe, despite the fact that most of its vast jungle tracts have now been turned into luxuriant fields and orchards". An eminent writer in his work *Tent Life in Tiger Land* has said: "Purnea had

North Bhagalpur bordering on the *Terai* is admittedly even in India a very sportsman's paradise, and is probably, or was at all events, the best tiger-shooting ground in the world'. The observation still holds good, as will be seen from what I have to say in the pages that follow."

This description of Purnea, a paradise for a *shikari*, however, does not hold true now. Most of the jungles have now been cleared. The famous Bhowa and Mohanpur jungles where 30 years before wild buffaloes roamed about were the last to fall to the axe. The tall grass lands have now been reclaimed. Owing to the vagaries of rainfall and climate many of the water logged areas have become dry and some have been reclaimed. Economic pressure has been the incentive for bringing cultivable waste lands into reclamations. A liberal grant of gun licenses led to an indiscriminate shooting which at times almost touched off butchery and birds are no longer attracted to the remains of the water logged areas. The big games have almost disappeared and rhinos have not been seen in the course of the last four or five decades. Crocodiles and lizards were so abundant at one time that many people made a living out of shooting them. Crocodiles are very scarce now. It may be mentioned here that the Raja Bahadur of Baraili had shot an animal cross-breed between a hyaena and a leopard, 150 tigers and two rhinos.

The reclamation of Kosi river which has been undertaken is the last knell of *shikar* in Purnea district. It cannot be expected now that in the hot months beginning with the advent of spring different types of wild animals from Nepal *Terai* would migrate towards the south. Tall waving grass and jungle shrubs, on the banks of the small streams of the Kosi tributaries, mentioned in "Purnea a *Shikar* Land" would no longer harbour wild animals. Raja Kirtyanand Sinha has rightly observed in his book that the river Kosi with its tributaries plays a very important part in giving the district of Purnea the character of a *shikar* land. Those who are interested in knowing more of Purnea in her days of *shikar* would find interesting reading in Raja Kirtyanand Sinha's two books 'Purnea a *Shikar* Land' (1916) and 'Shikar in Hills and Jungles' (1934). There are also two other books one by J. Shillingford and the other by L. Duff, who was once Subdivisional Officer throwing interesting light on the fauna and avifauna of Purnea district. In Hamilton's description of Hindustan it occurs: "The population seems in some places to be diminishing for the extreme timidity and listlessness of the people have in

some parts prevented them from being able to repel the encroachments of wild beasts".

J. Inglis (Maori) in *Tent Life in Tiger Lands* (1892) observes: "Purnea and North Bhagalpur bordering on the Terai is admittedly even in India a very sportsman paradise, and is probably or was at all events the best tiger shooting ground in the world".

Only one variety of deer, the hog deer is still found on the banks of the tributaries of the Kosi, and the north of the district. Birpur area used to be full of wild life but it has now been cleared because of Kosi project and has been connected by roadways. Dozens of motor vehicles now pass on these roads which used to be thick forests before. Pigs and wild pigs were available all over the district. Pig-sticking was a favourite sport of the European planters. Even pigs are getting scarce. O'Malley mentions of the tree jungles, called *Katabals*, where tigers were found in large numbers. Such jungles were near the Kaliaganj Indigo Factory and also in *diara* jungles along the Ganges. In 1909 two were shot at a place, seven miles from the Purnea town. Man-eaters were very rare even at the time of O'Malley and they are extinct now. Hyaenas have also become rare. In 1934 a hyaena was shot in Kishanganj town by the Editor of this Gazetteer.

Jackal and foxes are still numerous. The number of wild buffaloes had been estimated to be 250 in the district by O'Malley. The Bhauih jungles of Raj Darbhanga had a number of them. With the clearing of Bhauih jungle in the forties we have seen the last of wild buffaloes in Purnea district. Hares which were found in abundance on the high lands have declined owing to indiscriminate shooting and clearing of jungles and bushes. Porcupines were very rarely met with when the last Gazetteer was compiled. They are not seen now.

#### *Avifauna.*

The district had a large variety of birds and the following classification can be made of them :—

- (a) Game and non-game (wild) birds.
- (b) Migratory and non-migratory birds.
- (c) Land and water birds.

#### *Game birds.*

The game birds may be migratory and non-migratory both. Among the non-migratory game birds are partridge (black and



marsh), florican and the leek (lesser florican), peafowl, several varieties of quail pigeon, plover, and others, the marsh partridge are turning rare and are expected to become extinct in course of next few years. Varieties of bittern are available.

#### *Water Birds.*

Teal and snipe visit the district in the cold season from the *terai* areas. The polton teal, whistling teal, the duck and the spotted bill are the varieties of non-migratory water birds. The pink-headed duck which was found a few years back is extinct now.

The abovementioned game and water birds make their nests in bushes on the ground. The breeding of these birds is done generally before the rainy season in the flooded areas, but there cannot be any closed season for their breeding, and may breed even earlier. They must breed in such a manner so as to make their young ones able to fly before the floods. Mr. Johnson, a gentleman from Purnea mentioned to the Editor that he found eggs of Marsh partridge on the 26th February and the 7th of March.

Geese and whistling teal breed in old marshes and tanks. The black ibilis is also a migratory bird and is available all over the district. Among other migratory birds are Sarus (demoiselle crane), geese (four varieties), curlew, ortolan, egrets and storks in winter. They used to start pouring in the district from October and remained throughout the winter. Mr. O'Malley states that the Sarus is rare but demoiselle crane is abundant, which announces its arrival in great flocks by trumpeting. They are seldom shot. The varieties of duck were mallard, pintail, white eye and grey duck, tufted duck, pochard, spotted bill, Shoveller shag (teal), the blue wing snipe fantail, jack and painter. The varieties of geese are bare headed, grey, goose bukta and pink headed. The varieties of pigeons were blue, rock (smaller) and the bigger. Curlews were of three varieties, viz., the blue wing, grey and small grey. Quail did not arrive till December and remained till the end of April. Ortolan came after the middle of March and were seen all over the district. All these birds have declined now.

Parakeets were available in the north of Purnea town and wild peacocks on the south of the district. These birds created a great nuisance to the crop. The worst among the crop-eaters is the Kaim (*Galinula porphyriol*). This bird was celebrated for

its beauty among the ancient Greeks. They were found on the low lands and remained for the whole year in the district. These birds are still seen but not in that proper abundance.

Another destructive bird is Kolang (common crane and Andrea Grus of Europe). It remained in the district throughout the cold season. When heat increases, it retires to breed. The above crop-eaters attack the fields in the day time and harass the farmers very much who retire from the fields being heavily tired after whole night watch of the field against the wild animals. One peculiar bird is called Galinule which moves unseen in the fields causing much damage to the crop. The *Kalatitir* or black partridge approaches very near the Francolin of Europe. The large partridge or *Titir* is an excellent bird for the table. *Sougka* (*anasacula*), *Dighongs* and the *Lalmunia* (*anasterina*) are also very excellent on the table. The ortolan is very delicious on the table and is a passage bird. It fattens on the grass seeds, which grow in the hot season, and which season is the best for its game. Lady Inpey used to collect them. It approaches very near to Calandre Lark of Latham. Buchanan has mentioned that the similarity between the Ortolan (*Bageri*) and the Calandre Lark is due to the fact that when the rainy season appears a few stragglers might be reaching Italy and the southern Europe, where it is found rarely. But there are abundant marks by which the two birds can be distinguished, their habits and their uses being quite different and thus it is improper to consider them belonging to the same species. Other excellent eaters are snipe, horican and golden plovers, but remained much neglected till the Europeans poured in the district. Herons are available in water which are of various types and the white herons have a fishy taste. Sparrows, parakeets and *mainas* are eaten by the lower castes.

#### Other Wild Birds.

Among the other wild birds are vultures, eagles, kites, hawks, crows, found all over the district. Peacocks are found in the southern regions. Parrots and *mainas* migrate from the *terai* areas during the winter. These are not crop-eaters and do not cause much harm to the cultivators.

A bird enthusiast has given a script in 1959 on the current bird life in Purnea. It mentions that jungle quail, *Bageri*, green pigeon, different varieties of doves (Indian ring, spotted, red turtle, rufous turtle and green dove), Sky Lark, Bush Lark, Ashy Crowned Finch Lark, different kinds of snipes, *Kaim* (Whistling

(eal), Ibis, Herons (White and Grey), little Cormorant, Egret, Sarus cranes, Jakona, Large Pied Wagtail, River tern, Little Ringed Plover, Spotted Ringed Plover, King-fisher, Swallow different kinds of ducks (*Adhinga*, *Dighock*, *Pintail*, *Suchhab*, *Mukhta*, *Lalshar Chaita*).

The shrub, jungles and orchards harbour Koel, Papiha, King Crow, Black-headed and golden orioles, Babblers, Bulbul, Indian tree pie, Wood pecker, Crow Pheasant, Hornbills, Nilkantha, Baya, Barber crimson breasted and green, Cuckoo and Hoopoe. Nightjars are sometimes met in the roadside jungles. The paradise fly catcher comes in the rainy season for nesting. White spotted fan tailed fly catcher are also common. Various kinds of *Mainas* are found in Araria and Kishanganj subdivisions. *Munias* of different species are also found. *Lalmunia* is common in Kishanganj subdivision. Fidda is found in southern portion of the district sitting on the telegraph wire. Yellow throated sparrow and *Tuti* are some times caught by the professional bird catcher and sold with Bageries. Large Indian Parakeet and green Parakeet make their nest in the holes of big *Simal* and Mango trees. In the rainy season swarms of blossom headed parakeet and green parakeet are seen in corn fields.

Magpai Robin and Sun bird are among garden nesting species. Owls, Owlets, Vultures, Eagles are also found.

This list may be compared with the list of birds recorded from the district of Purnea by various observers including Dr. Francis Buchanan Hamilton (1809-10) and Dr. Jerdon (1860-64).

Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), House Crow (*Corvus Splendens*), Treepie (*Crypsirina vagabunda*), Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch (*Sitta castanea*), Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides somervillei*), Red-capped Babbler (*Timalia pileolata*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pyrenonotus cafer bengalensis*), Jerdon's Bushchat (*Saxicola Jerdoni*), Barnes's Bushchat (*Oenanthe melanoleuca melanotetaca*), Himalayan Rubythroat (*Luscinia pectoralis Pectoralis*) Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Black-headed Shrike (*Lanius schach tricolor*), Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus cristatus*), Rosy minivet (*Pericrocotus roseus roseus*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocerus*), Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Black-headed Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*), Finsch's Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris pollaratzski*), Common Myna (*Sturnus tristis*), Black-throated Baya (*Ploceus philippinus benghalensis*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Little Bunting (*Emberizza pusilla*), Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Large Pied Wagtail

(*Motacilla madraspatensis*), short-toed Lark (*Calendrella brachydactyla*), Purple Sunbird (*Nectarina asiatica*), Asiatic Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus telephonus*), Pipiha (*Cuculus varius*), Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Calamator Jacobinus*), Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*), Crow-Pheasant (*Centropus Sinensis*), Large Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*), Nilkant or Roller (*Coracias bengalensis*), Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*), White breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Grey Hornbill (*Tockus birostris*), House Swift (*Apus affinis*), Franklin's Nightjar (*Caprimulgus affinis*), Grass Owl (*Tyto capensis*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Pondicherry Vulture (*Torgos calvus*), White-backed Vulture (*Pseudogyps bengalensis*), Pallas's Fishing Eagle (*Haliaetus leucoryphus*), Green Pigeon (*Teeron phoenicoptera phoenicoptera*), Peafowl (*Pavocristata*), Red Jungle Fowl (*Gallus gallus*), Red Spur Fowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*), Blue-breasted Quail (*Coturnix chinensis*), Grey Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*), Black Partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*), Kyah or Swamp Partridge (*Francolinus gularis*), Grey Partridge (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Little Button Quail (*Turnix Sylvatica*), Kora or Watercock (*Gallixrex cinerea*), Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio Porphyrio*), Coot (*Fulica atra*), Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydroph sianus chirurgus*), Common Crane (*Grus grus*), Sarus Crane (*Grus Antigone*), Lesser Florican (*Syphoetides indica*), Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), Stone Plover (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), Spur-winged Plover (*Hoplopterus spinosus*), Yellow-wattled Lapwing (*Lobipteris malabarica*), Grey-headed lapwing (*Micrisarcops cinereus*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Avocet (*Recurvirostra avocetta*), Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*), Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Fantail Snipe (*Gallinago Gallinago*), Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*), White Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), White-necked Stork (*Dissoura episcopus*), Adjutant Stork (*Leptopilos dubius*), Lesser Adjutant (*Leptopilos javanicus*), Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), European Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), Pink-headed Duck (*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*), Grey Lag Goose (*Anser anser*), Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*), Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), Large Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), Widgeon (*Anas penelope*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Garganey Teal (*Anas querquedula*), Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*), and Pochard (*Aythya ferina*).

This list might be usefully supplemented by reference to the Darbhanga and Monghyr lists in the volumes of the Gazetteers for those districts.

Regarding game birds the following description occurs in the last *District Gazetteer* of Purnea by O'Malley published in 1911 :—

"The game birds that breed in the district are peafowl, *bittern*, both lesser and greater *florican*, partridge (black and marsh), *cotton teal*, whistling teal, pink-headed duck, button quail, black ibis, goggle and golden plover, green pigeons, blue fowl and some waders. Peafowl are found in fair numbers in the eastern tracts bordering on Malda, and a few in the *katabals* near the Ganges *deltas*, while *bittern* frequent the banks of marshes and swamps to the south of the district. The lesser *florican* or *lek* is rare, but is occasionally flushed on grass lands to the south. The greater *florican* and both varieties of partridge are seen in fair numbers; bags of half a dozen *florican* and of 15 or 20 brace of partridge in a day when beating for other game, are not unusual. Marsh partridge keep to the lower country and heavier cover to the east, south and west, but black partridge prefer high grass lands. Geese and whistling teal breed in old tanks and marshes. Pink-headed ducks are found in the south, but rarely. The black ibis also stays in the district, and stray pairs are to be seen in all parts. Besides the above, the *sarus*, demoiselle crane, geese (four varieties), duck and teal (several varieties), snipe, ibis (the spoon bill and white), curlew, quail, ortolan, plovers, egrets and storks visit the district in the season. These birds start coming in late in October and remain throughout the winter, when they may be seen in all inundated parts of the country. The *sarus* is rare, a few pairs only being met with, but the demoiselle cranes come in great flocks giving warning of their arrival by loud trumpeting. They are seldom shot, being very shy. Of geese there are four varieties, best known as the bare-headed, grey goose, *nukta* and pink-headed. Ducks include the mallard, pintail, white eye, grey duck, tufted duck, tufted pochard, spotted bill,

shoveller, shag, etc., teal, the blue wing, etc., snipe, the pintail, fantail, jack and painter; pigeons, a small variety like the blue rock and the bigger bird; and there are three varieties of curlew, the blue wing, grey and small grey. Quail do not arrive into the district till December, generally remaining till the end of April; they are really plentiful only in one year out of every five. Ortolan come in after the middle of March; for a couple of months or so, and in a good year, thousands are to be seen on high waste lands all over the district."

But this description is no longer correct. Many of the species mentioned in O'Malley's description have disappeared.

In the last *District Gazetteer of Purnea* by O'Malley published in 1911 mention has been made of rhinoceros, tigers, leopards, buffaloes, hog-deer, antelope, nilgai and wild pigs. Leopards were quite plentiful. *Shikaris* used to kill tigers in the *terai* by the following device:—"At two or three points near which it is probable that the tiger will pass, a split bamboo, with all the knots cut out, is placed on a rest about a foot and half from the ground. To the end directed towards the tiger's path a strong bow is attached, the string of which, when bent, is fastened in a notch near the other end. In the hollow of the bamboo an arrow lies, which is made from some hard wood or old bamboo, well sharpened and poisoned with the juice of a plant, believed to be aconite. A long piece of firm cord is tied to the bow-string near the notch, and stretched forward across the tiger's path. As he comes along, he usually trips over the cord, thereby discharging the arrow, which generally hits him just behind the shoulder. The wound is often so severe as to be of itself fatal, but if not the poison soon causes death. For the protection of wayfarers there is a guard-string called *dharmut*, i.e., a cord stretched obliquely across the path at some distance from the bow. It is about four feet from the ground, so that the tiger can pass under it, but a cow or a man would strike against it." O'Malley had particularly mentioned that leopards were "still fairly plentiful", hog-deer are the only deer now left in Purnea and that even nilgai has become very scarce. Pigs were fairly plentiful and buffaloes existed in small numbers. Mention was also made of porcupines, hares, foxes and jackals.

#### Fish.

Fish is an important item in the food of the district. The district is very rich in water resources and several varieties of fish

are found. O'Malley mentions of *Buari*, *Hiba*, *Tengra*, *Bachwa*, *Mui*, *Kanchatti*, *Naini*, *Katla* and *Kalhan*. Among these the most popular and plentifully found are *Hiba*, *Rohu*, *Katla* and *Bachwa*. *Rohu* is the most delicious of them. Varieties like *Bhetki* and *Mulletts* have been considered as sea-fish by Buchanan. *Hiba*, *Bhetki* and *Mulletts* are found in the Ganga during the rainy season. *Mirka*, *Kalabasa*, *Chutull* and *Phullie*, several varieties of carp and pike are mentioned to be found by Buchanan. These are not very delicious and are not eaten by rich people. *Bachwa* runs up to two pounds in weight and takes a high fly. *Kabai* is another flying fish and is found mostly in ponds and tanks. Some tanks and ponds are owned by big zamindars where fishes are preserved and grow to a larger size weighing up to 20 pounds. There are other smaller varieties like *Chilwa*, *Darwa* and other cat-fish family as *Sauri*, *Garai*, etc., which are eaten mostly by poor people. Purnea lobsters were once famous. *Magur* is another mud-fish much prized by the people. Purnea had a great name for the fish resources much of which has been exhausted by indiscriminate catch and export. Some peculiar varieties like very heavy *bangar* fish which looks like a monster is only available in this district in Bihar. They are relished by Muhammadans and some particular caste-men. Any of them would weigh more than a maund and the mouth has got very sharp set of teeth. These fish thrive on dead bodies and refuse matters.

Fishery in the district was very much neglected. The whole fish industry is, more or less, in the hands of the ignorant and poor fishermen who have no capital, no proper training and no improved implements and carry on the same indigenous method of fishing.

Their one idea is to catch fish regardless if their store is good or exhausted, without any idea of preserving them and improving their breed. Another factor for the deterioration of the fish is the water hyacinth known as Purple terror. There is a very large demand locally for fish but a considerable export is made every day.

It may be mentioned here that there does not appear to have been any detailed study of fish and fisheries of Purnea district since Dr. F. Buchanan made a study during his engagement from 1807 to 1813 for making a minute investigation into the history past and present, as well as the natural resources of the district then under the Government of Bengal. Buchanan's script was published with an introductory note by Surgeon-Major Francis

Day, Inspector-General of Fisheries in India who had edited it. This was published as Volume XX of the Statistical Account of Bengal by W. W. Hunter. This want of a study is unfortunate because in the meanwhile we have probably lost a large number of species of fish that Buchanan found in Purnea district. As a matter of fact, Buchanan has mentioned 134 varieties of fish in Purnea district. Some of the Indian names that he has mentioned do not appear to be current any longer or may have undergone changes in the nomenclature.

Buchanan mentions that some fish used to be dried in order to be exported to the mountaineers and among the people of the district; this sort of dried fish was not in request. On investigation it was found that the export of dried fish has totally stopped and practically no fish is dried now. Buchanan had further mentioned that the Kochs used to prepare balls called *Sidal*, by pounding the fish with vegetables. This also seems to have almost died out.

Regarding the fishermen Buchanan thought they were very skilful in catching fish, and chiefly procure them in ditches by making little banks across and throwing out the water. He mentions: "The fishermen, so far as I saw, have none of the complicated machines used in Dinajpur and Rangpur, and a great many have neither nets nor boats, but in place of the former, use screens made of reeds, and never go to fish except in shallow water. There are none of the Ganrars, or people who fish with the harpoon; but some of the lower tribes of fishermen occasionally use a spear. Many of the natives fish with the rod for amusement. The rod and tackle are exceedingly coarse, and not at all fitted for showing dexterity in their use. The fisher never uses an artificial fly, nor does he drag his bait. It is suspended by a float, and he sits with the utmost patience, until a fish bites. He then drags out his prey by mere force, and, if it be small, makes it fly over his head, like our European boys catching minnows."

Buchanan went to the length of calculating the number of fishermen in the district which was estimated at about 14,000 fishermen and many of them were boatmen, and only fish when they cannot procure a voyage. He mentions: "It is probable, however, that each man, on an average, may catch fish to the value of eighteen rupees a year. They probably give at least to the value of one-third of the fish to the agents of the landlords. Some fish is exported. A little of this is dried, and is sent to Bhutan or Nepal, but by far the greater part is sent to Murshidabad, without any care taken to preserve it, farther than by using a quick conveyance. The kinds sent are chiefly the *Rohu*, *Mrigal*, and *Chital*."



It is interesting to read in Buchanan's Memoirs that "In the cold season some boats, of from 100 to 200 maunds burthen, are half filled with water, and great quantities of small fish are put into them, and sent living to Calcutta. The fish are so thick that they are just kept wet, but the water is frequently renewed. The kinds are the *Singi*, *Muuri*, and *Kabai*, all small fishes very tenacious of life, and in much request with the natives, as supposed to possess restorative powers".

It may be mentioned that in place of fish being exported in boats half filled with water, it is now exported in ice-packed boxes to various destinations.

#### *Crocodiles.*

There are two varieties of it, the long nosed fish eating is called the *Garial* and the man-eating large sized is called the *Magur*. The *Garial* is found mostly in fast running water channels and rivers such as Kosi, Panar, Parwan, Mahananda and Kankai. The *Magur* is found in the abovementioned rivers as well in the sluggish and slow rivers like the Lowrati. Both the varieties lay eggs, each batch numbering about 20. The female one buries these eggs in sand to be hatched out by the heat of the sun. Mr. O'Malley noted that cattle and ponies and even unwary people were carried off by these *Magurs*. They were shot in a large number by local sportsman and in the decade from 1930 to 1940 there was a big business in crocodile skin from Purnea. Indiscriminate shooting for business has brought in a very perceptible decline in the number of crocodiles in the district.

#### *Insects.*

Insects in Purnea district are plentiful and of several varieties.

The ball-rolling scarab or the *Bhumrah* is a very interesting beetle to watch. While busy rolling his ball of mud, in which the female one has laid her eggs, they help each other, to roll the ball into a shallow hole which they prepare for its reception. They push their balls in with their rear legs while they walk backwards. The male beetle is just like a miniature rhinoceros.

The praying-mantis is allied to the grass-hopper family and two varieties of it are found. One is shaped just like a dried twig of a tree, and is brown in colour, the other has its wings formed like a green leaf. They derive their name by the attitude they take. It is an attitude of defence and they can defend their eyes from the attacks of their foes.

Crickets and grass-hoppers are very great noise makers. If one listens to their noise which they make in the evening, one is apt to notice that there is a definite relation between their performance and the temperature. If it is a hot evening these little musicians of nature will be more noisy while in a cold and dull evening their excursion is much slower. The so-called chirping of these insects results from rubbing together of the wing covers and has nothing to do with legs.

#### *Flies.*

Among the family of flies are the bees (honey), ordinary, house flies and other singing varieties of flies which annoy cattle very much. The ordinary flies are regarded as pestilential creatures. They are polluters of food, carriers of infections and a standing menace to the health of men and animals.

#### *Bees.*

The bees are well termed the busy bees. Fruit growers and gardeners owe much to these busy bees. Bees carry the pollen from one flower to another. The supply of wax and honey to mankind is a very great product that they make. Two varieties of honey bees are available in the district. The best known is the dark brown bee. The other is a small variety, a little bigger than the house fly, but very similar to the latter. This bee usually has its hive in holes of trees or mud walls. The honey produced by this bee is considered by some people to be superior in flavour to the honey produced by the larger variety.

#### *Crawling Insects.*

Centipedes (*Gozurs*) and *Gangoors* are the usual varieties of the crawling insects, found in the district. Centipedes are poisonous insects and cause swelling when they creep on human body. These are found mostly at damp and dirty places. Their colour is red and a centipede is said to have hundreds of legs. The *Gangoor* is another variety of crawling insects and is found mostly at damp and muddy places. It breeds in thousands, and has hundred<sup>s</sup> of legs. Its colour is also red, but it is not poisonous like the centipedes. It is a very timid creature and when touched rolls in the size of a rupee. Both centipedes and *Gangoors* are from an inch to four inches long.

Scorpions are also seen in the district particularly in damp places and jungles.

#### *Ants.*

There are several varieties of ants, starting from the ordinary house ant to the large black ant, the black and red tree ant, the

white ant and the green large sized ants. The red and black tree ants live mostly on *Sal* and mango trees. The white ants destroy most of the ordinary timber trees except teak, and attack the roots of living plants. These ants make tunnels and galleries in home-steads and fields and thus do a great damage to the crop. There is a local belief among the folk people that when ants come out in a chain, they announce the rain. The author has himself experimented the truth in this saying.

#### *Reptiles.*

There are several varieties of snakes, both poisonous and non-poisonous. Among the poisonous snakes the Cobra is well known and is seen all over the district. The water Cobra, which the folk people call as '*Paniah Deraj*' is more poisonous than the Cobra, and reaches the length of eight feet and more. The *Karait* or black Cobra is found all over the district, but mostly in the monsoon forests. This is the most poisonous snake. Another variety of *Karait* (*Bahira*) is said to be non-poisonous. It is brown in colour and has yellow bands down its body and is very slow and sluggish. The Russel viper is also seen. It is a venomous snake, but its poison takes a long time to affect. Pythons are also seen and usually inhabit in well wooded mango groves, some of them being very long, but the average length being 8-12 feet.

#### *Lizards.*

Can be seen very commonly on the walls of the houses. There are two varieties of it—the Iguana and the Monitor Lizard. The Iguana was fairly common in the district, till it was discovered that their skins had a market value. For some time there was a brisk trade in lizard skin and they are now scarce. One was shot by F. Buchanan and was 6'6" long and the skin had been kept in Calcutta Museum. Its colour was dark brown and its head was just like a house lizard. The long tailed garden lizard is very common in the district, and is very useful for the gardens as it feeds on small insects which cause harm to the plants and flowers.

#### FLORA OF PURNEA TOWN.

The flora of the town of Purnea is made up of trees, shrubs, and grasses. Some of the indigenous trees are—

- (1) The Cotton Tree—This tree when full grown is a large tree, and has big blood-red flowers. It is usually

unhealthy as it was hemmed in by the marshy channels of the Saura River.

There was a shift of the Government offices more towards the west of the town by 1835 and gradually the official residents in the civil lines migrated to the present site of Purnea town. The European indigo planters also started settling in that portion of the Purnea town leaving Rambagh or near about the district headquarters. The only building left in Rambagh, was the Church and the priests' house. The Roman Catholic Church was dismantled and re-erected in the new station of Purnea where the Europeans had already set up their residences. The foundation of this new Church was laid in 1849 and the Church was there till 1934 when it was badly affected by the Bihar Earthquake. The Church was dismantled again and the present Church was erected nearby within a couple of years of the Earthquake.

The nuns of Loreto Convent of Darjeeling had come to Purnea near about 1882 and had opened a day school as well as a boarding school for the children in Purnea district. When the Jesuit Mission of Bengal took over the Purnea Mission from the Capuchin Mission, the school was closed, and the nuns returned to Darjeeling. This house still stands and is known as "Coulmblin". "Coulmblin" is one of the oldest houses in Purnea town. It is now occupied by the Allisons.

Quite a number of European families had settled down in Purnea town and round about. Even till 1938 there were quite a large number of European families lingering on in Purnea town and round about. There were the Shillingfords, Johnsons, Picachis, Cawes, Hayes, Downings, Tom Smith, Byers, etc. in Purnea town. Many of them were gentlemen-farmers, the indigo concerns having been abolished years before and some were in the employment of Banaili and Nazarganj Raj. Earlier some of them had made great contribution to the agricultural prosperity of the district by showing better technique in agriculture and farming methods. Usually each of them would have a consolidated block of land with a bungalow in it, their *kothis* would be run more by the subordinates known as *Amlas*. Many of them were interested in dogs and horses and were keen sportsmen. Mr. Tom Smith of Kolassy was a marvellous horseman and could tame any wild horse. His father Charles Smith was known as Prince Charlie and was one of the biggest race horse owners of his days. He also had extensive property at Hinoo in Ranchi. It is said that when Prince Charlie would go out for a walk he would be followed by about 50 of his pet highly bred dogs. The

and Mrs. Smith were of great help in organising socials when the Houston expedition came to Purnea in 1933 and for the first time flew over Nepal in planes.\*

Another well-known family the remnants of which are still continuing to Purnea is that of the Shillingfords. The three original Shillingfords were Joseph, George and Fred and they were all great sportsmen. Joseph died in 1889, Fred in 1907 at Brighton.

Two brothers George Palmer and Charles Palmer came to Purnea near about 1811. They were related to the John Palmers of Calcutta. George Palmer died in 1840. Charles Palmer had married Begum Reazon Nissa, a Mohammadan lady who had been converted into Christianity. She was also the 8 annas proprietor of *Pergana* Siripore with Babu Pratap Singh. Reazon Nissa died in 1870 and Charles Palmer in 1873. They had one daughter Marian, who married William Pringle Downing. Marian Palmer Downing pre-deceased her father Charles Palmer. Charles Palmer left his property, which was left to him by his wife Reazon Nissa, to his grand children and children of Marian Palmer Downing. Marian Palmer Downing had married G. S. Hayes. The original Palmer estate was divided between the Downings and the Hayes in 1874 and came to be known as the Downing Estate and Hayes Estate. Mr. Marian Hayes died in 1911 and G. S. Hayes in 1924.

Another family the Gaoes were related to the Shillingfords by marriage. Henry Gaoe who died in Purnea in 1886 was the proprietor of Gondwarrah indigo concern which was ultimately owned by the Maharaja of Darbhanga. The ancestors of the Johnson family were J. C. Johnson and E.W. Johnson who owned at one time three indigo concerns in the district.

There was a Crow family who were related to the Downings by marriage. The last of the Crow family in Purnea was F. Y. Crow, who died at Sursee in November, 1948.

The Forbes owned the Sultanpore Estate in Forbesganj which is named after the family, were big landlords and indigo planters. A. H. Forbes was a barrister but does not appear to have practised. He was the last of the family out in India. He died in Darjeeling but was brought and buried in Purnea in Brit.

\*If anyone is interested he could find a lot of materials in the books on the Expedition written by Wing Commander Fellows and others (P.C.R.C.)

1932\*. There were numerous other families of European settlers who settled in Purnea both as indigo planters and private gentlemen or officials.

The Indigo planters had their Doctor David Picachy, a good old Medico who was almost always on his trap and horse. Dr. Picachy was also looking after all the employees of the planters. In the early days of the European planters there were a few Mission Hospitals one of which was at Kanki which has now gone to West Dinajpur. The Majlisipore Mission at Kanki ran their own schools and hospitals.

It may be mentioned that Korah is still known as "Gena-Bari" because a rhinoceros was shot there. This has been referred to before. Another report is that Mr. A. G. M. Wodschow, Manager of the Korah Indigo Concern had shot a rhinoceros. It may also be possible that two animals had been shot.

The Indigo planters did a lot in improving the town of Purnea. A big race course was established in the area in front of the present Girls' School and behind the residence of Mr. William. The regular race meets were so popular that race horses and jockeys would come from Calcutta to take part in these race meets. The planters had their own house boats. Before the railways were established indigo used to be sent down to Calcutta by river.

Reference has already been made to the *shihar* that the planters used to indulge. It is on record that Allan Johnson and W. R.P. Downing who is still a resident of Purnea once shot a big crocodile which measured 28'-9" from tip to tip and round the girth. When the much distended belly was opened an undigested body of a boy was found. The entire body of the boy in two portions were recovered and from a ring on his big toe was identified to be an Etwari of the Awho had been missing since a few days back. Mr. Downing reports that in many of the alligators they had found stones in the reports of the species. He has also experimented on riding a water buffalo through alligator infested streams to experiment the truth of the unwritten law between alligators and water buffaloes, that alligators would not attack or molest the other.

#### EARTHQUAKE OF 1934.

The great Bihar Earthquake of January 15, 1934, was another landmark in the history of the district. Although the epicenter of this earthquake was located far away the damages done to up in

\*The above notes were made by one from a book published in 1920 by the Father H. Hostin S.J. The title of the book is "Inscriptions on Christian and Memorial Tablets."

roads, buildings, railway tracks, bridges and culverts were not inconsiderable. It is true that Purnea district escaped lightly in comparison to the other Bihar districts like Muzaffarpur and Champaran and this was probably due to the sandy composition of the soil. Nevertheless, a large number of private and public buildings were damaged in all the urban areas. Gratuitous relief, house building, sand clearance and agricultural loans had to be distributed. The widely spread cracks and fissures on the roads and culverts had thrown the communications out of gear for a considerable time. The administrative authorities, however, tackled the situation quickly and tactfully. Officers were deputed to assess the damages. As the houses in the villages were mostly light structures of jute-reeds and thatch, the damage to them was not so severe. Agricultural economy was considerably upset as a large volume of sand and sulphuric clods had been thrown out and had to be cleared. One interesting feature of the Earthquake of 1934 was that the wells both in the rural and urban areas were choked and had to be cleared. The incidence of health in Purnea district is said to have definitely improved after the Earthquake of 1934 and the older generation people assert that the water of Purnea district and the potability of water had definitely improved.

#### KISAN SABHA MOVEMENT.

*Kisan Sabha* Movement which had been responsible for an acute agitation in Purnea district in the third decade in this century and figured prominently for about 20 years has its roots in the very agricultural economy and the previous structure of permanent landlordism in this State. From time to time leaders have tried to agitate for a better deal for the *kisans* (peasants). The inherent defects in a permanent settled arrangement became all the more acute in Purnea because of a large number of absentee landlords and because a number of the *zamindars* left the administration of the *zamindari* absolutely in the hands of their *Amlas* (employees) without reference to the old revenue records of Purnea prior to the abolition of *zamindari* will show that a large number of landlords in Purnea district came from undivided Bengal and other provinces and most of them paid very rare visits to their *zamindari*. Rich families of Murshidabad, Dacca, Calcutta and other places owned large slices of *zamindari* in this district. Some of the Tagore families, the *Tagore Zamindari Company*, some of the *Tagore families* and a few European planters who had gone away abroad had *zamindari* interests in portions of the district. They were represented by their *Amlas* and it is a well-known fact