

WEST BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS



MĀLDĀ



By

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सत्यमेव जयते

December, 1969

between which and the Rājmaḥal hills the Ganges and other Himalayan rivers forced their way southwards.

The thickness of the alluvium is not known in detail ; little drilling has been carried out down to the basement rock.

One drill hole recently made for ground-water investigation, near Mandilpur, touched granite at a depth of about 210 metres, indicating that the Archaean granite complex forms the basement of at least a part of the Rājmaḥal gap.

The alluvium is seen to consist of silt, sand, gravel and clay.

Aquifer tests showed rather poor water yield at Kaṅgsā and Nityānandapur and fairly good discharge at Mandilpur.

Earthquakes.

Due to the Great Earthquake of 12th June, 1897, with its epicentre on the Shillong plateau, cracks up to a mile length and up to a few feet in width opened all over low-lying lands. Spoutings of sand and water were observed.

During the 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake, the district experienced earthquake intensity of about VII (Mercalli Scale), that is, with phenomenon of cracks in buildings and development rarely of sand vents in alluvium.

(c) FLORA AND FAUNA

Pemberton in the course of his revenue survey in the middle of the nineteenth century came across extensive stretches of jungles and marshes which were the abode of various wild animals including rhinoceros and different species of birds. He noticed the mango, the plantain, the banana, the custard apple, the mulberry, the marsh melon, the water melon, the lime, the citron, the tar fruit, the leeches, the peach, the gooseberry, the *bail* or wood apple, the kirnee, the pomegranate, the tamarind, the betelnut and the cocoanut among the fruits available in the district. He obviously forgot to mention the jackfruit because of its commonness. Among the jungle trees he mentioned the mango, the cocoanut, the palm, the cotton, the aloe, the willow palm, the date-palm, the *pepul*, the *bābool*, the jack tree, the acacia, the wild plum, the burgut, the bamboo, the tamarisk, the *hyjal*, the saul, the *sissoo*, the *sagoun* or teak, the *muhooā* and the toon. He mentioned that reeds, that is, *nal-khāgrās* were utilised for the making of charcoal. This charcoal made from reeds was in common use by the blacksmiths of Māldā. He also noticed the *sholā* plant. Among wild animals he mentioned the rhinoceros, the tiger, the leopard, the tiger cat, the inchneumon, the otter, the monkey, the jackal, the porcupine, the hare, the sambur, the *bara siṅgha* deer, the spotted deer, the antelope, the hog deer, the wild buffalo, the fox, the wolf, the pole cat, the civet cat, the wild cat, the *kuṭāss* etc. Hogs were plentiful. Among reptiles he noticed the boa constrictor or python, the *gohsaup* (a snake-eating lizard which sometimes grew to the length of five and half feet), the cobra, the *korāit*, the *dhamnā*, water snakes of various kinds, the blood-sucker, the chameleon and lizards of various kinds, the gheekorain (resembles a snake in its motion, but has two short legs in front), the alligator, the crocodile etc. Among wild birds he noticed the wild

goose, forty varieties of the wild duck, the florican, the snipe, the cormorant, the heron, the sparrow, the peacock, the golden oriel, the green parrot, the pelican, the partridge (black and grey), jungle cock and hen, tern of various kinds, the ring-necked paroquets, the kite, the goshawk, the falcon, the adjutant, the swallow, the bulbul, the cerleu (grey and black), the peewit, the *koel*, the blue and green pigeon, the rock pigeon, the ring dove, the king fisher, the woodpecker, the rook, the jackdaw, the mina, the plover, the ortalan, the hoopoo, the robin, the sand martin, the jay, the quail, the button quail, the golden plover, the widgeon, the horned owl, the white owl, the common owl, the kyrah, the water crow, the night crow, the paddy bird (four kinds), the brahmince duck, the sirus, the ground dove, the common dove, the hornbill, the spoonbill, a variety of honey birds, the tailor bird, the starling, the gull, the water wagtail, the sand lark, the byer etc.

Mr Carter, writing in 1935, described the flora and fauna of the then undivided district of Māldā in the following manner:

"Among the fruit-bearing trees, the most common is the mango, for which the district is famous. The orchards are distributed all over the part of the district west of the Mahananda river, with the exception of a strip along the Ganges. Jack fruit trees are fairly common, and plantain trees are commonly grown but the fruit is not of particularly good quality. The lichi and custard apple are also found but not in any number. Among the trees of economic value the most common is the date-palm. It is grown generally along the sides of roads or on ails and is tapped during the cold weather for its juice, from which gur is produced. The supari (areca nut) is not so common, and the cocoanut palm, so commonly found in most Bengal districts and so useful to the settlement staff, is conspicuous by its absence. The lack of any saline element in the soil seems to be the reason why the cocoanut palm will not produce any fruit. नवमव नयत

"Bamboo clumps are commonly found in almost all villages, and amongst other trees mention may be made of the nim and tamarind, and in the diara area of the babul and the boir or plum tree. In the Barind, trees are scanty, especially in the north, where, apart from the village sites, there are only occasional nim, pakur or simul trees and patches of sal wood. In the south, however, there are date palms and tal trees in some numbers.

"Malda used to be famous for its big game. Today there is practically none, though as far as small game is concerned the district has still several attractions to offer, which are not to be found in most other districts. Hunter observes, 'The ruins of Gaur and Pandua are the favourite haunt not only of tigers, but of every other beast, bird and reptile which frequents the isolated jungles of Bengal. The Katal (Barind) also which is estimated to cover about 150 square miles in this district, particularly that portion between the Tangan and Purnabhaba (Punarbhavā—*Ed.*) rivers, is almost entirely given

up to wild animals. The jungle is too dense in many cases to admit even the passage of an elephant and consequently the larger beasts of prey breed almost undisturbed.' Among the list of big game he mentions tiger, leopard, wolf (rare), ox, rhinoceros (very rare), wild hog, wild buffalo, large swamp deer, hog deer and spotted deer. The description is that of the sportsman's paradise. Nowadays the jungle has been almost entirely cleared, and the construction of railways has cut off most of the large game and confined it to the jungles under the Himalayas. The only big game now to be found in the district is the leopard, which resides chiefly in the jungles along both banks of the lower reaches of the Kalindri, in the belt of jungle between English Bazar and Muchia on the east of the Mahananda and in the jungles around Gaur. Wild pig exist in the scrub jungle of the Purnabhaha valley, and the uncultivated portions in the south-west of Harishchandrapur police-station. Deer are practically unknown, though the District Gazetteer includes hog deer in the list of wild animals. There have been stray cases of deer coming into the district, but they are invariably hunted down by the Santals. Nilgai also occasionally come into the district from Purnea.

"Among game birds, both Hunter and the District Gazetteer give lists in which some of the birds mentioned are never found, and some so rarely that their inclusion is not justified. Peafowl, which occur in both lists, are unknown. The same is the case with merganser, while the pink-beaked goose which is mentioned in the Gazetteer is extremely rare. The mallard and pink-headed duck have been shot in the district, but they are also extremely rare now, and I have never been fortunate enough to see one.

"The following game birds now exist. Among geese, the bar-headed goose is found in some numbers on the chars along the Ganges, which are his feeding grounds in the early morning. The greylag also visits the north-west part of the district, but is rarer than the bar-headed. Among duck, the most commonly found is the gadwall and then the pintail. Spot bill are not common. The widgeon rarely comes as far east, and I have only seen a few. Pochard are to be had on every duck beel, the most usual varieties being the common and the white eye. The black-tufted pochard is less common, and I have found it principally in the northern part of the Tangan valley. The red-crested pochard is also not commonly found. The common teal and the gargeny or blue-winged teal are found in large numbers. Of the ducks which are not generally considered fit for the table the shoveller is fairly common, and the ruddy sheldrake or Bramhiny visits the chars of the Ganges and the upper reaches of the Kalindri.

"One bird which is omitted by Hunter and the District Gazetteer is the nokta or comb duck, which is found in some numbers on certain beels. It is a large bird, weighing up to

six pounds, and contrary to the general belief, is quite eatable, at any rate in Malda district where it feeds on winter paddy. The male is distinguished from the female by the fleshy knob at the base of the beak.

"Snipe are found in the marshy areas which dry up during the cold weather, and often on higher ground near swamps. There are four varieties—the pintail, fantail, the jack snipe and the painted snipe.

"Golden plover are common, and great flights of the smaller silver plover can often be seen wheeling over marshy areas. The shamkhol, generally known as the beefsteak bird, is commonly found on beels, as are the stilt, redshank and other waders. Whistling teal and cotton teal abound in the beels and large tanks.

"Coming to the land birds, the most outstanding bird is the florican. This is unfortunately very uncommon nowadays, for in the past its beautiful plumage and its rarity have singled it out as the particular object of the sportsman. The female has been protected for a number of years and the male for the last few years. It prefers high grassy country with patches of cultivation, particularly mustard, such as is found near the south of the Purnea border. I have also seen one in the Tangan valley, but it is unusual for floricans to habitate in that type of country. Partridges are found in some numbers in the Tangan and Purnabhaha valleys, and to lesser degree near the Purnea border. There are two varieties—the black and the swamp. Green pigeon and button quail are fairly common, but grey quail less so. Jungle fowl are rather rare, but a few can be found in the jungles along the southern bank of the Kalindri near its junction with the Mahananda, and around the ruins of Gaur.

"Among amphibious reptiles, the snub-nosed crocodile is found in large numbers in the Tangan and Purnabhaha rivers and in the beels lying adjacent to them. It also haunts many of the large tanks which are scattered all over the district. It is not comparable in size with the crocodile of the Sundarbans, the average length being not more than nine or ten feet ; but its presence is remarkable in tanks which often lie miles from any other water. The gharial, the long-nosed fish-eating crocodile, is found commonly in the Ganges. The poisonous reptiles found in the district are the cobra and the Russell's viper. Occasional pythons have also been found. During the last few years, the comparatively high price of crocodile skin has resulted in the wholesale slaughter of crocodiles. Various methods are employed for catching and killing them. The Santal method is to locate the hole in the bank of the river or tank by which the crocodile enters his den. This is then fenced in with bamboo stakes and the crocodile is dug out. The Muhammadans fish for him with a hollow bamboo 10 to 15 feet in length, at each end of which is fastened a rope with a baited hook. As soon as the bait

is swallowed, and the crocodile hooked, he makes for the bottom and tries to shake it off ; but by dragging down one end of the bamboo, the other end is elevated above the surface and shows his position. Eventually he collapses from exhaustion and is hauled in. A third method, generally employed by up-countrymen, is harpooning. As soon as a crocodile is hit, he tends to roll over on his side, and the rope attached to the harpoon begins to entwine him. The more he struggles, the more he becomes enmeshed until he can be dragged to the shore and killed."

Mr. Carter's description perhaps holds good even today.

The district contains a large number of *beels* and tanks and is also traversed by a number of rivers. Various kinds of fishes are accordingly available in the district such as:

1. Dasaytis (Pastinaches) or Sankar ; 2. Gadusia chapra (Ham) or Karti ; 3. Hilsa ilisha (Ham) or Elish ; 4. Sardinella fimbriata (Cuv. & Val.) or Khoirā ; 5. Corica Soborna (Ham Buch) or Subarna Kharikā ; 6. Raconda russellina (Gray) or phesā ; 7. Engraulis telara (Ham. Buch) or Phesā or telgāgrā ; 8. Notopterus notopterus (Pallas) or Pholoi ; 9. N. Chitala (Ham) or Chital ; 10. Galaxis indicus (Day) or Chunā māch ; 11. Amphipnous cuchia (Ham. Buch) or Kuchiā ; 12. Anguilla bengalensis (Gray & Hardew) or Bāim ; 13. Esomus danricas (Ham) or Danrika ; 14. Rasbora elenga (Ham) or Elengā ; 15. Amblypharingdon mola (Ham) or Mouralā ; 16. Barbus Sarana (Ham) or Saral punti ; 17. B. chrysopoma (Cuv. & Val) or Sarna punti ; 18. B. (Tor) putitora (Ham) or Mahāsol ; 19. B. Tetrapogon (Mc. Clell) or Tit punti ; 20. B. (Cyclocheilichthys) apogon (Cuv. & Val) or Punti ; 21. B. conchoni (Ham) or Kānchan punti ; 22. B. (Puntius) ticto (Ham) or Titā punti ; 23. B. (Puntius) stigma (Cuv. & Val) or Punti ; 24. B. titius (Ham) or Punti ; 25. Catla catla or Kātal ; 26. Cirrhina mrigala (Ham) or Mrigal ; 27. C. reba (Ham) or Bāṭā ; 28. Crossocheilus latia (Ham) or Cālā bāṭā ; 29. Labeo nandina (Ham) or Nādin ; 30. L. fimbriatus (Bloch) or Nadin ; 31. L. calbasu (Ham. Buch) or Kālbaus ; 32. L. goinus (Ham. Buch) or Ghainnā ; 33. L. rohita (Ham. Buch) or Rui ; 34. L. bata (Ham) or Bhāṅgan bāṭā ; 35. Clarius batrachus (Linn) or Māgur ; 36. Heteropneustis fossilis (Bloch) or Siṅgh ; 37. Callichrous bimaculatus (Bloch) or Kānee Pābdā ; 38. C. pabda (Ham) or Pābdā ; 39. Ailia coilia (Ham. Buch) or Bāspātā ; 40. Wallago attu (Bloch) or Boāl ; 41. Chaca chaca (Ham) or Chegā ; 42. Eutropichthys vacha (Ham) or Bāchā ; 43. Pseudentropius murius (Ham) or Gāruā ; 44. P. atherinoides or Bātāsi ; 45. Silondia silonia (Ham) or Sillōṅ ; 46. Pangasius pangasius (Ham) or Pāṅgās ; 47. Mystus seenghla (Sykes) or Āirh ; 48. M. aor (Ham. Buch) or Āirh ; 49. M. menoda (Ham) or Āirh ; 50. M. corsula (Ham) or Golsā teṅgrā ; 51. M. teṅgra (Ham) or Bazari teṅgrā ; 52. M. vitatus (Bloch) or Teṅgrā ; 53. Rita rita (Ham) or Ritā ; 54. Bagarius bagarius (Ham) or Bāghā Āirh ; 55. Belone canila or Kāṅkle ; 56. Cypsilurus