

CHAPTER X

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

FORMER ROADS

The earliest road, in the modern sense of the word of which there is any trace in the district was the magnificent Badshahi (royal) or military road, constructed by the Muhammadan conquerors, which ran from Midnapore through the town of Burdwan to Rajmahal, whence it was continued to Monghyr. The remains still exist in perfection in what is now the Birbhum district, just north of the Ajay. The road was an embanked one, 75 yards in width, planted with trees and was aligned in perfectly straight sections between certain points chosen for their natural features, such as river crossings, or great tanks. At every eight miles a mosque was built, with an assignment of lands for its maintenance. According to tradition the road was constructed by the Subahdars of Bengal in the 15th century, when their seat of Government was either at Pandua or Gaur. In the Burdwan district no bridges survive on this road, and the waterways which it traverses are so wide that it is not likely that their bridging was ever attempted. District roads follow this great roadway from the Ajay through the police circle of Mangalkot to the metalled road from Guskhara railway station to Nityanandpur on the Burdwan and Katwa road, and from Karjana, one of the mosque stations, to Burdwan. The Burdwan and Katwa road also is maintained along it for eight miles, whilst south of Burdwan the metalled road from that town to Midnapore adheres to its line. In the later localities its distinctive character has been almost entirely lost, and its sides have been so much encroached on by cultivation that the present roadway is with difficulty maintained. The best preserved section of this grand old road, in which its original proportions can be most fully appreciated, is the length of eight miles from Karjana to its intersection by the Guskhara metalled road.

The mosque at Burdwan may be identified with that still attached to the Pir Bahram shrine. At Karjana, eight miles north of Burdwan, the mosque has disappeared, though the site and its brick ruins are plainly visible. At Kalutanr or Sayir, eight miles further north, a very large mosque, still maintained in a dilapidated state by the Musalman villagers, marks the old station. It is an ugly building, with only a little stone work about its foundations, and the bricks of which it is built are large, coarse and modern looking. At Sarbakpur on the road to Uchallan, eight miles south of Burdwan, a similar building survives in much the same state. At Mangalkot the mosque stands on a mound and is a beautiful ruin, still in very fair preservation. It is built of basalt and fine small bricks, the basalt stones having obviously first done duty in Hindu building. It has been conjectured by some observers familiar with the Gaya shrines that the Mongalkot mosque was originally a Buddhist erection. The *aimma* lands which served for the maintenance of these buildings were all resumed between 1819 and 1836. If the tradition that the road was constructed in the 15th century is correct it points to the great age of some of the immense tanks, with which the district is studded, inasmuch as the most frequent points, from which the straight sections of the road were laid down, are these tanks, to the existence of which the angles in its course are plainly due.

On the bank of the Ajoy opposite Katwa the village of Sankai stands in a rectangular mud fort, now intersected by the high road, which was subsidiary to that Katwa and served to defend the mouth of the river which, in its course through the district, formed the principal highway from the west up to the end of the last century. Three miles north of Sankai there stands in isolation on the plain a solid mass of masonry, comprising a Mughal bridge of three large arches, but the waterway, which it was meant to span, has disappeared. It is uncertain whether this bridge stood on the road from Hooghly to Murshidabad, along which Clive marched in 1757, or on the branch road from Katwa to Nagar in Birbhum. There is another old badshahi road known as Takti Khan's Jangal which extends over thirteen miles

from Radhakantapur on the Satgachia road near Satgachia police station to the border of the district at Dastanpur in thana Jamalpur. A portion of this road, about four miles in length, from mile 55 of the Grand Trunk Road to Jougram has been restored by the District Board recently. The road has also been bridged though it is not metalled.

In a letter from the Judge and Magistrate, dated the 9th March 1802, we read that the "three grand and most useful roads leading to Hooghly, Cutwa and Culna, which may properly be termed the ports of the district, have been completely made." A fourth leading to Birbhum was in a considerable state of forwardness, and the Magistrate proposed to commence another to join the military road leading to Midnapore. A new bridge had recently been constructed over the Banka at an expense of Rs. 20,000. The roads, however, were very defective in bridges. Most of these roads were originally constructed and maintained by forced labour, convicts being employed on this work, but a considerable position of the road to Kalna was made by the Maharaja of Burdwan, that town being his country seat.

MODERN ROADS

The District Board now maintains in all $203\frac{1}{2}$ miles of metalled and bridged roads, 298 miles of unmetalled roads and 652 miles of village roads. Of these the Grand Trunk Road which traverses the district for 100 miles running parallel with the railway, portions of the Raniganj-Midnapore road and the Lithoria road near Sitarampur, are maintained by the Board with the help of a grant from Provincial grants. The more important roads are (1) the Grand Trunk Road which enters the district at the 51st milestone from Calcutta. This magnificent road, 40 feet wide in places, is metalled with laterite metal up to the 128th mile, and beyond with hornblende or iron stone, the metalled surface being 8 feet wide except for the last 20 miles before it leaves the district, where it is 16 feet wide. Throughout its length, except in the town of Burdwan itself, 150 feet of land has been

acquired for the road. The road is bridged throughout, crossing the rivers Banka, Tamla, Singaran and Nunia, and the Bengal-Nagpur Railway at Asansol, which here runs in a cutting, by an overbridge. There are level crossings of the East Indian Railway at Memari, 56th and 59th miles; near Panagar, 101st mile; on the 143rd mile where the road crosses the Luckipur branch line; and near Asansol, 156th mile. There are inspection bungalows at Bud-Bud, 96th mile; Rajband, 106th mile; Mohanpur, 119th mile; Chandmaree, 129th mile; and a dak bungalow at Barakar. The road runs parallel with and close to the East Indian Railway throughout its entire length, and there is consequently little traffic on it except between Raniganj and Barakar.

(2) Burdwan to Katwa, 34 miles 70 yards. The road is metalled and bridged throughout and there are inspection bungalows at the 8th, 15th, 29th and 35th miles.

(3) Memari to Manisambati, 16 miles.

(4) Pandua in Hooghly to Kalna, 15 miles, of which the first twelve miles are in the Hooghly district and are maintained by that Board.

(5) Khana junction feeder road to the Grand Trunk road, 1 miles 5 furlongs.

(6) Guskhara to Nityanandpore, 14 miles 1 furlong. There is an inspection bungalow on the first mile at Guskhara.

(7) Guskhara to Mankur, 14 miles 6 furlongs.

(8) Mankur to Bud-Bud, 2 miles 2 furlongs.

(9) Panagar to Elambazar, 14 miles. The Dulay-Kandore suspension bridge on the 5th mile has a 75 feet span and a waterway of 750 square feet. The river Kunur, crossed in the 7th mile, is generally fordable throughout the year, but is subject to sudden freshets which last only a few hours. The road ends on the right bank of the river Ajoy and there is an inspection bungalow on the 2nd mile near Kaksā.

(10) Panagar to the Damodar, 3 miles.

(11) Rajband to Gopalpur, 3 miles.

(12) Raghunathchak Ferry Road, 6 furlongs.

(13) Raniganj to Mangalpur, 2 miles.

(14) Raniganj to the Ajay, 16 miles. The road is continued in Birbhum to Suri. There is a ferry at the end of the road, on the river Ajay, in the Birbhum district.

(15) Sitarampur to Nyamatpur, 1 mile 4 furlongs.

(16) Barakar Feeder Road, 4 furlongs.

(17) Radhanagar to Sanctoria, 2 miles 7 furlongs.

(18) Raniganj to the Damodar river, 3 miles 2 furlongs.

(19) Lithoria road—Nyamatpur to the Damodar river, 3 miles 2 furlongs.

Besides these first class roads there are several main roads of which portions are metalled. The more important are—

(1) Burdwan to Bankura, 10 miles 3 furlongs.

(2) Burdwan to Kalna, 33 miles 7 furlongs; an old road constructed by the Maharaja of Burdwan and made over to the Road Cess Committee. The first 4 miles and the last 5 miles and 7 furlongs are metalled. The Maharaja used to maintain staging bungalows at every eight miles along this road, but only two are now kept up—at Satgachia and Kalna.

(3) Katwa to Kalna, 33 miles 7 furlongs, of which the first five miles from Katwa are bridged and metalled.

Besides these almost every railway station has its feeder road and these are for the most part metalled. There are also a number of unbridged roads constructed during the scarcity of 1874. The north Damodar embankment from Guhugram, 13 miles west of Burdwan, to below Chakdighi, where the river enters the Hooghly district, affords a high-level roadway passable by carts, and the Ajay embankments are much used as foot-paths.

MUNICIPAL ROAD

The Burdwan, Raniganj and Asansol Municipalities, as well as those of Katwa and Kalna, also maintain a considerable

length of metalled roads. In 1908 the Burdwan Municipality kept up 23 miles of metalled road, while in the Raniganj Municipality there were 5 miles of metalled roads. Kalna and Katwa which are comparatively poor Municipalities maintain 18 miles of metalled road, while at Dainhat 4 miles of metalled road are maintained.

STAGING BUNGALOWS

The Distric Board maintains staging bungalows on the Grand Trunk Road at Bud-Bud, Rajband, Midnapore and Chandmaree. It also keeps up inspection bungalows at Karjana, Susandighi, Srikhand, Katwa, Memari, Guskhara, Panagarh, Oochalan, Satgachia, Kalna, Asansol, Banbahal, Jaunagar and Kusumgram. Dak bungalows are also maintained at Barakar on the Grand Trunk Road and Burdwan, where half of the circuit house is now used as a dak bungalow. Most of the bungalows have accommodation for two persons and contain the necessary furniture.

BRIDGES

The network of rivers, creeks, and drainage channels with which the district is covered add very greatly to the cost of the construction and repair of its road communications. For instance the Grand Trunk Road, which traverses the district from end to end for nearly 100 miles, is carried over six rivers, including the Banka, Tamla, Singaran and Nunia. Two of the bridges over these have each a total waterway of 2,000 superficial feet, and the total waterway of the bridges on the road is 10,020 superficial feet. In the same distance there are one hundred and sixty-six brick arched culverts with a total waterway of 3,562 superficial feet. At Barakar, where the road leaves the district, the river of that name is spanned by a fine masonry bridge. Other important bridges are the Dulay-Kandore suspension bridge on the road from Panagar to Elambazar, which has a span of 75 feet; the Singaran and Tumaní bridges on the road from Raniganj to the Ajay; the Victoria bridge over the Khushi Nala and the Karjana bridge on the Burdwan-Katwa road.

WATERWAYS

The chief waterway is the Bhagirathi, up which steamers ply to kalna all the year round. Formerly all the coal exported from the Raniganj coal-field was carried down the Damodar. An account of this traffic in 1852 is given in the report on the Damodar Valley by T. Oldham.¹

“At present all the coal from this district is sent down to Calcutta in boats by the Damodar, a river, or rather torrent, which is only navigable for a few months in the year, and even then during floods only. At these times an immense fleet of boats may be seen starting from the several wharfs or ghats along the banks, and stretching in a continuous line for some miles in length. Should the flood continue these boats, with few exceptions, reach Umpta (where the river becomes sufficiently deep to be navigable at all seasons) in safety, but should the water fall, as often happens before they have accomplished this distance, they are left stranded on some *chur*, possibly to get off again during some succeeding rise of the water but more probably to be destroyed at last.” There is now practically no traffic on either the Ajay or the Damodar. Such as there is consists merely of timber rafts floated down when the rivers are in flood.

The trade on the Bhagirathi above Katwa is now declining greatly owing to the silting up of the river bed. At certain seasons of the year the river is only with difficulty kept open for the passage of country boats, and it is only in the rainy season that the steamers from Calcutta can reach the town. This river was formerly the ordinary channel for Behar produce and in 1842-43 carried as much as 120 lakhs of maunds of produce, and even so late as 1876 carried 40 lakhs of maunds a year.² The competition of the East Indian and other railway however has reduced the traffic on it to a mere shadow of what it once was, and although this is now to some extent reviving owing to the demand in

1. No. VIII of the selections from the records of the Bengal Government, 1852.

2. (Statistical Register, April 1877.)

Calcutta for country produce, such as jute and vegetables, it forms but a minute proportion of the trade of the district.

There is a daily steamer service of Messrs. Hoare, Miller and Company's steamers to and from Kalna throughout the year, and to and from Katwa on alternate days during the rainy season. The steamers carry both passengers and goods. The only other boat route of which much use is made is the lower reach of the Khari river below Manteswar police-station. A large quantity of grain is brought down in country boats by this route from Nadanghat, the principal rice mart of the interior.

CANALS

The only canal in the district is the Eden canal, which was opened by sir Ashely Eden in 1881. The canal receives its water from the river Damodar with which it is connected by the river Banka. There are sluices at Jujuti some six miles west of the town of Burdwan. The canal starts from an anicut at Kanchannagar, immediately west of the town, and extends to Jamalpur where it joins the Kana-Nadi and the Kana-Damodar. It is never used for navigation, and was constructed partly for purposes of irrigation and partly in order to supply the Burdwan Municipality with a sufficient supply of water for the waterworks, and to clear the low-lying waterlogged villages on the right bank of the Damodar.

FERRIES

The District Board maintains thirteen public ferries, the management of which has been made over to the Local Boards. The most important of these are the ferry over the Damodar at Ragunath chak near Raniganj on the Raniganj-Midnapore road, those over the Bhagirathi at Mirzapur, Dewanganj and Uddhanpur, and the ferry on the Ajay on the Katwa-road at Sankhari. The ferry receipts are decreasing and in 1908-09 amounted to Rs. 9,300 as compared with Rs. 10,700 in the previous year. The decrease is attributed to the fact that most of the rivers are fordable during the greater part of the year. Besides the thirteen ferries managed

by the District Board there are five ferries which belong to Government, viz., at Kalna, and Gayespur on the Bhagirathi, and at Sadar Ghat and Kastha Gola on the Damodar within the town of Burdwan. The whole proceeds of the Kastha Gola ferry and half the proceeds of the Sadar Ghat ferry have been made over to the Burdwan Municipality.

RAILWAYS

The East Indian Railway main line traverses the district, the loop and chord lines branching north at Khana Junction, and Sitarampur. At Ondal (Andal) Junction the line to Suri which crosses the Ajay by the recently constructed bridge north of Baidyanathpur station leaves the main line. The growth and prosperity of the district have been very intimately connected with the railway. Construction was started in 1851 and in 1855 the line was opened as far as Raniganj, which was the terminus during the mutiny. The rapid development of the coal industry which has transformed the Asansol subdivision from an un-peopled wilderness into one of the busiest industrial centres in the world soon followed. Formerly as has already been noted, all the coal was sent down the Damodar in barges, an expensive and risky method of transport. Of late years many new branch lines have been constructed to serve the coal fields, and in the western portion of the Asansol subdivision there is now a network of lines and sidings leading to the collieries. The Ondal loop separates from the main line at Ondal and goes round the north of the coal fields, rejoining the chord line at Alipore north of Sitarampur. while there is an interior loop which serves Toposi, Ikhra, Jamuria and Chichuria stations with a branch to Domohani. From Asansol a branch of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway connects with the main line at Sini. In 1907 the grand chord line between Gaya and Sitarampur was opened. The line crosses the Barakar river at Barakar by a fine viaduct and has considerably shortened the through route to Allahabad. Asansol itself has become one of the largest railway settlements in India, and the locomotive shops there are said to be the most extensive in the world. There are Railway settlements also at Andal, Burdwan and Raniganj.

RAILWAY PROJECTS

A line from Hooghly to Katwa via Kalna is at present under construction and the land is now being acquired. The length will be 65.20 miles and the approximate cost is estimated at Rs. 61,72,000. It is proposed to eventually continue this line through Azimganj to Barharwa station on the loop line, with the object of tapping the more important villages and trading centres along the west bank of the Bhagirathi. A further extension of the line to Sainthia station on the Ondal-Sainthia chord line, or to Ahmadpur station, is also projected in order to link up this section of the line with the proposed Gaya-Koderma-Baidyanath and Ahmadpur branch, the survey of which was sanctioned by the Government of India in 1902. The construction of a branch line from Burdwan to Katwa is also under consideration, but it is unlikely that this will be taken up for some time.

LIGHT RAILWAYS

There are no light railways or tramways in the district. In December 1901 Messrs. Martin and Company submitted a proposal to the District Board for a light railway (2' 6" gauge) from Memari railway station to Chakdighi on the Damodar river, a distance of some 15 miles. The Board at first received the proposal favourably but, after further investigation, decided not to proceed with the scheme.

POSTAL COMMUNICATION

In 1908-09 there were 183 post-offices in the district and 656 miles of postal communications. During the year 6,946,000 postal articles were delivered including 2,230,000 letters, 3,960,000, post cards and 350,000 packets and parcels. The value of money-orders issued in the same year was Rs. 31,79,000 and of those paid Rs. 25,07,000. Postal telegraph offices have been opened at Burdwan, Kalna, Katwa, Samudragarh, Ukhra, Raniganj, Kalipahari, Asansol, Sitarampur, Barakar, Kulti, Nandi, Panuria, Charanpur, and Dishergarh.