

CHAPTER II

HISTORY

PREHISTORIC PERIOD

By reason of its position and natural advantages the district of Burdwan must, from the earliest times, have been the seat of a settled civilisation. The town itself has been identified with the Parthalis or Portalis which, according to the Greek geographers, was the royal city of the Gangardæ or Gangarides. Mr. Wilford also identifies the Damodar river as the Andomatis of Arrian and the Ajay as his Amystis with Katwa (Sanskrit Katadvipa) as his Katadupa. The early Aryan invaders, thrown back at first by the Rajmahal hills and the deadly jungle which lay on their western slopes, soon found their way into the plain of Bengal by the Ganges, which then as now was the sacred river of the Hindus, and had long before the time of the Greek geographers founded the great city of Tamralipta (Tamluk) near its mouth. Their numbers, however, were not sufficiently strong to enable them to drive out the original Dravidian inhabitants whom they found settled in possession of the country. Nor indeed could the invaders have done without them. Serfs and labourers must have been needed to till the ground ; menials must have been required for domestic services. These classes of the community were naturally recruited from the conquered and subject races who formed by far the larger part of the population. The usual process by which the subject races were admitted within the pale of Hinduism followed, and probably in a few generations the original population of the country had accepted the status allotted to it under the Brahminical system and was included among the lower castes.

THE GANGARDÆ

The Gangardæ were undoubtedly Hindus, and Mr. Oldham¹ has conjectured that they were mainly composed of the Bagdis who can still be identified as the original stratum of the population in the deltaic portion of the district, and who are allowed by the Hindus of pure Aryan race to represent the great aboriginal section which was admitted within the pale of Hinduism in distinction from all the rest who are classified as Chuars. He further conjectures that this caste or tribe is in its origin sprung from the same stock as the Sauria Maler of the hills of Rajmahal and of north Godda and Pakur and the Mal Paharia of the Santal Parganas.

THE MALLI

Both these races, in his opinion, are derived from the Malli and the Sabaræ or Suari or Suaræ who are mentioned by all the Greek geographers. They lay to the east of the Prasii of Palibothra (Patna); their boundary was the Ganges, and they lay about Mount Maleus or Mallus which threw so portentous a shadow, and which has been identified with the Mandar hill in South Bhagalpur: "In the forest tracts of Shergarh", Mr. Oldham writes, "and the adjoining jungle, pargana Senpahari, chiefly in villages on the Ajay, are still to be found nearly 2,300 Mals—Rajbansi Mals they call themselves—who can be clearly identified as members of the great Mal race. Between these Mals and the Bagdis there is an intimate connection. To this day they partake of the same *hookah* and admit a common origin, and in the case of Bishtupur a common sovereign; and my observation of both people leads me to conjecture that the Bagdis are the section of the Mal who have accepted civilization and life in the cultivated country as serfs and co-religionists of the Aryans: while those Mals who are still found scattered through the Bengal delta, and who are not, like the Rajbansi

1. W. B. Oldham, *Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwan District*, Calcutta, 1804.

Mals of Burdwan, clearly traceable to the Maler of the hills, are either the descendants of isolated and conservative fragments of the race, or of those members of it who tried to follow the example of the Bagdi after the latter had become constituted as a recognised and exclusive caste and therefore failed. In the Maler we have an undoubtedly autochthonous race. To them are easily and certainly traced the Mal Paharis, and through these the Mals of at all events all western and deltaic Bengal, and, as I conjecture, the Bagdis."

If however this conjecture is correct, there is little doubt that the Bagdis of the Greek geographers' time had already adopted the status under the Brahminical system which they now occupy, and that the Gangardæ, while mainly composed of them, included also their Brahman priests and masters. If then the Bagdi were the most numerous among the Gangardæ and if Portalis was Burdwan and their chief city, it must have occupied to them much the same position as Bishnupur did in more recent times as the undoubted capital of a Bagdi kingdom held by a Bagdi king, if indeed Portalis was not Bishnupur itself.

THE BAURIS

The other great stratum of the population, the Bauri caste, is to be found in the western portion of the district. But the Bauris though semi-Hinduised and calling themselves Hindus, and so-called by their low caste neighbours, are not admitted to be Hindu by the Hindu Aryans but are pronounced by them to be unmitigated Chuars. Although undoubtedly Dravidian, it is impossible to connect them with any other tribe or caste. They are, however, plainly the lowest large stratum now to be found in the non-deltaic portion of the district, which may be called Bauri land, while the remaining large deltaic portion is still more distinctly Bagdi land. The typical Bauri tract is pargana Shergarh, the stretch of rolling rocky country which lies between the Ajay and Damodar rivers to the west. Before the coal discoveries of the last century, it was a tremendous wilderness, dotted at

long intervals by tiny clearings and settlements, and intersected by no great road or route. Here there are few remains of any importance, except the ruins of the forts at Dighi east of Faridpur police-station, at Churulia on the Ajay, and at Dihi Shergarh, the old capital of the pargana. The forts at Churulia and Dighi are by local tradition assigned to the Burdwan family, but the stonework at Dighi is far more ancient than any remains of theirs and resembles the Katauri remains in the Santal Parganas. The fort at Churulia is said to have been built by Raja Narottam, but nothing further is known of him. The Dihi Shergarh fort is comparatively modern.

THE CHUARS OF THE JHARKHAND

Owing to its physical character and situation, this tract was for long a sort of debateable land, and served as the high-road and harbour of the Chuars or jungle-tribes of the Jharkhand the great western forest, in their descents upon the settled country to the east. It is probable that it had no settled population, and that the Mals already mentioned are its real aborigines. The Bauris however are by far the largest section of its population of a primitive character. They do not claim to be autochthonous as do the Mals, and as they have all the characteristics of a broken race with no cohesion, it is possible that they are, as has been conjectured, a portion of some such people as the Uberræ of Megasthenes, the Bhars of Behar, who poured or drifted into the country as it became open to them. They have no traditions of kings, or leaders, or gods, or indeed of any state anterior to their present degraded serfdom, and though clearly Dravidian, it is impossible beyond this to connect them with any other tribe or caste. "There is," Mr. Oldham writes in 1894, "no other considerable section of the population of Burdwan of undoubtedly Dravidian origin. The inexplicable Doms are over 50,000 strong; the Kolarians have no more numerous representatives than the Santals some 6,000 strong, the side drift of the great northern immigration of that race increased by immigrants whom the coal mines have attracted. There

are some 3,000 or 4,000 Kaoras and some 35,000 Chandals. Some individuals of the former tribes claim affinity with the Maghs of the Sunderbans, and it is quite possible that both people came up the delta from the coast and are comparatively modern Mongolian or low Indo-Chinese in contrast to the old Mongolian Kolarians or to the Dravidians who came down towards the sea."

In the dawn of history therefore we find the greater part of Burdwan included in a great Mal or Bagdi kingdom which stretched far into Birbhum, and up to the modern Damin-i-Koh with its chief town at Burdwan or more possibly at Bishnupur itself. While the wild rolling country to the west which lay at the foot of the impenetrable hills and forests of Central India was still a vast unsettled wilderness, the haunt and refuge of thieves and robbers, of demon-worshippers and those "eaters of raw flesh" who were so abhorred by the early Aryans.

THE GUPTA KINGS AND THE SEN KINGS

In the seventh century under the Gupta kings the district formed part of a kingdom known as Karna Suvarna, which lay to the west of the Bhagirathi and comprised the districts of Burdwan, Bankura, Murshidabad and Hooghly. Its king, Sashanka or Narendra, the last of the Guptas, was a fanatical worshipper of Siva, and early in the seventh century invaded Magadha and cut down the sacred Bodhi tree. The capital of this country has been identified by Colonel Waddell with a suburb of the town of Burdwan. Mr. Beveridge, however, places it at Rangamati in Murshidabad, and this is probably the more correct view. Later the district came under the rule of the Sen kings, of whom the most famous is Ballal Sen who reorganized the caste system and introduced Kulinism amongst the Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas. To him is attributed the division of Bengal into four parts—Barendra, Bagri, Banga, and Rarh to the west of the Bhagirathi which included Burdwan. The last king, Lakshmana Sen, was still ruling when Bakhtyar Khilji invaded Bengal at the end of the 12th century.

THE SADGOP DYNASTY OF GOPBHUM

In more recent times the first settlement of which a glimpse can be obtained is that of the Sadgop dynasty of Gopbhum, the farthest cape or headland of the promontory of rocky land which just out into the district from Central India. The neck of this promontory is pargana Shergarh lying between the Ajay and the Damodar. Between it and Gopbhum in the same formation are the recent formed parganas Salimpur and Senpahari which probably belonged to Gopbhum. The actual headland is formed by Gopbhum, with the delta not only fencing it in on the east, but coming round it on the south and edging in on the north. Beyond lay the country formed by the uncertain and ever-changing courses through the silt of the Damodar, the Ajay and the Ganges, which on the British accession was found to be the richest tract in Bengal and the area of its oldest and most settled cultivation.

Gopbhum with part of the debateable land between it and Panchet now included in the parganas Salimpur and Senpahari was formerly, according to the universally current tradition of the tract, the seat of Sadgop dynasty, some traces of which are still extant. The only Raja of the race whose name still survives was Mahendra Nath, or, as he is locally called, Mahindi Raja. His seat was Amrargarh, close to the station and town of Mankur, and the long lines of fortification which enclosed his walled town are still visible. How far the Sadgop power extended to the east can be surmised from the local prevalence of the members of the modern caste, the Aguris. The line of marshes which lies south of Katwa to the west of the Bhagirathi is still held by this caste who occupy the old deltaic soil between this line and the present boundary of Gopbhum in which the Sadgops are still the most prominent caste. The Aguris, by their own admission, are the product of unions between the Khetris of the house of Burdwan and the Sadgops of the Gopbhum dynasty, and the caste arose within the last two hundred years. This recent formation of the Aguri caste indicates that the Sadgop kingdom of Gopbhum existed in

however curtailed a state till almost modern times, first as subject to the Mughals, and then under the shadow of the house of Burdwan itself. Its south-western extremity, now pargana Salimpur, was apparently held by two Sadgop kinglings, probably mere cadets of the house of Gopbhum, one stationed at Bharatpur on the Damodar, and the other at Kankeswar or Kaksa. The latter was attacked and overthrown, and his lands taken by a Bokhariot partisan named Sayad Sayad Bokhari, whose descendant Sayads still hold the Kaksa lands in *aimma* to this day. A similar fate probably overtook the Bharatpur chief. The remains of the tiny forts at Bharatpur and Kaksa are still to be seen, and old Hindu images carved in black basalt are frequently found in the neighbouring tanks. Mangalkot on the Ajay, which is rich in Hindu remains, similar to those found at Kaksa, may also have been an outpost of the Sadgop kingdom. It can however only be said for certain that the Sadgop dynasty held the present Gopbhum and Salimpur parganas, and it is here only that any remains of them are found: nor does tradition assign to it any wider domain. The prevalence of the Aguris, who undoubtedly sprang from it, in such numbers to the east of Gopbhum indicates that its extent may have been wider, but in any case its undoubted seat was on the high pasture lands and at the edge of the forest of Gopbhum. It is highly probable that though originally the Sadgops came with the higher Aryans to Bengal and attended them as serfs or menials in their successive progresses, they ultimately worked their way up through the Bagdi country to the pleasant pastures of Gopbhum, and finding themselves undisturbed and alone there, since the non-pastoral Bagdi had deserted its barren and shallow soil for the richer delta, founded their kingdom which was of no great antiquity or duration, and could not have existed without the protection or neutrality of the neighbouring Bagdi sovereign of Bishnupur.¹

1. This account of the Sadgop dynasty is condensed from that given by Mr. Oldham.

THE MUHAMMADAN INVASIONS

The Muhammadan invaders early fixed on Burdwan as one of their seats, and have left in it several interesting relics of those times, of which the most notable is the splendid military road from Gaur and Rajmahal to Midnapore and Cuttack. Close by was their great settlement at Pandua, and due north of it near Manteswar thana was Mahmudpur : while the fine strategic position of Katwa and soon attracted them. In 1199 A.D., Bakhtyar Khilji, the Pathan general of Muhammad Ghor who conquered Behar, possessed himself of Nabadwip or Nadia, and his followers spread over Burdwan. The whole district is sprinkled over with numberless *aimma* tenures, and the history of Kaksa and the Muhammadan settlement at Churulia under Raja Narottam's fort show how some of the Muhammadan villages were formed. Subsequently the greater part of Bengal gradually came under the control of the governors who ruled at Gaur or Laknauti until 1338 when Muhammad Tughlak declared himself independent.

THE MUGHALS

From that date till 1574, in which year Akbar defeated Daud and annexed Bengal, the country was ruled by various lines of independent kings, mostly of Pathan origin. Burdwan is first mentioned in Muhammadan histories in 1574 in which year, after Daud Khan's defeat and death of Rajmahal, his family were captured in the town of Burdwan by Akbar's troops. Some ten years later the district formed the scene of several engagements between Daud's son Kuttu and the imperial forces. The conquest of the district must however have been complete and rapid, as in 1590 we find Burdwan mentioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari* as a *mahal* or *pargana* of Sarcar Sharifabad assessed at 1,876,142 *dams*.

SHER AFGAN

In 1606 the famous Sher Afgan, then superintendent of the district under the Subahadar of Bengal, was attacked and

slain by order of the Emperor Jehangir just outside the town. The unmerited misfortunes of this nobleman, his lofty character and courage, and the beauty and exalted destiny of his wife Mihr-ul-nissa, "the sun of women," render their story perhaps the most romantic in all the romantic history of the Mughal Emperors. Mihr-ul-nissa, afterwards the Empress Nur Jahan (light of the world), was the daughter of Chaja Aiass, a native of Western Tartary who with his wife had left that country to push his fortune at the court of the Emperor of Hindustan. "In the midst of the great solitudes through which they had to pass, his wife was taken in labour and was delivered of a daughter. They had fasted three days : no house was there to cover them from the inclemency of the weather ; no hand to relieve their wants. To carry the child was impossible. A long contest began between humanity and necessity : the latter prevailed, and they agreed to expose the child on the highway. The infant, covered with leaves, was placed under a tree, and the disconsolate parents proceeded in tears. When they had advanced about a mile from the place, and the eyes of the mother could no longer distinguish the solitary tree under which she had left her daughter, she gave way to grief ; and throwing herself from her horse on the ground exclaimed 'my child, my child'. Aiass was pierced to the heart. He prevailed upon his wife to sit down : he promised to bring her the infant. He arrived at the place. No sooner had his eyes reached the child, than he was struck almost dead with horror. A black snake, it is said, was coiled around it ; and Aiass believed he beheld him extending his fatal jaws to devour the infant. The father rushed forward : the serpent alarmed at his vociferation retired into the hollow tree. He took up his daughter unhurt and returned to the mother. He gave her child into her arms, and as he was informing her of the wonderful escape of the infant, some travellers appeared and soon relieved them of all their wants. They proceeded gradually and came to Lahore. The advancement of Aiass at the court of Akbar was rapid, and he eventually attained the office and title of Actimad-ul-Dowla, or High-Treasurer of the Empire. Meanwhile the child who had been

so miraculously preserved, grew in beauty and learning. She was educated with the utmost care and attention. In music, in dancing, in poetry, in painting, she had no equal among her sex. Her disposition was volatile, her wit lively and satirical, her spirit lofty and uncontrolled. Selim the prince royal visited one day her father, and the ladies according to custom were introduced in their veils. The ambition of Mihr-ul-Nissa aspired to a conquest of the prince. She sung, he was in raptures : she danced, he could hardly be restrained by the rules of decency to his place. Her stature, her shape, her gait had raised his ideas of her beauty to the highest pitch. When his eyes seemed to devour her, she as by accident dropt her veil, and shone upon him at once with all her charms."

Selim distracted with his passion, knew not what course to take. Mihr-ul-Nissa had been betrothed by her father to Aly Cooly Sher Afgan, a Turkomanian nobleman of great renown. Salim applied to his father Akbar, who sternly refused to commit a piece of injustice, though in favour of the heir to his throne. The prince retired abashed, and Mihr-ul-Nissa became the wife of Sher Afgan, who shortly after left the Court of Agra and retired to Burdwan.

DEATH OF SHER AFGAN AND KUTB-UD-DIN

The passion for Mihr-ul-Nissa which Selim had repressed from a respect and fear of his father, returned with redoubled violence when he himself mounted the throne of India. He recalled Sher Afgan from his retreat. He was afraid however to go so much against the current of public opinion as to deprive that Amir of his wife. His incredible strength and bravery had rendered Sher extremely popular. His family and his former reputation were high. Born of noble parents in Turkomania, he had spent his youth in Persia ; and had served with uncommon renown Shaw Ismail, the third of the Sufoiya line. His original name was Asta Jillo ; but having killed a lion, he was dignified with the title of Sher Afgan or the Overthrower of the Lion. In the wars of Akbar he had served with great reputation. Jehangir kept his court

at Delhi when he called Sher Afgan to the presence. He received him graciously and conferred new honour upon him. Sher Afgan naturally open and generous, suspected not the Emperor's intentions. Time he thought had erased the memory of Mihr-ul-Nissa from Jehangir's mind. He was deceived : the monarch was resolved to remove his rival : but the means he used were at once ungenerous and disgraceful. On one occasion he enticed Sher Afgan to attack a tiger unarmed : on another he gave private orders that one of the elephants should waylay him in a narrow street and then tread him to death. Both attempts failed : Sher Afgan killed both tiger and elephant. The doomed nobleman now retired to Bengal, but even there security was denied him. Kutb-ud-din, the Subahdar of Bengal and foster brother of the Emperor, hired forty assassins to attack and murder the Emperor's rival when an opportunity should offer. The attempt was made one night when Sher was asleep. Roused by one of his assailants who thought it shame that forty men should fall on one, he defended himself so vigorously that he slew many of the ruffians and put the band to ignominious flight. Despairing of safety, the unfortunate nobleman retired from the capital of Bengal to his old residence at Burdwan, hoping to live there in obscurity with his wife. Shortly after his retirement Kutb-ud-din paid a state visit to Burdwan. He made no secret to his principal officers that he had the Emperor's orders for despatching Sher. The Amir hearing that the Subahdar was entering the town, rode out with two servants only to meet him. One of the pikeman insulted him and on the insult swords were drawn, and Sher Afgan realising that his fate was come attacked Kutb-ud-din, who had mounted his elephant, and breaking down the howdah, cut him in two. Five other nobles fell by his hand, but he was at length overpowered by numbers. It is said that Jehangir in grief at the death of his foster-brother swore a vow that he would never see Mihr-ul-Nissa again. But her beauty and his former love conquered, and for many years she, conjointly with him, ruled the empire of India. A circumstance so uncommon in an Asiatic government is thus recorded on the coin of that

period : "By order of the Emperor Jehangir, gold acquired a hundred times additional value by the name of the Empress Noor Jahan (Light of the World)."¹

The tombs of Sher Afghan and Kutb-Ud-din lie side by side within the town of Burdwan and tradition still points out the scene of their encounter.

PRINCE KHURRAM'S REBELLION

In the year 1624, Prince Khurram, afterwards the Emperor Shah Jahan, in his rebellion against his father the Emperor Jehangir, after passing through Central India, seized upon Orissa and moving northwards attacked the district. The fort of Burdwan after a short resistance was surrendered by its commander, Salik.

THE RISE OF THE BURDWAN RAJ

Shortly afterwards the great Burdwan house whose history from this period onwards is identical with that of the district was founded. According to tradition the original founder of the house, was one Sangam Rai, a Khattri Kapur of Kotli in Lahore, who, on his way back from a pilgrimage to Puri, being much taken with the advantages of Baikunthapur, a village near the town, settled there and devoted himself to commerce and money lending. Abu Rai, who was appointed Chaudhuri and Kotwal of Rekhabai Bazar in the town in 1657 under the Faujdar of Chakla Burdwan, is said to have been his grandson, and he is the first member of the house of whom there is any historical record. He owed his appointment to the good service rendered by him in supplying the troops of the Faujdar with provisions at a critical time.² His son Babu Rai, who owned pargana Burdwan and three other estates, was succeeded in his turn by his son Ghana Shyam Rai. Upon the death of Ghana Shyam Rai, his son Krishna Ram Rai succeeded to the

zamindari, and among other new estates acquired the pargana of Senpahari. In 1689, he was honoured with a *farman* from the Emperor Aurangzeb in 38th year of his reign confirming his title as Zamindar and Chaudhuri of pargana Burdwan.

REBELLION OF SUBHA SINGH

During the reign of this emperor, in 1696 A.D., Subha Singh, zamindar of Chitua and Barda, then a part of Burdwan, with the aid of Rahim Khan, an Afghan chief, raised the standard of rebellion against the empire. Having united their forces they advanced to Burdwan, and in a pitched battle slew the Raja and captured all the members of his family, except his son Jagat Ram Rai who escaped to Dacca and sought assistance from the governor. The rebels encouraged by their success which drew a large number of soldiers of fortune and other vagabonds to their standards, succeeded in capturing the important town of Hooghly, and possessed themselves of most of the country west of the Bhagirathi. Amongst the captives taken in Burdwan was the Raj Kumari Satyabati, the daughter of the Raja whom Subha Singh kept in confinement until an opportunity should offer of sacrificing her to his lust. Entering her apartment secretly, he endeavoured to outrage her, but the heroic girl as he approached drew from her clothes a dagger which she had concealed as the last defence of her honour and stabbed him, killing him almost immediately. Feeling herself polluted by his touch, she then turned the weapon on herself and pierced her own heart. On the death of Subha Singh, the insurgents elected the Afghan chief Rahim Khan to be their commandar, and under his leadership the rebellion assumed so threatening an aspect that the emperor appointed his own grandson Azim-u-Shan to the government of Bengal, Behar and Orissa. In the meantime Zubbadust Khan, son of the Nawab, had taken the field against the rebels, and had by a series of successful movements driven them back upon Burdwan. They were finally defeated just outside the town by Azim-u-Shan, and their leader Rahim Khan was killed. The revolt of Subha Singh is of special interest, as it

1. Stewart, *History of Bengal*.

2. (B.K. Mukherjee "Annals of Burdwan Raj", *The Calcutta Review*, January, 1910).

indirectly let to the foundation of the towns of Calcutta, Chandernagore and Chinsura. The English at Sutanuti, the French at Chandernagore and the Dutch at Chinsura, alarmed at the progress of the rebels, applied to the Nawab Nazim for permission to put their factories into a state of defence.

FORTIFICATION OF CALCUTTA

The Nawab ordered them in general terms to defend themselves and interpreting his orders in accordance with their inclinations they transformed the settlements into fortified cities which were the first which the Indian emperors suffered foreigners to build in any part of their dominions. After his defeat of the rebels Azim-u-Shan continued to reside for nearly three years in the town of Burdwan during which time he built the great mosque which bears his name.¹

KIRTI CHANDRA RAI

Jagat Ram Rai, who had been restored to the estate and honours of his father, the deceased Raja Krishna Ram Rai, after the revolt of Subha Singh, made further additions to the family estates of the Burdwan house, and was honoured with a *farman* by the Emperor Aurangzeb. He was treacherously murdered in 1702 A.D., and left two sons, Kirti Chandra Rai and Mitra Sen Rai. The elder brother, Kirti Chandra Rai, inherited the ancestral zamindari, and added to it the parganas of Chitua, Bhursut, Barda and Manoharshahi. Kirti Chandra was a man of bold and adventurous spirit. He fought with the Rajas of Chandrakona and Barda near Ghatal, and dispossessed them of their petty kingdoms. He also seized the estates of the Raja of Balghara, situated near the celebrated shrine of Tarakeswar in Hooghly. He subsequently proceeded to Murshidabad and got his name registered as proprietor of the new properties. But the boldest achievement of Kirti Chandra was his attacking and defeating

1. Stewart, *History of Bengal*.

the powerful Raja of Bishnupur. The end of the seventeenth century had left the Birbhum and Bishnupur Rajas at the summit of their fortunes. Their territory lay beyond the direct control of the Musalman power, and as frontier chiefs they were of so much importance in keeping the border, that the Muhammadan viceroys treated them rather as allies than as subjects. The Burdwan Rajas dwelt nearer to the Murshidabad Court, and were from time to time squeezed accordingly. Nevertheless they prospered, from a money point of view, as a clever Hindu family almost always did prosper in contact with indolent Musalman administrators.

THE MARATHAS

But with the beginning of the eighteenth century, an entirely new set of conditions came into play in Western Bengal. A new and more powerful enemy appeared, in whose presence all local dissensions were for the time forgotten. Year after year the inexhaustible Maratha horse overflowed upon the border. Under the Muhammadan system, a family was secure in proportion as it was near the frontier and distant from court; but now safety could be found only in the heart of the Province. The Marathas fell with their heaviest weight upon the border principalities of Birbhum and Bishnupur. Tribute, free quarters, forced services, exactions of a hundred sorts, reduced the once powerful frontier houses to poverty; and their tenantry fled from a country in which the peasant had become a mere machine for growing food for the soldier. Burdwan not only lay farther inland, but its marshy and river-intersected surface afforded a less tempting field for cavalry, and a better shelter for the people. The Marathas spent their energy in plundering the intervening frontier tracts where the dry soil and fine undulating surface afforded precisely the riding ground which their cavalry loved. There they could harry the villages exhaustively, and in detail, by means of small parties. But in Burdwan the nature of the country compelled them to be more circumspect. They could act safely only in considerable bodies; and the cultivators

soon became accustomed to fly, as a matter of course, to some swamp-protected village whenever the Maratha horse appeared, leaving very little to eat, and nothing to destroy, behind them.¹

ALI VARDI KHAN REPELS THE MARATHAS

In 1741 forty thousand horse under Ragoji Bhonsla, the Maratha chief of Berar, overran Orissa and the western districts of Bengal, plundering and laying waste the country as far north as Katwa. The Nawab Ali Vardi Khan, who was encamped at Midnapore, fell back before the invaders on Burdwan, and thence retired to Katwa. But the retreat soon became a rout, and it was only with the greatest difficulty and with the loss of most of his baggage and artillery that he gained the shelter of that fortress. Encouraged by his reverse, the raiders possessed themselves of all the country west of the Bhagirathi. Their ravages have been graphically described in the *Riyazu-s-Salatin*: "Sacking the villages and towns of the surrounding tracts, and engaging in slaughter and captures, they set fire to granaries and spared no vestige of fertility. And when the stores and granaries of Burdwan were exhausted, and the supply of imported grains was also completely cut off, to avert death by starvation, human beings ate plantain roots, whilst animals were fed on the leaves of tress. Even these gradually ceased to be available. For breakfast and supper, nothing except the disc of the sun and the moon feasted their eyes. The whole tract from Akbarnagar (Rajmahal) to Midnapur and Jaleswar (Jalasore) came into the possession of the Marathas. Those murderous freebooters drowned in the rivers a large number of the people, after cutting off their ears, noses and hands. Tying sacks of dirt to the mouth of others, they mangled and burnt them with indescribable tortures."² In the next year Ali Vardi Khan defeated Bhaskar Rao, the Maratha general, at Katwa,

and after a short but successful campaign drove the raiders out of his dominions. The Maratha general retreated to the passes of Panchet, and eventually making good his retreat to Chandrakona, emerged in the open country round Midnapore.¹ This was, however, but the first of many such raids, and although frequently defeated the Marathas returned again and again until in 1751 the Nawab, worn out by the struggle, ceded the province of Cuttack to them, and agreed to pay an annual tribute of 12 lakhs of rupees as the *chaut* or tributes of Bengal.

CLIVES TAKES KATWA

Ali Vardi Khan died in 1756, and within two years his successor, the weak and disolute Suraj-ud-Doulah, was a fugitive, and the province of Bengal was virtually in the hands of the East India Company. In 1757 Clives in his march up the western bank of the Bhagirathi, before the battle of Plassey, seized the fort of Katwa which was abandoned by the garrison at the first assault. The governor of the fort, who was an adherent of Mir Jafar Khan and implicated in the conspiracy, had promised to surrender, but when Major Coote, who had been sent forward with a small force, summoned the fort, he found that its commandant had again changed sides, and he was therefore compelled to attack it. As soon however as the garrison saw the troops advancing, they set fire to the mat buildings in the fort and absconded. The English army encamped in the town and the neighbouring villages, and Clive halted here for two days while he continued his negotiations with Mir Jafar Khan. Dissatisfied with the assurances of the latter, he determined to consult his officers on the situation. Having called a council of war, he proposed two plans for their consideration, either that the army should at once cross the river and attack the Nawab who was advancing from Murshidabad, or that availing themselves of the large supply of stores which they had taken in Katwa they should halt

1. Hunter's *Statistical Account of Burdwan*.

2. *Riyazu-s-Salatin*—Translation by Maulavi Abdus Salam, Calcutta, 1904.

1. *Seir-ul-Mutakharin*, Raymond's translation.

there during the rains and await reinforcements. The council by a majority of twenty to seven decided in favour of delay, but Clive, after an hour's meditation in a grove near the town, decided to attack at once, and acting on his own responsibility gave orders for the advance which led to the decisive battle of Plassey.¹

Three years afterwards the Marathas again appeared in the district. During the invasion of Shah Alam, the Maratha chief Sheobhat, who supported the cause of the Emperor, suddenly advanced to Midnapore, and after making himself master of the country, pushed forward a detachment to Bishnupur and threatened Burdwan. The Emperor marched south towards Murshidabad and the Maratha general advanced to Bishnupur, but was unable to prevent the Nawab, Mir Jafar Khan, from effecting a junction with a British force under Major Caillaud in the neighbourhood of Burdwan. Finding it impossible to force his way to Murshidabad in the face of the combined forces, Shah Alam withdrew with the Marathas to Bishnupur, and thence marched with them to Patna. A small force was left at Bishnupur, but at the close of the year was driven out by an English force.²

CHITRA SEN RAI

Meanwhile the Burdwan house had continued to prosper. Kirti Chandra died in the year 1740, and was succeeded by his son Chitra Sen Rai, who added the parganas of Mandalghat, Arsha and Chandrakona to the paternal estate, and was invested with the title of Raja by the Delhi Emperor. The fort at Rajgarh, which still exists, was built by him as an outpost against his enemies of Birbhum, Panchet and Bishnupur, with all of whom he and his father had waged successful war. North-west of it on the Ajay there lies a small table-land clothed with dense forest on which he built another and still stronger fort. His cannon with his name in

1. Stewart's *History of Bengal*.
2. Broome's *History of the Rise and Progress of the Bengal Army*.

Persian deeply graven on them lie there to this day. The surrounding tract, part of which lies across the Ajay in the present Birbhum district he called after himself and his new stronghold, Senpahari.¹ He died in the year 1744 without issue, and was succeeded by his cousin, Tilak Chandra Rai. In 1753, Tilak Chandra Rai was honoured by the Emperor Ahmad Shah with a *farman* recognising and confirming his right to the *raj*, and a few years afterwards was invested by Shah Alam with the titles of Maharaj Adhiraj Bahadur, and Panj Hazari, or commander of five thousand troops. In 1755, in retaliation for the attachment of his property in Calcutta by order of the Mayor's Court, he put an embargo on the Company's trade within his estates, stopping it completely. The dispute was only settled by the intervention of the Nawab.

BURDWAN CEDED TO THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

Three years after the battle of Plassey, on the 27th September 1760, "the enlarged compact and fertile zamindary of Burdwan, which is like a garden in the wilderness"² was, together with the districts of Midnapore and Chittagong, ceded to the East India Company by Nawab Mir Muhammad Kasim Khan, Governor of Bengal. At this time Burdwan contained an area of 5,174 square miles, and is described as being the most productive district within the whole province or *Subah* of Bengal. But the country was in a very unsettled state, and the Company did not find their new acquisition so profitable as they had hoped. The early days of their rule were troubled ones. The Maharaja had not accepted the new order of things without opposition, and the records of the time are full of complaints of his "insolence" and "rebellion." That these were not uncalled for may be inferred from the fact that in July 1760 his troops actually defeated two hundred sepoys in an engagement that had arisen out of an attempt to arrest one

1. *Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwan District*.
2. Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company.

of his servants. Soon after the transfer of government the Maharaja broke out in open revolt, and in November 1760 we find the Nawab informing the British authorities that the Birbhum and Burdwan Rajas have made common cause, have collected ten or fifteen thousand peons and robbers and are preparing to fight. The insurrection was short-lived. Major White was at once sent to take possession of Burdwan, and on the 29th December 1760 completely defeated the allies who had endeavoured to resist his passage of the river Domodar at Sanghatgola.¹

But civil war even when successfully waged is not likely to improve the revenues. The zamindari of Burdwan when ceded to the Company was estimated to yield a net revenue of 31,75,391 sicca rupees, and within three years the assessment was raised to Rs. 41,72,000 by the resumption of lands formerly held as baze-zamin without payment of revenue. But for many years afterwards the Company's officers had the greatest difficulty in collecting even a portion of this sum. The first "Superintendents" appointed were Mr. Johnstone, Mr. Hay and Mr. Bolts. Dissatisfied with the collections of revenue for 1760-61, they farmed out the estate at public auction for a period of three years, a procedure which was directly opposed to the financial practice of the Mughal Empire. The needy adventurers who became contractors at the sale, as might have been expected, failed in their agreements, and matters went steadily from bad to worse. The Superintendents were charged with every sort of corruption, and apparently they did as a matter of fact hold a considerable part of the district in their own hands.

The district still suffered from the ravages of the Maratha raiders, and the Maharaja took full advantage of the fact to avoid the payment of revenue. A letter from him to the English authorities describes the ruin caused by these raids: "How can I relate to you," he writes, "the present deplorable situation of this place? Three months

1. Selections from the Unpublished Records of Government. Revd. J. Long, Calcutta, 1869.

the Marathas remained here, burning, plundering and laying waste the whole country; but now, thank God! they have all gone, but the inhabitants are not yet returned. They have lost almost all they were worth. You are well acquainted with the bad situation of this place at present, but I hope I shall soon be able to pay you the money in the time that I agreed. It has been my bad fortune to have my country burned, plundered and destroyed by the Marathas, which is the reason that there is now a balance due to the Company; and to reinstate my country again must be attended with great difficulties, which gives me much uneasiness."¹

Terrible however as the depredations of the Marathas had been, the records prove that the permanent injury inflicted on a deltaic district in the last century was comparatively slight. The dry, undulating territory on the frontier returned to jungle, and the ancient houses of Bishnupur and Birbhum were ruined; but the moist lands of Burdwan yielded their yearly harvests, and, excepting the tract to the north of Katwa, which was in a state of chronic devastation, even received an increase of cultivators, by the general flight of the peasantry from the western borders. A more dreadful calamity was impending, and before the country had recovered from the ravages of the invaders it was plunged in all the horrors of widespread famine.

FAMINE OF 1770

The famine of 1769 did for the Burdwan Rajas what the Maratha horse had under Muhammadan rule done for the great frontier houses of Bishnupur and Birbhum. A graphic account of this terrible visitation is given in Hunter's "Annals of Rural Bengal."

"The distress continued to increase at a rate that baffled official calculations, and in the second week of May the Central Government awoke to find itself in the midst of

1. Hunter's Statistical Account of Burdwan.

universal and irremediable starvation. 'The mortality, the beggary', they then wrote, 'exceed all description. Above one-third of the inhabitants have perished in the once plentiful province of Purneah, and in other parts the misery is equal.' All through the stifling summer of 1770 the people went on dying. The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they sold their sons and daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of the trees and the grass of the field; and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead. Day and night a torrent of famished and disease-stricken wretches poured into the great cities. At an early period of the year pestilence had broken out. In 1770 the rainy season brought relief, and before the end of September the province reaped an abundant harvest. But the relief came too late to avert depopulation. Starving and shelterless crowds crawled despairingly from one deserted village to another, in a vain search for food or a resting place in which to hide themselves from the rain. Millions of famished wretches died in the struggle to live through the few intervening weeks that separated them from the harvest, their last gaze being probably fixed on the densely covered fields that would ripen only a little too late for them. 'It is scarcely possible,' writes the Council at the beginning of the September reaping, 'that any description could be an exaggeration.'

Before the commencement of 1771, one-third of a generation of peasants had been swept from the face of the earth, and a whole generation of once rich families had been reduced to indigence. Every district reiterated the same tale. The revenue farmers—a wealthy class who then stood forth as the visible government to the common people—being unable to realize the land-tax, were stripped of their office, their persons imprisoned, and their lands, the sole dependance of their families, re-let. The ancient houses of Bengal, who had enjoyed a semi-independence under the Moghuls and whom the British Government subsequently acknowledged as the lords of the soil, fared still worse.

From the year 1770 the ruin of two-thirds of the old aristocracy of Lower Bengal dates. The Maharaja of Burdwan, whose province had been the first to cry out and the last to which plenty returned, died miserably towards the end of the famine, leaving a treasury so empty that the heir had to melt down the family plate, and, when this was exhausted, to beg a loan from the Government, in order to perform his father's obsequies."

EARLY ADMINISTRATION

In 1776, the administration of the district and of the Burdwan estates was taken out of the hands of Tej Chandra, and placed in those of his mother, the Maharani Bishtu Kumari, the widow of Maharaja Tilak Chandra, one of the principal opponents of Warren Hastings. From the proceedings in Council of the 16th January 1775, we find that she charged Mr. Graham with embezzling 11 lakhs of rupees alleged to be the property of her infant son. Graham was a friend of Warren Hastings who defended him warmly, and the Governor-General's opponents in Council fastened on the charge, and even went so far as to insinuate that Hastings had himself profited by his subordinate's dishonesty. The charge against Mr. Graham was never proved, and there is little reason to doubt that it was totally false. The Maharani retained control over the estate and district till 1779, after which date Maharaja Tej Chandra resumed the management.

The records of 1782 disclose the house sinking steadily into ruin. The Government forced the Raja, as zamindar, to discharge in some fashion his duties towards his people, and many of the earliest documents contain articles of agreement for the repair of the embankments and bridges at his expense. Until after the permanent settlement, the family still maintained a considerable body of troops as bodyguard, the annual cost of which was estimated at four lakhs of rupees, besides other costly paraphernalia of native pomp, without the income necessary to pay for them. A long series of painful personal degradations followed: imprisonments of the Raja in his palace, forced sales of his

lands, the foreclosures of mortgages, the swooping down of his private creditors, and a hundred miserable evasions and struggles. Our officers were not very patient, and they were constantly provoked. Not only was there a vast mass of 'arrear,' which the Collector was ordered, under pain of high displeasure, to levy, and of which he found it absolutely impossible to recover a single rupee; but four times each year, at the quarterly instalments, the Raja sank deeper and deeper into our debt.¹ Of other features of our administration in these early days we hear little but here and there in the old records we get glimpses of the state of the country. From a letter written in 1788 we find that the Collector maintained on his own responsibility a small standing army. It consisted of a Subahdar, a Jemadar, and a Havildar Major, eight Havildars and seven *naeks*, seventy-seven sepoy and five drums and fifes: the total cost of the establishment was Rs. 619 a month. That such a force was necessary can be seen from the same letter. "I had had occasion," the Collector writes, "to send out a force to arrest a notorious dakait named Jeebna, who has assembled under him upwards of four hundred men armed, and with whose assistance he committed the most atrocious depredations in the pargana of Shergarh and St. Pahary, laying waste with fire whole villages, leaving contributions and plundering the inhabitants." The country in fact was overrun with these banditti, and a few years later the Magistrate of Birbhum estimated that there were two thousand dacoits in Burdwan, Birbhum and Rajshahi alone. Disbanded soldiers, thieves, and broken and lawless men of every class, collected in formidable bands, roamed the countryside plundering and burning at their will. On one occasion the officer charged with the duty of arresting the leader of one of these bands actually asked for a howitzer and a battalion of sepoy. And the head-quarters of the British officers were only too often surrounded by a ring of blazing villages whose fate they could neither prevent nor avenge.

1. Hunter's Statistical Account of Burdwan.

Except the Collector and his assistant, there were practically no Europeans in the district. The Company were very jealous of any interference with their trade, and in 1788 strict orders were issued that no European being a British subject not in their service would be allowed to reside in the district without a license. Much of the Collector's time seems to have been occupied in bitter and acrimonious correspondence with the various commercial residents, including the well known Mr. Cheap of Birbhum. The insolence and oppression of their servants was proverbial, and there were constant disputes between them and the peasantry. "I imagine," writes the Collector to one of the residents, "it would be attended with less trouble to you in case of future references that you forward them by dak instead of peons the insolence of whom in many instances requires chastisement."

But in fact the chief object of the administration at this time seems to have been to make the Maharaja pay his revenue, and all other considerations were subordinated to this. The very earliest letter preserved in the records of the Burdwan Collectorate contains a suggestion that his property should be attached, and a few months afterwards in 1788 we find the threat executed. "Besides the peons which you have placed over me for the balance of the Magh kist," the Maharaja writes in a tone of dignified remonstrance to the Collector, "you are now increasing my distress and disgrace by proceeding to attach my house and property." Remonstrance however availed little with the Board in Calcutta. On one occasion the Collector held over an attachment and was promptly censured. It was useless to plead that the district had suffered from a flood such as that of 1787 when "every house in Burdwan and every village contiguous to it fell down, and nothing but the banks of tanks remained for the reception of every living creature." The Board insisted on payment, and regarded such pleas as mere equivocations.

The Company was, moreover, only one of a host of claimants; and what between the stringent demands of the

Revenue Committee, the piteous requests for pension by female members of the family, and the clamorous private duns and usurers who thronged the Raja's palace, the Collector had a very unhappy time of it. "The Ranee," he writes in 1787, "is at her old tricks again." Severities did but little good. The Government might summon the impoverished Raja to Calcutta, imprison him in a wing of his palace, and turn his own bodyguard into his jailers; but such measures produced little money and much popular discontent. Whenever the Board of Revenue had been specially hard upon the Raja, a thousand annoyances and interruptions somehow took place in the Company's trade. The commercial resident complained of 'obstructions', and the Salt Department deplored an outbreak of "opposition to the business of the Aurangs." While the Revenue authorities could make the Raja's life miserable, the Raja could render his territory a very unprofitable one to the British Government.¹

THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

The Permanent Settlement substituted a reign of law for these endless bickerings and quarrels, and the new order of things which it brought about rescued Burdwan. Under Regulation I of 1793, Maharaja Tej Chandra entered into an agreement with Government to pay regularly the revenue, amounting to *Sicca* Rs. 40,15,109, and also *Sicca* Rs. 1,93,721 for *pulbandhi* or repairs of embankments. But in spite of the Permanent Settlement the affairs of the estate did not fully recover, and the disastrous effects of the scarcity of 1769 and the bond of debt and arrears which it had left in its train were still felt. The estate fell into arrears, and the mismanagement became so pronounced that the Maharaja's mother compelled him to execute a deed of sale assigning the entire estate to her. She was a woman of considerable business capacity, and she might ultimately have succeeded in saving the whole estate if her life had been prolonged. Many of the lands had been parcelled out among

a large number of farmers or *ijaradars*, most of whom withheld payment. And the Maharaja found it impossible to realise his rents with the same punctuality with which he was compelled to pay his revenue. The inevitable result of this system of sub-infeudation was the accumulation of arrears in the Government demand. The Maharaja was summoned to attend the Board of Revenue, and was threatened with the forfeiture of his zamindari, but to no purpose. Munshi, afterwards Raja, Naba Krishna Deb was appointed *kruk sazawal*, or attaching officer, but he could do nothing. The Collector of Burdwan suggested the sale of the zamindari in lots, as the only way of recovering the arrears of revenue; and in 1797 the Board commenced selling portions of the estate. Each lot consisted of several villages. The principal purchasers were Dwarkanath Singh of Singur, Chhaku Singh of Bhastara, the Mukharjis of Janai, and the Banarjis of Telinipara.

Thus was laid the foundation of the present landed aristocracy of the Burdwan and Hooghly districts. These sales went on regularly every three months; and in order to prevent the entire dismemberment of the estate, Maharaja Tej Chandra bought up several lots in the names of his officials and dependants. About this time Maharani Bishnu Kumari died. On her death, Maharaja Tej Chandra resumed the management of the estate and one of his first acts was to endeavour to arrest its ruin by giving away portions of his zamindari in perpetual leases, or *patis*, a form of tenure, which is described amongst the land tenures of the district. After half a century of poverty and ruin, the Burdwan house at last found itself under the guidance of a singularly prudent Raja: the creation of under-tenures, and the various other machinery for improving an estate which the Permanent Settlement introduced, have now rendered it the most prosperous house in Bengal.

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

The subsequent history of Burdwan is of little interest. Maharaja Tej Chandra had a son, Pratap Chandra, who

1. Hunter's Statistical Account of Burdwan.

disappeared during the lifetime of his father, and was never heard of afterwards. It is supposed that he went forth incognito either through some petty annoyance or in search of adventure. Several years afterwards a pretender personating him appeared, but his claim, after a searching investigation, was dismissed by the Civil Court. In 1832 Maharaja Tej Chandra died, leaving to an adopted son, Mahtab Chand, his great landed and funded estates. On the latter's succeeding to the raj in 1833, the English Government honoured him with a *khillat*, and he afterwards became one of the most enlightened representatives of the landed aristocracy of the province. At the time of the Santal rebellion in 1855, the Maharaja aided the military authorities by forwarding and supplying stores and means of transport. During the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, he did everything in his power to strengthen the hands of Government. He placed elephants and bullock-carts at the disposal of the authorities, and kept open the roads between Burdwan and Birbhum and between Burdwan and Katwa, so that there was no interruption of intelligence between the seat of Government and the anxiously watched stations of Birbhum and Berhampur. In 1864 the Maharaja was appointed an additional Member of the Viceregal Legislative Council, being the first native gentleman of Bengal who was so honoured. He died in 1881, and was succeeded by his adopted son, Aftab Chand, who only lived till 1885, when on his decease and according to his will the estate was taken charge of by the Court of Wards. Aftab Chand left a widow whom he had empowered to adopt, and she exercised the right in July 1887 in favour of Sir Bijay Chand Mahtab Bahadur, K.C.I.E., the present Maharaj Adhiraj Bahadur. The Maharaja has recently obtained from Government a *sanad*, dated the 1st May 1903, conferring upon him as zamindar of Burdwan the hereditary title of Maharaj Adhiraj to be attached to the estate.

CHANGES OF JURISDICTION

When ceded to the East India Company in 1760 the district or *chakla* of Burdwan, as then constituted, comprised besides

the present district the whole of the present district of Bankura formerly known as Western Burdwan, together with parts of Hooghly and Birbhum. In 1805, the western parganas of Senpahari and Shergarh which now form part of the Asansol sub-division, together with the territory now included in Bankura, were made into a new district, called the Jungle Mahals. These parganas were afterwards restored to Burdwan when the district of Bankura was formed in 1833, but their criminal jurisdiction fluctuated for many years later between the Magistracies of Birbhum and Bankura. In 1820, Hooghly was formed into a separate district, and numerous minor transfers to and from the district were afterwards made. In 1872, the district area was increased from 2,825 square miles to 3,588 square miles, including river circuits, by transfer from Manbhum, Bankura and Hooghly; and in 1879 the thanas of Sonamukhi, Kotalpur and Indas were retransferred to Bankura, while the Jehanabad subdivision was transferred to Midnapore.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The most interesting remains in the district are the fine stone temples at Barakar and the shrine of Kalyaneswari under the Hadla hill, some four miles north of Barakar in the Asansol subdivision. There are some interesting tombs in Burdwan, among which may be mentioned those of Sher Afgan, Kutb-ud-din and Pir Bahram. There are also some fine temples of comparatively recent date at Kalna, in the grounds of the Maharaja's palace, including one particularly fine one of carved brick. The remains of the old Muhammadan royal or *badshahi* road from Rajmahal to Midnapore with the mosques attached still exist, and ruins of old forts are found at Dihi Shergarh, Dighi, Rajgarh, Churulia, and Kaksa, in the Asansol subdivision, and at Mankur, Burdwan, Katwa, and Kalna.