

CHAPTER IX

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

There is reason to believe that in the days of Muhammadan rule the southern portion of the district was fairly well provided with roads. These warlike conquerors were in the habit of making broad military roads to all portions of their dominions and keeping them in repair by the labour of the subject peoples. One of these roads ran from Damdama or Gangarampur to Ghoraghat, thus connecting two important military stations. It is said to have been a fine road in its day and to have formed the basis of the present District Board road from Gangarampur to Ghoraghat *via* Patirampur and Hilli. After the decline of the Muhammadan power the roads made by them were allowed to go to ruin. It does not appear that the Hindu rulers, who probably travelled mostly by boat or on elephants, ever troubled themselves much about making roads through their possession. A hundred years ago there were hardly any of these in the district. It is true that in Major Rennell's map and in his list of the Roads in Bengal and Behar, published in 1777 and 1781 respectively, a large number of roads are shown as leading from Dinajpur town to various places, but

**DEVELOP-
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it seems that most of these merely existed on paper. The only roads, worthy of the name, which actually existed, were the roads communicating with the capitals of other districts, and these were constructed by the early British Collectors with the aid of convict labour. They are said to have been fine broad roads, but were totally unbridged and probably most of them more or less impassable during the rainy season. As a consequence of the lack of roads for commerce, this was mostly carried on by boats in the rains. At this season there was a considerable export of rice to Calcutta and Murshidabad by means of large country boats while small boats, of all kinds plied by way of the streams and *khals* between the big *bazars* and the villages in the interior. In the dry season such trade as existed was carried by pack bullocks over fair-weather tracks through the fields or straight across country. Carts were non-existent except in Dinajpur town, and only plied in its vicinity or along the high roads leading to the head-quarters stations of the neighbouring districts. The land-holders through whose lands these roads ran were bound to provide ferries for the use of the public, but we read that the ferry-boats were very bad and accidents frequent. Fifty years later some improvement is noticeable, though communications still appear to have been in a rather imperfect state. The Revenue Surveyor's account of the roads as he found them may appropriately be quoted: "The district is not famous for good roads. The principal thoroughfare is the Darjeeling high road, which traverses the entire district from north to south and connects the Sikkim-Himalaya mountains with the great Gangatic Valley. This line of road has been well chosen. From the Ganges to Kantnuggur on the Pooranababa (or Dhapa), a distance of 100 miles, there is no *nullah* of any importance. It is a raised earthen road, kept in good repair, and is practicable at all seasons for wheeled carriage, except the worst part of the rains. The small water-courses are bridged over. This used to be the road taken by *dak* travellers proceeding from Calcutta to Darjeeling; but since the opening of the railway to Rajmahal and Monghyr, it is nearly deserted for the more direct road *via* Carragola Ghat and Purneah high road. There are also three branch roads lead from Dinajpur to Maldah, Rungpore, and Bograh, which are kept in repair by the Ferry Fund, and are average fair-weather roads. The latter, which is essentially a Dinajpur

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road, is only just completed, and the community are mainly indebted to the untiring exertions of Mr. G. R. Payter for its completion. It promises to become of great utility in opening up the communication with Bograh. The northern half of the Division abounds in numerous moderately good bye-roads, but the total absence in many parts of the southern pergunnahs of anything resembling a road or even a foot-path is very striking. The partition ridges of earth raised between the rice fields are often the only means of communicating with the neighbouring villages. In these parts carts are unknown, and the only means of transporting baggage across country is on elephants; and this is rendered difficult from the numerous bheels, water-cuts, rivers, and ditches, which are everywhere encountered. Where water communication is so abundant during the rains little inconvenience is experienced by the inhabitants from the absence of roads. The remains of a high road from Maldah to Ghoraghat, said to have been made many years ago by Baum Rajah, and called 'Jangal', can still be traced in many places, but is overgrown with jungles, totally obliterated in some places, and in total disuse. In several parts of the district, particularly in the north, the level nature of the country admits of fine-weather cart roads being extemporised by merely cutting away the raised divisions of earth between the paddy fields, by which grain is conveyed to the granaries on the rivers. There is another road leading from Dinajpur *via* Hurreepoor to Kishengunge, in Purneah, which is not kept in good repair; another leads from the latter place *via* Raigaunge to Maldah, which traverses the western portion of the district. In the north of the district all the Thannas are connected by moderately good fair-weather roads." The Mr. Payter referred to in the above extract was the farmer of Government khas mahals of considerable extent in Bogra. The old road called "Jungal" ascribed to Ban Raja had probably nothing to do with that prince, being instead the remains of the Muhammadan military road through the south of the district previously referred to.

The district is now well provided with roads connecting the various important centres with head-quarters or with the railway line. In 1909-10 the total mileage of roads maintained by the District Board, not counting village roads, was 993. Besides these there is a considerable mileage of village roads more or less practicable for carts in the cold

weather and which at all seasons afford a means to foot passengers of getting about. These are repaired from time to time either by some zamindar or large tenure-holder, or at the cost of the District Board, if the repairs are considered as urgently necessary and a little money is available. None of the roads in the district, with the exception of a few miles in Dinajpur town, Parbatipur, and Phulbari, and a small portion of the Balurghat-Hilli road are pukka and it can scarcely be said that they are kept in a good state of repair. The District Board does its best, but the money available for communications is quite insufficient, amounting in 1909-10 to some Rs. 50 per mile excluding original works, and in consequence the roads are apt to be deep in dust in the cold weather and sloughs of despond in the rains. Most of them are fairly well provided with bridges of a permanent nature, though this improvement was only effected a few years ago at a cost to the District Board of incurring a heavy debt. Water communications are not what they were 100 years ago, as the principal rivers have been steadily silting up, and as roads and railways will form the principal means of communication throughout the year in the future, it is of the utmost importance that something should soon be done to improve the former.

**PRINCIPAL
ROADS. MU-
RSHIDABAD
ROAD**

This runs almost due north from Godagari on the bank of the Ganges and passes through the entire length of the Rajshahi and Dinajpur districts and a corner of Malda. It enters Dinajpur district near the village of Khatirpur, 50 miles south of Dinajpur town, and passes through the town itself, and the villages of Kantanagar (12 miles north of Dinajpur), Birgnj (17 miles), Thakurgaon (35 miles), Fakirganj, and Atwari, close to the last of which it crosses the Nagar river and enters the Purnea district. It is identical with the old Darjeeling road described by Major Sherwill, and the whole length of it from Godagari to Atwari was originally constructed in the early days of British rule at the cost of the Dinajpur district. Nowadays the portion south of the town is called the Murshidabad road and that to the north the Darjeeling road. The alignment of the road is excellent and only one river of any size, the Dahala, has to be crossed till Kantanagar is reached, where there is a ferry across the Dhepa. Between Thakurgaon and Atwari two streams, the Sinea and the Soke, and the Tangan river, have to be crossed, but all of these are fordable throughout

a great portion of the year. The fine tanks of Ramsagar and Pransagar are on this road, respectively 4 and 12 miles south of Dinajpur. As this is one of the principal roads in the district great efforts are made to keep it in repair, but owing to heavy cart traffic and scarcity of funds the road surface has been worn away in places till it is below the level of the surrounding paddy fields.

This was the old high road to Rangpur but has now **RANGPUR ROAD** been almost abandoned in favour of the railway which follows very much the same alignment. It is, nevertheless, kept in a reasonable state of repair. The first portion from Dinajpur to Chirirbandar is little use except by foot passengers. From Chirirbandar (9 miles east of Dinajpur) on to Parbatipur (19 miles) a certain amount of cart traffic passes over it. The road was in process of being metalled when the railway was first opened. The work was then dropped but portions of the old metalling may still be seen between Parbatipur and Chirirbandar. The road crosses the Kankra and the Atrai, both of which are fordable in the dry season and provided with ferries in the rains.

This runs due west from Dinajpur as far as Birol, a **MALDA ROAD** railway station and trading centre (5 miles), where it takes a turn to the south-west, and passing by the beautiful old Mahipal Dighi tank crosses the Tangan at Bansihari, the head-quarters of the thana of that name. From there it is some 10 miles to the Malda border, which it crosses 2½ miles south of Daulatpur. From Birol to Bansihari there is comparatively little cart traffic on the road, and it is consequently fairly good, though narrow in places. From Bansihari on there is heavy cart traffic with Malda, large quantities of paddy being exported and potatoes and pulse imported.

This runs south-east from Dinajpur to the railway **BOGRA ROAD** station of Hilli just across the Bogra border. The most important villages on its route are Samjhia and Chintaman, both centres of the rice trade. At the former it crosses the Atrai river, where there is a ferry. The road is kept in fair order though the cart traffic on it is heavy.

The Purnea road runs in a north-westerly direction **PURNEA ROAD** from Dinajpur, passes through the lower portion of the Pirganj thana and the northern portion of the Hemtabad out-post and enters Purnea on the boundary between the Ranisankail and Raiganj thanas. In Dinajpur district it

crosses the Tangan and Kulik rivers as well as two less important streams, the Koharli and the Nuna. All of these are hereabouts pretty deep and have to be crossed by ferry throughout the greater portion of the year. On the Purnea border the Nagar has to be negotiated. This, however, though wide and somewhat formidable in appearance is fordable in the dry season. There are few places of any importance on this road. Malun, where there is a small District Board bungalow, and Bindole, where a large market is held, are perhaps most worthy of mention. Near where it crosses the Purnea border, the road passes within two miles of the large and important village of Haripur.

KISHENGANJ ROAD

This is an important road passing as it does through the important centres of Bochaganj, where there is a charitable dispensary, a big zamindar's *kachhahri*, and a large market; Pirganj, which is a thana headquarters and boasts a registration office and a large Middle English school; and Nekmarad, where one of the largest annual cattle fairs in the province is held. This road takes off from the Purnea road about five miles from Dinajpur and runs more to the north, crossing into Purnea in the extreme north of the Ranisankail thana. As in the case of the Purnea road, the principal rivers which have to be negotiated are the Tangan, Kulik and Nagar. None of these are bridged. The road after crossing the Purnea boundary runs direct to Kishenganj, a distance of about 14 miles.

BALURGHAT ROAD

This road connects Balurghat with the district headquarters and is one of the most important roads in the district. It runs in a more or less south-easterly direction to Kumarganj (16 miles from Dinajpur), the head-quarters of the police out-post of that name, where it crosses the Atrai. Between this and Patiram (23 miles), the next important place through which it passes, it takes a turn and runs due south. Patiram was formerly a much more important place than it is now, being the head-quarters of the principal thana in the southern part of the district. This was removed to Balurghat when the Sub-division was formed. It is still, however, an important trading centre, and there is a very heavy cart traffic between it and Hilli, the nearest railway station. There is a District Board bungalow here, and a charitable dispensary has recently been established. From Patiram the road runs along the east bank of the Atrai to Balurghat (32 miles). From Balurghat it runs still due south

along the river to Patnitola (44 miles), a fairly important village and a thana centre. About four miles south of this it crosses into Rajshahi.

This is a short road only 16 miles long, running in an easterly direction from Balurghat, but is important as being the nearest means of communication with the railway at Hilli, just inside the Bogra district. It is joined by the road from Patiram at the village of Daput about five miles west of Hilli. The only river of any importance to be crossed is the Jamuna just before Hilli is reached. This is fordable in the dry season. This road has recently been taken over by the Public Works Department who are in process of making it *pakka*. It is the only road in the district maintained by the department.

BALURGHAT-HILLI ROAD

This runs almost parallel with the Murshidabad road, keeping close to the east bank of the Punarbhaba all the way. Eighteen miles south of Dinajpur it passes through the village of Gangarampur, a thana head-quarters, where new charitable dispensary has recently been opened. Two miles further on is the large village of Naya Bazar on the Tangan, where many merchants reside and a considerable trade in rice and other produce is carried on. From this place the road runs almost due south, and passing through a small corner of the malda district comes round in a curve to the east and joins the Murshidabad road, a couple of miles above Nischintapur. This latter part of the road runs through several villages buried in mango groves and is pretty enough, but it is little used and badly kept up.

GANGARAMPUR ROAD

This runs from Thakurgaon to Nilphamari railway station on the Eastern Bengal State Railway, a distance of 26 miles. The first 19 miles are in Dinajpur district and the last 7 in the Nilphamari Sub-division of Rangpur. The direction of the road is almost due east to Gareya (8 miles), after which it takes a south-easterly direction passing through Jharbari (16 miles) and Joyganj (18 miles). The two first of these are important collecting centres for jute. Joyganj is noteworthy as containing a *kachhahri* of the zamindars of Teota in Dacca district and a *dharmagola*, or grain bank, managed and supported by the cultivators of the vicinity. There is heavy cart traffic on this road which carries the trade, principally consisting of jute, of the whole of the north-eastern portion of the district. With the exception of the Atrai, which is fordable in the dry season and

NILPHAMARI ROAD

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crossed by ferry in the rains, there is no stream of any importance to be crossed between Thakurgaon and Nilphamari. The road is well provided with bridges and kept in fairly good repair.

OTHER ROADS

The above are the principal roads in the district, in the maintenance of which most of the available District Board funds are spent. There are other of less importance, such as the road from Ranisankail to Churaman and on to Malda *via* Bindole, Raiganj, and Durgapur, that from Birol to Kaliyaganj and on to Churaman *via* Durgapur, that from Nawabganj to Ghoraghat *via* Bhaduria, that from Patmitola to Nithpur *via* Moheshpur and Ghatnagar, and various minor connecting roads, but less attention is paid to these, and a detailed description of them is hardly necessary.

RAILWAYS

The main line of the Eastern Bengal State Railway traverses the eastern angle of the district from north to south for a distance of 31 miles. The Behar section of the same railway leaves the main line at Parbatipur junction and runs from east to west across the centre of the district passing through the head-quarters town. The former was opened on different dates between 1884 and 1887 and the latter between 1887 and 1891. This railway was originally called the Northern Bengal State Railway. The stations on the main line from north to south are Parbatipur, Bhawanipur, Phulbari and Chorkai (identical with Berampur) and those on the Behar section from east to west are Parbatipur, Chirirbandar, Kaugaon, Dinajpur, Birol, Radhikapur, Kaliyaganj, Bangalbari, and Raiganj.

WATER COMMUNI- CATION

Something has already been said about the water communications in the district. At one time, in the almost entire absence of roads, the bulk of the commerce of the country was carried by means of the rivers and *khals* during the rainy season and even today there is a considerable export of grain by the Atrai, Jamuna, Punarbhaba, Tangan, Kulik and Mahananda. It is universally admitted, however, that the rivers in general, but especially the Atrai have in recent times deteriorated greatly as a means of communication. This is due to the fact that for some obscure reason they are silting up and are now only navigable for country boats of any size during the height of the rainy season and even then for a comparatively short distance up stream. This silting up process has been especially rapid in the case of the Atrai since the earthquake of 1897, and there is rea-

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son to suppose that the level of a portion of its bed must have been raised then. Indeed several petitions have been submitted to Government for dredging this river, but have been rejected on the score of expense.

CANALS

There are only two navigable canals in the district. Of these the Malijal is a canal some 6 or 7 miles long connecting the Atrai and the Dhepa a little above Birganj. It is said to have been originally constructed by a Muhammadan chief, Sadat Ali, and to have carried a considerable volume of water, till in 1786-87 the Tista, which originally flowed down the channels of the Karatoya and Atrai, changed its course and made its way in a more easterly direction into the Brahmaputra. Since that time there has been comparatively little water in this canal, though without its help the dhepa would be a much smaller river than it is. The other navigable canal is a short one, only 2 or 3 miles in length, connecting the Punarbhaba with its branch the Brahmani, a few miles below Gangarampur. This carries as much water almost as the main stream of the Punarbhaba. It is not known by whom it was originally constructed. Another canal worthy of mention is the Ramdanra of Raja Ramnath constructed to connect his countryseat, of Govindnagar and Prannagar, so that the transport of the family idols from one place to the other might be facilitated. This is now no longer navigable, except perhaps for small boats in the height of the rains, but the high embankment which marks its southern bank is still intact and is a noticeable feature in the landscape. The present road from Birganj to Thakurgaon follows the southern bank of this canal for many miles. In and near the town of Dinajpur are several canals dug at one time or another for drainage purpose. The principal of these is the Ghagra formed by Raja Ramnath to connect the Gabura, a small branch of the Atrai, and the Kachai stream. The united streams of the Ghagra and Kachai after their junction on the east of the town were called the Ghagra and flowed into the Punarbhaba at a point south-west of the present *maidan*. In 1878 the outlet into the Punarbhaba was blocked up, and a fresh channel was cut for the Ghagra which finally joined the Punarbhaba at Ghughudanga six miles south of the town. The object was to prevent the water of the Ghagra being held up by the river when the latter was in flood and flowing into the town. This so-called canal is little better than a drain or ditch and is not

BOATS

navigable.

The inhabitants of Dinajpur have little aptitude for boating, and amongst them the instinctive watermanship, which seems to be born in the people of the districts further east, is unknown. As might be expected, their boats are somewhat clumsy and primitive. To begin with we have the *donga* or small dugout, a cranky little craft chiefly used by fishermen. Next in size to this comes the *saranga* or full sized dugout, the boat in most general use for all purposes. This is sometimes enlarged by side planks and roofed with bamboo matting (*chhai* or *chappar*) and is used for carrying passengers and cargo. These dugouts are made of *simul* and *tarul* trees and are the only boats made in the district, all other boats being imported from Jalpaiguri. A somewhat larger boat generally used for fishing is the *dinghi*, also known as *naotakhta*, as being made with nine planks on each side. The boat most generally used for carrying passengers and cargo is the *kosha*. It is a plank built boat long and narrow in shape and has a certain grace and symmetry of its own. It is made in various sizes. The smaller sizes are constructed to carry between 20 and 50 maunds of cargo while the larger sizes, generally called *patkosha*, carry up to 200 maunds. Besides the above, larger boats of varying patterns and tonnage may be met with on the lower reaches of some of the rivers in the rainy season. These are of foreign construction and are known amongst the people of the district by the general term *bara nauka* (large boat).

POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS

Daily postal communication with Calcutta was established in the very early days of British rule by means of the Murshidabad or Darjeeling road passing through the town of Murshidabad. In 1861-62, the earliest year for which statistics are available, we learn that the number of letters, parcels, books, etc., carried by the post office was 63,028. In 1870-71 this number had increased to 157,701. In 1862 a tax called the Zamindari Dak Cess was introduced. This was for the maintenance of dak runners for the conveyance of papers, letters, packets, etc., between the head-quarters of thanas and the District and Sub-divisional offices. This continued to be levied from the zamindars till 1906 when it was finally abolished and the work taken over by the postal department. The district now contains 54 post offices and 340 miles of postal communication; the number of postal articles delivered in 1909-10 was 1,683,448. The number

of telegraph offices unconnected with the railway is four, viz., those at Dinajpur, Rajganj (a quarter of the town), Parbatipur, and Raiganj. The opening of two new telegraph offices at Thakurgaon and Balurghat has recently been sanctioned, but the lines have not yet been laid. The number of savings bank deposits in 1909-10 was 4,895 and the amount deposited was Rs.6,33,000. The value of the money-orders issued in the same year was Rs.20,81,000 and of those paid Rs. 6,79,000.