

**MUGHAL RIVER FORTS IN BANGLADESH  
(1575-1688)**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL**

by

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A Thesis Submitted to Cardiff University in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
**Master of Philosophy**

**SCHOOL OF HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND RELIGION  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY  
DECEMBER 2012**

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## ABSTRACT

The existing scholarship on the Mughal river forts fails to address some key issues, such as their date of construction, their purpose, and the nature of their construction, how they relate to Mughal military strategy, the effect of changes in the course and river systems on them, and their role in ensuring the defence of Dhaka. While consultation of contemporary sources is called for to reflect upon these key issues, it tends to be under-used by modern historians. Furthermore, the unavailability of inscriptional evidence for the river forts has led the relevant researchers to an unremitting debate concerning the river forts and the identity of their builders.

These limitations suggest the need for further study. This study suggests that an advanced study, analysing and discussing contemporary and modern sources, along with field work conducted on the sites of the river forts, can clarify and resolve the various outstanding problems, thereby present and defend an improved understanding about the building and purpose of the river forts.

This study suitably focuses on the historical changes in the course of the river systems and their impact on the building of river forts. Moreover, it examines in close details the role of river forts in the defence of Dhaka against various enemies, such as internal (bhuiyans, zaminders and their Afghan allies) and external (sea-borne invaders, such as the Maghs of Arakanese and the Portuguese) during the period 1575-1688. Finally it reasons out that a satisfactory study on the Mughal history in Bangladesh largely depends on pursuing a comprehensive and advanced study of the physical evidence and on wider consultation of contemporary and modern textual sources such as Persian, Bengali, Assamese and Arakanese.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply indebted to my two supervisors, Professor Denys Pringle and Professor Geoffrey Samuel, for their unfailing supervision, constructive criticism and invaluable advice at all time throughout the period of my study. Without their patience and inspiration, this thesis would not have had accomplished a complete form. I am truly fortunate to have them as my supervisors.

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for my brother-in-law, Mohammad Raju Ahmed for his unconditional assistance. Without his aid, maps and figures provided in this thesis would not have been possible to be furnished. Thanks are also due to the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh for granting me permission to visit their archive and compile rare photographs.

I offer my appreciation to the staff of Cardiff Archaeology section, Sarah Tovey and Helen Szewczyk, for their assistance. I am also indebted to the library, particularly the inter-library loan staff at Cardiff University for their assistance throughout the study period. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, son and husband for their forbearance and understanding in coping with the difficulties inherent in such an undertaking.

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**PART ONE**

**THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE, AND OUTSTANDING  
PROBLEMS**

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Brief Introduction: The Main Questions

I commence with a number of questions which are essential for the research into the defence of Mughal Bengal.

- What are the limitations of the current state of knowledge about the Mughal river forts in Bangladesh?
- What are the implications of these limitations for the scholarship of Mughal history, in particular their military history in Bengal?
- What kind of possible solution do the archaeological studies offer to them?
- What role do the contemporary and modern sources play in studying the building and purpose of the river forts?

While responses to these questions may seem obtainable, they are diverse and contradictory, in particular concerning the date, builder and method of building of the river forts. This suggests that this area would benefit from further study, which is the purpose of this dissertation.

For a satisfactory study on the medieval Mughal military history of Bengal, it is important to conduct both field work in each of the river fort sites, and to consult documentation contemporary with the forts. This will provide a basis to reflect upon the various relevant questions and the competing opinions of modern historians of the Mughal period as regards the river forts. Modern historians have tended to underuse

contemporary sources, limiting our knowledge of the river forts. As mentioned above, there are disagreements among modern historians concerning the date and the builders of the river forts. As there is no inscriptional evidence available for the river forts, the solution to the problem concerning date and builders of these forts is complex.

The aim of the study is thus to achieve a new and improved understanding regarding the building and purpose of the river forts through analysing and discussing contemporary and modern sources along with field work conducted on the sites of the river forts. The main questions to be addressed:

1. What do the contemporary sources tell us about date and builders of river forts?
2. What was the purpose of river forts and to what extent is this reflected in their design and architectural style?
3. What do the contemporary sources and study of the existing remains/relics tell us about the condition and construction of river forts?
4. What was the Mughal military strategy in eastern Bengal? And how was the building of river forts influenced by political, economic and military circumstances there during the period 1575-1688<sup>1</sup>?
5. What effects may historical changes in the course of the river system have had on the building of river forts?
6. What role may have been played by river forts in the defence of Dhaka against sea-borne invaders during the period 1575-1688?

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<sup>1</sup> All dates of this thesis are AD unless otherwise stated.

In order to attempt to seek answers to these questions, the main objectives of the study are:

- A. To undertake field work on each site and provide an interpretation of the forts' surface remains;
- B. To consider the extant remains of the river forts in defining a chronological building sequence for them;
- C. To take account of contemporary historical sources to assess the reasons why the builders of the river forts chose to place them where they did;

My thesis comprises two parts: 'The Current State of Knowledge, and Outstanding Problems' and 'Analytic Discussion'. The first chapter of Part One, i.e. the former section involves a brief introduction to Part One. The second chapter of this part illustrates the historical background - political and economic; of medieval Bengal, raising questions wherever appropriate and possible about the existing scholarship. In the third chapter of this part, an analysis is offered to investigate the implications of the changes in river systems – once more questioning the existing scholarship wherever appropriate and suitable.

Chapter four of Part One contains a description and discussion of the river forts, with a detailed account of their position and orientation. Following the description and discussion, suggested by the field work conducted on three river forts (the Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur river forts), this chapter is also devoted to considering the relationship between the architecture of the river forts and other architecture of the period.

Chapter five of Part One expounds military strategy and technique in the period, with special reference to issues such as how boats were used militarily; how guns were used against boats; what guns were available and how gun-platforms might have been used.

I have employed two different approaches to investigate into the solutions to the outstanding problems as regards the date, building and purposes of the river forts. They are: field work and critical textual analysis. This study is not intended to give details of forts or fortifications the Mughals built and/or used for non-military purposes; nor does it cover details of military outposts of the Mughals. The current study is limited to the study of river forts built and used for a military purpose.

Apart from those interested in medieval Mughal military history, the intended readership of my thesis includes historians of the medieval history of Bengal as a whole. Furthermore, this study is intended to motivate researchers to conduct further research on the river forts, with due focus on wider contemporary and modern sources (e.g. involving Persian, Bengali, Assamese and Arakanese sources) and physical evidence.

## 1.2 Sources and Scope of Study

The Mughal Empire was a Muslim imperial regime, which, at the height of its power, controlled most of the Indian subcontinent including present-day Bangladesh for a period from AD 1526 to 1857.<sup>2</sup> It therefore occupies a large and vital part of the Mughal period of Bangladesh. A range of significant architectural monuments were erected by the Mughal rulers during this period in the form of mosques, tombs, gates, *hammams* (bathing places), *katra* (caravansarai), *Idgah* (place where Muslims get together twice a year on the occasion of *Eid* (festivals), bridges, forts and fortifications.

These architectural monuments fall into two types: the religious and the secular.<sup>3</sup> The Mughal forts and fortifications of Bangladesh belong to the secular type. However, there are different types of Mughal forts and fortifications, and these may be categorized according to two distinct considerations-- form and function. Those based on form may be divided into three main categories: (i) border outposts, (ii) river forts and (iii) palace forts.<sup>4</sup> Those based on function may be categorized into two major types: (i) fortified defence centres (forts that were used only for military purposes) and (ii) fortified cities (forts that were used for both civil and military administrative purposes).<sup>5</sup> As specified in the above categorizations, the river forts were built for merely military purposes.

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<sup>2</sup> Richards, J. F., *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.1.

<sup>3</sup> While mosques, tombs and *idgah* belong to the type of Mughal's religious architecture, other structures such as river forts, palaces, gates, *hammams* and *katras* belong to the type of secular architecture.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to these three types there are two other types, though not primary but not without significance – (iv) *Katra* (caravansarai) and (v) *Hammam* (bathing places).

<sup>5</sup> Begam, A., *Forts in Medieval Bengal : An architectural Study* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rajshahi University, 1992 ), p.268.

The architecture of the Mughal river forts of Bangladesh was ‘suited to the local climate and environment in this deltaic land’<sup>6</sup> and influenced by the imperial Mughal architectural styles (mainly developed in North India). In any case, while the imperial Mughal buildings were designed and constructed in stone, the edifices of the Mughal river forts of Bangladesh followed a brick tradition on account of the total absence of stone in this area. The brick tradition of the Mughal architecture of Bangladesh also involves other indigenous products, such as mud, bamboo, reed and wood. Three river forts could be discerned by means of their surviving physical remains in Mughal Bangladesh. Built around Dhaka, these three river forts were known respectively as the Hajiganj fort (formerly known as Khizirpur fort), the Sonakanda fort, and the Idrakpur fort. Their possible dating varies from AD 1610 to 1663.

The earliest available enduring written work to deal with the Mughal forts and fortifications and their history of military encounters in Bangladesh is the four volumes of *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi*<sup>7</sup>. The books of *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi* were written between 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1625 and 27<sup>th</sup> May 1632 by Alauddin Isfahani Alias Mirza Nathan, a courageous fighter, who accompanied his father, the admiral of the imperial fleet, Malik Ali (later entitled Ihtimam Khan), to Bengal and joined the imperial service in 1608, continuing in his post until 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1625. The author refers to the existence of a fort at Hajiganj (formerly Khizirpur) area and one at Sonakanda area in *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi*.<sup>8</sup> Although there is no mention about Idrakpur fort in this source, this may well help to give an idea about the dates and builders of the Hajiganj and Sonakanda forts. It is a reliable and well-

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<sup>6</sup> Dani, A.H., *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p.28.

<sup>7</sup> The *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi* is divided into four *daftar*s or Books. Each book deals with the period of different *subahdars* who ruled Bengal during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627).

<sup>8</sup> Nathan, M., *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi*, M.I.Borah (tr.), vol. I (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936), pp. 77-79.

documented primary source for the reconstruction of the history of Mughal Bangladesh, because the author composed this work from his personal observation and experiences. The value of the books of *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi* is also heightened by the accuracy of illustration of the topology of Bangladesh by the author, who had travelled to almost whole of Bangladesh. For Abdul Karim, Mirza Nathan's interpretation about the topography of this country in *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi* is so accurate that modern scholars will be able to redraw the map of medieval Bangladesh without difficulty and accurately.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi*, the later part of *Akbornama*<sup>10</sup> of Abul Fazal gives us an idea of the contemporary political condition of and the early Mughal aggression in Bangladesh. This book is often regarded by scholars as one of the principal sources for the reconstruction of the history of Mughal campaigns and forts and fortification in Bangladesh. Although this description is very brief and sketchy, the history of the rise of Bangladeshi *bhuiyans*, *zamindars* and chiefs may be reconstructed reliably on the basis of the information given by the later part of *Akbornama*. This book is also generally accepted by scholars in this field as the most reliable source about the chronology of the period in question. While this source is less informative about the Mughal rivers forts of Bangladesh, its account of the contemporary political condition and the Mughal aggression in Bangladesh are of significant help in the reconstruction of the history of the early Mughal forts and fortification of Bangladesh.

Next to *Akbornama* in terms of its importance as a contemporary source is the *Ain-i-Akbari*<sup>11</sup> of Abul Fazal. Although this source is an administrative manual and a kind of a gazetteer, it is important for information about the power and position of medieval

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<sup>9</sup> Karim, A., *History of Bengal: Mughal Period*, vol. 1 (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies (IBS), 1992), pp.13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Fazal, A., *Akbar-Nama*, H.Beveridge (tr.), vol. III (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Fazal, A., *Ain-i-Akbari*, Jarrett, H.S. (tr.), vol. II (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949, reprint 1993).

Bangladeshi *zaminders* and also contains important information about the geographical location, borders, distances and measurements of Bangladesh along with a brief but reliable account of the history of neighbouring tribal areas (such as Kuch-Bihar, Assam, Tippera and Arakan).

Another two contemporary sources for the Mughal period of Bangladesh are the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*<sup>12</sup> of Emperor Jahangir (the Memoirs of his own) and the *Iqbalnama-i-Jahangiri*<sup>13</sup> of Mutamad Khan. The *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri* is important as a documentation source of dates of appointment, recall or dismissal of subahdars (provincial governors) and imperial officers. The *Iqbalnama-I-Jahangiri* gives account of almost the same historical facts and dates (with no more than one or two exceptions) like the *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*; it is thus of equal importance.

Two other records that are of help in reconstructing the history of Bangladesh in the reigns of the Mughal emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb (1628 to 1707) are *Maasir-ul-Umara*<sup>14</sup> of Shahnawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, a biographical dictionary of Mughal officers, and *Tazkirat-ul-Umara*<sup>15</sup> of Kewal Ram, a biographical account of the Mughal nobility ranging from the reign of Akbar to Aurangzib, 1556 to 1780. However, Kewal Ram's compiled biographical record is very short and imprecise though it involves biographies of 1,200 nobles. In comparison, Shahnawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy's biographical dictionary *Maasir-ul-Umara* has been found to be a more reliable and valuable work of reference by the students of Mughal history.

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<sup>12</sup> Fazal, A., *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Memoirs of Jahangir), Rogers, A., (tr.) by H.Beveridge (ed.), vol. I (From the first to the twelfth years of his Reign), (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909).

<sup>13</sup> Khan, M., *Iqbalnama-i-Jahangiri*, ed. by Abdul Hai and Ahmed Ali (Calcutta: 1865).

<sup>14</sup> Khan, S. and Hai, A., *Maasir-ul-Umara* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1988-91).

<sup>15</sup> Ram, K., *Tazkirat-ul-Umara*, (tr.) by S.M. Azizuddin Husain (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985).

*The Fatbiyya-i-Ibraiya*<sup>16</sup> of Shihab-ud-din Talish is another contemporary source for the Mughal period of Bangladesh. This book enhances its value as a source by involving almost all the military encounters and administrative activities of Mir Jumla (1660 to 1663), who was said to have been the most capable and successful Mughal provincial governor and general among every one of his time and rank who served in Bangladesh during the Mughal period. While for many commentators Mir Jumla is the person who built Idrakpur river fort between 1660 and 1663, for others this account is not beyond criticism. Thus care should be exercised when making use of this source.

The writings of European travellers and Portuguese missionaries are also valuable for my undertaken project. In this connection travellers who gave important accounts of the Mughal period of Bangladesh are Ralph Fitch<sup>17</sup>(who visited Bangladesh in 1586), Fray Sebastien Manrique<sup>18</sup> (between 1629 and 1640), Francois Bernier<sup>19</sup>(between 1659 and 1667), Jean Bepstiste Tavernier<sup>20</sup>(1640), Niccolao Manucci<sup>21</sup> (between 1656 and 1666). Their accounts are valuable for the reconstruction of the Mughal period of Bangladesh. Information given by the Portuguese missionaries about the conflict of the Mughals with the king of Arakan are also of value to the researchers of the Mughal period of Bangladesh.

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<sup>16</sup> Talish, S., *Fatbiyya -i-Ibraiya* (Calcutta: Aftab-i-Press, 1849).

<sup>17</sup> Fitch, R., *Early Travels in India (1583-1619)*, ed. by Foster, William (London: Oxford University Press, 1921).

<sup>18</sup> Manrique, F. S., *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique: 1629-1643*, 2 vols., (tr.) by C. E. Luard (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927).

<sup>19</sup> Bernier; F., *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656-68*, First Indian edition (India: Constable and Smith, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> Tavernier, J. B., *Travels in India*, (tr.) by V. Ball & ed. by W. Crook, 2nd edi. (London: Oxford University Press, 1925).

<sup>21</sup> Manucci, N., *Storia do Mogor*, 4 vols,(tr.) by W. Irvine (London: John Murray,1906).

A late nineteenth-century source is *Shubarna Gramer Itibas*<sup>22</sup> of Sharup Chandra Ray, in which he is found to deal directly with the forts under study. Ray's work involves a brief account of the Hajiganj and the Sonakanda forts, though we find no mention of Idrakpur fort in his work.

As no contemporary source is available to deal with Idrakpur fort, we have to rely on those works which have been undertaken or published much later in order to reconstruct its history. In this connection, the *List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal*<sup>23</sup> of the Government of Bengal Public Works Department, and *Tawarikh-i-Dhaka*<sup>24</sup> of Munshi Rahman Ali Taesh, published at the first decade of the twentieth century, are worth mentioning here. Both publications are found to shed some light on the all the river forts including Idrakpur fort, though the descriptions of those forts are only a few lines in length.

Another four sources for this period exist in *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*<sup>25</sup> Dacca: *A Record of Its Changing Fortunes*<sup>26</sup> by A.H.Dani; *Discover the Monuments of Bengal*<sup>27</sup> by Nazimuddin Ahmed and *Islamic Heritage of Bengal*<sup>28</sup> edited by G. Michell. Dani, Ahmed and Michell touch on the three river forts and their works are of special value to the researchers into this field because of covering some central aspects of those forts, such as date, architectural styles and strategic importance, albeit briefly, in their works.

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<sup>22</sup>Roy, S.C., *Shubarna Gramer Itibas (History of Subarnagram)*, (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 1891).

<sup>23</sup> *List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal* (Calcutta: Govt. of Bengal Public Works Dept., 1896).

<sup>24</sup> Taesh, M. R. A., *Tawarikh-i - Dhaka*, (Dhaka: 1909).

<sup>25</sup> Dani, A. H., *Muslim Architecture in Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961).

<sup>26</sup> Dani, A. H., *Dacca : A Record of its Changing Fortunes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.(Dacca : Safiya Dani, 1962).

<sup>27</sup> Ahmed, Nazimuddin, *Discover the Monuments of Bangladesh*, (ed.), by Sandy (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Michell, G.(ed.), *The Islamic Heritage of Bengal* (Paris :UNESCO,1984).

Moreover the local traditions, archaeological surveys<sup>29</sup> and reports, renovation and conservation measures undertaken by the Archaeology Department of the Government of Bangladesh, the Land Record, the memoirs and the district gazetteers<sup>30</sup> published in the British period and later in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi periods are also valuable, as they supply information about old monuments, historical places, roads and waterways, commercial and industrial centres and so on. The above mentioned sources are of particular interest. They will mostly be utilized as the major sources with the view to reconstructing the history of the river forts in Bangladesh. Taken together, contemporary sources document some important aspects of the river forts.

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<sup>29</sup> *Bangladesh Archaeology*, vol. I, No.1 (Dacca: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1979) and Cunningham, A., *Archaeological Survey of India Report (of a Tour in Bahir and Bengal in 1879-80)*, vol. XV (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1882) also *Protected Monuments and Mounts in Bangladesh*, Dacca: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1975.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor, J., *Sketch of the Topography & Statistics of Dacca* ( Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1840 )and Hamilton, B., *Geographical, Statical and Historical Description of the District or Zila of Dinajpur in the Province or Suba of Bengal* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1833).

# Chapter Two

## Historical Background

### 2.1 Political History

The political history of medieval Bengal<sup>1</sup> (1204–1757) involves two major regimes: (1) The Sultanate regime (1204–1576), and (2) the Mughal regime (1576–1757). The Sultanate rule in Bengal started after the conquest of a small sector in the north-west of Bengal by Muhammad Ikhtiyaruddin Khalji (1204-1206) the general of Delhi's Sultan Mohammad bin Sam, in 1204. This period could be categorized into three sub-phases.

In phase one of the period (1204–1338), Bengal was ruled more or less autonomously although the imperial authority used to nominate local authorities. No typical map of Bengal developed as some areas of Bengal were outside Delhi Sultanate's rule. The second phase, a phase between 1338 and 1538, is distinct because Bengal was ruled by independent sultans throughout the phase. Although most of Bengal did not come under the control at the beginning, it came under the control of Bengal Sultans during the final half of this phase. Thus Bengal emerged as a large independent and sovereign state during this time. The Illiyas Shahi Dynasty (1342-1493) and the Hussain Shah Dynasty (1493-1538) ruled during this phase.

The third and last phase of the Sultanate period, (a phase) between 1538 and 1576, involves the rule of two Afghan dynasties, namely the Suri dynasty (1540-1555)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bengal in the context of this study is intended to mean the territory comprising mainly West Bengal (India) and present Bangladesh. The area has been selected as it was a single geographical unit in the period under study.

<sup>2</sup> There are three rulers in Suri dynasty: (1) Sher Shah (1540-1545), (2) Islam Shah Suri (1545-1553) and (3) Adil Shah (1553-1555).

and the Karrani dynasty (1564–1576).<sup>3</sup> The third phase started with Sher Shah Suri (1539-1545), who was the undisputed master in Bihar (a province of India contiguous to Bengal), occupying Bengal and driving out Sultan Ghiyasuddin Muhmud Shah (1533-1538), the last Sultan of Hussain Shahi Dynasty. And hence the 200-year old independent rule of Bengal Sultans ended through the advent of Shar Shah Suri.

However, Sher Shah Suri failed to maintain peace in Bengal for long. Being treated as a political menace, Shar Shah Suri was severely assailed and ousted from Gaur (the then capital of Bengal) by Humayun (1530-1539, 1555-1556), son and successor of the Mughal emperor Babur (1526-1530).

Humayun spent six months in Gaur after his victory, and abandoned himself to pleasure. Taking advantage of Humayun's negligence, Sher Shah Suri blocked his passage to north India, defeated him at the battle of Chausa in 1539, and re-occupied the capital, Gaur. Furthermore, confirming his position in Bengal and Bihar, Shah Suri advanced to north India and occupied Delhi by defeating Humayun in the battle of Bilgram in 1540. By means of this victory, the control of the Indian sub-continent was transferred to the Afghans under the leadership of Sher Shah Suri.<sup>4</sup> Humayun somehow managed to save his life by seeking asylum in the court of the ruler Shah Tahmasp-I (1524–1576) of Persia.<sup>5</sup> During the turmoil, in the period between 1538 and 1540, Bengal was, in effect, under the control of neither Sher Shah Suri nor Humayun. Consequently, the Bhuiyans (local chieftains) of Bengal became independent in their respective areas.<sup>6</sup> The Afghan

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<sup>3</sup> There are four rulers in Karrani dynasty: (1) Taj Khan Karrani: (1564-1566), (2) Suleiman Khan Karrani: (1566-1572), (3) Bayazid Karrani (1572) and (4) Daoud Shah Karrani: (1572- 1576).

<sup>4</sup> Haidar, M., *Tarikh-i- Rashidi*, trans. by N. Elias and E.D. Ross, (London : Curzon Press, 1898), pp.471-80.

<sup>5</sup> Dani, A.H., *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p.166.

<sup>6</sup> Karim, A., *History of Bengal: Mughal Period*, vol. I, (Rajshahi: IBS, 1992), p.118.

rule in India, founded by Sher Shah Suri, did not survive for long. It ended up with the re-capturing of it by Humayun in 1555, especially during the time of Shah Suri's weak successors.

Bengal was, however, under the rule of the Karrani dynasty between 1564 and 1576. This started with Taj Khan Karrani: (1564–1566), an employee of Sher Shah, in 1564. Sulaiman Karrani (1566-1572) succeeded his brother Taj Khan Karrani in 1566 and accepted the authority of Akbar, Humayun's successor (1556 to 1605), to the throne to protect his place in Bengal and in Bihar. Bayazid karrani (1572) succeeded his father Sulaiman Karrani in 1572, but he was killed by his nephew and son-in-law Hansu in the same year. Dawud Shah Karrani (1572–1576) assumed the throne after the death of his brother Bayazid and declared himself independent of Akbar, and assumed for himself the title 'Badsha Alampana Abul Muzaffar Dawud Shah'<sup>7</sup> The audacity of Dawud Shah Karrani instigated Akbar to invade Bengal. Khan-I-Khanan Munim Khan (1574-1575), the Mughal Subahdar( provincial governor) of Emperor Akbar, induced the defeat of Sultan Dawud Shah Karrani at the battle of Tukaroi on 12 April in 1575, and forced him to sign a peace-treaty.<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to take revenge and re-capture Bengal, Dawud Karrani again rose in blazonry in alliance with his Afghan kinsmen and the mighty Bengal Bhuiyans, and confronted the Mughal rulers in 1576. Afterwards on 12<sup>th</sup> July in 1576, Dawud Khan Karrani was defeated and killed by Mughal subahadar Khan Jahan (1575-1578), who was nominated by Akbar after the death of Khan-I-Khanan Munim Khan in 1575. Two centuries of independent rule of Afghan Sultans had been terminated with the death of Dawud Shah Karrani. Thus the Mughal rule got a strong foothold in Bengal during the time of Emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Although the Afghan regime was

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<sup>7</sup> Beveridge, H., 'Note on the Tarikh Salatin Afaghina', *JPSB*, 12 (1916), pp. 297-98.

<sup>8</sup> Karim, p .136.

defunct, their military chiefs together with the Bengal Bhuiyans and Zamindars created a stiff resistance to the consolidation of the Mughal power. At one stage, the emperor Akbar faced a grave crisis. He attempted to conquer the whole of Bengal by sending general after general but without any keen desire of success. Internally the Mughal rule in his time was weakened in Bengal by the upheavals of the Mughal rebel captains while externally it faced a series of attacks by the Bengal Bhuiyans (chieftains), Zaminders (landlords), and Afghan generals. Anti-Mughal forces conspired to place Mirza Hakim, the administrator of Kabul and brother of Emperor Akbar, on the throne.<sup>9</sup> The Mughal rebel captain, Masum Khan Kabuli (1584 and 1599), one of the influential members of the alleged conspiracy against the Mughal authority, joined the Bar-Bhuiyans and their chief Isa Khan Masnad-i-Ala (1578-1599), and reinforced their resistance to the Mughal aggression. Later on Masum Khan Kabuli himself declared independence, acquired the title of Sultan,<sup>10</sup> and fought till the last day of his life against Akbar. Both Isa Khan and Masum Khan Kabuli died within a short span of time, and after their demise, in 1599 Masum Khan's son, Mirza Munim Khan, joined with Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, and continued to resist the entire reign of Akbar. Thus Akbar passed away leaving the conquest of Bengal incomplete.

The Mughal rule in Bengal was preferably more successful during the reign of Jahangir (1605-1627),<sup>11</sup> son of Emperor Akbar. Islam Khan Chishti (1608-1613), a new Subahdar, brought the whole of Bengal (except Chittagong) under Mughal rule by adopting new policy decisions and skillfully implementing them. Thus the period between 1576 and 1612 cannot be properly envisaged as the Mughal period in Bengal,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.166.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmed, S. *Inscription of Bengal*, vol. IV (1233-1855) (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Society, 1960), pp.259-60

<sup>11</sup> Karim, p.32.

but rather it was a period of the rule of different military chiefs and local Bhuiyans and Zamindars. As Abdul Karim puts it:

During the fall of the Afghans and establishment of the Mughal rule in Bengal, for about 36 years, some military chiefs, Bhuiyans or Zamindars kept different parts of Bengal under their control and ruled their territories independently.<sup>12</sup>

However, Islam Khan Chishti's policy strategies include strengthening the flotilla of war-boats, placing this region under a new and efficient admiral, shifting capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka and focusing more on forts and fortifications. By virtue of his tremendous capability of war plans and their operations he managed to defeat the local Bhuiyans and Zaminders and made them surrender to the Mughal authority in such a way that they would never be able to gather further strength to act against the Mughal authority.<sup>13</sup> Also, in his time, the kingdom of Bengal expanded partly towards two neighbouring kingdoms, namely Ahom and Arakan. As S.N. Bhattacharya writes it:

The twenty two years of Bengal history in the region of Jahangir (1605-1627) proved to be a formative period. The leading tendencies of the subsequent history of Mughal Bengal, and the directions in which the currents of political life and foreign relations mainly ran, were determined during this period. As a result of the exertions of a few noted governors, particularly Islam Khan, the whole of Bengal had been brought under the effective rule of the Mughal Emperor, and the province had attained a geographical and political unity unknown for a long time before. But in the process of rounding off the territories of the new province, the government had been brought into direct and immediate contact with two power frontier states, the Ahom kingdom on the north-east and the kingdom of Arakan on the south-east, with both of which it had two ways severe and prolonged warfare of which only the beginnings lie in the reign of Jahangir.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.662.

<sup>14</sup> Bhattacharya, S.N., *History of Bengal*, vol. II, Jadu Nath Sarkar (ed.), Dhaka University, 1948, pp.314-15.

The Mughals were in power in Bengal till the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Mughal power started dilapidating thereafter. During the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), Murshid Quli Khan (1700-1727) was the Subahdar of Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. He established a strong administrative system in this region including Bengal. The capital was shifted from Dhaka to Murshidabad in his time. However, due to the remoteness and thereby less control of imperial authority over Bengal, the Subahders of Bengal were blessed with conducting administrative jobs almost autonomously, and this gradually led them to ruling Bengal independently, assuming the title of Nawab. Murshid Quli Khan laid the foundation of the autonomous Nizamat (*Subah Bangla*) rule in Bengal. Thus Bengal lost its political and economic importance to the imperial administration, and a disconnectivity between imperial authority and the independent Nizamat of Bengal developed over the years which finally ended with the defeat of Nawab Sirajuddaula (1756-1757), the last Nawab of Bengal, to the British East India Company in the battle of Plassey in 1757. Bengal then came under the authority of the British. The topographical condition of Bengal was one of the major constrictions for the Mughals in attending to conquer and control it. Bengal was predominantly a riverine area, and being located in the centre of eastern Bengal, Dhaka was able to command all the big river routes. Situated on higher ground in a low-lying region, Dhaka stands on the northern bank of the River Buriganga. This river, about 26 miles in length, takes off from the River Dhaleswari, a little below Savar, and flows down to the north of Narayanganj; and through these two rivers Dhaka is connected by water with great rivers, namely Ganges (Padma), the Meghna and Brahmaputra.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the network of the river system of Bengal is so extended that through this network the remote parts of the land is accessible. Islam Khan thought of that and decided to use this opportunity in order to

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<sup>15</sup> Karim, A., Origin and Developemnt of Mughal Dhaka', *Dhaka: Past, Present and Future*, ed. by S.U. Ahmed, 60<sup>th</sup> ed., (Dhaka: ASB, 1991), pp. 24 - 42 (p. 26).

intensify the campaign against the rebellious and independent Bara–Bhuiyans (Zamindars), Afghans kingdoms and so to establish Mughal hegemony in Bengal.<sup>16</sup> In view of that goal, Islam Khan transferred the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka. Soon after transferring the capital he decided to strengthen the navy, and for this purpose he requested the emperor Jahangir to send an efficient officer to take over the naval establishment. Dhaka is the place from which he sent soldiers against his enemies in all directions and from which he managed to suppress enemies, to a considerable extent, those who had been devastating lower Bengal. Ultimately the hydrographic condition of the city Dhaka showed its importance both as a strategic and commercial centre, and the choice of Dhaka as capital, proved Islam Khan's great statesmanship.<sup>17</sup>

As S. U. Ahmed puts it:

Once the hegemony was established, Dacca became a provincial capital. It would also, later in the century became the base from which river defense against Portuguese and Magh raids was organized and the Mughal advances north into Cooch Bihar and Assam, and south–east to Chittagong and Arakan were launched.<sup>18</sup>

S.N. Bhattacharya, who next made a detailed study of the subject, suggests that the capital was transferred with a view to restraining the Magh and the Portuguese pirates as well as the rebellious Zamindars and chiefs of lower Bengal.<sup>19</sup> Islam Khan is found to have focused on constructing or repairing forts and fortifications in and around Dhaka in his innovative plans and devices. On this issue, in his *Babaristan-i- Ghaybi*, Mirza Nathan states that:

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<sup>16</sup> Begam, A., 'Forts in Medieval Bengal: An architectural Study ' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rajshahi University, 1992), p. 266.

<sup>17</sup> Karim, A., 'Origin and Developemnt of Mughal Dhaka', pp. 24-42 (p. 27).

<sup>18</sup> Ahmed, S.U., *Dacca: A Study in Urban History and Development*, (London: Centre of South Asian Studies, 1986), p.10.

<sup>19</sup> Bhattacharya, S.N., *Daccu University Studies*, vol. I, (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1935), pp. 36-63.

While Islam Khan was still near Shahjadpur he sent three imperial officers accompanied by a great number of soldiers, boats and subordinate staffs to Dhaka with orders to construct (or repair) the fort of Dhaka.<sup>20</sup>

Also, Mirza Nathan mentions that Islam Khan used Khizirpur fort (located on the western bank of the river Shitalakhya and to the north-east of Narayanganj, and about 9 miles away from Dhaka) as a base of operation against Bara Bhuiyans.<sup>21</sup>

Bengal was under increasing enemy attacks on the eve of Islam Khan's move of the capital to Dhaka. It is in this context, according to Dani that the river forts of the Hajiganj and Sonakanda (located on the eastern bank of the river Shitalakhya, and opposite the Hajiganj fort) were constructed.<sup>22</sup> However, there is strong disagreement as to the date and builder of these forts. Afterwards, during the period of Mir Jumla (1660-1663), Subahdar of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in (1658-1707), Khizirpur fort came to more prominence than before, and he is also found to strengthen the defences of Khizirpur fort to guard against enemy attacks, including Magh's, with the view to protect capital Dhaka.<sup>23</sup> On Hajiganj and Sonakanda forts, A. Karim states:

There is undoubted evidence that these forts were occupied (repaired and strengthened) from time to time by the Mughal Subahdars, Shahbaz Khan, Islam Khan Chisti, Oasim Khan Chisti, Ivrahim Khan Fathjang, Islam Khan Mashhadi and Mir Jumla.<sup>24</sup>

The chain of Mughal river forts was completed by constructing another strategically important fort at Idrakpur area in Munshiganj district on the bank of the river Ichamati, 15 miles south east of Dhaka. According to Dani (1962), it was possibly built by Mir Jumla to check the raids of the Maghs and the Portuguese, who then travelled upward

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<sup>20</sup> Nathan, M., *Baharistan-I- Ghaybi*, M., I., Borah, (tr.), 2 vols, (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936), p.54.

<sup>21</sup> Karim, A. *History of Bengal; Mughal Period*, vol. 2, (Rajshahi: IBS, 1995), p.434.

<sup>22</sup> Dani, pp.225-26.

<sup>23</sup> Karim, vol. 2, p. 435.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

the river Meghna from Chittagong, and plundered the district of Dhaka.<sup>25</sup>In asserting political stability the Mughals studied the geography of this land and gave highest priority to the type of river forts. Thus, the Mughals developed the river forts, which were not rooted in the traditions and conventions of north Indian architecture .<sup>26</sup> The Mughal influence was greatest in the provincial metropolis, where the successive governors erected buildings for their own use. With the new Mughal Monuments, Dhaka changed the appearance of the Bengali architecture. But the building materials were local. The red sand–stone and marble from upper India were not available in Bengal and therefore the provincial governors had to be satisfied with Bengal bricks in building river forts.<sup>27</sup>

From the functional point of view, the Mughal river forts at Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur can be seen as the ‘fortified defence centres’ which were used only for military purposes, while the palace forts (namely the Lalbagh fort, the Zinzira fort) built by the Mughals in Dhaka can be regarded as the city fortifications used for both military and civil administrative purposes. The new type of Mughal forts with artillery platforms sprang up with the systematic development of defence devices which were directly related to arms and ammunitions. Naturally during the Mughal rule in Bengal the siege type of fort did not grow as it had lost its significance altogether with the advent of gunpowder and modern weapons.<sup>28</sup>

It thus appears that the history of the Mughal river forts, beginning from the establishment of Dhaka as the Mughal capital during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) to that of Aurangzeb (1658–1707), lasted just more than a century. During

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<sup>25</sup> Dani. A. , *Dacca : A Record of its Changing Fortunes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn ( Dacca: Safiya Dani, 1962), p.259.

<sup>26</sup> Begam, A, ‘Forts in Medieval Bengal: An Architectural Study’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rajshahi University, 1992), p. 284.

<sup>27</sup> Dani., *Muslim Architecture*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> Begam, A., ‘Forts in Medieval Bengal : An architectural Study ’ ( unpublished doctoral thesis, Rajshahi university ,1992 ), p.418

this period, as has been stated, river forts evolved as the basic military device developed by the Mughal's for resisting their enemies, confirming the use of the imperial architectural style in the context of the defense of Bengal. Nevertheless, despite the disagreement about date and builders, a unity is noticed in all of the river forts, and that is, the defence facilities (e.g. provision of artillery platform, loopholes, corner bastions and so on), which are the basic characteristics of the type of military building architecture.

## 2.2 Economic History

Bangladesh, being a place with a favourable geographical integration, enjoyed an economic prosperity from time immemorial. Direct river communication between Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal) and North India, and also easy communication between numerous places within this land (through different major rivers and their many distributaries) had contributed to a large extent to the growth of internal traders through reducing the cost for the transport of her products. In addition, being located at the fountainhead of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh took the privilege of maintaining sea-borne trade and commerce, with the first instance recorded around the 2<sup>nd</sup> B.C.<sup>29</sup>

Among the different phases of progress in trade and commerce in Bengal, the development that occurred during the Mughal regime was distinct. This (glorious) era begins with the establishment of the Mughal capital at Dhaka by Islam Khan in (the early years of seventeenth century) 1610. Dhaka gradually achieved great commercial importance and became the most reputed trading centre during this period. From an almost insignificant position (a military outpost of the Mughals and the headquarters of their *Thanadar*) Dhaka, according to A. H. Dani, became the queen of the cities of Eastern India.<sup>30</sup> The main reasons for this significance were not only its strategic importance as the capital of what was then Bengal but also its capability of monopolizing the trade and commerce of Bengal.

This status was previously held [however] by the neighboring inland port city of Sonargoan 'which was well defined by the confluence of the Sitalakhya, the Dhaleswary

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<sup>29</sup> Chaudhuri, S., *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal, 1650-1720* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1975), pp. 178-189.

<sup>30</sup> Dani, A.H., *Dacca: a Record of its Changing Fortunes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Dacca: Safiya Dani, 1962), p.31.

and the Meghna giving a triangular shape to the southern tip of the track.<sup>31</sup> Sonargaon maintained the dominant position in Bengal for about two hundred years throughout the independent Sultanate of Bengal (1338-1538). Of two centuries of governance, the ten-year ruling of Sultan Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah (1338-1349) was remarkable because of Shah's endeavour in developing trade and commerce between Bengal and South-East Asia.

Ibn Battuta (1304-1377) was a Moroccan traveller who visited Sonargaon during Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah's regime (1338-1349) in about 1345. Battuta's account includes information on the profusion of food grains and low-priced commodities of every day use. As Muazzam Hussain Khan puts it:

He [Ibn Battuta] refers to the brisk internal and external trade of this region. He noticed marketplaces on the banks of the rivers and innumerable boats carrying men and merchandise. He has mentioned the practice of beating drums from every boat on the river as a signal for identifying inland merchant boats and for detecting stranger boats as a safeguard against piracy. He also mentions the sea-borne trade-links of Sonargaon with China, Java and Maldives. In view of the abundance of the necessaries of life and its soothing scenery on one hand, and the wet atmosphere and oppressive vapour bath on the other, the traveller justifies the attitude of foreigners who call Bangladesh a *dozakh-i-pur az n'imat*, which means an inferno full of gifts.<sup>32</sup>

Dani cites from the record of Chinese trade missions which describe Sonargaon as:

A walled place with tanks, streets, bazar and which carries on a business in all kinds of goods... [A]ll goods are collected here and distributed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chowdhury, A. M., 'Site and Surroundings', *Sonargaon-Panam*, ed. by A.B.M Husain, (Dhaka : Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1997), pp.1-31 ( p.4)

<sup>32</sup> Muazzam Hussain Khan, 'Ibn Battuta', in Sirajul Islam (ed) *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2003). Available at <http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/Preface.htm>

<sup>33</sup> *Vishwabharati Annals*, vol. 1, pp. 96-134.

In his book *The Rise of Islam and the Frontier, 1204-1760*, Richard M. Eaton cites Rockhill who maintains that:

substantial qualities of treasures were imported in exchange for locally manufactured for export. As early as 1415 we hear of Chinese trade missions bringing gold and silver into the delta, in addition to satins, silks, and porcelain.<sup>34</sup>

Also Eaton cites Rockhill who mentions that:

A decade later another Chinese visitor remarked that long-distance merchants in Bengal settled their accounts with *tankas*. The pattern continued throughout the next century.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore Eaton mentions from the same source about Bengal's production of fine cotton cloths (muslins), rugs, veils of various colour, gauzes ( a thin translucent fabric of silk, linen, or cotton), material of turbans, embroidered silk and brocaded taffetas between 1415 and 1432.<sup>36</sup>

Ralph Fitch, an English traveller and trader, visited Sonargaon in about 1586 and wrote that:

Sonargaon is a town six leagues from Stripur, where there is the best and finest cloth [Muslin] made of cotton that is in all India. The chief king of all those countries is called Isa Khan.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Eaton, R., M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760)* (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>35</sup> Rockhill, Notes on the Relations, cited in Eaton, R., M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760)* (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.437-40, 443-44.

<sup>37</sup> Fitch, R., *Early Travels in India (1583-1619)*, ed. by Foster, William (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 25.

Ralph Fitch's narratives also include information about such towns and ports as Tanda, Hughli, Satgaon, Chittagong, Bakerganj, Sripur, as well as the Sundarbans (currently recognized as the largest mangrove forest on earth) and the course of the River Ganges in addition to Sonargaon, which eventually proved useful to the English East India Company. Sonargaon was at the height of its power(s) towards the last half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century under the local chieftain Isa Khan; but although it was short lived, for in 1608 Sonargaon's economic importance was destroyed through the defeat of Isa Khan's son Musa Khan by the force of the Mughal governor Islam Khan (1608-1613) in (1611).

Islam Khan crushed Sonargaon and established his capital at Dhaka (which he named Jahangirnagar), although it is not clear exactly why he deserted Sonargaon and built a new capital at Dhaka. Dani's account, however, on this issue, is worth mentioning here. He maintains that Sonargaon lost its importance because of the shifting of the course of the river Meghna,<sup>38</sup> although as a place of cotton fabrics production it managed to retain its own position till the foreign competition ruined its trade.<sup>39</sup> Muazzam Hussain Khan enlarged this view by saying that Sonargaon's prosperity continued up until the rise of Dhaka not only as a producer of cotton but also as the administrative centre of southeastern Bengal.<sup>40</sup>

Here Dani's account about the relationship between 'cotton fabrics', shifting of the course of the river Meghna and the commercial importance of Sonargaon seems more convincing. Infact Sonargaon's 'position on the bank of the Meghna gave it the

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<sup>38</sup> Dani, p.32.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>40</sup> Khan, M. H., 'Ibn Batuta', in Sirajul Islam (ed) *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2003)  
Available at <http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/Preface.htm>

first importance as an inland port town in the medieval history of Bengal<sup>41</sup> It is also a fact that the course of the river Meghna has shifted. Thus, given this one can reasonably surmise, as has been assumed by Dani, that the change in the course of the river Meghna adversely affected the Sonargaon-based 'cotton fabrics' trade, leading its traders either to discontinue their business or relocate their factories elsewhere, in all probability to the neighboring town Dhaka, which was strategically important being situated on the bank of the river Buriganga. Similarly reduced flow of the river Brahmaputra may have also influenced the commercial importance of Sonargaon which in turn provides persuasive support for Dani's account on the issue in question.

The first and main commercial headquarters to start trade and commerce in Dhaka was the Shah Bandar (an inland customs house). Their headquarters were used by the Mughal provincial authority to collect inland customs. The authority used to record all kind of goods imported or exported with the name of merchants, their consignments and value, the date of entry, amount of duty, place of origin of the cargo and its destination. The important imported items included jute, unrefined sugar, mustard seed, oil, honey, wax, ivory, shell lack, ghee, betel nut, cloths, linseed, cheese, turmeric and mats. These items were imported from different places of Eastern Bengal as such, namely, Chandpur, Sylhet, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Bhawal, Kishoreganj, Barisal, Comilla, Habiganj, Nayarhat, Mymenshing, and Mirzapur. A certain amount of the commodities were used for the consumption of the city dwellers, and the remaining amount distributed to other places through the inland markets.<sup>42</sup>

There are, however, disagreements among the scholars as to the location of Shah Bandar. According to Abdul Karim, Shah Bandar was situated at Mirpur in Dhaka

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<sup>41</sup> Dani, p.256.

<sup>42</sup> Mohsin, K.M., 'Commercial and Industrial Aspects of Dhaka in the Eighteenth Century', ed. by S.U. Ahmed, *Dhaka Past Present Future*, (Dhaka : Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1991), pp. 64 –73, (p.68).

although he does not mention the source of this claim.<sup>43</sup> A provincial council review proceeding, however, is supportive of Karim's position. This proceeding involves a petition of the 'zaminders' (landlords), 'qanungos' (employees of the land registration office) and 'dandidars' (wholesaler or reseller), which refers to Shah Bandar being situated at Mirpur and dependent on Dhaka.<sup>44</sup> S.M. Taifoor and A. H. Dani maintain an alternative view regarding its site. S.M. Taifoor, on the affirmation of James Taylor says that Shah Bandar was the chief port town of the Pathans and the Mughals and was located on the opposite side of Narayanganj beyond the River Shitalakhya.<sup>45</sup> The list of trading items, according to Taifoor, involved salt, tobacco, betel- nuts, metal and timber and several wooden sloops were employed in carrying them.<sup>46</sup>

Due to the lack of any material or original source of references, here both the accounts have been given based on secondary sources. Thus the possibility of resolving the disagreement relating to location of Shah Bandar is rather difficult. However, from the record of chaukis (customs posts), it can be surmised that there were a large number of principal and subordinate stations, but all of them were subordinate to Shah Bandar.<sup>47</sup>

Owing to its famous cotton-fabrics products, Dhaka managed to attract a significantly large number of foreigners, and the list of exported items included betel-nut, pulses, gram, oil, ghee, cheese, ivory, shellack, jute bags, ginger, wooden furniture, timber, bamboo and mats alongside the famous fine cotton fabrics. Those items were

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<sup>43</sup> Karim, A., *Dacca the Mughal Capital* (Dhaka : Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1964), pp.38, 54-55 and 63

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, J., *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca* (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1840), pp. 99-100.

<sup>45</sup> Dani, A.H., *Dacca: A record of its Changing Fortunes (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, (Safiya S. Dani., Dacca, 1962 ), pp.110-111, Taifoor, S M., *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ( Dhaka: Lulu Bilquis Banu and others, 1956), p.35 (note-1)

<sup>46</sup> Taifoor, S.M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, Revised and Enlarged Second Edition, (Dhaka: S.M. Perwez,1956) p.47

<sup>47</sup> Mohsin, p. 69.

sent through Shahbandar mainly to Patna, Calcutta, and Murshidabad. A remarkable thing is that all the manufacturers of fine cotton fabrics, particularly ‘muslins’, were positioned within the area Dhaka district, namely at ‘Dhaka city, Sonargaon, Dhamrai, Teetabari (on the left bank of the Shitalakhya river), Jangalbari (left bank of the Brahmaputra), Bajitpur (about 18 miles from Jangalbari) and Bikrampur. Well; it may be that this is the major reason for Dhaka and Sonargaon being so famous for textile, particularly for muslin.’<sup>48</sup>

Sebastain Manrique (1629 –1648), a Portuguese from Oporto, came to Bengal on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1629 and visited Hijli (There were Portuguese settlements on the sea – shore of modern Medinipur district) and Dianga (Portuguese settlement opposite Chittagong). His account, as mentioned by many scholars including Abdul Karim, is very useful for reconstructing the economic and social history of Bengal. On commercial prosperity, Manrique writes:

Many strange nations resort to this city on account of its vast and commerce in great variety of commodities, which are produced in profusion in the rich and fertile lands of this region...The vast pecuniary advantages derived by the Emperors and Mogol Rulers from this city are incredible...what added materially to the riches of this city was the juxtaposition of the fertile and pleasant principalities of Bacala [Bakarganj district], Solimanvas [Sulaimanabad in the west Bakarganj], and Catrabo [Katrabuh in Narayanganj].<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore on the immensity of foreign trade he maintains that:

So expensive is the trade that over one hundred vessels are yearly loaded up in the port of Bangala with only rice, suger, fats, oils, wax and other similar articles...The finest and richest muslins are produced in this country, from fifty to sixty yards long and seven to eight hand-breadths wide, with borders of gold and silver or coloured silks. So fine, indeed, are the muslins that merchants place them in hollow bamboos, about two spans long, and thus

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<sup>48</sup> Karim, A., *Dhakai Muslin (in Bengal)* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1965), pp. 1-16

<sup>49</sup> Manrique, F. S., *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique: 1629-1643*, vol. I, (tr.) C. E. Luard (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927), pp. 56-57

secured, carry them throughout Corazane[Khorasan], Persia, Turkey, and many other countries.<sup>50</sup>

Francois Bernier (1625-1688), a French traveller, came to Dhaka at the outset of the ruling period of the Mughal governor Shaista Khan (1663-1678 and 1680-1688). As to the amazing quality of cloth of Dhaka, he writes that there is in Dhaka such quality of cloth that it can be called storehouse for that kind of merchandises.<sup>51</sup> The fact of the matter is that the finest quality muslin was favourable to the Mughal rulers and their family members, and thus the imperial Mughal authority put especial attention to the manufacturers of muslins, and also built a number of state- owned factories at Dhaka.<sup>52</sup> Due to its geographical location, Dhaka, particularly Shah Bandar, enjoyed commercial importance from the beginning of Mughal conquest of Bengal, which continued to enjoy commercial importance under subsequent Mughal governors till 1717(except for a gap between 1639 and 1659 when prince Shah Shuja, the Mughal viceroy moved his residence from Dhaka to Rajmahal on political and his personal ground).

According to another European traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who visited Dhaka in 1666, notes that the merchants left Rajmahal for Dhaka to protect their trades because the river, having taken another course, was then over half a league from the city of Rajmahal. As Tavernier puts it:

Merchants have removed themselves to Dacca, which is at present a large city, and a town of great trade.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, J., *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca* (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1840) p.5; and Karim, pp.69-98.

<sup>52</sup> Karim, p.191.

<sup>53</sup> Tavernier, J.B., *Travels in India*, (tr.) by V. Ball & ed. by W. Crook, 2nd edi. (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p.100.

During the period of the Mughal governor Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang (1617-1624), the 'Bhatti' of East Bengal reached a far greater level of agricultural productivity. The surplus grain was exported from Bengal through two principal seaports, Chittagong in the East and Satgaon in the West, via the Indian Ocean to the places as far West as Goa and as far East as the Moluccas in Southeast Asia.

The Mughal governor Amirul Umra Nawab Shaista Khan (1663-1678 and 1680-1688) brought about a significant change in the traders' community of Dhaka by inviting and involving the Portuguese. They settled in Sandwip and in Arakan, where they were confined, trading in salt in Loricol near Dhaka (and finally won over them in Sandwip), and arranging them a place to live in Dhaka, which is known as 'Fringi bazar' (situated about 12 miles from the city, on the bank of the river Ichamati), upon their positive response to his (Shaista Khan) proposal.<sup>54</sup>

Another most important attainment of the Mughal history of Bengal during the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan is the conquest of Chittagong (the chief port of the whole eastern India) from the Arakanese rulers in 1666. For Chittagong was the viable sea port in Bengal for foreign trade. Chittagong was commercially connected with the distant regions of Europe, the Middle East and Far East. During the medieval period Chittagong became one of the chief centres of the import and export trade. Caesar Frederick writes that he saw more than eighteen ships anchored at Chittagong in 1567. The principal items of export from Chittagong, he writes, were Indian great store of rice, very great quantities of bombast cloth of every sort, sugar, corn and money with other

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<sup>54</sup> Talish, S., cited in 'The Conquest of Chatgaon', *JASB*, 1907, p.407.

merchandise. Unfortunately no precise idea of the pattern of foreign trade in Chittagong during the Sultanate period descended on us.<sup>55</sup>

Chittagong was renowned for its excellent harbour and port facilities for a long time. The Muslim merchants from the eastern hemisphere came long before the Portuguese and monopolized the foreign trade in Chittagong. De Silveira, who visited Chittagong in 1518, noted that he saw numerous Muslim merchants and their trading vessels in Chittagong port. J.J.A. Campos also notes that after that ‘it became an established custom from the time of Silveira’s visit to Bengal (1518) to send annually (to Bengal) a Portuguese ship with merchandise’<sup>56</sup>, and by 1531 the number of vessels were increased up to seventeen.<sup>57</sup>

A rough idea of the value of the Portuguese trade in Bengal could be formed from the fact that they paid over Rupees 100,000 yearly as customs duties to the Mughals at the rate of 2.5 percent on the value of goods exported and imported. In other words, the annual value of their trade in Bengal was around Rupees 4 million. Thus undoubtedly the Portuguese carried on a very lucrative trade in Bengal and almost monopolized the external as well as coastal trade while in inland trade they were formidable competitors of the country merchants and other foreigners.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Qanungo, S.B., *A History of Chittagong*, vol.1, (Chittagong: Dipankar Qanungo, 1988), p.614.

<sup>56</sup> Campos J.J. A., *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, (London: Butterworth & Co, 1919), p.30.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

<sup>58</sup> Chowdhury, S., ‘Medieval Trade and Commerce’, in Sirajul Islam (ed) *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2003)  
Available at <http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/Preface.htm>

The Mughal conquest of Chittagong contributed significantly to the diminution of more than hundred years of piratical activities of the Portuguese and the Maghs of Arakan in the coastal districts of Bengal.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, Shaista Khan invited and won the consent of the Dutch (who had their factory by the side of the river Buriganga on which the Mitford Hospital is positioned now and also had a garden house at Tejgoan in Dhaka) with the view to combating pirates and strengthening contemporary trade and commerce. The French also arrived Dhaka about 1682 and established a factory at Dhaka where the Ahsan Manzil is positioned now, acquiring a great deal of property, and also contributing to the expansion of trade and commerce in Dhaka.

Similar to the European companies, Asians came from Armenia, Arabia, Persia and different parts of the subcontinent and contributed to the eastern Bengal economy as well. Also the presence of local merchants and the existence of a large number of people belonging to various professional and artisan classes also contributed to this economy. But the control of the trade and commerce of the Mughal capital Dhaka came to an end with the shifting of provincial capital to Murshidabad by the Mughal governor Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) in 1717, and the development of Pachotrabandar as the main trading centre instead.

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<sup>59</sup> Karim, vol. 2, p.5

## Chapter Three

### River Systems and Historical Changes in the Systems

#### 3.1 Major River Systems

Bangladesh is bounded by disconnected hill systems to the west, north, and east (i.e. by the Rajmahal Hills to the west, the Himalayas to the north and the Tippera Hills and Chittagong Hills to the east) and by the Bay of Bengal to the south. The largest river systems of South Asia, namely the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and the Meghna, drain into the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh.

The Brahmaputra originates at the snout of a glacier in the Kailas Range of the Himalayas, in south-western Tibet. The river originates at an altitude of about 5300m<sup>1</sup> and then flows 1100km eastward across the Tibetan Plateau as the Tsangpo River, before turning south to cross the east-west trending ranges of the Himalayas. The ranges crossed include the Greater Himalaya (average altitude 6000m), Middle Himalayas (average altitude 3000-5000m) and the Sub-Himalayas (average altitude 1000-2000m). The river breaks through these ranges via a series of deep, narrow gorges before entering the Vale of Assam in India. After travelling 700km in a south-westerly direction in the Assam valley, the river turns south again to enter Bangladesh from the north and flows to the south for about 170km to join the other major river, the Ganges, at Aricha, 70km west of the capital city Dhaka. Within Bangladesh, the length between the border and its

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<sup>1</sup> Goswami, D.C., 'Fluvial Regime and Flood Hydrology of the Brahmaputra River', *Memoir Geological Society of India*, 41 (1998), pp. 53-75.

confluence with the Ganges at Aricha is approximately 220km, which has been acknowledged as the Jamuna River.

The Jamuna is one of the largest rivers in the world, ranking fifth in terms of discharge and eleventh in terms of drainage area.<sup>2</sup> The annual hydrograph of the river is 25, characterised by low flows in winter, between January and March, and high flows in summer, between July and September. The high flow occurs in the summer season due to a combination of overflow of melting snow from the Himalayas and during monsoon rainfall in India and Bangladesh.

Originating in the Gangotri glacier at an altitude of about 3,900m in the Himalayas, the Ganges, the largest river in South Asia, flow east-south-easterly for about 212km from the Indian border to its confluence with the Brahmaputra (Jamuna).

The confluence of the river Brahmaputra and the Ganges downstream is known as the Padma. The Padma flows southeast for about 100km before its confluence with the Meghna River. The further combined flow is known as the Lower Meghna River, which drains south to enter the Bay of Bengal.

The Lower Meghna River is a tidally affected river. The hydraulics of flow is influenced by tides in the Bay of Bengal, especially during the dry season. Conversely, during the summer-monsoon season the influence of the tide becomes feeble. The average annual flood discharge in the Lower Meghna River is about 97,000 m<sup>3</sup>s<sup>-1</sup> and like the Padma River, it has a relatively broad flood extremum.

The Meghna river systems, however, can be divided into two sub-systems: the Surma-Meghna river systems and the Padma-Meghna river systems. The Surma-Meghna

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<sup>2</sup> Thorne, C.R., Russel, A.P.G. and Alam, M.K., ' Planform Pattern and Channel Evaluation of the Brahmaputra River, Bangladesh,' *Braided Rivers* ed. by J.L. Best and C.S. Bristow, No. 75 ( London : Geological Society of London Special Publication, 1993), pp. 257-276.

river system flows from the northeastern border with India to Chandpur, where it joins the Padma. The Surma-Meghna at 669km is considerably the longest river in Bangladesh, formed by the union of six lesser rivers. Below the city of Kalipur it is known as the Meghna. The Padma-Meghna river system flows from the confluence point of the Padma and Meghna, which is 145 kilometers to the Bay of Bengal.

This mighty network of four river systems flowing through the Bangladesh Plain drains an area of some 1.5 million square kilometers. The numerous channels of the Padma-Meghna, its distributaries, and smaller parallel rivers that flow into the Bay of Bengal, are referred to as the Mouths of the Ganges. Like the Jamuna, the Padma-Meghna and other estuaries on the Bay of Bengal are also known for their many *chars* (tracts of land/mini islands).

A fifth river system, not connected to the other four, is the Karnaphuli. Flowing through the region of Chittagong and the Chittagong Hills, it cuts across the hills and runs rapidly downhill to the west and southwest and then to the sea. The Feni, Karnaphuli, Sangu, and Matamuhari--an aggregate of some 420 kilometers--are the main rivers in the region. The port of Chittagong is situated on the banks of the Karnaphuli. The Karnaphuli Reservoir and Karnaphuli Dam are located in this area. The dam impounds the Karnaphuli River's waters in the reservoir for the generation of hydroelectric power.

### 3.2 Historical Changes in the Systems

The movements of the larger rivers across the floodplains are crucial for our understanding of changes of political, economic and environmental conditions of Bangladesh in historic times. The Brahmaputra was dominant in constituting the central part of Bangladesh. The sediment deposited by the river Brahmaputra through flowing water, especially soil formed in river valleys and deltas from material washed down by this river, created the floodplains of Jamalpur, Tangail, Mymensingh, Kishorgonj and Narsingdi districts. In the west the Bengali-Karotoya floodplain was formed by sediments from both the Tista and the Brahmaputra. It is conjectured that the main channel of the Brahmaputra shifted from west of the Madhupur Tract to its east and back again several times.<sup>3</sup> What is fairly certain is that in the past several thousand years this river flowed to the east of the Madhupur Tract. A major earthquake in 1772 tilted the valley between the two Pleistocene terraces and possibly raised the level of the floodplains in Mymensingh district. These changes were not catastrophic but sufficient to divert most of the flow into the river. It took some thirty years to complete the build up of these channels into the main stream of the Brahmaputra.

According to this view, the abandonment by the Brahmaputra river of its course to the east of Madhupur in favour of its present course, the avulsion of the Teesta river to join the Brahmaputra and the systematic shifting of the mouths of the Ganges from the west to east, may all be explained as responses to the shorter distance to the sea and,

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<sup>3</sup> Rashid, H., 'Land and People: Change in Environmental Conditions', in *Archaeological Heritage* ed. by S. M. Rahman ( Dhaka : Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2007), pp. 9-19 (p.16 )

hence, steeper gradient offered by a course along the ‘*zone of weakness*’.<sup>4</sup> Support this view, Goodbred et al. maintain that when the Brahmaputra River changed its course in the late 19th century it was not the first time that it had occupied the ‘zone of weakness’ and they suggest that its course may shift again in the future, including the possibility of the river reverting to its former course through the Sylhet Basin.<sup>5</sup>

C.S. Bristow suggests that the avulsion of the river Brahmaputra was gradual rather than instantaneous and hence the new course of this river has changed from ‘sinuous’ to ‘braided’. According to him it took 100 years to have changed into its present course.<sup>6</sup>

There is no agreement among the scientists concerning exactly when, how and why the avulsion occurred. In this context, use of this term should not be taken then to indicate that the shift occurred during a single event or even within a few years. For example, in 1916, Hirst suggested that the avulsion took place gradually over a sixty-year period.<sup>7</sup> What is known is that shifting did not begin in earnest earlier than 1776 because Major Rennell’s map of that date clearly shows the Brahmaputra flowing east of the Madhupur, along the present course of the Old Brahmaputra River. It is also clear that the shifting of the main course had been accomplished by 1830, as Colonel Wilcox’s map of that date indicates that the main flow had been diverted to form the Jamuna, to the west of the Madhupur block.

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<sup>4</sup> Sarkar, M.H., ‘Morphological Research of the Brahmaputra–Padma-Lower Meghna River System to the Assam Earthquake of 1950’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Nottingham University, 2008), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Goodbred Jr., S.L., Kuehl, S.A., Stecler, M.S. and Sarker, M.H., 2003; ‘Controls on facies distribution and stratigraphic preservation in the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta sequence,’ *Sedimentary Geology*, vol. 155 (2003), pp.301-316.

<sup>6</sup> Bristow, C.S., ‘Avulsion, River Metamorphosis and Reworking by under-fit Stream: a Modern Example from the Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh and a Possible Ancient Example in the Spanish Pyrenees,’ *Spec. Publs int. Ass. Sediment*, 28 (1999), pp. 221-230.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, J. P. and McIntire, W.G., ‘Quaternary Geology of the Bengal Basin, East Pakistan and India,’ *Bulletin of the Geological Society of America*, vol. 70 (1959), pp.319-342

Regarding how the shift occurred, writing in 1810, Buchanan Hamilton noted that the Brahmaputra was at that time ‘threatening to shift westwards along the course of Konni (or Jennai) river’<sup>8</sup> and for many years the popular opinion was that this threat was realised in the late 18th century when, ‘the Brahmaputra started to divert the flow through the Jennai River’. However, this opinion has recently been challenged<sup>9</sup> on the basis that both on Rennell’s map of 1776 and modern maps the Jennai River is located to the east of the town of Dewanganj while, following its avulsion, the Brahmaputra occupied a channel west of Dewanganj.

Based on these sources and analyses, it may be concluded that the long-term evolution of the Jamuna since 1830 has progressed through westward migration, widening and planiform metamorphosis following the creation of the river by avulsion. Initially, the Jamuna displayed a meandering planiform that incrementally shifted westwards, but during the twentieth century the river widened and became braided, although its braid plain retained a sinuous form. During the last three decades of the twentieth century the rate of widening accelerated while westward migration slackened to effectively zero.

The main course of the Ganges, which had formerly coursed down to what is now the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel in west Bengal, was replaced in turn by the Bhairab, the Mathabhanga, the Garai-Madhumati, the Arialkha, and finally the present day Padma-Meghna system. The active stage of delta-formation thus migrated south-eastwards surpassing time and space, leaving behind the rivers in the old delta, now represented by Murshidabad, Nadia and Jessore with the Goalunda Sub-Division of

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<sup>8</sup> Fergusson, J., ‘On Recent Changes in the Delta of the Ganges,’ *The Proceedings of the Geologists’ Association*, XIX (1863), pp. 321-353

<sup>9</sup> Bristow, *Op.Cit* in note 6.

Faridpur, to languish or decay.<sup>10</sup> Williams first described recent changes in the course of the Ganges and their inter-relationship with the evolution of the Ganges Delta. He concluded that about 500 years ago the Ganges was flowing along what is now the course of the Hoogly River, with the Bhairab River being one of the several large left-bank distributaries of the Ganges.<sup>11</sup> As the Delta's active portion gravitated eastward, the regions in the west, which received diminishing levels of fresh water and silt, gradually became moribund. Cities and habitations along the banks of abandoned channels declined as diseases associated with stagnant waters took hold of local communities. As Eaton puts it:

the delta as a whole experienced a gradual eastward movement of civilization as pioneers in the more ecologically active regions cut virgin forests, thereby throwing open a widening zone for field agriculture.<sup>12</sup>

As contemporary European maps show, it was in the sixteenth century that the great Ganges river system, abandoning its former channels in western and southern Bengal, linked up with the Padma, enabling its main course to flow directly into the heart of the east. As early as in 1567 the Venetian traveller Cesare Federici observed that ships were unable to sail north of Satgaon on the old Ganges, i.e, today's Bhagirathi-Hooghly in West Bengal. About the same time the Ganges silted up and abandoned its channels above Gaur, as a result of which that venerable capital of the Sultanate, only recently occupied by Akbar's forces, suffered a devastating epidemic and had to be abandoned. In 1574 Abul-Fazal remarked that the Ganges River had fractioned into two branches at

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<sup>10</sup> Eaton, R. M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760)*, (London: University of California Press, 1993), p.195.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, C.A., *History of the Rivers in the Ganges Delta 1750-1918*, (Dhaka: Bengal Secretariat press, 1966), p.96.

<sup>12</sup> Eaton, *Op.Cit* in note 10.

the Afghan capital of Tanda; one branch flowing south to Satgaon and the other flowing east toward Sonargaon and Chittagong. In the seventeenth century the former branch continued to decay as progressively more of its water was captured by the channels flowing to the east, to the point where by 1666 this branch had become altogether unnavigable.

To the east, however, these changes had the opposite effect. With the main waters of the Ganges now pouring through the channel of the Padma River, the combined Ganges-Padma system linked eastern Bengal with North India at the very moment of Bengal's political integration with the Mughal Empire. Geographic and political integration was swiftly followed by economic integration, for direct river communication between East Bengal Products, especially textiles and foodstuffs, from the frontier to the imperial metropolises.

The river Meghna, its distributaries, and smaller parallel rivers that flow into the Bay of Bengal, are referred to as the centre of river traffic to all parts of Bengal including the sea. This gives this tract of land the geophysical importance, capitalizing on which the city of Sonargaon flourished in the medieval period. Sonargaon (the medieval capital of eastern Bengal survives only in the name of Sonargaon, which is at present the name a Thana in the district of Narayanganj) was well defined by the confluence of the Sitalakhya, the Dhaleswari and the Meghna, giving a triangular shape to the southern tip of the tract.

The Menikhali, a small rivulet, after emerging from the Brahmaputra, runs from Kaikar Tek in a slightly north-easterly direction, forming the southern boundary of the Mograpara union, and joins the Meghna near Baidher Bazar. In the southern part of the Bandar Thana there is a canal, the Trivent Khal, which starts from the Sitalakhya near

Sonakanda fort and runs in a north-easterly direction to join the Brahmaputra slightly below Kaikar Tek. These two waterways accorded connection between the Meghna and the Sitalakhya via the Brahmaputra and thereby ensured easy communication throughout the year. This communication advantage made Sonargaon the chief centre of interest in the medieval period.

Sir Alexander Cunningham in his report of a tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879-80 located Sonargaon 3km to the north of an old branch of the Meghna River, and 5 km to the west of the present course of the stream. When the site was first selected, the Brahmaputra flowed 5km to the west, between the Lakhya River and the present course of the Meghna, suggesting it as a most favourable position for monopolizing the commerce of all the rich countries to the north.

However, after the establishment of the Mughal capital at Jahangirnagar (Dhaka) the political importance of Sonargaon was ruined. But why did this happen? If we observe carefully, we will see that value and lack of it of Sonargaon as a capital was dependent on its 'communication facilities'. The Brahmaputra, at present a rather thin flow, runs in a southerly direction forming the boundary between the Sonargaon Thana and the Bandar Thana which lies to its west. The Shitalakhya flows almost parallel to the Brahmaputra Stream, a few miles to the west, forming a dividing line between the Bandar Thana, Narayanganj, which lies on the western bank of the Shitalakhya. Given this it can well be assumed that there is a connection between the transfer of the capital from Sonargaon to Dhaka and the gradual decay of the communication facilities due to the poor flow of the River Brahmaputra.

On every occasion, the reason for transfer of the capital of Bengal from one place to another was the shifting of river course and the decline of sanitary conditions.

Interestingly all the capitals of Bengal were situated on the bank of the Ganges river systems.

Given this, it could be assumed that the political, economic and cultural changes that took place post-sixteenth century were significantly influenced by the eco-demographic, particularly the changes in the great river systems. Thus a plausible study of the advent of Mughal authority in Bangladesh (i.e. the ‘new’ or ‘active’ Bengal delta) involves a thorough study of the changes in the river systems. In this context Eaton’s observation can be cited who maintains that ‘the Ganges River completed its eastward shift into the Padma system at the very time – the late sixteenth century – when Mughals’ power was becoming consolidated in the region’<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Eaton, *Op.Cit* in note 10 (p. 227).

## Chapter Four

### Descriptions and Discussion of the River Forts: Architectural Relationship of the River Forts with Other Buildings of the Period

#### 4.1 The Hajiganj, the Sonakanda and the Idrakpur River Forts: Description and Discussion

##### 4.1.1 Hajiganj River Fort

23°38'00.24"N 90°30'46.45"E

**Location:**

Located at Narayanganj Sadar Upazila under Narayanganj district, the Hajiganj fort stands on the western bank of the River Shitalakhya, just at the point where the old Buriganga discharged into it. This area is the meeting point of the Shitalakhya and the old Brahmaputra rivers. The fort acquires its present name from the name of the region of Hajiganj. The area of Hajiganj was formerly known as Khizirpur. It is 14.68 km from the capital, Dhaka.

**Description:**

The Hajiganj fort is entirely constructed with brick and covered with plaster. The fort area is 1.52m higher than the surrounding ground level, and extends from east to west. It is hexagonal in plan. The entire surrounding wall of the fort is about 0.91m thick and about 1.83m high. Some 1.22m above the ground level on the inside, the wall is provided with a projecting rampart walk, which is nearly 0.61m wide and was used for the operation of muskets against the enemies.

The north and south walls measure 44.4m. The other four sides of this fort are almost of same length, measuring 36.1m. The fort has circular bastions at six corners, of

which three are larger and of the same size (positioned in along the walls of southern and eastern side), measuring 9.04m in diameter, while the other three (positioned in along the walls in the north and north-south sides) are comparatively smaller but also equal in size, measuring 3.95m in diameter. There is a seven-step pyramidal artillery platform situated in front of the south-east corner bastion within the area on the southern side, making it apparent that the gun platforms at Hajiganj fort are aimed south (presumably over the former course of the river which cut across from the Sitalakhya to the Buriganga).

The only gateway of this fort is positioned in the middle of the northern wall. It is a four-centred archway, and is placed within a rectangular frame. There are several plastered panels on both sides of the gateway. The top of the gateway is decorated with merlons. The gateway comprises an inner and an outer staircase. The outer staircase has a flight of eighteen steps, measuring 5.07m wide (provided with two wide side walls), while the inner staircase has a flight of eight steps, measuring 3.4m wide, and the interior archway is 19.16m high and 15.92m wide. The arched gateway is embellished with rectangular niches. The gateway was, apparently, held by a heavy bolt, now missing; two sockets for a wheel (from which the heavy bolt might have drawn out) remain in the middle of the inner walls at the entrance.

There is a barren-locus standi, grandiloquent tower with spiral stairs of brickwork in the eastern corner of the fort ground. This is the only internal structure within the fort area. This tower is now under renovation. A construction of a large plinth with three pillars and a staircase has been found alongside the north and north-east side of the fort.

The entire fortification wall and bastions are crowned by numerous big merlons perforated with varying loopholes for muskets. The loopholes are not uniform in size or

number, suggesting that both merlons and loopholes were used for operational purpose rather than decorative reason.

### **Discussion and observation**

After a long period of gradual decay, the east corner bastion and some parts of the walls (adjacent to that) of Hajiganj fort have been reduced to a complete ruin. In all probability the debate among the researchers concerning the plan of this fort – whether pentagonal or hexagonal – is implicit in the provision for the east corner bastion and some missing part of walls adjacent to it. Those who ignore the ruined fraction as part of the original plan of this fort describe the fort as pentagonal, while those who consider the east corner bastion and the adjacent missing walls as part of the original plan describe it as hexagonal. The Department of Archaeology has endorsed the latter suggestion by restoring the east corner bastion and the adjacent missing part of its walls. The diagram which I have considered in this regard suggests that it is hexagonal in plan.

There is no available inscriptional evidence regarding the specified date of construction of Hajiganj fort. Thus the date of this fort has become quite difficult to determine archaeologically. The unavailability of any inscriptional evidence has resulted in a widespread debate about the date of this fort, suggesting further study needs to be done on its exact dating. Some scholars, such as Hasan (1904), Taesh (1985), and Ahmed (1991) recognise Mir Jumla (1660-1663) as the builder of this river fort. According to Hasan, the fort is said to have been erected by Mir Jumla to resist the incursion of the Magh and the Arakanese. The same view is reiterated by Ahmed in *Dhaka Past, Present and Future*. This book maintains that the viceroyalty of Mir Jumla for three years from 1660 to 1663 was very significant as drastic measures were taken to extirpate the marauding pirates by the construction of three water forts in and around Dhaka.

Dani (1961) and Taifoor (1956) maintain on the contrary a different view and claim that the glory of erecting the Hajiganj fort is wrongly attributed to Mir Jumla (1660 to 1663). For Dani, it may have been more likely to be built soon after Islam Khan established the Mughal capital at Dhaka (1610). Mirza Nathan (a commander in the Mughal campaign against local Bhuiyans) in *Babaristhan-i-Ghaybi* (1936) states that he along with a large army, constituted his headquarters at Khizirpur, raised battlements on the bank of the river in the face of numerous difficulties and drove the enemy away in a lamenting plight. This place is also mentioned in this book as an important defence centre of some of the most influential 'Bhuiyans' (Chieftains) and local heroes who fought against the Mughals. Mirza Nathan's account provides an idea about the importance of Khizirpur (now Hajiganj) as a place of strategic importance even before the transfer of the Mughal capital Rajmohal to Dhaka in 1610. *Babaristhan-i-Ghaybi*<sup>1</sup> (a contemporary source), refers to as Khizirpur is the same as present-day Hajiganj, which means that the Hajiganj structure was within the area known as Khizirpur and might have been erected at a later date.

A British C.S. Map of Mauza Hajiganj under Narayanganj prepared by the Department of Archaeology and Museums in 1920-21 sheds some light on the Mughal's involvement with the re-erection of the Hajiganj fort, if not exactly the date. The area of about 25 acres is pointed out as the Hajiganj fort in this C.S. Map (J.L.No.199 and *dag* (plot) No. 4o to 5o). The survey map involves an outline of surrounding walls of the Hajiganj fort, suggesting that there was an old fort spreading over a much bigger area out of which the Hajiganj fort was captured and rebuilt by the Mughals. Taifoor refers to

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan, M., *Babaristan-I- Ghaybi*, M. I., Borah , (tr.), vol . I, (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936), p.79.

buildings within Khizirpur/Khanpur.<sup>2</sup> We do not know, however, anything about his sources. Plus, places that he mentions are not identifiable at present as well. Thus until the site is excavated more thoroughly in the light of British C.S. Map, nothing more can be assumed other than that this fort was probably rebuilt by the Mughals during the early seventeenth century.

This fort came under the aegis of the Department of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan in 1950. It has been renovated and repaired several times since then, particularly during Bangladesh period. The Department of Archaeology and Museums of the Government of Bangladesh took measures at first in the financial year 2005-06 and later in 2006-07 for its renovation and conservation. In this work measures were taken to rebuild the east corner bastion together with its lost part of the adjacent walls. Although the Department of Archaeology tried to retain its original characters, the provision of a flight of eight steps up to the rampart walk in the restored bastion makes it different from the rest of the original five bastions that involve a flight of six steps up to their rampart walk.

The Department of Archaeology and Museum in its *Protected Monuments and Mounds in Bangladesh* (1975) refers to the barren locus standi tall structure with spiral stairs of brick form in the eastern corner of the fort ground as an observation tower. But there are disagreements about the observation tower, whether it was built along with the fort or afterwards. Dani (1961) maintains that the present appearance is no doubt due to modern repairs, but its presence links this fort with other river forts of this time. However, the brickwork and overall decaying condition of the fort suggests that the observation tower and the fort are not contemporary; but rather the material, method of

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<sup>2</sup> Taifoor, S. M., *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Dhaka: Lulu Bilquis Banu and others, 1956), p.135, note 1, p.137, note 1 and p.140, note 1.

construction and size of bricks indicate the observation tower to be of subsequent construction. Thus further research is needed for a convincing verdict on the construction date of the fort and the tower in question.

On the interior barren locus standi tall structure within the fort area in the eastern corner of the fort ground, the brick size and brickwork suggest that it might have been constructed at some point in the colonial period (1858 to 1947), if not more recently. The construction of a large plinth of this fort has been entirely a neglected issue in the literature of relevant researches. As far as I acknowledge, nobody has yet mentioned anything about this. Some local people expressed their belief during my field visit that it was a fire brigade station, but dissenting and offering different opinions, some other local people stated that it was a foundation of a hospital. In my observation no such evidence available (in the site or elsewhere) behind such local beliefs during a visit to this site could be ascertained.

The overall dilapidated condition of Hajiganj fort suggests its historical significance (during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century), and also its importance in securing the Mughal capital of Jahangirnagar (present day Dhaka) from enemies or piratical attacks. As mentioned earlier, the fort was brought under the aegis of the state, but due to insufficient care currently the fort site is being used as playground and owing to that it is gradually decaying towards a complete ruin.

## 4.1.2 Sonakanda River Fort

23°36'25``N 90°30'42``E

### **Location:**

Located in the village Enayetnagar of Kolagachchia union under Narayanganj Bandar Upazila in Narayanganj district, Sonakanda fort stands on the eastern bank of the river Shitalakhya just at the point where formerly it met the river Brahmaputra (another river that flows through Dhaka). Or, to put it the other way it is situated to the south of the point from where the Triveni Khal (Canal) takes off from the Sitalakhya, which flows along the western side of the fort. It is 16.83km from the capital, Dhaka.

### **Description:**

The Sonakanda fort comprises two main portions: (1) a quadrangular fortified rampart wall which consisted of four wings surrounding with a central courtyard in the east, 2) a raised artillery platform on the western front, where stands a round drum of huge dimensions overlooking the river (see 3D visualization of the structures of the Sonakanda river fort). Most probably large cannons were mounted in this strategic position.

Brick built and covered with plaster, the Sonakanda fort is quadrangular in plan measuring 86.56m ×57.0m (enclosed area) with its only entrance from the north. The brick size is 19.05×8.89× 3.81cm. The entrance gateway is placed within a rectangular frame and engraving rosette in spandrel, which involves several plastered panels in its inner and outer walls. The facade of the gateway is projected within a semi–octagonal

shape. The gateway was defended, apparently, by a heavy bolt, now missing, of which two sockets (from which the heavy bolt might have drawn out) in the middle of the inner walls at the entrance are still in existence. The gateway is topped by merlons.

The surrounding wall is 3.39m high and 1.06m thick. There is a huge artillery platform with a staircase alongside the surrounding wall of the western front of the fort. The walls are surmounted by merlons pierced by loopholes. The merlons are loopholed for 0.91m from the top, 1m high on an average, and the bottom being built solid and those are envisaged to have been used to put guns aiming at the enemies through their loopholes. The western wall postulates some flaking plaster and areas of thin coating.

The rectangular portion of the Sonakanda fort has four engaged circular corner bastions crowned with merlons set with regular loopholes. The corner bastions on the north-west and south-west are equal in size, measuring 3.39m height including the crenellation, and 6.85m in diameter. On the other hand, the bastions on the north-east and the south-east corners are also equal in size, and measuring 3.39m height including the crenellations and 4.26m in diameter, i.e., the bastions in the north-west and south-west are larger than the one on the north-east and the south-east corner. However, all the circular corner bastions are connected with a 2.5m narrow walkway from inside, and their walls are set in with regular loopholes. Further all the four corner bastions are octagonal and each involves a hollow inside and maintains the same level with the ground. There are two similar niches at the neck of each bastion. The bastions' walls are capped by many loopholes and several open and closed arches, but the arrangement and number of loopholes differ from one another.

A staircase on the west side leads up to the circular raised platform entered by a cinque-foiled archway with a flight of 25 steps up from the courtyard. The length of the

three-stage staircase from the ground to the artillery platform is 16.15m, and every step on an average is 15cm wide. The raised circular platform is 6,09m in height. It comprises two circles: inner and outer: while the inner circle is 15.24m in diameter, the outer circle is 21.75m in diameter. The thickness of the surrounding wall of the platform is 0.91m. The artillery platform is surmounted by 32 (five-cusped) merlons with loopholes, on average over 0.97m thick and 1.91m high. The height of the cinquefoil archway is 2.84m from inside and 4.27m from outside.

### **Discussion and observation:**

The Merlons were commonly used to put hand guns aiming at the enemies through their loopholes. Of the merlons, some are large, suggesting that they were used to fit big cannons in the state of emergency during the wars. There is no trace of any permanent structure in this fort site apart from the circular artillery platform.

At the end of the staircase a gateway is provided to enter and there is a wall surrounding the platform. There are loopholes and merlons in the circular raised platform similar to loopholes and merlons of the surrounding rampart walls and bastions. But the loopholes and merlons in the circular raised platform differ by being notched, while those in the walls and bastions are plain. The circular platform is filled with earth up to the rampart level to form a strongly built platform, suggesting that it was meant for a large calibre cannon aiming at the attackers coming up the river. Such platforms are notable as the major features of the medieval Mughal river forts in Bangladesh. In terms of height (6,09m) and width of the circular platform (21.75m in diameter), the Sonakanda fort is larger than the 7-step pyramidal artillery platform of the Hajiganj fort (as mentioned earlier in the description of the Hajiganj fort), suggesting that the Sonakanda

fort was a better constructed fortification than that of the Hajiganj fort. But there is no evidence or additional information available, supportive of this claim.

The flaking-plastered or pocked spaces in the western wall suggest that flaking plaster areas were of thin coating and that is why they became visible due to the removal of the plastering. The pocked spaces are also found in two other river forts (i.e., in the Hajiganj and the Idrakpur river forts), suggesting that it might have happened to the two other forts for the same reason; thin coating.

Some researchers claim that Sonakanda fort is datable to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. A group of scholars, such as Hasan (1904), Taesh (1985), Ahmed (1991) and Husain (1997) reinforce this claim. Others (e.g. Taifoor 1956) say that it is a pre-Mughal fort. Those who consider Sonakanda fort as a Mughal erection appear to attribute the construction of this fort to Mir Jumla (1660-1663). On the other hand, according to Taifoor, Sonakanda was a pre-Mughal fort, perhaps built by the Turks or Pathans to check inroads of the Arakanese. This debate on the date is in a way insubstantial as there is no inscriptional record for this fact. Available views on this fort relating to date are, therefore, often indecisive and contested, suggesting a gap/disruption to work on further. Attempted by me and mentioned on occasion, this study, is an endeavour to that end.

It has been restored and mended several times and its restoration and preservation is continued till date by the Department of Archaeology and Museum of Bangladesh government. The defensive walls and the massive artillery platform are still in existence. One of the major challenges that require urgent attention from the concerned caretakers (particularly the Department of Archaeology and Museums) is the rectangular fortified rampart wall portion of the fort, which has now already been half buried, and

under the threat of being buried entirely in near future. Furthermore, like the Hajigonj fort, this fort site has been used as play ground and occasional fair ground of the local people, and gradually decaying towards complete damage. Thus, in its present condition, it is not reasonable to say that this fort is well preserved with the assistance of the Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangladesh. The only reasonable alternative is to recommend the concerned custodians to take urgent measure in order to protect this fort from being rapidly vaporizing. This is obviously a good attempt although not significant for the present study.

### 4.1.3 Idrakpur River Fort

23° 32'50.60"N 90°32'01.85"E

#### **Location:**

The Idrakpur fort is positioned on the northern bank of the river Ichamati in the region of Idrakpur in Munshiganj district, and 23.48 km south-east of Dhaka. The River Ichamati has dried up, leaving the fort fending on a silted up area. At present, it is hardly possible to apprehend that the fort was once beside the River Ichamati, as it is now located some way from the river, which flows about 1.6 km to the north.

#### **Description:**

Idrakpur fort comprises two parts, the western and the eastern, separated by a screen wall. The western part covers an open area measuring 97m x 51.80 m internally and is surrounded by a curtain wall with four equal size circular corner bastions. The corner bastions are 6.09 m in diameter, and 4.60m in height. There are loopholes in every bastion. On the other hand, the eastern part is smaller than the western part, measuring 77m x 44 m, and includes a high solid circular platform in the middle and a small bastion at its north-east corner, but there is no structural existence as such at its south-east corner. This circular platform is 24m high above the ground and 32.91m in diameter. The access is through a flight of steps (1.9m broad and 18.26m long) of the platform across the eastern side of the defence wall. There is another 9-step staircase that leads down into the basement chamber. But this chamber at the foot of the staircase is protected by an iron grill.

The artillery platform is made fully firm to rampart level and above this level the fort walls are perforated with numerous loopholes of different sizes to place heavy

cannons. The parapet wall is enlivened with merlons. The space at the top of the artillery platform is currently occupied by a bungalow pattern tali house, which serves as a residence of a class-four employee of the local Deputy Commissioner office. In addition, some modern structures, including public residence, water tank, and government office (NSI) are also built inside the fort on the southern side of the western part of the fort.

The only gateway is 2.10m broad set within a rectangle frame with single turret with both outer sides on the north wall of the fort. It is set through a four-centred pointed archway and topped by merlons. Outer side of the gateway is provided with panel decorations and inner part is only plastering. The eastern part extends for about 10.3m in length on its northern side while it is shorter on the south. The fort is entirely made of brick with lime mortar.

#### **Discussion and observation:**

One of the most significant features of the fort is its huge and lofty solid circular platform. The flight of steps leading to the basement chamber suggests that most likely the underground chamber in the platform was used for some important reasons. But the reasons are not yet being distinguished categorically. Ayesha (1991) claims that it was an armoury ready stock of arms and ammunition.<sup>3</sup>

Now the question is whether Ayesha gets this point right. Armouries contain weapons, including guns, swords, pikes, etc, but not the gunpowder. The gunpowder, for fear of explosion, needs to be preserved in a more secured place (e.g., in a place like magazine) so as to protect it from fire and sparks incurring near it. The basement chamber of the Idrakpur fort appears to be the most restricted place within the entire

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<sup>3</sup> Begam, A., 'Forts in Medieval Bengal: An architectural Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rajshahi university, 1992), p.328.

fort construction. The chamber has no communication with the upper part of the platform but is approached by a flight of steps down from the courtyard to the chamber threshold. Given this the chamber seems more like a magazine than a platform of armoury. And by the same token Ayesha's assertion seems implausible.

One may well claim that as the basement chamber has no communication with the upper part of the platform, it might be a prison, or even a public lavatory. But further investigation is needed to arrive at a relatively convincing decision. Nevertheless the use of gunpowder and modern weapons by the Mughal rulers implies that there must be a place for the preservation of gunpowder, and in line with this it may well logically be assumed that the basement chamber was used as a secured place for the preservation of gunpowder, which means it was most likely used as a magazine, not a prison or a public lavatory.

In the preface of his book *Military Architecture*, Quentin Hughes writes:

The evolution of military architecture is muddled by the weapons used against it and by those used in its support. Gradually weapons assumed a position of importance far in excess of the actual structure of the fort, and changes in the fortification have been largely the consequence of the improvements that have been made in weaponry.<sup>4</sup>

This seems supportive of the assumption that we have just established in the previous paragraph. In light of Hughe's observation it can be assumed that the extensive use of the gunpowder<sup>5</sup> had a profound impact upon the structural change in the Idrakpur fort, and the Mughel rulers, in order to accomplish the requirement of a safe place for the protection of gunpowder, had appended the provision for a basement chamber to the architectural plan. The basement chamber in the Idrakpur fort seems to be constructed

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<sup>4</sup> Hughes, Q., *Military Architecture* (London: Hugh Evelyn Limited, 1974), p.7.

<sup>5</sup> The use of gunpowder in India, however, predates any the rivers river forts. Probably it was introduced to India by the mid -1300s and bronze guns dating to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. For more see *Wikipedia*, available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannon>.

on this purpose. If we observe, we would see that the provision for a secured place for the preservation of gunpowder is viewed only in the Idrakpur fort (the basement chamber), suggesting that this fort was perhaps erected after the use of gunpowder had become rather popular.

The big platform of lofty height of the Idrakpur fort was meant for mounting massive cannon, clearing that it was a massive military structure built by the Mughal rulers. This river fort, in addition, involves greater strategic importance as an outpost since the Mughal conquerors had to pass through the River Ichhamati while proceeding towards Dhaka.

There is, however, no inscriptional evidence concerning the date of the Idrakpur river fort. Based on architectural commonalities of Idrakpur fort with other contemporary forts and fortifications, scholars are inclined to assign a mid-seventeenth century date to it. As maintained by Taifoor (1956), Dani (1961) and Ahmed (1984), this was probably built by Mir Jumla in about 1660. Government of Bengal Public Works Department, in its publication *List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal*, maintains that this fort was built during the time of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1659-1707). Further research needs to be done to address this issue. I am going to tackle these questions in the later part of the thesis. Although there is a bastion on the north-east corner of the fort, there is no bastion in the south-east corner of it. But the reason is unknown why the south-east corner is empty. However, further research is needed for a more convincing decision on this issue.

The Idrakpur fort was declared a protected monument under the A.M.P. Act (Act VII of 1904) in 1909. But a number of structures including the quarters of Munshiganj's District Commissioner (built on the top of the artillery platform), the residence of the sub-divisional officer of Munshiganj, a water tank with in the enclosed

wall of this fort reveal that there was no impact of the A.M.P Act of 1909 on the conservation history of this fort. Presently this premise has been used by the employee of the sub-divisional officer of Munshiganj as a residence.

Like the Sonakanda fort, this fort has also got buried both in its eastern and western sides, and is under the threat of being completely buried in the near future. The assistance of the Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangladesh is in urgent need in order to protect this fort from being entirely buried. But no measure has been taken yet on the part of the relevant departments of the government. Thus, the present condition of this fort is almost similar to the other two forts under analysis, and due to insufficient care this fort is also gradually decaying towards a complete ruin.

From the above descriptions and discussions of the three river forts, it can be advised that in the development of the three river forts in Bangladesh, some common features evolved naturally, resulting from the condition of climate, available material, and local characteristics. Considering ground plans, surrounding walls pierced with loopholes and crowned by merlons, corner bastions, artillery platforms, small and large loopholes (to put small guns and cannons aiming at the enemies through their loopholes), watch tower and so forth it can be said that the river forts were built by the Mughal rulers. But, the date of those river forts, as mentioned earlier on several occasions, is still unresolved, the main reason being that there is no inscriptional evidence from the sites to indicate a date. However, based on the use of gunpowder and the provision for magazine (the basement chamber) for the protection of gunpowder, in a way, distinguish the Idrakpur river fort as the very last military construction among the three medieval Mughal river forts. Between Sonakanda and Hajiganj river forts the latter seems older than the former one. The considerable difference concerning the size of the artillery platform between

the Sonakanda and the Hajiganj forts is a significant indication of their dates; for instance the bigger size of the artillery platform of the Sonakanda fort discerns its superiority and recentness as a military construction than the Hajiganj fort with a small 7-step pyramidal artillery platform. Thus it seems that although from the above analysis we can determine the chronological order among the three river forts, we can not date them precisely.

Information and experience that I have gathered through field survey, are of assistance to provide an opportunity to outline the architectural development of three river forts in Bangladesh together with their strategic (see chapter five for details), socio-political and commercial importance(see chapter 2.1 and 2.2 for details) during the Mughal period in Bangladesh. The above discussion is also expected to be constructive in articulating the overall features of the architecture of the river forts in Bangladesh, and in discerning the relationship between the architecture of the river forts and that of other architecture of the period. The following part of this chapter will be an effort to that end.

## 4.2 The Relationship between the Architecture of the River Forts and that of Other Architecture of the Period

Under the Mughal rule, the architecture of Bangladesh entered a new era of significance. The governors, appointed by the Mughal empires in regular succession to rule the Bangladesh, were of either royal blood or in some way associated with the royal family, and many of them were patrons of art and architecture. Hence architectural activities, carried out by the governors with a good link to the empire, were supplemented by certain drawings and designs imposed by the celebrated master builders and architects of the empire<sup>6</sup>. And this resulted in the penetration and assimilation of the imperial Mughal architectural tradition into the local tradition of the medieval architectural establishments of Bangladesh. The Hajiganj, the Sonakanda and Idrakpur river forts are one of the types of the medieval Mughal architectural establishments in which the imperial Mughal tradition seems to have been assimilated at a greater level.

The Mughal capital Dhaka<sup>7</sup>, being located in a riverine track and also being exposed to various enemies' attacks and looting, demanded forts of a certain kind that could withstand attack from the river. Furthermore due to the unavailability of the red sandstone and marble of Upper India in the delta of Bangladesh, the Mughal provincial governors had to compromise with local conditions (particularly with the distinctive topography and unavailability of stone and marble), and satisfy themselves with the locally available constructional material, bricks. Thus, they attempted to commission the river forts in such a way that they became compatible with the local reality, settings and

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<sup>6</sup> Nihar, G., *Islamic Art of Medieval Bengal Architectural Establishments*, (Kolkata: 2003), p.67.

<sup>7</sup> Dhaka was chosen to be the capital chiefly for the facility of its river communication so essential in the deltaic region.

the need. And, as we will discover now in this discussion, these concerns had a profound influence on various aspects of the river fort architecture, such as constructional and structural elements, decoration, conception and purpose.

Brick, the only constructional element of the river forts, stood out as the characteristic building material of medieval Mughal architecture in Bangladesh, while the use of a hard, deep-red sandstone and marble were characteristic of imperial Mughal architecture elsewhere. However, there was exception; the stone was used as building material in the south gate of Lalbagh fort (a palace fort) and the structures attached with it. Besides stone arches, stones were also used as casing materials to add strength to the brick core of the structure of Lalbagh fort. Although the architecture of the river forts as a whole has compromised with local conditions, the Mughal features shine out clearly in their brick and plaster work.

Other common structural elements of the imperial fortified palaces include massive surrounding walls, courtyards, gateway, pavilions, *Diwan-i-Amm* (public audience hall), *Diwan-i-Khass* (private audience hall), a bath house, *Zenana* (courtyard with pavilion based around pools and a separate area for women) and gardens. Mosques and mausolea are also seen as part of the fortified palace (e.g., Fathepur–Sikri). On the other hand, the list of common structural elements of the river forts would include surrounding curtain walls with circular corner bastions, artillery platforms, gateways, merlons and loopholes.

The decoration of the central Mughal fortified palaces was carried out utilizing different techniques, such as ceramic tilework, carved and inlaid stonework, and *pietra dura* inlay with coloured and semi-precious stones. On the other hand no decorative works as such were carried out in the river forts. Plastering was the general method of ornamenting the Mughal architecture in Bangladesh. Thus river forts were not an

exception to it. Like the other Mughal buildings in Bangladesh the river forts were both internally and externally covered with smooth plaster coating. Lime mortar (a mixture of locally available sand and lime with water), was used in all types of Mughal building. The wall was divided into rectangular and square panels and they were decorated with small arches. Sometimes geometric pattern, floral design rosettes, scrolls and different type of leaves and stems were used in the plastered decoration on the surface of the buildings. Example includes Lalbagh group of monuments, Chhota and Bara Katra (caravanserais), Tomb of Bibi Mariyam, Idgah (prayer place). To be more precise about one example, the tomb of Pori Bibi located in the Lalbagh palace fort complex (built by prince Muhammad Azam Shah, date 1678) in Dhaka is, however, an exception. For instance the dados/wainscots of the corner chambers of the tomb are decorated with encaustic tiles of various colours. The entrance door to the tomb is made of sandalwood and decorated with Chinese motifs. Fretted marble screens block the openings on the other three sides. The interior walls of the tomb chamber are graced with white marble, while the floor is laid with geometric patterns of marble and black stones. The white marble was brought in from Rajputana and Jaipur. However, this feature is not applicable in the case of river forts because the style of the whole river forts was plain or less ornamented.

A significant relationship is seen between the imperial fortified forts and the river forts in regard to their main entrances (gateways). In imperial Mughal architecture the central gateway was always given importance. Same treatment had been applied in the case of the river forts in Bangladesh. The central gateways of the river forts were built comparatively larger in size than the surrounding walls, and were set in project frontons. The gateways of the river forts were distinguished with more or less lofty projections. The frontons were further distinguished by bordering ornamental turrets (though the gateway of Idrakpur fort is plain) although the style of the whole fort buildings was less

ornamented. Furthermore the 'half octagon towards the interior' style of the gateway was one of the striking aspects of the river forts in Bangladesh. This was an imitation of the imperial architectural feature. Compared to the three river forts (i.e., Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur forts), the gateway of Lalbagh fort seems to reflect the work of imitation of the imperial gateway architectural features with more clarity.

Some Mughal buildings (such as Mosques, Tombs, and Idgahs) include corner tower which are always extended beyond the parapets. The corner tower has evolved in the Mughal forts and fortification as corner bastion (a form projecting from the curtain wall of a fort or fortification which commands the foreground and outwork).

Architectural units that are provoked by human worldly needs, and/or being used in regular way of life are classified as the type of secular architecture. Houses, palaces and porches are example of secular architecture. By the same token the river forts are secular architecture. Hence, by definition, the river forts certainly had a precise contribution towards the fulfillment of certain human need(s). The river forts were erected merely for ~~on~~ their defensive needs. To be more precise, they were erected to protect the capital Dhaka from their enemy menace, particularly the ones from the *Bara-Bhuiyans* (local chieftains), the Mogh and the Portuguese. Artillery platforms, loopholes, merlons (merlons are placed in the corner bastions, the certain walls and the artillery platforms) are some of the strong sources of testimony which tend to justify that the river forts were erected merely for the military purposes.

On the other hand Lalbagh fort (a palace fort) was used as a centre for both civil and military administration. The non-existence of artillery platforms, loopholes, merlons and the provision of audience hall, the viewing pavilion, Bibi Pori's tomb, mosques and its axial layout suggest that the Lalbagh fort was erected and used for merely

administrative purpose, not as a place to withstand attack from the surrounding rivers. Besides the imperial Mughal fortified palaces were used for military purpose as well as for centres of civil administration.

The Imperial fortified palaces, however, were used mainly as fortified defensive centres and places to protect the people and the empire, rather than as centres in which to plan military attacks against enemies. The Lalbagh palace fort is found to be an inspiring model of the imperial palace fort in north India. For instance, the gateway is one the most striking features of Mughal architecture and nearly all the major characteristic features of Mughal gateway architecture (such as, the 'half octagonal shape towards the interior', bordering ornamental turrets in the frontons, the rising towers above the parapet and taper to a petalled bud, *chattries* for guards, the height and grace) are reflected in the gateways of the Lalbagh fort.

Compared to the Lalbagh fort, the river forts share fewer features in common with the imperial fortified palaces. One of the shared features is the lofty projection of all the forts irrespective of their types and locations. Another example involves the very plan of forts, which is oblong (the Hajiganj river fort, which is hexagonal in plan, is an exception in this case).

The parapet surrounded by merlons with loopholes can be substantiated here as a further example of the common feature of the Mughal military architecture. The curtain walls of the river forts of Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur are crowned with big merlons pierced with musket loopholes. The loopholes are not always uniform in size and number. Thus the whole walls assume the character of battlemented parapet which is not present in Mughal buildings.

On another point, in their conception and purpose the Mughal forts in Bangladesh differ from those in North India. From the conception point of view, the river forts are entirely incomparable, uncommon and original although the palace fort of Lalbagh and others are the miniature versions of imperial fort architecture. The Mughals built up their defence mechanism in conformity with the topological position of Bangladesh. But most significantly the battlement parapet with big merlons with musket loopholes, lofty artillery platform can be envisaged to be a balanced architecture in terms of its plan and proportion in the structural aggrandizement.

The river fort architecture that flourished in medieval Bangladesh is not comparable with the premium and the extravagant architecture which flourished in the medieval India. But this is easily understandable, as Bangladesh was a province under the Imperial Mughals, and also the building work was based on bricks, not on stone and marble. Nevertheless Mughal medieval military architectural units including the river forts, as mentioned earlier, managed to earn high recognition for its bricks and plaster works. And the gradual adoption of a range of Mughal architecture features in the buildings of Bangladesh gives us opportunity to learn the great lesson of the history from primary sources.

## Chapter Five

### **Military Strategy and Techniques in the Mughal Period in Bengal**

As they were not familiar with topographical peculiarities of the landscape and its hostile climate conditions, warfare in eastern Bengal for the Mughals was much harder than in other parts of Indian subcontinent. Thus the most vital undertaking of the Mughals was to be aware of the above mentioned unfamiliar issues, and then to take into account these realities in setting out their strategy for the construction of forts and fortifications, which were the centre of their military (as well as administrative) activities. Given this, the overall planning and arrangement of Mughal forts and fortifications, which was pursued in the medieval Mughal period of Bengal<sup>1</sup>, were significantly influenced by the topographic and climatic conditions of this region. Among the significant aspects, which received particular attention by the Mughals in constructing effective but feasible defence constructions, were: method of construction, location, availability of construction-materials in this riverine region, availability of weaponries and relation of these weaponries to the prospective forts, use of boats for military purposes, and use of available guns against enemy-boats. These are the aspects which lie at the nub of the traits of military strategy and techniques of the Mughals in eastern Bengal. This chapter,

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<sup>1</sup> Erection of the Mughal military forts and fortifications in eastern Bengal was accomplished in two phases, famously known as the early Mughal phase and the later Mughal phase. The early period was from their arrival in 1575 to the occasion when Dhaka was made capital of Bengal in 1612. The later period was from the very year of capital transfer in 1612 to 1757. After the transfer of capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1717, erecting of forts and fortifications in eastern Bengal were greatly declined.

in the light of this understanding, attempts to illustrate military strategy and techniques of the Mughals under six thematic heads:

- Methods of construction of forts
- Location of forts
- Features of forts
- Relation of forts to weaponry used to defend and attack
- The military use of boats
- Available guns and their use against boats

#### **Methods of construction of forts:**

There are two sources of information about Mughal forts and fortifications in eastern Bengal: textual documentation and archaeological evidence.

#### **Methods of construction of Mughal forts known through textual documentation:**

In view of its military details and authority, the *Babaristan-i-Ghaybi* (hereafter *Babaristan*) is a vital textual source of reference for the researcher interested in the reign of the Mughals. For predominantly rich in military details, the author of this book himself took part in most of the encounters. In his account, Mirza Nathan makes frequent mentions of forts and fortifications built by the Mughal force.<sup>2</sup> Presently there is no surviving

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<sup>2</sup> The forts mentioned in *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi* are: the fort of Jatrapur, the fort of Dakchara, the fort of Kalakupa, the fort of Dhubri, the fort of Salka, the fort of Minari, the fort of Chanpratap, the fort of Asurainagar, the fort of Putamari, the fort of Ranihat, the fort of Tashpur, the fort of Ghalwapara, the fort of Raja Baldev, the fort of Taraf, the fort of Dhamdhama, the fort of Shahzadpur, the fort of Pandua, the fort of Fulbari, the fort of Baliganj, the fort of Pachadhari, the fort of Gargaz, the fort of Hazop, the fort of Bhalwa, the fort of Shykh Habibullah, the fort of Taknnia, the fort of Yakub Khaja, the fort of Haji Shamsuddin, the fort of Fathabad, the fort located at Ata Khal, The fort located at Matibhanga, The

structural evidence of the examples of forts documented in *Baharistan*; and there is no aerial photography or ground survey of the documented instances either; thus no structural reference can be made to them. These forts, in all likelihood, might have been built pursuing constructional methods of typical Bengali forts, which the author calls ‘gargaz’<sup>3</sup>.

As Nathan describes, ‘gargaz’ is an enclosed outpost, which was made of large logs of wood set in the ground and fixed with beams and scaffolding with a seat on it. The seat was intended to facilitate the fort commandant to have a view of the enemy’s fortification.<sup>4</sup> It suggests that wood was one of the main constituents of Mughal forts. Although there is no precise mention of other materials that might have been used in constructing such forts, it may well be assumed that over and above wood, a range of other available rough and ready materials were used in constructions, such as earth, bamboo, reed and so forth. The force of this assumption is grounded on the view that it was not economically viable for the Mughals to bring in materials like stones from central India to build forts in eastern Bengal. Furthermore in view of defence against their local enemies, it seems that the Mughals did not need to go beyond locally available materials and styles of construction. Given this, it can be assumed that methods of construction of the Mughals’ forts and the typical Bengali fort ‘gargaz’ were presumably the same and the entire destruction of Mughal defence structures, documented in *Baharistan*, could be explained by the use of indigenous and perishable materials in constructions. However, since there is no surviving structural evidence or aerial photography or ground survey of

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Protapaditya’s fort between Bhagirathi and Kagarghata, the fort of Beg Murad, the fort of Nathan etc. See Nathan, vols. 1& 2.

<sup>3</sup> Nihar, G., *Islamic Art of Medieval Bengal Architectural Establishments*, (Kolkata: 2003), p.543.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.543. There is example of Mughal forts in *Baharistan* that was entirely made out of logs-of-wood. For more see Ibid., p.99.

the examples of forts documented in *Babaristan*, the diffidence of this source of information can not entirely be ignored.

### **Methods of construction of Mughal forts known through archaeological evidence:**

From the formative deliberation, Mughal forts and fortifications were of two categories: (1) water forts and (2) palace forts. There is no disagreement about this classification among the scholars. Dani has been found to subdivide the former into two types: (1) river forts and (2) border out-posts.<sup>5</sup> In the total absence of stone<sup>6</sup> in riverine eastern Bengal, these structures were built of brick. The walls, both internally and externally, were covered with smooth plaster coating.

As archaeological remains suggest, the method of construction of river forts was to build surrounding walls with a gateway in the facade together with bastions at some distance from one another (generally four bastions, one at each corner of a fort) as well as an artillery platform with the view to providing opportunity to watch the approach of the invaders and to defend against them. These structures have been found to be composed of five constituents: foundation, surrounding walls, artillery platform, bastions, and gateways. The foundation was the structural element of river forts embedded into the earth to support all the load of surface structure of these forts. The surrounding walls covered with plaster were a closed arrangement of bricks. The walls were built in sections of different measurement in length, thickness and height. The north and south walls of Hajiganj river fort measure 44.04m and other four sides are of

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<sup>5</sup> Dani, A. H., *Muslim Architecture in Bengal* (Dacca : Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p.24.

<sup>6</sup> In entire absence of stone, the Mughal had to use bricks to construct forts and fortifications. The Mughal forts in eastern Bengal thus suffered due to unavailability of quality materials like stone. There was, however, exception: stones were used in the structure of Lalbagh Fort (especially in arches) - a palace fort - as casting materials to add strengths to the brick core.

same length measuring 36.10m. The Sonakanda river fort covers an area measuring 57m x 86.56m. The western part of Idrakpur fort covers an area measuring 97m x 51.80m and eastern part of Idrakpur covers an area measuring 77mx 44m. The thickness and height of the surrounding walls of the river forts were between 0.91m and 1.06 and between 1.83m and 3.39m respectively (for details see chapter 4). Mortar (mixture of lime, brick-dust and water) was used in the walls to make these fort structures stronger and long-lasting. River forts however lacked any kind of ornamentation. The plastering of the internal and external sides of the fort walls was light brown in colour.

The artillery platform represents a striking constructional peculiarity of the Mughal river forts. It distinguished river forts from other forts and fortifications (namely palace forts and border out-posts) built by the Mughals in eastern Bengal. From the raised artillery platform, they used to keep an eye on the invading forces (coming along the river ways) and fired cannons both large and small at the enemies from the raised platform. Hajiganj fort, however, is an exception in this context; the height of the artillery platform of Hajiganj fort is much less than the height of that of the artillery platforms of Sonakanda and Idrakpur forts.

Another important aspect of methods of construction of Mughal river forts was the lofty gateways with the provision for essential safety measures. Comparatively larger than the surrounding walls, gateways were often raised and wide to allow elephants to pass. This is well illustrated in the gateway-structure of Sonakanda and Idrakpur forts. These two river forts were oblong in plan. The Hajiganj fort, which was hexagonal in plan, was an exception in this case.

The general method of construction of border outposts, as archaeological remains show, was to build an outer wall on both sides with a gateway in the facade

together with bastions on the corners within which a guard house was provided for watching the approach of the invaders. These out-posts were composed of four main constituents: foundation, surrounding walls, bastions, and gateways. The list of such defensive constructions includes the following: the border outposts at Ghoraghat (situated on the western bank of the river Karatoya in Dinajpur district), the border outposts at Chatmohor (situated on the south-western bank of the rivulet of Baral, which joined the river Karatoya in Pabna), the border outposts at Selimgarh (situated on the bank of the river Karatoya at Sherpur in Bogra district), the border outposts at Sujabad (situated on the bank of the river Nalchiti, a few miles away from the Barisal district proper), the border outposts at Bokainagar (situated on the eastern bank of the river Brahmaputra at Gouripur in Mymensingh district), the border outposts at Egarasindur (situated in the village Egarasindur at the point of three tributaries of the river Brahmaputra in Pakundia Upazila of Kishorganj district), the border outposts at Jangalbari (this outpost, locally known as Isa Khan's residence, was situated on the western bank of the rivulet Narasunda in Karimganj Upazila of Kishorganj district), the border outposts at Qella/Quila (fort) Tajpur (situated on the bank of the rivulet Suraja, a tributary of the river Brahmaputra, in Kishorganj district) and the border outposts at Ander Qella/Quila situated within hillocks in the centre of Chittagong city, which exists as a testimony of Mughal hill-fort in eastern Bengal).<sup>7</sup> All the sites of out-posts, on account of their topographical conditions at the time of their construction (during the medieval Mughal rule in Bengal), were of much strategic importance.

Following the aforementioned discussion, although the method of construction of Mughal forts and fortifications in eastern Bengal was more or less consistent,

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<sup>7</sup> Begam, A., 'Forts in Medieval Bengal: An Architectural Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rajshahi University, 1992), pp. 258-314.

differences did occur. The constituents of both types of defence constructions were almost the same except for one i.e., the presence of raised artillery platform in river forts, which made the river forts distinct from border out-posts. But it is to be noted that while the raised artillery platforms of the river forts were meant to keep an eye on the invading forces and to defend against them, the border outposts (which were also known as guard houses or *chowkis*) were used for the same purpose i.e., to keep a watch over the inroad of invading forces and to defend against them. Overall it may be said that the functioning of these two types of fortifications were virtually identical.

The border out-posts were generally located on the acreses or on the banks of rivers at strategic points outside Dhaka, in particular between the boundaries of two territories. And the river forts were located on the banks of the rivers in an around the provincial capital Dhaka, which is evident in the still surviving remains of Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur river forts. The size of these two types of constructions was different: river forts were much bigger than border out-posts. The reason for such difference between river forts and border out-posts can be explained by the difference of security needs and the location of these constructions. While border outposts were intended for obstructing the boundary to attackers and to serve as forward base from which punitive expeditions could have been launched into enemy territories (which includes Coochbihar and Arakan Kingdom), the purpose of erecting river forts was to keep an eye on all major river routes in and around the provincial capital Dhaka, and to safeguard the capital (which was the main administrative and trade centre of the Mughals) against all types of aggressors (namely aggressions carried out by the local chieftains and Zaminders, or by Mags pirates and Firingees).

It thus seems that the methods of construction of Mughal forts and fortifications were mainly determined by availability of constructional materials and military demands.

The structure and design of military constructions were also influenced by the capability of the enemies and their stock of artillery. Although both borders outposts and river forts were constructed for military purposes, river forts (as opposed to border outposts) were built more strongly because of their implications for protecting the capital Dhaka (the main centre of trade and commerce as well as administrative activities of the Mughals), suggesting that location had a role in determining their strength and significance.

#### **Location of forts and fortifications:**

The principal means of communication of the Mughals between places and shipments of goods (within and outside Dhaka) during their rule in eastern Bengal was river routes. The same routes were being used by various invading forces to attack the capital for looting and plundering. Thus the Mughal forts and fortifications (in particular border out-posts and river forts) were so sited as to be able to safeguard the river routes from invading forces. These structures were commonly constructed on the bank of rivers using topography (i.e. natural set up of rivers) to one's advantage. As archaeological evidence show, the still extant river forts were located on the bank of rivers. For example, while the Hajiganj and Sonakanda forts were built on the bank of river Shitalakhya, Idrakpur fort was built on the bank of river Ichamati.

The contemporary military treatise *Babaristan* attests the view that forts and fortifications were commonly constructed on the bank of rivers in eastern Bengal. From the narratives in *Babaristan*, at the start of the statesmanship of Islam Khan (1608-1613) in Bengal, the first three forts to be constructed by the Mughals were on the confluences

of Khal (canal) Jogini.<sup>8</sup> But none of these forts can be found on modern maps. As N. K Bhattasali argues, they must have been washed away by the great Brahmaputra River (Jamuna).<sup>9</sup> Another fort that the Mughals built was at the confluence of three rivers: the Ganges (Padma), the Dhaleswari and the Ichamati. The name of this point of confluence, as mentioned in *Babaristan*, was Katasgarh.<sup>10</sup> To conquer the confluence of River Ichamati at Jatrapur, the Mughal force constructed block-houses on the bank of the Ichamati River, beginning from the confluence of Katasgarh up to the confluence of Jatrapur.<sup>11</sup> They constructed trenches on the bank of the river Ichamati, a place opposite to Katasgarh. Like Khal Jogini these places can also not be found on modern atlas. Following Bhattasali, it can be argued that all these places had been effaced due to the same reason, i.e., the encroachment of the great Brahmaputra River. In *Babaristan* it is also referred to the as 'fort of Dhaka' that the Mughal force (in particular, Shaykh Kamal, Tuqmaq Khan and Mirak Bahadur Jalair) constructed on the bank of the River Buriganga.<sup>12</sup> The fort of Dhaka has been identified with a modern central jail compound, although no trace of this fort can be found at present as such.

Archaeological evidence of border outposts support the view that these structures were also commonly stationed on the bank of a river or a place (over land) close to a river, at various strategic points all over the country outside Dhaka. Such defence structures, as mentioned earlier, were built as a primary barrier to aggressors. Border outposts were of considerable significance. With the erection of such outposts at

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<sup>8</sup> There was a location named Khal Jogini shown in Rennell's map, sheet no 6.

<sup>9</sup> Bhattasali, N.K., 'Bengal Chiefs Struggle for Independence in the Reign of Akbar and Jahangir,' *Bengal Past and Present*, XXXV-XXXVIII, 1928-29.

<sup>10</sup> This is shown in Rennell's map, sheet no 6. From the narratives in *Babaristan*, three other strategically important places such as Jafarganj, Baliya and Shahzadpur, were closed to that confluence.

<sup>11</sup> Nathan, pp. 51-54. It is also marked in Rennel's map, sheet no 16. As shown in the map, it was situated 30 miles from Dhaka.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

different significant strategic points, the Mughals successfully managed to keep vigilance on the territorial boundaries and attempted to obstruct invaders before they managed to advance towards Dhaka. This strategy had a significant role in consolidating the Mughals' authority over the whole of Bengal as far as its south-eastern frontier Chittagong.

From the archaeological evidence as well as from narratives in *Babaristan*, more significantly, it appears that there was a correlation between the location of forts and their constructional style and strength. River forts, for instance, built in the region of the Mughal provincial capital Dhaka (i.e., at Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur), were relatively stronger than those of border outposts which were stationed outside Dhaka, specifically in territorial areas. Located in the centre of eastern Bengal, the Mughal provincial capital Dhaka was able to command all the important river-routes in eastern Bengal. And also situated on the bank of the River Buriganga, Dhaka was criss-crossed by many minor rivers and creeks, and thus a place of excellent network of internal waterways of great commercial and strategic importance. Thus it may well be assumed that river forts were built larger in order to contain a larger number of soldiers ~~more~~ permanently in order to defend the capital Dhaka against forces invading by river. Such a military strategy is well manifested in the still extant archaeological remains of river forts and in the various military facilities created within the fort structures, such as battlemented loopholes and raised artillery platform for firing guns and cannons aiming at invading enemies. Having received a higher priority in terms of constructional strength, river forts are still found in a better state. Contrariwise the structures of border outposts, relatively less strongly built, are now mostly in oblivion.

## **Features of Mughal forts and fortifications in eastern Bengal:**

Having discussed methods of construction and locations, a list of features of Mughal river forts and border out-posts can thus be made as follows:

Feature of river forts:

- River forts have surrounding brick-built well-plastered walls. They are oblong in form (with an exception of Hajiganj fort, which was hexagonal in plan).
- All the fortifications have bastions, which form a part of the fort wall, but not the top of the parapet.
- The battlemented surrounding walls with loopholes, bastion in every corner and circular artillery platform with lofty projection, attain both balance in the plan and proportion in structural elevation of river forts.
- Distinguished with lofty projection, the gateways of river forts were rectangular, extended with half octagonal shape towards the interior. A lofty projection of gateways represents that gateways were a reproduction of the architectural feature of gateway of forts of central India.
- River forts were non-decorative.
- Located at strategic places i.e., on the bank of major rivers around the Mughal provincial capital Dhaka, and also built more strongly to station a large number of soldiers on a more permanent basis, river forts turned out to be the key points of defence of the Mughals against various invading forces.

### **Feature of border outposts:**

- Surrounded by brick-built fortification walls and attached with some bastions at regular intervals (which were being used as an observatory chamber to protect the invaders attacks), the oblong-planned-border outposts (albeit being smaller in size) seem to have had all the architectural forms and designs that were required as a military structure resembling the river forts except for one dissimilarity: the lack of an artillery platform.
- The small surrounding walls attended with a small door way, bastion at certain intervals both attain balance in the plan and proportion in structural elevation of border out-posts.
- Border outposts were non-decorative.
- Albeit having a considerable significance as a garrison-post, border outposts, being located outside Dhaka, did not receive attention equal to the level of river forts. Thus, these military structures were structurally different.

From features listed in the paragraph above, it overall seems that border outposts involve some structural and functional features like river forts except for two aspects: provision for artillery platform and lofty projection of gateways. To be more specific, both types of defensive constructions have the same constructional element (bricks), a similar structural design (both had surrounding walls and bastions), and also they were more or less stationed at similar strategic places ( such as on the banks of rivers or over land but somewhere close to a water-body). Furthermore, these military structures share commonality in plan i.e., both river forts and border out-posts were commonly oblong in plan. Given these similarities, border outposts can be envisaged to be the miniature version of the river forts.

### **Relation of forts to weaponry used to defend and attack:**

Arms used by the Mughals to attack and defend against their enemies had a profound influence upon the construction and design of their forts and fortifications. River forts, for example, accommodated the following members of military variants based on the weaponry available to the Mughal forces. The rampart walls, bastions and artillery platform of river forts were crowned with big merlons and pierced with musket loopholes. These are well illustrated in the river forts at Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur. The loopholes were not always uniform in size and number. Thus, the whole rampart wall as well as the outer layer of artillery platform and bastions assumed the character of battlemented parapet. The provision of such musket loopholes was introduced for the ease of gun fire. The merlons and parapet walls provided with loopholes had the provisions for mounting guns as well as musketeers, which gave the ability to counter fire at the attackers along the wall. Furthermore, the directions of loopholes were so arranged as to be able to look forward (to command distant approaches) as well as downward (to command the foot of the wall), which attests the view that river forts were so designed as to be able to use their weapons in a less difficult and efficacious manner. Bastions of the river forts were carried in the corners rising beyond the parapets, suggesting that bastions were made elevated above the parapet to strengthen security measures of river forts through facilitating the opportunity to watching invading force from all sides of the forts. In other words, the introduction of bastioned towers had denied the easy cover to sappers at them.

Another military variant, which represents the distinctiveness of the river forts, was the raised artillery platform of these forts (although in comparison with Sonakanda and Idrakpur river forts, the artillery platform of Hajiganj river fort was almost plane).

The pinnacle of the raised artillery platform, as mentioned earlier, was being used to keep eye on invading forces as well as to aim small and large (calib) cannons at the attackers coming along the river–ways. With the systemic development of modern weapons, in particular guns and cannons (which are said to have constituted the essential elements of war in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century), the constructional design of river forts seem to have been changed. The provision for the raised platform in river forts is an example of such changes. With the introduction of the artillery platform, the height of the ramparts of river forts was reduced considerably. And river forts were rather planned as polygons. Such change in the height of ramparts was brought about through precise calculation in order to reduce the ground outside the fort which the guns of the defenders could sweep.<sup>13</sup> Another reason for introducing raised artillery platform was to cover every space outside the walls with gunfire.

It is worth mentioning that with the introduction of an artillery platform in military constructions, the tradition of the siege type of forts (which was meant for constructing forts with solidly-built raised thick surrounding walls) had entirely been lost. Put differently, with the introduction of raised platform to river forts, the significance of solidly-built raised thick surrounding walls for security purpose had entirely been reduced; presumably because they did not expect to be attacked with any large size cannon but by small guns.

From the narratives in *Babaristan*, it seems that the method of besieging enemy forts and the technique of constructing raised platforms ( on a temporary basis) in front of (besieged) forts, and raising the platforms to a height of the parapets with the purpose of bombarding the garrison from the commanding height were no less

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<sup>13</sup> Keegan, J., *A History of Warfare*, (New York: Vintage, 1993), p.326.

significant aspects of the Mughals' military matters. Such structures (or artillery platforms) were raised and gradually extended towards the besieged fort. As stated in *Babaristan*, all major enemy forts in eastern Bengal (such as the fort of Chadpratpa, Fathabad, Dackchara, and Tupia) were besieged and occupied by the Mughal force through using raised platforms constructed in front of (besieged) forts, which were built elevating the platforms gradually extending towards the besieged fort to a height of the parapets with the purpose of bombarding the garrison from the commanding height.<sup>14</sup> For example, the besieging cannons were placed on a mound of the raised platforms in order to reach as high as top of the wall of enemy fort. This attests the view that all defense constructions, built by the Mughals, were suitable for operating arms and ammunition available to them.

Following the above discussion, it can now safely be said that there was link between availability of weaponry and the design and structure of Mughal defence structures, in particular river forts. To be more precise, structure and architectural design of river forts were mainly grounded on available weaponry the Mughals used against their enemies. Given this, as mainly guns and cannons constituted the Mughal weaponry in the medieval period, the structure and architectural design of river forts were mainly determined by these types of weaponry. Put differently, the structure and designs of river forts were greatly influenced by the weapons developed during the medieval Mughal reign in Bengal than that of ornamental, aesthetic or art historical aspects.

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<sup>14</sup> Such raised platforms, however, sometimes boomeranged upon the besiegers since they were made out of local materials, such as dried grass stalks and mud, and hence enemy tried to set fire on them by long bamboo poles burning thatches at the top. For more see Nathan, vol. I, pp. 32-34, 59, 66 and 169.

### **The military use of boats:**

On account of the topography of rivers and climate conditions of this region, the flotilla of war-boats rather than cavalry was more effective in the warfare in eastern Bengal. Being aware of this, the Mughals increased their collection of war-boats, and also significantly increased their skill in military use of boats. From the narrative of the 'review of boats at Shahzadapur' in *Babaristan*, it becomes apparent that the fleet of Mughal war-boats comprised various types of boats, such as *Katari*, *Maniki*, *Bathila*, *Kusa*, *Khelna*, and *Gondola*.<sup>15</sup>

As accounted in the above-mentioned review, the large cannons and *Zabarzangs* (field pieces) were mounted on *Katari*, *Manaki*, and *bathila*. These boats were quite big, and on the gangway of each boats (a line of) wagons (one kind of trading cargo which was called *thattari* and which was used as barrier against enemy attack) were displayed. The cannons were mounted on those big boats in such a manner so that wagons could be lowered down at the time of firing them, making that a battlement. Furthermore a series of towers were arrayed on the line of wagons.

The review also indicated that the wagons (*thattari* boat) and each of the cannons were covered with tigers' and leopards' skin and the boats were covered with a gold embroidered canopy. The fleet 'was arranged in such a way that if it was desired to discharge the artillery, these wagons, which stood like the wall of a fort on the boats extending from one side of the river to the other, could all at once be made to lie flat on the boats, and when the dreadful cannon were discharged, by the time their smoke disappeared, these wagons could be raised to their former

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 48

position.<sup>16</sup> This was like a floating bridge, and in front of it six fully equipped war-*keusas* were set as *qarawal* (vanguard). The sailors were clothed in armour. The floating boat was arrayed by tying them in such a way that the whole body could be made to sail in a straight line or rotate sidewise as required. This arrangement of the fleet entails that the Mughals accomplished a tremendous skill in military use of boats.

Furthermore constructing a temporary bridge via using boats to cross over rivers was a significant move displayed by the Mughals. As narrated in *Babaristan*, to cross the river Ichamati, Admiral Ihtimum Khan and his son Mirza Nathan constructed a bridge with the boats of the traders.<sup>17</sup> Another documentation of the use of boats as moving bridge has been found in Nathan's account in *B-I-G* where he narrated the event of besieging and occupying the fort of Dakchara (a stronghold of the chief of local chieftain Musa Khan) by the Mughal force. As in this case Nathan puts it:

Mirza Nathan than ordered the wagon, kept on a moving bridge on the boats, to be brought up... wagon were brought up and placed on the ground where the soldiers were staying under the protection of their shields.<sup>18</sup>

There again, use of boats as a bridge has been found in Nathan's account of the raid of the Magh Raja against the Mughals in Bhalwa (located in present day Noakhali district). On this occasion, at the order of the then statesmen Qasim Kahn (1613-1617), the Mughal force constructed a bridge with big cargo boats (such as 'Bhadia' and 'Patila') on the River Shitalakhya from Khizirpur up to Bhalwa. The author of this source furthermore adds that about two thousand horsemen and four thousand expert men with matchlock were transferred over the bridge.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.229-30.

Ayesha Begum referred to Abul Fazal who maintained that structures of boats were made in such a way that they could be used for various military purposes. For example, boats were so structured that both ends of the boats could rise much higher than the fort walls.<sup>20</sup> From the above discussion it seems that the Mughals used boats very skillfully for various military purposes, which helped them develop facilities to fight on water and successfully oppose their enemies who were very familiar with this landscape. It is worth mentioning here that boats were also used as the personal transport of the statesmen of Bengal as well as of admiral and other important naval officers. The name of Islam Khan's boat was 'Chandni', which was also called 'Fath-i-Dariya' (Triumph of the sea). The name of the personal boats of Ihtimam Khan and Mirza Nathan were 'Jal- Tarang' and 'Qutb-Asan' (a kotal suwari kusa) respectively.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Available guns and their use against boats:**

As mentioned in *Babaristan*, during the statesmanship of Islam Khan, the Mughal force realized that increased amount of arms and ammunition was essential for warfare in eastern Bengal. In view of that goal, they significantly increased the collection of arms and ammunitions. As narrated in *Babaristan*<sup>22</sup>, they took three hundred and thirty pieces of cannon of the type of *gajnal* (small cannon), *batnal* (match-lock) and *shir-dahan* (cannon, with mouths shaped like a tiger's mouth)' from Kalyan Singh of Allahabad for their use in Bengal. Also they acquired two war-boats name *Jaltarang* and *Nadula* together with four *Shir-dahan* cannons from Wazir Khan of Jhusi.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, as narrated in the same source *Babaristan*, they received eighty-five pieces of big cannon

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<sup>20</sup> Begum, pp. 267-68.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan, p.42.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.8.

of the type of *bigu- mardan*, *kidar- mardan*, *kuj-mardan*, *kunjar-mabanj- bhaia* , *sulaymani* from Rohtas fort (located in Jhelum district of Punjab).<sup>24</sup>

Mirza Nathan makes frequent references of the use of cannons and other weapons against enemy-boats in *Babaristan*. In mentioning how the Mughal force destroyed *Sundara* (the boat of Musa Khan) by cannon-shots, Nathan wrote:

Mirza order[ed] his artillery-men to fire upon the boats of the enemy which were plying on the river with ease. The gunners fired a few volleys to their heart's content. The shots from the cannon '*Sulayman*' struck the *Sundra* (boat) of Musa Khan and shattered it to pieces...<sup>25</sup>

On another occasion, as narrated by Nathan, the Mughal force, discharged their big cannon (here name of cannons has not been mentioned by the author) on the enemy war-boat and threw the enemies down from the top of their boats. On this occasion, as a result of cannon-shots, the large *Kusas* (enemy-boat) were sunk in the current of defunctness with their soldiers.<sup>26</sup>

The types of cannons, used by the Mughals were not limited to the list provided in *Babaristan*. For the still surviving cannons of the Mughals do not belong to this lists, which in turn suggests that in addition to cannons mentioned in *Babaristan*, the Mughal force had used some other cannons as well. Examples of these type of cannons include: the big cannon discovered and now placed at Usmany Udyaan in Dhaka city (which was probably made during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) ; the inscribed huge cannon of Murshidabad dated 1637 ( which was cast in Jahangirnagar during the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (1627-1658) ; the inscribed cannon of the time of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan(1627-1658) discovered dated A.H.1066/1655; and the Cannon of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.77-78.

Subahdar Mir Jumla (1660-1663), which was built during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707).

Given the above-mentioned discussion, it seems that the Mughals' weaponry mainly comprised cannons. A question now may well be asked: can the Mughal Empire be labelled 'Gunpowder Empire'? Some historians <sup>27</sup> argue that since the use of cannon (gunpowder was the basic to cannon technology) had played the most vital role in defeating and thereby expanding and consolidating the Mughals' authority all over the Indian sub-continent up to the eastern frontier of Bengal, they may well be called the 'Gunpowder Empire'. Nathan in his work clearly ascribes the use of cannon to the Mughal Hindustan, and gives an account of the use of cannon by the imperialists' army in their battles with the local *Bhuiyans* and *Zamindars* of eastern Bengal. Also, he ascribes the same to local chieftains of eastern Bengal. Nathan recognizes that Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore had such firepower. In this context Nathan writes that at the order of Islam Khan, Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore (who surrendered to Islam Khan in 1609) agreed to submit one thousand of maunds (41 tonnes) of gunpowder in addition to twenty thousand infantry and five hundred war-boats.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore he mentions that cannon were fired by the army of Musa Khan in 1611 <sup>29</sup> on the imperialists' position from his fleet near Khizirpur, and by Usman in 1612<sup>30</sup> at the battle of Daulambapur. But there is no mention in Nathan's work about the use of such firepower by any local rebellions of the extreme north-eastern frontier of Bengal. As regards the use of cannon by the twelve chieftains, Abul Hashem Miah maintains that

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<sup>27</sup> McNeill, W. H., *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 95-98.

<sup>28</sup> Nathan, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-176.

some of Bara Bhuiyans such as Isa Khan, Kedar Roy, Khwaja Usman, Pratapaditya and Sitaram Roy of Mahmudabad (Jessor) had their own cannons made by the local blacksmiths. The big cannon now placed in the Usmany Udyan, and the huge cannon of Murshidabad are believed to have been made by Janardn Karmaka (blacksmith) of Sylhet.<sup>31</sup>

Given this, it can be said that imperialists were not the only users of cannon or gunpowder, which is why the Mughals state can not be labelled the 'Gunpowder Empire'. To mention another reason in favour of our claim, and thus against the Mughals, they did not introduce cannon to India; cannon 'had been found in North India and the Deccan since the second half of the fifteenth century, nearly a century before the Mughal age.'<sup>32</sup>

Another question now may well be asked: 'how critical was the use of gunpowder in consolidation of the Mughals' power in eastern Bengal?' Nathan's writes, 'cannon, cross-bows, rockets and other firearms of this type...are the aggressive firearms of India'.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that cannon were not the only weapon that the Mughals used, but the list involves other weaponry, namely muskets and artillery. The French traveller Francois Bernier noted that the Mughals were capable of delivering six arrows before a musketeer could fire twice<sup>34</sup>, which suggests that cannons were used in combination with many other types of weaponry as well as arrows, and thereby attests that mounted archers, musketeers and artillery played a considerable role alongside the cannons in Mughal warfare. Given this, it can be assumed that cannon were the most lethal variety of weapons that the Mughals had used. Over and above cannons, a number of other

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<sup>31</sup> Mia, M. A. H., 'Cannons in the Subcontinent with a Special Reference to the Historical Cannons of Bengal', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 36 No.1, (1991), 65-66.

<sup>32</sup> Eaton, R., M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760)*, (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 152.

<sup>33</sup> Nathan, vol. 2, p.508.

<sup>34</sup> Streusand, D., *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.53.

weaponries played a considerable role in Mughal warfare in eastern Bengal. Other weapons used by them were: muskets, swords, bows and arrows, and horses.

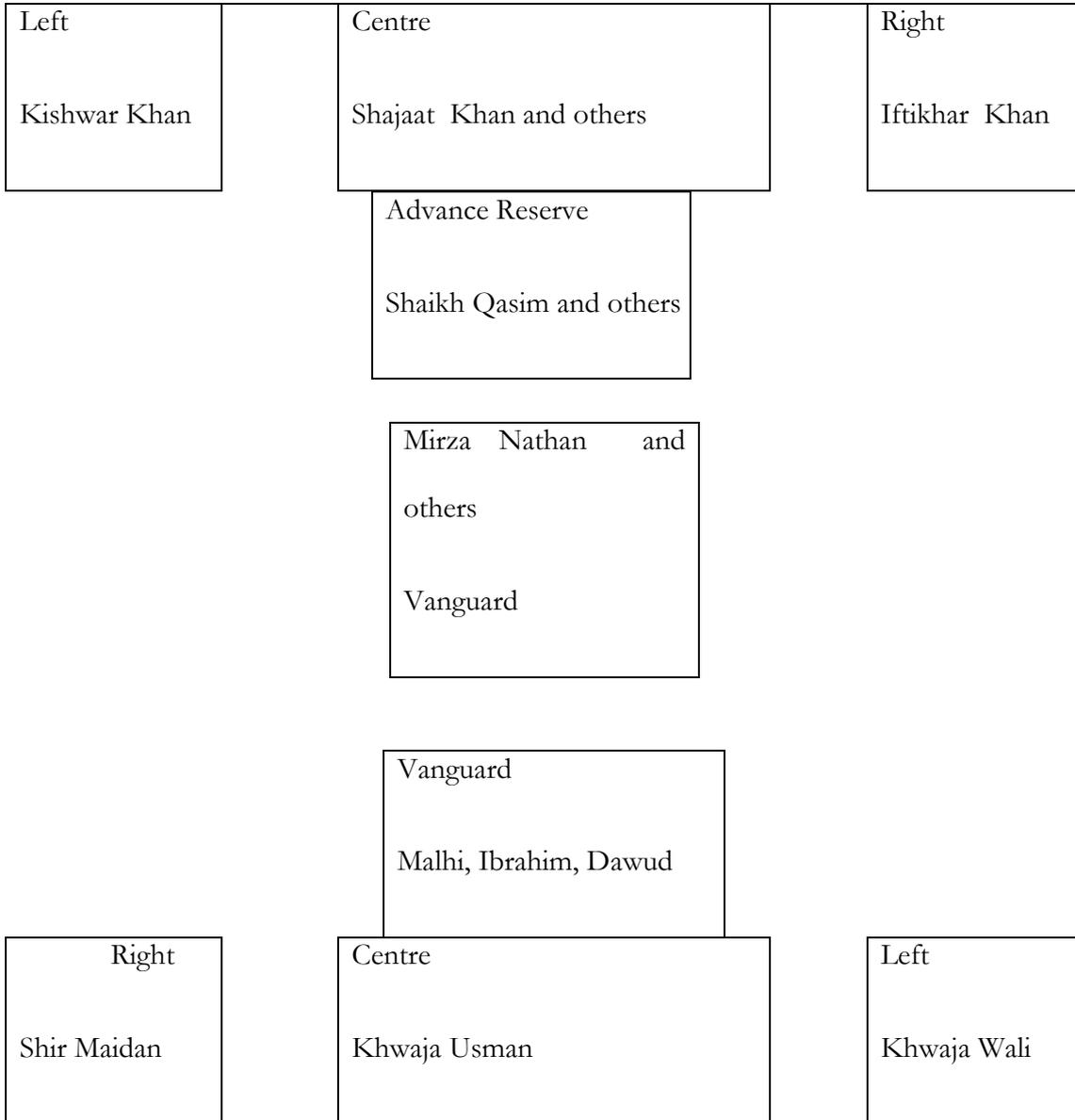
It is worth mentioning that the Mughals were very efficient in using elephants, not only as a carrier but also as a weapon. As mentioned in *Babaristan*, elephants were mounted on wheels to carry out charges on enemy forts under the shelter of a heavy defensive screen called 'gardun kalan'. Such use of elephants was a common means of the Mughals' attack on the enemy forts and fortifications in eastern Bengal. However, although Nathan narrated this as his own experience, the claim of this statement that 'elephants were mounted on wheels to carry out charges on enemy forts' seems unrealistic. My source happens to be not *Babaristan* but an English translation from the 1930s. Thus it is evidently the problematic translation, not *Babaristan*, responsible for unrealistic information, such as elephants on wheels.

Another significant aspect of the Mughal military strategy and techniques was the deployment of 'a mixed force structure'. Referring to *Babaristan*, Eaton writes that the Mughals operated about ten major campaigns against local chieftains and their Afghan allies during the decade between 1608 and 1618. They deployed a mixed force 'averaging for each campaign 4,000 musketeers 2,100 mounted archers, and 300 war boats.'<sup>35</sup> A further significant aspect is their battle-order. The Mughal battle order was relatively more defensive than their enemies, in particular the battle order of the Afghans. While in the Mughals' battle order there was a wing behind the vanguard (which is called Iltamish or advanced reserve), in the Afghans' one there was no such wing. As narrated in *Babaristan*, the Mughal force pitched their camp in Daulombopur battle dividing their army according to the order mentioned below.

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<sup>35</sup> Eton, p.152.

### Mughal battle order



### Afghan battle order

Source: Karim, A., *History of Bengal*, vol. 1. 1992, p. 306

What has emerged from the above mentioned analysis, in particular from archaeological evidence and the contemporary sources, is that the Mughals were quite capable of planning their military strategy and tactics well-suited to the topographical conditions in which (riverine eastern Bengal) they were formulated. As ~~has been~~ observed here, the characteristic traits of the Mughal military strategy and techniques were implicit in their four major initiatives, to say the least:

Firstly, the plan of undertaking a meticulous study on eastern Bengal's climate and geography, particularly the positions of rivers and rivulets, and strategic places from the points of view of war-operations, and reaching the conclusion that flotilla of war boats were more effective than cavalry and use of war-boats and cannons were more effective than any other equipments in the warfare in eastern Bengal.

Secondly, and more importantly, the plan of constructing forts and fortification on the bank of rivers using topography of rivers as a natural advantage, not to defy it.

Thirdly, the plan of constructing the right type of defence structures with appropriate priority in the right (strategic) places.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the plan of executing a military machine that effectively combined gunpowder weaponry with mounted archers and naval forces, i.e. the deployment of a mixed force structure, was no less significant aspects of the Mughals' military matters.

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<sup>36</sup> As has been discussed here, the magnitude of construction and their location were based on security needs and purpose. While river forts were strongly built to station substantial bodies of army on a more permanent basis in strategic places in and around the provincial capital Dhaka to depend it from attacks of invading force, border out-posts were built to place small bodies of army in strategic places all over the province outside Dhaka.

What is more, it has also been apparent from the above analysis that river forts were the most significant and useful innovation of the Mughals. For river forts have had all the features that were required to dissuade the invading forces i.e., these structures played the central role in defending the provincial capital Dhaka (which was the centre of their administrative and trade activities) against various invading forces. Albeit some limitations in relation to river forts, plan of constructing border out-posts, the miniature version of river forts in a qualified sense, in strategic places outside Dhaka, was also no less significant aspects of military matters of the Mughals’.

## **PART TWO**

### **ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION**

Part Two contains analytical discussion of the historical periods during which the river forts may have been built. Each chapter covers a specific period and assesses the various military threats to the Dhaka region at that time and the possible role that the river forts of Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur may have played in it. It is hoped that by drawing together the political, economic and military situation of each period, and by looking at the river system at that period, this part will succeed in reaching a convincing conclusion about the building and purpose of the river forts in question.

Chapter seven of this part covers the political, economic and military situation of the period from 1576 to 1611. It also draws attention to the river systems of this period. Through them, this chapter attempts to assess the link between the river systems and the position and building of the river forts, together with the possible involvement of the bhuiyans with the building of the river forts.

Chapter eight of this part contains a detailed account of subhadar Islam Khan's successful campaigns in eastern Bengal, in particular in Bhati, including his immediate successors' (1613-1628) campaigns. It executes this by focusing on the political, economic and military situation as well as drawing attention to the river systems of this period. This chapter winds up with exploring and assessing the possible connection of Islam Khan and his immediate successors<sup>2</sup> with the building of the river forts.

Chapter nine focuses on the period of subahdar Shah Shuja (1639-1660). It contains an account of the administrative and military situation of Bengal in Shuja's time and assesses his enemies' threats to Dhaka region, in particular threats from the Portuguese and the Maghs of Arakans. The key objective of this chapter is also to identify the link between Shah Suja and the building of the river forts.

Chapter ten is devoted to discerning the connection between subahdar Mir Jumla's time (1660-1663) and the building of the three river forts. Like the previous three chapters, this chapter also exercises this by discussion political, economic and military situation as well as drawing attention to the river systems of Mir Jumla's time.

Chapter eleven, the last chapter of this part, deals with subahdar Shaista Khan's (1663-1678 and 1680-1688) successful campaign against Chittagong. Over and above the discussion of the significance of this victory for restoring a long-term peace in Bengal, which had been achieved through suppressing the Portuguese pirates and driving out the Maghs of Arakan from the area of Chittagong, this chapter argues that Shaista Khan had no involvement with the building of the river-forts.

## Chapter Six

### Resistance to the Mughal Rulers, 1576-1611: the Role of Isa Khan and Other Bhuiyan Leaders

The independent Afghan sultans' rule came to an end in Bengal with the defeat of Dawud Karrani (1572-1576) by subhadar Khan Jahan (1575-1578) in the battle of Rajmahal on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1576.<sup>37</sup> At that time, eastern Bengal was under the rule of 'bhuiyans', 'zaminders' and different military chiefs, who ruled different parts of Bengal as autonomous or semi-autonomous chiefs. Bhuiyans (famously known as Baro-Bhuiyans (twelve chieftains))<sup>38</sup> were the major barrier to the Mughals' conquest of eastern Bengal, in particular 'Bhati'<sup>39</sup>. Divided into many *parganas* (small areas/districts), 'Bhati' was governed by Bara Bhuiyans who had been governors of Bengal sometimes under the Sultans and sometimes independently. They put up a refractory resistance to the Mughal aggression (sometimes jointly or sometimes independently). Being the chief of the bhuiyans leaders, Isa Khan (1576–1599) ruled 'Bhati' and led the local resistance

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<sup>37</sup> Fazal, A., *Akbarnama*, H.Beveridge ( tr.), vol. III (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1973), pp. 227-28.

<sup>38</sup> Following the *Akbarnama*, a list of some eight bhuiyans can supply. They are: Isa Khan (the leader of the chieftains), Ibrahim Naral, Karimdad Musazai, Majlis Dilwar, Majlis Pratap, Tila Ghazi, Kedar Rai, Sher Khan. Ibid., pp.645–651.

<sup>39</sup> In Bengal the word 'Bhati' generally means low land and the entire low-land of Bengal is Bhati. Karim says, it received this name, as it was lower from west Bengal (Karim, pp.107- 113). There is however disagreement about the limits of Bhati. As has been argued in Wikipedia ( Baro-Bhuiyan), for some modern scholars, Bengal is riverine country and most of it remains flooded for more than half of the year thus different low-lying areas of Bengal should be identified with Bhati; for others the whole of low-lying track from the river Bhagirathi to the Meghna is Bhati; and for some others, Hijli, Jessor, Comilla and Bakerganj should be included in Bhati. Given this disagreement, it is really difficult to get the clear idea about the limits of Bhati. The Baro-bhuiyans fought against the Mughals in the reign of emperors Akbar and Jahangir and they submitted within a few years. Thus it seems that area of Bhati may be identified with the help of (contemporary) Mughal histories, mainly the *Akbarnama*, the *Ain-e-Akbari* and the *Babaristan-I-Ghaybi*. Following these three contemporary sources of information (about the warfare between Baro- Bhuiyan and the mughal force), Bhati may well be determined as the area surrounded by the River Ichamati in the West, the River Ganges ( and Padma ) in the south, the kingdom of Tippera in the east, and the Alapsingh pargana in the greater district of Mymensingh extending towards north-east of Baniachang in Sylhet in the north.

movement against the Mughal rulers. He continued with the resistance activities against the Mughal aggression and invasion until he died a natural death in 1599. The Mughals force could not manage to subdue him. Thus it can be said that the region of Bhati was mainly under the rule of Isa Khan and his allies for a period of 23 years from 1576 to 1599.

After Isa Khan's death in 1599, Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, led the bhuiyans-resistance against the Mughal rulers. Although resistance under the leadership of Musa Khan was also a glorious chapter for the Bengalis (for details see chapter eight), the resistance was short-lived. It ended up with the defeat of Musa Khan by the Mughal force (during the governorship of Islam Khan (1608-1613)) in 1611<sup>40</sup>, suggesting that the bhuiyan resistance to the Mughal rulers in effect came to an end in 1611 with submission of Musa Khan along with his brothers and zaminder allies to the emperor Jahangir's general Islam Khan.

The first reference to Isa Khan (1576 to 1599) has been found in *Akbarnama*.<sup>41</sup> Abul Fazal, the author of the book, states that after the death of the Mughal subahdar Munim Khan on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1575, Dawud Khan Karrani (1572-1576) broke his agreement and fell upon the Mughals. Taking advantage of this turmoil, Isa Khan attacked Shah Bardi, the Mughal admiral (*mir nawara*), and defeated him.<sup>42</sup> The place of war was not mentioned in *Akbarnama* although in consideration of the latter occasions it seems that the place of war was somewhere near Sarail<sup>43</sup>, the pargona of Isa Khan. Khan Jahan (1575 – 1578) came as the new subhadar of Bengal a couple of months later after

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<sup>40</sup> Nathan, M., *Babaristan-I- Ghaybi*, M.,I., Borah (tr.), vol. I, (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936), p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> Fazal, pp. 227-228.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>43</sup> Sarail Pargana is still now an important place north of Brahmanbaria on the eastern bank of the Meghna. The battle of 1578 between the Mughal Subhadar Khan Jahan and Isa Khan took place on the Meghna and places around.

the death of Munim Khan. In the absence of a governor, Bengal, and in particular Bhati, was entirely out of Mughals' control during this short period of time.

As we have mentioned earlier, the independent Afghan sultans' rule came to an end with the defeat of Dawud Karrani (1572-1576) by the new subahdar Khan Jahan in the battle of Rajmahal in 1576. Following the death of Dawud Karrani, the Afghans gathered at Satgaon<sup>44</sup>, but they engaged in in-fighting and thus lost integrity and unity. Taking advantage of this disunity and conflict, Khan Jahan advanced to Satgaon in December 1577 and made Satgaon clear of Afghan enemies.<sup>45</sup> After this victory, Khan Jahan returned to Tanda, the then capital of Bengal.

Although the aforementioned victories brought the Mughals an undisturbed stay in the capital of Tanda, consolidation of the Mughals' power in eastern Bengal, in particular in the region of 'Bhati', was nonetheless a far cry. Isa Khan's success over the Mughal Admiral Shah Bardi inspired him to continue with rebellious activities against the Mughals. Two landholders (zaminders) of Bhati, Ibrahim Naral and Karimdad Musazai robustly engaged themselves with the anti-imperialists movement of Isa Khan.<sup>46</sup>

With the aim of subjugating Isa Khan and his allies, Khan Jahan came from Tanda to Bhati in 1578.<sup>47</sup> He reached Bhawal<sup>48</sup> in Bhati via Goash (located in

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<sup>44</sup> Satgaon was located on the confluence of the rivers Bhagirathi, Jamuna and Sarasvati in west Bengal. In the Sultanate period, it was an important port city and continued its importance up till the river Sarasvati dried up in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Afterwards the river Hugli came in the supremacy. For more see Karim, A. *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1963), p.214.

<sup>45</sup> Fazal, p. 376.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 376-377. Although there is no mentions of Ibrahim Naral and Karimdad Musazai's zamindari in *Akbarnama*, they, according to Bhattasali, were zaminder of Sonargaon and Maheswardi parganas respectively. For more see Bhattasali, N. K., 'Bengal Chiefs' Struggle for independence in the Reigns of Akbar and Jahangir', *Bengal Past and Present*, 38 (1928), p.29.

<sup>47</sup> Fazal, p.376.

Murshidabad, west Bengal). In his presence and counsels most of the rebels, particularly the Mughal admiral Shah Bardi (who initially raised his voice against the newly appointed subhadar Khan Jahan<sup>49</sup>), became loyal to Khan Jahan. Isa Khan, however, did not accede to Khan Jahan, but rather continued to show noncompliance. Given this, Khan Jahan sent a large fleet under the admiral Shah Bardi and Muhammad Quli against Isa Khan. In order to reach Sarail, the pargana of Isa Khan, the Mughals' fleet rowed up the rivers Banar, Sitalakhya, Kiyara Sindur (Egara Sindur<sup>50</sup>), Brahmaputra and Meghna. On their way to Sarail, they first reached Egara Sindur, which was located on the eastern bank of the river Brahmaputra. From there they headed for Sarail by the river Meghna via Bhairab Bazar and Joanshai (present-day Astogram). To resist the Mughal force, Isa Khan attacked the Mughal fleet at Kastul (a place presently called Kathail, located two miles west of Astogram on the river Meghna). But in this battle Isa Khan was defeated.<sup>51</sup>

Majlis Dilawar and Majlis Pratap<sup>52</sup>, two landholders of that division of Bhati, however, managed to resist the fleet of the Mughal admiral Shah Bardi and Muhammad Quli. The two landholders proved themselves as a formidable barrier against them. Muhammad Quli was caught by the landholders and was held in captivity. But with the

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<sup>48</sup> Bhawal is located on the north of Dhaka. Extending towards the Garo Hills, it lays the jungle tract of this area. Its surface passes through numerous rivers which flow through a hilly and generally barren country. For more see *Akbarnama*, p.377; Wise, J., 'Bara –Bhauiyans of Eastern Bengal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.43 (1874 ), 209- 214.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>50</sup> Currently there is no river exist in the name of Kiyara Sindur. This strategically very important place (in particular, during the days of the Baro- Bhuiyans) is now called Egera Sindur , which is situated on the east bank of the river Brahmaputra just opposite to this place from where the river Banar takes off. It is the meeting place of different rivers and streams.

<sup>51</sup> Fazal, p.377.

<sup>52</sup> It has been mentioned in *Akbarnama* that they were zaminders, but the names of their parganas have not been mentioned in this source. Bhattasali assumes that they were zaminders of Joanshai (located opposite Sarail) and Khaliajuri parganas respectively. For more see *Akbarnama*, p.377; Bhattasali, p.28.

help of Tila Ghazi<sup>53</sup>, another landholder, the Mughal army eventually managed to keep them safe from any severe downfall in this conflict.

As a farsighted politician, Isa Khan then realised that it was necessary to enhance his resources to resist aggression and invasion of the Mughal force. In view of that goal, he took the initiative to establish a rapport with other local landholders, Afghan chieftains as well as the rulers of neighbouring kingdoms<sup>54</sup>, and formed an anti-Mughal politico-military alliance.

Subahdar Khan Jahan died in 1578. After the Sarail chapter, Isa Khan transferred his headquarter from Sarail to Bukhttarapur- a site on the left bank of the River Sitalakhya. There is no mention of any serious engagements between the Baro-bhuiyans (particularly Isa Khan) and the Mughal force in *Akbarnama* during the period from the death of Khan Jahan up to the beginning of the governorship of Shahbaz Khan in Bengal (first term: October 1583 - March 1585 and second term: January 1586 to November 1586). Taifoor states that immediately after assuming the governorship in 1583, Shahbaz Khan launched a campaign against Isa Khan. Shahbaz Khan attacked Bukhttarapur, the head quarter of Isa, and destroyed it. Isa Khan then shifted his headquarter from Bukhttarapur to Katrabo; a place beyond the River Sitalakhya, positioned across the fort of Khizirpur.<sup>55</sup> The authenticity of this claim, however, is quite dubious as there is no reference in *Akbarnama* about Shahbaz Khan's attack on Bukhttarapur and Isa Khan's shifting of his headquarter from Bukhttarapur to Katrabo.

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<sup>53</sup> Tila Ghazi was zamindar of Talipabad or Talibabad and belonged to the main stream of Ghazi family of Bhawal.

<sup>54</sup> Bengal was surrounded by some politically significant independent kingdoms: on the north-east by Kuch Bihar, on the east by Tippera and on the south-east by Arakan. These kingdoms were also affected by the Mughal's aggression and clashes often occurred between the Mughals and these kingdoms. Isa Khan attempted to make rapport with all the neighbouring kingdoms. He solicited assistance from them, and succeeded in getting support from Amar Manikya (1577-1586), Raghu Dev, the king of Tippera and Kamarupa respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Taifoor, S.M., *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, 2nd edition, (Dhaka: Lulu Bilquis Banu and others, 1956), p.68.

As narrated in *Akbarnama III*, after his appointment as governor in 1583, Subahdar Shahbaz Khan was first at Ghoraghat and later at Shrepur Murcha. And he actioned to Bhati during monsoon the following year in 1584, and soon after his arrival in Bhati he carried out his first campaign against Isa Khan.<sup>56</sup> On this occasion, Shahbaz Khan first reached Khizirpur<sup>57</sup> and pitched camp there. There were two ‘strong’ forts, one on each side of the River Sitalakhya close to the camp.<sup>58</sup> After several fights with Isa Khan’s personnel, Shahbaz Khan captured these two forts. As a result Sonargoan, a place 3 miles from Khizirpur, came into the possession of the Mughal’s servants. The status of Sonargoan was at the height of its power and glory throughout the ruling period of Isa Khan (towards the last half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). During that time it was also the main centre of trade and commerce between Bengal and South-East Asia. The remarks of Ralph Fitch (the envoy of Elizabeth I to the court of Emperor Akbar) on Sonargaon (which he visited in about 1586) well explain this, which reads as follows:

Sinnergan [Sonargoan] is a town six leagues from Serrepore [Sripur], where there is the best and finest cloth [Muslin] made of cotton that is in all India. The chiefe [chief] king of all those countries is called Isacan [Isa Khan], and he is chiefe [chief] of all the other kings.<sup>59</sup>

Isa Khan built numerous strongholds in its neighbourhood to resist the attempts of the Mughal emperor Akbar from annexing this region. From this discussion it can be argued that sited on both sides of the River Sitalakhya, the above-mentioned two forts were in the list of strongholds which Isa Khan built. This is, however, merely a supposition as there are no contemporary or physical remains in favour of it. Nevertheless it appears that the sites of these two forts were strategically important. For,

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<sup>56</sup> Fazal, pp. 672-73.

<sup>57</sup> As I mentioned in chapter 3, the area of Khizirpur is now know as Hajiganj, which is 14.68 km from the capital, Dhaka.

<sup>58</sup> Fazal, pp.648-49.

<sup>59</sup> Fitch, R., *Early Travels in India( 1583-1619)*, ed. by Foster, William ( London : Oxford University Press, 1921), p.25.

as we have mentioned earlier, soon after these forts were captured by the Mughal force, Sonargoan descended under the control of the Mughals. As Taifoor states, presumably soon afterwards, Isa shifted from Katrabo to Junglebari (present-day Kishoreginj district), a place that was famous as an important centre of muslin weaving industry. The special variety of muslin called 'jungle Khas' was manufactured in this place and was supplied for the great 'umera' (royal employees).<sup>60</sup>

A question now arises from the above discussion whether or not the two forts on inversely situated on the banks of the River Shitalakhya that Shahbaz Khan captured during the war of 1584 may be identical as the present-day fort of Hajiganj (the area of Hajiganj was formerly known as Khizirpur and the fort was also popular by its' old name Khizirpur) and the fort of Sonakanda positioned across the same river. At present there is no difficulty with the identification of Khizirpur, Sonargoan and Katrabo. Khizirpur is situated about a mile north of present day Narayanganj Sadar and about 14.6 km from the capital, Dhaka. Situated on the River Shitalakhya, Khizirpur is 4.8 km from Sonargaon.<sup>61</sup> And Sonargaon is now a township about 27 km to the southeast of the capital Dhaka. It is bounded on the east, west and south by the Meghna, the Shitalakhya and the Dhaleshwari respectively and in the north by the Brahmaputra.<sup>62</sup> Katrabo is under the Rupganj upazila in Narayanganj district. The remains of this pargana/city of medieval Bengal are still seen in Masumabad village, located on the right/eastern bank of River Sitalakhya, by the Bahadur Khan *Bil* (canal) of Rupganj upazila. The surviving

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<sup>60</sup> Taifoor, p.68.

<sup>61</sup> It was historically such a prominent business centre that a number of renowned travellers visited this place, namely the great Muslim traveler Ibna Battuta visited this place in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese traveler Fei Sin in 1415 and an English traveler and trader Ralph Fitch in 1586.

<sup>62</sup> Chowdhury A. M., 'Site and Surroundings', *Sonargaon-Panam*, ed. by A.B.M Husain, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1997), pp.1-31 (p. 2)

remains include part of *Divan Badi* (the residence of the Diwan), the sweet-water tank inside its compound, the tank called *Divan Dighi* (lake) and a ruined tomb on the northern bank of the tank.<sup>63</sup> In identifying the site of Katrabo, James Wise in his work correctly states that Catrabo is Katrobo, now ‘tappa’ on the Lakhya, opposite Khizirpur, which for a long time was the property of the decedents of Isa Khan Masnad-i-Ala.<sup>64</sup>

As observed earlier, Abul Fazal mentions that the place where Shahbaz Khan first reached in Bhati was Khizirpur. Beveridge notes that this place (Khizirpur) was about a mile north of Narayanganj in the Dhaka district.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore Abul Fazal states that Shahbaz Khan captured two strong forts on both sides of the River Shitalakhya, and then mentions Sonargoan and Katrabo which he had plundered. Looking at the current identification of Khizirpur, Sonargaon and Katrabo it can be argued that Abul Fazal, in *Akbarnama*, places them in their proper places. And it suggests that the fort of Hajiganj (once called Khizirpur) and the fort of Sonakanda and the two forts on both sides of the River Sitolakhya that Shahbaz Khan captured during the war of 1584 are in the same place, if not identical. Abul Fazal’s description also suggests that the places on the bank of the River Shitalakhya and Banar were strategically quite important. The forts and fortified buildings, namely the Egara Sindur fort, the Khizirpur fort and the Sonakanda fort on the banks of the river Shitalakhya and Banar were used by the bhuiyans and their allies to resist the Mughal campaigns against them. It will not be out of context to say that Isa Khan used Khizirpur fort to defend the immunity of the place on the eastern bank of the River Shitalakhya. For later events show that after the death of Isa Khan, the

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<sup>63</sup> Khatun, H., ‘ In Quest of Katrabo’ *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol .31 (1986 ), p.84.

<sup>64</sup> Wise, J., ‘Bara -Bhauyans of Eastern Bengal’ *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 43 ( 1874 ), pp. 209 – 214 ( p. 211 );

<sup>65</sup> Fazal , III, p. 648, note.3

bhuiyans were losing their power and control, and Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, surrendered to the Mughal force after they captured the fort of Khizirpur.

Taking the advantage of Isa Khan's engrossment in a mission to the neighbouring kingdom Kuch Bihar<sup>66</sup>, Shahbaz Khan afterwards attacked Katrabo, the headquarters of Isa Khan, plundered and severely destroyed it. After plundering and destroying Katrabo, Subahdar Shahbaz Khan sent a group of troops to another significant cum strategic place named Egara Sindur (which was also a magnanimous town and strategically important place now in the Pakundia Upazila of the Kishoreganj district) to plunder it. After plundering Egara Sindur, they descended to the old Brahmaputra River. Masum Khan Kabuli (1581- 1599)<sup>67</sup> arrived there to resist them. In this engagement with the Mughal army, Masum Khan Kabuli was defeated and fled, and took shelter on an island. A portion of the Mughals' army assumed position at Tok (which was located opposite Egara Sindur on the west bank of the river Brahmaputra, from where the river Banar takes off) and built a fort there, and the rest of the members of the group of army resumed position at Bajsarapur (present day Bajitpur).<sup>68</sup> During this time, the Subahdar Shahbaz Khan was leading his army encamping on the bank of the river Banar<sup>69</sup> (Panar in *Akbarnama*), a distributory of the river Brahmaputra.

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<sup>66</sup> Kuch Bihar was the northern frontier of Bengal. Naranarayan (1555-1587) was the first king of this kingdom. It was strategically very important place for the Mughals. The rebels used to take shelter in Kuch Bihar when they got defeated by the Mughals (e.g., the rebels took shelter in Kuch Bihar when they were defeated at Ghoraghat). Thus the frontier kingdom of Kuch Bihar was also one of the targeted places of the Mughals. They wanted that kingdom to be loyal or friendly to them.

<sup>67</sup> He was a military captain of the time of Akbar who turned into one of the leaders of the rebels. Although other rebellions were suppressed, Masum Khan Kabuli did not submit to the Mughal rulers. He declared independence and his headquarter was at Chatmohar in Pabna district. Kabuli joined with Isa Khan and continued his war against the imperialists till his death in A.H. 1007 / (1598-1599).

<sup>68</sup> Fazal , p.647.

<sup>69</sup> Beveridge following Rennel mentions that the Banar is another name for the Luchia (Lakhya). Also Beveridge cites Taylor's *Topography Of Dacca*, Calcutta, 1840, says, p.12: "The Banar unites the Brahmapootra and Luckia (the Buriganga). It has formed deep bed for itself in the hard kankar soil of the Northern Division, and in some places is more than fifty feet deep".

On discovery of this news Isa immediately returned home from Kooch Bihar with a large army and offered a vigorous resistance against the Mughal force. Several fierce engagements took place between Isa Khan's force (Masum Khan Kabuli) and the Mughal force by on land and water as well on both sides of the old Brahmaputra River; namely Tok and Egarasindur. Isa Khan and his ally Masum Khan Kabuli defeated the Mughal force in the battle of Egarasindur and Tok.<sup>70</sup> Masum Khan Kabuli, a rebel Mughal noble, defeated Tarsun Khan in an engagement on the old Brahmaputra River at Bajitpur. Tarsun Khan lost his life at the hand of Masum Khan Kabuli as he refused Kabuli's proposal of joining them to fight against the imperialists.<sup>71</sup>

During this time, Shabaz Khan encamped on the bank of the River Banar (Panar in *Akabarnama*), a branch of the River Brahmaputra.<sup>72</sup> And he sent a proposal to Isa Khan saying that Isa Khan should either deliver up the dissenters to them or drive them away from his vicinity. But it did not work as Isa Khan was not sincere in his affectionateness about compromise. As a result, the battle commenced began over again and continued for seven months, but proved indecisive. Isa Khan and his allies tried their best to drive away the Mughals' army. They were waiting for the monsoon to attack the camp of Shahbaz Khan, but that year the rainfall was less than usual. In this situation, the soldiers of the bhuiyans' leader Isa Khan abridge the river Brahmaputra in at least fifteen places, inundating the whole area of Shahbaz Khan's camp. Thus Shahbaz Khan's campaign of 1584 against the bhuiyans and allies met with complete failure, and compelled him back to the capital of Tanda from Bhati.<sup>73</sup> The situation of the Mughal's authority in eastern Bengal was very precarious at that time. Taking advantage of such a

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<sup>70</sup> Fazal, p. 658.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 657-60.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.658 .

<sup>73</sup> Habiba Khatun says that the area of Baniachang and Kastul were the best but difficult retreat routes for the imperialists. For more see Khatun, H., 'Isa Kha', *Itihās Parisad Potrica*, 1993, pp.321-331.

situation, Isa Khan captured and imprisoned the *thanadar* (military administrator) of Dhaka in 1584.<sup>74</sup>

Akbar sent Shahbaz Khan to subjugate Bhati for a second time in 1586. At this time, Isa Khan sent a peace proposal with declamatory presents and conciliatory nomenclature to Shahbaz Khan and pretended to be faithful to the emperor.<sup>75</sup> In so doing, Isa Khan succeeded in averting the Mughals from further aggression and invasion in Bhati, and as a result he ruled Bhati virtually unbridled for almost a decade.<sup>76</sup>

The final battle that Isa Khan fought against the Mughal force was when Man Singh (1594 to 1605) sent a large ground force and a fleet to Bhati in September of 1597 under the command of his son Durjan Shingh. He attacked Isa Khan's capital, Katrabo. With their own Bengali war boats, Isa Khan and his ally Masum Khan Kabuli build up a sporadic resistance to the imperialists' naval force. Despite some initial success, Durjan Shingh was finally defeated and killed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September (in the same year) in a naval engagement at a place 12 miles off Bikrampur.<sup>77</sup> Isa Khan, Daud Khan, Abdullah Khan, Mahmud Khan and his nephew Alaol Khan continued engagements with the imperialists.<sup>78</sup> Three years after the death of never acceded to the Mughals until he died a natural death in 1599. Assuming the title *Masnad-i- Ala* (most highly positioned)<sup>79</sup>, Isa

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<sup>74</sup> Fazal, p.439.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 696-97.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.721-22.

<sup>77</sup> Bikrampur, a rich and flourishing paragan, was situated on the west bank of the river Padma. It encompasses the area with the Padma on the west, the Dhaleswari on the north and east, and the confluence of the Arial River and the Meghna on the south. Chand Rai was zaminder of Bikrampur of his days. It is said that Isa Khan had a fight with Chand Roy and forcefully carried away his daughter Sunai (Sunamayee) and married her. For more see Karim, pp. 68-69.

<sup>78</sup> Karim, p.89; Taifoor, p.71.

<sup>79</sup> Historians are of diverse opinions as to the background of Isa Khan's title 'Masnad-i-Ala'. The reference to Isa Khan's *Masnad-i- Ala*, as found in *Rajmala*, the king of Tippera, at the request of the Queen Amaravati (who took Isa Khan as her son), conferred the title of *Masnad-i- Ala* on Isa Khan and granted a group of army to his aid which consisting of 52 thousand solders. For more see S., Kaliprasanna (ed.), *Rajmala-3*, Agaratala, India, 1341. Tippera era, p.16. M. A. Rahim maintains that in recognition of the bribery of Isa Khan showed against the Mughal admiral Shah Bardi and also the service he gave to him,

Khan ruled Bhati as the chief of the local and Afghan heroes until his death. This resulted in the ruination of the Mughals' desire of subjugating east Bengal, especially Bhati during the ruling period of Isa Khan.

After the death of Isa Khan, his sons Musa Isa Khan in 1602, Raja Man Singh established Dhaka as the centre of his military operations in the east<sup>80</sup>, which eventually gained the importance of being the capital of Bengal during Islam Khan's statesmanship.

As narrated in *Akbarnama*, Man Singh established himself in his new headquarters Dhaka within a short period of time, and the stability of power tipped from the Mughals forever. From the new headquarters, he mounted an enthusiastic campaign against Isa Khan's relations and other allies exploiting the disarray that was caused by Isa Khan's death. The Afghans and the Arakanese leagued with Dawud Khan, one of the sons of Isa Khan, to strengthen the resistance against the imperialists' invasion. Thus, of all the enemy entities, in 1603, Man Singh first worked on Dawud Khan and then on Kedar Rai and the Arakanese.<sup>81</sup> In all these battles, according to Abul Fazal, Man Singh met with tremendous victory. Man Singh ordered a number of brave army to cross the River

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Dawud Karrani conferred this title on Isa Khan in October, 1575. For more see Rahim, M. A., *The History of Afghan in India*, p. 226. On the basis of the tradition collected by James Wise, the Mughal subhadar Man Singh took Isa Khan to the emperor Akbar, and the emperor conferred Isa Khan on the title of Diwan and Masnsa-i-Ali and gave him a grant of numerous parganas in Bengal. For more see the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 43 (1874), pp. 213-14. But these views can not be accepted in view of the statement of Abul Fazal who maintains that Isa Khan did never go to the imperial Court. For more see *Akbarnama*. III, p. 1140. It seems that being a court historian, Abul Fazal did not let miss out any opportunity to applaud the emperor Akbar. For Bhattasali, 'no statement can be more clear and it is inconceivable that Abul Fazal would needlessly conceal or forget to mention so important and, from the imperial point of view, so welcome a piece of information'. *Bengal Past Present*, 38 (1929), p.5. The inscription on Isa Khan's cannon also afford serious objection against the claim of Wise's tradition. For the date of Isa Khan's cannon is A.H 1002/ 1593-94, thus he had the title of the *Masnad-i- Ala* before Man Singh took over the change of subhadar of Bengal in 1595.

<sup>80</sup> Fazal, p. 809. The purpose of Man Singh was to make the rebellious ambitions of all these elements inaccessible. Dhaka, the far eastern frontier of the imperialists, had long been recognized as a strategically significant place. It had been an outpost of Muslim settlers since at least the mid- fifteenth century, to say the least. Munim Khan also realized this, and it was implicit in his decision of making Dhaka the headquarter of a *Thana* (or military centre) shortly after taking charge of the province in 1574. For more see Eaton, R., M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760)*, (London: University of California Press,1993), p.45.

<sup>81</sup> Fazal, pp. 1213-14, 1235.

Ichamati to punish Dawud and Kedar Rai, the zaminder of Bikrampur. With the severity of the attack of the Mughal army Daud Khan went off to Sonargaon. Kedar Rai was defeated and killed, whereas the Arakanese were pushed back from the lower delta.<sup>82</sup>

After the defeat and death of his son Durjan Shingh in the hands of Musa Khan and his allies in 1603, Man Singh, as mentioned in *Akbarnama*, himself led the campaign against the bhuiyans and their allies in 1603 and 1604, and he conquered the whole of Bhati and set up thanas at strategic places.<sup>83</sup> From the narratives by Abul Fazal in *Akabrnama*, it appears that the imperialists had managed to establish their authority in Bhati (if not in the whole of eastern Bengal) between 1599 and 1603 under the leadership of subahdar Man Singh.

However the cogency of Abul Fazal's testimony remains open to question. For later events, according to many Mughal military historians including Mirza Nathan (the author of *Babaristan-i-Ghaybi*, show that the whole of Bhati was under the control of bhuiyans and their allies until Islam Khan became the governor of Bengal in 1608. Even the Alapsingh pargana, the only Thana that was under the control of the Mughals at that time, according to the same source, was captured by the Afghan hero Khwaja Usman. The whole of eastern Bengal including Bhati (except for Chittagong) came under the authority of the Mughals during the period of rule of Islam Khan between 1608 and 1613.<sup>84</sup>

After the death of Akbar, his son Nur-al-Din Muhammad Jahangir (1605-1627) ascended the throne on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1605. Within three years of his ascending the

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<sup>82</sup> Eaton, p. 149, note. 45.

<sup>83</sup> Fazal pp. 1213-1236.

<sup>84</sup> Nathan, M., *Babaristan-I- Ghaybi*, M., I., Borah, trns., 2 vols, (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936), p.100.

power, Jahangir had to change the subahdar of Bengal for a couple of times.<sup>85</sup> At that time, Man Singh was in the capital city of Agra. Being reappointed as subahdar of Bengal by the emperor Jahangir, Man Singh returned to Bengal, but was recalled or dismissed by the emperor within a year. Qutub-ud-din Khan (1606-1607) was appointed in Man Singh's position on 12<sup>th</sup> September in 1606. After the death of Qutub-ud-din Khan in AD 1607, Jahangir Quli Khan (1607-1608), the subahdar of Bihar, was appointed subahdar of Bengal. He was very advanced in age and died on the 6<sup>th</sup> May in 1608. Islam Khan (1608-1613) was appointed subhdar of Bengal soon after the death of Jahangir Quli Khan. From the year of the death of Akbar in 1605 to the year of appointment of Islam Khan, no substantial advancement was made by the Mughals. The story of the fundamental accomplishment of establishing the Mughals' authority in east Bengal was started under the leadership of the extraordinarily able and determined commander, Islam Khan in 1608 onwards (the next chapter involves a detailed discussion on this matter).

Abul Fazal's *Akbarnama* is often criticized by the relevant historians for involving confusing description of places of battles, location of rivers and so on. The main reason for these confusions is the fact that the author of *Akbarnama* was a court historian who never visited East Bengal. In Abdul Karim's words:

As Abul Fazal had no acquaintance with Bengal, he had no personal knowledge of the geographical and topographical condition. That is why, at times, he makes confusion about the location of places and distances from one place to another.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Fazal, A., *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Memoirs of Jahangir), Rogers, A., (tr.), H.Beveridge (ed.), vol.I (From the first to the twelfth years of his Reign), (London :Royal Asiatic Society,1909), p.208.

<sup>86</sup> Karim, vol.1, p.5.

On the other hand, Mirza Nathan, the author of *Babaristan-i-Ghaybi*, visited almost the whole of the riverine eastern Bengal and himself participated in most of the battles with the bhuiyans and their Afghan allies as a vanguard warrior. Thus *Babaristan-i-Ghaybi* is envisaged to be one of the original sources of information about the Mughals' campaigns in eastern Bengal.

Given this, it can now plausibly be said that although the Mughals invaded several strategic places of Bhati (namely Sarail, Khizirpur, Sonargoan, Katrobo and Egara Sindur) and succeeded in looting and occupying some of the places, they could not maintain possession for a long time in opposition to the strong and determined resistance of Bhuiyans and their Afghan allies. During the period in question, the imperialists merely succeeded in breaking tottering Afghan power in Tanda (which they made the capital of Bengal, and ruled West Bengal without difficulty), West Bengal. Thus the area of Bhati during the period of 35 years from 1576 to 1611 was under the control of Isa Khan and his son Musa Khan and their allies Afghans.

From the above discussion (on the Mughals campaign against Bara-Bhuiyan, in particular Khan Jahan's campaign of 1578 and Shahbaz Khan's campaign of 1584 and 1586 against Isa Khan and his allies, also Man Singh's campaign of 1603 and 1604, and their resistance by Isa Khan and his allies) we get some ideas about the river systems of Bengal, the places of conflict and the names of strategic places in Bhati in the days of Akbar. Also we get an idea about military threats to Dhaka region and the role of forts within the area in query in those days.

It seems that both Khan Jahan's campaign of 1578 and Shahbaz Khan's campaign of 1584 against Isa Khan extended all along by the Rivers Ichamati, Shitalakhya, Banar, and Brahmaputra up to the River Meghna and its distributaries. This

suggests that in the days of Akbar the area of Bhati was surrounded by three great rivers: the Padma, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna and their distributaries. To determine the Mughals aggression in Bengal and its resistance by the Bara-Bhuiyans, understanding the riverine scene of medieval Bengal thus seems very significant.

Furthermore, the Padma-Brahmaputra-Meghna river-system had a significant influence on the political, military and economic situations of eastern Bengal, in particular Bhati during the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century. The Baro-bhuiyan leaders rose to power in this region and resisted Mughals' aggression. As we mentioned in chapter three, on every occasion, the reason for the transfer of the capital of Bengal from one place to another was the shifting of the river course and the decline of sanitary conditions. And interestingly, all the capitals of Bengal were situated on the bank of the Ganges river systems (to be more specific, on the bank of the River Padma) in and around Dhaka.

Also from the above discussion it has so far been apparent that military threats to the Dhaka region to a considerable extent increased when Isa Khan rose (from the position of a petty zaminder of Sarail pargana) to the power of an extensive territory of Bhati and also became the chief of the Bara-Bhuiyans. As we have discussed earlier, the Mughal governor Shahbaz Khan led the campaign of 1584 mainly against Isa Khan. During this campaign, the conflict spread over almost all of the strategic places of Bhati, which were within or neighboring places of the vicinity of Dhaka. Among the major strategic places in and around Dhaka were Bhawal, Junglebari, Tok, Egara-Sindur, Bajitpur, Astogram, Bikrampur, Sonargaon, Katrabo and Khizirpur. Isa Khan together with his Afgan ally Masum Khan Kabuli, a rebel military chief of Akbar, resisted all the Mughal campaigns carried out in all the above mentioned strategic places in and around Dhaka region.

More importantly the discussion of this chapter supports the claim that all the battles that took place between Emperor Akbar's and Jahangir's generals and the bhuiyan leaders and their allies were in the same geographical areas. These areas most likely comprised the area of Bhati. And overall it seems that it was the main target of the Mughals' campaigns during Akbar's reign. But Isa Khan and his allies effectively resisted all the Mughals' campaigns until 1599. It suggests that in all probability Isa Khan erected strongholds in the strategic places in and around Dhaka, mainly on the bank or near the bank of the river Shitalakhya at the point of Khizirpur and Katrabo. The Mughals occupied all these strongholds and erected many new forts as they were advancing towards their target of subjugating Bhati. Among the major occupied forts are the two strong forts on both sides of the river Shitalakhya. It suggests that these forts were very significant for the protection of the territory of Isa Khan. For, as we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, Isa Khan had lost control of Sonargaon as soon as the Mughal force captured these two forts. This clearly indicates that the forts in and around the area of Dhaka were very significant for the protection for either party during the period in question. But who built them still remains unclear owing to the lack of contemporary textual documentation or any inscriptional evidence.

## Chapter Seven

### **Islam Khan, Mughal Subahdar, 1608-1613, and His Immediate Successors: The Portuguese and Arakanese/Magh Threats during this Period**

Since the Death of Dawud Khan in 1575, the Mughals were in possession of (West) Bengal. Although the then emperor Akbar (1556-1605) had sent about a dozen generals to subjugate eastern Bengal, they failed to accomplish their task successfully.<sup>1</sup> Thus Akbar had to breathe his last in 1605 leaving this objective unaccomplished. It was during his son and successor emperor Jahangir's reign (1605-1627) that the Mughal became successful in establishing a regular administration in nearly the whole of eastern Bengal. Like Akbar's generals, Jahangir's first few generals proved ineffective in subjugating eastern Bengal. Hence Jahangir appointed Islam Khan, an exceptionally able and determined commander, as a Subahdar of Bengal in May 1608 to get the unfinished mission executed. With his determined diplomacy and capacity to plan those military strategy and tactics which were better suited to battles in inhospitable areas of the topography of the Gangetic plain, Islam Khan managed to subjugate the whole of eastern Bengal including the isolated low-lying area except for its south east frontier, Chittagong, during his lone five years of statesmanship from 1608 to 1613. Having briefly discussed Islam Khan's major campaigns in eastern Bengal against Bhuiyans and their

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<sup>1</sup> During Akbar's day, Mughal control was limited to only a small portion of Bengal centring on the city of Tanda, from Rajmahal in the west to Ghoraghat in the north and Sherpur Murcha (Bogra) in the east, Burdwan at Satgaon in the south. For more, see Eaton, R., M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760)*, (London: University of California Press, 1993), p.150.

Afghan allies, and also having discussed the overall political and military situation of eastern Bengal at the time of Islam Khan's immediate successors (from 1613 to 1639), this chapter attempts to determine possible military threats, in particular the Portuguese and the Maghs threat, within the Mughal territory in particular to Dhaka region and the potential role of forts in this period.

### 8.1 Islam Khan, Mughal Subahdar, 1608-1613

Although the successful campaigns in eastern Bengal under the statesmanship of Islam Khan during the reign of Emperor Jahangir were one of the most significant achievements of the Mughals, only limited information about the campaigns can be found in contemporary Indo-Persian chronicles (i.e. Indian chronicles in Persian language). As I mentioned earlier, on occasion, among the contemporary textual sources regarding the history of medieval Mughal period of Bengal are: *Tuzuk- I-Jahangiri*,<sup>2</sup> *Abdul Latif's Diary*<sup>3</sup> and *Babaristan-I- Ghaybi*<sup>4</sup>. But the only source that gives greater details about the Mughals' campaigns in eastern Bengal, with an important record of political and military situation of the then eastern Bengal, is *Babaristan*. As Abdul Karim puts it:

Mirza Nathan's narrative is consistent all through, he arranged the events chronologically, and in my study I could detect no inconsistency or errors. That is why I have a feeling that Mirza Nathan did not write the book from

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<sup>2</sup> Fazal, A., *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*, Rogers, A., (tr.), ed. by H. Beveridge, vol. I (London : Royal Asiatic Society, 1909)

<sup>3</sup> *Abdul Latif's Diary*, discovered by sir Jadunath Sarkar, is a very important source of information about the early days of Islam Khan's statesmanship in Bengal ( in particular, for one year, 1609).

<sup>4</sup> Nathan, M., *Babaristan-I- Ghaybi*, M.I Borah , (tr.) , 2 vols, (Gauhati : Government of Assam, 1936)

memory. He must have had notes [about wars and battles and all important events] with him, which he kept during his active life in various battle-fields.<sup>5</sup>

Abdul Karim takes this consideration further by noting that:

Apart from the wars and battles, Mirza Nathan's knowledge of topography was very accurate. Mirza Nathan had travelled in all most the whole of Bengal. In places where he participated in battles, he gives wealth of details about the places of strategic importance.<sup>6</sup>

From the forgoing remarks it seems that although *Babaristan* is not a socio-political history of Bengal, it is a valuable source of the details of Islam Khan's campaigns in eastern Bengal. Discussion in this chapter therefore has predominantly been based on *Babaristan* although, on occasion, two other sources (i.e. *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri* and *Abdul Latif's Diary*) have been used as points of reference.

A study of *Babaristan* gives the idea that the history of the Mughals' period in Bengal in effect began after the arrival of Islam Khan. Upon receipt of the order of appointment as a Subahdar, Islam Khan moved to Rajmahal, the then capital of Bengal, and intensely studied the geopolitics of eastern Bengal and identified some problems confronting the successful Mughal conquest of Bengal. Among the major problems, as has been identified and/or recognized by modern Mughal historians, are:

- : Low-lying Gangetic plain Bhati and its Bara-Bhuiyans; the Afghans under Khaja Usman and Bayazid Karrani in Bukainagar and Sylhet;
- : Desire of a well-equipped, well trained, loyal and dutiful navy and armed force and;

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<sup>5</sup> Karim, A., *History of Bengal; Mughal Period*, vol.1 (Rajshahi: IBS, 1992), pp.11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.13.

: Long distance between the capital city of Rajmahal (the western corner of the province) and the war-zone of Bhati.

With a view to tackling the challenges listed above, Islam Khan cautiously prepared a plan of action. As described in *Babaristan*, the central aspect of his plan involves two momentous decisions: (1) establishing a strong naval force, the main blind spot of the Mughals in eastern Bengal, which was arguably one of the major disadvantages that caused their predecessors to be defeated in many of their campaigns in eastern Bengal during Akbar's reign; (2) transferring the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka which was at the very heart of the war-zone of Bhati, and also geographically more favourable from the point of view of strategy and commerce.

Islam Khan's plan, mentioned in the paragraph above, suggests that he realised that the success of establishing Mughal authority in the rebellious province of Bengal largely depended on the effectual implementation of the above mentioned plan. Drawing up the major obstacles, Islam Khan, therefore, sent a representation to the emperor Jahangir. The emperor accepted his delegacy, and extended his mighty imperial support through immediately appointing the experienced Mutaqid Khan as a *diman* (revenue administrator) and the experienced imperial naval officer Ihtimum Khan as Mir Bahr (admiral) of the fleet.<sup>7</sup> Having received a generous supply of arms and equipment and generous support from the newly appointed officers, Islam Khan first of all attempted to reorganize, in other words to cement the fragile, naval and armed forces. He was also blessed with the authorization by the emperor for transferring the capital of Bengal from Rajmahal to Dhaka; a place situated in the centre of Bhati and well connected through river networks with the peripheral areas of eastern Bengal, in particular all the headquarters of the Bara-Bhuiyans. By this means, Islam Khan imported the Mughal

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

culture and authority to the Bengal delta, which had so far remained beyond the reach of the North Indian rulers.

As narrated in *Babaristan*, before he marched from Rajmahal to Ghoraghat on the way to Bhati on 7th December 1608, Islam Khan forcibly subjugated the three south-western kingdoms of Birbhum, Pachet and Hijli.<sup>8</sup> Islam Khan reached Ghoraghat in June 1609 and proceeded towards *Bhati* on October 15 in the same year.<sup>9</sup> He spent first half of 1610 battling against the Bara-Bhuiyans. His first battle with the Bhuiyan-leader Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, took place at Jatrapur, located on the bank of the river Ichamati, about 30 miles to the west of Dhaka. But this place can not be identified due to change of course of rivers during the last several hundred years. In this battle Islam Khan defeated Musa Khan and occupied Jatrapur fort, as garrison of the enemy fort were unable to withstand the assault.

Immediately after occupying the fort of Jatrapur, Islam Khan began to proceed to Dakchara<sup>10</sup>, a place situated at a distance of about three miles to the north-west of Jatrapur, where Musa constructed a lofty fort known as Dakchara fort and occupied it<sup>11</sup>. Islam Khan then advanced towards Dhaka<sup>12</sup>. Making Dhaka his capital, Islam Khan renamed it Jahangirnagar, after the name of Emperor Jahangir. The Bhuiyan-leader Musa Khan was remained un-subdued. He retreated to the River Sitalakhya and began

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20. Observing this, Raja Pratapaditya, a very powerful and influential landlord of Jessore, and Raja Satrajit of Bhushna offered submission to Islam Khan. The zaminders and other chiefs around Rajmahal were terrorized and discouraged from conspiring against Islam Khan. That is how Islam Khan kept his rear safe.

<sup>9</sup> Sarkar, Sir J., 'Abdul Latif's Diary' *Bengal Past Present*, 35 (1928), pp.143-46.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan, vol.I, pp.56-58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., see map, p.54. Islam Khan ordered Mirza Nathan to lead this operation. The garrison of the fort failed to withstand the Mughals attack and the Dakchara fort was occupied by them as well. With the occupation of the fort of Jatrapur and Dakchara, the first phase of the war of the imperialists with the Bara-bhuiyans was over.

<sup>12</sup> Since Akbar's day, Dhaka was a Thana Headquarter. A fort was also their after the name of Dhaka before Islam Khan invaded it.

preparing himself for the second and final phase of war against the Mughals.<sup>13</sup> He chalked out a war plan and assigned duties to his armies according to their skills and position.<sup>14</sup>

Considering the strategic measures of Musa Khan and Islam Khan and their posting of soldiers, Karim assumes that while Musa Khan's strategy was defensive, Islam Khan's one was offensive. Even in defensive preparation, Musa Khan failed to show prudence as he surprisingly left Khizirpur undefended (which was strategically a very important place), and thereby allowed this place to be occupied by the Mughals. Khizirpur was a point of communication between Katrabo and Chaura on one side and Sonargaon and the Bandar canal on the other.<sup>15</sup> The imperialists used this vantage position over both wings of Musa Khan's army and naval installations. By occupying Khizirpur, from a strategic point of view the Mughals won half the battle. After fortifying in and around Dhaka, Islam Khan sent expeditions against all the Bhuiyans' positions and won over them, occupying the enemy forts one after another.<sup>16</sup> Islam Khan then

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<sup>13</sup> As part of the preparation, Islam Khan established small chawkis (guard-stations) at Bikrampur and Sripur. He remained beside the Bandar canal, and posted Mirza Mumin behind him, and 'Alau'l Khan on the other side of the canal. He posted 'Abdu'llah Khan at Qadam Rasul, Dawud Khan at Katrabo, Mahmud Khan at Demra Khal and Bahadur Ghazi at Chaura (For map see Nathan, vol. I, p.54). From this defence measure it appears that Musa Khan laid stress on the defence of both sides of the River Sitalakhya (as his capital Katrabo was laid by this river). His neighbouring town was Sonargaon. And for that reason he defended the Bandar canal (it flows by Sonargaon and meets the river Sitalakhya), building forts on two sides, and himself taking up position in one fort. For more see Nathan, vol. I, pp.77 and 83.

<sup>14</sup> Islam Khan ordered Ihtimam Khan to fortify Dhaka. He gave Mirza Nathan and Shaykh Kamal command of Khizirpur and Kumarsar. Both built forts in their respective places and enhanced their defence over there. At the request of Mirza Nathan, Islam Khan decided to keep Ihtimam Khan at Khizirpur, and sent Mirza Nathan to Katrabo against Dawud Khan, Shaykh Rukn to Demra Khal against Mahmud Khan, and 'Abdu'l-Wahid to Chaura against Bahadur Ghazi. Mirza Nathan occupied the west bank of the River Sitalakhya and built a fort opposite to the fort of Dawud Khan at Katrabo. For more see Nathan, vol. I, pp.77-79.

<sup>15</sup> Karim, vol.I, p. 260.

<sup>16</sup> Mirza Nathan, with the support of soldiers sent by Ihtimam Khan to his aid, attacked the fort of Katrabo on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1611. After a severe battle and hand-to-hand fight, the Mughals managed to occupy the fort. Ihtimam Khan fell upon the fort under the command of Abdullah Khan at Qadam Rasul. With the help of his son Mirza Nathan, Ihtimam Khan finally won this battle. After this victory Ihtimam Khan ordered Mirza Nathan to help the fleet with the attack on the fort of Musa Khan and Alaul Khan. Nathan then fell upon the fort of Musa Khan. Musa Khan could not stand to attack and left his fort without fight in order to save himself. Without delay Mirza Nathan then crossed the Bandar canal and attacked the fort of Alwal Khan. The latter by the same token fled by boat. Musa Khan with all his brothers and zamindar allies fled to Sunargaon. Mirza Nathan attacked Musa Khan at Sunargaon and

decided to begin a campaign against Usman of Bukainagar<sup>17</sup> and Bayazid Karrani of Sylhet. He planned the campaign in a grand way as Usman was a great warrior and won the battles against them.<sup>18</sup>

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made him flee to the island of Ibrahimpur. Afterwards Haji Shams -al- din Baghdadi, the chief officer of Musa Khan, surrendered to Islam Khan and handed over Sonargoan to the Mughals. There is no mention of war of Musa Khan with the imperialists at Sonargoan. It appears that Musa Khan did not attempt to attack the Mughals as he had lost his courage and war equipment. At that time Daud Khan, brother of Musa Khan, was killed by the Portuguese. His death made Musa Khan very upset. Musa Khan then decided to launch a vigorous last attack on the Mughals, and due to that he first occupied a deserted fort (built by the king of Arakan during the time of Man Singh) and fortified it. Mirza Nathan came to know of this and having equipped a large force he went there. After a short fight Musa Khan fled to Ibrahimpur. Musa Khan launched his final counter-attack against the Mughals' fort of Kudalia, where Shaikh Rukun (he was accused of excessive drinking of intoxicating liquids) was appointed in the place of Tuqmaq Khan. Hearing this news, Mirza Nathan came to the help of Shaikh Rukn. He tried to keep Musa Khan and his zaminders out of the Bandar canal by discharging big cannons against them until the arrival of the admiral's fleet. After the arrival of admiral's fleet the Mughals started attacking Musa Khan and his zaminders from three sides. As narrated in *Babaristan*, both the Bhuiyans and the Mughals showed their great ability in this final battle. But after a great skirmish and much struggle the Mughals won the battle, but with great difficulty. Thus the resistance of the Bara-bhuiyans of Bhati against the Mughals came to an end before the end of 1611; and all the Bara-Bhuiyans including their leader Musa Khan and his brothers submitted to Islam Khan. He also brought the kingdoms of Pratapadhyta of Jessore, Ram Chandra of Bakla and Manikya of Bhulua under his control and subdued the kings. For more see Nathan, vol.I, pp.79-80.

<sup>17</sup> Bukainagar is marked in modern maps to the north- west of Kishoreganj, at present a district. In ennell's Bengal Atlas, Bukainagar is marked in Pargana Momenshahi, east of the river Brahmaputra.

<sup>18</sup> A number of imperial officers were sent with this expedition under the command of Ghias Khan and the leadership of Shaykh Kamal and Shaykh Abdul Wahid. After taking preparations, the imperial officers along with the subjugated *Zamindars* and Bhuiyans of *Bhati* began campaign against Usman from Hasanpur. At the suggestion of Islam Khan, they first made 'a breach in the bank of the river Brahmaputra, so that its water might inundate the land and reach a high level round the fort of Bukainagar and thus make it possible for the fleet to move up to the fort. They proceeded to Bukainagar by raising a block- house or fort after fort. As has been mentioned in *Babaristan*, they built at least nineteen lofty forts. The forts were constructed within a very short time and they were surrounded by deep trenches. The Mughal force defeated the Afghans in the battle of Bukainagar. But the latter they fled to Uhar, in southern Sylhet (in present Maulvibazar district), which was at that time under Bayazid Karrani and his brothers. Given this, Islam Khan decided to launch a simultaneous attack on Usman, his sons and brothers and Bayazid so that one could not go to the support of the other. In line with his plan, Islam Khan then commenced two campaigns, one being led by Shajaat Khan (the emperor sent him on request of subhadar Islam Khan to lead the army against Usman) against Usman, and the other by Ghias Khan against Bayazid Karrani. On 3 March, 1612, in the morning the imperial officers came out of their block-houses and started their last battle of Daulambpur against their last enemies. The battle continued from early morning till mid-day. The Afghans fought bravely and the battle was going to be undecided. When the Afghans found that the Mughals would not yield their ground, they became disappointed. The sudden death of Usman made them lose heart and eventually caused them to take to flight. The Mughals won the battle of Daulambpur with their last but powerful and strong-minded enemies, Usman and his followers, including his brothers, in 1612. When the news of Shajaat Khan's victory and the death of Usman reached the other group of Afghans under Bayazid Karrani at Sylhet, they repented for their arrogance and found no alternative but to submit, and surrendered to the Mughals in great humiliation. Thus ended the rule of Afghans of Bukainagar and Sylhet and the whole of Bengal came under the authority of the Mughals up to the river Feni, which was fixed as the southern frontier. For more see Nathan, vol. I, pp.104-105, 109, 163 and 173-190.

Although Islam Khan accomplished his task of conquering almost the whole of eastern Bengal by defeating the Bara-Bhuiyans and the Afghan hero Usman by March 1612, and although through their defeats the war-time disorder and hassle significantly came to an end in eastern Bengal, the peace was breached in two places at the beginning of 1612 by the raids of the Maghs of Arakan within the Mughal territory. First the Maghs attacked Sripur and Bikrampur, and burned and plundered a number of villages in these places. On this occasion, the Maghs came with three hundred boats, knowing that there was not sufficient Mughal force in the 'thana' to check their advance.<sup>19</sup> Learning that, Islam Khan sent a large number of armies to help Shaykh Yusuf (in charge of Sripur military headquarter), but the Maghs fled with no difficulties before the Mughal force arrived there. By increasing the number of armies in the vulnerable places (i.e. at Sripur and Bikrampur), Islam Khan removed his anxiety for the time being.<sup>20</sup> Jahangir in his memoirs, says that Islam Khan captured some Maghs and sent them to the emperor through Shaikh Hushang, son of the subahdar Islam Khan.<sup>21</sup> A few days later, the Maghs again raided Bhulua (the present-day greater Noakhali district). The Maghs fled with ease before Islam Khan sent aid to Shaikh Abdul Wahid there. There is no mention of any other menaces in *Babaristan* by the Maghs during Islam Khan's statesmanship.

There is no mention in contemporary sources, in particular in *Babaristan*, about any major battle between the Mughals' and the Portuguese (Firingi)<sup>22</sup> during Islam Khan's period in power as well. The reason may well be the fact that Chittagong, the most familiar area to the Maghs and the Portuguese, is the only area which was out of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., vol. I, p.146.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> Fazal, vol.1, p. 236.

<sup>22</sup> Firingi is a term used to mean the Portuguese pirates.

Mughals' domain during his statesmanship.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned in *Babaristan*, the Firingi pirates' attack took place only once and that was against Dawud Khan (they shot him dead), brother of Musa Khan during Islam Khan's statesmanship.<sup>24</sup> The Portuguese and the Maghs pirates used to come to Dhaka not permanently to stay over there but for plunder and abduction. The following accounts of Sir J.N. Sarker, seems to be supportive of this observation. As he puts it:

In Jahangir's region, the pirates used to come to Dacca for plunder and abduction, by the *nullab* [water-way] which leaves the Brahmaputra, passes by Khizirpur and joins the *nullab* of Dacca. Khizirpur is situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra on a narrow embankment (*al*). In the monsoons, all the land except the sites of the houses is covered with water. The Governors of Dacca, therefore, at the end of the monsoons and during the winter which was the season of the coming of the pirates, used to go to Khizirpur with an army and encamp there.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that in order to check these pirates on a permanent basis, Islam Khan may have had built forts by river-routes near Khizirpur that led to Dhaka. This is a very significant reference as Khizirpur is apparently the location of one of the three river forts. Sarker, however, does not seem to supply any evidence for this claim.

The Mughal authority was not restricted merely to eastern Bengal. Islam Khan succeeded in annexing the adjoining kingdoms of Kamraup, Kamta and Kachhar to the Mughal Empire.<sup>26</sup> After a long - drawn out war, Islam Khan induced King Parikshit Narayan of Kamraup to surrender. Being defeated, the King Satrudaman of Kachhar had to face the same fate. Owing to his friendly relationship with the Mughals, Lakshmi Narayan the King of Kamta did not have to go through a formal submission.

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<sup>23</sup> Karim, vo.I, p. 364.

<sup>24</sup> Nathan, vol. I, pp.85-86.

<sup>25</sup> Sarkar, J., N., *Studies in Mughal India*, 33-249 (p.127).

<sup>26</sup> Nathan, vol. I, pp. 222-253.

Islam Khan's expedition towards Bhati extended by the rivers Karatoya, the Atrai, the Ichamati, the Shitalakhya, and the canals Kudia, Jogini and Dulai (present day the Buriganga River). And his expedition to Bukainagar and Sylhet was extended along the River Shitalakhya, the Brahmapura and the Egara-Sindur up to the River Meghna and its distributaries. The list of major war and strategic places includes Katasgarh, Jatrapur, Dackchara, Kalakupa, Khizirpur, Kumarsar, Katrabu, Qadam Rasul, Sonargoan, Demra canal, Chaura and Ibrahimpur. This shows that, like his predecessors, subhadar Islam Khan led his campaigns for the most part in the same geographical area of Bhati.

From the foregoing account, it can be assumed that Bhati, in particular the greater Dhaka district, was surrounded by three great rivers: the Padma, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna and their distributaries during Islam Khan's rule. Being situated in the centre of this great river-network of eastern Bengal, Dhaka was enabled to command the entire water-route-trade of Bengal. Put differently, the geographical position of Dhaka, with its easy access and safe anchorages to ships and vessels, lent it distinct significance. Furthermore it seems that during Islam Khan's term in power, Dhaka region was under the military threats of various local and external enemies: the bhuiyans and zaminders, the Magh and the Portuguese.

In addition from the above account it also seems that the whole history of Islam Khan's period of rule was a tale of terrible battles, attacks and counter-attacks. But all his efforts paid off. After arriving in Rajmahal and passing through the unfamiliar topography the central delta and suppressing disloyal chieftains on the neighbouring area of the Ganges-Padma river course, Islam Khan reached Dhaka, at the heart of *Bhati*, in 1610, and gradually defeated and subdued the Bara-Bhuiyans including their leader Musa Khan, the mighty Afghan chiefs Khaja Usman and Bayazid Karrani. This was not the

end of story of Islam Khan. He also subdued three frontier kingdoms: Kamraup, Kamta and Kachhar.

Although Islam Khan did not go to the war-front in eastern Bengal except for the one at Jatrapur, his determined diplomacy or skilful policies, military tactics and strong-minded statesmanship have been overall found to be among the main reasons behind the Mughals success in subjugating eastern Bengal and neighbouring kingdoms. In particular, his success may be attributed to his policies of divide and rule, setting the chiefs and bhuiyans against each other, negotiating with powerful chieftains before going to settling fate in the battle-field, transferring the capital of Bengal from Rajmahal to Dhaka, attacking and occupying and fortifying important enemy-forts and erecting forts after forts in strategic places and his demands of his situation etc. And this suggests that he was the main architect of the Mughal conquest of the whole of Bengal excepting Chittagong.

Among the various decisions of Islam Khan, the decision of transferring of the capital of Bengal from Rajmahal to Dhaka proved to be very wise. This decision proved very instrumental to the Mughal conquest of Bengal in a diverse and effective manner. For instance, thanks to this decision (1) eastern Bengal was exposed to the Mughal culture for the first time; (2) Mughal rulers obtained direct control of the riverine trade between East and West Bengal, between Bengal and upper India, and between Bengal and the wider world beyond the bay staying in Dhaka,<sup>27</sup> which was connected to the

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<sup>27</sup> It is officially known that Dhaka was the centre of all political activities and gained a peak of power and influence in the seventeen century. Fray Sebastiao Manrique, who was in Bengal in 1629-30 and again in 1640, described the place as a Gangetic emporium?. See Manrique, F. S., *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique: 1629-1643*, vol. I, (tr.) C. E. Luard (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927), p .45.

Padma-Ganges river system at a point midway between the Bay of Bengal and older seats of Muslim power in the Gaur-Tanda region.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, as observed here, Islam Khan had to erect and/or occupy numerous forts and fortifications in many strategic places in and around Dhaka firstly to subdue the Bhuiyans and their Zaminders allies and secondly to protect the Mughal capital Dhaka effectively from attacks of the Maghs of Arakan and the Portuguese pirates. For the threat to Dhaka was not entirely reduced through the defeat and subjugation of the Bhuiyans. The Magh and the Portuguese attacks and robbery in Dhaka, using the Sitalakhya river (a principal river-route to Dhaka, as mentioned earlier, which leaves the Brahmaputra, passes by Khizirpur and joins the Dulai river of Dhaka), were a regular event. But there is no evidence (textual or physical) available in favour of what I have summarised here. Nonetheless, from the discussion above, it can be assumed that Khizirpur area (i.e. the area close to the bank of the river Shitalakhya) was one of the main strategic concerns of Islam Khan. Also it can be assumed that in order to protect the Mughal capital, Dhaka, from various enemies, especially the Maghs and the Portuguese, Islam Khan had to erect forts on the bank of the river Sitalokhya in the area near Khizirpur. In the light of this information, it seems that Islam Khan might have had built or strengthened the Hajiganj fort (located on the Sitalakhya mouth of Dulai river near Khizirpur) and the Sonakanda fort (located about a mile down the Sitalakhya river on the opposite side of Hajiganj fort). But this means that we can not say for sure that Islam Khan was the builder of these two river forts.

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<sup>28</sup> Eaton. pp. 150-151.

## 8.2 The Immediate Successors of Islam Khan and the Portuguese and Magh Threat during this Period

After the defeat of the Bara-Bhuiyans and the Afghan chieftains, the Maghs of Arakan and the Portuguese settlers in Bengal remained to be overpowered. They were the main source of threat to the successors<sup>29</sup> of subahdar Islam Khan until the late seventeenth century, when Mughal Subahdar Shaista Khan (first term: 1663-1678; second term: 1680-1688) invaded Chittagong and robustly defeated them in 1666. The combined force of the Portuguese navy and the Arakanese army was a formidable force before the Mughals. The immediate successor of Islam Khan was subahdar Qasim Khan (1613-1617). As narrated in *Babaristan*, the Magh King raided the Mughals' territory at least twice, during the rule of Qasim Khan. The first raid of the King of Arakan, Min Khamaung (1612-1622), who took the Muslim name Husain Shah<sup>30</sup>, took place either in late 1614 or early 1615 on the Thana of Bhulua (the Mughals' frontier of Bengal), of which Shaikh Abdul Wahid was in charge. Taking advantage of absence of Abdul Wahid in Dhaka, when he had gone to meet subahdar Qasim Khan, the Magh King attacked on Bhulua Thana.<sup>31</sup> Knowing this, Abdul Wahid hurriedly proceeded to Bhulua. With the support<sup>32</sup> of subahdar Qasim Khan, Abdul Wahid managed to make the Magh King

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<sup>29</sup> The successors of subahdar Islam Khan from 1613 to 1639 were Qasim Khan Chishti (1621-1617), Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang (1617- 1624), Mahabat Khan ( AD1625- AD 1626), Mukarram Khan(1626-1627), Fidai Khan (167- 1628), Qasim Khan Juyini (1628- 1632), Azam Khan(1632- 1635), and Islam Khan Mashhadi (1635- 1639).

<sup>30</sup>Leider,J.P.,“TheseBuddhistKingsWithMuslimNames”(2009)<<https://sites.google.com/site/kogyikyawarakan/arakan-information/Articles-main-page>>[accessed 15 September, 2012]

<sup>31</sup> Nathan, vol. I, pp.329-330.

<sup>32</sup> In order to help Wahid to resist the Magh King, subahdar Qasim Khan went to Khazirpur at the mouth of the river Shitalakhya and ordered to construct bridge with big cargo boats all over the Shitalakhya rivers at Khazirpur point to supply war equipments with warriors from Khazirpur to Bhulua using the build bridge.

retreat from Bhulua. But it was not a very easy job. On this occasion, the clash between the Maghs and the Portuguese (Firingis) played a vital role in resisting the Magh King.

The Maghs wanted to maintain a good relationship with the Portuguese to strengthen their power against the Mughals. But the relationship did not last long as the Portuguese were engaged in piratical activities, and everybody became victims of their activities including the Maghs. During the Maghs' raid in Bhulua, the Portuguese suddenly attacked the Magh fleets and captured their commander. Taking this advantage, Abdul Wahid prepared his army for a battle with the Maghs. Without causing any delay he then crossed the Dakatiya *Khal* (canal)<sup>33</sup> and hastened upon the Magh soldiers. The Mughal army pushed back the Magh soldiers as far as the Fani River and captured many elephants along with five hundred soldiers.

The second raid of the Magh King of Arakan occurred in the same place, Bhulua in 1615.<sup>34</sup> The King attacked 'with a large force consisting of fleet, artillery, elephants, cavalry, and infantry'<sup>35</sup>. On this occasion, the Portuguese fleet assisted the Magh force to fight against Abdul Wahid. He failed to stand against this terrifying joint-attack. Evacuating Bhulua, Abdul Wahid took refuge in the Dakatiya river, a tributary of the Meghna that flows through Noakhali district. The Mughal officer Mirza Nuruddin together with some other courageous Mughal officers made a counter attack on the Magh force. Being trapped in a bog, the Magh King was compelled to surrender to the Mughals. A number of Maghs soldiers were captured in this engagement and the king was allowed to escape alone surrendering all of his soldiers and war equipment in early

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<sup>33</sup> The Dakatiya canal (or the Dackiteeah river of Rennell) rises from the hills of Tipperah and falls into the Brahmaputra near Chadpur. See *Babaistan*, vol.1.II.p. 334. Also see Rennell's Map No. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Nathan, vol. II, pp. 383-387.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

January in 1616.<sup>36</sup> But there is no mention about what happened to the Portuguese in this battle. Someday between late 1616 and early 1617, subahdar Qasim Khan himself advanced to Bhulua to lead an offensive attack against the Magh King with Chittagong as his goal. He launched an attack on the King of Arakan at Katghar (a village 20 miles north–west of Chittagong); but at some point suspended this battle, due to lack of food supply to the briny army and retreated towards Dhaka.<sup>37</sup>

The Katghar battle was his last (but incomplete and unsuccessful) attempt against the Maghs. He failed to ensure an effective stand against the Maghs, let alone annex Chittagong to Mughal Empire. He was also accused of administrative incompetence and misconduct with subordinates. For his insincerity, inefficiency and failure in accomplishing the Mughal's cause, Qasim Khan Chishti was eventually censured and recalled to the imperial court.<sup>38</sup>

Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang (1617-1624) was appointed subhadar of Bengal after Qasim Khan Chishti. According to *Babaristan*, a Magh raid took place in Bhulua during Ibrahim Khan's rule in 1620.<sup>39</sup> The Magh King invaded and plundered many villages and held many villagers captive. The Magh troops, on this occasion proceeded up to the river Meghna (perhaps with Dhaka as target). Learning this, Ibrahim Khan left Dhaka for Bikrampur, then crossed over Ariyal Khan river<sup>40</sup> and came approached the enemy for a battle. The Magh king then retreated without engaging in a battle.

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<sup>36</sup> Ali, S.M., *History of Chittagong*, (Dhaka: Standard Publications Ltd., 1964), p.44.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 404-407.

<sup>38</sup> The orders for Qasim Khan's dismissal and the appointment of Ibrahim Khan were issued by the Emperor Jahangir on 8<sup>th</sup> April in A. D. 1617 . See Fazal ,*Tuzuk*, vol.1, p. 373.

<sup>39</sup> Nathan, vol. I , pp. 632-633.

<sup>40</sup> Arial Khan River is one of the main south-eastward openings of the river Padma. Bifurcating from the River Padma this river runs through Faridpur and Madaripur districts before draining into the north-eastern corner of Barisal district.

Subhadar Ibrahim Khan himself led an expedition to Arakan in the same year (1620), but, according to *Baharistan*, he failed to achieve his objective because of his mistake in the choice of route.<sup>41</sup> Towards the end of Ibrahim Khan's subahdari (1624), Prince Shah Jahan (son and successor of the then emperor Jahangir) rebelled against his father, marched towards Bengal and took control of Bengal by killing Ibrahim Khan. He appointed Darab Khan (1624-1625) as a Subahdar of Bengal.

The Magh King Thiri Thudamma (1622-1638), son of Min Khamaung, invaded Bhulua during Darab Khan's rule in 1624. The Maghs plundered many villages of Bhulua and captured a good deal of booty<sup>42</sup>. At that time, Mirza Baqi, Thanadar of Bhulua, who finally made the Magh King Thiri Thudamma retreat from Bhulua. Shahjahan was in control of Bengal for about a year from 1624 to 1625. There is no mention of any other Magh raid on the Mughal frontier of Bengal in contemporary sources during the short rule of the revolutionary prince Shah Jahan in Bengal.

As prince Shahjahan's aim was to occupy the throne of Delhi, he marched towards north India to make a final bid for the throne. Hearing this news, Emperor Jahangir restored his authority in Bengal and appointed Mahabbat Khan (1625-1626) as subahdar of Bengal. The Magh King invaded the Mughal territories during Mahabbat Khan's reign in 1625. On this occasion, the Magh King proceeded up to Khizirpur and blockaded Dhaka. Khanzad Khan, son of Mahabbat Khan, sent troops against the Magh King, but they could not stand up to the Magh attack and were utterly defeated. The Magh force entered the capital city, burnt and plundered it and left with a large treasure and quite a few captives.<sup>43</sup> This was the last Magh attack in the Mughal frontier of Bengal during the reign of Jahangir. This defeat of the Mughals by the Magh king shows the

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<sup>41</sup> Nathan, vol. II, pp. 629-634.

<sup>42</sup> Nathan, vol. II, p. 607.

<sup>43</sup> Nathan, vol. II, p.749.

weakness of the Mughal subahdar Mahabbat Khan, compared to his predecessors, Islam Khan, Qasim Khan and Ibrahim Khan. The succeeding subahdars of Jahangir's rule (he died on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1627)<sup>44</sup> in Bengal were Mukarram Khan (1626-1627) and Fedai Khan (1627-1628). Nothing is known about any further Maghs raid in the Mughal territory during the short period of the statesmanship of these two subahdars.

Prince Shahjahan ascended the throne on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1628 and inherited the whole of the subah of Bengal (except for Chittagong). Qasim Khan Juyini (1628-1632) was the first subahdar of Emperor Shahjahan (1628-1658). In his book *Padshahnama*, Abdul Hamid Lahori refers to an expedition of subahdar Qasim Khan Juyini against the Portuguese at Hugli in 1632.<sup>45</sup> The most remarkable event during his rule in Bengal was the evicting of the Portuguese from Hugli. The Portuguese could not withstand the Mughal attack and left Hugli after enormous loss of fighters and resources. From the writings of Manucci it is known that subahdar Qasim Khan managed to seize five hundred Portuguese alive and transported them to Agra where they were imprisoned at the behest of the empire for life.<sup>46</sup> Consequently the Portuguese base for the slave trade was ruined. As S. M. Ali puts it, 'after Islam Khan's death the Mughal authority in East Bengal became ineffective and was restored fully by Qasim Khan Juyini in 1628'.<sup>47</sup>

The emperor Shahjahan's determination to punish the Portuguese was the enigma behind this success. At the command and assistance of the then empire Shah Jahan, (1628-1658), subahdar Qasim Khan Juyini took strong measures against the Portuguese. As the Mughal historian Abdul Hamid Lahori writes, there were three

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<sup>44</sup> Hai, A., and Ali, A., *Iqbalnama -I- Jahangiri*, (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1865), p.294.

<sup>45</sup> Lahori, A., H., *Padshahnama*, vol. I ( Calcutta : Asiatic Society,1867-68), pp. 435-436

<sup>46</sup> Lahauri, M. S. K., '*Amal-i Salib*, ed. by G. Yazdani, vol. I (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1912), p.501.

<sup>47</sup> Ali, p.39.

reasons, to say the least, behind the determined decisions of empire Shahjahan to entirely demolish the Portuguese. They are<sup>48</sup>

- (1) The Portuguese assisted the rebels of Bengal (especially Bara-Bhuiyans) to create extreme resistance against Shah Jahan's expedition to Bengal, while he was a prince;
- (2) The Portuguese used to abduct Bengali men and women to sell them as slaves in Hooghly market of Kolkata where they established a growing naval port.
- (3) On several occasions, the Portuguese assisted the king of Arakan, the permanent enemy of the Mughals, with manpower and weapons;
- (4) They were forcibly converting people to Christianity.

The next subahdar of Bengal was Azam Khan (1632-1635). As narrated in *Riyaz-us- Salatin*<sup>49</sup>, Azam Khan was unable to discharge the duty of a subahdar appropriately and thus was recalled. The most important event, as narrated in *English Factories in India*, during the time of Azam Khan was the return of the Portuguese to Hughli with the permission of the Mughal authority.<sup>50</sup> Islam Khan Mashhadi. (1635-1639) was succeeded by Azam Khan. He faced an invasion in Bhulua made by the Magh king in 1638. On this occasion, the Magh king could not show his strength as there was a civil war going on in Arakan at that time and the Portuguese settlers and pirates of Chittagong supported the cause of the Arakanian rebellions. The Magh king without the help of Portuguese gunners and fighters could not fend and thus retreated. Thus Mashhadi's period of rule was relatively more peaceful although he could not annex Chittagong to the Mughal

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<sup>48</sup> Lahori, vol. I, pp.435-441; Jalil, M.A., *Bangey Magh- Firingi o Bargir Atyachar (The Tyranny of the Mughls, Firingis and Bargi's in Bengal)*, (Dhaka : Bangla Academy, 1988), pp. 1-22.

<sup>49</sup> Salim, G.H. *Riyaz-us- Salatin* (Calcutta: 1903), pp. 210-11.

<sup>50</sup> Foster, W., ed. *English Factories in India*, 1618- 1669, pp. 308-309.

Empire.<sup>51</sup> It now seems overall that the successors of Islam Khan, in particular, Qasim Khan Chisti (1613-1617), Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang (1617-1624), Mahabbat Khan (1625-1626), Mukarram Khan(1626-1627) and Fidai Khan (1627-1628), had to face frequent raids, looting and abduction by the Maghs of Arakan and the Portuguese. But none of them was able to prove his worth. As observed here, of three subhadars (Qasim Khan Juyini, Azam Khan and Islam Khan Mashhadi) appointed in emperor Shahjahan's reign in Eastern Bengal, Qasim Khan Juyini had been found to prove his worth to a considerable extent through eliminating the Portuguese from Hughli. But nobody could restrain the Maghs of Arakan. Thus although the situation in Bengal was to some extent pacified in Shah Jahan's day, especially during the time of Qasim Khan Juyini for removing the Portuguese, the Mughal capital Dhaka and its surrounding areas were not entirely free from Magh attack, looting, plundering and abduction until they were robustly demolished and Chittagong was annexed to the Mughal empire by Mughal subahdar Shaista Khan in 1666. This suggests that there was importance of forts and fortifications during this period. But from the foregoing discussion it seems that we can not identify any of the immediate successors of Islam Khan as the builder of the river forts.

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<sup>51</sup> Subhadar Shaistah Khan (16673-1678, 1680-1688), had finally managed to accomplish the long cherished Mughal's cause, annexing Chittagong to the Mughal domain and establishing their authority in the whole of Bengal, by expelling the Maghs of Arakans (which will be covered in details in chapter 10).

## Chapter Eight

### Shah Shuja, Mughal Subahdar, 1639-1660: The Portuguese and Arakanese/Magh Threats during This Period

Shah Shuja was appointed Subahdar of Bengal after the recall of his immediate forerunner Islam Khan Mashhadi (AD1635–1639) by emperor Shahjahan (1627 – 1658) on 23<sup>rd</sup> February in 1639. He was the first Mughal prince appointed as subahdar in Bengal. He founded Dhaka as the capital of Bengal. But at some point (the date is unknown)<sup>1</sup>; he transferred the capital of Bengal from Dhaka to Rajmahal.<sup>2</sup> According to Ghulam Husain Salim and many other modern scholars, Shah Shuja used Rajmahal as his seat of government and his deputies, Mir Abul Qasim (1639- 1651) and Rashid Khan (1652-1660) ruled lower Bengal from Dhaka.<sup>3</sup> On a later occasion (in March, 1642) the neighbouring province of Orissa was also added to his command. Over and above his subahdari of Bengal and Orissa, the kingdom of Kamrup and the vassal kingdom of Kuch Bihar were placed under his rule which made him the viceroy of almost the whole of Eastern India.<sup>4</sup>

Shah Shuja (1639-1660) ruled Bengal for about twenty one years in the thirty years rule of his father emperor Shahjahan (1627–1658) with two short intermissions

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul Karim assumes that the transfer of capital might have occurred in the second term of Shuja's statesmanship (i.e., between 1652 and 1660). But he also recognizes that his assumption is not conclusive. For in 1640 Suja's bungalows at Rajmahal are said to have been burnt by fire. If he was not at Rajmahal, his bungalows would not have been there. For more see Karim, A., *History of Bengal; Mughal Period*, vol. II (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1995), p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Shuja escaped from the inclement weather conditions of eastern Bengal as well as could hang about closer to Delhi in order to make a bid for Mughal throne in due course.

<sup>3</sup> Salim, p.213.

<sup>4</sup> Karim, vol. II, pp. 219-220.

between 1647-48 and in 1652<sup>5</sup>. One of the few important developmental stages of Dhaka city was during the time of Shah Shuja. Shuja was a great builder. Among the earliest Mughal buildings in Dhaka which dates from his time are: the *Bara Katra* (Caraban Sari: made as the residence of Shuja, which was eventually used by the travelling merchants), the *Idgha* (a raised platform enclosed on all sides made to offer congregational prayers on *Eid* festivals), the Husainidalan and the Churihatta mosque.<sup>6</sup> There is no mention in any contemporary sources about whether or not Shuja lived in Dhaka while these edifices were constructed. But the building of Caraban Sari suggests that initially Shuja planned to settle in Dhaka. By the same token, it can also be assumed that he first came to Dhaka and continued his administration from there for a certain period of time; to be more precise, during the time he was constructing the above mentioned edifices.

A question now may well be raised: Did Shuja build any new fort or fortify any old fortifications in addition to the above mentioned administrative and religious buildings? To my knowledge, there is no mention of such information in any contemporary source. Syed Muhammad Taifoor, however, in his book *Glimpses of Old Dhaka* writes that a few smaller fortifications were raised in the southern frontier of Bengal (i.e., in some riverine districts adjoining the Bay of Bengal) during Shuja's time to check activities of the Maghs of neighbouring kingdom Arakan. As Taifoor puts it:

In Shuja's time , fortifications were raised over some riverine districts boarding the Bay of Bengal in order to check the activates of Arakany

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<sup>5</sup> The emperor called away Shuja to send to Kabul as governor in AD 1647- AD 1648. During this interval Nawab Iteqad Khan was in charge of Bengal. His absence fro the second time in 1652 was of short period (from 17 April AD 1652- AD 21 July AD 1652).

<sup>6</sup> Dani, A.H., *Dacca : A Record of its Changing Fortunes* , 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Dacca: Safiya Dani , 1962), p.37.

raiders. One such small ruined fort can still be seen in the village Shujabad, a few miles from the Barisal district headquarters.<sup>7</sup>

An additional question now may well be aroused: why did Shuja not build any forts and fortifications in and around Dhaka? As it has been stated by the court historians, no serious trouble took place in any part of Bengal because traditional enemies based in Bhati (in particular the *zamindars*) and other local miscreants were awed by the fact that the prince himself was holding the office of subahdar.<sup>8</sup> They also stated that like Bengal, the neighbouring province Orissa was overall peaceful during Shuja's administration apart from two engagements.<sup>9</sup> Given this, it can be assumed that the vital reason for Shuja not building any forts and fortifications in and around Dhaka is the fact that there was no threat to Dhaka from any miscreant, such as from the Portuguese and the Maghs.

The political stability in Bengal provided Shuja with enough time and scope to concentrate on the economic prosperity of Bengal. In view of this goal, he allowed overseas traders and companies to Bengal and granted them opportunities to run trade with no obstructions. More importantly he allowed them to run their business free of charge or rent. Consequently, there was an enormous amount of progress in the areas of trade and commerce during Shuja's time. In 1641, Shuja approved a Nishan (letter) to the Portuguese of Hugli ensuring facilities of trade and confirming to them through a *farman*

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<sup>7</sup> Taifoor, S. M., *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Dhaka: Lulu Bilquis Banu and others, 1956) p.128.

<sup>8</sup> Sarker, J. N., *History of Bengal*, vol. II (Dhaka: Dhaka University Studies, 1948), p. 333.

<sup>9</sup> The only two exceptions were his invasions to Hijli (against Bahadur Khan, a habitual rebel) and Tippera. The reason of campaign against Khan was him being delayed in making payment of revenue. Bahadur Khan was defeated in this engagement, but he was pardoned on the condition that he would pay more revenues than before in future. On his campaign in Tippera, Shuja defeated the King of Tippera. The defeated King made peace by giving up a segment of his territory adjoining to present Comilla district. Through building a mosque on the bank of the river Gumti in Comilla (which is still existing in fine condition and bears his name), Shuja is found to commemorate his victory against the King of Tippera.

(order) of the emperor Shajahan of 1633.<sup>10</sup> The English East India Company and the Dutch company also obtained privileges from Shuja more than the Portuguese, according to Charles Stewart.<sup>11</sup> The Persians<sup>12</sup> also got a strong foothold in Bengal due to the privileges granted to them by Shuja.

Shuja is known to have encouraged private trade, which involved his own trade of chartering ships over and above foreign traders (in particular the Persians). What is more, he took the trouble of revising the settlement of Todar Mal in Akbar's time and making a fresh settlement of revenues, increasing them by 15%.<sup>13</sup> Sebastien Manrique, a Portuguese missionary, visited Dhaka in Shuja's time (in 1640). For him, even though Shuja transferred the capital to Rajmahal (which was the capital of Bengal from 1639-1660), for all practical purpose of administration Dhaka remained the principal centre and expanded even during the interval. As Manrique puts it:

This is the chief city of Bengala and the seat of the principal nababo or Viceroy, appointed by the Emperor, who bestowed this viceroyalty on several occasions, on one of his sons. For this city is today, as I said, the chief city and as such the metropolies of those in Bengala. It stands in a wide beautiful plain on the banks of the famous and here fructifying Ganges (actually Buriganga) river, beside which the city stretches for over a league and a half. The well-known suburbs of Manaxor (Maneswar) at one end and of Narandin (Narinda) and Fulgari (Phulbaria) at the other serve to round off the city suitably.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stewart, C., *The History of Bengal*, (Delhi: 1971), pp. 251-255.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250.

<sup>12</sup> Being a learned, cultured and polished, Shah Shuja, a typical Mughal prince, like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, patronised the cultured intellectual society of Persian scholars, Shfis and administrators. Belonged to the *Shia* sect, the root of these people were mostly in Iran.

<sup>13</sup> Sarker, p.228.

<sup>14</sup> Manrique, F. S., *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique: 1629-1643*, vol.1. (tr.), C. E. Luard (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927), pp. 43-44.

An improvement occurred in the sector of agriculture in Shuja's period. It seems that the political stability gave him an opportunity to concentrate on trade and agriculture and make a considerable progress in these areas.

The history of Bengal in the time of Shuja, however, was not one of continued peace. The political stability in Bengal started deteriorating when a rumour spread in September 1657 that the emperor Shahjahan was dead.<sup>15</sup> In actuality Shahjahan fell ill on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1657, but Dara Shikoh, his eldest son, kept it undisclosed to protect his place on the throne. Immediately after such a rumour, three other patricians' started preparing themselves for their bid for the imperial throne. Shuja crowned himself as king at Rajmahal and took the imperial title of 'Abul Fazal Nasiruddin Timur the Second, Alexander the Third, Shah Suja Bahdur'<sup>16</sup>. He then marched with a large army supported by war-boats in the river Ganges, but had to retreat to Bengal, outsmarted at the hands of his brother prince Dara's army at the point of Bhadurpur (in present Uttar Pradesh).<sup>17</sup>

The second campaign Shuja made against his brother prince Aurangzeb (who acquired the Mughal throne after defeating Dara twice and stamping him to death) on 5th January 1658 took place at Khajwa (in Uttar Pradesh).<sup>18</sup> In this battle Shuja was defeated and retreated towards Bengal. In his way back to Bengal, Shuja was attacked by the Mughal army under Mir Jumla<sup>19</sup> at several points, but successfully opposed them on every occasion. Shuja fought his last battle against his brother Aurangzeb's army in April 1660. On this occasion, Shuja found himself about to be surrounded by Aurangzeb's army at Tandah and incapable of reorganizing his armies. He therefore fled to the fort of Bhulua, the last outpost of the Mughals, and asked the king of Arakan for help in

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<sup>15</sup> Shah Jahan recovered his illness and died later on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, AD 1666. For more see, *Saksena*, p.343.

<sup>16</sup> Taifoor, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> Masum, M., *Tarikh-i-Shah Shujai* (n. d), pp. 151-153.

<sup>18</sup> Kazim, M. M., *Alamgirnama* (Calcutta: 1868), p.269.

<sup>19</sup> Mir Jumla was a general of Emperor Aurangzeb, who proved his extraordinary generalship by driving Shuja out of Bengal.

containing it. But being turned down by the King of Arakan he had no option but to accept his offer of going to Arakan with his family and close fellows for shelter (they boarded ships on 12 May 1660).<sup>20</sup>

On his arrival, the king cordially received him and allowed him to stay in a house with his family in the outskirts of the capital. As Mughal historians imply, behind the shift of the king's benevolent attitude to Shuja was the failure in realising his desire to marry one of Shuja's beautiful daughters, or to grab the assets that he had brought with him. At any rate it did not last long and he soon launched an attack against Shuja. Shuja and all of the Mughal patricians' and princesses were tortured to death except for a few of followers who managed to flee to the countryside.<sup>21</sup> According to Leider, a fraction of people those who survived were incorporated in to the royal guard of Arakan.<sup>22</sup>

From the above discussion it seems that Shuja was successful in administering Bengal in the sense that no serious disturbance of peace occurred by any local or external enemies including the Portuguese or the Maghs in Bengal during his time. The two exceptions were his successful expeditions to Hijli and Tippera. Shuja also successfully managed the Portuguese, who came to Bengal for business and were based in Hijli. They were submissive to Shuja as he granted them privileges for running trade without obstacles. But their fellow Portuguese, who committed plagiarism, accompanied by the Maghs of Arakan, had been disconnected from their fellow Portuguese traders and thus became diluted in Shuja's time in Bengal.<sup>23</sup> Given this, it can now be concluded

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<sup>20</sup> Sarker, Sir J. N., *History of Aurangzeb: Based on Persian Sources*, vol. I and II (Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd., 1912), pp. 370–79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 370- 379.

<sup>22</sup> Leider, J.P., *Arakan During the Maruk U Period: The Political Success of a Buddhist Border States'* (2008).  
<<https://sites.google.com/site/kogyikyawarakan/arakan-information/Articles-main-page>> [accessed 15 September, 2012]

<sup>23</sup> Campos, J.J.A., *History of the Portuguese in Bengal* ( Calcutta: 1919), p.159.

that there was no serious threat to Dhaka in Shuja's time. And by the same token it can be said that the peaceful situation in the country was presumably the primary reason for Shuja not building any new fortifications or fortifying any old ones in and around Dhaka.

Sir J. N. Sarker's assessment of the peaceful condition in Bengal during Shuja's time is that it amounts to an absence of history.<sup>24</sup> For him, the court historian referred to Bengal only when there was disturbance of peace, external invasion or Mughal conquest in frontier kingdoms. Sarker adds that this does not entirely go in favour of Shuja. For, as he says, Shuja may well be lucky in the sense that there was a peaceful atmosphere in Bengal during his time, but absence of history cannot be totally accepted as valid evidence of Shuja's success as a statesman; rather, for him, it was the major cause of his ultimate failure. A trouble-free and luxurious life made Shuja inactive. Also it made him lose his energy, preparedness and vigour, which were needed for his bid for the Mughal throne (i.e. in the wars of succession) and also for his protection the campaigns of his brothers, Dara and Aurangzeb, against him.<sup>25</sup> Likewise it can be said that no external invasion or Mughal conquest of frontier line occurred during his period for the same reason. All these are illustrated in his being in the end a bankrupt, both in name and fame, and also in his consenting to go to the savage kingdom Arakan for shelter, where he was brutally killed with all of his family members and close followers and associates.

From the foregoing description, it now becomes apparent that Shuja was a great builder and greatly remembered for his building activities in Dhaka. But he seems to have not built any forts or fortifications in Dhaka and its vicinity. At least there is no textual or physical evidence available as a proof for such activity. However, as it has been asserted

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<sup>24</sup> Sarker, Sir J. N., p. 333.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

by Taifoor, Shuja built some forts in the districts boarding the Bay of Bengal to check the activities of Arakany raiders (examples include the ruined small fort in the village Shujabad, a few miles from the Barisal district headquarters). One of the reasons behind this, as this discussion seems to suggest, is that, as opposed to Islam Khan's period of reign (which was arguably full of terrible battles, attacks and counter-attacks), Shuja's period was politically and militarily more peaceful and stable (except for the last few months of his rule when he went through an unsuccessful war of succession). This suggests that military threats to Dhaka from various enemies, in particular from the Portuguese and the Maghs were significantly less. This, in a way, recommends that Shuja was not the builder of any of the three river forts. The unavailability of any contemporary textual or physical evidence accommodating the view that Shuja built the river forts in question seems to be supportive of this recommendation. But it is worth noting that there is a certain implication of the unavailability of any contemporary textual or archaeological evidences for the authenticity of this recommendation as well. For there is no real evidence to support this recommendation.

## Chapter Nine

### **Mir Jumla, Mughal Subahdar, 1660-63: The Portuguese and Arakanese/Magh Threats during This Period**

Born in about 1591<sup>1</sup> in Ispahan, former capital of Iran, Mir Jumla came to India in around 1630<sup>2</sup> to seek fortune. Extraordinarily enterprising and amiable in nature, Mir Jumla managed to rise in successive stages from the post of a simple clerk to the position of ‘wazir’ (minister) of the Emperor of Delhi, Shah Jahan (1628-1658). His fortune dramatically changed through his participation in the war of succession (5<sup>th</sup> April, 1660) on behalf of Aurangzeb (the then Mughal viceroy of the Deccan province) against Shah Shuja (the subahdar of Bengal) and his success in driving Shuja out of Bengal. The emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) was so pleased that he appointed Mir Jumla the Subhadar of Bengal in May 1660 and honoured him with high titles of ‘Khan Khanan’ and ‘Sipahsalar’ with an increment of *Mansab*.<sup>3</sup>

Mir Jumla held the viceroyalty of Bengal for nearly three years from 1660 to 1663. He spent only a year and a half in Bengal. He had to spend the rest of his time period of his office in campaigns in Kuch- Bihar and Assam. Within the short period of time he spent in Bengal, he made some administrative decisions and accomplished some construction activities. At the outset of his rule, Mir Jumla reorganized the administration, which had become loose, defiant and unruly in the absence of Shah Shuja

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<sup>1</sup> His date of birth is not referred to in any contemporary sources. This date has been found in Karim’s book, which he says has been found by examining various stray references. See Karim, A., *The History of Bengal*, vol. II (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies 1995), p. 508, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sarker, Sir, J.N., *History of Bengal*, vol. II (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1948), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Khan, S. M., *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (Calcutta: 1873), pp.18-19.

during the war of succession. He then gave attention to the rule of justice, sacked corrupt people and replaced them with honest people.

Another most vital administrative decision was the transfer of capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka. As maintained by Abdul Karim<sup>4</sup>, the main reasons for the transfer of capital were to:

- keep refractory zaminders and bhuiyans under control;
- protect the menace of the Maghs of Arakans and the Portuguese.

For him, Mir Jumla might have taken into account the concern that although bhuiyans and zaminders were suppressed by subahdar Islam Khan (1608-1613), they could still create trouble for the Mughal administration. In support of his statement, Karim has been found to supply the following piece of evidence: The siding of Khwaja Kamal (zaminder of Birbhum) with the Mughals forced Shah Suja to leave Rajmahal. Thus, if Munawar Khan (the great grand son of Isa Khan and the chief of the Bengal zaminder's Flotilla) supported the cause of Shuja, the latter could have forced the Mughals to leave Dhaka in the same manner and resumed his governorship.

It is understandable that it was much easier for the Mughals to keep watch over the refractory zaminder, the bhuiyans, the Portuguese and the Maghs of Arakan from Dhaka. The ousted Shah Shuja was at that time under the shelter of the King of Arakan, and thus was one of the sources of threat to the Mughal government in Bengal. Given this, the decision of transferring the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka seems to have been a far-sighted and timely-made decision by Mir Jumla. Karim's view regarding the transfer of the capital to Dhaka thus seems very plausible. And through this, Dhaka had got its previous glory back.

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<sup>4</sup> Karim, A., 'Mir Jumla', *Banglapedia: National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*, 2006. <<http://www.banglapedia.org/>> [accessed 10 July 2012]

Another significant element of Mir Jumla's rule in Bengal was his able and visionary policy relating to the north-eastern frontier. In a very short period of time for about a year and a half, he conquered the frontier kingdoms of Kamrup and Assam. Kuch-Bihar was a vassal state, which he also brought under the full control of the Mughal administration. Through these victories, Mir Jumla raised the pride of Bengal to the top level in eastern India.

Mir Jumla was initially a trader and by dint of that he rose to fame. He first got in touch with European traders, in particular the English and the Dutch while he was in service of Golconda in Deccan. The European traders viewed him as a businessman and detrimental to their interest. But the success of Mir Jumla in the war of succession and his assumption of the statesmanship of Bengal brought about a change in their attitude towards him. The English felt that it was necessary to impress Mir Jumla in order to ensure their greater benefit. Mir Jumla was well aware of the role of trade and commerce to the economy of a state. Thus while he became subahdar of Bengal, over and above his personal trade-interest, he had to take into account the well being of the province. In order to achieve the economic objectives of the province, Mir Jumla used to maintain a positive and effective attitude towards the foreign traders. As a subahdar of Bengal, he looked to the interests of foreign trades and traders with a view to ensuring the benefit of Bengal through their contribution in the form of revenue and customs. He did not compromise with anything that could result in economic loss to the province. When needed, he often took action against foreign trades in order to realize customs and revenues.

During Mir Jumla's time, the trade of the Portuguese had diminished. The English and Dutch traders emerged to occupy their position. Mir Jumla provided support to the English and the Dutch traders to enjoy a trade opportunity which was already ensured

for them by the imperial court. The foreign traders made best use of this prospect in Bengal. Over and above the economic cause, Mir Jumla utilized his improved relationship with the foreign traders on military purposes. He, for example, employed half a dozen English sailors to his service about military issues.<sup>5</sup> He also employed a number of foreigners, in particular the Dutch and the English, to build war-boats.<sup>6</sup> As mentioned by Manucci, Mir Jumla employed an Englishman named, Thomas Prtte to make ammunition for river-fighting.<sup>7</sup>

Mir Jumla is also remembered for his construction activities in eastern Bengal (mainly in and around Dhaka). The Mughal historians are more or less of the same opinion about this. For them, although Mir Jumla was only present in the capital Dhaka for a very short period of time, he had to his credit quite a number of constructions which include at least a gate, two roads, two bridges and a network of forts.<sup>8</sup> The gate Mir Jumla built at the northern end of the capital has now been demolished to widen the road. But two pillars of the gate are still there on both sides of the road to commemorate the gate. While forts were necessary for strategic purposes, roads and bridges were beneficial for military purpose (such as quick transit of troops, tools and ammunitions) as well as public well being. One of the two roads he built was the road now widely known as Mymenshingh Road, which connects Dhaka with the northern districts. Mir Jumla built a fort at Tongi-Jamalpur to guard this road.<sup>9</sup> He also built a bridge on this road which is widely known as Tongi Bridge.<sup>10</sup> The other road Mir Jumla built, which

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<sup>5</sup> Foster, W., ed. *English Factories in India, (1618-1669)*, vol. 13 (Oxford : 1906- 27), pp. 68-70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> Manucci, N., *Storia Do Mogor or Mugul India*, (tr.) W. Irvine, vol. II (London: John Murray, 1906), p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Karim, A., 'Origin and Developemnt of Mughal Dhaka', *Dhaka Past Present and Future*, ed. by S.U. Ahmed, 60<sup>th</sup> ed., (Dhaka : Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1991), 24-42 (p. 32).

<sup>9</sup> Taifoor, S. M., *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ( Dhaka :Lulu Bilquis Banu and others, 1956), p.79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

connects Dhaka with Fatulla (old Dhapa), is now widely known as Narayanganj Road. He built a bridge called 'Pagla Bridge' on this road. Tavernier visited this bridge and maintained that 'it is a fine brick bridge, which Mir Jumla ordered to be built'<sup>11</sup>.

Mir Jumla is said to have built two forts at Fatulla.<sup>12</sup> Some parts of these forts as well as the roads are still in existence. The road off Fatulla, through extension, could lead up to Khizirpur. As it has been mentioned earlier in this thesis on several occasions, there were two forts (i.e. the Hajiganj fort and the Sonakanda fort) situated on the opposite sides of the River Shitalakhya in the area of Khizirpur. As we mentioned earlier in chapter five and chapter eight, Abul Fazal referred to these two forts in *Akbarnama* while discussing the battle between the Mughal general Shahbaz Khan and the bhuiyans at Khizirpur. As it has been also mentioned earlier in chapter eight, Khizirpur was strategically a very significant place during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. This area was used by subahdar Islam Khan as the centre of operations against the bhuiyans. This suggests that Mir Jumla was not the builder of the Hajiganj fort and Sonakanda fort. However, he probably strengthened these forts, for as was the case similar to his predecessors, Khizirpur continued to be strategically a very important place during the time of Mir Jumla as well. In this context, it is worth mentioning here what Shihab-ud-din Talish says about this:

...The Nawab (Mir Jumla) started from Jahangirnagar (Dhaka) leaving Ihtisham Khan in Khizirpur to protect the capital.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tavernier, J.B. *Travels in India*, (tr.) by V. Ball & ed. by W. Crook, 2nd edn (London : Oxford University press, 1925), p.104.

<sup>12</sup> Dani, A. H., *Dacca – A Record of its Changing Fortunes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Dacca: Safiya Dani, 1962), p.33.

<sup>13</sup> Talish, S., *Fathiyya -i- Ibariyya* (Calcutta: Aftab- i- Alamtab Press, 1849), p.64.

While Mir Jumla became ill in Assam and due to the illness while he was moving back, and also while his illness was getting worse, according to Talish, the doctors recommended the Nawab to go to Khizirpur.<sup>14</sup> The above mentioned quotations suggest that perhaps Khizirpur was strategically the most significant place in Mir Jumla's time. It also suggests the view that although Mir Jumla did not build them, he might have had strengthened its defence through fortifying the Hajiganj fort and the Sonakanda fort owing to the strategic significance of the place in question. As we can observe from the above discussion, strengthening forts and fortifications situated in the area of Khizirpur was necessary to guard the capital Dhaka from the Magh and the Portuguese attacks during Mir Jumla's absence in Bengal (in other words during his campaigns in frontier Kingdoms).

Besides the forts mentioned above (a fort at Tongi-Jamalpur and two more forts along the Narayanganj Road at Fatulla), Mir Jumla is said to have built another strategically very significant fort at Idrakpur in Munshiganj (for details see chapter four).<sup>15</sup>

As A. H. Dani puts it:

In the town of Munshiganj, approachable by steamer and launches from Narayanganj, exists a Mughal fort, known as Idrakpur Fort, possibly built by Mir Jumla, to check the raids of the Maghs and the Portuguese, who then went up the river Meghna from Chittagong, and plundered in the districts of Dacca.<sup>16</sup>

He adds that this fort stood beside the River Ichamati, which is now dried up as a result of siltation. Taifoor maintains the same view about the builder of Idrakpur fort. He says:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Dani, A.H., *Dacca: A Record of its Changing Fortunes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn ( Dacca : Safiya Dani , 1962), p.47.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.p.259.

Under Mir Jumla's order the Idrakpur fort of Munshiganj was built on the junction of Ichamoti (now dried up) and Ganges (known as Meghna) rivers.<sup>17</sup>

For him, this fort was strategically very important as, while proceeding towards Dhaka, all Mughal conquerors had to pass through the River Ichamati. In old days, starting from Pabna, the River Ichamati ended in Munshiganj.<sup>18</sup>

One of the claims made in the quotations mentioned in the paragraph above is that the menace of the Maghs and the Portuguese was still present during Mir Jumla's time. This claim seems acceptable in the sense that after the Mughals' victory over the bhuiyans, the Maghs and the Portuguese were the major enemies to the Mughals. Another major claim made in the above-mentioned quotations is that Idrakpur fort was built in a strategically very important place, a place on the bank of the River Ichamati in Munshiganj. These claims, however, do not necessarily prove the view that Mir Jumla was the builder of this fort.

As we can observe here, many modern Mughal historians<sup>19</sup> share the same view with Dani and Taifoor and maintain that Mir Jumla built the Idrakpur fort. But a question may well be asked here: are their views evidentially verified? The answer is 'no'. Firstly, there is no inscriptional evidence available in favour of their claim. Secondly, contemporary sources<sup>20</sup> remain silent as regards the builder of Idrakpur fort. Given this, it can safely be said that modern Mughal historians' claims about Mir Jumla as the builder of the Idrakpur fort is not proven, which eventually justifies the need of further investigation on the issues in question.

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<sup>17</sup> Taifoor, p.136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Sarkar, J. N., *The life of Mir Jumla - the General of Aurangzeb* (Calcutta:Thacker, Spink &Co.Ltd,1951); J.N. Sarkar, (ed.) *History of Bengal*, vol. II (Dhaka: Dhaka University Studies, 1948); Sarkar, J.N., *History of Aurangzeb*, vol. III, New Delhi, pp.1972-74; Karim, A., *History of Bengal, Mughal Period*, vol. II, Rajshahi, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Khan, S. and Hai, A., *Maasir-ul-Umara* (Calcutta:1988-91); Khan, S. M., *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (Calcutta: 1873)

From the foregoing discussion, it now can safely be said that the Magh and the Portuguese threat was present during the time of Mir Jumla. Thus he had to make various decisions for political, economic and military purposes. For military purposes and public well being, he built roads, bridges and a network of forts. This chapter also suggests that although Mir Jumla was the builder of a number of forts and fortification in and around Dhaka, he was not the builder of the Hajiganj fort and the Sonakanda fort. But in all probability he took the initiative to strengthen these two forts. Furthermore it suggests that although the modern Mughal historians' claim that Mir Jumla was the builder of the Idrakpur fort, there is no archaeological proof (such as inscriptional evidence) or textual authentication (in any contemporary sources) behind their claim. Nevertheless overall it may well be said that the River Ichamati was only one possible water-route for travelling to Dhaka from southern frontier of Bengal, the areas where the Maghs and the Portuguese pirates were based in. Another water-path for reaching Dhaka from outside was the River Brahmaputra; but as I mentioned following J. N. Sarker in Chapter Seven, the outlet which connected the River Brahmaputra with Khizirpur had dried up during Jahangir's reign. In this sense, it can be assumed that Mir Jumla might have built the Idrakpur fort on the River Ichamati (the one and only waterway for enemies to approach Dhaka for attack in his time) at Idrakpur in Munshiganj to guard the capital Dhaka from enemy attacks (in particular the Maghs and the Portuguese). Nevertheless it is hardly possible to say anything conclusive regarding the builders of Idrakpur fort without a thorough archaeological investigation.

## Chapter Ten

### Shaista Khan, Mughal Subahdar, 1663-1678, 1680-88: Campaign against Chittagong

In the period immediately after the death of Mir Jumla in 1663, the administration of Bengal fell critically into disarray. Sir Jadunath Sarker compares this ‘with the reign of mice in a neglected barn’<sup>21</sup>. The emperor Aurangzeb appointed Dawud Khan, the subahdar of Bihar as the subahdar of Bengal on a temporary basis on 27<sup>th</sup> September in 1663, and then appointed Mirza Abu Talib, alias Shaista Khan<sup>22</sup>, to the same position on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1664. Nothing is known about the five-month rule of Dawud Khan in Bengal. With a break for about a year in 1678-79, Shaista Khan ruled Bengal for about twenty-four years from 1664 to 1688, the longest period for which any one has held the office of subahdar in Bengal.

On his arrival in Bengal, Shaista Khan chalked out a plan and drew attention to the pressing issues. As the administration had fallen into chaos after the death of Mir Jumla, Shaista Khan at first dedicated his energies to re-establishing order in the administration. Determined in nature, Shaista Khan used his kinship<sup>23</sup> with the emperor to intimidate the dishonest officers and the unruly zamindars. His policy proved effective in restoring discipline in all branches of administration.

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<sup>21</sup> Sarker, Sir J.N., *History of Bengal*, vol. II, (Dhaka: Dhaka University Studies, 1948), p.372.

<sup>22</sup> Emperor Jahangir gave Mirza Abu Talib the title of Shaista Khan in the 21st year of his reign. Mirza Abu Talib was also granted a higher rank and title by the Aurangzeb. The prestigious title of *Amir-ul-Umara* (chief of the nobles) was conferred on him by Aurangzeb in recognition of his services during the War of Succession.

<sup>23</sup> Of Iranian origin Shaista Khan was son of Asaf Khan and grandson of Mirza Ghias Beg Itimaduddaula who were familiarly connected with the Mughal royal family. While Nur Jahan, daughter of Itimaduddaula was the queen of Jahangir, Mumtaj Mahal, daughter of Asaf Khan, was the queen of Shahjahan. Thus by relation Shaista Khan was maternal Uncle of Aurangzeb. Shaista Khan’s father and grandfather had the position of Prime Minister under Emperor Jahangir and Shahjahan respectively.

Soon after the administrative rearrangement has been made, Shaista Khan's concentration was drawn to the frightening attitude of the King of Arakan towards Bengal. The relationship of Bengal with Arakan was never pleasant ever since the occupation of Bhulua by subahdar Islam Khan in 1611. As we mentioned in earlier chapters, from time to time the King of Arakan used to send expeditions to Bengal. The king also endangered the Maghs and the Portuguese pirates who were engaged in plundering Bengal. The pirates plundered whichever part of the rural area fell in their way, and on occasion they even attacked, damaged and plundered the capital city of Dhaka. What is more:

the pirates carried off Hindus and Muslims, men, women and children along with their property. The pirates sold their captives to foreign merchants, the Dutch, the English and the French and at the ports of the Deccan.<sup>24</sup>

From the first day of his subahdari of Bengal, Shaista Khan had been facing the same situation. According to the Dutch record *Dagregister*, immediately before the arrival of Shaista Khan in Bengal, the King of Arakan sent an expedition to Bengal in 1664.<sup>25</sup> It sailed up the river towards Dhaka, destroyed hundreds of Mughal vessels and deported hundreds of people from the countryside into slavery. Shihabuddin Talish also mentioned of an Arakanese expedition into Bengal in the same year.<sup>26</sup> He says that in this expedition the Magh pirates came to Bagadia, a dependency of Dhaka, and defeated Munawar Khan, the chief of the Bengal zaminder's flotilla. Stewart also referred to an Arakanese expedition into Bengal as well.<sup>27</sup> According to him, they plundered many

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<sup>24</sup> Karim, A., 'Shaista Khan', *Banglapedia: National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*, 2006. <<http://www.banglapedia.org/>> [accessed 15 October 2012]

<sup>25</sup> *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 26, Part.1, Reprinted in the Burma Research Society, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publications, 2(1960), 91-92.

<sup>26</sup> *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.3,1907, pp. 405-406.

<sup>27</sup> Stewart, C., *The History of Bengal; from the First Mohammedan Invasion until the Virtual Conquest of that Country by the English, 1757*, (Delhi :Oriental Publishers,1831), p. 296.

villages and hundreds of innocent people, including women and children who became victims of that raid.

Given this situation, Shaista Khan fixed his sights on conquering Chittagong, for Chittagong was the pirates' nest and was also used by the King of Arakan as a base of campaign against the Mughals'. Shaista Khan thought that conquering Chittagong<sup>28</sup> would be the best way to save the Mughal province of Bengal from raids by the King of Arakan and the plundering activities of the Maghs and the Portuguese pirates. To accomplish this goal, Shaista Khan set out three preliminary objectives. They were: (1) to reorganize and strengthen the Mughal flotilla of war-boats; (2) to win over the Portuguese on their side; and (3) to win over the Dutch companies so that they would help the Mughals' in their campaign against the Arakanese.

The Mughal flotilla of war-boats was fatally ruined due to the negligence of Shah Shuja during his involvement in the war of succession. But reorganizing and strengthening the flotilla of war-boats was very essential, as the opponents of the Mughals, the Arakanese, were renowned for their expertise in navigation and marine warfare. As part of his plan, Shaista Khan therefore first took step to repair old war-boats and also built many new war-boats in the dockyards of Dhaka, Jessore and other river ports. He prepared 300 vessels ready for naval warfare within a year or so.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Chittagong was under the control of Arakanese while Shaista Khan was planning to conquer it. Some of Jahangir's subahdars tried to annex Chittagong to the Mughal territory but failed. Subahdar Islam Khan occupied the province up to the Feni River. And this was the frontier line between Bengal and Arakan until Shaista Khan's time.

<sup>29</sup> Karim, A., 'Shaista Khan', *Banglapedia: National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*, 2006. <<http://www.banglapedia.org/>> [accessed 15 October 2012]

Besides reorganizing the flotilla of war-boats, Shaista Khan took steps to win over the Portuguese<sup>30</sup> on his side. In doing so, Shaista Khan ordered his personal officer Shaikh Zia Ud-Din Yusuf to start a dialogue with the Portuguese based in the area of the port of Loricul, which was widely known as Firingi bazaar (the Portuguese were also known as Firingi). Yusuf successfully influenced them to write to their comrades at Chittagong to incline towards the Mughals and in return to benefit from a stable and secure life instead of their present insecure and unsettled life of piracy.<sup>31</sup> Shaista Khan successfully used the same diplomacy on the Portuguese captain of Tamluk and Hugli.<sup>32</sup> This offer of Shaista Khan was attractive to the Portuguese of Chittagong. Consequently they moved from Chittagong to Bhulua (present day Noakhali). Shaista Khan employed them in the Mughal service before the end of 1665.

Subsequently Shaista Khan concentrated on the third objective of his mission: obtaining the support of the Dutch in his campaign in Chittagong against the Arakanese. The Dutch had benefited much from their privileged trading prospect in Bengal. Now if they wanted to continue with their trade in Bengal, they had to help the Mughals in their impending war against Arakanese and to cease their trade in Arakan. Here also Shaista Khan succeeded in winning over the Dutch support on their side.<sup>33</sup>

After all arrangements were completed, Shaista Khan now started concentrating on setting out the military strategy for the Chittagong campaign. He first ordered Munawar Khan to attack the Island of Sandwip (an ideal naval base which lay between Chittagong

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<sup>30</sup> The Portuguese mainly started piratical activities from the early 17th century after they failed to protect their trade supremacy against the Dutch and the English. The Portuguese pirates took shelter in Arakan, and were encouraged and supported by the king of Arakan to plunder Bengal together with the Magh pirates. For more see Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Karim, A., *History of Bengal; Mughal Period*, vol. II (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1995), p.553.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.3, 1907, p.406.

and Dhaka), and conquered it in November 1665. In the last week of December in 1665, he then sent his well-planned expedition to Chittagong. Buzurg Umid Khan, son of Shaista Khan, was given the overall command of the Mughal troops. Ibn Husain, the admiral, was in charge of the navy. The subahdar himself took up the duty of supplying provisions. The Mughals' force first fought a great naval battle at sea and then in the River Karnafuli. In this battle the Mughals won over their enemies with the help of the Portuguese. Being defeated the Arakanese navy moved back. But some of them took shelter in the fort of Chittagong. The Mughal force besieged the fort of Chittagong on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1666. On the following day, Buzurg Umed Khan made an entry into the fort and occupied it, and Chittagong was conquered by the Mughals. With the permission of the emperor, Chittagong was renamed Islamabad.

Over and above the fulfilment of a long-cherished political desire of the Mughals, the conquest of Chittagong caused profound pleasure all over the province. For on account of this victory people got relieved from brutal attacks, oppressions and plundering of the Magh and the Portuguese pirates. Furthermore, it helped to liberate thousands of kidnapped and imprisoned men, women and children. In sum it brought peace to Bengal. To restore peace in the north-eastern frontier of the province, Shaista Khan also took necessary steps to put down the unruly chiefs of the bordering states, who raised their heads taking advantage of the disorder after the death of Mir Jumla. He made all the neighbouring kings (i.e. the Raja of Kuch Bihar, the Raja of Jaintia, the Raja of Tippera and Bahadur Khan of Hijli) bound to offer submission and to promise to pay tributes.

The implications of the undisturbed Bengal were enormous for its agriculture, trade and commerce. The emperor encouraged an increase of trade, since trade (mainly export

trade) was an excellent source of income for the country. Shaista Khan facilitated trade and commerce in Bengal for European companies. He took initiatives to make land and river routes safe from thieves to protect the benefits of foreign traders. Private trade was prohibited by the imperial *firman*. Shaista Khan compelled the foreign traders to abide by the law of the country. Thus at times conflicts materialized between the European companies and the Mughal port and custom officials, when the foreign traders were in breach of the law of the country or failed or unwilling to pay their dues. Shaista Khan did not yield to unreasonable demands of foreign traders. He expelled the English traders from Bengal for breaching the law of the country.<sup>34</sup> However, like other provincial subahdars, Shaista Khan himself also indulged in private trade, but the difference is that he was engaged in internal trade, not exports trade.<sup>35</sup> He has been highly praised by the Mughal historians for his tremendous success in advancing the economy of Bengal. They envisage him as 'the model of excellence'. As Karim puts it:

He was also praised because in his time the price of grain was extremely low, so much so that rice was being sold at the rate of 8 maunds per rupee. While leaving Dhaka, he caused the following inscription to be engraved on the western gate of the city "Let him only open this gate who can show the selling rate of rice as cheap as this".<sup>36</sup>

Shaista Khan is also greatly remembered for his building activities in Bengal. He built a number of religious and secular buildings in and outside the capital Dhaka. He introduced a new style in constructing monuments, which is widely known as Shaista

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<sup>34</sup> Karim, A., 'Shaista Khan', *Banglapedia: National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*, 2006. <<http://www.banglapedia.org/>> [accessed 15 October 2012]

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Karim, A., 'Shaista Khan', *Banglapedia: National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*, 2006. <<http://www.banglapedia.org/>> [accessed 15 October 2012]

Khani Style. Among the major constructions of Shaista Khan are : the Chhota Katra <sup>37</sup>, a three-domed mosque with corner towers on the River Buriganga near Mitford Hospital, the tomb of Bibi Pari (Fairy lady)<sup>38</sup>, the Chawk Bazar Mosque, the Satgumbad Mosque, the Khizirpur Mosque ( there is a tomb<sup>39</sup> aside this Mosque), on the bank of the River Shitalakhya. Furthermore he made some additions to Lalbagh Fort and after the name of the emperor he renamed it Aurangabad fort.

From the foregoing discussion it overall seems that Shaista Khan's fame and contribution rest on his conquest of Chittagong. It was not only significant for restoring peace (i.e. political success) in Bengal but also significant for tremendously boosting the economy of Bengal. Furthermore this victory establishes him to be one of the most outstanding Mughal generals who struck the last and final blow to the Portuguese pirates and the Magh of Arakan's raids in Bengal. It also emerges from the previous discussion that he was an extremely able administrator with enlightened motivation for establishing social justice and the wellbeing of the people. In particular, he can be praised for alleviating corruption among bureaucrats and giving aid to the people by eliminating unlawful taxes. His determined diplomacy was also recognizable. As we have observed here, he successfully motivated the Dutch to close their trades in Arakan and to give them support in their campaign against the Arakanese. His diplomacy is further illustrated in his ability to employ the English and the Dutch to his service on military purposes.

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<sup>37</sup> It was built in 1664 for visitors, visiting traders and travellers. A small single-domed mosque with admirable architectural beauty was within its enclosure. There was an old single-domed square tomb in the courtyard of this structure. All these are extant in ruins.

<sup>38</sup> It is one of the very fine specimens of architecture in Dhaka of Shaista Khan's time. This tomb was constructed within the walled enclosure of the Lalbagh fort importing costly material from central India. Bibi Pari (also known as Iran Dukht), who met a premature death, is said to have been a daughter of Shaista Khan. That is why he spent open-handedly on the construction of the tomb of his daughter.

<sup>39</sup> This is said to have been the tomb of a daughter of Shaista Khan called Bibi Mariyam.

His extensive building activities also succeeded in being the models for his age. His contribution to building forts and fortification in Bengal was less than his work in other sectors. Discussion of this chapter gives no reliable idea about whether or not Shaista Khan fortified any of the three river forts under discussion in the study. But as peace was restored in Bengal in his time through his winning over the Portuguese pirates in the Mughal side and also through the conquest of Chittagong by defeating and exterminating the Magh of Arakan from Bengal for good, it is less likely that Dhaka was under any serious military threats for which he had to build rivers forts to protect Dhaka.

## **PART THREE**

### **Chapter Eleven**

#### **Conclusion**

The study has embarked upon an analysis of the current state of knowledge of the Mughal river forts in Bangladesh. Having identified existing disagreements about the building of river forts in chapter one of Part One, I contended that although there is a broad area of agreement about the purpose of the river forts, scholars have failed to provide precise knowledge about some important aspects of those forts. The existing scholarship on the Mughal river-forts does not satisfactorily address the building of the river forts, justifying the view that further research is required on those issues. In particular it fails to explain:

1. The dates and building of forts;
2. The purpose of the forts and the nature of their construction;
3. How do they relate to Mughal military strategy;
4. What effect did the changes in the course and river systems may have had in them; and
5. What role they may have played in the defence of Dhaka.

In chapter two of Part One, I discoursed the historical background, in particular the political history and economic history of medieval Bengal. In the section on political history I mentioned that although the Afghan regime was defunct through the defeat and death of Afghan general Dawud Khan Karrani (1572–1576) at the hands of Khan Jahan

(1557-1578), the Mughals could not establish their authority in Bengal during Akbar's reign, for the Bengal bhuiyans and zaminders created a strong resistance to the Mughal rulers during this period. This situation continued under the leadership of Isa Khan (1576 – 1599) until his death in 1599. Thus Bengal was in effect under the rule of independent chieftains in Isa Khan's period. The Mughal era effectively began in Bengal (except for Chittagong) during the reign of Jahangir with the subjugation of Isa's son Musa Khan (the last independent ruler of Bengal prior to the Mughal era) in 1611. But their rule in Bengal was not undisturbed due to the menace and piratical activities of the Portuguese and the Maghs of Arakan, which extended from the coastal districts of Bengal to the capital Dhaka. In establishing political stability in riverine Bengal, the Mughals gave highest priority to safeguarding the river-routes in and around the capital Dhaka. Over and above building forts (namely the Lalbagh fort) for administrative use, the Mughals developed a network of fortified defensive centres, which they used only for military purposes. The existing strongholds are the river forts located at Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur. The network of fortified centres involved a number of border outposts as well.

In the section on economic history in chapter two, I discussed the economic condition of Bengal during medieval period. Being a place of favourable geographical integration (i.e. easy and economic communication thanks to widespread river networks and the opportunity for maintaining sea-borne trade and commerce between Bengal and South-East Asian countries) the eastern part of Bengal had enjoyed economic prosperity from early times. Trade and commerce also developed quickly in Eastern Bengal in the post-medieval period after the transfer of the provincial capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka in 1611. However, Eastern Bengal was economically strong even in the pre-Mughal period. Sonargaon, a neighbouring inland port, maintained a dominant economic status for about two hundred years prior to the Mughal age. In Ibn Battuta's words, in the

fourteenth century Bengal was a vast misty country abounding in rice. As I have depicted, Dhaka gained the dominant economic status when Sonargaon lost its importance because of the shifting of the course of the River Meghna and dwindling flow of the River Brahmaputra. Eastern Bengal, in particular Dhaka, thanks to its famous cotton-fabric production, rice, sugar, oils, wax and other similar articles, attracted many foreign traders such as the European companies (i.e. the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English) and Asian companies (in particular from Armenia, Arabia, Persia and different parts of Indian subcontinent). The presence of foreign merchants considerably contributed to the economy of Bengal. But the economic glory of Dhaka again came to an end with the shifting of the capital and the trading centres from Dhaka during the viceroyalty of Mughal subahdar, Murshid Quli Khan (1717 to 1727) when Pachotrabandar at Murshidabad developed as the main trading centre instead.

In chapter three of Part One, I discussed river systems and historical changes in the systems and argued that the political, economic and cultural changes that occurred after the sixteenth century had been significantly influenced by the changes in the great river systems. By the same token I also argued that a satisfactory study of the Mughals' political and military activities in Bangladesh would involve a thorough study of the changes in the river systems. The main course of the great Ganges river system had formerly coursed through what is now the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel in west Bengal. It was first replaced by the Bhairab, the Mathabhanga, the Garai-Madhumati, the Arialkha, and afterwards by the present-day Padma-Meghna river system. This means that over time the active stage of delta formation migrated south-eastward. The former channels of the rivers were abandoned leading to a decline in the political importance of western and southern Bengal. The River Ganges completed its eastward shift into the Padma system in the late sixteenth century, when the Mughals' power was becoming

consolidated in the region. Economic integration occurred between East Bengal products, especially textiles and foodstuffs, from the frontier to the imperial metropolis, thanks to direct river communication. Moreover as I mentioned in this chapter, there was a link between the transfer of the capital and the shifting of the river course in this deltaic province. All the capitals of Bengal were situated on the bank of the Ganges-Padma river systems.

In chapter four of this part, I discussed and analysed the three Mughal river forts: the Hajiganj Fort, the Sonakanda Fort and the Idrakpur Fort. I conducted field work on each of the river forts sites. My description and discussion, based on the field work and available textual sources, imply: (1) that in the development of the three river forts in Bangladesh, some common features emerged, which may be related to the topography of eastern Bengal and the building materials available; (2) that, considering some aspects such as ground plans, surrounding walls pierced with loopholes and crowned by merlons, corner bastions, artillery platforms, small and large loopholes, and watch towers, it can be said that the river forts were built following a distinctive architectural style; but (3) that the date and name of builders of those river forts are still unknown because of the absence of any specific historical or inscriptional evidence.

Furthermore, as I mentioned, following available textual references although we can say that the Hajiganj and Sonakanda forts are older than the Idrakpur fort, we cannot categorically prove that all three rivers forts are Mughal constructions. For historians of the Mughal period maintain divergent opinions about this. As I mentioned, while for some (such as Taifoor) except for Idrakpur fort all the forts including the Hajiganj fort and Sonakanda fort are pre-Mughal, for others (such as Tayesh, Dani, Hasan and Ahmed) all three river-forts are Mughal. Furthermore I observed that the architectural

style of the brick built and plastered river forts of Bengal was different from that of the extravagant north Indian stone and marble buildings of the period.

In chapter five of Part One, I tackled the military strategy and techniques that the Mughals adopted in their conquest of Eastern Bengal. Consulting and analysing contemporary sources, in particular *Babaistan-i-Ghaybi*, I concluded that the Mughals were capable of planning and implementing military strategy and tactics well-suited to the topographical conditions of riverine eastern Bengal. Their capability was well illustrated in four major initiatives : (1) taking account of eastern Bengal's climate and geography, they placed more emphasis on war-boats and cannons than on cavalry; (2) they constructed forts and fortifications along the rivers making use of the topography of rivers as a natural advantage, (3) they made sure to construct the right type of defensive structures with appropriate priority in the right strategic places; and (4) they developed a military machine that effectively combined gunpowder weaponry with mounted archers and naval forces, i.e. the deployment of a mixed force structure.

Furthermore I argued that their capacity to devise a military strategy and its practice in riverine Bengal was well illustrated in the method of construction of forts, the selection of the location of forts, the relation of forts to weaponry used to defend and attack, the military use of boats and the use of guns against enemy boats. Border outposts, the miniature version of river forts, were also of no less significant element of military matters of the Mughals.

At the outset of Part Two, I furnished a brief introduction to Part Two, which explains how this portion is structured. In addition to this brief introduction, Part Two includes five chapters. As I explained, each chapter of this part covers a specific period, discussing the political, economic and military situation, looking at the river system at

that period, assessing the various military threats to the Dhaka region in the light of this information, and finally discussing the possible role of the forts during this period.

As the first attempt towards the objectives of Part Two, chapter six briefly discussed the political, economic and military situation of the period from 1576 to 1611, with special reference to the role of Isa Khan and other bhuiyans in constituting effective resistance to the Mughal rulers. As has been observed here, during the period of 35 years from 1576 to 1611 the Mughals' control was restricted to Tanda in West Bengal, and the area of Bhati was in effect under the control of Isa Khan, other bhuiyans leaders and their Afghans allies.

Moreover, as I observed, the places of war between the Mughal force and the bhuiyans were the strategic places of Bhati, which were located within the area of Dhaka or its vicinity (such as Bhawal, Junglebari, Tok, Egara-Sindur, Bajitpur, Astogram, Bikrampur, Sonargaon, Katrabo and Khizirpur). This seems to suggest (1) that there was a serious military threat to the Dhaka region during the time when Isa Khan rose to the power over an extensive territory of Bhati from the position of a petty zaminder of Sarail pargana; and (2) that the strategic importance of these places was rooted in their being located along the Padma-Brahmaputra-Meghna river-system. The continuous battles between the bhuiyans and the Mughals also seem to suggest that forts and fortifications in the area of Dhaka had a vital function during this period. Both the bhuiyans and the Mughals needed to control the forts within this area, suggesting that Isa Khan had either erected or occupied strongholds in the strategic places in and around Dhaka, in particular along the river Shitalaykha near Khizirpur and Katrabo (the headquarter of Isa Khan). But this does not certify the claim that Isa Khan was the builder of the Hajiganj and Sonakanda forts, for no contemporary textual or any archeological evidence is available now to support it. On the other hand, as the Mughals could not conquer eastern Bengal,

in particular Bhati, during the lifetime of Isa Khan, it is very unlikely that they could have erected or were given any chance to erect any permanent strongholds close to the headquarters of Isa Khan or in its vicinity. It should be noted that there was also a mention of the Magh or the Portuguese raids in Bengal during Isa's time.

In section one of chapter seven of Part Two, I pointed out that, like his predecessors, subahdar Islam Khan led his campaigns for the most tenacious part in the same geographical area of Bhati. But unlike his predecessors, subahdar Islam Khan defeated and subdued the Bara-Bhuiyans including their leader Musa Khan who took the leadership of the bhuiyans after the death of his father Isa Khan, and advanced towards the eastern part of Bengal and defeated the mighty Afghan chiefs Khaja Usman of Bukainagar and Bayazid Karrani of Sylhet. He was the main architect of the Mughal conquest of the whole of Bengal except for Chittagong. Also he subdued three frontier kingdoms: Kamrup, Kamta and Kachar. As I listed, his success relied on three things: determined diplomacy, military tactics and strong-minded statesmanship.

As I observed, the frequent Magh raids, not the Portuguese (as it has been mentioned in *Babaristan*, the Portuguese attack took place only once and that was against Dawud Khan, brother of Musa Khan during Islam Khan's term) began in Bengal in the early seventeenth century during Islam Khan's time. Thus it seems that in protecting Dhaka from local enemies (i.e bhuiyans and their allies) and external enemies (i.e. the Maghs of Arakan), Islam Khan had to erect and/or occupy numerous forts and fortifications in many strategic places in and around Dhaka, in particular in the area of Khizirpur. This suggests that Islam Khan might have had built the two forts situated along the River Sitalakhya: the Hajiganj fort (located on the Sitalakhya mouth of Dulai rives near Khizirpur) and the Sonakanda fort (located about a mile down the Sitalakhya

river on the opposite side of Hajiganj fort). But there is no contemporary textual or archaeological evidence (e.g., inscriptions) available in favour of this claim.

In section two of chapter seven, I analysed and argued that the successors of Islam Khan, in particular, Qasim Khan Chisti (1613-1617), Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang (1617-1624), Mahabbat Khan (1625-1626), Mukarram Khan(1626-1627) and Fidai Khan (1627-1628), had to face frequent raids, looting and abductions by both the Maghs of Arakan and the Portuguese pirates. But none of these rulers was able to prove his worth except for Qasim Khan Juyini, who, succeeded in eliminating the Portuguese from Hugli. This seems to suggest that none of them was involved with the building of the two river forts located along the River Sitalakhya near Khizirpur. But here again there is no contemporary textual or archaeological evidence available in favour or against this claim.

The discussion and analysis of chapter eight reveal that according to historians Shuja was successful in administering Bengal in the sense that no serious disturbance of peace occurred involving any local or external enemies including the Portuguese or the Maghs of Arakans in Bengal during his time. He managed the Portuguese merchants by offering them the opportunity to run their trade in Bengal without obstacles. And their fellow Portuguese, who committed acts of piracy, piracies accompanied by the Maghs of Arakan, had grown indolent leading to their decline in Shuja's time in Bengal. Consequently, according to these historians, there was no serious threat to Dhaka in Shuja's time. Thus for the same reason Shuja, as they claim, was not in need of building forts and fortifications in the Dhaka region. But it is also a claim with no support from any contemporary textual source or archaeological evidence.

Having discussed and analysed the political, economic and military situation in Bengal during subahdar Mir Jumla's time, 1660-1663, following military historians dealing

with the Mughal period, I argued that Mir Jumla was not involved with the construction of the Hajiganj fort or the Sonakanda fort. For these two forts were mentioned long before by Abul Fazal in *Akbarnama*, a contemporary source. Furthermore I took into account the views of several modern Mughal historians (such as Dani), who claims that Mir Jumla was the builder of the Idrakpur fort. As I mentioned, this claim seems plausible in the sense that it receives support from the following account of Shahabuddin Talish, who says that in Jahangir's reign the pirates used to come to Dhaka for plundering and abduction through a canal which, taking off the Brahmaputra, approached Dhaka via Khizirpur. The governors of Dhaka used to go to Khizirpur during the plundering season with an army to check the advance of the Portuguese and Magh pirates. But this water route to Dhaka was closed when this canal dried up after some years. Thus the water route to Dhaka became restricted to the Jatrapur and Bikrampur side, i.e. the River Ichamati.

Given this, it can be assumed that Mir Jumla might have built the Idrakpur fort at Idrakpur in Munshiganj to check the advance of the Maghs and the Portuguese pirates to Dhaka through the last option, the River Ichamati. However, it is hardly a conclusive claim since, like other cases; there is no contemporary textual or archaeological evidence to support it.

In chapter ten, I tracked Mughal subahdar Shaista Khan's campaign against Chittagong and observed that Shaista Khan's fame and contribution rest on his conquest of Chittagong. This victory was significant for restoring a long-term peace in Bengal through suppressing the Portuguese pirates and driving out the Magh of Arakan from the area of Chittagong. For the Mughal historians, this peaceful situation resulted in a tremendous improvement in the economy of Bengal. As an extremely able administrator

with enlightened motivation, according to the historians, Shaista Khan also established social justice and the wellbeing of the people. His determined diplomacy, as they describe, was well illustrated in his ability to motivate the Dutch to close their trade in Arakan and to give them support in their campaign against the Arakanese as well as in his decision to employ the English and the Dutch in his service for military purposes.

Chapter ten revealed that his extensive building activities were models for his age. More importantly this chapter confirms that he made hardly any contribution to building forts and fortification in Bengal in comparison to other sectors. It suggests that Shaista Khan had no involvement with the building of the river-forts. This assumption seems plausible as there was no need for Shaista Khan to build fortified defence centres as peace was restored in Bengal in his time through (1) the conquest of Chittagong, (2) the winning over of the Portuguese pirates and all European companies in the Mughal side and (3) the permanent extermination of the Maghs of Arakan from Chittagong.

Concerning the building of the river-forts, based on the above findings, four important conclusions can be drawn.

- (1) That the river-forts were built during the Mughal era in Bengal by Mughal rulers can be claimed in the sense that some crucial constructional aspects of the three river-forts (such as their ground plans, surrounding walls engraved with loopholes and crowned by merlons, corner bastions, artillery platforms and watch towers) are similar. However, we do not know precisely when.
- (2) The methods of construction and architectural styles of the river forts are characterised by the availability of materials and the purpose of building them. For example, while the use of bricks and the

absence of stone and marble characterise their material aspect the effective use of weaponry to defend and attack (i.e military purpose) characterises their architectural style.

- (3) That the construction of the river-forts is profoundly influenced by the topography of riverine eastern Bengal. These forts are an important source for the Mughal history of Bengal. For the Mughal conquest of Bengal proved their superiority in military activities, and the three river forts, as the major fortified defence centres, can help to reconstruct the medieval Mughal history, in particular the military history of Bengal. In other words, an effective study of the medieval Mughal military history of Bengal is largely dependent on the remains of the three river-forts.
- (4) The river forts are among the fortified defence centres which played the most vital role in protecting the Mughal capital Dhaka from various local and external enemy-attacks.

These conclusions are based on the field work that I undertook on all three river forts and consultation of the contemporary textual sources. The chief limitation in relation to research materials is the fact that I had to resort to the Persian sources in problematic and unreliable translations rather than the original. Another limitation of my study is that it is based only on the Bengali and Persian sources. Currently a number of writings on Arakan<sup>1</sup> and Assam<sup>2</sup> have become available. Due to time constraints, I could

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Jacques P. Leider, focusing on historiographic issue of Arakan, says that in the writing of Bengali historians on Arakan, they concentrate on three things: ‘ (1) The raids of Arakanese fleets and the aggressions against southern and eastern Bengal; (2) the Bengali Muslim influence on the court of Arakan;(3)Arakan’s control over chittagong . Most articles are void of any contextual approach and generally try to give a kind of synthesis based on Bengali and Persian sources. So the main criticism one can formulate concerns the neglect of any arakanese socio-cultural, economic or political background that would have provided a more sensitive approach to the (indeed horrifying) slave-raids (but the Arakanese incursions were not only slave-raids!) and to the impact of the Muslim presence at the court which varied

not consult them during my study. Given this, some recommendation for future researchers into this field can be made:

- (1) Researchers into this subject area should consult more extensive readings; in particular, in addition to the Bengali and Persian sources, they should consult works done on the socio-cultural, political and economic background of the Arakanese and their relationships (in particular regarding trade) with the Bengalis during medieval period. Some of the writing on Assam should also be consulted as they are potentially relevant.
- (2) As we have observed in this study, most of the Mughal historians attributed the credit of building river forts to certain Mughal subahdars, but these attributions are not proven. The Archaeological Department of the government of Bangladesh should encourage further research into this area with necessary financial support to conduct in-depth research involving necessary archaeological excavation. Otherwise the medieval history, in particular Mughal history of Bengal, will suffer an irreparable loss. For, as I mentioned earlier, the remains of the river forts are an important source of medieval Mughal history of Bengal. Given this, the government

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considerably over the decades.' For more see, Leider, J.P., 'Arakan During the Maruk U Period: The Political Success of a Buddhist Border States' (2008).

<<https://sites.google.com/site/kogyikyawarakan/arakan-information/Articles-main-page>>; Also see, Leider, J.P., 'These Buddhist Kings With Muslim Names' (2009).

<<https://sites.google.com/site/kogyikyawarakan/arakan-information/Articles-main-page>> [accessed 15 September, 2012]

<sup>2</sup> Kanaklal Baurua writes focusing on the links between Portuguese and Hindu Kings in the Assam-Bengal region. This may well provide us with new ideas about Portuguese. One of the ideas is that over and above their identity as mercenaries, the Portuguese might have had a political structure of their own. For more see, Baurua, K., 'Seventeenth Century Portuguese Travellers in Assam' in *Discovery of North-East India*, 3 (2005), 67-73.

should take proper initiative to protect the archaeological remains of the river forts. And further research, as mentioned above, should begin before it becomes too late, i.e. before the existing remains of the river forts go in complete ruin.

Despite some limitations, I believe that this study has provided a valuable additional perspective to the current state of knowledge about the river-forts. It is hoped that the findings of this study will elevate awareness about the limitations of existing knowledge of the river forts, and encourage further research in the area in question.

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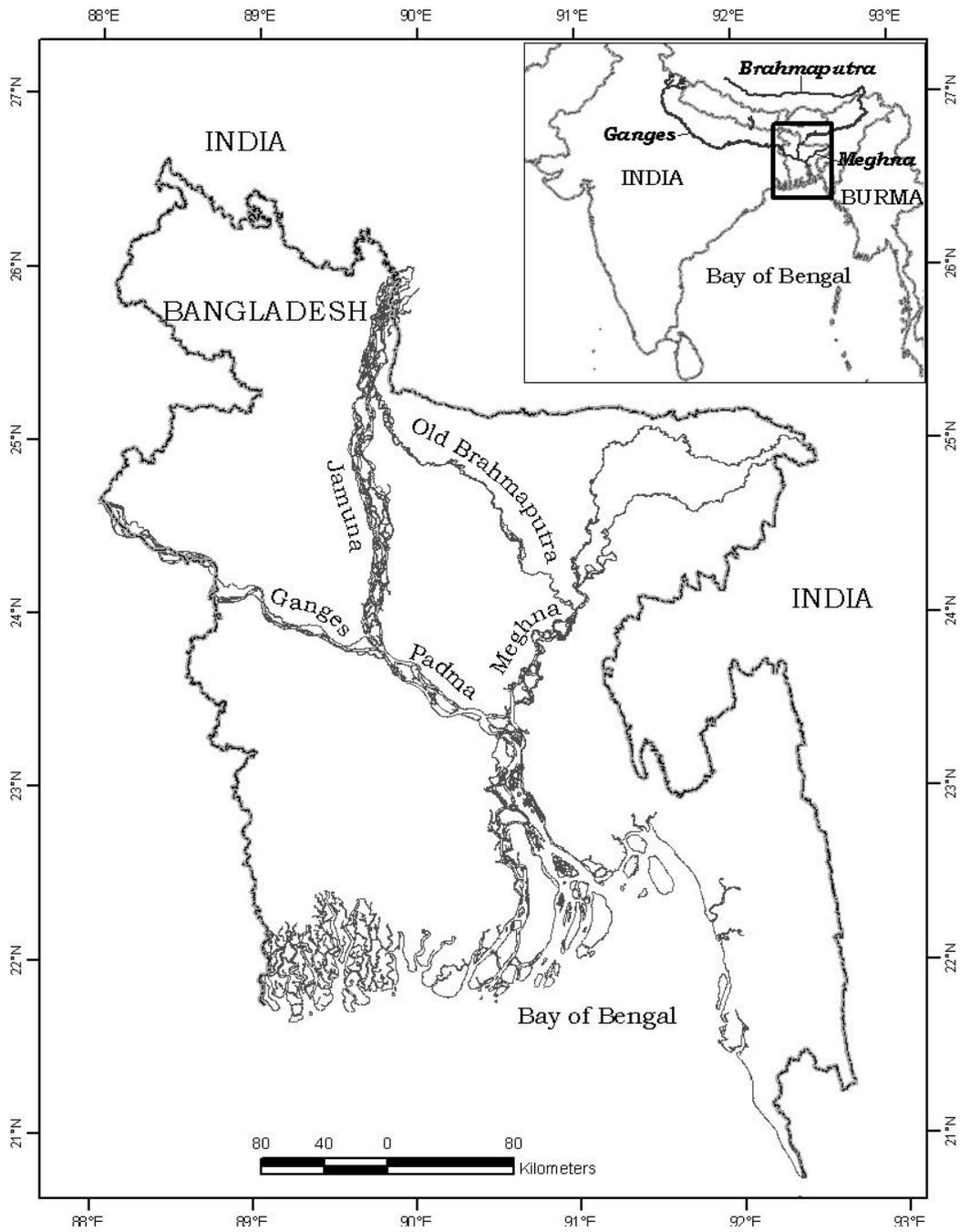
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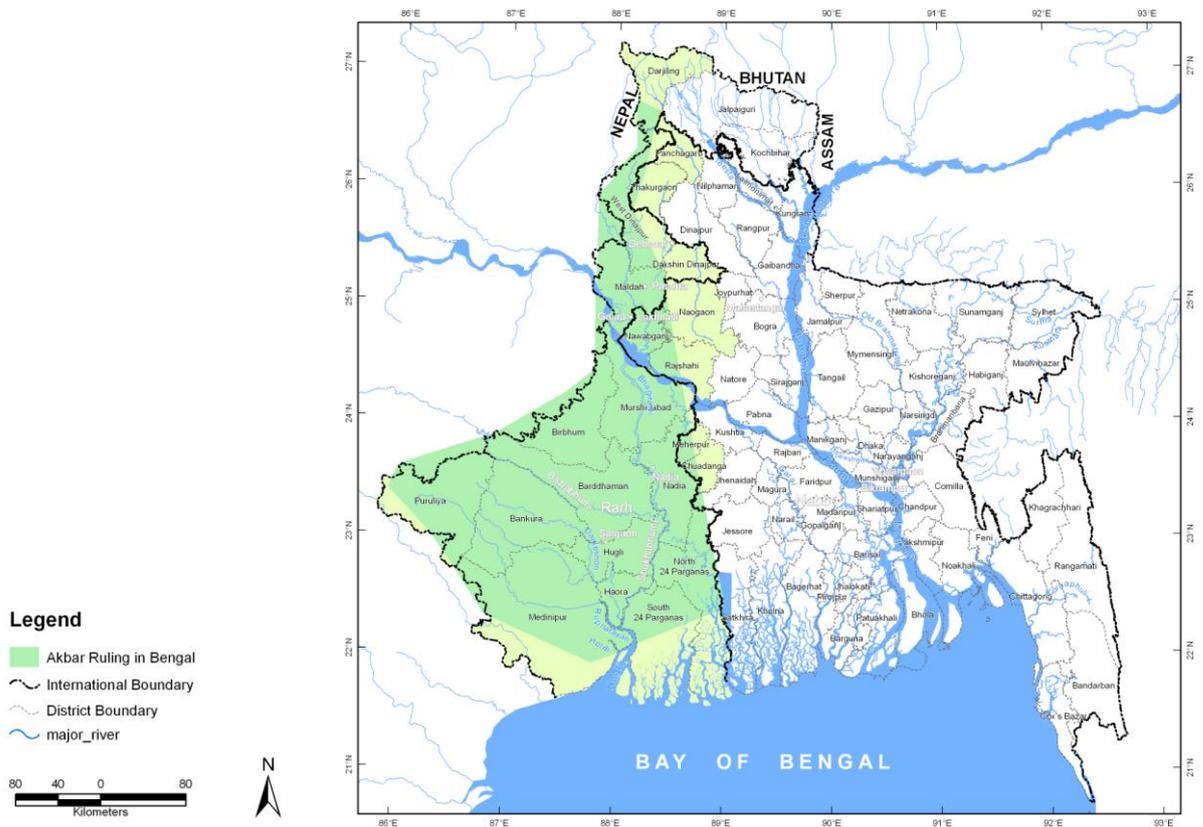
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## **MAPS**

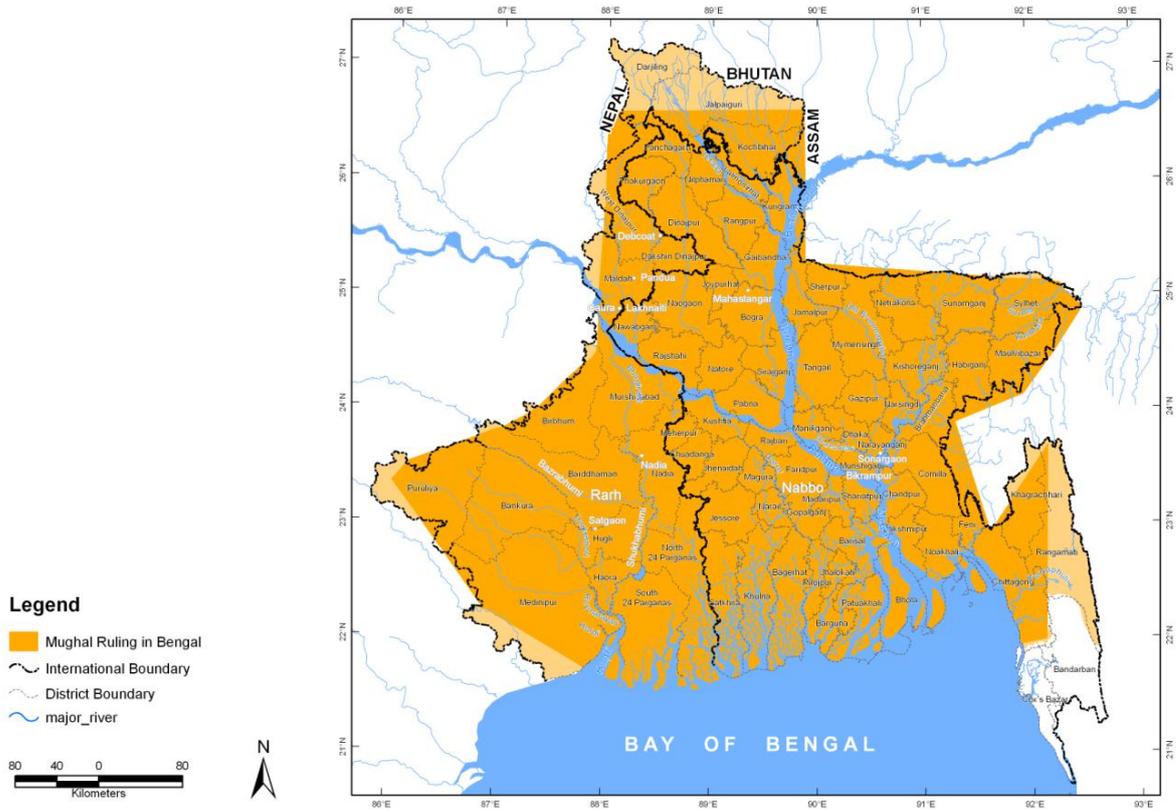


Map1 Study area map ( Sarker 2008)

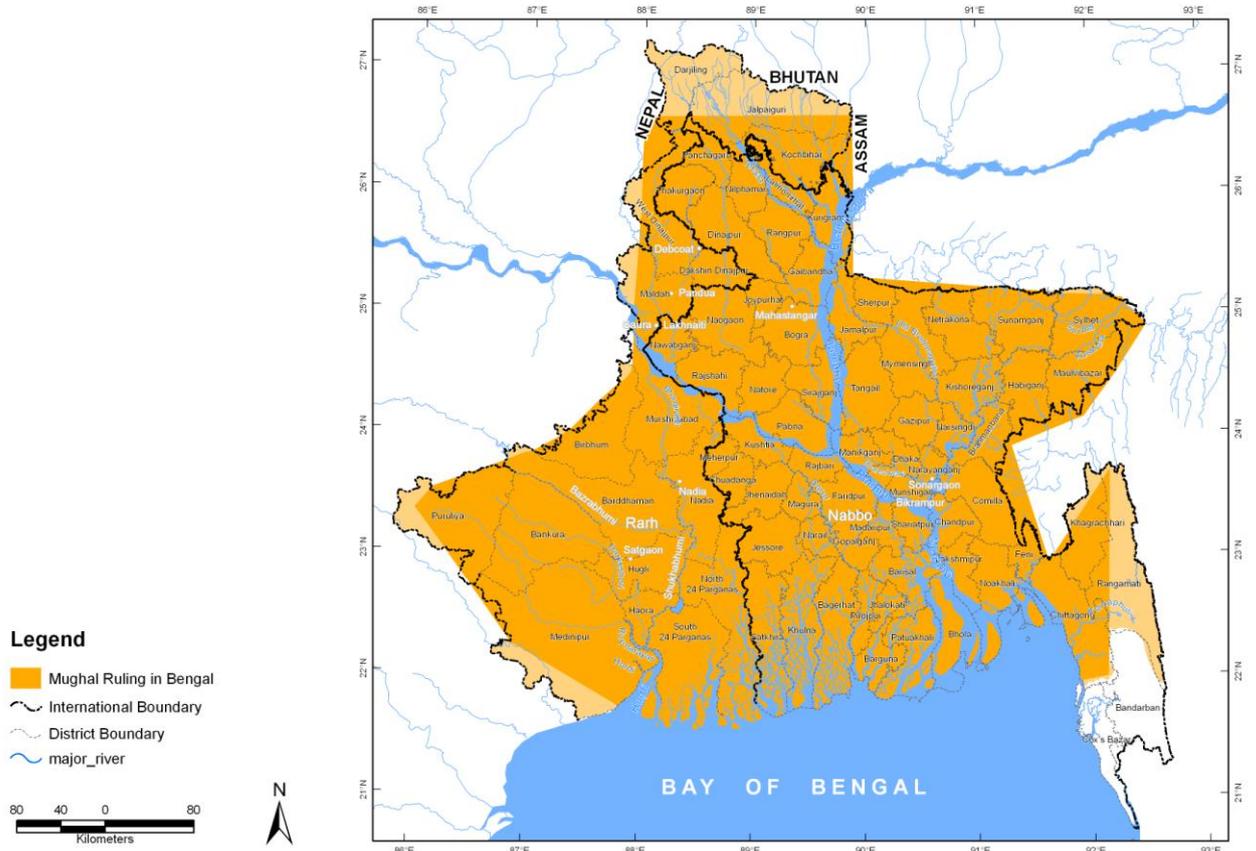




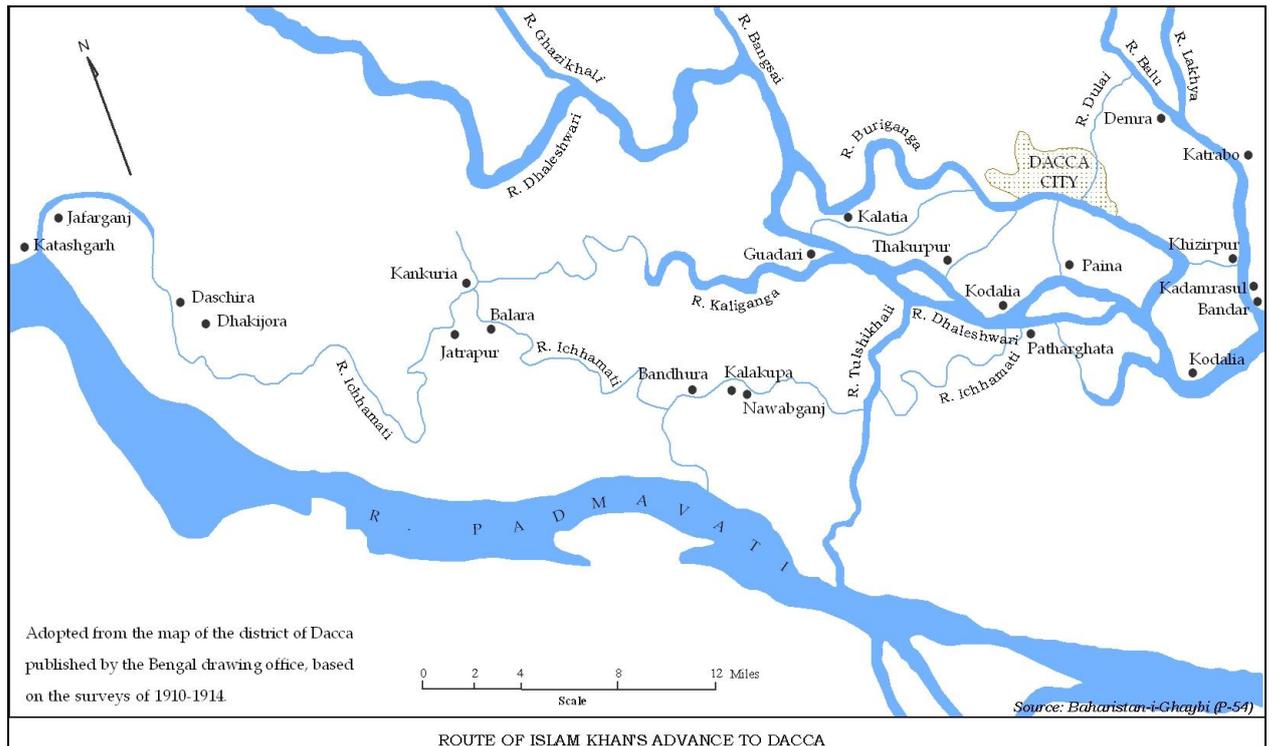
Map 3 Bengal under the Emperor Akbar (Shahnawaz and Imran 2011)



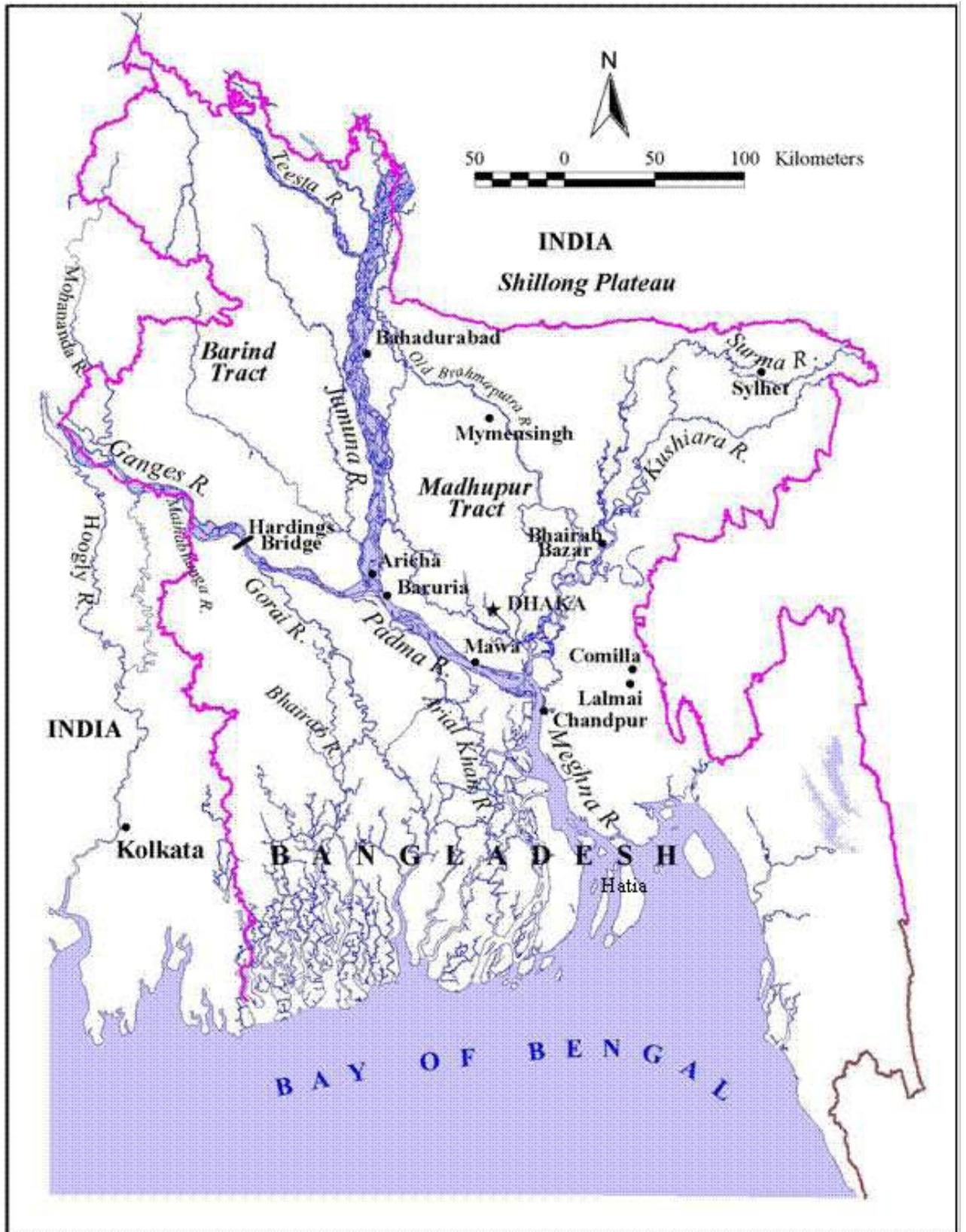
Map 4 Bengal under the Bara- Bhuiyans (Shahnawaz and Imran 2011)



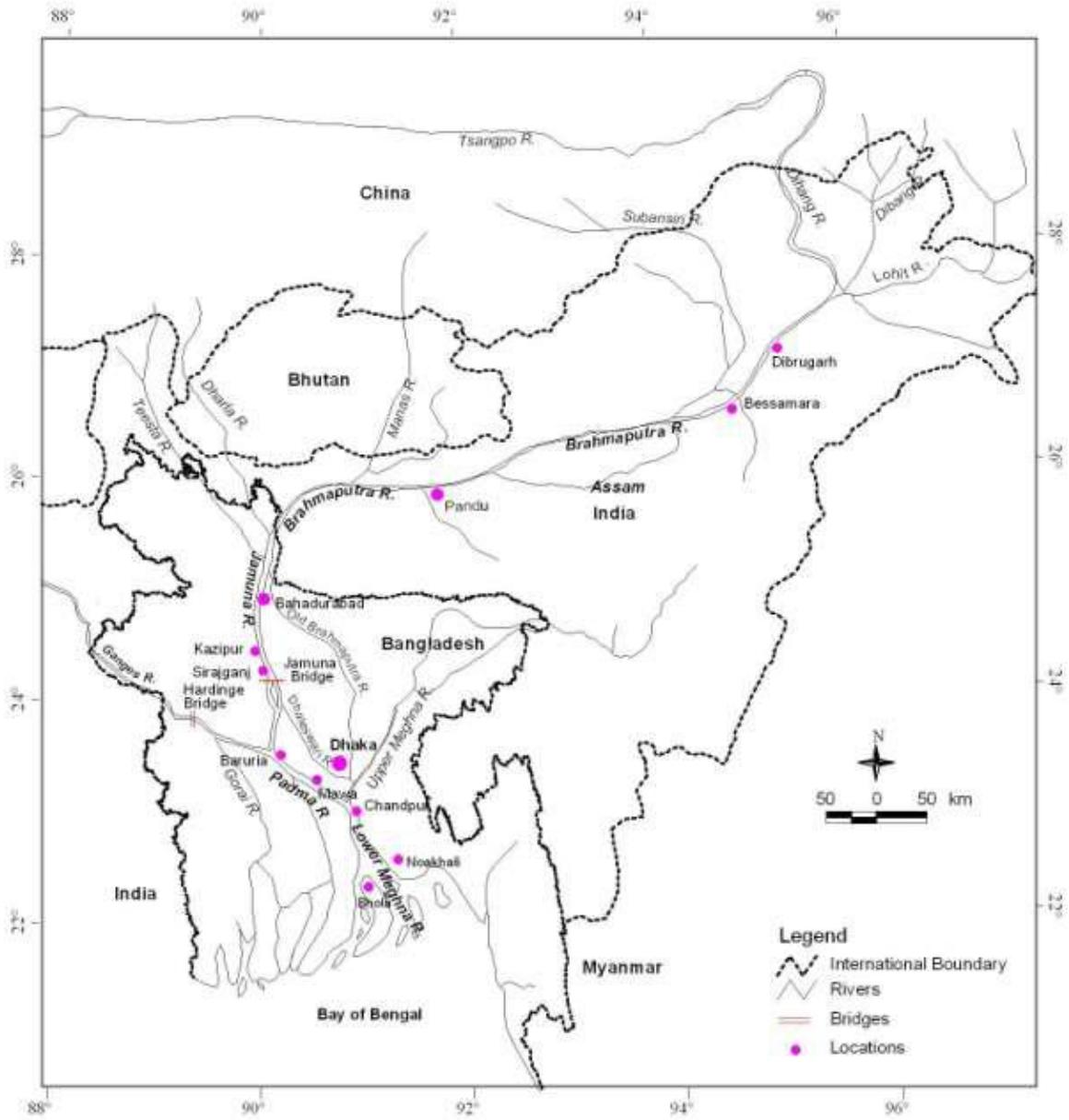
Map 5 Bengal under the Mughals before the conquest of Chittagong (Shahnawaz and Imran 2011)



Map 6 Route of Islam Khan's advance to Dhaka



Map 7 The main river systems of Bangladesh (Sarker 2008)



Map 8 Brahmaputra, Jamuna, Padma and Lower Meghna river system ( Sarker, 2008)

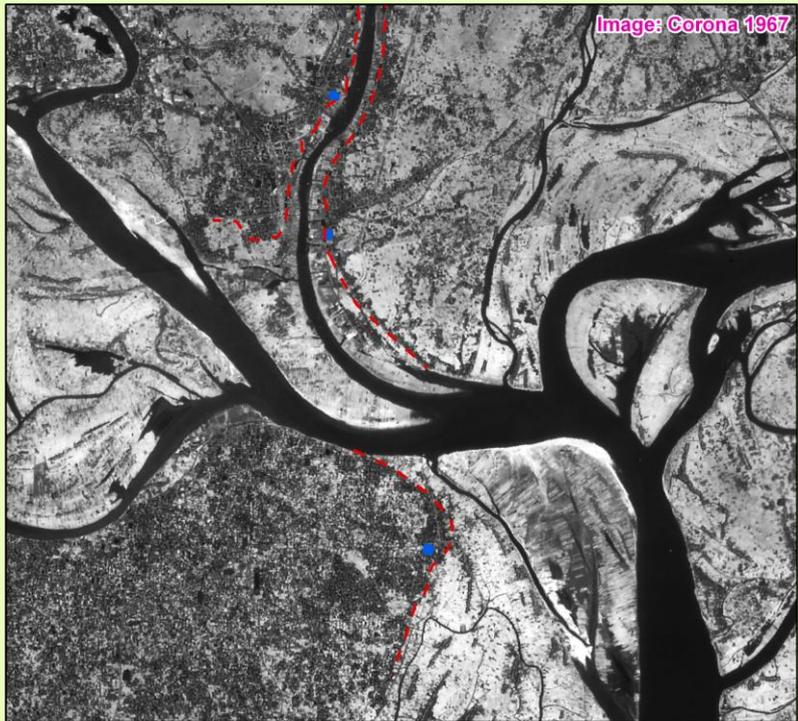


Image: Corona 1967

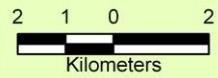


Image: Landsat 2003

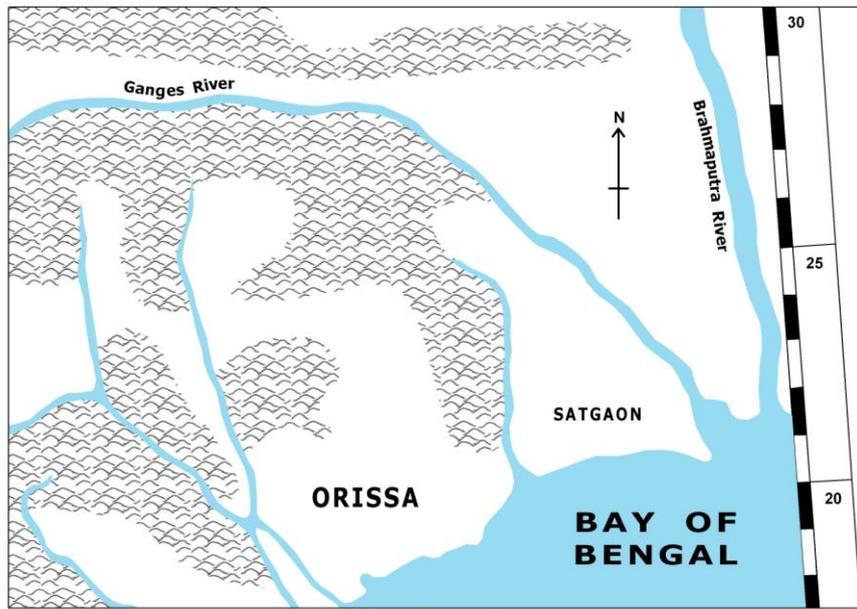
**Legend**

- - - Paleo River Bankline

Fort

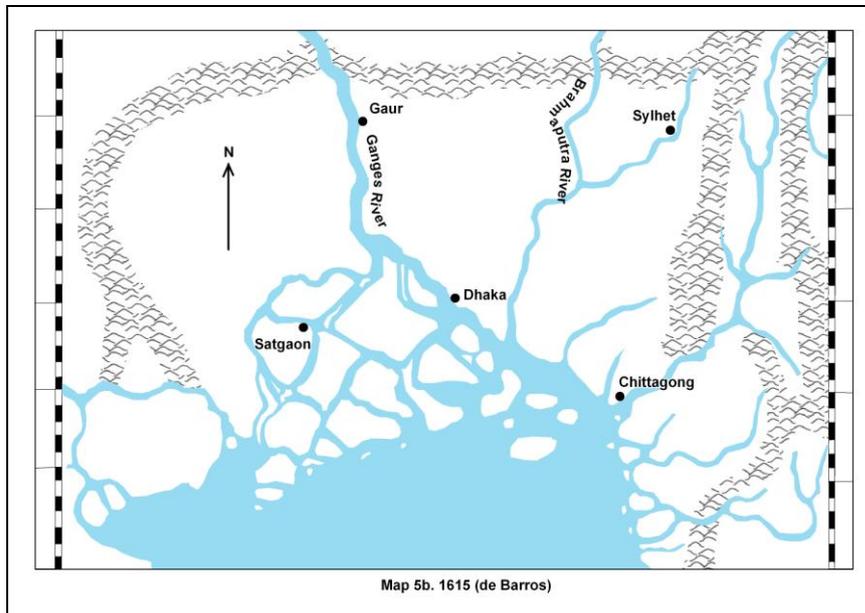


Map 9 Palaeo channel over view



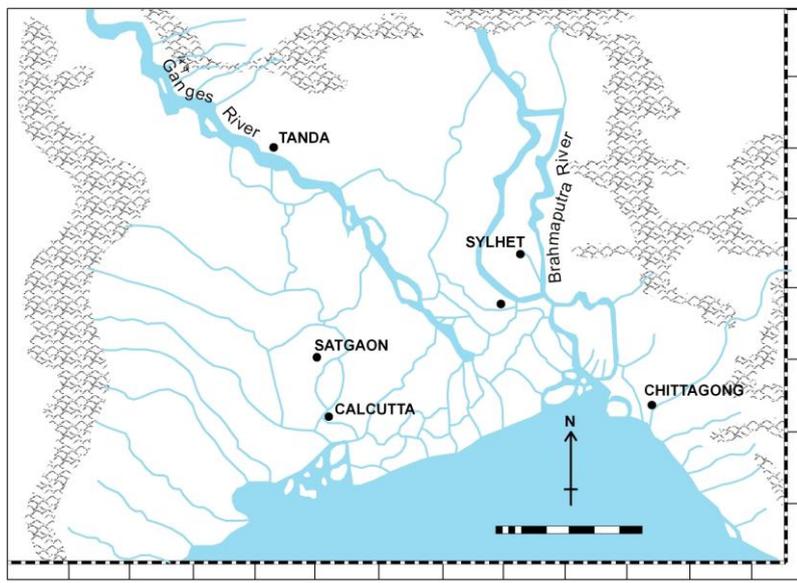
Map 5a. 1548 (Gastaldi)

Map 10 a. Changing courses of Bengal Rivers, 1548- 1779 (Eaton, 1993)



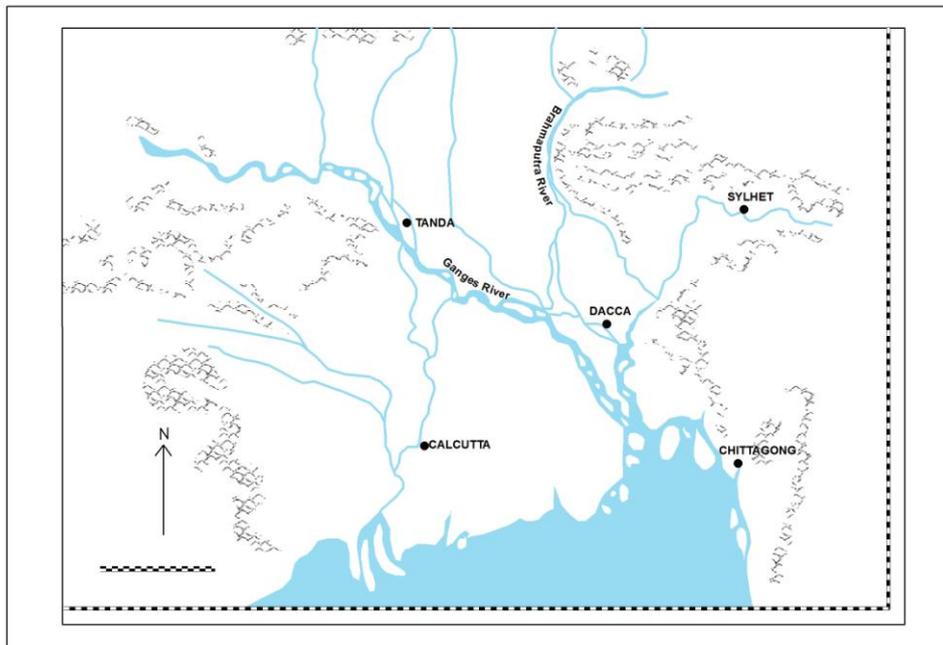
Map 5b. 1615 (de Barros)

Map 10 b. Changing courses of Bengal Rivers, 1548- 1779 (Eaton, 1993)



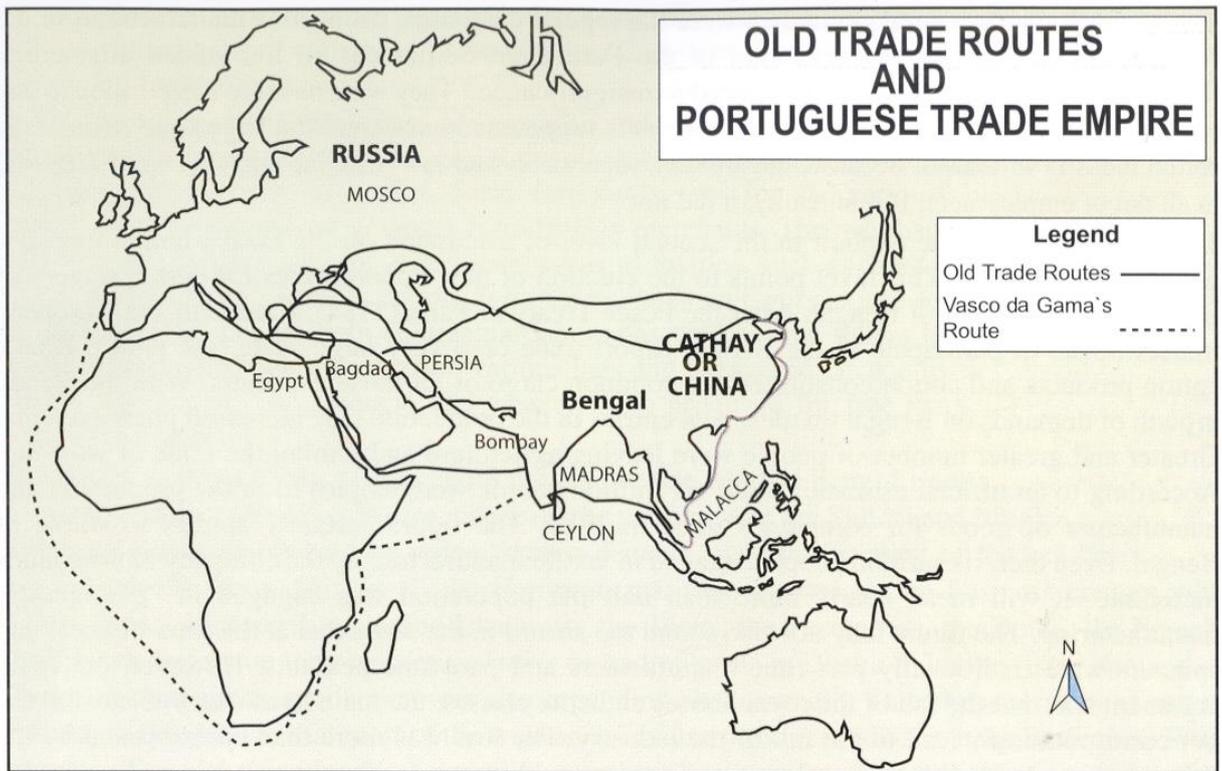
Map 5c. 1660 (van den Broeke)

Map 10 c. Changing courses of Bengal Rivers, 1548- 1779 (Eaton, 1993)

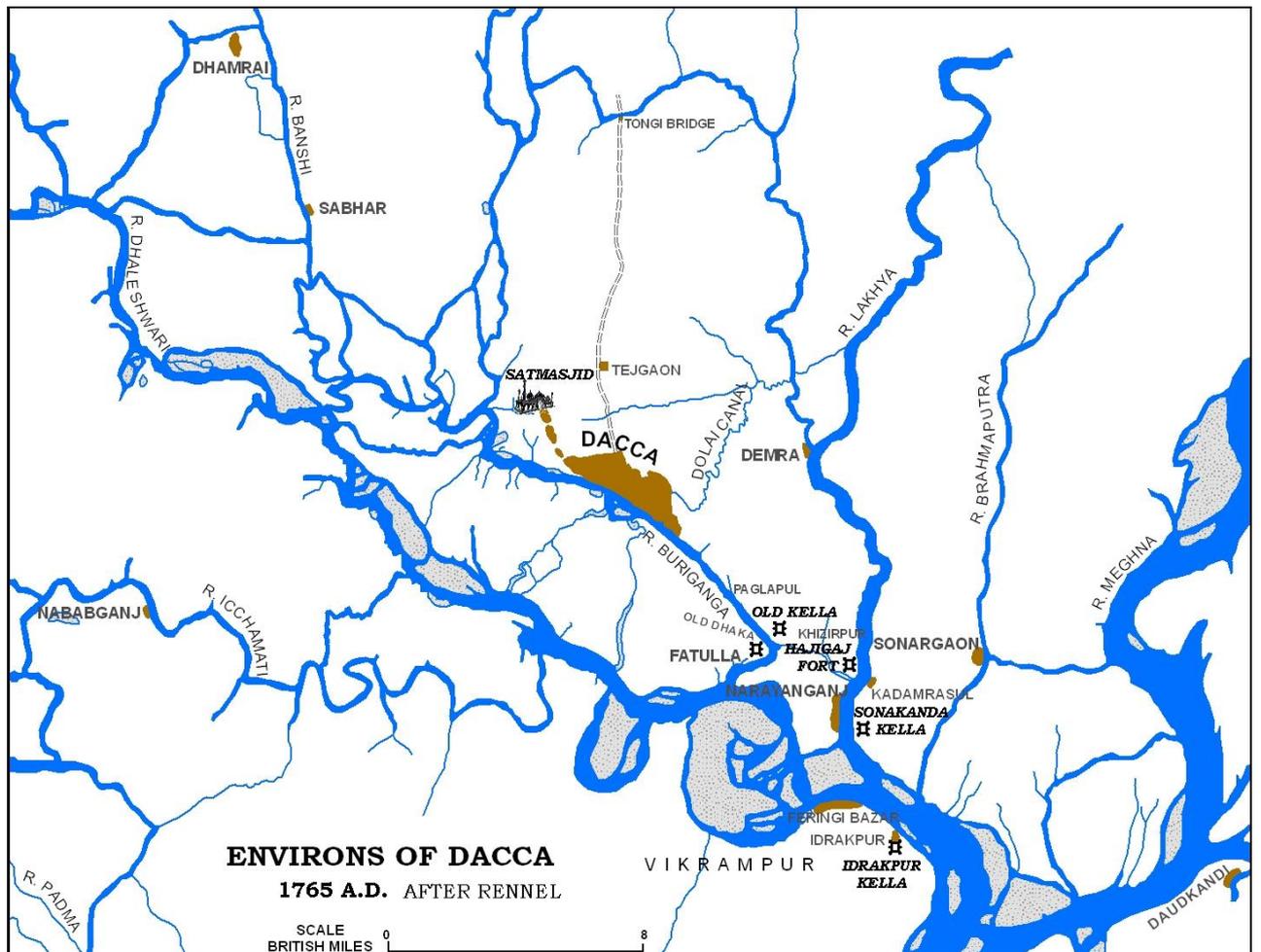


1770(Rennell)

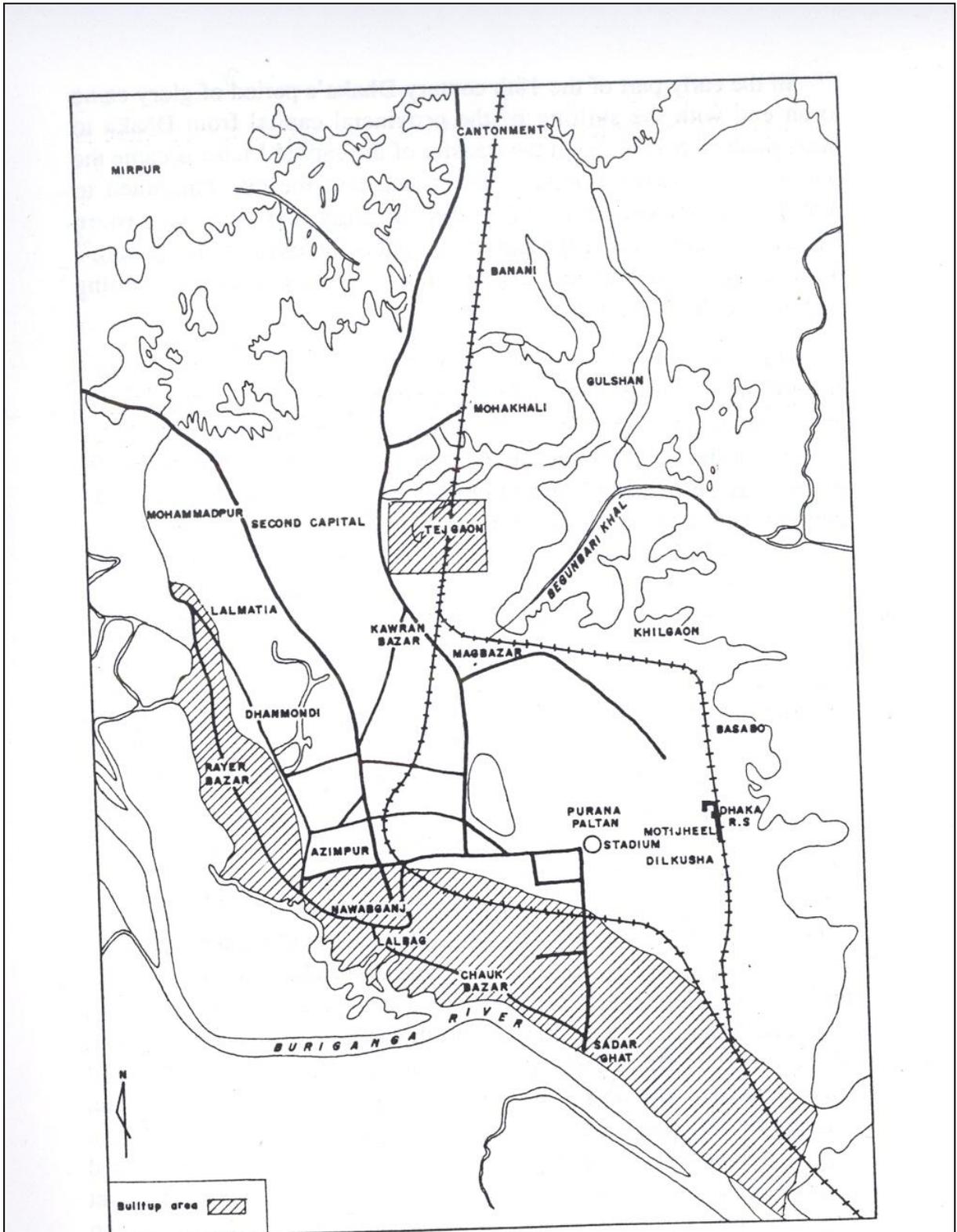
Map10 d. Changing courses of Bengal Rivers, 1548- 1779 (Eaton, 1993)



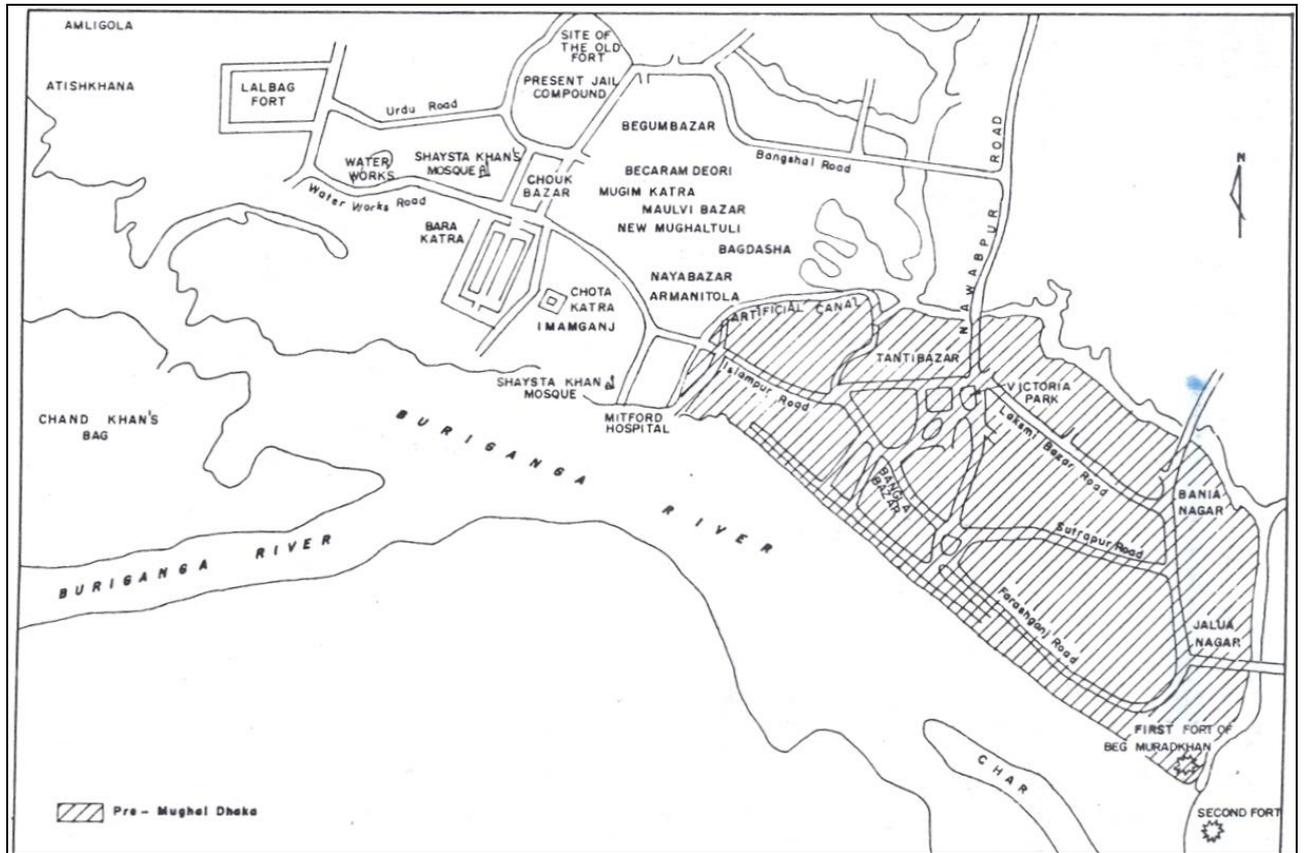
Map 11. Old trade routes and Portuguese Trade Empire (Islam, 2008)



Map 12. Environs of Dhaka (Dani, 1962)

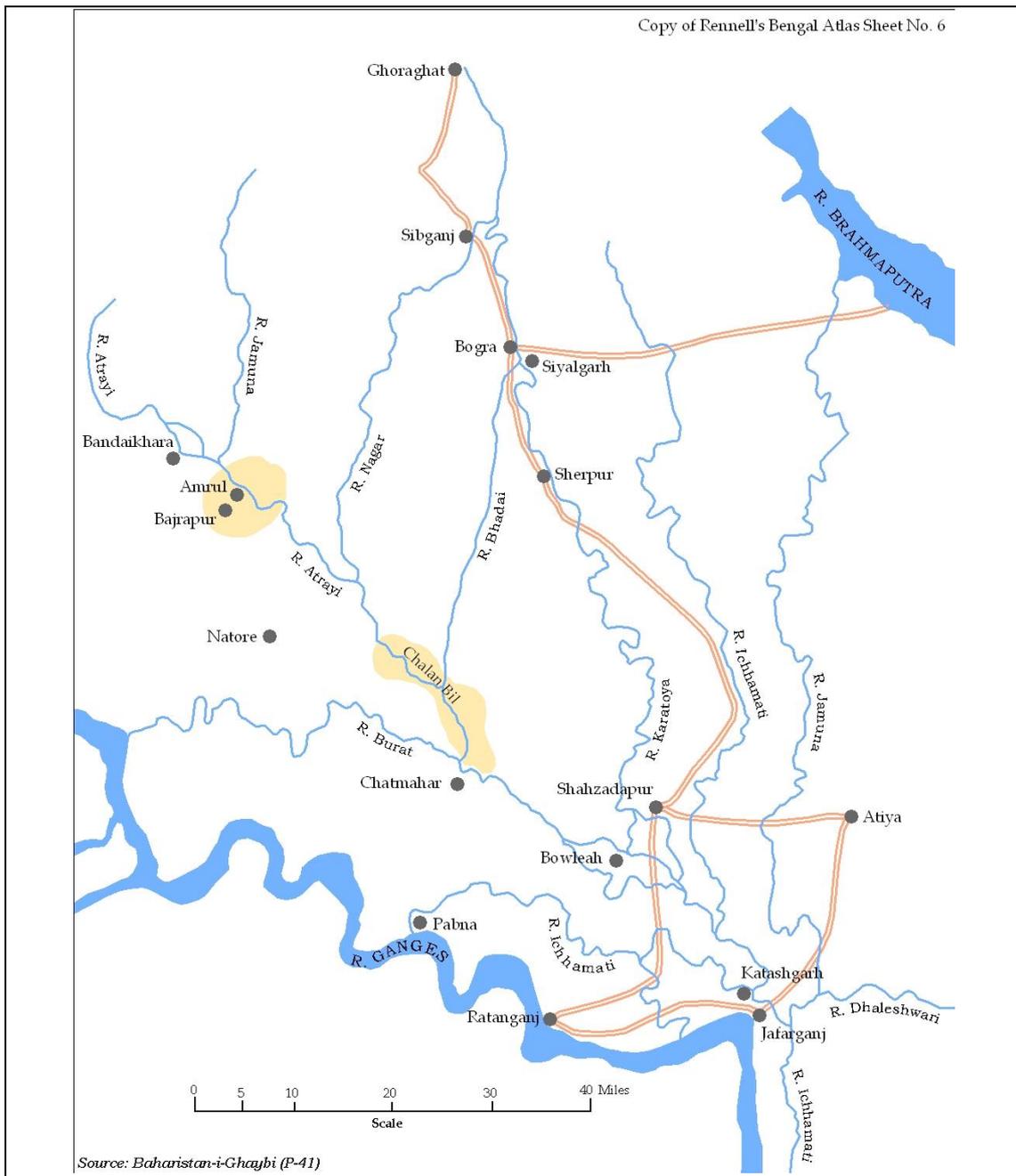


Map 13. Mughal Capital Dhaka (Chowdhury and Faruqui, 1991)





Map 15. Bengal under the Mughals after the conquest of Chittagong



Map 16. Some forts during Islam Khan's period in Bengal (based on Rennell's Bengal Atlas Sheet, No. 6) (Borah, 1936)

## **FIGURES**



Fig 1. Satellite view of river networks and location of river forts ( ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software was used )

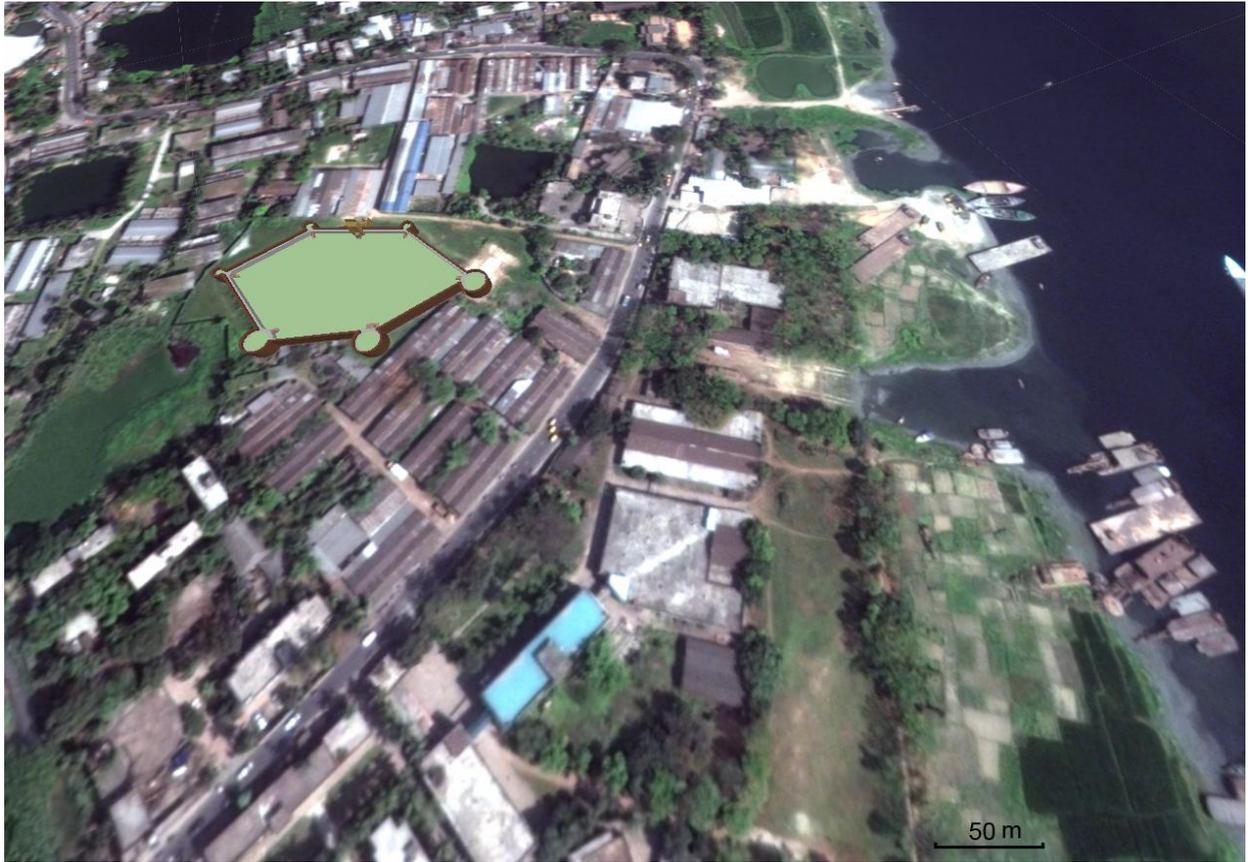


Fig 2. Satellite view of the Hajiganj fort (method used: ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software)



Fig 3. Satellite view of the Sonakanda fort (method used: ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software)



Fig 4. Satellite view of the Idrakpur fort (ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software is used to prepare and 3D visualization of the fort structure)

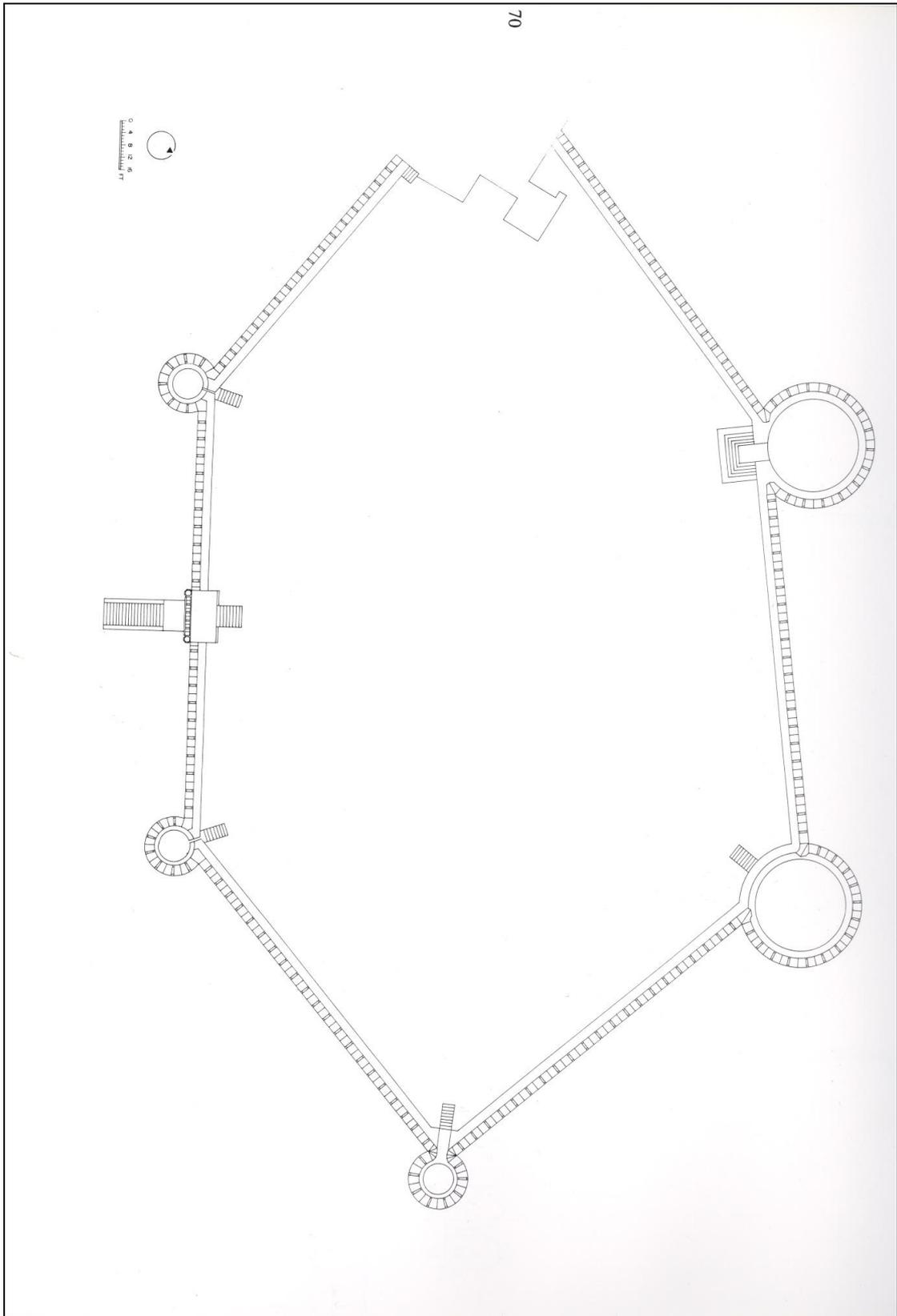


Fig 5. Plan of the Hajiganj fort (Haque,Ahsan, Ashraf, 1997)

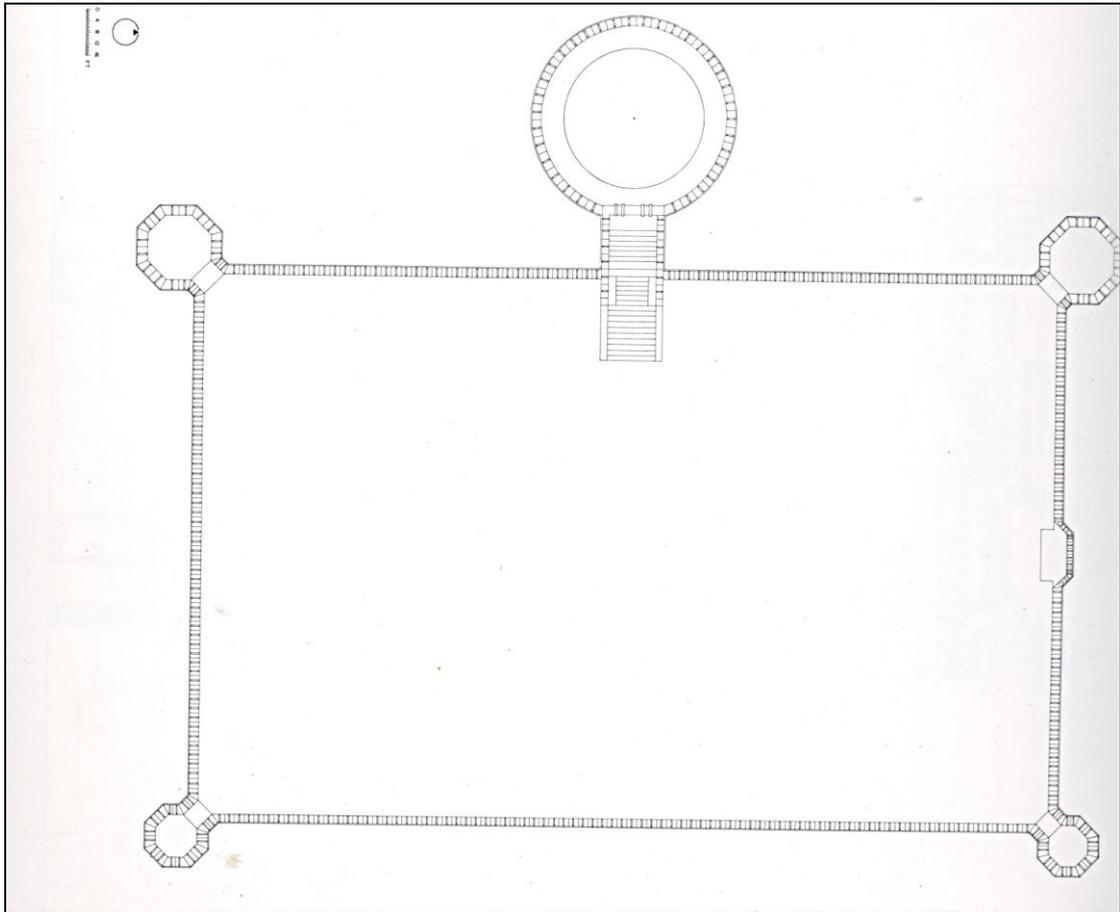


Fig 6. Plan of the Sonakanda fort (Haque,Ahsan, Ashraf, 1997)

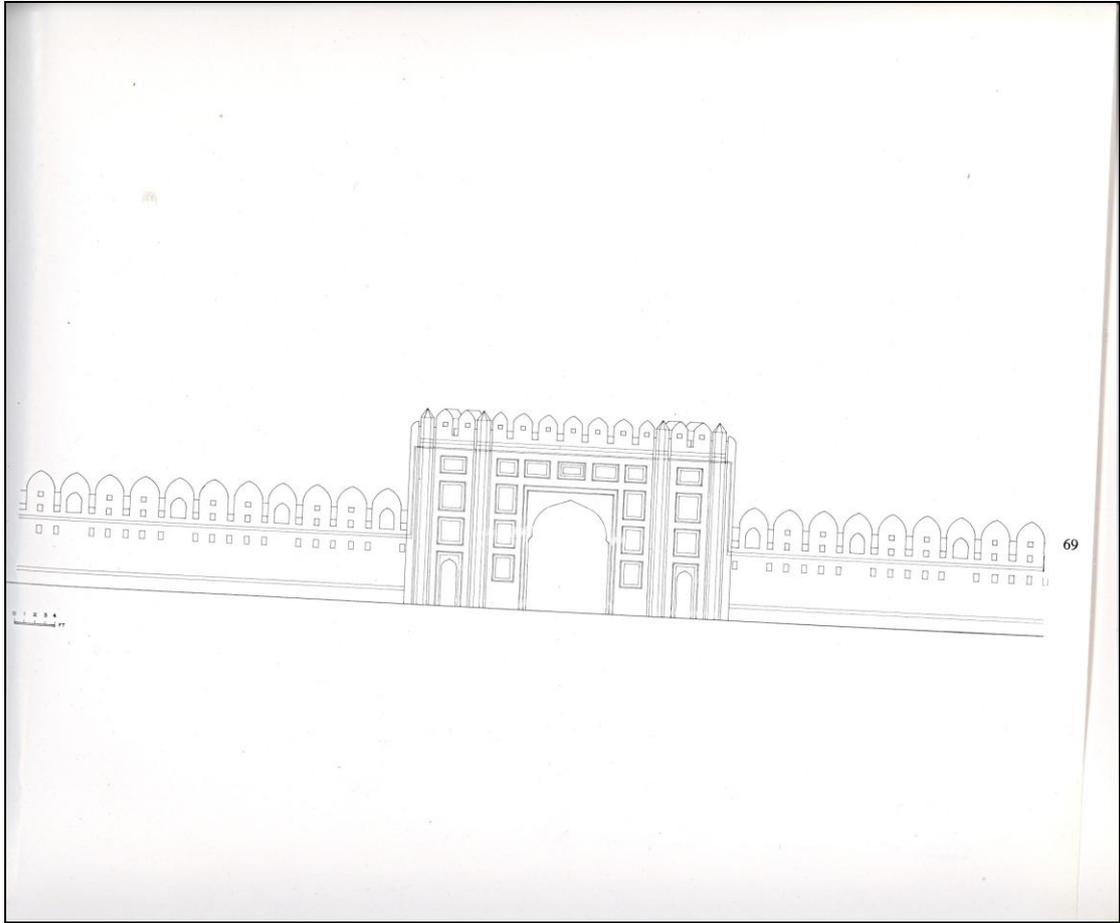


Fig 7. Elevation of the Sonakanda fort from North (Haque,Ahsan, Ashraf, 1997)

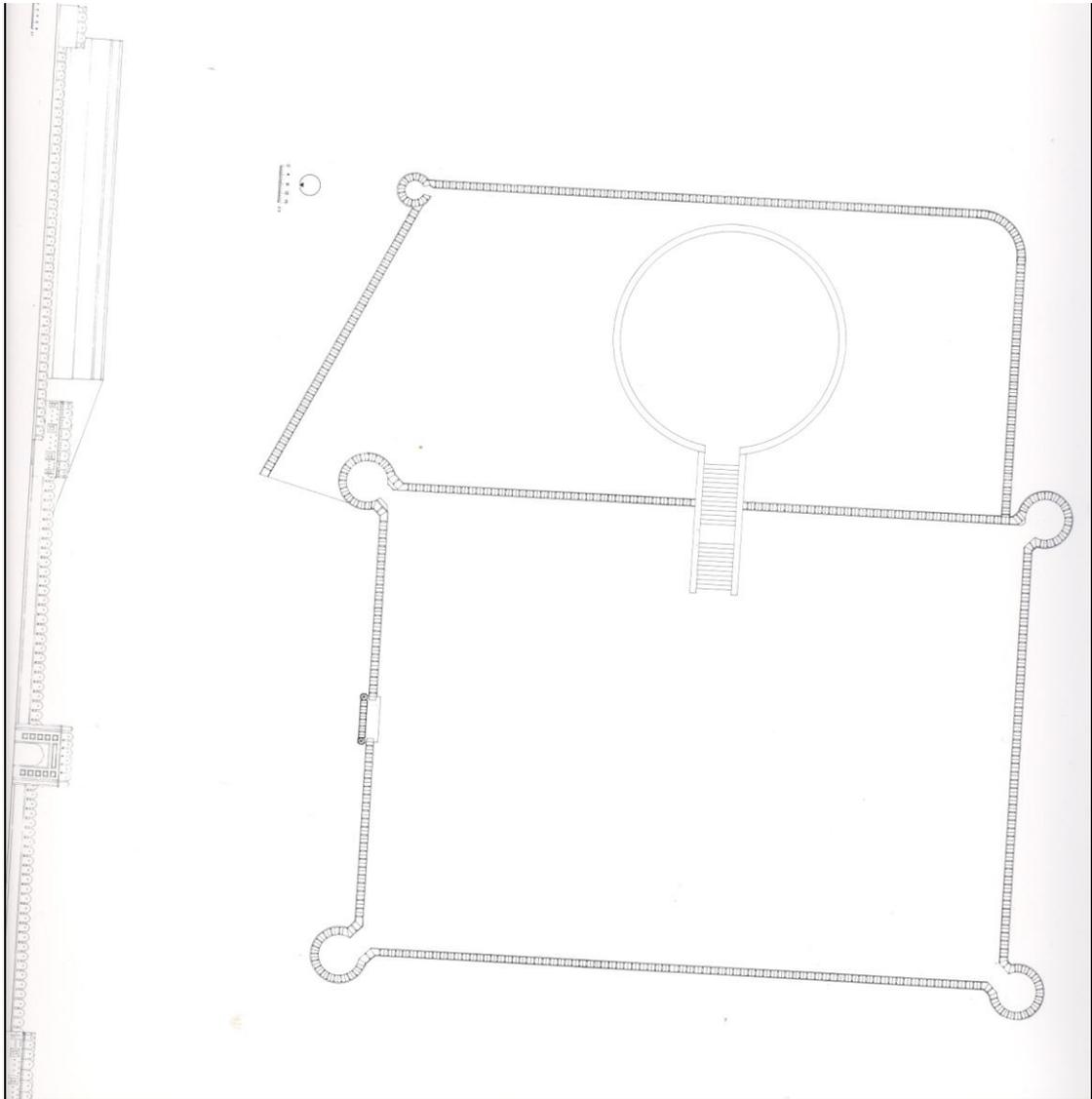


Fig 8. Plan of the Idrakpur fort (Haque,Ahsan, Ashraf, 1997)

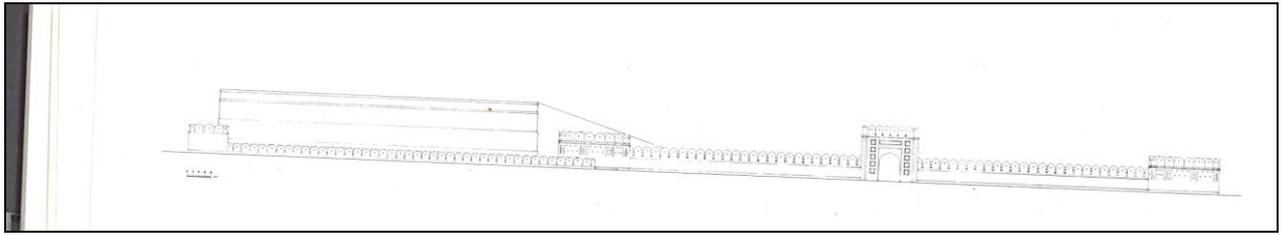


Fig 9. Elevation of the Idrakpur fort from North (Haque,Ahsan, Ashraf, 1997)

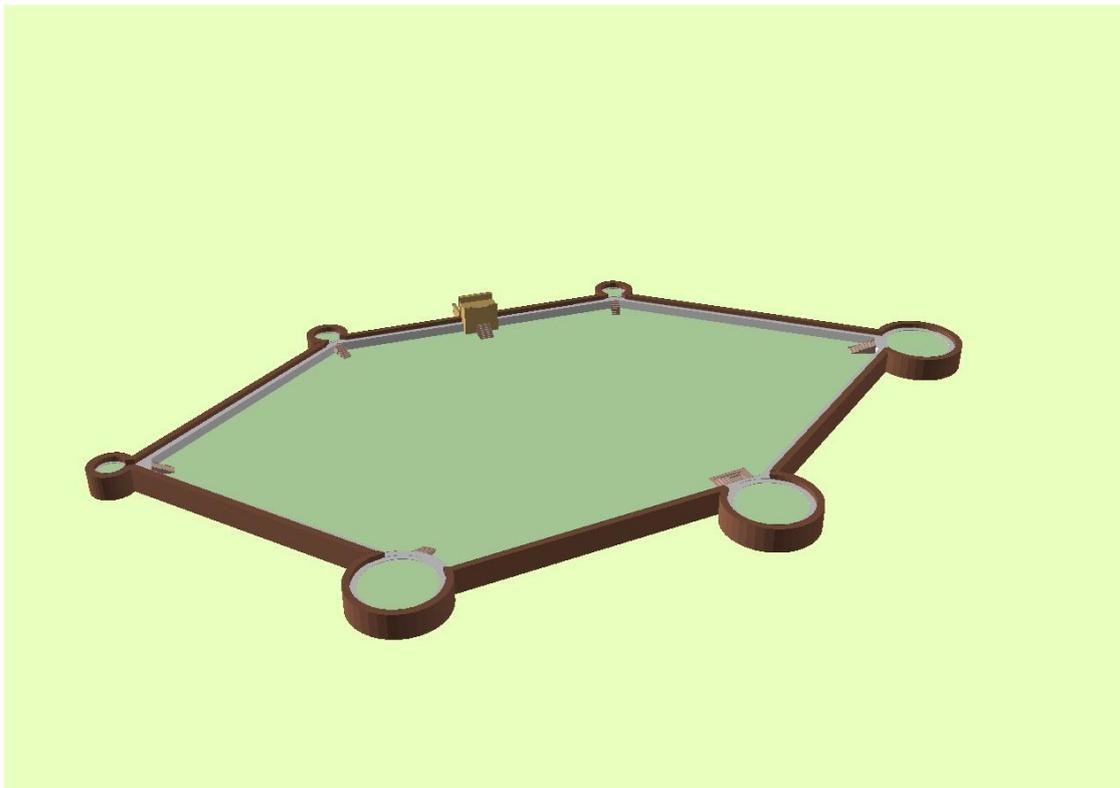


Fig 10. 3D visualisation of the structure of the Hajiganj fort (Device used: ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software)

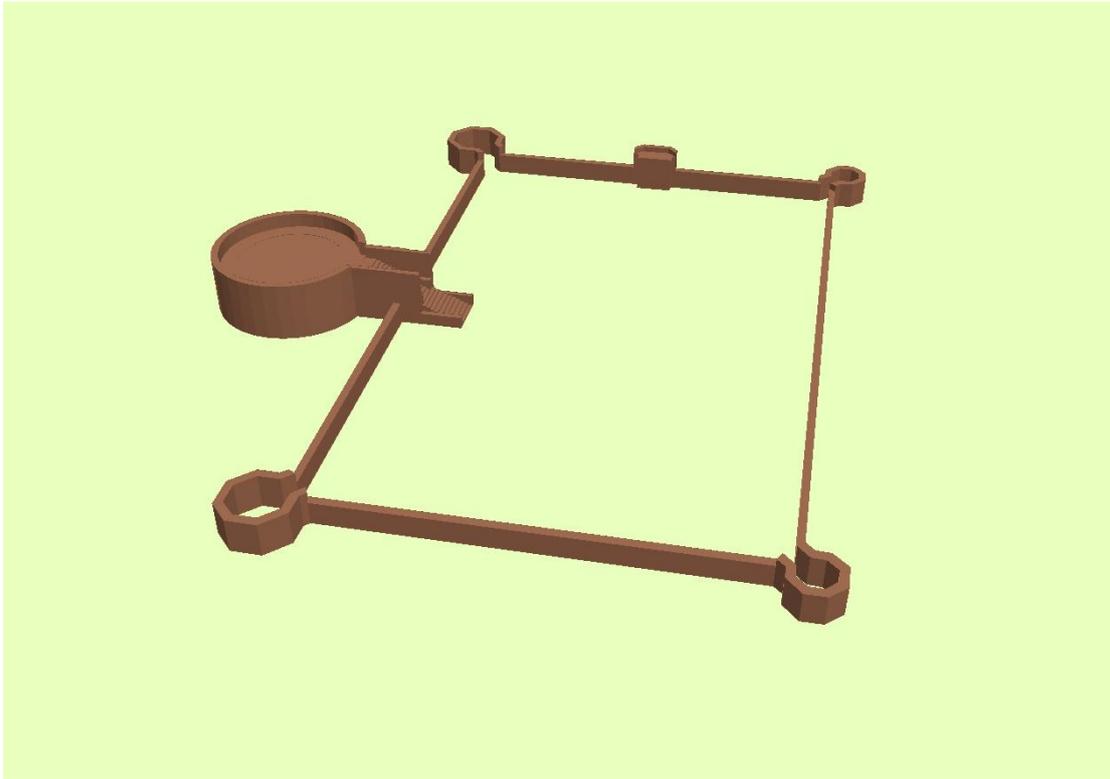


Fig 11. 3D visualisation of the structure of the Sonakanda fort (Device used: ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software)

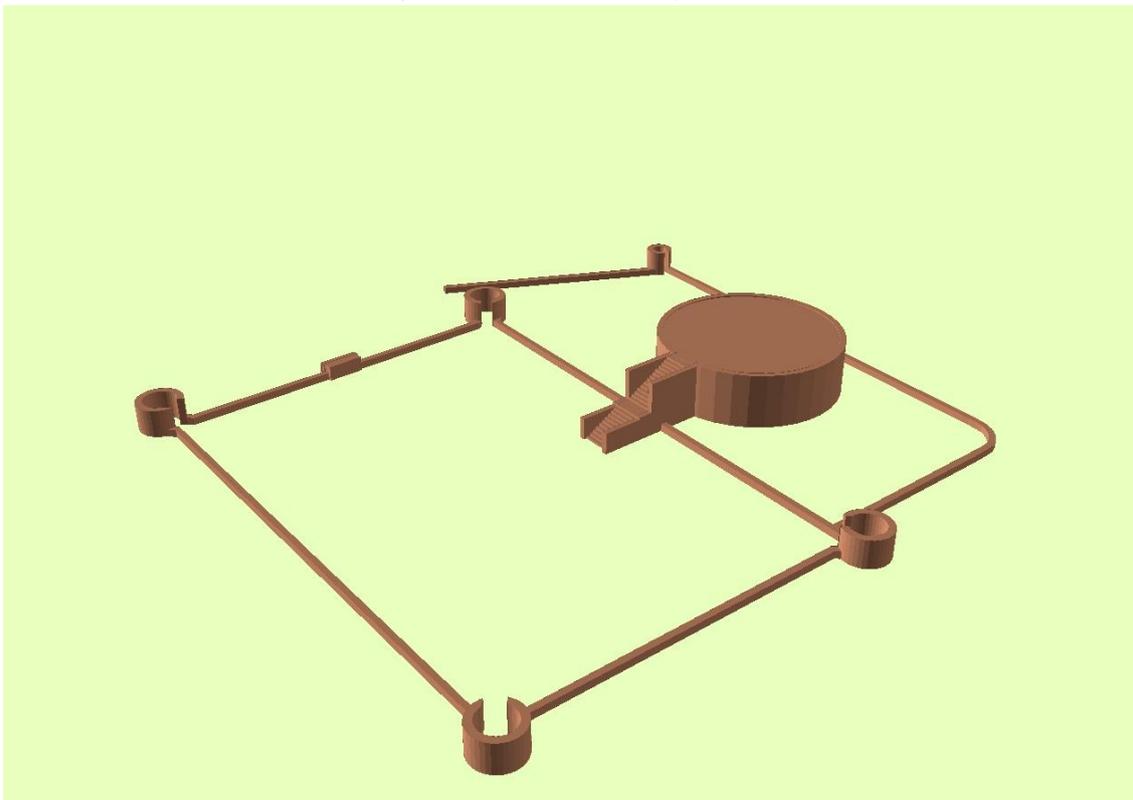


Fig 12. 3D visualisation of the structure of the Idrakpur fort (Device used: ArcScene module of the ArcGIS 3D Analyst extension software)

## PLATES



Plate 1 a. Gateway of the Hajiganj fort: viewed from front



Plate 1 b. Gateway of the Hajiganj fort: viewed from inside



Plate 2 a. Eastern bastion of the Hajiganj fort before renovation (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)



Plate 2 b. Renovated eastern bastion of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 3 a. Seven-step platform in southern bastion of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 3 b. Southern bastion of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 4 a. Loopholes in southern corner bastions of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 4 b. Observatory tower of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 5 a. Inner pillar with spiral stairs of the observatory tower of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 5 b. South-western corner bastion with merlons and loopholes of the Hajiganj fort



Plate 6 a. Gateway of the Sonakanda fort: viewed from the front



Plate 6 b. Gateway of the Sonakanda fort: viewed from inside



Plate 7 a. Stairs of the observatory tower of the Sonakanda fort



Plate 7 b. Observatory tower of Sonakanda fort (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)



Plate 8 a. Merlons in the observatory tower of the Sonakanda fort



Plate 8 b. Flaking-plastered or pocked spaces of the wall of Sonakanda fort



Plate 9 a. Merlons in eastern wall of the Sonakanda fort



Plate 9 b. South-western corner bastion of the Sonakanda fort



Plate 10 a. Merlon and loopholes in the south- western corner bastion of the Sonakanda fort

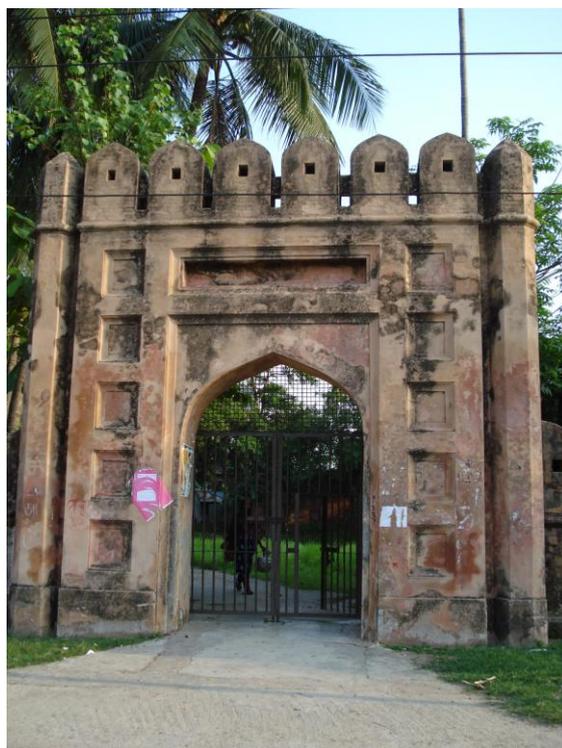


Plate 10 b. Gateway of the Idrakpur fort: viewed from the front



Plate 11 a. Gateway of the Idrakpur fort: viewed from inside



Plate 11 b. Stairs of the observatory tower of the Idrakpur fort



Plate 12 a. Observatory tower of Idrakpur fort (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)



Plate 12 b. North–western corner bastion of the Idrakpur fort



Plate 13 a. Big loopholes in the north-eastern corner bastion of the Idrakpur fort

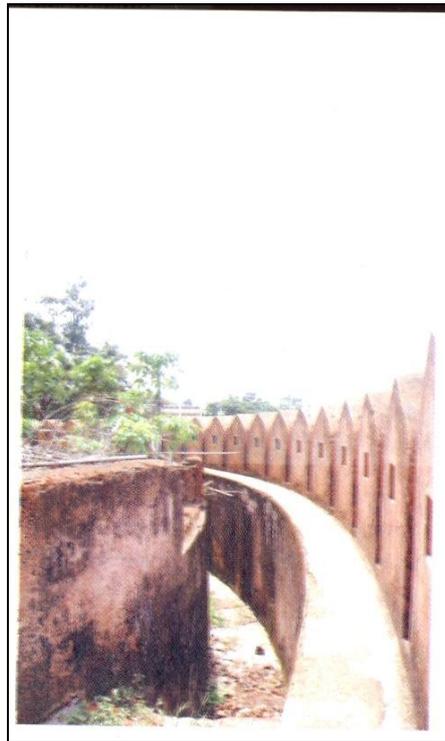
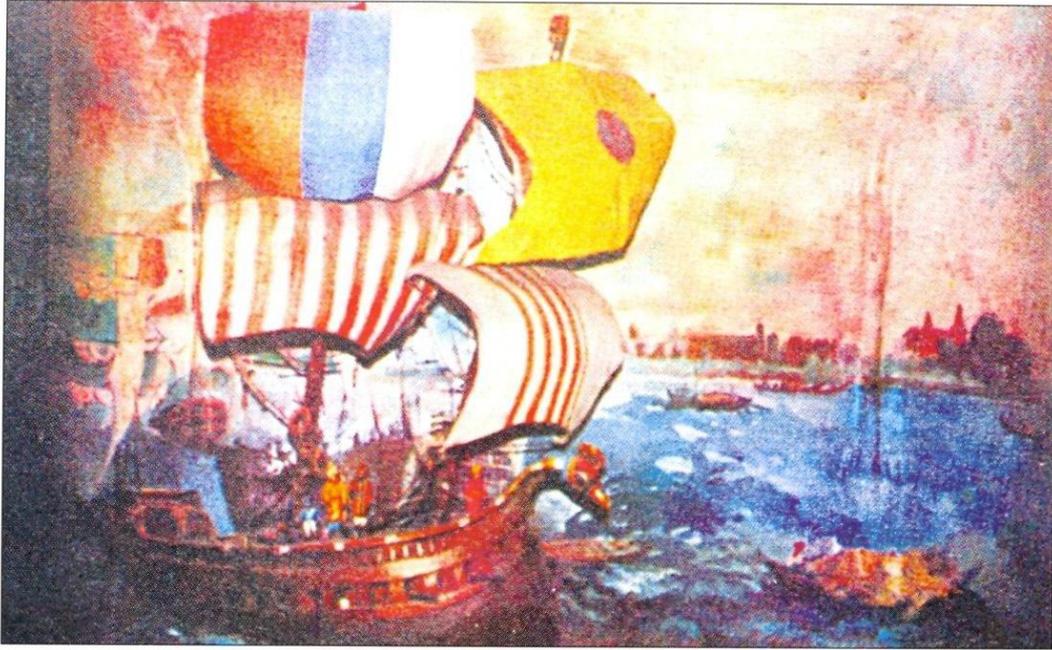


Plate 13 b. Secrete passage to the basement of observatory tower of the Idrakpur fort



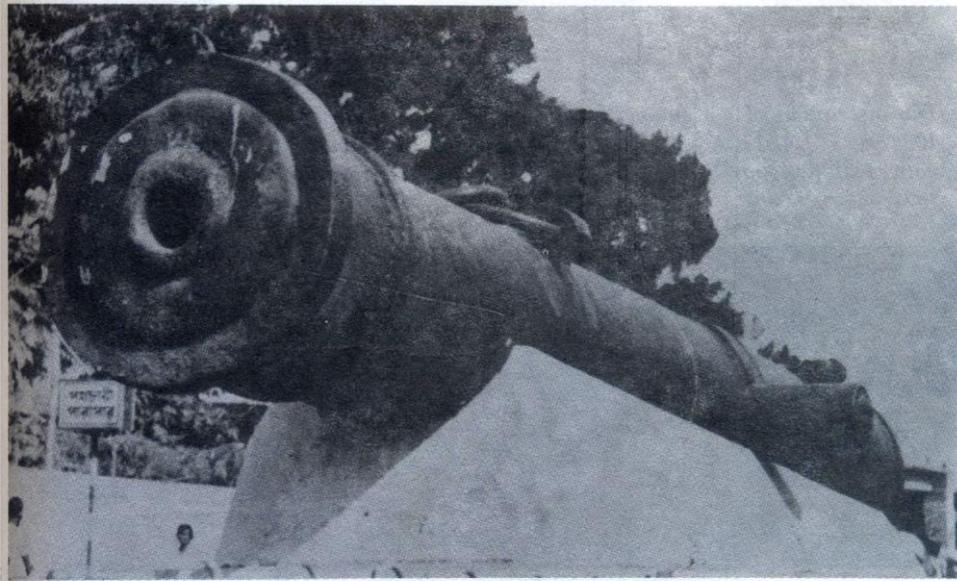
Fleets of Subedar Islam Khan as seen by an artist

Plate 14 a. Fleets of Islam Khan as seen by an artist (Hassn, 2008)



Inscribed Cannon of Isa Khan discovered at Dewanbagh near Narayanganj dated 1002 A. H./1593 A. D.

Plate 14 b. Inscribed Cannon of Isa Khan discovered at Dewanbagh near Narayanganj dated A.D.1593. (Miah, 1991)



The big Cannon of Dhaka City now placed at Usmany Uddhan. A Mughal period Cannon probably belongs to the reign of Emperor Jahangir.

Plate 15 a. The big Cannon of Dhaka city now placed at Usmany Uddhan. A Mughal period Cannon probably belongs to the ring of Emperor Jahangir. (Miah, 1991)



Plate 15 b. Mughal painting showing battle order ( Balasubramaniam, 2008)



Plate 16. a Shah Shuja's Bara Katra ( Dojly: 1815)



Plate 16 b. Shah Shuja's Idgah (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)



Plate 17 a. Shah Shuja's Husaini Dalan (the British Library: 1904)



Plate 17 b. Mir Jumla's gate (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)

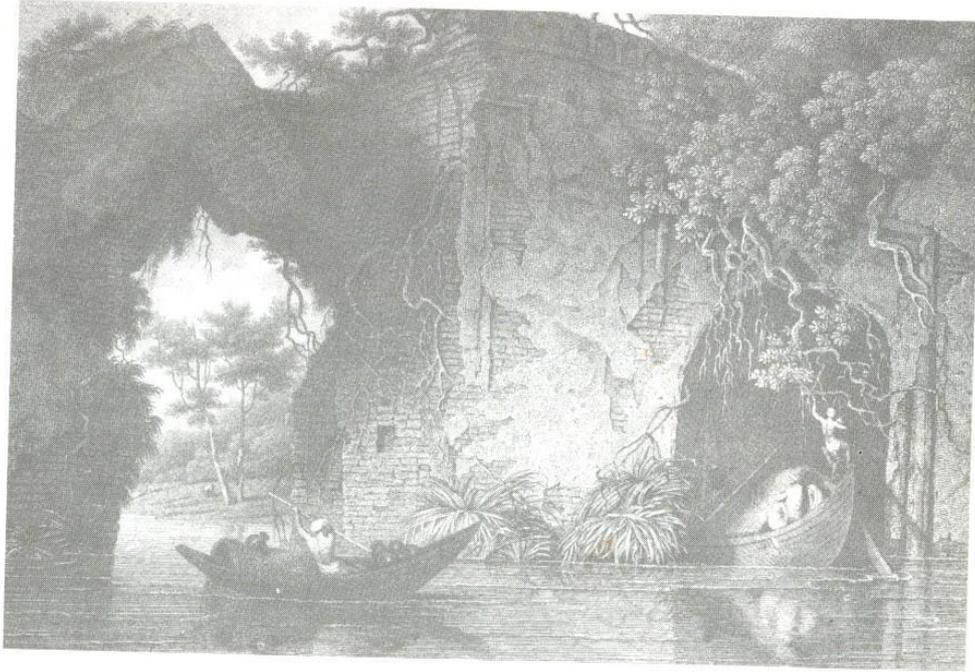


Plate 18 a. Tongi Bridge (Dojly, 1815))

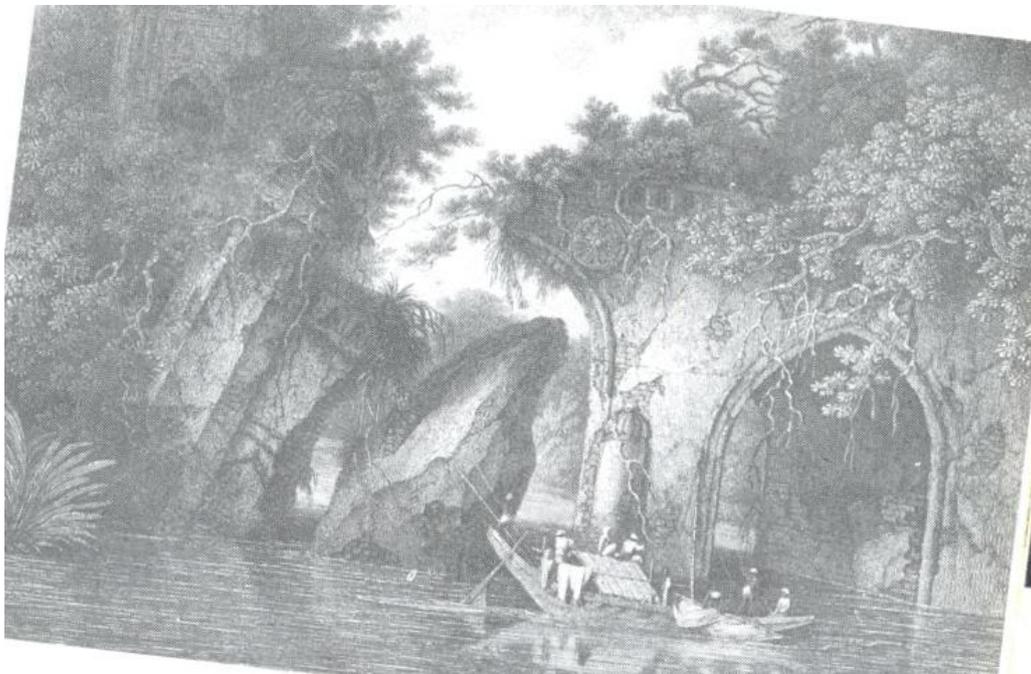


Plate 18 b. Pagla Bridge (Dojly, 1815)

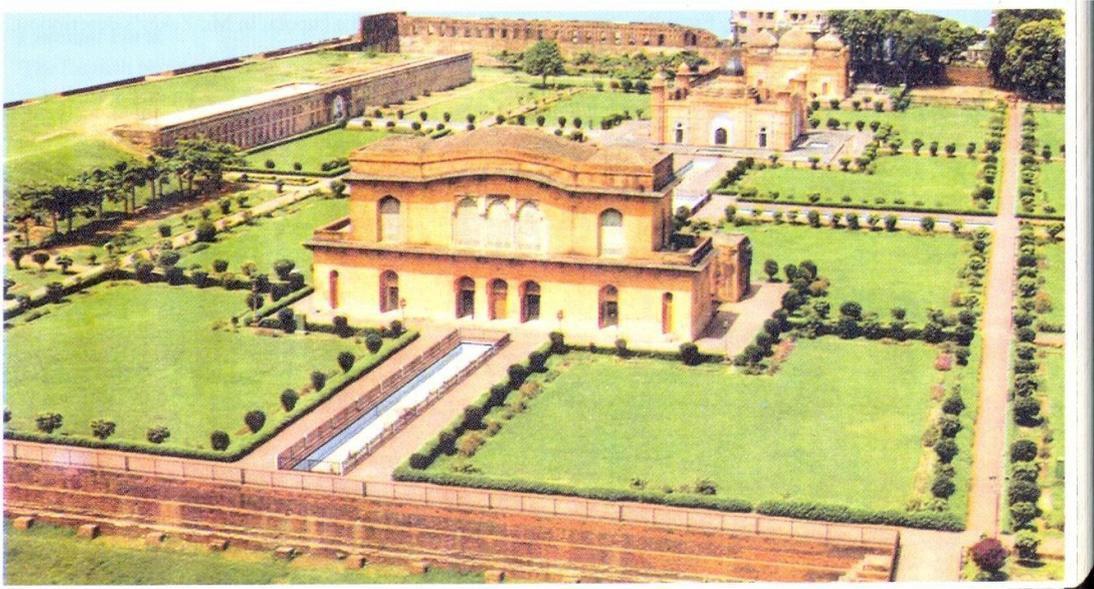


Plate 19 a Aerial view of Lalbagh Fort ( Rhman, Khnodker and Showrov, 2007)



Plate 19b. Tomb of Pari Bibi(source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)



Plate 20 a. Saat Gumbad Mosque (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)



Plate 20 b. Bibi Maryam's mosque and tomb in Narayanganj (source: the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh)