Malda Town - Emerging as an Important Commercial Centre in the Gateway to North Bengal

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Abstract

Various theories regarding urban land use pattern (sector model, multiple nuclei theory etc.) has highlighted that urban centres may emerged based on its commercial activities e.g. banking, market place, office buildings, transport terminals, shopping malls, hotel, restaurants etc. Commercial activity within cites includes the buying and selling of goods and services. Such activities typically demands relatively small amount of land with multiple transaction which are important to a community's economy. They provide employment facilities, the circulation of money, and often serve many other roles important to the community, such as public gathering and cultural events. Malda Town is an example of such commercial place which is located at Malda District in West Bengal, India. Mango, jute, popyseeds and silk are the most notable products of this district. Moreover the town has some strategic advantages, it is located in the gateway to North Bengal, it is well connected with the neighbouring states Bihar & Jharkhand and neighbouring country Bangladesh. This paper has tried to find out the growth and development of the Malda town from its historical past till today and also tried to highlight the economic prosperity of this town as an emerging commercial centre.

Keywords: commercial, gateway, multiple nuclei, strategic advantages, urban.

Introduction:

A commercial place or commercial zone is any part of a city in which the principal landuse is commercial activities (shops, offices, theatres, restaurants, etc.) as opposed to a residential neighbourhood or an industrial zone. Commercial place in city is the area primarily composed of commercial building, such as a downtown, CBD, financial had quarters or shopping centre. Commercial activity within cites includes the buying and selling of goods and services in retail business, wholesale financial establishments, and a wide variety of uses that are broadly classified as 'business'. While commercial activities typically take up a relatively small amount of land, they
are important to a community’s economy. They provide employment, facilities, the circulation of money, and often serve many other roles important to the community, such as public gathering and cultural events.

A commercial area is real estate intended for use of profit business, such as office complexes, shopping walls, service centre and restaurants. The city government must determine that the chosen area is indeed commercial area. The zones must be separated for commercial, industrial and residential areas.

Previously various theories of Urban landuse pattern has highlighted the fact that the Urban Centres emerged based on its commercial activities like Concentric zone model, Sector theory, Multiple nuclei theory etc.

Some example of commercial area building are :-

- Bank
- Call Centre
- Grocery store
- Office buildings (where business transaction occur)
- Movie theatre
- Pharmacy
- Restaurant
- Shopping Mall
- Sports Area

General Description of Malda and its importance :-

Malda Town is an example of such commercial place which is located in West Bengal, India. It lies 347 km. (215 miles) north of Kolkata. Mango, jute, popyseeds and silk are the most notable products of this district. The special variety of mango produced in this region, is exported across the world and is acclaimed internationally. The folk culture of gombhira is a feature of the district, being a unique way of representation of joy and sorrow of daily life of the common people, as well as the unique medium of presentation on national and international matters.

The gateway to North Bengal, Malda with its rich history and heritage is one of the most famous tourist destinations of West Bengal. Nestled at the confluence of the Mahananda and Kabiri Rivers, Malda Town, with all its grace, adds to the beauty of Bengal.

Objective of selecting this place as a Commercial Town :-

Malda Town can be regarded as a commercial place because the primary land use here is commercial activities (shops, offices, hotels, bank, restaurants, malls, theatres, etc.) as opposed to a residential neighbourhood, or industrial zone. It is the linking district between North Bengal and South Bengal and therefore Malda has this
locational advantage which makes it the centre for development of commercial activities, which include the buying and selling of goods and service in retail business, wholesale, financial establishments, etc. This business industry provide employment, facilitate the circulation of money, and often serve many other roles important to the community, such as public gathering and cultural events.

Over the years, based on these commercial activities, a good number of markets, theatres, restaurants, offices, banks have come up in Malda. Moreover the tourism industry and mango – silk – jute cultivation have paved the way of further development of this district. With the coming up of new markets, malls, theaters, hospitals in recent years, rural urban migration is taking place and this has led to the increase in the number of high-rise multi-storied building in the district. Various parts of the district are getting modified so as to attract more people towards the town.

Study Area :-

Malda is the gateway of North Bengal. It was once capital of Gour Banga with its 3733 sq.kms. lay of the land classified into Tal, Diara and Barind.

To the south is Murshidabad district, to the north are North Dinajpur district and South Dinajpur district, to the east is the international border with Bangladesh, to the West is Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand and Purnea of Bihar.

English Bazar, the district headquarters which lands its name to the district, during its early days grew up only near the side of the river Mahananda, and now the place is known as phulbari. Some of the oldest houses can be found here. The city started to grow since 1925 – 1930. Now nearly half a million people live in this city. It is a part of the former Gour. The town is recognized as the English Bazar Municipality. Its notable railway station is named as Malda Town.

Methodology :-

Regarding the conduct of this survey, both primary and secondary data collection have been considered. Major portion of the secondary data has been collected from Malda Municipality office, Tourist Lodge and of course various websites. Primary data has been collected via face-to-face interview with the inhabitants. The face-to-face interview consisted of a number of questions regarding developmental aspect of this district and the persons who were selected for the interview fall under the age group of 55-65 years who have been residing in this district for quite a long time; the gradual development of this district in terms of economy and commercialization and urbanization are experienced by them.
Description of the Town in Brief :-

Demography

According to 2011 census Malda district has a population of 39,77,970 roughly equal to the nation of Liberia or the US State of Oregon. This gives it a ranking of 58th in India (out of a total of 640). The district has a population density of 1071 inhabitants per square kilometers (2770/sq. miles). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 21.5%. Malda has a sex ratio of 939 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 62.71%

Northern part of the district has dominantly Hindu 53% population; Muslims are 46%. Tribemen and Christian people also live here.

Southern Malda is dominated by 59% Muslim population. Sujapur Idgale is one of the largest in India. Hindus are only 40% in this part.

Overall Malda district (Northern Malda and South Malda together) has 51% Muslims and 48% Hindus; others are 1%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGION IN MALDA</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MUSLIMS</td>
<td>51.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HINDUS</td>
<td>48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTIANS</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIKHS</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHERS</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational Facilities :

Malda contains some of the elite schools of the state. Malda Zilla school, Ramkrishna Mission Vivekananda Vidyamandir, Barlow Girl’s High School, A. C. Institution, Lalit Mokan Shyam Mohini High School, Malda Town High School, C. C. Girl’s High School, The St. Xavier’s School (English Medium), St. Mary’s School (English Medium), Holy Child English Academy, North Point English Academy are source of education. All of them have concentrated in and around the town. Other higher educational institutes are-

- University of Gour Bakga
Govt. Teachers’ Training College

Malda College


**Economy:** Malda Town is a part of Malda district and therefore the economy of Malda district casts an impact on Malda town being a commercial place. The economy of the district is basically an agrarian one and ranks as one of the most underdeveloped district in West Bengal. The backwardness is characterized by low per capita income, low yield per acre, backwardness in industrialization, shortage of capital and entrepreneurship, and also the lack of infrastructure and large labour surplus.

The district has no known mineral resources and thus agriculture remains the main stay. The main agricultural products are paddy wheat, jute and Rabi crops.

Despite this backwardness, Malda occupies an important place in the map of the state for the production of raw silk yarn. The annual estimated production of raw silk yarn in this district is about 85% of the total output of the state.

Production of mango is another important aspect of Malda’s economy. About 45,000 acres of land are covered by mango orchards which, in normal years, bear fruit to the extent of 3,60,000 tokens of the value of which in money terms comes to about Rs.5.5 crores.

**More about mango production in Malda :**

It will not be out of place to put in a few words about the mango production of Malda district, which has earned fame for this district. Mango is abundantly grown over the whole district with the exception of ‘Baried’ area. English Bazar is by far the highest and the best mango growing taluk. It is followed by other taluks, namely Ratus, Manikchak, Kaliachak, Chanchal, Malda and Harischandrapur in that order. There are mainly two varieties of mangos (i) the ‘gooti’ or the ordinary varieties of mango grown from ‘seed’ and (ii) ‘Kalam’ which is grown from grafting. The latter is of superior quality and fetches higher price. The finest varieties namely Brindabani, Langra, Kchirshapati, Fazli etc.

**Importance of Malda Town as a Commercial Place :**

The importance of Malda Town has increased over the years. The factors which led to increase its importance are :-

- Export of Mango & Litchi.
- Situation of this town at the strategic location in between north and south parts of West Bengal.
• Nodal value of transport and communication as connecting West Bengal with its South to North and acts as a corridor to enter Bangladesh.

• Priority increases towards business and other public service enterprises.

• Huge rush of in emigrants from neighbouring states (Bihar, Orissa) and districts (Murshidabad and Dinajpur) in search of better livelihood.

The main features which deliniates Malda Town as a commercial place are :-

i) Banking Service

ii) Increasing number of hotels.

iii) Potential areas of service enterprises.

iv) Nature of transport and communication.

v) Business and other service sectors.

vi) Market Centres

i) Banking Services and Insurance :-

Adequate banking services available at Malda town makes it commercially and economically active and viable in nature, as banks are leading to accelerate the rate of commercial activities, i.e. more the rate, more the member of available to the people.

The numbers of all types of banks present in the town are :-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Banks</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Banks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative Banks</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLDB Banks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of insurance companies present here are 5 which makes areal prospects of selling products of insurance to grass root people.

ii) Increasing number of hotels:

Number of hotels and restaurants are huge is this town. From a general estimation it can be said that the number of hotels has increased by more than 50% in the last 15 years. The increasing member of hotels and restaurants depicts the fact of demand of hotels for commercial economic and other purpose.

Number of hotels and restaurants, guest houses are given below :-

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Houses</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
iii) Potential Areas of Service Enterprises :-

Service enterprises are another important parameters which envisage the economic activities of the area. The area offers different types of services like-Dry cleaning, cold storage, beauty parlour, offset printing, serene printing, publishing, pathological laboratories, snacks bar, fabrication and engineering lab work, optical lenses griding, spray printing etc.
iv) **Nature of transport and Communication** :-

Situated at the junction of North and South Bengal, Malda town is also a very important link between them and also with the North Eastern states. There are 1 state bus stand, one main and one secondary bus stand, many taxi stands. Railway network is well connected and well-organized, in fact Malda Town is also itself a railway headquarter of North Bengal.

v) **Business and other service sectors** :-

The scale of economics of main activities occurring here are business based on different purposes. Economy of this district stands on major activities like – Mango, Litchi and Sericulture. But the major belts of these activities are not so prominent at Malda Town. Rather Malda Town has flourished based on various commercial activities and common business like :-

- Jewellery Business.
- Hotel and Restaurant Business.
- Business related to motors, tyres etc.
- Tubes of vehicles.
- Fruit-business and fish – business.

**Malda Town – Features which make it a commercial place** :-

The mango and silk industry, various attractive tourist spots, increasing number of markets – malls – hospitals etc, the strategic position of the district, the hotels – lodges – restaurants – all these make Malda a Commercial place.

**Mango Trade** :- The mango trade is one of the most important feature of the economy of this district and one which leaves important impact on the economy of this district. The price of mango varies according to its class and the effect of weather on the crop, for hail and heavy rains are most injurious to the formation of a good fruit. To recent years, there have been several failure of crops and there seeks to be a cycle of good and bad years. A bumper crop usually comes once in four years and is followed by a bad bear in which the production may come down to 25% - 30% of the average production. Then comes a moderate crop with production ranging between 45%-50% followed by a second bad year. The only consolation for such a bad year is that the price rises in proportion to the extent of failure of crop. Such function in the total product and price make it very difficult to reach an accurate estimate of the annual value of the mango trade.
Tourists Industry :-

Surroundings of Malda is of immense importance to the Archaeological Department of India. All the sites are maintained by Archaeological Survey of India. Some famous spots are :-

Gour :- Once the capital of Bengal, there are in total 5 different spots which can be seen here. 12 km. south of Malda, right on the Industries – Bangladesh border, gour is situated which is one of the most important historical placed of 14th and 15th Century Bengal. The relics that are particularly worthseeing are the Bara Soka Mosque, Dakhil Darwaja, Qadam. Rasul Mosque and the ruins of the extensive fortification. There are colorful enameled tiles on the Gomti Gate are Firoj Minar.

Pandua :- 18 km. north of Malda is another important site of archaeological importance that has some impressive Muslim architecture, including the vast Adma Mosque built by Sikakder Shah in 1369. It is one of the largest Mosques in India, and it was built over a Hindu Temple, and has 378 small domes. The Eklakhi Mausoleum and several smaller mosques are the other places of attractive in Pandua.

Jagjivanpur :- The discovery of a Copper plate charter of 9th century in Malda has revealed that the Pala ruler Mahendrapala, who claimed himself as the son and successor of Bepavala, granted a piece of land to Mahasekapati Vajradevi to build a monastery there. The archaeologists found five major records viz. Tulabhita, Akhridanga, Nimdanga, Maibhita in and around the village of Jagjivanpur of these the mound Tulabhita is the biggest and most impressive and was first selected for excavation. During the excavation, a brick built monastery with its sanctum, bastion – cum-cells, Varandah, toilets, steps cokeples, well, courtyard, extrancs have been discovered. The archaeologists claim that the monastery bears resomebalance with the great Vikramsila Maharihara.

A bronze image of seated Buddha in Bhumisparsha Mudra along with another metal image of Buddhist Goddess Marichi, huge number of terracotta seald, plaques, beads of semi-precious stones and terracotta pot shreds were recovered during excavation.

Farakha Barrage :- Down south of Malda Town is the famous Farakha Barrage, a famous picnic spot, but the view from the other side of the entire Dam will surely give one goosebums. NTPC factory can be viewed from here and one of the NTPC colonies is well – managed. An open air restaurant is also available here. On Sundays a lot of employees of NTPC does fishing in the large sake situated here.

Deer Park :- Just across the National Mighway from Pandua, is a well preserved Deer park. This is controlled by the Forest Dept., and one can witness migratory birds during winter.
Indo-Bangladesh Border: Malda Town is situated just 10 kms. Away from the international border, but with prior permission of the Border Security Force.

Restaurants and Food Joints: Malda is famous for special varieties of mango that are available in summer. Also, there are two special variety of sweets available only in Malda viz. – Kansat Chamcham and Roskoladamba. One can try Aamsatwa (sort of mango pulp cake, dried in seen) made from mango, the most famous being that made from Gopalbhog mango. A few restaurants and food joints include - Aaheli Restaurant, Metro life, Indians, Gour Food Zone, Tandoori Plaza, Ideal Bakery, Lukochuri, Mr. and Mrs. Idly, Pizza Meet, India Gate Biriyani, Pizza Hut, Amul Mangout etc.

Connectivity and Accessibility: Malda is well connected by both road and rail. It is the Divisional Headquaters of Eastern Malda Division.

Malda Town lies on National Highway 34, and all buses plying from Kolkata to Siliguri in the North will give a halt at Malda. By road, it is 300 kms. Away from Kolkata, the main city of West Bengal. Malda is well-connected by railways. There are some direct trains from the local main station, i.e. Malda Town; connecting Bangalore, Chennai, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, Dibrugarh, New Delhi, Surat, Mumbai, Nagpur, Visakhapatnam etc.

Train Service: By rail, Malda is on the main like between Calcutta and New Jalpaiguri, served by numerous trains such as the Janasatabdi Express, the Gour Express, the Kanchenjungha Express, the Teesta Torsa Express, the Kamrup Express, the Haaate Bajare Express, Yashwantpur Express, Brahmaputra mail, Radhikapur, Padatik Expresss and the Darjeeling Mail to name a few. Since July 2012, Shatabdi Express (12041/12042) runs between Howah and New Jalpaiguri, which stops at Malda Town Station.

Road Service: Malda is easily accessible by road from any part of the rest of India. It is 347 km. away from Kolkata towards north and 256 km. from Siliguri towards South. The NH 34 passes through the district NBSTC, SBSTC, CSTC, buses and many privately operated buses ply between Calcutta and Malda. The buses, leaving from the Shahid Minar and the Ultadanga bus terminusus, take about eight hours to complete the journey. NH 34 is crossing the Malda Town at Rathbari point which is the CBD of the City.
Hotels and Lodges :-

The Central bus terminus of Malda town and the Malda railway station are about two Kilometers apart, connected by the NH34. The majority of the hotels and lodges have come up clustered around the Highway and the adjacent Rabindra Avenue.

There is the WBTDC’s Malda Tourist Lodge at Rathbari, English Bazaar, which doubles as the local tourist office. The youth Hostel provided by the West Bengal Government’s youths services offers popular accommodation, especially for the student community.

Apart from the tourist lodge of WBTDC Ltd. there are some private hotels in Malda including that of star category; these include –

Hotel Royal Park, Golden Park Hotel and Resort, Hotel Chanakya, Hotel Kalinga, Hotel Fudraprastha, Hotel Purbanchal, Continental Hotel, Hari Om.

Conclusion :-

From the discussion, it can be said that, over the years, Malda town has become a commercial place based on its strategic location and economic development. In order to serve as a commercial place and also to accelerate its growth as a profitable commercial centre, certain suggestions can be taken into consideration:-

- The present distribution of the population, its standard of health and well being, its occupations, and the available opportunities for education and culture should be studied, while any tendencies towards change or development should noted.

- Buildings or other material survivals, or traditional associations which are worthy of preservation should be given attention to with a view to maintain its individuality.
Particulars of local government areas, municipal and parochial, and details as to ownership and usual tenure of land are necessary to improve the town.

There should be development of the existing open spaces, parks, playgrounds etc., and particulars may well be added of existing activities towards betterment, the working of which may have a bearing on the civic improvement of the town.

The formation of appropriate centres for governmental, administration, commercial or educational purposes makes for economic efficiency.

Ample space should be provided for the placing of public buildings as to accommodate without inconveniences the large member of people likely to assemble there.

A regular relative between the different roads converging on the centre and the facades of the buildings between these roads should be maintained.

The Street system should provide for a sufficient member of radial lines leading out of the town and connecting with existing main roads.

Roads and streets should be maintained properly in terms of cleanliness and repairing.

Urban Planners must think about construction of flyovers to minimize traffic congestion.

There should be specification of space for car parking in market areas and garbage disposal ground in different localities.

References

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