

## **On The Way to Dry and Die: A New Aspect of the History of Decline of Kashimbazar Port**

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**Abstract:** *Between the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Murshidabad district became a commercial hub. Some travelers (Tavernier, Barnier and Hedges) at that time, have written about Kashimbazar in their written documents. According to their documents, not only most of the Indian merchants but also many Asian and European merchants well settled and stayed permanently around Kasimbazar port. The commercial activity of the inhabitants of Murshidabad and especially of Kashimbazar Island was at its peak. The famous silk trade of Kashimbazar was known to the world and also other merchandise except silk were exported from there. Kashimbazar had also witnessed mixed political events at that time. Several natural disasters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century like an earthquake, flood, etc. were important factors for the destruction of commercial events of Kashimbazar. With the changes of courses of Bhagirathi, Padma and Jalangi River, the settlements around Kashimbazar were destroyed and turned into a swampy jungle.*

**Keywords:** Commercial, Traveler, Merchants, Earthquake, *Settlements*

Politics, economics and geography govern the life of any port, and the purpose of the study is to explore and investigate. I hope that the economic and geographical aspects will give a more balanced picture by this study. The fall of Hughli port in 1632 resulted in the rise of Kashimbazar port as well as a place of trade and commerce. Now Cossimabazar is lavishly neglected. In the seventeenth-eighteenth century, the Kashimabazar's name was spread all over India even throughout the world. The Kashimbazar was famous for its port center or as a trading center. Some goods of Bengal were spread all over Asia and Europe by this port. Some trade centers (near Kasim Bazar) became famous like Bhagwanagola, Azimganj and Jiaganj and the three trading centers were the built-in bank of river Bhagirathi. There were so many reasons behind the development of Kashimbazar and others (Bhagwanagola, Azimganj, Jiaganj) as a trading center. For example, there was an abundance of highly skilled craftsmen, Low cost of production, cheap transportation because they used to river transport and the land was fertile. Mulberry, cereals, etc were cultivated well. Cotton and yarn were available here.<sup>1</sup> Cossimbazar was the most important center of raw silk which was exported every year to the European markets from there. The price of silk varied from Rs.3 to Rs.7 per seer according to quality and supply.<sup>2</sup> About 1633 the Dutch company employed 700 silk weavers and the Dutch company leading company in the silk business at that time. They exported silk from Kashimbazar to Japan and Holland. According to Hunter, the English East India Company colony was established in 1658 in Kashimbazar. The French East India company colony was reestablished by Dupleix in 1734 in Kashimbazar. They exported good quality silk and other merchandise from Kashimbazar to Europe and they imported from china to Kashimbazar such as alum, camphor, Zinc alloy, mercury, cochineal (sindur) and false pearls.

Bengal is well-known for its system of Riverine ways, perhaps unrivaled elsewhere in the world (Bowrey, 1903; Forster, 1998: letter1) and Cossimbazar enjoyed the use of one of the most wide-ranging riverine networks of the province. Cossimbazar was situated a limited miles away from the new capital (Murshidabad) of Bengal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Murshidabad became the capital of Bengal then the merchant or traders had been getting more facilities. European company (British, French, Dutch, Armenian) Persian, Turkish and Indian (Multan, Lahore, Hyderabad, Benaras, Gorakhpur, Kashmiri, Gujrati) merchants lived here.<sup>3</sup> Various bankers started living here like Jagat Seth (Manickchand) and established a mint in Murshidabad.<sup>4</sup> Buchanan described Kashimbazar in 1828, *'the boundless market whose roads saw the brightness of the Sun, so filled as it was with outstanding buildings was in a remarkably beneficial position to enjoy the benefices of commerce'*. On the other, it lay at the center of what was known in the eighteenth century as the triangle or the island-shaped by the three rivers of the. Kashimbazar Island is surrounded by three rivers Bhagirathi, Padma and Jalangi.

There was hardly talking about the Kashimbazar in any historical record before the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The decrease of the port Hooghly in 1632 resulted in the raised of Kashimbazar port as an internal port city as well as a place of trade and commerce. Niccolo Manucci derived to Cossimbazar on 1660-61. He writes, *"I reached Cossimbazar at three days journey from Hooghly (by boat) and here I saw that they made much high-quality piece goods and much white cloth. There are in this village which is near the Ganges three factories of the French, English and Dutch. From Cossimbazar I took the road to Rajmahal."*<sup>5</sup>

**Table: 1**

The geographical analysis of piece goods in the company's orders for Bengal

Areas	Orders sent out November 1681	Orders sent out August 1682	Orders sent out December 1683
Cossimbazar	84,100 pieces	222,600 pieces+20bales	208,00 pieces+20bales
Hugli	23,500 pieces	110,200 pieces	158,300 pieces
Balasore	72,500 pieces	162,000 pieces+16bales	158,000 pieces+16 bales
Dacca	21,300 pieces	81,500 pieces+12bales	71,500 pieces+12bales
Malda	27,800 pieces	86,500 pieces+20bales	86,500 pieces+20bales
Total	229,200 pieces	662,800 pieces+68 bales	682,500 pieces+20bales

Source: Susil Chaudhury, *Companies, Commerce and Merchants Bengal in the Pre Colonial Era*, Kolkata, 2015, p.106

Here we see more clothes or fabrics type goods were exported from Kashimbazar. One thing is clear to us from Table: 1 that Kashimbazar was one of the most important trading centers or ports in Bengal.

This trading center played a vital role in Europe and Asia. Various goods or merchandise were export to different countries of Asia and Europe. Asian countries were Rangoon, Pegue, Achine, Penang, Bnkulan, Batbhia Malacca and Macao, Tattha, Bosra, Mocha, Zidda, Muscut, and Canton of China, etc.<sup>6</sup> European countries were England, Dutch, France, and Armenia, etc.<sup>7</sup> So, Cossimbazar gradually gained a familiarity with the whole world. The Cossimbazar silk was very

famous in the royal empire of French emperor Louis IV because the Silk cloth or *rumal* became a symbol of modernity for them.<sup>8</sup> But English East India Company has done business better than the other European Company and built the British colony at Kashimbazar in 1658.

Silk is an alarming dress material. The Ramayana and Mahabharata were described as silk. In the medieval period, the silk industry had prospered and under the English & other European companies and silk turned into an important trading product. The Bengal silk market came into prominence after it was originally opened to Europe by the Dutch.<sup>9</sup> Cossimbazar was the most important center of trade of raw silk which was exported every year to the European markets. The price of silk varied from Rs.3 to Rs.7 per seer according to quality and supply.<sup>10</sup> Tafeta was the name of the greatest and expensive silk produced in Cossimbazar. The weavers usually made three types of *Taffeta* like Pucca Green, Pale Green and Blue. In 1685 Indian traders (Surmas, Biswas, Chowdhury, Ghosh, Karpi, Sarkar and Dutt) were supplying silk to East India at Kashimbazar. Around 186 merchants dominated the supply of raw silk to the East India Company at Cossimbazar till when the *Dadni* system was abandoned in favors of the agency system in the year 1754.<sup>11</sup> The Dudhoriya family came to do a clothing business from Bikaner in Rajasthan and settled in Murshidabad. Apart from all the mentioned big traders, many small traders exist in Murshidabad who were involved in various business activities. One such group was of the monks who belong to religious communities and they exported raw silk from Murshidabad to Mirzapur and the number of their exports per year was 1,000 *maan*. Among the insignificant merchants as such, Murcha and Quar were also there and they were probably from the shaikhabati of northwest Rajasthan. There were one of the famous names was Uziniara was an Ujjayan Brahmin.<sup>12</sup>

Jiaganj and Azimganj had established some factory or godown for sugarcane, grain, crops and Tant Saree. Fabrics (29,340pcs) were exported from Cossimbazar in 1793.<sup>13</sup> The king of Bhagirathpur, under Kashimbazar Island, became famous for the salt trade after the battle of Pllassey. The main and fundamental constituent of gun powder was Saltpeter. The Saltpeter was made in every corner of Bihar.<sup>14</sup> Also, Saltpeter was made in Purnia of Bengal which is called '*Nijamat Shora*' because this '*shora*' was sent for different ceremonies and festivals of Mughal's court and it was also needed for Bengal nabab's army. The saltpeter also came from the Patna factory to Murshidabad.<sup>15</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, mainly Dutch took away most of the saltpeter made in these places among all the European companies; the amount was almost about 50% of the total production of saltpeter. But Clive took over all the saltpeter making centers in his hand after Plessey. The Elephant teeth industry and handicrafts of wood have become famous industry at Kashimbazar Island. The artworks created by the teeth of the elephant were taken away by the European in Europe. The teeth of the elephant and the artworks by the wood were also taken a front position and become very famous among the Europeans. Papers handicrafts were also a famous cottage industry at that time. The paper industry was built around Chunakhali (near Kashimbazar) and the traders related to this industry were named 'Kagaji'.

There were different reasons for the decline of the prosperity of Cossimbazar port. Several natural disasters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century like an earthquake, flood, etc. were important factors for the destruction of commercial events of Kashimbazar. With the changes of courses of Bhagirathi, Padma and Jalangi River, the settlements around Kashimbazar were destroyed and turned into a swampy jungle. Otherwise numerous pieces of evidence of environmental and ecological have changed in this area.

According to the writing of contemporary travelers like Tavernier, Barnier and Hedges wrote documents and they were trying to come from Hooghly to Kashimbazar through the waterways but they failed to dryness the River. The dried portion of this Bhagirathi River becomes a closed bill (local name Katiganga).<sup>16</sup> Due to that closed bill, severe epidemics can be noticed there and that place becomes a cremation ground. We have seen the documents of Tavernier, Hollowell, Bernier and Hedges that they were not able to reach Kasimbazar from Kolkata by river transport due to small depth they used small *boat*.<sup>17</sup> The English government and much were responsible for the fall of this Cossimbazar. The navigability of the river here increased so much that the English Department did not do anything about it. There was no effort colonial Government to clear silt and sediment from the river. As part of the excavation at Padma and Bhagirathi, Bhagirathi transformed into a new look. As a result, the Bhagirathi River was naturally removed from the center of Kashimbazaar. There was a Slewis Gate in the Katiganga to make it livelier every year.<sup>18</sup>

On September 29, 1785, an extreme flood occurred in Murshidabad. The flood of the river Bhagirathi made dangerous situation throughout the riparian tract of the Cossimbazar. The outbreak of epidemic plague was seen after the flood. The flood was an annual phenomenon in this region because there were floods every year, significant years 1834, 1838, 1848, 1856, 1866, 1870. The flood of 1823 was most destructive and in 1787 a massive cyclone arose in the region. Major Daan an English inhabitant of Cossimbazar died with his wife in this calamity.<sup>19</sup> As a result of the cyclone, innumerable buildings were collapsed and inhabitants were forced to leave the area. The entire area became a thick jungle and it became a dwelling for Mosquito and wild animals. Evidence was noticed that the number of tigers rose in this area. In the year of 1902, the British Government announced an award of Rs10, 000 for kills a tiger.<sup>20</sup> In 1871-1872, 12,930 people were dying from various diseases but most people died of malaria fever. In the same two years, 6645 persons were treated for fever at several dispensaries.<sup>21</sup> An idea is clear from the above discussion that the river was an important factor for the decline of the Kashimbazar port.

### Notes and References:

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