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## Studying the Progressive Tale of Burdwan Town: A Sociological Study of a Growing Small Town within the State of West Bengal, India

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### ABSTRACT

Burdwan (another name 'Barddhaman') is 23<sup>rd</sup> town of the state West Bengal. Burdwan is still regarded as a small yet growing town. Burdwan town exhibits its uniqueness in a distinctive way. The town is developing into an industrial town, while making a steady progress towards establishing itself as a Class-1 city, yet the town is trying keep up its pace with its agricultural roots. The town exhibits multi-cultural traits, Bengali culture and language predominates. The town retains its traditional ethos while adapting the modern lifestyle. The inexpensive lifestyle, growth of industrial economy within and around (the town), the expansion of educational and health sector in the Burdwan town often attracts the people from neighboring rural and urban areas to migrate here. This article tries to present an wholistic study of Burdwan town by examining and explaining its past and present. This article also highlights the various socio-cultural and economic factors that act as a catalyst for the spread of industrialization and urbanization from time and again.

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**Aims:** This article aims to study and examine different aspects of Burdwan town and produce a comprehensive essay on the tradition-modern continuum as found in the progressive nature of the town. There are not many academic or scholarly articles written on a small town like Burdwan town. This article was written with an intention to develop a wholistic report on the town. This may contribute towards the studies on Burdwan town in future.

**Research Objectives:** The article focuses mainly on:

- To comprehend the diversified yet vibrant history of the town
- To study the traditional cultural imprints of the town
- To assess the impact of urbanization and industrialization on the town
- To evaluate the change in Socio-cultural aspects within the town

**Methodology:** The study employs qualitative research study to examine different annual reports of Burdwan Municipality as well as other governmental and non-governmental documents. This article is entirely an exploratory study via which the researcher tried to delve into the past and present-day development of Burdwan town.

**Results and Discussions:** The study uncovers a notable discussion on the infrastructural, socio-cultural and economic development of Burdwan town that had been observed for the past few decades. This study also identify various factors that shows the continuities of traditional aspects of the town as well the development of modernized urban life that are reflected through multi-cultural as well as multi-religious heritage of the town Burdwan.

### **Introduction:**

The seemingly small yet developing rur-urban town, Burdwan is one of the oldest towns of the state West Bengal in India. The headquarter of Purba Bardhaman District, Burdwan is regarded as the most developing and growing town located in the southern part of West Bengal, after the metropolitan city Kolkata. The steady growth in the population in recent decades, shows that Burdwan Town is keeping up with the anglicized version of its name “Barddhaman” that mean prosperous and growing gradually. Burdwan town is often called as the royal heritage city of the state West Bengal.

### **Geographical Location of the town:**

The geographical location of Burdwan town made the town favorable for the development of both agricultural and industrial economy. Burdwan town was formed on a flat alluvial plain area, covering approximately 26.30 square kilometers. The town extends from 23°12′ North to 23°17′ North latitudinally and 87°49′ East to 87°53′ east longitudinally. The town is situated 1100 km away from Delhi, the capital of India, and less than 100 km away in the north-west part of the nearest metropolitan city Kolkata, directly via the grand trunk road that connects the National Highway (NH) -2 and also via Eastern Railway. Burdwan district is surrounded by many rivers: the River Bhagirathi – Hooghly (in the east), the River Ajoy along with its many tributaries flows (in the northern side), Damodar and Banka

River (in the south-west). Burdwan district is surrounded by Nadia District (in east), Hoogly District (in south-east), Bankura and Purulia district (in south-west) and Paschim Bardhaman district (in north-west).

### **A Brief History of the Town:**

Burdwan town, located in West Bengal, has a rich history dating back to 5000 BC. It was named Badh-e-dewan during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir and was the headquarters of various Maharajas. In 1657, Bardhaman Raj was established by Sangram Raj, a Hindu Khatri family member who served both the Mughal Emperors and the British Government. The Eastern Railway was opened in 1855, and the town prospered under King Maharaj Mahatab Chand Ray Bahadur, who was known for his loyalty to the British Raj. The town's chief educational institution, Burdwan Raj Collage, the University of Burdwan, and the Maharajadhiraj Uday Chand Women's Collage were built on the Maharaja's estate. Burdwan town has also been a cultural center and administrative body during the East India Company. Since the establishment of the Municipality of Burdwan in the year 1865, it is the only governing body of the town. This administrative body with a total population of approximately 3.1 lacs is regarded as the most populous municipality, among the other towns of Purba as well as Paschim Bardhaman of West Bengal in India. The total geographical area of Burdwan Municipality covered as estimated is 26km<sup>2</sup> (26 sq km) and is placed in the 3rd biggest growing town by the area covered in this district. Another statutory body initiated under the Government of West Bengal, Burdwan Development Authority (BDA) along with its sub-sector Burdwan Planning Areas (BPAs) also playing an important role in planning the infrastructural and developmental programmes within the town Burdwan, since its inception in the year 2002. Burdwan Development Authority along with Burdwan Planning Area had started taking initiatives to formulate progressive and innovative schemes in the town that promotes a wholesome sustainable development, and most significantly the infrastructural development. This aims to mitigate with issues of being old heritages towns that are probably hindering the growth of the town.

### **Economical Status of the town:**

Roots in Agriculture: Burdwan town was often referred as “Rice Bowl” of the state West Bengal. The town is also regarded as “Granary of Bengal” owing to the facts that this town is located in agricultural belt and still continues to be the largest agricultural centre. Burdwan town is still continuing its agriculture pursuits as the town witnessed developing many types industries primarily based on agro-based products. Burdwan town also famous for its service towards establishing itself as the prime

trading centre that produces goods and other raw materials that helps in flourishing the agricultural hinterland. It is believed that Burdwan town being the granary of West Bengal has the potential to develop itself as a Mandi town that promotes the traditional form of country's economy that is agriculture (Burdwan Development Authority Website, 2024).

Development of Industrial Economy: With the introduction of industrialization in this town, the process of urbanization had also accelerated. In recent decades, industries like oil mills, rice mills and few other industries were also established here in this town. The geographical location and intricate communication system of Burdwan town also makes it more compatible for setting up new business. Again the availability of cheap laborers in different parts of the town as well as in nearby villages helps the rich businessmen to set up their business, not just in the heart (core) of Burdwan town, but also in the peripheries or even in the suburbs like Memari, Rasulpur, Gangpur, etc. on the north-west part and Galsi, Paraj, Pursha, Budbud, etc on the south-west part of the town. The town even witnesses the growth of many small-scale industries such as weaving, pottery, metalwork, etc. flourishing in the different parts of the town. With the progress of time, Burdwan town is growing more graciously and is in the process of gradually transforming itself into an urban city.

Burdwan town is the administrative centre of the Purba Bardhaman District that includes the main administrative and governing offices and main retailing and commercial centres. The town is regarded as a railway junction, and had two extensively well planned bus terminals located at the two ends of the town. The town also includes numerous schools and educational institutions, approximately 189 colleges (including degree colleges, B.Ed. Colleges and other private professional institutes) under the University of Burdwan, making the town a growing educational hub that attract a decent amount of migrants who comes in the town for attaining higher degrees from the neighboring villages as well as the states too. Likewise, along with these educational institutions, Burdwan Medical College and Burdwan hospitals, many private nursing homes, multi-speciality hospitals, renowned health care units, diagnostic centres, health labs, etc. are established here in this town, which makes sure of providing quality health care services. This transforms Burdwan town into a large health care industry.

The growing demand for setting up spaces needed for housing and commercial purposes results into the development of two townships in recent years in the town, namely Renaissance and Ulhas townships establishes the town as growing real estate. With the growing features of industrialization within the town, Burdwan started witnessing the other features of urbanization and modernization which was reflected via the establishments of various shopping malls, branded showrooms, famous group of eateries, car showrooms, spa and saloons, multiplex, etc. These had helped the inhabitants of Burdwan

town to keep its pace with the urbanized or modernized life of its nearby metropolitan city, Kolkata.

The Bypass section that connects that National Highway-2 has also been widened into a four lane corridor that paves a better connection and helps the Burdwan town to maintain a good relation with the other important regions as well as with the neighboring villages and the state. This had lead to a significant growth of economic opportunities in the both agricultural and industrial pursuits that attracts not just the migrants to settle down here but also the daily comers (individuals who daily comes here in Burdwan town to work in the morning and then returns back to their place of origin). For Burdwan town provides various kinds of economic opportunities and simultaneously a good quality lifestyle that is more economical than one can find in other parts of the state West Bengal. Individuals from different socio-cultural and economical background are often found settling down here in this town permanently. This helps the town to grow more culturally as individuals who are migrating here are found carrying their cultural traits while mingling with the old heritage of Burdwan town.

Thus, the major alteration in both socio-cultural and development of industrial economy within the town resulted into the expansion of urban pockets. These urban pockets are mostly characterized by definite population exhibiting classy modern lifestyles, industrial activities, etc. The industrial sector of Burdwan town has a high population and newly developed urban concentration. The somewhat decline in agricultural workforce within the town, in recent years, as observed, highlights the major shift towards industrial economy and service sectors.

### **Cultural Aspects of the Town:**

The town predominantly exhibits Bengali culture and ceremonial codes and procedures of Sanatan Dharma. Traditional Bengali music and dance forms on Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Geeti, Boul Gaan, etc remains popular. One can find Burdwan town being still famous for its traditional Bengali cuisine that includes rice (bhaat), fish dishes (maach), dishes made with poppy seeds (posto), sweets (mishit), and many more. The phrase “mach-bhate bangali” seems perfectly fit with the inhabitants of Burdwan town. Yet the town had grown into a multi-cultural heritage owing to its various invasions in different phases of history. Also, the migration of various individuals from different socio-cultural (people migrating from both rural and urban areas) as well as regional backgrounds (such as Bihar, Orissa, Punjab, etc) points out that once can find the instances of “unity in diversity’ within the town. Even some households of this town, though a very negligible in numbers, belong to Chinese that lead them to flaunt their inherited cultural beliefs and rituals, while adapting the cultural traits of Bengalees as well as Sanatan Dharma.

Burdwan town still continues to be the one of the oldest “heritage town” of the state West Bengal. Adorned with many ancient religions institutions (that includes both the Hindu temples and Islamic tombs), Burdwan town still had its roots into the traditions. Tourists often visits various places like Vijay Toran, Khaja Anwar Ber, Nawab Bari, Pir Baharam, some properties of King Mahatab Chand like Rajbati, Golapbag (which are used as the administrative office and academic campus by the University of Burdwan) and also the Maharajadhiraj Uday Chand Women’s College, etc all are heritage properties of Burdwan town. Tourists are also attracted towards visiting newly developed urban attractions like Meghnad Saha Planetarium, Burdwan Science Centre, Krishna Sayer Ecological Park, Ramnabagan (Deer Park), etc. These places are often seen to be surrounded by various shops of small businesses like food stalls, tea stalls, hotels, stalls selling daily needed objects, handmade jewelleryes, etc. Thus, Burdwan town while maintaining its traditional heritage promotes and supports small-scale business. This, in turn, attracts more people to migrate here to use their talents and skills and establishing small-scale businesses that contribute to the tertiary or informal sector of country’s economy.

### **Conclusion:**

Burdwan town provide its inhabitants a lifestyle that had dual features. While Bengali Language and Culture predominates, the town embraces the culture of other religions like Muslim Christian, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism etc. One can find the Bengali culture getting mixed with other regional cultures like Bihari, Oriya, etc. as well as different tribal cultures like Santhali. Again one can find the continuity of Bengali cuisine and festivals, while town is found adapting the new sentiments, new cuisines, and getting attracted towards celebrating the festivals and occasions of welcomed either by the invasions or by the people who are migrated here in the town. Talking about the instances of town’s economic life, a nominal amount of inhabitants of Burdwan are observed still being engaged with agriculture, while the town is seemingly progressing towards establishing itself as industrial town. The town still had its roots attached with its neighboring rural areas, while developing its connection with its nearing metropolitan city Kolkata as well as other cities and even states. While following the traditional values like family and kinship ties, community bonding and sentiments, celebrating vibrant festivals, etc. the inhabitants of this town are becoming accustomed with the modern urbanized lifestyle. Burdwan inhabitants, in one hand, had continued to inherit its traditions; while on the other hand, they are seen adapting the modern culture.

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