



## Bankura Municipal Health Services During The Colonial Period

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### ABSTRACT

Before the establishment of Bankura Municipality, an unsanitary environment prevailed there. The entire area was full of dense forests. Naturally, there were outbreaks of various types of diseases. In the late 19th century and the 20th century, various epidemic diseases such as malaria, plague, cholera, black fever etc. appeared in this area. Naturally, medical facilities were extremely lacking at that time. Whatever treatment there was entirely dependent on quinine. Naturally, the need to improve medical facilities became imperative. Municipal responsibility was to improve health service facilities and management. The municipality had a dispensary committee. The members of that committee were District Magistrate Municipal Chairman and some middle class educated people of that time. This committee looked after the entire treatment process starting from allotment of money. All important medical systems were developed including vaccination to combat various epidemic diseases. Homeopathy system of treatment became very popular among common people during this time. Various homeopathic doctors have been providing healing services to the public by treating various types of ailments ranging from very simple to complex ailments. At that time, patients were kept admitted in the hospitals as per the need. Various surgeries were also performed there according to the disease.

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Moreover, hospitals had facilities for outdoor treatment. Many people fell ill on their way back from Jagannathdham in Puri and went back home after receiving treatment at the medical centers in Bankura. That is, the medical centers of Bankura city took a leading role in providing health services to the people.

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Before the up gradation from rural areas to urban areas, the area under Bankura municipality was a relatively unsanitary environment. The whole area was very dense and there was a constant practice of narrowing the roads before and after they were built. Hence the multiplicity of proposals mentions the breaking of road encroachments. There were many unsanitary rotting ponds in the area from which malaria was able to establish its extreme foothold in Bankura. In this dense area, the outbreak of various diseases was very easy. Many people lost their lives from the end of the 19th century to the two decades of the 20th century because, during this time, various types of epidemic diseases including malaria, plague, cholera, black fever appeared in this area. At that time there was almost nothing to treat these diseases. What medical facilities there were woefully inadequate compared to the prevalence of the disease. Treatment consisted mainly of some limited treatment and quinine. The motion brought on 30th July 1923 justifying the establishment of the Bankura Sammilani Medical School referred to this decline in population. It was said that, Medical school is necessary in the district in view of the reduction by more than 10% of the population in 10 years.

Municipalities were entrusted with the responsibility of municipal health services and management. The municipality had a dispensary committee. This dispensary committee used to play a big and important role in the maintenance of health services in the municipal area. Educated middle class people used to get place in this dispensary committee. At that time, middle-class educated people considered it a great honor to get a place in this committee. According to the qualifications of the post, the District Magistrate was the person in charge of the health department. No expenditure could be allocated without the approval of the District Magistrate. In 1932, the new Bengal Municipal Act was introduced. Under this new law, the Town Board was given certain powers that were beyond the purview of the Municipal Chairman. And till 1932 the district magistrates were the ex officio municipal chairman and had the power to override the opinion of the elected board commissioners. These powers included appointing and removing municipal officers and employees, making contracts, enacting municipal laws or presenting the municipal budget. In addition, the municipal board also got the right to determine the

terms of employment of municipal workers.<sup>1</sup>This new municipal law of 1932 was much more relaxed but still had some inner power. A resolution passed on March 25, 1931 shows that the municipality did not grant the prayer of three thousand rupees for the repair of the building of the Lady Hospital. In this case, it is said that judgment will be considered about the allocation of this expenditure next year. A resolution passed on February 11 in 1935 disallowed the grant of Rs 100 made by the Dispensary Committee. But a decision was taken to give 3000 rupees for the silver jubilee festival of the British Raj. A resolution passed on 22nd December 1936 sanctioned a grant of 150 rupees towards the diet head of patients at the Sadar Hospital.<sup>2</sup>

Municipalities had health officers to look after health and water supply. This health officer played an important and extraordinary role in the supervision of adulterated food and in sanitation and conservancy. This Health Officer was employed under the Section 91 Subsec. 3 Acts of 1885 AD. In those days, he was employed on a salary of one hundred rupees after passing several levels of examination. Section 351A contained Model Rules for this officer. In this section, a sanitary inspector worked under the supervision of this health officer in the municipality. In 1919, the Adulterated Food Act was introduced under Act IV. A decision was taken on 30 August 1924 to charge Gopal Chandra Nandi, a businessman of Bankura municipality, under this anti-adulteration act.

At the time of establishment, Bankura municipality was in an unhealthy environment. Hence the issue of outbreaks of various epidemic diseases was alive there. Because of this there was a need for vaccination among the people of the city. At that time, the various laws and restrictions imposed by the municipality seemed quite objectionable to the common people, but this vaccination did not cause much trouble. However, in many parts of India at that time, there was some doubt about the intentions of the ruling class in the minds of the common people. In 1872, the municipal councilors of Bankura recommended that the vaccinators continue to work for another three months.<sup>3</sup> The Vaccination Report of Bengal Province of 1873 shows that despite the predominance of orthodox Hindus in the town of Bankura, vaccination was done fairly well.<sup>4</sup> Since then, people gradually got used to vaccination. However, vaccination was not done in a very simple and unobstructed manner. The Bengal Province Vaccination Report reveals that no financial support was received from local leaders for vaccination. Even they were very conservative and prejudiced. In some cases they have even outright opposed vaccination.<sup>5</sup> Sensing this reality, the Deputy Chairman of Bankura Municipality had a slightly different way of thinking in 1883 AD. And he took a decision, to open a vaccination center in place of worship or nearby. A total of

14 vaccination centers were opened based on this decision. Of these, except one, the remaining 13 were in place of worship. It is believed that this was an attempt to legitimize a system introduced by the Christian rulers with the sanction of Hinduism. That is, all this was the product of a very well-planned and well-thought-out idea. And in this case the success was astounding. This success was acknowledged in the official report of 1883 AD.<sup>6</sup>

After the opening of this vaccination center there was a tremendous success in vaccination among the people of the city. Within two years of the opening of this vaccination center, it became almost impossible to find an unvaccinated person in the city. As a result, the number of vaccination centers was reduced from 14 to 6. No such admirable initiative and vigilance has been noticed by the municipality or the Government in the case of cholera. However, when cholera epidemics occurred, chemicals such as potassium permanganate were used to decontaminate water. Many times, when the water in the pond became contaminated, the municipality would order the owner of the pond to spread lime according to the municipal law, expressing the fear of disease. In the first decade of the 20th century, when cholera was spreading in the city of Bankura and it was thought that it would soon become an epidemic, the clothes of the patients were cleaned in any water reservoirs belonging to the municipality. The biggest surprise is the utter indifference of the municipality in this regard.

On August 1 in 1924, extensive schemes were adopted to prevent cholera from becoming epidemic in the Bankura Municipality. A health Bye-law, adopted by the Bankura Municipal Board on 17th November 1931, included several important points. Considered the question of framing a bye-law in connection with the precaution against infectious diseases on the lives suggested in Govt. Circular No 2237-41 M dated the 12th June 1931. Resolve that the following bye-law be framed and that sanction of Govt. be obtain there to :- Whenever a member of the family or a person residing in a house, serai etc, be attacked with Cholera, Smallpox, Influenza, Plague or Typhoid the headman of the family or the keeper of the Serai shall give information either personally or in writing to the Municipal office within 6 hours or that attack or as soon as the disease is detected. Otherwise Rs. 5/-. A decision was taken on 27 March 1936 to employ a large number of vaccinators temporarily to prevent the spread of smallpox in the city. During this time government orders were issued to control cholera, pox, plague, diphtheria and other diseases. On June 11 in 1935, the Health Committee was formed for the Anti Tuberculosis Campaign. The members of this committee were the then Bankura Municipal Chairman, Vice Chairman, Dr. Ramgati Banerjee, Dr. Kalipad Banerjee, Harisadan Dutta, Swami Maheshwarananda, Dr. Damodar

Dasgupta, Dr. Durgadas Gupta, Dr. K. R. Chatterjee and others. The work of this campaign started on 26th July 1935 AD. At this time the vice chairman of the municipality and Dr. Ramgati Banerjee were requested to issue a handbill to make the townspeople aware of the epidemic. At this time it was decided to request Dr. Ramgati Banerjee submitted a scheme to transfer the leprosy clinic of Lokpur to the municipality on 26 February 1937. The District Board authority approached with a request to handover to this municipality the leprosy clinic building at Lokepur for the purpose of starting a clinic in that building.

### **Charitable Dispensary**

Bankura Municipality has been running a Charitable Dispensary since its inception as part of its public welfare work. Since the Malla era, many pilgrims used to travel over Bankura to Jagannath Dham in Puri. From the period 1869-70, all those pilgrims used to take necessary medical treatment in this dispensary. The dispensary was renovated in 1872 with the financial support of King Damodar Singh and local advocates and merchants to provide better services. A native doctor was then employed on a salary of 50 rupees and a vaccinator on a salary of 10 rupees per month. Also, to make the dispensary more public oriented, a compounder was appointed on a salary of Rs.6 per month. By the early 20th century, however, the dispensary had ceased to exist. For the convenience of pilgrims, a rest house was constructed on Pilgrim Road in 1885 at a cost of Rs 32 & 13 annas. The current location of this Pilgrim Road is on the connecting road between Kewra Rose Garden, crematory and Lalbazar junction.

This charity hospital was one of the many other successes of the Bankura Municipality. The hospital, established by the municipality, was a second-class facility as per government standards. The municipal chairmans have always been vigilant to provide quality medical services in this hospital. Between 1893 and 95 AD, the municipal chairmans visited the hospital a total of 22 times. Civil surgeons were regularly present in this hospital.

Below is a table showing the patient statistics of the charitable hospital<sup>7</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Patients Under Treatment in Hospital</b>	<b>Number of Outpatients</b>	<b>Number of Surgeries</b>



<b>1893</b>	306	9120	40
<b>1894</b>	232	9876	56
<b>1895</b>	178	6229	54

However, the government was quite happy with the medical services provided by the hospital. But day by day the number of pilgrims traveling is increasing. In 1872, the municipal chairman expressed concern about the cost of the hospital under increasing pressure from such a large number of pilgrims.<sup>8</sup> In the year 1887-88, the cost of the hospital from the municipality was Rs.1970.<sup>9</sup> In view of those times, the expenditure of such amount of money was quite high. But at that time, in an important city like Puri, the government, municipality and the Puri lodging house fund were able to spend Rs. 2289 in the public health sector.<sup>10</sup>

One of the examples of the development work of the municipality is the management of Gurdasi Homeopathic Charitable dispensary. The hospital, which has passed many ages, continues to provide services to people even today. Deputy Magistrate Raibahadur Ramsdan Chattopadhyay, a resident of Pathakpara, established this Gurudasi Homeopathic Charitable dispensary on 10th April 1924 to preserve the memory of his divine mother. In fact on 27th March in 1923 Ramsdan Bhattacharya applied to the municipal board expressing his desire to establish a homeopathy dispensary for free treatment in Bankura. Incidentally, Ramsadan Chattopadhyay was the eldest son of Pandit Ganga Narayan. Again, Pandit Ganga Narayan was the elder uncle of world famous journalist Ramananda Chattopadhyay. In this case, he expressed his desire to donate some money. In view of that Bankura Municipal Board took such a decision:- that the offer with the terms set forth in the petition and enumerated below be accepted.

- The Charitable Dispensary be called "Gurudasi Charitable Dispensary."
- A room with necessary furniture, books and medicine be provided in the heart of the town.
- A doctor be appointed to examine patients free and to supply them medicine free of charge at certain hours every day and to be fixed by the municipal commissioners.
- If for any reason the dispensary is abolished in future the fund will be re endorsed to the donor or his legal heir and successor.

The municipal commissioners highly appreciate the liberty on the part of the doner in making such a handsome grant towards the establishment of such an institution and do hereby record a vote of thanks to the doner.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the Bankura Municipal Board took such a decision, the work of setting up the Gurdasi Homeopathic Dispensary was not completed very easily. At the time of its establishment, the dispensary was located in Nakul Mandal's shop house, in front of the present Town Co-operative Bank. Where there is now a drug store. Ramsdan Chattopadhyay handed over the company's paper of Rs. 30,000 to the Bankura municipality for this homeopathic dispensary. Depending on the interest on that money, the dispensary will be able to meet its expenses.<sup>12</sup> It took about seven years to properly decide how to keep the fund received as donation and how to earn thirty rupees per month from that fund. Later in 1933, the money was officially kept as a deposit in the Imperial Bank. The Calcutta Gazette of 1930 discusses this fund in great detail. The interest earned from this endowment fund was spent on the dispensary as per the terms of the doner. Apart from this money, the municipality used to allocate monthly grants to this dispensary from its own funds. Till 1967 the Endowment interest money came to the dispensary. But after 1967, due to some unknown reason, money from the endowment fund suddenly stopped coming to the dispensary. Gurudasi Homeopathic Dispensary continues its glorious existence even today. All the expenses of this dispensary are now borne by Bankura Municipality. Even today, the sick people of a wide area of the municipality are equally benefiting from this homeopathic dispensary treatment system and medicine.

Moreover, the entire cooperation of the then municipality chairman Rasbihari Banerjee made the dispensary run smoothly. The earnest efforts of founding physician and freedom fighter Dr. Ramdas Chakraborty enriched the initial phase of this homeopathic charity clinic. It is said that Bankura Municipality has been entrusted with the management of the charitable dispensary since its inception. The foundation of the present charitable dispensary building was laid on 23rd January 1959. Preeti Ghosh, wife of the then popular District Magistrate Ranjit Ghosh, laid the foundation of this dispensary. But the present building was built in 1975. The construction of this building was successfully managed and facilitated by the earnest efforts of the then municipality chairman Uday Bhanu Ghosh, Commissioners Shrishtidhar Banerjee, Nimai Kundu and former physician Dr. Bhavani Kingkar Chakraborty. Dr. Girindra Shekhar Chakraborty has been engaged in the medical services of this



municipal dispensary since 1990. He continues to treat hundreds of people every day in that charitable dispensary.<sup>13</sup>

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