

A Geographical Analysis of Muzaffarpur City

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Muzaffarpur Geographically is located between 26°0'0" & 26°12'0" north latitude and 85°18'0" and 85°29'0" East longitude, occupying 4135.74 acres of land. Muzaffarpur town has a sizeable population of 3,05,525 according to 2001 census. Having an inter-stream area between a shifting river of Budhi Gandak and Fardo Nallah, Muzaffarpur city became collecting and distributing centre of North Bihar Plain. The physical panorama of the city exhibits the presence of the valley, flood plain, leve, interfluves and other depositional features. The oxbow lake adds to the beauty of the city. The smooth rolling inter river basin is rich in agriculture produce which are catalysts to the progress of the city. The plain rises gradually towards the north to meet the foothills and the Himalayan tract and it slopes down towards the south to the master consequent streams of river Ganga which is main artery of the Middle Ganga plain. There are numerous tributaries which originate from both the sides of river Ganga and drains from north to south and south to north following the general slope and ultimately meet the main artery. At the micro level it may be considered that the area delimited by the Kosi River in the east and River Gandak in the west forms the Muzaffarpur Plain on which the city of Muzaffarpur is located. This Plain has been traversed by many navigable rivers on which only country boats ply. There is good network of roads in the region for smooth transportation and good links. Muzaffarpur city is transport hub of the region from where all sorts of transport linkages radiate.

The River Gandak in the west forms the most problematic obstacle in the smooth transport connection with the western region. A road bridge has been recently constructed over Gandak River which provides easy mobility of goods and man. Prior to this bridge a pantoon bridge was over Gandak River which permitted light vehicle on Rewaghat and was not much reliable and safe. It is to note that River Gandak is most unreliable in its depth in the course, as it forms some times shoals and sometimes removes in a month or two. However pantoon bridge linked Chapra, Siwan and other urban centers and the region as well. The construction of new road bridge over Gandak at Rewaghat has opened a new chapter in the history of transport connection with Chapra, Siwan say western region. Chapra is more easily accessible from Muzaffarpur is a Sonpur by rail and good but circuitous metallic road. But now road over bridge at Rewaghat has reduced the distance by road and there is smooth mobility. The city of Muzaffarpur has also railroad linkages with Motihari and Darbhanga with adequate frequency of buses, trucks, maxis as the roads have become sufficiently wide in good condition since few years back.

Sitamarhi and adjoining areas once were not easily accessible due to the gap of Budhi Gandak River which had been patched up by the construction of road over bridge on the river at Akharaghat in the city. It has also facilitated the further urban development in the city and there is very smooth transport and communication system in the region. Muzaffarpur city is also linked with Raxaul a sophisticated town strategically located near international boundary between Nepal and India at a metalled road distance of 121.3 kms. It is also connected with rail line with the city and other cities of India. The nearest smaller urban centres are well connected with good metalled roads which feed the city with men and materials - Mahua lies at a distance of 38.6 kms and Jandaha at 51.4 kms. A good frequency of buses, taxies, maxis and trucks is always at service.

Kolkata the commercial capital of Eastern India is connected with road and rail with this city. The completion of NH 28 has eased the transport & communication means. The city is located on the rail route from Delhi to Kolkata and the cities of Assam; hence it finds a natural flow of transport and communication between Delhi, the administrative and political capital of India and commercial capital Kolkata. The construction and

opening of Rajendra rail-cum road over bridge as Ganga near Mokama and Farakka has accelerated the transport and communication of the region.

The construction of Mahatma Gandhi Setu on Ganga at Guljarbagh at Patna has opened a new chapter in the circulation system of the region and Muzaffarpur city got new impetus in its growth. The two hour drive from Muzaffarpur to Patna has changed the mobility as well as structure of economy of the region and the city of Muzaffarpur itself. The bridge has generated new traffic and diverted the traffic volume from other directions. As Muzaffarpur has beneficial location on the main line of Central-Eastern Railway, it is connected with Lucknow, Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and other main towns of the country. All these have helped the city of Muzaffarpur to grow as a collecting, producing and distributing centre of various goods. The establishment of Bela Industrial Estate complex has enhanced its growth, as it produces various kinds of industrial products for the consumption of local and places at remote distance.

The nodal character of the city has contributed in becoming an important site of trade and commerce in the North Bihar Plain. Moreover, its service region become under in respect to wholesale of some goods to even Patna, the capital of Bihar located in south Bihar Plain. A number of goods from the urban centre of the neighbouring cities of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Jharkhand overwhelm the market of Muzaffarpur city. Carpets from Kanpur, Luxury goods from Kolkata, bedsheets from Gorakhpur, Banarsi Sari from Varanasi, Bhagalpur cloths like bedsheets, chadar, lungi, towel and silk cloths from Bhagalpur flood the market of Muzaffarpur as these goods find their ways for their consumption in the wide service area of the city. The famous Sutapatti mohalla of Muzaffarpur in respect to wholesale cloth market has a great name throughout the state. Thus the city has achieved a control key place in respect of Woolen, Cotton, Siliken and other various types of textile goods business in North Eastern Section of India. Thus the city of Muzaffarpur holds a key location in North Bihar.

Muzaffarpur city in its Origin and evolution is closely linked with the river Budhi Gandak. It might be a significant consideration in the siting of the city. In historical past there was preponderance of water transport and in area of water transport a river side location was preferred for the settlement in view of smooth line of communication, domestic use of water and at some places the river also provided defence to the settlement at least from two or three sides. Moreover the river also provided firm ground of levee and bluffs for siting of a town. Before the advent of modern rail road facilities, water transport was the most important means of trade and commerce and travel as well. The natural levee of the River Budhi Gandak provided firm and high seed ground for the origin of town. The ferry services at the site across the river provided a break of bulk point in the transportation of goods and men. Thus the site naturally acted as a place of collection and transfer of sizeable goods of a large hinterland of fertile North Bihar plain. This stimulated the growth of the city. Consequently the city spread between the River Budhi Gandak on the north and the Fardo Nala on the south. Thus the natural and special characteristics of the site of the city have greatly influenced and guided its normal functions.

By virtue of its nodality Muzaffarpur city has centripetal forces to attract the men and material of the region and rail roads coverage to this greater services centre from the neighbouring urban centres traversing from the agrarian heart of the North Bihar Plain. As Muzaffarpur is the largest central place of the North Bihar Plain, there is influx of people from the different parts of this plain and abroad.

The foundation of the city of Muzaffarpur is said to be laid sometimes in the eighteenth century by Muzaffar Khan, a revenue farmer of Chakla Nai Pargana who appropriated for the purpose 291.37 hectares or 720 acres of land in the four adjacent villages of Sikandarpur in the north, Kanhauli in the east, Saidpur on the south and Saraiyaganj in the west. Before the appropriation of the land there used to be a small 'kasba' muhalla at the site which was later named as 'Kasba Muzaffarpur'. All these four villages may be termed as 'seed villages' or 'seed site' or 'Embryo' of the city. Thus it can be also said that the city began its urban life as a proprietary town of Muzaffarpur Khan. So the town may be called a medieval town in terms of the origin and growth.

Mr. Choudhary's second supposition is that, "At first Muzaffarpur constituted a part of the district of Tirhut, Later on in 1875 it was divided into two districts - the eastern portion formed the district of Darbhanga and the western portion formed a separate district of Muzaffarpur after the name of its chief town founded by Muzaffar Khan, a general of Akbar." But in support of the second thesis of Mr Choudhary there is no other historical record and the spatial studies of the city's antiquities also do not support the second idea of Mr. Choudhary.

In context to birth of the city another thesis is that in 1793 a settlement of 100 bighas of land was made with one Mr. Thomas Parker on behalf of Nawab Jafar by Ganga Ram Vakeel on an annual rent of Rs. 50/- only. The land constituted a part of the Sikandarpur village. Sikandarpur Maidan and Saraiyaganj areas were settled by Ganga Ram Vakeel.

Physical Location and Physical features :- Muzaffarpur town has a riverine site in almost smooth plain. So the difference between the highest place and the lowest is insignificant. i.e. 2.34 meters. The maximum height above sea level in the north and south west 51.206 meters. The land slopes down towards the south at amount of 1/44000 along the 86° E longitude and the city lies on 85°25'0" E longitude. So it has been assumed that the amount of slope must be low at the site of Muzaffarpur city as the surface has almost plane character. As the region is a depositional plain, the relief is minimum in the region where Muzaffarpur urban centre lies.

The land rises towards the river bank within the town to reach a maximum height of 53.340 meters near the crest of the levee. It will be clear by a cross section if drawn along the line from kejrival temple on the River Budhi Gandak in the north and Ram Dayalu singh College, Muzaffarpur in the south. It shows a considerable change of level of 7.520 meters up to the Muzaffarpur lake from the levee area. The land also slopes down from Saraiyaganj Tower to Ram Dayalu Singh College, Muzaffarpur up to nearly 0.11 meters. The land abruptly falls 7.82 meters within a distance of 500 meters from the eastern edge of Chandwara. The land of the city in the northeast, southeast and southwest are lower. Their respective height above sea-level within half a kilometer of the city limit drops down to 50.6, 50.3 and 49.99 meters respectively. The physical attributes of this site of Muzaffarpur has every impact on the pattern of urban land use. The old city centre developed first on the relatively higher ground. Gradually the different land uses followed the more preferred land according to height and the public utility services are developed according to need.

Climate :- Some of the public utility services are influenced by climatic condition. Climate determines the housing pattern of any settlement, the development of different types of land uses and public utility services. It also influences the land forms and the productivity of the region. Rainfall, temperature, winds, Relative Humidity and the wind velocity are the chief elements of climate that influences the weather and climatic condition of any urban centre and its environ. The architectural features are guided by the climatic condition in different climatic regions. The region in which Muzaffarpur is located lies in the monsoonal subtropical climate. This climate at Muzaffarpur is characterized by hot summer, dry winter and wet monsoon (rainy season). May is the hottest month with an average minimum temperature of 25°C and the average maximum of 32°C. The loo is a common feature at Muzaffarpur during rainless May & June months.

The city of Muzaffarpur receives average rainfall between 1100 and 1300 mm. Normally the winters are cold and dry and the temperature sometimes falls down to less than 8°C. Sometimes westerlies showers rain in winter season and Muzaffarpur receives rain which is very much beneficial in the region for rabi crops. During rainy season roads are inundated with water as drainage system is faulty and non accommodative of excess water from rainfall. The drainage are choked. The traffic movement is hampered; electricity supply and telephonic connections are also disrupted.

Economic milieu of Muzaffarpur City :- Occupying almost the central place of Middle Ganga Plain Muzaffarpur city enjoys strategic location and a beneficial situation. The entire surrounding region of the city has an agrarian culture. It produces various kinds of crops, fruits and woods. The alluviums of the Ganga plain is noted for the bumper cropping. The city environ is famous for lichi cultivation not only in India but abroad too. Thus the city has grown primarily as a collecting centre of different produces in the region and also an export centre of these goods. It is evident from the fact that the old area still dominates trade and commerce and the name of Mohalla is also given on the dealing of the different articles, Golapar, Suttapatti, Sonarpatti, Chhata Bajar, Lakri Dhahi etc. The northern Terai Region of Bihar and Nepal, the alluvials of the Ganga plain and the plateau of chotangpur have winded up its position. The location of the city is so significant that all important roads and railways linking the north eastern and western India; north of the Ganga have to cross through it. Thus the situation has contributed much in becoming the city a central place or regional capital of its catchment area. Its position in the middle of the western part of North Bihar Plain is very much advantageous for the rapid growth of the city. Muzaffarpur is located at about equidistant from Darbhanga in the east, Sitamarhi in the north, Samastipur and Dalsingsarai in the southeast, Hajipur in the south and Motihari a little more far away in the northeast. The centre of the circle made by all these settlements was vacuum in regards to settlement or service centre. Thus the vacant region needed an urban centre due to some sorts of Geographical requirements. In course of time the city got its commanding position and flourished to be a larger urban centre engulfing all other service centers in its catchment area in respect of multi-dimensional functions like administrative, educational, commercial, health, industrial and transportation etc. In the region there are service centers as second or third in order. As the region has rich land resources and man resources, some smaller service centers have grown which feed Muzaffarpur city.

The Demographic and Cultural Characteristics of the region :- The Muzaffarpur town is the district headquarters of Muzaffarpur District and the Commissionary headquarters of Tirhut Division. The district has a population density of 1200 persons per sq. Km according to 2001 census. The district encircles an area of 3122.56 sq. Km. The district has a population of 3746714 persons as per census 2001. It is the fourth largest district in Bihar in 2001 in terms of population, accounting for 4.5% of the Bihar states population. Muzaffarpur district with an urbanization level of 9.30% is ranked 12th in terms of urbanization in the State. The number of households in the districts is 650882 and the average size of the household is 5.8 persons. The sex ratio in district of Muzaffarpur is 920, which is similar to the state average of 921. The percentage of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe population in the district is 15.9% and around 0.1% respectively. The total literacy rate is 48.0% Muzaffarpur city is the largest urban centre in the region and in the district. Kanti having population of 20871 and Motipur 21,957 are two other urban centers which are comparatively very smaller towns. Thus the region in which Muzaffarpur town lies is densely populated.

The region enjoys a good network of metalled, brick soaling and unmetalled roads. It is also traversed by rail in different directions. The region has many religious places and historically important centers which have been developed as tourist places and place of worship. Thus the region of Muzaffarpur city is culturally sound.

Historical features of the city of Muzaffarpur :- The evolution and growth of any urban centre has impact on the spatial pattern of land use of the town and the public utility services. The unplanned and haphazard growth of the old cities shows the nature of growth of slum pockets due to congestion of houses, lack of roads, sewerages, water supply and other sanitary facilities. The parts of urban settlements which are of recent origin show comparatively either absence of slum pockets or a very small pocket of slums due to presence of almost all possible facilities of urban life with a planned development of all the urban land uses. A comprehensive understanding of the origin and growth of the city is, therefore, essential to have at least a working knowledge of

its political, economic, social and cultural heritage, artistic and technical skill, architecture and spatial pattern of nucleus around which different land uses successively grew and the town evolved to the present status.

Muzaffarpur town has developed out of many complicated intersections. These intersections are influenced by such human and natural factors over which human beings could have at the most a partial control. The city represents a high intensity in production and distribution. Its location in the fertile land has been favoured by social and natural conditions of the region which helped in weaving an economic design to bear the increasing burden of the growing needs of its inhabitants.

The town of Muzaffarpur shows a very complex historical background of its origin and growth. Its origin cannot be ascertained with certainty. The geographical study and analysis of its location has brought to light its various necessities and circumstances which caused the origin and evolution of the city. The dynamic character of the various requirements and circumstances during the different periods of the country's history have helped the anatomy of the city to be cast accordingly. No city in Bihar except Patna illustrates so clearly an impact of political, social and economic developments through the ages. The geographical setting, the social change and mobility, religious metamorphism and the political modes of the nation have impressed greatly Muzaffarpur to such an extent that each and every remarkable area of the city shows a separate socio-cultural unit reminding a distinctive period of historical origin and growth.

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