

AN APPRAISAL OF THE CENTRALITY OF MUGHAL DHAKA ALIAS JAHANGIRNAGAR BASED ON A MODIFIED VERSION OF CENTRAL PLACE THEORY

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Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar became the capital of Mughal Subah-i-Bangalah in the early 17th century CE. As the principal seat of the region and the centre of trade and commerce, it attracted the opportunity seekers, travellers, traders, government officials from different parts of the then known world and became a true cosmopolitan city. During the Mughal period the city was full of beautiful palaces, forts, richly decorated houses, caravanserais, mosques, shops, streets, bridges, etc. But owing to the ravages of time and the unplanned development of modern Dhaka, nothing is left except a few mosques, tombs, the ruins of a fort, and a few local names associated with the Mughals. It is now difficult to locate Jahangirnagar, the Mughal capital of Subah-i-Bangalah, based on archaeological evidence. Previous researchers (mostly historians, and/or architects) attempted to locate the capital in the older of part of present-day Dhaka through analysing mostly historical narratives, and occasionally material evidence. Owing to a lack of training in archaeological data analysis, early assumptions and narratives show an absence of archaeological interpretation of material evidence. However, the present research does not seek to challenge the accepted narrative of Dhaka as the capital of Mughal Bengal; rather it is an attempt to comprehend the centrality of Dhaka by using archaeological evidence and by analysing some parameters developed from modified versions of Christaller's Central Place Theory presented by Kimmig and Gringmuth- Dallmer.

Keywords: Central Place Theory, centrality, Dhaka, Jahangirnagar, Mughal period

Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar¹ was the principal seat of Subah-i-Bangalah² during the Mughal period. It was named after the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605 – 1627 CE) when *Subehdar*³ Islam Khan transferred the capital of Subah-i-Bangalah from Rajmahal to Dhaka in the early 17th century CE. From then on it became not only the centre of Mughal administration in the *Subah*⁴, but also a flourishing centre of trade and commerce. Various historical references,⁵ and travellers' accounts⁶ narrate Dhaka, or Jahangirnagar as the capital of Mughal Subah-i-Bangalah, and referring to these descriptions scholars⁷ have identified the older part of present-day Dhaka as the Jahangirnagar.

For defining the political status of Dhaka, scholars have depended on the descriptions given in the historical references, and/or travellers' accounts. They occasionally considered archaeological material remains dated to the Mughal period found in Dhaka. Their description of material remains is limited to the description of architectural elements, ornamentation, style, etc.⁸ along with the occasional attempt to analyse epigraphic evidence.⁹ Some scholars¹⁰ have considered placenames to explain the spatial arrangement of the capital.

¹ Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, used to be called Jahangirnagar during the Mughal era.

² *Subah-i-Bangalah* or the Bengal province of the Mughal kingdom comprised East Bengal or today's Bangladesh and West Bengal of India.

³ *Subehdar* was the official title for the head of *Subah-i-Bangalah*, like the governor of a province.

⁴ *Subah* was a territorial region in the Mughal administration like a present day-province.

⁵ NATHAN, M. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa during the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan*, 1936; TAISH, M. R. A. *Tawarikh-i-Dacca*.

⁶ TAVERNIER, J.-B. *Travels in India*.

⁷ DANI, A. H. *Dacca: A Record of its Changing Fortune*; KARIM, A. *Dacca: The Mughal Capital*.

⁸ DANI, A. H. *Dacca: A Record of its Changing Fortune*; HASAN, S. M. *Muslim Monuments of Bangladesh*.

⁹ HASAN, S., SHARIF, A. Dhaka. In CHOWDHURI, A. M. (ed.). *History of Bangladesh Sultanate and Mughal Periods (c. 1200 to 1800 CE)*; MUSA, Md. A. *History of Dhaka through Inscription and Architecture (A Portrait of the Sultanate Period)*.

¹⁰ HOSSAIN, M. S. Strategies to integrate the Mughal settlements in Old Dhaka. In *Frontiers of Architectural Research*; RAHMAN, M. M., ZAMAN, M. K. B., HAFIZ, R. Translating text into space for mapping the past territory of a city: a study on spatial development of Dhaka during Mughal period. In *City, Territory and Architecture*.

But these assumptions and descriptions often show an absence of interpretation of material culture in a theoretical framework appropriate for archaeological research. This is primarily because of the paucity of archaeological evidence and a lack of training in archaeological data analysis. Most of the scholars who previously attempted to study Mughal Dhaka were either historians,¹¹ or architects.¹² They certainly did not have training in explaining material culture. Moreover, present-day Dhaka stands on Mughal Dhaka and so, except for architectural remains including surviving mosques, tombs, a fortress, and two ruined caravanserais, all evidence of Mughal Dhaka has disappeared forever and made it a difficult task to identify Jahangirnagar or Mughal Dhaka on the basis of archaeological evidence. However, this research does not seek to challenge the accepted narrative of Dhaka as the capital of Mughal Bengal; rather it is an attempt to explore the centrality of Dhaka based on archaeological and historical sources by applying a modified version of the theoretical framework called Central Place Theory.

The primary aim of this research is to assess the centrality of Mughal Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar based on a modified version of Christaller's Central Place Theory¹³ by using archaeological and historical data sources. This research attempts to determine whether the historical and archaeological data sources refute, support, and/or redefine the already established status of Mughal Dhaka in conventional historical narratives. For the purposes of this research, we have considered indicator-based parameters, such as the presence of fortifications, the presence of external trade confirmed by imported products, the application of gold and silver and other precious metals in making precious objects, the presence of rich burials (i.e. tombs), and the presence of adequate transportation of a central place as proposed by Kimmig¹⁴ and function-based parameters, such as power, trade, security, cult, and production as outlined by Gringmuth-Dallmer¹⁵ after modifying Christaller's Central Place Theory to fit archaeological research. Along with the aforementioned parameters, the site rank or site-based hierarchy of the archaeological sites has been taken into consideration to determine the centrality of a place in its hinterland zone.

¹¹ Such as KARIM, A. *Dacca: The Mughal Capital*.

¹² Such as HOSSAIN, M. S. Strategies to integrate the Mughal settlements in Old Dhaka. In *Frontiers of Architectural Research*.

¹³ CHRISTALLER, W. *Central Places in Southern Germany*.

¹⁴ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H., HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*.

¹⁵ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

The Mughal history of Bengal (1576 – 1765 CE) began with the conquest of Tanda¹⁶ with the defeat of the last independent Sultan of Bengal, Daud Khan Karrani, at the battle of Rajmahal in 1576 CE by the imperial army of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556 – 1605 CE). Though the *Baro Bhuiyans*¹⁷ had political jurisdiction over most of eastern Bengal until 1612 CE, the conquest of Tanda in 1576 CE is considered as the benchmark of the commencement of Mughal political dominance in Bengal. From then on, the Mughals continued their administrative authority over Bengal until 1765 CE when *Nawab* Mir Qasim was defeated, and handed over the *Diwani*¹⁸ authority to the English East India Company. Thus, the defeat of *Nawab* Mir Qasim at the battle of Buxer in 1765 CE is considered the culmination of Mughal domination in Bengal.

The settlement history of Dhaka goes back to before the arrival of Mughals. But owing to insufficient archaeological evidences, it is somewhat problematic to claim its centrality in the region. Though careful analysis of epigraphic and archaeological sources¹⁹ suggests that Dhaka enjoyed administrative position in the region to some extent before the Mughal period, this cannot be stated with certainty because of the fragmentary nature of other archaeological evidence (i.e. artefacts, and/or features). It is generally accepted that Dhaka began its rise to become the centre of authority when *Subehdar* Islam Khan moved to Dhaka in 1610 CE and officially transferred the capital of Mughal Subah-i-Bangalah from Rajmahal to Dhaka. From then on Dhaka enjoyed political and economic dominance until the seat of the provincial administration was transferred to Murhsidabad in 1717 CE by *Nawab* Murhsid Quli Khan. Though the capital was moved from Dhaka, it did not lose its status as an important administrative centre until the defeat of *Nawab* Siraj by the English East India Company at the battle of Plassey in 1757 CE. After obtaining *Diwani* from the Mughals in 1765 CE, the English East India Company made Kolkata the principal seat of their newly acquired territory, the Bengal Presidency. Consequently Dhaka finally lost its pre-eminent position in administration though it did not lose its central

¹⁶ Tanda was the capital of *Subah-i-Bangalah* situated in West Bengal of India. Currently, there is no trace of Tanda except in some historical sources.

¹⁷ The *Baro Bhuiyans* were a group of *Zamindars*, or landowners (feudal) of Afghan and native origin who repeatedly posed a threat to the Mughal occupation in Bengal. Musa Khan, a landowner (feudal) of Afghan origin, was the most notable among the *Baro Bhuiyans*.

¹⁸ After obtaining *Diwani* authority or the revenue administration of *Subah-i-Bangalah*, the English East India Company literally became the authority in Bengal province.

¹⁹ HOQUE, Md. M. ঢাকার প্রাচীন ইতিহাসঃ একটি প্রত্নতাত্ত্বিক পর্যালোচনা [History of Ancient Dhaka: an archaeological interpretation]. In *Pratnatattva*; HASAN, S., SHARIF, A. Dhaka. In CHOWDHURI, A. M. (ed.). *History of Bangladesh: Sultanate and Mughal Periods (c. 1200 to 1800 CE)*.

position in trade and commerce in the region. However, for most of the British colonial period (i.e. from 1765 to 1947 CE) in Bengal, Dhaka did not enjoy important administrative status except for six years when it became the capital of Eastern Bengal and Assam province between 1905 and 1911. But the union of Bengal in 1911 resulted in loosing its central position in the region. After 1947, it became the provincial centre of East Pakistan under the Pakistan colonial administration. Finally, the glorious victory in the war of liberation in 1971 made Dhaka the capital of a newly independent Bangladesh, and since then it has enjoyed the status of centrality in all aspects (e.g. political, economic, cultural, etc.) in the region.

Space has always been an area of interest among archaeologists, particularly those interested in settlement pattern study. Among the various concepts of spatial analysis available to archaeologists, Central Place Theory (CPT) is one which was primarily developed for the discipline of geography to analyse urban space, and to evaluate the size and distribution of cities in a given region. CPT is attributed to the German geographer Walter Christaller.²⁰ Despite the theory having been abandoned in geography in the 1980s, it is now being applied in archaeological research.²¹ In Bangladesh, settlement pattern study is a comparatively new area of interest in archaeological research, in which concepts such as network analysis,²² central place theory²³ have been applied recently. Previously, Rahman²⁴ used the concept of central place for comprehending the centrality of an early historic archaeological site known as *Mahasthangarh*. In our research, we intend to assess the centrality of an area as well as explore the effectiveness of some parameters of two modified versions²⁵ of Christaller's Central Place Theory in a medieval urban setting in Bangladesh.

²⁰ CHRISTALLER, W. *Central Places in Southern Germany*.

²¹ NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn*; RAHMAN, Md. Rifat-Ur. Central Place Aspects in Archaeology: A study of archaeological site in Mahasthangarh, Bangladesh. In *IJRHAL*; COMBER, M. Central Places in a Rural Archaeological Landscape. In *Journal of the North Atlantic*.

²² SEN, S. Landscape Contexts of the Early Mediaeval Settlements in Varendri/Gauda: An Outline on the Basis of Total Surveying and Excavations in Dinajpur-Joypurhat Districts, Bangladesh. In *Pratnasamiksha*.

²³ RAHMAN, Md. Rifat-Ur. Central Place Aspects in Archaeology: A study of archaeological site in Mahasthangarh, Bangladesh. In *IJRHAL*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H., HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*;

The concept of central place is an innovation by the German geographer Walter Christaller. His aim was to explain the settlement pattern of Southern Germany.²⁶ His Central Place Theory was developed for economic reasons in which a central place could provide goods and/or services to the population living in the surrounding territory, and the population could have physical, financial, and political access to the goods and/or services provided by a central place. His Central Place Theory rests on the idea of *centrality* that claims an area's relative importance compare to its hinterland zone. In this context, the term "importance" refers to the degree to which an area exercises central functions. Christaller's definition of *centrality* of an area is based on its central functions. According to him, "a place deserves the designation center only when it actually performs the function of a center"²⁷. The functions of a centre, according to King,²⁸ include the activities demanded by the people living in rural areas around the central place. In this sense, a central place acts as a service centre for the people living around the central place. King²⁹ also mentions some functions of a central place, such as selling daily necessities (i.e. grocery and food), selling clothes, hardware, etc., providing healthcare services, providing social and cultural services (e.g. education, recreation, etc.), and so on. However, a number of factors play a role in making a place the central place of a region. According to Christaller,³⁰ these factors include its economic importance in the region, modes of transportation, topography, soil fertility, and mineral abundance in the region.

Christaller's concept of centrality³¹ is not readily applicable in archaeology for identifying a place as the central place of a region, so his concept of centrality has been modified to fit archaeological research. For example, unlike Christaller, Kimmig,³² after modifying Christaller's central place theory, has

GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

²⁶ CHRISTALLER, W. *Central Places in Southern Germany*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁸ KING, L. K. *Central Place Theory*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ CHRISTALLER, W. *Central Places in Southern Germany*.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H. and HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*; as cited in NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn*.

proposed a set of indicators to identify the centrality of a place. These indicators, according to Kimmig,³³ are:

1. Presence of fortifications,
2. Presence of external trade confirmed by imported products,
3. Application of gold and silver, and other precious metals in making precious objects,
4. Presence of rich burials (i.e. tombs), and
5. Presence of adequate transportation.

On the other hand, Gringmuth-Dallmer,³⁴ like Christaller, stresses functions in order to identify the centrality of a place. Gringmuth-Dallmer³⁵ has further outlined a list of functions, i.e. power, trade, security, cult and production. However, the functions proposed by Gringmuth-Dallmer do, in fact, corroborate Kimmig's indicators to identify the central place: imported objects indicate an important trade function, sophisticated burials specify power (both economic and administrative) and authority, fortifications point to security as well as administrative authority. Therefore, the presence of both indicators and functions in an area can confirm its status as the central place in a given region as well as assess the centrality in the region.

Christaller's modified version of Central Place Theory has been used in different fields of archaeological research.³⁶ However, Nakoinz³⁷ has proposed 5 different fields in which central place theory can be adopted, such as:

1. Identification of central places
2. Reconstruction of territories
3. Reconstruction of hierarchies between different central places

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*; as cited in NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn.*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn*; NAKOINZ, O. Models of Centrality. In *Journal for Ancient Studies*, Vol 3; COMBER, M. Central Places in a Rural Archaeological Landscape. In *Journal of the North Atlantic*.

³⁷ NAKOINZ, O. Models of Centrality. In *Journal for Ancient Studies*.

4. Process of centralization
5. Cybernetics of settlement systems.

In this research we have chosen one of the five fields: identification of central places. And, the modified versions of Christaller's theory of central place presented by Kimmig³⁸ and Gringmuth-Dallmer³⁹ have been applied to comprehend the centrality of Jahangirnagar or Mughal Dhaka.

While commenting on the significance of the study of both history and archaeology Salles and Alam commented "... that archaeology cannot be understood without the help of historical records, and that history cannot be reconstructed without comprehensive interpretation of the archaeological data".⁴⁰ Therefore, for comprehending the centrality of Jahangirnagar or Mughal Dhaka, along with historical descriptions, a multilayered framework has been adopted, based on two modified versions of Christaller's Central Place Theory⁴¹ presented by Kimmig⁴² and Gringmuth-Dallmer⁴³ by Nakoinz.⁴⁴ Also, the site hierarchy or site rank of the archaeological sites dated to Mughal period has been adopted to define the status of Dhaka as a central place in the region.

First, the list of indicators proposed by Kimmig⁴⁵ mentioned earlier has been taken into consideration. Four indicators, such as the presence of fortifications, the presence of rich burials, the presence of adequate transportation and the presence of external trade confirmed by imported products from the proposed list have been successfully corroborated by our archaeological data. Though Bangladesh National Museum, Lalbagh Fort Museum and some private

³⁸ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H., HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*.

³⁹ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

⁴⁰ SALLES, J.-F., ALAM, Md. Shofiqul. The Archaeology of Mahasthan: Historical and Environmental Perspectives. In ALAM, Md. Shofiqul, SALLES, J.-F. (eds.). *First Interim Report 1993 – 1999: France-Bangladesh joint venture excavations at Mahasthangarh*, p. 14.

⁴¹ CHRISTALLER, W. *Central Places in Southern Germany*.

⁴² KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H., HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*.

⁴³ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

⁴⁴ NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn*.

⁴⁵ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H., HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*.

collections have on display objects made of precious metals dated to the Mughal period, because of the limited access to the museums and private collections, we could not include the indicator ‘application of gold and silver, and other precious metals in making precious objects’ in our research. But a previous personal visit to the museums and private collection gives us an insight in Kimmig’s proposed indicator ‘application of gold and silver, and other precious metals in making precious objects’.

Second, the list of functions of a central place as proposed by Gringmuth-Dallmer⁴⁶ has been considered to comprehend the centrality of Dhaka. Collected archaeological data correlate with four proposed functions (i.e. power, trade, security, and cult).

Third, site rank has been taken into consideration to determine the centrality of a place. Conventionally, site rank, or site hierarchy, is defined by the size and population of a site.⁴⁷ But since human intervention has altered the size of the archaeological sites in the area studied, it is not possible to use size as a baseline data to determine the rank of the archaeological site. Instead, we have used the official and social position of the builders of the architecture (e.g. mosques, forts, palaces, etc.), or the person who is resting in the tombs to determine the site rank. The site rank has been defined in a 3-tier hierarchy system; Rank 1: monuments constructed by or tombs for higher ranking officials, such as governors, and/or family members; Rank 2: monuments constructed by or tombs for comparatively middle rank officials, such as officials other than governors; Rank 3: monuments constructed by or tombs for lower ranking officials, and/or ordinary people.

We have retrieved data of diverse types including spatial data (or site locations), site rank, site function, and site chronology from varying sources, such as historical narratives, government records, inscriptions, archaeological sites, or historical monuments, old sketches, or paintings, old photographs, old maps, open-access satellite images etc.

Locational data of the archaeological sites have been extrapolated by using a hand-held GPS receiver. We have also used open-access satellite imagery (i.e. Google Earth images) to capture locational data when there are no physical remains left. In such cases we have inferred probable location from different textual sources, such as historical references, government records, old photographs-paintings-drawings, epigraphy, old maps, etc. Also, we have analysed the placenames to retrieve the spatial data of the archaeological sites.

⁴⁶ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

⁴⁷ DUFFY, P. R. Site Size Hierarchy in Middle-Range Societies. In *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*.

Defining site rank is difficult when supporting data is not adequate. One way to define site rank is size and population. But since encroachment has altered the size of the site, it is not possible to use size as a baseline data to determine the rank of the site. Instead, we have used epigraphic and historical references. Fortunately, a fair number of Arabic and Persian inscriptions dated to the Mughal period have been recovered from many sites (from mosques and tombs particularly). These inscriptions have also mentioned the official, and/or social position of the builders of the mosques, or the person who is buried in the tombs. Based on this data source (i.e. inscriptions), it is possible to determine the rank of the archaeological site. Similar to the epigraphic sources, historical references, such as official records, travellers' accounts, etc. also provide information to determine the rank of the site.

Site function is an important aspect for assessing the centrality of an area in a region, and also to infer the social complexity of the population of the region. We have recorded diverse functions of the sites including fortification, administration, trade, cult, burial, etc. Both epigraphic sources and historical references have provided data related to site functions. Some of the sites had more than one function. Often mosques were built with space for commercial activities, such as the Khan Mohammad Mridha mosque which had space for shops from which the mosque maintained its daily expenditure.

For recording the chronology of the sites, we have particularly relied on the corpus of epigraphs⁴⁸ along with historical references,⁴⁹ and the stylistic understanding of the monuments.⁵⁰ We have mentioned calendar age wherever possible (based on epigraphs); otherwise, we have used century to reference the age of the site.

Evolving from a conglomeration of a few hamlets dedicated to different professional groups (e.g. weavers, conch shell cutters, fishermen, milkmen, carpenters, etc.) Dhaka became the capital of Bengal during the Mughal period. It has had all the necessary natural resources (e.g. water-based transportation, natural fortification, agricultural land, etc.) to serve an administrative and economic centre. That is why we observe that the Imperial Mughals chose Dhaka as the capital of their most resourceful *Subah* of their empire. The once-wide Buriganga river, on the bank of which Dhaka stands, connected the capital with two major river-based commercial networks (i.e. the Ganga, and Brahmaputra river networks) along with providing quick passage to the vulnerable *Bhati* (i.e. East Bengal) to fight against the powerful *Baro Bhuiyan*

⁴⁸ KARIM, A. *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*.

⁴⁹ NATHAN, M. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa during the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan*.

⁵⁰ HASAN, S. M. *Muslim Monuments of Bangladesh*.

adversary. A woodland to the north, and the network of rivers enclosing Dhaka on all sides provided the Mughals with natural fortifications against any attempt at subjugating Dhaka by their enemy. The vast plain, despite the fear of flooding and consequent devastation of crops, acted as the lifeline of the agrarian economy of Subah-i-Bangalah. The numerous canals that once crisscrossed the city Dhaka provided the facility to move people and products not only within the city but also to other parts of the *Subah* by connecting Dhaka with the major river-based trade networks (i.e. the Ganga and Brahmaputra river networks). The land of Subah-i-Bangalah or Bengal used to provide the maximum revenue during the Mughal, and subsequent British Colonial period. Therefore, Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar truly became the centre of the Subah-i-Bangalah during the Mughal period.

Being the centre of Bengal, Dhaka attracted people not only from the Muslim world, but also from the rest of the world. Along with the Turks, Afghans, and Persians, merchants from the non-Muslim world (i.e. Europe) also came to Dhaka to seek their fortune. Among the Europeans, the Portuguese were the first to come to Dhaka as missionaries and merchants and were then followed by the Armenians, Dutch, English, French, and Greeks. While the Turks, Afghans and Persians worked in the Mughal administration, the Europeans, on the other hand, engaged in economic activities. At one point in the past, Dhaka became a true cosmopolitan city.

The Mughals were great builders. They beautified their cities with beautiful architecture. Like other Mughal cities (e.g. Old Delhi, Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, etc.) in India, they constructed magnificent mosques, tombs, palaces, forts, bridges, marketplaces, etc. in Dhaka as it was the capital of the province of Bengal. Also, the Turks, Afghans and Persians worked in the Mughal administration commissioned many splendid monuments in Dhaka. Along with them, the early European merchants, and missionaries constructed Kuthi,⁵¹ and a number of churches. Many of these early immigrants (i.e. Muslims, and non-Muslims) died in Dhaka and were buried in rich tombs. Therefore, the old mosques, tombs, palaces, forts, bridges, marketplaces constructed by the Mughals, Greeks, English and Armenians are reminders of the past which clearly indicate the centrality of Dhaka in the Mughal period. The historical references, such as the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*⁵², and travellers' descriptions, such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's travel description⁵³ describe Dhaka or Jahangirnagar as the centre of Subah-i-Bangalah. But it is yet to be examined

⁵¹ The European trade centre was called Kuthi.

⁵² NATHAN, M. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa during the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan.*

⁵³ TAVERNIER, J.-B. *Travels in India.*

with the aid of archaeological evidence. In this analysis, we will attempt to assess the centrality of Dhaka based on the archaeological evidence with the help of a modified version of Central Place Theory. For assessing this centrality we have considered Kimmig's⁵⁴ indicator-based concept of centrality and Gringmuth-Dallmer's⁵⁵ function-based concept of centrality and the site rank method.

There are 138 archaeological sites (see Table 1) of varying types including a fort, palace, audience hall, Hammamkhana,⁵⁶ Katra,⁵⁷ a bridge, marketplace, mosque, church, Kuthi and tomb have all been found in Dhaka dated to the Mughal period (1576 – 1765 CE). Though time has taken its toll, a good number of these monuments are still standing and occasionally being used for different purposes from the one intended one: Boro Katra, once used as a caravanserai, is now being used as a *madrassa*, or Islamic religious education institute.

Among the five indicators proposed by Kimmig⁵⁸, four indicators have been analysed. The presence of fortification has been confirmed by the occurrence of forts; the presence of rich burials is indicated by the construction of beautiful tombs; bridges over the canal and river, and landing platforms on the bank of the Buriganga river confirm the presence of adequate transportation; and the presence of non-local building materials (i.e. stone) which were imported from outside of the region indicates the presence of external trade in Mughal Dhaka. Both mosques and tombs have been found with stone as building material. Since there was no stone quarry in Bengal, stone had been collected from different parts of India, and transported to Dhaka for constructing the monuments. Monuments with stone made architectural members, thereby indicating the presence of important external trade. The remaining indicator, the 'application of gold and silver, and other precious metals in making precious objects' could have been taken into consideration in our research if we had access to cultural artefacts that might have given information about it. The

⁵⁴ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H. and HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*.

⁵⁵ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

⁵⁶ A Turkish bath, it was a sign of royal status.

⁵⁷ Katra was initially constructed as a palace and later transformed into a caravanserai to provide board and lodging to traders.

⁵⁸ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H. and HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*; as cited in NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn*.

cultural artefacts found by the limited excavations that have taken place in Dhaka are stored and displayed in the museums, and access to these items is limited. However, among 138 archaeological sites of Dhaka (see Table 1), 45 sites conform to Kimmig's proposed indicators for a central place in a region. Therefore, it can be stated with some degree of certainty that Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar enjoyed a central position in the region during the Mughal period.

Table 2: List of indicators mentioned by Kimmig⁵⁹

Sl.	Type of Indicator	Number of sites
1.	Presence of fortifications	6
2.	Presence of external trade confirmed by imported products	11
3.	Application of gold and silver and other precious metals in making precious objects	Not analysed
4.	Presence of rich burials (i.e. tombs)	19
5.	Presence of adequate transportation	9

The presence of the indicators of a central place as mentioned by Kimmig confirms the centrality of Dhaka during the Mughal period. There were 5 forts built in Dhaka for protecting the population of Dhaka from the *Magh* raiders and Portuguese pirates. Frequently the *Magh* raiders and Portuguese pirates vandalized Dhaka and its adjacent region before the Mughals established the principal seat of the Subah-i-Bangalah in Dhaka. After making Dhaka the capital of their province, the Mughals strengthened a few pre-Mughal forts (i.e. Beg Murader Fort 1, Beg Murader Fort 2, and Old Fort), as well as constructing two new forts (i.e. Lalbagh Fort, and Zinzira Fort), and a royal elephant stable (i.e. Pilkhana) These forts and the royal elephant stable represent the indicator 'presence of fortifications' of a central place.

For constructing forts, palaces, mosques, and tombs, the Mughals imported expensive building materials (i.e. granite, basalt, and marble). Since there was no stone quarry in Bengal, stone was imported from outside of Bengal. Also,

⁵⁹ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H. and HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*; as cited in NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School "Human Development in Landscapes" (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn.*

the Mughals used various luxury products (e.g. Chinese porcelain) which was imported from outside of Bengal. For maintaining economic activities, the Mughals constructed a number of *bazars* (or marketplaces) in Dhaka. Chawkbazar was a famous marketplace of Dhaka which was also called Shahi Bazar (or imperial marketplace). Many imported and luxury products were sold in Chawkbazar. Therefore, the use of stone in constructing buildings as well as the presence of an imperial marketplace in Dhaka denote the indicator ‘presence of external trade confirmed by imported products’.

After transferring the capital of Subah-i-Bangalah from Rajmahal to Dhaka, many Mughal administrative officials came to Dhaka along with their family members. Some of the higher administrative officials were relatives of the Mughal emperor. For an example, *Subehdar* or Governor of Bengal Shaista Khan was a maternal uncle of Emperor Aurangzeb. During their official tenure, if any Mughal administrative official or any family member of a Mughal administrative official died in Dhaka, he/she would be buried in Dhaka. For example, the first *Subehdar* of Bengal Islam Khan Chisti died in Dhaka and was buried in Badhshahi Bagicha (i.e. the Imperial Garden). Also, Pari Bibi, the beloved daughter of the most notable *Subehdar* Shaista Khan died in Dhaka and was buried in Lalbagh Fort. Often the family members constructed beautiful and rich tombs over the grave of the deceased. For example, the tomb of Pari Bibi was built by her father the *Subehdar* Shaista Khan, for which Shaista Khan imported expensive building materials from outside of Bengal. These tombs therefore represent the indicator ‘presence of rich burials’ as mentioned by Kimmig.⁶⁰

Dhaka was once crisscrossed by canals, and surrounded by rivers. These canals and rivers played a primary role in communication within the city as well as with the surrounding regions. These canals were used to move both people and products within the city. In addition the rivers were used to maintain trade, with two river-based trade networks (i.e. the Ganga and Brahmaputra river-based trade networks). Also, the Mughals constructed a royal road across the city which was used for both commercial and military purposes. Moreover, a number of bridges (e.g. Hayat Beparir Bridge, or Narinda Bridge, Khawaja Malik Ambar-er Bridge) were built over the canals running through the city for transportation. These bridges and royal road match the indicator ‘presence of adequate transportation’ proposed by Kimmig.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

In order to understand the centrality of Mughal Dhaka we have analysed the functions of archaeological sites proposed by Gringmuth-Dallmer⁶², and out of five functions we have investigated four functions; ‘power’, ‘trade’, ‘security;’ and ‘cult’. It is important to mention here that the function ‘cult’ has been investigated by the data extrapolated from religious sites (i.e. mosques and tombs), and owing to the lack of archaeological data we could not study the function ‘production’. Nevertheless, British colonial records⁶³ frequently mention muslin⁶⁴, which was one of the most luxurious commodities produced in Bengal since the remote past. Dhaka was to become the centre of production as the commodity was often called *Dhakai Muslin* (i.e., muslin produced in Dhaka). According to Taifoor,⁶⁵ a number of muslin factories were established in the Tantipara area⁶⁶ of Dhaka. In fact, the European *Kuthis* were established in Dhaka and other parts of Bengal to collect and stored various commodities including muslin, which were later exported to other parts of the world. However, out of 138 archaeological sites of Dhaka (see Table 1), 135 sites fulfil all functions except ‘production’, and some sites attest more than one function; the mosque with a shop indicate both ‘cult’ and ‘trade’; and on the other hand, forts, a palace, a *Hammamkhana* and a tomb indicate ‘power’; a bridge, shop, marketplace, *Katra*, *Kuthi* indicate ‘trade’; forts indicate ‘security’; and mosques without a shop indicate ‘cult’. Thus, the archaeological sites representing different functions proposed by Gringmuth-Dallmer⁶⁷ also prove Dhaka to be the central place in the region during the Mughal period.

⁶² GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

⁶³ WISE, J. *Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of Eastern Bengal*.

⁶⁴ A very delicate and fine cotton commodity for which Bengal used to be famous in the ancient world.

⁶⁵ TAIFOOR, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: a short historical narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dacca* [2nd edition].

⁶⁶ An area where the weaver community used to live even before the arrival of the Mughals.

⁶⁷ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*.

Table 3: List of functions mentioned by Gringmuth-Dallmer⁶⁸

Sl.	Type of Function	Number of sites
1.	Power	41
2.	Trade	17
3.	Security	16
4.	Cult	82
5.	Production	Not analysed

A survey of the functions of a central place and its relation to the archaeological sites has been made by Nakoinz.⁶⁹ According to him, “for detecting central functions we can use the same finds and features which were used as indicators of princely sites in a traditional hermeneutic approach. For example, trade is indicated by imports, power by rich tombs and security by fortifications”.⁷⁰ Among the different archaeological sites of Dhaka, forts-royal elephant stable-palace-*hammamkhana*-gateway-*darbar* khana-royal road-tomb represent the presence of the function ‘security’, and ‘power’; bridge-marketplace-royal road-landing platform-European trading centre denote the presence of the function ‘trade’; and the large number of mosques-Hindu temples-Sikh temples & monastery attest the presence of the function ‘cult’ in Dhaka. Therefore, the presence of the functions of a central place as proposed by Gringmuth-Dallmer⁷¹ in Dhaka clearly indicates the centrality of Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar in the region during the Mughal period.

The concept of site rank, or site hierarchy also sheds light on the centrality of an area in a given region. A considerable number of archaeological sites

⁶⁸ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*; as cited in NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School “Human Development in Landscapes” (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn.*

⁶⁹ NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School “Human Development in Landscapes” (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁷¹ GRINGMUTH-DALLMER, E. Cultural Landscape Patterns and Settlement Systems. In *Settlement Research*; as cited in NAKOINZ, O. Concepts of Central Place Research in Archaeology. In *Kiel Graduate School “Human Development in Landscapes” (Hrsg.), Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology, Bonn.*

showing the characteristics of higher rank (i.e. rank 1) indicates the centrality of the area in a given region. The archaeological sites of Dhaka, based on site rank, or site hierarchy, also exhibit the centrality of Dhaka during the Mughal period. Among 138 archaeological sites (see Table 1), 34 sites display features of rank 1 (i.e. monuments constructed or occupied either by the *Subehdar*, or by family member of the *Subehdar*; 20 sites display features of rank 2 (i.e., monuments constructed, or occupied by the higher government officials (e.g., the *diwan* or chief revenue administrator); and 35 sites display features of rank 3 (i.e., monuments constructed or occupied by lower administrative officials, and/or ordinary people).

After transferring the provincial headquarters to Dhaka from Rajmahal in 1610 CE, the *Subehdars* along with their family members came and resided in Dhaka. Moreover, a well-organized administrative cadre system was present in Dhaka for running the provincial administration. Conventionally, higher administrative positions in the provincial government (e.g. *Subehdars*, or governors) were occupied by officials who were appointed by the emperor himself, and often the family members (i.e. son, uncle, nephew, cousin) of the emperor were appointed to these higher positions, such as *subehdar* Shaista Khan, who was an uncle of Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658 – 1707 CE). They (the emperor's family members) often commissioned the construction of beautiful mosques, palaces, tombs to display their authority and positions in the capital. The presence of a considerable number of archaeological sites of rank 1 (i.e. 34 sites) thus indicates the centrality of Dhaka during the Mughal period.

This research came up against some limitations especially in data collection. During the fieldwork we faced difficulties in locating some historic monuments given in the list (see Table 1). Though the historical narratives and previous survey records⁷² inform us about the presence of ancient monuments (e.g. a fort, mosque, tomb, etc.) in Dhaka, a number of historic monuments have been lost for anthropogenic and natural reasons. Many historic monuments from the Mughal period have been completely demolished for constructing new buildings, or partially altered to transform the use of the monuments. Also, some monuments, such as Beg Murader Fort 1, Beg Murader Fort 2, and *Pustha* Palace have been washed away due to the change of the course of the Buriganga river on which these monuments once stood. Therefore, the original locations of these monuments could not be found on the ground.

On the other hand, a university-based committee named the Dhaka Architectural Book Preparation Committee has conducted a survey to locate the

⁷² DEPARTMENT, Public Works. *Revised List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal, 1886.*

old monuments of Dhaka. The committee has also published a list⁷³ of the Mughal mosques which were hitherto unknown. They prepared the list based on some newly discovered Arabic and Persian inscriptions. Though a complete translation of these inscriptions is not yet available, we have managed to collect some information about some 35 mosques. But due to the unavailability of a complete translation of these inscriptions, we could not deduce some valuable information about these 35 monuments, such as site rank, or hierarchy, information necessary to comprehend Kimmig's⁷⁴ proposed indicator. Therefore, a limitation has become inevitable in the analysis.

Dhaka as the capital of Bangladesh has enjoyed a central status in the region since at least the beginning of the 17th century CE. As today, during the Mughal period it provided central services and goods as in Christaller's Central Place Theory. Careful analysis of archaeological sites and historical description evidently supports the modified versions of centrality presented by Kimmig and Gringmuth-Dallmer. Almost all the archaeological sites of the Mughal period (1576 – 1765 CE) conform to the indicators and functions of a central place in a hinterland area. Therefore, it can now be said with greater confidence that Dhaka alias Jahangirnagar was the central place in the region during the Mughal era.

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⁷³ DHAKA, Architectural Book Preparation Committee. *ঢাকার নিখোঁজ শিলালিপি* [Lost Inscriptions of Dhaka].

⁷⁴ KIMMIG, W. Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen. In OTTO, K. H., HERMANN, J. (eds.). *Siedlung, Burg und Stadt. Studien zu ihren Anfängen*.

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