

CHAPTER-IV

GROWTH OF OTHER INDUSTRIES

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JUTE PRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter the researcher has dealt with economic developments with regards to tea plantation industry and the inauguration of Railways. North Bengal had great commercial prospects. The introduction of Railways opened the Indian markets to the International sphere. As a result traditional mode of cultivation had been superseded by advanced and scientific method of cultivation. It paved the path for the steady growth of capitalistic entrepreneurship with regards to various commercial crops. Here attempt has been made to examine the production and trade of jute, tobacco, rice and rice mills and the production of timber and bamboo in the area under study. While narrating these entire forces attempt has also been made the economic importance of these produces and the attitude and policy of the Colonial Government in this regard.

Jute is an important non foodgrain commercial crop which occupies a key place in the economy of the Eastern States of India namely West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa. During the Colonial rule in India due to the commercialization of agriculture, jute became an important cash crop. Regarding jute George Blyn remarked that in Greater Bengal the main non-foodgrain crop about half of the total was jute, since virtually all the jute was grown in this region.¹ It should be mentioned that the first form of commercialization was associated with plantation agriculture, especially tea plantation of the Northern districts of Bengal. The second type of commercialization came to be known as “subsistence commercialization” or the ‘jute phase’. Under this jute version of commercialization, peasants in search of minimum subsistence level of living turned to intensive cash crops, mainly jute in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like that of other parts of Bengal, during the colonial rule, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, undivided Dinajpur and Rangpur (now in

Bangladesh) were familiar as important jute cultivating zone.² The agro-climatic situation of the Northern districts of Bengal helped this region to become an important jute cultivating zone. Commercial crops are more remunerative than foodgrains. As whole area of North Bengal was suitable for the cultivation of this cash crop, it became a principal cash crop of North Bengal. Prof. Sugata Bose reviews this jute phase in the following words: "Raising a cash-crop which promised a higher gross income seemed to the man of small holders the better bet for assuring subsistence in the early 20th century than growing insufficient quantities of rice.³ Due to the export of jute from India to Europe and with the growth of jute mills around Calcutta in the late 19th Century, jute cultivated area was extended in North Bengal. The opening of the Suez Cannel in 1869 and the growth of railway communications further stimulated the growth of market economy had great impact upon this cash crop.

Historical records show that this non-food grain agricultural crop known in India from ancient times. The word *patta* occurs in Manu and Mahabharata. Jute is also mentioned in Ain-i-Akbari and in the contemporary Bengali literature, Kavi Kankan Chandi by Mukundaram Chakraborty (1575 A.D.). It should be mentioned that the evidence of trade in jute cloth in the sixteen century in Bengal noticed by Jarret, the English translator of Ain-i-Akbari who identified sack-cloth (tat) with jute from the district of Rangpur and Mukundaram Chakraborty in his Kavikankan Chandi there were the references of both *nalita* the pot-herb and gunny bags made of jute.⁴ As early as the middle of the seventeenth century the European nations interested themselves very largely in the manufacture of canvas and cordage with fibres. Thus, in India during the reign of Jahangir soon after the embassy of Sir Thomas Roe, the East India Company was permitted by the Mughal government to establish a factory at Piple, twenty two miles from Balasore. The factory carried an extensive rope works and manufacture of fibre fabrics. But nothing of jute or jute made canvas or gunny cloth is found. It is also to mention that no only Sir Thomas Roe but in the earlier travels of Bernier, Fayrer, there

was no mention on jute and till 1766 jute did not occur in any part of the proceedings of the unpublished records of the government. The earliest record i.e. "commercial index to the proceedings, of the late Board of Trade, for 1796", in which mention is made of jute having been sent to the Hon'ble Court of Directors in more than one occasion. In this record it was mentioned that Dr. Roxburgh, an Englishman sent to England a bale of fibre prepared by himself from the bank of the produce of *Corchorus Capsularis*, which he described as "the jute of the natives". It should be mentioned that prior to Roxburgh in 1793, the company's officers had sent to England 100 tons of fibre under the name of *pat* and the court of Directors enclosed a report of the committee of warehouses stated that the fibre was superior in quality to any known in the trade. Thus the East India Company after establishing its stronghold in Bengal (1765) when found a good quality of fibre well appreciated in England tried to find out its prospects. Within a very few years i.e. in 1801 the commercial residents of Chittagong, Malda and Rangpur wrote to the Board of Directors about the prospects of the cultivation of this crop.⁵ Soon after that time the value of this fibre was immediately recognised and the expansion of trade of this crop has been constant and rapid. The modern jute industry of Bengal may be said to have had its origin in the year 1828. Because exportation to Europe was commenced in that year and 364 cwt of raw jute were sent to Europe for commercial purpose.⁶ After that event what is found that the British manufacturers started setting up jute mills in Dundee in Scotland in the 1830s and in the year 1833 raw jute exported to Europe was of 300 tonnes.⁷ But it is to be mentioned that though prior to the Britishers found commercial prospects of this crop locally its cultivation was not neglected. Though not extensively this crop was cultivated but for local use viz. for preparing gunny cloth, paper and various uses the crop was not unknown to the cultivators. In Dinajpur district paper was made by the local Mahomedans from jute. In this district there were between 80 to 100 families employed in making paper sufficient to meet the existing demand. The quality was very inferior and the people who made it required little or no capital usually carrying it

themselves to the markets, and the petty traders who brought it afterwards sold it by retail.⁸ Besides Dinajpur, Malda, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri also manufactured paper out of jute fibre.

Though the Indians were familiar with this non-food grain crop but it was not extensively cultivated in India till the beginning of 19th century. The Charter of 1833 had opened the way for import of capital from England and the arrival of the free traders had enhanced the prices of all most all Indian articles. Free trade wrought a further revolutionary change because British investors were very much interested to invest in different fields of economy of India. Thus with the participation of British investors in trade and agriculture a remarkable growth of trade in raw materials had to be seen and much more private capital had been invested in raw materials in Bengal. In agriculture certain specialized crops began to be grown not for consumption in the village but for sale in the national and international markets. Jute cultivation was profitable and the peasants cultivated it to meet their needs. It should be noted that to the Indian peasants, commercialization seemed a forced process. To meet the excessive land revenue demand of the state and high rates of interests charged by the moneylenders, the cultivator perforce had to rush a part of his cultivation for cash crop.⁹ In North Bengal the peasants preferred jute. Evidence shows that more than 90 percent of the total jute crop grown almost entirely in North and Eastern Bengal – was consigned overseas either in raw or in manufactured forms. From the last quarter of the 19th century for Colonial interest the Britishers inspired the cultivators extensively to cultivate jute due to the high demand of jute in Europe. For Colonial interest variety of experiments of jute were carried out in Rangpur and Jalpaiguri.¹⁰ There are less hazards in jute cultivation than the other crops. In consequence, eagerness among growers for jute cultivation had increased. It is found that acreage under jute in Bengal more than double between 1872-73 and 1899-1900.¹¹ The report of the Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar stated that jute trade was doubled in Cooch Behar in 1874 than 1872.¹² Different Officials records showed that jute cultivation extensively expanded in Rangpur, Dinajpur and

Malda in the late 19th century. Thus jute cultivation was expanding considerably in the Northern districts of Colonial Bengal year by year. Jute cultivation expanded and from the late 19th to the first half of the 20th century jute cultivation was smoothly continued in Bengal as well as North Bengal.

The expansion of Railway system ultimately widen the market for British goods in India, increased directly the demand for British manufactured in India and finally increased the flow of export of raw materials from India. It is the general opinion of the Economists that with the introduction of railways due to broader maker production of agricultural crops extended in a great extent. As the railways connecting Calcutta to the jute districts of North Bengal a sharp rise in the jute cultivation in North Bengal took place. It should be mentioned in this connection that Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri were the most important jute producing areas of North Bengal and the opening and expansion of railways in these areas jute became an important commercial cash crop of North Bengal. In this regard it is quite pertinent to mention that Haldibari was an important jute trading centre, Matigara, Galgalia and Aluabari were the important raw jute storage centres and Rajganj was also an important jute mart.¹³ With the introduction of railways jute producing areas were extended as it was easy to export and the peasants got a handsome profit from this cash crop.

It is to be mentioned that though jute occupied as valuable commercial cash crop in North Bengal, but prior to jute tobacco had also took an important place in the economy of North Bengal as a commercial non-food grain agricultural crop. Both W.W. Hunter and J.F. Gruning mentioned the economic value of tobacco cultivation and tobacco trade in North Bengal.¹⁴ In the eighty's of the eighteenth century when tobacco had already established as a profitable crop in North Bengal particularly in Cooch Behar, the cultivation of jute as a commercial crop was unknown to the people of that area. Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that in the list of several agricultural crops of Cooch Behar for

export and import putdown by Messieurs Merrer and Chauvet, the special commissioners of Cooch Behar appointed by the British Government did not mention jute at all.¹⁵ Thus as a commercial crop jute was latter introduced and to make it a commercial crop only to the credit of the Britishers in Bengal and North Bengal also. From the second half of the 19th century cultivation of jute as a commercial crop had been carried in Greater North Bengal and was extensively cultivated in Patna, Dinajpur, Purⁿia, Jalpaiguri, Bogra.¹⁶ According to the Report of Hem Chunder Kerr, the Deputy Magistrate on special duty, Calcutta that jute was moderately cultivated in Cooch Behar and Malda and from the time of Sikkim War the cultivation of jute was carried in Darjeeling and in Cooch Behar one fifth of the population engaged in jute cultivation.¹⁷ Thus it is clear that jute became an important commercial crop during the second half of the 19th century in North Bengal. It is now relevant to mention that the extensive jute cultivation in India particularly in Bengal presidency was not the outcome of indigenous needs; it was a creation from the pressure of an international event i.e. the Crimean War which took place in the year 1854. During the war time hemp was extensively used in England, but the Crimean War brought a ban on the export of hemp from Russia to England. Where upon the British traders and manufacturers concentrated on jute, another superior natural fibre which was very recently known to them. The demand of jute was increased in Europe also from the time of Napoleonic War to the World War-I.¹⁸ On the other hand according to the report of Roberts Finlow (1906) that though jute cultivation expanding considerably year by year but that was not sufficient to meet the demand of the international markets and at the sametime in other countries notably Java, French Indo-China and West Africa apparently successful efforts were being made to introduce the cultivation of jute. So, it was highly advised if possible to extend considerably the jute growing area in India.¹⁹ Thus, like other parts of India jute cultivating land was increased in Bengal and North Bengal also for Colonial needs. From a statistical report it is found that from 1900 to 1919 export of raw jute was considerably increased in India.²⁰ The rapid

demand of jute increased its demand as a cash crop in North Bengal and thus jute cultivation and jute trade considerably expanded in North Bengal.

Let us observe the jute production and jute trade of North Bengal during the concerned time period. During the Colonial rule Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and undivided Dinajpur were the major jute producing areas of North Bengal. From different official documents it is found that between 1872 to 1930 jute cultivation in undivided Dinajpur district expanded in a large scale. According to the Report of cultivation of and trade in jute in Bengal in 1872 the area under jute cultivating land in Dinajpur district (undivided) was 117,629 acres. In 1909-10 ninety two thousand acres were reported as being under jute in Dinajpur district and in 1930 the area under jute in Dinajpur was 73,000 acres.²¹ Jute was principally grown in the Thakurgaon sub-division, and also in parts of the Kotwali and Raiganj thanas and in the Chirirbandar out post of the undivided Dinajpur. Raiganj was the principal jute mart in Dinajpur District. F.W. Strong ascribed that the crop had been well known in the district for over a century and during 1909-10 there had been a market increased in the cultivation of this staple.²² Strong also remarked that Major Sherwill, the Revenue Surveyor, mentioned jute was quite one of the less important crops of Dinajpur and was used for local consumption such as making cordage, gunny bag, and even coarse cloth. Whatever Sherwill mentioned but it is not easy to deny that a considerable quantity of jute was exported from undivided Dinajpur.²³ From Dinajpur jute exported to foreign countries through Calcutta via Parbatipur.²⁴

As cultivation of jute was profitable than that of other crops, cultivation of jute gradually expanded in Jalpaiguri also. The most vital factor which influenced presents decision to cultivate jute was its high price. It was commented by Commissioner E.E. Lowis that, "it is on the whole a more profitable crop than rice and the rise in price since 1880 has been considerable at the sadar and in the interior."²⁵ The farmers had no problem in getting loan from the money lenders and the latter being

assured of getting back the advanced money had no hesitation in advancing loans at high interests to the jute cultivators. All these factors prompted jute cultivation in the Jalpaiguri district. J.F. Gruning stated that the cultivation of jute in the Jalpaiguri district, "has increased at a very rapid and the area under this crop has more than doubled in the six years between 1901-02 and 1907-08."²⁶ But in the list of the Manager of Baikunthapur to the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri in 1891 it was stated that in the regulated portion of the district particularly in Baikunthapur jute did not figure among the list of crops.²⁷ However, the most striking advancement of jute cultivation took place in the western Duars in 1895 when Sunder submitted his settlement report that the area under jute was only 6,620 acres and the crop was confined mainly in the Mainaguri Tehsil. But Gruning pointed out that in the regulation portion of the district the cultivation of jute began slowly but soon the cultivation was extended and it absorbed twenty-five percent of the land where Bhadoi rice used to grow.²⁸ Gruning also mentioned that between 1901-02 to 1907-08 due to the increased area under jute it decreased the area under rice from 637,000 acres to 631,600 acres and he also mentioned that in the district jute cultivation increased from 59,800 acres in 1901-02 to 125,500 acres in 1907-08.²⁹ The most important jute producing areas of Jalpaiguri were Mainaguri, Madarihat, Alipur tehsil and Rajganj block. It should be mentioned that the best variety of jute was grown in the Rajganj block but in the whole district the condition of fibre was good. Following the extensive jute cultivation there emerged many European and Indigenous jute farms in Jalpaiguri district.

The following tables show the average price of raw jute per maund in the districts of North Bengal and in Bengal in different period under study.

Price of Jute per maund for six years at Jalpaiguri

| Article | | 1884-85 | | | 1885-86 | | | 1886-87 | | | 1887-88 | | | 1888-89 | | | 1889-90 | | | Percentage of increase |
|---------|----------|---------|----|---|---------|----|---|---------|----|---|---------|----|---|---------|----|---|---------|----|---|------------------------|
| | | Rs. | As | P | |
| Jute | Trader 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 122 |
| | Trader 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 100 |
| | Trader 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 14 | 0 | 81 |

Source: No.2C dated Camp Maynaguri, the 3rd April, 1890. From D. Sunder, Esq. Settlement Officer, Western Dooars, Jalpaiguri, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, West Bengal State Archives.

Table : 2

Price of Jute per maund at Cooch Behar

| Average price per maund of jute for the decade ending | | | | | | | | Price per maund of jute in 1900 | |
|---|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|---------------------------------|----|
| 1870 | | 1880 | | 1890 | | 1900 | | | |
| Rs. | As | Rs. | As | Rs. | As | Rs. | As | Rs. | As |
| 4 | 8 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 0 |

Source : Harendra Narayan Choudhury, The Cooch Behar State and its land revenue settlement, 1903 Cooch Behar State Press, P.191

Table : 3

The average harvest prices of jute in Bengal

| Period | Rs. |
|---------|-----|
| 1911-12 | 7 |
| 1920-21 | 6 |
| 1921-22 | 9 |
| 1930-31 | 7 |
| 1931-32 | 5 |

Source: Report of the Indian Jute Mill Association for the year ended 31st December, 1949, Calcutta, p.116.

Cooch Behar was also an important jute cultivating zone and was extensively grown in the western portion of the state. Mekhliganj and Haldibari were the two important jute cultivating areas and jute trade centres of Cooch Behar. It is said that Mekhliganj takes its name from a fine jute fibres which were called mekhli. There was a great demand of fine golden jute fabric of Haldibari and Mekhliganj both in India and abroad. During 1872 the total area under jute production in Cooch Behar was 25000 acres and gradually its cultivation was extended.³⁰ According to the report of the Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar that jute trade was doubled within two years between 1874 and 1872 as it established an important cash crop in the economy of Cooch Behar. Commercialization also made impression to the economy of Malda and Darjeeling in respect of jute cultivation. In Malda the total area under jute in 1872 was 3500 acres and its cultivation gradually expanded in this district. G.E. Lambourn mentioned that during his time jute grew on a normal area of 30,000 acres approximately and the best quality of jute in Malda was known as poli jute grown in the low land of Gajol thana.³¹ G.E. Lambourn also mentioned that during his tenure jute trade had risen through riverine route in Malda. However, in Malda jute covers a comparatively small area and is not a very successful crop because the quality is very inferior to that of the other jute growing districts.³² Naxalbari, Kharibari, Matigara were the important jute cultivating areas of Darjeeling. O'Malley ascribed that the cultivation of jute increased largely since the advancement of the railway system of the transport which ensured cheaper costs of export of jute. Thus, it is found that due to commercialization of agriculture more or less every district of North Bengal produced jute.

The following table shows jute areas and jute production for the year 1872 and 1873 in North Bengal.

Table : 4

| District | Total area of arable land in acres | 1872 | | 1873 | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Area under Jute in acres | Yield of Jute in maunds | Area under jute in acres | Yield of Jute in maunds |
| Dinajpore | 1650400 | 117629 | 1764435 | - | - |
| Jalpaiguri | 1260800 | 50000 | 750000 | 50000 | 750000 |
| Cooch Behar | 600000 | 25000 | 375000 | 25000 | 375000 |
| Malda | 670080 | 3500 | 52500 | 3500 | 52500 |
| Darjeeling | 16462 | 1500 | 22500 | 1500 | 22500 |

Source: Report on the cultivation and trade in jute in Bengal, Hem Chunder Kerr, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1877, P.65.

Table: 4A

The following table illustrates jute area for the year 1907-08 to 1909-10, 1929-30 to 1930-31 and 1931-32 to 1932-33 in North Bengal

| Districts | 1907-08 to 1909-10 | 1929-30 to 1930-31 | 1931-32 to 1932-33 |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Area under jute in acres | Area under jute in acres | Area under jute in acres |
| Dinajpore | 92000 | 73000 | 41000 |
| Jalpaiguri | 125500 | 42000 | 26000 |
| Cooch Behar | - | 30100 to 31000 | 16000 |
| Malda | 30000 | 38000 | 16000 |
| Darjeeling | 3600 to 4000 | 4000 | 2000 |

Source :

- 1) F.W. Strong, Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Dinajpur, The Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1912, P-58
- 2) J.F. Gruning, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteer, Jalpaiguri, The Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1911, P-59
- 3) G.E. Lambourn, Bengal District Gazetteers, Malda, The Bengal Secretariat, Book Depot, Calcutta, 1918, P-43
- 4) Trisrota, A Bengal Weekly Published from Jalpaiguri, Editor, Suresh Chandra Pal, dt.12.7.1931 and 1.3.1932.

5) Department of Agriculture of Bengal, Agricultural Statistics of Bengal for 1907-08 and 1909-10, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909 and 1911 p.11 and p.13 respectively.

6) Bengal District Gazetteer, B. Volume, Malda District Statistics 1921-22 to 1930-31, Table VII, Part-II, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1933, p.7

7) Report of the Administration of Bengal, 1930-31 and 1931-32, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot 1932 and 1933, p.2 and p.2 respectively.

In 1872-73 Mr. Hem Chunder Kerr estimated the total area under jute in Bengal at about a million acres. Within twenty years, the area had increased to nearly two millions acres. With the turn of the century the area began to increase, reaching the record figure of 3.88 million of acres in 1907-08.³³ From the table different records show that the area under jute had increased vigorously and the period 1907-08 to 1909-10 was the peak period of jute in North Bengal also.

During colonial rule jute was the single most important item in India's export trade and East Bengal and North Bengal were the base for only source of jute. The government was interested for developing this cash crop. Experiments in the cultivation of jute were carried out on the lines indicated by the Inspector General of Agriculture.³⁴ Further, in the Budget of 1920-21 the government had taken measures for improving this cash crop in Eastern Bengal and North Bengal and the effort of the government met with remarkable success. In the budget of 1920-21 the scheme for the distribution of improve paddy and jute seed had been taken. The Agricultural Department of Bengal sold 2,070 maunds of jute seeds to the cultivators in 1920.³⁵ The Government also proposed to establish four new District Agricultural Farms, at a cost of Rs.1,10,000 for agricultural development.³⁶ Variety experiments of jute were carried out by the government at Burdwan, Faridpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri. Thus, from the beginning of the commercial cultivation and export of this non foodgrain crop reached its peak upto 1928-29 and during that time it also reached a high price level.³⁷

The following table shows the selling price of raw jute in Bengal between 1914 and 1929.

| Year | Rs. | Rate of influx |
|------|-----------|----------------|
| 1914 | 207775000 | 100 |
| 1921 | 265943000 | 127 |
| 1922 | 285000000 | 137 |
| 1923 | 310500000 | 149 |
| 1924 | 547391000 | 263 |
| 1925 | 836762000 | 402 |
| 1926 | 548955000 | 264 |
| 1927 | 512910000 | 246 |
| 1928 | 502734000 | 241 |
| 1929 | 446950000 | 215 |

Source: Bartir Pathe Bangali, Binoy Kumar Sarkar, Calcutta, 1934, P.37

According to the estimate of Binoy Kumar Sarkar, it is found that the selling prices of raw jute in Bengal in 1914 was Rs.20,77,75,000 and prior to the depression in 1925 was the peak period of jute price. In that year the selling price of raw jute was Rs.83,67,62,000. He fixed the rate of raw jute in Bengal Rs.100 for the base year 1914 and calculated the rate of influx prior to depression in 1929 was Rs.215.

Most of the raw jute and output of the industry was intended for export to Europe and other Oceanic Countries through seas by Calcutta Port. The Britishers established jute mills located on the banks of the river Hooghly connecting Bay of Bengal. Various European Companies engaged in the transport of jute from the jute districts to the port of Calcutta and the steamship companies carrying jute and jute goods from Calcutta to the various parts of the world.³⁸ The shipments were made from Calcutta mainly as a commission basis and under this system, goods were purchased by Indian shippers in their own name. The shippers received a fixed commission for their services. As year passed by, there was a fundamental change in the character of jute trade conducted by the shippers; they gradually emerged from the status of commission

agents to the principal traders. In the jute trade itself, European businessmen were involved at almost every stage from the buying of jute upto the shipping of jute and jute fabrics to foreign countries. The reason behind the European dominance in jute is that the Imperial Bank makes advances to the European merchants on the hypothecation of the stock of jute stored in their *mufassal* godowns.³⁹ In the internal trade in jute, the Europeans were the dominant element where as *farias* (jute peddlers) and *beparis* (local traders) played a vital role. In the village the unfledged crop was brought by the *faria* who usually belonged to the cultivating class. This class while buying jute from the cultivators charged a deduction called *Dhalta*, i.e. a weight discount to compensate for the allegedly excessive moisture in jute and after getting this discount they sold it in the weekly primary markets or *hats* to the *beparis*. But the report of the Enquiry into Deterioration of jute mentioned that "It was the middlemen and not the raiyats who were entirely responsible for the deliberately watering the jute before sale."⁴⁰ Actually in the lower strata or locally the jute business was at the hands of *mahajans* or brokers. They were well to do people, being mostly the Marwaris, who have their godowns at the exporting centres. There are two other classes of middlemen sometimes intervene. The first is the *dalal* (broker) who is engaged by the exporter to induce selected *baparis* to bring their jute to one centre. He also acts as adviser when advances are made to the *beparis*. The second is the *aratdar* (owner of a godown) who lets out to the *beparis* on Commission. Although he does not become the owner of the jute, he retains an interest in the profit derived from it. Besides the Marwari community, the Saha Community also played a vital role as a creditor to this jute business as *mahajan* or broker. The Dinajpur survey and settlement Report mentioned that alienation of land was gradually increasing especially in the neighbourhood of big towns and big *hats* mostly resided by the Sahas and the Marwaris who were the money lenders and the amount of transfer was increasing more rapidly in jute areas than in other areas.⁴¹ The *mahajans* gave advance money to the *beparis* or sellers, the condition being that the latter must bring to the *mahajans* all the jute they can get

from the raiyats. The money is not realised from season to season, but is allowed to be in the hands of the *bepari*. When the jute is brought to the *mahajans*, he settles the price with the buyer secretly, the *bepari* having nothing to do with it and often not knowing at all what his jute sells for. He has only a general idea of the state of the market from the price other *beparis* receive for their jute on several occasion the way of price is settled between the *mahajan* and the buyer. The main European farms or companies connected with jute trade were Duffus, Steel, Landale and Clark, Ralli Brothers, Sarkies and Company, David and Company and R. Sim and Company. These bigger farms and companies through their agents controlled the whole jute trade of Bengal.

The introduction of railway transport system in North Bengal and the connection of jute districts of North Bengal with Calcutta invited different creditors both European and Indigenous to invest in jute more and more. The North Bengal jute comes from the tract embraced by the following towns: Purnia, Parbatipur, Kissanganj, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar which includes an area of about 15000 square miles.⁴² Both the European and Indigenous farms played a vital role in jute trade in North Bengal and this became possible with the satisfactory communication network which greatly helped to expand the span of jute area as well as jute trade in North Bengal. It is found that during the period 1870-71 to 1899-1900 exports of jute shipped from Calcutta port to Britain increased by an average value of Rs.6 lakhs per annum.⁴³

Besides the exportation of raw jute from North Bengal, a considerable number of hand made gunny cloth and gunny bags also exported from North Bengal to Calcutta market. The following tables show the supply of gunny cloths and gunny bags from the districts of North Bengal.

Supply of hand made gunny cloth to Calcutta market.

| Name of the District | Year | No. of gunny cloth |
|----------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Jalpaiguri | 1886-87 | 23,33,660 |
| | 1887-88 | 29,52,390 |
| Darjeeling | 1886-87 | 8,98,520 |
| | 1887-88 | 10,52,660 |
| Dinajpur | 1886-87 | 2,55,300 |
| | 1887-88 | 4,74,500 |

Source : Report on the Administration of Bengal 1887-89, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1889, p.136.

Supply of gunny bags to Calcutta market in 1888-89.

| Name of the District | No. of gunny bag |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Jalpaiguri | 13,49,880 |
| Darjeeling | 6,94,960 |
| Dinajpur | 14,25,315 |

Source : Report on the Administration of Bengal 1888-89, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1890, p.144.

It is quite pertinent to mention that before the opening of railways, nearly the whole of both inward and outward traffic used to be carried on by country boats. With the opening of railways in North Bengal now considerably diverted the traffic from the rivers and have almost monopolised the export of jute. W.W. Hunter mentioned that prior to the introduction of railways from Raiganj, an important trade mart, 28,310 maunds of jute was exported in 1873 through river route and he also mentioned that from Nov. 1875 to Feb. 1876, for the six months from Jalpaiguri 50,540 maunds and from Cooch Behar State 72,934 maunds of jute was exported through river route.⁴⁴ During the period under study a great volume of jute was exported from North Bengal through railway which also indicated how largely this cash crop was cultivated in North

Bengal. In the year 1888-89, from Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and Darjeeling districts respectively 459916 maunds, 99290 maunds and 61261 maunds of jute exported through railways.⁴⁵ In 1891 through Eastern Bengal Railway 1,92,900 maunds of jute was exported from Jalpaiguri.⁴⁶ J.F. Gruning mentioned that in 1907 from Jalpaiguri 17,106 ton or 427650 maunds of jute was exported.⁴⁷ From Dinajpur 2,72,000 maunds of jute was exported in 1909-10.⁴⁸ Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that during his time. 3,00,000 maunds of jute valued Rs.12,00,000 was exported from Cooch Behar.⁴⁹ The Annual administrative report showed that during the period 1911-12, 5,19,010 maunds of jute was imported into Haldibari for exportation.⁵⁰

Thus upto the first decade of the 20th century due to the huge demand from Europe for raw jute there was a corresponding rise in jute growing areas and raw jute trade. But jute crop like other commercial crops witnessed many fluctuation in prices, in several phases and this fluctuation in price structure affected the cultivators.

Though jute cultivation extended in a large scale in North Bengal but the general jute growers were deprived from the real value of their toils. From jute high profits earned by the big merchants and dealer and also the Government. It was observed from the investigation on the cultivators in this region that they were bound to sale their output to various intermediaries namely, the *farias*, the *Mahajans*. The intermediaries controlled the price of raw jute. It should also be noted that the peasant indebtedness was due partly to the extension of the cultivation of jute at the expense of paddy, the subsequent crop.⁵¹ Because the profits from the sale of jute were easily squandered; and the ryots, having no money to harvest the subsequent crop, incurred debt. They entered a vicious circle, plunging deeper and deeper into debt and growing more and more jute. It was stated in an agricultural Exhibition that financial condition of the jute growers deteriorated in Duars because excess profit from jute inspired them to grow more and more jute.⁵² Consequently, overproduction decreased the price of jute. The Great

depression of 1929, affected jute exports and between 1930 and 1933 the prices of jute touched a low scale. The following table shows the fluctuation of jute price in Bengal between 1929 and 1933.

| Year | Jute price |
|------|------------|
| 1929 | 100 |
| 1930 | 54.9 |
| 1931 | 50.4 |
| 1932 | 50.0 |
| 1933 | 43.9 |

Source: Sujata Mukherjee Journal of History, Jadavpur University, Vol.V, 1984, P.84.

The following table shows the fall in the world demand of raw jute and gunny.

| Year | Raw jute export Vol. | Gunny export vol. |
|------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1929 | 100 | 100 |
| 1930 | 47 | 58 |
| 1931 | 36 | 40 |
| 1932 | 31 | 40 |
| 1933 | 35 | 39 |

Source: Omkar Goswami, Article – Then Come the Marwari, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 22, 3(1985).

It is found that the prices of jute fell by about 56 percent in the year 1933. Owing to the drastic fall in the prices of jute the average cultivable areas of the rural family decreased in the jute growing districts and the districts of North Bengal were not exception of it. It is found that the net cultivable area per rural family between 1911 and 1931 decreased in Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and Cooch Behar. In Jalpaiguri the net cultivable area per rural family in 1911 was 5.28 acres where as in the year 1931 it was only 3.72 acres area under jute cultivation per rural family between 1911 and 1931 was respectively 4.78 and 3.41 acres.⁵³ Due to the fall of prices the cultivators had curtailed the employment of hired labours as

far as possible. From the documents it is noticed that every where during the jute season groups of cultivators helped each other with the weeding of the crop.⁵⁴ In some parts of North Bengal due to this unprecedented fall of jute price the cultivators as there was no way transferred their lands to the non-agriculturists. It is observed by the survey and settlement officer of Dinajpur that "Transfer of land to non-agriculturists seems to have increased due to the fall in prices of jute".⁵⁵ During the depression period (1929-33) and onwards occurred the fall in the price of jute even below the cost of production. The jute growers were financially weak and the simple poor peasants could not understand the clever device of bringing about artificial rise in the price of jute at the time of the sowing season in order to induce the unsuspecting cultivator to put a larger area under jute.⁵⁶ Thus, the over production decreased the prices of jute. The inevitable result was that the mills were able to get their supplies at their own price and the poor cultivators suffered for their ignorance and simplicity. Bengal jute growers Association, Calcutta preliminary remarked (31st March; 1933) that due to monopolistic character of jute the government have fully benefited and those engaged in the jute trade and industry.⁵⁷ However, the jute merchants and *farias* expressed adverse views. The argument made by the jute merchants and *farias* was more or less uniform regarding the low prices of jute. According to their views that over production, financial crisis and the competition of hemp and paper with jute were the causes for low prices of jute. In this connection mention should be made of the opinions of several *farias*, merchants and the report of the district Board under the study of the region. Babu Sohanlal Agarwalla, *faria*, Thakurgaon, district Dinajpur dated 8th March 1933 argued that financial crisis was the most important factor to depress the price of jute and due to financial crisis the area under jute was becoming less and less every year. Babu Rasiklal Guha, merchant, Balurghat, district Dinajpur was of opinion over production is one of the factors for depression the price of jute, but that is not the only factor. Hemp and paper are two product in competition with jute. Babu Curudas Mukherjee, President, Shikarpur – Saldanga Union Board, district

Jalpaiguri dt.1st April 1933, had opinion over production combined with financial crisis had helped to lower the price.⁵⁸ Due to the unprecedented fall in the price of jute the cultivators were unable to get more than even half of the cost of their production. The major jute growing areas of East Bengal like Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur and the northern districts of Bengal, the cultivators were left with little or no margin of profit and were unable to pay rent or debt of the *mahajans*.⁵⁹ It is reported that the market for jute, was especially bad in 1933 and about 12.5 percent of the previous year's crop and almost 75 percent of the current year's remained unsold in Jalpaiguri.⁶⁰ Though the jute growers were victimized, had no choice but to fall back upon jute as there was no alternative profitable crop which could meet the cash demand of the cultivators. Although during the jute price depression period sugar cane cultivation increased to some extent, it failed to occupy any substantial amount of jute land. It should be mentioned that sugar cane was not a seasonable crop like jute; but was a perishable crop. The report of the jute Enquiry Committee (1939) mentioned that due to the small number of sugar mills in the jute districts, the jute growers were reluctant to change over to sugar cane as a large scale.⁶¹ Notably, the fall in the acreage under jute and its cultivation during the depression, as pointed out by scholars did not seem to be as dramatic as the fall in the post war years. This was in spite of the fact that fall in the prices of raw jute was much steeper in the depression period. This indicates the absence of alternative crops for the jute growers.

Thus the sharp price fall during the depression period naturally reduced the purchasing power of the agriculturists. The primary producers in jute growing districts were particularly hard hit. Per capita net cash receipt in agricultural sector went down steeply, influenced by sharp down ward trend in cash earning from jute. Immediately after depression (1933) the average incomes of sample families fell drastically. A noticeable fact was that the position deteriorated more remarkably in the jute growing districts. In an agricultural exhibition named "Jalpesh Krishi Pradarsani" in Jalpaiguri district it was mentioned that the people

of Duars greatly victimized due to large scale cultivation of this cash crop.⁶² This low prices of jute not only affected the cultivators, but as a whole it also affected all the sections of the society. It is noticed that due to unprecedented fall in the price of jute not only the cultivators victimized, but the zamindars, *mahajans*, merchants, artisans, lawyer, and above all the sections of the society economically affected in the jute cultivated areas.⁶³ During the depression period, the area under jute year by year drastically fall. From the table 4A it is found that within two decades the area under jute in North Bengal decreased by half of the total jute land in different districts of North Bengal and particularly in Jalpaiguri district its production fell by one fifth.

It is already mentioned that the extensive jute cultivation in this region was not the outcome of indigenous needs; it was the British commercial interest and from the pressure of international events, high prices of flax etc. forced them to think about using jute as a viable alternative. The total result was the inauguration of extensive cultivation of jute in the Bengal presidency particularly in the riverine plains of Eastern Bengal and North Bengal. It was the most vital factor which influenced peasants decision to cultivate jute was its high price. But when the export of jute and jute products reached its peak (1928-29) at a high price level the world had begun seriously and intensively to search for substitutes from the Nationalistic point of view.⁶⁴ Thus, from 1930 onwards that so many countries began seriously to try to make themselves self-supplying in such products. During that time some foreign countries who were the importer of India's jute restricted the use of jute by law and some foreign countries decided to use cotton in lieu of jute. The report of L.R. Fawcus mentioned that in Germany the use of pure jute goods was prohibited by law during that time and United States of America which had been using jute for last 24 years decided to use cotton twine.⁶⁵

Thus jute market drastically fell and jute had no demand in the European market. As jute lost its market the jute companies in Bengal

gradually curtailed the jute trade. So, the area under jute is becoming less and less every year. Thus the fate of this commercial crop was depended upon the demand of European market and when that need was over it became valueless to the European traders. In this context it is quite pertinent to observe the role of the Government regarding jute question. The Draft Report Chapter VII stated that jute should be controlled by the state instead of by the ultimate consumers. The report stated that Indian Jute Mills Association who have been controlling the policy of pricing the jute do not look to the interest of the jute growers. Thus, the strong argument of the government was that jute should be controlled by the state to assure the price to the jute growers. Apart from this the government recommended for fixing the rate of jute respectively bottom to top grade raw jute.⁶⁶ But the fixing of raw jute price was not an easy task. Because in the absence of reliable costs data, particularly the data relating to the cost of manufacture of the jute goods and it was not practicable to fix a minimum price which will be appreciably higher than the prevailing price. Thus to fix it at the prevailing market price would serve no useful purpose, while to fix it at a lower price might be definitely harmful to the interests of the jute growers. The report of the Bengal Jute Enquiry Committee regretted that in spite of best efforts of the government, the government was unable to solve the jute price question as the jute mills Association was not cooperated on this subject.⁶⁷ Thus, it was urgently necessary for the government in the public interest to fix a minimum rate for contracts relating to raw jute futures and the immediate action should be taken for that purpose. To solve jute price problem the government took very rigid policy by passing an ordinance on jute question. It was said that jute should be restricted and after the commencement of that ordinance no person should make a contract relating to raw jute future at a rate of less than thirty six rupees and if any contract less than thirty six rupees be punishable with imprisonment may for one year or with a fine of thousand rupees.⁶⁸ After the passing of this ordinance the Bengal Provincial Government or the League Government passed an act and distributed licence to the cultivators for

compulsory restriction of jute cultivation. Through the agency of the president Panchayats and the union boards the Government distributed leaflets among the cultivators and strongly urging them not to sow with jute more than 50 percent of the area sown with that crop in the past season.⁶⁹ Due to the compulsory restriction of jute cultivation export of jute had become so restricted that there was no market of jute.⁷⁰ Apart from this the European Association under the auspices of Bengal Chamber of Commerce placed an Interim Report where more or less they did not want a jute future market at all.⁷¹ Due to this, jute cultivation became meaningless to the poor peasants and the sum total effect was the impoverishment of the peasants. Thus the grower of this commodity has never known except for a brief period what prosperity really means.

Though in the thirties of 20th century a drastic fall of jute price and consequently jute areas decreased, however, in the second half of the 19th century was indicated as jute era of Bengal. Within two decades from seventy's of the 19th century the area under jute in Bengal was doubled.⁷² Thus it was stated that the second half of the 19th century may well be called the golden age of jute.⁷³ As a result jute industry was developed year by year in Bengal. The first jute Mill in Bengal was set up in Rishra and started operating in 1855 under the name of "Auckland Jute Mill".⁷⁴ In 1881 there were 20 jute mills in the Bengal presidency and by 1901 the number rose to 36. In 1905 the number rose to 42 and prior to the World War II there were 62 jute mills located in Bengal.⁷⁵ It is noticed that jute manufactures remained an industry almost completely dominated by the British, more particularly Scottish business right upto the end of the Second World War. Among all the directors of jute mills it is found that only one Indian viz. Luchmi Narain Kanoria, the board of directors of the smallest jute mill named Soorah Jute Mill Company Limited.⁷⁶

It is now quite pertinent to observe that despite the favourable geographical condition i.e. suitable climate for jute cultivation, abundance of ponds for keeping the crop and the relative cheapness of labour, jute industry in any part of North Bengal did not turn into a plantation

enterprise like the tea industry. There was no hurdle in starting a plantation enterprise in this region with a combination of agriculture and industry as large quantities of jute was grown in this region but had no primary industrial infrastructure for starting a jute industry. One factor may have been the relative lack of power – coal was almost entirely absent in this region and there was no development of hydroelectricity. On the other hand there was no regional entrepreneurial group in this region. In North Bengal more or less ninety percent people depended on agriculture what is found from different census report. It should be mentioned that raw jute and output of the industry was exported to Europe and other oceanic countries and Calcutta and its adjoining areas enjoyed many advantages in terms of geographic as well as economic sphere. There was no such scope to the Colonial Government for starting a jute industry in North Bengal. It should also be mentioned that apart from Northern districts of Bengal, the Eastern Bengal region was the supplier of huge raw jutes to Calcutta from where jute could easily be exported to European countries. So, all these factors prompted the European and at a later stage, the Marwaris to invest in jute and with their capital jute mills were set up on the both sides of river Hooghly.⁷⁷ Presumably, existence of preconditions favourable to the growth of jute manufacturing industry in North Bengal was quite unthinkable.

TOBACCO PRODUCTION

Another cash crop which was grown in the districts of North Bengal was tobacco. This crop is found to be an important non-foodgrain crop of the agricultural economy. From the records it is believed that the first direct reference to tobacco in India is associated certain Portuguese Missionaries who introduced the plant and knowledge of its properties and its cultivation began in the beginning of the 17th century in Deccan plateau.⁷⁸ After the introduction of this crop during the reign of Akbar its cultivation speedily spread over the entire continent.⁷⁹ For a period of about 100 years, tobacco for commercial purposes was cultivated in Gujrat and Deccan areas, later on it spreaded to the rest of India. Like other parts of the world, tobacco passed through the period of persecution and its ultimate complete distribution through India was only an example of how rapidly this profitable new crop incorporated into the agricultural economy of India. Thus as a commercial crop tobacco cultivation became very popular in India. Although tobacco was grown in practically every district in British India, the important tracts were few in number and were situated in the provinces of Bengal, Madras, Bihar, Orissa, Burma and Bombay.⁸⁰ In Bengal the main tobacco growing areas were in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Rangpur and in the state of Cooch Behar.

Besides jute, tobacco was the most important cash crop of North Bengal. It was believed that the three Ts' e.g. Tea, Timber and Tobacco were the backbone of the economy of North Bengal. The favourable agro-climatic condition greatly assisted for largely extension of the cultivation of this cash crop in the two districts of North Bengal i.e. Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. Despite these two districts, in Dinajpur, Malda and Darjeeling more or less tobacco was cultivated. From the record it is found that tobacco cultivation in Malda, Dinajpur and Darjeeling was to be very limited extant and was grown for home consumption.⁸¹ It is to be mentioned that among the different crop plants tobacco holds an important position mainly for commercial non-food plant and an instrument of very high importance in economy. Because the traffic in

tobacco was large and the people made a good deal of money from it. Thus, tobacco became an important staple of North Bengal.

During the period under study Jalpaiguri was an important tobacco growing zone. It is quite relevant to mention the statement of J.F.Gruning. He ascribed that Tobacco was a very valuable crop and was grown largely in the western Duars and the best tobacco lands of Jalpaiguri district was lying between Tista and Torsa rivers.⁸² W.W. Hunter also mentioned in his Statistical Account of Bengal that good quality of tobacco was grown in Jalpaiguri district. According to W.W. Hunter the Baura area of Jalpaiguri produced superior quality of tobacco leaf and texture.⁸³ According to the report of the Deputy Commissioner of Duars that in the Terai and Duars tobacco grew splendidly and cultivators sown the first crop sown in the richly manured land begging tobacco. The District Census report of 1891 mentioned that tobacco was another special crop of great importance raised in Jalpaiguri district and its cultivation was very profitable. This report also mentioned that all lands however were not fit for tobacco cultivation; only the highlands were suited for tobacco.⁸⁴ D.H.E. Sunder mentioned that eight kinds of tobacco grown in Jalpaiguri District.⁸⁵ J.A. Milligan during his settlement operations in the Jalpaiguri District was not impressed about the state of agriculture in the Jalpaiguri region, but he mentioned that excellent tobacco was grown in Falakata Tehsil and in Patgram.⁸⁶ Thus it is to be mentioned that as Jalpaiguri was suited for the cultivation of this cash crop the Government greatly encouraged for the tobacco cultivation in this district. From the report of C.T. Metcalfe it is found that government was extremely interested for the cultivation of this commercial crop and tobacco cultivating lands were increased year by year.⁸⁷

Different varieties of tobacco grew in Jalpaiguri district. The great leaf or the lower leaves of the plant called *bispat* and the better kinds of leaf were known as *pakka-pat* and *hickat*. For the development of tobacco cultivation Colonel Haughton made some experiments of Virginia tobacco both in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts, but it resulted in failure.

The Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri also devoted much attention to this subject. Thus the Britishers paid attention as they found a great prospect of this commercial crop and hoped that this crop could be run as a profitable commercial venture. In this respect it is quite pertinent to mention the view of C.T. Metcalfe, Esq officiating Commissioner of Cooch Behar who had seen a great prospect of trade of this commercial crop in the region under study. The officiating commissioner ascribed, "Tobacco grown in Jalpaiguri district, especially in the Duars was very fine, and when the amount of land available for its cultivation in the Duars, was remembered that it would be understood that tobacco trade was susceptible of being very largely opened up in Jalpaiguri district."⁸⁸ Besides the trading prospect, the commissioner also remarked that Jalpaiguri was the best place where Cigar manufactory could be established.⁸⁹ The tobacco of Duars was appreciated in different markets and most of the tobacco grown in Jalpaiguri district exported into Burma by the name of Rangpur tobacco and after manufacturing in Burma it came back to Calcutta as the best Burmese Cigars. Water carriage from the district of Jalpaiguri to Calcutta was easily and cheaply got by the Tista and Brahmaputra River. The gradual progress in the means of communication stimulated the tobacco trade and this sign of stimulation could easily be seen in tobacco cultivation. The statistical reporter of March 1876 reported that the cultivation of tobacco in the district largely increased. The tobacco packed up into bundles under gunny covers and forwarded by boat to Goalanda and thence to Calcutta by rail and it was also remarked that the value of this crop would greatly increase with the opening of the contemplated railway in this district.⁹⁰ The tobacco trade of Jalpaiguri district was chiefly in the hands of Arakanese who exported the leaves to Burma, where the Burmese Cheroots were made from tobacco leaves.⁹¹ Further, this crop was exported to Bhutan and also to Dacca and Calcutta.⁹² But this article passed through different hands for which the prices of tobacco also varied. Primarily the cultivators sold the produce to the *paikars* (an itinerant petty dealer) at his own door or at the nearest market and the latter able it to the nearest *goladar*, who exported

it in large quantities to the *arutdars*. D.H.E. Sunder mentioned that the chief markets of Jalpaiguri district for sale of tobacco were Falakata and Dhupguri where from a good quantities of tobacco exported during the tobacco season.⁹³ Tobacco of Jalpaiguri also exported by water to Sirajganj and other markets. J.F. Gruning mentioned that in the Patgram police circle, there were a number of merchants who carried on an extensive trade in tobacco and exported by way of the river to Dacca and other eastern market. From the report of C.T. Metcalfe it is found that the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri stated that in 1873, 30,000 maunds of tobacco was exported from Jalpaiguri district, valued Rs.1,80,000.⁹⁴ J.F. Gruning mentioned that for the year 1909 – 1910 the total production of tobacco in Jalpaiguri district was 10400 ton.⁹⁵

Tobacco was grown extensively in Cooch Behar state also. In the eastern portion of Cooch Behar State the crop formed one of the Staple crops. The chief localities where this crop grown were the southern and Western portions of the state. Mathabhanga, Mekhliganj, Sitai, Sitalkuchi, Western part of Dinhata, Sibpur were famous for producing good quality of tobacco. W.W. Hunter mentioned that in Cooch Behar state tobacco took about one sixth of the cultivated area and it became an established crop, grown extensively and produced and used by indigenous methods and equipments.⁹⁶ It is quite pertinent to mention that prior to the introduction of commercialization of agriculture by the Britishers, cultivation of tobacco for exportation was not unknown to the people of Cooch Behar. It is found that in the late 18th century tobacco already established itself as an important non-food grain crop of Cooch Behar for exportation. Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that during the time of Messieurs and Chauret (1788), the special commissioners appointed by the British Government, 40,000 maunds of tobacco was exported from the state of Cooch Behar.⁹⁷ As a cash crop tobacco cultivation was very profitable and the cultivators got a good deal of money and on the other hand with the opening of modern transport system i.e. the railway transportation, development of road transportation as well as the riverine facilities, the area under tobacco land gradually

extending year by year. The cultivation of this crop was very popular and was found to be an important non-food grain commercial crop of agricultural economy among the major crops. It is to be noted that tobacco was more paying both in terms of per unit of land as also per rupee of total investment. In consequence both the ruler of Cooch Behar and the Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar took initiative for tobacco cultivation. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that after 1773 a political negotiation was taken place between the Cooch Behar Raj and the East India Company. Writing on the official history of Cooch Behar, Harendra Narayan Choudhury stated that before the First Anglo-Bhutanese War (1772-74), the Bhutanese systematically took possession of a large number of 'taluks' (a land unit) in the western Duars which were formerly held in farm under Cooch Behar.⁹⁸ By the beginning of the 18th century the kingdom of Cooch Behar became very weak, and by 1765 Bhutan reigned practically supreme in Cooch Behar. Thus, to outwit the Bhutanese, the Cooch Behar raj entered into a treaty with the East Indian Company in 1773 and became virtually a feudatory state of the Company and after the queen's proclamation Cooch Behar became a princely state. Thus a good relation was established between the British Government and the Cooch Behar raj which also helped for the development of the Cooch Behar state. As it is mentioned that both the ruler of Cooch Behar and the British authority were not remained indifferent with regards to the cultivation of this commercial crop, the state encouragement and British appreciation was followed from the fact that a tobacco exhibition was held in Cooch Behar in August 1872 at which seven varieties all of them locally produced, were exhibited and prizes were given to several of the exhibitors.⁹⁹ It is also to be noted that Royal encouragement for tobacco cultivation may be mentioned from the writing of prince Nitendra Narayan (15th June 1915). He wrote that tobacco was a principal crop of Cooch Behar, and with a view to introduce in the state of Cooch Behar scientific methods of curing as followed in other countries, under the instruction of his father Maharaja Nipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, he went to Cornell University, New York where he specialized himself in

agriculture for sometime and he also went to Cuba, West Indies where he observed the method of the culture, curing and manufacture of the famous Havana tobacco. Nitendra Narayan also mentioned that Mr. I.B. Majumdar was deputed by his father to accompany him in his tours, a tobacco specialist who had already visited the different tobacco growing centres in Macedonia and Asia Minor, where the best Turkish tobacco came from.¹⁰⁰ The earliest attempt to improve Indian tobacco may be said to have begun with the establishment of Calcutta Botanical Garden where several types of tobacco were experimented in 1887.¹⁰¹ It should be mentioned that prior to the Britishers' experiment of tobacco in India experimental farm was established in Cooch Behar State in 1877 for scientific method of tobacco cultivation.¹⁰² Members of the royal family of Cooch Behar were entrusted for the supervision of that farm. But due to economic loss the farm closed with in a short time. But the efforts of the rulers of Cooch Behar for the development of tobacco cultivation were not stopped. Between 1905-1906 again an experimental farm was opened for tobacco cultivation in Cooch Behar state. During that time three kinds of American tobacco were sown viz. yellow prior, bright yellow and white. Among the three kinds of tobacco yellow prior tobacco was suitable in Cooch Behar. For the development of tobacco cultivation two American tobacco experts were appointed. The American tobacco experts of the Peninsular Company highly praised the tobacco of Cooch Behar state and remarked that they had seen in the market as the best Indian tobacco produced in Cooch Behar in 1909.¹⁰³ It was also stated in the Annual Administrative Report of the Cooch Behar state that the quality of the tobacco grown in the farms of Cooch Behar state to be almost as good as tobacco grown in America.¹⁰⁴ Several hundred maunds of yellow tobacco were successfully grown and cured from imported American seeds in Cooch Behar tobacco farms and sold to Madras, Munger, Rangpur and other factories. Several maunds of Sumatra tobacco were also grown at the Governmental Experimental farms in Cooch Behar.

Thus it is found that as a commercial non-food grain crop the cultivation of tobacco was encouraged both by the Britishers and the

Cooch Behar State. The prosperous *jotedars* in great number were very much interested to invest in tobacco. As a result year by year tobacco land increased in Cooch Behar and tobacco became the chief crop of Cooch Behar State. The Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar stated that during 1874 about 50,000 acres were cultivated with tobacco in Cooch Behar State. But C.T. Melcalfe's opinion regarding tobacco land was much below the rank of the Deputy Commission of Cooch Behar, though he acknowledged that the chief crop of the state was tobacco.¹⁰⁵ Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that during his tenure in 1902 the area under tobacco cultivation in Cooch Behar state was 105,898 bighas or about 35,000 acres which was a little above 7 percent of the cultivated and 5.2 percent of the total assessed area.¹⁰⁶ He also mentioned that the gross value about 26 lakhs of rupees which represented the amount of cash annually obtained by the people from this crop. He calculated that deducting a half of this for cost of cultivation the net income derived by the farmer was 13 lakhs of rupees.¹⁰⁷ From this statement one cannot denied of its economic value. The tobacco of Cooch Behar mainly exported through the merchants of Eastern Bengal to abroad. The main centres of tobacco trade were Manikganj, Narayanganj and Sirajganj. The merchants of Eastern Bengal purchased the tobacco of Cooch Behar from different *hats* of Cooch Behar viz. Mathabhanga, Mekhliganj, Sitai, Dinjata, Haldibari. Through river one lakh maund of tobacco exported every year to Dacca and Murshidabad.¹⁰⁸ It should be mentioned that tobacco trade was run entirely on credit and many persons were tempted to enter the trade as commission agents on traders. Hence, of course, they have to face tough competition from the old established middlemen, such middlemen were not only known to the tobacco growers but were also very sound in the trade with their long professional standing. Obviously, they did not like the entry of the new-comers. To prevent them, therefore, they adopted many malpractices and there by do not allow the new comers to stabilize in the trade. Thus, they just try to monopolize the trade. Thus it is clear that tobacco trade was a monopoly of the tobacco traders. Mathabhanga was famous for tobacco trade and the trade was

mostly conducted through the ports of Brahmaputra, Manikganj and Narayanganj. From Kalikaganj Bandar at Mathabhanga the quantity of tobacco exported abroad was 11285 maund in 1901-02 and the total quantity of tobacco exported through Kalikaganj Bandar in 1911-12 was 38,555 maund.¹⁰⁹ Thus it is found that within a decade tobacco exported three times and above from Kalikaganj, indicated how tobacco trade was extensively increased in Cooch Behar State. Mekhliganj was an important tobacco trade centre. Besides Mekhliganj, Lalbazar was also an important tobacco producing area and tobacco trade centre. The Burmese merchants annually took away thousands of maunds of tobacco from Mekhliganj and Lalbazar. In 1876 its export to Burma was valued at Rs.10 lakhs.¹¹⁰ Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that during his time in 1902, 400,000 maunds of tobacco was exported to Burma valued Rs.20,00,000.¹¹¹ The Burmese merchants used to come to Mekhliganj to purchase tobacco leaves and send those for Rangoon and other Burmese ports. A good quantity of tobacco also exported from Shibpur, Gosanimari, Chaurahat and Dinhata. Dinhata had its tobacco trade mostly along the Sahebganj, Gosanimari and Rangpur road. It is to be noted that the tobacco was exported in a raw condition in bundles by country boats through Dhurla, Tista, Curtoa and Mahanadi rivers principally to Calcutta and neighbouring districts. Regarding tobacco trade it should also be mentioned that tobacco was very rarely exported by railway, as frequent trans-shipments damage the leaves, and deteriorate the quality. Thus, it is found that tobacco became a profitable commercial crop in Cooch Behar and from Cooch Behar its exportation was abundant. It is to be mentioned that tobacco which was the most widely grown commercial non-food grain became an instrument of very high importance in the economy of Cooch Behar. The cultivators eager to cultivate this cash crop to meet the land revenue of the state. In this connection it is quite pertinent to mention that statement of colonel Haughton who remarked that the ryots mainly depended upon the tobacco crop to pay their rents in the Cooch Behar division.¹¹² Though the peasants cultivated this cash crop to meet the land revenue, the gradual

expansion of tobacco land and its abundant exportation flourished the economy of Cooch Behar.

The table shows for a period of tobacco cultivation in North Bengal and the total production of tobacco in Bengal for the year 1873-74.

| Tobacco in Bengal 1873-74 Total area in acres / last 5 years | Producing District | Average area under cultivation in acres / last 5 years | Annual exports in maund |
|---|--------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 20,000 | Cooch Behar | 24000 | 287500 |
| | Jalpaiguri | 30000 | 30000 |
| | Darjeeling | 24 | Nil |
| | Dinajpur | 20000 | 30000 |
| | Malda | 1240 | Nil |
| Total | | 75264 | |

Source: Report on the cultivation and curing of tobacco in Bengal, No.3725,
Dt. Calcutta, 29th December 1874, P - Appendix - A

And

Report of Govt. of Bengal, Agricultural Department, Cooch Behar
Division, No.144T, dt. The 21st August 1873, P.53.

From the table it is seen that during the year 1873-74 the total area of tobacco cultivation in Bengal was 2,00,000 acres and out of this 75,264 acres area tobacco was cultivated in North Bengal. The table shows that Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar were the major tobacco growing area of North Bengal. The table shows that 20,000 acres were under tobacco in Dinajpur. But in the later years the area under tobacco land had not been increased rather it gradually decreased. Though in 1873-74 from Dinajpur 30,000 maunds of tobacco was exported, but in the later years no remarkable figure of exportation of tobacco from Dinajpur is found. Its cultivation rapidly confined almost for local consumption and little of it was exported. Because the quality of the tobacco produced in Dinajpur was very inferior.¹¹³ F.W. Strong mentioned that during his time tobacco was principally grown in Parbatipur, Chirirbandar, Parkerhat, Khansama and Birganj thana (all are now in Bangladesh) and the area under tobacco land was 9,800 acres in 1910 and very little maunds of tobacco was exported i.e. 20,000 maund in the direction of Rangpur where it was used for *hooka* smoking.¹¹⁴ Malda and Darjeeling had no remarkable tobacco

land. The table shows that in 1873-74 the area under tobacco in Malda and Darjeeling were respectively 1,240 acres and only 24 acres. From the two districts no exportation was done and in the later years also any exportation is found from these districts. G.E. Lambourn remarked that tobacco grew in Malda as a garden crop for local consumption and the normal area under tobacco crop being 10,000 acres.¹¹⁵ In the later years tobacco land in Malda further decreased. The district statistic mentioned that in 1930 the area under tobacco land in Malda decreased by only 4,000 acres.¹¹⁶ It is found that Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar where tobacco cultivation and its exportation was extensively increased as both these areas produced good qualities of tobacco leaves. According to J.F. Gruning the total area under tobacco cultivation in 1901-02 in Jalpaiguri was 112,900 acres and in 1907-08 the area of tobacco land mentioned by him was 119,400 acres.¹¹⁷ It has already been mentioned that during 1902 the area of tobacco land in Cooch Behar was 35,000 acres and from Cooch Behar large quantity of tobacco was exported. From the records it is found that in the year 1913-14 the area under tobacco cultivation in Bengal was 318,000 acres and out of this 203,000 acres tobacco land was in North Bengal.¹¹⁸ During the period under study tobacco growing areas were greatly expanded both in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. It should be mentioned in this connection that besides Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, Rangpur of the Rajshahi division was also an important tobacco producing area. From Rangpur several thousands maunds of tobacco was exported to Burma.

Thus, it is found that the Britishers for their own commercial interest encouraged the tobacco cultivation in India. Repeated and persistent efforts have been made by the British Government since 1786, when Colonel Robert Kyd, in his letter proposing the establishment of the Botanical gardens at Calcutta referred to the improvement of tobacco as a desirable measure fit for export to the European market.¹¹⁹ The Britishers tried to improve the growth and curing of the leaf by the importation of skilled growers and cures from Manilla or elsewhere.¹²⁰ According to the Government Report which roughly estimated the gross annual value of

the tobacco harvest of Bengal during the period under study was 1,00,00,000 maund per year and Burma was the main consumer of Bengal tobacco. In the area under study it is found that bulk of the tobacco exported from Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and the tobacco of the Duars was highly appreciated in different markets. Thus a proposal was placed by the officiating commissioner of Cooch Behar for the establishment of a Cigar manufactory in the Duars. However, during the prior under study any effort had been taken by the Colonial Government in this regard. It is seen that the rulers of Cooch Behar had taken much initiative and tried their best for the improvement of tobacco cultivation in Cooch Behar. With the active participation of the rulers of Cooch Behar for the development of tobacco cultivation scientific method of curing was introduced, even specialists of tobacco from foreign countries were appointed in the state farm of Cooch Behar. As a result good qualities of American tobacco were produced in the state farms of Cooch Behar which acquired high prices in comparison to indigenous product. In this connection it is to be mentioned that in 1911-12 the average price of Cooch Behar State produced farms of American tobacco was Rs.35 to 60 per maund against Rs.5 to 10 per maund of the indigenous product grown by the cultivators.¹²¹ Succeeding in this field the rulers of Cooch Behar saw an aspiration for the establishment of tobacco factory in Cooch Behar State, but no response had been seen from the Government.¹²² Thus, the sum total effect of the cultivation of this commercial crop was that it remained as a commercial crop merely for exportation. It is to be mentioned that the economic policy of the Colonial Government was to flourish their homeland taking raw materials for their industries from the colonies and industries were permitted to grow in colonies only so far as they did not compete with those of their homeland.¹²³ Thus it is no wonder that the Colonial Government could support in this respect, because in Virginia good qualities of tobacco grew and the Britishers had already established Cigar manufacturing industry in their homeland. Though, the basic policy of the Colonial Government was free trade which encouraged the activities of exporting raw materials for the industries of

their country. But in case of tobacco the picture was quite different as the demand of Indian tobacco in Europe was insignificant. In this connection it is quite relevant to mention the report of J.E. O'Connor. According to the report that little was Indian tobacco known in the English market, due to badly prepared and the English dealers would not look at it. The report also mentioned that nearly the whole of the tobacco produced in India was consumed in the country and the great bulk of it in the district in which it was grown and small quantities were transported to the neighbouring districts where the cultivation was not extensive.¹²⁴ Further, regarding its exportation the Report stated that Bengal exported tobacco in a small way to the Trans-Himalayan Country on its Northern frontier and to the Central provinces on the South west and in large quantities to Burma. Thus, the demand of tobacco of Bengal as well as North Bengal was insignificant to the European traders. It is to be mentioned that from India for the period 1871-72 a very little amount of tobacco was exported about 9,500 cwt valued in all at Rs.21,000.¹²⁵ The Britishers in India for the introduction of Tea, Chinchona, Rhee and Cotton which were all new industries did not hesitate to act as a pioneer and incur great expense in clearing the way for private enterprise. But tobacco was no new industry and it had been grown in India from a longtime ago and its cultivation was widely expanded. So, to make tobacco a profitable article of export to European market the Government could and should encourage and sustain the well directed efforts by which industry may be taken deep root in the region of our study. But that could not be happened from the Colonial sides. However, tobacco industry had been laid by the establishment of Rangpur Tobacco Company in 1909, financed and managed by Indians in Rangpur district of Rajshahi division.¹²⁶

RICE PRODUCTION AND RICE MILL

In the predominated agricultural economy of North Bengal, rice formed the staple agricultural product. But the state of rice production was not remarkable and the low prices of rice did not alter even after the advent of the British in the area under study. It is found that due to large traffic cash crops like jute, tobacco etc. grew extensively in this region from the second half of the nineteenth century. It is also mentioned that from the second half of the nineteenth century a rapid development started in tea garden industries in the northern parts of North Bengal. Due to this an influx of population increased the demand of rice. It was the modern communication system i.e. the construction of metalled roads, the inauguration of railways brought a revolution in the production of agricultural crops in this region. Thus, from the second half of the nineteenth century like the cash crops a considerable extension in rice cultivation also started in this region under study. Though paddy is primarily a consumption crop but it played a cash crop in a few district of north and central Bengal.¹²⁷

When Darjeeling was first taken over by the British administration the Terai was to some extent under plains cultivation. From the middle of the nineteenth century expansion of rice cultivation was rapid in Darjeeling district, but in the hilly portion of the district it was not grown extensively as that of the plains. W.W. Hunter ascribed that in 1870s a considerable extension had taken place in the area under rice cultivation in Darjeeling district.¹²⁸ It is to be mentioned that due to the rapid growth and development of tea gardens both in hill and Terai, the jungle lands of the Terai's were being rapidly taken up for rice cultivation for the influx population of the tea gardens both in hill and Terai areas. For the development of rice cultivation an attempt was made to introduce Carolina rice into the district. The picture was almost the same in Jalpaiguri district also. W.W. Hunter mentioned that the report of the Deputy Commissioner remarked that since its annexation of the western Duars portion of the district in 1864, the area under rice cultivation had

very considerably extended in Jalpaiguri district.¹²⁹ He further stated that rice land extended in the district owing to the influx of new settlers from Cooch Bihar and Rangpur district.¹³⁰ It is recoded that in 1892-93 36,288 people emigrated to Jalpaiguri from Cooch Behar.¹³¹ Maynaguri, Falakata, Ambari-Falakata, Rajganj, Dhupguri, Kumargram, Debiganj, Bhotepatty and Alipurduar were the chief rice produced area of Jalpaiguri District. In Cooch Behar state paddy grew all over the state. However, in Cooch Behar there were some special tracts known for the excellence and abundance of this agro crop. In this context mention should be made Western portion of Mekhliganj, Northern portion of Mathabhanga, North of Cooch Behar and almost the whole of Pargana Tufanganj, for well known paddy produced areas. W.W. Hunter mentioned a very considerable extension of rice cultivation in Cooch Behar and during his time the area under rice doubled within two decades.¹³² In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that from the early years rice was an important agro crop of the agricultural economy of Cooch Behar. Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that in the late eighteenth century 100000 maunds of rice was exported from Cooch Behar state.¹³³ From the seventies of the nineteenth century rice cultivation extensively started in Malda district. W.W. Hunter mentioned that during his time there were 250,000 acres of land under rice cultivation in Malda district.¹³⁴ The low land of Gajole Thana, Bholahat, Kashimpur, Chandipur, Jalapur, Sujapur, Dhantola, Mahadipur were the chief rice produced areas of Malda district. Of the region under study Dinajpur was specially famous for its rice production. As a great crop of Dinajpur Dr. Buchanan Hamilton mentioned that in the beginning of the nineteenth century different varieties of rice grew in Dinajpur district.¹³⁵ Raiganj, Hemtabad, Bansihari, Balurghat, Gangarampur, Kushmandi, Kaliyaganj were the important rice produced areas of Dinajpur district. It should be mentioned in this context that the fertility of the soil of Dinajpur district was very high than that of other areas of North Bengal. Of this district ninety one percent people engaged in agriculture and rice covered some 68.7 percent of the net cropped area.¹³⁶

Thus it is found that except the hill portion all the areas of North Bengal were suitable for rice production. The greater part of North Bengal covered with very fertile land and varieties of fine rice grew abundantly. It is quite pertinent to mention that of the districts of North Bengal rice grew abundantly in Dinajpur and Malda and both these two districts possessed great advantages of water communication for the exportation of this agro-crop. The geographical advantage of the cheap river traffic with Calcutta, carried by boats to and from these districts facilitated the export and import trade. Thus it is found that great trade of rice conducted through the riverine route of the various river marts of Malda and Dinajpur. In this riverine trade most of the traffics passed through Sahibganj, the registration station up and down the Ganges to Calcutta. It is to be mentioned that in 1872 the total quantity of rice passed through Sahibganj from Dinajpur and Malda district amounted to 1,628,794 maunds or 59,625 tons, and in 1873 to 1,538,898 maunds or 56,334 tons, but in 1874 due to famine the failure of the aman harvest caused the decreased of the exportation to no more than 53,275 maund or 1950 tons.¹³⁷ However, another report highlighted that the combined exports of Paddy from Dinajpur and Malda to be much higher in normal years 1872 and 1873 at 17 to 18 lakhs of maunds.¹³⁸ It is quite pertinent to mention that of the export of rice from the two districts, the maximum of it grew within the limits of Dinajpur district. The Statistic of the export of 1873 showed that out of 1,538,898 maunds or 56,334 tons of which 407,489 maunds or 14,917 tons were exported only from Malda district.¹³⁹ It is to be mentioned that Malda was a rice produce surplus district and even in the later years also from Malda a good quantities of rice was exported. It is recorded that approximately 3 lakhs of maunds of rice were exported annually of which 50,000 maunds came from undivided Dinajpur district.¹⁴⁰ Besides, the particular mentioned period in ordinary years also it is found that through Sahibganj the greater portion of the rice exported from Dinajpur. Nitpur on the Purnabhaha, Raiganj on the Kulik, Asani on the Tangan and Kalkamara on the Tangon, Kumarganj, Chandganj, Patiram, Balurghat and Hili were the important marts where from large

quantities of rice exported to Calcutta. It is evident that annually 29 to 32 lakhs of maunds of Paddy exported by railway from different stations of undivided Dinajpur district.¹⁴¹ Further, Gopalganj which did not appear in the Sahibganj returns, was a large mart and from that mart 180,000 maunds or 6589 tons of rice exported annually.¹⁴² Of the total surplus rice of Malda and Dinajpur, the great bulk of the rice were sent to up country and one half of the rice consigned to the North Western provinces. Besides, the rice of Dinajpur and Malda also exported to Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. W.W. Hunter mentioned that during his time the quantity of rice exported from Dinajpur to up country was 1,700,000 to 1,800,000 maunds or from 62,232 to 65,892 tons exclusive of the Malda rice.¹⁴³ It is also to be mentioned that the rice exported through different marts of Dinajpur, the whole of that were however, not only Dinajpur produce. A great deal of the rice of the west and the south – west of Rangpur district also collected at Dinajpur marts on the Atrai and Karatoya rivers and so sent to Calcutta. It is to be noted that the traffic from the Atrai river to Calcutta was transported almost entirely down the Matabhanga river and if the Matabhanga got dry it exported by way of the Eastern Bengal Railway. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that Patiram, Kumarganj, Chandganj and Balurghat were all on the Atrai River in Dinajpur district. In 1873, the total export of rice from these marts was 1,500,000 maunds or 54,910 tons of that, 800,000 to 1,000,000 maunds or 29,285 to 36,607 tons were consigned down the Matabhanga river to Calcutta. In that year it is also known that 200,000 maunds or 7,321 tons of rice was conveyed by the Eastern Bengal Railway.¹⁴⁴ Hili which was the than period in Bogra district largely exported Dinajpur rice. In 1873 120,000 maunds or 4392 tons rice was exported from the large rice mart of Hili. It is to be mentioned that the statistics of the river traffic of Jalpaiguri district for the six month ending February 1876, no rice or paddy was exported and from Cooch Behar a very little amount of rice was exported amounted 502 maunds and according to the estimate of the native merchants the value of the export of rice in 1876 was £10,000.¹⁴⁵ Thus, it is found that in the second half of

the nineteenth century exportation of rice was very insignificant in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that during the second half of the nineteenth century both in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar jute cultivation extensively extended due to the high prices of this cash crop. Thus, the cultivation of this agro crop suffered a set back during that period in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. It is to be noted that most of the expansion of jute took place in the Duars area of the Jalpaiguri district, but significant expansion also took place in the regulation or permanently settled part. In many areas this expansion took place at the expense of food crops. In the regulation part of the district, for example, 25 percent of the area which previously grew bhadoi rice came to grow jute by the first decade of the twenty century.¹⁴⁶ It is found that in 1901-02 the land under rice cultivation measured 637,000 acres but in 1907-08 the acreage decreased to 631,600 acres.¹⁴⁷ In 1907-08, the price of jute was very high in Jalpaiguri district and the cultivators grew large quantities of jute. But the price of jute fell and they did not make much profit what they had expected. Thus from that period there was a tendency of the cultivators to restrict the area under jute and to grow more rice in Jalpaiguri district.¹⁴⁸ However, the production of this agro-crop in Jalpaiguri district was not sufficient to meet the local demand and thus rice had to be imported from the major rice producing district of Dinajpur and from other provinces and neighbouring counties. The cheapest quality of rice also obtained from Ceylon to meet the demand of rice eating immigrant population in the Duars.¹⁴⁹ In this context it is to be mentioned that due to the rapid extension of tea gardens there was an influx of the population in the Western Duars as well as Jalpaiguri and the local supply of rice was not sufficient to meet the demand of the population. J.F. Gruning stated that the local supply of rice was insufficient to meet the increased demand of the large tea garden population, and thus rice was imported in considerable quantities from Dinajpur.¹⁵⁰ Besides Dinajpur, a considerable quantities of rice also imported from Rangpur to meet the demand.¹⁵¹

With the development of modern communication system i.e. the construction of roads all over North Bengal as well as with the opening of railways, area of rice cultivation was extensively extended and exportation of this agro-crop was also increased in North Bengal. It is to be mentioned that in Malda the opening of railways has given a value to land, practically value less a few years ago, rice cultivation was extended.¹⁵² In 1917, the area under rice land was 524,000 acres in Malda, in undivided Dinajpur district it covered an area of 998,700 acres or 79.6 percent of the net cropped area in 1911, in Cooch Behar state it was 7,79,000 bighas under rice in 1902, in Jalpaiguri district it was 637,000 acres in 1901 under rice, in Darjeeling district the area under rice in the Terai was 49,523 acres or 79 percent in 1925, in Kalimpong Estate the area under rice was 8,204 acres or 13.4 percent and in the Hill area of the whole Tista area, the area under rice was 528 acres or 3.3 percent in 1920.

The table shows the total area of agricultural land and total area of Paddy cultivation in different districts of North Bengal for the year 1915-16.

| District | Total area of agricultural land (in acres) | District | Total area of paddy cultivation land (in acres) |
|------------|--|------------|---|
| Dinajpur | 2525,440 | Dinajpur | 1174,000 |
| Jalpaiguri | 1868,160 | Jalpaiguri | 709,600 |
| Darjeeling | 744,960 | Darjeeling | 42,600 |
| Malda | 1215,360 | Malda | 598,000 |

Source : Agricultural Statistics of Bengal for 1915-16, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1917, p.11

It is to be mentioned that though jute ruled very high price in North Bengal and rice cultivation suffered a set back in some areas of North Bengal, the picture is somehow different in Malda and Dinajpur. In undivided Dinajpur inspite of the rise in importance of Jute, during the period under study rice was by far the most important crop of Dinajpur and Dinajpur was the chief rice growing and exporting district of North Bengal. The Commissioner of Rajshahi and Cooch Behar Division

remarked referring to Dinajpur rice exportation in 1880 that grain trade used to be carried on during rainy season only by boat from Dinajpur but with the opening of North Bengal State Railway the trade lasts all the year now.¹⁵³ It is found that with the inauguration of railway the picture was changed in inter-regional or inland trade of rice. Between 1900 and 1920 the ratio of the quantum's of the inland rice trade by country boat and railway fell from 11:7 to 5:15.¹⁵⁴ This agro-crop was exported to a greater or less extent from every important mart of North Bengal and every railway station was a collecting centre. Hili, Raiganj, Naxalbari, Matigara, Jalpaiguri, Haldibari and Cooch Behar became the principle trade marts and collecting centres of rice of North Bengal. It should be mentioned in this context that the Terai routes through Naxalbari and Adhikari did not carry any exports of rice but both these stations were important for importing considerable quantities of rice. From these two stations annually 100,000 maunds or 3,663 tons of rice imported.¹⁵⁵ In 1909-10 nearly six lakhs of maund husked and un-husked rice exported from Dinajpur by rail. Harendra Narayan Choudhury mentioned that with the opening of railways in Cooch Behar state a considerable quantities of rice exported from different parts of Cooch Behar.¹⁵⁶ It is to be mentioned that Galgalia which is 29 miles from Siliguri just inside the Bihar border and only a mile from the border of Nepal, was a depot for paddy from Nepal and supplied rice to the whole Darjeeling district. The annual exports of rice and paddy from this station was about 14 thousand tons.¹⁵⁷ The trade of rice through Galgalia was railed to Siliguri and other stations on the main Darjeeling – Himalayan Railway. It is to be mentioned that the tea garden population of Jalpaiguri was accustomed to get rice locally from the villagers and if it was deficiency in the local supply, then to import inferior quality of rice. It is significant to note that in the later years also Jalpaiguri figured among the rice deficit district of Bengal. However, a little quantity of rice exported from Jalpaiguri district. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that by railway in 1919 the export of rice from Jalpaiguri district was amounted 17,000 maunds.¹⁵⁸ It is also to be mentioned that during the month of Sept. 1920 by the Bengal Duars

Railway the total amount of rice and paddy exported from Jalpaiguri to different districts of Eastern Bengal were 1,262 maunds and 1,696 maunds respectively.¹⁵⁹

It is quite relevant to enquire as to who controlled the trade of this agro-crop. In this context it is to be mentioned that rice had a multi-dimensional market structure extending from the village '*hat*' at the micro-level to the national market. Most of the internal trade of this agro-crop was carried on at the local markets or bi-weekly markets called *hats*. The *Paikars* who were all local men purchased this agro-crop from the cultivators and sold those off to the merchants. Sometimes the *Paikar* happened to be the cultivators himself, who sold his own crop as also those of his neighbours to the merchants. The merchants were very often petty traders. The Marwaris in a great number and in some little extent the up countrymen and the Bengalee Saha community controlled the upper strata of this trade.¹⁶⁰ The local grain dealers controlled the rice husking which was an important industry of North Bengal under study. Large quantities of cleaned rice prepared in different villages of North Bengal and the labours connected with this industry were almost entirely up country cooly women. But this husking industry greatly declined its importance in the later years as it is found expensive than machinery process. Thus un-husked rice was most commonly exported from different parts of North Bengal as the husking process was being performed elsewhere by machinery at reduced costs. It is quite relevant to mention that the successful commercial application of rice hullers in Bengal started some times in the 1890s and the mechanical processing of rice had started in Bengal sometime in the early nineteenth with small hullers operated by steam engines.¹⁶¹ But in the area under study upto 1920-1921 there did not emerge a single rice mill.

The following table shows the development of rice mill in North Bengal.
Development of Rice Mill in North Bengal

| Year | Total number of Rice Mill in Bengal | Total number of Rice Mill in North Bengal |
|---------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1920-21 | 137 | Dinajpur - N.A. Jalpaiguri - N.A. Bogura - 3 Bakarganj - 1 Rajshahi - 1 Total - 5 |
| 1934-35 | 403 | Dinajpur - 30 Malda - 2 Jalpaiguri - 1 Darjeeling - 5 Bogura - 2 Bakarganj - 4 Rajshahi - 2 Total - 46 |

Source : i) Report of the Census of India - 1921, Vol.V, Part-I, pp.408-409

ii) Report on the Marketing of rice in Bengal Senior Marketing Officer, Bengal, Appendix - XII, As reproduced in the Report of the Bengal Paddy and Rice Enquiry Committee Vol.I, Bengal Government Press, Alipore-1940, Chairman, M. Carbery, P.14

From the table it is found that upto 1921 there emerged 137 Rice Mill in Bengal of which there were only 5 located in the greater North Bengal and no Rice Mill emerged in the area under study during that period. After 1921 Rice Mill gradually emerged in the area under study and upto 1935 it is found from the table that of the total Rice Mill of Bengal i.e. 403 there were 46 located in greater North Bengal of which 38 was located in the area under study. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that rice milling industry of Dinajpur offered a case in point. It is to be mentioned that the industry though a late origin in this district had rapid progress within a short period. From the table it is found that upto 1921 there did not emerge a single Rice Mill in undivided Dinajpur but within fifteen years the table shows that there emerged 30 Rice Mill in the undivided Dinajpur. Needless to say that in the pre partition era there were 43 Rice Mill in Dinajpur district. Due to partition 24 now belonged to East Pakistan and remaining 17 mills belonged to the newly constructed

Dinajpur district. It is to be mentioned that 10 out of 17 mills belonged to West Dinajpur district which were located at Hili close to the border of Pakistan.¹⁶² In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that in the pre partition era due to the locational advantage of Dinajpur, rice mills got the abundant supplies of raw materials. Dinajpur mills had been mainly fed by the paddy coming from the districts of Bogura and Rangpur in addition to the local supplies of the district and the rice produced by these mills was regularly sent to the market of Bihar and North Western provinces.

It is found that in the area under study rice milling industry originated late in comparison to other parts of Bengal. After 1921 Dinajpur (undivided) flourished in rice milling Industry. Besides Dinajpur, during the period there emerged only one rice mill in Jalpaiguri district and two in Malda district, five in Darjeeling district and in Cooch Behar state there emerged not a single rice mill, though some of the areas of North Bengal were found surplus areas of rice production. In this context it is to be mentioned that the negligible growth of the rice milling industry in North Bengal region particularly in Jalpaiguri district and Cooch Behar State was perhaps attributable to the increasing importance of the cultivation of jute in these areas. It is also to be mentioned that the geographical advantage of a cheap river traffic of Malda district with Calcutta carried by boats to and from the district was remained the cheapest method of transport caused for not significant emergence of rice milling industry in Malda district. Thus, it is found that though rice was commercially cultivated, like the other industries rice milling industries were not developed in the area under study in a remarkable figure in comparison to the other parts of Bengal.

The following tables show the price of rice in Bengal and North Bengal.

Average price of common rice in Bengal per maund of 82.28 lbs.

| Year | Price | | Year | Price | | Year | Price | |
|------|-------|----|------|-------|----|---------|-------|----|
| | Rs. | a. | | Rs. | a. | | Rs. | a. |
| 1901 | 3 | 11 | 1911 | 3 | 12 | 1921-22 | 6 | 0 |
| 1902 | 3 | 6 | 1912 | 4 | 3 | 1922-23 | 5 | 8 |
| 1903 | 3 | 1 | 1913 | 5 | 5 | 1923-24 | 5 | 8 |
| 1904 | 2 | 15 | 1914 | 5 | 10 | 1924-25 | 6 | 7 |
| 1905 | 3 | 4 | 1915 | 5 | 13 | 1925-26 | 7 | 0 |
| 1906 | 4 | 12 | 1916 | 5 | 7 | 1926-27 | 7 | 3 |
| 1907 | 5 | 7 | 1917 | 4 | 11 | 1927-28 | 7 | 8 |
| 1908 | 5 | 8 | 1918 | 4 | 3 | 1928-29 | 6 | 10 |
| 1909 | 4 | 10 | 1919 | 7 | 6 | 1929-30 | 6 | 0 |
| 1910 | 3 | 10 | 1920 | 7 | 4 | 1930-31 | 6 | 0 |
| | | | | | | 1931-32 | 4 | 1 |
| | | | | | | 1932-33 | 3 | 5 |
| | | | | | | 1933-34 | 2 | 10 |

Source : Report of the Bengal Paddy and Rice Enquiry Committee, Vol.I, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Chairman M. Carbery, 1940, p.24

Average price of common Rice in North Bengal per maund during the year
1875 to 1896

| Names of places and prices of information | 1875 | | | 1876 | | | 1877 | | | 1878 | | | 1879 | | | 1880 | | |
|---|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|
| | Rs. | A. | P. |
| Matigara hat, mahajan's account | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Siliguri sub-jail | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 6 | 4 |
| Jalpaiguri jail | 2 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 13 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 6 |
| Alipur sub-jail | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 12 | 0 |
| Rangpur from the settlement of Joydeb taluk | 2 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 15 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 0 |
| Dinajpur from Calcutta Gazette | 1 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 1 | 11 | 0 |
| Bogra from Calcutta Gazette | 1 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 7 | 0 |
| Jaipur settlement record | 1 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 11 | 1 | 5 | 11 | 1 | 14 | 0 | | | | | | |
| Total | 9 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 11 | 0 | 13 | 15 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 10 |

| 1881 | | | 1882 | | | 1883 | | | 1884 | | | 1885 | | | 1886 | | | 1887 | | | 1888 | | |
|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|
| 8 | | | 9 | | | 10 | | | 11 | | | 12 | | | 13 | | | 14 | | | 15 | | |
| Rs. | A. | P. |
| 2 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 12 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 14 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| 1 | 12 | 4 | 1 | 13 | 11 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 15 | 11 |
| 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 10 | 2 | 14 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | 3 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 12 | 0 |
| 1 | 4 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 6 | 1 | 12 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 0 |
| 1 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 6 | 1 | 11 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | 11 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 17 | 0 | 11 | 15 | 14 | 9 | 12 | 1 | 3 | 12 | 2 | 8 | 12 | 15 | 11 |

| 1889 | | | 1890 | | | 1891 | | | 1892 | | | 1893 | | | 1894 | | | 1895 | | | 1896 | | |
|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|
| 16 | | | 17 | | | 18 | | | 19 | | | 20 | | | 21 | | | 22 | | | 23 | | |
| Rs. | A. | P. |
| | | | | | | 2 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 11 | 2 | 10 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 13 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 4 | | | |
| 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 11 | 2 | 12 | 11 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 6 | | | |
| 2 | 8 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 | | | | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 15 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 11 |
| 2 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 12 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | 2 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 5 | 2 | 13 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | | | |
| 15 | 1 | 5 | 12 | 1 | 7 | 16 | 6 | 1 | 23 | 6 | 9 | 23 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 5 | 7 | 15 | 11 | 4 | 12 | 11 | 11 |

Source : Final Report on the Darjeeling Terai Settlement By Sasi Bhusan Dutt, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1898, P-Appendix IV, E.

Average price of Rice in the district of North Bengal in 1899 (from July to December).

| District | | Quantities per rupee in seers | |
|------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | S. | C. |
| Dinajpur | July to September | 16 | 13 ¹ / ₃ |
| Jalpaiguri | | 15 | 9 ¹ / ₃ |
| Dinajpur | October to December | 17 | 10 ² / ₃ |
| Jalpaiguri | | 14 | 5 ¹ / ₃ |

Source : Price lists of Staple food crops in the local areas of Bengal, prepared under Section 39(1) of the Bengal Tenancy Act, VIII of 1885, 1899, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1900, p.3

Average Price of Rice in the districts of North Bengal in 1922 (from January to December)

| District | Local areas | Marts which prices were taken | Quantities per rupee in seers (average price) | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---|----|
| | | | S. | C. |
| From January to March 1922 | | | | |
| Dinajpur | Balurghat | Balurghat | 7 | 8 |
| Jalpaiguri | Alipurduars | Alipurduars | 8 | 6 |
| | Sadar | Dinbazar | 7 | 9 |
| Malda | District of Malda | Balia Nawabganj | 7 | 9 |
| From April to June 1922 | | | | |
| Dinajpur | Balurghat | Balurghat | 7 | 9 |
| Jalpaiguri | Alipurduars | Alipurduars | 7 | 10 |
| | Sadar | Dinbazar | 6 | 13 |
| Malda | District of Malda | Balia Nawabganj | 6 | 11 |
| From July to September 1922 | | | | |
| Dinajpur | Balurghat | Balurghat | 7 | 1 |
| Jalpaiguri | Alipurduars | Alipurduars | 7 | 0 |
| | Sadar | Dinbazar | 6 | 9 |
| Malda | District of Malda | Balia Nawabganj | 6 | 10 |
| From October to December 1922 | | | | |
| Dinajpur | Balurghat | Balurghat | 8 | 7 |
| Jalpaiguri | Alipurduars | Alipurduars | 8 | 0 |
| | Sadar | Dinbazar | 6 | 10 |
| Malda | District of Malda | Balia Nawabganj | 8 | 0 |

Source : Price lists of Staple Food Crops in the local areas of Bengal, 1922, Prepared under Section 39(1) of the Bengal Tenancy Act. VIII of 1885, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1923, pp.3-4

TIMBER AND BAMBOO PRODUCTION

North Bengal region was covered with plentiful natural resources of dense forest. As the consequent of the Charter Act of 1833 the arrival of the free traders saw this region the prospects of this natural resources. It should be mentioned that economic exploitation of forest wealth for shipbuilding, East India Company was quite aware of the commercial potentialities of the timber. It is in the late 18th century the English traders paid attention to timber trade when they acquired the legal authority of the administration of Purnia region. In a letter dt. 13th August 1790 S. Heatly, Collector of Purnia, reported that the timber was one of the principal items from Nepal and the value of this import to Purnia, as per his estimate, was Rs. 70,000.¹⁶³ In 1797 Captain Hiran Cox, British Resident at Rangoon testified the durability of Burma teak ships. It is to be mentioned that Sal, Pine and Fir trees suitable for masts and spars of ships and also for other purposes were objects of pressing necessity to the Colonial interests of the company. These were imported from Burma at highly expensive prices. It was apprehended that supply of timber from Burma might receive serious setback. So, the company now turned towards Nepal. In 1801 Captain Cox, the first British Resident at Kathmandu, was instructed to endeavour to obtain the privileges of cutting and transporting timber on a contractual basis if he found the government of Nepal disinclined to come to terms over the cession of the forest lands.¹⁶⁴ Francis Buchanan has given a graphic narrative of the timber trade between Purnia and Nepal during the year 1809-10. He mentioned that the timber floated down the Kosi from Nepal. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton also mentioned the timber trade from Nepal. He wrote that as the woods of Bhutan were exhausted as those in the Company's territory, so that the greater part of the timber was brought from Nepal.¹⁶⁵ Huge quantity of timber was floated by various branches of the Kankayi into the Mahananda. For the timber trade a duty of four rupees on each boat loaded with timber was taken by the government of

Nepal.¹⁶⁶ It is found that in 1833 the Nepal Durbar asserted Rs.10 lakhs as revenue yielded by Terai regions out of which Rs.3 lakhs was from the timber of the Terai regions.¹⁶⁷ Thus it is not easy to deny that there was an extensive trade of timber from Nepal by the merchants of the East India Company. In the second half of the 19th century the import of timber from Nepal to India assumed a spectacular dimension. But from 1868 the Nepal Darbar employed their own officials to cut down timber which was afterwards sold by auction at different depots. It appears that by 1877 timber was no longer sold to contractors in the forests and the Darbar did not allow the merchants from India to fell and remove it from the forest for themselves.¹⁶⁸ The timber trade was smoothly continued but when the Darbar discovered extensive fraud committed by its subordinate officials it prohibited the sale of timber and was also trying to restrict excessive export of timber from Nepal. Thus owing to internal disturbances in Nepal and partly owing to alleged misconduct of some Indian traders, there was sharp decline in the trade in the last decade of the nineteenth century. As the English traders were familiar and close connected with timber trade at this juncture they were also conscious of the importance of the forest wealth of North Bengal. In this connection it is quite relevant to mention that realizing the value of the woods of Baikunthapur forest the British East India Company employed some people in this region for conducting timber trade at the beginning of the 19th century.¹⁶⁹

It should be mentioned that the northern areas of North Bengal i.e. Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri were covered with dense forest. The British planters already opened different tea gardens and the government now started to open railway in different parts of North Bengal. Thus, to meet the demand of the Indian rail road's for sleepers and that of tea plantation industries and for various construction works, the Colonial Government now turned towards the forest wealth i.e. the timber of North Bengal.

Among the vast forests the hills subdivision of the Darjeeling contains the following important forest tracts for supply of timber.

- i) Mahaldiram tract is well stocked with timber of all kinds – oak, magnolia, chestnut etc.
- ii) Panchar, a large tract of forest very well stocked with timber as Chilauni, fir, sal etc.
- iii) Outer hills, from Rangthang to the Tista river, were well stocked with sal, fir and other trees. The hills from Sivak up the valley of the Tista, had nearly all the good sal tree.

It should be mentioned in this connection that sal timber was very useful for the railway sleeper and fir timber was used for tea boxes. In the plains or Terai subdivision, the forest trees principally met with were sal, sisu, sisun and chilauni.

Besides Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri contains several extensive and fine forest tracts. In the regulation part of the district, in the extreme north, was an extensive and valuable sal forest known as Baikunthapur Jungle Mahal. It was under the possession of the Raikat or Raja of Baikunthapur. In 1809 Dr. Buchanan Hamilton commented regarding the importance of Baikunthapur that the woods of Battris – hazari or Baikunthapur have been nearly exhausted of sal and sisu, the only trees that are cut for exportation, although they contain a great abundance of timber in reality, perhaps more valuable.¹⁷⁰ It is to be mentioned in this regard that the total of forest area under Baikunthapur which was a private property of 219,227.5 acres or 342.54 square miles. W.W. Hunter mentioned seven forest tracts in the western Duars as (i) in Bhalka Pargana, (2) in Bhatibari Pargana, (3) in Buxa Pargana, (4) in Madari and Charoa Kshattriya Parganas, (5) in Lakshimpur Pargana, (6) in Maraghat Pargana, (7) in Mainaguri Pargana. The total area of the forest tracts of Jalpaiguri district exclusive of the Baikunthapur jungle Mahal was 41,737 acres.¹⁷¹ Most of the forests of Jalpaiguri district contained valuable sal and sisu trees and also many kinds of common jungle trees.

It is to be mentioned that when Darjeeling was taken over in 1835 from Sikkim the area particularly between the Kyal and the Balasan on

the east and the Rangnu and the Mahanadi (Mahananda) on the west, was entirely covered with dense forest and was practically uninhabited. In 1839 the cultivation and manufacture of tea in Darjeeling was started under the East Indian Company and from that time the expansion of tea gardens in Darjeeling areas the conversion of the forest into cultivated land for tea garden was started. Thus the rapid clearance of forest considerably extended in Darjeeling. The hill areas between the Mechi and the Balasan and between Tista and Mahanadi (Mahananda) were taken over in 1850 and the Kalimpong subdivision was annexed in 1865. Both these newly annexed areas there were the rapid clearance of forest for extension of cultivation as population increased due to an influx of settlers. But prior to 1863 the British government paid very little attention to the conservation of forests. As a result the areas had exploited the forest resources with gradual deforestation. As the prices of fuel and timber had greatly increased with gradual deforestation the Colonial Government was not remain indifferent about the commercial potential of timber. It should be mentioned in this connection that from late 18th century to the mid 19th century the traders and merchants of the East India Company had great attention to the timber trade of Burma and upto 1863 Calcutta had imported all the timber requirements from Burma and from Northern India.¹⁷² Besides this, upto 1877 the British merchants from India smoothly conducted the timber trade from Nepal to India. In 1858 with the queen's proclamation the administration of India was taken over from East India Company to the British Crown. As the British Crown now became governing authority, it took some constructive works for colonization. Realizing the over exploitation of the forests of India now the Colonial Government tried to save the remaining forests from total destruction and introduced measures of conservancy. In 1865 Government Forest Act inaugurated a definite Colonial policy regarding the forests in India. So, naturally forests of North Bengal too came under the purview of the Colonial Forest policy. In this connection it is quite pertinent to mention that to implement conservancy of forest in North Bengal in 1864 Dr. T. Anderson was temporarily appointed as

Conservator of Forest. Dr. Anderson was entrusted with the work of carrying out preliminary investigation and inquiries to the northern part of the province, i.e. the Eastern Himalayas including Sikkim and the belt of sal forest in the Terai and Duars at the foot of the hills. In August 1864 forest conservancy was inaugurated in Bengal and the first reserves were notified in 1865 in Darjeeling Division.¹⁷³ Though the reservation of Darjeeling Division was notified but till 1874 the Forests of Darjeeling District were within the Cooch Behar Forest Division. In 1875, the Darjeeling forests were taken out of the Cooch Behar Division and made into a separate Division and the hill portion of Kalimpong and Kurseong were included in Darjeeling Division. In 1878 the Reserved Forests of the Darjeeling district formed under three separate division viz. Darjeeling Division, Kurseong Division and Kalimpong Division and further the reservation was notified on Terai and Duars forests areas. In 1879 the first notification was published by which nearly 280 square miles of forest areas were declared to be reserved forest area in Jalpaiguri district.¹⁷⁴ The reserved forests of Jalpaiguri district were divided into two divisions, the Jalpaiguri and Buxa divisions. The forests of Jalpaiguri division situated between the Tista and Torsa rivers and the Buxa division was situated east of the Torsa in the Alipurduar subdivision. The forest area of Jalpaiguri division and Buxa division covered at the time of J.F. Gruning in 1911 respectively 182 square miles and 327 square miles. A.J. Dash mentioned that the total area of the three divisions of Darjeeling district covered 2,80,000 acres of reserved forests. It is to be mentioned that the Baikunthapur forest which was a private property of 342.54 square miles belonged to the Raikat of Baikunthapur, the Colonial Government tried to impose Forest Act to this forest. According to J.F. Gruning, for the preparation of map and record of rights in respect of estate's forest was one of the primary reasons for extending settlement in the Baikunthapur estate. So, in 1904 it was proposed to extend the Forest Act to this forest and in June 1908 a preliminary notification was issued for the reservation of the forest. But the manager of the estate strongly protested against the imposition of the Forest Act of the Government to the Baikunthapur

forest. Due to the strong protest the forest department gave up their control of the Baikunthapur forest in 1913. Thus it is clear that the British by extending the Forest Act in North Bengal tried to colonise the forest wealth, natural resources of North Bengal.

It is now quite pertinent to observe the utilization of forest wealth i.e. the uses of timber from different forests of North Bengal. It should be mentioned that long before, during the time of Warren Hastings “timber” was mentioned as one of the items of trading possibilities in North Bengal. Now by imposing the conservancy on the forests of North Bengal the motto of the Colonial Government was to commercialize the forests produce i.e. the timber of North Bengal by supplying them to the other parts of Bengal. It is quite clear in replied to the request of the Government for a report on the feasibility of forestry operations in Duars during the Anglo-Bhutanese War (1865) Dr. Anderson, the Conservator of Forests remarked that:

“The Western Dooars themselves are very thinly populated and the requirements of the people are very small indeed. On the other hand timber is much in demand in the districts south of the Dooars, especially in Cooch Behar, Rungpore and the Western part of the Dacca presidency”.¹⁷⁵ The forest department was also optimistic that timber of North Bengal would replace the more expensive timber from Oudh and Nepal in the markets of East Bengal and would soon be able to generate a handsome profit from this trade. Despite the timber markets of Eastern Bengal it was the Construction of North Bengal Railways and other Railways and for tea industries the demand for timber provided the forest department with the much needed market for its products. In this context it is to be mentioned that from the outset the Colonial Government failed to chalk out a plan, but they had a wishful aim to use the forests of North Bengal for financial gain. At the primary stage the Railway Department was the main buyer of the timber of forest department. The Colonial Government hoped to commercialize the forests on the basis of the demand of the railway sleepers. But due to Peculiar Railway rule the

Railway Companies did not deal directly with the Forest Department. The Forest Department was compelled therefore to sell the railway sleepers to the contractors and the contractors sold it to the Railway Companies. It is found that about the year 1865 one Mr. Dear secured monopoly for working the whole of plains forest in the Darjeeling district for supply of railway sleepers.¹⁷⁶ Besides the European Contractors one finds the references of Native contractors contracted to deliver large number of railway sleepers.¹⁷⁷ Due to the Railway rule at the outset the Forest Department could not improve its timber trade. Thus, to improve timber trade and to save the Department from losses the Government thought of changing its policy and started departmental operations of the Forests of North Bengal. E.P. Dansey in his report mentioned that he informed the Government to take a systematic series of improvement for commercialization of the timber of both Jalpaiguri and Buxa division.¹⁷⁸ Thus it was an opportunity to the British Government that the forests of North Bengal could be run as a profitable commercial venture.

The three reserved Divisions of Darjeeling i.e. Darjeeling Division, Kurseong Division and Kalimpong Division and the two reserved Division of Jalpaiguri i.e. Jalpaiguri Division and Buxa Division now supplied the required timber in different parts of Eastern Bengal and North Bengal. Besides the reserved forests, the timber of Khas Mahal or unreserved forests and Baikunthapur forests of Jalpaiguri were also supplied timber. In this connection J.F. Gruning remarked that "Sal timber is cut in the forests of the western Duars and Baikunthapur and floated down to the Brahmaputra river, where the greater part of it goes to Dacca and Sirajganj."¹⁷⁹ Most of the Sal timber exported by water to the markets of Eastern Bengal and the purchasers of timber were mostly native merchants from Nator, Dacca and Rangpur. The timber exported from Jalpaiguri through river by the native merchants of Eastern Bengal chiefly for building boats. The streams available for floating timber in the western Duars were Tista, Jaldhaka, Mujnai, Torsa, Kaljani and Sankosh rivers. In the western Duars a timber depot was established at Domohoni. The Statistical Report for the six months ending Feb, 1876 showed the export

of 1310 loads and 1926 loads of timber from Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar respectively.¹⁸⁰ Further, timbers were procured from the reserved forests for making tea chests and railway sleepers. In this regard it is to be mentioned that both the tea planters and Colonial Government were not remain indifferent about the commercial potential of timber. From the forests of Jalpaiguri the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri could obtain nearly all the timber and fuel according to their requirement from their own grants which were very large. There was also an almost unlimited demand of Sal timber for meter gauge sal sleeper from the Eastern Bengal State Railways, Bengal and North Western Railways and Bengal Duars Railways. Thus with the opening of Bengal Duars Railways, the Eastern Bengal Railways, North Western Railways were provided with abundant supply of timber from the Jalpaiguri forests areas. It is to be mentioned that Dacca and other places of Eastern Bengal took most of the heavy sal timber which instead of being cut into railway sleepers were taken by local purchasers to Alipurduar where they were sold to merchants coming from Dacca and Rangpur.¹⁸¹ The Cooch Behar Railway line for its Small Carrying Capacity due to 2.6" gauge there was difficulty in carrying forest produces. Thus, the timbers from the adjacent regions were brought to Gitaldaha Junction where it joins the Eastern Bengal State Railway.¹⁸² The reserved forests of the Buxa division were very compact with Sal, Sisu, Khayer and Magnolia trees. W.W. Hunter mentioned that much of the fine timber was cut from this forest before the tract came into the hands of the British Government.¹⁸³ From 1875 to 1888 nearly all the exploitation work was done departmentally, but during the next ten years departmental work was almost suspended and purchasers removed nearly the whole of the small outturn obtained from the forests. It is mentioned in the progress Report of the Forest administration that from Buxa forest division to meet the demand of the railways, the number of sleepers supplied in 1879 was 18,449, in 1880 it was 22,683, in 1881 it was 29865 and in 1882 it was 21,602.¹⁸⁴ Thus it is found that during the four years from 1879 to 1882 from Buxa forests 92,599 sleepers were supplied for railways. After 1888 in 1899-1900, again the departmental

operations began and sleepers were supplied to the Eastern Bengal State Railway. In this connection it is quite pertinent to mention that in 1911-1912 the Colonial Government supplied 1.5 lakh of sal sleepers for the Eastern Bengal State Railway and the Sara Bridge from Buxa and Goalpara divisions and earned a profit of about Rs.1,40,000.¹⁸⁵ In 1930-31 from Buxa division timber extracted departmentally amounted to 16.8 percent of the total outturn against 9.1 percent in the previous year owing to large supply of sleepers to railways.¹⁸⁶ In 1933, the most noticeable item was the establishment of a trade in matchwood trees. One thousand eight hundred and fifty eight tons of match wood were railed from the Buxa division to Calcutta during 1933-34. Further, from the North Borojhar Reserve of the Buxa division by an agreement with Messrs, Kanyalall Lakhiram of Beech Tea Estate 23,760 cubic feet of Khair trees extracted and the Government gained a royalty of Rs.5,197-8. In that year the total value of the sale of timber, fuel, bamboos, grazing and minor produce rose from Rs.3,80,075 in the previous year to Rs.4,52,414.¹⁸⁷ Sisu tree is another important tree of Buxa forests that wood's is suitable for tea-boxes. As the forest department sold this wood in a very high rate the tea garden owners had to import the tea-boxes. In this regard the Colonial Government took initiative measures to solve the problem and it was entrusted to M/s Davenport and Company for the extraction of timber within the Buxa Reserve to be used for the local production of tea boxes. At Rajabhatkhawa in the Buxa Division the Buxa Timber and Trading Company erected a veneer factory. The factory supplied the required three and five ply boards for tea boxes. During the World War-I the company had gone into liquidation but within a short time it ultimately achieved. E.P. Stebbing mentioned that in 1925 he had seen some beautiful three and five ply boards in the factory.¹⁸⁸ The table shows the outturn of timber from the forests of Jalpaiguri Division.

Statement of total outturn of Timber from the forests of Jalpaiguri Division from 1878-79 to 1887-88

| Year | Green trees (cft) | | Dry trees (cft) | |
|---------|-------------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
| | Sal | Others | Sal | Others |
| 1878-79 | 67083 | 284 | 29985 | 110 |
| 1879-80 | 7708 | 22660 | 38465 | 415 |
| 1880-81 | 35930 | 8061 | 30610 | 112 |
| 1881-82 | 48351 | 11590 | 35650 | 245 |
| 1882-83 | 67922 | 8354 | 38979 | 790 |
| 1883-84 | 113992 | 4850 | 38086 | 881 |
| 1884-85 | 31717 | 3383 | 32680 | 4910 |
| 1885-86 | 39065 | 483 | 36175 | 386 |
| 1886-87 | 82716 | 2670 | 29075 | 1278 |
| 1887-88 | 44108 | 5610 | 114499 | 4200 |
| Total | 538652 | 67945 | 424204 | 13127 |

Source : N.B., 25-38, File 10/3, October 1892, West Bengal State Archives.

The forests of the Darjeeling division had been used mainly to meet the local demands. The timber of the Darjeeling forests were mostly used for fire wood consumed by the tea estates, timber for tea box planking, timber for constructional works etc. The box planking from the departmental saw mill at Sukna was sold to the local tea gardens. The total outturn of timber of different kinds amounted to 7.75 millions of cubic feet during the year. In 1921 a departmental depot opened at Darjeeling for the continuous supply of charcoal gave quite satisfactory results.¹⁸⁹ It is to be mentioned that a large quantities of firewood consumed by the different tea estates and the Darjeeling division forests supplied large quantities of firewood for the cantonments of Jalapahar and Lebong and Town Darjeeling also.¹⁹⁰ This forest division supplied a small quantity of sal timber which exported from the Tista Valley. However, in 1920-21, large quantities of sleepers were sawn and supplied from this division to the Eastern Bengal Railway and Sal logs sent to Messrs, Martin and Co., Calcutta and to Messrs Howard Brothers, London for disposal.¹⁹¹ The Kurseong division also exported large quantities of sal timber. The export of sal poles took place by cart to Kishanganj and sal and other logs and scantlings by rail from Siliguri. It

is noted in the Progress Report of the Forest administration that the Kurseong division supplied large quantities of timber for the construction of bridges on the Ganges and for the Northern Bengal State Railway in 1877-78. In 1878, 12540 sleepers were supplied to Northern Bengal State Railway from Kurseong division.¹⁹² In the hills Kurseong and in the plains Siliguri were the main markets for the produce of the forests of the Kurseong division. In 1927, for timber business three saw mills were opened at Siliguri of which one owned and worked by the forest department of Government.¹⁹³ Of its opening year the Government saw mill gained a profit of Rs.15,458 and the mill got gross revenue on sales of sawn timber in 1929, Rs.125,943 and in 1930 Rs.110,759.¹⁹⁴ The forests of Kalimpong division supplied a means of extracting sal timber for the construction of the Tista Valley Cart Road and for the tea industry in Jalpaiguri District.¹⁹⁵ The export of the timber of this division consisted mainly of fire wood for tea gardens in the adjoining Jalpaiguri District for tea packing and particularly the sal timber for sleepers and house building in North Bengal. Despite these uses, there were local demand of the timber of this division for firewood, charcoal, timber for orange boxes in a large scale also. In this context it is to be mentioned that from 1906-07 to 1922-23, 1,186,383 cft sal timber, 3,732,675 cft other species of timber and 19,590,266 cft firewood outturn from Kalimpong division.¹⁹⁶ Thus, it is found that the Britishers fully utilized the forest wealth, particularly the timber of North Bengal for commercial venture and Colonial interest. Depression also hit to the timber business of the Colonial Government. In the Jalpaiguri and Buxa Divisions departmental operations were reduced due to the slump in the timber market and the decrease in the demand of railways for sleepers. The sale of round sal timber at the Government timber depot at Siliguri decreased from 21,077 cubic feet to 20,789 cubic feet, but the sale of sawn sal increased by about 8,000 cubic feet and in spite of considerable reductions in sale prices the gross revenue collected on mill account increased by nearly Rs.11,000. The trading account of the Siliguri Saw mill, however, showed a loss of Rs.982 on the years working.¹⁹⁷

It is quite relevant to mention that the local people had very limited requirement of the timber or the principal forest produce. Thus it was the British merchants and the Colonial Government both had a special attraction towards this natural resource to make it a profitable commercial venture. It is to be noted that besides railway sleepers and tea industries, there was a great demand of timber in Eastern Bengal for various uses. Sal and other hard-wood had a great demand for countryboats and pleasure boats, plough, yoke, bullock carts, carts drawn by horses and palanquin. Demand for 'sisu' was especially for furniture. In the construction of brick building, for supporting roof, the beam of 'sal' wood was essential in those days. To meet these many and various demands in Eastern Bengal the merchants from Dacca used to come at Buxa, Jalpaiguri, Baikunthapur and Eastern Duars to collect timber. As there was a great demand of timber in the market of Eastern Bengal and to the adjacent district of North Bengal timber trade was flourished in North Bengal. Thus Baura, Sukhani, Lataguri, Domohani, Ramshai, Khagrijan, Malbazar, Naxalbari, Siliguri became important timber trading centre of North Bengal. For easy carrying of timber logs, the forest department also paid attention for the maintenance of roads and the Colonial Government opened branches of railway line. In Jalpaiguri district between Rajabhatkhawa and Alipurduar, the road was maintained by the forest department, as much of the timber was carted to Alipurduar and floated down the Kaljani river from that place. There were certain roads maintained by the forest department of Darjeeling district. For carrying timber logs branches of railway lines were opened from Rangpur and Parbatipur to Lataguri and from Lataguri to Meteli hill. It is to be mentioned that the Colonial Government wanted to utilize the timber of North Bengal to generate a handsome profit from open market, but it was mostly used for serving the Colonial needs. Subhajt Roy in his book "Transformation on the Bengal Frontier, Jalpaiguri, 1765-1948" touched this issue and showed that it was the broader needs of the Colonial State, the forests in the Duars were utilized for their own exploitation.¹⁹⁸ His discussion was confined only one of the forest division

of Jalpaiguri district i.e. Buxa forests divisions. The picture was somewhat same in the Jalpaiguri Division and the three forests divisions of Darjeeling district. In this context it is to be mentioned that for the opening of Bengal Duars Railways in 1891-92, the Colonial Government made a free grant of mature sal trees and the value of this concession was amounted to Rs.30,000.¹⁹⁹ So, the sum total effect of the timber production of North Bengal during the period under study was that large quantities of timber was used for railway sleepers, tea industries for serving the Colonial interest. But the utilization of timber as commercial venture and the commercial outlook of the Britishers also paved the way for the involvement and emergence of the native Bengalees in timber trade of the area under study.

The following table shows the amount of net profit gained by the British Government from the forests of Jalpaiguri Division and Buxa Divisions.

Statement of Revenue, Expenditure and Net Profits from the forest area situated in Jalpaiguri and Buxa Division from 1882-83 to 1893-94 and 1898-99 to 1907-08.

| Year | Jalpaiguri Division | | | Buxa Division | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Revenue | Expenditure | Net profits | Revenue | Expenditure | Net profits |
| | Rs. | Rs. | Rs. | Rs. | Rs. | Rs. |
| 1882-83 | 11805 | 17057 | - | 80443 | 68711 | 11732 |
| 1883-84 | 8077 | 14660 | - | 75045 | 64942 | 10103 |
| 1884-85 | 8993 | 16550 | - | 55641 | 65276 | - |
| 1885-86 | 7835 | 20589 | - | 27740 | 44742 | - |
| 1886-87 | 12421 | 20483 | - | 53503 | 50487 | 3016 |
| 1887-88 | 12060 | 14293 | - | 30589 | 26101 | 4488 |
| 1888-89 | 14328 | 12262 | 2066 | 12920 | 20004 | - |
| 1889-90 | 24635 | 15666 | 8969 | 31296 | 22725 | 8571 |
| 1890-91 | 31998 | 15967 | 16031 | 23398 | 23913 | - |
| 1891-92 | 23697 | 25656 | - | 12465 | 22188 | - |
| 1892-93 | 29189 | 29648 | - | 12556 | 23296 | - |

| | | | | | | |
|---------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1893-94 | 40185 | 25705 | 14480 | 10185 | 23165 | - |
| 1898-99 | 54568 | 21131 | 30427 | 17452 | 23315 | - |
| 1899-00 | 56780 | 34378 | 22402 | 28826 | 33683 | - |
| 1900-01 | 55345 | 37101 | 18244 | 43228 | 37135 | 6093 |
| 1901-02 | 56774 | 449018 | 11856 | 62675 | 40032 | 22643 |
| 1902-03 | 68621 | 44089 | 27532 | 57334 | 55917 | 1417 |
| 1903-04 | 55199 | 31738 | 23161 | 63255 | 76691 | - |
| 1904-05 | 88521 | 50434 | 38097 | 120789 | 84783 | 36006 |
| 1905-06 | 99403 | 43807 | 55596 | 132434 | 91671 | 40763 |
| 1906-07 | 133630 | 48740 | 81890 | 215037 | 97351 | 117686 |
| 1907-08 | 104730 | 41662 | 63068 | 220893 | 121220 | 99673 |

Source : For the year 1882-83 to 1893-94 D.H.E. Sunder: Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, (1889-95), Part-I, Ch.I, P.14, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta-1895 and for the year 1898-99 to 1907-08 J.F. Gruning, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Allahabad, 1911, p.71.

The following table shows the yield of revenue from the forests of Darjeeling District.

The statement of yield of revenue from the forests areas of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong division.

| Year | Darjeeling Division | Kurseong Division | Kalimpong Division |
|---------|--|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Timber fine wood and Box planking timber | Timber and fire wood | Timber and firewood |
| 1925-26 | Rs.1174,684 | Rs.254,836 | Rs.109,846 |
| 2930-31 | Rs.1921,324 | Rs.197,070 | Rs.89,207 |
| 1935-36 | Rs.1170,853 | Rs.225,345 | Rs.62,953 |

Source : A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1947, pp.132-33

BAMBOO PRODUCTION

Though the economic historians and the economists regard North Bengal as the region of Tea, Timber and Tobacco, it is also to be noted that bamboo is another Commercial Commodity of the region. In the early phase of the Colonial rule the bamboo is not considered as a commodity. With the passage of time it is found a change in the commercial and industrial policy of the East India Company and subsequently the British India Government. The development of the paper mill at Calcutta and surrounding areas has largely converted the bamboo as a Commercial Commodity. In the pre-industrial phase it was mainly used for the domestic purposes, but the growth of jute mills changed the character of the bamboo cultivation of the region under study. Like Jute industry paper industry was located on the banks of the Ganges, but there were no hinterland for the raw materials of the jute and paper industries. As a result the bamboos of northern North Bengal particularly exported to Calcutta though in a limited manner to cater the rising paper mill of the surrounding Calcutta. It is to be noted that the quantity of export of bamboo was not much noticeable; still it was opened up a new vista in the economy of northern North Bengal. We can precisely mentioned the case of the export of bamboos to Calcutta. Some local records gives us information about the exportation of bamboos from Haldibari to Titagarh paper mills.²⁰⁰ Apart from this another point is to be noticed here that bamboo was the part and percale of the cultural life of the Indo-Mongoloid people. From Jalpaiguri of the Bengal to the entire North East India as well as South East Asia we found the massive use of the bamboos in the domestic life of the people of these vast areas. W.W. Hunter mentioned that bamboos grew extensively in the norther parts of this region and formed the fuel supply of the people, besides being used largely in the building of houses, fences etc.²⁰¹ In the Terai dry bamboo and jungle twins were sold at the cost of 4 annas per cart.²⁰² Needless to say even today northern North Bengal is the Chief supplier of bamboos to the paper mills of Calcutta and its surrounding areas. In this context we must

mentioned that the bamboos of Goalpara of Assam region which was used in the paper mills of Calcutta.

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