

Chapter - II

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Bengal's Cotton Textile Industry Prior to 1757: A Bird's Eye View

Cotton industry was a rural cottage handicraft industry of Bengal functioning from the days of antiquity. Bengal was famous all over the world for its production of exquisitely beautiful cotton fabrics. Various kinds of cloths were manufactured by the weavers of Bengal which were differentiated by various names according to the fabrics and places where they were made. The cotton products of Bengal can be divided into two broad categories as muslin and calicos.

This chapter analyses the status of the cotton textile industry of Bengal prior to 1757. It considers various aspects of this traditional industry during the period on the basis of historical evidences, export of industry's output, import of raw cotton for industry's consumption and its production organization. From the careful investigation on the basis of evidences and data, this chapter suggests that the growth of the industry was conspicuous in the said period. The ample demand from the Mughal Emperors and their provincial rulers coupled with the export demand by the European merchant companies since the early seventeenth century created sufficient growth impetus to the Bengal industry. Bengal calicoes were in great demand for the mass market while its muslins attained high appreciation from the affluent society of the European continent. The large influx of Bengal cotton products into England was a threat to the survival of the British cotton industry. This chapter argues that before the advent of machine spinning and weaving Bengal was probably the world's most famous producer of cotton textile.

Section I discusses the historical evidences of the cotton textile industry of Bengal. Section II explores the trade of Bengal cotton products in different parts of Asia and Europe in the period under review. Section III analyses the production organization of the industry in the period. Section IV shows the production and import of raw cotton in Bengal looms along with the prices of various cotton products of Bengal. Section V is a concluding part over viewing all the aspects discussed here.

I

From the hoary past man has been using various fibres like flax, wool, silk, hemp and cotton for producing cloth. Of these, cotton fibre is the most universally used from the early days of civilization to the present day. It is believed that cotton fibre has been used by the Indian Hindus for making cloths for no less than 4000 years. The term *Kapas* (cotton) is probably derived from the Sanskrit word *Carpasa*. It is said that from 1500 B.C. to 16th century, India was the hub of the cotton industry, and she supplied cloths to Europe for ages. The West learned spinning and weaving from India. Dr. Forbes Royle said that the cotton manufacture was undoubtedly established in India long before we get it noticed in any reliable historical source.²¹ In the *Institutions of Manu* written in about 800 B.C. it is decreed that the sacred thread of a Brahman must be of *carpasa* (cotton) only.

The first definite mention of Bengal Cloth was in the valuable record of ancient Indian commerce "The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea".²² (60 AD). From this record, it appears that fine muslins were produced at many parts in north-western India but it stood nowhere in terms of quality with regard to those produced in Bengal. It also appears from the record that a whole piece of the finest Indian muslin of 20 yards long and 1 yard wide could be passed through an ordinary finger ring. In 10th century A.D, Ibn Khurdaba, an Arab geographer, described the production of cotton clothes in

²¹ Royle, *On the culture and Commerce of Cotton in India and Elsewhere*, p.4.

²² Schoff, W. H., *The Periplus of the Erithrean Sea Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean By a Merchant of the First Century*, P. 258.

Rahmi (a place near Dhaka).²³ Chao-Ju-Kua, a Chinese traveler in the first decade of thirteenth century, mentioned that in Ping-Kalo (Bengal) superior double edge sword-blades, cotton and other clothes were produced.²⁴

In the Mughal period, the cotton industry of Bengal was in flourishing condition which was mentioned in various literatures. Robert Orme described that the cotton manufacture of Bengal was almost as a national industry. He noted that it was difficult to find a village in Bengal where almost every man, woman or child was not employed in making a piece of cloth.²⁵ The muslins of Dhaka, especially those produced for the Emperors and his seraglio, were wonderful due to their fineness. The price of such muslins was higher at least ten times than the price of any cloth made for the Europeans or anyone else in India. The excellent quality of the Dacca muslin can be understood from the story of Aurangzeb's daughter. The Emperor wrongly considered his daughter as naked when she had draped no less than seven folds of this cloth around her body.²⁶

Pyrard de Laval travelled in Bengal in the first decade of the seventeenth century when the trade of Bengal was dominated by the Portuguese and said, that the inhabitants of Bengal, both men and women, are wondrously adroit in all such manufactures such as of cotton, cloth and silks and needlework, such as embroideries which are worked so skillfully, down to the smallest stitches that nothing prettier was to be seen anywhere. Some of these cottons and silks were so fine that it was difficult to say whether a person so attired be clothed or nude.²⁷

²³ Dowson, J. ed., *The History of India As Told By Its Own Historians*, vol.1, p. 13-14.

²⁴ Hirth, F, 'An article on Chao-ju-Kua's ethnography, etc.', *J.R.S.A*, 1806, p.495.

²⁵ Orme, R., *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire*, p.409.

²⁶ Bolts, William, *Considerations*, p. 206.

²⁷ Gray, A., *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval etc.* vol I, p.329.

Ralph Fitch during his travel in India in 1583 found production and trade of cotton and cotton cloth in many places of Bengal namely Gaur, Saptagram and Sonargaon. Sonargaon, a village near Dhaka, was described by Ralph Fitch as the place that produced the best and finest quality of cotton cloth in all over India.²⁸ It is mentioned in the Ain-i-Akbari that in Sonargaon , a large quantity of a very fine muslin was manufactured.²⁹

Moreland, while describing the cotton manufactures of Bengal, observed that the people of Bengal during this period (1600 A.D) used to wear clothes made of either jute or cotton, and that the province was so densely populated that its clothing must indicate a substantial proportion of the entire textile consumption of the country.³⁰

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Bengal cotton textile industry was flourishing through internal and external trade by the indigenous and European merchants and through the patronage of the Mughal Emperors and the Provincial rulers like the *Nawabs* of Bengal. It was described in the writing of Bolts and Orme who were two contemporary observers. William Bolt's description is very significant in this regard. He says that every possible encouragement was given by the Mughals to the merchants of all nations who were allowed free ingress and egress for their traffic to and from Bengal by land and water, in so much that large caravans overland were used to come from the distant parts even from Muscovy for the purposes of trade into Bengal and the adjacent provinces.³¹ The description presented by Orme on the same topic states that Bengal by its situation and production had the most extensive commerce of any province of the Empire. Delhi was from thence supplied with all its linens and silks, raw and manufactured, with cloths, with sugar, opium,

²⁸ Foster, W., ed., *Early Travels In India*, 1583-1619, p. 24-28.

²⁹ Jarrett, ed., *Ain-I -Akbari*, Vol.II, p.124.

³⁰ Moreland, *India at the death of Akbar*, p.179.

³¹ Bolts , op, cit., p.67.

grain etc. The European nations made their largest and most valuable investments there.³²

During 1739-1759, the Mughal Empire fell but the luxurious mode of living of the Emperors and his noble court continued. Besides this, there were the *Nawab Wazir* of Oudh, the petty Ruhela Chieftains in the North and the *Nazim* in the South. The plenty of demand from the above and export demand by the European companies gave necessary impetus to the growth of Bengal cotton industry.

II

In the sixteenth century, Bengal was celebrated for its export of textiles to many regions in Asia and Europe. During 1500 – 1800 Bengal was gradually incorporated into the capitalistic world system through oceanic trade with Europe after the advent of the direct sea route from Europe to Asia via the Cape of Good Hope. The pioneers in direct European maritime trade with India were the Portuguese. It began with the arrival of the Portuguese like Vasco da Gama. Encouraged by the Portuguese trade in the sixteenth century various European nations founded joint-stock companies in the early seventeenth century for trade in India, and among them the English East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (V O C) were prominent. Calicoes and muslin of singular beauty and endless variety were the important items of export by these companies from Bengal. In A.D. 73, Pliny was aware of the trade and manufactures of India and described the Bengal muslin as 'of superior excellence'.³³

The first European Settler in Bengal, the Portuguese, shipped various things produced by various manufacturers from Bengal. Calicoes of Bengal were a very considerable part of the Portuguese export into Europe in the early sixteenth century. Pyrard de Laval travelled in Bengal in the first decade of the seventeenth century when the trade

³² Orme, *op. cit.*, p.416.

³³ Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, vol. II, p. 229.

of Bengal was dominated by the Portuguese and commented, that excellently woven cotton clothes of Bengal, were exported.³⁴ Though at one point of time, say by the end of seventeenth century, the Portuguese controlled the sea – routes of the Indian Ocean held no important position in the commerce of Bengal.

The cotton textile industry of Bengal was well established when the English came here. Besides the domestic consumption, Bengal cotton products became the principal article of exports in the world market then. In 1615, Milburn described from Sir Ddudly Diggs's Pamphlet that a considerable quantity of Bengal calicoes was exported from England to other European countries. He also mentioned the estimate given by Munn which shows that the annual export of calicoes from Bengal to England was 50,000 pieces in 1628. That estimate also exhibits that the cost of those calicoes were on an average 7 s per piece in India and were sold in London at 20 s per piece.³⁵

From 1631 painted calicoes started to be exported from Bengal in considerable quantities by the English East India Company. During 1653 – 1656, the Bengal calicoes captured the World market thanks to its low price and high quality. The English East India Company supplied it to many parts of Europe and even Amsterdam itself. Later their export areas declined.³⁶

The English East India Company exported Bengal cotton products even in England during 1656-57, although the cotton manufacturing had existed in England since the beginning of the seventeenth century. However, the industry was not well developed and the quantity of production was small even in 1656-57.

In 1677 England imported Bengal calicoes to the tune of £1,60,000 and by 1680 England imported printed and painted calicoes worth £ 3,00,000 annually for her own

³⁴ Gray, op.cit., p.328.

³⁵ Milburn, op. cit., p. 230.

³⁶ *ibid*, p.230.

consumption.³⁷ By 1699, the supply of Bengal clothes spread in the British market to a great extent and its price came down to a very low level, so much so that it became ruinous to the English cotton manufactures. From 1700, British Parliament enacted different laws prohibiting the supply of the Indian muslin and calicoes in England. According to the Act of 1700, from and after 29th September, 1701, the import of all painted, dyed and stained calicoes from India was prohibited, although import from India to England was allowed for re-export in the law.³⁸ According to the Act of 1720, the use of stained or dyed cotton cloth of India in Britain was a penal offence.³⁹

The lion's share of the textiles imported in the Nederland was coarse goods which were re-exported. The Dutch company had been extensively involved in intra-Asian trade. Between 1660 and 1680, according to Mr. Moreland's calculation, Japan took nearly one-tenth of all the cotton goods shipped by the Dutch from Batavia.⁴⁰ The Dutch exported cotton manufactures of Bengal to Siam, Moluccas, Ambionia, South Africa, Arabia, Persian Gulf, Egypt and adjacent parts of North Africa. The export items of them consisted mainly of calicoes and ordinary muslins.⁴¹

Table 2.1 given below shows the percentage share of different textile categories of Bengal exported by the Dutch to Batavia, Japan and Persia in 1730-55.

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 230.

³⁸ Quoted in Ray, Identifying the woes of the cotton textile industry, *EHR*, Nov. 2009, vol.62,4, p.6.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ Moreland, 'Indian Exports of Cotton Goods in Seventeenth Century', *Indian Journal of Economics*, 1924-25, vol. 5, p. 241.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 241.

Table: 2.1: Percentage share of different textile categories of Bengal exported by the Dutch to Batavia, Japan and Persia in 1730-55

Categories	Gunnies	Ord. Calicoes	Muslins	Silk	Mixed	Others	Total
A. BATAVIA							
(1)1730s							
Total Pieces	263,375	277,284	29,985	(#)	(#)	13,414	584,022
% Share	45.10	47.48	5.12			2.30	100
(2)1740s							
Total Pieces	258,961	96,641	53,986	(#)	(#)	22,419	432,007
% Share	59.94	22.37	12.50			5.19	100
(3)1750s							
Total Pieces	228,955	109,668	16,915	(#)	(#)	16,346	371,884
% Share	61.57	29.49	4.54			4.40	100
B. JAPAN							
(1)1730s							
Total Pieces	0	27,299	(#)	120,989	72,862	9,488	230,648
% Share		11.84		52.46	31.59	4.11	100
(2)1740s							
Total Pieces	0	2,980	(#)	21,359	10,370	1,377	36,086
% Share		8.26		59.19	28.74	3.81	100
(3)1750s							
Total Pieces	0	7,086	(#)	9,381	2,200	1,677	20,344
% Share		34.83		46.11	10.81	8.25	100
C. PERSIA							
(1)1730s							
Total Pieces	14,000	22,972	13,760	(#)	10,060	4,590	65,382
% Share	21.41	35.14	21.05		15.39	7.01	100
(2)1740s							
Total Pieces	32,363	3,582	23,036	(#)	6,069	3,600	68,650
% Share	47.14	5.22	33.56		8.84	5.24	100
(3)1750s							
Total Pieces	0	3,300	8,275	(#)	0	2,600	14,175
% Share	0.00	23.28	58.38		0.00	18.34	100

Compiled from S. Chaudhury: *From Prosperity to Decline*, p. 199. # or small included in "others"

After 1720 the Dutch began to fall rapidly behind the English and a quite unnecessary ostentation and corruption ultimately led to the extinction of their position as a political and commercial power in Bengal and also in the rest of India. The Dutch

were unable to withstand the competition of the English and the French in the eighteenth century.

III

The cotton industry of Bengal was a rural domestic handicraft industry which grew adjacent to agriculture. In the era of extremely difficult communication, villages far away from administrative and military centres were developed as a self-sufficient economy, and the needs of the people were simple. In this period caste system was a predominant factor in both social and economic life of Bengal. Every kind of work was hereditary and each craftsman inherited the right to work for certain families. There were separate castes for carrying on different professions. These hereditary occupations led to the occupational divisions. There were three stages in the cotton industry of Bengal as follows.

First Stage: It consisted in freeing the cotton from the seeds and in beating it with an instrument so as to make it fit for being spun. Generally the women of peasant families, who spun, also engaged in cleaning and beating.

Second Stage: Spinning was the second stage which employed the largest number of workers. Generally, the women of all castes were engaged in the production of cotton thread for the weavers.

Third stage: Weaving was the third stage which unlike spinning was confined to a particular caste.

Weaving was carried on by the people who belonged to weaver caste but when the demand for cloth increased many people from other castes became weavers. There were two types of economic institution namely the domestic industry and the guilds which originated in the country during the early ages. In the domestic system, workers formed small groups. Each group used to produce and consume for itself, and there was little exchange of commodities and no proper market. In the second

system, though the different castes retained their individual social entity, all of them were members of the same guild regulating the industry.⁴²

Membership of guilds was hereditary but new members were allowed to enter on payment of entrance fees. The guild tested the efficiency and the knowledge base of the new entrant. The guild strictly fixed the hours of work, holidays of a year and stipulated regulations about the various details of work. In Dhaka, for example, the working hours were from 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning till noon and then again from 2 or 3p.m. to 6 or 7 p.m. There were to be forty holidays in a year, when labour was suspended. The conditions of the Hindu guild fit in very well with the European guilds of the middle Ages.

The Indian guild had also various common feasts and other activities as in its European counterpart, and helped the members in every direction. The common fund was used for supporting the poor, building and keeping temples and schools, for celebrating festivals and even for conviviality of various sorts. A popular way of raising funds was by giving the sole right to sale to a particular shop on a fixed day and to get the monopoly over sale for the day, the shop had to pay an amount, often settled by auction. The guild feast was celebrated just as they were in Europe, with mystery plays, processions, pantomimes, etc. The greatest festival of Dhaka Guild was the Birth of *Krishna*, or *Krishna-Janmastami*.⁴³

In the early stages of the guild, we find simple system of production with little division of labour. In this regard Baines observed that the process of cotton production in India was not divided among different groups.⁴⁴ But as the market for cotton manufactures had widen up, the process of making clothes became highly specialized and that ensured considerable division of labour. According to Taylor's

⁴² Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India*, vol.1,p.139.

⁴³ Thomas, P.J., 'The Indian Cotton Industry, about 1700 A.D.', *Modern Review*, Feb.,1924, p.135.

⁴⁴ Baines, *The Hist. of cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*, p.74.

description, in the district of Dhaka the production process gradually became complex where specialization and division of labour were similar to the specialization and division of labour in the English Woollen Industry during the early period of the Industrial Revolution. A small independent producer who was a member of guild, used to invest his own capital and employ his own family labour. He used to deal with customers directly, and so there existed no middleman between the producers and the customers. Here, the possibility of creation of fraud business was little. The production was carried on by the master weavers. A master weaver having two or three looms employed hired labour for production. He used to employ an apprentice (*nikari*) and a journeyman worker (*kareegar*) on temporary basis. The employment of boys as *nikaries* was a common feature. As Taylor described, the boys of fourteen years of age might be seen working at the loom and more than often they appeared to be experts at the business.⁴⁵ Here the craftsman was independent. He had to perform many roles as an employer, merchant, foreman and even workman, all by himself.

When different European companies came, the export demand for cotton goods increased to a large extent and the cotton industry of Bengal started to flourish gradually. At that time the entire system of production underwent a change and as a result the earlier independent producers started to work under the '*Mahajans*' who were like the '*Clothiers*' in England with a slight difference. The '*Clothiers*' were more enterprising craftsmen but a '*Mahajan*' was more a broker or wholesale agent than a craftsman. The '*Mahajans*' were actually the capitalist class that provided a substantial part of necessary capital and used to make advances to the weavers for the supply of clothes at a fixed price. A '*Mahajan*' used to appoint *paikers* and *mookeems*. The *paikers* used to meet the weavers and advance money. The *mookeems* used to inspect the making of clothes. The '*Mahajans*' often had a business of money lending along with his cloth business. The exploitation of the weavers by the '*Mahajans*' was possible because the weavers were poverty ridden. The weavers sometimes worked themselves i.e. they did not work under the '*Mahajans*'. Whether

⁴⁵ Taylor, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the manufacture of Cotton at Dacca in Bengal*, p.78.

working under the 'Mahajans' or independently, the weavers carried on their business in the traditional way with the help of his family by appointing a *nikari* and a *kareegar*.

The best season for weaving fine muslin was from the middle of May to the middle of August owing to an excess of moisture in the atmosphere during these three months.⁴⁶ The coarser fabrics could, of course, be produced throughout the year. But outcome was generally much greater in summer than in winter.

The weavers were paid one *anna* and a half (2d.) per day for preparing thread for the loom, 2 to 3 *annas* (3d. to 4 ½ d.) per day for weaving plain muslins and 11 *annas* (6d.) per day for weaving flowered muslins. Sometimes the weavers who produced flowered muslin were paid according to the number of figures they made – generally 1 *anna* for seven figures.⁴⁷ All of them were served mid-day meal by the employer and there was a personal relation between them as distinct from 'the cash-nexus' of modern factory employment.⁴⁸ There has been a homely relation between the master and their employees. A boy at the age of 10-12 joined as an apprentice.⁴⁹ The apprentice was housed and fed by the master. Besides he was given 2 to 3 *annas* per month as pocket money.⁵⁰

In Mughal period, the powerful Kings built up many big *karkhanas* for manufacturing various kinds of handicrafts. The excellent craftsmen in different fields of industry were assembled in a *karkhana*. These state *karkhanas* were made and maintained in Dhaka and certain other places during the Mughal period for producing fine muslin. The description of these *karkhanas* is found in the *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazl and also

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.37.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.78.

⁴⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p.138.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.78.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p.138.

in the writings of Bernier. Bernier, in 1666 found such *karkhanas* in many places and he called them 'halls'. According to him, large halls or workshops for the artisans or *karkhanas* were seen in many places. In one such hall, embroiders were found busily employed, superintended by a master; in another you could see goldsmiths, in a third painters, in a fourth varnishers in lacquer work, in a fifth joiners, turners, tailors, shoe-makers, in a sixth manufacturers of silk brocade and fine muslin.⁵¹ These *karkhanas* were called '*mulboos khas'cooties* i.e the factories for making 'royal clothing'. According to the description of Taylor, there existed such *karkhanas* in Dhaka, Sonargaon and Junglebarray.⁵² These *karkhanas* were superintended by *Darogas* whose prime duty was to inspect the production of all the cloths made for the Emperor's use.⁵³

As the agent of the *Darogas*, the *Mookeems* inspected every day the threads which the weavers brought for their looms. Those weavers selected for State *karkhanas* were supposed to be the best producers and they were bound to follow some strict rules, failing which they were punished. *Jamdaunies* or embroidering cloths, the exclusive products of Dhaka, were also produced in the State *karkhanas* for the Emperor's use. The raw materials were supplied by the State and the weavers were paid their salaries directly from the State Treasury. The weavers were compelled to work in the *karkhana* were not paid salaries in accordance with their skill and sometimes a part of their salaries was exploited by the *mookeems*. All these forcefully impoverished the weavers in spite of their excellent skill.⁵⁴

The production system of the cotton industry of Bengal had changed gradually with the expansion of trade and commerce by the European companies in Bengal. From

⁵¹ Bernier, *Travels in India*, p. 259

⁵² Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 78

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Sarker, J.N., *Mughal Administration*, p.162.

the seventeenth century, the English, the Dutch and the French were engaged extensively in cotton trade in Bengal. Among them the English reached the superior position in the commerce of Bengal to other merchants, Indian and Foreigners as well from the outset of the eighteenth century, particularly after obtaining the *Firman* from the then Mughal emperor, Farukshiar in 1717.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the British East India Company established many factories in different parts of Bengal like Hooghly, Dhaka, Cassimbazar, etc. Here, a factory means a house of agency for the sale and purchase of goods on commission. At that time the traditional 'Dadni System' of production flourished. *Dadni* or advances were given to the weavers by the Merchants through a host of intermediaries like *dalals*, *gomastas* and *paikars*. But at the same time goods were bought with ready money also. The rich weavers often invested their own capital for the production of clothes.

It was a common practice for respectable families of the weaver caste to employ their own capital in manufacturing goods, which they sold freely on their own account. At Dhaka in one morning 800 pieces of muslin brought by the weavers of their own accord were purchased at the door of a single gentleman.⁵⁵

The East India Company procured cotton products from the weavers through the *dadni* Merchants and always imposed strict control over the Merchants. The companies gave securities to the Merchants and took necessary steps against sending clothes of inferior quality.⁵⁶ The Merchants always did not abide by their contracts and failed to supply the said quantity of goods in time. For this reasons the company reduced the emphasis on this system of advances and started procuring necessary items with ready money. In this new system the procurement of cotton goods was

⁵⁵ Choudhury, *From prosperity to Decline etc.*, p.147.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Dutta, K.K., Letter to the Court, 11th Dec, 1741, *Studies in the History of the Bengal Subah*, p.124.

usually done by the company through their *gomastas* or agents directly from the *aurung*.⁵⁷

The method of procurement of goods by ready money system remained satisfactory for the time being. But with the advancement of time, the *gomastas* became very powerful and they abused their power to fulfill their own interest. The East India Company then started implementing another method where the weavers were directly attached with the company. They were given advances and bound to submit their total produce to the company only. In this new system a large number of *gomastas*, *paikars* and *dalals* were employed by the company at every *aurung*. Their duty was to inspect strictly whether clauses of the contracts were obeyed by the weavers or not.

The production organization changed drastically after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and a new production organization emerged in the industry when the British captured all political and economic power of Bengal.

IV

Bengal imported raw cotton from Surat, Doab, Berar and certain other parts of the Decan. K.N. Chaudhuri, could not find any logical explanation for why Bengal imported cotton from Central India and Gujrat via sea-route though it had all the potentiality of growing cotton to suffice its own needs.⁵⁸ Colebrooke describes that at one point of time cotton was cultivated in Bengal and the total production was nearly equal to the total need of her cotton industry.⁵⁹ A fine quality of cotton was produced in the eastern part and a coarser kind was gathered in every part of the province.⁶⁰ According to Pyrard, in early seventeenth century cotton was so plentiful

⁵⁷ Datta, K.K., ed., *Fort William India House Correspondence, 1748-1756*, vol.I, Letter to court, 18th Jan, 1754, para 34, p.762.

⁵⁸ Chowdhuri, K.N., 'The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1974, vol. 11, p.175.

⁵⁹ Colebrooke, *Remarks on the Husbandry and Internal Commerce of Bengal*, p. 130.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 131.

in Bengal that after providing enough for her own consumption for the production of clothes, she exported cotton.⁶¹ The finest quality of cotton in the world was produced in the vicinity of Dacca. This finest cotton known as *kappas* was cultivated only on a small area on the bank of the River Meghna which is only 40 miles long and 2-3 miles wide.⁶² In the said vicinity two superior quality of cotton was primarily cultivated. They were *phootee* and *bhyratti*.⁶³ The world famous Dhaka muslins were produced from those cottons. As pointed out by Joseph Bebb, the then Resident of Dhaka, around 1790 *phootee* was considered superior to *bhyratti* by the Dhaka spinners.⁶⁴ The fine muslins of the Dhaka district were *mulboos khas* (the King's muslin and were used by the emperors' family of Delhi), *sarkar-alis* (like *mulboos khas* and were used by the emperors' family of Delhi), *ab-rawans* (running water), *shabnams* (evening dew), *shubnams* (morning dew), *nyansooks* (soothing to the eyes), *seerbati* (semitransparent like sherbet), *terrandams* (clinging to the body), *charkhanas* (checked muslin), *dooreans* (striped cloth), *dokinas* (white striped clothes), *saktas* (white striped clothes), *jamdanis* (designed muslin), *tanjibs* (ornament of body), *buddun khas*, *kumees*, *rangs*, *jhunus* (much worn by dancing women), and *allabalies*.⁶⁵ Some finer quality of cotton called *nurma* or *caur* was produced in Malda, Radhnagar, and Burdwan. Some fine muslin clothes like *nyansooks*, *mulmuls*, *seerbati*, and *dooreans* were produced from the *nurma*.⁶⁶ Some coarser varieties of cotton such as the *corree*, the *bhoga* and the *muhree* were produced in different parts of Bengal. *Bhoga* cotton was produced in Malda, Haripal, Birbhum, Bisnupur, and Burdwan. *Muhree* was cultivated in Burdwan, Radhnagar, and Haripal. *Corree* was produced in Haripal. From that coarser cotton some coarser

⁶¹ Gray: op cit, p. 328.

⁶² quoted in Chaudhuri, K.N., op.cit., p 175.

⁶³ Medicott, J. G., *Cotton hand-book*, p. 108.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Watson, J. F., *The Textile Manufactures*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ *Reports and Documents*, pp. 302-323.

clothes such as *garha*, *guzzees*, and *dooties* were produced for the native people.⁶⁷ As the demand for cotton manufactures of Bengal increased gradually and her cotton cultivation declined, Bengal cotton industry had to depend on other provinces of India for its demand of raw cotton.

Prices of cotton goods manufactured in of Bengal varied to a great extent because large varieties of products were produced. A large variety of muslin, the finer cotton product, and different types of calicoes were produced. The Dhaka muslins which were produced for the use of the provincial *Nawabs* or for the use of the Mughal Emperors were very costly. From Taylor's description we learn that the price of Dhaka *jamdaunies* were Rs. 250 a piece in the time of *Nawab* Sirajuddaullah (1756-57).⁶⁸ At that time a piece was even priced Rs. 450 which was made for Muhammed Reza Khan, the *Naib Nazim* of Dhaka. But in 1752-53, the *jamdaunies* exported by the Dutch and the English were only Rs. 31-43 per piece.⁶⁹

The prices of different types of muslins and calicoes are illustrated in the following two tables.

Table 2.2 shows the different types of two principal muslins, namely *khasa* and *mulmul*, and their respective prices which the English East India Company contracted for their supply with Calcutta Merchants in 1742. Table 2.3 shows the cost prices of some of these textiles procured in different areas of Bengal by the Dutch Company in 1752-53 and also in 1754-55.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Quoted in Chaudhuri, *From Prosperity to Decline*, p. 144, Taylor John: Home Miscellaneous Series.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

Table: 2.2: Different types of two principal muslins namely *khassa* and *mulmul* and their respective prices at which the English East India Company contracted for their supply with Calcutta Merchants in 1742

Name of Piece-goods	Length x breadth (in covid)	Price per Piece	
		(Rs)	(As)
<i>Khassa</i> Malda fine	40 x 3	17	8
<i>Khassa</i> Malda flowered	40 x 3	22	5
<i>Khassa</i> Cogmaria	40 x 3	9	8
<i>Khassa</i> Cogmaria	40 x 2 ¼	7	6
<i>Khassa</i> Orrua	40 x 2 ¼	7	12
<i>Khassa</i> Orrua flowered	40 x 2 ¼	12	8
<i>Khassa</i> Serry	32 x 1 ¾	3	3
<i>Khassa</i> Burron	40 x 2	4	12
<i>Khassa</i> Kumarkhali	40 x 2	4	12
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur	40 x 3	10	-
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur fine	40 x 3	16	8
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur	40 x 2 ¼	7	12
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur	40 x 2	6	12
<i>Mulmul</i> Cossajura	40 x 2	11	-
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur fine	40 x 2	19	-
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur fine	40 x 2 ¼	22	8
<i>Mulmul</i> Santipur fine	40 x 3	30	-
<i>Mulmul</i> Serry	36 x 1 ¾	4	2

Compiled from S. Chaudhury: *From Prosperity to Decline*, p. 140.

Table: 2.3: Cost prices of some textiles procured in different areas of Bengal by the Dutch Company in 1752-53 and in 1754-55

Name of Piece-goods	Category	Production area	Price per piece (in Florin)
<i>Khasa Junglebarry</i>	Muslin	Dhaka	72-73
<i>Khasa ordinary</i>	Muslin	Hughli	13-15
<i>Mulmul ordinary</i>	Muslin	Hughli	11-13
<i>Duriyas</i>	Muslin	Dhaka	46-51
<i>Duriyas</i>	Muslin	Hughli	25-29
<i>Humhum</i>	Muslin	Hughli	11-12
<i>Bethilas</i>	Fine Calico	Hughli	11-12
<i>Chowtars</i>	Fine Calico	Hughli	12-12.5
<i>Bandanas</i>	Silk	Kasimbazar	8-9
<i>Armosin (Taffeta)</i>	Silk	Kasimbazar	8.5-9.5
<i>Dheris</i>	Silk	Kasimbazar	17-18
<i>Baftas</i>	Coarse calico	Dhaka, Hughli	8.5-9
<i>Guinees</i>	Coarse calico	Hughli, Kasimbazar	13-14

Compiled from S. Chaudhury: *From Prosperity to Decline* etc., p. 143.

V

From time immemorial, the cotton manufactures of Bengal were famous all over the world. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas are full of references to the cotton goods of India. Among all the territories of India, Bengal was the most renowned for her excellent cotton manufactures.

From the early seventeenth century (i.e. during the Mughal period) the traditional cotton industry of Bengal reached a dominant position both in the Indian market and

in the International market when the European merchant companies like those of the Portuguese, the English, the Dutch, the French and the Danes exported the Bengal cotton goods to international markets.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century when the powerful Mughal Empire had started to decline with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Indian subcontinent fell into the grip of a political instability which hampered the growth of the industry. This political turmoil did not affect Bengal much till the first half of the eighteenth century because in that period Bengal was in the hand of powerful *Nawabs* like Murshidkuli Khan and Alibardy Khan. So, prior to the Battle of Plassey the cotton trade and the cotton industry of Bengal continued to grow as before. The English reached their dominant position in the Bengal Economy after the grant of the Farman by Farrukshiyar in 1717 to the English East India Company. The English East India Company exported a large amount of cotton manufactures from Bengal to both their home country and the rest of the world. The quality of Bengal cotton goods was so acceptable to the English and other European markets that the English machine made products were far from the competing with the Bengal manufactures. The Bengal textile and calicoes captured the English market to such an extent that the English Parliament enacted laws against their importation. These prohibitive measures, however, had little adverse effect on the export of the Bengal cotton manufactures, as the English merchants carried on a lucrative re-export trade in Europe.

In spite of many hurdles, the cotton industry of Bengal, therefore, maintained her position of prominence in the International market during the period prior to 1757.