

Chapter - III

Protest and resistance movement of the Weavers of Santipur

Bengal alias India had coined its name and had a standing in the history of the textile industry since long and that we have discussed already. Speaking of Bengal muslin would obviously refer to the ones produced in Dacca. On the other hand though not that famous like Dacca yet another place remarkable for finer woven fabric was Santipur. Both the places were noted for their fine woven fabrics in the undivided Nadia district. The places were significant for producing muslins. In this regard it calls for a discussion on muslin.

Cotton or Carpus weaving is an ancient practice in India. The muslin in Bengal was also known as '*Carpasium*'. These are all derived from the Sanskrit word Carpas.¹ There is another saying that the word calico was derived from the place Calicut. The muslin of Calicut was famous.² It is said that for many years the overseas traders collected muslin fabrics from the port of Macchlipattam near Madras. Some says that the Turkish emperor used to wear turbans made of muslins collected from India and hence Indian muslin was in great demand there. "In the 17th century due to the fear of the Portuguese pirates across the Bay of Bengal, traveling became difficult and risky, weavers in Mosal, the capital city of Turkey then, started weaving fabrics like that of Bengal's finer variety of textile. The name muslin was thus derived. Though we consider 'machhlip' as the more appropriate origin for muslin."³

"The aristocratic section of the society generally used muslin clothes more. A length of 10 yards by 1 yards muslin would cost Rs 60 –80. The cheaper variety was 20 yards by 1 yard and priced at Rs 2. It took 7 to 8 days to weave a length of muslin. The width of a muslin thread was 1/1000th part of an inch. In

England the muslin thread would measure $\frac{1}{480}$ part of an inch. Four yarns of muslin in Bengal when combined, will form a single yarn in the English factory. One *Abroya muslin* length of 15 feet by 3 feet of meagre 900 grams weight would take the weavers by and large 6 months to complete".⁴ In the description given by Tavernier that the Persian king was gifted by the Indian messenger a 300 yards muslin length coiled inside a coconut which was of the size of an egg of an ostrich. The muslin of Dacca was generally 20 yards in length, 1 yard in width and frills on one side. Many used to place order and get it woven according to their taste and choice. The loom in muslin weaving would use more threads for warp than weft. In a 20tola inferior variety of muslin would have warp and weft in the ratio of 11: 9. In case of greater length the warp count of thread would be more. Lighter the weight more would be the price. A length of 10 yards and 1 yard of width muslin would have 1800 counts of yarns.⁵

Different types of Muslin:

1. *Jhuno* : like spider web
2. *Rang* : very fine quality
3. *Sarkar Ali* : The Nababs used this variety, finer quality, tough. The weavers of this variety used to get Jagirs from the government.
4. *Khasa* :
5. *Sabnam* (Dewdrops of evening) :

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In the description of French traveller Tavernier it is found that emperor Aurangzeb's daughter Zebannisa was wearing it and walking across the palace when the emperor reprimanded her thinking she did not cover her body with clothes properly, such finer was the variety of the muslin.

These varieties of muslin were mainly woven in Dacca, the Santipur variety of muslin were quite advanced too the proofs of which are evident. During the reign of King Krishna Chandra a group of youths of the Mulliks at Ranaghat

used to procure finer quality of muslin from Santipur and export it to European countries. In the beginning of the 19th century the representatives of the East India Company used to procure muslin of worth 170000 pounds from here.”⁷

In 1786, Hallwell in his writing praised the finer yarns and weave of muslin in Bengal. “N. E. of Calcutta, distant about 3 day’s journey, lies Krishnanagar, the fort and capital of Rajah Kissen Chunder. He possesses a tract of country of about twelve day’s journey and is taxed at 9 lacs per year though his revenues exceeded 25 lacs. His principal looms are Santipur, Nuddeah etc, where Mulmuls, Coffaces and cotton yarns are manufactured.”⁸

This finer quality of cotton fabric produced in Santipur had immense demand in the market and the British recognized the fabric as mulmul. “At Santipore, the manufacture of mulmuls was an exclusive occupation of the weavers. Even the weavers who weaved mulmuls could not weave mulmuls of superfine quality which required a highly specialised skill. Mr. Fletcher, Commercial Resident at Santipore in 1788, stated that Mulmuls superfine $40 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ yards is an assortment which only a few weaver can manufacture well and from the scarcity of proper thread (owing to the famine of 1788) for the cloth, I do not think, that the quantity wanted can be procured. The ordinary mulmuls 40×2 and $40 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ yards can be manufactured by all the weavers who make the middling mulmuls”.⁹

Parts of Loom

While discussing weaving industry it is crucial to mention about the primary parts of the loom. To construct a loom the following parts are needed. Previously these parts were made with bamboo and wood. Shantipore was surrounded with bamboo and forests of other plants and trees that has evident influence on the choice and make of handloom parts. All these gave rise to a proverb about Shantipore “bamboo, box and ponds were the beauty of Santipore”. Loom parts made of bamboo and wood were mentioned as *Kole Norod*, *Bar Norod*,

*Sana, Boya, Maku, Noli, Kole Khili, Bar Khili, Beekale Piri, Tepor Noli, Dangi, Dola Kathi, Chorka, Latai, Dokti, Theka, Chocha and Bish-Karam.*¹⁰

Since ancient times the loom that has been used in India is called Handloom or Bengal Loom. Looms made with the wood variety and had more longevity to work and lasted for 3 to 4 generations. Here one has to operate the Maku on one hand and hold it by the other hand. It is difficult to weave fabrics with wider measurements on this type of loom but very thin or thicker variety can be woven on it using least of thread it can produce such thin fabric that handlooms cannot produce. One cannot work fast on Bengal handloom. A skilled weaver can run the maku 31/32 times per minute. The foremost fault in the model is there is no resting space for maku and every time it has to be kept in a straight line and run with equal stress or else it would not run and may fall down. For new apprentices it is not an easy task to run a maku.

It is with this Bengal handloom through which several finer varieties of textiles were produced in Dacca, Santipore and other areas of Nadia district that received accolade from various places of India and abroad.

Finally, the advent of flying shuttle loom invented by John Kay in the last half of 18th century brought about a change that improved the face of Bengal handloom. It had many similarities with the handloom mechanism. Teaks of good quality after sun-dried properly, " the parts of the loom are made.

The significant parts of this loom are :

Dokti, Baksho, Mut kath, Pakha, Mutha Kath, Frame, Maku, Hatol, Tarajut Hath Khil or Khil Kathi, Pasha or padol, Naraj, Kole Naraj, Bahir Naraj, Wosari or Moti, Belna, Jhamp, Sana or Nach, Nachni, Nachnir Pati, Mechka, Sor or Dangi, Sir Dangi, Josher, Gulot Kolputh or "Bo" pati, Chorki, Natai, Ghurni Kath, Teko, Charka, Tanar Noli, Thali or Poren, Tana Nol, Bar or chali, Tanahata Sor, Holki, Murabari or Palabari, Jharon, Tanapechha

Dangi, Satashi or chiyor, Fulki, Majan or Brash etc.¹²

These parts are used to run the loom and prepare cotton textile till now. Previously yarn was made using spinning wheel everywhere in Bengal. Later yarn was made using machines. Despite the higher technology based machines the yarn has to be tough, glossy and in line or else good quality clothes cannot be made. In the cloth yarn that is laid longitudinally is called warp and it is divided into two parts. Part of this thread is passed from the upper portion and part is passed through the lower portion with the help of maku and placed laterally and it is called weft thread. Both these yarns should be tough, striking and in line more the warp thread.

To make the thread usable it needs to be dipped in water properly following the rules. Then it should be wrapped properly along the 'natai pati' (kabari stick). Next the thread is given 'mochra' (piecing). Thin yarns are appropriate for mochra and thicker ones for joining.

At the end of the process yarns are given *vatan* and *bolan* (sizing), thick threads are starched or a mixed pulp of Chopped rice and khoyer is applied whereas for thinner threads khoi pulp is applied. Previously rice starch used to be used hence was known as Vatan. Using these starch when the yarn is smeared and rolled the length gets increased and it is called Bolan.

The thread reel is sun-dried and dried reel is fitted into the bobbin and in line that facilitates weaving.¹³

Then the woven length of cloth is plained. It is done with water whereas now we use Sabu to do the same. The warp and weft was done putting khoi pulp hence water was used to rinse it out and then applying a little weight it was straightened and dried out.

Like other areas in Nadia, at Santipur clothes were woven using similar technique. Gradually Jacquard machine was introduced in this region. At Baranagar in

greater Calcutta, an English had established a factory for Jacquard machines by the name Industrial Orvong Company that is also the origin of Jacquard machines in Santipur. Later a man with the employees of the English man called Kalipada Mondol had set up another such factory named 'Mondol Company' that permanently introduced the Jacquard machines in Santipur. Previously the machine could not generate so many designs as it does now.¹⁴

While discussing the weaving industry of Santipur it can be mentioned that no proof is evident from where it can be concluded whether Santipur in Nadia existed or not in ancient time. The existence of the place becomes evident for the first time in the 15th century during the reign of Raja Ganesh Danujadarman (The ruler of Gaud) (AD. 1401).¹⁵ While probing the origin behind the name it was known in the middle of 8th-10th century in the composition of 'Charyapada' the name was derived.¹⁶ There is also confusion about the time period during which weaving started in Santipur. In Addaityacharya's Biography there is mention in the "Addaityamangal" kavya

|| *"Santipure jato chilo tantubai*
Acharya prangone asi horigun gai" ||¹⁷

It is evident from this that weaving had started in Santipur much before the arrival of Sri Chaitanya. Perhaps it was started from the beginning of the of Sultanate period. On the urge of Lakshman Sen, the king of Gour, several weavers, tailors and masters came from Dhamrai in Dacca and settled here in Santipur.¹⁸ The weavers at Santipur manly had the expertise in weaving muslins. Naturally they had started weaving muslins here. Later this became famous as 'Santipur Sari' with fine intricate borders. After the arrival of Advaitya Prabhu many weavers had arrived from Dacca, Tangail, Bikrampur and other areas to Santipur. Again in the first half of 16th century due to the disturbances created by Mog and Arakan bandits many weavers had shifted from Dacca to Santipur

in Nadia district.¹⁹ Thus gradually Santipur grew up as a major textile weaving centre and its prosperity increased manifold. Before the settlement of the weavers from East Bengal, the erstwhile Santipur textile though was famous but had lacked in the finesse and subtlety in their work, which these weavers from East Bengal introduced later. The yarn needed to weave such finer quality was produced from a particular variety of cotton which was not grown in Santipur initially. East Bengal is riverine delta with high moisture in the climate conducive to produce such higher quality of cotton.²⁰

While shifting from Dacca, Bikrampur to Santipur many weavers had brought seeds of the higher quality cotton produced in their lands. They planted and sowed seeds; the cotton produced was not like that of Dacca due to different weather condition yet it was of much higher quality. Textile produced from this cotton was known as Mulmuls.²¹ Later Carpus cotton became popular in Santipur and about 3000 tonnes of this variety was produced. Over and above to meet the demand at Santipur another 400 tonnes of cotton used to be imported. Gradually Santipur started producing thicker variety to thinner and subtle types. Besides the weave being subtle the muslim masters used to weave them in intricate designs. Till now they have their descendants continuing at Santipur. Hence '*Ripu*' and '*Arong Dholai*' at Santipur are still famous all over Bengal.²²

In the context of handloom textile it is important to mention the implication of the word "Arong Dholai". It is mainly used for thrashing a crooked person clean and straight. East India Company opened Santipur Commercial Residency or Commercial Settlement and started business with the famous textile of Santipur. The above settlement had 11 textile collection centres and each such centre was called arong. Before depositing the clothes at the arong they were washed properly. They were boiled in the mixture of cow-dung, "saji mati" and alkaline mixture and washed and beaten with mugur to clean and straighten it.

The clothes looked white as conch-shell and were called 'Sankha-petai' cloth. Santipur was famous for its wash and clothes from settlements of other areas were sent here for wash. Still Santipur wash or dholai is famous and hence the proverb has originated.²³

The evolution of 'Santipuri' or 'Mulmul' can also be attributed to the contribution of the women of that era. Girl child within the age of 15 years whose palms were still very tender used to prepare the yarn in the early hours of the morning in the fields before the dew drops would dry up. As lack of moisture and softness would make the yarn thick.²⁴ The weavers then would weave with 250 to 300 counts thread. Now a days where 50 / 60 or 100 counts thread are considered subtle in the 15th or 16th century the girl child by dint of the dexterity of their hands could spin 250/300 counts subtle yarns. Later this subtlety reached the height of 1000 counts during the Mughal period. Today what machine cannot produce, the poor uneducated women and children could produce such finer yarns.

Dewan Kartickeyo Chandra Roy in his "Khitish Bangshabalicharit" has mentioned that previously there was no import of yarn from foreign countries in the country. The yarns that were spun by the women were used to weave all textiles in India. There were numerous instruments with which yarns were spun here like 'Takru' O 'Charka'. The former was used to spin fine yarn and latter to spin the thicker variety, through the occupation of spinning thread they used to earn money to support their livelihood.²⁵

The characteristics of Santipuri sari :

The primary characteristic of these saris was their fine teaxture and delicately and elaborately designed borders. It was extraordinarily designed with smooth texture, lightweight and an extremely comfortable to wear. The Silk or jari borders were woven with needles. Primarily with charcoal designs were marked on the

soft silk texture and then those designs were woven with needles directly on the cloth. The women did this needlework. Their intricate and fine embroidery with needles in skilled hands used to make these saris attractive and popular amongst all. This became a significant point of self-sustenance for the women. Initially handloom textile was of four types - *Ellol, Dam, Sam, Chaharam* etc were the different names and varieties of saris. Striped in White or colour *Sarbasundari, Sinduri, Kharkemuti, Chowrangi, Taskhupi, Choukhupi, Ainakhupi* etc. As mentioned in Mukundaram Chakroborty's 'Chandimangal' ballad perhaps *Meghadomboru* saris were made too.²⁶

There were many other varieties of saris like the jor for the deities, then the ones with borders called *Chandmala, Taj, Tajkolka, Kolka, choukolka, Tekka, Ero, Chanch, Rajmohol, Doroka* (two different borders on two sides). *Kanadumri, Gaan, Aish, Mach, Manush, Poshu, Pakhi* etc. were the other types of borders.²⁷ Pakhi or Bird border was the general range, bird being a generally accepted being. Colours that were mostly used were yellow, red, blue or purple and wherever needed black was mostly used. The stitch that was mostly used was run type.

Tercha, bokeya, Leak, Chatai, Pati, Bans Pata, Jotil, Botam Ghar, Chain, Cross, Darning (more like the ripu or repair stitches) etc were the other stitches that were used. Borders were woven with 40 to 300 counts yarns of silk or jari. Orni or dupatta or stole were woven too.²⁸ Formerly various types of stole or Orni or dupatta were produced at Santipur like Chakmilan (exquisite expensive type woven in 300 counts yarn), vari par orni etc. and yarns from spinning wheel used to be used before the advent of English yarns. They were exported abroad. Santipur and Phulia had given a remarkable dimension to the formation and designs of stole that were in great demand as an export. While weaving the dexterity in running the warp and weft smoothly and swiftly and later the intricate,

fine designs that were done made each piece of textile an object d'art. Previously the Muslim craftsmen used to colour the yarns. After the partition many of them had left the country and traditional yarn and the colour went missing.

It was not always the natural objects that were made the subjects for designing the borders. With an attitude of reform many other subjects were designed on the borders. The subjects that were woven were like songs/ballads promoting Vidyasagar's Widow-remarriage issue. One that was significant was the line saying, "*Benche thako Vidyasagar chirojibi hoye*". Sometimes it could be just the opposite cursing Vidyasagar for reforming the society's evils "*Suey thako Vidyasagar Chirorogi hyoe*". Dhotis (fine length of cloth) named 'Jolsaghar' were woven till recently.²⁹ Among the Santipur weavers there was one such person who could replicate almost identical figures on cloth following any photo/statue. He was known to be the only person who could do it in the country. After replicating the figure of King George V on textile, he had won a prize of Rs. 500.³⁰

Without mentioning some of the names of the weavers whose skill, expertise and understanding of the art had evolved the handloom industry as a seat of art were Kishori Lal Pramanik Kirtoniya (champion of the old method of weaving). He was famous for developing motif of different songs, names and pictures on the borders. He was also famous for innovating various things in handloom. In this field PurnaChandra and his son Gora Chand were very famous too.³¹ Later it was Bhupathi Charan Pramanik who introduced the jacquard method in 1923 and brought about a revolution in textile designing. The name of Girish Chandra Pal, the champion of the old method needs special mention. Had this great artisan not being there, the handloom industry would have long perished at Santipur under the blow of the industrial revolution. Gora Chand Pramanik was a significant name in developing designs on the pitch board. He used to bond

the design in a way that lasted long. Among his designs that demand special mention are Krishnachura kolka, Brindabani mayur, Horin. These designs were popular at Santipur for long time. He would first hit the punch machine with hammer and cut the pitch board, later had discovered a machine that would cut the border appropriately. He believed in the theory that if the weaver is expert, the old designs become new in his hands. Bamacharan Pramanik was the one who was skilled in producing stole or orni. He had won the gold medal at the Mohon mela in Calcutta. Ramchandra Dalal was famous for weaving finer fabrics. In 10 hours he could weave all of I mora of yarn.³² Mathuramohan and Brojomohan Pramanik of the "Boka" family had the same skill as that of Ramchandra Dalal.³³ in this context it is important that we discuss the implication of the word "Boka" which otherwise would have meant stupid.

During the time of Sri Chaitanya when weaver Shibram had arrived at Nabadwip with his family, Lord Chaitanya had directed him to settle at Santipur and started another generations of weavers here. Since Shibram was great devotee of Sri Chaitanya and was always engaged in devoted recitals the adversaries of Sri Chaitanya specially the angry Brahmins used to identify him as Boka or stupid and thus his generation came to be known as Boka bongsho. Though in history we often come across the weavers being called Boka, but spinning yarns out of cotton and then with wonderful skill and artistic proficiency they weave beautiful textiles where there is no trace of dullness. On the contrary, it exhibits their high mark of artistry, intelligence and creativity.³⁴

Another remarkable weaver was Chandra Kanta. He could weave more than I mora of yarn and was famous for making borders. Nitai Chand Pal was famous for fast par and Pata weaving. Elite people like King Krishna Chandra, Palchaudhuris of Ranaghat, Maharaj Monindra Chandra Nandi used to buy clothes from him. Bhupathi Charan could replicate on the cloth whatever picture

he would see. Bhupathi Charan, Shibkali and Harakali Pramanik were those who invented new types of borders in the industry. Hajari lal Pramanik's song, chandelier or birds depicted on the sari border was famous. Once an Englishman impressed with a border depicting the song "*Yamuna puliney bose kande Radhabinodini*" had asked for the price and purchased. Later he had cut the border and sent it to England.³⁵ It can be derived from here how special was the Santipuri textile in those days. In the initial period at Dacca the weavers could design borders as good as Santipur but later the skill went missing.

Another speciality of Santipuri sari was its longevity. Here the kind of fine yarns the women used to spin with lot of care and dedication was unparalleled which the English mechanized loom could never match later. The English had taken samples of this thread and underwent many researches and trials still their machine could never produce 100 counts subtle yet durable thread ever. The reason why even any ordinary textile made in our country is more durable than the foreign textile because the way our yarns are tightly rolled with lot of care and made strong by starching, which is not done anywhere else. Otherwise these clothes would have not been so lasting yet the thread was thin and do not go soft and weak.³⁶

The discussion and description of the Santipur textiles in the words of the poets and novelists are worth mentioning. In the middle of 18th and 19th century in Bengali literature especially in Mangal Kabya, there is ample reference that gives idea of the textile in this area. *Meghambor, Kolaboti, Chandmala, Meghadomboru, Ratnamala, Rajmohishi* etc wonderful varieties of textiles are mentioned.³⁷

Macheta dekhiya mare dorpone chapar

bachiya poroye meghadomboru kapor — kobi kankanchandi

Vromorer moto borno oti sukhhotoro

*meghambor nam tar oti monohoro—jodunandan*³⁸

Dinabondhu Mitra the famous dramatist on santipur says -

Nibosito kare lok sonkhya nahi tar

gosain dorji tanti hajar hajar

Santipure dury sari saromer ori

*nilambori ulangini sarbango sundori.*³⁹

Dwijendra Lal Roy wrote -

Oi porone tar durey sari mihi Santipure

*oi Santipure durey re vai Santipure durey*⁴⁰

Poet Nabin Chandra Sen wrote-

“Sei Sanipure durey sari soromer ori” Now goes to foreign”⁴¹.

Bhobani Charan Bandopadhyay wrote -

“Santipur, Ombika, Baigachhi, Dacca, Chandrakona, Khasbagan, Barahanagaradi and other places where saris were bordered as red, *kakrapere* (like crab), *nil pere* (blue), *tabizpere*, *boranagure* and *durey* or *striped*.”⁴²

A magazine named “Basantak” published from Calcutta drew a picture that depicted Santipur (fashionable well attired youth) and Ula (Birnagar-tonsured aged man) were requesting each other for travelling by the newly conceived railways in between which is personified as a lady-

|| *Santipur vashe, eso momo pasey, dibo monomoto sari*

ula bole jato, sasya nana moto, dibo pure gari.||⁴³

Besides Rasaraj Amrita Lal Basu had depicted in his writing about the specialities of Santipur like ‘*Fulparwala*’ and ‘*Kalkadar*’ saris and ‘*Jari-bordered orni*’ / *Stole*.⁴⁴ Anurupa devi in her ‘*Bharatborshio Bramhagyan*’ treatise in explaining the meaning of the word ‘*Bharatbarsho*’ has mentioned that this word has been used in the way Santipur and Dhoti (Santipure dhuti) and mango of Bombay is connected (Bombai aam). Thus establishing an eternal connection between a

place and for what products it is famous for. Its meaning is expressed in the word 'Bharatborsho' itself.⁴⁵

It is clear from this that Indian tradition and culture had a nexus with the flourishing textile industry of Santipur. With its rise and fall the country's political and economic rise and decline is connected. Through the development and advancement of the loom machinery one can observe the development of freedom movement of India. Bamacharan Basu in his book 'Bastra Bayan Siksha' has discussed this in details. He expressed that if the traditional Bengal handloom items be made in a way such that it can be used in a different way, then it is possible that every house would use it giving rise to increased number of looms, weavers and volume of products.⁴⁶ It is true that during that time there were weavers living in many parts of Nadia. There was no crisis of spinning wheels. But weavers elsewhere lacked the skill of producing finer quality and dedication unlike the Santipur weavers. This is the reason why Santipur was a recognized name in the history of cotton textile.

Historian Kalikrishna Bhattacharya wrote that Bengali weavers had shown such excellent skill with the native loom, the way it was creating beautiful flowers of art that is imitable by all in the world. From the beginning to the end of the process is a brilliant example for imitation to any body.⁴⁷

It is evident that generally the weavers were sincere, simple, honest and harmless group of people. Santipur weavers were no exception to this. The dedicated love of the weavers for their aurang and loom had helped the weavers to fight back collectively and had also called a strike. The historians have acknowledged the beginning of patriotic movement in the second half of the 19th century. But it was dormant among the community for long time. Therefore it was during the Sanyasi Rebellion, the first noteworthy protest against the British exploitation, when the weavers had taken part in it.⁴⁸ They were also not indifferent to the

great Mutiny of 1857. They were also part of the social reforms in the 19th century. They actively participated in the Swadeshi movement and took part in the Charka movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Hence such freedom fighters do strongly claim the right of recognition and vivid discussion of their struggle throughout this period.

The exquisite beauty of “Santipuri sari” was revealed during the Mughal reign and it became famous worldwide. In the words of Durga Chandra Sanyal in his book “Banglar Samajik Itihas” – It is known that the textile industry of Santipur is famous since ancient days. During the Mughal period its eminence was further augmented. During those days the textiles were initially sent to Delhi. From there it used to be sold to different countries like Kabul, Beluchistan, Iran, Arab, Turkey, Greece and Italy at golden prices.⁴⁹ During the reign of the king of Nadia, Rudra Roy between 1683-94 AD, the textile industry of Santipur had witnessed much progress. This progress reached its zenith during the reign of King Krishna Chandra Roy in 1728 - 1782 AD. It was during his time that the delicately designed fine quality dhoti or cotton length produced here earned recognition across the world. In 1766 AD, according to the report of Hallwell, Santipur that was within the domain of King Krishna Chandra Roy, was famous for its twists, mulmul and other finer variety of clothes. During this time annually Rs. 9,35,929, 3 ana 9 pai used to be sold from the Santipur chapter of textile.⁵⁰ The male members of the royal family used to wear dhoti or fine cotton length made in Santipur. The Mughal ladies used to wear 22 yards delicate and superior textiles produced here.

The delicacy of the textile as well as the higher quality weaving style of Santipur had attracted the attention of the European companies specially that of the East India Company which has discussed earlier. Among their establishments and workshops in the Bengal Subah Santipur was very famous. During this time

due to the fact that the Business Representative House and government owned larger textile units were situated here at Santipur it gradually had turned into the centre of the textile business. Besides, the river Ganges flowing by the town had facilitated trade much more than any other place. The East India Company had opened two establishments in Nadia, one at Santipur and the other at Kumarkhali. Observing the concentration of textile growth and trade and commerce at Santipur in the first half of the 18th century, the company made an establishment spending more than rupees 1 lakh at Baigachi in Santipur. During this time the company had a flourishing textile business in the southern regions of India. Still the company used to purchase handloom textile worth 1,20,000-1,50,000 pounds from Santipur. At the Kuthirpara region at Santipur, the company used to own two aurang units at Banok and Ghai, the latter was comparatively small in size and had more than 500 native workers engaged there. (In the Appendix the list of English employees who had worked in these establishments till 1832 are given) The native workers had worked hand in hand with the company and grew their status financially. Later these employees turned into the early moneylenders of Santipur. The company also wanted to keep the employees satisfied and purchase textile through them and export it to different European countries and make huge profit out of it. The English trader used to sell only two third of the textile in the English market and used to export the rest to France and America. From these countries a portion used to be re-exported to other countries. Santipur was one of the major establishments and business centres of the British and its importance lay in the existence of the aurang units or textile collection centres under it. The aurungs were at Santipur, Sonaberia, Bagara (Baganchora), Kaligunj, Deulpur, Kholi, Monohargunj, Niniya, Satboyra, Sebati, Siddhipasha. During this time the names were available according to the accented pronunciation of the English and in most cases the

exact names were not found.⁵¹

It is worth mentioning that till the time of Alivardi Khan the English company could not exercise much influence in the trade and commerce in Bengal.⁵² Till 1756 the weavers had the freedom to produce and sell textiles at Santipur. N.K. Sinha has revealed in his book that during the time of Alivardi Khan the condition of the weavers were completely different. He said-“ The weavers used to manufacture their goods freely and without oppression, restrictions, limitations and prohibitions.”⁵³ Even the Court of Directors was aware of it. Till 1753 the dadni system was on. In this regard the mentality of the Court of Directors was “ The Directors had also a feeling that the dadni merchants had managed investment in a way in which the weavers had been encouraged and their number had increased.”⁵⁴

After 1753 with the demolition of dadni system and introduction of the gomastah system the condition of the weavers became critical. The inspiration, which had kept the weavers motivated till before 1757, started declining drastically after 1757. The exploitation of the weavers in the hands of the gomastahs started immediately after 1753. Initially they were not supported by the political powers. But after 1757 they started availing political facilities and grew powerful, which increased their abuses. The weavers grew fragile and insecure in their hands. “The decline of the manufacture was inevitable because the weavers were obliged to work against their will at what ever prices are arbitrarily imposed upon them.”⁵⁵ It is true that in places like Dacca and Santipur where the English had tough competition with other European and Asian traders in business though the weavers of those places had suffered in the hands of the British but it was never reached any extreme point. That is why the company tried to establish its dominance over the weavers at Santipur and other places. In 1757 the year in which the battle of Plassey was fought the English company had made an

investment of Rs 1,68,500. Most of this money was usually given to the weavers as advance or dadon. This dadon was given through the gomastahs of the company. The gomastahs used to forcibly collect clothes from the weavers at unreasonably cheap price in the interest of the company. This fetched high profit for the company. In 1758 and 1759 in two letters written by the company has expressed satisfaction at the performance of the gomastahs and expressed eagerness to invest more money in this sector. In 1753 when the company withdrew the dadoni system it had justified that the company did not receive clothes even by paying money on time. The dominance and control of the gomastah system had devastated the weavers. The employees of other companies or independent traders used to offer more money to the extent of 20 to 30% more over the English company. Even they were interested in taking rejected clothes or ones that did not match up with the East India Company's sample at much higher prices. The weavers had the freedom to sell their clothes to others till the time of Alivardi as the Nawab could firmly control the company and its operation in Bengal. He would negotiate with other foreign companies like Armenian, French, Dutch and others and would maintain the commercial gain in the trade for the players and the producers as well. Dr. Kali Kinkar Dutta has mentioned about this in his book.⁵⁶ After 1757 when the gomastah system was empowered with political rights the company used it detrimentally against the weavers to maximize profit and in the course the weavers of Dacca, Santipur who had so long acquired freedom in producing and selling their products in the market were ruined. The court with the advent of the gomastah system tried to motivate the weavers like the time of the dadni system. On one hand the English did not want to revive the dadni system on the other they did not want to project the company as an enemy before the weavers.⁵⁷

In 1765 after acquiring the Dewani right the influence of the English company

increased manifold over the weavers of Bengal especially at Santipur. In 1770 the famine occurred. It caused immense damage to the weaving industry. Many artisans who produced cotton textile or made twists died in the famine. At Santipur about 25% of the yarn spinners had died.⁵⁸ But that did not affect the demand for Santipur textiles rather it had increased gradually but the price did not go up correspondingly.

TABLE NO. 1**SANTIPOOR AURUNG**

Account of Cash remitted for the provision of the Investment and the Balance due from the weavers from the 1st of May 1757 to 1st May 1771

Year	Cash remitted to Santipoor Aurung	Current Rupees P piece. Balance due from the weavers
1757	2,01,901. --	726.8 - 3.
1758	1,27,200. --	854.1. -
1759	1,50,000. --	944.11.6.
1760	45,000. --	1031.0.3.
1761	1,75,000. --	1273.0.6.
1762	1,25,289. --	792.11.6.
1763	1,00,000. --	1925.15. -
1764	96,500. --	1930.4. -
1765	1,15,000. --	916.2.9.
1766	1,00,000. --	231.6.9.
1767	28,000. --	261.15. -
1768	1,95,000. --	10,766.7. -
1769	80,000. --	13,203.9. -
1770	75,000. --	24,481.2. -
1771	1,60,000. --	23,807.12.3.

Source : Board of Trade : Commercial, General letters from the Court of Directors, 13th December 1765 to 15th September 1785.

EXTRACT OF CONSULTATION DATED 12TH APRIL 1773, Page - 58.

During this time the wage of a yarn spinner was 3 anas a day and wage of a weaver for any ordinary fabric was 2 to 3 anas per day, and that of the weaver for finer quality with design was 11 anas a day. The gomastahs used to dig even into the meagre earnings of the weavers. Exercising their political influences the gomastahs would ensure that the weavers could not sell their clothes to any outsider / trader. In 1772 the number of weavers at Santipur was more than 40000. The exploitation of the English company made their life miserable. Their freedom that they had enjoyed since the time of the Mughal rule was destroyed. Their life alongwith their livelihood with handloom was at stake. Very often they were deceived by the gomastahs. When they would weave very fine or fine or average variety of clothes the gomastahs would serially call it just fine, average or below average and cheat them on prices. Even at times the clothes declared as rejected were not returned from the English establishment. Eyewitness and annoyed at the exploitation of the English company was William Bolts who wrote about the agony of the weavers - "With every species of monopoly, therefore every kind of oppression to manufacturers of all denomination throughout the whole country has daily increased; in so much that weavers for daring to sell their goods, and Dallals and Pykars, for having contributed to or connived at such sales, have by the company's agent, been frequently seized and imprisonment confined in irons, fined considerable sums of money, flogged and deprived, in the most ignominious manner, of what they esteem most valuable, their castes, weavers also upon their inability to perform such agreements as have been forced from them by the company's agents universally known in Bengal by the name of Mutchuleams, have had their goods seized, and sold on

the spot, to make good the deficiency”.⁵⁹

“The torture were incredibly cruel. The poor weavers were cheated in all respects. They were bound to deliver predetermined quantity of clothes in time at the prices determined by the company (at 15 to 40 rupees lesser than the actual cost). If someone would secretly sell the clothes outside at justified prices then he would be severely penalized. His loom thread, clothes would be severed. For first-rate weavers the penalty would be even worse, their thumb would be cut off and made incapable of weaving or any related work for the rest of the life.”⁶⁰

In this situation the weavers were compelled to rise in mass protest. In 1773 as mentioned earlier, the famine occurred, during the weavers had intimated their condition and difficulties to the English authority in writing. The Court of Directors had understood the complexity of the situation the weavers were into and they thought about it. Understanding the interests of other foreign companies in trading with the weavers of Santipur, the Court wanted to lease out some freedom to the weavers. In 12th April 1773 mentioning about the application of the weavers the authorities of the company had issued a letter. They admitted that there is no mistake in whatever the weavers of Santipur has complained about. They have now come to understand the miserable condition of the weavers. The prices that the weavers earned for their clothes are hardly enough to meet their expenses. Due to the famine, misery of the country has increased manifold and many weavers had died out of starvation. In this situation there was no other way than to help the weavers to come out of the condition. Not just appeal, the weavers, after silently suffering the torture for long had submitted a complain letter to the authority signed by the weavers collectively. (See Appendix No. I) The weavers had first united under the leadership of Bijayram. Later Ramram, Lochon Pramanik and others joined the leadership. They were

not satisfied only by a written complaint, walking overnight they had all reached Calcutta and verbally communicated their grievances before the Company authorities and sought justice. The weavers had warned that until their grievances are taken care of they would not weave any cloth for the company. Dr. Suprakash Roy had highly praised this protest of the weavers.⁶¹ This protest can be identified with that of the modern day's Trade Union movement.⁶² This was a rare instance in the history of the labour as because, by the workers in India, the farmer's revolt against the British had not started yet. Till then there was no sign of collective protest or any sign of separate labour union's existence. In this situation the protest of the weavers of a native village seeking rightful wages and opportunities, borne the hint of Subaltern Revolt. In this context it is remarkable that the weavers of Santipur on the one hand struggled and fought back to sustain their industry on the other they joined in revolt with the farmers against the British in Sanyasi Rebellion. Both the protests were simultaneous. Dr. Suprakash Roy and Dr. Atul Sur had enlightened further in their books.⁶³ In this situation Hastings declared complete freedom for all weavers and producers.⁶⁴ It goes without saying that the protest raised by the weavers of Santipur had compelled the English authority to find the remedy promptly. The weavers did not derive any long term gain out of it but though temporary they had derived some relief from the daily oppression.

Despite freedom, the method of taking advance kept the weavers in the same darkness. Board of Trade again initiated the agreement for investment. Many of the persons who had entered the agreements were Bengalis from within the state. But they were all employees of the company and the latter invested through them. If these employees ever failed to deliver goods within the specification and date they were punished and such instances were plenty. When the process of investment had started, a contractor appointed at Santipur named Blaquire

had said-the weavers at Santipur were reluctant to work for the company. Mostly they were keen on working for others or independently.⁶⁵

In this situation on 27th May, 1786, nine weavers of Santipur mentioning their difficulties and seeking solution had submitted a collectively signed letter before the comptroller of the Aurangs William Barton as follows :-William Barton translated a Petition from the Santipore wavers.

We the undersigned submit the following on behalf of all Santipur weavers-:

1st. The price of thread is dear; in the mafussil the muster clothes are very old and much worm and have become fine. We therefore cannot deliver clothes according to those musters at the established rates and therefore pray that the prices may be increased.

2nd. Your petitions take advances for the letter B. the company's letters by which b, our clothes are prized, are A, B, C & D. if it happens that the clothes which we deliver are inferior to letter D, the gomastah will not return the clothes but receives them in the Dutch or ferreted assortment by which we lose two or three rupees on each piece whereas were these clothes to be returned we could sell them at one or two rupees profit and we could deliver others in there of in ten or fifteen days.

3rd. For every small fault the gomastah confines our stocks and thereby brings disgrace upon us, we are the company's weavers and had never been accustomed to such treatment. Your petitioners therefore pray that those grievances may be redressed.

the 16th of Jaystho - 27th May 1786

Birinchy Bustam

Ramkishore Cast

Saufferam Pramanick

Balaram Pramanick

Signed

Ramhurry Pramanick

Coonjudutt Bunnick

Neelo Pramanick

Ramlochun Pramanick

Rassoe Pramanick

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From this application one can understand the miserable condition of the weavers. The gist of their letter is, they had appealed for higher price as prices of twists are going up hence the cost of production. The clothes marked as D by the gomastahs are seized inflicting loss upon the weavers whereas elsewhere it can fetch them prices where they can make profit of 1 or two rupees or may deliver better quality clothes in lieu of it in 15 days. Moreover the gomastahs used to disgrace the weavers for trifling issues, which was unprecedented, the weavers had never experienced before.

The protest made by the Santipur weavers in 1773 had brought benefits for weavers at other places as well. Again the protests of 1786 whether justice was done or not the weavers of Santipur never lagged behind to raise voice for their rights.

To react to the protests made by the weavers of Santipur the company had issued regulations at different time on different issues recorded in the proceedings of the Public department on the 22nd April 1782. All these were made to frighten the weavers but the weavers had the indomitable courage and persistence to fight back for their rights that was evident from their later course of actions. In reply to the petition (27th May) of the weavers John Beanland (agent for Macrofls, the contractor) on 30th May 1786 informed William Barton, the comptroller of the Aurungs. "...The complaints are both frivolous and trifling, so I am induced to hope sir, that you will be pleased to cause such punishment to be inflicted on the ring leaders as may prevent the like behaviours

in future.”⁶⁷

He further wrote about the trifling complaints of the nine weavers and bringing allegations against them :

Ans. ^s1st

“It is denied that the muster cloth are old, or in the state they are represented to being. They are the identical ones that were established by Mr. Blaquire and approved of by the weavers themselves at the very time that both cotton and provision were considerably dearer than what they are at present, consequently there can be no reason either for changing the musters or increasing the prices. But the fact is, there are several private gomasthas that have settled in the aurang, who hold out superior advantages to the weavers and these refractory complaints have been inflaming the minds of all the others because they are not suffered to work for those intruders with impurity.

Ans. ^s2

It is acknowledged that the cloths which are found inferior to the letter D of the mudling sort, are taken into the Honrble company’s ordinary assortment (which is what is turned Dutch in the petition). This is the established custom of the aurung, and was instituted by former super intendants of the investment purposely to prevent the weavers from making bad cloths.

It often happens that the weavers take advances for superfine or fine clothes and two or three months after deliver in return clothes that will only pass in the lowest letters of the five sorts. It therefore follows if those clothes are returned were to be returned to the weavers, it would be an encouragement for them to make clothes inferior I the sort for which the advances were made purposely that they might sell them in the bazaar, and the consequences would be that no investment would be provided.

Ans.3d

Formerly it was customary if a weaver was detatory (sic) in the delivery of his cloths, or made it inferior to the assortment for which he took advances, the superintendant had authority to punish him - at present the weavers are under no control, they take the company's advances and make cloths for private Merchants; several were detected in this practise at the very time that they had advances in their hands for two and three peices of fine and superfine cloth, yet had not a single loom employed for the investment; I therefore ordered the looms with the private cloths on them to be signed and detained in the factory, until that day delivered the cloths for the investments, likewise confined the weavers in the stocks in order to deter others from the like behaviour; this however is what has given rise to the third & last article of complaints and the turbulent and rebellions weavers who made it, took this opportunity to inflame the minds of all the weavers throughout the aung and excited them to put a stop to the investment by taking no more advances to that upwords of six weeks labor, will be lost from the evil counsel of those people.

Signed John Beanland

Agent for the Contractor

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A true copy

J. Selpor (sic)

Not only John Beanland, even John Fergusson in 26th June 1786, had written to the Board of Trade addressing the president Charles Stuart that some obstinate weavers of Santipur had taken advance from the company and instead of supplying the clothes, have stopped weaving and fled to some other place. On investigation it has been found that they have sold the cloth they have made taking advance from the company to outsiders. [See Appendix No. II]

It is evident that the English company, despite all its efforts, could not completely control the weavers of Santipur. In this situation Beanland declared that no weaver would be allowed to sell clothes to outsiders before settling the advance

taken from the company. [See Appendix No. II]

The weavers were united against it. To spy under whose leadership the weavers were united in protest, a peon was sent who got beaten in the hands of the weavers. The weavers were adamant that they would not work for the English unless their wages are increased. Fergusson declined to raise the wages and the company declined too. This further aggravated the protests of the weavers. It is remarkable that the export business increased in the later half of the 1780. The demand for Santipur textile went up further.

TABLE NO. - 2

Statement of the Investment for 1786/7

Factories	Names of Contractors	First Advances			2d Advances			3d Advances			Laks	
		of 10 annams			of 4 annams			of 2 annams				
Santipore	J. Fergusson	61,934	7.	10	24,773	12.	9.	12,386	14.	5.	99,095	3.

Source : Progs of Board of Trade - 18th July 1786, Vol - 51, Part - 2, Page - 324.

The company also wanted to export more of the textiles of Santipur. The reason behind the boost in export trade is discussed now. The English were so long fighting against the different resisting forces within India like Tipu Sultan in Mysore, French, and Marathas and after the war ended they had wanted to settle down peacefully and focus on expansion of business. Though in 1776 after Industrial revolution in England the company was forced to change its items for export.⁶⁹

The company had wanted to export more and more of the textiles from Santipur and other places whose cloths were very popular then. But the recurrent protests of the Santipur weavers irritated the company very much. Compelled to enter into a peaceful reconciliation with the obstinate weavers the President of Board of Trade Charles Stuart had deputed Bebb to Santipur from Calcutta. The

irony was that it was Charles Stuart who had earlier declined to concede to increase the wages and later he was compelled to change his mind. This proves the outstanding demand and dignity of the Santipur textile in the world and also that he was frightened by the Indomitable spirit and awareness of right of the weavers, the confirmation to which was found several times. John Bebb later gave a declaration after scrutiny and judging reality that Santipur textile had a huge market in Europe. So many independent traders are trying to purchase cloths from here and do business. In this situation though the weavers are taking advances from the company, they are selling the cloths to outsiders at higher cash prices.

In a nutshell, the huge demand for Santipur cloths on one hand had empowered weavers in negotiations with the English company, on the other hand had frightened and compelled the company, despite initial rigidity, to release grudgingly several benefits to the weavers later on. In this situation with the increasing demand for cloths the prices of twists went up. The company did not raise the wages of the weavers proportionally and thus the income of the weavers was effectively reduced than before. Again the company unable to collect more cloths from the weavers its income was decreased too. The business followed a downward trend. Weavers used to meet regularly to discuss about their wages and how to increase it. Their protests were becoming widespread including far off aurangs. Gradually the weavers around Santipur had also stopped working. While John Bebb stayed at Santipur the weavers had submitted a collective petition to him on 12th July in 1786 where they had complained after introducing contract method the conditions of the weavers had become miserable.⁷⁰

It further said that the unbearable dominance and control by Mr. Beanland, his gomastah Kishore Sanyal, dalal and other employees who were running the

business under the contractual system (1784-85) were making living miserable for the weavers. The weavers were cheated on wages in many ways. Like they were given wages of fine cloth for making super fine cloth, that of average for fine cloth and ordinary for standard/medium quality. For the expensive *nayansukh* variety they are paid the wage for dutch or ordinary type. On one side lesser wages on the other increased price of twists. In this dilemma, the weavers were compelled to sell their ultimate belongings to procure two square meals. Many of them were moving out of Santipur. The way the weavers were tortured in the hands of Mr. Beanland and his gomastah Kishore Sanyal is beyond description. Until they are removed and replaced by someone experienced to handle that aurang, the weavers would not work. The weavers would be bound to leave the place and work elsewhere. The ways in which the weavers were cheated on wages were given in the petition. Like money is advanced for weaving *nayansukh* variety and rate would be fixed later Rs8/9 rupees is reduced and wages for dutch/ordinary variety would be given. Again advance given and rate fixed for super fine or superior quality of mulmul later rupees 5 would be lessened and wages paid would for that of fine quality. Again for fine type and ordinary type, payment would be reduced by Rs 3 or 4 and Rs4 or 5 and wages of medium and ordinary quality would be paid respectively.⁷¹ After scrutiny John Bebb reports, "Nothing can be done with the weavers without they are paid a price more equal to their labour than they receive at present."⁷² If the weavers can be satisfied the aurang can collect annually 10 to 12000 cloth pieces from here. But the situation was boiling. The obstinacy and discontentment of the people worried the company. Mr. Beanland expressed the possibility of physical assault to Bebb and Bebb requested the collector of Nadia Mr. Redfurn to send 8 to 10 guards for protection. He suggested that in order to discipline the adamant weavers and ensure the future

prospect of the aurang this would be an appropriate measure. Bebb was surprised by the localized yet organised and collective protest made by the weavers of Santipur for raising their wages and against the atrocities of the British. He described this awareness, protest and work-consciousness, as unparalleled. The way they had united undaunted by the threatening by representatives of the company, reaching up to the office of the Board of Trade and expressing their grievance and rights, the way they collectively refused to work unless their objections are settled was beyond any comparison.⁷³

It is clear from John Bebb's report that the rebellious attitude of the weavers had agonized the English company. The company became concerned of the fact that the attitude of the weavers of the Santipur would influence the other weavers and was compelled to pass several regulations. Even before Bebb had submitted his report, the company in order to frighten the independent traders interested in buying cloths from Santipur, had passed a regulation on 19th July, 1786, "It is hereby directed that every weaver be furnished with a ticket specifying the name, place of abode and cootey under which he works, and containing an account of the dates and period of advances made, the value of the cloths or goods he shall from time to time deliver in return."⁷⁴

Thus with the help of political power and law the company had wanted to silence the revolting voice of the weavers. When the weavers of Dacca, Teetabaddy region were bearing the pain of atrocities of the English company, weavers at Santipur raised their voice in protest.⁷⁵ "At Dacca, the weavers accepted the regulations without much opposition. The result was the decline of the Teetabaddy aurang, which manufactured one very important assortment for the company's investment. There were 900 houses of weavers in Teetabaddy in the year 1774 but the number fell to 500 in 1778."⁷⁶ The fact is cloths of Santipur had huge market in Europe that has been discussed before. Because

of this enormous market appeal and facilities of trade available at Santipur traders from everywhere used to crowd here to procure goods. Bebb who had stayed at Santipur before his posting at Dacca said among all places he had witnessed the market competition the most at Santipur. This was the reason when the weavers would get better price they could dare to sell their products to independent traders and not to the company.⁷⁷

In this regards it is worth mentioning the reason how could the weavers of Santipur protested against the powerful English Company. It was possible primarily due to the huge demand for the Santipur textile, secondly due to this demand and other trade facilities traders of other foreign companies and independent traders from elsewhere used to frequent the place to procure goods and thirdly because of the courage, organised effort and work ethics and consciousness of the weavers of Santipur. The weavers always demanded wages matching their labour and skill. With the increase of prices of all items of bare necessities, twists induced them into thinking the justice of matching increase in earnings and hence the demand for higher wages. Such labour consciousness was exceptional then. At present it may be a common feature, but 230 years ago rising in protest against the British Government and with such awareness, righteousness, organised collective protest with work consciousness was few and far between. At that time no Indian had the courage to protest against the British rule. Where at the area of Teetabaddy (manufacturer of Tanjeebs Sari) we find the weavers submissive, frightened and trying to be happy with even less than bare minimum, the burning protests of weavers of Santipur was a remarkable instance. In this regards a petition in 1798 is remarkable.

Petition from	FORT William, the 10th July, 1798
Santipore Weavers	Translation of a Petition from Santipore weavers to the Commercial Council dated the 25th assar. 1205

corresponding with the 6th July, 1798 - Received on the same day -

When we have prepared the thread for the different sorts of cloths, for which advance have been made to us, sorters of thread came to allhouses, and sort the thread, after which, on our commencing to weaver the cloths with the said thread they came daily to inspect the progress, and affix the company's seal to the cloths. On the completion of the Piece, we deliver it in at length, are counted, and the cloth is weighed, and exmined with the Musters, by the sarter, the Gomastahs and Naib Gomastah; and received if equal to them, and if inferior returned.

The cloths which are thus received, are afterwards priged by the sarter, the Gomastahs and Nayeb Gomostah, and the gentleman, who throw them into inferior sorts, than those which they appertain to. This does not pack in our presence, and we are told some days afterwards, when the cloths are entered on our chits that they have been thrown into inferior assortments.

When on hearing this, we request permission to examine our cloths with the Musters, it is refused.

We suffer great loss from these lardships and therefore pray, that you will take such steps, as you may deem fit for giving us redress and relieving us, that we may continue to furnish the Honrble Company's investment and pay them Revenues.

Poraun Doree - Manager -

Ramsunder Paramanick

Crishna Purshaud Paramanick

Calachund Paramanick

Gangaram Paramanick

Sig



- Poraun Dorre
- Lochun Dolou
- Subho Paramanick
- Bulram Mundul
- Gopul Sein
- Sitaram Khaun
- Rammedhu Cashto
- Horen Senn
- Bijaram Biddente
- Doocooree Dololl
- Muddun Khaun
- Ramtonoo Collyah
- Nocu Khaun

Hanaye agah &c^a,

All inhabitants of Santipore

A true translation

W. C. Blaquire

Translated ordering.

78

May be that is why in 1773, 1786 1798 and later in 1801, 1810 and taking part in the first organised protest against the British rule the Sanyasi revolt, the protests of weavers of Santipur still continued. Again they raised their voice after 1833 in 1905 and thereafter till 1947 and even till 1977 the indomitable spirit of these weavers was very much present and continues till today. Incidentally the weavers of Teetabaddy were paid the same wages for the 20-30 years and even less at times and yet they lived somehow and continued weaving, the reason is explained by N.K.Sinha- 'This was only possible because most of them had a little land which they cultivated themselves'.⁷⁹

The weavers of Santipur, though had some land but they did not depend on that. Loom was their live vein (heart bit) and the clitter clatter sound of it kept them ticking too. Weaving was their profession and means of livelihood. They did not make any compromise on that. That is why whenever they had found the wages of the company inappropriate, they sold the cloths to outsiders at higher prices. Beanland was a contractor and had made every effort to stop the weavers but the furious attitude of the weavers frightened him. In 1788 when weavers of Teetabaddy were happy with less than minimum payment the, weavers of Santipur revolted and they also become successful. On the basis of the Report the gomastah was replaced. The demands of the weavers were overall met up. Out of the imprisoned 12 weavers, nine of them were released after a year for their good conduct. Disturbed by the rest three, the latter were sent to the Khiderpore jail. Anyway, till this chapter the revolt of the weavers yield in success. But this was not the end of all. The company informed the higher authority in England about the impending danger of such organised revolt. Again in 23rd July 1787, new law was passed to keep the weavers under firm grip.⁸⁰ The superintendent of Revenue and Opium Manufacturer and composer of Calcutta Police George Charles Meyer had translated the law in Bengali. The translation (12 pages) was printed in Calcutta in the company's press. In the introduction of the law it is written : "All native weavers who are connected with the affairs of the company, a law is enacted to them, the meaning of which is thus:" the law was made further stiff and another law was passed in 1789.⁸¹ George Charles Meyer too translated that.

The new law could not bind the indomitable spirit of the weavers of Santipur. The atrocities of the Kuthi-in charge increased day by day. If the weaver would not deliver the cloths they would be thrashed, ousted from their homes. On the other hand the weavers also started revolting and protested against the abuses.

On 26th January 1801, the weavers of the village of Sonaberia under Santipur chapter had submitted a petition before the office of the company in Calcutta.

[See Appendix No. III]

The petition highlighted the different ways and means by which the weavers were exploited. Skilled weavers were running out of job as the industrial revolution had started in England. The machine-made cloths were taking its place in India. In this regard some points are remarkable. The industrial revolution was budding and England and its parliament since 1700 was keen to protect its growth. The effort started materializing from 1790. But till 1780, 1790 and even till 1810-15 ample evidence is available proving that Santipur textile was very popular. Even in 1790 excluding the cloths manufactured in the kuthi, the company used to purchase cloths worth Rs 15 lakhs annually.⁸² Effort to keep the Santipur handloom cloth under their control is another evident that proves the above statement. It is also true that understanding the significance of the situation the company was changing the items of its export. Like in 1795 cotton piece goods Rs 47,74,591, raw silk-Rs 17,24,137, sugar-Rs 19,41,213, salt Petre Rs 3,37,875 were the main items of export. In 1799-Rs 90,51,324 cotton piece goods and raw silk Rs 17,25,000 was exported.⁸³ The export of cotton piece goods was remarkable. But situation started changing from 1801. In 1806 after restriction inflicted due to the blockade of Napoleon but the export from Bengal was not disturbed. The matter was already discussed earlier. But overall the export was affected. The fine textile of Santipur was adversely affected. Even the women who were dependent upon the textile industry for their livelihood were miserably affected. In 1810 indigo was exported of worth Rs 20,00,000 and cotton piece goods of worth Rs. 25,50,000.⁸⁴ The export of cotton fabrics was reduced. The labour consciousness that was evolved in persistent negotiation was hampered too. In a nutshell the Bengal's labour had

to be give space to machine. “ The cheapest Hindu labour could not compete either in quality or quantity with Lancashire’s mules or throstles”.⁸⁵ After 1820 the company did not export Bengal fabrics to St Helena or any other places around it.

In this regard on 13th October, 1810, the manager of Santipur kuthi Charles Bailey wrote a letter. He said that if quality work could be given to weavers consistently then they would be able produce better work. If a skilled weaver did not get order for superior quality cloths order from the company for 4 to 5 months, he would be compelled to weave with thick yarn, the ordinary variety, and would sell in the ordinary market. Gradually his skill would come down. His two square meals get uncertain for the family and then against advance from the company it is impossible for the weavers to maintain the quality and deliver the cloth. It is significant that in reply to the complaint against the weavers for inferior quality and use of thicker twists, he took the weavers’ side.⁸⁶

As there was no demand, like other establishments or kuthi, Santipur kuthi was shut down in 1818. Mr. Long remarked in this context- “ The last ruins of these factories were pulled down, and sold between 1870 and 1880. The name ‘Kuthirpara’ (Rows of kuthies or factories) still remains.”⁸⁷ So long the weavers were in the habit of selling cloth at one point. Despite all harassment, they used to deliver goods here as they used to get cash in hand for it. After the Kuthi was closed down, both male and females were in acute financial trouble. Delving into the history of handloom textile it is seen the weavers of Santipur, though doomed receded temporarily rose to prominence again. Once the English company inspired the weavers to weave finer fabrics and this came to their help. With the decline of export trade and fall of the aristocratic class (Jamindars, Talukdars) in the country, there was decline in the demand for finer fabrics. This was compensated by the rise of the ‘Babu’ - (Bhadralok) class in the

society. Santipur could retain its existence by selling fine fabrics to the 'Babu'-s of Calcutta.⁸⁸

With the fall in the production of handloom products, the production of superior, medium and average varieties of twists also came to a stop. Though the weavers still continued weaving handloom textile but the problem regarding spinning of twists remained unresolved. From 1825 the import of twists from Europe devastated the native textile traders and it also stopped the use of indigenous twists completely. This had also affected the women adversely. The discontinuation of manufacturing of native twists led to disaster that is continuing till today as such twists are no longer produced today as the technique and elegance of the method is lost. The cessation of production of twists could not prevent the handloom production at Santipur.

Santipur textile survived all crises. The weavers of Santipur and their collective protests that had started in the 2nd half of 18th century continued. Though the pattern and time changed many things, but the fighting spirit of the weavers remained unchanged. The sense of pride in the work and awareness of right kept the textile industry of Santipur alive even after De-industralisation . It had only experienced crest and trough. The struggle of the weavers can be referred to as the ultimate fight of the labour class for dignified living. Several times these weavers were attacked but they had never lost their battle. The concept of nationalism or patriotism could not be really expected among the uneducated poor weavers in the 18th or 19th century. But their consciousness of right and struggle for existence can be described as the fight for self-empowerment. Or put it as, for the first time in India local weavers of small region could fight against the injustice of the British Rule and this was the first fight for nationalism that had started much before the Swadeshi movement.

Industrial downtrend cannot be blamed upon the British alone, the Indians are

also responsible for it. Though many a time the nationalist historians put the entire blame on them it can be understood at present that for many reasons the Indian counterparts were also responsible for it equally. When it had actually begun, the efforts of the weavers of Santipur were remarkable. In the words of Narendra Krishna Sinha - "When weaving started with imported twists they were the first to promptly adjust to the scenario."⁸⁹ Simultaneously weavers of other areas might have done it too but their weaving was restricted to dhoti, gamcha, lungi or the basic items of daily use. The Santipur weavers could move beyond this because of their skill to weave finer variety and indomitable spirit and persistence and had continued even after the closure of the Santipur auring in 1828. An excerpt from the book of Debendra Bejay Mitra is significant- "The weavers manufactured cloths with the imported cotton twist and sold cloths at a much lower rates than before. But still they earned some profit because they could purchase the imported yarn at much cheaper rates. Thus the weavers of Santipore using the imported twists, somehow maintained themselves."⁹⁰ Labour consciousness also implies work ethics and commitment towards the work and undoubtedly the weavers of Santipur had it to the fullest extent. But there was literally lack of participation of common people to it. After 1833, fancy machine-made foreign items at a meagre rate of 2.5% tax flooded into the market. Public started buying those items available at cheaper prices and nobody judged the quality. It was a common belief that foreign items are better. But actually those items were cheap in price, apparently fine but after few washes the colour or fineness fades away gradually. The natives preferred those items to indigenous products though the later though, at times thicker and apparently unattractive but were much lasting in all aspects. With the decline in use of native saris for ordinary use the weavers only thrived upon weaving finer qualities or mulmuls. The requirement for this was comparatively

much lower, that is the trend of the public in the country getting inclined to foreign goods was definitely the primary reason for the De-industrialisation. Previously working on the loom was considered a dignified job. But that started changing from the onset of the 19th century. With the influence of western culture many got adequately educated but all found employment under the British government far more prestigious than working at the loom. Gradually Santipur, which was once the centre for excellent Indian textile, started perishing. Bengalis could not understand the destruction of native industry tantamount to destruction of self-existence. Losing the individualistic the weavers in Santipur started getting disintegrated and many gave up weaving and joined factories elsewhere. In her book 'The Working Class of Bengal' Deepika Basu highlighted that the number of labourers in Bengal was much less than other regions of the country. Hence this proved that not many weavers had become labourers or might have returned after not being able to cope up with the hardship of being labourers in factories. It was a mismatch for a handloom weaver to become a routine labourer. It has been mentioned earlier that the weavers of Santipur were very fast to adjust to the changed situation. Handloom weaving continued no matter even after imported items lured our countrymen, the weavers continued weaving finer varieties even if the demand was low and the foreigners adored it still. The weavers continued their struggle to retain their individualistic existence through their weaving and begun a history of Protest and Resistance. Even after the decline of industries in 1833, the textile industry of Santipur could still retain its glory. The famous weaver and artisan Girish Chandra Pal had glorified handloom textile with his touch of excellence. When Deputy Magistrate Iswar Chandra Ghosal was the president of the Santipur Municipality. Girish Chandra Pal of Madan Gopal Palli was famous for his textile industry. He owned many looms at his residence. He employed several weavers and

manufactured new designs of cloths. In his workshop the weavers used to weave textile of 40 dangi. Girish Chandra invented a new type of sari called *Kalabati* under Iswar Chandra's order where the entire sari was done without twists and only with jari and he did it himself. The sari had golden jari one side and silver on another. Iswar Chandra had bought one sari like that with Rs 250 and the other was sold out at Rs 1000. In 1883 Girish Chandra had participated in an international exhibition at Calcutta by sending a handkerchief with words from bible woven on all sides and at the centre his name, "Calcutta Prodarshani -1883 Khristabdo"⁹¹ was woven. That handkerchief was preserved with his grandson Kshitish Chandra Sahitya Bhusan. It goes without saying that Girish Chandra knew English and Sanskrit. In those days he used to design embroidered borders on cloth imported from Manchester. Earlier they had only plain border in mono-colour. The designed borders that Girish Chandra had evolved then as he visited the artist's house impressed the chief justice of the Calcutta High Court Mr. Fiyar had copied some of the designs and had sent it to Manchester. Later they were woven into cloths manufactured in Manchester and were brought to India. Girish Chandra was awarded a certificate of Honour for designing such excellent designs. There were other famous weavers whose name and contribution have been discussed earlier.

Maharsi Bholanath Chanda in 1845 had mentioned in his diary that there were about 10000 weavers and tailors at Santipur. That the weavers were not all lost was evident in 1872 in Adamsumari. It was seen, that at Santipur, there were about 13,680 textile weavers, Jute weavers 273. Goods were sent to Calcutta for being Santipur speciality, that was in demand and not as excess. Hence one can conclude that even after 1833 weaving continued at Santipur.

TABLE NO. - 3**Size of the weaving population in the Bengal Presidency.**

Names of factories or regions	Total population	Total no. of weavers houses	The Period when the estimates was made	Weavers employed by the Company	Weavers employed by the private Traders	Total weaving population
Santipore	----	-----	1822	----	-----	50,000
Santipore	----	-----	1872	----	-----	13,680

Source : Progs of Board of Trade - 29th June, 1827, Prohs No. 48, Vol - 453, Part - II,

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Between 1880 and 1885 due to epidemic of malaria and later within 1890 in flood the population had declined and many weavers had moved out of Santipur to Calcutta and other areas with factories. In 1906 in a census publication by Mr. Gate it is said that many farmers had moved out of Santipur. In 1898 the magistrate of Nadia writes that only a few weavers are left who waves very ordinary cloth. Kalikrishna Bhattacharya referring to the same year had written that about Rs 3,25,000 worth textile was produced at Santipur annually. In 1909 there was sharp decline in that earnings. Shifting of the central office, change of the course of the river, change in public mentality, advent of plague etc were the reasons that had attributed to the decline of business and population at Santipur.

It is true that natural disaster in 1890 had adversely affected handloom industry at Santipur but it had again revived in 1898 inspired by the partition of Bengal and nationalist movement. The latter had worked wonderfully in reviving all native indigenous industries. Being deeply attached with the movement, handloom

production got back to its original volume of production. The weavers gained back their joy. Despite the exploitation of money lenders the weavers could see some hope. Apparently it seemed that the period of struggle of the weavers are over and life had calmed down for them but the weavers of Santipur had still a long way to go. So long they were vocal against the British rule. Now they had started protesting against the leaders of the Indian national movement which had lasted till the period of the Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhiji, upto the year 1930.

The weaver of Santipur and the Swadeshi Movement :

Before the discussion it is important to note that we have mentioned the situation of Nadia and particularly Santipur in the period 1890 and till the beginning of the Swadeshi Movement. This would show how warm and refreshing was the Swadeshi movement for the weavers. In the later half of 1880 and beginning of 1890 famine had taken away the lives of many weavers. As a result many weavers had moved out of Santipur. The price of rice had gone up from Rs 3.5 to Rs. 4.5 per 40 kg. With the earning of 7 to 8 anas per day, the weavers could still manage to live. The foreign black-bordered dhuti and sari were very popular and were sold at Rs 2 a pair. It is clear from here how the natives adored the foreign goods. During the famine the price of rice had gone up to Rs 7 to 8 per 40 kg and situation became complex.⁹²

The moneylenders, taking the opportunity, utterly exploited the weavers and kept their business alive. The helpless weavers started switching off to jobs at jute mills. Many weavers started settling down at Baranagar, Srirampore and Rishra. But weaving being their traditional profession and for generations they could not bear the monotony of routine labour, irony of slavery and hardships of long hours and meagre pay. They started returning to Santipur and starved. At this time an engineer named Haridas Pal, driven by commercial interest in an

effort to help the poor helpless weavers, installed 'thakthaki' looms again.⁹³ He employed many weavers paying reasonable wages in his workshop. But the products could not match the competition with the imported goods in the market. He incurred huge loss and despite all his effort the loom could not run.

It is shocking that when the weavers of Santipur were trying to revive the native fabrics and sell them to earn their livelihood, their own countrymen did not support them. But the weavers in order to retain the country's pride and tradition had fought back against the British. The same people, after two years, motivated by the Swadeshi movement had bought those cloth at increased price. Had they realised a couple of years earlier, then the factory would not have turned into ruins due to utter indifference and negligence of the people, rather it could have become a huge success with the appreciation of the natives and stood there as a burning example of achievement.

In Bengal with the advent of machine run loom handloom did not come to an end. The following data proves it further.

TABLE NO. - 4

Yr	Loom	Mill
1896-97	7840 lakh yards	3540 lakh yards
1926-27	13150 lakh yards	22590 lakh yards ³

Source : Tantu o Tantri, 5th Year, 1st Issue, Baisakh 1335 Bangabdo

Within a gap of 30 years it is found that mechanized loom has advanced further keeping the handloom lagging behind.

Swadeshi movement had immense impact upon the handloom sector and it had increased its production manifold the following data confirms this :

TABLE NO. - 5

1904-5	8280 lakh yards	6780 lakh yards
1905-6	10840 lakh yards	7000 lakh yards

		(At first high productivity)
1906-7	11840 lakh yards	7080 lakh yards
1907-8	11080 lakh yards	8080 lakh yards
1908-9	11160 lakh yards	8280 lakh yards
1909-10	8960 lakh yards	9630 lakh yards

Source : Tantu o Tantri, 5th Year, 1st Issue, Baisakh 1335 Bangabdo

From 1908-09 after Morley Minto reforms handloom industry started to stagnate and imported items witnessed a boom in the sale. The year after the reform the mill production exceeded the handloom production. There was a tough competition between the two. In 1914-15 again handloom production exceeded that of the mill, later mill again super-ceded. Handloom could not surpass mill production though in 1918-19 the handloom production was more than that was the total volume of imported cloth used in India.⁹⁴

The mistake made by the Bengalis was promptly rectified during the Swadeshi movement. The movement aroused patriotism. The weavers who had left the profession returned to their traditional profession. Apart from Santipur, cloth made in Pabna, Josohar, Mymensingh, Khulna was widely sold too. Many bought handloom textile at higher prices to motivate the weavers. Male members from elite families started coming to the loom at Dacca, Santipur to learn weaving. There was a wave of revival of the native industries. The poor artisans and weaver though still exploited by the moneylenders, had earnings that were still 2 to 3 times more than their earlier wages. But though the profit was mostly taken away by the moneylenders.

Before the Swadeshi movement many weavers were compelled to compromise with the quality of the goods. The borders were made strong and well knit. The rest was done substandard and it was also not as bright as it is today. But during this time huge demand changed the situation and quality was improved

immensely. Quality was upgraded and new designs were discovered for the border. Jari work was made popular among all communities. The borders were designed with patriotic songs and were sold at exorbitant prices that were beyond expectation. The weavers at Santipur designed on the border the lines from the song “Dhanodhanye puspe vora”, “Bande mataram” and excited patriotism in all.⁹⁵ The textiles of Santipur had its own glory that was acclaimed widely.

The period from 1906 to 1915 was the time for revival of Santipur handloom industry. The loom underwent changes and became upgraded. The First World War (1914-18) interrupted the progress. During the war import of yarn, jari and other important items were stopped. Hence prices of the remaining stock in the country went up by 4 to 5 times. Native thread cannot be used in handloom anymore. It was used only for weft for producing thicker variety of cloth. In this regard it will not be out of context to mention that those who were influenced by the wave of patriotism had they focused more on the production and use of native twist that would have been an appropriate instance of patriotism. Hence it was more of sentimental reason than from a contemplated and well-thought principle the many of the so-called patriotic people were acting. During this time the leaders were trying to harass the manufacturers to satisfy their political interests at Manchester and hence the love for native textile. They gave up imported items and started using native products. They did not think deep enough to realise that production of native thread was doomed and without the imported twists looms cannot work. They were indifferent to the issue. That is why when true patriotism was evoked later the thought of charka or spinning wheel came foremost. Had it started earlier then the problem regarding yarn would have been solved long before Gandhiji's time.

During the 1st and 2nd decades of the twentieth century ups and downs in the

history of handloom industry a few words would be relevant on the problems faced by the textile industry of England.

Since long England was trying to destroy the Indian textile industry and flourish the English textile industry but it received a blow during the 1st world war. During and after the war the market for imported cloth in the Indian market was destroyed by the popularity of Indian textile. In 1880-90 during famine to keep the manufacturers at Manchester happy, the British government in India did not levy any tax on imported English goods and yarns. In the parliament vote for the English producers were more and thus this flattery continued. The Manchester weavers earned about 40 crore from India by selling yarns. Had it been taxed, the government would have earned Rs 4 crores. Also if the prices of imported goods had gone up a bit it would have facilitated sale of native goods. The British patronized the Manchester weavers but taxed basic items like salt and made the poor sufferer in various diseases for want of salt.⁹⁶ But the war brought ruin before the textile industry of Manchester. In 1914 India used to import 40 Nos. 5000 – 6000 bundles (Gaat) of yarns from England. After the war, some of these 40 Nos. & 32 Nos. yarns started importing from Japan. Slowly the, import from Japan increased to 3000 gaat to Calcutta and 5000 - 6000 to Bombay and Madras and later it came down to 10000 gaat 40 Nos. was imported.⁹⁷ Before war weft thread 80 Nos. would cost 10 anas per mora. (In 1324 bagabdo it had become 915, / 90 mora). Then it was 901 /15. The critical condition of England suggested soon it would be 10 mora. The price of food was still affordable though price of rice in India was comparatively reduced. The wages were not reduced anywhere. To combat the situation and compensate the 5 crore loss of Indian British government, it was the policy to levy higher tax on thicker variety of cotton fabrics imported in India. To facilitate Manchester to survive in competition with textiles from Japan, Italy and China,

goods imported from those countries were be taxed heavily. After war unemployment has increased in Manchester. Due to increase in price of goods during war the dresses of women were also changed. The length of skirts were made knee-length and with lesser frill.⁹⁸

Anyway the problems of the 1st world war did not affect the weavers of Santipur much. Though the prices of goods went up, still cloth of Santipur was in great demand and sold at higher prices. The moneylenders took the weavers under their grip. They started giving advance. With sudden rise in the price of imported goods unexpectedly brought the marwari cloth merchants to Santipur and its cloth became popular with them. They started buying and trading with Santipur textile and made profit in lakhs. The riches of Bombay, Madhyapradesh Rajputana started buying cloths saris/dhotis etc from the moneylenders at exorbitant high prices and also placed new orders. Though the weavers of Santipur worked under the moneylenders still they were able to earn their livelihood properly. Rather it can be said that they lived in better conditions than before. War ended but demand for Santipur cloth did not.

TABLE NO. - 6

Not just Santipur, the textile industry of Bengal was in boom. The following data reveals :

In 1921-22 during non- cooperation movement there was more production of native textile than the use of imported foreign goods.

Year	Imported foreign cloth used in India	For Native which cloth used
1896-97	19,320 lakh yards	10,310 lakh yards
1915-16	20,190 lakh yards	23,280 lakh yards
1916-17	17,720 lakh yards	20,850 lakh yards
1917-18	14,060 lakh yards	21,920 lakh yards
1918-19	10,450 lakh yards	23,120 lakh yards

Year	Imported foreign cloth used in India	For Native which cloth used
1919-20	9,360 lakh yards	19,650 lakh yards
1920-21	14,050 lakh yards	25,590 lakh yards
1921-22	9,800 lakh yards	27,350 lakh yards
1922-23	14,670 lakh yards	28,800 lakh yards
1923-24	13,740 lakh yards	25,960 lakh yards
1924-25	17,100 lakh yards	29,960 lakh yards
1925-26	15,020 lakh yards	29,290 lakh yards
1926-27	17,280 lakh yards	33,580 lakh yards

Source : Chandra, Dharendra Krishna

Tantu o Tantri, 5th year, 1st Issue, Baisakh 1335 Bangabdo

Part of the foreign cloth that was imported into India was exported to other countries and rest was used in India. Again cloth manufactured in India were exported to other countries and rest retained in India, the figures of which are given. About 20 lakh worth Khadi textile was produced then. but it could have been more. The native handloom textile compensated for the balance and lived on.⁹⁹

Freedom movement and world war led to the revival of the weaver and handloom industry and also promoted the economic growth simultaneously encouraging the revolutionary spirit of the weavers. They used their loom as pen and reformed the society on one hand and rose in revolt against the British on another. But these happy days did not last long. The leaders of the national congress declared cloth made of native threads will be considered as swadeshi and not the one with imported threads. The places where cloth was made of imported thread were : Dacca, Santipur, Begumpur, Devipur, Shrirampur, Joirampur, Ramjeevanpur, Foridpur, Atpur, Burdaman, Forashdanga, Beledanga, Kolme, Rajbolehat, Joshohor, Shimla, Tangail, Bagherhat etc where bedcovers, dress

materials, saris, towels, gamcha, mosquito net, shawls were produced. The poor weavers here used to mix in their products 20% of the imported threads and the rest was hard labour, care and lot of respect and love for the work that was completely ignored. They used to take their products to Howrah haat but it would not sell. Bengalis were then blind with the wave of patriotism forgetting what true patriotism and integrated thoughts were like.

The magazine 'Sanjibani' had protested against the injustice upon the weavers. It comments, during swadeshi movement there was development in Santipur textile though there is also another angle to it. It was since long famous for its dhoti and sari both in India and abroad. There are about 1200 ghani of looms there. They use no.60 or no. 50 threads. Annually on average 86,400 Nos. of cloth was produced and each piece cost not less than Rs 7 on average. At Santipur overall textile worth Rs 604800 is produced. Half of it was used to produce dhuti and sari at Santipur and so the congress has discarded that. The sale of Santipur textile had reduced to $\frac{1}{4}$ the earlier volume. This had made the condition of the weavers miserable. In Bombay and Ahmedabad business men used imported machines to manufacture textiles. Thread was the main ingredient of Santipur textile. That is imported from abroad does not justify the boycott of such cloth made out of that thread.¹⁰⁰

The Santipur 'Ttantubai Sangha' and 'Bastra Shilpo Sanrakhini Samity' had protested against this. Bholanath Pramanik Banikantha wrote on behalf of them that "majority of the population at Santipur earn their living by weaving. The widows of well to do and middle class families do the embroidery work and also earn their living through it. The ostagar and washerman earn their living by washing cloth more than a middleclass clerk. The makers of the parts of the loom also get their living from this industry. The kalakar or rongkar dyes the cloth and get their living from it. If the weaving industry that is very old and

traditional had shut down, many traders would be affected too. To run the native looms money were spent in crores for imported threads, but the earning was 4 to 5 times more.¹⁰¹ In 4th of Asadh, 1337 Bangabdo, in a public meeting at Buro shibtola at pramanik house at the premise of the Krishna temple the following topics were discussed. "How to prepare cloth using native threads ? How to stop treatment of poor wash at aurang for engraving flower on the cloth ? How to stop the manufacture of cloth for the shops of Calcutta ? How to clear stock fast ? What are the facilities that can be provided to weavers ? How to protect textile industry of Santipur and develop it further ? The president of the meeting was Lakshmi Kanta Mitra, MLA and secretary Bholanath Pramanik Banikantha. It was decided in the meeting of the working committee that imported threads would be discarded and native threads would be used instead and stock would be cleared in the market as per the direction of the Congress".¹⁰²

In this regard an account is given before and after the picketing. "When there was no discard or / picket movement at Burrabazar or India." At that time Burrabazar and other places daily 1500 gaat of imported cotton was sold worth Rs 7.5 lakhs. After the movement it reduced to daily Rs 25000 worth cotton (50 gaat)."

"The picketing had boosted sale of native threads. Average daily 400gaat of native threads were sold worth 1.5 lakhs (১৫০০). But such condition did not last long".¹⁰³

Though thread was produced it was not enough to solve the problems of the weavers of Shantipur. Use of Khadi also disturbed the production of old traditional looms. In this regards an article was published in 'Tantu O Tantri', 'Samayik Prosango'. "During the partition of Bengal and Swadeshi movement, the condition of the weavers had improved. Till then, spinning wheels or tokli were not so much in use and volume of threads so produced were not much.

There was not much mill. Khadi was not much in use. During the freedom movement since the last Chaitra the condition of the weavers were becoming worse. People were more inclined to the use of Khadi. Congress had discarded the use of imported cloth and cloth made of imported thread and there was widespread picketing at schools, colleges, and everywhere. At Howrah haat though there was no picketing yet sale was closed. The price of handloom textile reduced considerably. Even the thicker variety of cloth was sold at lesser prices. The price of imported twists went down. Unemployment increased everywhere.”¹⁰⁴

The weavers of Santipur at that critical time were compelled to rise in revolt again. The President of ‘Tontubai Sammyalani’ Sri Narendranath Nath Seth, on behalf of the weavers wrote a letter to pradesh Congress leader Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy : “Separating from the labour and livelihood of countrymen yet promoting native goods is not what is true swadeshi feeling is all about. This matter was discussed in 1906 in the meeting of congress subject committee in presence of Lokmanya Tilak”.

Also in this letter there was mention of revival of textile industry and not to boycott it for the use of imported thread in it.

The letter was sent through Bholanath Pramanik Banikantha. He knew all about the miseries of the weavers. He could explain the condition of the weavers properly before Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy.

Sri Narendranath Nath Seth had written another letter to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy in 23rd August, 1930.

“The weavers who use handloom could not be compared with others. The people of India had forgotten about this native industry. Owing to their false thrift and fashion the weavers have suffered since past 150 years, secondly they were ready to use native threads but there were no adequate supply of it.

Thirdly out of 80% of the textile woven here represents the labour of the native weaver whereas an imported cloth has 97% of foreign revenue that had already been sent to the country. The future of that movement was dependent upon the security and prosperity of these weavers. Fifthly these cloths are more lasting because of the use of wooden sana. Whereas mill used steel sana. Fast speed and metallic contact reduces the longevity of the thread. Sixthly considering all respects handloom textile should be used and made popular more than those in mills.

In this condition sale of handloom cloths should not be entrusted to foreign traders for sale. Firstly the weavers have already started using native twists. Secondly the handloom cloths already produced should be sold first else the weavers will feel cornered. Thirdly though there are many faults with the current business policy still it provides means of livelihood for many. The industry had been kept alive through the principle of demand and supply and did not include the principle of financial exploitation for the countrymen. Fourthly those who are traders of imported cloth understand the business as their European counterparts as means of economic exploitation. If the charge of weaving would be entrusted upon such people destruction of the industry would be definite".¹⁰⁵

It is important to consider that we take into account all such factors. I am ready to accept any of the working solutions and am not resistant to anything new. But we should be careful that this should not harm the handloom industry and other business activities. The foreign economists condemn the Bengalese and the latter is driven off almost from every means of livelihood.

Thus two letters were written to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy who had not responded to the letters.

On 31st July Sri Narendranath Nath Seth had written a letter to the then president of Congress working committee Sardar Ballavbhai Patel as below-

The president of 'Bangiyō Tontubai Samity' expresses that all looms stand still due to want of fine yarn, produced goods stagnate in the godown. It only involves foreign money to the extent of 20% of the total cost. The weavers have no other support and hence they will be compelled to starve henceforth. We have to revive handloom as the shore-up for the future and nourish the industry suitably.

Along with this letter a copy of the earlier letter written to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was also submitted to him but before any measure could be taken as the British imprisoned him shortly after that.

Handloom specialist Sri Bholanath Pramanik Banikantha wrote that lakhs of weavers in and around Santipur earn their livelihood by using imported thread. If the congress declare ban on the use of imported yarn then the weavers will sink into critical state. As suitably matching homemade yarns are not available here. So he put appeal before all congress leaders to discontinue with the ban or campaign against such textile made with imported yarns rather take initiative for production of fine yarns here within the country. If the weavers get suitable homemade yarns they will never use the imported variety.

The helpless, illiterate weavers were not far behind and took part in the protest. The role of these people from the so-called lower strata of the society (subaltern) was an instance by itself in the history of India. Now question arises what does 'swadeshi' mean, is it just speech with rich texture or connecting to the wants and grievances of people and be there by these struggling community who were full of indomitable courage and spirit to rise in protest against the British time and again since the 18th century.

Here follows a description of a significant conference held in Poush-1337 Bangabdo.

To correct the current misery of the handloom structure a meeting was convened

in the Howrah town hall on 23rd December. The then Calcutta Mayor Subhas Bose presided over the meeting. Sri Santosh Kumar Bose-deputy mayor Calcutta municipality was present too. The traders of the indigenous clothes of Howrah haat, moneylenders and wholesalers were invited to be present here. Hundreds of textile traders from Achander, Rashidpur, Gourhati, Santipur, Khulna, Joshohar, Burdwan were also present.

Initially Sri Niyogi (Sri Gyananjan Niyogi-Secretary Pally Sanskar Samiti) questioned the traders whether they could use the indigenous threads instead of using the imported variety and what are the problems behind using such homegrown variety. In response to this Sri Binod Bihari Dey stated that they have no objection in using the native variety of yarns neither it had any disadvantage. Only the yarns of no. 40/70/80 are not readily available and not effective. It needs special attention. At that time after the durga puja all retailers were producing textiles using native yarns still it did not sell well.

The main reason being that the textile once woven with native yarns could not be demarcated from the imported counterparts and buyers would not be convinced even they are assured under oath. Textiles prepared from imported yarns of worth 7 to 8 lakhs were lying in stock and for the same reason about 2-3 lakhs worth textile made from native yarns were in stock. Customers preferred the latter as those made of foreign yarns. In this condition the weavers are the worst sufferers and require instant remedy or the misery will reach a stage that would be beyond any control. In reply to this Kiran Shankar Roy (Secretary-Swadeshi League) said the congress would look into the matter of helping traders for using native yarns. Subhas Chandra Bose after discussion suggested the traders and moneylenders to form a committee and try to sell goods made with native yarns to outside the state. The congress would help them if they would continue making clothes using native yarns. He also suggested

them to set up arat, centralized bulk selling points and outlets ad sell indigenous fabrics keeping low margin of profit.

It was now for the investors and traders to consider the advices and suggestions of congress. But the point was how to clear the stock of goods prepared using the imported threads that was lying in the stock. Due to the far spreading influence of the swadeshi movement there was hardly any buyers for such goods. Only the independent states raised hope.

But each state had their respective culture and tradition and the textile produced were very much to the tune of Bengali taste and culture. Again if the traders and moneylenders follow the suggestion of congress that the latter would help selling textiles produced with native yarns then a separate and new organisation had to be set up. This would involve expenses like rental charges, advertisement costs, and wages of women-spinners all would amount to no less than Rs 200 to Rs 250 per month. If the congress would give assurance to support such expenses like rentals then the stakeholders can proceed further.

Another fact that drew attention was native yarns and quality available. Threads marked no. 20 and 28 were available in plenty. But textiles made from this thicker variety would hardly find any consumer. The initial demand during the first few months had faded away. Though the no. 110 yarn was produced in the mills and no. 90 in Mohini mill no. 50 or no. 60 was available in the market. Only Sholapur would produce no. 80. occasionally. The fabrics were woven mixing the native mill produced yarns of no. 70 and no. 110. But the weekly requirement was 10 bundles or gaant (each bundle= 500 pounds) of no. 70 and no. 80 yarns in the market or else the loom could not run. Had the congress would then request the mill owners to supply no. 70, no. 80 in the market in plenty only then matters would turn as desired. In this regard the attention of the Indian mill owners and authorities of congress were sought.”

Signed by Sri Jotindra Mohon Pal.¹⁰⁶

Protest had started in Dacca as well and it received fresh impetus during 1930 when The Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhiji, (in the year 1930) begun. After few years of silence Gandhiji had led this movement. The program of the Civil Disobedience Movement incorporated besides the breaking of the Salt Laws, picketing of shops selling foreign goods and liquor, bonfire of foreign cloth, refusal to pay taxes and avoidance of offices by the public officers and schools by the students. Even the women joined forces against the British. Those from orthodox families did not hesitate to respond to the call of the Mahatma. He insisted on the use of khadi. While promoting the charka, Gandhi felt that for a nation to turn self-reliant, it had to return to indigenous manufactured goods. The Santipur weavers were inspired and men and women started using charka almost in every household. To use charka widely, discussions were held. The learned folks of Santipur published books on it. When the entire nation was promoting the madness that was witnessed in the remote villages of Santipur for empowerment and building self-reliance was amazing. Could the use of khadi yarns free the weavers from trouble? Or could they find suitable yarns for making fabrics and indigenous textile could provide them two square meals were the questions of the day. Truly speaking, in the days of Civil Disobedience Movement with flow of patriotism the community at large including the weavers did not pay heed to their personal problems. Specially the weavers of Santipur had forgone the profit that they used to earn weaving textile made from imported yarns and switched on to native yarns or khadi.

But at the initial phase due to Gandhiji's charka movement and passing of Sarda Remarriage Act there were great demand for purely Indian textiles. Huge number of marriages was held and there was short supply of homegrown textile.

There was a trend of boycotting foreign goods and demand for Indian textiles. The mills started thinking of producing finer yarns for the market. Mohini mill had introduced sample of no. 60 yarns in the market and promised to introduce more of the variety in the market soon. If they could import raw cotton from Egypt and prepare finer yarns then the lost glory of India could be revived.¹⁰⁷

Post World War political, social and economic unrest around the world had also influenced India as well. During the war the production of Indian textile had increased. Even export had gone up. Post war situation had changed. The political revolutions in India, frequent picketing had adversely affected trade. People fell into miserable condition owing to hike in price of foodstuff, increased unemployment. Gandhiji's charka movement brought in new impetus among the populace. It had inspired Santipur weavers too. The mills started providing the threads. The weavers of Santipur started weaving and established weaving training school for all irrespective of gender, caste and creed. Women took active part in it. The objective behind the school was to educate people in handloom and make self-reliant. They had the noble objective of rectifying small errors in looms and weavers' work preserving the oldest tradition of India and stand by Gandhiji's principle.

Situation gradually changed as the excitement faded away. After 1833 finer fabrics were primarily woven at Santipur. It was not possible for the weavers to give up the old tradition and continue for long. The matter was grave and needed contemplation. After the decline of initial enthusiasm the weavers started facing problems like scarcity of suitable yarns and fall in the sale and this had led to the inflow of unfair means in the weaving industry of Santipur. Surprisingly the weavers who had never compromised with weaving even at the hardest time of struggle gave away to dishonest measures under the tough condition.

At that time some local traders would buy inferior textiles from Ramjibanpur,

Beldanga, Parmaduni, Dhaniakhali, Meherpur and get it embroidered and starched at Santipur that would look attractive, thicker and made huge profits out of the sale of the same. Some would procure any ordinary quality fabric from any trader in Calcutta and get needlework done at Santipur and after starch and dholai from there these fabrics were sold as pure Santipur variety earning good margin from it. Hence these traders were not keen on buying Santipur fabric and pay justified price for it as they could easily procure other inferior quality at a cheaper price and could easily pass it off as Santipur variety and gain out of it. The actual weavers were affected and were forced to sell the fabric at lesser price. This made them economically fragile. Many of the weavers got entrapped in the debt-web. Want of money led to lack of food and misery and many were forced out of work.¹⁰⁸

10 or 11 years before the traders of Bombay used to purchase loads of Santipur stuff but later cheated on quality and price for which they had stopped purchasing the same. The dishonesty of some local traders had earned bad reputation for the weavers of Santipur in general. It had lost its glory and fame. If the traders would change their practices it could still be revived. The weavers could be revived and restored to their profession and would not have to starve to death. Or else the situation would be similar to when the golden egg bearing duck would get killed for good.”¹⁰⁹

The shrewd moneylenders did not spare any opportunity in that period. “ A pure black embroidered fabric at Santipur would cost rupees 12 to 150. No ordinary person would purchase such piece neither the seller would make much profit in selling them off to such customers. Hence some of the moneylenders would buy fabrics made of finer threads from the foreign factories at cheap prices and get them blocked in different design that they would again bring to Santipur to complete the designs in needlework. Generally the women used to

do such needlework in their leisure hours. They would earn from rupees two to five for such labour. The washermen of Santipur were equally famous then. The moneylenders would then get their fake Santipur varieties washed by the expert washermen and that could pass them off as ones from Santipur. The shrewd investors would then carry the loads of fabrics on a porter's back and sell them in the different corners of Bengal making huge profits. They did not hesitate to proclaim the fabrics to be original pieces of Santipur. The customers were often lured by the look of the fabrics and hence such fabrics had enormous demand in the market. But such fabrics were not lasting in quality or colour. Soon people started losing respect for the Santipur textiles. This adversely affected the Santipur textiles in both ways."¹¹⁰

But the Art and aesthetic conscious weavers of Santipur did not sit idle. Through different meetings and writings in magazine or papers they tried to alert all involved with the weaving industry about the gravity of the situation. Despite all hardships the weavers had retained their finer quality work hence for them it was not possible to accept such dishonest practise of some traders compromising with the quality. It was apparently for utter economic crisis, hardships and scarcity of quality yarns and that some of the weavers were forced to succumb to temptation and take resort to dishonesty else it was difficult to accept the fact that weavers who were so long loyal to the quality of their products could ever do such malpractices.

"In 1914-18 during the First World War import had stopped and due to other factors there were some crisis in the textile industry which had been discussed before. After that the wages of the labourers were between Rs 40 to 60. After the Civil Disobedience Movement the business of the Bombay mill owners prospered manifold leading to decline in the Bengal textile industry. Still the weavers earned wages between Rs 24 to 28. Even in bangabdo 1345 wages

were in the range of Rs 15 to 16. From 1346 the wages declined steeply. Where previously about one and half years ago for 100 dangi-s the wages was Re 1 and two ana later it fell down to 12 anas only. The monthly wages stood at not more than Rs 7/8 per weaver. Consequently about 12000 families at Santipur were at the doorstep of utter poverty and hunger. After the Second World War prices of goods went up even higher. The situation had put the handloom and its survival at stake. It was difficult to retain the valued characteristics of the Santipur textiles. Increasing unfair competitiveness among the investors themselves had brought down the price and wages of the textile industry even lower.”¹¹¹

The only remedy could have been the formation of labour union or association, co-operative society and a special help from any bank. It is evident that the combined support from the association and bank could restore the lost glory of Santipur textile industry once again. It had happened so. At Santipur the district board run weaving training school was set up. The secretary of the school, the then Municipal Chairman Dr. Sachinath Pramanik could please the Bengal's industrial development in charge then Mr. Weston by showing the school on 1341 Bangabdo. At that time Santipur had 700 looms for weaving jacquard designs. Mr. Weston declared a grant of Rs 1200 for the school.”¹¹²

To meet the problematic situation the labour association was established. In the meetings of the association issues like prices of yarns, misery of weavers, scattered affect of machine, industry and other social disorders and the weavers' primary training school were discussed. The secretary of the weavers association Sri Khetranath Pramanik had played a key role in this matter. In claim for rights the weavers had taken to strikes as well. The weavers of Santipur in the last half of the 18th century already displayed the instance of strike. Comrade Kanai Pal the secretary to 'Sramik Sangha' had played a vital role in organizing the strikes.

It was under the leadership of the Sramik Sangha or labourer's association that the weavers could fight back the dishonest investors and restore their rightful claims.¹¹³

From the above discussion it is evident that the Santipur weavers were conscious labour and their awareness was revealed from time to time at the pre and during the independence movement. Sometimes voices were raised against the British or the national leaders or against the dishonest investors. In those days weavers were aware of the wages in the market around the country. They used to compare the wages prevalent at Bombay then analyze the reasons why wages in Bengal would be less and went ahead to solve the problem. The fighting spirit of the weavers is still found today. At present there are many co-operative societies in and around Santipur and Phulia. The government run co-operatives, Tantuja, Manjusha (the buyers) have helped the weavers to a great extent thus reduced the influence of the moneylenders /investors. The moneylenders in their own interest have started looking into the interests of the weavers. In this regard the Basak community of moneylenders of Phulia are much ahead of others in their humane approach.

At present the primary occupation of the community at Santipur is still weaving. The women of the families are also fully involved in it. There are families who cannot think of any other occupation. The unity in continuing with the tradition among the community has prospered Santipur. The profession has its benefits and hazards, prosperity, happiness and miseries too; it has grievances and often led to revolts and protests. The love and deep commitment in their profession has continued without interruption.

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