

**DECLINE OF THE SILK INDUSTRY
IN MALDA REGION**
with special reference to the British Period

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph. D.
IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS,
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS,
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

১৯৯১ সালের আগস্ট মাসে
শিবপুর দিনবুন্দহুও ইনস্টিটিউশন (কলেজ),
হোবরাহে প্রদান করা হয়েছে

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Acknowledgements

At the very beginning, I must express my gratitude for Sri Santosh Kumar Chakraborty, Lecturer in English (Retired), Malda College. This elder colleague of mine first involved me in the studies of the silk industry of Malda as early as in 1972 when he invited me to prepare a paper for a seminar, on the structure of co-operative societies in the silk industry of Malda district. It is his inspiration that made me successful in presenting in my paper a new 'model' of silk co-operative society for experiment; and since then my interest in the particular industry was roused.

My indebtedness to Dr. Manas Dasgupta, Professor of Economics, University of North Bengal, is without bounds. He has not only been the Supervisor of my thesis, but has also been the prudent guide and a source of unending inspiration without which this dissertation could never be completed. I express my sincere respect for him. I thankfully acknowledge the co-operation I have received from Dr. K.C. Chattopadhyay, Vice-Chancellor and Dr. Tapas Chattopadhyay, Registrar, North Bengal University.

I am grateful to Sri Siddhartha Guha Roy, Sri Ratan Dasgupta and Sri Suranjan Chatterjee, all of whom are Senior Lecturers in History in different colleges of Malda

and Murshidabad districts. Not only did these young friends of mine provide me with many useful source materials, but I was also benefited from the thought-provoking discussions I often had with these scholars.

In the early phase of my studies, I received a lot of help from Mr. B.B. Roy, Retired Deputy Director and Mr. U. Bhattacharya, Retired Joint Director, Sericulture (W.B.). I remember and thankfully acknowledge their help. I am grateful to Sri Kalyan Kumar Bagchi, District Magistrate of Malda (1982) who gave me permission to go through the materials in the Malda Collectorate Library and Record Room, and even to photocopy a few selected documents. I am also grateful to all the employees of Malda Collectorate Library and Record Room for their sincere co-operation. Special mention must be made of Sri Gourinath Agarwal in the Library and Sri Sisir Ganguly in the Record Room without whose active help it would have been impossible for me to unearth useful documents.

I thankfully appreciate the sincere co-operation offered to me by the authorities and employees of the following Libraries and Institutions where I had to work for this thesis during the last few years :

Malda District Library, Malda;

Malda Museum, Malda;

District Central Co-operative Bank, Malda;

National Library, Calcutta;

Asiatic Society Library, Calcutta;

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta;

State Secretariat Library, W.B., Calcutta;

State Archives, W.B., Calcutta;

North Bengal University Library, N.B.U. Campus

Finally, mention must be made of my wife, Kajal, who has taken much trouble in assisting me in the manuscript.

Objective of the Thesis

The title of the thesis makes it relevant to an analysis which covers a period of more than two hundred and fifty years - from the establishment of the Malda factory by the East India Company in 1680 A.D. to the end of the British rule in 1947. Writing the history of a particular industry of a region covering such a long period, undoubtedly, poses some serious problems and may seem to be an overambitious project. This is an attempt to vent some of the justifications we have.

From a first hand knowledge of the silk industry in the Malda region some important questions would arise. First, although Malda for centuries was a centre for silk manufacture - from sericulture to silk weaving, why is it a producer of only raw silk at present? Secondly, how did the mahajani system emerge which is the prime cause of present day malady in the silk industry of this area? From our knowledge about the effects of British policies of trade, land and revenue on the economic life of this region, there are reasons to believe that the existing organisation of the silk industry is a hang over of the colonial days. Hence, our interest in economic history is an outcome of our quest towards an understanding of the problems and studying the colonial process of development in the silk industry of Malda.

Although the debate on the fate of India's traditional industries began since the late nineteenth century, recent studies in 'de-industrialization' have drawn our attention to the differential impact of colonial developments on different sections of local handicraftsmen and the sharp fluctuations that accompanied the process of tying up India's regional economics with the metropolitan economy of Britain. It is this aspect that we have sought to highlight in our analysis of a retrogression in Malda, viz., from manufacturing of silk articles to the production of raw silk, which we believe to be a process of decline. This we sought to do because we observed a few important things in the available historical accounts as well as in the findings of our initial investigations. First, the decline of the silk industry of Malda attained two distinctive stages : (1) from weaving to a specialization in raw silk, and (2) an absolute stagnation in the specialized industry. Secondly, K.N. Chaudhuri while editing a few 19th century writings in his outstanding book "The Economic Development of India Under the East India Company (1814-58)" has given a scholastic analysis of the fact that it was England's strategy to convert, through conscious exploitation, her colonies into primary producing countries; and the political and economic influence of Britain entirely transformed Indian exports into the category of primary commodities. Dr. A. Sarada Raju in her "Economic conditions in the Madras Presidency (1800-

1850)" has also stressed that decline of handicrafts was the most significant feature of the first half of the 19th century. But the effects of this policy on the Malda region, like many other parts of the country, was different in respect of cotton and silk weaving. As against the eclipse of silk weaving, handloom cotton weaving (medium and coarse varieties only) has survived up to the present day. Our specific interest lay in the study of silk weaving only. Thirdly, in the process of colonialization of the silk industry certain related issues arise, e.g. specialization in raw silk and technological change or specialization and the growth of entrepreneurship. Similarly, in the course of colonial development and specialization the real burden fell on the basic growers - the peasants and artisans; such oppression was, of course, met with various forms of resistance. In our study, we have tried to combine these issues with the central issue, because we are of the opinion that they are inseparable.

On the logical plane, the structure of this dissertation requires an analysis of both the general trend in Bengal silk and the particular case of Malda region. The methodology used in this thesis is one of testing the hypotheses posed in course of our discussion on the one hand and analysing primary source materials on the other. For both the purposes we depend on unpublished original primary documents of the Malda Collectorate Record Room and

West Bengal State Archives as well as Published Reports and Proceedings available. We also depend on Gazetteers and similar records and various books, articles, papers, dissertations etc. in the related field of study. We have tried to use these as evidence of the pre-colonial through the colonial policy of commerce exerted by the East India Company and the British crown.

Our special emphasis is on the primary documents of the Malda Collectorate Record Room unused in any dissertation so far. These documents have been available after a good deal of endeavour and have been used in the context of a limited period only - the second half of the 19th century. Discussion of this period has almost been entirely based on such virgin documents and we could not incorporate a large portion of them as they are not directly related to the basic objective of study. In only one context (Chapter II) we quoted from Sushil Chaudhuri's book "Trade and Commercialization in Bengal (1650-1720)" some valuable records important to our discussion. They are some Factory Records of Malda and other factories as well as Despatch Books of the East India Company preserved in the India Office Records Library in the U.K. These records are not available in India and for obvious reasons it was not possible for us to consult the original documents housed in London.

Nevertheless, regarding the limitations of presenting

a dissertation that covers such a long period, we struggled hard to overcome the difficulties involved. Reflections of this struggle might be had on the mode of our discussion. A few examples may be cited. First, in course of narration, a kind of detailed chronological survey was not possible. We were bound to choose an analytical view point regarding the nature and course of development and bound to leap forward whenever required in view of the reasoning : we did not attempt to cover all the events and perhaps that was not possible also. Similarly, on some occasions our discussion may seem to go a little back and forth. This we did to centre attention upon the analytical point in focus; a mere running commentary in chronological sequence is not our objective. Secondly, pruning of documentary materials in hand became inevitable, although we had to ^{use} ~~sue~~ frequently a good number of references to our comments which we wanted to make authentic. This was required specially because the history of the silk industry of this region has not been compiled so far.

In this connection, we would like to mention that Chapter I is not an integral part of the main body of the thesis, but these pages had to be written to highlight :

- (i) that the region enjoys the glory of being the ancient haven of silk which came from China,
- (ii) the pre-British structure of the industry, and
- (iii) the source of attraction of this regional industry to the Europeans. This

chapter has been constructed to assist in a better understanding of the following chapters.

Similarly, in our discussion of the period 1914-47 we did not intend to analyse all the details. What we tried to emphasize was our observation that during this period the conscious attempts to arrest the decline of the silk industry of Malda was bound to be futile under the conditions of a backward organisational set up that had taken a firm grip over the industry by this time. It is also our intention to emphasize here that the same backward organisation prevented Malda from deriving the positive effects of the War impetus.

We had to limit our analysis within such definite lines because our objective is to study the causes and nature of decline with special reference to the British colonial policy as well as the implications of such decline in the subsequent development of the silk industry of Malda region up to the end of the British rule.

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Silk :

Silk originated in China and the art of silk manufacturing is no less than five thousand years old. The basic method of silk production was put to industrial use by the Chinese, and silk is one of the fundamental elements of the Chinese civilisation through ages. In antiquity, the Chinese legend venerates Lie-tsu, the chief concubine of Emperor Huang-ti (c.2640 B.C.) as the 'patron-saint' of silk; because she discovered how best to treat mulberry, the silk worm and its thread so that it would surpass all other materials of the Orient. Since the Chinese closely guarded the secrets of this valuable art and technique, Chinese silk became an absolute in itself throughout the world. Since 115 B.C. silk began to form an important and costly item among the prized products of China which came to Persia; and towards the beginning of the Christian era such purchases were made by Rome. Curious conjectures were prevalent in Europe and elsewhere about the source of this glossy fibre; and eagerness mounted to know the secrets of the art. The art of sericulture and production of silk were smuggled to Europe as well as to other countries of the East and the know-how was thus extended. According to legends, a princess of China, who married the chief of Khotan, succeeded at the risk of her own life, in carrying the eggs of silk worm and seeds of mulberry in the living

of her head dress. In a similar legend we find that two Persian monks who had long resided in China, brought to Constantinople the required eggs and seeds concealed in a hollow bamboo cane. In course of time, expansion of sericulture was carried to a good number of countries in Europe, Asia, America and Australia; but in recent history, raw silk production receded from many countries and at present the main silk producing countries are Japan, China, India, South Korea and the U.S.S.R.

The silk manufacturing process has an agro-industrial structure consisting of four interrelated branches (output of one branch being the input of the next branch), viz,

- i) Cultivation of mulberry, the feed plant of the silk-worms.
- ii) The art of sericulture which concerns itself with the rearing of silk worms under artificial or domesticated conditions, the formation of cocoons and securing of these before they are injured or pierced by the moths; (and also maturing of a sufficient number of moths to supply eggs for the cultivation in the following season). In Bengal, one band means one generation of the worms - one crop of sericulture.

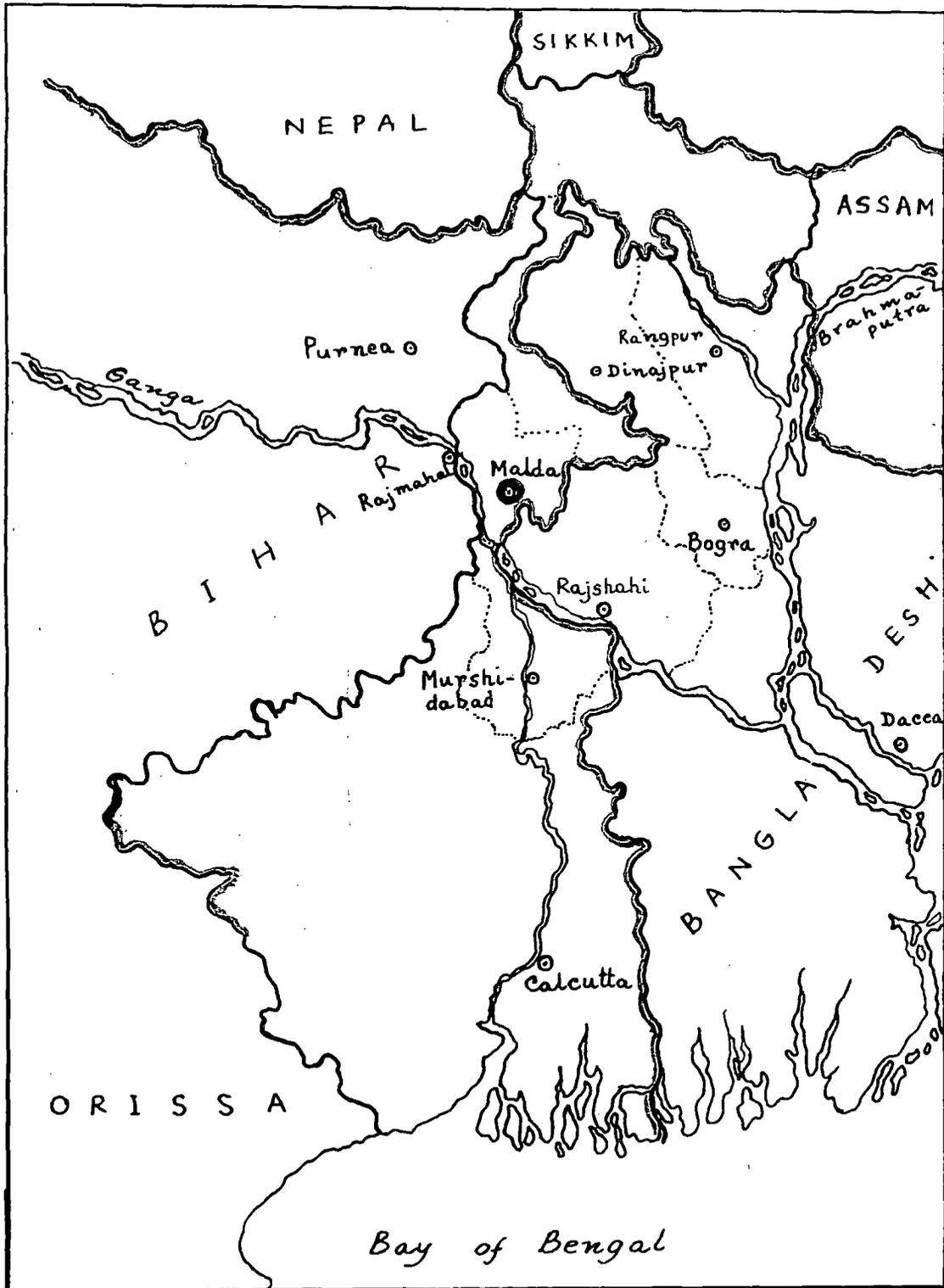
iii) Reeling of the silk filament out of cocoons into silk thread. The filament spun into a cocoon by the caterpillar is so fine, that several filaments are reeled together to produce a single thread thick enough to handle. Silk that has been reeled is known as raw silk.

iv) Weaving of cloth from raw silk, including the final stage of bleaching, dying and printing.

In addition to the above kind of pure silk thread and pure silk fabrics, threads are prepared from silk wastes for use in the weaving or textile industry. The sources of silk waste are : (a) lustreless and uneven thread on the outside layer of the cocoon, and unavoidable waste during the reeling process; (b) the extreme inside layer of each cocoon; (c) cocoons pierced by the moth. Our concern in the present study is mainly with pure silk production. Again, apart from mulberry fed wilk worm (Bombyx Mori) which is the principal source of silk, there are certain other races of non-mulberry fed worms. Silk produced from these worms (such as tassar silk) is outside the purview of this study.

1.2 Malda Region :

To be specific, the present study mainly concerns itself with the district of Malda; but in the title we have



MAP I
MALDA REGION

used the term 'region' rather than 'district'. There are at least two reasons why the concept of 'Malda region' is more useful to us for the purpose of studying the silk industry. First, the district as a separate administrative unit was formed only in the early 19th century taking slices from Purnea, Rajshahi and Dinajpur districts.¹ Secondly, geographically some adjacent districts like Dinajpur, Rangpur and Bogra together with this district constitute a region whose silk industry was tied up by the same forces of history, particularly during the period under study. Hence, although most of these adjacent areas are now in Bangladesh² and although this thesis deals with the district of Malda, occasional references must be made to the districts which were correlated to Malda both industrially and commercially.

It is silk textiles that attracted the Dutch to this region in the early 17th century and subsequently the British, Malda was the sixth centre of trade of the East India Company in Bengal; and the flourishing township of English Bazar around the English settlement was established as early as in the 80s of the 17th century. In this connection, it is to be noted that the town of Malda referred to in early historical documents generally indicates the present town of 'Old Maldah' which was one of the prosperous trading centres of Eastern India in the pre-British days particularly when Pandua was the capital of Bengal. It was an important port town at the confluence of the rivers Mahananda and Kalindri. Before the English came,

the Dutch and the French had factories here. When for obvious reasons the East India Company shifted their settlement from Malda to English Bazar on the other bank of Mahananda, this new settlement (English Bazar) grew to be a prosperous inland trading town and a silk emporium of Bengal (like Kashimbazar). In the subsequent documents of the company 'Malda' refers to English Bazar settlement;³ and at present English Bazar is the district headquarter known as the town of Malda or Malda Sadar. The aspect of the town of Old Malda is a story of rapid decay since the company days; Buchanan Hamilton in 1810 witnessed such a decay of the port-town.

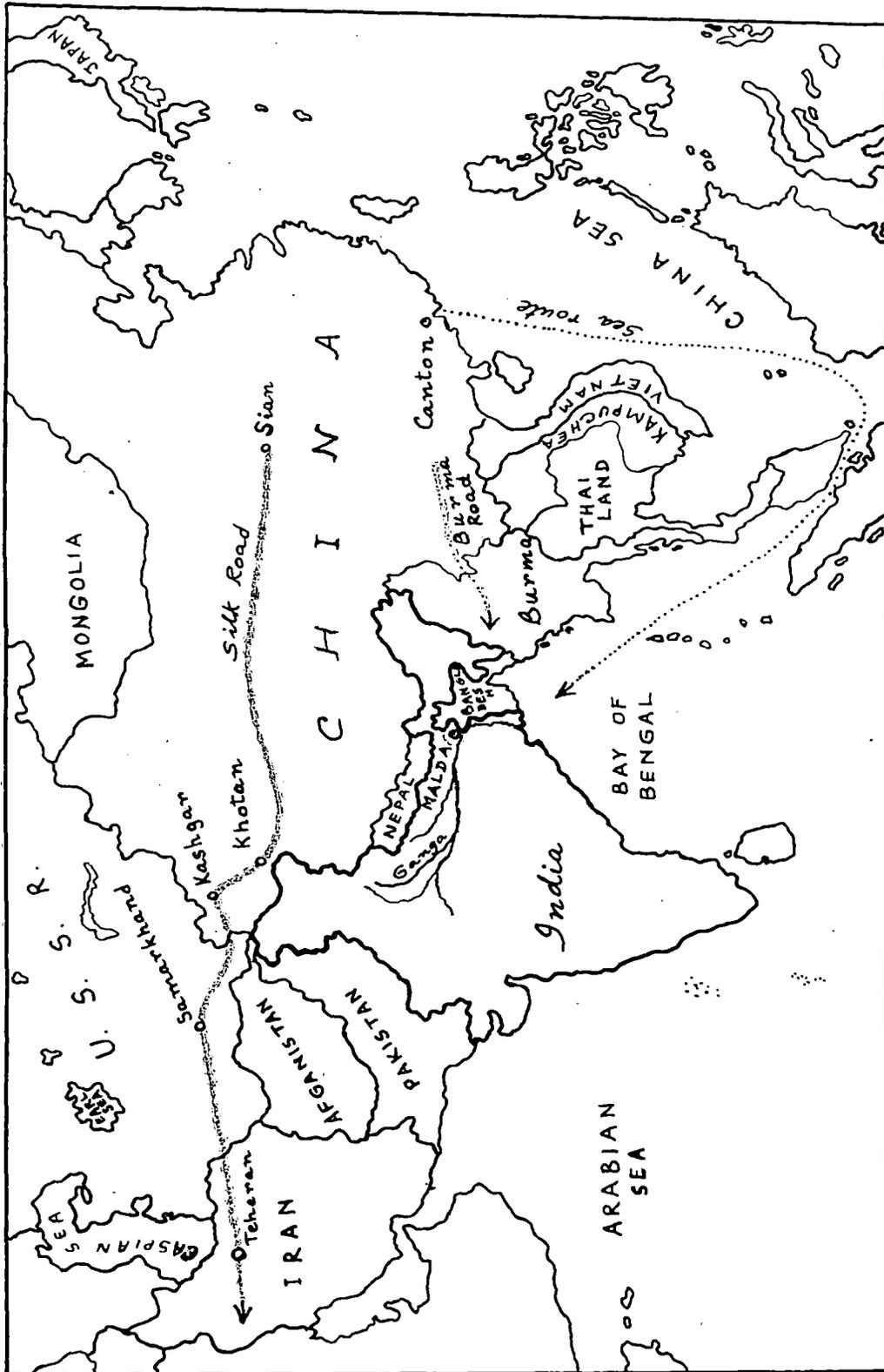
In the 18th and early 19th centuries a good number of districts in Bengal were producers of silk : viz, Midnapore, Hoogly, Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Howrah, Nadia, Jessore, 24-Parganas, Bogra, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Malda, - a few districts were specially famous for it. But since the second half of the 19th century sericulture gradually dwindled down to insignificance in almost all other districts excepting Birbhum, Murshidabad, Rajshahi and Malda, of which the last three became the main producers. Further, Bankura and Murshidabad became the centres of silk weaving while Malda became the centre of cocoon rearing and silk spinning. Malda retained her ancient craftsmanship of silk production, and at present raw silk is the most important commercial product of Malda.

1.3 Silk-route to Malda :

The date of introduction of sericulture to India has not been ascertained. In any case, the introduction of silk production to this country, like anywhere else in ancient history, has become possible by means of smuggling it from the Chinese provinces ignoring the penalty of death; and obviously different legendary tales are related to such smuggling of the art. But, as historical documents all the legends may not be unmistakably dependable. For example, the description of how a Chinese princess carried the seeds and eggs in the lining of her head dress has sometimes been related to the spread of sericulture in Bengal.

Among the geographical distribution of domesticated mulberry silk worms in India, Kashmir and Bengal are the two regions where they have been believed to be systematically reared since a very remote period. In view of the fact that Kashmir was close to both the famous 'silk-road'⁴ and the Bactria-Taxila road, the possibility of a separate silk-route to the spread of sericulture in Kashmir cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, a few specific considerations are worthy of attention in our search for the silk-route to Malda.

That the first seat of the art was the Ganga-Brahmaputra valley area (of which Malda is a part) is not a mere conjecture. Geoghegan has established this fact from



MAP II
SILK ROUTE

his analysis of the distribution of the species of silk worms, and concluded that the insect was introduced from the north-east.⁵ George Watt again has drawn our attention to another important logic : Europeans in their description of the 'silk road' as well as the Bactria-Taxila Road pointed out how silk merchandise formed the most significant item in the trade routes from China in the beginning of the Christian era, while no mention is made of locally produced silk in northern India or beyond the northern frontiers; but accounts of locally produced silk about the same period are available of the Ganga-Brahmaputra valley area.⁶ A third consideration is the role of Bengal ports as the mart for exchange between the East and the West. Boulnois and others have shown that Europe was anciently supplied with silk from the Orient through Bengal ports as well as along the 'silk road' through Central Asia. In the Bengal-mart Europeans and Arabs could purchase both local products and merchandise which which came from China. Recent researches have shown that towards the end of the first century A.D. the majority of the Chinese silk imported by Mediterranean countries was shipped from Bengal ports together with Indian commodities.⁷ Another point of specific importance is the diplomatic relation between China and India. It is to be borne in mind that in the early christian era four powerful and prosperous empires had firmly established themselves over the greater part of Eurasia : Rome, China, the Parthians and the Great Kushana Empire in India. But, according to Chinese annals

the first Indian missionaries in China were not from the land of Kanishka but from "T'ien-Chu" which was the name they used for the tropical region of the Ganga, not forming a part of the Kushan empire, and which came to be known as the Gangetic plain of Bengal region.⁸ Tien-Chu sent embassies to China during the reign of Ho-ti between AD 89-105 and again between AD 159-161. These visitors travelled the sea-route. Hence the Bengal region had established relations with China much earlier than other regions of India. Among these considerations in our search for the silk route to Malda, the most important one is, nevertheless, the merchandise routes between the East and the West as well as the significance of Bengal ports.

Chinese merchandise were brought to India through any of the three distinct routes :

- i) The dangerous Bactria-Taxila road which crossed the Himalayas through Kashmir and was open only for a part of the year.
- ii) The sea-route starting from the southern coast of China rounding the peninsula of Indo-China through the Malacca straits and up to the mouth of the Ganga.⁹ Orientalists in recent times have underlined the importance of this route.

iii) The Burma-road, i.e. through Burma, which was less frequently used.

The important link among the three routes and the Bengal ports was the river Ganga. The above foreign routes as well as the internal link have been used by all other classes of people like soldiers, monks, ambassadors, travellers etc. For example, as per the itineraries, Fa-Hsien visited northern parts of India and travelled the north route, while Hieun Tsang visited Tamralipta along with other parts of Bengal and travelled the sea-route. Merchandise routes were the only routes of travel.

In our opinion, there is a stronger probability of sericulture being imported (or rather smuggled) to Malda and adjacent areas in the Ganga-Brahmaputra valley through Burma-road. Our hypothesis is based on the following observations in addition to the above explanation of why Malda region is the pioneer. First, there are specific evidences of commodity and cultural exchanges between this region and China between the 5th century B.C. and 9th century A.D.¹⁰ From these accounts, it is known that the ancient civilization in the kingdoms of Kamtapur and Kamrup established such relationship with China and the Chinese merchants travelled through Burma. There are reasons to believe that this valley area is Tien-chu in the Chinese annals. It is also important to note in ^{these} accounts that the trade route through Burma was a regular one and that such exchanges took place

at specific marts. Secondly, the Burma-road was a safer route for smuggling than the sea-route, because it was relatively a dangerous course over rivers mountains and jungles. Thirdly, in course of carrying the eggs of multivoltine¹¹ race of worms such a long distance, certain rearing operations might have been necessary ^{en} ~~ex~~-route, which was an impossibility on the sea-route. In this connection it should be noted that in spite of a Buddhist prejudice to the death of chrysalis in the cocoon in course of silk production, practice of sericulture has a remote part in Burma; but the great Tibetan table-land has apparently never been the seat of silk manufacturing as the climate there is inimical to mulberry. Sericulture is a speciality in south and south-west China. Fourthly, multivoltine species of worms, known as deshi cocoons, has been through centuries the most widely reared race in Malda region. Also, the rearing operations in this domesticated industry have traditionally been conducted by special castes known as Pundas (as in Sanskrit). This hereditary silk-worm rearing caste of Bengal through the ages live mainly in Malda and parts of Murshidabad and Rajshahi.

1.4 Malda Silk in the Pre-British Period :

Since the silk industry catered to the needs of the nobles and the merchants, colonies of skillful artisans settled around a chief mart, a port or the palaces of the kings. After the prince and his court had in some new caprice abandoned the city, a large part of the artisans remained; and the settlement of these craftsmen often became a surviving

proof that the decaying town had once been a capital city. The exquisite silk textiles of Murshidabad and Malda may seem to be the witness to the days when they were capitals of Bengal. In Malda, Gaur was the Hindu metropolis of Bengal and later on both Gaur and Pandua (or Firozabad) were successive capitals of Bengal until 1576 when it was shifted first to Rajmahal and subsequently to Dacca and Murshidabad. On the other hand the present town of Old Malda rose to its height as a port-town during the Mughal rule.

During the reign of the last Hindu dynasty at Gaur, the prosperous capital was a centre of both internal and external trade. Sericulture and manufacturing of silk fabrics were important industries in the region; and silk cloths were then despatched to the important mercantile townships of Dacca, Sonargaon and Saptagram mainly for export. Again, the identification of Bara Sagar Dighi among the relics of Gaur as a harbour has given us points to presume that this was a centre for traditional ship building industry for external trade as well as naval warfare.

This enormous tank (one mile long and half a mile broad) lies about 5 miles from the citadel of Gaur and about 4 miles from Malda Town, and is the work of Lakshman Sen about the middle of 12th century A.D. It is situated very close to the river Bhagirathi (old stream of Ganga) and the high land north of Sagar Dighi is supposed to have been a commercial town.¹² The importance of Gaur as a port of

international trade has been established by Bal Krishna by identifying it with the port 'Bengala'.

The Muhammadan conquest of Bengal in 1202 A.D. is reported to have caused the manufacture of silk cloths to dwindle away for the time being. Prohibitions against weaving of silk came because the strict religious law will not allow Muslims to wear (specially the stronger sex) clothing of pure silk on ceremonial occasions. Soon after the desertion of Gaur, as the native account puts it, the industry was revived; one Sita Basani (rearer) of Jalalpur brought back the worms to the bank of Mahananda. But considering the evidence of the periods before and after the sultan regime in Bengal, complete stoppage of silk production during the rule of the sultans does not seem to be possible; even if it had happened, it was absolutely a very short-term set back to the industry. On the other hand, the prohibitions led to the introduction of special Maldehi mixed fabrics (woven with silk and cotton) known as mashru or sufi, the latter word meaning 'permitted'. These mixed textiles became a speciality of Malda region for centuries to come.

Revival of pure silk textiles did not also take much time. The economic urge behind the revival and continuing of silk manufacturing in the form of pure or mixed varieties was undoubtedly external trade. High quality of Bengal silk textiles of this period is evidenced in a number of historical accounts. For example, exquisite manufactures of Bengal

including silk was described by Ibn Batuta who visited Bengal in 1345 A.D. on his way to China as an envoy from Md. Tughlaq. Mulberry silk production as well as good foreign commerce in Bengal in her own rich-built ships has also been described by Mahuan the interpreter with the Chinese Embassy (from Emperor Yung-to) who visited Firozabad (i.e. Pandua) in 1405 A.D.¹³ In those days the number of patterns of Maldehi cloths was perhaps limited, but the fabrics, exquisite in colour and design, were known by characteristic names, e.g. (i) Mazchhar - ripples of the river, (ii) Bulbul-chasam - nightingale's eyes, (iii) Kalintarakshi - pigeon's eyes, (iv) Chand-tara - moon and stars.

A systematic account of the silk industry of Malda during the Mughal period is also available. Irfan Habib has observed that in the Mughal empire the largest quantity of silk was undoubtedly produced in Bengal although sericulture was also practised in Assam, Kashmir and the western coast. P.J. Marshall has shown that in the same period, the largest concentration of looms in Bengal were at Malda in the north and at Lakshmipur and Dacca in the east.¹⁴

Before Akbar, the large fiscal division 'Vilayet-i-Lakhanauti' was named after its capital Lakshanavati (or rather Lakshmanavati) the other name of Gaur. During Akbar's rule, in the restructured fiscal divisions, sarkar Jennatabad became famous as a place of abundance in good silk stuff. The expression Jennatabad or Jinnatabad bestowed on Gaur was

derived from Jinnat-ul-bilad or 'paradise of provinces'. The region was so styled by Humayun owing to the fertility of its soil, richness of its produce and vastness of its resources. In the subah of Bengal the sarkars of the Malda region have been identified with their approximate equivalents of the districts in the last stage of the British rule as follows :

Sarkar Jennatabad	=	District Malda (major portion).
Sarkar Pinjara	=	District Dinajpur and parts of Rangpur and Rajshahi.
Sarkar Barbakabad	=	District Rajshahi (major portion), south-west Bogra and south-east Malda.
Sarkar Ghoraghat	=	Districts south Rangpur, south-east Dinajpur and north Bogra.
Sarkar Tajpur	=	Eastern Purnea district and western Dinajpur.

All these sarkars taken together, form a compact region in the Ganga-Brahmaputra Valley area which were all famous for producing and exporting different varieties of silk and muslim textiles. Of these five sarkars, the central industrial position was attributed to Jennatabad; Lakhnauti was the most important township here and it was a place of master craftsmen of silk.¹⁵ During the later Mughal period also, 'pargana Maldah' and its environs retained the fame and royal patronage.

The importance of Malda in the internal trade during the Mughal period is also explicit in different evidences. Towards the northern provinces, Bengal merchants brought Malda products to Patna market and took Bihar goods to Malda and other parts of Bengal. From Malda three varieties of silk goods used to come to Patna by river route (a) Ornees (women's veils) - ornamented with silk and gold, (b) Bala-bands (turbans), and (c) Ellaches - a silk stripped stuff or silk cloths with a navy pattern running lengthwise. The merchants of Malda were generally of the up country origin, called the Hindustanis and Mughals, i.e. Central Asiatic foreigners; but there were other strangers like Khurasanians, Persians, Armenianans as well as the Portuguese. At Malda, they all enjoyed the amenities like rest houses (sarai) where they could lodge and keep their goods on payment.

In view of the above significance of Malda during the regimes of the Hindu Kings, the Sultans and the Mughal Viceroys - for the textile industry and trade, - there is no wonder that artisans of silk would have settled around both Gaur and the great port of present day Old Malda. It may seem interesting to note here that major sericultural operations in the Malda district (as well as in West Bengal) today has been concentrated in Kaliachak and English Bazar thanas around ancient Gaur, while the Europeans found the weavers' villages around the port town of Old Malda.

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1.5 The Pre-capitalist structure :

Most economic-historians agree in characterising pre-British social formations in India as pre-capitalist formations. There is no doubt about the fact that such an economy was basically agrarian in character and within the economic self-sufficiency of the village communities the institution of village handicraftsmen specialized along definite lines to cater to the needs of the community members. It is also true that in spite of relatively high crop yield¹⁶ per producer the potential for accumulation was not fruitfully realised for a transition; because the mechanism of extraction and subsequent redistribution of the surplus agricultural product, the vast scale of rent appropriated by the ruling classes and the sections they maintained, unusually large unproductive population feeding on the agricultural surplus product, and nevertheless extensive near-subsistence economy, -all helped to keep a stable and somewhat stagnant socio-economic structure in India.

V.I. Pavlov is further of the opinion that the embryonic forms of private property in land were a serious obstacle to the emergence of newer and mature relations within the framework of feudal society.¹⁷

Within this nature of the society the potentiality of the merchants and the artisanal industries like silk must be considered. In pre-British Bengal, as well as in other places of India, the manufactures were of two main categories :

(a) the village handicrafts supplying the simple needs of the local population, i.e. determined by the division of labour and demand conditions within the village community;

(b) handicrafts producing articles of high quality and catering to the needs of the wealthy nobles and merchant exporters; these articles were not for common consumption of the masses, and they were produced in the clusters around the towns or business centres. Silk was one of the second category, and was also a part of display of splendour and magnificence in the King's courts. Although such display of wealth in the court cannot necessarily be an indication of prosperity of the people as a whole, there is no denying that sericulture was a major occupation in Bengal. In the matter of crafts and industries, the general policy of the Mughals was directed to having all the articles of necessity and luxury manufactured in the country. Akbar in particular attempted to improve all indigenous manufactures; and royal karkhanas were established. Such karkhanas at Malda have not yet been traced; but such karkhanas were there in Murshidabad. On the other hand, in spite of relative apathy of the Mughal rulers to trading, Bengal ports were of great importance and so was silk fabrics as a chief merchandise.

Data about the extent of accumulation in the hands of the merchants is not available, but in India, neither the merchants became industrial capitalists directly, nor could they import 'needed techniques and methods of organisation from abroad with some local adaptations'. *Inability of*

merchant-capital to bring about a transition in India may be attributed to various reasons; but the basic one should be traced in the nature of interaction between the merchants and the artisans. Generally the merchandise was varied and the merchants picked up commodities in which prospect of profit was bright. They have shown no interest in specific capital investment for specialization either by increasing the scale of production or by improving technology. It is interesting to note that silk or cotton-mixed-silk fabrics were of consistently good demand from the merchants. Silk fabrics were exported from the ports of Bengal, and these ports had connection through local traders with a vast area of primary producers. Even exports from Surat, the important port on the western coast, constituted textiles from Patna, a collection centre of Bengal products. However, the mode of interaction between the merchants and artisans was as follows.¹⁸ The artisans often worked on their own, buying their own raw materials, working them up themselves and selling them either to the nearby marts or to wholesale merchants who traded with other regions. Or, the artisan would be given an advance in money by the merchant; the former would buy the raw materials and deliver the product to the merchant at an agreed price. Such contracts used to be annual or seasonal and advances or supplies were regulated according to demand. The merchants, as a general practice, did not appoint artisans directly, nor did they interfere into the production system pursued by the artisans. There are evidences, no doubt, of the merchant advancing credit and raw

materials to the artisan who would then deliver the finished or semi-finished product to the merchant and would be paid at a piece-rate. The rich professional moneylenders on the other hand performed a crucial function in commerce by advancing or standing security to the merchants. There are also evidences of manufactories in which a number of workers were brought together under one roof under the control of a merchant or merchants. But they were rare for the reason that household-based industry allowed the merchant to expropriate the products of labour of all the members of the artisan's family, and no significant economies of scale seemed to operate in handicraft production. The royal karkhanas could not be the forerunners of modern factories, because they did not have to obey the dictates of the market.¹⁹ Thus the Indian merchants in general were unlike the European merchants who organised small factories under direct supervision, appointed artisans there and inevitably specialized. Organisation of artisanal industries in this country was purely domestic in character, such small units spread over a vast region and the capital invested reached the primary producers separately in pretty small slices through different merchants at different stages. Merchant capital failed to consolidate the primary producers.

The existence of regional as well as functional specialization among different ethnic-cultural groups of merchants was a barrier to the process of market-integration. On the other hand, the existence of artisan's guild in the form of local caste guild of the manufactures^{rs} of particular

commodities held an opportunity for consolidation. The fantastic degree of specialization in textile production was linked to the fact that each variety of cloth was the speciality of a particular sub-caste. One major exception to the caste pattern was the participation of peasants in the profession of weaving, which is evident in the case of Malda also. Since manufacturing of products like silk is closely linked to agriculture the peasants were often indistinguishable from professions like reeling and weaving. But, major caste domination in the professions from rearer to weaver was the general pattern in Malda. It should also be borne in mind that apart from the caste pattern the traditional silk producing profession included a large number of muslim population. However, neither quantitative nor qualitative information are available about the existence of caste or other forms of artisanal guild in the Malda region.

There is a very common notion among the English writers on Indian (or Bengal) silk that this industry like many others actually flourished in the hands of the English as a direct result of their commercial interference, and that the Indian (or Bengal) silk industry enjoyed its 'golden age' during the British period. But such analysis gives undue weight to the increase in volume of production of silk over some time in the British period; and such analysis carefully guards the imperialist onslaught on the Indian handicrafts and their subsequent decline. With the advent of the East India Company and finally with its political supremacy, a

historical process started which could not be endured by the silk rearers and weavers. All these happened as a direct consequence of the colonial trading interests of the British in this country. The twin process that arose in the 19th century destroyed the important handicrafts, chiefly textiles and converted our agrarian economy into a source of raw materials for the 'workshop of the world'. The silk industry of Malda region is a glaring example of such de-industrialization in the sense that Malda region was compelled to experience a kind of retrogression from producing silk articles to raw silk while such specialization did not change the basic organisation of production and was unable to introduce capitalistic mode of development. The relevance of this remark in the context of Malda will be discussed in this thesis.

Tapan Roy Chaudhuri has, however, clearly negated the idea suggesting that there is nothing to distinguish between pre-colonial India and pre-industrial Europe in terms of performance and potentialities, which is also evident from our discussion in this section. According to him, since the pre-colonial Indian economy was a traditional agrarian economy with dominant subsistence sector coexisting and partly interacting with a complex and more sophisticated world of commerce, manufactures and credit, since India had not witnessed any agricultural revolution, since her technology was rather primitive as compared to her advanced

civilization, a spontaneous movement towards industrialization was unlikely in that situation. What the British did is that they thwarted the normal forces of development and distorted the structure of the Indian economy in favour of her own needs.

1.6 Interests of the Europeans :

The 16th century was a period of Portuguese supremacy in the eastern seas, a period of Portugal's monopoly in oriental trade. But, towards the close of the 16th century other Europeans were showing keen interest in the rich prospects of Bengal trade. The Dutch, the French and later on the English were anxious to enter Bengal through its 'hundred gates of commerce'. But the English ultimately outwitted others. The English East India Company was incorporated by the Royal Charter in 1600; and the company obtained from the Mughal the farman for liberty to trade in Bengal in 1634. Since the middle of the 17th century the political and economic position of the East India Company in England was strengthened; the course of events in India strengthened ^{the company's} ~~its~~ position in this country also. Before the close of the 17th century the Company earned supremacy in Bengal trade, and the economic life of Bengal was inevitably linked up with and dependent on the trading and investment activities of the Company. The main purpose of the East India Company was to supply England and Europe with the products of Asia, not that of developing a market there for European goods.

Hence, their primary consideration in the development of trading organisation was to create a chain of supply points where trade could be established on favourable terms and with some degree of security.

In the advance of the English from the Coromondal coast up to the Bay of Bengal, one most important direction of investment was in silk. Again, as the settlements in Bengal spread, silk attracted more attention. The Company's interest in Bengal silk is evident from the factory papers as early as in 1618; and it is the cheapness of such stuff that was the main point of attraction. During 1616-18, Francis Fettiplace and Robert Hugues - two well known servants of the Company - were then engaged in the Agra Factory in procuring silk. Their comments on Bengal silk was :

"Silk could be provided in infinite quantities at least 20 per cent cheaper than in any other place of India and is of the choicest stuff; where are also innumerable silk-winders, expert workmen and labour cheaper by a third than elsewhere."²⁰

But the difficulty on the part of the Company was that they had no settlement beyond Balasore in Bengal proper where from silk trade could be successfully operated. Cheapness of Murshidabad and Malda silk is also evidenced by Company's documents of 1650 in connection with the despatch by private English traders. Soon the Hoogly factory

and then the Kashimbazar factory were started. Kashimbazar was essentially a silk factory; its proximity to the provincial capital of Murshidabad gave it later on an added importance and from the date of its establishment this factory played a conspicuous part in the annals of the Company's silk trade in Bengal.

In Malda region the Dutch had silk factories before the English came; and the Dutch had a good business here. But, the impact of the European trading company's presence was still less significant because of the larger control by the Indian merchants on production and trade of cotton and silk textiles. Malda in 1670 supplied Rs.3 to 4 million worth of textiles every year to Indian merchants at a time when the European procurement from this place was around Rs.50,000.²¹ The English factors after their settlement here carefully devised a system which resulted in a monopoly of the East India Company up to the days of its forfeiture by the British crown.

The volume of Company's trade in Bengal was increasing rapidly in the seventies of the 17th century. In 1677 Dacca and Malda piece goods brought large profits in England; and the stock for Bengal was now raised by the Court of Directors to £ 1,00,000. East coast exports consisted of exports mainly from Bengal and the Court asked to buy here principally silk textiles of finer quality. The continuous increase in the stock for Bengal was as follows :²²

1674	-	£	85,000	
1677	-	£	1,00,000	
1679	-	£	1,10,000	
1680	-	£	1,50,000	
1681	-	£	2,30,000	: Hoogly was also separated this year from Fort St. George administratively.

Before the settlement of Malda, piece-goods of this place were procured by the Agra factors through Patna and different classes of native merchants. Malda silk generally reached the mart of Agra up the Ganges and the Jamuna.

Shortly after the establishment of the Kashimbazar factory²³ the Company opened the silk factory at Malda (1680) and since the beginning of the 18th century it made strenuous efforts to foster the silk trade at both Kashimbazar and Malda. It is Streynsham Master who on some special assignment in Bengal, took steps for founding the new factory at Malda; the sixth centre of English commerce was thus founded in Bengal.

One important aspect of the Company's trade in Bengal in the beginning was the impact of the autonomy of local rule. Because of the distance from the Mughal capital and other reasons, Bengal used to be nominally ruled from Delhi; the Viceroy or Nawab of Bengal exercised power not far from that of an independent sovereign. The history of trade

relations between England and India in this part of the country is, therefore, closely bound up with the dealings between the Company and the successive viceroys also.

This aspect of the Company's dual relationship with the state (both the Emperor at Delhi and the local nawab) is very much significant to the Company's investment and trade in Malda factory from the start.

Notes and References to Chapter I

1. Please see Appendix D and Map I.
2. The major silk producing areas of undivided Dinajpur came to be included into the present Malda district; but silk production of those areas are less significant now.
3. "It is by utter confusion, that the common name of Maldah is sometimes applied indiscriminately to both places (Old Maldah and English Bazar) ... even found its way into official maps."

W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.VII (Indian Reprint 1974); p.50.

4. This was a trade route (silk being the chief merchandise) from Sian in Eastern China through Khotan (beyond Kashmir frontier), Samarkhand and Persia to Europe. For details,

L. Boulnois - The Silk Road (translated from French by D. Chamberlin), London 1966.

and Ryoichi Hayashi - The Silk Road and the Shoso-in, Tokyo 1975.

5. J. Geoghegan - Some Account of Silk in India, Calcutta 1880, p.XIV.
6. Sir George Watt - The Commercial Products of India, London 1908, p.993.
7. Archeological excavation enables us to differentiate between the products which came from northern China via the Central Asian route and those which came from southern China by way of north-east India.

L. Boulnois - The Silk Road, op.cit.; p.56.
8. L. Boulnois - The Silk Road, Ibid; p.69.
9. Lotika Bharadarajan in a recent article has categorically emphasised the importance of ancient sea-route from Tonkin through Indo-China to Tamralipti, and observed that once a trade channel had been made operative it was rarely closed although the volume of traffic circulating along it might have been subject to severe fluctuations.

Lotika Bharadarajan - "Chronology as related to sources for the study of Indian Maritime History (1500-1800 A.D.)", Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay, Vol.52-53 (1977-78, new series); p.311.

10. Khan Chaudhuri Amanatulla Ahmed - History of Coochbehar (Beng.), Part I, Coochbehar State Press 1936; pp.49-53, 417.

11. Several generations of the worm a year; this is the original Chinese species.

12. Abid Ali Khan - Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua, Calcutta 1931, pp.42, 89.

For evidence of traditional ship building industry in Bengal before the Muslim rule,

Bal Krishna - Commercial Relations between India and England (1601-1757), London 1924; pp.26, 50-51.

13. Nalini Kanta Bhattasali - Coins and chronology of the early independent sultans of Bengal, Cambridge 1922; pp.170-171, 174.

14. Irfan Habib - The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707), Aligarh 1963; pp.51-52.

and P.J. Marshall - The East India Fortunes : The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century, London 1976; p.33.

15. For details about the Malda region during Akbar's rule,

Abul Fazal's Ain-i-Akbari, Vol.II.

Translated by Colonel H.S. Jarrett, corrected and further annotated By Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta 1949; pp.127-28 etc.

and, Gulam Hussain Salim - Riyazu-s-Salatin, Delhi 1975; pp.47-48 etc.

16. A high crop yield in agriculture in spite of a relatively stagnant technology in pre-colonial India.

Tapan Roy Chaudhuri - 'The mid-eighteenth century background' in The Cambridge Economic History of India (CUP 1984) Vol.II, Part I, Chapter I, pp.17-21.

17. V.I. Pavlov - Historical premises for India's Transition to Capitalism, Moscow 1979, pp.39-40.
18. Amiya Kumar Bagchi - Merchants and Colonialism (Occasional paper No.38), Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, September 1981; p.15.
19. According to Amiya Kumar Bagchi, the importance of royal karkhanas as potentially capitalistic organisation has been overestimated by Irfan Habib, "In a situation in which the wages of artisans were extremely low, and owners of capital had little to economise on labour by organising large-scale production, royal karkhanas could hardly lead to a systematic development of large-scale production or production techniques."

Amiya Kumar Bagchi - Merchants and Colonialism, Ibid; p.33.
20. A.F.M. Abdul Ali - 'The Silk Industry in Bengal in the days of John Company', Paper at Indian Historical Records Commission, 7th session (Poona, 12 January 1925), Calcutta 1925; pp.5-6.
21. Tapan Roy Chaudhuri - 'The mid-eighteenth century background' in The Cambridge Economic History of India, op.cit; p.27.
22. C.R. Wilson - The Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Vol.I, London 1895; p.58

and, C.J. Hamilton - The Trade Relations between England and India (1600-1896), Delhi 1975; Ch.3.
23. Factory = A station for procurement, warehousing and supply.

Chapter II

The East India Company (Early Settlement)

2.1 Opening of the Malda Factory :

Since the mid-seventeenth century Kashimbazar was the general market of Bengal silk and a great quantity of silk goods used to be manufactured around Kashimbazar and Murshidabad. Accordingly, Kashimbazar factory became the chief mart for procurement of Bengal silk by the Company's servants. As Bengal trade of the Company expanded investment in the specific items of silk became very profitable. It is from this commercial urge of the Company that in 1676 the inception of a factory at Malda took its first shape. In this year, Streynsham Master was appointed the Chief Representative of the Company in Bengal and was ordered to perform certain important duties.¹ Malda factory is believed to be the outcome of his efforts to increase Company's trade.

In the consultation of 14 October 1676 at Kashimbazar Master's commercial interest in Malda, about 15 miles from Rajmahal, was expressed; and he proposed investment in samples of goods to be procured at this place. In those days the Company's servants were sent to Rajmahal to superintend the coinage of English bar silver in the Mughal mint there; and they explored the neighbourhood during leisure. Some of them, like John Marshall, gave the opinion that Malda was a place eminently suitable for coarse goods for Europe. Master seized upon this information as a chance to carry out the

clause in his commission allowing him to purchase any goods suitable for the home market not hitherto imported to England. In persuasion of this consultation, Master ordered Richard Edwards who was bound for Rajmahal in charge of Company's bullions, to make a step over to Malda, to provide the samples, and at the same time to find out how the trade of that place was conducted, so that the Council might judge the advisability of making a settlement there. In accordance with the instructions, Edwards despatched some expensive samples which reached Master at Hoogly on 26 November 1676; and ten days later he received Edwards' account of Malda.² Edwards wrote in his report :

"The Towne is small, but conveniently seated on a branch of the Ganges and a small river from Morung³ which joyne a little above the Towne, which is of great resort being the staple of cloth etc. for that part of the country and comes in from all parts within thirty or forty myles. The chiefe trade driven there is by Factors of Agra, Guzzaratt⁴ and Benaras Merchants, who yearly send them from fifteen to twenty-five Pattelaes⁵ whose lading consists of Cossaes⁶ and Mullmulls⁷ from 1½ Rupees to 5 rupees per piece, and mun-deels and Elatches⁸ of all sorts valued at about one lakh each Pattella and about half that amount by landing said goods and raw silk.⁹ What goes by land is sent in April or May and that by water as soone as the river begins to fall, which is usually about the latter end of August and in September; and

Table IParcel of merchant from whom Edwards
purchased, 1676

<u>NÖ. of pieces</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Price in Rupees</u>
150	Cossaes	40 cubits x 3 cubits	13 to 14 per pc.
50	do	do	11½ to 12½ " "
25	do	do	10 to 11 " "
100	do	40 cubits x 2½ cubits	9 to 10 " "
50	do	do	7½ to 8½ " "
50	do	do	6¾ to 7½ " "
400	do	35 cubits x 1¾ cubits	5 to 7 " "
300	Mullmulls	36 cubits x 2 cubits	5 to 7 " "

Source : Richard Edwards' letter about Malda and the situation and trade thereof

- Richard C. Temple (ed.) : The Diaries of Streynsham Master

and, Walter K. Firminger (ed.) : Malda Diary and Consultations (1680-82).

about three Lack of Rupees yearly goes to Dacca and Elaches and course cloth and about the same value to petty merchants of Rajamull and Muxadabad¹⁰ and other places below. The weavers very willingly ingage in any new sort of worke, either of white cloth or silk of different Lengths breadths, fineness, colour, or stripe is bespoke."

Edwards also described in his report the Dutch mode of 'investment' which prevailed during the time. There were, of course, other merchants, e.g. the native merchants and the Armenians; and the factors of Agra or Surat had to procure Malda fabrics through these merchants at the cost of ready money. The Dutch had a factory at Malda and they used to carry on their investment throughout the year, but mainly from February to September; the greatest annual investment the Dutch had made there was Rs.50,000. Since river traffic started from end August and September, procurements had to be made ready by that time. On the other hand traffic by land were sent during the summer months. Hence, merchants' advances as well as ready purchases were made mainly during February-September. Edwards made a point in reporting that because of the Dutch monopoly in the area it was difficult to procure samples of good sort from the market. He purchased the musters from a merchant who had a quarrel with the Dutch and who was perhaps ready to sell them to the Englishman at a cheaper rate. The information regarding the parcel of this merchant has been described in Table I. Total value of the samples amounted to Rs.845, and the dearness of

the samples was accounted for by the fact that these were 'the sorts the Dutch buy' and not common to the market.

Edwards added that the goods would come to 8 to 10 per cent cheaper if money were advanced, and that there would be no difficulty in getting cloths of different dimensions if desired. Regarding imports of the area his comments were simple as saying, "The vend of imported goods is very inconsiderable, some small quantities of pepper, copper, Tynn, Tutenagg¹¹ may go off, but they usually supply themselves from Sudelapore,¹² which is about four five miles away."

However, the musters were sent to Kashmibazar for being sent to England; the report on Malda was found favourable and samples were satisfactory. On 12 December 1677 the Court of Directors wrote to Bengal, "Maulda goods ... wee finde the goods of which you sent us Musters are very well liked here, and therefore, we have ordered a large quantity thereof to be provided to which end wee order that you invest there, of the stock we now send you, in the goods we write for to the value of 80 or 100 thousand Rupees."¹³ On 13 December 1679 the consultation at Hugli marked the official commencement of Malda Factory.

According to the 'Malda Diary and Consultations (1680-82)',¹⁴ on Thursday 22 April 1680, at about noon Mathias Vincent, Chief of East India Company's affairs of the Bay of Bengal, Edward Littleton, Chief of Kashimbazar,

Fitche Nedham, designed Chief of this new factory and Jonathan Prickman, 3rd, along with other servants arrived at Mirzapur in 'Sight of Maulda'. They pitched tent on shore and went to hire a house at the town for the residence of the company's servants until the factory is built. They could hire a house only on 24 April, the rent being Rs.13¼ per month. On April 27 and 28, the local Kazy, his gomostah, the Faujdar and Crowry¹⁵ came to the Englishmen to welcome them and promised all favour in their power. Subsequently on April 29, Mr. Littleton and Mr. Nedham visited the Fausdar and Crowry of Malda and presented each of them Rs.11. These visits and counter visits of 27, 28 and 29 April were significant if we look at the developments during the following years when the Nawab's servants continued to make oppressive demands on Company's trade on the basis of their own interpretation of the Emperor's Farman while the Company's servants ceaselessly tried to pacify them with bribes and presents, in cash and kind, to enforce their interpretation of the same farman.¹⁶ While the Company desired to conduct duty-free trade, the nawab and his officers found in the English a source of revenue and bribes. A conflict sustained.

2.2 From Malda to English Bazar :

The Malda factory was opened when the Company's trade and investment in Bengal was fast expanding and on the other hand, when Company's anxiety to procure an umbrella of duty free trade was increasing too. The 'Malda Diary' is a

testimony to both of these issues : On the one hand the factors tried their best to expand investment, on the other hand they were much preoccupied with the problems created by the Faujdar in the name of the nawab at Dacca.

Within seven days from their arrival at Malda the factors called the weavers of the town, procured samples and made agreements with them. They found the goods cheaper here as compared to Kashimbazar and Dacca.¹⁷ One reason behind such a market condition was considered to be the absence of brokers, because the Dutch usually had a direct dealing with the weavers; but they hoped that to facilitate investment brokers would soon be put to deal. It was resolved that the goods which could be procured here would not be made at Dacca, and that raw silk would be bought from Seerpore and adjacents. By the first week of May 1680 the factors became successful in developing the broker system of investment and the first such broker with whom an agreement was made is 'Crepoll Dellol'; the period of time allowed for bringing the goods against advance was three months. Within a few weeks a number of broker-businessmen were appointed and the list was gradually extended to include twenty-four of them. Very few of them were of local origin and a few were very rich merchants having their business at Kashimbazar also. It is the brokers who now received the bulk of advances and orders from the Company. The big merchants had a greater role to play in Company's investment. First, the Shaw

brothers and four others were the Company's financiers;¹⁸ they lent money to the Company on need. Secondly, the Shaw brothers were in charge of minting of silver; and on liquidity requirements quick silver was sold to traders. For example, quick silver was sold to Ramjiban Pasaree of Satta-llapur at a price Rs.4 per seer :

on 10 March 1681 = 2 maunds
on 11 March 1681 = 1 maund

The rate was revised to Rs.4-4 annas per seer in June 1681.¹⁹ By the end of June 1680 the network for investment through brokers and pycars was more or less adequate. At the same time the factors explored newer areas in search of weavers, even going through dangerous and difficult journey for days. At this stage, wherever dependable brokers could not be found, the factors did not hesitate to come into direct agreement with the weavers. With further development of the broker system, the company, however, did not advance to the weavers without a broker's approval.

The other side of the story was one of continuous bribing of the Nawab's officials, the extent of bribes growing day by day.²⁰ As per the diary (e.g. dt. 6 September 1680), the bribing of the officials was made to befriend them both for the tax issue and also for the apprehension of any dispute with the weavers on pricing their goods. The

practice of 'presents' meant for the local officials was sometimes extended to the Dutch doctor, because the English had no doctor with them.

But the policy of satisfying the nawab's officials did not prove to be fruitful. Although the position of the company had already been strengthened in Bengal, the English did not like to come into conflict with the local nawab; and at Malda they decided to overcome the difficulty by shifting their factory to the other side of the river Mahananda. The company had a number of reasons to take this decision. First, they had already learnt that Jijia (poll tax) was being strictly collected at Rajmahal, and they apprehended a greater conflict for which local trouble should best be avoided. Secondly, the other side of the river was under the jurisdiction of a separate nawab at Purnea. Thirdly, on the other side of the river they found a local collaborator Raja Roychaudhuri of Makdumpur who owned the land suitable for a new factory.

Raja Roychaudhuri was in financial trouble and he invited the English factors to inspect his land at Makdumpur within two miles from Malda and on the bank of Mahananda. The long and almost square land of 56 bighas was liked by the factors and the agreement was finalized on papers with the official seal of the Kazi on 1 December 1680.²¹ The Raja also tried to make money by getting a contract for

supply of bricks and stones from the relics of Gaur so that the factory building could be constructed at a low cost.²² This Zamindar also assured the Englishmen of all possible help from his side so that they might develop their trade and investment. The English considered his help to be useful and sent presents to him. In February 1681 a few thatched houses were built at Makdumpur village, pending the erection of the building, and a ditch was made ^{around} ~~about~~ the ground as landmark and 'to keep the natives away'. During the following months they shifted to the new factory which initiated the growth of a new town - English Bazar. According to the 'Malda Diary', contracts with the merchants and weavers at the new factory began in March 1681. The old factory at Malda was not completely deserted, but goods were no longer stored there. In April 1681 two of the factors went to Purnea and sought assistance from the nawab there; the nawab gracefully assured them of assistance in case of any trouble.²³

It is during this period that jijia was strictly imposed at Malda, many weavers and merchants fled to the neighbouring areas of Makdumpur. There were also a few weavers' villages to the south of Makdumpur; but the factors depended mainly on weavers and merchants of Malda. The Faujdar and other officials took all possible steps to interrupt normal business of the English. They forced the dalals and pycars, coerced the workers and weavers preventing them all from going to the new factory and serving the English. However,

the behaviour of the local officers of the nawab was not merely an effort to enrich the royal treasury; their exploitative action had also a motive to reap personal benefit. The factors came to realise that they needed the merchants and dalals as well as workmen to settle and live on the Makdumpur side of the river. The Faujdar also hindered dadni by the English and even procured an order issued from Dacca to the effect that the English should immediately leave the new factory and live at Malda.²⁴

Business almost came to a standstill; the factors informed Hoogly about the troubles and attempted to appease the local officials. However, they somehow managed to reach an understanding and the Ma^kdumpur factory started pricing of goods from 19 October 1681. In December that year and March next year the factors also received orders from the Faujdar of Rajmahal and the Kazi of Gopalpur directing their people not to hinder English business.²⁵ Business picked up and boats full of silk were soon sent to Kashimbazar.

The factors at ease named the local market as Naya hat or new market, and called the newly growing township 'Englezabad' (or English Bazar as it is known later on) signifying a town of the English making. In the following course of history of British investment in the Malda region, the English Bazar factory and later on the Residency house grew into prominence and came to be known as the Malda factory or the Malda Residency while the town of Malda

itself lost its importance as a trading centre and subsequently came to be known as Old Malda.²⁶

The parwana from Dacca for clearing business of Malda was received at English Bazar on 19 October 1682.

2.3 The early company system (investment) :

(a) Their interest

That the English factors could afford such a costly conflict with the local rulers indicates the bright prospect of company's trade in terms of profit. Their interest at Malda was in piece goods in general and silk goods in particular; but they were interested in raw silk too. From the early years of the 16th century the silk textile industry of England was growing although it was still insignificant. But England was not a producer of raw silk and she had to depend on imports. The company attempted to obtain raw silk from Bengal, along with silk goods of course, as early as 1621 through Patna,²⁷ Since 1670 raw silk from Bengal was regularly imported to England but it accounted for only 1 per cent of the total import value (K.N. Chaudhuri's estimate). Although Bengal raw silk was not strictly homogeneous, there was a quick acceptance of such raw silk in England since 1670's and its popularity grew on. On the other hand there was a great reduction in raw silk supply from Persia. The regular and certain supply of raw silk from Bengal, no doubt, helped the growth of the English industry to national

importance. However, as we shall see later on, the market for Bengal raw silk in England contained elements which made it a highly unstable one. Opening of the Malda factory was also guided by the hope of creating trade in fine muslins for which Dacca became famous. Therefore, company's investment at Malda combined three interests : (i) in silk and mixed textiles, (ii) in raw silk, and (iii) in cotton piece goods. The first and the third group of items were procured for markets both in England and in other European countries; the second group was for the English industry only. The priority for the first two groups can be best studied from the mode of advancing, the accounts and also from the gradual stress given to silk investment at Malda during the subsequent decades. K.N. Chaudhuri in his 'The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company' (pp.503-505) has given an exhaustive list of textile imported from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The following silk and mixed fabrics of that list appear in the Company's documents as very common items of procurement at Malda :

1. Bandannoes - silk handkerchief
2. Cherconnaes - mixed, striped and checks
3. Doreas - mixed
4. Elatches - mixed, striped
5. Seersuckers - mixed, striped
6. Sooseys - mixed, striped
7. Taffetas - silk piece goods.

All these items were fashion-wears in England and they were re-exported to the Continental market. It should also be

Table II'To be provided at Malda, 1682

Item	Variety	No. of pieces/ quantity
Cossaes fine	Muslin	13,000
Mulmul of all sorts	muslin	15,000
Tanjeeps fine	muslin	10,000
Seerbands fine	muslin	5,000
Seersuckers	mixed	4,000
Rehings	muslin	3,000
Humhums fine	muslin	4,000
Addaties fine	muslin	1,500
Mandilla	mixed, striped	10,000
Puttaes or Bird's eyd	muslin	2,000
Puttaes	striped	3,000
Doreas fine	mixed	4,000
Elatches	mixed	12,000
Any sort of Taffeta, silk or silk and cotton		20 Bales

Source : Despatch Book dt. 28 August 1682 (India Office Record), quoted in Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal (1650-1720), Calcutta 1975; p.265.

[Original Record housed in India Office Records Library, London.]

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noted that the novel thing Malda could offer (with which objective the centre was opened) was the special kind of Maldahi mixed fabrics as well as fabrics of pure silk. Neither cotton piece goods nor raw silk was of any special distinction. That silk piece goods, both pure and mixed, as well as muslin were the main attraction of company investment at Malda can be understood from a typical order for provision of goods at the centre, given in Table II.

(b) Procurement and pricing :

As regards procurement of commodities, the company was after expanding a multitiered agency system in the marketing chain. The company appointed merchants as their dalals or brokers and came in definite contracts with them depending on the orders received from England through Hoogly. Standard samples were usually examined and their price agreed;²⁸ sometimes advance money was also delivered; but the value of the supply depended on actual pricing at the time of delivery. In spite of many deductions made on delivery, the contract price for silk was an object of intense bargaining between the merchants and the Company. There were occasions when this led to controversies. The brokers advanced money to the pycars - the sub-agents, who moved from weaver to weaver, advanced money and procured their product at prices determined by the actual market conditions as well^{as} their influence on the weavers. Both the merchant and the pycar were commission agents; and the factors, nevertheless, received from

the company, in addition to salaries, handsome commission on the value of procurement and despatch.

From the factory records and proceedings of the Court of Directors it is known that the Court at London sent list of orders by January-March every year with a few exceptions. These lists were generally prepared about two years ahead of the arrival of goods at the English ports, i.e. sufficient time margin for procurement and despatch was allowed, including the voyage. The Bengal Council after receiving the consolidated list, sent out individual requisitions for specific items to different factories with a stipulated period. On receipt of this list, negotiations started at the factory level with brokers, pycars and weavers. The brokers in their turn shifted the targets of production to the artisans. Thus the village artisan now became subservient to the dictates of the London directors not merely ^{to} the dictates of the local market; and in that sense the autonomy of the rural artisan was destroyed. It may be noted in connection with the company's 'investment' system at Malda that initially there was a departure from the general practice. In places like Malda, where merchants of good standing or security were not available in good numbers, the company preferred pretty brokers; but, it was not interested in dealing with the working manufacturer direct.²⁹ Circumstances at Malda compelled the English factors to transact a part of their business directly with the weavers.

Expansion of demand through a distant contact did not come to substantial benefit to the basic growers; because the organisation of production remained separate from and yet dependent on the functions of trade and credit which acquired a multitiered specialization. The ryots and artisans of Bengal had the experience of the merchant's way of advances - advances in the form of money and materials and purchase of the finished articles by the merchant mahajan. But, now there emerged too many middlemen who appropriated the bulk of profit, and the actual producer was delinked from the market of his product although the local market came in contact with the wider export market. Acharyya Jadunath Sarkar explained that the role of the mahajan before the East India Company was important to the basic grower and did not destroy their individual role in the market while interest payment was also low in terms of market value of the product. But, with the advent of the company's trade, the new class of brokers with previous contract with both the factors and the manufacturers and with knowledge of the limits to market and prices, had little risk to bear while the share of profits absorbed by them was enormous.³⁰ There is, however, not enough evidence to show in exactly what proportions profit was shared by different groups of merchants and brokers involved in Malda. In fact, this is the beginning of a process by which the regional economy became ill balanced; wealth was confined to the hands of a small minority of middlemen clustering around the English settlements and making fortunes but not developing the potential

resources while the ruling nobility only made a show of wealth.

The big merchants who worked as the key-brokers, operated with their own capital and had a mixed up business of money lending, dealing in other commodities as well as working as the company's agents. The indigenous capital thus served the company's interest; because by arrangements of Streynsham Master, the company generally made cash purchases only at the time of procurement. While during the same period the ownership of capital was divorced from management in England through the growth of joint stock companies with limited liability as its feature, the Bengal merchants held fast to their traditional organisation and only extended the methods they generally practised. There was hardly any organisational innovation to encompass the situation arising of the appearance of the English factors. At Malda, the situation was worse in the sense that the factors had to call for the services of merchants from other places like Kashimbazar, Hoogly and Balasore to help their investment run smooth. In the absence of a direct link between the merchants and the external market, two secondary impacts could be felt on their operations :

- 1) Big merchants at times formed rings just as a means of increasing their bargaining power, and such an attempt became the cause of concern for the company.

ii) There was a considerable growth of the financial machinery, because the specialized activities of a class of merchants in credit and exchange flourished as a result of the direct requirements of the company.

The merchant rings often compelled the company officials to pay higher prices, of course, to no gain of the weavers; and sometimes the question of pricing led to serious controversy and conflict. In January 1684 the Malda factors reported that they tried daily to fix the price of goods at reasonable terms, but found it extremely difficult as all the pycars stood off at the instigation of two merchants, Sambhunath and Ghanashyam. They tried by all means to have merchants of their own choice to come and fix the prices of their goods. "If we should permit", the factors wrote, "it would certainly ruin the factory for the future and be an unspeakable damage to the company."³¹ The merchants even dragged the issue to the nawab's adalat at Dacca for months and secured the decree that the Royal muckeem (broker) would settle the price of silk. But, the company never gave up its right to fix the price of goods, because, loss of the right to fix price meant a loss of control on the market. From the Diaries of Streynsham Master it is known that generally silk goods to cotton goods were 2.5:1 in price at the initiation of Malda factory.³²

Similarly, although the organisation of production did not change some newer elements were also being known to the region as a result of the procurement system that was launched, e.g. rigid standardization, fixing price according to sample at the time of giving advance, small private manufactories where the merchants directly employed weavers to have a greater share of the trading fortune, all adopted and extended through the English method of procurement or 'investment'. Also, since the company was catering to the buyers of England and the Continent, it had to gradually adjust the colour, pattern and size of various silk goods according to the taste of the European consumers. It, therefore, sent to Bengal at various times dyers, throwsters, painters and weavers to instruct the artisans here to make their products suit the European market where company's silk had to compete with Italian and French silk. Such a process, although with less endeavour in the 17th century, started earlier than the initiation of the Malda factory. As early as in 1663 the Court of Directors objected to the native practice of dying silk "in the gum" and asked that the taffetas should be bought in an ungunmed condition as these could be treated an improvement in England in the desirable manner. After a successful experiment, Bengal silk goods were made to pass ~~in~~ in the market as Italian. In 1668, the company sent to Bengal Roger Fowler, a skillful dyer; and again during 1670-75 a number of skilled artisans came to this country for some rectification and improvement in the

dying process. They were all asked to keep their art secret from the natives.³³

(c) Grading to quality

Among the new experiences of the Malda artisan as a result of their interaction with the English factor the immediate one was strict quality control never before known to the local market. In the case of both piece goods and raw silk the factors strictly adhered to the principle of quality sorting; and sorting was a complicated affair having its impact on pricing. The strictness in sorting often discouraged the merchants and angered the weavers and rearers; but the company maintained the practice with great care like their efforts to continue with the right to pricing. Classification of raw silk at Malda (as in other centres too) was commonly termed-head, belly and foot to signify the gradation according to quality - first, second and the third.³⁴ The English used to purchase the first two sorts generally in the proportion 5:4. On one occasion (Malda Diary dated 30 June 1682) sorting of silk was done into the 1st to 6th grades according to wind and skein. Silk of short skein was called Putta, and the superfine sort of short skein was known as Puttany. There was one special category called Dolleria in which head belly and foot were all mixed.

The factors often received special instructions from Hoogly or Kashimbazar, as per the directives of the Court,

regarding gradation, quality, pricing, maintenance of separate silk account etc. One such instruction, for example, during the initial years of the Malda factory had some interesting features. The instruction said :

- i) raw silk brought in by the pycars shall be sorted in the factory before it is priced, and the pricing will be done by the Chief, the Second and the Third of the factory;
- ii) the warehouse keeper shall look well into the putting of the silk back into bags and write upon the bags the number of the sortment, the name of the merchant, the weight of each sort received;
- iii) the warehouse keeper shall keep columns of the weight of each sort separately in the ledger;
- iv) the warehouse keeper shall not allow any native to enter the warehouse without an Englishman, and that also not more than one at a time, to prevent theft;
- v) raw silk shall be weighed out and packed for England at the same weight it is received in, and some Englishman of the factory do assist at the weighing of the silk and all

other fine goods in and out.³⁵

(d) Indigenous funds for the company

One of the early problems of the East India Company in the whole of Asia was the problem of liquidity and from settlement to settlement the problem varied in degree. On the other hand the English merchants were aware that their success depended on their ability to purchase with ready money. We have already noted that the factors of Malda were frequently short of ready funds and for expanding investment the Chief borrowed from big merchants, the brokers, at interest. At Malda the factors resorted to such borrowing from the very initial years, as evidenced by the Malda Diary. On the part of the merchants, such credit was one more avenue for expanding their business and earning interest in addition to their profit as brokers. On the part of the company, this was a way out to employ indigenous capital to the benefit of its own investment. The size of the loan usually varied from Rs.8,000 to Rs.20,000; and at times even larger sums were also borrowed. The rate of interest was 1% per mensem³⁶ subject to further revision. The major financiers of this factory were the leading merchants like Paramanand Shaw, Sukhanand Shaw, Kunjaman Shaw, Chaturmal Shaw, Ghanshyam Das, Hridiram Tewari, Thakurdas Brahmin etc. Among these lenders the most influential Paramanand and Sukhanand lent very often and also large sums. Malda Diary has a number of instances like that on 13 May 1680 when Paramanand

gave 20 thousand rupees and the company requested Sukhanand for further money. All ~~of~~ the financiers were mainly bankers or shroffs³⁷ as well as traders having their base at Kashimbazar; in addition to buying company's bullion they also issued bills of exchange or letter of credit in favour of the company whenever it needed them. It should be noted that in course of the subsequent development of silk trade, the indigenous merchants merely supplied ready money but could not command trade.

2.4 Factory organisation :

Malda factory was started as a subordinate factory to Hoogly; later on after the establishment of Fort William (in 1699) and shifting of the Bengal Council, this factory became subordinate to the Fort. Orders and instructions were received accordingly. But, in those days many of the consultations for regulating company's affairs in Bengal, particularly for silk trade, were held at Kashimbazar. Hence instructions were also received from Kashimbazar. The despatches were sent, as per instructions, to both Hoogly and Kashimbazar; but, since Kashimbazar was the chief centre of company's silk trade despatches to Kashimbazar were more frequent. On the other hand, for the company's bills getting negotiated and bullions exchanged or minted, relationship with Kashimbazar was closer. But, all accounts were settled with the Bengal Council; and monthly returns had also to be sent.

Because of the distant nature of East India Company's trade operational sequences of business were controlled and regulated by the Court of Directors as the central decision making authority and at the same by the Bengal Council; through this system the Company diffused the concentration of power and authority on the one hand, and created an impersonal bureaucratic structure on the other. The factories as permanent trading establishments were run with a bureaucratic staff guided by definite instructions, formal procedures, rules, targets strictly laid down at an impersonal level without weakening the contribution of individuals.

At the factory level, final responsibility rested on the Chief, and it is he who presided over all the consultations in the factory. The first chief appointed to the Malda factory was Fytche Nedham. He was succeeded in 1681 by Robert Hedges. The chief was assisted in his functions by the Second and the Third in rank. Often these juniors had specific responsibilities to bear, e.g. the Second was in charge of keeping the books and journals of accounts relating to silk merchants and weavers. The chief enjoyed certain special privileges to others in addition to his higher salary.³⁸ There were other subordinate staff like the warehouse keeper, cook and male, peons, mashalchees etc.; and the subordinate staff were generally recruited from the natives. The chief, the second and the third were always supplied with arms for their protection as well as three horses for *their*

transport; only the chief enjoyed one palanquine for his use. In addition to those, a bazra (boat with a cabin) was purchased at the Malda factory from the Dutch in January 1681. Such a means of water-transport was of great importance since Malda region has got a net work of rivers and rivulets.

The salaries of the factors at Malda (as per Malda Diary) were half that of the servants of the company at Hoogly :

	At Malda	At Hoogly
Chief ...	Rs.6 per month	Rs.12 per month
Second ...	Rs.4 " "	Rs. 8 " "
Third ...	Rs.3 " "	Rs. 5 " "

These official salaries were almost nominal, and the servants of the company derived their wealth mainly from the commission they enjoyed on the value of despatch, which was many times larger than the nominal salary. In addition to these the officers carried on private trade and earned a profit.³⁹ It is the commission and profit that made these posts the most lucrative in company's service and attracted its best men. We shall see in Chapter III how the company's servants made a fortune in Bengal particularly when company's monopoly was firmly established in the second half of the 18th century.

2.5 The Competitors :

When the English came to Malda the main centres for supply of Bengal textiles were Kashimbazar, Dacca, Malda, Hoogly, Balasore and Patna; and at almost all these places they faced competition from other Europeans. At Malda the competition was a triangular one : the English, the Dutch and a third group of merchants including both the indigenous ones and the Armenians. It may be noted here, that almost a century later (in the late 18th century) the English at Malda had to face some competition from the French; but, the Dutch were by that time ousted from Malda while the native merchants completely lost their control over silk-trade. Hence, competition from the French was not a matter of serious concern to the company at Malda. The indigenous merchants of the 17th and early 18th centuries were the supplier to other parts of India, i.e. they catered to the wide internal market and the volume of their foreign trade was not enormous. The Armenians were mainly interlopers and newcomers to Malda as compared to the Dutch. But, among the rivals the Armenians, though few in number, lasted the longest. Also until the later part of the 18th century there existed a 'cordial' relation between the company and the Armenians, perhaps because they were engaged in the peaceful pursuit of commerce, i.e. without any social or political interest.⁴⁰ The Armenians formed their first settlement in Bengal in the year 1665 by virtue of a royal farman from Aurangzeb at Saidabad near Murshidabad. They carried on their

trade with their own funds and also with mutual credit within the community. They travelled all the provinces in India and had trade links beyond the Indian frontiers. At Malda they had no settlement and generally came to purchase raw silk only. But at Murshidabad, in the early 18th century, the Armenians even set up silk reeleries of their own with employed winders working on a wage basis, an institution the company had to destroy by force as it was a challenge to the company's ambitions monopoly after Palashi.⁴¹

Thus in external trade, the most important and powerful rival of the company here were the Dutch, and one of the objectives behind an effort to secure trading privilege from the nawab or emperor was to defeat the Dutch in competition. The Dutch had a factory at Malda prior to the English and their dealing was direct with the weavers through a system of dadni while the English tried to develop a system of dealing through native brokers. One of the reasons why the English had to introduce dadni direct to the weavers, in the absence of brokers, was competition with the Dutch; and Malda factors in their letters to the Council at Hoogly repeatedly asked for money to keep the weavers engaged and thus prevent them from going over to the Dutch. Dadni to the weavers had to be provided by the English not only to bring them to company's investment but also to keep them in constant employment throughout the year so that they could not be enticed away by the rivals. This required a good deal

of untimely advances; and Malda factory records reveal that dadni to weavers were provided in January just to prevent the needy weaver from falling into the Dutch. According to the 'Malda Diary', although contracts with the weavers were made since the starting of the factory, a regular system of dadni to the weavers commenced from 3 January 1681. It was also noted in the diary that as a result of dadni practice, more and more weavers flocked to the English. English factors were always apprehensive of the Dutch move, because the Dutch might also endeavour to counter English arrangements. In September-October 1680 according to Malda Diary, the English estimated that the Dutch had given out Rs.60,000 and were trying for newer funds from their Kashimbazar establishment.⁴² In 1682 the English factors at Malda reported :

"The Dutch are calling on all our pycars and weavers procuring them great dadni if in case they will bring a writing to bring us our remains and take no more dadni of us which causes a great many of them to flock thither."⁴³

The duel between the Dutch and the English was not a phenomenon of Malda only; similar conflict of interests was visible at Kashimbazar also. In fact both the European companies were eager to derive profit from lucrative trade in Bengal piece goods - both cotton and silk. By 1697 one-third of all exports which the Dutch company had sent to Europe from the whole of Asia came from Bengal. The role of Bengal

goods in British trade was even more striking; - in a normal year in the early 18th century up to 60 per cent of British imports from Asia originated from Bengal.⁴⁴

At Malda, the Dutch trade failed to keep pace with English investment since the early 18th century, and the English ultimately succeeded in overpowering the Dutch. The story of overpowering the Dutch in terms of trading method, commercial organisation and financial technique was, of course, stretched over many years. It may also be noticed that with the advent of the English at this centre the Dutch understood that they would lose in the competition with the English, as they had already experienced in many other parts of India. At least one instance may be pointed out from the Malda Diary; the Dutch chief of Malda was called back in January 1681 to live at Kashimbazar; and he sold out the strong and handsome bazra to the English factors at a cheap price. The Dutch were perhaps trying to concentrate at a larger centre - Kashimbazar.

One simple impact of such competition among the buyers might have been an enhanced price of silk and silk textiles. It was, in fact, reported by the Dutch that they were facing the problem of about 50 per cent rise in certain textile prices.⁴⁵ But, since the English soon established a near monopsony in purchases, since they strictly controlled pricing, since there was no existence of a normal market with proper knowledge of the market condition to both sellers and

purchasers, and since they developed a multitiered agency system, it is difficult to ascertain any impact of the competition on price receipts of the weavers. Price rise and benefit to the weavers, if any, was obviously a very temporary phenomenon.

2.6 Problems of investment :

Adjusting the sequence of purchases according to schedule and financing trade was always a delicate and complicated matter for the chief of the factory. We have already seen how native merchants' capital was used by the company to cover the inadequacy in their own resources which were obtained either by sale of bullions they imported or by minting them in the Royal mint at Rajmahal. The silver of the company was partly in bars and partly in Mexican and Spanish dollars, while gold was chiefly in European coins. Sending bullion to the mint for coinage was not resorted to if it could be avoided; and practically minting of the bullion was done only when a sufficient price for it could not be secured in the market. Sometimes bullion, specially gold, was not locally saleable; but minting at Rajmahal took considerable time to the disadvantage of the Englishmen's need for liquidity. Again, at the mint the native rulers practised a preferential treatment to the merchant bankers, which created further hindrance to factors' business. In 1683, for example, Bul Chand (or Bal Chandra) the revenue official of Murshidabad sent a great quantity of copper to

be coined, which took so much time that the English could have coined by that time, as it was said, 4 lakhs of rupees. The Rajmahal mint, in addition to minting charges, imposed a 5 per cent customs; and in 1684 Rafiuzzaman, the faujdar of Rajmahal imposed a condition that the company must sell all its gold mohurs to him at the mint at his own prices.

Dependence on the mint thus became highly unfavourable to the factors. To obviate this difficulty, a contract was first made with the big banker of Kashimbazar, Chitormul Shaw, to take all the bullion at a fixed rate. Later on, in 1705 the company finally resolved to coin all imported treasures in its own mint at Madras and despatch them to Bengal factories. The practice continued, and in 1707 the court instructed not to alter it except in case of urgent necessity.

Until this system was introduced and also occasionally later on, the factors had the necessity of selling bullion for providing themselves with cash. This required much knowledge of the local market, judgement and acuteness in bargaining as in the purchase of goods for Europe. The difficulty in assessing the value and the great variety in the quality of current money, the differences among numerous local exchanges and violent fluctuations in price to which bullion was liable, kept the question of exchange a vexed one for the servants of the company. The fluctuation in bullion prices became particularly embarrassing in the case

of gold mohurs, because the market price of gold and gold mohurs dropped since the late 1670s and continued to be low up to the first decade of the 18th century, as is evident from the following information.⁴⁶

Market price of gold mohurs

<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Price (Rs. - Annas)</u>
Early 1670	Hugli	15-2 to 15-4
Feb. 1677	Kashimbazar	13-14
July 1677	"	13-10
Dec. 1678	"	12-13
Sept. 1684	Malda	12-6 to 12-8
Sept. 1711	Calcutta	14-6 to 15-8

In view of this, in 1686 the Court resolved to send to Bengal only silver rials which might be exchanged or minted into rupee without much trouble.

The second problem was with the merchants. At Malda, apart from big merchants, the factors had to make contracts with various smaller merchants and pycars. The company felt lack of security at this and apprehended the risk of running into loss from 'bad faith'. The Court asked its servants time and again to organise the merchants into joint stock societies which might avoid the risk. This could be done at Madras, and this the Court found advantageous to the company in more than one ways. But, the servants at Malda failed to form any such society, and they introduced here a

special kind of security system for any contract with petty merchants and weavers : the merchants or weavers had to stand security for each other.⁴⁷

In reality, however, the petty merchants were unable to make a breach of faith : in case they did so, the company could penalise them in various ways. But, when the problem came from the giants, the company was helpless. One form of the breach of contract, the factors considered most, was selling the goods to others at a higher price offer. When the prominent and influential merchants were involved in such transactions with the interlopers or other European companies, the company could do little to prevent them. In 1683, Sambhunath Shaw, the Malda dealer, received advance from the company and then carried all the goods to Hoogly with the intention of selling them to interlopers. The company now sought a parwana from the local faujdar to 'deliver Ghanashyam, Maniram and consorts of Sambhunath' to the company and to find out Sambhunath or 'to distress their families'. The faujdar not only refused to give any such parwana but even protected all these persons from the company. The Malda factors asked the Hoogly Council to seize Sambhunath forcibly and send him to Malda, 'which if it succeeds will break the neck of this design and become a terror and disappointment to the other combines'. But nothing to this effect could be done by the company; and Malda servants reported at the end of the year,

"The bad example of Sambhunath running away to Hugli and underhand endeavouring to sell the Honourable Company's goods to the interlopers hath caused all the picars etc. to whom money had been given out to abscond."⁴⁸

The third problem was with the servants of the company itself. It appears from the diaries of Streynsham Master and William Hedges that the factory officers were nonetheless guilty of unfair methods, to their personal benefit, in dealing with the suppliers of goods for company's investment. The case of Job Charnok was not a unique one⁴⁹; servants of the company at other places ~~also~~ were also involved in extraction of unofficial commission from the weavers at the time of pricing their goods or buying goods at a price less than the estimate. In fact, the special tasks of Master and Hedges included tackling of such corruption among the factors. But, the degree of such attempts by the company's servants to make a fortune was trivial as compared to their successors in the post-Palashi period, which we shall discuss in Chapter III.

2.7 Growth of Company's trade :

The year of initiation of the Malda factory was also the starting point of a boom in company's textile trade from Bengal. In 1681 the Court designed a great encouragement of textile trade in the Bay and its annual increase. In 1681 the

Table IIIPosition of Malda Factory, 1682

Factories in Bengal	Company's Investment for 1682 (£)	Stock in 1682	
		Amount in Treasure (£)	Amount in Goods (£)
Kashimbazar	140,000	73,395	7,964
Balasore	32,000	16,776	1,820
Dacca	16,500	8,652	938
Malda	15,000	7,863	953
Patna	14,500	7,601	824
Hugli	12,500	6,553	711
TOTALS	230,500	120,840	13,210

Compiled from : Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and
Commercial Organisation in Bengal
(1650-1720), Calcutta 1975 :
pp.56, 213.

Court's order for an investment in Bengal textile was £ 2,30,000; but in 1682 Court's order for the same was £ 2,50,000 in addition to its instruction for borrowing locally upto £ 1,00,000 for raw silk.⁵⁰ Intention for further increase in investment was seeded in both profit motive and the motive to oust the Dutch from Bengal. In fact, there was strong demand and a favourable market for Bengal silk and cotton textiles in Europe during the last two decades of the 17th century as well as in the early decades of the 18th century. Percentage share of Bengal textile in annual cargo increased four times between 1650 and 1700 A.D. In 1689 the Bombay Council wrote to London that Bengal trade was a jewel in the company's affairs. The problem of a new English company for trade in East India^s in 1699 was no barrier, because the two companies were amalgamated in 1709 under the name - United East India Company. In 1704-5 there was a temporary decline in tonnage of shipment because of not only duties but also dullness of market in Europe, scarcity of silver etc. The first decade of the 18th century also witnessed a reduction of trade at Madras and Surat while the Dutch failed to keep pace with the expansion of English trade.

As against this background, the position of Malda factory became important from the beginning as is seen in Table III. Although Kashimbazar was the largest mart for export of commodities, Malda, the youngest of all, ranked

fourth. It should further be remembered that among the six centres, Kashimbazar and Malda were important from the point of silk investment. Orders sent to Malda Factory⁵¹ increased right from 1682 :

<u>November 1681</u>	<u>August 1682</u>	<u>December 1683</u>
27,800 pieces	86,500 pieces	86,500 pieces
	+ 20 bales	+ 20 bales

But, Malda factory became subjected to occasional disturbances which led to its instability until the end of the 17th century. The first important disturbance was the Anglo-Mughal conflict on the issue of customs and trading privilege. We have already seen in section 2.2 above that since the beginning of investment at Malda the factors came in conflict with the local authorities over this issue. In 1686 it was a wider phenomenon; the English took recourse to arms and a war between the company and the nawab was launched. As a result of the war, Malda factory had to be closed down for some time because the factory was ransacked by the nawab's army. They took away the treasure in the factory, and the Englishmen fled away to Hooghly and Madras. When the war was settled to the advantage of the English, Company's trade was further consolidated towards steady growth. The Company demanded to the nawab that it should henceforth be allowed to trade customs free and that the nawab should rebuild the factory at Malda, which had been destroyed, restore all the money and help the English recover

their debts.⁵² The nawab in reply appointed his commissioners to treat for peace. In September 1688 the Court in its letter to Bengal Council wrote,

"We have no manner of doubt of the continuance of our peace in all the Mughal's dominions, and, therefore, we think the sooner our Agent Charnok resettles the factories at Kashimbazar and Malda from whence we used to have our best returns, the better it will be for the company."⁵³

In 1689 Ibrahim Khan II replaced Shayestah Khan at Dacca and the factors who fled to Madras came back at the invitation of the new nawab.

Very soon in 1695 events gave the English an opportunity to derive benefit, even at the cost of a temporary drop in procurement, from the turmoil and rebellion within the country. Subah Singh, a rich landowner of Burdwan, broke into rebellion joined by Rahim Khan, an Afgan chief from Orissa. They first slew Raja Krishna Ram of Burdwan, seized his family and property and then advanced further. The rebel force rapidly increased in number, because others joined it. The insurgents captured Kashimbazar, Rajmahal and Malda. Then Murshidabad also fell into the hands of the rebels. Zabardast Khan, the nawab's son, was placed by the emperor in charge of the nawab's force to resist the rebellion. He defeated them, speedily recovered Rajmahal, Malda and Murshidabad, and drove them away to Burdwan in

1697. Walsh writes : the course of war did not concern the English except in so far as it emboldened them to press for further grants. In June 1697, the English further attempted to restore their properties. They sent to Zabardast Khan for negotiation an influential Armenian merchant and asked for the properties of the English, recovered from the rebels at Rajmahal and Malda, to be restored to them. Zabardast Khan, however, refused.⁵⁴

In 1706 the capital of Bengal was shifted from Dacca to Murshidabad. This became advantageous to the company's servants at Kashimbazar and Malda to have ready negotiations with the nawab. The acquisition of Zamindary rights of Calcutta in 1698 and establishment of Fort William in 1699 were the first steps in the direction of the company becoming sovereign, the final steps being the battle of Palashi and the grant of diwani rights.

In spite of interruptions, the company tried at Malda to enlarge investment and bring under its purview newer merchants. For example in 1691 when the factory was just rebuilt after the war with the nawab, the Court directed the Bengal Council to adjust differences with Mathuradas and hold a 'fair correspondence' with him. Mathuradas, the 'competently rich' merchant at Hoogly made very great investments beforehand at Malda. Now that the mark up on the cost price of Bengal silk goods was very high in the European market, the company's concern was for a greater

investment and therefore, it asked Bengal Council to enlarge investment even by allowing Mathuradas 10 to 12 per cent commission if he would provide sufficient commodities for the company.⁵⁵ Instead of competition at Malda, the company wanted Mathuradas' trade to be complementary to their investment.

It has been mentioned in section 2.3 above that Malda factory was initiated when demand for raw silk for the new silk textile industry in England was growing. In 1681 the Court prohibited all Englishmen from dealing privately in raw silk, because it was asserted that (i) it was highly profitable, (ii) private trading had enhanced prices, (iii) the Court was willing to make monopoly of the company more extensive. Again, as a result of the European war, supply of raw silk from Turkey was interrupted in the early 1690's; and the orders of 1693-4 demanded larger procurement of raw silk from Bengal. In London since 1681 the weavers went against the wear of Bengal silk textiles, because their importation was telling heavily on the demand for English silk goods. When the number of weavers had been inflated there by 50 thousand refugee weavers from Nantes in 1685, the clamour for protection from the competition of Bengal silk textiles became stronger. The company gave special attention to the import of raw silk but continued to import silk textiles, because they were the "general wear in England" and were also in great demand in the whole of the continent. Petitions, Pamphlets and the widespread rioting by the

Table IVPercentage of Annual Exports by the
East India Company from Bengal

Year	Raw Silk (%)	Textiles (%)
1684-85	24	71
1690-91	8	83
1694-95	5	83
1699-1700	19	77
1704-05	31	38
1709-10	13	83
1714-15	11	83

Compiled from : Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and
Commercial Organisation in
Bengal (1650-1720), Calcutta
1975; pp.249-54.

Spitalfields silk weavers in 1697, - all led to the passing of the Act prohibiting Indian textiles in 1700. In 1700 the statute was enacted that all silk goods and stuff mixed with silk should be locked up in warehouses till re-exported. But, import of silk piece-goods from Bengal went on unabated, as is evident from Table IV. In it 1704-5 was an abnormal year, because total exports were enormously reduced in this year. Again, the period from 1700 to 1711 was a temporary phase of adjustment to the English statute : On the one hand, the English weaving industry was unable to absorb raw silk beyond certain limit; on the other hand, total silk export from Bengal increased.

To some extent, the concurrent transformation of the English tariff system provided with sufficient revenue; but, the implications of such a fiscal system was deeper in the context of economic relationship between England and India. The prohibitions of 1700 were strengthened by the second statute of 1720 along with excessive duties levied on Bengal goods.⁵⁶ Bal Krishna has given a list of articles subject to tariff and this included all the important varieties of silk textiles produced at Kashimbazar and Malda. All these tariff measures imparted great impetus to the dying and weaving industries in England; and the English silk weaving industry was making strides during the first half of the 18th century. But, ^{their} ~~this~~ impact on silk manufacturing in Bengal

was not severe, because of the existence of a steady continental market and because silk weaving industry was not a staple industry in England.

Notes and References to Chapter II

1. The main points of his special assignment were ; to inspect all the books and accounts and reduce them to the plain and clear method of the Presidency of Surat ; to find out the best methods of disposing of imports to India and providing exports to England, especially raw silk and taffetas, and the mode of contracting for Indian goods ; to seek for novelties from India for export ; to investigate the character and ability of Company's servants and the causes of dissensions and quarrel among them; training of the Company's servants; and above all, introducing a new system of administration. (underline ours)
- Richard C. Temple (ed.) - The Diaries of Streynsham Master (1675-1680), VolI, London 1911; p.3.
2. 'Richard Edwards' letter about Maulda, the Scituation and Trade thereof'.

Richard C. Temple - The Diaries of Strensham Master, Ibid; p.399.
 3. Nepalese of terai - the sub-Himalayan forest belt.
 4. Gujarat.

It may be noted in this context that there was lack of leading local merchants at Malda.
 5. A large flat-bottomed boat for carrying goods.
 6. Derived from Arabic Khasa; fine muslin variety.
 7. Muslin variety.
 8. Silk cloth with a lengthwise pattern.
 9. The quality of raw silk was initially considered inferior in 'goodness' to that procured at Kashimbazar.
 10. Rajmahal and Murshidabad.
 11. Zinc.

12. Saudellapur, on the bank of Bhagirathi (the old course of the Ganga). Saudellapur is very close to the ancient harbour 'Bara Sagar Dighi'.

Edwards' statement also reveals the nature of self-sufficient rural economy.

13. Quoted from Letter Book V in R.C. Temple - The Diaries of Streyntsham Master, Op.cit.; p.26.

14. Edited by Walter K. Firminger during 1909-17 and published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal (henceforth mentioned as the Malda Diary).

15. Kazy = A mohammadan judge or magistrate appointed originally by the court of Delhi to administer justice. He also attested or authenticated writings which under his seal were admitted as the original in proof.

Gomostah = Agent.

Faujdar = An officer of the government who was in charge of a chakla and combined civil and military functions.

Crowry = A revenue collector and overseer; derived from crore (crore of Rs. etc.).

16. For details please see Appendix A.

17. Consultation at the Malda factory dt. 29 April 1680. Price of silk piece goods in the initial agreements varied between Rs.4-12 annas to Rs.9-0 as. per piece (Malda Diary).

18. Shaw brothers : Paramanda Shaw and Sukhananda Shaw.

Four others : Kunjaman Shaw, Hridiram Tewari, Ghanashyamas and Thakurdas Brahmin.

The Shaws or Sahukars had extensive business in silk in the whole of the triangular region of Kashimbazar Malda and Rajshahi.

19. W.K. Firminger (ed.) - The Malda Diary and Consultations, Op.cit.; p.97, 113.

20. Initially the presents to the Faujdar and Corwry were broad cloth and rarities to the amount of Rs.100, but it increased on. On 4 October 1681 only Jeamshire Beag (Jamsher Beg) the Crowry was presented with Rs.500 and another 500 rupees was lent to him without interest.

On 6 September 1680 the diary comments on these officials as "hungry after gifts". (Malda Diary)

21. As per the accounts of the factory for the month of December the value of the land was settled to be Rs.300.

In July 1681, an adjacent plot of 8 bighas more was purchased from the Raja at an agreed valuation of Rs.40/- (forty). (Malda Diary)

22. As an advance payment for such supply, he received from the factors Rs.300 in addition to the value of his land. The materials were scheduled to be brought by boats in the rainy season when the river is high. In July-August 1681 a total of 105 lakh bricks were supplied at the rate of 3500 bricks per rupee. (Malda Diary)

23. Asfandiyar Khan (spelt as Spyndar Caun in the diary) was the new nawab at Purnea during that time. It is known that the nawab also invited the English to settle a factory at Purnea.

Malda Diary dt. 19 April 1681; and

W.W. Hunter - Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.XV, London 1876; p.221.

24. Similar order was also issued by Bulchand from Murshidabad.

Malda Diary dt. 8 September 1681.

Bul Chand is Bal Chandra, the chief revenue officer of Hugly and Murshidabad.

25. Makdumpur was in the Bhatidah - Gopalpur pargana of Purnea.

26. For example, according to the consultations at Fort William dt. 11 July 1715, after the shifting took place, the factory at Englesabad used to be called Maulda Factory in the Books and Accounts of the Company.

Also see, C.R. Wilson - Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Vol.II (Pt.I), Calcutta 1900; p.223.

27. Bal Krishna - Commercial Relations between India and England (1601-1757), London 1924; p.98.
- For details of Company's import of Bengal raw silk also see,
- K.N. Chaudhuri - The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760, Cambridge 1978; pp.345-348.
28. Variation of prices from dalal to dalal is noticed in the Malda Diary and usually three months' time was given to the broker for delivery.
29. R.C. Temple (ed.) - The Diaries of Streynsham Master, Op.cit.; p.136.
30. Jadunath Sarkar - Economics of British India (2nd edn.), Calcutta 1911; pp.223-226.
31. Hugli Factory Records (India Office Records Series), quoted in Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.141. (Original record in London).
32. R.C. Temple - The Diaries of Streynsham Master, Op.cit.; p.139.
33. C.R. Wilson - Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.46.
- and Mazharul Huq - The E.I. Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.207.
34. C.R. Wilson - Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Vol.I, Ibid.; p.376.
35. C.R. Wilson - Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Ibid.; pp.394-5.
36. This was the rate in 1680; interest rate was subsequently raised to $1\frac{1}{8}$ per cent in 1681 and to $1\frac{1}{4}$ per cent to $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent in 1682 - as evidenced by the Malda Diary. But on some occasions one or two merchants also lent to the company at less than the general rate; e.g. Chintaman Shaw, company's chief merchant at Balasore, lent through his gomastah Rs.10,000 to Malda factory at the rate of 1 per cent in 1682.

37. Properly Seraf, according to Mazharul Huq.
 38. For example, candles at the company's charge were allowed only to the chambers of the chief.
 39. "Everyone traded in some way or other, from the Governor of a settlement to the lowest servant of the Company, not excluding the Chaplin and the school master."
- J.T. Wheeler - Early Records of British India : A history of the English settlement in India, Calcutta 1878; p.298.
40. Mesrovb Jacob Seth - Armenians in India, Calcutta 1937; p.325.
 41. William Bolts - Consideration in India Affairs (2nd edn.), London MDCCLXXII; pp.194-5.
 42. Such investment may be viewed against the estimated Dutch investment of Rs.50,000 in Edwards' Report 1676. (Sec. 2.1 of this dissertation).
 43. Malda Factory Record (IOR) quoted in Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.138.
 44. P.J. Marshall - The East Indian Fortunes, the British in Bengal in the Eighteenth century, London 1976; p.29.
 45. Muslin pieces (10 yds. x 1¼ yds.) which cost Rs.6 to 9 earlier had to be bought at Rs.9 to 15 when the English entered the market and increased competition.
Sushil Chaudhury - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.202.
 46. Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Ibid.; p.104.
 47. Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Ibid.; p.133.
 48. Hugli Factory Records (IOR) quoted in Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Ibid.; p.135.

49. Job Charnok was the chief of Kashimbazar factory in 1680's. Complaints reached Hedges that he took 2 per cent from the weavers for pricing their goods and also bought from them sometimes 5-7 per cent less than the full official value. The allegation was also substantially proved.

Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.181.

50. C.J. Hamilton - The Trade Relations between England and India, Delhi 1975; p.52.

51. Despatch Books (IOR) quoted in Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.201.

52. Total claim for compensation amounted to over Rs.66 lakhs.

J.H.T. Walsh - A History of Murshidabad District, London 1902; p.4.

53. C.R. Wilson - Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.118.

54. J.H.T. Walsh - A History of Murshidabad, Op.cit.; pp.4-5.

55. Sushil Chaudhuri - Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.76.

56. For the statutes of 1700 and 1720 :

Bal Krishna - Commercial Relations between India and England, Op.cit.; p.259, Appendix A.

G.W. Southgate - English Economic History, London 1960; pp.127-8. and

F.P. Robinson - The Trade of the East India Company (1709-1813), Cambridge 1912; p.140.

Chapter III

From Manufacturing to Raw Silk

3.1 The Perspective :

(a) Strength of the Company

The East India Company's efforts to establish duty-free and unmolested trade were aimed at achieving a monopoly power while their silk business received temporary shocks in the hands of the nawab of Bengal even during the first two decades of the eighteenth century. In 1715, in spite of permission granted by Farruksiyar to the company to carry on their silk trade, Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan of Murshidabad was putting serious obstacles to such trade at Kashimbazar, Dacca, Malda, Patna etc.¹ The nawab was considered by the English as jealous of the growing powers of the company in Bengal. But, subsequently as a result of successful treatment of the nawab in his critical illness by William Hamilton, a surgeon of the company Murshid Kuli Khan granted a farman in 1717 empowering the company to carry on trade duty-free against annual payment of Rs.3000 at the Hoogly Exchequer. Company's goods in transit were also exempted from being stopped or examined by the officers of the government. This farman opened the first steps to unqualified rights of trade to the English in Bengal; it enabled them not merely to outdistance their European competitors in commercial enterprise, but also to defy the authority of the government of the country whose prosperity began to be increasingly dependent on the trade of

the company. "Forty years later, the vindication of the terms of the farman formed one of the grounds by which Clive justified his march against Siraj-ud-daula."²

Several other parwanas to facilitate the English trade were also passed; and the farman along with the parwanas proved to be of great stimulus to company's trade. To make the best use of the vast advantages gained from the Nawab, the company's servants took to inland trading in salt and other articles. Conscious of their military strength, they made improper use of the dastaks (exempting them from paying duties on merchandise for the purpose of external trade only) and carried on duty-free internal trade. Since the Indian merchants were not exempted from the duties, this unequal and unfair competition tended to give the company and its servants a virtual monopoly in the trade of the commodities they liked.

During the following years it was rather an oppression by the English the complaints of which reached Bengal darbar. Fault finding on both sides continued on matters like slavery, imprisonment of soldiers, allegations on private trade and various others. Distressing messages from all centres of trade, particularly from Dacca and Malda, were constantly pouring in regarding harsh treatment of the Englishmen. For example,

"A party of Englishmen conducting some boats in Malda river had a quarrel with a chauki, killed two of the chauki men and wounded a third. One dead body was brought to Murshidabad."³

The nawab was outraged, but now the question of security of the state and commerce of the English became increasingly interlinked.

In the mean time the centre of gravity of Company's commercial policy which had already moved from Surat to Madras further moved to Bengal in the early years of 18th century. On the other hand, there was a rapid increase in the financial and political strength of the Company in England from 1720's onwards.

The battle of Palashi (1757) had far reaching effects on the course of political and economic history of Bengal, since the authority of the native ruler ~~was~~ eclipsed under the dominant influence of the East India Company. Again the grant of diwani rights in 1765 brought the economy of Bengal under direct control of the company. It should be noted that 1757 and 1765 coincide with the early years of industrial revolution in England. Company's political and economic supremacy could now be fully exercised as the growing factories of England demanded. The most important principle behind trade policy was that trade should be in general

subservience to the interests of the 'home industries'. The course of English commerce in Bengal, Company's attitude towards Bengal handicrafts and the fate of Bengal artisans were all shaped by the decisive force - colonialization of trade.

(b) Economic Transition

Prior to the emergence of a colonial relationship Bengal earned a trade surplus, because she exported goods for bullions. Roughly between 1720-60 the foreign trade of Bengal underwent a phenomenal increase and bullion imported by the East India Company and other European companies poured in to the Royal mints of this country. Trade generated an increase in money supply, economic activity, output and employment.⁴ A marked increase in the production of raw silk and silk textiles along the general trend is also observed. But, with the extension of colonial pattern of trade, the surplus was gone, and from 1758 onwards the East India Company had not imported any bullion into Bengal.⁵ It is precisely from such date that the process of transition started in the silk industry of Malda.

A general conversion of the Indian economy through a rapid decline of her traditional industries was experienced later, - during the first half of the 19th century. On the one hand, some of the contemporary writers in England cited the decline of Indian handicrafts as a near-perfect example of the newly developing theory of comparative costs; on the

other hand, nationalist historians of India noted this as the exploitation of the country by the economic system of the imperial power. Indian export-import trend during the first half of the 19th century demonstrates conclusively that India now stood in the position of a buyer whose traditional products were being pushed out of both foreign and domestic markets by the factory-products of England. Between 1814-15 and 1854-55 Indian imports expanded over 10 times while her exports expanded just under 3 times.⁶

But, the effects of the so called industrial revolution in England began to be felt on Bengal's silk industry since the last decades of the 18th century : British rule in India had a marked impact on the volume, variety and organisation of raw silk production in Bengal; but it crushed her craftsmanship in silk textiles. It should be noted here that the transition in the silk industry of Malda can not be analysed prima facie as a general destruction of cottage industries; because aggregate value of output increased while the regional economy had to specialize in raw silk production alone. But, in the process, Malda's specialization in raw silk production occurred (late 18th century) much earlier than a general destruction of Indian cottage industries. Malda's ~~transition destruction of Indian cottage industries. Malda's~~ transition was ahead of the general transition of the Indian economy.

At the grant of diwani, the company obtained revenue administration of Bengal; and this directly had two bearings on the manufacture of silk : (i) the land policy of the company became closely related to the investment policy in silk, because silk production is agriculture-based; (ii) it was the policy of the Court to bring revenues to England in the form of goods of which raw silk formed a large part. This they felt should also serve the national interest of England in furnishing raw materials for the silk textile industry. Their policy, therefore, was to encourage production of raw silk in Bengal. Also as a result of company's monopoly, Bengal's trade in silk piece goods with the rest of India and overseas through other merchants declined steadily.

For the mass of the population in Bengal, the change from Mughal to company rule was felt through revenue administration, but for certain sections of artisans the experience was more complicated. ^{Not} ~~But~~ only did the export of raw materials pave the way for the eventual destruction of weaving and other handicrafts in the next century, but a direct measure that ensued from the profit motive was that the company started silk reeling in its own aurungs. This clearly indicated larger demand for better raw silk although they continued to purchase inferior raw silk.⁷ To the extent that silk reeling was conducted in company's aurungs the former weavers had to join them as workers or wage earners. Scope for such alternative employment was, of

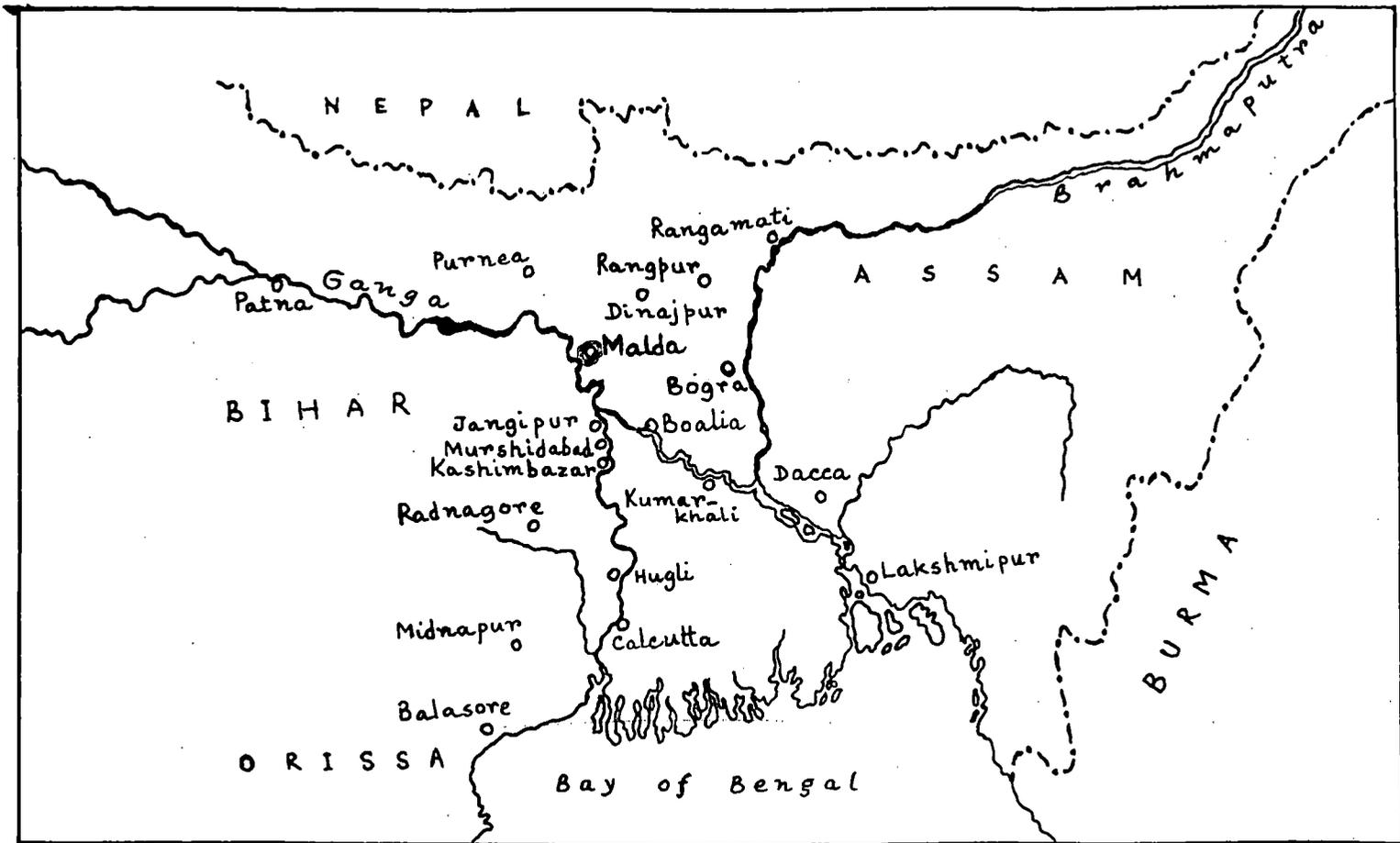
course, severely limited as compared to the huge unemployment of weavers. The decay of the weaving branch also brought about a depressing state of poverty for those who remained in employment in the silk industry. On the other hand, since the company claimed a right over the artisans and weavers, impact of changes in the pattern of export trade was felt in the relationship of the producers with their market and in their life and working conditions. The artisans felt that the traditional relations had been broken up, but there was little evidence of a progressive commercial management replacing this; instead the company relied on rural intermediaries for implementing its resolutions. There were obvious incentives, the banias were usually able to win a share of power and profits. By serving the company's interests and operating under its control the rural hierarchy established itself in the focus of power. Native merchants could prosper only by seeking the assistance of the new rulers. British trade on the other hand still depended on Indian skill and Indian capital. The master-bania relationship provided a framework within which these needs could be met. After 1793 many banias purchased zamindary and played a dual role as the collaborator.

3.2 Malda silk up to Palashi :

In the fifty years preceding Palashi, some clear trends are visible in the silk industry of Malda. The interest of the Company was persistent in the investment in silk

textiles; and in Malda up to 1760 there is no evidence of a decline in the silk textile industry or extension of sericulture and raw silk production at the cost of the weaving branch. Although the protective laws in England had no severe effect on silk weaving, there is no denying of the fact that the statutes compelled the Company to enhance their investment in the alternative of raw silk, which slowed down the expansion of the silk weaving industry.

Two remarkable features of the period should be noted. First, this was a period of extension of company's business in the areas surrounding Malda, raw silk gradually gaining relative importance. The Company encouraged cultivation of mulberry, rearing operations and raw silk production to make sericulture gradually the foremost industry of the region. Secondly, this was a period of consolidation of the system of dadni. Along with these, there was a third trend, as in elsewhere of Bengal, - the extension of private trade by the servants of the company. Initially the extension of private trade found its way into inland trade. The abuse of company's dastaks in the interest of private trade meant a loss of revenue for the nawab at Murshidabad, and he conveyed his right resentment to the Bengal Council. The Court of Directors in 1736 attempted to put an end to foul practices with the dastaks; but by this time private trade as a source of gain both to the company and its servants had firmly established itself in the business of the factories and paved the way for private fortunes to be made by the company's



MAP III
IMPORTANT SILK MANUFACTURING CENTRES OF BENGAL IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

servants in the decades to come.

In Bengal cultivation of mulberry and production of raw silk were extended during the first half of the 18th century through new factories at Kumarkhali, Ghatal, Rampur-Boalia, Jangipur, Sardah, Lakshmipur and Rangpur. Of these, Rampur-Boalia and Sardah are adjacent to Malda.⁸ Sericulture was intensified in the silk producing areas of Dinajpur, which had already been annexed to Malda factory; Rangpur adjacent to Dinajpur was now brought under raw silk production, and it was further extended southward to Bogra. Silk from Rangpur and Bogra was of inferior quality; but that of Rampur-Boalia and Sardah was of superior quality and provision of raw silk gradually increased from these centres. The weavers' villages of northern Rajshahi had earlier come under the jurisdiction of Malda factory; now raw silk from Rampur-Boalia became famous in England for its use in the hat industry.

Among the factories in the Malda region from Rangpur to Rajshahi and Murshidabad there existed a good network of communication. On the one hand there were the rivers like the Ganga, Mahananda, Tangan, Atrai, Punarbhaha etc.; on the other hand there existed a triangular road link among the principal centres : Malda, Dinajpur and Rampur-Boalia, the last one having secondary road links with Natore and Sardah. The condition of roads were not good enough on all the stretches, but road traffic increased along with

increase in company's investment or provision. Again the ferry from Godagarighat to Lalgolaghat on the Murshidabad side across the Ganga made the road and river links to Kashimbazar and Jangipur connected to the triangle. The easy link between Malda and Calcutta was undoubtedly the Mahananda and the Ganga. Such a communication net work within the Malda region and its good connection with Calcutta could be of immense importance to the company in fostering raw silk production over such a wide area around Malda. Perhaps for geographical and other reasons manufacture of raw silk was not extended to other parts of the Purnea district.

In spite of the extension of sericulture, the regional economy was becoming ill-balanced through the evolution of both the contract and agency systems. Wealth was confined to the hands of a small minority who lacked in both enterprise and the ability to develop the potential resources. This is the aspect of consolidation of the dadni system in Malda region. The initial problem of the company here in developing a multitiered broker system based on advances link could now be overcome, and the indigenous dadan merchants could now play their pivotal role in the flow of capital (or of goods in the reverse) to dalals and pycars ultimately reaching the weavers rearers or reelers. In such flow of 'investment' from the company's servants to the basic producer, there existed the element of contract which ensured supply to the company and intermediate profit to the middle-

men. The weavers and sericulturists were now completely alienated from the actual buyer, and it was the pycar who established direct or immediate linkage with the primary producer. The pycar got an expanded opportunity to acquire commercial capital and to subject the primary producer to its dictates. From social point of view the class of pycars originated from middle merchants or petty traders, the upper strata of the peasantry and often the members of the Mughal official class in the village. The strength of the pycars grew on and within a few decades their role was transformed into trader-cum-money lender and even big land-holders. When the pycars firmly established themselves in the rural society sources of their financial strength were as varied as : (i) official commission, (ii) margin of profit between the price paid to the artisan and price taken from the merchant/company, (iii) element of usury in the advance given, (iv) weight and batta, (v) manipulation which pycar used in paying advances in kind, (vi) pycar's right to collect the waste silk. The role of the pycars was specially strengthened afterwards in 1788 when the company's association with the dalals for procurement of silk piece-goods and raw silk ended.

On the other hand, procurement of silk and silk goods by the company through this contract system was coming under stress towards the middle of the 18th century. Investment targets set by the Court remained often unfulfilled at Malda and other centres because of certain disputes between the

company and the dalal merchants. In 1680's the dalal merchants mainly worked with their own capital; gradually, advance payment to them against the contracts became a more general practice. In the beginning of the 18th century the company was usually paying 80 per cent of the purchase price in advance to these merchants. In spite of many deductions made on delivery, the contract price for silk was an object of intense bargaining between the merchants and the company. It is also on record that in the 1720s and 30s the English officials emphasized their inability to control the silk-market of the whole of Malda region. As the strength of the dalals increased, in early 1750's, they demanded 86 per cent, which the company was reluctant to pay. It did not allow such conflict to injure trade and from 1753 the contract system of procurement through native merchants was gradually altered to the agency system of making advances and obtaining goods through the gomastahs.⁹ In some cases, when the agency system failed to establish the link between the factory and the producers through gomastahs, assistance from additional intermediaries like the pycars or merchants were called for. Operations at Malda were virtually managed by both salaried officers and merchants till early 1780's. The agency system also called for an elaborate hierarchy of factory officers; and such official organisation for management of company's business was further systematised with the setting up of the Board of Trade in 1774 for management of company's mercantile operations in Bengal.

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The conflict between the merchants and the factors at Malda during 1750's could be a pressure tactics on the part of the native merchants. Because, the Maratha invasion of Bengal during the latter half of the reign of Ali Vardi Khan (1748-56) became a serious menace to company's silk trade at Kashimbazar. "We find from the records of 1751 that the dearness of raw silk and silk piece goods for some time past is owing to the Marhattas constantly entering Bengal, plundering and burning people's houses and destroying the chief aurungs from whence the workmen have fled to distant parts."¹⁰ The Marathas did not cross the Ganga and hence Malda region was unaffected by the plunder. It is likely that some of the fleeing artisans came to the areas adjoining the factory at Malda; because alternative employment was possible here. But, there is no clear evidence of such a migration while it has been established that such artisans fled across the Ganga and sought refuge at Rampur-Boalia.¹¹ A large part of the refugees were domiciled to this side of the river : By crossing the river they could escape the Maratha raids, but could by no means escape the English onslaught in the decades to come. This migration was of no special significance to Malda-Rampur area, only that the Court, as a result of the Maratha incursions, asked their servants to encourage cocoon rearing and silk winding eastward of the Padma - "in places of security and tranquility."¹²

3.3 Trend after Palashi :

(a) Extension of investment in raw silk

In a letter from the Bengal Council at Fort William to the Court of Directors dated 10 January 1758 a return of investment at the eleven aurungs was sent; and Malda topped the list with the highest investment of more than Rs.3.5 lakhs.¹³ In a similar letter to the Court dated 12 November 1761 annual investment at Malda has been mentioned as Rs.5 lakhs and above. The target for such an escalation of Malda investment after Palashi was raw silk procurement; because from this period the Court continuously reminded the Council of the importance of increasing provision of raw silk. It was also the directive of the Court that such extension of raw silk production should be made at the cost of weaving of silk cloth. A few examples can be cited from these excerpts¹⁴:

- (i) Letter from the Court, 22 February 1764,
Para 26 - "... extend the provision of raw silk as much as possible."
- (ii) Letter from the Court, 15 February 1765,
Para 111 - "There being a great demand for home consumption, and we being willing to contribute as far as lays in our power to encourage so useful and national a manufacture, we would have you if the situation of your finances will possibly admit of it, comply with the orders in the list of

investments as nearly as you can ..."

(iii) Letter from the Court, 17 March 1769, -
the Court "... desired that the manufacture of raw silk should be encouraged and that of silk fabrics be discouraged."

(iv) In 1768 the Court advised the government that it was to the increase in raw silk that they looked chiefly for the means of bringing home their surplus revenue, the importation being a national benefit.

The Council in its turn informed the Court in 1770 that cultivation of mulberry and extension of investment in raw silk had become the object of their constant attention. Already in 1767 Governor H. Verelst urged the zamindars of Bengal to give all possible encouragement to the cultivation of mulberry. The Committee of Circuit in 1770 also recommended certain rent concessions to encourage mulberry cultivation, and a few such concessions were attempted in 1772.¹⁵

To keep pace with such desires of the Court and to increase the provision of raw silk at Malda where falling quality was reported, the Council also effected some administrative reshuffle in the commercial residency. Attempts were made to appoint the most efficient servants of the company at Malda. In November 1761 George Gray was appointed the Commercial Resident because the Council felt it necessary to

appoint one senior servant there on account of its great distance from the Presidency and the great risk of so large a sum of money in the hands of gomastahs.¹⁶ Later on, Mr. Gray was transferred to Kashimbazar and Richard Barwell along with an assistant Mr. William Barton were appointed there, which was judged necessary on account of "the extent of business at the factory". Malda provision of goods under the direction of Mr. Barwell turned out extremely good and the Court was highly satisfied with his management of business at Malda.¹⁷

In 1763 the company was in a temporary trouble with Kashem Ali Khan which led to the imprisonment of some members of Kashimbazar residency. It was apprehended in September 1763 that investment would suffer on this occasion at Calcutta, Kashimbazar, Malda and Patna, but in December 1763 it was found that the major parts of the goods would be recovered at Kashimbazar and Malda. Mr. Charles Goring was at that time temporarily employed to look after investments at both Kashimbazar and Malda. Along with the appointment, the Council published a strict order forbidding the purchase of any article by private merchants at both the centres.¹⁸ In fact, the company was concerned with the prohibition of private trade in silk to prevent the supplies of the company being adversely affected in the aurungs or centres from which silk was provided. In 1770 the Court wrote to the Council, "No private trader be permitted to purchase silk of any kind

or quality whatever at any auring from whence our investment is supplied; but that all such private traders be compelled to seek other aurungs not in any degree appropriated to our service, and from such aurungs only all silk for private trade must be procured." In reply to such a directive it was pointed out by the Council that virtually no such place existed where company's investment was not carried on.¹⁹ *

The Governor and the Council while loyally executing the orders of their Directors for a larger supply of raw silk, sounded a note of warning against the exclusion of private traders from silk business. This protest was not destined to the protection of the native merchants, but was largely influenced by the group interest of the English traders and company's servants engaged in private trade. Their argument before the Court was that the entire produce would not be taken over by the company alone and hence, for the effective culture of mulberry, the surplus must be taken off by private trade.²⁰ The company eager to despatch Bengal resources to home, however, allowed private trade in silk by company's servants and English traders only, subject to certain regulations while occasional strictures continued. Intention of the company to expand raw silk production was thus perfectly synchronised with not only discouraging silk weaving but also eliminating the native traders from silk trade. Such exclusion of the native traders is significant in view of the fact that in 1720's and 1730' the officials of the company at Malda (and other places in North Bengal)

* The Residents were also instructed to discontinue the practice of bringing privately purchased goods to the factory under the pretext of examination.

continued to emphasize their inability to control the silk market and prices.²¹

Still silk piece goods were not yet completely omitted from the purchase list. The Council in 1762 sent one chest of silk piece goods in each ship for trial at several markets in Europe : These articles were sent in their natural colours so that they could be dyed to suitable colours in England. Similarly in the list of species of goods and places of their procurement attached to Court's order in 1770, we find the mention of Maldahi Cossaes, a variety of mixed stuff.²²

(b) Organisation of silk trade

In 1770 Malda factory at English Bazar was fixed upon for a Commercial Residency; the new residency house was built by Mr. Thomas Henschman, which was strongly fortified and which still exists today to house the district collectorate. The building turned into a silk manufactory to accommodate both the warehouse and company's filature. Hunter observed that the years between 1760-90 were a period of great prosperity and that rearing of silk worms and manufacturing of silk fabrics became the general occupation of nearly all classes of people on both banks of the Mahananda in the neighbourhood.²³ Hunter has over-simplified his observations about this era of prosperity and also the era of decline of the industry with the closure of company's trade; but his description is a document to show widespread extension of sericultural operations around the fortified settlement of

the commercial residency in the 60's, 70's, and the 80's of the 18th century.

The commercial resident had the key role to play in the long chain of activities that produced annual investment. The resident purchased through gomastahs materials for the filature as well as manufactured raw silk and fabrics. Now Malda had several satellite factories in Hurrial, Buddaul, Jagannathpore etc.; but grading and pricing were usually held at the central aurang at the responsibility of the commercial resident. According to Board of Trade Proceedings, the flowering of cloths procured at the subfactories were also done at Malda aurang. At Malda the commercial resident had six to seven officers to help him in grading raw silk and the piece goods, apart from other staff to supervise the manufactory, the gomastahs and the subordinate staff like peons etc. Goods had to be sent to Calcutta for final grading under the supervision of the Export Warehouse keeper. The perplexing issues in which a resident was involved as the supreme authority in investment of the locality were :

- (i) treatment of the weavers and other workmen by the company's agents,
- (ii) relationship between the resident and the foreign traders,
- (iii) conflict of interest between the Resident (representing company's commercial interest) and the Revenue Collector (representing the political and administrative aspects of the rule).

Further reference to these issues will be made at suitable places in this chapter.

Between 1772 and 1793 three important aspects of company's operation had their direct implications to the functions of the commercial resident :

(a) By orders of the Court, in 1774 the Board of Trade was formed, which allocated funds to the residents and gave them the authorisation to draw on the Revenue Treasury of the district for the money they needed. (This Board was replaced by another Board in 1786).

(b) During these years a coherent legal system was evolved to formalize among other things the relationship between the manufacturers and the company.²⁴

(c) In 1776 the privilege of private trade in extensive terms was confirmed to the servants of the company.

In the elaborate organisation of investment in silk, the silk reeling industry presented certain special features which deserve notice. It is particularly striking that while cotton-spinning was wholly carried on by independent workers in their cottage, much of the silk winding was done in company's manufactories - in the aurangs - by hired workmen employed for the purpose. This aspect of the silk reeling industry has some resemblance with indigo manufacture by the company. At Malda there were several filatures in the head factory²⁵ of English Bazar and a large quantity of ~~raw~~^{raw} silk was also produced for the company at the hired private filatures. In addition to such manufactories, raw silk was

purchased by the gomastahs from individual chassars (rearer-cum-reeler). The raw materials, i.e. cocoons, for the filatures were procured through pycars because they had direct link with the chassars from village to village.²⁶ The pycars made advances to the cultivators of mulberry and rearers of silk worms. The accounts of the pycar with the company used to be settled for each bandh, but not until such cocoons of the bandh had been wound into silk when the resident proposed such price as he judged reasonable. This made the pycars quality-conscious. There are instances that the chassars preferred to sell raw silk than the cocoons; hence the pycars had to overcome such resistance with social influence and timely advance much required by the poor villagers. Strength of the pycars was increasing, because, the role of pycars as both financier to the chassars and agent of the company in running its trade (both official and of the servants) became crucial in maintaining the commercial exploitation of agriculture. The pycar rose above his status of a petty broker having a small capital. The role of the pycars was further reinforced in 1788 when the company wanted to eliminate the dalals from the chain of procurement. The filatures, on the other hand, gave an opportunity for the company to exercise greater control over the production and marketing of raw silk.

Generally, uniform monthly or weekly wages were paid for the workmen in company's filatures; but at Malda (and

also at Ganutia) the reelers were divided into classes and paid according to merit.²⁷ The system might have done something to improve efficiency of labourers and quality of silk at Malda factory; but through the use of wage differentials the company started exploiting child labour. Because, at the ^{basins} ~~basie~~ of the filature the Company used to employ adults as katni (who controls the thread) and boys as pakdar (who winds the reel). It is ironical to note that the same practice is often noticed in the reeling establishments of the mahajans even today. The scope for independent earning by the reelers was gradually narrowing down in the face of company's pressure, and the chassars were gradually being confined to cultivation of mulberry and rearing of cocoon only. In this regard the company adopted a policy of compulsion to be exercised on the reelers. As early as in 1757 Fort William framed regulations on the artisan and his wages and introduced a kind of taxation; - every artificier was required to take a license from the zamindar for the use of his trade within the company's jurisdiction; and the zamindar had to maintain records of all kinds of wage-rates and license fees. Such regulations appear to be more a fiscal measure than a plan for the regulations of industrial relations or choice of profession. We are told by Mr. Long in his "Selections from Unpublished Records of the Government" that the regulations wanted to incorporate all workers into respective bodies and the plan was substantially the same as followed in old village communities in India.²⁸ But it should also be noted that

(i) the role of the zamindar under the British rule had altered, (ii) against the license fee and the provision of penalty no attempt had ever been found in company's regulations to reorganise the rural industries into newer and more consistent system favouring growth, (iii) under the changed circumstances, the model of village community was unworkable. Nevertheless, the system proved to be inadequate in conditions of company's shift of policy towards production at the aurang; and hence, it now resorted to direct compulsion which made fiscal measures redundant. In a general letter to Bengal Council dated 17 March 1769 the Court not only expressed its highest preference for extending raw silk but also recommended the payment of higher wages to winders so that they left their own method of winding in their homes and came to work in company's filature under the direction of its own experts. Winders of silk were, however, unwilling to join the company as wage earners; because they combined reeling with rearing in their homes. The Court advised the use of authority to compel the winders to work in company's filature if the offer of higher wages failed. At the same time to fulfil the need for larger raw materials suggestion for higher cocoon prices was made.²⁹ The British explanation to the practice of compulsion is that the Directors made an attempt to facilitate their investment by increasing consumption of Bengal silk at the expense of Italian silk.

(c) Weavers starve

We have noted in 3.3(a) that with a shift in company's

trade policy and particularly after 1765, silk weaving industry was on the decay without any immediate chance of revival. The weavers were sometimes forced to work as winders; but very few could join the filatures. Unemployment among the weavers was widespread and some even fled to get rid of the company's pressure. Since occupations of agriculturists and weavers were blended together, many of the weavers exchanged the plough for the shuttle and created excess pressure on land. Reports of starving weavers were available. In view of all these, "uncommon scarcity of weavers" was witnessed in all factories and aurangs as reported by Verelst, the Governor in 1767, but still Kashimbazar and Malda were the two principal centres of silk weaving. Curiously enough he could not account for the scarcity and noted that the scarcity was more acute in connection with finding weavers for the supply of company's investment.

Verelst also reported that "a great number of the weavers had deserted the profession to seek for subsistence from a less precarious calling."³⁰ For those who were in employment the situation was nonetheless gloomy and hardpressing. The weavers were forced to accept lower prices than prevailing in the market;³¹ and a recognised practice was that interest upon advances to weavers would be returned in the shape of a further slice off the purchasing price. This does not, however, mean that the cocoon growers or winders were in a much better position. The pycar forced the chassar to accept 'his own price'; and with the growing economic and social

strength of the pycar, the rearers were subdued to accept a below-subsistence level of living. On the other hand, with the company's practice of compulsion, there was no reason for the winders' remuneration to be fair enough; the average monthly remuneration of a winder in company's filature was Rs.0 - Annas 12 - Pies 3. Payments were made on the basis of daily work, and Prof. N.K. Sinha has estimated this average monthly earning of the winder in company's filature. He has also shown the wage differential and estimated that a sardar having generally 15 winders under his charge earned Rs.2-9-3 per month. Company's cost of winding one maund of raw silk (40 seers) on account of payment to winders and other workmen varied between Rs.35 and Rs.40-15-0 in the factories of Rajshahi-Malda region.³² Further explanation to the oppression on artisans ^{has} ~~have~~ been made in Sec. 3.5 below.

(d) Company as the revenue collector

After 1765 it was essentially as revenue collectors that the English entered into actual occupation of the country and it was the exigencies of the revenue service that compelled them to elaborate a system of government. Company's revenue administration was, however, closely related to their primary preoccupation with trade and investment. The terms of the Committee of Circuit appointed in 1772 were concerned with the high problems of administration of revenue and justice; but they also had interest in company's commercial affairs. At Kashimbazar, for instance, they took into consideration the subject of the decline in the silk investment;

and Samuel Middleton was placed in charge of the Kashimbazar factory, who was to negotiate the revenue affairs of Rajshahi as well. Richard Phipps, Superintendent of Rangpur filature was to be entrusted with the charge of revenue collections in Goraghat and Idrakpur under the superintendence of the collector at Rangpur. In regard to Malda, it was determined that "the districts which lye contiguous to Maulda, and in which the Resident represents that a number of weavers and other dependents of the Factory reside, shall be formed into a collection, and put under the Resident of the Maulda Factory, which will not only contribute to promote the success of the investment, but also prove a fund for supplying its resources."³³ The arrangements for a mixture of commercial with governing occupations were systematised in the establishment of the Board of Trade in 1774.

But the Revenue administration system posed two problems for the investment in silk. First, company's policy of securing largest possible revenue from land resulted into higher collection, but the surplus of wealth that used to remain with the local authorities now began to flow to Calcutta, the central treasury of the company. Mr. Ducarel, the Collector of Purnea wrote to Hastings on 25 December 1772 :

"Formerly a large part of the money collected here was spent on the spot and the Revenue of the country principally centering in Moorshedabad ... but from the time that the wealth and commerce of the country has been by degrees

transferred to Clacutta this district by its great distance in common with all the upperpart of the province has suffered in its Revenue as Calcutta lands and those in that neighbourhood have improved."³⁴

The second problem was more striking, which was simply a clash between the revenue and commercial interests of the company. Records show that there was a complaint from the commercial side that the revenue collectors' treatment of the growers of silk harmed investment in silk. The Court's policy was to offer proper incentives in the form of lower rents (for cultivation of mulberry) and exemption from taxes (for production of raw silk), while the growers of silk were actually charged with high rents as is evident from the proceedings of Committee of Circuit when it made a particular inquiry into the causes of the rise in price of silk. A good example of such conflicting interests can be cited in the tussle in early 1780's between the Commercial Resident of Malda and the Revenue Collectors of Dinajpur and Rangpur. The Resident's profit depended on low price of goods purchased as well as low rents; hence he argued before the Council that the disorder sanctioned by the collector, like beating up the weavers and ryots for rent, imprisoning them or driving them out of their houses etc., were ruining the economy of Bengal. On the other hand, the Collector, whose gain lied in high rent and high prices, argued : 'Caring only for profit and having impoverished the peasants through low prices, the ruin was brought about and the peasants were encouraged to defy the tax-collector."³⁵

Another instance of such a type of conflict affecting the silk winders and company's investment may be cited from Rangpur in 1778. Prior to 1769 the zamindars "used to flog" the winders as they did other ryots to enforce the payment of their rent. Silk winders were increasing in number every year, and the Committee of Circuit in 1772 allowed certain adjustment for them. The winders availed themselves of their position as workers of the company, applied for further exemption and by threats of desertion from the factory tried to relieve themselves of coercion by the zamindar. Curling wrote to Hastings, "If the zamindars take common methods of recovering the revenue, the silk factory is immediately deserted and the winding put a stop to." The zamindars made a petition and Curling sought the sanction of some regulations from Hastings to prevent workmen from deserting company's factory and thereby a decrease in company's investment. Hastings on 22 May 1778 proclaimed an abolition of the exemption allowed to the winders, authorised the zamindars to levy same rate of rent from the winders and other ryots, and directed not to claim any arrear from the winders. At the same time he advised a rise in the wages at the aurangs. The incident is a very important document of a conscious resistance on the part of the poor winders; but the Governor and the Board of Trade had to consider their relation both with the zamindars and the nacauds.³⁶ They had to decide in favour of revenue aspect; because the villagers were all pretending to be nacauds only to get rid of rent payment. The Governor

invariably thought that coercion could be applied to the winders if necessary.

(e) Problems of price and quality

Some seasonal variation in the price of raw silk has always been experienced depending on the varying price and quality of cocoons. But company's emphasis on raw silk now brought with it rapidly increasing price of the material.³⁷ Between 1660's and 1735 average rate of annual rise in raw silk price was 1.4 per cent while between 1735 and 1753 it became 3.8 per cent. From early 1770 the Bengal Council reported to the Court that price of silk was rising steadily and would rise still more. In 1773-74 the rate of increase exceeded 60 per cent as the price of filature silk reached Rs.14-8 annas per seer. Such a price trend could be attributed to an increase in demand; but the servants of the company ascribed this to the reversion to the old system of buying through the native merchants and the famine of 1770 which took a heavy toll of the growers. However, in October 1775 the Board of Trade informed the Court of the falling price. This ~~The~~ reveals the impact of demand conditions in England on the raw silk price of Bengal; because, since the later years of 1770s the Court followed a policy of reducing temporarily the purchase of Bengal raw silk. This had an impact not only on silk price but also on the prospect of qualitative improvement of winding silk. Depressed price of 1780s and price fluctuations during 1790s were also results of fluctuation in demand for raw silk in England. It is necessary

to note the obvious effect of such price-fluctuation on actual growers.

Falling quality of raw silk was another vexed question for the Bengal Council since the mid-18th century. Industrialization in England called for better quality raw silk, and establishment of filatures was a move in the direction of meeting such demand. The problem of quality boiled down to the question of technology since the traders and manufactures of silk goods in England were of the opinion that Bengal silk could replace Italian silk in the English market, if reeled in the same manner. The Court in its letter to the Council (dt. 31 January 1770) also transmitted the same notion that the Italian method of reeling would "render it easier to wind and to work with less waste and that with such advantages it would sell at a much higher price than at present." Prior to this in 1757, the Court sent Richard Wilder to Kashimbazar to examine the causes of defective quality of raw silk. He set the winding process to some improvement and continued to stay in India till his death in 1761.

Complaint of a deterioration in the quality of Malda silk came from the Court as early as in 1761. One of the reasons behind the appointment of George Gray, a senior servant of the company, was to look after the quality of raw silk as the commercial resident. Similarly in 1770 at the time of appointing Mr. Bathoe to the same post the

Council was concerned with the quality aspect. "As the Maulda investment had apparently decreased in quality since it had been under the direction of the gomastahs ... And Mr. Bathoe having been so strongly recommended by you for his knowledge in the aurung business and having discharged the office of Sub-Export Warehouse Keeper to our entire satisfaction, we appoint him to act as Resident at Maulda, having in this appointment a view towards your interest by putting it into such capable hands."³⁸ The fall in quality was a symptom of degeneration, and mere individual supervision in the capacity of a resident was no solution. Such a fall in quality was not unique for Malda, and the Bengal Council made experiments with seeking assistance from instructors brought from Europe as well as with introduction of different variety of worms. In such a bid for improvement in raw silk production the first batch of Italian reelers from Novi were brought to Bengal in 1770 and were appointed in different factories under the general superintendence of James Wiss, Pickering Robinson and William Aubert. Among the three teams with three Superintendents, two were posted in Malda-Rajshahi-Rangpur area. Introduction of superior Chinese cocoons and subsequent attempts to introduce Chinese mulberry failed; but silk prepared after the Italian method reached England in 1772. The new method was extended and Wiss "was in a position to report in 1783 that Italian Spinners were no longer wanted in Bengal."³⁹ Superintendents were, however, appointed to important

factories producing filature raw silk. From the proceedings of the Board of Trade (Commercial) dated 7th January 1783 it is known that James Frushad was appointed the Superintendent of Malda aurung in that year. It is also observed from the proceedings that no cost reduction could be achieved through the attempted technological improvement.

During this period the company frequently altered their system of purchase. After 1774, company's servants themselves became contractors for the supply of raw silk; silk trade was opened to individuals in 1783; it was again placed in the hands of company's officers in 1785, only to revive the agency system in 1787; and so on. Such changes in the method of purchase had to be experimented with, because the Court noticed that Bengal silk was getting costlier than Italian silk although Bengal labour was much cheaper than that in Italy. The real explanation to such an observation might be sought in the activities of company's servants, the collusive or fraudulent contracts and above all the dependence on a pre-capitalistic mode of acquiring raw materials. Through all the changes in the system of purchase, the role of the pycars could not be eliminated, rather their position was confirmed in course of time.

(f) Problem of silver

In 1771 sicca rupee was made the standard currency, and towards the close of the 18th century Malda factory had a special problem - shortage of silver coins for investment.

During the days of subscription investment, Residents often reported that delivery of large quantities of silk was disturbed by the delay of advances beyond the expected period; but now the disturbance came in the shape of shortage of a particular specie. The Board of Revenue and the government were facing a problem of general shortage of silver; on the other hand, timely and proper realization of investment depended not only upon large advances during the early months of the year, but also paying the artisans and pycars with silver. Generally they wanted payment entirely in silver at the end of collections and for the remainder of the year indiscriminately in gold and silver. Government tried to control the proportion of different coins one Resident was entitled to receive, by the Regulations of 13th July 1795. Since by the simultaneous arrangement of the Board of Revenue the Resident of Malda was liable to draw bills for assignment from the Collector of Dinajpur, the Resident faced an additional problem regarding getting right currency at the right moment to ensure timely investment. A specific example may be given from the long correspondence over the issue in 1796 among the Resident, the Collector, the Board of Trade, the Revenue Accountant etc.⁴⁰

Udney, the Resident of Malda, wrote to Morgan, the Acting Collector of Dinajpur on 4th April 1796 requesting him payment of Sicca Rs.83,972 in silver out of a total bill of S.Rs.1,37,000, because his treasury was "almost entirely destitute of silver", "the payment is calculated comfortable

to the orders of the Govt. dt. 13 July 1795", and because he was "extremely in want of money to carry on investment." Earlier in 1794 Udney was advised by the Board of Trade (on recommendation from the Accountant General, Board of Revenue) to exert endeavours to promote the circulation of gold and specify in advance to the collector (of Purnea then) the requirement of silver.⁴¹ Morgan in his reply was ready to pay only S.Rs.45,000 in silver. Udney was not in a position to receive the larger quantity of gold and was ready to wait till the next month for payment of the remainder in silver. As Morgan did not divulge from his decision, Udney had to refer the case to the Board of Trade; and it took a long involvement of the Revenue Accountant and even the Governor General to impress upon all concerned that the requirement of Udney was justified. The Governor General in Council finally authorised "to grant the Resident at Malda permission to exchange a portion of gold requisite to realize the remaining sum of S.Rs.38,972 required by him in silver for the purpose of investment." Similar difficulty with silver was also faced by the Hurrial factory situated between Malda and Rajshahi. Hurrial factory was disappointed by not receiving from the collector of Rajshahi ^{any} and portion of payment of the April (1796) assignment in silver; and for want of silver the business of that aurung had been entirely at a stand for some time.

In fact, the Regulations of 13th July 1795 empowered the collectors to purchase silver in the event of shortage in

their treasuries, but still they refused the Residents on the plea that large sums as reserve should not be kept in the custody of the out aurungs. Perhaps the experience of raids (1760-1790) was still fresh in the minds of the company authorities. It is also important to note, in the present context, that among the eight important factories, cash balance with Malda used to be very high. According to the Weekly Treasury Accounts dated 2 September 1794. Malda enjoyed the highest balance as follows :⁴²

	Gold mohurs	Half mohurs	Quarter mohurs	Silver S.;.-a-p	Total S.Rs.-a.p
Factory	65	...	401	50754-11-1	53393-11-1
Filature	15	6495- 2-10	6735- 2-10

The Residents on the other hand pressed for silver since the artisans persisted in ^{their} ~~their~~ refusal to accept gold, because silver coin was the key currency in circulation. In fact, the exchange of gold for silver could not be effected without a lose of time and labour and, in some cases, of value. Hence, the Collectors and the Revenue Accountant or the company authorities wanted to shift the burden on to the artisans via the commercial residents. The Board of Trade was finally convinced of Udney's observations that timely and proper realization of investment depended on large advances up to June of a year and during this period the Resident's treasury should contain at least 10/16th in silver. That rivalry from the French was there at Malda is not to be forgotten.

(g) Conflict with the French

By 1780 monopoly of the East India Company was virtually established in Bengal. Old rival the Dutch were out from Malda. Both the Dutch and the French were almost ousted from Bengal trade as well. But, for political reasons, trading rights of the French in India was recognised by the British in the treaty of 1786. Both before and after 1786 Malda became a scene of occasional conflict between the French and the company over the issue of silk trade. One reflection of the conflict was the opposition of Residents at Malda to the hoisting of a flag by the French at their places of business. After the agreement of 1786 the French were eager to send flags wherever they stationed agents; but the flag controversy was quite pronounced in 1770s also. Vigorous protests by residents like Bathoe, ^{Grant} ~~Grand~~ and Udney against the French flag have been recorded. In the language of Udney, "A flag imposes upon the natives and may convey the idea of some privilege, authority or respect. Used by the French where they were not allowed before it might naturally be used as a concession of greater influence and be capable of misapplication."⁴³ On similar grounds the Residents even obstructed at Malda the trade of the Armeni-
ans. In July 1787, ^{Sarkis} ~~Sarkis~~ Munassakar (an Armenian trader who came to Malda in 1762) made a petition to the Board of Trade to the effect that Udney was responsible for molesting, disgracing and injuring his dalal at Malda. The motive behind the action of the residents was simply one of estab-

lishing the company's supremacy. The residents also had their own reason to obstruct others' business; because the servants of the company earned profit in the capacity of private trader. Conflict between the French gomastahs and English Residents was also reported from Dacca, Santipur and Khirpai.

Business in the name of the French began in Malda in 1767 when a villager Kanai Sarkar came into contract with M. Chevalier to purchase cloth and silk as a contractor receiving commission. He provided goods through the merchants and dealers of Malda and also set up warehouses at Kaligaon and Mahanandapur. In both the places he engaged weavers, and hoisted French flag on his house just as the gomastahs of Englishmen did. In 1770, Bathoe the English Resident at Malda made Kanai Sarkar take down the flag telling him that he might carry on his business but should not hoist a flag.⁴⁴ In 1774 Kanai Sarkar ceased his operations and until 1784 the French did not send any gomastah for their trade. But after 1784 the friction with the French was no longer confined to the flag controversy; because by this time the servants of the company became the contractors of company's supply, and scope for their making a monopoly profit was enlarged.

The regulations of 1786 forbade any clandestine purchase of articles from company's weavers; but the French in a bid to procure quality products and to have a share of English trade, tried to carry on such surreptitious business.

It was alleged by the Commercial Resident at Malda that French agents went into remote villages where there was a public market and purchased from weavers for ready money cloths woven with advances received from the company. For obvious reasons, as we have noted earlier, the weavers became averse to work for the company : In view of the lower price offered by the company and growing unemployment the higher prices offered by the French tempted the weavers to snap their engagements. Initially the resident contractor tried to check these in two ways, - employing some native servants to block such transactions, and seeking redress from the court. These devices were not always considered sufficient, they regarded it as a matter of French invasion on the investment front and restricted the movement of French dalals as much as possible. In May 1787 Udney seized twenty pieces of cloth from the peon of the French gomastah at Malda; and similar interventions continued. Udney took an alarmist view by reporting that the French would sap the foundations of company's trade. When Udney sought action from the court, the French argued straightforward that the cloths seized were "contracted for claudenstinely no doubt but not fradulently"; - because, the very favourable terms of the French offer induced the weavers to supply surplus of their labour.⁴⁵ Udney proposed that the French should contract with 'uninitiated' weavers, i.e. weavers not covered by Englishmen. The French abused the English of exercising an 'indecent monopoly' with private interests. They claimed that either a number of good weavers be assigned to them at

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Malda or every company be left at liberty to contract freely with any weaver. Such a proposal for open competition was by no means acceptable to the Englishmen and they turned down the proposal by simply stating that the artisans and weavers were booked by company's servants through advances. The French really understood that they were competing with a monopolist company as well as with its servants engaged in private trade.

3.4 Silk as a source of private fortune :

(a) Individual motive

As early as in 1727 the Governor General of Bengal assured the Directors in London that every servant of the company was allowed the freedom to improve his fortune in any way that he would choose, either inland or by sea.⁴⁶ The monopoly of the company since the second half of the 18th century improved the position and opportunity of these servants. Their own private trade and company's investment were inextricably blended to their own advantage. Udney, the Commercial Resident at Malda argued that in this way more weavers and rearers were employed, the company had greater choice and artisans' earning increased. But such arguments were used merely as a veil to cover the personal motive of a financial gain by the Residents and their ally. The 'privilege of trade' confirmed by the company to their servants (in the general letter dated 24 December 1776) made the post at the commercial residencies most attractive,⁴⁷ and

many Englishmen made a fortune at the company's avarage. One interesting case is that of Charles Grant⁴⁸ who stayed at Malda as the Resident for nearly six years since 1780. His case helps us to understand the role of a Commercial Resident in the later half of the 18th century. A part of Grant's personal wealth could come from the indigo plantation and factory he established on a large scale near Gaur; but his indigo project failed on account of unsuccessful speculation and huge investment. He was also in the midst of large debt when he came to Malda. The chief source of his fortune was huge profits made from silk trade - both as the contracts for the company's investment and as a private trader. With such profits he could make good his loss in indigo, be out of debt and within four years from his arrival at Malda he became a wealthy man; because he made more money than had made ever before.⁴⁹ It is also interesting to note that all these were done when Malda suffered from consecutive famines and witnessed raids by the rebel fakirs. (Please see sec. 3.6 below).

Commercial Resident's interest as a private trader were frequently in conflict with his official duties as a buyer for the company, e.g., if goods were in short supply the Resident might (i) buy the best material for his own trade and leave the inferior for the company, (ii) simply buy all available supply and then resell to the company at a higher price, (iii) use company's money for private trade and add many fictional charges to expense account etc. Unfortunately, all details of Grant's private trade are not

known; but some idea of how he used company's machinery in his own favour is available. Grant exploited his official position in all possible ways to make a profit; at the same time he did not hesitate to have nonpermissible dealings. In 1781 as a result of a war between English and Holland, a law was passed forbidding British subjects in India to lend money or sell goods to the foreigners (meaning the Dutch of course). But, since trade with the Dutch was one major way of remittance of fortune made in India, Grant used to send money home through Amsterdam even when he became the Secretary, Board of Trade.⁵⁰ In 1780 Grant supplied the cotton piece goods by agency method and claimed that he had not made anything on transactions. But, during the same period he made a profit from his transactions with the Dutch, which was till then not positively illegal but frowned upon by the Directors.

In 1782 the resolution of the Court for a change from agency to contract system was not welcomed by Grant. He was in favour of the agency system, because that would allow him to exercise his position as the supreme commander of all company investments. His own comments on this issue are remarkable, "As my object at Malda was private trade, I looked upon this resolution ... as an adverse event ... the man who controlled the right to spend £ 50,000 for the company's goods in the Malda area had a tremendous advantage over any other trader ... authority and power to oppress the weaver and to drive out other competitors."⁵¹ Grant,

however, sent to the Council his own bid for the contract, which was not the lowest. He defended his bid by explaining that lower prices quoted by the Indian merchants would have meant oppression on the workmen. Grant was given the contract for the whole of cotton piece goods and a part of raw silk; to his displeasure, three-fifths of the silk contract were given to native merchants. In the following years he made huge profits from the contracts of Malda and Buddaul investment,⁵² (chiefly in raw silk at Malda). From his own accounts it is known that surplus earned by him as official reward for risk bearing was 10 to 12 per cent of the cost of investment (i.e. value of purchase by the company as per contract). After Grant had made his contract, the Board of Trade decided to make a considerable increase in the supply from Malda. Grant discovered that his overhead charges increased very little, but he was still paid 12 per cent of the total cost of investment; he, therefore, made much more profit than he had expected.⁵³ In 1786 he made new proposals like : (i) increase in the percentage allowed for risk and incidental charges, (ii) contract for three years instead of customary one year.

During the first year (1780) of his stay at Malda the filature was idle possibly as a result of the prevailing slump; Grant was afraid of a scandal to take the silk contract, and it was given to some one outside the company's service. Grant used the idle filatures of the company since 1781 and was able to produce a surplus which ~~the~~^{he} sold in his private

trade. The company, nevertheless, cooperated with and encouraged him even with technical assistance. For example, in April 1783, the Board of Trade made arrangements through Kashimbazar the supply of required quantity of Brass-coggs and Double-crossing machines (of English model) to Malda filature on request.⁵⁴ Such machines and spare parts were usually supplied to company's contractors and private filatures either on payment or on agreement to return the machines after expiration of the engagement. The control and use of company's filatures obviously gave Grant a great advantage over any other private, silk merchant. It has been said by Embree that Grant's profit mainly came from his work as company's contractor; but since 1782 Grant shipped considerable quantities of raw silk to England on his private account. His largest shipment appears to be in 1786 when he got permission to send home three tons of raw silk on company's ships.⁵⁵

In 1783, on account of lesser import of bullion, the company faced a problem of scarce currency and insufficient funds, failed to advance money for the contract and hence proposed 'subscription investment' on the basis of loans. It was stipulated that the funds from company's treasury would be paid to the Residents by instalments in the following manner :

(a) First advance 10/16th, on the terms being acceded to;

(b) Second advance 4/16th;

(c) Third instalment 2/16th, issued upon delivery.⁵⁶

Charles Grant used his own money in subscription investment, enhanced his investment in raw silk and even made additional provisions on some occasions.⁵⁷ Indian merchants played a very important part at that time in extending credit or handling company's bills at a high discount rate. As the Commercial Resident, Grant was the link between the banias and the company; he tried to use fund problem of the company to his own advantage. He often offered to buy the whole of company's investment at Malda on his own credit and to collect it later from the company with a discount on the bills. Grant also raised loans for himself for this purpose and earned a profit margin. While the market rate of interest was 12 per cent (plus 1 per cent for transacting money affairs through agents), the discount rate on company's bills was as high as 18 per cent - thereby leaving a comfortable margin of 5 per cent for Grant who expected the discount rate to go up to 20 per cent.⁵⁸ All these were done when the Board of Trade expressed that they had "a firm reliance on Mr. Grant's integrity and great experience in the Malda investment."⁵⁹

It was not only the Commercial Resident who had the idea of making a fortune, but everybody in position of authority from the highest to the lowest including the gomastahs and pycars developed a commercial outlook of just

filling in the pocket. Needless to say, they all gained at the cost of the artisans' woes; and nobody had the least hesitation to coerce the ryots and artisans to his own benefit. The Council had often to deal with complaints about the personal greed and misconduct of the junior servants.⁶⁰ Within this set up with a general profit-fever and the divorce between power and responsibility, bribes, presents, customary payments to superiors etc. were accepted as a part of the social system. The Court forbade acceptance of presents and bribes, but innumerable allegations were streaming in, because offer of presents was the obvious temptation faced by Residents, Junior servants and Revenue Collectors. George Gray collected in the very year 1764 what he called "voluntary presents from zamindars and others whom by my situation I was enabled to assist or oblige"; but many witnesses were, however, produced to show how the payments had been enforced by violent extortion involving torture.⁶¹

(b) The spread of filatures

In the context of raw silk production, the general profit motive helped the spread of filature system and a budding form of rudimentary capitalist enterprise could be witnessed in it, particularly because of the required scale of operation. The first filatures were built by the company at its own expenses; but individuals soon began to set up their own filatures and offer their silk to the company. In 1774-75 the top four contracts for producing filature silk

(called new Italian method) were given to company's servants at Malda, Kumarkhali, Radhanagar and Jahangirpur. Subsequently, more and more Englishmen were encouraged to invest in silk workshops and those who managed to obtain contracts to provide company's silk were liberally rewarded for the expenses they incurred in setting up new works in the auring or outside. Company's servants very often hired private filatures; and a number of small filature workshops were set up by the pycars too. In Malda region, the pycars like Ranjee See and Moqtayulla possessed their own filatures and had taken individual contract with the company to the extent of 51 maunds of raw silk.⁶² All these English and native owners of filatures were entrepreneurs in the sense that they established the workshop, hired labour, purchased raw materials and produced silk thread. But a little share of the flourishing fortune was not within the reach of the actual producers for a number of reasons. First, the opportunities for the weavers were closing. Secondly, the winders joining the filatures were ill paid. Thirdly, the cocoon producers did not enjoy a free market for their ^{produce} to be used as inputs to the filatures. The advance to the rearers did not provide sufficient working capital, but they were constantly squeezed beyond their viable production capacity. Increasing fines and charges on account of technical fault or cost of services etc. further depressed their expectations and incentive to production inevitably diminished. Only their financial dependence on the pycars and the company increased progress-

ively. Even Charles Grant observed that poverty of workmen prevented them from being independent and freedom of trade in the European sense was impossible in Bengal.⁶³ Thus the rudimentary elements of capitalist enterprise in the filatures failed to elevate the whole organization of production to a new system of independent producers and balanced expansion at all stages of the silk industry. The limited resources of the artisans outside the filatures also stood in the way of a general technical improvement. Although the filature-owners could earn a profit on contract with the company, the interests of the company's servants on the one hand and of the native filature owners, gomastahs and pycars on the other clashed; but the second group established a relation of partnership and collaboration with the first group. Such partnership provided the framework for a large scale transfer of wealth from this country, because socially, politically and economically commerce was more important than industry.

3.5 Oppression and Resistance :

Under the pretence of securing investment for the company, its servants and their partners not only deprived the artisans and ryots of a share of profit but such alliance also resulted into unbounded tyranny and extortion on all manufacturers and weavers of silk. Mazharul Huq has observed that after Palashi the oppression and exploitation grew worse because (i) there was no effective government in the country and there was lack of administrative responsibility on the

part of the company, (ii) the rise in power and prestige of the servants of the company actually meant that anybody who managed their affairs could do what he pleased.⁶⁴ However, we do not subscribe to his view that emphasizes the responsibility of the gomastahs and banias in ruthless exploitation.

It is true that the direct agents of oppression were company's gomastahs, pycars and other employees, but the exploitation of artisans came from the authority of the company and the basic mechanism of oppression was economic in nature. William Bolts rightly observed, "... the company's investment for Europe in a more peculiar degree, has been one continued scene of oppression; the baneful effects of which are severely felt by every weaver and manufacturer in the country, every article produced being made a monopoly; in which the English with their Banyas and black gomastahs, arbitrarily decides what quantities of goods each manufacturer shall deliver and the prices he shall receive for them"⁶⁵ (underline ours). It is obvious that with the political and economic authority of the company such exploitation was not confined within the economic limits of price-quantity determination; and William Bolts has vividly described the nature of rigorous oppression and injustice on the winders and other manufacturers. He has opened before us the various methods of oppressing the artisans practised by company's servants and agents, from a zeal for increasing company's investment in silk, e.g., by fines, imprisonment,

floggings, forcing bonds from them and even to the inhuman extent of cutting off the thumbs of the winders. He has also analysed that the consequence of these had been a decrease in the number of artisans, scarcity, dearness and debasement of manufactures as well as diminution of revenue. To some British writers the description by Bolts seemed to be exaggerated because of his career background. ^{Bolts} ~~Both~~ entered company's service in 1759 and was in a senior position. He had to resign in 1766 as he was censured by the Court of Directors. As a result of his quarrel with the Bengal authorities he was arrested in 1768 and was deported to England. He avenged himself by bringing to book the company's misrule in his 'Consideration on India Affairs' published in 1772. Even if some writers question the actual extent of oppression, judging by the enormous profits made by different groups, the degree of exploitation appears to have been severe.

In the case ^{of} silk industry the pressure of exploitation was felt by both the classes of rearers and the winders. From the first group raw material was secured and from the second the labour for winding it. Larger the quantity of silk required for the company and larger the rush for profit, stricter became the regulations on the workmen and chassars to force them serve the purposes of company's servants and agents. Hence the so-called flourishing of the silk industry meant wider and more ruthless exploitation of the rural

craftsmen. Low wage payment to winders has already been mentioned in sec.3.3(c) above. The burden of improving the quality of raw silk in company's filatures was also shifted to the poor winders in various forms. For example, Charles Grant in 1783 reported to the Board of Trade that in respect of the defective products "the Nurdeas appearing to have been negligent, made good the loss - which was brought to the Company's credit";⁶⁶ the charge of negligence was, of course, arbitrary. The Residents and other officers responsible for maintaining quality always followed a bureaucratic practice of shifting the responsibility to some one else. For example, in May 1796 in reply to Board's unfavourable report on the quality of silk from Bauleah (i.e. Boalia), the Resident held the Superintendent responsible and suspected as well "a collusion between Filature mohurrers and the cuttannies", although he himself "daily examined the skeins at 2 o'clock". The Superintendent in his answer to the issue pointed out defective packing of the bales.⁶⁷ Another important part of the use of force by the company was a claim of a "right over the weavers". H. Vansittart explained to the Directors in 1767 that they "are not at liberty to leave your service, and engage with others; nor when the cloths are made are they permitted to sell them to the best bidder; but they are obliged to bring them to your warehouse, where they are valued by your servants, in the customary manner, according to their quality; and if upon account of the dearness of provisions of other particular circumstances a small increase in the price is at any time required, it is your servants who

determine at any time what it shall be."⁶⁸ The essence of bondage explained in this letter reveals that the instruments of exploitation - advances and pricing - were inter-related. The artisans having little working capital, had to depend on advances from the commercial people; on the other hand, by giving advances it was possible for company's agents to obtain goods at a very low price. Mazharul Huq has shown that the unfortunate artisans were always in arrears and their condition was reduced to a state of slavery.⁶⁹ In the case of rearers the same mechanism implied a special form of operation of merchant capital in agriculture in which the chassar is constantly in need of money, borrows it from the buyer and repays the debt with goods. In fact, the rearers were subject to two fold oppressions - (i) as a ryot in the hands of the revenue collector, (ii) as a producer of cocoon in the hands of company's servants and agents. While the officers of the collections "distressed them in one way for their established rents", the gomastahs pycars on the other hand "pressed them for the goods in such a manner as to put it out of their power to pay their rents."⁷⁰ Thus the conflict of the dual interests of the company happened to be a contributing factor to the severities of exploitation on the rearers of silk cocoons.

During 1769-70 it appeared on occasions that the company was opposed to exploitation of the producers and was concerned with their welfare. This was particularly reflected in the duties of the Supervisors appointed to the diwany

districts. The functions of the supervisors were multiple : (a) revenue collection, (b) administration of justice, (c) regulation of trade and commerce. As regards the third item the supervisors were also instructed to make a statistical survey of the industries of the district; and the most important duty under this head was "to stop the exploitation of the manufacturers by the gomastahs, pycars, dalals and other agents through whose hands the articles of merchandise passed from the poor producers to the ultimate buyer."⁷¹ But the task of checking exploitation was beyond the competence of any supervisor, because (i) they failed to realise or tried to shield the fact that oppression by the native agents was the outcome of company's policy itself, (ii) the company was not in a position to control the pycars. On the other hand, when complaints from the rearers against the pycars were increasing the Court advised the Council to be very careful in attending to these, "... If the chassars are oppressed, relief should be administered, yet in such a manner, if possible, as not to lessen the influence of our pykars with those persons on whom the investment principally depends."⁷² (emphasis ours). Since 1770, under the condition of famine, oppression seemed shockingly intensified, and hundreds of weaver's families of Malda deserted their native village and occupation for reasons of intolerable oppression.⁷³ In 1773 Hastings government adopted a resolution which aimed at giving the producers freedom to accept or refuse advances from the agents of the company for supply of goods. But the ability of the producers to refuse company's advance depended

on (i) the viability of the independent producer, (ii) the existence of company's competitors, and (iii) an authority imparting justice; all of these conditions were non-existent. Rather reports show that the pycars used their social position to force the chassars to come into uneconomic contracts. The shift of company's policy later on from agency to contract system of procurement meant no change, since the contractors were company's servants or influential bantias all of whom depended on the pycars.

Company's organisation of investment was so erected and so difficult it was for the producers to avoid company's jurisdiction that nothing less than a rebellion could provide strength to the resistance of the producers against oppression. Apart from the Sannyasi and Fakir revolt, reports from the commercial residents since 1770 indicated that varying forms of resistance against the system of appropriation were visible. But, within the company's legal system and in view of the artisans' needs for survival, such resistance became sporadic in nature. It is also important to note that resistance at the first instance came from the weavers, mainly in the form of 'combination of weavers' in a bid to have collective negotiations.⁷⁴ A slowing down of production or a refusal to accept advances and other types of non-cooperation were the initial response. Such moves were undoubtedly strengthened in the wake of a wider rebellion of the 1770's and 1780's. Udney, the Resident of Malda reported in 1790 that the weavers were very much

opposed to the additional regulations of 30 October 1789 and showed the greatest aversion to comply with the penalty clauses.⁷⁵ The weavers were determined not to take advances with penalty clauses because so many things prevented them from fulfilling their agreements on schedule - sickness, inability to get proper thread in proper time, interruption due to disputes with the zamindar and the like. The weavers felt that they had been enslaved, but ultimately had to submit; because circumstances had been shaped step by step in such a way that they very much depended for their existence on the work which the company would offer. Still the realisation of the weavers to go against the authority of the foreign commercial enterprise in a big way was great. It was found that two groups were less incited to rebel : those who worked as labourers in company's factory and the rearers. For the first group, their dependence on filature was obvious. For the rearers the pycar was the immediate object of their resistance but the pycar by virtue of his roots in the rural economy was also able to become the channels of representing the grievances of the rearers. The primary producer's dependence on the pycar as their leader foretold to an extent their failure in the long drawn struggle against the company.

Another form of resistance was the unwillingness of the artisans to accept innovation initiated by the Company. Most English writers described this attitude of the artisans as a lack of dynamism in them; but in the face of unemployed

weavers and petty rearer-cum-reelers being appointed to company's filatures as wage earners, their resistance to innovation may be viewed as simply their unwillingness to accept alienation from the means of production.

3.6 The Famine and the Rebellion :

(a) A natural calamity ?

The decades after Palashi were a period of the British policy transforming the pre-capitalist economic structure of Bengal to unfamiliar disbalances with unfamiliar ends. For the silk industry, the transformation led to severe distress of the weavers, winders and rearers - unemployment, hunger, below subsistence living condition and above all oppression without limits. Two more historical events of this period were particularly related to the woes of Malda artisans : one apparently was the product of a natural calamity but nevertheless a product of British policy in India; the other was a desperate reaction of the oppressed rural population against their foreign as well as native masters. The first one is familiar as the great famine of 1770 and the second is the long drawn Sannyasi and Fakir rebellion continuing for over thirty-five years since 1763.

In a country where agricultural operations were fully dependent on rainfall and other climatic factors, famines were not unknown, and shortage of food was often a product of nature; Malda too experienced periodic famine conditions during

the Hindu, Sultan and Mughal regimes. The famine of 1770 was different that it was caused not only by severe droughts in the two preceeding years, but also by the revenue policy of the company and monopoly trading in food grains by the English traders and their native collaborators.⁷⁶ After the company achieved the diwany rights in 1765, their primary concern was to squeeze the agrarian sector for maximization of surplus from land to be employed in 'investment' and administration. Drought and exorbitant demands for revenue reduced the purchasing power of the peasants and common people. On the other hand, the peasants were compelled to sell their produce at a low price to the monopoly grain traders who were the servants and gomastahs of the company. These traders fixed their own selling price at such a high level that common people could hardly purchase one-tenth of their food requirement.⁷⁷ The Court of Directors observed with conviction that "persons of some rank in our service" were responsible for augmenting the distress.⁷⁸ The government also purchased large quantities of rice for use of its army. The outcome of all these was a devastating calamity the severity of which was unknown to this part of the country during the last 150 years at the least; and roughly one-third of Bengal population perished for want of subsistence.

The famine did not rage with equal fury in all the districts; most affected parts of Bengal were Nadia, Birbhum, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Purnea and Bhagalpur.⁷⁹ One-half of the

people died in Bhagalpur town alone; Dinajpur was almost depopulated and ruined as a result of the famine combined with a big fire; Ducarel, the Supervisor of Purnea reported in 1770 that two lakhs of people perished in that district; in Rajshahi the drought was followed by a flood, and the famine left almost a permanent effect on the agriculture of the district. Ducarel also reported from Purnea to W. Hastings on 25 December 1772, "We lost nearly half of inhabitants which felt particularly on labouring and working people." In the Malda area, from the enumeration of the looms employed in company's investment (at Malda) after the famine, it is known that the number was halved and the company could get half the quantity of cloth next year. Again, mortality was most among weavers, boatmen, silk-winders, cocoon growers etc. The general impact on the silk industry was a rise in the price of silk thread. The famine caused a 25 per cent rise in the price of wound raw silk in Malda, and in the case of cottonthread the rise was even larger.⁸⁰ This came to be a crushing blow on the weavers for whom company's price offer now became inadequate to meet the cost. Another important effect on the primary producers was a tendency to switch over from mulberry to grain production. Such a trend had to be countered by the pycars and company's servants with further compulsion and use of force. Company's oppression and the famine proved to be two sides of the same pressure crushing the silk producers.

Thus, the great Bengal famine of 1770 is historically important not only because it was incomparable in terms of severity but also because it formed the key to the history of Bengal during the succeeding decades. The recovery from the effects of famine was a long process, and the company's government spent little either to revitalize the economy or for the purpose of relief. But, the company was well aware of the needs of their investment : Rent concessions were advocated for mulberry cultivation. Another specific evidence is the letter from the Supervisor of Rajshahi (at Natore) to the Chief of the Controlling Council of Revenue on 29 March 1771 in respect of special revenue arrangements for weavers who lived in some parts of Rajshahi but belonged to Malda factory.⁸¹

In 1783 another famine put Malda people to distress. Price of grain shot up very high in Malda - from 10 seers per rupee in 1771 to 5 seers per rupee in 1783. This time proposals for relief and market regulations were witnessed. Two sets of measures were proposed to execute relief measures: (i) restriction on hoarding of grains or selling it at an exorbitant price; (ii) procurement and storage of rice for distribution at a fair price to the manufacturers and others. The purpose of such regulations was mentioned in the notices hung up on the factory doors saying "... so that the weavers and poor people here may live" (underline ours).⁸² The proposed measures were adopted on the basis of recommendations made by the Resident Charles Grant; and it is clear that the

emphasis was on relief to the workers and weavers of the aurung, --- the lessons of the famine of 1770-71 in terms of loss of working population was still fresh in the minds of the factors. However, the measures ended with ineffectiveness since rice could not be procured and the merchants, beparies or goldars could not be controlled. The story of such ineffectiveness is known from the correspondence between Charles Grant and the Board of Trade.

(b) Artisans take to arms

The Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion of north-Bengal (1760-97) was a spontaneous revolt on the part of the rural people : It was a violent resistance to the colonial rule - a Peasants War.⁸³ The roots of the revolt lay in the company's policy towards trade and revenue. The roots of other revolts during this period, like the Chakma revolt (Chittagong cultivators) in 1776-87 or the revolt of the Rangpur peasants in 1783 were broadly the same; - and these may be conceived as parts of the same process of struggle against the new imperial authority. The popular strength of this rebellion can be traced in the classes of active participants, the organisation and the modus operandi. Peasants and artisans unable to bear the burden of company's policy and oppression as well as of the famine of 1770, organised themselves with the sannyasis and fakirs, resorted to violence and attacked company's factories and servants, zamindars and the new group of money lenders in the

society.⁸⁴ On the other hand, these Sannyasis and fakirs had their own reasons to rise against the company; because the colonial policy not only curtailed their privileges but also threatened the main source of their living.

British records have equated the sannyasis and fakirs with gypsy like population who moved from one place to another. But, in fact, we find two types of such religious population - some of the sannyasis and fakirs came to Bengal and Bihar from northern India and settled here. As residents they became merged with the peasant population of this region and made peasants' interest their own. The other groups of sannyasis and fakirs used to come to this province from time to time for the purpose of pilgrimage and moved from one place to another. The resident sannyasis and fakirs also moved in groups from one place to another on occasions of pilgrimage. During the Mughal regime these sannyasis and fakirs commanded respect from all classes of people. Both Hindu zamindars and local nawabs granted them rent free lands for cultivation and settlement. The muslim rulers of Gaur and later on the nawabs of Dacca and Murshidabad were very much respectful to the sannyasis and fakirs; a huge number of rent free holdings to sannyasis were found in parganas Sherpur, Kagmari and Pukhuria in the Malda-Rajshahi region.⁸⁵ The sannyasis were also engaged in trade and money lending while the sannyasis and fakirs were given certain privileges in trade and agricultural operations. Non-resident fakirs generally subsisted on alms, but also enjoyed, by sanads from the nawab, privileges

like compulsory supply of provisions from local residents as they pass through any tract of the country.

The sannyasi merchants were peddlers in character; at Malda they used to carry on trade between Malda and the upper parts of India. The sannyasis were the main carriers of raw silk from Malda to the indigenous mart of Mirzapur; even in 1773 W. Harwood, the Collector at Rajmahal, reports to the Committee of Circuit that the Pathan and sannyasi merchants purchased goods at 'Malda and other aurangs in the neighbourhood' and despatched them through Rajmahal. But, under the pressure of the new circumstances privileges previously enjoyed by them in the form of duty free trade were withdrawn. Because the company used its power to establish monopolistic control over production and marketing of commodities like silk as well as on all internal trade. The sannyasis now had to pay duty on their trade 'under the seal of the Syer Putchonterah Akburnagar'.⁸⁶ Even when certain duties were abolished by the public regulations, duties on the Pathan and sannyasi merchants were not exempted. The interests of the sannyasi merchants were also wounded by the English factors in another way. Since the sannyasis were pedlars, they could depend neither on advance system nor on a fixed establishment to buy raw silk; they preferred to buy with ready money. The rearers and winders were also eager to sell for ready money; but the company organisation for procuring raw silk had so widely and firmly established a monopoly that it was now

difficult for the sannyasis to find good quality raw silk or a manufacturer unattached to the company. Not only did the company exclude from raw silk private indigenous traders including sannyasis, nor only the company imposed customs on their merchandise, but Hastings also had the categorical intention to expel the sannyasis from their residencies. Outright resumption of rent-free lands was attempted in 1788, and the government had passed restrictions in 1772 on the indigenous money lending activities mainly to accommodate the emerging group of new mahajans from among company's servants and pycars. The sannyasis and fakirs were almost eliminated from the economic basis of their subsistence. Furthermore, the company's government imposed tolls on medicants at pilgrimate centres. The sannyasis and fakirs resorted to plunder in a desperate bid to fight the colonial authority;⁸⁷ since the interests of rural masses merged with those of the sannyasis and fakirs, the displaced rural artisans as well as the peasants joined them. Both Suprakash Roy and N.K. Sinha have shown that weavers (including silk weavers) who became permanently unemployed and wretched, could not find a living in agriculture and fled their homes, were the first group to join the rebellion. After the famine the number of these sannyasis and fakirs swelled to fifty thousand and the revolt took its form of a popular rebellion. Others who joined this militant struggle were the soldiers and burkandazes. The disbanded soldiers of the late Mughal, Rajput and Maratha armies had already joined the ranks of sannyasis and fakirs.

On 12 March 1783 Charles Grant reported to the Collector of Bhagalpur that many burkandazes thrown out of employment by the zamindars (on account of their own depleted condition) also joined hands with the fakir raiders. Grant also reported to the Board of Trade on 2 June 1783 about the "misbehaviour and defection in the factory burkandazes."⁸⁸ During the whole period of rebellion, the barind region (comprised of Malda, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur) became their main area of operation; Malda area was frequented by fakir raids in particular. (Please see Appendix C also) The chief targets of their attack were the factories with their British residents as well as gomastahs and mahajans; the tactics was a guerilla warfare avoiding frontal confrontation; the prime modus operandi was interception of the revenue in transit which, they assumed, would hit at the base of company administration.

That the weavers were the first group to rebel is known from the accounts of the first attacks on the Dacca and Rampur-Boalia residences.⁸⁹ During 1770-71 the company became very much alarmed with continuous raids in Purnea, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur; and Malda became a field of operation under the leadership of Majnu Shah, Shovan Ali etc. although one of the company's servants of Malda factory was killed by sannyasis in the forests of terai a few years back in 1766. Majnu and his followers took possession of the mosques and shrines at Mahasthangarh and Pundrabardhan and

made these their forts to conduct operations in Malda and Dinajpur. In October 1770 an armed party of fakirs were allowed to enter Malda for pilgrimage only after their arms were confiscated.⁹⁰ But the real attack on the Residency at Malda came in March 1783 when the fakirs plundered the treasury of Charles Grant. From the correspondence ^{Grant} ~~Grant~~ had in March 1783 with the Collector of Bhagalpur, the Board of Trade and the Commanding Officer of Troops at Berhampore, we come to learn how Majnu and his followers approached step by step the neighbourhood of Malda, attacked and extorted contributions from company officials, zamindars' kutcheries and the like. On the other hand we also learn how Grant apprehended attack on factories and asked for security personnel. A.T. Embree has shown that the soldiers who arrived at Malda were unwilling to fight with the 'holy-men'. Many sepoys from the security force also joined Majnu. Further regiments were deployed but before they arrived Majnu had left Malda.⁹¹ Majnu appeared again at Malda in the mid-summer of 1784. It is during this period that we get information regarding combined attacks by the sannyasis and fakirs; on the other hand many petty zamindars evicted from their earlier position also collaborated with local people in their fight for resistance. In Malda, the plunder of Jagannathpur factory (a sub-factory under Malda Residency) on the night of 6 May 1783 may be taken to be one such act committed by a zamindar with the help of about 200 weavers, ryots and pikes. After special investigation by W. Williams

to this act of "unexampled outrage" the authorities learnt that the caretaker to the minor zamindar of Hattinda executed the well-planned plot.⁹² Again, during 1793-97, Sobhan Ali, Ramjani Shah and Johuri Shah commenced operations in the districts of Dinajpur, Malda, Purnea and some other parts of north Bengal. Johuri Shah and Motiullah two leaders in Malda-Dinajpur area, along with a big armoury of the rebels were captured by the British troops from the jungles of Pichhli within 5 miles from the Malda residency.⁹³

The fact that displaced weavers and artisans as well as impoverished peasants joined the rebel force shows that Malda people rose to protest against the company regime in a big way. That the rebellion had a popular basis in the rural areas can be substantiated by the observations that the English intelligence failed to collect proper information about the movement of the rebels,⁹⁴ that punitive taxes or hanging in public place within the village could not suppress it. Collector of Dinajpur in his letter to the Collector of Murshidabad (dt. 22 June 1788) observed that the villagers had become partisans to the Fakirs.

3.7 Position of the Industry upto 1834 :

The first half of the 19th century is considered to be a very crucial period of transition in India. England was fast becoming world's leading industrial nation and was intensifying a conscious exploitation of the economic potential of her colonies. In India, the entire transformation

into a primary producing country was effected through the main instruments of trade and fiscal policies. This period is roughly called the era of de-industrialization.⁹⁵ In the case of the silk industry and more precisely in the Malda region, we have already seen, the process of decline started since 1760s, which was a transformation from a manufacturer of silk textiles to a producer of raw silk. The process brought with it an expansion of raw silk production; but in the process of expansion and intensification of colonial relationships fluctuations and instability in the prices of raw silk and cocoons were experienced.

(a) The depression

In general, price of all primary products as exportables were now subjected to the British requirements; but on the other hand, there was low short-term elasticity of supply too. We have already pointed out in Sec.3.3(e) that since 1770s through the eighties price of raw silk was depressed. In 1793 the silk trade still remained gloomy. There was no reason for raw silk production to experience a depression except that the Court's policy was to reduce importation of raw silk for a time, because it apprehended a noticeable shrinkage in demand for raw silk all over the continent. Hence, the European market caused Bengal producers ^{suffer.} ~~suffer.~~ In 1794 the company experimented with throwing their surplus raw silk into 'orgazine' and reputation of Bengal orgazine silk⁹⁶ was established in 1796, when inspite of initial loss

Table V
Cost of filature silk at the Company's
Factories

Date	Factory	Cost of Cocoon per seer			Total prime cost & charges per seer		
		S.Rs.	As.	Ps.	S.Rs.	As.	Ps.
1794 June	Jungypore	6	1	8	7	13	7
	Malda	6	10	9	9	10	2

1794 July	Jungypore	5	8	10	9	3	4
	Malda	6	3	6	9	2	0

1794 August	Jungypore	5	10	8	9	4	2
	Malda	5	13	0	7	12	8

1796 February	Jungypore	7	0	9	8	9	1
	Malda	7	12	8	9	5	2

	Average of all Factories		...		8	10	1

Source : Board of Trade (Commercial) Proceedings;
September-October 1794 and May 1796.

the Company ordered for consignments of 4,000 bales of Bengal silk.⁹⁷ It is claimed that this was an attempt on the part of the company to improve the quality of Bengal silk so that it is more suitable as warp for the silk textile industry. But a close scrutiny of the policy reveals that it was adopted in the face of the temporary recession in European silk market. Company expected that (i) Italian imports could be replaced by such orgazine silk prepared from their surplus stock, (ii) unemployed warehouse workers could be absorbed. The Committee of Warehouses reported that initially the throwing of 3,00,000 pounds of silk into orgazine would create employment for at least 7,000 unemployed warehouse workers.⁹⁸ However, textile manufacturers except the ribbon makers did not support the move, and it is reported that the English spinners protested against the policy.

The shock of short-term fluctuation in the European market was sufficiently distressing for the poor producers of Bengal. At the same time company's filature at Malda became successful in attaining a cost reduction as is evident from Table V. Excepting Kashimbazar, Jangipur was then the largest supplier of filature silk. In 1794, while in Jangipur cost of filature raw silk increased in spite of a fall in cocoon price, Malda was able to reduce the cost level remarkably. From a scrutiny of the heads of charges such cost reduction reveals that Malda became successful in

squeezing payment to spinners and workmen as well as on firewood etc. Hence, at Malda both the rearers and the spinners were worse hurt by the depression. From the standpoint of company's interest, allotment for investment in October 1794 was obviously biased in favour of Malda.⁹⁹

However, Malda's efficiency in cost reduction was soon lost as may be noticed at the bottom of the table, i.e. in February 1796. At the end of the 18th century, Malda continued to be one of the foremost silk trading centres of Bengal, the other ones being Kashimbazar, Kumarkhali and Jangipur.

(b) Growth of demand renewed

In 1807, with the cessation of silk imports from Italy to England on account of the Napoleonic war, demand for Bengal silk improved and the temporary depression in the silk industry of Bengal ended. In Malda region, high price of cocoon and high rates of rent were reported. But, the petty producers or chassars, having previous experience of fluctuations, were unwilling to respond to this demand. As a result, increase in demand did not immediately result into expansion of mulberry cultivation or growth in the production of cocoons. This led the company to impose further elements of compulsion; and fluctuations in the international market thus enhanced the tensions between chassars and company's officers in almost all the silk producing areas of Bengal. The need for compulsion increased in 1808 when the manufacturers of England demanded increased quantity and quality of Bengal silk

for the English industries. The British manufacturers adopted a resolution on 21 May 1808 seeking active measures to improve Bengal silk. Gradually, however, silk centres of Bengal had a busy time, and in 1813 a considerable increase in the export of Bengal silk is noticed, registering a renewed prosperity for some time to come.¹⁰⁰ N.K. Sinha has shown that since the second decade of the 19th century silk became the most important article of investment as per the annual allotment by the Board of Trade; but the silk industry of Bengal became at the same time ill-controlled.¹⁰¹ The same source tells us that in 1827 there were 4400 pycars for the Company's factories in Bengal, and the total amount of commission paid to 12 Commercial Residents was Rs.5,50,567. In 1826, the prohibition in England upon the wear of Bengal silk goods came to an end, and in 1829 preference was introduced in favour of raw silk manufactured in company's filatures. At Malda the provision of filature raw silk for export increased simultaneously with Kashimbazar¹⁰² :

Scale of provision of filature raw-silk
for investment (in bales) - as per
requisition

	<u>1817</u>	<u>1824</u>
Kashimbazar	750	800
Malda	500	550

A good account of the silk industry of Malda during the early years of the 19th century is available from the account given by Dr. Buchanan in 1810, which elaborately

described the rearing reeling and weaving of silk in the region. His studies were generally confined to the technical aspects of production; but this report together with other documents relating to the period reveal a few important aspects of the industry of Malda region as follows.

(c) Weaving still existent

First, Buchanan not only observed Malda as a primary producer, but gave an account of the weaving industry still existent. According to his account, 47,000 weavers received advances from the factories at Malda and Jangipur.¹⁰³ The clothes produced were almost mixed - the warp being silk and the woof cotton. The warp was generally disposed in stripes and the woof being in one colour : this led to stripes running lengthwise on the cloths. There were about 11,000 looms in the region, but not one-half of them constantly employed; the economic condition of the weavers was also deplorable, remuneration for these mixed cloth was Rs.5/- per loom per month (employing a man and his wife).¹⁰⁴ This account indicates that in spite of rapidly declining indent for Bengal piece-goods, in spite of company's onslaught, Malda maintained in a feeble way her tradition of weaving mixed cloth, a speciality known as 'Maldahi' : It is these cloths that once attracted the company to Malda. One reason behind such survival was some demand for these cloths within the internal market of India. In 1817 the Commercial Resident of Malda reported an unprecedented demand for silk

piece goods at that station.¹⁰⁵ Such a temporary rise in demand was accounted for by the Resident in terms of the Napoleonic war; but such an explanation seems unsatisfactory, because Italy was the supplier of raw silk to England. Rather, the growth in American-European trade could have some impact. However, this was absolutely a very temporary condition and the general condition of the weaving branch was unaffected by the busy atmosphere of silk trade in the early 19th century. Although, the loss of internal market was less pronounced in the case of silk textiles, the lack of increase in the general purchasing power explains why internal demand did not rise significantly.

(d) Pricing

Secondly, the company during the closing years of its trade, made certain changes in the system of pricing of cocoons supplied by the pycars. Prior to 1827 agreements with the pycars were made separately for each bandh, but final prices were settled by the Resident only when the cocoons of the bandh had been wound into silk. Such a price was to be finally approved by the Board of Trade without any reference to the prices paid at other factories for the same bandh. But in 1827 the company formed silk circles and adopted a policy of one rate for each circle.¹⁰⁶ The move was able to achieve in the Malda circle an uniformity in price offered to the pycars. But this did not ensure reasonable and uniform price to the cocoon growers; nor was it designed to do justice

to the pycars and rearers. The new system was adopted to bring down and ensure stability in the price of cocoon; because since 1815-16 the Board of Trade was annoyed with a so-called progressive increase in prices paid for cocoons. In March 1831 the Board of Trade resolved not to sanction a higher price and directed the Resident, "You are enjoined to make it known to the pykars by proclamation, that silk is only required on the terms specified, and that higher prices will not be submitted to, unless it be on account of the higher letters A No.1 and A No.2; they will thus see their own interest, in procuring cocoons calculated to yield the best description of silk."¹⁰⁷ (underline ours). The Board also specified cocoon prices for each bundh and allowed for best cocoons compensatory additional amount above the general price. In June 1831 the Board further observed that the persistent high price of cocoons was a result of supply falling short of increased demand. It directed the attention of the Residents to bring down price to the former level, desired investigations to every item of expense, found labour cost unchanged over the years and made their own calculations about the cost of rearing.¹⁰⁸ On the basis of such calculations they fixed in 1831-33 their price of cocoon (and also of wound filature silk) which they thought remunerative enough to the rearer-cultivator. Needless to explain that the incidence of company's attempt to bring down price of silk was ultimately shifted to the basic grower through the pycars.

Efforts to bring down price of raw materials, as analysed by Major B.D. Basu, was witnessed in the case of all major imports to England from India.¹⁰⁹ He has observed that the price of almost every raw produce of India was much lower in England in 1830 than in 1814. This according to him, either goes to show that the company and the private traders compelled the natives to sell their produce at a low price, or that the natives had to do so on account of lack of demand for raw materials within the country. In the case of raw silk he has substantiated his view by comparing raw silk prices in England at three points of time :

	<u>1793</u>	<u>1815</u>	<u>1831</u>
Raw silk price (per lb.)	21s.	18s.1d.	13s.7.5d.

(e) Prospect of a capitalist enterprise

Thirdly, when East India Company's trade in India ceased in 1833 by a bill in the British Parliament, it did not mean abandonment of raw silk export from Bengal. The company after 1833 sold out its factories and filatures to private European companies operating in Bengal. It was declared that the filatures would be disposed of to capitalists ready to carry them on. The major firms which purchased the filatures were Agency Houses for whom the avenue for acting as entrepreneur became widened. Since the 90's of the 18th century a portion of Bengal raw silk used to be imported to England and warehoused by the company through

such Agency Houses, besides company's own imports. According to K.N. Chaudhuri, these agency houses were the main instruments through which western capitalism and business institutions were being introduced in India.¹¹⁰ But these firms did not very much alter the organisational structure of silk trade, nor could they elevate the structure of the industry to a capitalistic form of production. The reasons may be summarised as :

- (i) The Agency Houses securing capital from foreign private traders and company's officials, financed and controlled mainly indigo and sugar manufacturing as well as shipping and banking. Their silk trade was less pronounced up to the end of 1820s. The disastrous fall in the price of indigo shook the stability and longevity of the agency houses.
- (ii) Production and export of raw silk from Bengal were exposed to the European demands and the passing of the command from the company to these firms meant little change to the basic grower.
- (iii) Since raw silk was exported as a semi-manufactured commodity, and since it had a complicated agro-industrial structure, factory-level production required independent farmers producing mulberry and rearing cocoons as well as a competitive market for this raw material. Such a structure was impossible within the land relations in British Bengal.

(iv) Under this set up the new firms also depended on the middlemen (pycars), which they considered profitable and more viable form of operation. Capitalistic type of investment was not ventured by them. To Bengal peasants and rearers the new firms merely replaced the East India Company, with the only change that a sole monopoly had gone.

(f) Technological diffusion

Fourthly, the period from 1790 to 1830's may be conceived to be a period of technological diffusion in Malda, in the reeling stage of course. Although the company introduced the Wis⁵-method of reeling much earlier, it took decades for the producers of the country to adopt to the technological change; technological diffusion was most rapid during the first two decades of the 19th century. Buchanan in 1810 observed in Malda region that the natives had almost ~~almost~~ entirely abandoned with the "original Hindoo manner" of winding silk - by means of a small reel (laya) which is fastened to a spindle that the workman twists round with his hand. Instead, they use larger reel (ghai) moved by a winch after the European fashion. Several people in the area had huts provided with more than one reels (combined with furnaces), and they followed the Italian mode of reeling - same as the company. Still there were complaints of defect in the method of imparting proper twist to the thread, for which orgazine was employed in Britain. The reeling machines used

in company's filatures were, however, based on the best European models.

But, a thorough change in the direction of technological improvement would have required in the silk industry much more than the only effective improvement in reeling. Unless the newer reeling methods are accompanied by the following, they are bound to be impotent to yield much results :

- (i) introduction of superior varieties of cocoons;
- (ii) arresting of the silk worm epidemics; and
- (iii) improvement in the practice of mulberry cultivation.

The irony lies in the fact that, "the method of cultivating mulberry and the kinds cultivated were in 1835 just what they were a century before,"¹¹¹ while attempt to introduce new stocks for experiments in rearing was negligible. According to the Minutes of the Board of Trade dt. 23-24 April 1819 : At Malda deshi cocoons were the best and the most plentiful; and about one-fifth of the whole annual produce of the district was Madrassie cocoon. However, the technological diffusion in reeling of raw silk reached the distant village rearer, and the company placed greater preference for filature silk and cocoons of good quality.

It is interesting to note here that some of the Bengal Factors felt the necessity of improving the quality of

cocoons for improving the quality of filature silk as early as in 1796. Atkinson, Resident Jangipur Aurung wrote to the Board of Trade in reply to their regulating samples, "no care no attention whatever can form good silks from bad cocoons."¹¹² In his opinion the spinners of this country were no inferior in skill to the spinners of Italy, but since degeneration of cocoon was the cause of bad silk, establishment of breeding houses or nurseries under the inspection of silk agents was necessary. He even went to the extent of commenting that the mode of conducting company's silk investment through the advance system had changed the attitude of the rearers from quality to quantity and was responsible for the degeneration. His proposal for nurseries was not cared for. During 1826-30, the Court also rejected an attempt by the Resident, Santipur Factory to cultivate mulberry and rear cocoons under his direct supervision.¹¹³ In 1830, in the evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, the degeneracy of Bengal silk worms and their proneness to diseases were distinctly assorted. But the issue did not receive much attention in terms of a policy formulation. The days of the company were drawing to a close, and attending to such needs of the silk industry called for a broader agricultural policy in India.

According to a statement just before the cessation of company's trade,¹¹⁴ there were 11 head factories in Bengal excluding one experimental filature at Howrah. At Malda the company had 480 basins as follows :

Head factory (English Bazar)	3	filatures with 300 basins
Tannore (Sub-ordinate factory)	3	" " 180 "
<hr/>		Total 480 basins

In addition to company's own filatures, a large supply of raw silk was prepared from hired private filatures which had 1,002 basins as follows :

Private filatures under Malda factory :

Connyshopur	...	176	basins
Thackoorparah	...	48	"
Dhorul	...	48	"
Bhwnpore	...	80	"
Futtypore	...	50	"
Ramnagore	...	100	"
Dowlutpore	...	60	"
Govindpara	...	172	"
Naum Bassodipara	...	74	"
Dhonorah	...	40	"
Elengah	...	44	"
Runjunparah	...	22	"
Bhonpore and Dungaparah	...	88	"
<hr/>		Total	1,002 basins

The number of basins in the hired filatures was the second highest in Malda, the highest being in Sonamookhi - 1,350

basins. In fact, the company began to hire private filatures on a wide scale in 1810 to guard itself against a possible glut in the market and also as a measure of control over the private production. While many private manufacturers became rentiers¹¹⁵ the company also manipulated demand to force many other petty manufacturers to sustain losses and thus to close down their filature units. It is the interest of the company that required a technological diffusion, and it is also their interest that prevented a smooth and further acceleration in the pace of such diffusion. By compelling the private filatures either to be rented out or to be shut down, the company ruined the possibility of a growth of private entrepreneurship along capitalist lines in the silk reeling industry of Malda. It is relevant to note here that while the company did not allow independent private manufacturers to grow, it let out subordinate factories under Rampur-Boalia in 1831 to some of their pycars who were middlemen not entrepreneurs. It is also to be noted that given the commercial organisation of the company, given the organisation of production or production relations, technological diffusion was confined to big private producers, mainly from among the middlemen.

With the passing of the Charter Act of 1833 company's concern with Bengal silk ended; but the despatch of silk continued for 1834-35 and filatures remained in company's

possession while hired private filatures were given up and purchase of silk by contract was discontinued. In 1835 and 1836 transfer of the company's filatures was arranged by auctions etc.

Notes and References to Chapter III

1. A.F.M. Abdul Ali - The Silk Industry in Bengal in the days of John Company, (Paper at Indian Historical Records Commission, Poona, January 1925); pp.9-10.

Diary at Fort William dt. 10 December 1716 :
"Our boats with the Hon'ble Company's goods from Dacca and Malda being stopt at Didergunge by the customs..." etc.

C.R. Wilson - Early Annals of the English in Bengal, Vol.II, Pt.I, Calcutta 1900; pp.xlv-xlvi.

2. Sukumar Bhattacharya - The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal (1707-1740), Calcutta 1969; p.30.
3. Sukumar Bhattacharya - The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, Ibid.; p.40.
4. Om Prakash - "Bullion for goods : International Trade and the economy of early 18th century Bengal", IESHR, Vol. XIII, No.2, April-June 1976; p.178.
5. Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal (1698-1784), Dacca 1967; p.195.
6. K.N. Chaudhuri (ed.) - The Economic Development of India under the East India Company (1814-58), Cambridge 1971; p.25.
7. Indian Record Series : Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI, Public, Select and secret (1770-1772), Delhi 1960; p.XXXVII (Introduction).
8. Rampur-Boalia has later been known as the district head-quarter of Rajshahi; the Rampur-Boalia subdivision was immediately adjacent to Malda. Sardah, on the bank of the Ganga, is thirteen miles south-east of Rampur-Boalia.

Among the other factories mentioned, Jangipur is near Murshidabad while Ghatal and Lakshampur are in south Bengal.

9. Company's gomastah was a salaried employee at the aung, having extensive duties of making advances and maintaining a regular supply. He had to accept a considerable responsibility and risk as well.

10. A.F.M. Abdul Ali - The Silk Industry of Bengal in the days of John Company, Op.cit.; p.10.
11. L.S.S. O'Malley - Bengal District Gazetteer (Rajshahi), Op.cit., p.179.
12. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Calcutta 1956; p.178.
13. Fort William - India House Correspondence (Public Series), Vol.II (1757-1759), Delhi 1957; p.267.

Perhaps that was an abnormal year for Kashimbazar and in the letter from Fort William dt. 30 Oct. 1762 (Vol.III, p.438) we find that Kashimbazar investment has picked up to be only the second to Calcutta.

14. Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.IV, pp.16, 88.

A.F.M. Abdul Ali - The Silk Industry of Bengal in the days of John Company, Op.cit.; p.18.

and
Report of the Proceedings of the East India Company in regard to Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, London 1836; p.vi.

15. W.W. Hunter - Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.IV, London 1881, p.507.
16. Letter to the Court, 12, Nov. 1761.
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.III, pp. 361-2.
17. Letter to the Court, 6 February 1765 and 20 March 1766.
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.IV; pp. 305, 409.

Barwell was promoted from Sub-Accountant to Commercial Resident. He held many important positions in the service of the company later on and finally became one of the councillors during the governorship of W. Hastings.

18. Letters to the Court, 11 July and 29 August 1763.
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.III; p.511.

19. Letter to the Council, 23 March 1770 and Letter to the Court, 12 February 1771.
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI;
pp.19, 273.
20. Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI;
p.xxxvii read with letter to the Court, 2 April 1771.
21. K.N. Chaudhuri - The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company (1660-1760), Cambridge 1976;
p.357.
22. Letter to the Court, 30 October 1762,
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.III;
p.440.

and
Letter to the Council, 23 March 1770,
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI, p.17.
23. W.W. Hunter - Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.VI,
London 1876; pp.94-5.
24. According to 1780 regulations, Mufassal Diwani Adalats
were set up, and Malda came under the jurisdiction
Purnea. By 1793 the number of Mufassal courts were
increased from 6 to 18, and Malda along with parts of
Purnea, Dinajpur and Rajshahi came under the jurisdic-
tion of Twajepur of Tajpur.
25. A company filature as a silk reeling unit consisted of
20 to 100 basins varying according to the scale of
operation. According to company's records the filatures
at Malda aurang were large ones with 100 basins in each.

Report of the Proceedings of the East India Company in
regard to Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk,
Op.cit.; pp.215-16.
26. Very few instances are also there that advances were
made directly to the cocoon growers through gomastahs.
27. H.R. Ghosal - Economic transition in the Bengal Presi-
dency (1793-1833), Calcutta 1966; p.45.
28. Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy
and Commerci in Bengal, op.cit.; pp.29-30.

29. C.J. Hamilton - The Trade Relations between England and India (1600-1896), Delhi 1975; pp.156-7.
30. and Mazharul, Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, op.cit.; p.210.
30. For scarcity of weavers and Verelst Report, H.R. Ghosal - Economic transition in the Bengal Presidency, Op.cit.; p.50.
and
Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.186.
31. C.J. Hamilton - The Trade Relations between England and India, Op.cit.; p.74.
32. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Op,cit.; p.181.
33. W.K. Firminger (ed.) - The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company, 28th July 1812, Calcutta 1917; p.ccxx.
34. Records of the Govt. of Bengal, Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit at Rangpur, Dinajpur, Purnea and Rajmahal, Calcutta 1927; p.109.
35. For details of the conflict : A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, London 1962; pp.87-88.
36. Correspondence between Curling and Hastings. Bengal District Records (Rangpur) 1770-1779, (ed. by W.K. Firminger), Calcutta 1914; Record Nos.45-49, pp.42-54.
Nacaud = "Nagade" in colloquial, meaning a labourer who spins at a stretch.
37. For the movements in raw silk price, Appendix E, and Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit., pp.211-12.
38. Letter to the Court, 25 August 1770.
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI; p.211.
39. For the success of the experiments :
Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI; pp.7-8.

N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the silk fabrics of Bengal, Calcutta 1903; p.15.

and N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal, Op.cit., Vol.I, p.179.

40. For details of the correspondence, Board of Trade (Commercial) Proceedings, 10 May to 27 May 1796. Henceforth mentioned as B.T.(Com.).
41. B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, 15 and 18 September 1794.
42. B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, September-October 1794.
43. B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, 22 August 1786.
44. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.39.
45. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Ibid.; pp.45-47.
46. P.J. Marshall - The East India Fortunes : The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century, London 1976; p.106.
47. Allowances of the servants at Malda residency were regulated at a total of Rs.2000 per annum, which indicates that the company was not interested in paying out large sums as salaries.

Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.IV, p.125.
48. Charles Grant started his career as a junior servant of the company in Bengal, was attracted to the lucrative prospect of a commercial resident, made a lot of money at Malda residency, was promoted to higher position in the company, became the Commercial Adviser of Cornwallis and finally ended his career as a Director.

It is Grant who persuaded William Carey to begin work as a missionary at one indigo factory in Malda area. Carey later on became famous in Serampore for his contributions to Bengali literature and press.
49. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Op.cit., p.77.

50. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Ibid.; p.80.

51. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Ibid.; p.74.

52. In 1766, Buddaul aurang being continuous to Malda, was annexed to it.

Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.IV; p.446.

53. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, op.cit.; p.78.

and N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.22.

54. Letter from the B.T. to Resident, Malda, 1 April 1783, and other related correspondence.

B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, April-May 1783.

55. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Op.cit., p.79.

The Governor General and Council resolved on 22 April 1783 to allow the article of raw silk manufactured on account of individuals to be transported to England on the company's ships. Hastings pointed out to the B.T. that such trade "now promises a channel to individuals of remitting their fortunes to England without resorting to those ruinous practices either of exporting bullion or supplying the means of Traffik to Foreigners to enable them to Rival the Company." (Letter dt. 30 June 1783).

B.T. (Com.) Proceedings, April-May and June-July 1783.

56. Resolution of the Governor General and Council dt. 22 April 1783, and Circular letter from the B.T. to Residents (including Malda) dt. 12 August 1783.

57. While in 1782-3 Grant invested Current Rs.92,000 in the provision of raw silk at Malda, the same account was augmented in 1783-4 to such a level that 10/16th of the value of investment came to C.Rs.2,50,375.

B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, January-March, August-September and October 1783.

58. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Op.cit.; pp.22-23.
and Resolution of the B.T. dt. 17 April 1783.
59. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Op.cit.; p.78.
60. For example, in their letter to the Court, 28 November 1766.
61. P.J. Marshall - The East India Fortunes, Op.cit.; p.104.
62. Gautam Bhadra - "A preliminary note on the role of the pycars in the silk trade and production in Bengal", Op.cit.; p.6.
63. A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Op.cit.; pp.70-71.
64. Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit.; pp.175-76.
65. William Bolts - Consideration on India Affairs, London, MDCCLXXII; p.191.
66. Letter from Charles Grant, Resident Malda, 8 January 1783, B.T.(Com.) Proceedings.
67. Letter from C.S. Collison, Resident Bauleah, to the B.T., 4 May 1796; Letter from the Superintendent of Silk Investment to the Board, 18 May 1796, B.T.(Com.) Proceedings.
68. P.J. Marshall - The East India Fortunes, Op.cit., p.37.
69. Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.184.
70. William Bolts - Consideration on India Affairs, Op.cit.; p.192.
71. Mazharul Huq - The East India Company's Land Policy and Commerce in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.121.

72. Fort William - India House Correspondence, Vol.VI; p.19.
73. Suprakash Roy - Bharater Krishak Vidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram (Bengali), Calcutta 1980; p.68.
74. Hameeda Hossain - "The East India Company's Organisation of Cotton Textile Production in Bengal - (1753-1813). Paper at workshop seminar, CSSS Calcutta, February 1982; p.8.
75. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.164.
76. Curiously enough, revenue collections in 1771 was even larger than that in 1768 and the merchants accumulated larger profits from brisk business during the famine.
A.N. Chandra - The Sannyasi Rebellion, Calcutta 1977; p.161.
77. Nikhil Sur - Chhiyattarer Manwantar O Sannyasi-Fakir Vidroha (Bengali), Calcutta 1982; p.19.
78. W.K. Firminger (ed.) - Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company, Op.cit.; p.cxcix.
79. Portions of Malda were then parts of Purnea and Dinajpur.
80. For details of the devastation, N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal, Vol.II, Op.cit.; pp.50, 53, 61.
Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit at Purnea, Vol.VII; pp.108.9.
and Nikhil Sur - Chhiyattarer Manwantar O Sannyasi-Fakir Vidroha, Op.cit.; p.27.
81. B.T.(Com.) Proceedings.
82. B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, October-November 1783.
83. Suranjan Chatterjee has unambiguously argued in a recent article that this rebellion was an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal peasants war under the leadership of the advanced groups from within the traditional classes - the Fakirs and Sannyasis in this case.

Suranjan Chatterjee - "New Reflections on the Sannyasi, Fakir and Peasants War", EPW, Vol.XIX, No.4, Review of Political Economy, January, 1984.

84. As early as on 13 April 1771 Mr. Rous, Superintendent Rajshahi reported that the starving peasants had reported to 'villainy' and joined the groups of Sannyasis and Fakirs.
- W.W. Hunter - Annals of Rural Bengal, London 1868; p.44.
85. Nikhil Sur - Chhiyattarer Manwantar O Sannyasi-Fakir Vidroha, Op.cit.; pp.48, 51.
86. Letter dt. 16 February 1773, Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit at Purnea, Op.cit.; p.182. Akburnagar is Rajmahal.
87. Initially, the distressed or evicted zamindars took assistance of the sannyasis and fakirs to harass the company. In 1760's sannyasis and fakirs assisted the zamindars of Saran and Burdwan against the company.
- S. Chatterjee - New Reflections on the Sannyasi Fakir and Peasants War, Op.cit.; pp.PE-7-8.
88. Governor General in Council, Revenue Proceedings Resolution No.17 dt. 8 April 1783.
- and B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, June-July 1783.
89. A.N. Chandra - The Sannyasi Rebellion, Op.cit.; p.164 and S. Chatterjee - "New Reflections on the Sannyasi Fakir and Peasants War", Op.cit.; p. PE-8.
90. A.N. Chandra - The Sannyasi Rebellion, Ibid.; pp.46-7. Also Appendix C of this dissertation for the importance of Malda as a centre for pilgrimage.
91. For details :
Letters from C. Grant, 8 March, 10 March and 24 October 1783, B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, January-March 1783, October 1783.
- and A.T. Embree - Charles Grant and British Rule in India, Op.cit.; p.93.

92. Letters from C. Grant to the B.T., 8 May, 19 May, 2 June 1783 and subsequent proceedings of the Board and the Governor General in Council.
93. Suprakash Roy - Bharater Krishak-Vidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram, Op.cit.; p.49.
94. P. Milner Dacres, President Committee of Circuit wrote about this to W. Hastings (dt. Rangpore 30 December 1772) Proceedings Committee Circuit, Op.cit.; p.60.
95. Regarding preciseness of this period there is diversity of opinion. According to N.K. Sinha, the process of de-industrialisation covers the years 1793-1833.
N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal, Vol.II, Op.cit.; p.1.
96. Throwing into orgazine meant a special technical arrangement for twisting together two or more finer filaments of silk thread. Such twisted thread was particularly suitable for warp.
97. Report of the proceedings of the E.I. Company in regard to the Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, Op.cit.; p.xxvii.
98. F.P. Robinson - The Trade of the East India Company (1709-1813), Op.cit.; pp.142-43.
99. A sum of S.Rs.5,70,474-9-11 was allotted for Malda against S.Rs.3,14,965-8-3 for Jangipur.
B.T. (Com.) Proceedings, 21 October 1794.
100. Such renewed attention of the company on raw silk may be viewed against the decline of cotton manufacturing in Bengal. As a primary producer, India was exporting raw cotton-an agrarian product, while she exported raw silk as a semi-manufactured commodity.
101. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal, Vol.III, Op.cit.; p.18.
102. Report of the Proceedings of the E.I. Company in regard to the Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, Op.cit.; pp.33, 60.

103. Geoghegan - Some Account of Silk in India, Calcutta 1880; p.21.
104. Amallesh Tripathi - Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency 1793-1833, Calcutta 1979; p.219.
105. H.R. Ghosal - Economic Transition in Bengal Presidency, Op.cit.; p.50.
106. Report of the Proceedings of the East India Company in regard to Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, Op.cit.; p.xxxvii.
107. Extract Circular letter to all Silk Residents, 4 March 1831, Para 2, 18, 19.

The company was then mainly interested in filature raw silk. Such silk used to be graded by letters according to fineness as :

Grade	A		B		C		
	No.1	No.2	No.1	No.2	No.1	No.2	No.3
No. of filaments/ cocoons	4-5	7-8	10-12	12-14	16-18	18-20	24-30

Report of the Proceedings of the E.I. Co. in regard to Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, Op.cit.; pp.91-94.

108. Minute of B.T. dt. 7 June 1831.
109. Major B.D. Basu - The Ruin of Indian Trade and Industries (2nd edn.), Calcutta 1927; p.80.
110. K.N. Chaudhuri - The Economic Development in India Under the E.I. Co., Op.cit.; p.19.
111. J. Geoghegan - Some Account of Silk in India, Op.cit.; p.27.
112. Letter dt. 25 April 1796, B.T.(Com.) Proceedings, 3 May 1796.
113. Report of the Proceedings of the E.I. Co. in regard to Trade Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, Op.cit.; p.xxxiv-xxxv and Appendix G.

114. Statement of the several silk factories in India, the property of the E.I. Co. as they stood in March 1832.

Report of the Proceedings of the E.I. Co.; in regard to Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, Ibid.; pp.216-21.

115. The rent for hired filatures in most cases being 4 annas per seer, was paid on the quantity of silk which company's workmen wound therein.

Chapter IV

Fifty Years After the East India Company

4.1 The Transfer of Filatures

Between 1835 and 1836 the company ceased to operate in Malda region and its factories and filature establishments were sold to two sets of buyers :

(i) All the large silk establishments in Malda and Rajshahi districts passed into the hands of two big companies - M/s. Watson & Co., M/s. Louis Poyen & Co.; later on a third big firm ventured in the region, viz., Bengal Silk Company.¹ Of the two major companies, Louis Poyen was a French house. The silk producing areas of Dinajpur were now included in the newly formed district of Malda. (Please see Appendix D). Filatures of Bogra were shut down in 1834. During the forties and fifties smaller European firms also existed, but their role was insignificant and their operations were very temporary.

(ii) Some of the smaller establishments were first leased out and then sold to some solvent pycars and contractors of the company. But the emergence of native independent filature owners may be ascribed to the fact that the private filatures hired by the company were now freed. In Malda district only, their number was large enough to exceed one thousand basins. These native owners were the affluent

section of rural population, and in most cases they were former pycars of the company.

As two distinctly different groups of filature owners now controlled production, a clearly visible sharing of market is also witnessed.² Raw silk produced in the European filatures were exported; and the existence of a French company as a big producer indicated a relative expansion of French control in the European market : Data on import of Bengal silk into France during this period also justify such an indication. On the other hand, output of the natives were either consumed locally (including Murshidabad) or sent to northern India. A good quantity of superior quality silk thread from Malda found its way to Benaras famous for highly ornamented silk fabrics. Gradually trading communities from the north-west provinces and Bihar were attracted to Malda silk and established themselves as dealers of silk here. Marwaries - Agarwala, Oswal, Bhakat, Poddar etc. are some of the merchant communities who as dealers were interested in trading profit and did not manufacture silk. This aspect of an emerging class of dealers also signified the growth of domestic demand for silk.

The European firms continued the practice of Purchasing cocoons by contract through the pycars. This meant that the position of the rearers vis-a-vis the filatures did not alter as a result of the units changing hands from the East India Company to Watson and others. Theoretically, the

producers
independent native ~~procedure~~ purchased cocoons from the market; but practically these owners with their legacy in the past regime preferred to continue the advance system and exploit the poverty of the rearers to earn a larger profit. Since, many of these owners were the pycars of the East India Company, they had a direct link with the rearers since a long time past; and they maintained the earlier production relation by simply using the cocoons now in his own filature instead of the filatures of the company. This is the origin of a mahajani business in the silk industry of Malda, which is still prevalent.

It was the petty reelers who either purchased the cocoons in the open market or used self-reared cocoons. Distinction between labour and capital was not pronounced in the case of petty reelers. These petty reelers were never solvent enough to invest and flourish; and they were victimised by the growing class of silk dealers. Thus the new set up failed to change the production relation from its colonial character : The hang over of East India Company's organisation of 'investment' fell too heavily on the silk industry of Malda region.

4.2 Market Trends :

With these characteristics performance of Malda in terms of production and export of raw silk was fairly stable during the whole period from 1833 to 1875, and Malda retained

Table VIGeoghegan's Estimate of Average Annual
Export from Bengal

Period	Average Annual Export of Raw-silk (in lbs.)	Average Annual Export of Waste- silk (in lbs.)
From 1838-39 to 1841-42	1,384,242	...
From 1842-43 to 1845-46	1,555,130	...
From 1846-47 to 1 1850-51	1,290,024	...
From 1851-52 to 1855-56	1,511,506	...
From 1856-57 to 1860-61	1,511,768	41,552
From 1861-62 to 1865-66	1,485,763	616,138
From 1866-67 to 1870-71	1,558,246	740,398

Source : J. Geoghegan - Some Account of Silk in
India, Calcutta 1880; p.31.

its position as one of the big five (Rajshahi, Malda, Murshidabad, Midnapore and Birbhum districts).³ Foreign demand was still the determining factor of the state of silk industry; and the export figures more or less justify the stability in external demand for Bengal silk even after the departure of the East India Company, which is evident from the following figures :

(i) Total export of Bengal silk
to England in 1835 ... 727,535 lbs.⁴
(in spite of some fluctuations and declines during
1831-35)

(ii) Average annual export of
raw silk from Bengal during
1838-39 to 1841-42 rose to ... 1,384,242 lbs.

The export figures since 1838-39 have been shown
in Table VI (transcribed into Graph I p.220A as well).

It is also to be noted in Table VI that waste silk which were so far mainly consumed within the country, now found its way into the foreign market since the middle of the 19th century. From the information furnished by Geoghegan, we get an additional conception : since Chinese exports of raw silk to Europe increased enormously since 1841, the stationary state of exports from Bengal in absolute terms meant a comparative decline of Bengal silk trade in the international market. In the background of entire transformation of Indian exports into the category of primary commodities, K.N.

Chaudhuri made his own calculations to high-light that percentage share of raw silk in the total Indian exports declined during the period from 1814 to 1858,⁵ indicating a change in the composition. But, the export trend in table VI is in conformity with K.N. Chaudhuri's basic observation regarding the period : a rise in the value and volume of exports, more precisely, primary exports.

However, the relatively stable position of the raw silk industry of Malda up to 1870's should also be viewed in terms of some other general features of the Indian economy in the first half of the 19th century : (i) eagerness of the British Crown to follow a policy of promoting Indian exports in order to increase India's capacity to import; (ii) importance of Indian exports in a strictly financial sense in the new multilateral trading arrangements (i.e., international payments system of Britain : India : Rest of the world); (iii) commercialization of Indian agriculture; and (iv) emergence of factor markets in land and labour. But, in 1860's 70's and 80' the development of the silk industry of Malda was particularly shaped by the local aspects of famine and taxation. Hence, special attention has been given to these aspects in this chapter.

The appearance of the French companies in 1830's in production and export of Malda silk posed some problem for the British silk industry and policy of the British Crown

towards the export of silk piece goods to the European countries through France was not favourable. In the early 1830's Bengal's silk bandannas⁶ and other handkerchief had a ready sale in France; hence the export of Indian silk piece goods was prohibited and British silk piece goods were sold in large quantities in France. When the prohibition had to be taken off silk handkerchiefs of Bengal faced additional demands since 1840 and British goods almost disappeared from the French Market.⁷ But such a pull of demand was temporary and the specific item was of less significance as compared to bulk exports of raw silk.

With the cessation of East India Company's monopoly finally in 1833, there was no reason to think that the monopoly of foreign purchasers had been waved. Companies like Watson almost monopolised the export of silk. Apart from the producing companies, the Agency Houses formed the institutional framework for export trade monopoly; the agency houses were the main instruments through which Western business organisations were being introduced in this country in response to the requirements of world trade, and through which a link between Indian peasant producers and the world market was maintained (to replace the East India Company). In 1830's only six agency houses controlled 65 per cent of exports from Bengal.⁸ Potential domestic demand was also released; but the emerging mahajans took positions to leave the primary producer on the same footing. The foreign

companies as well as the dealer and mahajan community usurped the profits of the industry. The condition of the petty producer rather deteriorated since 1874-5, which will be discussed later on.

Price of raw silk rose slowly during the period from 1858 to 1870. As regards quality of silk, a change from the East India Company to the new private companies were without any marked difference. In 1840 Larpent expressed before the Select Committee of the House of Lords that the private companies' silk was not inferior to what had previously been supplied by the East India Company; but in 1841, complaints regarding inferior quality of silk piece goods from Bengal was available. This may not be an evidence of a fall in the quality of raw silk; but it is to be remembered that a fall in the quality of raw silk, if any, was due to degeneracy of cocoons. The problem of bad cocoons did not, however, receive any attention; rather Sir Thomas Wardle after 1858 manufactured and accomplished the renewal of the efforts to improve the method of reeling. It was only in 1882 that the government took up the question of experimenting with mulberry cultivation and supply of silk-worm eggs. The first trial was given at the Berhampore Central jail without any good result.

In Malda one major event was the use of steam power in the filatures of the European concerns in early 1870's. It is S.J. Andrews, the Manager of Louis Poyen & Co., to whom

credit is due for the first introduction of steam power.⁹ But the event could not have a long-lasting effect on large scale production of raw silk, because the firms soon withdrew from the field of production and the units were closed down.

4.3 Early Signs of Regional Specialization :

From the mid-19th century one important trend was visible, that is the decline in mulberry cultivation and cocoon rearing in some districts particularly in southern Bengal. This particular phenomenon grew into some sort of regional specialization since the closing years of the 19th century - Malda region specializing in rearing and raw silk production while Murshidabad (and to some extent Birbhum) specializing in silk weaving. But the early symptoms of such specialization was witnessed as a decline in sericulture - a gradual withdrawal of chassars from mulberry cultivation and rearing. In 1833 mulberry cultivation was pursued in the districts of Rajshahi, Malda, Bogra, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Burdwan and Midnapore; but Maxwell-Lefroy observed a gradual decline in mulberry cultivation and pointed out that sericulture existed in 1880 in five districts - Rajshahi, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Midnapore.¹⁰ Sericulture did not recede from Malda except in a few small pockets.

The aspect of specialization will be dealt with in a forthcoming section in Chapter V; here we may emphasise the initial factor responsible for such a change. Every British

Report during this period mentions a shift of the cultivators from mulberry to other profitable crops; and in our opinion, the historical force behind this was commercialization of agriculture which particularly gained momentum after the extension of Indian railways. The commercialization of agriculture was undoubtedly influenced by the economic ties between the economies of Bengal and England; but it opened the prospect of selling crops in the open market.¹¹ The production decisions were, nevertheless, forced upon the peasants by the British rulers and rich farmers both of whom shared the profit.

In the case of Malda district the advent of commercialization did not cause much harm to sericulture for the following reasons :

(i) Mulberry was also a cash crop in the sense that it was necessary for producing cocoons to yield raw silk. England's interest in raw silk was dwarfed by the infiltration of the French companies; but the British government did not try to regulate the production and market of mulberry and cocoons, since that would have gone against the British and French companies depending on contract system for procuring cocoons. The government was also not interested in forcing extension of this cash crop. A status quo was maintained in this regard.

(ii) The second important commercial crop in the district was indigo; but the areas found suitable for indigo were

located in the thanas adjacent to Purnea; - the majority of the indigo factories were also located there. Thus, the thanas around English Bazar and Gaur did not come into conflict with indigo cultivation. Extension of jute cultivation was also a later event here and areas suitable for jute did not also come in conflict with mulberry.

(iii) The third important factor could be the necessity for producing food crops. But in Malda mulberry cultivation was mainly carried on in the high lands not suitable for food crop cultivation.¹² Scope for a better return from land was severely restricted in these areas in particular. In spite of the famine of 1866 and 1874 a switch over from mulberry to food crops was not a major trend in Malda. We shall discuss in the next chapter how sericulture rather concentrated in the district.

4.4 The Famine Again :

(a) The Famine and the relief policy¹³

In 1865-66 and 1873-74 two successive famines swept over this part of the country; the second one affected not only Bengal and Bihar but also the north-western provinces of India. According to W.W. Hunter, the famine of 1866 was short lived in Malda and the shock was mild. In all the adjacent barind districts like Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Bogra, the experience was similar. But the famine of 1874 was severely felt in Malda as well as in other barind

districts.¹⁴ In 1866 the highest price of rice in Malda was Rs.4 per maund, and food prices later on did not return entirely to the pre-famine normalcy.¹⁵ In December 1873 when the famine was still mild, price of rice in different markets of Malda ranged between Rs.3-4 annas and Rs.4 per maund;¹⁶ and such prices shot up during the following summer months. From a report given by H.R. Reily to the Collector of Malda in March 1874 we come to learn about starvation and epidemic in the villages, lack of rainfall and complete 'drying off' of the boro crop, as well as relief operations executed.¹⁷

In official documents, the first alarm on the famine was raised in Malda in the letter no.143 dt. 20 November 1873 from the Accountant General, Bengal to the Collector of Malda (MC-RR), which started with a note on the impending famine and informed the Collector about the arrangements for purchase of food grains for relief purposes. In December 1873, the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division¹⁸ was informed of the appointment of W. LeF. Robinson as the Special Relief Commissioner in the districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bograh, Malda and Rajshahi while his powers and functions were also specified.¹⁹ He was invested with the powers of a first class magistrate and collector to be ordinarily exercised "in matters connected with relief, local works and land acquisition and other business connected with scarcity."

From these documents we learn that a famine-relief

policy was distinctly available in 1874; a relief policy that evolved gradually since 1860-61. In 1865-66, famine relief was half-hearted; food riots and inadequacy of relief vexed the government. In 1873-74 the government began to appreciate the approach of a famine in advance; and before the scarcity took a severe turn, the Government of India appointed Sir Richard Temple to organise famine relief specially by arranging for the distribution of food in the interior areas. He introduced for the first time a number of liberal measures, but his actions were later criticised as too generous and extravagant. Relief operations in Malda in 1874 should be viewed against such a back-drop.

The relief operations had two main aspects - (i) distribution of grain, and (ii) provision of "useful employment" to people by the Public Works Department for construction of roads, excavating tanks etc. In general the two were interrelated, because grains were distributed or sold at a cheaper rate as wages to the labourers employed. Relief employment was provided to people both in the towns and in the countryside. There were instances of cash advance to the cultivators as well as an instruction from the government that coercive means should not be applied to collect arrear rent of the January (1874) instalment.²⁰ That the government was not interested in spending funds directly for charitable relief is known

from the memo sanctioning relief funds for the month of July 1874.²¹

However, by 1876 a recovery from the famine-stricken condition was complete; market price of rice also declined. On the average, it was Rs.1-11-5 annas per maund in 1876-77; but a short-term rise is again noticed in 1877-78 (Rs.2-15 annas per maund).²² Reilly wrote on 19 May 1876 to the Collector of Malda that he had already realised 87% of the famine advances to the cultivators and hoped to realise another 7% after the next rice crop that year.²³ Different relief measures had also been discontinued by that time.

Since the middle of the 19th century. Indian famines reflected a universal lack of employment, general poverty and scarcity price of grains. The famines of 1866 and 1874 were caused to some extent by the lack of favourable climatic conditions; but their nature was shaped by the general features of the Indian economy and its impoverishment.²⁴ Factors such as loss of employment, excessive land revenue burdens and export of food stuff played their roles while commercialization of agriculture had a very disastrous effect leading to shortage. In the case of Malda, general impoverishment, lack of employment etc. were undoubtedly the major factors; the contribution of commercialization of agriculture could not be traced for want of specific data. The question of mulberry cultivation affecting food crops did not, however,

arise for the simple reason that additional pressure of enlarged demand, internal or external, for silk could hardly be felt. It is only indigo cultivation in the northern and north-western parts of the district that might have limited food production seriously; but it should be noted that indigo production declined from a value of Rs.5,00,000 in 1876-77 to Rs.4,50,000 in 1877-78.²⁵ Such a decline was caused not only by the closure of one concern in the later half of 1877-78 but also by a general set back of the industry.

(b) The impact

Hunter did not elucidate the impact of this famine in his 'A Statistical Account of Bengal' (1876); nor such an account is available in other contemporary writings. However, in the case of Malda, impact of the famine on both cultivation of mulberry and production of raw silk can be traced without ambiguity. A very likely effect could have been a displacement of industrial crops by food crops; but in Malda such a trend was not visible immediately after the famine. From the following table on area of cultivated land and other related documents, a few things are clear.

Area of cultivated land (in acres)
Malda District

	<u>1876-77</u>	<u>1877-78</u>
Total cultivated	5,33,760	5,33,960
Mulberry	25,388	25,388
Indigo	30,645	30,645
Rice	2,50,673	2,50,730

Source : Part I-A and III-D of Return 41B for the relevant years (MC-RR).

First, total cultivated area as well as area under rice cultivation indicated a slight increase; but area under mulberry or indigo remained unaltered. Secondly, famine destroys both human skill of the cultivator and his capital assets like cattle without any erosion of zamindar's land. This would affect cultivation of all food and non-food crops; and this would exert some pressure on average cost of production and price of industrial output using agricultural raw materials. Information in Part IIIG of the above Returns (41-B) reveals a change in the value of total raw silk output from Rs.2,50,000 to Rs.3,00,000 without any significant variation in quantity produced. This indicated a 20 per cent rise in the price of raw silk over the years 1876-77 and 1877-78. A change in labour cost was not responsible for the price rise, because wages for skilled and unskilled labour remained stationary. Thirdly, to meet the expenditure incurred on relief operations a license tax was imposed since 1878. We have discussed the significance of this tax in sec.4.5(b) below.

As regards impact of the famine on mass movement, the famine of 1874 was distinctly different from that of 1770. Unlike 1770 no upsurge of cotton and silk weavers or other oppressed workmen can be traced in Malda region immediately after 1874.

4.5 The Fiscal Burden :

As an economy moves from agrarian stagnation to an

industrial society, newer fiscal weapons, other than land revenue, emerge. But in colonial India such newer tax bases were searched for with the purpose of further extraction of the already de-industrialised economy and of maintaining the 'imperial order'. Income Tax and License Tax are two taxes imposed during late 19th century, administered without much economic consideration and are relevant to Malda's economy.

(a) Income Tax

Rent roll of Bengal during the years 1853-54 to 1868-69 reveals that there has been a steady increase in the current demand; the collection also have increased, but there has been at the same time a large increase in remissions and outstanding balances.²⁶ The other urge for introducing new taxes was the heavy strain on the public exchequer caused by the mutiny of 1857. The government wanted to impose taxes on profit, property, profession and trade to augment public finance. However, in 1860 income tax was imposed on the advice of James Wilson; the rate and area of incidence were reduced in 1862 and the tax ceased in July 1865.²⁷ In 1867-68 a license tax was imposed at the advice of Mr. Massey; it worked unfairly so that a certificate tax took its place in 1868-69. This tax was also unfruitful and on the advice of Sir Richard Temple income tax was reimposed from 1st April 1869 at the rate of 1 per cent. This tax met with no opposition and in the middle of 1869-70 the rate was raised

Table VII

Return of Assessment under Part IV of
the Indian Income Tax Act XVI of 1870 :
For the Quarter ending 31 March 1871

District of Maldah		Form No.11			
Persons whose incomes or profits are assessed at Rs.		Number Assessed	Total Demand		
			Rs.	As.	Ps.
Not less than	500 but less than 750	617	12,109	8	0
"	750 " 1000	253	6,844	8	0
"	1000 " 1500	131	5,109	0	0
"	1500 " 2000	71	3,834	0	0
"	2000 " 10000	110	12,151	6	6
"	10000 "100,000	4	2,762	3	3
	100,000 & Upwards	1	3,437	8	0
	TOTAL	1187	46,248	1	0

Source : Malda Collectorate, Record Room.

to 2 per cent - further to 3.12 per cent in 1870-71. In Bengal, the collections from income tax in 1868-69 amounted to £1,55,412 while expected yield in 1869-70 and 1870-71 were £10,51,600 and £21,80,000 respectively.

In Malda, according to Income Tax Return in Form 11 for the quarter ending 31 March 1871 from the Collector to the Board of Revenue (MC-RR) we get the figure Rs.46,248-1 as. - 9 as. to be the total demand on assessed income in the district. This means that annual collection from this tax source was about Rs.1.9 lakhs. Table VII gives us a fair idea about the income groups and their tax liability. From detailed description, we learn that most of the assesses, particularly having annual incomes above 750 were traders and businessmen or persons having large estates. Since silk was a staple manufacture of high value, it was likely that a large part of taxable income accrued from business in silk. Correspondence among the Collectors of Malda, Purnea, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Calcutta etc. (MC-RR) reveals that individual assesseees had sources of profit and income in districts other than his place of residence, and at the time of assessment such income earned in other districts was also taken into account. Even, the Collector of Gazipur (U.P.) inform his counterpart in Malda about "the nature of business some businessmen of Malda conduct with places" of his jurisdiction.²⁸ We also come to learn from the letter that items imported to Malda from Gazipur were sugar and mustard while commodities

exported from Malda to Gazipur were rice, gunny and silk. Such silk finding its way to Gazipur were meant for the weavers of Benaras and other places. Information about individual big merchants is available but the abstract accounts of their business could not be traced.²⁹

(b) License Tax

The license tax of 1878 was more extensive in character as it became applicable to all trades, manufacturers, artisans and professional^s. According to the Act and Rules for its administration³⁰ :

(i) The act was called "The Bengal License Tax 1878" and was applicable to "all territories subject to the Lt. Governor of Bengal, including the Town of Calcutta."

(ii) "Whereas in order to provide means for defraying the public expenditure from time to time incurred and to be incurred for the relief and prevention of famine in British India it is necessary to effect a permanent income of the revenue, and it is therefore expedient that persons carrying on trades dealings and industries in the territories administered by the Lt. Governor of Bengal should take out licenses and pay for the same ..." (underline ours).

(iii) License would be granted by the district Collector or his office; but in the assessment and collection of the tax the Collector was "subject to the control of the Commissioner and the Board of Revenue."

(iv) Classes of trader or artisan or others who were under^{the} purview of this act, as per schedule II, included from jewellers to fishermen and milkmen, from printers and book binders to liquor shopkeepers, from photographers and actors to snake-charmers, from inn-keepers to dhobis and barbars, from merchants and commission agents to hawkers and dealers in cowdung, from goldsmith to black smith and vendors of all sorts. The tax was also levied on artisans employed in large works; and the collector could "require the employer of such person to deduct the amount of his fee from any salary or wages due to such person." But, the act did not apply to persons "earning their livelihood solely by agriculture, or to any cultivator of land as such in respect of the sale of the produce of his land, when he shall not keep a shop or stall for the sale of such produce, or to any receiver of rent in kind in respect of the sale of produce received as such rent." By such arrangements landlords and tenant cultivators (compelled to sell his produce to the mahajan) were exempted; but the self-sufficient farmer emerging as a capitalist farmer was discriminated against. However, as per schedule II, the tax applied to weavers in silk, silk spinners, dealers in silk and every class of manufacturer of silk, - not even to spare the rearers as farmers.

(v) In schedule A of the Rules, the licensees or the assesseees were grouped into classes according to their minimum taxable income and the general rate of taxation ^{was} ~~as~~ 2 per

Table VIIIBengal License Tax : Act I, 1878 and
Act II, 1880 Division of Classes

1878				1880		
Class	Grade	Minimum Taxable income (Rs.)	Rate of Tax (Rs.)	Class	Minimum Taxable income (Rs.)	Rate of Tax (Rs.)
I	1	25,000	500	I	25,000	500
	2	10,000	200			
II		5,000	100	II	10,000	200
III		2,500	50	III	5,000	100
IV		1,000	20	IV	2,500	50
V		250	5	V	1,000	20
VI	1	100	2	VI	500	10
	2	100	1			

Source : Malda Collectorate, Record Room.

cent of the gross annual income. Some changes were made in respect of classification and annual fees between the Acts of 1878 and 1880 as shown in Table VIII.

(c) Impact of the license tax - a closer look

As compared to income tax, burden of license tax fell heavily on the artisans. Shifting of the burden of such taxes by merchants and big producers was possible through various avenues; but such shifting by the petty artisans was almost impossible. It is difficult to analyse the impact, on Malda's silk industry, of license tax in isolation; because the general trend of the industry was the resultant of a good number of forces. But a few things should be stressed. First, as the preamble to the act states in unambiguous terms, the famine brought about the license tax; and their combined effect contributed to a general decline of the silk industry analysed in the following sections. Apparently the tax was 2 per cent of the gross income; but the rate at which the assesseees, particularly in class VI, fell defaulters and the coercive ways by which arrear taxes had to be collected, reveal that the tax was a heavy shock to middle and poor artisans. Secondly, the tax was not merely regressive in nature, but more important than the tax itself was the way the defaulters were dealt with; - in the silk industry the defaulters were small rearers, petty reelers and weavers of the mixed stuff. Thirdly, we have got in the Record Room of Malda Collectorate five Tour Diaries and three Assessment Lists by the License Tax

These persons though weavers of silk worms
do not ~~in any form~~ according to
my computation derive a taxable
income - leaving Jadrpur at evening
reached Chhota Mahadipur and by
selling a pony of ~~Ashtadulal~~ Khidir
Mandak realized Rs 9/- being the
balance tax + fine remains due
after what have been previously realized
by the persons - visited Sulpur, Madanpur
Chak Pratap Mokimerola. Here occupied
Shah Sultan who weaves silk worms
& reels silk by three silk reeling apparatus
& earns a taxable income of about Rs 500/-
a year. Passed through ~~Imulitola~~, ~~Satampura~~
~~+ Chhabhpura~~
Ganga Prasad, & halted for the night -

Returned to Sudder Station, attended 14th 15th & 16th
Office - submitted reports, paid money
into the Treasury, prepared a revised list
of assessment of villages of the taluqa
Kaliachak & the miscellaneous pincodes

PHOTOCOPY I

A page from the Diary of the Licence
Tax Assessor (13 - 16 May 1882)

Assessor;³¹ they are relevant to particular areas of the district at a particular time, but a careful study of these documents helps us to perceive the above conclusions as well as many other aspects of the silk industry in Malda during early 1880's :

1. In Englishbazar-Sujapur-Kaliachak-Sahapur-Shibgunge belt more than 50 per cent of the assesses were deriving their income from sources of silk manufacture and trade; silk reeling and rearing were subsidiary occupations for other groups of people. For the areas Gomastapur, Bulbulchandi and Old Malda also silk is a prime occupation; but towards Ratua profitable occupation on silk declines in percentage of total taxable earning. This aspect reveals that regional concentration of sericulture and silk reeling to a certain degree had already taken place within the district of Malda.

2. The industry in general was not thriving to prosperity; rather a process of decline was under way. This can be understood not only from the cases of defaulters or of those excluded from the assessment list³² but also from the general comments in the diary on 'decline' or 'fall in trade' in the context of silk in particular villages. Such a decline was specially noteworthy in specific villages. For example, in Sahapur, a village on the bank of Mahananda opposite Englishbazar, there were 19 taxpayers (in the income groups 500-2500) in 1884 most of whom were dealers

in silk and mixed cloth except one weaver; - but in 1885 the number dropped to 16, - the three excluded from the list suffered loss in silk business.³³

A few examples of prosperous merchants or pycars of cocoon failing in business are worth mentioning as their cases reveal the aspect of decline better. First, take the case of ... Mondal³⁴ of Jarlahi beyond Golapgunge and Bhogmanpur. He was a pycar of cocoon and used to supply them to the Balighata silk filature in Jangipur sub-division (Murshidabad district). "On the close of the filature this person's circumstance has undergone a change" writes the assessor, "Instead of his being a money-lender himself he has become a debtor, having failed in his cocoon supply business, and he is no longer able to derive a taxable income - he has therefore been exempted from assessment this year."

Secondly, Doman Chandra Sha (Saha) of Sahapur was degraded from class V to class VI. He had been a dealer in silk, suffered a loss and fell into debt.³⁵ The assessor notes, "He has even pledged his dwelling house and other immovable property to secure a loan of Rs.1000. He also owes other sums to different mahajans. In fact this once prosperous silk dealer has entirely failed and ceased to deal in silk." However, on account of his income from other sources he was still assessed in class VI.

The third case - Abdul Karim Biswas of Shampur became a defaulter.³⁶ The assessee was a supplier of cocoon to Watson & Co., suffered a considerable loss possibly because he failed to fulfil the contract, and his "circumstances have undergone material alteration". "Messrs Robert Watson Co. of Barogharia has obtained a civil court decree against him of about Rs.5000 which the defaulter has not been able to pay up and consequently measures have been adopted by the civil court for the satisfaction of the decree by attachment of the immovable and movable properties."

The incidence of a few such bigger dealers failing in silk business had undoubtedly fallen on the petty grower and the loss of earning on the part of small producers might have been more widespread.

3. Weaving of mixed cloth was still prevalent in a few villages - Sahapur and its adjacent; but the industry was in the most decaying condition. Such weaving was being maintained as a subsidiary occupation as the column meant for recording source of income in the assessment list show;³⁷ weavers might have practised it along with weaving cotton. The decay of mixed cloth weaving is reflected not only in declining earning of the assesses but also in the general comment by the assessor, e.g., "... village is inhabited by mahamedans whose occupation is weaving mixed stuffs of silk and cotton. In former years there were great demands

for the sorts of cloths called by various names, viz., catar, muzlahar, Bulbulchasam etc. The trade declined since and weavers are now degenerating and no longer manufacture valuable thans as they used to do in former days. - None of these class of men are now able to earn a taxable income."³⁸

4. From an observation of the new assesseees included or upgrading of assesseees from lower class to upper class we find such cases in the silk industry also. Such persons are particularly found in Englishbazar and Sujapur areas.³⁹ The class of people so included or upgraded may be grouped into two - one, dealers in silk in the town, and the second, big rearer-cum-reelers in the villages. In fact, both these groups can be identified as growing mahajans. There are also a few marginal taxpayers (in class VI) who are middle class sericulturists cultivating own land, rearing cocoons and reeling silk in one to three self owned reeling machines. These middle class growers may be called viable producers; and they hardly showed any sign of prosperity. On the other hand, there is seldom a case of petty rearer earning a taxable income.⁴⁰ In some villages inquiries were made to cases of rearers at the instance of the Panchayet, but it was found that they did not earn a taxable income.

These observations read with para 2 above, help us to conclude that in sericulture and silk business, only ~~te~~^{two} sets of activities by two similar sets of economic agents

Inquired into the circumstances of the
 defaulters Kasir Bahad & Kales Shukla
 of Tikia Tule - Ranjan still ~~affected~~
 of Hydrabad - failed to recover from them
 the arrears taxes - The prospects of their recovery
 is small but I will make another attempt
 in future - The names of these ^{defaulters} ~~persons~~
 have been excluded from the current
 years list as they have suffered ^{considerable} loss
 in their silk-reeling business ^{are} no longer
~~able~~ to earn a taxable income - Prepared
 and submitted a complete revised list
 of the Thana Ratura -

Proceeded to Nagarpur after visiting
 Ramchandpur, Gangapatti, Durganagar
 - ~~Room~~ Nos 5-10 - from Mastah Pal
 Rapur 4-7-8 from Disher Pal 1-3
 Rapur 6-14 - from Madal Mandil
 In the evening arrived at Nagarpur
 and made inquiry about license tax.

PHOTOCOPY II

Another page from the Diary of the Licence
 Tax Assessor (15 - 16 June 1884)

flourished profitably - the members of the former pycar community who could become mahajans in the villages, and the dealer-mahajans in the town trading in raw silk; - the basic grower or petty reeler drifted to poverty and insolvency and gradually became dependent on these two groups of mahajans. The profitability of dealing in raw silk by the growing merchants also indicated a rise in domestic demand. The mahajani system was further shaped and strengthened in the decades to come.

5. What was particularly painful for the artisans was the coercive method of collecting arrear taxes from the defaulters. For such collection, the assessor and his peons generally practised the so-called "distress sale" of the defaulter's movable properties. Even in the case of death of an assessee arrear taxes were recovered from the sale of movable properties in possession of his heirs. The assessor and his peons also frequently adopted "all possible coercive measures" to recover taxes, but he has not specified what these are. Hence, in addition to distress sale such coercive measures might have implied any sort of harassment and torture. The diaries are full of such practices and not infrequent are the examples of extreme inhuman coercion like those on a defaulter who is now infirm and unable to reel silk for an earning,⁴¹ on a rearer-reeler - an old man who has lost his eye sight,⁴² on a widow and his son who have no means of earning but huge debt,⁴³ and so on. In the case of

rearers and reelers distress sale was made of cocoons, raw silk, reeling apparatus, cow, bullocks or anything the assessor could lay his hands on. Thus, distress sale for the recovery of taxes resulted into loss of capital or assets on the part of the producer and led him to further distress and insolvency. Such an effect accelerated the decline and strengthened the mahajani system.

A specific example, in this context, of a reeler pauperized may be cited : the case of Ramjan Shekh of Mirerchak in Englishbazar thana. According to tour diary dt. 17 April 1883, "The defaulter it appeared loss in silk-reeling business and ceased to reel silk..."; and the arrear tax was realised by distress sale. In the next year, on 8 July 1884, "... inquiries into the circumstances of Ramjan Shekh" was again made and "Found no movable property worth distress sale"; - the diary states, - "The assessee incurred debts from Kalu Sarkar and other money lenders and having suffered loss in the silk-reeling business is not able to pay up his debts and his liabilities since increased and become now an insolvent." The assessor, however, recommended for remission of his arrear tax.

6. Finally, the method of assessment and collection was unscientific. In most cases, the assessment was based on verbal instances supplied by the panchayet or influential persons, and above all, on complete guesswork of the assessor

on tour.⁴⁴ It is only in the case of big merchants that scrutiny of accounts and books was made. It is very important to note that about 50 per cent of the assesseees were assessed at the minimum level of Rs.500 p.a. (class VI). It is doubtful whether all these artisans really earned that income. In an assessment on the basis of guess work and others' information, there is every possibility that poorer artisans were also drawn into the assessment list to enhance revenue collection to the credit of the district authorities. On the other hand, method of collection was also disadvantageous to the small producers since no instalment was allowed; but the fine on arrear tax was three times the amount of tax due.

4.6 The State of the Industry :

On the 30th May 1884, The Statesman, a Calcutta daily published an interesting editorial note on the basis of Dr. Hunter's estimates and Mr. Hume's letter to the Pioneer, to show that "90 per cent of the people in India are worse off and have fewer comforts, fewer clothes and less food "under British rule than "they every were under any native administration". In the background of such a general impoverishment of the economy and her people it is difficult to expect prosperity of a particular industry in a particular region.

A description of the general condition of silk

industry in Malda during late 70's and early 80's of the last century is available from Hunter's Account and the Reports from R. Porch, the Collector of Malda.⁴⁵ These descriptions do not admit that a general decline has started. But a scrutiny of these accounts as well as other available documents prompt us to conclude otherwise; and our observations have been accommodated in this section as well as in Section 5.2 Hunter found the silk weaving industry of Malda in a "languishing state", but observed on the other hand the manufacture of raw silk "in a flourishing condition". The weaving branch of the industry had already become insignificant and the silk industry of Malda in Hunter's time was mainly producing raw silk. Hence, Hunter compiling his studies mostly in 1874-5 could find no symptom of a decline; and in our opinion the decline occurred presumably just after the famine. A comparison of Hunter's account (published 1876) with the Return 41B for 1876-77 from Malda district (MC-RR) gives us an indication : the number of European concerns in raw silk production declined from 7 to 6.⁴⁶ The indication that the European part of the raw silk producing industry in Malda started experiencing a downfall, is strengthened by the report from Porch. According to him business of the European part of the industry was not prospering, - it was "at best a very precarious industry"; the native side of the industry on the contrary was prospering. The Collector further comments, "If the European supervised silk filatures were closed, the native silk

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industry would still thrive for a long time, but undoubtedly such collapse would recoil upon it and be disastrous to the native silk industry which is so largely subsidised and indirectly guided by European capitalists. Without that capital and guidance and support the native silk industry would, it is believed, become very precarious and collapse after a time." There is much truth in these comments; because the silk industry of this region had grown with European demand, European capital and European commercial interest for more than two centuries past. Although in terms of output the European part of the industry was less than one-third of the total,⁴⁷ the shock of dwindling European filatures must be great for the district's industrial scene, and it was to be felt by the rearers. But Porch failed to see that the native side of the industry did not actually thrive for a long time. The backward organisation, with mahajans at the apex, inherited from the European commercial organisation and the lack of growth of capitalist enterprise within the country were bound to be reflected in a general decline.

Hunter's account is statistically precise, while the report of Porch is statistically inaccurate, ambiguous, and full of phrases like 'nearly' 'about' etc. But still some comparison may be worthwhile. In Hunter the estimated area of land under mulberry cultivation in the district is 20,000 acres while Porch calculated it to be about 35 square

miles (i.e. 22,400 acres). Hunter estimated annual cocoon production to 60,000 maunds, Porch ambiguously stated such out-turn to be variably calculated from 12,000 to 60,000 maunds. Thus, during the period 1876-83 there was no appreciable change in mulberry cultivation and cocoon production in the district. Rather, if both the estimates are taken to be accurate, slight changes may be presumed in terms of a rise in mulberry cultivation as well as of an instability in cocoon production : the first presumption is a symptom of Malda's growing specialization as a sericulturist,⁴⁸ and the second one a symptom of decline. Hunter estimated the number of artisans in weaving and reeling of silk in Malda to be 13,366, while in the census of 1891, population dependent on all branches of silk was 42,896; here again no appreciable change can be presumed. Porch in his report mentioned such population dependent on mulberry cultivation, rearing, reeling and weaving of silk as 3,00,000; this seemed to be an exaggeration, because total population in the major silk producing areas of the district (thanas Englishbazar, Malda, Kaliachak and Sibganj) was 3,61,357 only as per 1871-72 census.⁴⁹ However, all these statistical observations do not indicate that the industry was thriving, although such data, in our opinion, is not sufficient.

Both Hunter and Porch gave us an idea about the commerce in silk produced in the district. Filatures under European system of reeling and supervision manufactured

superior quality of raw silk for the European markets. Silk reeled in the antive sector was inferior in quality (known as khamru) and was sold to Bombay, Benaras, Delhi, Mirzapur etc. as well as to the local weavers of Maldahi cloths. These cloths were marketed to Calcutta, Benaras, Bombay, Nagpur, Allahabad and were also partly purchased by local people. Hunter described Amanigunj hat to be the chief silk mart of the district, where buyers from the neighbouring districts like Rajshahi and Murshidabad came to make purchases; the other silk markets were at Bholahat and Kashimpur. Hunter also observed that through silk trade wealth accumulated in the hands of traders in silk and cocoon; but the majority of the banias or trader-mahajans were from the north-west provinces and Bihar so that profits of these classes were ultimately remitted away from the district.

This particular observation and our analysis in this chapter affirms our views :

(i) In the organisation of industry after the East India Company, even if the industry had maintained its flourishing condition, the profits were appropriated by the Europeans and the emerging class of mahajans and traders ; - the condition of general rearers and reelers could not improve as a result of the pressure of mahajani mode of business, the famine and taxes.

(ii) We are of the opinion that a process of decline in the silk industry of Malda started since the mid-1870's and the basic force behind it was the very unfavourable structure of the industry where profits are not ploughed back but general growers are exploited to enhance such profits. It is this structure that prevented the industry from growing even in the face of a rise in domestic demand which we have noticed. The traders and mahajans not only refrained from performing the responsibilities of entrepreneurs but also prevented the growth of a free market. The raw silk reelers often did not know where and who were their purchasers while the purchasers also had no information about the individual reelers.

A few other factors responsible for initiating the process of decline may be briefly mentioned here. First, as R.R. Ghosh observed, just after the famine of 1874 the degeneracy of Bengal cocoons were accentuated by the spread of pebrine, a silk worm disease. Perhaps, this explains the instability in cocoon output estimated by Porch in 1880-83. In fact, pebrine became a problem to almost all the silk producing countries of the world except Japan. But, the European countries "worked out the salvation of the industry" from this dreadful disease by the cellulaire system of seed selection after Pasteur of France, while Bengal "still steeped in ignorance" was losing her position in the world market.⁵⁰ In addition to this epidemic, Ghosh pointed out

the tendency of the rearers to underfeed the worms; and he has also explained the economic reason behind this. In his opinion, the presence of a class of leaf-seller and another class of rearer "who depend solely upon the former for the supply of leaves" was the cause.⁵¹ The question of ownership of mulberry land and mahajani business becomes relevant to this point.

Secondly, high rate of rent for mulberry land acted against the interests of the industry. Porch in his 1883 report remarked, "rents for mulberry lands sub-ryoti are so high as from ^{Rs.} 16 to Rs. 25 per bigha, and press heavily on the industry." Such rent was discriminatory against mulberry and was an effect of commercialization of agriculture. Such prohibitive rent reduced net earning of the small rearer and increased that of the landowner-mahajan. The issue of rent became subject to attack since 1886.

Finally, in spite of an enlarged domestic demand, the foreign demand condition was still the guiding force. Decline of Bengal raw silk export presented in Graph II (p. 220 B) and section 5.2 show us why external demand might have caused a general decline of the silk industry of Malda. From 1872 production of silk in Japan increased enormously; - since disease was unknown in Japan and since she improved the quality of her silk to a very high standard. Japan rapidly rose to be the most important supplier of silk and silk goods to the world market and demand for Bengal silk

consequently began to fall. Prominence of Japan in the international market became faster in the decades to come and Maxwell-Lefroy observed a continuous fall in the demand and price of Bengal silk upto 1915.⁵²

Notes and References to Chapter IV

1. H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.I, Calcutta 1916; p.18.
2. For details of such an account, W.W. Hunter - Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.IV, London 1881; p.572.
3. J. Geoghegan - Some Account of Silk in India, Calcutta 1880; p.32 and
N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the silk fabrics of Bengal, Calcutta 1903; p.32.
4. Report of the proceedings of the E.I. Company in regard to Trade, Culture and Manufacture of Raw Silk, London 1836, Appendix A; p.4.
5. K.N. Chaudhuri (ed.) - The Economic Development of India under the East India Company (1814-58), Cambridge 1971; Introduction p.26; Also p.1, 2, 3, 5, 10 for the general issues in the following paragraph.
6. i.e. Bandhanas which were silk handkerchiefs dyed with spots and rings. They were mainly woven in Murshidabad and Malda. 'Tie and dye' method of printing the handkerchiefs signifies the name bandhanas.
L.S.S. O'Malley - Bengal District Gazetteer (Murshidabad), Calcutta 1914; p.137.
7. N.K. Sinha - The Economic History of Bengal, Vol.III, Calcutta 1971; p.12.
8. S. Bhattacharya in Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.II (Edited by Dharma Kumar), Delhi 1982; p.293.
9. W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.VII, (Indian Reprint) Delhi 1974; p.96.
10. W.W. Hunter - Imperial Gazetteer of India, Op.cit., p.509, and
H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Op.cit., pp.12-13, 18.
11. Under the colonial conditions such open market was not 'free' in a theoretical sense. Prospects of higher price and cash return should be emphasised.

12. The levels of such land were further raised by tank silt dressing on the surroundings - a practice required by the nature of the soil.
13. For further documentation of the relief operations in Malda, please see Appendix B.
14. For a detailed account of the intensity of these two famines in this region, W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vols.VII and VIII, London 1876 (Indian Reprint 1974).
15. W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Ibid., p.92.

In the official English documents 1 maund = 80 lbs and 1 seer = 80 tolas.

16. Letter No.280 dt. 18 December 1873 from H.R. Reily, Deputy Collector and Manager Chanchal Estate to the Collector of Malda.

Source : Malda Collectorate Record Room (henceforth mentioned as 'MC-RR').

Source of all other primary documents in rest of this chapter is also MC-RR.

17. No.426 dt. 21 March 1874, Report on scarcity and relief, From Reily to the Collector Malda (MC-RR).
18. Malda was then included in the Rajshahi Division having its headquarters at Berhampore. Please see Appendix D also.
19. Letter No.3810 dt. 5 December 1873, from C. Bernard, the Officiating Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division; Copy forwarded to the Collector, Malda.
20. No.155-SR dt. 16 January 1874 from C. Bernard, the Officiating Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division.
21. No.4257-SR dt. 3 July 1874, from J.F.K. Hewitt, Officiating Junior Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, Scarcity & Relief Department to the Relief Commissioner, Rajshahi.

22. Prices of rice quoted from Part III F of Return 41B to the Board of Revenue (Dist. Malda).

Such return (XLI-B) contained an extensive annual statistical reporting on the district to be sent to the Board of Revenue at the end of each financial year.

23. Letter No.41 dt. 19 May 1876.

24. Causation of starvation and famines analysed by Amartya Sen in his master piece 'Poverty and Famines : An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation' (OUP 1984) is very relevant in the discussion of famines in India under colonial rule. Exchange entitlements are determined by the mode of production and production relation; and the entitlement approach to famine concentrates on the ability of different sections of population to establish command over food, using the entitlement relations operating in the society depending on its legal, economic, political and social characteristics.

25. Part III G of Return 41B for the years 1876-77 and 1877-78.

26. George Smith (ed.) - Annals of Indian Administration, Vol.XIV, Serampore 1870; p.293.

Necessity for replenishing the treasury implies that the pressure was thrust upon the existing land revenue burden.

27. The tax yielded £8.25 million.

George Smith - Annals of Indian Administration, Ibid.; p.343.

Other information in this paragraph is also primarily based on the same reference.

28. No.183 dt. 11 September 1870 in reply to Malda Collr.'s No.140 dt. 6 September 1870 (MC-RR).

29. From the above letter (in ref.no.27) we come to know about one Deepnam of Malda who was a big businessman in silk at Gazipur. In the Diary of the License Tax Assessor dt. 21 April 1883 (MC-RR) we find one Shewgolam Bhakat carrying on business in the districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Rajshahi and Patna as well as in the north-western provinces.

30. Abstract of the Act passed by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in Council as well as the Rules for the Administration of the Act under section 39 of Act I 1878 and under section 32 of Act II 1880. (MC-RR)
31. The assessor concerned was M.N. Banerjee. He was the Head Clerk in the Collectorate and was appointed the License Tax Assessor by the Collector Malda during certain period in the year. All the diaries commence with a similar note on the joining report and assuming charge of the assessor. The purpose of his tour was making inquiry into any new case of taxable income and collection from the defaulters. According to his T.A. Bill for October 1885 : his pay was Rs.150 per month and he was eligible for a daily allowance @ Rs.3 per day during the tour. The establishment of Mr. Banerjee as the assessor consisted of one clerk and two peons. Available documents mentioned in the text are as follows (MC-RR) :-

Diaries (i) May-June 1882 (ii) April 1883 (iii) June 1883 (iv) May-July 1884 (v) July, October 1885.

Assessment Lists (in Form A of the Revised Rules) dt. (i) 24 September 1885 (ii) 4 October 1885 and (iii) 13 October 1885.

Such documents for the whole of the district and well arranged chronologically for a few years were, however, not available.

32. A good number of defaulters every year suffered considerable loss in the business of silk rearing, reeling or trade; many of these defaulters were subsequently excluded from the list of tax-payers.
33. Tour Diary, September 1885 and Assessment List dt. 24 Sept. 1885. (Henceforth T. Diary and A. List).
34. Name illegible, T. Diary 27 June 1884.
35. T. Diary 15 September 1885.
36. T. Diary 27 July 1885.
37. In the case of taxable assesseees weaving of mixed cloth had been combined with reeling, money leading, tailoring, trading etc., excepting a single weaver of Sahapur whose occupation has been mentioned as "weaving mixed stuff" only, - earning Rs.500 per annum.

38. T. Diary 22 September 1885.
39. T. Diary 18 April 1883, 27-28 April 1883, 15 September 1885, etc.
40. There were several occasions that the assessor had passed through a village of rearers, even in the Kaliachak area, but a single person could not be assessed.

T. Diary 12-13 May 1882, 29 April 1883.
41. T. Diary 29 April 1883.
42. T. Diary 4 July 1884.
43. T. Diary 28 April 1883.

Similar coercion and attempts to distress sale were frequently made on persons in total helplessness after a big fire burning all his properties (28 April 1883), or persons over head and ears in debt (5 June 1883) etc.; - needless to extend examples.
44. There were also occasions when the assessor depended on verbal instructions from the Collector or Deputy Collector in charge of license tax. For example, T. Diary 15 June 1883 : "Gangadasahara Holiday - solicited an interview with the Collector. This was granted at 5.50 p.m. Received verbal instructions on matters of license tax."
45. W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.VII, Op.cit.; pp.96-102.

Porch sent two reports to the Govt. of Bengal, one in June 1880 and the other in February 1883; since the original texts are not available we depend on abstracts quoted in L. Liotard - Memorandum on Silk in India, Part I, Calcutta 1883; pp.21-22.
46. Hunter mentioned 7 European units producing filature raw silk, majority of which belonged to Watson & Co., Louis Poyen and Cie of Lyon; Return 41 B mentions 6 such units.
47. According to Hunter's estimate (1876) the European part produced 620 maunds and the native part produced 1500 maunds raw silk in the district.

48. In Hunter's account value of annual raw silk output in the district was Rs.15,20,000. He has also compared the value of woven silk and mixed cloth with those of Buchanan Hamilton's estimates to show a decline in weaving; in Hunter value of mixed cloth (Maldahi) was only Rs.6,000.
49. W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.VII, Op.cit.; p.38.
50. R.R. Ghose - Decline of the Silk Industry in Bengal and how to arrest it; Calcutta 1915; p.3.
51. R.R. Ghose - Decline of the Silk Industry in Bengal and how to arrest it, Ibid.; p.4.
52. H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.I, Op,cit.; p.10.

Chapter V

Observations Up to 1947

5.1 A Review of the Organisational Structure of the Industry :

Starting with the premises that trade between India and Europe was a function, among other things, of price differential - a product of the difference in price of labour, - it was the profit motive of the East India Company that drew it to Bengal. At Malda they were struck by the cheap abundance of fabrics - cotton, silk and mixed; and hence their interest in Malda lay in cotton textiles, silk textiles, raw silk and the special variety of Maldahi cloth (mixed stuff). Certainly, such an interest of a foreign trading company, in a theoretical framework, means working of the foreign demand pull on the domestic producers, and as a result, the domestic industry must flourish generating higher income and employment. But, the structure of the artisanal industry in the relatively stagnant economy of Bengal, its interaction with the trading interests of the company and England and particularly the organisational structure and the system of 'investment' they introduced, prevented the silk manufacturing industry from attaining its normal course of development.

The structural form on which the commercial organisation for company's investment rested was : one head factory

near a major Indian port and a number of sub-stations in the interior of the country wherefrom procurement of goods for export would be made. This means that the East India Company moved their procurement centres near the base of production, and the cluster of weaving villages were drawn into the market net work linked with the international circuit. The commercial organisation provided the administrative framework for regulating their commerce.

Thus introduction of company's investment caused foreign demand reach the door of weavers and artisans, but the system of investment followed by the company was highly unfavourable to these manufacturers. The company depended upon a pattern of commercial transactions in which indigenous dadni merchants played a vital role in the flow of capital and goods through dalals and pycars. The company was dependent on the local commercial community at many points : Without Indian expertise it could not obtain the goods and without Indian capital it could not carry on investment. But, the company was not only dependent on such native commercial community, but it shaped them to its own need. At Malda, the absence of big dadni merchants in the beginning of the company era proves that the weavers and producers here attained a higher degree of independence. The company developed for itself a class of strong middlemen in the region and made the artisans serve its commercial organisation through these middlemen. The freedom of silk weavers and producers were

completely lost in the commercial interests of a foreign company. As the company's commercial organisation became more and more elaborate, and as the company won more and more political power in Bengal, it began to play a more dominant role in its relation with the local business community who now turned banias and found collaboration highly profitable. Such a commercial partnership drove the actual producers to the wall.

On the part of the artisan, since silk production and weaving were industries of high valued inputs, meeting the bulk demand was beyond their means; and they had to be dependent on the pycars for their working capital. The advancing system was also detrimental to the growth of individual artisan, because it led to a lack of accumulation of capital in his hands in spite of increased demand for his output. This together with a loss of free market or open sale prevented the growth of capitalistic enterprise or independent producers in the silk industry of Malda as perhaps in other parts of the country. Production decisions were forced upon the industry by the company according to its own requirements; and hence level of output could not be a general indicator of prosperity either of the industry or of the sections of population engaged in production. Thus the individual small producers were impoverished by the trade policy of the company; this combined with its land and revenue policies proved to be of great hardship for the

rearers.

The filatures which were opened by the company for the purpose of large-scale production of good quality raw silk suitable for Europe, also failed to function as capitalistic enterprise. The features of separation between capital and labour or exploitation of labour¹ were present, but these filatures depended for their supply of raw material on the same dadni or contract system and established a complete monopoly in the market for cocoons which were being produced under a land system unsuitable for the market economy. When the East India Company ceased to operate, the private European firms continued the same method; and so, when these firms stopped business the large filatures had to be shut down, because the class of entrepreneur had not grown. The local commercial community with their legacy in company's system of investment had by this time emerged as a mahajan class at all stages of silk production. Their transition from middlemen to mahajans was inevitable. Hence, it is the colonial production relation which prevented the growth of the silk industry along capitalistic lines. As these mahajans and traders operated and managed an organisation of production which by itself was stagnant and since the foreign market was gradually snapped, silk industry of this region registered a decline ^{in absolute terms} within fifty years from 1835 when the East India Company backed out. Seeds of decline were inherent in East India Company's policies.

5.2 The Course That Followed (1886-1914) :

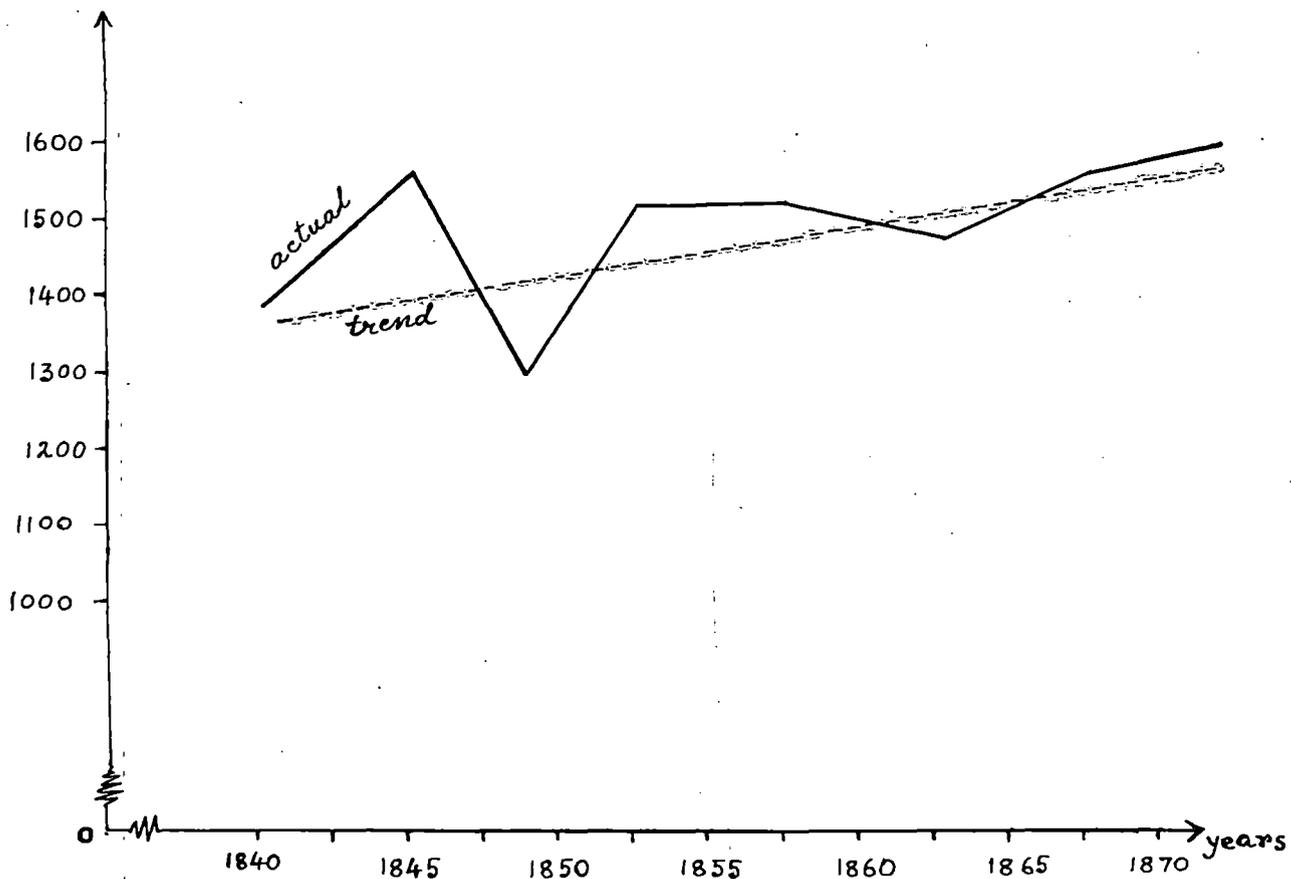
(a) A decline

In 1886 and 1887 two conferences on the silk question were held at Calcutta and in 1886 silk products of Bengal were displayed at an Indo-colonial exhibition.² But, now after two hundred years of British domination on the industry, Bengal had little to display. The question which occurred to the conferences was the problem of a languishing industry and also an effort to sort out the cause of the threatening trend. The largest problem which was focused by the manufacturers at the conference came as an attack against the zamindars fixing high rent for mulberry land in Malda, Rajshahi and Murshidabad. Such rent was the most excessive in Malda, - as high as Rs.16 per bigha, which was even higher than the average of English rents; but land used for growing rice in the plots adjoining the mulberry land used to be rented at 12 annas to 1 rupee per bigha.³ It was also pointed out that such high rents for mulberry land began since the prosperous years during the American Civil War. However, this was not the total picture of the forces causing a decline as we have already noted. Mr. Morey of Robert Watson and Company pointed out in the conference that low price of silk and failure of cocoon crops were among the reasons.

The industry during the last 200 years had been export oriented and its fluctuations had been tied up with the fluctuations in the foreign market. In the circumstances,

GRAPH I

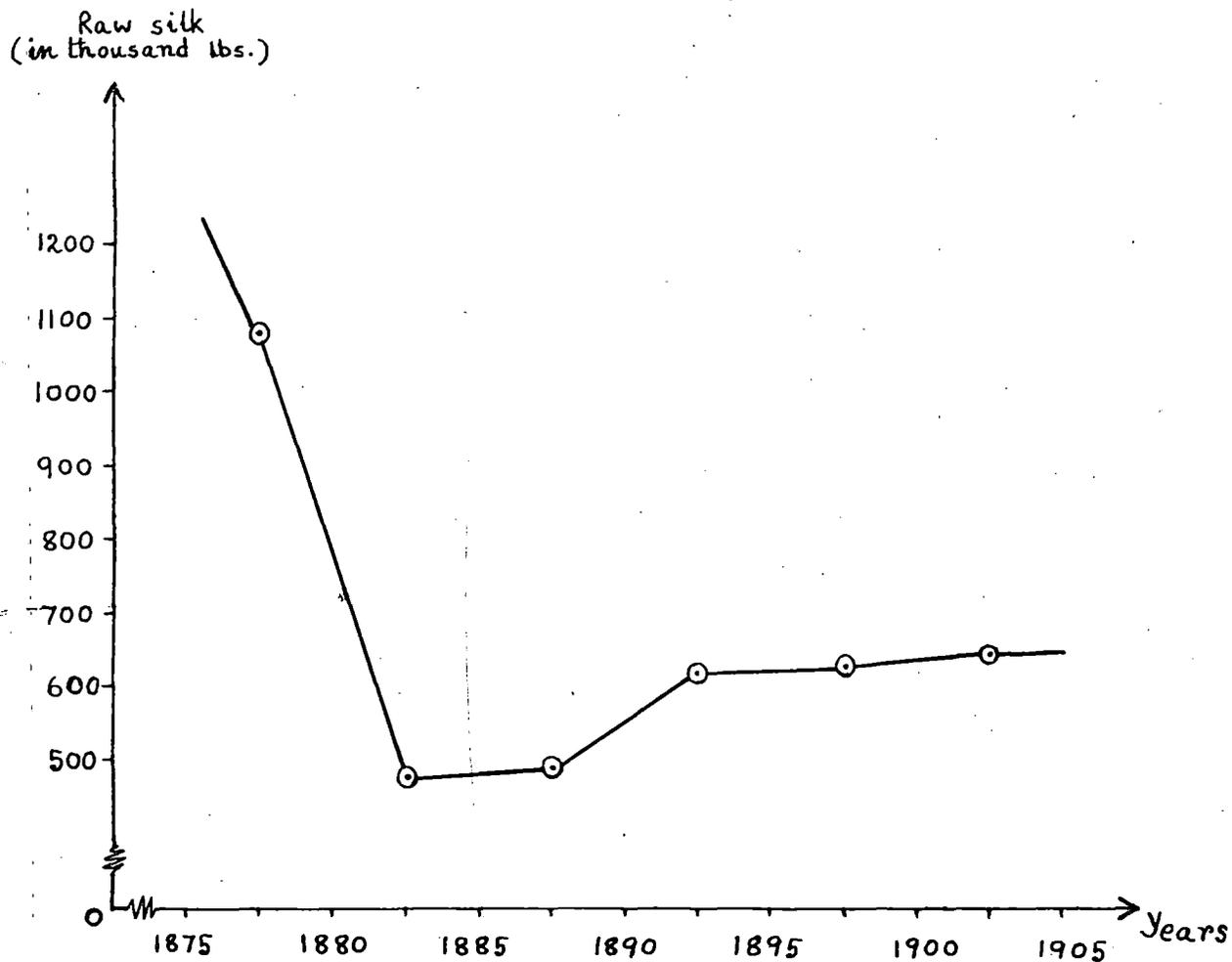
Raw silk
(in thousand lbs.)



EXPORT TREND - BENGAL RAW SILK

Drawn on the basis of average figures supplied by Geoghegan quoting Collector of Customs (Some Account of Silk in India, P. 31) - Please see Table VI also.

GRAPH II



EXPORT OF BENGAL RAW SILK

Drawn on the basis of average figures given in N. G. Mukherjee - A Monograph ..., P. 31-32.

depressing condition of the silk industry of Bengal can be best studied from the time series Graphs I and II showing export trends of Bengal raw silk. The trends demonstrate conclusively that after the departure of the East India Company, Bengal raw silk had been experiencing a slowly rising trend in exports and the actual levels were at a high pitch; but after mid-1870's exports declined absolutely and since early 1880's the levels of exports continued to be much lower than the levels of early '70s. In an export-based industry this is the basic symptom of a general decline. N.G. Mukherjee observed with an optimistic note that during the last decade of the 19th century there had been a considerable change in the direction of raw silk exports from Bengal, - instead of a unilateral export to England volume of export increased towards France and Italy as a result of a competition among these countries.⁴ Such a trend might explain, to some extent, a slight rise in exports during the period; but such a rise was insufficient to arrest the decline of the industry. On the other hand the directional change could not be an explanation to the general decline because such a directional change actually began from the 40's as we have seen earlier.

The decline in raw silk exports from Bengal shown in Graph II was mainly caused by the "decaying vitality of the British silk manufacturing industry" which N.G. Mukherjee himself has admitted.⁵ The fact is that England was failing.

in competition with France, Italy and the new champion Japan. Japan continued to sweep the world market with both raw silk and manufactured silk products; and the quality of her silk products became a threat to the European manufacturers. Bengal failed to achieve any qualitative improvement; and hence, in spite of a directional change, Bengal could neither stand the fall in exports to England nor could she capture a sizable portion of the European market. European demand for Bengal silk was shrinking.

It is also an important observation by N.G. Mukherjee about Malda region in the wake of the 20th century that the native side of the industry had a tendency to revive since 1880's which the European side of the industry had been decaying. He followed Porch in this regard and the claim was more an explanation to show the success of his own experiments than a reality. On the other hand, the symptoms of revival were, in fact, symptoms of regional specialization, and in the face of decay of the semi-capitalistic European enterprises the possibility of the industry to flourish was inevitably doomed. In terms of the statistical information supplied by both Sir George Watt and N.G. Mukherjee on the basis of census figures of 1891 and 1901 it is apparently seen that total population employed in the silk industry increased during the decade from 42,896 to 43,477.⁶ But such an increase is rather a symptom of Malda's specialization in mulberry cultivation, cocoon rearing and reeling in the native ghais than a symptom of expansion of the industry

as a whole. Because, during this decade the number of people employed in mulberry cultivation and cocoon rearing increased at the cost of a loss of employment in large filatures and looms.

(b) Condition of weaving

During the last decade of the 19th century a general expansion of the silk weaving industry of Bengal was witnessed in spite of a decline in the export of such fabrics. This was caused by an increase in domestic demand; and the demand condition was further accentuated by the popular values during the Swadeshi Movement since 1905. One favourable condition for such a general development was the fall in raw silk price. But, the condition of weaving branch of the industry in Malda registered no sign of expansion in the wake of such a general development in Bengal. This signified Malda's specialization in raw silk. It should also be noted in this context that the costliest varieties of ornamented and embroidered silk fabrics used in Bengal came from Benaras looms which procured raw silk from Malda and other centres of Bengal.

In Malda the weaving branch had already declined to insignificance; but the practice of weaving silk fabrics, particularly the mixed varieties, somehow continued. N.G. Mukherjee found the industry 'almost defunct' in Malda, and he was unable to supply specimens in the district monograph

Table IX

Silk Cloths and Mixed Cloths Woven in
the District of Malda, 1903

Sl.No.	Item (Name of the variety)	Price	
		Rs. - As.	to Rs. - As.
1.	Maldahi Gultishi Katar	4 - 0	7 - 0
2.	Maldahi Udakatar	4 - 0	7 - 0
3.	Maldahi Belkhali Fuldar	9 - 0	10 - 8
4.	Chaki Mujlahar	9 - 0	10 - 8
5.	Sada (Bleached)	8 - 0	9 - 8
6.	Nangfuli	9 - 0	10 - 0
7.	Fulam Senaja	10 - 0	11 - 0
8.	Kadamfuli	14 - 0	16 - 0
9.	Chand-tara	10 - 0	13 - 0
10.	Pattadar Seraja	8 - 0	10 - 0
11.	Sarhor Seraja	8 - 0	9 - 8
12.	Bulbul Chasma	9 - 0	10 - 0
13.	Maldahi Katar Hirašana	6 - 0	8 - 0
14.	Maldahi Katar Kalbali	6 - 0	8 - 0
15.	Masru	3 - 0	6 - 0
	(a) Lalsahana		
	(b) Sikiar		
	(c) Qundlal		
	(d) Malichur		
16.	Chanfulia	10 - 0	11 - 0
17.	Kashida	10 - 0	11 - 0
18.	Dhuties (5 yds x 44/46 inches)	10 - 0	15 - 0
19.	Thans for Coating (10 yds x 44 ins)	20 - 0	25 - 0
20.	Uranis (3yds x 1.5 yds)	5 - 0	7 - 0

Source : N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the silk fabrics of Bengal, Calcutta 1903; p.53.

while he supplied a lot of such samples from Murshidabad. But, he has given us a good description of the silk cloths woven in the district of Malda. According to him, in the early 20th century Malda manufactured silk saris, dhutis, handkerchief, sheets and pieces of coating, uranis, chaddars etc. of various sizes; the special process of naksha and weaving could be found in the mixed varieties. Reminiscent of the once-glorious industry we get in his monograph an exhaustive list of such articles - made of silk or silk and cotton, along with their prices in 1903 (Table IX).

All the peices in table IX were not uniform in size (e.g., Maldahi Gultishi Katar was of 3 yards x 32 inches while Kadamfuli and Chandtara were 6 yards long), and the price list should be viewed against the general price of silk yarn Rs.15 to Rs.16 per seer. However, so many varieties and non-uniform sizes indicate that Malda was maintaining traditional weaving but on an uneconomic scale. In the midst of traditional technology and pattern of weaving the important changes that took place was in the use of dyes. Use of indigenous dyes⁷ decreased rapidly since the close of the 19th century, which were replaced by the aniline dyes (artificial) introduced by the German firms; bleaching with indigenous materials continued.

Report of N.G. Mukherjee on the number of weavers in the district (in terms of 1901 census) is somewhat misleading: according to his statement there were "over 2,500 silk

weavers" in Malda, while Hunter stated the number on the basis of 1872 Census to be only 287.⁸ Such a rapid growth in the number of weavers taking to silk weaving was impossible in view of the languishing state of the industry. Also important is to note that such weaving was confined to a small pocket of the district in the early years of the 20th century. The confusion on the part of the census workers in enumeration of weavers was natural; because, excepting naksha weaving, silk weaving used to be pursued occasionally by the cotton weavers on the same loom. It is only naksha weaving that required separate loom for silk; but very few weavers of Malda now possessed such looms since a naksha loom cost Rs.30 to 40 against Rs.4 to 10 for an ordinary loom.⁹

Maxwell-Lefroy in his report put four systems in the organisation of weaving in India¹⁰ :

- (i) The single weaver (and his family) who sells his product locally or to a dealer.
- (ii) Master-weaver who employs weavers in their own houses but who advances materials, pay wages and sell the product.
- (iii) Handloom factory in which the owner erects the building, buys machinery and pays for labour and raw material.

(iv) Mills (e.g. of Calcutta and Bombay) employing power in the factory.

Among these, the first system is the oldest organisation of artisanal industry, and in Malda this was the only system found in silk weaving during the early 20th century. Both Lefroy and N.G. Mukherjee observed that the weavers were almost completely dependent on the mahajans. Mukherjee found weavers vending and hawking their silk cloths in the villages and towns of Malda district, and sometimes the weavers carried their bundles of silk cloth down to Calcutta by train before the pujas, i.e. in September-October. But these examples were seldom and silk goods were not sold at the local hats; only one or two shops in Englishbazar town sold silk fabrics. The major part of the silk cloths produced in the district were sent out by the trader-cum-money lender community for sale to Bombay, Calcutta, Jaipur, Mirzapur etc. These mahajans supplied the thread and also made advances to the weavers for the purchase of thread and support of their families : In lieu of advances the mahajan forced the weavers to sell their product to him, offered merely cost price and charged heavy rates of interest on the advances. The earning of the weaver was reduced to his wages only (4 to 6 annas per day). Mukherjee is justified in one of his comments about silk weaving in Malda, "So long as this state of things continues, it is hopeless to expect that the industry will flourish."¹¹ For the improvement of

Malda weaving Mukherjee stressed the need for creating demand for the fabrics both within the country and outside. But any expansion of expected demand was perhaps unable to change the condition of weavers and create a climate for an increase in investment so long as the mahajani system was there.

(c) Raw silk

As a result of competition from China and Japan price of Bengal silk declined to a great extent in the European market since the 80's and 90' of the 19th century. Such a decline in the price of raw silk was not matched by a proportionate fall in the price of cocoons. The European concerns with large fixed cost on filatures could not continue profitably. It is because of the existence of a large native side of the industry that the European firms could not force down the price of cocoon. These companies first tried to reduce establishment charges by concentrating their work in a few factories; and finally since the early years of the 20th century they virtually closed down their factories. By 1915 Louis Poyen and others wound up their business from Malda; and silk filatures in other districts were also closed down. When the East India Company abandoned their filatures, they were taken over by the private European companies; but now, no native firm was found eager to take the charge of the large filatures producing superior quality of raw silk. One reason behind this was certainly the dull export market; but the other reason was that the native capital-owners were

engaged in the mahajani form of business in raw silk, and they lacked in enterprise to run filatures on capitalistic line. The result was a complete closure of the filatures, and Malda now had to be content with its khamru silk and the mahajans. There was a temporary set back for the cocoon growers attached to the European filatures; but the shock could not be severe for the industry, because (i) withdrawal of the European firms was slow, (ii) the mahajans were prepared to grab the poor rearers, and (iii) soon the First World War itself was an impetus in the form of an extended demand.

As against the closure of European filatures the encouraging feature since 1880's in the Indian silk industry was the opening of Bombay weaving mills.¹² This could be a parallel source of demand for raw silk from Malda; but Bombay depended on raw silk imports from China and Japan, and as these mills expanded, Indian import of raw silk increased against smaller such exports. The single silk textile mill at Calcutta grown just before the War (I) was also not a good buyer of raw silk from Malda. The possibility of turning out superior quality raw silk was doomed in Malda before the First World War.

(d) Regional specialization

By this time regional specialization was complete in Bengali silk production. The trend began, as we have noted

earlier, since the middle of the 19th century and was accelerated towards the close of it. In districts other than Malda and Rajshahi sericulture either was stopped or became insignificant in the early 20th century, because sericulturists were taking to other pursuits. The census figures of 1891 and 1901 as well as various reports in the first two decades of this century will reveal the nature of the specialization that took place :

Decline of Sericulture	Expansion of Weaving
Burdwan Division -	
Abandoned in Burdwan, Hoogly, Midnapore.	Birbhum, Bankura
Insignificant in Birbhum, Bankura	
Presidency Division -	
Rapid decline in Murshidabad. In other districts abolished.	Murshidabad
Rajshahi Division -	
Insignificant in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogra.	

In Midnapore it is tasar weaving that expanded; the district thus went out of the map for mulberry silk manufacture. According to a report from the Collector of Murshidabad (1872) sericulture and silk reeling declined in the district since 1830';¹³ and a kind of geographical division of labour developed since the weavers of Murshidabad depended

on Malda for the supply of silk thread.¹⁴ In Rajshahi district silk reeling industry remained but cocoon production decreased to such an extent that the European firms had to depend since 1890's on cocoons imported from Malda.¹⁵ It was also reported that the raw silk industry began to languish since the closing years of the 19th century and in 1916 no European filature could be found in Rajshahi.¹⁶ Mulberry cultivating part of Dinajpur had already been included in the district of Malda, and in 1863 J.L. Sherwill found no trace of sericulture as trade, profession or manufacture in the district of Dinajpur.¹⁷ It is only in the district of Malda (Bhagalpur Division) where an increase in mulberry cultivation and cocoon production was registered. Thus a regional specialization took its shape in the silk industry of Bengal : Murshidabad, Birbhum and Bankura specializing in silk weaving while Malda and to some extent Rajshahi specializing in sericulture and raw silk production.

This, however, does not mean that mulberry cultivation was not given up in Malda; rather, there is evidence of mulberry cultivator switching over to other crops in this district also. As early as in 1878, Baboo Bhobaneswar Singh, Deputy Collector (Settlement) Malda writing to the district Collector on the settlement in Shergheer Panchanandapur Estate¹⁸ stated, "... the sorts of lands as entered in the chitta and according to which rent roll has been prepared are incorrect and unfair viz., that the lands not growing

mulberry have been sorted as mulberry lands ..."; and he also pointed out, "... mulberry lands have been made to grow other crops...". On an enquiry into certain objection, he reported, "... in some cases I have found no trace of mulberry having been grown on the lands recorded as mulberry growing lands." In fact mulberry cultivation was fast concentrating within the district in a few continuous areas like Bholahat, Sibgunj, Kaliachak, ^{Su}Rejapur, Englishbazar, Old Malda and some adjoining parts of Muchia-Bulbulchandi. In such areas mulberry cultivation expanded during these decades while it was given up in other areas of the district. In a census of mulberry cultivation in 1913 it was found that the same process of simultaneous adoption and rejection continued in Malda, but it had slowed down. On the basis of last five years' average, it was estimated that mulberry cultivation had been given up in about 350 acres, while new cultivation of mulberry was adopted in about 311 acres in 1913.¹⁹ Thus, Malda's specialization occurred in two degrees : First, Malda specialized upto raw silk producing stage against Murshidabad, Birbhum and Bankura; and secondary, a concentration of the silk industry took place in the southern part of the district; - the thanas practising sericulture more or less surrounded Englishbazar.

(e) Experiments

In the background of a silk worm epidemic caused by pebrine in 1870's attention of all concerned as well as the

government was drawn to the control of epidemic and improvement in rearing. After the unsuccessful attempt to experiment with mulberry plantation and rearing at Berhampore Central Jail in 1882, N.G. Mukherjee, Assistant Director to the Department of Agriculture was deputed in 1888 to be sent to Europe to study rearing and reeling eradication of disease discovered by Louis Pasteur.²⁰ After his return, Mukherjee was engaged for several years since March 1888 in experimental rearing of pure seed (i.e. cocoon seed) and demonstrating the scientific method of rearing. The experiments were initiated jointly by J. Wood Mason, Superintendent of Indian Museum and N.G. Mukherjee. Small nurseries were established at several places - Alipur, Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Malda etc., and the initial results were regarded as encouraging so that the government sanctioned Rs.3000 per annum for the purpose of conducting the seed centres and imparting training to the rearers.²¹ It was the intention of the government that the nurseries be ultimately handed over to trained rearers to carry on without further assistance from the government.

Mukherjee himself claimed great success of the experimental nurseries between 1888-1896 in fulfilling objectives like controlling epidemics, teaching the rearers of Pasteur's method, achieving less uncertain cocoon crops etc. He extensively quoted reports of P.C. Lyon, Director of Agriculture Department and other Europeans to establish :

- (i) that the ^{worm seed} ~~seed~~ produced under his instruction was a great improvement over ordinary seed;
- (ii) that the cultivators were gradually appreciating the new seeds; and
- (iii) that his pupils in independent charge of private nurseries, originally started by him, were making their business pay.²²

In these reports and comments a special mention was made of the Kagachira Nursery in Malda. This nursery was managed by Dandadhar Das, one of Mukherjee's trainees, and it earned a high reputation in the districts of both Malda and Murshidabad. It was found in some cases that rearers travelled long distances to obtain worms of a good breed. It was observed that Mukherjee was more successful in Malda than anywhere else.

However, the involvement of the government was confined to Rs. 3000 per annum only and N.G. Mukherjee had to establish his success so that the grant was not discontinued. In 1903 he reported successful working of 15 seed rearing stations by professional rearers in 5 districts of which 7 were situated in Malda alone. In Rajshahi a separate sericultural school was established under the patronage of a few local zamindars. On the whole his scheme became known as a successful one which was able to rouse some interest. There was, of course, no reason that one or few individual

efforts on European lines would be of great success, and completely different opinion regarding the development policy of Mukherjee was also available.²³ However, such evaluation of Mukherjee's scheme bearing a rigid and narrow policy as well as of its failure came during the First World War.

On transfer of N.G. Mukherjee in 1898 to Shibpur Botanic Garden, silk merchants of Bengal formed themselves into a committee to carry on the scheme already initiated under government patronage. Between 1898 and 1906 this 'Bengal Silk Committee' chalked out various plans to carry on rearing stations and nurseries on a wider scale :

- (i) construction of 9 special nurseries directly under the committee in charge of trained subordinates.
- (ii) appointment of a Superintendent and four supervisors in the districts of Murshidabad, Malda, Rajshahi and Birbhum, to train rearers in their own houses;
- (iii) free gifts of microscopes and other necessary appliances or selling them at cost prices to selected rearers; etc.

Bengal Silk Committee sought to raise for themselves a fund of Rs.5,000 per annum by selling bonds guaranteed for three years; and they proposed a government subsidy of Rs.3,000 per annum. The subsidy was granted and it was raised to extent of Rs.6,000 and subsequently to Rs.10,000.²⁴ However,

the scheme did not proceed as expected. In our opinion, it was not possible to achieve success on a wider scale within the prevailing economic organisation of the industry and without direct government interference. In Murshidabad progress was slower, and in Birbhum or Midnapore the scheme seemed impotent. In the plan, the attention of the Committee was particularly directed to the district of Malda where the best cocoons were available and the best rearers in Bengal lived; accordingly the scheme was relatively successful in Malda. But here too the rearers did not always rear properly and could not avoid the temptation of selling bad seeds. It was also inevitable that the benefit of scientific rearing and appliances could be reaped by rich farmers or mahajans, not by ordinary poor and illiterate rearers overburdened with debt.

In 1906, as a result of silk traders' representation to the government, a committee under the chairmanship of the Director of Agriculture, was appointed to consider the question of a decline of the silk industry in Bengal.²⁵ The committee emphasised again the production of pure seeds and recommended among other things, model rearing houses, extension of mulberry plantation, extension of scientific rearing and above all direct control of the government. Meanwhile in 1905, N.G. Mukherjee was sent on deputation to Kashmir and Mysore to conduct investigations into improved method of silk reeling. In his observation, the inferior

quality of Malda silk was attributed "not to any defect in the reeling machine but to the poverty of Bengal cocoons".²⁶ In April 1908 Agricultural Department of the government of Bengal took up sericultural operations. A special committee was appointed to assist the Director of Agriculture; the director was its chairman and the members represented the European and native firms 'interested in silk industry of the Province'. The Superintendent under the Bengal Silk Committee was appointed Superintendent Sericulture by the government. Government also felt the necessity of a Central Nursery at Berhampore in addition to the nurseries in the silk growing districts.

Old nurseries were taken over by the government from the previous Bengal Silk Committee; but the government was not eager to run numerous seed stations all over the silk producing districts. It very soon followed the old policy of encouraging and depending on private rearers, while operating a few nurseries of its own. The argument was put like this,

"... I have discovered, however, that in France, Italy, Japan and China, Government in no case attempts to supply the entire seed required. The principal quantity is supplied through professional rearers working under Government supervision. Further, it is most important that the existing professional silk-worm rearers should not be ruined by the action of the Government. This would be what would happen

if the scheme as originally conceived were carried into effect."²⁷ Such a logic was forwarded by the government in view of the recurrent losses incurred in running the nurseries.²⁸ Although the government was against opening of newer nurseries, special importance was attached to the two government nurseries opened at Piyasbari and Amriti in Malda, which had been evidenced in the above letter from Blackwood.²⁹ The capital cost of Malda nurseries was Rs.40,000 each, which was equal to Berhampore Central Nursery and higher than other nurseries. Other cost-revenue data at a glance has been mentioned below (as they stood in 1914)³⁰ :

Seed rearing stations : (Malda)	Capital cost on mulberry (Rs.)		Average Annual Recurring Cost (Rs.)	Revenue (Rs.)	
	Incurred	To be incurred		Probable for 1914-15	When completed
Piyasbari	4,000	4,000	9,796	3,000	4,500
Amriti	4,000	Nil	9,696	2,000	4,500

The cost figures are exclusive of the cost of disinfecting the houses of professional rearers as well as cost of expert supervision. What is interesting about the above data is that when the government itself failed to make the nurseries economically viable, it expected private rearers to adopt such a scientific approach to seed rearing and make profits. Government policy to leave mass-scale scientific seed rear-

ing with professional private rearers was the policy of an escapist.

(f) A review of the causes of decline

All the official and semi-official attempts to study the causes of decline in sericulture and raw silk industry in Bengal during the first two decades of the twentieth century mainly considered the following factors behind the ^{diminution}~~diminution~~ :

- (i) increased cost of mulberry cultivation and worse plant being cultivated;
- (ii) better value of land for other crops as compared to mulberry;
- (iii) defective rearing and degeneration of worms;
- (iv) spread of pebrine;
- (v) relative increase in agricultural wages other than mulberry cultivation and cocoon rearing;
- (vi) defects in reeling operation;
- (vii) want of knowledge of market conditions and of proper organisation.

Stress varied from one study to another, but it was only R.R. Ghose who emphasised the seventh point and opined

that this deserved highest attention.³¹ In general the studies emphasised the technical aspects of the industry and finally recommended improvements in rearing and reeling. Lefroy went further to recommend legislative measures like protective import duties. But in our opinion, in the face of international competition unless superior silk at cheaper rates could be produced there was little chance of the industry getting revitalized. The organisation of the industry under the mahajani system was the largest obstacle to be overcome in this respect. Factors like wage increase in staple agricultural crops was actually of little importance, because (i) such an increase was never rapid in the labour surplus agrarian economy, (ii) rearers also engaged the ~~female~~^{female} and child members of the family in rearing operations, which was not possible in all other agricultural crops. When a general decline in Bengal silk is considered, factors like attractiveness of alternative crops was a factor no doubt; but this cannot explain the whole issue, which is evident from the case of Malda where sericulture did not recede. Even in the case of Malda the industry started with a set back from the early 20th century. The set back was not quantitative; it was rather a technological reversal. The large-scale filatures were closed down, smaller private filatures or country ghais remained, while the organisation of the industry was based on adverse land relations and the mahajani system. In the face of rising cost of living the general distress of the rearers and their total dependence on

the mahajan for finance, raw material, appliances, employment and market created an atmosphere where the silk industry could not flourish. It is interesting that the above investigations did not totally overlook the organisational barrier, and in different contexts they concerned themselves with two vital problems : unfavourable rent structure and the mahajan. Even in 1903 rent for mulberry land in Malda was the highest and the rearers found "it impossible to get on without incurring debt."³² From the silk weavers to mulberry cultivators the mahajans dominated on all stages, and N.G. Mukherjee also thought that the industry would be prosperous if the artisans could be "relieved of this burden". Lefroy in 1916 observed that the mahajans as a class were "too prosperous" and the want of capital and organisation among the artisans bound them to the mahajani system.³³ R.R. Ghose remarked that the sericulturists were "over head and ears in debt". "They work more for the benefit of the parasitic money lenders who take out from them their real interest in the work."³⁴ He also suggested formation of co-operative societies and banks for "freeing them from the clutches of these vampires".

In our opinion, these unemphasised observations and comments contained the true picture of the industry and reflected the basic factor restricting the development and growth of ^{it. The spread of mahajani capital and lack of growth of} capitalistic enterprise provided an organisation within which any superficial attempt to modernize must be futile. The parasite of pebrine was perhaps less harmful

than the parasite of mahajan.

5.3 From 1914 to 1947 :

Since the First World War India entered into the phase of modern industrial development; because it is from this period that modern large-scale factories were expanding faster than ever. But the remnants of village handicrafts were not wiped out as a result of the emerging industrial evolution, because of the structure of the rural economy, unchanged living condition in the villages, lack of communication, speciality in the works of artisans, slow and limited industrialization and various other factors. Indian Industrial Commission (1916-18) headed by Sir T.H. Holland also observed the vitality of the old domestic industries as one of the most striking features of Indian industrial life and pointed out the survival of these industries in the face of factory competition both Indian and foreign.³⁵ Malda and its immediate vicinity did not experience the direct effects of modern industries. On the other hand, sericultural operations are so special in nature that it is impossible to set up the industry in the urban areas. Thus the silk industry of Malda region did not come into direct conflict with the new era of large factories in terms of resource and labour use etc.

A few other important aspects and trends in the Indian economy had some relation with the silk industry of Malda. For example, the Report of the Royal Commission on

Agriculture (1926-28) emphasised agricultural research and gave some attention to the co-operative movement. Both of these had some relevance to sericulture and the silk industry. Similarly, the war impetus as well as the depression of 1930 struck both Indian agriculture and export oriented handicrafts. The Provincial Governments in 1937 undertook extensive programmes for reforms and rural reconstruction; their nation-building zeal was interrupted by the exigencies of the Second World War. The War with accompanying problems of supply, the escalating demand for food and raw materials, the famine and haphazard price control, all led the rural economy to a position where the middlemen were benefited at the cost of distress of basic growers. The trend had its impact on the silk growers also, and on the eve of 1947 the condition of the silk industry as well as of the farmers and artisans was no better than their condition prior to 1914.

(a) War-impetus - World War I

The Holland Commission on Indian industries (1918) pointed out in a very precise manner the effect of export potentialities of the War incurred on economic changes in the rural areas. The commission reported, "we find an increasing degree of local specialization in particular crops, especially in those grown for export".³⁶ The industrial scene of Malda studied in the Survey of Cottage Industries in Bengal (1984) reflected similar potentialities.

Our earlier observation regarding the inter-district and intra-district specialization in sericulture, silk reeling and weaving is substantiated by this survey. Silk reeling was found to be the most important industry of Malda district; and such reeling was conducted entirely on country ghais; - there was, of course, some variation in the scale of operation. This industry was found to be the occupation of two thanas only, Kaliachak and Englishbazar, where 1,787 basins were engaged; and the reelers depended entirely on the local production of cocoons.³⁷

From the pre-war days, besides the normal use of silk as an article of dress, demand for silk for its industrial use was expanding, e.g. as electrical insulating material (since silk is a non-conductor of electric current). During the World War I there was a sudden spurt in the demand for silk as it was employed in large quantities for surgical dressings, cartridge bags, balloons, parachutes, chords etc. R.C. Rawley remarked "There was hardly any branch of warfare in which silk goods were not in demand in some form or other".³⁸ This extraordinary war demand was responsible for a great rise in the prices of raw silk and an overall extension of mulberry cultivation in India. But, expansionary effect of the War on Malda was less significant as compared to other parts of India - Kashmir and Mysore. Kashmir had already established a complete government monopoly from the cultivation of mulberry to the

marketing of raw silk, had minimised the chance of disease and had completely modernised its reeling process. Thus Kashmir was naturally the best prepared for taking the fullest advantage of the rise in demand. War demand particularly meant demand for superior quality raw silk. In fact both Bengal and Mysore were caught unprepared; but Mysore could show greater energy in effecting necessary improvements (particularly since 1920) in order to take advantage of the new opportunity. The Malda industry with its stagnant and traditional organisation turned out inferior silk and was generally ignored by the foreign buyers. R.C. Rawlley categorically mentioned the existence of too many middle^{men} and brokers as a prime barrier to the question of economy in the raw silk industry of Bengal.³⁹ When Kashmir silk began to establish its reputation even in the face of competition from China and Japan, Bengal silk was found increasingly unsatisfactory in both England and France. Bengal raws were consumed only in sewing, ribbon and crape weaving industries in Europe. This limited utility prevented price of Bengal raw silk from getting appreciated in the world market during the war boom.

Since the temporary war-impetus had less significant impact on the silk industry of Malda; the Survey of Cottage Industries noted a very unsteady condition of the industry in 1924; but the report failed to make any detailed estimate of the yearly out turn of silk in the district of Malda in

the absence of proper statistics. Weaving branch of the industry now comprised of a negligible part of the entire industry in Malda district. "A microscopic part of the total silk produced is consumed by the silk weavers of the district. The approximate consumption of the district is 55 maunds only".⁴⁰ From the report of this survey we come to learn that the local merchants had innovated a new method of disposing of raw silk by post to merchants in different parts of India and also to Ceylon; but the bulk of Malda's silk went to south India.⁴¹ About 400 maunds of raw silk usually went to the weaving industry of Bankura; and the weavers or merchants of Murshidabad had their supply direct from Malda. This information gives us an impression that both textile and other industries in some parts of India depended on the raw silk supply from Malda. A very interesting point about postal despatch should be noted; the business was conducted entirely on a credit system which raised a great obstacle to fresh parties, merchants or weavers, willing to take up this business. The survey specifically mentioned a new firm under the title of Khan Brothers & Co. whose proprietors were all influential local gentlemen of Malda. It was trying to organise marketing of silk on the advantageous terms to local reelers, but could not push sales as they were unable to take the risks of credit business.

The practice of postal despatch and credit business was acceptable to the merchants at the receiving and,

because (i) it saved them from sending agents to Malda, (ii) it gave them an opportunity to maintain monopoly in their own areas of business. From Malda side, the business of selling raw silk was entirely in the hands of Marwari merchants who functioned as mahajans vis-a-vis the reelers. As compared to other parts of India, the modus operandi of the local merchants was, however, different in Malda and Murshidabad.⁴² The local merchants were known as aratdars who in Malda got quotations for Canton silk or general market price through their agent at Conjeevaram and fix the selling price of a standard variety of local silk. A contract is then entered into with the reelers on the basis of that rate; and obviously the reelers get less than the market price on account of the advancing system. The account with the reeler was adjusted only after the disposal of the silk procured from him, and the reeler after the delivery of his produce had to wait for the sweet will of the merchant-mahajan while the merchant was not responsible for any loss or shortage. It was likely that these merchants deceived the reelers. There was room for fraud, misrepresentation and exploitation at various stages owing to the peculiar accounting system, different weights, lack of finance and marketing ability of the reelers and the peculiarity of moisture absorption possessed by silk which changes its weight with varying degrees of moisture. Under ordinary circumstances the reelers could not know their exact position in the market, as sales were entirely in the

hands of the merchants. Generally, a large advance to the reeler varied between Rs.400 and Rs.500, and usual rate of interest was 15 per cent. But, the price paid to the reeler was so low that sometimes the merchants could afford to call his advance interest-free; the reeler had further to pay towards commission, profits and charges, for charity and various other items. Since Conjeevaram weight and Malda weight differed and since railway freight per maund was smaller from Malda than from Mysore, the selling expenses were lower for Malda merchants than for Mysore merchants.⁴³ Hence, Malda captured a larger ~~share~~^{share} of the south-Indian market. Malda's dependence on south India for sales is also evident from the fact that pricing by Malda merchants was based on the market conditions in south India, as we have just seen.

This type of organisation is raw silk marketing reveals that (i) local price at Malda was to some extent governed by Chinese imports; (ii) the war impetus was not directly effective at Malda, but she expanded her trade to south India, while Kashmir and Mysore was busy meeting the expanded foreign demand; (iii) unlike Kashmir, collection and marketing by merchants at Malda was on primitive lines. As regards (i) about it is to be noted that since 1915 China more or less continually exported to India mostly coarse varieties of her raw silk. Malda had to compete with Chinese silk in the south-Indian market, and we have already

seen that quotation for Canton silk determined the price of Malda silk. China put further attention to the Indian market after the failure of American demand in 1929. Like the petty reelers, the cocoon producers were also heavily indebted to their purchaser - the village mahajan. The entire system of producers' bondage with the class of mahajan stood on the way of the industry's response to a temporary rise in demand.

(b) Remnants of the weaving branch

The survey of cottage industries in Bengal (1924) also portrayed in good details how, in spite of her specialization in raw silk production, Malda maintained some remnants of the weaving branch of the industry. Here too the mahajani system was the cause of the weavers' plight, and even in the face of rising demand for silk fabrics the weaving branch of the district was rapidly dwindling away to antiquity. According to the Report on the survey, traces of three kinds of silk weaving could be found - Katar (mixed fabrics), Matka (woven from silk waste) and pure silk. Of these three, the first kind (i.e. katari) was almost lost. Only a few mahamedan weavers of Sahapur, Bala and Nageswarpur villages in Englishbazar thana area practised such weaving as a subsidiary occupation during only a few months of the year. Otherwise these people were cultivators and/or cotton weavers; they were also engaged in mango business during busy mango season when the looms were closed down. These

weavers produced katari cloths as working partners of the mahajans who supplied raw materials and family expense. The accounts were adjusted at the end of the season and the weavers got normally 25 per cent of the sale proceeds as their wages. Average income of a weaver (assisted by the members of his family) was about Rs.25 per month.⁴⁴ The mahajans sold the goods through brokers and the usual market for these products was the Middle East; - exports were made by Bombay merchants.

Matka weaving was concentrated in two areas. - (a) villages Goyeshpur and Jote within the Englishbazar thana, and (b) villages Narattampur, Mohanbag, Sibnagar and Dewan-jagir in Sibgunj thana close to Englishbazar. The first area had 3 establishments with 13 fly-shuttle looms and one country loom engaging 40 weavers on monthly wage basis, while the second area engaged 44 families and 68 looms. All these weavers generally purchased matka yarn from Jalalpur in Kaliachak area. These yarns were woven into saris with red boarders, dhutis, chadars and thans to the extent of 20,000 yards valued roughly at Rs.55,000 annually. Most of the weavers sold off their produce to the local mahajans with a reduction price up to 50 per cent. On an average, a weaver helped by a female member of the house earned Rs.12 to 14 per month. It is in the case of matka textile than a considerable portion of the produce used to be consumed locally. The rest was to Rajshahi and Calcutta. Mahajans and wholesale

dealers dispose of most of the produce. However, there was enough scope for improvement in the quality of such cloths and the yarn as well.

Pure silk weaving was also concentrated in the same weaving region of the district - from Sahapur to Sibgunj,⁴⁵ but only in 5 villages. The extent of the industry may be conceived from the following table⁴⁶ :

Villages	No. of families	No. of looms	Yearly out-turn (No. of pieces)
1. Puratan Alidanga	12	23	850
2. Nutan Alidanga	11	19	700
3. Sibgunj proper	1	3	75
4. Dewanjagir	12	28	975
5. Hazaridanga	20	39	1,500
Total	56	112	4,100
Value of annual out-turn = Rs.84,000			

These weavers used silk thread produced within the district unlike their counterparts in south India who supplemented domestic supply of raw material by imported varieties. The produce comprised of mainly saris with plain and designed borders as well as some quantity of dhutis and chadars. It was only in the case of pure silk weavers that a few families were found to be working independently of the mahajans; for others, mahajans controlled their life. But still, pure silk

weavers enjoyed higher average income : one weaver helped by one female earned Rs.24 to 25 per month. One or two weavers were stated in the report to be fairly rich; in fact, they owned large land holdings and they were mahajans themselves. Like matka cloths a part of the pure silk produce was locally sold and the rest was sent to Rajshahi and Calcutta by the mahajans.

A closer look at the details provided by the survey of cottage industries (1924) reveal a few important aspects of the weaving branch of the silk industry of Malda (including all the three varieties). First, it should be emphasized that excepting two villages in Jote-Arapur area attached to Old Malda and in the northern suburbs of Englishbazar, all the silk weaving villages lay in the area Sahapur to Sibgunj - attached to the south-eastern side of Englishbazar. All the villages in both the areas were traditionally famous for weaving since the pre-British days; and at the same time, the weavers engaged were also traditional weavers - both Hindus (tantis by caste) and Muslims. It has been pointed out earlier that raw silk production had already concentrated to the area south of Englishbazar. Plotting all these areas on the map of the district we find a southern and south-eastern cluster around Englishbazar the seat of English trade.

Secondly, neither the weavers nor the looms mentioned in the statistical abstracts were exclusively engaged in silk

weaving alone; the silk-weavers had other pursuits - cotton weaving or else, and the same loom used to be engaged in both silk and other sorts of weaving. In general, exception a few weavers in pure-silk, the economic condition of the weavers was poor. The situation explains to some extent why silk weaving more or less completely disappeared from the district in 1940's. For the mass of poor weavers engagement in a production using costlier raw material implying higher debt burden for him proved to be useless; for the few well-to-do weavers silk weaving was not the prime source of their income and wealth, which was land or otherwise, and they had no hesitation in the post-Second World war period to abandoned the less significant productive activity in their economic life. During the inter-war period silk weaving was carried on more as a traditional or habitual economic activity than as a regular productive operation on an economic scale.

Thirdly, the remnants of silk weaving maintained with some allied economic activities which were also lost with the abandoning of weaving. There is no doubt in it that these subsidiary activities were almost negligible in terms of number of men employed or their income; but they existed in the inter-war period as a part of the extinguishing tradition. For example, there were a band of 15 workers in the weaving locality whose business was to make the warp for the weavers; wages of such men was about 12 annas per day. Similarly another special class of workers did the twisting of yarn; -

10 persons helped by 10 boys; - wage of a man with a boy came to about Rs.1 a day. Weavers of Malda also dyed their own yarn of all colours except black which they did in Murshidabad.

Fourthly, the organisation of production was so structured that the mahajans dominated as in the case of raw silk production and as a result of which the prospects of growth was sealed. Growth of private enterprise either in the line of independent weaver or capitalistic entrepreneur would have saved weaving from extinction, particularly in the case of pure silk textiles for which there was a growing internal market. To some extent, tradition thwarted the marketing prospect of Malda textiles in various other ways. For example, all katari goods were woven in thans of long-practised measurement - 8 yds. 27 inches, which was unsuitable for the much altered conditions of market. Since the mahajan was not an entrepreneur nor an order-supplier merchant he had little business to interfere with such specifications.

Fifthly, from the survey of 1924 it is evident that in terms of aggregate almost 50 per cent of the silk textile produced in the district was consumed locally. This is significant, since expansion of internal market meant both of the local market and of the market outside Malda. Under the circumstances, extinction of silk weaving from Malda in 1947 cannot be explained by her own specialization or the

growth of Murshidabad weaving centre alone. One very important fact is undoubtedly the inclusion of Sibgunj thana area into East Pakistan.

(c) Experiments : co-operation

During the inter-war period, experiments by the policy makers were made with the silk industry of Malda along two major directions - (i) economic : provision of a parallel economic or financial organisation through the establishment of co-operative societies, and (ii) scientific : provision of research, extension services and training facilities, supply of proper seeds etc. Both the attempts were more or less ineffective in breaking the good old stagnation and the vicious structure of the industry. The second experiment along with some supplementary proposals will be discussed in the sub-section 5.3(f) below; at this stage we just have a review of the co-operatives only.

The plight of the silk producing people in Malda had been long drawn and since the early 20th century need for co-operative societies was discussed. The stress on organising co-operatives as a suggested way out for improvement was renewed in 1920's. Peddie,⁴⁷ a very enthusiastic District Collector, took initiative in this matter. Initially, co-operative societies were planned as credit societies advancing loans to both sericulturists and reelers, but later on establishment of reelers' societies (producing raw silk)

was the main target. In 1922 Malda District Central Co-operative Bank resolved (resolution dated 30 June 1922) that it was prepared to organise two silk-societies in the district provided that :

- (i) About one lakh of rupees necessary to finance the societies will be available as loan from the Federation of Co-operative Banks or any other source at a rate of interest 6 per cent per annum.⁴⁸
- (ii) A cash credit of at least Rs.50 thousand be granted immediately.
- (iii) A specially qualified officer be deputed by either the Sericultural or Co-operative Department for proper supervision of the societies.
- (iv) At least 12 members join each society and the amounts advanced should be covered by assets.

From the experiences the District Central Co-operative Bank had already gathered from financing a few reeler members of existing agrarian societies, the Bank included stock of reeled silk as the most important item in the asset side. Hence, regarding the fourth condition, the Bank sought authority from the Registrar, Co-operative Societies for supplying raw silk against orders from the Registrar. Such a system would have enabled the financing organisation to have a command over the produce of the societies; and a kind

of co-operative linkage could well be established with the weavers' societies in the districts of Murshidabad Bankura and Birbhum. It was also considered that such marketing arrangement by the Bank or the Co-operative Department could have made the societies viable. But in practice the required co-operative net work was absent and in the marketing of raw silk the major difficulty was that the competitor Marwari merchants were engaged in credit sale which became the general practice in the silk market. On the other hand, in the absence of a detailed inter-district co-operative linkage and widespread net work of societies, the marketing arrangement seemed much like a replica of the mahajani system - the creditor commanding the out-turn of the debtor.

Overcoming the difficulties was not easy, and establishment of two reelers' societies in Malda took shape after a few years; solution to the problem of linkage was attempted by organising simultaneously the Bengal Co-operative Silk Union in 1927. But, the story of their effectiveness continued to be disappointing. Particularly in the face of declining silk prices and increasing foreign competition during the great depression years, the viability of the societies could not be properly judged. The Report of the Tariff Board 1933 found only one silk co-operative society in Malda, and that too not in good health.⁴⁹ For decade to come co-operative movement failed to bring about any significant change in the traditional system of silk manufacture in

GRAPH III



INDIAN EXPORT OF RAW SILK

Drawn on the basis of LEAGUE OF NATIONS
STATISTICAL YEAR BOOK 1930-31, quoted in
Report of Indian Tariff Board 1933, p.5

Malda.

(d) The trend

The survey of cottage industries in Bengal in 1924 depicted the Malda scene at a particular point of time after World War I; but to understand the trend of the industry of Malda it should be viewed against the international and national perspective. Report of the Indian Tariff Board (1933) analysed, on the basis of available international statistics, the relative average shares of different countries in world silk production and consumption during 1920-29 as follows :

	<u>Production</u>	<u>Consumption</u>
Japan	65%	U.S.A. 70%
China	20%	Rest 30%
Italy	10%	
Rest	5%	

The trend of world production disclosed by these data showed that production had decreased during 1920's in Europe and India while it went up rapidly in China and Japan, - at least exportable surplus in these two countries increased enormously. On the demand side, U.S.A. became the single largest consumer and hence the Wall Street crisis of 1929 had severe impact on all the silk producing countries. Fluctuation in Indian export is evident from Graph III.

This graph reveals that while exports to the world market from Japan and China increased steadily during 1920's Indian exports declined when the War impetus was over, and after a temporary revival during 1926-27, declined sharply again. In fact, during 1920's both post-war boom and phenomenal prosperity of the largest consumer U.S.A. sustained high demand for silk and silk products in the international market; but, India failed to share the advantages. The temporary revival of Indian exports in 1926-27 can be explained both by improvement in the quality of Kashmir silk and decline of Italian production. That Indian exports started decreasing from the year preceding Wall Street crisis was a phenomenon to be explained by the presence of her Asian competitors. From 1929 onwards there was no scope for the Indian industry to thrive, since against falling international price of silk her export price rose as a result of sterling depreciation.

World price of silk declined severely in 1930-31. Towards the end of 1930 price of raw silk was 40 per cent lower than at the beginning of that year and only 1/7th of its record value in 1920; at the end of 1931 silk prices were the half of what they were at the beginning of the year and 1/10th of the record prices obtained in 1920.⁵⁰ It may be noted that silk prices fell proportionately more than those of cotton and wool. This was perhaps due to greater elasticity of demand for silk as it is an article of luxury. In 1932 the rate of price cut was checked to

some extent because production was curtailed in some countries, notably in China and Italy, and there was some improvement in demand. During the same period of 1930-32 price of Indian silk rose ^{in the world market;} but this aspect did by no means reflect any special demand for Indian silk, it was purely nominal and was due to the linking of the rupee to sterling and the consequent depreciation of rupee in terms of gold. This invariably gave a distinct advantage to Chinese silk competing with Indian silk.

China was not only competing with India in the foreign market, she now threatened the indigenous Indian producer by a very unequal competition within the internal market of India.⁵¹ India not only lost her own share of the world market, her weaving establishments were now attracted to the better quality of foreign raw silk, - Indian raw silk production faced a crisis. At the same time, artificial silk which suited people's straitened purses better, flooded the Indian market. Entry of Chinese raw silk into the internal market of India was not new. We have already seen import of Chinese silk by the south-Indian weavers in the early 20th century. Even in 1886, Wardle, incharge of the Silk Court in the Indo-Colonial Exhibition (Calcutta), observed the use of superior Chinese raw silk by Indian manufacturers.⁵² But, now the intensity of Chinese competition became damaging to the Indian industry. Chinese export of raw silk in India prior to 1929 mostly consisted of coarse qualities, because her best silk were

sent to Europe and America. But after the failure of American demand, China began to send to India unusually large quantities of high grade filature silk at a price uneconomic to the producer of Indian hand-reeled silk. The Chinese government also gave bounty to encourage export of raw silk. An compared to Malda⁵³ the situation was less damaging to Kashmir and Mysore, because silk industry in both of these provinces under complete or partial state assistance had already improved the quality of their silk while Malda produced inferior variety only. On technical aspect can be cited : In 1933, the Tariff Board found no power-driven filature in Malda, while Mysore had three French type and Kashmir had five Italian type power-driven filatures engaged in raw silk production.⁵⁴ Along with the Indian industry losing ground in the world market, Malda had special reasons to suffer from the export shock. In the twenties Malda silk, because of its inferior quality, was generally used in Europe for making silk hats and some types of ribbon; and in the early thirties these articles went gradually out of fashion thereby incurring a great loss of export market to Malda.

Markets outside India for Malda silk was thus lost altogether; the attraction of the European manufacturers to the use of silk waste was remarkably inadequate to compensate for the loss in any way. In the internal market Malda could not overcome her weaker competitive position in relation to

either Chinese raw silk or raw silk from Kashmir and Mysore. As a result the market for Malda silk in different centres of India, viz., Nagpur, Sholapur etc. ceased for some time; despatch to Benaras had practically entirely been stopped according to the Industrial and Traders Association of Benaras and the Director of Industries, U.P. Various examples of big transactions to these centres being stopped were available.⁵⁵ Messrs. Nagindas Fulchand, a leading merchant of Benaras, who dealt with 40 per cent of Malda raw silk closed their business at Malda in 1933 and started trading in Chinese silk. Similarly Mr. Chinai, a Bombay-based trader had three branch agencies at Malda, Jangipur and Rajshahi; in 1933 only one agency was working at Jangipur for observation only, without doing any business. In 1934, the District Collector of Malda collected figures indicating a most disheartening state of the silk business at Malda. Prices of Malda raw silk fell below average and in 1934-35 price of Malda hand-reeled silk varied around Rs.4/- per lb. While the fair price for inferior silk recognised by the Tariff Board was Rs.5/-; at the same time ex-duty price of foreign silk in India was slightly below Rs.3/- per lb.⁵⁶ Such price a position not only injured the reelers but also the rearers of Malda. The power looms in the silk weaving mills of Calcutta, Bombay and Mysore used insignificant proportion of Indian raw silk and no Malda silk. Thus demand for Malda silk outside Bengal went remarkably down excepting a part of

south-India. The only consumer of Malda raw silk became the handloom weavers of Bengal; but the rank of Bengal as a producer of silk goods was far below that of some other centres like Mysore. According to the census of 1931, the annual value of silk goods produced in Bengal and Mysore were Rs.18.42 lakhs and Rs.48 lakhs respectively.⁵⁷ Under the pressure of international demand conditions as well as of competition from China on the one hand and Mysore and Kashmir on the other, the Malda silk industry was left to a condition absolutely without any prospect of growth.

(e) The case for protection

Although Malda was the worst sufferer, the Indian silk industry in general was shocked by the fall in world purchasing power and foreign competition. It was represented to the Government of India that imports constituted a grave menace to the existence of the indigenous sericultural industry of this country. It was therefore decided by the Department of Commerce, Government of India that the claim of the industry for 'protection' should be the subject of an enquiry by the Tariff Board under the Presidentship of Mr. Fazal Ibrahim Rahimtoola. The Board was requested to examine the following questions and to make recommendations⁵⁸

- (a) whether having regard to the nature and extent of the competition of raw silk from foreign countries, the claim of the sericultural industry to protection could be

established; and

- (b) if the claim was found to be established, in what form protection should be given and to what extent.

In particular, the Board was requested to consider how its recommendations would affect the handloom weaving industry.

The Board, after a detailed scrutiny made out a case for protection of the silk industry in terms of the following⁵⁹ -

- (1) silk production as an old established industry was to be safeguarded from extinction,
- (2) the industry might be localised but was of general importance,
- (3) it had important place particularly in the agricultural economy, it was important as subsidiary occupation and also as a supplier of raw material to the weaving industry,
- (4) it had natural advantages, advantages of labour and power and specific advantage of a potential market.

About the fourth point above, the Board observed that India

in 1933 consumed about double the quantity of raw silk she produced; and all the articles which were manufactured from imported silk could be made from Indian silk. That was the only direction in which, the Board opined, market for Indian raw silk might be extended. In this sense the Board ruled out the possibility of promoting export of Indian raw silk in the near future; the contraction of foreign market for silk, the Board analysed, was consequent upon the economic situation all over the globe. "We regard the decline as permanent and expect the industry to meet it by an adjustment of the cost of production" - the Board commented.⁶⁰ Accordingly, while recommending import duty as the measure of protection, the Board reported :

"The object with which we propose the duty is to afford the industry time in which to re-organise itself, to reduce its cost of production by cheapening mulberry leaf, eliminating loss in cocoon production, and improving the efficiency of its reeling methods, and to introduce some degree of method and system into its marketing."⁶¹

In course of its analysis the Board also emphasised that government assistance in India was essential for the agricultural industry. This was evident from the fact that the industry was at its best in those parts of India where it received the greatest help and encouragement from the state,

viz., Kashmir and Mysore. Greater co-ordination among Kashmir, Mysore and Bengal was also advised.

On the basis of various cost and economy aspects and cost differential with imported silk - the Board, however, recommended for a period of five years, different specific and ad valorem tariff rates for all kinds of silk articles imported - from silk textiles to cocoon. In the case of raw silk the proposed duty was Rs.2-6 annas per lb. or 50 per cent ad valorem whichever is higher : import duty applied to all classes and qualities of raw silk and the same ad valorem duty was applicable to cocoon imports. Attempts to cost reduction and quality improvement were encouraged and the Board in this connection made some supplementary proposals,⁶² e.g.,

- (i) need for compensating the weaver for the increased cost of his raw material,
- (ii) improvement in technical methods and marketing,
- (iii) Imperial Sericultural Committee to be set up as a branch of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, etc.

It was stressed that the success of China or Japan was largely due to measures adopted for improvement in the technological aspects of the silk industry.

The Government by the Indian Tariff (Textile Protection) Amendment Act of 1934 granted protection, for the first time, to the sericultural industry for a period of five years, and it was subsequently extended for another year by the Second Amendment in 1939 pending consideration of Tariff Board's Report of 1938. But, the Tariff Act, while accepting the principles of protection imposed duty rates below those recommended; - in the case of raw silk the duty was 25 per cent ad valorem or a specific duty of Rs.0-14 annas per lb. Accordingly many quarters were dissatisfied with the act, considered protection to be insufficient and proposed enhancement of protective duties.⁶³

In our opinion, enhancement of duties was not the unique solution, particularly in the case of Malda. Because the problem was not the protection of an infant industry, it was the saving of an old established industry from extinction; and hence more important was production and sale of raw silk on an economically viable basis. On the other hand, it was of little avail to protect the sericultural industry unless the silk produced was of the sort which the Indian weaving industry wanted and unless the sericultural industry was likely to produce as much silk as the weaving establishment in aggregate was prepared to use. Under the circumstances, it was unlikely for the Malda silk industry with its existing organisational framework, to rise above the drifting situation only with the help of a protective

umbrella; and we have already pointed out in sub-section 5.3(d) above, that business in 1934-35 was dull and stagnant without any visible prospect of change.

(f) After protection

Even the inadequate protection given to the sericultural industry by the Tariff Act of 1934 was able to reduce import of raw silk to some extent; but for obvious reasons Malda experienced insignificant effect of such a policy. The second Tariff Board on protection of the sericultural industry was set up in 1938 and this Board recommended enhancement of duties on both raw silk and silk fabrics.⁶⁴ But before action could be taken on the report of this Board, the Second World War broke out, and the government deferred their decision on long term policy. The tariff duties on silk were, however, extended from time to time by Tariff Acts until the end of March 1947. In fact, outbreak of the war rendered tariff protection unnecessary, and the Second World War proved to be a real impetus for the Indian silk industry in general and Malda in particular, however temporary that might be. The altered role of the government was specially effective to bring about a change.

A change in government attitude could be visible since 1937 in the hands of the Bengal provincial government. Although in 1936 Bengal had very little to exhibit in the All India Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition,⁶⁵ an ambitious Five-Year plan for industrial development of

Bengal was chalked out in 1937 which included the silk industry in a big way. The Plan for the silk industry proposed a scheme for development and thorough reorganisation - mulberry cultivation, cocoon production, reeling and weaving, marketing and standardization, not excluding training and financial facilities or establishment of a Central Silk Institute. The whole scheme was arranged in three stages⁶⁶ - (i) mulberry cultivation and sericulture proper, (ii) reeling of raw silk, and (iii) manufacturing and weaving; of these stages the first two were particularly relevant to Malda.

Reduction of rent on mulberry land was proposed, but actual experimental work and researches in mulberry cultivation as well as improving the race of cocoon worms were started on a very small scale with the help of the University College of Science, Calcutta. The reeling branch was planned to be developed as a capitalistic industry; - quality of cocoons, skill of reelers, use of suitable machinery, co-operative or other forms of organisation, unintermittent reeling throughout the year, conditioning houses along the Japanese model, standardization, transport cost were the aspects which were covered. Such an elaborate and overambitious plan was beyond the capacity of the provincial government to execute and as the War broke out in 1939 there was no opportunity to implement the scheme in such a form. Because the Government of India was now interested in increased supply only.

Table XAverage Price of Raw Silk Per lb.

Date	Price of good quality filature silk	Price of inferior silk
	(Rs. - As. - Ps.)	Rs. - As. - Ps.
1943 December	41 - 14 - 0	17 - 9 - 0
1944 January	43 - 0 - 0	16 - 6 - 0
March	44 - 0 - 0	22 - 0 - 0
August	90 - 8 - 0	30 - 0 - 0
December	60 - 0 - 0	27 - 0 - 0
1945 January	72 - 0 - 0	19 - 8 - 0
March	112 - 0 - 0	25 - 5 - 0
April	118 - 0 - 0	29 - 8 - 0
May	72 - 0 - 0	22 - 0 - 0
June	71 - 0 - 0	22 - 8 - 0

Source : Government of India, Department of Industries and Supplies; Report of the Silk Panel, 1947; p.5.

The War impetus took a many-pronged shape : First, there came a total cessation of silk imports to India. Secondly, war brought with itself the urgent, new and imperative demand for silk. Thirdly, since the large war requirements were mainly of good quality filature silk, Government specially stimulated the development of filatures and gave sericulture an incentive unequalled in the past. Fourthly, along with the diminution of imported silk textiles and other consumer goods, the purchasing power of some classes of people in the internal market increased. As a result of such increased demand conditions, both internal and external, the price of all categories of raw silk shot up to unprecedented heights. The highest price rise was of course visible in filature silk, which itself was a reflection of war demand. From the sequence of time in Table X it is evident that the price movement was directly related to the war demands. Since the war mainly needed better quality filature silk, price for such silk rose proportionately faster and the gap between the two prime grades of silk widened. This is why Government encouraged the production of filature raw silk and directly purchased such silk from the producers on the basis of cost of production.

Apart from stimulating filatures the Government executed another important policy during the war - a long outstanding proposal for setting up a sericultural research station. The need for establishment of a Central Research Station was first impressed upon the Government in 1918 by

the Imperial Institute, London. The Second All-India Sericultural experts Conference held in Lucknow in December 1940 stressed the same need. With co-operation of the Bengal Government the Central Sericultural Research Station at Baharampur (district Murshidabad) was established late in 1943 with a sub-station at Kalimpong. It was easier for the government to convert the central nursery into Central Research Station. The work of the Station was carried on in four different sections, viz., Biological, Botanical, Biochemical and Pathological. Of them the Biological section was the most important initially, and it started collecting different worm races from various parts of the world and reared them with a view to acclimatize them in this country, obtain suitable races for different regions, and hybridize. Supply of disease-free worm seeds to rearers was the main objective, but various experiments were also made to study climatic variations on silk worms, diseases of the worms, seed storage technique, improved cultivation of mulberry etc. The scope of the Research Station was limited and after five years from the date of its inception the station was found to cope with 20 per cent of the rearers' demand.⁶⁷ Malda, however, was in an advantageous position because of her nearness to the Research Station.

As a result of the war impetus and the initiative by the Government of India as well as the Bengal Government, Malda experienced development of her silk industry in two

major directions. First, the extension of sericulture : such extension was evident from the extension of mulberry cultivation. Acreage under mulberry rose in Bengal from 8,893 in 1939-40 to 15,516 in 1945-46;⁶⁸ and given the specialization among districts in silk production and weaving, most of this extension occurred in Malda. This definitely was an indication that sericulture now turned to be a profitable pursuit compared to other cash crops. But, this does not mean that the additional profits raised the standard of living of the basic growers; because the organisation of the industry remained unchanged, and there was no scope for the profits being shared in higher proportion by the actual sericulturists. Rather, the famine condition and the general scarcity reduced the standard of living of the common rural folk. Secondly, the number of filature basins increased in a bid to meet the nature of new demand. Power driven filature establishments like those of Kashmir or Mysore were not set up in Malda, but simple filatures were established and the number of filature basins in the district increased during the was as follows⁶⁹ :

1939-40	1940-41	1941-42	1942-43	1943-44	1944-45
100	120	140	180	1,231	1,735

Development of filature silk was a new basis for optimism in a situation when little significance was left for raw

silk from Malda both in the national and the international markets.

It was, however, difficult to expect much from the abnormal ^{war} ~~was~~ situation. Because, as the war-impulse was exhausted the problem became how to safeguard against a possible collapse, the industry which the state encouraged to expand for its own purposes. If the industry would have been left unsupported at this stage, a shrinkage or even a collapse along with consequent unemployment was probable. It was a good sign that the Government of India in 1947 appointed a Silk Panel with R.N. Rao as its Chairman. The Silk Panel confined their enquiry into sericulture proper, i.e. from cultivation of mulberry to production of raw silk and spun silk; utilization of raw silk was considered to come under a separate panel for the weaving industry. The recommendations of the Silk Panel were mainly directed to :

- (1) Improvement of mulberry cultivation;
- (2) Adequate supply of disease-free seed and improvement of quality;⁷⁰
- (3) Control of silk worm diseases;
- (4) Improvement of rearing, reeling, organisation and marketing, the need for sericultural co-operatives being stressed;

- (5) Development of spun silk industry and full utilization of by-products;
- (6) Inter-Provincial and states co-operation in regard to these objectives, - setting up a Central Silk Board of India to bring together the knowledge and interests of all silk producing parts of the country.

The policy of protection was executed half-heartedly. State initiative during and after the war increased expectations; but how far such initiative could be productive depended on many 'ifs', the most important one was, of course, government's ability to restructure the organisation of the industry.

Notes and References to Chapter V

1. Wages of the spinners at Malda residency remained stagnant at Rs.2.5 per month over the period from 1792/3 to 1822/3 although prices of consumption articles nearly doubled during this period.

S. Bhattacharya in Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.II (ed. by Dharma Kumar), Delhi 1982; p.288.

2. Special Silk Court at the exhibition was set up with the help of the Bengal government and Bengal Silk Committee. The purpose of the Silk Court was collection of silks and information as might tend to awaken the attention of the manufacturers and to bring prominently forward the question of silk production to the notice of the public. Wardle, an expert silk dyer who took charge of Indian Silk at Paris Exhibition of 1878, came to India to take charge of the Silk Court in the Exhibition of 1886.

Proceedings of a Conference on Silk held in the Office of the Revenue and Agricultural Department of the Government of India, at Calcutta, on the 8th January 1886; Govt. Publication 1886; p.1.

3. Proceedings of a Conference on Silk ... etc., at Calcutta 1886, Ibid.; p.5.
4. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Calcutta 1903; p.32.
5. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Frbrics of Bengal, Ibid.; p.62.
6. Sir George Watt - The Commercial Products of India, London 1908; pp.1014-15; and

N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Ibid.; pp.70-71.

In 1911 census the number dropped to 42,548 again.

7. In the indigenous method silk threads were bleached and dyed before they were woven. Buchanan and Hunter have described the numerous dyeing materials such as : Turmeric and jackwood (for yellow), Safflower (for rose red), Manjit (for red) as well as iron, wheat flour, butter, alum, terminalia chebula etc. for different shades. Materials were mostly grown within and in the immediate neighbourhood of Malda region.

8. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Op.cit.; p.45, and
W.W. Hunter - A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.VII, London 1876 (or Indian Reprint 1974); p.100.
9. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Ibid.; p.101.
10. H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.I, Calcutta 1916, p.141.
11. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Op.cit.; p.66.
12. Bombay mills with steam power used to weave silk fabrics for the Burmese market.
W.W. Hunter - Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume IV, London 1881; p.578.
13. L.S.S. O'Malley - Bengal District Gazetteer (Murshidabad), Calcutta 1914; p.128.
14. J.H.T. Walsh - A History of Murshidabad District, London 1902; pp.105, 112.
15. Sir George Watt - The Commercial Products of India, Op.cit.; pp.1014-15.
16. L.S.S. O'Malley - Bengal District Gazetteer (Rajshahi), Calcutta 1916; pp.108-9.
17. J.L. Sherwill - A Geographical and Statistical Report of the Dinagepore District (1863), Calcutta 1865.
18. Letter No.17 dt. 25 February 1878; Collection XXIV - Settlement. (MC-RR).
19. H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.18.
20. N.G. Mukherjee was a graduate in Agricultural Science from Europe. While East India Company's experts paid attention to reeling, Mukherjee concentrated on nurseries. A total approach was still lacking.

21. Note on sericulture in Bengal, A pamphlet published by the Deptt. of Agriculture, Bengal, 1908-09; pp.1-2.
22. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Op.cit.; pp.16-18.
23. "The Pasteur ideas regarding disease were accepted blindly, without investigation, without reference to the wholly different conditions. For thirty years disease-free seed has been issued, but no disease-free race exists at present even."
H. Maxwell-Lefroy - A Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.28.
24. Note on Sericulture in Bengal, a pamphlet (govt.) Op.cit.; p.2.
25. The committee was appointed in the Government Order No. 1062 T-R, dt. 18 June 1906.
26. N.G. Mukherjee - Suggestions on the improvement of silk reeling in Bengal; Calcutta 1906; p.8.
27. Letter from J.R. Blackwood, Director of Agriculture, dt. Calcutta 7 June 1916, quoted in
H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.III, Calcutta 1916; p.14.
28. 'Statement of Profit and Loss' in Note on Sericulture in Bengal, a pamphlet (govt.), Op.cit.; p.7.
29. Nurseries at Berhampore (Murshidabad), Piyasbari and Amriti are still existent.
30. H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.III, Op.cit.; pp.16-22.
31. R.R. Ghose - Decline of the Silk Industry in Bengal and how to arrest it, Calcutta 1915; p.4.
32. N.G. Mukherjee - A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal, Op.cit.; pp.7-8, 13-14.
33. H. Maxwell-Lefroy - Report on an inquiry into the Silk Industry in India, Vol.I, Op.cit.; p.5.

34. R.R. Ghose - Decline of the Silk Industry in Bengal and how to arrest it, Op.cit.; p.33.
35. Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, Calcutta 1918; p.193.
36. Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, Ibid.; p.3.
37. Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries in Bengal, Department of Industries, Bengal, Calcutta 1924; pp.83-85.
38. Report of the Indian Tariff Board regarding the grant of protection to the sericultural industry, Delhi 1933; p.6.
39. R.C. Rawlley - Report on an inquiry into the utilization of Indian Silk in Great Britain and France, Calcutta 1918; pp.67, 79.

For other observations particularly pp.9-10, 15, 45-46, 65.

40. Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.85.
41. From postal information the survey gathered that raw silk from Malda was sent to so many centres as Berhampore (Ganjam), Trichinopoly, Triplicane, Masulipatam, Trivancore, Conjeevaram, Salem, Secunderabad, Belgaum, Surat, Sujanagar (Gurudaspur), Mobarakpur (Azimgarh), Bijnour, Amritsar, Anantpur (M.S.M. Rly.), North Arcot, Madras, Bangalore, Tanjore, Bhandra, Chittagong, Bankura, Benaras, Kayts (Ceylon) and other places. The largest part of such despatch went to south India.

Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries in Bengal, Op.cit.; p.85.
42. Practically very little business was done by the merchants of Malda on commission basis business was conducted on outright purchase basis and their profit lay in the use of mahajani power and capital.

The Report of the Indian Tariff Board regarding the grant of protection to the sericultural industry, Delhi 1933; pp.119-121.

43. Conjeevaram 72 tolas = 1 seer
Malda 81 tolas = 1 seer
44. Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries in Bengal,
Op.cit.; p.90.
45. After 1947 most part of Sibgunj thana has fallen into
East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.
46. Source : Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries in
Bengal, Op.cit.; p.94.
47. After whom the present Silk Reeling Institute of Malda
town has been named.
48. On enquiry the Bank found that societies would not take
a loan on more than 9 per cent interest; hence keeping a
margin of 3 per cent the Bank sought funds not exceeding
6 per cent rate of interest.
49. Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Op.cit.; p.121.
50. Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Op.cit.; p.7.
51. Burma also faced a similar problem of menacing Chinese
competition into her internal market since 1920's and
more since early 1930's.

C.C. Ghosh - Report of the sericultural operations,
Burma (for the year ending 31 March 1933), Rangoon 1933,
p.1.
52. Proceedings of a Conference on Silk etc. at Calcutta
on the 8th January 1886, Op.cit.; p.6.
53. Bengal Raw Silk had laready become synonymous with
Malda silk.
54. Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Op.cit.; pp.29,
83-84.
55. A.N. Sen - The inadequacy of protection to Silk Industry,
Calcutta 1935; p.9.
56. In March 1935 such price of foreign raw silk (mainly
Chinese) was 2 rupees 9 annas only.

- A.N. Sen - The inadequacy of protection of Silk Industry, Ibid.; p.3. Also p.6 for the level of Malda silk price.
57. Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Op.cit.; p.102.
 58. Resolution of the Government of India in the Department of Commerce No.607-T(1) dated 3 December 1932.
 59. Chapter XII of the Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Op.cit.
 60. Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Ibid.; p.165.
 61. Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Ibid.; p.166.
 62. Chapter XIV of the Report of the Indian Tariff Board 1933, Op.cit.
 63. A.N. Sen, Inspector of Technical and Industrial Institutions, Bengal, wrote - The inadequacy of protection to Silk Industry, (Published by Govt. of Bengal, Industries Deptt.), Op.cit.
 64. Report of the Indian Tariff Board on the continuance of protection to the Sericultural Industry, Bombay 1949; p.3.
 65. The fabulous exhibition was held in Lucknow from December 1936 to February 1937. Bengal demonstrated among other things 5 looms weaving silk and cotton along with some exhibits on the sericultural process.

Proceedings of the Eighth Industries Conference (Lucknow), Delhi 1937; p.96.
 66. S.C. Mitter, Director of Industries, Bengal - A Five Year Plan for Industrial Development of Bengal, Calcutta 1937; pp.51-56.
 67. An abridged report on the working of the Central Sericultural Research Station, Berhampore (1943-48), Govt. Publication 1950; p.1.
 68. In Mysore the extension of acreage under mulberry was faster - 30,000 in 1939-40 to 78,000 in 1945-46.

Report of the Silk Panel 1947, Govt. of India, Deptt. of Industries and Supplies; p.6.

69. Report of the Silk Panel 1947, Ibid.; p.15.

70. The Silk Panel observed that Malda's basic problem on the technological front was the provision of better worm seeds. Government experiments with hybridization were yet to yield satisfactory results.

Report of the Silk Panel 1947, Ibid.; p.9.

Chapter VI

Summary and Conclusions

The annals of the silk industry in Malda region is very remote. This region is a part of the tract of land where sericulture (mulberry silk) was first introduced in India. For centuries Malda region practised the art of sericulture and silk-textile manufacture. In the pre-British period, within the organisational structure of a pre-capitalist mode, Malda enjoyed the glory of producing and exporting silk textiles of high standard in spite of certain ups and downs in the industry. Her foreign trade in silk textiles was based on both uniqueness in quality and the competitive power of low cost of production. The English as well as their earlier European predecessors were attracted to this region by the cheap abundance of cotton, silk and mixed varieties of exquisite textiles. The Malda Factory was opened by the East India Company as their sixth centre of commerce in 1680 in search of novelties. Silk fabrics and special Maldahi mixed stuff were such novelties that ^{satisfied} ~~satisfied~~ the company. With such advent of these foreign traders, i.e. the pressure of foreign demand on the Malda silk industry, there was a simple possibility of the industry breaking the stagnation of the pre-capitalist organisation and starting a process of growth and dynamism. But that nothing of the sort happened can be explained from the impact of the English trade policy on the simple and

quiet economic life of this country.

For any industry to grow, certain structural changes in terms of both method and organisation of production are inevitable. Such changes occur under the pressure of expanding market and through accumulation of surplus as well as its re-investment. In our opinion, the forces behind structural change in the silk industry of Malda during the British period became impotent on account of organisational barriers. Stagnation in the British period is characterised by the organisation of silk production; - the stagnation is structural. It is also our opinion that the decline of the silk industry in Malda region occurred in two stages :

Stage I : Her transition from a manufacturer of silk goods to a producer of raw silk, which was forced upon her in the last quarter of the 18th century. (Analysed in Chapter III).

Stage II : An absolute decline in the capability of the existing industry it self, which is witnessed since 1880's. (Analysed in Chapter IV).

Organisational barrier

It is important that Malda factory was established at a time when both Bengal silk goods and raw silk had a good market in England and Europe and these were fetching good prices. Under the circumstances, importance of this youngest

factory rose to the rank of the fourth in terms of investment. Although Malda factory had to be closed down for some time towards the close of 1680's on account of a conflict between the English and the Nawab on the issue of granting privileges, the situation at the end of 1690's was very favourable for the growth of company's investment at Malda. Such a position was further accentuated by the decline of Gujrat trade in the early 18th century and the corresponding increase in the importance of Bengal trade. Expansion in the magnitude of company's commerce was undoubtedly a factor which changed the direction, composition and control of India's foreign trade. Direction and control of trade changed along with the growing strength of the company; as regards composition of trade what may be observed at the least is the steady import of bullion with which the company and other Europeans paid for the exports from India.

It is necessary to mention here that European goods were too costly for the Indian buyers to be greatly in demand, while the higher price of silver in this country gave a natural stimulus to its export from Europe in return for the import of low-cost manufactured commodities. The company was an important earner of precious metals through re-export of Indian commodities to the continent (also known as the Levantine market). Such a pattern of trade with India provoked doctrinaire prejudice in England against the

export of treasure; and the company had to overcome the mercantilist theories to secure official approval of its policy; because, its success depended on the purchase of commodities with ready money at the supply points - the so called factories. On the other hand, the phenomenal increase in foreign trade along with bullion that poured into the Imperial mints of this country resulted into an expansion of money supply as well as economic activity in Bengal. A marked increase in the output of silk textiles and raw silk at all the centres including Malda was also an outcome of such expansionary effect. But, this tremendous pressure of foreign trade and the consequent changes failed to alter the general economic structure of this country. To be specific about the silk industry, apart from the quantitative enlargement of output no major qualitative change was witnessed. Expanding output did not result into accumulation since the structure of the industry was based on a chain of middleman hierarchy founded by the British, which was a direct hindrance to accumulation, re-investment, growth and structural change. Nevertheless, other opinions on this issue, i.e., lack of qualitative change in the traditional silk manufacturing industry during this period, are available; but they appear to be stray comments.

Some investigators have stressed the absence of division of economic functions between rural and urban centres along European lines; some others have pointed out the serious limitation on the overall size of the domestic market;

still others emphasize the stagnant technology. But, all these analyses are inconclusive in nature. Because, traditional silk manufacturing industry was localized around capital cities and trading centres while enlargement of foreign demand was sufficient for a technological breakthrough and structural change. In our opinion, the most important observation relevant to silk industry is the backward organisation of production. Malda's silk industry may be a case study to testify the observation that lack of organisational change was at the root. Because in Malda, it is the East India Company which firmly established the middleman hierarchy that was less prominent before the company era. The company found it difficult to do without dalals who knew the local market, and the company found it advantageous to involve big merchants who had the finance. Merchants' control over the producers or artisans was not new, what was new was the rapid growth of such control as well as erection of a multi-tiered broker system where the producer was completely alienated from his purchaser. Hence, within the framework of the company's trading method, commercial organisation and financial techniques, the profits from expansion of output was appropriated by the host of brokers and merchants hindering the scope for accumulation, reinvestment and growth or even the scope for the emergence of independent private producer under the conditions of enlarged demand.

Specialisation and entrepreneurship

With the starting of the industrial revolution in England and seizure of political power in this country by the company over administration and revenue, England could force upon Malda a transition from manufacturer of silk fabrics to a producer of raw silk as semi-manufactured stuff. This was, in fact, a part of the general process of colonial exploitation and conscious attempt by England to convert India to a primary producing country serving the interests of British industries. To the advocates of the newly developing theory of comparative costs, the decline of Indian textile and other industries might provide a near-perfect example. A shift in the production function brought about by the industrial revolution reduced cost of production in the British manufacturing industries; and England was now in a position to undersell Indian domestic products. Price elasticity of demand for British textiles in India was also high. Thus, for the first time in history, India stood in the position of a buyer of commodities, whose traditionally low-cost products were being pushed out of both domestic and foreign markets. But, comparative cost was certainly not the only determinant of trade between India and England. Political power and coercive methods were applied to meet the colonial interests of England in this country. Hence, in the transition process, it is not the comparative cost of silk textiles that determined the fate of artisans in Malda. It is rather the interests of British industries which

controlled the production decision of the artisans of Malda; - they had no choice, because the company was the only buyer. The East India Company purchased raw silk at Malda since the commencement of the factory, and they increased purchase of raw silk here particularly in the early 18th century; in England tariff was also imposed on silk textiles from Bengal since 1700 A.D. But, these measures were an attempt to protect the silk weaving industry of England; and its impact on the silk industry of Malda was insignificant because of the very small size of the industry in England. Rather, Malda experienced an extension of output of both silk textiles and raw silk since the early 18th century; and the increase in their exports had an overall expansionary effect on the rural economy of this region. How far such an expansion benefited the actual growers is, of course, subject to verification. The extension of raw silk production in Malda since the early 18th century was also an effect of increased textile export. But, Malda's specialization in raw silk production in the process of decline of handicrafts under colonial pressure was a different story. Forced specialization gave rise to an unbalanced internal economy, involving great stress and strain in the process of adjustment to the changing economic and political conditions.

Destruction of cottage industries was not general. It was rather a reversal of the process of development; because the weaving branch was suppressed while the reeling branch was pressurised to yield more. It was a colonial

pattern of trade that engaged rearers and reelers of Malda to the interests of the textile industry of England. It was a decline not in quantitative terms of volume or value of output, it was a decline in terms of a qualitative change in the composition of both exports and imports. In spite of this, there was scope for a second degree change if the raw silk producing industry could attain for itself a change in the organisational structure of pre-capitalist forms rooted in the system of brokers, contractors and agents. But, the mode of operation of the English and later European companies and the policy of impoverishing the actual producer not only maintained but strengthened the pre-capitalistic organisation in the silk reeling industry of Malda.

The weaving branch of the industry declined fast and lost its importance in the economy of the region. The remnants of the weaving branch could be traced as late as the 20's of the present century, but Malda, beyond doubt, specialized in raw silk production since the last parts of the 18th century through the early decades of the 19th century. Her speciality in weaving mixed cloths continued, although insignificantly, as a result of demand in the Middle East as well as within the country. However, in the face of expanding demand, Malda's specialization in raw silk production failed to bring forth any basic change in the industry's structure so that the theory of comparative cost could establish here an increase in efficiency through specialization. The commercial organisation of Residents, gomastahs, agents, pycars, brokers

etc. with which the East India Company operated rendered major changes unnecessary. The possibility of Indian merchants growing as capitalist entrepreneurs was thwarted by the English policy of monopoly control over the external and internal trade of this country. Although commercial aptitude of Indian merchants were not inferior to their foreign counterparts, although company's investment depended on these indigenous merchants, although a large class of traditional financiers developed remarkably the machinery for credit and exchange or even commercial rings were formed among indigenous merchants before the mid-18th century, the English with their newly acquired commanding power could successfully ward off these merchants from the controlling tower of internal and external trade. The merchants rather found it necessary and advantageous to collaborate with the foreigners and make a profit as bania. The interests of the merchants were subservient to the interests of the English; and the scope for accumulation for entrepreneurial emergence became absurd. Such scope was so much lost over time that in the late 19th century, when the filatures of Malda were abandoned by the European companies, there was no indigenous owner to take over. Certainly, this was not due to mere lack of funds.

The entrepreneurial emergence as a class could have altered the organisational structure of the silk industry along capitalist line; and such development could have been

advantageous to the primary producers too. The lack of entrepreneurial emergence, instead, gave way to the mahajani system which pushed the silk industry of Malda to a situation of permanent stagnation and backwardness during the decades to come.

Specialization and technology

Another aspect of Malda's specialization in raw silk is its potentiality of bringing about a technological break through. If this happened, much of the organisational barrier could have been removed. In this connection the role of the East India Company as the organiser of filatures and as the promoter of technological improvement should be noted. There is no denying of the fact that intrinsic quality control by the company was a good experience for the village artisans of Malda; the company with its vast financial resources and a monopsony of purchases could successfully command a standard of production. There is also no denying of the fact that the company endeavoured to improve silk reeling methods. But, what the company failed to attain or what it did not attempt to achieve was a general diffusion of advanced technology throughout - to the benefit of the common producer. Hence, as the company established filatures, there developed a dual technology : the modern one along European model for the company itself and the primitive one for the country reeler. When they ceased to operate, the filatures were sold out to private European firms; and when these firms stopped business the filatures were closed

down for want of an entrepreneurial class. The general technology once again drifted to backwardness with minor modifications. In fact, such a reversal of technology went hand in hand with the Mahajani mode of production relations that filled in the entrepreneurial vacuum.

Impact of the British domination on the technology of Malda's silk industry in general was by all means limited : The technological modifications of the 18th century did not constitute a starting point for a major technological revolution; and again their trading interests made the company busy in interfering with the technology in the semi-manufacturing stage of raw silk production alone. They had not attempted a similar improvement in the efficiency of moriculture and cocoon rearing; their land policy was also against any such advancement. Such a partial attempt cannot be of general significance or success in an agro-industry like silk production which is interrelated stage by stage. On the other hand, the filatures failed to initiate a capitalistic enterprise. Such large-scale units separated capital from labour, exploited cheap labour to compete in the product market, initiated advanced technology, but continued to derive raw material through the dadni system of brokers and pycars, which was unsuitable for the growth of a free factor market. Both the system of procurement of cocoons and the land system were incompatible with a market economy or capitalistic line of development in the silk industry.

John Crawford, as early as in 1837, tried to draw attention to the general problems of economic development in India pointing out that the disparity between the levels of technology in the traditional economy of India and those in Western Europe was the prime barrier.¹ If a logical analogy is drawn, structural stagnation in the silk industry of Malda region might be explained in terms of technological inertness; because technological improvement ensures more efficient use of resources. But, such an analysis is oversimplified and it fails to consider the institutional background behind technological advancement. The case study of the silk industry in Malda explicates that the colonial economy and trade policy created all hindrances to any possibility of a technological revolution in the industry even in presence of strong demand conditions. The problem of backward organisation is closely interrelated with the problem of backward technology.

The mahajani system

We have noted that specialization acquired by Malda region in raw silk production failed to exercise any major change in favour of the industry itself. This was caused by the colonial policy of the East India Company and the British crown. Organisational barrier was, in fact, a manifestation of how such colonial policy was implemented. This draws our attention to the emergence and prevalence of the mahajani system at all stages of the silk industry of Malda during the second half of the 19th century and decades of the 20th

century. Up to the end of the British period, mahajani system was the only organisational form. The mahajani system emerged from the colonial production relation and by the time the European companies leave Malda, the system had firmly established itself to replace European organisation for production and commerce. It is not a mere historical coincidence that the mahajani system came to the complete domination of the industry from a period when Malda silk started to decline in quantitative terms also, i.e., since the last two decades of the 19th century. For the rest of the British period the mahajani system closely insulated the industry from all prospects of growth and became successful in deriving the entire surplus to its own favour.

It has been pointed out that the East India Company moulded the role of the traditional dadni merchant to its own needs and developed a commercial organisation based on brokers and pycars. It is through this organisation that they procured first textiles and raw silk and then raw silk only; and as they started filatures, they were purchasing cocoons through the same arrangement. Thus the village pycar for decades had established a direct relationship with the rearers; and under the system, the rearer was dependent for his production and existence on the advance from pycar. On the other hand, he was bound to sell his cocoon to the pycar. Such a relationship based on finance and exploitation served

the interests of the company well. The role of the pycar precisely attained new dimensions from the time when the East India Company departed. While the large filatures of the company were sold out to big European firms, the smaller filatures previously hired by it were now owned by the solvent native pycars and contractors. These pycars now used the long established production relation with the rearers in favour of his own filature. On the other hand, the pycars continued to supply cocoons to the new European firms, mainly a French one. When the French buyer was out, the erstwhile pycars were at the apex of the production organisation using the same colonial production relation.

Meanwhile the existence of independent petty reeler was further abolished as the Marwari merchants grew to be the prime dealers in raw silk and established for themselves an economic relation with the reelers similar to that between the pycar and the rearer. It may be noted here that the Marwari traders began to infiltrate in to the rural structure of Malda particularly since the permanent settlement when interest of local bantias was shifted to land. But, prominence of these traders in raw silk trade grew on since the mid-19th century when the East India Company had an exit from the Malda scene. Marwaries were gradually able to take a firm grip over such trade, because they knew the outside market better and had a good link with the traders of Benaras and other parts of India, including the exporters.

Now, there emerged two sets of mahajans : one, the village mahajan who is the supplier of finance as advance to the rearers, is a big producer of raw silk and has under his clutches a number of rearers whom he exploits; the second mahajan is the trader in the urban centre who advances to the reelers, does not participate in production and exploits the reelers under his clutches. The rural mahajan as a solvent big producer of raw silk could not be exploited by the urban traders; business between these two groups were absolutely on commission basis. The petty reelers had no way to establish a direct link with the market, because in the face of large capital requirements and competition from the rural mahajan they were bound to depend on the trader-mahajan. All the mahajans used their offer of advances, both productive and unproductive, to prevent the artisans from being independent producers; and their mode of operation did not call for any immediate modification of the state of technology. The mahajans were also callous to such investments particularly because the market fluctuation in silk increased enormously since the last quarter of the 19th century. The artisans on the other hand did not have the opportunity to try an improvement because they were not independent producers. Among the parasites of silk worm, 'pebrine' is called the most efficient one because it does not kill the worm but continues to suck. The mahajan can be best compared to pebrine, because he manages and manipulates the system in such a way that the artisan neither

attains self-sufficiency nor perishes. The mahajan was no longer an individual, he became an institution having its own utility to the silk producing people and having the basic control on the industry.

The burden of specialization

In the light of the above analysis of the forces operative in the silk industry of Malda region during the British period the condition of the actual producers - ~~rearers~~, rearers, reelers and weavers may be observed. The pressure of growing foreign demand or a general expansion in quantitative terms came to no benefit to these artisans. There are, of course, economists who believe that a general apathy of the British government in India in regard to improving the conditions of the working population might be attributed to the Smithian doctrine of subsistence wages. Theory or no theory behind the policy, the artisans of Malda were impoverished and oppressed under the colonial economic policy; they became wretched during the British period. Their employment and living were no longer decided by the indigenous forces, but became subjected to the needs and dictates of English trade and industrialization. Rather, their economic life was now tied up with the frequent fluctuations in the European market. Profits of a booming condition was appropriated by the company and its servants as well as their native agents while the loss of a slump was shifted

to the basic grower in the form of a lower procurement price. They were the people who, along with the peasants, bore the direct burden of British trade policy in silk. In all possible ways their labour and skill were exploited by the British and their Indian collaborators. The shifts in the methods of procurement from broker to contract to agency and other forms, or the shifts from indigenous reeling to filatures made little difference to the burden on the artisans. And finally the emergence of mahajani system permanently deprived the artisan of his just share in the profits of the industry. Such an onslaught on the artisans were met by them not without resistance. What is important to note is the fact that the 18th century weavers and other artisans of this region participated in a long drawn rebellion after the great famine of 1770, while their counterparts of the 19th century did not rise to the occasion after the famine of 1874 although peasants' struggle in different parts of Bengal flashed at different points of time. Why the direct forms of resistance could not be repeated is the subject of a separate research work; but possible conjectures are many. For example, it may be said that the Company and the British Crown could successfully secure the effective support of the feudal class since the 'Permanent settlement' of 1793 and could also channelize this against the poor peasants and artisans. Similarly it may be noted that after 1857 the British government came down with a heavy hand and adopted a more judicious positioning of troops, or that the

base of nationalist movement was now shifted from the rural masses to the urban intellectuals, particularly of Calcutta. But two most important things were that in 1870's, as compared to 1770's, the silk industry and its workforce became greatly limited and that during the famine of 1874 people found in the government a supplier of gratuitous relief. (Please see Appendix B for details).

Attempts to arrest the decline

Attention to the causes of absolute decline in Malda silk industry was particularly drawn from 1880's when the industry was passing through a severely languishing condition. In fact, the low tide could not be reversed during the rest of the British period. Apart from the fall in export demand the other reasons which were analysed included the land revenue arrangements, increasing cost of mulberry cultivation, degeneracy of cocoons, silk worm disease, lack of research, the prevailing mahajani system, unimproved reeling method etc. These causes of stagnation or decline cannot be expected to have been removed within the existing uneconomic structure of the industry. By this time sericulture started receding from many districts of Bengal, but Malda continued her specialization in raw silk production although in a more limited and compact part of the district. This is precisely the beginning of the second phase of decline, when the industry languished in absolute terms, and when absolute control of the industry went into

the hands of the mahajans; - the mahajani era began.

With the initiative from Bengal Silk Committee and with government grants attempts for experimentation started with establishing nurseries to supply of disease free worms. The programme was relatively successful in Malda, but its extension was severely restricted only to few wealthier farmers and mahajans. A total approach to the improvement in the silk industry removing all the above causes of stagnation was missing; the basic drawback also remained unidentified. Further experiments were carried on in the inter-war period of this century towards research and training as well as with co-operative societies. But, these attempts were absolutely inadequate in view of the situation prevailing during that period. The first world war came as a temporary impetus to the industry; but by this time Malda had to face two kinds of competition : first, internal, from Kashmir and Mysore - the regions which were competent enough to exclude Malda from deriving any favourable impact of the war; secondly, external from China. Apparently, Malda's inability to adjust herself to the needs of the World War I seemed to be technological; because, the war demanded better quality filature silk. But, if we look at the problem a bit closer, it is not difficult to find out that technological inertia was the result of the rigid ^{or} ~~regan~~organisational set up. Kashmir and Mysore under the shelter of government supervision leaped forward far ahead of Malda who without any sort of such

assistance and with traditional organisation was unaware of how the war was gearing the silk industry up. The question that became the immediate one at the time of world wide depression was that of protecting the old and languishing industry. The Second World War acted as a booster, in the real sense, to Malda's silk-industry. How far such an impetus together with the measures of protection were potent enough to place the industry on a stable growth path is to be ascertained after 1947. And hence, Malda silk industry upto the end of the British period was suffering from a long drawn stagnation.

It may be emphasised that limited resources of the artisans, lack of radical technological change and above all the typical mahajani system, among other factors, might explain why in spite of some experimental improvements no major change took place in the silk industry of Malda during the last seven decades of the British period, while Malda's specialization in raw silk production - the eclipse of silk weaving - was an imposition by the colonial authority. What is more interesting is to note that the handloom cotton weaving industry survived mainly because of local demand, thanks to the remnants of the old village community system. But, silk weaving industry along with superfine cotton weaving, was so tied with foreign demand that the British could successfully obtrude their colonial policy and interests upon such production. Weaving of mixed varieties (silk with cotton)

continued on a very limited scale up to 1920's on account of a limited demand from the Arab countries : This was possible because mixed fabrics, instead of pure silk fabrics, were 'permitted' as ceremonial wear by the orthodox Islamic dictum. It is the colonial policy which forced Malda to specialise and it is again the colonial economy which gave rise to the mahajaniform of backward organisation that led the industry to a general stagnation.

Reference to Chapter VI

1. John Crawford's "Commercial Resources and Monetary and Mercantile System of British India" in K.N. Chaudhuri (ed.) - The Economic Development of India under the East India Company (1814-58), a selection of contemporary writings; Cambridge 1971.

Appendices . . .

Appendix A

The Controversial Farman

1. Prelude to the farman

In 1651, Prince Suja, the Governor of Bengal, by a nishan (permit) permitted the English to have freedom of trade in Bengal without any customs or other restrictions in return for an annual payment of Rs.3000 only. Again the second nishan of 1656 allowed them to build factories or warehouses etc. in ^{any} ~~any~~ part of Bengal. After the departure of Shah Suja from Bengal in 1657 uncertain political conditions grew and the years following 1661 were of growing anxiety for the East India Company regarding their trading activities. Mir Jumla the nawab who had his own private trade using even the services of the English and their ships, came to a conflict with the company. Much trouble was created when the factors at Hugli seized a country vessel of Mir as a security for the recovery of their debt. However, the episode ended in restoration of the boat and an apology by the English Agent; but the English realised the importance of compromising with or winning over the local nawab for continuing their profitable trade. The system of renewal of nishan with the change of governor also prevailed.

In 1672, Shaista Khan made such renewal of the nishan of Shah Suja, with the sanction of the Emperor and granted, for the annual payment of Rs.3000, passing of all

goods of the English free of duty. He also directed the local Faujdars and other officers to assist the factors to recover debts due to them from merchants, weavers and others with whom they had dealings. The company's boats were to be allowed to pass along rivers without any customs.

But since 1677, when Shaista Khan temporarily vacated his office and moved to Agra, there were frequent changes in the Nawab of Bengal; and the Court of Directors of the East India Company found it very expensive as well as troublesome to procure permit from every succeeding governor. They desired the higher authority of a mandate from the Emperor of Delhi.

2. The controversy

In 1680 the following farman issued by Aurangzeb was received at Hoogly :

"In the name of GOD, Amen. To all present and future rulers in Surat that remain in the hopes of the Emperor's favour. Be it known that at this happy time it is agreed of the English nation besides their usual custom of two per cent, for their goods, more one and a half per cent jizyah or poll-money, shall be taken. Wherefore it is commanded that in the said place, from the first day of Shawwal in the twenty-third year of our reign of the said people, three and a half per cent of all their goods, on account of custom or

poll-money, be taken for the future. And at all other places, upon this account, let no one molest them for custom, rah-dari, pesh-kash, formaish and other matters by the Emperor's Court forbidden, nor make any demands in these particulars. ... Written on the twenty-third day of the month Cafar, in the twenty-third year." (underline ours)

This document is a historical example of the difficulties and dangers which arise from uncertain punctuation. Read as above, with a full stop after 'future', it would appear that Aurangzeb demanded 3½ per cent from the English at Surat and that at all other places their trade was absolutely free. This was the English punctuation. If the full stop be removed and placed after 'and at all other places', the sense is altered: At Surat and at all other places a tax of 3½ per cent is to be levied on the English trade. This was how the Nawab of Bengal and other Indian officials understood the matter, and they lost no time in acting according to their understanding. Shaista Khan who returned to Bengal at this time (1679), at once demanded the payment of the tax.

The difference of interpretation led to conflict at several places including Kashimbazar and Malda. The local officers took oppressive measures to collect revenue and the English denied to pay taxes in a bid to protect the company from a violation of privileges. The conflict led to a deadlock in trade in 1682, which was observed by Hedges who came

to Bengal that year. The English resolved to appeal to the Nawab at Dacca, but they were prevented from doing so by the local officers by all means. Hedges had to visit the Nawab at Dacca secretly and in October 1682. He obtained a promise of redress and he returned to Hoogly full of hope only to meet with disappointment and further harassment from the nawab's officials.

3. The aftermath

In 1686, the East India Company retaliated with arms and a war between the company and the Mughals ended with a settlement in favour of English privileges. In 1690 hostilities were supposed to end with the most humble and submissive petition by the company, in recognition of which Aurangzeb granted his farman for a renewal of trading privileges against old payment of $\text{Rs. } 3000$ a year. In 1699, Fort William was established. Despite fortified settlement, the company could not completely secure its trade against occasional molestation by local officials in the early years of the 18th century; and the most important development was the grant of farman in 1717 by Murshid Kuli Khan.

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- (3) J.H.T. Walsh - A History of Murshidabad District, London 1902; p.3.
- (4) Sukumar Bhattacharya - The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal (1707-1740), Calcutta 1969; Ch.II.

Appendix B

Famine Relief : Some documents relating to Malda (1873-74)

The whole of the relief operation in 1873-74 was administered by the government officers through three-tier committees - Central Relief Committee, District Committee and the local Sub-Committees at the sub-division or thana level. The lowest unit of relief operation was a circle comprising of approximately 50 villages; on an average, 10 circles were placed under the charge of a particular senior officer. At the district level the whole operation involved all the government officials of Malda and the most responsible jobs were handled by the Collector with his Deputies, District Police officials and P.W.D. Engineers. Among these officers, only eight were "entrusted with advances of money from the Government Treasury for purposes connected with scarcity and relief."¹

The whole relief operation was dependent on large scale purchase of grains and their transportation to godowns. Excepting very few constructed by the government, these godowns were generally private godowns hired by the government for the purpose of storing relief-grains. H.R. Reily, Deputy Collector and Manager Chanchal Estate (Court of Wards) was the chief officer in charge of transportation, and he was frequently advanced 20 to 25 thousand rupees for the purchase and transportation of grains. Although Reily was one of the

eight officers entrusted with advances from the treasury, he was found to have drawn highest amounts as he was in charge of grain transportation. He was advanced so frequently as Rs.20 thousand on the 3rd March and again Rs.25 thousand on the 23rd March 1874.² It is from the reports of Reilly that we come to learn that bulk of rice was procured from Kustia and Shahibgunge; he had a target of 1,50,000 maunds procurement and by 15 April 1874 he had fulfilled 1,32,573 maunds.³ District storage or procurement was supplemented by 47,880 maunds received from the Central Relief Committee. Apart from transportation by Railways, the cost of freight being borne by the government, the district authorities had to deploy a huge fleet of carts and boats. Two government steamers, 'Sir William Peel' and 'Toynbee', were also engaged in carriage of grain particularly from Shahibgunge. Distribution or sale of grains became more important during the months March to September 1874. Apparently the quantity of rice was large enough, and average stock in different godowns was considered 'sufficient' or 'satisfactory' by the middle of June. According to the 'weekly returns' from storekeepers (or from the Grain Officer) stock of rice at two important godowns were satisfactory as :

Godagaree - as on 4 June 1874 = 7,464 maunds

Gazole - as on 22 May 1874 = 8,380 "

Similarly, according to a report from Golap Halder, Asstt. Relief Superintendent of storage of government grains at

Gomastapore, Parbattypore and Rohunpore on 17 June 1874, stock for the purpose of relief was sufficient. But, the average availability of grains should be viewed against the total population of the district and the remaining months of the season upto the next crop in November-December.⁴ In this respect, the supply of grains was by no means sufficient or large.

In the case of general relief through works undertaken by the P.W.D. there is no reason to believe that grains were sold to the workers at a very cheap rate. At a time when market price of rice varied between 10 seers to 12 seers per rupee the grains sold by the relief committee to labourers were priced at 13 seers per rupee, which included "the remuneration of the moodee".⁵ Again a report from Reilly to the Collector of Malda (No. 426 dt. 21 March 1874) indicated that distress sale of food grains was being made at a price 10-11 seers per rupee. However, the quantity of rice sold in this manner was raised month by month. To the rural poor relief came in the form of employment opportunity as well as availability of grains.

Although this is the first time that poor people of Malda found limited relief to their distress, the whole set up arranged for famine relief exposed a system where larger part of the sums spent had to be used for transportation, storage and establishment charges. There can be little doubt

that cost of operation rather than the actual relief was extravagant. A few aspects of such huge operational cost may be cited as follows :

- (i) For expenses on transportation of grain (excluding railway freights) a permanent advance of Rs.1000 per month was sanctioned to the Collector of Malda. Since the Collector found it to be meagre, the sanctioned sum was raised to Rs.10,000 per month in March 1874.⁶
- (ii) Reily, the officer in charge of transportation, engaged 1400 carts in one route only where he expected to 'move 4000 maunds a day'; and he was seeking for 400 carts more to be added to his fleet; he even hired carts from Dinajpur for transportation from Shahibgunj while he had to pay higher rent for these Dinajpur carts.⁷ Cost of operating the two government steamers was also enormous.
- (iii) Grains were stored in private golas (godowns) hired on monthly rent basis. A small clue to the rate of rent is that a relatively small gola at Old Malda was hired at the rate of Rs.30 per month and payments were made in advance.⁸ Capacity of the golas varied between 500 to 10,000 maunds, and the number of golas required may be guessed.

- (iv) In almost all the cases, the private golas were found unsuitable and the cost of repair or renovation was borne by the district authorities at the expenses of the relief fund.⁹
- (v) Apart from the rental on a gola, large sums had to be paid to man each gola. Usually every gola had at least one store keeper and two chowkidars or peons. For larger stores more staff was employed and store keepers were paid a higher remuneration. Sometimes weighmen, called kaialdurs were also appointed for weighing grains. Generally a store-keeper was paid Rs.20 per month, a chowkidar Rs.6 per month and a kaialdur between Rs.5 and 6 per month.¹⁰ It is to be noted here that big mahajans and aratdars or rich farmers who owned private golas for storing their own grain found an opportunity to make profits by letting the stores out and at the same time working as store keepers at most places.
- (vi) The district authorities had to spend large sums on special allowances to their officers : on horses and boats for their supervision etc. Only Reilly was granted an increase in allowance of Rs.200 p.m. for his famine services, which continued for years and enhancement of which he applied for making permanent.¹¹ All the relief expenditures also meant a

good deal of earning to the contractors who worked as middlemen to supply both grains and means of transport.

References to original documents :

(Source - Malda Collectorate Record Room)

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2. Order Nos. 747 T dt. 3 March 1874 and 928 F dt. 23 March 1874, from the Collector to the Treasury Officer. It is to be noted that Reily was also in charge of relief operations in 11 circles of the Chanchal area.
3. Letter No. 14 F dt. 15 April 1874, from H.R. Reily to F.J. Alexander, the Offg. Collector of Malda.
4. Total population of the district as per 1872 census was 676,426.
According to one report from Reily dt. 29 March 1874 on the Relief Return of the Chanchal sub-division for the week ending 27 March, 11,912 maunds were stored for a population of 1,57,559 while the average daily number of persons receiving relief grain numbered 2169.
5. Estimate of the cash receipt from grain sold to labourers etc. for April and May 1874, vide Accountant General's Circular No. 14 dt. 14 April 1874. (Name of the officer-in-charge of the estimate is illegible).
6. Official Memorandum No. 15206 T dt. Calcutta 14 March 1874, from the Accountant General to the Magistrate-Collector Malda.
7. Letter No. 14 F dt. 15 April 1874, from Reily to the Collector; op.cit.

8. No. 57 F dt. 8 December 1873, from the Offg. Collector Malda to the Deputy Collector in charge of Treasury.
9. For example, advance was made to the Sub-Inspector for repairing of godown floors, clearing of the godowns and repairing of the machans.
No.57 F dt. 8 December 1873, Ibid.
10. Returns from Gazole godowns dt. 22 May 1874, and Storage Report from the Asstt. Relief Superintendent dt. 17 June 1874.
11. No.41 dt. 19 May 1876, from H.R. Reily to the Collector of Malda.

Appendix C

A note on the Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion

The Sannyasi and Fakir rebellion was the first of its kind in Bengal and Bihar against the company rule and its indiscriminate dispossession of the various elements constituting the traditional society. It was a peasants war - a popular form of organised militant resistance to the colonial rule. Since Malda was an important region when the rebels were active and since the displaced artisans of the Malda silk industry joined it we may note here, in brief, the importance of Malda as a centre for pilgrimage.

The Sannyasis and Fakirs were active in north Bengal and parts of Bihar in general and particularly in the barind area where silk industry had its concentration. Among the Sannyasis it is the Giri sect having the traditional custom of carrying arms, that participated; and among the Fakirs, it is the Madari sect that participated. In the case of Malda, the Madari sect of Fakirs were specially organised here and they led the movement of this tract. If we go through the correspondence, reports, resolutions and other documents of the East India Company and its government during the last three decades of the 18th century we find a deep concern, alertness and apprehensiveness among the officials of the whole area regarding possible movement of the Sannyasis and Fakirs their surprise attacks, need for additional troops to

combat the rebel activities, impact on revenue and investment, suspected helpers of the rebel force, stern actions against them etc. Such documents are mainly related to Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Malda and Purnea.

Of these areas, Malda-Dinajpur tract was particularly important to the Fakirs. That is why leadership of the Fakirs was prominent in Malda, although Sannyasis or other Hindu leaders like Bhwani Pathak operated in league with the Fakirs in the barind region. In fact, for pilgrimage the route from Malda to Rangpur through Dinajpur was generally covered by both Sannyasis and Fakirs. Usually the Sannyasis' route was from Allahabad either to Janakpur (Nepal) through Purnea (a portion of Malda was then a part of Purnea district), or to Kamrup through Rangpur and Coochbehar, or to Puri and Sagar islands through Malda. But, for the Fakirs of Madari sect Malda and Dinajpur were very important places of pilgrimage. The shrines of Mahasthan (Dinajpur) and Pandua (Malda) were the centres of such pilgrimage, and hence the Fakirs had a long tradition of coming in close contact with the rural people of this area. The shrine of Baba Adam at Mahasthan as well as the Adina Mosque and the shrine Bari Dorgah of Pir Makdum Shah Jalal (and also the Chhota Dorgah near by) in Malda are well known traditional centres of religious congregation. The festivals at these places commenced during the months December to April next, - the slack period in agricultural practice. This periodical

concentration of pilgrimage offered them later on a special opportunity for organised resistance to the Company.

Sources :

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5. W.K. Firminger (ed.) - Bengal District Records (Rangpur) 1770-1779, Calcutta 1914.
6. Records of the Govt. of Bengal, Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit at Rangpur, Dinajpur, Purnea and Rajmahal (Vols.V to VIII). Calcutta 1927.
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Appendix D

Identity of a district : the case of Malda

According to Murshid Kuli Khan's redistribution of fiscal divisions in 1722, the chakla of Murshidabad, out of 13 chaklas in Bengal, included the whole of present Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna, Murshidabad and parts of Birbhum, Malda and Nadia. Other parts of Malda along with Purnea was included in a separate chakla. Since the grant of diwani to the East India Company in 1765 upto 1813 the areas under the present Malda district comprised parts of Purnea, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and also Murshidabad with certain variations at different points of time. As an administrative unit, the district of Malda only began to exist since 1813 when, in order to secure a closer magisterial supervision, various police circles were detached from the districts of Purnea, Rajshahi and Dinajpur and were placed in charge of a Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector who was stationed at English Bazar. But, it was not before 1870 that the district acquired a complete geographical and administrative identity; rather, even after 1870 minor alterations took place for a few years more.

In February 1813, the Superintendent of Police of the Lower Provinces laid an unfavourable report before the government that the state of crime in this tract of the country, consisting of eight adjoining thanas of the above mentioned

districts, had worsened. On account of great distance of these thanas from Magistrate's Head Quarter (e.g. Kaliachak to Purnea 100 miles, Shibgunj to Purnea 120 miles) effective administrative control was difficult to be exercised, and he proposed the posting of an able Assistant to the Magistrate of Purnea or Dinajpur in the vicinity of Malda, so that effective control over criminal offences may be exerted. On the basis of this report, in March 1813, these thanas were placed under the charge of a Joint Magistrate - Depute Collector. The powers of this magistrate was anomalous in character, and confusions regarding criminal, revenue and civil jurisdictions of Malda continued for a long time. Eight thanas (police circles) constituting the district in 1818 were as follows :

(i) Sibganj		
(ii) Kaliachak		
(iii) Bholahat		from Purnea district
(iv) Gurguribah		
(v) Malda		
(vi) Bamangola		from Dinajpur district
(vii) Rohunpur		
(viii) Chuppye		from Rajshahi district

Initially the Deputy Collector of Malda seemed to have been under the control of both Purnea and Dinajpur and enormous difficulties were faced for the treasury operations. It is as late as 1832 that a separate treasury was for the

first time opened at English Bazar. The correspondence between the Commissioner of Bhagalpur Division and the Deputy Collector of Malda between 3 October and 27 November 1832 show that the Commercial Resident's Treasury was being used for the purpose and the Treasurer of Criminal Court was asked to perform the duties of Treasurer of the Collectorate with an increase of Rs.15 to his personal allowances. Details of the duties and responsibilities of both the treasurer and the commercial resident were also specified. In January 1833 the Divisional Commissioner wanted to know from the Deputy Collector about the safety of the room occupied in the commercial resident's treasury and also whether all money receipts could be transferred there. The Deputy Collector in reply expressed inconvenience on account of immediate transfer of all money to the Commercial Resident's Treasury and reported "that although the room now occupied in the building as the treasury is insecure yet that insecurity would be easily obviated by a little alterations the expense of which would not exceed 65rupees." In May 1833 the accommodation of the treasury guard was also built at the estimated expense of Rs.74. In August 1833 the Commissioner of Bhagalpur noticed delay in transfer of necessary records to Malda and requested the Commissioner of Balleah (Rajshahi) and Collector of Purnea to issue "immediate orders for immediate transfer of the same." However, in 1836 the East India Company ceased to operate in the district of Malda and the Residency House was used to accommodate the

District Collectorate and Treasury, which is still continued (the new collectorate building has been added to the complex only in early 1985).

A full Magistrate and Collector was appointed in 1859; and till 1875 there was no District Judge, when the anomalies in the judiciary were more or less amended. The court however, continued to function under the judgeship of Dinajpur upto 1879 when it was transferred to that of Rajshahi. Meanwhile in 1862 Mr. E.H. Lushington, Secretary to the Government of Bengal initiated attempts to reshuffle and fix up sub-division boundaries of the Rajshahi Division, and hence a plan for specification of the boundaries of Malda district was launched. During the whole of the year much controversy arose and much correspondence was spared to settle the principle and for the execution of the sub-divisional boundaries. Initially, it was proposed that Malda district will be cut to three sub-divisions - Gorhund, Malda and Deatollah; proposal for a fourth at Nowabad also came soon; controversy over the sub-divisional headquarters also continued. Ultimately the plan was dropped and the "existing territorial arrangements to which the people are accustomed" were not disturbed. The officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal wrote to the officiating Commissioner of Rajshahi Division in his No.3601 dt. 13 October 1862.

"It seems to the Lieutenant Governor that having regard to the impending introduction of the new constabulary and to the consequent relief of subdivisional officers from all police duties, the jurisdiction proposed to be assigned to each sub-division is much smaller than is either necessary for the convenience of the people or sufficient to provide employment for the officer in charge of it."

Territorial identity for the district of Malda was deferred to 1870 when prior to the census of 1871 the Boundary Commission and the Government of India effected certain rectification of the district boundaries. According to the thana maps supplied by the boundary commission, certain villages were transferred from and to this district. These arrangements also became helpful to simplify the boundaries and make fiscal and criminal jurisdictions continuous. As is known from the letter no. 418 A dt. 15 August 1873 of the Collector of Malda written to the Divisional Commissioner, the boundary with the district of Murshidabad posed difficulty "arising out of constant changes in the course of the Ganges and the chur islands in the river." (The Ganges became the boundary between Malda and Murshidabad under the new arrangement.) The district boundaries were notified in 1875; but modifications or execution of rectifications continued till 1876. The correspondence among the collectors of Malda, Purnea, Rajshahi and Dinajpur during that year reveal transfer of different estates from and to the district of Malda. Hunter in his Statistical Account of Bengal (1876)

described the district to be comprised of nine police circles. Alterations continued, names of police circles were also changed in course of the modifications and Lambourn's District Gazetteer (1918) shows the district divided into ten police stations (thanas) with four outposts.

In 1813 the newly formed district formed a part of the Bhagalpur Division; it was transferred to the Rajshahi Division with effect from 1 March 1833. The Revenue Department (Jurisdictions), Government of Bengal again transferred the district to Bhagalpur Division in November 1876. In 1905, at the time of the partition of Bengal, Malda district formed a part of the Rajshahi Division. In 1912 when the partition of Bengal was annulled, Malda continued to be included in the Rajshahi Division till August 1947.

The territorial identity of Malda district had a final change in 1947. M.O. Carter in his Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Malda (1928-1935) stated fifteen police stations in the district :

(i) Harishchandrapur, (ii) Kharba, (iii) Gajol, (iv) Bamangola, (v) Habibpur, (vi) Old Malda, (vii) English Bazar, (viii) Ratua, (ix) Manikchak, (x) Kaliachak, (xi) Sibganj, (xii) Bholahat, (xiii) Gomastapur, (xiv) Nachole, (xv) Nawabganj. Of these fifteen, some alterations were made in the Bamangola P.S. in 1941; and finally the last five police stations, viz., Sibganj, Bholahat, Gomastapur, Nachole

and Nawabgunj, were transferred to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1947 as per the award of C. Radcliffe. The district came to exist with ten police stations, while the Old Malda P.S. now became known as Malda P.S. Malda district is within the Jalpaiguri Division and is the southern-most district of northern Bengal. According to the census of 1981 total population of the district is 2,031,871.

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4. Quarterly Index to the Revenue Correspondence of Commissioners with their Collectors; Bhagalpur Division, 1829-35.
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Appendix E

Price of Bengal Raw Silk

N.B. :-

1. This chronological price list is not exhaustive, nor is it continuous. This is just a compilation of price quotations available from different sources. The list may be useful for going through this thesis as well as studying a similar subject. There is every scope for improving the list by making it more precise and adding to it the general observations on the price trends.

2. If any minor discrepancy arises between this list and the main text at any particular moment, the text should be taken as more accurate and authentic.

3. The price quotations, unless otherwise stated, refer to price of Bengal silk in general.

4. On two occasions prices have been quoted in sterling measures, as they were available; apprehending various complexities, conversion has not been attempted to.

5. Rs. means (Rs. - Annas)
£ means (£ - Shillings)

The Price List

<u>Date</u>	<u>Price per seer</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1660's	Rs. 2-2 to 2-4	
1670's	£ 0-14	
1730	Rs. 3-8 to 4-12	
1735	Rs. 4-10	Best quality
1745	Rs. 5-14	
1747	Rs. 9-4	
1753	Rs. 7-12	
1773	Rs. 9-0	
1774	Rs. 10-9	
	Rs. 14-0 to 14.8	For filature silk
1780	Rs. 6-3	
1794 (June)	Rs. 9-10	Cost price at Company's filature, Malda
1796 (February)	Rs. 7-14	Do, Kashimbazar Cost
	Rs. 9-5	price at Company's filature, Malda.
1817	Rs. 8-6	Do, Kashimbazar
1818	Rs. 12-0	Invoice cost Sicca Rs.
1819	Rs. 12-10	"
1820	Rs. 13-5	"
1821	Rs. 14-0	"
1822	Rs. 14-12	"
1823	Rs. 14-10	"
1825	Rs. 14-12	"
1826	Rs. 15-6	"
1827	Rs. 14-14	"
1828	Rs. 15-4	"
1828	Rs. 14-3	"
1830	Rs. 13-2	"
1831	Rs. 12-8	"
1832	Rs. 12-2	"
1833	Rs. 11-12	"
1834	Rs. 11-8	"
1835	Rs. 11-0	"
1858	Rs. 11-0	"
1859	Rs. 8-0 to Rs. 16-0	
1860	Rs. 9-8 to 16-12	
1861	Rs. 10-0 to 21-0	
1862	Rs. 9-8 to 19-0	
1863	Rs. 7-8 to 15-8	
1864	Rs. 9-8 to 19-8	
1865	Rs. 11-0 to 17-0	
1866	Rs. 11-0 to 19-0	
1867	Rs. 14-0 to 26-0	
	Rs. 12-0 to 25-4	

<u>Date</u>	<u>Price per seer</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1868	Rs. 11-0 to 26-0	
1869	Rs. 15-0 to 27-0	
1870	Rs. 16-0 to 25-8	
1876	Rs. 18-0	Price of Malda thread
1886	£ 0-17 to 1-3	Price of Malda thread
1898-99	Rs. 12-12	thread
1899-1900	Rs. 11-14	"
1903	Rs. 15-0 to 16-0	"
1914	Rs. 16-12	Filature silk
1915	Rs. 14-8	"
1916	Rs. 17-6	"
1917	Rs. 22-6	"
1918	Rs. 26-9	"
1919	Rs. 24-10	"
1920	Rs. 29-0	"
1921	Rs. 29-1	"
1922	Rs. 36-2	"
1923	Rs. 34-8	"
1924	Rs. 29-15	"
1925	Rs. 22-1	"
1926	Rs. 22-1	"
1927	Rs. 20-13	"
1928	Rs. 20-7	Filature silk, Malda
1929	Rs. 17-14	" "
1930	Rs. 14-7	" "
1931-32	Rs. 8-9 to 12-0	at Malda
1932-33	Rs. 8-0 to 15-8	at Malda
1943 (December)	Rs. 83-12	Best quality filature silk
1944 (August)	Rs. 35-2 Rs. 181-0	Inferior silk Best quality filature silk
1945 (March)	Rs. 60-0 Rs. 224-0	Inferior silk Best quality filature silk
	Rs. 50-10	Inferior silk

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