

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.

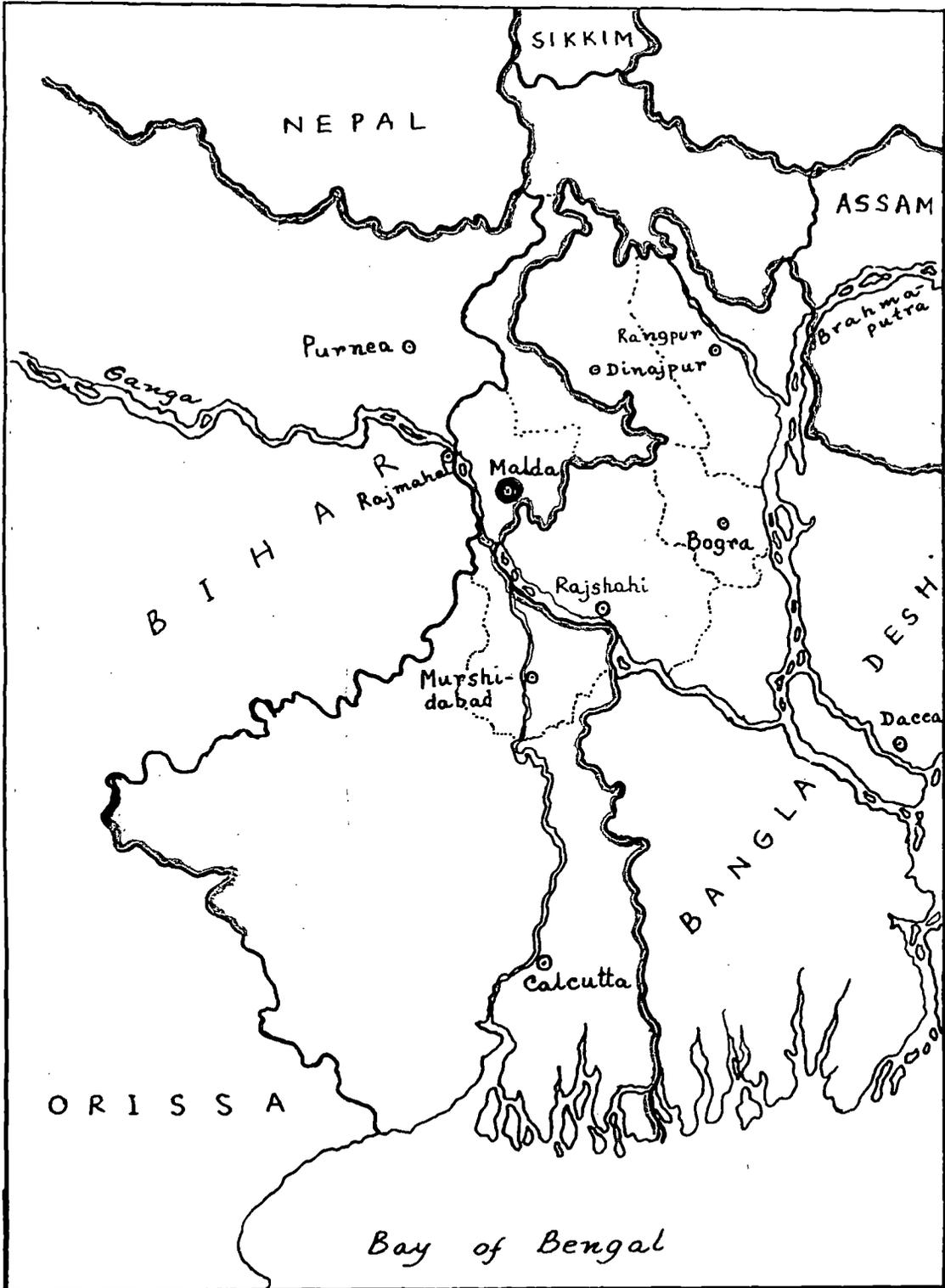
iii) Reeling of the silk filament out of cocoons into silk thread. The filament spun into a cocoon by the caterpillar is so fine, that several filaments are reeled together to produce a single thread thick enough to handle. Silk that has been reeled is known as raw silk.

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 wick 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.

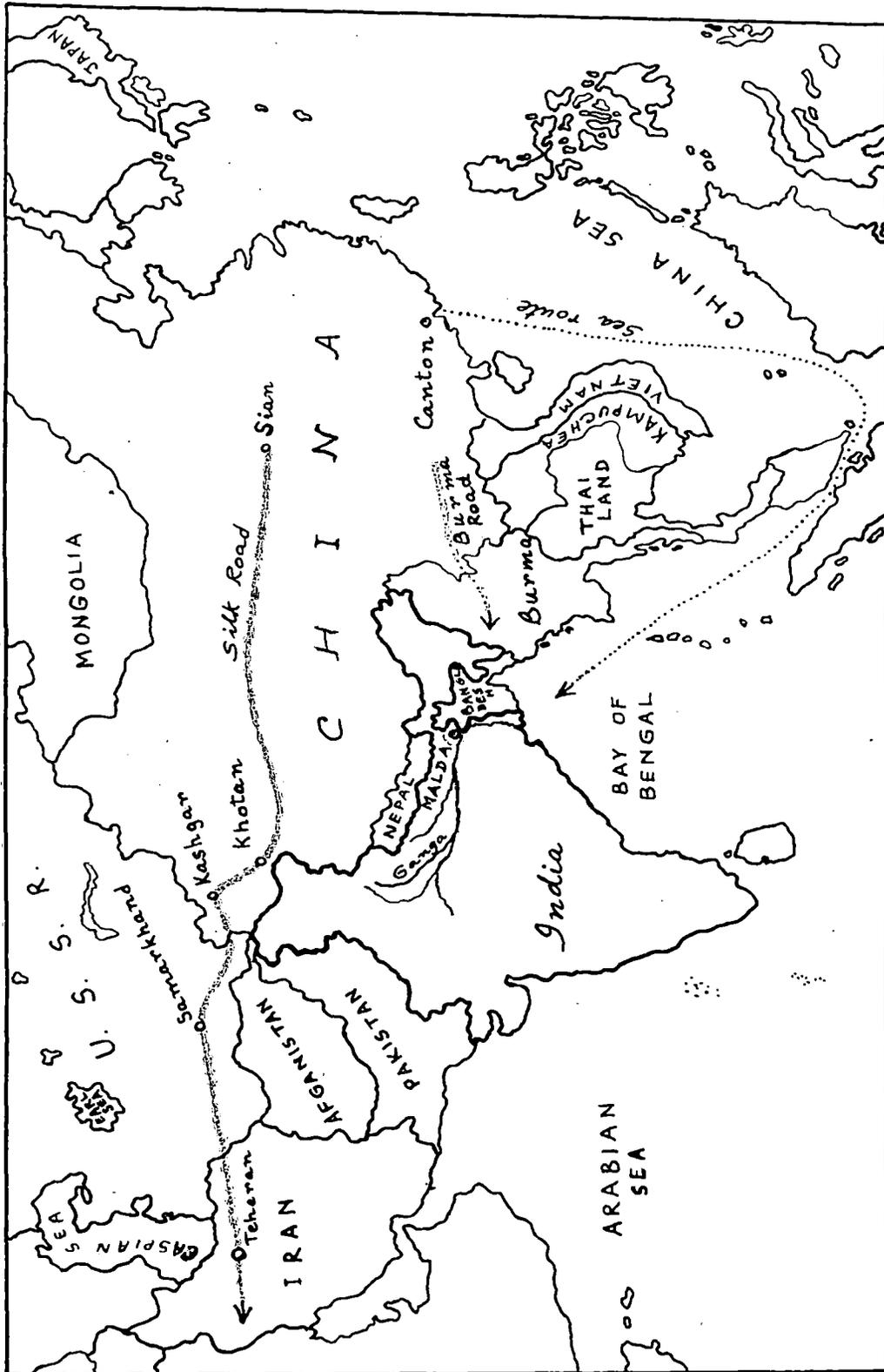
In the 18th and early 19th centuries a good number of districts in Bengal were producers of silk : viz, Midnapore, Hoogly, Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Howrah, Nadia, Jessore, 24-Parganas, Bogra, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Malda, - a few districts were specially famous for it. But since 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.