

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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. <sup>Not</sup> ~~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.<sup>7</sup> 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



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**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.<sup>8</sup> 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, Punarbhaba 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.<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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."<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> 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 excerpts<sup>14</sup>:

- (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.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> \* 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.<sup>20</sup> 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)

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\* 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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

(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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

(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 factory<sup>25</sup> of English Bazar and a large quantity of ~~raw~~<sup>raw</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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 <sup>basins</sup> ~~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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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."<sup>30</sup> 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;<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> Further explanation to the oppression on artisans <sup>has</sup> ~~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."<sup>33</sup> 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."<sup>34</sup>

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."<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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."<sup>38</sup> 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."<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup> 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 <sup>any</sup> 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 :<sup>42</sup>

	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 <sup>their</sup> ~~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, <sup>Grant</sup> ~~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."<sup>43</sup> On similar grounds the Residents even obstructed at Malda the trade of the Armeni-  
ans. In July 1787, <sup>Sarkis</sup> ~~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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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,<sup>47</sup> and

many Englishmen made a fortune at the company's aurrangs. One interesting case is that of Charles Grant<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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."<sup>51</sup> 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,<sup>52</sup> (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.<sup>53</sup> 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~~<sup>he</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

Charles Grant used his own money in subscription investment, enhanced his investment in raw silk and even made additional provisions on some occasions.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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."<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup>

(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.<sup>62</sup> 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 <sup>produce</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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"<sup>65</sup> (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. <sup>Bolts</sup> ~~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 <sup>of</sup> 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";<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> 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."<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

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."<sup>70</sup> 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."<sup>71</sup> 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."<sup>72</sup> (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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> The Court of Directors observed with conviction that "persons of some rank in our service" were responsible for augmenting the distress.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup>

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).<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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'.<sup>86</sup> 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;<sup>87</sup> 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."<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> 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~~<sup>Grant</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup>

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,<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup> 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 <sup>suffer.</sup> ~~suffer.~~ In 1794 the company experimented with throwing their surplus raw silk into 'orgazine' and reputation of Bengal orgazine silk<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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 Kashimbazar<sup>102</sup> :

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.<sup>103</sup> 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).<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup> 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."<sup>107</sup> (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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> 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 Wis-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,"<sup>111</sup> 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."<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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,<sup>114</sup> 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 rentiers<sup>115</sup> 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 jurisdiction 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 Presidency (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/ cocoon	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.