

CHAPTER 3

PRODUCTION-RELATIONS: A STUDY OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN PRODUCERS, FINANCE, INDIGENOUS PATRONAGE AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S INVESTMENT IN SILK.

Silk industry reached a stage of perfection in Bengal and it was one of the major industrial activities of the people of Malda and Murshidabad. It had a flourishing trade in the European markets. I would now analyse the different components of the production relations without which the push factors in the growth of silk industry of Bengal cannot be fully comprehended.

During the British period the production relations in Silk industry, like the cocoon industry, underwent several important changes. The changes should be studied in four main heads - (i) the condition and nature of production relations before the consolidation of the British Power in Bengal, (ii) the emergence of a new type of production relation during British rule, (iii) the mechanism of enforcing the new system¹ and (iv) the role of the women of Malda and Murshidabad in the silk industry.

I

The silk industry of Malda and Murshidabad was organised on a domestic basis. Every silk weaver's cottage was a workshop. There was not a single village at Malda and Murshidabad without such cottages. It was involved inextricably with the life of the people." In the province of Bengal ... it is difficult to find a village in which every man, woman and child is not employed in making a piece of cloth."² The manufacturing of silk goods was done by hand. It took much time. It also depended on the skill and patience of the weavers. The silk weavers of Malda and Murshidabad achieved that quality. The indigenous mode of production was very simple. But the products of the little loom were really very excellent. Baines was moved and he remarked that the products of the indigenous looms "might be thought the work of fairies or insects rather than of men."³ Birdwood also

remarked that "it is only through generations of patient practice that men attain to the mystery of such subtleties."⁴ Baines was very much inspired by the characteristics of the Indian manufacture. It was the extraordinary skill of the weavers that made the products superfine and Baines was moved to say, "it cannot but seem astonishing that in the department of industry, where the raw material has been so grossly neglected, where the machinery is so crude and where there is little division of labour, the results should be the fabrics of the most exquisite delicacy and beauty, unrivalled by the products of any other nations even those best skilled in the mechanical arts."⁵ The silk manufacturers of Malda and Murshidabad got the assistance of all the members of their family in all the stages of manufacture. A great number of workers were engaged in different stages of silk production and obviously the outturn was considerable. "It is further remarkable, that every distinct kind of cloth is the produce of a particular district, in which the fabric has been transmitted, perhaps for centuries, from father to son - a custom which must have been conducted to the perfection of the manufacture."⁶ Samuel Charls Hill stated that Bengal was rich in the production of commercial goods and produced "cloth of all kinds, most beautiful muslins, silk, raw or worked."⁷

The silk of Bengal, particularly of Malda and Murshidabad, had a flourishing trade both in and outside India. "The Hindu, Armenian and Muhammedan merchants carried on a brisk trade with other parts of India and with Turkey, Arabia and Persia ... The despotism of the Nawabs of Bengal never degenerated into absolute oppression, commerce and manufacture were encouraged up to the battle of Plassey, the balance of trade was in favour of Bengal."⁸ This was the impression of most contemporary observers such as William Bolts and Robert Orme.

Bolts remarked, "in those times every possible encouragement was given by the Moguls to merchants of all nations, who, very contrary to the present impolitic conduct of the English East India Company, were allowed free ingress and egress for their traffic to and from Bengal, by land and by water; insomuch that

large caravans over land were used to come from the most distant parts, even from Muscovy, as well as large fleets of boats down the river Jumna and Ganges, for the purpose of trade, into Bengal and the adjacent provinces."⁹

According to Orme, "Bengal by its situation and production has the most extensive commerce of any province of the Empire. Delhi is from hence supplied with all its linens and silks, raw and manufactured, with cloths, with sugar, opium, grain etc. The European nations make their largest and most valuable investments here."¹⁰

In Bengal, both agriculture and manufacture went side by side and the weavers produced silk and cotton goods of different qualities - fine, superfine etc., and that had a great demand in the internal and external markets. "The demands for Bengal manufactures can never lessen, in regard that their quality is so peculiar to that country, that no nation on the globe can either equal or rival them."¹¹ There was also a considerable production of cotton and silk at much cheaper rates and "the greater part of these manufactures and of the raw silk, is exported, and Europe receives the largest share, the rest goes by land sea to different parts of the Empire."¹² Bernier who visited Kasimbazar in January 1666 mentioned that "the Dutch have some times seven or eight hundred natives employed in their silk factory at Kasimbazar, where in like manner, the English and other merchants employ a proportionate number."¹³ In the words of Tavernier Jean-Baptiste, a French doctor and traveller, "Kasimbazar, a village in the kingdom of Bengal, can furnish about 22,000 bales of silk annually, each bale weighing 100 livres. The 22,000 bales weighing 2200,000 livres at 16 ounces to the livre. The Dutch generally took, either for Japan or for Holland, 6000 to 7000 bales of it, and they would have liked to get more, but the merchants of Tartary and of the whole Mogul empire opposed their doing so, for these merchants took as much as the Dutch, and the balance remained with the people of the country for the manufacture of their own stuffs. All these silks are brought to the kingdom of Gujrat, and the greater part come to Ahmedabad and Surat, where they were woven into fabrics."¹⁴ The silk industry of Bengal was considerably improved during the

period 1708-1757 and there was keen competition among the European Companies for securing raw silk and silk fabrics of Bengal.¹⁵

"Murshidabad was the store-house of Bengal silks, and a fairly large silk industry existed, both in rearing the worms, reeling and throwing the silk and in weaving all manner of silk goods."¹⁶ There was abundant quantity of silk in Murshidabad which could be provided in infinite quantities "at least 20 percent cheaper than in any other place in India and is of the choicest stuff, where are also innumerable silk winders, expert workmen and labour cheaper by third than elsewhere."¹⁷ Bernier also stated that "there was in Bengal such a quantity of cotton and silks that the kingdom may be called the common store house for those two kinds of merchandise, not of Hindustan or the empire of the Great Mogul only, but of all the neighbouring kingdoms, and even of Europe."¹⁸ The silk cloth of Malda was known as Maldahi cloth and it had a great demand for its pattern in the European markets. In those days the principal patterns were mazchar, "ripples of silver", bulbulchasm, "nightingale's eyes," Kalintarakshi "pigeon's eyes", and chandtara, "moon and stars." It is on record that in 1577 Shaik Bhik of Malda sent three ships of Maldahi cloth to Russia by the Persian Gulf.¹⁹ The city of Murshidabad along with Benares and Ahmedabad was also famous all over the world for its gold brocades or kincobs.²⁰

The Mogul rulers were great patrons of silk fabrics and in the Mughal age there grew up state Karkhanas for manufacturing textiles of variety. Bernier found in 1666 such Karkhanas in many places which he dubbed 'Halls'.

"Large halls are seen in many places called karkhanas or workshops for the artisans. In one hall, embroiderers are busily employed, superintended by a master, in another you see goldsmiths, in a third painters, in a fourth varnishers in lacquer work, in a fifth joiners, turners, tailors, shoe-makers, in a sixth manufacturers of silk brocade and fine muslins."²¹

Taylor²² mentioned that these Karkhanas or factories were superintended by the 'Darogas' and they inspected the work of the weavers regularly. The constant supervisoion of the 'Mookeems' and 'Darogas' deterred the weavers from taking any improper practices. The weavers, on the other hand, cultivated their arts and that made them more skilled and adept in manufactring. In the State Karkhanas, "the artisans repair every morning to their respective workshops where they remain employed the whole day and then in the evening return to their homes."²³ In the 'Halls', the skilled artisans were selected and supplied raw materials for manufacturing goods for the use. They were salaried employees and paid from the state treasury.²⁴

The 'royal Karkhanas' set up by the Mughals produced silk cloths of finer quality for their use. In the Ain-i-Akbari, Abul Fazal mentioned the existence of Karkhanas or workshops maintained under the patronage of the Emperor, where goods of great artistic skill were produced.²⁵ The weavers were always patronised by the Nawabs and native princes. The royal patronisation helped the poor artificers to develop their skill in a particular pattern of work. "Artificers confine themselves to one sort of work, so that a goldsmith will not work in silver, nor a silversmith in gold. In the Aurungs, or looms a weaver will only weave one single sort of stuff during his whole life unless he be compelled to take another in hand."²⁶

No doubt, as a result of over specialisation the industries had to suffer from the usual defects. Nonetheless, the fact remained that the constant encouragement which the weavers received from Nawabs, as, the Nawabs were in the habit of making gifts to the Imperial Court at Delhi of the choicest local products, helped the weavers to develop craftsmanship and thereby stimulated to maintain the beauty of the regional and local industries.²⁷

"The native princes, and chiefs of various description, the retainers of numerous dependent, afforded a constant employment to a vast number of indigenous manufacturers, who supplied their masters with gold and silver stuffs curiously flowered plain muslins, a diversity of beautiful silks and other articles of Asiatic luxury."²⁸ Thus, the luxury and pomp of the muslim princes encouraged a spirit of expense and large sums thus found

their way into the hands of the artisans.²⁹

These establishments were run only by the expert indigenous workmen, though on a small scale. Bernier also referred to such private manufacturers. He observed, "rich merchants and tradesmen ... pay the workmen rather higher wages."³⁰ Luiller reported in 1702-03 that the indigenous merchants "apart from their large number of agents maintain a great number of workers, whom they make to work for very little."³¹

Caste consideration appeared to be a dominant factor in the production relations. Every work was hereditary. Each craftsmen or menial inherited the right to work for certain families.³² However, the caste system was not the only decisive factor in the productivity of silk industry. Other factors also played vital roles in it. In early days, weaving was carried on by the weaver caste. At that time the villages were self-sufficient, the need of the people was minimum and the presence of the foreign trade in the country was almost negligible. But when the demand for the indigenous goods had increased on account of the expansion of domestic market, the limit of the caste system was crossed and weaving consequently became the profession of other non-weaving castes also. However, the different castes engaged in weaving retained their entity. Still, they all were the members of the same guild.³³ It was the 'guild'³⁴ that regulated the industry instead of caste. Membership in the guild was hereditary. The new comers could be admitted in the guild on production of entry fees. The guilds were conscious in maintaining the standard of their art and, therefore, kept a constant watch on the admission of unqualified persons. The working hours, holidays etc., were fixed by the guilds. It made regulations about the various nature of work.³⁵ In the early stages of the guild, there was little division of labour.

Baines was of opinion that the processes of production were not divided among different groups.³⁶ But it was not static and was gradually changing with the growth of markets. As the demands of the goods increased so also the conditions changed. The early system of production was that a small independent manufacturer, generally a member of a guild, worked with his own

capital and employed his own labour for manufacturing goods. The customers had a direct contact with the producers. As the craftsmen and consumers directly dealt with each other, the possibility of fraud was very little.³⁷ But the interference of the middle-men, engaged by the Company, created a great hardship and loss to the silk producers. "The parties have been transacting business at a loss through middlemen or agents who are going fatat their cost".³⁸ The craftsmen were technically skilled and had apprentices under them who were paid small wages.³⁹ The wages paid to the 'Nikaris' and Karigars varied according to their ability to work. The skilled and small craftsmen, having two or three looms of their own, engaged usually an apprentice (Nikari) and a journeyman Karigar) for the production of silk. The apprentices were "fed by the employer mid-day and there was a personal relation between them as distinct form the cash-nexus of modern factory employment."⁴⁰

The silk producers of Malda and Murshidabad got the assistance and co-operation of all the members of their families in the production of silk. It was also equally true to the rest of Bengal. James Taylor wrote, "boys of fourteen years of age may be seen working at the loom and are very often very expert at the business."⁴¹ In the pre-colonial phase, the craftsman was independent. He combined in himself various functions of work-man, foreman, merchant and employer. But the growing demands of the market brought about a change in the production system and it was not feasible for the independent producer to cope with it. The change in the production system had a great impact on the producers. They lost their freedom and those who were independent earlier, now found themselves working under a 'Mahajan' who was more a merchant than a producer and invested only his capital.⁴² Mulberry silk production was costly and the producers having had no other means to finance their undertakings had to depend on advance for production. They received advances from 'Mahajans' and the 'Mahajans' used to give that for the supply of cloths at a fixed rate. The travelling agents of the 'Mahajans' were paikars who had a direct contact with the weavers. The paikars on behalf of the 'Mahajans', made the advances to the producers. Under the

paikars, there existed another group of experts called 'Mookeems' who travelled door to door in the weavers' colony to inspect cloth making. The exact relation between the 'Mahajan' and the weavers working for him was not definitely known. The Mahajans invested capital in the production and the poor weavers had to depend on them. It was the poverty that forced the artisans to depend on the money lenders. It was naturally easy for the 'Mahajans' to exploit the labour of simple and poor craftsmen. The producer-Mahajan nexus therefore was far from complimentary, though there was a homely relationship between the master craftsman and his apprentices. The apprentice was housed and fed by the master and besides that he received 2 to 10 annas as pocket expenses.⁴³

The artisans and manufacturers of Bengal enjoyed some opportunities upto the reign of Alivardi in freely manufacturing and selling their products. "It was then a common practice for reputable families of the Tantee or weaver caste to employ their own capital in manufacturing goods which they sold freely on their own accounts. "There is a gentleman now in England who in the time of Alivardi Khan, has purchased in the Dacca province in one morning eight hundred pieces of muslin at his own door as brought to him by the weavers of their own accord."⁴⁴ They were not forcibly bound to work in Company's filatures. "Before Plassey they were comparatively free. We cannot say that there was no oppression then. But there was no monopoly, not even a quasi-monopoly, and until the days of Siraj-ud-Daula there was the Nawab's administration, however corrupt, to appeal to."⁴⁵ But Plassey changed the situation and "since those days the natives have had no Nawab to apply to in cases of oppression, but such as were the dependent creatures of the English Company, against whom they could hope for no redress."⁴⁶

In the seventeenth century, the English, the French and the Dutch carried on extensive commercial transactions in Bengal. The simplification of the custom duties of the country attracted the merchants to come to trade. In the opinion of Robert Orme "the customs and imposts throughout Hindusthan are fixed and unalterable. The merchants may at any time make an

exact calculation of the deductions to which his trade was subject. Customs paid at any of the Mughal ports are not to be demanded at any other for the space of twelve months."⁴⁷ The Dutch trade was more prosperous than that of the English in Bengal and their main centres of trade were at Kasimbazar, Chinsura and Patna. The French got the permission of Shaista Khan, Viceroy of Bengal, for their commercial settlements and in 1693 succeeded in obtaining a farman from Aurangzeb for the trade in Bengal. The earliest factory of the English for the trade in Bengal was established on 14th May 1633 at Hariharpur on the Mahanady delta and from there they reached Balasore towards the end of June, 1633. The Hugli factory was founded in 1651 on the bank of the river Hugli. In 1658 another factory was opened at Kasimbazar, the emporium of silk trade. In 1668 a new factory was opened at Dacca, the then capital of Bengal and in 1680 another factory was founded at Malda. The foundation of Calcutta by Job Charnak in 1690 completed the process of factory settlement.⁴⁸ Farrukhsiyar's Farman of 1717 placed the English Company in superior commercial position in comparison with other merchants Indian or foreign. It was the sheet anchor of the Company's commercial right in Bengal till the battle of Plassey.

At the time of Alivardi there was readiness of sale, full competition among the English, the Dutch and the French, the Armenians and Indian traders.⁴⁹ Alivardi considered all the European companies equally and did not hesitate to inflict punishment on the wrong-doer. In 1748, Commodore Griffin of the English Company captured some of the trading vessels of the Mughals and the Armenian merchants. They lodged a complaint to the Nawab for redress. The Nawab immediately issued a Perwannah to Barwell, the Governor of Calcutta, and ordered for the immediate delivery of the goods to the merchants. The English were ultimately forced to comply with the order of the Nawab and accordingly made up the losses suffered by the Armenians.⁵⁰

From the death of Aurangzeb (1707), the disintegration of the Mughal Empire had started but the luxurious life of the Mughal Emperors continued. The rulers of the different parts of India used to think that they would command respect of the people of

the country if "they could make their courts miniature replicas of the Mughal Darbar."⁵¹ The demand of the silk piece goods of Malda and Murshidabad was naturally high to them. The merchants of the different parts of the country carried on a brisk trade of Bengal silk. Bolts remarked, "A variety of merchants of different nations and religions such as Cashmeerians (of Kashmir), Multanys, Patans (Pathans), Sheikhs, Suniassys (Sanyasis or mendicant traders of the Terai region), Poggyahs (up country merchants), Betteeas (Bhutias) and many others used to resort to Bengal annually, in Caffeeahs, or large parties, of many thousands together (with troops of oxen for the transport of goods) from different parts of Hindostan."⁵²

Before Plassey, the English Company had to face keen competition from the French, the Dutch, the Portugese, the Prussians, the Danes as well as the Asiatic traders like the Armenians, the Mughals, the Pathans who were actively engaged in the trade in different parts of Bengal. They sent their gomastas to the aurungs, who offered increased prices for cloths and other articles to the great inconvenience of the English traders.⁵³ The competition among the merchants was much beneficial to the weavers as it resulted in the increase of price. The custom house books at Murshidabad in the time of Alivardi showed an entry fee of Rs. 70 lakhs in raw silk "exclusive of the European Investment which was not registered in them as being either duty free or paying at Hoogly."⁵⁴ Verelst knew the condition of Bengal before Plassey and wrote thus about the time of Alivardi Khan - "The farmer was easy, the artisan encouraged, the merchant enriched and the prince satisfied."⁵⁵

II

The battle of Plassey changed the situation. It was the turning-point not only in the political condition but also in the economic position of Bengal. The age-long silk industry of Malda and Murshidabad received a serious set back during the British rule, as the English took interest in the production of raw-silk⁵⁶ and not in the manufacture of silk fabrics. They were deeply connected with the production of Bengal raw silk for the

benefit of home products. There was an increasing demand for raw silk in England. The English Company paid much more attention to sericulture than the weaving of silk stuff. The silk weavers of Bengal, particularly of Malda and Murshidabad, were badly affected by the new import policy. After the fall of trade in cotton piece-goods, the place was to some extent taken by silk manufactures. There was not a single house in the villages of Malda and Murshidabad where silk-manufacturing was not done. It formed an important aspect of the silk industry there. But the British interest in sericulture offered a serious blow to the weavers there connected with the manufacture of silk goods.

Bengal silk had a great demand to the public of great Britain and of the Continent. The English Company, therefore, took a serious interest in the production of raw-silk and taffeta to meet the taste and likings of the buyers there. The Company was careful in the production of raw-silk inasmuch as it had to compete with the Italian and French silks. The Court of Directors, therefore, sent regular instructions for maintaining the standard of raw silk in quality, colour and lustre. The Bengal Council was told "all taffetas to be made as near to the Italian fabric."⁵⁷ The weavers of Bengal could not always produce silk and taffetas as to the specification of the Company. The Bengal Council, therefore, requested the Directors to send dyers and throwsters to instruct the people engaged in manufacturing silk.⁵⁸ The Directors also realised that if it were so it was likely to open a great market for them in Europe. So, they sent Rowger Fowler in 1668, "an able, skillful dyer for the better carrying of this work."⁵⁹

Henceforth, they sent many experts in Bengal to organise silk industry conforming to the specifications of the Company. In 1679, the Directors reported that improvement done by the English dyers in the art of dyeing was of immense advantage to them.⁶⁰ The Court of Directors also cautioned the Company officials in Bengal to the effect that the easy life of Bengal would breed pride and laziness among the English dyers and weavers. "Such are the temptations and avocation from business of the luxurious country and such is the high pride and laziness of many of our countrymen, when they go abroad to ease and

plenty dominion and command over slaves, that they seldom prove intent upon their business although they did work hard for their bread at home and many times could not find to earn their bread by."⁶¹ Though the Directors realised that the service of the English dyers was indispensable to carry on the dyeing business in India and to instruct the indigenous people engaged in that art in English factory,⁶² still, they were reluctant to send dyers and weavers in Bengal.⁶³

The Company tried at one time to set up a silk industry in Madras. The position of the Company was much more secure there than in Kasimbazar, the main centre of silk industry of Bengal. The weavers of Kasimbazar were not willing to go elsewhere. In 1695, the Calcutta Council tried in vain to convince a few skilled silk weavers of Murshidabad to go to Madras with mulberry trees and silk worms.⁶⁴ The Factors reported that "these Bengal fellows will not leave their native country notwithstanding all the arguments we can use and promise of great wages ... "⁶⁵ The Factors realised that it was difficult to bring the weaver from Murshidabad for the making of taffetas and working of silk. The Company, therefore, maintained the silk factory at Kasimbazar for the procurement of silk and taffetas.

The techniques adopted by the Company in the organisation of silk industry were not new. These were already prevalent in Bengal. Yet, the European Companies introduced certain new elements in the organisation and production of raw silk which may hardly be called their innovations. The Company introduced the 'ideas of specific standardisation' for the production of silk regarding size, colour and quality as to the demand of the European market. As the demand of the Bengal silk was high, the producers did not bother about the standard. They were sure about the sale of their products to one buyer or the other. The indigenous merchants fixed the price of silk after getting the products and not at the time of giving advance. Fixing of price of the silk commodities according to the sample by the European Companies, before giving dadān⁶⁶ to the producers was a novelty in the production policies. "They (the Companies) also sometimes

set up establishments for the processing of cloth, especially bleaching and dyeing as also for winding or reeling of silk, employed weavers and artisans purely as a wage-workers and even brought throwsters, weavers and painters from Europe who instructed local artisans and weavers in these arts and tried to improve the quality and colour of the piece-goods or raw-silk."⁶⁷ These institutions were not new. They simply enhanced the very range of the manufacturing system in the region. The small manufactories under indigenous management were already prevalent in the country and the activities of the European Companies only extended the range of such establishments. The Indian merchants and tradesmen engaged artisans and weavers in their small manufactories; and the system was later accepted and extended by the Europeans.

It was found in the history of the Company's silk trade that the cheapness and superior quality of Bengal silk attracted the attention of British consumers and it was a fashion in England to use Bengal silk products. The universal use of Bengal silk goods impeded the home production and created "great discontent among the manufacturers throughout England more particularly in London, where they became very outrageous, and carried their violence so far, as to attempt to seize the treasure at the East India House."⁶⁸ The British Parliament thought about a remedy and to protect and encourage the home manufactures, an act was passed in 1701, forbidding the use of painted or printed calicoes. It was declared that no "wrought silk of Bengal and stuffs mixed with silk or herba, of the manufacture of Persia, China or the East Indies should be worn or used in England."⁶⁹ The act had a disappointing effect on the silk manufacturers of Bengal. But it did not seriously affect the silk industry of Malda and Murshidabad, inasmuch as, 'silk fabrics continued to be imported into Great Britain for re-export to other countries.' The act certainly induced the Company to turn to the raw-silk trade.

Four classes of people from Bengal were directly benefitted by the silk industry. The cultivators of the mulberry plants formed the first group. The people belonged to the second group were the silk worm rearers. The third group was the winders who

performed the duty of silk winding, and the fourth, or the last group was called silk weavers who were engaged in manufacturing. Of these groups the first two had to face uncertainty on account of natural reasons which used to hamper their economy. The yield of cocoons differed. Moreover, the silk worms also perished at certain seasons.⁷⁰ There was no certainty about the price of the mulberry leaves also. Buchanan reported that the price of mulberry leaves at Malda varied from 1 to 30 rupees per basket at different times.⁷¹ Sometimes the production of mulberry leaves and silk worms failed and thus caused enormous distress to both the planters and the rearers.

In comparison with the silk rearers, the silk reelers were in a safer position. There were numerous silk winders in the silk district of Malda and Murshidabad. The system of silk reeling had certain special features. The cotton-spinning was carried on by the independent spinners in their own houses. Whereas, the silk winders were mainly the employees of local manufactureres and later of the Company and were employed in the Company's factories for winding silk after the Company had set up silk factories. The new organisation of the silk reeling industry was like the factory system of present day, the cocoon-rearers supplied cocoons to the winders and received advances for that.⁷² Originally, the Commercial Residents had the direct contacts with these groups. Later, silk investment was increased but instead of direct purchase dallals or middle men were engaged. There were several 'bunds' i.e., silk seasons in a year when cocoons were obtained by the dallals. It varied from place to place. The workmen employed in the factories received monthly wages. The remuneration did not vary considerably from one factory to another. According to Valentia, the winders engaged in the Jungipur factory received Rs.4½ per month, and the boys who turned the wheels got Rs.3/- each. The superintendents got Rs.5/- each and also a commission of few annas from the wages of workmen under them.⁷³ Generally, there was no distinction between superior or inferior workmen, though, the skill winders received an extra remuneration as their reward.⁷⁴ There were exceptions; at "Malda and Gonutia the reelers were divided into classes and paid according to their merit."⁷⁵

The adults as well as the boys were employed in reeling. Lord Valentia visited in 1803 the noted silk factory of Company at Jangipur and found that boys served a period of apprenticeship before promoted into the rank of reelers.⁷⁶ Thousands of workers were engaged in each of these factories. Valentia found 3,000 workers to be employed at the Jungipur silk Kuthi i.e., factory, of whom 1200 were connected with the filatures. Besides that there were many who carried on independent reeling in their own houses. "The process of reeling consists in cooking the cocoons at a temperature ranging between 95°C and 97°C for about 4 to 5 minutes to soften the gum so that it becomes possible to unwind the filament."⁷⁷ The private winders also did not suffer for money as the Company and the private silk dealers were eager to advance them. The indigenous system of reeling was followed by them. The silk reeled by them was called Bengal-wound silk or country-wound silk. And the silk reeled in the Company's factory was known as Filature silk. Though the reelers of Malda and Murshidabad became expert in Italian method of winding and established filatures in their own houses, the indigenous system of winding was not fully discarded. The Company exported not only filature silk but also Bengal wound silk. In 1801, out of Rs. 8,52,500 allotted for raw silk investment, the sum of Rs. 2,25,000 was meant for Bengal-wound silk. Gradually, the ratio of country-wound silk to filature silk was reduced and in 1826 import of country-wound silk was prohibited by the Court of Directors, except under special circumstances.⁷⁸

Due to import restrictions imposed on silk fabrics since 1701 the trade of the East India Company in raw silk grew steadily. The English factories and the aurungs were scattered throughout the province. After Plassey, the Dutch and the French filatures disappeared or were taken over by the English. The English factories and the filatures came to play an important role in the procurements and production of raw silk and silk piece-goods. The Calcutta Council always kept a constant watch on the quality of the silk supplied by the factories and instructed them to improve the quality. To procure raw silk, the

Company advanced money to the 'dadni merchants'.⁷⁹ The merchants had to give security. They were warned against sending raw silk of inferior quality. Sometimes the contracts having failed, the security of the merchants was forfeited and they were put in confinement.⁸⁰ The merchants sometimes did not fulfil their contracts. So in 1746, the Court of Directors sent instructions to the Calcutta Council that the Council should make little advance to the merchants and should purchase the goods from the merchants by 'ready money'. Accordingly, Calcutta Council instructed the employees of the Jugdea Factory "to keep secretly ... the orders of the Home in not advancing for goods but to pay for them as were brought into the House."⁸¹

But the merchants replied that it was not possible for them to supply goods without 'dadan'. They said, "the most they could think of undertaking for ready money was one-fourth part of the investment and unless they received 'dadan' for the other three-fourths, they could not promise to complete the investment".⁸² The French Company's investment was operated by the same merchants who had worked for the English Company. The Dutch and the French Companies offered favourable terms with the 'dadni merchants' and as their terms were more lucrative, the merchants preferred them to the English Company.

Since the merchants were not willing and often failed to supply the full quantity of goods, the English Company replaced the system of dadni merchants (i.e. 'contract system') in 1753 by introducing 'Agency System'. The agents or the gomastas were instructed to collect silk directly from the aurungs.⁸³ The Court of Directors issued the following instruction to the Calcutta Council for the future course of action. "Great care must be taken not to risque too much of our estate at a time in the gomastas' hands and that they give at all times sufficient and undoubted security to be answerable for what they are entrusted with and that notwithstanding your method of sending a Cash Keeper with the gomasta, who by way of a check keeps one key of Cash Chest yet the gomasta is to be accountable for all

the money you advance him."⁸⁴

A Committee was set up in 1755 with Roger Drake as the President for supervising the conduct of the servants. Charls Manningham, Richard Bechar, William Frankland were appointed as the members of the Committee.⁸⁵ This new method of the agency system was successful for the time being. It also did not produce satisfactory result. This system vested the gomastas of the Company with powers "which were frequently abused," as Verelst rightly indicated, "to their own emolument and an authority given to enforce a just performance of engagements, became notwithstanding the utmost vigilance of the higher servants a source of new oppression."⁸⁶ So, the Calcutta Council restored the old system of contract with the merchants in 1775 for procurement of silk.

The first half of the eighteenth century did not show any remarkable progress in sericulture. The industry had various ups and downs.⁸⁷ The Company did not get sufficient encouragement from the Nawabs of Bengal and this lack of encouragement greatly hampered their efforts. Moreover, the political turmoils like the Maratha incursion into Bengal, at times, forced the Company to close down their factories. It had a depressing effect on the industry.⁸⁸ The workmen fled to distant parts on account of the Maratha inroads during the period from 1742 to 1751. The Directors suggested their servants to encourage mulberry plantations, cocoon-growing and silk winding in places of security and tranquility.⁸⁹ They wrote, "we recommend the country to the eastward of the Poddah as best adopted to our purpose. For in case Bengal should ever be invaded by the Marathas or any other country power, the enemy could not cross that great river to destroy the mulberryplantations or disperse the winders of raw silk."⁹⁰

'Plassey shattered law and logic'. The aim of the Company's servants was to make their own wealth as much as they could from

inland private trade by exercising political authority. The position of the gomastas after 1757 was that "even the authority of the Rajahs and Zamindars in the country durst not withstand."⁹¹ With the enhancement of the trade, the evils of the Company had greatly increased which were scarcely felt before Plassey. According to Bolts, "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 Banyans and black gomastas, arbitrarily decide what quantities of goods each manufacturer shall deliver, and the prices he shall receive for them."⁹²

After Plassey the E.I. Company thought of introducing new technology in the industry. The indigenous methods of winding were rough and uneven in the same reeling. The Company, therefore, took steps to instruct the people in the improved European method of filaturing. The Court of Directors sent Wilder in 1757 to Bengal for the improvement of winding technique. He served the Company from the end of 1757 to 1761 and died in harness at Kasimbazar. He was succeeded by Joseph Porichon.⁹³ According to the trading and manufacturing communities in England raw silk production in Bengal could be so improved and extended as to answer all the advantages of Italian or Spanish sorts, and then, any quantity of improved Bengal silk could find in England a ready market for sale.⁹⁴ After the acquisition of the 'Dewani' of Bengal in 1765, the English Company showed a serious interest not only in silk trade but also in the improvement and extension of the silk industry. The Directors pointed out that they did not wish to increase the Investment of raw silk by means of oppression to the natives. They suggested that the winding of raw silk should be encouraged not by wages but by moderate bounties.⁹⁵ But this position was soon revised by the Court of Directors. In a letter to the Bengal Government, dated 17 March 1769, the Court informed that the silk manufacturers were employed as winders in the factories

of the Company and they would not be allowed to work elsewhere "under severe penalties by the authority of Government."⁹⁶ While steps were taken for the improvement of mulberry cultivation, the Court of Directors sent out a batch of skilled silk manufacturers to Bengal to teach the Italian method of reeling to the indigenous reelers.⁹⁷

At this time the famine of 1770 occurred in Bengal which was a great disaster for the economy of the country. The mulberry planters, Cocoon-growers, silk winders and weavers received a serious blow. The famine "had swept away one-third of the entire population engaged in silk cultivation all over Bengal."⁹⁸ It also carried away many of the inhabitants of Malda. N.K. Sinha held the view that the famine of 1770 caused the economic ruin of north Bengal.⁹⁹ It caused a scarcity of weavers in the looms and filatures. The famine swept of multitudes of those whose profession was to breed silk-worm. The once flourishing state of the commerce of Bengal in silk industry began to decline. The Court of Directors realised the situation and decided to adopt remedial measures for the improvement of that. They wrote "On comparing the once flourishing state of the commerce of Bengal with the gradual decline it has undergone for several years past, it gives us the greatest concern that so unhappy a change should have happened under our Government and at a time when our influence over the whole country was sufficiently established to enable our servants to remove every visible source of this unnatural decay."¹⁰⁰ The remedy they suggested was freedom in trade. They thought that the liberty in buying and selling would encourage the manufacturers and their numbers would be enhanced.

In spite of this havoc, the Company continued to encourage the production of raw silk. A number of reeling factories were established about this time. The waste lands were given free for two years for the cultivation of mulberry. The rent of the third year would be the half of the ordinary rates in Murshidabad district of the time. Presumably, mulberry cultivation was

stimulated and it was extended even upto Bihar. Consequently, the production of silk had also increased but its quality did not improve significantly. The Directors, therefore, sent out Messrs. Weiss, Robinson and Aubert, with artisan reelers from Italy and France, for the improvement of the quality of Bengal silk. Mr. Aubert died on the voyage. Weiss and Robinson arrived in Bengal in 1770 and introduced new methods of reeling in Kasimbazar factories and elsewhere. In 1771, the Company imported 'seeds'¹⁰¹ from China to improve the Bengal species but the change of locality or bad management did not make it fruitful. In 1773, the Directors sent another batch of skilled Factors, Messr. Platell, Baumgartner, Frushard and Brigante for the upliftment of silk production and as a result the improvements went on steadily. And by the year 1775, a really satisfactory method of reeling was almost universal. The average export of raw silk to England between 1772 to 1775 was 187,494 "small pounds" for each year. But the next decade i.e. 1776 to 1785 showed a wonderful increase and the annual average was 5,60,283 "small pounds" while those from Italy, Turkey, did not exceed 282,304 lbs.¹⁰² The production of raw silk was visibly stepped up in Bengal.

Mr. Weiss was an expert silk manufacturer and under him four Italians were engaged to serve. He was assisted by Robinson and succeeded in establishing the new method of winding. The method was no doubt superior and that "at one operation from the pod it is capable of producing silk of any letter at the same time that its length and colour are preserved and it is free from the foulness which is peculiar of the country silk."¹⁰³ The Bengal winders had their inherent capacity to learn new methods and soon they became expert in acquiring the European method of reeling. For about a month the Italians were engaged in spinning to instruct the winders. After that, "one of the Italians acted as overseer over the new spinners. Another was entrusted with the making of reels and with teaching the inhabitants how to make them. A third Italian was employed in reeling off worms and in instructing the inhabitants in so doing and a fourth acted as overseer over the buildings and over the cocoonaries

showing how to preserve them. Thus the filature system developed and the inhabitants of Bengal became very efficient in all these branches. They learnt all the little niceties required to make good silk. Weiss was in a position to report in 1783 that Italian spinners were no longer wanted in Bengal."¹⁰⁴

Before 1786, the Company's purchases of raw silk were supplied mainly by contract and as a result the Company's interest had suffered. So, the Company adopted Agency System in 1787 and since the establishment of the Agency System the prospects of Company's silk trade became brighter. However, the revival of the silk trade was slow and the French Revolutionary War in Europe made the future of the trade to some extent gloomy. From 1793 to 1808, there were 'ups and downs' in silk trade and from the table given by Geoghegan in his book 'Some Account of Silk in Bengal', we found that there was a sharp fluctuation in the supply of silk from Bengal.

T A B L E 3:I

Title : Fluctuation in the supply of Bengal Silk.

Year	Company's Bengal raw silk imported lbs.	Private Bengal raw silk imported warehoused by Company lbs.	Total lbs.
1793	677,988	91,885	769,873
1794	494,487	...	494,487
1795	379,543	12,984	392,527
1796	340,060	21,046	361,106
1797	88,219	...	88,219
1798	352,780	...	352,780
1799	643,803	1,618	645,421
1800	454,600	...	454,600
1801	310,368	...	310,368
1802	78,950	35,794	114,744
1803	336,189	68,904	405,093
1804	415,917	205,793	621,710
1805	460,303	375,601	835,904
1806	235,215	173,308	408,523
1807	225,984	267,601	493,585
1808	325,243	53,225	378,468

Source : Geoghegan, Some Account of Silk in India, Calcutta, 1872,
P.4.

From the table 3:I it is found that the figures of Company's import in 1793 could not be reached till 1799. In that year the Company secured 677,988 lbs. of silk. But the worst year for the Company was 1802 and in that year the Company did not secure more than 78,950 lbs. In 1797, the total import of silk from Bengal was 88,219 lbs. and there was no private venture in that year. But in 1805, the total import of silk from all sources was 835,904 lbs. including the private import of 375,601 lbs. In the years 1794, 1797, 1798, 1800, and 1801 there were not at all any private import. The private imports of raw silk from Bengal were really very 'trifling'. The wars with Napoleon Bonaparte prevented the silk weavers of England for getting silk from Italy. They were eager to accept Bengal silk. The depression of the Company's silk trade ended in 1807. The continental system imposed by Napoleon Bonaparte "occasioned an active cessation of the customary importation of Italian raw-silk"¹⁰⁵ into England. The demand for Bengal raw silk was naturally high. The Bengal Government was told to enlarge silk production to at least four thousand bales.¹⁰⁶ To meet the demand, the number of filatures at the Company's silk factories was increased and the production of raw silk within a few years almost turned into double.¹⁰⁷ The investment in silk was enhanced.¹⁰⁸

The Company had reeling centres in all the factories from the beginning excepting Gonatea. Each had a number of out-factories under it. The annual production of silk at Gontea factory during the six years ending in 1813, amounted to an average of six hundred maunds. The silk factory of Rampur-Boalia produced an enormous quantity of silk and furnished "almost inexhaustible supplies of silk to merchants of all descriptions."¹⁰⁹ The quantity in the export of Bengal silk had increased after 1813 but at the same time the quality had declined. It was noticed from the writings of the Board of Trade. In 1814, the Board of Trade wrote about its deterioration and expressed their "surprise and displeasure at the very discreditable character and quality of the Boalia silk."¹¹⁰ In their letter to the

Commercial Resident at Jungipur they expressed the same dissatisfaction. "We are extremely concerned to observe", they wrote, "that the silk of this dipatch is of so very indifferent a quality, that it is spun in a very negligent manner, and sorted at the factory with equal inattention."¹¹¹ The quality of silk produced from Kumarkhali factory was also not good and "did not exhibit that degree of superior quality which was formerly characteristic of this filature."¹¹² So was the case with the silk of Rangpur.¹¹³ Bengal silk lacked that softness which was the characteristic feature of the Italian silk and it was one of the causes of the decline of the Bengal silk industry.

Though the Company took interest in the quantity of silk rather than quality, still the fact remained that they did not neglect the quality altogether. They supplied time to time the eggs of the Italian and French silk moths to the Commercial Residents for the improvement of the quality.¹¹⁴ The Residents also took steps for the qualitative improvement of silk. The Directors wanted both quantity and quality of silk, though it was always not feasible. The quantity of export of raw silk from Bengal had enormously increased in 1807, although the cultivation of mulberry leaves did not flourish accordingly. As the silk-worms were under fed, the quality of silk could not be maintained.¹¹⁵ The 'paikars' or the 'dalals' collected cocoons from chassars and supplied them to the factories of the Company for winding. They had the sole interest only in quantity and not in quality, because any quantity of cocoons they could obtain had been easily disposed off to the private silk dealers.¹¹⁶

The impulse given by the Charter Act of 1813 combined with the cessation of the hostilities in Europe in 1815 encouraged the Company to export silk to the European countries, particularly those that had discontinued their trade relations with India during the war. Moreover, the decline of trade in Cotton manufactures led the Company to invest more in silk trade. Bengal silk acquired pre-eminent position in the European markets and the average annual export of raw silk during the

eight years ending in 1820-21 was nearly 75 lakhs of rupees. Kasimbazar was the principal silk weaving centre of Bengal and its silk fabrics were purchased both by private and foreign merchants. "Cossimbazar is the general market of Bengal silk, and a great quantity of silk and cotton stuffs are manufactured here, which are circulated throughout great part of Asia; of the unwrought silk, 300,000 or 400,000 lbs. weight is consumed in the European manufactories."¹¹⁷ The other important silk-station was Malda in North Bengal. The Commercial Resident of Malda reported in 1817 that the silk-piece goods of Malda had an unprecedented demand in Europe. The existing factories were enhanced, new filatures were added and a new silk station was established at Santipur.¹¹⁸

The 'revived silk industry' helped a section of Bengal cotton weavers who were thrown out of employment due to the decline of cotton industry in the early years of the nineteenth century. It was found in some parts of Bengal like Malda and Murshidabad that the cotton and silk industries existed side by side. Nonetheless, the relief to the cotton weavers was not considerable in comparison with their displacement in cotton spinning and weaving. They rapidly lost their home as well as foreign market. The cotton weavers of Dacca, the principal cotton weaving centre, did not benefit from the increased raw silk demand, as it did not become an important silk station.¹¹⁹

In spite of the stimulus given by the Charter Act of 1813 in silk trade, the private traders failed to make any satisfactory progress in it. In silk, the Company's exports far exceeded that of the private traders. It was three times to six. The table given 3:II indicates the quantity of raw silk imported into London from Bengal during the years 1813-1826.

T A B L E - 3:II

Title: Bengal Raw Silk imported to London from 1813 to 1826

Year	On Company's account lbs.	On Private account lbs.	Total lbs.
1813	831,891	252,459	10,84,350
1814	722,727	114,239	836,966
1815	522,810	279,476	802,286
1816	381,215	398,549	779,764
1817	373,459	128,876	502,335
1818	758,116	402,860	11,60,976
1819	553,105	197,922	751,027
1820	811,875	259,572	10,71,447
1821	817,625	172,838	990,463
1822	845,382	197,235	10,42,617
1823	850,668	310,518	11,61,186
1824	660,012	271,637	931,649
1825	669,230	220,206	889,436
1826	989,338	338,635	13,27,973

Source: Hari Ram Ghosal, Economic Transition in Bengal
Presidency, Calcutta, 1966, P.288.

From the table 3:II it was found that only in 1816 the private trader's import of raw silk into England was 17,334 lbs. more than that of the Company. Otherwise, the Company's import was always much ahead of that of the private traders. The quantity of the silk fabrics exported by the Company to the European markets was insignificant in comparison with their export of raw-silk. The bulk of silk-piece goods exported to England were not intended for the home market but for re-export to other European countries. As the supply of cotton goods fell, so the demand for Bengal silk manufactures appreciably rose up not only in Europe but also in the non-European markets.¹²⁰ A kind of silk fabric, called 'corah',¹²¹ had a great demand all over Europe.¹²²

Under the provisions of the Charter Act of 1833, the English East India Company had to wind up their silk business from Bengal. They formally withdrew in 1835. Two years took to sell their filatures to the individuals or the private silk dealers.¹²³ Raw silk-production in Bengal was immensely increased by the British in the interest of their home silk industry, but at the same time the other aspects of the industry-the age-long silk-weaving industry of Bengal, which was the pride of India, lost the former position for ever.

III

After the establishment of the British Power in Bengal, a new system of production relation had emerged. The basis of this organisation was the system of 'dadán'. The Company had the monopoly right in giving advance to the weavers through their 'dalals'. The advance system was an old system. The Company did not develop it. It only established monopoly in the 'advance system'. The 'Plassey' and the 'Dewani' gave the English Company political and economic lever in the 2nd half of the eighteenth century, which helped them in imposing monopoly. The acceptance of 'dadán' involved obligations on the part of the winders and weavers to give the Company silk goods in return worth the value of advance. After Plassey, there was no free competition and the

artisans were obviously deprived of getting a fair remuneration for their products. As mulberry plantation and cocoon-rearing were costly production, the chassars and the nacauds had to depend on 'dadan'. The evils of the advance system could have been wiped out by free competition only, but the interference of the English Company prevented that. It was the policy of the Company to give advance to the silk producers before they received advance from any rival mercantile groups so that they might always be placed under an obligatory contract with the Company. The Commercial Residents gave more emphasis on the advance system for the production and purchase of silk. If the English Company could not make contact with the silk weavers beforehand for giving advance, there was every chance for them of taking advances from the French or the Dutch.¹²⁴ Because the terms of the French and the Dutch were lucrative to the weavers.

"The English Company had to encounter the competition of the other European and the Asiatic traders. It is not true that the Dutch were the only European rival of the English Company in the field of Bengal's Commerce in the mid-eighteenth century. Other European traders, like the French, the Portugese the Prussians and the Danes, as well as the Asiatic traders, like the Armenians, the Mughals, the Pathans, and some others, were then actively engaged in trade in different parts of Bengal. They sent their gomastas to the aurungs who enhanced the prices of cloths, and other articles, to the great inconvenience of the English factors."¹²⁵

Therefore, the Commercial Residents of the English Companies adopted the business strategy to make advance to the weavers so that they were constantly employed and be in balance.¹²⁶ The instructions of the Court of Directors to the Bengal Government were that "in the purchase of silk from the first hands we recommend you to give an increased price, if necessary, so as to take that trade out of the hands of other merchants of Kasimbazar to prevent the 'surdars',¹²⁷ from winding off silk in their Houses."¹²⁸ The Directors wanted enhanced quantity of raw

silk, for it would bring home their 'Revenues'.¹²⁹ The Directors wrote again in 1769 that "we would have you endeavour to induce the Manufacturers of Wrought silk to quit that Branch and take to the winding of Raw silk."¹³⁰ It was the raw silk that guided mainly the advance system of the Company and for collecting that the coercive methods were also applied. Bolts was of opinion that the winders of raw silk called Nakads had been treated "with such injustice that instances were known of their cutting off their thumbs to prevent their being forced to wind silk."¹³¹

The advances were given "on a rough guess as to the amount required." It was always made against security and given in instalments during 'bunds' for the supply of cocoons. The final accounting was done after the completion of the 'bunds'.

"The Company's silk ... is provided by the advances of cash made from the factory to a class of native agents called pykars who in their turn made advances to the cultivators of mulberry and rearers of worms ... each of the Company's factories employs numerous pykars who give security for money advanced to them. The pykars deliver cocoons into the store houses of the factories ... The price is calculated upon the quality of silks the cocoons produce."¹³²

The pykars had to give security to the Company. Because if they fail to supply cocoons according to the agreement, their outstanding balances were recovered from the sale of the property of the security.¹³³ The Company preferred security on the landed property but that was not good or feasible for all the time. Then they had to satisfy themselves with the security of respectable merchants or others.¹³⁴ Sometimes, the pykars themselves stood as guarantors for others to get advances.

Both the pykars and the private traders preferred ready money purchase in transaction. "The pykars always sold their silk to the highest bidder and went for 'ready sale' for immediate cash."¹³⁵ Sadanand Bondapadhay was an agent of a Gujrati silk

merchant at Murshidabad who made a wholesale ready money purchase of silk at the village of Kumarkhali.¹³⁶

The pykars were the collectors of raw materials from the primary producers. The Company had the direct link with them. And the private traders made contract with the pykars through their 'dalals'. Prosperity of the pykars helped them in collecting cocoons from the rearers. Most of the mulberry cultivators and the silk-worm rearers were poor. They had to depend on the pykars for advance. This acceptance of advance forced them to sell their cocoons to them. The poverty of the artisans gave the pykars an easy access and operation with them. The primary producers had always to depend on one or another set of pykars for their daily necessities. The pykars supplied advances not only to the silk producers but also to the Company and private traders.

The advance system combined with the British monopoly forced the artisans to work for the Company. They had no other way but to work for the English Company and the Company took this advantage in exploiting the chassars and nacauds. The silk growers always preferred to sell their cocoons by cash. They generally got an extra advantage for that. But, by the 2nd Article of the Regulations of 1787 it was told that "the weavers who have not fulfilled their engagements to the Company shall not work for newer engagements or bazar sales until those engagements are completed." And the weavers once employed for the Company, there was almost no chance of being relieved. The Company's men always engaged their services "by pricing their cloths into inferior letters and always having a balance against them."¹³⁷

The previous balances were treated as a part of the advances due for the next year. The silk producers always complained that the balances were not justly due, as the Commercial Residents used to price their cloths into inferior qualities. It was the ultimate aim of the Company to retain the artisans and forced them to work under the Company. "The weavers were forbidden to

work for foreign merchants until English orders had been completed."¹³⁸

The weavers who did not like to work under the Company had no escape and the Company's men always compelled them to work under the pretence of balance. The weavers were forced to take advances and "there is every reason to believe that in many cases advances were forced on the weavers."¹³⁹

After the American War of Independence the English Company took a more generous view to private trade in raw silk. They had no surplus money and had to depend on loan for investment. So, the Directors gave permission to all the servants of the Company to export to England any quantity of raw silk from Bengal that they could procure on their own account. But they also intended that they would resume their right in the trade of raw silk as soon as their funds would permit. They emphasised their exclusive right of bringing raw silk from Bengal to England.¹⁴⁰ The Company shortly resumed the trade and with the adoption of the agency system in 1787 under Cornwallis, there was a revival of the Company's prospects in silk trade.¹⁴¹

The English Company had to face serious competition from the Dutch and the French traders in the purchase of cloths. The prices given by them were more than that of the English Company and hence the Company was unable to eliminate their rivals from the markets. The Company's men began to interfere directly with their rivals in silk purchase. The chief of the Dutch factory at Chinsura complained in his letter dated 9th July, 1785 to the Governor-General Warren Hastings that the English Company's gomastas of Mahanandpur and the places adjoining it under Malda factory had forbidden by sound of drums that the weavers would not be permitted to manufacture any cloths for the Dutch. They were further warned that if they tried to deliver any piece of cloth to the foreign merchants, they would be severely punished.¹⁴² Similarly, the gomastas and dalals of the Dutch Company at Santipur complained in 1786 that Mr. Beauland of English factory there had ordered the weavers not to make any cloths but for the English Company.¹⁴³

The French from Chandernagore complained to Lord Cornwallis in 1787 that Mr. Udney, the Chief of the English Factory at Malda, seized from their peons 'twenty-one-pieces of cloths that they were carrying to the French House of Commerce'. The trade of the Armenians at Malda also came to a stop by the interference of the Company. Sarkis Munassakar was an agent of the Armenian merchants at Malda for the purchase of cloths. He complained in the same year to the Board of Trade that he did not face any trouble at first, but now his dalals were forbidden by Mr. Udney, Company's Resident at Malda, in collecting and purchasing cloths. This has resulted in his loss of Rs. 35,000. Mr. Udney stationed his peons at the houses of weavers and ordered that Company's seal should be affixed on the cloths. Thus he had collected 52 bales of cloths and 5200 pieces for his personal trade.¹⁴⁴ In these ways, the English Company's men tried to eliminate the rival mercantile groups from the market.

The right of private trade given to the Commercial Residents was more harmful than that of monopoly. The private traders often abused the regulation XXXI of the Act of 1793 and forced the winders and reelers of silk thread or the weavers of silk-piece goods to accept the price they liked to give for their own private investment. The Board of Trade in its proceedings complained against the exactions and chicanery done by the native officers, on the other hand they also acquiesced to the same on the part of the Europeans.¹⁴⁵

The mulberry planters and the cocoon growers too did not get the proper price for their production due to the intervention of the middle men. The pykars or the dalals defrauded them of their proper share of profits. There was always an uncertainty which they had to face in every course of transaction. The weavers were often deprived of proper price of their cloths, as they found that a part of their cloths was rejected as below the Company's pricing. The price of the silk bunds was settled after

reeling. The primary producers were always subject to the 'vicious circle of the advance system'.

"Long before the advent of the season for a particular commodity the merchants of the Company would reach the actual cultivator or manufacturer through their native agent or broker, who work through a host of smaller agents, and advance money to them so as to obtain a right of pre-emption for the purchase of a particular commodity. The broker negotiated with the merchants, and on his recommendation the dadni or advances would be made to the merchants, whose business it was to establish contact with the dealers at different stages until the actual cultivator or producer was reached. The amount advanced varied from 10% to 70% of the value of the goods to be supplied."¹⁴⁶

It was difficult to expect the planter, the growers and the weavers to accumulate capital out of his remuneration to free himself from this cash-nexus. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton in his survey of the districts of Bengal mentioned the average remuneration of the mulberry cultivators at Rs. 5.12 as. per month, the cocoon growers at Rs.3.8 as. per maund of cocoons, the silk winders at Rs.7 per month and the weavers of mixed and silk goods at Rs. 5 per loom per month. The Company paid no higher wages to its worker. The price of foodgrains was high. The producers were caught in the 'whirlpool of world prices'. They did not get themselves free from the debt. In the continuous high price market they had to borrow money from one to satisfy another and thus found themselves enmeshed in indebtedness. The economic picture of the Bengal districts under the Company presented by Buchanan (1807-10) was really very sad.

"The cultivation of mulberry and the production of the cocoons were left to the people, the Company making advances to them, and setting the price after the delivery of the silk or the cocoons. The Company had eleven or twelve filatures in Bengal,

the machinery being on the Italian principle and very simple. The Company's Residents were paid by a commission of 2½% on the quantity supplied, and were also allowed to purchase on their own account."¹⁴⁷

The Company was interested in purchasing silk directly from the weavers and not from the Aurungs. The service of the brokers was, therefore, considered essential. They had a direct contact with the merchants and weavers. Lakhs of rupees were advanced by the Company to the weavers in the name of 'dadan' through the brokers. Sometimes, their activities disgusted the Company. The activities of Kantu Sarkar, the broker of Company at Kasimbazar, forced the Court of Directors to take decision in abolishing the post of the broker and accordingly instructed the Calcutta Council to do that. But the Council of the Company did not agree to abolish the post as because it would ultimately hamper the Company's 'Investment.'¹⁴⁸

"The Company had about twelve Residencies and extensive manufactories, but did not carry on the manufacturer beyond reeling."¹⁴⁹ As a result, the subtleness in manufacturing the finer silk had diminished. The English Company was only interested in the production of raw silk and the English silks were imported to a large extent. The age-long silk industry of Malda and Murshidabad which was famous for its sheen, lustre, longevity, colour and quality gradually lost ground under the colonial exploitation of the Company, though the British economist Vera Anstey said, "Indian methods of production and of industrial and commercial organisation could stand comparison with those in vogue in any other part of the world."¹⁵⁰

The "production by independent Indian manufacturers had been discouraged, sometimes by positive prohibition, later on by the influence of the Company's Residents. The weaving of fabrics had been largely discontinued. Men who had worked on their own

capital, produced commodities in their own homes and villages, and obtained their own profits, were now dependents on the Company's Residents, who supplied them with raw cotton and raw silk, and received prices which the Residents settled. They had lost their industrial and economic independence with their political independence, and obtained wages and prices for what they were told to produce. Thousands of them looked up to the Company's factory for employment, having ceased to be independent producers for the world's markets. The factories demanded raw produce; the people of India provided the raw produce; forgot their ancient manufacturing skill and lost the profits of manufacture. The public in England marked that trade between Europe and India had increased - the increase in the import of raw produce and the export of manufactured articles enthralled them and they further argued that by this trade India became prosperous. "The Lords and Commons inquired whether this increasing trade should be in the hands of private traders. None cared to inquire if this increase in exchange meant the extinction of Indian industries and the loss of industrial profits to India. None desired to inquire if it was possible to revive the weaving industry of India for the economic welfare of the people."¹⁵¹

IV

Though the history of the silk moth was closely associated with humanity still sericulture was the 'industry of the poor', and so, in the silk industry of Malda and Murshidabad the role of women was not only unavoidable but it was in fact very substantial. The women of Malda and Murshidabad were engaged in all the stages of silk production. In the cultivation of mulberry, the women worked with men and played a vital part in helping them in the production. Women chopped the mulberry leaves and fed the silk worm from its early stages. In the silk worm rearing, women took an active part and in all the phases of it their functions

were as much arduous as that of their menfolk. They maintained the cleanliness of the rearing house and disinfected the Dalas¹⁵² by using cow-dung and keeping it in the heat of the sun. When the silk worms became ripe, the women with all the other members of the family placed the worms in the Chandraki to enable the worms to make cocoons. They also helped the male members by keeping the cocoons in the sun or by boiling water to kill the insect inside the cocoons for reeling/filaturing. Those who were engaged in silk spinning were known as Katanis, and the katanis were women. They had an inherent quality and were expert in reeling. Women of Malda and Murshidabad, irrespective of caste and creed, achieved the skill in filaturing. "These women, who acquired their skill by culture through generations, developed a sense of most acute and delicate touch that enabled them to produce yarns which were finer and far more tenacious than any of the machine-spun yarns of Europe."¹⁵³

In Muslin, the spinning of the finest yarn was confined to the upper caste women of 18 to 30 years of age. But in silk, the work of spinning, reeling and filaturing was done by both the sexes of the Hindus and Mahommedans of all categories from low to upper castes. In silk weaving, the women had to wind off the raw silk from the pod of the worm. "A single pod of raw silk is divided into twenty different degrees of fineness; and so exquisite is the feeling of these women, that whilst the thread is running through their fingers so swiftly that their eyes can be of no assistance, they will break it off exactly as the assortments change, at once from the first to the twentieth, from the nineteenth to the second."¹⁵⁴ Usually these women were habituated to sedentary work. They had skill and inherent quality in silk weaving too. "They usually work in the morning and afternoon, when the light is less dazzling to the eyes, and there is moisture in the air to prevent the thread from breaking."¹⁵⁵ The work of floral designs, i.e., butidars was the exclusive preserve of the women.

Though women played a vital role in the silk industry of Malda and Murshidabad, the polluted women were strictly forbidden to enter the silk-worm rearing room and "women, parturient or menstruating, are forbidden to approach the sheds."¹⁵⁶ The superstition was so deep in the minds of the people on account of the fact that silk worm was associated with purity that the rearers were very particular in maintaining the sacredness of the rearing houses also. Purity was maintained from the very beginning of the silk production and, at all stages of its manufacture polluted women were dissociated from the process.

In the history of silk industry, the role of women (though they played a 'great part') remained untold and was not focussed properly. In spite of their periodic disability their contribution to the development of silk industry in Bengal, and in its world-wide fame was not only necessary but practically indispensable. However, it did never occur to any contemporary observer to study the intricate female association with silk production and examine the process of education through which they reached the state of perfection which they did to build up reputation of Bengal silk. Nor, do we have any reference to what wages did they earn. Silk remained the 'queen of fabrics', but sericulture was the 'industry of the poor' and it is presumable that though their products might have adorned others, they could not use it to adorn themselves.

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