

CHAPTER - VIII

LIVING STANDARD OF THE RURAL CRAFTSMEN

The living standard of the proto-industrial producers especially weavers in 'Pull' and 'Pull Corridor areas' of rural Bengal during later half of the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries was not bad on the whole because the Company's investment in these areas was exposed to the full competition of European and Asiatic rivals and private traders¹. The living standard of weavers in 'Pull' and 'Pull Corridor areas' of rural Bengal during later half of the 18th century especially after 1778 had deteriorated considerably.² Other proto-industrial producers in 'pull' and 'pull corridor areas' of rural Bengal were not well off throughout the period under review.

The living standard of proto-industrial producers in 'neutral', 'Push' and 'Push Corridor areas' of rural Bengal throughout the period under review presents a different picture. The proto-industrial producers of these areas including weavers, spinners etc. faced hardships in arranging for their livelihood. To maintain their minimal subsistence, the proto-industrial producers of these areas in absence of appropriate transportation system through land, river and ocean depended largely on native merchant capitalists to sell their proto-industrial products who offered

1. For details of this issue see, N.K.Sinha, History of Bengal 1757-1905, (University of Calcutta, 1967), p.113. Also see, N.S. Gupta, Industrial Structure of India during Medieval Period, (New Delhi, 1970), pp.118-119. For further details see Shiv Chandra Jha, Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India, (Calcutta, 1963), pp.36-44. Peggy Woodford, Rise of the Raj, (New Jersey, 1978), pp.52-55. Also see Letter from Mr. Francis to Lord North, (London, 1792-93), p.62, J.Kumar, Company India: A Comprehensive History of India, (1757-1858), (Patna, 1980), pp.235-240.

2. Important Cotton Textile manufacturing places like Dacca, Shantipore and other places realised this condition. See N.K.Sinha, History of Bengal, 1757-1905, p.113.

them minimum possible profits. In absence of any competition from merchant capitalists to purchase their proto-industrial products they had no option than to sale their finished goods to these merchants on merchant's terms and conditions.

The proto-industrial labour during 17th and 18th centuries in Bengal may broadly be categorised under four heads:

- (i) Master artisans
- (ii) Skilled Craftsmen
- (iii) Apprentices
- (iv) Unskilled labour or beginners.

The master artisans was a highly qualified and a matured person who had acquired a good deal of excellence and perfection in his craft and skill by undergoing a rigorous programme of training and apprenticeship.³ Such master artisans had their own kārkhanas and maintained the system of production there by employing other artisans including skilled craftsmen, apprentices and unskilled labourers on the wage basis. The domestic industry system organized for the supply of distant markets. The Indian weavers, whether working on his own account or the money lenders, certainly utilised the labour of the members of his family.⁴ In the imperial kārkhanas the master artisans functioned in two capacities: (i) they worked on the delicate and the finer article of higher artistic excellence; and (ii) they guided and supervised the work of skilled workers and apprentices. Their wages

3. N.S.Gupta, Industrial Structure of India during Medieval Period, (N. Delhi, 1970), p.118.

4. See Shiv Chandra Jha, Studies in the Development of Capitalism, p.36. Also see M.P.Gandhi, The Indian Cotton Textile Industry: Its Past, Present and Future, (Calcutta, 1930), pp.20-23. M.P.Gandhi believes that wife managed the bullocks. The boys sometimes arranged the thread by means of wooden handles and thus helped the father in the process of weaving.

were three times higher than the ordinary labourers.⁵

The bulk of the finished goods were manufactured by the skilled craftsmen who formed the major part of industrial labour. As soon as they were promoted from the position of an apprentice to the status of skilled craftsmen, they were paid double the wages.

Poverty and indigence were the most innate characteristics of proto-industrial producers during the Mughal period.⁶ It is unfortunate that on the very significant subject of the quantity of food consumed by the rural handicraftsmen especially the unskilled and the apprentices our contemporary authorities are not very helpful. We are slightly better placed with regard to the kinds of food which entered into popular diet. In Bengal, rice formed the staple diet of the masses. Food grains were supplemented pot-herbs. Fish was more popular in Bengal but, was not taken frequently or in large quantities especially by those who lived inland or far from rivers.⁷ Palsaert asserts that workmen 'know little of the taste of meat! He further says, "for their monotonous daily food they have nothing but a little khichri made of green pulse mixed with rice eaten with butter in the evening, in the day time they munch a little parched pulse or

5. N.S.Gupta, op.cit., p.119.

6. The Contemporary writers who believed that Mughal villages were generally poor and inequalities prevailed among different strata of village people are Babur, Abu'l Fazl, Salbank, Ralph Fitch, Palsaert, Terry, J.Xavier, Bernier, Tavernier, Moreland and more recently Satish Chandra and Irfan Habib are most important. See for details Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, pp.90-92. Also see Satish Chandra, "Standard of Living: Mughal India," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.1, C.1200-C.1750, p.459. These writers talk about the 'indigent's clothing, fooding and sheltering' etc.

7. Satish Chandra, "Standard of Living: Mughal India," loc.cit., p.462. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System of Mughal India, pp.91-92.

other grain (sattu).The output of ghi per capita, was higher in Mughal Bengal.

Sugar and other sweetmeats, dry and liquid, can be procured in abundance.Gur was commonly consumed in the villages. Since the price of salt in terms of wheat at the time of the Ā'in was double that in modern times, the amount of salt consumption per capita was at a much lower level. than now. It was exceptionally scarce and dear in Bengal and in parts of it and people were driven to use a bitter substance containing salt, extracted from the ashes of banana stalks. Spices such as cuminseed, coriander seed and ginger were probably within the peasant's reach but capsicums or chillies, cloves, cardamoms and pepper were too expensive.

During certain seasons the rural craftsmen were presumably able to enjoy fruits of the more common kind as well as those growing wild.

Tārī (toddy) and other intoxicating drinks distilled from plants such as mahu^w and sugar-cane were also used. Tobacco smoking had already become a mass habit by the end of our period.

The clothing of the ordinary craftsmen in rural Bengal was characterised by its scantiness. "Though climatic factors and social traditions cannot be discounted, the quantity of clothing was an index of poverty since the upper classes could be distinguished by the type and quality of the clothes they wore."⁸

8. Satish Chandra, "Standard of Living :Mughal India," loc.cit., p.460.

During latter Mughal period cotton cloths as well as other cloths were more expensive relative to wheat than at present.

Abū'l Fazl records that common people of Bengal 'for the most part went naked, wearing only a cloth (lungi) about the loins! In other words, just the shortest dhoti sufficed for men and a sārī for women. Moreland is of the opinion that women did not wear any blouses with their sārī and treats it as an illustration of the paucity of clothing. In the rural areas of eastern India till recent times, wearing of a blouse was not common.

The poor did not use shoes and generally went bare-foot. Moreland notices the use of shoes in Bengal on very small scale and thinks that this was due to the high cost of leather. Leather shoes were used by the richer section of the rural society. Women both rich and poor wore jewellery profusely.

The rural handicraftsmen in Bengal lived in the huts made by roping bamboos together upon a plinth of mud excavated at

9. Contemporary writer like Babur observes "Peasants and the lowly go about completely bare-footed. They tie on a thing called languta, a decency-clout which hangs two spans below the naval. From the tie of this pendent, another clout, beneath it, is passed between the thighs and made fast behind. Women also tie on a cloth (lung), one-half of which goes round the waist, the other is thrown over the head." See Baburnama, Tr. S. Beveridge, II, p. 519. Other writers like Salbank for Agra, Finch for Banaras, Pelsaert for Agra also held the similar views. Almost all of them talks about the little use of woollen cloths during winter. Finch while speaking of Banaras, adds that in winter, in lieu of wool "the men wear quilted gowns of cotton like to our mattraces and quilted caps." Salbank from Agra postulates ".....indeed woollen cloth is so rare a matter to be seen worn by the people of this country, by reason of the dearness of it and the cheapness of their own cotton" (Letter Recd VI, p. 200). Pelsaert speaks of the scantiness of the domestic possessions of cloth of the workmen of Agra.

10. Contemporary Hindi Potets, like Tulsidās and Sūrdās, however, mention panahi and upanaha being different types of shoes worn by the city and rural folk. See Satish Chandra, "Standard of Living: Mughal India." Ibid, p. 460.

the site. The indigent some times shared their rooms with their cow or goat. The better off among the rural craftsmen had a number of rooms, depending upon the size of their family, space for storing foodgrains and a walled courtyard. The rooms would not generally have any windows, the entrance sufficing for light and air. These houses had cots, chauki etc. on the name of furnitures.

Utensils made of bell-metal or copper were not used generally since these were expensive. Iron was used in the 'small iron hearths' upon which the common people 'baked' their bread. In some indigents families earthen pots were used even for cooking.

The standard of living of other proto-industrial producers like ordinary tailor, barber, metal worker especially lohar, carpenter, stone-cutter, oil pressure, sweetmeat seller, palanquin-bearer, painter, carpet maker, paper manufacturer, thatcher, leather workers, lace maker, fireworks maker, sword sharpner, seller of torches and leaves used as platters, boat manjees, women, coolies, bricklayers, peons, darwans, washerman, masalchis were not above the minimal subsistence during the late 17th and the first decade of the 18th centuries in 'Pull', 'pull corridor', 'neutral', 'push corridor' and 'push' areas of rural Bengal.¹¹ Most of these proto-industrial producers were bound to the dominant agricultural castes by traditional ties of the client patron relationship and collectively maintained like their fellow service caste groups. Hereditary fixed shares of the village produce, supplemented by grants of rent-free land or replace in some cases by cash payments.

11. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-agricultural Production: Mughal India," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C. 1200-C. 1750, (Delhi, 1982), p. 264. S. Bhattacharya talking of the wages of such labourers for the year 1739 also held the same view. See his, The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1704 to 1740, (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 196-197.

constituted their main income. This is described as 'jajmānī system in modern anthropological writings on India. Jajmānī system' was the characteristic basis for rural manufacturing in eastern India.¹²

Another group of proto-industrial producers were a vast array of servants and slaves who lived at the margin of subsistence.¹³ These servants and slaves were highly skilled because of two reasons: first, it was the tendency towards minute specialization built into India's socio-economic mores, through which these servants and slaves acquired specialization in certain trade; and the second, it was the Mughal nobility's evidently perfectionist taste for highly-skilled services, that created a fantastic range of skilled-service occupations.¹⁴ Despite the availability of slaves in large number and an extensive trade in slavery, the bulk of such services was performed by 'free' labour in response to market demand. Their services were a contribution

12. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-agricultural Production: Mughal India," Ibid, p. 279.

13. Ibid, p. 304. Also see Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The State and the Economy: Mughal Empire," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, p. 180, Ibid, p. 181.

14. Such highly skilled servants and retainers were employed in the imperial stables, the haqās (who taught horses the elementary steps), the akhṭachīs (who looked after the harness), the mirdāh (an experienced groom placed over ten servants) etc. were important. In such servants and retainers were also included the weavers, jewellers etc. The servants of the stables were lived a bit above the subsistence level. "The driver of an ox-drawn carriage could draw as much as 12 dāms per day, besides an annual allowance if they also repaired the carts which worked out at about 6 dāms a day, not a subsistence wage when the price of foodgrains ranged from 6 to 12 dāms per man (56 lb). "These earnings stimulated the demand for proto-industrial products.

to the national product. Servants cost very little.¹⁵ Slaves cost hardly anything more than their diet which for the most part was nothing but rice.

Among those who performed services at the humblest level were included the 'peons' needed to accompany carts to help, push or rescue these when necessary, palanquin bearers and armed guards, all available on hire. The ḥalākhōr ('the most objectionable and scandalous of all the inhabitants') to whom all food was permissible and ḥalāl, employed' in sweeping the streets, in carrying away the dirt and dung, in washing the dead bodies' and other similar jobs defiling to Hindus and Muslims alike¹⁶ were another category of this group of proto-industrial producers whose standard of living was below the subsistence level.

The standard of living of skilled and master proto-industrial producers related to different trades was certainly better off compared to unskilled and apprentices. But on the whole, most of the skilled and master proto-industrial producers except the textile proto-industrial producers were not better placed. The root causes of 'indigence' among these proto-industrial producers were, firstly, through the economic and social exploitation of this class by the ruling classes and secondly, through indebtedness whereas in Europe the root cause of 'indigence' was the poverty

15. Tapan Raychaudhuri estimated in 1620s the wages of servants on the west coast which was about 10 shillings a month in 'wages, victuals and clothing', see his "Non-agricultural Production: Mughal India, loc. cit., p. 304. Although the wages for the servants in eastern India is not available for our period.

16. Ibid., p. 305.

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via indebtedness.

The nobles in collaboration with different kinds of zamin-dars due to the instructions from the Mughal emperor as well as due to their personal interests contributed considerably to the promotion of commercial and industrial productions thereby maximising the total income of Mughal state, through establishing greater peace and security by a centralized empire, and thus created favourable conditions to the growth of money economy.¹⁸ Although the autonomous chieftains had been free to maintain their internal affairs, yet they were instructed not to charge too many taxes from the merchants passing through their principalities.¹⁹

17. For details of 'indigence' in Europe see Olwen H. Hufton, The Poor of 18th Century France, 1750-1789, (Oxford, 1974), p. 54. Also see H. Medick, "Proto-industrial Family Economy;" in Peter Kriedte, H. Medick and J. Schumbohm, Industrialization before industrialization, p. 64. G. H. Zinke views indigence as, "Despite hard work the means are often lacking for the necessities of life. There are never any savings and shortages exist everywhere. One can only earn one's barest necessities through the work of one's hand." For details of poverty in Europe during our period through contemporary eyes see Brian English, Poverty and the Industrial Revolution, (London, 1971), pp. 12-32. Also see Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age, (London, 1984), pp. 25-325.

18. See Satish Chandra, "Some aspects of the growth of money economy in India during 17th Century," IESHR, Vol. iii, No. iii, (September, 1966), p. 326. For the role of zamindars see S. Nurul Hassan, "Three Studies of the Zamindari System," Medieval India: A Miscellany, Vol. 1, (Bombay, 1969), p. 233. Also see his, "The Position of the Zamindars in the Mughal Empire," IESHR, Vol. 1, No. IV (April-June, 1964), p. 3. For further details see his, "Zamindars under the Mughals," Robert Eric Foykenberg (ed.), Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History, (New Delhi, 1979), p. 23. For different kinds of zamin dars see B. R. Grover, "Nature of land rights in Mughal India," IESHR, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1963), p. 9. S. P. Gupta, "Ijara System in Eastern Rajasthan (C. 1650-1750)," Medieval India: A Miscellany, Vol. 2, (Bombay, 1972). B. R. Grover, "The Nature and the Evolution of Talluqdari System during the Mughal Age," IESHR, Vol. II, No. III, (July, 1966), p. 269.

19. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System of the Mughal India, p. 185.

It is obvious from a critical and minute analysis of the contemporary writings and travel accounts that the workers employed in the imperial kārkhānas for manufacturing luxury goods, arms etc. and acted as training grounds for skills which eventually could be placed at the disposal of nobles and feudatories were not well above the subsistence level.²⁰ The A'in demonstrates that the wages of skilled artisans working in the imperial kārkhānas were well above the subsistence level.

The imperial kārkhānas of Dacca, Sonārgaon, Junglebaree and Bajetpur were superintended by dāroghas appointed by the Mughal government who exercised uncontrolled authority over all persons employed in those kārkhānas.²¹ The selective expert weavers in Bengal were invited to work here, with their names registered. They were compelled to work at the appointed hours continuously until the different tasks assigned to them were finished.²² Inspectors were appointed to carefully investigate the thread that was brought to the looms and none was permitted to be used until it was compared with the standard thread and approved of. This eventually deterred the weavers while manufacturing the cloths. Guards were appointed to vigil over any weavers who displayed an unwillingness

20. Tapan Raychaudhuri quotes Bernier to describe this tendency. Bernier describes their conditions in the royal kārkhānas as 'near-servitude! He (Bernier) wrote "The arts in the Indies would long ago have lost their beauty and delicacy, if the monarch and principal Omrahs did not keep in their pay a number of artists who work in their houses, teach the children and are stimulated to exertion by the hope of reward and the fear of the korrah!"

21. James Taylor, A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Cotton Manufacture of Dacca in Bengal, (John Mortimer, London, 1851), p.82.

22. Ibid, p.82.

to work and on their report corporeal punishment was inflicted on those weavers who were reportedly attempted to abscond.²³ Apart from this oppression, the weavers were defrauded of considerable portion of the wages allowed to them by the government. It is stated that during Sooraj-ud-Dowlah's times 25% was regularly deducted from their pay and retained as perquisite by the officers and the servants of Mulboos khās kutees.²⁴

The manufacture of jāmdāni muslins was a monopoly in the hands of the government. These fabrics were manufactured exclusively by the weavers of the Dacca aurang. The weavers at Dacca were advanced for the manufacture of muslins by the dārogāh of the sudder mulboos khās kutee at Dacca. The rest were manufactured at the weavers houses. James Taylor further states that the weavers were forbidden under pecuniary and corporeal penalties to sell jāmdāni muslin to any person a piece exceed the value of 72 livers. Therefore, the European and native merchants were made purchases of this sorts through government brokers.²⁵ These agents paid a considerable amount annually for the privilege they enjoyed and in return, they charged a percentage on all sales arranged by them. A tax called chappa jāmdāni was also imposed on the weavers of this sort of muslin and continued to be collected till the year 1792.

The mulboos khās investment formed a part of the naẓr which

23. Ibid, p.83.

24. Ibid, p.

25. Ibid, pp.83-84.

the Governor of Bengal presented annually to the emperor at Delhi. Murshid Kuli Khan (Governor of Bengal in the days of Aurangzeb) used to send 500 pieces of muslin and few other articles, cost in total £ 15,984 annually from Dacca to Aurangzeb as nazr the cost of which was beared by the muslin weavers.²⁶

The nobility's involvment in commerce was of more dubious value. At one level, it helped in channelling part of the resources siphoned off agriculture and manufacture into the export-import trade and thus stimulated the production of export goods. Every section of the ruling class right from the royal family to petty shiqqdars (incharge of the smallest administrative units) participated in this activity.²⁷

It is evident from contemporary documents and records that merchant's commercial intercourse into the Mughal territories was dependent on the discretion of the respective noble or jagirdar and the Governor and rank and file of the Mughal administration implemented state policies only partially according to their own whims to personal pecuniary gains.²⁸ The absence of legal ban on private trade by the state officials in the 17th century led to an increase in the Mughal noble's administrative interference in trade and manufacture and this lacuna in state policy produced all kinds of irregularities.²⁹

26. Ibid, p.84.
27. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "State and the Economy: The Mughal Empire," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C. 1200-C. 1750, (Delhi, 1982), p. 182.
28. Ahmad Raja Khan, "Mughal Administration and Trade in Subah of Bihar," Proceedings of Indian History Congress, (Bombay Session, 1980), p. 2.
29. Ibid, pp. 2-3.

This activity of the Mughal nobles had negative implications for trade and manufacture. The emperor and nobles usually used their authority to corner the market.³⁰ They imposed monopolies on certain branches of trade and manufacture.³¹ The imposition of such monopolies were not only in the nature of additional taxation, but disrupted the normal flow of exchange activities. The official involvement in the internal trade was virtual extortion of organized commerce.³² The royal monopoly over salt, formed out to traders was in effect a form of additional taxation. Sha'ista Khān turned monopoly into a source of private profit and extended the monopoly from time to time to other commodities like saltpetre, beeswax and even fodder. Prohibitory orders from state hardly bore any results.³³

The forms of extortions of the rural proto-industrial

30. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The State and the Economy: The Mughal Empire;" op.cit., p. 183.

31. For the Contemporary connotation of the term monopoly see Cotton Manuscript, British Museum (hereafter cited as BM), London, (available in National Archives of India) (hereafter cited as NAI). Here monopoly is regarded as, "A monopoly, an institution or an allowance by, the king by his grant commission or otherwise to any person or persons body's politik or corporate of or for those to buying, selling, maturing, working or offering anything whereby any person or persons body politik or corporate are sought to be restrained of any freedom or liberty that they had before or hindered in their lawful trade."

32. Tapan Raychaudhuri, loc.cit., p. 183. The most notorious example of this kind was the activities of the Sūbedār Shaista Khān and Prince Azimushshan in Bengal.

33. Ibid, p. 183.

producers including merchants ranged from straightforward plunder to ostensibly legitimate taxation. Presents for the officers and their minions-were demanded with persistent regularity-appear to be a part of normal expenses of trading and manufacturing life during Mughal period. Appeals for redress to higher authorities were worth little unless accompanied by presents. Instances of proto-industrial producers being thrown into prison for their inability or refusal to provide what was demanded were common enough. Sha'ista Khān raised the extortion of skilled proto-industrial producers indirectly to the level of highest watermark by devising the ingenious technique of forcing loans on merchants at 25% per annum and refunding the capital with interest at the full annual rate after six to eight months. Interest, therefore, went upto the 50%. The nobles forced the merchants to buy goods at 10 to 15% per 100% higher than the market rates was another favourite trick practised by them. Harsh exploitation of the proto-industrial producers as well as of the merchant class was done by nobles or emperor through establishing monopolies over particular commodities.³⁴ These were simply an indirect form of taxation, with the monopoly leased out to some speculator who passed on the cost of the lease to the proto-industrial producers and regular dealers as well besides charging monopoly prices. On every transaction involving the nobles or petty bureaucrats, some

34. Ibid, p. 186. Such monopolies were introduced in indigo at Agra in 1630s and saltpetre in Gujrat in 1655.

bribe had to be given.³⁵

Besides the various illegal exactions, the proto-industrial producers were heavily exploited by heavy and vexations inland tolls and custom duties charged by Mughal bureaucrats. Shihāb-ud-dīn Tālish, the historian of Aurangzeb's period noticed the ḥāṣil or custom duty was collected from every trader from the rose-vendor down to the clay-vendor, from the weaver of fine lines to that of coarse cloth, besides zakāt or 1/40th of income charged on travellers, merchants and stable keepers.³⁶ The duties were undoubtedly heavy and were abolished and reduced from time to time but one does not know how efficiently. The Mirāt-i Ahmādī mentions that Aurangzeb had abolished all road tolls, tax on foodstuffs and beverages; but these abolitions were either very temporary or confined to certain regions or state of the empire. This is attested by Grant's reference to seven types of imports current in Bengal during the 18th century.³⁷ Perhaps the vexation and delay caused by the toll-posts were at least as great a hindrance to trade as the actual exaction. Tolls were also collected by local rāyas, rebels and bandits.³⁸

On the whole, custom duties was not moderate, varying over-time from 2.5% to 5%, the European companies generally paying less. The actual amounts collected depended a good deal on the personality of the officials concerned, for in practice levying of additional taxes was within the Governor's powers.³⁹ The Hindu

35. Ibid, p. 187. At Rajmahal, the Augustinian monk Manrique considered that he had done a great stroke of business in finding himself free from the 'multitude of clerks' who eventually cleared his dues and gave him a passport, without which it was impossible to leave that riverain port.

36. Ibid, p. 187.

37. Ibid, p.

38. Peter Mundy paid zakāt to bandits on several occasions.

39. Tapan Raychaudhuri quotes it from Dagh Register (38), (1640-41), p. 379.

traders paid duties at the rate of 5% while the muslims paid 2.5%. The duty of Muslim was abolished altogether by Aurangzeb. Manucci observed that the Hindu traders payment of personal tax every year in advance virtually ruined them to the great delight of Aurangzeb.⁴⁰

Despite such numerous tolls and duties and high magnitude of appropriations, trade was highly profitable. The high profitability of trade in international markets during latter 17th century is explained by the nature of long-distance trade, which profited from the inaccessibility of the sources of supply and was concerned mainly with luxury and comfort goods. The profitability of long distance trade was high enough to absorb the cost of transport and official and non-official exactions of the ruling class. The international trade had become so profitable during the 17th century, that the institution of insurance (bīma) begins to be heard of. The first and perhaps the only reference to insurance (bīma) in the Persian sources was made by Sujān Rai which was a very late notice.⁴¹ Marine insurance was a well developed and elaborate institution in the 17th century India widely practised on the Western Coast.⁴² Marine insurance rate was higher than the inland insurance rate on account of high rate of piracy, damage through shipwreck, etc. on the high seas. Instances of goods insurance abroad as well as the whole

40. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The State and the Economy: The Mughal Empire," loc. cit., p. 188.

41. A. J. Kaiser, "Merchant shipping in India during the 17th Century," Medieval India: A Miscellany, Vol. II, (New Delhi, 1972), p. 208. Sujān Rai, writing in 1694 had expressed great surprise at this practice. He mentions bīma in the context of the activities of the sarrafs and the institution of hundī (bills of exchange).

42. Ibid, p.

ship insurance are available in the contemporary sources. The reference to bottomry and respondentia⁴³ is also available in the writings of contemporary European merchants and Company's servants. The profitability of foreign as well as long-distance trade and the maintenance of these insurance institutions were particularly the consequence of the ruthless exploitation of the proto-industrial producing classes. The intermediaries or the merchant capitalists were essentially buying extremely cheap from the proto-industrial producers and selling it very dear in the international markets. That was why the bulk of the proto-industrial producers earned little more than mere subsistence which must have helped sustain this high rate of profit.⁴⁴

43. The Oxford English Dictionary defines bottomry as 'a species of contract of the nature of mortgage where by the owner of the ship or the master as his agent, borrows money to enable him to carry on or complete a voyage, and pledges the ship as security for repayment of the money. If the ship is lost, the lender loses his money, but if it arrives safe, he received the principle together with interest or premium stipulated, "however it may exceed the usual or legal rate of interest!" Respondentia was essentially the same practice with the difference that the loan taken was not upon the ship but upon the goods abroad. Thus following points emerge with regard to bottomry and respondentia.

- (a) it was a loan upon the particular voyage of the ship or the goods abroad;
- (b) the rate of interest was exorbitantly high;
- (c) the loan did not involve any consideration of time;
- (d) if the ship was lost, the lender lost his money.

A late source (1704) has given varying rates of bottomry and respondentia, most probably at Madras. The following rates are quoted in 1704:-

- | | |
|---|---|
| (i) China - 20 to 25% | (vi) Pegu - 20 to 25% |
| (ii) China and Persia
- 40%(45% in 1703) | (vii) "Battavia" and
Surat - 35 to 40% |
| (iii) Bengal- 15 to 18% | (viii) "Manila"- 30 to 35% |
| (iv) "A cheen"- 15 to 18% | (ix) Surat - 25 to (blank) |
| (v) "Battavia"-20%. | (x) "Mocho"-30% |

Source: A.J. Qaiser, "Merchant Shipping in India during the 17th Century," Medieval India: A Miscellany, Vol. II, (New Delhi, 1972), pp. 211-213.

44. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The State and the Economy: The Mughal Empire," op.cit., p. 188.

Various activities of the various merchant classes had negative as well as positive impact on the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers.

There were some Indian merchants who dominated the markets by acting as great financiers and public creditors, as state treasurers and sometimes, they even financed the 'investment' of the English East India Company.⁴⁵

These merchants also controlled the wholesale market, both buying and selling of practically every commodity which changed hands at the port. They also directed foreign trade, coasting trade and controlled other centres of Commerce.⁴⁶

Three other types of profitable activities linked bankers to the Mughal State. The major banking firms had most direct connection with the organised units of production and supply to the Court, karkhāna etc. Secondly, the major banking houses were

45. B.B.Misra, The Indian middle classes and their growth in Modern Times, pp.22-23. Also see Karen Leonard, "The great firm theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire," CSSH, Vol.21, (1979), pp.154-155. These 'great firms' was a business firm in a wide variety of enterprises, with several branches, often based on one household. These financiers made loans, received deposits and dealt in hundis for payment transmitted throughout the country. The bankers also played the role of state treasurers. Specific Banking houses were frequently appointed by a ruler to extend cash money and credit for the payment of salaries and other expenses on a regular basis. Thus, the delays and irregularities due to seasonally delivered land revenues could be frequently avoided. Jagat Seth of Bengal, Virji Vora of Surat, Malaya Chetti of South India and later Chinanna Chetti were important banking houses of this class of bankers. Hundis are written orders for payment of written amount of money.

46. B.B.Misra, loc.cit., p.24.

functioning as contractor for the construction of public edifices in the 16th and 17th centuries because it was an extremely profitable branch of capital investment business. And finally, the great banking firms were involved in dealing bullion exchange and jewellery.⁴⁷ These firms, therefore, dictated the prices of commodities manufactured in various proto-industries of Bengal in open wholesale markets on their terms and conditions. The ultimate loser were the proto-industrial producer who were offered the minimum possible profit or virtually the product's cost.

Finally, these banking houses were also involved in revenue collection. It were bankers who controlled access to the actual collection of land revenue, through provision of credit or cash. The amount of interest set and the securities demanded by bankers were more critical economic conditions than the revenue demand fixed by a territorial ruler. Bankers provided the funds and agents to collect the land revenue to gain their position as tax farmers.⁴⁸ In Bengal, it was Jagat Seth who presided over annual negotiations with leading zamīndārs, settled accounts, allocated fresh supplies of funds.⁴⁹ As tax farmers, these banking firms ruthlessly exploited the peasants as well as the proto-industrial producers of the areas concerned.

47. Karen Leonard, loc.cit., p.157.

48. Ibid., p.156.

49. Ibid., p.158.

The second important branch of Merchant's engagements was the money changing. Mughal coinage was of the highest metallic purity and the minting was free i.e. it was open to any one to get his bullion converted into specie at nominal rate of change. The value of the coins, therefore, closely correspond to their weight in metal. Moreover, coins were also held to depreciate the value with age. The ṣarrāfs, the money changer, possessed a specialised skill for determining the alloy, weight and age of every coin.⁵⁰

This element of merchant community obtained the newly coined money from the mint, introduced these coins into circulation through their transaction as money changers. In Northern India, the ṣarrāfs only dealt in the imperial currency. The Mughal currency was tri-metallic and the need often arose of changing the coins of one metal into those of another i.e. gold muhrs into rupees and rupees into dāms. Since the value of these coins in terms of each other fluctuated constantly in accordance with the changes in bullion prices and since the rupees were widely in circulation in commercial transactions, the ṣarrāfs were probably often called upon to change old rupees or those which had fallen below the standard weight into the new coins or rupees. ṣarrāfs

50. Irfan Habib, "Banking in Mughal India," Tapan Raychaudhari (ed.), Contribution to Indian Economic History, (Calcutta, 1960), p. 3.

of the 17th Century also issued and discounted ⁵¹ hundis. Through money changing the banking houses and the ṣarrāfs were indirectly involved in the exploitation of proto-industrial producers. Money changing involved the charging of some commission which depended on place, market, party involved, metallic value and time. These commissions, ultimately, had to be charged by the proto-industrial producers, so that their commodities could be sold cheaper and immediately in the international markets. If the merchants purchased the commodities of Bengal's proto-industries dear, the total cost of the commodities including customs, other exactions, transportation charges, money changing commission etc. became much more dearer and, therefore, it lost its international markets.

51. Ibid, pp.8-13. The rates of discount were often expressed in the form of ratios between the amount received by the ṣarrāfs at the one end and that repaid at the other. The discount covered the allowance of risk of non-payment, the charges of reverse remittance i.e. for remittance from the place on which it was drawn to the one where it was discounted, the interest on the amount of the hundis for the period allowed for repayment and finally, the charges of insurance on goods against which the hundis was drawn. From this it would appear that the hundis drawn in these transactions were generally known as "Jokhaini hundis, which contains certain conditions, in accordance with which if the goods are lost or destroyed in transit, the drawer or holder of the hundī, who buys it with full knowledge of the risk has to suffer the loss. For further details see, V.I. Pavlov, Historical Premises for India's Transition to Capitalism, (Moscow, 1978), p.88. During the age of later Mughals there were rich ṣarrāfs called Kathiawala in Murshidabad. Most of them were members of oswal caste from Western India who settled in Bengal. The close relations usually maintained within their caste helped the Marwari money lenders and bankers in Bengal to consolidate their position. Also see C.K.M. Walter, Gazetteers of Marwar, Mallarni and C., (Calcutta, 1877), p.24. Marwaris were originally the resident of Marwar, which in Akbar's time included the districts of Ajmer, Jodhpur, Sirohi, Nagaur, and Bikaner. They spread far and wide over the whole country into a number of sections called Oswal, Mahesri, Agarwal, Porwal, Srimal, Srisrimal, Vijayawargi, Saraogi and Khatri.

It is quite clear from a minute survey of the records of the trading companies that the level of prices in the Indian wholesale spot markets adjusted according to the normal interaction between supply and demand current at the time of transactions, according to the information available to the buyers and sellers and the merchant's experience of the past behaviour of the market. In our period the selling side of a particular Asian Commodity was not so concentrated that the suppliers could always dictate the prices at will. However, the main instruments for the stabilization of prices and the reduction and minimization of the risks associated with spot bargain in commodity markets were through advance contracting.⁵²

The origin of advance system as it was practised in Mughal India can perhaps be traced to the ideas of Islamic jurisprudence. The law of sillim sales, for example derived its authority from Koran itself and signified a contract involving a prompt delivery. In the language of the law, it signified a contract for sale, causing an immediate payment of the price, and admitting a delay in the delivery of the wares. According to Hanifa a sillim sale was valid only if, among other conditions it specified the period of the delivery and the rate of the capital advanced. It is also specified in the Hedaya that 'articles be spoke from the manufacture, in a contract of sillim, are considered as entities.. and that a contract for workmanship is a sale and not merely a promise.⁵³

52. K.N. Chaudhuri, "Markets and the traders in India during the 17th and 18th Centuries," K.N. Chaudhuri and C.J. Dewey (eds.), Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979), p. 159.

53. K.N. Chaudhuri has taken this from Charles Hamilton, The Hedaya or Guide: A Commentary on the Mussulman Laws, (Second edition, London, 1870), pp. 299, 302, 308. See also Ibid, pp. 159-160.

Before the arrival of the European companies the Asian and the Portuguese merchants did not fix a definite price of the commodities at the time of advances and fixed the prices of the goods only at the time of its delivery; whereas the European companies introduced the fixing of the prices according to the samples at the time of dādnī.⁵⁴ In the former case, there was little prospect of exploitation of the weavers by merchants through fixing the prices of the commodity below its quality. Middle men like dālāls, pāikārs etc. were not involved and hence, no share by them in the labour of the weavers and the artisans. In the case of the later method the artisans were heavily and harshly exploited by both dālāls and pāikārs and the Company's merchants. Most of the parts of the investment and the procurement of the commodities for the long-distance trade in the later half of the 17th century were procured through advance contract.⁵⁵ This demonstrates the high magnitude of exploitation of the artisans through this method. Advance contract system was a major instrument in deteriorating the standard of living of proto-industrial producers in rural regions of Bengal.

The Company's servants procured native manufactures through

54. Shushil Chaudhuri, "Textile Trade and Industry in Bengal Subah, 1650-1720" IHR, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Sept. 1974), p. 275. It can be argued that despite the increased demand for textiles and competition among buyers, both European and Asian, it seems that the weavers and artisans had hardly any bargaining power which remained mostly in the hands of these merchant middlemen.

55. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Inland Trade," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C. 1200-C. 1750, p. 344.

56

native merchants by regular contracts. These were the dādnī merchants. The dādnī merchants were preferred because they lived in Calcutta for long under the protection of the English. They acted as brokers to East India Company in their dādnī business in the 17th as well as first half of the 18th centuries.

57

The usual intermediary between the English and the petty proto-industrial producers were sent out into the districts round the factory to buy on the Company's behalf in the cheapest market, major emporia or the smaller urban markets.

58

He had to give a security and was rewarded by a brokerage of 3% on all

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transactions. There was a second method to invite the merchants in the city to send samples and to purchase through them. But

the system of sorting out them in vogue was bad as is evident

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from the frequent complaints. Passes were provided to dādnī merchants in the name of English Company, so that the raw materials and commodities were freely transported to its destination without interruption.

61

56. J. Talboys Wheeler, A History of the English Settlement in India, Early Records of British India, p.224.

57. N.K. Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to the Permanent Settlement, Vol. I, p.6.

58. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Inland Trade," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I, C. 1200-C. 1750, p.344.

59. C.R. Wilson, The Early Annals of the English in Bengal, (Calcutta, 1895), p.63.

60. Shafaat Ahmad Khan, The East India Trade in the 17th Century (In its Political and Economic Aspects), p.155.

61. C.R. Wilson, op. cit., p.63. Also see, Ian Bruce Watson, Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India, 1659-1760, (N. Delhi, 1980), p.134. Control of the dastaks was in the hands of the Fort William Council, which could then exclude from this protection whomsoever it wished, or change exorbitant commissions when issuing the certificates to the private traders.

This heavy extortions by dalals, paikars, merchants and nobles impelled the artisans to compensate this through providing bad quality commodities, involving in illicit trade etc. The cheating by the weavers and other proto-industrial producers is evident from contemporary European records.

62

The proto-industrial producers of the Mughal period were a little better placed compared to the proto-industrial producers

62. Indrani Ray, "Of Trade and Traders in 17th Century India: An unpublished French Memoir by George Rooques," IHR, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, (July, 1982 to June, 1983), pp. 91-94. Mr Rooques was of the opinion that one can spin the grossest variety of cotton into fine and finest one by using the canji on thin and loosely woven cloths but the thick cotton would shrink during bleaching and would turn the cloth loose textured and reddish, while the fine cotton swelled, filled up the cloth and turned marvellous white. Those with experience could distinguish the pieces at sight because those made of fine cotton were seen white when they came out of the loom while the others are always reddish and can never be bleached well. He recognised three names for the cotton piece good: dorgagis, sanvagagis and bafetas. The dorgagis were $\frac{1}{2}$ cobs in width, the sanvagagis $\frac{1}{4}$ cobs and bafetas one full cobe, which consisted of 24 tassons; 42 of these make one ounce. These were made one or two tassous less in width and $\frac{1}{2}$ a cobe or more less in length. Weaving 2 cobs less per piece, meant a loss of 10% for the buyer. A dorgagi of 9 visas would be middling fine because 9 visas consist of 1440 threads, one visa having 160 threads.

It was on the visas that the weavers applied their subtlest tricks for stealing cotton and giving the same width to the cloth. Four varieties were recognised by him:

- "(i) is bonafide which had equal gaps throughout. They rarely use this one;
- (ii) tends to cheat little; its gaps one wider in the middle, this will not take away more than 40 threads from the cloth meaning $\frac{1}{4}$ th of a visa and as much as 5 pessos per piece from its estimated cost;
- (iii) the gaps of the third reed would have twice as much of the opening as the second which takes away $\frac{1}{2}$ a vissa i.e. to say, 80 threads, as a result 10 pessos, and;
- (iv) takes away one full vissa and you can say 20 pessos."

of Nawab's and Company's periods. Commercial competition among the various Asian merchants which included Moorish, Armenian, Gujrati, Hindustani merchants etc.⁶³ and European merchants which included English,⁶⁴ Dutch and French merchants contributed considerably to their comparatively little more wages. The magnitude of English East India Company's exports, imports and profits can be guessed by the following data: the exports of the Company at the end of the 1674 and the beginning of the 1675 amounted to 430 thousand pounds. The return from this adventures amounted to atleast

63. For the role of Moorish merchants in Bengal during 17th and 18th centuries see John Dunning Baron, East India Company: A Defence of the United Company of Merchants England Trading to the East Indies and their servants against complaints of the Dutch East India Company, (London, 1762), p. 39. For Armenian merchants in Bengal see Ashin Das Gupta, "Some Attitudes among 18th century Merchants." Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.), Ideas in History, (PPH, New Delhi, 1968), pp. 165-666. Armenians dominated the cosmopolitan town of Hughli in the first half of the 18th century.

64. For the merchants of the English Company see, Suresh Ghosh, The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal, 1757-1800, (Leiden, 1970), pp. 9-11. The Directors of the Company themselves merchants, personally choose the suitable candidates. Stress was placed upon previous experience abroad preferably in Spain, Africa, Covant etc. Emphasis was also laid on good character, honesty and soberiety. Many of the early recruits were experienced merchants. It was laid down in 1674 that promotion should be by seniority. Also see William Foster, The East India House: Its History and Associations, (London, 1924), pp. 2, 30, 31. The East India Company owed its incorporation and its privileges to a royal character which prescribed its method of Government viz., a Governor and 24 Committees or Directors. Trading Capital was raised by subscriptions among the members of various "Voyages" or "Stocks" and shares in these could only be held by members of the Company. Much of the work was performed by committees themselves and the officers employed and at its inception were a secretary and a beadle. A book-keeper, a Solicitor, a Cashier, and a ship's husband were soon added.

860 thousands pounds and 'often times much more!' ⁶⁵ But the main instruments for a little increase in the wages of the proto-industrial producers were the private merchants and ⁶⁶

65. A Treatise concerning the East India Trade: Being a most profitable trade to the kingdom and best secured and improved by a company and a joint stock company, (London, 1680), p.7.

66. Private trade is used as portmanteau term denoting all the commercial intercourse with India and within East Indies conducted for the benefit of the private merchants rather than the company, see, Ian Bruce Watson, op.cit., p.61. Under this trading system were included the Company's servants, commanders and seamen etc, see, Sir Evan Cotton, East Indiamen: The East India Company's Maritime Service, (London, 1949), pp.30-33. The real and substantial attractions of the service (commanders, seamen and even servants) lay elsewhere in the form of 'encouragements' and 'indulgences! The 'encouragements' were detailed in a printed form, hung up in each ship. Those who appeared after the union of the two companies in 1709 a reward was promised 'to proportion to their merits' to all seamen. The opportunities offered by the 'indulgences' of private trade were, great that an officer must be unlucky indeed if he did not amass a comfortable competence. Also see Bal Krishan, Commercial Relations Between India and England, (London, 1924), pp.77, 78, 79 etc. Company allowed their servants and the officers of their ships to their own account in a few unimportant articles of export and import. Following list of goods allowed to be exported and imported by private merchants in 1631: perpetuana's and drapery, pewter, woolen stockings and garters, ribb and roses edge with gold lace, beaver hats with gold and silver bands, felt hats etc. The goods allowed to be imported from India: Long pepper, white pepper, white powder sugar, nutmegs, bezor stones, drugs of all sorts, agate beads, blood stones, musk, aloes, socotrina, carpets, quilts of sattin, etc. But the Company's servants were not satisfied with this indulgences and frequent complaints were recorded by the correspondence of the Company on the violation of their monopoly. In 1650 the export of broad cloth, lead, quick silver, vermillion, coral, elephant's teeth etc. were prohibited on private accounts. Also see, E.B. Sainsbury and W. Foster (eds.), Court Minutes: 1640-164, pp. 202, 212, 213, 217 etc. Court Minutes, 1644-49, pp.139, 239, 243, 262, 273 etc. Court Minutes, 1650-1654, pp, 61, 69, 73, 86, iii etc. In 1658 the Company granted its indulgence to the master and men of the "Smyria Merchant" for ten tons of private goods on the outward voyage and 20 tons for the return voyage, providing no prohibited goods were carried, see also, Court Minutes, 1660-1663, pp.173-174, Court Minutes, 1664-1667, pp. 18-19. By the beginning of the 18th century the rights to private trade for seafarers had been institutionalised. Occasionally, regulations were implemented to restrict the seafarers and Englishmens collaboration for fetching high profits. Actions were also taken to prevent "deviation" of shipping which caused increased demurrage charges for the company and against the carriage of unlicensed commodities.

interlopers.⁶⁷

It was the Mughal monetary system in the later 17th Century that adversely affected the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers. The mints worked on the basis of 'free' coinage (i.e. it was open to any one to take bullion to the mint and get it converted into coin upon a separate payment made to cover minting costs and seigniorage). The minting costs and seigniorage amounted to about 5.6% of the value of the coins minted. When the treasury issued coins in payments, it recovered these charges through a deduction of 5%, known as do-dāmī (amounting to 5.3% of the net payment). Theoretically, the value of a coin should have equalled its weight in bullion plus the minting charges and seigniorage. In actuality, the newly minted coin usually carried a higher value, because of the time it took to get bullion converted into specie in the mints.⁶⁸ The older Mughal coins (chalanī) had to suffer a discount. The khazanā coins minted in the previous reign were accepted at a still larger discount. If the bullions were changed into coins, the money changer (ṣarrāf) charged his commission. These discounts and commissions were, in

67. Interlopers were the another important group of English private merchants, little more than pirates. The interlopers and their supporters in England vehemently criticised the Company's monopoly. See, Harihar Das, The Norris Embassy to Aurangzeb, (1699-1702), (Calcutta, 1959), p.62. Interlopers were becoming so troublesome, that in 1684 the Directors at home reiterated their orders to the Government of Bengal, to secure some place of safety (for which the sum of Rs.30,000 was authorised). See Colonel S. Rivett-Carnac, The Presidential Armies of India, (London, 1890), p.63.

68. Irfan Habib, "The Monetary System and Prices," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C.1200-1750, p.361.

actual fact, charged from the proto-industrial producers while exchanging these coins for the products of the proto-industries. Therefore, the merchants were doubly profited, through purchasing very cheap and selling comparatively very dear. The ultimate loser were the proto-industrial producers.

Moreland's views that commodity prices in India remained largely stable down to the 1660s with exception in the relative prices of copper and silver⁶⁹ have been challenged by more recent research. K.N. Chaudhuri maintains that the quantities of silver imported from Spanish American mines determines the circulation of silver coins in India during 16th, 17th and first half of the 18th Centuries.⁷⁰ But the more recent studies have analysed this

69. Tapan Raychaudhuri has taken it in his "Inland Trade," *op. cit.*, p. 335. He (Tapan) used the arguments of Moreland where (Moreland) opined that copper becoming expensive over time. The import of silver into Bengal increased during the period under review, silver prices fell pushing up the general price-level in terms of the silver-based currency.

70. See K.N. Chaudhuri, "The East India Company and the export of Treasure in the Early 17th Century," *EHR*, Second Series, Vol. 16, No. 1, (1963-64), p. 38. Also see his, "Treasure and Trade Balances: The East India Company's Export Trade, 1660-1720" *EHR*, Second Series, Vol. XXI, No. 3, (Dec, 1968), pp. 482-487. He also holds the similar view in his "Foreign Trade: European Trade with India," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C. 1200-C. 1750*, pp. 395-397. According to him treasure formed the largest proportion of the total value of the Company's exports to the Indies. Between 1600 and 1640 the total value of the exports in any single year seldom exceeded £ 100,000 the two exceptions being 1623 and 1625. But this volume increased to £ 2600,000 in the 1680's. Also see Aziza Hasan's "Mints of the Mughal Empire: A Study in Comparative Output," *PIHC*, Patiala Session (1967, Pt. 1, Patna, 1968), pp. 328-330. Also see his "The Silver currency output of the Mughal Empire and prices in India during the 16th and 17th centuries," *IESHR*, Vol. VI, No. 1, (1969), pp. 85-116. For further details see his reply to a critique of his article in *IESHR*, Vol. VII (1970).

developments antithetically and emphasised that it was the "broad based, varied and massive demand for the instruments of monetization, together with simultaneous long-term developments in production and supply of monetary media" that was the pre-condition for flows of American silver and for Euro-Asian trade.⁷¹

The records and evidence studied suggests some broad secular trends in the general movement of prices. One spurt rise appears to have come between 1610 and the mid 1630s, with the price level rising by 1½ (1.5) and 2 times of what it was in 1595. The early 1660s registered another spurt after a slight decline. Gold and copper prices climbed to very high levels. The scale of the rise in the price level was reflected only partially in copper, whose silver price increased by about 40% during the entire 50 years. This spurts in movement of prices definitely affected the wages of the proto-industrial producer. Here again, it were the proto-industrial manufacturing employers in Europe who gained extra profits from the continuous fall in real wages which is evident from Hamilton's data which shows that in 16th and 17th centuries prices rise was much faster than wages. The information on wages in India during 17th century has not so far been gathered in any profusion, it, therefore, would difficult to make any quantitative research on these lines.⁷²

71. Frank Perlin, "Monetary Revolution and Societal change in the late Medieval and Early Modern Times - A Review Article," The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XLV, No. 5, (Nov, 1986), pp. 1041-1046. Also see Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Inland Trade," loc. cit., p. 337.

72. Irfan Habib, "The Monetary System and Prices," Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C. 1200-C. 1750, p. 378.

Even if we concede only that wages lagged behind prices in the short run, we must assume that an extra gain occurred to employers. This source of yielding income became a significant source of capital only if wage earners were, in relatively large numbers, employed by merchants or manufactures irrespective of whether they organized production in kārkhanas which was rare or advanced dadān which was common. The merchants and companies might, therefore, be said to have benefited from depression of the real wages in the 17th century India, through reducing the production costs by organized procurement with their limited control over the production process that least affected or uneffected their investments. This, in turn, encouraged a high volume of trading due to the inducement of increased individual transactions.⁷³

⁷⁴
The plebeian culture of the proto-industrial producers during later 17th and early 18th centuries was manifested in common practice of the manners and customs of the proto-industrial producers and it influenced their consumption patterns, through consumption of superfluous 'luxuries' and delicacies, jewellery, fashion, clothing etc. Plebeian culture also rooted in

73. John S. Deyell and R. E. Frykenberg, "Sovereignty and the "Sikka" under Company Raj: Minting pre-rogative and general legitimacy in India," IESHR, Vol. XIX, No. 1, (Jan, March, 1982), p. 7.

74. Plebeian culture of the proto-industrial producers in Europe is an important area in socio-economic history of 17th and 18th century recently developed by Economic and Social historians. Most important among those is E. P. Thompson who had done some commendable works on this issue. See specially his, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class struggle without class" Social History, Vol. 3 (1978), pp. 134-159 and "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," Journal of Social History.

the solidarity of proto-industrial producers, disaffection and forms of protest that include food rioting, political protest, demonstrations, etc.⁷⁵ E.P. Thompson holds that in Patrician society, Plebeian culture is associated with the actual erosion of paternalist forms of control through the expansion of 'free' masterless labour. But it does not present any crisis to the old order. Vertical consciousness was well envisaged among the plebs, but this vertical consciousness did not bind them with adamantine chains of consensus to that society's rulers.⁷⁶ Plebeian culture, therefore, cannot be viewed as revolutionary one nor even as proto-revolutionary one, nor as differential culture either, nor as conservative one. It is a conservative and irrational culture in its forms. It bred riots but not rebellions: direct actions but not democratic organization.⁷⁷

In the Mughal India the plebeian culture of the proto-industrial producers were manifested in different types of protest actions. The forms and contents of the plebeian culture of the Mughal proto-industrial producers in Bengal against the extreme exploitation by the Mughal nobles, monopoly, engrossing etc. were demonstrated through flight, demonstrations, hartals, leaving the

75. For solidarity among the proto-industrial producers see A.J. Fletcher and J. Stevenson, "Introduction," A.J. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), Order and disorder in Early Modern England, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), pp. 9-10. For Food rioting and the participation of women into it, see John Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots 1790-1810," Past and Present, No. 120, (August, 1988), pp. 88-108. For disaffection, see Nicholas Roger, "Popular protest in Early Hanoverian England" Paul Slack (ed.), Rebellion, Popular Protests and the Social Order in Early Modern England, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984), pp. 278-280.

76. E.P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" Social History, Vol. 3, (1978), p. 144.

77. Ibid, pp. 134-159. Also see his "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," Journal of Social History, Vol. VII, No. 4, (Summer, 1974), p. 397.

towns etc. They also organised mass petitions to the Central government against the oppressive attitude of the State functionaries.⁷⁸ Food rioting, and any other forms of protests had not been observed in Mughal India. Mughal proto-industrial producer's women perhaps had played no role in food rioting unlike their European counter-parts.⁷⁹

Irregularity of labour formed a most important feature of the plebeian culture of Mughal proto-industrial producers. 'Leisure preference' was the major cause of irregularity of labour. Festivities not only served the purpose of shared pleasure but also affirmed the solidarity and social cohesion among the Mughal proto-industrial producers.

BENGAL NAWABS

It were the brokers including dādnī merchants, dalals and pāikārs⁸⁰ whose exploitation of the rural proto-industrial producers

78. Irfan Habib, "Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India," Cyclo-styled.

79. John Bohstedt, "Gener, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790-1810," Past and Present, No. 120, (August, 1988), pp. 88-108.

80. Pāikārs (spelled pykars in company records) were a group of intermediaries who contracted to supply goods on the basis of advances made to them. They were engaged in the supply of cotton piece-goods, went on foot into the interior and collected the finished goods from individual proto-industrial producers. Ram Gupta was such a pāikār at Dacca. Dālāls were different types of middlemen. They charged commissions as gumāshtās, but in their business transactions they were seldom responsible for the payment of the goods sold or bought by them. Besides they were not stockists.

knew no bounds during the nawāb's period. Penalties were imposed upon these merchants in case of the failure of respecting the contracts.⁸¹ At a time of such economic instability, merchants found it difficult to operate the system of advance orders on accounts of difficulties in procuring capital. Consequently, in 1741, the system of buying through brokers had been stopped by the Company although the dādñī system continued till 1753, when the Company abolished the dādñī system of investment through native merchants.⁸² The reason for the change lies in the frequent failures of the merchants to supply the contracted goods in a given time, and in their demands for dādñī at the rate of 85% of

81. K.K. Datta (ed.), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol. I, 1748-1756, (Delhi, 1958), P. XL. Even then, there were many cases of not fulfilling the contracts and dādñī merchants asked for bigger advances. Large money advance and ready money payment did not solve the problems of the dādñī merchants as well as the weavers involved. For the cases of the failure of brokerage system and its continuation see, HMR, Vol. 10, Copies of general letters from Bengal to Court of Directors and letters from the other persons, 25th Jan. 1737-13, Dec. 1742, Bengal General dated 29th Jan. 1738. There were other kinds of complaints mentioned in the HMR, Vol. III, Pt. II, copies of general letters from Bengal to Court of Directors and letters from other persons, 17th Nov, 1731 to 9th Feb, 1733, Fort-William General dated 26th June, 1732 which contains that dādñī merchants carried the goods to their own houses.

82. Hameeda Hossain, The Company Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal, 1750-1831, (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 3. For the abolishment of dādñī system see, J. Tolboys Wheeler, A History of the English Settlement in India: Early Records of British India, p. 255.

the prices of goods.⁸³ Now the investment was made through gumāshtās and weavers were directly connected with the business of the Company and her servants.

It, therefore, became necessary for the gumāshtās to go in the districts, villages and factories and bought goods for the Company. The servants of the Company employed gumāshtās in like manner to carry on the inland trade. The gumāshtās entrusted with the English Flag and Company's dastak, they bought and sold duty free.⁸⁴ The gumāshtās of the Company, her servants and the Europeans dealt in salt, betel and tobacco since 1753.⁸⁵ The Company's servants had their private trade on their own account, conveyed goods from one part of Bengal to another and claimed exemption from duties for this private inland trade.⁸⁶

83. K.K.Datta, Alivardi and His Times, (Calcutta, 1963), p.156. Also see Bengal General dated 29th Jan, 1736, quoted in MR, Vol.IV. Pt.I, Copies of General letters from Bengal to Court of Directors and letters from other persons, 31st July, 1734-15th Jan, 1738. According to this document before 1736 70% dadni had been advanced, which decreased to 60%, in some cases 50% and on others even to 30% during 1730s. Also see Letter of Court of Directors, dated 31st January, 1755. Quoted by K.K.Datta in his, Alivardi and His Times. (Calcutta, 1963), p.156. Consequently, the Court of Directors suggested to form a supervisory committee to look after investments in different factories and aurangs. Accordingly, a committee consisting of four members, Mr. Roger Drake, the President of the Council in Calcutta, Mr. Charles Manningham, Mr. Richard Becker and Mr. William Frankland was formed. Encouraged by the favourable attitude of the Court of Directors, the council at Calcutta decided unanimously on the 10th March, 1755, that the method of making purchases directly at the aurangs should be continued.

84. J.Tolboys Wheeler, loc.cit., pp.300-301.

85. Letter of the Governor to Saiful-Mulk dated Oct. 11, 1767. See Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Vol. II, 1767-69, (Calcutta, 1914), p.159.

86. Ramesh Dutt, Economic History of India, Early British Rule, (London, 1906), pp. 18-19.

This new method, though successful for sometime, did not produce satisfactory results. It vested the gumāshtās and the agents of the company with powers "which were frequently abused" as Verelst justly pointed out, "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."⁸⁷

The Company in collaboration with her servants exploited the proto-industrial producers harshly through the method of examining the goodness and quality of the cloths. Merchants and proto-industrial producers often complained the strictness followed by the warehouse keepers in sorting out the commodities.⁸⁸ Commodities were prized previously according to the quality of the middle piece whereas during 1750s the sorters (i.e. warehouse keepers and their assistants) distinguished those three pieces as their different letters which occasioned the loss. Therefore, orders were placed to sort every letter in three different parcels and later put them together for one prizing thereby preventing the lower letters being run into the higher. Accordingly, there was a loss from 20 to 25% in sorting the gurrahs and soot rumāls for which reason they wrote to the dālāls to whom they advanced dādñī to deduct the like amount out of the cloth.⁸⁹

87. Verelst, A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal, p.85. C.J. Hamilton quoted this in his, Trade Relations between England and India, (1600-1896). (Delhi, 1975), p.125. D.B. Mitra has also quoted this in his, The Cotton Weavers of Bengal: 1757-1833, p.47.

88. 2nd Jan, 1751-52, General Letter from Bengal by the Ship Kent No.2. Received from London, 12th June, 1752, HMR, S.No.17, Copies of General letters from Bengal to Court of Directors and letters from other persons, 1752-53.

89. Ibid, For the method of sorting out the cloths see Public proceedings Fort-William the 17th Dec, 1752, copy of letter from C. Manningham export method of sorting the cloth, Ibid,

From contemporary records it appear that since the people of the region lost the protection of their native prince, the proto-industrial producers were frequently exploited by lawless dominion of adventurers of the lowest order.⁹⁰ The merchant adventurers greatly increased in number traded to India, under licences or commissions from Cromwell and their increased operation in the different regions of rural Bengal reduced the wage rate of the proto-industrial producers. Indian goods had little demands in English markets. These disconnected interlopers or private merchants had brought home great quantities of Indian commodities, of inferior quality, particularly cottons, drugs and spices thereby increasing the smuggling trade in these articles.⁹¹

The Qasimbāzār Factory records show the monthly rates of wages for building workers and other proto-industrial producers in the year 1739 as detailed below:

Bricklayers	-	Rs. 3-0-0
Carpenters	-	Rs. 2-15-0
Women	-	Rs. 1-0-0
Coolies	-	Rs. 2-0-0
Boat Manjees	-	Rs. 3-0-0
Peons	-	Rs. 2-8-0
Darwan	-	Rs. 2-8-0
Washeman	-	Rs. 10-0-0
Barber	-	Rs. 3-0-0
Masalchis	-	Rs. 2-0-0

Source: S. Bhattacharya: The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1704 to 1740, (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 196-197.

90. Letters from Mr. Francis to Lord North, (London, 1792-93), p. 64.

91. Charles Maclean, A View of the Consequences of laying open the trade to India and C., (London, 1813), pp. 61-62. Also see letter from Mr. Francis to Lord North, (London, 1792-93), p. 64. For smuggling trade in such articles see, Letter to the Right Honourable Henry Dundas, one of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State and C. From the Committee of buyers of East India Piece goods for Home Consumption, (London, 1792-93), pp. 5-12.

The pitiable economic condition of Bengal's proto-industrial producers was further aggravated by drain of wealth transferred from India especially from Bengal to England by East India Company and her servants. The high magnitude of the drain of wealth from India can be displayed by the following data: "The average annual value of the British merchandise export to India was no more than £ 15,000 between 1600-1620, whereas the average value of the export trade was £ 113,000 between 1721 and 1725 and £ 154,000 between 1731 and 1735. Import from India which was £ 551,000 in value in 1700 shot up to £ 742,000 in 1716 and £ 996,000 during the 1730s"⁹² Contemporary writers recognised that after 1730s the balance of trade turned against India because the English as well as the other European nations purchased Indian commodities out of the revenues and circulating cash of the country.⁹³ This drain of wealth was in reality, a heavy burden for the maintenance of a balanced standard of living of the proto-industrial producers of Bengal.

Yet the proto-industrial producers of the nawab's period were more prone towards freedom of movement, freedom of professional mobility etc. and their overall standard of living was a bit higher compared to the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers of the Company's period. Few or virtually no original reports and surveys are available on the subject

92. Sourindranath Roy, "British Connection with India as a factor in pre-industrial capital accumulation in England, India, Past and Present, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1984), p. 72.

93. General Remarks on the System of Government in India, (London, 1769), pp. 82-83.

of caste, division of labour based on gender, age and caste etc. in India.⁹⁴ But the recent research monographs associated with the subjects of caste and division of labour based on gender and age of other proto-industrial producers of Bengal are lacking.

According to the social grading and occupational categorization of Bengali castes ascribed to Raja Ballal Sen in the 12th Century, weavers fell in a low category of nine castes known as nābasūdras. They were graded into two major castes, the higher status tāntīs and the jugis. The Dacca tāntīs were divided into two sub-groups: the borobhagiya, who assumed the title of basak given to cloth merchants, and chotobhogiyas who were originally kāyasthas expelled from their caste for changing their occupation. There were three main tāntī sub-group in West Bengal: the aswini who wove both cotton and silk, the mariyal, who wove only silk and uttarkhal who wove only cotton. Other sub-caste differentiation was traceable to occupational differences: thus the halua jugis gave up weaving for agriculture and the rangrez jugis took to dyeing thread.⁹⁵

The geographical mobility of the weaving castes was partly seasonal, conforming to the demand for their work. Dhūnerās migrated from Bihar to East Bengal at the time of the cotton harvest. Some castes moved over a period of time to settle down

94. H.H. Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, (Calcutta, 1892), Vols. I and II have been consulted. James Wise, Notes on Races, Caste and Trades of East Bengal, (London, 1883). These works have been consulted by Hameeda Hossain. See her, The Company Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal, 1750-1813, (Delhi, 1988), p. 47.

95. Hameeda Hossain, The Company Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal: 1750-1813, pp. 48-49.

permanently in districts where demand exceeded supply. The Dacca tāntīs, according to Wise, were supposed to have migrated from Māldā in the 17th Century, while the trihutia and mungirya tāntīs were of Biharī descent.⁹⁶

The Plebeian culture of the proto-industrial producers during these periods followed those modes of protest employed by Mughal proto-industrial producers. Apart from these the proto-industrial producers during the first half of the 18th century adopted varying forms of resistance directed not only against circumventing the authoritarianism of the Company's official agents but also the system of appropriation.

Though different forms of resistance were adopted, yet there was minimal possibility of the proto-industrial producers of one trade being able to organize a collective response.⁹⁷ A large number of the proto-industrial producers ostensibly accepted the system imposed on them, while surreptitiously, they continued to work for other customers. Some of them sought to escape the system by migrating from their villages and aurangs or deserting their occupations. More positive forms of protest were also utilised: a slowing down of production or refusal to accept advances in the face of forced and uneconomic appropriation was the initial response.

The proto-industrial producers of these periods had a high preference for leisure against work. These proto-industrial producers protested against the new work culture introduced by the European East India Companies. The European proto-industrial producers had a high preference for leisure against work and demanded customary annual and weekly pattern of work and leisure.⁹⁸

96. Ibid., p.49.

97. Ibid., p.124.

98. Hugh Cunningham, Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, C.1780-1880, (London, 1980), pp.57-58.

The European proto-industrial producers protested against any danger to their plebeian culture through demonstrations, shouting, cheering, cat-calling intimidation and violence. Falling in this effort labourers followed machine breaking.⁹⁹ In the context of Bengal during this period machine breaking and machine wrecking was an impossibility because of the non-development of machines in various trades of Bengal.

COMPANY PERIOD

From the 1730s onwards, Bengal was frequently subjected to war, violence, and social unrest caused by raids and wars carried on in the western region by the Marāthās; incursions by the Maghs in the East; wars amongst the European companies and conflicts between the nawābs and the Company. At the economic level, serious disruption was made by a succession of crop failures and scarcity which led to famine conditions after 1770.

The decline of Mughal political power decentralized Mughal

99. E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, (London, 1964), p. 10. It is noted that in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire etc., Ludites were using attacks on machinery whether new or old. There were two concrete reasons for machine breaking. The first type implied no special hostility to machines as such but under certain conditions, a normal means of pressuring employers or putters out to providing them concessions with regard to wages and other matters, a traditional and established part of industrial conflict in the period of high proto-industrialization. It was not only directed against machines, but also against raw materials, finished goods, or even the private property of employers depending upon what sort of damage these were most sensitive to. Machine wrecking not concerned with technical progress only, but also with the maintenance of customary standard of living which included non-monetary factors such as freedom, dignity and wages.

administration which was sharpened by the Marāthā invasions in the 18th century especially between 1738 and 1750. The Marāthā raids of these periods destabilized rural society and disrupted Bengal's economy by attacking important centres of administration and trade, as well as villages in the interior in Murshidābād, Nadia, Bīrbhūm, Bānkurā, Midnapur, Rajshāhī, Bardwān etc.¹⁰⁰ Cargo boats were plundered, trade and production disrupted that led to a scarcity of grain, shortage of labour and rapidly increasing costs.¹⁰¹ The nawābs efforts to retaliate against the Marāthas had disastrous financial consequences straining the resources of the state, zamīndārs and bankers.

The merchant community became the main target of Marāthā raids both directly and indirectly. Threats of attack on the ships of the merchants in the Bay of Bengal made them reluctant to carry on trade.¹⁰² The Company's trade was not safe from the Marāthā scourage as is evident from the letters of factory chiefs.¹⁰³

100. Hameeda Hussain, The Company Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal, 1750-1813, p. 1.

101. K.K. Datta (ed.), Fort-William-India House Correspondence, 1748-56, Vol. 1, (New Delhi, 1950), pp. II-III. Also see his Alivardi and His Times, p. 67.

102. K.K. Datta, Survey of India's Social Life, (Calcutta, 1961), p. 172. This is evident from following example: "In 1742, from the house of Jagat Seth in Murshidabad, which had financed rulers, companies and merchants, 2 crore Arcot rupees (legal currency) were plundered. In 1748, the Patna sarrāfs send their money to north India due to the fear of Alivardi's financial demands. Therefore, it were the Maratha raids and Alivardi's financial demands that lightened the money market. Also see Hameeda Hussain, loc. cit., p. 2.

103. In 1792, the Dutch factories at Kowgrama (in Murshidābād) and Nowgram (in Bardwan) were plundered and burnt. In 1743, the Court of Directors were ascribed that investment was short and the cloth were of poor quality. Between 1747 and 1751, commercial Residents reporting from Dacca, Balasore, Qasimbazar and Murshidabad expressed their fears. See J.N. Sarkar, "Maratha Invasion of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa," JIH, (1926), pp. 85-90.

Letters to the Court of Directors mentioned one t n after another from where the proto-industrial producers ran away, commodities could not be procured due to the Marāthā presence. The proto-industrial producers that included weavers, washerman, spinners and other proto-industrial producers from Bardwān, Nadia, Murshidābād, Qassimbazar, etc. had deserted the aurangs and left the Company's cloths and goods in an unfinished state.

These factors contributed to an escalation of prices: in 1753 it was noted that the cost of cotton rose upto Rs. 22 or 23 per maund; rice and grain too demonstrated a rising trend. The price of rice had risen by three or four times. Marāthā incursions into the Nawab's territory were occured in 1753, 1760.

Since the Marāthā raids into the countryside started after every monsoon and lasted throughout the winter, it affected the rural activity. It interrupted communications between villages and aurangs, between factories and markets; and villagers deserted their place of work for safer areas.

The eastern zone was also not safer due to regular attack by Maghs of Arakan regions between 1746 and 1769.

Open warfare was resorted amongst the French, the Dutch and the English with similar results. The final round for commercial dominance led to military confrontation with the Nawābs of Bengal with known results. These developments of the later 18th century affected the economic and social conditions of proto-industrial producers. Gumāshtās were obstructed in their procurement in villages by local officials and in some instances washermen were beaten up. Subsequent delays in delivery upset the

shipping shedule and sales in London. This meant an indirect loss of opportunities to the earnings of the proto-industrial producers because demand and consequently supply decreased.¹⁰⁴

The economy of Bengal in general and different proto-industrial producers in particular were adversely affected by abnormal weather conditions that led to famine. In 1769-70,¹⁰⁵ 1783-84 and again in 1787-88, abnormal weather created famine conditions in large tracts all over Bengal. The immediate impact was recorded as depopulation, death by starvation, sickness etc.

The proto-industrial producers were disasterously affected. From this time on, weaving ceased to occupy a place of great eminence in the economy of Bengal which was regarded as the direct result of the famine. Contemporary records informed that spinners, weavers and cotton growers had died in great numbers. This sharply raised the prices of materials and finished goods which is accompanied by a reduction in quality. Consequently, Bengali cotton cloths gradually started lessening its markets in Europe and the earnings of the proto-industrial producers employed in cotton cloth manufacturing proto-industries gradually reduced. Other proto-industrial producers were felt the evils of the famine even more worst partly because of the less job opportunities and partly because of the sharp rise of the prices of the

104. K.K. Dutta, The Bengal Subah, pp. 318-26, 331.

105. For details of this famine see, Charles Grant, "Observations on the state of Asia," p. 14. Also see Ainslee Embree, Charles Grant and British Rule in India, (London, 1962), p. 35. The famine started in Nov, 1769. There were repeated droughts until the summer of 1770. The famine was felt in all the Northern districts of Bengal. Also see Hameeda Hussain, loc. cit., p. 10. Charles grant thought that three million people had died during the famine, but this was too low a figure. Sir William Hunter concluded that ten million was a more reasonable estimate. A large proportion of the famine victims were children.

food grains due to hoarding and monopolies by the Company's servants. The price of rice rose to 40 times and later to even 10 times its usual price. That was why, the Bengal famine is regard as the product of grain manipulations on the part of the Company's servants.

106

Specific mention of the damage to proto-industrial producers during 1783-84 is not found in the records.

The calamity of 1787-88 due to floods and cyclonic storms in Dacca, Lakhipur, Māldā, Shāntipūr, Burron and Chittagong led to shortages and famines. The proto-industrial producers engaged in cotton cloth proto-industries were once more affected seriously. Production stopped, and looms were ruined. Other proto-industrial, producers of these regions were also hard hit. In Dacca, the cotton crop was destroyed and the price of rice and salt had gone up. By August 1788 the failure of the Boro rice crop created the prospect of even higher prices. The proto-industrial producer's wages were not adjusted to sudden fluctuations in prices, higher wages were demanded to offset the increased cost of production. The dearth continued and empelled the proto-industrial producers to using their advances for subsistence, leaving little for the purchase of raw materials to feed their respective proto-industries. Unemployment and low wages further reduced the purchasing

107

106. Ainslee Embree, Ibid, pp. 35-38.

107. Hameed Hussain, op.cit., pp. 12-13. In Lakhipur, the unusual price of rice and cotton during two years had increased the market price of cloth, although the quality had considerably deteriorated. This was a clear consequence of a scarcity of kapas and reduction in the number of spinners. In Malda the price of cotton had increased by 50% by Feb 1788. The scarcity of grain was felt even as far as Sylhet, Rangpur, Nadia, Birbhum, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Comilla.

power of the proto-industrial producers that turned many weavers away from their occupation.

The cumulative effect of various wars, confrontations and disasterous famines can apparently be envisaged in the rise of prices of various grains. K.K. Datta has calculated the rise in the price of rice to be in the range of 30%.¹⁰⁸ S.M.S. Hussain has calculated the annual fluctuations of rice, gur, mustard oils, sugar and ghi. Hameeda Hussain used his data in following manner: "The price of rice peaked during the famine years to an average of Rs.1.57, the highest price being Rs.3.33 in 1771. In 1783 and 1797 it came down to Re.1.00 per maund. Mustard oil increased steadily until 1787; sugar prices were significantly higher between 1769 and 1773. Gur showed a marginal increase during this period but no abnormal peaks as in the case of Sugar."¹⁰⁹

The periodical price rises are attributable to scarcity conditions caused by climatic changes in 1769-71, 1776, 1783-88 and 1791-92, which is apparent in the fluctuations of prices in different regions of Bengal.¹¹⁰ These periodic rise in the prices

108. K.K. Datta, "Markets and prices of Articles in Bengal, 1700-1765", IJE, Vol. XI, part. 4, (1931), pp. 669-82. Hameeda Hussain quotes him: "In 1738 one rupee bought 2 maunds 20 seers of rice, whereas by 1751 only 1 maund 32 seers were available for the rupee. In 1754, 32 seers of fine rice and 40 seers of coarse rice could be bought for a rupee at Calcutta;" See her, Ibid, p. 17.

109. Hameeda Hussain, op. cit., p. 17.

110. Hameeda Hussain argues that in Murshidābād the quantity of rice available for a rupee dropped from 6-7 seers in June 1770 to 3 seers in July. In Qassimbazar area, this was 15 seers per rupee. By the end of 1771 rice crops had improved but the fall in prices adversely affected the peasant's income. It was not before the middle of the decade that prices stabilized. In the 1787-88 famine a similar tendency could be seen.

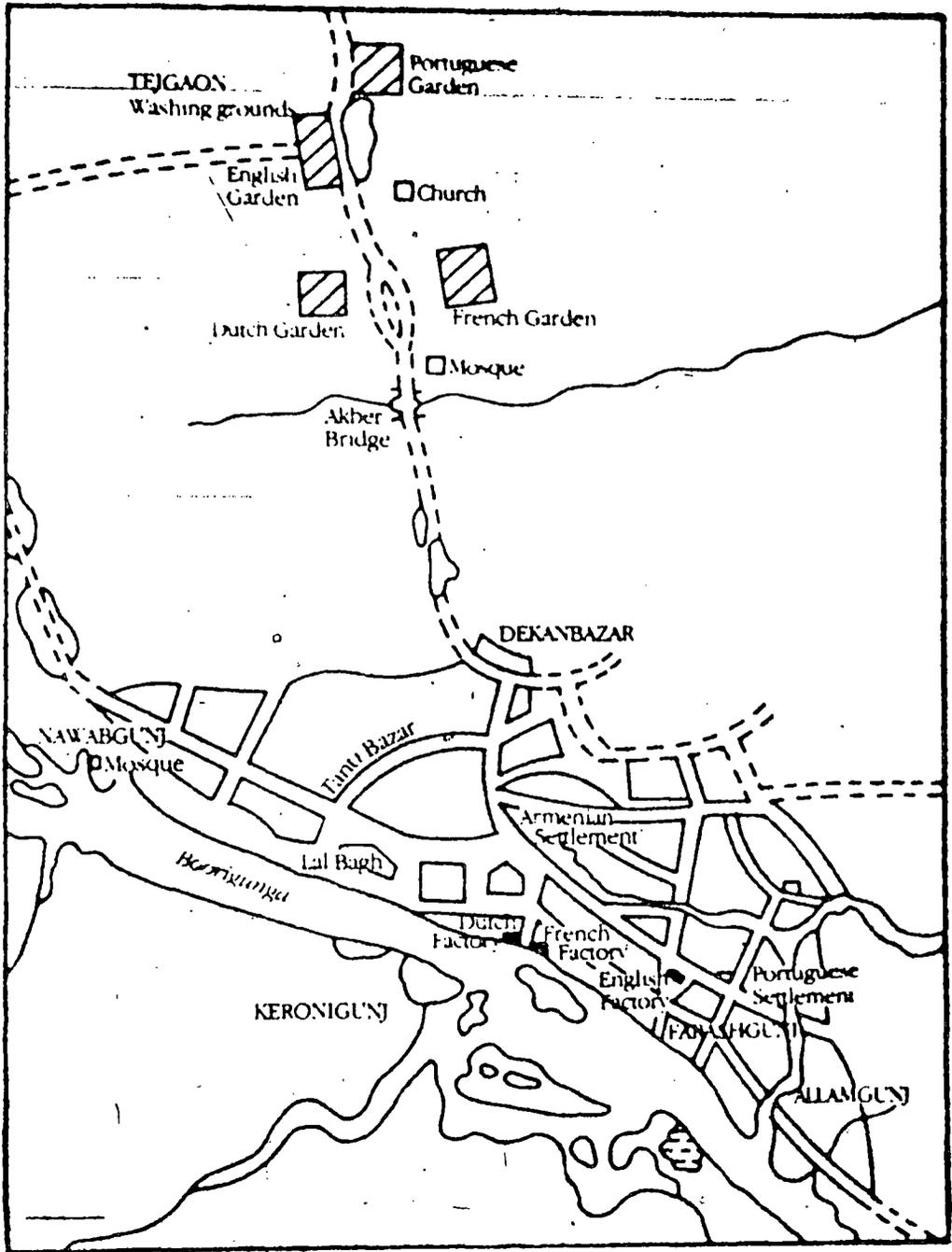
of such basic like rice, gur, mustard oil etc. must have affected subsistence levels, which were not compensated by an increase in the wages of the proto-industrial producers throughout the period.

The gumāshtā system during the Company period became very oppressive, because force was applied to make the weavers undertake the Company's business not at a fair price for their labour.¹¹¹ At Dacca, for example, the weavers got 20 to 30% more by working for the agents of other Companies. The weavers earned commonly not more than Rs. 6 or 8 per month from their labour. There is no doubt that normally the advances would be received readily enough. Although the change was commonly made that they were often forced upon the manufacturers by the agents of the Company.

To do away with this oppression of the weavers the Company declared freedom in trade on the 12th April, 1773 with partial success. It relieved the weavers from the oppression of the Company's servants to some extent. Now, the weavers started refusing to accept the orders of the Company.

To rectify this evil, the Company re-introduced contract system based on monthly basis on 1775 without much success. The pricing system employed in the Company's warehouse was faulty

111. C.J. Hamilton, Trade Relations between England India, (1600-1896), (Delhi, 1975), p. 150.



MAP. 9. COMMERCIAL SETTLEMENT AND WEAVER'S QUARTERS IN DACCA

that meant a further loss on the part of the weavers.¹¹² The heavy extortions of the weavers has been described in following words in 1784: "We have until now transacted the business of the circar through the dalals, which does not yield us a sufficiency for our subsistence.... We are employed perhaps two months in the year and are necessitated to remain idle the other ten months, we are moreover subject to survival impositions on account of russoms demanded by the dālāls to the amount of 4 annas in the rupee, so that there remain little or no profit to us."¹¹³

For relieving the British Cotton cloth manufacturers from dependence on American supply and also for compensating the losing market for cotton-piece goods in Europe, the Directors in the 1780s suggested that Company should invest, procure and ship raw cotton to England. The suggestion was aimed to spoil the cotton proto-industry of Bengal, throw its poor proto-industrial producers out of employ by depriving them of the material on which their labour and subsistence depend and finally, open a new and sufficient market for British machine cotton products. The Board in 1787 made an effort to improve the quality of Bengal cloth by introducing a new system of reeling thread then was in operation in England without much success.¹¹⁴

112. D.B.Mitra, The Cotton Weavers of Bengal, 1757-1833, pp.47-66.

113. Translation of a petition of Luckum, Muktaram, Subram and other feagees, inhabitants of Chittagong-Board of Trade (Commercial) proceedings, 1st June, 1784, J.Kumar, Select Document on Indian Trade and Industry, (New Delhi, 1981), p.163.

114. Ainslee Embree, Charles Grant and British Rule in India, (London, 1962), pp.104-105.

The new Board of Trade made significant contribution to the creation of a legal Framework for the relations between the Company's government and the people, which was embodied in the "Regulations of Weavers," issued by the council in July 1787. The fundamental purpose of the Regulations for Weavers' was to end the oppression of the weavers by providing for Bengal a substitute for the laws of contract which were the basis of European commerce and the lack of that in India increased the oppression and fraud. One of the main contentions of the 'Regulations' was to improve the Company's commerce. Since the political power in Bengal was in the hands of the Company, the Company's servants had no hesitation

115. Regulations for weavers, More particularly those in the Company's Employ, with a general Supplementary Article, passed by the Right Honourable the Governor General in Council on the 23rd July 1787, (Calcutta, the Honourable Company's Press, 1787). The author of the 'Regulations' was Charles Grant. The 'Regulations' began with the declaration that once a weaver had accepted advances from the Company he had to abide by the contract. (Art. 1). Two further regulations were made to enforce the declaration. The First, "Aimed at the private traders and representatives of foreign companies, made any person liable to prosecution who bought cloth from weavers who had accepted the Company's advances, (Article V). This was a clear assertion of the primacy of the Company's power over all rivals. The other regulation for preventing the weavers defaulting on their deliveries to the Company gave the Commercial Residents the right to set 'peons' or 'guards' over workmen to ensure that they fulfilled their contracts." (Art. III). The brutality of these guards were frequently condemned by weavers but Grant felt that the system could not be abandoned until a stronger sentiment existed in favour of keeping contracts. (Art. VII). The Article IX of the Regulations forbade the imprisonment of the Company's weavers without prior discussion of the case with the Commercial Resident. The 'Regulations' ended with the injunction that all of the Company's servants, whether in the 'Revenue or in the commercial or in the judicial line' should treat the proto-industrial producers 'with kindness and encouragement! (Art. XIV).

in manipulating the regulations in the favour of their (Company's servants) commercial interests in Bengal.

The weavers in their capacity as traders were subject to the payment of police tax.¹¹⁶

The socio-economic condition of the other proto-industrial producers of cotton proto-industry of Bengal was not better than the weavers. The spinners income in North Bengal on the average was onconsiderable. Three rupees was the yearly average. But these were exceptions. There were many women spinners who earned "as much as from 4 to 7 shillings a week" by spinning. We have even instances of women meeting the whole expenses of their family out of their income from this occupation.¹¹⁷

Other proto-industrial producers like silk reelers, silk winders, silk cloth weavers were no better placed. The Shāntipur silk weavers complaint that the prices provided to their cloths by the Company's gunāshṭās amounted to no more and in some cases even to less than the cost of the materials. They laboured without any wages and they simultaneously, were forbade under Corporal chastisement and forfeitures to work for private merchants. As a result, they have no substitute of subsistence but to consume a part of advances and made them irrecoverable balances.¹¹⁸

116. W.W.Hunter, Bengal Ms Records: A Selected list of 14,136 letters in the Board of Revenue, Calcutta, 1782-1807, with an introduction and index, Vol II, letter No. 3469, (London, 1894), p. 31.

117. J.Kumar, Company India: A Comprehensive History of India: (1757-1858), (Patna, 1980), p. 237.

118. Extract of Consultation dated 12th April, 1773, Board of Trade, (Commercial), General letters from Court of Directors, 18th Dec, 1765 to 15th Sept, 1785, (Cyclostyled), p. 48.

The standard of living of the proto-industrial producers engaged in salt manufacturing, fishing, marine, iron mining and manufacturing, coal mining, corundum, etc. were pitiable.¹¹⁹

The standard of living of the proto-industrial producers engaged in ship building in a colony established near Calcutta was high because they were very expensive. A common Bengal Caulker earned $\frac{1}{2}$ dollar per day there.¹²⁰

Various duties imposed upon the transit of the products of various proto-industries of 'pull; 'pull corridor; 'corridor; 'push corridor' and 'push areas' of Bengal had an adverse effect on the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers of these areas during Company's period. The transit of goods and commodities from one place to another within Bengal was subject to transit duty while¹²¹ the flow of goods and commodities to and from certain specified towns was subjected to town duty.

119. For details see Balai Barui, The Salt Industry of Bengal, 1757-1800: A Study in the interaction of British monopoly Control and Indigenous Enterprise, (Calcutta, 1985), pp. 37-56. Also see general letter to the Court of Directors, dated 28th Oct, Board of Revenue, General letters to the Court of Directors 1771-1885, 30th August 1771 to 24th April 1772, Vol. 1, p. 66. For iron proto-industrial producer's condition see Ranjan Kumar Gupta, "Iron Manufacturing Industry of Birbhum: A Study of its growth and Extinction," JIH, Vol. 38, Part I-III, (April, August, Dec, 1980), p. 105. Also see Hites Ranjan Sanyal, "The Indigenous Iron Industry of Birbhum," IESHR, Vol. 5, No. 1, (March, 1968, pp. 102-103. Also see V. Ball, Jungle Life in India, (London, 1880).

120. James Kyd, esq., "On Indian Timber and Ship building, Copy of letter to Admiral Drury in 1808," John Phipps (compiled), A Collection of papers relative to ship building in India, (Calcutta, 1840), pp. 8-9.

121. Tarasankar Banerjee, History of Internal trade barriers in British India, Vol. 1, (Bengal Presidency), (1765-1836), (The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1972), p. 1. Taxes in the Mughal period had two principal branches: land revenue and sair. The term sa'ir denotes market, but in its wider sense, it meant various kinds of imports upon trade and property and transit duty (rahdari) was originally a branch of the sa'ir. In course of time transit duty developed into a separate full-fledged customs duty. There are references in the Abu-l Fazl's, A'in-i Akbari that during the reign of Akbar the collection of transit duties was a feature of the Mughal taxation system.

N.J. Shah recognises the native system of transit duties as 'more of the nature of a toll' imposed in every sub-division of district on each load of goods transported through it or imported for consumption therein or exported therefrom to other sub-divisions. These goods moving within its limits were free from duties until they reached the frontier.¹²² During Company period when disorder and dishonesty were omnipresent phenomena, the rulers of provinces, the tax farmers and the imperial tax collectors usurped the unrestricted right of managing and collecting the transit duties (originally meant for great thorough fares of trade) upon petty traffic in articles of general consumption and of village to village trade. In Bengal numerous agents were employed in the collection of transit duties who greatly aggravated the vexation of this levy by imposing a host of petty and unauthorised exactions. The burden of the transit duties differed at different places and even varied at the same place according to the disposition of the collectors. The duties were levied upon almost every article of life and they were collected either at custom houses or at the markets.¹²³ The real and heavy material loser were the different proto-industrial producers because they were the persons who were involved in inland commerce, local trade and bāzār, qaṣba and mandī level transactions.

The customs duties levied on the export and import of goods and commodities at different custom houses indirectly

122. N.J. Shah, History of Indian Tarrif, (London, 1924), p. 13.

123. Ibid, p. 18.

adversely affected the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers of the different areas of Bengal. The Court of Directors in their letter dated 3rd March, 1758 fixed the general customs on both imports and exports at 4% leaving the Council at Fort William the right to impose and change more or less on particular commodities.¹²⁴

In 1760s Vansittart agreed on the plan that the import and export trade of the Company was to be exempted from duties on condition that the Company's dastak was invalid for inland trade. Duties were to be paid on all goods and commodities of inland trade at a fixed rate of 9% on the prime cost at the places where the goods were provided. The plan was condemned and rejected by Calcutta Council. The Council decided that the English were entitled by Farman to trade in country produce duty free, the nawab could be allowed a 2.5% custom duty on salt only. The gumashtas were beyond the jurisdiction of the nawab's officials.¹²⁵ In Bengal,

124. H.N. Sinha (ed.), IRS, Fort-William-India House Correspondence Vol. II, 1757-1759, (Delhi, 1957), pp. XIIIV, XIV, XVI. For the collection of these custom duties, they ordered the establishment of two custom houses with two custom masters. The principal custom house was to be established by the river side and all sea exports and imports were to be collected there. The head of this office was called sea custom master. The second custom house was to be established at the extremity of the Company's bounds as contiguous to the Grand Trunk Road as possible and at this post duties were to be levied on all goods introduced into Calcutta or sent to other parts of India. The head of this post was called as Land Custom Master. To prevent smuggling, the Court ordered guard boats to patrol the river every night and on land European guards were to go their rounds from 10 at night to five in the morning. All these regulations were adopted by the Council except that in respect of certain commodities they fixed the custom's duty at 2% instead of 4% as ordered by the Court.

125. S. Srinivaschari, IRS, Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol. IV, 1764-1766, (Delhi, 1962), pp. XVIII-XIII.

it is estimated, that the net revenue yielded by customs duty at the port of Calcutta on an average of the three years 1768¹²⁶ 1769 to 1771-1772 was arrived at Rs.1,90,285 or £ 19,028. The contribution of the proto-industrial producers in the custom duty was indirect and larger, because on the whole, the merchants were charged these charges from the proto-industrial producers while purchasing the commodities. They further charged these levies while selling these commodities in the markets to the peasants, proto-industrial producers and others which hampered the standard of living of these people.

On 16th Feb. 1773 a notification was made which involves the following notice: "After first day of Bysack or 12th day of next April, no Dustaks, Ruannahs, Perwannah, orders or immunities will be granted to any person whatever; but an equal rate of duties will be established for all goods or merchandise belonging to the Company's servants, foreigners or natives, without distinction whatever."¹²⁷ This system was abolished in 1788 by Cornwallis. There was, however, an increase during the next three years, the annual average rising to Rs.3,40,908 (£ 34,090)¹²⁸ that meant a further deterioration in the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers of Bengal. In the year 1793, the revenue from custom duty in Bengal approximately doubled (i.e. it stood at about Rs.6 lakhs).

126. Pramathanath Banerjee, Indian Finance in the Days of the Company, (Macmillan and Co, Limited, London, 1928), p.208.

127. Tarasankar Banerjee, History of internal trade barriers in British India, Vol. 1, (Bengal Presidency), (1765-1836), p.12.

128. Pramathanath Banerjee, op.cit., pp.209-210.

By the regulation 1 of 1797, an additional duty of 1% was levied upon imports into or exports from Calcutta (money and bullion excepted), to assist in defraying the expenses of an armed vessel employed for the protection of the commerce of this part of the country against privateers.¹²⁹

The town duty throughout the Company period was so heavy that it affected the standard of living of the various proto-industrial producers of different areas of rural Bengal much more negatively than transit and custom duties. Holwell's "Report on the Company's Revenue in Calcutta" dated the 15th Dec. 1752 mentioned many other tolls imposed on the goods and commodities brought for sale. Monopolies were also subject to these taxes. The bāzār farmers and their agents used to stay on the principal roads leading to their respective bāzārs and exacted a sort of toll from the dealers passing to other bāzārs. Many farmers renewed their engagements after the expiry of their terms, on condition that these collections would not be made in future.¹³⁰

Contemporary documents record that before the attack of Calcutta by Siraj-ud-daullah a commission of 5% on all sales of European houses was attempted to be imposed as town duty. Due to the stiff resistance by the European inhabitants of Calcutta, the Court of Directors in 1757 ordered for the relinquishments of this imposition.

129. Ibid, pp.209-210.

130. Tara Sankar Banerjee, History of internal trade Barriers in British India, Vol. 1, (Bengal Presidency), (1757-1836), p.45.

The Court of Directors in a letter of 10th April, 1771, described that many bāzārs in Bengal had existed without governmental authority which must be an infringement of its right, a great detriment to the public collection, and a burden and oppression on the inhabitants and proto-industrial producers. Zamīndārī Chaukīs and petty chaukīs were abolished. Despite this prohibition, ample evidences were available to demonstrate that the transit as well as town duties were being levied by zamīndārs and this practice was general upto 1790. Lord Cornwallis in his minute on 10th Feb. 1790 had recorded such actions of zamīndārs. In the interior where the collectors of the Company were less effective and less active, the evils existed to a greater extent.¹³¹

Mr. Scott, Collector of Calcutta, provided the following information about the town duties in his letter of March 1785 to the Committee of Revenue. According to that letter the collections in the bāzārs consisted of rents called bāzārī and 'tollah' paid daily by each of the bāzār ra'iyat for retailing articles in the government bāzārs. The 'tollah' was previously a customary collection in kind but from 1779 it had been commuted for money.¹³² In

131. Ibid, p.15.

132. Ibid, p.44. Report of Dewan in 1779 has been quoted by Tarashankar Banerjee to display the collection of 'tollah' before 1779 in cash. The rate of tola had never been fixed by the government. It has always been settled by mutual agreement between the bāzār and ra'iyat; and in all disputes on the rate collected the complaints was decided from former custom. The payment to the government was fixed either in perpetuity or for a long period of years. The government control over the erection of bāzārs and the levy of bāzār duties had already been established in 1781. The Governor General in Council on 21st Sept 1781 announced that goods sale in shops, the property of individuals were exempted from town duty. The town duty was levied on the stalls and shops situated on Company's ground.

1781 a town duty of 4% on the Calcutta price was levied at Calcutta on all foreign goods passing through the port.¹³³

After 1788, Town duties were allowed to continue as usual. The Regulation 42 of 1793, Section II, modified the rules for collecting town duties of Calcutta by providing liberty for merchants and persons to transport goods within the province of Bengal free from all duties and tolls whatever. A custom house with custom master at Calcutta was established at Calcutta for the collection of these duties.¹³⁴

Section 2 of the Regulation 39 passed on 22nd May 1795, abolished the town duties.

Most of the respectable and wealthy merchants enjoyed favourable differential treatment. The amount of duties levied and extracted on merchandise of every description transported by them was invariably low. Inferior bepārīs and proto-industrial producers of the bāzārs of Bengal had to pay an increased duty in the proportion of 20 or 25 or even 30% upon articles transported or exposed for sale¹³⁵ which considerably reduced their earnings as well as standard of living.

133. N.J. Shah, History of Indian Tarrifs, (London, 1924), p.45.

134. Tarashankar Banerjee, op.cit., p.20. Following duties were charged as obvious from the statement of Town duties in 1794:

On goods imported from the interior^o of the country-

Piece goods	-	2%
Raw Silk	-	2%
Cotton thread	-	1%
Gruff articles (grain)	-	4%

On goods imported from sea

From Europe:

- (i) On the English Ships - 4% on the invoice cost.
- (ii) On Foreign ships - 4% upon a Calcutta value estimated at 60% on the invoice cost.
- (iii) From places within the Company's chartered limits 4% on the amount of the estimated Calcutta value.

135. Ibid., p.46.

The drain of wealth, during Company period through various means too well a documented subject in recent years to be repeated here, had an adverse effect on the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers. The villages and the towns were plundered outright. The sweat and blood of the Indian peasants and proto-industrial producers reduced to money, became one of the principal source of the primitive accumulation of capital for the British landed aristocracy and the moneyed plutocracy.

Most of the recent writers seem to agree silently with Furber's weighty argument, in The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II that the annual despatch of Indian wealth to the metropolitan country caused no injury to India. Irfan Habib vehemently criticised Furber's argument. He maintains that the large part of Indian wealth was set apart for 'investments' was,

137

136. For the detailed of statistical study of drain of wealth see following works: Pramathnath Banerjee, Indian Finance in the Days of the Company, pp. 78-129. Irfan Habib, "Colonization of Indian Economy, 1757-1900," cyclostyled. J. Kumar, Company India: A Comprehensive History of India, (1757-1858), (Patna, 1980), p. 20. James Mill and H.H. Wilson, The History of British India, Vols. IV, pp. 109, 357, 358, 359, 360, Vol. V, pp. 348, 350, 351, Vol. VI, pp 4, 252, 472-473, 474, 475, 476 etc. Amlesh Tripathi (ed.), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol. XII, 1793-95, (Delhi, 1978), pp. 5-11. P. Patwardhan (ed.), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol. VII, 1773-1776, (Delhi, 1971), pp. XXXII-XXXIII. P.C. Gupta (ed.), Fort William India House Correspondence, Vol. XIII, 1796-1800, (Delhi, 1959), pp. XVIII-XXXVII. Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol. VI, 1770-1772, (Delhi, 1960), pp. XXXI-XXXVII. John Dunning Baron, East India Company: A Defence of the United Company of merchants England Trading to the East Indies and their servants against complaints of the Dutch East India Company, (London, 1762), p. 39. Sourinranath Ray, "British connection with India as a factor in pre-industrial capital accumulation in England," India, Past and Present, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1984), pp. 72-76. A.I. Levkovsky, Capitalism in India: Basic trends in its Development, (Delhi, 1966), pp. 4-25; Michael Edwards, British India, 1772-1947: A Survey of the nature and effects of alien rule, (London, 1967), p. 86.

137. Irfan Habib quotes it from Ferber's article. See Irfan Habib's, "Process of Accumulation in pre-colonial and colonial India," IHR, Vol. XI, Nos. 1-2, (July, 1984-January, 1985), p. 76.

after all, not sent out in gold and silver, had that been the case, no one would have found employment. This is a doubtful generalization. What the Company and the English did, however, was to buy Indian cotton goods, silk etc. thus providing employment to numerous weavers, silk winders etc.

What Furber, first of all, missed is that India lost use as well as exchange values when these products went out of the country without any return from there. Had these immense wealth been used within the country, the numerous proto-industrial producers would have certainly been 'happier' and even 'wealthier' in material terms thereby improving their standard of living.

The diversion of revenue into Company's investment affected employment opportunities for the proto-industrial producers. We suppose that the pre-colonial rulers by equivalent amount of expenditure maintained, in the first instance the same number of artisans. To keep close to the hypothetical argument, we further suppose that they purchased the same quantities of cloth, employing same number of weavers as the English did. Once the purchases had been made, they would have large quantities of cloth on their hands and they could begin issuing such cloth in payment of wages (not in fact a rare practice with Mughal potentates). "The result: the cloth, by such distribution, would give livelihood to a further class of persons paid through this means. The case would be no different had the Indian potentates simply sold the cloth on the market and employed retainers or brought other commodities out of the proceeds: employment would have been given to a large

number of people in addition to the weavers already employed. It is easily seen that the argument is not affected if actually the Indian potentates bought goods different from what the English invested in. The very retention of those goods in India would enable employment to expand, whenever these were sold or paid in form of wages.¹³⁹

The plebeian culture of the proto-industrial producers of Bengal during the Company's period is characterized by the forms of actions to be adopted by the proto-industrial producers etc. Most of the political economists postulate that protests of proto-industrial producers in industrializing countries pertain a series of negative reactions and responses to the impact of the process of early industrialization and that protests tend to consist of short-term incidents and to involve spontaneous fights, riots, demonstrations, violence and mob action etc.¹⁴⁰ But these forms of actions can no longer be recognized as spontaneous outbursts rather they are viewed as rational uses of the available resources, governed by a web of rules. Here the destruction of property was not random, 'as would be expected on the view that protest spontaneous and unorganized; instead, targets were carefully selected.'¹⁴¹

Similarly, violence was not the prerogative of the desperate and poorly organized members of the workforce but tended to be used by groups of skilled workers in order to exert pressure on their employers. Threatening letter, arsons, physical violence etc.

139. Ibid., p.77.

140. P.K.Edwards, "Conflict at Work: A materialist Analysis of Work Place Relations", (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988), p.107.

141. Ibid.

were used by proto-industrial producers.

During the mature phase of the proto-industrialization and the early phase of industrialization, pure labour protest was a rarity because of three reasons. The most important cause that must have militated against the development of collective organization by proto-industrial producer was the small scale production and the dispersal of proto-industrial producers between many different factories and workshops. The second factor was the way in which work was controlled. Division between managers and employees were often unclear and customary understanding affected work relation and prices as well, not in terms of wage levels but also regarding the hours of work, accepted standard of workmanship and the organization of work tasks. The third factor was the mainlines of division lay not between masters and journeymen but between those two groups, as direct producers and merchants. The potential for conflict between masters and workers was not absent, but

142. Ibid., p.108. Also see Roger A.E. Wells, "The Development of the English Rural proletariat and social protest, 1700-1850," UPS, Vol. 6, No. 2, (Jan, 1979), pp. 127-129. Also see Michael R. Weisser, Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Europe, (Sussex, 1979), p. 17. For details of crime in Europe see J.A. Sharpe, "Crime and Delinquency in an Essex Parish: 1600-1640," J.S. Cockburn (ed.), Crime in England, 1500-1700, (Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1977), p. 99. Also see Cockburn, "The nature and Incidence of Crime in England: 1559-1625: A Preliminary Survey," J.S. Cockburn (ed.), Crime in England, 1500-1800, pp. 49-71.

143. Op. cit., p. 113. E.J. Hobsbawm asserts that in pre-capitalist times, the working class was a crowd not an army. Enlightened, bureaucratic and orderly strikes were impossible and thus, workers could only fight by means of demonstrations, shouting, cheering and cat-calling intimidation and violence, in this effort labourers followed machine breaking. See his, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, (London, 1964), p. 10.

it was constrained by several influences which meant that overt disputes about the terms of the effort bargain were rare. ¹⁴⁴

In case of Bengal proto-industrial producers in Company period lacked organizational strength and bargaining power. In spite of a community of interests which developed among proto-industrial producers, who supplied their goods for export trade, they failed to evolve an effective social organization. In their work a division of occupational caste groups into panchayats had given a loose organizational structure. But as much of the work was carried on by individuals, little cohesiveness was developed amongst spinners, dhuneras etc. The social divisions of labour which were accentuated by the presence of intermediaries also prevented a link-up between different occupational groups. It was the export trade that enabled certain classes of proto-industrial producers specially the weavers, washmen and embroiderers etc. to evolve into a loosely defined, separate occupational group with shared economic interests. The proto-industrial producer's direct involvement in market negotiations, the opportunities the proto-industrial producers received to work together, etc., provided them a limited cohesiveness. The proto-industrial producers could now identify their economic interests with their village and the particular buyer they worked for, or the specific material they produced. Within their rank and file an order of authority was established which could be seen in the case of the master weavers down to the journeymen or apprentice in each village weaving caste. But the capability of their caste-based

144. P.K. Edwards, Conflict at Work: A Materialist Analysis of Work Place Relations, (Oxford, 1986), p. 113.

organization to protect proto-industrial producer's interests remained inadequate, particularly when the market was manipulated by a more dominant, central organization.¹⁴⁵

This, however, should not be meant that the proto-industrial producers did not react against the gradual imposition of the Company's controls. The proto-industrial producers adopted varying forms of resistance, directed against circumventing the authoritarianism of the Company's official agents as well as the system of appropriation. Most of the proto-industrial producers accepted the system, while surreptitiously they continued to work for other merchants. Some of them escaped the system by migrating from their villages and aurangs and also by deserting their occupations. Even then there was little possibility of the proto-industrial producers being able to organize a collective response.

Slowing down of production or a refusal to accept advances in the face of forced and uneconomic appropriation was the initial response. With a visible increase in demand and a multiplicity of traders appeared in the aurangs, particularly between 1775 and 1787, the proto-industrial producers refused openly. Reports from the commercial Residents indicated that during this period 'combinations of weavers' were formed to resist and defy the orders of the factory or aurang.¹⁴⁶

145. Hameeda Hossain, The Company Weavers of Bengal: The English East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal, 1750-1813, pp. 123-124.

146. From Dacca, Grueber complained in 1776 against the existence of such a 'combination' under his factory. He reported that weavers from two villages noted as conchanaghat and Tangabo under Sonargaon arung refused to work for the Company. During the course of the investigation he learnt that they had been intimidated by weavers of Sonargaon. Two witnesses from Sonargaon gave evidence supporting this. Similar reports can be have from Narainpur, Shantipur, Malda etc.

Such non-cooperation was possible as long as there were other buyers to turn to. Market competition increased their bargaining strength. These proto-industrial producers were instigated or supported by those dālāls who had been dismissed by the Company in 1774. A 'Combination' continued with varying strength until 1794, when John Taylor, traced six ring leaders who were then sent for trial to the Faujdarī Adālāt. These 'combinations' of the proto-industrial producers were guided by various interest groups, initially by dālāls on behalf of the proto-industrial producers, mainly for fixing prices and advances. Later, the head weavers, ijārādārs or village māṅḍal became influential. These 'combinations' adversely affected the procurement of the Commercial Residents.

147

These exploitation of the proto-industrial producers contributed considerably to the development of professional dacoiti in the affected regions as well as hilly regions protected by local zamīndārs. Sanyasis and faqirs became notorious groups of religious raider. They became more active in the regions of Rangpur, Chilmari and Karatia.

At one time the Nischindpur factory was threatened by a Sanyasi raid. As late as 1793 reports came in from Malda of armed faqirs infesting the country, disrupting industry and cultivation.

The economic situation developing in Bengal after famines of 1770 and 1787-88 had improved conditions of agricultural employment. This induced a shift from manufacturing occupations to agriculture. In 1790s, the Permanent Settlement, reduced the importance of manufacture. The consequent negative impact, alongwith

other factors, helped to increase the relative weight of agriculture in the rural economy.

From this detailed examination of the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers throughout the period under review, we identify a decreasing trend in the living standard of the proto-industrial producers. The living standard of the Mughal proto-industrial producers was better than that of the nawab proto-industrial producers. The proto-industrial producers of the nawab's period were undoubtedly better placed than those of the Company proto-industrial producers. The reasons for this is varied and divergent. In the same period the standard of living of the English proto-industrial producers shows an upward trend.¹⁴⁸ The real wage of the adult male working class failed to increase between 1755 and 1819, but from 1819 to 1891 it rose at an annual rate of 1.85%.¹⁴⁹ Within the Britain the debate revolves mostly round the 'Lower classes' which is more or less equivalent to bottom two thirds or three quarters of the income distribution. Sometimes the debate

148. For a detailed study of the standard of living of British proto-industrial producers during early Industrial Revolution see, P.K.O'Brian and S.L. Engerman, "Changes in income and its distribution during the Industrial Revolution;" R. Floud and D. McCloskey (eds.) The Economic History of Britain Since 1700, (Cambridge, 1981), p. 180. Also see P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, "English workers living standards during the Industrial Revolution: A new Look;" and G.N. von Tunzelmann, "The Standard of living debate and optimal Economic Growth;" both in, Joel Mokyr (ed.), The Economics of the Industrial Revolution, (London, 1985), pp. 177-205. and pp. 207-226 respectively. Also see, Eric Hopkins, "Working hours and conditions during the Industrial Revolution;" EHR, Vol. 35, No. 1, (1982), pp. 55-57. Also see Joel Mokyr and Cormac O'Grada, "Poor and Getting poorer? Living standards in Ireland before the Famine;" EHR, Vol. XL1, No. 2, (Second Series, May, 1988), p. 231. For further details see, Joel Mokyr, "Is there still life in the pessimist case? Consumption during the Industrial Revolution, 1790-1850;" JIH, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1, (March, 1988), pp. 70-87.

149. Jeffery G. Williamson, "Why was British Growth so slow during the Industrial Revolution;" JEH, Vol. XLIV, No. 3, (Sept, 1984), p. 688.

revolves round the 'workers' but that excludes lumpen proletariat as well as vagrants and occasional labourers in the countryside. Therefore, several doubts arise regarding Lindert's and Williamson's findings as decisive evidence in the standard of living debate.¹⁵⁰ This data did include the incomes of those who were employed in formal labour markets and received a money wage. They excluded the self-employed and domestic servants, as well as the other portions of the employed labour force such as women and children. Still some kind of improvement is traceable in England whereas in Bengal's proto-industrial producers' standard of living during our period we have altogether a different trend that is a regular decline in the standard of living of the proto-industrial producers. The improvement in England's proto-industrial producers' standard of living was accompanied by the process of the industrialization proper, whereas a regular decline in Bengal proto-industrial producer's standard of living is accompanied by de-industrialization.

150. Joel Mokyr, "Is there still life in the pessimist case? Consumption during the Industrial Revolution, 1790-1850," JEH, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1, (March, 1985), pp. 70, 87.