

## PREFACE

Several historical writings in recent years have been devoted to trade, urban life, agrarian history, and social and cultural life of Bengal in the 17th and 18th centuries on the basis of primary and secondary source material available in various archives and libraries, both in India and abroad. Surprisingly enough, no research monograph has taken up in problem of rural industrialization of Bengal, which provided the goods for internal as well as external trade and which was responsible for the hectic activity of various European East Indian trading Companies, privateers as well as other Afro-Asian traders. It was again the proto-industrial production and its supply to different national and international markets that can appropriately be recognised as the pre-condition for flows of American silver into India rather than American silver that was the pre-condition for developments in international commercial exchanges after the 16th century.<sup>1</sup>

Hence the need to pay attention to these neglected issues such as manufactures of rural Bengal, its dynamism, its role

---

1. For details of the issue of the flows of American silver and its role in international and national trade, see K.N. Chaudhuri, "The East India Company and the Export of treasure in the Early 17th Century", Economic History Review, (hereafter cited as 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. 482-493. For further study see his, "European Trade with India", The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 1, C. 1200-C. 1750 (eds.), Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, (Orient Longman, 1982), pp. 382-406. For the antithesis of K.N. Chaudhuri's views see Frank Perlin's, "Monetary Revolution and Societal change in late Medieval and Early modern Times-A Review Article", The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XLV, No. 5, (Nov. 1986), pp. 1041-1046.

V

in internal, coastal, intra-Asian and foreign commerce of Bengal, etc. It might also be useful to examine the manufacturing activities in Bengal in the context of "proto-industrialization."<sup>2</sup> Since 1972, the concept of proto-industrialization gained momentum in European and American academic circles to construct new historical, social, economic and cultural interpretations regarding transition from feudalism to capitalism. The works of Rudolf Braun, Franklin F. Mendels, D.C. Coleman, Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, Jurgen Schlumbohn, Pat Hudson, Charles Tilly and Richard Tilly, P. Lasslet, Rosenberg, Herbert Kisch, David Levine, Wolf Fisher and many others have revolved round the Western Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, America, China and Japan, etc. No commendable, micro and macro-economic work have been devoted to analyse agricultural, rural industrial, industrial developments of any region of India or India as a whole in the frame work of proto-industrialization. Only a limited attempt has been made by Frank Perlin to examine the validity, acceptability and dynamism of the proto-industrialization process in Indian continent, although the thesis is devoted to the South Asia.<sup>3</sup> The fundamental contention of Frank Perlin's, "Proto-industrialization" and pre-

---

2. 'Proto-industrialization' as an economic term to denote 'Industrialization before industrialization' was first used by Franklin F. Mendels, in 1972. For details about the terms and its utilization see his, "Industrialization and population pressure in 18th Century Flanders," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "The first phase of industrialization process" Journal of Economic History, (hereafter cited as JEH), 32, (1972), p.261. Gay Gullickson, "Agriculture and Cottage Industry: Redefining the cause of proto-industrialization," JEH, Vol-43, No.4 (Dec, 1983), p.831. D.C. Coleman, "Proto-industrialization: A Concept too many," EHR, Vol. 36, No.3 (August, 1983; Second series), pp.44-47.

3. Frank Perlin, "Proto-industrialization and pre-colonial South Asia," Past and Present, No.98, (1983), p.33.

colonial South Asia" is to study the de-industrialization process in India within the frame-work of proto-industrialization in which he has accepted Amiya Kumar Bagchi's de-industrialization thesis.<sup>4</sup>

We recognised the prevalence of usurer's capital, commercial capital and merchant capital in case of Bengal. This played vital role in national, international, internal, local and coastal commercial intercourse by European East Indian Trading Companies, privateers as well as other Afro-Asian traders.<sup>5</sup> Thus the demand of rural handicrafts increased considerably and it provided impetus for qualitative as well as quantitative advancements in their production. This led to the improvement of living standard, rise in inflation, price rise, money economy,

---

4. See Frank Perlin, loc.cit., pp.30-95. Also see Amiya K. Bagchi, "De-industrialization in India in the 19th Century: Some theoretical implications," Journal of Development Studies, XII, (1976), pp.135-64. Bagchi's thesis is critically examined by Marika Viciany. "The De-industrialization in the 19th Century: A methodological critique of Amiya K. Bagchi," IESHR, 16, (1985), pp.105-146. Bagchi further responded to this, see his, "A Reply," IESHR, 16, (1979), pp.148-49.

5. For this purpose see Om Prakash-Dutch Trade in Bengal, K.N. Chaudhuri's Trading World of Asia, K.N. Chaudhuri, Trade and Civilization in Indian Ocean, Sushil Chaudhuri, Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal, N.K. Sinha, Economic History of Bengal two volumes. etc. For users capital, see Irfan Habib, "Banking System in Mughal India," Tapan Ray Chaudhury (ed.), Contribution to Indian Economic History. Also see Irfan Habib, "Usury in Mughal India," in Comparative Studies in Society and History, 1964. For All India Commerce, See Ashin Das Gupta, Decline of Surat, Tapan Ray Chaudhury, Jan Company in Action in Malabar Coast, Pamela Nitingale, Trade and Commerce in Western India, etc. For privateers see, Watson, Foundation for Empire English Private Trade in India: 1659-1760, (Delhi, 1980).

intensification of market, urbanization, and exploitation of labourers or petty commodity producers by merchants, and merchants as well artisans of various class by zamindars and ruling groups of the Mughal courts during the initial period of our study and by merchants in particular and European merchants in general in collaboration with middle men and Indian merchants, etc. during later period. Simultaneously it is also maintained that early medieval technologies were still at work in rural industries, transportation etc. No attempt was made to replace them.<sup>6</sup> No modern commercial innovations were used in dealing with Western merchants. .

Therefore, the study of rural industries during the 18th century Bengal, which consisted of culture and manufacture of cotton, silk, indigo, opium, ship building, sugar, jute and making of various qualities of ropes, ornaments of gold, silver, brass and steel etc. pottery, fishing, utensils, mat weaving, carpet weaving, coal mining, iron mining etc. is urgently needed.<sup>7</sup>

---

6. For details of the art and manufacturing see T.N. Mukherjee's Art and Manufacturing, (Calcutta, 1881). This book is written with a view to produce a detailed description of art and manufacturing of whole India. Birdwood, George C.M., The Industrial Arts of India, (Piccadilly, 1880) also failed to bring a micro-study of industrial arts of a region of India.

7. For details of iron mining see S. Bhattacharya, "Iron Smelters and the indigenous iron and steel industry of India: From stagnation to atrophy," in Aspects of Indian Culture and Society, (ed.), Surjit Sinha, (Calcutta, 1972). Also see R. Kumar Gupta, "Iron Manufacturing Industry of Birbhum: A Study of its growth and extinction," Journal of Indian History, Vol. 38, parts I, III, (April, August, Dec. 1980), Also see Hitesaranjan Sanyal's, "The Indigenous Iron Industry of Birbhum," IESHR, Vol. 5, No. 1, (March, 1968), pp. 102-105.

The mining and metallurgy should be studied in some detail. Iron was mined in the Birbhum district of Western Bengal. Iron mines had also been established in Raniganj area of Western Bengal. During the later half of the 18th century attempts were made to develop coal mining, but it was mined on a limited scale by with the founding of Raniganj coalfields in 1774.<sup>8</sup>

The technological basis of these rural industries has also to be studied properly. And finally, the study of the living standard of rural craftsmen has to be given proper weightage.

It is proposed to study the mode of production in these crafts because it is the mode of production in a particular craft that determines the level of its development and its potentialities to make transition to different mode of production in a craft, its organization, etc., that determines the level of technologies in that craft.

Only recently, micro-economic study of various crafts has been undertaken by economic historians. Even then the field of economic history is in its formative stage. H.R.Ghosal's Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency, (Calcutta, 1966), R.M.Chaudhuri's, The Evolution of Indian Industries, (Published by the Calcutta University, 1939) are path breaking research works. But these works are confined to modern Indian history. These works do not shed any critical light on the mode of

---

8. For this see W.W.Hunter's, Statistical Account of Burdwan, Vol.4. Also see R.M.Chaudhuri's The Evolution of Indian Industries, (Published by the Calcutta University Press, 1939), pp.94-123.

production of different crafts of pre-colonial India in general and Bengal in particular.

Debendra Bijoy Mitra's, The Cotton Weavers of Bengal, 1757-1833, (Calcutta, 1978), is really a commendable work so far as the mode of organization of that craft is concerned. This study again confines itself to the colonial period. Secondly, this work is only confined to only one craft i.e. cotton. In this study D.B. Mitra has devoted only one chapter to mode of organization in the cotton industry. Rest of the chapters are mainly concerned with trade, cotton monopoly, the importance of cotton industry in the general economy of Bengal during the period studied by him. He has not undertaken to study the level of technological sophistication in the cotton industry, its role in industrialization or de-industrialization of the industry in the long run, the factors that affected its technological sophistication, living standard of cotton craftsmen, etc. He has not studied the proto-industrialization of Bengal and its role in industrialization proper or de-industrialization. Hameeda Hossain's, the Company's Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal: 1750-1813 is really an important work in this direction. But, this study again confines itself to the textile industries of modern Bengal that include cotton, silk and to some extent jute. This work does not study proto-industrialization, technologies related to this industry, etc.

Balai Barui has worked on the salt industry of Bengal.

His book, The Salt Industry of Bengal: 1757-1800: A Study in the interaction of British monopoly control and indigenous enterprises involves the various methods of filtration, obtaining the salt water, obtaining of saline earth, boiling, etc., with apparatuses utilised in this industry. The work is helpful to study the salt industry.

The present research work entitled "A Century of Handicrafts in Rural Bengal C. 1670-1770: A Study in the mode of Production" is quite different from these studies because it has undertaken to study various handicrafts in rural Bengal in the framework of proto-industrialization. One of the main concerns of this research work is to examine the causes of de-industrialization in Bengal in a framework generally unexplored so far.

My treatment regarding the proto-industries of Bengal is conceptual and statistical. This conceptual, empirical and statistical treatment of the areas involved in proto-industrialization of Bengal is based on available original and secondary source materials published and unpublished in European and Indian languages in various archives and libraries of India.