

Preface

Cotton textile industry was the most important industry among all cottage industries of Bengal that developed in the days of antiquity. A considerable number of studies and research have been devoted to Bengal cotton industry, which offers us a comparative view of the Bengal industry *vis-a-vis* the cotton industry of England. Those studies identify when and how technological innovations in Great Britain gained supremacy over Bengal. The earlier studies have concentrated on cotton industry of Bengal as a whole, but almost none has explored or revealed the real status of the industry in a particular district of Bengal. We find only some studies which attempt to focus on the cotton industries in the district of Dhaka. This study is an attempt to analyse the status of the cotton industry of Birbhum, Burdwan, and Hooghly districts of Burdwan division during 1757-1857.

The cotton textile industry of the above mentioned districts of Bengal grew prior to the advent of the European traders into the districts. The rural cotton industry of those districts used to meet mainly the local needs and that of the neighbouring districts. The fine muslins and calicoes of Burdwan and Hooghly districts had some market in different parts of India and foreign countries as well. The advent of European merchant capital in those districts took place probably in the eighteenth century. Since then, the districts' production of cotton goods gradually became dependent on European capital. The European capital enhanced the productive potentialities in rural cotton industry to a great extent in those districts. A growing market in abroad, particularly in England and other European countries led to a large increase in the production of cotton piece-goods in the districts. The investigation of these developments in the field of manufacturing, the proliferation of trade of cotton piece-goods in those districts, and the assessment of their importance in the economic life of the districts concerned, have been discussed in the thesis.

This study elaborately explains the status of the cotton industry of the above mentioned districts and shows its decline from prosperity in the first half of the nineteenth century on the basis of unpublished original primary data which have hardly been utilized so far. Besides, those primary sources, all secondary sources which are relevant to this research topic have also been consulted and taken into account.

The present study is devoted to exhibit the sudden boom of the cotton industry of the above districts in the period under review through the merchant capital of the English East India Company on the one hand. On the other hand it shows the decline of the industry in the first half of the nineteenth century and identifies the actual period as well as the actual reasons behind that demise.

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