

## Network of Exchange and Intermediary of South West Bengal in the late Eighteenth Century

**Quazi Aktar Ali**

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Department of History, Vidyasagar University

---

### Abstract

---

The arrival of the Europeans and search for essential commercial goods connected the hinterland of South West Bengal with the outerworld. Communication system developed. It was found that the indigenous traders were notable helpful to this communication system. The Bengali trading community took a vital role in the trade of South West Bengal as well as the entire Bengal. They were known as ‘gomostah’, ‘baniyan’, ‘dadni bonik’, ‘paikar’, ‘dalal’ etc. They acted as the agents of foreign traders mainly the Europeans. They were merely middlemen when the foreign traders came to Bengal but their trading flourished when the European traders operated their trading in Bengal. The foreign traders were not familiar with the local languages, customs system, trading centres, measurement of goods etc. Moreover, local communication and local markets were quite unknown to them. In that cases, the foreign traders needed local representatives who would become their helpers and solve all the problems. Historically, it is seen that in the second half of the eighteenth century the foreign company’s merchants and the indigenous traders had a special control over the economy of Bengal. The people of this country accepted the participation of the Europeans in the administration and economy of Bengal. The native traders became the subsidiary of the Europeans in business. The Indigenous merchants also developed their own business. It is said the indigenous merchants created a favourable situation for the trade and business of the Europeans.

**Keywords:** Dadni bonik, Paikar, Dalal, Gomostah, Baniyan, chakla

### Introduction

In the eighteenth century the Indian Ocean linked the unknown regions of India through the European ships. Their arrival connected the hinterland of South-West

Bengal with the larger world. As a result, commercial relations between rural Bengal and the Europeans developed. In that case the indigenous trading community took a vital role in the trade of South West Bengal as well as the entire Bengal. They were known as 'bonik', 'dadni bonik', 'paikar', 'dalal', 'banian', 'gomastah', etc. Previously they operated their trading as free traders but in the period of my discussion, they acted as the agents of foreign traders mainly the Europeans. They were merely middlemen when the foreign traders came to Bengal, but their trading flourished when the European traders operated their trading in Bengal. It was evident from different sources. The foreign traders were not familiar with the local languages, customs system, trading centres, measurement of goods etc. Moreover local communication and local markets were quite unknown to them. In that cases, the foreign traders needed local representatives who would become their helpers and solve all the problems. Such as example the first British ship *the Falcon*, when anchored at Calcutta port in 1679, Ratan Sircar, a professional washer man was appointed as its local representative cum interpreter. Later he acquired a huge wealth by continuing business with the foreign companies.<sup>1</sup> The trader's community of Bengal or the middlemen took the advantage of the situation like other places in the world.

This indigenous trading community not only took part in the internal trade but they also took an important role as middlemen in external trade. They knew very well about the real situation of the markets. A great number of middlemen were found in the European investment to the trading goods like cotton, silk<sup>2</sup>, salt<sup>3</sup> etc. in South West Bengal. They became landholders with their income as the middlemen and they controlled the local areas. But in this context, it is said that the control of the colonial administration became stable gradually and the condition of the traders as middlemen got worsened. In this article as the agents of the Europeans, the uprising and activities of the middlemen, trading communities and the internal trading network of South West Bengal will be discussed.

South West Bengal the so-called entire Bengal was favourable in trade. In addition to the favourable trading environment, there were many large and small markets and organised commercial infrastructure. From the past the entire Bengal was so much important to the foreign traders. So the Portuguese, the British, the French and the Dutch came to Bengal following the Parsian, the Turkey and the Arabian. Among them, the British, the French, and the Dutch became a major trading

---

<sup>1</sup> S.Bhattacharyya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, Firma KL Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969, p.202

<sup>2</sup> K.K.Dutta, *Fort William India House Correspondence (1748-56)* Vol. 1, 1958, p 192

<sup>3</sup> Balai Barui, *The Salt Industry of Bengal, 1757 -1800, A Study in the Interaction of British Monopoly Control and Indigenous Enterprise*, Calcutta/New Delhi; K. P. Bagchi and Co, 1985, p.13

communities in Bengal. In the second half of the eighteenth century the participation of the European companies in the trading made some reformation in the trade, trading organizations, and the markets of the entire Bengal. Active participation of the European companies influenced the trade, trading centres and mercantile structure of the entire Bengal. Among the European companies, the English East India Company stabilized their political power as a corporate body.<sup>4</sup>

In the eighteenth century, there were so many large markets in the entire Bengal. Among them Sonargaon, Jagadia, Dhaka, Chattagram, in the east, Murshidabad, Kasimbazar, Satgaon, Hoogly, Calcutta, Balasore, Chinsura, etc. in the west were the main centres. Besides these so many smaller, important trade centres were set up locally like Hijli, Tamluk, Burdwan,<sup>5</sup> Ghatal,<sup>6</sup> Khirpoy, Radhanagar, Chandrokona, Sonamukhi,<sup>7</sup> Bissenpore, Anandapore, Medinipore,<sup>8</sup> and Balasore, Boloramgori<sup>9</sup> in South West Bengal.

After being satisfied with the identity of the Bengali middlemen, the private traders besides the English East India Company engaged them as 'gomostah', 'banian', 'dadni bonik', 'paikar', 'dalal' etc and made an investment with them and operated their trading. As a trading organisation, the East India Company was far more ahead than the other European companies and the merchants of Asia because of the dominance and integrated communications from places of manufacture to the selling markets by the heads and the subordinate officials of the factory (centres of production) and 'aurung' (wholesale trade centres / a place where any article of trade was manufactured and collected for wholesale disposal or export).<sup>10</sup> In the seventeenth century, the factories and *aurungs* were controlled by the council of the main centre of trade in Hoogly.<sup>11</sup> Later Calcutta became the main centre of trade and since then the factories and *aurungs* were controlled directly by the council.<sup>12</sup> The European Companies had established factories in the important

---

<sup>4</sup> Kumkum Banerjee, Grain Traders and the East India Company; Patna and its hinterland in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, *The Indian Economic and Social History review*, 23, 4 (1986), p.403

<sup>5</sup> Charoborty.M A Summary of the Changes in the jurisdiction of Districts in Bengal, 1757-1916, Calcutta, 1917, P. 34 and Bengal District Gazetteers Midnapore , p.33

<sup>6</sup> Sukumar Bhattachariya, , *Op.Cit* , Calcutta, 1969, p.145

<sup>7</sup> Tarasankar Panigrahi, *The British Rule and the Economy of Rural Bengal; A Study of Mallabhum from 1757 to 1833*, New Delhi, Marwah Publications, 1982,p 89

<sup>8</sup> WBSA, Board of Trade, 31st May, 1776

<sup>9</sup> K.K Dutta , , *Op.Cit*, the World Press Pvt. Ltd, 1960 p. 151

<sup>10</sup> Sukumar Bhattacharya, *Op.Cit*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 12

<sup>11</sup> Niranjana Dhar, *The Administrative of the East India Company in Bengal 1714- 1786* , Vol.1 (Political), Calcutta, Eureka Publishers, 1964, p.9

<sup>12</sup> William Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs*, London, MDCCLXXII (1772), pp.70-71

production and trading centres in South West Bengal to collect the trading commodities before the establishment of the English East India Company's permanent dominance in South West Bengal. Of these Radhanagar, Khirpai, Sonamukhi, Haripal, Golaghar, Kashijora,<sup>13</sup> etc.were already existed.

The East India Company gained its permanent dominant position in South-West Bengal when *chakla* Midnapore and *chakla* Burdwan came under them in 1760. In those places, so many factories and *aurungs* were set up. One Resident in *chakla* Midnapore and one Resident in *chakla* Burdwan were appointed as the heads of judicial, administration and revenue.<sup>14</sup> John Stone and Hey were the first residents of *chakla* Midnapore and *chakla* Burdwan respectively.<sup>15</sup>

In the eighteenth century the hinterland areas of South-West Bengal were connected with other part of the World. It was because of the arrival of the Europeans.<sup>16</sup> The European Companies set up so many factories in search of essential goods and to collect them. In course of research in South- West Bengal, it is noticed that most of the factories and *aurungs* were set up in the places of production and trading convenient to good communication. Unlike Birbhum most of the factories and *aurungs* were connected with navigable channels. It was a usual fact that every part of Bengal had some navigable channels, even in the dry seasons, within 25 miles. It was more common to find a navigable channel within 'a third of that distance'.<sup>17</sup> So many large and small rivers flowed from the plateau of Choto Nagpur through South West Bengal. Rennell's map reflects a clear idea of the navigation system of South West Bengal.

The economic development of rural Bengal was the boon of the fluvial network. Transportation through navigable channels was more profitable as well as convenient and secured in commercial activities. During the time of Rennell 30,000 boatmen (*Majhi*) were engaged in internal navigation.<sup>18</sup>

Communication took place through four stages inland route or water channel – from villages or production areas to the *bazars*, from one *bazar* to another, from

---

<sup>13</sup> K.K. Datta, , *Op.Cit* , Calcutta, 1960, pp.151,154

<sup>14</sup> Harry Verelst, *A view of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal*, London ,1772, pp. 70-74

<sup>15</sup> Farmingar, W.K.( ed), *The Fifth Report of the Affairs of the East India Company*, Vol. 1, Calcutta,1917, p. cxxiv

<sup>16</sup> Rila Mukherjee, Ed. *Vanguards of Globalisation ; Port- Cities from the Classical to the Modern*, New Delhi, Primus Books, 2014, p.1

<sup>17</sup> James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan or the Mogul Empire* London, 1785. First Indian Edition, Calcutta, 1976, p. 382

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

that *bazars* to larger *bazaars* or cities and from cities to the outer world.<sup>19</sup> It is argued that space is partly produced by the ‘connections (of a given place) to the rest of the world’ and that different connections line at the heart of the production of different kinds of spaces. Similarly, it is seen that the European Companies, mainly EIC made communication through the weaving goods trading that reflects a model like:

**Model: 1 I**

Production Centre / Village → Factory → *Aurung* / Residency → Main Centre / Calcutta → Outer World

Production centres and distribution centres of weaving goods divided different regions of South West Bengal in to a several zones –‘North- East’, ‘North’, ‘Central’ and ‘South-West’. Cotton, silk piece goods and raw silk producing villages were interconnected with the *aurungs* on the basis of their producing goods. The produced goods would reach Calcutta, the main centre of the Company from *aurungs* through residency and then these would be exported to the outer world. In a word, the producing villages became the part of the international trading through an integrated trading network.

In the ‘North- Eastern’ zone of South-West Bengal the EIC had three main centres – Khirpai, Ghatal and Radhanagar. There were nine important *aurungs* under Khirpai, these were Chandrakona, Haripal, Joynagar, Coincolla, Radgebulhaut, Colina, Mayapur and Dinacolly.<sup>20</sup> Radhanagar had eleven manufacturing parganas under its control.<sup>21</sup> Numerous weavers, reported to be residing around the Chitwah Burda *aurung* were able to manufacture more than two *lakh* pieces of cloth. The cloths made in this *aurungs* were *Mulmuls*, *Dooreas*, *Charconnaes*, *Soosies*, Neck cloths, *Adgurraes*, *Seersuckers* and *Currydarries*.<sup>22</sup> Khirpai and Gopalpur produced *Dooreas* and *Mulmul*, *Cossijurrah* articles that were the general demand, especially for flowering in Dhaka.<sup>23</sup> As a separate residency Ghatal<sup>24</sup> was an important centre of the Company. There were so many *aurungs* under Ghatal like Gopigunj.

In South-West Bengal the production centres were established in indigenous way but latter these became more active by the influence of the factories or *aurungs* of the Europeans. The goods were transported mainly through the water ways from

---

<sup>19</sup> Mukherjee Tilottama, *Of Roads and Rivers; Aspects of Travel and Transport in Eighteenth Century Bengal*, M. Phil Dissertation, J.N.U., 1997,

<sup>20</sup> Board of Trade Commercial (BOT) Vol. 7, 23rd May, 1776

<sup>21</sup> Provincial Council of Revenue Burdwan, (PCRB) 17th June, 1776

<sup>22</sup> BOT, Vol. 23, 21st May, 1780

<sup>23</sup> BOT, Vol. 4, 11th August, 1775

<sup>24</sup> Sukumar Bhattachariya, , *Op.Cit*, 1969, P. 145

these centres to the headquartered in Calcutta. The main route of water in this region was Rupnarayan in the eastern part of the South- West Bengal frontier. It was first cited in Rennell's map. Dwarakeswar and Shilai were merge and become Rupnarayan at Bandar under present Khanakul police station. It flows beside Tamluk and meets Hoogly River at Geonkhali. Shilai is the main tributary of Rupnarayan which flows through Ghatal town having mingled with many other small rivulets. The ferry service was operated in the rainy season only in the upper portion of Ghatal. But in the lowland of Ghatal the ferry was available throughout the year by the flow-tide.<sup>25</sup> Ghatal was the main trading port of this region in South West Bengal. The rivulets, having without sufficient water for ferry in the dry seasons, the goods of Khirpai, Radhanagar, Chandrakona and Narajole were despatched to Calcutta through Ghatal port.

The 'Central' zone of South-West Bengal was based on Midnapore. It was relatively small with a few *aurungs* under it. Cussary, Mohunpur, Ootmarrey, Narrajole and Patna were the *aurungs* belonging to the factory of Midnapore.<sup>26</sup> Mohunpur and Pantapur were its principle *aurungs*.<sup>27</sup> Mohunpur and Narajole were the most crowded *aurungs* of Midnapore.<sup>28</sup> *Teaoys, Mulmull, Rajebullaby* and *Seerbunds* were some of the articles manufactured in Midnapore. Except these, different types of clothes were exported from Midnapore like *Charconnaes, Chucklaes, Nillaes, Peniascoes, Sannoestur, Salbasts, Garba, Hammam*.<sup>29</sup> In the lower *parganah* of Burdwan province (in Tamluk and *parganah* of Kashijorah, Shawpur and Cutubpur) and Gongapur of Midnapore *sarries* and coarse cloths were made for the common people of the villages around of these *aurungs*.<sup>30</sup>

Midnapore, on the bank of the river Kangsabati was the main centre of the 'Central' zone in South West Bengal. The river Kangsabati produced a rivulet near Kapastikri village. This rivulet flows through the lowland of Narajole and mingles with Rupnarayan near Sribara village to the south- eastern part of Ghatal sub-division.<sup>31</sup> The main branch of Kangsabati which flows by Panskura meets Haldi River and then mingled with Hoogly River. The goods were transmitted to Calcutta through the river Kangsabati in the rainy seasons. In the dry seasons these were

---

<sup>25</sup> W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. 3 Part-1 ( The District of Midnapore) Calcutta, 1997, P. 24

<sup>26</sup> BOT, J. Peiarce's letter to William Aldersey dated 27th May, 1776.

<sup>27</sup> BOT, Vol. 26, 26th February, 1781

<sup>28</sup> BOT, Vol. 156, 24th November, 1801

<sup>29</sup> W.K. Firminger, *Bengal District Records; Midnapore:1763-1767*, Calcutta, 1914, PP. 8-9

<sup>30</sup> BOT, Vol. 20, 22nd September, 1779

<sup>31</sup> Pranab Roy & Panchanan Roy, *Ghantaler Katha: Ghatal Mahakumar Itihas o Samajchitra*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, Sandesh, 1st Published(1977) reprint 2007, P.1

transported through road having no other option for transportation. According to Philip Coales, the Resident of Midnapore it appears clear that he was unable to send the expected amount of despatch from his *aurung* because of the 'shutting up of communication between Midnapore and the presidency by the way of Gongacolly and river Kangsabati and hence the dispatch would be sent by the road when the road were dry and proper for the transportation of the Company's bales over land'.<sup>32</sup>

Sonamukhi was the main centre of the 'Northern' zone of South-West Bengal. It was also a large *aurung* with a few other significant *aurungs* such as Bishnupur, Pattersayre, Roybagney and Gopalnagar<sup>33</sup> Coshinagore, Rebagory, Gungapur under it.<sup>34</sup> It is further mentioned that when Jhon Cheep was the commercial agent of Sonamukhi, he controlled three main factories and twelve subordinate factories.<sup>35</sup> *Khasas, Baftas, Sannoos* were produced in the subordinate factories of Sonamukhi.<sup>36</sup>

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the production centres of South- West Bengal were connected with each other with various markets by water ways as well as land routes. In some areas land routes were the only mode of communications. In these cases Sonamukhi can be pointed out. The contractor of Sonamukhi wrote that, 'as there is no water carriage in this country, by which means despatched would be made ... the cloths are conveyed on bullocks to a magazine in Culna ...'<sup>37</sup> though goods were despatched to Calcutta from Bishnupur *aurung* under Sonamukhi through Dwarakeswar River. This type of information was found.

Balasure and Balaramgori in the frontier Bengal were the important centres of 'South- Western' zone of South-West Bengal from where different types of weaving goods like *Chuckleas, Piniascos, Gingham* etc.<sup>38</sup> were exported to Calcutta through Balasure port. Keshiary was the main centre of *tasar*. The *tasar* of Keshiary were exported regularly to Calcutta through Balasure port by the Europeans.<sup>39</sup>

It is evident that in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the indigenous middleman collaborated the Europeans in several ways they (1) helped to establish connection

---

<sup>32</sup> . BOT, Vol. 40, 11th November, 1783

<sup>33</sup> BOT, Vol. 34, 24th December, 1782

<sup>34</sup> BOT, Vol. 4, Letter no.163, from Ramcaunt Chateerjee, Gomastahh of Sonamooky, dated 7th September, 1775

<sup>35</sup> BOT, Vol. 29, 11th December, 1781

<sup>36</sup> BOT, 11th November, 1805

<sup>37</sup> BOT, Vol. 31, 21st April, 1782

<sup>38</sup> K.K. Datta, *op.cit*, 1960, P.151

<sup>39</sup> S.S O' Mally, *Bengal District Gazetteers; Midnapore*, Calcutta, 1995, P.240

with the local marketing system, (2) organised dadny merchants for procuring export items, (3) promoted and expanded business applying their own knowledge and intelligence, (4) provided capital and (5) misused the dastak. The middleman or baniyan became very important for the Company and officials.

It was the most vital aspect of production organisation that the organisations were tied with an agreement. The agreement was made between the middlemen (*paikars*) and the weaver based on the goods which would be sent to the markets.<sup>40</sup> The *paikars* would supply the raw materials or give money to the weavers in advanced. With the advance cash from the *paikars*, according to the agreement, the weavers would buy raw materials or use the money for the necessity of their families during the production period. The principal elements of this system were — a financial requirement of the weavers, their limited buying capacity from the markets and their non-risk attitude regarding the demand of the markets.<sup>41</sup>

I have mentioned earlier, the European Companies made use of the more dominant form of production in their trade. The institutional structure of production, procurement and trading organisation conducted by the Europeans were skilled and sophisticated.<sup>42</sup> Firstly, the East India Company collected goods through the agreement with the native merchants. They had their own commodity supply network throughout Bengal. The East India Company made contact with the local or grass-root producers with the help of those native merchants. The native merchants acted as agents and they collected goods from the producers by paying money as advance supplied by the European Companies. It was known as '*dadan*' and those native merchants were called as '*dadni* merchants'<sup>43</sup>. The East India Company paid one-fourth in cash and the rest third-fourth as *dadan* of their investment for collecting goods.<sup>44</sup> In this system the producers were supposed to provide goods if they had taken the advance (*dadan*) from the *dadni* merchants. After supplying goods, according to the *dadan* system, the producers would deal in independently; sometimes with the other merchants. Besides Company every official including the Fort William Governor and the council members had one or more middleman who looked after their business concerns. He was responsible for

---

<sup>40</sup> Om Prakash, *The New Cambridge History of India; European Commercial Enterprise in pre – Colonial Indian*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 166

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Om Prakash, op.cit, 1998, p. 3

<sup>43</sup> Datta Rajat, "The Commercial economy of Eastern India Under Early British Rule" in H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke and John G. Reid, '*Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds: c1550-1850*', Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 340-369

<sup>44</sup> K.K. Datta, *Fort William India House Correspondence (1748-56)*, Vol. 1, 1958, p. 192



money advanced to the dadni merchants as also for the timely supply of the export commodities.<sup>45</sup>

The English private merchants expanded their business through the indigenous middlemen or banyans from domestic and intera- provincial markets. Moreover the Government of Bengal could realise a very small amount of revenue from them because of their evasive attitude. The European merchants and the local traders were better paymasters in this regard. The malpractice of tax evasion through *dastak* was regular phenomenon of the Company officials. They were also very reluctant to pay any duty on salt production and other trades along the coastline. Besides their co –operation to all these misdeeds, banians capital intelligence and efforts were regarded as effectives inputs. The European merchants unusually got 20 to 25 percent of the total profit.<sup>46</sup> For this reason most of the English young men before leaving London for Calcutta, used to collect names and addresses of faithful banyans for making the new environment more favourable and familiar. The former staff of the East India Company usually recommended and provided the names of obedient banyans to their new successor.

In 1753 the East India Company introduced an agency system instead of *dadni* system as the traders failed to provide goods under the agreement due to various obstacles. In this system, the Company would collect their necessity goods for exportation directly by their agents or *gomastah* from the factories and *aurungs*.<sup>47</sup>

In the newly introduced agency system (1753 A.D.) a large number of *gomastahs*, *paikars*, *dalals* were needed to be appointed to collect goods from the producers and the manufacturers. They would also supervise the goods at the factories and *aurungs*. William Bolts in his '*Consideration on Indian Affairs*' says that the factors or the agents were called as *gomastahs*. Since 1753 the *gomastahs* became the official agents of the Company and soon acquired the status of the Company's representatives.<sup>48</sup> In the various *aurungs* the Company procured its goods. Besides the master given to each *gomastah* to guide him in providing the Company's investment, he was given monthly salary (5-50 rupees) and a palanquin (in keeping with the official status as a Company official) and a few staffs under him.<sup>49</sup> The staffs were a clerk or *mohuri*, a cash keeper, a few peons and some *harkaras* with a

---

<sup>45</sup>Sushil Chaudhuri, Merchants, companies and rulers; Bengal in the eighteenth century, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol.31(1) February 1988, p.76

<sup>46</sup> Subodh Kumar Mukhapaddya, Prak Plassey, P.46

<sup>47</sup> N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal ; From Plassey to the Permanent Settlement*, Calcutta, (Third Edition 1965) Reprint 1981, Vol. 1, Calcutta, p. 157

<sup>48</sup> Hameeda Hussian, *The Company Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company and the Organization of Textile Production in Bengal 1750-1813*, Delhi, 1988, p. 90

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 87

*gomastah*. The lodging for the *gomastah* was arranged at the factories or *aurungs*. It was called *cutcherry* where he summoned the *dalals* and the weavers by the peons or *harkaras*. They signed a bond and promised that they would provide goods on a stipulated rate on a scheduled day. At that time the *gomastah* would give them a part of stipulated amount as advance.<sup>50</sup>

The *gomastahs* played a vital role in the Company's business. They had to provide in order to enter the Company's service besides pledging their allegiance and exclusive service to the Company. They not only enjoyed the administrative power but also raised a financial stability from the *gomastah* of Warren Hastings. It is evident that the *gomastahs* were able to raise their small empires for them besides being powerful.<sup>51</sup>

The *gomastah* and the agent as well as *tagadgeer* or collector of textile, *jassendar* or appraiser of the valuation of the production played a crucial role in the textile production and the Company's investment. The natives were appointed to those posts in a nominal salary.<sup>52</sup> The *middleman* or *banian*, according to Bolts, was the important person in this system. 'a banian is a person (either acting for himself, or as the substitute of some great black merchant) by whom the English gentlemen in general transact all their business. He is interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash-keeper, and in general also secret keeper. He puts in the under clerks, the porter and door keeper, stewards bearers of the silver staves, running footmen, touch and branch light carriers, palanquin-bearers and all the long tribe of under servants for whose honesty he deemed answerable: and he conducts all the trade of his master, to whom, unless pretty well acquainted with the country languages, it is difficult for any of the natives to obtain access. In short, he possesses singly many more powers over his master, than can in this country be assumed by any young spendthrift's steward, money-leader and mistress all together; and father serves, very conveniently sometimes, on a public discussion, to father such acts or proceedings as his master dares not avow. There is a powerful string of connections among these banian, who serve all the English in the settlements of Bengal, as well in all public offices as in their private affairs.'<sup>53</sup> 'He conducts all the trade of his master, to whom, unless

---

<sup>50</sup> H.G Rawlinson, *British Beginnings in Western India 1579-1657*, Oxford, MCMXX, p. 127

<sup>51</sup> Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Continuities of Social Mobility in Traditional and modern Society in India: Two Case Studies of Caste mobility in Bengal*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.30, No. 2, February 1971

<sup>52</sup> Binod Sankar Das, *Changing Profile of the South West Bengal*, Kolkata, 2013, p.167

<sup>53</sup> William Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs*, vol-1, London 1772-75, p-84

pretty well acquainted with the country languages; it is difficult for any of the natives to obtain accesses'.<sup>54</sup>

The *paikars* under the *dalals* were an inferior set of brokers/agents. The *paikars* maintained the connection between the *dalals* and the weavers as well as the *gomastahs*.<sup>55</sup>

The *dalal* and the *paikars* were found in every village in the entire district. They intervened in any type of exchange of goods in *haats* and markets. To get the maximum profit they bought goods at the lowest price and for this purpose they threatened the producers and shopkeepers. They dozed the customs duties in the name of the Company though the Company was the sole authority to enjoy such duties. In 1767 the *paikars* were entrusted to supply weaving goods to the *aurungs* of the EIC in South-West Bengal. It is clearly found the chart (I: 1):

**Table No: I.1**  
At the *Aurung* of Chandrakona (26 *paikars*)

Name of the <i>Paikar</i>	Number of pieces per month contracted for in 1766	Number of looms assigned to each <i>Paikar</i> in 1766	Number of looms assigned to each <i>Paikar</i> in 1767
Kamdev Thakur	66	49	48
Raghudev Thakur	15	19	16
Janki Thakur	27	22	21
Gangaram Thakur	27	27	24
Hari Ghosal	21	18	18
Udirt Thakur	18	19	19
Sadhu kar	90	77	70
Jugal Poddar	75	57	60
Kaliram Hai	51	38	38
Gauranga Dutta	45	41	41
Govardhan sarkar	45	40	40
Raghu sarkar	24	25	27
Bhagirath Das	24	19	29

<sup>54</sup> H.G.Rawlinson , op.cit, MCMXX, p. 127

<sup>55</sup> Bolts, op.cit, 1772, p. 193

Motiram poddar	24	21	21
Uknitjan Teli	30	20	22
Trilok Chaudhuri	45	28	30
Titu Sarkar	54	49	50
Trilok Sarkar	27	18	23
Lokicharan Chaudhuri	27 40	22 35	20 35
Jaganath Das	30	29	29
Sani Sarkar	18	15	15
Hit kar	18	10	12
Ganesh Poddar	15	70	12
Jaganath Bairagi	17	8	9
Jugal Bari	27	26	26
Bairagi Das			

At the *Aurung* of Khirpoy (9 *Paikar*)

Sarveshar Pahari	225	180	205
Kirparam Teli	90	72	70
Panju Dutt	30	24	40
Sitaram Pal	30	24	25
Sundar Mahi	90	72	70
Manik Mondal	60	48	46
Baburam poddar	60	48	50
Kashi Pal	30	24	25
Gokul Das	521/2(half)	42	40

At the *Aurung* Radhanagar (2 *Paikar*)

Jugal Chaudhuri	60	48	46
Motiram Dutt	30	22	25

At the *Aurung Ghatal* (1 *Paikar*)

Dukhiram Doba	100	80	60
---------------	-----	----	----

At the *Aurung Udayraj pur* (1 *Paikar*)

Sarbjot Thakur	28	23	23
----------------	----	----	----

At the *Aurung Ramjibon pur and Hajipur*(1 *Paikar*)

Hiranand Chaudhuri	60	48	50
--------------------	----	----	----

At the *Aurung Sammraat* (1 *Sarkar* or *gomastahh* being an employee of the English Company)

Name not given	150	150	231
----------------	-----	-----	-----

Source: Om Prakash, 'From Market –Determined to Coercion –based: Textile Manufacturing in Eighteenth Century –Bengal', in Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (eds), *How India Clothed the World of South Asian Textile, 1500-1850*(Leiden; Brill, 2009), pp. 217-52

In 1788 the commercial agents were appointed. Since then the so called middlemen and the *paikars* got vanished from the system of investment in collecting goods. From the identity of the *paikars* it was known that most of the *paikars* were the local money lenders and the traders who acted as the link men between the producers, weavers and the Company. In 1750-60 they were not so rich *baniyan* in Calcutta. Some of them were landlords. The Company in the initial stage of their reign protected those middlemen and landlords. Narrain Satpatty took the responsibility of collecting raw cotton and engaging weavers to supply the goods of the best quality. Narayan Satpati, the weaving merchant of Midnapore can be mentioned in the context of the Company's investment directly by the agents. He was sent to the *mufassal* to collect goods as a *tahasilder*.<sup>56</sup> An account of his collected goods is mentioned.

**Table No: I.2**

Year	Advance (current rupees)
1762	8640 (advance made by Burdett)
1763	4518.8.9
1764	34093.7
1765	36103.14.6 (advance made by Mr. watts}

<sup>56</sup> WBSA, Provincial Council of Revenue Burdwan (PCRB), 8th March, 1776, pp. 182-85

1766	78389..9 (made by Mr. Graham)
1767	72210.14.3
1768	91733.2.9
1769	85245,1
1770	25694.4
1771	11474.10 (Mr babar)
1772	21900.6
1773	43200

Source: PCR Burdwan 8<sup>th</sup> March 1776, p 182-185

Silk thread was collected from the jungles of Gogooi, Mooga, Silda, Ramggoon of Midnapore district. Besides this, silk thread was collected from different parts of Mayurbhanj and Dhalbhum. The indigenous merchants, *paikars* and the middlemen (*dalals*) collected silk thread from those places in a low rate and sold those to the weavers of Anandapur and Keshiari. Sometimes the merchants sold their goods at the villages and towns engaging the weavers in paying money. The *santals* and other *adibashi* people sold the cocoons to the farmers or the producers. But sometimes they would collect silk thread and sold it to the *paikars*. The *paikars* collected silk thread throughout the year through *dadni* system.<sup>57</sup>

Different types of people were in silk industry like the producers of mulberry plants, *rearers* of silk worm, winders and weavers. They were all benefitted from it. Most silk winding was done in the Company's factories and skilled workers operated those factories. The *rearers* of silk worms received advanced money for supply of cocoons. Initially, the commercial agents of the Company contacted the producers directly. But when the investment in silk increased, the Company had to engage middlemen or *dalals*. They were appointed at the *aurungs* on the basis of monthly salary.

Besides the *paikars* the Company very often approached the regional rulers for their investment. Having received the *parwannah* from the Company, Hurry Sing, the *Zamindar* of Burdwan stated the names of his authorised persons for silk purchasing. They were Giridhar Dalal, Gobinda Ram Khamrai, Tilak Ram Bag, Narayan Dhara, Gour Charan Das, Ram Maji, Sham Khanra, Damodar Mandol, Asharam Behera, Jasmont Chowdhury, Rasamoy Samanta, Janardan Mandal, Tutiram Mandol etc. It was told that they would operate their trade freely.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Binod Sankar Das, op.cit, 2013, P. 185

<sup>58</sup> BOT, 29th June, 1775, P. 499

In another sector, we see even before 1757 the European private traders were engaged in salt trading. They operated their trade in the name of indigenous merchants. In a word, it can be said that at that period of time the monopoly over salt trade was in the clutches of indigenous merchants. The political changes in the 1760s led to the establishment of the East India Company's monopoly over salt trade and by phases the capitalist interest of the British Raj developed monopoly over the system of salt production. From 1760 to the beginning of 1770 the private traders and the servants of the East India Company operated salt trade. In that period in spite of losing of their monopoly over salt the local traders operated salt trading with the Europeans. It is cited in the chart below. (I.3)

**Table No: I. 3**

Year	Name of the Merchants	Quantity purchased	Quantity contracted for	Place of manufacture
1768	Lokenath Nandi	2,00,022	-	Hijli
1768	Anadiram Naik	2,34,415	-	„
1768	Sridhar Saha	90,750	-	„
1772	Kashnath Sen	1,74,820	-	Hijli, Sujanmota Tamluk
1772	Ghanashyam Sarkar	80,572	-	„
1772	Sridhar Saha	1,65,600	-	Hijli, Sujanmute
1773	Sridhar Saha	1,65,600	-	Hijli, Sujanmota
1773	Loknath Nandi	62,444	-	Sujanmota Hijli
1773	Arup Narayan & Narrain Chand	62,976	-	Mahisadai
1775	„	126,482	-	„

Sources: [ Comptrolling Committee of Revenue Progs, Vol. 2 , 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1771, P. 130, Progs of the Revenue Board Consisting of the Whole Council, Vol. 8, Part 1, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1773, Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Progs , Vol-2, Part 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1774, Progs. Vol-6, Part -3, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1775 Consult No. 3]

The seth and Basak family were the traditional *baniyan* of Calcutta whose business spread throughout entire Bengal. Apart from them these were also some well-

known mediator *baniyans* with them. Some of them were Gokul Ghosal, Baranasi Ghosh, Hidaram Bandopadhaya, Akrur Dutta, Manohar Mukhopadhaya, Krishnakanta, Nandi.<sup>59</sup>

### Conclusion

Historically it is seen that in the second half of the eighteenth century the foreign company's merchants and the indigenous merchants had a special control over the economy of Bengal. The people of this country accepted the participation of the Europeans in the administration and economy of Bengal. The native merchants became the subsidiary of the Europeans in the business. The Indigenous merchants also developed their own business. It is said the indigenous merchants created a favourable situation for the trade and business of the Europeans. As a result, when the British Company occupied the political power of Bengal, the indigenous merchants earned a great deal of property by using the political power of the Europeans and in return, they helped the Europeans to earn a large lump of money.

The Second half of the eighteenth century was too much significant from the socio-economic and political point of view. In that period the Company acquired the political power and made reformation in the field of land and revenue. In the same way they included so many policies in the trade and commerce. So many new trader communities arose and the Bengalee traders was one of them. Farukshier's Forman opened a new vista for the Company. It was seen that that the Bengali traders helped the Company's business to be stabilized.

A significant change came in trade and business in South West Bengal after the Battle of *Plassey* in 1757. It was seen that the special power in Bengal i. e. acquiring *dewani* accelerated the company's business rapidly. Latter the number and importance of the *banians* got increased. The Company provide the *banians* so many facilities. Their development reached the top when the Company banned the private trading of its employees in 1772.

This artical points out that The Company's entry in South West Bengal Productions and its consumption opened a new era in the field of trade over markets and its transaction got increased. It changed the production system and developed the communicative network. The agents or the indeginous middle men performed their functions tergetting the Europeans both the domestic and the external trade of South West Bengal directly or indirectly with their activities. The extent of assistance extended by the agents to the Europeans for procuring goods had encouraged the local traders to expand their commercial acitivities in the entire Bengal. The Europeans had very little knowledge about the commodity supply centers of Bengal. They procured commodity every part of South West Bengal by

---

<sup>59</sup> N.K Sinha, op.cit, Vol. 1, p. 91



using the network of agents. The production hubs of exportable goods thus got inspiration and incentive, which eventually expanded the external trade.

The performance of agents in domestic trade of Bengal at that period had a negative impact. This was because the banians also had started abusing dustak's like employees of East India Company. It caused a sharp disparity within the domestic trade. The situation became extremely dangerous to the local traders as their existence in the market was at stake.

After the overall review of the role of middlemen, one point clearly appears that the middlemen extended their best possible co-operation to the Europeans when they arrived here first for a business mission. They also extended full support to the English for developing a colonial economy in this region and in return they acquired plenty of wealth. This worth of middlemen to the British merchants in South West Bengal so-called entire Bengal declined in the latter period for many reasons like the establishing of a new English educated class, the British's well acquainted with the local languages, social norms and mannerism, and the changed situation of the world.