

SILK TRADE: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Silk industry has been a highly prestigious industry in Malda since the older times. There has been reference to the different kind of silk piece goods and the importance of Pundabardhan is also found in the 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya.¹ The glorious silk item of Gaur was called then 'Pattabastra'.² The Muslim rulers were great patron of silk fabrics.³ Mention of high quality silk cloths were found during the medieval period. Abul Fazal was the grand vizier of the Mughal emperor Akbar and he mentioned in 'Ain- I- Akbari' about the existence of the Kharkhanas or working places, where the various silk articles were manufactured through the great artistic skill.⁴ As a result, various merchants were actively attached with the silk trade of Malda. A lot of people under mercantile section were engaged in the silk industry and trade in the region of Malda. Malda was well known as a silk industry of the Bengal province.

Bengal silk was the cheapest of all Asiatic silks and throughout the seventeenth century it was much cheaper than even the Persian and Chinese silk.⁵ For a long period demand of silk throughout the entire India and abroad was fulfilled by supply from Malda. Due to its glorious past along with limitless possibilities of silk trade with Malda, the native and European merchants, various trading Companies,

¹ E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, New York: Macmillian, 1964, pp.37 – 38.

² G.E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers – Malda*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918, pp.65-66.

³ S. C. Guha, *Silk Industry of Malda and Murshidabad from 1660 – 1833*, Siliguri: N. L. Publishers, 2003, pp. 146 – 147.

⁴ Blockman, *Ain - I – Akbari*, Translated book, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1949, pp. 87 – 92.

⁵ Bal Krishna, *Commercial Relations between India and England*, London : Routledge, 1924, pp. 142, 197.

and changing marketing system were composed with the concerned silk trade since the pre-colonial period. Based on the silk of Malda, the newly commercial network enlarged from local to national and beyond. This Chapter focuses on the nature of the silk trade, both internal and external, from various perspectives.

INTERNAL SILK TRADE:

Internal silk trade has been very important for the economic support of the indigenous peoples, those who were fully engaged in the silk industry of Malda. Besides that, the activities of the native merchants were very significant. According to Sushil Chaudhury, this is not to deny the role of Indian traders in the silk business.⁶ From the period much earlier to this, Indian traders from Gujrat, Delhi, Agra, and Lahore exchanged precious metal for Bengal silk.⁷

Bengal possesses an old cultural heritage in the art of silk – worm rearing and weaving of silk fabrics. Historical evolution of such a specialized professional structure may be attributed to an intricate network of socio – cultural fabrics of the people living in the rural areas of Bengal. It may, however, be noticed that sericulture has maintained a systematic phase of prosperity and decay in this province since very early periods of history.⁸

⁶ Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal*, Delhi: Manohar, 1995, pp. 224 -226.

⁷ Anindita Goswami, 'A Study on Historical Analysis of Murshidabad Silk Industry at Nawab's Reign (1717 – 1757)', *International Journal of Social Sciences*, New Delhi : New Delhi Publishers, Vol.8, No. 1, March 2019, p. 33.

⁸ Saswati Mukherjee, *Sericulture in West Bengal*, Calcutta: Bhattacharyya and Bros, 1992, p. 3.

Since the pre-colonial period, the various regional centres under Bengal province has been famous for silk production, such as, Kasimbazar, Jungipur, Malda, Kumarkhali, Rampur – Boalia, Rangpur, Radhanagore, Rangamati and Gonutea.⁹ In Malda, Shahpur and Sibganj were two important silk weaving centres where *Gultishi*, *Bulbul Chasm*, and certain other patterns were fabricated. Saris, dhuties, romals, sheets were also produced in the silk manufacturing centres of Malda.

Among the various species of silk fabrics exported from Malda to Punjab and the United Provinces, the most important were *Swagaji* (red and white stripes on the orange ground), *Maskha* (with black and orange stripes), *Selai Khata* (black stripe on orange ground), *Phularu* (red flowers on yellow or white ground), *Sushi* (red and blue checks), *Jarda* (red and white stripes on a yellow ground).¹⁰ The original *Maldahi* cloth was of cotton and silk, but now a days the old names of *bulbul chasm* (nightingale's eyes), *chand tara* (moon and stars), *mazchar* (ripples of the rivers), *kalintarakshi* (pigeon's eyes), which were derived from the different patterns woven, were commonly applied to the cloths made of silk, as well as to the mixtures.¹¹

In the silk industry, the weavers of Malda continued their production with minimum wages then, but the condition of torture did not reduce. For example, one weaver at Haripal got wage of Rs. 16 and 13 Anna, whereas another weaver of Malda got Rs. 11 and 12 Anna.¹² Although, they continuously produced outstanding silk through their best artistic ability and patience.

⁹ Ibid. pp. 96 – 99.

¹⁰ Sailendra Kumar Bag, *The Changing Fortunes of the Bengal Silk Industry 1757 – 1833*, Calcutta: Manasi Press, 1989. pp. 83 – 84.

¹¹ G. E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers – Malda*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1819. pp. 70 – 71.

¹² Debendra Bijay Moitra, *The Cotton Weavers of Bengal (1757 – 1838)*, Calcutta: Firma Publisher, 1997, pp. 117 – 118.

The native silk producing method was known as *khamru*, and, the European method was treated as filature system. The difference is that in filature silk evenness of size throughout the skin, elasticity of thread, colour, and appearance are looked for, whilst in *Khamru* reeling with so much importance is not attached to these qualities. The result is that from a maund of cocoons which will produce two to three seers of filature silk, nearly half a seer more of *Khamru* can be reeled.¹³ Mainly, *khamru* silk was highly sold in the native market.

The Bengal silk piece goods, specially, *Maldahi* silk cloths were exported in the market of Gujrat, Surat, Ahmedabad and other parts of the country.¹⁴ The silk traders continued to export the raw silk and silk piece goods mainly to Benaras, Mirzapore, Nagpore, and Bombay. The native and English merchants studied that price of silk at Malda was cheaper than other places in the Bengal province.¹⁵ So they considered, Malda as the main trading centre of Bengal. G. E. Lambourn's observation is that at Shahpur village in Malda, nearly 200 families were engaged in the silk production. Here *gulthishi*, *bulbul chasm* and other patterns of Malda's silk cloth are woven, the weft being of cotton while the wrap is silk. There are about seven families who can dye the yaru locally, and cloths valued at about half a lakh of rupees are annually exported to Bombay, Ahmedabad and Nepal. *Udu*, *gulthishi* and

¹³ G. E. Lambourn, Op.Cit., p.67.

¹⁴ Tapan Roychaudhuri, *Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir: An Introductory Study in Social History*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1990. pp. 178 – 189.

¹⁵ T. D. Koshy, *Silk: Production and Export Management*, New York: Macmillian, 1968, pp. 240 – 243.

bulbul chasm are sold locally from Rs. 3 – 8 per *than*, *kadam – fuli* from Rs. 12 to Rs. 16.¹⁶ The price of the silk clothes fully depend on the contemporary trading system and demand.

The internal silk trade was carried on both through land routes and river ways. The different centre for the production of raw silk and silk stuffs were connected through the inland water ways and caravan routes. Majority of merchants preferred the inland water ways as it was cheap and was also considered as a highly flexible means for the movement of merchandise.¹⁷ The English East India Company's records confirm that the animal also served as the chief means of conveyance through the caravan routes.¹⁸

The domestic silk market flourished for a long time and the silk trade of Bengal was a boon to many. The different categories of merchants were attached with an extensive trade in Bengal silk piece – goods in various parts of the country. Especially, the Hindu people of Bengal and other parts of India used indigenous silk cloths on ceremonial occasions, so silk always had a large internal market. Bernier wrote in 1660 that Bengal was commercially stronger than Egypt. It exported in abundance cotton, silk, rice, sugar and butter.¹⁹ The people of Malda were fully attached with the silk industry and due to the favorable condition of silk trade, merchants came from Agra, Benares and Gujrat, the silk

¹⁶ G. E. Lambourn, Op. Cit., p. 69.

¹⁷ K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia And East India Company (1660-1760)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p.345.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 353.

¹⁹ Radha Kamal Mukherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1938, p. 92.

goods being conveyed both by land and water.²⁰ In the seventeenth century, Malda was the principal trading centre of Bengal. Silk fabrics were exported to all parts of India, to Masulipatnam, Goa and other parts and along the Coromandal Coast and to Agra by way of the Ganges and the Jamuna.²¹

The internal silk market of Bengal flourished without any disturbance up to the first half of the eighteenth century. The native merchants went to Malda from distant parts like Peshwar, Gujrat, Multan, Benares and Agra to collect silk fabrics for their business in and outside India. The native traders were said to ply between India and the Mediterranean countries to carry silk trade even before the establishment of the Roman Empire.²² This trade, in no case, could have been conducted on the basis of any product from Malda and Murshidabad.

Not only the Bengali Mahajans, but also other traders like Kashmirians (merchants from Kashmir), Multanis (merchants of Multan), Pathans (Afgan merchants) were closely attached with the Bengal silk trade.²³ They were actively engaged in the silk industry and were also treated as the key factor for the internal silk trade. Besides Malda, silk were also cultivated in different parts of the Bengal province, such as Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, and West Dinajpur, but due to its best quality, Malda gained

²⁰ Richard Temple, *The Diaries of Streysham Master*, Vol.I, London : J. Murray, 1911, p. 26.

²¹ R. K. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 178.

²² Bhupendra Nath Datta, *Banglar Itihas*, Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1383 (Bengali Year), p. 155.

²³ Sailendra Kumar Bag, p. 82.

the prestigious position.²⁴ So, the different merchants always want to be involved with the Malda's silk industry and trade for gaining the maximum profit. The rising demand for the different silk goods of Malda was mainly due to its longevity and suitable colour.

The *Khamru* market as well as native market was largely controlled by Marwaris of English Bazar.²⁵ The professional reelers supply them with raw silk against advances, and the lack of capital, which this system implies, tends to keep the reelers impoverished and at the mercy of capitalists. The raw silk of the *Khamru* market is exported largely to Madras, Nagpur and up-country.²⁶

It is very important that the price of raw silk fluctuated sharply from time to time. With the fluctuation of price, the quantity of raw silk exported from Bengal by the Company varied simultaneously. The keen competition which the Company had to face with the indigenous merchants and bad or good harvesting of silk were responsible for the change of price. The highest officials of the Government, the princes of the royal blood, and members of the nobility often appeared as competitors in the field of silk market.²⁷

²⁴ Saswati Mukherjee, *Sericulture in West Bengal*, Calcutta: Bhattacharyya and Bros, 1992. p. 8.

²⁵ G. E. Lambourn, *Op. Cit.*, p. 68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969, p. 128.

The Sannyasis and the Fakirs of Bengal had a wide organization based on fraternity and conducted the internal silk trade travelling from place to place. The Sannyasis actively captured the main way of the domestic silk market of Bengal.²⁸ The *Gossains* are sometimes referred to more generally as *Bairagis* or *Sannyasis*.²⁹

The Sannyasis have also been mentioned as traders coming from North India through various routes into Murshidabad and Malda. They acted as traders at Malda in particular and in some other parts of Bengal in general. It appears that large quantities of silk produced in Malda were sent to Mirzapore and Benares through the Sannyasi traders. From Mirzapore, those were conveyed through the caravan routes to Lahore, Multan and in various marts in Rajasthan.³⁰ They were professionally dependent on the silk trade, but when the English East India Company demanded huge amount of tax from Sannyasis mainly after Dewani in 1765, then they organized in rebellion against British Raj in the late eighteenth century.

The merchants came from the distant parts of India, such as Western Provinces and Deccan to engage with the silk trade in Bengal. The trade of Bengal connecting Western Provinces, Deccan, Surat, Delhi, Agra, Madras etc. with the inland and inter – provincial trade of the country made her prosperous. The

²⁸ H. R. Ghosal, *Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency (1793 – 1833)*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966, p. 172.

²⁹ C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the age of British Expansion (1770 – 1870)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.142.

³⁰ Sailendra Kumar Bag, p.82.

trading contact of Bengal with all parts of India and abroad contributed to the solvency of the country. Although, it is very significant that the British East India Company's trade was depicted in the post – Plassey phase, “as the destroyer of indigenous industries, its finance as a medium of ‘drain’, its revenue policy as an incubator on agrarian development and its empire – building as the cause of the colossal India debt.”³¹

The English East India Company gained a better position through the victory of Plassey battle and acquisition of ‘Dewani’ in 1765. In this situation, the English Company was more interested to take up the raw silk from silk weavers of Malda as well as Bengal than the silk made cloths. In pre -Dewani period, the English Company had to economically depend on the native merchants for conducting their trade, but in the post-Dewani phase the condition totally changed and as a result, the English Company could establish themselves as superior in the silk trade.

In 1770, one third of the population of Bengal was swept away due to the terrible famine and as a result, it seriously hampered both agriculture and silk industry along with trade.³² At that time, the inland silk trade of Malda as well as of Bengal suffered a huge loss.³³ But on the contrary, the English

³¹ Amalesh Tripathi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency (1793 – 1833)*, Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. iv.

³² R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1906, p. 256.

³³ N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962, p. 54.

Company established silk filature factory at Malda in 1770 to obtain the maximum profit from silk business.³⁴

In this part, I discussed about the nature of the internal silk trade of Malda under the British colonial rule (1770 – 1833). Before Plassey, the native merchants were the main purchaser of the silk piece goods, but after Plassey, the European merchants, especially British traders reached the highest stage in the silk trade of Bengal, as well as in Malda. Especially, the Dewani of 1765 and the different Regulating Act were not favor of the native traders in enriching the domestic silk market. The native traders lost their importance through the discriminatory colonial policy.

The British colonial policy adversely impacted the affluence of the internal silk trade of Malda and also Bengal. Thus, I discuss on external silk trade to better compare with the internal silk trade of Malda, along with Bengal.

EXTERNAL SILK TRADE:

The history of the external trade of Malda's silk can be dated back even before the British rule in India. In the pre - colonial period, different merchants from different places were engaged in the silk industry and trade of Malda. Silk manufactured in Malda satisfied different dignities like as, culture, vanity and fashion of the Roman Bengal province Emperors.³⁵ For instance, in 1577, Sheik Bhik, a silk merchant

³⁴ Saswati Mukherjee, Op. Cit., p. 99.

³⁵ R. R. Ghose, *Decline of the Silk Industry in Bengal and How to Arrest it*, Calcutta: Chuckervetty, Chatterjee and Co, Book-Seller and Publishers, 1915. p. 1.

of Malda, sailed for Russia through the Persian Gulf with three ships laden with silk cloths and silken stuffs which were manufactured at Malda.³⁶

Up to the first half of the 18th century, the indigenous and Asiatic merchants were the most formidable rivals of the European Companies in the silk market. Raw silk was a very important export commodity in the English Companies trade in Bengal since the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the demand of the English for raw silk was mainly met by the silk of France, Italy, Persia and China. The Dutch Company conducted the profitable silk trade,³⁷ but in the middle of seventeenth century, the Dutch became more interested in trading with Japan than with Europe.

The Dutch Company switched over to the trading of precious metals from Persia instead of Persian silk. The export of raw silk to Europe became too uncertain. In the early years of the seventeenth century, the British Company has been interested in the Persian silk trade. At that time, the English Company had to face competition with the Dutch, French and Italian merchants. Besides, the indigenous merchants were also strong competitors against the English Company. At that crucial moment, the British Company turned their focus into Bengal province and established Hugli Factory in 1651, the Kasimbazar Factory in 1658, and, the Malda Factory in 1680 to smoothly conduct an extensive trade in Bengal.³⁸

³⁶ G. E. Lambourn, p. 66.

³⁷ Om Prakash, 'Trade and Politics in Eighteenth Century Bengal, in *The Eighteenth Century India: Debates in Indian History and Society*, edited by Seema Alavi, New Delhi : Oxford University Press, pp. 136 – 137.

³⁸ Sushil Chaudhury, *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal 1660 – 1720*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1975, pp. 178 – 179.

Since the establishment of the British Factory, the British Company reached the highest position in the silk trade in spite of other European competitors, especially the Dutch.³⁹ The demand of Bengal silk was always high in the entire European market and the British Company was encouraged by the outstanding profit from silk business of Bengal.⁴⁰ Due to Farrukhsiyar's Farman in 1717, the English Company was fully attentive only in Bengal's trade, especially silk trade of Malda.⁴¹ Actually, the English Company ensured to supply raw silk from Bengal. The reputation and superiority of the silk of Mada and Murshidabad were marked by everyone, particularly of the British Company. So the British colonial policy was very much strong to take up the profit from external silk trade of Malda. Silk industry of Bengal was improved considerably during this period and, so, it had certainly attracted the European Companies for securing raw silk and fabrics from Bengal, particularly from Malda and Murshidabad. The export of raw silk from Bengal exceeded the import from China to England.

Although, sericulture did not progress more better in the first half of the eighteenth century. The English Company also did not get enough help and encouragement from home and as a result, the efforts of the Company were also desultory. Moreover, the political anxiety of Bengal forced the factories to close.⁴² During the period 1742 – 1751, the Maratha invasion into Bengal imposed limitless pressure on the silk workers from various sides. It had a miserable effect on the silk industry.⁴³ The Directors gave their opinion into the very crucial condition that the Company should serve their activities in the silk trade, and be careful to protect it from any other disturbance.⁴⁴

³⁹ K. Glamann, *Dutch Asiatic Trade (1620 – 1740)*, Copenhagen : Danish Science Press, 1958, pp. 123, 129 – 130.

⁴⁰ K. Glamann, *Dutch Asiatic Trade (1620 – 1740)*, The Hague : Danish Science Press, 1958, p. 122.

⁴¹ S. C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 76.

⁴² J. H. T. Walsh, *History of Murshidabad*, London : Jarrold and Sons, 1902, p.102.

⁴³ K. K. Datta, *Studies in the History of the Bengal Subah (1740 – 1770)*, Vol. I, Calcutta : University of Calcutta, 1936, p. 437.

The turning point of the East India Company's started from the Plassey in 1757. Before Plassey, different European merchants, such as Dutch, Portuguese, and French were actively engaged with the silk trade. After the battle of Plassey, the situation went in favor of the English East India Company. The English Company became the main regulator of the silk industry and trade in Malda, as well as in the Bengal province. They imposed their executive power on the native silk workers, agents, and trade.

In 1757, the Court of Directors sent Mr. Wilder to Bengal for the improvement of silk winding and from that year the conditions began to improve.⁴⁵ Mr. Wilder successfully served the Company for four years and 'died in harness' at Kasimbazar in 1761.⁴⁶ The Company got the 'Dewani' of Bengal in 1765.

After the acquisition of Dewani the Company took serious interest in raw silk business. Not only that, gradually they also changed their business strategy. The Court of Directors wrote on 17 March, 1769 to the Bengal Government that the silk manufactures should be forced to work as silk winders in the Company's factories. They faced severe penalties by the authority of Government if they worked anywhere else.⁴⁷ A batch of skilled workmen was sent to India from Italy and France as we had already mentioned to teach the Italian method of winding to the indigenous reelers.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Letter from Court of Directors, 7 April, 1773 ; Fort William – India House Correspondence, Vol. VII, p. 12, Para 30, 1971, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

⁴⁵ G. E. Lambourn, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ R.C. Dutt, *Economic History of India under Early British Rule*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner, 1956. p. 256.

⁴⁸ J. H. Tull. Walsh, *A History of Murshidabad District*, London: Jarrold and Sons, 1902. p. 103.

There was a great demand of different colours with different sizes of cloth in the England market. In 1774, broad cloth of 120 bales, red cloth of 400 bales, green cloth of 60 bales, and, yellow cloth of 50 bales were sent from Bengal to the market in England.⁴⁹

Due to some measures taken by the Company a satisfactory result was achieved by 1775, the average export of raw silk to England during the following decade, rose to more than 5,60,000 ‘small pounds’⁵⁰ in a year.⁵¹ On the contrary, the total import of raw silk into England from the non-Indian countries like China, Italy and others during 1776-85 was only 2,82,304 ‘small pounds’ in a year.⁵²

The Company however had to sustain a loss in the silk trade during this time. On the one hand, the cost of production became high; on the other, the sale of the commodity in the British market had shrunk. The abrupt change in the profit margin is attributed to the procurement mechanism of the Company. It was known as the contract system, contract being entered into by the company agents in different factories with the local suppliers to procure silk for the Company from rural manufactories. According to the Board of Trade, the total amount incurred from the Malda Factory was Rs.37, 861, 4 (current rupees).⁵³

⁴⁹ Letter written by C. W. Boughn. Rous, Import Ware House Keeper to Warren Hastings, President, Fort William, 16 May 1774, Bengal Public Proceedings, Range 2, Vol.5, pp.780 – 792, Proceeding, Home Misc., Vol. No. 37. NAI.

⁵⁰ 16 avoirdupois ounces or 0.4536 kilogram.

⁵¹ H. R. Ghosal, *Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency (1793 – 1833)*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966, p. 41.

⁵² Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, Vol. II, London, 1813. p. 256.

⁵³ Letter written by J. I. Keighly, Account Officer to Per Colbrooke, Governor General, 31 July 1775, Bengal Letters Received, Vol.14, p.183, 7 June 1776, Proceeding, Home Misc., I.O. Copy, Vol. No. 38, NAI.

The agency system was adopted in 1787 for investment in silk.⁵⁴ In rural areas of Bengal, a double monopoly market exists since the time of East India Company. They have implanted the seeds of market imperfections through their 'Agency System'.⁵⁵ The adoption of the agency system no doubt made the prospect brighter in the year 1792 when the total value of raw silk export exceeded twenty lakhs of rupees. The establishment of the Agency System in Bengal not only ensured silk procurement but turned the silk trade again into a profitable proposition. The net profit of the Company in silk trade for 18 years from 1786-1803 was 616,781 pound; on an average was 34,266 pound per annum or about 13 percent.⁵⁶ During the year 1803, the supply of Bengal silk rose to nearly one hundred and fifty bales in a year.⁵⁷

Since the year 1803, the export of silk to England increased steadily.⁵⁸ But the silk supplied by the private traders was not good in quality, "being badly worked, foul and gouty, and partaking largely of those defects for which Bengal silk was formerly so much reprobated."⁵⁹ This policy was reflected in the allotment of the total investment of 54 lakhs of sicca rupees in 1808 to different articles. In order of importance and of the total amount allotted, cotton piece good came to be relegated to the second position.

⁵⁴ S. C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 122 – 123.

⁵⁵ Saswati Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ S.C Guha, *Silk Industry of Malda and Murshidabad from 1660 to 1833*, Siliguri: N. L. Publisher, 2003, p. 124.

⁵⁷ Milburn William, p. 255.

⁵⁸ Milburn, p. 257.

⁵⁹ Buchanan, *Purnea Report*, Patna, 1928. pp. 405-07.

The development in silk investment during this time was also noticed by Buchanan. He mentioned that in Purnea district about 47,000 persons got advances from the factories of Malda, Murshidabad and Jungipore for the supply of cocoons. Purnea supplied about 44,000 maunds of cocoons every year to the factories of Malda and Murshidabad.⁶⁰ Not only that, the indigenous workmen produced in their houses nearly two thousand maunds of filature silk and the value of that was about six lakhs of rupees.⁶¹ From the Report of Buchanan, we came to know that production of raw silk in Sahabad district was enormous and silk worth rupees 3, 15,000 was annually exported from Sahabad to the Maratha country in the west.

The impetus given by the Charter Act of 1813 stimulated a remarkable increase in the export of Bengal silk.⁶² Besides, the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars and the slump in cotton textile market necessitated the revival of silk trade with India.

The decline of the cotton industry and the fall in the export of Bengal cotton piece goods encouraged the Company to invest the major portion of their surplus money in silk trade, and, Bengal raw silk became the most prominent item in the foreign market. The average annual export of raw silk during the eight years ending in 1820-21 was worth nearly seventy five lakhs of rupees.⁶³ In the year 1819-

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 407.

⁶² S. C. Guha, p.126.

⁶³ G. A. Prinsep, *Remarks on the External Commerce and Exchanges of Bengal*, London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1823. p. 36.

20, the export of raw silk reached its highest level and was valued at rupees 94, 10,743.⁶⁴ The export to England alone was more than 67 lakhs of rupees.⁶⁵

The persons who came from England and built private filatures in Bengal failed in their attempts and had returned. The high price demanded for cocoons was beyond the capacity of the British private traders to pay. Moreover, the rent of mulberry lands was charged four times higher than that of other lands.⁶⁶ It was complained that the Company kept the price high for avoiding the competition of the private traders. But the allegation was not true. The cause of its success has to be sought elsewhere. The Company was directly connected with Bengal and knew the pulse of the people. The experience and contact with the people helped the Company to run the business smoothly. That was the reason why progress in silk trade made by the Company was more satisfactory than that of the private merchants. The quantity of silk piece goods exported by the Company were obviously less than that of raw silk.

The silk manufactures exported to England were intended not for the British market but for re – export to other countries of Europe. In addition to it there was also demand for Bengal silk goods outside Europe and the demand steadily increased due to the fall of the cotton piece goods' trade.⁶⁷ After the Napoleonic wars, the export of Bengal silk goods to Europe increased in spite of the progress of silk manufactures in Italy and France. A kind of unbleached silk called *corah* appeared to be in great

⁶⁴ S. C. Guha, Op. Cit., p.131.

⁶⁵ H. H. Wilson, *A Review of the External Commerce of Bengal*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1830. p.67.

⁶⁶ S. C. Guha, Op. Cit., p. 131.

⁶⁷ H. H. Wilson, *A Review of the External Commerce of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1830. p. 95

demand in the markets of Europe. Finally, the Charter Act of 1833 compelled the East India Company to wind up its silk trade in Bengal, but the native zamindars, pykars and silk merchants did not get the profit from Bengal silk cultivation and trade. So, they raised protest against the monopoly of the silk trade of the East India Company in 1834.⁶⁸ Lastly, the East India Company had to withdraw its illegitimate policies and works from silk industry and trade in 1835.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SILK TRADE:

After the industrial revolution in England, the English East India Company tried to encourage for the production of raw silk and the Company could force upon Malda a transition from manufacture of silk fabrics to a producer of raw silk as a semi-manufactured stuff.⁶⁹ Due to the industrial revolution, a huge portion of raw silk was needed for producing silk piece goods in England cloth factories. So, the English East India Company exported raw silk from Bengal, especially from Malda, because Malda was the largest silk cultivation and production centre in the Bengal province.

The native silk cultivators were bounded to the continuous supply of raw silk due to the Dadni system. It has been pointed out that the English East India Company moulded the role of the traditional dadni merchant to its own needs and developed a business organization based on brokers and pykars. Although the native silk workers obtained some profit from the inland trade, but they were affected by the external trade, history proves that the loss of inland market was more pathetic than the loss of the

⁶⁸ Letter written by Zamindars, Pykars and silk Merchants of Bengal to William Barendish Bentinck, Governor General in Council, Fort William 24 November 1834, enclosed in letter from Secretary to Government in General Department, dated 1 December, Letter No. 21, petitioners also send true copy to H. J. Princep, Secretary to Government, Proceeding, Board of Trade (Commercial), Proceeding No. 45, Vol. 542, 11 December 1834, WBSA, Calcutta.

⁶⁹ B. D. Basu, *The Ruins of Indian Trade and Industries during British Raj*, London : Discovery Publisher, 1989, p. 85.

external market.⁷⁰ The colonial exploitation and hegemonic attempt by British on a primary producing country served the interests of the English industries.

During this transitional phase, the native silk artisans of Malda suffered extremely, because they had no choice and the British Company was the only buyer.⁷¹ The glorious silk economy of Malda was lost under the colonial pressure and Malda existed only with unbalanced economy. The British Raj captured the entire resource of Malda resulting in misery.

After the discussion on the internal and external silk trade of Malda, I argue that the native silk merchants lost their glamorous position due to inequitable policies of the British and that the Company reached the unquestionable position as trader, who was the main regulator of the entire silk business of Bengal, especially in Malda. However, the silk industry and trade of Malda were comprised of the different economic transition and historical variation during the period under observation (1770 – 1833).

From the industrial context, ‘without adequate financial support no business can survive. Without sound financial management, no business can prosper and grow.’⁷² This reality fully proved of the silk

⁷⁰ Hoque Sabiruddin, ‘The Real Condition of Silk Industry in Malda Under the Colonial Rule (1757 – 1833) : An Introduction’, *Manan*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, October 2018, p. 368.

⁷¹ Om Prakash, Op. Cit., p. 151.

⁷² H. V. Shivappa, *Indian Silk Industry*, Varanasi : Ganga Kaberi Publishing House, 2001, p. 79.

industry and trade of the Malda under colonial oppression. Native people involved in the different stages of the silk cultivation, production – organization, silk industry and trade, lost their minimum economic efficiency by the inhuman colonial motives of the British Raj.