

PREFACE

In this thesis the agrarian economy and the trading structure of South West Bengal of the second half of the eighteenth century (1753-1790) have been analysed. The main purpose of this research is to review the elements like local agricultural production, salt production, producers, local trade, traders' community, collection of *sair* and the system of the markets. The matters related to production and exchange has been specially emphasized. More over the trading organization of the English East India Company and their attempt to set up mastery on different fields as the administrators have also been discussed.

The tenure of my discussion is from 1753-1790. The period is so much significant in the history of trade and business of South West Bengal. At the beginning of the second half of the eighteenth century, with the treaty signed between Raghuji Bhosle for the Maratha and Alivardi Khan – the *Nawab* of Bengal peace regained in South West Bengal and the regional industries based on agrarian economy began to be developed. At the same time the English East India Company introduced agency system in 1753 to collect necessary goods, having faced troubles in this regard through the *dadni* system. This agency system influenced the regional industry and development of internal trade and business. On the other hand, in 1790 the English Company as the chief of the administration of the South West Bengal as well as the entire Bengal formed Board of *Sayer* to operate markets and trading system smoothly by reforming the former defects. According to the regulations on June 11, 1790 it was said that no landlords or any other else, in future, could collect duties, *levy* etc. Only the state would be the sole authority to enjoy such right. So the destined period bears too much importance in my research.

One of the main objectives of this thesis has been to establish that the second half of the eighteenth century in South West Bengal was a period of intense commercialization brought about by a combination of factors inspired the traders to be united in internal trade. Firstly, the high price of the goods benefitted the merchants in the province. Secondly, the merchants would control the price of goods favourable to them between town and countryside. Thirdly, they would collect agricultural goods from the *ryots* in low rate but sold those in consumers in a satisfied price in the urban areas. Apart from these, the Famine of 1770 favoured of them.

The Company's entry into the internal trade had a clear impact on the internal markets of South West Bengal. By the regulations of 1773, the merchants got free from the hindrance of the outposts, toll stations and economically important areas. The merchants immediately reacted on it. They re-established the private *gunjs* to collect their necessary goods or buy others from those markets. From the *golahs* and the landing places grains were turned out. The government ordered the customs house to engage officials at various places. The re-distribution of the markets for the merchants increased the direct control of the internal markets both in network and distribution.

The state introduced more modifications in the existing structure of taxation and duties in 1790. The land holders were prohibited from collecting any *sair* and in return were offered compensation. The Company intended to break what it perceived as the existing bottlenecks in local marketing systems but not for general freedom of trade, but for its own benefit. The Company intended to execute the trading operated freely by the local traders in the regional fields. The Company's attempted regulatory management systems appeared to have met with partial success and evoked a mixed response.