CHAPTER - 6

THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY AND THE CONDITION OF THE PEASANTRY
The peasantry of the Burdwan Zamindari, who paid ground rents, were of two kinds: the Khudkast and the Paikast ryots. The Khudkast, who were fixed and permanent ryots, possessed a certain piece of ground, the rent of which was payable whether they cultivated it or not. They were liable to pay their proportion of all general assessments and whilst they complied with the legal demands, it had not been the custom of the country to eject them from their grounds. But this custom was often broken through for profit of the farmer by turning out one ryot to make room for the other, who offered better terms for the same ground. The ryots being unable to pay the rent also sometime quitted their Khudkast lands. These removals naturally caused variations amongst the ryots of this category in their established articles of assessment. It was not customary to grant annual Pattas to them as their Jumma was in general supposed to be known.

The Paikat ryots were those who cultivated the lands not particularly appropriated either by annual Patta or for a longer term as might be agreed up on by them and the farmer. They paid only for such lands as they cultivated and in their agreements, stipulated for the number of Abwabs they were to pay as well as the rate of the Vasil. The Paikat ryots were of two types: Thika ryots and Khamar ryots. The former undertook for a certain quantity of ground at a fixed rate. But the latter, cultivating the Khamar lands, received a certain

1. PCRB, Prog., 5 August 1776; BR, Prog., 24 June 1788.
share of the produce thereof.¹

Varieties of crop were cultured in the fertile lands of Burdwan. The Aus paddy, sown in Baisakh (April-May) and gathered in Bhadra (August-September), and the Aman paddy, sown in Asar (June-July) and harvested in Aghran (November-December), along with wheat constituted the staple crops. Besides, pulses, vegetables, spice, fruits and cash crops of different kinds were produced. The pulses included lentils, Mung, Chick-pea, Mas Kalai, Arahari, pea, etc. The mustard and sesame constituted the oilseeds. The vegetables comprised aubergine, Ol, Karala, Jainga, varieties of edible herbs, onions, garlics, etc. Spices like ginger, etc. and fruits like cucumber, water-melon, etc. were also cultured. The cash crops included mulberry, jut, indigo, Kapan, sugarcane, betel leaves, and coconut.²

Besides discharging the 'established revenue', the ryots had to pay several Abwabs, which differed from one region to another and even from village to village. Some of the cesses, which were originally in the nature of additions to the Asal Jumma, had often been consolidated with it and thus a new standard assumed as the basis of succeeding impositions. Hence the Provincial Council of Burdwan found in June 1776 that "the several heads of collection vary in almost every village throughout the Province."³ By about the same time, G.G. Ducarel,

1. Ibid. G.G. Ducarel, the Superintendent of the Khalsa Records, was made to believe by the zamindari Karmacharis that the produce of the Khamar lands was equally divided between the ryots and the farmer, which varied in some trifling particulars. The truth, however, was otherwise.
2. PCRB, Progs., 22 August and 26 September 1774; Appendix to BR, vol.34, Part II (29 April 1788); Appendix 15.
3. PCRB, Progs., 28 June 1776.
the Superintendent of the Khalsa Records, also observed:

"The aboabs differ perhaps in every village and each ryott may be said to have his special custom which often is only known to himself & the writers of the village to which he belongs. The consequence of this intricacy is that it may be in the power of the Farmer to claim more articles than his due, and of the ryott by connivance with the Puttwary to conceal them. The very calculation of the articles themselves is so difficult and complicated that it is liable to great mistakes. When complaints are made no man can clear them up but the writer or Puttwary of the village or by reference to his papers. It seems the interest of all the parties to preserve this complicated system and the ignorant ryott being attached to it by prejudice & long usage."

The ryots could pay their rent either in cash or in kind. Cash rent was known as Naga, the importance of which in terms of rental must have been lesser than that of produce rent inssofar as natural economy as yet prevailed over money economy in the countryside. Produce rent was of two types: Sanja and Khamar. The Sanja was, as defined by Collector Ireland in 1796, "payable in kind with the quantity of grain specified". As per their quality, the Sanja lands annually paid from ½ - 5 maunds of grain in Bishnupur. As reported by another Collector, John Kinlock, the Khamar lands had no settled tenants but were cultivated by contract, the terms being various in various parts of Burdwan. The farmer, however, used to engage with ryots of the most contiguous villages and after the gathering in of the harvest, it was divided by established proportions.

1. Ibid, Prog., 5 August 1776.
between the farmer and the cultivator of 1:1 or 2:1 or the cultivator in some cases retained the entire produce and paid a certain amount in money calculated upon the price which the same article might bear in the adjacent market. According to A. Hesilrige, the officer on deputation to Bishnupur, the Kut Khamar was a mode of assessment, whereby an estimate of the quantity of grain a field would likely to produce was made by not less than five principal villagers, half of which at all events must be paid to Government. The Khal Khamar was another mode of assessment, whereby the Gomasta and the ryot made a division of the harvested grain, the former taking from each heap as much as he could draw at once with both hands at the further advantage of Government and a somewhat less quantity for himself. The straw in both the modes became the property of the ryot. In all probability, the prevailing forms of rent in Burdwan were more less similar to Bishnupur.

According to a new model of peasant stratification in eighteenth century Bengal as devised by a recent researcher, there were only two broad strata — the owners of adequate and inadequate land or those who could reproduce their domestic economies and those who could not or, to be more specific, the middling and the poor. Therefore, the gap between the relatively rich and the comparatively poor was very small and any major natural calamity could easily reduce the former to the ranks of the latter. Naturally, the bulk of the rural population could not keep at hand sufficient seed stock and reserves of foodgrain to tide over even one season of

scarcity. Burdwan could not have been an exception to this general situation.

The peasantry of Burdwan were overwhelmingly dependent on the monsoon rains, which were but uncertain. Irrigation, though not as modern and as widespread as it is now, was not unknown to the Burdwanites. In fact, agriculture in eastern Burdwan largely depended on 'overflow irrigation', while that in the central and western quarters on irrigation by tanks. But the early colonial government seriously neglected the Pulbandi repairs and the Burdwan zamindar also did the same under the mounting pressure of rack-renting. The primary given to revenue-collection vis-a-vis public utility service and the publication of an order prohibiting the excavation of tanks were steps fraught with danger. All these made the Burdwanites more vulnerable to natural calamities.

Since the tenurial system was prevalent in Burdwan, the cultivators of the soil had no direct access to or connection with the zamindar but through several levels of rent-collecting intermediaries. Each level managed its own profit while collecting the rent from its immediately subordinate stratum and paying the same to its immediately superior collector. Thus, the incidence of rent gradually increased downwards in the


multi-tier agrarian structure and, in the last instance, fell heavily on the ryots. The Permanent Settlement did more harm to them than it bettered their circumstances. The Regulation XXXV of 1795 and the Regulation VII of 1799 that came in the wake of the Cornwallis System weakened the position of the husbandmen vis-a-vis the zamindars and the farmers. When a novel kind of 'subinfeudatory' land tenure called the Pattani system was introduced by the Burdwan Raja by around the turn of the century, the intermediate levels had got a definite landholding status, though not yet legalised, whereas the situation of the tenantry became far more distressing.

With this general framework in mind, it would now be wholesome to analyse at length the sources and nature of oppressions on the peasantry and their reactions thereto and then to arrive at the all-important question of whether their lot really improved or deteriorated under early colonial policies and practices.

The Sources and Nature of Oppressions on the Peasantry

Needless to say, the late eighteenth century peasantry of Burdwan had been a prey to varied kinds of oppressions perpetrated by the economically powerful classes positioned above them in the social hierarchy. During the period under discussion, the following sources of oppression may be detected:

1. the zamindar,
2. the merchant-Mahajans,
3. the intermediate landed interests belonging to the tenurial and or the subinfeudatory land systems,
(iv) the Mandals or the village headmen, and
(v) miscellaneous.

(1) Due to the severe inundation of September-October 1787, the Burdwan Raja fell in balance and prayed for remissions of the revenue-demand to the English authorities. This being not granted, he began to adopt rigorous means to collect his revenues. At this, the Collector observed that "if the Zemindar enforces such rigorous chastisements upon his farmers, they must press the petty Izaradars etc. & then it must ultimately fall upon the Ryotts, who, being unable to comply with their demands, are through necessity obliged to fly to other provinces, not only to the local but future prejudice of this Province. ¹ It appears from this incident that the adoption of any stringent policy by the early colonial Government reached down to the cultivators of the soil via the Zamindar, the Sadar Mustagirs, the Kutkipadars and so on, its intensity being increased at each of those levels. Since the Company's Government was ever unwilling to remit or even suspend the revenue-demand despite an extremely unusual situation had taken place, the plight of the ryots knew no bounds as they were pressed for their revenue dues when they had not even the means of subsistence.

The placing of Mahsule over the ryots by the Zamindar and the farmers was another "source of infinite oppression". Their heavy expenses prevented the under-renters and the ryots from making good their balances and ultimately attended with a very considerable loss of revenue to the Zamindar. According

¹. BR, Prog ., 15 February 1788.
to Collector Mercer's estimate, not less than three or even four lakhs of rupees were annually expended in Burdwan for charges of Mahsuls alone to the great detriment of revenue. This practice also caused the loss of a numerous body of men, who would otherwise be obliged to gain a subsistence by cultivating lands instead of the idle employment they professed of acting as guards over their neighbours. Moreover, the Zamindar was "both a party & judge in revenue disputes". He often applied severity in collecting the revenue and deputed Tahsildars into the Mufassal on the complaint of the farmers without any reference to the court of justice.

The Zamindar also imposed on the ryots occasional imposts or cesses called Mathots, which were of "peculiar Hardship to the Ryots". We came to know from a representation by the ryots of Tuppa Barda at the close of 1775 that a hundred kinds of exactions under pretence of the Raja's or his family's social ceremonies, Pulbandi, etc. were used to be levied on them. Shortly afterwards, they again complained that a Mathot for the Raja's wedding was imposed on them, which was ordered by the Provincial Council of Burdwan to be refunded. The Zamindar also collected the Merdar Jumma, "an oppressive article of the Bazee Jumma", in Kalna and other villages along the banks of the Ganga, which was ordered by the Governor-General in Council on 4 October 1776 to be abolished. The Managers were instructed accordingly and a publication was made at the Dewan Daftar and the Dewani Adalat of Burdwan.

1. Ibid, Prog •, 11 October 1790.
2. SC, Prog •, 9 May 1770.
3. PCRB, Prog •, 29 December 1775.
4. Ibid, Prog •, 4 January 1776.
to the above effect. ¹ At the beginning of 1777, the Kutkinedare and ryots of Burdwan represented against the collections of Nemodari Salami, Darry batta of 18 Gandes and Jaydadi Mangan and Mamuli Mathot.² Since 1787-1788, the seven Cowrie assessment was imposed by the Zamindar under the name of Rastabandi. This tax having been collected without any authority from Government, Collector Mercer considered himself obliged to prohibit it by the 50 Article of the Revenue Regulations as well as by the Board of Revenue's orders of 4 August 1789. But the six Cowrie assessment, which had been collected since 1782-1783 under the name of Sadar Kurtun, was allowed to remain because the Collector recommended it as its present abolition would cause much confusion in the accounts of the settlement now forming and as the ryots did not object to its payment.

It had been one of the principal objects of the early colonial revenue administrators to put a stop to every kind of extra exactions from the peasantry over and above their established revenue. Of course, it did not emanate from any goodwill to protect the cultivators from oppressions perpetrated by the indigenous rent-collecting agencies and to help them improving their lot by saving the surplus after paying the standard Jumma for subsistence and gearing up husbandry. The early colonial Government had, on the contrary, only one point in view, that of keeping the swan that begot golden eggs unhurt! That is why, we find two articles in the resolutions of

¹ Ibid, Prog., 7 October 1776.
² Ibid, Prog., 22 January 1777.
³ BR, Prog., 1 November 1790.
14 May 1776, formulated for the management of the Burdwan Zamindari, prohibiting the imposition of any unlicensed exactions on pain of forfeiture and punishment. On 29 January 1779, the Burdwan Council categorically warned Kaliprasad Sing, the Zamindari Dewan, not to collect beyond what was just from the under-renters and the ryots for he would have to be brought to account for any conduct on the contrary. The Zamindar also had always to undertake not to levy any kinds of arbitrary imposts but the established revenue whenever he had the occasion of entering upon a new settlement with the Company's Government. These, however, could not deter him.

The anticipation of revenue often made by the Zamindar was another curse which told heavily upon the indigent cultivators. In the autumn of 1788, to cite only one instance, the Raja withheld payment of revenue although he collected in full the Kist of Aswin (September-October) and even anticipated that of Kartik (October-November). Such "early & unusual anticipation of the rents", observed Collector Brooke, "certainly is attended with immediate & considerable distress to the Ryotts as the only means the Ryotts can have to answer such premature demands is either by mortgaging his crops or borrowing of money on exorbitant terms—either of which must hamper the spirit of Industry, lessen his small profits & ultimately prove injurious to Government."

Especially, the plight of the ryots of the Khamar lands

1. PCRB, Prog ., 18 May 1776.
2. Ibid, Prog ., 29 January 1779.
3. BR, Prog ., 29 August 1788.
4. Ibid, Prog ., 7 October 1788.
of the Zamindar knew no bounds. Since there were no fixed rules about the division of the produce between the two parties in lands of this denomination, the Burdwan Zamindar often made an arbitrary division of the crop in his favour. In cases of disputed shares, he must certainly have applied physical force like confinement and flogging for tilting the balance to his advantage. Collector Brooke attributed the impoverished condition of Pargana Mandalghat in the early 1790s to several causes, one being the coercions exercised by the Kutkinadars, to whom the Raja had farmed out the Khamar lands of the Pargana. This is how the situation prevailed therein: "In the Kummar lands it is the Custom of the Pargunnah for the Ryott to receive his share in the proportion of 9 in 20. With this equitable mode of distribution, the Ryott would well be contented if it was faithfully adhered to, but the Cutkinnadar usually overrates the produce by which means the Ryott is left with a very inadequate recompense for his labour. In addition to this imposition, the Ryott is obliged to pay in ready money such proportion of the crops as belonged to the Zamindar and Cutkinnadar. He suffers another violent oppression by an arbitrary valuation. For example, if a Ryott has to pay for 100 maunds of rice & if agreeable to the price at which he sells it at the Bazar it produces 100 Rs., the Cutkinnadar enhances the value of Rice by making the Ryott pay him back at the rate of 1 [rupee] for 32 seers by which the Ryott sustains a loss of 8 seers in every maund & is compelled to pay 125 [rupees] for rice which he could only sell for 100 Rs."

1. PCRB, Progs., 29 December 1775 and 4 January 1776.
2. BR, Prog ., 6 July 1792.
The early colonial Government also occasionally strengthened the hands of the Zamindars that oppressed the peasantry. The Permanent Settlement, though secured the interests of the landholders, did not give adequate protection to the cultivating classes. Deeming it in many respects deficient for fully protecting the interests of the Zamindars, the Regulation XXXV was enacted in 1795, which armed them with summary powers of distraining their tenants' property but it also required a time-consuming judicial process to bring distrained property to auction. So far, so good. But Governor-General Wellesley promulgated the notorious Regulation VII of 29 August 1799, generally known as Haptam. It was a law for enabling proprietors and farmers of land to realise their rents with greater punctuality by empowering them "to distrain, without sending notice to any court of justice or any public officer, the crops and products of the earth of every description, the grain, cattle, and all other personal property" of their defaulting ryots. Once the landlord or his agent distrained the cultivator's property, the latter had only one of the two alternative courses open to him: either to pay the rent claimed (i.e., to give up his rights at once) or to enter into a bond with good security, binding himself to institute a civil suit within 15 days for the trial of the demand and to pay whatever sum might be adjudged to be due from him with an interest of 12% per annum (i.e., to enter upon an expensive litigation with a powerful and unscrupulous superior). Thus, at the turn of the century, the position of the ryots vis-a-vis the Zamindar became extremely precarious.

But the coin had its other side as well. The ryots were often found to complain to the English authorities against the imposition of extra-legal exactions by the Zamindari Karma-charis. In consequence, summons were issued into the Mufassal for requiring the perpetrators to appear at Burdwan for trial, whereas on the plea of being sub judice, the complainants stopped payment of their revenues. Between 19 October 1778 and 27 January 1779, no less than 1,217 such complaints were made to the Burdwan Council. The summons having been issued during the season of the heavy collections, the progress and the amount of revenue-collection suffered a serious setback. There can be little doubt that most of the complaints were grounded upon trifling causes with the sole aim of withholding payment. In August 1787, the Raja complained to the Collector that a great loss had been incurred by him by the latter’s summoning the farmers and Zamindari officers in the Mufassal to answer to “small complaints” preferred against them by the ryots. Since he was responsible to Government for the revenues of Burdwan, he solicited that all such complaints should be first made to him and upon his not redressing them satisfactorily, they should make their references to the Collector. Kinlock did not consider his request to be “unreasonable”. As for reasons, he commented: “I have found a great many of the complaints of Ryotts extremely frivolous & solely for the purpose of not wishing to defray their Revenues & causing unnecessary delay.”

1. PCRB, Prog., 29 January 1779.
2. BR, Prog., 21 August 1787.
(11) The bulk of the late eighteenth century Bengal peasantry were so resourceless that they could not even commence their agricultural operations without outside financial aid. The small peasant holdings depending excessively on the subsistence sector in agriculture were naturally vulnerable to any unbalancing forces, what to speak of the almost continuous saga of food scarcities and near-famine situations during 1769-1800 in Bengal\(^1\) as well as in Burdwan. After the murderous famine of 1769-1770 occasioned both by natural and human factors, recurrent floods happened in the *Zamindari* in September 1770, 1771-1772, 1772-1773, 1781, September-October 1787, May and September 1788, September 1791, August 1792, July and September 1794, August 1795, September 1796, June, July and August 1798 and August 1800. These inundations were also caused by natural as well as human factors leading to entire or partial crop failures. \(^2\) It was this chronic shortage of working capital and uncertainties of production that provided the backdrop for the entrance of the merchant-Mahajans to the realm of agrarian production.

They advanced to the peasants consumption and production loans. The former type of loans were taken at an exorbitant rate of interest depending on the dictates of the creditor chiefly for maintaining the poor peasant families in particularly bad agricultural seasons. Since a series of good harvests were few and far between in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, they could not circumvent the prospects of prolonged indebtedness and, in the contrary,  

\(^1\) Datta, R., *Agricultural Production .... etc.*, pp.94-97 and *Merchants and peasants .... etc.*, pp. 383,392-393, 399.  
\(^2\) Vide supra,
were compelled through necessity to take further loans, whereby a vicious cycle was created. The latter type of loans were given as advance payments long before the commencement of the agricultural season for meeting the costs of cultivation. Since the agricultural season for Aman paddy was Asar-Aghran (June-December), advances on this crop were made in Pous (December-January) or Magh (January-February) of the previous year. Similarly, as the season for Aus paddy was Baisak-Bhadra (April-September), loans were given in Aswin (September-October) of the preceding year. Of course, in the case of the latter crop, Gomastas were alternatively sent to the countryside to purchase the surplus produce at harvest from the ryots before they could dispose it to others.

Naturally, such a system of rural crediting had a widespread impact on the peasantry. Even in a fertile region like Burdwan, an estimated 50% of the standing (Aman) crop in October 1794 was the product of production loans given by the merchant-Mahajans. Both the loans were, however, essentially oppressive, albeit necessary, in the then prevailing agrarian situation. If the interest in cash charged upon consumption loans ranged from 24-36%, that in kind upon production loans ranged from 38-50% per annum. Moreover, the price mechanism under which the latter type of loans were given was additionally profitable for the merchant-Mahajans. These were advanced six months before the commencement of the agricultural season.

1. Datta's articles. The same point had been succinctly suggested earlier by W.B. Bayley in 'Statistical View of the Population of Burdwan', Asiatick Researches, vol. 12, 1816, p. 553.
season when prices were at their highest and repayments had to be made immediately after the harvest when prices were at their lowest, thereby compelling the ryots to part with a larger portion of the produce while making adjustments for the seasonal price variation. The peasantry could not but acquiesce in this subservience because of their shortage of resources and lack of storage facility and means of transportation of grain. These loans had become so long-standing a custom that the ryots could not think of without them; the cultivators of Pargana Burdwan confessed in August 1774 that it "is only because of the merchants that we have the means of purchasing our subsistence and preserving our lives."¹

(iii) The pre-Permanent Settlement tenurial society or post-Settlement subinfeudatory society of eighteenth century Burdwan was multi-tier in structure. Collector Davis observed in mid-1793: "The Rajah's whole Zemindarry is let in farm to persons termed Sudder Mustagirs, or Farmers holding their leases immediately from the Zemindar. These Sudder Mustagirs have parcelled out the greatest part, but not the whole, of their Farms to underrenters, called Kutkenadars; some of whom have again subdivided the lands they hold among yet smaller farmers; so that there are, in some instances, a gradation of four persons between Government and the Ryotts, though in general it extends only to one Kutkenadar, and in some cases the Sudder Mustagir collects part of his rent from the Ryotts himself."² The notable Karmcbaris of the Zemindari

¹ Datta's articles.
² BR, Prog., 12 June 1793.
were themselves Sadar Mustagirs such as Nandakumar Roy, the Dewan, Gangaram Mitra, the Karkun, Debnath Sing Chowdhuri, the In-charge of Records, and Budhan Chandra Mitra, principal Counsellor and Manager in different Daftars. Besides, so numerous were the servants and dependents of the Raja and his family and they had for so long a time been under-renters of small portions of all the Parganas of Burdwan that at a new settlement a Sader farmer was bound to find himself in difficulties to let his Parganas in Kutkina without having recourse to them.

The working of this multi-level rent-collecting apparatus had been a potent cause of distress to the peasantry in more ways than one. Understandably, the rent index escalated as it passed downwards from the Company through the Zaminder, the Sadar Mustagirs, the Kutkinadars the under-renters and reached the cultivators of the soil at the bottom of the agrarian hierarchy insofar as everyone aimed at collecting from his immediately lower rung the amount of rent payable by him to his immediate overlord plus his personal profit. To be sure, Collector Davis informed the Board of Revenue on 9 June 1793 that "the Kutkinadarry Jumma exceeds the settlement made by the Rajah with his Sudder Mustagirs." Again, when the Raja's acquisitions in Twenty-four Parganas and his purchases in Bishnupur were resolved to be sold and he furnished the Collector the papers relative to them, it was found that the amount of the Sadar Mustageri Jumma on all those Mahals was Rs. 6,71,745 whereas the Kutkinadari Jumma Sa. Rs. 6,74,364, the

1. Ibid, Prog ., 24 June 1793.
2. PCRB, Prog ., 19 June 1777.
3. BR, Prog ., 12 June 1793.
difference being Re. 2,619. 1 Naturally, with the increase in the volume of the rental, increased the rent difficulties, both of which assumed the maximum proportions at the bottom rung of the agrarian society.

These intermediate landed interests also used to impose on the ordinary peasants unauthorised, extra-legal exactions. In June 1776, the Zamindari Dewan delivered in a form of a Kabuleat to be taken from the under-renters of the Raja, wherein they were to bind themselves not to collect from the ryots Ozun, Mathot, tax on Pulbandi, Wangan, fines and Salamy on account of the Base Jumma being excused by the orders of the English authorities. They had also to individually undertake that "If the Collection of any is proved against me, I will pay the Penalty according to the Orders of the Committee." 2

In the same month, the Burdwan Council recommended to the Governor-General in Council that each Kutkinadar on delivering his Kabuleat should execute a Muchleka to grant Pattas to his ryots at the Jumma of 1768-1769 exclusive of all Mathote and subject himself to a heavy penalty in case of his collecting from them more than was paid for the same lands in that year. 3

But all these and similar other efforts, as it appears from subsequent current of events, proved to be utterly ineffective.

Numerous complaints were made by the ryots from time to time against illegal exactions by the farmers, the Kutkinadars and under-Kutkinadars, citation of a few of which would be certainly illustrative. In November 1776, the ryots of Kamalpur in Pargana Khandaghosh complained that Kushal Sing,

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1. Ibid, Prog ., 19 July 1793.
2. PCRB, Prog ., 8 June 1776.
3. Ibid, Prog ., 28 June 1776.
who took Kamalpur in Kutkina from the Gomaste of Kutkinadar. Ram Sing Jamadar, had paid no attention to the public orders and demanded from them Ozup, Mathot and Batta. For the last four months, he refused to accept the Kists paid by the ryots, assembled and beat them and plundered their effects. Having been thus tormented, they petitioned for his removal. The parties attending, another Gomaste was sent and assurances were given that no further oppression would be committed. 1

In the next month came a complaint from the ryots of village Chakhari in Pargana Baira against the exactions of the Kutkinadar, who demanded from them Ozup, Pulbandi, Parbandi, Deva Kharcha, Sader Parbani, Chanda, Mouza Salami and Batta. Further, as they formerly twice paid voluntary donations on account of defraying funeral expenses of a farmer and wedding of two brothers of the next farmer, the present farmer wanted to include these voluntary donations in the Jumma. They, therefore, solicited that an order be issued so that "the Kutkeenadar take no more from us than the just revenue."

Thereupon, the Burdwan Council wrote a Parwana to Gangaram Mitra, the farmer of Pargana Baira, forbidding him to make extra-collections. 2

How such exactions by the farmers distressed both the lesser Kutkinadars and the ordinary peasants is evident from a petition sent by the Kutkinadars of Pargana Bhursut. They complained against Laxminarayan Chatterjee, the farmer of the Pargana, for confining and oppressing them for increase and inclusion of Deva Kharcha and Parbani. He curtailed Chanda from their rents and increased the Jumma on the false

1. Ibid, Prog., 19 November 1776.
2. Ibid, Prog., 9 December 1776.
plea of addition of new Mahals. As a breach appeared in the existing Bandh in village Digarocy in 1774-1775, they and the ryots as well got deduction but this year, it had been refused by the Sadar renter. He also claimed Batta, Mouza Salami, ducks and fowls from the ryots, which the petitioners stated that "we do not receive in Moffussil". Not only that, he put peons over the poor ryots and thus put them to expense. The consequences of all these were that six villages became desolate and Rs.500 was incurred as balance. As per their request, the Burdwan Council ordered the Dewan Daftar to enquire about the grievances.

Though in this case complainants, the Kutkinadars in general were in no less degree perpetrators of oppressions over the peasantry. Witness the outrages committed by the Kutkinadar of Kushurdanga in Pargana Balia, who exacted fines from the ryots, sold their trees and fish from their ponds and even forcibly took possession of a tank dug by a ryot. Also witness the tyranny of Jaduram Roy, the Kutkinadar of village Saku in Pargana Bagha. He threw the cultivators out of their houses for making gardens, took fish out of their ponds and sold the houses of deserted ryots. On the Khansamani Dewan's failure to redress them, the Burdwan Council ordered the dissatisfied ryots to pay their rents to the Sadar Izadar of the Pargana instead of Jaduram. Similarly, Sitaram Pal, an inhabitant of Chuatni in Pargana Azmutshahi, complained of exactions by his farmer over and above the established revenue. As a number of peasants from different

1. Ibid, Prog ., 1 February 1777.
2. Ibid, Prog ., 12 January 1776.
3. Ibid, Prog ., 4 February 1777.
parts of the Zamindari arrived at Burdwan in April 1777 and represented that an increase in revenue was demanded from them and that they were threatened with dispossession on their refusing to comply with, a general Pervane forbidding the practice was sent to all the farmers of Burdwan. ¹ Notwithstanding, it does not seem that the evil was abated appreciably.

A custom had been introduced in Pargana Mandalghat since 1789 under the name of Nilam Beshi, the practice of which was attended with, according to Collector Brooke, "the most pernicious Effects & if suffered to continue will greatly reduce the Cultivation & consequently the Revenues of Government." The practice was as follows: The ryots generally commenced his cultivation about the beginning of Chaitra (March-April) and was far advanced in it by Asar (June-July), until which period the Kutkinadar was at liberty to accept offers of an increase for the land thus cultivated. If the cultivator agreed to pay the increase offered, he was continued in possession. But if not, he was instantly ousted and left to seek his redress for the loss of labour, the expense of seed, etc. What was a severe aggravation to this accumulated hardship, the season for cultivation being nearly over, he was rendered destitute of means for providing food for himself, his family and cattle. ²

The miserable condition of the peasantry remained much the same, if not became more acute, under the Pattani land

¹. Ibid, Prog ., 18 April 1777.
². BR, Prog ., 6 July 1792.
tenure insofar as now the intermediate interests, acquiring a new nomenclature, assumed the power and liabilities of a Zamindar so long as they punctually paid their revenues, which enhanced their power of non-economic coercion. This is, however, not strictly within the purview of the present study.

(iv) The social and economic influence of the Mandals was another potent source of oppression over the peasantry. The reason behind the formers' preponderance over the rural milieu is not hard to understand: "in the season of cultivation, they [the ryots] are supplied [by the Mandals] with loans on their crops to purchase the implements of husbandry & even for their immediate subsistence. Such loans are generally paid back in the produce of their lands estimated at the highest rate, loaded with a heavy & arbitrary interest & in the leisure season, they are employed by their several superiors in cultivating their Jarkannee & Rubbee crops...."

These opulent Mandals along with the intermediate landed interests thwarted an attempt of the Company's Government during 1776-1777 to provide the ryots of Burdwan with Pattas. To begin with, on 14 May 1776, the Governor-General in Council arrived at nineteen Resolutions in consequence of bestowing the revenue management of Burdwan upon the Zamindar thereof, the seventh of which bound him to grant Pattas to the ryots


2. PCRB, Legis., 17 January 1777.
on their requisition in a certain form to be prescribed by Government. Though this was at first grossly neglected by Dewan Lala Kushal Chand, the newly-appointed Managers started distributing Pattas to the Kutkinadars with strict instructions to issue them in no time to the ryots. But it was found after the expiration of the prescribed time-limit of six months that the process of distribution to the actual cultivators could not be started because despite laying the strictest injunctions throughout the Mufassal, "not a single Ryott as yet appeared to take out a Pottah".

The Burdwan Council attributed such backwardness of the ryots to the socio-economic influence of the farmers, the Kutkinadars and the Mandals: "It is evidently the interest of the Farmers and Kutkinadars to prevent the Ryotts being possessed of Pottahs for were this point to be affected [sic], their influence in mofussil as well as their advantages would immediately be at an end and the real Jumma of each district being thus positively ascertained, the Ryotts would object to contribute any further than their Pottahs specified to the many unjust & unascertained charges which in respite of every effort of Government are now brought against them by the Farmers and their agents through the means of the Head Ryotts or Mundals of each village, who are permitted to share in the extortion made from the poor and labouring Ryotts". This latter class were so circumstanced that they dared not to act

1. Ibid, Prog., 18 May 1776.
2. Ibid, Prog., 17 June 1776.
3. Ibid, Prog., 9 September 1776.
4. Ibid, Progs., 27 and 31 December 1776.
contrary to the wishes of their aforesaid superiors. The Burdwan Council realised that "we can never expect that the opulent Ryotts [i.e., the Mandals] will apply to for Pottahs of themselves but rather do everything in their power to prevent the inferior Ryotts from procuring them." They concluded that "the inferior Ryotts without the interposition of Government will never have a sufficient confidence to free themselves from this kind of vassalage which they now labour under to their Munduls & other opulent Ryotts...." They, therefore, devised a plan for distributing Pattas under the direct supervision of the members of the Council a few months later and reported to the Governor-General and Council of Revenue that "The only obstacles which we are apprehensive of meeting with would arise from the attempts of the Cutkennadars & opulent Munduls to frustrate the progress of a measure which would so materially affect their influence in the district & put a stop to the many unwarranted exactions." 

(v) Then there were external aggression, internal confusion and natural calamities to make the miseries of the peasantry full to the brim. As regards external aggression, the invasion of the Bangis in an organised way during 1742-1751 and sporadically during August 1760-February 1761 led to large-scale destruction of crops and desertion of the ryots. In fact, they were during the former period plundered both by

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, Prog *, 22 May 1777.
4. Vide supra.
5. Vide supra.
the Marathas and the detached parties of the Bengal army in the guise of the *Barris.*

Internal confusion was created by the frequent movements of the Company's troops and the occasional deterioration and tension in the relationships between the Burdwan Raja and the Company or the intermediate landed interests. In 1760, Maharaja Tilak Chand complained that the Telengas, who had encamped at several places of his zamindari, went into the villages of Pargana Mandalghat, Jahanabad, Chitwa, Bhursut, Baligari, Chowmua, etc. and "plundered the inhabitants and otherwise ill-treated them". The ryots were thus obliged to run away and even the zamindari karmacharis could not remain there to collect the revenues. From this, he claimed that a loss of two or three lakhs of rupees accrued. When after his return from Birbhum, Major White captured a fort in Burdwan in January 1761, the Raja registered a similar complaint of loss of revenue. In March 1761, he entreated the Calcutta Council to recall Sumner from Burdwan, where his presence with a force had caused such a panic amongst the inhabitants that they were leaving the villages through which he passed to the great detriment of the collections. Besides, often the relationship of the zamindar with the Company as well as with his subordinate landed intermediaries became tensed regarding matters of revenue, creating an undesirable confusion in the rural milieu.

Last but not the least, there were what they generally regarded as 'punishments by the Providence', i.e., plight due

1. Vide supra.
2. Long, op.cit., items 499 and 500.
3. Ibid, item 539.
4. Vide supra.
to natural calamities. The famine of 1769-1770; the violent storm of 18 and 19 Kartik 1194 B.S. (November 1787 A.D.); the floods of September 1770, 1771-72-1772-73, 1781, September 1787, May and September 1788, September 1791, August 1792, July and September 1794, August 1795, September 1796, June, July and August 1798, August 1800 created a deplorable situation of chronic shortage, if not always a crisis, of food, enfeebling thereby the bulk of the peasantry composed of "the inferior Ryotts". Their distress increased more due to the policy of the Company's Government not to make as far as possible remission or suspension of the revenue-demand even in the event of any severe natural calamity in order to keep its lion's share of the agrarian surplus intact.

The Modes of Peasant protest

It is quite unjust to take it for granted that the late eighteenth century peasantry of Burdwan were utterly non-reactive and omnipatient. But given the socio-politico-economic strength and influence of their tormentors, their reactions to the many-fold oppressions on them could not but be limited in intensity and extent as well. However, their reactions may be classified into passive and active modes of protest: the former included petition to the English authorities and desertion of their lands and habitations; the latter comprised assemblage before the alien authorities and open defiance and violence. Of course, all these were by nature rudimentary forms of peasant resistance.

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1. Vide supra.
2. BR. Prog., 7 December 1787.
3. Vide supra.
The very first step of this culture of protest was to send petition either to the Collector or to the Chief of the Provincial Council of Burdwan or through either of them to the higher authorities at Calcutta. Herein, they described the cause of their distress, the methods adopted by its perpetrator and requested early redress of their grievances. Thereupon, an enquiry into the complaint usually took place by the orders of the authorities and the complainants sometimes got redress wholly or partially and sometimes not.

If and when petitions failed, they often took to desertion. In fact, given the heavyweight of their outragers, this was the most suitable passive method of leaving the site of oppression silently and secretly forever as well as registering an indirect protest against the oppressive practices at the same time.

Distress due to drought, famine and flood and the policy respecting natural calamities as pursued by the early colonial administrators and their indigenous collaborators were the potent causes of desertion. During the great famine of 1769-1770, when almost all the peasant families had no means of subsistence, the Company made a very trifling remission of the revenue-demand and continued the collections with the utmost severity. Not only that the actual collections were kept at par with the pre-famine years but it was even increased in the year following the famine. Naturally, the destitute peasant families deserted their age-old lands and habitations in groups in search of food and employment. A severe drought took place in Burdwan in 1774 excepting its southern
most Parganas. The ryots upon their rents demanded began to desert into the neighbouring Districts to avoid payment. In order "to prevent a repetition of that fatal Mortality which was experienced in 1177 [1770-1771], Parvanas were issued to the farmers of the affected Parganas to treat the ryots with such lenity as to prevent their desertion and to assure them to remit their revenues where the crop had been destroyed. Among all the Parganas of Burdwan, Mandalghat, being situated at the confluence of the Damodar and the Rupnarayan rivers, was the most prone to inundations. In fact, it had become a regular annual phenomenon there. Whenever a flood happened and the crops and habitations of the peasants sustained damages, they being unable to pay their revenues deserted either to some "nearby villages" or "to a great distance." Of course, the husbandmen of Mandalghat were not unique in this respect; it became more or less a general practice everywhere that whenever the flood-stricken ryots were pressed for payment of revenue, they deserted.

The imposition of varied kinds of illegal exactions by the intermediate landed interests often led to peasant desertions. We are informed by a petition of 1777 from the Kutkinadars of Pargana Bhursut against Laxminarayan Chatterjee, the farmer thereof, that due to his many-fold oppressions, as many as six villages became desolate. Besides, as the Company's Government was ever unwilling to remit the state demand of revenue in spite of a severe natural calamity, the Zamindar usually adopted "rigorous extremities. He pressed his farmers

1. PCRB, Prog., 22 August 1774.
2. Ibid, Prog., 11 August 1774.
3. Ibid, Prog., 1 February 1777.
for revenues and the latter in turn pressed their under-renters and thus the amount of collection as well as the magnitude of the pressure increased downwards in the agrarian hierarchy, throwing in the process the bulk of the weight upon the peasantry at the bottom, who, being unable to comply with the demands, were "obliged to fly to other Provinces".  

Being driven to the walls, the cultivating classes often resorted to direct action by assembling before the Burdwan Council to register their protest or by turning to violent methods. In February 1779, Kaliprasad Sing, the Zamindari Dewan, complained against the conduct of the Foujdar officers, whose duty was to protect and take care of the ryots and maintain peace but they, on the contrary, did nothing but distress and put them to a great expense for peons. Their mode of enquiry was not intended to redress but intrude disturbances. The Burdwan Council found from the Rowana Book that as many as 345 peons had been detached into the Mufassal since November-December 1778, i.e., within three months, of whom 174 did not yet return. Many farmers and ryots had assembled to confirm the accusations of the Dewan. Ramprasad Sarkar, the Comasta of village Gangpur; Parikshit Pal, the Mukaddam of Ozude in Pargana Senpahari; Ramkrishna Das, the Comasta of village Hargaung in Pargana Muzaffarshahi; and sundry ryots from Pargana Haveli, Bumunbhum, Balia and Chitwa were amongst them. The Council considered the conduct of the Foujdar officers as highly culpable but as the Foujdar and the Moulavi assured to prevent such conduct in future, they were merely warned.  

1. BR, Prog *, 15 February 1788.  
2. PCRB, Prog ., 3 February 1779.
In another incident, we find that though the collection of Ozun was formerly prohibited, it was allowed since February 1779, but now the peasantry protested against its re-imposition. On 8 March, Karkun Budhanchandra Majumdar represented to the Council that many ryots had "assembled in a clamorous manner at Burdwan" on account of the late order for the collection of the Ozun and that they refused to return to their villages, whereby the collection of revenue was bound to be much impeded. Thereupon, they were ordered to go back and pay Ozun agreeably to the customs of the land on pain of punishment.

As regards these rudimentary forms of protest, the neighbouring Zamindaris were no exception to Burdwan. Padmalochan, the Naib of Birbhum, then a part of the Burdwan Collectorate, informed the Board in January 1775 that after some deductions were granted to the ryots of Barbucksing, those of other places to the number of five or six thousands assembled before the Kachari and made "demands of Diminution in their Rents". As they said that unless they were allowed the same deductions as were obtained by the ryots of Barbucksing, they would not discharge their revenues but would go and complain at Burdwan, he was obliged to promise them every possible satisfaction. In November 1775, Rammohan Roy, the Naib of Bishnupur, then under the jurisdiction of the Burdwan Collectorate, informed the Burdwan Board that the Rabi and cotton crops could not be cultured that season due to want of rain and as irrigation from tanks proved quite insufficient. Consequently, robberies became very much prevalent in the western

1. Ibid, Progs., 1 and 4 February 1779.
2. Ibid, Prog., 8 March 1779.
part of Chakla Bishnupur as well as adjacent to the city. Moreover, the inhabitants of Taraf Balsay being led by some persons had assembled together at Rusenda, summoned other ryots and resolved that as drought had happened, they would not be able to pay their revenues. Thus, "an uproar" had arisen in the Mufassal. As desired by the Naib, the Board sent a Parwana to quell all disturbances and enforce payment of revenue.

The instances of the ryots resorting to open defiance and violence were few and far between. In 1771, one such incident occurred in Pargana Chandrakona, when all the ryots of nearly 25 villages under the leadership of three Mandals and others assembled together and obstructed the collections. The Shikdar called them to assemble at the Kachari and tried to make them pay their balances after adjustment to the Kutkinadar, though they paid no heed to him. A peon was sent but in vain. At last, the Thanadar went with an order of the Burdwan Council to arrest the culprits. He even actually arrested some of them but as many as 500 ryots with clubs disgraced the peons and the Markarasa and refused the culprits to be taken. At such an instance of "rebellious conduct" and disrespect of its orders, the Council sent a Parwana to the Thanadar to bring the three Mandals together with five of the principal ringleaders concerned in rescuing those Mandals and provided him with a party of sepoys to do so. A similar incident took place in 1786 in the neighbouring Zamindari of Birbhum. Ramnath Roy, Krishnachandra Mandal and 140 ryots

1. Ibid, Prog., 8 November 1775.
2. Ibid, Prog., 27 February 1777.
thereof petitioned against the collection of extra exactions over and above the Jumma by the Zamindar and the farmers. A great number of the ryots fled and a great many more, almost to the amount of the whole, had been ready to decamp. But the ryots of Supur stood upon the defensive.\(^1\) Obviously, all these amply demonstrate how sensitive were the late eighteenth century peasantry of Burdwan and also western Bengal.

**A Fundamental Question: Did the Condition of the Peasantry Improve or Deteriorate under Early Colonial Rule?**

At the outset, it should be taken for granted that the peasantry of Burdwan had a fairly large chance of improvement at least as the result of developments from three quarters: the supposed increase in grain prices, the growth of commercial agriculture and the granting and distribution of Pattas. Let us examine one by one their extent in real terms and their actual impact on the standard of living of the cultivating classes.

It has been suggested by P. J. Marshall that the prices of the necessaries of life including rice began to increase by the 1740s but his was essentially a 'view from Calcutta'.\(^2\) On the basis of available price data of rice at Calcutta, Murshidabad and Dacca for the 1730s and 1770s, R. Datta has proposed "a price rise in the province in the late eighteenth century".\(^3\) Obviously, the point has thus been over-simplified and generalised. We cannot but take a poor view of such theses

\(^1\) BR, Progs., 7 June 1786.
\(^3\) Datta, R., 'Merchants and peasants ..... etc.', p. 382.
in the progress of our discussion.

The calculation for preparing a price index of grain is indeed a very complex one. It appears from the available price data relating to grain prices of Burdwan that (a) the prices of rice or paddy were different at different marts of the zamindari at the same season; (b) the different qualities of rice (such as coarse, middling and fine) had got different prices at the same mart and at the same season; (c) the prices of the same quality of rice varied at the different seasons of the year at the same mart. That is to say, the period and venue of sale as well as the quality of grain were very crucial and usually determined the price. Another thing to be reckoned with is the unit of measurement, i.e., whether the grain was weighed by 60 or 80 Sicca weight per Ser. Given these variables, a systematic and chronological study of grain prices in late eighteenth century Burdwan is very difficult, if not impossible, to pursue for want of integrity of information.

In 1774, rice of middling quality was sold at the Kanchannagar market at 1-10 maunds of 80 Sa. weight per Ser per Sa. Rupee on 1 Asar (mid-June). But its price escalated to become 28 Sers a Sa. Rupee on 9 Bhadra (late August). Likewise, the price of paddy had risen from 2-13 maund per rupee on 1 Asar to 1-10 maund per rupee on 9 Bhadra. Fine

1. BR, Prog., 29 April 1788.
2. Bayley, W. B., 'Statistical View ...... etc.', p. 553.

The price of a given quality of rice was higher in Asar (June-July) and the same quality became lower in Pous (December-January) at the same mart.
wheat which was priced at 27 Sere a rupee on the former date was sold at 21 Sere a rupee on the latter date. The price of coarse wheat increased from 37 to 28 Sere per rupee in between those two dates. 1 Of course, all these increases are mere examples of seasonal price variations.

In April 1788, Collector Kinlock found himself in difficulty in reporting to the Governor-General in Council about the quantity of rice he could purchase on account of Government from Burdwan and the price at which the purchase could be effected. This required an enquiry but it would surely induce the farmers and the merchants to increase its price. Since it was the object of Government to purchase the grain at as low a rate as possible, he instead proposed sending out people to places where grain was to be procured to make an immediate purchase of it in like manner as any other dealer. "It is equally impossible", he observed, "to specify any fixed price as it varies considerably in every Pergunnah throughout the District." At Burdwan, the price of rice was from 25 to 28 Paka Sere per Sa. Rupee; at Mandalghat, it sold higher being from 20 to 24 Sere a rupee; but at Shergarh, it was about 35 Paka Sere the rupee. 2 Though here we know the particular season (i.e., the beginning of Baisakh), we are in the dark about the quality of the rice.

In January 1797, Collector Ireland on a similar requisition informed that the price of rice at Burdwan just then was 1-30 maunds per Sa. Rupee and that of paddy 2-20 maunds per Sa. Rupee. At Kalna, rice was sold at the rate of 1-20 maunds a Sa. Rupee and paddy at 2-15 maunds a Sa. Rupee. At Pattercuchi,

1. PCRB, Prog.*, 22 August 1774.
2. BR, Prog.*, 29 April 1788.
rice was cheaper and was priced at 2 maunds per Sa. Rupee.\(^1\) Here, the period of sale was 30 January or the middle of Magh but the quality of rice is unknown.

The list of prices of rice at the Commercial Residencies of Haripal, Khirpai, Radhanagar and Sonamukhi during 1792-1823 reveals neither a steady rise nor any continuous fall in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Here, the quality of rice, the period of sale and the unit of measurement are not known to us but without uniformity being observed in these respects, no scientific data regarding grain price may be obtained.

The table of wholesale price of coarse rice in Pous (December-January) at Mankar during 1783-1784-1812-1813, which W. B. Bayley "prepared with perfect accuracy", is the most scientifically-based and authentic price data for our period. It appears from these statistics that the price of rice fluctuated considerably during 1783-1784-1792-1793 so that there had been no steady rise or fall in prices for more than three consecutive years. The price data of 1793-1794-1802-1803 and 1803-1804-1812-1813 give the same picture. During the first ten years, the average price per annum was 2-5-12 maunds of 80 Sa. weight per Ser per rupee, that during the second was 2-14-2 maunds and that during the last 2-1-12 maunds. It appears from this table that the period 1793-1803 was generally a cheaper one than the ten years preceding or following it. But though authentic, we should remember that it is essentially the picture of only one mart of this extensive Zamindari.

1. Ibid, Prog., 4 April 1797.
2. BT, Prog., 29 June 1827; Appendix 16.
3. Bayley, W.B., 'Statistical View ... etc.', p. 565; Appendix 17.
From the price data discussed above, it is very difficult to conclude anything for the entire Burdwan Estate. The grain prices were different according to their different qualities and places and periods of sale. The sole major trend we notice is fluctuation, sometimes wide and sometimes limited, depending upon the relation between local demand and supply, the speculation of the merchants and their hoarding, the productivity of the locality in a particular year and the outbreak of natural calamities. Given this state of affairs, any steady rise in prices in late eighteenth century Burdwan is impossible to discern, though the price-level might have escalated in comparison with the preceding half-century.

It seems that the ordinary peasants were not in a position to profit even from these short-term price increases. Though prices might rise at a distant mart and at a particular season of the year (usually just before harvesting), they had neither the means to own or hire the agencies of transporting grain from a low-priced area to a high-priced one nor could they save enough of their produce after paying for consumption and production loans in cash or kind to the merchants and cash rents to their immediate superiors for the sole purpose of profiting by sale at a time when prices were at their peak.

The culture of commercial crops in Bengal and elsewhere in India dates back to pre-colonial times.\(^1\) Besides encouraging the cultivation of traditional cash crops like mulberry, Kapas\(^2\) and sugarcane, additions were also made to the list

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2. The culture of Kapas and mulberry have been dealt with in Chapter 4.
in the early colonial period.

Sugarcane was cultivated on an extensive scale in the Burdwan Zamindari. The Company's Government made advances to the Commercial Residencies of Radhanagar\(^1\), Sonamukhi\(^2\) and Haripal\(^3\) on account of the provision of sugar for each and every year. The amount of investment in sugar at the first place was usually greater than the other two. Besides investing, the early colonial Government also attempted agricultural experiments for a better outturn of sugarcane. For instance, the Commercial Resident of Radhanagar endeavoured to plant cuttings of China sugarcane towards the close of 1797.\(^4\)

It appears from an enquiry of December 1792 that the total land under sugarcane cultivation in Burdwan amounted to 25,000 Bighas or thereabout. The average product of a Bigha of sugarcane was 15 maunds of molasses or 3 maunds 30 Sers of 80 Sa. weight per Sear of the best sugar. The Burdwanites consumed and exported molasses, consumption being nearly equal to the amount of exportation. The molasses of Burdwan were exported usually to Calcutta, Hugly and Midnapur, while sugar was exported to Calcutta.\(^5\) The Company had several factories for sugar manufacture within the Burdwan Zamindari, one of

1. BT(C), Progs., 7 and 29 December 1790, 20 December 1791, 24 August 1792, 6 and 16 January, 12 and 21 May and 9 October 1793, 17 March and 14 April 1795, 25 November and 2 December 1796, 21 February and 26 November 1797, 20 February and 4 December 1798, 30 November 1799; BR, Progs., 28 January and 23 August 1793.
2. BR, Prog. *, 9 December 1793.
3. Ibid, Prog. *, 31 December 1793.
4. BT(C), Prog. *, 12 December 1797.
5. BR, Prog. *, 26 December 1792.
The production of indigo as an important commercial crop in Bengal dates roughly from the 1780s. A number of favourable circumstances were stimulating its growth. Though its demand was steadily increasing in Europe, its supply from the traditional sources such as Benaras, Oudh, Agra, Gujrat, Sindh and the Coromandal coast in India, the southern parts of North America and the West Indies was sharply declining. It was against this backdrop that England looked to Bengal for the necessary supply of indigo. The stabilisation of English political control over and the cheapness of labour in Bengal were particularly favourable. Moreover, an increasingly larger supply from Bengal would leave, after catering for the home consumption, enough to be exported from London to meet the entire demand of Europe. Two other circumstances initially favoured the growth of the Bengal indigo industry: First, as a result of rapid economic changes associated with the English Industrial Revolution, the commodity-composition of the Company's trade between England and Bengal was also changing, thereby giving indigo a chance to have a place in the items of export from Bengal. Secondly, protection was afforded by the Court of Directors to the Bengal indigo industry, that is to say, the import of indigo into Bengal from other indigo-producing areas was discouraged to enable Bengal to build up her monopoly position.

Considering that the system of exclusive contracts for the supply of indigo during 1780-1788 was impeding the rapid

1. BT(C), Prog., 7 June 1796.
2. Chowdhury, B., Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal (1757-1900), vol.1, Calcutta, 1964, pp.73-78.
growth of its cultivation, the Director threw the trade open in 1788. In the early period, there were some obstacles to the growth of indigo cultivation, the principal among which were the problems of organisation of production and the problem of capital formation. However, until 1802, the European-dominated Bengal indigo enterprise expanded under the fostering care of the Company, the native zamindars remained largely non-participants due to lack of enterprise.

Indigo cultivation in the Burdwan zamindari under enterprising private Europeans dates back to a period immediately following the throwing open of the trade. In May 1788, the Governor-General in Council received a petition from Monsieur Bonneau requesting permission to carry on an indigo manufacture on his private account in Burdwan. They complied with the request and directed the Board of Revenue to acquaint the Collector about it.

Indigo cultivation began in Pargana Bagri since 1793 under private European initiative. On 18 January 1793, Robert Chapman solicited Collector Brooke's approbation and protection for cultivating indigo and erecting a set of indigo works in Bagri belonging to Etimamdar Chatter Sing, who had already through his Dewan encouraged him. Chatter inspired Chapman to fix upon the situation by the promise of every assistance and gave his word that his ryots would cultivate any quantity of land Chapman might want or that he would engage to deliver Chapman certain quantity of indigo weed at a rate mutually agreed upon. But prior to any such agreement taking place

1. Ibid, p.78.
2. Ibid, pp. 78-84.
3. BR, Prog.*, 16 May 1788.
regarding cultivation, the planter wanted to be empowered with the authority of Government. He solicited governmental support to his proposed "open mode of proceeding", that is, every Bigha of land he might advance upon for cultivation should be registered with the name and place of the ryot's residence. The amount of money actually paid by him and received by them or any contract for the cultivation of land or for the supply of indigo weed that he might at first or afterwards enter into with the zamindar or anybody else should be similarly registered. He hoped that it would be "beneficial to all parties": it would fully enable him to perform his contract with the Company by securing the real quantity of land advanced upon, the full advances to the ryots and the full ground rent to the zamindar. The Collector readily complied with the proposal and the Board of Revenue and the Supreme Council also agreed to his being authorised to appropriate a quantity of ground in Bagri.

In March 1793, when Chapman procured two Pattas one each from Maharaja Tej Chand and Etimamdar Chatter Sing, the Board of Revenue objected against his availing himself of them. By a Mukarrari Patta, the Maharaja granted Chapman 7,001 Bighas of Pateet land and jungles in Tarafa Bisunchara and Kuslar in Pargana Bagri at the fixed Jumma of 5 Anas per Bigha amounting to Rs. 2,187-13 per annum. But he was to pay revenue only for whatever portion of this ground he would cultivate. A few days earlier, by executing a Doul Patta, the Etimamdar granted Chapman all the Pateet and jungle lands cultivable in Chutterganj and Jadunagar — the quantity of

1. Ibid, progs., 28 January and 1 February 1793.
which would be later on measured by the granter—at a Jumma of 8 Anas per Bhiga. However, Collector Brooke was in favour of confirming them.  

The Collector expected the following advantages to accrue from this: "The Choars of Pergunnah Boggree it is well known have for many years been guilty of the greatest Depredations but in consequence of the Encouragement given by Chapman to the people in the neighbourhood of his works, the Choars are daily coming in to offer their services & he has actually at this time about 2000 in his Employ & there is Reason to expect they will turn out industrious subjects as others will most probably follow this example. Robberies will be rendered less frequent & hopes may be entertained that the waste parts of Boggree Pergunnah will be brought into cultivation." On the other hand, he apprehended some problems in case of non-confirmation. Chapman having already expended nearly Rs. 10,000 in erecting indigo works and clearing the jungles, he and the Raja would surely complain if deprived of the benefits they promised themselves by the engagement they had entered into. The Raja would conceive himself particularly injured if not allowed to avail himself of so favourable an opportunity of procuring revenue from waste lands, whereas Chapman, being deprived of the means of fulfilling his contract with Government, would be liable to a penalty independent of the losses of capital already invested by him.  

Initially, Chapman wanted to have a Patta for some lands for the purpose of erecting his indigo works but as

1. Ibid, Prog., 10 April 1793.
2. Ibid.
it appeared from these Pattas that lands therein included
were intended to be appropriated to cultivation, the Board
of Revenue solicited the Supreme Council's sanction previous
to confirming them. The Council informed the Board that
they had no objection to Chapman holding on a perpetual lease
or purchasing from the Burdwan Raja a sufficient quantity of
land required for the erection of the works and buildings nece-
sary for carrying on his indigo manufacture but they would
not allow his purchasing a greater quantity than that above
specified for any purpose whatever. With respect to the money
expended by Chapman on the lands rented to him in perpetuity
by the Raja, they only observed that he ought not to have taken
possession of the land without their sanction and hence he
was not entitled to any indemnification.

With the gradual establishment of increasing numbers of
indigo manufactories within the Burdwan Zamindari, rivalries
often took place among the indigo planters for acquiring suit-
able sites. Such a conflict occurred at Kalna in 1793 be-
tween Herbert Harris and J. Liotard. The former had already
established indigo works at Santipur and Kalighata near Rana-
ghat in the vicinity of Kalna. Since the latter intended and
actually proceeded to set up a manufactory at Kalna much to the
detriment of Harris' works, he began using every endeavour to
remove Liotard to a distance far away from that place. Pre-
viously, Liotard had promised Harris not to start indigo works
at Kalna but his agent had himself rented 500 Bighaes of land
on his principal's account. Besides, finding no other suitable

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid, Prog ., 24 April 1793.
place at a greater distance, he resolved on continuing it in Kalna without causing any detriment to Harris' manufactory. Naturally, Harris represented his case both to the Collector and the Board of Revenue so that Liotard might not be permitted to start his venture at Kalna. He wrote to the Board that many difficulties had attended him in the culture of indigo since he began his enterprise in early 1789 from not knowing the nature of the soil and the prejudices of the natives but he had combated them hitherto with "tolerable success" and had increased the cultivation of the plant yearly. But should Liotard be permitted, the labour and pains he had been at for the last four years not to add the expense and trouble would be lost to him as Liotard would surely reap the benefit from fixing in the midst of those villages, whose inhabitants he had with much exertion got to cultivate the plant so that his "advantages which are yet to come will fall into the Hands of a man who has had no part in the Outset of the Business." He sorrowfully uttered that if Liotard be allowed "my Works at Santipore and Rannagaut which have cost a very large sum of money will be rendered of no Value, for the Ryotts will not bring plant to me when they can go to a nearer Work, and the Ryotts will take advances for the same Ground from both me and him under different Names." Further, he claimed the Government's protection as both of his works were set up with the Board's permission; he had been in constant contract with the Company; and he had conducted his business to the entire satisfaction of the Raja and the ryots. Moreover, his enterprise was of much importance to the revenue of the country

1. Ibid, Prog., 3 December 1793.
as well for so far he had laid out a capital of 2½ lakhs of rupees in both the Districts of Nadia and Burdwan and would deliver into the warehouse 1,400 maunds of indigo by the close of 1793.¹

Being convinced by the justness of Harris’ representation, the Board recommended to the Supreme Council for disallowing Liotard’s proposed project at Kalna. As Liotard had already proceeded to the erection of indigo works without previously obtaining the sanction of Government, the Board suggested that on this ground alone he might be prohibited.²

The Supreme Council, without going into the rivalry of the competing planters, accepted that safe line and refused to allow him to erect works or manufacture indigo at Kalna or anywhere in the country.³

Thus, in regard to Europeans, the regulations existing were sufficient to prevent new works being erected avowedly on their own part in places where they might prove prejudicial to others already established but in instances where they acted under the cloak of a native and in all cases where the natives themselves were concerned, there appeared to be no restraint authorised to prevent such intrusion as was complained of by Messrs Blume and Barretto of Suksagar in February 1795. They represented that Monsr Chambon of Chandannagar was about to erect an indigo work at Rammagar, a village to the northward of Nayasarai, where he had already purchased in the name of his Sarkar Gourhari Bhandari a tank and leased a spot of ground from the Talukdar thereof and

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¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid, Prog., 31 December 1793.
that Monsr Levinbag also of Chandannagar was about to set up another one at Dholsara to the westward of Nayasarai Creek upon a spot of ground leased to his Sarkar by the Kutkinadar of that village. As both of these works came amidst Messrs. Blume and Barretto’s lands and near their works, they apprehended detriment to their culture and so they demanded redress by prohibiting the newcomers.

Despite these difficulties, indigo cultivation gradually extended. In October 1794, J. B. Birch indulged in the cultivation and manufacture of indigo in the Burdwan Zamindari. On 18 November, he informed the Collector about his willingness to establish a factory at a site at Jamalpur near Selimabad in Pargana Haveli. He agreed with the proprietors of a tank and land adjoining thereto for the purpose of building the works as soon as he could have obtained the permission of Government. In further explanation of his plan, he transmitted an account of Patta granted to him for erecting indigo works, from which it appears that he obtained lands having an annual rent of Rs. 39-11 in perpetuity situated in the villages of Jote Raghab, Enledpur and Jote Krishna in Pargana Haveli.

Mr. Weeldem of Serampur had an indigo manufactory at Rishra. The indigo works and premises contained 155-15 Bighas besides the ground on which the road was made that led to Serampur.

In November 1794, John Philip Gardiner purchased the manufactory from him. By about the same time, Messrs. J. Stephens

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1. Ibid, Prog., 13 February 1795.
2. Ibid, Prog., 31 October 1794.
3. Ibid, Prog., 28 November 1794.
4. Ibid, Prog., 6 January 1795.
5. Ibid, Prog., 18 November 1794.
and R. S. Perreau applied for leave to manufacture indigo in Burdwan as because Ramram Chatterjee, an inhabitant of Pargana Sheristanagar, consented to grant them a Patta for 9 Bighas of Brahmottor land in Gobardanga village for the purpose of erecting an indigo factory. Perreau was already jointly engaged with Stephens in the manufacture of indigo at several factories in Nadia, 24-Parganas and Jessore. The Supreme Council soon complied with their application.

In May 1795, John Cheap, the Commercial Resident of Sonamukhi, petitioned for permission to hold 29-6 Bighas of land situated in Serrachdee and Chukurea at a Jumna of Sa. Rs.29-4 granted by the Maharani of Burdwan. He further wanted permission for cultivating the lands so rented by his own bullocks and servants as it was necessary to show the ryots that the plant would be advantageous to them, without which the diffidence they might entertain of a new cultivation might not be so soon removed. Though he was permitted to cultivate and manufacture indigo, his proposal for holding land in farm for cultivating indigo was incompatible with the principle generally adhered to. Towards the end of 1795, W. Fairlie applied for permission to establish a small factory at the village of Chappahati in Pargana Ranighati for the purpose of collecting cloth and some other articles of Burdwan and erecting a set of indigo works.

It is quite true that the growth of cultivation of traditional as well as new commercial crops in late eighteenth century Burdwan provided the peasantry thereof with cash

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1. Ibid, Prog., 28 November 1794.
2. Ibid, Prog., 12 December 1794.
3. Ibid, Prog., 12 June 1795.
4. Ibid, Prog., 3 November 1795.
Incomes. It also led to the extension of agriculture by bringing back into cultivation the waste lands and by the reclamation of the forest lands. Since the system of indigo cultivation was profitable and did not as yet assume its oppressive character of the later century, it seems that the peasants who became engaged in its culture did so with pleasure. But the growth of commercial agriculture, particularly indigo, was very limited in extent. To be sure, in 1830, Burdwan had got only 8 indigo factories and 22,258 Bighas or 7,345.14 acres of land under indigo cultivation, which constituted only 1.29% of the total acreage in the then Bengal Presidency.

Naturally, the bulk of the peasantry could not derive any benefit from the cultivation of cash crops in some particular areas of the zamindari, whose soil and other considerations were conducive to their culture.

As regards the early colonial Government's endeavour to grant Pattas to the ryots of the Burdwan Zamindari, it appears that the alien administrators did neither carry on the scheme whole-heartedly nor did it prove to be so simple and easy as they might have initially thought. On 14 May 1776, the Supreme Council made it obligatory upon the Burdwan Zamindar to grant Pattas to his ryots. That is to say, it should henceforth be his business to take care that his under-farmers carried it into execution in the Munfassal.

2. FCQB, Prog. 18 May 1776.
3. Ibid, Prog. 9 July 1776.
At the beginning of June, the Zamindari Dewan delivered in the proposed form of a Kabuleat to be taken from the under-renters of the Raja, wherein was incorporated the provision that all the ryots should receive new Pattas and that those should be made out in the Mufassal in the recipients' presence and they should repair to the Sadar to procure the seal to be affixed to it. But the duty of distributing Pattas was initially neglected by the Dewan.

Nor were there less difficulties regarding the content and mode of distribution of Pattas. On 22 June, the Dewan represented that there were as many as four categories of land in each village according to their quality and rate of assessment of rent and that in the Khamar lands, the ryots had been under engagement of receiving a share of the crop according to the sort of land they stipulated. Due to the immense variety of lands and engagements, it was out of the question to grant Mukarrarli Pattas to the ryots indiscriminately. Shortly afterwards, the Burdwan Council also pointed out the following difficulties which stood in the way of issuing Pattas. First, without a local scrutiny of the accounts of each ryot for many years back, it would be impossible to ascertain what Mathot ought to be included in the Jumma and what not as the several heads of collection vary in almost every village. Secondly, such an enquiry could not be effected in less than two or three years. Thirdly, an inevitable delay must attend the granting of Pattas from the Sadar, where each ryot must

1. Ibid, Prog ., 8 June 1776.
2. Ibid, Prog ., 17 June 1776.
3. Ibid, Prog ., 22 June 1776.
repair from the most distant parts of the Estate to the great
detriment of cultivation. To obviate these, they suggested
that the Jumma of each ryot be formed from the revenue of
1768-1769 excluding all kinds of extra-exactions in order to
ascertain "the most reasonable rate of collection" and that
each Kutkinadar on delivering his Kabuleat should execute a
Muchleka to grant Pattas to his ryots at the above-stated
Jumma.

At the beginning of August, the newly-appointed Managers
were ordered to grant Pattas according to the several forms
proposed for the different types of lands. Just before that,
G. G. Ducarel, the Superintendent of the Khalsa Records, sub­
mited a report on the Patta to be granted to the ryots of
Burdwan, wherein he expressed his opinion that great incon­
venience might attend the proposal of making the rates of
1768-1769 the rule of future collection and that the rate of
1775-1776 minus the excess exactions given up by Government
was "the only safe rule." As these Pattas would grant them
in some degree "a prescriptive right to their ground", some
checks might be necessary to prevent frauds in granting Pattas
and the lands of the Khudkast ryots should be subjected to a
measurement when they were suspected of concealing the true
quantity, which appeared a common case in the Mufassal and
the occasion of an article of taxation called Nemondar Salami.
With respect to the Paikast and other ryots, whose Pattas
were renewable, nothing more was required than that they be made
out in the same simple form as the others so that in case of
being infringed, the Government might come to a speedy under-

1. Ibid, Prog., 28 June 1776.
standing of the ryot's complaint and afford him redress.
Since the new initiative and arrangement for granting pattas
would strike at the profits of the under-farmers and the
Zamindari Karmacharis and would even have the prejudices of
the ryots, for whose benefit it was intended, to operate against
it, it might be expected that many difficulties would arise in
the process of execution. Some degree of caution and patience
would thus be necessary for such a sudden change of the long-
established mode of the Province.

The Managers started distributing pattas to the Kutkina-
dars with strict orders to issue them to the ryots without
delay. But the stipulated time-limit of six months for
distributing new pattas being expired, they were brought to
account. In explanation, they stated that despite their utmost
efforts not a single ryot appeared in the Mufassal to take
out a patta neither had any ryot repaired for that purpose to
the Sadar Kachari. The Provincial Council of Burdwan attri-
buted such backwardness in the ryots to take advantage of the
good intentions of Government apparently so favourable to them.
to the all-pervading influence of the intermediate landed in-
tereses and the Mandals, whose prospect of domination over
the peasantry would have become bleak by the distribution
of pattas.

The Burdwan Council thus realised that the circulation
of pattas through the Kutkinadars would be but a far cry for
the moon and that the Managers were neglecting to forward this
part of the engagement by persiverance and attention. Therefore,

1. Ibid, Prog., 5 August 1776.
2. Ibid, Prog., 9 September 1776.
3. Ibid, Progs., 27 and 31 December 1776.
4. Vide supra.
it might only be carried into execution by government officers under the supervision of the Company's servants because "the inferior Ryotts" would otherwise never have a sufficient confidence to free themselves from their present vassalage under the Mandals. 1 A few months later, the Council submitted a plan for issuing Pattas to the ryots. According to it, the Province was to be divided into three divisions: the first was to comprehend the Parganas contiguous to Burdwan and to be under the superintendence of the Chief and the other two divisions were to be superintended by the members of the Council to be deputed for that purpose into the Muffasal. They would keep a register and issue Pattas agreeable to the form supplied by the Khalsa. Each superintendent would have to be allowed an establishment with a monthly expenditure of Rs. 498. So the proposed arrangement would cost the Government Rs. 1,494 per month.

They recommended to commence the plan early in the ensuing season, i.e., about the middle of January 1776, when all the principal crops would be gathered. 2 After yet another few months, the Governor-General and Council of Revenue resolved not to consider the plan but reserve it for another season as it could not be carried into execution at that late period of the Zamindar's lease without much inconvenience. 3

Thus, this important business was shelved for an indefinite period. It took a fresh resume in 1787-1788. The Board of Revenue by its orders of 10 August 1787 required the Collector in conjunction with the Kanungos and principal Mutsuddis to prepare the forms of Patta to be executed by

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1. PCRB, Prog ., 17 January 1777.
2. Ibid, Prog ., 22 May 1777.
3. Ibid, Prog ., 8 September 1777.
the zamindar and farmers, which should contain specific rates of assessment or a specific sum for a given quantity of land, either generally or according to its quality and produce. On 20 May 1788, Collector Kinlock assured the Board that there had not been wanting attention on his part to accomplish so desirable an object and enclosed a form of Patta proposed by him to be granted to all the ryots of Burdwan.

More important, however, were the minute observations he made into the nature of obstacles that stood in the way of introducing an uniform Patta for all the ryots of Burdwan. He found that "in this extensive District not more than one-fourth of the Ryotts are in possession of Pottahs". The revenue due from a ryot was generally ascertained by established custom and former usages and a ryot cultivating more land than he originally held by his engagement did not always occasion a renewal of his Patta but the revenue was generally accounted for in the adjustment of his accounts. Therefore, the first obstacle pointed out by him was that no Patta might be said to be Mukarrar or permanent even at the assessment at which it was granted for a ryot renting land which would yield one production and from circumstances being able afterwards to cultivate a more profitable article must account for the surplus revenue in a proportionate rate to what was paid by other ryots who had Pattas for the cultivation of the same article.

There arose a second obstacle even from the description of the different ryots who received Pattas. The several categories of ryots noticed by Kinlock were the Khudkast and the

1. BR, Prog., 24 June 1788.
2. Ibid.
Palkast and the latter class was again of two kinds—the Wij Ganj Paikast and the Baze Ganj Paikast. Besides them, there were the Muttariffe ryots, who did not cultivate lands but had shops and carried on a profession and paid a high house rent to all the above ryots. It, therefore, appeared to him "impossible to establish (a) general fixed quit Rent either upon the quantity of the Land or upon the specific quality of its Produce without totally altering the present system & abolishing the distinction observed among Ryotts." However, an average assessment might be established in granting Pattas upon the aggregate valuation of the present productions of any given quantity of land brought by their labour and industry. It must be calculated upon the amount of the revenue which they now paid, whilst other ryots whose lands not affording similar advantages would be rated proportionally. But in consequence, he apprehended that the ryots, not having the prospect of further advantages by their attention to cultivation, might suffer their lands to go to decay, while others having a view to considerable profit from their industry, would endeavour to bring their lands to the highest state of cultivation.

There was also a third objection. In several Parganas, a variation of the crop was continually taking place, neither depending upon labour nor industry but from the effects of inundations, whereby the rivers changed their courses or occasionally accumulated silt on the low lands. Some lands were thus improved and from only yielding a crop of rice would produce either of the valuable articles of cotton or sugarcane.

1. Ibid.
whereas a greater loss was often sustained by those ryots whose lands were either washed away or covered with beds of sand. Consequently, a variation must ever take place in the different rates of assessment. 

On the other hand, Khamar lands had no settled tenants but were cultivated by contract, the terms being various in the different parts of the Estate. Usually, however, the ryot received one-half or even one-third of the produce or the farmer in some cases retained the whole produce and paid a certain amount in money calculated upon the price which the same article might bear in the adjacent market.

"Therefore the revenue of the country", concluded Kinlock, "does not appear to me of the nature of a Land Tax and the Husbandman is not the proprietor of the soil. His profit is only proportioned to his productive labour & the object of improvement equally tends to the advantage of Government or to whomsoever the lands belong & therefore if the Labours of the Ryott can improve the production of the Soil he actually pays an additional Rent. Consequently, his profits are or ought to be proportionally increased with the extent of his own Industry & improvements."

The form of the general Patta which Kinlock drew out in conjunction with the late Karkun, Jagatnarayan Mitra, contained particulars about the quality of the land (such as paddy ground, Sona land, cotton land, Do Fasali and sugar-cane land), their quantity and the revenue payable per Bigha.

Since this Patta was intended only for such ryots as were

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
already in possession of land, the Board of Revenue provided, by some additions and omissions in its wording, for those ryots to whom the land of an absconded ryot might be granted or for new ryots who for the first time would receive Pattas. But this time again, the Supreme Council fell back. On 20 June 1788, they forbade any Collector or Commissioner to grant Pattas to the ryots without their sanction as "upon more mature Consideration of this Subject", they saw "many objections to the General Introduction of this practice."  

The Burdwan Council expected that if their plan for distributing Pattas under the superintendence of their own members were well executed, it would greatly contribute to ascertain the value of Malguzari lands in every Pargana. The Board of Revenue also expressed the opinion that they had "no doubt of the good effect being produced by the introduction of Pottahs in this Zemindarry...." But Collector Kinlock from various reasons apprehended that the granting of general Pattas might be attended with difficulty. He, however, believed that "the system can only be effectually established & readily introduced where the Collections are Khas....." Another Collector, S. Davis, proposed in August 1794 for the more regular introduction of Pattas, first in the Khas Mahals and gradually throughout the Zamindari, with which the Board also concurred. But the Governor-General in Council was too cautious about innovations in the complex arena of late

1. Ibid.  
2. Ibid, Prog., 27 June 1788.  
3. PCRB, Prog., 22 May 1777.  
4. BR, Prog., 14 October 1788.  
5. Ibid, Prog., 24 June 1788.  
6. Ibid, Prog., 17 October 1794.
eighteenth century indigenous revenue system. Naturally, no progress was made in the direction of providing Pattas to the three-fourths of the ryots of Burdwan who were devoid of it.

From the foregoing analysis emerge the factual realities that the supposed increase of grain prices during the late eighteenth century was more apparent than real for the prices, depending upon a set of variables, were always fluctuating instead of steadily escalating as have been suggested by some scholars; that the growth of commercial agriculture was uneven and limited in extent; that the endeavour to arm the peasantry with Pattas was but half-hearted and incomplete. On the backdrop of the many facets of exploitation, the early colonial Government being the supreme driving force behind the exploitative machinery from above, the failure of these and like potentialities told heavily upon the peasantry and went a long way to keep their prospect as bleak as ever. Since the Company's Government adopted unscrupulous policies and practices with the singular aim of maximising the agrarian surplus leading to the Permanent Settlement, the pressure of revenue-collection increased downwards and reached its peak in the lowest rung of the agrarian hierarchy to considerably lessen the "small profits" that were left to the bulk of the peasantry after satisfying all the parties.

Thus, the condition of the peasantry of late eighteenth century Burdwan gradually deteriorated under early colonial rule as against pre-colonial times. But perhaps they were better off than their counterparts of the next century, when British rule was fast acquiring its full colonial character.