CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGES IN INDUSTRIES (1891-1947)

We have seen in the preceding chapters that agriculture and trade played a dominant role in Manipur's economy. However, the colonial authorities identified some of the traditional industries particularly weaving, silk and salt as good sources of revenue and therefore attempts were made to develop them. But in spite of their encouragement and financial investment, the industries tended to stagger in its growth. Many of the traditional industries in fact declined in term of the work force. The number of total workers and dependents declined from 48,431 in 1911 to 10,379 in 1931.¹ The important factors responsible for the decline were lack of capital investment and limited marketing facilities.

Handloom Industry:

Weaving which had been one of the important sectors of industry in Manipur since the pre-colonial days continued to play a crucial role in Manipur's economy even during the first half of the 20th century. As early as 1891, the Political Agent reported that the Meitei women, with the utilisation of the hill cotton, manufactured different kinds of clothes including the turbans worn by the hill tribes. Attempts were made by the colonial rulers to introduce certain improved methods of manufacturing clothes by opening of training schools, installation of fly-shuttle loom and establishment of separate department of the Govt. As a first step, a weaving school was opened to improve the traditional process of making clothes in 1910-11 and an expert weaver, lent by the Department of Agriculture of Assam, was employed in the school for about four months. The instructor trained two Manipuri women in the use of improved

handlooms and these two ladies were later on associated as instructress in the weaving school with a view to imparting their knowledge to other women. Ten women who attended the weaving school under the two instructresses were given extensive training in the field.⁴

Unfortunately, the school could not bring about substantial change in the production of the clothes because of the unsuitability of the looms for the production of fine fabric. It was stated by the local weavers that even in making coarse clothes the thread had got broken more often than in the ordinary looms. But, the colonial authorities defended their venture by arguing that it was because of mismanagement. Although the looms were also used as an experiment in weaving silk clothes, when the experiment failed to produce a desired result, the school was closed down on March 31st, 1913.⁵ The traditional looms, though primitive and labour intensive continued to be utilised for the production of clothes in the state ⁶ which were exported

⁴ Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1911-12, P. 7.
⁵ Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1912-13, P. 8.
⁶ Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1913-14, P. 8.
to the neighbouring districts. But the exports could not be continued for long due to the dearness of yarn and scarcity in the supply of cotton from the hills. In order to support the industry there was import of cotton from the Naga hills and Assam. This coupled with the onset of Non-Cooperation Movement in British India increased the volume of export of Manipuri clothes. The other reasons for the increase in the demand for Manipuri clothes were its durable quality, artistic design and elegant finish. In view of all these considerations the colonial authorities expressed their hope that the industry would grow fast once a good market was obtained.

Realising the prospect of the industry, some enterprising Manipuris purchased a Fly-shuttle loom from Serampore in 1922. Based on the mechanism of that loom, some thirty new looms were locally made with new improvisation. The new looms according to the reports of the Political

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Agent of Manipur worked quite well and the weavers appreciated the advantages of those new looms.\textsuperscript{10} The number of looms began to increase, but the looms in general continued to be labour intensive and its productions were sold in the bazar at a very high price.\textsuperscript{11} In spite of the high price, there was a rise in the demand for Manipuri clothes in various parts of British India.\textsuperscript{12} The installation of improved looms facilitated the production of clothes in greater volume to meet the bigger demand for Manipur handloom products. The production in turn demanded import of thread and yarn in the state which provided a boost to the Indian Cotton textile industries.\textsuperscript{13} With a view to further encourage the industry especially the weaving of cotton and silk materials, a new "Arts & Crafts Department" was set up and made operational in 1930s. To start with, the authorities of the department purchased all the goods collected by Mrs. E.M. Jolly, companion to Her Highness the Maharani, who had started a small business in

\textsuperscript{10} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1922-23, P. 11.
\textsuperscript{11} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1924-25, P. 9.
that line. With this development the department became operational and Mrs. Jolly was made the first Manager. To assist her, the government appointed one clerk, one store keeper and a peon.\textsuperscript{14} Till 26th June, 1933 Mrs. Jolly looked after the department but due to ill health, she had to resign and her daughter Mrs. Imrie took over the charge as a manager. The department engaged 17 or 18 agents in various parts of India working in commission basis. In 1933-34 a profit of Rs. 1,213/- was realised.\textsuperscript{15} Unfortunately, Mrs. Imrie had to resign on 30th June, 1934 as she was leaving the state. In her place Mrs. Davis became the manager of the department on the 1st July, 1934. Due to such administrative problems, the department experienced underproduction and in the process suffered a lose of Rs. 2,800-12-8/- in 1934-35. Therefore, the authorities decided to close down the department. But, Mrs. Davis was adamant of reactivating the department and the Darbar, after due

\textsuperscript{12}Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1926-27, P. 11.
\textsuperscript{13} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1930-31, P. 19.
\textsuperscript{14} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1931-32 P. 25.
consideration, decided to give her another chance to revive the industry. As she proceeded to build up the business again, large orders were received from different firms in England including Mrs. Liberty and Company of London. Over a thousand rupees worth of Arts and Crafts items were taken out for exhibition at the Empire Exhibition in London in May, 1935. The Arts and Craft items presented by the Darbar to the Silver Jubilee Gift Exhibition of Arts and Crafts in Shillong in May, 1935, was well received and it had in fact been given an award.¹⁶ Till 15th February, 1936, Mrs. Davis looked after the department with great devotion. However, she also left for England in the early part of 1935.

On her departure, K. Tombi Singh, a local man was for the first time appointed manager on the 20th April, 1936. It was reported that appointment of a local man was to reduce the expenditure on the establishment. Under his management the sale proceeds of the department for the year 1935-36 was

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Rs. 9,066-15-6/-\textsuperscript{17} In the next year K. Tombi Singh and Babu N.K. Kerr of Maxwell Bazar participated in the Lucknow Exhibition and a sum of Rs. 2,395-12-9/- was realised as sale proceeds from the exhibition. Because of the attractive texture and pattern of clothes two medals, one Gold and one Silver were awarded. During the same year, Babu Noresh Chandra of Imphal Pharmacy took some articles to the Habiganj Exhibition for which a Silver Medal was awarded to this department. The total sale proceeds for the year 1936-37 was Rs. 6,188-4-7/-\textsuperscript{18} Encouraged by the growing revenue of the department, the Darbar vide Resolution No. 14, of 20th April, 1938, sanctioned a sum of Rs.221/9/- for participation in the Lucknow Exhibition.\textsuperscript{19}

In course of time, the department grew and gave encouragement to a number of private weavers. An independent firm under the name of M.P.Kundu was established and

\textsuperscript{17} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1935-36, P. 8.

\textsuperscript{18} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1936-37, pp. 15-16.

\textsuperscript{19} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1937-38, P. 17.
Manipuri boys including the Naga boys were given training.\textsuperscript{20} By the early part of 1940s, the department could install as many as 200 country looms. The value of investment went up to the tune of Rs. 25,000/- and about 30,000 mounds of yarn were annually imported for use by the department.\textsuperscript{21} The functioning of the department was, however, disturbed by the Japanese bombing of Imphal in 1942 \textsuperscript{22} and there was complete dislocation till 1945. It was reorganised in 1945 and A. Ibotomcha Singh, held charge of the department. The latter subsequently became "Textile Commissioner of India". During the post II world war period the department could no longer of proper incentives, unavailability of sufficient yarn and tremendous increase in the import of machine manufactured clothes.\textsuperscript{23} As early as 1908, Hodson had pointed out that

\begin{enumerate}
\item Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1938-39, P. 10.
\item Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1940-41, P. 10.
\item Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1943-44, P. 17.
\item Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1944-45, P. 17.
\end{enumerate}
heavy influx of Manchester clothes crippled the traditional handloom industry. The total number of workers and the dependents on cotton textile industry fell from 46,764 in 1911 to 39,384 in 1921. In 1931, the number further declined to 5,667. As the internal as well as the external markets gradually became more limited and also since the Marwaris completely dominated the trade, most of the looms remained idle. The weaving industry as a result continued to remain only as a household occupation for women mostly at their leisure hour and was no longer a profitable business. The British policy of imposing tariffs on the export of cotton goods and the world wide financial crisis were also the other important factors for the decline of the weaving industry.


II

Silk Industry:

Like the handloom industry, manufacturing of silk was a flourishing sector of traditional economy. With the disappearance of the royal court after the war of 1891, the encouragement given to embroidered and good quality silks had almost died out. To revive this industry, the colonial authorities initiated some steps. In 1896-97 the Political Agent made some arrangements to exhibit Manipuri silk through the "Society for the Preservation of Encouragement in Indian Art" in the Victoria Art Exhibition in London. In spite of this effort, people began to depend on the imported silk clothes and in 1898-99 silk clothes worth Rs.30,000/- were imported. In the next year too, out of the total value of Rs. 52,178/- worth of import through Naga hills the share of silk was Rs. 4,000/-.  


Therefore, the colonial authorities felt that starting a silk industry in the state itself would encourage the local people to produce the same. Accordingly, correspondence was started with Messrs Wright Anderson and Company of Calcutta. In response to the request, the company deputed Mr. Anderson to Manipur in 1902 to assess the prospect of starting a silk industry in the state. Convinced by good prospect, he returned to Calcutta and submitted to the government a draft agreement to be signed between the Manipur State Darbar and Syndicate of the Company. In the draft he proposed for granting a monopoly right to the company. However, the draft agreement was sent back for modification of some of its provisions. Meanwhile, Mr. W. Lane, Secretary of the Foreign Department wrote to E.W. Botton, officiating Chief Commissioner of Assam on 30th May, 1903 for more information about the local condition of silk growing in Manipur, the qualities and kind of silk being imported, the number of silk growers and the probable effects that the proposed industry might have on the people before the grant of monopoly. To concretise the step in this direction, Mr. Hennikar, Director of Land Records and Agriculture of Assam, was sent to Kashmir where a state-run
silk industry was functioning to assess the merit and demerit of granting a monopoly right to a private company. While appreciating the monopoly right of the government, the Director pointed out that there would be no harm in giving monopoly right to the private company provided the state retains the power to control and inspect the functioning of such industry. He further pointed out that such a venture would help the government from making a heavy expenditure.\textsuperscript{29}

The Political Agent, after making necessary improvements on the draft agreement, submitted the same to the government on 11th October, 1905 \textsuperscript{30} which was finally approved by the government. Then finally an agreement was concluded on 29th November, 1906 for a period of 30 years according to which the state had to maintain only a supervisory role in the functioning of the factory. The Raja of Manipur granted lands for the successful operation of the factory free of land revenue and he would not levy tax on any cocoons and silk wastes exported by the farm. The net profit obtained

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\textsuperscript{30} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1904-05, pp. 4-5.
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from all operations should belong in equal shares to the farm and the state and in case of any disputes, the decision of the Lt. Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam was to be made final and binding on both the parties.\textsuperscript{31} Without losing much time, the company commenced its operations. The Political Agent reported that he had done all that he could do to ensure success of the venture.\textsuperscript{32} But, in the next year Messrs. Anderson and Company to whom was given all rights to make silks in the state was transferred to the Manipur Company, Ltd. under an agreement with his Highness the Raja, and in the same year, it began its operation. The Company was given large blocks of waste lands suitable for growing mulberry in Lamdeng and Sangtha valley.\textsuperscript{33} But in the next year, due to want of rain, the land could not be prepared well for mulberry plantation. Moreover, the company could not obtain labourers due to cholera epidemic. The Manager, in spite of those circumstances, made his best


\textsuperscript{32} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1906-07, P. 6.

\textsuperscript{33} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1907-08, P. 6.
effort to effect satisfactory progress in sericulture by taking up 314 bighas of new land for the purpose. But the industry could not take off as was expected. The Darbar however decided to continue the experiment for a year or two at least, hoping that with mulberry already planted, there would be a considerable decrease in the cost of establishment, which might lead to a possible success of the venture. Unfortunately, the company faced many adverse circumstances such as unsatisfactory hatching of Italian-Japanese seed from Europe; destruction of some of the worms owing to the carelessness of the mulberry farmers as well as disturbances created by pothang agitators; the spread of malaria among the silk farmers; destruction caused to the worms by rates and hail stones; outbreak of pebrin disease and the subsequent abandonment of mulberry plantations due

to poor productivity. The problem was further compounded by the refusal of the Calcutta cold storage farms to keep silk worms; operations confining to few villages in the hills; leaving of profession by the Loi community who removed themselves to Imphal in the hope of being absorbed in the higher classes of Manipuris; and extensive use of silk clothes imported from Assam. Even after the establishment of a separate Arts and Crafts department in 1931 the industry could not be developed.

Salt Industry:

Management of local salt wells was also identified as one of the important sources of revenue. The colonial authorities first took up the works of repairing the existing salt wells at Waikhong, Ningel, Sekmai, Chandrakhong, Challao, Kharasan etc. In the valley the wells were given out to contractors while in the hills, the hillmen were allowed to work by themselves. In the early part of the British rule, the local salt industry constituted a major portion of the state's revenue but in the later period of their administration, the imported salt replaced the local salt and as a result, it became a negligible source of revenue to the state. The following table indicates the trend of receipts of salt revenue during the period from 1891-92 to 1946-1947.

43. R. B. Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of India, (Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1979), P. 29.
### TABLE G

Salt Revenue Receipts during 1891-92 to 1946-47

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Receipts (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1891-92</td>
<td>10,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>13,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1893-94</td>
<td>11,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1894-95</td>
<td>9,601</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1895-96</td>
<td>8,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1896-97</td>
<td>11,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>1897-98</td>
<td>7,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1898-99</td>
<td>5,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>8,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>1901-02</td>
<td>7,147</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>1903-04</td>
<td>5,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>1905-06</td>
<td>4,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>1907-08</td>
<td>2,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>1910-11</td>
<td>1,508</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>1911-12</td>
<td>2,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>1912-13</td>
<td>2,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>1913-14</td>
<td>1,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>1914-15</td>
<td>1,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>1915-16</td>
<td>1,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>1916-17</td>
<td>1,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>1917-18</td>
<td>1,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>1918-19</td>
<td>3,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>4,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>3,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>3,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>3,713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>3,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>1,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>1,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>1946-47</td>
<td>1,920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Administration Report of Manipur State (Corresponding years)
Since the very beginning of colonial rule the local authorities adopted different ways of assessing as well as increasing the revenue of the various salt wells of the state. As for instance, at Challao the principal salt making station in the hill, government supplied iron karais (Salt-pan) for boiling the brine for which a tax of Re.1/- was charged per karai per month. In a year, the tax was levied for 10 months and during the other two months which normally was the time for cultivation the wells were farmed out to the valley Meiteis. In the case of salt wells in the valley particularly the one at Chandrakhong, payment of revenue was made in kind. In 1892-93, the state godown in turn then sold it out in retail. In 1892-93 the state purchased 700 karais and a sum of Rs. 1,819/- was spent on it. By improving the wells the state could realise an amount of Rs. 13,265/-. But it was pointed out that the heavy nature of the labour had made the industry very unpopular. The colonial authorities, therefore, suggested a cheaper method of working the industry to compete with the foreign salt.\(^44\) The import of outside salt had in fact led to the decline in the revenue.

\(^{44}\) Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1892-93, P. 6.
of the local salt wells to from Rs. 11,874/- in 1892-93 to Rs. 9,601/- in 1893-94.\textsuperscript{45} To increase the amount of revenue, sum of Rs. 577/- was invested in the purchase of iron karais to install them in the local salt wells.\textsuperscript{46} Besides, the Darbar insisted the people to consume the local salt only. The local authority also instructed the Brahmins to outcast any person who consumed imported salt. But except the old people who were more conservatively inclined, majority of the inhabitants continued to consume the cheaper imported salt. Despite these efforts, the value of imported salt still rose higher to an amount of Rs. 414/- and there was a corresponding decline of the revenue from that of the local salt to Rs. 8,855/- in 1895-96. The Darbar, therefore, imposed a number of punitive measures including stricter instructions to outcast people who consume the imported salt. In order to avoid the restriction imposed by the Darbar, many people began to practice the deceit by preparing Liverpool salt "in the same circular saucer-like cakes as Manipuri salt".\textsuperscript{47} As a result of the

\textsuperscript{45} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1893-94, P. 6.
\textsuperscript{46} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1894-95, P. 6.
\textsuperscript{47} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1895-96, P. 16.
efforts put in the last few years, the state could increase the amount of salt revenue to Rs. 11,112/- in 1896-97 but it was a temporary phase as in 1897-98, the next year it again fell to Rs. 7,150/-, due partly to non-supply of iron karais to many of the salt wells. Although the government made provision for the purchase of more iron karais, the late arrival of the karais led to the closure of many hill salt wells resulting to further decline of the revenue to Rs. 5,254/- in 1898-99. Towards the end of 1900, 400 new karais were brought from England at an expenditure of Rs. 1,185/- and distributed to the salt wells. Altogether 396 karais were installed thereby increasing the revenue again to Rs. 8,318/- but it was only for a short spell because in the next decade the contribution of the local salt wells became marginal. In fact its revenue had fallen from Rs. 8,318/- in 1899-1900 to Rs. 1,508/- in 1910-11. One of the reasons for such a sharp decline was the liberal import policy of the colonial

authorities. By the early part of 1900s, the Liverpool salt had completely dominated the local salt supply. Hudson also reported that "Liverpool salt has to a great extent succeeded in ousting the homemade articles." Since the imported salt was cheap, the local sellers used to remelt the imported salt and give it the local shape so that the people would buy it.\textsuperscript{51} Having received less and less salt revenue, the authorities decided to relinquish the management of the local salt wells. But before giving it up, it was thought wise to allot the different wells to concerned villages in order to avoid fighting for ownership.\textsuperscript{52} The Darbar was also in favour of providing certain protective measures with a view to fostering the local salt and other indigenous industries which found it difficult to compete successfully with cheaper goods. However, the Political Agent expressed his doubt about the possibility of reviving the industry against the foreign salt.\textsuperscript{53} In fact, 7,000 mounds of Liverpool salt were

\textsuperscript{51} T.C. Hodson, \textit{The Naga Tribes of Manipur}, (R.B. Publishing Corporation, 1982), P. 32.
\textsuperscript{52} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1903-1904, P. 4.
\textsuperscript{53} Administration Report of Manipur State for the year, 1910-1911, P. 12.
imported in 1911-12. Surprisingly, again the receipt of the salt revenue was in an upward trend, and it increased from Rs. 2,035/- in 1911-12 to Rs. 3,713/- in 1922-23. The increase was because of a number of steps taken up by the authorities during the period. One of such step was the issue of prohibiting adulteration of local salt. Secondly, in 1935-36, the salt wells at Nongkhong were repaired. Also it was reported that the salt wells at Shikhong which remained idle for the last 25 years was repaired by a contractor called Huidrom Gouramani Singh at a cost of Rs. 350/-. Subsequently, the Darbar issued an order that private owners whose salt wells were repaired at the state’s expense were to pay Rs. 100/- a year to the government. In the next year the Darbar passed another resolution ordering that private wells which were not properly maintained and repaired would revert to the

state. Under such strict orders, salt wells at Waikhong, Shikhong, Ningel and Chandrakhong were properly repaired by the contractors. But in spite of the continuous efforts the amount of revenue collected declined and it could not attract the attention of the local authorities any more. In term of work force also, the number of traditional manufacturers declined from 712 (total workers and dependents) in 1911 to 214 (total workers and dependents) in 1921. In the census table of 1931, no data of salt manufacturers was found, which meant the salt industry had been absolutely wiped out or they were reduced to an insignificant position.

The above discussion, thus, clearly indicates the trend of a gradual decline of the traditional industries during the colonial rule. No doubt, the British opened weaving school, installed fly-shuttle looms, started Arts and Crafts department but in spite of these ventures, the

weaving industry finally declined mainly because of the unrestricted import of cotton clothes, withdrawal of the protection given by the traditional nobility, smallness of the market to absorb the export and the monopoly control of the Marwaris. Initially the state gave a lot of encouragement to the development of silk industry. It was taken up by Messrs. Anderson and Company and later by the Manipur Company Ltd. In spite of their endeavours, the industry could not be developed because it was confined mostly to the Loi community and the increasing use of the imported clothes by the local people. In fact, nothing of the silk industry was reported after 1930s which means, the industry had been either thoroughly destroyed or it no longer played an important role in the socio-economic life of the people. Even in Salt Industry although the colonial authorities took up certain steps such as repairing of the existing salt wells, supply of iron karais, insistence on the people to consume local salt to encourage more production etc. but the unrestricted import of Liverpool salt drove the supply of locally manufactured salt out of the market which finally led to the decline of this traditional industry. There was also a trend of decline in the traditional 'metal industry'. The number of workers
depending on the metal industries declined from 493 (total workers and dependents) in 1911 to 175 (total workers and dependents) in 1931. The decline was because of the increasing use of imported aluminium and enamel products. Many other traditional industries like basket-making, jewellery, food industries though exist till today were confined to the level of production for local consumption. In 1931, the number of persons depending on food industries like 'rice pounders', 'flour-grinders', 'grain-parchers', etc. who were mostly females had declined to 1,171 persons (with dependents). This decline was precisely because of the installation of the rice mills in the valley. The mills had thrown the rice dealers out of their jobs because both common people as well as the rice exporters started buying rice from the mill owners. The number of rice 'dealers' declined from 2,882 (including dependents) in 1911 to 998 (excluding dependents) in 1931.62 Thus, it may be reasonably pointed out that collection of revenue being the main objective behind the innovative measures taken up by the colonial authorities, the traditional industries declined with no qualitative improvement of modern industries.