CHAPTER 5
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Petition, Negotiation and Resistance

As seen in the previous chapter, the Company made attempts to establish a new jurisdiction based on law and coercion to control this lucrative sector of Bengal’s economy. Scholars who have studied this have assumed that these regulations were successful in realizing the Company’s intention. However, the evidence in the Company’s records provide a mixed picture and this chapter studies to what extent the textile producers both within and outside the Company were able to subvert this system. This chapter is also discusses the extent of resistance the textile producers put up, and assesses aspects of persistence and change in late eighteenth century Bengal.

Arzee and Darkhast: Petitioning as a Mode of Negotiation

One expression of the weavers’ response was the submission of written petitions. These arzees or written petitions were from time to time submitted to the Company officials and addressed to the Commercial Resident or to the President of Board of Trade. Petitioning was perhaps one of the most common forms of making displeasure known to those in authority. The response of the weavers in Bengal cannot be seen as distinct from the behavioral pattern common among the artisanal communities in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere against coercive state policies. Artisanate not just in Bengal but in other parts of the
subcontinent also adopted this method to put forward their grievances.\(^1\) Petitioning also seemed to be an ‘officially’ acceptable or recognized act as suggested by the detailed and frequent documentation of these written complaints in the Company records. A typical *arzee* or petition is as follows (submitted by the weavers of Calcutta to William Aldersay)\(^2\)

That your petitioners since the time of Mr. Halwell never pay any puttah salamy to the Honble [sic] Company, but now the said Honble [sic] Company’s people wanting to take the puttah salamy of their houses.

Therefore your petitioners most humbly pray your most Honble Board will be pleased to take their hard case into consideration and humbly hopes such unjust demand of the said puttah salamy may be diminished.

And your petitioners as in duty bound

shall ever pray.

The petitions were often ‘couchèd in the most deferential language and expressed in submissive terms’\(^3\) and dealt with various issues bothering the weavers. For instance the Haripal weavers complained of loss of profit due to the faulty prizing of their cloth by the gomastah. The cloths were of the same sorts and quality as former times but were now sorted into six different types, instead of four. The reason, according to the weavers, for such an act by the contractor Herbert Harris was that he wanted to supply the Company as well as the private merchants for his own profit.\(^4\)

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2 WBSA, BTC, vol. 6, Part- III, 1\(^{st}\) April- 29\(^{th}\) June, 1776, Petition dated Fort William, 8\(^{th}\) May, 1776.
3 Sahai, ‘Artisans, the State, and the politics’.
Persaudpur weavers petitioned Leonard Collings against the gomastah for forcibly deducting money from the weavers during the former’s absence. The gomastah was also accused of reduction in the amount of advances to the weavers, of beating and tying the weavers and demanding misadvanced cloths (cloths either not advanced for or issued reduced advances for). The weavers requested Collings to take their case into consideration and deliver justice.5

Forcible extraction of money was also petitioned against in other aurungs such as Dhaniakhali under Durhautta, to the amount of 9000 rupees.6 Other complaints included the gomastah making forcible advances to weavers who did not work for the Company. In this regard two petitions were submitted by the weavers of Khursay and Persaudpur.7 The perseverance and resolve of the weavers come across in their repeated petitioning of the same issue. The Haripal weavers in their petition inform of complaining against the gomastah for several months.8

Weavers also displayed a tenacity and single minded determination to make their issues heard. Haripal weavers provide a good example of this fact. There were many grievances against the gomastah. In their petition, the tantis of Cuttorah, Persaudpur, Khussury and Chandoolay, complained of the ‘illegal extraction of money’ from them by the gomastah. They also expressed their unhappiness over their request not being fulfilled. The

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5 Ibid., vol. 70, 1st - 30th August, 1788. Petition from Persaudpore weavers to Leonard Collings dated Fort William, 1st August, 1788.
6 Ibid., vol. 81, 1st - 29th September, 1789, Part – II. Petition dated Fort William, 29th September, 1789.
7 Ibid., vol. 110, 5th May - 27th June, 1794. Petition from Khursay and Persaudpore weavers dated Fort William 28th May 1794.
8 Ibid. Petition from Hurripaul weavers dated Fort William, 18th June, 1794.
Resident had agreed to repay them but not discharge the gomastah. The weavers threatened that ‘your petitioners came down to Calcutta and say that without the said Ramnaut Boneijee (gomastah) discharged from the aurung, your petitioners cannot carry on the business.’ They prayed that their case be taken into serious consideration. They desired that a ‘new gomastah’ be appointed in place of the old, for them to carry on their work without hindrance. Thus they were willing to work but on a condition and on their own terms.

Petitions of weavers were also windows to the changes that were taking place in the way the Company’s way of functioning. Petitions of weavers from Haripal and six other aurungs to the Secretary of the Board of Trade inform that the measurement of cloth used to take place in their presence and if the measurement was less, it was never refused to be accepted. In this context they complained against the cloth measurer who, coveting bribes, measured their cloths less. They also complained against Thomas Philpot, the Resident, for refusing to take the cloth and confining and beating them and tying them to pillars. Despite their weaving cloths broader than the sample the cloths were still not accepted.

Petitions were certainly not written randomly. It is very possible that they were organized and well-thought out move by the weavers. They were rarely written by individuals, although it was not altogether uncommon; however, the arzees were more commonly collective representations. For instance, an arzee from the weavers of Durhautta was signed by 1400 weavers from four districts. Similarly, another was written on behalf of 17000 Surul weavers by their wakeel. Wakeels were at times hired by the weavers to represent them. Haripal weavers mentioned in their petition the good profit they used to have

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9 Ibid., vol. 70, 1st – 30th August, 1788. Petition dated Fort William, 26th August, 1788.
10 Ibid., vol. 95, 4th November - 30th December, 1791. Petition dated Fort William, 29th November, 1791.
11 Ibid., vol. 54, 1st – 30th March, 1787. Petition dated Fort William, 14th March, 1787.

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earlier, when the goods were sorted into four categories and valued at a proper value with the mutual consent of the Company's gomastah, dalal and their wakeel, one Nayan Nundy.\textsuperscript{12} Petitions were also carefully written and backed by sound evidence. For instance, the Dhaniakhali weavers accused the gomastah and his associates of taking illegal dustorees from them. They revealed that they had their own writer to calculate and ascertain how much the gomastah and his associates owed them.

The weavers' petitions also provided a glimpse of their expectations. Lakhipur Resident, C. R. Crommelin, mentioned in his letter the objective of the various regulations.\textsuperscript{13} They were 'intended to give the husbandman and manufacturer that security for their property and free will in the employ...of...their labour, which justice and humanity require.' There can be no doubt that the manufacturers would have believed in such promises of the Company when it acquired a political foothold in Bengal. They may have indeed expected to profit from their engagements with the Company, given the latter's status as a single large purchaser of assortments in Bengal. Of course when the weavers realized that they hardly had much to profit (this became clearer towards the end of the century), it gave rise to defiant behaviour. Most of the complaints in the petitions were concern the material world of the weavers.

The petitions almost always started with a context, in which the grievances were based, and which were generally favourable in nature. For instance, in their petition, the weavers of Nadia and other places under Santipur began by stressing on their long association with the Company. Weavers from various kothis under Sonamukhi reminded the addressee about their association with the Company from 'time immemorial' and the favourable

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., vol. 54, 1\textsuperscript{st} – 30\textsuperscript{th} March, 1787. Petition dated Fort William, 14\textsuperscript{th} March, 1787.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., vol. 115, Part - II, 7\textsuperscript{th} – 28\textsuperscript{th} April, 1795. Letter from Luckipore Resident, C. R. Crommelin dated 21\textsuperscript{st} February, 1795. Fort William, 7\textsuperscript{th} April, 1795.
treatment they received. The Haripal weavers reminisced the good profits they used to have when the goods were sorted into four different sorts and valued at proper value. In another petition, weavers of Haripal and six other aurungs began their petition by informing that the measurement of cloths used to take place in their presence and even if the measurement was less the cloths were never refused to be taken. The purpose for doing so was probably to invoke the benevolent nature of the Company and to bind the authorities with the belief that they could do no wrong, or rather, that they were not expected to wrong the petitioners. In eighteenth century Maratha country, antiquity\textsuperscript{14} was invoked to affirm that it was perhaps the chief source and the standard of ‘right’ versus the wrong, and in the late eighteenth century Jodhpur, traditions and customary practices marked the standard of ‘legitimate’ or \textit{wajib} acceptable to the artisans.\textsuperscript{15} In the case of Bengal, the past or rather the conduct of the initial years of the Company was stressed as just and acceptable. By referring to the Company’s goodness, the weavers let their awareness of the Company’s deviation from what was right be known and thus put pressure upon the Company to rectify and redress the wrong. The weavers thus displayed an understanding of the working relation between the employer and the employees and therefore held the Company responsible for the material prosperity and well being of the weaving community.

The relation between the pre-colonial state and its subject is a much explored theme. It is widely accepted that there was an intimate paternal relation. At the lowest administrative level, the village, the relationship was seen in the form of patron and client, based on obligation and loyalty. Sahai in her study of pre-colonial Jodhpur mentions that the Rathor rulers were seen as ‘pater familias’, enforcing ‘justice’, addressing the most intimate problems

\textsuperscript{14} Sumit Guha, ‘Wrongs and Rights in the Maratha Country’.
\textsuperscript{15} Sahai, ‘Artisans, the State, and the Politics’.
of the artisans and thus responsible for the overall welfare of the subjects. However, such a relation was not static but one in which constant negotiation of social space was an integral feature. The official records do not give much information on whether the Company had managed to inherit this attitude from its predecessors. It is not known whether the Company addressed the everyday concerns of the ‘Company weavers’ as the petitions exclusively deal with the professional concerns of the weavers. However, among the Company officials only John Cheap, the Sonamukhi Resident was known to have taken a keen interest in day-to-day concerns of the local populace and dispenses ‘justice’. According to Hunter, the locals saw in Cheap ‘the Company in the form of Vishnu, powerful for good, less venerated because less feared but adored, beloved’. The Collector, Keating, was unpopular, and therefore Cheap exercised considerable magisterial power and the ‘villagers....referred their disputes to the arbitration of the Commercial Resident. Little parties arrived every morning...’ John Cheap remained for nearly a quarter of a century in his palace at Surul. However Cheap’s image as a dispenser of justice was not a permanent one as the weavers did not hesitate in petitioning against him. The weavers of Hautcaunpur aurung, a subordinate of Sonamukhi, complained to Cheap about the atrocities of the gomastah; however, they were disappointed and stressed that ‘that Gentleman gave us no relief and moreover now gives us one rupee less advance upon each piece of cloth than he did in former years’. The weavers may have suffered on account of the private trade of Cheap, through which he amassed immense wealth so that he popularly came to be known as ‘Cheap the magnificent’. Thus the manufacturers did not seem to have any permanent image of who could be the dispenser of ‘justice’. The commercial regulation allowed them to seek redress from the Resident or Contractor, if the injury was offered by the

17 Ibid., p. 355.
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Resident and the Contractor himself or if they did not provide a redress then complaint could be addressed to the Collector. If the conduct of the Collector was not satisfactory, the weavers could themselves represent their case at the Presidency.\(^\text{19}\) The weavers lost no opportunity in availing of this provision and thus frequently petitioned against the Residents, Contractors and their agents to higher authorities. The manufacturers also did not hesitate to make use of an alternative source of protection, the rural elites, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Although the Company records do not provide any evidence of it, the weavers may have petitioned to the zamindars as well.

Often, when *arzees* and *darkhasts* were submitted either to the Commercial Resident or to the President of Board of Trade, the administration investigated into the complaints and provided reports to the Board. Often, the Board also looked into the matter. The responses of the Board as well as the Chief or the Commercial Resident are important as they give us a glimpse of the official attitude towards the weavers’ grievances. The official responses are also important for understanding the manufacturers’ later course of action. For instance, Herbert Harris’ (the Haripal contractor) response to the allegations made by the weavers was that ‘the petition was fictitious and made without authority or communication from the weavers and was fabricated by a person called Nayan Nundy.’\(^\text{20}\) The Haripal weavers’ constant demand for the removal of the gomastah and replacing the old with a new one hardly brought the desired result. As mentioned earlier, Haripal Resident Leonard Collings refused to discharge the gomastah. The Board too in its reply agreed that the gomastah was wrong in his extraction of the dustooree but saw such extractions as a part of an old custom during the Contract system thereby diminishing the magnitude of the gomastahs action. The Board chose

\(^{19}\) Article 17, Regulation of 19th July, 1786. Appendix 1.

to overlook the gomastah’s offence as it was only his ‘first’ one. Another reason behind the Board’s refusal to dismiss the gomastah was that it did not want to comply with the weavers’ proposition. The Board decided not to give in to the weavers’ request, despite it being rightful, so as to discourage others from making similar complaints.\(^{21}\) Similarly, in response to two petitions from the weavers of Khursay and Persaudpur (complaining about forcible advances made by the gomastah), the Board ordered an investigation into the complaints, and if the gomastah was found guilty, the Board was to suspend him without dismissing him.

A distinct change in the subject/objective of the petition of Haripal weavers can be noticed from 1794 onwards. While the petitions still continued to mention the atrocities caused by the gomastah and the consequent hardship, there is no request for the dismissal of the gomastah. Rather, the focus shifts to their own departure from the Company’s service. A Cuttorah weaver in his petition appealed for liberty.\(^{22}\) The Persaudpur weavers ‘desired that they be freed from the Company’s employ on account of their being unable to weave for the Company given their dim sightedness and their ignorant children not assisting them.’\(^{23}\) The weavers also desired quitting from the Company’s employment to escape the atrocities of the gomastah. In another petition the Chutteah weavers ‘beg to be released from the Company’s employ’.\(^{24}\) Similar petitions were also submitted by the Durhautta weavers. In fact, the Durhautta weavers were more persistent than those of other aurungs in seeking release from the Company’s employment and continued submitting several petitions with the same subject over a span of few years. While the tone of these above mentioned petitions is subdued, it

\(^{21}\) Ibid., vol. 70, 1\(^{st}\) – 30\(^{th}\) August, 1788. Letter from the Board to Leonard Collings dated Fort William, 26\(^{th}\) August, 1788.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., vol. 113, 4\(^{th}\) November- 26\(^{th}\) December, 1794. Petition dated Fort William, 22\(^{nd}\) April, 1794.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., vol. 122, 3\(^{rd}\) – 31\(^{st}\) May, 1796. Petition dated Fort William, 6\(^{th}\) May, 1796.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., vol. 124, 1\(^{st}\) July - 30\(^{th}\) August, 1796. Petition dated Fort William, 8\(^{th}\) May, 1796.
certainly does not hide the weavers’ aversion to the Company’s employment, which was possibly due to the weavers’ perception that the working conditions were no longer favorable as their demands were not met.

The tone and nature of the weavers’ protest through petitions needs to be gauged to understand whether it was an outright defiance or disguised negotiation. Some of the petitions show that apart from putting forward their grievances, the weavers also seemed to be engaged in subtle negotiation. For instance, the petition of the tantis of Dhaka, addressed to the Dhaka Chief and worded as following, ‘we have referred our complaints at Calcutta to this purpose and we referred to you to have justice done us, and received hopes of redress from you, but instead of making any allowance you demand from us the full balance...’ This letter is then signed by several weavers and concluded with the following statement, ‘As you are our Chief we humbly beg you will do us justice so that we may be enabled to maintain ourselves and fulfill our engagements with the Company’.25 At times the petitions were also accompanied by suggestions and subtle threats if these were not incorporated. The Santipur weavers complained against the faulty prizing which led to material hardships and their inability to provide for themselves food and clothes. The weavers concluded the petition by requesting to ‘put persons...who are experienced in the manufactory of cloths...’ They further added ‘if the gomastah and all the present servants removed and others sent instead of them, we will remain and carry on the business, but if not we cannot stay here and live’.26

A petition of the weavers of kothis of Mohunpore, Dugnapur, Ramchunderpur and Maunker Mokaums, subordinate to Sonamukhi, reads as follows,

We have from time immemorial been employed by the Company and furnish cloths according to our advances and have never been beaten or otherwise maltreated, but in the present year the Gentleman at the Soorool cooty beats and ill treats us. We are poor artificers and cannot remain and work under such treatment as we now receive.

We continue to deliver to the Company cloths of the same quality as we have always been accustomed to deliver but now these cloths are refused to be received and are ferretted and afterwards are purchased from us for ready money which not only occasion a great loss to us in price, but disable us from completing our deliveries. We are poor people and are ruined by this practice...

The Company's cloths have always been worked at the Dignagur cooty, but now the washing place have changed to Soorool cooty ... We are poor people and beg that the washing of cloths may again be performed at Dignagur and then we shall be able to remain and fulfill our engagements.

We last year went to Calcutta and brought from thence a Hookum Namah from the Board of Trade which we gave to the Gentleman at Soorool, which....is in his possession and contained an order that weavers should only work for the Company voluntarily and without compulsion. Notwithstanding this, weavers who are not inclined to take advances from the Company are beaten and otherwise forced to receive them and; further those weavers who are not inclined to enter into engagements any further than what they could fulfill are forced to receive more advances than they can manufacture for. We are poor artificers and are labouring under this injustice. You are the masters of the country and we humbly beg for redress that we may be able to remain in security. This is our request.27

This petition shows a clear departure from the above mentioned forms of petition writing. It clearly holds the Company responsible for their ruination and the prevailing of injustice in several forms. The petition also reveals the weavers' open denial of the Company's employment. The weavers openly negotiated for a suitable work condition by making it known to the Company officials that they could only work if the washing grounds at Dignagur would be retained. The defiant tone of these petitions also becomes clear from the

fact that these are not signed at the end with the customary ‘as in duty bound shall we ever pray’.

There were some petitions which did not even bother to disguise their threat such as the one by the weavers of Neetal kothi, a dependant on Surul (Sonamukhi) –

We receive advances from the Factory for gurrah cloths. We used to be allowed at the rate of 5 rupees per piece...which enabled us to maintain ourselves. We now receive at the rate of 4 rupees which does not suffice for our support. The mofussil gomastah require a large quantity of cloths than we can manufacture and when we get them made by other weavers they all take 1 rupee more which is a loss to us upon each piece. Further they (the gomastahs) in various ways subject us to peada (peon) charges and thereby distress us, so that we cannot remain. You are our masters, we are hopeful that you will give orders for us to be released from the concerns of the Factory, so we shall be able to continue in our country, else we must quit it. As we suffer great distress we have fled away and come to you. If we obtain our discharge we can retain.\(^\text{28}\)

**Resistance: Its Everyday Manifestation**

This section deals with the more active forms of response as compared to submission of petitions. For this section, complaints of the Company officials addressed to the Board of Trade are used. The letters of the officials often gave the impression of that the weavers were defiant. The officials also complained about weavers who ‘leave their work to make either intended or real complaints\(^\text{29}\), ‘spin away their time’, ‘work when necessity compels them’,

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\(^{28}\) Ibid., vol. 95, 4th November – 30th December, 1791. Petition dated Fort William, 23rd December, 1791.

'over hurried their labour to procure fresh advance.' These were some minor or rather indirect forms of resistance.

The submission of *arzees*, despite being regular and frequent, was an expensive affair, as it involved travelling to and fro from Kolkata which also involved some expenditure. Travel to Kolkata also meant neglect of work which led to further reduction in already meager profits. Thus, in between submitting petitions, the forms of defiance adopted by the manufacturers were those that have been described by scholars such as James C. Scott as the ‘ordinary weapons of the relatively powerless groups.’ The forms of struggle described by Scott are characterized by absence of ‘collective outright defiance’ and required little or no coordination or planning, often representing a form of individual self-help. These forms of struggle are what Scott terms as ‘everyday forms of resistance’ and which were carried out through passive non compliance, subtle sabotage, evasion and deception. In his study of the peasants, Scott observed that everyday forms of resistance were organized in ‘contrasting, paired forms’ in which each pair is ‘everyday resistance’ and the second represents open defiance which Scott argues dominated the peasant and working class politics. Everyday forms of resistance were almost always intended to mitigate or deny claims made by dominant classes or groups or to advance claims in relation to the superordinate classes. Such claims have ordinarily to do with the material nexus. Everyday resistance most strikingly departs from other forms of resistance in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. While institutionalized forms of resistance are formal, overt, concerned with de jure changes,

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33 Ibid., p. 29.
everyday resistance is more informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate de
facto gains. The strength of this form of resistance lies in the fact that it never ventures to
contest the formal definition of hierarchy and power. It does not aim at the replacement of the
system, in this case the authority of the Company. Everyday forms of resistance displayed
'human persistence and inventiveness.'³⁴ Besides the 'everydayness' of these forms of
resistance, scholars such as Michael Adas have also termed these protests as non-
confrontational. Adas in his study of the peasant resistance in Burmese and Javanese society
has termed everyday resistance as 'avoidance' as opposed to the confrontation form of
protest, which was marked by violence and was the consequence of change in political
system, from 'contest state' to colonial. The various forms of 'avoidance' protest included
petitioning, change in patron/allegiance, flight, and banditry.³⁵ In the context of India, recent
years have witnessed a spurt in the study of everyday forms of resistance among 'plebeian'³⁶
society. The most popular of the resistance studies are that of the subalternists, who look at a
wide range of resistance forms among a wide stratum of society. However the factor that sets
the subalternists apart from the everyday theorists is that their focus is mainly on the dramatic,
vigorous, covert forms of resistance leading to a decisive impact and which thus differ from the
non-confrontational forms of protest, the goal of which is immediate, mostly materialistic
gain and not long term change. A pioneer among the works on everyday forms of protest in
Indian context is the work of Irfan Habib.³⁷ Habib argues that various forms of class struggle,
especially that of 'landless proletariat' in Mughal India, were the consequence of

³⁴ Ibid., p. 32-33.
³⁵ Michael Adas, 'From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Precolonial and Colonial Southeast
³⁶ Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour unsettled: Mobility and protest in the Madras region, 1750-1800', *IESHR*, vol. 35, No. 4,
³⁷ Irfan Habib, 'Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India'.
contradictions existing in the social structure especially in the form of land revenue. These class resistances were both silent as well as explicit and could take several forms as was seen in the case of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{38} The peasants were often engaged in actions which did not intend to affect a particular outcome, for instance, tampering with the sealed sacks of grain meant to be the state’s share or the petty theft of grain, among other things. Scholars have argued that even such actions qualify to be identified as ‘resistance’ as each of these intended to counteract the pressures exerted by the state/ruling classes.\textsuperscript{39} Such acts have been termed as ‘self help’ and implicitly expressed accommodation with the system, being token, unsystematic and individual acts.\textsuperscript{40}

Unsystematic acts emerging out of self interest and not intending to affect any particular consequence were also prevalent in Bengal during the period of study. Verbal attack or use of abusive language may have been one such act that was possibly routinely applied. The use of abusive language was a valuable and a commonly used tool in the hands of the artisan community for ‘every day’ forms of resistance. There are numerous references to the peons or other Company servants being abused. These were officially reported as just ‘abuses’ but their content has never been preserved in official records. No actions were taken against such attacks, which may have made them even more effective. Another factor that made verbal attacks very effective was that these were directed against servants who happened to be among the locals. Also, the official records do not mention anywhere that there were any local witnesses to peons and other servants being abused. It is most likely that

\textsuperscript{38} Harbans Mukhia, ‘Illegal Extortions from Peasants’. See also R.P. Rana, ‘Agrarian Revolts in Northern India’.
\textsuperscript{39} Dilbagh Singh, ‘Contesting Hegemony: State and Peasant in Late Medieval Rajasthan’, in Rajat Datta (ed.) 
Rethinking a Millennium: Perspectives on Indian History from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century, Delhi, 2008, pp. 300-14.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
the local population in a show of solidarity never ‘witnessed’ against those who used this weapon against the Company’s servants and in fact may have wholeheartedly participated with the weavers in their resistance. This could also be the reason why there seems to be no evidence of retaliation on the part of the peons or other Company servants to these abuses. Verbal assaults would have been even more effective if the families of the weavers also participated in them. However, though no such information is provided by the official records, it is possible that children and women also participated in humiliating and taunting the peons who stood guarding their houses and looms or when they appeared to collect the monthly installments of cloths. Such possibilities become more believable by Taylor’s description of the characteristics of people of Dhaka. Locals of Dhaka, according to Taylor, displayed a great propensity to petty quarrels. Petty affrays and assaults, Taylor pointed out, were frequent occurrences in the city (and elsewhere). The causes for these were also equally petty. For instance, quarreling between children or ‘the want of punctuality on the part of embroiderers, in finishing kasseidas, also frequently gives use to a great deal of wrangling and strife between them and the oostagurs and oostanees’. Taylor further pointed out that ‘in all these cases, a long continued war of words in which the women take an active part, usually precedes the outbreak of open hostilities.’ Thus it can be assumed that the women folk also participated wholeheartedly with the men in a show of defiance towards the Company and its servants.

One of the most enduring problems faced by the Company officials was that of its weavers selling cloths advanced by it, to the private individuals and merchants. To prevent the weavers from doing so, peons were placed at the weavers’ houses.

42 Male and female superintendents of embroidery work.
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There can be no doubt as to the strictness and seriousness with which the Company officials and servants took up their duties. It was very difficult to outwit the overseers of the Company’s investment. However, the weavers’ ‘persistence and inventiveness’\(^{44}\) is best seen in a case from Chittagong aurung. The Resident, Thomas Harris, writes about ‘the great obstructions....from the registered weavers disposing of their goods for ready money and by other clandestine means...’\(^{45}\) The registered weavers who had provided cloth to a private individual (Mathew Lewis) were seized and the superscription on each piece of the confiscated cloth was examined. The superscription on one of the pieces read ‘Ramsunker at Cotgur’ which actually belonged to Ramjeebun (a registered weaver) who was ‘father to Ramsunker, a child of one year and half old’.\(^{46}\) Ramjeebun later confessed that he had made two pieces of cloth and had put his son’s name on them in order to prevent detection in the sale of them! Putting fake names on cloths to facilitate their clandestine sale (through or in the name of their children and relatives) was also reported from Malda.\(^{47}\) Resorting to such means may have been very common among the registered weavers during the period of study.

Besides such activities, the weavers were also experts at removing the mark of the Company stamped at the end of the cloth, and for this kind of cunningness they also involved the services of the washermen.\(^{48}\) It was then easy for the weavers to sell such cloths to private

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\(^{44}\) Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 33.

\(^{45}\) WBSA, BTC, vol. 72, 3rd – 30th October, 1788. Thomas Harris’ letter to Charles Stuart, dated 27th September, 1788. Fort William, 14th October, 1788.

\(^{46}\) Ibid. Letter from Thomas Harris dated 25th September, 1788. Fort William, 14th October, 1788.


\(^{48}\) Ibid., vol. 126, Part - II, 6th – 30th December, 1796. Letter from Luckipore Resident, C. R. Crommelin dated 9th April, 1796. Fort William, 16th December, 1796. (After Crommelin discovered that the ink mark of the Company was washed, so he ordered fresh marks to be made with Baella and chunamed in the same manner as
merchants and individuals without the risk of the Company laying any claim to such assortments. The washermen were also hand in glove with the weavers and gave statements in favour of the weavers (confirming that the cloths indeed belonged to the private purchasers) on being questioned by the officials.\textsuperscript{49} The manufacturers may have also found friendly support among the ruffogurs. Although the official records do not give any information on such an alliance, the Haripal weavers lamenting the dismissal of a certain ‘Calloo ruffugur’\textsuperscript{50} in their petition hints at some sort of mutual collaboration. Manufacturers may have greatly benefited by the ruffugur’s careful mending of defects in the cloth and when such services were rendered at low cost, these associations were more than welcome.

The reduction in price or wages from the early 1790s was a huge blow for the manufacturing community which was in the service of the Company. No amount of petitioning resulted in redress. Hence, the weavers found other ways to safeguard their profits. The Dhaka Chief’s letter mentions that the:

\begin{quote}
[A]rrears is the greatest at Junglebarry and Bazetpore. The difficulties which the weavers of that aurung gave me in the beginning of the year on settling with them for the present investment.....after a long and obstinate resistance made to my efforts was followed by an attempt on the part of the weavers to deliver cloths of an inferior quality...hoping by this means to counterbalance the reduction of prices by a saving in before. However the weavers found a way to get rid of this new mark also, with oil and a weed called Ponah which grew on the surface of the tanks and other standing waters).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., vol. 81, Part-I, 6\textsuperscript{th} – 28\textsuperscript{th} August, 1789. Malda Chief, G. Udny’s letter dated 1\textsuperscript{st} August, 1789. Fort William, 18\textsuperscript{th} August, 1789. Two washermen witnessed in favour of the Armenian agent.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., vol. 95, 4\textsuperscript{th} November – 30\textsuperscript{th} December, 1791. Petition from weavers of Hurripaul and six dependant aurungs addressed to the Secretary dated Fort William, 29\textsuperscript{th} November, 1791.
the quality or quantity of thread used.....the weavers would not consent to any being taken lower than C.51

Besides debasing the cloth, the weavers were also accused of jeopardizing the investment itself. In the year 1775, Henry Guinand was appointed examiner into the state of investment at Dhaka. Guinand was not only supposed to investigate but also make suggestion for the improvement and increase of the Company’s investment in the Dhaka aurungs. During the course of his investigation, Guinand discovered that one of the reasons behind the sorry state of the investment was the weavers themselves. He attributed the decrease in investment to the character of the weavers and thus gave a glimpse of the permanence of the same in his letter to Nicholas Grueber, the Dhaka Chief, where he stated ‘your endeavors or mine cannot new mould the minds of men, who will ever be governed by passion or prejudice. Such are the weavers; we may add to their character a constant discontentedness, equal to their propensity of over reaching their employers at all times.’ Guinand then went on to give a detailed account of the activities of the weavers,

It is notorious the Inhabitants of these parts work only when necessity compels them, they spin away their time alleging that their complaints were to be heard and when obliged to deliver their work, to procure fresh advance they over hurried their labour, made bad cloths and even so adulterated the thread they had contacted to work with, that the inside of the pieces differ widely from the outside and proved so much inferior that the goods were thereby rendered totally unsaleable, the only punishment they know that would be inflicted was to make another piece or pay the money; the first they refused, to the second they pleaded inability and by litigating the weavers wore their time, and the employers their advances...52

Besides the passive responses of the weavers, stronger forms of resistance also become apparent from references to 'weavers fleeing to asylums or charity villages' and 'not returning to work'. Officials' letters also reveal that the weavers 'assemble in a body and threaten to complain', 'raising riots', 'collecting in bodies of four and five hundred', 'entirely neglect their looms'. Officials also complained of 'armed confrontation'. Such occurrences of two dominant forms of resistance have been termed by Scott as 'contrasting, paired forms of resistance' in his study of the peasants. By this term he means that the first of each pair is 'everyday resistance' and the second represents open defiance, which he argues dominated peasant and working class politics. In the case of Bengal, the weavers are not known to have strictly adhered to 'contrasting, paired' forms of resistance but had resorted to active forms in accordance with the circumstances.

Peons and gomastahs were the faces of the Company's repressive policies and were also instrumental in causing misery to the weavers. There were several incidents when the Company servants were directly attacked by the weavers. It was frequently reported that the peons were beaten up. For instance, the Sonamukhi Resident's letter mentions an occasion when he had not received cloths from Mohunpur and therefore sent his servants to collect the same from the weavers' houses. He also sent peons to assemble the weavers to explain the

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delay. Some assembled, but the greatest part drove away his peons, and the Resident’s gomastah informed him that this was done at the instigation of a few weavers. When these few weavers were sent for, they beat his peons. When the Collector of Burdwan sent peons to deliver those weavers to the Resident, the weavers decamped and went to Calcutta.\textsuperscript{59}

Weavers also resorted to agitation in response to the use of violence by the pykars and dalals, in their extortion of balances by ‘continually raising riots, collecting in bodies of three, four and five hundred to the entire neglect of looms and the injury of the investment, in the meanwhile setting the country in a flame...’ as is evident from a letter written by Khirpai resident H. J. Chandler, stating the need for civil authority.\textsuperscript{60}

If the weavers were men of credit and substance, they were more assertive in their dealing with the Company and would be adamant in their refusal to ‘proceed to the looms or go with business till their matter is adjusted.’\textsuperscript{61} Similar information is also provided from Lakhipur and Dhaka. In Dhaka, the weavers of the city at one point stopped their looms partly as a consequence of the opposition given by the mokeems to their laying of the warp with ill sorted threads, partly because of the gomastahs rejecting cloths inferior to the letter C and partly because of the many ferretted cloths sent back from the sudder which the weavers had been called upon to exchange.\textsuperscript{62} According to the Lakhipur Resident, the weavers of Rajegunge aurung particularly displayed boldness and ruthlessness in severing their ties from

\textsuperscript{59} WBSA, BTC, vol. 93, 5\textsuperscript{th} July – 30\textsuperscript{th} August, 1791. Letter from J. Cheap dated 21\textsuperscript{st} July, 1791. Fort William, 29\textsuperscript{th} July, 1791.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., vol. 4, 4\textsuperscript{th} July – 29\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. H. J. Chandler’s letter to Samuel Middleton dated 18\textsuperscript{th} August, 1775. Fort William, 25\textsuperscript{th} August, 1775.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., vol. 34, Part-I, 1\textsuperscript{st} October – 12\textsuperscript{th} November, 1782. Richard Becker’s to P. M. Dacres, dated 28\textsuperscript{th} September, 1782. Fort William, 10\textsuperscript{th} October, 1782.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., vol. 94, 2\textsuperscript{nd} September – 28\textsuperscript{th} October, 1791. Letter from J. Taylor dated 23\textsuperscript{rd} September, 1791. Fort William, 7\textsuperscript{th} October, 1791.
the Company, being ‘substantial’ men.\textsuperscript{63} Out of a total of 1,376 ‘numbered’ weavers, 465 weavers obtained their ‘discharge’ from the Company’s service, which was by far the largest number discharged from any of the twelve aurungs under Lakhipur.\textsuperscript{64} Crommelin provided the following account of the Rajegunge aurung and its weavers:

This aurung would be a most valuable one to the Company, if the weavers could be persuaded to remain in the Company’s employ, the cossaes produced in it, are excellent in every respect and the baftaes generally of a good quality but there are three strong reasons weighing against even a distant hope of the Company reaping any essential advantage from it, by advances immediately to the manufacturers, vizt.,

1. Their disaffection
2. Their independence
3. It’s being the principal mart for private purchases, considered chiefly as a cossaes aurung.

The first point, the disaffection of the weavers, I attribute chiefly to their having been at first generally forced into the employ and indeed, as soon as they found there was an opening for them to leave it, they began to show their disaffection openly, refusing to work...that the columns “deserted”, “will not work”, “unable to work” and “discharged” particularly the latter, exhibit greater numbers than any other aurungs...in respect to second and third points, they are generally substantial men, with property at their disposal and being situated at the center, almost of constant competition, can generally if not always dispose of the produce of their labour to advantage. Men thus situated, will naturally more severely feel the hardship of a constant tie and consequently when opportunity offers, will not only effectually free themselves from it but be cautious of leaving even an opening for similar restraint in future. Their balances are comparatively trifling and their independence in respect to property renders them safe, indeed such as have already required their discharge, have brought the money with them and those who are unwilling to work have expressed readiness to pay in their balance...

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., vol. 126, Part- II, \textsuperscript{6th} – \textsuperscript{30th} December, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated \textsuperscript{9th} April, 1796. Fort William, \textsuperscript{16th} December, 1796.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
The weavers of this aurung, do not generally bring their own goods to the hauts, a few of the poorer of course do, and a few receive advances from the pykars and secure a moderate profit without trouble or delay; but by far a greater number work upon the strength and their own funds, and generally derive a handsome profit from the competition amongst the pykars who purchase from house to house with ready money, securing themselves thereby from risk and balances and deriving a moderate profit under the great advantage of generally a prompt sale.

Under all circumstances therefore I consider that Rajegunge aurung to be one of the least likely ever to be brought into the Company's employ so as to be made a resource to be depended upon. It cannot be hoped that men of property will tie up, without adequate advantages, nor scarcely advantages [sic: advantageous] equal to those they already enjoy. Funds of their own or advances if they prefer them, a ready sale under almost a constant competition and the disposal of their property, at their option. 65

Thus rich weavers worked for the Company only till it was advantageous to them. By the end of the century, working for other merchants and especially the domestic market seemed more advantageous to these weavers, and therefore they boldly refused to work further for the Company and purchased their ‘discharge’.

It was not uncommon for weavers to assemble in large numbers and present their grievances. It would not be wrong to assume that such actions were deliberate and were done to add strength to their cause. Such gatherings were never peaceful and weavers displayed behaviour that clearly aimed at intimidating and unnerving the Company officials and servants who frequently reported of ‘passion and prejudice of a very numerous body of weavers’. 66 Moreover, large gatherings of manufacturers (to present their complaints) could be seen as a defiance of the articles XVII and VII of the Regulations of 19 July 1786 and 23

65 Ibid.
July 1787, respectively, which stated that the weavers 'may represent their case at the Presidency by a delegation of not more than ten of the number of complainants.'

The power of collective behaviour on the part of the weavers is clearly displayed in Dhaka Resident James Taylor's letter. Taylor gives a vivid description of the clamorous behaviour of the weavers in his letter. Such behaviour was displayed especially during the prizing processes when,

[T]he mokeems surrounded at that time by 1 or 200 weavers each solicitous for the prizing of his own cloths and striving by entries or clamorous exposition to influence the mokeem against the judgment and on the other hand by a more strict attention to the examination of cloths at the sudder, than circumstances had before admitted of, give rise to much murmuring and dissatisfaction on the part of weavers particularly at Dacca, Sonargong and Narainpore.

Large gatherings were also preferred by the manufacturers with the objective of influencing decisions in their favour. For instance, in the Jangalbari and Bajitpur aurung, the weavers having given in debased cloths,

[Ε]ntertained hopes...that the appearance of their numbers, the general disposition which prevailed among them and above all the season and the considerable balance of cloths due from their aurung would have induced me (the Dhaka Chief) to accede to their unreasonable claims and receive the whole of the ferretted cloths in C as part of their engagements. When the weavers found me determined not to indulge them in any points which their engagements did not justify, they became solicitous that D should be taken...

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67 Appendix 1.
The collective mentality of the weavers is also evident from the Lakhipur Resident's letter. He mentions: 'if one man (weaver) experiences an injury the whole are apprehensive of being subjected to the like'.\(^{70}\) The weavers also demanded solidarity and community participation from the members of their community. Punitive actions were taken against those who did not conform to the same. For instance, weavers boycotting the prizing process in Santipur beat a weaver named Gongaram Peramonick who came to prizing and insisted on going in even when stopped by the others. The weaver was eventually rescued by the Company servants.\(^{71}\)

Although scholars have attributed everyday forms of resistance to an avoidance of direct confrontation with authority and to an attempt to reduce the chances of repression, a very different picture comes to light in the case of weavers in Bengal during the period of study. Patna was one region where the Company was fast losing its control. One of the reasons attributed by the officials for to their lack of control was that the Company had always depended on local agents to carry out investment on behalf of the Company. Over a period of time, these indigenous agents greatly undermined the Company's presence in Patna and its surrounding regions by neglecting its trade and giving preference to their own. In such a situation the Company hardly had any direct contact with the weavers, not to mention any control over them. Thus, in the case of Patna, the Company weavers showed their dissatisfaction in a different way from their counterparts in other areas of Bengal.

Weavers in and around Patna seemed to have been in a relatively privileged position as revealed by P. M. Dacres' letter. He confessed about 'the little check they [aurung

\(^{70}\) Ibid., vol. 121, 1\(^{st}\) March – 29\(^{th}\) April, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 12\(^{th}\) December, 1795. Fort William, 8\(^{th}\) March, 1796.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., vol. 137, 3\(^{rd}\) July – 31\(^{st}\) August, 1798. Letter from E. Fletcher dated 28\(^{th}\) July, 1798. Fort William, 31\(^{st}\) July, 1798.
contractors] have over the manufacturer who [was] not being bound by any penalty in case of failure…\textsuperscript{72} It may have been possible that the Company officials could not place peons over the weavers (to recover balance), as was the practice elsewhere, due to the Company’s precarious position in the region. Dacres further pointed out that ‘the manufacturer…[was] under no such obligation…in case the contractor presses him to make good his deficiency…’\textsuperscript{73} In cases where the Contractor pressed the manufacturer to take advance to fabricate a piece of better quality, and took the bad cloth from the latter’s hand, the manufacturer displayed a very distinct boldness of attitude. Dacres wrote, in such cases ‘he [the weaver] immediately has recourse to the asylum which is afforded him in the regulation which has been made for promoting of trade and going to the nearest administration of justice who is generally the aumil or zamindar and who find it their interest to protect him…’\textsuperscript{74} In Patna, the weavers did not hesitate to take advantage of the loopholes within the regulations and be defiant and wriggle out of a situation where they did not have to pay the balance.

Balance of cloth was one of the most contentious issues between the Company and the manufacturers. In the previous chapter it was shown that the Company’s way of dealing with this was by introducing coercive decrees. The weavers on the other hand displayed different ways of dealing with this enduring problem.

Three modes of dealing with balances are noticed during the period of study and each reveals a different form of resistance adopted by the weavers. The first and most common form was desertion with huge balances in hand. Second was paying the balances, and outright refusal to accept any further advances from the Company hence, defection from Company’s

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., vol. 11, Part-1, 1\textsuperscript{st} April - 6\textsuperscript{th} May, 1777. P. M. Dacres letter to William Aldersey, dated 5\textsuperscript{th} April, 1777. Fort William, 18\textsuperscript{th} April, 1777.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
service. The third form was through conscious creation and maintenance of balances by the weavers. The last form totally turned the tables on the Company officials and instead of balances being important tools of subjugation in the hands of the Company officials, they actually became a matter of great concern and worry for them.

Increasing the balances was an important instrument in the hands of the Company officials to keep the weavers tied to the employment of the Company, as mentioned in chapter four. This was a vicious cycle from which weavers could rarely get out. To pay the balances of one year, the weavers were made to take advances for the next year, which was very discouraging for them. However, the manufacturers did not always get discouraged by such an act as is revealed in Henry Guinand’s letter to Nicholas Grueber, which states that balances have ‘contrary to the interest of the Government by increasing the debt of the weavers, given them an opportunity of gratifying their natural bent to deceit and thereby totally debasing the fabrick [sic: fabric].’ Thus, instead of making good their balance, weavers continued to compromise on the quality of cloth. Although slowing down their work would have been self defeating for the weavers, as it would have further increased their balance, this did not bother them as they were reported to ‘delay the delivery of them [cloth] to so distant a period as to put it out of the contractors power to adhere punctually to the tenor of his engagement.’

However, Dacres, the Patna Chief, confessed that it was more common for the weavers to debase the fabric rather than delay the delivery. The Khiroipai Resident too reported that the pykars and dalals complained of weavers ‘not only refusing their just balances’ but took

76 Ibid., vol. 11, Part- I, 1st April – 6th May, 1777. Patna Chief, P. M. Dacres’ letter to William Aldersey, dated 5th April, 1777. Fort William, 18th April, 1777.
advances from them and 'delivered the worst.'

Thus, the Company's procurement process was seriously hampered by the 'delay in delivery and delivering the worst' method adopted by the weavers as a response to the problem of balances.

When faced with making good their balance, the weavers also did not hesitate to take advantage of the Company's uncomfortable relation with its rivals. Weavers were known to play private traders against the Company and vice versa when cornered with the recovery of the debt, as is evident from the petition of Meer Hyder addressed to Charles Stuart. Similar occurrence is also evident from the petition of Markar Mury John, an agent for Basra merchants, residing in Kolkata. The gomastah of Moyapur had sent peons to the weavers' houses and seized the cloths belonging to Mury John. Being remediless, he demanded that the weavers return his money. 'But the weavers taking advantage of the confusion, refused to return the money back...in which fraud they were protected by the said gomastah...' It was a common practice among the weavers to take advances from one party, and if unable to fulfill their agreement, seek help and protection from the other, especially that of the Company officials and servants, who were more than happy to oblige in such situations in the hope of gaining more weavers for their service.

The weavers at times not only refused to provide cloth for which they had taken advances (as stated in the Sonamukhi Resident's letter) but mostly absconded from their villages to escape balances. Even when the Company increased the prices, which it did rarely,
it was almost always inconsiderable with regards to the price of the necessities and was inadequate for the sustenance of the weaver and his family. Thus ‘some [of them] from the utter impossibility of ever being able to liquidate their accounts have left the aurung…cannot find out to what place they have retired’. The Resident’s only solace was that ‘not one fourth so many have run away this year as appeared…to have been the case last year…’81

Desertion or flight from the area of work and residence was a common weapon at the disposal of the weavers. Flight was not specific to the manufacturers of Bengal but was conveniently adopted by those at the bottom of the social ladder both within and outside the Indian subcontinent. Scott says, ‘desertion…achieves something where mutiny may fail, precisely because it aims at self-help and withdrawal and rather than institutional confrontation…massive withdrawal of compliance is in a sense more radical in its implications…’82 Scholars have pointed out that migration or desertion of weavers was a well established phenomenon long before colonialism.83 Flight is also recognized as an expression of class struggle where weavers migrated in order to resist those that made demands upon them, as was the case in Bengal.84 In South India, mobility was also seen by some scholars as one of the chief characteristics of the weaving population.85 Scholars have viewed desertion as a form of ‘collective withdrawal’ rather than as an ‘individual, spontaneous response to existential perils, nor as a positive decision to migrate to a more favourable environment.’86 In

82 Scott, Weapons of the Weak, p. 32.
85 Ramaswamy, Textiles and Weavers, pp. 120-21.
86 Ahuja, ‘Labour unsettled’.

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several cases mobility or flight was adopted as a form of protest to improve bargaining position among other things, in the case of Bengal this form of protest was adopted by the weavers more to abandon their responsibility in favour of profitability emerging out of bazaar sale. In most cases it was the land-labour scarcity that ensured the success of mobility as a weapon, but in the case of the Bengali weavers, desertion managed to have an impact on the Company mainly because of the perpetual labour shortage faced by it. Ahuja describes desertion or ‘collective withdrawal’ as the ‘ultimate resource against oppression’. 87

Although the Company officials made great efforts to trace and bring back the deserted weavers, it was very difficult to trace the absconding weavers as the table below shows and even more difficult to persuade them to come back to their original homes once they were traced.

**Table 5: Showing number of Deserted Weavers and the balances they owed to the Company in various aurungs in 1790.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aurungs</th>
<th>'Of whom no intelligence can be procured'</th>
<th>'Who are returned and work as journeyman or who are poor and destitute'</th>
<th>'Residents in other places'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of persons</td>
<td>Amount (Rs a p)</td>
<td>No. of persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2,114.6 4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonargaon</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>7,512 15 17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhamrai</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>5,589 6 15</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titabadi</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>2,343 7 15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narainpur</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2,278 1 12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandpur</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>367 8 -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>20,205 14 3</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


87 Ibid.
Chapter 5

One of the reasons why the weavers got accepted wherever they chose to reside was that they contributed to the revenue of that region. Table 5 shows that a total of 1,111 people had absconded from various aurungs in and around Dhaka. No information could be procured for about 40 to 91 percent of the deserted weavers. 7 to 52 percent of the weavers had taken residence elsewhere and it was only 1 to 12 percent who came back to work again as journeymen, most probably because they were poor and could not find better opportunities elsewhere. Although scholars have deemed migration to be a ‘short term strategy designed to cope with more particular circumstances’ this seems to be only partially true in case of Bengal. Thus, out of the total 1,111 absconding weavers, 1,005 did not come back to their original aurungs. These were also the ones who had larger balance against them, a collective sum of 35,387 rupees. Those that returned to their old aurungs had relatively lower balance of 4,137 rupees. Although most cases of desertion during the period of study seem to have been of permanent nature, this does not mean that temporary desertion did not take place. Temporary migrations were also common. Temporary desertions occurred annually especially at the close of the season and were attributed solely to the weavers’ inability to liquidate their balances and consequently to secrete themselves. Often, at the end of the season the weavers could make little or no profit (due to enhanced price of thread, being in great demand by private purchasers) and thus had little option but to take to flight. Instances of mass desertion were also reported from Lakhipur. C. R. Crommelin, the Lakhipur Chief, reported considerable decline in the number of looms employed for the Company and attributed it to a large number of desertions and refusal to work. One of the greatest fears of the Chief was that a great number of weavers would give up their Company ‘numbers’. By August 1795, the

88 Haynes and Roy, ‘Conceiving mobility’.
89 Ibid., vol. 121, 1st March - 29th April, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 12th December, 1795. Fort William, 8th March, 1796; and vol. 126, Part-II, 6th – 30th December, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 9th April, 1796. Fort William, 16th December, 1796.

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Chief informed, at least upward of one third of the originally numbered weavers had defected. Crommelin feared that by the end of that year 1,349 more weavers would defect from the Company’s service. Therefore, from a total of 9,447 weavers only 4,700 numbered weavers would remain, after deducting the number of deaths and those that refused to work.  

From Table 5 it is evident that at least 436 weavers were traced and found to have taken residence elsewhere. This could also mean that the Company officials could not persuade them to come back to their original aurungs. It is interesting to know the kind of places these weavers fled to in order to escape paying their balance. Henry Halsey, a contractor for the Company in Sonamukhi, writes in his letter about the ‘asylum for [the] disaffected weavers and ryotts of the Company aurungs and lands’ provided by ‘a number of petty tallookdars and Baza zamin holders’ who did so in order to increase the population of their own lands. Although the weavers along with other groups of the artisanal community suffered in the constant clash between the Company and the local authorities, the weavers over time managed to find a way to enlist the support of either of the two authorities to their cause as and when the situation demanded. Thus, Halsey mentions the existence of a number of ‘charity villages and petty talooks’ throughout the country. These charity villages seem to have been the bastions of opposition to the Company’s authority. Halsey writes that these villages and talluks ‘pay no revenue to Government and esteem themselves greatly independent of every authority practiced in the malguzary lands’, and that ‘in these places of

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90 Ibid., vol. 121, 1st March - 29th April, 1796. Letter dated 12th December, 1795. Fort William, 8th March, 1796. Each weaver had one loom, so there were 4,700 numbered looms.
93 Ibid.
asylum the weavers frequently take refuge with considerable balances in their hands.\textsuperscript{94} Here the weavers were ‘mostly supported by the proprietors being muttasuddies, or holding protection from such\textsuperscript{95}. There is ample evidence that the weavers having sought refuge in these charity villages received complete protection, which included armed protection as and when the situation demanded. Halsey further informed that when peons were sent to bring back such weavers, they were ‘are assaulted by the whole village and drove away with disgrace.’\textsuperscript{96} Thus there was no doubt that these charity villages and petty talooks were safe havens for the fleeing weavers. Such behaviour was probably greatly encouraged by the zamindars and talukdars as they benefited considerably, for an increasing population of weavers put their villages ‘in a flourishing state....in prejudice to the Company’s malguzary lands...’\textsuperscript{97} There are also references to whole villages being especially set up to give protection to the Company weavers as was the case in Burdwan.\textsuperscript{98} The local authorities did not just oppose the peons sent by the Company to fetch the absconding weavers but also prohibited the weavers from receiving the Company’s advances\textsuperscript{99} and encouraged the weavers to weave coarser cloth rather than the Company’s assortments, which went well with the weavers. A vivid description of the protection accorded to the absconding weavers is given in a letter from J. B. Smith, the Sonamukhi Resident,

\begin{quote}
[T]wo weavers under Soupoore named Sam Dauss and Goopey Sah who have worked for you from the first establishment of this aurung by Mr. Hawkins and have received
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Ibid., vol. 34, Part- II, 19\textsuperscript{th} November – 31\textsuperscript{st} December, 1782. Soonamooky Resident, J. B. Smith’s letter to P. M. Dacres, dated 19\textsuperscript{th} November, 1782. Fort William, 26\textsuperscript{th} November, 1782.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Ibid., vol. 34, Part – I, 1\textsuperscript{st} October – 12\textsuperscript{th} November, 1782. Soonamooky Resident, J. B. Smith’s letter to P. M. Dacres, dated 7\textsuperscript{th} October 1782. Fort William, 10\textsuperscript{th} October, 1782.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Chapter 5

your advances this year also....Sam Dauss 41 Rupees and Goopey Shah 53 [rupees] have absconded one to a village called Narsingpore, and the other to Reowrah situated in Burdwan...the jagudur for Soupoure came and acquainted me, that they had refused delivering their cloths at your cootie. That he was told to go away, and no peons sent by me should be permitted by me to go in the village; on such information I immediately dispatched peons with and authority from me to bring those weavers....they were beat unmercifully and confined by order of the gomastah of the village, my authority and myself abused in most opprobrious terms, intelligence of this riot being brought me....I got together about a dozen peons and went in my palanquine to bring the weavers myself, but on my approach to the village, a tom tom [drum] was beat and the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages assembled to a tall bamboo that was erected with a stick and a piece of cloth suspended to it, each man armed, some with stout bamboos, others with swords and targets to oppose me....were assembled at a moderate computation to 1000 peoples I had to walk away with my party...100

Even when the weavers were brought back, they did not really benefit the Company as is evident from the Dhaka letter.101 Such weavers did not show any inclination to work for the Company. The letter informs about the resentment (towards the Company’s employment) of the ‘Attya people [the recovered weavers from Dhamrai]’. Bebb’s letter mentions ‘the Attya people...which showed the remembrance and indicated the resentment of former hardships. Several of the men gave to me as the reason of their repugnance for entering into Company’s service, the rigour with which Barwell’s return of advances and collection of balances had been enforced. “Sir” said several of them “we sold our all and were ruined to satisfy these demands.”102 These weavers held the Company responsible for their impoverished state, which according to Bebb was caused by the ‘hard dealings of the Contractors’ further

102 Ibid.
aggravated by the dearth of 1783, the inundation of 1787 and the ‘subsequent famine that oppressed this part of Bengal for sixteen months’. Bebb further added that though the weavers of the region were in a better position than other people of the same class due to the relief provided by the government in the form of grain supplies, they had still suffered considerably. Thus the recovered weavers made it known to the Company that despite their joining its service (possibly against their wishes) they were ‘in no situation to satisfy old claims’.

Therefore it can be assumed that despite succeeding occasionally in bring back the weavers from the places where they had taken refuge to escape paying balances, the Company had no hope of benefiting, especially because the retrieved weavers were in no position to pay their balances, and secondly, the weavers would serve the Company grudgingly, and would debase the cloths they made. Thus, retrieving weavers meant loss for the Company in many ways.

By the end of the century weavers were also resorting to a more permanent solution to deal with the problem of balances. Weavers from several aurungs were reported to have paid their balances and also refuse to accept any further advances. Company officials lamented the weavers’ refusal to accept further advances and the reason extended by the latter for such refusals was lack of profit or little profit, which was no compensation to them. Thus Samuel Beachcroft, the Harial Resident, reported that in one village a hundred persons declined the acceptance of any further advances. In their deposition the Haripal weavers clearly expressed their desire to quit the Company’s employ and also showed their preference to work for the bazaar instead.

Weavers from Cuttorah aurung (Haripal), both young and old

103 Ibid.
(between 21 to 70 years) gave various reasons, such as ignorance and dim sightedness due to old age, as reasons for their inability to continue any further in the Company’s employment. Their determination to get rid of their balances comes across in their preference to liquidate their balances in cash rather than in the form of assortments as was the common practice. Furthermore it was common for the relatives of the Company weavers to get inducted in their stead in case of death or retirement (a method of tying the weaver and his family to the Company service in perpetuity). However, the Cuttorah weavers who deposed were completely averse to the suggestion of their children joining the Company’s employment and gave reasons such as failure of the offsprings to learn the trade or their taking up professions other than weaving (although this must have been far from the truth given that children inevitably followed parents’ professions). When asked how they would maintain themselves once out of the Company’s employ, each of them were confident of surviving by providing common cloth for the domestic market. This also gives a glimpse of a flourishing domestic market by the end of the century.

Besides the above mentioned places, weavers in other areas also desired emancipation. Weavers were seen taking advantage of the factor that was responsible for the very existence of the manufacturing centers. For instance, Sonarundi aurung was said to be so close to the river that it gave the weavers ample opportunity for constant sale of short and light cloths and thus they could derive small profits for easy labour, which was cited as the reason behind the weavers’ desire for emancipation. ¹⁰⁶

The third form adopted by the weavers to deal with balances was to deliberately create them. The Lakhipur Chief proposed that the weavers and looms that would continue to work

for the Company in 1796 could be divided into four categories. There were 4,700 weavers and an equal number of looms available to the Company. The first category of manufacturers made finer assortments and there were 1000 of them; in the second category there were 1,500 weavers and they made lower and middling assortments; the third and the fourth category of weavers were ones that the Chief feared the most. They were described in the following manner,

[the third category] manufacturers of the lower and middling assortments, but who are in deep balance, and who from underhand connections with pykars and clandestine sales in the hauts cannot properly be estimated so high as the proceeding [sic: preceding]... [the fourth category] manufacturers of the lower and middling assortments, but who are in deep balance, who cannot be trusted with full advances, but who may now and then deliver in a piece or two and receive a trifling advance in return... 107

Of the third and the fourth categories, there were 1,500 and 700 weavers, respectively, in Lakhipur. Crommelin further stressed, ‘the third description are a set of people who take every opportunity of privately disposing of their cloths in the hauts and who instead of endeavouring to work out their old balances, by degree, seem rather disposed to add to them, so that no certain dependence can be placed upon them.’ 108

Besides desertion, refusal of advances, liquidation and deliberate creation of balance, fictitious registration of ‘death’ can also be looked at as another form of resistance against balances, although hypothetically, in the absence of sufficient evidence. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Company under its ‘numbering and registration’ system gave one number to two weavers. While explaining the declining number of registered weavers, the

107 Ibid., vol. 121, 1st March - 29th April, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 12th December, 1795. Fort William, 8th March, 1796.
108 Ibid.
Lakhipur Chief had divided the weavers into several categories such as "dead and not replaced", "deserted", "will not work" and "discharged". The Chief was very perplexed that in eight years since 'registration' of weavers began, only 99 people were reported as 'dead', which was a small number and which was also a combined number for all the aurungs under Lakhipur. The Chief gave the following explanation,

[T]hat it was a practice at the aurung factories frequently to include two persons under one number, so that if one died, the number continued under the name of the survivor, and very probably if that survivor had a son, the son's name was added to the number, in place of the person deceased, by which means no death appeared and the ties upon the family was continued, this was not confined merely to the son's of the weavers, but extended to any of their kindred in the family generally the nearest. Another practice also, was that of putting in other people, under the old numbers without reporting the death of the first holders, or the circumstances, to the Sudder to have ascertained every charge of the kind, would not only have taken up a great deal of time, but would have answered no particular good purpose...

Thus it was not just a practice not to report death, but it was a discrepancy on the part of the servants and officials not to register 'deaths' as it was considered waste of time and a worthless exercise. This attitude may have cost the Company dearly, especially at a time when a decline in number of weavers in its service became a persistent problem in most of the manufacturing centers where the Company conducted its business, and may have been a significant hindrance to its sustained efforts to bring about an increase in its labour force.

While the Lakhipur Chief was perplexed at the report of such a small number of deaths over a significant period of eight years, the Board was left astounded when a large number of deaths were reported from Dhaka and its subordinate aurungs in a single year,
especially of those who owed large balances to the Company. The following table shows the number of deaths recorded in each aurung in 1790.

Table 5.1: Showing the number of Dead Weavers and the balances they owed to the Company in various aurungs in 1790.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aurungs</th>
<th>“Who have no representative or assets”</th>
<th>“Whose children were minors at the time of the father’s death and are since employed by the Co and are very poor”</th>
<th>“Whose children were minors at the time of the father’s death and have since followed some other trade”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of persons</td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>No. of persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>2408</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonargaon</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9309</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhamrai</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10022</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titabadi</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narainpur</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>10446</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandpur</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>32,808</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.1 shows that a total of 793 Company weavers were listed dead in the year 1790. Of these it is interesting to note that children of only 29 deceased weavers or merely 3 percent of the total came back to the Company for employment. The reason, as cited in the table, was that they were ‘very poor’ and perhaps knew of no other means of earning. The children of a relatively larger number of dead weavers chose to follow other trades which have not been specified in the table. It is very much possible that these children opted to weave for the domestic market or may have indeed moved away from weaving. It is apparent from this table that the largest number of deaths of those weavers were reported who owed larger balances, for instance, as shown in the first column. These weavers were also reported to have no
‘assets’ and therefore may have been unable to pay back their dues, which also means that they were mostly poor weavers and could not purchase their ‘discharge’, like the rich Rajegunge weavers of Lakhipur, or pay back their balance in cash and boldly refuse to work for the Company, like the Cuttorah weavers of Haripal, who can also be considered as wealthy. Thus, poor weavers probably had to be more creative and conniving and probably forge their ‘death’ in collaboration with the indigenous servants of the Company, who were responsible for recording or providing information about the weavers. It is possible that these weavers may have bribed the local servants to declare them ‘dead’ in the Company records. This hypothesis receives some strength from the Board’s reply to John Bebb’s letter, expressing ‘distrust of the reports made by the native servants, of weavers dead...from Bazetpore Junglebaree you have now sent us...no advances were made at this aurung till srbon 1194 or July 1787. That so many should die insolvent, or nearly so, with such large advances in their hands, before the end of that year seems extraordinary; it is not out of the scale of possibility but it has a suspicious appearance.’

It would be worthwhile to look at some of the reasons for weavers’ dissatisfaction with the Company’s employment. Besides the coercive policy and low labour rates paid to the weaver, there were several reasons for the manufacturers’ aversion to the Company’s employment. One of the reasons was that at times the weavers had to weave assortments of lower quality for which they were naturally paid less in the Company’s employ. Their hardships were aggravated when the price of basic necessities like grains would shoot up, as was evident from the ‘heavy complaints’ of the Burron weavers. Princep, in a letter written

111 Ibid., vol. 92, 3rd May – 28th June, 1791. Board’s letter to Dacca Resident, John Bebb, dated Fort William, 28th June, 1791.

almost a year later, further revealed the difference in the earnings of various groups of weavers in the same aurung. The *tanties* employed for making fine assortments such as *francis fine cossaes* were paid more than adequate price for their additional care and purchase of finer threads than those who made lower assortments such as Kumarkhali and Burron *cossaes*.  

Princed solicited alteration of putton rates and consequently of the contract prices (possibly in favour of the weavers of lower assortments). He warned that if the prices were further lowered it would ‘inevitably force them [weavers] to decamp with their balances or fabricate inferior cloths for the Honble [sic] Company...’

Lakhipur Resident C. R. Crommelin’s letter provides another reason for the manufacturers’ dissatisfaction with the Company’s employment. It reveals that he not only ‘found it utterly impracticable, either to induce the weavers to enter into engagements’ but also found it difficult ‘to keep them even to the performance of such engagements as they do enter into...for so unexpected a defection on the part of the weavers’. Although Crommelin could never really trace with certainty any essential cause for particular dissatisfaction to the Company’s employment, he concluded that it was ‘the idea of showing an independence which they never possessed before, merely because they now possess it, or by the suggestion of zamindars and talookdars, aided by those of designing peoples amongst themselves’. He traced the reason for such behaviour within the Company’s policies and pointed out,

> [T]hat the major part of the weavers were numbered in the first instance....this proved a fundamental evil, for instead of their minds being attached to the Company’s

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114 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
employ they probably esteemed their numbers as badges of restraint, which the advantages of the Company afforded, could not get the better of and now that they have fully ascertained the real privileges the regulation afford them, they are eager to get rid, even of the names of a numbered weaver...though the markets are low and without purchasers, yet the abundance of the year had reduced the articles of life to such low rates, that they can live for a mere trifle and have no present occasion for regular employ...¹¹⁷

Crommelin explained such behaviour of weavers by revealing that the weavers benefited more by catering to the local market than to the Company. In weaving for the haat a weaver could manufacture an average of four pieces per month as opposed to two pieces for the Company in a month or three pieces in two months. Despite the debased nature of the assortments (meant for the haats), the price of the cloth was not lowered. The weaver was also not subjected to trouble, expense or loss of time if he sold in a haat near his place of residence, where he carried his cloth to the haat dalal, who disposed it, received a pun per piece and adjusted the weaver’s account. If the weaver’s labour was sold to the pykars, the pykars or their people collected the produce from the weaver’s house, or if the weaver carried his goods to them, he was lodged and fed in the absence of the pykars and nothing was spent out of the weaver’s own pocket. On the contrary, if the weaver worked for the Company, the produce of his loom was not above half; an inattention in his manufacture caused a deduction in the prizing; and if he attended the prizing himself, he incurred expenses and loss of time, and there was possibility of him being subjected to delay and fraud in the adjustment of his account, from the idleness or roguery of the mohussil servants. The Company’s business was extensive and many servants were employed, also the Residents resided at great distances, so

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

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that there was every possibility of their failure to check the shortcomings in the functioning of
the Company.\textsuperscript{118}

Another reason for the weavers' disinterest in the Company's employment was that
they could evade being subjected to \textit{taunt salamie} of two to three rupees per loom, which was
levied by the local authorities 'by declining the Company's advance'.\textsuperscript{119}

In Mureasarai (in Chittagong province), upward of 750 weavers were reported to have
quit the Company's employment, the reason being that the weavers were left without
employment in the intermediate space between expiration of one investment and settlement of
another. They sought advances from individuals who afterwards kept them supplied with
money and engaged their labour to the total preclusion of the Company's agents. In order to
attract the weavers back to the Company's employment, the Lakhipur Resident decided to
abolish the dustorees and assured them of protection. On his doing so, the weavers agreed to
take the Company's advance.\textsuperscript{120}

At times the weavers also revealed their complete disregard for the Company's
employment by deciding to quit without any particular reason. Sonamukhi Resident J. Money
states in his letter that,

\[
\text{[T]here seems to be a great degree of dissatisfaction to the Company's employment}
\text{without any causes assigned. For notwithstanding the weavers confess that they are}
\]

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., vol. 121, 1\textsuperscript{st} March - 29\textsuperscript{th} April, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 12\textsuperscript{th} December, 1795. Fort
William, 8\textsuperscript{th} March, 1796; also vol. 75, 2\textsuperscript{nd} - 30\textsuperscript{th} January, 1789. Letter from Henry Scott dated 28\textsuperscript{th} December,
1788. Fort William, 9\textsuperscript{th} January, 1788.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., vol. 76, 3\textsuperscript{rd} - 27\textsuperscript{th} February, 1789. Board's letter to Luckipore Resident, dated Fort William, 24\textsuperscript{th}
February, 1789.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., vol. 58, 3\textsuperscript{rd} - 31\textsuperscript{st} July, 1787. Luckipore Resident, Henry Scott's letter to Charles Stuart dated 24\textsuperscript{th} June
1787. Fort William, 3\textsuperscript{rd} July 1787.
fully paid and treated, still they dislike the business. The general answer from those who have paid up their balance...[was] that they will act as they please...To prevent people leaving the Company’s employ who have no immediate grievances to redress will....be very difficult as they are actuated from former ill treatment and perhaps apprehension of a return of such conduct...121

Letters from places such as Santipur and Gollagore also reveal weavers’ refusal to work with the Company122 and their objection to receive its advance.123 In Patna, despite the Company’s effort to offer fair and just prices, the weavers were unwilling to enter into engagement with the Company.124

Resistance among weavers cannot be seen as an independent phenomenon taking place in the late eighteenth century Bengal. Within the manufacturing industry there were groups other than the weavers who were also resisting the Company’s policies. For instance, John Princep, the chintz Contractor, informed Samuel Middleton about the difficulties he was facing. He wrote, ‘my chintz workmen having for sometime past been very turbulent and dissatisfied with the prices paid for their labour and their demands having risen to a pitch which I cannot comply with, unless by being a very considerable loser by my contract...’125

There are also several references to the running away of the washermen who worked for the Company, leaving the officials in a lurch and bewildered. Ruffugurs too showed a

spirit of defiance by refusing to work for the Company and were audacious enough to prevent those working outside the Company from providing their services to it. The Dhaka embroiderers also took to petitioning\textsuperscript{126} and made known their grievances.

**Significance of Resistance**

This section focuses on the extent of success or failure of the weavers’ response and the Company’s response to it. The official letters complaining against the weavers reflects the degree of failure of the Company’s measures at least during the 1770s and early 80s. For instance, the weavers’ ‘refusal to work and return of the advances’\textsuperscript{127} showed that the Company was not yet successful in controlling production and that the asymmetries of contract was not reversed fully in the favour of the Company.

The success of weavers’ actions can also be seen in the failure of regulation or when regulations were undermined, or even when the weavers interpreted them in their own way. Lakhipur Resident Crommelin wrote ‘I must confess that I have but little hope of prevailing upon any additional number of weavers to remain in the employ...for the minds of the lower description of people, seem intoxicated with their own interpretation of Free Will, no dependence can be placed upon them...’\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., vol. 58, 3\textsuperscript{rd} – 31\textsuperscript{st} July, 1787. Petition of embroiderers at Dacca to Charles Stuart, dated Fort William, 6\textsuperscript{th} July 1787.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., vol. 7, 1\textsuperscript{st} April – 29\textsuperscript{th} June, 1776. Letter No. 258, written by Ramcaunt Chatterjee, Gomastah of Soonamooky, dated 23\textsuperscript{rd} February, 1776. Fort William, 14\textsuperscript{th} May, 1776.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., vol. 121, 1\textsuperscript{st} March – 29\textsuperscript{th} April, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 12\textsuperscript{th} December, 1795. Fort William, 8\textsuperscript{th} March 1796.
The failure to implement the regulation and make it binding upon the weavers can also be seen as a shortcoming of the Company. The weavers openly and fearlessly flouted the regulation and left the officials in jeopardy. J. Cheap, the Sonamukhi Resident, wrote to Charles Stuart and,

[T]ransmitted... a list of weavers belonging to one of the dependencies thereof vizt. Gopaulnagore (consisting of 21 registered families, including 37 looms and 58 weavers) who being in balance to me have received advances from Radnagore factory and now refuse to complete their engagements. According to the Regulations for the Company’s weavers a previous intimation of not intending to receive advances ought to have been made to me, prior to their taking them from another factory...\(^{129}\)

In several instances, the weavers not only refused advances but also returned the advances they had taken, which managed to generate fear among the Company servants. The President lay before the Board, letters from Sonamukhi gomastah, Ramcaunt Chatterjee, which mentioned,

[E]leven weavers from the aurung of Caushinagur have been to Burdwan to complain and brought with them a perwannah, since which they will not work, and have given back the advances they had received, the rest of the weavers of that aurung have done the same and say...for this reason no advances can be made at that aurung. Seven weavers from the aurung of Roy Bogni have done the same and all the weavers have given back their advances...We are afraid all the weavers will do the same.\(^{130}\)

Similarly, John Fergusson’s letter revealed that the whole class of weavers belonging to Gopipur, one of the principle aurungs of Santipur, refused to work for the Company and

\(^{129}\) Ibid., vol. 80, Part-I, 1\(^{st}\) – 30\(^{th}\) June, 1789. J. Cheap’s letter to Charles Stuart, dated 12\(^{th}\) June, 1789. Fort William, 16\(^{th}\) June, 1789.

\(^{130}\) Ibid., vol. 7, 1\(^{st}\) April – 29\(^{th}\) June, 1776. Letter No. 258, written by Ramcaunt Chatterjee, Gomastah of Soonamooky, dated 23\(^{rd}\) February, 1776. Fort William, 14\(^{th}\) May, 1776.
could not be prevailed upon.\textsuperscript{131} There were upward of 300 weavers who worked for the Company at Gopipur. Nicholas Grueber, the Dhaka Chief wrote to Samuel Middleton expressing his fear that too much pressure on the weavers caused by the sudden demand to pay their balance would drive them away (from the Company’s employment) and ‘tempt them to seek a livelihood in the employment of private merchants for the future.’\textsuperscript{132}

Officials’ admittance of finding it difficult to ‘prevent advances made by other people to Company weavers’ shows that the Company was facing difficulty in eliminating its competitors. Minutes of Company officials also reveal the ‘immense freedom enjoyed by the weavers’\textsuperscript{133} as late as 1770s and 80s. More importantly, the tone of some of these complaint letters provides a rare glimpse into the utter helplessness\textsuperscript{134} of the Company officials with regard to weavers’ activities. Also, the occasional reference to the weavers’ character gives some glimpses into the behaviour of the weavers’ vis-à-vis the Company officials and their agents.\textsuperscript{135} There are also direct references to the ‘refractory behaviours’ that the officials daily experienced.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., vol. 50, Part- II, 1\textsuperscript{st} March – 15\textsuperscript{th} May, 1786. John Fergusson’s letter to William Barton, dated 6\textsuperscript{th} March, 1786. Fort William, 7\textsuperscript{th} March, 1786.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., vol. 3, Part- I, 31\textsuperscript{st} March – 2\textsuperscript{nd} May, 1775. Nicholas Grueber’s letter to Samuel Middleton, dated 17\textsuperscript{th} April, 1775. Fort William, 21\textsuperscript{st} April, 1775.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., vol. 11, Part- I, 1\textsuperscript{st} April – 6\textsuperscript{th} May, 1777. Charles Bentley’s Minute dated Fort William, 22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 1777.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., vol.34, Part- II, 19\textsuperscript{th} November – 31\textsuperscript{st} December, 1782 . J. B. Smith’s letter to P. M. Dacres dated 16\textsuperscript{th} December, 1782. Fort William, 24\textsuperscript{th} December, 1782. (Soonamookey Resident on his failure to bring back absconding weavers expresses his fears that such activities of the producers would “…render him contemptible in the eyes of your weavers and the country people in general and convince these uninformed natives that those who can oppose by joining authority with force, can do in all things as they please….“)

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., vol. 5, 3\textsuperscript{rd} October – 29\textsuperscript{th} December, 1775. Henry Guinand’s letter to Nicholas Grueber dated 14\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. Fort William, 24\textsuperscript{th} October, 1775. Guinand described the weavers as ‘men, who will ever be
There were frequent complaints by the Residents and Chiefs of various factories, throughout the period of study, about their utter helplessness in the face of rising competition. In fact, there were loopholes in the Company’s policies that hindered its servants from working successfully. For instance, Nicholas Grueber, the Lakhipur Chief wrote about the dilemmas that he faced with regard to the Company’s investment.\textsuperscript{137} His problems were caused mainly by the license given by the Board to the private merchants of every denomination, in the Lakhipur district to purchase without restraint, which seems to have proved very fatal. This led to an increase of ‘private native agents’ who paid much higher prices than before. Not only that, there was an increase in the number of new merchants. Finding the opportunities lucrative, ‘the dependants of the zamindars are become merchants’. Such a circumstance was detrimental to the Company’s commercial branch as ‘the influence they have over the pycars and the weavers, as their ryots will enable them to exact their services upon any terms.’ Besides these, Grueber was also burdened by the presence of other Europeans and the fear that the Dutch and the French would reestablish their factories. He feared that the extraordinary demand for assortments in his district would not only enhance the prices but also deprecate the fabric and tempt the weavers to weave the cloth shorter and narrower than the usual length and breath. He further wrote,

\begin{quote}
Under these circumstances, the trouble, anxiety and difficulty I had to [face in order to] procure the investment of 1783/4… and the uncertainty of accomplishing my views for a long time gives me the greatest uneasiness. I found myself surrounded by intruding agents upon an equal footing with myself, although the Honble [sic] governed by passion or prejudice. Such are the weavers; and we may add to their character a constant discontentedness, equal to their propensity of overreaching their employers at all time."
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., vol. 4, 4\textsuperscript{th} July - 29\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. Nicholas Grueber’s letter to Samuel Middleton dated 4\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. Fort William, 12\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., vol. 46, 4\textsuperscript{th} January - 29\textsuperscript{th} March, 1785. Nicholas Grueber’s letter to William Barton dated 18\textsuperscript{th} January, 1785. Fort William, 18\textsuperscript{th} January, 1785.
Company's Commercial Chief, who is supposed to have sufficient power in his
district to prevent the inconveniences I have pointed out, but no such power exists and
it is also erroneously imagined he has sufficient authority over the manufacturers to
oblige them to obey his orders...

Thus, in a way the Company's policies were responsible for some of the competition it
was facing by providing an opportunity for the creation of new bodies of merchants, who then
challenged its position in the market.

Besides registering the weavers under its employment, continuous effort was made by
the Company officials to enlist as many weavers, especially those who had never worked for
it. In the previous chapter, it has been mentioned that poor non-Company weavers were
forcibly advanced and coerced into providing cloth for the Company's investment. However,
these efforts of the officials were not always met with success. This is evident from Santipur
Resident E. Fletcher's letter. He mentions the considerable difficulty he faced in providing the
baftas of Burron investment. The Burron baftaes were a late introduction in the investment,
and a considerable number of baftaes was being ordered, so much so that 16,000 coarse and
4,000 fine baftaes were ordered in the year 1795. In 1788 it was noticed that there were many
weavers who did not work for the Company but supported themselves by making coarse
cloths for local consumption and bazaar sales. However the difficulty mentioned above by
Fletcher arose from the circumstance of general unwillingness shown by these weavers
towards taking advances. This shows that even after several years the officials failed to lure
the non-Company weavers to its service, thereby failing in its goal of a successful investment.
The average monthly earnings of these weavers when employed solely in making baftas was
found to be between 4.4 to 4.8 Sicca rupees supposing a man to make three pieces a month.138

138 Ibid., vol. 121, 1st March - 29th April, 1796. Letter from E. Fletcher dated 2nd March, 1796. Fort William, 4th
March, 1796.
Thus it can be assumed that those weavers who earned good profit from bazaar sale could not be lured or coerced into the Company’s employment.

The Company officials of various aurungs realized the impact of the weavers’ attitude on the Company’s investment. The officials made various efforts to appease the weavers and woo them back to the Company’s employment. E. E. Pote, the Courgong contractor, wrote to P. M. Dacres about the necessity of recalling the weavers to the Company’s employment with some ‘indulgence and encouragement’\(^\text{139}\). The Courgong weavers had found employment with the agents of Danes and other individuals after the Company had suspended the making of coarse cloth in that aurung.

The Company’s effort to woo weavers can also be seen in the case of Tipperah (Tripura). In order to attract the weavers, it was even willing to bend long established norms such as prohibition of purchase by ready money. Thus, Chittagong Resident, Thomas Harris mentioned in his letter to Charles Stuart that,

> [G]omastahs sent into the Tipperah district would be able...to register a number of weavers, but as that country has been left entirely to the control of the private merchants, it would in all probability not only be tedious, but difficult to counteract them...think it an object worth trying and would recommend one or two small factories to be fixed at the best aurungs....making ready money purchases until by fair dealing and good treatment, a sufficient number of weavers would be induced to engage...\(^\text{140}\)

As seen earlier, the response of the Company officials’ to the weavers complaints were not always positive. However, there were some instances when the grievances of the

\(^{139}\) Ibid., vol. 40, 4\(^{th}\) November – 30\(^{th}\) December, 1783. Letter from E. E. Pote dated 10\(^{th}\) November, 1783. Fort William, 11\(^{th}\) November, 1783.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., vol. 80, Part- II, 3\(^{rd}\) – 31\(^{st}\) July, 1789. Thomas Harris’ letter to Charles Stuart dated 20\(^{th}\) June, 1789. Fort William, 3\(^{rd}\) July, 1789.
manufacturers were looked into, and necessary actions taken, although it must be mentioned that such gestures on the part of the Company officials were rare. John Bebb, the Dhaka Resident in his letter to Charles Stuart mentions about some weavers of Shybar (a mofussil of Dhaka) who complained of money being extracted unjustly from them. The charges were investigated and found true and the amount exacted was found to be about 350 rupees. 'Restitution was made of the whole sum...distributed among several parties to whom it belonged. The immediate consequence of this act of justice was that 12 weavers, inhabitants of Shybar who have not before worked for the factory, took Company's advances...'

Bebb’s excitement at this addition to Company’s list was understandable especially in the face of the difficulties he was facing due to the weavers’ indifference towards the Company's employment. However such positive responses (from the weavers) definitely lacked permanence and the Resident’s joy was short lived. Complaints from Shybar weavers began to pour in soon regarding undue exactions of money by the gomastah, a factor that was responsible at that time for turning the weavers of several aurungs away from the Company's service.

The Company officials’ acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the Company’s policies in the light of the weavers’ protest can also be seen as some form of success of weavers’ actions. Company officials rarely agreed with the weavers demands or reasoning. However, by the end of the century with the weavers deserting the Company’s employment to symbolically show preference for alternative employment/ employers or even directly refusing the Company’s advance or petitioning to be released form the Company’s employ,
some officials did admit to flaws in the modus operandi of the Company. One of the best examples of the official acceptance comes in the form of the Sonamukhi Chief’s letter to Charles Stuart\textsuperscript{143} written in context of the demand for an increase in Company’s investment (to the amount of 1,00000 current rupees) by the Court of Directors and the inability expressed by the Chief to fulfill that demand. However the Chief did suggest a solution to bring about an increase in the investment which was in favour of the weavers and at the same time defeating the interest of the Company. He wrote as follows,

I deem it but a justice due to my manufacturers to represent the lateness of the season, the high price of the grain and every necessary of life, the failure in many parts and throughout the whole of my residency the very indifferent crops of cotton and above all the advantages which they will be deprived from this prevention of working for the private merchants, whose price being infinitely superior and the assortments which they purchase, greatly inferior to the Company’s. The weaver derives a profit, when in his transacting with the Company from the opposite causes the effects are exactly the reverse.

Grain is now in Beerbhoom at only 28 seers for a Rupee, when formerly it used to be from two to three maunds and often even more and in Burdwan it is considerably dearer.

The coarsest cotton thread is at only two seers for the Rupee and at this time of the year it is generally the cheapest.

In the weavers’ transactions with private traders, the third letter of your assortments, C, is fixed on as the muster of A and the same price is paid them for it, which is paid for your A. The measurement is fixed, by the standards of your cloths after they are washed and dressed which makes a considerable difference both in the length and breadth. The consequences that naturally follow are a certain preference to the manufacturing the low assortments and to receive the advances of the private traders, as every way more advantageous and infinitely less difficult to satisfy...the method which to me appears most likely to have the effect of giving the Company's

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., vol. 69, 1\textsuperscript{st} – 31\textsuperscript{st} July, 1788. Letter from J. Cheap dated 11\textsuperscript{th} July, 1788. Fort William, 11\textsuperscript{th} July, 1788.
assortment a decided preference, which, is an increase of price for the weavers labour....that the weavers in the Company’s employ are far from being the greatest part of the manufacturers in the circle of my district, and that should you adopt my opinion and authorize me to make the proposed increase for the price of labour there will be every reason to expect that many more weavers will work to be employed for the Company and those now in the service be induced wholly to manufacture for the investment which must consequently increase which you will be enabled to draw from my aurungs. This is not merely matter of opinion but the positive assertions of the people themselves who invariably have declared to me that they would prefer the Company’s employment were the profits nearly equal to those which they derive from making cloths for merchants.

In this letter the Chief clearly supports the weavers’ decision to give preference to working for the private merchants and accepts very honestly that they profited more by weaving lower assortments (for the domestic market).

Attractive offers were also made at times by Company officials to win over the manufacturers. Thus, in order to attract the weavers (of Mureasrari) back to the Company’s employment, the Lakhipur Resident decided to abolish the dustorees and assure them of protection. On doing so the weavers agreed to take the Company’s advance.144 Herbert Harris, the Khirpai contractor, had to institute rewards to those weavers who would deliver the greatest number of the higher letters. It was difficult for the contractor to prevail upon the pykars and the weavers of Khirpai and Chandrakona to make assortments (middling and ordinary mulmuls in this case) for which the Company did not pay much, the profits were insignificant and did not afford the weavers any maintenance. Thus in order to induce the weavers to make assortments that had never been made in the Chandrakona aurung before, the

Contractor had to come up with attractive offers for the weavers. The Lakhipur Chief was obligated to extend considerable advances in order to keep them in the Company’s employment. When Sonarundi weavers began to quit, the Sonamukhi Chief directed his assistant to repair to the Sonarundi factory and endeavour as much as possible to prevent other weavers from quitting the Company’s business. Thus, great effort was made by officials to salvage the declining fortune of the Company.

Impact of Resistance

This section deals with the impact of the weavers’ response, if any, upon the social and economic structure. An important aspect which is explored in this section is the geographical extent of the weavers’ resistance, which would also mean that these were the areas that experienced the Company’s control. This can then be seen against the regions that were not under the Company’s control and which may have offered an option to the weavers to relocate. The weavers’ migratory nature may have added strength to their resistance.

From the previous sections it is clear that regions around Dhaka, Sonamukhi, Haripal, Harial, Lakhipur, Malda and Patna were ones that were directly under the Company’s control

148 Ibid., vol. 26, 2nd January–27th March, 1781. James King’s letter to P. M. Dacres dated 10th March, 1781. Fort William, 13th March, 1781. (weavers migrated at the slightest hint of unrest or pressure, for instance when the Marathas would set fire to the aurungs the inhabitants fled to different parts of the country)
as is evident from petitions as well as from various resistance activities. However, it is difficult to ascertain the areas that were not under the direct control of the Company or rather those that did not face the heat of its policies. However, one way of knowing such areas is by tracing the areas the Company weavers fled to or took refuge in. The Company records rarely mention the places the weavers absconded to as is evident from the official letters that it was very difficult to trace the weavers’ new residences. However, there are a few rare references to such places. For instance, Haripal Resident S. Beachcroft’s letter mentions ‘several of the Company’s weavers (that had absconded) having taken up their residence at Aria Jemaulpore in the district of Dinajpore...’\textsuperscript{149} In another reference, John Fergusson wrote to Charles Stuart about the ‘very refractory disposition of the Santipore weavers, (who) have all to a man stopped working for the Company and most of them actually deserted and gone to Ambooah...’\textsuperscript{150}

A deposition of Russanund Mozundar, monshy (munshi) to Mr. Smith, the Sonamukhi Resident, provides information about the flight of five weavers, residents of the village of Cuttool in Bishnupur, under the kothi of Roybagny, to Koorsgunge, a village in Burdwan.\textsuperscript{151} The Burdwan raja had come to blows with the Company for giving shelter to its weavers.

It is worth taking note of those areas that did not provide for the Company’s investment. Shahbad, Rangpur, Rangamati, Ramgarh, Birbhum, Tamluk (an important

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., vol. 94, 2\textsuperscript{nd} September – 28\textsuperscript{th} October, 1791. Letter from Samuel Beachcroft dated 26\textsuperscript{th} August 1791. Fort William, 2\textsuperscript{nd} September, 1791.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., vol. 51, Part- II, 18\textsuperscript{th} July – 22\textsuperscript{nd} August, 1786. Letter from John Fergusson dated 26\textsuperscript{th} June, 1786. Fort William, 18\textsuperscript{th} July, 1786.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., vol. 44, 2\textsuperscript{nd} July- 24\textsuperscript{th} September, 1784. Deposition of Russanund Mozundar dated Fort William, 20\textsuperscript{th} July, 1784.
channel for passage of cotton), Nadia, Sylhet, Tripura and Gungamundul\textsuperscript{152} were some of the regions that produced cotton which was entirely for local consumption. As the Company did not advance for its investment in these places, it can be assumed that its policies were also rarely implemented here, thus making it safe haven for the fleeing weavers.

When weavers moved from one area to another, there certainly may have been changes in the economic structure of the region they left behind. Due to lack of information it is not known to what extent the economic structure of the place was affected as the decline in production or revenue of such region was not recorded. Moreover the non-Company weavers of that region may not have migrated along with the Company weavers. However, there are stray references to loss of malguzary from such areas. For instance, Robert Holme noted that persons when harassed by the Company gomastah (subjecting them to forcible advancing) preferred to desert their village and settled near Burdwan causing a great loss of malguzary.\textsuperscript{153} Similar instances was reported from Cullyanpur where some Muslim weavers were forced to receive advances from the Company’s servants at Kumarkhali and when the cloths they furnished were appraised 25 percent lower than the market price, the weavers chose to flee. The tallukdar of Cullyanpur also accused the Company of acting contrary to the regulation passed (that cloths shall be obtained from weavers by a free purchase, for ready money). The tallukdar complained that ‘two families have migrated and a failure in revenue is likely to take place’\textsuperscript{154}. The concerns of the Company officials provide a glimpse into the consequences of

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., vol. 87, 2\textsuperscript{nd} July – 31\textsuperscript{st} August, 1790. An account of cotton produce, by John Bistrow, Richard Kennaway and John Bebb, dated Fort William, 10\textsuperscript{th} August, 1790.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., vol. 50, Part- I, 3\textsuperscript{rd} January – 24\textsuperscript{th} February, 1786. Acting Collector of Hughli, Robert Holme’s letter to William Barton dated 11\textsuperscript{th} January, 1786. Fort William, 13\textsuperscript{th} January, 1786.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., vol. 139, Part- II, 4\textsuperscript{th} – 28\textsuperscript{th} December, 1798. Translation of a petition by Rammanick Bose, the vakeel of Raampersaud Chowdhary, Talookdar of the mowzah Cullyanpore in the Sindooree pergannah under the
the manufacturers' mobility. In the case of Midnapur, Coales suggested employing the unemployed weavers in making other assortments which was not their forte but which would not be difficult to adopt. Coales knew very well that migration of a large number of weavers would certainly be a loss to the Company. However, the regions that were receiving these fleeing weavers may have certainly benefited. As is mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, the local authorities were more than welcoming of such groups.

While there are records of individual defection, there were also instances when the weavers moved along with their families, which must have been a more common practice. Taylor expressed great concern in his letter when twenty five weavers (belonging to the Harial aurung) fled with their families, while twenty three left their family behind owing a balance of approximately 562 rupees to the Company. In another letter the Harial Resident informed of the flight of two hundred and five weavers who had fled the aurung with their family owing the Company 2078.25 rupees, while seventy two others absconded, leaving their families behind, and who owed the Company 732.12 rupees. When weavers settled with their entire family, it was even more beneficial for the local administration of the new place. Weavers with large families could produce more than their stipulated engagements within a certain time. Thus they were valuable assets for the Company as advances were made to them to make good deficiencies probably created by others.

Rajshahy Zillah, addressed to the Commercial Board dated 30th November, 1798. Fort William, 4th December, 1798.


Chapter 5

Factors such as caste may also have played a significant role in strengthening the weavers' resistance. Guild-like artisan organizations were not unheard of. These artisanal organizations were mainly social organizations based on caste, locality, product and technique. Such community organizations not just regulated the social life of the members but also their occupational life. The position of authority certainly belonged to the headman, and in case of the weavers, this position was occupied by the head weaver. These head weavers, according to Company sources, not just organized production (by acting as agents, receiving orders from the merchants and distributing work among the members) but were also men of credit, and therefore assumed to be powerful.

As seen elsewhere, the weavers did have a strong caste based organization. Even though some scholars have denied the importance of the guild or the importance of some form of organization, in the case of weavers' resistance these did play a significant role. The head weavers were known by various names in different places, for example as toukdars, mookees or sircars. While in the fourth chapter the head weavers were seen in a different light as forming a nexus with the gomastahs in exploiting the weavers, records have also shown them in a another light, as leaders in resistance to Company's policies. Lakhipur Resident C. R. Crommelin's letter reveals the influential role of these men. Crommelin writes, 'the minds of such of the manufacturers as are capable of judging for themselves, yet by far the greater part are so ignorant and easily led, that they adopt without thought or hesitation, the suggestion of any man, to whom they have accustomed to look up with respect, or to attend to as their

158 Sarkar, 'Social Organization of Artisan'.
principal councilors. To hide his own inability to control or rather to retain the weavers to
the Company’s service, Crommelin portrayed the weavers as weak willed and swayed by any
kind of influence. However, this was far from the truth, as revealed elsewhere in the same
letter where Crommelin mentions ‘since the increased insolence of conduct of the lower
orders of people, of all descriptions seems already to have sapped the foundation of the
influence and authority of the higher orders and will if not checked overthrow them.’
Although Crommelin’s letter does not mention the head weavers, it is understood that he was
referring to them and that these head weavers were respected and obeyed by the weaver
community.

Affluent weavers were also known to have played the role of pykars. It was very much
possible that the head weavers may have played the role of pykars and negotiated and
contracted from the Company as well as from other merchants, on behalf of their community.
Thus Crommelin also mentions the role of pykars in enticing away the weavers from the
Company’s employment or clandestinely purchasing from such as remained in it. In fact, the
Lakhipur Chief provided a vivid picture of pykars activities which posed a serious threat to
the Company and which are as follows:

When the idea of a general and uncontrolled free agency first got into the aurungs...it
ran like wild fire and it seemed as if every man was happy at the prospect of
emancipation from the Company’s employ and anxious for the moment when it would
take place, the pykars lost not the opportunity, but endeavoured by every means in
their power to alienate the minds of the people from the employ of the factory, their
chief object was if possible, at all events to prevent them from entering into
engagements at the settlement for the year, and I have reason to believe that many of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{160}}\] Ibid., vol. 121, 1st March – 29th April, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 12th December, 1795. Fort
William, 8th March 1796.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{161}}\] Ibid.
the weavers were furnished by them with money in advance to pay in their balance...\textsuperscript{162}

Crommelin also suspected the pykars of playing a role in debasement of the Company's assortment in order to draw the weavers in their own service. Thus the weaver leaders in their capacity as pykars certainly played an important role in weakening the Company's hold and therefore its control over the weavers. During the period of study the service of pykars was indispensable to the Company; at the same time, they proved to be very troublesome for it. The head weavers' hold over the community therefore cannot be doubted, as, in their role of pykars they enjoyed the advantage of local influence and probably of consanguinity and connections of families and this was one reason which made the weavers give preference to them.

When the weavers faced difficulties due to the Company's policies, the head weavers acted as their representatives and played important roles. In the 1790s when the weavers began to face a decline in the Company rates, a cause of many of their complaints, the head weavers played the role of bargainers for the community. John Taylor, the Dhaka Resident, mentions in his letter that in 'Junglebary Bazetpore scarcely any advances has been issued. The principal weavers refused to receive any unless I would agree to restore the prices of 1791.'\textsuperscript{163} In the year 1792, the rates had been reduced by 10 to 14 percent below that of 1791. Thus 'the body of weavers whose conduct in general regulated by the head weavers expressed similar determination.'\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., vol. 126, Part- II, 6\textsuperscript{th} – 30\textsuperscript{th} December, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 9\textsuperscript{th} April, 1796. Fort William, 16\textsuperscript{th} December, 1796.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., vol. 103, Part- I, 4\textsuperscript{th} – 28\textsuperscript{th} March, 1793. Letter from J. Taylor dated 14\textsuperscript{th} March, 1793. Fort William, 28\textsuperscript{th} March, 1793.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
These leaders also demanded justice for their community. Taylor also mentions how the head weavers managed to excite an assembly of 3 to 400 weavers and called for ‘justice’ when one of them was beaten at his commands. Taylor gives a vivid description of the influence these leaders had on the community. He further mentions that in a moment the seated weavers ‘rose and advancing in the most vociferous and tumultuous manner’ surrounded him. Taylor was later rescued by his people. Later he had these principal weavers from three dhees of the city of Dhaka arrested and imprisoned for fifteen days.

Though there is not much information about these community heads as leaders in the weavers’ resistance to the Company policies, still the Company records do provide a glimpse of instances when these community leaders did come to the fore on behalf of their community. For instance, in Lakhipur, the Resident was troubled by the disposition shown by ‘Gopy and other head tanties to mislead the more ignorant of them’. The head weavers were accused of not just causing a decline in the deliveries but also of being instrumental in presenting petitions that were not based on any real causes, doing so with the objective of alarming either the Resident or the dewan into giving them money. According to the Resident, these head tanties were supported in their endeavours by people of more consequence and influence than them, both at Lakhipur and in Kolkata.

In another instance, official correspondence mentions a certain Godadhur Dutt who along with three others was reported to have instigated the weavers. These four weavers were also the headmen of kothis of Mohunpur, Dugnagore, Ramchunderpur and Maunker mokaums

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166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., vol. 126, 6th – 30th December, 1796. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 9th April, 1796. Fort William, 16th December, 1796.
under the subordination of Sonamukhi. R. Gale, in reply to a petition of Sonamukhi weavers' mentions the underhand means used by 'a few evil designing men to induce a few weavers to go down to Calcutta' to complain against him.

Besides plainly instigating, these weaver leaders were also known for leading in violent protest. For instance a certain ‘Bungoo Shaw’ was reported to have led ‘a great number of men armed with latters [sic: probably lathis or sticks]’ to rescue a weaver who was apprehended for refusing to obey the summons of the gomastah of Kampta aurung. The weaver was not only rescued but the factory servants were also beaten. This incident so unnerved the Resident that he requested the Collector to furnish him with a perwannah ‘to do away the impression Bungoo Shaw’s publication had made on the weavers or to send for him’ to be examined by the Collector. Like Bungoo Shaw there were others such as Gopee Dut, Gopee Addue and Lochun Nundee from Haripal who were reported to have led violent protests and instigated twenty to thirty weavers by saying ‘he is always beating us, lets beat him’ to the ‘hard treatment or currah suktee’ they had been subjected to. However, it is not clear whom these leaders were referring to, whether to a Company servant or Thomas Philpot, the Resident.

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171 Ibid.
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Besides reference to the community head as leaders, the records also mention the names of a few who may not have necessarily been community heads but provided leadership as and when the occasion demanded. These leaders are mentioned from several areas that witnessed weavers' resistance to the Company. For instance Nayan Nundy (from Haripal) is described as a ‘vakeel’ by the weavers in one of their petitions and thus portrayed as their representative who bargained on their behalf for their cloths to be prized into four letters instead of six. However, Herbert Harris, the Khirpai contractor, in his comment on a petition of Haripal weavers gives another description of Nundy, not as a vakeel but as a weaver ‘distinguished as a leader in a former riot at the aurung.’\footnote{Ibid., vol. 56, 2\textsuperscript{nd} – 31\textsuperscript{st} May, 1787. Letter from Herbert Harris dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} March, 1787. Fort William, 11\textsuperscript{th} May, 1787.} In another instance, a certain Gongadur Doss submitted a petition on behalf of the Sonamukhi weavers addressed to Thomas Lane, and similarly claimed to be the ‘vakeel’ of the weavers.\footnote{Ibid., vol. 4, 4\textsuperscript{th} July - 29\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. Petition from Gongadur Doss dated Fort William, 22\textsuperscript{nd} September, 1775.}

E. Fletcher, the Santipur Resident, refers to a man named Prawn Dary, who played an important role in interrupting the prizing process. Dary had been dismissed from the Company's service almost a year and a half prior to the incident but still managed to influence the weavers and gather a body of 3 to 400 weavers and left for Kolkata in the night to avoid being arrested by the magistrate.\footnote{Ibid., vol. 137, 3\textsuperscript{rd} July – 31\textsuperscript{st} August, 1798. Letter from E. Fletcher dated 28\textsuperscript{th} July, 1798. Fort William, 31\textsuperscript{st} July, 1798.}

G. Hatch, the former superintendent of Titabadi, while replying to a petition of weavers mentions a man named Bustom Doss, who on being informed about his balances
began to be very refractory' and also forbid other weavers from meeting Hatch. And when a peon was sent to apprehend him, Doss with the assistance of other weavers beat the peon.\textsuperscript{176}

Although not much is know about non-Company weavers influencing their brothers who worked for the Company, it is very much possible that irrespective of their employers, the weavers co-existed as a social and occupational group and that the ties may have been strong enough for the non-Company weavers to influence the Company weavers. Thus J. Money, the Acting Resident of Golagore, wrote to Peter Speake about his suspicions of the weavers who did not work for the factory of exciting those that worked under it.\textsuperscript{177}

The officials' loathing for these leaders is understandable and evident from Lakhipur Chief C. R. Crommelin's letter. He describes them as the 'most restless, unprincipled people, of weight and consequence amongst the manufacturers [and] are generally taken into the employ of the zamindars and through these men the weavers are frequently stirred up to discontent and opposition without any real cause for these men do have an essential interest in it...'\textsuperscript{178} Suspicion of these people or rather the resistance leader is but very obvious as they managed to hurt the Company's business considerably.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., vol. 4, 4\textsuperscript{th} July – 29\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. G. Hatch's letter to Samuel Middleton dated 6\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775. Fort William, 12\textsuperscript{th} September, 1775.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., vol. 134, Part- I, 6\textsuperscript{th} March – 3\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1798. Letter from J. Money dated 10\textsuperscript{th} April, 1798. Fort William, 13\textsuperscript{th} March, 1797.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., vol. 115, Part- II, 7\textsuperscript{th} – 28\textsuperscript{th} April, 1795. Letter from C. R. Crommelin dated 21st February, 1795. Fort William, 7\textsuperscript{th} April, 1795.