CHAPTER III

THE DECLINE OF VILLAGE CRAFTS AND AFTER

The East India Company's rule in the two districts of south-west Bengal accelerated the tendency of maximisation of revenue which led ultimately to the maximisation of land rent. This rent pressure on land ultimately led to a tendency of opening up of new holdings for cultivation expansion towards the marshy nimak mahals of south, south-east Midnapore and towards north, north-west of Midnapore and Bankura, generally known as jungle mahals and forest tracts. The Raj undertook welfare measures to expand yielding capacity of the soil. They restored law and order and ensured social justice and spread of English education. Irrigation facilities were opened up and construction of roads, canals and railways was undertaken. They wanted to ensure public health and sanitary conditions and to preserve cattle power and forest resources. The result was the upward mobility of a relatively affluent middle peasantry, mainly the caste groups of the Mahatcs and Mahisyas. But the agrarian economy registered a crisis owing to lack of cash crop cultivation like jute and plantation economy which was prevalent in east Bengal and, above all, due to decline of village crafts. In this chapter attempts have been made to analyse how and why the village crafts like salt and cotton and silk textile crafts declined leading to the pauperisation of the artisans making land the only means of subsistence and forcing denudation of forest lands and bringing salt tracts under cultivation.
a) Salt:

Under the management of the zamindars in the coastal belt of Bengal and Orissa, salt was produced from a remote past. Kautilya's Arthasastra, the Mahabharata in the Shanti Prava (29, 69), the Amarakosa (VI, 104-106) mention salt tax as a source of royal revenue.¹ The king's supervisory authority over the manufacture of salt was revealed in the Satavahana epigraphs.² The sovereign authority over the manufacture of salt was found during the Gajapati rule of Orissa, which included parts of this region, during the regime of the Delhi Sultanas and even in the subsequent period. The oceanic trade under the Indian merchants came to an end in the seventeenth century but the Hindu merchants like Chimcham (Khemchand) and Chintaman Shah, brokers of the English merchants, carried on coastal trade. It may be presumed that in the early eighteenth century land holders leased out khalaries (salt producing lands) to the intermediaries-cum-merchants who settled migratory salt workers or molungies on the salt khalaries and accepted advance from the salt merchants. The investment of the foreign merchants in salt manufactures enhanced the production of better quality fire-boiled pungah salt and increased the mobilisation of labour personnel in the salt tracts of Midnapore. The days of the kerketch salt by solar evaporation ended and it was only left for the consumption of the poor people.
The Nababs of Bengal used to assign the monopoly of salt trade to the highest bidder, who was named Fakhr-ul-tejar. The salt production had some dislocation due to the Maratha and the constant tussle between the Company and the Indian rulers and competition among the foreign companies for reaching the primary producers at a minimum expense. The tension continued between the Nababs and the Company on the question of duty-free trade, on the basis of the firman of Farruksiyar of 1717.

The company, as the Diwan of Bengal subah, was concerned to formulate a more equitable and satisfactory plan in salt production and trade and the Court of Directors forbade the private trade of the Company's officers in salt. Besides, in 1765, Lord Clive formed an Exclusive Society to exact 35% of the salt duty for internal trade and in this way, they acquired a complete monopoly over the manufacture of, and trade in salt. In the commercial sector also the age-old method of internal trade and village craftsmanship under the fostering care of the landlord-capitalist came to an end. Internal salt and opium trade came under the Board of Customs, Salt and Opium leading to great abuses after the abolition of the Exclusive Society.

In the forest and salt tracts two distinct processes of development could be found. In the nimki mahals a gradual centralisation of the production machinery under the Company's
government had taken shape. In the Jungle Mahals, on the other hand, with the recognition of the zamindars' right over the soil, some sort of decentralised authority over property was slowly taking place since 1793. Moreover, since 1793 two different sets of control began to spread over the sphere of salt production: (1) In the field of manufacture there was no evidence of control by the permanent ruler in the pre-British period. It resulted in the wiping out of the intermediaries like landholders. Itmamdars, Hodadars and other types of salt contractors. The wage-earning labour class succeeded in demanding payment on contract basis as well as lease-hold right of land for cultivation during the rainy season but the rise in cost of living during the British rule led to rapid pauperisation of the salt labourers. And the British trade policy, zeal for suppression of all avenues of the landlord's extra income and death hazards in the unhealthy climate led to the Company's loss in salt production, (2) In the field of trade the control previously exercised by the landholders and speculative up-country merchants now shifted to the Company's Agents. The system of advance payment was not only monopolised by the government officers connected with the rule of the salt tracts but, on the pretext of suppressing smuggling, the age-old internal trade was banned. Consequently, elaborate methods were adopted to suppress clandestine traffic in this commodity as well as internal trade in salt, textile
and opium that had subsisted from a remote past. Throughout the region licensed vendors were authorised to sell only opium produced under government supervision and brought mainly from Bihar but the concealed cultivation of poppy and resultant extraction of opium prevalent in the hilly region and adulteration of inferior quality of opium with government-authorised opium could not be suppressed.

Attempts were made to regulate silk and cotton textile-production in the old textile-producing areas of Radhanagar, Ghatal, and Mohampur under the supervision of commercial agents to the exclusion of the French and other Indian up-country merchants. But lack of adequate investments in the narrow money market could not bring large returns to the Company's exchequer. In a separate section the history of decline of the village textile crafts of this region would be discussed.

Besides revenue settlements and administrative reforms, the Company's government was mindful about investment in trade. They invested a large sum from revenue in commercial undertakings. While Keating was the Collector of Bishnupur and Birbhum, Cheap was the Commercial Resident at Sonamukhi. Cheap supervised over the commercial transactions of the district in three head factories and twelve subordinate factories. The important products were silk, cotton textile, fibres, gums and lac dye. Sometimes government servants with regular pay were entrusted to transact business without
making any private profit but they were allowed a percentage of commission. There were also non-salaried agents who contracted to supply goods at a certain rate and they were allowed private profits. John Cheap, the Commercial Resident, also enjoyed the privilege of carrying an enormous business on his own account. He exercised magisterial power and judicial authority over the producers. Being entrusted with the duty of making purchases for the Company, he had the entire artisan classes under his complete control. This resulted in the elimination of intermediaries, beginning from the landed proprietors down to the labour-procurers, from having sway over the production sector.

For a while the Company’s investments succeeded in eliminating the disguised under-employment in the countryside, but ruthless profiteering motive of the darogahs, sardar-labourers and contractors in the aurangs, and gradual shrinkage of the home market for the commodity productions, ultimately pauperised the artisan classes in the Jungle Mahals. In this chapter it is proposed to study the manufacture of and trade in salt, cotton and silk textiles in separate sections.

In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the Company’s government tried slowly to establish direct contact with the salt molungies, a process which was completed by 1803. Consequently, the middlemen, like zamindars, farmers and itmam-dars, were gradually eliminated from the framework
of salt manufacture within thirty years. With the introduction of farming system in Hijli and Tamluk in 1772, the salt khalaries were also leased out to the farmers for a term of five years on condition that they would deliver salt to the Company only.  

These farmers again used to sublet their mahals to a class of under-farmers, called kutkinadars, who were mostly hereditary zamindars. As farming system was not considered conducive to the Company, Warren Hastings introduced 'Agency System' in the centres of production in Midnapore. The agents stored salt and sold it to the wholesalers at a price to be fixed by the government from time to time. Cornwallis passed some Regulations to protect the manufacturers from the alleged oppression of merchants. Lord Cornwallis introduced auction sales in limited lots with a view to breaking down any sub-monopoly that might have been created by the salt merchants and it was abandoned in 1836. The rise in price of salt within a span of 30 years is evident from the following table.

**Table No. 26**  
**Rise in prices of Salt**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Price per hundred maunds (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>234/314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796/97</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>306/380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1803/04</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Appendix to the Report of the Select Committee, 1832, Parliamentary Report on Salt in British India, 1856.
This rise in prices by more than 50% in salt with other essential commodities like rice constituted one of the causative factors for the peasant resistance movements in the Jungle Mahals.

By 1803, the Salt Agents under the Board of Trade became the sole authority in the manufacture and distribution system of salt. As a result of different experiments, the condition of molungies worsened. The Agents used to furnish advance to the landlords before 1780 and not to the molungies directly. But this practice of advance payment to the molungies started slowly after 1780. By the Regulations XXIX and XXX of 1793, the agents were given the sole authority not only to sell but also to control the manufacture of salt. The land holders were prohibited from producing salt in private capacity.

In 1794 the salt labourers worked on a daily wage basis, collected fuel free of cost from jalpai lands, took advance from the Agents through the salt darogahs in the off season and were responsible for the delivery of the stipulated amount of contracted salt. The clandestine importation of Orissa Salt to Bengal came to a halt with the occupation of Orissa in 1803. As a commodity, salt continued to be sold from the government godowns by auction at a flexible rate. The demand of karkatch salt diminished and better quality and fine fire-boiled pungah salt
production was produced. Even the coarse type of non-marketable gutch salt was also manufactured by boiling saline water for the land holders and the domestic consumption of molungies themselves on a contract basis under the Surburrakarry molungies. 14

In the first half of the nineteenth century the migration of population took place from one region to other in the south-western direction and from the northern hilly area to the midland palins and from there to the coastal region in search of low rental lands and job opportunities. 15

The Company was much worried about the settlement of jalpai lands which were kept apart from the 1793 land settlement with the zamindars. When the salt production was under the management of zamindars, the molungies could procure fuel free of cost from these lands. But with the extinction of the salt-producing power of the zamindars and conversion of the salt labourers into thicka labourers, the zamindars demanded extra cess from the molungies for collecting fuel. The government khas lands and zamindary waste lands were situated in such a way that the Revenue Board was afraid of a loss of land revenue as a result of short-term settlements of these waste lands. In this situation, with a view to augmenting production, the salt agency allowed the molungies to encroach upon these already barren jalpai lands situated near the khalaries.
Different types of produce rents, called abwabs, were collected from the primary producers before 1793. The khalary rent (callary = leased land for producing salt) was paid by the merchants, salt manufacturers and contractors when the adoora system was prevalent. After 1793 the salt agents paid it to the landed proprietors through the collectors. But in case molungies also cultivated the same lands they had to pay khalary rent in salt through the Agency. There was no uniformity of rules in the two agencies of Tamlook and Hijli regarding khalary rent. The landed proprietors demanded from the molungies a type of produce rent called patta-jummah. In some places an extra cess, called khazna salt, was also collected for the conversion of jalpai lands into cultivable lands. The process of imposition and collection of these rents had no uniformity. With the introduction of monopoly of the Company, the molungies were required to deposit their rent in kind to the Salt Agency and the proprietors were paid in cash from the revenue department.16 Besides, there were many unrecognised taxes which the zamindary ambas and paiks used to raise, like recognition taxes (Manyas), market tolls, marriage tolls, etc. These taxes were paid to the zamindar for receiving some benefits from him without paying any extra money. The landed proprietors sometimes settled the ryots and the molungies in the non-revenue paying jalpai and salt tracts and made for himself a source of income.17
The other avenue of income of the land holders was from the underground market. The Indian merchants preferred to patronise this clandestine traffic in salt, the so-called internal smuggling, which was nothing but internal trade carried on by the people but declared illegal by the government where the landed proprietors shared the profits. In 1825, when all sorts of produce rents were converted into money rent, the internal smuggling flourished in full swing, making fruitless all the efforts of the European Salt Officers and their Indian associates to curb the intensity of the so-called smuggling. This was because the so-called smuggling was nothing but the logical continuation of the age-old trade communication which existed from the pre-British period in this region.

In this changed situation the Board of Trade and its salt department were concerned with two objectives: (1) to increase salt revenue and (2) to ensure the marketability of the produce. Hogg Mackenzie criticised it by saying that the salt monopoly was being carried on with an eye to revenue and trade only. But the salt papers contain copious references to prove that the Company's agents amassed huge fortunes in the shape of commissions over and above their monthly pay ranging from Rs. 200 to Rs. 300. In order to diminish the intensity of internal smuggling commissions were granted even to the Indian kayals and
supervisors and nearly 85% of the sale proceeds of smuggled salt was spent in rewarding the detected officers. 18

The Agents had vast and different duties to perform and, to lighten the burden of the Agent in the two salt agencies of Tamlook and Hijli, the post of assistant Agent was created with the monthly emolument of Rs.200/- and a variable amount of commission. Below them there were the salt darogahs and ghat darogahs to supervise the accumulation of salt in godowns and its delivery across the rivers. They were sometimes responsible for giving advances to the molungies and contracted to produce karkatch salt through particular khalaries within an estimated expenditure. 19 They often exercised compulsion and used physical violence to ensure production and check smuggling. The kayals and other types of salt workers had to perform different types of works whenever required. For an honest and efficient discharge of duties, the kayals were liberally rewarded.

The salt records abound in illustration of profits arising out of the difference between the receiving and disbursing price of salt rents. There were many types of advance payment made by the salt agency to the molungies. But there was an exceptional advance, termed as unrefundable advance (Betalavi taka), made by the landed proprietor of Maynachoura to the molungies which they utilised sometimes
for the daily necessities of life. The system of advance in cash or commodities ensured easy supply of salt from khaliaries to the godown by diminishing the possibility of clandestine trade. The salt agencies demanded 25-36 maunds of salt for the delivery of one hundred maunds as pungah or 'surf' on the pretext of 'zarti parti' and 'shukti' or wastes despite the low price of salt. From the salt correspondence it is found that the molungies expressed their inability to deliver goods of stipulated contract under such low prices and high deductions. Consequently the accumulation of undelivered arrears of salt compelled the molungies either to protest against or to abscond from the jurisdiction of the agency officials. To save the molungies from such desperate actions of desertions by keeping arrears, the price of salt was increased a little but it did never exceed Rs. 72 in Mandalghaut and other areas. The molungies were also allotted lands for crop cultivation in the rainy season to alleviate their economic miseries which opened up marshy jalpai lands for cultivation. This process got a momentum after 1856.

Before 1803 the molungies were in arrears of salt and, tired of compulsion, often fled to the Maratha regions. But after the conquest of Orissa in 1803 the immigration of molungies to Orissa came to a sudden halt. The primary producers, who could neither resist the usurious claims of creditors nor could abscond, sank into the class of pauper. In such a
position the molungies became a prey in the hands of village money-lenders. The abolition of adjoors system did not materially improve the economic condition of the thicka molungies, who began to settle down in the barren jalpai lands on a low rental basis in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The wages they received and the produce which they could extract from saline lands could not meet their daily necessities of life. They had to take loan from the mahajans. Consequently, the independent peasant molungies were degraded into a class of dependent peasantry without any land of their own. The whole labour force, engaged in salt production, was brought under the denomination of molungies.

Their class interests very often differed, as such they could not provide an organised resistance against usury and official oppression and they failed to meet their economic demands from the authorities. This was partly due to the absence of village level leadership coming from the landholders which can be found in the jungle mahals in that period. Since 1803, seeing no other alternative they immigrated to the Sundarbans and Saugar islands, being allured by the high rate of pay and free non-taxable cultivable lands. This migratory movement towards the Sundarbans ultimately prevented the process of depeasantisation of the primary producers. Continuing poverty of the peasants persisted, because the land owners had no incentive or means for more land utilisation with limitation of the internal
market. Thus while all categories of labourers were enhancing their income through legal and illegal means, the upper stratum of the molungies took resort to protest to express their grievances before the authorities which brought no effects due to clash of class interests between the middle and the upper stratum of the molungies.

Some scholars viewed that the agitation of the molungies formed the genesis of trade union movement of the working classes in the salt tracts. But in the salt tracts the movements never took an organised shape under the landed proprietors assisted by their armed retainer, as they did in the Jungle Mahal district under the naiks. It would be a far-fetched conclusion if one wants to call it the first spark of trade union movement of the salt workers with a conscious ideology to change the economic machinery and social relations.22

The illicit trade in salt flourished after the 1820’s and the Company was worried about it. The growth of the volume of salt production in south-west Bengal and increase in the number of unauthorised khalaries and of labour personnel in the production machinery owing to the immigration of wage-earners from outside helped to accelerate the tempo of smuggling. This smuggling started in the last decade of the eighteenth century by the active collaboration of land-holders and the Company’s clerks due to profit motive.23 The Company used to buy salt from the molungies at the rate of Rs. 77 per one hundred maund,
while the wholesale buyers purchased it from the Government at not less than Rs. 350 for the same amount. 24 This wide margin in salt price was definitely an allurement to native merchants to indulge in illicit salt trade. 25 Consequently, each operative in the production machinery from the landed proprietor on the top down to the daily wage-earner and his women folk in the family at the bottom had an active contribution to this illicit trade. 26 By this time Tucker, Richards and Crawfurd vehemently criticised the condition of the salt labourers. In the words of Crawfurd: "The labourers were practically in a state of slavery. Every man of them was being in debt to the Company inextricably and for life". 27 By the reforms of Cornwallis and by the Regulation X of 1819, the molungies were granted some concessions to better their condition but both the departments and the employer-cultivators took care not to enhance the labour rate. The Company introduced the 'surplus system' in 1811 with a view to divert a portion of unauthorised salt into the legal market by granting some financial help to the molungies but it did not bring the expected result and in course of time it was abandoned. 28

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the two main objectives of the Company were to prevent smuggling and to adopt measures to clear out the overstocked salt and superintendents of salt choukies were appointed to prevent smuggling and illicit trade in salt. 29 But the salt records show that those who were responsible for checking illicit trade were themselves responsible for abetting its growth.
In 1819 the general control of the department was transferred to the Board of Customs, Salt and Opium but smuggling virtually could not be stopped, as the Salt Board failed to cope with the heavy surplus produced in recognised khalaries and also by frequent robberies committed on the Government salt godowns. Another feature which added to the difficulties of the salt department by 1830 was that most of the golas were overstocked with the supply of previous years' paid for but uncleared salt. The Calcutta merchants complained that the overstocked condition of the salt market was due to an excessive increase in smuggling. The following table shows the increase in the quantity of uncleared salt.

Table No. 27
Increase in the quantity of uncleared salt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Quantity of salt</th>
<th>Price per Mds.</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>Uncleared salt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>31,09,000</td>
<td>243-48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1794</td>
<td>34,00,000</td>
<td>301-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,79,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>36,00,000</td>
<td>287-4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,01,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>46,00,000</td>
<td>419</td>
<td></td>
<td>12,96,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>50,00,000</td>
<td>319-12/352-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,38,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>44,00,000</td>
<td>372</td>
<td></td>
<td>22,51,755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Parliamentary papers; House of Commons Report.
G. Plowden, Commissioner of Inquiry on Salt, pp. 145-47.
The following table shows the rise in salt prices per 100 maunds of salt of every Agency and the upward tendency of accumulation of uncleared salt.

Table No. 28

Decrease in the selling price

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>October 1 1844</th>
<th>May 1 1855</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hidgellee &amp; Kallanggur Pungah</td>
<td>Rs. 375</td>
<td>Rs. 310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissennuggur</td>
<td>Rs. 370</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terropey kea</td>
<td>Rs. 390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramnuggur</td>
<td>Rs. 360</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamlook Harainpore</td>
<td>Rs. 345</td>
<td>Rs. 303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


To overcome this overstocked state of the salt market, the Government decided to reduce both the number of annual sales and the quantity put up for sale and also decided to abolish less productive salt divisions, closing down unauthorised khalartes with their aurungs and gola stations in each agency. As a result, thousands of workers, immersed in debt, were thrown out of employment. Consequently, on 6 July 1835, by the Regulation X, it was decided to appoint uncovenanted servants as superintendents of the salt choukies of Bengal.
The Company's salt monopoly declined in the third decade of the nineteenth century and was finally terminated in 1856. The impact of Industrial Revolution, the lassiez faire policy followed by the British Government and the free importation of Liverpool salt were among the causes of the collapse of salt monopoly in Bengal as well as in Midnapore. The salt monopoly of the Company was terminated owing to both internal and external challenges. It had no connection with the Charter Act of 1833. It was neither connected with the Bargir Hangama or collapse of the law and order situation. Signs of exhaustion were found in the second decade of the nineteenth century due to extensive embankments, unhealthy climate and lack of fuel lands. In a situation of unsteady labour supply, slow rise in the prices of daily necessaries of life, particularly of rice, the production of salt seemed unremunerative to the land holders and unattractive to the wage earners. The flourishing smuggling in salt trade had also pernicious effect in this respect. But it cannot be accepted that the overstocked market was due to the importation of foreign salt at a cheap rate. Though the Orissa salt was prohibited from being imported in Bengal, time and again, specially by the Regulation XXII of 1814 its free importation to Bengal could not be checked.30

By this time the vehement criticism against the Company's salt policy in Bengal had started and the Company had to bow down before the external challenges in the shape of clamour
for free trade and open door policy. The imposition of a custom duty of three sicca rupees a maund on all imported salt was approved by the Court of Directors, who feared the importation of cheaper salt from the Cape-Verde Island following free trade as permitted by the Charter Act of 1813. However in 1803, about 600,000 maunds of coastal salt was sent for delivery in Bengal, and the Company had to heed the interest of British ship-owners who wanted to bring cheaper salt of the Coromandal coast into Bengal. With the introduction of free trade, the Court of Directors thought it better to sell salt by public auction. But the Board of Customs, Salt and Opium strongly objected to the proposal of public sales at hired price rates on the ground that it would in all probability affect government revenue without benefiting the people. The Commons Committee on Indian Affairs (1831-32) suggested that it would be desirable to supply salt by importation instead of manufacture by the Government. Ultimately, the British merchant interests defeated the Company's salt monopoly when the Select Committee recommended in 1836 the abolition of the system of periodical auction sales and the establishment of the system of open warehouse sales at fixed price.

Once the salt manufacturers of south-west Bengal, specially in Midnapore, were struggling for their bare existence against the mounting expenses for the manufacture of salt,
over-burdened with numerous salt taxes, selling salt at unremunerative prices and fearing for the unsold and overstocked market. Their final death-knell was sounded when importation of cheap Liverpool salt began. In May 1834, Liverpool salt sold at Rs. 377-4-3. In November 1834, Liverpool salt was at Rs. 372-0-0, in the sale of May 1835 Hijli pungah was Rs. 394-3-0 and Liverpool boiled was Rs. 393-0-0 per 100 maunds. Tamluk and Hijli were capable of supplying half of the demand of the Bengal market when monopoly was abandoned but the salt tax, imposed upon the people and contributing a revenue of one million and a quarter sterling in 1833, remained as menacing as ever.

The history of the salt manufacture and trade between 1836 and 1856 was a constant competition between the Indian and foreign salt manufacturers and merchants on the one hand and the constant endeavour of the Salt Agency to convert salt mahals into paddy fields by settlement with the molungies on the other. Consequentially, salt production became unattractive and unremunerative, tending to be a home industry which ultimately led the molungies to abandon gradually the manufacture of salt and to concentrate on paddy cultivation, fishery and betel-leaf plantation on a large scale. Thus when in east Bengal and the Tarai region of north Bengal, commercial agriculture of jute and plantation economy of tea developed, sometime denuding forest lands and even converting the paddy fields for cash
crop cultivation, a different picture emerged in the south, south-east Midnapore: salt manufacture gave way to monoculture of paddy through expansion of cultivation. Some of the molungies also abandoned their country home in unhealthy villages, infested with malaria, for job opportunities towards the urban localities round Calcutta by the 1850s. But the alternative income resources at the urban centres like Contai, Tamluk and also in Calcutta did not bring large-scale depopulation in the villages. Density of population in these two subdivisions of Midnapore, as represented in the Census Reports in the twentieth century, will prove that despite their seasonal migration to urban centres, they were very much entrenched in their villages, busy in property making through their alternative income resources, apart from their income from land and decreasing salt manufacturing activities.

Thus a new economic scenario unfolded itself between 1832 and 1909 in the salt tracts of Contai and Tamluk subdivisions. The abandoned salt tracts and barren jalpai lands were converted into cultivable lands, where sanitary conditions were attempted to be maintained to attract population despite virulent tropical diseases and rent settlements were effected with the mahisya caste-group leaders. The salt records, preserved only in the Midnapore Collectorate, reflect a graphic picture of land settlements in the jalpai and the nimak mahals since 1832. As importation of Liverpool salt to
India increased its quantum, the pungah salt produced in Tamluk and Contai became difficult to market by the Salt Agencies. From 1832 to 1856 the marshy but barren jalpai lands were settled with the molungies at the initiative of the Salt Agencies and the flow of salt water in the paddy fields was regulated through the salt canals. This led to enhancement of rent in the newly cultivated jalpai lands by the traditional proprietors. The molungies, turned ryots, carried on impregnation of salt in the paddy fields after the harvesting season was over in order to compensate their loss from rent enhancement. But this clandestine salt, manufactured beyond the knowledge of salt agency, was marketed collusively by the land captains, itmamdars and hodadar salt contractors which overstocked the already accumulated salt in the Company's warehouses. The copious references in the salt records show that the molungies, mainly belonging to the caste-group of mahisyas, not only fought for their subsistence against the oppression of the salt agency clerks and watchman coming from outside who wanted to purchase property in the salt agencies but also against the traditional landed proprietors, mostly belonging to the Utkal brahmins, who were so long enjoying an annuity from the salt agency but now began to settle the molungies in the marshy lands abandoned by the agency as denuded forest and jalpai lands to enhance their rent collection from the temporarily settled molungi ryots.
But the picture did not represent a scene of conflict only between the emergent property owning middle peasantry and the Utkal brahmin landed proprietors. Because after 1856 with the abandonment of salt monopoly by the Company the Salt Agency systematically abandoned the salt mahals to the landed proprietors for a permanent settlement of population for cultivation expansion. An air of collaborative efforts started between the zamindars and the middle peasant mahisyas for cultivation expansion and simultaneous cultivation of paddy and impregnation of salt in the same fields. The lands were developed into plots and made taxable to the permanent tenure-holder middle peasantry. This is the beginning of the emergence of a class of middle peasantry from among the mahisyas, who numerically outnumbered the other caste groups and pioneered the societal change. Salt workers of other caste groups also received settlement (bandobastha) from these plotholders (chakdars or lotdars) on payment of an agreed rent in produce. Thus when the educational developments took place, a machinery of property making was in full swing, utilising the labour of the disbanded molungies and expanded land-holdings in the abandoned salt tracts.

Thus English education, Brahmo movement (under the leadership of Bipin Sasmal) and new job opportunities in the subdividional administrative machinery and legal profession became catalysts for moving the machinery of property-making by the relatively affluent molungies-turned-landholders in the newly settled
salt tracts of Contai and Tamluk. These mahisyas and kaibartas after 1803, when the salt producing areas were transferred from Orissa to Midnapore, snapped their social matrimonial relationships with Balasore of Orissa, and began to look towards Calcutta as a cultural oasis to overcome their identity crisis. The machinery of property-making compelled them to have a love-hate relationship with the Utkal brahmin landed proprietors on the one hand and the Raju and khandait caste groups of Jallasore on the other. They had also developed a relationship of conflict and collaboration with the Rârhi brahmins and kayasthas in these regions, who since the beginning of the nineteenth century migrated to the nimki mahals as official professionals and teachers and turned land-holders when the nimki lands were converted into paddy fields. Thus a mutual economic dependence between the two dominant caste groups strengthened a socio-cultural identity, since instead of looking towards Orissa culture and attempting to distort the Oriya dialect they usually used, they looked to the cultural centres of Calcutta and, despite being despised by the Calcutta Bhadraloks as 'keutas' and 'kentho Oriyas', they began to acquire real estates in and around Calcutta to dominate the political arena of Bengal. This tendency of conflict and collaboration became more sharp with the dawn of the twentieth century.

Thus the middle peasantry mahisyas, increasing landholdings as already explained, took the social leadership. Consequently, in the then agrarian society a three-fold conflict
emerged, the first being between the traditional Oriya brahmin landlords and the mahisya middle peasantry. 49 The second conflict was between the mahisya land captains and the low rental molumgies-turned-occupancy lease-holders of low caste origin, who were increasingly becoming pauperised and moving constantly towards the periphery of villages being pushed by the affluent mahisya through the mechanics of usurious money-lending and hold over labour power through their control over the tools of cultivation. But this type of conflict was coloured by mutual dependence on each other for cultivation expansion. In this group is included the minority Muslim population who carried on agrarian crafts on the periphery of villages. Both the caste Hindus and peripheral Muslim minorities were mutually dependent on each other for continuing the cultivation process all the year round. This explains the total communal harmony in this region which could not be found in east Bengal, where the majority Muslim peasantry developed hostility with the absentee Hindu landlords for their financial extortion. 50 And the third conflict was between the mahisyas and the upper caste educated government pleaders, officials and teachers who were coming from outside and trying their best to control the opened-up avenues for land holdings through the auction sales and in connivance with the government apparatus. Owing to the vast uncultivated and uninhabitated stretches of land, the migratory movement of population continued throughout the nineteenth century even up to the Sundarbans with collaboration among the peasant
caste-groups through a process of low rental settlements. With the transfer of salt agency lands to the Board of Revenue, the government, in turn, undertook sanitary measures for improving sanitary conditions which would be conducive to human settlement. They regulated the flow of saline water through canals and even encouraged human settlements through landed proprietors and affluent ryots. When the freedom movement started in the first decade of the twentieth century, these three types of conflict emerged in the social turmoil with a vocal slogan of Swadeshi and Swaraj and, on Gandhi's advent, the "Labana Satyagraha" became a clarion call of these sections of the community. This is a subject which calls for detailed studies in the fourth and last chapters.

b) Cotton Industry

From the ancient times cotton textile industry was the most prosperous industry in Midnapore and Bankura. It was organised on a domestic system and, in importance, was next to agriculture. The inland and overseas trade in textile goods through the port of Tamralipta was carried on regularly. In the Muslim period the state karkhanas of cotton textile flourished. Under the patronage of the Hindu chiefs of Bishnupur, Midnapore and Burdwan, many weaving villages came up and the cotton cultivation developed in Midnapore and Bankura. Since the seventeenth century, the Dutch, the French, and the English
trading companies carried on extensive trade in cotton and silk textile goods. These foreign companies carried on internal trade through the dadni merchants. These merchants were harassed by the nababs, who arbitrarily extorted from them customs duties and other irregular payments. Many weavers had to take shelter around the British residencies to save themselves from their oppression and the English East India Company tried their best to guard these merchants. Since the 1730s, the Nabata invasion had a beneficial effect on the production and trade in textile goods, which accordingly increased and many weavers fled from the aurangzi owing to Largi incursions. 54

As a result, the weavers of Balasore and Pipili, which were important centres of manufactures, fled to Bishnupur, Midnapore and Calcutta and some took to other professions. 55

Thus, the decline of the economic life of Orissa stimulated textile manufactures in the important weaving centres of these two districts (i.e. Midnapore and Bankura), like Radhanagar, Khirpai, Chandrakona, Chetua Borda and Sonamukhi. Alivardi Khan concluded peace with Raghiji I in 1751 and the river Subarnarekha became the boundary between Orissa and Bengal.

Since 1753, the trading in cotton textiles through the dadni merchants came to an end, and the paid Indian agents, known as gomasthas, were appointed by the Company for the purchase of textile goods and cotton piece-goods directly from the weavers, being financed by the Residents and later on by the English private contractors under the Board of Trade. Many weavers used to take advance from the Company as well as from the indigenous private traders and foreign traders for the supply of piece-goods. The majority of the
weaver community, however, depended on ready money sale of their fabrics, which was increasingly in demand.

The spinning of the cotton thread was mainly confined to women folk in the weaving families. Even the spinning industry was not concentrated in the hands of a particular caste or section. It was carried on even by persons belonging to the higher caste of Brahmins for their thread ceremony. The majority of the spinners produced the coarser thread out of the country cotton. Secondly, a large number of skilled spinners had perished in the famines of 1770 and 1788. The increasing demand for fine thread often outran supply. To encourage this spinning of fine thread, rise in price was considered to be a necessity and the commercial resident of Sonamukhi had to offer a small premium as incentive to every spinner of fine threads.

Increased volume of trade in textile goods might have increased the demand for raw cotton of this region. Colebrooke viewed that the whole of raw cotton required for yarn-making in Bengal was produced locally. But in course of time, with the decline in its cultivation, it was considered necessary to import raw cotton from Surat and Bombay to Calcutta through water route and to local aurangs through land route. There is no sufficient statistical data available to indicate the expansion of the cotton cultivation area to
meet the demand of the expanding market. Only stray references in the proceedings volume of the Board of Trade in 1790 indicate that the cotton cultivation was inadequate to meet the demands of the Bengal market. In Birbhum, the local production of cotton was 80,000 mds and about 17,000 mds. were imported from Patna. The Burdwan aurangs also depended on the Nagpur and Bombay varieties from Calcutta, because Burdwan produced it inadequately. Three varieties of cotton were produced, viz, the nurma, the muhrea and the bogga cotton. The production of cotton at Sonamukhi was also much below the demand of the market and the aurangs at Bishnupur were impelled to import Barar cotton from Mirzapur to the extent of about 2500 mds. The kaur, the muhree and bhojee and the total cotton production was about 15,000 mds. The Midnapore aurangs depended solely on the Bombay cotton transported from Calcutta. Gradually there was a sharp fall in the import of Surat cotton. Inevitably, there was a sharp rise in the price of raw cotton from Rs. 14-14-½ to Rs. 18-7-11 in Khirpai and from Rs. 13-8 to Rs. 19-4, at Sonamukhi between 1792 and 1823. This corresponded to the price rise of rice from Rs. 1-12-4 to Rs. 2-9-3 per maund at Khirpai and at Radhanagar from Rs. 1-8 to 2.00 within this period. Therefore, the paucity of raw cotton and non-availability of finer handmade thread sharpened the demands for rise in selling price, which constituted the major cause of decline in textile industry and hastened the Company's decision to import machine-made thread to this region.
Thus although the village level textile industry had flourished under the patronage of the Company's government, adequate measures for improvement in cotton cultivation were not adopted. This may be due partly to the natural calamities of drought and flood and the resultant breakdown of the zamindari embankments and to some extent, due to the increased demand of land rent in the cotton-producing fields without taking adequate measures to increase the productivity of soil. Even financially the ryots were dependent on the weavers and the textile pykers, which is considered to have a discouraging effect on the cotton cultivation. The fabrics like khasas (cossaes), baftas, sonnoes flourished at Radhanagar, Midnapore, Khrpai and Chandrakona in Midnapore and at Bishnupur and Somanukhi in Bankura. Gurrahs and chintz, a kind of coarse printed cloth, together with the art of bleaching, dyeing and flowering of cloths also flourished in these districts. Both Bowrey and Straynsham Master find that, since the sixteenth century, Midnapore and Kashiary specialised in producing coloured clothes and Chandrakona and Khrpai specialised in muslins and flowered clothes which had a great demand in Germany, Africa and the West Indies.

There was no improvement in machinery or in productive units in the cotton textile industry in the then situation in these two districts. Even the Indian specialised arts of bleaching, dyeing and flowering were relegated to the
background with the changed demands within and outside the
Indian market and the phenomenon was due to some extent to the
gomasthas or supervisors, who played an important part in the
textile production and investment around this time. The role
of the 'tagadgeers' or the collector of textile goods and the
"Jassandars" or the appraisers of the valuation of the products was
also significant. The tagadgeers performed work with the help
of ill-paid Indian agents who, with the aid of the village
level pykars and delals, exploited the weaver community. Such
exploitation became injurious to the weavers' interest. On
many occasions, the Company's contractors and agents took
money illegally from the poor weavers, who had no other
alternative but to protest against them. That type of protest
of agitated weavers ultimately led to the resignation of
J. Dyneley, the Commercial Resident of Radhanagar. 67

There existed a crude form of guild system in production.
The mandals, as leaders of the weavers with landed property
and a large number of weaving machines, formed the middle
statum of the community. Just below the mandals, there
existed a number of master weavers who had a number of looms,
procured raw cotton from the cotton producers in the neighbouring
market and sometimes employed hired labour for completing their
part of the community contract with the pykars. 68 Generally
the coarser fabrics were prepared throughout the year, but
the finer quality of fabrics was manufactured in the rainy
season between May and August owing to an excess of moisture in the atmosphere and according to the demands of the internal market for ready money sale. 69

An important feature of the cotton textile industry was the system of advance which was generally given to the weavers thrice in the year, once in May about 10/16, another about September 4/16 and lastly in the winter 2/16. The utility of the first instalment was to enable the weavers to buy raw materials and implements, hiring spinners, and appoint extra weavers in accordance with the volume of contracts. 70 Inspite of the advances, the weavers had to depend largely on ready money sale of their goods. The cotton weavers, by taking advance from the Company, received a good amount of ready capital to start with.

Apart from the merits of the system of advance, its drawbacks were not far to seek. The money advance in the off season tended to lower the valuation of the textile products and bound the weavers to the Company's investment all the year round. In the case of delay and non-fulfilment of the agreement, the manufacturers were liable to penalties and even prosecution. 71 Moreover, there was increase in the price of raw materials. During the twenty years from 1793, the wages of labourers also rose speedily. But the rates given to the
skilled weavers by the Company were extremely low. According to an agreement between the commercial resident and the weavers of Sonamukhi dated January 1793, the price given to the latter for a class gerah was only Rs. 3-9 as per piece, whereas the price obtained from the same piece at London sales was 45s 6d each. The Company did not allow any proportionate increase in the price of textile goods. The master weavers, after payment of rent, labour charges and the price for raw materials and good grains, were left with a negligible margin of profit in the competitive money market. Above all, the cotton manufacturers, who took advance from the Company, were debarred from taking any orders of alluring prices from others until the previous orders were fulfilled. The weavers protested and showed their unwillingness to work for the Company. Consequently, the weavers of Sonamukhi as well as of other places of this district did not agree for long to sign any written agreement with the Commercial Resident for the supply of clothes.

Inspite of its unpopularity, the system of advance turned out to be the only subsistence when the Company's cloth investments showed signs of decline in the early nineteenth century. The shrinkage of the internal and foreign markets and the fall in demand for standard quality clothes from
the Indian Pykars may be attributed chiefly to the gradual decline of the weaving industry. Such a crisis led to large-scale unemployment among the weavers.\textsuperscript{75} After 1818, when the demand for piece-goods fell off in foreign market, the greatest part of Company's surplus revenue was invested in raw silk.\textsuperscript{76}

The paucity of good quality raw cotton and the finer thread at a cheap rate, rise in wages of labourers, and the heavy demand of textile goods on account of private trade led to deterioration in the quality of goods.\textsuperscript{77}

The Company had to depend on private traders and Indian pykars because of their difficulties in finding ready money for investment. Such dependence compelled the Company to buy goods of inferior quality which, in turn, led to shrinkage in demands for south-west Bengal's goods in the foreign markets.\textsuperscript{78} It was due to paucity of superfine cotton and thread that ultimately compelled the English Company to import Manchester thread\textsuperscript{79} for the manufacture of finer textile goods. But even then the weavers of different centres of these districts demanded higher rate for the textile goods and the Company stepped up their importation of cotton twists from England for the Bengal market. Thus, a serious crisis crept into the spinning industry.

In the early nineteenth century a crisis overtook the already exhausted cotton textile industry of this region,
which witnessed a rapid fall since 1793. Marx quoted the Governor General's report of 1834-35 that "the bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India" to explain the pernicious effects of importation of Manchester machine-made textile goods in the British empire.\(^{80}\) C.J. Hamilton viewed that it was not the selfish commercial policy of England, but rather the inability of Indian cotton manufacturers to compete with the machine-made products of the country, which was responsible for the decline of the textile industry.\(^{81}\) Both J.C. Sinha and K.K. Datta agreed that the decline was perceptible in the late eighteenth century, which was hastened by the Industrial Revolution. It had been contended that the bargir invasions, political anarchy, spread of gang robberies following the decline of the Mughal empire, and natural calamities following the famines of 1770 and 1788, led to the decline of the weaving industry. But H.R. Ghosal rightly pointed out that the effect of these man-made and natural calamities was temporary and that the oppression of gomastha and dalals, regarded as primary causes of the decline, could not give a crushing blow to the industry.\(^{82}\) So also the arguments that fall in the demands for the textile of this region in the courts of Nababs and preferences of the landed nobility for the Manchester machine-made fabrics, might explain the decline to some extent without touching upon the main problem of the crisis.\(^{83}\)
Recently scholars, like Marris D Marris, have argued that while British cloth was competitive with Bengal's handloom production, machine-made yarn seemed to have strengthened the competitive position of the indigenous handloom sector despite the fall in cloth prices. The sharp fall in the prices of Manchester yarn, no doubt, benefited the handloom industry, but it gave a death blow to the already moribund indigenous spinning industry.

Industrial Revolution, no doubt, might have had a discouraging effect on the cotton textile industry in this region, causing the weavers of Midnapore and Bankura to lose the foreign market. But why did they fail to monopolise the traditional internal market in the early nineteenth century? There was an increasing demand of South-west Bengal's textile products abroad in the late eighteenth century. Then why there could not be any improvement in the cultivation of cotton? These questions could not be answered by the mere plea of Industrial Revolution in England.

To explain these paradoxes, the internal forces as well as the external pressures, which barred the usual growth of the weaving industries of this region, could be taken into consideration. An analysis of these factors reveals that the importation of machine-made yarn in the early nineteenth century led to the fall in prices of textile products which had undoubtedly a discouraging effect on the
cotton spinning industry. But it could not be ignored that, throughout the eighteenth century, the Company's policy of investment aimed at low rate of the products and low wages to the weavers. This had a discouraging effect on cotton cultivation and thread manufacture in the country at a time of steady rise in the prices of foodstuff and wages of labour. There was no improvement of cotton cultivation because of the easy availability of Mirzapur cotton at a cheap rate. Since 1785 there was an extensive growth of cotton spinning mills in England, which marked the steady rise of cotton thread imports to Calcutta. In 1825-26, the value of the British yarn imported into Calcutta was only Rs. 81,000, next year it exceeded Rs. 8,00,000 and in 1838-39 the total import was valued at Rs. 56 lakhs.85 The Company's tariff policy and the imposition of fresh taxes on Indian goods in order to safeguard their own interests led to a serious crisis in the handloom cotton industry of this region. The decline started from the finest qualities of fabrics and gradually its effect fell on the fine and coarser qualities of clothes.

It may be concluded that the weaving industry in this region attained a temporary splendour on an artificial foundation of the Company's investment policy and it quickly lost that place as soon as that foundation was withdrawn. It led to greater concentration of rural man-power on agriculture, leading to subdivision of holdings, and the
balance in the agrarian economy ended in monoculture with emphasis on paddy cultivation. It gave a death-blow to the development of an entrepreneurial class for the growth of an urban society. But in the 1860's, it was the rising tide of 'nationalism' that gave a new stimulus to the revival of village spinning and weaving industries but it appeared in the shape of new machinery in place of the old productive units and organisations.

c) Silk

The reputation of the silk fabrics and muslin fabrics of Bengal had spread to countries bordering on the Mediterranean. It is known from Lambourn that "nearly 23 years before i.e., about 1577 A.D., a merchant of Mala Sheik Bhik set sail for Russia with three ships laden with silk cloth and that two of his ships were wrecked somewhere near the Persian Gulf". Bengal was producing this valuable stuff from a remote past and was sending it to the silk marts of Dacca, Sonargaon and Saptagram for the use of her princes and noble man and for the external trade also.

The culture of the silk-worm was first undertaken in China and the product of these insects was first used there as a material for textiles. As recorded in the Chinese work, called the "Silk worm classic", about 2600 B.C. a queen named Si-Ling-Chi first encouraged the silk industry in China,
From the old literature it is evident that about 300 A.D. the technical knowhow of silk manufacture reached India from China. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the East India Company agreed to take advice from the Chinese silk experts for the improvement in quality of silk worm eggs and mulberry plants for developing the industry. Before the British merchants, the Pathan and Mughal rulers carried on extensive trade in silk products. The Muslim rulers of sixteenth century India, the local Hindu nobility as well as the temple priests were the great patrons of silk fabrics. The British merchants, with the help of Indian merchants, used to carry on trade after paying the internal transit duties, while the other foreign companies often tried to make it duty-free in the early eighteenth century.

The Company tried its best to protect the silk manufacturers from the financial exactions of the Muslim and Maratha Paudjars by setting up direct contact with the manufacturers. Radhanagar and Mishnupur of this region developed into important silk-producing centres under the Company's patronage. However, due to political turmoil in the mid-eighteenth century, the silk industry of this region could not flourish properly. The peace settlement made between Alivardi Khan and Raghuji I in 1751 demarcated the south west between Balasore and Midnapore and the Silk Industry got momentum. Consequently, by 1753, the Company gave away the idea of silk investment through the Indian
merchants in this region. The Company appointed salaried kuthi gomasathas as well as pykars. The Dutch and the French merchants also established kuthis in different places of these districts. Like the cotton textile industry, the silk manufacture also flourished out of the centres of artisans of Orissa during the Maratha incursions. The artisans fled from Orissa's manufacturing centres to Midnapore and Bankura. 89

The indigenous silk manufacture remained in a crude and undeveloped state and no body wanted to reorganise it or to extend its cultivation. The Company made some reforms and arranged for the safety of the artisans in the south-west districts of Midnapore and Bankura. For the acute shortage of raw cotton and cotton thread, they exported Mirzapur black soil cotton to Murshidabad (Bhagawangola) in lieu of Bengal wood silk to make it profitable and up to the standard.

The sahukar merchants, as well as the sannyasi merchants of Benaras, were directly connected with Bengal silk trade. The total value of the import and exports of Gossains at Mirzapur and Benaras from Bengal, carried through the custom house of the Raja of Benaras, was Rs. 1,614,795 in 1785. They remitted gold to Bengal for the raw silk and piece goods. 90 Crooke says that the Gossain merchants of Mirzapur were engaged in trade from Bengal to the Deccan and most of them became so prosperous that they had abandoned religious life. 91
The manufacture of woven silk-goods received a setback from the Act of the year 1700, prohibiting export of Indian silk goods to England. But throughout the eighteenth century, the silk piece-goods of Bengal began to be exported to the distant parts of the British empire. The demand for the Bengal raw silk rose from 1751-65 on an average from £60,000 to about £80,340 pounds of 16 ounces each per annum. But the Indian silk goods could not compete with the Italian or Spanish silk due to the inferior method of reeling, adopted by the chassars in Bengal. In 1770 some Italian artisans were brought to Bengal to introduce their novel pattern of reeling in the silk aurungs and initiate a new mode of mulberry cultivation. But the disastrous effects were evident during the famine of 1770 when many workers died and mulberry fields were converted into paddy land.

To overcome this difficulty the government decided to settle mulberry lands at a low rate on a permanent basis. But the fall in demand of raw cotton and machinations of dalals affected the economic condition of the mulberry cultivators and cocoon-chassars. Above all, the permanent settlement and oppression of the zamindar gomasthas had a pernicious effect on the ryots and cocoon rearers. Besides, the chassars and mulberry ryots had to take risks in cocoon rearing and in feeding the worms but they were helpless before flood and sudden inundation from rivers and torrential rain. Besides,
they were dependent on the pykers. They had to accept their terms according to market conditions. A series of complaints, found in the records of the Board of Trade, against the landed proprietors and pykers showed the discouraging state of cultivation of mulberry. 94

Different types of mulberry silk worms were reared in these two districts: (1) Miestari or Madrasi which are suitable for the worm in the rainy seasons, (2) chhotapalu or Deshi suitable for the cold seasons, (3) the Bara palu which was an annual variety of which egg-stage continues for 10 months instead of 8-18 days, and (4) the chenu-palu which was reared chiefly in the Tamluk subdivision of Midnapore. Usually, three or four crops of cocoons were reared in a year. The parasitic fly often made silk rearing impossible if all the crops were taken in the same locality. 95 Another danger to the cocoon was the stormy weather and rain for which the chassars had to sustain heavy loss. In this region the mulberry cocoon silk produced two other varieties, viz, the tassar and the endi.

With the introduction of filature silk, the cultivation of indigenous cocoons became precarious and uncertain. In 1830, in the evidence before the select committee of the House of Lords, the degeneration of silk worms came to light. This decline was due to epidemics which devastated France and Italy and appeared in India. With the help of Roxburgh
the Company's government initiated a plan of improvement in the method of mulberry cultivation and rearing of silk worms. In 1832, the Italian silk worms bred at St. Helena was imported and introduced at Sonamukhi.

In spinning, weaving and supplying cotton to the weavers, the pykars played an important role. These middlemen were running a parallel market for the piece-goods made out of Bengal wound silk. The chassars and the owners of private filatures as well as the silk winders and weavers were all dependent on these native pykars. The winding and reeling of filature was done in the Company's factories at Radhanagar in Midnapore and at Sonamukhi in Bankura. The pykars or middlemen wholesale dealers could dictate terms to the chassars for the cocoons at their own price. A series of complaints was lodged against these middlemen. The independent silk winders and_reelers also manufactured the filature silk. The Company exported not only filature silk but also a considerable amount of Bengal wound silk manufactured by the private persons. In 1801, out of the total amount of Rs. 8,62,500 sanctioned for the Company's raw silk investment, the sum of Rs. 2,25,000 was set apart for Bengal wound silk. But gradually the investment in filature silk decreased until in 1826 it was entirely prohibited by the Court of Directors except under special circumstances.96

With the decline of cotton piece goods there was a steady rise of silk fabrics. In 1838 about 2,10,000 pieces of omrah
silk pieces of fabrics were exported to Europe out of which only 16,000 pieces went to England. The cotton weavers were benefited by the silk industry, specially those who were out of employment with the decline of cotton industry. But in the absence of adequate capital formation and fluctuation in the demands of internal and external markets, the silk industry gradually declined. The Indian entrepreneurial class could not provide a steady maintenance grant to alleviate the miseries of poor weavers. Many of the chassars owned lands but the weavers were more or less dependent on weaving. When they were not spinning motka or working in filatures, they worked as day labourers in the paddy fields. Of course, the silk weavers were regarded as superior to cultivators in social position and more prosperous than cotton weavers. But they were all under the thumb of the money-lender mahajans. Besides getting silk at a cheap rate, they charged the weavers heavy rates of interest which amounted to 12-36% (per cent) per annum. This constituted a serious impediment to the growth of silk industry.

The Company did not monopolise the silk trade in this region at the beginning. There were the Dutch, the French, and the private individuals who participated in silk trade. By 1793, the total value of raw silk obtained from the aurungs exceeded 29 lakhs of rupees. But in the wake of the French Revolutionary wars, the Company suffered a loss of more than
4% on raw silk due to the fact that huge amount of piece goods remained unsold. Gradually due to financial difficulties, the Company's investment decreased. In 1801 it slightly exceeded Rs. 8,62,000 sicca rupees. In the wake of Napoleonic wars, the Company increased the volume of trade on filature silk. The silk factory of Ganutia was purchased by the Company in 1807, and placed in charge of John Cheap, the commercial Resident of Sonamukhi, and the annual production of this factory up to 1813 amounted to an average of over 600 maunds. The annual average export, as found in the records of the Board of Trade from 1773-92 stood at about 4,09,000 lbs. During 1799-1812 it was about 4,38,554 lbs. and during 1813-34 it was 9,82,761 lbs. The Company continued its silk operations in this region up to 1835 (according to W.W. Hunter, 1833) when it gave up its commercial monopoly. Thus the connection of the East India Company with the silk trade in south-west Bengal came to an end. The Company could not, however, suddenly throw out of employment the persons engaged in silk manufacture and hence their silk factories were not entirely disposed of till 1837.

The increase in the volume of export of Bengal silk since 1807 could not give an impetus to the silk industry in this region. The cultivation of mulberry plants did not increase proportionately. Successive cultivation of the plants in the same field had a pernicious effect on the
The silk worms were underfed and price of the mulberry leaves sometimes reached a staggering sum. The deforestation and conversion of swampy lands into cultivable paddy fields hindered its growth. Above all, the oppression of the silk diwans and gomasthas created a dangerous situation in the field of production. The silk diwans, like Shum Kishore Singh of Chandrakona, amassed huge fortunes. The high prices of cocoons, demanded by the wholesalers, went beyond the reach of many private traders. The rent of the land was also high. In this background the Company had decided to wind up their silk business under the provision of the Charter Act of 1833. The Company by 1837 sold all filatures to the private companies, such as Messrs Watson and Co, James Lyall and Co, Louis Payen and Company and the Company's silk trade thus came to an end. Many workers became jobless and were bound to concentrate on the land cultivation for paddy as a monoculture.
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33. Report from Select Committee on the Affairs on the E.I. Co. 1832, iii, p. 69.

34. Third Report from Select Committee of the House of Lords 1838, Appendix c, p. 158.

35. AHQ to R Saunders, Secretary, Board of CS and O, 2 December, 1824 and J. Coyatt, Acting Collector, Hidgalle to W. Blunt, Revenue Commission, Cuttack, 20 January, 1825 MC.

36. Cuttack Revenue Commission to Midnapore Collectorate, No. 3804, 2 September, 1840 MC.

38. From Executive Engineer Hidgalee Div. to Midnapore Collector, 28 February, 1873 MC.

39. Petition of some molungi ryots to Midnapore Collector, 7 February, 1873 MC.


41. Superintending Engineer to H.T. Prinsep, Controller Salt Choukib No. 217, 27 August, 1861 MC.

42. Tyt. Haig, Lieutt. Cd. R.E. Jt. Secretary to Bengal government in PWD (Irrigation) to Rev. Supdt. of Canals, 8 March, 1871 MC.

43. J.C. Price, Settlement Officer to Midnapore Collectorate, 21 March, 1873 MC.

44. To Salt Agent, Hidgalee from Midnapore Collect. 4 September, 1840, No. 234, 224 MC.


46. PBR, 6 July, 1882, No. 23, 28 June, 1881, Letter No. 609A.

47. J.H. Doley, Midnapore Collector to O.W. Mulet, Asst. Collector, 19 February, 1835 and also to Rev. Com. Cuttack, 27 June, 1834, 5 May, 1834, 18 July, 1835 MC.

48. E.J. Shuttleworth, Supdt. to Contr. Govt. Chowkey, Tamluk, 8 October, 1861, No. 12 MC.

48B. CR, 1951 CXIX-XX, LXV.

49. Rev. Com. Cuttack to Superintendent of Settlements, Midnapore, No. 2623, 6 September 1839 MC.
51. From Baboo N.C. Naug to Midnapore Collector, 25 January, 1873 MC.
52. Asst. Surgeon, Contai, 11 February, 1840 to J.H. Berlow, AHD MC.
54. Letter to Court, 8 January, 1742, 30 November, 1745.
55. BT(C)P, 26 March, 1805.
57. BT(C)P, 22 September 1789, Letter of 15th September.
58. Sonamukhi is a small Municipal town in the district of Bankura about 25 miles from Bankura town. It was once famous for cloth manufacture and its shellac industry has not altogether died out. Sonamukhi was then not the Head Station of the commercial residency of that name. The Head Station was at Sural in the modern Birbhum district, while at Sonamukhi there was a subordinate factory.
60. BT(C)P, Vol. 87, 20 August, 1790.
62. BT(C)P, 29 June, 1827, No. 30.
64. Henry Ricketts, Report on the District of Midnapore including Hidgellee and Cuttack, Calcutta, 1858, Part I.
67. BT(C)P, 25 September, 1789.
68. H.R. Ghosal, op. cit., p. 4.
69. BT(C)P, II, November 1806.
70. H.R. Ghosal, op. cit., p. 17.
71. BT(C)P, 3 June 1793.
72. BBT(C), 3 June 1793, 13 March 1794.
73. BT(C)P, 12 August, 1794.
74. Letters from the Commercial Resident, Sonamukhi to BBT(C), 27 May, 1796.
75. BT(C)P, of April, 1829, B.T. General letter of 3 September, 1828 which mentions Board's Report of 29 June, 1827.
76. BT(C)P, 9 June, 1827.
77. BT(C)P, 5 June, 1801.
79. ET(C)P, 20 April, 1781.
82. H.R. Ghosal, op. cit., p. 6.
89. ET(C)P, 30 August, 1805.
92. William Milburn, op. cit, p. 252. There were two measures of raw silk, great pound of 24 oz and small pound of 16 oz.

93. BT(C)P, 13 January, 1789.

94. BT(C)P, April 25, 1787, BT(C)P, September 17, 1819, May 5, 1820.


96. BT(C)P, 5 June, 1801; 9 January, 1827.


98. BT(C)P, May 30, 1793.

99. BT(C)P, November 25, 1793.

100. Milburn, op. cit, p. 255.

101. Milburn, ibid, p. 257.

102. BT(C)P, 8 October, 1819.

103. BT(C)P, 20 July, 1787.

104. Bengal Misc. Records, Letters from the Acting Resident of Boalia to Board of Trade, 3 May, 1832, 16 May, 1832, 14 July 1832, even before the passing of the Charter Act, 1833, the Company in 1831 had let out the subordinate factories under Rampur Boalia to several of their pykars on contract.