CONCLUSION

Contrary to the claims of several scholars, late eighteenth century witnessed a strong persistence of Bengal's textile industry. Several extensive manufacturing centers continued to exist. Some of the aurungs such as Sonamukhi, Dhaka, Lakhipur, Kherpai, Harial and Haripal were extensive in terms of geographical extent, size of the resident weaving population, number of manufacturing villages within these areas and quantity of production and its importance in the market. Besides these centers there were several others significant ones. The varied products of these aurungs continued to be in demand. Besides export market there was large flourishing internal market with a strong demand from the growing population. The existence of aurungs and emergence of new ones was influenced by ecological and other conditions. Rivers such as Ganga and Brahmaputra and their tributaries not just provided easy transport of finished goods and raw materials but were also responsible for the fertility of soil. Intense cultivation of paddy and other crops ensured availability of food grains and raw material to the manufacturers. The insufficiency of locally grown cotton was countered by import of cotton by a well established road network which was also responsible for distribution of finished goods. Although the period of study was marked by floods and droughts, these scarcities were not serious enough to disrupt production.

Besides the changing landscape of Bengal in the late eighteenth century, changes were also taking place within the textile industry. The dominant forms of production continued to exist during the period of study namely production through investment of personal capital by rich as well as poor weavers for sale in the market and production through indigenous intermediaries. Important changes were witnessed in the second component. The Company
gave up its dependence upon the dadni merchants in favour of paid servants or agents. The Company’s objective was to maximize its profits through greater control over production and producers by controlling the channels of financing, the agents. Tremendous authoritative power was invested in these servants with the acquisition of political power by the Company. Despite its political power, the Company continued to be dependent on indigenous intermediaries to conduct its business.

Besides these two forms, this work argues that the third form of production through *karkhanas* continued to exist in the late eighteenth century. Luxurious Bengal cloths were in great demand from both within and outside Bengal. *Karkhanas* were patronized by the *Nizamat* of Murshidabad. Besides the *Nazim* and his relative, large sums were spent on expensive cloth by other influential people as well as by the urban landlords of Kolkata and the rural elites. Influential indigenous merchants also maintained several production centers. The controlled and supervised production undertaken in the *karkhanas* came to be emulated by the Company during the period of study and was applied in a much more organized and systematized manner to a larger work force and over an extended area. A high degree of specialization was reached during this time due to the combination of superior technology, both in terms of instruments and empirical knowledge and a rigorous process of inspection of assortments at every level of production.

Weavers in the second half of the eighteenth century possessed multiple identities, the most dominant being that of ‘Company weavers’. However this tag lacked permanence. Thus claims of Company’s influence on weavers being vicious enough to force them to abandon their profession does not hold true. Not only did the Company remain unsuccessful in attracting the weavers within its walls, it also failed in completely controlling the manufacturers labour.
Due to its unsuccessfulness, the Company introduced several Commercial regulations with three broad objectives. Firstly, the Company attempted to redefine its working relation with the weavers through legal contracts which bound them to stipulated time of delivery and making good their debts before contracting with others. System of numbering and registration and debt collection through the agency of peons was also introduced. Secondly, the Company sought to redefine the market position of its rivals by pledging cooperation and also specifying that they could contract with only those who had not received its advances or who had completed their engagements with the Company. Thirdly it sought to redefine the administrative rights of the rural elites under whose control the weavers lived by assuring them of non interference in their revenue collection and forbidding them to interfere in the Company’s engagements with the manufacturers. While these were the clauses stated in the regulations, in reality there were several rules that were in practice during the period of study. The Company officials and their servants consciously practiced the theory of ‘coercion’ in several ways. With regard to the weavers, the practice was to tie them in perpetuity to the Company by a deliberate creation of balances through faulty prizing, persuasion and deception, and through forcible advancing, thereby exclusively reserving for the Company not only the labour but also the person of the manufacturers. The rivals were harassed by having their businesses hindered through deliberate interference and obstruction in their production and with their producers. The zamindars found their hereditary rights of levying taxes being curbed which in turn threatened to curtail their administrative authority. However evidences reveal that the Company could control neither its rivals nor the zamindars.

The tag of ‘Company weaver’ was also not taken very seriously by the weavers themselves and did not hinder them from interacting with whomsoever they wanted. This was the enduring character of Bengal weavers.
Evidence also reveals that there was an entire world of weaving outside Company gates that was oblivious to the anxieties of the Company. To this world the Company weavers frequently returned to, for several reasons, one being better pay for less labour. Thus, the material condition of non-Company weavers was better and less tedious. Women folk in general contributed significantly to the family income and therefore to the overall material condition especially in the face of rising price of necessities.

Scholars have argued about shrinking population of the weavers by the end of the century. This was true for the Company weavers but definitely not for weaving community in general. There is ample evidence of new entrants to weaving such as the muchies, and old ones at lower level being pushed to more specialized production evident from the case of julahas. The Company is credited for its vital role in this process. In its great need for labour force the Company was not concerned about the purity/pollution of the artisans and in its scheme of things all the weavers had a place, even the unskilled one. These prove that weaving, at the end of the century continued to provide better prospects of life, thereby drawing aspirants from lower castes.

Most of the weavers not only continued to weave for others along with their Company engagements but many also responded to its coercive policies with protest. The most common form of protest adopted by the weavers was through petitioning against the atrocities of Company servants and unfavourable work conditions such low wages, increasing balance, forced advancing among other. Baring few exception, the Company officials purposely refused to redress the complainants or rendered unsatisfactory solutions which caused the manufacturers to use arzees for subtle negotiations or to threaten the officials. Besides petitioning, the manufacturers also indulged in several everyday forms of resistance against various problems they faced. Verbally attacking the servants, debasing fabrics, abandoning
work to proffer complaints were some of the passive forms of protest. Besides these more
dramatic forms of resistance included attacking the servants who used violence and various
methods were adopted to deal with the problem of balance such as outright refusal or return of
advances or deliberate creation of balances. The most dramatic of response was desertion and
defection from Company services. Large number of weavers left the Company services to
work for the domestic market which was more profitable. The weavers also received support
from their caste organizations. Head weavers and other influential people provided leadership
to the manufacturers by bargaining for better pay, instigating armed confrontation or
arranging alternate engagements with Company’s rivals in their capacity as pykars and dalals.
The weavers also received support from the zamindars.

These forms of protest did have its impact and significance. Besides a considerable
loss of labour, Company also faced hindrance to its business and procurement; the officials
were also considerably troubled with anxiety, fear and uncertainty which caused several of
them to adopt various measures to placate the manufacturers.

Therefore, the textile industry during the period of study is a classic case of analyzing
the transition in eighteenth century India, an example of persistence within transformation.
Late eighteenth century witnessed the robust functioning of an older system of production
despite a milieu of change and pressure brought about by the early colonial government.
Therefore it can be argued that the textile industry was nowhere near decline during the
second half of the eighteenth century and instead had a vast and expanding domestic market
for its produce, which also provided a scope of resistance to the weavers against the
Company’s coercive measures.