

A Study on Historical Analysis of Murshidabad Silk Industry at Nawab's Reign (1717-1757)

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ABSTRACT

The word used in India 'Silk and cocoon' is in ancient Sanskrit literature indicates that India had a kind of silk-worm in very ancient time. From the philosophical evidence with of silk-worm in very ancient time. From the philosophical evidence with reference to silk thread in Mahabharata, the 'Ramayana' and the 'laws of Manu' it can be said that silk industry existed in India since before the Christian era. Various accounts of the history of silk in India claim that silk weaving in Bengal existed from ancient times. Records show that the silk weavers of Murshidabad were operating in 18th century when Nawab Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) shifted the capital of the Dewanee of Bengal from Dhaka, now in Bangladesh, to a new capital he built on the east bank of the River Bhagirathi and named Murshidabad. Murshidabad is famous for its cowdial saris made of fine mulberry silk with flat, deep- red or maroon borders made with three shuttles. The borders are laced with fine serrated design in gold zari. Murshidabad silks are also popular for hand-printed designs and other materials which are also printed with wooden blocks. Calcutta and Serampore in the Hooghly district are the main textile hand-printing centres in West Bengal. In this study we are trying to know the golden era of Silk industry at Murshidabad and the price of silk, business and patronized by Nawab's reign on this industry and also the farmer's condition. Once silk goods of Murshidabad were exported to the different countries of the world. In sixteenth century Murshidabad exported its silk product to the coasts of East Africa, Arabia, Turkey, Syria and other Countries (Majumdar, M. 2017).

Keywords: Nawab's Regin, Seiculture, Silk Industry, Golden Era

China is the mother of silk cultivation and it is considered as the land of 'Serica'. The technique of mulberry cultivation, process of silkworm rearing and the art of silk reeling originated in China nearly 3000 years ago in the period of Emperor Hwang-Ti. All the processes and techniques relating to silk weaving were kept secret and China monopolized the silk trade for about 2000 years. Over the centuries, silk has been patronized by emperors and kings in China, Japan, Thailand, India and Europe. The history of silk development spans through centuries and can be traced around the world's very ancient route called "Silk Road" which began in China, passed through Tashkent, Baghdad, Damaseas, Istanbul and reached European country. The technique

of sericulture finally found its way to other countries through smuggling, through artisans captured as prisoners of war, through monks and various other ways (Ganga and Sulochanachetty, 1992). The origin of sericulture is a matter of controversy, some says that sericulture was extended from China to Kashmir or it was developed independently. The ancient historians did not give any opinion on this issue. Therefore, it can be said definitely whether sericulture was indigenous or was brought into this country by the foreigners is a matter of controversy. Secondly, reference to silk in ancient Sanskrit literature does not explain the Origin of its raw-material i.e. silk yarn and therefore does not

afford any evidence as to the actual production of raw silk used in silk manufacturing.

The word used in India 'Silk and cocoon' is in ancient Sanskrit literature indicates that India had a kind of silk-worm in very ancient time. From the philosophical evidence with reference to silk thread in Mahabharata, the 'Ramayana' and the 'laws of Manu' it can be said that silk industry existed in India since before the Christian era. Definite evidences are not available for supporting the introduction of silk in India from other nation. But some experts have opined that the Indians discovered it in the sub-Himalaya region independently of the Chinese, who invented it earlier in their own country (Mukherjee, S. 1992). But it was reported that sericulture introduced in Murshidabad when Chinese Visitors Hu-en Sang visited Murshidabad Rangamati area at the reign of King Kaniksha but it is also controversial.

According to Majumdar and Sarkar, 2017, Murshidabad silk came to prominence during Muslim regime in the 13th century. Organized development of sericulture & proper exploitation of silk in this District is initiated by East India Company. Once silk goods of Murshidabad were exported to the different countries of the world. In sixteenth century Murshidabad exported its silk product to the coasts of East Africa, Arabia, Turkey, Syria and other countries. Then came East India Company and captured the silk business. The company used to purchase silk yarns from the reelers and exported them to the Western Countries for producing silk products and gradually the company acquired full control over the silk production in the district. Murshidabad has a rich cultural heritage and the art of hand weaving formed its integral part.

Objective

The main objective of this study to know the "Golden Era" of silk industry and the trading pattern, price of silk at Nawab's reign i.e. from 1717 to 1757.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Present study was undertaken to know how Silk Industry run at Nawab's reign (1717 to 1757). Why we called Golden era of this Silk Industry at the Nawab's

reign? The study was conducted various sericulture villages viz. at Baluchar, Mirzapur, Kriteshawari, Dahapara, Jay Krishnapur of Nabagram and Jangipur area. In these villages farmers are engaged with Silk Industry before the nawab's reign. We are also conduct our study at Cossimbazar, Saidabad, Manindranagar area where the port is there for trading the raw silk. We have also taken some interview of famous Historian of Murshidabad about our study.

The Golden Era of Silk Industry (1717-1757) Why?

From the beginning, of Murshidabad district was noted for sericulture which is clear to us from the Arthasashtra of Kautiliya.

This industry got its peak performance here due to the hard labour and courage of Nawab's of Bangla. Consequently it was being attracted by the foreign traders i.e. Dutch French, British etc.

Some places of Murshidabad district had got an excellent position in sericulture and a number of foreigners had come to Murshidabad especially in Cossimbazar, Saidabad, and Jangipur. Among them Cossimbazar was dominant. Dutch colony was established (1648) at Kalikapur, British colony (1658) at Cossimbazar French at Saidabad (1691). Besides these every Foreign Traders had a common colony in Cossimbazar. British colony was also in Jangipur and Guntiat (Mukherjee, S. 1992). The first people who had predicted the future prospect of Cossimbazar in terms of sericulture was British. The British company had sent a group of visitors from Surat to observe the market of lower Ganga of Patna. In 1621 they published that there is a bright future and availability of silk. So, they allocated ₹ 50,000 for the establishment of a colony. Then the Cossimbazar started to see the dream of industries and gave its real form. In 1681, the British East India Company invested or allocated 2, 30,000 pound and in the Bengal out of this 1, 40,000 pound was invested only for the Cossimbazar. After the establishment of colony in Malda and Cossimbazar, the export of silk and silk cloth increased and it started to reach among the common people of England as it was cheap and of high quality. During this time a large silk industry existed which carried rearing, reeling and weaving operations. For the travel accounts

of the medieval and late medieval writers i.e. Francois Bernier (1656-1668), J.B Tavernier (1676 A.D), George Forster (1808), one can reasonably guess the flourishing condition of the silk industry, and particularly Cossimbazar of Murshidabad at that time attained celebrity in raw silk production and several factories were located here. From Bengal, raw silk was usually exported to the Middle East and European countries. The easy navigability of the Ganga River along with its tributaries provided cheap transport for the growth of internal trade in silk products. In the eighteenth century James Renel wrote that Cossimbarar is the common silk market of Bengal and it is the leading producer of silk and silk product. Its exports cover the major part of Asia. The raw silk value of 3,00,600 to 4, 00,000 pound goes to British factory.

In this era, Nawab's of Bengal helps British East India Company to flourish the silk industry. For that reason this industry saw the golden days on that time. The company's Filature and other instrumental worth was ₹ 20 lakhs. The British Company established a Filature for silk at Jangipor in 1773. Lord Valencea had mentioned in his description that it was the largest silk centre of East India Company having 600 furnace, and 3000 labourers. It was the working centre up to 1835 and then their dominant trade was stopped. A large number of new British Farm started to work. Among them Mesurse Watson & Co. was the leading silk industrial company. (District Gazetteer, Murshidabad District-2000).

How the Black Cloud Covered on Silk Industry?

According to Compendium of Statistics of Silk Industry-1999 it is clearly stated that after battle of Plassey the the black cloud was covered on this industry, The retrogression of silk industry in Murshidabad was started due to the political anarchy and the battle of Plassy. The British dealers started to torture the silk cultivator, which led to the decline in the interest of cultivators of sericulture. Consequently this industry could not regain its lost glory or rejuvenate.

And the Cossimbarar & Malda lost its relevance. Bangladesh was transformed from silk cloth exporter to Raw silk exporter nation. After the Industrial Revolution in England, the Britishers felt the necessity of raw silk.

As a result, the demand of raw silk in England reached at zenith Point during the middle of the eighteenth century. So they invited a group of scientists from England to cultivate silk in indigenous method. In 1776-1785 the annual average export from Bengal to England was worth of 5, 60,000 small pound and the total from Italy, France, Turkey was 2,82,304 pound. Due to the high expense to produce silk in Bengal in 1776-85, the company was bitterly affected after Nawab's reign. Then they left the share business and started individual business. Yet they could not develop the condition. Besides, the French Revolution is another important cause for the decline of British silk business. They developed to some extent in 1792. And they left the Treaty method and adopted the new policy through broker for collecting silk. In 5th Feb. 1795, the Silk Industrial Organization of England submitted their memorandum to the Court of Director for the large supply of silk from Bengal. As a result, the company got its new form and the production of raw silk increased two fold in the factories. In 1833 by the order of the Charter Act the English Company curtailed their business.

From the report of month of May in 1976, it was being depicted that at that time there was 45 European filatures and 67 indigenous Filature in Murshidabad and 3,500 European basins and 1,600 Native basins. Two labourers were engaged in each basin. About 10,600 people were engaged according to the estimate, though it was a very difficult job to estimate the raw silk production accurately. It was guessed that the annual raw silk production was 2, 46,000 pound worth of ₹ 16, 80,000. For this production ₹ 10, 80,000 had to pay the silkworm cultivator and ₹ 1, 80,000 to reeling labourers. Then the profit was ₹ 18,000.

DISCUSSION

According to Indrajit Roy, Bengal silks got a wider market during 1660-1757 but Golden Era starts from 1717 from the reign of Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) thanks to the Dutch and English East India Companies who set up their permanent factories in Bengal around the mid-seventeenth century. The Dutch introduced it first in Japan, and subsequently in Europe, giving the article an important space in their trade (Om Prakash,1978).

According to Bal Krishna the English Company, however, ventured it to the European market from the beginning. Europe accepted Bengal silks quickly because of the indifferent quality and higher costs of Persian silk that resulted from the state monopoly and 'internal revolutions, disorder and anarchy' during the second half of the seventeenth century. Silks from Italy, France and China, the other competitors of repute, were superior to Bengal silks, but received only marginally higher prices in the market. On account of its substantially lower cost price, traders earned a higher profit margin in Bengal silk, and therefore gave it a place of prominence. K.N. Chaudhuri has constructed a time series of price for Bengal silk during 1669-1760 by deflating the in-invoice values of British silk import from Bengal. They thus represent the average c.i.f. prices of Bengal silks in England. Susil Chaudhuri, however, criticises the series for ignoring the product variety, the fineness of the product and their harvest. He believes, "If all these factors are not taken into consideration in minute details while working out the cost price, the results are bound to be misleading" (Sushil Chaudhuri, 1995). The product variety was, however, determined by the place of manufacture and the harvest by the season of manufacture.

Since, the proportions between the seasonal and annual productions and between the district-level and province-level productions remained fairly stable in the long run, we may reasonably assume a stable composition of total output in respect of product variety and harvest. It was also stable from the viewpoint of fineness since the proportion of 'head' or 'belly' in green cocoons that determined the fineness of the final output, was constant. Hence, there should exist one-to-one relation between the average price and the quantity of output so that the concept of average price holds theoretically sound. According to Bal Krishna again, Britain's import composition of raw silks in terms of these variants seems fairly stable as it was determined by consumer demand and the state of technology, both of which were constant over the long-run period. Thus, for example, England imported 'head' and 'belly' by 4:5 for a long time. Regarding the product variety, the only significant change that has been reported was the more import of

Gujrati silk (a finer variety manufactured in Kasimbazar) in 1735 when the taste was altered and the technology became supportive (Sushil Chaudhuri, 1957). Under these conditions, the average prices, as worked out by K.N. Chaudhuri, bear a unique relation with the quantities of export, and are fairly representative of the ruling prices in Bengal. In contrast, a randomly chosen price at any given point of time in a year may be biased in any direction depending upon the specific demand and supply configurations at that point of time. We, therefore, rely here primarily on K.N. Chaudhuri's price statistics, and corroborate them, wherever possible, by data from other sources.

The question of identifying relevant market forces behind the change in price is settled here on the basis of the quantity of export. A rise in price associated with higher volume of export is considered an outcome of higher market demand whereas the supply factors are held responsible when a rise in price is associated with a lower export volume.

From a range of 3-4 shilling a pound in the 1650s, as revealed in the previous section, K.N. Chaudhuri's estimate shows that the average price of Bengal silk rose to 5s a pound in 1669 and 6s 2d in 1670.

For the quinquennium 1669-73 as a whole, the average price stood at 6s 7d per pound (vide Table 1), almost double the figure a decade ago.

K. Glamann also notices this rise in price. According to him, the price for each pound increased from 2.82fl in 1649 to 4.11fl in 1669 and 4.09fl in 1670 (K. Glamann, 1957). Table 1 highlights a continuous rise in price over the following decade, 1674-83, which stabilised above 7s a pound during 1684-93. Data provided by Sushil Chaudhuri show that the rise was from ₹ 155 per maund in 1663-64 to ₹ 217 per maund in 1676-77 and culminated at ₹ 298 per maund in 1682-83 (Sushil Chaudhuri, 1975). This steep rise is explained partly by the failure of Persian silks in the European market, which Bengal swiftly grabbed. The other part of the explanation is that this period was characterized with 'an almost revolutionary change' in the European fashion where by silk got increasing preference to traditional woolen stuffs. By virtue of its cheapness,

Bengal silk mopped up the major stake. This was true both for Holland and England. In 1691, Bengal raw silk accounted for 95 per cent of total silks sold by the Dutch Company in Amsterdam. Regarding the British trade Bal Krishna remarked, "This trade was, in fact, so vigorously pushed up that during the next five years [1680-81 to 1684-85] an unparalleled advance was made in the quantities to be procured in Bengal. According to Bal Krishna in the earlier or subsequent history of the Company up to the Battle of Plassey, such extensive amounts were never ordered." The contemporary rise of silk price in Bengal was the reflection of these events.

Table 1: Quinquennial average of silk price in Bengal, 1669-1759

Period	Average price		Period	Average price	
	s	d		s	d
1669-73	6	9	1714-18	9	6
1674-78	7	8	1719-23	8	2
1679-83	7	11	1724-28	8	1
1684-88	7	3	1729-33	10	4
1689-93	7	7	1734-38	9	3
1694-98*	6	8	1739-43	9	5
1699-1703	10	5	1744-48	12	3
1704-08	11	10	1749-53	14	3
1709-13	9	2	1754-59	16	5

*3 years' average \$ Excluding 1757

Source: Calculated from K.N. Chaudhuri, *The trading world*, pp.533-34.

After a lull during 1694-98, the price of Bengal silk surged again, reaching at 10s 5d a pound during 1699-1703 and 11s 5d during 1704-08, (K.N Chaudhari). This phenomenon was perhaps due to supply bottlenecks as the rise in price was associated with a fall in business volume. Whereas Great Britain imported annually 88,984 great lbs. During 1679-83, her import was 85,924 great lbs per annum during 1698-1703 and 32,973 great lbs. during 1704-08. When the price was at the peak of £1 1s 7d per pound in 1700, the quantity of her import was as low as 2,601 great lbs. The Dutch Company documents also confirm a shortage. In 1701, their Directors communicated, "The small amount [of Bengal *mochta* silk] received has inconvenienced the producers so much that a number of manufacturing

units had to stop production. According to Om Prakash The price of this variety has gone even beyond that of the best grade *tanny* silk." These bottlenecks seem to have been the outcome of the revolt by Sobha Singh, the *Zaminder*, who kept the province at bay during 1695-97. In fact, the English Company could not import a single ounce of Bengal silk in 1696 since both Kasimbazar and Radhanagar were in grave disorder. According to Abdul Karim, 1963 subsequent events were equally unpleasant. The new *Subahdar* Prince Azim-us-Shan who controlled the revolt involved substantially in personal trade. He extorted goods from merchants and artisans, destroying the business of both English and Dutch Companies. The English Company failed to undertake silk business in 1699 also. The disorder came to an end only after the intervention of the Emperor who reprimanded the *Subahdar* and reduced his rank by 1000 horses. The price scenario in Bengal stagnated for the next 35 years. When Murshid Quli Khan (1717 -1727) engage as a subedar of Bangla, Bihar and Orrisha by Mughal emperor, then Silk industry of Murshidabad resume its journey for Golden period.

An increased flow of specie might increase the price of a commodity in two ways. It might raise the prices of wage-goods, thus causing higher cost price of the commodity. Even if we do not recognise this way of causation, the higher effective demand that follows from added flow of specie is expected to boost up the demand price of the product. This line of causation assumes significance here since much of the specie that flew into Bengal during this period was meant for raw silk. K.N. Chaudhuri's data show that this article accounted for almost a quarter of the English Company's aggregate import from this province. It was also a principal article in the contemporary Dutch merchandise. These companies together raised the effective demand for Bengal silk from the mid-seventeenth century. According to Sushil Chaudhuri this is not to deny the role of Indian traders in this business. From the period much earlier to this, Indian traders from Gujrat, Delhi, Agra, Lahore etc. exchanged precious metal for Bengal silk. Added bullion from European houses, however, enhanced competition among buyers, converting it into a sellers' market.

For the explanation of the price stability during 1708-43, we borrow the thesis of Om Prakash that the rising supply of money in this period was associated with rising output so that the possibility of price escalation was negated. In that case, imported precious metal 'really becomes an instrument of growth with the savings, investment and production in the economy registering an increase."

K.N. Chaudhuri's price series is concerned with the best quality raw silks that were exported from Bengal, and that also at the c.i.f. rate, so that they must score above the ruling rates in Bengal. According to K.M Mohosin, 1769 the average price of raw silks that non-European traders exported from Bengal was, according to W. Aldersay of Kasimbazar factory, 9s. per pound in 1749-53.

CONCLUSION

If we see the whole discussion than come to know that how the silk industry grow in Murshidabad at Nawab's reign . By this industry the socio economic status of the sericulture farmers are also increased on that time.

Long waves thus prevailed in the price of Bengal silk during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. It was a cheap commodity during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, and became cheaper in the second quarter with a fall in price from 5-7s per pound to 3-4s. The price soared up as silver was increasingly poured in since the mid-1700 at the behest of European companies. It became 6s 9d during 1669-73, 11s 10d during 1704-08 and 12s 3d during 1744-48. The price continued to advance through the colonial regime, although the inflow of species dried up. Since the East India Company purchased silk from revenue proceeds for the purpose of 'remittance', the silk price received due support of effective demand at a time when other trades in Bengal had severe liquidity crunch.

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