

CHAPTER VIII OCCUPATIONS, MANUFACTURES AND TRADE

OCCUPATIONS

ACCORDING to the statistics obtained at the census of 1901, altogether 60.7 per cent of the population are supported by agriculture—a proportion considerably below the general average for Bengal. Of the total number of agriculturists, 40 per cent are actual workers, including 5,000 rent receivers, 214,000 rent-payers and 47,000 labourers. Various industries support 15.9 per cent of the population, of whom a little more than half are actual workers, including 16,000 fishermen and fish dealers, 10,000 cotton weavers, 9,000 rice pounders and 6,000 basket makers; goldsmiths, ironsmiths, workers in brass, potters, carpenters, silk spinners, and necklace makers are also numerous. The number dependent for their livelihood on commerce and the professions is very small, only 0.7 per cent being supported by trade and 2.2 per cent by the professions; of the latter 44 per cent are actual workers, including 3,000 priests, 4,000 religious mendicants, 1,100 medical men and 700 teachers. About 87,000 persons, or nearly 8 per cent of the population, are earth workers and general labourers, and 22,000 persons are herdsmen.

MANUFACTURES

The following is a brief account of the principal manufactures and industries of the district.

SILK WEAVING

Silk weaving is still a fairly prosperous industry. It is carried on at Bishnupur, Bānkurā, Rājgrām, Bīrsinghpur, Jaypur and Gopīnāthpur; but the chief centre of the industry is Bishnupur, which has a special reputation for the manufacture of prettily embroidered silk scarves, plain and flowered *sāris* or dress pieces

for women, and a maroon coloured cloth called *dhupchhāyā*. Though the fabrics are not equal to the Berhampore silk in fineness and evenness of texture, they are in considerable demand in the district, and also outside it. Only a portion of the raw material used in the looms is produced locally, the balance being imported. But silk-worms are reared and silk is spun in the villages of Dhāndā, Punīsol, Keshabpur, Chingānī, Tilaghāgrī, Simlāpāl, Pakhurdabā, Pāthardabā and Barakhuliā. The silk of the mulberry cocoons spun into thread by the country method of reeling is called *khāmrū*. The following is a brief account of the process of manufacture.

The first process that the native reeled silk undergoes in the hands of the weavers consists of winding silk of different degrees of fineness on different *lātais* or spindles. The second process is that of bleaching, the silk being boiled for an hour in water mixed with the ashes of *sāl* leaves, after which it is washed and dried, and again rolled on a *lātai*. A sort of gum, prepared by boiling parched paddy in water, is now applied, and the warp and woof are prepared, the former consisting of two strands and the latter of four strands of thread. The art of dyeing silk with a true black dye seems to be known, the dye being obtained from *harītakī*, filings, and a small proportion of ferrous sulphate. A blue dye is made of indigo, *harītakī*, soap, and a few other ingredients. A red dye is obtained from lac, which is finely powdered and boiled with tamarind, alum and *khār*, i.e., crude sodium carbonate. An orange colour, called *jarad*, is made of *kamalā* powder, *khār* and alum.

The quantity of pure silk manufactured is comparatively small, but it is reported that there is a good demand for the products of the looms of Bishnupur. The articles manufactured are *phulām sāris*, or cloths for females with patterns of flowers on them, which are sold at Rs. 10 to Rs. 20 each; *dhutis* or cloths for males, sold at Rs. 10 to 12 each; *thāns*, or dress pieces, sold at Re. 1-8 to Re. 1-12 per yard; scarves or comforters sold at Re. 1-8 to Re. 1-12 each; handkerchiefs sold at 12 annas each; and silk checks sold at Re 1-8 per yard. The flowered *sāris* of Bishnupur are in special request, and are exported to other districts.

TUSSER SILK WEAVING

The fabrics mostly woven, however, consist of tusser silk; and the local *ketes* or coarse cloths, made out of thread spun from pierced cocoons (answering to *matkā* cloths), are well known. These stuffs are not only durable but cheap, a piece of *kete* sufficient for a complete suit of clothes costing only Rs. 4 or Rs. 5. The following is a brief account of the method of manufacture.

The eggs of the silk-worm are gathered and put on the leaves of *āsan*, *sāl*, and *sidā* trees in the jungle. In due time the cocoons are formed, and are gathered by cutting the small branches from which they are suspended. The cocoons are sold at Rs. 5 to Rs. 9 a *kāhan*, i.e., a set of 1280, and are purchased wholesale by substantial merchants, who retail them to the weavers. When they have passed into the hands of the weavers, the cocoons are first boiled in water, mixed with wood ashes, and are next washed and cooled. Five cocoons are then taken at a time, and the silk from them is wound by a woman on a *lātai*. The silk thus obtained is gummed and otherwise prepared for weaving as in the case of domesticated silk. It is generally coloured violet and red with aniline dyes, but sometimes is dyed yellow by means of turmeric and *kamalā* powder. The various kinds of tusser fabrics manufactured in this district and their prices are as follows: *sārīs*, sold at Rs. 3 to Rs. 8; *dhutis*, sold at Rs. 2 to Rs. 5; *thāns* or long pieces for making dresses, sold at 12 annas to Re. 1 per yard. The weavers also produce a species of mixed cotton and tusser, which is sold at 8 annas to 10 annas per yard.

The principal centres of the tusser silk industry are Gopināthpur, Bānkurā, Rājgrām, Sonāmukhī, Bishnupur and Rājhat-Bīrsinghpur, where there are nearly 3,000 families of weavers, who weave tusser in preference to cotton, if they get a supply of cocoons; but, for want of cocoons, only about a fifth of the number are habitually employed in tusser weaving. Rājgrām is a recognized mart for tusser cocoons; and not only local, but also Singhbhūm cocoons, find their way into the hands of the *mahājans* of this village. The weavers are men of the Tānti caste, who generally prepare the silk themselves from the cocoons. The greater portion of the tusser silk produced

is sold locally, but brokers come annually from other districts, and buy a considerable quantity of their fabrics from the weavers.

Regarding the prospects of the industry, Mr. N. G. Mukerji remarks in his monograph on *The Silk Fabrics of Bengal* (1903): "In Bānkurā the silk weaving industry still holds its own, though cocoon rearing has dwindled down into insignificance. The silk-worm epidemics have been the principal cause of the great contraction of the industry within a very few years both in Midnapore and in Bānkurā; and as both districts still contain large numbers of people who depended at one time on sericulture, but who have now taken to other pursuits, the resuscitation of the silk industry in these two districts, if taken in hand within a few years, is not such a difficult matter to accomplish." This hope appears likely to be fulfilled.

In a *Report on the State of the Tusser Silk Industry in Bengal and the Central Provinces*, published in 1905, Mr. N. G. Mukerji states: "The tusser weaving industry of Bānkurā seems to be more famous than of any other place I have yet visited. The *sārīs* and *dhutis* of Sonāmukhī and Bishnupur are very famous; even in Dacca and Mymensingh they are prized. At Sonāmukhī there are about a thousand families of tusser-weavers; at Bishnupur there are about 500 to 700 families of tusser and silk weavers; at Gopināthpur and Bānkūrā about 400 families; at Rājgrām about 200 families, and at Rājhat-Bīrsinghpur about 400 families. These represent at least 10,000 individuals working or capable of working in tusser. When they cannot get enough cocoons, they take to cotton weaving, but they prefer turning out tusser. The weaving industry of Bishnupur seems to be very extensive. There are more than 500 families of weavers in the town, and they weave either silk or tusser, more silk now than tusser. Silk weaving is improving, while tusser weaving is going down. The weavers say it costs them now almost as much turning out a tusser *sārī* as a silk *sārī*, and people prefer a silk *sārī*."

The quantity of cocoons reared locally is, however, insufficient to meet the demand of the weavers, and large numbers are imported from Midnapore and Chotā Nāgpur. The cocoon rearing industry is, in fact, no longer of importance, though some rearing is carried on within 8 miles of Bānkūrā, the cocoons being brought

to the market at Rājgrām, and also in the Khātrā thana, the cocoons being exported to Chaibāsā.*

COTTON AND WOOL WEAVING

The cotton weaving industry is now of little importance owing to the imports of cheaper machine-made cloth. Coarse cotton cloth is still made by hand looms in most parts of the district, but is gradually being driven out of the market. The *swadeshī* movement is reported to have done little to arrest this tendency in Bānkurā, where the inclination of the people to use country-made clothes is not pronounced, and the sale of Manchester goods has consequently not decreased. Blankets are woven by small colonies of Bheriāls (the shepherd caste) at Lokpur and Kendudī on the outskirts of Bānkurā town. It is reported that these shepherds were originally immigrants from Gayā, but have now cut off all connection with their native district and made Bānkurā their permanent home.

LAC INDUSTRY

The manufacture of lac was formerly carried on extensively, but is on the decline owing to the competition of cheap foreign lac. The number of factories accordingly decreased from 35 in 1901 to 24 in 1905, but rose again to 26 in 1906, when the outturn was 4,160 maunds. The chief centre of the industry is Sonāmukhī.

The raw lac is a resinous incrustation, which is produced round the bodies of colonies of the lac insect, after it has fastened on the twigs of certain trees, such as the *palās* (*Butea frondosa*), *kusum* (*Schleichera trijuga*), *sāl* (*Shorea robusta*) and *āsān* (*Terminalia tomentosa*). This insect lives on vegetable sap, which it sucks up by means of a proboscis from the succulent tissues of these trees. When the larvae escape from the dead bodies of the females, they crawl about in search of fresh sappy twigs; and at the time of swarming the twigs of the trees infested by them will often be seen to assume a reddish colour, owing to the countless masses of minute larvæ moving all over them.

* This account of the silk industry of Bānkurā has been compiled from Mr. N. G. Mukerji's monograph on *The Silk Fabrics of Bengal* (1903) and *Report on the State of the Tusser Silk Industry in Bengal and the Central Provinces* (1905).

Those that survive penetrate the twigs and become permanently fixed there, till they emerge as insects, proceeding in the process of digestion to transform the sap sucked up by their proboscis, and to exude from their bodies a resinous incrustation, with which they ultimately become incrustated. The twigs continue to be incrustated until the crop is collected in May to June and October to November, or just before the swarming seasons.

The incrustated twigs are collected and sold to dealers under the name of "stick-lac." These are dried, broken up and crushed, and the lac is pounded and washed under water. The washings, when boiled down and concentrated, become "lac-dye," and the washed lac is known as "seed-lac." The lac is now placed in long shallow cloth bags, and these are twisted in front of fires till the lac melts and is squeezed through the texture of the bags. When sufficiently cooked, it is spread out on hot tubes until it assumes the form of large thin sheets. These are next taken until it assumes the form of large thin sheets. These are next taken up by skilled operators, who stand in front of the fires, and stretch the sheets till they become as thin as paper, forming the "shellac" of commerce.

COLLIERIES

There are three collieries in the northern extremity of the district adjoining the Asansol subdivision of the Burdwān district, coal being found only in a narrow strip along the Dāmodar. Of these only two are worked regularly, viz., Kālikāpur, which was opened in 1876, and Jamunākānāli, opened in 1906; the third, the Bānskurī colliery, opened in 1897, worked only for six months in 1906, and was then closed. Both the working mines have inclines, and machinery is not used for raising the coal, which is brought to the surface by the primitive means of baskets carried on the heads of the labourers. The mines are small, and the daily average number of labourers employed in 1906 was only 45 below ground and 45 above ground. The labourers are local men, generally belonging to the Bāuri, Sāntāl and other low castes, and their average daily earnings are about 4 annas each, or about the same as those of agricultural labourers. The coal is consumed locally for burning bricks, etc., and is reported to be of inferior quality. The output is declining steadily, owing

to the fact that a large proportion of the coal needed for local consumption is now brought by rail from larger mines outside the district; the result being that the average annual output decreased from 10,000 tons in the five years ending in 1901 to 9,000 tons in the quinquennium ending in 1905.

OTHER MINERALS

Laterite is found nearly all over the district, and is quarried to a large extent for road metalling, and to a small extent for building purposes. Few rocks present greater advantages from its peculiar character. It is easy to cut and shape when first dug, and it becomes hard and tough after exposure to the air, while it seems to be affected very little by the weather. Indeed, in many of the sculptured stones of some of the oldest temples in the district, the chisel marks are as fresh and sharp as when they were first built. It is perhaps not so strong, nor so capable of resisting great pressure and bearing great weights, as some of the sandstones or the more compact kinds of gneiss; but it certainly possesses amply sufficient strength for all ordinary purposes. It has been largely used in the old temples, and the elaborate specimens of carving and ornament in some of these shew that the nodular structure and irregular surface of the laterite do not prevent its effective use for such purposes of ordinary ornamentation as mouldings, etc. Slabs of the rock, from 4 to 5 feet long, are easily procurable. They are quarried in a rude but effective way; a groove is cut with a rudely pointed pick round the slab, another is made underneath, and then a few wedges driven in split off the block. The looser and more gravelly forms of laterite are used for road-metal, for which purpose they are admirably adapted.

Large quantities of stone are also available in the hills, and quarrying was formerly carried on at the Susuniā hill. White lithomarge is obtained under the laterite at a point about 12 miles north-east of Bānkurā, and mica is found in some parts of the Khātrā and Raipur thanas, but its quality is so poor that it cannot be worked profitably. Kaolin is found in most parts of the district; it is used locally for whitewashing houses, and is also exported to Rāniganj for the pottery works there. Gold is reported to occur in small quantities in the sands of the

Dhalkishor and Kāsai rivers, and is believed to exist in *pargana* Ambikānagar in an estate belonging to the Tagore family. Some prospecting work has been carried on, but the results were not satisfactory.

BRASS

Brass and bell-metal utensils are made, on a fairly large scale, at Bānkurā, Bishnupur and Patrasāyar. Bānkurā is said to be famous for its large water-vessels, a *lotā* with a spout being a speciality of the town; and handsome rice bowls made of wood bound with brass, similar to those known as "Surī bowls", are also turned out. The brass utensils manufactured in this district are much prized in native households elsewhere in Bengal, and considerable quantities are exported to Calcutta and other parts of the country.

INDIGO

No account of the manufactures of the district would be complete without a mention of the indigo industry, which was formerly of considerable importance. Writing in 1863, Colonel Gastrell said that the principal indigo concerns were those of Mr. J. Erskine in the north and of Dr. Cheek in the south of the district. The headquarters of the former was at Sonāmukhī, and there were out-factories at Asuriā, Desuriā, Nārāyanpur, Rāmpur, Tāsuli, Krishnanagar and Gopālpur. The latter, with headquarters at Bānkurā, had factories at Sāntor, Mākrā, Ondā, Bishnupur, Amdāngrā, Champātōlā, Jaypur, Kotalpur, Khatnagar, Gopālnagar, Patrasāyar, Jāmūrā, Barā and Kānkiliā. A reference to old maps shows that there were also factories at Sānturi and Dīgha near Bānkurā on the east, at Kurpā to the south on the Tāldāngra road, at Rol, and at several places along the banks of the Dhalkishor. The industry has now completely died out.

OTHER INDUSTRIES

There are two tobacco manufactories in the town of Bishnupur, from which a scented tobacco is exported to almost every part of Bengal. The process of preparation is kept a trade secret,

and the price varies from Rs. 5 to Rs. 200 per maund. Woodcarving is carried on in a small way at Bānkurā and Bishnupur, household requisites and sporting materials being manufactured at the latter place. A new business in fretwork and perforated carving in wood and metal has also been started at Bānkurā. Molasses are manufactured by the cultivators all over the district, but the industry is on the decline. Penknives, razors and scissors of good quality are made at Sāshpur in the Indās thana, and conch-shell ornaments at Bānkurā, Bishnupur and Patrasāyar.

TRADE

Rice, brass and bell-metal ware, silk stuffs, hides, horns, lime and lac are the chief articles of export, while the imports are coal, salt, spices, cotton twist, cotton yarn and European piece goods. A small part of the trade passes through the Rāniganj and Pānāgarh stations on the East Indian Railway, but most of it is conveyed by the Midnapore-Jerriā extension of the Bengal-Nāgpur Railway, which passes through the district. The construction of the latter line has increased the volume of trade, but has not yet afforded special facilities of export and import to all the trade centres. Consequently, wheeled traffic still continues to a considerable extent; but the quantity of import or export by carts cannot be ascertained. The trade of the district is mostly carried on by means of permanent markets and also through the medium of *hāts* and fairs.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

There is no uniformity in the system of weights and measures recognized in the district. There are no less than three seers of different weights in the town of Bānkurā alone, viz., a seer of 60, 62 and 80 *tolās*. The first is used exclusively by dealers in brass utensils, the second by retail dealers for weighing salt, spices, fish, vegetables, etc., while the third is used by wholesale dealers for all kinds of commodities. In other parts of the district the seer of 60 *tolās* is used by grocers and other traders, whether wholesale or retail; that of 62 *tolās* is common in the Bishnupur subdivision and in the south-west of the headquarters subdivision for all kinds of commodities, and a seer of 64 *tolās* is employed

in the Chhātnā outpost for weighing all goods except rice and oil. In some parts of Bishnupur and Chhātnā, again, a seer of 72 *tolās* is used by traders in silk, rice and oil, while the standard seer of 80 *tolās* is used for all kinds of goods in Kotalpur, Indās, Sāltorā and Gangājalghāti. Wholesale dealers in brass and bell-metal also use weights known as *bisā* and *pal* in parts of the Kotalpur thana, a *pal* being equivalent to $8\frac{1}{2}$ *tolās*, while the *bisā* contains 20 *pals* or 170 *tolās*. For measures of capacity the standard is the *pai*, the capacity of which differs very greatly in different places, varying from 74 to 105 *tolās*. For measures of length the English yard and foot are in common use, while the cubit (*hāth* or *kāthi*) of 18 inches is generally used for measuring cloth.

The old land measure in Bānkurā was as follows: 1 *kānī* = 12 *chhatāks* Bengal standard measure, or 1 pole 22 yards 5 feet; 40 *kānī* = 1 *uān* 3 *kāthā*, or 7 poles 28 yards 2 feet; 50 *uāns* = 1 *ārhi* $7\frac{1}{2}$ *bighās*, or 2 acres 2 roods 18 poles 19 yards 8 feet; 4 *ārhis* = 1 *drun* = 30 *bighās*, or 10 acres 1 rood 34 poles 19 yards 7 feet. The Bengal standard *bighā*, which was introduced with the revenue survey operations, is equal to 1,600 square yards, and is divided thus: 20 *gandās* = 1 *chhatāk*, or 5 square yards; 16 *chhatāks* = 1 *kāthā*, or 80 square yards; 20 *kāthās* = 1 *bighā*, or 1,600 square yards. There is another division of the standard *bighā*, as follows: 16 *gandās* = 1 *biswānsī*, or 4 square yards; 20 *biswānsīs* = 1 *biswā* or 80 square yards; 20 *biswās* = 1 *bighā*, or 1,600 square yards.