

Original citation:

Berg, Maxine (2015) The merest shadows of a commodity : Indian muslins for European Markets 1750-1800. In: Berg, Maxine, (ed.) Goods from the East, 1600-1800 Trading Eurasia. Europe's Asian Centuries . Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 119-134. ISBN 9781137403940.

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/86984>

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Please acknowledge as follows: reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan'.
Berg, Maxine (2015) The merest shadows of a commodity : Indian muslins for European Markets 1750-1800. In: Berg, Maxine, (ed.) Goods from the East, 1600-1800 Trading Eurasia. Europe's Asian Centuries . Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 119-134. ISBN 9781137403940.
The following statement must also be displayed: 'This extract is taken from the author's original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive, published, version of record is available here: <http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9781137403933>
on www.palgrave.com and www.palgraveconnect.com

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

'The Merest Shadows of a Commodity:' Indian Muslins for European Markets 1750-1800.

Maxine Berg

Introduction

Dhaka in Bangladesh was recently the site in April, 2013 of the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory producing cheap clothing for the West; at least 1,129 people were killed. But Dhaka was another place in the eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries. Robert Orme, the eighteenth-century orientalist wrote in the early 1750s of Dhaka, where all the cloths for the use of the king and his seraglio were made in 'such wonderful fineness as to exceed ten times the price of any linens permitted to be made for Europeans, or anyone else in the kingdom'. In the 1760s the Dutch traveller Stavorinus wrote that 'Bengal muslins were made so fine that a piece of twenty yards in length or even longer could be put into a common pocket "tobacco box" (i.e. snuff box)'.ⁱ

In 1851 *The Athenaeum* published a review of *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Cotton Manufacture of Dacca, in Bengal* by a former resident in Dhaka. The book was by John Taylor, and based on a Report he wrote over fifty years before when he was the Commercial Resident of Dhaka. At that time he drew up a report of nearly 300 pages which he presented to the Board of Trade in Calcutta in 1800.ⁱⁱ

The book was presented to the Royal Society of Arts as a response to its call for treatises on objects shown at the Great Exhibition.ⁱⁱⁱ The reviewer wrote:

'The beautiful and delicate muslins from Dacca which have formed so prominent a feature in the Indian Department at the Exhibition have again directed attention in some measure, towards that peculiar district and branch of industry in Bengal to which we are indebted for productions so exquisite and so costly. It is admitted on all hands, that the finest of the Dacca muslins exceed anything which can be produced by the looms of Europe: and when the Manchester manufacturer described them "as the merest shadows of a commodity," he pronounced, in fact, the highest eulogium which they could receive, and indicated in a few words the deficiencies of the English when compared with the Indian manufacture of muslins.'^{iv}

This phrase, 'the merest shadow of a commodity' raises questions over shadows and commodities, over luxuries and consumer goods, and over fine craftsmanship and manufacture which were central to intellectual debate, political economy and economic policy during the Eighteenth Century, and are still central to the way we think about luxuries in the globalized world of the Twenty-First Century. Early modern Europeans were fascinated by the materials and craftsmanship of manufactured goods imported from Asia. Both made them objects of wonder, but also of sensuality. These Eastern imported goods acquired a special status of highly-desirable luxury goods for Europeans. Their conditions of manufacture and trade also made them, however, into 'new luxuries' for rising urban, wealthy and even middling groups. Europeans sought to observe, analyse and codify the materials and craftsmanship of Indian muslins and printed and printed calicoes, and of Chinese porcelain, enhancing their luxury status. This provided an important framework for John Taylor's original late eighteenth-century Report, and its legacy in his book for the Great Exhibition some fifty years later.

Luxury Goods and Eastern Imports

My own work in recent years has focussed on the impact of imported luxury goods on European industrial and consumer cultures. I have worked on the Asian provenance of those goods rather than on American sourced colonial groceries: sugar, chocolate, coffee and tobacco in changing the diets and food practices of Europeans. Asia's luxury goods did more than this: they changed the clothing, household domestic and display practices, and above all, the industries of Europe.^v As David Hume put it in 1777, 'Their own steel and iron ...become equal to the gold and rubies of the Indies', and the Abbé Raynal in the same year:

'If Saxony and other countries of Europe make up fine China", if Valencia manufactures Pekins superior to those of China; if Switzerland imitates the muslins and worked calicoes of Bengal; if England and France print linens with great elegance; if so many stuffs, formerly unknown in our climates, now employ our best artists, are we not indebted to India for all these advantages?'^{vi}

The exotic in those luxury goods associated with long-distance sea voyages and East India Companies continued, for many Europeans, to depict the meaning of Empire through the Nineteenth Century. Arindam Dutta in his *The Bureaucracy of Beauty* has written 'Economists may bristle, but empire is about taste: gold, silver, spices, silk, tea, textiles, the view, furniture, opium, coffee, bananas, paisley, arabesques ...'^{vii}

There is a long history connecting luxury with foreign imports, and this passed into the mercantilist debates of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. But it was not just imports, but imports from the East that gave luxury its particular caché in the later Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Silk was Europe's classic ancient luxury import from China. The fabled Silk Route conveyed all manner of luxury and other goods, but silk marked its identity with exotic luxury.

Chinese silk continued to be imported into Europe throughout the early modern period and the Eighteenth Century, though Italy had long become the major producer for the West from the Fifteenth Century onwards. By the later Seventeenth Century there were new imports of cotton calicoes and muslins, of porcelain and lacquerware. These attained great popularity during the Eighteenth Century, and were soon imported in large quantities by Europe's East India Companies and sold as decent, high-quality semi-luxuries available in a wide range of patterns, styles, qualities, and prices.

Asian models also stimulated Europeans to produce their own imitations in both production processes, designs, and marketing strategies. For Asian luxury goods were highly successful transmitters of technology, designs, and aesthetics. Such goods transmitted cross-cultural characteristics across great distances. The Eastern sources of these luxury goods also aroused the interest of Europe's savants, travellers, producers, and merchants. Enlightenment writers, natural historians, and travellers investigated and recounted the customs and manners of the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, of China, India, and South-East Asia, including the cultures of the courts, the transformation during the early modern period of huge cities from Istanbul to Edo, and their varied and highly sophisticated consumer cultures drawing on all the world's commodities.

European curiosity in these cultures extended to investigation of production processes capable of supplying high domestic populations as well as an extensive wider world trade in high-quality goods. Luxury goods, often perceived at the time to be the master works of single craftsmen, were discovered to be the outputs of large-scale production units organized with intense division of labour, such as Jingdezhen, the porcelain city; or the composite products of a whole series of tribal, religious, and caste communities, again highly specialized through an intense division of labour. Yet the porcelain was harder and finer than any European substitutes; writers marvelled at muslins so delicate they could hardly be seen, and cottons printed in unusual colour palettes with dyes unaccountably fixed.

The discovery of and desire for Asia's luxuries were not the same as their possession. This required an enormous expansion in trade and distribution over the course of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. The rise of Europe's East India Companies, monopolies to be sure, but competing with each other and considerably bolstered by significant private trade, brought more luxury goods to Europe, made them accessible to broader groups of the wealthy elites, and in Britain and the Netherlands to the middling and sometimes artisan classes. Such luxuries became cheaper relative to staples, thus increasing the relative incomes of the wealthy even as those of the poor declined.

Jan de Vries and the Trade in Asian Goods

Jan de Vries has conducted the most systematic analysis of the data on Asian trade to Europe. He summarises the reasons most historians give for Europe's desire for Asian manufactures: they were unique, superior, and cheap. Did Europeans acquire these goods in the course of the early modern era because of events in Europe that entailed a new capacity to purchase Asian goods? The Asia-Europe trade considerably developed the institutions and organization of international markets, and in the realms of economics, reduced transactions costs over the period. The East India Companies functioned as early versions of multinational corporations, both in developing markets for Asian luxury goods, and in organizing supply and shipping. Merchants developed and adapted designs in anticipation of European taste, and interacted in Asia with go-betweens, banyans and Hong merchants, using pattern books, textile swatches, musters and models to transmit to the manufacturing communities on the ground. They imported large quantities, judging quantities and markets on information gathered at the quarterly East India Company auction sales.

Between 1500 and 1795 11,000 European ships set out for the Cape route to Asia – 8,000 returned – some were wrecked, but many of these 3,000 stayed for the intra-Asian trade. Tea, textiles, porcelain, lacquerware, furnishings, drugs and dyestuffs made for a systematic global trade carried in quantities which by the later eighteenth century came to 50,000 tons a year. This made for just over one pound of Asian goods per person for a European population of roughly 100 million. But there was an even more rapid growth in this trade from the 1790s to the early years after 1815, when that tonnage reached 100,000 tons a year, doubling historic rates; this increase was largely due to private traders now accessing previously monopoly-dominated Indian Ocean waters.^{viii}

If we look to textiles and porcelain alone, we see the prodigious amounts of these goods reaching Europe from the Seventeenth Century. We need also, however, to put the

Asian trade in wider perspective. There was steady decadal growth of c. 1 per cent per annum; the trade was growing faster than Europe's population, but not by a great deal. 50,000 tons could be fitted into one of today's container ships. We can compare this with Europe's growing trade with the New World – this grew at 2.2 per cent per year, and the rise in the number of slaves transported from Africa to the New World which also grew by 2.1 per cent per annum. Jan de Vries estimates that another measure, the cumulative value of British, French and Dutch imports from Asia came to only 11.5 per cent of their total aggregate imports. Imports from the Western Hemisphere were c. 30 per cent of total imports; by value Europe's imports from the Americas was nearly three times that from Asia.^{ix}

Yet these Asian imports by the mid Eighteenth Century were by no means marginal to the European economy. De Vries concludes that it is likely that the greatest impact of this trade was to stimulate new European consumer wants, and indeed it is striking that the growth of demand for almost every Asian commodity generated the search and development of alternate sources of supply outside Asia. European consumption of non-European goods in the 1640s affected only the most elite consumers, and consisted mainly of pepper, spices and exotica. By the 1780s, however, European households consumed annually non-European goods valued at 14-15 English shillings or 8 Dutch guilders per household for Europe's c. 120 million. Of course this consumption was highly unequal by region and class, but its impact was high including reorganizing the structure and timing of meals, drawing poor and rural householders to the shops that were the only source of the goods, raising the utility of cash incomes, and providing a whole range of new goods for import tariffs and excise taxes.

If we look specifically at cotton textiles Riello's recent study of the world cotton industry estimates that 1.3 million pieces of cotton textiles reached Europe by the late 1680s, rising to 24.3 million pieces over the period 1665-1799. If we break this down to annual levels, we find that all the European companies sent some 100-200,000 pieces to Europe in the 1660s to 1670s; but less than one hundred years later this was 1,400,000 pieces. By the 1790s, however, these textile exports from India went into steep decline. By then more of Europe's demand for cottons was met by Europeans themselves. This decline in India's exports, as Riello point out, predated the mechanisation of the Industrial Revolution by a generation.^x The India trade by this decade faced inelasticities in supply and quality-control failures. Debate now focuses on whether this was caused by production crises or by intense competition among the European companies, private traders and indigenous Indian merchants with other lucrative markets to supply.

Riello demonstrates that the EIC's average purchase price for Indian cotton textiles doubled over the century after the 1660s. Over this same century manufactured goods, including textiles produced in Europe tended to decline in nominal price.^{xi} Riello also noted 'sufficient evidence that while prices increased quality worsened.... As consumption expanded in Europe, there was an incentive to replace increasingly expensive Indian cottons with competitively priced products produced in Europe'.^{xii}

European trade in Indian textiles was part of a wide Indian Ocean trade that affected India, Africa and South East Asia as much as it did Europe. The expansion of trade following on the East India Companies trade in the later Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries suggest an impact in Bengal amounting to 40 per cent of the growth in the region's economy in that period. Bengal by the later Seventeenth century was India's largest single manufacturing centre and *entrepot* for world trade; added to it were major export economies on the Coromandel coast and Gujarat/Mahashtra. The Indian economy throughout this period of greatly expanded trade with Europe was highly commercialized. Highly specialized textile villages were fed and housed with goods from great distances. The raw cotton woven by Bengal weavers was transported from Gujarat.

Bengal Muslins and European Demand in the Late Eighteenth Century

Let us now turn to those Bengal weavers and the European East India Companies seeking to access fine muslins in the 1790s, the time when John Taylor was writing his *Report*. India's comparative advantage lay in the high quality of its artisan manufactures. The low costs of India's labour and its openness to penetration by foreign trade attracted Europe's East India Companies to develop controls over a transnational production and exchange of cotton textiles.^{xiii} As David Washbrook has analysed, specific regions developed multiple specialisms of skills and products through the caste system and the division of labour. Extreme specialization became the hall mark of 'caste-inflected 'difference'', for niche markets and fine specialization of production. Heavy investment in human capital took the place of inputs of fixed capital and infrastructures.^{xiv} Before the colonial period India never developed the classic 'putting out' system of Western Europe where merchants provided not just advance 'wages', but raw materials or thread. Indian artisans protected their skills and command of their work; merchants advanced money, but the weavers bought their own thread. By convention the worker could cancel the contract by returning the advance.^{xv}

From the mid Eighteenth Century the English East India Company's investment in South Asian textiles increased sharply; textiles accounted for 53.5 per cent of its total exports to

Europe in 1758-60, but increased in 1777-9 to 78 per cent.^{xvi} European markets became increasingly dominated by textiles from Bengal; these provided 40 per cent of the cargoes exported to Europe. The economic background to this, as Tirthankar Roy has argued recently, was not a narrative of decline from precolonial prosperity to colonial de-industrialization.^{xvii} There were greater inward flows of silver into Bengal from Britain and Europe in the later Eighteenth Century, and increased economic activity. Indeed, the internal market and private trade were even more important than Company trade. The Company controlled only 25 to 33 per cent of the weaving population, and private trade took over sixty percent of the cotton piece goods produced in Dhaka.^{xviii}

While East India Companies traded printed calicoes from Gujarat across the Indian Ocean as well as to Europe, they focussed their European trade increasingly on the muslins from the district of Dhaka.^{xix} The key European framework for this muslin trade was an explosion from the 1770s of fashion demand for loose-fitting women's gowns made from this soft, fine, and even translucent fabric.^{xx}

Dhaka's textiles were produced in rural domestic industry settings in contrast with the textile manufactures of western and northern India where much of the manufacturing was urban or set in villages close to major cities. The weavers of Bengal were mainly peasant farmers, and as Robert Orme, the eighteenth-century orientalist, observed 'in Bengal it is difficult to find a village in which every man, woman and child is not employed in making a piece of cloth'.^{xxi} Every district produced a distinct product, and the industry was very decentralized, relying on an extensive river transport system. The area produced luxury textiles, but also coarse and medium qualities; the finest muslins and calicoes were highly localized.^{xxii} Localized centres of production, or *aurangs* specialized in many different varieties of weaving; spinning and washing were also specialized. There was intense caste and occupational differentiation in Bengal textiles; every stage of production became a separate manufacturing activity.

Until the last half of the Eighteenth Century production was organized under the *dadni* system where merchants or other intermediaries gave the weavers a cash advance, but the weavers bought their own yarn. The system promoted control of merchant capital over the producer, but not over the process of production itself.^{xxiii} The English East India Company tried to change this system in the later part the Eighteenth Century. There were increasing conflicts between the Dutch, French and English Companies, and between private merchants and the Commercial Resident.

Dhaka, and specifically Lakshmipur, a place of fine-quality textile manufacture sixty-eight miles down the river from Dhaka, was the place where Linda Colley's *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* found the private trader, James Crisp, Marsh's husband, seeking like others in the 1770s a lucrative private trade in the brilliantly coloured cloths of the area. He competed with the East India Company, other European private traders and Asian merchants to attract native weavers to his own trade.^{xxiv}

The Company encouraged artisans to settle with their families under the protection of the Company, 'especially those who could introduce any new arts or manufactures or improve such as were already established.'^{xxv} The Calcutta Council also tried to get weavers to settle in the Company territory in Calcutta to manufacture different types of cloth. The Company issued regulations to register the weavers.^{xxvi} The Regulation for Weavers in 1782 made it illegal for merchants to buy and weavers to sell cloth which had been contracted on East India Company advances.

If we turn to Dhaka in the 1790s, there had been a decline in the quantities and qualities of cloth produced, but even so, forty-seven different assortments were produced at all the *aurangs*. Greater demands were made on quality control. The weavers were regularly inspected, pieces were then appraised and selected at the *aurang*, and at the further stage of the warehouse in Dhaka, yet another selection was made. Cloth rejected rose from 20.19 per cent in 1791 to 41.44 per cent in 1799.^{xxvii} Weavers were squeezed beyond their production capacity by the pressures from local *zamindars* and Company intermediaries. Some abandoned their manufacture, turning to agricultural employment; others absconded or died, their heirs inheriting their debts.^{xxviii}

The Report on Dhaka

The East India Company Report on Dhaka was a large-scale investigative survey of a kind not conducted on European manufactures or industrial regions until the 1830s and 1840s. The Report on Dhaka finds its roots in the attempts by the Dutch and French East India Companies in the 1760s to gain access to weavers in some of the *aurungs* of Bengal. A joint investigative mission of the English, Dutch and French East India Companies was set up, and a Report was eventually submitted by the Dutch representative on the mission.

This early Dutch Report was followed in 1790 by a Danish report by Jacob Scavenius, head factor of the Danish Company in Serampore. Danish trade had expanded in the region during the American War of Independence, and the Danes and a small number of private merchants were the only neutral traders until the Peace in 1783. They then had

to compete with other European nations. Scavenius wrote a report on the customs and commercial organization of the region's textile manufacture. He described the simple technologies and fine quality of the products where there were no machines to shorten the work of the artisan; 'the spinner and weaver require and expect only what is necessary to pay for the material, to have enough to eat and a little leisure...they work solely for their subsistence; they have no prospects of improving their work or of changing the organization or the tools they use... Through unwearying industry and with the help of a few paltry tools these poor people, nevertheless, are able to produce the prettiest and finest cloths without the use of machines'.^{xxix}

Scavenius noticed that the price of piece goods had risen 12 to 15 per cent since the 1770s, accounting for this mainly by European demand. The problem the Europeans faced, he continued, was acquiring goods of sufficient quality at low enough prices. He gave a moving account of oppressed working conditions: 'advances are paid, but only in small sums for fear they will spend the money on food and deliver no cloths or run away to some other place...a peon is often sent who stands over the poor creature and supervises the work; when it is eventually finished and delivered, the piece is at most of a very mediocre quality and of uneven yarns'.^{xxx}

John Taylor, then the Commercial Resident of Dhaka followed with his report of nearly 300 pages which he presented to the Board of Trade in Calcutta in 1800. He set the history of the muslin manufacture in the wider framework of England's development of its own industry. By 1787 the cotton manufacture of Great Britain had increased in value to £7,500,000, and there were forty-one spinning factories at work in Lancashire. In the same year the value of the whole trade of the Dhaka region was £1,562,500. Taylor marked this as 'the most flourishing period the cloth trade of Dacca, or it was, at least, the year in which the amount of exports was the greatest. Soon after this, the trade began to decline...In 1817 the Commercial Residency was abolished, and the factory closed'.^{xxxi}

Taylor provided great detail on production processes and organization in a fifty-page 'Account of the fine Cotton, Thread and Fabrics produced in the Dacca Province'. He provided a close and detailed account of weaving and related processes as well as drawings of those at work. He reported: 'The most beautiful plain fabrics, manufactured in the Dacca Province, are made at the aurungs of Junglebarry Bazetpore and Sonangong. The Weavers of the former excel in manufacturing Muslins of a close texture, the Weavers of the latter Aurung in making thin and clear Muslins'. He engaged with some of the

weavers to make three pieces of the finest fabrics, and was told it would take twelve months to make a full piece of such cloth.^{xxxii}

He gave special attention to the art of making *jamdannies*, or of embroidering cloths in the loom. This was a skill exclusive to the weavers of the Dhaka *aurung*. Demand had kept up, and it had not 'reduced the care of the spinners or weavers or reduced [their] skill...a constant attention to the improvement of the fabrics has in the meantime been given by the Company's investment at this Factory'.^{xxxiii} In the case of muslins he accounted for a reduced demand by the Company since the Mughals because now there was new English production, and then 'there were no rival manufactures in Europe...Europeans had not learned to imitate the art of weaving Muslins. In the purchase of Indian fabrics there was consequently much less necessity than there now is for strictness in examination of them'.^{xxxiv}

Taylor wrote of the poor condition of the weavers in Dhaka in the 1790s. The impact of the war in Europe had reduced many of them to a 'state of insolvency'. There had been a steady decline in demand for Dhaka goods. A number of the manufacturers had stopped weaving: some had gone to other occupations, others 'reduced to a state of indigence.' It was 'unsafe to trust them with advances even when the demand for cloths increase ...'.^{xxxv}

Lancashire Muslins

Against the background of these difficult years of the 1790s in the production of Bengal muslins we can place the rising manufacture of new British muslins. Samuel Crompton's spinning mule, invented in 1779, was known as the Muslin Wheel. One of the early Lancashire manufacturers to use it, Samuel Oldknow, competed directly with Indian products, and faced a "severe burst of competition" whenever East India Company vessels unloaded cargoes of textiles.^{xxxvi} By 1784, Oldknow had over 1,000 weavers working for him, and his entire output supplied London fashion markets for muslins and calicoes. His London merchants demanded frequent design change, month by month, and insisted on high quality. They conveyed a charged competitive atmosphere. By the spring of 1789 muslins made up nine-tenths of Oldknow's production; high proportions of these quality goods were figured and highly differentiated.^{xxxvii}

The London merchants at the time prepared a history of the rise and progress of the British muslin and calico manufacture for the Lords of the Council for Trade, claiming

that ‘the object they [the inventors] grasped was great indeed – to establish a Manufacture in Britain that should rival in some measure the Fabrics of Bengal’.^{xxxviii}

John Taylor’s *Report* of 1800 clearly connected the plight of the Dhaka weavers to this rising British manufacture. By the time he published his *Descriptive and Historical Account* in 1851 he could provide a full history of the contrasting rise of British muslin manufacture and the decline in the trade of Dhaka muslins, and alongside this new initiatives to expand production of the unique raw cotton of the Dhaka region to supply British mills.

John Taylor’s Report and Information Flows

John Taylor’s *Report* provided one of those very early accounts of the trade and manufacture of Asian goods. The great detail it provided on skills, work processes and craft manufacture alongside close data collection on output, product types and labour input was then unmatched in accounts of European manufacturing regions. It shows European appreciation of fabrics, colours and embroideries which even by the end of the eighteenth century could not be produced in Europe. The Report opens questions on the levels of Company control, especially in the Bengal textile industry, challenging an older historiography on colonialism and the decline of the textile industry.

The *Report* is also an excellent example of an important part of the Europe-Asia trade neglected by economic historians. It was a contribution to Europe’s enlightened accumulation of ‘useful knowledge’, in Joel Mokyr’s terms, of Indian cotton production.^{xxxix} It was part of that wide history of European information gathering in India, including natural history and economic botany, cartography, legal codes, languages and ethnographies.^{xi} As de Vries has recently argued, this information exchange was if anything more important than levels of trade. The East India Companies spread this information from their numerous trading factories and ships across maritime Asia and parts of Africa toward their command centres in Asia and Europe. Their trading factories, like that in Dhaka, were ‘information rich’ nodal points; East India Companies collected, processed and acted on this information, directing investment decisions, and passing it back to Europe. The information that followed in the wake of trade flows, as de Vries, has argued could ‘set in in motion transformations in both consumer behavior and commercial organization with far reaching consequences’.^{xii}

The trade in luxury goods such as the Dhaka muslins and the accumulation of information on the skills and craftsmanship that went into their making also raise

important questions of chronology over Asian manufacture and European industrialization. These are issues long addressed in India's historiography, the so-called 'de-industrialization' debate. Prasannan Parthasarathi has argued the important place of the 'India' factor in the years of miracle of British cotton inventions. But yet the impact of this mechanisation, as Riello and de Vries have argued, would not challenge the quality of Indian fabrics and levels of trade in these for another generation. In the 1790s when the Lancashire manufacturers petitioned Pitt over the renewal of the East India Company charter, and argued for total prohibition of sales of Indian textiles in the British home market, they did not succeed because even in face of two decades of intensive attempts at British import substitution and mechanisation, London wholesale dealers knew that the pinnacle of London society still preferred genuine oriental prints.

But yet the quality of those fabrics is not enough in itself to explain a confluence between a crisis in the luxury trade and rising challenge of a new and still small, but highly competitive new industry in Britain. We need to give close attention to the limitations during these crucial decades of the 1780s to the 1820s of a luxury trade based in a production system in India that David Washbrook has termed 'alternative economics.' In this economics artisan expertise developed both in response to specialised markets and to an elaborate division of labour through the caste system. There was heavy investment in specialist skills and human capital. Specialist techniques were guarded by caste exclusivity. European trade and settlement brought wider markets penetrated by money. The facility to produce quality goods in great variety had made India an ideal producer for Europe's emerging fashion markets. Indian producers innovated and produced the designs and unique forms of quality that European consumers craved. But growing wealth and markets also contributed to more specialisation, more refinements of skill and with it more status distinctions.^{xliii} But it did not lead to accumulation and the kind of 'quality with standardization' model developed in Europe. Perhaps what we see in the Dhaka of the 1790s is a system of 'alternative economics' that had reached its limits.

The celebrated Dhaka muslins, observed, analysed and codified in John Taylor's Report on Dhaka made an important contribution to Asia's luxury textile trade to Europe in the later eighteenth century. Its production problems, problems of access, quality and control by Company merchants instigated the Report. Britain's own early cotton manufacturers, even by the stage of the Report on Dhaka, were engaging in a competitive development of fine cottons, also termed muslins.

ⁱ Cited in Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline. Eighteenth Century Bengal* (New Delhi:Manohar, 1995), p.133.

ⁱⁱ Account of the district of Dacca by the Commercial Resident Mr. John Taylor in a Letter to the Board of Trade at Calcutta dated 30th Nov. 1800 with Pt. 2 Nov. 1801 and Inclosures In Reply to a Letter from the Board dated 6th Feby. 1798 transmitting Copy of the 115th Paragraph of the General Letter from the Court of Directors dated 9th May 1797 Inviting the Collection of Materials for the use of the Company's Historiographer. Home Miscellaneous 456F, India Office Records, Asia, Pacific Africa Collections, British Library.

ⁱⁱⁱ *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Cotton Manufacture of Dacca, in Bengal, by a former Resident in Dacca.* (London:Mortimer, 1851). See *The Athenaeum*, November 1, 1851, no.1253, pp.130-140.

^{iv} *The Athenaeum*, p.130.

^v See 'In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 182 (2004), pp. 85-142; *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005); *Luxury, the Luxury Trades and the Roots of Industrial Growth, cha Britain's Asian Century: Porcelain and Global History in the Long Eighteenth Century*, in Laura Cruz and Joel Mokyr, eds., *The Birth of Modern Europe Culture and Economy 1400-1800 Essays in Honour of Jan de Vries* (Leiden: Brill) 2010, 26 pp..insert page 9, in Frank Trentmann, (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook on the History of Consumption*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), pp. 173-212; 'Britain's Asian Century: Porcelain and Global History in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Laura Cruz and Joel Mokyr, (eds), *The Birth of Modern Europe Culture and Economy 1400-1800 Essays in Honour of Jan de Vries* (Leiden: Brill 2010), pp.insert pages

^{vi} David Hume, 'Of Commerce' (1752), in David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Eugene F. Miller (ed.) (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), p.264; Abbé Raynal, *The Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (1776), vol. II, p. 288.

^{vii} Arindam Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of its Global Reproducibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

^{viii} Jan de Vries, 'Understanding Eurasian Trade in the Era of the Trading Companies', this volume, chap. 1, p. 30.

^{ix} Jan de Vries, 'The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World,' *Economic History Review*, 63, 2010, pp.710-733, p. 728.

^x Giorgio Riello, *Cotton The Fabric that Made the Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p Need page

^{xi} Riello, *Cotton*, pp. 107, 116. Riello notes that over this long time period procurements shifted among Indian regions and shifted toward higher quality cloth. But, the rise in prices was not only a result of such shifts; prices within regions and types of cloth also rose.

^{xii} Riello, *Cotton*, p. 108.

^{xiii} Riello, *Cotton*, p. 106.

- ^{xiv} David Washbrook, 'India in the Early Modern World Economy: Modes of Production, Reproduction and Exchange', *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007), pp. 7-111, p. 87.
- ^{xv} See Prasannan Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 83-93 on the bargaining position held by the weavers in the early eighteenth century which Parthasarathi argues they lost in the later century as the East India Company tightened its hold on South India.
- ^{xvi} Ghulam Nadri, *Eighteenth-Century Gujarat. The Dynamics of its Political Economy, 1750-1800* (Leiden: Brill 2009), p. 136.
- ^{xvii} Tirthankar Roy, 'Where is Bengal? Situating an Indian Region in the Early Modern World Economy', *Past and Present*, 213, (2011), pp. 115-146.
- ^{xviii} Rajat Datta, 'The Commercial Economy of Eastern India under Early British Rule', in H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid (eds), *Britain's Oceanic Empire. Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, 1550-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 340-369, pp. 344, 365; Rajat Datta, *Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialisation in Rural Bengal, c. 1760-1800* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000). Also see Om Prakash, 'From Negotiation to Coercion: Textile Manufacturing in India in the Eighteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 41 (2007), pp. 331-68, p. 342 for discussion of India's internal market for cotton textiles as the exclusive preserve of indigenous merchants.
- ^{xix} Om Prakash, 'From Market-Determined to Coercion-Based Textile Manufacturing in Eighteenth-Century Bengal' in Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy eds., *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 217-252.
- ^{xx} This point is made by John Styles, correspondence with the author, 26 May, 2014. Also see his *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2007).
- ^{xxi} Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), p.135.
- ^{xxii} Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline*, pp. 137-9.
- ^{xxiii} Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline*, pp. 148-151.
- ^{xxiv} Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London; NY: Harper, 2007), pp. 245-255. On the operation of private trade in the area see Bishnupria Gupta, 'Competition and Control in the Market for Textiles: Indian Weavers and the English East India Company in the Eighteenth Century', in Riello and Roy, *How India Clothed the World*, pp. 281-308.
- ^{xxv} Mukherjee, 'Markets, Transport and the State', p. 78.
- ^{xxvi} Mukherjee, 'Markets, Transport and the State', pp. 256-7.
- ^{xxvii} Mukherjee, 'Markets, Transport and the State', pp. 158-9.
- ^{xxviii} Mukherjee, 'Markets, Transport and the State', pp. 158-9.
- ^{xxix} Cited in Ole Feldback, 'Cloth Production and Trade in Late Eighteenth Century Bengal. A Report from the Danish Factory in Serampore', *Bengal Past and Present*, lxxxvi,(1967) Part II, pp. 124-141, p. 126.
- ^{xxx} Feldback, 'Cloth Production and Trade', p. 137.
- ^{xxxi} *The Athenaeum*, p. 140.
- ^{xxxii} *The Athenaeum*, pp. 137-143.
- ^{xxxiii} *The Athenaeum*, pp. 175, 179.
- ^{xxxiv} *The Athenaeum*, p. 181.
- ^{xxxv} *The Athenaeum*, pp. 211, 221.
- ^{xxxvi} George Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1924), p. 3.
- ^{xxxvii} Unwin, *Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, Salte to Oldknow, 23 May 1786; 18 and 19 Oct. 1787, pp. 67 and 96.
- ^{xxxviii} Unwin, *Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, p. 63.
- ^{xxxix} Joel Mokyr, 'The Intellectual Origins of Modern Economic Growth', *Journal of Economic History*, 65, 2, (2005), pp. 285-351; Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Maxine Berg, 'Useful Knowledge, "Industrial Enlightenment", and the Place of India', *Journal of Global History*, 8, (2013), pp. 117-141.
- ^{xl} Christopher Bayly,

Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj and James Delbourgo eds., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* (Segamore Beach, MA: Watson Publishing, 2009).

^{xli} De Vries, 'Understanding Eurasian Trade in the Era of the Trading Companies', p. 32.

^{xlii} Washbrook, 'India in the Early Modern World Economy'.