

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BIHAR:
SOME ASPECTS OF THE SHAPING OF
A REGIONAL ECONOMY**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
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SANTOSH KUMAR MALUA



**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
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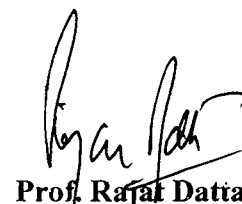
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for Prof. Mridula Mukherjee

(Chairperson)

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067


Prof. Rajat Datta

(Supervisor)

Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Dedicated
To
My Dearest Parents

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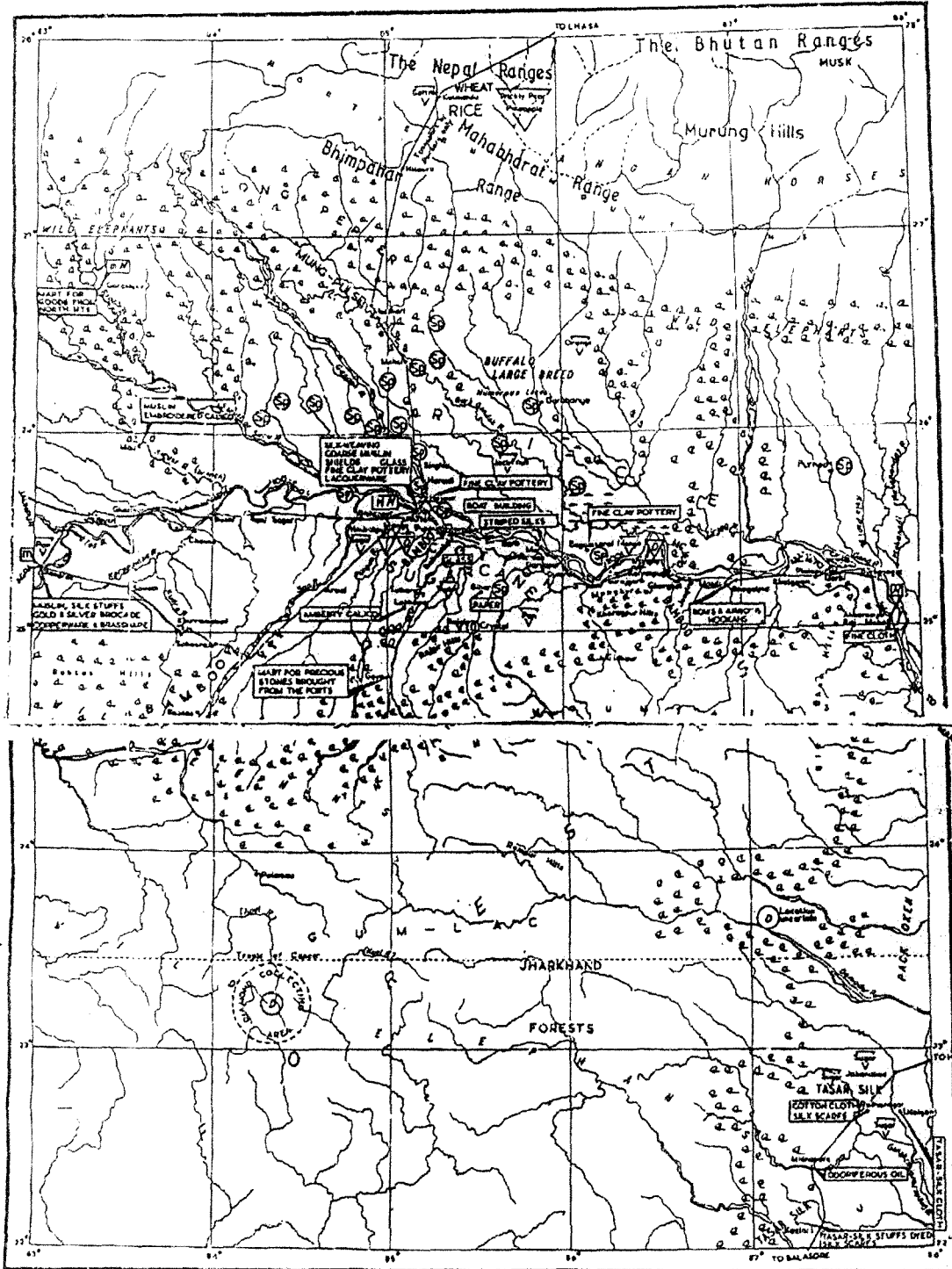
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Santosh Kumar Malua

MAP-I BIHAR ECONOMY



Scale 1: 2,000,000
 Miles 0 10 20 30 40 50
 Kilometers 0 10 20 30 40 50

REFERENCE

- Forest
- Swamps & reeds
- River channel, now abandoned
- Main channel & year when active
- Navigable, tonnage of largest boats
- Bridges
- Diamond mine
- Quarry
- Salt-petre
- Fruits, localised/processed agricultural product
- Indigo
- Opium
- Craft product
- Rupee mint, 1595
- " Aurangzeb
- Copper mint, 1595

Source: Irfan Habib (ed.) *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, Delhi, 1982, 10B

INTRODUCTION

Bihar in the seventeenth century was a region with large-scale commercial activities which ultimately made it a lucrative destination for all the European trading countries. In course of time these commercial activities proved to be very vital in shaping the economy of Bihar. Hence, it is quite essential to look into the economy of Bihar in the seventeenth century in order to understand its commercial structure in general and to understand the broad contours of an emerging regional economy in particular. Specifically, there are three core aspects which are explored to unravel the general problematic:

1. The genesis of European trade, particularly that of the English East India Company in the region and its consequences;
2. The trade in saltpetre, its commercial utility and role in the emerging commercial nexus in the region;
3. The role of Patna as a lynchpin in the whole trading nexus in the region as an urban complex and redistribution system;

The role of Bihar in the economy of India in the medieval period has been studied neither exhaustively nor satisfactorily. This is surprising

because Bihar was an important center in this period due to its widespread and varied economic activities. This was one of the most important factors in establishing the status of Bihar not only as an important revenue generating subah but also as a crucial centre of trade and commerce.

Abul Fazl informs us that Akbar, considering the strategic position in the eastern end of the empire constituted Bihar as one of the subahs (province) of Mughal Empire in c.1579-80.¹ Due to its geographical location on the bank of the river Ganges, access to waterways for transportation was an added advantage. Availability of popular trading commodities such as sugar, silk, opium and most importantly saltpeter attracted not only the local merchants but also merchants from Holland, England and France. Here the role of Patna as a trading mart due to its location at the convergence of two rivers, Ganges and Punpun, cannot be ignored. Since Patna was the headquarter of subah of Bihar and as the royal mint was also housed there, it could easily procure all the need of merchants from money to materials for the trade. This facilitated increased economic activities and which led to urbanisation in the region.

¹ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. II, (tr.) H. S. Jarret, 2nd edn. Revised by Jadunath Sarkar.

Calcutta, 1978, (First published, 1949), p. 162

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Scholars on Bihar like S. H. Askari, R. R. Diwakar, Qeyamuddin Ahmed, Jagdish Narayan Sarkar and Aniruddha Ray have extensively explored the history of Bihar. Askari's range of articles and books: 'Bihar During the First Quarter of the Seventeenth Century' (1943) 'Bihar in the time of ShahJahan' (1944) and *Islam and Muslims in Medieval Bihar* (1998), all broadly outline that it was not the arms of Bakhtiyar Khalji in the thirteenth century which brought Islam into Bihar, but the sufi mystics of the Firdausia sect who were instrumental in initiating it in Bihar. Secondly, these sufis were not only engaged with their distinct way of practicing Islam but were also instrumental in transforming the native society from its rural base. Thirdly, since there was no sanctified seclusion observed by these Sufis from the ruling political quarters, there was an indirect legitimacy rendered to the new rulers. Lastly, it is in the religious sphere these sufis and power dynamics in the political arena set out the motion of growth and development of the region. On the basis of hagiographical literature and chronicles Askari presented the history of Bihar in this fashion and identified it with typical medieval traits of the interplay of religion and politics.²

² S.H. Askari 'Bihar During the First Quarter of the 17th Century' in *Proceedings of Indian History Congress* (Hereafter *PIHC*), 1943, pp. 348-53; 'Bihar in the time of Shah Jahan',

R.R. Diwakar in his work *Bihar Through The Ages*, (1958) has also perceived the history of medieval Bihar along the same lines. He is, however, of the opinion that it was not the religious affiliation of the medieval rulers but religion in its totality which played a vital role in the construction of society and gave impetus to the transformation of the region. This ultimately gave a constructive cultural identity to Bihar. But his projection of the history of the medieval Bihar on the basis of chronicles and travel accounts conveys an impression of the society in two watertight compartments, Hindu and Muslim. Although he did not reject the influence and intermingling between these two religions. He failed to overcome the understanding of history as a mere succession of political events. For, his chronological settings itself reveals his conviction that political circumstances somehow or the other profoundly moulded the shape of medieval Bihar. His idea of growth and development of the region is restricted to religious and political performances carried out in the region.

Qeyamuddin Ahmed, Brahmadeva Prasad, S.M.Karimi and others have seen political progress and economic activities as the two of the

PIHC, 1944, pp. 348-59 and S. H. Askari, *Islam and Muslims in Medieval Bihar*, Patna. 1998

(First Published, 1989)

strongest influences in establishing Bihar in its medieval milieu. Q.Ahmed in his Source oriented research work *Corpus of Arabic and Persian inscriptions of Bihar*, (1973) provided us with information in the available epigraphic sources. These can be helpful only in tracing the activities of influential individuals but these do not indicate or measure the scale of a regions economic growth.

The essays of Brahmadeva Prasad 'Restoration and Early Phase of Mughal Rule in Bihar (1574-1614)' and 'Bihar as Subah of the Mughal empire (1614-1660 and 1666-1770)' in the *Comprehensive History of Bihar* series edited by S.H. Askari and Q.Ahmed, (1987) provide a wider picture of Bihar as an important subah of the Mughal empire. The pacification of Bihar was always difficult owing to it being a troubled region because of refractory zamindars and the continuing Afghan resistance to Mughal rule. Moreover local rulers of Ujjain and few Rajputs from Bhojpur continued their allegiance to the Afghans. All these including the strategic position of the province made it imperative for it to be given proper attention and consequently Akbar onwards all rulers remained watchful towards Bihar.³ Also, the fact that Bihar was capable of producing one of the highest amount of revenues of about 26

³ Askari and Ahnad (ed.) *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Patna, 1987, pp. 83-164

crore Dams comparable to other subahs of the Mughal Empire such as Agra (54 crore Dams), Allahabad (30 crore Dams) and Bengal (36 crore Dams) etc. made it such a vital province for the rulers of north India.⁴

S. M. Karimi in his essay 'Late medieval Towns of Bihar Plain', (1970) had studied the process of urbanization. He has categorized the origin and development of towns in Bihar as military garrison, as administrative centre, as places of commerce. He argues that there were specific aims and forces which were behind the establishments of towns in the late medieval period. Such forces as he saw then were military garrisons, which required proper forts and forces along with proper provisions and these gave an impetus to the establishment of town in the regions. Since Rohtās, Bhagalpur and adjoining areas were among those areas where garrisons were deployed and they grew up as towns. Similarly, trade was among the most important forces which involved all the spheres of life. This is what Patna and its hinterland experienced when there was increase in trading activities in the region. Karimi then

⁴ Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, New Delhi, 2000. (First Published, 1963).

presents graphic account of the centrality of foreign trade and commerce in making Patna a highly active market town.⁵

Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, R.N.Prasad and Aniruddha Ray are among those historians who have significantly explored seventeenth century Bihar on the basis of travel accounts. Sarkar in his essay 'Economic Life in Bihar (c.1526-1757)' in the *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, (1987) revealed that medieval Bihar was noted for its widespread and varied economic and commercial contact with three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. In spite of it's being rural and agricultural at the base, increased economic activities impacted on the process of urbanization. Foreign travellers frequenting this region in seventeenth century recorded many types of business.

In 2003, Aniruddha Ray's work *Transformation of Bihar: European (Chiefly French) Discourses (Late 16th to early 19th century)* has given the same reasons behind Bihar's gaining popularity in economic as well as political sphere. But he has shifted somewhere from the existing notions, specifically on the point of agents determining this change. Unlike others he argues that it were not exactly the Mughals but the

⁵ S. M. Karimi. 'Late Medieval Towns of Bihar Plain (12th century AD to 18th century)', *Journal of Bihar Research Society* (Hereafter *JBRS*), Vol. LVI, 1970, pp. 172-190

Europeans who understood the worth of this region and engaged there with high levels of economic activities. They discovered the vast trading prospect of saltpeter and musk. Further such increased economic activities encouraged a process of urbanization which in due course brought about a transformation of Bihar in general and Patna in particular. An important point made by Ray is that it was the Europeans who competed among themselves for trading rights and privileges without any indigenous resistance to it.

The general historiography of seventeenth century India suggests that it was in this period that India witnessed durable political stability, territorial integration and an expansion of economic activities. Agra became an active economic zone of the century. Trade and commercial links with European traders brought manifold advantages to the Mughal Empire. But all these were restricted to the first half of the seventeenth century. The second half of the seventeenth century is seen as a period of crisis. The processes of the decline and the emergence of regional politics were the main basis of this debate. The historiography on this debate broadly tries to identify the causes of the Mughal decline within the structure and functioning of the Empire on one hand and on the other hand it looks for the causes of turmoil or instability in different

parts of the Empire.⁶ However, there is a debate over the nature of the crisis, it is difficult to ascribe a single factor commonly applicable to the problems of the Mughal empire in all its regions and provinces. Consequently a regional perspective on Mughal decline substantially dilutes the application of one general theory to explain Mughal collapse all over India.

Therefore a study of Bihar may provide us with a wider option to look into the era outside the paradigm of the imperial crises at the center. As a matter of fact Bihar seems to provide a different picture. Politically it remained as before with no territorial changes and divisions. Regional political stability emerged here, as it continued to be governed by appointed subadars. Although there were some disturbances during the exiles of rebellious princes in the region, that did not hamper the substantial growth of European trading activities in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁷ Availability of cheap saltpeter was perhaps the central cause for the arrival of traders from other parts of the world.

⁶ Muzaffar Alam. *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India Awadh and Punjab, 1707-48*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 2-10

see Chapter 1 for details.

CHAPTERISATION

In the light of these features of seventeenth century, in the history medieval India, the study of commercial economy of Bihar is understated in the following three chapters:

1. Commercial activities and the growth of European trade in Bihar.
2. Saltpetre trade: Structure, organization and volume.
3. The city of Patna: the City and its Commerce.

First chapter is a survey of commercial activities in the seventeenth century which tries to look at the process of trade and commerce in that period, and its contemporary trends and constraints. India's foreign trade in the seventeenth century mainly concentrated on the exports of the raw materials such as textiles, pepper, indigo and saltpetre. In the first half of the seventeenth century Surat was the main centre for English trade in India. But, as the war between Persia and Turkey hampered the trade in that region, traders started looking for other options.⁸ Besides, famine in the 1630s, forced the traders towards the

⁸ Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and The Decline of Surat, c.1700-1750*, New Delhi.

eastern region. Initially in 1620 a group of merchants from Surat had visited to Bengal and also reached to Patna. However, it took almost more than a decade to establish trade activities in Patna. It was in 1632 that Peter Mundy first made a positive assessment of the region and advocated the cause for future trade which eventually proved to be fruitful for the Company. Bihar as a threshold to Bengal and Orissa also provided good hinterland to the region. Bihar was situated between Agra, Allahabad and Bengal and Orissa and this geographical advantage linked it to these places through land and water.

Secondly, this chapter also discusses the causes and course of the growth of English trade and commerce in the region in the seventeenth century. In 1634 a firman was obtained from emperor Shahjahan to trade with Bengal. In the process of enhancing trade northward from Masulipattnam they made it to Harishpur, Orissa and Balasore. In spite of initial difficulties the East India Company did not try to abandon it and in 1650 the Madras council decided upon Balasore to carry out trade along the line of Hugli, which finally made them realise the importance of Bihar and its trade potential.

The second chapter focuses on the structure, organization and volume of trade in the saltpeter. In this chapter there is an attempt to find answers

to the questions like why saltpetre was in demand in the seventeenth century? Why Bihar saltpetre was popular and what were the intricacies in saltpetre trade? Besides there is a discussion on the production process and the producers of saltpetre.

The third chapter deals with the increased commercial activities and urbanization of Patna in the backdrop of its role as a commercial mart. Patna as the capital of the subah of Bihar had the royal mint housed there. It was geographically very conducive for agriculture, as its riverside agricultural tracts never made it dependent on the monsoon. The growth of its importance as a city basically rested on two factors, internal and external. Internally, it was due to its natural resources in agriculture and minerals, and externally it was the expansion of European trade in the region which enhanced its importance in the seventeenth century. These factors collectively resulted in increased commercial activities in the region and it led to a rapid urbanization of Patna.

The general inference which we get from this is that due to its uneven political situation and historically being considered troubled state, historians have had a problem of conceptualizing the positive dynamics of the regional economy. The coming of the Europeans was a landmark

in its history, for it was they who recognized its trade potentialities. Saltpetre became the main object of trade and played a crucial role in the expansion of foreign trade and economic growth to the region.

SOURCES

Primary sources available and used for this study can be categorized in the following heads:

- English translation of Persian chronicles
- Travel accounts, and
- English Factory Records

English translation of the chronicles such as *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, *Badshahnamah*, *Alamgir namah*, *Riazul Salatin* and *Baharistan-i-Ghayabi* are relevant to the study of seventeenth century. But these chronicles have not recorded any reference of Bihar's economic growth and development. All the references are only to the political character of the region and its problems.

Travel accounts on the other hand help us in tracing the economic life of Bihar. There are many travellers' accounts which have been used for this study. All these travellers except Ralph Fitch (16th century) had visited Bihar in the seventeenth century and do not form any specific group on the basis of their ethnic identity or purpose of visit. However, English travelers who were in search of trade in the east frequented this region in the period and recorded minutely the happenings of that period and the region's history and thus they form a large number in this study. Travel accounts provide information since the time of constitution of

Bihar as one of the subahs of Mughal Empire in 1670s and they also provide further information about the region's economy and help in explaining the way it worked.

Ralph Fitch, who had visited Bihar in the late 16th century, informs us about the earlier status of Patna as a kingdom in ancient period but (now) it was under the Mughal monarch Akbar. He came to Patna from Benaras. His first impression of Patna as an upcoming trade town help us locating the initial phases of trade and commerce in the region. His account enables us to get the details of commodities popular in trade at that time such as cotton, sugar and opium. Besides his account also tells us about the means of transport and transaction in seventeenth century Bihar.

Peter Mundy visited Patna in the third decade of seventeenth century. He was instructed by his seniors from Surat to go for Patna to renew the experiment terminated unsatisfactorily in 1620-1621 by Hughes and Parker to explore the prospects for trade in the region. Mundy's account enables us to determine the trade potentialities of Patna during that time. He describes Patna as economically a very rich province. His account informs us about the abundance of sugar, grain and cotton in the region. In addition to this, his account helps us in getting idea about the Patna

and its hinterland. Most importantly we get good information about the ports near Patna, like Satgame (Chittagang, 300 koss); Serrepore, near Dacca 160 koss; Heeglee and Peeplee etc. His account also provides us with the price of certain commodities such as quicksilver, vermilion and pepper. Besides his account has some details regarding the political situation in Patna and about the Mughal governor Abdullah Khan.

Edward Terry provides us with a detailed account of the socio-economic aspects of seventeenth century Bihar. Most importantly his account provides us with a description of the staple commodities of the region such as indigo, cotton, silk, velvet etc. He also mentions about the spice trade relation with Java, Sumatra and Malacca. Fray Sebastian Manrique visited India during the time of Shahjahan. From his Account we get detailed geographical account of Patna as situated at the north of the river Ganges and with a population of over 200,000 at the time of his visit in 1629-1643. Jean Baptiste Tavernier's account first informs us about the Dutch Factory in Chapra region, situated on the right bank of the river Ganges ten koss above Patna. His account further tells us about other important rivers of the region used for waterways such as Punpun and Gandak.

Manucci also helps us in understanding the distance of the regions of that period; he took four days to reach Patna through water and land routes from Benaras. His account confirms that Patna was a large city by that time and there were two factories, one each of the English and Dutch, functioning for the trade in Saltpetre. His account also gives details of saltpetre that was supplied from Patna and stored in Bengal and from where it was loaded on ships to various parts of Europe. During his time Daud Khan was the governor who had close relation with Dara Shikoh but after being defeated in the war of succession he sided with Aurangzeb.

We get very useful information about the functioning of the customhouses in the seventeenth century from the accounts of Thevenot. He had visited Bihar in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. His account gives us detail about the duty paid in the customhouses by various people. Thevenot had to pay 3 ½ percent and Hindus had to pay 5 percent as duty.

John Marshall's account helps us in knowing the exact details about the location of Patna and its neighborhood. He informs us that Jehanabad factory was ½ coss away from Singhiya, a prominent trading region of the period.

Thomas Bowry's account identified Patna as a 'tributarie to the Emperors of Hindostan.' Patna was commercially a very active region, a threshold to Bengal and Orissa. Commodities were imported through land from north to Patna and exported through the river.

The other important body of primary sources used is the English Factory Records which provide details of business dealings which the English had. They also are a valuable supplement to the travel accounts. Though in case of Bihar there is no substantial information available in the Factory Records for the first half of the seventeenth century, as there was no significant initiative taken till the 1640s by the English. But there is complete record of the next twenty years of the substantial increase in English trade activities. Since the latter duration of the seventeenth century saw the beginnings of a crisis of the Empire, there are also references in these records regarding the current political situation and of its effects on the larger establishments of foreign trade and commerce.

CHAPTER I

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES AND THE GROWTH OF EUROPEAN TRADE IN BIHAR

In India the seventeenth century manifested itself in the expansion of large-scale maritime trade and commerce, and thus constituted an important period in medieval Indian history in general and in the history of medieval Bihar in particular.¹ The close contact with European mercantile nations, specifically the English, proved to be a deciding factor in the history of India by the end of the seventeenth century. For Bihar the large-scale trade and commerce carried on by Europeans, particularly the English proved to be important and connected her economy to international trade. Politically this period witnessed the firm consolidation of the Mughal rule in the eastern

¹ Historiography on seventeenth century India suggests that the first half of seventeenth century was a prosperous phase in the Indian history. It was to a large extent due to a stable political situation provided by the Mughal rule which stimulated to economic growth. But the situation was reversed in second half of the seventeenth century. There were some inherent as well as external problems creeping into Mughal rule which ultimately brought the downfall of the Mughal Empire. [For details see Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: Society, The Jagirdari Crises and The Village*, Delhi, 1997 (First Published 1982); Irfan Habib *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, Bombay, 1963 etc.] But in case of Bihar there appears to have been a different situation at work. There was a long spell of inactivity in the first half of the seventeenth century. But, the second half witnessed vibrant commercial activities in the region with the Europeans expanding their

provinces of Empire under the three great Mughals: Jahangir (1605-1628), Shah Jahan (1628-1658) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707).

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TRADING ROUTES, CENTRES AND ITEMS OF TRADE

In the seventeenth century a regular trade was carried on between India and the West by means of three main routes: by sea to the Arabian Coast at Aden and from there to Cairo and Alexandria; the second was sea route to the Persian Gulf and from there by land to Aleppo and on to the Levantine ports, and the third was the overland by Kandahar to the cities of Persia and Turkey.² During this period the chief operating ports in South Asian region were:

1. Lahari Bunder in Sindh.
2. Gujarati ports like Surat, Broach and Cambay.
3. Bassien and Dabul in the Ratnagiri district.
4. Ports like Nagapattanam, Masulipattanam on the east coast.
5. Malabar ports like Cochin and Calicut.
6. Bengal ports like Satgaon, Sonargaon and Chittagong.

trade, and there was one item of trade, saltpetre, which really played a crucial role in bringing the regional economy.

² C.J. Hamilton, *The Trade Relations between England and India (1600-1896)*, Delhi, 1977, p.5

Throughout the Mughal period India continued to trade with countries of Asia and Europe. When the English East India Company obtained a monopoly of the English trade between the Cape of Good Hope and the eastern waters in 1600, it found that the Indian cloths and calicoes were in far greater demand in the islands of the Archipelago than the English woollens. Therefore it decided to send ships to Surat to load with cottons which could be used as a means to purchase the pepper and spices of the islands.³ During this period the European trade with the East was largely confined to the dealings in five classes of goods: the spices from the Archipelago and the Spice Islands, the raw silk of Persia, and the saltpetre and indigo of India.⁴ In fact it was indigo which was the most important European import from India before the discovery of Indian cotton.⁵ Tavernier provides us with the principal items of trade such as silk, cloths, cotton, spices and drugs. From his account it appears that the raw silk principally obtained from the neighbourhood of Kasimbazar was carried to Gujarat and woven into fabrics chiefly in the towns of Ahmadabad and Surat. Although a considerable quantity of indigo was then produced in Bengal, it was inferior in quality to that of the Agra

³ Ibid. p. 15

⁴ Ibid. pp. 31-2

⁵ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading world of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 330

district. However, describing the range of economic products available in eastern India, Tavernier has the following to say:

Kasimbazar, village in the kingdom of Bengal, can furnish about 22,000 bales of silk annually, each bale weighing 100 livers. ...the silk of Kasimbazar is yellow, as are all the crude silks which came from Persia and Sicily. But the people of Kasimbazar know how to bleach theirs with a lye made of the ashes of a tree which is called Adam's fig, which makes it as white as the silk of Palestine. White cotton cloths come partly from Agra and the vicinity Lahore, partly from Bengal... There is lastly the indigo of Bengal which the Dutch Company conveys to Masulipatnam; But this indigo and that of Burhanpur and Ahmadabad can be bought cheaper by 30 percent than that of Agra.⁶

A fair quantity of the finer cotton cloths and small quantity of manufactured silk goods were imported. The East India Company's purchases of cotton goods were made not for import into England, but for the markets of the further East and Persia. India indeed possessed almost a monopoly in the manufacture of cotton goods.⁷

⁶ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*. Vol. II, (tr.) V.

Ball, and (ed.) William Crooke, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 2-8

⁷ C.J. Hamilton, *The Trade Relations*, p. 32

The cloths were sent in large quantities to the Archipelago to be exchanged for spices, and to Surat and from there to Persia where they found a ready market.⁸

Peter Mundy provides us with the list of some important ports of that period in the eastern provinces⁹:

1. 'Satgame' (Chittagong)
2. 'Serrepore', near to Dacca
3. 'Heeglee' (Hugli)
4. 'Peeplee' (Pipli)
5. 'Horsepor' (Harishpur)
6. 'Manikpatan'

SHIFT FROM THE WEST COAST TO THE EAST COAST

Surat continued to be the chief centre of European trade in India in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁰ The principal trade from Surat to Europe then consisted of indigo, saltpetre and silk and cotton goods.¹¹ By the middle of the seventeenth century the position

⁸ Ibid. p. 28

⁹ Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1608-1667*, Vol. II, (ed.) R.C. Temple, London, 1914, pp. 152-153

¹⁰ C. J. Hamilton. *The Trade Relations*, p.21

¹¹ Ibid. pp. 21-22

of the trade at Surat was at a low ebb. The severe wars of the Indian rulers, the tussle between the Dutch against English threatened the whole set up. In the latter half of the century, however, the situation improved and the position of Europeans specifically that of the English trade was placed on a stronger foundation.¹² But the attempt to develop the East coast of India as an alternative to Surat was the result of a devastating famine in Gujarat in 1630s.¹³ The establishment of trade in Bengal, the discovery that Madras calicoes were better suited to European markets than those of Gujarat and the decay of indigo trade for which Surat was the principal seaport, all these combined to bring the east coast into prominence which it was to retain for many years.¹⁴

Initially the Surat factors were reluctant to start English trade in Bengal. They were attracted by the productivity and fertility of the land, but had reservations about opening a factory because of various constraints since English goods, particularly cloth, had no prospective market in Bengal. Despite various perceived hazards in the English trade in Bengal, a dominant consideration was that the

¹² Ibid. p. 29

¹³ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company*, London, 1965, p. 71

¹⁴ W.H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb: A Study in Indian Economic History*, Delhi, 1972, pp. 98-99

Portuguese power was losing its grip everywhere. Therefore, there was a growing urgency of entering into trade with Bengal, which was marked contrast to the previous indifference. It is evident in some letters of this time. 'If any innovation or hopes of trade to Bengala shall occure,' wrote William Metholed from Masulipatam to Roe, 'it cannot but be somewhat helpful to our proceedings.'¹⁵ But Thomas Kerridge, President of Surat Factory, discounted the idea on the ground that, Bengal being a 'whott [hot] country', its inhabitants mostly 'very poore Gentiles' and its seacoast controlled by the Dutch and the Portuguese.¹⁶ In 1623 the English had obtained the firman from Jahangir. According to the agreement between English and Jahangir, the English were granted the right of free trade throughout the Mughal Empire. They were promised freedom of trade in the ports, 'Surat, Cambay, and Bengala.'¹⁷ By this time, the Dutch had already started operating in the Bay of Bengal. In 1627 they had made their way into the interiors of three provinces viz., Bengal, Orissa and Bihar.¹⁸ By the end of Jahangir's reign they had already secured a good position in Bengal. The Dutch had the advantage of

¹⁵ William Foster, (ed.) *The Embassy of Thomas Roe to the Court of Great Mogul*.

London, 1899, pp. 175-8

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 180-83

¹⁷ William Fosters (ed.) *English Factories in India*, (Hereafter *EFI*), 1618-69, Oxford, 1906-27, 1622-23, p. 309

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 185

large number of ships and ready capital to invest and their mastery of the trade of the Far East.¹⁹ By 1630, the Dutch Coromandel factories acquired a pivotal position in the Company's trade with the countries round the Bay of Bengal. After getting a firm foothold on the coast, the Dutch now extended their activities to Bengal, Orissa and Bihar.²⁰ It was a deliberate policy of Shah Shuja's government to grant *firman*s to the Europeans allowing them to trade in Bengal.²¹ In 1641, the Dutch had a prosperous trade with Pipli. In 1653, they erected their fort at Chinsura. The factories in Bengal were placed under the authority of the Coromandel government. In the year 1655 a separate directorate was created for Bengal.²² The decline of the Portuguese and the limited resources of the English Company enabled the Dutch to secure for themselves a predominant position in the trade of Bengal and Bihar. The expulsion of the Portuguese by the Mughal forces in 1633-36 provided the Dutch with an opportunity to establish their trade in the interiors of the Bengal and Bihar.²³ They obtained royal firman to trade in the region from the Emperor Shah Jahan. By the middle of the seventeenth century they

¹⁹ *EFI*, 1655-60, p. 6

²⁰ *EFI*, 1630-33, p. 209

²¹ K. M. Karim, *The Province of Bihar and Bengal under Shah Jahan*, Dacca, 1974, pp. 180-81

²² *Ibid.* pp. 174-75

²³ *EFI*, 1634-36, p. 146

were well settled with a good organisation and large capital. They had their factories at Patna, Chapra, Hajipur and Fatuwah in Bihar. The main items of trades were saltpetre and opium.²⁴ The foreign travellers visiting this region during that period had acknowledged the importance of Dutch traders.²⁵ In addition to their chief factory at Patna they had subordinate factories at Chapra and Daulatgunj for saltpetre. At Fatuwah, Baikunthpur and Lakhwara there were factories for textiles, and in Hajipur there was a factory of opium.²⁶ Throughout the seventeenth century the Dutch maintained their prime position in the export of saltpetre from Bihar. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Dutch were in a comparatively better position than the English regarding the saltpetre trade and the equipment of factories. Tavernier says that the Dutch used to take silk from Kasimbazar for Japan and Holland.²⁷ They used to carry it by the canal connecting it with the Ganges to Hugli from where they exported to Europe. It has been noticed that the Dutch were in a fairly good position so far as their saltpetre trade was concerned. They had a depot at Chapra in Bihar from where they sent saltpetre to Hugli. For refining saltpetre, the Dutch used to import boilers

²⁴ K. M. Karim. *The Province of Bihar and Bengal*, pp. 175-76

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 440

²⁶ *EFI*, 1637-39, p. 207

²⁷ Tavernier, *Travels in India*, vol. II, p. 2

from Holland. Apart from all these, they used to carry Bengal indigo to Masulipatam and gumlac to Persia.²⁸

The years 1618-21 saw the English making serious efforts to open trade with eastern India. Robert Hughes and John Parker, two factors of the Company, were sent to Patna to erect a factory there and to explore further possibilities of silk trade with Bengal.²⁹ They were also charged with the specific job of requiring emerti (*Ambati*) calicoes and other cotton goods. On June 5, 1620, Hughes started from Agra, without any merchandise but with bills of exchange to the value of Rs. 4,000. At Patna Hughes found large quantities of raw silk which was brought in boats from Bengal, but the wastage and cost of transport to Agra rendered the purchase of raw silk at Patna unprofitable and as late as August 1621, he and Parker were directed to purchase 100 maunds of Bengal silk.³⁰ Hughes found the Portuguese busy with their business there.³¹ But they could not establish anything substantial there in the initial five to six years stay. Hence, the factors were ordered in June 1626 to dissolve the factory and return to their headquarters. Accordingly they left Bihar

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-18

²⁹ *EFI*, 1618-21, p.116

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. xxiii-xxiv

³¹ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, p. 360

in September 1626. Thus the mission of Hughes and Parker failed, not because of local difficulties, but because of orders of withdrawal issued by the controlling authorities of the English Company in India. This, however, did not stop the English contact with Bihar. Patna goods continued to be produced at Agra from Bihar traders. Twelve years later another attempt was made in this direction. In August 1632 the chief of Agra sent Peter Mundy to Patna. He succeeded in selling some quick silver and vermillion and after a stay of two months returned to Agra and corroborated the report of Hughes and Parker.³² Though two attempts of the English to effect settlements in Bihar and Bengal from the north were not successful, they proved to be beneficial in the long run. It was on the basis of their experiences about their well-established rivals viz. the Portuguese and the Dutch, products, people and polity of the area, they were successful in establishing settlements in Bengal and Bihar from the south. The grant of the 'golden firman' in 1632, giving liberty of trade with all the ports in the territory of the king of the Golconda, led the English at Masulipatam to send an expedition to develop the coastal trade northward. The capture of the Hugli in July 1632 and the general ouster of the Portuguese from Bengal by the order of the emperor Shah Jahan further enhanced the chance of the

³² Ibid. pp. 360-61

English.³³ Soon after the decline of the Portuguese power in Bengal, the English started their trade there. Even during the supremacy of the Portuguese power, the English were making strong efforts to open trade in Bengal, but it was in 1650 that the Company could establish any business of a permanent nature over there. The actual date of the establishment of the Patna factory is uncertain. A settlement was probably made after the foundation of the Hugli factory in 1651.

The English first succeeded in opening regular trade on the east coast during the third decade of the seventeenth century. The first opening of trade, however, was organised not by the factory at Surat but by Masulipatam. A regular attempt to open trade with Bengal seems to have commenced with the voyage of the 'Hopewell' dispatched in July 1631 under the charge of Thomas Robinson who was detailed from Masulipatam. The enterprise 'fayled of its expected success, yet proved not altogether frute lessae, having thereby laid a good beginning to a future hopeful trade.'³⁴

The advance of the English from the Coromandel coast up to the Bay of Bengal was primarily due to the enterprise of local officers. The

³³ B. P. Saxena. *History of Shah Jahan of Dihli*, Allahabad, 1973, p. 106

³⁴ *EFI*, 1630-33, pp. 182, 198, 203

English faced the famine of 1630 in the Coromandel coast. Its scourge ravaged the whole tract of land from Gujarat to Golconda coast. The high prices of foodstuffs, the general dearth of piece goods on account of the mortality among weavers and workers made the cheaper commodities of Bengal and Bihar very desirable. Further, the capture of Hugli by the Mughal forces in September 1632 and the supposed intention of the emperor to stamp out Portuguese trade in Bengal, led the Masulipattam factors to conclude that a particularly favourable opportunity had offered itself for planting English trade in those parts.³⁵ The English were very hopeful of their trading prospect in the region. They sailed up to the Hugli in a country junk and laid the foundation of a factory between the Dutch settlement at Chinsurah and the Portuguese settlement at Bandel. The trade seems to have been so profitable that in 1627 the Council at Batavia advised that 67, 000 lbs. in spice be sent to Masulipattam to be invested in country cloths to be exchanged for spices in Batavia. The English position at Masulipattam was nevertheless far from satisfactory. The Dutch placed every difficulty in their way. If the English obtained authority for their trade from the court of Golconda, the Dutch had the influence of the local governors on their side.³⁶ In spite of these difficulties and firmans

³⁵ *EFI*. 1630-33. p. xxx

³⁶ *Ibid* pp. 25-26

granted at short intervals by the kings of Golconda, the agent of the English company at Masulipatam succeeded in getting some more suitable centres for the establishment of the East India Company's trade. Eight Englishmen set out in a native junk and reached Harishpur in 1633. The English leader, Cartwright, obtained from the Muslim Governor of Orissa Aqa Muhammad Zaman³⁷ an order granting him liberty to trade and to export free of customs duties at any port in Orissa and to purchase ground upon which to build a factory at Harishpur. In the same year a factory was founded at Balasore. They placed their agent at Masulipatam and sent a vessel, just arrived from England, with a cargo chiefly composed of broadcloth and lead as a means to open up trade. The English goods proved unsaleable and the founders of the new settlement mostly perished of fever. At the same time, the Portuguese from Chittagong Coast and the Dutch from the Coromandal coast attempted to crush at the outset any efforts on the part of the English to develop trade in Orissa.³⁸ In 1639 at Madraspatam, close to the Portuguese station of San Thome, the English built a fort and also got exemptions from all customs duties.³⁹ The settlement at Balasore dragged out a bare existence until 1641. A ship belonging to the Company was ordered

³⁷ *EFI*, 1634-36, pp. 12. 204

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 30

³⁹ *EFI*, 1637-39, p. 27

to go and bring away the remaining factors. These orders, however, were not carried out due to the interference of Francis Day, the founder of Madras. He visited Balasore in 1642 and decided that it should not be abandoned, since in his view there was good prospect of a regular and profitable coastal trade between the Coromandal coast and Bengal in which the Company could take part. Meanwhile Norris, one of the factors at Masulipatam, had been sent to the port of Pipli to take advantage of the firman granted by Shah Jahan and he reported that an indefinite quantity of fine cloths could be purchased in Bengal suitable for the Persian and Southern markets.⁴⁰ In 1642, Madras was recognised as the chief factory of the Company on the Coromandal Coast. The trade of the Coromandal Coast was steadily increasing. In 1650 the Madras Council decided to utilize the port of Balasore for the purpose of sending cargoes in native boats along the coast to Hugli. With the help of Gabriel Boughton, the surgeon to the Mughal viceroys of Bengal, the English obtained in return for presents amounting to Rs. 3,000 a license free trade in the province. A factory was founded in Hugli and trade opened up in sugar, silk and saltpetre.⁴¹ The Dutch had already a settlement on the Coromandal coast at Pulicat, and when the English in 1611 attempted to open up trade at that place, they were refused

⁴⁰ *EJI*, 1637-39, p. 31

⁴¹ *EJI*, 1633-36, pp. 30-31

permission by the local rulers on the ground that exclusive privileges had already been granted to the Dutch. They succeeded, however, in obtaining permission to trade at Pettapoli, now known as Nizampatam, where they left factors, thus founding the first English settlement on the Bay of Bengal.⁴² The President at Surat obtained a firman in 1634 from the Emperor Shah Jahan, granting of the English liberty to trade in the province of Bengal without any other restriction than that their ships should resort only to the port of Pipli.⁴³

But the immediate cause for the shifting of the English to Bengal is attributed to the great scarcity of cloth and provisions at Masulipatam due to the 'miserable tymes full fraught with the Calamitie of Wars, pestilence, and famine in the 1630 at the Coromandal coast' and secondly, to the total expulsion of Portuguese from Bengal in 1632.⁴⁴

The English opened up their trade in the Bay of Bengal by establishing factories at Hariharpur and at Balasore in 1631 when the '*Hopewell*' with Thomas Robinson aboard was sent from

⁴² *EFI*, 1618-21, pp. 53-57

⁴³ *EFI*, 1633-36, pp. 29-30

⁴⁴ *EFI*, 1630-33, p. 182

Masulipattam to Bengal but returned within three months owing to bad weather.⁴⁵ The second attempt was made in 1632 when the *Pearl* with Thomas Woodson was sent into Bengal with a Cargo of lead, quicksilver, vermilion and cloth to be exchanged for rice, butter and cloth. This ship also could not finish her voyage and came back to Masulipattam.⁴⁶ The third attempt was made in 1633. Agent John Norris of Masulipattam sent Ralph Cart Wright, Thomas Colley and six other Englishmen into Bengal on a country vessel to open up trade there.⁴⁷ The last English attempt made in this direction from Masulipattam in April-May 1633 met with success. On October 25, 1634, the factors from Bengal informed the company that goods sold there were extremely cheap and good. While cloth was very cheap and powdered sugar was being sold at 2-½ d. a pound including all the charges. The factors also felt that their goods including broad cloth, spices, tobacco, iron, tin and sundry other goods could be disposed of there with a good margin of profit.⁴⁸

Writing about the various commodities available at Bengal, the English factors informed that, 'Bengal is a rich province, Raw silk is

⁴⁵ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, p. 361

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 2

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 23

⁴⁸ *EFI*, 1634-36, pp. 41-42

abundant. The saltpetre is very cheap and of best quality. Our operations are growing so extensive that we shall be obliged to build new and large warehouses.⁴⁹ Thomas Bowery has painted a colourful picture of Bengal trade.

It is one of the largest and most Potent Kingdoms of Hindostan, blessed with many fine Rivers that Issue out into the Sea or Gulph of Bengala, vizt. Between Point Palmeris (the Entrance thereof) and the Arackan Shore, the whole Extent of the Bay being about 300 English miles Over, Some of which are navigable both for great and Small Ships, together with many other conveniences. This Kingdome is now become most famous and Flourishinge. First for the great River of Ganges and the many large and faire arms thereof, Upon the banks of which are Seated many faire Villages, delicate Groves and Fruitefull lands, affordinge great plenty of sugars, Cottons, Lacca, honey, beeswax, butter, Oyles, Rice, Gramme, with Other beneficiall Commodities to Satisfie this and many other Kingdoms⁵⁰

⁴⁹ C.R. Wilson. *The Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, Vol. I. Delhi. 1983. p.33

⁵⁰ Thomas Bowery. *A Geographical Account of the Countries Round the Bay of Bengal*. (ed.) R. C. Temple. London. 1905. pp. 133, 135

The English also obtained patent from Shah Shuja for custom free trade in these provinces in lieu of the annual payment of Rs. 3,000.⁵¹ The English merchants successfully obtained the permission for duty free trade from the Nawab of the Orissa province, Aga Muhammad Zaman.⁵² They got permission to export, free of customs, at any port of Orissa, and to purchase ground, build factories etc. In the very next year 1634 the English obtained a firman from Emperor Shah Jahan, giving them liberty to trade in the whole of Bengal, but retaining their ships into the port of Pipli at the mouth of the Subarnarekha river.⁵³ Thomas Bowery has given an interesting account of the trade of Balasore.⁵⁴

...it is noe better then a very wild Open bay that Extendeth it selfe from Point Conjaguaree to Palmeris; the River is called Haraspoore. Here are considerable quantities of Callicoes made and Sold to the English and Dutch, but are first brought over land to them to their Factories in Balasore, in the bay of Bengala.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *EFI*, 1650-54, p. xxvii

⁵² C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals*, Vol. I, p. 8

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 11-12; *EFI*, 1634-36, pp. 12, 204

⁵⁴ Thomas Bowery, *A Geographical Account*, pp. 231-32

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 129-30

Patna was known for cotton goods in the seventeenth century. Peter Mundy has furnished a list of three types of the cottons: (a) Khasas, (b) Emerties (Ambarties) and (c) Hamam.⁵⁶ Among these the Emerti (Ambarti)⁵⁷ cloth was much in demand and in order to procure this the East India Company had sent Robert Hughes, a factor in 1620.⁵⁸ It was during this period that the English Surgeon Gabriel Boughton achieving significant medical feats had found great favour with the Imperial house at Agra. He enjoyed a very warm relationship with Prince Shuja, the viceroy of Bengal and Orissa in 1645.⁵⁹ It was under these favourable circumstances that the East India Company resolved to establish factories in the Gangetic valley of Bengal and Bihar. The '*Lioness*', under Captain Brookhaven, dispatched for the very purpose from Britain in 1650, reached Balasore via Madras by the end of the year. The Captain stayed back and deputed James Bridgeman, Stephens and others to proceed to arrange for obtaining 'silke' from Bengal and 'petre' from 'Patenna' (Patna).⁶⁰ The first English factory at Hugli was established in the beginning of the year

⁵⁶ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, pp. 114, 361

⁵⁷ Emerti (Ambarti) cloth was stout close calico of narrow width, produced cheaply and in large quantities at Patna. K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*, p. 504

⁵⁸ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, p. xxviii

⁵⁹ Tavernier, *Travels in India*, pp. 143-46

⁶⁰ R. Barlow, and H. Yule, (ed.) *The Diary of Sir William Hedges During His Agency in Bengal*, Vol. II. London. 1887-90, pp. 184-80

1651 and soon subordinate agencies were also established at Cassimbazar, Rajmahal and Patna.⁶¹

In the year 1658 the organisation of factories at Patna including other sub-agencies in the eastern region took place.⁶² There was saltpetre establishment at Singhee (modern Shinghya) near Lalgunj, 12 miles north of Patna.⁶³ In the meantime, Bihar and Patna gained importance on account of cheap but fine quality of its saltpetre.⁶⁴ Job Charnock was the chief of Patna at that time.⁶⁵

Regarding the volume of trade in that period there are some problem inherent to the prevailing system of keeping record. Moreland explained the difficulties in assessing the accurate details of export in the seventeenth century. Since there were many trading companies such as Portuguese, Dutch and English and all of them had different method of record keeping. Moreover there is confusion regarding how much quantity was exported from India to Europe for, vessels

⁶¹ J. Bruce. *Annals of the Hon'ble East India Company*. Vol. I, p.532. cited in Sheela Shaha and D. N. Shaha. *The European Trading Companies in Bihar*, New Delhi, 1996, p.7

⁶² *EPI*, 1655-60, pp. 142, 189-90

⁶³ *Ibid.* pp. 213-5

⁶⁴ C.R. Wilson. *The Early Annals*, Vol. I, pp. 45-46

⁶⁵ R. Barlow, and H. Yule, (ed.) *The Diary of Sir William Hedges*, Vol. II, pp. 45-46



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carrying trading items used to visit many other countries before reaching to their destinations in Europe. This problem is very acute in the records of Dutch as Dutch ship used to visit Batavia and other places after taking items of trade from India and then collecting all merchandise from other countries they finally reach to Europe. But there are no separate, country wise, tabulation of details of merchandise collected. Interestingly this difficulty is not there with the English trade. There are accurate entries for each country and its articles exported to Europe. On the basis of English Factory Records it is clear that the western coast of India was more efficient than eastern coast in the first half of the seventeenth century. There was annual export of about 2 to 3 lakh of rupees from western coast in the first half of the seventeenth century whereas from eastern coast it was nil. When trade extended to the eastern coast a substantial amount of export was carried on to Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. The trade export ratio of both the coast was about 2:1 and 5:3. The period 1620 to 1648 saw the annual export of about 2.5 to 3.5 lakh of rupees. There was considerable increase in the volume of trade in 1649 to 1660.⁶⁶ In this period annual export was about 3.5 to 8 lakh of rupees. Since it is very difficult to separate the details of trade articles all over so these export detail are strictly

⁶⁶ Moreland, *Akbar to Aurangzeb*, p.104

on the account of the three main articles i.e. textile, indigo and saltpetre.⁶⁷

BIHAR IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW OF ITS POLITICAL HISTORY

Akbar constituted Bihar as one of the subahs of Mughal Empire in 1580 AD.⁶⁸ The boundary of the subah as stated in the *Ain-i-Akbari* was as follows:

Its length from Gadhi to Rohtas was 120 koss; its breadth from Tirhut to the northern mountains, 110 koss. On its eastern boundary is Bengal; to the west lie Allahabad and Oudh. On the north and south it is bounded by hills of considerable elevation. Its chief rivers are the Ganges and the Son.⁶⁹

The Subah contained seven sarkars (Tirhut, Hajipur, Saran, Champaran, Monghyr, Bihar and Rohtas) and one hundred ninety

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 96-107; K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*, pp. 530-33

⁶⁸ Abul Fazl. *Akbar Namah*, Vol. III, (tr.) H. Beveridge. (Bibliotheca Indica), Calcutta, 1939, p. 413

⁶⁹ Abul Fazl. *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. II, (tr.) H. S. Jarret, 2nd edn. Revised by Jadunath Sarkar. Calcutta. 1978. (First published. 1949), p. 162

nine parganas, and yielded a gross revenue of over 22 crore dams or over 25 lakh rupees.⁷⁰

138 parganas out of 199, paid revenue in cash.⁷¹ Under Aurangzeb, as noticed by Bernier, Bihar contained eight sarkars and two hundred and forty five parganas and yielded a revenue of about 96 lakh rupees.⁷² Even after the subjugation of eastern provinces in 1576 by Akbar these regions were reluctant to accept the suzerainty of Mughals. Bihar witnessed the outbreak of serious revolt against emperor Akbar in 1580. The regulation concerning the branding of horses introduced by Shahbaz Khan while he was Mir Bakshi caused the initial dissatisfaction. The new system of financial reforms which required a through investigation into the titles of jagirdars, and religious innovations which alienated the orthodoxy, and the somewhat strict enforcement of the new regulations brought about a rebellion in the province in 1580. However, it was suppressed with a strong hand and order restored in the province of Bihar.⁷³ Akbar's death in 1605 aggravated their rebellious feelings. It virtually

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 163

⁷¹ Aniruddha Ray, *Transformation of Bihar European (Chiefly French) Discourse (Late 16th to Early 19th Century)*, Darbhanga, 2003, p. 20

⁷² Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-68*, (tr. & ed.) Archibald Constable, Delhi, 1972, p. 457

⁷³ Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, (ed.) *The Cambridge Economic History Of India*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1984, pp. 177-78

conferred upon Jahangir the whole task of consolidating these regions. After so many failures finally Jahangir succeeded in establishing Mughal ascendancy in the region and appointed Islam Khan as the subadar of the region.⁷⁴

Jahangir figures prominently in the history of Bihar since the closing years of sixteenth and the beginning of seventeenth centuries. In 1600 when he as a prince rebelled against Akbar he came to Allahabad and making it as a base seized the eastern provinces. He was in control of all the regions up to Hajipur and Patna. He took for himself more than 30 lakhs of the khalsa revenue in Bihar. He made extensive grants of land in Bihar to his favourites during his stay there.⁷⁵ After his accession Bihar remained one of the independently administered provinces of the Mughal empire. It is said that in the first decade of the seventeenth century, Mahru-un-Nisa (Nur Jahan), the then widow of the Sher Afaghan, the faujdar of Burdwan, passed through Darbhanga on her way to Delhi after the death of her husband. Local tradition still associates with this visit the construction of Noor Sarai and of a royal mosque there. The English

⁷⁴ Ala-al-Din Ishpahani, *Baharistan-i-Ghayabi*, (tr.) M. I. Borah, 2 vols. Gauhati, 1936 records the history of Bengal, Bihar and the Kingdoms of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup from 1608 to 1624.

⁷⁵ R.R. Diwakar, *Bihar Through the Ages*, Patna, 1958, p. 491

looked to Muqarrab Khan as one of their best friends.⁷⁶ He was governor of the province of Bihar and had good contact with the English traders at Surat. He was fond of tapestry curtains, broad cloth, looking glasses, swords and small arms. The English sold most of the goods to him.

Like his father Jahangir, the rebel Prince Khurram also came to Eastern Provinces for seeking support and raising funds. Khurram also like his father made extensive grants of land in Bihar to different persons. Mirza Murad, the eldest son of Mirza Rustam Savi with the surname of Masud Fidai, one of the governors of Bihar, settled at Patna where he built a mansion on the banks of the Ganges.⁷⁷ During the period of Shah Jahan's rule (1628-1658) Bihar continued to remain a separate province under a governor. One of the governors of Bihar, in the early years of his reign was Saif Khan, who proved to be a highly successful administrator. His governorship of nearly four years (1628-1632) was a period of peace, prosperity and splendour for the province. He constructed lofty public buildings at Patna. Peter Mundy refers to the Madarsa and the mosque attached to it, which Saif Built. The Madrasa was regarded as a great seat of learning and its principal was esteemed and looked

⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 491-92

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 493

upon as an authority on Muslim law. It was during Saif's regime that two Brahmin Pandits of Mithila, who were the ancestors of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, gave a display of their remarkable memories and intellectual powers at the Imperial court at Agra for which they were richly rewarded.

Bihar continued to remain a separate Province under a governor during the period of Aurangzeb's rule. The Cheros of Palamu rose in rebellion but their rebellion was suppressed by Bihar Nazim- Daud Khan Quraishi in December, 1664. He founded a town in this district This new city came to be known as Daudnagar after the name of the governor and it became a centre of trade and industry. It was during the governorship of Ibrahim Khan (1668-1673) that a terrible famine occurred in Bihar in 1670-71 AD Thomas Bowery and John Marshall have given graphic description of the sufferings of the people of Bihar.

Notwithstandinge Pattana be soe fertile to afford graine to Such a plentifull countrey as Bengala, yett in the yeare of our Lord 1670 they had as great a Scarcitie, in soe much that one Pattana Seere weight of rice (the plentifullest graine in the country) was Sold for one rupee the Seere containing onely 27 Ounces, and, in a few months, there was none at all to be had at that rate,

in soe much that many thousands of the Natives perished in the Streets and open fields for want of food, and many glad to Sell their own children for a handfull of rice.⁷⁸

In latter end of May 1671 there dyed of Famine in Pattana about 100 persons dayly and had so for 3 or 4 months, corne was then (vizt.) Wheate 2 ½ Rupees per maund... Merchants in Pattana threw themselves into a common well and drowned themselves...⁷⁹

While Safi Khan was the governor of Bihar (1680-82) the rebellion of Ganga Ram and that of Raja Rudra Singh of Bhojpur occurred but these were suppressed. While north Bihar was directly under Mughal authority, south Bihar still remained outside the purview of Mughal rule. During Sahajahan's reign an attempt was made towards annexing south Bihar. Bhojpur and Palamau were brought under Mughal rule in this attempt. But Palamau was not completely subdued till the time of Aurangzeb.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Thomas Bowery, *A Geographical Account*, pp. 226-27

⁷⁹ John Marshall, *Notes and Observations*, (ed.) S. A. Khan, London, 1927, p. 150

⁸⁰ K. M. Karim, *The Provinces of Bihar and Bengal*, pp. 121-122

BIHAR IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW OF ITS COMMERCIAL ECONOMY

Bihar enjoyed a privileged position on the economic map of India not only because of her geographical situation but also due to its rich commercial potential. Edward Terry visiting India during 1616-1619 found Bihar a 'very fertile province'.⁸¹ In addition to this, the growth of trade fostered the growth of market economy, which helped Patna to grow at a faster pace drawing the merchants and the artisans to the city of Patna. The growing importance of Bihar can be seen from the writings of many travellers visiting during seventeenth century. Pelsaert in the 1620-1627 provided a lucid description of the trade of Agra with the eastern countries. Writing of Patna he informed that it 'yields annually 1000 to 2000 maunds of silk...Patna produces also much muslin, but it is coarse... also shields, which sells well at Agra.'⁸²

In 1629-1643 Manrique found that there were abundant commodities available in the region. Thevenot in 1670s reported the same and stated that

⁸¹ W. Foster. (ed.) *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619*, New Delhi, 1968, p. 295

⁸² Francisco Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India, Being The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*, (ed.) P. Geyl and W.H. Moreland, New Delhi, 1972, p. 2

Patna is a very large Town, lying on the west side of the Ganges in the, where the Dutch have a factory. Corns, sugar, ginger, long pepper, cotton and silk with several other commodities, are plentyfully produced in that countrey, as well as Fruits; and especially the Ananas.⁸³

Patna also received the trans-Himalyan traffic through the Gandak River as well as the overland traffic from the north and the west.⁸⁴ This also shows how the city situated on the bank of the river Ganges could become principal carrier of traffic to the sea. The other reason for its economic vibrancy was the vast hinterland supplying raw material which had a high international demand. As a matter of fact Bihar constituted an important link in India's economic and commercial contact with the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe.⁸⁵ Bihar attracted mercantile Europeans on many counts. All the European travellers who visited Bihar in seventeenth century noticed the economic viability of Bihar.⁸⁶ Bihar was basically known

⁸³ Surendra Nath Sen. (ed.) *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, New Delhi, 1949, p.

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⁸⁴ Aniruddha Ray, *Transformation of Bihar*, p. 18

⁸⁵ R.R. Divakar, *Bihar Through the Ages*, p. 3

⁸⁶ See Appendix-II, in Askari and Almad (ed.) *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. 11, Pt. II, Patna, 1985, pp. 547-567

for its cotton, cotton and silk cloths, sugar, opium spices and a variety of agricultural products, but most importantly it was saltpetre trade which imparted a remarkable importance in that century. Patna was the provincial headquarter and a well recognized international trade mart. Besides there were many other centres of trade, such as Dariapur, Lakhwara, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. Bihar through its capital Patna enjoyed an important place in trade and commerce. Its geographical location proved to be an important link in connecting Bengal and upper India. The Ganges was one of the most important river highways of inland commerce in Eastern India. It was very helpful in transporting boats of merchandise throughout Bengal and catering to the needs of Eastern as well as North Western India. Throughout the seventeenth century all the European trading nations who participated were fascinated with the cheap water transport down the Ganges. It enabled them to facilitate their trade from North Bihar to Calcutta and Chandernagar. Bihar was famous for the manufacture of saltpetre and opium. There were saltpetre producing centres at Patna, Bihar, Saran, Shahbad, Tirhut, Rampur, Khagaul, Sadikpur, Nawada, Bhabua, etc. Opium was one of the most desired product in the region. During Akbar's time it was known as *poppy*.⁸⁷ Besides saltpetre and opium Bihar was also known for its cloth. Patna was well known for calicoes and muslin. The cloth factories

⁸⁷ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. II, pp. 163-64

were situated at Patna, Chapra, Jehanabad, and Singhiya. Apart from that there were indigo and sugar factories at Patna and its nearby places.⁸⁸

Hence there was large-scale trade and commercial activities in the seventeenth century. India was one of the most lucrative trade destinations for all the European trading countries. Availability of cotton, indigo and then saltpetre etc. in large quantity with cheapest cost was the driving force in attracting all trading companies from different European countries. In the first half of the seventeenth century Surat was the main centre of all these commercial activities. But due to some political as well as socio-economic reasons there was a shift from western coast to eastern coast in the second half of the century. This shift from west coast to east coast also shifted the concentration of trade activities and further expanded it along the eastern coast line. Bengal due to its geographical situation at the Bay, silk and other items of trade got wider recognition as a prospective trade centre. Bihar was also discovered as a centre for items like indigo, opium and saltpetre. Besides, there were availability of easy and cheap river way through Ganges made this region very suitable for trade establishment. The elimination of Portuguese in 1632 further enhanced the chance of Dutch and English traders to settle

⁸⁸ Askari and Ahmad. (ed.) *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. II, Part. II, pp. 429-31

down in Bihar. Thus, by the middle of the seventeenth century Bihar became an important trade centre in the eastern region. From 1650s onwards there was large-scale trade activities carried on this region. Consequently in due course of time Bihar emerged as a high profile economic region with its growing trade and commerce.

CHAPTER II

SALTPETRE TRADE: STRUCTURE, ORGANISATION AND VOLUME

Saltpetre was one of the major items of trade in the seventeenth century. The demand for this commodity increased in the seventeenth century due to growing international rivalries among European nations. According to K.N.Chaudhuri saltpetre became a profitable commodity in the second half of the seventeenth century. It was reflected by the difference of price ratio among other goods and of saltpetre as 1:2 and 1:4.¹ Since saltpetre was used widely as an important ingredient to gunpowder, Moreland rightly suggested that the origin of saltpetre trade must be sought in the military history of the Europe.² In the letter of the English East India Company to the Surat factors dated September 12, 1653, provisions of 200 tons of refined saltpetre was required in England but was 'of great expense in those times of warr [war] between them and the State of Holland.'³ The East India Company in a letter of January 28, 1659 awarded the place of honour to saltpetre, for the purchase of which £ 5000 was to be remitted annually to places where that

¹ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 336

² W. H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb: A Study in Indian Economic History*, London, 1923, p. 118

³ *EFI*, 1651-54, p.196

commodity could be brought at rates 40 or 50 percent cheaper than at Hugli.⁴

SALTPETRE: THE PRODUCT

Saltpetre is a kind of artificial salt prepared from nitrates. It was produced mainly through natural processes. It was used extensively for different objects, as an ingredient for gunpowder, in animal dyes like lac and cochineal, for medicinal and antiseptic purposes like preservation of fish and meat, and embellishing food preparations, for manure especially of wheat and tobacco, and in glassmaking, bleaching, washing and cooling purposes.⁵ There is, however, no reference of such use of saltpetre in the writings of merchants, agents etc. of the seventeenth century. Instead there are abundant references to saltpetre as an ingredient for gunpowder, as ballast for ships and for cooling purposes.⁶ We learn from the *Ain-i-Akbari*:

⁴ *EFI*. 1655-60. p. 275

⁵ George Watt, *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India*, London, 1908, pp. 431-47

⁶ J. N. Sarakar, 'The Saltpetre Industry of India in India in the Seventeenth Century (with special reference to Bihar)', *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol.23, 1937, pp. 322-23

Saltpetre, which is gunpowder, produces the explosive heat, is used by his majesty as a means for cooling water, and is thus a source of joy for great and small.⁷

There is the account of Peter Mundy which tells us that saltpetre was widely used as an ingredient for gunpowder and for the preparation of explosives and fireworks. It was also used for cooling drinking water or any other liquid.⁸ From Bernier's account it appears that the poor people could not afford to enjoy the luxury of using saltpetre for cooling water.

...The higher sort of people make use of saltpetre, whether in town or with the army. They pour the water, or any other liquid they may wish to cool, into a tin flagon, round and long-necked, as I have seen, *English* glass bottles. The flaggon is then stirred, for the space of seven or eight minutes, in water into which three or four handfuls of saltpetre have been thrown. The liquid thus becomes very cold and is by no means unwholesome.⁹

⁷ Abul Fazl. *Ain-i-Akbari*. Vol. II (tr.) H. S. Jarret, 2nd edn, corrected and revised by Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta, 1949, p. 55

⁸ Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1608-1667*, Vol. II, (ed.) R. C. Temple, London, 1914, pp. 203-5

⁹ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire AD 1656-1668*, (ed.) Archibald Constable and (tr.) Erving Brocks, New Delhi, 1968, (First Edition, 1819), pp. 356-7, 364

Prior to the seventeenth century European use of saltpetre was confined as saleable ballast. This was of additional advantage to the European Companies which otherwise had to take the uneconomic method of using iron as ballast to make the deep-sea ships seaworthy.¹⁰ The English and the Dutch Companies used it as 'kintledge' or ballast in ships. On January 17, 1643, the Swally factors wrote to the Company that the sea commanders were...

...not only infinitely desirous of such kintledge but the freight thereof is as good as gained unto you whilst in place thereof, and for want of such ponderous goods for stifening, they are necessarily enforced to lay in and carry hence so much ballast.¹¹

Though this was obviously a secondary and incidental use, it appears from the English Factory correspondence that besides saltpetre, sugar was also used as ballast in place of stones, possibly as cloak for saltpetre.¹²

¹⁰ Susil Chaudhuri, *Trade And Commercial Organisation In Bengal, 1650-1720*, Calcutta, 1975, p.160

¹¹ *EFI*, 1642-45, p. 94

¹² *EFI*, 1637-41, p. 198

SALTPETRE: METHOD OF MANUFACTURE AND ITS PRICE

Saltpetre was usually found in villages, which had formerly been inhabited and then abandoned for some years.¹³ It was prepared from three varieties of soils: black, yellow and white; but the black soil, being free from salt or brackishness, yielded the finest saltpetre.¹⁴ It was mined in the form of brown-black dust and washed in the factories by using water and some chemicals. Saltpetre washed only once or twice was supposed to be of inferior quality. This type of saltpetre lost much of its weight while being so processed in the factory. Saltpetre washed thrice was of medium quality and that, which were washed four times, was considered to be the best.¹⁵ The English factor Peter Mundy and the Dutch factor Pelsaert provide us with the method of manufacturing saltpetre in the seventeenth century.¹⁶ The method noted by Peter Mundy is somewhat brief and lacking in important details, compared to that described by Pelsaert. Mundy writes:

¹³ Francisco Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, Being *The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*. (tr.) P. Geyl and W. H. Moreland, Delhi, 1972, p. 46

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 46

¹⁵ Afzal Ahmad, *Portuguese Trade And Socio-Economic Changes on the Western Coast of India*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 137-138

¹⁶ Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, pp. 29-34; Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Voi. II, pp. 153-56

From about 20 course [koss] off they bring a kinde of earth on carts, which is spread abored in places made of purpose, powringe water thereto, which in a few days will cake like ice on the topp. This they take away now and then, and after refine it by boylinge it in water, all durt and trash goeing to the bottome. This is the best saltpetre that is transported out of India to Christendome.¹⁷

Pelsaert gives further details:

Two shallow reservoirs like saltpans are made on the ground, one much larger than the other. The larger is filled with the salt earth and flooded with water from a channel in the ground; the earth is then thoroughly trodden out by numbers of labourers till it is pulverised and forms a thin paste; then it is allowed to stand for two days, so that the water may absorb all the substance. The water is then run off by a large outlet into the other reservoir, where a deposit settles, which is crude saltpetre. This is evaporated in iron pans once or twice, according to the degree of whiteness and purity desired, being skimmed continuously until scarcely any impurities rise. It is then placed in large

¹⁷ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, pp. 76-77

earthen jars, holding 25 to 30 lbs.; a crust forms in the dew the night, and if any impurities are still left, they sink to the bottom; the pots are then broken, and the saltpetre dried in the sun.¹⁸

In the early seventeenth century Francis Buchanan also recorded almost similar procedure of its refining. He tells us that

...selected saline earth, which contained both the salts, and in the usual manner procured from it a dirty brine, such as is commonly made in the operation for obtaining: this was divided into two portions; the one intended to be made into culinary salt was evaporated until near dryness, when it formed a dirty saline mass, that deflagrated on the coals without any description; but still the quantity of muriate of soda that it contains, render it eatable. The other portion of the brine was only evaporated until it showed a tendency to crystallize when dropped on a plate, and was then strained through a cloth and placed to cool, when of course the nitre shot into fine crystals. The brine which remained on being evaporated to dryness, gave a salt much freer from earthy impurities than what was called

¹⁸ Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, p. 46

culinary salt, and it contained a greater proportion of muriate of soda, as when placed on burning coals it not only deflagrated, but decrepitated. In fact, by the usual process employed in making nitre, this brine would have been again boiled and cooled twice, and then the nitre having been mostly separated, the remaining brine would have contained an almost pure muriate of soda, and this in fact is usually procured by the workmen who make nitre, while the muriate that is formed during the first boilings, is removed as it falls to the bottom of the vessels.¹⁹

The refining, in order to remove impurities, was usually done by the Indian methods of evaporation in which earthen vessels were used. The English factors reported in 1652 that they were facing great difficulty in refining for want of copper pans. The Company's agent Greenhill and William Gurney at Fort St. George wrote in 1652 that saltpetre could be obtained in large quantities from Patna to Hugli and Balasore but could not be refined for want of suitable equipment such as copper and pans. Refining in great earthen pots was tedious and troublesome because those pots often broke in the middle of

¹⁹ Francis Buchanan, *An Account Of The District Of Bihar And Patna In 1811-1812*. Vol. II, New Delhi, 1986 (First Published, 1934), pp. 662-663

processing. Due to unavailability of copper pans locally the Company decided to divert to this purpose appliances which had been sent for making sugar at Assada in Madagascar.²⁰ The cost of refining, however, was very small being only $\frac{1}{4}$ of an anna [Rs. 0.01/-] per maund.²¹

There were generally three varieties of saltpetre:

1. the refined one called *dobara-cabessa* or *culmy*,
2. the twice boiled or *dobara* and
3. the crude variety termed *cutckha* or raw.²²

The proper season for making saltpetre probably began after the end of the rains that is about the end of September. John Spiller at Tatta wrote to Surat, on September 8, 1647, 'The chief time of making saltpetre is now approaching, money is needed.'²³ Early in the 19th century November was the time for making saltpetre in Bengal and Bihar.²⁴ The European companies generally exported the refined saltpetre. Refining of saltpetre was necessary for its commercial use.

²⁰ *EFI*, 1651-54, pp. 95-96

²¹ *Bengal Public Consultations*, Range 1, vol. 6, f. 488a, cited in Susil Chaudhuri, 'Saltpetre Trade And Industry In Bengal Subah' in *PIHC*, vol. I, 1973, p. 264

²² *Factory Records, Hugli*, vol. 10, f. 235, cited in *Ibid.* p. 264

²³ *EFI*, 1646-50, p. 152

²⁴ George Watt, *Dictionary of the Economic Products*, p. 434

The best saltpetre for commerce 'well refined in long, neat, and transparent crystals, cooling to the tongue, when applied to it, and flaming much when thrown upon burning coals.'²⁵ Good gunpowder could be made only from well-refined saltpetre while unrefined saltpetre was likely to damage other goods by contact. Further, the letter of the East India Company to Surat, dated April 25, 1653 shows that the charges for freight and customs were the same for refined and unrefined saltpetre.²⁶ Hence the East India Company's authorities in England repeatedly exhorted their factors in India to send only well refined saltpetre of a certain standard, and to reject all below that level. In 1643, the East India Company wrote to the Surat factors that 'if saltpetre be sent, it must be refined up to the assay of prooffe as otherwise it was not worth carriage...' In its letter dated April 25, 1653, the Company complained to the Surat factors of the bad quality of saltpetre lately received, and ordered that in future it should only be sent refined. Similarly in its letter dated September 12, 1653, the Company demanded from Surat 200 tons of refined saltpetre for the Dutch War, and wrote that saltpetre refined at Ahmadabad, though white was very bad, full of salt, and worse by ten percent than Agra saltpetre, and that no Rajapur saltpetre was

²⁵ William Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, Vol. II, London, 1813, p. 238. cited in J. N.

Sarakar, 'The Saltpetre Industry of India', p. 319

²⁶ *EFI*, 1651-54, p. 137

necessary, unless exceptionally well refined.²⁷ It was natural, therefore, for the Company's factors in India to make serious endeavours to have crude saltpetre well refined. About the middle of the seventeenth century (March 29, 1644), there was no 'peterhouse' or saltpetre refinery at Surat, and saltpetre was usually refined at Ahmadabad or Agra. Raw saltpetre of Malpur was refined at Ahmadabad. On March 26, 1644, the Swally Marine factors wrote to the Company, that the unrefined saltpetre of Malpur brought to Ahmadabad would be refined there in the company's 'owne house', and they thus hoped to make it better and cheaper than in the last year. But the sum total of the cost price of raw saltpetre at Malpur, the excessive transit charges, and the cost of refining to the high level of purity desired by the Company rose so much that the Swally Marine factors enquired on November 28, 1644, whether the Company wanted to have further consignments refined to same degree. In spite of high charges, refining was vigorously pursued also at other places, like Raybag, Swally Marine, Masulipatam and Madras.²⁸

Difficulties in refining saltpetre were met with not only in the West coast, but also in Bengal and Bihar. The letter of Captain

²⁷ *EFI*, 1642-45, p. 124; 1651-54, pp. 179, 196

²⁸ *EFI*, 1642-45, pp. 164, 175, 205; 1646-50, pp. 78-9, 186-7, 282; 1651-54, p.22

Brookhaven dated Balasore, December 14, 1650, suggested that the saltpetre procured from Patna was to be refined at Hugli. The need of refining was also emphasised in the letter of the Masulipatam factors to the Company dated February 28, 1651 which noted that a properly equipped refinery would be required in Bengal, if the trade was to be continued. But these suggestions could not be carried into effect, for about that time there seems to have been no refineries at Hugli. The deficiency in the method of adequate refining equipment at Patna was, however, made good during the vigorous superintendence of Job Charnock (1664-80). On September 1, 1665, Mr. Blake in charge of the Bengal establishment at Hugli wrote to Madras that

...the quantity of saltpetre sent home had been much improved of late. What (we) shall this year send up (will) the best that has gone from these parts, of twice boyled, occationed by the convenience of a warehouse which Mr. Charnock had built on the river side neere our petremen that now he veewes all they bring in, if bad returnes it to be then boyled over again. Also, the whole yeare they may be bringing it in by water. So that now, if (we) had moneye, 1000 tonnes might easily yearly be procured.²⁹

²⁹ *EFI*, 1665-67, pp. 138-40

References to prices of saltpetre in this period are not enough to enable us to form an exact estimate of their fluctuations. The price of saltpetre varied from place to place and in the same place in different circumstances.³⁰ The price of saltpetre shows a mixed but general upward trend throughout the period. It is difficult to find out precisely the cost price of saltpetre as it depended on different factors, e.g., the place and time of purchase as also on the variety bought. The saltpetre of Bengal was cheap and of the best quality. In 1650 it's cost at Patna only Rs. 1 a maund and at Hughli Rs. 1.12 including customs and freight charges. At Balasore it was Rs. 2-10 a maund. About 1665-70 the saltpetre at Patna was cheaper than on the West Coast and at Masulipatam. Saltpetre from Rajmahal formed a part of investment for Pegu about the middle of the seventeenth century.³¹ It was natural that when buying at a port the Company's factors had no choice of material and price and had to take any trash they could get at whatever price the seller demanded. During 1651-54 the price of saltpetre at Patna was generally about half of that at Balasore. About 1665-70 the saltpetre of Patna was cheaper than on the west coast and at Masulipatam. But the price seems to have risen from Rs. 1 a mound in 1650 to about Rs. 1-3 in 1679, for early in December 1679 Streyensham Master received from Patna a copy of

³⁰ J. N. Sarkar. 'Saltpetre Industry of India', p.

³¹ *EFI*, 1651-54, p. 111

an invoice of 31 boats laden with 29891 mahmudis³² of saltpetre amounting to Rs. 65791.³³ Referring to Patna, Tavernier writes that the relative price of refined and brown saltpetre was 3:1 and that a maund of saltpetre cost 7 mahmudis³⁴

As noted earlier, the price of saltpetre at Patna in Dec. 1650 was Rs. 1 per maund, while with charges for freight, it amounted to Rs. 1. ¼ anna [Rs. 1. 0.01] at Hugli. But the English bought the same variety for the ships despatched that year at Rs. 1 per maund. In other words, the English had to pay 5 percent more for the commodity during the shipping season. The price at Patna was about 40 to 50 percent cheaper than that in Hugli. In 1659-60 the English factors procured saltpetre at Rs. 1 per maund at Patna which indicates a 12.½ percent rise in price than that in 1650-51. This tremendous increase in the price can only be explained by the competition among the European Companies and their heavy demand. Earlier, only the Dutch Company used to export the commodity from Patna when the English first began trade in saltpetre in 1650-51. Thus the former found saltpetre very cheap. But with the growth of the English trade and the heavy demand by the Europeans on the market, the price

³² The value of 1 *Mahmudi* was about four ninth of a Rupee; Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, p. 211.

³³ *EFI*, 1651-54, p. 55

³⁴ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol. II, (tr.) V. Ball, London, 1889, p. 10

soared accordingly. The other contributory factors for fluctuation in prices appear to be the occasional attempts at monopoly by local rulers as also uncertain weather conditions. It was reported that more saltpetre was procurable in dry seasons than during the rains.

During 1663-64 and 1664-65 the price of saltpetre was Rs. 3 per maund while the refined variety ranged between Rs. 2 to 3. But during 1668-69 to 1675-76 there was a sudden rise to over Rs. 4. In the eighties however, the average price was about Rs. 2 with the lowest figure of Rs. 1.5 in 1682-83. However such fluctuations, did not have any negative impact on the saltpetre trade. Instead the trade in saltpetre continued to grow steadily in upward direction. There was no sign of decrease in the amount procured due to these risks prevailing in that period over trade in saltpetre.

SALTPETRE: ITS PRODUCERS

Saltpetre was generally procured through *assamies* or petersmen to whom money was advanced in the right season.³⁵ Often merchant and middlemen were employed for procuring saltpetre. In May 1683, the Company contracted for 4120 maunds of saltpetre at Rs. 1.5 per

³⁵ *Factory Records, Hugli*, Vol. 10, f.194, cited in Susil Chaudhuri, 'Saltpetre Trade Industry', p. 266

mound with three petermen: 'Bucketmall', 'Mulukchand' and 'Siabray' who had provided all the Company's saltpetre in the previous year, and now gave good security for the fulfillment of the contract.³⁶ In 1684 the Patna factors reported that they dealt with one merchant, named Prevott [Prabhat ?] who would not deal at the same price as the *assamies* on the ground of the trouble given by the *nawab* and his officers.³⁷

The peasants formed one of the most important classes engaged in the production of saltpetre, possibly as a subsidiary occupation, since they, with their cattle, were able to supply whey, one of the essential elements in the production of saltpetre.³⁸ The Dutch factor Pelsaert wrote from his seven years' experience (1620-26) at Agra: 'The peasants have now recognised that the produce is wanted by us as well as by the English...'³⁹ In May 1647, the English factors at Ahmadabad sought to take the consent of the *barahs* or Bohras to allow the English to share with the Dutch.⁴⁰ The saltpetre manufacturers were reported by Job Charnock to be slow in bringing

³⁶ *Factory Records*, Patna, Vol. I, pt. IV, f.18, cited in *Ibid*, p. 266

³⁷ *Factory Records*, Hugli, Vol. 10, f.194, cited in *Ibid*, p. 266

³⁸ J. N. Sarkar, 'The Saltpetre Industry', p. 341

³⁹ Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, p.46

supplies and careless as regards to the quality. He attributed this to the fact that he did not have the power to imprison or punish the manufacturers.⁴¹

SALTPETRE TRADE IN BIHAR

Saltpetre was obtained from various parts of India. In the first half of the seventeenth century Coromandal coast, Gujarat and Agra were the main regions of saltpetre procurement. Ajmer was also one of the important centres for saltpetre manufacture.⁴² However, the most important and substantial producing region for saltpetre was neither in the north nor in the south but was concentrated in the areas near Patna.⁴³ Bihar saltpetre was both cheaper and of better quality than the other parts of India. Moreover, its transportation to the seaports was made much easier by the proximity of the Ganges to the source of supplies.⁴⁴ Up to 1650 there was very moderate volume of trade carried on by the traders their exports rising not more than 50 tons.

⁴⁰ *EFI*, 1646-50, p. 127. (These Bohras were probably not Shias or Ismailis, but Sunnis—essentially peasants, sturdy, thrifty and excellent cultivators. They continued to prepare saltpetre even up to 1825.

⁴¹ *EFI*, 1670-77, p. 354

⁴² Devenot and Careri, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, (ed.) S. N. Sen, Delhi, 1949, p. 14

⁴³ K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*, p. 337

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 337

From 1620s to the 1640s the trade in saltpetre was generally between 30 to 40 ton in volume in a year.⁴⁵ The establishment of Dutch and English factories at Patna was followed by a remarkable expansion of the trade, increased facilities for supply coinciding apparently with an enhanced demand in Europe. Though Moreland expressed his doubt on the exactness of the amount of the volume demanded but it was reported that in 1653 the English Company ordered 200 tons.⁴⁶ Saltpetre soon ranked as a primary object of commerce. Formerly it had been obtained in small quantities from various sources; its production for export was almost concentrated in Bihar. The reason for this is to be found in the low prices prevailing in this region.⁴⁷

In Bihar the natural conditions for the formation of saltpetre were located in a remarkable degree in Patna, Gaya, Chapra, Tirhut, Saran and Champaran. Chiefly Patna and Saran were important centres for the production of saltpetre.⁴⁸ But curiously enough Bihar came to prominence only in the second half of the seventeenth century. Hughes and Parker made no mention of saltpetre among the products

⁴⁵ Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, p. 120

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 121

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 121-22

⁴⁸ Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, Delhi, 1982, pp. 39-42

of Patna during their first Commercial Mission to Patna in 1620-21⁴⁹. Peter Mundy, who visited Patna in 1632, referred to saltpetre produced in the neighbourhood among the commodities available there but thought it was not of a very good quality and better and cheaper saltpetre could be procured elsewhere.⁵⁰ The Mughal government drew its supplies from Agra and Ahmadabad and neighbouring regions especially for its own military purposes and it had not tapped Bihar for saltpetre. Bihar saltpetre came to be used only for the local purposes and was not considered as a standard ingredient for gunpowder. Thus the dormant potentialities of Bihar as a source of supply of first class saltpetre were worked up only as a result of the procurement of foreign merchant communities and their demand. Besides there was also the gradual decline of the importance of other centres due to which Patna and other regions in Bihar were acknowledged as the best place for procuring saltpetre.⁵¹ Manucci remarked about Patna that traders ‘...find there the materials for a great quantity of saltpetre, which is carried by the Europeans to Europe.’⁵²

⁴⁹ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, p.135

⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 152-56

⁵¹ *EPI*, 1630-33, pp. 4, 155

⁵² Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, (tr. & ed.) William Irvin, London, 1907-08, p. 400

With the growth of trade in saltpetre the English traders had to look for some approachable location outskirts of the city of Patna. Mr. Blake as its chief had built one of the first factories occupied by Europeans in Tirhut.⁵³ It was close to the saltpetre ground and far from the interference of the Bihar *Nawab* and his subordinates. The interference of the local administration and its officials in this trade was circumvented by staying at Singhee.⁵⁴ The chief of the English establishments in Bihar usually lived there. Streynsham Master met seventeen saltpetre carrying boats coming from Singhiya and Patna. Another place of saltpetre production was about 15 or 16 miles west of Singhiya but its name is not known. Also at Nanagur (Nanagarh or Naungar) east of Patna a *baniya* or sometime only a peon used to collect the saltpetre from the neighbourhood and then sent it on boats to Patna. Chapra was described by Tavernier as a 'large village where the Dutch had its saltpetre refined.'⁵⁵ The French and the Portuguese also had factories there. Patna was the principal centre of supply of saltpetre from neighbouring parts. Hugli, Balasore and Pipli were the chief ports for its export. The whole amount of saltpetre collected at Patna was sent to Hugli in large flat-bottomed and exceedingly strong vessels called *Patellas*, each bringing down

⁵³ *EFI*, 1646-50, pp. 135-147

⁵⁴ Singhiya near Lalgunj in Hajipur subdivision on the left bank of the river Gundak about 15 miles north of Patna.

⁵⁵ *EFI*, 1651-54, pp. 127-139

4000-6000 Bengal maunds or about 200 tons.⁵⁶ Thomas Bowery pointed out that:

All the Saltpetre is Sent hence to Hugli in great flatt bottomed Vessels, of an Exceedinge Strength, which are called Patellas; each of them will bringe downe 4,5,6000 Bengala maunds.⁵⁷

Saltpetre was carried from Patna to Hugli and to the ports of Balasore and Pipli in various types of country crafts known as *Patellas, Boras and Palwars*.⁵⁸ The English traded in raw saltpetre even in the absence of these necessary equipment. The Dutch had more efficient facilities than English to procure saltpetre.⁵⁹ Saltpetre was carried down from Patna to Balasore not only on boats but also by land. The Balasore factor wrote to the Company in 1659 that saltpetre was carried down by oxen from Patna.⁶⁰ But the land route was not very safe for the traders, as the semi-independent chiefs used to intercept saltpetre on the way. They used to purchase it at a low price and then re-sell it at high price.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *EFI*, 1655-60, pp. 213-216

⁵⁷ Thomas Bowery, *A Geographical Account of the Countries Round the Bay of Bengal*, (ed.) R. C. Temple, London, 1905, p. 225

⁵⁸ *EFI*, 1651-54, p. 95

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 113

⁶⁰ *EFI*, 1655-60, pp. 297-98

Saltpetre was among the commodities that was sometimes monopolised by the state during that time. In 1636 saltpetre was declared a state monopoly. The government exercised control over production, refinement, purchase and sale of the commodity.⁶² Most of the local governors exercised monopolies over saltpetre. Prince Shuja's men seized the saltpetre boats of the Dutch and English several times at Rajmahal.⁶³ This monopoly was creating problems for the Europeans. Moreover the war of succession adversely affected this trade. This incident disrupted the trade of the English merchants.

...Prince of Bengalah (Shah Shuja) [second son of Shah Jahan] hath received a very great overthrow, and this day came newes that he was retreated into Pattana, not for a seige, and Oramzeeb (Aurangzeb) was with an army of 80,000 horse within three days march of Pattana, pursuing him...⁶⁴

On March 14, 1659 factors at Patna report that they had heard from Chamberlain that Sultan Muhammad and Mir Jumla reached Patna two days after Shah Shuja had left the city. Learning that Mir Jumla had been made the Governor of the Province, Chamberlain paid him

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 305

⁶² *EFI*, 1634-36, pp. 18. 21

⁶³ *EFI*, 1655-60, pp. 63-64, 120-397

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 279

two visits. The factors feared that he would retaliate by stopping their trade; but in any case the purchase of saltpetre was for the time being out of the question. The English tried to pacify the governor Mir Jumla by offering gift worth Rs. 600 but he refused.⁶⁵

The relation of the English traders and the rulers of the regions and the centre remained mixed in nature. There were occasions when strong measures had been taken by the rulers and there were also many opportunities provided to the traders by the rulers to carry out duty free trade in the region. We have examples of central as well as provincial rulers granting them lower rates of export and import duty, privileges of free trade and residence, granting lands in perpetuity to these companies for erecting factories, fortresses etc. Though sometimes there were exaction and extortions by the local officials, they were invariably forbidden from taking more than the usual customs duty, and specific institutions to refrain from molesting these Europeans for exaction or other forms of profiteering are made in Imperial firmans, Nishans, provincial Parwanas and Sanads. Moreland on the testimony of Abul Fazl and others, states that the prescribed scales of custom duties were distinctly moderate and the usual rate of 2 ½ percent did not appear to have been materially higher when actually paid. The rates were increased

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 280-81

during the seventeenth century but not to an excessively high level, ranging from 3 ½ to 5 percent.⁶⁶

Thus the trade in saltpetre which attracted Europeans in general and the English in particular to Bihar proved to be a multifaceted event. Multiple utility of saltpetre in the seventeenth century due to the transformation in the European warfare and large scale maritime trade and commerce were the main reasons of its being so popular in this period. This popularity brought along with it the prosperity to the region of Patna. It ultimately gave impetus to an intense trade in the region and consequently to the growth of the city of Patna in the seventeenth century.

⁶⁶ Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, pp. 123-7

CHAPTER III

THE CITY OF PATNA: THE CITY AND ITS COMMERCE

Manrique (1629-1643) during his visit to Patna in the late of the seventeenth century observed that

Patna is a populous city having a population of 200,000 men. Many tradesmen including six hundred brokers and middlemen, who are very wealthy, inhabited it.

He has described Patna as one of the biggest towns of the whole of the Mughal Empire. 'It was the meeting place of merchants of different nationalities, the Portuguese, the Armenians, the Mughals, the Pathans, the Persians and the East Bengal traders.' Further putting high status to it he remarked that

If the opinions of the false Heathendom of old were more founded on fact than on high-sounding tales, we might, with good reason, suppose that the God who was the son of Jupiter and Maya used to live most of his days in the city of Patna and... occupied with the enormous quantity and variety of merchandise in the town...¹

¹ Fray Sebastian Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique*, Vol. II, (tr.) H. Hosten. London, 1927, pp. 139-141

In 1632, Peter Mundy wrote about Patna,

The cittie lyes alongst on the river Ganges, which, with the suburbs, may conteyne in length about 3 miles; a very long Bazare with trees on each side. It hath above 200 of grocers or Druggists, and of severall druggs a world. It is the greatest Mart of all this Countrie, from whence they repaire from Bengala that way to the sea side, and from Indostan and other Inland Countries round about, Plentiful in provisons, abounding with sundrie commodities...²

Tavernier in 1640s observed that Patna was one of the largest towns in India. It was not less than ‘two coss’ [koss] in length.³ He informs that the Dutch had an establishment there. They had a saltpetre refinery at Chapra, situated at the right bank of the Ganges, 10 coss [koss] above the Patna.⁴ Making a remark on the public life of the people out there he narrated that

...arriving at Patna with M. Bernier, we encountered some Dutchmen in the street who were returning to Chapra, but who halted their carriages in order to salute us. We did not separate before we had emptied

² Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia 1608-67*, Vol. II, (ed.) R. C. Temple, London, 1907, p. 157

³ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol. II, (tr.) V. Ball, London, 1889, p.100

⁴ *Ibid.* p.122

together two bottles of *Shiraz* wine in the open street regarding which there is nothing to remark upon in this country, where one lives without ceremony, and perfect liberty.⁵

In the second half of the seventeenth century Manucci recorded that

...by land I arrived in four days at Patnah, a very large city with bazars, the greater part thatched, inhabited by many merchants. For here is prepared much white cloth of fine quality. In this city were two factories one of the English and the other of the Dutch, seeing that here, besides cloth of cotton, much fine silk cloth is woven and a huge quantity of saltpetre produced, which goes to be stored in Bengal, and is there loaded on ships for various parts of Europe.⁶

THE CITY OF PATNA AND ITS ENVIRONS

Patna in the seventeenth century was known for its trade. Merchants from all the trading countries came and transacted business. The growth of Patna as a town can be attributed to many reasons. As rightly pointed by S. M. Karimi that there can be many driving

⁵ Ibid. p.122

⁶ Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, (tr.) William Irvin, London, 1913, p. 77

forces which play crucial roles in the making of a place important on the basis of its socio-political or commercial utility.⁷ As a garrison, as a residential space and as a commercial hub Patna fulfilled all these three functions. As it was also the capital of the province and the royal mint was housed there, there were many other related activities which arose within its boundaries. Moreover, it was the centre of trade and that played a vital role in the process of urbanisation of the region. The political as well as economic importance of Patna had long been recognised by rulers and traders. It was not an uninhabited site when Sher Shah transferred the headquarters of the local government to Patna in 1541. Sher Shah realised that its geographical position on the bank of the Ganges had lots of strategic importance.⁸ Thereafter Bihar Sharif lost its earlier importance and Patna, enjoying the protection of the fort, and getting the advantage of the river, soon grew to be 'one of the largest cities of the province.'⁹ It was known as a 'Pattana', meaning a mart, a name indicating its commercial importance. Patna was one of the four ports which the Mughals had set up for regulating commercial traffic in eastern India: Hugli or Bakshbandar for collecting duties from external trade, Dacca and Murshidabad for collecting duties

⁷ S. M. Karimi, 'Late Medieval Towns Of Bihar Plain (12th Century AD to mid 18th Century)' in *JBRS*, Vol. lvi, Pt. I, Jan-Dec., 1970, pp. 172-190

⁸ Askari and Ahmad (ed.), *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Patna, 1987, pp. 405-407

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 406

from internal commerce of Eastern and Western Bengal respectively, and Patna for collecting duties from internal and inter-provincial trade.¹⁰ Tavernier has some interesting remarks about the working of the customs office at Patna. Alleging that the custom office was corrupt. Tavernier says:

Those [merchants of Bhutan] who return by Gorakhpur and have an understanding with the customs officer, take from Patna and Dacca coral, yellow amber, tortoise-shell brackets and others of sea shells with numerous round and square pieces.¹¹

Thevenot described 'Patane a very large town lying on the west side of the Ganges where the Dutch had a factory.'¹²

We get some idea of the environs of Patna from the accounts of foreign travellers and merchants of the period. Though it is not possible to locate all the places mentioned by them, many places are nevertheless identifiable. John Marshall and Tavernier have described the eastern and northern environs of Patna. John Marshall observes that '...Patna lies west of Huglie, soe that by this account Pattana would be 320 $\frac{4}{10}$ miles or 5d.20m. West, and 208 miles or

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 431

¹¹ Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol.II, pp. 258-63

¹² Thevenot and Careri, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, (ed.) S. N. Sen, New Delhi, 1949, p. 106

3d. 28m. North west by west, by reason of the Great Hills which hinder their passage.’¹³ In course of his journeys from Balasore to Patna (1669-70), and from Patna to Hugli (1670-71), Marshall mentions More as Mor or Mohare, Mokameh as Mokocia or Muckeya, Pundarak as Punarakh and Cundeck, Barh as Barr Bar, Athmal Gola as Asumelike Surrey, Ranisarai as Raning and Ranincassera, Fatwah as Footooa and river Punpun.¹⁴ As regards the northern hinterland of Patna (across the Ganges), Marshall refers to Hajipur, Sonpur (Soneigh), Jahanbad (as Jonabad), Nanagaur and Singhhiya (as Singhee), while Tavernier refers to Chapra (Daulatganj just east of the town) as a place of refining saltpetre. Hajipur, then situated at the confluence of the Ganges and the Gandak, was about 8 miles from Patna by boat. Marshall described it as a great, ancient and ruined town a famous place and the seat of a king. The town had a ‘sarai’.¹⁵ The king’s highway connected Hajipur and Nanagur about 9 miles south east of it and 20 miles distant from Jahanbad. The East India Company had a house of their own at Nangarh along a channel of the Ganges. It was a pleasant place, situated amongst topes (grove) of trees and the way from thence to Hajipur was considered very pleasant. It was then a very healthy place. Jonabad (Jahanabad) was 11 miles distant from

¹³ John Marshall, *Notes and Observations*, London, 1927. pp. 78-79

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 79

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 153

Hajipur; the English factory situated at this place was set up in 1676.¹⁶ Like Nanagur and Jahanbad, Singhiya near Lalganj on the left bank of the Gandak also contained a factory for refining saltpetre. It was 15 miles distant from Patna by water, and very conveniently situated for managing the saltpetre business. The English factors wanted to escape the rapacious demands of the Governor's officers by living at Singhiya.¹⁷ In 1632 Peter Mundy described the western and southwestern environs of Patna in the following words

The road from Naubatpur (about 13 miles S.W.) to Patna was full of a million of mango trees in plotts and groves on both sides.¹⁸

POLITICAL SITUATION IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PATNA

Since the time of its formation as an independent subah in the Mughal empire, Patna as a capital of Bihar happened to be a place of refuge of almost all the princes of the Mughal empire. Jahangir and Shah Jahan were the first to initiate the trend of rebellion against the

¹⁶ *EFI*, 1670-76, p. 320

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 320-21

¹⁸ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, p. 134

crowd at the centre and seeking refuge in the plains of Bihar.¹⁹ This trend in course of time culminated in the time of war of succession in the Mughal empire. These disturbed the rhythm commercial transaction. In 1659 the Bengal Agency reported that the civil war was desolating Bihar and Bengal, and also hampering the trade of the English merchants and even threatening their personal safety.²⁰ During the main contest for throne Aurangzeb reached Patna pursuing Shah Shuja with an army of 80,000 horses. In course of this trouble Mir Jumla was appointed as the governor of Bihar. He was not liked by the English factors but to pacify him Chamberlain, the then chief of Patna factory, paid him two visits. But it bore no results. The factors feared that he would retaliate by stopping their trade and in any case the purchase of saltpetre at Patna was for the time out of the question. The merchants had fled on the approach of the contending armies. The English tried to pacify Mir Jumla and offered him gift worth of Rs. 600 but he refused.²¹ Though these political disturbances caused temporary dislocation in the established rhythm they had no long term negative impact on trade and commerce. These disturbances were of temporary nature and after the dust had settled from these, the winner used to distribute jagirs and other benefits to their subordinates along with traders. Shah

¹⁹ K.M. Karim. *The Provinces of Bihar and Bengal Under Shah Jahan*, Dacca, 1974, p. 7

²⁰ *EFI*, 1655-1660, p. 278

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 279-281

Jahan did so after his occupation of the Patna. Raja Narayan Mal Ujjainia was given a mansab of 5000 and his brother's was raised to 3000.²²

THE CITY OF PATNA: ITS TRADE AND COMMERCE

Patna was a very important place among the trade centres of the eastern region. Its unique commercial importance rested on two principal grounds: (a) as a centre for supply of saltpetre and an emporium of cotton goods and (b) as an inland market for sale of many kinds of goods. Patna owed its importance as an inland trade centre to its geographical position situated on the right bank of the river Ganges. It acted as a link connecting Bengal and upper India. The Ganges and its tributaries constituted the most important river highway of inland commerce in Eastern India. Patna attracted traders from all round the globe due to its strategic and convenient position in the middle regions of the Ganges; it was also connected by road with eastern and north western India. Thus, transporting boats of merchandise throughout Bengal and catering to the needs of eastern as well as north western India. If Calcutta was the south-east gate for foreign trade Patna was the north-western gate for up country trade.²³

²² Ala-al-Din Ishphahan, *Baharistan-i-Ghayabi*, Vol. II, pp. 722. 816

²³ Askari and Ahmad, (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. II, Part II, p.432

The whole area from Patna to Mokameh as described by travellers was fairly prosperous with respect to manufacturing of textiles both silk and cotton, jasmine oil, paper and fine earthen wares. Tasar silk was then imported in Bihar from the Lakhnauti and Burbakabad Sarkar areas of Bengal province. Patna, Fatuha, Baikunthpur (near Khusrupur) Qadiriganj to the east of Nauabad (Nawada) and Buniadganj near Arwal were important towns of silk manufacturing. Cotton was extensively grown in Patna and Naubatpur areas during Shah Jahan's time.²⁴ Lekhewar, Nundanpur and Biharsharif were important centres where fine calicoes. These were considered very valuable and profit making articles by the English factors in 1620-21.²⁵ There were three types of emerti [*ambartee*]: the razai about Rs. 2 per piece, the zafarkhani at Rs. 6 per piece and the Jahangiri Rs. 12 per piece.²⁶ But when Peter Mundy visited Patna in the year 1632 he remarked that at Agra emerti cloths were cheaper than Patna.²⁷ The region round Patna within the radius of nearly 50 miles had important centres and markets of cotton manufactures. The cotton industry was flourishing in the time of Manucci. He observed

²⁴ B. P. Saxena. *History of Shah Jahan of Dihli*, Allahabad, 1973, p. 13

²⁵ *EFI*, 1618-21, p. 306

²⁶ Askari and Ahmad, (ed.), *The Comprehensive History Of Bihar*, Vol. II, Part II p.422

²⁷ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, p. 305

that 'fine white cloth' was manufactured at Patna and was 'very plentiful' in the province.²⁸

Patna was famous not only for the production of raw cotton and manufacture and supply of cotton cloths, but also for being an important centre of silk trade. Raw silk was imported into Patna in large quantities from Murshidabad and Saidabad in Bengal. Hughes and Parker also tried their fate in this trade but could not carry it.²⁹ Benaras mandils, turban cloths, woven with silk and gold threads were available at Benaras in larger varieties and at cheaper rates than at Agra. Hughes suggested to the Surat authorities that these might be easily procured at Patna, especially if there was demand for these in Persia.³⁰ Manucci found that Patna was a centre of manufacture of bottles and fine earthen pottery, including cups of clay finer than glass, lighter than paper and highly scented. Hajipur was also a pottery centre.³¹

A boat building industry emerged in the region in the wake of heavy transactions of saltpetre. The necessities of saltpetre trade served as an incentive to boat construction under the patronage of the English

²⁸ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 141

²⁹ *EFI*, 1618-21, p. 112

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 206

³¹ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, pp. 426, 484

East India Company and also determined the type of inland and coastal boats used. We come across varieties of boats from the reference made by travellers during their visit to the region. The *Patellas* was a flat bottomed boat used to carry saltpetre; the *Boora* was a very light boat rowed with 20 or 30 oars and carried saltpetre and other goods from Hugli downwards; the *Purgoo*, was probably a frigate used between Hugli, Pipli and Balasore. Alexander Hamilton (1688-1723) observed that the Hugli- Patna saltpetre boats were over 50 yards long and 5 yards broad and 2 ½ deep and had a capacity of over 200 tones.³² Finally *Pulwar* were small boats of about 12 to 15 tones sometimes conveying saltpetre from Patna down the river.³³

Ralph Fitch states that at Patna people found gold by digging.³⁴ Diamond mining was carried on in Jahangir's time but all trace of these mines seems to have been lost after 1612. Jahangir writes in his memoirs that during the 12th year of his reign Ibrahim Khan Fath

³² J. N. Sarkar, *Studies in Economic life in Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 301-302

³³ Thomas Bowery, *A Geographical Account of the Countries Round the Bay of Bengal*, (ed.) R. C. Temple, Cambridge, 1905, p. 225

³⁴ 'They dig deep pits in the earth and wash the earth in great balls and therein they find the gold and they make the pits round about with brick that the earth fall not in.' Foster, *Early Travels in India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 71

Jang, the governor of Bihar, sent him nine diamonds from the state mine there and from the collections of the zamindars of Bihar.³⁵

In the seventeenth century Patna was not only a centre of inter-provincial trade but also of international trade. It was connected with Agra, Allahabad and Benaras, and land routes on the west of the river and hence with the general system of overland traffic to Central Asia, West Asia and Africa. It lay on the route from Agra to Chatgoan, the port of Bengal and was connected with other ports of Bengal, like Tanda, Hugli, Kasimbazar etc. it also traded with Orissa.³⁶ Thomas Bowery rightly observed that it was

a country of very great Trafficke and Commerce, and is really the great gate that openeth into Bengal and Orissa, and consequently into most parts of India viz. from the Northern Kingdom or Empires (by land), namely Persia, Carmania, Georgia, Tartaria etc. The commodities of those countries are transported hither by Caffila who also export the Commodities brought hither by the English and the Dutch as also of this Kingdom.³⁷

³⁵ Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, (tr.) Rogers and Beveridge, London, 1909, pp. 315-316

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 429-30

³⁷ Thomas Bowery, *A Geographical Account*, p. 221

The industries and trade of Patna made it an important meeting place of merchants of different nationalities for whose convenience there were many sarais established. Saif Khan's sarai was one of the most famous sarai of that time.³⁸ Peter Mundy during his visit to Patna noticed that there was

Zeffe Ckauns Sarae [Saif Khan sarai]...chiefley for
Merchants of straunge Countries, as Mogolls, Persians,
Armenians...the other sort of Saraes are in all places.³⁹

John Marshall found many sarais during his journey from Hugli to Patna. Between Mokameh and Patna there were other sarais. Mughal ka sarai [modern Mughalsarai] was among them.⁴⁰

The above details make it abundantly clear that Patna was not only an important centre of production but also a thriving emporium of inland or inter-provincial trade. Besides the articles imported into Patna from other parts in India, various miscellaneous goods were also imported from different parts of India like Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, Bengal, Orissa, Agra, Surat etc.⁴¹

³⁸ Askari and Ahinad. (ed.) *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. II, Part II, p.430

³⁹ Peter Mundy, *Travels in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II, p. 159

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.434

⁴¹ Askari and Ahinad, (ed.), *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, p.429

There were many reasons behind the growth of Patna not only as the centre of trade and commerce but also as the capital of the province. The geographical position, providing easy access to land and waterways attracted traders to reach to the inner most areas of the region. It was positively supported by the commercially rich region and its hinterland. Moreover the Mughal policy of expansion on the eastern frontier further enhanced its importance as a threshold to reach the eastern regions. But as Aniruddha Ray rightly points out, it was the trade in saltpetre that gave to Patna its considerable edge. The Dutch and the English had factories nearly ten miles outside the city where they used to refine saltpetre and send these down to Hugli for export.⁴² These activities attracted various traders to this region, which further enhanced the process of the urbanisation of Patna.

⁴² Aniruddha Ray, *Transformation of Bihar*, p. 29

CONCLUSION

The study of commercial aspect of seventeenth century Bihar provides us with an insight to the regional economy of Bihar in that period. Its independent characteristic in sustaining its position in the eastern India in spite of other important trading centres such as Hugli and Balasore clarifies that though it was not a port town but its proximity to the river Ganges played an important role in making it a trade mart. The shift of trade from western coast to the eastern coast owing to the disadvantageous atmosphere at Surat led to the prominence of Hugli and that to be of Bihar. The trade in saltpetre attracted European traders to Bihar. A basic feature of this trade was that it was based on the export of raw and refined saltpetre. The saltpetre of Bihar was one of the cheapest qualities so there were heavy demand of it. The Dutch first and then the English started exporting it from Bihar. In the first half of seventeenth century, the export of saltpetre was moderate from Coromandal, Gujarat and Agra. But from the second half of the seventeenth century Bihar saltpetre surpassed all other regions in its production and export. After 1658, the English were procuring more than 25,000 maunds of Bihar saltpetre yearly from Bengal ports. Besides, its multifaceted utility as ballast, gunpowder and cooling agent also enhanced its status as one of the principal items of trade. The requirement of

refined saltpetre led to the establishment of many refineries which in course of time extended into the interiors. Hence, it causes expansion of English in the region. This particular item of trade proved to be an elixir in the fate of Bihar. These trading companies established many factories in Patna and its hinterland. Due to these developments Bihar grew as an important regional centre of trade and commerce in eastern India. Since Patna was situated at the confluence of two rivers, Ganges and Punpun, it provided good water transport to facilitate the trade. Besides its linkage with upper Indian plain through land routes made it more important. Initially it was only a production centre but as trade grew it developed as a centre of large-scale commercial activities. Besides as it was already the capital of subah Bihar, it fulfilled all required administrative transactions. Consequently all these activities led to a process of urbanisation in the region and the growth of the city of Patna occurred.

Mughal provinces displayed widely divergent levels of economic growth during seventeenth century. Economic standards always remained dependent of agriculture production and on trade and commerce, both inland and overseas. In this context we find Bihar growing as a centre of trade. This development made Bihar an important link in international trade. Consequently we find that there was a gradual formation of a regional economy which stayed

relatively immune from the negative developments in the centre such as the chaos after the war of succession and other disturbances in the Mughal empire itself.

It is obvious from the accounts of many travellers who frequented this region during the seventeenth century that Bihar was a prosperous trading province and Patna was a growing city. These travel accounts brought good name to Bihar. The knowledge of Bihar became wide and it crafted a good image of Bihar in the seventeenth century.

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