

A Local History of Global Capital

JUTE AND PEASANT LIFE
IN THE BENGAL DELTA

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HISTORIES OF ECONOMIC LIFE

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To Mama and Baba

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Cultivating Jute

PEASANT CHOICE, LABOR, AND HUNGER

BETWEEN THE CRIMEAN WAR (1853–56) and World War I (1914–18), jute cultivation in Bengal expanded exponentially. In 1850 approximately 50,000 acres of Bengal's land was sown with jute; in 1906 jute cultivation reached its historic high of close to four million acres.¹ From an insignificant commodity of international trade, jute became Bengal's leading export. In 1829, the first year that jute exports were enumerated by customs authorities in Calcutta, Bengal exported just eighteen tons of raw fiber valued at about 62 pounds sterling.² In 1910 Bengal exported thirteen million tons of raw jute valued at 13 million Indian rupees and another 17 million rupees of jute manufactures.³ The enormous increase in jute cultivation was concentrated in a relatively small part of the province: the active delta of the Brahmaputra, Ganges, and Meghna river systems of eastern and northern Bengal, comprising the districts of Rangpur, Pabna, Bogra, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, and Tipperah (see map 1). This region of silt and alluvium, annual floods, and shifting soil, mud, and water produced between 70 and 80 percent of the world's jute.⁴ When jute cultivation reached its historical high during the 1900s, more than 20 percent of these districts' cultivated lands were sown with fiber.⁵

The enormous increase in jute production took place without colonial coercion, or even incentives and subsidies. The colonial government of Bengal was, in fact, taken by surprise by the new commodity. In 1873, after jute was already established as Bengal's leading commercial crop, Bengal's lieutenant governor expressed embarrassed and profound ignorance regarding fiber: "Gentlemen who have come from home with a practical interest in such questions [about jute] have lately asked His Honor to answer some of them,

and he has been unable to answer them. . . . Mr. Campbell does not know to what language the word jute belongs, nor what it really means.”⁶ Unlike other contemporary commodities of empire, jute cultivation was not accompanied by enslavement, genocide, the violent enforcement of rigged contracts, massive irrigation projects, large-scale ecological engineering schemes, or the distribution of subsidized credit, seeds, and production technologies. The expansion of jute cultivation took place entirely through peasant choice, through the autonomous and independent decisions of tens of thousands of peasant households in the Bengal delta to devote increasing quantities of land and labor to fiber.

Economic historians of the delta have established that peasant decisions to grow jute were driven by markets, prices, and profits. Sugata Bose describes the expansion of jute as the “second phase” in the commercialization of agriculture, as the statist and capitalist coercion that characterized indigo cultivation in the early nineteenth century gave way to market forces and pressures during the late nineteenth century.⁷ Omkar Goswami has shown, through careful statistical analysis of admittedly flawed colonial agricultural data that year-to-year variations in jute acreage corresponded to fluctuations in the price of fiber, at least prior to the Great Depression of 1930.⁸ The close correspondence between acreage and price is revealed in the expansion of fiber over time: jute acreage increased in bursts, with spikes in global prices followed by periods of rapid expansion. Between the Crimean War and World War I, there were three booms in jute cultivation: between the mid-1860s and 1873, from the mid-1880s to 1890, and, finally, between 1905 and the beginning of World War I in 1914. These periods of rapid expansion closely corresponded with booms and busts in global capital.

The first jute boom took place during the late 1860s and the early 1870s, as jute prices increased sharply driven by the enormous increase in demand from Dundee manufacturers. Calcutta’s fiber exports increased from 2.3 million tons in 1866 to 7 million tons in 1873. In several jute-growing districts in the delta—for instance, Pabna, Mymensingh, Dacca, and Faridpur—commercial jute cultivation began in the early to mid-1860s.⁹ When prices reached a record high in 1872, cultivators responded by “[taking] up whatever land was ready at hand” and extended acreage by 30 percent from the previous year, to 760,000 acres. This was a fifteenfold increase from the estimated 50,000 acres sown with jute in 1850.¹⁰ In a pattern that was repeated over the coming decades, prices collapsed in August and September 1872, just as cultivators were preparing to harvest their record crop. The Long Depression had set in, and prices would remain depressed for the remainder of the decade. Jute cultivators abandoned their crops, allowing the plants to rot in the fields, and sharply reduced jute acreage the following year.

Jute acreage recovered to 1872 levels only at the end of the decade, reaching an estimated 795,000 acres in 1880. Cultivation then began to expand rapidly, as prices doubled from an average of 2 rupees and 11 annas per *maund* in 1882 to 4 rupees and 15 annas in 1890. Jute acreage expanded sharply at the end of the decade, from 1.45 million in 1888 to 2 million acres in 1890. When prices collapsed again in 1890, falling by 35 percent, cultivators responded as they had done in 1872—allowing standing crops to rot and sharply reducing acreage the following year, by 12.5 percent to 1.75 million acres.¹¹

Jute acreage averaged at just above 2 million acres between 1890 and 1905, when increases in prices led cultivators to amp up jute production. Calcutta prices rose sharply in 1905, a 28 percent increase followed by a 29 percent increase the following year. Increased acreage followed on the heels of high prices, rising by 11 percent in 1906 and then 13 percent in 1907. The 3.9 million acres sown with jute in 1907 was a historic high (see table 1.1). When prices fell again in 1907, cultivators reduced acreage. The increase in prices after 1911, and the record prices of 1913—10 rupees and 8 annas a *maund*—spurred

TABLE 1.1. Variations in Acreage and Price of Jute in Bengal, 1904–1915

	Acreage*		Price**	
	Acres	Percentage change	Rupees per maund	Percentage change
1904	2,850,000		5.375	
1905	3,090,700	8.4%	6.875	27.9%
1906	3,434,000	11.1%	8.875	29.1%
1907	3,846,500	12.0%	6.625	-25.4%
1908	2,766,300	-28.1%	5.5625	-16.0%
1909	2,773,100	0.2%	5.625	1.1%
1910	2,841,600	2.5%	5.5	-2.2%
1911	2,737,600	-3.7%	6.5625	19.3%
1912	2,536,900	-7.3%	8.375	27.6%
1913	2,456,600	-3.2%	10.5	25.4%
1914	2,872,600	16.9%	6.25	-40.5%
1915	2,086,300	-27.4%	6.9375	11.0%

* The acreage is for the entire province of Bengal. The Bengal delta accounted for more than 80% of the province's acreage. These figures are from Department of Statistics, *Estimates of Area and Yield of Principal Crops in India, 1914–15*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing Press, 1915, p. 11

** This is the average price of fiber in markets across Bengal during a fiscal year, that is from July to July. The prices are compiled from Government of Bengal, *Reports on Trade Carried by Rail and River in Bengal during the Years 1904/5 to 1914/15*, Calcutta, 1905 to 1916.

an increase of 17 percent in acreage in 1914. However, just as cultivators were preparing to harvest their crop in August 1914, World War I commenced, global trade came to a temporary standstill, the German market disappeared, and prices plummeted. This time, jute cultivators did not allow their crops to rot in the field, as they had during previous price busts. Instead, they relied on women and children rather than waged workers to harvest fiber and tried desperately to sell their produce at whatever prices were available. The price collapse of World War I began a rapid and thorough process of peasant immiseration in the Bengal delta.

These statistics of acreage and price do not, however, reveal the extent to which peasant households had to reorganize the distribution of plants over farmlands and rearrange rhythms of work and leisure in order to accommodate fiber. In and of themselves, statistics do not explain why cultivators could respond to price busts by allowing their crops to rot in 1873 and 1891 but not in 1914. This chapter goes beyond statistical analyses of market responsiveness to explore what decisions to grow more jute entailed in terms of agrarian space and time. Peasant decisions to grow more jute were, simultaneously, decisions to not grow rice. Jute competed for peasant land and labor with the delta's two major rice crops—winter or aman paddy and spring or aus paddy. Choices between commercial fiber and subsistence grain dominated peasant economic life and were the most consequential decisions made by peasant households during the agrarian year. This chapter examines how peasant households responded to global markets by adapting to rhythms of work, ecologies of smallholdings, seasons of rain, sunshine, and monsoons, and the growth cycles of plants to produce combinations of jute for global markets and rice for household subsistence.

Jute remained inextricably tied to the soil of the Bengal delta. Nineteenth-century attempts to transfer jute cultivation to other parts of the world failed. In 1873 the Queensland society in Australia requested and received jute seeds from Bengal, though little seems to have come out of it.¹² A more concerted attempt to introduce jute cultivation in Louisiana, in the Mississippi delta, during the same period also failed—though it caused consternation among colonial officials in Bengal.¹³ A report by the US Department of Agriculture noted success in growing the plant in the Mississippi delta but concluded that unless the process of extracting the fiber from plants was mechanized, farmers would not take up large-scale cultivation.¹⁴ In other words, white settler farmers in the United States and Australia were not willing to adapt rhythms of life and agrarian ecologies to the demands of jute—to exploit household labor or to risk hunger, as the Bengal peasantry did in growing jute.

The first section of this chapter explores how the competition between rice and jute for peasant land and labor was played out against the delta's ecology of soil and water and its calendar of rains, sunshine, and floods. The second section examines how the displacement of rice by jute introduced seasonal hunger into the peasant calendar, and how it spurred peasant indebtedness and reduced peasant households' ability to withstand market shocks. Hunger and market-based subsistence explain why peasant households were able to abandon standing jute crops in the 1870s and 1890s, but not in the 1900s. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how the market collapse of World War I triggered the mass immiseration of the delta's jute cultivators.

Fiber and Grain

The colonial official J. C. Jack wrote the following description of the Bengal delta's ecology of soil and water in his account of Faridpur district:

The delta of the Ganges is a peculiar country, worth knowledge and worth description. It is made up of new mud, old mud and marsh; it contains rivers as large as any in the world, linked together by an amazing network of lesser rivers, streams and ditches; it mostly disappears under water for several months in the year; yet it grows abundant crops everywhere and supports a very considerable population in considerable idleness.¹⁵

This description of "new mud, old mud and marsh" is an apt typology of the delta's ecology though, of course, the "considerable population" that labored on this landscape was most certainly not living in "considerable idleness." Jack's distinction of "new mud" and "old mud" mapped onto the formal and less poetic categories of "low land" and "high land" widely used in official and merchant accounts of the delta's ecology.¹⁶ New mud (low land) consisted of the newest alluvial deposits of the delta's river systems, loamy soil closer to riverbanks and the earliest to flood during the monsoons. High lands were older silt formations, firmer and more clayey soil and only a few feet above the lowlands that flooded later in the monsoons. Marshes consisted of the extensive lakes and swamps—*beels* and *haors*—scattered throughout the delta. Though categorized as wastelands, marshes were important sources of fish and fodder grass. This landscape of new mud and old mud was in constant flux, as the delta's shifting rivers produced "new mud" at an astonishing rate through the formation of river islands, or *chars*, and exposed riverbeds, or

diara lands. The nineteenth century witnessed considerable augmentation of cultivable land, as peasant households cleared jungles and drained marshes, converting “wasteland” into arable farmland.

In the expanding agrarian frontier of the nineteenth century, land appeared unlimited. Peasant production was constrained by the households’ ability to mobilize human and animal labor rather than the limitations of land. W. W. Hunter’s statistical accounts of the jute-growing districts of the 1870s distinguished between small, medium, and large farms, with small farms generally less than five acres, medium farms ranging from five to fifteen acres, and large farms consisting of twenty acres or more. Significantly, however, Hunter provided another measure of landholdings more appropriate to the relatively sparsely cultivated delta: the number of pairs of plow oxen required to cultivate the peasant farm. Small farms could be cultivated with one pair of oxen, medium with two, while large farms required three or more. By the end of the nineteenth century, when the limits of the agrarian frontier were reached—that is, there was no more so-called wasteland to convert into arable farmland—land rather than labor became the major constraint to peasant production. In 1900 the majority of peasants cultivated no more than four acres.¹⁷ Peasant holdings fragmented rapidly during the twentieth century: by 1930 the average landholding in the jute-cultivating districts varied between one and two acres.¹⁸

Peasant decision making consisted of choices regarding which plants to cultivate when on which portions of their arable lands. The major crops were autumn (*aus*) and winter (*aman*) rice, jute, and a winter (*rabi*) crop of oilseeds, pulses, or spices. Colonial statistics suggest that, during the early 1900s, peasants sowed about 44 percent of their land with *aman*, 14 percent with *aus*, 17 percent with jute, and 20 percent with *rabi* pulses, oilseeds, and spices.¹⁹ This distribution of plants over peasant holdings was influenced by prevailing prices but was also constrained by soil, labor, seasons, and the growth cycles of plants.

Aus rice and jute were sown broadcast—scattered by hand—after spring rains in February and March. Lowlands were sown first, to give the plants a chance to survive early inundation with the onset of monsoon floods during June and July. Sowings on highlands began later, during April and May. Highlands were sown with *tossa* jute—*Corchorus olitorius*—whose lustrous fibers commanded a higher price. The deep roots of the *tossa* jute plant were unsuited for lowlands, which were sown with lower-quality white jute—*Corchorus capsularis*. In Mymensingh, jute was called *aus* or *aman* depending on whether it was planted on high or low land.²⁰ *Aus* paddy was almost exclusively sown on highlands, especially as jute came to dominate lowlands. The

preference of lowlands for jute was also related to work: jute fields had to be plowed more heavily and frequently than rice fields and the more clayey and harder mud of the highlands required heavier plowing.

Aus paddy and jute germinated during the hot summer months of April and May. Jute fields were periodically thinned out as they gained in height, creating a gap of a few inches between each plant. The arrival of the monsoons was a critical period: if the monsoon rains came too early and heavy, floodwaters would overtop jute and aus plants; a delayed monsoon would stunt the plants and reduce yields. If rains and floods were timely, jute and aus would have a growth spurt, sometimes growing several inches in a day to outpace rising floodwaters. The plants were ready for harvest during the floods. Jute plants would have grown to twelve feet or higher, the bottom third or even half submerged with the rest of the plant forming a wall of lush green rising up from the inundated fields. Peasant workers waded into flooded fields, dipped their sickles underwater, and cut the plants a few inches above the roots. Harvested stalks were then steeped in water for one or two weeks, a process known as retting, that would rot the stems and allow fibers to be stripped from the stalk. Once retted and stripped, fibers were dried in the sun: packing and transporting still wet jute would damage the fibers. The end of the monsoon was perfectly suited for the jute harvest, as receding floods left behind plentiful standing water for retting and the post-monsoon sun shown bright and fierce to dry the fibers.

The considerable labor in preparing fibers was accompanied by the onerous tasks of preparing aman seedbeds and transplanting seedlings. Aman seedlings were transplanted in September and October, soon after the jute had been harvested. The paddy could be transplanted onto lands just cleared of jute, but this resulted in much reduced aman yields as jute was an exhaustive plant for the soil. As jute cultivation expanded, however, more and more cultivators double-cropped with jute and aman on lowlands. Aman was harvested during the winter, in December and January.

The winter witnessed the sowing of the delta's third and least important rice crop, *boro* paddy. During the dry winter, the delta's water levels dropped and marshes, streambeds, and riverbanks became available for rice cultivation. Boro rice was transplanted onto such lands during December and January and reaped during April and May, before monsoon floods once again inundated marshes and streambeds. Boro's acreage was limited by the availability of watered lands during the dry winter months. More significant winter crops included pulses like *moong* and *masoor dal*, spices such as chilies, ginger, and turmeric, and oilseeds, like mustard and sesame. These winter crops were collectively known

as rabi crops. These plants were generally sown on highlands during the winter and harvested in the early spring. Rabi crops were concentrated on highlands partly because these plants were better suited to the more clayey soil but also because the lowlands were occupied by other plants: the aman was yet to be harvested when early rabi sowings began and rabi harvest coincided with the early preparation of lowlands for the following spring's jute sowing.

From the mid-1860s to the early 1870s, global jute prices rose steadily, culminating in a sharp and sudden rise in prices in 1872, before commodity markets went bust with the onset of the Long Depression in 1873. Peasant households responded to these prices by producing ever-increasing quantities of jute. The decision to devote more land and labor to fiber did not, however, lead to a diminution in rice production. In fact, peasant households extended both rice and jute cultivation between the 1850s and the 1870s. Mymensingh's jute acreage had increased to 84,000 acres by the mid-1870s while, simultaneously, increasing its rice exports "by about twenty percent."²¹ Similarly, Tipperah experienced a "great extension of rice cultivation" while its jute acreage extended to 87,000 acres. With the exception of the densely populated Dacca district, the jute-growing districts were also substantial rice-exporting districts for much of the nineteenth century.

The delta's peasantry was able to extend both rice and jute production because of the expanding agrarian frontier, as more land was being brought under the plow. Colonial officials argued that lands newly formed by the delta's shifting rivers motivated jute cultivation. The collector of Brahmanbaria wrote: "the large *churs* thrown up by the Meghna . . . opened his [the cultivators'] eyes, and the plant [jute] now forms the staple produce of the country next to paddy."²² Moreover, in Mymensingh, the shifting channels of the Brahmaputra had created considerable new lands attractive to jute cultivation: "The cultivation is largely carried on throughout nearly the whole District, but particularly in the rich alluvial tracts formed by the Brahmaputra in the south-eastern tract between Ghafargaon and Bhairab Bazar in the north of Dacca District. The river has here silted up a great deal of late years, and the alluvial accretions thus formed, are found to be exceedingly favourable to the growth of jute."²³ Jute cultivation also expanded onto lands freed from indigo production, following the anti-indigo revolt in 1859, when peasant households in indigo-growing regions in parts of the delta successfully resisted indigo planters' attempts to force indigo cultivation. The rising profitability of fiber may even have been one of the motivating factors behind cultivators' refusal to sow indigo during the 1850s.²⁴ The Jute Commission of 1873 noted: "In Mymensingh and Rungpore

the cultivation [of jute] has been gradually spreading for the last twenty five years or thereabouts, but the extension has been notable there since the cultivation of indigo was abandoned."²⁵ Jute cultivation also extended through the reduction of fallows, which led to a decrease in the availability of fodder for dairy cows and an increase in prices of milk and dairy products. The collector of Tipperah stated: "The two most important articles which appear during the last ten years to have been growing permanently dearer are milk and fish. The increased price of the former is owing to the absorption of pasture lands; and that of the latter to the improved condition of the people, and the larger demand for fish which has arisen in consequence."²⁶

In 1872, after half a decade of steady increase dating back to 1866, jute prices rose steeply—by over 30 percent from the previous year. Motivated by the spike in prices, cultivators took up "whatever land was ready at hand," that is, land formerly devoted to *aus* and *aman* paddy. Writing in the aftermath of the jute boom, the jute commissioner Hemm Chunder Kerr estimated that two-thirds of the total land devoted to fiber consisted of former rice lands, another quarter consisted of "newly-reclaimed land not formerly under cultivation," and only one-sixteenth of land alienated from declining indigo production.²⁷ However, even this sudden diversion of land and labor from grain to fiber did not compromise peasant households' food security. As Kerr proceeds to note: "up to this time [1873], the alienation [of rice land] has not so reduced the supply of food as to be injuriously felt."²⁸

Jute production resumed its upward trajectory during the 1880s and 1890s, as commodity prices continued to rise, though it was interrupted by another global depression in 1893. The extension of jute acreage during the 1880s registered on the senses of the delta's observers, particularly their sense of smell. The retting of jute stalks in standing water was a smelly process and the stink of rotting fibers particularly repulsed Nabakumar Sen, a lawyer returning to Agartala after a visit to the countryside on a case. He recounted his sufferings to Shambhucharan Mukherjee, who described it in an account of his time at the court of the maharaja of Tipperah:

The air is filled with the stink of jute—it was impossible to breathe—not a square inch of pure air is to be had in the whole country. . . . It was worse than dung—the jute decomposition. Worse than the vilest animal excreta! he [Sen] exclaimed. My own language! thought I, as I remembered my experience . . . when walking from the boat to the mansion of the Mookerjees, I was obliged to run for life from the stench.²⁹

Beyond causing a stink, the expansion of jute cultivation during the 1880s and 1890s sharply reduced the production of rice. For the first time, parts of the Bengal delta had become reliant on imports of rice. As a colonial report from 1891 noted: "There can be no doubt that the over-production of jute in 1890-91, which led to a serious drop in the price of that commodity, also had the effect of restricting the area devoted to rice. Throughout North and East Bengal there has been a tendency of late years to sacrifice 'the staff of life' to more lucrative crops. Districts which used to feed themselves must now import: stocks are short, and normal prices of grain very high."³⁰

The expansion of jute production during the 1890s was also accompanied by a sharp increase in peasant indebtedness. Jute was a more expensive crop to cultivate than rice and required more hired labor in thinning out the fields during April and May and during harvest. Further, while laborers working on the rice harvest were often paid in kind, jute workers had to be paid in cash. Jute production was financed by cash loans to be repaid in cash after the fibers were sold. The substitution of commercial grain with commercial fiber hence entailed increasing dependence on loans and was a critical element in the rise of debt and interest as the major mechanism of expropriating peasant surplus.³¹

Peasant indebtedness did not, however, reach alarming proportions during the 1890s, as they would during the expansion after 1905. Fiber had not yet compromised food security for most peasant households, and much of the debt incurred was to smoothen household subsistence during periods of seasonal scarcity. Even as the agrarian frontier reached its limits and peasant smallholdings fragmented, most jute cultivators were able to extend jute cultivation without compromising subsistence rice production. They did so by increasingly double-cropping jute and aman on lowlands, by transplanting aman seedlings onto farms just cleared of jute. Double-cropping entailed considerably harder work, particularly during September and October, when jute was harvested, aman seedbeds prepared, and aman seedlings transplanted on the same piece of land. This extra labor, however, produced diminished returns: jute plants depleted the soil of nutrients and aman yields were drastically reduced when planted onto lands just cleared of jute. The 1890s thus witnessed the beginnings of a long decline in the productivity of agrarian labor in the delta, which would only reverse with the arrival of green revolution technologies in the 1970s.

The enormous increase in acreage following the price spikes of 1905 registered visually in the agrarian landscape: for the first time in the delta's

history, jute acreage exceeded that of *aus* paddy. This created a powerful visual image of the dominance of fiber over grain: an observer looking over the delta's agrarian landscape between March and August could see that jute covered more land than paddy. Gobinda Chandra Das's poem "Jute Song," published in 1914, opened with the lines: "Oh my tasty jute! / You have covered Bengal's crown, Bengal's fields / Where ever I go, I see you / In every village you have an office, in every neighborhood, a mart."³² During this period, Bengali middle-class intellectuals began speaking of a war between fiber and grain. In 1911 Dwijdas Datta, a lecturer in agriculture at Shibpur engineering college wrote: "Jute is now in competition with paddy. Both are involved in a great war. Who can predict whether our own food-grain will win or whether the foreign-required fiber will win in this Kurukshetra [the great battle recounted in the Mahabharata] and whether we will have to learn to eat jute in order to survive."³³

The expansion of jute during the 1900s spelled the final end to subsistence rice production in the Bengal delta. Jute cultivators now produced only a portion of the household's food requirements and depended on jute profits to purchase their remaining subsistence from markets. During the 1900s, Bengal became a regular importer of rice from Burma, and the newly created rice tracts of the Irrawaddy delta, Britain's most recent territorial acquisition in South Asia.³⁴ J. C. Jack described jute cultivators' market-based subsistence strategies in Faridpur in 1916:

some of the cultivators have given up the growing of their whole food supply on a calculation that it would be more profitable to grow jute and buy grain. . . . Nowadays the cultivator tends to grow jute on all the land fit for the purpose and to grow rice and other food crops only on the remainder. If that remainder is insufficient to supply the family requirements in food, he prefers to buy rather than to reduce the amount of land under jute.³⁵

With the end of subsistence rice production, seasonal hunger became a regular feature of the peasant calendar. The *aus* harvest in July and August was no longer sufficient to tide the household over until the *aman* harvest of December and January, nor would the *aman* harvest last until the following *aus* harvest. Each year, the weeks before a grain harvest were periods of possible hunger, when the cash earnings from jute were necessary to ensure simple survival. Seasonal hunger and debt were closely related, as cultivators became reliant on loans—for the most part from *mahajans* or professional money-lenders—to finance subsistence purchases from markets. Peasant households'

needs for subsistence-smoothing loans peaked during the monsoons, during June and July, before the aus and jute harvests, when grain stocks from the aman harvest and cash earnings from the previous year's jute sales were running low. Peasant households depended on high-interest loans to survive these recurrent periods of seasonal scarcity and to stave off hunger, thus driving up levels of peasant indebtedness to crisis levels.

Colonial officials attributed this spike to "extravagant" and "frivolous" consumption. As F. A. Sachse, the district magistrate of Mymensingh, wrote in 1913: "The *crores* of rupees paid for the raw article have had no visible effect on the manliness or contentedness of the agricultural classes or even on their material prosperity. They have no idea of saving, and in most cases their earnings from jute are frittered away on profitless extravagances long before the next crop is on the ground. By increasing their credit the inflated prices of jute have deepened rather than diminished their general indebtedness."³⁶ However, simple subsistence rather than "profitless extravagance" drove peasant indebtedness.

Hunger

At the beginning of the 1873 jute season, prices fell sharply. The Long Depression, which has been described as the "first truly international crisis," had set in, resulting in a collapse in global commodity prices that was rapidly communicated to rural jute markets.³⁷ The price of best-quality jute in Sirajganj markets fell from 5 rupees per maund to 3½ rupees per maund, and the price of low-quality jute in Narayanganj was as low as one rupee a maund.³⁸ As prices collapsed, cultivators simply allowed a portion of their crops to rot in the field. In Dacca and Mymensingh, the jute commissioners were "informed, everywhere, that quantities of jute grown last season had been left abandoned in the fields."³⁹ The collector of Tipperah reported that "the rayats left one-fourth of the crops rotting in the fields uncut."⁴⁰ Cultivators thus chose to absorb the sunk costs of production rather than incur the additional expenditure of harvesting and preparing nonrenumerative fibers. Even if they prepared jute, cultivators were able to hold on to their fibers in the hope that prices would rise. In January 1873, jute traders reported that "cultivators are now withholding their fibre from the export depots, in the hope that prices may again rally."⁴¹ The delta's peasantry were able to allow crops to rot in the field and to hold fiber back from the market because they did not rely on earnings from jute to stave off hunger.

During the 1870s, seasonal hunger was not yet a feature of peasant life and the enormous expansion of jute had, thus far, been accompanied by an increase in rice cultivation and export. As their granaries held sufficient rice for subsistence, peasant households were not forced to sell jute to stave off hunger. Thus peasant households responded to price collapses by abandoning the standing jute crop and focusing their labor on other crops—notably, aman paddy and rabi crops. In the meantime, they restricted market-based consumption and took on some loans to tide them over difficulty.⁴²

The expansion of jute cultivation during the 1880s did not compromise food security. When prices collapsed in 1891, in response to yet another global economic depression, jute cultivators responded in much the same way as they had done in 1872, by allowing a portion of their crop to rot in the fields rather than incurring the additional expenses of harvesting unremunerative fiber.⁴³ However, by this time, rice production had been reduced to the bare requirements of subsistence, allowing a very small margin in case of failed harvests. While peasant households were insulated from price shocks during years of normal harvests, they were vulnerable to ecological shocks and partial failures in rice production. In August and September 1893, large portions of Brahmanbaria subdivision in Tipperah flooded, when the Gumti—a tributary of the Meghna river system—breached its embankment. This flood was an early indicator of the increased vulnerability of cultivators to external shocks as a result of reduced food production. The floods affected the standing aman crop, destroying fields and severely reducing yields, which, according to government estimates, were about half of what might be expected in a good year. Even in the 1890s, after almost three decades of continually expanding jute cultivation, a portion of Brahmanbaria's aman crop was normally exported. However, the reduced yields of that year meant that rice had to be imported into the delta: in other words, cultivators had to purchase rice from market-places. In May of the following year, a serious shortage of grain was felt in the district, or to use the colonial government's euphemism for seasonal hunger, residents in Brahmanbaria experienced "distress."⁴⁴ This distress lasted from April until August, when peasant households could harvest aus paddy and jute. During those months, peasant households in Brahmanbaria "managed to subsist by mortgaging their lands, selling some property, or borrowing to get enough to carry them on till the aus paddy and jute are cut."⁴⁵

Peasant households' ability to withstand price shocks was, however, compromised with the adoption of market-based subsistence strategies in the 1900s. The rapid increase in jute cultivation during this period coincided with

a diminution in the size of peasant holdings. Peasant households were only able to increase jute production by sacrificing subsistence rice cultivation—a sensible and profitable strategy as long as the terms of trade between jute and rice were favorable to jute producers. However, cultivators' dependence on cash proceeds from jute sales to procure simple subsistence meant that they were no longer able to allow their standing crops to rot or even to hold on to fibers in hopes of better prices. They simply had to sell to stave off starvation. The vulnerabilities of market-dependent livelihoods were cruelly exposed in August 1914, when World War I erupted just as cultivators were preparing to harvest jute.

World War I led to a virtual cessation of all shipping and trade and markets for jute virtually disappeared. When selling resumed in September, prices were absurdly low—two rupees a maund for the best jute, compared to the ten to twelve rupees that ordinary jute sold for during 1913.⁴⁶ Fearful of panic spreading through the delta, the colonial government distributed pamphlets through the jute tracts urging cultivators to hold on to their crop, as markets would be restored and prices would rise again. The pamphlet issued on August 15, 1914, stated: "On account of the sudden outbreak of war in Europe buyers have stopped buying jute temporarily but such a state of things will not last long. . . . If you can wait a little, there will not be any big loss, but if you sell in a hurry, the loss will be great."⁴⁷

However, cultivators were unable to hold on for any length of time. L. Birley, the magistrate of Dacca, toured the jute-growing villages in the district during August and September 1914 to keep an eye on developments. He noticed that cultivators had decided to forego employed labor and exploit household labor: "I was informed by all classes that cultivators were stripping their jute for themselves instead of by hired labour; in many places I saw a man with one or two small boys stripping jute and I think that this statement is correct."⁴⁸ Unlike in 1872, cultivators did not—*could not*—abandon their crop in the fields and instead they intensified the exploitation of household labor. Their inability to hold on to the crop was related to hunger. As Birley stated: "the tour had left me with the impression that the raiyats had more staying power than we had credited them with at first, but that they were feeling anxious, and that if they could not sell their jute soon those who did not get a good crop of *aus dhan* would feel the pinch until the time of the harvesting of the winter rice."⁴⁹ The most desperate cultivators had already sold their jute at very low prices, but found that they could not buy rice with their returns from jute. Birley spoke to a group of "small cultivators who had sold all their jute at this price [Rs. 2 a maund] and were subsisting on loans of rice from friendly cultivators."⁵⁰

The price collapse of World War I marked the end of a period of peasant prosperity in the Bengal delta and began a process of rapid, thorough, and utter peasant immiseration. After World War I the majority of the delta's jute-cultivating peasantry would be rendered destitute by a combination of unfavorable global markets, ecological shocks such as floods and epidemics, land fragmentation, and a crushing debt burden. Many impoverished cultivators during the 1920s traced the beginnings of their destitution to the market shock of World War I. Shah Abdul Hamid's *Krishak Bilap* or *Peasant Lament*, published in Kishoreganj in 1922, narrates one such case of peasant immiseration, and demonstrates how the market shock at the beginning of World War I provided a decisive push toward a downward spiral into poverty for Bengal's jute-cultivating peasantry.

In 1921, on his way from Kishoreganj to Mymensingh, Shah Abdul Hamid observed the following scene of a tearful farewell at a rural railway station.⁵¹ An elderly man was standing in the entrance to a third-class carriage. His wife and children, with their belongings wrapped up in sheets, were inside the car, behind him. On the platform stood another teary-eyed family, congregated to say farewell. A man was holding on to the elderly man's legs, kneeling on the platform and wailing and weeping. As the train started, he refused to let go, and had to be dragged away. After the train departed, Hamid asked this man what happened. The man replied that that was his brother, who had lost all his possessions and was going away with his family to build a new life in the jungles of Assam. The man proceeded to narrate how his brother was reduced to such destitution:

In the last German war, when the price of rice was 16 takas a maund and that of jute, one taka, my older brother fell into trouble. He had about fifteen or sixteen mouths to feed in his family and they had to buy rice from the market. Driven by hunger, he went to see a large moneylender—who has over a lakh takas outstanding in loans at any time—in a nearby bazaar. From the moneylender, my brother borrowed six and a half maunds of rice, valued at 100 rupees.⁵²

Three years later, he had not repaid anything and the moneylender sent a message that he was on “his way, with papers, to the courthouse in Mymensingh.” The brothers caught up with the moneylender at the railway station, with fifty rupees in cash. The debt was renegotiated and, under the new terms, he owed the moneylender three hundred rupees and had mortgaged his farm. Misfortune, however, piled on misfortune. His two oldest sons, who looked

after the farm, died of smallpox within a few days of each other. He lost his crop to floods one year. For five years, his debt continued to pile up until finally the moneylender claimed his mortgage—taking away the unfortunate farmer's arable land and, finally, even the tin sheets out of which his house was built. In the end, losing everything, he left with his family for the Assam jungles.⁵³

Conclusion

Peasant decisions to grow jute were driven by prices, and booms in jute prices were closely followed by rapid expansions in peasant land and labor devoted to fiber. However, these decisions had significant ramifications. First, they entailed peasant households working considerably harder: sowing both jute and aus with the spring rains, harvesting and preparing both plants in August and September, and preparing and transplanting seedlings while harvesting and preparing jute. Double-cropping jute and aman on the same soil resulted in a further intensification of peasant labor and also to far-diminished yields. Second, it involved considerable risks, particularly the risk of hunger. The decision to pare down rice production to bare subsistence requirements during the 1890s created vulnerabilities to ecological disasters, where shortfalls in rice production could cause starvation. And the fateful decision during the 1900s to adopt market-based subsistence strategies created new vulnerabilities to market shocks, as was tragically revealed at the beginning of World War I.

Why were peasant households willing to rearrange their lives—even risk hunger—for the sake of fiber? The following chapter examines peasant households' desire for cash profits from fiber in terms of consumerist desires, their desire to purchase the myriad consumer commodities that had become available in the delta's rural marketplaces during the nineteenth century. Together, these two chapters constitute an attempt to flesh out economic images of peasants as profit-driven automatons responding to fluctuations in prices. This chapter has argued that peasant market-responsiveness should not be viewed solely in terms of the cold calculus of prices and profits, but in terms of corporeal peasant bodies laboring on soil and in water and the imperatives of subsistence and hunger. The next chapter will investigate the consumerist desires and fantasies of peasant households.

Consumption and Self-Fashioning

THE POLITICS OF PEASANT CONSUMERISM

COLONIAL OFFICIALS and urban Bengali *bhadralok* (salaried professionals) observers of the Bengal delta during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries commented extensively on the prosperity of jute cultivators. This prosperity manifested itself through the myriad market-purchased consumer goods on peasant bodies and within and atop peasant homes. Sambhucharan Mukherjee, editor of *Mukherjee's Magazine* and prominent member of the Calcutta intelligentsia, noted in 1887, while floating down the Meghna through Tipperah, "It is something that so many about here are well protected in this cold weather by the cheap cottons and woollens of Europe. The women have all more costly ornaments. . . . Silver clearly predominates. . . . It was all due to jute."¹ A colonial report from 1891 similarly commented: "Owing to improved facilities of export, and the growing value of jute, the standard of comfort in the cultivating class has distinctly advanced during the decade. The raiyat wears better clothes and shoes than his father, eats more abundantly, and sleeps on a more luxurious bed. His cottage is brightly and cheaply lit by a rude kerosene lamp. He kindles his fire with Swedish safety matches which have driven the English product from the market. When ill, he calls in a doctor, and uses quinine and other costly drugs."² By the 1900s the list of peasant-consumed articles had expanded to include corrugated iron roofing, English education for sons, and multiple marriages for men. Rising levels of indebtedness and increasing food insecurity, however, meant that consumption was no longer viewed solely as a sign of peasant prosperity but also peasant improvidence. As a colonial official noted in 1913:

The jute cultivator is notoriously improvident. The high prices he has been getting during the past ten years has turned his head altogether and upset his domestic economy. The large amount of cash that he handles has made him extravagant, and his style of living has risen in a remarkable degree. He eats much better, wears better clothes, and lives a cleaner and more sanitary life than before. His house has improved, corrugated-iron has taken the place of thatch, and the compounds and gardens are cleaner. He educates his children in many cases, sending them to English schools, which are fast springing up, and calls in doctors in case of illness. He indulges more frequently in litigation and marries more wives, paying a good deal more for each than before. But all this advance in the ways of living is much more than is warranted by his material prosperity. The money that he gets by the sale of his crop he squanders in a few months, and very often, I am inclined to think, almost universally, he runs into debt before he can sell his next harvest.³⁰

The previous chapter examined how peasant decisions to grow jute transformed the delta's landscape of plants, soil, and water and its rhythms of work and leisure and hunger and subsistence. This chapter examines why peasant households chose to rearrange their spaces and lives so thoroughly, even risking hunger, for the sake of fiber. Peasant decisions to grow more jute were driven by their desire for the various goods and services that they could purchase with proceeds from sales of fiber. Instead of the cold calculus of prices and profits, we should examine jute cultivators' hot desires for consumer goods.

Kaminikumar Chakrabarty, an employee of a zamindari estate in Mymensingh, described cultivators' relationship with jute in an 1882 agricultural manual: "These days there is a lot of affection (*ador*) towards jute in this country. For this reason cultivators plant an excessive (*odhik*) quantity of jute. The romantic (*shuromik*) cultivators love (*bhalobasha*) jute so much that they sing songs like 'there is no crop like jute' while working the fields."⁴ It is unusual to think of the cultivators' relationship to the plant as one of "love" and "affection," and the phrase seems particularly out of place in an otherwise dry and technical manual on best cultivation practices for various crops. It is hard to explain the peasant ditty "there is no crop like jute"—jute was an onerous plant to cultivate and, as Bengali poets liked to point out, fibers were inedible.⁵ Peasants' love of jute was, in fact, the desire for the myriad goods and services purchased from jute earnings in the delta's marketplaces.

Peasant households exchanged fiber for cloth, gold and silver ornaments, umbrellas, copper and brass utensils, corrugated iron sheets, kerosene lamps and oil, Swedish safety matches, cigarettes, gourmet fish, seasonal fruit, confections and sweets in rural marketplaces. Through the consumption of these myriad goods, jute-cultivating households crafted new forms of dress, domesticity, and sociality. However, unlike urban, middle-class South Asians during the same period, peasant men and women did not experiment with Western forms of dress and domesticity. Men and women did not adopt new styles of clothing, peasant families did not move into multiroom dwellings with specialized spaces for sleeping, entertaining and dining, and they did not furnish their homes with chairs on which to sit upright and tables on which to serve meals. As a result, colonial and urban bhadralok observers did not recognize jute cultivators' dress and domesticity as modern and, instead, held paradoxical views of peasant bodies and homes as signifying both prosperity and backwardness. Though crafted out of global flows of commodities, peasant "habitations of modernity" remained firmly rooted in precolonial, agrarian, and Muslim forms of dress, domesticity, and dining.⁶

Consumption-driven peasant self-fashioning extended to property, to peasant households' claims to enhanced rights to the land they tilled. As Andrew Sartori has convincingly demonstrated, property was integral to Bengali Muslim peasant subjectivity.⁷ The mechanics of claiming and obtaining property rights were a form of market-based consumption. Property rights were colonial products, created through state legislation, which could be purchased—occasionally through expensive litigation against zamindars—in the form of stamped paper in subdivisional courtrooms and revenue offices. This chapter revisits the antirent movement, whose beginnings coincided with the jute boom of the early 1870s, in terms of the peasant consumption of enhanced property rights. I reinterpret colonial and bhadralok complaints of peasant litigiousness—"he indulges more frequently in litigation"—in terms of the consumption of colonial legal services. The consumption of property rights was not solely about economic security against zamindari depredation, but was also critical to the project of fashioning the idealized image of a property-holding peasantry.

The importance that peasant households attached to consumption was revealed in their resistance to the Swadeshi program of economic boycott of 1905–6. The Swadeshi movement arrived in the Bengal delta in the form of the forcible prevention of the sale and purchase of imported commodities in rural bazaars and fairs by urban, middle-class Swadeshi activists. This nationalist

program coincided with the boom in jute prices of 1905, a period of heightened consumption. Jute cultivators resisted Swadeshi activists, sometimes forcefully, leading to clashes between peasants and nationalists in bazaars and fairs in Tipperah, Jamalpur, and Dacca. Historians of the Swadeshi movement have described these clashes between mostly Muslim peasants and mostly Hindu Swadeshi activists as “communal”—that is, primarily informed by religious difference. Historians have also viewed peasant consumption purely in economic terms: imported commodities were cheaper than locally made products and Bengal’s peasantry resisted the boycott as it raised their cost of living. I argue that peasant resistance to Swadeshi activists was neither communal nor economic: they were vigorous attempts to protect rural markets and fairs as spaces of *pleasurable* and *enjoyable* consumption.

Before embarking on a discussion of jute cultivators’ consumption-driven self-fashioning and the politics of peasant consumerism, it will be useful to describe spaces of consumption. Jute cultivators purchased these new goods and services primarily from three kinds of marketplaces: *hats* or occasional markets held once or twice a week in villages, *melas* or annual fairs commemorating religious festivals, and *ganjes*, riverine and railway market towns that served as wholesale centers.⁸ Peasant homesteads were generally within walking distance of several hats, and many peasant men—never women—frequented multiple hats. Itinerant traders traveled from hat to hat selling regular household necessities: salt, spices, cloth, utensils, kerosene oil, mustard oil, fish, fruit, grain, and vegetables. Peasant men did not just visit hats to purchase such necessities, but also to socialize. As J. C. Jack wrote about the Faridpur cultivator, “he does not ordinarily go to buy anything, but to talk with friends and neighbours.”⁹

Melas or annual fairs were far larger and more vibrant events. They usually accompanied religious festivals, such as the bathing festival in Nangalband near Narayanganj, the celebration of Janmasthan, the birth of Krishna, in Jamalpur, and the death anniversary or *urs* of Sufi pirs, such as the Nekmard fair in Dinajpur. While the hats dealt in daily household necessities, melas focused on durable goods and exotic items. For instance, at the Neckmard mela at Dinajpur, held annually in April, traders sold oxen from Purnea, ponies from the Bhutan hills, horses from Kabul, elephants from Assam, and even camels from the northwest: “people from all parts of Northern India frequent the fair. Mughuls and Afghans bring dried fruits, embroidered saddlery, daggers, swords, looking-glasses, and so on. Sikhs may be seen manufacturing combs out of ivory and sandal-wood. The hill tribes bring down blankets, woollen cloths, walnuts, musk, ponies, and yak tails. The Nepalis sell *kukris* (heavy

bill-hooks, the national weapon of the Gurkhas) and *chirda* leaf. Quantities of real and imitation coral beads are exposed for sale by the bankers of Dinajpur."¹⁰

Market towns or ganjes were spaces for wholesale trade, where itinerant traders purchased cloth, kerosene oil, rice, and other consumer articles that they retailed in rural hats. Certain retail commodities were only available at the market towns, rather than in rural bazaars. The *Mymensingh District Gazetteer* noted in 1915: "shops in the more important marts . . . sell English glass, mirrors, crockery, writing materials, medicines, lamps, stores, matches, cigarettes."¹¹ Further, legal, educational, and medical services were only available in small towns, in the courts, lawyers' and doctors' practices, and English-language schools that proliferated in mofussil towns as the colonial state penetrated deeper into the delta.

The first section of this chapter examines the peasant consumption of property rights during the antirent movement of the 1870s. The creation and consumption of state-legislated property rights were integral to projects of peasant self-fashioning and the first jute boom created opportunities for jute cultivators to enjoy the enhanced property rights that had been created by the Rent Act of 1859. The second section explores the consumption of myriad consumer goods in hats, melas, and ganjes, demonstrating the ways in which peasant men and women crafted distinctively agrarian, Muslim, and Bengali practices of dress, domesticity, and dining through the exchange of jute for machine-made cloth, metals, kerosene oil, and so forth in global commodity markets. The third section of this chapter examines peasant resistance to the Swadeshi program of economic boycott, arguing that the peasant resistance to Swadeshi attacks on their consumption of imported goods from rural hats and melas demonstrates the importance peasant households attached to practices of pleasurable consumption. The final section examines the crisis of World War I on peasant consumerism through episodes of peasants looting hats in protest of high prices of essentials during 1917–18.

Property

Colonial officials viewed the rise in peasant litigation accompanying the first jute boom of the early 1870s as a sign of prosperity. The collector of Bogra noted in 1873: "perhaps the most tangible evidence of the easy circumstances of the people is to be found in the rapidly increasing number of petty complaints brought before the courts."¹² Litigiousness was perceived as a form of frivolous entertainment, through which peasants enlivened their dull, rural

existence. According to the collector of Tipperah, "the absurd quarrels among the people, which result in the most wantonly false charges at the police station, show they must take a positive pleasure in the progress of the case, quite apart from any idea of getting justice or obtaining any solid advantage. . . . I can only suppose that the investigation of a case is a pleasurable break in the monotony of a dull life; but it is at least to be regretted that choice should be made of so extravagant a diversion."¹³

Rather than an "extravagant diversion," litigation was critical to peasant self-fashioning. During the antirent movement of the 1870s, it was a means to access enhanced property rights legislated by the colonial state in the Rent Act of 1859. Continuous peasant struggles to obtain more secure rights to the land they tilled during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were an ongoing attempt by jute-cultivating households to attain an idealized peasant selfhood. The paradox of property in the Bengal delta was that, while zamindari rents were not particularly onerous, and zamindari power was limited in most of the delta, peasants' political energies were focused on property and the rights of tenancy.¹⁴ This paradox suggests that the peasant struggle for property rights was not solely about protection from zamindari depredation but was instead driven by a different set of desires. Andrew Sartori has argued that a Lockean conception of property, based on the principle that labor constituted claims to property, underpinned discourses of peasant Muslim-ness. I follow Sartori in taking seriously the place of property in the Bengal peasantry's ideals of selfhood, that to obtain secure property rights was to pursue an idealized conception of rights to the land they tilled.

Sartori ascribes a "resonance" or a "concatenation" between the Lockean forms of property created by the colonial state and "agrarian political energies."¹⁵ This resonance between the colonial state's legislation and peasant politics is best understood in terms of the peasant consumption of colonial legal services. Unlike many subaltern communities, the Bengal peasantry did not take issue with the colonial state's authority to create, distribute, and guarantee property rights. Instead, peasant political energy was directed toward obtaining property rights and toward legislative reforms of property law. Property deeds printed on paper stamped and sealed with the judicial authority of the colonial state were among the few written documents owned and closely guarded by largely illiterate peasant households. Property was conceived as a state-constituted product that peasant households consumed by purchasing judicial stamps or, if their claims to property were resisted by zamindars, through expensive litigation. These legal expenditures were financed by fiber.

Colonial historians have tended to examine the relationship between the colonial law and agrarian society as a supply-side phenomenon, in terms of colonial debates on property rights and the penetration of colonial laws and legal institutions into the agrarian countryside.¹⁶ Prior to the rise of jute, the East India Company state was not interested in providing legally codified property rights to peasant producers. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 focused on relations between zamindars and the company, allowing zamindars absolute freedom in their dealings with peasant tenants. Further, the legal costs of initiating property-related lawsuits were prohibitively high. Hence, during the early colonial period, peasant households responded to zamindari depredation through extralegal measures, such as moving out of a particular zamindar's estate, and not by taking recourse to courts of law.¹⁷

During the second half of the nineteenth century, colonial property law was made more relevant and accessible to cultivators, as the colonial state introduced new ideas of property into their agrarian dominions in South Asia. The Rent Act of 1859 set limits to zamindari powers to enhance rents or evict peasant households. At the same time, the colonial state also reduced court fees and stamp duties and expanded courthouses in the delta's smaller mofussil towns. After 1864, provincial civil courts—rather than the local Revenue Department—were empowered to adjudicate rent suits.¹⁸ The Rent Act of 1859, the expansion of courtrooms and judges in the countryside, and the lowered costs of litigation constituted a broad set of supply-side measures that made property law accessible—*consumable*—by the delta's peasantry. Equally significantly, these supply-side reforms had to be accompanied by the peasant households' ability to finance the consumption of property. The influx of cash into peasant households during the first jute boom of the 1870s created an effective demand for colonial property rights.

In May 1873 peasant smallholders in the Yusufshahi Pargana of Pabna district organized themselves into an "agrarian league" and refused to pay their zamindars' demand for enhanced rent. Yusufshahi Pargana probably had one of the highest densities of jute cultivation in all of Bengal. Yusufshahi was in the Sirajganj subdivision, close to the port city Sirajganj, at the time the "greatest jute mart in eastern Bengal." It was estimated that of the 192 square miles sown with jute in Pabna during 1872–73, 123 square miles was in Sirajganj subdivision.¹⁹ Within two months, agrarian leagues had emerged throughout Pabna and, over the following years, across Bengal, as cultivators organized themselves into agrarian leagues and resisted landlords' attempts to increase rents.²⁰ The rent-disputes were brought to a close only in 1885, with the introduction of

a new Tenancy Act by the colonial state, granting cultivators enhanced security of tenure and further protection against rent enhancements.

For the most part, cultivators conducted their antirent struggle through colonial legal institutions. The formation of an Agrarian League in Yusufshahi was preceded and probably inspired by the conclusion of a court case in Sirajganj, where a peasant household had successfully sued against the landlords' rent increases. The primary function of the Pabna Agrarian League was to raise subscriptions to support members in legal disputes. Each of the districts convulsed by the antirent movement witnessed steep increases in rent suits during the period.²¹ These suits were conducted under Act X of the Rent Act of 1859, which had created the legal category of "occupancy ryots" who enjoyed greater security of tenure and protection against rent enhancements. Peasants brought lawsuits against landlords attempting to raise rents or, alternatively, zamindars instituted suits against peasants who refused to pay enhanced rents. The outcome of the rent disputes turned on whether the peasants in question were entitled to the legal status of occupancy ryot under Act X.

K. K. Sengupta, the historian of the Pabna disturbances, ascribes an important role in the movement to a group of "substantial ryots," and proceeds to define that group in terms of its ability to make "huge profits through the cultivation of jute."

The leadership of the league, therefore, was provided by men of considerable means such as petty landlords . . . village headmen . . . and jotedars . . . This disgruntled section of the rural gentry found a large number of supporters amongst the occupancy ryots described by Sir Richard Temple, "as the most influential section of ryots." Some of the occupancy ryots made huge profits through the cultivation of jute, a cash crop which only the substantial ryots could afford to cultivate. . . . These substantial ryots were sufficiently well-to-do to offer an effectual resistance to the zemindars.²²

The role of the substantial, "sufficiently well-to-do," jute cultivating peasantry across the jute tracts of eastern Bengal was underpinned by their ability to finance expensive and lengthy lawsuits. From the peasant perspective, litigation was successful. The costs of litigation drained zamindars' resources quicker than that of the peasantry. K. K. Sengupta argues that, "the landlords who had enough resources in 1875 to harass their tenants in the civil courts had become by 1878 quite impoverished." The agrarian leagues were effectively pooling jute cultivators' resources, and the peasants' stoppage of all rents to zamindars while cases were pending had the desired effect.²³

The colonial government had a different interpretation of the place of jute in the rent disputes of the 1870s. They did not see fiber as the source of finance for peasant consumption of legal services, but as forming the basis of conflicts between zamindars and ryots. The official theory of the rent disputes was that landlords were attempting to raise rents to gain an increasing share of the rising prosperity of the cultivators. In the words of the commissioner of Chittagong Division, "the rise which has taken place during the last few years in the price of produce and in the value of land, combined with the absence of any well-defined rules to regulate the rate of rent has caused a feeling of uncertainty to rise, which has alienated the tenantry from their landlords and embittered relations."²⁴ Act X of 1859 specified that increases to rents had to be passed through the civil courts of the government and peasants were aware of this stipulation. Hence, all attempts to raise rents made their way into the courtroom. However, while Act X allowed for rates to be enhanced because of the rising value of the produce, it was vague about the extent to which rents could be enhanced. Hence, the cases lingered in the courts. In the meantime, peasants organized to stop all payments of rent and an uneasy tension prevailed between landlords and tenants. This chain of events is neatly captured by the lieutenant governor of Bengal's three-step model:

1st- That there are large disputes pending between zemindars and ryots regarding the degree in which rent may be enhanced by reason of the increase during recent years in the value of the produce of land;

2nd- That when these disputes become embittered, then, besides the question of enhancement, other questions become involved, such as the levy of certain cesses, the payment of alleged arrears, the past rate of rent, the area of actual holdings—the end of all this being that the payment of rent altogether in some places is likely to be held in abeyance for some time;

3rd- That under such circumstances zemindars have sometimes attempted, or may attempt, to collect rents by force, which attempts are forcibly resisted,—the result being breaches of the peace.²⁵

The colonial diagnosis of the issue as one of vagueness in property laws led to a lengthy discussion in bureaucratic circles about necessary reforms to agrarian property rights in Bengal. In 1881 the colonial government circulated a draft Tenancy Bill, further enhancing security of tenure and offering even greater protection against rent enhancements to the occupancy ryot. Zamindars reacted angrily, proclaiming that the new bill would destroy them.²⁶ The Tenancy Act of 1885 curbed the zamindar's powers vis-à-vis their tenants and, as Sugata Bose

has argued, brought to an end the rent and revenue offensive against the peasantry of Bengal. From 1885 onward, zamindari rents would no longer be the primary mechanism of surplus extraction from the Bengal peasantry.²⁷

By the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of the delta's jute cultivators fit into the legal category of "permanently settled occupancy ryot," and thus possessed legal protections against rent enhancements and evictions by zamindars. Attaining the legal category of property rights was not solely about gaining economic security, but also about fulfilling an idealized notion of peasant selfhood premised on secure property rights to the land they labored on. Further, and more significantly, peasant households fashioned themselves into property-holding subjects through acts of consumption: enhanced property rights were a colonial legal product that was consumed through expensive and lengthy lawsuits financed by jute profits.

Dress, Dwellings, Diet

For colonial and bhadralok observers of the agrarian delta, peasant prosperity was apparent in their dress, dwellings, and diets. W. W. Hunter's *Statistical Account of Tippera* stated that "the general prosperity of the people is shown in their houses, in their food and clothing."²⁸ Regarding cultivators in Mymensingh, Hunter noted: "The people of the District are making rapid progress toward improvements of many kinds. A common husbandman now-a-days is much better dressed, has fewer unsatisfied wants, and more knowledge of what tends to promote his comfort, than people of his class had twenty years ago."²⁹ The collector of Noakhali similarly associated prosperity with clothing and housing: "This improvement [in material conditions of cultivators] is seen both in their dress and in their dwellings."³⁰

These "improvements" in dress, dwellings, and diets consisted of the increased expenditure in hats, melas, and ganjes on imported cloth, metal utensils, corrugated iron roofing, kerosene lamps, gourmet fish, seasonal fruits, and the occasional confectionery. Yet, these "improvements" did not entail experiments with Western forms of dress and domesticity. Despite the increased consumption of various commodities, peasant households' clothing, housing, and food retained strong elements of continuity with the past. Even as it was constructed out of the consumption of global commodities, the peasant habitation of modernity was resolutely agrarian and local.

Clothing

Manchester cloth or, in the language of colonial trade statistics "European piece goods," was the most significant commodity imported into the Bengal delta. The first jute boom, sparked by the Crimean War, was accompanied by a sharp spike in Calcutta's cloth imports, which increased in value from .5 million to 8.25 million rupees between 1855 and 1875. While not all of this increase was attributable to consumption in the jute tracts, jute-growing districts consumed more cloth per capita than the rest of the province.³¹ The second jute boom of the 1880s and 1890s followed the expansion of the railway network into the delta. Railway traffic in European piece goods between Calcutta and the delta increased sharply, at an average annual rate of 11.5 percent on the Northern Bengal State Railway and 7.1 percent on the Eastern Bengal State Railway between 1882-83 and 1891-92, and an average rate of 5.6 percent on the Dacca State Railway between 1886-87 and 1891-92.³² The final and decisive jute boom of the 1900s was not accompanied by a comparable increase in imports of Manchester cloth: the delta's cloth imports increased at an annual rate of only 1.5 percent between 1905-6 and 1912-13.³³ This was partly due to the Swadeshi boycott of cloth, but also because jute earnings were being invested in other consumer goods. By the 1910s peasant expenditures on clothes, largely Manchester cloth, accounted for a full 10 percent of peasant households' annual expenditure, regardless of whether the family was living in "comfort" or "extreme indigence."³⁴

The increased consumption of cloth did not, however, result in a revolution in peasant fashion. Both before and after the jute boom, peasant costumes remained largely unchanged: a *lungi* or sarong with a *chadar* or shawl for men and a *sari* for women. Unlike urban South Asians, men had not adopted trousers and buttoned shirts and women did not wear petticoats and blouses along with saris. Instead of a change in fashion, the increased consumption of cloth meant that peasant men and women owned more changes of clothes, and were better able to replace worn and torn clothing. When colonial officials or urban *bhadralok* noted that peasant wealth is reflected in clothing, they were not speaking about new forms of clothing but newer, cleaner, and less-worn clothes. The absence of change in peasant fashion meant different things for peasant men and women. For peasant men, it implied the wider adoption of a distinctive agrarian Muslim form of dress, associated with the Faraizi movement. The *lungi* differentiated the delta's Muslims from Hindus, who wear the sarong as a *dhuti*, with the cloth passed between the legs.³⁵ Haji Shariatallah,

the founder of the Faraizi movement, advised Muslims to wear the dhuti without passing the cloth between the legs—that is, as a lungi—because it would facilitate the motions of Islamic prayer. From the colonial perspective, the lungi became a signifier of Muslim difference from Europeans: “externally a *Faraizi* may be known by the fashion of wrapping his *dhuti* or waistcloth round his loins without crossing it between his legs, so as to avoid any resemblance to a Christian’s trousers.”³⁶

For women, the absence of change in clothing accompanied the lack of change in their mobility. Urban women adopted petticoats and blouses and new ways of wearing the sari to appear in public spaces. Peasant women’s dress—*sans* the blouse and petticoat—drew prurient and scandalized commentary from the colonial male gaze: “The ordinary dress of a woman . . . is the *sari*, a long piece of cloth fastened round the waist so as to form a petticoat and also a covering for the upper part of the body. It has the great advantage of being cool, but at times leaves little to the imagination, and it is no matter for surprise that men should not like their womenfolk to appear freely in public in quite exiguous attire.”³⁷ B. C. Allen makes an important point: peasant women’s mobility was restricted even as jute cultivation expanded. Peasant women’s labor, which included threshing rice, stripping jute, and the like, was conducted within the shielded and protected space of the homestead. Peasant women did not visit hats and melas and, when they visited family, they traveled in the covered portions of boats, ox-drawn carts, or, rarely, in palanquins. The increased consumption of cloth meant that peasant women owned more and less-worn and torn saris; they did not, however, own clothes that enabled them to appear in public.

The more substantive changes in peasant fashion were not in clothing, but in ornaments for women and umbrellas and hairstyles for men. Colonial sources noted that increased peasant wealth resulted in an upgrade in women’s ornaments—from *lac* to brass and copper, from brass and copper to silver, and from silver to gold. The collector of Bogra observed in the 1870s that ornaments of “lead, glass or shell” had been replaced by “brass ornaments and silver ear-rings.” Shambhu Charan Mookerjee stated that in Tipperah in 1882, “the women have all more costly ornaments. . . . Silver clearly predominates.”³⁸ The *Tippera District Gazetteer* stated in 1915: “Gold ornaments have been substituted for silver in the houses of the upper classes, and silver for those of bell-metal or brass.”³⁹ Colonial sources do not, however, indicate whether the use of precious metals in ornaments was accompanied by a change in jewelry design.

The widespread adoption of umbrellas was another sign of peasant fashion. Beyond providing protection from the rain, umbrellas were regular accessories for peasant men in public—at hats and in small towns. The collector of Bogra commented in 1875: “Well-to-do *rayats* constantly walk about with umbrellas.”⁴⁰ Calcutta’s imports of umbrellas increased sharply during the 1880s and reached 3 million umbrellas in 1893–94. Imports tapered off as umbrellas began to be assembled in Bengal from imported fittings of steel ribs and cloth.⁴¹ Peasant expenditure on umbrellas was noted in anticonsumerist pamphlets and poems published during the 1920s, which I discuss in greater detail in chapter 4. One such tract urged cultivators not to spend five or six rupees on an umbrella from Ralli Bros but to make their own umbrellas at home.⁴² These anticonsumerist tracts also dwelt on peasant men’s hairstyles, castigating them for spending money on fancy “Albert cuts” in towns rather than getting cheaper haircuts from the village barber. The Albert cut was a distinctive hairstyle that became popular in towns and villages following the visit of Prince Albert Victor to South Asia and Calcutta during the winter of 1889–90.

Despite these changes in peasant fashion—newer and cleaner clothing, gold and silver jewelry, umbrellas, and hairstyles—to Europeans, peasant men and women often appeared poorly dressed. As the *Dacca District Gazetteer* commented: “Well-to-do Muhammadans often spend a good deal on their wardrobe, but fortunately the villagers have not yet become imbued with any desire to squander money on dress and an old man whose clothes would disgrace a scarecrow will sometimes admit that he has sold his jute for as much as Rs. 500.”⁴³ In reality, though peasants were spending a considerable portion of their income on clothing, peasant dress was not recognizably modern to European eyes. Instead of experimenting with European fashions with their increased purchases of machine-made imported cloth, jute-cultivating men and women adopted forms of dress particular and specific to Bengali and Muslim peasants.

Housing

Even as they recognized peasant homes as indicative of prosperity, colonial officials were struck by the bareness of their interiors. The *Tippura District Gazetteer* stated: “Cultivators even when well to do have still less [than zamindars]. A box or two to hold their clothes, a wooden stool, some mats on which they sleep on the mud floor and that is all.”⁴⁴ Peasant belongings appeared “cheap and tawdry” to colonial officials, as the *Mymensingh District*

Gazetteer also noted: "The tin lamps, the earthenware pots, the wooden *hookahs*, the two penny half penny ornaments and toys which he brings back from the *hat* are all of the most *tawdry and cheap* manufacture."⁴⁵ These absences were not indicative of poverty, but rather the peculiarity of tastes. J. C. Jack ascribes the bareness of peasant homes to aesthetic preferences:

A wealthy Bengali . . . has as little furniture as a member of the poorer classes. Cupboards are rarely to be found even in the houses of the most wealthy; linen is usually kept in boxes or chests, often richly decorated with brass work. A Bengali always eats off the ground, from a sheet or mat and squatting on his haunches. He will not eat off a table. . . . If he sits on a chair at all, he selects a very low stool, for to sit on a chair of the ordinary size is to him not at all restful; when he is tired and requires a rest he will squat on his haunches. . . . To beds there is not the same objection, but of all articles of furniture bedsteads are the most expensive and cheap bedsteads are of little use. In truth the absence of internal decoration and of furniture is not a question of money, but a question of taste. The wealthiest Bengali who is untouched by foreign influences keeps as bare a house as his poorer neighbours and eschews ceilings, painted walls and furniture as completely as they do.⁴⁶

As was the case with peasant fashion, colonial observers did not recognize the considerable peasant expenditure within and atop their homes as modern. As with peasant clothing, these expenditures had created forms of domesticity firmly rooted in the agrarian past and did not entail adopting and adapting new forms of domestic life. Unlike urban South Asians, the delta's peasantry did not construct multiroom homes, with specialized spaces for different activities. The basic design of the peasant home remained unchanged: one-room dwellings constructed around an internal courtyard, or *uthan*. The dwellings consisted of a frame of timber posts and beams supporting a sloping roof, and the number of dwellings varied according to household wealth. Only one of the dwellings was specialized—the kitchen with earthen hearths—while the rest were multipurpose spaces for sleeping, storage, and entertaining.

Peasant households, however, had invested considerably in the interiors and exteriors of their homes, through purchases of new kinds of construction materials, utensils, and indoor illumination. Strikingly, these peasant-purchased commodities were largely metallic: copper, brass, or enameled iron utensils, corrugated iron roofs, tin lamps, and tin or brass trunks. Colonial sources generally ascribe cultivators' preference for metal in terms of

TABLE 2.1. Average Annual Increase in Metals and Minerals Imported into Eastern Bengal, Northern Bengal, and Dacca Blocks by Rail, 1900-1901 to 1905-1906

Metals/Minerals	Percentage increase
Wrought brass/Brass manufactures	8.0%
Wrought iron and steel	27.7%
Iron and steel manufactures	21.8%
Kerosene oil	28.0%

Compiled from Government of Bengal, *Reports on the Trade Carried by Rail and River in Bengal in the Official Year 1900-1901 to 1911-12*, Calcutta, 1901 to 1912. It is not possible to prepare one table on the basis of these reports for two reasons. First, as the tables show, the categories of metals are altered. Second, the partition of Bengal into Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1905 means that the geographic categories of trade are changed.

TABLE 2.2. Average Annual Increase in Metals and Minerals Imported into Eastern Bengal and Assam by Rail and River, 1906-1907 to 1911-1912

Metals/Minerals	Percentage increase
Metals, brass manufactures	22.1%
Metals, wrought iron and steel, bars, sheets, girders	37.8%
Metals, wrought iron and steel, other manufactures, including cutlery	31.4%
Kerosene oil	4.4%

convenience and utility, rather than aesthetics: corrugated iron roofs were fireproof and easier to maintain than thatching, metal utensils were easier to clean, tin lamps burning kerosene oil provided brighter light. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 tabulate the annual average increase of imports of metal and minerals by rail into the jute tracts during the first decade of the twentieth century. Imports, however, had begun much earlier. The traffic in metals on the Northern Bengal State Railway had increased at an annual average of 13.1 percent between 1882 and 1892, by 16.8 percent on the Eastern Bengal Railway between 1882 and 1888, and by 10.8 percent on the Dacca State Railway between 1886 and 1892.

The first jute boom of the 1870s led to peasant investments in their homes. The Collector of Noakhali described the improvements in peasant housing in 1875: "Houses, which used to be built of straw, bamboos, and reeds on low marshy lands, are now constructed on well-raised lands and of better and more durable materials."⁴⁷ These materials did not yet include metal but rather higher quality timber and thatching. A rural poem from a later period

associated jute prosperity with timber frames: "Say brother, there is no crop like jute / The one who deals in jute has seven huts / And his four-roofed house is built with strong Joanshahi timber."⁴⁸

Corrugated iron began to be used during the second and third jute booms, from the 1890s onward, and by the early twentieth century, corrugated iron roofing became the definitive symbol of peasant prosperity. The survey and settlement report for Tipperah of 1916 states: "Though rice covers a larger area than jute, jute is really the most important crop. All cultivators depend on it entirely for comfort and largely to provide the money to purchase rice. The extension of its cultivation has increased the prosperity of tenants greatly and the spread of *expensive houses roofed with corrugated iron clearly shows this*"⁴⁹ The subinspector of madrassas in Sirajganj, Mokhtar Ahmed Siddiqi, wrote in his pamphlet on the history of Sirajganj: "The jute trade has improved the conditions of ordinary people so much that there is no poverty in these parts. In every village and in every neighborhood *we see many tin houses—only because of jute*."⁵⁰ Gobindo Chandra Das, an unknown poet from Sirajganj, rhymed in his 1914 poem, the *Jute Song*: "Those who did not have straw hovels / now their houses are covered / four-cornered, eight-cornered, shiny tin."⁵¹

Metal utensils entered peasant households earlier, from the first jute boom onward. The collector of Bogra observed in 1875: "Those who used to do very well with earthen pots and pans now have vessels of brass and copper. Vendors of these vessels say they now sell as many at a single fair as they formerly sold at three."⁵² By the early twentieth century, copper and brass utensils were commonplace in peasant homes. The *Tippera District Gazetteer* noted: "For cooking and eating, they use brass and bell-metal pots and pans, plates, and bowls of enameled iron and cheap but ugly imported pottery."⁵³ Further, the absence of metal was a clear sign of poverty, as J. C. Jack commented on Faridpur: "in the poorer homesteads the most obvious signs of poverty will be holes in the walls of the huts and the absence of brass plates, pots and jars."⁵⁴

Tin lamps were yet another form of metal that had become commonplace in peasant homes. Kerosene lamps had become ubiquitous during the late nineteenth century, and all peasant households—from the rich to the poor—used kerosene oil for illumination.⁵⁵ "His cottage is brightly and cheaply lit by a rude kerosene lamp. He kindles his fire with Swedish safety matches which have driven the English product from the market," a colonial report in 1891 noted.⁵⁶ The *Dacca District Gazetteer* commented: "For lamps the cultivators use little tin pots filled with kerosene or earthenware saucers with the wick floating in the oil."⁵⁷ Beyond lamps, the tin cans used for storing

and transporting kerosene oil were another source of metals introduced into peasant homes. Empty cans were widely used as receptacles for a variety of household goods and a metalworking industry had emerged that reshaped oilcans into domestic goods. According to the *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*: "The only new industry is the manufacture of steel trunks painted in gaudy colours which are so conspicuous in the shops of Mymensingh and Netrakona. Tinsmiths in the same shops also make lamps, chiefly from empty kerosene tins. It is impossible to imagine what people did without these tins when only local vegetable oils were in use. Besides providing receptacles for paint, lime, grain, and all sorts of other commodities, they are made into furniture, roofs, and walls of houses and boats."⁵⁸

The written archives' silence on the place of metal in peasant aesthetics means that it is difficult to conclude that the increased consumption of metal in peasant domestic spaces constituted a form of metallic modernity, akin to that described by Nira Wickremasinghe in reference to the consumption of sewing machines, bicycles, and gramophone players in colonial Sri Lanka.⁵⁹ Whether or not peasant dwellings constituted a metallic modernity, they were certainly a habitation of modernity, specific to peasants in the agrarian delta, crafted out of the consumption of metals financed by sales of fiber. As with peasant fashion, colonial commentators did not recognize peasant homes as modern. Colonial officials and middle-class Bengali observers were struck by the changes that had not taken place rather than those that had: they focused on the absence of chairs and tables and the lack of specialized rooms for sleeping and entertaining.

Food

As with peasant clothing and housing, peasant diets remained largely unchanged even as jute-cultivating households purchased more of their foods from markets. The continuity in peasant diets was noted in the *Tipperra District Gazetteer* in 1915: "Since then [1881] there has not been much change in the food of the people, but in other respects the standard of comfort is rising."⁶⁰ Peasant meals were much the same in the 1900s as they had been in the 1800s, based on rice, vegetables, fish, and spices—with milk and meat as occasional luxuries. During the 1870s the peasant diets consisted "chiefly of common rice, pulses, *kachu* (a species of yam), vegetables of different sorts, salt, oil, fish, and occasionally milk. Milk is more a luxury than an ordinary article of food."⁶¹ This was unchanged in the 1910s: "The peasant has three meals a day. In the

early morning the rice (*pantha bhat*) left over from the preceding day is eaten cold with a little salt and some burnt chilies and perhaps a little fruit if in season. The midday and evening meals have rice as their foundation and with this is taken dal of different kinds, or fish, or vegetables. Milk is a luxury and not one of the staple foods."⁶² Even as peasant households purchased more of their foods from markets—particularly their main staple, rice—peasant diets did not experience anything like the changes in working-class diets in Europe, where sugar had become a major calorie source.⁶³

The expansion of jute did accompany the rise of a new intoxicant, tobacco, though tobacco never displaced the primary intoxicant almost universally consumed by peasant men and women—the betel nut and betel leaf. Tobacco consumption was already widespread during the 1870s: in Noakhali “many men, and some women and children, smoke; but the habit is not universal in the District. The stimulants, betel-leaf and betel-nut are in common use.”⁶⁴ With the expansion of jute cultivation during the nineteenth century, however, peasant households, particularly men, switched from smoking homegrown or locally grown lower-quality tobacco to smoking higher-quality Rangpur tobacco.⁶⁵ Further, peasant households were smoking manufactured cigarettes rather than loose tobacco from hookahs: the *Tippera District Gazetteer* noted the “increased demand for crockery, cigars, cigarettes and perfumery.”⁶⁶ Eastern Bengal and Assam’s imports of manufactured and unmanufactured tobacco rose sharply during the 1900s, increasing by an annual average of close to 50 percent between 1905 and 1912. Tea, on the other hand, had not made substantial inroads into peasant households by the early twentieth century, despite the concerted colonial campaign to introduce South Asians to Britain’s favorite beverage. The *Tippera District Gazetteer* stated that, “tea is now taken in the towns, and outside them by well-to-do persons,” but rarely consumed by peasant men and women.⁶⁷

The most significant changes in peasant diets were not in the structure of meals, the primary sources of calories, or intoxicants, but in the occasional expenditures on specialty, gourmet foods: confectioneries, seasonal fruits, bottled drinks, and luxury fish. These purchases were made during visits to rural hats and annual melas and were more likely impulse purchases rather than planned expenditures. Interestingly, such treats were rarely consumed at the hat, but were brought home and shared with the entire family. J. C. Jack wrote that, in Faridpur: “Even if he buys some soda-water or lemonade or sweetmeats, of which he and his children are inordinately fond, neither he nor they will consume them at the market. If he buys fruit, mangoes or lichis,

one or two may be eaten at the market." Purchases of such treats spiked during harvest time or after sales of jute, when peasant households were flush with cash: "In the harvest season nine out of every ten cultivators returning from the market will carry an earthen jar full of sweetmeats and at least a pair of the best fish obtainable, whatever may be their price; if the large jack-fruit, which is not unlike a melon and a great favourite with the cultivator is in season, he will carry home two or three also."⁶⁸

These purchases of "the best fish obtainable" are noteworthy, because colonial commentators maintained that most of the fish consumed by peasant households was not bought in markets but was caught by men and boys of the household. Peasant men purchased prized varieties, usually caught by professional fishermen in the larger rivers, rather than the varieties available to amateur fishermen in ponds and streams near the homestead. Increased peasant purchases of fish can be traced back to the first jute boom: in Tipperah, fish prices rose in the 1870s due to the "improved condition of the people, and the larger demand for fish which has arisen in consequence."⁶⁹ Jute cultivators' demand for prized varieties of fish would keep their prices high. In his account of Sirajganj, Mokhtar Ahmed Siddiqi complained that jute cultivators were driving up prices of *hilsa*, the quintessential Bengali fish, beyond the affordability of salaried professionals: "They [jute cultivators] pay one taka, one and half takas for a simple *hilsa*, while bhadraloks, salaried men and businessmen do not dare to pay more than 10 or 11 annas for the same fish."⁷⁰

The consumption of bottled drinks, sweets, seasonal fruit, and luxury fish was a form of gourmet consumption, more concerned with enjoyment and pleasure than the simple fulfillment of caloric needs. These were impulsive purchases, prompted by vendors' cries and by the sights and smells of fish, fruits, and confections at hats and melas. These purchases transformed rural markets and fairs into spaces of pleasurable consumption, where peasant men and boys indulged in impulsive purchases of luxury foods. The significance of hats and melas as spaces of pleasurable consumption was revealed during the Swadeshi movement, when peasant households vigorously defended these spaces from Swadeshi activists' occasionally violent attempts to prevent the sale of imported goods at marketplaces.

Swadeshi, 1905–6

The colonial state's administrative decision to partition the province of Bengal into two halves, Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam, was met with vigorous opposition among the mostly Hindu urban *bhadralok* in Calcutta and in eastern Bengal's small towns. The urban *bhadralok* perceived the partition decision as an attempt to cripple Bengal culturally, politically, and economically. In response, they launched a concerted and organized movement against partition—the Swadeshi movement. This was one of the earliest attempts at nationalist mass mobilization, as urban nationalists sought to enlist the support of the so-called peasant masses. Unfortunately for Swadeshi activists, mobilization consisted of enrolling consumerist jute cultivators in a program of economic boycott—of abstaining from the consumption of imported commodities.

The Swadeshi program of economic boycott was informed by a nationalist economic discourse focused on India's impoverishment and deindustrialization through colonial rule. The poverty debate, Bipan Chandra has demonstrated, was the primary issue for nineteenth-century Indian nationalists. Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of Indian Nationalism, spent a lifetime calculating and proving India's poverty.⁷¹ Moreover, the devastating famines of the 1870s and the 1890s that swept parts of central, western, and northern India were considered to be definitive proof of Indian poverty. Indian nationalist thinkers argued that the colonial economic relation—the exchange of primary commodities for manufactured goods—had impoverished India. In his economic history of British India, R. C. Dutt documented the demise of Indian industries, particularly the textile industry.⁷²

In this nationalist discourse of colonial impoverishment through primary commodity production, jute cultivators were an embarrassing anomaly. In their rhetorical defense against the nationalist charge of impoverishment, officials of the colonial state frequently drew attention to jute cultivators' apparent prosperity. An 1892 memorandum on material conditions of the peasantry, claimed that jute "pours a flood of wealth into Central and East Bengal . . . [and] it would be difficult to over-state the influence for good on the material condition of the peasant exercised by the vast and ever-growing volume of international trade."⁷³ In their attempts to counter colonial claims and to square jute cultivators' prosperity with national impoverishment, nationalist thinkers recast jute cultivators as economic villains who were enriching themselves at the expense of their communities and the nation. Nationalists

charged jute cultivators with forsaking their communities for their colonial masters, diverting land away from the production of rice, food, oilseeds, and dairy for local communities to produce fiber for distant mills and factories. Chandrashekhar Kar's poem *Shekal-ekal* (Those days, These days) attributed reduced supplies of fish and milk and the adulteration of *ghee* to the spread of jute cultivation onto land formerly left fallow for cattle to graze:

[Those days] there were fish in the canals and lakes, rice on the fields
Cows would give plenty of milk
There was no jute cultivation anywhere in the country
There were fields of grass here, there, and everywhere.⁷⁴

Nationalists accused jute cultivators of polluting Bengal's water bodies, through rotting stalks in standing water and, to add insult to injury, using their jute profits to purchase medicines to protect themselves against the diseases that they were causing to the rest of the community. Nikilnath Roy's pro-Swadeshi pamphlet *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal), published at the peak of the Swadeshi movement, explicitly accused jute cultivators of selfishly aggrandizing themselves at the expense of the nation, by substituting grain with fiber, starving their fellow countrymen, and by polluting the delta's water:

From outside it seems that in this life-struggle [jute production], our cultivators are winning. But what is happening inside? The cultivation of rice has been reduced to such an extent, that ordinary people are experiencing starvation every year. . . . It is true that a few cultivators may have made some money, but there is no doubt that lack of rice cultivation has driven ordinary people and even some cultivators to hunger and death. On top of that, the rotting of jute in rural waterbodies has destroyed the health of these areas and the very cultivators who grow jute are spending their money on quinine and other foreign medicines. . . . Only if everyone can survive equally out of this, can we say that we are winning this life-struggle. Otherwise there is no value to victory.⁷⁵

The biggest crime perpetrated by jute cultivators, however, was their consumption of imported commodities. In Swadeshi economic thought, the consumption of imported goods—particularly cloth—had deindustrialized and impoverished India. While the pollution of water bodies, the increased prices of rice, milk, mustard oil, and fish, and the adulteration of *ghee* were local issues, deindustrialization was a national problem. Jute cultivators were not only guilty of forsaking their communities for global markets and

wreaking ecological damage on local water bodies, but they were also guilty of impoverishing the entire nation.

The Swadeshi program sought to revitalize India's economy by directing its energies inward, within the nation's territorial boundaries. Swadeshi economic thought was influenced by Friedrich List's idealized autarkic self-sufficient national economies, where flows of capital and commodities were contained within territorial borders.⁷⁶ Enmeshed in global commodity flows, jute cultivators, therefore, were anathema to the Swadeshi economic ideal. Swadeshi activists sought to realize their economic vision through a consumer boycott of imported commodities, their only policy option given the colonial state's unwillingness to erect protective tariffs. These were, of course, the very commodities that were critical to peasant projects of self-fashioning. Unsurprisingly, the economic boycott failed to gain traction in the jute tracts, especially during a period of booming jute prices and expanding jute cultivation.

Between 1905 and 1906, in scores of rural marketplaces throughout rural eastern Bengal, Swadeshi activists attempted to prevent the sale and purchase of imported articles.⁷⁷ During the first half of 1906, activists picketed against the sale of foreign merchandise in numerous markets in the jute tracts, especially in Pabna, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Dacca, Faridpur, and Tipperah districts.⁷⁸ Rumors that colonial authorities had enforced the ban on imported goods and that imported salt and sugar contained pig and cow bones circulated in these areas.⁷⁹ The boycott was also enforced through intimidation and coercion. P. C. Lyons, the senior bureaucrat in the Home Department, reported that schoolboys were being organized by their teachers to "picket the shops and prevent the sale of European goods by forcible interference with both purchasers and sellers."⁸⁰ Swadeshi picketing was sometimes met with forceful resistance, leading in several instances to violence.

These clashes between Swadeshi activists and traders and consumers were depicted as episodes of communal violence, between mostly Hindu activists and mostly Muslim traders and consumers. Lyons perceived the danger of communal clashes in February 1906, when he wrote: "And, in all places, the members of the Muhammadan community were more specially subjected to oppression of this kind [forcible purchase of Swadeshi goods], until, at the time that the agitation reached its height, a danger had arisen of organized reprisals, which would have raised trouble of a very serious nature. Muhammadans form 60 per cent of the population of Eastern Bengal, chiefly

belonging to the cultivating class.”⁸¹ Religious difference certainly played a role in Swadeshi conflicts, and Swadeshi activists had alienated Muslims with the use of explicitly Hindu slogans and symbols.⁸² Religion and caste figured in the enforcement of boycott, as in the punishment of a Brahmanbaria shopkeeper, who “under grave provocation, struck a Brahmin boy picket, [and] was made to tender an apology, shave his head, and give away ten pairs of English cloth, which were carried in procession through the streets to the accompaniment of patriotic songs and finally burnt.”⁸³

The economic element of anti-Swadeshi resistance boiled down to the financial effects of the boycott—causing a rise in prices and forcing peasants to consume more expensive locally made goods. As P. C. Lyons pointed out, “The effect of the artificial demand for country-made goods was to raise prices very greatly, and the cultivators have suffered heavy pecuniary losses from the ostracism of imported articles.”⁸⁴ The economic dimension of anti-Swadeshi resistance was not about finance; it was about defending rural markets as spaces of pleasurable and indulgent consumption. This was apparent in the anti-Swadeshi resistance at the Nangalband fair near Narayanganj during April 1907. The Nangalband mela accompanied a Hindu bathing festival that regularly attracted over a hundred thousand pilgrims. As in other hats, melas, and ganjes, Swadeshi activists roamed the fairgrounds brandishing sticks, *lathis*, and attempting to prevent stallholders and consumers from dealing in imported goods. When they forced a small boy to return a German-made looking glass that he had purchased for an anna or two and another boy to return a small box labeled “Made in Germany,” consumers and shopkeepers confronted the men and snatched away their lathis. These protests were met with a concerted show of Swadeshi force. A large crowd of young men descended on the bazaar brandishing lathis, and looted and forcibly closed down traders’ stalls.⁸⁵ The defense of small boys’ consumption of German-made looking glasses and small ornamental boxes was not about the financial impact of the Swadeshi boycott—it was an attempt to protect the mela as a space of pleasurable consumption, of the indulgent purchase of small European-manufactured toys by peasant boys. I will describe two episodes of market-related clashes during the Swadeshi movement, when peasant men and women sought to defend marketplaces as pleasurable spaces: in a small rural hat in Brahmanbaria and at a mela in Jamalpur.

Mogra Hat, Brahmanbaria

The Swadeshi movement arrived in Tipperah in the persons of A. Rasul and Bipin Chandra Pal and through the medium of a mass meeting. On February 23, 1907, Rasul presided over and Pal addressed a meeting of a mostly Hindu middle-class audience consisting of pleaders, schoolteachers, and schoolboys.⁸⁶ The meeting resolved to oppose the partition of Bengal, to boycott foreign-made goods, government education, and legal services, and to promote scientific agriculture and sanitary improvements. They also decided to form a Tipperah People's Association, headquartered in Comilla and with branches all over the district. A conference was held at Kasba, a small town in the Brahmanbaria subdivision, where it was decided to start eighty branch committees in the jurisdiction of the Kasba police station.⁸⁷ On March 17, 1907, the first of these branch committees met in Mogra, a hat or market town, twenty-nine miles north of Comilla, very close to the Agartala railway station on the Assam Bengal Railway and in the Chakla Rawshanabad estates owned by the maharaja of Hill Tipperah. At this meeting it was resolved to disallow the sale of foreign goods at the twice-weekly bazaar at Mogra, particularly Liverpool salt which was traded in significant quantities.

On March 18th, a public meeting was held in Mogra. The next day, a Tuesday and a bazaar day, Swadeshi activists went around the market warning vendors not to deal in foreign goods. On the next bazaar day, Saturday the 23rd, Swadeshi activists tried to physically stop a Muslim trader, who had come from Brahmanbaria, from selling Liverpool salt. In the ensuing row, two men were injured and the Brahmanbaria trader's stall upturned.⁸⁸ Fearing that there would be an escalation of violence on the following hat day, the 26th, D. H. Wares, the subdivisional officer (SDO) of Brahmanbaria arrived in person, accompanied by two of his inspectors, one Muslim and one Hindu, and a small contingent of village *chaukidars*, or village police. Over the course of an eventful afternoon, Wares had to intervene twice: once to separate "about 300 Muhammadans . . . and about half the number of Hindus [who were] thrashing each other with lathis and throwing stones at each other," and then to defuse the situation between "perhaps a couple of hundred Hindus endeavoring to guard [the bazaar] against a larger number of Muhammadans."⁸⁹

There was no looting involved; this was a show of force. As the district magistrate of Tipperah noted, "both sides came . . . prepared to fight."⁹⁰ It seemed that the Muslims, being in the numerical majority, were prepared to carry on the fight. On March 27th, a group of Muslims attacked seven

Hindu shops and several stalls at a small hat in Ghatiara, between three and four miles from Mogra, and part of the Sarail zamindari. On March 28th, a group of five hundred Muslims collected to attack the village of Binauti, three miles south of Mogra, and home to a number of wealthy, "respectable" Hindu families. D. H. Lees, district magistrate of Tipperah, received an anxious call for help from these prominent Hindus and arrived in time to avert violence. The arrival of twenty-five armed Gurkhas on the 26th and a further contingent of fifteen armed policemen on the 27th had ensured that an uneasy peace prevailed.⁹¹

The colonial authorities did take one further measure to defuse the situation—they reasserted the doctrine of free and unrestricted trade. They arranged with the maharaja of Tipperah Hill State to have the following notices circulated in Mogra hat and surrounding areas:

It is hereby notified that in Hats, Bazaars and Melas . . . there is full liberty for all persons to buy and sell any article they please. In case of any interference in this connection information should be given by the aggrieved party to the sub-manager of the district concerned.⁹²

A similar notice was issued in Ghatiara and surrounding villages, this time by the collector of Tipperah, in his role as the manager of the Sarail zamindari:

Allegations having been made that in certain bazaars and other places undue pressure has been put on sellers as well as buyers not to deal in certain articles, it is hereby notified that in all bazaars, hats, melas, etc. in the Sarail estate, full liberty exists for people to buy and sell what they please. If there is any interference in this respect, information should be given by the aggrieved party to the undersigned.⁹³

Janmashthami mela, Jamalpur

A two-month-long mela was held on the outskirts of Jamalpur town in celebration of Janmashthami, or Krishna's birth. As in Nangalband near Narayanganj, Swadeshi volunteers patrolled the Jamalpur fairgrounds, brandishing lathis and "endeavouring to prevent the sale of European goods." On April 21, 1907, the same day as the assault on traders at the Nangalband festival, Swadeshi activists launched a full-blown attack—with men, lathis, and an elephant—on traders at the Janmashthami fair. R. Nathan, the commissioner of Dacca, described the Swadeshi assault in the following manner:

Things went on smoothly to 3 or 3-30 P.M. At this time some two hundred zamindari servants, pleaders, mukhtears and volunteers, with lathis, with an elephant, marched round and entered the Mela shouting "Bande Mataram." The volunteers wore conspicuous badges. They molested the shopkeepers and destroyed a certain amount of European toys and sweetmeats and scattered some Liverpool salt.

As in Mogra, mostly Muslim shopkeepers and consumers struck back against mostly Hindu Swadeshi activists. As Nathan proceeded to narrate: "The shop-keepers and the Muhammadans attending the Mela became enraged and attacked the volunteers, using sticks and booth poles and lathis which it is said were snatched from the volunteers. The volunteers' scattered and fled. . . . The Muhammadans pursued striking and shouting . . . and endeavoring to get at the fugitives." They continued their attack—targeting Swadeshi shops selling domestically produced goods, the zamindar's court, and, more egregiously, a Hindu temple: "Ten Muhammadans entered the Durgabari in pursuit of fugitives and . . . partly damaged the image which had been prepared for the [Janmasthan] festival and did some other damage. . . . [They also] entered three *swadeshi* shops, and damaged some of the stalls. . . . They pelted the cutcheries of the . . . Gauripur estates and of the Ramgopalpur estate."⁹⁴

Peace was restored in Jamalpur through an agreement between Hindu and Muslim "leaders" in the town—salaried professionals, landholders, and substantial traders who claimed to represent their respective communities. The two parties signed a form stating that they "deeply deplored . . . [the] unfortunate disturbances [that] have occurred in the town of Jamalpur . . . are exceedingly desirous to prevent their renewal and to restore quiet . . . [and] will use to the utmost their influence on their communities to promote peace."⁹⁵ Notably, the Muslim leaders asked for an end to "Swadeshi oppression." As Nathan recounted: "At the request of the Muhammadans I asked the Hindus if their promise included "swadeshi" oppression, and in the presence of the Muhammadans they replied that it did."⁹⁶

Events at the hat and the mela followed a similar pattern. In both Mogra and Jamalpur, violence commenced with Swadeshi activists' assault on consumer goods: Liverpool salt at the hat and European toys and sweetmeats at the mela. This assault was met with shopkeepers' and consumers' resistance. Mostly Muslim consumers and traders retaliated against Swadeshi activists, seizing their lathis and chasing them out of the mela and the hat. They then continued

their attack, targeting Hindu-owned and *Swadeshi* shops, Hindu authority figures, and even Hindu religious sites. In Mogra, they attempted to attack the homes of wealthy Hindus and, in Jamalpur, they attacked the zamindar's *kutcherry* and the Durgabari temple. Peace was restored when the colonial state intervened, by announcing that "full liberty exists for people to buy and sell what they please" in Brahmanbaria and brokering an end to "Swadeshi oppression" in Jamalpur between Muslim and Hindu "community leaders."

Nationalists and imperialists saw these conflicts through the prism of communalism rather than consumerism, as conflicts informed by religious differences rather than differences in economic ideas regarding market-based consumption. Swadeshi leaders interpreted their failure to "mobilize" peasant support in terms of the inability of primarily Hindu elites to appeal to the religious sentiments of the mainly Muslim peasantry. Hence, their efforts to garner Muslim support were often couched in the language of religion. A pamphlet circulated through the jute tracts that combined the image of the nation as the mother goddess with appeals to stereotypes of Muslim masculinity: "Mussalmans, mother entertains high hopes in you. Strong as you are, broad as your chests are, strong as your arms are, fear not to die, to save our mother from dishonour. Say once 'Din!' 'Din!' 'Allah ho akbar' and take possession of the towns by whatever means you find to hand, lathi or sword, sticks or guns, or anything."⁹⁷

Appeals to Muslim masculinity—broad chests and strong arms—could not mitigate the nationalist elite's antipathy toward market-dependent jute cultivation. The program of economic boycott was premised on a nationalist economic discourse that vilified jute cultivators' market-entangled lives. Swadeshi activists envisioned an autarkic and self-sufficient economy where the circulation capital and commodities were contained within the nation's territorial limits. Nationalists accused jute cultivators of forsaking the national community: they produced inedible fibers for distant markets instead of food-stuffs for proximate consumers and they purchased goods manufactured in distant factories instead of South Asia's local products. Swadeshi activists carried this message of economic nationalism into the jute tracts during a consumerist boom fueled by high jute prices. Unsurprisingly, jute cultivators were not responsive to Swadeshi appeals to forsake global commodity markets for the sake of an imagined national community. Instead, they responded with hostility.

World War I

If the nationalist economic discourse lost the battle of economic ideas among jute cultivators, does that imply that British ideas of a *laissez-faire* economy were victorious? Were jute cultivators more responsive to the colonial government's doctrines of free trade, to proclamations of the liberty to buy and sell as posted around Brahmanbaria after the Mogra riots? If the colonial government believed that jute cultivators were doctrinaire free traders, they would be disabused of this idea by incidences of looting in eastern Bengal's rural markets in December 1917 and January 1918. The crisis of World War I shook the market-based consumerist livelihoods of jute-cultivating households. As jute prices plummeted and the prices of peasant-consumed articles spiked, consumption stopped being pleasurable and market entanglements became stressful. Rather than a means of self-fashioning, peasant consumption now focused on the struggle to secure subsistence. Widespread instances of looting demonstrated that peasant politics had shifted focus, toward ensuring the viability of their market-based livelihoods.

During December 1917 the government reported 91 cases of looting in rural marketplaces in eastern Bengal and another 28 during January 1918. A majority of these incidents took place in the jute tracts of eastern and northern Bengal: 22 of them in the jute regions of Rangpur.⁹⁸ Similar incidents took place in the jute-growing region of Purnea, in the province of Bihar, and in the Sylhet district in Assam: Sylhet was in the Meghna valley, adjacent to Mymensingh and Tipperah, and ecologically, economically, and culturally similar to those important jute-growing districts.⁹⁹ The government stated: "There can be no doubt that the main cause of these disturbances is the high price of salt and cloth, which people attribute to the greed of shopkeepers. The discontent is accentuated by the low prices obtained for paddy and jute."¹⁰⁰ In several instances, looters claimed that the government had given them permission to loot shops charging excessively high prices: "An absurd idea had got abroad that Government would not be adverse to people taking the law into their own hands and compelling the vendors of cloth and salt to bring down their prices."¹⁰¹

The government decided to respond in December 1917 by enlisting the support of prominent locals "who can explain to their tenants and others the economic causes of the high prices and the futility of the looting."¹⁰² The difficulty of attempting to control riots through economic theory became apparent to the state when cases of looting did not abate during January 1918.

The situation “eased” in February and it was “attributed partly to the fall which had taken place in the price of salt and partly to the promptness with which the rioters have been apprehended and placed on trial.” Significantly, the government announced that it would bring the prices of salt and cloth under control. Looting came to an end with price controls—the very opposite of the proclamation of “full liberty for all persons to buy and sell” in Mogra in 1905.

The cases of looting also took place in a particularly vulnerable period in the crop calendar, during December and early January, just before winter rice or aman was harvested. The situation eased in late January and February, after the aman harvest. The government feared that violence would recur once more, in the “hot weather” as the aman crop was depleted and before the aus and jute harvest came in: “It is . . . far from improbable that disturbances may break out again in the hot weather, when the resources of the cultivating classes will be depleted owing to the poor prices which they have received both for jute and for rice.”¹⁰³

During the decades after World War I, global commodity markets decisively turned against cultivators and the peasant politics of consumption came to focus more on hunger and subsistence rather than on pleasure and self-fashioning. During this period of immiseration, anticonsumerist nationalist economic discourses found more fertile ground in the deltaic jute tracts. As I discuss in chapter 5, this was the case during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements of 1921–22, when anticonsumerist nationalist discourses similar to the Swadeshi economic message found greater traction among jute cultivators during a time of low jute prices, unfavorable commodity markets, and widespread hunger.

Conclusion

The nineteenth-century era of relative prosperity, driven by expanding jute cultivation, food security, and favorable global commodity markets, manifested in the peasant consumption of a variety of goods and services: property rights, cloth, ornaments, metal utensils, kerosene oil, corrugated iron, German-made toys, sweets and confections, seasonal fruits, and luxury fish. These forms of consumption, I have argued, were critical elements in peasant projects of self-fashioning, and in crafting a distinctively agrarian, Muslim, and Bengali habitation of modernity. Peasant consumption cannot be reduced to narrow economic self-interest. Their desire for secure property rights in a landscape of limited zamindari power was driven not solely by economic

and financial motives but also by an idealized conception of peasant claims to property. Peasants' desires for various commodities in rural marketplaces were not only motivated by their utility or affordability but by the desire to construct new kinds of dress, dwellings, and diets—distinctive Muslim clothing, metallic homes, and the occasional indulgence in gourmet food. Peasants' vigorous resistance against the Swadeshi program of boycott was not just about the financial costs imposed by the boycott, but also an attempt to protect rural hats and *melas* as spaces of pleasurable consumption where men and boys purchased sweets and toys. The onset of a rapid and thorough process of peasant immiseration during and after World War I, however, brought an end to this period of consumerism. After World War I, peasant market engagements were focused primarily and even exclusively on securing subsistence, on staving off hunger. The nineteenth-century politics of consumption gave way to a twentieth-century politics of hunger.

Peasant market entanglements were accompanied by a physical infrastructure that enabled vast quantities of peasant-produced fiber and peasant-consumed cloth, accessories, construction materials, utensils, illumination, and foods to circulate in and out of peasant homesteads. The circulation of peasant-produced and peasant-consumed commodities took place through the interface between steam-powered transport technologies of railways and river steamers and an existing infrastructure of country boats and ox wagons. Intermediary market towns—the *mofussil*—were located at the intersection of these transport infrastructures. *Mofussil* towns grew and expanded along with the jute trade during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as spaces where peasant-produced fibers were assorted, bulked, and packaged en route to Calcutta. The towns mentioned in this chapter as sites of Swadeshi mobilization and anti-Swadeshi resistance—Brahmanbaria, Narayanganj, and Jamalpur—were important, fast-growing market towns connected by rail and steamer to Calcutta. The next chapter focuses on the circulation of commodities and the emergence of the *mofussil* as a significant space for peasant material lives and political action during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

26. British observers frequently noted the absence of English-style villages, with a noticeable village center. However, the weekly and twice-weekly rural markets—hats—performed many of the same roles as the English village center.

27. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics, 1919–1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, chap. 1.

28. Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam in the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, describes the early settlement of the frontier, particularly the incentives provided by the Mughal state to settle the frontier. Iftekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State, and Social Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, discusses the continued settlement of the frontier in the nineteenth century, and colonial policies to encourage such settlement. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*, argues that the delta's agrarian limits were reached by the early twentieth century.

29. Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

30. Histories of agrarian colonial Bengal often proceed from the assumption that the Permanent Settlement of 1793 was a foundational moment. For a detailed history of its implementation, see Sirajul Islam, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal: A Study of Its Operation, 1790–1819*, Dhaka: Bangla Akademi 1979. For an intellectual history of the various land policies debated by East India Company officials in the early days of the Company Raj, see Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of the Permanent Settlement*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1963.

31. See Iqbal, *Bengal Delta*, chap. 1, for how zamindars found it difficult to exert authority over the shifting ecology of the delta. See John Wilson, "A Thousand Countries to Go": Peasants and Rulers in Late Eighteenth Century Bengal," *Past and Present*, 189, 2005, 81–109, for a case study of how peasants in Rangpur would "vote with their feet," leaving zamindari estates if they felt their exactions were too onerous.

32. Rajat Datta, *Society, Economy, and the Market: Commercialization in Rural Bengal, c. 1760–1800*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000.

33. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, chap. 3.

34. See Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, esp. chaps. 5 and 6, for Muslim Vaishnavism and for the significance of devotionism to Sufi saints and their shrines.

35. Muin-ud-din Ahmed Khan, *History of the Faraizi Movement in Bengal, 1818–1906*, Karachi: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965.

36. Ahmed Kamal, *State against the Nation: The Decline of the Muslim League in Pre-Independence Bangladesh, 1947–1954*, Dhaka: University Press, 2009

Chapter 1

1. M. W. Ali estimated that 50,000 acres were sown with jute in 1850, in *Jute in the Agrarian History of Bengal, 1870–1914*, Rajshahi, 1998. The second figure of 3.9 million acres is from Department of Statistics, *Estimates of Area and Yield of Principal Crops in India, 1914–15*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing Press, 1915, p. 11.

2. *Report on the Administration of the Custom Department in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1874–5*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1875, p. 4.

3. *Report on the Administration of the Custom Department in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1909-10*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1910, p. 3.
4. N. C. Chaudhuri, *Jute in Bengal*, Calcutta: Printed by J. N. Bose, 1921, pp. 210-11.
5. Computed from Department of Statistics, *Estimates of Area and Yield of Principal Crops in India, 1914-15*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing Press, 1915, p. 11.
6. "Resolution," 4th February 1873, GoB, Agri Dept, NAB.
7. Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
8. Omkar Goswami, *Industry, Trade and Peasant Society: The Jute Economy of Eastern Bengal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.
9. Hemm Chunder Kerr, *Report on the Cultivation of, and Trade in Jute, in Bengal*, London, 1874, p. 18.
10. Chaudhuri, *Jute in Bengal*, pp. 210-11.
11. Acreage figures are from Government of India, *Agricultural Statistics of India, 1900-01 to 1904-05*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906.
12. Supply of jute seed to the Queensland Acclimatization Society, Revenue and Agriculture, Fibers and Silk, 9/13, Part B, January 1874, NAI.
13. In a government resolution to investigate the cultivation and trade of jute, George Campbell, the lieutenant governor of Bengal, noted: "The Americans are actively prosecuting the experimental growth of the plant in various parts of their country." "Resolution," 4th February, 1876, GoB, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 4, NAB.
14. S. Waterhouse, *Report on Jute Culture and the Importance of the Industry*, Department of Agriculture: Special Report, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1883, p. 14.
15. J. C. Jack, *The Economic Life of a Bengal District: A Study*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916, p. 2.
16. J. C. Jack was not referring to the much broader distinction of soil between the moribund delta of western Bengal and the active delta of eastern Bengal—the distinction between red clay or *khiyar* and the black clay or *pali mati* of the east. There were no *khiyar* lands in Faridpur, and red clay in the east was only found in the Madhupur jungles of Dacca and Mymensingh, and in parts of north Bengal. Jute was not grown at all in these *khiyar* lands.
17. Government of Bengal, *Agricultural Statistics of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1901, pp. 6-13.
18. Government of Bengal, *Report of the Banking Enquiry Committee*, Calcutta, 1930, p. 27.
19. Estimated from Government of Bengal, Department of Land Records and Agriculture, *Season and Crop Reports of Bengal, 1901-2 to 1904/5*, Calcutta, 1902 to 1905.
20. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, London: Trubner, 1876, Mymensingh, vol. 5, p. 423.
21. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Mymensingh, vol. 5, p. 420.
22. Excerpted in the report of the Chittagong Commissioner, 2nd September 1872, in D. J. McNeile, Secretary, Government of Bengal, 4th February 1873, GoB, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 4, NAB.
23. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Mymensingh, vol. 5, p. 421.
24. Several witnesses before the Indigo Commission of 1860 claimed that cultivators were reluctant to sow their lands with indigo because greater profits could be made from jute,

safflower, and rice cultivation. *Report of the Indigo Commission, 1860*, ed. Pulin Das, Darjeeling: University of North Bengal, 1992, pp. 91–92 and p. 160.

25. Kerr, *Report on Jute*, p. 18.

26. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Tippera, vol. 6, p. 398. I will write in more detail about the rising demand for fish as a consequence of the “improved condition of the people” in chapter 2.

27. Kerr probably overestimates the alienation of rice lands: if fully two-thirds of jute land were former rice lands, rice and jute exports could not have simultaneously extended during this period. Kerr, *Report on Jute*, p. 49.

28. Kerr, *Report on Jute*, p. 50.

29. Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, *Travels and Voyages between Calcutta and Independent Tipperah*, Calcutta, 1887, pp. 255–56.

30. Memorandum on the Material Conditions of the Lower Orders in Bengal, 1891–92, p. 13, Agri Dept, Proc B, List 14, Bundle 13, NAB.

31. Sugata Bose has argued that the Tenancy Act of 1885, which I address in greater detail in chapter 2, spelled the end of the rent and revenue offensive in the Bengal delta and its subsequent replacement by high-interest loans as the major mechanism of surplus extraction.

32. “Ore amar shadher paat! / Tumi chheyechho Bangala muluk, bangala desher math. / Je deshe jekhane jai, shethhay tomar dekhtey pai / Grame Grame office [afis] tomar, paray paray hat.” Islam Robi, Sirajganj, 18 Bhadro, 1321, or September 2, 1914.

33. Dwiidas Datta, *Pat ba nalita*, Calcutta, 1911, p. 1. Kurukshetra was the scene of the final battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the Mahabharata. The reference to having to eat jute would become a popular trope in folk literature on jute; see chapter 5.

34. Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.

35. Jack, *Economic Life*, p. 85.

36. F. A. Sachse, Settlement Officer, Mymensingh to Revenue Dept, Government of Bengal, 21st February 1914, GoB, Proc A, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 28, NAB.

37. See David Glasner and Thomas F. Cooley, “Crisis of 1873,” in *Business Cycles and Depressions: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Garland, 1997, pp. 132–33.

38. Kerr, *Report on Jute*, p. 62.

39. H. Anstruther and H. C. Kerr, Jute Commissioners to Secy, GoB, Statistical Dept, 10th May 1873, GoB, Proc A, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 4, NAB.

40. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Tippera, vol. 6, p. 391.

41. “Commercial Epitome,” *Economist*, 31(1534), January 18, 1873, p. 18.

42. The Collector of Bogra reported in 1872: “The cultivators of jute, however, have suffered a check during the year under review, from the fall in its market price; and the greatly increased sale of non-judicial two-anna stamps seems to indicate that the rayats in many cases have preferred borrowing to reducing their expenditure.” Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Bogra, vol. 8, p. 206.

43. B. B. Chaudhuri, “Commercial Agriculture: 1859–85,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 7(2), 1970, p. 244.

44. R. M. Waller, Commissioner of Chittagong Division to Government of Bengal (GoB), Revenue Dept., 19th May 1894, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 14, NAB.

45. R. M. Waller, Commissioner of Chittagong Division to GoB, Revenue Dept., 21 June 1894, in *ibid.*

46. L. Birley, District Magistrate, Dacca, to Commissioner of Dacca, 5th October 1914, in "Depression in Jute Trade on Account of the Outbreak of War in Europe," February 1915, GoB, Proc A, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 29, NAB.
47. Note dated 15th August 1914, in *ibid*.
48. L. Birley, District Magistrate, Dacca, to Commissioner of Dacca, 5th October 1914, in *ibid*.
49. *Ibid*.
50. *Ibid*.
51. Shah Abdul Hamid, *Krishak Bilap*, Bandulia, 1328 b.e. (1921). The title translates as "extinction of the peasantry," the main theme of this pamphlet. His two previous publications, mentioned in the foreword to *Krishak Bilap* are titled *Prajakahini* (Stories of Prajas) and *Shashon-shongskarey Gramya Mussalman* (Rural Muslims in Political Reforms).
52. Hamid, *Krishak Bilap*, pp. 9–10.
53. *Ibid*, p. 11.

Chapter 2

1. Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, *Travels and Voyages between Calcutta and Independent Tipperah*, Calcutta, 1887, p. 10.
2. Memorandum on the Material Conditions of the Lower Orders in Bengal, 1891, GoB, Agri Dept, List 14, Bundle 20, NAB.
3. K. C. Dey to GoB, Revenue Dept., 4th February 1914, in GoB, Agric Dept, August 1914, in *ibid*.
4. Kaminikumar Chakrabarty, *Krishak*, Sherpur, published by Sree Tamijuddin Ahmed, 1893, p. 38.
5. Among many other poets from eastern Bengal, Abed Ali Mian, from Mymensingh, wrote extensively on the inedibility of the fiber, contrasting it with the taste of home-grown rice. Abed Ali Mian, *Kali Chitra*, Rangpur: Alamnagar Lokaranjan Press, 1323 b.e. (1917).
6. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002.
7. Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
8. Chapter 3 discusses the growth of these market towns during the late nineteenth century in more detail.
9. J. C. Jack, *The Economic Life of a Bengal District: A Study*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916, p. 47.
10. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Dinajpur, vol. 7, p. 387.
11. F. A. Sachse, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Mymensingh*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1917, p. 89.
12. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Bogra, vol. 8, p. 206.
13. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Dinajpur, vol. 8, pp. 387–88.
14. Sugata Bose, in *Agrarian Bengal*, has established that credit and interest rather than land and rent were the primary mechanism for expropriating peasant surplus. Iftekhar Iqbal,

in Bengal Delta, has shown how the delta's ecology prevented the application of the permanent settlement over large tracts of farmlands.

15. Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*, pp. 29–30.
16. David Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India" *Modern Asian Studies*, 15(3), 1981.
17. John Wilson. "A Thousand Countries to Go To': Peasants and Rulers in Eighteenth Century Bengal," Past and Present, 189, 2005, pp. 81–109.
18. K. K. Sengupta, *Pabna Disturbances and the Politics of Rent, 1873–1885*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974, p. 75.
19. The relatively small district of Pabna had the most land sown with jute in 1872–73 according to government estimates. Hemm Chunder Kerr, *Report on the Cultivation of, and Trade in Jute, in Bengal*, London, 1874.
20. With the exception of Bakarganj and—to a lesser degree—Faridpur, all the affected districts had significant jute acreage. All the jute-growing districts of the delta, except for Rangpur, experienced the antirent movement. Also, agrarian leagues did not emerge in non-jute-growing districts of western Bengal.
21. Sengupta, *Pabna Disturbances*, pp. 45–46.
22. Sengupta, *Pabna Disturbances*, p. 13.
23. Sengupta, *Pabna Disturbances*, p. 91.
24. From the Commissioner of Chittagong to the Revenue Department, GoB, July 29, 1875, in *Proposed Amendment of the Rent Law in Bengal*, Dept of Rev, Agri and Comm, Land Revenue and Settlements, February 1879, Nos. 11–29, File 21, 1879, NAI.
25. "Minute," Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, August 21, 1875, in *Rent Disputes between Landlords and Their Tenants in Bengali*, Dept of Rev, Agri and Comm, Land Revenue and Settlements, Pros No. 3–5, February 1876, NAI.
26. Petition by zemindars and other landholders of Bengal and Behar against the Tenancy Bill, Rev and Agri, Revenue, File N. 21, Part B, December 1883, NAI.
27. Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
28. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Tippera, vol. 6, p. 387. The charge of "laziness" as an outcome of prosperity is obviously false. As chapter 1 demonstrated, cultivators worked considerably harder to produce additional cash with which to finance consumption.
29. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Mymensingh, vol. 5, p. 418.
30. Quoted in Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Noakhali, vol. 6, p. 289.
31. Expenditure per head on clothing in eastern districts in 1877–78 was one rupee, 4 annas, and 7 paisas against one rupee, three annas, and 6 paisas in central, and 14 annas and 3 paisas in western districts. In the jute districts of Pabna and Faridpur, expenditure on European piecegoods exceeded two rupees per head.
32. Calculated from *Reports on the Rail-Borne Traffic of Bengal during the Years 1884–85 to 1891–2*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1886 to 1893.
33. Between 1906–7 and 1911–12, imports of cloth into the Rajshahi, Dacca, and Tipperah blocks increased at a barely noticeable 1.5 percent annually. Compiled from Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, *Reports on the Trade Carried by Rail and River in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam during the Years 1906–1907 to 1910–11*, Shillong, 1907–11.

34. J. C. Jack estimated that a family living in "comfort" in Faridpur spent £1.67 on clothing out of a total budget of £16.67 and a family living in "extreme indigence" spent £0.67 on clothing out of a total annual expenditure of £6.67. Jack, *Economic Life*, p. 71. F. A. Sachse presented the budget of a wealthy family of sixteen members in Mymensingh who spent 140 rupees on clothing out of an annual budget of 1,400 rupees. Sachse, *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, p. 72.

35. The *Tippera District Gazetteer* noted: "Their [Muslim] dress, the *lungi* and the muslim cap, and speech distinguish them from the Hindus." J. E. Webster, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Tippera*, Calcutta, 1910, p. 29. Similar comments were made of the distinctive Muslim peasant dress in other parts of the jute tracts. The *Dacca District Gazetteer* stated: "Muhammadans in place of a *dhuti* wear a *lungi* or petticoat of coloured cloth reaching to the ankles and a fez or cap." B. C. Allen, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers: Dacca*, Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1912, p. 87.

36. Quoted in Muin-ud-Din Ahmed Khan, *History of the Faraizi Movement in Bengal*, p. 132.

37. Allen, *Dacca District Gazetteer*, p. 87.

38. Mookerjee, *Travels and Voyages*, p. 10.

39. Webster, *Tippera District Gazetteer*, p. 43.

40. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Bogra, vol. 8, p. 205.

41. *Reports on the Administration of the Customs Department in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1893-94*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1894, p. lxiii.

42. Abul Hai, *Adarsha Krishak*, Mymensingh: Mymensingh Zilla Bhandar Press, 1920, p. 43.

43. Allen, *Dacca District Gazetteer*, p. 87.

44. Allen, *Dacca District Gazetteer*, pp. 86-87.

45. Sachse, *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, pp. 67-68.

46. Jack, *Economic Life*, p. 27.

47. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Noakhali, vol. 6, p. 290.

48. "Bolo bhai, nailyar shaman krishi nai / Nailya bepari, satkhanda bari / Joanshaiya thuni diya banchhe choari," quoted in Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*, p. 80.

49. B. C. Prance, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Riparian Area of District Tippera Conducted with the Faridpur District Settlement, 1909 to 1915*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1916, p. 4, emphasis added.

50. Maulvi Mokhtar Ahmed Siddiqi, *Sirajganjer Itihas*, Sirajganj, B.E. 1322 (1915-16), p. 53, emphasis added.

51. Gobindo Chandra Das, "Paater Gaan," *Islam Robi*, Bhadro, 1321 (September 1914), reprinted in Siddiqi, *Sirajganjer Itihas*, p. 88.

52. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Bogra, vol. 8, p. 206.

53. Allen, *Dacca District Gazetteer*, pp. 86-87.

54. Jack, *Economic Life*, p. 29.

55. J. C. Jack estimated that a "family in comfort" in Faridpur spent 2 shillings and 8 pence annually on kerosene oil and a family living in "extreme indigence" spent 6 pence. Jack, *Economic Life*, p. 71. Further, a wealthy peasant family in Mymensingh purchased five tins of kerosene oil each year, at 2¼ rupees a tin during the 1910s. Sachse, *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, p. 72.

56. Memorandum on the Material Conditions of the Lower Orders in Bengal, 1891, GoB, Agri Dept, List 14, Bundle 20, NAB.

57. Allen, *Dacca District Gazetteer*, pp. 86–87.
58. Sachse, *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, p. 79.
59. Nira Wickremasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka*, New York: Bergahn Books, 2014.
60. Webster, *Tippera District Gazetteer*, p. 44.
61. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Rangpur, vol. 7, p. 226.
62. Webster, *Tippera District Gazetteer*, p. 31.
63. Sidney Mintz brilliantly traces the rising importance of sugar to English working-class diets in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, New York: Penguin, 1986.
64. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Noakhali, vol. 6, p. 291.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
66. Webster, *Tippera District Gazetteer*, p. 44.
67. The *Mymensingh District Gazetteer* reported that wealthier peasant households were consuming higher-quality tobacco grown in Rangpur, rather than the “locally-grown weed.” Sachse, *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, p. 31.
68. Jack, *Economic Life*, pp. 47–48. Also, the jackfruit is nothing like a large melon.
69. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Tippera, vol. 5, p. 398.
70. Siddiqi, *Sirajganjer Itihas*, p. 25.
71. Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, London: S. Sonnenschein, 1901.
72. R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, vols. 1 and 2, London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner, 1902 and 1904.
73. Memorandum on the Material Conditions of the Lower Orders in Bengal (1892), GoB, Proc A, Agri Dept, Agri Branch, List 14, Bundle 12, NAB.
74. Chandrashekhar Kar, *Shekal-ekal*, Calcutta, 1918, p. 7.
75. Ray Nikhilnath, *Sonar Bangla*, Calcutta, 1906, p. 132, emphases added.
76. Manu Goswami discusses the significance of Friedrich List to Swadeshi economic thought in “From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40(4), 1998, pp. 609–36.
77. Statement of the Inspector General of Police, December 1, 1905, in *State of Affairs in Eastern Bengal and Assam and Bengal in connection with the partition and the swadeshi movement*, Home, Public, Part A, Nos. 169–186, June 1906.
78. See the numerous reports from the various districts in *ibid.*
79. According to the inspector general of police, the movement “was given a fillip by Judgish Chundra Roy, a pleader, who in a meeting at Pabna made the claim that English sugar was purified with the blood and bones of cows.” *Ibid.*
80. From P. C. Lyon, Chief Secy, G of EB&A to Secy, Home Dept, GoI, February 21, 1906, *ibid.*
81. From P. C. Lyon, Chief Secy, G of EB&A to Secy, Home Dept, GoI, February 21, 1906, *ibid.*
82. “Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*, Bangalore: Permanent Black, 2010.
83. From R. W. Carlyle, Chief Secy, G of EB&A to Secy, Home Dept, GoI, January 25, 1906, *ibid.*

84. From P. C. Lyon, Chief Secy, G of EB&A to Secy, Home Dept, GoI, February 21, 1906, *ibid.*

85. Copy of Mr. B. C. Allen's diary, dated 21st April, 1907, in *Hindu-Muhammadan Riots in Mymensingh District in Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Proc A, Home Dept, Political, Nos. 6-16, July 1907, NAI. For a description of the Nangalband fair, including the legend of its origins, see F. D. Bradley-Birt, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, London: Smith, Elder, 1906, pp. 297-304.

86. From the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 25th February 1907; reprinted in *Riots at Comilla and Certain Other Places in Tippera District*, Home, Public, Part A, Nos. 159-171, May 1907.

87. *Ibid.*

88. D. H. Wares, SDO, Brahmanbaria to Collector, Tipperah, 25th March 1907, in *ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*

91. D. H. Lees, District Magistrate, Tipperah, to Commissioner, Chittagong, in *ibid.*

92. Reprinted in *ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

94. Confidential Report of R. Nathan, Commissioner of Dacca, 24th April 1907, in *ibid.*

95. "Enclosure III," in *ibid.*

96. "Enclosure II: Tour Diary, 22nd to 23rd April, 1907," in *ibid.*

97. *State of Affairs in Eastern Bengal and Assam and Bengal in connection with the partition and the swadeshi movement*, Home, Public, Part A, Nos. 169-186, June 1906, NAI.

98. Govt of Bengal to the Home Department, Govt of India, 21st January 1918, *Report of the Cases of Looting of Hats in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam*, Home, Public, Part B, Nos. 184-205, NAI.

99. Govt of Bihar and Orissa to Home Department, Govt of India, 22nd January 1918 and Govt of Assam to Govt of India, 1st February 1918, in *ibid.*

100. Govt of Bengal to Govt of India, 14th December 1917, in *ibid.*

101. Govt of Assam to Govt of India, 1st February 1918. Also, Govt of Bengal to Govt of India, 1st February 1918 and Govt of Bihar and Assam to Govt of India, 22nd January 1918, in *ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*

103. Govt of Bengal to Govt of India, 1st February 1918, in *ibid.*

Chapter 3

1. Strictly speaking, as the Hobson-Jobson describes it, the mofussil was a relational term; from the perspective of Calcutta, the delta's small towns were the mofussil, but from those small towns themselves, the surrounding countryside was the mofussil. The Hobson-Jobson definition of the mofussil is "The provinces—the country stations and districts, as contra-distinguished from 'the Presidency'; or, relatively rural localities of district as contra-distinguished from the sudder or chief station, which is the residence of the district authorities." p. 570.

2. Government of India, *Census of India*, 1901, part 6, part 1, pp. 31-33.

3. Government of Bengal, *Reports on the Internal Trade of Bengal*, 1877-80.

4. "Letter from Dr. Peck," *Missionary Magazine*, 34(6), June 1854, p. 164.