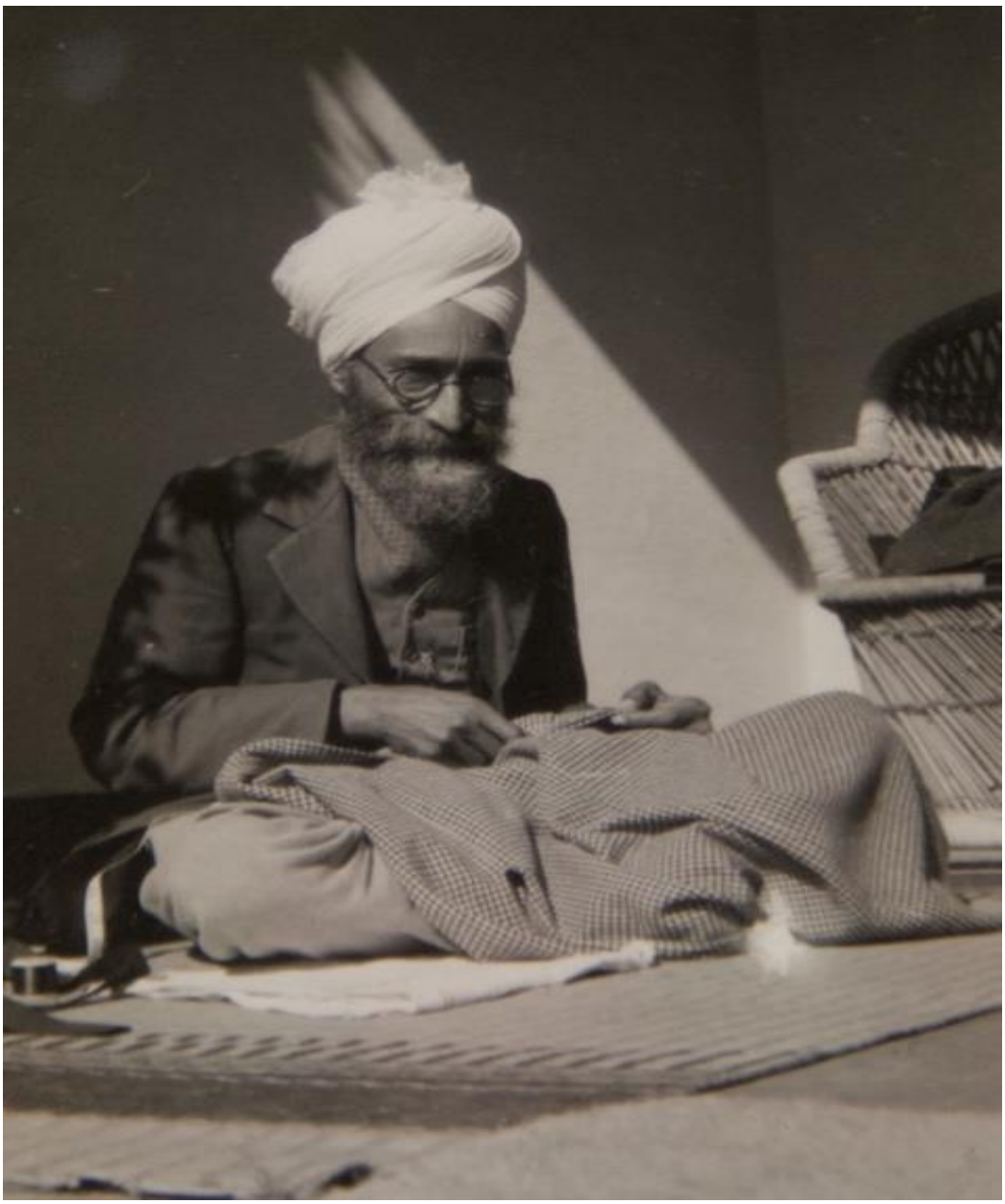
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

A Social and Economic History of *Darzis* (Muslim Tailors) in Calcutta, c. 1890-1967

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Fitzwilliam College
30 August 2022



This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of History
University of Cambridge

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically declared in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

This thesis is 78,807 words in length, including the Table of Contents but excluding front matter, footnotes, references and bibliography, as specified by the Degree Committee. Tables are counted as 150 words each. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit.

Abstract

Name: Humaira Chowdhury

Thesis Title: A Social and Economic History of *Darzis* (Muslim Tailors) in Calcutta, c. 1890-1967

This thesis brings together two bodies of scholarship, the first on immobility, and the second on artisan capitalism. *Darzis* (Muslim tailors) and Dawoodi Bohra merchants who stayed on in Calcutta between 1890 and 1967, are at the heart of this study. They are shown to be resilient survivors rather than passive victims of ghettoisation and state control.

Without undermining the real predicament of immobility – entrenched poverty, physical frailty, obligations of care-work, communal intimidation and everyday indignity – this thesis demonstrates how some Muslim tailors thrived in constrained contexts.

This thesis examines their strategies of survival and negotiation through what I describe as 'immobility capital', a cluster of assets which consist of: (a) locational incentives and 'mythic resources'; (b) a knowledge of material culture and consumption practices; (c) the 'property of skill'; (d) a mastery of small technologies, such as Singer sewing machines; and
(e) patronage networks, such as with Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters and family firms.

Not every tailor had every asset. For instance, a tailor with a skill did not necessarily have a patron, but adapted the skill in response to changing market demands for particular commodities. Together these artisan communities were able to transform their assets into sufficient 'immobility capital' to stay on, and sometimes flourish, in independent India.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to The Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre and Nehru Trust for Cambridge University for the PhD studentship which gave me the financial means to pursue my doctoral research at Cambridge. Archival grants and bursaries from the Faculty of History and Fitzwilliam College enabled me to do fieldwork in India and the United Kingdom. Special thanks to my College tutor, Professor Keshav Srinivasan for supporting my applications for hardship funding in the fourth year.

The Royal Historical Society Marshall Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), London gave me the confidence and much needed financial assistance to work through the pandemic. This thesis has benefitted a great deal from the feedback and comments I received on draft chapters I presented at the IHR workshops. The Economic History Society bursary and the Ellen McArthur grant helped me through the final stages of thesis-completion.

The Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge, has been an integral part of my academic life. I wrote substantial chunks of my thesis at the Centre's library. Many thanks to Dr Kevin Greenbank for helping me access primary sources at the Centre's archive. His advice on IT matters and kind gestures on multiple occasions are much appreciated. I thank Dr Rachel Rowe for assistance with online archival repositories, Rare Books catalogues, and inter-library loans.

Many thanks also to the staff at archives and libraries in India and the UK: the National Library, Kolkata; the West Bengal State Archives (at Bhawani Dutta Lane), Kolkata; the National Archives of India, Delhi; the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), Delhi; The Royal Commonwealth Society Collections at the University Library, Cambridge; The Asian

and African Studies Reading Room at the British Library; and the Clydebank Library, West Dumbartonshire Council.

I am grateful to all the interviewees for being so generous with their time and willingness to participate in this research. Their contributions to this study have been invaluable.

My greatest debt is to Professor Joya Chatterji, my supervisor, for teaching me the warp and woof of writing history. Every time the 'imposter syndrome' crept in she showed immense faith in my abilities, which helped me rebuild my self-confidence. Her unwavering support on personal matters at challenging times meant a great deal to me. Prof. Chatterji's books and articles have inspired me to 'dig deeper' and look for answers to some of the questions raised by her work. Dare I say that this thesis is the harvest of my efforts from 'tilling on her field'. I received rigorous comments on every draft. She read every line of every chapter (down to the ellipses!) I have but tried to live up to her exacting standards.

I have learnt so much from conversations and discussions with Professor Tanika Sarkar – at the 2018 conference on 'Women, Feminism, Nation-Building in India' in Cambridge; over tea at the British Library cafeteria and in Delhi.

Even though I was briefly taught by Professor Samita Sen at Jadavpur University before I started my PhD at Cambridge, her lectures and indeed her writings have influenced my research in more ways than one.

I owe many thanks to Dr Hussain Ahmad Khan and Dr Anam Rana (Institute of History, Government College University, Lahore) for all their help with intermittent lessons in Urdu and transliteration.

Copious thanks to Meeraal for cheering me on in the last stages of my PhD. She helped me transliterate an Urdu source used in this thesis. She proofread a chapter and suggested edits in others. Dr Uttara Shahahi agreed to a last minute request to proofread one of the chapters. I am grateful to them both for making time to read my work.

Former PhD students at Cambridge have inspired me through their critical engagement with history and history-writing: I thank Dr Partha Pratim Shil for the stimulating conversations not just about research and academia, but also about our shared love for food and Qawwali. Dr Edward Anderson supervised my MPhil thesis and has continued to provide support through all my academic endeavours. Dr Uditi Sen and Dr Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta gave me the opportunity to present a paper at the Wolfson conference at Cambridge in 2018. I thank them both for their words of encouragement and perceptive feedback at different stages of research and writing. Animated discussions and minor 'squabbles' with Dr Ishan Mukherjee about doing history and anthropology were fun and invigorating.

I thank Dr Amy Erickson for organising walks with students during the lockdown.

My friends in the UK have been an enormous source of strength through good times and bad: Tanisha, Sabrina, Lauren, Lalage, Phoebe, Maddalena, Megha, and Pearl. Thank you.

Bina aunty and Moti uncle have played a big part in making me feel ‘at home’ in the UK. I thank them both for their nourishing warmth and affection.

I would not have been able to finish this thesis without the love and care of my family – Ma, Abba, Dida, Imran, Arif, Pratiksha, Amaaya and Aayaan – and of course, my ‘surrogate’ family in Cambridge.

Balu, Amma and Appa – thank you for believing in my academic pursuits. I would not be here without your nurturing support and love.

I dedicate this thesis to Sam, my anchor, my *moner-maanush*.

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Select glossary of terms

Ajlaf	lower-caste groups as opposed to *ashraf.*
Akhlaq	character.
Amanat	deposit.
Anguthi	thimble.
Anjuman	a Trust or governing body.
Ashraf	higher-caste Muslim groups consisting of Saiyyids, Sheikhs, Mughals and Pathans.
Azardari	learning centre.
Bania	merchant.
Bahas	oppositional debates.
Bhadralok	gentlefolk.
Bhadramahila	middle-class Bengali women.
Biradari	endogamous caste and kinship group.
Bustee	slum or ghetto.
Chadar	long cloth for draping around the body.
Chakri	clerical work.
Chaitra	April (month in the Bengali calendar).
Chaplis	a pair of sandals.
Chupkan	a cape-like tunic, fitted to the upper body but flared from the chest down.
Cummerband	a long muslin belt wrapped around the waist.
Cutcherry	office or courthouse.
Darzi	Muslim tailor.
Da'wat	community.
Dhaga	thread.
Dhobi	washerman.
Dhuti	waist-cloth.
Dobashi	bilingual.
Dresswala	costume designer.
Farwakht	sales.
Guz	measuring tape.
Haat	informal market.
Hisaab-kitaab	book-keeping.
Hunar	skill.
Ilm	knowledge.
Jamader	sweeper.
Jors	dress-sets.
Juti	(embroidered) shoes.
Kasai	butcher.
Karigari	artisanship.
Karkhana	artisan-workshop.
Kerani	clerk.
Khadi	home-spun cloth.
Khalasi	boatmen.
Khansama	principle male head of staff in elite households.

Khilat	robe.
Karidhari	purchase.
Karobari	business.
Khatah	account book or ledger.
Kulla	conical shaped hard cap.
Kurta	long tunic.
Lohar	metalworker.
Lungi	waist cloth.
Magh	January and February in the Bengali calendar.
Manihar	bangle seller.
Mansuri	cotton carder.
Mashq	replica.
Mazaar	Muslim shrine.
Mazri	light cotton fabric.
Muhasib	accountant.
Musalli	sweeper.
Mofussil	district; countryside.
Muminin	members.
Munazara	religious debates.
Murid	disciple.
Nujeeb	regimental troop.
Nurbaft	capturer of light.
Ostagir	master artisan/ master tailor.
Pagri	turban.
Phalgun	February and March (months in the Bengali calendar).
Pir	Muslim saint.
Pottaha	ironsmith.
Puttee	a piece of cloth or bandage used as a ligature round the lower part of the leg in lieu of a gaiter.
Pyjama	cotton drawers.
Rajeb	7th month in the Islamic calendar.
Raie	green grocer.
Riba	interest.
Sarf	customer.
Shagird	apprentice.
Sheikhjee	dairy farmer and cattle dealer.
Sherwani	a tailored knee-length outer garment resembling a long coat, front buttoned with a stand up collar and long sleeves, varying in length and fabric.
Sipahi	soldier.
Solar Topee	sun hat.
Srabon	June and July (months in the Bengali calendar).
Sufi	an exponent of Islamic mysticism.
Sui	needle.
Syce	horse trainer.
Tafsir	Quranic learning.
Tarbiyat	upbringing.
Urs	death anniversary of a Muslim saint.

Ustad	master artisan or artist.
Zari	intricate embroidery.
Zakheera	stock or storage.

Note on translations and transliterations

In the transliterated passages quoted in the dissertation, diacritical marks have not been used for the reader's convenience. I have phonetically transliterated excerpts from the Urdu source used in this thesis.

The Hindi to English interview translations were done by me.

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Introduction

This thesis is about Muslim tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants who stayed on in Calcutta between 1890 and 1967. It seeks to provide preliminary answers as to why some Muslim groups remained in Calcutta after partition, and why internally displaced persons (Muslim returnees/evacuees) gravitated to particular 'clusters' within the city and borderlands, where their co-religionists lived in large numbers. In so doing, it hopes to address an important question that has been overlooked world-wide by scholars of refugees, ghettos, or internal displacees.

Patterns of micro-movement and internal displacement within West Bengal have been noted by a few historians.[1] These have, however, stopped short of explaining the reasons behind Muslim 'clustering' in particular locations, or have suggested only that minorities hunkered down together to seek safety in larger numbers. Beyond this, no one has asked why some people did not move at all, or why so many displacees gravitated in large numbers towards certain spaces. This thesis, in contrast, asks what the magnetic factors were that underpinned a forcefield of attraction to particular places. The aim of this thesis is to address this lacuna by using the new concept of 'immobility capital', exploring the links between labour, artisanship, and immobility. In doing so, this thesis critiques the (often disparaging) descriptions of Muslim neighbourhoods in post-partition Calcutta as culturally homogenous, deteriorating spaces, that lacked economic vitality, and were perpetually frozen in a state of intractable socio-economic deprivation.[2]

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[1] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Mahadeb Prasad Basu, *Anthropological Profile of Muslims in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, Government of India, 1985); M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in Aspects of Their Social Organisation* (Calcutta: The Anthropological Survey of India, 1974).

[2] Anwesha Sengupta, 'Becoming a Minority Community: Calcutta's Muslims After Partition', in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar eds., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social

Without glossing over the everyday forms of violence that endanger Muslim lives in India[3] – and recognising the social and political tensions that keep fracturing (and re-articulating) neighbourhood identities along lines of religion and work – this thesis analyses Muslim neighbourhoods not as 'barricaded spaces', but as multifaceted sites of interactions between different social groups. The overgeneralising accounts of Muslim ghettoisation as 'safe zones' precludes the possibility of understanding Muslim neighbourhoods as vibrant spaces of social and economic enterprise – small-scale manufacturing firms embedded in formal and informal credit networks and unique forms of labour organisation that connected these inner-city neighbourhoods to the borderlands.

This thesis not only examines the period from 1947 until the end of Congress government in West Bengal in 1967, it also goes back to the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century to investigate the longer histories, structures, and processes that had an impact upon Muslim tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants. In the colonial period there were multiple ways in which different groups 'mobilised and used as well as opposed the institutions of the colonial state and the niches that opened up between new and old structures.'[4] In pursuing Frederick Cooper's line of thought, this dissertation seeks to locate the 'niches' that enabled these Muslim groups (tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants) to

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Science Press, 2015), pp. 434-458; Anasua Chatterjee, *Margins of Citizenship: Muslim experiences in urban India* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 36-57; Rakesh Basant and Abusaleh Shariff, 'Introduction', in *The Handbook of Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-26; Jeremy Seabrook and Imran Siddiqui, *People Without History: India's Muslim Ghettos* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011).

[3] Tanika Sarkar, 'Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Women and Children in a Hindu Rashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 37, No. 28 (2002), pp. 2872-2876; Rubina Jasani, 'Violence, reconstruction and Islamic reform: stories from the Muslim "ghetto"', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 42, Nos. 2-3 (2008), pp. 431-456; Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Introduction' in *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[4] Frederick Cooper, 'The dialects of decolonization: nationalism and labour movements in post-war French Africa', in Ann Laura Stoler, Frederick Cooper eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in the Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 406-435.

accrue assets in the decades *before* partition, especially between 1911 and 1945. These cumulative assets were then deployed, in varying measure, to make a success of staying on in West Bengal.

The three Muslim 'clusters' in Calcutta – Kidderpore, Metiabruz-Garden Reach, and New Market, the commercial district stretching from Esplanade to Burrbazaar – are at the heart of this thesis. The Hindustani or Urdu-speaking tailors from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who resided in smaller pockets dispersed in the precinct of the docklands in Kidderpore, constituted a separate endogamous group, distinct from the Bengali-speaking tailors of Metiabruz.[5] In historicising these topographies, this study will argue that some stayers on and internally displaced Muslim groups, rather than being 'stuck' on the 'wrong side' of India's border,[6] made informed choices to remain in particular lived spaces. Indeed, many moved into those areas because of its locational advantages: nodes of patronage, markets, and 'mythic resources'. In doing so, this study has sought to understand Muslim spaces not through tropes of exclusion and victimisation, but through processes marked by *both* movement and staying on; enchantment and cosmopolitanism; agency and exploitation.

Metiabruz, for instance, provides a compelling example of how social hierarchies within the tailoring business informed labour segmentation. Tailors in Metiabruz can be divided into two broad categories. The first was engaged in *Hater Karobari* (the *haat* trade), making cheaper garments to sell in the local *haats.* Metiabruz tailors specialised in this sector of production, selling their wares at the Monglahat weekly market in Howrah (see Map 1.2 in Chapter One),

[5] M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in Aspects of their Social Organisation* (Government of India: Anthropological Survey of India, 2005), p. 49 and p. 52.
[6] Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck in Bengal: Immobility in the "age of migration"', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 51, Issue 2 (2017), pp. 511-541.

one of the biggest informal bazaars for readymade garments in eastern India. Eighty percent of the stalls in this *haat* were occupied by Metiabruz and Santoshpur tailors.[7] The second category is bespoke tailoring based on individual customer orders. This niche market involved making fitted garments that required specialised skills in cutting and stitching based on precise body measurements. Some of the outfitting firms in Esplanade subcontracted orders to the Metiabruz tailors who specialised in bespoke dressmaking.

Metiabruz tailors operated in tandem with different units of production, where labour was organised in three categories: (i) family or household unit of production where the head of the family, the *ostagir* (master tailor) commanded the work of (usually) unpaid family members to produce apparel for a competitive rate; (ii) the household unit of production, including apprentices (often kinsmen), learning the craft from the *ostagir*. Their output through the training period is unpaid. (iii) The tailoring unit of production, run by the *ostagir*, involving the work of household members, extended relatives and non-kinsmen, paid according to the quantum of work. The *ostagir* of these larger production units played the vital role of securing orders from outfitters, as well as the requisite materials from cloth suppliers at weekly *haats* or from clothiers in Burrabazaar.

If Bengali-speaking tailors dominated tailoring businesses in Metiabruz, then Urdu-speaking 'upcountry' tailors worked in close collaboration with long-standing Dawoodi Bohra outfitting firms in Esplanade. Muslim groups in Calcutta have been robust and plural. The religious marker 'Muslim' has encompassed a wide range of groups, engaged in different

[7] M.K.A. Siddiqui and S.P. Lala, 'The Darzis of Metiaburj: A Study in the Organisation of Tailoring as an Occupation', in M.K.A. Siddiqui ed., *Aspects of Society and Culture in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1982), p. 142.

occupations, and enmeshed in social and economic milieus. For this reason their stories will be written in the form of a social and economic history.[8]

Historiographical Overview

This dissertation builds upon the theoretical and empirical contributions of M.K.A. Siddiqui and Kenneth McPherson. Their works have provided rich and valuable insights into the heterogeneity and polymorphous nature of Muslim groups in Calcutta before partition. This thesis also draws upon the scholarship of Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander, Annu Jalais, and Romola Sanyal who have focused on the experiences of internally displaced minorities within cities and in the borderlands. This scholarship urges us to go beyond legal, geographical and geopolitical questions around borders – in order to look at the 'historical effects of borders' on people 'from the periphery', as well as experiences of 'statelessness' among minority Muslims in India after 1947 and Bihari Muslims in Bangladesh after 1971.[9]

The dissertation seeks to make an intervention in the historiography on Muslim ghettoisation and internal displacement in West Bengal by bringing to the fore the hitherto unexamined

[8] Taylor Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[9] Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim migration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Joya Chatterji, 'The Fashioning of a Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and Bengal's Border Landscape, 1947-1952', in *Partition's Legacies* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2019), pp. 49-122; Willem van Schendel and Mahbubar Rahman, '"I am Not a Refugee": Rethinking Partition Migration', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, Issue 3 (2003), pp. 551-584; Jason Cons and Romola Sanyal, 'Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia', *Political Geography* Vol. 5, No. 13 (2013), pp. 5-11; Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, 'Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands', *Journal of World History* Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997), pp. 211-242; Willem van Schendel, 'Statelessness in South Asia: The Making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves', *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 61, No. 1 (2002), p. 127; Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta 1918-1935* (Dietrich: Ergon Verlag, 1974); M.K.A Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta*, pp. 16-17.

history of Muslim tailors, their relationship to place, and their interdependencies with Dawoodi Bohra merchants.

The literature on Muslim ghettos in West Bengal has tended to rely on symbolic and spatialised binaries, such as Hindu-Muslim, insider-outsider, safe-unsafe, periphery-centre, rural-urban, and city-borderland.[10] These categorisations have produced analytical blind-spots, from which Muslim localities emerge through tropes of isolation, marginalisation, and victimisation. Such accounts are not attentive to the ways in which Muslim groups have sustained themselves in the face of economic adversity and state antipathy – by relying on historically embedded networks, attached to particular places, established through trade, migration, pilgrimage, and the circulation of *sufi* saints.[11]

Calcutta's Muslim groups have remained outside the remit of scholarly engagement with Muslim ghettos in India. A glaring omission in Christophe Jaffrelot and Laurent Gayer's *Muslims in Indian Cities* is the lack of insight on the 'trajectories' of Muslim marginalisation in West Bengal. Although the collected essays in this book highlight regional variations in experiences of Muslim ghettoisation, Jaffrelot and Gayer provide very little insight on how neighbourhoods came to be reconfigured through movement and immobility. Analysing

[10] Anasua Chatterjee, *Margins of Citizenship: Muslim experiences in urban India* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 36-57; Anwesha Sengupta, 'Becoming a Minority Community: Calcutta's Muslims After Partition', in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar eds., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), pp. 434-458; Jeremy Seabrook and Imran Siddiqui, *People Without History: India's Muslim Ghettos* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011).

[11] Kirti Nayaran Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim migration* (New York: Routledge, 2016); John Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj, 1865-1956* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015); Barbara Metcalf, 'The pilgrimage remembered: South Asian accounts of the hajj', in Dale. F Eickelman and James Piscatori eds., *Muslim travellers: pilgrimage, migration, and the religious imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 85-107; Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1207-1760* (Berkeley: University of Cambridge Press, 1993).

Muslim neighbourhoods as closed units of analyses precludes the possibilities of understanding how Muslim spaces are interconnected not just within cities, but beyond them.[12] The interconnectedness of borderland clusters with inner-city clusters needs to be understood not just within the framework of marginalisation and dislocation, but as enabling economic agency through interdependencies forged between small producers and family firms, geographies of opportunity, and occupational niches attached to these spaces.

This thesis will make room for more nuanced understandings of mobility and immobility by examining the kinds of assets that Muslim groups in Calcutta had which informed their decisions to stay on after India's partition.

Until 1947, Calcutta represented 'a tessellated mosaic of distinct "sub-communal groups", each with its own unique and shifting history'.[13] Certain parts of Calcutta had already become dominantly 'Muslim' areas, notably Park Circus, Bowbazar, Ekbalpur, and Karaya.[14] Just a decade before 1947 Muslims enjoyed political dominance over united Bengal, and had asserted themselves socially and culturally even in areas of Hindu preponderance. Muslims in undivided western Bengal were far more heterogeneous than their Bengali-speaking counterparts in the agrarian tracts of eastern Bengal.[15]

[12] Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States: India, China and the Himalayas, 1910-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Willem van Schendel, 'Easy Come, Easy Go: Smugglers on the Ganges', *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1993), pp. 189-213; on informality and subversive politics of marginalised groups in the borderlands see, Malini Sur, 'Bamboo baskets and barricades: gendered landscapes at the India-Bangladesh border', in Barak Kalir and Malini Sur eds., *Transnational Flows and Permissive Polities: Ethnographies of Human Mobilities in Asia* (Amsterdam: IIAS publication, 2013), pp. 127-150.
[13] Joya Chatterji, 'Of Ghettos and Graveyards: Muslims in West Bengal 1947-67', in Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy eds., *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 239.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760*, p. 101.

Partition dramatically reversed the position of Muslims in West Bengal. Communal politics in the region leading up to partition, the communal riots of 1946,[16] and large-scale displacement and refugee migration led to the creation of clearly discernible 'Muslim clusters' spread across the city's geography.[17]

Between 1947-1967, an estimated 12 to 13 million Hindus and Muslims crossed the border between East and West Bengal as refugees, looking to resettle and rebuild their lives in the 'right' nation. Millions of others stayed put in the 'wrong' side of the Radcliffe Line, among them were countless numbers who were internally displaced.[18] Chatterji's work has been attentive to the ways in which some groups crossed borders and others did not. Some moved shorter distances within the Bengal delta, while many others huddled in the 'long shadows' of the new national borders. Others, fewer in number, embarked on a passage to faraway places in the West.[19]

Different Muslim groups responded differently when they realised that their lives and property were at risk. As Chatterji puts it, 'among the many factors that determined their actions were how easily they could take their assets away with them, how effectively they could deploy their skills to earn a living in the east, what contacts they had there, how their prospects compared with what they might still hang on to in the west if they stayed put…[it] mattered whether they lived in clusters or were scattered in isolated pockets. It also mattered

[16] Also known as the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946, see, Nariaki Nakazato, 'The Role of Colonial Administration, "Riot Systems" and Local Networks during the Calcutta Disturbances of August 1946', in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar eds., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), pp. 267-319.
[17] Nirmal Kumar Bose, 'Calcutta: A Premature Metropolis', *Scientific American* Vol. 213, No. 3 (1965), pp. 90-102.
[18] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations: "Mobility Capital" and Migration in the Bengal Delta', 1947-2007', in *Partition's Legacies*, p. 264.
[19] Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 52-79.

whether they were near the border or far from it.'[20] The ones who 'stayed on' were first internally displaced and then ghettoised, their everyday trials silenced by the religious majority. Chatterji's evocative description of the Selimpur ghetto is a case in point. Muslim residents in Selimpur, a South Calcutta area where greatest number of refugee colonies were located, gradually lost their rights over a local graveyard. Such ghettoisation was 'creeping', as Muslim graveyards, and other Muslim spaces were slowly encroached upon by Hindus.[21] This was not an exceptional case, Chatterji writes, 'Calcutta's landscape is dotted with Selimpurs. Most Muslim burial grounds in the city bear similar marks of retreat and defeat'.[22]

Muslim groups remained in, or moved to, clusters which varied in size, density, and location, each with its own distinctive social, political, and economic histories.[23]

Joya Chatterji's concept of 'mobility capital' helps to explain patterns not only of migration, but also significantly of internal displacement and staying on.[24] In describing migrant agency, she has offered two critical propositions: first, that migrant networks were often marked by older patterns of movement and mobility – these were at the heart of the process, and minimised risks and/or maximised advantages linked with migration. In doing so, she challenges the dominant assumption that 'forced migrations' caused by political upheavals such as the partition were different from 'economic migrations' driven by labour market demands. Migrants in fact straddled this divide.

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[20] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 160.
[21] Joya Chatterji, 'Of Ghettos and Graveyards', pp. 222-249; Romola Sanyal, 'Hindu space: urban dislocations in post-partition Calcutta', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Vol. 39, No. 1 (2014), pp. 38-49.
[22] Joya Chatterji, 'Of Ghettos and Graveyards', p. 239.
[23] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, pp. 181-194; Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 161-191.
[24] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 304.

Particularly valuable are the contrasting findings about migrants of different status. The concept of 'mobility capital' is applicable to disadvantaged groups just as much as it is to the transnational networks of the elite. It is the 'bundle of assets' that facilitated the movement (or lack thereof) of mostly poor and lower-status Muslim migrants. Their movement entailed 'complex calculations about whether and when to leave, where to go.'[25]

Second, Chatterji's research underlines the reasons why some social groups get 'stuck' in times of adversity – the brakes upon the 'cumulative causation' in the migration process.[26] The fragility of networks that inhibited some people's capacity to move had to do with, as she demonstrates, not having enough 'mobility capital'. The Bengal delta's Muslim migrants tended to have 'very particular bundles of assets, competences, or dispositions which influenced the trajectory of his or her movement'.[27] These included social networks and contacts garnered from personal histories of mobility; literacy; portable skills (that hereditary artisans tended to have), and material wealth. Migrants tended to be young, able-bodied and their numbers included many more men than women. They deployed their assets in varying amounts to make their migration ventures possible. Among the elements that made up the bundle of assets for 'mobility capital', actual monetary resources proved not to have been so critical in the case of some Muslim stayers on, for instance, lascars and cash-poor itinerant agriculturalists.[28]

By contrast, those who stayed behind got 'stuck' because they tended to 'lack some or all of these attributes.'[29] For instance, women tended to stay behind to care for the ailing. This is a

[25] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations', p. 269.
[26] Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck', in *Partition's Legacies*, pp. 423-433.
[27] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations', p. 271.
[28] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 304.
[29] Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck', in *Partition's Legacies*, pp. 424-425.

pertinent issue, but lies outside the remit of this thesis because of fieldwork constraints related to the pandemic. Custodians often stayed behind to tend to shrines and graves of the deceased. Many who intended to leave, failed to do so because they experienced, what Chatterji has described as, 'network atrophy'. Networks ruptured over time, limiting the migrant's choices and their trajectories of movement as time passed.[30]

Without playing down the realities of such 'stuckness' and immobility – poverty, illness, obligations of care-work, communal intimidation and everyday indignity – this thesis demonstrates how some groups, Muslim tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants, in fact thrived within these threatened and seemingly uninhabitable contexts. I build on Joya Chatterji's body of work on immobility, but depart significantly from her theorisation of 'mobility capital'.

My concept of 'immobility capital' *does not simply reinforce* Chatterji's thesis that some Muslim groups who *had* 'mobility capital' stayed on in the 'wrong side' of the border (for instance, politicians; rank-and-file government officials.)[31] My point is that there were groups such as Muslim tailors who had *some* 'mobility capital' (e.g., skills), but they also had other kinds of assets embedded in the location, accrued over the years – access to informal markets, religious fairs, and 'mythic resources'; knowledge of local material culture; sewing machines; and patronage ties – that lent themselves, in varying degrees, to making a success of staying put, no matter how threatening it may have seemed. I call these assets, 'immobility capital'. Few tailors had every asset, but many had enough. For instance, a tailor with a skill did not necessarily have a patron, but adapted the skill in response to changing market demands for

[30] Ibid, pp. 423-433.
[31] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations', pp. 264-307.

particular commodities. Together these communities were able to transform their assets into sufficient 'immobility capital' to stay on, and sometimes flourish, in independent India.
I propose that we start by looking at what sort of assets make up both 'mobility capital' and 'immobility capital', and how much of it is required to increase a person's capacity to survive and even thrive. These asset bundles then determine the boundaries of a person's agency: they enable or constrain choices, whether to be 'mobile' or 'immobile'.

For instance, skills are an important asset that contribute to both 'mobility capital'[32] and 'immobility capital'. An artisan with skills can meet market demand, and make a living whether they stay or go. As Chatterji has shown, many artisans with skills moved to Dhaka (East Pakistan) after 1947, often tapping into pre-existing networks, or moved to particular princely states within India; for instance, the movement of Muslim weavers and artisans from Indore to Hyderabad.[33] I argue, on the other hand, that locational resources complemented the artisans' skills, which contributed towards having *more* 'immobility capital', which lent itself to staying put. Some Calcutta tailors, as this thesis will show, stayed on because their patrons (Dawoodi Bohra family firms) stayed on.

These complementary resources were tethered to a place, a region, a location with a long history of manufacture, the use of small machines in embedded tailor-clusters, informal markets, patronage connections with other stayers on, and different kinds of 'mythic' wealth.[34] They increased the 'stayer-on' artisan's chances of survival, and even of flourishing.

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Joya Chatterji, 'Princes, Subjects and Gandhi: Alternatives to Citizenship at the End of Empire', in *Partition's Legacies*, pp. 465-492.
[34] Ibid, p. 477.

A tailor with some 'mobility capital' (in the form of skills), may not have wanted to risk losing his access to the locational resources that make up his 'immobility capital.' Immobility does not mean that the person who stayed on became a tent-peg – sedentarised in perpetuity in one place. They moved internally in search of markets and new patrons, in ways that kept their access to these locational resources 'alive'. Immobility and 'mobility capital', rather than being either/or, were often complementary.

Another crucial asset that contributed to the tailors' 'immobility capital' was their interconnections with Dawoodi Bohra merchants. While Marwari family firms in Calcutta and Sindhi Hindu merchants from Hyderabad and Shikarpur have attracted much scholarly attention, there has been little to no work on Dawoodi Bohras in Calcutta.

In his monograph, *Merchants, Traders, and Entrepreneurs*, Claude Markovits makes the case that historians of the mercantile world of South Asia have had little to say about the specific role of Muslims.[35] Markovits' rich *oeuvre* on merchant networks emphasises the importance of a historical perspective on modern mercantile studies, contextualising South Asian socio-economic processes within their own spatial and temporal trajectories. He shows, for instance, how community allegiances and differences are forged through time and space.[36]

In his study of Hindu Sindhi merchants and of their trading networks from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Markovits dispels the 'unitary notion' of the South Asian diaspora. He demonstrates that South Asian migrants belonged to different social classes, and maintained links with their respective regions and locality of origin. Focus on the

[35] Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, and Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2008), p. 105.
[36] Ibid, pp. 202-204.

'subregional, microregional or even the local' is at the heart of Markovits' study because this is where the migrant merchant identities were defined. By concentrating on localities, he shows how Sindhi merchants were able to establish themselves in a European dominated world economy.[37]

Thomas A. Timberg and Claude Markovits' fascinating accounts of Marwari family firms have provided valuable insights on the business practices of mercantile groups and the interface between the state and business.[38] As a thriving mercantile community in Calcutta in the early decades of the twentieth century, Marwaris wielded immense political power and patronage.[39] By the interwar period, Marwaris had supplanted Bengalis and Punjabi Khatri merchants as agents in European firms. The latter groups could not compete with the formidable resources – access to capital and networks commanded by the Marwaris – and also the good reputation or *sakh*, of the community for its business norms.[40] But, the long-standing presence of Dawoodi Bohra family firms in Calcutta in this period has been a neglected area within South Asian scholarship on merchants. This thesis aims to bring to the fore this hitherto under-researched group of merchants and their interconnections with Muslim tailors in Calcutta.

While Markovits writes about trust as a necessary ingredient to successful business transactions, he dismisses the idealised 'fictive kinship ties of "brotherhood"'.[41] He describes

[37] Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 185-212.
[38] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris, from Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978); Claude Markovits, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-1939: The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[39] Rajat Kanta Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1979).
[40] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris From Traders to Industrialists*, pp. 76-78.
[41] Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants*, pp. 261-262.

trust as based on shared information about past behaviour; the power dynamics within communities resulting from affinities arising out of locational proximity, co-residence, kinship, and marriage alliances. He does not extrapolate, however, as to how trust and merchant reliance are often intertwined with religion, ethnicity and/or even caste.[42] Markovits' rich corpus says little about the role of artisans, or of the interdependencies between skilled artisans and merchant-outfitters that sustained craft-based capitalism. This, as the thesis will demonstrate, is a problematic omission.

The interdependencies between tailors and outfitters also fall through the cracks of both historiographies of artisan production and of consumption. Tirthankar Roy and Douglas Haynes, through their pioneering work on artisan communities, have highlighted the survival strategies and changes within artisan households in the late colonial period.[43] Tirthankar Roy, for instance, has focused on the adaptations of artisan groups, like weavers – particularly their modes of skill preservation, modification, and the reapplication of craft-oriented technologies.[44] But in these studies, masters weavers have received much of the limelight.[45] If weavers produce cloth, then tailors turn cloth into a fitted garment. This end of the production line is often obscured by an overemphasis on mechanised manufacturing and ready-made

[42] Ibid, p. 249 and p. 252.
[43] Tirthankar Roy and Douglas Haynes, 'Conceiving Mobility: Migration of Handloom Weavers in Precolonial and Colonial India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 36, No. 1 (1999), pp. 35-67; Tirthankar Roy and Douglas Haynes, 'Mobile artisans', in Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook eds., *Routledge Handbook of The South Asian Diaspora* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 43-52.
[44] Tirthankar Roy, 'Apprenticeship and Industrialization in India, 1600-1930', in Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden eds., *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Tirthankar Roy, 'Acceptance of Innovations in Early Twentieth Century Indian Weaving', *Economic History Review*, Vol. V, No. 3 (2002), pp. 508-509.
[45] Tirthankar Roy, *Traditional Industry in the Economy of Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tirthankar Roy, 'Out of Tradition: Master Artisans and Economic Change in Colonial India', *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 66, No. 4 (2007), pp. 963-91.

clothing. And yet, it was local tailors who met the sartorial demands of patrons across social classes for bespoke garments: from tailored suits to everyday wear.

In a similar vein, Douglas Haynes' *Small Town Capitalism* concentrates on artisan agency. He looks at 'the smallish actors and their creative attempts to adapt to the changing social and political environment'.[46] Haynes' work brings small town producers into focus through three distinct frames of analysis: the economics of manufacturing, consumer cultures, and social organisation of production – and he uses these to explain a distinctive form of regional capitalism in western India. His in-depth analysis of artisan households, *karkhanas* (workshops), neighbourhoods, associations, and key producers in small towns within one Indian region, departs from the conventional historiographies that describe artisans as victims of increasing mechanisation and industrialisation. Such historical scholarship, with its overwhelming focus on factory-based work, overlooked the role of small producers in the history of the industrial economy.[47] Haynes' scholarship also emphasises adaptations and continuities within the shift towards 'weaver-capitalists': the rise of trade unions in this sector, and the advantage of staying small within the changing economic order.[48]

In Haynes' work, however, actors in the weaving sector seem stuck in their 'niche' and not to have the possibility of moving out, or engaging with actors in other work-sectors. By comparison, there has been little historical engagement with inter-sectoral labour. Tailors, discussed in this thesis, manipulated their skills of cutting and stitching, as well as their use of versatile small technologies such as sewing machines, to work in a whole range of sectors,

[46] Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism in West India: Artisans, Merchants, and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[47] Prasannan Parthasarathi, 'Indian Labor History', *International Labor and Working-Class History* Vol. 82 (2012), pp. 127-135.
[48] Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism in West India*, pp. 265-303.

from sailmaking to shoemaking. They employed apprentices in small, self-reliant, garment-producing workshops, and adapted to changing market conditions – evolving consumer desires – with entrepreneurship and creativity.

More recently, scholarly attention has shifted from histories of production to histories of consumption. Haruka Yanagisawa, Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy and Douglas Haynes have drawn attention to new forms of demand for consumer goods; new markets for particular commodities across rural and urban terrains; and historical transformations in consumer behaviour. These changes have influenced the larger social history of South Asia.[49] However, by focusing on the consumer alone, we limit the possibilities of understanding how some small producers, like tailors, have used innovation and creativity to generate a demand for particular commodities, and shaping consumer behaviour. It is important, therefore, to place tailors and their networks at the heart of the histories of commodity and consumption histories. Continuities in demand for tailored clothing in the late colonial period generated work for tailors and they, in turn, influenced new consumer practices, stimulating demand through innovative tailoring techniques and developing new fashions.

State-control, border-making, widespread violence, and economic upheavals, made up the shifting landscape in which these forms of 'mobility capital' and 'immobility capital' were deployed. Some failed or got lucky irrespective of their resources. Nevertheless they remained agents with choices to make. Each migrant and stayer-on will have made their decision based not only on where their economic success was most assured but also for affective and 'mythic' reasons – where is it they want to make their home? Do they have the

[49] Tirthankar Roy, Douglas Haynes, Abigail McGowan and Haruka Yanagisawa eds., *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

'mobility capital' to risk a journey and make a new life in a new country? Do they have the 'immobility capital' to stay on in places where they are most embedded? These two forms of capital determine the boundaries in which the agent, and the 'community', is able to exercise choice. This thesis explores the new concept of 'immobility capital' through the Muslim *darzis* of Calcutta. They decided to stay on, in the most threatening of circumstances, but their assets were such that they not only survived but thrived.

Methodology and Sources

The conceptual framework undergirding this thesis draws upon historical, sociological and anthropological modes of inquiry, which has enabled a richer and more nuanced understanding of why some Muslim groups *chose* to stay on in constrained contexts. This study has used a variety of sources to uncover the hitherto unexamined facets of immobility.

The Bengal District Gazetteers, Statistical Accounts, Census records (1911-1961), Provincial Banking Enquiry Commission Report, anthropological survey reports, and the Calcutta Municipal Gazette have provided the building blocks for recontextualising Muslim 'clusters' in Calcutta – the historical significance of such clustering, and its impact on tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants.

In reconstructing Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's presence and development of the 'court-in-exile' in Metiabruz, this thesis has used Foreign Political and Home Public proceedings from the National Archives of India; Bengal Political and Foreign Consultation/ proceedings from the West Bengal State Archives; and sources on 'King of Oudh Wajid Ali Shah', at the India Office Records at the British Library. Bengali popular histories of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah

and novels about Indian tailors in colonial and postcolonial contexts have contributed towards bringing out the richness of accounts on artisan legacies and skilled craftsmanship. The thesis has derived invaluable insights from vernacular sources that have been critical in describing the tailors' labouring worlds in their own words. A rare and hitherto unexplored master-authored Urdu tailoring manual provides rich insight into ways in which masters sought to establish a distinctive craft authority, the importance of skills, and practices of skill acquisition and transmission within artisan trades.

The dissertation has relied on a wealth of materials, much of it hitherto unused, from the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) Collections at the University Library, Cambridge, and the Centre of South Asian Studies archive, Cambridge. These include British and Anglo-Indian memoirs, home manuals, photographs and private papers on accounts of colonial life in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. I have juxtaposed some of these sources with more 'traditional' records such as censuses and gazetteers, to demonstrate how and why the *darzi* seems to be more visible in, for instance, Englishwomen's memoirs. In the censuses they are far more elusive, indeed all but invisible.

British tailoring handbooks from the British Library and Indian newspaper advertisements from *The Statesman*, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, and *The Bombay Chronicle* have helped to track the changes in dress styles and dressmaking techniques in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century Calcutta. Bengal Army Dress regulation manuals, tailors' 'cutting books', and military proceedings from the India Office Records at the British Library have provided fascinating details on the production of military liveries, war commodities, and the growing demand for Indian tailors during the two World Wars.

The Singer Manufacturing Company Records (1864-1991) adds another layer to the story of staying on, in the context of how Muslim tailors came to possess sewing machines, how they used them to augment their skills, and the impact of these machines on the tailor's mobility or lack thereof. Singer Administrative Papers, Customers' Papers, Singer Catalogues, Singer Correspondences, Singer Publications and Promotional Materials, The Singer Red Review Journal from the Clydebank Library in Dumbarton (Scotland) have all contributed towards a better understanding of the profound significance of Singer sewing machines in the lives of *darzis.*

This study has sought out the life histories, hitherto undocumented, of Muslim tailors and Dawoodi Bohra outfitting firms. In so doing, I have curated a little archive of my own: oral history interviews; newspaper cuttings, photographs, and trade-cards from the private collection of my interlocutors; photographs of tailors in their workshops and shop hoardings, all pulsating with stories about the importance of place, staying on, and the survival strategies of Muslim communities.

Chapter Plan

The chapters in this thesis are thematic in structure and broadly internally chronological. Each chapter examines one 'asset' that makes up the bundle of a tailor's 'immobility capital'. Chapter One examines the 'locational incentives' that drew Muslim tailoring groups to Calcutta between 1911 and 1941: 'upcountry' tailors from the United Provinces and Bihar, and Bengali Muslim tailors from the eastern tracts of Bengal. This chapter shows that tailors were an indispensable part of the colonial economy. They took advantage of the colonial infrastructure to access patrons and markets and 'mythic resources' embedded in the region. The proximity to religious fairs associated with *sufi* shrines; and weekly and periodical *haats*

(markets) in the neighbouring districts of Calcutta, meant that tailors in manufacturing hotspots within the city clustered in these lucrative spaces.

The two World Wars created new and exciting opportunities for these tailoring groups, who repurposed their skills in cutting and sewing to work across different war industries. The tailor-clusters concentrated in areas along the river Hooghly: Metiabruz, Kidderpore, and 24 Parganas, all of which grew denser between the two wars. The locational embeddedness of markets and critical nodes of patronage attached to individuals, outfitting firms, and indeed the colonial state, meant that tailors had much to gain from their connections to these places and patrons. These incentives attached to particular locations was a critical asset that contributed to the Muslim tailors' 'immobility capital'.

Chapter Two sets out to explore the material culture, changing dress styles, and the demand for tailoring among the colonial middle classes in Calcutta between 1890-1940. The knowledge of material culture, consumption practices, and markets associated with particular kinds of dress styles was a crucial asset for tailors. They adapted to changing dress practices with remarkable alacrity. The circulation of paper patterns and 'cutting books' on three-dimensional garment-construction in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century influenced local tailoring practices. Consumers with varied tastes and aesthetic dispositions, belonging to different echelons of society in late-colonial Bengal, required tailors, skilled in handiwork, to make customised apparel for them. Clothing was central to the self-fashioning of the colonial middle-classes, and tailors made such projects possible by reinventing tradition. They handcrafted different kinds of dresses for an array of consumers to suit a range of purposes. This knowledge of material culture was one of the important assets of their 'immobility capital'.

Chapter Three examines the skill of the tailor, one of his most formidable assets. The tailor's skill and its invisibility in official sources, this chapter argues, has much to do with the problem of disaggregation in census enumeration and the reclassification of skills by artisans themselves. Caste played an important role in the ways in which colonial enumerators categorised tailors. In asserting skill-based structures of authority over the trade, tailors complicated the monolithic understanding of a dominant tailoring 'caste'. The chapter further examines how different tailoring groups sought to acquire, transmit, preserve, and assert their skills through vernacular tailoring manuals and tracts.

Chapter Four traces the use of Singer sewing machines among Muslim tailors in Calcutta in the colonial and post-colonial contexts. Sewing machines altered and reshaped the spaces in which tailors lived and worked. They augmented the tailor's skills in dressmaking, but sewing machines additionally enabled them to forge intersectoral linkages across industries. In the late colonial period, tailors acquired the use of sewing machines either through their patrons/urban outfitters or for themselves outright through The Singer Manufacturing Company's flexible 'hire-purchase agreements'. These machines were often inherited by second-generation tailors for whom they were prized assets, embedded in the places where they lived and worked, and becoming a vital asset that contributed to their 'immobility capital'.

Chapter Five analyses another key asset for Muslim tailors – their interdependencies with Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters. These Mustali Ismaili Shia merchant family firms had been long-standing patrons to intergenerational tailors who provided bespoke outfitting services to the firms' clientele. These 'relations of dependency' were forged in the interwar period and deepened in the subsequent decades. Many Muslim tailors stayed on in the

aftermath of partition because their patrons remained on the ‘wrong’ side of the Radcliffe Line – both groups unwilling to sever their connections with the resources embedded in the region.

Chapter One

Locational Incentives and 'Mythic Resources': Wartime Demand, Religious Fairs, and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's Legacy in late colonial Calcutta

'The abnormal increase in the volume of trade without proportionate and well-planned expansion of the city, thus involving a large influx of population in particular areas; the natural tendency of the people to reside as close to their business places and often in the same premises thus increasing the congestion; want of easy and rapid means of communication with the neighbouring suburbs…[the] innate unwillingness of certain classes of people to leave the area in which their ancestors have lived for generations past and the immobility of certain classes of the population.'

The Calcutta Municipal Gazette, 18 June 1925[1]

Introduction

In 1925, The Calcutta Municipal Gazette published an article on housing shortages and urban congestion in the city. It argued that these were induced by an 'abnormal increase' in trade and influx of migrant populations. The 'immobility' and 'innate unwillingness' of certain groups to leave their ancestral habitations and the 'natural tendency of the people' to live close to 'business places', were underlined as contributing factors for overcrowding. The '*bustee* problem' was deemed to be starker in particular wards in the industrial areas by the river Hooghly.[2] Kidderpore and Garden Reach were reported to have had 'large tracts covered by extensive clusters of huts, about 1700 in number'; many more 'insanitary' *bustees* with 'their dirty ponds and cess-pits', dotted the adjoining areas.[3]

[1]'Housing Problem In Calcutta: Can It Be Solved?—I', *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette,* 18 June 1925, p. 175.
[2] The term 'bustee' here denotes a densely populated area with poor municipal provisions, where the labouring poor live and work. Other terms such as 'slum' or 'ghetto' have also been used to describe these spaces.
[3] 'Housing Problem in Calcutta: Can It Be Solved?—IV Problems and Possibilities', *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette,* 17 January 1925, p. 397.

In these crowded tenements lived skilled migrant groups who engaged in hereditary occupations, and who benefitted from their proximity to these thriving economic spaces, some rooted in a longer history of manufacture and artisan cultures.[4] Among these groups were *darzis* for whom Calcutta's 'location' in the colonial economy from the late 1880s until the early 1940s was a formidable asset.

The various iterations of the terms, *darzi, darji* (in Hindustani), *durgee, dirzee, dhurgie, durzee,* come from the Persian word *darz* (sewing, hem or seam), denoting a male Muslim tailor.[5]

In the late colonial period, *darzis* deployed creative strategies to remain buoyant. They clustered in particular areas historically embedded in nodes of patronage. They responded to the stimulus that different 'markets' provided, often exerting skill-based control over production processes. Within the war economy, they carved out an occupational niche for themselves, making their tailoring skills more adaptable to allied trades, by taking advantage of new technologies like sewing machines. They aligned their well-honed craftsmanship to cater to the sartorial dispositions of patrons across social classes. They tapped into 'mythic'[6] resources such as The Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah's legacy in Metiabruz, and religious fairs associated with *sufi* shrines, to access markets and nodes of patronage. Through

[4] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta 1918-1935* (Dietrich: Ergon Verlag, 1974).
[5] Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words, Phrases and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* (London: John Murray, Albermarle St., 1903), p. 319; Ivor Lewis, *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs: the Dictionary of the Words of Anglo India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 49; Tom Hoogervorst, 'Sailors, Tailors, Cooks, and Crooks: On Loanwords and Neglected Lives in Indian Ocean Ports', *Itinerario* Vol. 42, No. 3 (2018), pp. 516-548 (p. 526). Also, these terms appear in colonial sources – early twentieth-century Anglo-Indian memoirs and home manuals – discussed in Chapter Two.
[6] Joya Chatterji, 'Princes, Subjects, and Gandhi. Alternatives to Citizenship at the End of Empire', in *Partition's Legacies*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2019), p. 477.

interdependencies and partnerships with urban outfitting firms, they exploited the fissures and changing 'local conditions' in the interwar period.

These overlapping social and economic forces generated, what I describe as 'locational incentives', which informed the spatial 'clustering' of Muslim tailors in particular neighbourhoods within the city and in the countryside.

This chapter examines the locational incentives for the 'clustering' of specific trades in Calcutta in response to the exponential wartime demand for tailors during the two wars. The three tailor-clusters by the river Hooghly in the 24 Parganas – Metiabruz, Kidderpore-Mominpur, the retailing stretch from New Market, Esplanade to Burra Bazaar, the heartland of mercantile activities in Calcutta, were central to wartime production (see Map 1.1). These spaces grew denser between 1911 and 1941. Tailors took advantage of colonial 'public works'[7] – road, railways, and canal networks – to access markets and manufacturing hotspots, often tapping into older migratory routes.[8]

'Upcountry' tailors from the eastern United Provinces and Bihar who had migrated to Calcutta in the early decades of the twentieth century to work in the mills and *karkhanas* very likely also tapped into pre-existing routes that opened up after Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's internment to Metiabruz in the late nineteenth century.[9] In another migratory wave, the Great

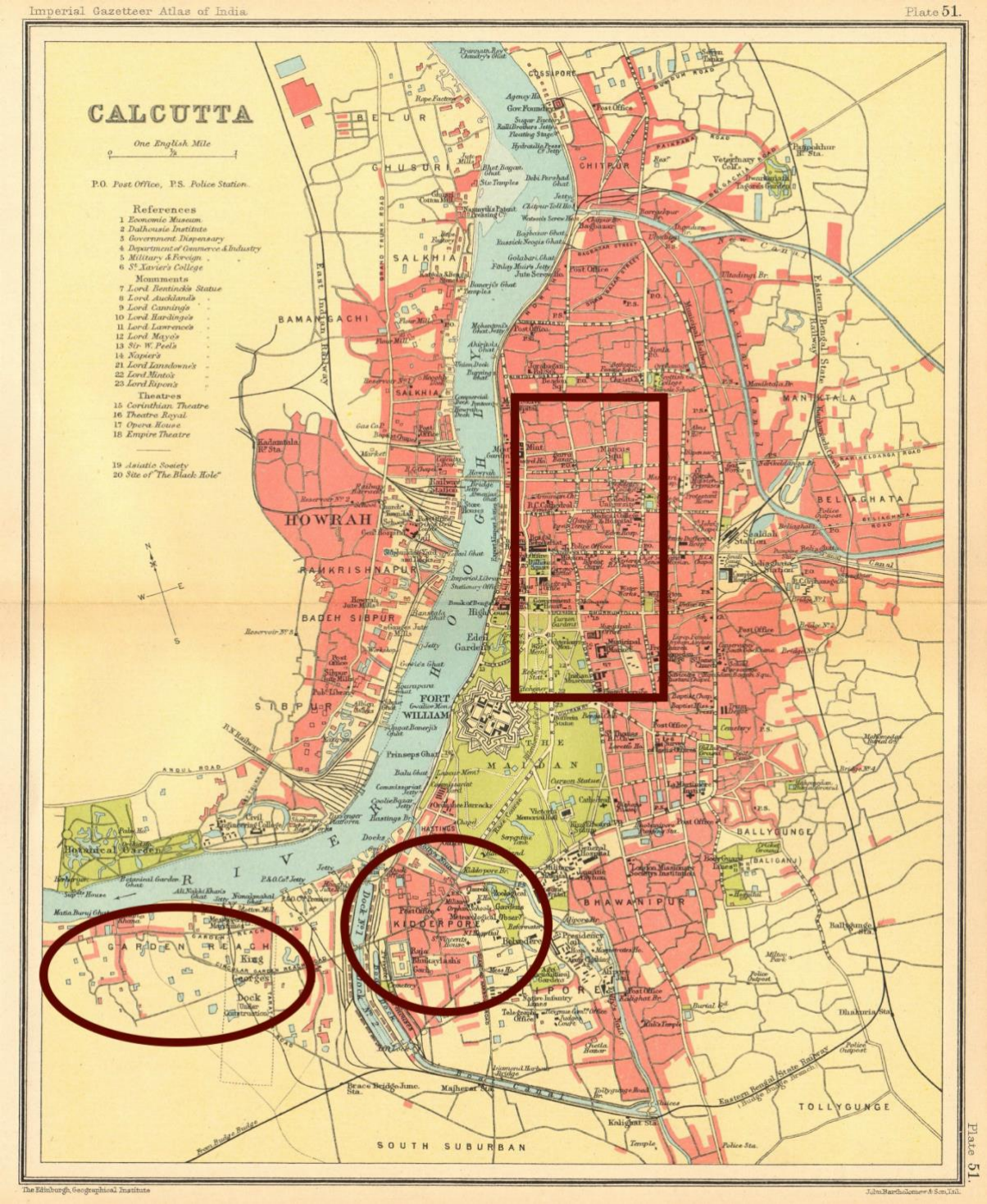
[7] Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire. Circulation, 'Public Works' and Social Space in Colonial Orissa. c. 1780-1914* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009).
[8] Joya Chatterji, 'From imperial subjects to national citizens: South Asians and the international migration regime since 1947', in Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (Oxon, Abington: Routledge, 2013), pp. 183-198.
[9] Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, p. 165; Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Internal Migration in India: the Case of Bengal* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1987), p. 57; M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in Aspects of their Social Organisation* (Anthropological Survey of India, Government of India, 2005), pp. 11-12; Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*, pp. 9-10.

Depression propelled Bengali Muslim tailors from the eastern tracts of Bengal to make their way westwards into lucrative production hubs within Calcutta, thereby intensifying competition between tailoring groups.[10]

I argue that the 'locational incentives' afforded by Calcutta in the early decades of the twentieth century – the war economy, informal markets, and embedded 'mythic' resources – enabled Muslim tailors to build up their 'immobility capital', which at the time of partition had an impact on their decision-making about staying on in the 'wrong' side of the border.

[10] Joya Chatterji, 'Prehistories of mobility and immobility: The Bengal delta and the "eastern zone", 1857-1947' in Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim migration* (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 34-35.

Map 1.1: The Map of Calcutta, 1931. The three 'tailors-clusters' are marked in red: Metiabruz-Garden Reach, Kidderpore, and the commercial district stretching from the Municipal Market (or New Market), Esplanade to Burra Bazaar.



Source: Imperial Gazetteer Atlas of India, 1931.

Tailors during the two world wars

Recent scholarship has reassessed the social, economic and cultural legacies of the world wars on non-European societies: South Asia's 'forgotten' armies, 'plebeian' prisoners of war, and 'non-combatant', 'follower rank' civilians who serviced the needs of the British Indian army.[11] These perspectives have zoomed out of the empirical frameworks that have hitherto focused on the macro-economic consequences of the two wars, elite networks, and high politics. Instead, the main thrust has been on understanding 'plebeian sources' that yield new insights into the 'mentalities and ways of making sense of the world in this period'.[12]

Another significant group of 'plebeian non-combatants', who clothed the army and produced a bewildering range of war commodities, were tailors. They were an indispensable segment of the war economy, and yet they remain invisible in much of the historiography on the world wars.

The Army itself was a 'voracious consumer' requiring enormous supplies of food, uniforms, bedding and blankets, tents, ammunition, sanitary provisions, medicines, drinks and tobacco. India's contribution to the whole range of war goods, especially in textiles and manufacturing was considerable.[13] If we go by the official figures, the strength of combatant troops of the Indian Army at the start of the First World War was 155,423 men including about 15,000

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[11] Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Ravi Ahuja, 'The Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps, 1915-1919' in Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 131-166; Radhika Singha, *The Coolie's Great War: Indian Labour in a Global Conflict, 1914-1921* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2020).

[12] Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, p. 7.

[13] Indivar Kamtekar, *The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 52.

British soldiers, while the strength in the non-combatants was 45,660.[14] By the end of 1919, 877,000 soldiers and 563,000 non-combatant military workers had been recruited in India, of whom 621,000 and 475,000 respectively served overseas.[15]

Tailors produced uniforms for different regimental troops and officers, catering to different stylistic requirements.[16] These uniforms personified what Radhika Singha has called the 'wartime code of hypermasculinity', encapsulated in the image of the 'martial races'. For Indian officers, notions of regimental honour and duty fused with the ideal of a 'warrior gentleman'.[17] Tailors gave these ideals physical form through their dexterous cutting and sewing skills.

Until 1901, the War Office recruited Sergeant Master Tailors from Britain for 'fitting the clothing of British troops serving in India.'[18] It gave them an annual allowance of rupees 440 to:

> '…. cover the cost of *fitting* soldiers of whatever rank, including recruits enlisted during the year, but exclusive of men transferred for their own convenience and those for whom clothing has been supplied in material….[the] allowance only covers the cost of *alteration* of clothing and not the cost of making up or completing made-up garments with such chevrons

[14] S.D. Pradhan, 'Indian Army and the First World War' in DeWitt C. Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan eds., *India and World War I* (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), p. 51.
[15] Ravi Ahuja, 'Disruptive Entanglements: South Asia and South Asians in the world wars' in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Maria Framke eds., *Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 475. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Madras accounted for only 3 percent of troops in the First World War. Steven I. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation. The Military and Indian Democracy since Independence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 59.
[16] On tailors' dressing 'martial' sepoys and 'warrior gentlemen', see Chapter Two.
[17] On the 'martial race' theory and recruitment of 'martial' soldiers, see David Omissi, *The sepoy and the raj: the Indian army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars. Between Self and Sepoy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), Chapter 1; Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentlemen: 'Gurkhas' in the Western Imagination* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995).
[18] 'British Army in India: Reorganisation'. *Military proceedings*, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. File no. 295 (1901), British Library.

> or other distinctions as may be supplied separately for which the sergeant master tailor is separately remunerated.'[19]

As this excerpt suggests, stitching a full ensemble for soldiers was not included in the annual allowance of British tailor masters, which was meant only for fittings and alternations. By the first decade of the twentieth century, as we shall see in the next chapter, formal menswear in the Indian Civil Services and the British Indian Army, emphasised advanced tailoring techniques of 'fitting' outfits with darts and waist-seams. Regimental tailors in this period used 'cutting handbooks', published in Britain in late 1890s, to produce military liveries.[20] By this time, most were darzis.

The War Office granted an additional 'four rupees per mensem' to the master tailor 'for the purpose of providing fuel for the tailor's shop'.[21] Officers could make a direct payment to their Sergeant Master Tailor from their annual allowance for altering and fitting the clothing 'either on completion of the alternations or in such sums as they may think proper during the performance of the work.'[22] Native master tailors superintending the fitting of clothing of British regiments, however, were '*not* entitled to the allowance authorised for [British] sergeant master tailors only'.[23]

This changed in 1910, as civilian sergeant master tailors from England were 'no longer willing to leave the country.'[24] The inclusion of Indian manpower into the war theatre, where

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[19] Emphasis mine. A letter from Col. Walton, Supdt and Agent for Army clothing, Bengal to The Officiating Controller of Military Accounts, Bengal. *Military proceedings*, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. File No.764 (1884), p. 2.
[20] See Chapter Two.
[21] 'British Army in India: Reorganisation'. *Military proceedings*, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. File no. 295 (1901), British Library.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Emphasis mine. Ibid.
[24] 'Appointment of a Sergeant Master Tailor to Cavalry Regiments in India', Letter to the Under Secretary of State for India, War Office. IOR/L/MIL/7/12988 (1910).

the possibilities of working or fighting alongside white personnel seemed imminent, the scenarios of unwanted racial intimacy raised alarm bells in British official minds.

In this context, the War Office declared that it was 'not desirable to employ British tailors on fitting and repairing the clothing of Indian personnel.'[25] It required that Indian tailors be employed for non-combatants: for instance, for the Indian horse- and mule-drivers of the supply and ammunition columns.[26] The incorporation of native tailors in the production of vaster numbers of regimental uniforms was one way of abating anxieties about racial intermixing and placing all coloured combatants and non-combatants, as Radhika Singha has put it, conceptually 'behind the lines'.[27]

It was Indian non-combatants, as Singha has shown, who kept the cogs of the war machinery running. The efficiency of Indian and British combatants on the frontlines depended on the 'care', auxiliary and support services of the latter. Singha has used the word 'coolie', or the 'regimental menial', to denote a category of labour consigned to the lowest rung of the global market in the nineteenth century, one presumed to be unskilled and replaceable. Cooks, latrine sweepers, porters, mule drivers, stretcher-bearers, *bhistis* (water carriers), construction workers, *dhobies* (washermen), and cobblers swelled the 'attached follower ranks' of the army during the Great War.[28]

Even within the 'follower' ranks, colonial recruiters distinguished between 'coloured labour with craft skill and literacy' and the 'unskilled coolie masses'.[29] Tailors, I argue, fell in the

[25] Military proceedings, IOR/L/MIL/7/1835
[26] Ibid.
[27] Radhika Singha, *The Coolie's Great War*, p. 39.
[28] Ibid, p. 3.
[29] Ibid, p. 39.

former category, although the War changed and challenged these ascriptive meanings and the relative social status of soldier and follower ranks in accordance with the 'strategic' importance of the work they did.[30]

The two world wars harnessed, indeed boosted, and diversified, the tailors' skills of cutting, sewing fabrics and leather goods for the production of military liveries, boots for officers, uniforms for non-combatant regimental troops, tents, blankets, and mosquito nets.[31] Moreover, Hindu upper-caste restrictions on handling raw hide opened up particular segments of garment and footwear production to Muslims and lower-caste groups (I will explore the linkages between caste, skill, and labour segmentation in tailoring, in greater detail, in Chapter Three).

As it happened, the two dominant streams of Muslims engaged in tailoring in Calcutta during the two wars included an internal stream of migrants from the eastern tracts of agrarian Bengal, and upcountry migrant tailors from the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and Bihar.

The Depression in 1929 also exacerbated conditions of rural poverty, particularly in East Bengal, which felt the fall of jute prices hardest, and forced some Bengali peasants and artisans to move westward towards Calcutta,[32] a trend that was to grow sharper during the Second World War. Meanwhile, the migration of *poorbea* tailors from eastern United

[30] Radhika Singha, 'Front Lines and Status Lines: Sepoy and 'Menial' in the Great War 1916-1920' in Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Brill, 2010), pp. 55-106.
[31] Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of Indian's Second World War* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), p. 167.
[32] Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander, Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, p. 39.

Provinces and Bihar in the early decades of the twentieth century, may well have tapped into older migratory routes[33] established in the late nineteenth century. These routes opened up after the East India Company interned Wajid Ali Shah in Calcutta after 1856, who was followed by his courtiers and households, and by the much wider patron-client network associated with him.

When India entered the war in August 1914, the 'militaristic infrastructure' was built around mobilising combatant and non-combatant manpower to be deployed overseas.[34] Particular skills, for instance, in dressmaking, construction work, and inland water navigation, were sought after and drawn into the fold of the Military Works, Public Works Department and the Railway Board. The Ordnance Factories for Civil and Military Supplies took charge of producing and distributing army uniforms through Army depots in different port cities of India.[35] Tailors who had the right connections were poised to exploit a booming market for uniforms.

Between 1913 and 1914, on the cusp of the Great War, the number of vessels that passed through the Calcutta port was 999, carrying 3,077,199 tons. A vast amount of traffic passed down the Hooghly River by river steamer and country boats: 204 steamers and 313 boats carrying raw jute, gunny bags, rice and paddy.[36] British-owned mills around Calcutta exploited the region's natural resources by commercially manufacturing jute, then the ideal

[33] Joya Chatterji, 'Prehistories of mobility and immobility: The Bengal delta and the "eastern zone", 1857-1947', in *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 18-52.
[34] Kaushik Roy, *India and World War II: War, Armed Forces, and Society, 1939-45* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 42.
[35] *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Indian War Economy*. Supply, Industry & Finance. (Delhi: Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, India and Pakistan, 1957), pp. 276-277.
[36] *Indian Industrial Commission 1916-1918 Report* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1918), pp. 18-19.

'breathable' packaging material.[37] In addition to its jute, Bengal reigned supreme in the production of handloom fabrics, mainly cotton, and the export of her products to overseas markets in Asia, America and Europe.[38] These resources – tied to the particular location – were harnessed to bolster wartime production.

Before the First World War, the army in India depended for its clothing on only 2 army clothing factories (at Madras and Calcutta), which turned out about 40,000 garments per month. The Calcutta Army Clothing factory was located in New Alipore in the vicinity of the Kidderpore port.[39] By August 1914, Indian troops were being sent off to France, Egypt, Dardanelles, East Africa, the Persian Gulf and as well as for operations in Mesopotamia.[40] To meet the demands for clothing, 18 smaller manufacturing units were set up to supplement the production in the Calcutta Clothing factory.[41] These tailoring units were in close proximity to the jute and cotton mills along the docklands. By June 1917, the outturn had increased by four to five times the pre-war average, and the total output for the First World War was just under 42 million articles.[42]

From 1918 onwards, Bengal, like many other parts of India, went through an economic crisis marked by unprecedented levels of inflation, drought, poor harvests, and wartime dislocations in railway and shipping lines. These created a perfect storm, bringing in its wake a massive

[37] By 1903-04, India's annual jute export was valued at about a hundred million rupees and Bengal emerged as not only the world's primary supplier of raw jute but also along with Dundee, one of the main processing bases. Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck', p. 408.
[38] Giorgio Reillo and Prasannan Parthasarathi eds., *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Tirthankar Roy and Kaoru Sugihara eds., *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850* (London: Brill, 2009).
[39] *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45*, p. 277.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, p. 279.
[42] Ibid.

shrinkage in international trade. As a consequence, prices of essential commodities like kerosene, cloth and salt shot up.[43] As Rajat Kanta Ray writes of wartime Calcutta, '[the city] witnessed expanding opportunities of employment offered by the abnormally inflated conditions of industry'; a large number of workers crowded into the towns from the countryside during 1919 and the first half of the 1920. They were then left stranded by a depression which came suddenly in the middle of 1920.[44]

In the interwar decades, with the rising momentum of the non-cooperation and Khilafat movements, 'strike fever' took hold in most formal industries and workers demanded wage hikes.[45] For tailors operating outside 'formal' workplaces, the interwar period had a different relevance and import, because they grew more significant as players in the colonial economy who challenged the stranglehold of British expatriates and colonial firms trading in textiles.

By 1930, two dominant trading groups – Marwari merchants with roots in Rajasthan and the Dawoodi Bohras, an under-researched group of Muslim merchants – had 'ousted' foreign businesses in Calcutta, with Burrabazaar at the centre of their mercantile operations.[46] Burrabazaar, located at the heart of Calcutta's trade and banking hub (see Map 1.1), arguably was given its name by 'upcountry merchants' who settled in and around this 'great' bazaar

[43] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India:1885-1947* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2014), pp. 170-171.
[44] Rajat Kanta Ray, 'Masses in Politics: the Non-cooperation movement in Bengal, 1920-1922', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 11, No. 4 (1974), p. 343.
[45] *Report of the Committee on industrial unrest in Bengal 1921* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1921); Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social conflict and political unrest 1875-1927* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) Chapter 4; Sanat Bose, 'Industrial unrest and growth of labour unions in Bengal, 1920-24', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 16, No. 44/46 (November 1981), pp. 1849-1860; Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Military: Bengal from Swadeshi to non-cooperation, c. 1905-22' in Ranajit Guha ed. *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); Subho Bose, *Does Class Matter?: colonial capital and workers resistance in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 5, pp. 149-187.
[46] *Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929-1930* Volume I. (Calcutta: Bengal Government Press, 1930), p. 30.

(*bara*, *burra*).[47] Since at least the early nineteenth century, it has been the chief domicile and workplace of North Indian and Marwari merchant communities in Calcutta.

As Thomas Timberg and Claude Markovits have shown, Marwari firms moved from arid, drought-prone, regions of Rajasthan to more prosperous, riverine locations, such as British-controlled ports of Calcutta and Bombay, in a 'capture of preeminence'.[48] In Calcutta, they clustered in Burrabazaar, which was the principal market for Manchester goods, and a resource clearing depot for export commodities. As distributors of cotton textiles, Marwaris became indispensable to European businesses – not only as distributors, but also in being able to advance capital for resources, and in obtaining resources from elsewhere in India.[49]

Another 'push factor' for Indian merchants groups migrating to colonial seaports was a fall in agricultural income wrought by the Great Depression. Land lost its worth as collateral, and forced liquidation of gold and silver assets resulted in the reallocation of rural capital to urban industries. Wealthy weavers and merchants redirected their rural savings and diversified into textile manufacture.[50] Many merchant groups from princely states in western India, with roots in trading, moved their businesses towards jute and cotton textile production in colonial port cities. Others circulated between them.

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[47] P. Thankappan Nair, 'The Growth and Development of Old Calcutta', in Sukanta Chaudhuri ed., *Calcutta: the Living City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 17. On the stereotype of the 'Merua', a derogatory term used to describe Marwaris arriving from Rajasthan, see, Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1978), p. 260; Dipesh Chakraborty, *Rethinking Working Class History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 232.
[48] Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950* (Anthem Press, 2006), pp. 134-135.
[49] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris, from Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), p. 78.
[50] Christopher Baker, 'Economic Reorganisation and the Slump in South and Southeast Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 23, No. 3 (1981), pp. 325–249; B.R. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-1947. The Economics of Decolonization in India* (London and Bakingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1979), pp. 30-47; Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic History of India, 1857-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 180.

Marwari merchant groups, as Markovits has shown, were well-versed in working with the advantages of the taxation systems of princely states and of British India.[51] They sought to exploit the possibilities presented by the decline of Calcutta's colonial firms.[52] Within mercantile trade, they took advantage of new opportunities offered by an exportable surplus in jute, cotton, wool, and opium.[53]

Dawoodi Bohras were another prosperous (Mustali Ismaili) Shia merchant group from present-day Gujarat, then the Bombay Presidency, who migrated to Calcutta in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century.[54] Dawoodi Bohras, like their fellow Muslim *banias*, Khojas and Memons, occupied niches that were not customarily filled by Hindus. They could be found in outfitting, shopkeeping, trading in hardware, glassware, stationary, and soap.[55] By the interwar period, Burrabazaar was the heartland of competing mercantile activities manned by these two merchant groups – Marwaris and Dawoodi Bohras.

Both took advantage of, in Frederick Cooper's words, the 'economic niches and social networks that open[ed] up' within the colonial economy 'with varying measure of instrumentality and enthusiasm.'[56]

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[51] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris, from Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), p. 78; Claude Markovits, 'What About the Merchants? A Mercantile Perspective on the Middle Class of Colonial India' in Sanjay Joshi ed., *The Middle Class in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[52] B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India, III,* pp.142-145.
[53] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris, from Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978).
[54] M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in Aspects of Their Social Organisation* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1974); Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 261-262.
[55] Hein Streefkerk, 'Gujarati Entrepreneurship: Historical Continuity against Changing Perspectives', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 32, No. 8 (1997), pp. 2-10; Monika Sharma, 'Idea of Money for Merchants of Gujarat in Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries, *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 19, Issue. 5 (2010), pp. 15-20.
[56] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 145.

In times of inflation, while the salaried classes struggled to keep up with rising costs for essential commodities; the Bohras and Marwaris often flourished.[57] They responded to new patterns of demand and supply brought about by the Great Depression, import-substitution, and increased production geared towards the domestic market. They made up the bulk of the new private investment in industry in the interwar period, especially in the 1930s.[58] They grew more entrenched during the supply shortages of the Second World War. By building alliances with the colonial state, they expanded their operations to incorporate smaller production units into large-scale manufacture.[59]

Muslim tailors, in turn, benefitted from their patronage ties with Dawoodi Bohra cloth merchants engaged in urban outfitting in Calcutta. In the last chapter, and indeed the thesis in general, I argue that the Muslim tailors' connections with these Bohra merchants, who also operated as clothiers for the army and provided bespoke outfitting services to the colonial elite, was an asset in itself –contributing towards the tailor's locational incentives. The interwar period was when the interdependencies and alliances between tailors and Dawoodi Bohra outfitting firms were forged. They deepened in the subsequent decades.

The tailors' skills in dressmaking and the pervasive use of sewing machines in the interwar period (discussed in Chapter Four), enabled them to exercise a considerable degree of autonomy and control over their trades in 'the World in World Wars'.[60] Many were able to

[57] While some businesses collapsed post 1920s, increased domestic market bolstered demand and small scale production in other industries, mainly clothing and hosiery. Tirthankar Roy, Douglas E. Haynes, Abigail McGowan and Haruka Yanagisawa eds., *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 63.
[58] B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India III,* p. 143.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Brill, 2010).

buy Singer sewing machines through flexible 'hire and purchase agreements', a growing phenomenon of this era.[61]

These 'small technologies' had grown more visible in the interwar years, both in urban settings as well as in the countryside. An excerpt from Malcolm Darling's papers from this period will illustrate this point.

Malcolm Lyall Darling, a British ICS officer stationed in Punjab for almost three decades (1904-05 until his retirement in the early 1930s) had gained a reputation for being a 'cultivated humanist', someone who sought to better understand the lives of the Indian peoples.[62] His conversations with villagers in the course of his long rides across the Punjab countryside provide glimpses of what the early 1930s may have been like for village artisans, including tailors.

On 10 December 1930, Malcolm Darling visited the village of Manwala for an inspection. A conversation ensued about 'village menials' and how they had been surviving through times of acute scarcity:

> 'The *pottahas* suffered the most, since the iron vessel has displaced the earthenware at the well. The barber has suffered least, for he is as much in demand as ever at weddings. There is a tendency for the menials to take increasingly to agriculture, and where they do so they prosper. The *musalli* is a good example of this. He is the sweeper connected to Mohammadenism, and though he will still sweep the village, he will not touch the lower tasks…in a village we visited on our way, they said it was still the custom to pay most of the menials

[61] 'Hire-Purchase System', *The Red S Review*, Vol. VI, No.3, November 1924. pp. 10-11. Singer Manufacturing Company Records. Also, Jon Lawrence, 'Class, "Affluence", and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c. 1930-64', *The Journal of the Social History Society* Vol. 10, Issue 2 (2013), pp. 273-299.

[62] Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993).

> in kind; but where cash was paid, for instance, to the weaver…payments had been reduced by half. *The darzi on the other hand refused to work for a lower wage, as his sewing machine cost as much as ever*'.[63]

This excerpt is striking because it reveals the dominant position of the rural tailor in the interwar period. At a time when British India was reeling under post-war inflationary pressures and rising prices of essential commodities, tailors seemed to have been an occupational group that held their bargaining position despite, or indeed because of, the unexpected structural and economic changes set in motion in the late 1920s.

In the urban economy, tailoring was a lucrative business, given the increasing demand for made-to-measure clothing, where the tailor's skill of cutting and fitting cloth to the precise body measurements of the wearer, was becoming highly coveted. Consumers with varied tastes and aesthetic dispositions required tailors, with their astute handiwork, to make customised apparel for them: from fitted suits and long coats, to sari-blouses and *sherwanis*. Clothing was central to the self-fashioning of the middle-classes, and tailors made such projects possible, often reinventing tradition and creating a demand for 'neo-indigenised' dress styles.[64] The tailor's knowledge of the changing material culture and hybridity in dress-practices in late-colonial Calcutta will be examined in Chapter Two.

As is well known, the decline of British exports to India in the interwar period promoted import-substitution in consumer goods and services opened up new avenues of growth for indigenous manufacturers and small producers. The demand for new consumer markets for a

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[63] *Malcolm Lyall Darling Papers*, Box 2, 2.1, pp. 4-5. Centre of South Asian Studies archive, University of Cambridge.
[64] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1996); Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

wide range of items: cigarettes, cosmetics, toiletries, tailored apparel, processed food stuffs, expanded in urban areas and bolstered local scall-scale manufacture.[65]

The following table attests to the demand for 'tailoring' services in the decade of 1931-1941:

Table 1.1: All India consumer expenditure, 1931-32 to 1940-41; current values and values at constant prices (Rs. In millions)

	1931-32	1932-33	1933-34	1934-35	1935-36	1936-37	1937-38	1938-39	1939-40	1940-41
Dress and Furnishing Textiles										
Cotton	1595	1686	1554	1678	1654	1696	1812	1904	2056	2023
Silk	135	132	127	113	103	133	96	138	86	162
Rayon	127	142	124	105	139	134	182	231	142	299
Woollen	111	130	124	101	96	93	120	120	114	89
'Mixtures'	42	21	16	36	38	46	88	64	77	127
Coir, Hair etc.	26	24	16	19	16	19	25	19	6	29
Total textiles	2036	2135	1961	2052	2046	2121	2323	2476	2481	2729

[65] B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India III: The Economy of Modern India*, pp. 138-139.

Services										
Tailoring	110	124	116	125	131	138	147	156	163	165
Laundry	141	160	150	161	168	178	189	201	209	212
Barbers	158	157	160	161	168	176	180	180	187	201
Jewellers	276	271	262	249	262	276	290	276	304	331
Total (d)	685	712	688	696	729	768	806	813	863	909

Source: R.C. Desai, *Standard of Living in India and Pakistan, 1931-32 to 1940-41*. 1953. Bombay: Popular Book Depot. pp. 260-263

As these figures suggest, the demand for cotton piece-goods continued to grow throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[66] Demand far outstripped supply in specialised markets, for instance, in hosiery.[67]

These figures, however, do not capture all the complex changes within the cotton textile markets during the interwar years.[68] The shifts in the internal organisation of mills as suppliers of cloth; the intermediaries participating in the distribution of cotton textiles; and the factors affecting the patterns of consumer demand, in early to mid-twentieth century have hitherto been discussed with regard to the handloom industry. The demand for tailored

[66] *India in 1930-31: A statement prepared for presentation to Parliament in accordance with the requirements of the 26th Section of the Government of India Ac*t (5&6 Geo. V, Chap. 61) (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1932), pp. 162-163.
[67] Haruka Yanagisawa, 'The Handloom Industry and its Market Structure: The Case of the Madras Presidency in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in Tirthankar Roy ed., *Cloth and Commerce: Textiles in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1996), pp. 259-264.
[68] S.D. Mehta, *The Indian Cotton Textile Industry: An Economic Analysis* (Bombay: The Textile Association of India, 1953), p. 126.

clothing, which coincided with the growth of the cotton textile industry, has largely been ignored.

The tailor was an indispensable segment of the production line for stitched, made-to-measure clothing, but was also important for making jute 'gunny bags', which were crucial wartime necessities needed for packaging grain. India's jute exports in 1926 were 618 thousand tons, valued at 280 million rupees. Germany and Britain were the largest buyers: the former purchased 158 thousand tons and the latter 127 thousand tons of jute bags.[69]

If the interwar decades provided tailors with the opportunities to forge alliances with Indian merchant-outfitters, the sheer scale and urgency of provisioning during the Second World War intensified those interdependencies. The demand for labour during the Second World War and hunger induced by wartime shortages further propelled rural to urban migration. In 1931, Calcutta had a population of an estimated 1.2 million people. By 1941, the 'flight from the impoverished countryside and migration related to war-time industrial production' saw the city's population rise to 2.1 million.[70]

More than 2.5 million troops were enlisted during the Second World War from present-day India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.[71] They included officers, soldiers, and a bewildering array of tradesmen, including cobblers, cooks, tailors, cleaners, and 'coolies'. Some had

[69] Tom Shaw, 'Report of Investigations into the Conditions of Indian Textile Workers Presented to the International Federation of Textile Workers (1927)' in Marcel van der Linden, Anna Sailer and Ravi Ahuja eds.,*"The Distress is Impossible to Convey" –British and German Trade-Union Reports on Labour in India (1926-1928)* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2020), p. 82.
[70] Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay ed., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), pp. 1-12.
[71] Kaushik Roy, *India and World War II: War, Armed Forces, and Society, 1939-45* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 42.

already served in the First World War.[72] The demand for tailors increased ten-fold between 1939-1945, in order to meet the urgent demand for clothing supplies and war-time goods.[73]

The rising wartime demand for industrial products, and failure of the British capitalists to meet it, compelled the colonial state to set up an 'industrial infrastructure' in India involving low-technology, war-related, large and subsidiary industries.[74] The increasing demand for uniforms and war commodities reinvigorated the prospects of regimental master tailors and army suppliers active during the First World War. The exponential wartime demand for military liveries and war commodities outstripped supply. Subcontracting by the government to bolster production opened up new opportunities for smaller tailoring units *already* clustered around the Calcutta docklands.[75]

[72] Yasmin Khan, *The Raj At War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2015), p. 167.
[73] Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, p. 301.
[74] Kaushik Roy, 'Military Industrialization in India, 1939-45' in *India and World War II: War, Armed Forces and Society, 1939-45* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[75] Subcontracting relates to the post Fordist production model whereby parts of a product or the product itself is manufactured at different places by different people, where labour is cheapest. So in a way, 'formal' industry may subcontract work to various people or agencies who/which employ informal labour. In this sense, formal enterprise and informality go hand in hand.

Tailor-clusters and workshops in Calcutta

Since at least the late nineteenth century, hereditary specialisation in tailoring developed into discernible clusters of Muslim tailors in and around Metiabruz. They worked under *ostagirs* (master tailors) as apprentices. The *ostagirs* acted as gate-keepers, restricting access to these tailor-clusters only to kinsmen and to apprentices from their own *biradari* (caste and kinship networks) – in order to preserve the skills and mitigate risks of economic competition.[76]

'Upcountry' tailors who came to Calcutta with Nawab Wajid Ali Shah after 1856 and in the subsequent decades, may well have been 'anchor points'[77] for new migrants from the United Provinces who came to work in Calcutta's jute mills in the early decades of the twentieth century.[78] Over time, these areas hemmed in by the industrial districts of Howrah and Hooghly attracted large numbers of upcountry migrant tailors from the United Provinces and Bihar.[79] They lived in the *bustees* along the river Hooghly around Kidderpore and Garden Reach.[80] Between 1911-1941, such clustering of Muslim tailors in lucrative spots along the river, with access to transportation networks, informal cloth markets and religious fairs, textile factories, and patrons, intensified in response to wartime demand.

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[76] Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism in Western India: Artisans, Merchants, and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[77] Ravi Ahuja, 'The Age of the "Lascar": South Asian seafarers in the times of imperial steam shipping' in Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook eds., *Routledge Handbook of The South Asian Diaspora* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 110-121.
[78] By the mid-twentieth century, apart from Awadhi-speaking men from the eastern districts of the United Provinces, Calcutta's 'Biharis' provided much of the workforce in the jute mills. They also did casual menial work as palanquin-bearers, doorkeepers, masons and construction workers. Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander, Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 165-166.
[79] *Indian Industrial Commission 1916-1918 Report* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1918).
[80] 'Housing Problem In Calcutta: Can It Be Solved?—I', *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 18 June 1925, p. 175.

The 1921 Census indicates that, out of the total labour force employed in 'establishments', nearly forty-six percent of the men and twenty-eight percent of the women were employed in various textile industries. They were all located, barring a few, in the neighbourhood of Calcutta, largely along the upper reaches of the Hooghly river.[81] Nearly half of those supported by industrial occupations subsisted by textile industries (186,000) in the 24 Parganas, of which forty percent lived by tailoring and dress making.[82] Thirty-nine percent of the skilled labour employed in Bengal's industrial districts were upcountry migrants from United Provinces, North and South Bihar, and to a lesser extent from Orissa.[83]

Such embedded tailor-clusters were at the epicentre of wartime production in Calcutta. This was reflected in the main recommendation of the Deputy Director General of Wartime Munitions to the Supply Department and Civil Production to harness:

> 'the available experience, knowledge and business acumen of those engaged in industry and commerce [is great]…there are a large numbers of small bazar firms whose existence is only discovered when specific orders are placed… [there] is reserve of capacity which has not yet been fully harnessed.'[84]

The recommendations insisted on maximising, to full capacity, India's 'mass of skilled and semi-skilled labour available for repetitive work.'[85] In order to expand the capacity for wartime production, it was deemed necessary to not only employ 'new sources of supply', but also use skilled artisans to provide technical training to novices through trade handbooks and oral lessons –

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[81] *Census of India 1921*, Bengal, Vol. V, Table XXII, Parts I & II.
[82] L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, 24 Parganas* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911), p. 187.
[83] *Census of India 1921*, Bengal Industrial Statistics, Table XXII, Parts IV and V.
[84] 'Recommendations of the Deputy Director General of Wartime Munitions Production on the working of the Supply Department and Civil Production', *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Indian War Economy.* Supply, Industry & Finance (Delhi: Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, India and Pakistan), 1957), pp. 169-172.
[85] Ibid, p. 170.

> ‘when it is necessary to expand productive capacity by employing new sources of supply, experience shows that not only Drawings, Specifications and Process Manuals are necessary but that is equally essential to accompany these with expert and patient verbal explanations…this principle is applicable throughout the whole field of production of munitions and war stores.’[86]

It is reasonable, then, to conjecture that commissioned master tailors who instructed apprentices and newcomers in tailoring units, also manned the labour-supply network through particular modes of caste and kinship-based recruitment systems.

To maximise and supplement mechanised factory production, innumerable ‘contract factories’ (smaller production units) came forward to meet the expansive wartime demand for clothing and leather goods. Contracted work was deemed suitable to meet the ‘colossal demands for army clothing’ because ‘contractors themselves provide all the machinery for fabrication except the actual *cutting of cloth* into component parts which the *durzies* did…[and] all the labour and supervisory staff was managed by the contractors’.[87] This was particularly significant in the context of tailors who did not possess their own sewing machines, who were a good proportion of all darzis. Their ‘cutting’ skills were sought after for contracted work, nonetheless.

In February 1940, the War Office commissioned the setting up of smaller ‘contract units’ in the compound of the Ordnance Inspectorate at Hastings, an area adjoining Calcutta’s industrial belt between Maiden and the river Hooghly:

> ‘It was known that about 10,000 *durzies* were available in the area. Operations commenced on a small-scale producing 40,000 to 50,000 shirts a month. As the demands increased, large warehouses were obtained from the Calcutta Port

[86] Ibid.
[87] Emphasis mine. Ibid.

> Commissioners Trust at Hide Road Docks and temporary workshops were built to the maximum capacity of the compound.'[88]

Sixteen contractors were employed to mobilise labour to ramp up the production. Wartime manufacturing spilled over to the *bustees* around the Hooghly delta.[89]

By 1943, in Calcutta's industrial units, seventy-five percent of the production was geared towards war munition supplies that included textile and leather goods.[90] Clothing factories alone were responsible for the supply of just under 416 million *tailored* clothing stores in India between 1939-45.[91] Between March 1940 to August 1945, 51 million items, an average of 770,000 articles per month was produced in Calcutta alone. The articles comprised of a baffling variety of bush shirts, shorts, kit bags, holdalls, *mazri* (light cotton fabric) clothing, anti-gas clothing, capes made of water-proof and oil-pressed fabrics, rubberised clothing, battledress suits, khaki drill trousers, and mosquito nets. The following Table 1.2 is a remarkable source which outlines the 'tailors' work' and the mind-boggling range of war items that tailors produced between 1939-1945.[92]

[88] Ibid, p. 282.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid, p. 198.
[91] Emphasis mine. Ibid, p. 276.
[92] 'War Record of Indian Ordnance Clothing Factories (Sept. 1939 to Aug. 1945)' F601/7822/H, CIS Historical Section. p. 515.

Table 1.2: An Overview of the Tailors' Work between 1939-1945

Name of item	1939-40	1940-41	1941-42	1942-43	1943-44	1944-45
Bush Shirts and Shirts Cellular	1,62,591	33,62,210	1,11,01,000	1,27,51,700	33,64,900	37,48,032
Shorts Drill (all types)	5,60,950	30,77,230	1,08,05,387	1,37,62,869	71,98,814	40,63,034
Battle Dress (B.D.) Blouses Drill and Cellular	NI	NI	NI	8,12,799	66,61,784	76,52,295
Battledress Trousers Drill	NI	NI	NI	9,34,920	56,59,880	90,78,063
Khaki Drill Trousers	14,000	3,96,990	40,27,000	59,63,814	20,89,963	57,07,975
Overall Combination	60,000	9,17,020	26,50,400	42,16,000	11,17,849	15,75,796
B.D. Blouses Serge	NI	2,72,950	5,49,300	5,89,566	4,86,627	4,17,073
B.D. Trousers Serge	NI	3,32,800	10,41,300	6,79,913	8,53,187	6,33,321
Flannel Shirts (all types)	1,41,410	15,29,410	16,70,811	19,05,489	13,74,117	6,67,788
Caps (all types)	985	2,75,980	12,83,123	2,86,290	31,57,241	15,27,990
Greatcoats Dismounted	31,000	2,92,300	6,30,740	4,36,000	1,73,000	0

Capes W.P. (all types)	NR	NR	2,11,577	5,51,963	6,73,471	13,27,823
P.W. Garments	NI	1,68,850	86,43,189	52,52,413	7,37,377	NR(O)
Anti-gas Capes	NI	NI	NI	NI	8,59,564	4,48,145
Kit bags	NR	2,13,000	13,35,800	41,89,330	18,48,864	10,19,856
Water-bottle covers	NR	NR	22,60,000	8,07,000	12,50,859	7,10,526
Nets Mosquito Universal	73,740	1,52,800	NR	24,00,400	24,66,923	16,06,434

NR= No record

NI= The garment was not introduced into the service in that year

O= The garment was made obsolete

Source: 'War Record of Indian Ordnance Clothing Factories (Sept. 1939 to Aug. 1945)' F601/7822/H, CIS Historical Section

The figures in Table 1.2 show that tailors were having to adapt to changing requirements for liveries and war commodities with astonishing speed. Between 1941-1943, tailors produced no less than 23,852,700 bush shirts and 'cellular' shirts (the style involved complex interlocking geometric parts to be sewn into one piece). 'Battledress' blouses and trousers were not introduced until 1942 and anti-gas capes until 1943. By 1944-45, horses were no longer used in warfare, as a result 'dismounted' greatcoats were made obsolete. Tailors produced 2,466,923 mosquito nets in the year 1943 alone. The mosquito nets varied in shape and size, made to suit the climate in different battlegrounds, and the status of the sleeper.

In some cases, the tailors' 'war work' corresponded with the work of other 'labour battalions' often recruited from the same region. For instance, the production of mosquito nets corresponded with major swamp clearance drives. Largely comprised of 'aboriginal tribes' recruited from Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, these men worked tirelessly to protect the American Airforce, British and Indian troops from contracting malarial diseases.[93]

Between September 1939 to December 1943, no less than 298 million *tailored* items were produced in manufacturing units in Calcutta. Clothing factories combined with *indigenous sources* accounted for and converted some 215 million yards of textiles, over 5,000 million yards of sewing threads and over 5 million buttons into 80 million *tailored* items of clothing.[94] The tailor-clusters drawn into wartime production of such magnitude meant that these spaces attracted more migrants because of the embedded resources in these locations.

Moreover, the use of different types of sewing machines to make clothing and leather items enabled tailors to repurpose their skills for allied trades in these locations. The demand for wartime footwear, for instance, increased from 100,000 pairs in 1939 to 16,339,000 pairs of ankle boots and 5,311,000 pairs of Chaplies (sandals) in 1943.[95]

By 1943, the nine clothing factories used contractors who employed 100,000 persons to tailor 375,000,000 yards of cloth.[96] The annual value of government purchase of textiles before the war was 2 million pounds sterling. Between 1939 and 1941, the government had spent almost

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[93] Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2001), p. 20.
[94] Emphasis mine. Recommendations of the Deputy Director General of Wartime Munitions Production on the working of the Supply Department and Civil Production. *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Indian War Economy,* p. 286.
[95] *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Indian War Economy,* p. 290.
[96] *Annual Accounts of the Ordnance and Clothing Factories in India for the Year 1939-1940* (Ishapore: Metal and Steel Factory Press, 1941), p. iii.

22 times more on these goods: 43,500,000 pounds sterling.[97] By the end of the war, there were more than 1.65 million Indian men in the Indian army with 15,700 Indian officers (including medical doctors) and hundreds and thousands more recruits serving in auxiliary roles, making up the total strength of 2.285 million.[98]

[97] 'India's War Effort', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India, Section II, 30 January 1942. WP(42)54, C.P, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi.
[98] Steven I. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation: The Military and Indian Democracy since Independence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 73.

The nexus between *darzis* and Dawoodi Bohra merchant outfitters

The need to feed, clothe and supply provisions to an army at war had transformative effects on the fortunes of some local people. Those who had established themselves as reliable contractors or purveyors of the British Army and Indian Army in the past, found themselves well placed to supply goods to it, now at unimaginable volumes. Small-scale military contractors based in specific regions were able to transform themselves into giant all-India suppliers, sometimes within weeks. If they were fortunate, they could secure almost exclusive rights to supply uniforms, boots, tyres, soap, and other provisions.[99]

In Calcutta, at this point, Marwari contractors of Burrabazaar and Dawoodi Bohra outfitters in central Calcutta sought to forge links with tailor-clusters in Metiabruz-Garden Reach and Kidderpore, to supply finished war goods, mainly uniforms, leather shoes, hosiery, and blankets.[100] They seem, very quickly, to have succeeded.[101]

Some family businesses began, as did Syed Babar Ali's in Lahore, as military contractors. These flourished at an astounding scale during the war years:

> 'We were called purveyors of the British Army. Whatever they needed by way of clothing, food –nothing to do with army hardware – boots, uniforms, food, canteens, what they required, consumables. And this was spread all over India, because the Indian Army was spread all over India, especially during the War, when the India subcontinent was a big theatre, feeding both the Middle East and China theatre. Lever Brothers came

[99] Syed Babar Ali's interview with Markus Daechsel in Lahore in 2007 cited in Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War*, pp. 168-169.
[100] M.K.A. Siddiqui and S.P. Lala, 'The Darzis of Metiaburj: A Study in the Organisation of Tailoring as an Occupation' in M.K.A. Siddiqui ed. *Aspects of Society and Culture in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1982), pp. 133-134.
[101] The case of Dawoodi Bohras and their long-standing connections with Muslim tailors will be discussed in Chapter Five.

> here and set up their factory and we were linked up with them.'[102]

The opportunities, in Calcutta, as much as in Lahore, boggled the mind. It fuelled intense competition between contractors in Calcutta, which grew so rancorous at times that some even made accusations of foul play and sabotage against their better-established rivals. An anonymous 'well-wisher of the allies' informed the American Consulate in the city that a shoemaker and tailor at a US Bengali base, one A.A. Qureshi, was acting as an enemy agent. After investigations, nothing incriminating was discovered.[103]

Staying on through war, famine and riots, 1941-1946

The year 1943 was a period when the congested urban core of Bengal was strewn with the dead or dying bodies of famine's victims. Starving people from eastern Bengal, where the famine struck, straggled to Calcutta with the hope of finding gruel kitchens, only to die there in their hundreds and thousands.

Yet, at the very same time, the consolidation of capital and boom in wartime industries engendered lasting social and economic formations that transformed the lives of those who survived and flourished in this period. Indian capitalists and a great many small producers like tailors reaped the benefits of wartime demand and increased production in war industries.[104]

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[102] Syed Babar Ali's interview with Markus Daechsel in Lahore in 2007 cited in Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War*, pp. 168-169.
[103] Calcutta Consulate General Records 1944: 814:3-822B, Box 143, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC cited in Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War*, p. 169.
[104] Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of the Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 251-260.

This thesis does not claim that those who were not deemed 'priority workers'[105] – i.e., those who were not 'provisioned and protected by wartime acts'[106] – were sheltered from the sharp end of life on the Bengal frontier. The 'cumulative violence' and death wrought by the Bengal Famine in 1943, the government's wartime food policies, and Japan's attack on the Kidderpore docks, caused panic and chronic hunger amongst all but the privileged.[107] The scale of famine mortality in the city itself was a profound shock even to Calcutta's elites.[108]

Nor does this thesis claim that the 'immigrant-dependent mosaic' of labour and industry in Bengal did not start to unravel in the face of extreme adversity. Strike action by migrant workers in the jute and cotton mills in Calcutta reflected the acute economic anxieties of these groups in this period. In the strikes in late 1939 and early 1941, workers demanded increased wages, 'dearness allowances', 'war bonuses', and the opening of 'controlled shops'.[109] On 18 December 1941, Calcutta and its suburbs were declared a 'dangerous area'

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[105] One group of 'priority' workers contributing to war efforts were Muslim *khalasis*. They were deemed to be 'essential' wartime workers only until they kept the cogs of the war machinery running. The colonial state's antipathy towards 'essential' workers revealed itself in the most ghastly ways in the aftermath of Japan's attack on the Calcutta docks. The corpses of the dockworkers lay unenumerated. Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of the Empire*, p. 148.

[106] The Government of India established a 'Priorities Committees' along with organisations such as the War Transport Boards that were responsible for working out special provisions for 'priority' workers in wartime industries. The 'Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance' was promulgated by the Government of India in February 1941. The Ordinance defined 'war industries' including: cotton and jute mills, armament factories, engineering firms, paper mills, printing facilities, and even tobacco factories, food service workers, gin presses, stone masons, as well as employees of municipal, provincial and central governments. Quoted from Home Political Files, GOI218/42 in Sanjoy Bhattacharya's *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45*, p. 41. Although these workers were deemed 'essential' to the war effort, they were put out extraordinary restrictions. Desertion was regarded as a punishable offence including one-year jail time and heavy fines.

[107] Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, pp. 251-260.

[108] Sanjukta Ghish, 'Famine, Food, and the Politics of Survival in Calcutta: 1943-50', in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay eds., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), pp. 204-232.

[109] The 'controlled shops' were Government subsidized shops for rice and other essential commodities. On postwar strikes and the emergence of 'labour' as both a political category and the a parameter of post-colonial politics in the late1940s, see, Ravi Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish": The crisis of the late 1940s and the place of labour in post-colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 54, No. 1 (2020), pp. 1041-1112.

and despite calls to stay back, residents of Calcutta began to flee in large numbers. War rumours (and truths) created an atmosphere of panic. Non-Bengali labourers boarded trains, or walked on foot, back to their native provinces.[110] Large numbers of Marwari merchants and traders who ran retail shops sold their stocks at reduced prices and left the city.[111]

However, while some migrant groups were fleeing Calcutta, others were being asked to stay put by political leaders in power.[112] *Darzis* were among those who stayed. Male outfitters and suppliers of military uniforms capitalised on the presence of foreign troops in Calcutta. Soldiers had flooded urban spaces, not least in 1942, after the USA joined the war, Indians, British, American and Australian forces made their presence felt in Calcutta which was at the heart of 'India at war'.[113] All these soldiers needed uniforms or repairs to their uniforms. By definition, the tailors' skills were in high demand.

Jack Lusby, a British pilot, kept a journal between 1942 and 1945, providing a first-hand account of how local tailors contributed to the burgeoning war economy:

> 'Our uniforms are fast becoming rather varied. We have them made to suit our own tastes from the local bazaar tailor...[Here] tailors must be handled very differently to the gem vendors. The latter, when the discussion reaches 'how much' stage, name a fantastic price which neither party takes very seriously. When the vendor ultimately, with a gesture of despair and resignation, names his bedrock figure, you repeat your own price, politely take your leave and mention that you'll call again tomorrow...[*the] tailors, however, don't bargain or haggle. Their fees are fixed irrevocably, and you take it or leave it.*'[114]

[110] Indivar Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942', *Studies in History* Vol. 18 (2002), pp. 81-102 (p. 87).
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Kaushik Roy, 'Expansion and Deployment of the Indian Army during World War II: 1939-45', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* Vol. 88, No. 255 (2010), pp. 248-68.
[114] Jack Lusby, *A Pilot's War Journal March 1942-1945* (London: William Kimber & Co Ltd, 1976), p. 21.

This attitude to price gives a hint of the strength of the tailor's bargaining position vis-à-vis his customer.

The colonial state, in the war years, imposed hefty taxes and controlled commodity prices in order to pay for the War itself.[115] Wartime rationing of food grains and cloth meant that some goods were scarce for the civilian population. The war-induced drive to regulate and enforce stringent measures on constricting all essential and non-essential items had a profound impact on the lives of ordinary people who found it difficult to procure even the coarsest cloth.[116]

The different facets and imperatives of the war economy had a transformative impact on 'formal' and 'informal' labour regimes; new forms of market control were put in place to regulate access to everyday commodities.[117]

Calcutta between 1911 and 1941 was the pulsating economic core of a vast web of interconnections emanating out of this location, tying together proximate and more distant geographies. Rail, road, and steamer had knit together the region of Eastern India, with Calcutta at the heart of this interconnected network. The railways, albeit unevenly, connected the region to upper, central and western India. The 'eastern zone' came to be interconnected by a particular transportation grid designed to serve a distinctive labour market.[118]

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[115] Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India, 1939-1945', *Past & Present* Vol. 176, No. 1 (2002), pp. 187-221.
[116] Anjali Bhardwaj Dutta, 'Genealogy of a Partition City: War, Migration and Urban Space in Delhi', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 42, Issue 1 (2019), pp. 152-169.
[117] Rohit De, '"Commodities must be controlled": economic crimes and market discipline in India (1939-1955)', *International Journal of Law in Context*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2014), pp. 277-294; Ravi Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish": The crisis of the late 1940s and the place of labour in post-colonial India', pp. 1041-1112.
[118] Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 34-35.

The transport infrastructure in the Bengal delta, the demand for particular kinds of labour, and recruitment systems, all combined to create opportunities of accelerated internal mobility for tailors. The locational incentives of the region were such that these groups were 'unwilling' to move away from their clusters, their 'immobility' reflected in the report on urban congestion in the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* on 18 June 1925.[119]

Intersectoral linkages and the art of cutting

For tailors, the skill of cutting was their most precious and exclusive skill. It enabled them to operate across different sectors of trade.

In studies that look at the interdependency between the 'formal' and 'informal' sectors of work, especially with regard to manufacturing and cloth production, the focus has been primarily on the complementarity of factory production with small workshop units. Intersectoral linkages across industries have been a blind spot in the literature. For instance, we know very little about how the same skill could be adapted in innovative ways to diversify and accommodate to changing market demands. A tailor could also be a barber and a shoe-maker. Their skills could serve a variety of purposes, beyond making clothes. They were passed down through generations, by modes of apprenticeships and gained contracts by word of mouth and also through written references. Wartime tailor-testimonials attest to the ways in which tailors adapted their skills to align with other trades.

[119] 'Housing Problem In Calcutta: Can It Be Solved?—I', *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 18 June 1925, p. 175.

Between 1935 and 1945, Jan Mohammad and Sons, a hereditary family firm of Regimental Tailors and Shoemakers, was also in charge of the Barbers' Shop in Barrackpore. In their testimonials, British officers describe Jan Mohammad, as a 'trusted old hand'[120] and 'a devoted old soul with a remarkable skill':[121]

> 'Jan Mohammed who is in charge of the Regimental Barber's Shop and also the Tailors' Shop has been a servant of the Regiment for many years and has served with each Battalion as they have succeeded each other in India. He is a splendid type, devoted to the unit and is possessed of a most cheerful and pleasant disposition. He or his sons have always cut my hair, and the service in the Regimental Shoemakers and Tailors' Shop under his control I have always found to be most obliging and punctilious.'[122]
>
> [Testimonial by K.F. Goellnicht, Captain 2nd Battalion, The Green Howards, p. 51]

Another testimonial attested that:

> 'The firm of Jan Mohammed & Sons have been Regimental Tailors and Barbers to this unit for about six months up to date. I have personally known them for considerably longer. Their organisation of the Tailor Shop and the standard of work they have maintained have been uniformly high, they have taken immense trouble to produce excellent results under trying conditions and I can recommend them confidently for work in the barracks, and private service in the officers' lines of very high quality.'[123]
>
> [Testimonial by Major J.M. Clift, The Lancashire Fus. 1/8th Battalion, p. 47]

These testimonials shed light on how, for tailors, wartime demand was an opportune moment for them to exploit their resources: their cross-sector skills, small machines, access to markets, and indeed their patronage networks. They could leverage their strong connections

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[120] Testimonials Jan Mohammed & Sons: Master Barbers & Tailors, 2nd Battalion. The Green Howards. 1948. J.B. Shears & Sons, Chelsea. *Military proceedings*, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. India Office Records, British Library. p. 13.
[121] Ibid, p. 35.
[122] Ibid, p. 32.
[123] Ibid, p. 47.

with state-supported local outfitters. They did out-contracted work independently or for outfitting firms, who serviced the clothing requirements of army men, civil servants, officers, clerks, and peons at different levels of the colonial bureaucracy. These localised circuits of demand and patronage embedded in Calcutta and its environs were critical to the tailors' success during the two wars.

Melas, religious fairs, and tailor-reformers in agrarian Bengal

The location of *haats* (informal cloth markets) along riverbanks, and the tailor-clusters' proximity to religious fairs (see Map 1.2 and Table 1.3), also served crucial economic purposes for the sale and purchase of cotton piece-goods and 'made to order' garments.[124] Religious fairs associated with Muslim saints and reformers; and the artisan lineages attached to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's legacy in Metiabruz, prove to have been significant 'locational incentives' embedded in the region.

The Bengal District Gazetteers abound with accounts of religious fairs associated with Muslim *sufi pirs* and saints along the river Hooghly.[125] For instance, at Kazipara, in the 24 Parganas, 'a large fair which lasts three days is held every year towards the end of December in honour of a Muhammadan *pir* saint called Pir Ekdil Sahib… [There] are two private markets called Bheritala and Bibibazaar and two annual melas held in Chitpur and Cossipur,

[124] *Accounts relating to the Inland Rail and River-borne Trade of India* (Delhi, 1933) p. 1; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer 24 Parganas* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1914), p. 212 and p. 185; G.E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918), p. 32, p. 36, p.83; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Murshidabad* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1914), pp. 156-158; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Hooghly* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book, Depot, 1912), p. 109.

[125] Pirs were the descendants of holy men or warrior saints revered across Bengal and Bihar who were thought to have brought Islam to this part of the subcontinent. Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 166-168.

at the end of December and beginning of January and lasts for five days.'[126] In Haroa, where *pir* Gorai Gazi is buried, a festival or fair is held close to his shrine on the 'occasion of *urs* in memory of *pir* Gorachand on the twelfth Phalgun (February-March), in the month of Chaitra (April) every year…devotees from all over the district attend this fair.'[127]

Religious fairs 'peculiar to Mohammedans' in the Hooghly district were also held in connection with the shrines at Pandua and Tribeni. At Pandua, L.S.S. O'Malley reported in 1912, that fairs associated with the shrine of a Muslim saint named Shah Suti Sultan (*suti, sutanati* which means cotton thread) were held every year in the months of Phalgun (February-March) and Chaitra (April). At Tribeni, the shrine of Shah Jafar Khan Ghazi is said to have been in existence for 700 years. Two fairs were also held at Tribeni, one in the beginning of Magh (January-February) and the other during Dol jatra (Holi). Hindus and Mohammedans both attend these fairs.[128]

The Baishazari mela in Malda, held in commemoration of Pir Makdum Shah Jalal, took place from the seventeenth to the twenty-second day of the Islamic month of Rajeb, four weeks before Ramadan. It attracted traders not only from different parts of Bengal, but also Bihar and the United Provinces.[129] This *mela* was:

> '…probably the largest in the district, [the] traders take the opportunity to carry on trade in various commodities…[a] large number of booths are set up by shopkeepers and artisans to sell

[126] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer 24 Parganas* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1914), p. 212 and p. 227.
[127] Ibid, p. 212.
[128] L. S. S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Hooghly* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912), p. 109. The Pandua, Tribeni and Furfura Sharif melas continue to be held in the month of December-January on the occasion of the observance of *Urs*. Jatindra Chandra Sengupta, *West Bengal District Gazetteer Malda* (1969), p. 133.
[129] Emphasis mine. G.E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918), p. 32 and p. 36.

> *finished* articles like blankets, cotton piece-goods, mats, brassware, utensils, etc.'[130]

A *mela*, usually glossed as 'religious fair', was a gathering of many people drawn to these spaces for a variety of reasons. They had long been nodes for the patronage of occupational and artisan groups whose skills and practices were revered by the upper classes, traders and merchants.[131] Melas also represented a space for sociality and consolidation of group identity, in which 'all members of a whole community [participated], united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview.'[132] Festivals, processions, and fairs constitute an arena where economic competition played out through 'rites of conspicuous display', where different knowledge systems co-existed and skills were hierarchically displayed, adorned, and valued.[133]

Unlike some hereditary Bengali Muslim performers at melas – for instance, the troupes of Bede snake charmers at the risk of delegimisation and progressive dissolution by Government laws[134] – tailors were less vulnerable to such measures. Their skills were sought after in these 'enchanted economies'.[135]

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[130] Emphasis mine. Ibid.
[131] Nita Kumar, 'The Artisan's World of Music', in *The Artisans of Banaras, 1880-1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 125-147.
[132] Alessandro Falassi, *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (New Mexico: Uni of New Mexico Press, 1987), p. 2.
[133] For a remarkable study of the ways in which religious festivals mean different things to the diverse social groups participating in them in context of Trinidad, see Frank Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 113-14.
[134] Carola Erika Lorea, 'Snake Charmers on Parade: A Performance-centered Study of the Crisis of the Ojhā Healers', *Asian Medicine* 13 (2018), pp. 247-275; Subhro Niyogi, 'Illegal snake shows stopped at 400-year-old Jhapan fair', *Times of India* (20 August 2015), https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Illegal-snake-shows-stopped-at-400-year-old-Jhapan-fair/articleshow/48550445.cms (accessed 15 December 2020).
[135] Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

The historiography on *melas* has tended to adopt two distinct approaches. The 'institutionalising' perspective has approached melas as a site of political and religious organisation. From this Foucaldian position, fairs emerge through the lens of official narratives concerned with discourses of hygiene, surveillance and crowd control.[136] Smaller regional fairs and the demographic spectrum of fairgoers – artisans, peasant cultivators, pilgrims, merchants, petty traders, shoppers – as well as the economic transactions and artisan energies in these spaces are largely obscured in such histories.[137]

A renewed interest in re-examining *melas* in late-colonial India as a 'subaltern space'[138] has opened up possibilities for unpacking the economic motivations of the fair-going multitude, including the artisans and small producers who were driven to these melas to market their wares and seek buyers for their goods and services.[139]

Informal markets associated with religious fairs have historically attracted traders, merchants and artisans, albeit with competing economic predilections. At least since the late nineteenth century, melas and religious fairs tended to be segregated along the lines of faith. Hindus were encouraged to boycott 'Muslim melas', which until the late nineteenth century had attracted members of both groups.[140] By the mid twentieth century, caste and community-based melas had come to dominate the repertoire of cultural fairs and festivals, whereby each self-identifying 'community' formed its own mela. For instance, in the eastern districts of

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[136] Kama MacLean, *Pilgrimage and Power: the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765-1954* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[137] Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: markets, society, and the colonial state in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
[138] Shahid Amin, *Conquest and Community: the afterlife of the warrior Saint Ghazi Miyan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[139] Pankhuree Dube, 'Rethinking *melas* as subaltern spaces: Pardhan blacksmiths and some aspects of "caste-passing" in fairs, 1872-1931', *Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2008), pp. 186-210.
[140] Ibid.

Bengal, Malda and Murshidabad, Hindu traders refrained from attending the *Urs* melas at which artisans including *Darjis* (tailors), *Sonars* (goldsmiths), *Rangaris* (dyers), among others, sold their wares.[141]

The spatial clustering of Muslim tailors in locations such as the 24 Parganas, Metiabruz-Garden Reach, and Kidderpore, were informed by their proximity to religious fairs and access to markets. Their existing knowledge of the location of these fairs, and of the Islamic calendar with predictable dates on which *urs* in honour of a *pir* (Muslim saint) or Eid celebrations were to be held, constituted, I suggest, a part of their wider understanding of their 'market'.[142]

For Muslims, *urs* (the death anniversary of a *sufi* saint) is an auspicious occasion, an opportunity to express devotion to the *pir*. The fairs associated with particular saints and shrines carry symbolic meanings for the fairgoers, many of whom are drawn to these spaces for spiritual and economic reasons. For some, the shrines are not only the source of potent power, but also homes of the departed saint and his family.[143] For artisans, these fairs represent one of the key nodes in their patronage network. Often the *mazaar* (Muslim shrines at graves) of the *pir* determines the kind of crafts that are on display in the fairs associated with the shrine. For instance, *chadars* (covers for the graves) are a very important part of *urs* rituals. Moreover, the territorial presence and locational embeddedness of these shrines represent a strong sense of meaning-making within communities, where saint-worship and

[141] Ibid.
[142] All the popular festivals are occasions for melas: *Id*, *Bakr-Id*, *Gyarhavin*, *Sab-I-Barat*, *Bar-I-Wafat* and *Teeja* (third day) of Muharram, which take place in specific days of the season, are still considered the most propitious for visiting and economic exchange.
[143] Joya Chatterji, 'Of graveyards and ghettos, Muslims in West Bengal, 1947-67', in Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy eds., *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 222-249.

devotion bring together both material and spiritual worlds.[144] They were critical nodes for tailors' operations, albeit not only in the way outlined above.

Despite the cyclical economic fluctuations, the decline of older forms of elite patronage, and the changing demographics of fairgoers over time, tailors benefitted from the economic activities in the markets at religious fairs associated with *sufi* pirs, embedded in particular locations. Weekly *haats* or periodical markets in towns and village-clusters dotted around Calcutta were more frequent affairs that did not necessarily have a religious dimension, although these markets – religious fairs and weekly *haats* – often overlapped.

For tailors, these spaces connected sites of production with consumption, where the exchange of artisan know-how was not limited to the geographies of the markets where they sold their wares. Tailors took orders for garments from traders in the *haats*, and made them at workshops or *karkhanas* located in manufacturing clusters. The proximity of these weekly markets, plotted on Map 1.2, to tailoring units within Calcutta meant that darzis were able to move internally, making the most of the locational resources available to them. They would pick up bulk orders from the *haats* in Howrah or Hooghly and return to their sewing machines located in the tailor-clusters in the 24 Parganas, returning with sewn garments as soon as they could make them up.

The Monglahaat or Metiaburuj *haat*, bordering Howrah and 24 Parganas, for instance, was (and continues to be) the largest market for handwoven cloth and cotton piece-goods in

[144] Sheikh Habibur Rahman, *Karmabir Munshi Meherullah* (Calcutta: Muhammadi Press, 1934).

Western and Central Bengal.[145] In 1909, L.S.S. O'Malley wrote that Calcutta and Howrah, the principal entrepots, connected markets in other districts through road or river. At Monglahaat, which was at the crossroads of these two principal districts (Howrah and 24 Parganas):

> 'numerous varieties and large quantities of …cotton, silk, and jute piece-goods [were] brought from Howrah, Hooghly, 24 Parganas, Midnapore, Nadia, and Jessore… [they would] find a ready sale chiefly among Calcutta dealers. Traders and hucksters [did] brisk business during the smaller religious fairs held in Narna, Makardah, Amta and elsewhere.'[146]

The markets in English Bazaar, located in the South-west of the river Bhagirathi in Malda district, would last for four to five days. In 1918, G.E. Lambourn reported that 'the business done [at English Bazaar] calculated at sums amounting to Rs. 200,000 and the daily attendance at about 8,000'.[147] The smaller *haats* in the district – Nawabganj and Ramkheli – drew some 5,000 or 6,000 persons.[148] A significant chunk of the sales in these markets included 'coats, vests, *chadars* (wide scarves), cotton *dhutis* (waist cloth), *saris*, and dress-pieces made-to-order'.[149] This hints at the lucrative prospects for tailors who moved between districts and markets, and who sold their wares to traders with prior knowledge of the demand for specific commodities in particular locations.

North of Malda, in Murshidabad, was seat of the Shia royal family of Nawab Wasif Ali Mirza Khan Bahadur (Nawab of Murshidabad, 1906-1959). The principal market in the area was in

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[145] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Hooghly* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912), p. 103; *West Bengal District Census Handbook Howrah* (West Bengal: Directorate of Census Operations, 2011), p. 29.
[146] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Hooghly* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912), p. 103.
[147] G.E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918), p. 83.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid, p. 36.

Berampore, Kasim Bazaar, which was another focal point of exchange between tailors, artisans, and their patrons who sought exquisite items for wear. These included:

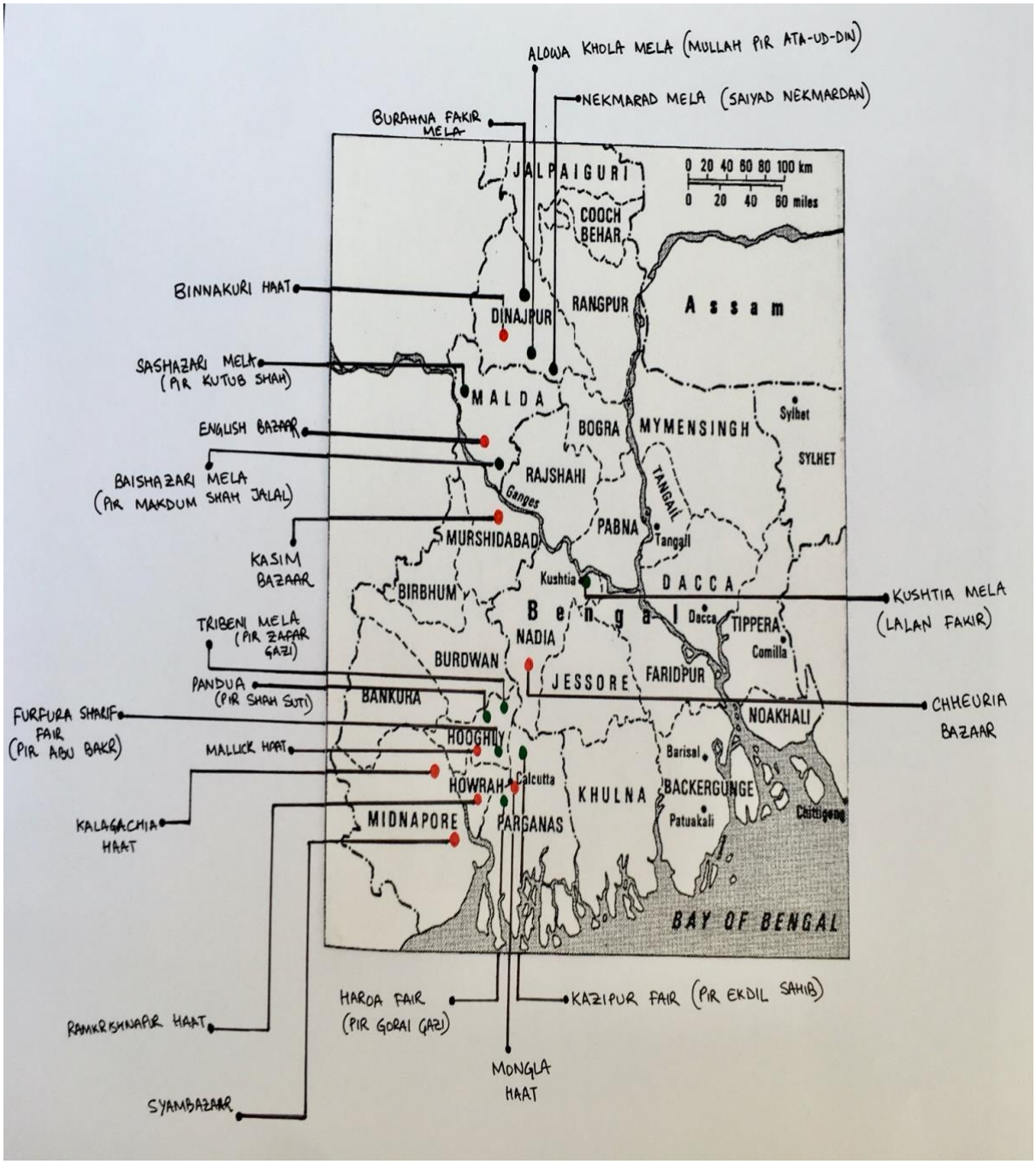
> '…*korahs* (gown-pieces) are in use among European ladies for making dresses and by Bengali gentlemen for making coats, and *chapkans* (a long robe, fastened on the right shoulder…scarves and sashes are made to order…"high class *korahs*" are used for making ladies' blouse-jackets and other garments'.[150]

For tailors, these *haats*, embedded in particular nodes of patronage, provided them with opportunities to showcase their skills in dressmaking, especially with regard to coveted, 'made to order' garments requiring the deft and nimble handiwork of a tailor.

Such patterns of tailor-clustering, moreover, need to be foregrounded in the context of Bengal's long manufacturing history, as well as the location of informal *haats* (markets) and religious fairs in particular districts within Bengal. [Map 1.2 shows the district-wise distribution of the largest religious fairs (depicted in green) and weekly or periodical *haats* (depicted in red) in the Bengal Presidency. The data shown in the map is from the corresponding Table 1.3.[151]]

[150] *Bengal District Gazetteers: Murshidabad District Statistics (1911-1912) to (1920-1921),* Vol. B (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1923), p. 157.
[151] The red and green dots on Map 1.2, representing weekly markets and religious fairs respectively, are a rough estimation of the places where these religious fairs and *haats* were held.

Map 1.2: Map of Bengal in 1943 with district-wise distribution of the largest religious fairs and weekly/periodical markets



Red dots = weekly and periodical *haats* (informal markets).
Green dots = religious fairs associated with *sufi* pirs and shrines.

Source: The map of Bengal in 1943 is from the *Famine Inquiry Commission (1945) Report on Bengal.* New Delhi: Government of India Press. Corresponding data on the map compiled from Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: District-wise list of the largest religious fairs and weekly/periodical *haats* in Bengal Presidency

Name of the District	Religious fairs	Periodical/ weekly markets	Types of items on sale excluding food, livestock, fuel, pottery, brassware, bell-metal utensils, baskets, and bamboo products
24 Parganas	-Kazipara – Pir Ekdil Sahib (held every year in December) -Haroa – Pir Gorai Gazi (held every year between the 11th day and 13th day of *Phalgun*)	-Monghla haat (or Metiaburuj haat) (every Saturday and Sunday)	Cotton piece-goods, blankets, *chadars* (wide scarves), *dhutis* (waist-cloth), shirts, coats, *paijamas* (long, ankle-length drawers), *kurtas* (long tunics)

Hooghly	-Srirampore, Furfura Sharif – Pir Abu Bakr (‘*Isal I Soab’* held over three days) -Pandua – Pir Shah Suti Sultan (held every year in the months of *Paus, Phalgun* and *Chaitra*. *Phalgun* fair lasts five or six days -Tribeni – Pir Shah Jafar Khan Ghazi (held in the beginning of *Magh* and other during *Dol Jatra* (Holi). The *Magh* fair lasts for four or five days	-Mallik Kasim haat Smaller weekly *haats*: -Mahanad, Rajhaat (Polba subdivision) -Dhaniakhali and Sheraphuli (Serampore subdivision) -Chanditala and Saikhala (Chanditala subdivision) -Bali Diwanganj bazaar (Goghat subdivision)	Cotton-cloth, silk and *tasar* (silk cotton mixed fabrics), *dhutis*, *saris*, *chadars*, *gamchhas* (towels), *rumals* (handkerchiefs), jute fabrics, rope, gunny bags.
Midnapore	--	-Syambazaar -Kalagachia haat (in Bakura and Ghatal subdivision)	Handwoven cloth, cotton piece-goods, *saris*, *dhutis*, *jors* (suits consisting of *dhuti* and *chadar*).
Howrah	--	-Monghla haat -Ramkrishnapur haat	*Dhutis*, *uranis* (shawls), *saris*, striped cloths, mats, and blankets.

Malda	-Baishazari mela – Pir Makdum Shah Jalal (held from the 17th to 22nd of *Rajeb*) -Sashazari mela – Pir Kutub Shah (held from the 8th to the 14th of *Shaban*, last day coinciding with the festival of *Sab-I-Barat*)	-English Bazaar (lasts for 14 days) Smaller weekly *haats*: -Balia-Nawabganj -Ramkheli	Cotton *dhutis*, *sari*, coats, vests, shoes, umbrellas, 'Jangipur blankets', 'dress-pieces made to order'.
Murshidabad	--	-Kasimbazaar (Behrampore subdivision)	*Korahs* (gown-pieces), coats, *chapkans* (a long cotton robe, fastened on the right shoulder), *hawai* (silk muslin) *saris*, *dhotis*, *rumals*, *chadars*, *jors*, *bafta* (silk cotton mixed) piece-goods, *rekhi* and *dhari* (striped, silk-cotton) piece-goods, shawls, scarves and sashes made to order.
Nadia	-Kushtia mela – Lalan Shah Fakir (held over three days on *Sab-I-Barat*)	-Chheuria bazaar (Kumarkhali subdivision)	-Cotton and muslin *chadar*, *saris*, *lungis* (striped and checked long cloths), *gamchha.*

Dinajpur	-Burahna Fakir mela (Shah Sultan Hasan Burahna Fakir, once a year in *Srabon*) -Alowa Khowa mela – Mullah Pir Ata-ud-din -Nekmarad mela – Saiyid Nekmardan (held over three days)	-Binnakuri haat Smaller *haats* in Ranisankail subdivision: -Nayabaazar -Railbazaar -Pakerhat	Cotton piece-goods, *dharis* (rugs), shawls, *saris*, coats, caps, blankets, shoes.

Source: The data in the Table 1.3 has been compiled from L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer 24 Parganas*, 1914. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 212 and p. 185; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Hooghly*, 1912. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 109, pp. 183-193; P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, p. 88; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Midnapore*, 1911. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 185; G.E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteer Malda*, 1918. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 32, p. 36, p. 83; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer Murshidabad*, 1914. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, pp. 156-158, p. 162, and *Bengal District Gazetteers: Murshidabad District Statistics (1911-1912) to (1920-1921)*, 1923. Vol. B. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 157; J.H. Garrett, *Bengal District Gazetteer Nadia*, 1910. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 88 and p. 114; F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal Gazetteers. Dinajpur*, 1912. Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, p. 21, p. 38, p. 85.

Although all districts produced ordinary cotton garments, certain centres only made the finer varieties of products: Murshidabad, Hooghly, Howrah, Nadia, and Midnapore, in the main. Hooghly, Serampore, Haripal, Dhaniakhali and Kalme produced fine cloth.[152] From Syambazaar and Kalagachia haat in Midnapore district, a range of *jors* (suits consisting of

[152] *Bengal District Gazetteers, Hooghly*, 1912. p. 183.

dhuti and chadar), *dhutis, saris,* and *chadars* found their way to markets every week in the Howrah *haat.*[153]

The two kinds of fabrics manufactured in Bengal were coarser goods made from lower counts of yarn for consumption by poorer people, and fine and superfine goods for elite consumers.[154] Competition from other fibres notwithstanding, cotton was able to retain its importance, primarily because of low per capita income and the clothing habits of the colonial middle classes.[155] Its uses had diversified far beyond clothing such as cotton cloth for piece-goods to cotton belting, artificial leather, and cotton bags as a substitute for hessian, for packaging dry food crops.[156]

Apart from weavers making cloth and other finer fabrics, these manufacturing districts had a considerable presence of tailors. Such patterns of artisan-clustering had significant implications for labour-supply geared towards wartime production. The two world wars exerted new pressures and created new possibilities on urban spaces and livelihoods.

Tailors, I argue, took advantage of the shifting imperial infrastructure (transport and military) in strategic ways. For instance, the railroad to Darjeeling, built to serve the colonial tea industry took them quickly from Calcutta to Murshidabad. They used their skills, access to

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[153] *Bengal District Gazetteers, Midnapore,* 1911. p. 126.
[154] A.Z.M. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, 'The Handloom Cotton Weaving Industry in Bengal' in *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1900-1930* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1982), pp. 194-231.
[155] For the British in India, their choices pertaining to food and clothing had a lot to do with the climate of the subcontinent. Vegetarian food and cotton garments were deemed most suitable for the Indian climate. James Johnson, *The Influence of Tropical Climates, More Specially the Climate of India, on European Constitutions,* London, 1813, cited in David Arnold, 'The discovery of malnutrition and diet in colonial India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31, No. 1 (1991), p. 1.
[156] Baditha Srinivasa Rao, *Surveys of Indian Industries. Volume II* (Indian Branch: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 14.

informal markets, connections with patrons across social classes, and indeed the colonial state, to carve out an economic niche for themselves *within* the infrastructure. They did so whilst preserving a modicum of artisan distinctiveness. By forging connections with Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters in the interwar period, tailors displayed effective entrepreneurial insight in adopting creative strategies to remain buoyant in the late-colonial period.

In tracing the strategies of Muslim tailors in the period from the 1890s to the early decades of the twentieth century in Bengal, it seems very likely that some Muslim tailors stayed on in West Bengal after partition not only because of the spatial concentration of trades along the river, but also because of their access to markets. These were fairs associated with *sufi* shrines and the episodic (but regular and predictable) markets held in the neighbouring districts in and around Calcutta.

By the mid-twentieth century, Muslim groups were concentrated in dense clusters in the South-west of Bengal, in the industrial and urban areas around Calcutta (the 24 Parganas, Garden Reach docklands, Howrah and Hooghly districts).[157] This particular zone, an area covering 2,000 square miles, was inhabited by roughly 1.8 million Muslims. Calcutta alone was home to about 500,000 Muslims.[158] The second belt where Muslims clustered in large numbers was in the North-east, in the agrarian tracts in Murshidabad and beyond Malda. While Muslims outnumbered Hindus in Murshidabad; in rural Malda, West Dinajpur, parts of Birbhum and Cooch Behar, Muslims bunched together in dense settlements.[159] In the aftermath of India's partition, Muslim refugees from eastern Bengal gravitated towards these

[157] Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander, Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, p. 167.
[158] S. P. Chatterjee, *Bengal in maps. A Geographical Analysis of Resource Distribution in West Bengal and East Pakistan* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1949), p. 52.
[159] Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck in Bengal: Immobility in the "age of migration"', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 51, Issue 2 (2017), pp. 511-541.

visibly large Muslim clusters, a paradoxical trend that has been hitherto described – I suggest mistakenly as 'clustering'.[160] This process, too, reveals how sought-after these areas were in terms of their 'locational incentives'.

'Mythic Resources': Tailor-Reformer Munshi Meherullah, the 'do-bashi' (bilingual) *pir* of eastern Bengal

Muslim tailors not only tapped into markets associated with *sufi* fairs, but they were also drawn into religious reform movements. In case of the latter, the patronage of self-proclaimed *pirs* often enabled tailors to mitigate economic competition. This too was a form of 'mythic' resource, embedded in the region, which some tailoring groups deployed in times of adversity.

The decades between 1880 and 1930 were marked by changing artistic styles and techniques, as well as skill transmission in the sphere of 'fine arts and crafts'.[161] The widespread diffusion of artisan training in this period opened up the space for the constitution of new social identities and aspirations.[162]

By the late 1920s, Depression-induced pressures drove Bengali Muslim tailors from the eastern tracts of Bengal to migrate westward into lucrative production hubs in Calcutta. This period witnessed intense competition between tailoring groups: differences were drawn on the basis of training, social standing, caste and sectarian divisions, and patronage ties with the

[160] Ibid.
[161] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new "Indian" art: Artists, aesthetics and nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[162] Ibid, p. 2.

colonial elite.[163] It was in this contested terrain that tailoring groups – Urdu-speaking *poorbea* tailors from upper India (United Provinces and Bihar), and Bengali Muslim tailors from eastern Bengal – competed with one another for dominance.

In this period, vernacular, master tailor-authored, manuals began to appear in the Urdu print sphere, melding both European and 'Indian' dressmaking techniques.[164] This strategy, I argue, was to establish a distinctive craft authority. While Urdu-speaking tailors used vernacular manuals to exert skill-based authority over the trade, strengthening solidarities within their own *biradari* (caste group); Bengali Muslim tailors asserted their distinctive craft authority through *do-bashi* (bilingual) 'improvement' texts, printed and circulated under the tutelage of reformist pirs.

The life history of Munshi Mohammad Meherullah (1861-1907) is a case in point. An itinerant tailor-turned-social reformer, he spearheaded the *atrap*[165] Bengali reaction against missionary efforts in the last decades of the nineteenth century in Bengal. His story provides a compelling example of how competing economic and religious sensibilities became enmeshed in revivalist movements. It also sheds light on the ways in which artisans drew upon reformist ideological precepts to create new understandings between the intersections of their working and religious identities.[166]

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[163] Artisan-authored trade manuals were crucial in making proclamations of 'distinction' of this kind. See, Amanda Lanzillo, 'Butchers between archives: community history in early twentieth century Delhi', *South Asian History and Culture* Vol. 12, No. 4 (2021), pp. 357-370.
[164] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (Dehaati Pushtak Bhandaar: Chavari Bazaar, Dilli, 1926). 687.1.Z12.K. Calcutta, National Library.
[165] *Atraps* were lower-caste converts, poor tenants and *raiyyats*, i.e, the large demographic of the rural peasantry and manufacturing classes of eastern Bengal. James Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (London: Her Majesty's printer Harrison & Sons, 1883), p. 28.
[166] Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).

Meherullah's distinctive career is revealing, not only on spaces and politics of religion but also legitimacy of belonging and identity in Bengal. His approach towards social reform and religious identity played an important role in defining the parameters of being a good 'do-bashi' (bilingual) 'Bengali Muslim'.[167] In wielding a 'do-bashi' authorial voice, one that was well-versed in both Arabic and Bengali, tailor-reformer Meherullah, and later his follower, Pir Abu Bakr, sought to establish a particular kind of religious authority that fortified their identity as 'do-bashi','Bengali Muslim' *sufi* pirs.[168] In so doing, they launched a powerful challenge to late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century North Indian reformist activities especially the prohibition of saint veneration.

As more and more Bengali-speaking *ajlaf* tailors entered the burgeoning colonial economy in interwar Calcutta, the well-entrenched Hindustani-speaking *ashraf* tailors were crowded in by these new entrants. The latter sought to distance themselves from their 'cruder' co-religionists by asserting their caste-based dominance over the trade, emphasising their artistic 'authenticity', and 'superior skills' through Urdu tailoring manuals such as Zulfiqar Anwar's, *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (1929), discussed in Chapter Three.[169]

Bengali Muslim tailors, on the other hand, sought to resist marginalisation within the community through printed, bilingual 'improvement tracts', published under the aegis of

[167] Sheikh Habibur Rahman, *Karmabir Munshi Meherullah* (Calcutta: Muhammadi Press, 1934).
[168] Pir Abu Bakr's successor, Allahma Saifuddin Siddiki wrote a biography of Pir Abu Bakr, *Furfurar Hazrat* (Ankuni, Hooghly: publication press unknown, 1993). A copy of Allahma Saifuddin Siddiki's, 'Furfurar Shorbadhikari Pir Abu Bakr', on the history of the shrine in Furfara Sharif and Pir Abu Bakr is available on https://archive.org/details/furfurasharif.islamic. Accessed on 11 May 2022. The Non-cooperation and Khilafat movement had seen the involvement of renowned pirs such as Abu Bakr of Hooghly and Badshah Mian of Faridpur, which provided legitimacy and confidence to the movement. See, Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-century Bengal*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 124.
[169] See Chapter Three.

reformers and self-proclaimed pirs, such as Pir Abu Bakr.[170] By the early twentieth century, the three-day religious fair, *Isal I Soab,* at Furfura, the 'shrine' of Pir Abu Bakr located in the Hooghly district, 'was attended by over a [hundred thousand] people every day.'[171] This fair, still held in the present day, represents a critical node of patronage – embedded in the region – to which Bengali Muslim tailors had access, and from which they benefitted.

The erosion of royal patronage and increasing competition from other social groups meant that tailors had to build up their own craft authority by turning to religious discourses about Islam and artisanship in way that facilitated the incorporation of different models of Islam.[172] In the early decades of the twentieth century, as Francis Robinson put it, authority was 'work-in-progress' as the ulama, unani hakims, literary leaders, and indeed tailors worked with competing and often overlapping versions of Islam in order to establish authority over their vocation.[173]

In the contest for establishing artisan authority, different tailoring groups sought to showcase their skills in different languages, addressed to specific audiences. They used competing and often overlapping narratives to underline their own version of Islam, and its relationship to artistry, technical acumen, and regional craft histories. But more on this in Chapter Three.

[170] Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs,* pp. 80-93.
[171] Abdul Bari, Isal I Soab Darshan, P.O., Rajgunj: Noakhali, 1924, p. 5 cited in Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 88-9.
[172] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Printing princely modernity: Lithographic design in Muslim-ruled princely states' Working Notes, *South Asian Popular Culture* Vol. 16, No. 2-3 (2018), pp. 245-252; Amanda Lanzillo, 'Between Industry and Islam: Stonework and tomb construction in colonial-era India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 55, No. 5 (2021), pp. 1510-1543.
[173] Francis Robinson, 'Strategies of Authority in Muslim South Asia' in *The Muslim World in Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2019), pp. 180-204.

The foundation for Pir Abu Bakr's reformist projects and 'Islamic purification campaigns' in 1916 against 'besharia' Islam in Kidderpore, Sealdah, Karaya, New Market, and Chandi-Chowk,[174] however, were laid by Munshi Meherullah in the late nineteenth century.

Meherullah's saint-like influence in Bengal's rural countryside and his impact on Bengali Muslims was informed by his rhetorical stance of approaching religion as a part of the lived experience of different constellations of Bengali Muslim society. It struck a chord with members of both *ashraf*[175] and *atrap* Muslims. His communities of 'spell-bound listeners' regularly attended *waz-mahfils* (propagatory meetings) to hear his speeches or to watch him engage in *bahas* (debates) with Christian missionaries.[176]

Meherullah understood the need for the material uplift of debt-ridden, rural peasant population, many of whom, like himself, turned to *karigari* (artisan work).[177] His reformist activities melded economic uplift with religious reform that was rooted in *sufi* devotional practices. This included attending fairs associated with pirs on auspicious occasions such as the *Urs*.

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[174] P.K. Datta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 88-9.

[175] Two layers of *ashrafs*: The first layer included Bengali Muslim *ashraf* or aristocratic classes comprising of Muslim landowning families, largely of North Indian aristocratic descent, English educated, living at the urban centres of Calcutta and Dhaka, with closer ties to the elite and sophisticated Persian-Arabicate cultures of northern India. These men also had close ties with the British administration and were largely absentee landlords. With regard to social reform, men like Nawab Abdul Lati, Syed Amir Ali and Chirag Ali, were aligned to ideas of western modernisation and political strategy of accommodation, later reinforced by the Aligarh Reform movement of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; the second layer included provincial middle class Bengali Muslims described by James Wise as practicing largely the *sabiqui* or syncretic form of Islam, with a reliance on traditional Hindu customary practices. James Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (London: Her Majesty's printer Harrison & Sons, 1883), p. 28.

[176] Rafiuddin Ahmed, 'Muslim-Christain Polemics and Religious Reform in 19th Century Bengal: Munshi Meherullah of Jessore', in Kenneth W. Jones ed., *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), pp. 94-96.

[177] Sheikh Habibur Rahman, *Karmabir Munshi Meherullah* (Calcutta: Muhammadi Press, 1934), pp. 46-48.

Habibur Rahman, the author of Meherullah's biography, writes that at the end of his education in Urdu, Meherullah left Chatiantala and moved to Jessore town in search of a vocation.[178] He trained as a tailor, an occupation that was largely filled by Muslims in Bengal. He apprenticed himself to a well-known sewing master called Jahan Baksh Mriddha, who was the family tailor to a white colonial officer's family (or the 'Saheb-bari'). Being the private supplier of clothing to the 'saheb-bari' meant that Mriddha, and in turn his apprentice Meherullah, had close connections to the European residents of Jessore town. In due course, Meherullah was able to build his own clientele (including the district magistrate, if his hagiographers are to be believed) to open his own shop in Jessore market in eastern Bengal.[179]

A market is, in most societies, the hub for both economic transactions and movement of information or ideas. Missionaries tended to distribute apologetic pamphlets at marketplaces that attracted large gatherings of people. On reading some of these pamphlets, Meherullah was spurred onto his path to defend Islam by refashioning himself as the '*dobashi*-Bengali'.[180] His theological training and knowledge of Persian and Arabic, along with a grounding in the Quran that was by all accounts, rigorous, made him an authoritative figure in his immediate social milieu – while also giving him the means to connect to the elite intellectuals from Calcutta and Dhaka. It is not surprising, therefore, that many weavers and Muslim tailors were drawn to Meherullah's disquisitions.[181]

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[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid, pp. 17-18.
[180] Ibid, p. 18.
[181] Ibid, p. 89; even in the Wahabi movement, for instance, 'a majority of active participants where Julahas (Muslim weavers) who in this region were known as *karigars* as their traditional occupation was weaving of cotton gamchas (towels) and lungis'. See, Barun De, *West Bengal District Gazetteers, 24 Parganas,* (Government of West Bengal, 1994), p. 90.

Like the *sufi* shrines, charismatic tailor-reformer Meherullah's religious activism and use of exegetical instruments – beliefs in miracles or saintly intermission in the lives of the Muslim peasantry and artisans, through a thorough study of the Quran and *tafsir* literature – can be inserted into the wider 'economy of enchantment' in South Asia.[182] The latter is also crucial to understanding the materiality of life, labour, and its close connection with religious faith and piety. For instance, Meherullah wove together the working habits and dispositions of tailors with Quranic learning by melding the textual with bodily practice. The labouring body in practice, would hone both skills – of acquiring Quranic expertise and tailoring – *through repetition in prayer and sewing in a cross-legged position.*[183]

The vernacular sources this thesis has drawn upon say little about *why* tailors assume a cross-legged posture to work, but the position itself has often been described in other sources as 'typical' to a tailor's craft. R. Campbell, the author of *London Tradesman,* notes that both tailors and shoemakers were prone to 'occupational diseases' such as 'numbness of [the] legs and sciatica since they sat with one of the legs back against the thigh'.[184] In similar vein, Prothero states that the 'tailor's working position of sitting "cross-legged" and always in one posture for long hours often in poor light', made them prone to developing a 'hunched-back' and failing eyesight.[185]

In merging the tailor's work with piety – sitting cross-legged in 'working position' and often in prayer – self-proclaimed *sufi* pirs such as Munshi Meherullah, and in the later decades his

[182] Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[183] On the influence of ulama among *karigars* and the relationship with Quranic learning and craft training, see, Barbara Metcalf, 'The madrasa at Deoband: a model for religious education in modern India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.12, Issue 1 (1978), pp. 111-134.
[184] R. Campbell, *London Tradesman* (London: David and Charles, 1970), p. 193.
[185] Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Folkstone: Wm Dawson & Son. Routledge, 1979. Reprint 2014), p. 27.

follower, Pir Abu Bakr, sought to claim a space of respectability, political legitimacy, and 'do-bashi' distinctiveness, within the world of Urdu print cultures and religious reform. If Bengali Muslim tailors had reformist pirs like Meherullah and Abu Bakr as their patrons, then the Urdu-speaking Awadhi tailors in Calcutta plugged themselves into a different kind of patronage network associated with the legacy of the last exiled king of Oudh, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in Metiabruz.

Wajid Ali Shah's legacy and tailoring in Metiabruz

The enduring legacy of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and his 'court-in-exile' in Metiabruz was another kind of 'mythic' resource embedded in location – tapped by Calcutta tailors in order to access markets or expand their patronage connections. Its base was, and continues to be, the suburb also known as Garden Reach, by the river Hooghly in the south of Calcutta.[186]

Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1920) was a Lakhnavi novelist, poet, playwright and essayist, who penned *Hindustan mein Mashriqi Tamaddun ka Akhiri Namuna yani Guzushta Luckna'u* ('Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture') in the early decade of the twentieth century. In an elegy to lost glory, he wrote of the Nawab's court of Oudh in a way that evoked Lucknow as 'the pinnacle of Indo-Muslim cultural achievement', 'the last example of eastern refinement and culture'.[187]

[186] Popular histories on Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in Metiabruz in Bengali include Sripantha, *Metiyaburujer Nabab* (Kolkata: Ananda, 1990); Anil Tapadar, *Kolkatar Chota Lakhnau* (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 2002).

[187] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, translated and edited by E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (London: Paul Elek, 1975, original published in 1926) Chapter 8, 'Wajid Ali Shah in Matiya Burj –The Mutiny'; Justin Jones, 'Urban Mythologies and Urbane Islam: Refining the Past and Present in Colonial-Era Lucknow', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 11 (2015), pp. 1-19 (pp. 1-2).

Sharar was born in Lucknow in 1860, but spent ten years of his boyhood in Metiabruz (1869-1879), where his father was in the service of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah.[188] As an adult, he lived in Hyderabad, where he worked in different capacities for either the Nizam or one of his nobles. He spent about two years in England tutoring a noble's son, a student at Eton, before moving back to Lucknow where he spent his last days until his death in 1926. By then, he had become one of the most accomplished literary figures in the city's Urdu public sphere.[189]

In his text, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, Sharar reminisced about 'Matiya Burj' [or Metiabruz] in the following lines:

> 'From the time of the King's arrival in Calcutta, a second Lucknow had arisen in its neighbourhood. The real Lucknow had ended and was replaced by Matiya Burj. There was the same bustle and activity, the same style of dress and poetry, conversation and will, the same learned and pious men, the same aristocrats, nobles and common people.'[190]

The arrival of Wajid Ali Shah in Calcutta was a crucial milestone in the growth and proliferation of cultures that brought together Hindustani and Bengali artisans and patrons. After the annexation of Oudh in 1856, Wajid Ali Shah left Lucknow for Calcutta with a view to set sail to England to plead his case against his unfair deposition. He set out with three hundred retainers, five or six wives, and an English businessman named Brandon, who served as his 'liaison' in the British-held territories.[191]

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[188] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, p. 17.
[189] C.M. Naim, 'Interrogating "The East", "Culture", and "Loss" in Abdul Halim Sharar's Guzashta Lakhna'u', in Alka Patel and Karen Leonard eds., *Indo-Muslim cultures in transition* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 189-204.
[190] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, p. 71
[191] Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Last King in India: Wajid Ali Shah 1822-1887* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2014), pp. 11-48.

He was taken ill when he arrived in Calcutta. His plans changed. The Nawab of Oudh chose to remain in Bengal, while his mother, Janab-e-Alia, and brother, Mirza Sikander Hashmat, went to Europe in his stead.[192] This change of itinerary was to have profound effects on the cultural, economic, and social life of the city in twentieth century.

Many refugees from Oudh had already begun to settle around the royal houses and, soon after Wajid Ali's release from imprisonment, their wives and courtiers began to arrive.[193] Andre Wink has shown how urban centres like Delhi attracted artisan refugees from central and western Asia as they sought refuge and patronage after fleeing from the Mongol invasions.[194] This was a process not dissimilar to that which took place in and around Metiabruz. By 1866, within a decade of Nawab Wajid Ali's deposition to Calcutta, the palace complex in Metiabruz had grown from 3 to at least 15 properties, surrounded by satellite townships inhabited by an expanding community of migrants and court dependents.[195]

Apart from the extensive and ever-increasing royal family, the palace was home to 2,225 employees and over 700 soldiers. All in all, in 1878, the establishment cost 52,490-4 rupees per month, 26,830-12. Major heads of expense included the overall pay of all the palace staff, from tailors to retained musicians.[196]

Over the next thirty years, Europeans who had lived in this suburb gradually moved away. The Nawab's palace complex grew. It was surrounded by an expanding settlement of migrants from Awadh. The 'court' at Metiabruz became a focal point of contact between late

[192] Ibid.
[193] National Archives of India Foreign, F.C. 2 September 1859, pp. 170-172 (henceforth NAI).
[194] Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World,* Vol. II (Leiden, 1996), pp. 184-185.
[195] IOR/L/PS/6/549 Coll.45/1, Sept.1866-Oct.1866. British Library.
[196] Wajid Ali Shah to Mowbray Thomson, 28 May 1878, WBSA, Poll File 98, Proc 1-2, May 1879, p. 181.

Mughlai and Hindustani culture, and colonial Bengali society. It was home to a large retinue of Hindustani and Urdu-speaking servants and artisans: tailors, *khansamas* (male head of household staff), musicians, dancers, cooks, butchers, *syces* (horse-trainers), gardeners, pigeon-keepers, among others. They began to settle in and around Wajid Ali Shah's court. Others followed suit, as Sharar's account of Metiabruz notes:

> 'Even the shopkeepers and moneylenders in Matiya Burj were from Lucknow and there was not a single product of Lucknow which was not there in its best form. Wherever one went one saw great magnificence and activity. All were charmed and fascinated by their pleasurable existence…'[197]

While the colonial officers who had access to the court noted that the Nawab dealt only with tradesmen and businessmen from Awadh,[198] the presence of Bengali musicians and patrons at the *mehfils* (gatherings to entertain/ poetry recitals) in court has been well documented.[199] This aspect of exchange in Metiabruz has had a significant legacy – it is one of the key nodes in the Hindustani-Bengali network of patrons, *ustads* (master-artisans), *shagirds* (apprentices) that branched out of the court and its satellite households into other areas of Bengal and beyond.

The Nawab was notorious among colonial officials for being a hedonist who was always in debt, thanks to his extravagant lifestyle. This, it has to be said, was a view that many residents took of 'their' Rajas and Nawabs. Two of the largest burdens on his treasury were the Nawab's menagerie of exotic animals, and his musical entertainments. Despite British attempts to curtail his expenses, it soon became apparent that Wajid Ali Shah was continuing to be a big spender: in 1879, wardrobes and the jewellery of his performers cost him 2,877-

[197] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow*: *The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, p. 74.
[198] NAI Foreign Political Part A, September 1864, pp. 166-168.
[199] Richard D. Williams, 'Hindustani music between Awadh and Bengal, c. 1758-1905*',* unpublished PhD thesis, Kings College London (2014).

14-6 rupees every month.[200] Much of the Government of Bengal's correspondence regarding Metiabruz was concerned with the Nawab's lifestyle, which was creating 'difficulties' in Garden Reach and beyond.[201]

There was much worried discussion about the 'wardrobes of dancing girls', whom historians of dance tell us, were in fact performers of exquisite forms of Kathak.[202] From the point of view of the tailor, however, all these changes in wardrobe provided exciting opportunities. In 1866, the base salary on an average per month for tailors in the royal entourage was 10 rupees, [203] not far behind compared to poets and balladeers, who received 13 rupees.[204]

Lakhnavi culture and the Awadhi community in Metiabruz, in particular, was not restricted to the royal palace. It gradually spread into adjacent suburbs such as Kidderpore.[205] Elite migrants from Lucknow began to occupy an expanding portion of the southern city, as the Nawab's relatives multiplied in number with each new generation, and needed to be accommodated in their own separate quarters. Over time, numerous satellite properties of courtiers and royals branched off from the original core of the royal court.[206] These provided venues for 'high society' gatherings and musical entertainments that were more loosely associated with the court-in-exile 'proper'. These were places at which dancers wore outfits of breathtaking beauty, and gentlemen dressed in style. The demand for the services of

[200] Report by Mowbray Thomson and Amir Ali, WBSA, Poll File 98, Proc 1-2, May 1879, p. 181. On the menagerie of foreign animals, see Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Last King in India: Wajid Ali Shah, 1822-1887*, p. 211, and pp. 218-219. And, Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, pp. 65-76.
[201] IOR/L/PS/6/534 Coll. 2/19, June 1864-Oct 1864. British Library.
[202] Margaret E. Walker, *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[203] IOR/L/PS/6/549, Coll. 45/1, September-October 1866. British Library.
[204] Ibid.
[205] IOR File I A, Oct 1887, pp. 339-350. British Library.
[206] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, pp. 65-68.

dressmakers and tailors with the highest skill radiated outwards from Metiabruz to surrounding areas of the city.

As historians have shown, Mughal 'successor states' rulers like Nawab Wajid Ali Shah were patrons to the most skillful master-artisans and workers in different arts and crafts, retaining them in state *karkhanas*. They sponsored the development of Persian encyclopedic manuals of crafts that catalogued artisan practices in royal workshops from at least the early seventeenth century.[207] In these royal *karkhanas* (workshops), skilled artisans had access to imported materials from across diverse regions, which they incorporated into their own work practices. They were employed both within elite workshops but were also self-employed artisans who sold their wares from their homes, *bazaars,* and in religious fairs. The catalogues that they used to transmit craft-based knowledge in royal workshops gradually reached wider audiences.[208]

These artisan workshops encouraged technical enhancement, design improvement, and workmanship. As Mohammad Yasin has pointed out, '[The] Mussalmans were experts in essential industries, royal patronage had attracted a large number of them to the Mughal Court where they could display their *hunar* (craftsmanship) and work in royal *karkhanas*

[207] The bulk of the urban-based artisan crafts emerged with the rise of Islamicate states in northern and central India in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Karkhanas of emperors, princes, merchant karkhanas, and houses of independent artisans, were central to artisan production and craft labour. Tripta Verma, *Karkhanas Under the Mughals: From Akbar to Aurangzeb, A Study in Economic Development, Society and Politics* (Delhi: Blackwell, 1994), p. 2; Nurul Hasan, 'The Morphology of a Medieval Indian City, A Case Study of Shahjahanbad' in Indu Banga ed., *The City in Indian History: Urban Demography, Society and Politics* (Delhi: Manohar, 1991), pp. 87-98; Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism*, pp. 265-302.

[208] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Writing Industrial Change in Urdu: Artisanship, Islam and Technology in Colonial India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, 4 (2021), pp. 666-683; Shireen Moosvi, 'The World of Labour in Mughal India (c.1500-1750)', *International Review of Social History* Vol. 56, No. 19 (2011), pp. 245-261.

(workshops).'[209] Kenneth McPherson was of the view that, 'the cultural trait of wearing tailored garments is generally associated with the advent of Islam in the country. The presence of Muslim tailors in the city [Calcutta] was therefore inevitable'.[210]

The public interest in the Nawab, especially his body, dress, and comportment, has tended to overshadow his political career. He came to epitomise the Muslim *ancient régime*: neglectful of public duty and excessive in personal indulgence.[211] In 1862, the Bengali satirist Kaliprasanna Sinha (1841-1870) made a visual record of the festivities and gossip of Calcutta in a series of sketches entitled, *Hutom Pyancar Naksa.* In one of the sketches, he recalled the excitement in the city surrounding the arrival of Wajid Ali Shah: 'The Badshah of Lucknow took centre stage. News spread that he'd taken up residence in Metiabruz. Some reported, 'He's garishly dressed. His feet are reddened with lac-dye…'[212]

But for a scholar of tailors, there is much detail about his sartorial style – a style emulated by the men his entourage, which went on to provide employment to thousands of artisans. In many of his portraits the Nawab is depicted in an 'achkan', a fitted tunic with a rounded or triangular neckline, and intricate gold *zari*-work (embroidery) on his *pyjamas* (long drawers) and *jutis* (shoes). The achkan demands a complex cut (it has been suggested that it was originally designed as a cavalry costume, discussed in the next chapter).[213]

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[209] Mohammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islamic India, 1605-1748* (Lucknow: The Upper India Publishing House Ltd, 1958), p. 29.
[210] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm,* p. 32.
[211] K. Humayun Ansari. 'The Muslim World in British Historical Imaginations: "Rethinking Orientalism?"', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 38, No. 1 (2011), pp. 73-93.
[212] Swarup Roy, *The Observant Owl: Hootum's vignettes of nineteenth-century Calcutta: Kaliprasanna Sinha's Hootum Pyanchar Naksha* (Calcutta: Black Kite, 2008), p. 90.
[213]As depicted in Image 1.1, the curved window-like shape on the right-side of the tunic was framed in a way that created a mismatch between the 'window', and the straight borders of the panel. This pattern was allegedly stylised and preferred by the Nawab. Ritu Kumar and Cathy Muscat, *Costumes and Textiles of Royal India* (London: Christie's Books, 1999), p. 165.

This much-desired garment has a longer history with roots in the Mughal sartorial tradition. Abdul Halim Sharar, the author of *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture,* credits Wajid Ali Shah and the court of Oudh as the inventor of achkans.[214] In his account, the *sherwani* emerged from an alteration of the achkan in the court of Hyderabad:

> '…its sleeves were made like those of the English coat, the adornments over the chest were discarded and for the lower part the shape of the English overcoat was adopted. It became so popular everywhere including Lucknow, that it is now the national dress of all Hindus and Muslims in India.'[215]

In describing Lucknow's 'glorious past' and its sophisticated 'Islamicate civic culture' – the costumes, culinary traditions, poetry, etiquette, and recreational activities such as kite-flying and cock-fighting – Sharar invokes Lakhnavi *tehzib* as central to the distinctiveness of the urbane culture of Oudh, and indeed to the Nawab's 'court-in-exile' in Metiabruz. Scholars including Justin Jones and C.M. Naim have argued that this overarching definition of *tehzib* encapsulates 'moral codes' (*akhlaq*), 'local practices' (*riwaj*), 'arts and crafts' (*funun*), 'traditions' (*riwayat*), 'protocols' (*adab*), and 'administrative rules or constitution' (*a'in*). It emphasised Lucknow's 'distinction and importance' in India, and was produced retrospectively long after the fall of Oudh to the British.[216]

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[214] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, p. 170.
[215] Ibid.
[216] C.M. Naim, 'Interrogating "The East", "Culture", and "Loss" in Abdul Halim Sharar's Guzashta Lakhna'u', p. 196; Justin Jones, 'Urban Mythologies and Urbane Islam: Refining the Past and Present in Colonial-Era Lucknow', pp. 1-4.

Image 1.1: The undated portrait of 'Shabih Mubarik Hazrat Wajid Ali Shah Bahadur' (Nawab Wajid Ali Shah) by his *shahi mussawir* (royal artist), Mohammed Jaan in Metiaburj



Source: IOR: L/PS/6/470, British Library

Upon reflecting on Sharar's essays about the 'projections' of Lucknow's glorious past by North India's Muslim nobility, Justin Jones has argued that the 'last phase' of Nawabi Lucknow was in fact one riven with turmoil and stagnation. The image of a harmonious Lucknow in all its regal splendour was 'less a historical reality of the early 19th, and more a product of a retrospective mythologisation of the city in the early 20th.'[217]

This constructed image of old Lucknow, mixed with ideas of civility, sophistication, and refinement, was 'appropriated and harnessed by many Muslim voices' (reformers, politicians, literary figures, and indeed artisans). It was a means of addressing their social and political demands, as well as for fashioning 'a distinctive Muslim cosmopolitanism in South Asia'.[218] But, we know very little about *how* tailors made these sartorial inventions possible: a subject that will be discussed in Chapter Two. The Nawab's sartorial style gestures towards late Mughal conventions of clothing;[219] it also highlights the novelty and variety in Lakhnavi design and dress styles. Tailors, for their part, for many decades drew upon what Justin Jones has called 'urban mythologies' associated with Lakhnavi dress practices, and the 'urban charisma' of the Nawab's courtly style, in order to expand the demand for their wares.[220]

In late nineteenth-century Calcutta, Nawabi Lucknow was new; it was exciting; it was enigmatic. Metiabruz, despite the tattered reality behind the myth of Lucknow, radiated a

[217] Justin Jones, 'Urban Mythologies and Urbane Islam: Refining the Past and Present in Colonial-Era Lucknow', p. 3.
[218] Ibid, p. 12.
[219] Mughal cultural connotations with regard to cloth and fabric symbolised power and the conveyance of authority from the Emperor through the *khullat* robe. See for instance, Christopher Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 172-209; Gordon Stewart, 'Robes of honour: A "transactional" kingly ceremony', *Indian Economic Social History Review* Vol. 33, No. 3 (1996), pp. 225-242.
[220] Justin Jones, 'Urban Mythologies and Urbane Islam: Refining the Past and Present in Colonial-Era Lucknow', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* Vol. 11 (2015), pp. 1-19.

powerful aura. It turbo-charged a new phase of economic growth in which tailors were key players – and reverberations thereof last to this day. Popular histories and fictional accounts of Wajid Ali Shah's courtly life in Calcutta have tended to neglect the significance of Metiabruz, the hub of artisan activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[221] While most cultural studies of Nawabi Lucknow have their end point in 1856 and represent Metiabruz as a haunting relic of a dead civilisation, Wajid Ali's own commentaries about his achievements there have rescued the place from permanent obscurity.[222]

Scholars have written about the Nawab's experiments with music and performance; for instance, how his court acted as a forum that drew together Hindustani *ustads*, Bengali patrons, and disciples. This further facilitated the transfusion of upper Indian musical practices through the arteries of elite Calcutta.[223] We know very little, by contrast, about the impact of Wajid Ali Shah's legacy on changing sartorial dress styles and tailoring in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Calcutta – its interactions and negotiations with colonial modernity. But there is no doubt that there was an impact. Much as Bengali musical traditions and performances were influenced by North Indian artistic traditions, clothing too was part of the circulation, conversation and enmeshing of Hindustani-Bengali aesthetics.

The spread of North Indian dress styles in late-colonial Calcutta was also largely driven by Awadhi business enterprises. Members of the royal family could only leave Calcutta having secured permission from the Government of Bengal, and senior individuals were barred from

[221] Sripantha, *Metiyaburujer Nabab* (Kolkata: Ananda, 1990); Anil Tapadar, *Kolkatar Chota Lakhnau* (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 2002).
[222] Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, 'King Wajid Ali Shah and his Two Indian Courts', *The Court Historian* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2014), pp. 43-62.
[223] Richard D. Williams, 'Hindustani music between Awadh and Bengal, c.1758-1905', unpublished PhD thesis, Kings College London (2014).

entering Lucknow. *Within* Calcutta, however, the queens, princes, and noblemen of Lucknow could set up houses and business enterprises, and they did. Indeed, these serviced the needs of the Lakhnavi elites.[224] The Nawab himself interacted with the city's elites and his courtiers, disseminating his printed works, occasionally writing for the newspapers, organising fairs and Muharram processions, annually opening his grounds to the public, building mosques and imambaras, and taking an interest in new enterprises such as railways, gas lamps, and zoological gardens.[225]

The presence of Awadhi tailors that grew around Wajid Ali Shah's royal patronage proliferated in late-colonial Calcutta. Much of the production for the courts were carried out in royal workshops or *karkhanas* in Metiabruz.[226] It is important to recognise, however, that patronage for tailors did not grow through a linear shift from royal, courtly patronage of hereditary tailors to the middle-class domain of soliciting tailoring services. It was a gentler spread, and tailors remained enmeshed in both worlds and markets. Different kinds of patrons –Lakhnavi, Bengali *bhadralok*[227], British – each with different sartorial needs and dispositions, forged connections with tailors.

The place of Muslim artisan cultures in *bhadralok* society are the subject of the next chapter. Yet it remains important here to underline the different forms of patronage that bolstered

[224] West Bengal State Archives A Genl Proc 92-101, February 1862.
[225] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, pp. 65-68.
[226] Ibid, p.261. Also, Mohammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islamic India*, p. 29.
[227] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2006). On the *bhadralok* in the context of the transition between Mughal and colonial economies; mimicry of the West; and the fraught relationship between tradition and modernity, see, Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self-Ironical Tradition in Bengali Literature', *Modern Asian Studies* 34, 2 (2000), pp. 379-406; S.N. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38', in Edward Leach and S.N. Mukherjee eds., *Elites in South Asia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

handiwork practices like tailoring in the late colonial period. Apart from the Muslim *ashraf* classes, the colonial state and the *bhadralok* – the spectrum of the middle-to upper class gentlemen – were all also patrons of Muslim tailors. Many of these tailors came from Metiabruz, but found patronage beyond its boundaries, plugging themselves into networks beyond, and indeed within, Calcutta. The great metropolis brought together late Mughal, colonial and *bhadralok* connoisseurs.

Given the scale of Wajid Ali Shah's investments in clothing and costumes for performances, it is possible to view the court as a crucial 'locational incentive' that led tailors to bunch around the area in such numbers that fed British concerns about Black Town 'congestion'. While tailors were not tethered to one particular group of patrons, and were mobile and versatile, moving internally to access a wide range of markets and patrons across the city. They were tied, however, to the geographies of opportunity and embedded locational incentives that Calcutta and its environs offered them.

Chapter Two

Material Culture: Dress Styles and the Demand for Tailoring in Calcutta, 1890-1940

'The Tailor Makes the Man'

The coatless clown is nobody;
the meanly clad are vile;
Above all men we honour him
whose coat is *cut in style*.
To him we bend in deep respect,
his faults we may not scan.
Then stand aside and let him pass:
The *tailor-moulded* man.

William Morrison, *Famous Tailors: A Series of Biographical Memoirs*, 1884.[1]

Introduction

This famous poem by a journeyman tailor has three key elements: the tailor, the 'tailor-moulded' person, and the commodity – a coat 'cut in style'. In this chapter, I will bring these elements together in order to situate *darzis* in what Christopher Breward has termed the 'hemline history'[2] of consumption, connecting the garment with the producer and the consumer.

Clothes made of different fabrics, patterns, cuts, colours and styles, are a crucial part of the sartorial dispositions, changing fashions, and aesthetic preferences of different echelons of society, starting from the elite, down to the lower strata. Moreover, a coat 'cut in style' reflects, with remarkable verisimilitude, the social position of the 'tailor-moulded man' or woman.

[1] Emphasis mine. William Morrison, *Famous Tailors: A Series of Biographical Memoirs* (Glasgow: Hay Nisbet & Co., 1884), p. 79. RB.23.a.26592, British Library.
[2] Christopher Breward, 'Undressing the past', *Gender and history* Vol. 8, Issue 2 (1996), p. 286.

Dress embodies societal values. It is a marker of status and prestige. It is also often a symbol of national pride.[3]

Fashions and functions of clothing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were both creative and innovative, evolving as fast as different social groups entering (or settled) in colonial Calcutta responded to the changing world around them. For instance, *memsahibs'* everyday decisions about what to wear involved navigating a shifting and complex terrain of personal taste, aesthetic adjustments, class, societal notions of propriety, and imperial identity.[4]

In times of crisis, from 1914 onwards, for instance, how well an outfit could provide protection became a matter of practical concern. Military uniforms were designed to protect the wearer from wounds and shield him from harsh weather conditions. They also functioned as visible signifiers of racial difference. The 'Indianisation' of the Indian Army and the Indian Civil Services required Indian men to be dressed in accordance with the stipulated guidelines of the colonial government. Indian officers and civil servants aligned themselves to 'Burra sahibs' by donning the 'black suit' and the English frock coat. Most asked their Indian master tailors to produce these desired clothes, which gave them the look they wanted to parade in public. Often, they dressed differently at home, keeping more tailors busy.

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[3] Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Bernard Cohn, 'Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century' in Annette B Weiner and Jane Schneider eds., *Cloth and Human Experience* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1989), pp. 312-13; Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Christopher Bayly, 'The Origins of Swadeshi: Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930', in Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 285-32.

[4] *Memsahibs* were Englishwomen in colonial India. The term 'Anglo-Indian' referred to the British in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but since the 1911 Census the term has been used to refer to a domiciled community of mixed descent who were formerly known as Eurasian, country born or 'half-caste'. See, Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 2; Indrani Sen ed., *Memsahibs Writings: Colonial Narratives of Indian Women* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008).

This chapter shows how tailors made different projects of self-fashioning possible for a range of patrons by moving from a phase of improvisation, in the last decade of the nineteenth-century, to a phase of perfecting the construction of garments, in the early decades of the twentieth century. The chapter also identifies the major shifts in the structure of the market for tailored garments in Calcutta between 1890-1947.

From at least the mid-nineteenth century, *darzis* had been making dresses for *memsahibs* and sahibs, better suited to the conditions in 'tropics' from paper-patterns that they brought with them. 'Half-caste', 'Eurasian', 'Anglo-Indian', 'creole' men and women wore the 'English dress' to pass off as 'British'. These outfits were, more often than not, the handiwork of native tailors.[5]

From the early 1900s, however, dress styles changed in response to new advances in tailoring techniques, augmented by the use of sewing machines. Tailoring between 1900-1940 was concentrated on 'cut and fit' rather than style. The new innovations – darts, waist and underarm seams – came with the British and fused with Indian dress styles.[6] Western-styled suits and frock coats made their way into dress and etiquette manuals for British and Indian 'gentlemen', whether in the armed forces or in the civil services.

Sartorial splintering marked the interwar period. The political upheavals of the interwar years affected the dress tastes of the nationalist elite: Gandhi shunned the Western suit and adopted

[5] Durba Ghosh and Chandra Mallampalli provide fascinating accounts of 'passing' and dress practices among 'East Indians' and mixed-race women in the eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth century India. Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Chandra Mallampalli, *Race, Religion and Law in Colonial India: Trials of an Interracial Family* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[6] Donald Clay Johnson, 'Clothes Make the Empire: British Dress in India' in Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster eds., *Dress Sense* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), pp. 79-80.

the unstitched *khadi* loincloth; Nehru wore *khadi* kurtas and form-fitting *sherwanis*[7] paired with a 'Nehru cap'; while Jinnah had an unabashed penchant for tailor-made suits. At the peak of the Second World War, we see a further splintering of dress styles as 'gentlemanly terrorists' like Subhas Chandra Bose aligned their tastes to military attire.[8]

In teasing out the tensions within the *khadi* movement and the clothing dilemmas in the late-colonial period, I demonstrate how a great deal of heterogeneity in clothing habits persisted despite nationalist attempts to 'Indianise' dress. Tailors benefitted from this hybridity and heterogeneity in dress styles. By manipulating their skills in different ways, tailors in this period made outfits adaptable for an array of consumers.

This chapter suggests that the knowledge of material culture gained from a persistent and varied demand for particular dress styles generated a vibrant market. This knowledge, tied to the market it served, contributed towards building the tailor's 'immobility capital'. I argue that in order to understand why tailors became so indispensable in this period, we look at the history of consumption alongside the history of production.

Encounters with the 'plebeian secret': *memsahibs* and Anglo-Indian women's memoirs and home manuals, 1880-1920

This thesis began with tailors during the two wars: the astonishing range of items they produced and the geographical locations in which they lived and worked. However, we did not really

[7] The *sherwani*, a tailored knee-length outer garment resembling a long coat, front buttoned with a stand up collar and long sleeves, varying in length and fabric, has been a coveted piece of clothing in the wardrobes of elite Indian men since at least the early twentieth century.
[8] Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

'see' the tailor. In this section, we will catch sight of the *darzi* who features in the most remarkable ways in *memsahibs'* reminiscences. *Darzis* seem to be more *visible* in particular kinds of sources, for instance, in early twentieth century memoirs and home manuals of Englishwomen in Calcutta.[9] In official records, on the other hand, their presence is rather elusive.

In colonial India, Englishwomen's encounters with native populations – with women who belonged to the lower classes and castes – have been a subject of much scholarly engagement.[10] Scholars have explored their everyday interactions within imperial settings, often intimate and deeply fraught, through the lens of race, class, region and religion.[11] Others have documented *memsahibs'* encounters with native men and women, looking at the complexities and tensions arising from colonial exchanges, with regard to 'household servants'.[12] And yet, in this large scholarship on *memsahibs*, a glaring omission is their relationship with native tailors. They were mostly men, who serviced their material needs, either as resident house-servants or as visiting dressmakers.

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[9] Indrani Sen ed., *Memsahibs Writings: Colonial Narratives of Indian Women* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008). There are few detailed accounts of bourgeois women in a colonial environment sitting in the comfort of their homes instructing tailors and seamstresses sitting on the floor, as in the Indonesian record. See, Jean Gelman Taylor, 'The Sewing Machine in Colonial Era Photographs: A Record from Dutch Indonesia', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 46, No. 1 (2012), pp. 71-95.

[10] Antoinette Burton ed., *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities* (London: Routledge, 1999); A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[11] Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); Janaki Nair, 'Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings, 1813-1940', *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 2, No.1 (Spring 1990), pp. 8-34.

[12] Mary Thatcher, *Respected Memsahibs: An Anthology* (Centre of South Asian Studies, Hardinge Simpole: UK, 2009).

Memoirs, photographs, and home manuals of Anglo-Indian women,[13] both English and Eurasian, assist in locating partial glimpses into their relationship with native tailors. These women were often either married to European officers or came as sojourners to visit family in colonial India. These sources demonstrate how crucial *darzis* were in maintaining (and sometimes dismantling) colonial hierarchies with regard to dress practices from late 1890 to 1940.

Examining elite reminiscences in order to excavate the everyday and experiential lives of subaltern populations is not a novel approach.[14] By reading *memsahibs* recollections against and along the grain, we see fleeting glimpses of the lives of the working-class actors in the most intimate contact zones – tailors, cooks, gardeners, wet nurses, among others – and the role they played in meeting the demand for personal services within and beyond the British and Anglo-Indian communities. In doing so, we gain a view of the way in which production worked alongside practices of consumption.

By the late nineteenth century, the greatest concession most sahibs and *memsahibs* were willing to make to the climate and medical opinion was the adaptation of their European dress. Men cast off broadcloth and formal woollen wear in favour of white linen jackets, waistcoats, and tailored trousers. British women abandoned the cumbersome corsets for cool

[13] The term 'Anglo-Indian' referred to the British in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but since the 1911 Census the term has been used to refer to a domiciled community of mixed descent who were formerly known as Eurasian, country born or half-caste. See, Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 2.

[14] Partha Pratim Shil, in his work on police constables in Bengal, has shown how the normative language of official reports often served to repress the agency of subaltern groups, and in doing so it, in fact, failed to conceal the actuality of the world it sought to discipline, control and make invisible. Partha Pratim Shil, 'Police Labour and State formation in Bengal, c.1860-c.1950', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2016).

Indian muslin.[15] Indian cloth, styles, and fashion commodities beguiled them more than is often understood.[16] Self-appointed expatriates advised British men and women to cultivate the 'cloth habit' – 'plain white washing calico or linen for wear in the hot weather'.[17]

Anglo-Indian women soon discovered that it was easier to get their outfits made by a native tailor than bringing them all the way out from Britain, since British-made clothes were more expensive and ill-suited to India's tropical climate, and the cost of haulage was not inconsiderable. It became an open secret that a local tailor was adept in replicating dresses from paper patterns that *memsahibs* brought with them instead of the 'real thing'.

The demand among Anglo-Indian women for native tailors, as a result, grew thick and fast. A 'Practical Guide For Persons About to Reside in India' (1882) suggests why:

> 'The Indian *durzee* is a very clever worker, good at imitating and bad at originating. Give him a good pattern and he will turn out a dress very nicely, with strong neat workmanship…My tailor was a very handsome young native, who rejoiced in the name of Iman Bux, and he remained with us all the time we were in India.'[18]

Since at least the 1850s, British memoirs and reminiscences about life in colonial Calcutta are replete with stories of the 'verandah tailor' labouring over the *memsahib's* dress – indeed, 'the verandah of a Calcutta house took the place of a British conservatory, where the box-wallah

[15] With regard to dressmaking, Fanny Parks, noted that the high bone collar and shoe-length dress of the Edwardian period which 'nearly induced apoplexy' in the heat were discarded in favour of cotton dresses during the day with 'only the sketchiest of underclothes under[neath]'. *Scott Papers*, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge (henceforth CSAS), p. 34.
[16] E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 420.
[17] *Indian Outfits & Establishments: Practical Guide For Persons About to Reside in India; Detailing the Articles Which Should Be Taken Out And The Requirements of Home Life And Management There*. By An Anglo-Indian (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1882), p. 10. Bodleian library, University of Oxford.
[18] Ibid, p. 13.

set out his wares for the *memsahib* to buy and where the verandah tailor, sat cross-legged, stitching clothes and furnishings for the household'.[19]

Image 2.1: 'The *durgee* in the verandah' of a European household, 1901



Source: Charles Ford collection, 1901. Centre of South Asian Studies archive (CSAS), University of Cambridge

In 1880, Captain John Bellew, a British cadet in colonial India, also wrote of a *dirgee* 'hard at work' in his memoir: 'there too the patient *dirgee* sits cross-legged, hard at work on the beebee

[19] *William Knighton, Tropical Sketches, or Reminiscences of an Indian Journalist* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1885), p. 13. Royal Commonwealth Society Collections, University Library, Cambridge (henceforth RCS).

sahib's ball-dress, or the sahib's nether garments, which he holds on to with his big toe and the one next to it.'[20] These memoirs and the richness of detail about the 'dirgee' conjure up how essential a part of white households tailors had become, by the late nineteenth century.

Colonial wives of servicemen appropriated the power and privilege of their administrator-husbands in displaying their social rank and status through dress.[21] They utilised the core ideals of the 'middle-class home' and dress code to articulate the prestige and authority representative of the colonial state.[22] They engaged in forms of sociability that extended beyond the bungalow or cantonment to markets, church congregations, and social clubs.[23] The clothes of new arrivals, in particular, were a source of great interest.

Memsahibs, congregating on the church verandah, would often exchange pleasantries and complement each other on their dresses:

> 'The well-to-do would pretend that they ordered everything "out from home"; even their parasols and the trimmings of their hats. Dresses that the wearers all swore came from England were generally made by a *bazaar* tailor. And what pains were taken to conceal this! The tailor had to do his work in the bungalow (for if he was allowed to take away one's material and pattern-book, one's friends or their *ayahs*, in neighbouring bungalows might notice) and in a side-room concealed by a screen in case an unexpected caller chanced upon the *plebeian secret.*'[24]

The less prosperous could always refer to 'a wonderful little man I know in the bazaar. Quite a genius in his own way'.[25]

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[20] Capt. Francis John Bellew, *Memoirs of a Griffin* (London: W.H. Allen, 1880), p. 21.
[21] E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p. 22.
[22] Verity McInnis, *Women of Empire: Nineteenth-Century Army Officers' Wives in India and The US West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2017), p. 119.
[23] Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India', *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 40, No. 4 (2001), pp. 489-521.
[24] Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1938), p. 276. RCS.
[25] Ibid, p. 237.

These excerpts shows how integral tailors were to the sartorial self-presentation of Englishwomen in India. They often kept this 'plebeian secret' – going so far as to hide their tailors from view, even from each other. While they wrote rhapsodies, in private, of the tailor's dextrous handiwork, they pretended to each other that the tailor did not exist. Herein lies a paradox. The *memsahib* is one key source of our knowledge about the *darzi*, but since he is *her* secret, her own record is secretive. Teasing it apart reveals colonial anxieties, to be sure, but it tells us relatively little about the tailor himself.

The social calendar of the Anglo-Indians in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was marked with balls, theatricals, fancy-dress parties, picnics, fêtes and gymkhana (sporting) activities. The routine of wearing different dress styles according to the occasion and time of the day was transported empire wide.[26] Colonial pastimes and long hours of leisure gave *memsahibs* plenty of time to design clothing. They also tended to be house proud, furnishing the interiors of their homes with as much 'class' and 'style' as possible.

However, this creative process of refashioning themselves in colonial India required sewing men skilled in the craft of replicating clothes, and making upholstery and drapes. Although we know very little about the *darzis* themselves and how they engaged with the Englishwomen they worked for, their encounters do tell us that the processes of cutting cloth, decorative styling, embellishing clothes and home furnishings were often joint endeavours. It involved the sartorial acumen of both the *memsahib* and the *darzi*. This process of co-production, in design and handiwork, however, was not devoid, nor could it ever be, of complex power relations.

[26] C.H. Forbes-Lindsay, *India: Past & Present*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1903), pp. 224-225. RCS.

Housekeeping manuals, such as, Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1863) and Catherine Beecher's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1849) served to promote and standardize prescriptions on dress. Their display of specific tasteful commodities provided visual symbols of status which needed to be reproducible and recognizable with the elite strata of society. These manuals coached women on how to embody their status and privilege by providing instructions on dress styles, fabrics to be used and necessary items required to dress the part.[27] This often entailed the *memsahib* supervising the *darzi*'s work with utmost precision and peremptory authority. Flora Steel and Grace Gardiner, both wives of British officers, wrote for instance, a version of Mrs Beeton's guide for Anglo-India, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1890). It advised *memsahibs* to keep an eye on their 'dirzi's' sewing work: 'Few *dirzies* can be trusted to cut out without any supervision, and it is far better for the mistress either to do it herself, or to order the tailor to show her the patterns tacked on to the stuff before the fateful scissors are brought into use.'[28]

Power relations and racial hierarchies notwithstanding, the native tailor soon was indispensable for the colonial elite for his remarkable ability to replicate design from paper patterns and for his 'industrious needlework'.[29] An anonymous, self-appointed 'expert', who claimed to have lived in the 'tropics', advised Anglo-Indian women travelling to the east of Suez, to take out 'materials unmade' and paper patterns for a local *durzee* to make dresses for them.[30]

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[27] M. Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: S.O Beeton, 1863); Catherine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849). RCS.
[28] Flora Steel and Grace Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 1st ed. 1890), p. 103.
[29] Edmund C. P. Hull, *The European in India or Anglo-Indian's Vade-mecum* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), pp. 130-131. RCS.
[30] *Indian Outfits & Establishments: Practical Guide For Persons About to Reside in India; Detailing the Articles Which Should Be Taken Out And The Requirements of Home Life And Management There*. By An Anglo-Indian (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1882), p. 11.

The type of fabric determined whether or not a tailor would be best suited to cut and sew the dress. Handiwork was far preferable to machine work for linen, not least where it was destined to go through rough use. In the 1880s, the price charged by such *dirzies* for 'making a dress made of silk or linen varied from five to ten rupees, and as a rule they finished their dresses very neatly'.[31] They also came in handy to 'repair frayed dresses' and even to make a new washing cover for the umbrella.[32]

Further, other than servicing the needs of European homes as a visiting dressmaker, the *durzee* was also 'a necessary appendage of the Anglo-Indian household'.[33] As a house-servant, the tailor was employed to put in long hours of work, making clothes and soft furnishings for the whole family, and also the servants.[34]

Apart from instructing young *memsahibs* on genteel clothing, home manuals prescribed ways in which they should maintain and manage their households, often with large retinue of servants.[35] Personalized livery for house servants and bearers signalled both the imperial status of the employers and the rank of the employee within the household.

These elaborate uniforms were distinguished by the colour of turbans and *cummerbund* – a long muslin belt wrapped around the waist.[36] An advertisement in *The Statesman* in November 1902 shows the kind of outfits that *khansamas* (male heads of household staff) and

[31] Ibid, p. 103.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Kathleen Blechynden, *Calcutta: Past & Present* (London: W. Thacker & Co., 1905), p. 127. RCS.
[34] Edmund C. P. Hull, *The European in India or Anglo-Indian's Vade-mecum*, p. 131.
[35] Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p. 19.
[36] Laura Sykes ed., *Calcutta Through British Eyes, 1690-1990* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 41.

khitmatghars (bearers) were expected to wear at work: 'chupkans' and 'achkans' (see Image 2.2).[37] These tailored garments were often sewn by the resident tailor.

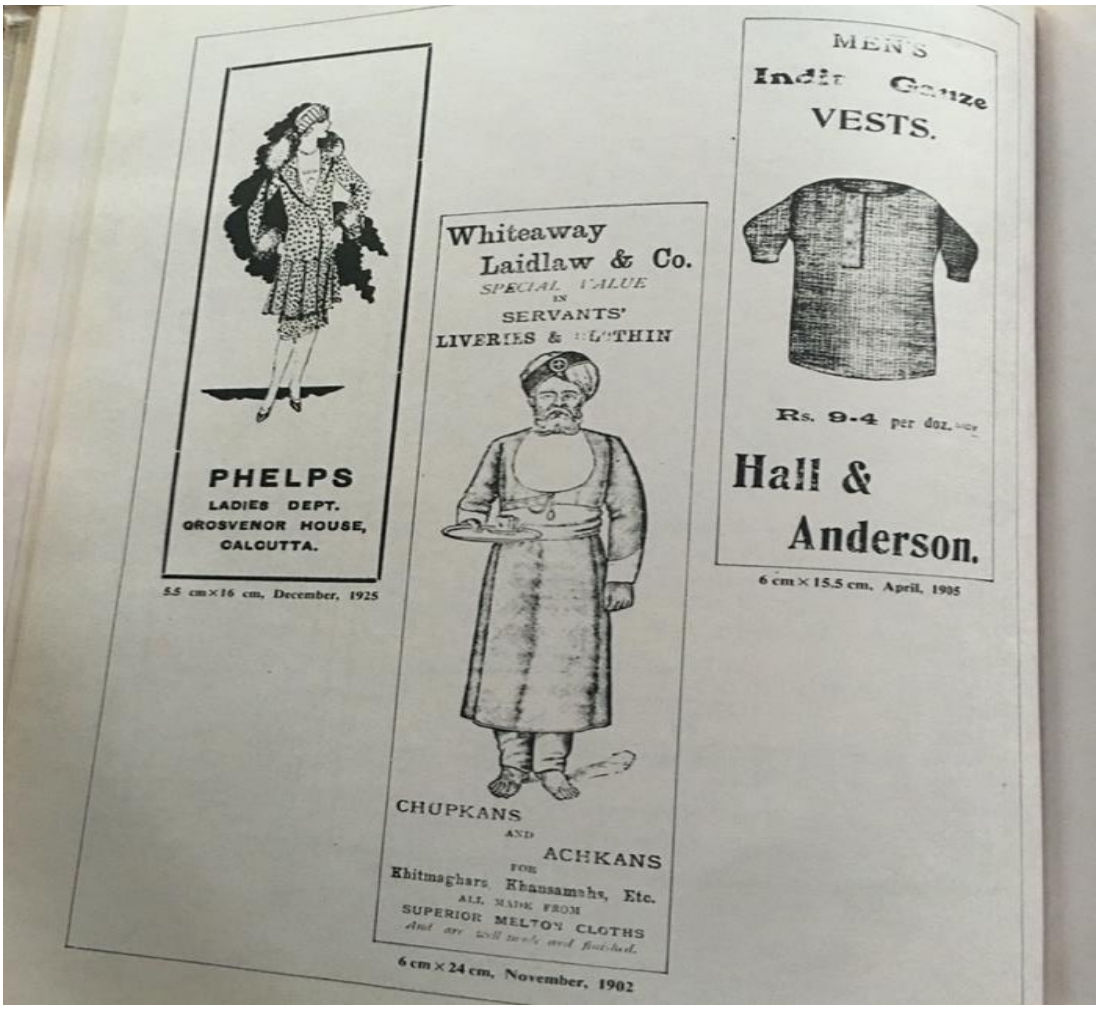
In 1850, a live-in tailor was the second highest paid house servant after the *bawarchi* (cook) – he received Rs. 12 per month whereas the *darzi* received Rs. 8.[38] By 1905, in more affluent Anglo-Indian households, 'the artistic skill of a *dirgee* was recognised in a salary of sixteen rupees a month'.[39]

[37] *The Statesman*, November 1902. Ranabir Ray Choudhury, *Early Calcutta Advertisements: A Selection From The Statesman, 1875-1925* (Calcutta: The Statesman Commercial Press, 1992), p. 184. Abdul Halim Sharar describes a chapkan as a 'cape', fitted to the upper body but flared from the chest down. It had 'the same semi-circular jabot and lapels as the "angrakha". The lapels were bow-shaped and sewn with buttons… there was an attractive bow shaped ring of buttons near the neck. It also had a broad gusset fixed to the left side by buttons.' Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, trans. E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 170.

[38] Fanny Parks, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque, during four-and-twenty years in the East*, Vol. I (Franklin Classics, 2018. 1st ed. 1850), pp. 209-10.

[39] Kathleen Blechynden, *Calcutta: Past & Present*, p. 128.

Image 2.2: An advertisement of 'Servants' Liveries & Clothing'



Source: *The Statesman*, November 1902

The talents of the *darzi* were even more sought after in princely households as Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali, in her famous memoir, indicates: 'one of the *khas* (special) servants in a mussulmaun household, was a "dhurgie" (tailor), who worked tirelessly making court dresses for native ladies…[and] home furnishings and uniforms for *nujeebs* (regimental troops)'.[40]

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the *darzi* was accompanied by a sewing machine, one of the first modern machines to find its way into daily use in India as in many other parts

[40] Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali, *Observations on The Mussalmauns of India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 60.

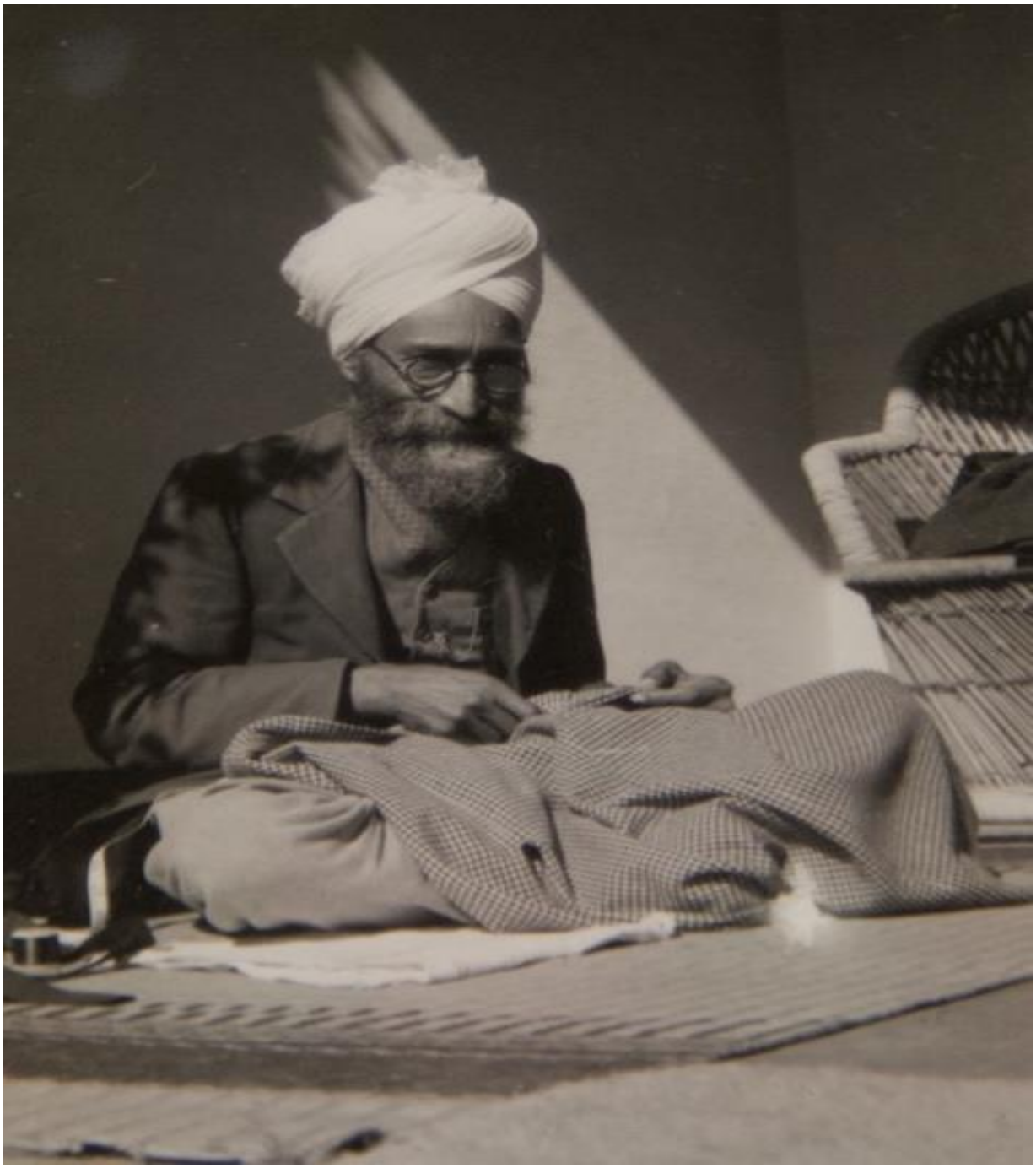
of the world (more on this theme in Chapter Four).[41] In the 1920s, Dr Hilda Davis reminisces in her diary about 'a *durzee* who made her a khaki blouse and altered some breeches to wear in the "jungle"'.[42] She describes him as:

> 'a nice old man with a long black beard who sat cross-legged in the corner of a verandah. He brought his own little sewing machine with him and had it on the floor'.[43]

In Image 2.3, the tailor himself appears to be wearing a double-breasted waistcoat and a jacket paired with a turban, perhaps showcasing his skills in western-style dressmaking.

[41] On the spread of sewing machines in non-Western societies, with close parallels to India, see, Uri M. Kupferschmidt, 'The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East', *Die Welt des Islams* 44 (2004), pp. 195-213.
[42] Dr Hilda Davis papers, *Braithwaite Collection*, CSAS, p. 6.
[43] Photograph of a *darzi* from Dr Hilda Davis papers. Ibid.

Image 2.3: A photograph of a *darzi* at work



Source: Dr Hilda Davis papers, Braithwaite Collection, Centre of South Asian Studies archive, Cambridge.

Overall, then, we can see that the *darzi* and *memsahib* made themselves each indispensable to the other.

The *Pukka Sahibs*

In the 1880s, Englishmen too were advised 'to take out a great number of cloth suits since native tailors make white cloth coats and the old familiar *solar topee* (sun hat) most admirably, provided they have a good pattern to cut by, which can easily be provided by bringing out a well cut suit from home.'[44] This advice, however, was accompanied by 'a caveat' that in 1882:

> 'the charges of Calcutta and Bombay tailors moreover are excessive, and none but the extravagant would dream of replenishing wardrobes at their hands when it is easy to order things from home'.[45]

This indicates just how coveted the skills of the *darzi* were at the time. They were not cheap.

From the late nineteenth century, civilian officers distinguished themselves from the military by the adoption of the black suit. The black British suit, the cut and colour, became a distinctive signifier of the Anglo-Indian *pukka sahib* (gentleman).[46] On the other hand, the official community of Anglo-Indians as a whole sought to distance themselves from the unofficial groups of planters and businessmen, who in turn, kept the growing medley of poor Europeans and Eurasians at arm's length.[47] This stratification, such a characteristic of late-Victorian and Edwardian India, was reflected in dress-style choices.

For instance, Alfred Claude Brown, the late editor of *The Empress,* who lived in Calcutta from 1905-1920 remarked that the 'black-coated civilian' among a crowd of red-coated officers

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[44] Emphasis mine. *Indian Outfits & Establishments,* p. 20. Also, Charles Allen writes that, Englishmen were advised to take paper patterns so that they could get copies made by a 'local durzee', see Charles Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj,* (Fifteenth edition, London Abacus, 2014). p. 43.
[45] Ibid.
[46] George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (New Delhi: Penguin Classics, 2001).
[47] William Delafield Arnold, *Oakfield, or Fellowship in the East*, Vol. 1 (London: Longman Brown, 1853), p. 91. RCS.

looked 'quiet and gentlemanly'.[48] He described himself as a 'non-official European', who did not represent the colonial state (but expected its protection nonetheless).

On the subject of clothing, Claude Brown's views reflect continuities in terms of the types of dress in demand that were not only deemed suitable for the 'tropics'; but also reflected their precise place in the social structures of the Raj.

It also reveals the vital role of the tailor in meeting those demands. Claude Brown's advice to British men travelling to the east of Suez in 1905 was to employ a local 'durzee' to make 'washing suits' and 'cotton frock coats':

> 'Your ordinary washing suits will be best obtained in India. Cotton frock-coats can be obtained if you employ a local *durzee*. *He is a master of imitation.* You have to give him an old frock coat and purchase the material you wish to have made up; *he will do the rest and turn out an exact copy of the pattern.* Moreover he will do it sitting outside on your verandah while you wait…a frequent complete change of clothes is helpful in an endeavour to keep cool in the tropics. Let your collars be on the large size, and the neckbands of your shirts should be a good half-inch larger still. The question of soft or starched collars is one for every man to decide for himself.'[49]

Here we see the colonial stereotype of the *durzee* as a 'mere copyist'[50] coming through in Alfred Claude Brown's view of Calcutta tailors.

Nonetheless, continuities in demand for local tailors and the indispensability of the tailor's skill in replicating clothes for frequent changes of dress, also speaks clearly here. The tailor was, in fact, not just reproducing new clothing from old patterns, but also improvising and modifying

[48] Alfred Claude Brown, *The Ordinary Man's India* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1927), p. 7. RCS.
[49] Italics added. Ibid, p. 18.
[50] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology,* p. 35.

the style of the outfit based on the wearer's exact specifications: 'collars be on the large size, and the neckbands of your shirts should be a good half-inch larger still'.[51] No doubt other clients had different views on the ideas of cuffs and collars; he serviced them all, in part by imagining how they wanted to look.

Indeed, by the early decades of the twentieth century, both the entrepreneurial and professional sections of the British middle-classes had developed a 'gentrified' bourgeois culture based on social exclusivity and conspicuous display.[52] The 'pukka sahib's code'[53] involved changing clothes several times in the day. The importance of evening dress, even when dining alone, was central to British etiquette. In the hot weather, men in Bombay would don white dinner jackets and black trousers. In Calcutta this was reversed.[54] Behind each outfit was a tailor. Even though he said little, the producer and the consumer were having a conversation.

Changing fashion trends and tailoring techniques: the circulation of 'pattern books'

Tailors were not just adept at replicating paper patterns to make dresses more adaptable for the '*Gora sahibs*'[55] and *memsahibs* in British India, they also kept up with changing fashion trends and dressmaking techniques.

[51] Alfred Claude Brown, *The Ordinary Man's India*, p. 18.
[52] Verity McInnis, *Women of Empire*, pp. 20-21.
[53] George Orwell, *Burmese Days*, p. 69.
[54] Jayne Shrimpton 'Dressing for a Tropical Climate: The Role of Native Fabrics in Fashionable Dress in Early Colonial India', *Textile History* Vol. 1, No. 23 (1992); Donald Clay Johnson, 'Clothes Make the Empire: British Dress in India', in Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster eds., *Dress Sense* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
[55] Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 16.

Between 1890 and 1920, a host of pattern-books and tailoring handbooks made their way into the colonies.[56] These were manuals devoted to the art of cutting, fitting, geometrical calculations in dressmaking, and three-dimensional body measurements, published in Britain. W.D.F. Vincent, an English tailor, authored a range of 'cutting-books' in the 1890s on how to create standardised paper patterns for different types of garments, suited to particular professions. A revelation among English clothiers and outfitters, Vincent's *The Cutter's Practical Guide to Coat Fitting and Making,* was grounded in mathematical principles and measurements governing garment construction. These new tailoring techniques involving darts and waist seams to create fitted outfits and uniforms, melded with local tailoring practices in India: 'waist seams evolved from a dart made at the waist to eliminate the crease which appeared when the coats lengthened in body'.[57]

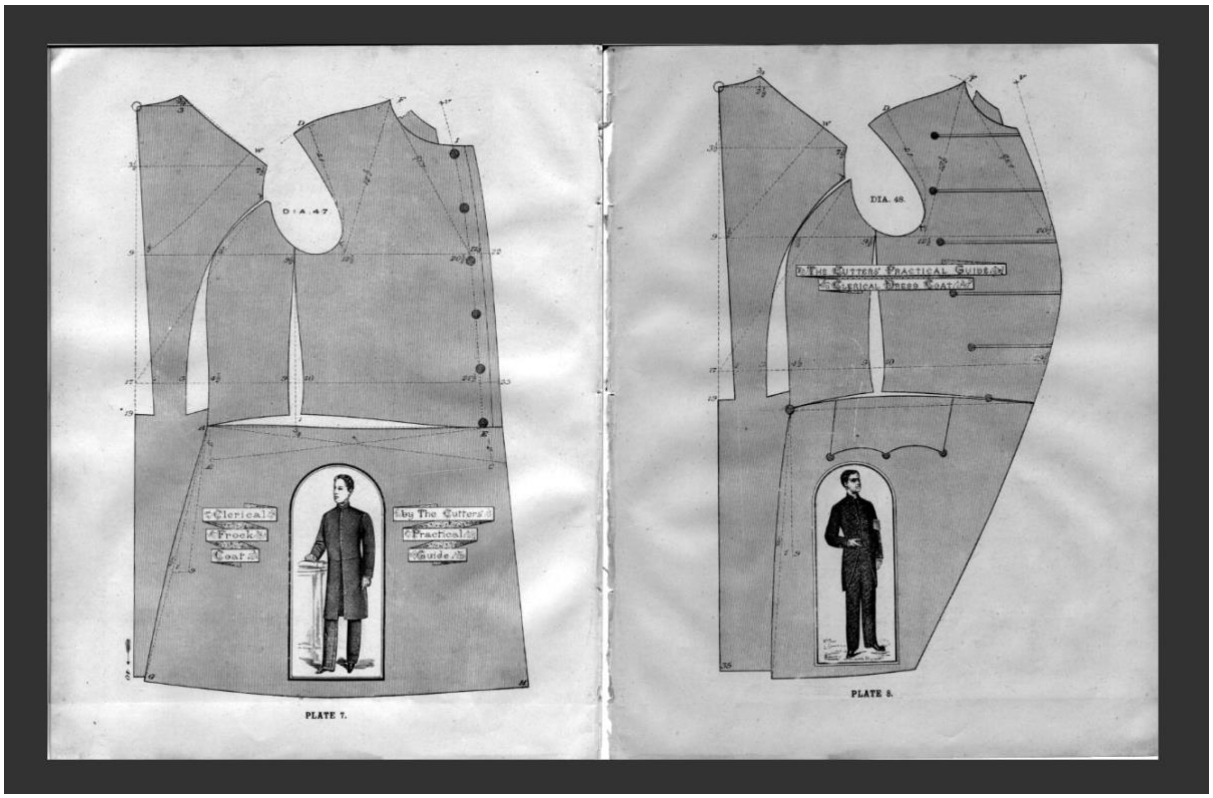
The pattern for a frock coat in Vincent's tailoring manual, for instance, indicated cut up pieces with stitching lines for button placements, a stand-up collar, and an inserted image of the finished garment (see Image 2.4).[58]

Pattern-making in British tailoring manuals published in the 1890s involved 'the construction or cardboard template from which the parts of a garment are traced on to fabric before cutting or assembling'.[59] But the main innovation in this period had to do with 'fitting' garments to the wearer's body.

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[56] The early nineteenth century tailoring manuals published in Britain included W. Walker, *The Tailor's Philosophy, or science complete in the art of cutting* (London,1839); J. Jackson, *The Improved Tailor's Art* (London, 1829). British Library Historical Print editions.
[57] A.S. Bridgland, *The Modern Tailor Outfitter and Clothier*, Vol. I (Ayllsbury and London: Watson and Vinfy Ltd, 1929), p. 21. British Library.
[58] W.D.F. Vincent, *The Cutter's Practical Guide to Coat Fitting & Making: Embracing Morning Frock & Dress Coats in All Their Varieties, Including Court, Naval, Police Uniforms, Clerical, Juvenile & Working Men's Bodycoats* (London: Williamson & Co., 1890). British Library.
[59] A.S. Bridgland, *The Modern Tailor Outfitter and Clothier*, p. 3.

Image 2.4: A Cutting Pattern for a 'Clerical Frock Coat', 1890.



Source: W.D.F. Vincent, *The Cutters' Practical Guide to Coat Fitting & Making: Embracing Morning Frock & Dress Coats in All Their Varieties, Including Court, Naval, Police Uniforms, Clerical, Juvenile & Working Men's Bodycoats*. 1890. London: Williamson & Co., British Library.

A.S. Bridgland, another English tailor in 1929 propounded that the key principle of garment construction lay in the cutter's 'sound knowledge of the body he seeks to clothe'. This was:

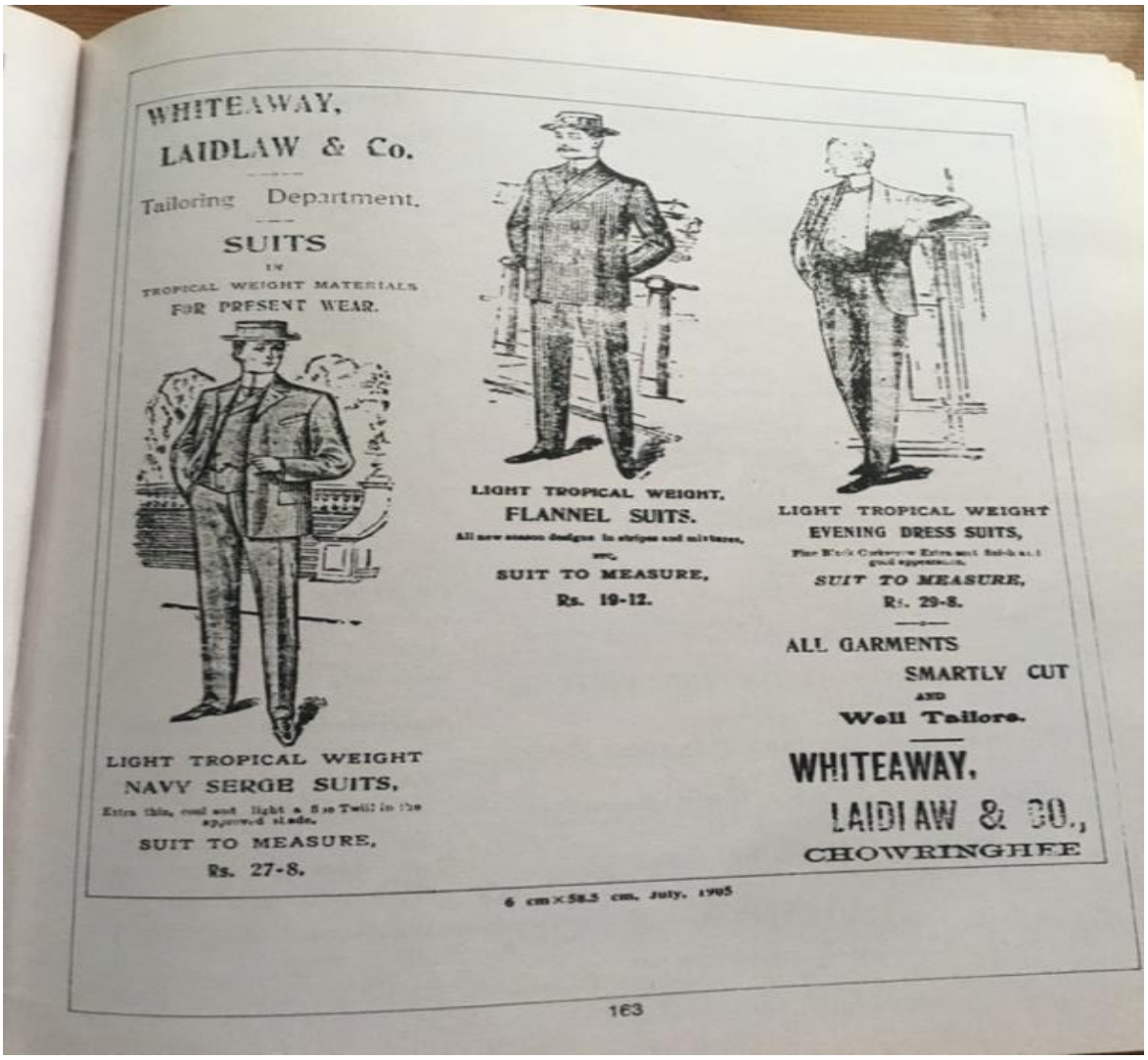
> 'just another way of saying that a knowledge of the science of anatomy must lie at the roots of all his work. He knows, for instance, that the seams of various garments follow certain curves. Why? Because the body demands that its contours shall be followed.'[60]

It is evident that menswear garment construction in the early decades of the twentieth century was invested in perfecting the right 'cut and fit' for an outfit. This involved, first and foremost, having a solid grasp of the human body, and then using well-honed tailoring techniques to manipulate fabrics and turn them into three-dimensional outfits, sewn to fit the wearer's body.

[60] Ibid, pp. 13-15.

Between 1880 and 1920, the demand for tailored outfits, and indeed civil and military uniforms, encouraged many British outfitting businesses such as Whiteaway Laidlaw and Co., to set up shop in Calcutta, often employing local tailors to supply the growing demand for Western clothing styles among the colonial middle classes (see Image 2.5).[61]

Image 2.5: An advertisement of men's 'suits' by Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co.



Source: *The Statesman*, July 1905

[61] Between 1890-1910, British expatriate firms in Calcutta such as Ranken and Co. and Whiteaway Laidlaw and Co. supplied military clothing and tailor-made garments for British and Indian elites. Christine Furedy, 'Development of Modern Elite Retailing in Calcutta, 1880-1920', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. XVI, No. 4 (1979), pp. 378-394.

As depicted in this advertisement from *The Statesman* in July 1905, not only were frock coats and 'smartly cut' tailored suits – 'light tropical weight navy serge suits', 'flannel suits', 'evening dress suits' – popular among British officials; British 'non-official' civilians, clergymen, as well as Indian officers in the civil services, took to wearing them.[62] They were also an important part of the British Indian military ensemble, albeit in modified form, which often infused both British and Indian stylistic elements.

In the interwar period, however, these British expatriate firms went out of business as Indian entrepreneurs (Marwaris and Dawoodi Bohras cloth merchants in the main) entered the outfitting market in Calcutta. Tailors benefitted from their patronage ties with these firms, especially Dawoodi Bohra outfitters in Esplanade, and their unique business practices. More of this in Chapter Five.

Perhaps the most important site which reinforced the daily performance of the 'pukka sahib' was the club. The emergence of a distinct 'clubland culture' consisting of a variety of gentleman's clubs for the elite, served to both divide people and to mobilize them on the basis of specific social and political identities.[63] The Bengal Club was the oldest among them. Established in 1827, and modelled on the London Oriental Club in British India, it was part of a recreation of urban elites in the condition of rapid social and economic change of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Calcutta. It was, as Mrinalini Sinha has noted, precisely this generative role of the clubs in fashioning a white British self, that has implicated the cultural politics of 'clubbability' in the enactment of 'whiteness' in colonial India.[64]

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[62] *The Statesman*, July 1905 in Ranabir Ray Choudhury, *Early Calcutta Advertisements: A Selection From The Statesman, 1875-1925* (Calcutta: The Statesman Commercial Press, 1992).
[63] Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2001), p. 504.
[64] Ibid.

However, for tailors, the proliferation of clubs in Calcutta offered new opportunities.

The clubs, through established protocols confined their membership to 'select people' – mainly elite, European bureaucrats, military officials and elite non-officials – i.e., those who were not in the employ of the government but were prosperous 'big men' in their own right. This approach to recruiting only those as members who could sustain a certain lifestyle ruled out 'poor whites', lower-class Europeans (British soldiers who were not of the officer class), and 'counter-jumpers' (those involved in technical occupations, or trade including shopkeepers.)[65]

Official clothing, a fitted full suit, was an important signifier of 'clubbability'.[66] The black suit took on additional resonance as the colour, not only of middle-class sobriety, but also of good governance and political legitimacy.[67] Anglo-Indian memoirs testify to the advantages of what Amiya Bagchi has called, 'clubland ties' between official, non-official European and elite native members of the clubs.[68]

Just as there were manuals advising *memsahibs* on how to live and dress in India, so too a genre of etiquette manuals emerged to teach Indians on how to comport themselves when mixing with British men. Indian gentlemen who were permitted to travel in the same carriage as a European had to 'dress respectably' and abstain from practices which might offend the sensibilities of the European, such as chewing betel, smoking a hookah or removing clothing from the upper part of the body.[69]

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[65] David Arnold, 'European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* Vol. 7, No. 2 (1979), pp. 104-207.
[66] Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability and the Colonial Public Sphere', pp. 489-521.
[67] E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p. 192.
[68] Charles Allen, *Plain Tales of the Raj*, pp. 101-102; Amiya Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 165-166.
[69] W.T. Webb, *English Etiquette for Indian Gentlemen* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1888. 5th ed.), pp. 83-84. RCS.

Here, too, 'Anglo-Indian attitudes' propelled many Indians who wished not to travel by 'coolie class', to turn their minds to clothes – and then to tailors.

Indian *Burra Sahibs*

The 1854 Bengal Resolution, which allowed 'native' gentlemen to appear before Englishmen wearing European suits and shoes, was extended to all of India in 1874. The Indian male elite, well-versed in British etiquette, began to refashion itself in the image of the sahib in a British suit – often more immaculate than that of the British official.[70]

After 1858, the project of modernizing India was driven forward by new recruits in the Indian Civil Service. Desk-bound official clerks were regimented by clock-time work (*chakri*), a strict dress-code, self-discipline, rules of administration, and magisterial duties limited to the space of the *cutcherry* (office or courthouse).[71]

Educational reforms and western education meant that the drive for English education, in particular, and Anglicisation in general, grew stronger among educated Bengalis by the turn of the century. The 'native gentleman', the *bhadralok*, was exemplified not only by his class, caste, and attitudes, but also by dress.[72]

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[70] E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p. 186.
[71] Sumit Sarkar, '*Kaliyuga, Chakri* and *Bhakti*: Ramakrishna and his Time', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 127, No. 29 (1992), pp. 1543-1566.
[72] Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 1-23; Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 169; Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: India and Bengal, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-16; Sumit Howladar, 'After Hegemony: The Bengali Middle Class', in Lancy Lobo and Jayesh Shah eds., *The Trajectory of India's Middle Class: Economy, Ethics and Etiquette* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 160-170; and Peter Mudford, *Birds of a different plumage*: *a study of British Indian Relations from Akbar to Curzon* (Collins, 1974), p. 111.

Describing men's attire in India in the late 1880s, B.V. Roy, a Bengali civil servant and member of the Calcutta Corporation wrote:

> '…a large busy wig at the ends, a long coat reaching below the knees, with large sleeves and cuffs, a finely embroidered vest, breeches, buckled tight at the knees. Long stockings, and shoes decorated with buckles. The men in that period were very partial to bright colours as well as a profusion of laces and embroideries in their dress.'[73]

By the late nineteenth century, there was a clear move away from such an ostentatious dress style – ornate embellished coats made of fine fabrics with embroidered brocades and colourful breeches – towards more sombre, formal wear with an emphasis on tailoring techniques.

The black suits, coats and frock-coats, buttoned waistcoats, buckskin breeches and trousers made with impeccable precision, grew popular among the colonial elite from the early 1900s. The British suit, however, was one item of apparel among a diverse range of Indian dress styles popular in fin-de-siecle Calcutta.

An account of dress in the 1901 Calcutta District Gazetteer describes the articles of clothing worn by the 'better classes of Hindus' and 'Muhammadans':

> 'The better classes of Hindus generally wear a cloth fastened round the loins, and falling to the knee (*dhuti*); over this a long cotton robe, fastened on the right shoulder (*chapkan*), with a wide scarf *(chadar*) tied around the waist, one end being thrown over the shoulder; as well as a pair of shoes or slippers. The wealthier among Muhammadans wear a pair of white or coloured cotton drawers (*paijama*) reaching to the ankle, a long tunic (*kurta*), or a cotton robe, which to distinguish him from the Hindu, he buttons on the left shoulder; a turban, and a pair of shoes and slippers…'[74]

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[73]B. V. Roy, *Old Calcutta Cameos* (Calcutta: Bankim Chandra Dipali Press, 1946). p. 34. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.32155, accessed on 12 December 2021.

[74] *Calcutta District Gazetteer, Statistics, 1901-1902* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1905), p. 125. https://archive.org/details/dli.bengal.10689.17268, accessed on 22 March 2022.

The ‘dhuti’, ‘chakpan’, ‘paijama’, ‘kurta’, ‘turban’, and ‘saris’ (I shall turn to the ‘sari’ below), were among the many outfits worn in the early decades of the twentieth century. These outfits, however, tended to be loose and often entailed draping unstitched cloth around the body, as in the case of the ‘dhuti’. The ‘chapkan’, on the other hand, required tailoring to make the garment fit the upper body of the wearer, with separate flared panels sewn onto the bodice.[75] In the subsequent years, the ‘chapkan’ evolved into an ‘achkan’ or a ‘*sherwani*’ that had a waist seam, fitted like a long English frock coat, with a stand-up collar, fastened with buttons instead of ties to secure the garment.[76]

These varied dress practices were reflective of the ‘middle-class lifestyles’ in early twentieth-century Calcutta. Sanjay Joshi has argued that the colonial ‘middle-class’ was not homogenous but ‘fractured’ in terms of its self-fashioning and its active identification with the forces of modernity. Middle-class identities retained a distinctly communal character because cultural markers of caste and communal difference remained important in the emerging class-based notions of identity.[77] Similar hierarchies fed into middle-class circuits in Bengal through involvement in civil service, educational institutions, and discourses on social reform.[78]

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[75] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, p. 170.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Sanjay Joshi, ‘Introduction’ in *Fractured Modernity: making of a middle class in colonial north India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-18.
[78] Economic status and Anglised education were the defining features of the ‘middling groups’ who identified as the ‘middle-class’. Some groups of this broad category included *bhadralok* professionals working in colonial institutions. B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Class: Their Growth in Modern Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). But, this category sometimes excluded, and at others included, small merchants and prosperous artisans, many of whom were Muslims. Whether they identified themselves as ‘middle class’, irrespective of their economic position, is a question yet to be fully answered. Prosperous Muslim merchants, for instance, have been in an economic sense, part of the ‘middle-class’ through trade and commerce. Muhammad Ali Jinnah came from a Dawoodi Bohra mercantile family, trading in cloth, that mediated between producers and European export firms. In, M. Reza Pirbhai, *Fatima Jinnah: Mother of the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). More on Dawoodi Bohras in Chapter Five.

As scholars have shown, young men from landed families proceeded to England to read for the Bar, or to study for the medical and other professions from the late nineteenth century.[79] Lord Curzon, in his budget speech in 1904, stated that appointments to public services in India must be governed by two principles: 'The appointment of persons in Government service was to be exceptional, and as a general rule young men who combined good family and social position with fair abilities and education …[in] enlisting the best native intelligence, the knowledge of the principles of government, the habits of mind, and the vigour of character, were essential.'[80]

The 'Indianisation of the government' in the late nineteenth century made way for new brown recruits to join the Indian Civil Services, the so-called 'steel frame' of the 'Anglo-Indian state'.[81] Dressing the part as a public servant of the imperial government, involved cultivating particular clothing habits that were deemed 'fit for public service'.[82] Indians holding various 'high' offices (whether political, civil or military) had to follow meticulous instructions on what to wear.

In May 1923, the Government of India Home Department stipulated in its 'Rules regarding the use of uniform for officers in civil employ' what all men (both Indian and British) in various services should wear.[83] However, on ceremonial occasions, Indian officers were permitted to wear a black 'chapkan with black or white pyjamas', paired with the 'national head dress'.[84] These rules were applicable to everyone who held a post:

[79] In 1863, Satyendranath Tagore became the first Indian to pass the ICS entrance examination.
[80] L.S.S. O'Malley, *The Indian Civil Service, 1601-1930* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1931), p. 225.
[81] Roland Hunt and John Harrison, *The District Officer in India, 1930-1947* (London: Scolar Press, 1980), p. 3.
[82] Ibid, p. 209.
[83] 'Uniform- Civil Uniforms- Rules and Regulations', Home Public Progs, n. 5-6 (Simla: Government of India, 1923).
[84] Ibid, p. 6.

> ‘Coat- Blue Cloth buttoned from Neck to Below waist and then falling loose to knees. Nine buttons up the front to back. Black silk lining
>
> Buttons- Gilt, Mounted. The Royal Arms (without supporters) surmounted by the imperial crown
>
> The collar and cuffs- of black velvet. Gentleman entitled to wear 2nd class uniform have an edging of purl embroidery on velvet collar and cuffs. Gentlemen entitled to wear 3rd class uniform have no embroidery on collar and cuffs
>
> Trousers- White
>
> Head Dress- Distinctive National Head Dress worn on ceremonial occasions [for Indian officers only]
>
> Socks- Black Silk
>
> Shoes- Black patent leather with gilt buckle, Rose, Shamrock and Thistle pattern’[85]

The emphasis on minute details in the making of the coat is striking: from the colour, fabric and style of the coat, the embroidery on the collar and cuffs, to the number of buttons depending on the officer’s class and rank. Such a coat, frock-style, buttoned from the neck to below the waistline with nine buttons, lined with black silk, could only be made by a tailor’s deft hands.

This ‘gentlemanly’ coat of a ‘high-ranked’ Indian ICS officer, existed alongside, other kinds of ‘Indian’ attire – ‘chapkans’, ‘achkans’, and ‘pyjamas’, to name a few. Alternating between ‘English-style’ and ‘Indian’ wardrobes created opportunities for tailors to make different styles of clothing to suit the varied preferences of the consumer.

[85] Ibid.

Tailors played a pivotal role in the sartorial performance of Indian civil servants as the *burra sahibs,* dressed in formal British wear, personifying the Victorian ideal of a gentleman.[86] With regard to British attitudes towards dress in the 1920s, Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, wrote:

> 'Perhaps the thing that most struck me for its utter absurdity was the matter of clothes. My husband had to order a new wardrobe, for he now had to wear a heavy flannel morning coat and striped trousers to all formal and official daytime occasions. He needed a close *imitation* of the British tweed suit, with padded shoulders, for everyday wear, a dinner jacket and black tie for informal parties, and tails and white tie with pumps for invitation to the government house, formal dinner parties, and other evening functions.'[87]

Dhanvanthi Rama Rau's protestations reveal that the sartorial repertoire of the brown Indian civil servant was no less exhaustive than that of his British counterpart. The Indian climate was not a good enough excuse for compromising the 'pukka sahib code'. Moreover, it was important for the Indian *burra sahib* to 'look like' the British officers to avoid humiliation, lest they be looked down upon with contempt.[88]

From the 1920s, and the Government of India Act of 1920, brown *burra sahibs* had a greater part in shaping policy, not least in the provinces. They, in turn, relied on '*keranis*', the clerical (scribal) groups, to keep the cogs of the 'paper state' turning.[89] The hierarchical, top-down bureaucratic nature of the Indian Civil Services (ICS) meant that the government relied on

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[86] Verity McInnis, *Women of Empire,* p. 21.
[87] Emphasis mine. Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, *An Inheritance: The Memoirs of Dhanvanthi Rama Rau* (London: Heinemann. 1978), p. 116.
[88] Ibid, p. 117.
[89] On the 'paper state', see Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012). With Gandhi's non-cooperation campaigns (1920-22) simmering, many *keranis* joined the nationalists, revolutionary terrorists and communist organisations, to escape the oppressive nine to five clock-time regime of 'chakri'. Sumit Sarkar, '*Kaliyuga, Chakri* and *Bhakti*: Ramakrishna and his Time', pp. 1543-1566.

information coming from different levels of the official hierarchy to ensure greater internal security.[90]

District officers spread out across 250 districts in British India were, in the main, British men. Many were successors to former Company officials who had written ethnographic compendiums or in the era of the Raj, ICS men, who were also gentlemen-scholars, worked on matters such as the 'castes and tribes' of India in the late nineteenth-century. But they were not all cut from the same cloth. Not all of them were Eton-Oxbridge graduates who ended up in India after passing the competitive civil service examinations. On arrival, some British officers would feel ill-at-ease upon receiving the deferential salutes from Indian bearers and sepoys, but they learned to accept it. They often experienced discrimination and snobbery *within* the official hierarchy.[91] Dressed in suits in hot weather, many struggled to keep up appearances. They mostly failed.[92]

To avoid racist slurs and derogatory remarks such as 'Western Oriental Gentlemen' (wog) from their white British colleagues, Indian ICS officers for their part, conformed to the 'pukka sahib code' with even more rigour.[93]

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[90] The 1857 Rebellion had provoked an 'information panic', and the district officer was to be one means to rectify that failure. Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) Chapters 5 and 9. And, Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993).

[91] Joya Chatterji, *Shadows at Noon* (forthcoming 2023). On two contrasting colonial figures in the ICS, F.L Brayne and Sir Malcolm Darling, see, Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes. The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993).

[92] Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest. The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World*, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2019), p. 58.

[93] Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, *An Inheritance*, p. 116.

Dressing like a 'sahib' was also a 'class imperative'. Indian officers in the civil services and in the garrisons used their clothing to define themselves as the socio-economic elite to 'reify their upper-class standing in the fluid social world…[and] to illustrate prosperity and gentility'.[94] Thus Rai Saheb Ashutosh Ghosh, an Indian civil servant in interwar Calcutta, kept a meticulous record of his monthly expenses. His account book for the year 1936 shows that he spent between 8-10 rupees in September, out of a monthly budget of 96 rupees, just on 'tailoring and repair'.[95]

Despite the 'Indianisation' policy, by the mid-1940s, the serving officers in the Indian Civil Service still only numbered around 1000.[96] But, the 'cadre of subordinates, from Deputy Collectors to lowly police constables, nearly all of them were Indian.'[97] The expansion of the bureaucracy in the early twentieth century brought the number of officials in the all-India services up to about 3,500, only a quarter of whom were actually employed in the Indian Civil Services. Within the services, an internal hierarchy ranged from the Indian Medical Service and the Indian Police to Education and Railways.[98]

By 1921, in Bengal alone over 47,000 worked in public administration, 67,000 in the army and 'the public force' (police).[99] A decade later, Bengal alone had almost 200,000 Indians employed in the allied services: 153,000 in the railways, 4,074 in irrigation services, 20,087 in post offices, and 3,397 in telegraph.[100] David Arnold estimated that between 200,000 to

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[94] Kevin Adams, *Class and Race in the Frontier Army: Military Life in the West, 1870-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), p. 160.
[95] Raisaheb Ashutosh Ghosh account books, 1936, Ashutosh Ghosh papers, Box 2, CSAS.
[96] David Potter, *India's Political Administrators, 1919-1983* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 21.
[97] Taylor Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 4.
[98] Edward Wakefield, *Past Imperative: My Life in India, 1927-1947* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 3.
[99] *The Census of India, 1931, Bengal and Sikkim*, Statement No. VIII-3, p. 261.
[100] *The Census of India, 1931, Bengal and Sikkim*, Subsidiary Table IV, p. 301.

300,000 police were working for the state in the 1930s and 1940s.[101] All these men needed uniforms to indicate their rank and place in the government.

But, keeping up the 'steel frame' façade was proving to be harder in the face of peasant and working-class uprisings, Non-Cooperation-Khilafat, and Civil Disobedience movement, in the 1920s and 1930s, which challenged the grip of the Raj of India.[102] Another formidable challenge came from the British Indian army.[103] Who dressed the 'martial' sepoys? The tailor, of course.

[101] David Arnold, 'Police Power and the Demise of British Rule in India, 1930-1947', in David M. Anderson and David Killingray eds., *Policing and Decolonisation: Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917-65* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 56-57; David Arnold, 'Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in Colonial India: The Madras Constabulary, 1859-1947', in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian history and society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 8-9.

[102] Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social conflict and political unrest 1875-1927* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), Chapter 4; Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Military: Bengal from Swadeshi to non-cooperation, c. 1905-22', in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984). *Poorbea* police constables in Bengal – poorly paid, equipped with only a *lathi* (bamboo stick) for self-defense, and not clothed as well as the Indian sepoys – were recruited from the same catchment area as the tailors and millhands of Calcutta. In the 1920s, at the peak of industrial workers' strike action, they too posed limits to the state's power by sending anonymous 'strike threats'. Partha Shil, 'Police labour and state-formation in Bengal, c.1860 - c.1950', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2016).

[103] David Omissi, *The Sepoys and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994); Kaushik Roy, *Brown Warriors of the Raj: recruitment and the mechanics of command in the sepoy army, 1859-1913* (Delhi: Manohar, 2008).

Indian *Sipahis*

Image 2.6 depicts a unit of the Bengal cavalry, 1st Bengal Lancers, in 1884. The soldiers appear to be dressed in what came to be known as the '*kurta*-uniform',[104] worn with a 'Sam Browne' belt (made of leather with a supporting strap that passes over the right shoulder), *cummerbund*, *puttees,* and the regimental *pagri* (turban).[105] Sylvia Hopkins has described the 'kurta-uniform' as a long 'frock-style' tunic with a thin gold braid and red piping running down on either side of the buttons in the front placket.[106] This appears to be a winter uniform because the collar and cuffs are made of astrakhan. The fitted sleeves of the kurta with epaulettes, pockets and buttons on the front placket with a straight long-cut, resembles an English frock coat. The length of the kurta, tightened with a *cummerbund*, is indicative of 'Indian' stylistic elements most noticeable in the north-western regions of India (for instance, among Pathans and Punjabis).

The image also depicts a regimental clerk wearing a 'chapkan' with a shawl.

[104] Sylvia Hopkins, 'A Compromise in Clothing: Uniform of the East India Company and Indian Armies, c. 1700-1947', in Alan J. Guy and Peter B. Boyden eds., *Soldiers of the Raj: The Indian Army 1600-1947* (Coventry: Clifford Press, 1997), pp. 128-132.
[105] Puttee, putty or puttee was a piece of cloth or bandage used as a ligature round the lower part of the leg in lieu of a gaiter. Henry Yule, *Hobson-Jobson: A glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, and of kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive.* New ed. edited by William Crooke, B.A. (London: J. Murray, 1903).
[106] Sylvia Hopkins, 'A Compromise in Clothing: Uniform of the East India Company and Indian Armies, c. 1700-1947', p. 130.

Image 2.6: A photograph of the 1st Bengal Lancers, 1884.



Source:
https://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyuniforms/indiancavalry/skinners1884.htm

In 1885, the 'Review Order of Dress' for British officers of the Bengal Cavalry was the appropriate 'British Army sealed pattern' – white pantaloons of 'jodhpur style', wide at the thigh and tight at the knee and ankle, and a white helmet. Overalls to be worn for dismounted duties. A regimental *pagri* (turban) wound around the helmet was permitted on ceremonial occasions. Indian troops wore a *kurta* and *lungi* tied around the waist.[107] They were expected

[107] Longhee or lungi, cloth wrapped one or twice around the hips and tucked in at the upper edge worn by Mohammedans. The Hindu style *dhoty* was cloth tucked between the legs. Henry Yule, *Hobson-Jobson: A glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, and of kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive.* New ed. edited by William Crooke, B.A. (London: J. Murray, 1903).

to tie their *pagris* 'in accordance with the National custom of wearers'. The netherwear was white 'paejamas'.[108] The *cummerbunds* were to be made of 'blue linen, 6 inches in breath…the cross to be of white linen.'[109]

Between 1902-1909, tailors made uniforms that not only distinguished different regimental sepoys from British soldiers, but also from their 'menial' follower rank staff.[110] In 1901, Henry Vaughan, an officer of the 7th Rajputs that joined forces to crush the Boxer rebellion, recalled that many foreigners 'used to mistake, or possibly pretended to mistake, the followers for Sepoys and thus got the idea that they were an untidy and unsoldierly lot'.[111] The sepoy, therefore, had to be distinguished from the 'coolie', and the tailor was best suited for facilitating that 'distinction' through uniforms.

[108] Bengal Army Dress Regulations, General Order of the Commander-in-Chief (GOCC), Code of Military Regulations, Bengal c.1885.
[109] Ibid.
[110] The Presidency armies were abolished in 1895, and replaced by four commands – Bengal, Bombay, Madras, and Punjab – of the 'Indian Army'. Between 1902-1909, Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief India, initiated major changes to prepare for war outside the subcontinent. The 130 infantry regiments including the local contingents were brought on the same footing and numerically arranged in a single sequence, as were the 39 cavalry regiments. The reorganisation of troops, after internal security needs had been met, formed a striking force of nine divisions and five cavalry brigades, organised as fighting formations with complete regimental staff. See, Brian Robson, 'The Organization and Command Structure of the Indian Army: From Its Origins to 1947', in Alan J. Guy and Peter B. Boyden eds., *Soldiers of the Raj: The Indian Army 1600-1947* (Coventry: Clifford Press, 1997), pp. 9-20.
[111] Lieutenant Colonel H.B. Vaughan, *St George and the Chinese Dragon* (Dartford, Kent: The Alexius Press, 2000. 1st ed. 1902), p. 117.

'Martial' sepoys had to be dressed in a manner that showcased the colonial fantasy of the 'oriental warrior'.[112] The *Manual of Physical Training for the Indian Army* in 1911 advised 'martial' soldiers to not wear tight clothing in order to hold the 'erect position'.[113]

Tailors had to make uniforms that not only personified the *esprit de corps* of regimental honour and duty,[114] but also projected and accentuated the warrior qualities of the 'martial' sepoys and officers.

Between 1900-1910, native tailors came in contact with British Sergeant Master tailors and cutters working for the regimental armies stationed in the garrisons in British India.[115] In time, copies of military uniforms could be found in the local bazaars at cheaper rates.[116] Indian musicians, entertainers, bandsmen in Calcutta dressed in old police and army hats, jackets, coats, buttons and pantaloons would become, over time, not an unfamiliar sight.[117] In 1896,

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[112] Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996). On the recruitment of 'martial races', Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The ethnohistory of the military labour market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); H.S. Bhatia, *Military History of British India, 1607-1947* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep publications, 2008), p. 19.
[113] *Manual of Physical Training for the Indian Army* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent , Government Printing India, 1911), p. 2.
[114] Verity McInnis, *Women of Empire,* pp. 20-21.
[115] Military proceedings, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. File No 295, 'British Army in India: Reorganisaton', (1901).
[116] Military proceedings, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. File No 764, 'Statement showing a difference in cost of making clothing for British cavalry—Tunics, Dragoon guides, Riding pantaloons, Cloth Trousers' (1911). British Library. In Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable*, 'fashun' conscious Bakha, the son of a sweeper working in the regimental barracks, provides a fascinating window into understanding how 'outcastes' were emulating, incorporating, and subverting western styles through local tailors. Anand writes, 'He [Bakha] had been told that they [Tommies] were sahibs, superior people. He had felt that to put on their clothes made one a sahib too. So he tried to copy them in everything…', Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001 ed.), p. 3.
[117] National Archives of India (NAI) Home (Public), A proceedings , July 1896. Nos 139-67. R.C.C Carr, Acting Secretary, Revenue Department, 5 December 1895.

W.H.H. Vincent, an official in the 24 Parganas district, was most disapproving of the '*foofoo* bandsmen' who paraded in Calcutta, 'dressed up like slovenly soldiers'.[118]

To forestall the circulation of counterfeit army uniforms, *The Army Regulations* in 1913 issued instructions on the 'Order of Dress' for commanding officers. They were:

> 'forbidden to introduce or to sanction any deviation from the sealed patterns of dress, clothing, equipment and badges…officers [were] permitted to purchase such articles of clothing, necessary materials suitable for their uniforms and equipment as may be available from Army Clothing and Ordnance Factories or regimental stores.'[119]

By 1913, the British Indian infantry officers followed the style of the uniform worn in the British Army. The Indian officer wore the same pattern of tunic as his British counterpart, with the addition of the *pagri*.

The following articles were universal for all Indian Infantry Regiments:[120]

> 'Great coat, Universal –
> Cloth, drab mixture, milled and water proofed; double breasted, to reach within a foot of the ground; stand and fall collar 5 inches deep (2 inch stand and 3 inch fall), fastening with two hooks and eyes; cloth tab and buttons; a 2¼ inch inverted expanding pleat down the centre of the back, from the collar to the waist terminating under the back strap; ordinary sleeves, loose turn back cuffs of single material, 6 inches deep; two large cross pockets with slightly curved flaps at the waist in front; vertical slit for sword jetted in left side 1½ inches above the pocket; a pocket in the left breast placed vertically between the second and third buttons; two rows of buttons down the front, four in each row, about 6½ inches apart the rows of 8 inches apart at the top and 4 inches at the bottom; two buttons to back slit with holes in a fly; a two inch cloth back strap sewn in side seams fastened with three holes and buttons; skirt to fasten with two tabs and

[118] NAI Home (Public) , A proceedings, July 1896, nos. 139-67. W.H.H. Vincent, Officiating Magistrate, 24 Parganas, 14 Nov. 1896.
[119] 'General Instructions and Orders of Dress', *Army Regulations, India. Volume VII, Dress*. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1913), p. 1.
[120] The Indian Infantry Regiments dressed in different colours: 'scarlet', 'khaki green' and 'drab' uniforms. *Army Regulations, India. Volume VII, Dress*. p. 3.

> buttons inside, and to run squarely all round; coat lined on shoulder and sleeve only; shoulder straps of same material as the garment, sewn on to the shoulder at base and fastened at the top by a small button; the top of the strap is triangular. Buttons and badges of rank in gilt metal. The coat is cut below the waist with spring to form 8 inch lap or 4 inches on from the centre line. The slit at the back should be of suitable length for riding.
>
> The collars of tunics, frock coats and jackets, will, unless otherwise stated, be cut square at the top in front, and fastened with two hooks and eyes; a silk tab sewn on inside. The height is not to exceed two inches.'[121]

Let us pause here for a moment to examine the style, shape, and purpose of this made-to-measure coat: it is a 'double-breasted' greatcoat made of a durable fabric, 'cloth, drab-mixture, milled and water-proofed'. What is the 'double-breasted' style trying to achieve? Perhaps an illusion of a broader figure. Double-breasted garments 'make people look larger than single-breasted…vertical lines, such as seams help to give an appearance of height to the figure, and horizontal ones breath.'[122]

The cut of the coat influences the style. A straight cut would propel the fabric to fall straight. A stand-up collar fastened to the coat with precise number of cloth buttons, and adjusted to the shoulders, neckline, sleeves with dart placements, would ensure that the garment sits comfortably on the shoulders. There is no margin for error. Incorrect distribution of width at waist could throw the coat out of gear. Cuts in the forepart often make a tight-fitting coat, but in this case, an extra allowance means that the coat had to have a comfortable fit, with a 'slit at the back' suitable for riding. The skirt had to be cut much fuller to 'run squarely all round' in order to provide sufficient room for walking. If disproportionate, then it would cause the back pleats, as well as those at the front, to gape open when the coat was worn.

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[121] Ibid.
[122] A.S. Bridgland, *The Modern Tailor and Outfitter*, p. 18.

The other elements that finish the garment – pockets, collar, cuffs – had to be attached in proportion to the main cut-out pieces. In this case, 'ordinary sleeves, loose turn back cuffs of single material…two large cross pockets with slightly curved flaps at the waist in front; vertical slit for sword jetted in left side 1½ inches above the pocket'.[123] Every part of the garment had to be made to serve a purpose (large, cross pockets with a vertical slit to fit a sword); other accoutrements also had to be made with absolute precision.

The amount of scaffolding needed to build a coat of this kind required deft handiwork. The cut had to be accurate, balanced, and proportionate to the body, attuned to achieve an 'erect' shape and form, stamped with authority and command.

Perhaps it was one of these greatcoats that Ramanand Tiwari (1909-1980), a Bihari police constable who later went on to become a socialist leader, used as a blanket to cover his body on a cold winter night in December 1936, as he waited for his British DSP *sahib* (Deputy Superintendent of Police) to arrive.[124] (It is not clear how he would have come to possess the greatcoat, given that he was a police constable with very meagre means, but as has been suggested, copies did make their way into the bazaar).

Further, going back to the Indian military dress:

> 'The rank of Indian officers is shown by metal badges worn on the shoulder straps as under:[125]
>
> *Risaldar Major and Subadar Major – Crown*

[123] Ibid.
[124]Transcript of an interview with Ramanand Tiwari by Haridev Sharma in July 1978 for the Oral History Project, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Cited and translated from Hindustani by Shil, 'Police Labour', pp. 113-114.
[125] *Army Regulations, India. Volume VII, Dress*. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1913), pp. 3-4.

> *Risaldar, Ressaidar, Subadar and Senior Sub Assistant Surgeon, 1st Class – Two stars*
> *Jemadar and Senior Sub Assistant Surgeon, 2nd Class – One star*
>
> Collar badges will be fixed with the centre of the badge 2 inches from the opening of the collar of the tunic or frock coat.'

The list of specifications was long indeed:

> 'Blouse—(Indian Officers in 2nd, 10th, 48th, 66th, 95th, 97th, 99th, and 109th Infantry)—
> Serge, scarlet, ordinary, length 40 inches to fit a man 5 feet 9 inches to 5 feet 10 inches varying 1½ inches to every 2 inches in height. Collar 1½ inches in depth of facing cloth, slightly rounded at front and fastened with one hook and eye with ½ inch gold lace round the ends and long the top; lined with scarlet Italian cloth. Shoulder straps of facing cloth with ½ inch gold lace all around except at base, fastening at neck with two small buttons. Cuffs of facing cloth 6½ inches deep at front and 2½ inches at side and back, ½ inch gold lace all round showing 1/8 inch of facing cloth. Opening in front 16½ inches in length made up 2½ inches wide, edged on both sides with ¼ inch of facing cloth, fastened in centre with three large buttons with a small hook and eye at top to fix to collar seam. Opening at side seam at bottom 6 inches in length. Kamarbands for wear with the blouse are of the colour of the regimental facing.
>
> Tunic—(except 2nd, 10th, 48th, 66th, 95th, 97th, 99th, and 109th Infantry)—
> Cloth scarlet No 1, with a piping of facing cloth ¼ inch wide down the left front and from bottom button to the bottom of tunic on the right front, slightly rounded at front and fastened with one hook and eye, with ½ inch gold lace round the ends and along the top; shoulder straps facing of facing cloth with ½ inch gold lace all round except at base; cuffs of facing cloth pointed 6½ inches deep in front and 2 ½ inches at side and back ½ inch gold lace all round showing 1/8 inch of facing cloth; eight large buttons down front, two at skirt behind, and two small buttons on shoulder straps. The sleeves and fronts are lined with white cotton; waist hook in seam on both sides. A pocket up and down inside left breast.'

Here too the attention to detail is striking. Precise mathematical calculations and proportionate measurements were needed to balance the size of chest and waist, length of the back and sleeves, 'to fit a man 5 feet 9 inches to 5 feet 10 inches varying 1½ inches to every 2 inches in

height'. The right amount of allowance in the arm-hole would ensure that the sleeves were not too tight when the arms were engaged in action. Piping and gold lacing on the tunic had to be done in accordance to the regimental colours, scarlet cloth in this case.

As for the 'Trousers and Pantaloons', the rule was:

> 'For mounted officers trousers or overalls should be cut straight, and from 1 ½ to 2 inches longer than ordinary trousers. They should be strapped firmly down to the boot and fit closely above the spurs. In mess dress, overalls are worn by all officers except Foot Guards.
>
> Pantaloons should be cut loose in the thigh and tight at the knee. Ample length from the hip to the knee is essential so that the wearer can have the necessary freedom in mounting and dismounting. They should have buckskin strapping at the knee, and, if made for hard wear, seat strapping also. Pantaloons should be furnished with a waist strap and buckle and with cross pockets.'[126]

Trousers and pantaloons had to be made with greater precision depending on whether it was made for 'hard wear', riding (mounting and dismounting), or seating. A straight cut 'strapped firmly down to the boot and fit closely above the spurs' provided an elongated length, accentuating an 'erect' posture.

Pantaloons had to be fabricated in a particular fashion – 'cut loose in the thigh and tight at the knee…ample length from the hip to the knee' was essential. They had to be furnished with a waist strap, buckle, and cross pockets. Such a flat, plain, three-dimensional, effect could only be attained through sophisticated tailoring and cutting techniques guided by a system proportionate to the human body.

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[126] *Army Regulations, India. Volume VII, Dress*. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1913), p. 4.

The rest of the ensemble – gloves, belts, caps, and boots – also required hand sewing:

> ‘Pagri—
> Regimental Pattern
>
> Forage Cap—
> Cloth, with three cloth welts, 4¼ inches total depth, diameter across the top 10 3/8 inches for a cap fitting 21 ¾ inches in circumference, the top to be 1/8 inch larger or smaller in diameter for every ¼ inch the cap may vary in size of head above or below the before mentioned standard. The sides to be made in four pieces, and to be 2 1/8 inches deep between the welts, a cloth band 1½ wide placed between the two lower welts. The cap set up on a band of stiff leather or other material, 1¾ inches deep, but not stiffed up in front.
>
> Frock Serge—
> Blue angola tartan, or serge. In regiments dressed in green and drab the frock will be the colour of the uniform.
>
> Gloves—
> Black leather for Indian Infantry regiments dressed in green; in drab, brown or drab leather.
>
> Sword Belt—
> The web sword belt will be worn under the tunic, and over the frock coat and kurta (under the sash or girdle) by all officers for whom it is the prescribed full dress belt. Infantry officers carrying colours wear the web sword belt over the tunic and under the sash.
>
> Boots—
> The height of the boot will vary according to the length of the leg. It should reach to about 4 inches from the top of the knee. The leg should be jacked sufficiently to prevent it sinking. A spur rest is fixed 2 inches above the edge of the heel to keep the spur horizontal…Ankle boots, black or brown, to be worn according to the colour of the uniform, with plain toe caps. Worn with putties or leggings, at the option of regiments, but all officers of a unit must be dressed alike.’

These accessories also had to be sewn to perfection. With the influx of different kinds of sewing machines for textiles and leather goods between 1880 and 1910, tailors were able to manipulate their skills to work not only in this demanding sector, but several others.

Image 2.7: A Photograph of the Officers of the Jodhpur Lancers, Linghem, France, 28 July 1915



Source: Photographer: H.D. Girdwood, Europeana Collections, 1914-1918. British Library

As is well known, in 1914, Indian soldiers were sent in large numbers to fight on European battlefields, where they encountered European societies for the first time. Ninety-thousand Indian soldiers and officers as well as fifty-thousand 'followers' and non-combatants were sent to France alone.[127] They, too, needed uniforms, and these were different from the ones they wore in India. They had to be.

[127] Statistics relating to Indian contribution to the Great War, IOR/L/MIL/7/18716. As Radhika Singha has shown, in the army, the recruitment of upper caste sepoys was premised on the recruitment of lower caste regimental followers for menial work that sepoys could not be asked to perform. Radhika Singha, 'Frontlines and Status Lines: Sepoy and "Menial" in the Great War, 1917-1920', in Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja eds., *The World in*

Indian officers at war wore khaki drill tunics with an upright collar, the lower garments being pantaloons and *puttees*. In certain regiments, as in the 3rd Cavalry, senior Indian officers wore the same khaki drill uniform as British officers, including the pith helmet. British officers wore khaki drill tunics with an open step-pattern collar. The headgear was the pith helmet and netherwear included 'jodhpur-type breeches' worn with field boots.[128]

By the interwar period, however, uniforms of British and Indian officers were far from similar. There were two very different styles of khaki drill tunics and khaki drill kurtas, with the British pattern service helmet and *pagris* tied in a variety of ways, together with breeches, pantaloons, *puttees*, gaiters, field boots and leggings. No regiment's dress could be regarded as the 'uniform' of the British Indian army.[129]

Tailors in this period were not just catering to the demand for western-style suits and military liveries, but also adapting to changing dress dispositions of a plethora of nationalist views. Between 1920 and 1940, master-tailor-authored vernacular tailoring manuals were in circulation. These contained cutting patterns for western suits as well as 'swadeshi' garments such as the '*sherwani*'. The paper patterns in these handbooks were similar to the ones used in British tailoring manuals published 1880-1920. I will return to vernacular tailoring handbooks in the next chapter.

By 1939, the Raj could not afford to pay for the elaborate and highly embellished uniforms that Indian troops wore in the Great War. 'Battle dress' meant something different in the Second

World Wars: Experiences, perceptions and perspectives from Africa and Asia (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 55-106.

[128] Sylvia Hopkins, 'A Compromise in Clothing', p. 133.

[129] Ibid.

World War. It consisted of a tapered 'blouse' made of serge and other light-weight fabrics, with trousers, short *puttees,* and boots.[130] The fact that the eastern front was in Bengal may have some part in explaining this sobriety of dress, but by no means all.

The debate about when, why, and to what extent, the Indian Army lost its 'martial' bias, is beyond the remit of this thesis. More important is the fact that by 1941, India had approximately 900,000 uniformed men in 'battledress', armed to fight in the war. By August 1945, this figure had risen to two-and-a-half million officers and men serving in 22 cavalry and armoured regiments, 268 battalions of infantry, 207 artillery batteries and 107 engineer companies.[131]

The sheer size of recruitment effort between 1939-1945 led to a shift in regional proportions. The geographical base of recruitment expanded to include 'non-martial' groups from eastern and central India.[132] Although a small number, Bengal provided 3.7 percent of wartime time supporting recruits, including artisans from 'depressed castes' – Lodhis, Kumhars, Mahars and Chamars. Some of these groups, the Mahars for instance, had served in the Great War and had been demobilized thereafter.[133]

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[130] While certain regiments retained the *pagris*, others such as the Gurkhas and Garhwalis, wore the slouch hat. But overall, the 'beret' replaced more traditional forms of headgear. By the Second World War, with the exception of some distinctive head-dresses worn on ceremonial occasions, the Indian-style dress ('kurta', 'pyjama', and 'lungi') no longer existed in the military parlance as far as uniforms were concerned. Ibid, p. 135.

[131] David Smurthwaite, 'The Indian Army in the Era of Two World Wars' in Alan J. Guy and Peter B. Boyden eds., *Soldiers of the Raj: The Indian Army 1600-1947* (Coventry: Clifford Press, 1997), p. 173.

[132] By November 1942, an estimated one million and a half soldiers had been recruited and many of these new recruits came from the 'untried classes'. See, Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'British Military Information Management Techniques and the South Asian Soldier: Eastern India during the Second World War', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 34, Issue 2 (2000), p. 490.

[133] Srinath Raghavan, 'Building the sinews of power: India in the Second World War', *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 42, No. 5 (2019), pp. 577-599.

With seventy-five percent of wartime production concentrated in Calcutta, the range and style of war clothing that tailors produced evolved between 1939-1944.[134] At the peak of the war, the ordnance factories and allied production units were 'cutting three hundred miles of cloth every day.'[135] As discussed in Chapter One, the embedded *darzi*-clusters along the river Hooghly had much to gain from the insatiable demand for commodities generated by the war economy.[136] Between 1940-1945, smaller 'contract units' were set up in Calcutta's industrial belt – wartime production spilled over to the Muslim *bustees* around the Hooghly delta. The forecast for the first six months of the war was a short list made up of sixteen key items including cotton jackets, shorts, trousers, pantaloons, overalls for mechanics, and mosquito nets. In 1939, the army adopted the cotton cellular shirt in lieu of the flannel shirt. Other major items of wartime production included khaki cotton cellular shirt of the 'tunic' type (1939), the battledress blouse made first of drill and then of cellular shirting (1943), and the 'Bush shirt' (1944).

By 1944, all forward troops were wearing battledress trousers of olive green or khaki drill. Headgear had also evolved between the two wars. At the outbreak of the Great War, 'Pith Hat' with a Serge F.S. Cap was worn by British troops whilst the Indian troops wore the traditional *pagri* and *kulla* (a conical shaped hard cap). By the end of the Second World War, all troops wore water-proof cotton 'General Service' cap of the 'beret' type, and for jungle warfare the Pith Hat and the *Pagri* was replaced by the jungle hat (a soft fisherman's hat).[137]

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[134] *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Indian War Economy*. Supply, Industry & Finance (Delhi: Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, India and Pakistan, 1957), p. 198.
[135] Ibid, p. 278.
[136] 'Recommendations of the Deputy Director General of Wartime Munitions Production on the working of the Supply Department and Civil Production', *Official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Indian War Economy*, pp. 169-172. Also see, Chapter One, pp. 47-48.
[137] Ibid, pp. 276-280.

Japan's conquest of Burma in 1942 brought the war to India's borders. War planning in Bengal was ramped up. Between January 1941 and October 1944, 1.3 million Indians joined the army and were stationed on the eastern front. Punjab, once again, provided half the fighting troops but new entrants joined the forces as well. By June 1942, even the infantry and cavalry included 'non-martial', 'untried', 'educated middle classes': a category used in military documents to denote urbanites who were permeating the India Army struggling to adapt to modern warfare on a new scale, in a new setting.[138]

Tailors also made uniforms for new recruits of the 'Civil Defense' forces. These entrants were often inexperienced civilians who constituted an adhoc, 'native' police force. The 'Air Raid Precaution' services (A.R.P.) was established to man the docks at Kidderpore and the industrial belt spanning both sides of the River Hooghly. The uniforms of these paramilitary forces consisted of khaki drill tunics fastened with four silver A.R.P. buttons, khaki slacks, shirts, socks and neckties, brown shoes and a steel helmet bearing the A.R.P. insignia.[139] Officers and all other members of the forces were to wear a 'navy blue brassard on which the prescribed Air Raid Precautions Service Badge shall remain imposed', and this would 'remain the property of the crown'.[140] These measures ensured that the A.R.P. attained an aspect of pseudo-military command of a militia operating with the authority of the colonial state.

The 'Civic Guards' needed uniforms too. They were reported to be acting as an effective 'special police' throughout Bengal, in order to maintain order amongst urban populations. They

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[138] *The Welfare Education Handbook: A Manual Designed for the Guidance of All Officers In The Conduct of Talks and Discussions On "Current Affairs",* Directorate of Welfare and Amenities, General Headquarters India, 1943. Chapter 1, L/MIL/17/5/2331, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library.
[139] A.R.P. Handbook, WBSA, Home Political, W-551/41.
[140] Ibid.

were to 'assist the regular police force in the protection of the civil population against the forces of crime and disorder'.[141] The non-monetary benefits of membership in the Civic Guards included new uniforms and a scheme of allowances to keep them 'active' during wartime.[142] The 'Home Guards' were organised under police supervision to operate in rural areas only. They would be required to wear an identifying badge 'indicating in Bengali letters the title of the organization'.[143] They would be armed with 'lathis' [canes], but initially received with no pecuniary reward for their services. However, it was proposed that 'if the Home Guards prove a success and establish themselves in the esteem and affection of the persons [in] whose services they are enrolled, there is no need to anticipate insurmountable difficulties in the way of providing them with uniforms and possibly other amenities…'[144] By the end of the war, the Home Guards in Bengal numbered close to 200,000.[145]

Tailors who lived in dense clusters in the 24 Parganas, Metiabruz and Kidderpore were, therefore, inundated with work. Bazaar tailors operating outside the state-sanctioned, contracted production units also benefitted from this increasing demand. Unauthorised copies of A.R.P. uniforms and badges were in circulation at this time. On finding young men wearing unauthorised A.R.P. armlets during an A.R.P. exercise in Sovabazar, an investigation was launched to look into the matter. It was found that at least seventeen firms in Calcutta were selling unauthorised A.R.P. brassards and badges to civilians. An order under the Defense of India Rules prohibited the manufacture or sale of unauthorised badges and a directive was

[141] WBSA, Home Confidential, W-477/42.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of the Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 36.

circulated stating that, 'it should be made very clear that anyone found in unauthorised possession of such articles shall be severely dealt with'.[146]

Tailors, as we have seen in the previous chapter, were a formidable force in the world wars. They produced different uniforms for different regimental troops, but also repurposed their skills to operate across sectors to meet the burgeoning demand for war commodities. They were instrumental in dressing soldiers as well as civilian paramilitary forces. The Indian Commissioned Officers before and during the Second World War became 'indistinguishable' from the old *Gora Sahibs* in the officers' mess, because of the tailor-moulded attire they dressed themselves in.[147]

But, the period between the late 1920s and early 1940s was also marked by sartorial eclecticism. In stark contrast to the tailor-made suits of the Indian *burra* sahibs (civil servants and army officers) and military uniforms of the Indian soldiers, were the *khadi*-clad swadeshi nationalists.

[146] WBSA, Home Confidential, W-477/42.
[147] Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars,* p. 16.

Swadeshi times

By 1905, 'economic swadeshi' had shed its sporadic character and developed into something like a real movement its political heartland, Bengal.[148] The promotion of swadeshi sales through exhibitions, shops, and cost-price hawking, fostered a reinvention and spread of indigenous crafts.[149] Technical education was harnessed by swadeshi firms for the development of new industries.

'Modern techniques' were incorporated, for instance, for the use of sewing machines in the textile and dressmaking industries. New indigenous trading shops came into the market 'overnight' in 1905 – the United Bengal Company of the Muslim swadeshi leader Guznavi in Bowbazar, Swadeshi Bazar on Cornwallis Street, Swadeshi Bastralay on Chitpur Road, all began to trade in swadeshi garments.[150] By 1908, many more Muslim swadeshi ventures were established. Muslim landed families – Abdul Sobhan of Bogra and A.H. Guznazi of Tangail – started the Bengal Hosiery Company in 1908 with start-up capital of Rs. 2 lakhs. It soon took over and expanded the old Kidderpore hosiery.[151]

While new swadeshi firms sprang up between 1905-1908, older and successful Muslim shops trading in foreign items, for instance, the Muslim boot-importers in the Chandni Chowk area in Calcutta, bore the brunt of the swadeshi boycott. One among them was Mahomed Zubbar-Abdul Karim, whose daily sale was in the region of a thousand rupees worth of imported goods. The impact of swadeshi goods was so hard-hitting that his sales dropped to Rs. 40-50 a day.

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[148] Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1994), p. 110.
[149] Ibid.
[150] *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 1 February 1906, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (South Asia microform project), henceforth, NMML.
[151] *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 16 January 1908; 6 February 1908; 4 December 1908.

Shaik Saboo and Shaik Jaboo, both foreign boot-traders in Chandi Chowk, also saw their sales plummet from Rs. 800-1000 to Rs. 100-50 in the year 1905.[152]

But, Annual Reports on the Maritime Trade of Bengal for the period 1900-1912, suggest that the overall impact of the wholesale boycott of English goods was mixed. The development of swadeshi industries in fact stimulated the import of foreign machinery, and even of certain varieties of cotton yarn. Moreover the report indicated that:

> 'the greatest increase was in cotton mill machinery, the value rising by nearly 6 lakhs…[there] were imports also of hand-power knitting machines that continued to arrive in considerable quantities.'

Ninety-seven percent of imports of machinery came from Britain.[153] Between 1900-1912, the import of Singer sewing machines manufactured in Kilbowie, Clydebank (near Glasgow), numbered at 324,064.[154]

Nevertheless, by the end of the Great war, as Manu Goswami has shown, India had emerged as a distinct 'national' market'.[155] The demand for 'nationalist commodities' in the late 1920s and 1930s created new opportunities for tailors. In this context, different forms of 'national

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[152] Fortnightly Report from Government of Bengal, 17 October 1905, Home Public Progs B, n.114-115. In the same year, Muslim merchants and zamindars of Chittagong started the Bengal Steam Navigation Company with Munshi Mahomed Kalamian as the managing director. The company ran a lucrative passenger service between Chittagong, Akyab and Rangoon despite stiff competition from two other foreign shipping lines. *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 11 March 1906 and 13 November 1906.

[153] *Annual Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1906-1907*, Annual Statement of the Seaborne Trade and Navigation of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1910-1911, Part I, No. 18-3. p. ix.

[154] 'The Annual Imports of Sewing Machines into India', in *Annual Statement of the Sea-Borne Trade and Navigation of British India with the British Empire and Foreign Countries* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1913).

[155] In 1917, the Government of India raised the duty on cotton imports from 3.5 to 7.5 %; in the 1920s it rose to 11%, and in the 1930s it stood at approximately 25% on all British piece goods (and 50% on foreign goods). See, Clive Dewey, 'The End of the Imperialism of Free Trade: The Eclipse of the Lancashire Lobby and the Concession of Fiscal Autonomy to India', in Clive Dewey and A.G. Hopkins eds., *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London: University of London Athlone Press, 1978), p. 36.

dress' began to emerge as *khadi* became a versatile tool with which nationalists could tailor swadeshi to suit different political circumstances.[156]

While much of the scholarship on *khadi* has focused on its reception and use in everyday life, of the producers who transformed this 'nationalist' fabric into a wearable 'national commodity' remain little known.[157] The manufacture, sale and consumption of 'nationalist commodities' created new networks which sometimes fed on older ones. Small producers benefitted from the demand for these commodities, which proved to have an enduring appeal. They carried multiple meanings, not just of taste, desire and aesthetic sensibilities, but also as long-lasting symbols of reverence in the life of a nation.[158]

Sumit Sarkar's brilliant illustration of rumours about the magical powers associated with Gandhi caps is a fitting example of how certain commodities carried 'symbolic value' that far outstripped the rather limited material gains artisans could be expected to derive from the revival of traditional crafts.[159]

Someswarprasad Chowdhury in *Nilkar Bidroha* (Indigo Rebellion) has written how at the height of the swadeshi movement against the Midnapur Zamindari Company, peasants started acknowledging this formidable Gandhi cap wearing ex-medical student as their 'guru, whose

[156] Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[157] Geneviève Zubrzycki ed., *National Matters: Materiality, Culture and Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), p. 2.
[158] Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[159] Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Cooperation, c. 1905-1922', in *Essays of a Lifetime: Reformers, Nationalists, Subalterns* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2018), pp. 416-474.

mantra is *dharmaghat* [strike]'.[160] The accidental death of the village headman who had opposed the movement, led to Someswarprasad's orders being considered to be the commands of 'Khoda or Ishwar.'[161] And by February 1922, Santals of Madarihat in Jalpaiguri had come to believe that they were immune from bullets as 'they were wearing Gandhi Maharaj's caps',[162] a recurrent feature in tribal and peasant uprisings in India whereby the Gandhi cap became the equivalent of an amulet having miraculous powers that could melt bullets and turn them into water.[163] Tailors benefitted from this trend of 'performative nationalism', the valorisation of a particular dress style, imbricated in the project of building a nation.[164]

As scholars have shown, the terrain of 'swadeshi fashion', however, was contentious and ambiguous in terms of its caste, class, and religious underpinnings.[165] Women often resisted swadeshi attire, finding it drab, uncomfortable, and undesirable, leading to selective adaptation. Many women did not want to wear white cloth, associated as it was with widowhood. Some chose to embroider or sew on borders, dye or tailor their *khadis* to beautify them.[166]

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[160] Someswarprasad Chowdhury, *Nilkar Bidroha* (Calcutta: Adhayan, 1972), p. 74. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.267093, accessed on 13 June 2022. The english translations of quotes used here are cited in Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Cooperation, c. 1905-1922', pp. 416-474.
[161] Ibid.
[162] *Mussalman*, 10 March, 1922 cited in Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Cooperation, c. 1905-1922', pp. 416-474.
[163] Ibid; Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-1922', in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies III: writings on South Asian history and society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); David Hardiman, *The coming of the Devi: Adivasi assertion in western India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), chapter 10.
[164] Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay, 'Between Elite Hysteria and Subaltern Carnivalesque: The Politics of Street Food in the City of Calcutta', *South Asia* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2004), pp. 37-50.
[165] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010. 1st edition in 1973); Charu Gupta, 'Fashioning Swadeshi: Clothing Women in Colonial North India', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XLVII, No. 42 (October 20, 2012), pp. 76-84.
[166] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London: C Hurst & Co., 1996), pp. 110-114.

By pairing blouses with saris, Dalit Christian women asserted their new status in the social hierarchy, and tied themselves to ideas of modernity, thereby subverting and modifying the exclusivist swadeshi sartorial project.[167]

While I do not have the evidence to show that tailors made these subversive projects of self-fashioning possible among Dalit Christian women, I conjecture that the garment itself – the blouse – was a sartorial invention emerging from the cross-fertilization of *memsahibs'* dress practices and the tailoring skills of the *darzi*.

By 1910, a small section of Calcutta's elite women took to wearing gowns, while experimenting with saris. Women who came in direct contact with European teachers, doctors and missionaries took to wearing tailored jackets, chemises and blouses.[168]

The blouse was an interesting garment, which both bridged and marked out the sartorial division between 'Western' and Indian clothing. Women of higher castes sought the respectability that came with donning a sewn bodice. The outcome was a collage of *deshiata* [indigeneity], retaining 'nationality' and 'cultural authenticity' and yet transgressing its bounds through the incorporation of western dress styles.[169] As Himani Bannerji has argued, clothing was central to organizing and expressing the consciousness of a significant strand of the 'westernized', reforming, middle class groups in Bengal.[170] The dress of the *bhadramahila*, a tailored blouse paired with a sari, modelled on the image of Victorian prudish femininity,

[167] Charu Gupta, 'Feminine, Criminal or Manly? Imaging Dalit Masculinities in Colonial North India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (2010), pp. 309-42.
[168] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 37.
[169] Himani Bannerji, 'Textile Prison: the Discourse on Shame (Lajja) in the Attire of the Gentlewoman (Bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal', *South Asia Research* Vol. 12, No.1 (May, 1993), pp. 27-45 (p. 40).
[170] Ibid.

was both reactive and submissive to colonial construction of appropriate womanhood.[171] However, the indirect offshoot of these sartorial innovation – a fusion of two cultural sensibilities that were not, in fact, opposed to one another – was an increased demand in stitched blouses among middle-class Hindu women in early twentieth century colonial Bengal. It created an entirely new market for tailors.

'Nationalist' and hybridised style of clothing in the late colonial period created huge opportunities for tailors who had become masters of flexible, adaptable, hybrid tailoring. They could not only appropriate the symbolism of *khadi,* but also define, contest, and negotiate the boundaries of what was deemed 'Indian' and 'western' clothing.

Hybrid dress practices: the demand for tailored suits and *sherwanis*, 1900-1947

There are many examples of how the colonial middle classes, despite their diverse and uncoordinated attempts to enforce the 'rule of colonial difference'[172] through dress, wore outfits that mixed elements from both European and Indian attire. The intermingling of sartorial preferences through the skilled handiwork of Indian tailors, introduced a great deal of hybridity in clothing and everyday wear. For instance, the paper patterns that Englishwomen brought with them to colonial settings served as a design template for fitted, collared blouses and petticoats worn under saris by genteel *bhadramahila* (middle-class Bengali women).[173] In

[171] Tanika Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugality and Nationalism in the Late Nineteenth Century in Bengal', in Jasodhara Bagchi ed., *Indian Women: Myth and Reality* (Sangam Books, 1997).
[172] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 11.
[173] Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 244-248.

similar vein, Englishwomen got dresses made by local tailors often using fabrics and design that were well suited to the 'hot interiors of the zenana'.[174]

At the elite end of the sartorial spectrum, Muslim theologians from rival schools of Islamic thought adopted different styles of headgear.[175] Modernizing Sunni Muslims, like Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, adopted European clothes and a Turkish headpiece; while Shia Muslims took to wearing European clothes and the four-pointed hat associated with Persian reformers. Anglicized Muslim elite men in the colonial professions often wore loose-fitted pyjamas with tunic 'kurtas' in private and English trousers and shirts in public.[176]

In the early decades of the twentieth-century, the moral panic over the 'modernization' of dress in India intensified, as new technologies in dressmaking as well as changing taste in clothing drew more consumers to adopt western outfits. Social and political tensions played out in contestations over clothing – moderating dress that looked appropriately 'Indian'. In this context, Emma Tarlo has challenged the monolithic narratives about *khadi* by emphasising the heterogeneity in dress practices and diverse meanings that people attached to their clothing choices in late colonial India.[177]

Although the colonial encounter involved a sharp disjuncture with existing craft practices, it also created new pathways for reformulating and inventing 'tradition'.[178] The outcome of this cross-fertilization – the indigenous appropriation of 'western-styles' – created a range of new

[174] Indrani Sen ed., *Memsahibs Writings: Colonial Narratives of Indian Women,* p. 37.
[175] Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915,* pp. 4-5.
[176] Christopher Bayly, 'The Origins of Swadeshi: Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930', in Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 307.
[177] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London: C Hurst & Co., 1996).
[178] Tapati Guha-Thakurta*, The making of a new 'Indian' art,* p. 3; and on 'inventing tradition', Eric Hobsbawn, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

aesthetic dress practices that emerged as 'Indian'. The *sherwani* was one such invention of the late-colonial period.

A reappraisal of the sartorial choices of the political elite shed light on the hybridity of dress styles in the late-colonial period. Nehru's public appearances in full-length *sherwanis* in the winter or a cotton *kurta* with a sleeveless jacket in the summer gained popularity in European circles as the quintessential (and stylish) 'Indian' mode of dress.[179] It too was a fashion choice. He also wore a 'Nehru cap' – a Congress cap – when in public, all through the year. In this choice, of course, lay a message whose meaning could not be clearer to all who met him. Elite Indians too adopted this style.

Jinnah was no less of a style icon. His penchant for tailored Savile Row suits stood in sharp contrast to the *khadi*-clad, kurta-pyjama that had become the rage among many (but not all) Indian nationalists.[180] He was most particular about his suits: 'irrespective of the weather he was always formally dressed…[Jinnah] unquestionably influenced the taste in clothes of the men of the twenties', noted his Aide-de-Camp, Mian Ata Rabbani. He preferred light colours and light grey suits. The *cut* and *fit* of his jackets and the distinctive razor-sharp crease and fall of his trousers were copied from Savile Row designs by his excellent Bombay tailor, Hamid Ali.[181]

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[179] The 'Nehru collar', as it came to be known, was famously adopted by the Beatles in the early 1960s. Michael A. Langkjaer, 'From Cool to Un-cool: Nehru and Mao Tunics in the Sixties and Post-Sixties West', in Marie-Louise Nosch, Zhao Feng, and Lotika Varadarajan eds., *Global Textile Encounters* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014).

[180] Fiona Anderson, 'Fashioning the Gentleman: A Study of Henry Poole and Co., Savile Row Tailors 1861-1900', *The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* Vol. 4, Issue 4 (2015), pp. 405-426.

[181] Mian Ata Rabbani, *I Was The Quaid's ADC* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 173. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, reinvented the loose shalwar kameez as a 'national dress' in Pakistan in the early 1970s. Nadeem Paracha, 'Dress, Faith and Edward Said: How The Kameez-Shalwar Became An "Islamic" Dress', *Naya Daur* (2019). https://nayadaur/2019/10/dress-faith-and-edward-said-how-the-kameez-shalwar-became-islamic-dress/ (accessed on 26 February 2021); Sheikh Mujib's signature style was a black sleeveless coat

Tailors were able to refashion their skills in order to cater to changing sartorial choices of the nationalist elite in the late colonial period. The *khadi* movement opened up a host of possibilities for tailors who could repackage their skills as 'swadeshi', encapsulating the essence of Indian civilization, whilst reinventing 'tradition' by melding the 'western' with the 'Indian'.[182]

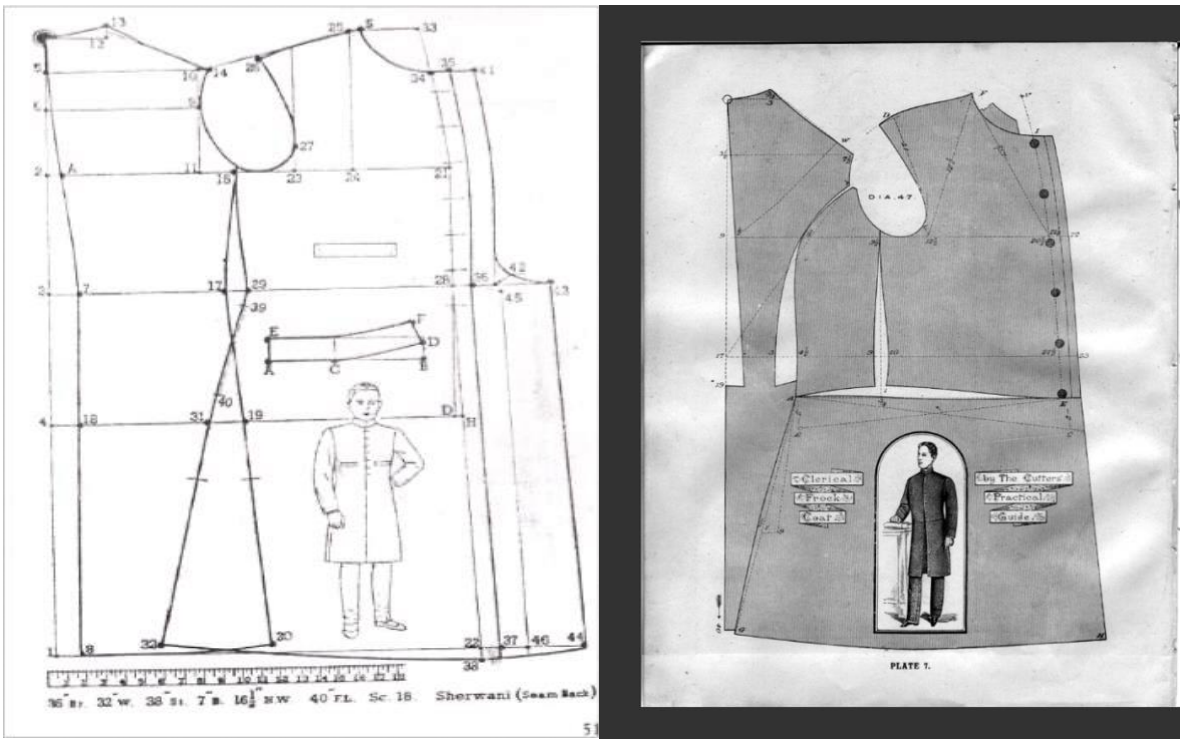
V.B. Juvekar's *Pocket Book of Cutting*, first published in 1941, was not unlike Vincent's 1890 pattern book for tailored menswear. Yet it was meant for a different purpose – clothing that was more aligned with 'Indian' swadeshi fashion.[183] For purposes of comparative analysis, we see in Image 2.8, a striking resemblance in the patterns etched out in the two cutting books, published at different moments in time and attuned to making two different kinds of garments – an English frockcoat as in Vincent's 1890 *Cutter's Practical Guide to Coat Fitting and Making*, and a *sherwani*, a hybrid version of the frockcoat, paired with a Nehru cap, in Juvekar's 1941 *Book of Cutting.*

worn over a white *punjabi*. Every Awami League leader and supporter at least had one set. Neamat Imam, *The Black Coat* (Reading: International Press, 2015), p. 59.

[182] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new 'Indian' art,* p. 120.

[183] V.B. Juvekar, *The Pocket Book of Cutting* (Bombay: Ball Printing Press, 1947. 3rd ed.), p. 51.

Image 2.8: Contrasting illustrations from V.B. Juvekar, *The Pocket Book of Cutting*, 1941 (left) and a cutting pattern for a 'Clerical Frock Coat', from W.D.F. Vincent, *The Cutters' Practical Guide to Coat Fitting & Making'*, 1890 (right)



Source: V.B. Juvekar, *The Pocket Book of Cutting*, 1941 (left) and W.D.F. Vincent, *The Cutters' Practical Guide to Coat Fitting & Making: Embracing Morning Frock & Dress Coats in All Their Varieties, Including Court, Naval, Police Uniforms, Clerical, Juvenile & Working Men's Bodycoats*, 1890 (right).

In his illustrated pocket manual on making a *sherwani*, Juvekar wrote:

> '*Sherwanis* have seven buttons although they can have five buttons if the wearer is short. Panditji [Nehru] preferred seven buttons on his sherwani… [There are] two different ways of tailoring a *sherwani*: it can be made by either cutting two back-pieces with a seam at the centre-back (like a coat), or with a single back. The cutting is done according to the body measurements of the wearer. Darts in the front of the garment are given for achieving a perfect fit.'
>
> '[It is] *cut* in English style. Knee-length. Fabric extensions, panels and gussets are not cut and attached to this garment.. Unlike the *angrakha* or *chapkan,* separate panels of fabric are not attached to this garment. The *sherwani* does not have a separate skirt with panels, but rather the fabric in the front panel is extended below the knee. Buttons are attached in the centre front placket, sleeve caps are fitted into the armhole. Similar to an

> English coat, the *sherwani* has an inner lining and a stand up collar.'[184]

I interpret Juvekar's pocket manual on making *sherwanis* as a material manifestation of a particular kind of 'swadeshi fashion' in the late colonial period. Juvekar's self-proclaimed familiarity with the dress dispositions of the 'tall men'[185] of the Indian nationalist elite, the reference to 'Panditji' in particular, is salient. It was a way of expressing allegiance to a set of ideas that came to circumscribe what it meant to be 'Indian' and dress as such. Here again, we see a fusion of techniques incorporating stylistic elements from both 'Western' and 'Indian' dress conventions. As discussed earlier, by the early decades of the twentieth century, precise cutting and tailoring techniques, with an emphasis on waist and dart seams, came to influence elite Indian menswear. Tailors adapted their skills to make what Ann Stoler has called, 'homespun creations' by incorporating British tailoring techniques (stand up collar, buttons sown onto a placket, trims, seams and darts for better fit) into Indian clothing design.[186] The *sherwani* was one such outfit.

A sculpted garment with three dimensions to its cut and pattern, the *sherwani* arguably morphed from an older version of the 'achkan' popular in the court of Hyderabad in late nineteenth century, and melded with the English-style frockcoat, to become India's 'national dress' in the late 1930s.[187] Juvekar's *Pocket Book of Cutting* attests to the popularity and the growing market demand for this outfit in the late colonial period.

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[184] Copious thanks to Toolika Gupta for drawing my attention to V.B. Juvekar's 1941 *Pocket Book of Cutting*.
[185] John Harriss and Stuart Corbridge, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 43.
[186] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (California: University of California Press, 2010), p. 24.
[187] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, p. 170. Also see, S.N. Dar, *Costumes of India and Pakistan* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1982. 2nd ed.); V. S. Sharma, *Studies in Indian Textiles: Collection in Salarjung Museum & State Museum* (Hyderabad: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 1998), p. 108.

But the *sherwani* was but one garment amongst many in the repertoire of clothing that came to recognised as 'Indian'. There were others that did not conform to this ideal.

In stark contrast to *khadi*-clad nationalists were elite Bengali 'militants' – Subhas Chandra Bose, Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty, Upendranath Dutta, and Barinder Kumar Ghosh, just to mention a few. Some had worked within Congress committees during the non-cooperation campaigns between 1920-1922, but after 1922, with local militant groups, they sought to undermine the government with force.[188]

Bose, who was expelled from Presidency College for protesting against a European teacher's conduct towards Indian students in 1916, went to England in 1919 to take the civil service exam, which he passed. Even though his father was a supporter of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, Bose declined to join the Indian Civil Service.[189] His view, however, is suggestive of the hybridity in dress dispositions in late colonial India:

> 'While I do not desire or advocate the abolition of the provincial dresses which have a charm of their own, I feel that alongside of them there should be a common dress which the Indian people should ordinarily wear both in India and abroad.'[190]

Bose's remark on the 'charm' of provincial dresses, despite his firm opinion on a 'common dress' for all Indians alludes to the sustained demand for hybridised clothing in the late colonial context, with some men retaining their preferences for *khadi* but also adopting Western styles

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[188] Durba Ghosh, 'Whither India? 1919 and the Aftermath of the First World War', *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 78, No. 2 (May 2019), pp. 389-397; Anwesha Roy, 'World War II and the Prospect of "Quit India" in Bengal: Perceptions, Rumours and Revolutionary Parties', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 44, No. 1 (2021), pp. 16-32.

[189] Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), chapter 2.

[190] Bose arguably wrote this article 'Some Problems of Nation building' (undated) on invitation by Meghnad Saha, founder of the journal, *Science and Culture*, while Bose was in Karlsbad, Germany in 1935. It was published in the first volume of the journal. Subhas Chandra Bose, 'Some Problems of Nation Building', *Science and Culture* Vol. 87, Nos. 1-2 (2021), p. 50. DOI: https://doi.org/10.36094/sc.v87.2021.

of tailored garments and accessories. A western style coat worn over a dhuti with shoes and a hat, was not uncommon in British India.[191] At the peak of the Second World War, Bose's adoption of military attire – khaki commander jacket with a shirt-collar and chest pockets on either sides, jodhpur-style pantaloons, and a distinctive Indian National Army (INA) 'side cap' with two buttons – represents the hybridity and dress-eclecticism in India in the late colonial period.

Nirad Chaudhuri provides a vivid caricature of the sartorial habits of wealthy Bengali men of Calcutta, in the late 1930s, who kept their European wardrobe separate from their Indian ones or mixed the two according to the social and political climate.

> 'So when the wealthy and conservatives Hindus of Calcutta put on European clothing either for business or fashion, they were scrupulous in putting them off before going into inner apartments, in fact even the inner courtyards, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the family deities and the women. Down to the thirties of this century, in the old families of Calcutta, I saw these clothes kept in a dressing room, furnished in the Western style and even with wardrobes made in England…those who were not rich enough to provide segregation of such high quality for their European clothes kept them in a small alcove in the men's apartments.'[192]

For Chaudhuri, the dress habits of the wealthy *bhadralok,* was part of the 'motley of Indian clothing'.[193] Chaudhuri belonged to *bhadralok* society. He wore European as well as Indian dress. But the sartorial secrecy also reveals a clothing dilemma in the 1930s-1940s, a crisis about how or whether to fashion oneself as 'appropriately Indian' or 'swadeshi', at least in public.

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[191] Karen Tranberg Hansen, 'Colonialism and Imperialism', in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* (London and New York: Berg, 2010).
[192] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Culture in a Vanity Bag* (New Delhi: Jaico, 2010), p. 72.
[193] Ibid; Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition,* p. 8.

Nonetheless, 'nationalist' clothing in the from the early 1920s to the early 1940s ranged from *dhutis*, kurtas paired with *pyjamas* or churidars, *sherwanis*, Gandhi caps, and *khadi saris*. Gandhi's western cloth burning campaigns generated a public upsurge in boycotting foreign items.[194] In this context, particular types of clothing came to be much sought after: *dhutis*, shirting, and long-cloths, coloured piece-goods, jeans, *chadars*, *khadi* and khaddar piece-goods, as indicated in Table 2.1.[195]

[194] Christopher Bayly, 'The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930', pp. 308-309.
[195] *Statistical Abstract for British India, 1936-37 to 1940-41*. Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1948), pp. 432-433.

Table 2.1: List of cotton piece-goods between 1936-1941

	1936-1937	1937-1938	1938-1939	1939-1940	1940-1941
Chadars (000lbs)	21,187	21,085	24,000	20,549	19,706
Dhutis (000lbs)	194,458	202,408	245,762	210,918	185,155
Drills and jeans (000lbs)	30,173	32,648	28,814	25,394	42,172
Cambrics and lawns (000lbs)	14,762	23,231	18,182	20,741	26,739
Shirtings and longcloth (000lbs)	157,828	184, 075	181,752	173,035	158,358
T-cloth, domestics and sheetings (000lbs)	38,377	39,504	40,228	42,690	42,692
Khadi, Dhugri, Khaddar (000lbs)	23,769	22,406	9,764	13,954	12,852
Coloured piece-goods	127,295	136,689	143,367	138,780	179, 183
Hosiery	5,477	6,881	6,962	7,087	7,578
Cotton goods mixed with silk and wool	5,593	7,551	6,651	8,400	11,975

Source: *Statistical Abstract for British India, 1936-37 to 1940-41*, 1948. Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics. Calcutta: Government of India Press, pp. 432-433

This table shows that among the varied dress preferences of consumers in the late-colonial period, the most coveted items of clothing were *dhutis*, coloured piece-goods, shirting and long-cloths. Between 1940-1941, the demand for shirtings and longcloth was significantly higher than *khadi* and khaddar piece-goods. Ready-made clothing existed alongside a growing market for made-to-measure garments. Many of these factory produced piece-goods (*dhutis*, for example) were often worn with shirts and tailored jackets. These created an expansive market for different kinds of clothing that required tailoring, from tailor-made western-style suits to *sherwanis* – and tailors soon learnt to 'bowl around the wicket' of styles and sartorial desires that their consumers preferred.

In this chapter, I use material culture in Calcutta from 1890 to 1947 as the lens through which to examine changing dress practices, and their influence on the demand for particular sartorial styles. The demand for tailor-made clothing had a considerable impact on the structure of the market for customised clothing that required specialised skills of 'cutting and fitting' cloth to the wearer's body. Tailors possessed these skills. They could turn a fabric into a fashionable, fitted garment, one of the most intimate and individualised objects of consumption.

As this chapter has shown, tailors moved from a phase of improvisation in the late nineteenth century – using paper patterns to make garments for *memsahibs* and *sahibs* in colonial India – to a phase of perfecting three-dimensional garment construction in the early decades of the twentieth century. Dressmaking for European and Indian households was one sector in the expansive market for tailored clothing. Another was the market for uniforms and military liveries for regimental troops as well as British and Indian bureaucrats, which burgeoned during the war years. Although this particular segment of the market was accessible to state-commissioned purveyors, the demand for tailored liveries opened up counterfeit channels of

production and exchange within the bazaar economy. By the 1930s, a market for bespoke ‘swadeshi’ garments created new opportunities for tailors – V.B. Juvekar’s cutting manual for *sherwanis* in a case in point. Sartorial splintering and hybridity in dress styles by the late colonial period generated new avenues for tailors who dexterously harnessed their skills to make a melange of outfits for an array of consumers. In this chapter, I have argued that it is this extensive knowledge of the changing material culture in Calcutta between 1890 and 1947, gained from serving a persistent and varied demand for tailored garments in a segmented market, that contributed to the tailor’s ‘immobility capital’.

Chapter Three

Skills: Caste Occupations, Artisan Authority, and Vernacular Tailoring Manuals

The cloths here being entirely for country use, and never having been exported to Europe, are made of different sizes, to adapt them to the dress of the natives; and the Hindus seldom use tailors, but wrap round their bodies the cloth, as it comes from the weaver.

Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras: Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, 1807.[1]

Introduction

Shafiqul Mollah received his first oral lesson in sewing from his father, a master tailor, at the age of nine. He was told to sit on the floor, cross-legged, with two needles placed side by side in front of him. He had to pick up one needle and bring it close to his right ear, and put it back in its place. He would then pick up the second needle and do the same, repeating the movement in identical sequence again and again, countless times. This, he said, was his first initiation into the craft of tailoring, learning by imitation the primary lesson in hand movement for sewing with a threaded needle. This hand-eye coordination required a great deal of patience, practice, and above all, skill.[2]

Sewing was the rite of passage to the far grander, and infinitely more complex, art of dressmaking. To master it required specialised skills to cut cloth in accordance with accurate, and geometric, proportions. Assembling the different cut-out parts and sewing them together to fit the body of a person, opened up a dress variation. The construction of cloth to clothe a particular body constituted the key element of the tailor's craft.

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[1] Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras: Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*. Vol. I (London: T. Cadell and W. Davis, 1807), p. 207.
[2] Shafiqul Mollah (master tailor). Personal Interview. 16 June 2019.

Skills are an important asset of the artisan/tailor's 'mobility capital'.[3] On the other hand, when skill was complemented by locational resources – such as regional patronage networks and 'mythic resources'; the knowledge of localised circuits of demand and material culture; and access to sewing machines – it generated *more* 'immobility capital'. For some Muslim tailors, these cumulative assets, in varying measure, acted as multipliers of their skill-sets – which lent itself to make a success of staying put after India's partition.

As we have seen in Chapters One and Two, the *darzi* was a ubiquitous figure in colonial India. *Darzis* continue to be an intimate part of our lives (if we wear tailored shirts, suits, or blouses), and yet we know very little about their histories and practices.[4] Some scholars have argued the tailoring profession lay in the margins of the colonial economy, which explains the dearth of knowledge on tailors in colonial and postcolonial histories.[5]

I propose, in contrast, two correctives to this argument. First, in the course of this chapter, I will show how the elusive presence of *darzis* in colonial sources has to do with the problem of disaggregation in census records. Not all tailors were *darzis*, but all *darzis* identified as Muslim tailors with different caste, sectarian, and regional affiliations. Colonial classificatory regimes of enumeration, however, would often lump together 'traditional occupations' under one category, thereby obfuscating differences across a variety of groups with different skills producing different wares.

[3] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations: "Mobility Capital" and Migration in the Bengal Delta 1947-2007', in *Partition's Legacies* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2019), pp. 271-272; 'On Being Stuck in the Bengal Delta: Immobility in the "Age of Migration"', in *Partition's Legacies*, pp. 401-442.
[4] A fleeting glimpse of this intimacy can be found in Mohammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. The tailor's awkwardness at taking Alice's body measurements for a blouse at a tailoring shop in Karachi, Pakistan. See, Mohammad Hanif, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (London: Vintage Books, 2012).
[5] Amanda Lanzillo and Arun Kumar, 'How Colonial History Contributed to the Socio-Economic Marginalisation of Indian Tailors', *The Wire*, 11 September 2021.

Second, the argument that tailors occupied a marginal position in the colonial economy risks reproducing the essentialism which reduces tailors into a single occupational category. There was a great deal of ambiguity about whether *darzis* represented an occupational group or a hereditary 'caste'. By the early twentieth century, we see that the term was used interchangeably for both Hindu and Muslim tailors, despite its explicit association with Mughal courts and princely patronage. How did this come about? What does this tell us about the skills associated with tailoring, and why did Muslim tailors tend to dominate the dressmaking trade?

In this chapter, I argue that the versatility of the tailor's skills of cutting and sewing enabled them to operate across industries. These intersectoral linkages between trades forged by the tailor's skilled handiwork were rendered invisible in colonial sources, and postcolonial histories of labour have missed them.

For their part, Muslim tailors provided a counter-narrative to colonial stereotypes by asserting their community histories and craft practices through vernacular tailoring manuals. Master-tailor authored manuals in Urdu established a distinctive craft authority in fortifying *biradari* (caste-group) solidarities. Bengali Muslim tailors, on the other hand, used bilingual, *'do-bashi'* 'improvement essays' to resist marginalisation within the wider Muslim 'community'. In reclassifying their skills and caste affiliations, Bengali Muslim tailors sought to dislodge and complicate the singular dominant narrative of a tailoring 'caste'.

Nevertheless despite competition, it was the 'property of skill',[6] that different tailoring groups strove to preserve, protect, and assert in order to access patrons and markets.

[6] John Rule, 'The property of skill in the period of manufacture', in Patrick Joyce ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 99-118.

Census enumeration, caste occupations, and the problem of disaggregation

One of the earliest visual representation of a *durzee* was produced by a traveler and artist, who lived in Calcutta between 1790 and 1803. Balthazar Solvyns is well known for his portraits of local 'tribes', occupational groups and 'castes'. In the ethnographic genre typical of his times, he depicted a 'Durzee' crouched on the ground working on a piece of cloth. This tailor found his way onto a list of 'Servants in a European Household in Calcutta'.[7]

In some colonial memoirs, the *darzi* is depicted as a 'mere copyist', lacking originality; someone who was bewildered by the frequent changes in European sartorial styles.[8] When asked to make a new dress by copying the design of an old garment, he would do so with unimaginative repetition, reproducing it in its entirety, patches, darns, and all.[9] As a 'house-servant', the *darzi* was described as being 'quiet, intelligent, and thrifty', but also lethargic and unreliable – the so called 'intimate enemies', who were 'catalogued' as such for an exhibition by John Lockwood Kipling in 1879.[10]

[7] François Balthazar Solvyns, *A Collection of Two Hundred and Fifty Coloured Etchings* (1799), Sec. II, No. 17. "A Durzee." p. 291. https://www.laits.utexas.edu/solvyns-project/solvynsonline/pages/Calcutta115.html. Accessed on 11 June 2022.
[8] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new "Indian" art,* pp. 18-19; Alfred Claude Brown, *The Ordinary Man's India*, p. 18; David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 35.
[9] Charles Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, p. 107.
[10] Susan Weber, 'Kipling and the Exhibitions Movement', in Julius Bryant and Susan Weber eds., *John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 205-280.

Image 3.1: A photograph of a *darzi* on a ceramic dessert plate with the caption, 'Till over the buttons he falls asleep and sews them on in a dream', 1879



Source: John Lockwood Kipling, '*nos ennemis intimes', ca.1879.* National Trust, Wimpole Estate, 205678.1. Cats. 169-79

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the British in India made concerted efforts to showcase India's 'traditional' crafts and craftsmanship through the ethnographic medium.[11] While Indian crafts were seen to offer an enormous wealth of design and dexterity, Indian artisans, on the other hand, were found to be lacking in technical aptitude. This narrative allowed colonial administrators to contrast supposed European technological advancement,

[11] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new "Indian" art,* p. 2.

with alleged Indian artisan stasis. It fostered the drive to preserve and develop India's 'traditional' arts and crafts under British tutelage.[12]

In colonial ethnographies, trade cards, photographic albums, and even on ceramic dessert plates (as shown in Image 3.1) the *darzi* was depicted as a 'timeless' relic of India's craft traditions – engaged in 'primitive' modes of production. These beliefs were predicated on not just ideas of the Indian tailor as resistant to technological change, but also rooted in classificatory regimes of colonial enumeration that categorised tailors as members of a marginal 'caste'.[13]

William Crooke (1848-1923), a British civil servant and a colonial ethnographer, for instance, dismissed Indian artisans as 'technologically anachronistic.'[14] A reference to tailors in his *North Indian Castes and Tribes* describes them in the following words: *Darji ka put jab tak jita tab tak sita* ('the tailor's brat will do nothing, but sew all his life long'). Crooke understood caste as being defined by occupation. He understood *darzis* to be a composite caste group which incorporated both Hindus and Muslims. In both cases, he saw tailors as marginal members of their religious communities claiming for instance that the majority of *darzis* in the United Provinces 'profess to be Sunni Muslims…but still cling to many Hindu usages'.[15] In similar vein, he thought of Hindu *darzis* as a liminal group for their attachment to Muslim *sufi* traditions.

[12] Ibid, p. 58.
[13] David Arnold, 'Technology and Subalternity', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 37, Issue 2 (2003), pp. 287-326.
[14] William Crooke, *Natives of Northern India* (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), p. 149. Royal Commonwealth Society Collections (RCS), University Library, Cambridge.
[15] Ibid.

While many *darzis*, especially in North and North-west India, were Muslims, other groups dominated the profession in different regions. For instance, Bombay had Goan (Portuguese) tailors, and Calcutta tailors were, in the proportion four out of five, Muslims.[16]

This characteristic of the trade was perhaps because tailoring was not an occupation *per se,* identifiable with a singular caste or community. This was unlike other caste-specific groups such as, say, weavers and metalworkers.[17] It was more accessible to apprentices who migrated to colonial cities to learn the craft. Tailoring was a route to both spatial and occupational mobility.[18] Colonial technologies of rule sought to fix caste rank through maps and census surveys in an attempt to homogenise occupations by caste, and sedentarise the itinerant artisan. This failed to recognise the often pre-existing avenues of subaltern mobility, change, and exchange.[19] These were illegible to the Raj and its census enumerators.

One consequence of this myopia is that it created stumbling blocks for histories of Muslim tailors. The tailors' skills are opaque – barely there – in conventional archives. The blurriness of Muslim tailors in colonial records such as censuses is a consequence, this chapter argues,

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[16] Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras: Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar,* Vol. 1 (London: T. Cadell and W. Davis, 1807). RCS.
[17] Prasannan Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[18] Rohinton Mistry's poignant exposition of skill and caste mobility in *A Fine Balance* comes to mind. Set in Bombay at the time of Indira Gandhi's infamous State of Emergency (1975-77), the novel explores the role of caste through the experiences of two of the central characters, the Chamar tanners-turned-tailors Ishvar and Omprakash. To escape caste oppression in their village, they move to Bombay and become apprentices to a Muslim master tailor named Ashraf. The novel weaves together different subject-positions on a social spectrum ranging from Muslim rent-collectors and tailors, Parsi families, wily vagrants, slumlords, profiteering police, and radical students, among whom Ishvar and Omprakash find themselves. Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (London: faber and faber, 1996).
[19] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations', in *Partition's Legacies*, p. 271; Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook, 'Introduction', in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-9.

with the problem of disaggregation and the reclassification of skilled artisan groups with caste and occupational categories.

For instance, in early Census records (1911-1941), tailors are lumped together under one category of Industries: 'Industries of Dress and The Toilet: tailors, milliners, dressmakers and darners'. In Bengal District Gazetteers from an earlier period, *darzis* (Muslim tailors) represent an 'artizan caste' [sic].[20] In early twentieth-century accounts of Anglo-Indian life in colonial Calcutta, examined in the Chapter Two, a *darzi* was also a 'servant in a European household'.

The problem of disaggregation is most evident in census figures on urban occupational groups. As shown in the table below, the 1911 Census recorded tailors under the category of 'industries of dress and the toilet'.[21] However, they are lumped together with other categories of textile workers, i.e., milliners, dressmakers, darners, embroiderers on linen.

[20] W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Districts of Midnapur, Hugli, and Howrah,* Vol. 3 (London: Trubner & Co., 1876), p. 36.
[21] 'Industries of Dress and The Toilet', L.S.S. O'Malley, *Census of India, 1911*. Bengal. Volume V. Part II (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913).

Table No. 3.1: 'Industries of Dress and The Toilet', Census of India, 1911. Bengal

Occupation	Total Workers and dependents	Actual Workers		Partial agriculturalists		Dependents (both sexes)
		Males	Females	Males	Females	
	514,427	177,677	32,461	27,750	905	304,299
Hat, cap and turban makers	1,433	705	56	10	-	672
Tailors, milliners, dressmakers, darners, embroiderers on linen	1,14,465	37,241	3,429	1,708	23	73,795
Shoe, boot and sandal makers	61,195	28,023	665	1,242	9	32,507
Other industries pertaining to dress, gloves, socks, gaiters, belts, buttons, umbrellas, canes, etc.	5,791	2,235	123	75	-	3,433
Washing, cleaning and dyeing	122,578	39,488	19,980	6,703	647	63,110
Barbers, hairdressers and wig makers	208, 862	69,922	8,174	18,011	226	130,766
Other industries connected with the toilet (tattooers, shampooers, bath houses, etc.)	113	63	34	1	-	16

Source: L.S.S. O'Malley, Census of India, 1911. Bengal. Volume V. Part II. 1913. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot

The figures in this table do not capture the work that tailors did in *karkhanas* (workshops) that used kin and caste-based labour to produce goods for the local markets in the 'informal economy', adapting to market fluctuations.[22] Douglas Haynes' work has underlined the heterogeneity of the production process involved in the development of a distinctive regional capitalism in western India. The social organisation of the 'artisan economy' involved artisan households, *karkhanadars* or 'weaver capitalists', hired wage-labour tied to the *kharkanas*

[22] Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism*, pp. 265-302.

(workshops), traders, and merchants. *Karkhanas*, as Haynes has shown, were essentially firms that engaged in the small-scale accumulation of capital. They promoted the highly-valued forms of specialised goods for market niches, not supplied by mills or by other handloom weavers.[23]

Master tailors who ran their own family-based, small-scale workshops, providing outfitting services to patrons, relied on the 'handmade value' of their items.[24] This niche market drew upon a particular aesthetic of 'authenticity' in creating a demand for bespoke, tailor-made garments.[25]

In the 'formal' workplace setting, as the figures from the 1911 census suggest, out of the total workforce (1,14,465) employed in the lumped category of 'industries and toilet', there were a far greater number of male tailors (37,241) than female tailors (3,429). Unlike in many other countries, India women did not enter the new factories, mills and mines in large numbers.[26] Whatever limited share they did have in the so-called modern industrial sector reduced drastically from the 1920s and 1930s, with rationalisation and 'organisation' of the working class.[27] With agricultural activities shrinking due to structural and economic upheavals, women

[23] Ibid, p. 243.
[24] Thomas Chambers' anthropological study of Muslim woodworkers and engravers in Saharanpur draws out the 'handmade' value of products and artisans playing on an aesthetic that commodified 'authenticity'. See, Thomas Chambers, *Networks, Labour and Migration Among Indian Muslim Artisans* (London: University College London Press, 2020), p. 53.
[25] On becoming an 'asli-karigar' and production of 'authenticity' among old Delhi's Muslim artisans, see, Mira Mohsini, 'Crafting Muslim artisans: agency and exclusion in India's urban crafts communities', in Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Ory DeNicola eds., *Critical Craft: Technology, Globalization and Capitalism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 239-258.
[26] De-industrialisation had adverse implications for women. Cotton spinning, one of the crafts destroyed by the 1830s, had been their most significant non-agricultural activity. Over time, women's work in processing food and forest products too experienced a sharp fall. Nirmala Banerjee, *Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario* (New Delhi: Sage publications, 1990).
[27] Samita Sen, *Domestic Days. Women, Work and Politics in Contemporary Kolkata* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016) p. 19.

migrated to the city to join the burgeoning informal service sector. By the turn of the nineteenth century, women were more visible in particular areas of work. They could be found in growing numbers in domestic service and in prostitution, with occasional overlaps between these occupations.[28]

In 1911, as Samita Sen has shown, domestic servants accounted for 12 percent of all workers in Calcutta. Between 1921 and 1931, absolute numbers of domestic workers doubled in colonial Bengal, with a steady rise in numbers over course of the twentieth century. The 'feminisation' of domestic service may have been the consequence of the decline of women workers in industries and mines.[29] The ban on women working in mines came into effect in 1928-29, and a large-scale retrenchment in 1930-1931, caused by the Great Depression, further affected women in these workplaces.[30]

However, as the table indicates, the 'dependents' of both sexes (73,795) significantly outnumbered the male workforce in that category. Who were these 'dependents'? This is a pertinent question because it brings to bear the role of numbers in the colonial imagination, and how this obscured the gendered nature of work. The purpose of these numbers, as Appadurai puts it, was to serve as 'a shorthand for capturing and appropriating otherwise recalcitrant features of the social and human landscape of India'.[31]

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[28] Ibid, p. 23
[29] Samita Sen, 'Gender and Class: Women in Indian Industry, 1890-1990', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 42, Issue 1 (2008), pp. 75-116; Swapna Banerjee, *Men, Women and Domestics: Articulating Middle-Class Identity in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 35.
[30] Samita Sen, *Domestic Days*, p. 19.
[31] Arjun Appadurai, 'Numbers in the Colonial Imagination', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), p. 30.

Attaching 'quantitative values'[32] to 'dependents', a large pool of unmarked human bodies, women and children in the main, enabled a kind of enumeration that categorised varied social groups under these official labels. It unyoked them from the fluid and diverse practices in which they engaged. The category of 'dependents', moreover, failed to capture the dependence on women's and children's labour within and beyond the factory floor. In family-run artisan households and workshops, women's work as 'producers' and 'reproducers' contributed towards the accumulation of capital and assets by male artisans.[33] And yet, their labour practices at home, in factories, in informal workshops and indeed in census figures, remained as elusive as those of the male tailors – if not even more so.

In Metiabruz, the bulk of the manufacturing relies upon a complex structure of labour segmentation: *ostagirs* (master tailors or unit owners) often employed as many as four or five apprentice-workers to run an average of the same number of sewing machines in the verandah of their households. *Ostagirs* procured orders as well as raw materials from different sources. These sources include Marwari whole-sale cloth merchants of Burrabazaar, who controlled the main output of garment production, subcontractors who outsourced government orders for uniforms for the police force, other governmental departments, and the Calcutta Port Trust.[34] They, in turn, distributed the work between a range of workers in the tailoring unit, both kin and non-kin: master-cutters, stitchers, button hole makers, trimmers, and ironers. While in New Market, in the North of the city, a pair of trousers would be made-to-measure by a single tailor in its entirety,[35] in Metiabruz-Garden Reach a dense network of labour relations undergirded the informal work arrangements geared towards ready-made dressmaking. Women and

[32] Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire. New Cambridge History of India II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 88-89.
[33] Maria Mies, *The Lace Makers of Nasrapur. India Housewives Produce for the World Market* (Melbourne: Spinifex, 2012).
[34] Shafiqul Mollah (master tailor). Personal Interview. 17 June 2019.
[35] Akbar Hussain (master tailor). Personal Interview. 14 June 2019.

children keep the cogs of these household production units going. They did the laborious work. They were often unpaid. They had no legal rights which protected workers in the formal factory sector. And they had to do what the patriarchs told them to do, in most cases.[36]

The other problem of disaggregation is with the nature of the skill itself. The versatility of their cutting and sewing skills predisposed tailors to work in different sectors of production – from furniture-making (upholsterers and tent-makers)[37], to in food packaging industries (sewing gunny and cloth bags for food transportation)[38]. In the tailor-testimonials discussed in Chapter One, tailors manipulated their skills to work across service and manufacturing sectors by taking advantage of small technologies such as sewing machines. A tailor could at once be a barber and a shoemaker.[39] He could be found in a jute or rice mill as well as a furniture shop. He could afford to not be, and never was, only a dressmaker.

A 1953 report on the organisation of labour at the Calcutta docks listed the names of Muslim tailors from Metiabruz who were employed by the Calcutta Port Trust to sew and repair ship sails.[40]

[36] Bela Bandhyopadhyay, 'Women Workers in the Informal Sector of Industry in Calcutta', *Journal of All India Women's Association* (September 1979); on the impact of debates on the 'informal sector' in India in the 1950s, 1970s, 1990s and 2000s, see Samita Sen, *Domestic Days: Work, Women, and Politics in Contemporary Kolkata*, pp. 1-15.
[37] V.K.R.V. Rao, *An Essay on India's National Income, 1925-1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1939), p. 113.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Testimonials Jan Mohammed & Sons: Master Barbers & Tailors, 2nd Battalion. The Green Howards. 1948. J.B. Shears & Sons, Chelsea. Military proceedings, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. India Office Records, British Library.
[40] *Establishment Schedule for Labour Organization at the Docks*, 1953. File No. 2881/1205/VI. Calcutta Port Commissioners.

One could even find them engaged in metal work: as embroiderers working with gold or silver thread.[41] C. A. Bayly has shown how the use of gold and silver thread on fabrics was a customary practice among Muslims. Gold and silver embroidered clothes were used as dowries, endowed with symbolic value and passed on between generations. For Muslim artisans, gold and silver *zari* had a special value because of its capacity to absorb light. This divine light, *nur*, was transferred onto the *khilat* (embroidered dress or shawl), by the skilled hands of a *darzi*.[42] The demand for this sort of specialized skilled workmanship perhaps explains the significant number of Muslim tailors in *zari* work.[43]

The tailor could also, as seen in Chapter Two, be a servant in a European household as this excerpt from 1882 indicates:

> 'The tailor is just as much your servant as your cook; you pay him so much a month; he feeds himself, as all native servants do, arrives about nine o'clock and sits patiently working in your verandah till about six o'clock, or later if necessary, only appearing every now and then in the drawing room to ask for more thread, or needles or buttons or tape'.[44]

[41] J.H. Rivett Carnac, *On Some Specimens of Indian Metal Work, Journal of Indian Art and Industry, 1886-1916*. Oct 1902, 9. pp. 70-80.
[42] C.A. Bayly, 'The origins of swadeshi (home industry): cloth and Indian society, 1700-1930' in Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 291.
[43] Zari-work is intricate and labour-intensive, much of which is done by women at home. Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta, 'Nation and Its 'Other' Women: Muslim Subjectivity and Gendered Agency in Delhi', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 44, Issue 2 (2021), pp. 380-397; Nirmala Banerjee, *Unorganised Women Workers: The Calcutta Experience* (Calcutta: Sangam, 1982); Anita Kelles-Viitanen, *Invisible Hands. Women in Home Based Production* (Delhi: Sage, 1987); Clare Wilkinson-Weber, *Embroidering Lives: Women's Work and Skill in the Lucknow Embroidery Industry* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999). Also, Kunal Basu's novel, *Kalkatta*, opens with Jamshed Alam at Medina Tailors where he worked as a cloth cutter. At home, Jamshed's wife, Jahanara, contributed to the household income by doing zari work in return for a paltry sum: 'only her fingers worked feverishly to make up her embroidery length every week, for which she'd be paid "less than a donkey carting a load of dung"'. Kunal Basu, *Kalkatta* (New Delhi: Picador India, 2005), p. 30.
[44] *Indian Outfits & Establishments: Practical Guide For Persons About to Reside in India; Detailing the Articles Which Should Be Taken Out And The Requirements of Home Life And Management There*. By An Anglo-Indian. London: L. Upcott Gill, 1882. Bodleian Library. p. 13.

Colonial categories of enumeration could not 'see' the tailors' fluidity and diversity in workplaces and work practices in the urban economy.[45]

Numbers in colonial censuses also fail to capture the extent to which the structural, economic and social changes wrought by the two wars and Depression-induced rural poverty impacted upon work practices. These included occupational differentiation, the weakening of caste-based obligations such as *begar* (customary unpaid labour for local elites), and rural to urban migration. Moreover, change in occupation was not a single event in the lifecycle of the working individual, but a continuous process requiring creative adaptability and of flexibility. Migration was a part of that process, facilitating experience, opportunities for skilling-up and spatial know-how.

Despite these economic shifts and internal variations in work cycles, colonial officials solidified caste occupations through ethnographic data that appeared in the form of all-India census reports and district gazetteers. As David Ludden has shown, from the 1820s caste lists began to rely on *varnas* to rank *jatis* while collapsing these distinct concepts under the term 'caste'.[46] Colonial census-takers relied on rigid interpretations of caste that allowed no room for fluidity. These imperial projections of neatly defined 'castes' and occupational groups glossed over, what Sudipta Kaviraj has called, 'fuzzy communities' and their differing social and economic practices.[47] *Darzis*, I argue were changeable, adaptable, fluid, and perhaps even 'fuzzy'.

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[45] Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[46] David Ludden, 'Orientalist empiricism: transformation of colonial knowledge', in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 261.
[47] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey eds., *Subaltern Studies VII, Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

It is, however, possible, to find glimpses of the *darzis*, and his 'absent-presence'[48] in the colonial archive. Hereditary occupations, far from being a singular category, were part of a fluid social layer of artists and artisans who continually migrated, adapted, shifted and adopted forms of identification that extended beyond the fixed boundaries of a 'caste'. Scholars reexamining the censuses have found many cases of flexibility in caste designation and self-identification. Joseph Schwartzenberg identified what he termed, 'category climbing', among agricultural people.[49] Frank Conlon wrote of the 'contentious representations' of caste categories created by 'upwardly mobile castes seeking to raise their rank.'[50]

It was not as though the reification of skills and 'caste climbing' by artisans themselves was unknown to colonial enumerators. In the 1921 Census, L.S.S. O'Malley reported that the designation 'Sheikh' had been adopted by members of various functional groups and also by new converts desirous of *hiding* [emphasis mine] their original status: 'a well-to-do of a functional group, say a Jolaha, will discard the designation Jolaha and call himself a Sheikh assuming a more respectable name. This ascent of the social ladder is satirized in the proverb – "last year I was a Jolaha, this year I am Sheikh, next year if prices rise, I shall be a Saiyyad"'.[51]

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[48] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), pp. 87-109.

[49] Joseph Schwartzenberg, 'Sources and Types of Census Error', in N. Gerald Barrier ed., *The Census in British India: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), pp. 41-60 (p. 46).

[50] Frank Conlon, 'The Census in India as a Source for Historical Study of Religion and Caste', in N. Gerald Barrier ed., *The Census in British India: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), p. 109; Margaret Walker, for instance, has shown how caste shifts took place in the context of *gharanas* of hereditary kathak dancers. Margaret E. Walker, *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[51] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Census of India, 1921*, Vol. V, Bengal Part 1. (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1923), p. 349. In his 1970 anthropological survey of the Muslims of Calcutta, M.K.A. Siddiqui listed more than sixty-five 'ethnic groups' (including sectarian groups) among the Muslim population of the city. They ranged from groups claiming foreign descent [and] having no traditional occupation and not organised on the basis of caste panchayats such as Saiyyad, Pathan, Moghul, and Sheikh; to 'occupational groups' that continued to pursue their traditional occupations besides adopting other occupations [and] generally had strong caste organisations such as the Bengali and non-Bengali *darzis.* M.K.A. Siddiqui, 'Caste Among The Muslims of Calcutta', in Surajit Sinha ed., *Cultural Profile of Calcutta* (Calcutta: The Indian Anthropological Society, 1970), pp. 26-49.

M.K.A. Siddiqui observed such cases of 'caste climbing' among Bengali-speaking *ajlaf* tailors who claimed 'Idrisi' heritage through the adoption of 'Saiyyad' surnames in order to 'ashrafise' their tailoring practices.[52] These instances are indicative of how certain groups sought to resist marginalisation from within the wider Muslim 'community'. Asserting 'ashraf' status, just as these tailors did, was a common strategy across many occupations. Skill acquisition and transmission were often at the heart of these attempts to 'caste-climb'. Surnames such as Molla, Khan, Nuskar, Haldar, Mallick, Sheikh, Mali, Purkayat, Mondal, Ghazi, Qazi and Baidya were found to be used among Bengali-speaking tailoring communities in Metiabruz. This is indicative of the processes of 'ashrafisation' among Bengali-Muslim tailors who often adopted titles such as 'Sheikh' to raise their status and resist marginalisation within the wider community.

[52] M.K.A. Siddiqui, 'Caste Among The Muslims of Calcutta', pp. 28-29. On caste stratification and 'ashrafisation' among *ajlaf* (converts from mid-ranking Hindu castes) weavers, see, Santosh Kumar Rai, 'The fuzzy boundaries: *Julaha* weavers' identity formation in early twentieth century United Provinces', *Indian Historical Review* Vol. 41, No. 1 (2013), pp. 117-143.

Artisan Authority and 'Skilling Up' in Urdu: Zulfiqar Anwar's *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (1926)

The rich body of literature on Indian artisans has tended to fall back on colonial sources to describe the world of artisans. English-language industrial catalogues and compendiums have also been used in works about the production of colonial knowledge in the arts and industry. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Manu Goswami, and Abigail McGowan have noted that the documentation of craft work in India was derivative of colonial knowledge formation. By accumulating specialised knowledge about Indian crafts, colonial administrators subjected small industries to the 'regulatory practices of the colonial state'.[53] In a similar vein, Abigail McGowan has argued that Eurocentric depictions of artisan work, whether in museums, exhibitions, catalogues or gazettes enabled colonial officials to produce fixed categories of Indian artisanship which they imposed upon a wide range of artisan practices.[54]

These indices on craft labour often existed alongside vernacular traditions of cataloguing and descriptions of artisan trades authored by indigenous artisans themselves. Scholars have overlooked a valuable source of knowledge about evolving artisan practices, by failing to engage with Urdu tailoring manuals written by Indian Muslim tailors. The historiography on the wider South Asian artisan tradition also overlooks them.[55] How much *darzis* knew of colonial stereotypes about them, we will never know for sure – probably a fair bit. Through these manuals they produced a counter-narrative of artisan labour: most resisted the colonial stereotype about their supposed technical ineptitude. But, beyond that, more significantly, these

[53] Manu Goswami, *Producing India*, pp. 133-135.
[54] Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 34-36.
[55] Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Vishwakarma Craftsmen in Early Medieval Peninsular India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 47, No. 4 (2004), pp. 548-82.

manuals produced by different tailoring groups sought to establish their own distinctive craft authority.

Kamyab Darzi Khana is one such manual. Written in Urdu and authored by Zulfiqar Anwar, a master tailor, it emerged in 1926, three years before the Great Depression. It was published by a bazaar printing press in Delhi called Dehaati Pushtak Bhandaar (Chavari Bazaar).[56] Although the manual says little about the author's background and family history, in the introduction, or in the lines interwoven with dressmaking instructions, we find traces of the context in which the text was created. From the manual, we get a sense of the deep knowledge that tailors had of the material culture of their times, changing consumption patterns, markets, and nodes of patronage.

Kamyab Darzi Khana is short treatise on Western-style tailoring for menswear, replete with generous illustrations, sketches, guided measurements, minute instructions, and detailed cutting patterns for men's shirts, trousers, jackets, vests, coats (double-breasted; riding coat; lunch coat with one button), waist-coats, blazers, collars, and cuffs.[57] What is remarkable about this manual is its utilitarian and functional form, anchored in practicality. It was quite unlike many of the artisan handbooks of its times, which tended to use glorified language and present acclamatory accounts of Muslim crafts by invoking Prophet Muhammad as a way of

[56] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (Chavari Bazaar, Dilli: Dehaati Pushtak Bhandaar, 1926) 687.1.Z12.K. Calcutta, National Library.

[57] Menswear is a niche segment in garment construction, quite distinct from tailors who specialised in making apparel for women. Unfortunately, I have not been able to trace tailoring manuals for women's clothing.

establishing craft authority.[58] These older artisan handbooks also tended to incorporate poetic verses interspersed with craft instruction.[59]

Zulfiqar Anwar in *Kamyab Darzi Khana* does not hark back to the Prophet to command authority. Instead, he offered a practical guide to learn the art of tailoring and the numerical literacy needed to run a successful tailoring shop. In doing so, he sheds what Tirthankar Roy has called the 'secretive master syndrome'[60]: he shares his unique and rare insights on tailoring with few frills, perhaps with Urdu-speaking master-tailors as his primary readership.

In Zulfiqar Anwar's rather laconic preface, we find these crucial lines that revealed his motivations behind authoring a tailoring manual in Urdu:[61]

> 'Urdu mein is kisam ki kitab hume bohot dino se khatak rahi thi lekin kuch wajuhat aisi thi ki is kaam koh hum pura na kar sake. Agar ye kitab qaum ki kuch bhi khidmat kar sakti hai, hum yakin kar sakenge ki hamari mehnat bekar nahi gayi'
>
> [Authoring a tailoring book in Urdu had been on my mind for quite some time, but my circumstances were such that I could not complete the work. If this book can be of some service to the 'community', then I shall believe that my efforts have not gone to waste].[62]

[58] One such artisan handbook was *Idrisnamah* or 'Book of Idris' authored by Sheikh Khwajah Muhammad and published in 1909. It claimed that the principles of cutting and stitching had been revealed to Idris by Allah and that Idris made the 'holy tunic' that Prophet Mohammad wore on the night of his ascension to heaven. The trade handbook would become something of a community history. It portrayed Muslim *darzis* as conservative, pious Muslims with a long and prestigious heritage in dressmaking, going back to the Prophet himself. The text's quasi-divine, quasi-pedagogic approach to disseminating skill and dressmaking sought to dislodge colonial narratives that described them as marginal within the trade. Sheikh Khwajah Muhammad, *Risalah-yi Idrisiyah* (Allahabad: Anwar Ahmadi Press, 1909) cited in Amanda Lanzillo, 'Writing Industrial Change in Urdu: Artisanship, Islam and Technology in Colonial India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 44, Issue 4 (2021), pp. 666-683.

[59] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Between Industry and Islam: Stonework and tomb construction in colonial-era India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol 55, Issue 5 (2021), pp. 1510-1543.

[60] Tirthankar Roy, 'Out of Tradition: Master Artisans and Economic Change in Colonial India', *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 66, No. 4 (November 2007), p. 987.

[61] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 1.

[62] Quam can be translated as 'community' or 'nation'. In this context, I have used the word to refer to a community with shared linguistic, regional and sectarian affiliations.

The *quam*-conscious rationale behind Anwar's manual reveals what was at stake for non-Bengali tailors writing in Urdu as they laid claim to a particular kind of craft authority rooted in North Indian 'ashraf' traditions, at a time marked by intense competition and communal strife between labouring groups. As has been noted, with the spread of lithographic printing press by 1930, Urdu trade manuals had begun to circulate in colonial North India.[63] The relative cheapness of the small, printed copies of trade manuals meant that these texts may have been accessible to the artisans themselves. It seems likely that *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (1926) made its way to Calcutta in the early twentieth century with upcountry Urdu-speaking Muslim tailors.

Scholars have shown that competing Muslim groups with sectarian affiliations sought to establish authority by adopting different strategies: madrasa reform,[64] oppositional debates (bahas),[65] 'religious goods',[66] newspapers in cities and *qasbahs* (market town),[67] and the use of primers and religious texts.[68] This thesis argues that master tailors, too, sought to establish their authority through printed vernacular manuals and trade handbooks, which drew in part

[63] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Printing princely modernity: Lithographic design in Muslim-ruled princely states', Working Notes, *South Asian Popular Culture* Vol. 6, Nos. 2-3 (2018), pp. 245-252.
[64] Fillipo Osella and Caroline Osella eds., 'Introduction' in *Islamic Reform in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. xi-xxviii.
[65] Justin Jones, *Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 186-221; Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[66] Nile Green, *Bombay Islam. The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[67] Megan Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers and Urban Life in Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[68] The 'ulama' were at the heart of the Urdu printing revolution of nineteenth century northern India, from the very first reforming pamphlets of the 1820s and 1830s through to the late nineteenth century when religious texts and publications dominated the print trade and centered around Deoband, the heartland of reform. See, Francis Robinson, 'Strategies of Authority in Muslim South Asia', in *The Muslim World in Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2019), pp. 180-204; on 'primers' see, Brannon Ingram, 'The Portable Madrasa: Print, Publics and the Authority of the Deobandi "Ulama"', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2014), pp. 845-871.

from British textbooks on dressmaking but were also rooted in longer traditions of writing about technological innovations and artisanship.[69]

Anwar's Urdu tailoring manual makes an interesting addition to the rich body of literature produced by historians such as Justin Jones, Megan Robb, and Brannon Ingram, who have drawn attention to the significance of Urdu sources, and their interactions with the cultural, political, and economic history of specific *qasbahs* (market towns).[70] Justin Jones, for instance, has shed light on Urdu writings produced about or by Muslim residents of Amroha, United Provinces, 1860-1930. He shows how wider religious reform movements – Aligarh, Deoband, and Bareilly – were in constant dialogue with local particularities; how the town's 'Islamic identity' and 'sharif' Muslim population came to be defined; how local institutions, the madrasas and imambaras, were used by leading families to reinforce hierarchies; and how public debates exacerbated local rivalries between Sunni and Shia Muslims.[71]

Strategies of authority and identities were being made and remade in this complex and shifting environment. As Jones has written of Amroha, 'the active printed sphere and developing

[69] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Writing Industrial Change in Urdu: Artisanship, Islam and Technology in Colonial India', pp. 666-683; Shireen Moosvi, 'The World of Labour in Mughal India (c.1500-1750)', *International Review of Social History* Vol. 56, No. 19 (2011), pp. 245-261.

[70] On earlier works on qasbahs: qasbah as 'microcosm', as a source of cultural tradition parallel to that of Hindu commercial towns, Christopher A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); on a qasbah as a unique 'urban formation opposite to the city', see, Mushirul Hasan, 'The Qasbah Culture', *The Hindu*, 22 July 2002; on qasbahs as more fluid, cosmopolitan, adaptive, and engaging with change, M. Raisur Rahman, *Locale, Everyday Islam and Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 31-37; Megan Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers and Urban Life in Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Brannon Ingram, 'The Portable Madrasa: Print, Publics and the Authority of the Deobandi "Ulama"', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 48, No. 4 (2014), pp. 845-871; also Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 27, No. 1 (February 1993), pp. 229-251; Justin Jones, 'The Local Experiences of Reformist Islam in a "Muslim" Town in Colonial India: The Case of Amroha', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 43, No. 4 (2009), pp. 905-906.

[71] On oppositional debates, Madh-i-Sabha and Tabarra conflict in 1930s in Lucknow, in particular, see, Justin Jones, 'The Local Experiences of Reformist Islam in a "Muslim" Town in Colonial India: The Case of Amroha', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 43, No. 4 (2009), pp. 871-908.

culture of religious disputation…all revealed that local religious life was constantly evolving according to a number of complex and sometimes contradictory pulls… [the] shifts in local religious life collectively reflected the transitory social and economic context of the colonial township when understandings of being a Muslim or Hindu, a Shia or Sunni, a Sheikh or Sayyid, were subject to a process of reconstruction and contestation'.[72] Zulfiqar Anwar's Urdu tailoring manual has to be read against this historical backdrop of competing claims and counter-claims by different social groups vying to establish their own version of authority in response to social, structural, political, and economic upheavals.

Asserting skill-based dominance over the tailoring trade was at the heart of the contest for establishing craft authority. Dressmaking became an important site of contestation between tailoring groups with different levels of skills. As discussed earlier, although the British in India were struck by the virtuosity of Indian 'arts and crafts', they nevertheless deemed Indian artisans to be technologically inept. From the 1880s, a number of technical schools were set up to harness the hereditary skill of a master craftsman (a 'magician' when it came to copying design, but 'unimaginative' and technologically backward', so they alleged.) His 'native skills' were to be guided into the 'best and purest channels of study'.[73] As Tapati Guha Thakurta has shown, 'Schools of Design' and 'Academies of Fine Arts' were set up to 'cultivate superior skills of ornamental design and to bring this skill to bear immediately on the…commercially viable manufacturers of India.'[74] Practical, employment-oriented, technical education was directed towards skilling up hereditary artisans in Westernised conventions of form and design.

[72] Ibid, pp. 905-906.
[73] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new "Indian" art*, p. 59.
[74] Ibid, p. 58.

The practical applicability and utilisation of new designs was disseminated through 'standard pattern books', discussed in Chapter Two, that were meant to provide a step-by-step break up of designs and modelling for the benefit of ordinary craftsmen, and these were to be distributed *free* among 'bona-fide' artisans.[75] The two modes of skill transmission – oral instructions in colonial technical schools and informal apprenticeships in master-artisan run *karkhanas* (workshops) – often overlapped.[76] These intersecting worlds of craft training and skill acquisition transformed the patterns of patronage and artisan livelihoods. The interpenetration of novel techniques and adaptation to new tastes and dress dispositions, created hierarchies within the tailoring trade.

The 'bazaar' tailors and the tailors attached to colonial technical schools competed with one another – to showcase their expertise in incorporating European styles in garment construction. In the 'bazaar economy', an indigenous arena that catered to different kinds of clients, tailors straddled both worlds of 'native' and 'British' aesthetics, and in turn, blurred the boundaries between the two.[77] Bazaar tailors adapted to the changing sartorial preferences by copying design and reproducing them cheaply, at a faster rate, and in vast numbers, to keep up with the demand for particular dress styles. The circulation of counterfeit military uniforms during the Second World War, discussed in Chapter One, is a case in point.

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[75] *Quinquennial Reviews of the Progress of Education in India, 1887/88-1907*, Bengal Government, Education Department, BGP/E, August 1904, pp. 171-172.
[76] *Quinquennial Reviews of the Progress of Education in India, 1887/88-1907*, Bengal Government, Education Department, BGP/E, November 1907, pp. 75-85.
[77] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new "Indian" art*, pp. 18-27; Anand A. Yang, *Bazaar India. Markets, Society and the Colonial State in Bihar* (California: University of California Press, 1998), Chapter 5 on Traders, Merchants and Markets, 1765-1947; on political economy and bazaars in qasbahs, Christopher Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and bazaars: North Indian society in the age of British expansion*, 1770-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapters 6 and 12.

Even within the bazaar economy, artisan niches came to be spatially segregated along the lines of skill and vocation. Hindu artisan groups such the painters, idol makers, and engravers dominated areas around Kalighat, Shovabazar, Kamurtuli and Baghbazar[78], while Muslim tailors could be found in large numbers in the wards in Kidderpore, Garden Reach-Mominpur, and New Market. The city-dwellers of Calcutta knew where to go in order to buy a 'Bat-tala' print[79], a tailor-made suit, or a dress replicated from a paper pattern. These lucrative clusters attracted many patrons and as a result drew scores of artisans and tailors to these thriving areas. These artisan clusters grew denser and more congested over time as different groups specialising in particular trades jostled with one another to carve out a niche for themselves.

Zulfiqar Anwar's tailoring manual, and its prosaic and technical character, can perhaps be contextualised by the backdrop of the widespread circulation of 'do-bashi' improvement tracts commissioned by *sufi* pirs, heightened competition, and communal strife. In 1926, the year in which Anwar's manual was published, Calcutta witnessed a communal riot connected with the 'Pir Burial' controversy.[80] Peshwari greengrocers and butchers of New Market locked horns with Hindu *bhadralok* spokespersons of the Calcutta Corporation, regarding the burial of a *fakir*, claimed to have been Muslim, by the shopkeepers. New Market was the epicenter of the riot, spilling over to adjoining areas in Kidderpore and Karaya –where there was a preponderance of Awadhi- and Bhojpuri speaking tailors.[81]

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[78] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new "Indian" art*, pp. 18-19; Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Calcutta: the Living City*. Vol. II (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M. 1978), Appendix V; M.K.A. Siddiqui and Pranab Jyoti De, 'The Image Makers of Kumartoli', in M.K.A. Siddiqui ed., *Aspects of Society and Culture in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1982), pp. 101-118.

[79] P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 116-117 ; M.K.A. Siddiqui and S.P. Lala, 'The Darzis of Metiaburj', in M.K.A. Siddiqui ed., *Aspects of Society and Culture in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1982), pp. 119-144.

[80] P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 109-148.

[81] The political climate in Bengal was already strained by provisions of the Bengal Pact (1923). The Pact promised a larger share of appointments to Muslims in the Corporation, as well as the voluntary banning of music before mosques and the freedom to perform cow sacrifice. Muslim politics in

The late 1920s also witnessed Bengali Muslim tailors migrating to the city in search of work. Prior to this period, Muslim 'improvement' essays on Islam and material uplift were already in circulation. Between 1908 and 1930, newspapers and presses dominated by Muslims reprinted these tracts that included short essays, stories, and poems.[82] Essays written in Bengali penetrated a literary space dominated by the urban Muslim intelligentsia, who supported and published improvement tracts in Urdu.[83] The Bengali essays were authored by ordinary people, many of whom were village artisans engaged in hereditary trades. Printed with sponsorship extended by punthi-patrons (patrons of hand-written manuscripts) – who were landlords, jotedars, or religious organisations – these essays sought to promote a distinctive 'Bengali Muslim' identity, immersed in *sufi* devotional practices and saint veneration.[84] One of the patrons of these Bengali improvement tracts was a formidable figure named Pir Abu Bakr.[85]

Abu Bakr claimed to be the 'pir' of Assam and Bengal, wielding control over fifty-two zillas in the early decades of the twentieth century.[86] He was associated with eighteen religious organisations throughout his life: two provincial level organisations, Anjumane Waizine

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Calcutta in the early 1920s was dominated by merchants. In 1924, out of the ten Muslim councillors elected with the help of Swarajists, five were merchants. Local Anjumans were dominated by petty merchants with intimate links to shopkeepers and traders. New Market was an important site for mobilizing support of these dominant political groups. See, P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 128-130; Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*, p. 80. On the controversy about the 'Pir's Burial' and 1926 New Market riots, see. P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, Chapter 3, pp. 109-148.

[82] As early as 1852, there were seven reformist books written in Urdu and printed locally that were available in the bazaars of Calcutta, Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 89.

[83] P.K. Dutta, 'Muslim Peasant Improvement, Pir Abu Bakr and the Formation of Communalized Islam' in *Carving Blocs*, pp. 64-109.

[84] Ibid, p. 66. Also, Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008) Chapter 3, pp. 68-108; Tariq Omar Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) Chapter 5, pp. 108-136.

[85] The Non-cooperation and Khilafat movement had seen the involvement of renowned pirs such as Abu Bakr of Hooghly and Badshah Mian of Faridpur, which provided legitimacy and confidence to the movement. P. K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, p. 124.

[86] Ibid, p. 88. On early sufis of the Bengal delta, see, Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1207-1760* (California: University of Cambridge Press, 1993); Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 166-168.

Hanafiya and Anjuman Ulemaya I Bangla, and various district-level associations including Anjumane Islamia (Faridpur) and Anjumane Tablighe Islam (Rangpur).[87]

A prominent member of tailor-reformer Munshi Meherullah's Sudhakar group, Abu Bakr resisted the dominant position of *ashraf* clerics central to the North Indian reform movements, who deemed saint worship to be 'besharia'.[88] The theological direction of Abu Bakr's Hanafi teachings was geared towards 'purifying' or bringing back into the Sunni Muslim fold, 'dissenters' such as the Wahabis, Ahl-I-Hadith, and Shia Muslims.

In his Bengali texts, Abu Bakr fortified his identity as a *do-bashi* (bilingual) 'Bengali Muslim' *sufi* pir, extending a powerful challenge to late nineteenth and early twentieth century North Indian reformist activities. Abu Bakr's saint-like charisma, like that of tailor-turned-reformer Munshi Meherullah, discussed in Chapter One, drew thousands of people to his 'shrine' in Furfara, Hooghly.[89] His political clout in Bengal's *mofussil* was as formidable as his presence in the inner-city bustees of Calcutta.[90] His outreach involved preachers dispersed across the Bengal *mofussil*, who distributed printed tracts and organised 'Islamic purification' campaigns. In 1916, Abu Bakr embarked on a campaign against 'besharia' Islam in Kidderpore, Sealdah, Karaya and Chandi-chowk, locations that encircled New Market. These campaigns were so popular that meetings attracted audiences of over twelve thousand people.[91]

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[87] Pir Abu Bakr and Akram Khan led the Anjuman Ulemaya I Bangla (formed in 1913) together until they had an ideological fall-out in 1916, the year in when the Lucknow Pact was signed. Akram Khan emerged as the leader of Anjuman Ulemaya for his support for Swarajists such as C.R. Das.
[88] Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884-1912* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1996), pp. 309-311.
[89] P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, p. 88.
[90] Ibid, p. 139.
[91] Pir Abu Bakr's successor, Allahma Saifuddin Siddiki wrote a biography of Pir Abu Bakr, *Furfurar Hazrat* (Ankuni, Hooghly: publication press unknown, 1993). A file entitled, 'Furfurar Shorbadhikari Pir Abu Bakr', on the history of the shrine in Furfara Sharif and Pir Abu Bakr is available on https://archive.org/details/furfurasharif.islamic. Accessed on 11 May 2022.

In 1918, over 2000 printed tracts had been published in 'pure' Bengali under Abu Bakr's aegis.[92] In these Bengali 'improvement' tracts, material and piety came together in a mutually constitutive way, the one reinforcing the other. The observance of piety through work, charity and asceticism were structured into the programme of religious fairs to venerate saints and sufis. These fairs, as seen in Chapter One, were a form of 'mythic' resource for tailors who thronged to these embedded markets. For instance, the religious fair in honour of Pir Abu Bakr, *Isal I Soab* in Hooghly district, attracted enormous crowds over three days.[93]

The emphasis of the Bengali essays printed under Abu Bakr's tutelage sought to bring together material improvement and entrepreneurial ambitions through embodied practices of piety: 'bathing practices of women, clothing habits, cleanliness and frugality'.[94] Pedagogical instructions in these improvement essays resonated with Munshi Meherullah's reformist ideological precepts that involved the melding of two crucial arenas of everyday life: the economic and the spiritual.[95] Material improvement of the 'community' was tied to the moral and spiritual uplift of the individual. The improvement tracts disseminated under the tutelage of Abu Bakr grounded Bengali Muslim religiosity as antagonistic to the teachings of other sects that forbade 'folk traditions' like saint veneration.[96]

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[92] P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, p. 88.

[93]Abu Bakr's follower-turned-opponent, Akram Khan, leader of the Ahl-i-Hadith sect, who ran the newspaper *Mohammadis*, opposed to *Isal I Soab* (religious fair in veneration of Pir Abu Bakr), challenged the *tawassuf* (sufi metaphysical knowledge) that Bakr claimed to possess. Reports about *bahas* (debates) engaged between the two sects, Hanafi and Ahl-i-Hadith, were circulated in the printed tracts. One of which was Mohammed Baccher Biswas', *Lakshmipurer Hanifa O Mohammader Bahas* (Shibnagar, P.O. Kothchandpur, Jessore, 1921), cited in P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, p. 95.

[94] Ibid. Cited in P.K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 90-91.

[95] Sheikh Habibur Rahman, *Karmabir Munshi Meherullah* (Calcutta: Muhammadi Press, 1934). Also see Chapter One.

[96] On Ahl-i-Hadith and the sect's denouncement of *sufi* practices, see, Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, p.270; Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and 'Introduction' in Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy eds., *Living Together Separately*: *Cultural India in History and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

We see a different version of artisan authority emerge from these Bengali essays, authored by ordinary artisans. Tailors operating outside of colonial institutions devised narrative strategies that positioned technological and material change not as the 'modernization' of labour, *per se,* but as reflective of their own religious and cultural practices. As with Munshi Meherullah's use of exegetical instruments (beliefs in miracles or saintly intermission in the lives of the Muslim peasantry and artisans) through a thorough study of the Quran and *tafsir* literature, the artisan-authored Bengali essays published under Pir Abu Bakr's aegis, integrated the acquisition of technical skills within prayer and demonstrations of piety in workplaces. Such narratives enabled Bengali Muslim tailors to fashion new understandings of the intersections of their labouring and religious identities.[97] To some extent, the '*do-bashi*' (bilingual) nature of these texts represented a cross-fertilisation of Bengali with an Arab/Prophetic model of Islam (not the Persianate Mughal past) to invoke a different model of authority.[98]

In 'Banglafying'[99] craft instruction, Bengali improvement essays not only enabled and ennobled Bengali as a medium of skill transmission but also drew in Persianate tradition into the Bengali sphere, affirming the value of their skill as well as their position as Bengali Muslims.[100] In wielding an authorial voice that used both Bengali and Arabic, Pir Abu Bakr drew upon the legacy of *do-bashi* (bilingual) tailor-reformer Munshi Meherullah to pose a formidable challenge to the dominance of Urdu-speaking tailors in the trade.

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[97] Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).
[98] Seema Alavi, *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 216-235.
[99] Richard David Williams, 'Music, Lyrics, and the Bengali Book: Hindustani musicology in Calcutta, 1818-1905', *Music and Letters* Vol. 97, Issue 3 (2016), pp. 465-495.
[100] Joya Chatterji, 'The Bengali Muslim: A Contradiction in Terms? An Overview of the Debate on Bengali Muslim Identity', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and The Middle East* Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1996), pp. 16-24.

How to Run a *Kamyab* (Successful) Tailor Shop

Kamyab Darzi Khana also provides valuable textual and visual materials on acquiring skills rooted in technicality, with additional 'tips and tricks' involved in garment-making and finishing. The first chapter of the manual, *kapra sine ke mutallik chand zaroori baatein,* (regarding cloth sewing – some important points), he writes:

> *'Jabse insaan ne kapra banana aur isko kaat kar jism dhakne ke kabil sikha, tabhi se silai ke hunar ka aagaaz huwa… silai ka hunar koyi naya hunar nahi balke yeh purane zamaane se chala aa raha hain. Kapre ke kayi tukro ko sui-dhage ke zariye jor dene ko "sina" kehte hain. Hum in cheezo ko baayain karenge jiski zaroorat zyada parti hain aur inke bagyer kaam karna namumkin hota hain.'*
>
> [Ever since humans learnt to make cloth and cut it, in order to cover their bodies, the art of sewing has been in existence….[the] art of sewing is not a new art but has been around from the olden times. The various cut-out pieces of cloth when stitched together with a threaded needle is called "sewing". I will describe a few things here that are very important; without them it would be impossible to do the work.]

Here Anwar sets out to claim a particular kind of craft authority by emphasising the significance of 'cutting' cloth rather than draping it around the human body. This remark may be read as a cipher, underlining both the long history of the practice of wearing stitched clothing, and suggesting that this was specific to Islamic sartorial traditions.[101]

The 'art of sewing' various cut-out pieces into one garment was not, for Anwar, a product of colonial modernity but in fact had a longer history – it could be traced back to the 'purana zamaana' or the 'olden times'. It is not clear whether he is referring to precolonial times, or an earlier period in the course of human history. Nevertheless, by leaving it opened-ended, it seems as though he is claiming a distinct kind of antiquity that was different from the master-

[101] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm,* p. 32.

artisan-authored handbooks of the early twentieth century, steeped in references to 'Idris' or the Prophet.[102]

Anwar then goes straight into the nub of the matter and writes that every tailor learns that at the start of his *shargirdi* (apprenticeship) that he would not be given a roll of material, a pair of scissors and a set of measurements until they had mastered the basic principles of tailoring. Nor would he straightaway be told to cut out a suit or an overcoat.[103] He would, first and foremost, be introduced to the core principles of his trade: *karigari ke asool* (rules of craftsmanship)*;* and *silai ki bunyaad* (principles of sewing).[104] This involved understanding the classes and quality of materials, the way to cut a roll of material, and the functions, possibilities, and limitations of his tools:[105]

> *'Kapra sine se peshtar agar chand mufeed aur karamaat baatoon ko madhde nazar rakkha jaye toh kapra silkar bohot umda hota hain.'*
>
> [Before sewing cloth, if some useful and miraculous points are kept in mind, then the sewing will be of a very high quality.]
>
> *'Awwal kapre ki katayi ka khayal bahot zaroori hain: kaichi ki dhar khub tez honi chahiye take kapra theek kate. Mota aur bareekh kapra sine ki sui'ya bhi alaihda alaihda ho, kyunki moti sui se kapra kharab ho jayega.'*
>
> [Excellent cloth-cutting requires careful consideration: the scissors should be very sharp so that the cloth is cut properly. For thick and fine fabrics, the needles have to be different because a thick needle could spoil the fabric.]
>
> *'Reshmi kapre ki siwan aur kaaguz ki ek choti jor pattiya astar ke niche rakh kar machine ki silai kijiye, nahayat saaf bakhiya hoga.'*

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[102] Sheikh Khwajah Muhammad, *Risalah-yi Idrisiyah* (Allahabad: Anwar Ahmadi Press, 1909), cited in Amanda Lanzillo, 'Writing Industrial Change in Urdu', pp. 666-683.
[103] Transliterated chapter entitled 'Takhfeef Karne Ke Asool' on cutting techniques in Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, pp. 3-18.
[104] Ibid, p. 4 and p. 7.
[105] Ibid, pp. 13-14.

> [To sew Muslin cloth, keep small strips of joint-paper under the lining before running the sewing machine- for a very clean seam.]

From these excerpts we see the *ustad*, Zulfiqar Anwar, setting out the rules for other master-tailors – describing in vivid detail the core principles for 'skilling up', the vital foundation for running a successful tailoring shop. First, the cutting and sewing of fabrics had to be done with careful consideration, preparation, and with utmost precision. Second, following these precise and somewhat 'miraculous' instructions such as using the correct tools would ensure the desired outcome of an 'umda silai' (excellent stitching or seam). The tools – a pair of sharp scissors, thread, needles, and a sewing machine – had to be faultless and best-suited for particular kind of fabrics. Using a thick needle to sew a fine fabric, for instance, was not advisable. For finer materials, a paper pattern underneath the lining of the cloth was recommended for ideal sewing and finishing. Tailor-made garments had to be of outstanding quality, and that could only be ensured through well-honed cutting and sewing skills, augmented by the use of sewing machines. I shall return to Anwar's remarks on technology, sewing machines, and suit-making in Chapter Four.

Anwar provides another foundational lesson for running a successful tailor shop: numerical literacy. Mathematical calculations, he proposes, were not usually perceived as being connected with textile and clothing design or construction, either by scientists or by artists. But in cutting fabrics, mathematics was crucial.[106]

Those who make clothing from cloth must always take into account two geometries: the plane geometry of the cloth and the solid geometry of the body. In order to clothe the body, tailors

[106] Ibid, p. 7.

begin with cloth. Woven, knitted or otherwise constructed, the inherent structure of cloth reflects mathematical principles. Interlaced threads create either square or triangular grids.[107]

On *'scale yaad karne ka tareeqa'* (method for memorising the units on a measuring scale), Anwar writes:[108]

> *'Lakri ki scale ke andar, joke walaiti bana hota hain, iske andar aath hisse hote hain. Char hisse iski chauraayi mein aur char hisshe iski lambaayi mein.'*
>
> [Inside a wooden scale, those that are foreign-made, inside that scale there are eight parts. Four parts in width and four parts in length.]
>
> *'Char, cheh, nau aur chaubees yeh hisse chauraayi mein hote hain aur lambaayi mein – do, aath, baara aur atthara hote hain. Inke dekhne ki khas pehchaan yeh hain ki, jis chaati ka coat kaatna hain toh, iske aath hisse, athaara ke number per milenge. Yani iski chaati ke nifsh se har ek hissa milega. Scale ke andar chaubees chaati se lekar chaallis ka hisaab hota hain. Aur dimag larane se toh har ek chaati ka hisaab nikal aata hain.'*
>
> [4, 6, 9, and 24, these parts are in width (measurement) and in length, there are 2, 8, 12, and 18. This scale has a special quality that if you have to cut a coat for a particular chest-size, its eight parts will be found on number 18. That means from the part below the chest, the other parts will match. With the units on the scale, one can measure chest sizes from 24 to 40. And, if one uses their brain then one could work out the exact calculations for the chest-measurement of any size.]

This excerpt demonstrates that an accurate grasp of numbers and arithmetic calculations was integral to dressmaking. As we have seen in Chapter Two, suits and coats had to be made to precise specifications down to a fraction of an inch. Without numerical skills, tailors would not be able to make such high-quality clothing; and the failure to do so would mean a loss of patronage.

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[107] Ibid, p. 14.
[108] Ibid, pp. 15-18.

As we see in this excerpt, Anwar teaches his readers the rules in memorising the units on a 'foreign-made' 'wooden scale' (perhaps with English numerals), used for making a coat. A solid understanding of the mathematical calculations on the scale would enable the readers (his *shagirds*) to work within the range of variation to make coats of different sizes. He also provides a complex set of calculations involved in memorising units on a 'inchi tape' or a measuring tape in inches:[109]

> *'Inchi tape yaad karne ka tareeqa* (method to memorise the units on a measuring tape in inches)
>
> *Ek girah mein do inch ek batta char*
> *Do girah mein char inch ek batta do*
> *Teen girah mein cheh inch teen batta char*
> *Char girah mein nau inch*
> *Panch girah mein gyaara inch ek batta char*
> *Cheh girah mein tera inch ek batta do*
> *Saat girah mein pandra inch teen batta char*
> *Aath girah mein athaara inch*
> *Nau girah mein bees inch ek batta char*
> *Dus girah mein baayish inch ek batta do*
> *Gyaara girah mein chaubees inch teen batta char*
> *Bara girah mein sattaais inch*
> *Tera girah mein unnattis inch ek batta char*
> *Chauda girah mein ekkattis inch ek batta do*
> *Pandra girah mein tehtis inch teen batta char*
> *Sola girah mein battis inch.'*

This excerpt could not be transliterated because of the sheer complexity involved in working out the precise mathematical break-up of these calculations. Suffice to say that perhaps a tailor would be best equipped to do this. It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this study. However it is important to underline just how crucial numerical skills were for running a '*kamyab darzi khana*' of this kind.

[109] Ibid, p. 17.

Furthermore, Anwar writes that numbers are integral to cloth-construction because those who make clothing transform flat fabric planes into three-dimensional forms. A single plane figure – such as a square, rectangle, or circle – can be used to create a garment without cutting or tailoring. Simple modifications are all that is required to fit a length of cloth around the body; pleating, gathering, tucking, and tying to make the flat plane follow the contours of the three-dimensional body. Cut and sewn clothing can also follow those principles. A single plane figure can also become a garment through the medium of a single seam.[110]

Anwar's tailoring guide bears some resemblances to late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century artisan trade manuals that borrowed words and phrases from English-language textbooks circulating through British Indian industrial and engineering schools.[111] These manuals integrated technical terminologies from English textbooks with Urdu directives.[112] For instance, in laying out the basic principles of suit-making, Anwar uses English words such as 'cutting', 'pattern', and 'machine' in his manual (in transliterated Urdu):[113]

> *'Saaf aur shidhe cutting ke liye kapre koh maize, takht ya zameen par bichhakar kaate…kapra kaatne se aur sine se pehle ek chota pattern ya namuna taiyyar kijiye, agar koi galti ho toh durust kare.'*
>
> [For neat and straight cutting, lay out the cloth on a flat surface, a table or on the floor…before cutting the cloth and sewing it, prepare a pattern, if there is a mistake then make another pattern.]
>
> *'Issi taraf jab namune ke mutabik kapra sil jaye, is waqt asal kapra sina shuru karein.'*
>
> [In this way when you have a pattern for the garment, then start sewing the actual fabric.]

[110] Ibid, pp. 17-18.
[111] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Writing Industrial Change in Urdu: Artisanship, Islam and Technology in Colonial India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 44.4 (2021), pp. 666-683.
[112] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, pp. 3-4.
[113] Ibid.

> *'Collar, cuff, asteen wagaira hamesha pehle kagaz par kaat kar mushq kar leni chahiye, kapre kaatne se pehle, sar guz nikaal kar ispar istiri karein. Isse kapra mulaayum aur saaf ho jayega. Kapra seete waqt pehle linger karle, phir machine kare. Is tarah kapra saaf aur khoobsurat sile ga.'*
>
> [Always trace the collar, cuff, sleeves etc. on paper; before cutting the cloth, iron out the whole material. This will soften the fabric and keep it clean. Before sewing the cloth, first anchor it then run the machine. In this way, the cloth will be sewn neatly and beautifully.]

These excerpts illustrate the continuities and ruptures in dressmaking practices from the late nineteenth to the early decades of the twentieth century. Tailoring techniques with an emphasis on 'cutting' and 'fitting' cloth to fit the human body were disseminated through trade handbooks and oral instructions in classrooms given by master artisans in vernacular languages.[114] These Western-style 'cutting books' on three-dimensional modelling in garment construction influenced local tailors. The illustrated diagrams and sketches in Anwar's manual, depicted in Images 3.2 and 3.3, resembled cutting patterns available in English tailoring manuals from the same period.[115] Such hybridisation, as discussed in Chapter Two, was ever more popular in artisan trades from the late nineteenth century.

However, Muslim tailors were not mere 'copyists'. Nor did they view themselves through the colonial state's jaundiced lens. They established new ideals about the role of religion in labour in articulate ways, in the new contexts that faced them. They integrated technical practices rooted in British artistic preferences, but did so in ways that imbued them with a (perceived)

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[114] Abigail McGowan, 'John Lock Kipling's Influence', in Julius Bryant and Susan Weber eds., *John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 489-511; Nadhra Shahbaz Khan, 'Industrial Art Education in Colonial Punjab: Kipling's Pedagogy and Hereditary Craftsmen', in Julius Bryant and Susan Weber eds., *John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 478-479.

[115] A.S. Bridgland, *The Modern Tailor Outfitter and Clothier*, Vol. 1 (Ayllsbury and London: Watson and Vinfy Ltd., 1929).

Islamic heritage and ecumenicism associated with their trade. In doing so, tailors sought to assert their authority and dominance in the trade through an explicit 'Muslim' craftsmanship.[116]

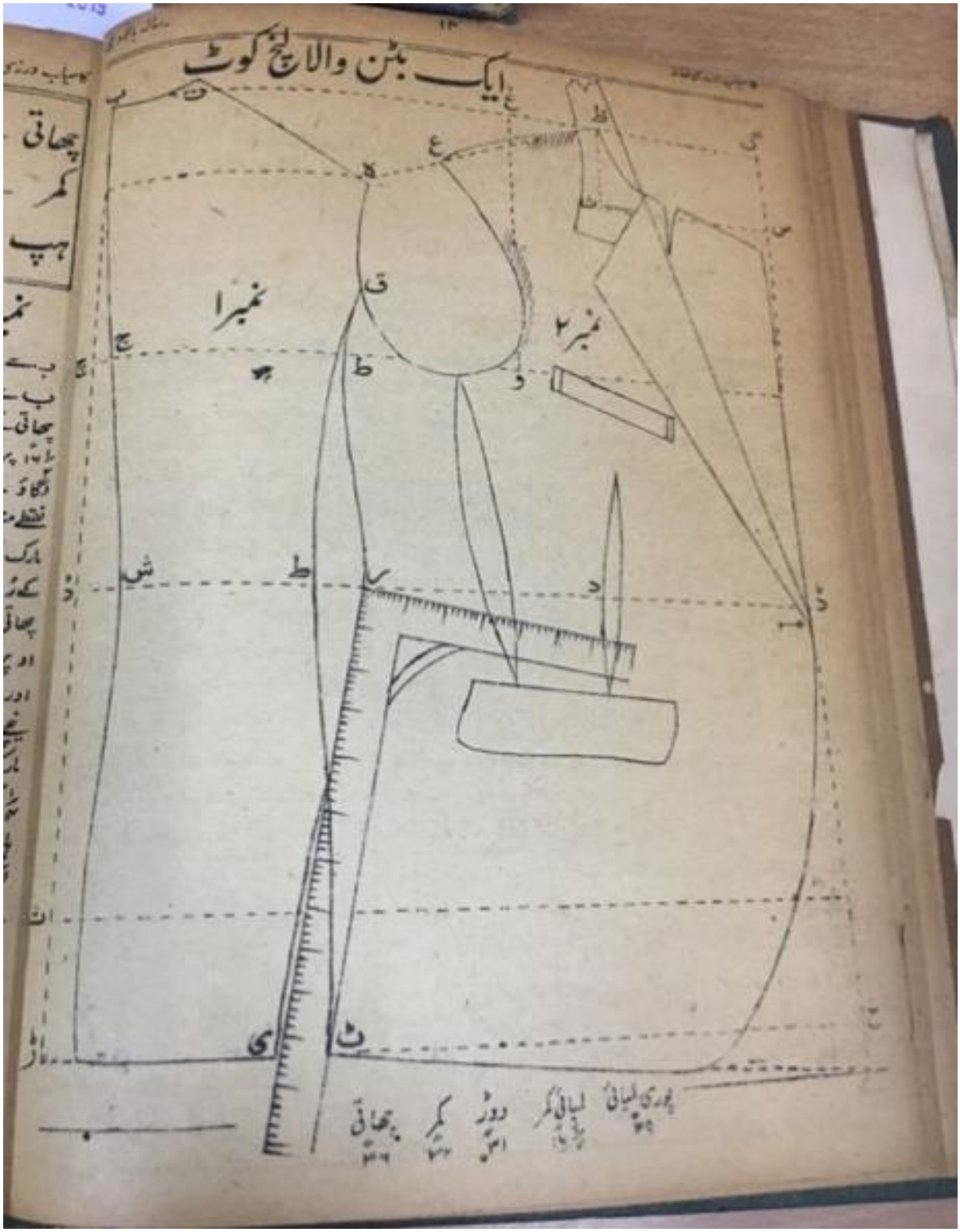
[116] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 3.

Image 3.2: An illustration on guidelines for taking measurements, 'naap lene ka tariqa mulaheza ho'



Source: Zulfiqar Anwar's *Kamyab Darzi Khana, 1926*, p. 10

Image 3.3: An illustration of how to make a 'ek button wala lunch coat' (lunch coat with one button)



Source: Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, 1926. p. 14

Anwar's tailoring manual underlined good workmanship in garment construction as a moral precept – *Islami hunar mand ilm* (Islamic knowledge on artisanship) – embedded in Islamic craft lineages rooted in North Indian artisan traditions.[117] To be a good artisan therefore was to be a good and pious Muslim. Anwar's manual, it must be noted, ought to be read against the backdrop of madrasa reform in North India and its relationship to craft instruction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[118]

It wove together North Indian craft lineages, the *ustadi-shagirdi* culture[119], with notions of Islamic piety, as a way of connecting members of their own *biradari* or caste-group. In asserting skill-based control over tailoring trade, Anwar's manual cross-fertilised both 'Western' and 'Indian' craft conventions in design and dressmaking as a way of establishing 'superior' craft authority and asserting their 'ashraf' status.

Unlike other trade handbooks published by Muslim artisans such as 'Idrisnamah' (Book of Idris) authored by Sheikh Khwajah Muhammad in 1909, which traced Muslim crafts and dressmaking practices to the legacy of Idris and the Prophet,[120] Anwar's manual promoted a broader social and economic engagement with material conditions and spaces of artisan production. It was a way of providing other Muslims with practical guidelines on learning the craft. The loss of royal patronage and increasing competition from other social groups meant that artisans could no longer take patrons for granted: they had to fight to keep their

[117] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 3
[118] Barbara Metcalf, 'The madrasa at Deoband: a model for religious education in modern India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 12, Issue 1, pp. 111-134.
[119] Tirthankar Roy, 'Out of Tradition: master artisans and economic change in colonial India', *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 66, No. 4, pp. 963-991; Tirthankar Roy, 'Apprenticeship and Industrialization in India, 1600-1930', in Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden eds., *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
[120] Amanda Lanzillo, 'Writing Industrial Change in Urdu', pp. 666-683.

networks.[121] In this context, they sought to build up their own craft authority by turning to religious discourses about Islam and artisanship.[122]

In his manual, Zulfiqar Anwar offers more than complex lessons on cutting, sewing, and numerical learning. He also provides some innovative, 'low-cost hacks' to his *shagirds* at the end of his manual in a section entitled, *kapre se daag saaf karne ka tareeqa* (the techniques to get rid of cloth stains):[123]

> *'Phalo ke ras ka daag chura ne ke liye, pehle sabun laga kar dho de. Agar daag saaf na ho toh kabuttar ki beeth daag par laga de phir paani se dhohde…Tel ya ghee ki chiknayi ke liye, pehle chikni jagah par soda-sabun lagayein. Agar saaf na ho toh, ek aur bari hairatangez tarqeeb: ki agar tel ki chiknayi par aap ghee lagadein; agar ghee ki chiknayi hain toh tel lagadein aur garam pani mein ubaalein, zaroor saaf ho jayega.'*
>
> [To get rid of fruit-juice stains, first wash with soap. If the stain does not go away, rub pigeon-guano on the area and wash with water…to remove oil stains, first wash with soda-soap. If it is not cleaned then [there is] another astonishing technique: if you rub ghee on the oil stain; or rub oil on the ghee stain and then boil in hot water then the stains will most certainly go away.]

Here, we see that the *darzi*'s craft did not stop at sewing garments to perfection. To hold on to his patrons, he had to deliver quality service again and again. Part of that process entailed a finished product that was impeccable in every way. To achieve that standard, Anwar suggests some ingenious 'tips and tricks' to remove fabric stains: the best way to get rid of fruit stains, he says, was to rub *'kabuttar ki beeth'* (pigeon guano) on the stained area, and thereafter wash

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[121] On 'crisis-in-authority', see, Francis Robinson, *The Muslim World in Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2019).
[122] Francis Robinson, 'Strategies of Authority in Muslim South Asia' in *The Muslim World in Modern South Asia,* pp. 180-204; Amanda Lanzillo, 'Printing princely modernity: Lithographic design in Muslim-ruled princely states', Working Notes, *South Asian Popular Culture* Vol. 16, Nos. 2-3 (2018), pp. 245-252; Amanda Lanzillo, 'Between Industry and Islam: Stonework and tomb construction in colonial-era India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 55, Issue 5 (2021), pp. 1510-1543.
[123] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana,* pp. 49-50.

the cloth in water.[124] He offers another '*hairatangez tarqeeb'*, an astonishing tip: to use 'ghee' (pasteurised butter) on an oil stain; and oil on a ghee stain before boiling the cloth in hot water – following this, the stain would most certainly go away. Such trade secrets, alongside rigorous and thorough craft training, seem to have held tailors in good stead.

They not only had to be good with numbers for producing high-quality, made-to-measure garments. But were also required to have cultivated sophisticated numerical skills for accounting and book-keeping, the bedrock for making a success of a tailoring business. Tailoring, Anwar writes, is the work of a man of wide experience (*'saalo ka tajurba'*).[125] Over many years he honed his skill to conduct a large business with success, passing down his knowledge to his sons. His tailoring manual guided young apprentices to learn the craft in a way that enabled them to be skilled master tailors and to use their skills to run their own businesses. Crucial to this success was a thorough grounding in numbers and numerical literacy.

Book-keeping methods

Tailors, Anwar emphasised, ought to have an exceptional grasp of accounting techniques, *hisaab kitab karne wala muhasib.*[126] The very word 'tailor' derives from the word 'tie'er' – *silai taakna*, from one who ties knots in a piece of hemp – as a numerical 'tally'.[127] Tailors

[124] Ibid. Guano has arguably been used as a natural fertiliser since at least the eighteenth century. It contained saltpeter, an essential ingredient of gunpowder. Its effectiveness in treating cloth-stains, however, is yet to be unraveled. On guano trade in the mid-nineteenth century. Richard H. Dillon, 'A Tall Tale about the Guano Trade', *Western Folklore* Vol. 11, No. 2 (1952), pp. 124-126.
[125] Transliterated chapter entitled 'Karobari Hisaab Kitab' on book-keeping in Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, pp. 25-32.
[126] Ibid, p. 26.
[127] Ibid.

should, in the nature of things, be masters in the mystery of numbers, *adaadi paimaish mein maahir*, arithmetical as well as symmetrical.[128]

Three separate inventories, *khatas*, are central to Anwar's book-keeping lesson: the *farwakh ka khata* (sales book), he writes, is an essential requisite for a successful tailoring business. A daily sheet of book-keeping should include the details of the customer, order measurements, date and particulars of transactions, and a petty cash account. The sales book must be maintained separately from the 'Stock and Purchases Book' (*zakheera aur kharidari ka khata*) and 'Salaries and Expenses Book' (*kharach aur tankhwa ka katha*).[129] The financial relations with the persons from whom the supplies for the business are procured (*zakheera hisaab*), or customers on whose behalf cloth is purchased (*kharidari hisaab*), should be noted down under 'stock and purchases'.

To take 'stock' of materials used in a tailoring business was a matter of high importance. Every yard of material was of considerable value. He advises his readers to keep effective checks on the consumption of the pieces of cloth purchased or provided by the customer, to ensure that wastage was reduced to the minimum. Each piece of material used to make a suit should be given a distinctive number which should be entered in the sales book.[130] On completion of order, a circular pendant ticket should be attached to the material showing the piece number, cost price per yard, and price of the garment.[131]

[128] Ibid, p. 29.
[129] Ibid, pp. 30-31.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid, p. 30.

Anwar also emphasises the importance of updating the 'Purchases and Stock' books on a regular basis. He goes on to state:

> *'Kuch karigar shochte hain ki jab ek suit order [sic] hone ke baad, ban jaye aur lehaaza uski kimaat bhi mil jaye toh hisaab-kitab wahi khatam ho jata hain.'*
>
> [Some tailors think that when a suit is ordered, made and paid for, that is the end of the matter as far as book-keeping is concerned].[132]

But, he warns, book-keeping practices need to be more sophisticated in a changing world of markets, suppliers, and consumers. Book-keeping enables the tailor to hold on to his patrons. The name of the customer and specifications of the order should be kept on record for future reference.[133] We notice here that Anwar was aware that tailoring was inextricably linked to changing markets. Hence, accounting methods had to be of a very high order. Anwar's *karobari hisaab kitab* (business account books) was distinct from the '*khatas*' (account books) of Marwari family firms that Ritu Birla has described, also from the '*bahi khatas*' of Aggarwal and Khattri businessmen from Banaras and Patna in the second half of the nineteenth century.[134]

Although the tailor's account books may have been dealing with smaller numbers compared to say Marwari merchants, Anwar's book-keeping methods also point to a difference in their detailing of 'patron-client' relationships.[135] Here, the tailor's coveted skill, his 'trusted hands', were of high value, which earned him handsome returns. For the tailor, then, it was important to hold on to these patrons and one way of doing that was to ensure that he provided high

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[132] Ibid, p. 29.
[133] Ibid, p. 30.
[134] Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 88-89; C.A. Bayly, 'Patrons and Politics in Northern India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 7, Issue 3 (1973), pp. 349-388.
[135] Anastasia Piliavsky ed., *Patronage as Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 37-122.

quality service with every single order. That, in turn, required scrupulous record-keeping with precise details of past orders placed by the patrons and their financial standing – lest a credit order be necessary. In case of the latter, the tailor would have to be judicious as to whether that might be possible. In this regard, Anwar writes: [136]

> '*Darzi ko apne sarf ko udhaar dete waqt hoshiyar rehna bahut zaroori hain. Udhaar tab hi dein jab sarf aapke jaan pehchaan ka ho*.'
>
> [The *darzi*, when providing his services to the customer on credit, should exercise prudence. Only do business in credit when the customer is well-known to you.]

To hold on to their patrons, this was a risk that the tailor was often willing to take.[137] Numerical literacy for tailors was thus as important as in affluent merchant families.

Double entry book-keeping made it possible for Indian businessmen to keep track of the large number of transactions entailed in businesses with multiple portfolios. Such a meticulous system of accounting was designed not to produce figures for overall profit, but to operate a large number of checks on the immediate cash flow position of the family firm.[138] Anwar's tailoring manual, likewise, underlined the importance of numbers in accounting and record-keeping, but it did so for a different purpose. Its aim was twofold: first, to reinforce the importance of precise mathematical calculations necessary for making particular kinds of customised garments. Second, to put in place a punctilious accounting system that distinguished specific orders from expenses incurred (purchases made and salaries disbursed) and income, under separate inventories. Advanced proficiency in numbers, therefore, was an imperative for a successful tailoring shop.

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[136] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 31.
[137] Ibid.
[138] C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian society in the age of British expansion, 1770-1870* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 376-378 and pp. 396-397.

The book-keeping methods in Anwar's manual also hint at the nature of market and consumption patterns in the early decades of the twentieth century. Changing consumption patterns and markets were key drivers behind the success of artisan work.[139] These book-keeping methods gesture towards the range of consumers and markets with which tailors engaged in the late 1920s to the mid-1940s. The idea of the 'market' for tailors was an expansive one, where different tailoring groups could carve out a niche for themselves. Their 'terrain of exchange', included multiple, and often intersecting, sites of production and patronage.[140] Tailoring groups negotiated competition within this shifting and contested milieu by showcasing competing and often overlapping versions of skill and craft authority.

The 'property of skill', locational embeddedness, and markets

For both groups, their skills needed to be safeguarded and preserved in the face of adversity and economic competition. Print culture provided the platform for multiple, and often intersecting narratives to co-exist. These tailoring groups, while asserting their distinctiveness, in fact functioned within overlapping patronage, markets, and demand for their most coveted asset: skill.

It was the 'property of skill' that different tailoring groups, at different moments in time, sought to accrue, assert, and protect by carving out their own niche within the trade. A hereditary tailor possesses what John Rule has termed 'the property of skill': 'a skilled artisan could often recognise his own work and describe it as "his" work even when it had been alienated from

[139] Haruka Yanagisawa, 'The Handloom Industry and its Market Structure: The Case of the Madras Presidency in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in Tirthankar Roy ed., *Cloth and Commerce: Textiles in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1996), pp. 259-264.
[140] Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

him by sale…this hidden form of property, an element of continuing creative possession is missed by a concept of property limited to material rights, yet it describes the property that skill invents.'[141] Tailors often described pieces of clothing that they had made, for instance a fitted suit cut in a particular style, as their patent creation.[142] It was this value of artisanal authorship that was fundamental to possessing a property of skill.

This property of skill also acted as a frontier against the 'unskilled'. Vernacular tailoring manuals of the early twentieth century seem to have been written with a potential audience in mind: the *ustad* (master tailor). Skill, in this sense, was male property rooted in social and gender distinctions with regard to technical aptitude and the lack thereof. In this regard, Samita Sen has argued that skill, as applied to gendered labour relations, was a social construct; it was never an 'objective economic fact, it was an ideological category imposed on certain kinds of work by virtue of gender and the power of workers who performed these tasks.'[143]

Community histories of artisan families engaged in small-scale manufacturing in India have survived and adapted to new markets through informal, guild-like arrangements among working households. These often involved apprentices who were mainly kinsmen.[144] Here too, dependence on family labour and women's unpaid work within the household enabled men to acquire skill *as* property, which in turn, became an asset for building up their 'immobility

[141] John Rule, 'The property of skill in the period of manufacture', in Patrick Joyce ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 104.
[142] Aftab Hussain (third generation master tailor). Personal Interview. 1 July 2019.
[143] Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India*, p. 105.
[144] Maxine Berg, 'Skill, Craft and Histories of Industrialisation in Europe and Asia', *Transactions of the Royal History Society* Vol. 24 (2014), pp. 127-48; Tirthankar Roy, 'The Guild in Modern South Asia', *IRSH International Instituut voor Sociale Geschied*enis Vol. 53 (2008), pp. 95-120.

capital'. How much of this capital was accrued by women is a question yet to be wholly answered.[145]

Skills and craftsmanship in dressmaking have survived because tailors have innovated and adapted to changing market conditions and consumer preferences. They have been supported by communities and family groups, and their craft practices, etched in vernacular trade manuals, have been passed down through the generations. *Kamyab Darzi Khana* is a classic example of a vernacular Urdu handbook that suggested the continued relevance of local apprenticeship models of artisan education outside of, what Gyan Prakash termed, the 'technologizing exercise of state power.'[146] These community histories convey not just cycles of production of high-quality products, but also the 'property of skill' accrued over many years of practice.

Contrary to the views of most colonial ethnographers, tailors exhibited a remarkable ability to incorporate new technologies and styles in dressmaking. This, in turn, gave them a great deal of flexibility in the markets they were able to access; different kinds of garments were made for different patrons to suit a range of purposes.

For tailors, the transmission of skills through vernacular handbooks and tracts was a way of staying anchored in particular patron-client networks. The skills of accountancy strengthened the tailor's place within these well-entrenched nodes of patronage. The tailor-clusters described

[145] On intersections between gender, work, and immobility. Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck in Bengal: Immobility in the "age of migration"', pp. 511-541. On women and informal labour, Naila Kabeer, 'Women Workers and the Politics of Claims Making: The Local and the Global', *Development and Change* Vol. 49, Issue 3 (2018), pp. 759-789; on women and skill, Maxine Berg, 'Craft and Small Scale Production in the Global Economy: Gujarat and Kachchh in the Eighteenth and Twenty-first Centuries', *Itinerario* Vol. 37, No. 2 (2013), pp. 23-45.

[146] Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 170.

in Chapter One were migrant hotspots. Between 1911-1941, these artisan hubs turned into magnetic forcefields, a consequence of its embedded locational resources, which in turn, contributed towards building the tailors' 'immobility capital'.

Different tailoring groups could access different kinds of 'mythic' resources and patrons, using languages rooted in the region, to remain competitive. Perhaps the stronger 'mythic' assets of Bengali Muslim tailors (their association with *do-bashi* sufi pirs) generated a reaction among Urdu-speaking tailors to outcompete their co-religionists by doubling down on 'skills'. This demonstrates that 'immobility capital' was responsive to the assets of competitors anchored in a particular location. Urdu tailors' emphasis on 'skill' in response to competition from the 'mythic resources' of Bengali Muslim tailors shows that if the former could not outflank the latter on matters of saint-worship and mysticism (in conjunction with skill), then another way of achieving a competitive edge over them was by asserting 'superior' technical ability and numerical proficiency.

In both cases, Urdu-speaking Muslims and Bengali-Muslim tailoring groups, used vernacular manuals and tracts to carve out, preserve, and assert their distinctive craft authority. Moreover, it was the locational embeddedness of their skills in particular nodes of patronage and markets that facilitated the tailoring groups to accrue different kinds of assets, in varying degrees, that contributed to their 'immobility capital'.

Chapter Four

The Tailor and Technology: The Singer Manufacturing Company and the Use of Small Machines

A grimy, black hand-machine in a casket, decorated with a tracery of leaves in yellow paint, that nibbled at the yards of cloth at terrific speed.

Mulk Raj Anand, *The Cobbler and the Machine,* 2006[1]

Introduction

This chapter will examine how tailors in Calcutta encountered sewing machines; teasing out the limits they imposed and the advantages they offered, within the late colonial and post-colonial context. The advent of Singer sewing machines, their physical qualities, the nature of the technology that powered these machines, and their diverse usages, had a profound impact on the mobility of tailors who made informed decisions about whether or not to move across borders in the aftermath of partition.

'Everyday technology', to use David Arnold's phrase, reshaped the course of artisan history in late colonial India.[2] It fostered new skills and generated local narratives about technology's multifaceted uses and manifestations. Artisans used sewing machines in a shifting colonial terrain fraught with competing and often overlapping articulations of modernity, material flows, movement of peoples, and social change.

[1] Mulk Raj Anand, *The Cobbler and the Machine,* in Saros Coswasjee ed., *Mulk Raj Anand, Selected Short Stories* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House India, 2006), p. 61.
[2] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

In this environment, labour and small technologies (such as sewing machines, bicycles, and typewriters) melded in a way that allowed for novel work practices to emerge. Some small machines grew to be more popular than others. Sewing machines, in particular, had a lasting impact on Indian craftsmanship and dressmaking. Indian crafts such as weaving, cane-making, brass-making and leather work underwent a radical transformation through the opening up of foreign and domestic markets in the early decades of the twentieth century. The adoption of new technological innovations, as Roy has argued, played a 'creative role' in bolstering 'Indian industrialisation.'[3] Yet, we know little about how tailors fared in this shifting environment.

As I have argued in Chapter Two, they fell through the cracks of both production- and consumption-based historiographies on late colonial India, so their uptake of technology has evaded the historian's eye. The fact is that sewing machines augmented the tailors' skills in profound ways. They enabled tailors to dominate new occupational niches that opened up in the early decades of the twentieth century. The afterlives of these 'alternate modernities'[4], an intermingling of colonial and indigenous social practices and possibilities, had a lasting impact on the life choices of labouring peoples in the post-colonial period.

Muslim tailors in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Calcutta engaged with industrial change through vernacular trade handbooks and instruction manuals that incorporated new technologies into their labour practices. Urdu tailoring handbooks often contained visual traces of a sewing machine, a foreign invention appropriated by *darzis* to meet local consumption needs.[5] Over time, these small machines became indispensable assets for tailors, enhancing

[3] Tirthankar Roy, 'Foreign Trade and the Artisans in Colonial India: A Study of Leather', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 31, No. 4 (1994), pp. 461-490.
[4] David Arnold, 'Technology and Subalternity', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 37, Issue 2 (2003), pp. 287-326.
[5] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 3.

their skills of cutting and sewing materials to suit different manufacturing processes. Localised systems of demand meant that some artisans, just as tailors, masons, carpenters, and metalsmiths, rarely abandoned their traditional occupations.[6]

Unlike weavers, whose engagement with new technologies was often limited by the size of regional markets, they maintained and honed their professional skills into the twentieth century.[7] For tailors, local demand across manufacturing sectors meant that they had to assimilate new technologies into their work practices with expeditious efficiency. The 'locational incentives' of being closer to embedded markets and patrons, with access to trade materials and sewing machines, meant that tailors had much to gain by staying on in these lucrative production clusters.

There is very little data on how tailors 'consumed' small technologies such as sewing machines in the South Asian context.[8] We only have shards of information about how the use of sewing machines influenced and reshaped local artisan practices. In this section, I will piece together fragments from newspapers, literary sources, the Singer archive, and excerpts from Zulfiqar Anwar's *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (1926), discussed in Chapter Three, to unpack the ways in which tailors used technology in their everyday lives. By doing so I seek to develop further the understanding of the relationship between the artisan's work and their immobility. The story of the sewing machine opens up into a number of sub-plots: the multiple intersecting sites in which these machines were operated; the people who used them; and how the interactions

[6] Tirthankar Roy, 'Home Market and the Artisans in Colonial India: A Study of Brass-Ware', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 30, No. 2 (1996), pp. 357-385.
[7] Tirthankar Roy, 'Acceptance of Innovations in Early Twentieth Century Indian Weaving', *Economic History Review*, Vol. V, No. 3 (2002), pp. 508-509.
[8] The two key texts on small technologies in South Asia include David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, 2015 and Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014).

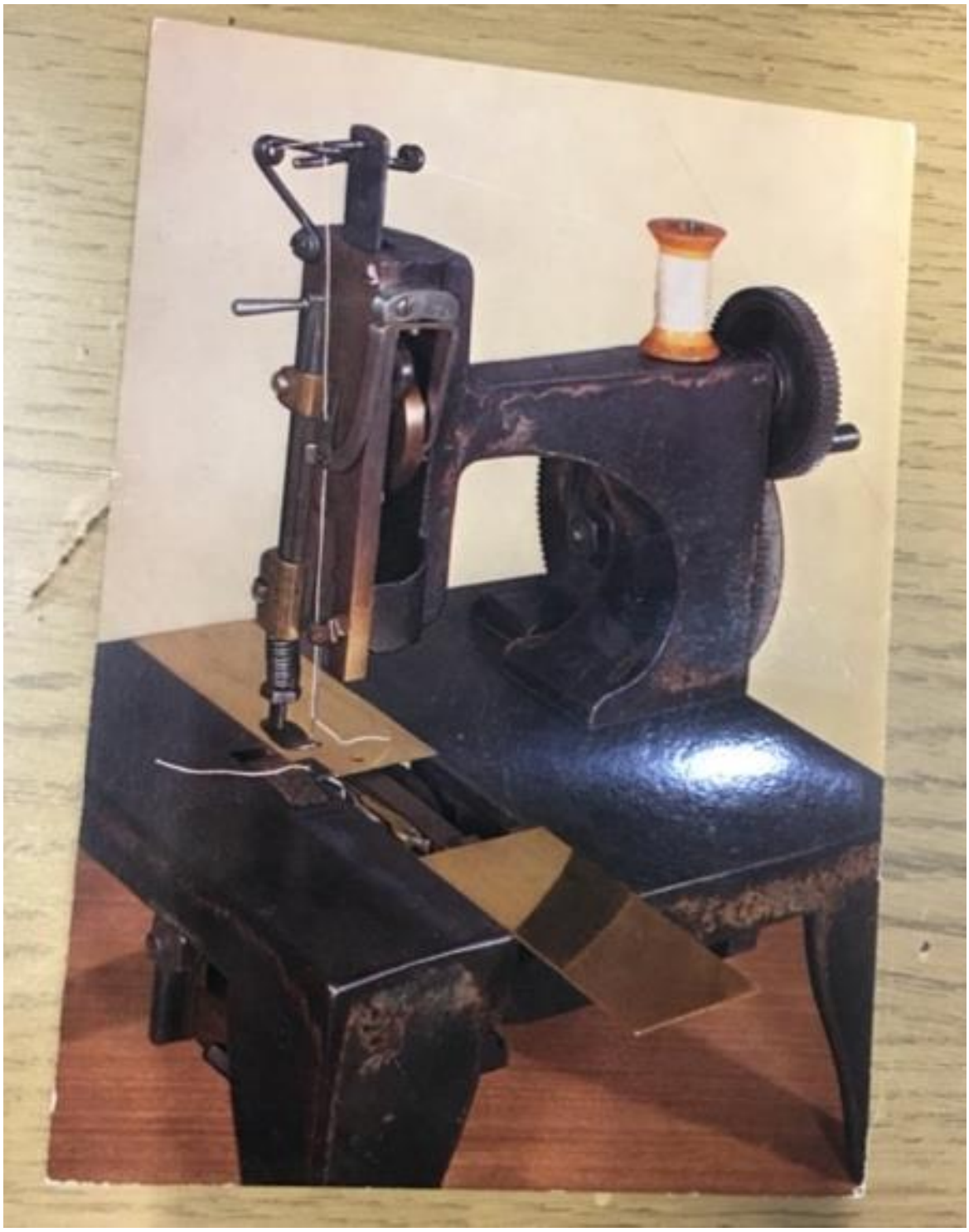
between the two reconstituted material culture, their place in markets, and in artisan practices in late colonial Calcutta.

Singer sewing machines: a brief history

The first Singer sewing machine was conceived in the early 1850s (Image 4.1) through an unusual partnership between a mechanical engineer, Isaac Merritt Singer, and a renowned lawyer of his time, Edward Clark.[9] In August 1851, Isaac Singer patented an early improved sewing machine with continuous stitching that had the following features: 'lock stitch, eye-pointed needle, shuttle for second thread, vibratory or double pointed, continuous thread from spools, horizontal table, overhanding arm, continuous feed, synchronous needle motion, thread or tension controls, giving slack thread as needed, presser foot, and ability to sew in other than straight line'.[10]

[9] 'Inception of Singer: Points of Singer Superiority', GDWD1/1/08/3, Administrative Papers, the Singer Manufacturing Company Records (henceforth Singer Archive, SA), p. 1.
[10] A photograph of the 1851 prototype of the first Singer machine, 'Singer centenary booklet', GDWD1/112/15, Alexander Murdoch series, SA; Singer brochure on 'stitch formations and producing different garments', GDWD1/1/08/26, Administrative Papers, SA, pp. 92-109.

Image 4.1: The 1851 prototype of a Singer sewing machine



Source: 'Singer centenary booklet', GDWD1/112/15, Alexander Murdoch series, SA

Singer's goal was to produce a machine which would sew a seam superior to the one handmade. He wanted a machine that was reliable in operation. The idea was to eliminate the arduous

needlework common to all forms of stitching in those times.[11] In subsequent years, ingenious improvements were made to sewing machines: different machines with different features suitable for a wide range of trades and industries were manufactured and distributed across the globe.[12] The 1851 prototype changed after the introduction of electricity, making the machine more practical and efficient. The revised model had a pedal-belt drive which was more conducive to long-term use compared to the older version with the hand wheel.[13] In 1856, Singer inaugurated a smaller, more compact machine with the turtle-back style, designed for household use rather than the garment industry. The first electric machine was the '15K' model marketed by Singer in 1889.[14]

From the late nineteenth century, both hand-operated sewing machines and electric-powered machines had made their way into the British colonies, India among them. As Nira Wickramasinghe has shown, the Singer sewing machine produced by an American multinational corporation was 'one of the first standardized and mass marketed complex consumer goods to spread around the world' in a way that cut across the political boundaries of the British empire.[15] Singer machines manufactured in Clydebank, Scotland, from the late 1860s onwards, made their way to the colonial port cities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras to serve the European and Asian markets in steamships travelling via the Suez Canal.[16] The

[11] 'How to Mass Produce A Miracle: History of the Firm', GDWD1/1/08/64, Administrative Papers, SA.
[12] 'Singer sewing machines recommended for use in various industries- information on the classification of trades, operations on garments and commodities, approximate output per machine', GDWD1/1/08/65, Administrative Papers, SA.
[13] 'Sew by Electricity: your machine so fitted will do more and better work without exertion on your part', GDWD1/1/07/6, News cuttings, SA.
[14] 'Some Important Historical Facts About The Singer Company', Press Information from Singer Folder, GDWD1/1/08/33, Administrative Papers, SA.
[15] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka*, p. 16.
[16] 'Singer centenary booklet', GDWD1/112/15, Alexander Murdoch series, SA, p. 6.

company's business organisation and novel sales techniques facilitated the firm's monopoly over the market for sewing machines.

Although sewing machines were also made in Germany, Britain, Japan, and other countries, from the late 1860s until the early 1950s, international trade was dominated by a single American firm, The Singer Manufacturing Company.[17] In 1912, Singer (US) controlled 60 percent of the market share of family sewing machines in America and 90 percent in foreign markets.[18] According to David Edgerton, Singer may have monopolized as much as 90 percent of the market.[19] India too became a growing market for these machines, albeit with resistance from some 'swadeshi' quarters in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Singer sales and marketing strategies in late colonial India

In late colonial India, the label 'Singer' was used to describe almost all sewing machines. It was a foreign commodity par excellence, which made its way into the Indian market in the late 1880s. A single American firm was responsible for the machine's global diffusion and reception. It was during George Ross McKenzie's era as the Managing Director of Singer (1882-1889) that the company's 'general expansionist behaviour' developed a serious interest in Asian markets: India, Ceylon, China, Japan, Burma, the Straits Settlements, Java, the Philippines, and in Australia.[20] The management at the Singer headquarters in New York treated India, Burma, and Ceylon as one single region. The Indian market, in particular, had been thought of in the early 1870s by the general agent for Britain and its colonies, George

[17] Robert Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), p. 307.
[18] Annual Reports and Accounts, Folder 6, GDWD1/1/08/99, Administrative Papers, SA.
[19] David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2006), p. 58.
[20] 'Singer Sales Points', GDWD1/1/08/3, Administrative Papers, SA.

Woodruff. He had divided the Indian subcontinent into two halves: the northern district to be worked from Calcutta and the southern district to controlled by Bombay. Ceylon would form a part of the latter.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, district offices and showrooms in different Indian cities grew in number, stretching from Madras in the South all the way up to the Himalayas.[21] The decision to open Singer offices in particular locations in colonial India was not informed by political boundaries or lucrative business opportunities, but stemmed from the marketing and sales strategies of Singer's head agent in India, Nusserwanjee Merwanjee Patell (Image 4.2).[22]

[21] 'Singer Business in the Himalayas', *The Red S Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, October 1939, SA, pp. 18-19; 'Singer Educational System in Madras', *The Red S Review*, Vol. VII, No. 5, January 1926, SA, p. 6.

[22] Image of Nusserwanjee Merwanjee Patell from the Wisconsin Historical Society online library. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM90488. Accessed on 11 January 2022.

Image 4.2: Singer's head agent in India, Nusserwanjee Merwanjee Patell



Source: The Wisconsin Historical Society online library. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM90488. Accessed on 11 January 2022

N.M. Patell, a sharp-witted man with exceptional business acumen, belonged to one of the leading Parsi families of Bombay. Parsis, as is well known were key players in the city's commercial development.[23] The Singer corporation followed the British colonial practice of appointing a member of the English-speaking gentry as their representative. As intermediaries

[23] Jesse Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

between Europeans and ordinary folk, Parsis played a critical role in the dissemination of modern technologies in India. It was N.M. Patell's business acumen that transcended the boundaries of the state and empire to create a demand for a technology that was revolutionary and destined to change the course of India's manufacturing and sartorial history.

In 1888, John Mitchell, 'one of the travelling inspectors' dispatched by Singer to report on local sales, remarked that Indian women were so ignorant and secluded that 'if advertisements reached their hands they would be unable to understand them'. His brief visit to India convinced him of the 'absolute uselessness of the Sewing Machine for the vast majority of the population' whose dress appeared to consist of 'one or two plain pieces of cloth wound in curious folds around the figure'.[24] Capturing the Indian market with its varying clothing habits was no easy task, not to mention competition from Japanese and German corporations.[25] There were many teething problems. Robert Davies has linked the relative failure of Singer in India at the early stages of its arrival to India's caste structure, illiteracy, the seclusion of Indian women, the inaccessibility of Indian homes to the Singer canvassers, the popular preference for cash sales, and the style of clothing that did not require a sewing machine to make them.[26]

This argument requires detailed scrutiny. First, Davies fails to account for why – if social structure and sartorial preferences were such a barrier – Singer machines grew so popular among Indian tailors and urban outfitting firms from the 1880s onwards, despite their initial marketing setbacks. Davies works with the assumption that either European or Anglo-Indian women were likely to buy sewing machines in India. However, Europeans and the *darzis* they

[24] Letter from John Mitchell to Singer agent in London, 20 April 1888, GDWD1/1/02/6, Singer Correspondences, SA.
[25] B.R. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-1947: The Economics of Decolonization in India* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1979), pp. 30-47.
[26] Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, p. 74.

employed were among the first to use these sewing machines.[27] Moreover, the demand for stitched, made-to-measure clothing among *Indian consumers* was one of the key drivers for Indian tailors to purchase these machines. Davies' explanation fails to take into account the structural changes between the two wars and the changing nature of markets that bolstered the use of small machines in tailor clusters embedded in particular locations.

Davies' argument about the stunted sales of Singer machines in India in the late 1880s tends to reproduce these racialised and gendered colonial stereotypes that informed Singer's early marketing strategies. On the contrary, a surge in Singer sales from the late 1890s, after a drastic change in N.M. Patell's marketing approach, says more about these early marketing hiccups than the societal structures of colonial India. From the 1890s onwards, the market for stitched, tailor-made clothing expanded at an exponential rate. Alongside this, there was increasing growth in the demand for military uniforms and war commodities in the run-up to the First World War.

Patell's initial selling methods and stock-keeping were called into question by Edward Sang, the Singer employee from New York whose role it was to oversee the firm's operations in Bombay and Calcutta. When Sang inspected the stocks in both cities, he was struck by the deplorable conditions in which the machines were found: 'skeletons of machines rusty and stripped of parts' were discovered in warehouses.[28] Sang suggested nickel-plating as a measure against dampness. He also interrogated Patell's problematic selling techniques. He described Patell as not having 'the necessary patience', especially with 'those of a lower caste'.[29] Nor

[27] 'Popularity of Singer Hand Machines in India', *The Red S Review*, Vol. X, No. 4, December 1928, SA, p. 13.
[28] Letter from Edward Sang to George Mckenzie, 10 August 1888, GDWD1/1/02/12, Singer Correspondences, SA.
[29] Ibid.

had he managed the account books in a methodical way, failing to provide answers for ledger discrepancies.[30] Thereafter, Patell was issued a warning by the Singer headquarters to revise his sales strategies and book-keeping methods. He was warned not to advertise the sale of damaged machines as that would create a bad reputation for Singer among hirers who had allegedly returned malfunctioning machines to local Singer agents.[31]

After a financial scandal and a brief fall from grace due to poor stock-keeping, John Mitchell, the chief inspector with the London office, reinstated Patell in 1887. Next, Patell introduced a new set of marketing strategies to broaden the Indian market. He discarded the old 'canvasser-collector' selling system where machines were marketed through door-to-door home visits and authorised the appointment of resident commissioning agents. These agents would advertise, secure orders, and collect market information, which would then be used by occasional traveling canvassers from city offices.[32]

Patell revised the selling plan based on the observation that local consumers preferred to buy the machine at the shop and pay in cash rather than make use of the hire purchase system. However, he ended up keeping both sale options – cash payment and hire-purchase agreements, open to individual customers and artisan groups who preferred to purchase the machines in instalments.[33] The Singer headquarters authorised Patell to sell the machines at a lower price for cash. Some customers made use of this attractive option and pooled in their resources into a common fund to buy a machine.[34]

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[30] Letter from Edward Sang to N.M. Patell, 17 April 1888, GDWD1/1/02/7, Singer Correspondences, SA.
[31] Ibid.
[32] 'To all Salesman-Collectors: Selling Points', *The Red S Review*, Vol. VII, No. 5, January 1926, SA.
[33] 'Hire-Purchase System', *The Red S Review*, Vol. VI, No. 3, November 1924, SA, pp. 10-11.
[34] Ibid, p. 11.

Unlike his American colleagues with their own orientalist views about India, Patell had a better understanding of local consumption practices and domestic markets. His revised sales strategy bypassed the small proportion of potential European buyers and focused instead on Indian tailors, who constituted a far larger market. He marketed the machines to master tailors who ran caste- or kin-based occupational guilds and made the critical decisions about purchasing or hiring sewing machines.[35]

Although his target buyers were men who by custom or trade were established tailors, nevertheless, evidence suggests that by the early twentieth century an increasing number of women in India were using sewing machines or learning to sew on such machines.[36] Patell was of the view that Indian buyers 'as a rule look to cheapness'. They would buy less expensive machines including 'imitation Singers' unless the Singer Company sold its machines at a competitive price. Contrary to company policy, he even offered discounts of at least ten percent.[37] Following this, Patell and his local agents in India drew up hire-purchase agreements that enabled tailors who could not afford to buy the machine, to rent or own one on easy instalment payments.

As a result, Singer soon disposed of more machines by hire purchase than were sold on a one-time cash payment. In 1877, 1,093 machines were sold, 599 to Indian customers, but a further 1,508 went through hire purchase. Indians bought 885 of the latter.[38] By 1885 there were thirty-

[35] 'Customer receipts for the purchase of Singer machines: Class 15K', GDWD1/1/07/3, Singer Customer Papers, SA. Also see, David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 77.
[36] Sharon F. Kemp, 'How Women's Work is Perceived', in James Warner Björkman ed., *The Changing Division of Labour in South Asia: Women and Men in India's Society. Economy and Politics* (Delhi: Manohar, 1987), p. 93.
[37] In this letter, N.M. Patell informed McKenzie that counterfeit Singers made by rival European exporters were in circulation at the time, N.M. Patell to McKenzie, 3 July 1883, Singer Correspondences, GDWD1/1/02/14, SA.
[38] Letter from John Mitchell to Singer agent in London, 20 April 1888, Singer Correspondences, GDWD1/1/02/6, SA.

five Singer outlets in India.[39] By 1905, the company had over a hundred branches across India, Ceylon, and Burma.[40] By 1917, the price for a Singer sewing machine in Calcutta was 93 rupees cash or 106 rupees on instalment.[41]

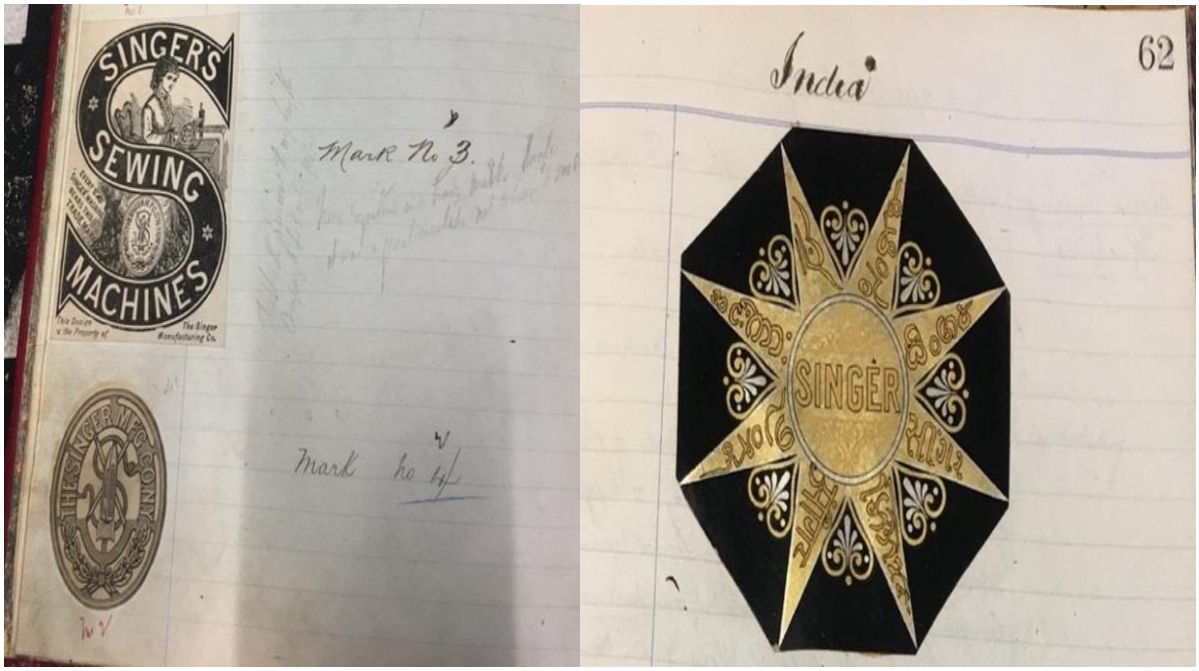
Patell's flexible sales strategies paid off in India. The hire-purchase agreements proved to be more popular among artisan groups who were perhaps accustomed to dealing with moneylenders reclaiming dues or pawning jewellery, when necessary, hence the idea of paying in instalments would not have been new to them.[42] Although the data is insufficient to vouch for a wider preference for hire-purchase payment in the years before the 1930s, the evidence suggests that this was the preferred mode of payment for sewing machines in the Indian subcontinent.[43]

Singer disseminated information about their machines through three key media: travelling salesmen, trade cards, and newspaper advertisements. Between 1889-1905, the company launched an advertising department that introduced Singer calendars, trade cards, pamphlets, and sewing tools bearing the trademark red 'S'. Unlike the images used for many other countries where a woman was shown working the machine, on Patell's recommendation to Alexander Murdoch, the chief agent at the Singer headquarters in New York, the Indian trademark was redesigned.[44] This was done with the view to make the machines more appealing

[39] Singer Handbook of Public Relations, GDWD1/1/08/26, Administrative Papers, SA, p. 11.
[40] Ibid, p. 20.
[41] 'Volume of receipts and coupons in various languages (Calcutta, Madras, Delhi)', GDWD1/1/08/1, Administrative Papers, SA.
[42] This was certainly the case in Ceylon. Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka*, p. 46.
[43] 'Hire Purchase Agreements for Singer Machines', GDWD1/1/07/3/3, Singer Customer Papers, SA.
[44] Letter from N.M. Patell to Alexander Murdoch, the chief agent at the Singer headquarters in New York, 6 July 1895, GDWD1/1/12/4, Alexander Murdoch series, SA.

for the Indian market. The word 'Singer' was inscribed in different regional languages and embossed within a gold star.[45]

Image 4.3: The Singer redesigned imprimatur for India with 'Singer' embossed in vernacular languages



Source: 'Registration of Singer trade cards: British colonies and foreign countries', GDWD1/1/08/04, Administrative Papers, SA

In 1901, Patell circulated the 'Singer Guide to India Ceylon and Burmah' among the company's agents – twenty thousand guides were printed, nineteen thousand of which were paper bound, and a thousand cloth bound. These contained illustrated catalogues of prices, types of sewing machines, and the history of the Singer company. Patell's plan was to sell these guides through local booksellers or at book stalls on railway stations.[46]

[45] 'Registration of Singer trade cards: British colonies and foreign countries', GDWD1/1/08/04, Administrative Papers, SA.
[46] Letter from N.M. Patell to Singer Manufacturing Company New York Executive Office, 10 October 1901, Singer Correspondences, GDWD1/1/03/02, SA.

Independent franchised agents of the Singer Company in cities around the world had to undergo rigorous training in sales and management. The Singer trade cards published in 1905 provided the salesmen with 'talking points' to discuss with prospective buyers. These included special 'educational services' offered to potential female buyers for furnishing 'something of a high order that shall appeal to the best element in the Homes'.[47]

Newspapers were a visual and textual medium which disseminated information about modern technologies. It was through newspaper advertisements that many tailors, petty traders, and outfitting firms encountered the different features of sewing machines.[48] As we have seen, before the arrival of Singer machines, *darzis* deft in needlework, produced garments by hand in the verandah of European households or in tailoring workshops. With sewing machines, they, too, entered a world of speed and replication. Unlike some parts of the world where women became tailors by profession after the advent of sewing machines,[49] in India, tailoring (before partition) was an urban profession manned in the main by male Muslim tailors, although not in an exclusive way.[50]

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[47] General Circular No. 33, from S.M. Colema to agents, 26 July 1892, GDWD1/1/08, Administrative Papers, SA; 'The Singer in the Home and the Workshop: Illustrated Catalogue', GDWD1/1/03/18, Catalogues, SA.

[48] The power of advertising is evident in one of Mulk Raj Anand's short stories, *The Cobbler and The Machine*, written in the 1930s. In this story, a young machine enthusiast tries to persuade a cobbler to buy a Singer machine by showing him an advertisement of 'an Englishwoman with a bun on the top of her head, wielding a Singer sewing machine'. This pictorial image evokes in the unlettered cobbler 'wide-eyed wonder' about the machine. Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Cobbler and the Machine', in *Mulk Raj Anand: Selected Short Stories* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House India, 2006), pp. 61-72.

[49] Women in Dutch Indonesia, for instance, worked as professional 'machinists' or seamstresses in European households. Jean Gelman Taylor, 'The Sewing Machine in Colonial-Era Photographs: A record from Dutch Indonesia', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 2012), pp. 71-95.

[50] David Arnold, 'Global Goods and Local Usages', pp. 407-429 and pp. 411-414. In a similar vein, Kupferschmidt shows that male tailors working in shops in the Ottoman provinces were the first to take up sewing machines given their predisposition to needlework and dressmaking. Uri M. Kupferschmidt, 'The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East', *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 44, Issue 2 (2004), pp. 195-213.

The gradual change in the ethnic distribution of tailors and seamstresses may indicate that buying a sewing machine demanded a certain kind of capital, the 'property of skill' which Muslim artisans from nonagricultural professions were more likely to have garnered by the early twentieth century.[51]

Advertisements in local newspapers sought to tap into the subjective desires of the potential buyers.[52] The Indian 'buyer', in Patell's initial marketing strategy, was an unmarked and open-ended figure. Unlike the gendered Singer advertisements catering to women and homemakers in America that appropriated Victorian ideals of female respectability, the English press advertisements in India marketed the machine to any type of buyer: man or woman, rich or poor.[53]

[51] This argument resonates with the case of Muslim tailors and Burghers in Ceylon who dominated the tailoring profession and made use of their connections with Bohra and Memon merchant traders. Between 1903-1926, Muslim tailoring shops with names such as Abdul Rahaman, Idroos and Sheriff, Sufi Brothers, Yusoof B.K, among others, sprang up in Colombo. The same trend was visible in Galle and Kandy where there was a relatively large Muslim community. Some of the tailoring businesses were already suppliers of military and civil garments. Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, pp. 123-125.

[52] Douglas Haynes, 'Advertising and the History of South Asia, 1880-1950', *History Compass* Vol. 13, Issue 8 (2015), pp. 361-374; Aravind Rajagopal, 'Advertising in India: Genealogies of the Consumer Subject', in S. Dube ed., *Handbook of Modernity in South Asia: Modern Makeovers* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 217-228.

[53] 'Singer Machines for Modern Tailoring', *The Statesman*, 12 July 1885, in Ranabir Ray Choudhury, *Early Calcutta Advertisements: A Selection From The Statesman, 1875-1925* (Calcutta: The Statesman Commercial Press, 1992), p. 184. A Singer promotional pamphlet reads thus: 'If you wish to reduce your tailoring expenses, if you wish to save your time, if you wish to see your family neatly dressed, if you wish to see your ladies engaged in useful and intelligent work at home then only Singer is the machine for you', GDWD1/1/05, Singer Promotional Materials, SA.

Image 4.4: An advertisement of Singer Sewing Machines in *The Statesman*, July 1885



Source: 'Singer Machines for Modern Tailoring', *The Statesman*, 12 July 1885 in Ranabir Ray Choudhury, *Early Calcutta Advertisements: A Selection From The Statesman, 1875-1925*, 1992. Calcutta: The Statesman Commercial Press. p. 184

However, Patell soon realised that the sales of sewing machines for 'family use', for instance, the 'Singer 201K', were significantly less in number.[54] N.M. Patell's marketing strategy shifted towards targeting men 'who by custom or trade were tailors'.[55] Whether as customers or sales

[54] Family and Artisan Sewing Machines and Equipment Folder. GDWD1/1/03/1. Singer Catalogues, SA, p. 26.
[55] N.M. Patell to McKenzie, January 16, 1885. GDWD1/1/02/2, Triplicates of outgoing correspondence from Singer, SA.

agents, women were not central to N.M. Patell's marketing strategy in India. For him selling sewing machines to *darzis* seemed like a far more lucrative prospect. For instance, particular kinds of machines were advertised solely for use by tailors –the 'dressmakers machine: class machine 66 and 101' came with a 'life-time' guarantee for unlimited use.[56] Singer advertised them as 'something of great value which cannot be with any other machine'.[57] Singer shops in cities around the world provided repair facilities, and machine parts (even for obsolete models) on short notice: 'no matter how old the machine or to what part of the world the owner may move, close at hand is Singer service'.[58]

Above all, the advertisements emphasised the durability of these machines.[59] In the early Singer advertisements, the 1885 advertisement from *The Statesman* (Image 4.4), for instance, contained useful information on hire-purchase options, the types of machines for sale, along with additional details about the name and address of Singer shops, the after-sales services including repairs and availability of duplicate parts, and reminding the buyers that accessories like needles, oils, and cottons were always in stock.[60]

The advertisement also provides an important clue about the location of the Singer shop, in 'Dalhousie Square' at the heart of Calcutta's commercial district, close to tailor-clusters in Metiabruz and outfitting businesses in Burrabazaar. Not only did Singer's sales benefit from its proximity to tailors and outfitting firms, the latter groups also benefitted from having these resources available to them, near at hand.

[56] Guarantee cards for Singer machines, GDWD1/17/3/4.n.d, Singer Customer Papers, SA.
[57] Singer postcards, GDWD1/1/07/4.n.d, Singer Customer Papers, SA.
[58] 'Points about Singer Superiority', GDWD/1/1/08, Singer Administrative Papers, SA, p. 7.
[59] 'Who'd expect a sewing machine to run perfectly after over 4000 hours of continuous running? Nobody except Singer', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 29 June 1907.
[60] 'Singer Machines for Modern Tailoring', *The Statesman*, 12 July 1885.

Advertisements in newspapers and magazines, however, were not the only way to promote the machine: international exhibitions and trade fairs, store front window displays, word-of-mouth promotions, and door-to-door travelling salesmen were other strategies employed by the company.[61] And it was not, as one might imagine, just the anglicized middle-classes who sought to own these machines (although many *bhadralok* women did), but also labouring artisans, tailors, and petty traders, for whom the sewing machine was a potential mine to exploit, a labour-saving device, and new technology to reckon with.

The following section will trace Singer's impact on the social, economic, and political landscape of late colonial Calcutta. *Darzis* in Calcutta occupied a unique and distinctive position in relation to these modern machines. They were quick to respond to the advantages that the machine afforded to them. The widespread appropriation of these machines by *darzis*, was not a unilinear, top-down acceptance of a 'foreign' invention, but rather they diffused and intertwined with their hereditary craft practices. *Darzis* integrated these machines into their older patterns of work in novel ways. The interactions between the two – the tailor and technology, the sewing machine and the tailor's hereditary skills – had a profound and transformative impact on the socio-economic structures within which they were embedded.

[61] 'Singer exhibitions and trade fair', *The Red S Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 8, June 1928, pp. 14-15.

Singer sewing machines and what they tell us about tailors in late colonial Calcutta, 1880-1947

David Arnold and Nira Wickramasinghe have provided fascinating insights into the history of technology from the perspective of the colonised peoples.[62] The foreign origin of Singer sewing machines did not deter Indians or Ceylonese communities from 'creatively appropriating', what Arnold as called, 'modernising goods'.[63] Based on the Singer Company papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society Library, which include boxes of administrative and financial records, trade cards, and correspondences between the Singer headquarters in New York and their 'oriental agents' dispersed around the globe, their analysis of the quotidian uses of small machines in the South Asian context is rich and insightful.[64]

However, both historians have overlooked the Singer collection at the Dumbarton council archive in Clydebank, Scotland, which reveals different dimensions of the sewing machine's usages by tailors. In 1867, Singer set up an overseas factory in Clydebank, near Glasgow. The following year, it built another production unit nearby in Kilbowie. The Company chose this location for the factory in the United Kingdom for its shipping connections, as well as its iron and cotton industries. By 1913, the Clydebank factory produced no less than 1,301, 851 machines a year, becoming the largest sewing machine factory in the world.[65] The Singer papers housed in the Dumbarton council archive contain rich and valuable sources on Singer's commercial transactions, 'overseas' business strategies, and its reception in British Indian cities

[62] On 'techno-political visions' vis-à-vis 'development' in India, see, David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity*, pp. 3-15; on technology, identity formation, and 'multiple loops of belonging', see, Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, pp. 45-62.
[63] David Arnold, 'Global goods and local usages: the small world of the Indian sewing machine, 1875-1952', *Journal of Global History* Vol. 6 (2011), p. 427.
[64] Singer papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Library.
[65] 'The History of the Sewing Machine', *The Red S Review*, Vol. VI, No. 3, November 1924, pp. 8-9.

such as Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, among others (1864-1991). Singer's 'The Red S Review' journal entries provide a fascinating window into how the machines were being used on the ground, in varied contexts, whether by the elite or by 'everyman'.[66]

The sheer versatility and impact of small technologies across different socio-economic contexts can rarely be found in official records and state pronouncements. Obscure and hole-in-the-wall council archives, newspaper cuttings, novels, and photographs often contain fragments of sources that give us access into the 'inner histories' of machines and their assimilation into people's everyday lives. I use these sources to suggest the ways in which Muslim tailors forged an intimate connection with sewing machines in late colonial Calcutta, and to show how the machines changed tailoring practices and the spaces in which tailors lived and worked.

Singer sewing machines reconfigured spaces, material culture, and artisan practices in different places, in distinct ways. During their tour of India in 1912, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the socialist economists of the Fabian Society, encountered sewing machines in schools in Peshawar in the North-West Frontier Province, where tailors sat on the floor of their tiny shops working on their Singer sewing machines.[67] In 1929, D. Narayana Rao in a report on 'cottage industries' wrote that, in the Southwest of India, in Malabar, a group of enterprising Muslim Mappillas used sewing machines to make the cotton caps worn by Muslim men, which they sold both in local areas or exported to other places. By the 1920s, the Mappillas had 200 machines and employed some 500 women and boys.[68] In the same period, in Lahore and Amritsar in Punjab, with their army cantonments and railway workshops, the local demand for

[66] The Singer Manufacturing Company Records (1864-1991), West Dumbartonshire Council archive, Clydebank, Scotland.
[67] George Feaver ed., *The Webbs in Asia: The 1911-12 Travel Diary* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1992), p. 289.
[68] D. Narayana Rao, *Report on the survey of cottage industries in the Madras Presidency* (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1929), p. 205.

uniforms gave rise to clothing factories, and installed rows of sewing machines to make them up.[69] In cities such as Calcutta and Dacca, large tailoring establishments proliferated to meet the growing demand for stitched shirts, coats, leather shoes and uniforms.[70]

With regard to Singer sales in India, Andrew Godley was of the opinion that they 'remained insignificant' in the period up to the end of the First World War, and only one percent of Indian households in 1916 had bought a sewing machine.[71] What he failed to consider was that one percent of households constituted, by 1911, over 315 million people.[72] The social and commercial impact of these sewing machines went far beyond mere numbers, large though they were. Between 1900-1950, more than two million sewing machines were imported into India.[73] Despite India's 'arrested development' in the early decade of the twentieth century, imports of sewing machines quadrupled between 1900 and 1914, underscoring the importance of this period to technological change in India.[74] In 1900, 74 percent of the sewing machines imported into India were from Singer's Clydebank factory near Glasgow. They entered Indian trade statistics as 'British manufactures'.[75]

The 'arrested development' of Singer machines in India was perhaps due to a strong backlash from the swadeshi ('homespun') movement. Swadeshi fostered new technological awareness

[69] *Census of India, 1911*, Vol XIV, Part 1, p. 507. Also, 'The Army Clothing Factory: Shahjahanpur, India', *The Red S Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3, November 1929, SA, pp. 13-14.
[70] 'Calcutta: the Second City of the Empire', *The Red S Review*, Vol. XX, No. 10, June 1939, SA, pp. 25-26; *Report on the survey of cottage industries in Bengal,* second edition (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1929), p. 52 and p. 78.
[71] Andrew Godley, 'Global Diffusion of the Sewing Machine, 1850-1914', *Research in Economic History* Vol. 20 (2001), pp. 22-23.
[72] E.A. Gait, *Census of India, 1911*. Volume I. Part I (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1911), p. 12.
[73] 1956 Reports and Accounts, GDWD1/1/08/11, Administrative Papers, SA.
[74] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 43.
[75] Ibid, p. 44.

in which machines and the commodities they produced became a contentious terrain. There was a wide spectrum among swadeshi activists, who held different opinions on many matters. In 1901, Pramatha Nath Bose, a former advocate for Western technical education in India, critiqued the 'machine craze' for causing the physical and moral decay and the degeneration of Hindus. In his view, modern technology was an imposition that facilitated British economic exploitation of India, and an illustration of the domination of the 'unscientific peoples of the world' by the 'scientific peoples of the West'.[76] In a similar vein, Aurobindo Ghosh, one of the staunchest advocates of the swadeshi movement in Bengal who, like Pramatha Bose, had been educated in England before taking up service under the aegis of the Maharaja of Baroda, espoused that the swadeshi movement was directed 'not merely against foreign goods, but against foreign habits, foreign dress, manners, and foreign education'. He sought to bring the Indian people 'back to their own civilization'.[77] The other end of the spectrum was the Tagore family that adopted a distinct version of Indian 'modernism' that resisted the demands of Bengali nationalism. [78]

The swadeshi movement in its political heartland in Bengal, however, floundered due to opposition of British commercial and industrial interests, backed by the colonial state.[79] The 'anti-climax' of the swadeshi movement in Bengal was compounded by, as Sumit Sarkar has argued, the inability of the high-caste Hindu leadership to engage with the lower classes, including the Muslim peasantry of East Bengal. Furthermore, a drift into terrorism in 1908

[76] Pramatha Nath Bose, 'Western Science from an Eastern View point', *Westminster Review* Vol. 156 (1901), p. 219.
[77] Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1967), p. 122.
[78] On Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, and the Jorasanko tradition of 'modern' Indian art that tended to focus on cosmopolitanism, revolutionary innovations and openness to European influences. See, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of new 'Indian' art*, pp. 226-313.
[79] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal,* p. 134.

further detached middle-class revolutionaries, who had more to lose, from the less fortunate. It met with severe state repression.[80] Nevertheless, the swadeshi movement in Bengal served as a precursor to the more successful mass mobilisation around the boycott of foreign goods by Gandhi. Although many swadeshi advocates urged the creation of Indian industries to drive out foreign competition, it was often small-scale enterprises making modest items of everyday consumption that were in the best position to take advantage of these circumstances.[81] Small producers refashioned themselves and the commodities they produced as 'swadeshi' in order to harness the appeal of 'moral consumption' practices buttressed by the movement.[82] Indian manufacturers and small merchant traders found ways to establish their own businesses, 'indigenising' their skills to meet the patriotic ideal and aesthetic vision of swadeshi.[83]

The growing demand for sewing machines must be set against this backdrop. Three Indian sewing machine manufacturers started to enter the domestic market in the late 1930s: Jay Engineering began to manufacture 'Usha' machines in Calcutta,[84] the Indian Sewing Machine Manufacturing Company in Lahore, and the Delhi Sewing Machine Company marketed their first machines called 'Daisy' in 1938.[85] Through innovative business strategies such as naming machines after family members, Indian entrepreneurs sought to appropriate the idiom of swadeshi to capture the domestic market. For instance, the Indian sewing machine 'Usha' was

[80] Ibid.
[81] Amit Bhattacharya, *Swadeshi Enterprise in Bengal, 1921-1947: The Second Phase* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1995).
[82] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 99.
[83] Manu Goswami, *Producing India*, pp. 28-30.
[84] In the 1920s, many of the taxi drivers in Calcutta were Sikhs. Bishandas Basil, the Sikh engineer who developed the first Indian made sewing machine 'Usha' worked in Calcutta but was originally from Ludhiana in Punjab. David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 102.
[85] David Arnold and Erica DeWald, 'Everyday Technology in South and Southeast Asia: An introduction', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 46, No. 1 (2012), pp. 1-17.

named after the founder's daughter. Likewise, 'Rani' sewing machines manufactured in the early 1950s bore the same name of the manufacturer's daughter.[86]

Muslim tailors, too, aligned themselves with the movement by using their skills to meet the demand for appropriate modes of 'Indian' dress or swadeshi commodities.[87] For instance, as discussed in Chapter Two, tailors showed themselves keen to meet the demand for stitched swadeshi umbrellas, hand-sewn *khadi kurtas* and Gandhi caps.[88] While some swadeshi nationalists held the strong view that modern technology impoverished Indian 'traditional crafts' and artisanship,[89] the sewing machine had a privileged place in Gandhi's philosophy and approach to craft production. An otherwise staunch opponent of 'Western civilization', he had a favourable disposition towards sewing machines: 'take the case of the Singer sewing machine', he said, 'it is one of the few useful things ever invented.'[90]

In Gandhi's worldview, the sewing machine was:

> '[an] intelligent exception...[he] would welcome any day a machine to straighten crooked spindles so that when the spindle gets wrong every spinner will have a machine of his own to make it straight.'[91]

Gandhi's otherwise anti-machinery doctrine thus accommodated Singer sewing machines, its foreign origins notwithstanding. In 1924, discussing his *Hind Swaraj* position with Mahadev Desai, Gandhi clarified that he was not against all machinery. He was against the 'craze' for labour-saving devices while men went about unemployed. When Desai pointed out that Singer

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[86] 'Usha machines', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 15 August 1960, p. 1; and 'Rani sewing machines', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 13 January 1952. Also see, Arun Joshi, *Lala Shri Ram: a study on entrepreneurial and industrial management* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975), pp. 277-283.
[87] See the example of Gandhi caps in the sub-section on 'swadeshi times' in Chapter Two.
[88] David Arnold, 'Global goods and local usages: the small world of the Indian sewing machine, 1875-1952', *Journal of Global History* Vol. 6 (2011), p. 427.
[89] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi* (Madras: Ganesh, 1912), p. 5 and p. 26.
[90] *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. 25. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1966), p. 251.
[91] *Young India*, 13 November 1924, in M.K. Gandhi, *Man Vs Machine*, edited by Anand T. Hingorani. (New Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1998).

machines were made in factories with power-driven machinery, Gandhi replied that this was true, but he was 'socialist enough to say that such factories should be nationalised, state-controlled.'[92]

Singer's advertisements often highlighted that Isaac Singer, the firm's founder, had invented the machine as a labour of love for his wife and as a means of saving her unnecessary toil.[93] This image aligned with Gandhi's conception of a handicraft-based economy. Gandhi's acceptance of Singer sewing machines, one of the few foreign technologies he did accept, reflects the dominant tropes through which some machines were used to reinforce conventional gender roles by binding women to hard labour. As Prem Chowdhry has shown, by emphasizing the benefits associated with working by hand, men expected women to do the laborious, painstaking work by denying them the advantages of using labour-saving modern machines and thereby binding them closer to the traditional social order.[94] Despite the early resistance to Singer machines from some swadeshi nationalists, there is little evidence of significant cultural resistance to sewing machines in India.

In the interwar period, Madhur Jaffrey writes in a memoir about how in her family's high-status household in Delhi in the 1930s, her mother owned a sewing machine that she used to make clothes for the family, and occasionally employed a 'bumbling' *darzi* to assist in the dressmaking.[95] So we see that it was not just *memsahibs* engaging the services of a *darzi* in dressmaking; middle-class Indian women, too, employed *darzis* for the same purposes.

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[92] Mahadev Desai, preface to MK Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (revised new edition, Ahmedabad 1939), pp. ix-x. Also, Benjamin Zachariah, 'Uses of Scientific Argument: The Case of 'Development' in India, c.1930-1950', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 36, No. 39 (2001), pp. 3689-3702.
[93] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 100.
[94] Prem Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations Rural Haryana, 1880-1990* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[95] Madhur Jaffrey, *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India* (London: Ebury, 2005), p. 143.

Moreover, it was not only urban tailors who incorporated these 'mechanical novelties' into their everyday work regimes.[96] The increasing mobility and rural penetration of Singer machines was quite pronounced. It was notable even in Chittagong, in eastern Bengal, where the *darzis* followed seasonal migrant labourers into neighbouring Burma for the paddy harvest, lugging their shirt-sewing Singers with them.[97]

Gandhi's blessing of sewing machines notwithstanding, Indian-made machines could not compete with the sales services provided by the Singer Company, whether on quality or after-sale services. As indicated in the table below, by the eve of the First World War, British-manufactured Singer machines constituted 66 percent of the market share, while the German-manufactured Pfaff sewing machines had risen to nearly 32 percent, taking up a large slice of the cake that was India's market.[98]

Tab 4.1: 'The Annual Imports of Sewing Machines into India, 1900-1901 to 1921-52'

Year	Sewing Machines
1900-1901	15,251
1901-02	15,415
1902-03	18,770
1903-04	26,247
1904-05	26,455
1905-06	26,683
1906-07	29,207
1907-08	28,241
1908-09	27,642
1909-10	29,291
1910-11	41,065
1911-12	39,797

[96] N.M. Patell uses this phrase in his letter to George McKenzie, 17 November 1881, Singer Correspondences, GDWD1/1/02/14, SA.
[97] *Report on the survey of cottage industries in Bengal*, 2nd edition, Government of Bengal (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1929), p. 102.
[98] Table computed from 'The Annual Imports of Sewing Machines into India, 1900-1901 to 1921-52', Annual Statement of the Sea-Borne Trade and Navigation of British India for the relevant years, cited in David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, pp. 47-48, and *The Statistical Abstract for British India, 1939-37 to 1940-41*. Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1948), pp. 432-433.

1912-13	57,581
1913-14	61,183
1914-15	51,149
1915-16	40,357
1916-17	74,642
1917-18	57,761
1918-19	27,534
1919-20	48,882
1920-21	62,964
1921-22	23,845
1922-23	46,050
1923-24	48,385
1924-25	61,229
1925-26	70,835
1926-27	71,497
1927-28	75,264
1928-29	78,241
1929-30	68,680
1930-31	52,222
1931-32	45,317
1932-33	39,109
1933-34	54,886
1934-35	83,354
1935-36	84,755
1936-37	64,791
1937-38	90,023
1938-39	61,231
1939-40	75,382
1940-41	34,586
1941-42	41,011
1942-43	18,575
1943-44	4,389
1944-45	10,050
1945-46	28,359
1946-47	59,486
1947-48	53,385
1948-49	56,938
1949-50	49,043
1950-51	23,425
1951-52	28,872

Source: Data compiled from The Annual Statement of the Sea-Borne Trade and Navigation of British India with the British Empire and Foreign Countries. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1913 and The Statistical Abstract for British India, 1939-37 to 1940-41, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics. Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1948. pp. 432-433

Despite the impact of the First World War on the global economy, and the partial boycott of foreign goods caused by the swadeshi movement, the sheer volume of imported sewing machines continued to rise until 1916-1917. There was a sharp decline in imports with the post-war trade slump in 1921, but as with other imports, demand for sewing machines reached another peak in the late 1920s. The Great Depression of 1929 halved India's foreign trade between 1928 and 1933. But those already in place were ubiquitous in tailoring workshops. Imports rose again in the mid-1930s reaching a high point in 1937-1938, when just over ninety-thousand machines entered Indian territory, but the numbers fell thereafter until the late 1940s.

Alfred Chatterton observed shortly before the First World War that Singer sewing machines were to be found in 'almost every tailor's shop in the country'. Although they were 'somewhat delicate and complicated pieces of machinery...[the] facilities for repair or renewal of parts have been so widely diffused that the tailors find no difficulty in keeping them in working order.'[99]The Second World War gave Indian manufacturers short-term respite from German competition. Churchill's Indian Ocean policy during the Second World War, restrictions on export commodities and stiff import duties, began to impact the sales of foreign machines in India.[100] In the light of these wartime structural and demographic changes – import restrictions imposed during the Second World War and supply falling far short of demand for war goods – I argue, as many have for other sectors, that these circumstances may have created opportunities for indigenous artisanship to expand. Tailors had time to skill up quickly, diversify, adapt their skills to different production units geared towards manufacturing a wide range of war commodities, and meet the local demand for government uniforms.

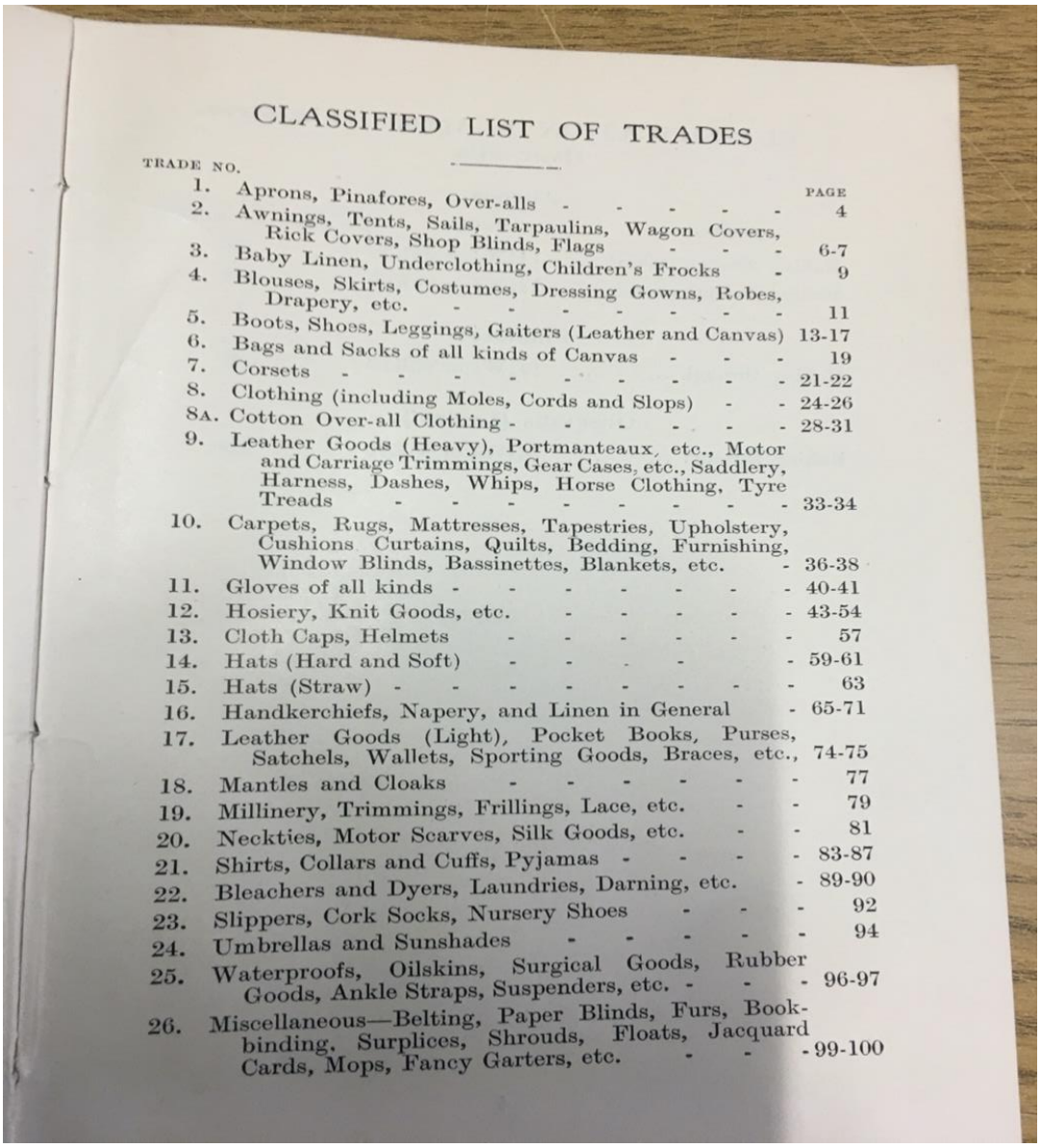
[99] Alfred Chatterton, *Industrial Evolution in India* (Madras: Hindu Office, 1912), pp. 21-22.
[100] David Arnold, 'Global goods and local usages: the small world of the Indian sewing machine, 1875-1952', pp. 410-411.

With the influx of Singer sewing machines, the way *darzis* worked on a piece of cloth changed, straddling two modes of work, the treadle machine and hand sewing. They negotiated between old and new techniques of production. *Darzis* produced a bewildering range of goods in wartime Calcutta. Sewing machines came into use to make commodities as varied as uniforms for different regimental troops, to sew fabric onto ship sails, collapsible rubber dinghies, tents, vehicle covers, special carriers for machine guns, horse harnesses, leather boots, gas masks with airtight seams, and even cordite bags.[101]

The sewing machine enabled new sewing trades to develop in relation to established modes of work. A tailor's Singer machine typically consisted of 200 component parts, together performing 1800 different operations, and facilitated a greater volume of work to be carried out.[102] Sewing machines made it possible for tailors to engage in work across sectors. The intersectoral linkages between trades that involved tailoring techniques of cutting and sewing can be gleaned from the list of trades in Image 4.5.[103]

[101] 'Singer in World War II, 1939-1945', GDWD1/1/04/3/09, Singer Publications, SA.
[102] Catalogues, Booklets and Price Lists, GDWD1/1/03/9, Catalogues, SA.
[103] 'Singer sewing machines recommended for use in various industries- information on the classification of trades, operations on garments and commodities, approximate output per machine', GDWD1/1/08/65, Administrative Papers, SA.

Image 4.5: Singer's Classified List of Trades



CLASSIFIED LIST OF TRADES

TRADE NO.		PAGE
1.	Aprons, Pinafores, Over-alls	4
2.	Awnings, Tents, Sails, Tarpaulins, Wagon Covers, Rick Covers, Shop Blinds, Flags	6-7
3.	Baby Linen, Underclothing, Children's Frocks	9
4.	Blouses, Skirts, Costumes, Dressing Gowns, Robes, Drapery, etc.	11
5.	Boots, Shoes, Leggings, Gaiters (Leather and Canvas)	13-17
6.	Bags and Sacks of all kinds of Canvas	19
7.	Corsets	21-22
8.	Clothing (including Moles, Cords and Slops)	24-26
8A.	Cotton Over-all Clothing	28-31
9.	Leather Goods (Heavy), Portmanteaux, etc., Motor and Carriage Trimmings, Gear Cases, etc., Saddlery, Harness, Dashes, Whips, Horse Clothing, Tyre Treads	33-34
10.	Carpets, Rugs, Mattresses, Tapestries, Upholstery, Cushions Curtains, Quilts, Bedding, Furnishing, Window Blinds, Bassinettes, Blankets, etc.	36-38
11.	Gloves of all kinds	40-41
12.	Hosiery, Knit Goods, etc.	43-54
13.	Cloth Caps, Helmets	57
14.	Hats (Hard and Soft)	59-61
15.	Hats (Straw)	63
16.	Handkerchiefs, Napery, and Linen in General	65-71
17.	Leather Goods (Light), Pocket Books, Purses, Satchels, Wallets, Sporting Goods, Braces, etc.,	74-75
18.	Mantles and Cloaks	77
19.	Millinery, Trimmings, Frillings, Lace, etc.	79
20.	Neckties, Motor Scarves, Silk Goods, etc.	81
21.	Shirts, Collars and Cuffs, Pyjamas	83-87
22.	Bleachers and Dyers, Laundries, Darning, etc.	89-90
23.	Slippers, Cork Socks, Nursery Shoes	92
24.	Umbrellas and Sunshades	94
25.	Waterproofs, Oilskins, Surgical Goods, Rubber Goods, Ankle Straps, Suspenders, etc.	96-97
26.	Miscellaneous—Belting, Paper Blinds, Furs, Book-binding. Surplices, Shrouds, Floats, Jacquard Cards, Mops, Fancy Garters, etc.	99-100

Source: 'Singer sewing machines recommended for use in various industries- information on the classification of trades, operations on garments and commodities, approximate output per machine', GDWD1/1/08/65, Administrative Papers, SA

But as far as dressmaking was concerned, machines could not achieve the accuracy and impeccable flawlessness needed in the making – cutting and finishing – of customised, made-to-measure clothing and military liveries. In this niche market, the tailor's 'trusted hands' interacted with the machine in a symbiotic way to achieve greater precision in the construction

of garments.[104] I return to Zulfiqar Anwar's interwar tailoring manual, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, to locate the sewing machine and its place in the tailor's labouring world.

Technology and skill: Singer's vernacular instruction manuals for tailors

In his text, *Everyday Technology*, David Arnold historicises and critiques the triumphalist discourses of technological determinism and imperialist projections of the 'transfer of technology' from the West to the colonies. He draws upon Arnold Pacey and Frederick Cooper's work to argue that the transfer of technology in a colonial setting should be understood as a form of dialogue between technology and its local adaptation, especially through social practices.[105] Arnold questions the colonised peoples' passive reception of modern technologies when he asks: 'who made these machines, who used them, how did it affect economic life and productive processes, and did they change the ways in which people worked?'[106]

Important though these questions are, Arnold's answers are vague and somewhat anecdotal. He refers to the appearance of sewing machines, typewriters, and bicycles in Indian novels, but fascinating though the discussion might be, he fails to explore the social and cultural impact of the entry of small machines in everyday life. Indeed, Arnold's work is central to the critique of

[104] Testimonials Jan Mohammed & Sons: Master Barbers & Tailors, 2nd Battalion. The Green Howards. 1948. J.B. Shears & Sons, Chelsea. *Military proceedings*, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. India Office Records, British Library.
[105] Arnold Pacey, *Technology in World Civilization: A Thousand-Year History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Frederick Cooper, 'Introduction', in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[106] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 4; David Arnold, 'Technology and Subalternity', pp. 287-326.

the thesis that Western technology, to quote Daniel Headrick, represented the 'tools' and 'tentacles' of Empire.[107]

Arnold suggests instead that the colonial state was in many respects 'too weak' to effectively use such 'instruments of rule', and the use of everyday technology worked in ways that had little to do with how the state had envisaged it.[108] But he stops short of explaining *how and in what ways darzis,* the prime subject of his analysis of small machines, 'appropriated' these modern technologies. He uses the term '*darzi*' in an undifferentiated manner to describe tailoring groups across India irrespective of their regional, caste-based, ethnic, and religious differences. He draws upon the Singer papers to show how sewing machines impacted upon tailors in the Madras presidency. Many 'traditional' tailors in Madras, he noted, were unlettered, and relied on their employers to provide them with sewing machines.

Arnold further states that tailor family budgets in 1938 required only Rs. 50 to set up a tailor shop. It cost about Rs. 200, equivalent of ten months income for a tailor to buy a new machine, but one could be purchased second hand for far less, or hired for between Rs. 20 and Rs. 50 a month.[109] But these findings are not generalisable and are unrepresentative of how tailors engaged with sewing machines in different contexts, and the ways in which they responded to the Company's sales strategies. Arnold gives too much agency to the technology itself. He says very little about *how* tailors from different social groups incorporated these machines into quotidian workplaces in different social and economic contexts, and how the machines, in turn, reconfigured local artisan practices on the ground. Arnold further states that sewing machines

[107] Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism 1850-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[108] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 127.
[109] N.K. Adyanthaya, *Report on an Enquiry into the Family Budgets of Industrial Workers in Madras City* (Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1938), pp. 44-47, cited in David Arnold, *Everyday Technology,* 2015.

were popular among Indian tailors due to the small capital investment needed to purchase these machines and the '*minimum levels of skill needed for their use*'.[110]

Arnold's presupposition that tailors required minimum skills to operate the sewing machines does not hold. If that were the case, then the Singer Company would not have published vernacular instruction guides for their buyers. The resources: markets and forms of patronage, artisan skills honed over many generations, as well as the socio-economic structures – the size and nature of markets – varied from one region to another. For Calcutta tailors who had prior training in meticulous needlework, the machines augmented pre-existing skills. The success of these machines among Calcutta's tailors was tied to their versatility, which complemented the tailor's malleable skills of cutting and sewing different kinds of raw materials. This gave them an added advantage over other artisan groups who were unable to repurpose their skills across different manufacturing sectors. This helps explain the tailors' upward mobility in the context of their engagement in not just producing liveries, but also bespoke garments for the colonial elite.[111]

The sheer scale on which tailors used sewing machines for wartime manufacture varied across social contexts. The Second World War was fought from Calcutta, a leading base for the battle over the Pacific Ocean. Hence, in 1941, no fewer than 935 sewing machines were shipped to Calcutta. Madras and Delhi, which housed troops, received 230 and 295 machines respectively, while only 10 arrived in Bombay.[112] The year after, Calcutta received 1000 shuttle bodies and

[110] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 67. Italics added.
[111] Testimonials Jan Mohammed & Sons: Master Barbers & Tailors, 2nd Battalion. The Green Howards. 1948. J.B. Shears & Sons, Chelsea. Military proceedings, IOR: L/MIL/7/13259. India Office Records, British Library, p. 13.
[112] 'Supply of Industrial Sewing Machines', GDWD1/1/02/2, Triplicates of outgoing correspondence from Singer, 2 December 1941, SA.

component parts for industrial sewing machines (as compared to 300 in Madras, 60 in Bombay, and 290 in Karachi).[113]

Sewing machines allowed for the creation of hybrid skills and techniques and tailors took up these opportunities with brio. Singer machines had a transformative impact on the hereditary skills of tailors, who, in turn, used their expanded skill-set to reinvent new production techniques that were transferable to different economic sub-niches. Tailors made scrupulous use of modern sewing machines in ways that allowed them to retain their occupational niches whilst at the same time adapting to changing markets. The *darzis* 'appropriated' the sewing machine, but they did so creatively, seizing the opportunities before them. Some made new styles of clothing which involved the melding of innovative cutting techniques and handiwork with machine-aided sewing. The versatility of their skills and technical expertise enabled them to operate across industries: dressmaking, shoe-making, book-binding, and saddlery.[114]

Through the adoption and translation of modern techniques in vernacular terms, tailors asserted the prominence of their skills across different manufacturing industries. The stimulus of new technologies gave tailors the opportunity to innovate, create new demand for particular dress styles, and use their skills to assert material control and social authority over their artisan trades. David Edgerton has used the phrase 'creole technologies' to describe these modes of incorporation whereby modern machines transplanted from their place of origin find uses on a

[113] 'Supply of Shuttle Bodies and Component Parts of Industrial Sewing Machines', GDWD1/102/3 1942, Triplicates of outgoing correspondence from Singer, 15 June 1942, SA.
[114] Singer sewing machines recommended for use in various industries- information on the classification of trades, operations on garments and commodities, approximate output per machine', GDWD1/1/08/65, Administrative Papers, SA. I borrow the phrase 'creative appropriation' from Frank Dikötter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 8.

greater scale elsewhere.[115] Perhaps the sewing machine is one such device. For tailors, technological innovations did not diminish their sense of embeddedness in the regional histories of their trades.

Muslim tailors also expressed the 'technological modernity' of their small machines in a different way. Urdu tailoring manuals about the use of sewing machines allow us to see how artisans themselves experienced and adapted to technological change. While we have discussed some in Chapter Three, it is interesting to find that tailors like Zulfiqar Anwar engaged with new materials and technologies as *supplementary* components to their well-honed skills, rooted in regional and religious histories of their craft. It was more a case of various symbiotic assimilations of new technologies by local emendations, rather than a whole-scale adoption or rejection of 'foreign' techniques.

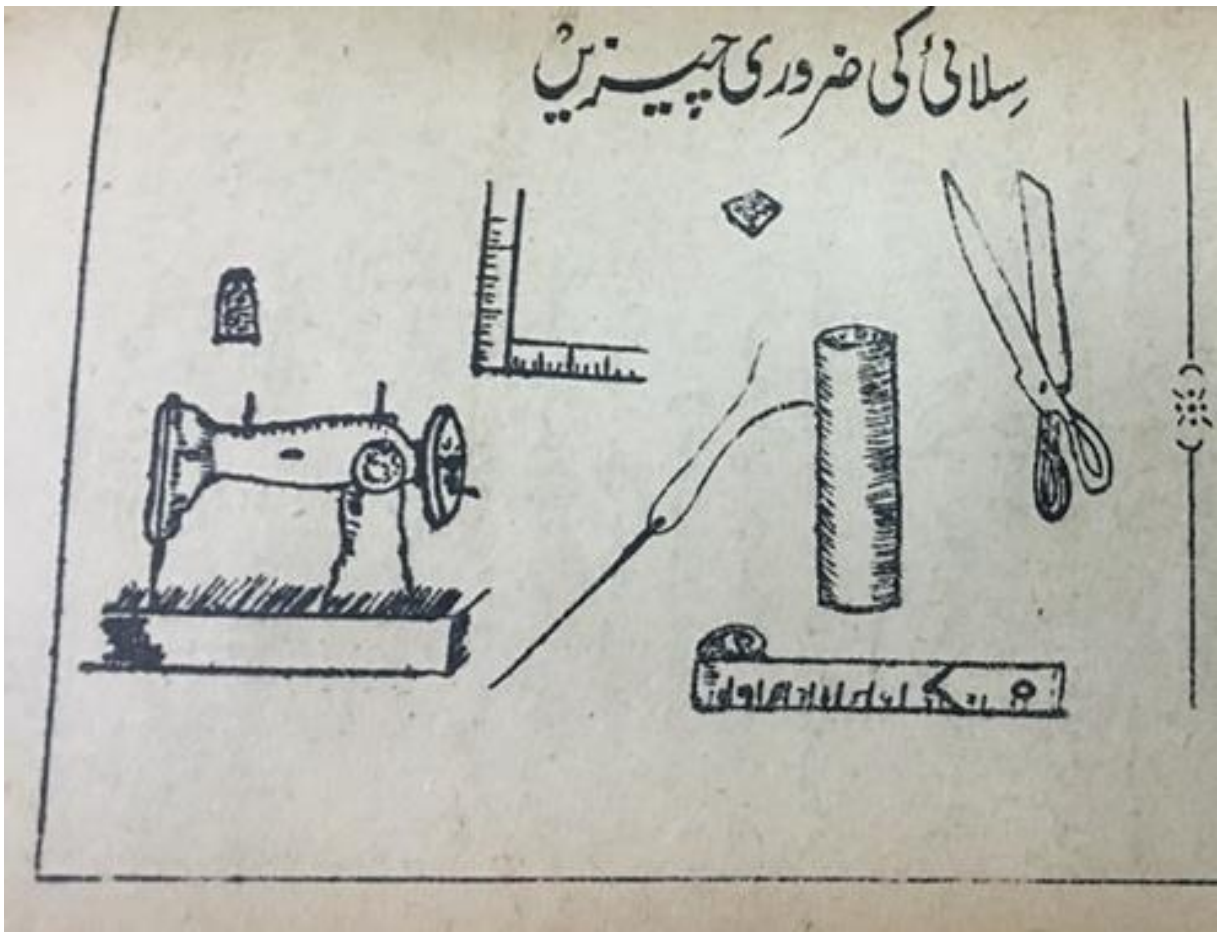
Recalibrating artisan skills to adapt to new machines required more than minimum effort. To capture what this process was like for tailors, a tailor's self-authored manual is useful. Zulfiqar Anwar in *Kamyab Darzi Khana* (published in 1926) writes:

> *'Purone zamaane mein log haath se kapra kaat kar siya karte the. Angrez zubaan ke saath saath, is hunar ne bhi tarakki ki - yaha tak ke silai machine taiyyar ho gaye aur rafta rafta haath se sine ka rawaz uthta chala gaya'*
>
> ['In the old times, people used their hands to cut and sew cloth. Like the English language, skills related to needlework made progress to the extent that sewing machines became available and over time the tradition of making clothes by hand started to disappear']

[115] David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*, p. 14; David Edgerton, 'Creole Technologies and Global Histories: Rethinking How Things Travel in Space and Time', *Journal of History of Science and Technology* Vol. 1 (2007), pp. 75-112.

This excerpt suggests a fading away of hand-stitching as sewing machines made their way into tailoring workshops. But while it is in the genre of 'histories of decline' relating to the old ways of sewing by hand, it celebrates rather than bemoans the new 'silai machine'. We find an image of a sewing machine in Anwar's manual – 'silai ke liye zaroori cheeze', important tools for sewing: *sui* (needle), *dhaga* (thread), *guz* (measuring tape), *kaichi* (scissors), *anguthi* (thimble), and machine (depicted in Image 4.6).[116]

Image 4.6: Anwar's tailoring manual, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, on 'silai ke liye zaroori cheez' (necessary tools for sewing)



Source: Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, 1926. p. 3

[116] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 3.

Zulfiqar Anwar also describes sewing machines as a modern, American (*Umrika*) invention imported into the colonies which provided a fresh lease of life to the craft of tailoring.[117]

> *'Maadern zamaane mein zyadatar darzi kapraa silne ke liye silai machine ka istamal karte hain. Ye machine Hindustan mein nahi balke Umrika se aati hain. Us waqat silai machine o mein Singer machine zyada mashur hain. Iski jaga-jaga per ajencies hain joki tamaam Hindustan mein phaili hui hain. Yahase machine'e zar naqad, kiraya aur kishto, dono par milti hain. Jo log ek must rupeeya de kar nahi kharid sakhte woh bichare is tarah se kaam chalate hain. Company ki is tarah ke raiwaaz ne garib or bezaar darzi o ko bahut faida pohchaya hain'*
>
> ['In the modern times, most *darzis* use a sewing machine to make clothes. These machines were not made in India but came from America. In those times, among sewing machines, the name Singer was most popular. The Company's agencies were spread all over Hindustan. The Company sold these machines on either cash or a hire-purchase system. Those poor people who could not make a one-time cash payment to buy these machines made use of the hire purchase system. In this way, the poor and vulnerable *darzis* benefitted from this tradition of the Company.']

He illustrates how 'Singer' machines were the most reputed (*mashur)* brand among tailors because of their sales options and agencies spread across 'Hindustan'. The Company made it possible, so Anwar says, for fledgling tailors with limited resources to either buy the machines in small instalments or pay in cash. Many tailors, he says, benefitted from the 'hire-purchase' system and after-sales services at Singer agencies across Hindustan.[118] Anwar's manual shows how aware and informed tailors were about the benefits of using Singer sewing machines.

Hire-purchase agreements with an assured guarantee card on sale enabled tailors to invest in these machines.[119] Although the hire-purchase receipts do not mention the names of the buyers, they do tell us the amount paid in each instalment. The Singer Manufacturing Company made

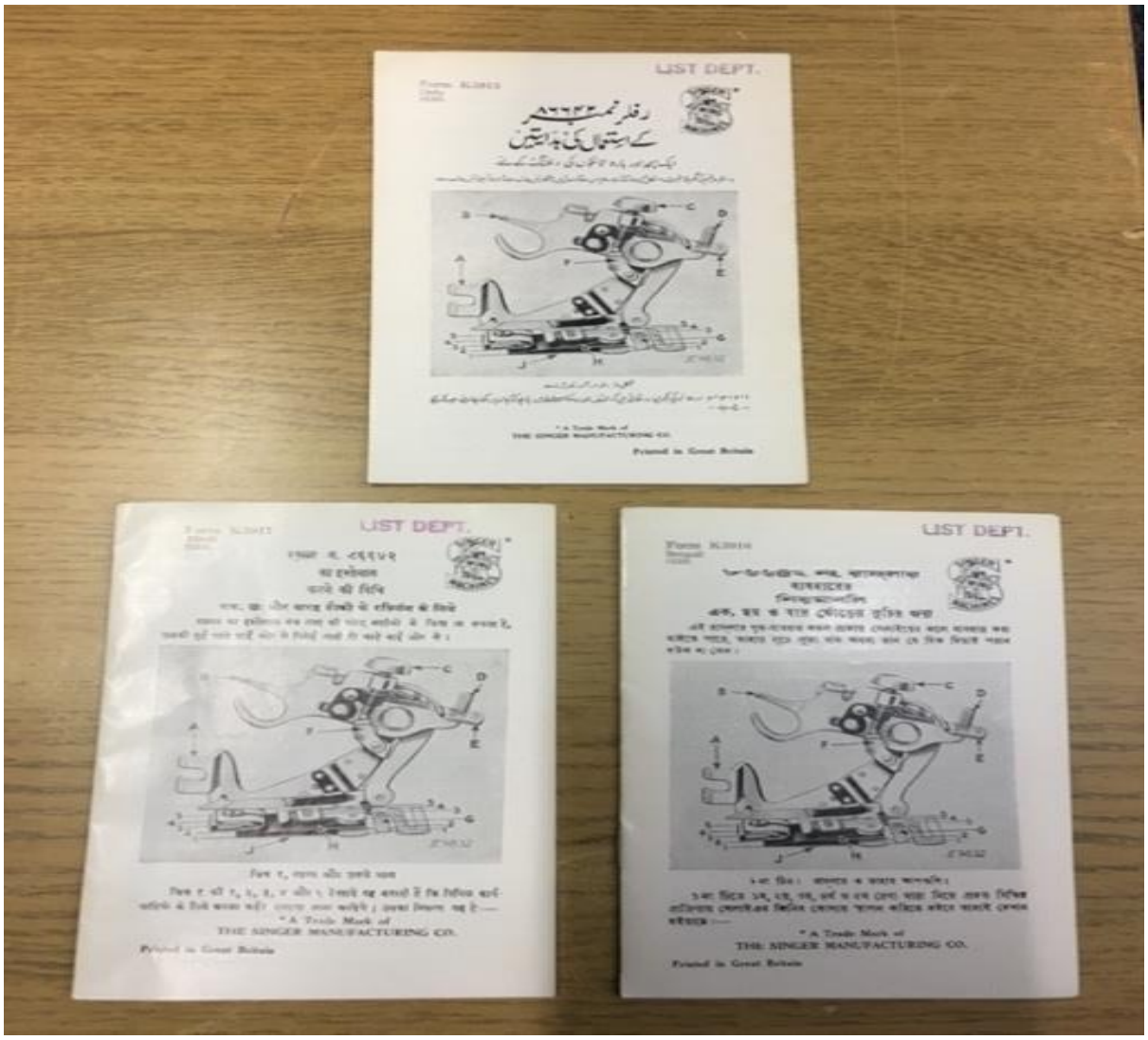
[117] Ibid, pp. 5-6.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Guarantee cards for Singer machines, GDWD1/1/07/3/4.n.d, Singer Customers' Papers, SA.

it possible for tailors to hire a sewing machine upon small weekly payments, on terms that enabled them to become the owners of the machines. Sales receipts from Calcutta for the years 1941 and 1958 indicate that sewing machines could be hired on a weekly instalment of five rupees and seven rupees respectively.[120]

Furthermore, every Singer machine purchase came with a complete instruction manual, in different vernacular languages, on how to use a Singer machine and its attachments (see Image 4.7).[121]

[120] 'Hire Purchase Agreements for Singer Machines', GDWD/1/07/3/3, Singer Customers' Papers, SA
[121] Manuals in various languages, GDWD1/1/01/1/09, GDWD1.2010.9189.n.d (Urdu); GDWD1.2010.9191.n.d (Bengali); GDWD1.2010.9193.n.d (Hindi), Sewing Machine Documentation, SA.

Image 4.7: Singer's vernacular instruction guides in Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali



Source: Manuals in various languages, GDWD1/1/01/1/09, GDWD1.2010.9189.n.d (Urdu); GDWD1.2010.9191.n.d (Bengali); GDWD1.2010.9193.n.d (Hindi), Sewing Machine Documentation, SA

To understand the possibilities of a sewing machine meant the ability to make a living from it, and save time and money. Women who encountered machines in working-class households often learnt the technical skills from their male kin. In this context, Zulfiqar Anwar writes: '*...ghar ki aurte bhi silai sikh kar kaafi bachat kar sakhti hain'* (even the women of the household can learn tailoring and save money).[122]

[122] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 4.

By the late-colonial period, sewing machines had made their way into homes, orphanages run by missionaries,[123] self-help organisations,[124] factories,[125] prisons,[126] *bazaars* (informal markets),[127] and street-side tailoring workshops. With sewing machines, women too entered a world of speed, replication, and accelerated time within the household. Sewing was seen to be conducive to appropriate moral conduct and a respectable form of women's 'home' work.[128] Sewing machines became prized dowry presents for brides as a way of signalling the new wife's domestic responsibilities.[129] These machines were geared towards home production by thrifty housewives and piece-workers supplementing the family income by home-sewing.[130] By extension, therefore, the use of sewing machines grew to become a desirable part of a modern woman's domestic accomplishments. As Kupferschmidt has pointed out, 'in societies which entertain strong reservations against women working or trading outside the home, the sewing machine comes as a perfect solution.'[131]

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[123] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 77.
[124] Women's 'rehabilitation' through the use of sewing machines was adopted in self-help organisations such as *Mahila Samiti* set up by Saroj Nalini Dutt, the wife of an Indian civil servant. See G.S. Dutt, *A Woman of India: Being the Life of Saroj Nalini* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), pp. 88-109; Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 137.
[125] On the factory system and new regimes of punctuality, precision, and scheduling. David Arnold, 'Technology and Subalternity', pp. 287-326.
[126] Clare Anderson, 'The Andaman Islands Penal Colony: Race, Class, Criminality and the British Empire', *International Review of Social History* Vol. 63, Issue 26 (2018).
[127] On the more positive aspects of the use and 'manipulation of a sewing machine' by a tailor in the bazaar. See, Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001), p. 35. Also, Anand A. Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society and the Colonial State in Bihar* (California: University of California Press, 1998), Chapter 5 on Traders, Merchants and Markets, 1765-1947; on political economy and bazaars in qasbahs, Christopher Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and bazaars: North Indian society in the age of British expansion*, 1770-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapters 6 and 12.
[128] 'The Singer in the Home and the Workshop: Illustrated Catalogue', GDWD1/1/03/18, Catalogues, SA.
[129] On 'dowry-gifting', see, Patricia Uberoi, 'Marriage, Alliance, and Affinal Transactions' in *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 232-233.
[130] Andrew Godley, 'The Global Diffusion of the Sewing Machine, 1850-1914', p. 20.
[131] Uri K. Kupferschmidt, 'The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East', pp. 204-209.

But the excerpt from Zulfiqar Anwar's manual draws out, perhaps unwittingly, another significant point that with the sewing machine the working-class household itself became – more evidently than it had been – a site of production. This complicates cosy nationalist binary conflations of the 'inner' with the spiritual and the 'outer' with the public domains.[132]

The Singer vernacular instruction guides, in particular, had a transformative impact on tailors. They enabled artisans proficient in needlework to assimilate the technology into their work practices with greater ease, blending their hand tailoring skills with work on sewing machines. Tailors reinvented and reworked the sewing machine's usages to adapt them to the changing world of taste, fashion, and consumerism.

Sewing machines are powerful things. Unlike big industrial machines, these small machines enable a certain degree of intimacy by virtue of their association with domestic spaces. This also instils a sense of cultural propriety over the machines, becoming loaded with affect. Zulfiqar Anwar uses the phrase, *lehez keemti zewar* ('expensive jewellery'), to describe the symbolic and emotional value of a sewing machine in a tailor's life.[133] A third-generation master-tailor in Calcutta, Manwar Hossain, inherited three Singer sewing machines from his father.[134] These machines became more than just objects that helped to make clothing. For some users, they acquired a quality that was worthy of worship and veneration, they became, as Nira Wickramasinghe puts it, 'technological gods of a sort'.[135] For intergenerational Muslim

[132] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[133] Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 5.
[134] Manwar Hossain (master tailor). Personal Interview. 12 June 2019. See Chapter Five, pp. 347-349.
[135] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, p. 139. On Vishvakarma puja in the jute and cotton mills of Calcutta, machines are worshipped by the workers; they are decorated and revered objects. Some people bless their machines and tools by which they make a living, by cleaning them and showing respect. See, Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Time of History and the Times of Gods', in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyds eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 35.

tailors and artisans, sewing machines became inherited family heirlooms – objects that demanded respect and reverence.

Chapter Three showed how tailors used their hereditary skills and technical expertise to critique the essentialised colonial narratives about them being 'technologically anachronistic'. This chapter has underlined the novel ways in which Muslim tailors domesticated the 'foreignness' of sewing machines by incorporating them into their everyday work practices. In doing so, they became harbingers of a new technological future. Their strategies of 'creative appropriation', through vernacular manuals and instruction guides, suggest that these were neither 'traditional' modes of artisan work nor a derivative of the West. For tailors, sewing machines enhanced their older work regimes. The sewing-machine offered new possibilities for skill-enrichment, and better prospects of employment across different sectors of production. This holds true in the light of David Arnold comment that 'there was no *darzi* revolt against the Singer'.[136]

Local competition from Indian manufacturers notwithstanding, until the late 1940s, almost 90 percent of the sewing machines made in Clydebank were imported into India from Britain.[137] Between 1946-1947, fewer than 8000 sewing machines were being manufactured in India. This rose to 17,000 by 1948-1949, but still amounted to less than one-third the number of imported machines.[138] This shows that Singer held a 'semi-monopolistic position' in the Indian market.[139]

[136] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 167.
[137] *Report on the Indian Tariff Board on Sewing Machine Industry* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1947), p. 12.
[138] Ibid, p. 2.
[139] Ibid, p. 12.

‘Development’, Technology, and the post-colonial state

In December 1947, the ‘Usha’ company advertised an image of rows of men at work with the caption, ‘The good *darzi* chooses it because it is made in India’.[140] As nationalism entered the ‘war’ over every ‘everyday technology’, India began to follow a strategy of import-substitution, and ‘Made in India’ machines tried to take up Singer’s vast slice of the market.[141]

Soon after partition, the Government of India was confronted by a number of urgent macroeconomic problems. The War had created inflationary pressures that the partition intensified. In 1947, India was heavily dependent on foreign imports to help its fledgling economy in the direction the government thought it should take. It was short of foreign exchange, and though it did have ‘sterling balances’[142] these could only be used to buy goods from Britain and from within the sterling area – which in its turn was recovering from the war’s after-effects, and therefore could not swiftly or cheaply provide India with the goods it needed.

Moreover, to stem the rise in prices, the government felt it must rein in its own expenditure, reserving finances for refugee relief (Punjab refugees took priority), defence services, civil

[140] *The Bombay Chronicle*, 20 December 1947. Centre of South Asian Studies (CSAS) microfilms collection.

[141] Tirthankar Roy has pointed out that, contrary to Arnold’s argument, there was in fact a sharp discontinuity in the progress of small technology in post-colonial India. Indian-made sewing machines, bicycles, and typewriters were not easily affordable even after 30 years of India’s independence. This was not because India was still poor but sheltered by a regime that forbade foreign trade in ‘consumer durables’ or household gadgets. Indian firms making these goods stopped innovating. See, Tirthankar Roy, *A Business History of India: Enterprise and the Emergence of Capitalism from 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). But, from the perspective of tailors who possessed Singer machines before partition, these machines held them in good stead for decades after, often being passed down from father to son. See Chapter Five. Manwar Hossain (master tailor). Personal Interview. 12 June 2019.

[142] The monies owned to India by the British government on account of India’s wartime expenditures on behalf of the Allies.

administration, and subsidy on imported food grains.[143] Hoping to receive special favours from the central government, West Bengal found itself scrambling for more resources.[144]

Heavy industrialization was at the heart of independent India's economic policies. The main bedrock of development planning in the 1950s was applied science and technological expertise.[145] It permeated the Five-Year Plans and the rhetoric of Indian politicians.[146] As Vivek Chibber puts it, heavy industry, state protection, centralization, and planning came to be the building blocks of the 'developmental state' in post-colonial India.[147]

Applied science and technology, with an emphasis on technical education and skill enhancement, came to be recognised as the necessary means through which the desired end of industrialisation would be made possible. Political legitimacy to these ideas came from institutions like the Planning Commission in the 1950s, a body that represented technical expertise and indeed was used as 'an instrument of politics'.[148] Institutions like the Planning Commission and the economic committee of the cabinet were at the core of the post-colonial Indian government's 'intervention' in the economy. The priority was to build a 'strong Indian

[143] C.N. Vakil, *Economic consequences of divided India: A study of the economy of India and Pakistan* (Bombay: Vora and Co. publishers, 1950), p. 82.
[144] With support from West Bengal, Article 369 gave the centre extensive powers to control vital areas of policy. The Constituent Assembly had taken away the province's largest sources of revenue, taxes on income and corporations, excise and jute duties. West Bengal had hoped that its gamble would pay off after partition but it failed. See, Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition,* pp. 245-247.
[145] Benjamin Zachariah, 'Uses of Scientific Argument: The Case of "Development" in India, c.1930-1950', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 36, No. 39 (2001), pp. 3689-3702; on the sectarian nature of 'Hindu' science, see, David Arnold, 'A Time for Science: Past and Present in the Reconstruction of Hindu Science, 1860-1920', in Daud Ali ed., *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[146] Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience* (Clarendon Press, 1987).
[147] Vivek Chibber, 'Bureaucratic Rationality and the Developmental State', *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 107, No. 4 (2002), pp. 951-989; Benjamin Zachariah, 'Uses of Scientific Argument: The Case of "Development" in India, c.1930-1950', p. 3690.
[148] Benjamin Zachariah, 'Uses of Scientific Argument: The Case of "Development" in India, c.1930-1950', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 36, No. 39 (2001), p. 3697.

economy, one in which the state held an important stake in heavy industries: steel, coal, cement and civil engineering'.[149]

As some scholars have argued, the 'authoritarian shadows' of the interventionist colonial state in the war years were felt more sharply in the policies geared towards 'development', implemented by the post-colonial state.[150] In the late colonial period, as Ravi Ahuja has shown, state capitalism provided the framework for social policies under the conditions of the war economy – restricted democratic participation and enhanced wartime emergency powers – paving the way for formulating a more homogenous, state-centred labour policy.[151]

The major pieces of legislation in 1947 and 1948, which had been prepared under Ambedkar's supervision, all bore resonance with this approach.[152] They were enacted by the interim government, but mostly under the first government of independent India. It was in the late 1940s that the state-centric industrial relations regime took shape, but it was also when the divide between what came to be called the 'informal' and 'formal' economies was legitimized by way of regulation.[153]

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[149] Industrial development was a provincial subject under the Government of India Act 1935, by 1949, control of industrial development was made a central subject: 'A Council of Industries' consisting of representatives of strategic industries, trading interests and members from state governments was formed to advise the government on its industrial policy such as target setting for various industries and regulations to be imposed by the centre', quoted in Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-1977: The Gradual Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 8.
[150] Ravi Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish": The crisis of the late 1940s and the place of labour in post-colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 54, Issue 4 (2020), p. 1068; Rohit De, '"Commodities must be controlled": economic crimes and market discipline in India (1939-1955)', *International Journal of Law in Context* Vol. 10, Issue 3 (2014), pp. 277-294.
[151] Ravi Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish"', p. 1079.
[152] Ibid, p. 1080.
[153] Prabhu Mohapatra, 'Regulated Informality: Legal Construction of Labour Relations in Colonial India', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Jan Lucassen eds., *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000* (East London: Macmillan, 2005).

Protective legislation remained restricted to factory labour, and 'sealed off' (largely through retrenchments) a small section of India's labour force from the vast majority.[154] The process of organisation, moreover, worked in tandem with the process of masculinization. Women workers remained outside the ambit of the Indian state's policies on industrial planning and development. They clustered, as Samita Sen has shown, in casualized and exploitative labour arrangements.[155]

Sewing machines, small-scale industries, and the 'unorganised' sector

In the 1940s and 50s, the central issue that animated debates on labour legislation was the definition of a 'worker'. This category broadly came to be defined as a factory-based, adult, male labourer entitled to some protection from labour law, 'sealed off' from the rest of the vast 'unregulated' workforce.[156] In early labour legislation in India, the category of the 'worker' came to be defined through the principle of exclusion – a division between those entitled to such legislation, and those excluded from it. Only 'vulnerable groups' such as women and children were deemed to require legal protection due to the pervasiveness of contracted relations between employer and employed.[157]

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[154] Ravi Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish"', pp.1084-1086; Raj Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 17; Raj Chandavarkar, 'From Neighbourhood to Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Left in Bombay's Girangaon in the Twentieth Century', in *History, Culture and Indian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 121-191.
[155] Samita Sen, *Domestic Days: Women, Work, and Politics in Contemporary Kolkata* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[156] Karuna Dietrich Wielenga, 'The Emergence of the Informal Sector: Labour legislation and politics in South India, 1940-1960', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 54, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 1113-1148.
[157] Aditya Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill: Factory Law and the Emergence of the Labour Question in Late Nineteenth Century Bombay* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), Chapter 2.

In the national labour policy after partition, the discourse shifted – vulnerable workers no longer received social security or legal rights. Alongside debates over the definition of a 'worker', arguments about the need to protect certain kinds of entrepreneurs – the 'small men' in trade and industry – played an important role in circumscribing labour legislation. These entrepreneurs were considered to be the underdogs engaged in 'cottage industries', epitomizing the entrepreneurial spirit. They needed to be protected by the state, and yet ironically, as Karuna Wielenga has argued, legal entitlements to protect small producers were made in order to deny protection to those even 'smaller' than them: their workers, or unpaid family labour.[158]

In fact, small-scale industry began receiving state support well before 1947. The colonial state encouraged manufacturing during the Second World War to meet the burgeoning wartime demand. By the end of the war, small capitalists were recognised as a distinct group with aid agencies and programmes developed specifically for them.[159] In 1955, Oscar Ornati divided industrial employment in India into the 'organised' and 'unorganized', based on the enforcement or non-enforcement of a series of employment conditions set out in the Factories Act.[160] The same terminology was used later in official classification attributing a different meaning to the term 'unorganised' – 'those who have not been able to organize in pursuit of a common objective'.[161] The 'unorganised' sector, thereafter, came to be defined as consisting of 'unincorporated and unregistered enterprises and household industries which maintain accounts or do not do so or are wholly managed by self-employed workers.'[162] It was this

[158] Karuna Dietrich Wielenga, 'The Emergence of the Informal Sector: Labour legislation and politics in South India, 1940-1960', pp. 1113-1148.
[159] Nasir Tyabji, *Small Industries Policy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 123.
[160] Oscar A. Ornati, *Jobs and Workers in India* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 23.
[161] *Report of the National Commission on Labour, 1969*, p. 417, as quoted by Jan Breman, 'The Informal Sector: A Concluding Review', in Jan Breman, Karin Kapadia and Jonathan Parry eds., *The Worlds of Industrial Labour* (New Delhi: Sage publications, 1999), p. 410.
[162] V.K.R.V. Rao, *India's National Income 1950-1980: An analysis of economic growth and change*, (New Delhi: Sage publications, 1983), p. 11.

small-scale sector that was expected to play the role of providing employment and the manufacturing consumer goods required to meet the market demand.[163]

In 1950-51, 'unregistered manufacturing' accounted for 5.36 percent of the share in net domestic product – 0.94 percent less than 'registered manufacturing' at 6.30 percent. The category 'personal services' contributed to 5.1 percent of the net domestic product. The latter category was sub-divided into services such as 'domestic', 'laundry and allied', 'barbers and beauty shops', and 'other personal services'.[164] The 'other personal services' could potentially have included tailors. Between 1950-51 and 1979-80, the index of growth in what was called the 'other personal services' was nearly nine times that of the total, and its share had increased from 1.0 to 9.0 percent. Yet, the report does not tell us the exact composition of these 'other personal services'.[165]

In another report on India's national income between 1950-1980 and the consumption of non-food expenditure, we see that the items which have the most significant increase in this period are clothing (4.22 to 9.87 percent) and furnishings including household equipment (from 1.20 to 3.25 percent).[166] In 1950, the Report of the Fiscal Commission (1949-50) stated that small-scale industries, owing to methods of production and close connections with the local market,

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[163] Planning Commission, *Report of the Village and Small Scale Industries (Second Five Year Plan) Committee* (Government Press: October 1955).
[164] V.K.R.V. Rao, *India's National Income 1950-1980,* p. 69 and p. 178.
[165] Between 1950-51 and 1979-80, the index of growth in 'domestic services' was 73.0; 'laundry and allied' was 131.8; 'barbers and beauty shops' was 143.8 and 'other personal services' was 1866.0. Ibid.
[166] The other non-food categories of expenditure that increased between 1950-1980 included: personal transport (from 0.25 to 1.33 percent), other transport including hired services (from 3.35 to 5.25 percent), medical care and health (from 1.14 to 2.86 percent) and education (from 1.33 to 2.48 percent). See, V.K.R.V. Rao, *India's National Income 1950-1980,* p. 77. These figures on private final consumption expenditure imply that over the period 1950-1951 to 1979-1980, national income had progressively increased, with non-food expenditure in clothing, increasing its share of total consumption expenditure. V.K.R.V. Rao*, India's National Income 1950-1980,* p. 76.

enjoyed a competitive advantage over large-scale factories.[167] The report made a significant observation that urban craftsmen and artisan-run small firms produced a medley of utility goods, semi-luxury, and luxury items by using:

> '…their "latent resources" especially entrepreneurship and small proprietorial assets…[they] sold their products *very widely* [sic], not merely in the nearest town, but over one or more states, and even in some cases in export markets'.[168]

It is fair to assume that for tailors, these 'small proprietorial assets' included a sewing machine, not to mention other 'latent resources' like their skills, access to markets, and patrons, that enabled them to remain competitive in the urban market.

Between 1950 and 1961, the number of sewing machines in use in India rose from 145 to 742 per million of the population.[169] The use of sewing machines, radios, and bicycles, among other small technologies, became one of the key indices used to indicate improving standards in India.[170] Although part of the increased internal demand for sewing machines was for industrial use by male and female factory workers, there was also a significant rise in the demand for domestic machines.[171] By the Second Plan, the revised policy of supporting small-scale industry served to incorporate the Gandhian philosophy of protecting 'traditional' village and cottage industries into the Nehruvian model of development. As a consequence, the national policy did not limit itself to 'traditional' industries, but promoted small-scale, 'modern' industries employing technologies like sewing machines.[172]

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[167] *India: Report of the Fiscal Commission 1949-1950.* Vol. I. 1950 (New Delhi: Government of India Press), p. 99.
[168] Ibid, p. 108.
[169] P.N. Dhar and H.F. Lydall, *The Role of Small Enterprises in Indian Economic Development* (Delhi: Institute of Economic Growth, 1961), p. ii.
[170] An example of a Singer advertisement from the late 1960s: 'Singer Free Service for 5 Years and a 5-year guarantee with the new Merritt Sewing Machine', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 9 December 1966.
[171] *Report of the Indian Tariff Board on the sewing machine industry* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1950), p. 11.
[172] Nasir Tyabji, *Small Industries Policy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 139.

In the mid-1950s, small manufacturing industries came to be recognised as 'modern' because of their 'labour-intensive methods using both power and machinery, located in urban centres and small towns, and catering to markets…[an] illustration of this type of small industries include the use of machine tools, sewing machines, electric motors, and a variety of other modern equipment'.[173] These small industries were subdivided into household and non-household firms, employing 'hired labour' in small, medium-sized, and large establishments.[174]

In 1956, there were 5,000,000 'small firms' with under 5 persons per establishment including working proprietors and unpaid family workers, out of the total establishments of 5,200,000.[175] The number of persons employed per establishment determined whether or not they fell under the scope of protective legislation. Most laws applied only to establishments employing more than ten workers (and some only to those with more than 20 or 50).[176] Workers in establishments of less than five persons operated in the 'informal sector', outside the ambit of Government regulations.[177]

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[173] P.N. Dhar and H.F. Lydall, *The Role of Small Enterprises in Indian Economic Development* (Delhi: Institute of Economic Growth, 1961), p. vii.

[174] In 1955, the total distribution of employment by type of enterprise (in thousands) in urban centres was 5,666, of which those: (a) employing less than 10 with power, or 20 without, using mainly household labour, were 2,821 (b) employing less than 10 with power, or 20 without, using mainly hired labour, were 897 (c) employing 10-49 with power or 20-99 without, were 298 (d) employing 50 or more with power, or 100 or more without, were 1,650. See, P.N. Dhar and H.F. Lydall, *The Role of Small Enterprises in Indian Economic Development* (Delhi: Institute of Economic Growth, 1961).

[175] The estimated breakup of the size distribution of manufacturing establishments numbering 2,00,000 include: 130,000 with 5-9 persons per establishment; 43,000 with 10-19 persons per establishment; 18,000 with 20-49 persons per establishment; 4,660 with 50-99 persons per establishment; 2,550 with 10-249 persons per establishment; 840 with 250-499 persons per establishment; 470 with 500-999 persons per establishment; and 580 with 1,000 and over persons per establishment. *Occupational Pattern in Manufacturing Industries, 1956*. Planning Commission, Government of India, 1959, pp. 45-46 in Table 3, cited in P.N. Dhar and H.F. Lydall, *The Role of Small Enterprises in Indian Economic Development* (Delhi: Institute of Economic Growth, 1961), p. vii.

[176] Karuna Dietrich Wielenga, 'The Emergence of the Informal Sector: Labour legislation and politics in South India, 1940-1960', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 54, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 1142-1143.

[177] Ibid. For an overview of the historiography on the informal sector debates in the 1950s, 1970s, 1990s and early 2000s, see Samita Sen, *Domestic Days*, pp.12-21; Jeemol Unni, 'Gender and Informality in Labour Market in South Asia', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 36, No. 26 (2001), pp. 2360-2377.

Between 1951 and 1961, even though the proportion of factory workers dropped in West Bengal by two percent compared to the national average, it is important to note that the service sectors of West Bengal's economy grew.[178] In 1955-1956, services accounted for the highest income-generating sectors, more than agriculture and manufacturing, in particular districts with a long history of manufacturing in West Bengal – Hooghly (33.96 percent), Howrah (36.92 percent), Murshidabad (34.75 percent), Nadia (38.35 percent) and the highest among these districts, 24 Parganas (52.76 percent).[179]

These artisan-clusters along the border – especially in 24 Parganas, Malda- Murshidabad, and West Dinajpur – had witnessed a paradoxical trend of 'reverse migration' in the aftermath of partition as Muslims from East Bengal migrated into these areas. These districts also absorbed internally displaced Muslims inside West Bengal, who gravitated towards these geographies where their co-religionists lived in large numbers.[180] These Muslim 'clusters' in the city and borderlands grew denser over time.[181]

This thesis has sought to explain *why* some Muslim groups – stayers on and internally displaced persons (Muslim evacuees/returnees) – remained in or moved to particular locations within Calcutta and Bengal's border clusters. These lucrative hotspots, with a complex variety of embedded resources, acted as magnets that provided the locational incentives to Muslim tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants, the prime subjects of this thesis, to remain in West Bengal after partition. But more on this in Chapter Five.

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[178] In 1961 the percentage of average daily employment in factories in West Bengal was 18.86 percent. See, *West Bengal: An analytical study*. Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Oxford & IBH Publishing, 1971), p. 11.
[179] *Inter-District and Inter-State Income Differentials 1955-1956*. Occasional Papers No. 6 (New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research, 1963), p. 31.
[180] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, pp. 181-188; M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta*, p. 26.
[181] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, pp. 181-194.

The spatial clustering of tailors in particular locations such as the 24 Parganas after 1947, for instance, was underlined in the 1961 Census. It indicated that the total number of tailors, cutters, and related workers in 24 Parganas numbered 32,557, of whom 2409 were women. Although they were spread all over the district, they were mostly to be found in urban areas.[182] Bisweswar Ray, Superintendent of Census Operations, West Bengal noted that, 'tailoring has become an *art* [sic] in urban areas, catering for modern fashions of both sexes…tailoring charges differ according to quality of the materials and also the work'.[183] In 1961, the prevailing rate for making a cotton full shirt, or a 'punjabi', was between Rs.6 and Rs.8; a pair of terry-cotton pants was between Rs. 25 to Rs. 30; a child's frock between Rs. 4 and Rs. 9; a woman's blouse Rs.3; and a set of pyjamas Rs. 2.50.[184] In Malda district, there were 135 tailoring establishments with 4,494 tailors and dressmakers engaged in wholesale trade at the weekly markets in English Bazaar, Kaliachak and Khorba (see Map 1.2 and Table No. 1.3 in Chapter One).[185] Significantly, Kaliachak, where the first instance of reverse migration was discovered in 1949, was in Malda.[186] By 1961, the 'clustering effect' was prominent in particular border thanas of Malda-Murshidabad, West Dinajpur and the 24 Parganas, where Muslims made up between half and four-fifths of the total population.[187]

As we have seen in Chapter One, Muslim tailor-clusters in Metiabruz-Garden Reach, in Kidderpore along the river Hooghly, and 24 Parganas were locations embedded in a long history of manufacture. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's legacy in Metiabruz; religious fairs associated with *sufi* shrines; weekly and periodical *haats* in Calcutta's neighbouring districts; and New

[182] *District Census Handbook, West Bengal 24 Parganas 1961* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1965).
[183] Emphasis mine. Ibid, p. 346.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Jatindra Chandra Sengupta, *West Bengal District Gazetteer Malda* (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1969), p. 117.
[186] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 188.
[187] Ibid.

Market's position as the shopping hub for the colonial middle classes; were valuable locational assets for tailors. The demand for tailors during the two World Wars has also been examined in Chapter One. Tailors in possession of their own sewing machines, and for those engaged in long term employment with well-entrenched outfitting businesses, such as the Dawoodi Bohra firms of Esplanade, the machine itself was an asset that contributed to their 'immobility capital'. These machines were in use in tailor-clusters with pre-existing access to embedded markets and patrons. It is not surprising therefore that the first Singer shop in Calcutta was situated in Esplanade, at the heart of the city's commercial district, with easy access to potential buyers, tailor-clusters, and outfitting firms in the adjoining areas.[188]

In the global history of small objects, Appadurai has argued that we have to follow the things themselves.[189] The location and context in which these objects were based required particular skills to use them. Sewing machines have to be understood in the light of how tailors embedded in local markets were using these machines to create commodities that helped them to maintain their patronage ties in those localised settings. The locational incentives attached to a place, the accessibility and affordability of small machines, skill-intensive labour markets, and their long-standing patrons, influenced, as we shall see in Chapter Five, the decision-making of tailors who chose to stay on in India after partition.

[188] 'Calcutta: the Second City of the Empire', *The Red S Review*, Vol. XX, No. 10, June 1939, SA, pp. 25-26.
[189] Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, p. 3.

Refugee-rehabilitation and Small Scale, 'Cottage Industries' in West Bengal

The growth of 'small industries' in India in the decade after independence coincided with the Government's refugee rehabilitation programmes. After partition, sewing machines began to be put to new uses. Between 1948-1949, Britain exported nearly fifty-one thousand sewing machines to India.[190] The post-colonial state adopted them in its schemes to 'rehabilitate' displaced and unattached women refugees by setting up sewing training schools.[191]

State-run welfare schemes typically expected refugee women to sew and embroider in order to supplement family incomes.[192] But as Anjali Bhardwaj Dutta has shown in the context of post-colonial Delhi, neither social constraint nor the force of custom circumscribed the ways in which refugee women began to use sewing machines. They rehabilitated themselves outside the disciplinary regimes of the post-colonial state, by tailoring under informalised arrangements to make their livelihoods. They set up shops and later boutiques in their homes.[193] Did West Bengal share the same story?

Unlike post-colonial Delhi, Calcutta was reeling under the weight of the 'stormy decades', the 1940s and 1950s, a period that brought about momentous changes which shaped the subsequent history of the city. It experienced the effects of the Second World War, the Famine in 1943,

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[190] David Arnold, 'Global goods and local usages: the small world of the Indian sewing machine, 1875-1952', *Journal of Global History* Vol. 6 (2011), p. 428.
[191] 'Supply of Singer Sewing Machines to Displaced Persons', File no. RHC/32 (6)/48, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India. National Archives of India.
[192] A Singer journal entry in 1940 suggests that the colonial government was using Singer machines as part of its welfare schemes for working class women in Bombay, 'Needlework and Welfare Schemes for Women in Bombay', *The Red S Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 5, January 1940, SA, p. 13.
[193] Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta, '"Useful" and "Earning" Citizens? Gender, state and the market in post-colonial Delhi', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 53, Issue 6 (2019), pp. 1924-1955.

independence and partition, communal riots, large-scale migration of (Hindu) refugees, and the internal displacement of its own religious minority.[194] An estimated six million East Bengali (Hindu) refugees were in West Bengal by 1973. Their arrival, and the mushrooming of squatter colonies in the 1950s up to the 1970s, led to the internal displacement of countless Muslims, a significant proportion of whom had 'stayed-on' after partition.[195]

Between 1947-1967, West Bengal witnessed a gradual economic decline set in motion by the social and economic dislocations caused by partition. A number of factors contributed to this downward spiral in agricultural and industrial output in the state. First, Bengal's two prosperous and interdependent economies of the East and West – the former supplied food grains and essential raw materials, and the latter processed the supplies in its factories, and industrial units, and also acted as a consumption base – were severed by partition. After 1947, West Bengal was left with a 'highly vulnerable industrial infrastructure', and the jute industry bore the worst brunt of the economic collapse.[196] The governments of India and Pakistan signed inter-dominion agreements on the supply of raw jute, but these fell through. Acute shortages in the supply of raw materials exacerbated the increase in prices and stymied the profitability of the mills. This had an adverse impact on the employment of factory labour. Between 1951 and 1961, the proportion of workers in India as a whole increased from 38.9 percent to 42.8 percent, but in West Bengal it fell from 35 percent to 33 percent.[197]

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[194] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar eds., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), pp. 1-12.
[195] Joya Chatterji, 'Staying on: partition and West Bengal's Muslim Minorities', in *The Spoils of Partition: India and Bengal, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[196] Amiya Bagchi, 'Studies on the economy of West Bengal since independence', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 33, No. 47/48 (1998), p. 2973. The effects of partition on jute, Bengal's largest industry, is well documented by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking working class history: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
[197] *West Bengal: An analytical study*. Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Oxford & IBH Publishing, 1971), p. 11.

Second, the 'food gap' in West Bengal in the 1950s made matters worse. In the years that followed partition, the state failed to improve its own rice yields culminating in an 'agrarian impasse' in Bengal.[198] With the influx of millions of refugees from east Bengal, the state's food shortages continued to grow more acute. Third, West Bengal's government was unable to raise sufficient resources to build back its shattered economy and infrastructure. And the Congress leadership at the centre was not impressed by West Bengal's demand for special treatment, as far as disbursing finances was concerned.[199]

The two key areas that were vital for Bengal's economic recovery – refugee relief and rehabilitation, and regulation of trade and commerce in foodstuffs, coal, iron, and steel – found little support from the national leadership in Delhi.[200] In 1952, the first Finance Commission's 'statutory transfers' disbursement of resources to states was based on two indices, 'need' and 'backwardness'. The states with the largest populations and requiring uplift got the most. West Bengal with its highly urbanized but reduced population lost out on both counts.[201] Nor did West Bengal get as large a share of the excise duties as it had hoped for. The Finance Commission denied any special advantages to more prosperous and urbanized states, whose wealthier classes consumed most of the goods which were subject to excise duties in India. As a consequence, the Finance Commission decided to allocate monies raised by excise duties

[198] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 245; J.K. Boyce, *Agrarian Impasse in Bengal: Institutional constraints to technological change* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
[199] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, pp. 211-259.
[200] The Inter-Dominion Agreement in 1948 was intended to stem the flow of refugees into Bengal. The central government regarded relief to refugees from east Bengal as a stop-gap measure, discouraging permanent rehabilitation and settlement. It insisted that the exodus of refugees from east Bengal into West Bengal could and should be halted, even reversed. Joya Chatterji, 'Dispersal and the Failure of Rehabilitation: Refugee Camp-dwellers and Squatters in West Bengal', in *Partition's Legacies* (2019), pp. 310-358.
[201] B.P.R. Vithal and M.L. Sastry, *Fiscal federalism in India* (New Delhi: 2001) Annexure XIX, p. 98.

according to 'need'. West Bengal found its share of excise duties shrink to about 7 percent of India's total.[202]

In the first two decades after partition, the Planning Commission distributed almost twice as much money to the states for their development as the Finance Commission's disbursements.[203] Between 1947-1967, Bengal's share of industrial aid was less than half the assistance given by the centre to Maharashtra, and just over a third of the amounts received by the old 'Bombay' Presidency (that is Gujarat and Maharashtra combined).[204]

West Bengal did not benefit from the national government's policies on trade, tariffs, and customs duties. The central government used tariffs and quota restrictions to protect industries which catered to India's domestic markets, but it did little to help export businesses. On the contrary, for many years after independence, it imposed an export tax on the jute industry. As a result, in Amiya Bagchi's words, the 'import-substituting industries sucked capital away from the …export-oriented industries', the crucial vector of West Bengal's industrial economy.[205] But, despite these macroeconomic challenges, small producers seized the opportunities that became available to them.

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[202] Ibid.

[203] West Bengal received the smallest plan outlays per capital of any state from the Planning Commission. Between 1956 and 1977, West Bengal received a meagre Rs. 186 per capita from the centre in plan transfers. And the monies that West Bengal did receive on account of 'discretionary transfers' (disbursed by the centre at will), were by way of loans and not outright grants. I.S. Gulati and K.K. George, 'Inter-state redistribution through the budget', in I.S. Gulati ed., *Centre-state budgetary transfers* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 276.

[204] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 250.

[205] Amiya Bagchi, 'Studies on the economy of West Bengal since independence', p. 2976. Also, on interwar policies on export trade, see, Basudev Chatterji, *Trade, Tariffs and Empire: Lancashire and British Policy in India 1919-1939* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

With the permit system in place, from the late 1950s, a new coalition between the West Bengal Congress and business families from trading and commercial castes (Marwaris and Dawoodi Bohras), petty traders, and small entrepreneurs, started to take hold. Those lower down the food chain – middlemen, slum lords, and *mohalla* musclemen – benefitted from the extended patronage by virtue of their affiliation with these groups. The distribution of permits incentivised new relationships to take root and cemented old alliances forged in the pre-partition years. These now played a crucial role in consolidating the authority of the Congress in every election until 1967.

Moreover, electoral democracy in India had created a space for Muslim stayers-on to negotiate their way into positions of power and influence, often taking advantage of factionalism within the Congress. As Joya Chatterji has shown, a new kind of 'Muslim politics' emerged in Calcutta from the mid-1950s, which despite often being conservative, did not reduce Muslims to a mere 'vote-bank'.[206]

The Government of India's cross-border trade agreements with Pakistan reinvigorated pre-partition patterns of trading on either sides of the Bengal border. Between September 1948 and April 1950, when there was supposed to have been a complete deadlock in trade relations, it was reported that more than 300,000 bales of jute, a commodity whose prices were high, were smuggled into India from East Bengal.[207] A report from the Committee on Border Trade compiled for the trade conference of 1953 concluded:

[206] By 1958, thirty-five Muslims had joined the ranks of the top Congress leadership in West Bengal. Of the twenty-five Bengalis who held ministerial posts in that year, whether in the state or at the centre, six were Muslims. Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, pp. 194-120.
[207] C.N. Vakil, *Economic Consequences of Divided India* (Bombay: Vora and Co. publishers, 1950).

> 'a certain amount of [illegal] trade continues to take place…By regulating it and properly defining its scope, there was much less danger of smuggling and other evils than by driving it underground'.[208]

While on the one hand, both governments made lofty declarations of carrying out trade – taxable and liable to regulations – with one another as independent nation-states, on the other hand, they were forced to come to a series of arrangements to accommodate commercial transactions to continue in the way that they had always existed before partition.[209] The open-handed policy on allowing older patterns of trading in the Bengal borderlands created opportunities for the 'illegal' flow of goods across the border.[210] As a consequence, smuggling and counterfeit garment trafficking opened up avenues for 'illicit' trade, connecting petty traders, peddlers, and small producers in the cities and the borderlands on either side of the Radcliffe Line.[211]

In 1948, the national policy of aligning 'cottage industries' with refugee rehabilitation found expression in the Ministry of Labour's resolution on industrial policy. The report celebrated

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[208] Ibid, p. 181.

[209] On inter-dominion trade agreements between India and Pakistan, see, Pallavi Raghavan, *Animosity at Bay: An Alternative History of the India-Pakistan Relationship, 1947-1952* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020), Chapter 4.

[210] Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, 'Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands', *Journal of World History* Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997), p. 229; Jason Cons and Romola Sanyal, 'Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia', *Political Geography* Vol. 5, No. 13 (2013), pp. 5-11; Jason Cons, 'Histories of Belonging(s): narrating territory, possession, and dispossession at the India-Bangladesh Border', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 46, Issue 3 (2012), pp. 527-558.

[211] On cross-border trade, Willem van Schendel, 'Easy Come, Easy Go: Smugglers on the Ganges', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1993), pp. 189-213. Joya Chatterji, 'The Fashioning of a Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and Bengal's Border Landscape, 1947-1952', in *Partition's Legacies*, pp. 49-122. On garment trafficking in the India-Bangladesh borderlands, see, Naila Kabeer, *Women's Labour in the Bangladesh Garment Industry: Choice and Constraints* (London: Routledge, 1994). On informality and subversive politics of marginalised groups in the borderlands, see, Malini Sur, 'Bamboo baskets and barricades: gendered landscapes at the India-Bangladesh border', in Barak Kalir and Malini Sur eds., *Transnational Flows and Permissive Polities: Ethnographies of Human Mobilities in Asia* (Amsterdam: IIAS publication, 2013), pp. 127-150; and Sahana Ghosh, 'Cross-border activities in everyday life: the Bengal borderland', *Contemporary South Asia* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2011), pp. 49-60. On border zones as spaces marked by particular forms of transience and flux, see, Tina Hariss, 'Trading places: new economic geographies across Himalayan borderlands', *Political Geography* Vol. 35 (2013), pp. 60-68.

India's small-scale cottage and handicraft industries with the view of absorbing the displaced refugee populations into the sector, in the following words –

> 'Cottage and small-scale industries have a very important role in the national economy, offering as they do scope for individual, village or co-operative enterprise and means for the rehabilitation of displaced persons. These industries are particularly suited for the better utilization of local resources and for the achievement of local self-sufficiency, in respect to certain types of essential consumer goods.'[212]

A number of 'training-cum-production centres' were set up that mainly catered toward rehabilitating refugee women. U. Bhaskar Rao, who was commissioned to write up a rather self-congratulatory report on the success of state-sponsored rehabilitation noted that, 'cottage and small-scale industries are the ideal answers to the problem of employment. They ensure that idle hands, whether in the towns or in the villages get busy.'[213] These work centres provided training in *silai* (sewing), knitting, embroidery, tailoring, basket-making, calico-painting and block-printing. In doing so, attributes of domesticity were evoked to provide women with 'vocational training' and skills to engage in work that would generate supplementary household income.[214]

In West Bengal where refugees clustered in large numbers, the State-government supported small-scale industrial development, and was geared towards providing vocational and technical training in designated training-*cum*-production units, camps, and homes, where possible. The focus was on bolstering different crafts involving spinning from rag cotton, weaving, *durree* and carpet making, tailoring, button making, book-binding, bamboo-work, and textile doll-

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[212] *Report on Industrial Development and Policy*, Planning Commission, Government of India (Delhi, 1950), p. 14.
[213] U. Bhaskar Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*. Department of Rehabilitation, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1967), p. 73.
[214] Women as 'earners' and breadwinners were not recognised in official or development discourse, relegating their work to be defined as 'free time' or 'leisure time' activity, 'naturally' emanating from their domestic work. Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta, '"Useful" and "Earning" Citizens? Gender, state and the market in post-colonial Delhi', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 53, Issue 6 (2019), pp. 1924-1955.

making.[215] Women in large numbers, particularly in homes, had to be equipped to earn their own living by acquiring skills. Several of these crafts were concentrated in areas where such skills could be easily mobilised to train displaced refugees.[216]

In 1956, The West Bengal government instituted a survey on the 'success' of refugee-rehabilitation programmes. Two years later, a detailed review of all schemes in the Eastern region was undertaken by a team of officers from the Rehabilitation Ministry. This report revealed certain 'undesirable trends' which called for prompt remedial action: first, it was apparent that further training in tailoring and weaving would only lead to a swelling of the ranks of the unemployed. The '*saturation* point in these occupations' [emphasis mine] had been reached. It was decided, therefore, to discontinue such training, and divert refugees to other trades or keep them on doles. On the other hand, it was discovered that 'the employment potential in other occupations, such as midwifery, nursing, stenography, teaching and mechanics were growing. Schemes for training in these lines were therefore deemed fit for expansion.'[217]

Two critical points emerge from these findings. First, tailoring was a 'saturated' market where incoming refugees 'found their talents at a discount'.[218] Second, as a consequence, the 'employment potential' of displaced persons had to be redirected to other occupations where the prospects of gainful employment were higher.

[215] U. Bhaskar Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, p. 183.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid, p. 185.
[218] Ibid.

Moreover, like the colonial state in the war years, the post-colonial state tapped into these 'saturated', pre-existing tailor-clusters for training refugees in handiwork-based crafts. The report revealed that 'several pre-existing manufacturing centres in West Bengal contributed to the initial success of these operations by introducing apprenticeship training schemes of their own, especially for the benefit of refugees, under the supervision of the State Directorate of Industries.'[219] That this claim has merit is shown by M.K.A. Siddiqui's findings that, after partition, Bengali Muslim tailors who had stayed on in Metiabruz trained East Bengali Hindu refugees concentrated around the Howrah region.[220]

However, since national planning in the early years after independence was geared towards heavy industries, economic planning for refugees did not yield satisfactory results. In 1951, a report on the *Co-operative Organisation of Small-Scale Cottage and Handicraft Industries* noted that:

> 'The term 'handicrafts' in its modern connotations can no longer be used to describe the traditional concept of craft practiced by members of an exclusive guild and carrying with it a multitude of social and economic rights and obligations. The success of the handicrafts and small-scale industries depends upon capital investment, credit supply, division of labour and direct touch with the markets -national and international, where the products were sold. In the absence of any one of them, the handicraft industry is doomed to fail.'[221]

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[219] Emphasis mine. Ibid, p. 64 and p. 182.

[220] Muslims tailors who stayed on in Calcutta retained their occupational niches and trained a large number of East Bengali Hindu refugees who settled in areas around Domjur in Howrah. See, M.K.A. Siddiqui and S.P. Lala, 'The Darzis of Metiaburj: A Study in the Organisation of Tailoring as an Occupation', in M.K.A. Siddiqui ed., *Aspects of Society and Culture in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1982), p. 133. Also see, Frederic C. Thomas, *Calcutta Poor: Elegies on a City above Pretense* (New York: M.E. Sharp, 1984), p. 106. Sunil Gangyopadhyay recollects in his post-partition memoir, *Those Days*: 'Muslim tailors were so deft with their needles that their Hindu counterparts could not compete and slowly edged out of the business. Muslim tailors and *zardozi* workers (embroiderers) held monopoly for all fine garments that were available in the city.' Sunil Ganyopadhyay, *Those Days* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1997), p. 52.

[221] *A Report on the Co-operative Organisation and Small-Scale Cottage and Handicraft Industries*, International Labour Office, 1950 in Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics, Vol. 22, 2 (April 1951), pp. 242-80.

The refugee handicraft industry could not adapt itself to the changing needs of consumers and markets, partly due to the government's flawed design to encourage handicrafts among novices without skills and lacking access to markets.[222] Unlike small-scale producers like tailors, weavers, embroiderers and dyers, the key element in the failure of refugee handicrafts was not the inability of refugees to recruit labour or to risk capital, but to recognise where consumer needs were changing.

While the 'feminisation of work' in the years after partition undoubtedly led to an increase in the number of working women, it cheapened the cost of labour and brought down wages in state-regulated workplaces.[223] The higher rate of women's participation in the workforce was not commensurate with a rise in their status. Flexible contracts and poor working conditions tended to place women in a more precarious position.[224] Nevertheless, refugee women sought to rehabilitate themselves in ways that brought the 'home' and the 'market' together in new and significant ways.[225] In a recent article, Anjali Bhardwaj Dutta provided fascinating accounts of Muslim women in post-partition Delhi doing piecemeal, home-based tailoring work to sustain themselves. Even though they operated at the margins of the mainstream

[222] Between 1957 and 1974, administrative control over the 'training-cum-production centres' went back and forth between central and state governments. By 1980, many refugee training centres had closed down on account of lack of funding or dearth of work, and the ones that did exist, declined or stagnated. See, Anjali Bhardwaj Dutta, 'Rebuilding Lives and Redefining Spaces: Women in Postcolonial Delhi, 1945-1980', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2014), p. 187.
[223] Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta eds., *Trauma and Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*. Vol. II (Calcutta: Stree, 2009); Samita Sen, 'Gender and Class: Women in Indian Industry, 1890-1990', pp. 75-116; Anjali Bhardwaj Dutta, Uditi Sen and Mytheli Sreenivas, 'Introduction: A Country of Her Making', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Special Issue (2021), pp. 1-11.
[224] Samita Sen, 'Women, Work and Household in Industrialising Asia', in Amarjit Kaur ed., *Women Workers in Industrialising Asia: Costed, Not Valued* (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2004).
[225] Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta, '"Useful" and "Earning" Citizens? Gender, state and the market in post-colonial Delhi', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 53, Issue 6 (2019), pp. 1924-1955.

economy, they nevertheless 'helped maintain family, household and community relations and gave them a sense of localised cultural identity.'[226]

Although the vision of small-scale industries (often conflated with village industries) in Nehru's government remained somewhat marginal to the first Five- Year Plans, by the Second Plan this had changed.[227] It became clear that the expansion of large-scale industry would take time, and the small-scale sector drew considerable attention from policymakers. It was this sector that was viewed in a more positive light: as employment-generating, less capital-intensive, and incorporating both 'traditional' and 'modern' modes of production to meet the projected demand for consumer goods.[228]

[226] Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta, 'Nation and Its 'Other' Women: Muslim Subjectivity and Gendered Agency in Delhi', *Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 44, No. 2 (2021), pp. 380-397.
[227] K.T. Shah ed., *Report: National Planning Committee* (Bombay: Vora and Co. Publishers, 1949), pp. 27-28 and pp. 35-46.
[228] Planning Commission, *Report of the Village and Small Scale Industries (Second Five Year Plan) Committee* (Government Press: October 1955).

Muslim tailors and the use of sewing machines in post-partition West Bengal

Darzis remained important after independence. Singer sewing machines continued to whirl away at street-side tailor shops across Indian cities. The imperial clubbishness of the colonial public sphere survived; 'clubbability' was appropriated in the service of a new elite in independent India.[229]

Official and bureaucratic clothing in post-colonial India involved uniforms and stitched menswear – this was pervasive across the various levels of government services throughout India.[230] After partition, with East Bengali refugees occupying government positions, the category 'middle-class' burgeoned further – the state being the dominant employee. The Government gave its employees in (so-called) Class III and Class IV material, and asked them to get their own uniforms made. So they went to tailors to make these up.[231]

In some organisations, to be sure, uniforms were no longer compulsory, but private tailoring agencies received contracts for uniforms required by low-ranking officials.[232] Further, even when there was no formal uniform, an informal one emerged for the world of work in the private sector – the 'pant-shirt', and even the suit. Making these made-to-measure outfits for upwardly mobile men required tailors with great skill.

[229] Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability and the Colonial Public Sphere', p. 504.
[230] Clare Anderson, 'Fashioning Identities: Convict Dress in Colonial South and Southeast Asia', *History Workshop Journal* No. 52 (2001), pp. 152-174; David Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India', in David Arnold and David Hardiman eds., *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 170-175.
[231] R & R 9 (47)/1952, Delhi State Archives, cited in Anjali Bhardwaj Dutta, 'Rebuilding Lives and Redefining Spaces: Women in Postcolonial Delhi, 1945-1980', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2014), p. 187.
[232] Ibid.

Table 4.2 reveals an interesting rise in 'manufacturing hand trades', 'factory establishments' and 'small enterprises' between 1948-1954. Tailors are likely to have straddled all these sectors, so despite the macroeconomic trends, they seem to have fared – it seems fair to extrapolate – reasonably well.[233]

Table 4.2: National Income by Occupational Categories (in crores of rupees)

Mining, Manufacturing and hand trades	1948-49	1951-52	1952-53	1953-54
Mining	60	90	90	100
Factory establishments	550	690	700	730
Small enterprises	870	950	970	970
Total	1,480	1,730	1,760	1,800

Source: *Statistical Report on the Production of Selected Industries of India*, Delhi 1954. Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Government of India, p. 11

Two-thirds (66.3 percent) of the expenditure of an average household, taking the country as a whole, was taken up by food; about a tenth (9.7 percent) by clothing and the remaining one-fourth (24 percent) was distributed among other heads of expenditure, such as education and health services. In 1951, as shown in Table 4.3, the consumer expenditure per month per person for Cities, Towns, Villages and India (August-November 1951) included spending on clothing, home furnishing (bedding), footwear, ceremonials and services.[234]

[233] *Statistical Report on the Production of Selected Industries of India* (Delhi: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 1954), p. 11.
[234] Ibid, p. 14.

Table 4.3: The consumer expenditure per month per person for Cities, Towns, Villages in India, (August-November, 1951)

	Rupees per person per month				Percentage of total expenditure			
	Cities	Towns	Villages	India	Cities	Towns	Villages	India
Clothing	3.78	2.05	1.48	1.59	6.90	6.50	6.11	61.19
Bedding	0.22	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.40	0.35	0.41	0.42
Footwear	0.43	0.18	0.14	0.15	0.78	0.57	0.58	0.58
Services	4.77	2.43	0.81	1.09	8.70	7.70	3.34	4.24
Ceremonials	2.91	1.86	1.47	1.54	5.31	5.90	6.07	5.99

Source: *Statistical Report on the Production of Selected Industries of India*, Delhi 1954. Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Government of India, p. 14

Again, tailors could well have been counted in the categories of 'clothing', 'bedding', 'footwear' and 'services'. These figures suggest that the use of sewing machines created new, unanticipated possibilities for Indian tailors after independence. They shaped the ways in which tailors worked, catering to the new demand from domestic and export markets. Machines augmented the tailors' interconnections with outfitting firms, and patrons, and expanded their clientele. Skilled artisans rooted in particular geographies with a long legacy of craft practices took advantage of these machines in order to assert authority over their trades.

The Gandhian ideology of cloth-making was at this stage repurposed to serve the political economy. Industrialists enlisted the moral and political capital generated by the *khadi* campaign to bolster industrialization.[235] The Republic of India dedicated large sums of money to the propagation of homespun cloth through institutions such as The All India *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission, the All India Handicrafts Board, the All India Handloom Board, and

[235] Raj Chandavarkar has shown, the Bombay mills, for instance, produced careful, machine-made copies of different sorts of homespun fabrics for distribution in the domestic market. Raj Chandavarkar, 'Labour and Society in Bombay, 1918-1940', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (1983).

the Small Scale Industries Board. The Government approved initiatives to foster small-scale manufacturing units; protect local artisan communities by providing capital for training and technical assistance; promote schemes for hire-purchase of machinery and equipment needed for small manufacturing units; and to generate employment opportunities in this sector with increased demands for domestic and foreign consumption.[236]

Muslim tailors benefitted from the substantial state patronage in this period for *khadi* production. In the years from 1950-1960, small local entrepreneurs, including tailors, deployed advertising in English and vernacular newspapers to promote their skills as 'swadeshi'. This *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* advertisement under the *Khadi* Gramodyog from 2 October 1959 is a case in point.

[236] *India 1956: A Reference Annual*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (New Delhi: Old Secretariat, National Printing Works, 1956), p. 115. *Report of the Sixth Census of Indian Manufactures* (Annual Series), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India (Delhi, 1951).

Image 4.8: An advertisement in *Amrita Bazaar Patrika Khadi* and Gramodyog Feature



PAGE TEN AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA KHADI AND GRAMODYOG FEATURE OCTOBER 2, 1959.

WITH BEST COMPLIMENTS FROM
ISLAMPUR CHAK KENDRA
RESHAM TANTUBAYA SAMABAYA SAMITY LTD.
[Certified by Khadi & Village Industries Commission]
Manufacturers of
FAMOUS MURSHIDABAD SILK
KHADI AND COTTON KHADDAR
P.O.:—ISLAMPUR, CHAK
Dist. MURSHIDABAD (West Bengal)
QUALITY FABRICS,
BEAUTIFUL TEXTURE AND
DURABILITY OUR SPECIALITIES.

MUKTI BANERJEE (ARTIST)
SPECIALIST IN
MUGA PAINTINGS
of
BEAUTIFUL & VARIEGATED DESIGNS
Please Contact At :—
15B, CANAL STREET, CALCUTTA-14.
(Phone:—23-5060)

Selling Agent :—
BENGAL VARIETY STORES
12, CHOWRINGHEE ROAD
CALCUTTA-13.

WITH BEST COMPLIMENTS FROM :—
NOOR ALI MONDAL
SIRAZUL ISLAM MONDAL
MOORSALIM MOLLAH
ABDUS SAMAD MOLLAH
ISPAHAN MOLLAH
MUZAFFAR HOSSAIN THUNDER
KHODA BAKSH MONDAL
KHALILUR RAHAMAN
SAMSUDDIN THUNDER
ABDUL RAHAMAN KHAN
GOLAP RAHAMAN
THE REPUTED AND WELLKNOWN TAILORS WHO MAKE STANDARD READYMADE GARMENTS TO KHADI GRAMODYOG BHAVAN, CALCUTTA.

KHADI SCHEMES

BUY KHADI FROM CERTIFIED BHANDARS

A Western Or An Eastern Economy?
By WILFRED WELLOCK

Source: *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 2 October 1959, p. 10

Here, we see, ‘Reputed and Wellknown [sic] tailors’,

Noor Ali Mondal
Sirazul Islam Mondal
Moorsalim Mollah
Abdus Samad Mollah
Muzaffar Hossain Thunder
Khuda Baksh Mondal
Khalilur Rahaman
Samsuddin Thunder
Abdul Rahaman Khan
Golap Rahaman,

advertising their names as well as their specialisation in making ‘readymade garments’; paying

their 'best compliments' to the *Khadi* Gramodyog Bhavan, Calcutta.[237]

The historical context in which these Muslim tailors paid tribute to the '*Khadi* Gramodyog', while advertising themselves and their skills, is significant. The period soon after India's partition was marked by 'anxious claims to belonging', as religious minorities sought to negotiate their place in the new nation.[238] With Gandhi's assassination, the political mood in the country had changed.[239] The dissolution of princely states, diminishing influence in government services, increasing marginalisation of Urdu, and subsequent evacuee property ordinances came as, as Attia Hosain describes them, 'death blows' to Muslim elite groups.[240] For Muslim stayers on at the non-elite end of the spectrum the challenges were more stark.

While some voices were more audible, their presence and politics more visible, others occupied a more restrained and deferential position – adopting a secular nationalist discourse, the least threatening to national unity. Furthermore, with the dissolution of the Muslim League, it was important for Muslim politicians, for instance, to reiterate secular positions, and oppose the mixing of religion with politics lest they be accused of harbouring separatist tendencies.[241] Muslim women refashioned their identities in resistance to, and conformity with, the national

[237] *Khadi* and Gramodyog Special feature, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 2 October 1959.
[238] Taylor Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[239] Ashis Nandy, 'Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi', in *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 70-98.
[240] Attia Hosain, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1987), p. 288; Taylor Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[241] In this regard, Mushirul Hasan has shown how Muslim political figures who stayed in India were often co-opted by the Congress party. See, Mushirul Hasan, 'In Search of Integration and Identity: Indian Muslims since Independence', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 23, No. 45/47 (1988), pp. 2467-2478.

status quo in post-colonial India.[242] Those holding the reins of leadership had to find answers to post-partition dilemmas within secular and democratic frameworks in seeking adjustments not as Muslims, *per se*, but as members of the larger Indian republic. However, this political manoeuvre of representing Muslims as 'unhyphenated Indians'[243] was one among several articulations of belonging that found expression in post-colonial India.

This advertisement by Muslim tailors is one such expression of belonging. By owing their allegiance to the state-sponsored '*Khadi* Gramodyog', the biggest patron of skill and artisanship, these tailors tacitly claimed their status as rightful subjects in India's postcolonial life. By using their structural location of being 'reputed and wellknown' tailors, and paying tribute to the *Khadi* Gramodyog, they deployed the version of 'Indian' craft heritage and authority endorsed by Indian nationalists. In doing so, they sought to emerge as historical subjects with a shared colonial past that shaped the history of *their* nation.

The modernizing national elite, exemplified by Nehru, considered religion and ascriptive affiliations as vestiges of a premodern era that only modernization and development would make redundant.[244] The 1950s and early 1960s era of 'Nehruvian development' involved a greater investment in state-run programmes that bolstered Indian handicrafts and cottage industries. In the light of these changes, by paying homage to the *Khadi* Gramodyog, the tailors in the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* asserted their place as rightful beneficiaries of the Indian state. This advertisement presents an opportunity to tease out the tensions between being Muslim,

[242] Humaira Chowdhury, 'The Life and Times of Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul: An Exploration of Muslim Women's Self-Fashioning in Post-Colonial India', *Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 44, Issue 2 (2021), pp. 264-281.
[243] Laurence Gautier, 'A Laboratory for a Composite India? Jamia Millia Islamia around the time of partition', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 54, Issue 1 (2019), pp. 1-51.
[244] Akeel Bilgrami, 'Two Concepts of Secularism: Reason, Modernity, and Archimedean Principle', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XXIX, Issue 28 (1994), pp. 1749-1761.

the 'enemy within' in post-colonial India on the one hand, and an 'artisan' on the other.[245] It also represents one out of the many competing, often overlapping, expressions of belonging that existed in the post-colonial period – where Muslim communities resisted exclusionary political discourses by using creative strategies to assert their right to belong to the Indian nation.[246]

[245] Arshad Alam, 'The Enemy Within: Madrasa and Muslim Identity in North India', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 42, Issue 2-3 (2008), pp. 605-627.
[246] Ornit Shani, 'Conceptions of Citizenship in India and the "Muslim Question"', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 44, No. 1 (2010), pp. 145-173; Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); and Taylor Sherman, 'Migration, Citizenship and Belonging in Hyderabad (Deccan), 1946-1956', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 45, No. 1 (2014), pp. 81-107.

Chapter Five

The Threads that Bind: Tailors, Family Firms, Shop Hoardings, and Place-Making after 1947

Dhaga ek aisi cheez hain jiska istamal har mard aur aurat kisi na kisi shikhar mein zaroor karta hain.

[A thread is such a thing that a man or a woman has certainly used it at some crucial point in their lives.]

Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, 1926

Although, a rule of their religion prohibits the taking of interest which has seriously prejudiced them in making money…curiously enough, the most enterprising Muhammadans are those of seaport towns- Bombay in the west and Calcutta in the east. These are astute and adventurous traders.

Sir Bampfylde Fuller, *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment*, 1910[1]

Introduction

A thread, a long thin strand of cotton, nylon or any other fibre, is an integral part of a tailor's toolkit. Zulfiqar Anwar's tailoring manual invokes the utilitarian meaning of a thread as a sort of 'thing' – *cheez* – that has been used by every man and a woman at some critical juncture in their lives.[2] In a metaphorical sense it also signifies connections, sometimes strong and at other times fragile, that tie people and places together. In this chapter I will unravel some of the threads that bind tailors to their patrons. Long-established family firms, merchant outfitters, and clients had access to enduring networks which became assets for tailors: their 'immobility capital', which persuaded them to stay on where they were.

[1] Sir Bampfylde Fuller, *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment* (London: John Murray Albemarle Street, 1910), p. 51.
[2] The literal translation of the word *shikhar* is peak, high point, or pinnacle. Zulfiqar Anwar, *Kamyab Darzi Khana*, p. 3.

These stories of the resilience and survival of Muslim artisan communities, unwelcome in India after 1947, have been hitherto rendered invisible in partition historiography. In comparison with the voluminous studies on East Bengali Hindu refugees and the 'partition in the east', a 'minute' historiography exists on the experiences of internal displacement within territories that became 'India' and 'Pakistan'.[3] This chapter will make room for accounts of Muslim tailors and Dawoodi Bohra families who made informed decisions to stay on in a seemingly hostile environment, and sought to assert their agency in adversity.

This chapter is attentive to the ways in which Muslim tailors and long-standing outfitting firms have depended on each other and collaborated in sustaining a niche market for bespoke garment production. In doing so, tailors have exercised a considerable degree of initiative in rehabilitating themselves in the face of *longue durée* processes of governmental neglect, social discrimination, and economic competition. They relied on their skills, their mastery of small technologies, patronage networks, and markets embedded in the region.

Historiographical overview on Muslim ghettos in West Bengal

In thinking about the impact of displacement and dislocation on Muslim lives, Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais' book, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*, made an extraordinary intervention in the field of migration and diaspora studies. They shifted the focus away from Hindu refugees in the historiography on partition and its

[3] Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'The "Regional" Turn in the Writing of Modern Indian History: Some Notes on the State of the Field', *Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 39, No. 1 (2016), pp. 271-285.

aftermath, and drew attention specifically to Muslim migrations and settlements within and beyond Bengal in course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[4]

One of the books most valuable contributions is to view Bengal not only as a source of migrants, but also as a destination: to conceive of a 'Bengal diaspora within Bengal as well as outside it'. This foregrounds the 'little' migrations – between eastern India and East Pakistan, in the rural borderlands, within and between districts in eastern India – alongside longer journeys and settlements between the Bengal region and the United Kingdom.[5] They trace the lived experiences of a diverse set of Muslim migrants: Bengali and Bihari Muslims on either side of the eastern border, in the borderlands, and Bangladeshi Muslims in the UK. The book thereby underlines the plurality and multi-layered historical specificities of these groups, and explores the relations between 'Muslim', 'Bengali', and 'Bengal' – how they are embedded in the intersections of linguistic, cultural, religious, and national identities.

The vast historical and theoretical canvas of this book provides an overarching picture of the history of mobility *and* immobility in the 'eastern zone' from 1847 to 1947. The book is attentive to the ways in which mobility is entangled with immobility, the material and affective constraints that impede people's choices, and the effects of new borders on patterns of mobility and immobility. This runs contrary to the dominant historiography of the subcontinent which describes the inter-Asian migrations of the nineteenth century as gradually slowing down due to increased sedentarisation and intensive agrarian colonisation by the early twentieth century. The book connect the histories of 1947 and 1971 in explaining why migratory patterns took

[4] Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).
[5] Ibid, p. 2.

the forms they did and how Muslims used pre-existing networks of mobility to move across state borders.[6]

In conceptualising migrant agency, Chatterji proposes the idea of 'mobility capital' – a bundle of assets often including fragile (pre-existing) networks, know-how, 'portable skills', movable wealth, literacy, and sense of relative deprivation – which propelled many Muslims to move within and beyond the Bengal region. Those who stayed behind tended to 'lack some or all of these attributes, or were held back by complex ties or countervailing obligations'.[7]

Chatterji explains this 'immobility paradox' through the idea of 'deficits' and 'overabundances' – macro, micro, and cumulative factors that inhibit the mobility of particular groups and individuals. By analysing the pre-existing networks between Bengal and the global economy in the late colonial period, Chatterji demonstrates how in the 'age of migration' particular groups could not move. They got 'stuck' for reasons such as entrenched poverty, 'network atrophy', physical frailty, illness, and obligations of care that inhibited the movement (of women in particular, and the debilitated).[8]

While these descriptions provide compelling accounts of why some people got 'stuck' in the 'wrong' country in the aftermath of India's partition. I argue that this picture, however, is incomplete. There were others who stayed put of their own volition. Or, if they moved, they did not cross the border to migrate to the 'right' country, despite having similar asset bundles to those who did move in the aftermath of partition. These relocated instead to 'magnetic' zones

[6] Ibid.
[7] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations', in *Partition's Legacies*, p. 271; Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck in Bengal: Immobility in the "age of migration"', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 51, Issue 2 (2017), pp. 511-541.
[8] Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck in Bengal', pp. 511-541.

where Muslims had chosen to stay on in large numbers. We know very little about the latter and why they chose to remain where they were, often in dense clusters – although, as Chatterji argues, the care of shrines and graves was a significant factor.[9]

Despite violence, impoverishment, and social boycott, many Muslims stayed on after partition, clustering in places within the city and along the borderlands. For instance, *The Bengal Diaspora* project revealed a paradoxical degree of reverse migration from East Pakistan to West Bengal, clustering around particular border-areas: 24 Parganas, West Dinajpur, Malda-Murshidabad.[10] However, the reasons for such clustering have been reduced to narratives about security: 'looking for safety in numbers'. While this may have been a significant point of consideration for internally displaced persons or group, I suggest that there were other factors that drew them to these spaces.

These clusters, as this thesis has shown, were vibrant and dynamic spaces of social and economic enterprise, historically rooted in thriving networks that connected up the whole of undivided Bengal through trade and commerce. Religious fairs associated with Muslim saints, and weekly and periodical markets dotted in and around Calcutta and its neighbouring districts (as shown in Chapter One, Map 1.2) provided the 'locational incentives' for tailors to remain or move into in these lucrative hotspots in the aftermath of partition.

Muslim clusters inside Calcutta where many stayers on remained – Metiabruz, Kidderpore and the municipal wards along the river Hooghly – have also eluded the historian's attention.

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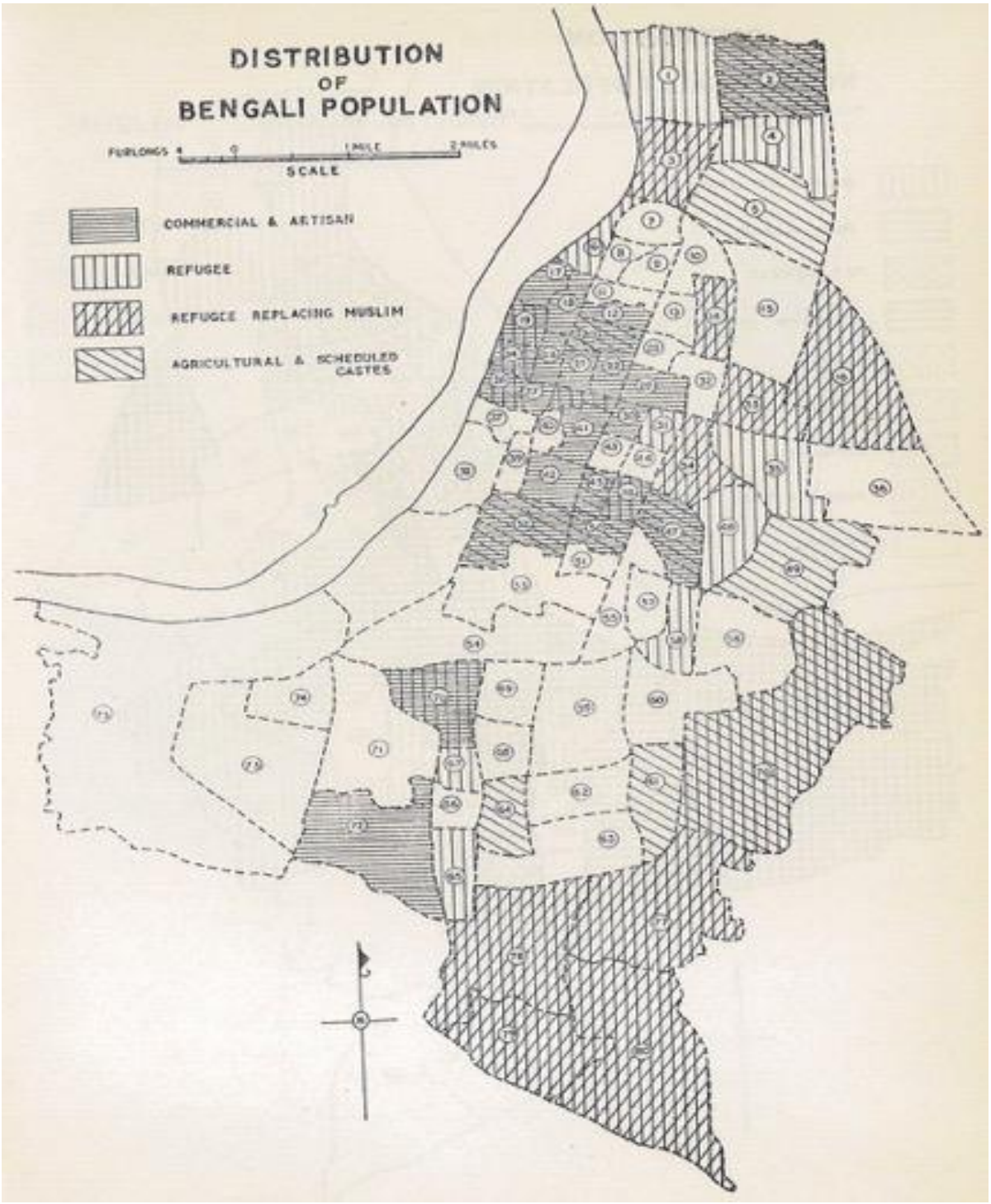
[9] Joya Chatterji, 'Of Ghettos and Graveyards: Muslims in West Bengal 1947-67', in Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy (eds.) *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[10] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition,* pp. 159-209; Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora,* pp. 161-171.

Nirmal Kumar Bose's *Calcutta: 1964 A Social Survey* provides land maps indicating the cartographic distribution of different linguistic and occupational groups, and the shifting patterns of movement within the city during the period of 1911-1961. The findings of this survey are indicative of the ways in which Muslim stayers on in the city were internally displaced by Hindu refugees. Bose reveals how many of Calcutta's mosques, graveyards and *waqf* properties were in a 'moribund condition', and some of them were used by refugees for residential purposes.[11] He also shows how particular areas, largely inhabited by Muslim merchants and migrant Muslim artisans from the eastern districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, were taken over by Hindu refugees. Where did these internally displaced artisans go?

[11] Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Calcutta: 1964. A Social Survey* (Delhi: Lalvani Publishing House,1986), p. 66.

Map 5.1: A map of Calcutta in 1964 showing the areas where Hindu refugees replaced Muslims



Source: Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Calcutta: 1964. A Social Survey*, p. 95

This map is useful in understanding the shifting settlement patterns of different occupational groups after 1947, but one glaring omission stands out. Though eighty wards were surveyed, Kidderpore, Mominpur, Garden Reach-Metiabruz, and other important municipal wards along

the Hooghly were left out. This is because these areas fell under the jurisdiction of the Port Trust authorities. Since the findings of the survey were confined to Corporation records, the spatial and demographic configurations of these specific regions were omitted from Bose's analysis.

These wards, left out of Bose's 1964 Calcutta survey, had a large concentration of tailors and artisans before 1947. These localities are at the heart of this thesis. In Chapter One, I historically foregrounded the reasons why these locations attracted particular kinds of migrants in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially between the two wars, some tapping into older networks (for instance, the legacy of the exiled Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah in Metiabruz). Internally displaced artisans may have sought shelter and refuge in these densely packed 'Muslim belts' along the Hooghly river. This was not just for reasons of security, although this must have been a significant factor given that Calcutta experienced one of the subcontinent's worst communal riots in 1946.[12] It was also I suggest, for its lucrative spatial advantages. The locational resources of these areas – their connections to the borderlands, compounded with access to sewing machines, markets, and patrons – contributed towards accruing 'immobility capital' that enabled Muslim tailors to stay on in Calcutta.

[12] Ibid.

A 'ghetto' of entrepreneurship: the *darzis* of Metiabruz

Metiabruz appears in late-colonial police records as a site of lawlessness, deviance and criminality: a recruitment ground for Muslim *goondas* mobilised from the Muslim labouring classes by political leaders.[13] Intelligence reports in the aftermath of partition continued to run surveillance in this area for fear of the 'enemy within' lurking in these carved Muslim blocs around Metiabruz and Garden Reach.

Suranjan Das has viewed these spaces through the lens of Muslim communalism, violence, and rioting: an 'unsettled zone' of rioters who would plunge into 'communal fury' – in Metiabruz, Garden Reach, Park Circus, Tangra, Tapsia, Tiljala, and the Beniapukur slums.[14] Metiabruz, he writes, 'had the appearance of a ghost town with the smouldering debris telling tales of the orgy of violence that rocked this area…Bengali and Bihari Muslims forcibly evicted Hindus who lived in these areas, their houses torched, their bodies burnt in the late hours of the night'.[15] Such one-sided accounts tend to obscure the sustained, targeted police raids and disarming of Muslim 'gangs' in these localities, backed by the Hindu majoritarian state.[16]

This thesis has sought instead to recover the rich history of artisan work in Metiabruz, a place steeped in 'mythic resources', and 'tacit knowledge economies'[17] – with a long history of tailoring associated with the legacy of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's 'court-in-exile' in Metiabruz.

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[13] On Muslim butchers in Metiabruz being mobilised by political leaders during riots, see Ishan Mukherjee, 'Agitations, Riots and The Transitional State in Calcutta, 1945-1950', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2017).
[14] Suranjan Das, '1992 Calcutta Riot in Historical Continuum: A Relapse into "Communal Fury"?', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 34, Issue 2 (2000), pp. 281-306.
[15] Ibid, p. 292.
[16] On police raids, see, Ishan Mukherjee, 'Agitations, Riots and The Transitional State in Calcutta, 1945-1950', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2017).
[17] David Washbrook, 'India in the Early Modern World Economy: Modes of Production, Reproduction and Exchange', *Journal of Global History* Vol. 2 (2007), pp. 87-112.

Many tailoring families in this locality have been engaged in dressmaking for generations.[18] Urdu-speaking tailors in Metiabruz claim to be descendants of master tailors who were patronised by the court of Oudh's exiled king. Bengali-Muslim tailoring families, on the other hand, continue to work in family-based units with access to patrons and rural markets in the Bengal borderlands.[19]

The tailors of Metiabruz remain invisible in the historiography on garment manufacturing in West Bengal. Scholars have omitted them from their surveys due to alleged 'law and order problems'.[20] This precludes possibilities of engaging with the long histories of skilled work in particular regions and the internal dynamics that underlie non-unionised, informal labour.[21] In 1961, the Census of Calcutta recorded that Muslims constituted 12.78 percent of its total population, down from 31 percent in 1931.[22] It also observed that they were concentrated in dense urban clusters in areas close to Garden Reach and former Tollygunj municipalities.[23] The anthropological survey of Muslims in Calcutta in 1971 illustrated how tailors in Calcutta came from different regions, castes and communities, but a large majority of tailors were Muslims, concentrated in areas around Metiabruz and Santoshpur in the Garden Reach municipal ward.[24]

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[18] M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in Aspects of Their Social Organisation* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1974); Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta: A Cultural and Literary History* (Kolkata: Roli Books, 2003).
[19] Apurba Kumar Podder, 'The making of "illegal" marketplace: State, Class and Space in Khulna, c.1951-2008', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2017).
[20] Ratna Sen, 'West Bengal Garment Industry & the Informalization Process', *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* Vol. 48, No. 4 (2013), p. 567.
[21] In the same article, Sen notes that: 'the reason for the poor union membership in garment manufacturing is, according to Das, [Secretary of Sara Kolkata Garments Manufacturing Karmachari Union] the disinterest of the young workforce (mainly Muslim boys) who do not want to unionise or even earn higher pay with benefits'. Ibid, p. 576.
[22] *Census 1961 West Bengal: District Census Handbook Calcutta Vol. II (*Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing), p. 351.
[23] Ibid, pp. 351-352.
[24] M.K.A. Siddiqui and S.P. Lala, 'The Darzis of Metiaburj: A Study in the Organisation of Tailoring as an Occupation', in M.K.A. Siddiqui ed., *Aspects of Society and Culture in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1982), pp. 119-143.

Whilst these areas were inhabited predominantly by Bengali Muslim *darzis*, adjoining areas in Nadial had dense clusters of migrant Muslim tailors from Uttar Pradesh who settled in these localities many generations before – in the satellite townships that grew around the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah.

A decade after M.K.A. Siddiqui's 1971 remarkable survey of Metiabruz tailors, Emmanuel Romatet's in-depth study of 'slum industries' in Calcutta in the early 1980s was perhaps the first study to describe the nature of the industry and modes of intergenerational skill retention.[25] The findings showed that over 100,000 Muslim tailors in Metiabruz were engaged in family-based activity, and that the incomes of these households were distinctly higher than those in other informal-sector activities. Family unit households living together in urban areas pooled their incomes, thereby making it difficult to compute individual earnings.[26]

The sizes of the operations were small but profitable, involving skill-intensive work that was part of a longer history of garment manufacture and sales at weekly *haats* and religious fairs in undivided Bengal (discussed in Chapter One). After partition, the bulk of the sales of clothes made in Metiabruz took place in weekly *haats* (markets) in the Bengal borderlands. Communities jostled close-together to make the most of their locational resources – access to urban patrons and markets – to sustain their livelihoods.

Romatet's survey indicates that an estimated two hundred thousand people just in the Metiabruz and Garden Reach tailoring units earned their living from the clothing industry. With

[25] Emmanuel Romatet, 'Calcutta's Informal Sector: Theory and Reality', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 18, No. 50 (1983), pp. 2115-2118.
[26] Ibid. Romatet's findings were subsequently reproduced in the IMF report on informal sectors of production. *Report on Urban Labor Markets in Developing Countries* (Quarterly publications of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank 25th Anniversary issue, June 1989), pp. 47-48.

this, and especially if we factor in other small businesses that surrounded dressmaking in the area – shops selling cloth, thread and buttons, transporters of cloth and finished garments – then we get a different picture of Metiabruz than the one painted by the police.

It is a 'ghetto' not of crime but of entrepreneurship where families live cheek-by-jowl, working in home-based and small-scale production units. They negotiate 'processes of informalization',[27] by circumventing rules regulating hired labour, in order to access sources of income in occupational niches like tailoring. In some ways, Metiabruz resembles the dynamic 'ghetto economies'[28] in the favelas of Sao Paulo or Salvador in Brazil, or in the African cities of Dakar and Johannesburg. Stephen Treuke has shown that 'structures of opportunity' are often embedded in particular locations. The proximity of Nordeste de Amaralina, a favela in Salvador da Bahia (Brazil), to upper-class neighbourhoods improved the favela-dwellers' access to labour opportunities.[29] A dense network grounded in kinship and communitarian ties within the favela strengthened intra-group solidarity in mitigating structural constraints.[30] These spatial constellations are described as 'sites with inherited structures of an "industrial past"…with enduring cumulative characteristics and practices' rooted in place that made conditions for 'survival and politics' possible.[31]

[27] Jeemol Unni, 'Formalization of the Informal Economy: Perspectives of Capital and Labour', *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* Vol. 61, No. 87 (2018), pp. 87-103; Samita Sen, *Domestic Days*, pp. 1-35; Imke Julia Regel and Mattias Pilz, 'Informal learning and skill formation within the Indian tailoring sector', *International Journal of Training Research* Vol. 17, No. 2 (2019), pp. 140-156.
[28] I borrow the phrase 'ghetto economy' from William K. Tabb, *The Political Economy of The Black Ghetto* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970), p. 51.
[29] Stephen Treuke, 'Structures of Opportunity and Constraints on Socioeconomic Integration in Three segregated favelas of Salvador, Brazil', *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 55, Issue 2 (2020), pp. 227-241.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, p. 240.

Tailors in Dakar and Johannesburg, as Joanna Grabski and Abdou Maliq Simone have shown, stayed 'plugged into demand circuits' for different patrons.[32] In Dakar, tailors engaged in creative practices and processes of 'making fashion' by providing a range of services and production options: contract-based workshops, bespoke tailoring, alteration counters, and makeshift tailoring units run by a single person.[33] Joanna Grabski writes that clustering and attachment to place provides Dakar tailors with several advantages: flexible labour arrangements often employing household labour, training novices to join the trade, mutual aid, and 'rotating savings and credit' mechanisms.[34]

In similar vein, Abdou Maliq Simone has argued that 'geographies of marginality' can also be spaces of 'economic resourcefulness'.[35] By mobilising economic resources of the ghetto – a common occupational structure in which the group has special advantages: modes of subcontracting, information-sharing, patronage of influential local leaders, and interdependencies with non-white groups – tailors in Johannesburg are able to increase their political bargaining power.[36] Ghettos in these accounts are vibrant and self-sustaining. They have been made and remade through migrants and movement, but also through embedded support systems, material and non-material resources, and the spatial concentration of groups that stay put, enabling others to join them.

[32] Joanna Grabski, 'Making Fashion in the City: A Case Study of Tailors and Designers in Dakar, Senegal', *Fashion Theory* Vol. 13, Issue 2 (2008), pp. 215-242; Abdou Maliq Simone, 'Between ghetto and globe: remaking urban life in Africa', in Roger Keil and Xuefei Ren eds., *The Globalising Cities Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 313-317.
[33] Joanna Grabski, 'Making Fashion in the City', pp. 215-242.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Abdou Maliq Simone, 'Between ghetto and globe', pp. 313-317; also, Sofia Vilarinho and Henri Christians, 'Identity Building Through Mediation by African Tailors', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol. 10, No. 1 (2020), pp. 841-855.
[36] Abdou Maliq Simone, 'Between ghetto and globe', pp. 313-317.

I conducted oral history interviews with second and third generation Muslim tailors in Metiabruz which provide rich insights into their 'relational sense of place'.[37] The significance of place in hereditary specialisation of trades also opens up possibilities of accessing local material cultures and technologies involved in small-scale production. Such accounts enable a grounded understanding of the connections between well-established hereditary tailors, local patrons, and family firms situated in Esplanade (stretching from Kidderpore to Burrabazar) and the adjoining areas in and around New Market.

On 16 June 2019, I interviewed Shafiqul Mollah, a master tailor since the late 1950s, at his own tailoring unit in Santoshpur Akra, Metiabruz. The octogenarian described the different stages of training involved in becoming a master tailor.[38] The first stage is known as *Choochtola* (needle picking). It takes immense concentration and hand-eye coordination to learn, by repetition, the hand movement for sewing.[39] The next stage, known as *Turpai,* involved taking rejected cloth pieces and learning how to stitch with a hand needle in straight lines. *Kaj Selai* and *Botam Taka* (cutting button holes and stitching around the holes to adjust buttons and hooks onto garments) was the stage preceding more complex methods of stitching by hand. The final stages were: *Saji kora* (finishing of the borders of the garments by hand stitching) and *Gotai* or *Magje kora*, a process known as piping (i.e, preparing a rolled border along the edges of a garment by cutting and folding cloth in an angular fashion). Learning how to operate the auxiliary parts of a sewing machine – whether foot-operated treadle machines or power-generated machines for embroidery – is one of the final stages in training.

[37] Doreen Massey, 'A global sense of place', *Marxism Today* Vol. 38 (1991), pp. 24-29.
[38] Shafiqul Mollah (master tailor). Personal Interview. 16 June 2019.
[39] I begin Chapter Three with Shafiqul Mollah's description of his first sewing lesson.

The penultimate lesson in tailoring, however, is learning how to cut cloth. The skill of cutting determines whether a *darzi* is a *karigar* (skilled workman specialising in needlework) or an *ostagir* (master tailor). Some of the apprentices start devoting part of their training time to observing and assisting the master tailor in cutting, and learning cutting techniques alongside machine work, in the hope of one day becoming master tailors themselves. Meanwhile, they have a lot to learn.

Shafiqul Mollah's 'thick description' of acquiring skills to become a *darzi* is a telling account of the ways in which labouring artisan groups produce 'social space' through their everyday practices. These include how they 'make' spaces through movement, knowledge transmission, narration and labour practices, and furthermore how such place-making by and within marginalised communities produce and sustain economic and affective ties. Such ties bind these communities together.[40]

In connecting up the geographies of artisan production in Calcutta, this chapter builds on the historiography of the social and political agency of artisan communities, and their adaptations and strategies of survival. I borrow from James Ferguson's theorisation of agency operating within a social and economic system marked by competition, hierarchical relations, obligations towards relational persons – which *create possibilities* for the dependents to exercise choice and freedom. This freedom is not borne out of independence but from a 'plurality of opportunities for dependence', a form of agency that seeks its own submission through

[40] Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Harper Collins, 1973), pp. 311-321; Nida Kirmani, *Questioning the Muslim Woman: Identity and Insecurity in an Urban Indian Locality* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013); Claire Alexander, 'Making Bengali Brick Lane: claiming and contesting space in East London', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2011), pp. 201-220; Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', pp. 24-29.

hierarchical dependencies.[41] The network of threads that bind tailors to their patrons and the merchant-outfitters' are the 'networks of dependence'. As Ferguson puts it, 'to be dependent on someone is to be able to make at least some limited claims on him or her…[being a] dependent of an actor with greater capacity to provide and protect, whether this is an individual, firm, an NGO, or indeed a political party or the state'.[42]

In using their skills to access different markets and their patrons, Muslim tailors have been dynamic, mobilising dependency on Burrabazaar in general but Dawoodi Bohra outfitters in particular. Some have been attached to the same patron over many decades doing intergenerational work for long-established family firms, whilst others have migrated to other cities in search of new opportunities and patrons. The social organisation of the localities in which tailors live and work, and their patronage connections to employers, clients, and *mohalla sardars* (neighbourhood-level intermediaries between the state and members of a political party) have enabled them to engage in forms of claim-making and political action, and to survive competition. This draws upon overlapping strategies to negotiate with the market and the state.[43]

Metiabruz tailors who did piecemeal work for subcontractors, or worked in production units run by *ostagirs* that sold standardised garments at weekly *haats*, procured cloth and other requisite materials for sewing from Marwari wholesale dealers in Burrabuzaar. They bought this both with cash or on credit. Siddiqui notes that Marwari cloth merchants and Metiabruz

[41] James Ferguson, 'Declarations of dependence: labour, personhood, and welfare in south Africa', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), p. 226.
[42] Ibid, p. 231.
[43] Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, 'Institutionalizing Informality: The hawkers' question in post-colonial Calcutta', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 50, Issue 2 (2015), pp. 675-717; Rina Agarwala, 'Reshaping the social contract: emerging relations between the state and informal labor in India', *Theor Soc* Vol. 37 (2008), pp. 375-408.

tailors worked on the principle of 'mutual understanding and trust… they maintain [a] good relationship with each other as friends in emergency'.[44] This is not to suggest that the tailors did not get trapped in debt and exploitative relations with Marwari financiers. Some Marwari cloth dealers would supply the *darzis* with cloth on loan without interest at the initial stage, but would subsequently charge interest on future orders for readymade garments, often by making an advance payment.[45] The lucrative nature of the tailoring in Metiabruz, however, has acted as a buffer for tailors – who were able, in the main, to repay their loans on time and mitigated risks of indebtedness. Interviewees suggest that these patterns persist well into this century.

Non-contractual obligations and informal bonds of trust tied different tailoring units together: in spite of receiving their training free of cost, Metiabruz apprentice-workers were not bound to work in the same unit run by the *ostagir*. It was not uncommon for an apprentice-tailor to take an interest-free loan, since interest is forbidden in Islam, from the *ostagir*. This would be on the condition that the amount would be recovered from his service. The apprentice concerned, however, might leave the unit to join another master tailor for better renumeration. The latter would then redeem the loan, paying it to his new recruit's former *ostagir*.[46]

In Metiabruz, different social groups have mixed, moved, and resettled. Over time, one could argue that the mixed pieces settled into a new pattern and got interwoven. Interdependencies between Urdu-speaking and Bengali-Muslim tailoring groups emerged out of informal labour arrangements. This refines the dominant historiographical position that Muslim ghettos emerged out of patterns of 'unmixing' among religious groups post-partition Calcutta.[47]

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[44] M.K.A. Siddiqui and S.P. Lala, 'The Darzis of Metiaburj', p. 138.
[45] Pervez Mollah (tailor). Personal Interview. 21 June 2019.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition,* pp. 159-209.

Muslim merchants, family firms, and Ismaili Shia business ethics

Claude Markovits made a strong case in his book, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs* (2008), to 'return the merchant to South Asian history'.[48] This return has only been partially realised. Markovits rueful acknowledgment attests to the lacuna in the historiography: 'the literature regarding the mercantile world of South Asia…has little to say about the specific role of Muslims'.[49]

Mercantile communities differed by region, jati, and sect within the subcontinent. Some trading networks bridged regions and countries. Shikarpuris and Hyderabadis from Sind and Khatris from Punjab engaged in diasporic trade in Central Asia.[50] Gujarati family firms, both Hindus and Muslims, traded in eastern and southern Africa and Southeast Asia.[51] Major groups of Muslim, Hindu and Jain merchants moved out of Gujarat; and Hindus and Jains extended outwards from Marwar and other parts of Rajasthan and further east to upper India and Greater Bengal.[52]

Two such mercantile communities, the Marwaris of Rajasthan and the Dawoodi Bohra (Mustali Ismaili) Shia Muslims from Gujarat, migrated to colonial Calcutta in different periods of the

[48] Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Period* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2008), p. 105.
[49] Ibid. Mattison Mines' study of Tamil speaking Muslim merchants is a notable exception. Mattinson Mines, *Muslim Merchants: The Economic Behaviour of an Indian Muslim Community* (New Delhi: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, 1972).
[50] Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[51] Pedro Machado, *Oceans of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 18-68; Harre Dominique, 'The Indian Firm G.M. Mohamedally & Co in Ethiopia (1886-1937)', *Annales d'Ethiopie* Vol. 30 (2015), pp. 285-311.
[52] Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam eds., *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950* (Anthem Press, 2006).

nineteenth century. While the former have attracted considerable academic attention.[53] The long-standing presence of Dawoodi Bohra family firms has been neglected. One goal here is to address this lacuna. It draws on hitherto unused sources from the private collection of two of the oldest outfitting firms in Calcutta – J. S. Mohammedally, and Akberally's. Oral history accounts, photographs, and newspaper advertisements illustrate how Calcutta tailors have long relied upon the patronage of these merchant-outfitter firms to sustain a niche network of bespoke garment production. I use the phrase 'merchant-outfitters' to underline the business structure of these family firms: they were cloth merchants, but at the same time were outfitting firms that provide exclusive tailoring services to their clients.

Very little has been written on Dawoodi Bohra merchant communities since at least the 1990s. Hanna Papanek's work on Memon and Bohra Muslims emphasized the shared dialects, religious affinities, regional cultures, and commonality of account book scripts as integral to the business practices of these communities.[54] Stewart Gordon's account of family firms in western India cites Bohras, in particular, as self-governing, and sharing both faith, community, and marriage ties.[55]

Dawoodi Bohras remain outside the ambit of Justin Jones' pioneering book on Shia Islam in colonial India, which focused on the Shia minority in Lucknow and the United Provinces,

[53] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris, from Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978); Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law Culture and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); and Claude Markovits, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-1939: The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[54] Hanna Papanek, 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim separatism, Entrepreneurship and Partial Modernization', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* Vol. 21, No. 1 (1972), pp. 1-32; Hanna Papanek, 'Pakistan's New Industrialists and Businessmen: Focus on the Memons', in Milton Singer ed., *Entrepreneurship and the Modernization of Occupational Cultures in South Asia* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press), pp. 61-106.

[55] Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 176-177.

1856-1947. In his view, they had little in common with the religious beliefs, familial, regional, political associations of the Isna 'Ashari Shia Muslims, also known Twelvers or Imamis, for their belief in the Twelve Imams as successors to the Prophet.[56] The book provides a fascinating window to understanding the formation of Muslim identity politics after the 1857 Mutiny, especially with regard to Shia Muslim groups. He shows that the reification of religious categories – Shi'ism as a distinct religious identity – was a deliberate outcome of local and national imaginaries. The discussion of competing models of religious authority in colonial Lucknow, the plurality of practices that made up 'marketplace Shi'ism', the growing sectarian strife between Sunni and Shia Muslims around rituals like Muharram,[57] and the place of Shia Islam in larger Muslim networks were all major contributors.

In Calcutta, however, the differences between Isna 'Ashari Shias and Dawoodi Bohras appears to have been less sharp. Wajid Ali Shah's deposition to Metiabruz after 1856, and the satellite townships of artisans that grew around his royal patronage, may help provide an understanding of how ideas pertaining to North Indian 'Shia Islam' travelled to Bengal – and its afterlives in the context of solidarities, albeit tenuous, forged between Shia and Sunni groups before and after India's partition.

[56] Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[57] In the early twentieth century, Muharram was an occasion for conflict and strife between Shia and Sunni groups across north India, but also between Hindus and Muslims. See, Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India,* pp. 73-113; Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided,* p. 146; Sandria Frietag, *Collective Action and Community. Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Joya Chatterji, Claire Alexander and Annu Jalais eds., *The Bengal Diaspora*, p. 167.

One potential distinction between Dawoodi Bohras and Isna 'Ashari Shias in Bengal is the former's huge role in trade and commerce. Their business practices would yield many insights to scholars of Islamic business ethics.

Historically, Dawoodi Bohras represent one of the two branches of the Ismaili Shia Islam. In denominational terms, they identify with Mustali Tayyibi Ismailis, who claim to be the spiritual descendants of Egypt's Fatimid Caliphate. Unlike the Nizari Ismailis, who believe that the line of *imams* continued through the succession of clerics bearing the title Aga Khan, the Mustalis believe that the last Fatimid caliph was the twenty-second *imam*, Abu I-Qasim Tayyib.

Since the twelfth century, both the spiritual and temporal leadership of the community has rested in a line of clerics bearing the title *Dai-al-Mutlaq*, seated first in Yemen and then, since the sixteenth century, in the Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.[58] The centrality of the *Dai al-mutlaq* as their all-encompassing authority sets Dawoodi Bohra Muslims apart. The Dai is considered *kal masum* (the innocent), the absolute and infallible spiritual leader of the Bohra *da'wat* (community). Scholars, including Asghar Ali Engineer, a Bohra Muslim himself, and Jonah Blank, have argued that the bulk of the group's ancestors converted to Islam from mercantile Hindu jatis within the Vaishya (trading) varna, in a process which began in the eleventh century.[59] Others have described Dawoodi Bohras as a prosperous business community, 'practitioners of Mustali Ismaili Islam with Gujarati descent.'[60]

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[58] Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 11-13.

[59] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Bohras* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980), pp. 1-36; Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras*, pp. 11-13; M.K.A. Siddiqui notes that Sunni Bohras have the same ethnic origin as Dawoodi Bohras and only on account of the difference in sect do they represent a separate endogamous group. See, M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta*, pp. 40-41.

[60] Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 5. On Dawoodi Bohra enterprises and economic prosperity, see, Hanna Papanek, 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim separatism, Entrepreneurship and Partial Modernization',

Several historical accounts of business communities in India suggest that marriage and kinship cemented these groups. I use the word 'community' here with caution. Far from being a monolithic category, the Dawoodi Bohra business community in India are, to use Tirthankar Roy's definition, 'a collection of families connected both socially and through business ties.'[61] And yet these groups were not just a collection of families or a club, as Roy suggests. They were dynamic and hierarchical organisations in which the patterns of hierarchy were derived from kinship relations. Such family conglomerates were more like 'firms' shaped as much by family values as by business values: 'there existed between the family-firm and the trading community of which it was a member an informal relationship symbolized by a very strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of one's community fellows and an overt preference for dealing with them'.[62]

Keeping trust in the presence of asymmetric information was one important function of the business community. The literature on Marwari family firms, for instance, shows that these business communities formed 'networks' in that the participants shared valuable resources such as credit and information.[63] These kin-based commercial merchant networks engaged in 'extensive negotiability'.[64] This 'negotiability' characterised vernacular practices generating

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Economic Development and Cultural Change Vol. 21, No. 1 (1972), pp. 1-32; Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Muslim Communities of Gujarat: An Exploratory Study of Bohras, Khojas and Memons* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1989); Vishnu A. Patankar and Nikhil K. Mehta, 'Indian Entrepreneurial Communities: The People Who Set-Up Their Businesses', *Journal of Business and Management* Vol. 20, Issue 2 (2018), pp. 41-49.

[61] Tirthankar Roy, 'The Guild in Modern South Asia', p. 112.

[62] Andrew F Brimmer, 'The Setting of Entrepreneurship in India', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* Vol. 69 (1955), pp. 553-576.

[63] Markovits refers to the 'so-called Marwaris', as an amorphous and multifarious term that does not refer exclusively to people from Marwar in western Rajasthan. Marwari firms in Calcutta date back to the early nineteenth century. In the period from 1810-1860, Marwari money lenders and traders had reached all parts of India barring the south; from 1860-1914, they moved eastward towards Bengal, Bihar and Assam where they established dominance over regional trade and finance. Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950* (Anthem Press, 2006).

[64] Ibid, p. 147.

the symbolic capital of caste, kinship, and lineage, and the capital flows of market exchange and production – both sites that colonial laws sought to restrict, impinge upon, or declare illegitimate.[65] Marwari businessmen recruited principals and agents from the same kinship group, and devised regulatory mechanisms in order to manage the potential for fraud and opportunism by insiders. Hierarchical authority and trust were intrinsic to the success or failure of these firms.

Claude Markovits' fascinating essay on merchant circulation in South Asia draws attention to the shared identity of Calcutta Marwaris dependent on common caste and regional origins. He also underlines, however, the integration of Marwaris and other communities, such as some Muslim groups, into their 'diasporic' contexts. He notes, for instance, their engagement in the social and religious lives of the adopted cultural milieus. 'Ethnic solidarity', he argues, needs to be understood in a more nuanced way than a single solidarity. He shows how identities of caste and ethnicity could be fluid and redefined, cautioning against any homogenising application of these categories in business history. Multiple solidarities worked in tandem, whether of caste or subcaste affinities, locality of origin, or language. These ties were dynamic nodes of information, rather than being 'structures' of commercial partnerships.

Business transactions along caste and other group-based affiliations, to be sure, were the preferred mode of economic exchange. This, Markovits argues, arose not out of a blind predilection for working with members of their community, but for the opposite reason: a

[64] Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital,* p. 21.
[65] Ibid, p. 193. Also, Claude Markovits, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-1939,* p. 14.

greater amount of usable information was available with shared community networks rather than about those outside them.[66]

I seek to build upon his work, and other scholarship on Indian merchants, by focusing on two key elements which have contributed to the long-term success of Dawoodi Bohra merchant groups. First, the role of religion and interdependencies between the firms. Second, the firms' relationship with their employed non-kin workers, skilled master tailors and cutters, who together sustain, what Wen Ying Claire Shih and Konstantinos Agrafiotis have called, the 'slow production network'.[67]

This 'slow production network', as some scholars have shown in the context of the long-standing presence of Savile Row tailors in London, sustains itself through interdependencies and mutual trust between tailors, outfitters, and cloth merchants. These networks enable them to hold on to niche markets, leverage their specialised knowledge in suit-making, and maintain the core competences needed to remain competitive in garment production. The longevity of Calcutta tailors relies upon skill-intensive techniques of production. These are slow by nature for the reason that creating customised, bespoke, garments involves alternating between handiwork (cutting/fitting cloth) and sewing machine work.

The third-generation and fifth-generation merchant-outfitters whom I interviewed in course of my fieldwork in 2019 adopted a relational approach to describing their labour organisation within this niche sector of garment production. Outfitters relied on the skills of master tailors

[66] Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era*, pp. 187-219.
[67] Wen Ying Claire Shih and Konstantinos Agrafiotis, 'Competitiveness in a Slow Production Network: The Case of London's Savile Row Tailors', *Journal of Clothing and Textiles* Vol. 35, No. 3 (2017), pp. 143-155.

to produce bespoke garments, while the tailors relied on the outfitters' patronage to survive competition by being part of this self-reliant network.

Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters in Calcutta

The origins of J.S. Mohamedally (Estb. 1909)

In 1909, Jiwaji Sheikh Mohamedally, founder of J.S. Mohamedally, set up a cloth trading and outfitting shop in Armenian Street in Burrabazaar.[68] He was one among 500-odd Dawoodi Bohra traders who migrated to Calcutta in the early decades of the twentieth century. In a series of interviews in 2019, I traced the history of three of the oldest Dawoodi Bohra family firms and outfitters in Esplanade: Mohamedali Goolamali & Co (1896), J. S. Mohamedally (1909), and Akberally's Clothiers (1964).[69] Two case studies, J.S. Mohamedally and Akberally's, will be discussed in this section.

Four common threads bind these Gujarati (Mustali Ismaili) Shia family firms together: they are all cloth merchants and outfitters providing tailoring services to their clients; the names of the firms are associated with the names of the founders; religion plays an important role in their business transactions; and they all have migration stories.

These family firms migrated from the same village, Sidhpur, in the Patan district of Gujarat. Their migration trajectory is quite similar to many Gujarati Muslim traders who, by the end of the nineteenth century, left the region of Sidhpur in search of business opportunities. They went

[68] 'Maintaining Decades of Customer Loyalty', *Hindustan Times*, 21 December 2002 [private collection of J.S. Mohamedally]; 'The House for Fabrics of Fashion J.S. Mohamedally', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 24 Dec 1951, p. 7.

[69] I was unable to access sources on Mohamedali Goolamali & Co. (1896) except this newspaper advertisement: 'Your Winter Shopping Centre: Mohamedali Goolamali & Co. Grant Street. Cal-12', Vol. XCVII, No. 335, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 5 December 1902, p. IV.

not only to Calcutta, but also to Bombay, Madras, and as far as Aden, Zanzibar, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, as well as Ethiopia, Burma, Madagascar and Siam.[70] Only a few historians have documented the Dawoodi Bohra diaspora,[71] but its scale and range is no less remarkable than that of Markovits' Shikharpuris.

But first a brief note on this merchant group: the term 'Bohra' is derived from the Gujarati word *vyahwar* or *vohrwu* which means 'to transact or trade', signalling their important role in commerce in South Asia.[72] They created a bridge of commerce that stretched from Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Dohad, Ujjain, Jamnagar, Nagpur and Pune, all the way to Calcutta in the East – well before the Calcutta-Bombay railway network was completed in 1904.[73] They also spun another rope linking them to Karachi in present day Pakistan.[74]

The literature on Calcutta's Dawoodi Bohra merchants is scarce. Only M.K.A. Siddiqui's anthropological survey reports, and Kenneth McPherson's layered description of Muslim groups in Calcutta in the early decades of the twentieth century mention them. Although, they do feature in every census (unlike tailors). One of the earliest Shia trading groups to settle in

[70] Dominique Harre, 'The Indian Firm G.M. Mohamedally & Co in Ethiopia (1886-1937)', *Annals d' Éthiopia* Vol. 30 (2015), pp. 285-311; Zoyab Kadi and Tahaer Zoyab, *The Vohrawaads of Sidhpur*, (Pune: Heritage India Communications, 2010), p. 15.
[71] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Muslim Communities of Gujarat: An Exploratory Study of Bohras, Khojas and Memons* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1989); Satish Chandra Misra, *The Muslim Communities of Gujarat* (Baroda: Asia Publishing House, 1964); Shibani Roy, *The Dawoodi Bohras: An Anthropological Perspective* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1984); Zoyab Kadi and Tahaer Zoyab, *The Vohrawaads of Sidhpur* (Pune: Heritage India Communications, 2010); Zarina Patel, *Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee: Makers of Kenya's History* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2002); Robert Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj India: Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 38-63; Arfakhashad Munaim, 'Transplanted Continuity: Examining the Ethno-Spatial Prospect of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Los Angeles', unpublished PhD thesis, University of California (2014).
[72] Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[73] Joya Chatterji, 'Prehistories of migration', in *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 166-168.
[74] Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe*, 2001.

Calcutta were Kutchi Memons from Kathiawar region in western India in 1770.[75] The other dominant economic 'sectarian-cum-ethnic group' from Gujarat was the Dawoodi Bohras. These merchant groups were distinct in cultural ways and language use, from their Bengali-speaking co-religionists.[76] Siddiqui, in his 1970 survey of Muslim groups in Calcutta, identified two heterodox sects: Imami Ismaili Shias (Khojas) and Dawoodi Bohras (Mustali Ismaili), who identified as 'Shia' in Calcutta, despite their distinctiveness vis-a-vis other Shia Muslim groups.[77] Their geographical pattern of settlement in the city, as well as their language, trade, and endogamy, informed their social exclusivity. They maintained their own voluntary group associations and controlled considerable funds for the uplift of impoverished group members.[78]

Unlike other Gujarati groups in the city they registered steady growth in their population, a trend that continued after the formation of Pakistan. Fewer Shia groups migrated to Pakistan than Sunnis.[79] Following a directive from their chief, the *Dai* (the spokesperson of the community), they showed great interest in investing both in business and small-scale industries.[80] From 25 individuals in 1889, their number grew to about 500 in 1935. By 1953, Dawoodis had registered a five-fold increase in numbers reaching 2500, and by 1969, they estimated to be over 3000. These figures may have been small in a large nation, but they wielded disproportionate influence in both the economy and in politics.[81] This merchant group also represented a crucial node in the global network of Shia merchants in the Indian Ocean region.

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[75] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*, p. 13.
[76] Ibid.
[77] M.K.A. Siddiqui, 'Castes Among Muslims of Calcutta', pp. 26-50.
[78] M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Institutions and Associations of the Muslims in Calcutta: A Preliminary Survey* (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), pp. 117-123.
[79] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 160.
[80] M.K.A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta*, p. 40.
[81] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Bohras* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980), pp. 1-36.

J.S. Mohamedally was one among the Dawoodi Bohra family firms that emigrated from arid, drought-prone parts of Gujarat to more prosperous port cities and riverine regions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Its main shop in Tower House, Esplanade, has remained in the very same location since 1938 (see Image 5.1). What does this long-term presence of a Muslim merchant group at the heart of the commercial district in Calcutta tell us about merchant networks, interdependencies, and staying on?

J.S. Mohamedally is a family firm that incorporates some characteristics of indigenous business communities that are built on trust, kinship ties, endogamous marriage alliances and shared regional affinities. But it is also in some ways a 'religious firm'. This is not to suggest that it operates within what Nile Green describes as an 'economy of enchantment' and 'cosmopolitan cults'.[82] It does not.

Bohra family firms in present day Calcutta follow the teachings of the Syedna, the fifty-third religious head of the sect, His Holiness Dai Syedna Muffadal Saifuddin. As the all-encompassing authority and spiritual leader of Dawoodi Bohras, the Dai radiates personal charisma which permeates every aspect of Dawoodi Bohra social, religious and economic practice.[83] Seeking the blessing of the Dai (who lives in India), through the ritual of *alamat,* is considered vital to the Bohra *muminin* (members) – be it for the start of a business venture, marriage alliance, or naming of a new-born child.[84] Digital technology now plays a critical role

[82] Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[83] Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe,* pp. 474-475; Mustafa Abdulhussein, *Al-Dai Al-Fatima Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 11.
[84] Mustafa Abdulhussein, 'Bohras', in John Esposito ed., *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 224-226.

in facilitating communication between dispersed members of this tightly-knit, global 'solidarity network', connected by *anjumans* (trusts) and *azardaris* (learning centres).[85]

When asked why the family moved to Calcutta from Gujarat in 1909, Muffadal Mohamedally, the fifth-generation owner of the J.S. Mohamedally family firm, replied:

> 'At the time Calcutta was raw for business. Our Holiness gave us permission to start business here. He gave us the line also to start this business, particular in cloth….First we had a shop in Burrabazaar. It was a very small shop. I have heard from my grandfather that J. S. Mohamedally used to carry clothes in a bag; he used to go door to door to sell clothes. Then slowly he expanded the business and we moved to Chowringhee [Tower House] in 1938. I have also heard that British officers used to come to our shop in horse drawn carriages to get their suits made.'[86]

[85] The Burhani Qardan Hasana Trust, for instance, is a corpus of registered charitable lending trusts spread all over the country and coordinated by the Trust's headquarters at Badri Mahal, Mumbai. The Trust processes documentation for financial transactions, be it a loan or promissory note, without charging any interest. Anjuman-e-Burhani, *In Reverential Memory of His Holiness Dr. Syedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb* (Kolkata: Nilhat Press, 1995).

[86] Muffadal Mohamedally (fifth generation owner of J.S. Mohamedally). Personal Interview. 10 June 2019. The undated black and white photograph of J.S. Mohamadelly shop at Tower House, Esplanade is from the J.S. Mohamedally's private collection. I took the present day photograph of the shop at the same location on 10 June 2019.

Image 5.1: An image of J.S. Mohamedally's shop in Tower House (since 1938), Chowringhee, Kolkata.



Source: (Left) The undated black and white photograph of the J. S. Mohamadelly shop in Tower House, Chowringhee, is from the J. S. Mohamedally's private collection. (Right) A photograph of the shop taken by the author at the same location on 10 June 2019.

Three significant clues emerge from this excerpt. First, visions and prophesies, as in the case of the Syedna's directive to the Mohamedally family to set up a business in Calcutta, are embedded within (Mustali Ismaili) Shia Islam. The Syedna is the supreme authority on all matters of the Dawoodi Bohra *da'wat (*community) – including business decisions. Prophesies and visions are also a part of a shared Islamic universe of signs and symbols that have continued to be an important aspect of wider Muslim religiosity.[87] Second, the location where J.S. Mohamedally first established his business in 1909, was in Burrabazaar, the heartland of mercantile business groups. Marwaris and expatriate British businesses occupied in this space in in the main,[88] though the latter were subsequently ousted by 'vernacular capitalists' in the interwar years.[89] Third, the firm had a clientele requiring tailor-made suits.

By the interwar period, as discussed in Chapter One, Burrabazaar was a site of competing mercantile ethos. Communal tensions between Marwaris and Muslim merchants in Burrabazaar were reported in the 1920s.[90] Marwari solidarity was occasionally used to boycott Urdu-speaking, upcountry Muslim weavers and tailors. As Rajat Ray has shown, 'just as [Marwaris] had their lines of communication with the Congress High Command, the Ispahanis [non-Bengali, North Indian Muslim merchants] acquired their own direct access to the central leadership of the Muslim League.'[91] Perhaps it was because of the fierce competition from

[87] Nile Green, 'The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. 13, No. 3 (2003), pp. 287-313.
[88] P. Thankappan Nair, 'The Growth and Development of Old Calcutta', in Sukanta Chaudhuri ed., *Calcutta: the Living City* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 17; Dipesh Chakraborty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. 232; Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1978), p. 260.
[89] B.R. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-1947*, pp. 30-47; Douglas Haynes, 'Vernacular Capitalism, Advertising and the Bazaar in Early Twentieth-Century in Western India', in Ajay Gandhi, Barbara Hariss-White, Douglas Haynes and Sebastian Schwecke eds., *Rethinking Markets in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[90] Rajat Kanta Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1979), p. 9.
[91] Ibid, p. 105.

Marwari traders that J.S. Mohamedally moved his business from Burrabazaar to Tower House in Esplanade in 1938.

J.S. Mohamedally differed from its Marwari merchant competitors in one fundamental way: their business ethics. In Marwari merchant networks, mutual trust and business reputation went hand in hand with *sakh*. The best translation of the term is credit, both in the sense of solvency and probity. A loaded word, it denoted credibility, testimony, trust, name, honour and reputation that undergirded economic transactions among the members of this merchant group.[92]

It also has a moral dimension. *Sakh* denotes 'creditworthiness' or 'business integrity' acquired through personal conduct. There could be several indices for this, such as keeping regular account books, being frugal, keeping one's financial and market obligations, and extending patronage to communitarian and religious activities.[93] As Markovits writes, 'information circulated widely through their channel: one did not have to rely purely on bazaar gossip to know whether one could trust so-and-so, but one could easily check a record of his transactions'.[94]

The business ethics of 'vernacular capitalists' conjoined idioms of credibility and piety, which were by no means restricted to the Marwari merchants alone.

[92] Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris From Traders to Industrialists*, pp. 76-78.
[93] Medha Kudaisya, *The Life and Times of G.D. Tata* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 9.
[94] Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam eds., *Society and Circulation*, p. 154.

The business practices of Dawoodi Bohra merchant families were based on the teachings of *Da'i al-Zaman* (Da'i of the Age). Each member conformed to (or at least strove to follow) the Al-Dawah Al-Hadith, 'the rightly guided mission' which is built on the foundation of *ilm* (knowledge), and is regarded as the act of acquiring for the cause of merit and forgiveness.[95] Some historians have noted that the 43rd al-Dai al-Mutlaq, Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin, bridged the gap between the Arabic language and local dialects in India to compose the *Lisan al Dawat,* 'the language of the mission', an intermingling of vocabularies of Arabic scripture, Urdu grammar, Gujarati dialect and Persian diction.[96]

J.S. Mohamedally has run as a family business since 1909, in broad compliance with the guidance received from His Holiness:

> We run our business according to three principles given to us by His Holiness: interest-free transactions, no credit and only cash business, customer satisfaction and quality control…[At] J. S. Mohamedally, we are very particular about what the customer wants, quality of the fabrics we sell, the pricing, and our behaviour.[97]

This excerpt alludes to the 'spiritual' foundation of Bohra commercial networks.

Muffadal Mohamedally went on to say that, if a person runs into difficulties with his repayment, there is a system of guarantors which helps to minimize the scope for default.

Another unique arrangement allows individuals to place their 'idle money' as interest-free short-term deposits or *amanat.* This system of interest-free lending is predicated on a spiritual commitment and trust that the borrower will repay the loan. In such a transaction, the lender

[95] Mustafa Abdulhussein, *Al-Dai Al-Fatima Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin,* p. 11.
[96] Ibid, p. 27.
[97] Muffadal Mohamedally. Personal Interview. 10 June 2019.

also accrues 'spiritual capital' for he provides the means for the borrower to escape indebtedness.[98]

Many scholars have identified the ways in which Islam is reconfigured as an ethical, 'entrepreneurial religion'. Caroline Osella and Fillipo Osella have argued that Muslim individuals' worth and wealth are calibrated according to business knowledge, and Muslim business communities seek to remain true to the moral teachings of their faith in advanced market economies.[99] Sunni Muslim practitioners find business practices in the *sharia* that manifest Islamic values of social and economic justice. These principles are thought to guide working relationships, and to define the meaning and purpose of work and financial prosperity.

For scholars such as Patricia Sloane, 'corporate Islam', connects the *sharia* to capitalism wherein the 'morality of the market' is governed by *riba*-free (interest-free or 'non-usurious') investments and financial transactions.[100] It is a site of moral production where those who identify themselves as Muslims, in their experience and subjectivity, are meant to aspire for, observe and preserve the *sharia's* moral and ethical injunctions through their material exchange and economic engagement.[101]

For family firms such as J. S. Mohamadelly, which are guided by religious principles, Shia Islam, in a broad sense, is a part of everyday mediation between business practices and daily observed pieties. An example of this can be seen in an advertisement in which J.S.

[98] Patricia Sloane, *Corporate Islam: Sharia and the Modern Workplace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[99] Fillipo Osella and Caroline Osella, 'Muslim Entrepreneurs in Public Life between India and the Gulf: Making Good and Doing Good', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2009), pp. S202-S221.
[100] Patricia Sloane, *Corporate Islam: Sharia and the Modern Workplace*, 2017, p. 10.
[101] Daromir Rudnyckyj and Fillipo Osella eds., *Religion and the Morality of the Market: Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 18.

Mohamedally informs its patrons that the shop's opening hours and services would change during the month of Ramadan:[102]

> 'Attention: J.S. Mohamedally. Patrons are requested to note that during the month of Ramzan from 23 December 1965 to 21 January 1966 our working hours will change…[the] Ramazan hours will be from 9:30am to 12pm, and then 1:30pm to 4:30pm (closing approximately two hours prior to the breaking of fast).'

Here we see how business and labour practices align with Islamic ethics, and are made commensurable with the demands of market competition.

Dawoodi Bohra family firms in Calcutta are a classic example of merchant groups who entered the burgeoning category of the 'middle-class' through trade. Dawoodi Bohras expanded their businesses in Calcutta after the Government of India reforms in 1920, which included provisions for provincial fiscal autonomy.[103] Indian trading communities, as has been noted, flourished because of the economic opportunities this opened for Indian businessmen and politicians. Cloth trading and dressmaking for the colonial middle classes was one such niche that attracted Dawoodi Bohra business families.

Since the mid twentieth century, Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters have been the linchpin of Calcutta's outfitting industry.[104] But their success has rested on their close connection with 'in-house' tailors; it is the latter's skill that has contributed to the longevity of these family firms.[105] Furthermore, through these networks, and given the versatility and dynamism of the outfitting firms, clothiers and master cutters, upward mobility became a real possibility for some tailors.

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[102] *Amrita Bazaar Patrika,* 8 November 1965.
[103] Claude Markovits, 'What about the Merchants? A Mercantile Perspective on the Middle Class of Colonial India', in Sanjay Joshi ed., *The Middle Class in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 123.
[104] 'J.S. Mohamedally: Calcutta's leading cloth merchants', *The Statesman,* 100 years special edition, 1875-1975. Centre of South Asian Studies archive, Cambridge.
[105] Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala (second generation owner of Abkerally's Clothiers). Personal Interview. 25 June 2019.

J.S. Mohamedally, a firm embedded in Dawoodi Bohra trade and kinship networks, have an insulated workforce of intergenerational tailors and cutters who are both Bengali-Muslim and Urdu-speaking, Shia Muslims. Muffadal Mohamedally was reluctant to give me permission to speak with the firm's master tailors. I suggest that this perhaps had to do with not giving away their 'trade secret' – a bit like the *memsahibs* in late colonial Calcutta who kept the 'plebeian secret' (their tailors) hidden from view, to avoid lower-class mimicry.

The firm's business ties with Gujarati mill owners enabled them, despite partition, to maintain a strong foothold in the cloth market in Calcutta by providing a wide range of fabrics for local consumption.[106] The managerial staff and sales people at J. S. Mohamedally were all Dawoodi Bohra migrant workers from Sidhpur, Gujarat. These hierarchical dependencies constituted a web of kinship and quasi-kinship connections that bound some Calcutta tailors to the Dawoodi Bohra outfitting family firms. Other tailors had, in all likelihood, similar relationships with cloth merchants and outfitting businesses, as in the case of Metiabruz tailors who carried out subcontracted work for Marwari clothiers in Burrabazaar and Bohra outfitters in Esplanade.

Interdependencies and collaboration between members of this network relied on trust, territorial proximity, quality control and the reputation of manufacturers. Cooperating family firms hoped to monopolise the market and capture more value with minimum formal control, instead of competing with individual proprietors in a smaller market. Cooperation and community solidarity often mediated individualistic motives of gain and profit.[107] 'Reputable

[106] 'Festive looks and festive thoughts…Always remember J.S. Mohamedally, an unforgettable name in the field of fabrics…dealer for Jamnagar Fabrics', 8 Jan 1958, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*; 'The Changed Husband: Jamnagar fabrics at J.S. Mohamedally', 17 October 1959, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*; 'J.S. Mohamadelly, dealer of Gwalior suitings', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika,* 16 November 1965.
[107] Rohit Varman and Janeen Arnold Costa, 'Competitive and Cooperative Behaviour in Embedded Markets: Developing an Institutional Perspective on Bazaars', *Journal of Retailing* Vol. 85, No. 4 (2009), pp. 453-467.

cutters' and master tailors who recognised each other's skills and capabilities remained socially cohesive within this 'slow production network' that sustained their livelihoods. Locational advantages correspond to the clustering of bespoke tailoring services – not relocating production to minimise costs, or to seek new markets. Instead, they choose to remain within slow localised economies that valued their outstanding quality and skill in making niche garments. These factors are crucial in creating conditions that enable tailors to survive by leveraging their skill-based, specialized knowledge towards the production of bespoke clothing.

The persistence of Dawoodi Bohra family firms specialising in cloth trading and customised outfitting bears testimony to the tenacious interrelationships between big and small producers – their entrepreneurship, their skills, their use of small technology, and their product-enhancing business strategies.

Here again we see how mobility and immobility came to be intertwined. Dawoodi Bohras were migrants who came to Calcutta in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, much like the upcountry Muslim tailors from Bihar and UP who migrated to the city to join the burgeoning colonial economy. Both groups took advantage of the 'colonial infrastructure' and Calcutta's place in wartime production; they lived and worked in urban hotspots, rich in locational resources. These spaces grew denser over time, attracting more migrants to clusters where tailoring was the dominant trade. Both groups stayed on in India after partition, concentrated in compact 'Muslim areas' within the city.[108]

[108] Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Calcutta: 1964 Survey*, p. 66; Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, p. 390.

The ‘immobility capital’ of the tailor who stayed on drew upon both the ‘mobility capital’ and ‘immobility capital’ of the Bohra merchants. For the Metiabruz tailors, for instance, their patronage ties with Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters, were key assets that contributed to their ‘immobility capital’.

Despite possessing the ‘mobility capital’ (financial resources and strong mercantile networks across the Indian Ocean region), many Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters chose to stay on in Calcutta because of the locational resources the city had to offer (access to labour, cloth markets, and clients). In this way, the Dawoodi Bohras were like some other ‘stayers on’ – Muslim politicians and rank-and-file government officials [109] – who had large amounts of both ‘immobility’ and ‘mobility capital’. They adopted different strategies of survival with varying consequences in the post-colonial India.

[109] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, pp. 290-291.

Akberally's: a Dawoodi Bohra family firm established in Calcutta after partition (Estb. 1964)

In 1964, Shaikh Ibrahim Akberally Calcuttawala and Shaikh Yusuf Akberally Calcuttawala established a small shop on Esplanade East Row, specialising in textiles and customized tailoring. A printed trade card by Akberally's for the Burhani Expo, the International Dawoodi Bohra Industrial and Trade Exhibition held in Mumbai in 2009, describes the firm as:

> '…house of best quality fabrics and master craftsmanship of renowned tailors… [The] shop … although modest but nonetheless gained popularity for its bespoke suiting and shirting and [the] talk of the town [for] tailoring on a wide scale'.[110]

The second-generation owners of Akberally's, Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala and Akber Yusuf Calcuttawala, have been engaged in the family business since the late 1980s, taking forward the legacy of their father.

On 25 June 2019, I interviewed Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala at his shop in Esplanade. Akberally's understand their long-term success as arising from possessing the 'client's goodwill'.[111] The average male customer, as Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala pointed out, does not want to have to visit a number of different shops for his desires to be satisfied. Therefore, by helping the customer with fabric selection from a wide range of suppliers, and superior tailoring facilities all under one roof, they rendered their customers a one-stop-shop service.[112] For Akberally's firm, the master tailor's skilled handiwork, his unique and distinctive cutting style, is a formidable asset for securing and maintaining a loyal clientele. Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala,

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[110] 'Renowned Suitmakers of Calcutta: Akberally's Clothiers', printed trade card for the Burhani Expo, International Dawoodi Bohra Industrial and Trade Exhibition held in Mumbai in 2009 [Private collection of Akberally's].
[111] Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala (second-generation owner of Akberally's). Personal Interview. 25 June 2019.
[112] Ibid.

too, refrained from giving me access to his tailors, although he emphasised how crucial the master tailors' skills were in producing bespoke clothing that *maintained* the reputation of his firm.[113]

Competition among tailoring houses and independent master tailors in Esplanade is, and has been, moderated through inter-firm linkages. Tailoring businesses acknowledge that mutual dependence is key to maintaining a stranglehold over the market, ensuring customer satisfaction, and thereby enhancing the reputation of the network.[114] The geographical concentration of Dawoodi Bohra family firms, connected through a 'shared community culture' and kinship-based partnerships, facilitates local infrastructure: a web of interlocked family connections keep small producers, i.e., tailors, buoyant. Spatial proximity to their principal markets, the skilled craftsmen and women, and supplementary industries located in Burrabazaar (cloth retailers, suppliers of thread, needles, buttons, zips, and packing materials) supported the firm's operations.

Extrapolating from my interviews with Muffadal Mohamedally, the fifth-generation owner of J.S. Mohamedally, and Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala, the second generation owner of Akberally's, it seems that the tailors employed by these firms occupied a somewhat stable position in the labour market, thanks to their skills, and the outfitting firms' reliance on them. Merchant traders and outfitting firms played an important role in manufacturing clusters by providing information on demand for particular products. Physical proximity to such clusters allowed outfitting firms to take advantage of the resources in the area: a pool of skilled labour, from master cutters to alteration tailors. In their turn, for clusters of tailors at places like

[113] Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala. Personal Interview. 28 June 2019.
[114] Ibid.

Metiabruz, their close ties of patronage with these businesses represented ‘relations of dependency’ that helped them negotiate survival in a sometimes fraught even hostile political setting.

Image 5.2: Aziz Ibrahim Calcuttawala, second generation owner of Abkerally’s Clothiers (estb. 1964), Kolkata



Source: Photograph taken by the author on 28 June 2019

Economic and geographical factors were not the only determinants that ensured the long-term stability of Dawoodi Bohra family businesses. Family firms run on value systems generated conditions for specific ownership patterns. These principles underlined informal socialization strategies that are bound up with the culture and institutions of the business community. Accumulated business know-how, and inheriting a good reputation and an array of contacts, further reinforce the position of hereditary owners. Establishments such as these were likely to weather upswings and survive episodes of social crisis and financial stringency. By following the principles etched out by the Syedna, Dawoodi Bohra firms like Akberally's portray their *akhlaaq* (character) and social position through their business practices. *Jame Karwoo,* 'to keep together', is an important aspect of their *tarbiyat* (upbringing).[115]

Central to the structure and maintenance of merchant networks, as Markovits has argued, was trust.[116] Being able to trust a fellow merchant with goods or capital was especially crucial in contexts where enforcement through legal institutions was either absent or ineffective. Honesty and trust were bound up with the 'name' and reputation of the firm and its creditworthiness. A good reputation, therefore, was an indispensable asset for everyone involved in the business operations of the firm.

Francesca Trivellato and Karen Leonard have raised questions about the role of trust, hitherto assumed to be the most critical attribute and asset of financial networks of Hindu banking and mercantile communities, especially in the context of long-term diasporic trade.[117] Trivellato

[115] Ibid.
[116] Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[117] Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Karen Isaksen Leonard, 'Family Firms in Hyderabad: Gujarati, Goswami, and Marwari Patterns of Adoption, Marriage and Inheritance', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 53, Issue 4 (2011), pp. 827-854.

has shown that membership in the Sephardic trade diaspora facilitated but did not guarantee co-operation, merchant solidarity or trust. Sephardic merchants relied on non-Jewish as well as Jewish agents, evolving legal norms and networks of information which guided their businesses.[118]

In the context of Indian family firms, meanwhile, Karen Leonard provides a nuanced understanding of three Hindu and Jain mercantile communities, Gujaratis, Goswamis, and Marwaris, in the princely state of Hyderabad in British India. By looking at different patterns of adoption, endogamous marriages and inheritance laws among Hindu and Muslim merchant communities, Leonard shows how an 'overstatement of trust' in studies of Indian merchants tends to obscure other factors that determine longevity of family firms.[119] She argues, for instance, that Hindu and Jains' encouragement of adoption, in contrast to Islamic constraints on adoption, gave the former an 'obvious advantage' when it came to the continuity of their firms and financial networks.[120]

In reassessing the historiographical emphasis on trust in merchant networks, Trivellato is critical of the idea that trust between firms existed as a 'self-evident attribute of a merchant community'.[121] Instead, she proposes the phrase 'communitarian cosmopolitanism' to characterize the experience of Sephardic merchants who synthesized business practices and mingled with non-Jews in an unequal and segmented society.[122] I build on Trivellato's conception of 'communitarian cosmopolitanism' to show how relations of co-dependence, reciprocity and reliance among Dawoodi Bohra merchant-outfitters and non-kin groups such

[118] Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers,* pp. 1-8.
[119] Karen Isaksen Leonard, 'Family Firms in Hyderabad', pp. 827-854.
[120] Ibid, p. 830.
[121] Francesca Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*, p. 12.
[122] Ibid, pp. 9-20.

as skilled Urdu-speaking Muslim master cutters (*ostagirs*) and tailors conferred an advantage on both groups.

While some tailors relied on the patronage of outfitting firms in order to survive, others fell back on their entrepreneurship skills, inherited knowledge systems, small machines, and product-enhancing business strategies to remain competitive within occupational niches.

Independent tailor-entrepreneurs in central Calcutta and New Market

Born in Sialkot in modern-day Pakistan, Barkat Ali moved to Calcutta with his brothers in the early 1900s.[123] He set up his first tailoring shop, 'Barkat Ali & Bros' in 1910 in Chowringhee-Esplanade, at the heart of the commercial district of erstwhile White Town.[124] The shop was originally a stable for army horses. Today it stands at the northern end of the Oberoi Grand Hotel arcade.[125]

As an apprentice to a British regimental tailor stationed in Calcutta, Barkat Ali learnt cutting 'on the job'. He made a name for himself by tailoring uniforms for British regiments. By 1925, he had established three outfitting businesses, two in Calcutta and one in Karachi. Each of these shops specialised in suit-making, and was managed by his brothers.[126]

[123] 'God made Man. Barkat Ali Makes them Gentleman. Barkat Ali & Bros: Tailors and Outfitters since 1910', sales pamphlet [Barkat Ali & Bros private collection].
[124] Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2006).
[125] Sheraz Ali (third-generation owner of Barkat Ali & Bros). Personal Interview. 13 June 2019.
[126] Ibid. I am grateful to Dr Tahir Kamran for corroborating this information. Dr Kamran, one of Barkat Ali's (Karachi) long-standing patrons, shared stories about the Barkat Ali master tailor who made his wedding *sherwani*.

Image 5.3: Shop-hoarding of Barkat Ali & Bros.



Source: Photograph taken by author on 13 June 2019

The third-generation owners of the business, Sheraz Ali and Sarfraz Ali, grandsons of Barkat Ali, took great pride in the history of their grandfather's reputation as a master tailor. Sheraz Ali learnt tailoring from his uncle Haider Ali, who had trained as a journeyman tailor in London. Haider Ali returned to India in the mid 1940s at an opportune time, when European-owned tailoring establishments, such as Ranken & Co. and Phelps, were shutting down.[127]

[127] Among the leading British retail firms for outfitting in Calcutta were Ranken & Co. specialized in making uniforms for the Indian army and robemakers for official decorative orders; and Phelps & Co.

Haider Ali's cuts were neat; he would give personal attention to his clients when taking their measurements, and on most occasions, cut the patterns himself.

After 1947, Barkat Ali's brother, Sher Anwar Ali, who had been managing the outfitting shop in Karachi remained in West Pakistan, while Barkat Ali and his family stayed on in Calcutta. 'It was decided that each shop would work independently [after partition]. We maintain family relationships, but do not have business ties with the other shop'.[128] Despite possessing 'mobility capital' (pre-existing familial connections in West Pakistan and their identification as Sunni Muslims), Barkat Ali family *chose* to remain in Calcutta. Barkat Ali's 'immobility capital' enabled his sons, Sheraz and Sarfraz Ali, to reap the benefits of the assets their father accrued over the years for staying on in India.

The measuring tape around Sheraz Ali's neck (see Image 5.4) attests to the personal attention he reserves for each client. Their patrons have included Calcutta's industrialists, the erstwhile reigning actor of Bengali cinema, Uttam Kumar, and former chief minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu. The Calcutta-based industrialist, S.K. Birla, director emeritus of the Birla Group of Companies, has been a client of the Barkat brothers for over six decades:

> 'He is one customer who is fussy to the tune of one-eighth of an inch. When I design his three button suits, he tells me exactly how much each button needs to be exposed'.[129]

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also designed uniformed for the Indian army. Christine Furedy, 'Development of Modern Elite Retailing in Calcutta, 1880-1920', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. XVI, No. 4 (1979), p. 393.

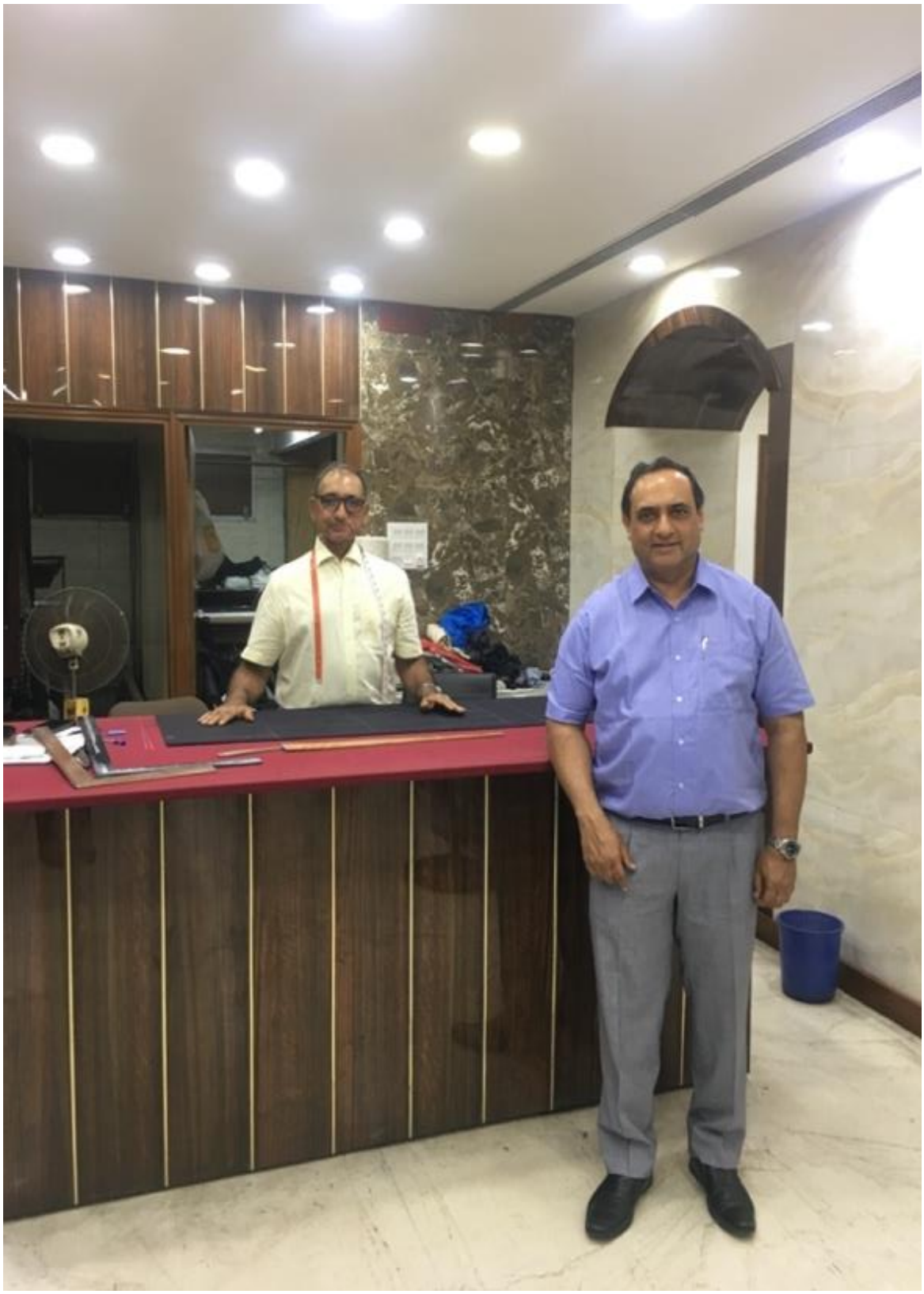
[128] Sheraz Ali. Personal Interview. 13 June 2019.

[129] Ibid. Barkat Ali's patrons are also mentioned in this article, Chandi Doulatramani, 'A stitch in time: a 108-year old bespoke men's tailoring store in Kolkata looks to the future'. https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/DgqLIwT2NhJW0v6LLkbFnK/A-stitch-in-time.html. Accessed on 12 March 2021.

Over the past years, Sheraz Ali has led a team of thirty tailors in the firm's operations. While Sheraz Ali oversees the preliminary and critical stages of garment construction (measurements and cutting), Sarfraz Ali handles trials (suit fittings) and sales. A customer typically makes three visits to the shop – the first to select the fabrics and give measurements, the second for a fitting, and the third for collection. Usually, five measurements are enough for a men's blazer, but tailors at Barkat Ali's take ten because they want the cutting to be precise on the very first trial.[130] Their perfectionism is what makes their 'brand'.

[130] Sarfraz Ali (third generation owner of Barkat Ali & Bros). Personal Interview. 13 June 2019.

Image 5.4: The Barkat Ali brothers, Sheraz Ali and Sarfraz Ali



Source: Photograph taken by author on 13 June 2019

The tailoring unit is on the floor above the shop. Thirty Singer sewing machines purchased twenty-five years ago are still in use. Two master cutters, guided by Sheraz Ali, were (at the time of my interview) charged with taking measurements and supervising the work of the other tailors. They exercised the greatest care to ensure that the fitting and finishing of the garments lived up to the reputation of the establishment.

One of the master cutters at Barkat Ali's, Akbar Hussain, has been associated with the firm since 1982. He was trained by his father, Shehnawaz Hussain, who also worked as master tailor at Barkat Ali's. The main structure of the garment – the cut-out pieces – are sewn together with a foot pedal sewing machine. Everything else, buttonholes, linings, pockets are created by hand, directly on the fabric.[131]

Akbar Hussain was (at the time of the interview) in charge of training new apprentices who had joined the Barkat Ali's firm, many of whom were internal migrants from Firozabad, Agra, and Jaunpur. Akbar Hussain instructions on suit-making included the following:

> 'When taking measurements for a suit, I tell my boys to "leave a margin" to create allowances and darts…I watch them take the measurements, if it is too tight or loose, I tell them to retake the measurement and write it down. Of course, there will be slight adjustments needed during fittings. But a good cut will only come from accurate body measurements. I then take the apprentice to the drawing table to draft the work for cutting. I give him brown paper to copy my draft pattern and cut it out'.[132]

While teaching cutting and sewing techniques to apprentices, master tailors often emphasized the importance of understanding fabrics. Each material has to be tested for shrinkage, accuracy of measurement, straight and even stitches, and neatness in pressing seams. This level of precision and solid grasp of materials brings Zulfiqar Anwar's 1926 tailoring manual, *Zamyab*

[131] Akbar Hussain (master tailor at Barkat Ali & Bros). Personal Interview. 14 June 2019.
[132] Ibid.

Darzi Khana, to mind. Continuities in skill transmission and master-tailor led apprenticeships can be seen in Akbar Hussain's instructions to 'his boys'.

Clients often returned with old suits made by the Barkat Ali Brothers for trims and alterations:

> 'A client came to us with his favourite navy blue suit tailored in 1988, and asked us to replace the buttons and repair the frayed lining, such is the trust that clients have in our craftsmanship'.[133]

Informal production and small-scale service enterprises, such as tailoring and garment making, are economic activities with potential for growth in terms of increased turnover and capital accumulation.[134] In bespoke tailoring, the sartorial identities of clients are negotiated through a collaborative design process that involves the skills and sartorial acumen of both tailors and patrons. The knowledge of materials and principles underlying all processes of garment construction, from pattern drafting and cutting to the final assemblage, requires precise mathematical calculations.

Customised clothing is thus a niche market that ties master tailors to their clients. This nexus of relations between tailors, outfitters and clients, as well as the perfectionism of its tailors, has ensured the long-term success of tailoring houses such as Barkat Ali's. Ali's decision to stay on in Calcutta after partition, despite possessing the 'mobility capital'[135] to migrate to the 'right' side in West Pakistan where his brother was, says a lot about his unwillingness to sever the threads – 'locational incentives', the firm's reputation, and patronage connections – that he had built in Calcutta before partition.

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[133] Sarfraz Ali. Personal Interview. 13 June 2019.
[134] *Report on Upgrading Informal Apprenticeship: A Resource Guide for India* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2012), p. 66.
[135] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations', pp. 273-304.

Another family firm to take advantage of the niche that opened up for military liveries and hosiery in late colonial Calcutta was Nuskar and Co. in New Market.[136] In Chapter One, we saw how male clothiers and outfitters supplying army uniforms capitalised on the presence of foreign troops in Calcutta. Demand far outstripped supply in specialised markets, for instance, in hosiery.[137] Between 1967-68, the National Federation of Industrial Cooperatives did business worth Rs. 1, 12, 000 in hosiery and footwear alone.[138]

[136] West Bengal Hosiery Association, Bharat Chamber of Commerce & Federation of India Chambers of Commerce and Industry. https://www.wbha.in/history.php. Accessed on 24 June 2019.
[137] Haruka Yanagisawa, 'The handloom industry and its market structure: The case of the Madras Presidency in the first half of the twentieth century', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 30, No. 1 (1993); Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, 'Welcome to Calcutta: An Orthodox Jewish American Soldier in India during WWII', *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* (2019), pp. 53-59.
[138] *India: A Reference Annual, 1969.* Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1969), pp. 347-348.

Image 5.5: The fifth-generation owner of Nuskar & Co., Mohiduddin Hossain Ali, in New Market



Source: Photograph taken by author on 2 July 2019

In recounting stories about his great-grandfather's wartime business strategy, the fifth-generation owner of Nuskar & Co., Mohiduddin Hossain Ali, said:

> 'During the war, military officers and cadets would come here to purchase khaki socks because we were the only shop who sold it. New Market was very close to the White Town, it was built to service the needs of the *bideshi* people [foreigners]…. My great grandfather had travelled to England many times. It is a cold country and woollen clothing is worn there much more than in India. Initially we used to cater to the taste of *sahibs* and *memsahibs*. We used to sell woollen coats, but since the war years, we have been specialising in hosiery: cotton and thermal vests, camisoles, socks, undergarments, handkerchiefs…'[139]

[139] Mohiduddin Hossain Ali (fifth generation owner of Nuskar & Co.). Personal Interview. 2 July 2019.

He shared a photograph with me of Australian marines walking past the shop, located in one of the aisles in New Market in 1943.[140] I took a photograph of the shop in 2019 to provide visual illustration of the continuing presence of old Muslim family firms in Calcutta – their ties to location that informed their decision to stay on after partition, often in exactly the same location as they were over a hundred years earlier. Advertisements in English and Bengali newspapers bear witness to their long-term presence at the heart of this retailing district in Calcutta.[141]

Long-established family firms such as Barkat Ali Brothers and Nuskar & Co. enjoyed the 'locational incentives' and patronage of their clients, which enabled them to remain in the same location over many years. Other independent tailor-entrepreneurs (for instance, second-generation Muslim stayers on), without strong patronage ties with outfitting families, took their skills elsewhere in search of new markets and patrons, though without severing their ties with Calcutta.

[140] Photograph of Australian marines in 1943 from Nuskar & Co. private collection.
[141] 'Ambassador of Sophomore shirts: Nuskar & Co.', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 3 October 1960; 'Thackeray easy care hosiery dealer in New Market: Nuskar & Co.', *Amrit Bazaar Patrika*, 14 September 1969.

Image 5.6: Photographs of Nuskar & Co. in New Market in 1943 (above) and 2019 (below)



Source: Photograph of Australian marines in 1943 from Nuskar & Co.'s private collection (top) and the present-day photograph of Nuskar & Co. in the same location was taken on 2 July 2019 by the author (bottom).

Manwar Hossain: The 'Anokhe Bombay Ladies Tailor' in Calcutta

Manwar Hossain shared memories of his father who had worked in the Bombay cinema industry as an *ostagir* (master tailor) in the early 1950s.[142] He said that his father, Shahid Hossain Mollah, had migrated from Calcutta to Bombay to work as an apprentice tailor at his uncle's workshop located near Prithvi Theatre in Juhu. He worked his way up as a journeyman tailor, producing costumes for *dresswalas* (who made costumes for films) for over a decade until he became a master cutter himself, and set up a tailoring shop of his own.[143] Manwar moved to Bombay as a teenage boy in the mid 1960s to learn the craft from his father, and over time went on to take control of its operations as his father started to lose his eyesight. They lived in a *chawl* in Dongri (a Muslim *bustee* in north Mumbai) where he honed his skills of cutting and fitting garments. Both he and his father specialized as men's outfitters.

In order to keep up with his competitors, however, he needed to diversify his skills. He ventured into new territory: ladies wear. At first, he struggled with the measurements and precise fit. He said '*pehle sahi nahi byaithta tha'* (at first, it didn't fit quite right). But living huddled together cheek-by-jowl in a neighbourhood with many other service communities presented opportunities to hone his handiwork:

[142] Manwar Hossain (master tailor). Personal Interview. 12 June 2019.

[143] The tailor, an anonymous figure in the 'cine-ecology' of Bombay cinema, has been an indispensable part of costume design in cinema production. See, Debashree Mukherji, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 6. Tailors are often left out of narratives about film consumption, film making and the broad, multi-layered infrastructures that support and sustain the craft of film making. Manwar Hossain was a part of this world for over three decades. Rachel Dwyer, Divia Patel and Clare Wilkinson-Weber, are among the few scholars who have drawn attention to the social composition of the film industry since 1947, many of whom are migrant Muslim tailors. See, Clare Wilkinson Weber, 'Behind the Seams: Designers and Tailors in Popular Hindi Cinema', *Visual Anthropology Review* Vol. 20, Issue 2 (2005), pp. 3-21; Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of India* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

> 'I lived close to a group of bar dancers who asked me to make *cholis* (fitted blouses) for them…initially I found it hard to copy from samples they gave me. The fit was not right. [Then] I asked one of the girls to take her *maāp* [measurements] so I could make the blouse according her body measurements. I learnt how to make fitted blouses on a trial and error basis.'

Tailoring requirements for heroines were met by costume designers, who began to appear in the 1960s. A 'good fitted blouse' was a standard brief for tailors making costumes for heroines. The key to getting the right fit involved great precision in cutting, stitching and darting. To make a coat or a blouse with a perfect and precise fit involved working out the number of darts needed to achieve the exact fit of the garment. The definition of a good 'fit', however, changed over time. For instance, the heroine Sadhana was known for her 'one-dart blouses' – as was her tailor Rehmat Ali, who made them. In the later years, this kind of angular style was replaced by a more rounded ideal.[144]

Hossain moved back to Calcutta in 1992 after spending over three decades in Bombay, first working for his father's patrons in the cinema circuit, and then serving the needs of his own clients. He refrained from commenting on whether or not the Bombay riots in 1992 had informed his decision to move. With three Singer sewing machines in tow, one of which he had inherited from his father, Manwar set up a tailoring business in Calcutta's Alimuddin Street, in close proximity to New Market. His shop is called 'Anokhe Bombay Ladies Tailors', named after his tailoring workshop in Bombay. The name of his shop, 'Anokhe Bombay Ladies Tailors' (the term 'anokhe' means unusual) appropriates his past patronage linkages with the Bombay cinema industry, a potential route for attracting new patrons in Calcutta. When I interviewed Manwar in June 2019, he had three apprentices working under his supervision: his son and two nephews respectively.

[144] Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of India*, p. 8.

Manwar Hossain's father, Shahid Hossain Mollah, a Muslim stayer-on at the time of partition, had some 'mobility capital' (skills). These would have enabled him to leave Calcutta, but instead he chose to remain in India. He made use of his 'immobility capital' (tailoring skills, pre-existing locational resources, sewing machines, and patronage ties with other stayers-on) first in Calcutta, and then in Bombay, where he worked as a 'dresswala'. The acquired assets of a successful tailoring business meant that, in the late 1960s, his son Manwar Hossain could join his father in the world of Bombay cinema. Both men kept their ties to Calcutta and its resources 'alive', which subsequently enabled Manwar Hossain to return to the city with his reputation and skills as a 'Bombay tailor'. Mobility and 'immobility capital', while distinct, often overlap. The 'immobility capital' invested by the father resulted in assets for the son which afforded both types of capital.

Image 5.7: Photograph of Manwar Hossain at his tailoring workshop, 'Anokhe Bombay Ladies Tailors' on Alimuddin Street near New Market, Kolkata



Source: Photograph taken by author on 12 June 2019

Image 5.8: Manwar Hossain's son and apprentice, Ismail, hand embroidering a dupatta



Source: Photograph taken by author on 14 June 2019

Hawker-tailors along the streets of Esplanade

Some scholars have argued that networks are built upon fractures and secrets just as much as strong, seamless connections.[145] Hawker tailors along Esplanade operate on the margins of the retail outfitting businesses, scrambling over resources with other hawkers, and surviving through their precarious links with counterfeit activities in the borderlands. Ritajyoti Bandhyopadhyay's account of street hawkers suggests that some hawker tailors tapped into resources available to them through channels of illegal garment trafficking between India and Bangladesh.

He gives the example of Abdul, a middle-aged tailor with vast experience in street hawking. Abdul originally came from Murshidabad, an erstwhile seat of Mughal power and patronage, where his father ran a tailoring workshop and smuggled garments to East Pakistan [now Bangladesh]. Some of Abdul's male kin worked as apprentices in an *ostagir*'s unit in the district, two hundred kilometres northeast of Calcutta. At the age of twelve, Abdul joined his brothers to learn tailoring under the same *ostagir.* When he turned twenty, he had the option of opening a retail garment stall on the Esplanade sidewalk. With opportunities for setting up his own business on the horizon, Abdul came into contact with a moneylender who agreed to give him a loan at a high interest rate. Much like the Metiabruz tailors' financial dealings with the Marwari cloth merchants in Burrabazaar, Abdul's good reputation as a hawker tailor in the credit market meant that the rate of interest on his loan would decrease and the duration of the

[145] Tim Harper and Sunil S. Amrith, 'Sites of Asian Interaction: An Introduction', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 46, Issue 2 (2012), p. 254. In drawing attention to the fragility and brittleness of networks, Joya Chatterji's formulation of 'network poverty' explains why some people are immobile in a highly mobile world. Joya Chatterji, 'On Being Stuck in Bengal: Immobility in the "Age of Migration"', pp. 511–41.

loan would grow - 'a good credit history could act as a collateral in the informal credit market as eventually happened with Abdul.'[146]

Abdul's precarious position within the network of counterfeit garment producers represents a thread of dependency, albeit tenuous, that ties the city to the borderlands. This network of illegal trade and manufacture of fake labelled garments spanned from Ludhiana in Punjab, which supplied the cloth, to Kidderpore in Calcutta, where the cutting happened in small tailoring units.[147] The copies of branded clothes were sewn, finished, ironed, stamped and packed in the adjoining areas around Kidderpore-Metiabruz and manufacturing units attached to this network. The garments then made their way to Abdul's stall in Esplanade.[148]

By connecting the different geographies of production, Abdul's story helps us to trace the cross-border trading networks that connect spaces within the cities and the borderlands. The garment production units in Metiabruz were supported by *darzis*, a substantial proportion of whom were drawn from Bengali Muslim villages of North and South 24 Parganas, such as Hooghly, Midnapore, Howrah, and Murshidabad. A vast population of women worked on an 'informal' basis in family-based production units in Metiabruz.

Unlike some parts of the world where women became tailors by profession with the advent of sewing machines[149], in India tailoring has been an urban profession of male Muslim artisans, although not in an exclusive way.[150] Women occupy the menial end of the manufacturing

[146] Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, 'Institutionalizing Informality', pp. 1-43.
[147] Willem van Schendel, 'Easy Come, Easy Go: Smugglers on the Ganges', pp. 189-213.
[148] Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, 'Institutionalizing Informality', pp. 15-16.
[149] Women in Dutch Indonesia, for instance, worked as professional 'machinists' or seamstresses in European households. Jean Gelman Taylor, 'The Sewing Machine in Colonial-Era Photographs: A record from Dutch Indonesia', pp. 71-95.
[150] David Arnold, 'Global goods and local usages: the small world of the Indian sewing machine', pp. 407-429

spectrum, shorn of protective rights, doing the most arduous tasks for very little pay. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, women and girls represent eighty percent of the factory workforce in garment manufacturing.[151] The surge of labour in Dhaka's garment manufacturing industry was, largely and continues to be, met by internal migrants seeking work in the city.

Lata-Sita: Tailors Recycling Old Clothes into New Outfits

While there exists a thriving black market for pirated, ready-made clothing supported by a network of cross-border smuggling, there remains space in the market for a tailor's dexterous skills. In contemporary Calcutta, the growing demand for environmentally sustainable clothing has driven young designers, such as Meghna Nayak, to employ local Muslim tailors to help her run a business. She designs fashionable garments which the tailors make from recycled clothing.[152] At her workshop in South Calcutta, Nayak and her team of *darzis*, restore old fabrics and reinvent them. In doing so, she combines 'a sense of newness and nostalgia, while creating the smallest carbon footprint and keeping the ethnical credentials of the old fabric intact.'[153] On being asked what it meant to run a 'zero waste' dressmaking business, she said:

> 'Apart from the very real impact of restoring thousands of metres of old fabric, and diverting kilos of waste from going into landfill, I like to use LataSita and the process of making clothing to start a conversation with my customers, many of whom have zero interest in the environment and sustainability.'[154]

[151] Naila Kabeer, 'Globalisation, Labour Standards and Women's Rights: Dilemmas of Collective (In) Action in an Interdependent World', *Feminist Economics* Vol. 10, No. 1 (2004), pp. 3-35.
[152] 'Making Upscaling Cool', *The Tribune*. 27 July 2019. https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/features/making-upcycling-cool-808256. Accessed on 16 February 2021.
[153] Meghna Nayak (owner of LataSita). Telephone interview. 12 November 2019.
[154] Ibid.

Many of the ‘signature pieces’ made at LataSita, for instance their ‘six saree skirt’, involve an intricate patchwork of old, recycled silk sarees. These are unique, hybrid creations handcrafted by *darzis*.

Image 5.9: The LataSita workshop in south Calcutta



Source: Meghna Nayak, owner of LataSita

Lucy Norris has looked at the consumption of recycled, second-hand *saris* across North India, remade into new styles of clothing by local tailors catering predominantly to the Western market.[155] The cutting up of old saris – refashioning traditional patterns and adapting them to new fashion trends – demonstrates how the tailor’s skills of cutting and reassembling textiles has responded to changing materials and cultural preferences. The reincarnation of second-

[155] Lucy Norris, ‘Recycling and Reincarnation: the Journeys of Indian Saris’, *Mobilities* Vol. 3, No. 3 (2008), pp. 415-436.

hand garments involves networks of designers, tailors, dealers and customers creating niche markets through entrepreneurial recycling. These produce clothing for the middle and upwardly-mobile classes, and also export fashionable furnishings for Western consumers.[156] Muslim tailors in Calcutta have been able to reinvent themselves, yet again, according to the changing demand for particular dress styles: 'antique', 'ethnic-chic' garments.[157]

Muslim tailors and merchant-outfitters who stayed on in India after partition adopted different 'pathways of immobility' to remain within the Indian union. J.S. Mohamedally, the Dawoodi Bohra family-firm, migrated to colonial Calcutta from a village in Gujarat in the early twentieth century, opening up economic vistas for other Dawoodi Bohra merchant families (like Akberally's) to move to Calcutta after 1947, despite the devastating consequences of partition upon the city.[158] Other family firms, such as the Barkat Ali Bros and Nuskar & Co., stayed on and ran their businesses in exactly the same locations as a 100 years earlier. Artisan clusters of hereditary tailors around Metiabruz and Kidderpore provided the 'locational incentive' for many displaced Muslim stayers on, mainly artisans, to move *internally* from one locality to another.[159] Such neighbourhood-level micro-movement is hard to quantify, and has hitherto been occluded by stories about large-scale, cross-border migrations across the Radcliffe Line.

[156] Ibid, p. 416. Also, on women entrepreneurs in small towns upscaling old saris for a living, see, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo 'The Economic Lives of the Poor', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 21, No. 1 (2007), p. 151.
[157] The reincarnation of old silk saris into clothing and soft furnishings- reassembled and redesigned with decorative *zari* borders – has had a niche market since Independence. Emma Tarlo has shown how small-scale manufacturers, mainly Waghris, developed the business of recycling Gujarati embroidery since the mid twentieth century. Emma Tarlo, 'The Genesis and Growth of a Business Community: A Case Study of Waghri Street Traders in Ahmedabad', in P. Cadene and D. Vidal eds., *Webs of Trade: Dynamics of Business Communities in Western India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997); Emma Tarlo, 'Ethic Chic: The Transformation of Hauz Khas Village', *India International Centre Quarterly* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1996), pp. 30-59.
[158] New Dawoodi Bohra outfitting shops that opened up in Calcutta after partition included A. Mohamedali & Co., *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 9 December 1966.
[159] Joya Chatterji, 'Of Graveyards and Ghettos', pp. 358-400.

Where it has been noted, no clear analysis has been provided to explain such movements beyond the 'search for security in numbers'.[160]

Independent tailor-entrepreneurs like Manwar Hossain have used their kinship networks to remain within the Indian territory, embarking on journeys between cities – Bombay and Calcutta – operating within migratory circuits in a way that kept their access to locational resources alive. The overlapping pathways of internal migration (between localities and cities) and immobility denote choice and informed decision-making on the part of internally displaced Muslims – their assertion of agency within adverse and constrained environments. These stories of survival, resistance and negotiation do not find expression in the historiography on Muslim stayers-on in India after partition. An example of their continued presence in the urban landscape of post-partition Calcutta, albeit in restrained and attenuated form, can be seen through signs and shop-hoardings.

Shop-hoardings, visibility, and place-making after partition

David Harvey, in his seminal work, *Social Justice and the City*, states: 'The city is a manifestly complicated thing'.[161] What makes a city complicated? Does the complexity arise from the multiple spaces through which it is constituted? Or is it due to the mangled histories and sensibilities that construct and articulate the city in different ways? Or should we ask, how, and in what ways, the city is made 'visible', or in exactly whose image is the city made or not made?

[160] Ibid; Mahadeb Prasad Basu, *Anthropological Profile of Muslims in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, Government of India, 1985).
[161] David Harvey, 'Social Processes and Spatial Form: The Conceptual Problems of Urban Planning' in *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 22.

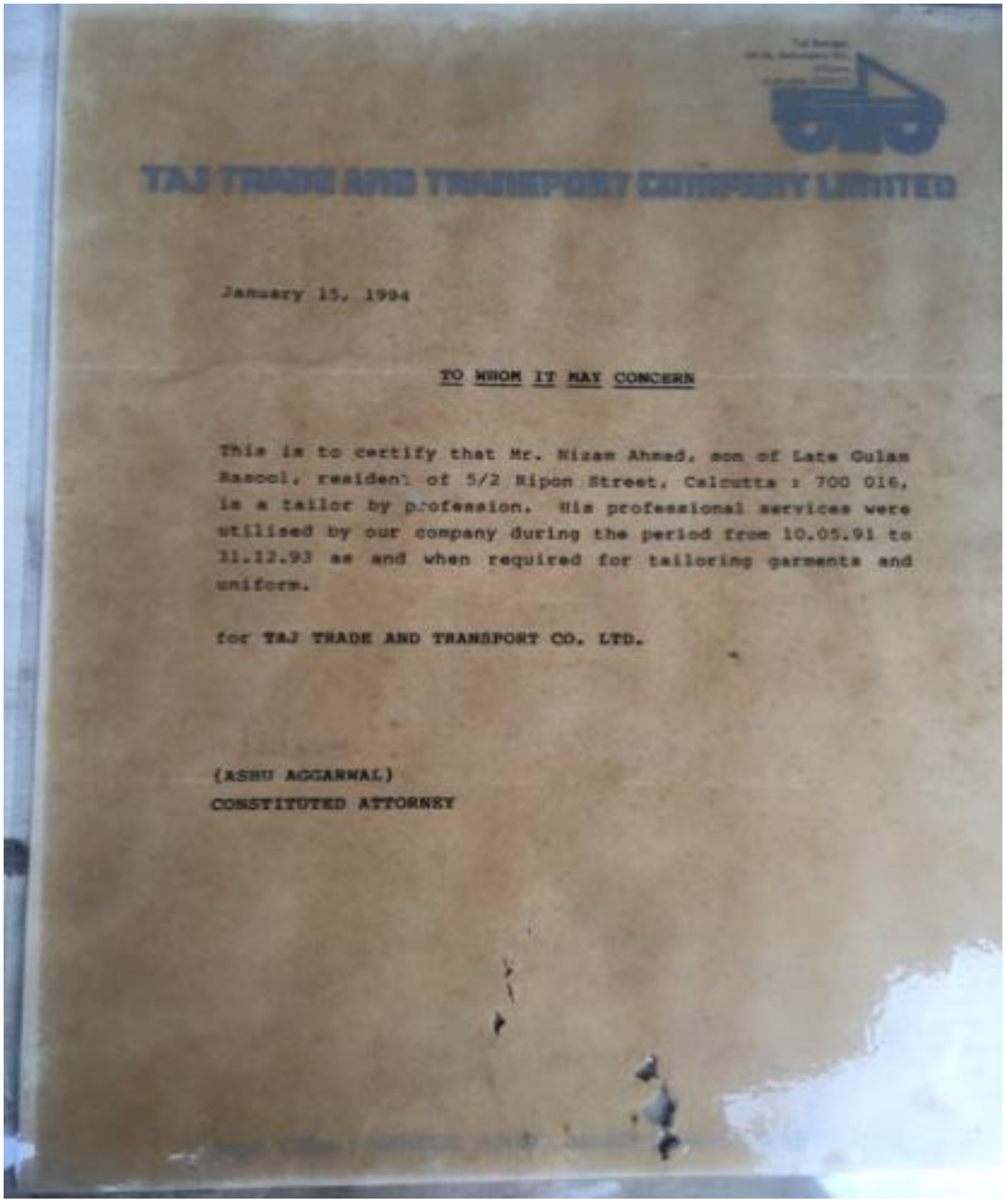
Investigating political economy through the lens of space and place provides a powerful tool for uncovering forms of exclusion and urban dislocation. Targeted violence towards religious minorities, political propaganda, and economic forces all fuel inter-community competition, material conflict and spatial distance.[162] This lens also creates possibilities to engage with the place-making strategies of internally displaced groups who engage in what Jonker and Amiraux call 'the politics of visibility'[163]. By using their 'immobility capital', Muslim tailors have asserted their agency by amplifying signs of difference and defending their right to be seen as 'visibly-Muslim' at work.[164] Shop-hoardings of tailoring workshops bear testimony to the long-term presence of Muslim stayers-on in the urban landscape of post-partition Calcutta. Signs, placards, shop hoardings can be read as place-making strategies, as 'insurgent texts', and as ways of inserting community histories within the urban visual register of the city.[165]

Nizam Ahmad's laminated testimonial from the Taj Group of Hotels, where he worked as an 'in-house' tailor for over two decades (making garments and uniforms for the hotel staff), is a self-presentation of his skills, prestigious patronage ties, and a potential route to accessing new markets.[166] In exploiting his reputation of being a skilled tailor with familial roots in Lucknow, Ahmad's tailoring shop in Metiabruz, 'Lucknow Tailoring House', appropriates the 'mythologised' legacy and 'urban charisma'[167] of Wajid Ali Shah, exiled Nawab of Oudh. This

[162] Ipsita Chatterjee, 'Violent Morphologies: Landscape, Border and Scale in Ahmedabad Conflict', *Geoforum* Vol. 40 (2009), pp. 1003-1103.
[163] Gerdien Jonker and Valerie Amiraux, *Politics of Visibility: Young Muslims in European Public Spaces* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006).
[164] Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (London and New York: Berg, 2010).
[165] Yair Wallach, *A City in Fragments: Urban Text in Modern Jerusalem* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), p. 108.
[166] Nizam Ahmad (master tailor). Personal Interview. 2 July 2019 [Private testimonial of Nizam Ahmad issued by the Taj Trade and Transport Company Limited, Kolkata dated 15 January 1994].
[167] Justin Jones, 'Urban Mythologies and Urbane Islam: Refining the Past and Present in Colonial-Era Lucknow', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* Vol. 11 (2015), pp. 1-19.

helps him to access the market rooted in sartorial dispositions attached to Mughal aesthetics, design, and dress practices.

Image 5.10: Private testimonial of Nizam Ahmad issued by the Taj Trade and Transport Company Limited, Kolkata (dated 15 January 1994)



TAJ TRADE AND TRANSPORT COMPANY LIMITED

January 15, 1994

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Mr. Nizam Ahmed, son of Late Gulam Rasool, resident of 5/2 Ripon Street, Calcutta : 700 016, is a tailor by profession. His professional services were utilised by our company during the period from 10.05.91 to 31.12.93 as and when required for tailoring garments and uniform.

for TAJ TRADE AND TRANSPORT CO. LTD.

(ASHU AGGARWAL)
CONSTITUTED ATTORNEY

Source: Photograph taken by author on 2 July 2019

Image 5.11: Photograph of Nizam Ahmad's shop 'Lucknow' in Metiabruz



Source: Photograph taken by author on 2 July 2019

Image 5.12: Jan Mohammad and Sheikh Mohammad, both first kins, in front of their tailoring shops in Ripon Street, Kolkata



Source: Photograph taken by author on 29 July 2019

The inscriptions on the hoardings of Jan Mohammad and Sheikh Mohammad's tailoring shops – the date of establishment (1943), family surnames (Mohammad), the shop's location (Muzaffar Ahmed Street), and the advertisement of the skill itself, 'ladies and gents tailors' – express the presence and visibility of an otherwise 'invisible' and ghettoised minority group.[168] Yair Wallach's work on commercial signs and street graffiti in modern Jerusalem is poignant in this context. He demonstrates how urban signs enable the visibility of vulnerable social groups: 'even though urban texts did not level incomes, instil ethnic harmony, bridge neighbourhoods or promote political consensus, they bracketed these ruptures within a shared experience of public space.'[169] Muslim shop hoardings overlooking Calcutta's streets are a reclaiming of space, a way of unsettling the real and metaphorical boundaries that separate the 'insider' and the 'outsider', the marginalised and the dominant, in the age of more aggressive Hindu nationalism.

[168] Jan Mohammad and Sheikh Mohammad (master tailors). Personal Interviews. 29 July 2019.
[169] Yair Wallach, *A City in Fragments: Urban Text in Modern Jerusalem*, p. 229.

Conclusion

This thesis has uncovered the hitherto invisible stories of Muslim stayers on in Calcutta – tailors and Dawoodi Bohra merchants – who, rather than being 'stuck' or 'stranded' on the 'wrong' side of the border, made purposive decisions to remain in West Bengal based on the particular assets available to them.

Many of these assets, built-up over multiple generations, were embedded in place; to leave would have been to leave behind buoyant markets, well-entrenched and dynamic manufacturing clusters, patronage connections, and 'mythic' resources. These assets that made up their 'immobility capital' would have been lost on the other side of the border.

Some of the tailors' assets contributed to both mobility and immobility (such as skill and small technologies). Skill was important everywhere; it enabled many artisans to move to new destinations, in search of new markets and patrons, perhaps with a sewing machine in tow. As scholars have shown, small numbers of Bhojpuri tailors did indeed move to Dhaka after 1947.[1] But, for a master tailor plugged into localised circuits of demand, connected to a patron, running his own workshop in a tailor-cluster with more than one sewing machine, with known and reliable *karigars* who made his hems, buttonholes, cuffs, and piping, leaving all this behind would not have been an ideal outcome, to say the least.

True enough, partition had changed things in India for Muslims: there is no getting around that. But skill and small machines, when embedded in long-established networks of outfitting firms,

[1] Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais ed., *The Bengal Diaspora*, pp. 57-58.

markets, and material culture, could be leveraged to make a success of staying on – even in the most adverse circumstances.

This thesis has developed these ideas by examining five key assets that made up the tailors' 'immobility capital': locational incentives and 'mythic resources'; knowledge of material culture and consumption practices; the 'property of skill'; sewing machines and their possibilities; and patronage ties with Dawoodi Bohra family firms and outfitters. Tailors, and other stayers on, each had their own unique asset bundle – allowing them to respond to the shifting social and economic environment. Being poor in some assets (e.g. having no machine or patron) could be compensated by wealth in another asset (e.g. skill, and connections to an outfitting business with access to sewing machines).

Two corollaries are important. Firstly, many stayers on who were rich in 'immobility capital' were certainly not impoverished in 'mobility capital' (after all, there was an overlap between them), but they weighed their options and made informed decisions to do what they felt might best secure their livelihoods and their families' welfare. Secondly, to be a stayer-on was not to be rooted to the spot. Indeed, constitutive of 'immobility capital' were those pre-existing social and economic networks that allowed Muslim tailors to move between neighbourhoods, districts, and Indian cities in a way that kept their access to Calcutta's hinterland and peninsular markets for tailoring 'alive'. In these ways, 'mobility capital' and 'immobility capital' were often complementary.

We must also distinguish between reason and compulsion. To have reason, by way of having the relevant 'capital', is not to be compelled to make a particular decision. Human agency is such that the sometimes the riskier path is trodden (e.g., people with a wealth of 'immobility

capital' who nonetheless left, and vice versa). These 'capital' concepts are the boundary frameworks of decision-making. Nor did making the 'better' decision guarantee a positive outcome; a subcontinent in chaos, wracked by violence and economic upheaval, made fortune's fools of many. Still, this thesis tells the story of one group who, despite the risks, chose to stay on and deploy their 'immobility capital' – and cut the cloth of their future.

The thesis raises some issues that could not be addressed. The 'strike' emerged as a powerful weapon among the industrial working classes in the early decades of the twentieth century.[2] There is no clear evidence to show that tailors were involved in the industrial strikes, but I pose some questions here as potential ground for future research: when and where, if at all, do Muslim tailors feature in these 'specific events' of workers' militancy in the late 1920s? For instance, did they participate in the 1928 municipal sweepers' strike in Calcutta?[3]

Given that Muzaffar Ahmad was the leading face of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, a group of mainly Muslim Bengali communists upholding the cause of the urban poor in this period, did tailors align their interests with members of other labouring groups? What impact did the 1928 sweepers' strike, which unfolded in the *bustees* in Metiabruz, independent labour leader Begum Sakina at the forefront, have on tailors in the area? This question is of great interest because we know that a small proportion of sweepers who participated in the municipal strike were upcountry Muslim *jamadars*, but *dhobies* (washermen) organised by their own caste panchayats, refrained from participating in the strike.[4] Did tailors keep away from the strike for similar reasons? What role did/does caste (*jati*-based occupations) and skill-focused labour

[2] Ravi Ahuja ed., *Working Lives & Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2013).
[3] Tanika Sarkar, 'Dirty Work, Filthy Caste': Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s', in Ravi Ahuja ed., *Working Lives & Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2013), pp. 174-204.
[4] Ibid, p. 199.

play in workers' participation in strikes? Did skill and artisanship always trump regional and linguistic unity (affiliation to the idea of Oudh as the 'homeland')? It seems not. If not, what can we learn from the pattern of strikes in Metiabruz that take us further in refining Rajnarayan Chandavarkar's idea of a neighbourhood as a site where 'class' is often made and experienced?

Muslim migrant workers from the United Provinces and Bihar were drawn into the Tablighi reformist movement at the end of the nineteenth century, and mobilised by sectarian leaders who were active in the 1926 Calcutta riots.[5] Given their involvement in reform movements, were tailors more 'active' in Tablighi Jamaat mobilisations grounded in Maulana Thanvi's reformist thought? If so, why did this not spur their migration to East Bengal, a huge centre of Tablighi activity?

Second, the thesis' end point is 1967, when Congress lost power in West Bengal. The 'crisis of governability' after the end of Congress dominance, the Left Front era in 1977, and the subsequent 'durability' of the Left Front government in West Bengal has garnered much scholarly attention.[6] However, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M)'s relationship to Muslim communities in the state has largely been ignored. The Communist Party of India and its relationship to Muslim groups in undivided Bengal has a long history, which is beyond the remit of this thesis.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Thomas Johnson Nossiter, *Marxist State Governments in India* (London: Pinter Publications, 1988); Ross Mallick, *Development policy of a communist government: West Bengal since 1977* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ben Rogaly, Barbara Harriss-White, Sugata Bose eds., 'Introduction', in *Sonar Bangla? Agricultural Growth and Agrarian Change in West Bengal and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Sage publications, 1999), pp. 11-35; Stuart Corbridge, Glyn Williams, Manoj Srivastava and Rene Veron, *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Nonetheless, a few points are pertinent. Governed by the CPI(M)-led left-wing coalition until 2011, West Bengal has been often described as a secular state, where Hindus and Muslims co-existed in harmony. Many scholars have reinforced narratives of peaceful co-existence, and the apparent success of secular ideals by the Left Front government.[7] Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, for instance, asserts that the traditional 'flashpoints' of caste, ethnic or religious groupings had never been of any special interest to the Leftists, or indeed any other major political party in West Bengal.[8] Although the CPI(M) did not address the high levels of unemployment among Muslim minorities,[9] Amrita Basu has argued that, '[t]he relative *absence* of violence against women, minorities, and the lower castes and classes in West Bengal has not earned the CPI(M) the credit it deserves.'[10]

In 2006, however, the Sachar Committee revealed that the Left government in West Bengal had been 'complacent in addressing reservations for Muslims in the state'.[11] It outlined the high proportion of Muslim men in jails, and the difficulties of all Muslims in finding formal employment.[12] The majority, perforce, were self-employed.[13] The report also underlined that Muslims in the state were predominantly an 'urban community', who lived in spaces with few urban amenities.[14] The West Bengal communist government's upholding of a 'secular' political

[7] Dwaipayan Bhattarcharya, *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Subho Basu and Auritro Majumdar, 'The Dilemmas of Parliamentary Communism: The Rise and Fall of the Left in West Bengal', *Critical Asian Studies* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2013), pp. 167-200.
[8] Dwaipayan Bhattarcharya, *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[9] The Prime Minister's High Level Committee, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report* (New Delhi, Cabinet Secretariat Government of India, 2006). Henceforth, The Sachar Committee report, pp. 12-14.
[10] Emphasis mine. See, Amrita Basu, 'Parliamentary communism as a historical phenomenon: The CPI(M) in West Bengal', in *Two Faces of Protest: Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 345.
[11] *The Sachar Committee report*, p. 24.
[12] Ibid, pp. 12-14.
[13] Ibid, p. 53.
[14] Ibid.

approach and its denunciation of 'identity-politics' elsewhere in India paradoxically meant that the complexities of Muslim ghettoisation within the state has received little attention.[15]

The 'party-society' approach of Dwaipayan Bhattacharya[16] perhaps provides the most interesting analytical window into understanding the Left Front regime. What remains unexplored is how the CPI(M) and its allies were involved in the 'refugeeisation' of West Bengal after 1977. Hindu refugees were an important constituency in the Left parties' political base. Upon coming to power, the Left Front legalised illegal squatter colonies of Hindu squatter refugees – giving them permanent title to much Muslim-owned urban land and housing.

By this process, Muslim 'areas' in Calcutta were bounded – sealed tight by law. The strong connection of the Left Front with refugee mobilisation is crucial in understanding how Muslim neighbourhoods in Calcutta finally *became* ghettos after 1977. Further study of this process is crucial and urgent, as they have since been (ostensibly) frozen in time, space, and imagination – and some have been impoverished profoundly in the ways that Chatterji showed them to be after fieldwork in the early 1990s, and the Sachar Committee in 2006.

That impoverishment, I suggest, had *not* always characterised Muslim social spaces after 1947. They were not frozen in aspic. They have varied with time, and the change – paradoxically in the era of refugee political influence – was not always for the good. Yet as my interviews with tailors suggest, despite this, they have sustained themselves by relying on their own skills, social networks, and resources embedded in the localities in which they lived and worked.

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[15] Abhijit Dasgupta, 'On the Margins: Muslims in West Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XLIV, No. 16 (2009), pp. 91-96.

[16] Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, 'Party society, its consolidation and crisis: Understanding political change in West Bengal', in Anjan Ghosh, Tapati Guha Thakurta, and Janaki Nair eds., *Theorizing the present: Essays for Partha Chatterjee* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 226-250.

Research now calls to be done on *how* they have survived these new and challenging changes to their conditions and times.

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