

# **Small is Beautiful? The Global Dimensions of Small-Scale Industries in Colonial Bihar (1900-1950)**

**Ulbe Bosma**

**International Institute of Social History  
& VU University, Amsterdam**

**&**

**Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff**  
**International Institute of Social History**

**October 2022**

Copyright © Ulbe Bosma & Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, 2022

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form other than that in which it is published.

Requests for permission to reproduce any part of this Working Paper should be sent to:  
The Editor, Commodities of Empire Working Papers, CLACS, School of Advanced Studies,  
University of London, Senate House, Malet St., London WC1H 0XG



**Commodities of Empire  
Working Paper No.36**

**ISSN: 1756-0098**

## **Small is Beautiful?**

### **The Global Dimensions of Small-Scale Industries in Colonial Bihar (1900-1950)**

**Ulbe Bosma** (*International Institute of Social History & VU University, Amsterdam*)  
**and Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff** (*International Institute of Social History*)

In his book *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, Schumacher argues that ever larger markets, larger political economies and consumer capitalism had caused a massive dehumanisation. As a radical counterpoint he presents a view of what he defined as ‘village-based industries’, which have also been labelled as ‘small-scale’, ‘traditional’ or ‘cottage’ industries.<sup>1</sup> According to Schumacher, such industries in which the process of manufacturing, production and servicing are done on a small scale, were “more beautiful”. Although we do not share Schumacher’s Tolstoian perspective, nevertheless our study engages with the transition from small-scale to large-scale industries in colonial India. However, we go beyond the value-loaded concepts of ‘small’, ‘traditional’, ‘industrial’ and ‘modern’, which still obfuscate a far more dynamic and perhaps more interesting thematic: namely how global connections contribute to the resilience and innovation of local economies. We researched tobacco and sugar cultivation and processing in colonial Bihar and discovered the crucial role local consumer markets played in mediating between global tastes and local producers and markets.<sup>2</sup> We argue that local markets could not have functioned without consumers in the region and, as Mukherjee demonstrated, throughout the eighteenth century internal pockets of demands sustained Bengal’s economy. Similarly, we show that mid-nineteenth century evidence exists of *gur*, molasses and tobacco belonging to quotidian consumption articles of ordinary people.<sup>3</sup> In what follows we provide a description of, and explanation for, this resilience of small-scale production amongst large-scale tobacco and sugar industries, which had a lot to do with local demand and politics.

While the histories of tobacco and sugar are usually described in terms of production in a colonial setting with consumption elsewhere in industrial societies, our paper concentrates on their circulation within domestic markets. In India, cane sugar and tobacco have in common that they have

---

<sup>1</sup> E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, London: Blond & Briggs, 1973. See also Madeleine Bunting, ‘Small is beautiful – an economic idea that has sadly been forgotten’, *The Guardian*, 10 November 2011, at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/10/small-is-beautiful-economic-idea>.

<sup>2</sup> This article is partly based upon previous research on ‘tobacco and sugar capitalist imperialism’ in colonial Bihar in British India. See Ulbe Bosma, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia. Industrial Production 1770-2010*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013 and Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *Colonising Plants in Bihar (1760-1950) Tobacco Betwixt Indigo and Sugarcane*, [India]: Patridge, 2014. Our research focused on the region that once constituted the Bengal Presidency and after 1912, the Bihar and Orissa Province and after 1936 the Bihar Province till 1947 when the British-Indian region became the state of Bihar in the newly created territory of the independent Republic of India and which till 2000 also included what now comprises Jharkhand.

<sup>3</sup> Tilottama Mukherjee, *Political Culture and Economy in Eighteen-Century Bengal. Networks of Exchange, Consumption and Communication*, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2013, pp. 14, 30, 39, 43, 48, 50, 69-73, 82, 117, 204, 216, 254, 260, 271. See also E. A. Horne, ‘Some Family Budgets from Bihar’, *The Economic Journal*, 26:103 (1916), pp.369-79; H. R. Perrot, ‘The Family Budget of an Indian Raiyat’, *The Economic Journal*, 2:87 (1912), pp.495, 497. For the numerous difficulties in quantifying the material life of people/households in pre-independent India see in particular Bina Roy, *Changes in Private Consumption Expenditure in India 1900-01 to 1950-51*, Kolkata: KLM, 2003, pp.50-1.

been cultivated and manufactured into different kinds of consumable products for domestic rather than international markets, with the size of their internal consumption always exceeding that of their exports. In the discussion below our focus is on *gur* (a particular kind of unrefined sugar) and *bidi* (a cigarette alternative in which leaves of primarily the *tendu* tree are filled with cured tobacco).

While these modes of production were locally embedded and geared towards India's internal markets their development became entwined with the emergence of large-scale sugar and tobacco industries in Bihar in particular. *Gur* and *bidi* were interrelated in economic and technological as well as socio-cultural sense with white refined crystalline factory sugar and (filter/white-) cigarettes respectively. Hence, we should not study these modes of production as being dichotomous but rather as different outcomes of technological innovations.<sup>4</sup> It was social-cultural configurations in early-twentieth-century colonial India, though, that gave 'white' cigarettes the marker of foreign modernity and emphasized *gur* and *bidi* manufacturing as being part of the indigenous crafts.<sup>5</sup> Darkish coloured *gur* and brownish *bidis* survived and flourished as 'traditional' and 'indigenous' products *because of* the arrival on the Indian market of 'modern' white crystalline sugar and 'white' cigarettes. It was part of a process analysed by, for instance, Indrajit Ray in his recent book on how large-scale enterprises emerged in Bengal between 1858 and 1914 at a time that was generally perceived as one of deindustrialisation. However, production in large factories emerged simultaneously with buoyant small-scale industries relying on manual labour rather than machines. According to Ray, the two sectors were not only perfectly compatible, the dividing lines between them were blurred as some small workshops could develop into full-blown industrial plants.<sup>6</sup> Ray's observations definitely apply to the tobacco and sugar economies for most of the north-eastern states of what once was British India.<sup>7</sup>

In this article we focus on colonial Bihar and Jharkhand, and the Bihari regions known in colonial times as Champaran and Tirhut in particular. Here, both small- and large-scale production systems flexibly assumed different forms of labour organisation, adopted new and improved plant varieties, new crushing/processing and production technologies over time and were produced in view of domestic demands that were, however, embedded and in fact to some extent determined by the dictates of imperial-capitalist tobacco and sugar global markets. Various improved tobacco- and cane-sugar plant varieties underwent different curing and crushing technologies in widely divergent settings of production and labour relations, arguably under a single dominant global capitalist mode of production. We will confine ourselves to the production of what now are known in Bihar as *gur* and *bidis*, including their ancillary industries that fabricated other related things such as for *bidi* wrappers, cigarette paper, cotton tread, crushing/cutting/curing machinery, fossil fuel engines, containers, matches, transportation and marketing services, including advertisements.

---

<sup>4</sup> Bosma (2013), p.263.

<sup>5</sup> Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, 'Yellow Tobacco, Black Tobacco: Indigenous (*desi*) Tobacco as an Anti-Commodity', in ed. Sandip Hazareesingh and Harro Maat, *Local Subversions of Colonial Cultures. Commodities and Anti-Commodities in Global History*, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, pp.29-49

<sup>6</sup> Indrajit Ray, *The Development of Modern Industries in Bengal. ReIndustrialisation, 1858-1914*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2018. See also Tirthankar Roy, *Traditional industry in the economy of colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 and Douglas E. Haynes, *Small town capitalism in western India: artisans, merchants, and the making of the informal economy, 1870-1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> This includes the states of Bihar, parts of West Bengal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, North-East India as well as parts of present-day Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand.

## Economic lives of ‘brownish’ *gur* and ‘white’ sugar in flux

Broadly speaking sugar comes in two forms – non-crystalline and crystalline – and of the latter there are two basic types: refined sugar produced in large factories where the juice is boiled in vacuum pans and cured from molasses with centrifuges; and sugars that are boiled in open pans and where molasses are not necessarily separated from the sucrose mass with a centrifuge.<sup>8</sup> The sugars produced outside the large factory compounds vary from yellowish white, to brown, to dark brown and sometimes almost black in colour, depending upon the amount of molasses (i.e. moisture, invert sugars and other insoluble matter such as ash, proteins and bagasse fines) left in the sugar mass.

For more than two thousand years peasants in Bihar knew how to squeeze juice from cane stalks. The juice was placed in earthen vessels that were put on burning ovens, and there kept boiling until the particles of water in the juice had evaporated. When the juice has become sufficiently thick, it was poured into other earthen vessels, where gradually it became cool and solid. This solid mass is what we define as ‘*gur*’. In addition to this raw peasant sugar, for more than 1500 years Bihar, and Patna district in particular, have had workshops producing crystalline sugar: the ‘*khandaris*’. This *shukkur* was manufactured by putting some thin extract of sugar cane into coarse sack cloth bags, and by putting a weight on these to squeeze out the molasses. Another well-known procedure was to put the sugar mass in a basket and place waterweed on the surface. The moisture of this aquatic plant rinsed the molasses from the sugar crystals. Elsewhere earthen pots were used with a hole in the bottom, plugged with bamboo. These three different technologies were all based upon the same principle but were applied by different communities in early nineteenth-century Bihar.<sup>9</sup>

At that time British entrepreneurs built dozens of state-of-the-art sugar factories equipped with vacuum pans in Bengal, including in northern Bihar. However, these disappeared after a sharp decline of sugar prices in the late 1840s.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the factories were outcompeted by the *khandsaris* that through a system of advances were able to secure those parts of the *gur* production that were available for the market. Only a few European refineries remained in Bengal and they survived by purchasing *gur* and refining it. It was, for instance, bought by proprietors of the Atchipore factory, who neither cultivated sugarcane nor produced *gur* themselves. Vacuum pan sugar was never the dominant sugar exported from India to England; these Indian sugar exports overwhelmingly consisted of *khandsari* until they were driven from the British markets by beet sugar.<sup>11</sup> The *gur* sector stayed miraculously competitive throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that was not the least thanks to its innovativeness. Cultivation tools and technology improved, and extensive irrigation projects were conducted. Important was the introduction of the iron roller mills worked by bullock power, invented in 1874 by British proprietors of the Beheea estate in Bihar and hence known as the Beheea Mills. These implements were mobile, had a much higher extraction rate and were less labour-intensive than

---

<sup>8</sup> In this respect it should be noted that small hand centrifuges came in use in the Indian countryside from the 1870s onwards, many of which came to be run by gasoline motors in the twentieth century. Bosma (2013), p.141.

<sup>9</sup> Chandra Prakash N. Sinha, *From Decline to Destruction. Agriculture in Bihar during the Early British Rule (1765-1813)*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1997, pp.129-49. See also Bhagawati Sharan Singh, *Aspects of Industries in Bihar During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Patna & New Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 2006, pp.53-68.

<sup>10</sup> See Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur. An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> Bosma (2013), pp.86-7.

the pestle-and-mortar mills that had been in use for centuries. Within a few years, 250,000 Beheea mills were in operation in North-Eastern India

Despite these innovations in *gur* manufacturing and the fact that this product was traded all over the province, government officials refused to recognise this as a true industry. One government report even claimed that the “primitive *gur* factories” only supplied *gur* for their own household consumption and perhaps of a few other families nearby. Even though it was “carried out at a considerable scale by cultivators” and “who also grow the sugarcane” it could, this official judged, “hardly be reckoned as an industry apart from agriculture”.<sup>12</sup> The report concluded that in the region of study, “the only large refining factory is the turbine mill at Nasriganj”.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, its author only considered the large sugar factory compounds with their vacuum pans, centrifuges and corrugated roofs that drew their cane from hundreds of farmers as an industry that seriously catered to large markets. Yet reports published in the decades around 1900 observed repeatedly that the demand for *gur*, also in Bihar, always exceeded the production. While the international demand for Indian sugar weakened in the late nineteenth century because of the ascendancy of highly refined cane and beet sugar, India’s *gur* sector proved to be remarkably resilient and even expanded.<sup>14</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century sugarcane, alongside tobacco, began to replace indigo and poppy – two cash crops that were on their way out in the agricultural landscape of Bihar.<sup>15</sup> Lands planted with sugarcane and tobacco yielded higher rent than if planted with subsistence crops or other cash crops. European-managed firms in Bihar started either cultivating cane themselves (instead of indigo) or eyed up the raw material cultivated by tenants on lands owned by Indian landowners, known as ‘*zamindars*’. This cane was then directly crushed and refined and for this purpose they built their factories close to the cane-growing areas, mostly in Champaran but also elsewhere in Bihar. Here, the acreage of land under cane increased considerably. A rapidly growing number of sugar factories began to compete for cane with the *gur* producers, who, however, enjoyed a still buoyant market.<sup>16</sup>

The large sugar factories that emerged in Bihar’s countryside were equipped with expensive state-of-the-art steam-driven engines, which required skilled labour for their operation.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the *gur* makers, these factory workers were separated from their households, worked for wages and were full-time employed and not simultaneously involved in cane-growing activities. These factories did not dominate the local sugar economy. The prohibitive cost of this machinery that had to be imported from abroad restricted their use. By 1910 there were just a dozen of these large sugar factories, of the type that dominated the landscapes of Cuba and Java, the most advanced exporters of industrial sugar. Only capitalists with deep pockets could afford to build them. Not surprisingly, these sugar industrialists demanded from the Government of India protection of their highly refined white sugar.

---

<sup>12</sup> L. S. S. O’Malley, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers (Shahabad) 1924*, New Delhi: Logos 2005, p.108.

<sup>13</sup> O’Malley (1924), p.109.

<sup>14</sup> Bosma (2013), pp.136-47.

<sup>15</sup> Sinha-Kerkhoff (2014); Bosma (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Bosma (2013), pp.193-202.

<sup>17</sup> M. P. Gandhi, *Problems of the Sugar Industry in India: Scope and Prospects of the Re-organisation in post-war period*, Bombay: Gandhi & Co., 1945, pp.3, 41.

Wynne Sayer, the most prominent government expert on sugar cultivation in India, argued that an “increase of wealth in Bihar” would be facilitated by large-scale “central sugar factories” that produced white sugar, rather than in *gur*, even though he acknowledged that the latter sector was innovative and that there was still room for further improvement.<sup>18</sup> In other words, in Sayer’s opinion, big was beautiful and he was confident that cultivators were not adverse to selling their crop to such new large-scale factories, particularly considering the low prices for *gur*. Sayer and like-minded experts believed in the success that could be achieved by “the large concern” situated amidst a cane-growing tract, which “owing to its greater efficiency” would be “of greater use than a small one”.<sup>19</sup> Officials of the Government of Bihar were swayed as well, and felt that the sector should be advanced through the establishment of the modern factory fitted with a plant capable of turning out a large quantity of vacuum-pan sugar. Yet they also recognised the immense problems these factories would face to procure sufficient cane to make their operations profitable. They were right.

Indian nationalist elites hoped that this ‘modern industry’ would make India independent from foreign sugar supplies. Prominent Indian entrepreneurs who were in close contact with the leadership of the Indian National Congress, such as the Birla family – today still owner of India’s largest sugar company – invested in sugar factories in Bihar in the 1920s and 1930s. What is more, some Bihari *zamindars* who had historically opposed European (indigo) planters now decided to invest in sugar factories. These Indian capitalists joined European capitalists in using the same methods of exploitation of the cane-supplying farmers. Cane growers in the region who sold their cane to these large-scale concerns, however, received official government support to establish farmers’ cooperatives that could bargain with the factory bosses. Working conditions as well as wages and labour rights of factory labourers increasingly improved as new (factory) laws were introduced in the course of the decades.<sup>20</sup>

While these big concerns multiplied particularly after the government of India established a prohibitive tariff against foreign sugar in 1931, so did cane cultivation by Indian peasants for the manufacture of *gur*. Indian sugarcane growers responded to increased domestic demand in similar fashion. Still carried out on a small-scale but witnessing an increase in the number of manufacturing units, the *gur* industry remained a stiff competitor for large-scale concerns throughout the twentieth century. Although the growing of cane to be processed by factories greatly increased during the first half of the twentieth century, centrifugal factory sugar never replaced *gur*. Actually, it had never been the intention of the colonial administration of India to replace the traditional sugar sector that produced a consumer item for which demand remained much greater than that of industrial white sugar.<sup>21</sup> Consumers remained so attached to *gur* that adulterating white sugar with molasses to create *gur* was not uncommon. However, refined sugar made some inroads against the darker *gur* in urban life, particularly among classes that used this sugar in combination with newly acquired habits of tea and coffee drinking, and for use in aerated or sweetened waters.

While the story about *gur* exhibits the economic resilience of the Indian countryside, we should not paint its labour conditions in too rosy colours. *Gur* manufacturing constituted “a currency

---

<sup>18</sup> Somerset Playne, *Bengal and Assam, Behar and Orissa: Their History, People, Commerce and Industrial Resources*, London: The Foreign Colonial Compiling and Publishing Company, 1917, p.626.

<sup>19</sup> Playne (1917), p.629.

<sup>20</sup> Bosma (2013), pp.239-45.

<sup>21</sup> Bosma (2013), pp.199, 204-205, 232-44.

to pay for services and settle debts”. It was produced in a rural society, as numerous scholars have described, that was marked by “horrendous inequalities”.<sup>22</sup> For one, cane cultivators-cum-*gur* producers, though generally not wage workers and using their own capital for investment in the industry, rarely owned the land they cultivated and sometimes even had to hire the mill from landowners or share it with other *gur*-producing households. Although the cane growers were predominantly middle-class peasants, who could afford to set a plot aside for cane, they were still dependent upon and often severely exploited by the landowners in Bihar (the *zamindars*) who were positioned higher up in the capitalist hierarchy. Peasants did resist, but by 1950 the big landowners-cum-industrialists also formed the new political power elite in Bihar, replacing British government officers and private European planters. Nonetheless, the cane cultivators-cum-*gur* producers had more options than workers employed in the large industrial sugar factories. They could still either deliver their cane to these factories or produce *gur* as an additional source of income and currency in the local economy. They also were better positioned in the existing colonial agrarian landscape in Bihar, than were landless agricultural laborers.<sup>23</sup>

While the *gur* industry and large factories competed for the same raw material, there was also an overlapping and shared interest between the *gur* and refined-sugar sectors. Even though large-scale sugar concerns were technologically advantaged, and their owners much better positioned in the existing colonial class- and caste-based hierarchical political economy, the small-scale *gur* producers and large-scale sugar concerns were under the spell of imperial sugar policies that had not prioritised the Indian sugar industry since Cobdenism had turned British sugar policies towards free trade and low sugar prices. Since 1864 Britain, at that time the largest sugar consumer in the world, had tried to strike a balance between the interests of the consumers and its refining industry, which accepted the non-centrifugal *khandsaris* sugar as unrefined sugar and thus gave the Indian traditional sugars an advantaged position in comparison to colonial centrifugal sugar. However, in the 1880s cheap refined beet sugar from Germany pushed the *khandsaris* from the British market and at the turn of the twentieth century these even threatened the *gur* and *khandsaris* sectors in India itself. In this way and united in a symbiotic dependency, both were firmly embedded in the global capitalist economy. Both the *gur* sector and the large sugar factories had responded to foreign competition by resorting to technological innovations that both enhanced the quality of their sugar and reduced production costs. Both in their way innovated the ancient forms of production in which they had been embedded in mutual dependency. They therefore played a creative role in India’s industrialisation. Although the extent and scale of their transformation differed, both came out with more competitive products. While engaged in competitive struggles to capture the domestic markets, *gur* held the better cards.

### **Economic lives of the ‘brownish’ *bidi* and ‘white’ cigarettes**

At the turn of the twentieth century, the cultivation of tobacco plants of different types for commercial purposes had a history of more than three hundred years in British India.<sup>24</sup> Like sugar it had been an important commodity for the East India Company merchants, who competed with other foreign

---

<sup>22</sup> Bosma (2013), p.263.

<sup>23</sup> P. Robb, *The Evolution of British Policy towards Indian Politics 1880-1920. Essays on Colonial Attitudes, Imperial Strategies, and Bihar*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992. pp.97-119.

<sup>24</sup> See Sinha-Kerkhoff (2014).

powers as well as with local traders. When tobacco cultivation was introduced in Bengal and elsewhere in the seventeenth century, it soon found an expanding market regionally and beyond, becoming a good source of revenue for the Mughals.<sup>25</sup> Tobacco sellers, dealers in semi-luxuries, were aplenty, which made their margins of profit rather small. During the nineteenth century, tobacco became quotidian in many parts of India.

The way tobacco was consumed, however, changed over time and place. Different classes, genders, different moments of life cycles, religious or ethnic communities each had their own consumption practices of either smoking tobacco or using it as snuff, ‘a drink’ in the form of nicotine water, or as chew.<sup>26</sup> There were also all sorts of pipes or waterpipes such as the *chillum* and cigars such as *cheroots* all using their own types of tobacco plants or parts thereof.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, there were existing smoking and non-smoking practices that changed with the addition of or even their exchange for tobacco: *paan* (betel) chewing and use of cannabis.<sup>28</sup>

Machine-made cigarettes became a global product in the early twentieth century through the British American Tobacco Company (BAT), a joint enterprise established by the American Tobacco Company and UK’s Imperial Tobacco.<sup>29</sup> While the two companies kept their home markets for themselves, cigarettes in the rest of the world were to be supplied by BAT. Various packaging and marketing strategies catered to different countries, of which India and China seemed to have the most promising markets. Once BAT had made successful inroads into the Chinese market, it began to exploit other opportunities in particular in India.<sup>30</sup>

Globally, it was the hand-rolled cigarette that for a long time remained more popular among smokers than the newly introduced machine-made cigarettes produced for mass-consumption.<sup>31</sup> However, India did not experiment with hand-rolled cigarettes. At the same time, machine-made cigarettes would never conquer the Indian market entirely, in contrast to almost everywhere else in the world. Nevertheless, produced in India with the help of British capital and followed by national efforts to also bring forth an Indian cigarette that likewise was adopted to local tastes, regional tobacco varieties and the pockets of the less well-off classes, the production and consumption of machine-

---

<sup>25</sup> See B. G. Gokhale, ‘Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century India’, *Agricultural History*, 48:4 (1974). See also R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Mughal Empire*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 2007, p.729.

<sup>26</sup> See Shibani Roy & S. H. M. Rizvi, *Nicotine Water to Heroin*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1986; E. R. Billings, *Tobacco: Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacture and Commerce, with an Account of its Various Modes of Use, from its First Discovery until Now, with Illustrations by Popular Artists*, Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1875.

<sup>27</sup> A *chillum* is a small pipe that later on also became part of waterpipes. A *cheroot* is a cigar that is truncated at both ends. William Crooke (ed.), *Hobson-Jobson. A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1903, pp.188-9, 195

<sup>28</sup> See S. N. Chanda, *The Tobacco Story from Myth to Mayhem*, New Delhi & London: Bloomsbury, 2017; Ram Manohar, ‘Smoking and Ayurvedic Medicine in India’, in Sander L. Gilman & Zhou Xun (eds), *Smoke a Global History of Smoking*, London: Reaktion Books, 2004, pp.68-76.

<sup>29</sup> J. Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 234.

<sup>30</sup> See Howard Cox, *The Global Cigarette. Origins and Evolution of British American Tobacco 1880-1945*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Laird Jones, ‘East African Tobacco Wars: Marketing machine vs. hand-rolled cigarettes, 1880-1914’, paper given at *Rethinking Tobacco History* workshop, University of Cologne, 2021.



made cigarettes did rapidly increase.<sup>32</sup> Prior to this, such cigarettes were initially imported from the UK, the USA, Egypt and Turkey, as was noticed by colonial official J. E. O'Connor in 1903:

[Within the last three or four years] a singular modification of popular taste has been witnessed, one which hardly would have been possible in such a country and amongst such a people. Some enterprising firms in Europe thought they saw an opening in India for the Native consumption of American tobacco in cigarettes in supersession of the *hookah* (or water-pipe) still commonly used by the people. Acting upon this idea they imported cigarettes in increasing quantity at lower rates bringing them within the reach of the masses, and in a very short time the arrangements made for bringing the cigarettes within the easy reach of the consumer had a very manifest effect.<sup>33</sup>

This increased internal demand for imported cigarettes mainly came from the expatriate community. Yet by the beginning of the twentieth century, better-off English-educated Indians also appreciated them, particularly as a status symbol, distinguishing them from the masses. Meanwhile, the large US- and UK-based cigarette concerns became most active in advertising their products amongst residents in British India. For instance, cigarettes manufactured in Bristol were exported to British India, where such foreign cigarettes and other imported tobacco products like cigars and pipe tobaccos were retailed in specialised outlets by tobacconists in major cities, foremost in Calcutta the capital of British India till 1912.<sup>34</sup>

Increased demand in British India, the imposition of import duties on unprocessed as well as processed tobacco and the advocacy of British colonial officials in favour of the establishment of an import-substituting tobacco industry in India, caused BAT to change its policy in Calcutta.<sup>35</sup> First of all, they established a branch of the Imperial Tobacco Company in Calcutta, which in addition to selling cigarettes in the Indian market, also began to manufacture its own and much cheaper cigarettes. This conglomerate quickly established other factories and tobacco-leaf development concerns all over India, in particular in Guntur, in the South.<sup>36</sup> However, following an earlier attempt at setting up a cigarette factory in Karachi, the first successful cigarette factory was started by the Peninsular Tobacco Company in Monghyr, Bihar (at the time still part of Bengal) in 1905. In order to reach out beyond the Indian upper class and expatriate customers, this factory started producing a low-cost cigarette that nevertheless introduced consumers to “the pleasures of smoking cigarettes”.<sup>37</sup> Helped by government policies that supported research into more robust seed and plant varieties as well as into curing methods, and that were geared in particular to the cigarette tobaccos, the future of this large-scale tobacco industry seemed bright in British India.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Goodman (1993), p.95.

<sup>33</sup> G. Watt, *The Commercial Products of India being an Abridgement of 'the Dictionary of the Economic Products of India'*, London: John Murray, 1908, pp.810-11.

<sup>34</sup> Howard Cox, 'Growth and Ownership in the International Tobacco Industry', *Business History* 31:1 (1989), p.53.

<sup>35</sup> R. Lethbridge, 'The Enhanced Duties on Indian Tea and Tobacco', *The Imperial Asiatic Quarterly Review and Oriental and Colonial Record* 18:35 (1904); H. B. Lees Smith, *India and the Tariff Problem*, London: Constable & Company, 1909.

<sup>36</sup> Indian Leaf Tobacco Development Co., *Indian Tobacco Leaves. A Story of Co-operation in India*, London: Harrison & Sons, 1943.

<sup>37</sup> C. Basu, *Challenge and Change: The ITC Story: 1910-1985*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1988, p.13.

<sup>38</sup> Sinha-Kerkhoff (2014), pp.173-204.

British officers working for Imperial Tobacco in Bengal promoted sales both of imported cigarettes and increasingly of those manufactured in Monghyr. These machine-made cigarettes were expected to replace other tobacco-consumption traditions, in particular water-pipe smoking. This strategy seemed to have worked well in other countries like Egypt.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, during the first quarter of the twentieth century these pioneers in British India also started advertising their smokes amongst a population that used tobacco mostly in a water pipe (*hookah*) that had a coconut as its base or who were used to chewing tobacco. Innovative advertisement strategies were started in Monghyr, and in addition to a factory with huge imported machinery and engines, a printing press was installed. The use of a white cigarette was demonstrated in rural areas all over Bihar and beyond and the (male) public was attracted to the smoke by the colourful packets that were fabricated in Monghyr and bore brands such as ‘Elephant’. Indeed, the rhythms of modern institutions such as tea plantations and jute factories had transformed the once favoured *hookah* into a cumbersome smoking device. However, as the British management in Monghyr and elsewhere also had noticed, female and male (migrant) workers did not take to cigarettes produced in their large-scale enterprise but smoked something they called *bidis*.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, according to several accounts on tobacco-consumption habits in India, *bidi* apparently only came into existence at the beginning of the twentieth century – or least only then tremendously increased. More importantly, it did not start with tobacco but with particular leaves found in forests. For instance, Sarda’s handbook of the Indian *bidi* industry mentions that in the forests surrounding Bastar and Bilaspur (now in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh), forest dwellers (now often labelled ‘*adivasis*’ or ‘tribals’) used to inhale the smoke of the green *tendu* leaf for medicinal purposes.<sup>41</sup> Pimpalpure argued that during the winter and rainy season, these “innocent people” could not get dry leaves hence they started smoking green leaves. It was only around the turn of the twentieth century that others (i.e. non-forest dwellers) in search of cheaper alternatives to foreign cigars and less cumbersome smoking gear than the existing *hookahs* launched the idea that these leaves could be filled with cheap tobacco parts. What is more, though the forest inhabitants were acquainted with tobacco, they themselves had often used this as chew or in different kinds of pipes. It thus appears that the *bidi* was a relatively modern invention that served the demands of the urban poor as well as offered an attractive enterprise for Indian businessmen and traders. Thus, though the leaf was known to have existed for centuries, only by the beginning of the twentieth century when cured tobacco was rolled in them did they gain economic value. Though other leaves, like the *astra*, were also used, the *tendu* leaf became most popular among businessmen as it was available in most Indian forests (including the southern parts of Bihar), could be stored for a long time and could be moistened when needed for making *bidis* to regain their rolling ability. It also was found that it blended very well with the taste of tobacco.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Rielli Shechter, *Smoking Culture and Economy in the Middle East. The Egyptian Tobacco Market 1850-2000*, I. B. Tauris: London, 2006; Relli Shechter, ‘Prosumption as Glocal History: Inconspicuous Consumption and Cigarette Production in Egypt, 1890-1939’, paper presented at *Rethinking Tobacco History* workshop, University of Cologne, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Basu (1988), p.35.

<sup>41</sup> K. B. Sarda, *A Handbook of the Indian Bidi Industry*, Camel House: Nasik, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> Nilima Pimpalpure, ‘Tendu Leaf and Bidis,’ *Asian Agri-History*, 3:2 (1999), pp.111-17.

Nevertheless, it is possible that some form of *bidi* existed in India for centuries. Laufer, in his 1924 description of tobacco and its use in Asia, described how in seventeenth-century southern India “for want of pipes” particular cigarettes known as ‘*buncos*’ were in fashion in India. A *bunco* was:

a little tobacco wrapped up in the leaf of a tree, about the bigness of one’s little finger, they light one end, and draw the smoke thro’ the other; these are curiously made up, and sold twenty to thirty in a bundle.<sup>43</sup>

This was a habit in Southeast Asia as well as on the Coromandel Coast in southern India during the eighteenth century. Yet the Hobson-Jobsen glossary indicates that the term *bidi* was not in use during the middle of the nineteenth century in British India. At the same time, the use of tobacco (and kindred terms) was given in this dictionary as well as terms *hookah*, *cheroot* and *bunco*.<sup>44</sup> The latter was defined as an old Malay word that meant “a wrapper, bundle, thing wrapped” and which at the time was similar to the *cheroot*. A *cheroot* was known as a special sort of Indian cigar, a roll of tobacco, truncated at both ends. However, as this catered to a different local and international market, it was not in direct competition with machine-made cigarettes, in the way that the *bidi* was.

It would seem that the term *bidi* was relatively new, although it may have been derived ‘*beeda*’, a word in Marwari referring to a betel leaf-wrapped offering of betel nuts, herbs and condiments, that was “a symbol of esteem and display of respect and reverence across the Indian subcontinent at the time”.<sup>45</sup> The mass consumption of tobacco in the manner of using a *tendu* leaf was relatively new as well. It was the inhabitants of forests who became the sellers of this leaf to urban contractors. This process was described in an ethnographic report published in 1946 concerning the ‘Kol Tribe of Central India’. Though this tribal group chewed tobacco, “during the months of May and June the leaves of the *tendu* tree (*Diosyprus melanoxylon*) are picked [often by women] for use in the *bidi* manufacture”. These leaves were collected in the mornings and evenings and “tied in bundles of one hundred each to be sold to the local contractor”. Of course, these *adivasis* had other sources of income, but the money earned in this way could be used to pay debts, it was reported.<sup>46</sup>

It was reported that the “merchandise of the *beedis* as an article is believed to have started about 1905 to 1907 in Bihar” itself.<sup>47</sup> Whether it had started in Bihar can be disputed, but it was certainly in Bihar that Indian merchants – in a war with cheap cigarettes produced among others by the Monghyr factory – decided to expand the manufacture of *bidis*.<sup>48</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, demand was high. Their production furnished, according to a report on ‘cottage industries’ in Bengal, a “profitable employment [as owners] to a wide range of men”, more specially “local Muhammadans” and “Gujaratis” – often Marwaris. These men had come to Bihar to engage in this lucrative enterprise that required “but little capital”. Besides, there was a preference among certain classes of men for this kind of smoker, whereas domestic demand for machine-made cigarettes

---

<sup>43</sup> B. Laufer, *Tobacco and its Use in Asia*, Anthropology Leaflet 18, Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1924.

<sup>44</sup> Compton Mackenzie, *Sublime Tobacco*, London: Windus 1957, p.311.

<sup>45</sup> P. Lal, ‘Bidi – A short History’, *Current Science* 96:10 (2009), p.1335.

<sup>46</sup> Walter Griffiths, *The Kol Tribe of Central India*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1946, pp. 265-8.

<sup>47</sup> Forest Research Institute Dehra Dun, ‘A Short note on the Bidi leaf Industry’, *Indian Forest Leaflet* 60 (1943).

<sup>48</sup> Uday Kumar Varma & M. M. Rehman, *Tobacco, Tendu Leaf and Beedi Workers in India. Problems & Prospects*, Delhi: Shipra 2005, p.2.

produced by the factory in Monghyr was still very limited.<sup>49</sup> The Bihar District Gazetteer mentioned that Gujaratis had indeed come from far to the forested regions of Bihar as although tobacco grew in abundance in Gujarat, the (cheaply obtained) *tendu* leaves for the outer cover of *bidis* were found in abundance in the Santal Parganas and other forested neighbouring districts of Bihar. Besides, the principal markets for this commodity were “the mining areas of Bihar and Bengal and the tea gardens of Assam”. “Labour [in Bihar] is also very cheap here,” the Gazetteer continued, “if compared to the employees of other areas”, as the rollers would “accept anything”. Moreover, it was explained, the “employees do not depend totally upon the earning from this industry for their livelihood.”<sup>50</sup>

However, the introduction of industrial cigarette enterprise in Bihar running on foreign capital and management but using Indian labour and local tobacco leaf, as well as this relatively new small-scale all-Indian *bidi* industry in the region, both started replacing the small-scale traditional *hookah* industry. It was this tobacco sector, which was still important in the late nineteenth century, that declined,<sup>51</sup> with those formerly involved possibly joining the labour force working in the cigarette industry. The large-scale factory that was established in the Basdeopur of Monghyr, electrically operated with Lancashire-made boilers and high-pressure compound engines, was the British answer to more traditional ways of smoking.<sup>52</sup> The *bidi* sector was organised somewhat differently. For example, in close proximity to the cigarette factory near the Nawadih railway station (Jhajha) there was a “thriving trade” in *bidis*, and the tribal Santals and Naiyas got “one piece per *binda*, or small bundle of [...] leaves, and they can pluck and bring in six to eight *bindas* a day”. The “actual makers” of the *bidis* received 4 annas per thousand, which they could roll in a day, but the manufacturer for whom they worked and who was often stationed in Kolkata received Re. 1-Re.1-4-0 per thousand *bidis*.<sup>53</sup> As with *gur*, most *bidi* workshops remained unregistered, and it is therefore impossible to provide proper quantifications. However, unlike *gur* manufacturing, *bidi*-rolling was an ‘all-indigenous’ affair with no European capital involved. Moreover, even though the government of India greatly stimulated tobacco research in Pusa, this research was conducted in close consultation with BAT and concentrated almost solely on a variety of experiments that could yield a type of tobacco plant that would suit as fillers in the ‘white’ cigarettes.<sup>54</sup>

The Indian Leaf Tobacco Development Company had also been established in Bihar and had ensured deliveries by former (European) indigo planters, who got involved in tobacco cultivation. Most of them contracted in turn local cultivators who predominantly cultivated it on a share-cropping basis. These tobacco growers could not manufacture their produce into *bidis*, because this required other tobacco varieties and curing methods and, of course, the *tendu* leaf to use as *bidi* wrapper.

---

<sup>49</sup> Government of Bengal Department of Industries, *Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries of Bengal*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1929, p.45; G. Birdwood, ‘The Foreign Trade of India for the Year 1906-1907’, *Journal of the Society of Arts* 55:2864 (1907), p.1073.

<sup>50</sup> P. C. Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteers. (Santal Parganas)*, Patna: Superintendent, Secretariat Press, 1965, pp.254-5.

<sup>51</sup> G. A. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life being a Discursive Catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of that Province with many Illustrations from Photographs taken by the Author, prepared under Orders of the Government of Bengal*, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975 [1885], pp.95-7; A Hindoo, ‘Smoking in India’, *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly*, 24 September, 1888.

<sup>52</sup> L. S. S. O’Malley, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers (Monghyr)*, New Delhi: Logos Press, 2007 [1926], pp.145-6. Shechter (2021) has shown how this policy was similar in other countries like Egypt, where a cigarette was introduced with the help of mostly foreign capital.

<sup>53</sup> O’Malley (2007), p.154.

<sup>54</sup> Sinha-Kerkhoff (2014).

However, only a few former indigo planters started cultivating Virginia tobacco; and it was also not an attractive alternative for local peasants who either preferred growing chewing tobacco or ignored tobacco altogether, preferring sugarcane or non-cash crop cultivation instead. Indeed, it became evident by the 1920s that in many districts, sugarcane and not tobacco had taken the place of indigo. As a result, the cigarette factory in Monghyr increasingly imported tobacco from southern India.<sup>55</sup>

Also, unlike *gur* manufacture, *bidi* rolling was normally not integrated in tobacco-cultivation activities. Even if *bidi* rollers were household-based, they were normally wage workers and did not possess the facilities and resources to produce *bidis* themselves. There was thus no connection between *bidi* manufacture and tobacco growers in Bihar. British planters also had had no interest in *bidi* manufacturing, yet some had started growing cigarette tobacco for the factory in Monghyr.<sup>56</sup> However, Bihar is still known for its cultivation of chewing and *hookah* tobaccos, which received government support after 1920 when it was decided that the southern parts of British India produced a better kind of cigarette tobacco than Bihar.<sup>57</sup>

Bihar is still known for its small-scale *bidi* rolling industry and much less for the cigarette factory in Monghyr. Here, although the number of rollers employed in a *bidi* shop became less, the total number of such workshops increased. While the workforce had previously been adult men, increasingly women and children were employed to roll on a part-time basis. By 1950, most of the factories were unorganised and based in village households instead of formal urban establishments. Whereas the Monghyr factory was supported in different ways by the government, many government reports did not even recognise the existence this ‘cottage’ industry. Nevertheless, the *bidi* industry came out with innovations of its own, such as self-lighting *bidis*, advertised as:

a new invention and eliminates all the inconveniences of matches, experienced generally in railways, trams, motor cars, lorries or in strong wind. It is most convenient to carry in the pocket and you never feel small when you have biris and no matches.

However, these never became popular as “our experience shows the market is not prepared to pay anything extra for convenience and good packing that we give”.<sup>58</sup> At the same time there was an increase of cheap machine-made cigarettes by small Indian enterprises. Thus, both *bidis* and cheap cigarettes were competing for the favour of poor consumers;<sup>59</sup> but in the end, it was the small-scale *bidi* industry that triumphed.

### **Political-cultural lives of sugar and tobacco during *Swadeshi* times**

An analysis of the *Swadeshi* movement points out that although *swadeshi* was originally conceived merely as a boycott of foreign goods and a clarion call to buy indigenous instead of foreign goods, it gradually attained a much more comprehensive character and became a concrete symbol of

---

<sup>55</sup> See Basu (1988)

<sup>56</sup> See Sinha-Kerkhoff (2014).

<sup>57</sup> L. P. Singh, *Economics of Tobacco Cultivation, Production and Exchange*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992, pp.15-16.

<sup>58</sup> Central Board of Revenue, Central Excise Branch, File No.87- Exc/36 1936.

<sup>59</sup> Haruka Yanagisawa, ‘Growth of Small-scale Industries and Changes in Consumption Patterns in South India, 1910s-1950s’, in Abigail McGowan Haynes, Tithankar Roy and Haruka Yanagisawa (eds), *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp.58-9.

nationalism that was worked out in detail by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>60</sup> *Swadeshi* epitomised the fierce economic competition between indigenous small-scale industrialists and powerful British-owned firms.<sup>61</sup> It also echoed disillusionment with the imperial rulers amongst some Indian (English-educated) middle-class communities, who not only embarked upon rethinking ‘modernity’ and directions of national development, but also initiated consumer boycotts and established indigenous enterprises.<sup>62</sup> A group of nationalist-minded politicians and entrepreneurs proposed alternative modes of commercialisation questioning a political economy defined by colonial and indeed racial hierarchies. Subsequently, small-scale and often village-based manufacturing was promoted, and the nationalist elites started or urged other Indians to start their own small-scale *swadeshi* industries.<sup>63</sup> Such small factories, often unregistered, offered alternative products to replace the imports. Crucially, this *swadeshi* spirit affected tobacco and sugarcane in British India, with lasting impact on cultivation, consumption, import-export, production as well as advertising strategies.

We have already discussed the changing production and consumption patterns of sugar and tobacco in Bihar during the first part of the twentieth century. From that vantage point both variants, the global and local, were each in their own way modern. However, in the context of increased alienation between colonisers and colonised as well as rising class conflict between *kisans* (peasants) and landowners (*zamindars*), and between Indian entrepreneurs and foreign capitalists, perceptions of the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ started changing – in particular under the influence of national leaders such as Gandhi.<sup>64</sup> Hence, the very presence of British rule and its embodiment, in terms of capital-intensive technology, was rebuffed and alternatives were proposed and materialised. Non-cooperation, non-payment of rent movements, (commodity) boycotts and quit India movements all addressed the ‘foreign’ and the ‘foreigner’. Simultaneously, the struggle for *swaraj* (self-rule) linked up with *swadeshi* (i.e. related to the ‘self’, the ‘own country’ and ‘self-reliance’). In this scenario, consumer items as well as their production modes became differently valued. This pertained particularly to *gur* and white sugar, and *bidis* and white cigarettes, as well as their production modes – i.e. large-scale industrial enterprise and small-scale industrialisation. These four commodities became juxtaposed as either ‘foreign’ or ‘indigenous’, and the ideology of *swadeshi* supported ‘Indianisation’ of sectors held by the British. Indianisation was lived out on the ground through ‘traditionalisation’ of ‘modern’ consumer items – i.e. an Indian appropriation of modernity, albeit with different implications for the competitiveness of our four commodities.<sup>65</sup>

Well before the end of the nineteenth century tobacco was perceived as ‘indigenous’. Inhaling tobacco through the *hookah* was defined as smoking in ‘oriental style’, exhibiting the embedding of

---

<sup>60</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973, pp.129-31, 137-48.

<sup>61</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Delhi: MacMillan India, 1983.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Sartori, ‘The Categorical Logic of Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904-1908’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23:1&2 (2003), pp.271-85.

<sup>63</sup> See Amit Bhattacharyya, ‘Random Notes on Bengali Enterprise 1900-1920’, *Journal of History* (Jadavpur University of Calcutta) 5 (1984). See also Amit Bhattacharyya, *Swadeshi Enterprise in Bengal 1900-1920*, Calcutta: Sm. Mita Bhattacharyya, 1986; Amit Bhattacharyya, *Swadeshi Enterprise in Bengal: 1921-47*, Kolkata: Setu Prakashani, 1995; M. K. U. Molla, *The New Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam*, The Institute of Bangladesh Studies: Rajshahi, 1981, pp.102-51.

<sup>64</sup> Kaushal Kishore Sharma, *Agrarian Movements and Congress Politics in Bihar*, Delhi: Anamika Prakashan, 1989; Saila Kumar Ghosh, *Colonial Modernization and Gandhi*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> See Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, ‘Modernization in Eastern India. Social-Cultural Diffusion of Tobacco Consumption’, paper presented at BASAS Conference, Exeter, 2018.

a once ‘exotic’ product.<sup>66</sup> Waterpipes were manufactured in various ways and made out of different materials to suit different classes – the *hookah* as the ‘Indian’ water-pipe was always “based on the idea of passing hot smoke through water in order to cool and purify tobacco of toxic substances”.<sup>67</sup> In early nineteenth-century India both *Sahibs* and British women took to this habit of consuming tobacco in the ‘Oriental’ way.<sup>68</sup> Evident from riddles, legends, sayings, songs, proverbs, paintings and even sculpture, tobacco and the *hookah* were thus thought of as part of ‘Indian culture’ by the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

However, this custom of *hookah* smoking by Britishers encountered increasing public condemnation for being un-British, unhygienic, primitive and outdated – particularly after the Mutiny of 1858. It lost ground in favour of European pipes, cigars and later on machine-made cigarettes. Indian *babus* followed this trend. Ironically, during the early 1920s cigarette boycotts would be supported by some of these very *babus* who by the beginning of the twentieth century had abandoned the *hookah* and through the new and foreign cigarettes had refashioned themselves as ‘modern middle classes’ in colonial India. Importantly, initially in Bihar these classes, demanding their own independence from Bengal, had taken an ‘anti-*swadeshi*’ standpoint as a deliberate tactic.<sup>70</sup> Yet later on, and although often pro-British in other contexts and against boycotts where many other ‘foreign’ consumer items were concerned during the 1920s, some commercial communities in Bihar along with others in urban India supported boycotts against imported cigarettes as well as those manufactured by the factory in Monghyr. Meanwhile, retailers of the ‘foreign’ cigarettes were easy targets for nationalist leaders, who exposed them as a ‘comprador bourgeoisie’.<sup>71</sup> Tobacconists in some cities were picketed and cigarettes burnt during boycott actions. As the demand for cigarettes declined, elsewhere in India businessmen were left with no other choice than to go along with the cigarette boycott and/or start supporting ‘indigenous’ alternatives. Some among these Indian business classes, in particular those located in Calcutta, set up *swadeshi* enterprises during the years from 1903 to 1908, producing a cheaper kind of cigarettes than those imported from abroad and even cheaper than those the Monghyr factory had started producing.<sup>72</sup>

With the expansion of nationalism towards the all-India movement, such ‘Indian’ cigarette factories also started elsewhere. In 1930, the Golden Tobacco Company began in Bombay to produce brands such as ‘Panama’, ‘Flair’, ‘Chancellor’, ‘Esquire’, ‘Legend’ and ‘Burton’. Significantly, many such Indian-based and financed companies (also) came out with alternative brand names to underline that these cigarettes were not foreign but made in India, by Indians and with Indian capital. Such a

---

<sup>66</sup> Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, ‘Embedding Cigarette Tobacco in Colonial Bihar (India): A Multi-Dimensional Task’, in Willem van Schendel (ed.), *Embedding Agricultural Commodities: Using Historical Evidence, 1840s-1940s*, London: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> See C. S. Ray, ‘The Hookah – the Indian Waterpipe’, *Current Science*, 96:10 (2009).

<sup>68</sup> Pran Nevile, ‘When Sahib was Hooked to Hookah’ in Pran Neville (ed.), *Sahib’s India. Vignettes from the Raj*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010. See also Percival Spear, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century Indi*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.75-82.

<sup>69</sup> Sinha-Kerkhoff (2014), p.90.

<sup>70</sup> Narendra Jha, *The Making of Bihar and Biharis Colonialism, Politics and Culture in Modern India c. 1870-1912*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2012, p.216

<sup>71</sup> S. Bhattacharya, ‘Cotton Mills and Spinning Wheels: Swadeshi and the Indian Capitalist Class, 1920-22’, in K. N. Panikar (ed.), *National and Left Movements in India*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980, pp.27-45; Suniti Kumar Ghosh, ‘Indian Bourgeoisie and Imperialism’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 23:45-47 (1988), pp.2445-7, 2449-58.

<sup>72</sup> Bhattacharyya (1986), pp.167-86; Cox (2000), pp.207-209.

firm was Vazir Sultan Tobacco (VST), founded in Hyderabad in 1916, which in fact was taken over by Imperial Tobacco later on. VST had come out with 'Charminar' and 'Zaffran' cigarettes. National India Tobacco in Bombay manufactured 'Star of India Cigarettes', and the front image on the package portrayed a Nehru-cap-wearing man, while the back image added that the cigarettes were "guaranteed to be made from best matured *Indian* Virginia tobacco with *Indian* labour & capital" and emphasised that "only the cigarette paper" was "Egyptian" (i.e. foreign). The Great Indian Confectionery MFG Co. in Bombay branded its cigarettes 'Rashtriya'. The Osmanieh Cigarette Company, which had registered branches in Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay, sold 'Hind Mata' cigarettes and added a similar text but in Hindi. A tobacconist for Nizam, Vazeer & G.T. Nizam cigarettes, which were manufactured in Bombay by John Petrino & Co., issued a pamphlet that stated in English: "Support the Indian industry by smoking guaranteed Indian made Nizam, Vazeer & Gold Tipped Nizam." This firm that also produced 'Taj No.1 Cigarettes' sold in packets of ten that were, according to the text on the pamphlet, "Made in India! By Indians! For Indians!".<sup>73</sup>

Once such *swadeshi* activities started in Calcutta, BAT in London changed its business strategy. As mentioned above, initially the firm had imported cigarettes from England and tried to sell them in the Indian domestic markets. But due to the boycotts, as well as the imposition by the Government of India of a substantial rise in tobacco import duties in 1910 as a protectionist measure, the factory in Bihar had been established with the aim of producing "low-grade cigarettes for domestic consumers".<sup>74</sup> This relocation of production demonstrates the interdependence that existed between economic and political regimes that governed the globalisation of capitalism. As Howard Cox put it:

As the scale of output in many industries adjusted to accommodate the automation of production, large-scale corporations developed which in turn provided a novel form of international economic expansion. Imperial Tobacco in Bihar greatly feared developments in the domestic markets during *swadeshi* periods. Facing the explosion of 'bazaar brands' launched by Indian enterprises, its European management realized that in order to remain competitive in the domestic market, they had to produce cheap cigarettes.<sup>75</sup>

In order to maintain its position in the Indian tobacco markets, Imperial Tobacco, like Indian capitalists, also resorted to changing packaging and other advertising strategies. The ITC also tried to make their still 'white' cigarettes look darker and thus 'traditionalise' or 'Indianise' them.<sup>76</sup> However, this transnational company had feared the wrong enemy. It was not the cheap white cigarettes produced by Indian *swadeshi* capitalist enterprise that threatened their profits but the small-scale production of brownish *bidis*.

In fact, the Indian *swadeshi* cigarettes could never compete with Imperial Tobacco. Despite vigorous attempts to present their 'white' (modern) cigarettes as 'brown' (traditional) (i.e. through

---

<sup>73</sup> For more details see Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, 'Wooing Indians with new smokes', in Bhaswati Bhattacharya and Henrike Donner (ed.), *Globalising Everyday Consumption in India. History and Ethnography*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2020, pp.98-121.

<sup>74</sup> See Howard Cox, 'International Business, the State and industrialisation in India: Early Growth in the Indian Cigarette Industry, 1900-1919', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 27:3 (1990); Howard Cox, 'Evolución del mercado mundial de cigarillos: la internacionalización de las empresas antes de 1945', *Informacion Comercial Espanola* 812 (2004), pp.125-36.

<sup>75</sup> See Cox (2000).

<sup>76</sup> Sinha-Kerkhoff (2020), pp.102-103.



traditionalisation of the modern), Indian capitalists were unsuccessful in their efforts to acquire a niche in domestic markets. Possessing limited capital but needing a lot for purchase of flue curing tobacco technology, foreign-made machinery, power engines and large-scale factories to accommodate them as well as cigarette paper and printing facilities for advertisements, to mention only the capital investments needed, most of them vanished quickly and some of them were taken over by Imperial Tobacco. Imperial Tobacco's white tobacco commodities therefore seemed safe. Nevertheless, the Bihar and Orissa Report of 1930-1931 rang an alarm bell:

The large tobacco factory at Monghyr had a bad year on account of the boycott of European style of cigarettes, and had to reduce the staff from about 3,000 to 1,200. The boycott caused a temporary boom in locally-made [*bidis*], which may [leave] a permanent mark on that industry.<sup>77</sup>

The report's prediction proved right. The *bidi* industry experienced a considerable boom in particular during the 1920s and the 1930s, which had disastrous effect on the newly established *swadeshi* cigarette factories also financed by Indian capital. What is more, even this *bidi* industry had come out with their own advertisement strategies, and some of them even designed their own packet covers and had their own brands – such as Hindmata Chhap by the General Bidi Company.<sup>78</sup> Though perhaps not due to advertising, the *bidi* boom nevertheless seriously impacted the British-American-financed Imperial Tobacco in Monghyr, which produced cheap 'European style' cigarettes.<sup>79</sup> During boycott actions in the early 1930s, this enterprise closed down its departments for a short while, although its management felt that "the buy *swadeshi* propaganda" would not become "a permanent feature in Indian life". Nevertheless, the new reality was that *bidi* consumption had tremendously increased, because most likely it was cheaper than even the cheapest cigarette manufactured by Imperial's factories or Indian enterprises. One of Imperial's managers stated that even "very poor people" could afford *bidis*.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the ordinary *bidi* and not cheap cigarettes became "a common man's smoke".<sup>81</sup>

Thus, the rapidly changing political landscape of early twentieth century India almost overnight turned the *bidis*, recent arrivals in domestic tobacco markets that had almost replaced the existing *hookah*, into a traditional and indigenous product. While cheap cigarettes produced by the same *swadeshi* capitalists remained 'white', *bidis* surely were 'Indian' and a symbol of Indian (male) culture and identity. This could be seen in advertising strategies. However, while firmly embedded in Indian society, *bidis* stayed in a symbiotic relation with the factory cigarettes. Produced in small-scale units and large-scale concerns respectively, both smokes formed an organic formation entrenched in tobacco worlds in which the capitalist mode of production was dominant. Ironically, *bidis* were bought by the very workers who manufactured the competing product in the newly established modern large-scale industries in British India during processes of industrialisation.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> P. T. Mansfield, *Bihar and Orissa Report of 1930-1931*, Superintendent Government Printing Bihar and Orissa Patna, 1932, p.107.

<sup>78</sup> Sinha-Kerkhoff (2020), p.113.

<sup>79</sup> See Cox (2000).

<sup>80</sup> GDK, 'Buy Swadeshi (Indian)', *Indian Journal of Economics*, 13:1 (1932), pp.89-91.

<sup>81</sup> Y. Chauhan, *History and Struggles of Beedi Workers in India*, New Delhi: AITUC, 2001, p.9.

<sup>82</sup> See D. R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, Oxford & London: Oxford University Press Press & Humphrey Milford, 1933.

A similar symbolic dichotomy existed between brownish *gur* and white sugar. In Bihar both sugars were produced, traded and consumed even before interference by colonial traders and entrepreneurs.<sup>83</sup> During the last part of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, both cane-based commodities were in flux due to the application of new technologies, curing and refining methods.<sup>84</sup> *Gur* was produced in small-scale enterprises through new cane varieties, crushing machines and modified refinery processes, and white sugar in large-scale highly mechanised production methods and production. Both could be perceived as different outcomes of similar industrialisation processes that took place in Bihar at the time. Moreover, all new machinery and technological improvement and scientific knowledge applied for the ‘improvement’ of their quality came through colonial officers, planters and scientists. Both were produced by Indian workers. Indeed, it was first British planters who started manufacture of sugar in large-scale factories through the vacuum pan process. However, soon Indian capitalists came to dominate the industry in Bihar and capital was “no longer the exclusive bastion” of the colonising race. British planters introduced the Beheea cane crushers to replace the pestle-and-mortar mills.<sup>85</sup> *Gur* production went through successive stages of innovation to become a product very different from how it was described in the early nineteenth century – namely as a “black and unsightly mass of concentrated cane juice with all its impurities”.<sup>86</sup> The main difference in the methods of production of *gur* and factory sugar was their scale and labour intensity. This ‘small-scale industry’ had a huge labour-absorbing capacity compared with large-scale sugar concerns at the time.<sup>87</sup>

*Gur* was once despised as too ‘blackish’ and its production methods disavowed as ‘primitive’ and in need of improvement. As in the case of cigarette tobacco, British efforts to improve the quality of sugar was aimed at boosting Indian cane processed by large-scale concerns in Bihar’s countryside, so as to make imports from Java redundant. However, this policy further sharpened the dichotomy between brownish *gur* and the highly refined white sugar, which became vulnerable in the volatile political-cultural constellation in British India to demonisation by nationalist leaders, and in particular by Mahatma Gandhi himself, who inspired Indian capitalists to start small-scale enterprise and boycott imported commodities. In such a political-economy, ‘white sugar’ lost its elevated status and increasingly became or remained associated with ‘white domination’, despite the fact that it was made by Indian labour, in Indian factories and increasingly owned by Indian capitalists – mostly from outside Bihar, replacing British firms. Refined sugar was targeted by the *swadeshi* waves, while *gur* was lauded as ‘healthier’ than refined sugar and socially and politically more responsible for being produced in small-scale (cottage) industries.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> S. Pruthi, *History of Sugar Industry in India*, New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1995, pp.1-18.

<sup>84</sup> B. C. Burt, ‘The Indian Sugar Industry’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 83:4317 (1935), p.922.

<sup>85</sup> Pruthi (1995), pp.139-43.

<sup>86</sup> Zachary Macaulay, *East India Sugar, or an Inquiry respecting the means of improving the quality and reducing the cost of sugar raised by free labour in the East Indies with an appendix containing proofs and illustrations*, London: Hatchard & Sons, 1824, pp.2-3.

<sup>87</sup> See Yukihiro Kiyokawa & Akihiko Ohno, ‘Technology and labour absorption in the indigenous Indian sugar industry: an analysis of appropriate technology,’ in Peter Robb, Kaour Sugihara and Haruku Yanagisawa (eds), *Local Agrarian Societies in Colonial India: Japanese Perspectives*, Richmond: Curzon, 1996; Bosma (2013), pp. 269-271.

<sup>88</sup> Anand T. Hingorani (ed.), *Gandhi for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Gospel of Swadeshi by M.K. Gandhi*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998, p.90.

The 1930s large-scale sugar concerns were still struggling against accusations that their product violated a crucial Hindu taboo.<sup>89</sup> An article published in the *Eastern Daily Mail* in 1907 was entitled ‘Swadeshi Sugar, An Indian Factory’, carefully spelled out that in contrast to practices elsewhere this new factory did not use bovine material (i.e. bone charcoal) in the refining process:

One of the latest to be opened is the Japaha Sugar Works, situated about 6 miles from Mozufferpore. High class sugars are made here with every care to avoid contamination with anything deleterious to Hindoo caste. The proprietors attach such importance to this fact that they are cordially inviting Native gentlemen to visit the factory during the sugar season and satisfy themselves on the point.<sup>90</sup>

It was an old theme. In texts meant to educate European planters in Bihar as to how to prepare white sugar that could compete in domestic markets, it was often advised not to use ‘bone char’ as a decolorising or cleaning agent while refining sugar in their mills. Mauritian sugar imports in India were therefore manufactured with lime.<sup>91</sup>

Kiyokawa and Ohno have tried to explain *gur*’s relatively more advantageous competitive position compared to ‘white sugar’ in colonial Bihar.<sup>92</sup> They conclude that the absence of sufficient micro data makes it hard to explain why the large-scale sugar factories were unable to compete with *gur*. Can the recurrent rumour that the ‘British Raj’ contaminated sugar by mixing animal bones in the white refined factory sugar have played a crucial role in this? We do not think so, although it might have helped to upgrade *gur* from ‘primitive’ to ‘desirable’ by nationalists and entrepreneurs who were in competition with the large sugar concerns. This symbolic meaning of *gur* as both ‘indigenous’ as well as ‘healthier’ might have helped this sugar to survive until this very day in India, where it still is brown coloured, produced in ‘small-scale’ industries by petty capitalists and still placed in opposition to ‘white sugar’.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

In order to answer the question posed in paper’s title whether ‘small was really beautiful’, we have examined the understudied aspects of (agro-)industrialisation in Bihar during the first half of the twentieth century. We focused on the production as well as consumption of four products, two from cane and two from tobacco leaf. We argue against the impression that during waves of globalisation in the late nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century, British India underwent a process of de-industrialisation that entailed the ruin of much of the craft-based small-scale-industries that had existed before.<sup>94</sup> Our paper strongly suggests a far more complex set of outcomes of globalisation.

---

<sup>89</sup> Pruthi (1995), pp.144-5, 194-5.

<sup>90</sup> T.O.B.N., ‘Swadeshi Sugar An Indian Factory’, *Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser* 20 June 1907.

<sup>91</sup> See in this respect also about experiments by Frederick Minchin, sugar manufacturer in Orissa, with lime to replace bovine charcoal, Bosma (2013), p.134.

<sup>92</sup> Kiyokawa & Ohno (1996), p.322; B. B. Dhawan, ‘The Traditional versus the Modern Case of Indian Sugar Industry’, *Economic and Political Weekly* (15 April 1967), pp.723-7.

<sup>93</sup> See <https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/wellness/story/benefits-of-eating-jaggery-or-gur-used-as-natural-sweetener-aids-in-degestion-better-than-white-sugar-278846-201>.

<sup>94</sup> J. Krishnamurty, ‘Deindustrialization in Gangetic Bihar during the nineteenth century: Another look at the evidence’, *Indian Economic Social History Review* 22:399 (1985), pp.399-416; and Sumit Sarkar, *Modern Times: India 1880s-1950s: Environment, Economy, Culture*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2015, pp.205-80.

*Gur* and *bidi* ‘small-scale industries’ provided additional income to cane growers and wage workers alike, who as petty producers, reproduced the contemporary, globally dominant capitalist mode of production. While these industries expanded in terms of the numbers of people they employed and in terms of output, they were not classified as ‘factories’ by colonial authorities. Moreover, *bidi* workshops often relocated to rural households that increasingly started operating through employment of women and (female) children therein. This enacted processes of ‘informalisation’ and feminisation of labour in this sector, which gave the *bidi* manufacturers an increasing competitive advantage over large-scale cigarette factories. In general, under the contemporary (inter-)national (labour) legislation in British-India, the bargaining power of wage workers involved in legal ‘factories’ that produced cheap cigarettes through flue-cured tobacco curing methods and refined white sugar through vacuum pan production technologies, has been better than those of workers in *gur* and *bidi* ‘non-formal’, unorganised and often unregistered manufacturing units.

The specific characterisation of commodified sugar and tobacco goods during the period of industrialisation we studied was not only along the axis of small- and large-scale enterprise, but also along a variety of other rankings. These ranged from modern and traditional (native, indigenous), and their respective value as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (i.e. ugly or beautiful, or more or less valued) was varied and changeable. Furthermore, we concluded that from an economic and technological point of view the four products we discussed can all be qualified as ‘modern’ (i.e. outcomes of economic, technological as well as cultural innovations). In the colonial context where two political regimes competed with each other for economic as well as political-cultural hegemony, all commodities possessed competitive market value albeit in different degrees and with alternating hierarchically ordered meanings attached to them as ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’. By the time British middle-class nationals handed over political power to members of the Indian bourgeois elites, who now became the rulers in a newly created Republic of India, it was *gur* and *bidi* that had ‘triumphed’ in terms of quantities that were produced and consumed in the state of Bihar and elsewhere, and as small-scale and indigenous products. Finally, to return to the question posed in our paper’s title whether ‘small is beautiful’, we can conclude that since both *gur* and *bidi* have been embedded in waves of capitalist expansion, there is in fact no ‘small’ (or ‘large’), but only consumer items in contemporary Bihar subjected to the same globally dominant capitalist mode of production. There is no room for a Tolstoyan or Schumpeterian ‘Small is beautiful’.

## References

- Amin, Shahid, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur. An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Basu, C., *Challenge and Change: The ITC Story: 1910-1985*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1988.
- Bhattacharyya, Amit, 'Random Notes on Bengali Enterprise 1900-1920', *Journal of History* (Jadavpur University of Calcutta) 5 (1984), pp.112-38
- Bhattacharyya, Amit, *Swadeshi Enterprise in Bengal 1900-1920*, Calcutta: Sm. Mita Bhattacharyya, 1986
- Bhattacharyya, Amit, *Swadeshi Enterprise in Bengal: 1921-47*, Kolkata: Setu Prakashani & Molla, 1995.
- Bhattacharya, S., 'Cotton Mills and Spinning Wheels: Swadeshi and the Indian Capitalist Class, 1920-22', in K. N. Panikar (ed.), *National and Left Movements in India*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980, pp.27-45
- Billings, E. R., *Tobacco: Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacture and Commerce, with an Account of its Various Modes of Use, from its First Discovery until Now, with Illustrations by Popular Artists*, Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1875.
- Birdwood, G., 'The Foreign Trade of India for the Year 1906-1907', *Journal of the Society of Arts* 55:2864 (1907), pp.1069-82
- Bosma, Ulbe, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia. Industrial Production 1770-2010*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Burt, B. C., 'The Indian Sugar Industry', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 83:4317 (1935), pp.919-40
- Chanda, S. N., *The Tobacco Story from Myth to Mayhem*, New Delhi & London: Bloomsbury, 2017
- Chauhan, Y., *History and Struggles of Beedi Workers in India*, New Delhi: AITUC, 2001
- Cox, Howard, 'Growth and Ownership in the International Tobacco Industry', *Business History* 31:1 (1989), pp.44-67.
- Cox, Howard, 'International Business, the State and industrialisation in India: Early Growth in the Indian Cigarette Industry, 1900-1919', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 27:3 (1990), pp.289-312
- Cox, Howard, *The Global Cigarette: Origins and Evolution of British American Tobacco, 1880-1945*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Cox, Howard, 'Evolución del mercado mundial de cigarrillos: la internacionalización de las empresas antes de 1945', *Informacion Comercial Espanola* 812 (2004), pp.125-36

- Crooke, William (ed.), *Hobson-Jobson. A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1903
- Dhawan, B. B., 'The Traditional versus the Modern Case of Indian Sugar Industry', *Economic and Political Weekly* (15 April 1967), pp.723-7
- Forest Research Institute Dehra Dun, 'A Short note on the Bidi leaf Industry', *Indian Forest Leaflet* 60 (1943)
- Gadgil, D. R., *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, Oxford & London: Oxford University Press & Humphrey Milford, 1933
- Gandhi, M. P., *Problems of the Sugar Industry in India: Scope and Prospects of the Re-organisation in post-war period*, Bombay: Gandhi & Co., 1945.
- GDK, 'Buy Swadeshi (Indian)', *Indian Journal of Economics*, 13:1 (1932), pp.89-91
- Ghosh, Saila Kumar, *Colonial Modernization and Gandhi*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 2008
- Ghosh, Suniti Kumar, 'Indian Bourgeoisie and Imperialism', *Economic and Political Weekly* 23:45-47 (1988), pp.2445-7, 2449-58.
- Gokhale, B. G., 'Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century India,' *Agricultural History* 48:4 (1974), pp.484-92.
- Goodman, J., *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Government of Bengal. Department of Industries, *Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries of Bengal*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1929.
- Grierson, G. A., *Bihar Peasant Life being a Discursive Catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of that Province with many Illustrations from Photographs taken by the Author, prepared under Orders of the Government of Bengal*, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975 [1885]
- Griffiths, Walter, *The Kol Tribe of Central India*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1946
- Haynes, Douglas E., *Small town capitalism in western India: artisans, merchants, and the making of the informal economy, 1870-1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Hingorani, Anand T. (ed.), *Gandhi for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Gospel of Swadeshi by M.K. Gandhi*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998
- Horne, E. A., 'Some Family Budgets from Bihar', *The Economic Journal*, 26:103 (1916), pp.369-79
- Indian Leaf Tobacco Development Co., *Indian Tobacco Leaves. A Story of Co-operation in India*, London: Harrison & Sons, 1943
- Jha, Narendra, *The Making of Bihar and Biharis Colonialism, Politics and Culture in Modern India c. 1870-1912*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2012

- Jones, Laird, 'East African Tobacco Wars: Marketing Machine vs. Hand-rolled Cigarettes, 1880-1914', paper given at *Rethinking Tobacco History* workshop, University of Cologne, 2021
- Kiyokawa, Yukihiro and Ohno, Akihiko, 'Technology and labour absorption in the indigenous Indian sugar industry: an analysis of appropriate technology', in Peter Robb, Kaoru Sugihara and Haruku Yanagisawa (eds), *Local Agrarian Societies in Colonial India: Japanese Perspectives*, Richmond: Curzon, 1996, pp.320-55
- Krishnamurty, J., 'Deindustrialization in Gangetic Bihar during the nineteenth century: Another look at the evidence', *Indian Economic Social History Review* 22:399 (1985), pp.399-416
- Lal, P., 'Bidi – A short History', *Current Science* 96:10 (2009), pp.1335-7.
- Laufer, B., *Tobacco and its Use in Asia*, Anthropology Leaflet 18, Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1924.
- Lees Smith, H. B., *India and the Tariff Problem*, London: Constable & Company, 1909.
- Lethbridge, R., 'The Enhanced Duties on Indian Tea and Tobacco', *The Imperial Asiatic Quarterly Review and Oriental and Colonial Record* 18:35 (1904), pp.73-82.
- Macaulay, Zachary, *East India Sugar, or an Inquiry respecting the means of improving the quality and reducing the cost of sugar raised by free labour in the East Indies with an appendix containing proofs and illustrations*, London: Hatchard & Sons, 1824
- Mackenzie, Compton *Sublime Tobacco*, London: Windus 1957
- Majumdar, R. C. (ed.), *The Mughal Empire*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 2007
- Manohar, Ram, 'Smoking and Āyurvedic Medicine in India', in Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, Smoke (eds), *A Global History of Smoking*, London: Reaktion Books, 2004, pp.68-76.
- Mansfield, P. T., *Bihar and Orissa Report of 1930-1931*, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing Bihar and Orissa, 1932.
- Molla, M. K. U. *The New Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam*, The Institute of Bangladesh Studies: Rajshahi, 1981
- Mukherjee, Tilottama Mukherjee, *Political Culture and Economy in Eighteen-Century Bengal. Networks of Exchange, Consumption and Communication*, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2013.
- Neville, Pran, 'When Sahib was Hooked to Hookah' in Pran Neville (ed.), *Sahib's India. Vignettes from the Raj*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010
- O'Malley, L. S. S., *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers (Shahabad) 1924*, New Delhi: Logos 2005 [1924].
- O'Malley, L.S.S., *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers (Monghyr) 1926*, New Delhi: Logos Press, 2007 [1926]

- Perrot, H. R., 'The Family Budget of an Indian Raiyat', *The Economic Journal*, 2:87 (1912) pp.493-98.
- Pimpalapure, P., "'Tendu" leaf and "Bidis",' *Asian Agri-Hist* 3:2 (1999), pp.111-17
- Playne, Somerset, *Bengal and Assam, Behar and Orissa: Their History, People, Commerce and Industrial Resources*, London: The Foreign Colonial Compiling and Publishing Company, 1917.
- Pruthi, S., *History of Sugar Industry in India*, New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1995, pp.1-18
- Ray, C. S., 'The Hookah – the Indian Waterpipe', *Current Science*, 96:10 (2009), pp.1319-23
- Ray, Indrajit, *The Development of Modern Industries in Bengal. ReIndustrialisation, 1858-1914*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2018
- Robb, P., *The Evolution of British Policy towards Indian Politics 1880-1920. Essays on Colonial Attitudes, Imperial Strategies, and Bihar*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992
- Roy, Bina, *Changes in Private Consumption Expenditure in India 1900-01 to 1950-51*, Kolkata: KLM, 2003
- Roy, Shibani and Rizvi, S. H. M., *Nicotine Water to Heroin*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1986
- Roy, Tirthankar, *Traditional industry in the economy of colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Roy Chaudhury, P. C., *Bihar District Gazetteers. (Santal Parganas)*, Patna: The Superintendent, Secretariat Press, 1965
- Sarda, K. B., *A Handbook of the Indian Bidi Industry*, Camel House: Nashik, 1995.
- Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973
- Sarkar Sumit, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Delhi: MacMillan India, 1983.
- Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern Times: India 1880s-1950s: Environment, Economy, Culture*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2015.
- Sartori, Andrew, 'The Categorical Logic of Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904-1908', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23:1&2 (2003), pp.271-85
- Schumacher, E. F., *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, London: Blond & Briggs, 1973
- Sharma, Kaushal Kishore, *Agrarian Movements and Congress Politics in Bihar*, Delhi: Anamika Prakashan, 1989



- Shechter, Relli, *Smoking Culture and Economy in the Middle East. The Egyptian Tobacco Market 1850-2000*, I. B. Tauris: London, 2006
- Shechter, Relli, 'Prosumption as Glocal History: Inconspicuous Consumption and Cigarette Production in Egypt, 1890-1939', paper presented at *Rethinking Tobacco History* workshop, University of Cologne, 2021.
- Singh, Bhagawati Sharan, *Aspects of Industries in Bihar During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Patna & New Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 2006
- Singh, L. P., *Economics of Tobacco Cultivation, Production and Exchange*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992
- Sinha, Chandra Prakash N., *From Decline to Destruction. Agriculture in Bihar during the Early British Rule (1765-1813)*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1997
- Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka, *Colonising Plants in Bihar (1760-1950) Tobacco Betwixt Indigo and Sugarcane*, [India]: Patridge, 2014.
- Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka, 'Yellow Tobacco, Black Tobacco: Indigenous (*desi*) Tobacco as an Anti-Commodity', in Sandip Hazareesingh and Harro Maat (eds), *Local Subversions of Colonial Cultures. Commodities and Anti-Commodities in Global History*, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, pp.29-49
- Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka, 'Embedding Cigarette Tobacco in Colonial Bihar (India): A Multi-Dimensional Task', in Willem van Schendel (ed.), *Embedding Agricultural Commodities: Using Historical Evidence, 1840s-1940s*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp.99-119
- Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka, 'Modernization in Eastern India. Social-Cultural Diffusion of Tobacco Consumption', paper presented at BASAS Conference, Exeter, 2018.
- Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka, 'Wooing Indians with new smokes', in Bhaswati Bhattacharya and Henrike Donner (eds), *Globalising Everyday Consumption in India. History and Ethnography*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2020, pp.98-121
- Spear, Percival, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998
- Varma, Uday Kumar and M. M. Rehman, *Tobacco, Tendu Leaf and Beedi Workers in India. Problems & Prospects*, Delhi: Shipra, 2005
- Watt, G., *The Commercial Products of India being an Abridgement of 'the Dictionary of the Economic Products of India'*, London: John Murray, 1908
- Yanagisawa, Haruka, 'Growth of Small-scale Industries and Changes in Consumption Patterns in South India, 1910s-1950s', in Abigail McGowan Haynes, Tithankar Roy and Haruka Yanagisawa (eds), *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 51-75

## Other Related Commodities of Empire Working Papers

- WP1: Sandip Hazareesingh, 'Chasing commodities over the surface of the globe'
- WP2: Jonathan Curry-Machado, 'Sub-imperial globalisation and the phoenix of empire: sugar, engineering and commerce in nineteenth-century Cuba'
- WP3: Jean Stubbs, 'Reinventing Mecca: Tobacco in the Dominican Republic, 1763-2007'
- WP6: Roberto Davini, 'A Global Commodity within a Rising Empire: The History of Bengali Raw Silk as Connective Interplay between the Company Bahadur, the Bengali Local Economy and Society, and the Universal Italian Model, c.1750-c.1830'
- WP9: Vibha Arora, 'Routing the Commodities of the Empire through Sikkim (1817-1906)'
- WP13: Alan Pryor, 'Indian Pale Ale: an Icon of Empire'
- WP15: Steve Cushion, 'Cuban Popular Resistance to the 1953 London Sugar Agreement'
- WP16: Jonathan Curry-Machado, 'In cane's shadow: the impact of commodity plantations on local subsistence agriculture on Cuba's mid-nineteenth century sugar frontier'
- WP17: Teresita A. Levy, 'Tobacco growers and resistance to American domination in Puerto Rico, 1899-1940'
- WP18: Patrick Neveling, 'A periodisation of globalisation according to the Mauritian integration into the international sugar commodity chain (1825-2005)'
- WP20: Jean Stubbs, 'El Habano: The Global Luxury Smoke'
- WP30: Geoffrey K. Pakiam, 'Waterlands: Coconut smallholders, commodity frontiers and environmental transformation on the Malay Peninsula, c.1862-1972'
- WP31: Jim Tomlinson, 'Supplying "Juteopolis": Dundee and Bengal Jute, c.1850-1914'

## Other Recent Commodities of Empire Working Papers

- WP26: Zehra Taşdemir Yasin, 'Through the Story of a Road and a Pipeline: The Formation of Commodity Frontiers and Modern States'
- WP27: Derek Byerlee, 'The Role of Crop Science in Opening Commodity Frontiers'
- WP28: Samuël Coghe, 'Extending the Pastoral Frontier: The introduction of cattle farming in French Equatorial Africa during late colonialism'
- WP29: Rafael Chambouleyron & Karl-Heinz Arenz, 'Frontier of Expansion, Frontier of Settlement: Cacao exploitation and the Portuguese colonisation of the Amazon region (17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> centuries)'
- WP32: Stan Pannier & Wim De Winter, 'Southern-Netherlandish Prize Papers: French and British Colonial Commodities at Sea during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century'
- WP33: Steven Ivings, 'Fostering a Trade in Japan's Northeast: The West Pacific Company at Hakodate in the 1860s'
- WP34: Mattia Steardo, 'Commercial Capitalism on the Banks of the Río de la Plata: The Meat Industry Between Empire and Independence'
- WP35: Wim de Winter, 'Silently Smuggled and Invisibly Dyed: The Trans-Pacific Smuggling of Semi-processed Asian Textiles and Peruvian Bullion in the Spanish Colonies and at Sea, 1547-1800'

**Commodities of Empire** is a British Academy Research Project based at the **Centre for Modern and Contemporary History, University of Birmingham**. It consists of a growing international network of researchers and research centres. Its websites and publications are hosted by the **School of Advanced Study, University of London**

The mutually reinforcing relationship between 'commodities' and 'empires' has long been recognised. Over the last six centuries the quest for profits has driven imperial expansion, with the global trade in commodities fuelling the ongoing industrial revolution. These 'commodities of empire', which became transnationally mobilised in ever larger quantities, included foodstuffs (wheat, rice, bananas); industrial crops (cotton, rubber, linseed and palm oils); stimulants (sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and opium); and ores (tin, copper, gold, diamonds). Their expanded production and global movements brought vast spatial, social, economic and cultural changes to both metropolises and colonies.

In the Commodities of Empire project we explore the networks through which such commodities circulated within, and in the spaces between, empires. We are particularly attentive to local processes – originating in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America – which significantly influenced the outcome of the encounter between the world economy and regional societies, doing so through a comparative approach that explores the experiences of peoples subjected to different imperial hegemonies.

The following key research questions inform the work of project:

- 1) The networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires;
- 2) The interlinking 'systems' (political-military, agricultural labour, commercial, maritime, industrial production, social communication, technological knowledge) that were themselves evolving during the colonial period, and through which these commodity networks functioned;
- 3) The impact of agents in the periphery on the establishment and development of commodity networks: as instigators and promoters; through their social, cultural and technological resistance; or through the production of anti-commodities;
- 4) The impact of commodity circulation both on the periphery, and on the economic, social and cultural life of the metropolises;
- 5) The interrogation of the concept of 'globalisation' through the study of the historical movement and impact of commodities.

<http://commoditiesofempire.org.uk/>

---

**Series Editor: Dr Jonathan Curry-Machado (London)**

**Project Directors: Prof. Corey Ross and Dr Simon Jackson (Birmingham)**

**Centre for Modern &  
Contemporary History  
University of Birmingham  
Birmingham B15 2TT**

**School of Advanced Study  
University of London,  
Malet Street,  
London WC1E 7HU**