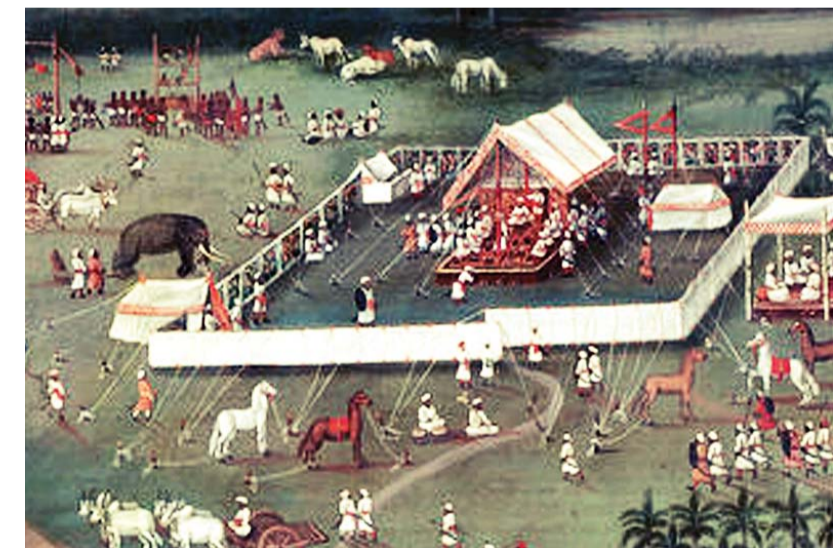


The VOC Factories of Bengal

The VOC arrived in the area around the Bay of Bengal in 1602 and set up several trading posts along the Coromandel Coast in India. With its chief Bengal factory first established in Hooghly, the company continued in the region to operate until its dissolution in 1800 and after as part of the Netherlands Ministry of Colonies, until 1825. Even though the VOC started out at almost the same time as the English, it eventually lost control of its possessions in Bengal after the British Raj took over. The beginnings of this venture can be traced back to the village of Chinsurah around the port of Hooghly.

• Verna Mohon

In 1664, a Dutch surgeon named Wouter Schouten spotted the VOC factory in Chinsurah as his ship approached the harbour of Hooghly. Seeing it from a distance, he exclaimed that "nothing shone brighter in Hooghly than the Dutch lodge there, standing tall on a distinct plain, at a musket shot's range from the waters of the Ganges" (Schouten, Book III: 68). He remarked on how the factory resembled a firm castle that was built out of stones. Its ornate walls and pointed corners were of the right height and equipped with cannons. The factory was spacious from inside and had a beautiful lodge for the Dutch director, along with other rooms for the council members and officials of the Company. There was also a warehouse for storing the merchandise that came in and went out daily. This factory with its typical functions of storage and commerce along with residence backed by military support was the primary base for the VOC in Bengal. There were also other factories in Kasimbazaar, Malda, Balasore, Pipri, Patna and Chupra around this region. In 1758, however, the VOC doubted the strength of this factory in Chinsurah to withstand attacks. An engineer employed to design an alternate factory proposed Bankibazaar (modern day Bankipur), close to Hooghly, as the chosen space. Bankibazaar was by then already a much-coveted place. Three decades earlier, the Ostend Company had succeeded in establishing a short-lived factory that

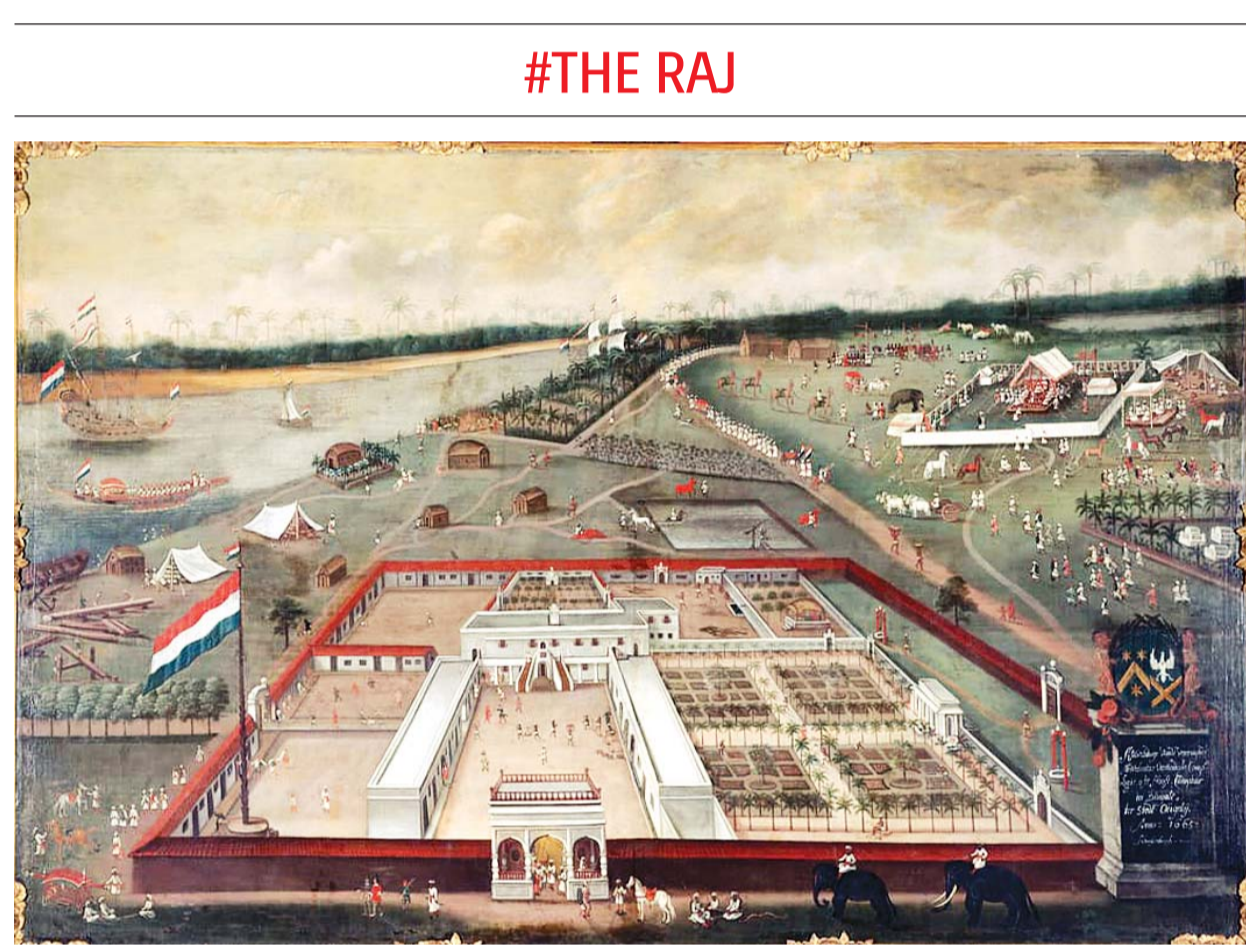


The Factory of the VOC at Hooghly in Bengal.



was closed down by 1731. Subsequently, both the Danish and the English East India Companies wanted to set up their factories. But the plans of the Company never came to fruition and the fortified factory of Hooghly, known as Fort Gustavus, continued to be in use. A typical VOC factory, including Fort Gustavus in Chinsurah, had gardens, cemeteries, tanks, storehouses and a lodge for residence and formed micro-settlements within the larger village setting. But what exactly happened inside the factories? Who visited them and how did the men inside interact with those outside?

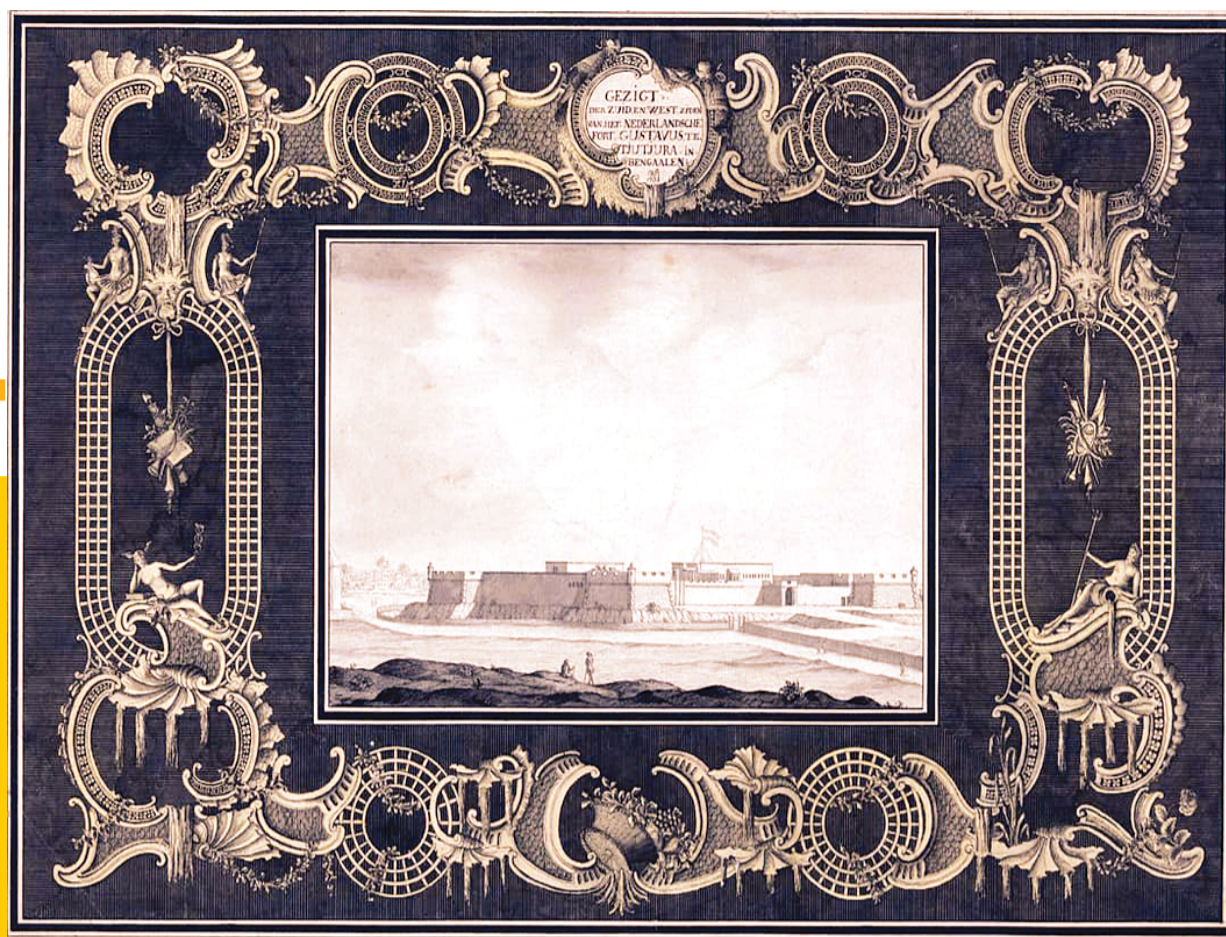
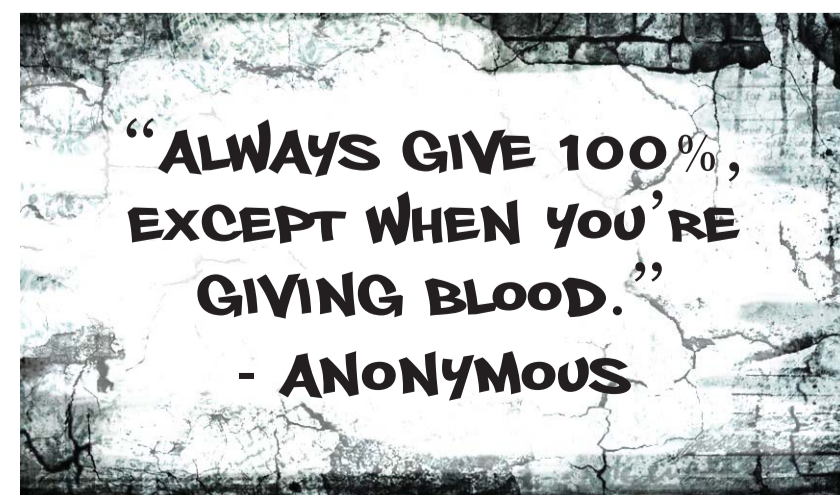
The VOC arrived in the area around the Bay of Bengal in 1602 and set up several trading posts along the Coromandel Coast in India. With its chief Bengal factory first established in 1635 in Hooghly, the company continued in the region to operate until its dissolution in 1800 and after as part of the Netherlands Ministry of Colonies, until 1825. Even though, the VOC started out at almost the same time as the English, it eventually lost control of its possessions in Bengal after the British Raj took over. The beginnings of this venture can be traced back to the village of Chinsurah around the port of Hooghly.



A VOC factory in Hooghly by Hendrik Van Schuylenburgh, 1665.

hostels that helped them with information on navigating the local surrounding, besides food and lodging. Such hostels continued to operate at the time of the Dutch and other European companies. The VOC surgeon, Schouten, of whom we mentioned before, stayed at such an inn when he arrived in Bengal. He wrote about the owner there as a man speaking creole Portuguese, born of a Roman Catholic father and an Indian mother who hosted him and entertained him in the evenings. Schouten owned a slave and went around the place, often enjoying the hospitality of local merchants as their guests. The area close to the river outside the Dutch factory was thus a bustling scene of people coming from and going to the port as they also mingled with the local populace. The VOC was accustomed to bargaining for space where it could construct its factories. In the case of Bankibazaar, it was suggested to buy all the houses in the surrounding area. A painting of the VOC factory in Kasimbazaar by Hendrik van Schuylenburgh shows the presence of these local houses in the immediate vicinity of the factory. Here, there lived a motley mix of

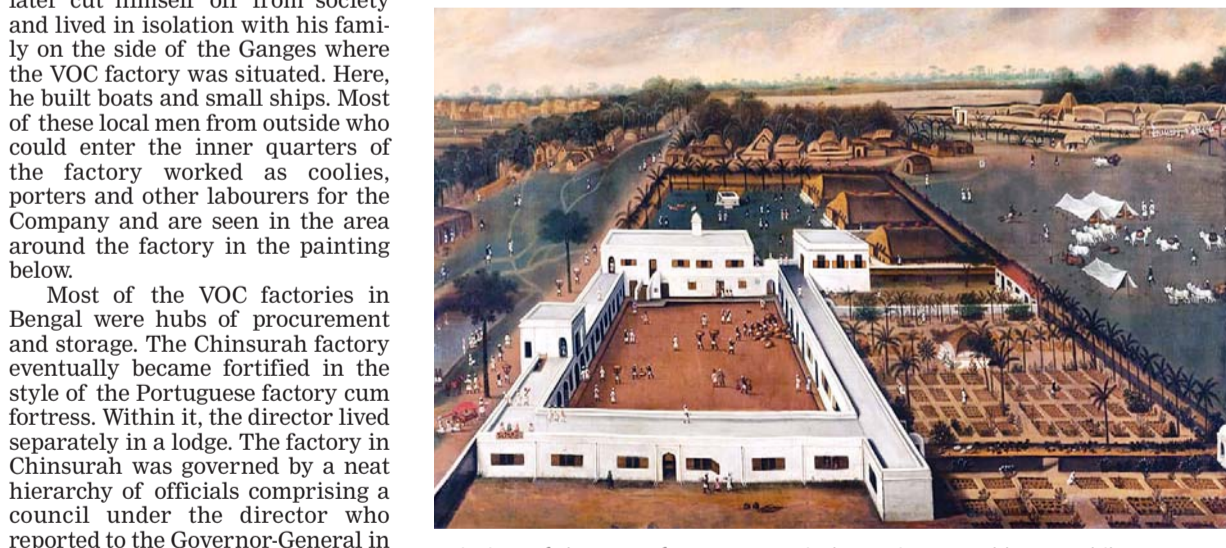
THE WALL



View of Fort Gustavus in Chinsurah.

#THE RAJ

which stored all the commodities for shipping abroad or across the Indian Ocean. The factory in Chinsurah with its open dalan (courtyard) invited merchants and brokers who negotiated over the prices of procured goods before supplying them to the Company officials. This was primarily true for textiles, including silk from Bengal. The factory in Kasimbazaar was unique in the sense that it was also a site for production. Within its walls, mills were constructed where silk was woven. Such silk was not just traded by the company but also by its officials in their private trade. The Dutch director of Bengal, Jan Albert Sichterman, became a nabob in the middle of the eighteenth century as he amassed huge riches through his private ventures and manufactured silk handkerchiefs (rumals) for trade. The plan of Fort Gustavus shows the different compartments inside the factory beside the main area. There were gardens, water tanks, a hospital, a church, a cemetery, storage houses for arms and artillery, and a quarter for carpentry. Of the many people who worked inside the factory, one could find gardeners, barbers, washermen, market-goers, coolies, horse attenders, grass mowers, cooks, carpenters, rowers, smiths, guards, artillery men and translators, accountants and scribes. With time, the factories of Bengal were not just limited to commerce but also assumed political functions. Scribes trained in Persian and Bengali languages were appointed to draft documents related to local land administration as the VOC became zamindars of the three villages of Chinsurah, Baranagar and Bazaar Mirzapur. The factory also housed



Painting of the VOC factory at Kasimbazar in Bengal by Hendrik Van Schuylenburgh, 1665.

BABY BLUES



#ROYAL RAJASTHANI FEAST

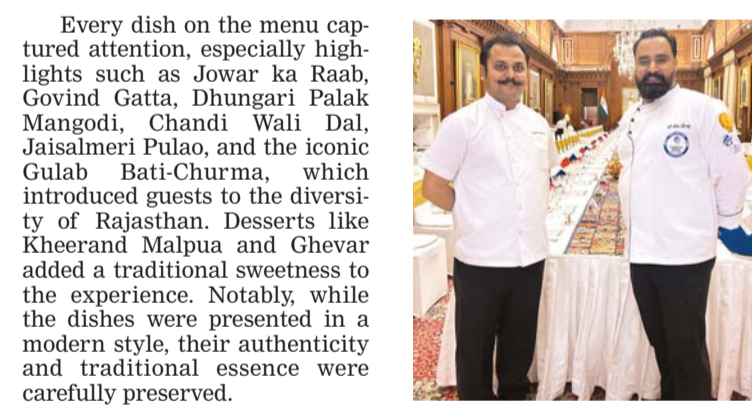
"A wonderful Rajasthani dining experience"

Congress Leader Shashi Tharoor remarked that the Rajasthani meal, despite being vegetarian, was exceptionally delicious

A t a special state dinner held on Monday evening at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the rich cultural grandeur of Rajasthan was showcased through its exquisite cuisine. In honour of South Korean President Lee Jae-myung, President of India Droupadi Murmu hosted a grand banquet. The presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with several senior ministers, added further dignity to the evening.

The highlight of the dinner was to introduce distinguished guests to the traditional and flavourful cuisine from various regions of Rajasthan. The specially curated menu was designed by renowned Rajasthan-based chef Dr. Chef Saurabh Sharma and his team. While relishing the meal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appreciated the chef and his team's efforts, stating, "It was a wonderful Rajasthani meal experience." Meanwhile, Deepthi Umashankar congratulated Dr. Chef Saurabh and his team for their achievement in representing Rajasthani culinary heritage at such a prestigious platform, and also extended her best wishes for their future endeavours. Congress Leader Shashi Tharoor remarked that the Rajasthani meal, despite being vegetarian, was exceptionally delicious.

What made the menu special
Chef Saurabh, along with his team, Chef Ravindra Naruka, Chef Himmat Singh, Chef Ratiram Prajapat and Executive Chef Mukesh Kumar of Rashtrapati Bhavan, presented Rajasthan on royal platters. The menu beautifully brought together traditional dishes from regions like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Bikaner, and Jaipur, along with recipes from royal kitchens, all presented with a contemporary touch.



One and a Half Months of Dedicated Preparation for Every Dish
Crediting his success to his mother, Dr. Uma Sharma, and his wife, Dr. Neha Sharma, Chef Saurabh shared that the support of his family was the most crucial pillar behind this achievement. He revealed that nearly one and a half months of intensive research and multiple trials went into finalising this special menu. He deeply studied traditional Rajasthani kitchens, local

ingredients, and ancient cooking techniques to ensure that each dish excelled not only in taste but also reflected the true essence of Rajasthan in its presentation. During this process, several combinations and culinary techniques were experimented with repeatedly. Only after careful refinement and selection was each dish included in the final menu, ensuring that the state banquet would stand out as a memorable international culinary experience.

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman