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Citation

BALABAN, Milan, Jan HERMAN, and Dalibor SAVIĆ. The early decades of the Bata Shoe Company in India: From establishment to economic and social integration. *Indian Economic and Social History Review* [online]. vol. 58, iss. 3, Sage Publications India Pvt, 2021, p. 297 - 332 [cit. 2023-04-26]. ISSN 0019-4646. Available at

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00194646211020303?journalCode=iera>

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00194646211020303>

Permanent link

<https://publikace.k.utb.cz/handle/10563/1010447>

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The early decades of the Bata Shoe Company in India: From establishment to economic and social integration

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The study presents a historical and sociological interpretation of the events that marked the gradual integration of the Bata Company into the Indian economy and society from the mid-1920s to the early 1960s. Within this context, in addition to the general economic, political and cultural developments, particular attention has been devoted to the everyday life of Indian and Czech workers in the Bata company town of Batanagar. The study is based on a comparative-historical analysis of available archival sources and a secondary analysis of the relevant academic literature. The results of the research indicate that during this period, Bata was forced to adapt continuously to the cultural specifics of Indian society, that is, the process of its integration into the Indian economy and society had pronounced global characteristics.

Keywords: Bata Company, Czechs, India, Batanagar, company town

The Bata Company¹ was founded by Tomas Bata² and his siblings Anna and Antonin, in 1894 in Zlín, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and started to develop significantly at the beginning of the twentieth century; thanks to technical and organisational innovations. After the First World War, in a society challenged by the post-war economic crisis, Tomas Bata applied an intensive rationalisation of the production process in the industry, based on American models and use of the assembly line, and started a new era in the development of the company.³

¹ *In the main text, the names of persons, the company and places are written in English without accents, for the purpose of more comfortable reading. However, in the footnotes, Czech accents are used in the writing of the original names of documents, authors and places of publishing, in order to ease to further research and tracing of documents in archives. For those reasons, the name of Jan Baros is written without an accent for the book published in English, and with an accent (Jan Baroš) for another book published in Czech language.*

² *Tomas Bata (1876-932) was a Czechoslovak entrepreneur, nicknamed the King of Shoes, the creator of the world shoemaking empire, and from 1923 to 1932 the mayor of Zlín. Tomas worked in his father's workshop for six years, and at the age of 15 years he tried unsuccessfully to start a business in Vienna. After this experience, he founded his own shoemaking business with his siblings in Zlín, when he turned 18 years in 1894. In his enterprises, Tomas Bata introduced original methods of production and management, employee motivation and business education. As mayor, he rebuilt the city of Zlín under the concept of a 'Factory in Gardens' and founded a garden town with original functionalist architecture. This model of factory and residential neighbourhoods with Bata architecture was also applied to other locations in Czechoslovakia, Europe and North America, where he built factory complexes. Tomas Bata died on 12 July 1932 in an air crash in Otrokovice. Under his leadership the company grew into a global enterprise that operated on four continents, employing over 31,000 people, selling its goods in 2,500 of its retail outlets and operating in 35 different branches of industry, trade, transport, finance and services. For more on the personality of Tomas Bata, timelines, bibliography and other features of his activities, see the website <http://en.tomasbata.org/>.*

³ *Ševeček and Jemelka, Company Towns of the Bata Concern, p. 37.*

For such a growing enterprise the Czechoslovak market became too small, so Bata turned his attention to foreign customers. The first wave of establishing firms abroad began after the First World War, when sister companies were founded in the USA (1919), Yugoslavia (1920),⁴ the Netherlands (1921), Denmark and Poland (1921) and England (1923).⁵

The expansion of the company was slowed by growing protests abroad from artisans and small footwear producers, as well as the outbreak of the economic crisis in 1929. During the Great Depression, individual countries protected their producers by raising tariff barriers, introducing customs duties on imports and encouraging various forms of boycotts of Bata's shoes. To support the export and sale of his products, Bata began a second wave of establishing sister companies, transferring production to foreign countries. The manufactured footwear in these factories was not subject to import restrictions, and the export of these shoes to the colonies of the individual states was more financially favourable in comparison with importing goods from Zlín.⁶

The factories abroad were opened in Ottmuth in Germany (today Poland) and Borovo in Yugoslavia (1931).⁷ In the following years, plants were established in Poland (Chelmek), Switzerland (Mohlin), France (Hel-locourt) in 1932, India (Konnagar) and England (Tilbury) in 1933, the Netherlands (Best) in 1934 and elsewhere.⁸

Within the above context, our research presents the economic and broader social specifics of the gradual integration of Bata into the Indian subcontinent over the period from the mid-1920s to the early 1960s. The overriding purpose of our research is to replenish the existing body of academic knowledge of the topic. Today, Bata is widely regarded as an indigenous brand across India, which is not surprising given that it has been present on the Indian market for almost a century. Very little academic research has been devoted to the above-mentioned period of its development, during which the necessary preconditions for its full integration into Indian society were created. At the same time, the research on this topic to date has mostly focused on economic history, that is, it has not been aimed at presenting the broader social circumstances that characterised Bata's gradual integration across the Indian subcontinent.⁹ A partial exception is the research carried out by Marketa Brezovska,¹⁰ which we nevertheless consider to suffer from certain shortcomings (e.g., it relied only upon archival documents from the archive in Zlín and existing mostly contemporary literature; like some other researchers M. Brezovska operates with a large and unsubstantiated number of Bata company towns, and presents those company towns within the model of ideal industrial cities. However, during the interwar period, they were predominantly established according to the principles of organic urban planning).

⁴ *Státní okresní archiv Zlín (State District Archive Zlín, further SOKA Zlín), f. Baťa, sign. XXVII, kart. 1879, inv. č. 8.*

⁵ *SOKA Zlín, f. Baťa, I/10, kart. 635, inv. č. 37; Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí Praha (Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Prague, further AMZV), f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, Baťa a. s. Zlín - zahraniční společnosti, 11 January 1937; Lehár, *Dějiny Baťova koncernu (1894–1945)*, p. 294.*

⁶ *Perutka et al., 'The Presence of the Baťa Shoe Company', pp. 47-48.*

⁷ *Balaban, M. Podnikání firmy Baťa v Jugoslávii, Zlín, p. 77.*

⁸ *Pokluda, Ze Zlína do světa, pp. 37-39.*

⁹ *Among other sources, we can mention a paper by Sreeparna Bagchi, 'The Zlín Enterprise', pp. 47-63.*

¹⁰ *Březovská, 'The City as a Business Plan', pp. 47-77; Březovská, Model střídá model.*

In contrast, our research approaches this topic from a more comprehensive heuristic perspective, both theoretically and methodologically. In the theoretical sense, the research is based on the assumptions of the multiple modernity paradigm.¹¹ The aforementioned theoretical approach enables us to view Bata's economic and social integration into Indian society not necessarily within the model of 'colonisation = modernisation = Westernisation', but rather as a sequence of concrete structural and cultural processes characteristic of a particular social context—that is, as a heuristic framework that does not prejudge in advance the interactions between the 'traditional-modern' or the individual/social structure.

Accordingly, we believe that this research will make a contribution to the deconstruction of the colonial narrative of India's economic history, or more precisely an empirical confirmation of T. Roy's claim that 'the focus on colonialism as the driver of India's economic history misses those continuities that arise from economic structure or local conditions'.¹² In this regard, we paid particular attention to the study of the daily life of Indian and Czech workers, as one of the most important indicators of the direction and intensity of mutual relations between Bata and Indian society. In addition, considerable attention was paid to identifying the similarities and differences between the way Bata pursued its corporate policies in India relative to other countries (e.g., in terms of salary levels or the circumstances surrounding the establishment and functioning of industrial cities).

In methodological terms, the research is primarily based on a comparative-historical analysis of previously unused and unprocessed archival material from the archives of the Bata Company in Batanagar, the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic, as well as archival documents from the State District Archive in Zlín. The research also uses academic and contemporary literature, and newsletters published by Bata.

Beginnings of the Bata Company in India

The first time Tomas Bata came to India was in 1925, when he saw vast possibilities for the firm's prospects. The enormous and changing Indian market, with a growing middle class who could afford more expensive European shoes and an abundantly available and skilled workforce, seemed a natural option for expanding the Bata business abroad. From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the number of people who could afford Western modelled shoes was already growing. In the 1920s, those Western models were displacing traditional shoes not just in bigger cities, but also in smaller markets. Such development was a significant factor, which contributed to Bata's expansion onto the Indian market.¹³ Another reason was the availability of raw materials, especially leather, and the large number of tanneries, which could provide the necessary material for production.

Already at the beginning of 1926, Bata opened the first shops in India (Calcutta and Bombay). One year later, in the British colonies in South Asia, the Bata Company had its stores in the following cities: Bombay, Calcutta, Colombo, Rangoon and Singapore. Soon after, Bata's activities intensified within the region.¹⁴

¹¹ Eisenstadt, 'Some Observations on Multiple Modernities', p. 29; Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute*, p. 105; Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*, p. 233.

¹² Roy, *Rethinking Economic Change in India*, p. 23.

¹³ Roy, *Traditional Industry*, pp. 187-88.

¹⁴ *Prager Presse*, 11 September 1927.

However, during the first few years, the company's exports did not grow, as the material circumstances in India did not allow for the import of more expensive European shoe production.

At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, the total imports of Japanese shoes to India numbered millions of pairs,¹⁵ while the import of Bata shoes was in the tens of thousands. With the fall of the British pound by almost 40% at the beginning of the decade, and with the introduction of preferential quotas and protectionist tariffs,¹⁶ the export of Bata shoes to India was impeded and became unprofitable. As India became a part of the empire trading area after the Ottawa conference,¹⁷ the import of goods outside of the British empire was highly aggravated. It was made even more difficult with the subsequent 70% devaluation of the Japanese currency, which further cheapened shoes from Japan on the Indian market.¹⁸

In the summer of 1931, the firm sent a group of 14 young workers to Calcutta, led by L. Ploskal.¹⁹ From today's perspective, this appears quite a hazardous approach on the part of the Bata Company. These were just young men, with or without minimal knowledge of the language, without sufficient financial reserves or meaningful contacts with their surroundings and without almost any knowledge of the domestic population and circumstances.²⁰ They opened shops in Calcutta and the surrounding region. After they had learned a few hundred words of basic English, training courses were commenced in which they trained 50 native workers for the positions of shoe sellers, chiropodists and other posts. Although they started this job with great enthusiasm, their efforts did not meet with success, and weekly sales were within the range of hundreds of pairs, while the company headquarters in Zlin expected orders within the range of hundreds of thousands, about the size of the Indian market (as shown in Table 1).²¹

¹⁵ These were mainly plimsoll shoes made of textile and rubber. As Japan was much closer and better connected with India than Central Europe, it was reasonable that imported Japanese shoes were 50% cheaper than shoes from Zlin.

¹⁶ In 1932, the duty in India for the import of leather footwear was increased from 15% to 25% ad valorem. A year later, as a result of the Ottawa conference, the duty for all states not belonging to the British colonial empire rose to 30% ad valorem (about 17%-18% of the retail price of shoes). Perutka et al., 'The Presence of the Baťa Shoe Company', p. 47.

¹⁷ Kumar and Desai, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 866.

¹⁸ Národní archiv Praha (National Archive in Prague, further NA), f. Ministerstvo financí, Londýn (further MFL), kart. 25, inv. č. 14.

¹⁹ Herman, 'Czechoslovak Shipping in the Inter-War Period', pp. 91-92.

²⁰ Baroš, *Čechoslováci na březích Gangu*, p. 49.

²¹ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. j. 1276/34, Obch. statistické informace pro firmu Baťa, 3 April 1934. Those statistics were summarised from data available to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which even the diplomatic representatives of Czechoslovakia took as merely referential, as at that time there were no complete, reliable statistics for shoe imports in India for end of the twenties/ beginning of the thirties. For these reasons, this statistical data needs to be approached with considerable caution. Under the Bata Company internal statistics those data were sometimes significantly different than official Czechoslovak stats: in the year 1928—to India was exported 80,000 pairs of shoes from Zlin; 1931—274,000; 1932—634,000; 1935—393,000; 1937—598,000; 1938—687,000. SOKA Zlín, f. Baťa, X, kart. 1541, inv. č. 118, Expedice Baťa a.s. ze Zlína (v letech 1928-38), 29 July 1938.

Table 1. Shoe Imports in Pairs in British India During 1928-33

Year						
Country	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Great Britain	817,366	614,969	554,473	139,555	196,799	119,014
Germany	439,719	176,622	200,114	62,307	81,156	45,608
Japan	171,781	348,945	2,484,872	7,997,257	6,342,486	6,369,796
Czechoslovakia	80,172	57,918	42,700	62,201	74,728	334,513
United States	692,367	569,380	492,422	–	–	–
Other Countries	517,559	790,093	1,108,216	–	–	–
Overall	2,722,964	2,667,643	4,891,800	8,580,517	7,110,805	7,009,356

Source: AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, c. j. 1276/34, Obch. statistické informace pro firmu Baťa, 3 April 1934.²²

To resolve the situation, Tomas Bata left Zlín by company aeroplane on 10 December 1931,²³ and after more than a month of air travel arrived in Calcutta on 16 January 1932. During this trip, he also organised a retail network in North African and Middle Eastern countries.²⁴ Furthermore, on 23 December 1931 a sister company, Bata Shoe Company Ltd., was registered in Calcutta.²⁵

While in India, Tomas Bata established the foundations for future development and assigned the task of founding a factory to one of his associates, John F. Bartos. Bata then returned to Europe, where he tragically died shortly afterwards in a plane accident in July 1932. Before leaving India, he arranged the renting of an old factory building in Konnagar, which was situated around 16 km north of Calcutta.²⁶

At the end of 1932, the Bata Company sent a new group of 20 Czechs with machines and two years' worth of supplies for production on the ship *Moravia*, which the company had recently bought for this purpose. In the opposite direction, with the same boat, a group of 18 Indian young men travelled to Zlín to be trained according to Bata standards for future employment in factories.²⁷

²² *Those statistics were summarised from data available to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which even the diplomatic representatives of Czechoslovakia took as merely referential, as at that time there were no complete, reliable statistics for shoe imports in India for end of the twenties/ beginning of the thirties. For these reasons, this statistical data need to be approached with considerable caution. Under the Bata Company internal statistics those data were sometimes significantly different than official Czechoslovak stats: in the year 1928—to India was exported 80,000 pairs of shoes from Zlín; 1931—274,000; 1932—634,000; 1935—393,000; 1937—598,000; 1938—687,000. SOKA Zlín, f. Baťa, X, kart. 1541, inv. č. 118, Expedice Baťa a.s. ze Zlína (v letech 1928-38), 29 July 1938.*

²³ *Even the New York Times describes the flight as the most lengthy and ambitious sales trips yet made by the aeroplane. Herman, Baťa létá z Otrokovic, Zlín, p. 21. Until that time private long-distance flights had been of the character of a sports feat (overcoming a speed or distance record) but not of a business trip.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁵ *Company archive Bata Batanagar (further CABB), Sales Policy and Organization Far East 1957.*

²⁶ *SOKA Zlín, f. Baťa, II/8, kart. 452, inv. č. 452.*

²⁷ *More details on the Bata's Company maritime operations can be found in the unpublished conference paper: Herman and Balaban, 'The Significance of the Sea'.*

The ship *Moravia* also brought half a million pairs of shoes for the creation of the initial capital for the firm in India.²⁸ After the assembly of the machines, production began in Konnagar, and the first 1,000 pairs of rubber shoes were produced on 1 May 1933. From that time, the retail network was expanded. These stores sold cheaper shoes from Konnagar, and also more expensive shoes from European Bata factories. The difference between the price of production and price of sales of footwear produced in India served to cover the import and distribution of shoes imported from Zlín. Because of this, footwear from Czechoslovakia could be sold in the Indian outlets for a wholesale price.²⁹ As Tirthankar Roy observes, the discussion taking place in India was on whether to industrialise India through direct foreign investment, or by establishing domestic industry with skilled labour from abroad.³⁰ The establishment of a modern shoemaking factory with capital and a skilled labour force from Czechoslovakia, but which in the great majority employed a domestic workforce and used domestic raw materials for the production of shoes which were sold mostly on the Indian market, combined both of these ideas. By launching production after the opening of a retail network, Bata was adapting to the pattern which had already been established by other firms with foreign capital, first trading, then producing.³¹ The important part of the Bata Company strategies abroad was their adaptability to the local circumstances and markets, as well as identification with the local economy and society. To avoid large protests of the kind that followed the company expansion in the 1920s and early 1930s, when the firm was exposed to various forms of boycotts and protectionist measures by different countries, as well as the introduction of the so-called Lex Bata legislation in Switzerland and France, which had the goal of stopping the company expansion, Bata deliberately built an image of a domestic firm wherever it operated. Following its expansion to Indian market, and its shift from trader to producer, the firm invested significantly in the Indianisation of its workforce, as well in building the image of an Indian firm.

Calcutta was chosen as the site for the opening of the factory and the headquarters of the Bata Company in India for several reasons. Among the main ones were access to the port and railways, as well as sufficient quantities of raw materials and an extensive labour force. Between 1921 and 1931 there was a significant drop in the number of Bengali industrial workers.

While in 1921 there were 1,674,290 workers employed in the province, a decade later this number had been reduced to 1,281,808.³² Also, during the interwar period, the overall number of workers throughout India who worked in the leather industry declined.³³ Due to the situation, any new investment that would lead to the employment of a large number of workers, such as the opening of a Bata factory, had to be welcomed. Calcutta had a long history and tradition in the leather industry, and according to Tirthankar Roy the first modern tannery in India was opened in Calcutta in 1795.³⁴

²⁸ Baroš, *Čechoslováci na březích Gangu*, p. 51.

²⁹ NA, f. MFL, kart. 25, inv. č. 14, Návrh na řešení případu fy Baťa, 14 June 1944.

³⁰ Roy, *A Business History of India*, p. 129.

³¹ This process is described by Tirthankar Roy in 'Trading Firms in Colonial India', pp. 26-32.

³² Chattopadhyay, *Trend of Industrialisation in Bengal 1901-1931*, p. 1425.

³³ *From 1.054 million in 1921 to 929 thousand 10 years later. This trend continued in the following decades and in 1951 only 750 thousand workers were employed in the leather industry. Kumar and Desai, The Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 539.

³⁴ Roy, *Traditional Industry*, p. 194.

However, there were only a few other modern but small shoe factories throughout the Bengal region,³⁵ while the majority of shoes were the product of cottage industry, which was dominated by Mochi artisans. Calcutta also housed the largest concentration of Europeans in India, and more than 80% of the 22,715 Europeans in Bengal lived in the city and its proximity, in addition to the largest concentration of non-European inhabitants who could afford better quality imported footwear.³⁶

The information from the Czechoslovak diplomatic network that the colonial government was not paying enough attention to the shoe industry and was not supporting the development of domestic industrial footwear production further strengthened the company's intention of expanding its business in India.³⁷ According to Czechoslovak diplomats in India, shoemaking was reserved mostly for the lowest caste of Indian society.³⁸ This was also another factor which contributed to Bata's decision, as this industry was not the focus of either domestic industrialists or the colonial government.³⁹ As the sole, indirect support for the footwear industry, customs tariffs were introduced on the import of raw leather, which resulted in the establishment of a large number of domestic tanneries,⁴⁰ but due to outdated technology they only provided second-class products.

Therefore, the production of better quality shoes still required the import of leather from abroad.⁴¹

³² Chattopadhyay, 'Trend of Industrialisation in Bengal 1901-1931', p. 1425.

³³ From 1.054 million in 1921 to 929 thousand 10 years later. This trend continued in the following decades and in 1951 only 750 thousand workers were employed in the leather industry. Kumar and Desai, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 539.

³⁴ Roy, *Traditional Industry*, p. 194.

³⁵ According to the report of the Czechoslovak consulate in Calcutta, at the beginning of the 1930s there were only five smaller footwear factories in Bengal, and none of them employed more than 260 workers. AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1080, *Statistická data a počty Evropanů v Indii a výroba obuvi v Indii*, 18 June 1930.

³⁶ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1080, *Statistická data a počty Evropanů v Indii a výroba obuvi v Indii*, 18. June 1930.

³⁷ The colonial government introduced protectionist measures for some of the most important industries, such as textiles, iron and steel during the 1920s, after establishing the Tariff Board in 1923. Kumar and Desai, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, pp. 868-69.

³⁸ The analysis from Czechoslovak diplomacy stated: 'no Indus from a better caste would go so low as to live by cultivating the skin of a sacred animal, namely a cow'. According to Tirthankar Roy, the workforce for example in tanneries in Bengal was composed entirely from Chamars who had migrated from North India. Roy, *Traditional Industry*, p. 180.

³⁹ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1081, č. j. 1414/31, *Průmysl obuvi v Indii*, 30 June 1931.

⁴⁰ In 1931, in Calcutta alone there were around 300, mostly smaller tanneries, which annually tanned around 1.9 million of hides and skins. In 1939, there were already 66 large tanneries in the whole of British India. Roy, *Traditional Industry*, pp. 180-81.

⁴¹ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1081, č. j. 1414/31, *Průmysl obuvi v Indii*, 30 June 1931.

By the end of 1933, the number of Bata stores in India had already grown to 86, and while the company initially focused on Bengal, it later started to move to other parts of India.⁴² However, in mid-1933 a negative campaign began in the Indian press, which had one of its sources in dissatisfaction with the fact that Bata published its advertisements almost exclusively in the newspaper *The Statesman*, while other papers were left with no revenue from them. As the main competition consisted of local Muslim traders in Bengal, they made use of these newspapers in order to deter deterring customers from purchasing goods in Bata stores.⁴³

In addition to this, the company encountered problems that were understandable in the initial years due to its arrival in entirely different cultural surroundings. These difficulties were deepened by the stubbornness of a company that was unwilling to change its established and functioning methods from Europe. Immediately after the arrival of the first groups, the company started to expand its retail network rapidly, although the management did not have a good understanding of the local conditions and customs of the Indian market.⁴⁴ For example, the development of the trade in tyres was utterly stalled because of the company's stubborn insistence on the trade methods which were in used in Europe, while merchants and wholesalers in India functioned differently.⁴⁵ Another problem was that the headquarters in Zlín sent letters with instructions in Czech, despite constant requests not to do so, as significant and time-consuming efforts then needed to be devoted to translating into English for different departments with native workers.⁴⁶

The Bata Company in Czechoslovakia developed a sophisticated and diverse advertising system (advertisements, posters, shops windows, billboards, performance events, cooperation with famous personalities, branding, advertising vehicles, transfer belts, competitions, company publications—magazines and newspapers), which was later also implemented abroad with the enterprise's global expansion. It seems that after entering India the company wanted to adapt to the market circumstances, so for example the prices were not listed in typical Bata fashion, that is, ending with nine (e.g., 9.99), but adapted to rupees and annas, as can be seen from the first Bata advertisement from 1926 (Figure 1). In later years Bata kept that system, as represented in advertisements on last pages of the *Batanagar News*.

⁴² Baros, *The First Decade of Batanagar*, p. 20.

⁴³ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. j. 2185/33, *Bata Shoe Co., Ltd.*, 27 June 1933.

⁴⁴ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. j. 2886/33, *Důvěrný dopis (jenom k vlastním rukám p. řed. Čipery nebo Meisla)*, 30 August 1933.

⁴⁵ CABB, *Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1936, Dopis pro ředitele Bartoše*, 19 March 1936.

⁴⁶ CABB, *Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1936, Dopis pro ředitele Rojta*, 1936.



Figure 1. Example of the Early Bata Commercial in India

Source: Baros.47

As at the beginning of its expansion into India, the firm did not understand the function of the Indian market and various mistakes were made (such as ordering a large quantity of light white sandal shoes which were poorly received by customers).⁴⁸ Only after several similar failures did the company start to pay more attention to the opinion of domestic shop managers, and focused in following years on the production of rubber plimsoll shoes, which met with great success on the market.⁴⁹

The firm also needed to adapt to the seasons of the shoe trade, and to focus its sales peak on the most prosperous Puja season in September-October (**Figure 2**).

⁴⁷ Baros, *The First Decade of Batanagar*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Baros, *The First Decade of Batanagar*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39



Figure 2. Example of the Bata Commercial for Puja Season

Source: Batanagar News, 30 September 1939.

The lack of trained vendors led to a significant problem in the functioning of the retail network, which was expanding fast, in that it was simply not possible to find and train a sufficient number of capable sellers and store managers. Moreover, even the monthly salary paid by Bata in its first year of existence could not attract capable employees. According to the Czechoslovak consul Jozef Lusk, its salaries for native workers in 1932-33 were only around 12 a month, which was not a sufficient living wage for the lowest 'Harijana', let alone the worker of a major European firm.⁵⁰ Even the Czech employees were not paid much more and received only around 35-40 a month, which in the absence of any family and the protective networks available to Indians in their own country, was mainly enough only for survival.

Due to such an unfortunate financial situation, they saved on necessary items, and in general were in a rather weak condition, physically and mentally exhausted by life in tropical conditions to which they were not accustomed. A similar situation applied to the young men who then lived and worked in the factory in Konnagar. Although they would have been expected to enjoy better conditions, they also suffered from various diseases. At one point in Konnagar, as many as 13 young Czech men were sick, and the entire venture seemed doomed to failure.⁵¹

⁵⁰ AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. j. 2886/33, *Důvěrný dopis (jenom k vlastním rukám p. řed. Čipery nebo Meisla)*, 30. August 1933

⁵¹ *At the beginning there were not even any toilets in the Konnagar factory, which additionally increased the danger of various infectious diseases (author's note).*

The consul Jozef Lusk urged the Bata management to pay much more attention to the condition of workers sent from Europe, and their overall behaviour and manners, since because of their bad reputation the company was faced with a social boycott by other Europeans in Calcutta. The way he saw it was primarily to improve the material position of Czechoslovak workers, so he recommended that if the salary of an indigenous worker was 12- 15 a month, then the salary of a European worker, namely a Czech, could not be 35- 40 but 120- 150, so that they could maintain their social status and fit into the European community in the city. He also recommended that Czechs did not perform any functions other than higher management, as leaders of groups of workers or store managers, since other Europeans do not take work below that level. He argued that when the Czechs performed tasks of a physical character, respect towards them decreased not just within the European population, but also in the native population.⁵² Since in the next stage of the company development such news did not appear, and it is even stated that Bata enjoyed an improvement of its reputation among the European population in Calcutta, it can be assumed that these recommendations were followed.⁵³ The success of the company was also contributed to by the finding and hiring of a capable local workforce.⁵⁴

Establishment of the Bata factory in Konnagar/Batanagar

At the beginning of the factory's operation in Konnagar, according to the later testimonies of Jan Baros, the company had a problem with the so-called Sardar system, under which most of the industrial enterprises in the surrounding area worked. Under this system, the factory did not employ people directly but hired them through a middleman who supplied the required number of workers. Money was transferred to this Sardar, who would then pay the workers. Bata had already developed and elaborated a system of recruitment and training in Europe and was not using intermediates.

⁵² AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. j. 2886/33, *Důvěrný dopis (jenom k vlastním rukám p. řed. Čipery nebo Meisla)*, 30 August 1933.

⁵³ CABB, *Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1936, Dopis p. řed. Rojtovi, Vavrečkovi, Udržalovi, 23 September 1936. However, for an illustration of the relations of Czechs in Batanagar with the English elite from the Calcutta, Vikram Seth's description can be used from his book A Suitable Boy, first published in 1993. He wrote that even decades after establishing of business in India:*

The Czechs ... resented ... the fact that the British commercial establishment in Calcutta did not treat them, although they were fellow-Europeans, as anything like their equals. The directors and heads of department and even covenanted assistants of the managing agency of Bentsen & Pryce, for example, would not dream of fraternizing with the Czechs of the Praha Shoe Company.

As Seth wrote from the experience of his father, Prem Nath Seth, who was an executive of the Bata Company at the beginning of the 1950s, the idea of the acceptance of Bata and the Czechs by the European population in Bengal in the mid-1930s was probably premature.

⁵⁴ *Finding capable local employees could be illustrated in the example of the case of Mohamed Yusuf and his advancement within the company. Yusuf was born in Lucknow in 1907, and after education at La Martiniere College in Lucknow and Edinburgh University, came back to India and joined Bata as a shop manager in Karachi, and later was promoted to establish the Bata business in Burma. After a successful stint, he became first Assistant Manager of the Wholesale Department in 1935. He was again sent to reorganise the failing Burma business, from where he was sent to the Zlín in the summer of 1937 for training. After returning, he took over the role of Manager of Wholesale Department, that is, one of the top positions in the entire Bata Company in India. Such a meteoric rise within the ranks was more the rule than the exception for the company. Batanagar News, 15 April 1939. Another example can be found in the career of Abdul Hameed. He was one of the boys sent to Zlín as an apprentice, and after returning he gradually advanced in the firm's hierarchy, eventually becoming Manager of the Advertisement Department. He was also sent for additional training to New York and San Francisco, from where he returned just before the outbreak of the war in Europe. Batanagar News, 17 February 1940.*

To implement its ideas and policies, the firm needed to shape its employees according to company ideals. This was mostly accomplished through social rationalisation and the 'education' of its labour elite through the Bata School of Work, with the goal of creating a disciplined, loyal and dedicated workforce. Employees were recruited mainly from the unskilled rural population.⁵⁵ The combination of their youth⁵⁶ and rural origin made them receptive towards the Bata training, the aim of which was the creation of homogenous teams who would be able to work successfully in autonomous workshops.⁵⁷ The firm preferred not to employ urban workers, as they mostly came from the industrial tradition and had usually already conducted workers' training in other factories/workshops, as a result of which they needed to be re-trained to work in the Bata system. For those reasons, employing workers through Sardar system, and not training them directly, was not acceptable for the company. This brought them into conflict with the Sardars, who whipped up sentiment against Bata so that even if the conditions in Bengal were favourable for new companies due to the abundant workforce, the company still had considerable problems recruiting new workers.

The foundation of the factory helped Bata in taking over a large part of the Indian market for plimsoll shoes, which had previously been dominated by Japanese production, and replacing them with those produced in Konnagar/Batanagar. According to the Batanagar chronicler Jan Baros, the Bata Company was able to persuade the primary plimsoll importer and wholesale tradesman, Mr Mohkamdin, to cease doing business with the Japanese and to buy shoes from Bata, which were produced on Indian soil.⁵⁸

As the lease of the old factory in Konnagar was due to expire in 1936,⁵⁹ and its site had already become too small for the expanding production, in 1934 the company bought land in a location 19 km south of Calcutta, and the first stone for the new factory complex was laid on 28 October 1934.⁶⁰ Less than two years later the factory in Batanagar began production after all the machines and workers had been removed from Konnagar in mid-1936.⁶¹ The building of Batanagar was the most significant and most important investment of the Bata Company outside of Europe during the interwar period. Its importance for the firm can be illustrated by the large number of intercontinental business flights that took place from Europe to this company town before the Second World War.⁶²

⁵⁵ *International Institute of Social History (IISH), International Labour Office (ILO) studies and reports; Series A-P, 1920-45; Studies on Industrial relations, 1930, vol 33, p. 235.*

⁵⁶ *The analysis conducted for the ILO in 1930 considered that the vast majority of workers in the Bata system were young, between 21 and 25 years old.*

⁵⁷ *IISH, ILO, Studies on Industrial relations, 1930, vol 33, p. 235.*

⁵⁸ *Baros, The First Decade of Batanagar, pp. 38-41. On the pages mentioned above, Baros described the process of suppression of Japanese competition, from a verbal agreement with M. Mohkamadin to a shoe vendors' conference held in Lahore at the beginning of 1934, where wholesalers from then North-east British India made agreements with Bata to purchase this company footwear, not just from Konnagar production but also from Zlin.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid., p. 17.*

⁶⁰ *Baroš, Čechoslováci na březích Gangu, p. 52. This date was chosen as it was the anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia as an independent state on that day in 1918.*

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The company town and factory complex in Batangar was designed by the Zlín architect František L. Gahura.⁶³ The plan was implemented on-site first by the builder Břetislav Martinec, who was in charge of the construction of the settlement from 1934 until 1937.

After he had completed three years of service in April 1937, control over the construction of the complex was transferred to Oldrich Zitek, who took charge of the Building and Planning Dept.⁶⁴ The Batanagar complex was built to meet the requirements under which other Bata towns were built, as they needed to be situated on a flat terrain, near a river or water channel. They were also supposed to have convenient travel links, with railways, motorways and airport connections. In the case that no railway or canal reached those factory towns, the Bata company would build them, as in the case of the water channel in Best in the Netherlands, or the railway connections to Borovo in today's Croatia. These towns were founded in areas with undeveloped industry or in depressed regions with a readily available workforce, which was then trained according to the company standards. Batanagar met those demands, as it was situated in Bengal, with plenty of available labour, and near Calcutta, with its traffic infrastructure. It was located on the Hooghly River and connected to major Indian waterways and in the proximity of the sea.⁶⁵

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⁶¹ *Batanagar News*, 24 April 1937. Every Bata company town had its newsletters, under different names, which were initially just to inform the factory workers about the everyday happenings in plants. However, they later developed to become more like a regular newspaper, which provided news not just about the factory and its workers, but also from the town, region and country as a whole. They were circulated in their thousands, and in the cases of Zlín and Borovo, in tens of thousands of copies. In some countries these newsletters were printed twice a week, and usually one issue was dedicated to life in the factory and company town, while the other issue focused on much broader topics and points of interest, directed towards the public outside of Bata towns. Despite being controlled and censored by the company, which was interested primarily in presenting a better public picture of the firm, these newsletters are an excellent source of information about everyday life in company towns. Later, however, from the 1960s this editorial policy changed, the newsletters changed to a smaller format and presented mostly filtered news about the company, stores, different meetings of managers, and other less relevant reports on life in the factory settlements. Unfortunately, only six years of *Batanagar News* have been preserved to this day, covering the period from 1937 to 1942. During Milan Balaban's research conducted in the factory archive in Batanagar in December 2016, issues after 1942 could not be found. M. Balaban also visited the National Library of India in Kolkata. However, unfortunately, the collections there did not contain newspapers from Batanagar.

⁶² Herman, *Baťa letá z Otrokovic*, p. 82. In 1931-32, Tomas Bata flew to India; in 1934 Tomas Janda; in 1936 Jan Baros; in 1937 Jan A. Bata; in 1938 Vaclav Rojt. Besides this, the firm had a small aeroplane (Zlín XII, VT-ALU), of its own production, with a base at Calcutta airport. This aeroplane was used for business trips within India and Southeast Asia.

⁶³ Horňáková, *František Lýdie Gahura, Zlín*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Baros, *The First Decade of Batanagar*, p. 65.

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Because of the tropical conditions, the buildings in the factory complex in Batanagar were made from reinforced concrete, unlike the Western Bata towns, which were built from a combination of red bricks, steel and concrete.⁶⁶ The factory buildings were marked with the same numbers as everywhere in the Bata world, starting with 11. Initially, only cheaper rubber shoes were produced, some 35 brands, which were sold at bazaars and Bata shops next to leather shoes imported from Zlín. However, from autumn 1936, the factory in Batanagar commenced the production of leather footwear. For this purpose, an additional 16 experts came from Zlín in September 1936 to establish production. **Table 2** presents the production numbers for leather and rubber footwear during the initial years.

Table 2. Shoe Production in Pairs in Konnagar/Batanagar 1933-38

Year	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Leather Footwear	0	0	0	44,600	334,100	421,400
Rubber Footwear	436,500	1,872,500	3,740,000	4,057,800	7,684,300	4,481,500
Overall	436,500	1,872,500	3,740,000	4,102,400	8,018,400	4,902,900

Source: SOkA Zlín, f. Baťa, I/13, kart. 908, inv. č. 119.⁶⁷

For the increased production, available methods of tanning were not good enough, and in 1937 the company founded a modern tannery in Batanagar.⁶⁸ In addition to tanneries, Machinery and Auxiliary departments were established in Batanagar, as well as chemical workshops, cardboard box production, a purchasing organisation and other production units were also established. Due to the increasing requirement, the company set up the Kottayam collection point for rubber in 1939. The number of stores also increased, and before the beginning of the Second World War the firm had 668 stores in British India.⁶⁹ The number of workers further increased during that period, and **Table 3** shows the increase over the decade of 1934-44.

⁶⁵ From 1937 Batanagar had a small harbour for ships with a capacity up to 8,000 tons. Hrnčířová, *Batanagar*, p. 34.

⁶⁶ *Batanagar News*, 24 April 1937.

⁶⁷ *Statistics for the year 1938 is just for the first half of that year.*

⁶⁸ *Baros, The First Decade of Batanagar*, p. 70.

⁶⁹ SOkA Zlín, f. Exico, kart. 1, inv. č. 5.

The progress of Batanagar can be compared with the development of the most successful Bata investment outside Czechoslovakia, Borovo in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. If we compare the number of workers and production in the year 1938 in both of these crucial factories, there were no significant differences. Both employed a similar number of workers (Borovo, 3,500; Batanagar, 3,307), and had similar production (Borovo, 7.1 million pairs of footwear; Batanagar around 9/9.5 mil).⁷⁰ At that time Borovo had a more substantial factory settlement.⁷¹

Table 3. The Number of Employees in Konnagar/Batanagar in the Period of 1933-44

Year	Number of Employees
1933	152
1934	335
1935	909
1936	2,400
1937	3,150
1938	3,307
1939	3,596
1940	5,368
1941	7,871
1942	6,902
1943	6,721
1944	7,497

Source: Baros.⁷²

The working day in the factory began at 7:30 h in the morning and continued until 12:00 h, followed by a two-hour lunch break. Work resumed at 14:00 h and initially finished at 18:00. Later the working day was shortened to 17:30 h, and just before the war it ended at 17:00.⁷³ Wages were paid every Monday. This system of work and payment was introduced from the system which Bata had developed in Europe. Bata, as we already mentioned above, usually claimed that the company paid higher salaries than other footwear producers, in addition to much better living conditions for the workers who lived in company premises.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *The factory in Borovo, however, produced mostly leather shoes, while almost 90% of the footwear produced in Batanagar was cheaper and simpler rubber footwear. Also, half of the workforce in Borovo were women, while almost all the workers in Batanagar were men. Batanagar News, 30 March 1940.*

⁷¹ *The Bata enterprise in Yugoslavia was nationalised after the war, later it became one of the ten largest companies in the whole of Socialist Yugoslavia, and before the war employed around 20,000 workers.*

⁷² *Baros, The First Decade of Batanagar, p. 104.*

⁷³ *Batanagar News, 15 April 1939.*

⁷⁴ *However, despite extensive construction, it is estimated that even in Zlín, where Bata built around 2,200 houses with one, two or four flats, only one fifth of the employees received accommodation in company housing. Every day employees from the surrounding municipalities within a radius of approximately 30 km commuted to the factory. The situation in other Bata factory towns in Europe and the world was similar to Zlín only in Borovo and Hellocourt. In other cities the housing supply was significantly lower. This was also the case with Batanagar, which at its peak around the year 1960 had 1,064 flats for families and 2,400 beds in dormitories for unmarried workers.*

While we do not have data about average salaries, as the company published only the highest weekly wages in the Batanagar News,⁷⁵ we have data about overall wages paid to workers during the period of 1933-37 (as shown in Table 4).

Table 4. Salaries in Konnagar/Batanagar Factory in 1933-39 Period

Year	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Overall Wages Paid (₹)	102,538	266,485	451,980	709,921	1,238,728	1,600,000	1,670,000

*Source: Batanagar News, 28 October 1940.*⁷⁶

Life in a Company Town⁷⁷

Upon moving to Batanagar, the firm slowly moved from temporary premises to more stable surroundings. In 1936 the building department built five large factory buildings, as well as 50 residential buildings.⁷⁸ All the buildings were supplied with electricity and furnished with kitchenettes and bathrooms, as well as telephones. As the factory complex and residential area were built on the banks of the Hooghly River, the building department needed to solve several issues such as humidity, the muddy terrain and the problem with drinking water, which needed to be drawn from almost 200 m deep. The problem with the ground and the vicinity of the Hooghly River was solved by laying the foundations for the building twice as deep as in Europe, from 3 to 6 m.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ For example, the highest weekly wages in the 52nd week of the year 1938 were: in the Rolling department '24.93; Automatic department '10; Machinery '10.14; Leather '13, Batanagar News 1 January 1938. Other issues of the newsletter also published similar results of the highest reached weekly salaries. After the outbreak of Second World War, with government commissions, the highest weekly wages for example in the 20th week of 1941 stood at: Leather Department '26.72; Rubber '15.40; Rolling '40; Machinery '28.1; Godown '15.29. Batanagar News, 24 May 1941.

⁷⁶ The Bata Company published these statistics, so there a need of strong precautions with interpretations of those data. As we already mentioned earlier, according to the majority of the researchers dealing with the history of the Bata Company, Bata statistics are mainly orientational.

⁷⁷ A description of life in a company town can be found in the above-mentioned book by Vikram Seth, in which Batanagar was renamed Prahapore, as the Bata company was renamed the Praha Shoe Company. Seth's novel presents an interpretation of the relations in the company between Indians and Czechs, and the attitudes and opinions which they held about each other. In the novel Tomas J. Bata became Jan Tomin, his Swiss wife Sonja became English, John Bartos became Pavel Havel, M. L. Khaitan was renamed Hiralal Khandeval, and Batamen were Prahamen.

⁷⁸ Batanagar News, 30 October 1937.

⁷⁹ Batanagar News, 28 October 1939.

The factory town was divided into two parts with a central road. On one side was the factory compound with the workers' colony, and on the other side were bungalows for supervisors, clerks, higher managers' villas, sports playgrounds, a cinema, club and community house, post office and other buildings. By 1937, 18 houses had been built for managerial staff,⁸⁰ as well as five dormitories for unmarried Czech workers, and a club house with a swimming pool and tennis court. In addition, 18 flats were built for clerks, situated in 3 blocks, and 20 blocks with 400 flats for native workers.⁸¹ Despite the Bata company's proclaimed equality, the flats for native clerks and workers were of a lower standard of comfort.⁸² In Batanagar the firm also built roads and railway station, which from late 1941 was connected with a direct line to Calcutta.⁸³ The company provided medical services with the opening of a clinic,⁸⁴ and later introduced dental care.⁸⁵

It also organised an anti-malaria team, which disinfected the malaria sites in Batanagar and the surrounding area. In addition, the firm organised the extermination of snakes in the region around the town, and gave instructions to residents and workers on how to treat snake bites.⁸⁶

Bata introduced 10 days of unpaid leave, which was already incorporated into the Bata system in Europe, and this unpaid leave was usually taken collectively during October.⁸⁷ Three factory restaurants were opened, one which served European dishes, and two Indian, vegetarian and non-vegetarian, with a capacity of 1,300 persons.⁸⁸ Besides this, the company opened a cinema,⁸⁹ library and reading room.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ *All family houses had three bedrooms, one dining room, a large bathroom and as well as room for a cook and a servant. Batanagar News, 24 April 1937.*

⁸¹ *Batanagar News, 24 April 1937.*

⁸² *Such inequality of accommodation standards became one of the main points of complaint during the serious labour unrest at the beginning of 1939.*

⁸³ *Batanagar News, 28 October 1941. Bata negotiated a service with the Eastern Bengal Railway company. It left Calcutta in the morning, and in the evening returned from Batanagar. Its primary purpose was to bring employees from the city to the factory and back.*

⁸⁴ *In the clinic, there were two doctors, Dr Hnatik and Dr Ahmeed. Hnatik was sent from Czechoslovakia, and before starting his job Ahmeed first went on a one-month training course in industrial healthcare to Bata hospital in Zlín. CABB, Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1936, Dopis pro p. primáře Baťovy nemocnice Dr. Tolara. The clinic had modern equipment such as X-rays, microscopes and other machines. It first operated in temporary premises and had three rooms: dispensing, consulting and dressing. In 1938 it moved to a larger pavilion, named after the wife of the company director. In addition to treating workers of the company, it also offered services for the villagers around Batanagar. The company also claimed that it introduced the first Health Insurance scheme for factory workers in Bengal in October 1934. Batanagar News, 12 July 1939.*

⁸⁵ *Batanagar News, 13 November 1937.*

⁸⁶ *Batanagar News, 9 April 1938.*

⁸⁷ *Batanagar News, 9 October 1937. This was later converted to two weeks of paid leave after the strike in January 1939.*

⁸⁸ *The price for a three-course lunch and dinner was two annas each. Batanagar News, 24 December 1937.*

⁸⁹ *Films in the cinema were screened in English, Hindu, Urdu and Bengali. Batanagar News, 30 October 1937. Films were later screened twice a day, with an average attendance of 500 per film, and overall in one year from August 1937 to August 1938 around 190 thousand people visited the cinema. The admission was two annas. Batanagar News, 29 January 1938. From November 1938, films for children of an educational character were shown every Sunday morning. In addition to films, these premises also housed different events such as theatre, oriental dancing, singing or circus shows.*

⁹⁰ *Batanagar News, 9 October 1937.*

The complex also housed a mosque and chapel for the Christians.⁹¹ Later a Hindu temple was also added. In September 1937, similarly as in other towns of the Bata system, a Bata School of Work was founded, intended to train a suitably qualified workforce. The school produced its first graduates in January 1938.⁹² From the next year, in addition to qualification courses, the school also offered teaching of English, Urdu and Bengali languages.⁹³

As everywhere in the Bata world, there was a significant focus on sports, but with the difference from European company towns that there were two football teams rather than one: S. C. Bata was formed by Czechoslovaks and later the Batanagar Sports Club, comprising Indians, was founded.⁹⁴ The S.C. Bata volleyball club was also established, playing in the Bengal Volleyball League.

The model of two football teams, one composed of Europeans and the other of Indians, was an exception in the organisation of sports in the town. The other teams, such as the volleyball, field hockey or tennis teams, which competed in the local Bengal or Calcutta leagues, were mixed.⁹⁵ A sports hall was also built for indoor sports activities,⁹⁶ as well as a football stadium. A playground and small swimming pool were constructed for children's needs. The standard Bata iconographic events were held in the town, such as the May Day celebrations⁹⁷ and annual commemorations of the death of Tomas Bata in July.⁹⁸ Another traditional event was held on 28 October, which marked not only the anniversary of the foundation of the independent state of Czechoslovakia, but also the day when the foundation stone for Batanagar was laid. On these occasions, thousands of people usually attended the factory, and panegyric speeches were delivered beside sports matches and free film screenings, and food was prepared for visitors.

The number of inhabitants continued to grow and reached around 4,500 in the autumn of 1939, just five years after the foundation stone was laid.⁹⁹ Of that number, around 150 people originated from Czechoslovakia, people working for Bata and their families. The transition to India was a significant change for people who came from Central Europe. The different conditions of life, including the change from a continental climate to the tropical and humid climate of Bengal, necessarily led to a reorganisation of family life. For people who came from a very egalitarian Czech society, where most of the national nobility had disappeared after the religious wars of the seventeenth century and had been replaced by a foreign Catholic aristocracy, it represented a fundamental change to arrive in a society where the fact that they were white Europeans catapulted them to a higher stratum of society.

⁹¹ *Batanagar News*, 24 April 1937.

⁹² *Batanagar News*, 29 January 1938.

⁹³ *Hrnčířová, Batanagar*, p. 54.

⁹⁴ *Batanagar News*, 13 November 1937.

⁹⁵ *Batanagar News*, 25 March 1939.

⁹⁶ *The sports hall had a capacity of 400 persons, and included two volleyball courts, a tennis court, equipment for table tennis, gymnastics and other sports. It also had an indoor swimming pool. Hrnčířová, Batanagar*, p. 37.

⁹⁷ *Batanagar News*, 5 May 1939.

⁹⁸ *Batanagar News*, 12 July 1939.

⁹⁹ *Batanagar News*, 28 October 1939.

The system of promotion and career advance in the Bata Company, which was based almost exclusively on merit and potential, led to the fact that people who came from an impoverished Moravian region became the 'wealthier' part of the population.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, while in Czechoslovakia the majority of them had led a modest life, this changed upon their arrival in India. According to J. Baros: 'The average European family in India has 2 to 3 persons employed in the household, usually a cook, servant, and cleaner'.¹⁰¹ The need for so many household workers was justified by the caste differences in Indian society, where 'for example, an Indian cook would never demean himself by washing the floor in the kitchen that he had soiled'.¹⁰²

Jan Baros, in his books about the Bata enterprises in India and the life of Czechs in Batanagar, wrote about the initial discomfort of the wives of Czechs in Batanagar with these household workers, as they were not used to having other persons working in their houses and needed to adapt to these breaches of privacy of their family life in India.¹⁰³ As a result of these different cultural standards, the cost of living also included expenses which were otherwise not typical for Bata's employees in Europe, such as a weekly 5 for servants and 5 for cooks for married European workers in Batanagar. For European bachelor workers those costs were lower, 2 for the servant, while it was expected that unmarried workers would eat in the company restaurant.¹⁰⁴ As the number of children grew in Batanagar, they had a quite different experience of life than they would have had if they had stayed in Czechoslovakia. In their early childhood they were reared by native babysitters, so for some of them the language they first adopted was not Czech, but Urdu, Hindi or Bengali.¹⁰⁵ When they later reached school age, the majority of those children was sent to boarding school in the mountainous Darjeeling region, as their parents preferred the climate there to the hot and humid climate of Bengal.¹⁰⁶

Bata company towns in India differed also in additional details in comparison with their counterparts in Europe and North America. While in the latter the centre of social activities was usually the community house, which was the location for cultural events as well as a restaurant and cinema, in India there was a dichotomy. The centre for Czechs and later higher managers of Indian origin was the Bata Club, while for the majority of the Indian workers this was the Community House. A similar situation also applied to the accommodation units. It was common in the European Bata company towns that the houses for ordinary workers and company management were mixed. The only difference was the size of the houses, as single-flat houses were reserved for higher ranks of managers and directors, with two-flat houses for lower managers, supervisors and clerks, while four-flat houses were for ordinary workers. In India, accommodation for Europeans and Indians was separated on different sides of the factory complex. The Czechoslovaks lived in a part of the settlement which was constructed to fulfil one of Bata's basic proclaimed principles: 'work collectively, live individually'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ According to Matyášová, who conducted oral history research with descendants of the Czechoslovak workers from Batanagar, they came mostly from poor rural families before they started working for Bata. Matyášová, *Reflexe vnímání pojmu*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰¹ Baroš, *Čechoslováci na březích Gangu*, p. 119.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.

¹⁰⁴ CABB, *Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1936, Průměrné týdenní vydání 1 zaměstnance v Indii, 11 February 1936.*

¹⁰⁵ Hrnčířová, *Batanagar*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁷ In the European part of settlement, individual villas were reserved for leading managers, and then two flat houses for the lower echelons of Czechoslovak workers.

On the other side, houses for Indian workers were built collectively, with six flats in one building for higher-level employees, and a collective settlement for ordinary workers.

This decision was later justified by the Batanagar chronicler concerning the fact that the plans for settlement from Zlín, which were used in Europe and North America, were not suitable for tropical conditions. Therefore, the company needed to adapt and create an entirely different kind of settlement, which would be more suitable for the tropics.¹⁰⁸ These accommodation units later became one of the main points of dispute during the general strike in January 1939 (Figures 3-6).

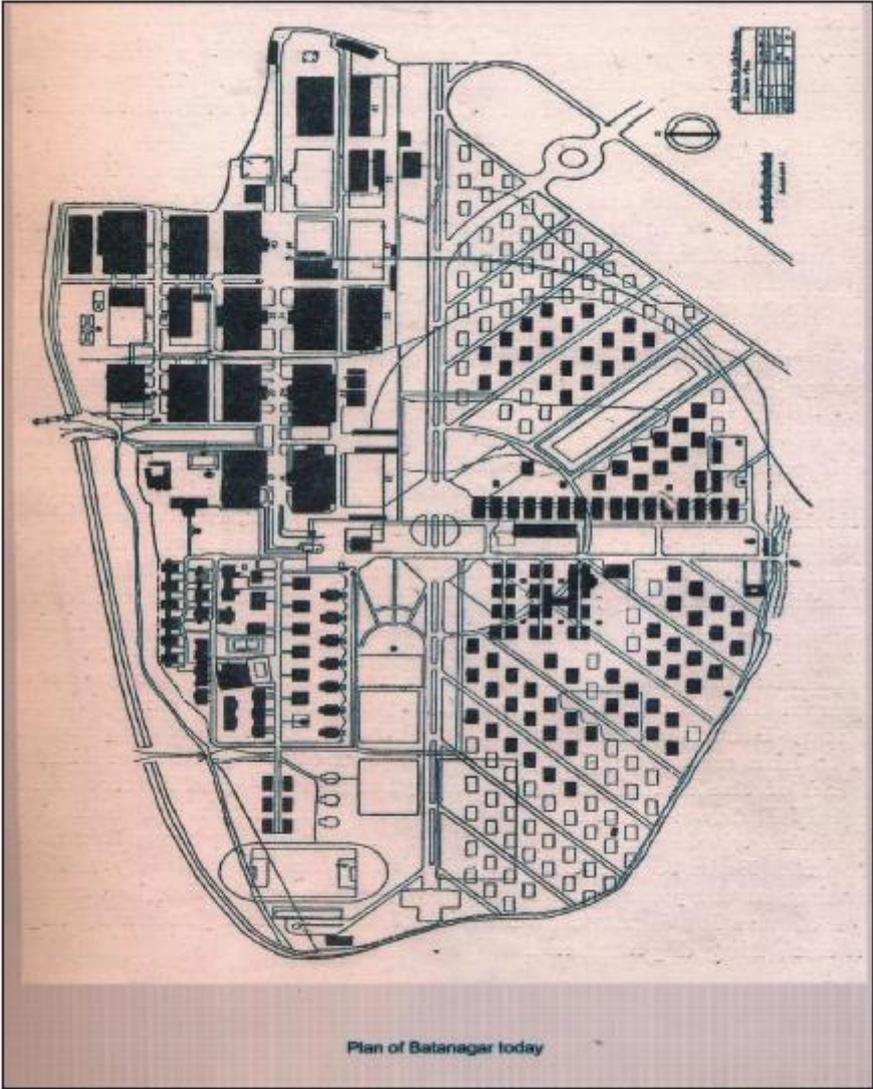


Figure 3. Plan of Batanagar in 1945

Source: CABB, Batanagar photo albums archive.

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Baros, *The First Decade of Batanagar*, p. 54.



Another two pictures of the Batanagar living colonies : 1938



Figure 4. Photo of the Accommodation Units in 1938

Source: CABB, Batanagar photo albums archive.

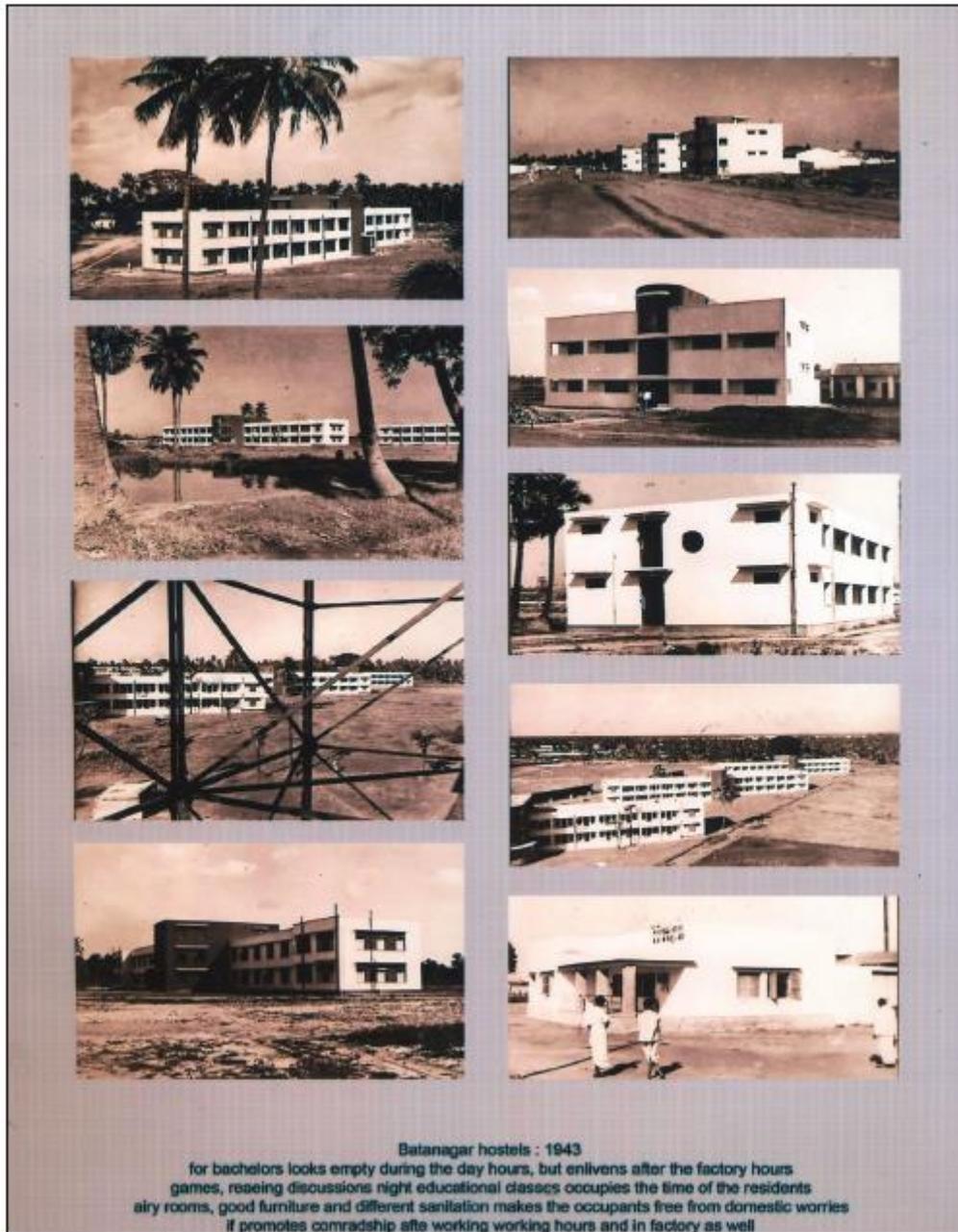


Figure 5. Photo of the Newly Constructed Workers Accommodation in Batanagar in 1943

Source: CABB, Batanagar photo albums archive.

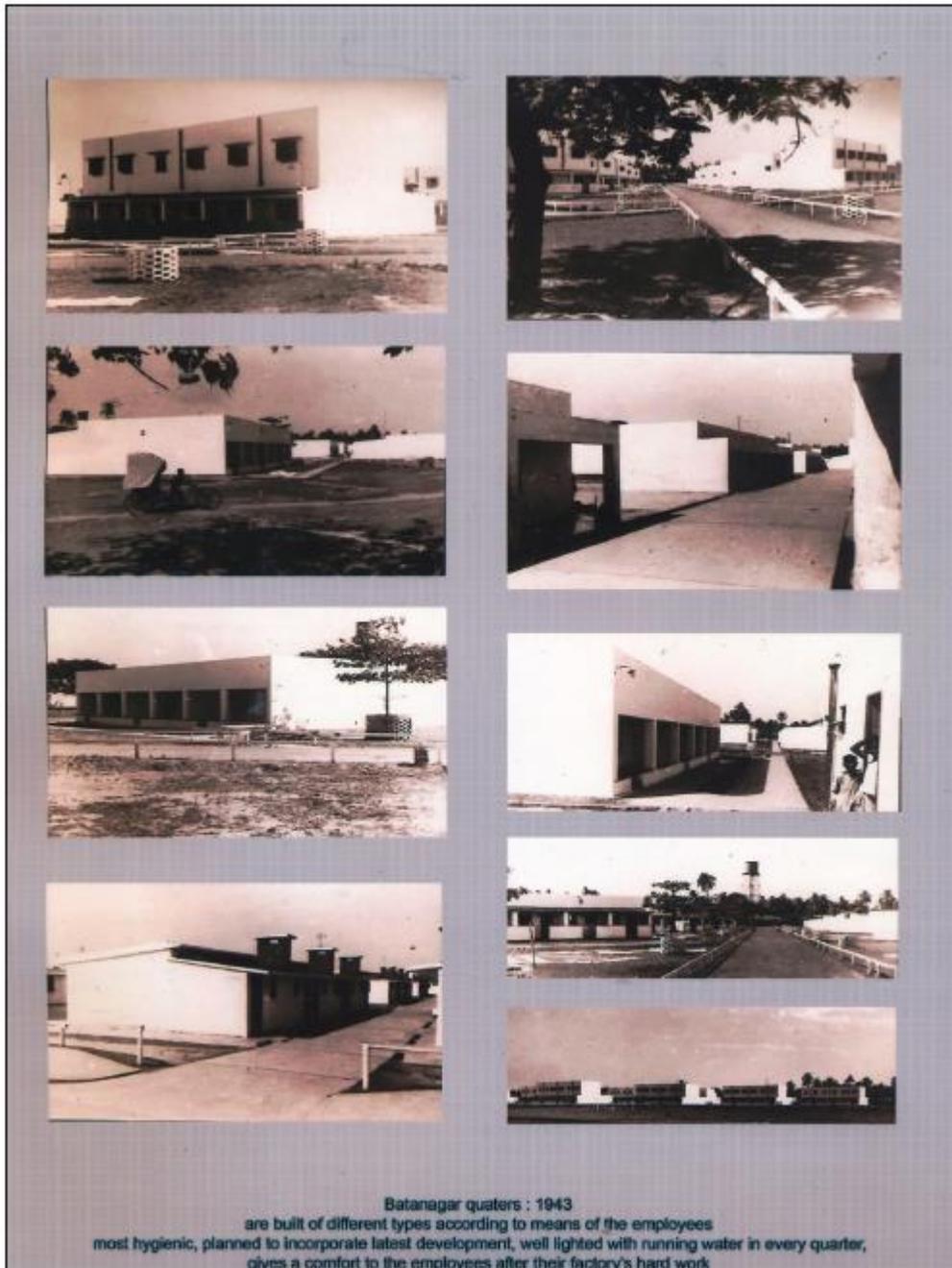


Figure 6. Photo of the Newly Built Married Workers Accommodation in Batanagar in 1943

Source: CABB, Batanagar photo albums archive.

Labour Unrest at the End of the 1930s

In January 1939, in Batanagar were held protest by workers, which were the most significant in all Bata factories in Czechoslovakia and abroad.¹⁰⁹ On Tuesday 3 January 1939, workers in Batanagar stopped work, blockaded workshops and began to threaten the management and European workers, as a result of which the company requested the help of the police. Thousands of workers participated in the protest, and a few days later the peaceful protests turned into violence, with attacks on workers who continued to work, as well as Europeans. As police attempts to disperse the strikers with clubs did not succeed, they opened fire on them, which resulted in the wounding of several workers. After this, the crowd scattered. News of the breaking up of the demonstrations spread throughout Calcutta and led to a further escalation of the situation. In the wild rumours which circulated through the city, several wounded workers became 25 dead strikers and 12 dead policemen. This was later inflated further into a story that Czechs had fired on Indian workers with revolvers, leading to the instalment of police protection over the colony. At that time, 115 Czechoslovak workers lived in the company town, with 25 women and 14 children.¹¹⁰

Food was brought to the colony under military supervision, and measures were prepared for the evacuation of women and children by the route of the Hooghly River if the situation became critical.¹¹¹ In Calcutta itself, the Indian Trade Congress held a major protest with the displaying of communist flags, and the population called for a boycott of Bata products. Slogans were also shouted against Czechs and their exploitation of workers and Indian resources. The Czechoslovak Consul in Calcutta Frantisek Tousek reported that the speed with which the police decided to shoot was suspicious, and took the view that this was mostly because the enterprise was not English. He believed that if those protests had been held in an English owned factory, the police would not have been so trigger-happy. In his opinion, in such a situation the police would have tried to find a way to calm the demonstrations without resorting to such drastic measures, which could have been expected to lead only to a further escalation and intensification of the conflict.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *The only other example of strikes in Bata company towns occurred in East Tilbury in England and Borovo in the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In England in the spring of 1938, younger workers went on strike to demand the recognition of unions. Less than 100 workers were involved in this strike, which ended after a few weeks with Bata recognizing the unions. In Yugoslavia, after a one-day strike in January 1941, the firm signed a collective contract on 27 February 1941, which allowed workers to join the official union, the Croatian Workers Alliance. Under this contract an 8-hour working day and 48-hour working week were agreed, a 50% wage increase was set for overtime and work on Sundays and holidays was prohibited. There was also an appendix stating that only people from the neighbouring region could be employed in the factory.*

¹¹⁰ *AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. 1/dův. 39, Nepokoje dělnictva v Baťové továrně v Batanagaru, 6 January 1939.*

¹¹¹ *AMZV, f. IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. 2/dův. 39, Nepokoje dělnictva v Baťové továrně v Batanagaru, 8 January 1939.*

¹¹² *AMZV, f. IV sekce, kart. 1082, č. 3/dův. 39, Nepokoje dělnictva v Baťové továrně v Batanagaru, 11 January 1939.*

The workers demanded an increase of their salaries,¹¹³ a reduction of their rent for their accommodation,¹¹⁴ removal of the paved roofs, provision of free healthcare, permanent contracts, an extension of the existing mosque and the construction of a Hindu temple in Batangar, as well as recognition of the workers' union.¹¹⁵

After two weeks of the strike, on 18 January 1939 the Bata company partially accepted their demands. This strike and the violence that took place was a rare example of strikes throughout the Bata system during the interwar period. After this strike, significant efforts were made by the Czech management to calm the situation and to earn higher loyalty and respect from the Indian workers. As in European factories, far greater emphasis was placed on the sense of belonging to the Bata company and the ideals of creating the perfect industrial worker and a better person. Workers were referred to as associates, a term which had been used elsewhere in Bata factories, but after 1939 this was emphasised even more.¹¹⁶ Czech workers were instructed that they must behave with a more humane and friendly approach towards the native workers and form friendships with them. By doing so, they were intended to attract local workers more towards Bata ideals and to make real 'Batamen' of them.¹¹⁷ The company invested significant funds in enhancing the living conditions of the Indian workers,¹¹⁸ and during the first half of the 1940s, even though this was during the war, a large number of new and better accommodation units were built for the native workers.¹¹⁹ It appears that these measures were successful, as the next reports of significant labour unrest and strikes in Batangar did not emerge until almost 40 years later, in the second half of the 1970s.

The Bata Company in India During the Second World War

The Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 dictated the secession of the border areas to Germany. After that, democratic Czechoslovakia was weakened and subsequently destroyed in March 1939. In these months, Bata's headquarters in Zlín prepared its foreign affiliates for a changed situation—sending its workers (especially Jews), goods, machinery and capital to safe countries outside of the reach of Hitler's Germany.¹²⁰

¹¹³ *Another of the demands was that the weekly minimum salary could not be less than '6 CABB, Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1939, Bata shoe factory workers union demands.*

¹¹⁴ *From five to three annas, which was accepted after the strike by the Bata Company. From these data it can be estimated that in Batanagar, as in other Bata company towns, the rent came to only a smaller part of the salary of a worker in the Bata system.*

¹¹⁵ *AMZV, IV. sekce, kart. 1082, č. 3/dův. 39, Nepokoje dělnictva v Baťové továrně v Batanagaru, 11 January 1939.*

¹¹⁶ *CABB, Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1939, Pokyny našim hochům, 9 January 1939.*

¹¹⁷ *CABB, Korespondence Batanagar-Zlín 1939, Pokyny našim hochům, 9 January 1939.*

¹¹⁸ *From mid-1939 the construction began of new buildings for the workers, which replaced the earlier accommodation. The new housing improved the standard of living, with electricity, water supplies, hygienic latrines, shower-baths and other amenities. Each flat had its covered veranda, and every building was supposed to have around 60 residents. Batanagar News, 9 December 1939.*

¹¹⁹ *At the beginning of 1941 the firm invested 2.5 lakhs for building additional accommodation for workers. Batanagar News, 15 March 1941.*

¹²⁰ *See more on this issue in Herman, 'Baťa, Židé a Steinův seznam', pp. 118-19. In addition, the company also sent the last apprentices from India to Zlín, M. K. Mukherjee, A. K. Gupta and B. R. Gupta, at the last moment, before the war in Europe started in September 1939. They arrived back in Batanagar at the beginning of November. Batanagar News, 4 November 1939.*

The Bata Company in India During the Second World War

Among other matters, a shipment was sent to India to make the Batanagar factory independent of the vulnerable connection with Zlin,¹²¹ Those measures made sense when on 14 March 1939 the Slovak Republic declared independence and day after Nazi Germany formed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (Protektorat Bohmen und Mahren in German), With that, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist.

In the ensuing situation, the Czechoslovak consuls in India did not act in coordination. While Ladislav Urban in Bombay refused to hand over the consulate to German jurisdiction, the Consul in Calcutta, Frantisek Tousek, obeyed the orders from German-occupied Prague and delivered the consulate to them. His move undermined the British administration's confidence in the Czechoslovaks (and the Bata company), and the British started to consider the Czechoslovaks disloyal, untrustworthy and a threat to British interests, This situation was resolved through the Consul in Bombay, Urban, who concluded a silent deal with the Batanagar factory director Bartos. After that the Czechoslovaks in Calcutta began to support Urban and thus the Czechoslovak government in exile under Edvard Beneš.¹²² When the Second World War began, the Batanagar factory supported the war effort of the Allies by adapting to war production, In addition to millions of pairs of military shoes, the army was also supplied with buttons, canvas for tents, belts and pouches,¹²³ In order to fulfil these orders, the firm had to hire new workers, and at the end of 1940 an additional 500 employees were hired,¹²⁴ Because of the adjustment to war production, production of consumer goods declined, which led to the closing of around 100 shops,¹²⁵ Government orders more than offset the 35% decrease in export due to the outbreak of the war.¹²⁶ This can be seen from Table 5.

Table 5. Bata Company Business in India During the 1940-41 Period

Particulars	Sale (₹, Millions)		Overall Increase (%)
	1940	1941	
Retail	7.5	9	+20
Wholesale	4.4	5.7	+30
Military	0.5	4.8	+730
Export	2.6	1.7	-35
Number of Workers Employed in the Production	5,340	7,871	+47

Source: CABB, Annual Report for 1941.

¹²¹ *The message from Zlin to the Batanagar factory stated that: 'You are aware of the events of Munich; it seems worse things will follow, Forget Zlin now, put the factory on its own footing, depending on the ability of your people and the experience of the instructors we have sent you', Baros, The First Decade of Batanagar, p, 129.*

¹²² *NA Praha, Ministerstvo vnitra, Londýn (further MVL), kart. 263, inv. č. 532, Československá kolonie v severní Indii, 15 September 1942.*

¹²³ *Baroš, Čechoslováci na březích Gangu, p, 103, 132.*

¹²⁴ *Batanagar News, 14 December 1940.*

¹²⁵ *Bata and Sinclair, Bata, p, 181.*

¹²⁶ *CABB, Annual Report for 1941.*

For support of the Allied activities in the ongoing war conflict, the 'Palacký' association of compatriots (later called the 'Czechoslovak Society') was established, which organised various cultural and sports events throughout the war. Beside this, workers in Batanagar gave 10% of their salaries in support of the Czechoslovak resistance and allied war funds.¹²⁷ They collected hundreds of thousands of Indian rupees each year.¹²⁸ During 1942, because of the bombing of Calcutta by the Japanese and the threat of invasion from occupied Burma, Czechoslovak women and children were evacuated from Batanagar to a hill station in Mussoorie, 1,500 km away.¹²⁹ At the same time, workers in the factory volunteered to join the army and local militia. In Batanagar, 700 people were trained to prepare for future Japanese aggression.¹³⁰ Around 20 Czechoslovak workers there also enlisted to the Allied armies, and after training they engaged in combat in three continents.¹³¹

Although the war was raging, the Bata company maintained a vast network of hundreds of stores in India, and the factory business expanded with the addition of more factories because of the lack of Japanese competition.¹³² In February 1940, the construction began of the Batapur factory near Lahore (now in Pakistan), where the production of rubber footwear (February)¹³³ and leather footwear (April) was launched in 1942. In May 1942, the Digha (Bataganj) factory for leather shoes was opened near Patna in East India, and the Mokamehghat tannery was opened in its vicinity in September 1943.¹³⁴ This network of factories and retail outlets on the Indian subcontinent was a solid foundation for Bata's business during the turbulent post-war period.

The Bata Company After the War

After the war, the Bata Company needed to adapt to the new circumstances. In 1947, after the division of British India, the factories in Batanagar, Digha, Mokamehghat and majority of the shops were within the territory of independent India, while numerous shops and the sizeable Batapur factory, with its 1,870 workers, ended in newly formed Pakistan (today Pakistan and Bangladesh).¹³⁵

¹²⁷ NA Praha, f. MVL, kart. 263, inv. č. 532, Baťové, Batanagar a Bartoš, 15 September 1942.

¹²⁸ Baroš, *Čechoslováci na březích Gangu*, p. 199; NA Praha, f. MVL, kart. 263, inv. č. 948, *Čechoslovák v Britské východní Africe*, roč. 6, č. 2, únor 1945.

¹²⁹ CABB, *Evacuation of the ladies*, 1942.

¹³⁰ Matyášová, *Reflexe vnímání pojmu*, p. 26.

¹³¹ *Of those volunteers, engineer Svatopluk Rada fought in the Soviet Union, Bedrich Kruzik served in the b-311 (Czechoslovak) Bomber Squadron of the RAF, Kurt Glasner and Frantisek Hanus entered the Indian army, and Vincenc Mesaros fought in defence of Tobruk, where he died in January 1942. Baroš, Čechoslováci na březích Gangu*, p. 133; NA Praha, f. MVL, kart. 263, inv. č. 532, Baťové, Batanagar a Bartoš, 15 September 1942; *Database of Czechoslovak soldiers online*: <http://www.vuapraha.cz/fallensoldierdatabase>.

¹³² NA Praha, *Ministerstvo průmyslu, obchodu a živností, Londýn*, kart. 19, inv. č. 87, *Podniky firmy Baťa a jejich situace*, 14 October 1943.

¹³³ *The opening of another large factory in Lahore brought unrest and unease among the workers, so the administration had to reassure them that it had no plans to shut down the production in Bengal. Batanagar News*, 28 February 1942.

¹³⁴ CABB, *Sales Policy and Organization Far East 1957*.

¹³⁵ Gatti, *Chausser les hommes qui vont pieds nus*, p. 257.

Already earlier, during the second half of the 1930s, the Bata Company had been able to cultivate good relations with the future political elite of India. The Bata Company had long-established connections with India from the mid-1920s, when the first apprentices came from India to the newly established Bata School of Work in Zlín. Tomas Bata's rhetoric on his first visit to India in 1925, which can be found in his essay *Two races*, is very much in the spirit of the 'white man's burden'.¹³⁶ During the following period, company owners modified their attitudes towards India and Indians. Already on his second visit, the tone of his opinion was changing in a more positive direction. In the meantime Tomas Bata was trying to establish connections with the Indian elite, and so in 1927 he hosted in his home the chief of the Congress party in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, J. C. Gupta, as well other Indian dignitaries in the following years.¹³⁷ His step-brother Jan A. Bata, who took over the role of chairman after Tomas's death in 1932, during his visit to India on his renowned trip around the world in 1937 wrote about Indians as: 'beautiful people, clean, tall, intelligent, and with high goals ... The shoemaker entrepreneur is free here like nowhere else in Europe'.¹³⁸ In the summer of the same year Muhammad Zafarullah Khan,¹³⁹ a member of the Executive council of the Viceroy of India, visited Zlín, and in January 1938 he also visited Batanagar.¹⁴⁰

A year later, one of the highest-ranking directors and former Czechoslovak diplomat, Hugo Vavrečka, organised the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi to Zlín in August 1938. The company sent a plane which brought them from Prague to Zlín, where they were considered honourable and distinguished guests.¹⁴¹ While in Zlín, he also met Thomas J. Bata, the son of the founder and future chairman of the Company, and met with him also several times later.¹⁴² Later J. Nehru visited the Batanagar and Bata factory in Faridabad in 1952, and other dignitaries visited Bata factories in the 1950s, for example, President Rajendra Prasad, who visited the Bataganj factory in Digha.¹⁴³

¹³³ *The opening of another large factory in Lahore brought unrest and unease among the workers, so the administration had to reassure them that it had no plans to shut down the production in Bengal. Batanagar News, 28 February 1942.*

¹³⁴ *CABB, Sales Policy and Organization Far East 1957.*

¹³⁵ *Gatti, Chausser les hommes qui vont pieds nus, p. 257.*

¹³⁶ *Hrnčířová, Batanagar, p. 18.*

¹³⁷ *Batanagar News, 12 July 1939.*

¹³⁸ *Doleshal, Life and Death in the Kingdom of Shoes, p. 183.*

¹³⁹ *Muhammad Zafarullah Khan (1893-1985) later became the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, President of UN General Assembly and president of International Court of Justice. He met Thomas J. Bata also before the war, and according to his memoirs they continued their relations subsequently, meeting several times during the post-war period. Bata and Sinclair, Bata, pp. 182-83.*

¹⁴⁰ *Batanagar News, 8 January 1938.*

¹⁴¹ *Zlín, 15 August 1938. In the newspaper article they described J. Nehru as one of the most intelligent and educated persons who ever visited the Bata factory complex in Zlín. This just shows how much rhetoric about Indians had evolved in the official Bata narrative if we compared it with the narrative from T. Bata's first visit to India in 1925.*

¹⁴² *Bata and Sinclair, Bata, pp. 185-87.*

¹⁴³ *CABB, Batanagar photo-albums archives.*

These connections enabled the firm to successfully cross over the colonial period to the newly independent India. Bata built up an image of an Indian firm with an orientation towards the public, employing Indian workers, using domestic raw materials, and reducing imports of footwear from abroad with the attendant loss of money out of the country.¹⁴⁴

The Bata portfolio was expanded in December 1951, when a modern factory for rubber and canvas shoes in Faridabad (near Delhi) was launched into operation. Very soon, the factory employed around 1,500 employees.¹⁴⁵ The overall position of the Bata Company in India is shown in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that the number of shops did not increase and remained stable over the course of the decade, and usually was around 770. The number of shops, as well as the sales of shoes, can be seen from Table 7.

According to the company's own statistics, Bata produced 4,800,000 pairs of leather footwear in India (6.4% of Indian production) as well as 14,040,000 pairs of rubber footwear (40% of Indian production) in 1955.¹⁴⁶ If we assume that production was not drastically increased/decreased in 1956, around half of the overall output of the Bata footwear was sold in Bata shops, while other half was sold through wholesalers or exported.

Table 6. Bata Business in India During Period 1951-56

Year	Number of Stores	Employees in Stores	Employees in Factories	The Overall Number of Employees
1951	738	2,259	9,504	11,763
1952	780	2,207	9,575	11,782
1953	770	2,314	9,262	11,576
1954	776	2,318	9,006	11,324
1955	770	2,321	8,916	11,237
1956	772	2,343	9,421	11,754

Source: CABB, *Sales Policy and Organization Far East 1957*

¹⁴⁴ Similar policies were adopted everywhere in the Bata system. As an example of the tactics used by the company see Ehrenbold, 'Putting Mohlin on the Map', pp. 129-45.

¹⁴⁵ According to the company narrative, the firm was invited by the Indian Government to found a factory in Faridabad, in order to ease the situation for refugees from Pakistan who resided there. According to Thomas J. Bata's memoirs, the firm first intended to build a new factory near Bombay. However, after a meeting of T. J. Bata with the first Indian President R. Prasad in Patna in 1950, they changed their plans and built a factory in Faridabad. Reflecting on the co-operation on this issue, T.J. Bata writes: 'As for the Indian Government, it adhered meticulously to its commitment. The refundable portion of the excess profits tax was repaid promptly, whereas other enterprises, which the government considered less cooperative, had to wait for years, by which time inflation had eroded the value of the money'. Bata and Sinclair, *Bata*, pp. 189-90.

¹⁴⁶ CABB, *Sales Policy and Organization Far East 1957*

Table 7. Stores and Sales for Bata India During 1947-56 Period

Year	Number of Stores	Sales in Pairs	Turnover (₹)
1947	443	5,722,200	21,500,000
1950	703	7,351,100	36,609,300
1951	738	6,983,400	40,569,900
1956	772	9,218,451	54,826,785

Source: CABB, Sales Policy and Organization Far East 1957

During the same period, a slow transition occurred from Czech top managers to Indian. The Czechs were already leaving after the Second World War, as many returned to Czechoslovakia, where the Bata Company had been nationalised in October 1945.¹⁴⁷ After February 1948, Czechoslovakia also became part of the communist bloc, and several people who went home on their regular leave could not come back to India. Other Czechs from Batanagar left after the end of the 1940s, mostly emigrating to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where they usually worked initially for local Bata branches, before leaving the company and founding their own business.¹⁴⁸ They were replaced by Indian managers. As Bata already had native Indian managers within the ranks of the company,¹⁴⁹ the enterprise did not have a significant problem replacing senior foreign managers with Indians.¹⁵⁰

This number increased in the following years, and the last Czech manager left Batanagar in the mid-1960s.¹⁵¹

On 6 April 1956, the company was newly registered as Bata Shoe Company Private Limited, Calcutta. In 1960, Bata had 779 stores in India and produced around 24 million pairs of shoes in four factories.¹⁵² At that time the chairman of the Bata in India was an Indian citizen, M. L. Khaitan, who had worked for Bata since the beginning of the 1930s. The flagship factory and company town in Batanagar experienced considerable growth towards the end of the decade. In 1961, it already employed 8,655 people (265 in managerial positions). In addition to managers' villas, the company town included 1,056 housing units for families and 2,400 beds in dormitories for single men, thus at the beginning of the 1960s around 12,000 people lived in the Batanagar company town.¹⁵³ At that time nobody could doubt the full integration of the Bata Company into the Indian economy and society.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ *The Bata Company lost around 75% of its capacities after nationalisation in Central and Southeast Europe. From the remaining parts of the firm in rest of the world, Tomas J. Bata formed the Western Bata Organisation, later the Bata Shoe Organisation. He also entered a lengthy legal process with his uncle Jan Antonin Bata, which finally ended in 1963 when the court in New York ruled in favour of Tomas J. Bata and his claims.*

¹⁴⁸ *Hrnčířová, Batanagar, p. 96.*

¹⁴⁹ *The first Indian managers were in Batanagar already in the second half of the 1930s. Already in 1941, the board of directors of the Bata Shoe Co. Ltd. numbered two Czechs and two Indians. J. Bartos, V. Klvac, M. L. Khaitan and N. J. B. Minahan. CABB, Annual Report for 1941.*

¹⁵⁰ *Bata and Sinclair, Bata, p. 191.*

¹⁵¹ *Hrnčířová, Batanagar, p. 96.*

¹⁵² *CABB, Udayabhaskar R. R, A Study on Bata Shoe Company Private Limited, Master Thesis, 1962, p. 17, 33.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *As Tirthankar Roy observes, the Bata Company mainly monopolised the middle sector of the shoe producing market, in an industry which had been mostly dominated by small producers in India. Roy, A Business History of India, p. 189*

Conclusion

The Bata Company venture in India, which brought hundreds of Czechs from rural Moravia to late colonial Calcutta, was one of the Bata company's longest and most successful investments in its international history. The enterprise, which was founded at the beginning of the 1930s, is still in operation and is one of the largest footwear factories in the entire country. The tropical climate was just one of the factors that made the foundation of the company in Calcutta difficult. A much more significant obstacle was the very different cultural environment of India, with its hierarchical system and castes, as well as relations between the European and domestic population. The Czechs, who first came in groups of young men later joined by their wives and children, needed to learn how to behave in colonial society. This included the maintenance of specific standards, not just material, but also behaving with good manners, staying in good physical shape and keeping a distance from the domestic population. With regard to these demands, the Bata Company needed to adjust its policies and standards to be accepted by the colonial elite and public in Calcutta. Since initially the salaries of the Czech workers were not much higher than those of Indian employees, in order to achieve the goals mentioned above the firm needed to increase their incomes. Other aspects related to life in the company town, which the firm built in Batanagar.

In this factory settlement, in contrast with other company towns in the West, the accommodation zones of European and Indian workers were separate, with a much better living standard for the Czechs. Another point of difference was the existence of the Bata Club House, where the social life of Westerners was concentrated, while a Community House was built for native workers. The better terms for European workers led to a severe labour conflict at the end of the 1930s. This led to significant company investments in improving the status and material standards of Indian workers. In the period following independence, the Bata company adapted to the new conditions and 'Indianised' its enterprise, with the gradual removal of European workers and the promotion of native employees to higher management positions. In summary of the above findings of the research, we believe that Bata's success as an enterprise within the Indian subcontinent was primarily due to its willingness to adapt its corporate policies to the cultural specifics of Indian society, that is, the process of its integration into the Indian economy and culture between the mid-1920s and the early 1960s had increasingly pronounced glocal features. Such a practice was in line with the business motto of Bata—Our customer, our master—but when compared to similar ventures by the company within same context elsewhere (e.g., in Africa or South America), it was accomplished with a far higher degree of economic and social integration into the native society.

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