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British And Bengal: Trade And Politics Of Power C. 1757 To 1764

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ABSTRACT

The first decade of the seventeenth century saw a new transformation in Indian scenario. The East India Companies (English and Dutch) made their appearance. These companies came as trading bodies here and tried their best to dominate each other. Till the second-half of the eighteenth century they actively participated in trading activities and balance of trade was in favor of India. By the second-half of eighteenth century we see an overturn of this phenomenon where the English company started divulging into power politics and with a short period of two decades they became the masters of Bengal. In this paper I have tried to look over the phenomenon of the conditions in Bengal which favored English to start their political career here. The various theories propounded by various scholars regarding whether it was a pre-planned idea of English to establish rule in India (Bengal) or it was just a circumstantial act have been inculcated in this paper. I have also tried to see the consequences of the Battle of Plassey and how it abetted English company for the Buxar victory.

KEYWORDS: *Chauth, Dadan, Dastak, Diwani, Farman, Nawab, Nizam, Khalsa land*

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INTRODUCTION

The English East India Company (EIC) was founded by a royal charter on 31st December 1600 as a joint stock company of London merchants uniting to combat Dutch competition in eastern trade. It was given monopoly to all trade from England to East and was permitted, even in an age dominated by mercantilist ideas, to carry bullion out of country to finance its trade. It was not, however, given any overt mandate at that time to carry on conquest or colonization. The Company formally started trade in India from 1613 after settling score with the Portuguese, who had arrived at the scene earlier. A Farman from Mughal Emperor Jahangir gave them permission to establish their factory or warehouse in India, the first factory being set up at Surat in the Western coast in 1617 when Jahangir received Sir Thomas Roe as English envoy in his court.

The foundation of Calcutta in 1690 and its fortification were followed by the grant of zamindari rights in three villages of Kolkata, Sutanati and Gobindpur. Two years later the situation become unstable again at the death of Aurangzeb, but was formalized again by *Farman* from emperor Farrukh Shiyar in 1717, which granted the company the right to carry on duty free trade to rent of 38 villages around Calcutta and to use royal mint. But this *Farman* seem to be the source of Battle of Plassey, when Murshid Quli Khan refused to extend its duty-free trade and it gradually developed and when Siraj-Ud- Doula became Nawab, he ordered to stop fortification and captured fort William of Calcutta and led to Battle of Plassey in 1757, in which British was victorious and offered the throne of Bengal to Mir Jaffar.”¹

AIMS / FACTORS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF BRITISH RULE

Many explanations have been given by scholars regarding the British conquest of Bengal & South India. The Decline of Mughal Empire and the Anglo-French rivalry led to conquest of Bengal as well as India.

The scholars who adhere to Defensive Theory of Imperialism regard this conquest as unintentional and circumstantial. J R Seeley says “The conquest of India was made blindly, unintentionally and accidentally and in a fit of absent mind fullness”² The historians of this school view that the conquest of India was a defensive response to French and commercial competition and to anarchical situation which developed with the decline of Mughal, and Anglo-French rivalry. For Philip Mason this conquest was to expel the French threat to English East India Company and project its trade.”³ ‘The so-called ‘turbulent frontier theory’ that 18th century was the time period of war and turmoil, and British used their military power to save Bengal, Bombay and Madras makes a similar impression.”⁴ An Eric stroke has argued The decline of Mughal empire followed by political fragmentation and instability made the Company to try their political career rather than any incentive from home. So, it was conquest of Bengal was a defensive move from Company to defend

their position.”⁵ Judith Brown has detected the complex rationale of this act. For him “This was not only the desire of quick profits for Company and personal ambition of some factors but also an extension of European imperial rivalry which led to the conquest of Bengal.”⁶

The psychologist theorists of Imperialism like N C Chowdhury, I B Watson, John Starchy, Martin Dreams make a different analysis of this event and draw different conclusions. I B Watson - “For them the psychology of the English officers was more important factor for conquest than any other. It was personal urge of the officers like Clive for self-assertion.”⁷

Economic Theory of Imperialism —The historians of this school put emphasis that the conquest of Bengal was because of economic interest. **Marshal** argues that “The political consideration is at least as imported as economic one. He asserts that annexation of Indian state focusing on weakening the French fled and local turmoil. He argued that the annexation of Awadh has an economic dimension but one can't deny the political implication and motives.”⁸

Ram Krishna Mukherjee argues that “EIC was attracted by commercial profit, therefore went for conquest of country and by reaching 1856 whole of the country was under their control. They formulated economic and administrative policy which was to secure their economic interest. The EIC under the leadership of Sir Josiah Child decided to an aggressive stand in defense of company's trading interest.”⁹

EMERGENCE OF BENGAL AS A INDEPENDENT STATE & CONFLICT BETWEEN THE EIC AND THE NAWAB OF BENGAL

In the beginning of 18th century, after the death of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb in 1707 central authority became weakness in this situation a number of regional states emerged on the one hand and there was constant war among each other for power, that is why many historians called 18th century as' **Dark Age**'. Among those regional states, Bengal became independent under the governorship of Murshid Quli Khan in 1717. While in 1719 the governorship of Orissa was added, transferred capital from Decca to Murshidabad. His period was known for improvement of revenue administration, including increase khalsa land, provided **taccavi** loans, land farming, forbade the hoarding grain.

Bengal was the most attractive province even during Delhi Sultanate, The EIC had greatest interest in trading in Bengal as nearly 60% of the British import from Asia consisted of Bengal goods. During 17th century they established themselves at Balasore, Hugli, Kasimbazar, Patna and Decca. The company paid a sum of Rs. 3000 per annum to the Mughal Emperor, who allowed them to trade freely in Bengal were worth more than that of Rs. 50,000 per annum. During a short period, from 1757 to 1765, the power gradually got transferred from the Nawab of Bengal to the

EIC because of the defeat of Indian powers in two decisive battles- the battle of Plassey and the Buxar. In 1727 there was 15 largest zamindars took the revenue of $\frac{1}{2}$ of the province like Omi Chand or the Armenian tycoon Khoja Wajid who control fleet ships, banker was Jagat Seth became their provincial governor of 1730 control over mint. Murshid Quli Khan was succeeded by Sarfaraj Khan and he was ousted by his father Shujauddin Mohammad Khan who control over the Bengal Bihar Orissa in 1727.

According to Philip Calkins that “The government of Bengal began to the battle developed took more like government by cooperation of the dominant forced in Bengal rather than the imposition of the rule from Bengal.”¹⁰ The conflict between the Nawab Murshid Quli Khan and English became more worst when he refused extend its duty-free provision to cover also the private trade of the company officials, he also denied permission to the company to buy the 38 villages and refused to offer the minting privilege, it started developing right from 1717. Nawab Alivardi Khan kept both of the English and French under control and forbade them from getting in any open hostilities. But the major problem before him was the Marathas and rebellion of Afghan. Ultimately, he came to terms with the Marathas by accepting to Chauth handed over Orissa to Marathas in the 1750. the company started the fortification in Calcutta to protect them from French, thus, without permission of Nawab.

After Alivardi Khan, Siraj- Ud- Daula became the Nawab of Bengal. He had a rival of Shaukat Jung, Ghaseti Begum Mir Jaffar and also Jagat Seth, Omi Chand, and Rai Durlabh. To these internal rivals were added the threat to Siraj position from ever growing Commercial activities of the EIC.

BATTLE OF PLASSEY: CAUSES OF HOSTILITY

“The major causes for the battle was the imperialistic ambition of the company. They came to India for trade but gradually they tried to control the trading center and occupied Indian Territory, for this they began Misuse of the royal Farman and Dastak — A *Farman* was a royal decree issued by the Mughal emperor in 1713 by Farruk Shiyar, gave freedom to EIC to trade without paying taxes. *Dastak* — a sort of pass issued by the company to its employee on the basis of Farman, allowing them from movement of company's goods. The servant of company started misuse the *Dastak* for their own use in private trade. The Nawab objected to the unfair practices of the servants of the company, further they started the fortification of Calcutta without taking permission from the Nawab in anticipation of their conflict with the French who had set up their factory at Chandannagar. Shelter and protection was given to the enemy of the Nawab by the English like the rich merchants of Bengal — Krishna Vallabh had in carried the displeasure of the Nawab but the company didn't hand over him to the Nawab rather gave protection, it creates some sort of enraged to the Nawab. Therefore, new Nawab orders to stop the fortification of Calcutta, when the Company failed to listen to the warnings, Siraj showed his strength by taking over the factory of Kasim Bazar, Governor Drake believed that he could avenge this

defeat by force and ignored the Nawab's overtures for a diplomatic reconciliation. This was followed by Siraj's attack on Calcutta and its capture on 20th June. Another issue which caused for the Battle was Black Hole Tragedy - which resulted 120 people had died due to suffocation. This episode is known as Black Hole incident. After all, they concluded Treaty of Alinagar – between the Company under Clive and the Nawab on 9 Feb, 1757 by which English got all the forts and also got right to fortify Calcutta. From that time English began another move that was conspiracy against the Nawab, Clive decided to dethrone the Nawab and raise Mir Jaffar on the throne, other conspirator included Mir Jaffar, Rai Durlab, Jagat Seth, Omi Chand.”¹¹

The final but not least the cause of conflict was that Clive blamed the Nawab that he had not carried out the terms of the treaty of Alinagar and that he was conspiring against the British by¹¹ writing letter to the French company. All these led to the battle of Plassey — 20 miles from Murshidabad on, 23rd June 1757. “The historic battle was fought only in name. The Nawab had about 50000 troops as against of about 3000 of Clive. Nawab's army led by traitors did not Show any worthwhile resistance. Nawab was defeated, captured and killed.”¹²

THE CAUSES OF BRITISH SUCCESS AND DEFEATS OF NAWAB OF BENGAL

The defeat of the nawab and the success of English were the following factors responsible like disputed claim of Siraj to become the Nawab resulting in mutual conflict among the nobles of court like Ghasthi Begum and Mir Jaffar and Siraj- Ud-Daula which weak the political power of Nawab, Diplomacy of the EIC to win over some of the nobles to their side, in weakness of political situation, Lard Clive used his diplomacy by conspiracy with Mir Jaffar Seth and other influential persons which help Clive to success also the home British Govt. fully supported with finance and sufficient army. Corrupt officers of the Nawab like Manik Chand — who were looking after the economic affair, of the Nawab was fled to Calcutta and help English against Nawab. Treachery of the Commander of the Nawab forces, no help to the Nawab from the French, the nawab also failure to understand the implication of the treaty of Alinagar, Superior Naval of the company. Beside these Clive in his part was a great military strategist, scientific tactics and modern weapons. “Lack of intelligence system of the Nawab administration, so it failed to get any clue of conspiracy against him.”¹³

As per Political consequence according to Jadunath Sarkar — “Battle of Plassey was ended the medieval age and modern period started, in the space less than one generation in the 20 years from Plassey the land of Bengal began to recover from the blight of medieval theocratic rule.”¹⁴ The great advantage gained to the company in the case of economic-what followed hereafter is often referred to as the *Plassey Plunder'* immediately after the war, the English army and navy received 21500 pounds for

distribution among their member. Apart from that between 1757-60 the company received 22.5 Million from Mir Jaffar, Clive himself got in 1757 a personal jagir worth of 34567 pounds. After that year not only bullion import stopped but also bullion was exported from Bengal.

According to *Macaulay & Mallesons*- “The fleet which conveyed this treasure to Calcutta consisted of more than a hundred boats from the very morrow of the victory the English became virtual master of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.”¹⁵

POST PLASSEY ERA TILL THE BATTLE OF BUXAR

After the battle of Plassey as reward for his support to the English against Nawab, Mir Jaffar who played the role of "Colonel Clive's jackal" was put to the throne of Bengal and he became totally dependent on the company for maintenance of his position and paid about Rs175, 0000 in presents and compensation to the English. “With the death of Miran, Mir Jaffar’s son, there was a fight for the Nawab ship of Bengal between Mir Qassim and Miran. Vansittart- the Governor of Calcutta agreed to support Mir Qassim’s cause after a treaty between Mir Qassim and the EIC, the terms of the treaty was as following

The company would get half of the share in chunam trade of Sylhet and gained outstanding dues from Nawab, Mir Qassim also promised to pay a sum of Rs 5 lakhs toward financing the company's war effect in southern India, right now it was agreed that Mir Qassim’s enemies were company's enemy and his friends are company's friends and the tenants of the Nawab's territory would not be allowed to settle in the lands of the company and vice-versa. After that when Mir Jaffar unable to meet the demand of company, they forced him to resigned in favor of Mir Qassim with pension of Rs 15,000 per annum.”¹⁶

Mir Qassim shifted his capital to Munger in Bihar. Initially Mir Qassim’s relationship with the EIC was amiable. To the company he seemed a person of improving Bengal's economy and thereby meeting the heavy demands of the company. The company had thought that Mir Qassim would be an ideal puppet for them, however Mir Qassim’s belief exemption of the company some factors which led to the conflict.

THE CONFLICT FOR SUPREMACY — BATTLE OF BUXAR

‘The company wanted to exercise administration control over Bengal but Mir Qassim was prepared to accept only the trading right of the company, therefore the official of the began the misuse of dastak and the exploitation of the Gomastah, it had become usual practice by the company agents to held a court under free and award punishment according to their wish which cause great financial loss of the Nawab, It also made local merchants face unequal competition with the company. Finding it impossible to check the misuse of Dastak Mir

Qassim removed trading duties from local merchant. The company also blame Nawab for murder of Ram Narayan the deputy governor of Bihar due to favorite of the company, and snatched all his wealth and also death of some Europeans due to several battle took place, to fight against Mir Qassim. On the same time Mir Jaffar was reinstalled to the throne of Bengal and Mir Qassim fled to Awadh and arranged a confederacy with the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja- Ud-Daula and Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, with a view to recovering Bengal from English. The combined armies of the three powers numbering about 50000 met the English force of 7000 under major Munro met at Buxar on 22 Oct. 1764 in a closely contested battle. Both sides suffered heavy losses but the British won the day.¹⁷ The victory made the British a great power in north India and contender for the supremacy of the whole country. While the English won the battle of Plassey by treachery and diplomacy, while the victory of Buxar was because of the superior military power of the west. The defeat of the confederacy was inherent in the defects of the Indian army and state.

POST BUXAR SETTLEMENT WITH DEFEATED PARTIES

After the victory of Buxar Clive's first made settlement with defeated powers. Settlement with Awadh- He proceed to Awadh and met Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab Wazir of Awadh, at Allahabad (16 August 1765) and made the following conditions —The Nawab surrenders Allahabad and Kora to Emperor Shah Alam, and agreed to pay Rs 50 lakhs to Company as war indemnity, & confirms Balwant Singh, Zamindar of Banaras, in full possession of his estate, this treaty turned Awadh into a buffer state between the company territory and of the Marathas. Then company forward the Settlement with Shah Alam II— By the treaty of Allahabad, the fugitive Emperor Shah Alam was taken under the Company's protection and was to reside at Allahabad. He was assigned Allahabad and Kora ceded by the Nawab of Awadh. The Emperor in turn issued a Farman dated 12 August 1765 granting to the company in perpetuity the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in return for company making payment of Rs 26 lakhs to him and providing for the expense of the Nizam at of the said provinces which was fixed at Rs 53 lakhs.¹⁸ Clive's settlement with Shah Alam also showed considerable practical wisdom. He ruled out the march to Delhi as 'a vain and fruitless project'. He made the Emperor a pensioner and thereby a useful 'rubber stamp' of the company. The Emperor's Farman legalized the political gains of the Company in Bengal.

Bengal after Battle of Buxar — After the defeat of Mir Qassim, Mir Jaffar again placed on the throne of Bengal, with following condition-The Nawab disband most of his army, to pay Rs 15 lakhs to the company and relinquishes his administration authority to the Deputy Nawab, who

will be appointed by the company. Thus, began dual system in Bengal. Buxar confirmed the decision of Plassey. To quote *G.B. Malleson* “English power in northern India became unchallengeable. The new Nawab of Bengal was their stooge, the Nawab of Awadh a grateful subordinate ally, the Emperor their pensioner. The whole territory up to Allahabad lay at their feet and the road to Delhi open. Never after Buxar did the Nawabs of Bengal or Awadh ever challenge the superior position of the company; rather the years following witnessed the tightening of English grip over these regions.”¹⁹

THE TRANSITION OF POWER OF BENGAL FROM THE NAWAB TO BRITISH -DUAL SYSTEM

“After the victory of two battles The EIC sought to control the political system of Bengal by setting up of the infamous Dual System whereby the Company acquired real power while the responsibility for the administration rested on the shoulders of Nawab of Bengal.

In the days of the Mughal Empire the two principles officers of the central government in the province were the subedar who looked after the Nizamat functions, military defense & administration of criminal justice, while the Diwan was the chief financial officers and in charge of revenue affairs, besides being responsible for the civil administration in the province, they served as check on the central authority. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal central authority weakened and Murshid Quli Khan, the Nawab of Bengal exercised the both Nizamat and Diwan functions. The Farman issued by the Emperor Shah Alam II on 12th August 1765 granted the Diwani function to the company in return for an annual payment of rupees 26 lakhs to the Emperor and providing for the expenses of Nizamat (fixed 26 lakhs). Earlier in February 1765, Najm ud Daula was allowed to succeed as Nawab of Bengal after the death of Mir Jaffar ,on the condition that, he practically surrendered the Nizamat functions entirely in the hands of the company and civil administration to the care of a deputy Nawab to be named by the company and not removable without their consent. Thus, the company acquired Diwani function from the Emperor and Nizamat function from the Nawab of Bengal for the exercise of these functions, the company appointed two Deputy Diwans, Mohammad Reza for Bengal and Raja Sitab Roy for Bihar, Mohammad Raja also acted as deputy Nizam. Thus, the whole administration was exercised through Indian agents of company. This system of government came to be known as Dual Systems, or rule of two, the company and Nawab. In actual practice the Dual System proved a sham, for the EIC exercise all political power and used the Indian agency mere as an instrument for their purposes.”²⁰

CONCLUSION

From the start, military and political considerations were critical to company's success. It was becoming difficult to make distinction between economic and political categories in this period of early British imperialism and it becomes difficult to subordinate the conventional shift from trade to politics. The basis for the 18th century company state and empire can be found in the long-term company's involvement in the sub-continent, its ideology and relationship with Mughal empire. The EIC incorporate many features of the early modern state in 17th and 18th century only like minting coin, waging war, making peace, assessing and collecting taxes, and administering the justice through mayor courts. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the company was involved only in trading activities in pre-1757 period. So, in an 18th century India marked by diffuse and fragmented. Sovereignty, company's leaders were prepared to deal ill, with a Britain until 1857 when British crown became from paramount power of India, ideologically baggage from Britain where idea of fragmented sovereignty was unthinkable. The issue of sovereignty continued to appear and re-appear in public realm of India.

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