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The Bureaucratic Corruption Leading to the Fall of Bengal (1700-1757)

Md. Abul Bashar*

Abstract: Bureaucratic corruption causes the breakdown of the chain of command among the administrators, resulting in the weakness and fragility of state machineries. Consequently, they lose sovereignty, and they submit to or are dominated by foreign corporate and political powers. This paper adopts methods of historical analysis to explore the endemic forces which led to Bengal falling under the suzerainty of the rapacious British East India Company. The paper argues that the central administration failed to allocate and discharge various executive offices and responsibilities, due to extreme dependencies among both the central and provincial governments. The present work maintains that administrators' wholesale rigging attitude exacerbated the already declining politico-economic condition of the Muslim ruling elites of the region, eventually facilitating a power shift away from the traditional elite toward the British colonizers by 1757.

Keywords: Bengal, Nazim, Bureaucrats, Conspiracy, Corruption.

Abstrak: Rasuah birokrasi menyebabkan keruntuhan rantaian pemerintahan Bengal dikalangan para pentadbir, lalu mengakibatkan kelemahan dan kerapuhan institusi negara. Bengal kehilangan kedaulatan, dan pentadbir tunduk atau dikuasai oleh kuasa korporat dan politik asing. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah analisis sejarah untuk meneroka kekuatan endemik yang menyebabkan kedaulatan Bengal jatuh di bawah pentadbiran rakus Syarikat Hindia Timur Inggeris. Analisis kajian ini mendapati bahawa pentadbiran pusat gagal memperuntukkan serta mengawasi tanggungjawab eksekutif pelbagai jabatan. Ini adalah kerana kebergantungan pemerintah pusat dan wilayah

*PhD candidate, Department of History and Civilization, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University (IIUM), and Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. Email: mabasharihc@cu.ac.bd

yang melampau. Penulisan ini menegaskan bahawa sikap penyelewengan dan pencabulan peraturan oleh pentadbir memburukkan lagi keadaan politik-ekonomi yang makin merosot dari golongan elit pemerintah Muslim di rantau ini, akhirnya memudahkan peralihan kuasa dari golongan elit tradisional ini kepada penjajahan British pada tahun 1757.

Kata Kunci: Bengal, Nazim, Birokrat, Konspirasi, Rasuah

Introduction

Bureaucratic corruption leads to the fall of states which develops due to the extreme dependencies on state bureaucrats who entered in administration through certain privileges and act for self-interest. Bengal provincial administration gradually turned into autonomous and maintained loyalty through just sending annual tribute to Delhi while Mughal central administration became fragile following the death of the Emperor Aurangzeb (d. 1707). Being independent in provincial administration Nawabs of Bengal reformed the civil and general administration to get more revenue and to secure power, which led to the emergence of a new bourgeoisie of state bureaucrats in several key posts of the province who played a notorious role to shift state suzerainty to the English. This paper analyses how corruption embedded in state machineries and the role of prominent bureaucrats in bringing Bengal under the domination of the British East India Company during the period 1700–1757.

Research method: Qualitative historical analysis has been employed in this research, critically investigating historical events using primary sources as principal research elements, as well as previous historical research works. Documents have been collected from several university libraries at home and abroad. Moreover, publications of the government, books of various authors, magazines, and research journals have been reviewed to extract necessary data and information for this research.

A glimpse of Bengal

It is bounded to the the north-west and north-east by the uplands of the Himalayas and Assam Hills, whose melting ice drains into the networks of rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal, supporting a vast ecosystem

and human civilization (M. Mohar Ali, vol. IA, p. 1). This low-lying and wide-sweeping land moistened by two-time natural tide in a day, seasonal rainfall and yearly flood which brought extreme fertility on the land. Resulting, this land alone produces rice three times in a year on the same piece of land with little affect to other crops (Abul Fadl, 1949, p. 134). It provided enough sustenance to entire people of Hindustan for two years (Bulletin 1, 1915, p. 3). Hence, Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta (1340) claimed 'Bengal, which is an extensive and plentiful country. I never saw a country in which provisions were so cheap' (Ibn Battuta, 1829, p. 194). Chinese traveller Ma-Huan (1415) who came in Bengal with a Chinese mission and following account on Bengal;

It is an extensive country; its products are abundant, and its people numerous; they are Muhammadans, and in their dealings are open and straightforward. The rich build ships, in which they carry on commerce with foreign nations; many are engaged in trade, and a goodly number occupy themselves with agricultural pursuits; while others exercise their crafts as mechanics (Geo. Philips, 1895, p. 530).

European traveller Caesar Frederick Hamilton who travelled this province in mid-sixteenth and end of the seventeenth century respectively they mentioned that Bengal is the cheapest of every provision (Bradley-Birt, 74-75). A British Historian of India Robert Orme (1743-1753) ascribed 'The province of Bengal is the most fertile of any in the universe, more of than Egypt and with greater certainty' (Orme, 1805, 404). People can live in with very little labour compared to other parts of the world, household industries thrived in the traditional ecosystem and agrarian economy, including spinning and weaving cotton and silk (Jon Wilson, 13). Hence, all the people including foreign traders could buy their necessities at a cheap rate and all the people could exercise their religion without any obstructions (Bernier, 1934, p. 438). Hence, Pre-modern Bengal was known as the land for opportunity among the fortune seekers, observers, travellers and traders. As well as its vast wealth of Bengal it attracted foreign traders to invade this region (M. A. Rahim, Karachi, 163).

All most all people of this region were very much proactive to till their land and to labour in industries day and night due to their advancement of economy. Thus, Bengal was known as great and 'common store house' for abundant production of silk and world-famous finest cotton

called Muslin and familiar for it not only in Hindustan but also ‘all the neighbouring kingdoms and even of Europe.’ Only Dhaka and its adjacent areas had 2350 cotton weaving house where 18 to 30 year old young male and females engaged in weaving cotton. Similarly, there were Dutch factories in Qasim-Bazar where seven or eight hundred native employees used to work daily and there were the English and other European factories where the same proportionate number of people engaged with works and exported to their countries. So, Bengal not only became an agricultural country but also an industrial one. Beauty and amiable disposition of the native women rose a common proverb among European traders that ‘the Kingdom of Bengale has a hundred gates open for entrance but not one for departure’ (Bernier, 1934, p. 438).

During the rule of Shaista Khan (1664-1677, 1679-1688), Bengal prosperity reached its zenith particularly after the conquering of Chittagong (1666) thereby this region witnessed unbroken peace and commercial prosperity which became proverbial (M. Mohar Ali, 1965-66, p. 85). Having vast property Bengal had 50% GDP while entire India had 27% of World GDP in under the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). Moreover, this land had three times the larger revenue compared to other provinces of the Mughal empire, Bengal had 50% GDP of the entire India while 27% of world GDP had in India in 1700 under the rule Emperor Aurangzeb. In sum, according to the meticulous description of the historical travellers Bengal was the richest, cheapest and mostly civilized province in pre-modern India. This land was considered as a prestigious gift from emperors where close relatives were appointed as governor with powerful vassals (Ascoli, 1917, p. 11). However, the geological beauty, fertility, and agricultural productivity of these lands always made it a target for conquerors striving for power (Jon Wilson, 2016, p. 11). Fables of the enormous prosperity of the region first attracted the British traders to gain its suzerainty (M. Mohar Ali, 1965-66, p. 85-90).

An overview of Mughal provincial administrative system: Bengal Province

This wealthy province was a priority zone for the Mughal Emperors, and it was traditionally governed by a military commander known as a Sipahsalar (‘Ain i Akbari, vol. II, 1949, p. 37). English records described the head of the province as Subahdar/ Nazim/ Nawab (Consultations,

29th September 1709), whose sole duty was to establish peace through executive actions for defence, criminal justice, and general supervision of the province (I. H. Qureshi, 1990, p. 228). Next in position but not subordinate to the Nazim was the provincial diwan, responsible for revenue administration and civil justice to the central government (P. Saran, 1941, p. 170). Each of them was enjoined 'to keep a strict watch over other' so; none of them could grow over-powerful (R.C. Majumdar, 1953, p. 563). These two principal officers were appointed by the Emperor and were practically responsible for the whole provincial administration. There were a good number of subordinate officers to assist the administration appointed by the Nawabs, subject to the Emperors (P. Saran, 1941, p. 170). These bureaucrats served for set terms that could be renewed upon expiry (A. Rahim, *J.A.S.P.* vol. VI, 1961, p. 104).

The central administration retained strong control over the provincial administration by transferring officials and maintaining checks and balances over the province, but these ties became weak from the beginning of the eighteenth century (Philip B. Calkins, 1970, 799-800) while Aurangzeb needed more funds to finance the Maratha campaign, and as the most prosperous region, this led to concentration on Bengal. Hence, he appointed a prominent imperial honest officer Murshid Quli Khan as Diwan of Bengal in 1700 with the title of *Kartalab* Khan ('revenue seeker'), owing to increase revenue (*Riyaz*, 1788, 246-47).

Murshid Quli Khan¹ (1700-1727) soon after his arrival devoted himself to fiscal administration and remitted 10000000 within short time of his appointment which brought great patronization of Emperor Aurangzeb. Even he shifted revenue administration from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1703 without consulting with the emperor due to clash with Nazim of Bengal Azim us Shan (1698-1712). To achieve his goal Khan followed a three-fold policy (i) resumed entire Jgirs and transferred them from Bengal to less productive and sterile land of Orissa. (ii) stopped unnecessary public expenditure, cut down revenue collection-charge and reduced the state forces. (iii) gave contract to

¹ Murshid Quli Khan, born in a Brahmin family, was purchased by Haji Shafi Ispahani who raised him as a son, giving him the name of Muhammad Hadi. He served the Mughals in various capacities as *Diwan-i-Tan* (Diwan of Salaries), the Provincial Diwan of Bengal, and the Diwan of Deccan.

collect land revenue directly through contractors called Ijaradars like farmers general of France² by taking security bond from Ijaradars known *mal-i-jamini* system (*T. B.* 1788, P. 42-45).³ By this process, a neo-landed class emerged in state revenue affairs as Ijaradars who were qualified Hindus; they gradually occupied position of the old Zamindars with the dignified title of Raja, Maharaja &c (*H. B.* 1948, p. 223, 409).

Formation of new ruling elite

To increase land revenue, Murshid Quli Khan preferred to take security bonds from Ijaradars (contractors) under the *mal i jamini* system, thereby many Hindus entered into the revenue administration with the dignified title of Raja, Maharaja, including Raja Raghunanda of Natore, Dighi Patya (zamindari of Rajshahi), Raja Srikrishna (maharaja of Mymensingh), and Raja Ramnath (zamindar of Dinajpur). During Khan's tenure in Bengal (1700-1727), 1000 of 1600 parganas' Ijaradars were Hindus (Razia Akter Banu, 1992, 21). Becoming reappointed as Diwan and Nazim of Bengal in 1710 and 1717 respectively, Khan began to rule Bengal independently and appointed many blood relatives in key posts of the province including his Shuja ud Doula (son in law), who was appointed as deputy Governor of Bengal (*J. N. Sarkar*, 1948, 422) and many Hindus from Brahmin, Vaishya, Kayastha in the highest post of Civil and Military administration including Srikrishna Acharya Chaudhury (Maharaja of Mymensingh), who served as Murshid Quli's revenue collector (*A. Rahim, J.A.S.P.* vol. VI, 1961, 108). Raghunanda was appointed as his Peshkar &c. (*N. K. Sinha*, vol. II, 1960, 120).

These neo-zamindars and their ancestors emerged as neo-ruling elite and held influential positions of the country. Thus, a capitalist new landed class entered in Bengal provincial administration under the patronization of Murshid Quli Khan (*A. Rahim*, 1961, 108) in result the supremacy of local Muslims declined (*M. N. Pearson*: 1976, 221). At the time another ruling group emerged in Bengal who were prominent bankers, financiers and commercials who acted as guarantor of newly emerged landed class, who were unable to pay state revenue (*W. Hunter*, 1876, p. 253). Manik Chand (founder of Jagatseth family), Fateh Chand

² Farmers General was a privileged association in France who had collected revenues on behalf of the king before French revolution.

³ Murshid Quli Khan used to take security bond from Ijaradars and fixed payable periodical instalments according to the prayers of the cultivators. *T. B.* 42-45.

were remarkable financiers who were appointed as financial adviser and state treasurer and became the 'right-hand man' of Khan, advised to shift revenue administration to Murshidabad.

Manik Chand and his son Fateh Chand were entitled with Seth and Jagatseth by Emperor Farrukhshiyar (1713-1719) and Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) in 1715 and 1722 respectively (W. Hunter, 1876, p. 254-55). Gradually, both groups (neo-zamindars and financiers) entered in ruling councils and started to play important roles in administrative reforms which facilitated to shift political power to the newly emerged ruling elites. In the course of time, the Seth family became an intimate friend for both Khan and the British in Bengal who could not make any decision without Seth's consultancy (J. H. Little, 1960, p. 15-28). Thus, this family became a decisive factor in the socio-economy and politics of the province (A. Rahim, 1978, 107-8). Therefore, historian Orme rightly mentioned;

There was a family of Gentoo merchants at Murshidabad whose head Jagatseat had raised himself from no considerable origin to be the wealthiest banker in the Empire, in most part of which he had agents supplied with money for remittances, from whom he constantly received of what was transacting in the governments in which they were settled: and in Bengal his influence was equal to that of any officer in the administration: for by answering to the treasury as security for most of the renters forming lands of the province, the circulation of the wealth, which he commanded, rendered his assistance necessary in every emergency of expense. (Orme, 1861, pp. 29-30).

Another neo-ruling elite formed in Orissa under the patronization of Shuja ud Doula⁴ (deputy governor of Orissa and son in law of Murshid Quli Khan) during the successive wars of the Mughals. At the time

⁴ Shuja ud Doula was an Afsar by descent of the tribe of Turkomans and inhabited of Khorassan (eastern province of Persian Empire), a bravest soldier of the empire by profession. Having intimacy with Murshid Quli Khan (at that time he was dewan of Hyderabad) Shuja ud Doula married his only daughter Zinnatun Nisa by whom he had a son named Mirza Asadullah familiar with Sarfaraz Khan, he had another son Named Tauqi by a concubine. However, Zinnatun Nisa was separated and lived in with his son in Murshidabad because, was a man gallantry and offensive to his wife (Stewart, 1813, 416).

Mirza Muhammad Ali (familiar with Alivardi Khan)⁵ came with family in Murshidabad from Delhi in 1720 as fortune seekers while Bengal was free from political conflict, but he was ill-treated by Murshid Quli Khan. So, he went to Orissa and entered in service with the grace of Shuja ud Doula (Riaz, 294). Getting fair-circumstances Alivardi Khan invited his elder brother Mirza Haji Ahmad, who came with his three sons and daughter in 1721 and appointed in several posts including revenue administration. (Kalikinkar Datta, 1939, p. 4-5). Being politically ambitious, tact and prudence both brothers rendered Shuja's revenue administration as influential agents both in revenue reforms and collections which increased revenue to a degree and brought respectable popularity and 'benefit to the empire' (Stewart, 1813, p. 416).

Murshid Quli Khan nominated his grandson Sarfaraj Khan as his successors without approval of Mughal central authority due to interruption of Jagatseth Fateh Chand though Shuja ud Doula (son in law) who was more qualified for the throne of Bengal. Who was also had a lascivious passion for women so he lost preference in getting selection. Consequently, Sarfaraz Khan succeeded on Bengal throne following his death (1727). Murshid Quli Khan though strictly controlled both newly emerged zamindars and ruling elite, who could not extradite state power to the qualified deputy for governance. This process was continued till 1756 thus, the state institution was becoming weak which facilitated to be stronger than the bureaucrats. However, Jagatseth Fateh Chand, Alivardi Khan and his brother Haji Ahmad advised Shuja ud Doula to succeed the throne of Bengal and aided him to obtain imperial sanad for gaining the position of Diwan and Nazim both Bengal and Orissa from Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah 1719-1748 (J. N. Sarkar, II, 422).

⁵ Alivardi Khan was also an Afsar of the tribe of Turkomans in Khorassan by his mother and thus relatives of Shuja Uddin Muhammad Khan (son in law of Murshid Quli Khan), his father Mirza Muhammad was a cupbearer of Emperor Azam Shah (14th March 1707-8th June 1707) who was 3rd son of Aurangzeb. Alivardi and his brother Mirza Ahmad were appointed in Delhi as superintendent of Filkhana (elephant stables) and Abdarkhana (Pantry steward) respectively during the rule of Azam Shah but could not stay long time in Delhi due to fratricidal struggle between two princes Muhammad Azam Shah and Muhammad Muazzam Shah. Their patron Azam Shah was died in bloody battle (Jaju) in June 1707.

Consequently, Shuja ud Doula enthroned himself on 1st July 1727 by deposing his own son and continued until his death (1739). He appointed his friends and kinsmen in several key posts of the province, including Alivardi Khan as Prime Minister, Haji Ahmad as Chief Adviser, Ray-i-Raiyan Alam Chand (Former Diwan of Orissa under Shuja ud Doula) as chief of the Khalsa of Murshidabad, and the banker Jagatseth Fateh Chand as financial adviser and treasurer (Siyar, vol. I, 381-84).

Being fond of ease and pleasures Shuja ud Doula entrusted provincial duties to the Council or Cabinet composed of Alivardi Khan, Haji Ahmad, Rai Raiyan Alam Chand and Jagatseth Fateh Chand. All important matters of the province were consulted with them. Particularly, Haji Ahmad became his intimate associate and councillor in all affairs in all affairs of the Nizamat, meantime Mirza Muhammad Ali was appointed as Foujdar of Rajmahal with the title of Alivardi Khan. Similarly, Hajis, three sons were appointed in several key posts of the province according to their merits at Murshidabad, Rangpur and Hugli (Riaz, 294) who became Alivardi's son in law by his three daughters. Moreover, Jagatseth and Alam Chand controlled the entire business and revenue affairs of the state and political affairs were controlled by Haji Ahmad and Alivardi Khan (Stewart, 1813, p. 417). Being highly politically ambitious and leading spirit, Alivardi Khan was appointed as Governor of Bihar who received imperial favour with the title Mahabbat Jang from Mughal emperor, without the recommendation of Nazim Shuja ud Doula (Riaz, 291-297). Thus, a group was becoming more authoritative in administration while Nazim was losing control of the province like the Mughal central power.

Emergence of a Confusing Authority

Being more influential over provincial affairs both Nizamat and revenue, said prominent bureaucrats (Jagatseth Fateh Chand, Haji Ahmad, and Ray Raiyan Alam Chand) formed a triumvirate who acted as the supreme authority and misguided Nazims in several cases. Moreover, Shuja ud Doula advised his son Sarfaraz Khan to retain councillors and obey them 'as the representative of his father and implicitly their advice in all affairs of the moments,' at his deathbed because he realized that the oligarchy had become the real power behind the throne, and his son would continue if he kept them in good humour, and nominated Sarfaraz Khan as his successor who agreeably reappointed them as

state advisers after his accession on 13th March 1739. These stubborn oligarchs became more emboldened in state affairs than before (Riaz, 308).

Using state power, said triumvirates accumulated money (J. H. Little, 1960, p. 89), power and misguided Sarfaraz Khan through the letter of Nadir Shah (1736-1747) demanding Bengal revenue through the letter which was originally written to Shuja ud Doula (Siyar, vol. I, 441). Moreover, said bureaucrats advised Sarfaraz Khan to deliver a Khutbah and produce coin in his name with sending revenue which was affronts to the Emperor Muhammad Shah (1719-1748). Additionally, Sarfaraz Khan was convinced tactfully to reduce strength of military on the plea of saving state expense and to regain the Emperor's favour. Hence, he disbanded nearly half of his troops, who were appointed as regular soldiers by Alivardi Khan according to the instruction of Haji Ahmad in 'view of the invasion of Bengal' who were enlisted by Haji Ahmad in Alivardi's army and sent to Patna. Though Sarfaraz Khan was informed about their clique, neither replaced them in right time due to their influence and intrigue over the administration (Riaz, 310-11) nor acquainted their conspiracy activities.

Alivardi Khan was trying to get imperial favour from Delhi through a noble, Ishak Khan, who had the Emperor's ear. He also informed Fateh Chand in a secret letter that 'on a certain day, he would commence his march' (Siyar, vol. I, 445-46). Alivardi Khan also established a conspiracy with Sarfaraz Khan's generals who were ready for 'treachery and regicide' who plotted against Sarfaraz Khan and did not work accordingly (Riaz, 314). Consequently, Alivardi Khan suddenly was attacked at mid-night of 9th April 1740 and a furious battle ensued in following morning on 10th April at Giria where Sarfaraz Khan was killed. Thus, Alivardi Khan succeeded the Bengal throne on 23rd April 1740 through conspiracy. Thereafter, Alivardi Khan consolidated his power through shifting Sarfaraz's family to Dhaka, (M. Mohar Ali, IA 1985, 602-8) and appointing kinsmen and relatives in key posts of the province including three nephews and in law like; Nawazish Muhammad governor of Dhaka (1740-1755), Sayid Ahmad governor of Purnea (1749-1756), Zain ud Din Ahmad governor of Patna (1740-1747) (B. K. Gupta, 1966, p. 143). Mir Jafar Ali Khan (Alaverdi's brother-in-law) was appointed paymaster of the Bengal army (Siyar, 324).

Alivardi's grandson Shaukat Jung (son of Sayid Ahmad), Siraj ud Doula, Ikram ud Doula (adopted by Nawazish Muhammad and Ghasiti Begum) and Mirza Mahdi were also appointed in several key posts. Moreover, Alivardi Khan dependent on non-Muslim elements, appointed many Hindus in important posts, including Raja Jankiram, Diwan Ram Narayan as governor, Raja Durlav Ram (son of Raja Janaki Ram) as commander of army and deputy governor of Orissa for some time (A. Rahim, *J.A.S.P.* vol. VI, 1961, p. 114), Raja Ram Singh as the head of the department of espionage and the faujdar of Midnapur. Similarly, Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, and Tripura were controlled by non-Muslim officials like Raja Rajballav, Gokul Chand and so on. Murshidabad was under the control of the Hindu bureaucrat Fateh Chand, a confidential adviser. Said posts became hereditary and filled up by many Hindus who prospered in civil, military, and revenue administration (A. Rahim, *J.A.S.P.* vol. VI, 1961, p. 115). As historian Orme rightly mentioned;

Nawab Alivardi preferred the services of the Hindus in every office and dignity of state, and seemed to regard the increase of their wealth as his own... thus the Hindu connection become the most opulent influence in the government, of which it pervaded every department with such efficiency that nothing of moment could move without their participation and knowledge (Orme, vol. II, 1861, p. 29).

Corrupt personalities and state power

Alivardi Khan while declared Siraj ud Doula as his heir for Nawabship of Bengal in 1752 despite seniority of Nawazish Muhammad Khan, Sayid Ahmad and Shaukat Jung then the family hopelessly divided among themselves though they died in Alivardi's lifetime except Shaukat Jung. Thus, Alivardi's family gradually fell into the deep dark hole of political weakness and increasing dependence on financiers and plotters (Riaz, 363). Consequently, Siraj ud Doula faced strong opposition of Ghasiti Begum (Alivardi's eldest daughter), Shaukat Jung (Alivardi's grandson) and Mir Jafar (Alivardi's brother in law). Both Ghasiti Begum and Mir Jafar fomented Shaukat Jung to claim Bengal Nawabship. Moreover, Ghasiti begum raised a private army under Mir Nazr Ali and Bairam Khan and tempted them to be commander of her vanguard and general of her army respectively (Riaz, 363) and even tried to recruit European soldiers for Begum's forces (Hill, II, 66). These flimsy circumstances

helped the English to consider that Siraj ud Doula's ascending to the throne may not be in peace.

Assuming Bengal throne after the death of Alivardi Khan (9th April 1756), Siraj ud Doula moved against Begum and secured his property and succeeded to stop Shaukat Jung. Consequently, Siraj ud Doula turned his attention to his own court, he retained Alivardi's administrative set up and adopted 'extremely pro-Hindu policies' with a more prestigious title Raja, Maharaja and Ray Raiyan like Raja Rai Durlav, Ray Raiyan Janaki Ray &c. in Civil, Military, Intelligence and Revenue departments. It prevented Muslim adherents to show sympathy to Nawab during the crisis (Riaz, 371). However, Nawab deposed Mir Jafar from the post of Generalissimo of Army and 'spies were set to watch his movements' which was justified because he (Mir Jafar) proved unfaithful and treacherous in the struggle with Maratha during the rule of Alivardi Khan and treacherous relation with Ghasiti Begum (Riaz, 365) whose post was given to Mir Madan, appointed another Kyeth Hindu Mohan Lal (Enemy of Jagatseth Mahtab Roy) as chief minister and controller of all affairs with title Maharaja and ordered all generals and noble to pay respect to him. All did but Mir Jafar refused even some time he did not show respect to Nawab (Riaz, 364). Therefore, Nawab was alienated from the sympathy of notable bureaucrats which influenced Mir Jafar to organise a successful plot against Nawab (Atul, 1953, p. 23).

Conflict with the English

It is crucial to understand the history of the East India Company in Bengal. The Company was formed in 1600 to carry on commercial activities in East Indies for British but it meddled in local politics within a short period of time and began to create trouble and quarrel with the natives of the fortune land. Hence, Shaista Khan expelled the Company with bag and baggage from the province. However, the British again interfered with local politics in mid of eighteenth century through sheltering Krishna Das (son of Raj Ballav) who fled to the English at Calcutta with Rs. 53,00,000 along with his family by bribing and his father also was placed under surveillance in plea of embezzling around twenty million rupees of public fund during his time (Hunter, Statistical account of Bengal, vol. v., 1876, p. 123), and improved fortification without Nawab's consent which was considered as a matter of rivalry (Hill, vol. III, 1905, 164).

At this juncture, Siraj ud Doula appointed Khawaja Wajid (an Armenian trader and court banker)⁶ to find out the intentions of the British so he visited Fort William four times along with Nawab's instructions but he was ill treated by the Drake (English Governor of Calcutta) and was turned out of Calcutta. Henceforth, Nawab blockaded and captured Qasimbazar, and seized Fort William on 3rd and 9th June, appointed Nanda Kumar, Raja Manik Chand as governor of Hughly and Calcutta respectively. Drake fled and stayed at Falta who followed double standard policy (i) consulted with other Englishmen of Madras factory including Clive and decided to proceed to Calcutta and by every means that they thought desirable, should try to renew the foundation of the Factory in Calcutta. If by negotiations and by payment of money this object could be attained, well and good; if not, force might be resorted to' (Riaz, 366-70). (ii) conducted with Raja Manik Chand, Khawaja Wajid, Jagat Seth, Rai Durlav Ram in view of intercession on behalf of the Company where Raja Manik Chand promised for strongest assurance to the English and to go down with their own army if they intend war.

Meantime, Clive (Commander of English troops in Bengal) and Watson (Clive's deputy) arrived in Calcutta with 30,000 soldiers and immediately established friendship with Manik Chand. Subsequently, the English recovered Qasimbazar and Calcutta through a sudden night-attack. Drake and his councillors restored on the authority at Fort William (Ives, 1773, p. 99) while Nawab was busy preventing rebel of Shaukat Jang in Purnea. Manik Chand) neither informed Nawab nor took proper steps against the English. On getting the news of English victory, Siraj ud Doula marched towards Calcutta but faced collision in night attack of the English which lost his boldness and then signed in an agreement with the English on 9th February 1757 known Alinagar treaty. Thereby, the English retained their commercial rights, restored factories, got the right of fortifications, coining in Bengal and promised money compensation by Nawab (Scrafton, 1763, p. 71).

At the time two events played an important role on Bengal history. (i) In February 1757 Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali (1722-1772) sacked Delhi and its adjacent areas and plundered wherever he went

⁶ Khawaja Wajid had commercial dealings with the English such courtiers acted as emissaries on important issues for Nawabs.

whose menace constantly created anxiety and confusion over Nawab's mind what made him dependent on Clive (strongest power of the time) though Abdali retired from Delhi on 3rd April but his menace remained. Hence, Nawab's best troops were deployed in Bihar frontier to meet the possible attack which led to a serious division of Nawab's forces' (B. K. Gupta, 117) and influenced Clive to take Bengal suzerainty (Hill, III, 270-71). (ii) The announcement of Anglo-French war came out in Bengal; fearing the extension of the war, Nawab was determined to follow policy of neutrality hence he appointed his deputy Nanda Kumar and sent him to the French settlement in Chandannagar to run the policy with the instruction 'to assist the French with all his force, in case the English should attack Chandernagore, or if the French should attack the English, to assist them in the same manner, that there may be no quarrels or disputes in the country' (Hill, II, 228) but he was sold to the English bribery and as prevented to assume any act, consequently Clive seized Chandannagar on 23rd March. Thereby, Nawab lost his natural and 'only capable allies against the English' (H. B. p. 485). Moreover, a French officer known as Mons Jean Law became an attendant in Nawab's court after the fall of Chandernagore, though he was sent away to Clive due to the English objection. At the time Clive built Fort William and a mint in Calcutta without any consultation with Nawab (Riaz, 371).

British Conspiracy against Nawab of Bengal

Under such circumstances Select Committee of the Fort William Council adopted *Coup d'état* as its official policy against Nawab on 23rd April (Hill, II, 368). Thereupon, Clive recommended Mr. Watts (Chief of the English Qasimbazar factory) to form a treacherous party to success the policy. Surprisingly, Clive received the following provoking letter from Mir Jafar⁷ with the seal of prominent Nobles (Jagat Seth, Durlav, Ram Narayan &c.) who worked vigorously on departure of Jean Law to persuade conspiracy against Nawab and induced the English to give his support and to fight from his side (Riaz, 370-71);

to let him know they stood affected and to assure him Siraj ud Doula was determined never to forgive the English the disgrace of his late defeated, but waited only a proper

⁷ Mir Jafar was the choice of Seth brothers, Ghasiti Begum and other notable nobles including Rai Durlav Ram, Mirza Amir Beg, Khadim Husain Khan &c. who 'promised to support of the soldiers under their command'.

opportunity to fall on them again... and concluded with a hint, that many of the principal officers of the army, whose lives were in continual jeopardy, from the cruel and capricious temper of the Soubah, had determined to depose him; that if the English would support him in his views on the Soubahship, he would readily make any concessions that might be found necessary to indemnify the English for the losses they had sustained, and to render their trade advantageous to them. (Scrafton, 80).

Similar instigating instructions were sent to Clive from Jagat Seth and Ram Durlav through their confidential agent including Umichand (Riaz, 370). In an interview with Watts, Mir Jafar emphasised to take proper measures on two points to establish the Coup d'état (i) to assemble Nawab's army in barrack from field and to re-appoint himself as Generalissimo of the Army. To remove said obstacles Clive requested Nawab 'that while the armies continued in the field, their enemies would be endeavouring to interrupt that perfect harmony and friendship which subsisted between them.' Thereupon, Nawab put his army into quarters without any doubt thereby Nawab became dupe of Clive's projects. At the time Clive cleverly placed himself in Nawab's mind by forwarding Balaji's provoking letter⁸ against Nawab which was considered as 'proof of the English loyalty' along with expressing the strongest friendship (Hill, II, 380). Nawab immediately ordered his Prime Minister Mohan Lal to put his army in quarter, to finish the affairs (Scrafton, 84), declared to reappoint redoubtable Army officers including Mir Jafar (Hill, II, 394) thus, the obstacles were resolved diplomatically.

The select committee demanded 'payment for their personal losses' from Nawab's treasury hence, Clive preferred getting more money on the treaty, who then consulted with Rai Durlav Ram (commander of the largest portion of Nawab's force and treasurer). Thereafter, Mir Jafar entered a treachery treaty with Mr. Watts on 1st May, promised to the English to give 100 lakhs to the English Company, 50 lakhs to the European inhabitants, 20 lakhs to native inhabitants of Calcutta, 7 lakhs to the Armenian traders in order to indemnify their losses from state

⁸ Clive received another proposal came from Peshwa Maratha religious leader Nana Saheb Balaji Rao (1720-1761) promising military support to the English, offering reimburse the English losses by its double values, proposing to divide Bengal among themselves (Scrafton, 82).

treasury and 'to join us as soon as the armies drew near each other: And we, on our parts, promised, by the blessing of God on our arms, to make him Subah of the three provinces' (Scrafton, 85-6). Siraj ud Doula wrote few letters to the French General Mr Bussy (1718-1785) at Deccan in order to get military support which was intercepted by the English and accused Nawab of 'breach of faith' (Riaz, 371).

Losing confidence on his Courtiers and own army, Nawab tried to pacify English wrath by giving khilat to Mr Watts and sent an excusing letter to Clive but he had 'already flung himself into the conspiracy headed by Mir Jafar, to dethrone Siraj ud Doula' (Riaz, 371). According to the description of *Seirul Mutakherin* Siraj ud Doula delayed paying indemnity on account of the losses sustained by the English during the capture of Calcutta 'by him' (*Seir*, vol. II, 637). According to the description of Luke Scrafton, the English were waiting to draw a crisis meantime, the affairs of Mir Jafar reached in Nawab's ears who ordered to point artillery against Jafar's house and surrounded it which was acquainted by Jafar to Clive 'that nothing could extricate him from the danger he was in, but the news of his march' (Scrafton, 87). Consequently, Clive marched towards Plassey on 13th June.

On hearing the aforesaid news, Nawab tried to conciliate disaffected officers who outwardly professed loyalty to him but inwardly plotted his ruins'. Moreover, he sent his grandmother (Wife of Alivardi Khan) to Mir Jafar with the announcement of forgiveness for his past deeds but he remained greedy for the throne and conspiracy against Nawab, who also relied on Raja Ram Durlav who was another traitor. Thereafter, both Siraj and Jafar reached at Plassey and encamped him in a considerable distance. However, Mir Madan (superintendent of the Artillery) suggested Siraj to finish first Mir Jafar because the English were coming by the instigation of him and that 'after the latter was killed, the English would not have the daring to approach this side' according to him. Meantime, the English set fire, at the time Mohanlal also reproached Siraj to remove Mir Jafar and Raja Durlav Ram from Katwa outpost.

On 23rd June the battle was opened with cannonade, but Mir Jafar stood at distance from the main army though Nawab summoned him to join from his side but he did not 'move from his position'. The fighting was going on with full stream and victory was visible on Nawab's

side for the brave fighting of Mir Madan and Mohanlal but suddenly a canon-ball hit Mir Madan which was the cause of his immediate death. Thereupon, Siraj went to Jafar and beseeched him to fight on behalf even he placed his Crown on Jafar's feet and addressed him as; 'I now repent of my deeds, and in the name of relationship that you bear to me, and in the name of the bounties that you received from my grandfather, Mahabbat Jang, I entreat you to defend my life and honour.' This pathetic appeal did not move the arch-traitor from his 'treacherous design under the mask of friendship who still harboured treacherous and gave deceitful answer that; 'To-day is at its close, and the time for further fighting to-day is over. To-day order the battle to cease; tomorrow I will fight for you with the whole army' (Riaz, 373).

At this situation Siraj ordered Diwan Mohanlal to stop fighting who was fighting vigorously who replied there is no time to return but fight. Hence, Siraj was consulted again with Mir Jafar who cunningly repeated 'former treacherous advice'. Thus, Siraj fell into the trap of Mir Jafar. Consequently, Mohanlal was summoned to the back which created disaster in Nawab's army and dispersed all directions. So, Nawab swiftly left the battlefield, halted at Mansurganj to way of Murshidabad where he found himself surrounded by self-seeker courtiers and deceitful traitors. So, Nawab sailed to Azimabad but was captured at Patna by Mir Daud (Brother of Mir Jafar) and Mir Qasim (son in law of Mir Jafar), who then carried him to Murshidabad where he was killed by Mir Jafar and his son Mir Miron. Thus, the richest, cheapest and mostly civilized empire fell to the hands of English colonizers which was continued till 1947.

Conclusion

A sagacious dreamy ruler can rule and build the country through necessary and fruitful reformations, however, he must keep in mind what will be the effect in the future for the reforms and to make his qualified deputy who could rule the country in absence of him. Undoubtedly, Murshid Quli Khan was a dreamy and extraordinary ruler of Bengal, but he failed to know sweeping effects of his reforms and to make his qualified deputy. During his rule neo-ruling elite particularly, the Bourgeois entered in administration as influential bureaucrats though they were controlled by him. But the neo-ruling elites were becoming more influential during the rule of fragile rulers who came in power as

his successors after his death who formed advisory council to run the country and depended on the council to lead the country. The dominant councillors could enthrone or dethrone the ruler who became greedy for money and power hence, they became corrupted and conspirators against state power whose advantages grasped by the English colonizers who were also materialistic for power of the region. In the twenty first century there were many countries over the world whose countrymen are considerably dependent on dominant bureaucrats along with advisors who are greedy for both money and power not for country or its subjects.

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