

**Nizamat in Bengal : A Study of its Rise,  
Growth and Decline (1700—1757)**

**Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the award of the Degree of  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**1988**

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## DECLARATION

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled, "NIZAMAT IN BENGAL:A STUDY OF ITS RISE,GROWTH AND DECLINE(1700-1757)" submitted by Mr.Munshi Mazibor Rahman in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy,has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This is his own work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the preparation of this dissertation I have incurred a great deal of debt to many persons who by their valuable advice, guidance<sup>nce</sup> and assistance tied me in a bond of gratitude. I express my indebtedness and gratitude to all of them. The work was originally started under the supervision of Professor Satish Chandra, but after his retirement I was placed under Dr. Muzaffar Alam. Despite his heavy schedule Professor Satish Chandra found time to give me his very valuable advice which helped me immensely. I feel honoured to express my deep regard and gratefulness to him.

I owe a lot to the members of the faculty, Centre for Historical Studies; in particular, to Professor Harbans Mukhia, Dr. Muzaffar Alam and Yogesh Sharma. I have no appropriate words to express my gratitude to Professor Mukhia who was very generous to extend his helping hand in getting over my difficulties, personal or academic, whenever I approached him. Dr. Muzaffar Alam supervised the work and much more than that, he inspired me to keep on working with patience until I was able to complete it. Yogesh Sharma read an earlier draft of chapters III and IV and offered useful suggestions.

There were many persons in Calcutta and at Burdwan from whom I received help. I owe a great deal to Professor

Barun De for his valuable suggestions. Among my teachers, Dr. Mihir Kumar Ray, introduced me in higher studies and Rajat Dutta and Bhaskar Das Gupta helped me in various ways. I must not fail to share my pleasure with my wife Rehana for her tenacity and constant encouragement to see the dissertation completed, and to my little daughter, Rimu, for her forbearance.

17.12.88.

Munshi Mazidur Rahman  
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## INTRODUCTION

Eighteenth century Bengal offers the scope of a fascinating study both in terms of political evolution, as evidenced in the transition to Nizamat, as well as socio-economic formations. At first sight Bengal became witness to three specific political syndromes: (i) it experienced the process of gradual, but steady decline in the authority of the Mughals; (ii) the rise and fall of a transitional regime - the Nizamat, based in a measure on local forces and (iii) the intrusion of a new alien force, first as economic and then as political - the English East India Company. While the first half saw the undermining of the first forces, the second half witnessed the grasping and gradual assertion of the hold, by the third. For our purpose we are concerned with the happenings of the first half of the century.

When the 18th century dawned, the days of Mughal meridian had already crossed its mark, and become a shadow of past. With Emperor Alamgir, the Empire itself had grown old, weak and feeble, and the happenings in the Empire were presaging ominous signs all around. The Empire was already passing through a process of 'crisis' which accelerated after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and let loose the forces of disruption, under the inefficient successors, thus betokening to the advent of the 'dark ages'.<sup>1</sup> While the earlier European

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1. J.N.Sarkar, Fall of the Mughal Empire, 4 vols (Calcutta, first edn., 1932-50, 1972).

historians, with their ulterior motive of justifying the British rule in India were the first to paint the 18th century as a period of decadence, disorder and chaos, Indian historians, also fell to the same pitfalls to view the century more or less in the same fashion. Sir Jadunath Sarkar was first to discuss at length the causes of the downfall of the Mughal Empire. To him too the causes of decline were more or less same as that of the British historians, i.e., decline in the personal attributes of the emperors, lack of efficient administrators, narrow religious outlook, etc. In his Fall of the Mughal Empire, analysing the causes of decline he emphasizes on the point to describe it as the blind alley of indigenous development. This viewpoint first came under attack from the historians of Aligarh who successfully met the challenge, so long posed by the earlier ones. Instead of relying on the political factors, from the 1960s, a host of scholars, utilising the contemporary sources, which contained many informations to show the working of other forces, have come forward with new interpretations, to view the crisis from a different angle and in a complex manner. Professors Satish Chandra<sup>2</sup> and Athar Ali<sup>3</sup> examined the problem on institutional basis. They saw the crisis in the

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2. S.Chandra, Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court (first edn., AMU, 1959); Introduction Medieval India: Society, Jagirdari Crisis and the Village (Delhi, 1982) chapter on Review of the Jagirdari crisis,
  3. Athar Ali, Mughal Nobility Under Aurangazeb (Bombay, 1966).

Jagirdari system which decapitated the Mughal ruling class, leading ultimately to the downfall of the Mughal Empire. In an article<sup>4</sup> published a few years back, Athar Ali has even observed it on an international plane. In the course of the eighteenth century among other things he saw the 'intellectual aridity' of the East paving the way of the debacle of the empires. Professor Irfan Habib dealt the Mughal crisis from an economic viewpoint, as the outcome of an agrarian crisis. Thus, the Aligarh historians have largely been successful in shifting the emphasis from the view held earlier to some more complex and diversified aspects of the problem.

Over the past one decade or so, historical researches have gone a long way to move further from the opinions of the Aligarh school. As a result, there has been spurt in research on eighteenth century India, more particularly on its various region, which tend to modify the characterisation of the century and judge the crisis in a new perspective. Eighteenth century India has thus been seen not so much in 'the decline of the Mughal ruling elite', but in the transformation and the ascent of inferior social groups to overt political power.<sup>6</sup> These inferior social groups, which had long been in formation

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4. Athar Ali, "The 18th Century - An Interpretation", Indian Historical Review, vol.V, 1979.
  5. Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India (Bombay, 1963) (Bengal tr. 1985).
  6. C.A. Bayly, Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire (CUP, 1987), p.9.



could not assert themselves in the face of the all powerful Mughal nobility. But with the decline of the Mughal authority, they began to emerge and consolidate their position in the body politic. The insulated Mughal official class (mansabdar jagirdars) subsisting on revenue farming or the revenue farmers, the traditional Hindu commercial merchant class and the zamindars appearing as the new gentry class symbolise this new social groups, who became politically more important than ever before. In many provinces, these groups acquiring wealth and social power, became in itself an instrument in the weakening of the Mughal order.<sup>7</sup> Again in some provinces, like Bengal, the Mughals themselves encouraged political formations, in an attempt to strengthen their bases. And in some, taking advantage of the impotence of the Mughal Emperor and the factional conflict in Delhi, the provincial rulers strengthened their hold over the province.

By aligning themselves with these newly risen social groups, these provincial rulers had been successful to build up an infra-structure, which was not decadent, rather showed signs of bustling economic activities, in which there was generation of more local surplus, development of trade and commerce. These various social groups in alliance with the countryside gentry, now became the unit of production, patron for increasing trade and commerce and the source of strength

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7. Ibid., p.11.

for the provincial kingdoms. This has been shown by M. Alam<sup>8</sup> while dealing with Awadh and Punjab. In other areas like Bengal, Malwa, Central India, Gujarat, Deccan, the similar process was at work. B.S. Cohn<sup>9</sup> was first to show the emergence of these various social groups and their working on the political system for the Banaras region. Following him, a number of articles have been published along this line for some other regions.<sup>10</sup>

Coming to Bengal, this debate has gained momentum since the publication of P.B. Calkin's article.<sup>11</sup> Calkins has argued that since Bengal was underassessed for a long time, its revenue was being consumed by two classes - the Mughal mansabdars-jagirdars and the most powerful landed magnates - the zamindars. When Aurangzeb being hard pressed for money sent Murshid Quli Khan to extract more revenue it led to momentous changes. It marked a 'shift in the focus of political power from Centre to the province', accompanied by a similar 'shift in the balance of power within the

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8. Muzaffar Alam, The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab (1707-48), OUP, Delhi, 1986.
9. B.S. Cohn, "Political Systems in 18th Century India: The Banaras Region", Journal of the American Oriental Society, no. 82, July-September 1962, republished in An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays (OUP, Delhi, 1987).
10. S.R. Gordon, "Slow Conquest: Administrative Integration of Malwa in the Maratha Empire" (1720-6), Modern Asian Studies, vol. 12, no. 1, 1977; Karen Leonard, "The Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants", Journal of Asian Studies, vol. 30.
11. P.B. Calkins, "The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal" (1700-1740), Journal of Asian Studies, vol. 24, 1970.

province', which ultimately led to the formation of a regionally oriented ruling group. There is no doubt, that the political structure of Bengal in the 18th century changed radically from what it was in the 17th century. Instead of controlling the provincial governors, the Centre itself got enmeshed in the Cobweb of problems and politics and was hardly in a position to control the affairs of the province. In this altered situation, the regular flow of revenue to Delhi by Murshid Quli Khan gave him almost a free hand as far as the affairs of the state was concerned. But in the process, it heralded a change in the socio-political set up of Bengal. The various social groups, which so long remained subdued now got an opportunity to assert itself. As the demands of revenue increased, simultaneously, it signalled the increase in the power of the zamindars. Side by side the pressure of paying the revenue in time (in this connection, Murshid Quli's treatment of the defaulters was almost barbarous as contemporary writers suggest) forced them to turn to the money-lenders. The growing impetus of trade and commerce, indicated the more enhanced role played by these merchants-bankers, who now began to play a more dominated role. The House of Jagat Seth was symbolic of the growing role of this group. Thus a new power-bloc was created in Bengal in the first half of the 18th century.

A number of historians have worked on this period of Nizamat. Following the publication of Stewart's History of Bengal (London, 1813) Sir J.N.Sarkar's History of Bengal, vol.II (edn.) (Dacca, 1948) is the first effort, to study the entire period of Nizamat. But it deals mainly with the political events with stray references to the zamindars. Abdul Karim's Murshid Quli Khan and His Times (Dacca, 1963) and K.K.Datta's, Alivardi and His Times (Calcutta, 1939), are, as the names indicate, history of the particular subadars, thus leaving out the history of the Nizamat as a whole. J.H. Little's, The House of Jagat Seth (Calcutta, 1967) is the history of the Jagat Seths. Recently Shirin Akhtar had made a study on the role of the zamindars entitled The Role of the Zamindars in Bengal (1707-72) (Dacca, 1982). Besides, K.K.Dutta's Studies in the History of the Bengal Subah (1740-1770) (Calcutta 1936) and N.K.Sinha's The Economic History of Bengal, vols. I and II (Calcutta, 1962, 1970) review the economic annals of Bengal. This dissertation with all its limitations is a humble effort to study the Nizamat in the context of its recent studies and interpretations.

The major difficulty faced for the study of the problems of Nizamat is the limitation of source-materials. Almost all the sources specific on its political and administrative dimensions are in Persian and the lying scattered. I have

mostly used them in translations and supplemented the information from other contemporary or near contemporary sources and secondary works.

As the major trading concern the English East India Company was closely related with the Nizamat, the merchants-bankers particularly the Jagat Seths, and various rajahs and zamindars in whose territory their factories were situated. In various documents of the Company are recorded its day to day dealings which testify not only to its activities, but throws much light on the entire socio-political condition of the province. To formulate any idea of the existing socio-political set up these records are thus of immense value. I have for my purpose utilised some of these, in particular, Bengal public consultains, which are preserved in India office library and are available here in National Archives in micro-films. Besides, I have gone through Long's Selections, Fort-William India House Correspondences, published by the Government of India. In addition, some Bengali source materials, e.g. the writings of Bharatchandra, Ram Prasad Sen, Manick Ram Ganguli have also been used.

In the first chapter, I have endeavoured first to show the Mughal provincial structure, and how it contained elements, by which power could be accumulated in one hand. The chapter illustrates how Murshid Quli in the changed atmosphere took

full advantage of this situation to lay the basis of the Nizamats. The chapter then elaborates on the nature of the relationships between the Nizamats and various social groups which proceeded after the evolution of the Nizamats.

In the second chapter, the main thrust is on the organization of zamindari institution, its role during the Mughal days and its importance and emergence as a potential force in the socio-political set up of Bengal during the period under study.

The third chapter deals with the rise, progress and evolution of the great banking house, the Jagat Seths, vis-a-vis their relationship with the Nizamats and the role played in the political fabric of Bengal.

The fourth chapter emphasizes to show why trading activities of the English East India Company always meant use of force and how it actually paved the way for the battle of Plassey to bring about the fall of the restive Nazim by a more amenable one.

The arguments shown, analysis given and views expressed in this dissertation are by no means conclusive. Rather all these are tentative and requires further in-depth enquiry and research to offer any concrete view.

Chapter IEVOLUTION OF NIZAMAT

With the advent of the 18th century, the Mughal Central umbrella was showing signs of disintegration under the heavy weight of the intense economic crisis, political turmoils and social chaos. The forces of cohesion and conciliation, which so long maintained the balance of the Mughal power had broken down and the Empire was passing through a severe strain even during the lifetime of Aurangzeb. After his death, it soon got out of control. Against this backdrop, the elements - the nobility, which once acted as champion of Mughal rule, no longer felt the necessity of saving the Empire from dissolution either by concentrating power or by carrying out reforms in the administrative system. Rather some ambitious nobles began devote their energies to carve out their own separate principalities.<sup>1</sup> With the shrinking of the Mughal authority, the focus of attention also diverted from centre to provinces which now became the cynocure of all activities. One after another, kingdoms like, Awadh, Deccan and Bengal were coming up and established. Thus, by the turn of the century, the great Mughal Empire was giving place to tiny ('successor states') regional kingdoms, its own effective limits being shrunken before the middle of the century 'to Delhi and its suburbs'.<sup>2</sup>

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1. S.Chandra, Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court (1707-40) Aligarh (1979, ed.), p.182.

2. P.Spear, Twilight of the Mughals (Cambridge, 1951).

In the wake of these developments Bengal also emerged as a separate principality, Utilising his position, first as a Diwan and then Subahdar, Murshid Quli Khan and later his successors, established a de facto independent Nizamat in the province. But one should keep it in mind that Bengal's emergence as a separate Nizamat, was not in the same train, as we observe in other parts, where the adventurists perhaps willfully endeavoured to carve out their own principalities. In Bengal, it seems to have been more in a process of natural development. Herein lay the peculiarity of Bengal's situation in comparison with other states. While the emergence of these separate principalities was almost a general phenomenon, differences were also there. Different authorities have signified the phase in different terms.<sup>3</sup> However, this being the general pattern in all-India plane, in provincial level, its variation was visible, either in its structural form or in its nature of development.

Unlike the earlier phase when the provincial government stood as a hinge between the central government and the local elements acting as representatives of the imperial authority and incorporating the local forces into the orbit of the Mughal system of government, its relationship in the prevailing

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3. S.Chandra calls it 'riyasats' (The 18th Century in India, CSSS, Calcutta, 1986), p.3; Richards views it as a proto-dynasty (Mughal Administration in Golkanda, OUP, 1975), p.300; and M.Alam calls it 'New Subahdari' (Crisis of Empire, OUP, 1986), p.69.



state of affairs with the centre began to transform and the hold over the provinces slackened, thus giving way to the enhancement of powers of the provincial rulers. Gradually, as the years advanced, the focus of relationship centred round the remittance of imperial revenues to Delhi. While the imperial government had remained satisfied with the regular flow of revenues, the provincial government secured increased authority in exercising its will more freely than before. In a sense, an unwritten writ of understanding was reached between the two, in which the former was to remain content with the revenue and the latter had the actual authority. One notable feature in this period of transition was the supersession of the Diwani to that of Subahadar though in theory, one was practically independent of the other. But though elsewhere, the Subahdar superseded all others, in Bengal, interestingly enough, the Nizamat was established through the personage of the Diwan. The Diwan gained ascendancy to grab the post of Subahdar, as we shall see later, and ensured his dominance by a variety of factors, to establish the Nizamat. In contrast with other regions, it was a peculiar process of development. It is, therefore, necessary for us to know how this came all about in which the Nizamat found its way of fruition and became the predominant feature of Bengal politics.

### The Classical Pattern of Mughal Provincial Administration

Before going over to this aspect, it is worthwhile for us to look into the structure of Mughal provincial government to enable us to understand clearly the position of the Subahdar.

The structure of provincial government under the Mughals was, in a sense, an exact miniature of that of the central government.<sup>4</sup> As per Mughal tradition of government in which provincial dyarchy was a notable feature, the head of the Subah was called sipahsalar.<sup>5</sup> The sipahsalar, was the viceregent of His Majesty,<sup>6</sup> appointed by an imperial order. Next to him, in official rank but not subordinate, in any way, was the Diwan, who was appointed by the hasbul hukum of the Emperor. These two principal officers were practically in overall charge of the whole administrative machinery. They were to be guided in the administration of the subah, by a Dastur ul-Amal, which was issued year after year by the Emperor and required to observe it strictly.<sup>7</sup> In this connection, it is important to note that along side men of position and

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4. J.N.Sarkar, Mughal Administration (Orient Longman, first India edn., 1972), p.36.

5. Ain-i-Akbari, vol.II, (tr.) H.S.Jarret (Calcutta, 1949), pp.iv-v; P.Saran, Provincial Government Under the Mughals (Allahabad, 1941), p.166.

6. Ain-i-Akbari, op.cit., p.37. This is a generic title undergoing many changes like Subahdar, tarafdar and lastly Nazim.

7. G.H.Salim, Riyaz us-Salatin (Riyaz) (tr.A.Salam, reprint, 1975), p.248.

loyalty, royal princes were appointed as Subahdars "So as gradually familiarise them with the administration and the actual assessment and collection".<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this measure was to keep them familiar with the affairs of the state so that they would not be misguided and depended on their own virtue owing to previous acquaintance.<sup>9</sup> The Subahdar was responsible for the executive, defence, criminal justice and general supervision; while the Diwan was responsible for revenue administration and civil justice. They were assisted in their work by a number of subordinate officers, viz., the Bakshi or the paymaster, the Sadr, the Qazi, the kotwal, the Mir Bahr or the officer in charge of different duties and taxes, the waqia nawis or the news-writer; occasionally another officer called amir was appointed in some provinces.<sup>10</sup> This provincial dyarchy, one of the salient features of Mughal administration, was, derived from Arabian sources, with a view to use it as checks and balances. "In the early centuries of Arab rule two political functions were sharply distinguished (in Egypt, viz.) the governorship and the treasury. The governor (called) amir had control over the military and the

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8. Risala-i-Zirat (tr.H.Mukhia in type-script).

9. Ibid.

10. Saran, op.cit., p.170. A Chatterjee, Bengal in the Reign of Aurangzeb (Delhi, 1967), pp.36-68.

polite only... Along side of him, was the head of the treasury (called) the amīl... these two officers had to keep strict watch on one another".<sup>11</sup>

For our purpose, it will be easy to understand the significance of the office if we discuss the duties and functions of the Subahdar in a bit detail. As representative of the crown the troops and people of the provinces were under him and their welfare depended upon just administration. Therefore, he was to be ever watchful for the consideration of the people's prosperity.<sup>12</sup> In order to attain this object, he was given wide range of powers to discharge his duties. As the Subahdar made recommendations for appointments and promotions such as the governorship of a sub-province, deputy governorship and other provincial officers,<sup>13</sup> therefore, the Subahdar was to take care to recommend only worthy persons.<sup>14</sup> One of his very important duties was to administer justice in the dispensation of which he was enjoined to exercise foresight and impartiality.<sup>15</sup> He was not authorised to execute capital punishment, but to refer them to the centre and act

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11. Compare J.N. Sarkar, op.cit., p.5.

12. Ain-i-Akbari, op.cit., p.37.

13. Saran, op.cit., p.187.

14. Sarkar, op.cit., p.39.

15. Ain-i-Akbari, op.cit., pp.38-39; Saran, op.cit., p.185.

thereof. He was enjoined to entrust each division of the kingdom, i.e., the faujdari areas of the districts to zealous, upright and dutiful guards.<sup>16</sup> For secret information he was to appoint intelligent and honest man. While on the one hand, as the guardian of the province he was responsible for the safety and security of the people, on the other hand, he was to oversee the possibility of the augmentation of the economic resources. With this end in view, he was required to pay attention to the extension of agriculture and encourage the ryot<sup>17</sup> to extend cultivation. He was given power to take stern action against refractory zamindars and lawless men, so that others take it as warning and pay revenue.<sup>18</sup>

The Subahdar was also to collect tribute, due from vassal princes close to his jurisdiction and arrange for its safe convoy to the imperial court. But that authority did not extend over those province who had direct contact with the Central government.<sup>19</sup>

To maintain the dignity and high status of the office, as also to cutdown on his public appearances the Subahdar was ordered to refrain from doing certain things. He was advised to exercise economy of words and behave carefully in society.

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16. Ibid.

17. Ain-i-Akbari, op.cit., p.39.

18. Ibid.; Sarkar, op.cit., p.41.

19. Saran, op.cit., p.187; Sarkar, op.cit., p.41.

He was to shun undesirable company and never let his income exceed his expenditure. He should not be placed anywhere permanently rather he should be ever ready for any transfer. In the discharge of his duties he was advised to be guided by a council of farsighted men.<sup>20</sup> The Subahdar was not permitted to assume royal airs or to imitate the imperial darbar which were the special prerogative of royalty. In the sixth year of his reign, having come to know about the behaviours of some governors in like manner, Jahangir ordered them not to sit in the Jharokha, not to ask their officers to keep guard on or salute them, not to have elephant fights, not to inflict punishment of blinding or mutilation, nor to confer titles on servants, nor order royal servants to do kornish or prostration, nor beat drums when they went out, nor to seal anything they, wrote.<sup>21</sup> Besides, he was to report to the imperial court twice in every month.<sup>22</sup>

The Diwan, who was rival of the Subahdar and the next most important officer acted directly under orders of the imperial Diwan<sup>23</sup> and was in every way, responsible to him. While the Subahdar was the executive head, the Diwan was the head of the revenue department and dealt mainly with financial matters.

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20. Ain-i-Akbari, op.cit., pp.38-40.

21. Memoirs of Jahangir (tr.Rogers and Beveridge) quoted in Saran, op.cit., p.188.

22. Sarkar, op.cit., p.39.

23. Ibid.

In the sanad of appointment the Diwan was given certain instructions about his nature of duties. As Diwan he was to : "Cause the extension of cultivation and habitation, in the villages, watch over the imperial treasury, that nobody may draw any money without due warrant; see that no official (amil) exacts any forbidden cess (alwab)".<sup>24</sup> At the end of every agricultural season he was to make a thorough check-up of the amils' ledgers to ascertain the amount due from them and report for dishonest amil's dismissals, to collect the arrears in easy instalments at the rate of five per cent and to realise the taqavi loans.<sup>25</sup> He was sometimes given the charge of the audit department and had full control over the allocation of expenditure to various departments.<sup>26</sup>

Thus both these two departments - Subahdar and the Diwani - represented to parallel and mutually independent organizations in the province. This system was, as noted earlier, in the nature of an administrative dyarchy, in which the motive was to create a most potent and reliable check and thus maintain balance between the highest officials in the province. In spite of the fact that both these two offices were fairly separate and acted quite independently, ~~the~~

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24. Saran, op.cit., pp.190-91.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

the Subahdar enjoyed a higher rank and status and being executive head of the government commanded greater prestige and honour in the public eye. The Mughals were not unaware of this danger. As a result, they devised ways and means to keep them under strict vigil. Administrative dyarchy itself, was a step to this end. At times, the central authority as a means of restraining the defiant mood of the Subahdar, enhanced the limits of authority of the Diwan. In the reign of Jahangir, when corruption, evil ways and arrogance of Qasim Khan, the Subahdar, required some check, the Emperor did the same by appointing Mukhlis Khan, at the combined office of the diwan bakshi and wagia nawis of Bengal. He was, even, given the authority to dismiss the Subahdar, if found unfit.<sup>27</sup> The most glaring example in this respect was, Aurangzeb's offence and order, to Azim-Us-Shan, his own grandson Subahdar, to quit Bengal, after having learnt about Azim-Us-Shan's nefarious design to kill Murshid Quli.<sup>28</sup> Besides, the various mansabdars who performed administrative functions in the province in different capacities also acted as a check over the activities of the viceroy.<sup>29</sup> The appointment of the wagia nawis,

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27. T.Raychaudhuri, Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir (Delhi, 1969), p.54.

28. Tarikh-i-Bangala (TB), Salim Allah (tr.Gladwin) (Calcutta, 1788), pp.20-21; Riyaz (tr.), op.cit., pp.251-52.

29. Raychudhuri, op.cit., p.55.



organization of occasional tours etc., were the other means by which the control was exercised. In the given set up, though both the offices were equal in theory, much could have differed, in changed circumstances, in practice. Given the propitious moment, opportunity and scope, there lay enough room for the Subahdar to extend authority and establish supremacy over the Diwan. As long as the authority of the Central Government was strong enough to deal with the provincial government as is seen in the seventeenth century, a subtle intangible bond acted as the strongest link between the Emperor and his men. In the face of such a situation, there was hardly any possibility or scope, for any Subahdar to be powerful enough, to gain ascendancy and carve out his own principality, since the central government had many ways to keep him in check. But once the power of exercising control over the provinces slackened and the 'bond of loyalty' that kept its men joint loosened, it exposed many of the loopholes in the given structure and foreshadowed the possibility of the Subahdar's hegemony and the writ of his control over the others as is evidenced in the eighteenth century in different parts of the empire.<sup>30</sup>

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30. For a detailed account see S.Chandra, Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court; J.F.Richards, op.cit.; M.Alam, op.cit.

The Rise of Murshid Quli Khan

Bengal, where the wars of conquest started comparatively late and the character of Mughal rule was like that of a foreign conquest in which the officers came and went, it required constant watch and control, a well - thought-out policy and high calibre - of administrative efficiency for the work of consolidation to fructify. More so, in a region like Bengal, the task of consolidation was rendered complicated by the nature of the country, its peculiar geography and unfriendly climate. The peculiar physical features of Bengal, its numerous inter-weaving rivers, streams, nalahs, canals, swamps its damp and moist air its prolonged rains for almost half the year, its numerous thick forests, also its peculiar vegetation, absence of wheat and barley, all these made communications difficult. The Mughal officers disliked to be posted in Bengal.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Mughals were weak in naval warfare and had to depend to a large extent on the local forces for infantry and warboats. The disinclination of the Mughal officers to serve in the province owing to climate<sup>32</sup> points to Bengal's peculiar geography. With this, was added the refractory nature of the local magnates. The recurring revolts of the frontier rajas and zamindars, the

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31. History of Bengal (HB), vol.II (J.N.Sarkar, ed., Dacca, 1948), pp.245-46.

32. ibid., op.cit., p.247.



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late conquest of Chittagong are indicative of this unsavoury fact.<sup>33</sup> The work of consolidation, along side expansion really began, when deviating from the normative practice of three years' standing Subahdars were appointed for longer terms and the office was conferred either on members of the royal family or to the kinsmen or to men of high repute.<sup>34</sup> The longer periods of office and the connection with the royal house served as a strong ground for the Subahdars and hence they could rely much on solid <sup>support</sup> from the imperial court.<sup>35</sup> In consequence, it implied vesting of more powers and more liberty in action in the hands of the Subahdars. Tapan Raychaudhuri aptly remarks, that Delhi and its Padshah, were, indeed very far away in the minds of the contemporary Benglai. There the Subahdar was a king, apparently a suzerain, over the more familiar vassal kings - the local zamindars.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the situation did not alter much in subsequent years. Rather in the declining years of Mughal rule, the idea found ample scope to be sufficiently nurtured.

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33. The Rajas of Tipperah, Assam and Kuch Bihar, who called themselves chatar dhari and the zamindars of Birbhum and Bishnupur though subjugated, were not fully subdued and raised their heads whenever opportunity came and even minted coins after in their own names. Salim Allah, Tarikh-e-Bangla, p.56; Riyaz, p.257.

34. Shahs Shuja held the post for 21 years (1639-59), with two years break; Mir Jumla held it for five years; Shaista Khan for 23 years (1664-88) with 2 years break and Azim-us-Shan for 10 years (1698-1707).

35. HB, vol.II, p.316.

36. T.Raychaudhuri, op.cit., p.40.

Any study of the Nizamat in Bengal, therefore, has to be made against this backdrop, when the chain of imperial control was fast receding and the face of a regional principality was in the offing.

In this perspective, the rebellion of Shobha Singh, the zamindar of Chetoah Bardah in 1696,<sup>37</sup> threw the whole administration in Bengal in total disarray and caused consternation in the minds of people. The almost unhindered progress of Shobha Singh and later his associate Rahim Khan, till they received the first rebuff at the hands of the Dutch in Chinsura, showed the utter helplessness of administration in Bengal, which in the opinion of Aniruddha Ray had created a 'vaccum'. As the Europeans were not willing to come forward, the rebels merely tried to fill up the vacuum.<sup>38</sup> Whatever might be the ideas of the rebels, the dimension of the revolt, with the joining to it, by some local zamindars with 1000 cavalry, took a serious turn.<sup>39</sup> The situation was grim and necessitated stern action. The imperial authority rose from their slumber and Azim-us-Shan was deputed as Subahdar. Pending the arrival of Azim-us-Shan, Zabardast Khan, was sent in, who brought to an end, the challenge thrown by the rebels. Azim-us-Shan was

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37. For an account of Shobha Singh's revolt see, TB, pp.6-11; Riyaz, pp.231-43; A.Roy, "The Revolt of Shobha Singh - A Case Study", Bengal Past and Present (BPP) (1969-70) pp.56-75.

38. A.Roy, op.cit., p.70.

39. Ibid., p.63.

followed in, by Mirza Hadi, better known as Murshid Quli Khan, in 1700, as the Diwan of Bengal. As an able and loyal officer, Murshid Quli got into the good graces of Emperor Aurangzeb.<sup>40</sup>

The appointment of Murshid Quli Khan, as the Diwan heralded a new era in the history of Bengal. Not only did it, witness the setting up of a new pattern of provincial administration, as a matter of fact, it convulsed the entire Bengal polity as well. The focus of attention which started shifting from centre to provinces now also drew the attention of Bengal. In other words, this development, howsoever limited in scale, lends support to the theory that able and efficient personalities in stead of serving the cause of the state directed their energy and strength to found their own autonomous rule. Murshid Quli's tenure of office during the reign of Aurangzeb, can be said to have formed the formative phase in the evolution of Nizamat. In fact, during this time, Murshid Quli acquired such a status that it became the stepping stone in his future career. However, this development brings forth two things: the political condition of the country in the 18th century and the structural lacunae which lay in the nature of relationships between the centre and the provinces. A short sketch of Murshid Quli Khan will help us understand this aspect.

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40. Riyaz, p.247.

Murshid Quli, a man of proven ability was sent to the province with specific instructions to try to increase the revenue. This decision was taken into consideration of the fact that Bengal was sufficiently under assessed and the increased income was being appropriated by the zamindars.<sup>41</sup> In the very first year, after assessing accurately the imperial revenue and Sair taxes, Murshid Quli was able to send one crore of rupees to the central treasury.<sup>42</sup> The Emperor was so satisfied that his plan of revenue reform (i.e. transferring of jagirs from Bengal to Orissa) met with approval from the centre. Besides, by curtailing the expenditure in the public department he effected enhanced revenue which immensely raised his status before the Emperor. This is evidently seen in his dealings with Azim-us-Shan.<sup>43</sup>

Besides the Emperor's permission to the decision to transfer the capital without prior consent from the Centre and rename the town from Maksudabad to Murshidabad after his own name speaks in itself of the Emperor's esteem for this noble officer.<sup>44</sup> Side by side, his power was being increased. Having been appointed initially as the Diwan of Bengal and Orissa, and faujdar of Murshidabad, within a very short span

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41. Risala-i-Zirat, p.14.

42. Riyaz, p.248.

43. Murshid Quli's growing influence infuriated Azim-us-Shan and he plotted to kill Murshid Quli Khan. The attempt failed and Azim-us-Shan was asked to quit Bengal and withdraw to Bihar. Riyaz, pp.249-52; Tarikh-e-Bangala, pp.20-21.

44. TB (tr.), p.21; Riyaz, p.251.

of time he was appointed faujdar of Sylhet, Midnapur, Burdwan and Cuttack. By 1704, he became the Subahdar of Orissa, the Diwan of Bihar and the faujdar of five districts. His mansab was also raised from 1500 zat/1000 sawar to 2000 zat/1100 Sawar.<sup>45</sup> In this way, he was the executive head of one province and almost half of Bengal, besides, holding the office of Diwani. More than that, the fact that he was the highest imperial officer present in Bengal invested him with honour and prestige and raised him greatly in the estimation of the people.<sup>46</sup> Even the appointments and dismissals for subordinate offices were made according to his recommendation.<sup>47</sup> The Emperor's good grace and eulogy for Murshid Quli is reflected in his letters.<sup>48</sup>

In the midst of all-round crisis in which the Emperor found himself captive, the unflinching loyalty and support of Murshid Quli, regular despatch of huge amount of revenue to the centre, veritably enhanced his position and status and made him almost unassailable before the eyes of the other local officials.

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45. HB, vol.II, p.399; A.Karim, Murshid Quli and His Times (Dacca, 1963), pp.23-24.

46. Karim, *ibid.*, p.24.

47. Sayyid Akram Khan and Shujauddin Muhammad Khan were appointed as his deputy in Bengal and Orissa. In Bihar, his deputy was his nominee.

48. Compare, HB, vol.II, pp.401-02.

Thus in Aurangzeb's reign, the status which he acquired was to prove of immense utility in future career. The Diwan's ascendancy over the Subahdar showed signs of future development in Bengal politics.

Soon after the death of Aurangzeb, the imperial Court politics, through the machination of Azim-us-Shan, forced Murshid Quli Khan out of Bengal and he was transferred to Deccan as Diwan. For full two years (1708-09), Murshid Quli was out of Bengal. But the murder of his successor, Ziaullah Khan by the naqdi troops in the streets of Murshidabad, necessitated the recall of Murshid Quli Khan in Bengal in 1710.<sup>49</sup> The recall of Murshid Quli demonstrated the competency and importance of Murshid Quli for Bengal. It is not unnatural that the Emperor's (Bahadur Shah-1) financial distress<sup>50</sup> and the apprehension of financial disorder as also his proven capability and loyalty might have necessitated his recall.

During the period of turmoil and the wars of succession following the death of Bahadur Shah in 1712, Murshid Quli maintained neutrality and showed fidelity to the crown, without getting himself involved to either of the party. To him whosoever, was, on the throne, was his master and he stuck to that principle strictly. In consonance, with that principle,

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49. Bengal Public Consultations (BPC): P/1/2, 31st March 1710.

50. "Financial Problems of the Mughal Government During Farukhsiyar's Reign", Z.U.Malik, Indian Economic and Social History Review, 1967, vol.IV, no.2, pp.265-66.



Murshid Quli, inspite of having strained relations, sent presents and tributes and remitted the entire balance of the imperial revenue, when Farrukhsiyar captured the throne.<sup>51</sup> This was no ordinary act in such a delicate situation, and paid rich dividends when he was rewarded with the office of deputy Subahdar. His regularity in sending the imperial revenues, his neutrality and early acquaintance brought about this reconciliation.<sup>52</sup> Though the Subahdari was held by Farkhundsiyar, the infant son of Farrukhsiyar and then by Mir Jumla, Murshid Quli was, in fact, the real administrator of the province, as the Subahdar was an infant and Mir Jumla never visited the province. Thus it opened up a new vistas in the career of Murshid Quli as well as it strengthened the basis of Nizamat. While elsewhere the country was being convulsed by revolts and sedition, Bengal remained free from these troubles. Murshid Quli Khan ruled the province with great vigour.<sup>53</sup>

With the conferment of the Subahdari<sup>54</sup> and elevation of rank to 7000, on Murshid Quli, the process of the making of a new Nizamat was facilitated to veer round that direction by the course of happenings.

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51. Riyaz, p.273.

52. Karim, op.cit., p.49.

53. Riyaz, p.276; TB, p.60.

54. Karim disputes Sarkar's date of 1717 by ascribing it in 1715-16.

Murshid Quli Khan, now became the undisputed leader of Bengal, and the centre-province relations entered into a new phase. In this sense, the conferment of Subahdari upon Murshid Quli Khan can be said to have formed the dividing line in its relations with the centre. With the cessation of the regular practice of deputing officials from the centre to the provinces (1713)<sup>55</sup> and the alienation of the provincial hierarchy, the organic link, which, so long had tied Bengal with the centre, came to an end. With this, the main structure of Mughal provincial government, i.e., duality in administration and as its corollary, checks and balances, between the Nazim and the Diwan broke down.

The result was obvious. The Nazim, Murshid Quli Khan, got ample scope and opportunity to usurp power and establish his hegemony over all others. Now we shall see how the Nazim, in the changed circumstances effected his authority.

Once the evolution of this Nizam was effected as distinct from that of the centre, it is worthwhile to inquire in what way, and to what extent, was it successful to impose its hegemony over the province. So far as the outward manifestation of the Nizam was concerned there was hardly any show-off during the reign of Murshid Quli Khan. Being a man of plain and simple living and an austere personality, in the

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55. HB, vol.II, p.410.

exposition of pomp and splendour Murshid was more concerned with the idea of streamlining the administrative super-structure. More than that he never attempted to assert his independence. Rather, besides, the sending of annual revenue and costly presents like tanga horse, elephants, sital pati ivory, musk,<sup>56</sup> at ceremonial functions, as a loyal imperial servant, he strictly observed the rules of conduct prescribed for the governor. He never used the Imperial fleet to his personal use and when in the rainy seasons the Imperial war-vessels came out from Jahanginagar (Dacca), he received it with ceremony and salute.<sup>57</sup>

However, he visualised that the Mughal Empire was nearing its end and if he were to stand and rule, he must strengthen and accumulate power in his own hands, barring which it would be difficult to maintain peace and order and the office of the Nazim would lose its meaning. It might be true that Murshid Quli Khan intended to strengthen the Mughal administrative structure by centralising the administration as Karim puts it, but it cannot be denied that the ultimate effect of it was opposite. It led to the strengthening of the hands of the Nazim and in consequence, to the establishment of a new Nizamat based on local forces.

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56. Riyaz, p.260; Z.U.Malik, The Reign of Muhammad Shah, Bombay, 1967, p.235.

57. Riyaz, p.281.

The Coming Up of a Local Political Alliance

The process towards the beginning of a new Nizamat was started-off through the institution of an emerging ruling class. This was effected first, by rallying round the Diwan - the close relatives, kinsmen, confidants and fortune-seekers - and later from amongst the natives of the province itself.

Since the Mughal conquests and the introduction of Persian as official language, many Bengali Muslims and Hindus were enticed to learn Persian, in order to have a career in the secretarial work of the Mughal provincial administration. Though the high posts and offices were reserved for men including the Khattris and Kayasthas of upper India,<sup>58</sup> the scope for recruits at the lower levels were thrown open to the local people. It thus opened a new vistas for career for the Bengalis.

When Murshid Quli Khan came as Diwan in Bengal, the Mughal Empire was already in deep crisis and the revenues of Bengal helped it much in meeting the increasing financial burden. As a result, the actions of Murshid Quli Khan were receiving easily royal sanctions. Both Salim Allah and Ghulam Hussain Salim write, that Murshid Quli's influence with the Emperor was so great that all appointments in Bengal were made solely at his recommendations and without his consent it

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58. HB II, p.223.

was impossible to obtain royal assent to any applications.<sup>59</sup> Already in Aurangzeb's reign, Murshid Quli Khan was allowed to appoint Syed Akram Khan and Shujauddin Muhammad Khan, his two relatives as his deputies in Bengal and Orissa respectively.<sup>60</sup> Also, at his recommendations, Nawab Saif Khan was appointed faujdar of Purnia.<sup>61</sup> Abdur Rahman was appointed darogha of Nawarah, two news writers - Salimullah and Md. Khalil - were dismissed and a posting to Orissa was cancelled at his complaint. Fourteen relatives of Murshid Quli who came from Iran, were, all given mansabs and appointed to various posts.<sup>62</sup> Since 1712 neither Murshid Quli, nor his successors, could look forward to Delhi for help and support. They were to draw their men and muscle from the insulated Mughal officials, relatives and from the natives of Bengal itself. It thus offered, in an indirect way, ample scope and opportunity before the native Bengalees, who came to fill up the different posts and offices, like qanungos, Diwans, faujgars, chaudhuris, etc. This probably explains, during the reign of Murshid Quli, the increase in number of Bengalee Hindu officials, mainly from amongst the Brahmins, Vaidya, Kayastha and Moiras.<sup>63</sup>

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59. Riyaz, p.260; TB, p.60.

60. Riyaz, p.254.

61. Riyaz, p.36-37; BDG, Purnia.

62. Compare HB-II, p.402 which cites Abkam 115a, 2186, 220a, 216.

63. Karim, op.cit., p.218; HB, p.410.

A look into the officials of Murshid Quli will help us determine this aspect of Nizam. Already we have seen that Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan and Syed Akram Khan were his deputies. After the death of Akram, Syed Razi Khan, son-in-law of Shuja-ud-Din was appointed to the post of Diwan in Bengal.<sup>64</sup> After his demise Sarfaraz, Murshid Quli's grandson, was enrolled into the same office.<sup>65</sup> Of the three deputies, in Dacca, during his tenure, Md. Ali Khan, Itisam Khan and then his son, the last two were his relations.<sup>66</sup> But the nature of relationship is not known. Mirza Lutfullah, son-in-law of Shuja-ud-Din Md. Khan was for a time deputy governor of Dacca.<sup>67</sup> Among his faujdars, Muhammad Taqi Khan, son of Shuja-ud-Din, was the faujdar of Balasore, Muhammad Khan, his special disciple become the faujdar of Murshidabad and the commander of the army.<sup>68</sup> After the death of Abu Turab, a relative of Azim-us-Shan, and the faujdar of Bhusnah, while leading a campaign against Sitaram, the zamindar of Bhusnah, Hossain Ali Khan, brother-in-law of Murshid Quli Khan, was appointed to that post.<sup>69</sup> Among the faujdars of Hooghly, Wali Beg, Mir Nasir and Mirza Ahsanullah, were his close associates and

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64. Riyaz, p.265.

65. Ibid., p.274.

66. Karim, op.cit., p.64.

67. Riyaz, p.274.

68. Ibid., p.271.

69. Ibid., p.272.

portege.<sup>70</sup> Besides, generals like Mir Banagali, Syed Anwar Jaunpuri, who spearheaded campaign against Rashid Khan and Muhammad Jan, the thanadar of Katwa and Murshidganj adored him and rendered faithful services.<sup>71</sup>

Among the officers of the Diwani department Diwan Bhupat Rai, and Krishna Rai, whom Murshid Quli brought from Delhi, Darab Narain Qanungo and his son, Shiv Narayan, Jai Narayan Talpatra Qanungo, his son, Srikrishna<sup>72</sup> all deserve notice.

In the altered political atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion Murshid Quli Khan, first by utilising the services of this loyal and faithful band of officers and secondly by gaining complete mastery over the revenues of Bengal<sup>73</sup> got ample scope and opportunity to exploit the situation to his favour. With this was added the financial difficulties of the Mughal Emperors, which gave chance to persons like Murshid Quli to assert their position and dominate them.<sup>74</sup> This is highlighted through the following cases. One Anandanarayan, zamindar of the Chaklah Rajshahi, once withheld payment of revenue and decided to fight in collusion with Ghulam Muhammad

70. Riyaz, pp.262-63, 284.

71. Ibid., pp.270-71, 279.

72. Ibid., p.262; S.Akhtar, Role of the Zamindars in Bengal (Dacca, 1982), p.41.

73. For revenue reforms see Karim, op.cit., pp.89-93; Fifth Report II, p.174, 194-204; S.Akhtar, Zamindars, pp.25-50.

74. "Financial Problems of the Mughal Government During Farrukhsiyars Reign", Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol.IV, 1967, p.265.

and Kalia Jamadar. Murshid Quli sent his officer Muhammad Jan, to fight them, in which Gulahm Jamadar was killed and Anandanarayan committed suicide. Therefore, Murshid Quli transferred his zamindari to two Bengal zamindars - Ramjivan, brother of Raghunandan, the Qanungo and Kali Kunwar.<sup>75</sup> According to Mughal practice, all accounts relating to the provincial administration were to be signed by the two Qanungos. One Darab Narayan, one of the two qanungos, once refused to put his signature and placed Murshid Quli Khan in trouble. Murshid Quli caused his death at a suitable time and allotted his ten annas of the Qanungoship to his son, Shivnarayan and six annas to Jai Narayan, a loyal officer of the Diwan, who had signed the Accounts.<sup>76</sup> These two persons later on under the patronage of the Nazim founded two zamindari houses.<sup>77</sup>

In another case, Murshid Quli Khan's supreme position in the state was seen in his dealing with the faujdar of Hooghli. The office of the faujdari of Hooghly was hitherto directly under the Emperor and was quite independent of the Subahdar. As this divided authority caused inconvenience, on Murshid Quli Khan's representation, therefore, the faujdari of the post of Hooghly, which was till then the chief port of

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75. Riyaz, p.259.

76. Ibid., pp. 252, 262.

77. S.Akhtar, op.cit., pp.39, 40-41.



Bengal, was brought under his authority as an appendage to the Nizam. Not only that, Murshid Quli succeeded in placing his own deputy, Wali Beg as the faujdar of the port.<sup>78</sup>

The revolt of Sitaram, the Zamindar of Bhusnah, in the Sarkar of Mahmudabad and the murder of Abu Turab, the faujdar, by the former threw a direct challenge to the authority of Murshid Quli. This perfidious act of Sitaram, infuriated Murshid Quli too much. Appointing Hasan Ali Khan, his own brother-in-law, as faujdar of Bhusnah, Murshid Quli sent a large force against him. He also asked the neighbouring zamindars to assist the faujdar failing which their zamindaris would be lost and thus Murshid Quli brought about his downfall. Sitaram's zamindari was confiscated and made over to Ramjivan, the zamindar of Rajshahi.<sup>79</sup> In another occasion, two Afghan zamindars of Jonki Sarubpur in the Sarkar of Mahmudabad, who were notorious in their lawlessness and pillaged revenues of the surrounding territories, were dealt with severely and had their zamindaris, settled with his favourite Ramjivan.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, Murshid Quli Khan, by applying a rigorous revenue policy, helped in the process of creating a loyal class of zamindars. In fact, of the greater zamindaris of 18th century

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78. Riyaz, pp.262-63.

79. Riyaz, pp.266-67

80. Ibid., p.178.

Bengal, Raj Shahi, and two others - Muktagacha and Momenshahi - were created by applying this policy.<sup>81</sup> In a bid, to secure punctilious and increasing flow of revenues to the centre, Murshid Quli helped in the growth of the already existing zamindaris like, Burdwan, Silbersa Seoraphuli, Rokumpur, Nadia, Muktagacha, Yousufpur etc. In fact, the history of the larger zamindaris shows that Murshid Quli made it a policy to increase the power of some of the loyal and big zamindars.

The actions of Murshid Quli foreshadowed two things: on the one hand, it preemptorily proved that Murshid Quli was a stern administrator and lawlessness had no place in his administration - be it the defaulting zamindars, insolent officers or his own son - whom it is said, he had slain to avenge the death of an oppressed man.<sup>82</sup> He had struck such a terror in the hearts of the mutasaddis, amils, zamindars, qanungos and other officers that they remained always in duress.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, this was more important, it was helping in the process of the creation of a loyal class of zamindars - officers. Being the sole authority in matters appointments, promotions and dismissals and by depriving the defaulting and insolent zamindars and conferring their properties, instead on a loyal group of men, Murshid Quli Khan bound them up, to

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81. S.Akhtar, Zamindars, p.31.

82. Riyaz, p.282.

83. Ibid., p.258.

a personal bond of allegiance and founded the Nizam based on local strength. The political atmosphere in Bengal had developed in such way, that Murshid Quli found a new class of men, looking to him at the head of the administration 'as their sole benefactor'. Murshid Quli adroitly, utilised the services of this group to fill up the vacuum and run the administration to his interests.

Therefore, it seems plausible, that a sort of give and take policy developed between the Nazim and the group, resulting in a new balance. When Shuja-ud-Din came to the throne this group found its expression in the composition of the Triumvirate Council<sup>84</sup> consisting of Haji Ahmad, Alivardi Khan, Diwan Alamchand and Jagat Seth. But it will be wrong to assume it as a bureaucratic superstructure, or as a solid bloc. Rather it was a group of different men with diverse interests who came close to rally round the Nazim with their dependents as it suited their interests. Hence, in this period of transition, the peculiar setting of Bengal politics, their policy was directed towards strengthening the hands of Nazim, on the one hand, and on the other, their own interests too, by having a more amenable Nawab. This policy found its expression after the death of Murshid Quli Khan. The Calcutta Council reported:

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84. Riyaz, pp.294-95; Seir-ul-Matakherin (tr.) (Calcutta, 1902), p.280.

"That Soojah Cawn being arrived on this side Ballasore, great numbers from Muxidevad are gone to meet him. That several of the Rajahs and zamindars, vacqueels have visited and received seerpaus from him. That on his approach they will send their vacqueels to pay their compliments and if the Nawab approves of it, they will pay their respects to him also and if they saw Futtichundsaw has not the sway, with him, as he had with Jaffer Cawn, they will not fail to sollicite him for the mint".<sup>85</sup> Thus a pyramid-type structure was evolved in which the Nawab was seated at the top.

Further, the imposition of abwab from 1722, onwards over the zamindars is an emphatic assertion of Nizam over the subordinate elements. The policy of levying abwab was new and a break with the traditions.<sup>86</sup>

When Shujauddin came to the masbad the hegemony of the Nizam took such a concrete shape that he did not have to stick to any rigorous measure like his predecessor, in administrative affairs. So, he on his accession, could order the release of defaulting zamindars and ask for regular payment without having taken recourse to any harsh measure.<sup>87</sup> He began to behave in such manner as would have indicated the

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85. Bengal Public Consultation (BPC), August 14, 1727, P/1/6.

86. J. Grant, "Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal", The Fifth Report, II, p.209.

87. Seir ul Mutakherin, op.cit., vol I, pp.279-80.

changed political atmosphere in Bengal. We should judge his 'paraphernalia of royalty and armaments', his building of grand palaces, arsenal, gateway and other offices in the light of this changed situation, which in normal case would not have been feasible.<sup>88</sup> He introduced, in clear deviation of Mughal norms, the practice of weighing himself against gold and silver on his birth anniversary.<sup>89</sup> That he deemed and behaved like a full-blooded monarch, is, indirectly corroborated by Salimullah when he says, "In a word, by his general conduct in the commencement of his government, he shewed himself deserving of his good fortune".<sup>90</sup>

By 1740, the most important chain of link between the centre and the province came to an end, with the complete stop of sending tribute to Delhi. Alivardi without caring at all for the centre, grabbed the mansad with the help of this group. And the Emperor of Delhi had no other way but to recognise the fait accompli in order that some money would be available. The Nizamat, thus, in all its intents and activities, came to be represented as a separate entity. The way Alivardi Khan got his favourite Sirajuddaulah, an inefficient and corrupt youth, even knowing all his frailties, Saddled on the mansad

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88. Riyaz, p.290; TB, p.75.

89. TB, p.75.

90. Ibid.

of Murshidabad, against the stiff opposition both from the House and Court officials, demonstrated clearly that the idea of Nizam as more or less a personal possession of the Nazim had taken root. The new Nawab, in order to curb the power and influence of some of the chief supporters of the old Nawab, displaced many of the officers of the old regime and filled the vacancies with his own young men.<sup>91</sup> The emphatic manner, with which these changes were effected speaks in itself of the power and position of the Nazim and the supremacy of the will and act of the Nazim. That the Nizam had lost its power and position, very shortly, is a different story, which was the outcome of the operation of an alien factor, in collusion with some disgruntled native elements.

#### The Centre-Province Relations

Now it might be enquired into the nature of relationships between the Centre and the provinces in this altered situation. One thing is, however, clear, that at no time did the Nazims of Bengal, disown allegiance to the Emperor. Rather on all occasions the Nazim were apt to get their actions sanctioned by the Emperor and sought to be glorified by being invested with titles and honours. When Muhammad Shah ascended the throne, he confirmed Murshid Quli Khan in

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91. S.C.Mukherjee, The Career of Raja Durlabh Ram (Varanasi, 1974), p.30.

his office and Murshid Quli sent treasure and presents in return. One writer has commented that his policy was to set up his own power and that of his family in Bengal with full concurrence and legal sanction of the Emperor and it was never his aim to use the power to defy the centre or to destroy its legitimate rights.<sup>92</sup> But it would be too much to say that Murshid acted consciously to grab power in his own hands. The situation was as such that the Mughal Emperors were too powerless to do anything and if the province were to maintain law and order, some sort of concentration of power within the subah was inevitable and this led him to centralise power in his own hands. There can be no doubt, that the foundation of the regime was so well entrenched that it was impossible to overthrow them without the risk of jeopardizing the stable administration and the existing harmony in centre province relations.<sup>93</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Murshid Quli, Shujauddin, Sarfaraz Khan and even Alivardi - though he secured the throne by the force of his strength - all on their accession sent nazrana and received titles and robes of honour in recognition of their Nizamat. The bestowal of honours and titles to

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92. Z.U.Malik, The Reign of Md.Shah, Bombay, 1977, p.235.

93. Ibid., p.236.

other members of the family was preferred<sup>94</sup> as that would raise their status and gave them a sort of sublimity in the eyes of their local subordinates.

Alivardi's allowance of the royal practice of dispatching the escheated property of Rs.40 lakhs of the deceased Sarfaraz Khan and Rs.14 lakhs on account of tribute to the Centre through his representative Murid Khan<sup>95</sup> are all proofs of the existence of some sort of Mughal royal authority over the Nizamat.

The currency, that was in circulation in Bengal was not the currency of the Nazims, but it bore the marks of the Mughal Emperor. A case in point, was the coining of siccas in favour of Nadir Shah, when he invaded Delhi, by Sarfaraz, through the machination of the Triumvirate Council. Again, the same Council exploited the issue to their advantage by carrying the tales to the Mughal Emperor on Nadir Shah's withdrawal, that coins were issued in the name of the invader. They thus secured a royal patent to overthrow Sarfaraz.<sup>96</sup> Similarly the continuance of the tradition of reading, Khutbah, on the occasion of any new Emperor by the Nazims is

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94. Riyaz, p.322; Tarikh-i-Bangala Mahabat Jangi, Yousuf Ali (tr.A. Subhan) (Calcutta, 1982), p.19.

95. Riyaz, p.322; Yousuf Ali, op.cit., pp.19-20.

96. Riyaz, pp.309-10.



another proof of the acknowledgement of the Mughal Suzerainty.

Above all was the issue of imperial revenues to Delhi. The regular and punctilious despatch of imperial revenue to the tune of Rs. one crore and some lakhs<sup>97</sup> every year to Delhi even as late as 1740, proves categorically that the Nazims did never attempt to disown allegiance to the centre. As a matter of fact, the Nizam owed its emergence as a separate entity to the regular flow-of tribute to Delhi. Even the cessation of the practice of remitting tribute to Delhi since the time of Alivardi, may be attributed to the Maratha and Afghan invasions. In fact, about the year 1743, Alivardi evaded payment on the pretext of Maratha incursions. The menace had affected the position of the Nawab to such a pitch that he himself had been forced to take 'casual aids' from the Europeans traders and principal zamindars.<sup>98</sup> The success of the Nazims in the maintenance of internal peace and order, had its effects also in their relations with the centre, which diminished the prospect of any interference by the centre.

Taken as a whole, the mutual relationship between the centre and the Nizam with the advance of years became more formal than real. As a matter of fact, the Nazim's firm hold

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97. J. Grant, "Analysis", Fifth Report, II, p.289.

98. Bharatchandra granthavali (Basumati), p.6; K.K.Dutta, Alivardi and His Times, (Calcutta, 1963), p.141.

over the subah, their remarkable success in the maintenance of internal peace and order, paving the way for augmentation of trade and commerce, and above all, the regular despatch of revenue precluded the possibility of any interference by the centre, in the affairs of Bengal. The invasion of Nadir Shah, had dealt the Mughal centre such a death blow, that it became powerless to do anything, when Alivardi literally usurped the power from Sarfaraz Khan whose governorship it had legitimated. It became merely a spectator to the on-goings in Bengal. So the Mughal authority had to remain content with whatever semblance of recognition was shown, to it by the Nizamat.

The Nazims, on the other hand, knew fully well that however strong was their hold on the masnad they could not claim any legitimacy. In the eyes of the people or the ruling elite, they were mere usurpers. As their position had grown out of the extraordinary situation, they always ran the risk; hence it explains Alivardi's concern to have royal approval. The ruling elite was also well aware of the fact. When, on being tormented at Sirajuddaulah's rule, the conspirators assembled at Jagat Seth's house, they talked of approaching the centre for a new Subahdar. So it was a situation which both found advantageous to their mutual interests. The Emperor had the glamour of suzerainty and financial support from the subah, while the Nazims enjoyed virtual independence by paying merely lip allegiance and occasional presents.

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99. R.Mukhopadhyay, Krishna Chandra Rayashcharitang (Calcutta, 1347 B.S.), p.27.

Chapter IITHE ZAMINDARS

The zamindars played a very crucial part in the political and social sustenance of the Mughal power. They formed an important stratum in the structural base of the Empire. The Mughals adopted a unique policy of accommodating the zamindars in various branches of administration by giving them employment in the hierarchy of functions. So powerful was the base of this class, that the Mughals had to keep a close and constant watch over it to prevent from it becoming an insurmountable threat to the state.

The emergence of Bengal as a semi-independent principality under Murshid Quli Khan and his successors, coincided with the emergence of a powerful group of zamindars, merchants, bankers and insulated Mughal officials to form, even though for a transitional period, a 'regionally oriented ruling group'<sup>1</sup> in the province. Of all these groups and power-blocs, the zamindars, by far, exerted maximum influence and authority in the body-politic of Bengal. Starting from their primary functions, i.e. revenue collections, the zamindars in Bengal, treaded equally in the political, social as also the administrative front.

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1 P.B. Calkins, "The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, (1700-1740)", Journal of Asian Studies, vol. 24, August 1970, pp. 799-807.

( I )

Zamindar is a very perplexing term, having a wide spectrum of definitions, based on the rights enjoyed by various persons. The term was in use even before the advent of the Mughals,<sup>2</sup> but the term began frequently to be used in the 17th century. Zamindar literally means a holder or a keeper of land. A person while employed his own resources and labour and brought a piece of land under cultivation, had malikana right over that piece of land and was recognized as zamindar. Again madad-i maash grants also, in course of time, assured the character of zamindari rights.<sup>3</sup> The zamindari rights, therefore, connoted "a variety of superior rights in the land or its usufruct", with any hereditary claim to a direct share of the peasant's produce. But that did not necessarily mean ownership of land.<sup>4</sup> As per Mughal tradition, zamindar became a generic title replacing the old local terms like khot, muqaddam, satarhi, biswi, bhoomia, etc.;<sup>5</sup> and embracing people from different strata of the ruling hierarchy - from rajas, ranas, rais to khots, muqaddams, chaudhuris, etc.<sup>6</sup> The

2 T. Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, eds., The Cambridge Economic History of India, vol. 1 (C-1200-1750), reprint Orient Longman (1984), p. 244.

3 S. Nurul Hasan, Thoughts on Agrarian Relations on Mughal India, PPH (reprint, 1983), pp. 18-20.

4 I. Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707), (tr. Bengali), K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta (1985), p. 165.

5 Raychaudhuri and Habib, eds., op.cit., p. 244.

6 R.E. Frykenberg, ed., Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History, Madison (1969), p. 18.

underlying principle was, perhaps, to introduce a further degree of uniformity by recognizing certain aspects of zamindari right and to mould all the different holders of land into a group of loyal agents. Though it seems that all the categories were brought at par by applying a degree of uniformity, in actual practice, however, it differed much. While the local chiefs were entitled to a kind of autonomy, the ordinary revenue paying zamindars were put under the surveillance of imperial officers. The relationship between the autonomous chiefs and the ruling authority rested more on military and political interests than on fiscal considerations.<sup>7</sup>

While this was the general characteristics of the zamindari institution, in provincial plane, numerous factors had their own role in its shaping. In Bengal, between the exist of the Afghans and the advent of the Mughals, the Bhuinyas, popularly known as the Barabhuinyas a name received on the analogy of Assam though their number was not 12 but many, rose in prominence and parcelled out the country among themselves as independent chiefs.<sup>8</sup> When the Mughal conquests began under Akbar and his successors, the Mughals kept themselves satisfied by forging certain links between them and the vanquished chiefs. In discussing the nature of relationships that developed between the Mughals

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7 Irfan Habib, op.cit., pp. 194-201.

8 N.K. Bhattashali, "Bengal Chiefs' Struggle for Independence in the Reign of Akbar and Jahangir", Bengal Past and Present, vol. 35, January-June 1928.  
Many interesting tales were till recently, in vogue

and these fallen chiefs, one authority has said, the payment of peshkash signifying political submission alongside maintenance of autonomy was a better indication of the actual state of affairs.<sup>9</sup>

This practice continued in an attenuated form in the intervening period, with the suzerainty of the Mughals being established over extensive areas. Since the time of Ibrahim Khan's subadari in 1617, many of the zamindars were restored to their old zamindaris, with all their privileges. One singular feature of this period was, cropping up of numerous taalluqas and petty zamindaris.<sup>10</sup> Thus in Bengal, zamindari organization developed along its own peculiar way. Even in province wise, the zamindari tenure in Bengal was different to an extent from the zamindari in Bihar.<sup>11</sup> When the Nizamat administration developed in Bengal in the

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in popular plays and dramas highlighting their heroics and valour of..

9 T. Raychaudhuri, Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir, Delhi (1969, second impression), p. 39.

But very recently his views have been contradicted by saying that in Bengal, two types of zamindari came upon the heels of Mughal conquest: (1) those who got back their watan jagirs known as Amlis zamindars, Jessore and Bakla were of this type. They collected revenue and prepared Jama and hasil as per Mughal revenue and rules. (2) those who were returned the whole zamindari were known as Ghair-i-Amlis, like Birbhum, Facheet, Bhusnah etc. They collected revenue in their own territories, according to their own customs (A. Ray, "Mogal Amaler Zamindar Talluqdar: Sankshipta Aalochana", Madyajuger Bharat, pp. 37-39 (K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1987)).

10 T. Raychaudhuri, 'Bengal', p. 66.

11 J. Shore's Minute, April 2, 1788, W.K. Firmingir, ed., The Fifth Report, vol. 2, paras 478-80.

beginning of the 18th century, the prevalent situation in the country provided ample scope to the zamindars to extend their power, influence and territory. However, almost all the zamindars were liable to some sort of financial obligations to the state. In this sense, the zamindars may be grouped into two categories: (1) the Peshkash paying zamindars; the Rajas of Birbhum, Bishnupur, Tippera, Chandrakona etc. belonged to this category. The peshkash paying zamindars were not subject to any revenue regulations, but paid in fixed tributes<sup>12</sup> in different forms.<sup>13</sup> (2) The mal-wajibi zamindars, who were subjected to imperial regulations and paid their revenues depending upon the estimation of the actual yields. Their rights and duties were under close scrutiny of the imperial authority and they in fact 'constituted the bulk of the zamindars in Bengal and formed the backbone of the Mughal revenue system'.

The two categories, however, do not show clearly the differences that existed among these zamindaris - in size, strength, resources, geography strategic location. On the criteria of the magnitude of their obligations with the government the dynamics of their powers and privileges their relations with the government, their economic resources and military potentiality and the regional custo-

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12 Ibid., para 184.

13 The Rajas of Ashm, Tipperah on hearing the news of the appointment of Murshid Quli Khan, sent him, ivory throne, palki, musk, fans of peacock feathers and herds of elephants as customary annual tribute. Salim Allah (tr.), 142, Riyaz-us-Salatin, p. 257.

mary practices, Shirin Akhtar<sup>t</sup> 14 in her recent study has classified the zamindars of Bengal into four types - the autonomous chiefs, the frontier zamindars, the big zamindars and the petty or primary zamindars. But we should keep in mind that any such distinct delineation did not exist in practice and one slid over the other.

### The Autonomous Chiefs

The first in this category were: (1) the autonomous chiefs; the Rajas of Kuch Bihar, Kock Hajo, Assam and Tippera fall in this category. After the Mughal conquest, when the Kuch Bihar rajas showed their allegiance and appeared personally at the Mughal Court, on Ibrahim Khan's recommendations Raja Lakshi Narayan and Parikshit Narayan, were reinstated to Kuch Bihar<sup>15</sup> and made ally of the Mughals. Similarly, the Rajahs of Assam and Tippeiah were restored to their old possessions on condition of regular payment of peshkash.<sup>16</sup> One notable thing about this category is that they were almost in complete sovereignty paying only a nominal tribute (peshkash) to the Emperors and Nawabs, without being subjected to any revenue regulations. Another notable feature in their relations with the Mughals was that their hereditary right to succession was not liable to

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14 S. Akhtar, op.cit., p. 8.

15 Mirza Nalhan, Baharistan-i-Ghaibi (tr. M.I. Borah), vol. 2, 521, T. Raychaudhuri, op.cit., p. 2.

16 J.N. Sarkar (ed.), History of Bengal, (HB), vol. 2, (Dacca, 1948), p. 415; T. Raychaudhuri, op.cit., p.2.



renewal from the Emperor. Being almost free in their own affairs, these chiefs always took advantage of any opportunity to assert their independence. Both Salim Allah and Ghulam Hussain give an account how these chiefs who did not bend their heads in submission, on hearing the news of the vigorous administration of Murshid Quli Khan, submitted and paid tributes.<sup>17</sup> Their territories included mostly in the north and north eastern border of the province. Their relation with the government was more of a political nature.

#### The Frontier Zamindars

The most notable of them were the Rajas of Birbhum and Bishnupur. Birbhum was first brought under Mughal yoke, by Mir Jumla, in 1659, with the help of some zamindars like, Khwaja Kamal Afghan.<sup>18</sup> Later Murshid Quli Khan conferred it on Asaduallah for the purpose of guarding the western border against the Jharkhand zamindars.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Bishnupur surrounded by dense forests and hilly terrains remained almost free from imperial control. Because of the location of these territories in the outlying parts of the Subah and their inaccessibility, they were left free in

17 Salim Allah, Tarikh-e-Bangala (tr. Gladwin), Calcutta, 1788, p. 142; Ghulam Husain Salim, Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr. A. Salam), reprint, 1975 (Delhi), p. 257.

18 West Bengal District Gazetteer - Birbhum, ed. D. Mazumdar, pp. 105-06.

19 J. Grant, "Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal", The Fifth Report-II, p. 196.

their own affairs, on payment of nominal peshkash. Salim accounts that considering the pious nature of Asadullah and the inaccessibility of Bishnupur, surrounded by forests and mountains, Murshid Quli also did not subject them to any revenue regulations.<sup>20</sup> In fact the zamindars of this two places were like guardian of the western frontiers. Besides, these big zamindars the rajas of the vast tracts of Jungle-Mahals, bordering Midnapore, Bishnupur and Birbhum, like Barda and Thakra in Midnapore,<sup>21</sup> the Rajput rajas of Pachet, Chandrakona and Mynachora<sup>22</sup> were also peshkash paying zamindars and enjoyed almost same privileges. In addition to this there were a number of petti frontier zamindars in the north, north-eastern region in the sarkars of Ghoraghat, Kuch Bihar, Bangal Bhum, Dakkinkole, Kamrup, Udehur, who were also prone to disown allegiance.<sup>23</sup>

#### The Big Zamindars

The third and by far the most important category was the big zamindars. Being located mostly in the interior contours of the province, their status and position was not same as that of the first two categories. They were very

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20 Riyaz, op.cit., pp. 256-57.

21 T. Raychaudhuri, Bengal, p. 64.

22 J. Grant, Historical Analysis, op.cit., p. 198; A. Karim, Murshid Quli Khan and His Times (Dacca, 1963), p. 76; Bengal District Records, vol. I (ed.), Fir-minger (Calcutta, 1914), p. 132.

23 A. Akhtar, Zamindars, p. 12.

much under the control of the government and they could be dispossessed on charges of treason and non-payment of revenues.<sup>24</sup> This category of zamindars formed the nuclei of the Nizam. They paid the bulk of the revenue and became the mainstay of the Nawab's strength. More than half of the total revenue was supplied by them. They also formed the political and administrative strength of the Nizam. Burdwan, Rajshahi, Nadia, Dinajpore etc.<sup>25</sup> were some of such big zamindaris.

#### The Petty Zamindars

It included zamindaris of lesser delineations like taraf, tappa, peasants cultivating their own lands, arising out of madad-i maash grants, royal grants for reclamation of waste lands, taalluqdari, collectors of revenue inheriting to prescriptive rights in course of time and dividing tendencies of moderate zamindaris.<sup>26</sup> Since their hold over land was small, so was their influence either in region or in administration.

Such was the configuration and stratification of zamindaris and zamindari establishments during the Mughal

24 Riyazus Salatin, op.cit., pp. 259-265-67; I. Habib, op.cit., pp. 191-92. <sup>previous</sup>  
From the description of the /two class of zamindars it appears, that the Nizam rulers also did not attempt to break the status quo. Perhaps they were aware that it was better to maintain status quo, by utilising their services in guarding the frontiers of the kingdom, thus using them as a buffer-ring, than to risining their kingdom in the altered situation, by attempting to break their privileged position.

25 J. Grant, op.cit., pp. 194-98.

26 S. Akhtar, op.cit., pp. 16-17.

and Nizamat period.

Units of zamindari, as it developed during the Nizamat period varied astonishingly from one pargana to innumerable parganas. While a big zamindari, like Rajshahi, included under the direct patronage of the Nazims as many as 164 parganas in 1748;<sup>27</sup> the petty zamindars, like Ramkishan and Shaker Khan were zamindars of pargana Nurullahpur and tappa Faizabad<sup>28</sup> only respectively. Men from different strata ranging from petty clerk, revenue officials, legal or military personnel, fortune-adventurers, religious saints and scholars came to fill the ranks of zamindars. Formation of zamindari along caste, clan or tribal lines, was a necessary adjunct of Mughal tradition.<sup>29</sup> This practice was not absent also in Bengal, where zamindari pattern developed, to an extent, along caste lines. Barring a few adventurers of non-Bengali caste, almost all the zamindars sprang from the Rarh (Western Bengal) Varendra (North Bengal), or Vanga (East Bengal) samajs of the Brahman and Kayastha gentry and were thus related by kinship to the high caste gentry of smaller fortunes, who constituted quite a large number of the population.<sup>30</sup> In area-wise formation the Pathan zamindari of Birbhum cons-

27 J. Grant, op.cit., p. 307.

28 S. Akhtar, op.cit., p. 18.

29 T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib, op.cit., p. 246; I. Habib, op.cit., pp. 170-80.

30 R. Ray, "The Bengal Zamindars: Local Magnates and the State Before the Permanent Settlement", Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. 12, no. 3, 1975, pp. 275-76.

stituted a fairly large militarist Muslim population.<sup>31</sup> In Bishnupur, the Brahmans were so large in number that they performed all agricultural operations,<sup>32</sup> which generally was inhibitive to them. Some Sadgop and Kaivarat/at Hijli, where the population of the two castes were in great majority.<sup>33</sup>

One interesting feature in the formation and organization of the zamindari, during the period of Nizamat, was the preponderance of Hindu zamindars who manned the various revenue departments as qanungos, chaudhuris, diwans and naibs.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps a glance at the zamindaris of the period would corroborate the validity of the argument.<sup>35</sup> Again among the Hindus, Kayasthas figured preponderantly, followed by the Brahmans.

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31 J. Grant, op.cit., p. 196; also W.W. Hunter, Annals of Rural Bengal, London, 1897, p. 88.

32 R. Ray, "The Bengal Zamindars", IESHR, vol. 12, no.3, 1975, p. 276.

33 Ibid.; Bengal District Gazetteers, Midnapore, p. 57.

34 S. Akhtar, op.cit., p. 33.

35 Rajshahi (for an account of the zamindari, see "The Territorial Aristocracy of Bengal - The Rajas of Rajshahi", Calcutta Review, vol. 56, 1873; also N.K. Sinha, vol. 2, pp. 120-21, Yousufpur, Rokunpur, Momenshahi, Rajnagar (see S. Akhtar, op.cit., pp. 37-42) where some of these categories. Various explanations have been offered in this regard. But it is difficult to say anything precisely what actually prompted to this development. One possible reason may be that the Hindus being expert in revenue matters got the favour of the Nizamat (J.N. Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. 2, p. 410). Salim Allah also says that Murshid Quli Khan employed in his revenue none but the Bengali Hindus. Another reason is that since 1713, Bengal's relation being cut-off from Centre, it had to recruit from local persons, which gave way to them. Thus in the given circum-

While this was the structural and organizational pattern of the zamindari, the nature of relationship, between the state and the different categories of the zamindars varied accordingly. Boughton Rous, gives an account of the relationships which deserves to be quoted:

"Upon the demise of a zamindar, his heir or heiress transmitted an account of the event in a petition to the Diwan of the Soubah and the Roy Royan, or, if landholders of the first rank to the Soubahdar himself, with letters to all principal men of the Court, soliciting their protection.

To an heir or heiress, who paid a large revenue to the state, the Soubahdar returned answer of condolence, accompanied with an honorary dress to the former and with a present of shawls to the latter...

After performing the funeral rites of the deceased, the heir, if of age, was presented to the Soubahdar, by the Diwan and the Roy Royan and after receiving the betel leaf and an honorary dress, was permitted to assume the management of the affairs, of his zamindary.

Minor heirs or heiresses received the honorary dress and shawls, above mentioned, through agents deputed for that purpose, to the court of the Nazim.

The Zamindars of secondary rank were entitled not only to a pair of shawls and a perwannah of condolence from the Soubahdar and for those of an inferior class, an answer from the Roy Royan,

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tances they manipulated their position, to found zamindari houses.

accompanied with the betel leaf, was deemed sufficient".<sup>36</sup>

From the above observation it becomes clear, that while the bigger zamindars were accorded an important status and they received royal sanads and khilats directly from the Subahdar, the lesser ones received them from the Roy Royan. It also brings to light another important question. On every occasion, when a new zamindar succeeded upon the demise of the previous one, his right to accession was liable to renewal by a sanad.<sup>37</sup> without which the zamindari right was deemed "notorious and incontestable".<sup>38</sup> This meant, in theory, subordination of the zamindar to the Nizamat and recognition to the Nawab's authority as the overlord; but in practice, the normal right of inheritance was followed, though incidents of disqualifications were not rare.

## II

Since the political and administrative framework of Bengal, as seen in the first chapter, had begun to change with the setting up of the Nizamat, it also wrought phenomenal changes in its relationships with the powerful

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36 C.W. Boughton Rous, Dissertation Concerning the Landed Property of Bengal, Appendices III, pp. 232-34 (London, 1791).

37 For a copy of Sanad, see Appendix I.

38 J. Grant, An Enquiry into the Nature of Zamindari Tenures in the Landed Property of Bengal (London, 1810), p. 43, Section II.

zamindari elements. As a matter of fact, the socio-political situations in the early eighteenth century 'provided remarkable openings for the zamindarship in Bengal'. In their anxiety to maintain and consolidate their position in a remote province like Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan and his successors conferred zamindari rights on many parties.<sup>39</sup> This measure in itself contained the seeds of the increasing power and position of the zamindars over the other elements. When Murshid Quli Khan came as Diwan in Bengal his measures to secure increased revenue led to important changes in the agrarian relations of Bengal. During the period 1700-22, Murshid Quli Khan, at an average rate of rupees one crore every year,<sup>40</sup> raised the collection of revenue from Rs. 11,728,541 to Rs. 14,115,363. This was an increase of 20 per cent in just 22 years, more than 22½ per cent in the past seventeenth century.<sup>41</sup> Murshid Quli Khan achieved this goal by three means. (1) He transferred the jagirdars to Orissa and brought the jagir lands under Khalisa department. (ii) He prepared a new rent-roll and placed amils and zamindars with instruction to be (iii) very strict in collection.<sup>42</sup> His uncompromising firmness in the collection of revenue has been harrowingly described

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39 Rous, op.cit., p. 39.

40 Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr.), para 248.

41 Sir John Shore's "Minute on the Rights of Zamindars"-Appendix No. 6, Board of Revenue Proceedings, April 2, 1788, vol. 127, pp. 539-40.

42 Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr.), paras 248-49.



by both Salim Allah and Ghulam Husain Salim.

Thus by adopting a very careful and punctilious policy, Murshid Quli Khan, had been successful in raising the revenue of the province, to a large extent. However, as regards the thoroughness of the settlement, there exists a lot of confusion. In the Risala-i-Zirat, it has been commented that since the days of Akbar, when Raja Todar Mal prepared the rent-roll, no fresh survey had been conducted and new assessments made. The zamindars paid revenue according to the old revenue roll, but collected on the basis of an assessment of the current revenue paying capacity of the area and its actual produce.<sup>43</sup> John Shore maintains that the scope of interference by the Nazim in the management of revenue was partial and not systematically followed.<sup>44</sup>

At the time of Murshid Quli's administration, there were 25,000 villages grouped into 1660 parganas and 34

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43 Risala-i-Zirat (tr. by Harbans Mukhia in type-script). Also Z.U. Malik in Medieval India - A Miscellany, vol. 4, AMU, 1977, "Agrarian Structure of Bengal at the Beginning of British Conquest", pp. 176-202.

44. Karim thinks (A. Karim, Murshid Quli Khan, op.cit., p. 83) that at least no survey was ever conducted in Birbhum, Bishnupur and Calcutta. Another authority seems inclined to assume that no survey took place in the larger zamindaris (R. Ray, "Bengal Zamindars, IESHR, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 272-73). In the absence of widespread settlement, it became customary to fix a lump-sum amount for the whole zamindari on the basis of a rough estimate of yields (S. Akhtar, Zamindars, p. 52).

"Minute of Shore, 18 June 1789, Appendix I, "The Fifth Report II, para 378, p. 82.

sarkars;<sup>45</sup> but for administrative and pecuniary considerations Murshid Quli compounded these 34 sarkars into 13 chaklahs to make the most important reform in the financial distribution of territory in Bengal.<sup>46</sup>

Murshid Quli Khan, faced with the problem of securing an increased flow of revenue, had to be very strict and adopted ruthless measures in the punctilious collection of revenue. Salim narrates how he confined the defaulters to the chehl satun (forty pillared) palace and at Baikunth to realise dues from the zamindars and defaulters.<sup>47</sup> In this way he imposed pressures upon the zamindars and intermediary landholders and indirectly upon the cultivators. As a result of this policy, the zamindar either had to meet the government demand or else had to give way to other zamindars.<sup>48</sup>

Calkins suggests a consequence of this policy was that the weaker or less efficient zamindars and intermediate collectors tended to lose their landholding rights and in the process, he had converted a large and less stratified base of small landholders into a smaller but more stratified base of larger and therefore, more powerful

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45 N.K. Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal, vol. 2, (Calcutta, 1969), p. 16.

46 J. Grant, "Analysis", The Fifth Report-II, p. 174.

47 Riyaz (tr.), pp. 258-59, 265.

48 Ananda Narain, Zamindar of the Chaklah Rajshahi lost his zamindari for non-payment of revenue. (Riyaz, p. 259).

landholders.<sup>49</sup> Murshid Quli Khan seems to have adopted it as a matter of a policy to ease the problems of revenue collection. He encouraged the formation of big zamindaris.<sup>50</sup> He perhaps thought that it was easier to compel a few big zamindars to observe the regulations of the ruling power.<sup>51</sup> Though this policy simplified the process of revenue collection, it brought in its train, some inherent complications. By adopting such a policy 'Murshid Quli Khan established direct political alliances' with selected local barons, on whom the Nizamats henceforth became more and more dependent for managing the countryside.<sup>52</sup> This

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49 P. Calkins, "Ruling Group", Journal of South Asian Studies, 24, no. 4, pp. 799-806.

50 By 1728, in Shujauddin Khan's Jama Tumari Tashkhis, 15 large zamindaris extending over 615 parganahs, yielded Rs. 65,22,111 revenue i.e. almost half of the total revenue of the Subah. These 15 zamindaris were Birbhum, Bishnupur, Burdwan, Rajshahi, Nadia, Dinajpur, Tipperan, Pachet, Mahmudshahi, Yousufpur, Rokunpur, Lashkarpur, Adrakpur, Futtessingh and Calcutta. J. Grant, "Analysis", The Fifth Report-II, pp. 194-98. Perhaps it would be too much to say that under the policy of the Nazims and the pressure of the big zamindars, the smaller zamindars had lost the ground and were swallowed. Because even after this, there remained 1045 parganahs which were divided among numerous petty zamindars. In Dacca, there were 418 zamindars, in Hugli 5, in Silberis 16, in Sylhet 146, in Chittagong not less than 1500, in Midnapore about 3000, in Purnea 15 (N.K. Sinha, The Economic History, vol. II, op.cit., p. 17). Besides, the growth of larger zamindaris as S. Akhtar has shown was not solely due to economic consequences; rather it was in part a response to the military as much as financial needs and through marriage, piecemeal purchase, inheritance, machination, bribery. Even force was resorted to S. Akhtar, op.cit., p. 31.

51 N.R. Sinha, The Economic History, vol. II, p. 14.

52 R. Ray, "Bengal Zamindars", IESHR, op.cit., p. 272.

ultimately resulted in the formation of a powerful and compact 'regional ruling group' in which the zamindars played a most dominant part.

By the 1720s, the political framework of Bengal had undergone perceptible changes. The Emperor in Delhi were too busy with the affairs of the Centre to deal effectively with the ongoings in the province. The Nazims on the other hand, could not assert their total independence.<sup>53</sup> Against this backdrop, the Nazims had to evolve a framework through which much needed revenue could be secured, law and order problem could be tackled, and in general, the overall administrative functions could be kept streamlined. Not only that, in the event of any external danger, the Nazims had to ponder over measures to ward that off successfully. Hence, to tackle all these problems successfully, Murshid Quli Khan and his successors, had to make a deal with the zamindars, who were veritably "the native guardians of the public peace and private rights", as Grant calls them, or 'rajas' as they appear to be in contemporary literature. The growth of the larger zamin-daris and the conferment of greater rights and privileges, in this context, at least offers an explanation to the changed circumstances in Bengal. By encouraging a group of men, to enhance their power and influence, the Nizam sought to create a loyal class as a necessary adjunct of

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53 The implications of relationships between the centre and the province have been discussed in Chapter I.

the Nizamat.<sup>54</sup>

Murshid Quli Khan, to ensure a regular and smooth flow of revenue, compounded the 34 sarkars into bigger units of 13 chaklahs and prepared the Jama Kamil Tumar<sup>55</sup> in 1722 to raise Rs. 142,88,186 as revenue. From this time onwards, Murshid Quli Khan also set a precedent of levying upon the zamindars "irregular and unconstitutional" Subahdar Abwabs.<sup>56</sup> Though the amount fixed by Murshid Quli was negligible in course of time, it told heavily upon the zamindars and in consequence upon the peasantry. Its effect upon the zamindars as well as the peasants could be gauged from the accounts of Sir John Shore. The Subahdari Abwabs, from Murshid Quli to Alivardi Khan, according to the estimate of Shore, amounted to "about 33 per cent upon the Tumar or standard assessment in 1658; and those of the zamindars, upon the ryots, probably at the same period, could not be less than 50 per cent; for exclusive of what they were obliged to pay to the nazims, a fund was required for their subsistence or emoluments".<sup>57</sup> As far as the collection of revenue was concerned, Murshid Quli, was satisfied only with extracting revenue from the zamindars

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54 Rajshahi, Burdwan, Dinajpur, Rokunpur, Mahmudshahi, Edrakpur, Rajnagar, etc., belonged to this genre which owed its enormous rise and growth in the 18th century to the official patronage. J. Grant, "Analysis", The Fifth Report-II, pp. 194-98; S. Akhtar, Zamindars, pp. 34-36, see also p. 27.

55 J. Grant, "Analysis", The Fifth Report, II, pp. 189-90.

56 Ibid., p. 205.

57 J. Shore's Minute, 18 June 1789, The Fifth Report-II, para 41, p. 11.

and leaving them more or less free to manage their own affairs - barring those defaulters, with whom he was very strict. The Nizamat found it profitable, for such a policy resulted in substantial reduction of the costs of revenue collection as well as peace-keeping force. Only an incredibly small force of 2000 cavalry and 4000 infantry represented the military power of the Nizamat at Murshid Quli's time.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, with the flow of officers from the Centre being stopped the Nazims had to recruit the hierarchy of officials, from the Subah itself, which again offered much scope to the zamindars.<sup>59</sup> Under the Jama Kamil Tumari, many small zamindars were placed under the supervision of a handful of great zamindars, nominated chaklahdars, through whom they paid their revenue.<sup>60</sup> The elevation of some bigger zamindars to the posts of chaklahdars, had its evil consequences also. Later they utilized their enhanced position at the cost of the Nizamat to their advantage.<sup>61</sup>

The Risala-i-Zirat accounts how the zamindars and functionaries of government abused their power and position to extract maximum revenue and deprive the state of its share. "These days men (i.e. zamindars) paid (revenue) on the basis of the same revenue roll (i.e. prepared at the

58 Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr.), op.cit., p. 257.

59 J.N. Sarkar (ed.), History of Bengal, vol. II, p. 410.

60 N.K. Sinha, The Economic History, vol. II, pp. 14, 18.

61 S. Akhtar, Zamindars, p. 30.

time of Todar Mal in 1682), but collected it on the basis of an assessment of the current revenue paying capacity of the area and its actual produce." At many places the actual collection was many times more than the revenue roll.<sup>62</sup> The functionaries of the government like ganungos, many of whom became themselves zamindars, purchased lands; but at the time of preparing a revenue roll, they showed a short-fall in the assessed revenue owing to desertion and diminution in the revenue paying capacity of the area. Later on they made up their loss by devising new imposts. Sometimes, at the time of preparing a new roll they detached their own taalluqa from one pargana and attached it to another and showed loss in the attached pargana to increase their profit.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the Nizam, parting with the authority of zamindars, let loose the zamindars to reign in their respective zamindaris almost freely.

Alongside revenue collection, the zamindars were the guardians of law and order and to some extent dispenser of justice in their own spheres of influence. In fact, the Sanads granted to the zamindars, speak of their police functions: "He (zamindar) shall be careful that no thieves, highwaymen, or disturber of public peace, take shelter within the limits of his jurisdiction and he is otherwise to exert his endeavours to promote the comfort and security of the Ryots, the increase of cultivation, population

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62 Risala-i-Zirat (tr.), H. Mukhia in type-script.

63 Ibid.

and the revenue. He shall be attentive to the protection of the high roads, that travellers may pass and repass without danger or molestation, but if a robbery should be committed he shall produce the perpetrators with their booty, which shall be restored to its owner and the delinquents given up for punishment; if he fails to produce the culprits he shall consider himself responsible for the amount plundered. He shall take special care that no individual within the boundaries of his zamindari shall practice an unlawful deeds or drunkenness..." Because of the distinctive physiography of Bengal, since the Mughal days, the zamindars had to maintain a contingent for the defence and maintenance of internal order. During the Nizamat rule, the authority of the zamindar's further increased and led to the organization of regular police personnel under the authority of the zamindars.<sup>64</sup> With the growth of the extensive territorial zamindaris in the interior of the Subah, the authority and importance of the posts of faujdar, which was already in a process of decline, had begun to be operative only in some frontier districts.<sup>65</sup> Even where the faujdar had authority, it could not be exercised there. For instance, the faujdar's

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64 S. Akhtar, Zamindars, pp. 119-20.

65 There were only 9 faujdar circles in whole Bengal - Chittagong, Sylhet, Rungpur, Rangamati, Jalalgarh (Purnea), Akbarnagar (Rajmahal), Rajshahi, Burdwan, Midnapore and Hugli.



authority did not extend to the zamindari of Burdwan and the Raja himself was responsible directly to the Nawab for both revenue and criminal jurisdiction since 1725.<sup>66</sup> With the advancing of years, the Nizamat's dependence upon the zamindars also increased. Murshid Quli Khan's policy, later on pursued by his successors, of encouraging big zamindars and of placing lesser zamindar into the hands of the former had precluded the possibility of penetrating vertically the Nawab's authority down to the parganah or village level, where the petty zamindars and taallugdars lived. The big zamindars got a free hand to deal with their lesser partners and asserting their own strength and position.

The dependence of the Nizamat, on the big zamindars, for their military help and the role played by the frontier rajas as guardian of border, also blunted the authority of the Nazim. The autonomy granted to some border chiefs and no assessments into these and frontiers zamindaris,<sup>67</sup> to some extent, indicate the Nazims' wisdom in utilising their services in times of danger, leaving them almost undisturbed in the handling of their affairs. In the western and southern part of Bengal - Birbhum, Bishnupur, Pached and over a large area prevailed the peshkash paying zamindars. Birbhum with an area of 3,858 sq. miles stretch-

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66 S. Akhtar, Zamindars, p. 118.

67 See Classification of Zamindars.

ing along the western border, 2/3 of its territory were excluded from the revenue assessment and allotted "for the maintenance of some thousands of barkandauzes, matchlockmen, or native Hindustani militia, appointed to guard the frontiers towards the barbarous unsubdued rajas of South Bihar.... The consequent loss of revenue, however, was less felt than the political disadvantages of dismembering a territory which commanded all the leading passes direct from bordering foreign independent countries".<sup>68</sup>

The Nazims thought it wise not to disturb the existing status, as it freed them from the burden of protecting the border regions. As a matter of fact, the Nizamat, by conferring zamindaris on many parties in the border regions, intended to create a buffer zone for safeguarding its interests.

During the reign of Alivardi Khan, the zamindars rendered very useful services to the Nizamat. In fact, the zamindar of Rajshahi, Ramkant rendered him valuable services by leading campaigns in his fight for the throne.<sup>69</sup> At the critical hours of Alivardi's fight against Rustam Jang (Murshid Quli II), son-in-law of the late Shujauddin Md. Khan, the zamindar of Burdwan, sent an auxillary force under the command of his peshkar, Manickchand to help Ali-

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68 Grant, "Analysis", The Fifth Report - II, pp. 224-25.

69 Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr.), p. 315.

vardi.<sup>70</sup> During the recrudescence of Maratha incursions, the zamindars came forward with men, money and other necessities to help Alivardi.<sup>71</sup> From the accounts of Yousuf Ali it seems that the zamindars of Burdwan, Birbhum, Midnapore must have come forward to subserve the Nazim's forces. Not only that, the zamindars of Rajshahi, Dinajpur<sup>72</sup> and Nadia<sup>73</sup> whose territories were not ravaged by the Marathas, offered financial help to the Nazim. It is not difficult to assume why the Maratha agent, Mir Habib, soon after the reduction of Katwa, Dnaihata and Bhowsingbera opened negotiations with zamindars to realise customs and rents from the people.<sup>74</sup>

The net result of all these activities was the bolstering up of the power and influence of the zamindars. The more the Nazims leaned on the help of the zamindars, the more it in consequence eroded the authority of the Nizam over them.

But the question is whether this phase of relation-

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70 Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr.), pp. 329-30; Yousuf Ali, Tarikh-i-Bangla Mahabat Jangi (tr. A. Subhan), pp. 29-30.

71 Bengal Public Consultations, August 16, 1743, P/1/16, April 24, 1742, P/1/15.

72 Stewart, History of Bengal (London, 1813), p. 491, also J.N. Sarkar, History of Bengal, II (Dacca, 1948), p. 449.

73 Bharat Chandrer Granthabali (Basumati Sahitya Mandir), p. 6.

74 K.K. Datta, Alivardi and His Times, Calcutta (1963), pp. 54-55.

ship was one of 'a partnership' and the emergence of a 'ruling group', as Calkins postulates. Admittedly a close relationships existed between the Nizam and the zamindars, but the basis and character of this relationship remained personal. It is true, that a sort of understanding between the Nizam and zamindars as a group seem to have developed as it suited their common interests. The Nizam built up its relations with various zamindars on various counts. Some like Rajshahi and Momenshahi, were given official backing and patronage, some like Birbhum, Bishnupur, Burdwan were allowed to thrive in consideration of their strategic location and importance, and some had come up through machination, bribery or misuse of power. Thus, the zamindars represented themselves not as a group but as individuals having personal loyalty and fidelity to the Nizam to serve their own vested interests. There was no institutional basis of the alliance between the two. It became evident in 1739-40 during Alivardi's contest for the throne, when the zamindars in their loyalty divided themselves into two blocs. Again the same set of zamindars did not hesitate to switch their loyalty from Sirajuddaulah to the English, when the latter began to emerge politically strong. Even after 1757, when the district of Burdwan was ceded to the English in 1760, the Raja of Burdwan, in alliance with the Rajas of Birbhum and Bishnupur raised the standard of revolt against the emaciated Nizam.<sup>75</sup>

Observing the peculiar nature of the zamindars, Ghulam Husain Tabatabai remarks "They are a set of men faithless to a high degree, short-sighted, impatient of control, even ready, on the least appearance of a revolution to turn their backs on their masters and to forget the most important favours received at their hands, losing no opportunity to execute all the mischief which occasion presents and on that account of their strange and inconsistent character, requiring at all times the strong grasp of a curbing hand."<sup>76</sup> As the rise of the zamindars in the socio-political framework of Bengal in the first half of the 18th century was, primarily based on decimated personal relationship, they failed to withstand the pressure in course of the emergence of new political alignments.

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76 Ghulam Husain Tabatabai, Seri-ul-Mutakherin (tr.), vol. II, Haji, Mustafa (Calcutta, 1789), 1902, pp. 393-94.

Chapter III

THE HOUSE OF THE JAGAT SETHS AND ITS INFLUENCE OVER  
THE ECONOMY OF THE PROVINCE

The emergence of the Jagat Seths as the monopoly banking house in Bengal during the first half of the 18th century was significantly linked to the fortunes of the Nizamat. The period witnessed the phenomenal rise of the Jagat Seths from a position of ordinary usurer to the monopoly banking business in the economy of the province. The House became an institution in itself and the prime motive-force in the financial matters of Bengal, as also the controlling authority. So enormous were its accumulations that it provoked occasional inroads particularly by the Maratha invaders.<sup>1</sup> The English were amazed to call them as 'Rothchilds of India'. Bruke once compared the House with the Bank of England. With their huge economic resources, were added the levers of political influence. Their power and influence at the Delhi Court and domineering command over the Nawabs of Bengal placed them in an unenviable position. The influence of the House was so great that the treasure of this House was regarded as Nawab's own.<sup>2</sup> Armed with all these, the House played a leading role

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1. Marathas attacked in 1742 and in 1757, Afghans attack under Ahmad Shah Abdali, Bengal Public Consultations, 27 May 1742 P/1/15; N.K.Sinha, Economic History of Bengal (Calcutta, 1962), vol.1.

2. Bengal Public Consultations (BPC) , 2 June 1730, P/1/8.

in the politics of Bengal. They became one of the chief advisers at the Nawab's Council and played the role of the kingmakers during their heydays.

### The Rise of the House

Before going into the details of the activities of the Jagat Seths, it is proper to examine some of the factors which accounted for the rise of this banking house during our period.

Bengal, being one of the rich commercial centres attracted many fortune-seekers. Hiranand Saho, the founder of the House came from Nagar of Marwar in Rajputana and belonged to the Gailarha family of the Oswals. He migrated from there and started his usury business in Patna in 1652. Patna was a big centre for salt-petre, where huge inflow of capital was required for the business purpose. Hiranand, being engaged in usury, used to lend money to the traders who flocked there. But the family could not make name in his time.

His son, Manick Chand migrated to Dacca 'in search of fortune', towards the close of the century and established his kothee<sup>3</sup> there. Dacca was then the provincial capital and a most important centre of riverborne trade in eastern India.

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3. 'Kothee' in Indian vernacular language means a mansion or substantial residential house. In this context it refers to a business house.

The innumerable water courses which is the distinctive physical features of Bengal interlinking it with networks of trade centres <sup>strewn</sup> / all over Bengal facilitated the stimulus of trading activities. James Renell in his Memoir of the Map of Hindustan calculates that at least 30,000 boatmen were employed in riverborne trade in Bengal. Om Prakash has suggested that the English and Dutch Companies alone may have created about 100,000 new jobs in textiles by their increased purchases early in the 18th century. Besides, the fame of Muslim added to its lusture. So traders from different countries, both indigenous and foreign - Indian, English, Dutch, French, Armenian - all thronged there. Desirous as they were for ready money investments these merchants were always in need of monetary assistance which could only be had from the money lenders. Prominent among the money lenders at Dacca during the time was Manick Chand, who carved out a niche for himself by providing the traders credit in time and made fortune. Along side his money-lending business Manick Chand had been successful in working up a good rapport with the imperial personages at Dacca. This gave him an added advantage and it actually turned his career. The appointment of Murshid Quli Khan as the Diwan of Bengal in 1700 proved 'a great moment

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4. "Bullion for Goods: International Trade and Economy in the Early 18th Century Bengal", Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol.13 (1976), pp.173-75.



to the fortunes of Manick Chand. Manick Chand developed a very good relationship with him and became one of his trusted lieutenants. When Murshid Quli Khan, following the dispute with Azim-us-Shan, transferred his capital to Makshudabad, later to be named Murshidabad after his name, Manick Chand also accompanied the Diwan and started his kothee (House) there.

Unfortunately, we have no sufficient information about the rise of Manick Chand as also about his House. Interesting, it is to note that most of the writers have mentioned about this House from the time of its established position. But it is possible to form an idea from the fact that Manick Chand's intimate relations with Murshid Quli Khan had helped him greatly in enhancing his wealth and influence. The emergence of his house as the powerful banking organization was, as might naturally be expected, a gradual process and coincided with the rise in fortune of Murshid Quli Khan.<sup>5</sup> Political connections worked hand in hand to increase economic power.

Capitalising his political influence and status, Manick Chand had been able to strengthen and further his position and business. When Murshid Quli Khan introduced his new revenue schemes and subsequently made Bengal a surplus province, the

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5. J.H.Little, The House of Jagat Seth (Calcutta, 1967), pp.11, 40.

House of Manick Chand became the direct beneficiary of the policy.<sup>6</sup> Again, when Murshid Quli Khan decided to establish the mint at Murshidabad it was rendered "easy by the command of specie possessed by the banker".<sup>7</sup> It might be speculated that the services rendered by the House to the Nawab impelled the Nawab to give opportunities in the shares of revenue thereby creating a condition of mutual dependence, which in later years increased in formidable manner. It is true that the right over the mint did not come to this House before the death of its Darogha Raghunandan in 1718; but the fact is that the "establishment of the mint at Murshidabad was due to him and wherever it was situated and whoever was in nominal control, there is no doubt that Manick Chand's influence over it was paramount".<sup>8</sup> The acquisition of the sole control over the management of the mint only a few years later by Fateh Chand testifies to this fact.<sup>9</sup>

Manick Chand became virtually the treasurer of the government. The zamindars and other collectors of revenue paid their revenues through this House and every year at the time of Punya

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6. P.Calkins, "The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700-400", Journal of Asian Studies (London), August 1970.

7. W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol.9, (Calcutta, 1875), p.253.

8. Little, op.cit., p.28.

9. Ibid.; C.R.Wilson, Early Annals of Bengal, vol.3 (Calcutta, 1911).

(annual settlement of revenue) the zamindars assembled at the banks of the Seth, settled their accounts and negotiated for fresh funds.<sup>10</sup> Not only that, the Nawab's private treasures were also deposited with this House. With the passage of time, the activities of this banking house was expanded and diversified.

Thus it becomes clear how political connections helped in building up the foundation of the edifice upon which the mighty structure of the House was erected in later years. K.N.Chaudhuri aptly comments that "there was certainly a very close connection between the finances of the Nawab and the meteoric rise to prominence of the great banking house of Fateh Chand, the Jagat Seth. Political skill and concentration of commercial wealth went hand in hand for any Indian merchant with a claim to eminence..."<sup>11</sup> This also probably explains, why earlier merchants like Khemchand and Mathuradas could not consolidate their position, notwithstanding brisk business and finance. In the absence of direct political connections and backing, these merchants always remained scattered and organisationally powerless.

How powerful was the hold of this House is evident from the fact that Joshiah Chitly, an agent of the English,

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10. Yousuf Ali, Tarikhi-Bangala-i-Mahabat Jangi (tr.A.Subhan) (Calcutta, 1982), p.117; A.Karim, Murshid Quli Khan and His Times (Dacca, 1963), p.89.

11. K.N.Chaudhuri, Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company (Cambridge, 1978), p.147.

who owed some money to Manick Chand could not even leave for England without making arrangements for its realisation.<sup>12</sup>

Manik Chand had established branches at Dacca, Patna, Calcutta, Banaras, Hugli and elsewhere. But the Delhi branch was established by his successor Fateh Chand.<sup>13</sup> Manik Chand, before his death, received the title of Seth from the Mughal Emperor and his family got the rare privilege of wearing gold at the feet, a rare honour shared with the Nawab.<sup>14</sup> He became the right hand man of the Nawab in all his financial reforms and in his private affairs. From Manick Chand's time the representatives of this House were recognised as the permanent members of the Nawab's Council.<sup>15</sup> When Manick Chand died in 1714, his adopted son, Fateh Chand, became the head of the House.

#### Fateh Chand, the Jagat Seth

Under Fateh Chand the real greatness of this House was in crescendo and it began to play the pivotal role in the economic as well as political life of Bengal. The era of monopoly business began also from his time. Under him the House reached the climax of wealth, power and influence. It

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12. BPC, P/1/2, February-March 1713.

13. BPC, P/1/2, February 1713.

14. Little, op.cit., p.27.

15. Hunter, op.cit., p.254.

had established centres in different parts of the country and carried on brisk business. The branch of Delhi was set up during his time as already mentioned. He was conferred with the title of Jagat Seth by Emperor Muhammad Shah in 1722 in recognition of his great service at the time of great scarcity in Delhi.<sup>16</sup>

The House became the famous centre of commercial credit. Besides Bengal, where it was almost in monopoly, its credit was great in Delhi, in western India and also outside India. Turani merchants from Central Asia, Armenian merchants trading in Basra and Jeddah depended on this house as much as the merchants from upper India, English and French private traders and English, French and Dutch Companies. With the expansion of the volume of trade, the bullion imported from Europe by the European companies could not keep pace with the goods exported and they had to keep themselves busy for finding other means to fill up their trade balance. Once the English tried to import European goods and freight ships<sup>17</sup> to tackle this problem. But this could <sup>not</sup> meet the growing demand for capital. The Company was forced to turn to this banking House for money. In the Bengal consultations of the 1730s and 1740s there are copious references of company's loans, repayment, sale and purchase of bullion and other transactions with this House.

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16. Little, op.cit., p.47.

17. BPC, P/1/6/, December 1725.

In this connection, the case of Kantu is most revealing. The case of Kantu revealed the working of the financial transactions of the Company in relation to Fateh Chand and the general body of merchants.<sup>18</sup> Kantu, as broker of the Company, used to take loans for and on behalf of the Company, for advancements of the merchants. In 1730, it was found that he owed to Fateh Chand Rs.2,15,000 and another Rs.33,000 to the other merchants. Besides this, he was responsible to the company for Rs.1,33,000. But his assets amount to Rs.2,72,000. Fateh Chand's contention was that he had 'lent the money to the Company' and held the Company responsible for that. Seeing the Company's dilly-dallying in making him pay, Fateh Chand appealed to the Nawab who appointed Haji Ahmad to look into the matter. The Haji advised the English that since "Fateh Chand's estate was esteemed as the King's treasure and the Nawab was resolved to see him satisfied", it was advisable for the English to avert an open rupture with the Nawab.<sup>19</sup>

The failure of the English to satisfy Fateh Chand so exasperated him that he entirely stopped the sale of the English bullion at Kasimbazar and Murshidabad and brought about a deadlock in their trade.<sup>20</sup> The English attempt to get the

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18. S.Bhattacharya, The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal (Calcutta, 1969), p.37.

19. BPC, P/1/8, 2 June 1730.

20. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p.38.

matter solved through the counsel of Sarfaraz Khan, Haji Ahmad and Rai Alam Chand all ended in failure. The helplessness of the two ministers to settle the dispute involving Fateh Chand showed the esteemed position of Fateh Chand. "The Nawab has such a regard for Fateh Chand, that is out of our power to serve you in opposition to him". All they could do was to advise the English to make up the dispute with Fateh Chand.<sup>21</sup>

The situation for the English became critical and their business came almost to a standstill at Kasimbazar and they were thinking of quitting Murshidabad. The Nawab became so exasperated with the English delay that he even threatened to stop their Patna fleet carrying salt-petre. Ultimately through the good offices of one Armenian merchant, Coja Owan and Indian merchants, the affair was settled and the English paid Fateh Chand Rs.1,30,000 who in turn promised to show good offices to the English. In 1743 again a Kantu type case occurred in the case of Sir Francis Russell who borrowed money from Fateh Chand. Though he borrowed money for his own private trade, but in view of Company's servants' tricky policy of borrowing any amount in the name of the Company it resulted in this confusion. Hence, Fateh Chand demanded the money from the Company and held them responsible for that. The Company had to pay keeping in view "the Company's interest to keep Fateh Chand in good sense".<sup>22</sup>

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21. BPC, 13 July 1730, P/1/8.

22. BPC, August-September 1743.

The importance of the Kantu case lies here that it demonstrated the extreme financial authority enjoyed by the House and its hold upon the Nawab and the native merchants. The English learnt the experience that in case of a conflict with Fateh Chand there was little hope of getting their interests vindicated from any quarter. That even the native merchants dared not trade with the English was highlighted from the fact that when after the dismissal of Kantu, "two substantial merchants to whom the post of broker had been offered in succession, had each refused to accept it giving as their reason that it would be impossible to carry on the Company's investment until the dispute with Fateh Chand was accommodated."<sup>23</sup>

The English realised their mistake and also the benefit of having transactions with Fateh Chand not only from the commercial point of view but from political point of view as well. Hence the Calcutta Council, in a letter dated 15 December 1732, ordered the Kasimbazar Council to give Jagat Seth the preference when they borrowed money in future and these orders were again repeated in 1736.<sup>24</sup> The Company's merchants at Kasimbazar started borrowing from Fateh Chand and on March 3, 1733, they took up Rs.200,000. Again on 2 March, 1738 the Company's servants borrowed Rs.130,000. On

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23. BPC, P/1/8, 9 June 1730.

24. BPC, 15 December 1732, P/1/9; 24 July 1736, P/1/10.



16 November 1738, we have reference of a transaction of different nature when Fateh Chand and his gomastah desired to have 66 pieces of red broad cloth and 66 pieces of green ditto.<sup>25</sup> During the later years we have copious references of the House advancing money to the Europeans. In September 1749 the debt of the Dacca factory to the House alone amounted to Rs.584,000 and in 1751 the Kasimbazar factory's debt rose to Rs.562,820.<sup>26</sup> At the time of Plassey the Dutch owed four lakhs and the French debt before the capture of Chandernagore amounted to a million and a half.<sup>27</sup> There is no doubt that the inland traders also approached the House for loan and benefitted them since their term was lenient than others. Following a request from the East India Company, the House lowered the rate of interest to 9 per cent in 1740 and it facilitated the process of credit taking from the House.<sup>28</sup> On 21 December the English at Kasimbazar borrowed Rs.60,000 from the Jagat Seth at the new rate of 9 per cent.<sup>29</sup> In this way, this House with its network of branches all over northern India established almost a monopoly business in commercial credit and 'became conspicuous for its wealth integrity and avowed favour of the governing

25. BPC, March 1737, P/1/10.

26. Factory Records Kasimbazar, 1751 quoted in S.Chaudhuri, "European Companies and Pre-Modern South Asian Commercial System" Calcutta Historical Journal, December 1787.

27. Sinha, op.cit., p.149.

28. BPC, 11 December 1740, P/1/13.

29. BPC, 26 December 1740, P/1/13.

power'.<sup>30</sup> But their activities were not confined to any single business, other factors were also at work in their emergence as the important banking house.

#### Control Over the Mint and the Bullion

Fateh Chand's succession to the House coincided almost with the right of superintendence over the Murshidabad Mint. After the passing away of Raghunandan in 1717, the control over the mint went to this House, which the House fully exploited to their advantage. And it became a source of "a perennial stream of wealth to the Seths".

Since in Bengal the standard of money was silver, the bullion was in most demand for coinage. Almost the entire bullion was supplied by the Europeans in exchange of their commodities. With huge resources ready at hand, the Jagat Seths controlled the purchase of bullion in Bengal. Fateh Chand and his control over the mint was so strong that he "actually dictated the price of precious metals". Though the farman of 1717 and the appended hasbul kumkum<sup>31</sup> gave the English the right to make payment in Madras rupees without discount and to use the mint for coinage, the English had never been successful before 1757 to avail of this opportunity.

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30. Sinha, op.cit., p.149.

31. Bhattacharya, op.cit., pp.20-21.

The Jagat Seths in alliance with the Nawab, withstood all attempts of the English to coinage. Even the Madras or Arcot rupees were not allowed to pass without batta in Bengal. In September 1721, the Kasimbazar factory reported "that while Fateh Chand is so great with the Nawab, they can have no hopes of that grant, he alone having the sole use of the Mint, nor dare any other shroff or merchant coin a rupee's worth of silver".<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the Court of Directors was anxious to get the privilege of minting secured and wrote to the Calcutta Council, "we hope our now constituted President and Council will give us a convincing specimen of their ability and zeal for our service among other things in obtaining the grant of coinage we have so often and with such earnestness press you to endeavour and shew'd you the loss we suffered and wherein the sale of silver and by the batta on our Madras rupees we can't add thereto".<sup>33</sup> In August 1727, when the English offered 16 chests of silver for sale they were amazed to see that none of the shroffs dared to quote a price higher than offered by Fateh Chand. The English, as a matter of fact, had to sell the bullion to Fateh Chand for what he offered. In 1743, Jagat Seth took the bullion of the English for sale

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32. BPC, P/1/5, September 1721; Little, op.cit., p.43.

33. Despatch Book, vol.101, f.102, 16 February 1722 quoted in S.Chaudhury's article "European Companies", Calcutta Historical Journal, p.147.

at a lower rate than that of the mint rate.<sup>34</sup> Again and again, the attempt of the English to get the use of mint and even the sale of bullion independent of Fateh Chand was frustrated by the latter.

Closely connected with the purchase of bullion was the currency movement and batta question. Here again the control of the Jagat Seth was supreme. As per Mughal tradition, banking business was performed by the sarraf (the most important officer in mint) who acted, as Tavernier informs us, "as a banker to make remittances of money and issue letters of exchange". Since the Mughal coinage was of the highest metallic purity, the value of the coins therefore, corresponded to their weight in metal. And it was essential for everyone to see not only that a coin received in payment was not counterfeit but that it had not also lost weight through clipping or wear. Tavernier gives an account of how this system operated. "The longer a rupee of silver has been coined or which have been coined a short time, because the old ones having often passed by hand becomes worn, and they are in consequence lighter. Thus when you make a sale it is necessary to say that you require to be paid in Shahjahani rupees, i.e., in new silver, otherwise your payment will be made in rupees coined 15 or 20

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34. S. Chaudhury, "European Companies", op.cit., p. 149.

	<u>Value at the Mint</u>		<u>Fatechand's Rate</u>
Estimates Pillar	Dollars @ 206	siccas	@204 siccas per
	per 240 sicca weight		240 sicca weight
Mexico	" 250 "	" "	"203 " "
French Crowns	" 270 "	" "	"205 " "
Duccatoons	2:7:3 sicca each		2:6:9 sicca each

years more; upon which there may be up to 4 per cent loss. For in the case of those which have not been coined within two years one-fourth per cent is demanded or at least one-eighth per cent is demanded and the poor people who do not know, how to read the year when these rupees or paisa were coined, are liable to be cheated because something is at ways deducted, from them one paisa or half paisa on a rupee and on the paisa three or four cowries.<sup>35</sup> Jagat Seth's control over the mint being absolute they were in full command to decide the charges according to their own term. William Bolts comments that Jagat Seth introduced the custom of batta or agio upon the siccas and made the nyop bear an additional batta.

Batson in 1760, estimated that the charge of stamping the rupees afresh was no more than half per cent and considerably less if a large quantity of rupees were brought to the mint.<sup>36</sup> The House in collusion with the shroffs of the mint took full advantage of it. The government decision to receive revenues only in sicca rupees of the current year opened the way of further profit to the House because of the batta system. "The Jagat Seths were responsible for the development of the custom according to which a new coined sicca rupee circulated

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35. J.B.Tavernier, Travels in India (tr.V.Ball in two volumes), first Indian edn. 1977, Oriental Books reprint Corporation, pp.23-24.

36. Long's Selections, p.216.

at full batta for twelve months, then fell by 3 per cent and had denomination of hirsauns or siccas of various years. At this stage they remained until they were recoined into siccas".<sup>37</sup> Even the sicca rupees of Dacca, Patna, Calcutta were not allowed to circulate without a discount. The batta on various foreign coins was also a source of profit. In September 1731, when a representation was made to the Nawab Shujauddin that the English were importing only Madras or Arcot rupees, the Nawab ordered the same to be treated as bullion.<sup>38</sup> In 1736, Fateh Chand succeeded in getting an order passed by the government reducing the value of Madras or Arcot rupees to benefit himself.<sup>39</sup> In December 1737 when the French were said to have secured a parwana for the clearance of their Arcot rupees and were promised a sanad for having the use of mint, Fateh Chand was incensed against the French for their procuring a mint and seemed to enjoy the harassing of the French.<sup>40</sup> Fateh Chand's income from batta alone, Scrafton estimated, amounted to seven or eight lakhs rupees a year. Even when the English got the right of minting in Sirajuddaulah or Mirjafar's time, the grant was not of much use because it interfered with the rights of the Jagat Seths.

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37. Sinha, op.cit., p.151.

38. Chaudhuri, op.cit., pp.188-89.

39. BPC, 13 December 1736, P/1/10.

40. Bhattacharya, op.cit., pp.114-15.

Malzamini and Banking

Another source of income which accrued to their treasury was from the revenue, which the House received from the collectors or zamindars. The House became the receiver of revenue and other kinds of payment made to the Nawab. The House was entitled to commission at the rate of 10 per cent and Scrafton informs us that the profit of the House was 40 lakh rupees a year.<sup>41</sup> The stringency of regulations in revenue collection, put such a pressure upon the zamindars that they found it difficult to deposit the revenue very often in time. They thus had to turn to the money lenders and bankers for ready-money to pay their revenue. In the Risala-i-Zirat, the hold of the money lenders or bankers over the zamindars, particularly in pargana level has been discussed vividly. On the one hand, the banker gained profit through usury, discount, presents and the charges made in the written bond (Tamassuk), which the borrower made with the giver promising to pay loan within a limited time. On the other hand, he realised the perquisites (rusum) of malzamini, the usury and discount under the head of the Mathut imposts from the pargana.<sup>42</sup> As the pressure of revenue-demands was more on the big zamindars, who bore the brunt of more than half of the total Bengal revenue, they had to look

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41. Bengal in 1756-57, vol.II (London, 1905), p.278.

42. Z.U. Malik, "Agrarian Structure in Bengal", Medieval India - A Miscellany, AMU, 1977; Risala-i-Zirat, type-script (tr. H.Mukhia), pp.11-12, 18-19.

to the House for money or to stand as surety as Yousuf Ali says. In this way, it brought huge grist to the House's mill in two-fold ways. While on the one hand, being rent receiver the House had its own commission, it provided money, on the other, to the defaulting zamindars. The House of Jagat Seth made a large part of their profits by collecting interest on loans which they made to zamindars who could not pay their revenue. The banking house acting as guarantor for money of the larger zamindars assured the government to pay their revenue regardless of their financial condition in time. Thus the banking house became the direct beneficiary of Murshid Quli's revenue policy and under the patronage of the Nazim built the richest banking house in Bengal and became the treasurer of the provincial government.<sup>43</sup> The batta on the gross import i.e., the Kutchra Amdani was their another source of income. Yousuf Ali says that at the beginning of the financial year (punya) during Alivardi's administration the arrears of the preceding year's collection amounting to six or seven lakhs of rupees were brought in bags and placed them before the Nawab. If anything remained outstanding from the amils and zamindars, Jagat Seth gave his written promise to pay the amount to the government of the Nazim.<sup>44</sup>

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43. P.B.Calkins, "Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal", Journal of Asian Studies, 1970, p.804.

44. Yousuf Ali, op.cit., p.116.



Having branches all over northern India, the House carried on their hundi business very briskly. From native businessmen to the European traders as also the Nawab all availed the opportunity of their hundis. They very often sent their money in bills of exchange and the English regularly drew their bills. Their hundis were of such demand that it was not necessary for them to despatch treasure chests from one place to another. The tribute of one crore to be sent to the Delhi Emperor could be paid by Fateh Chand Jagat Seth by one single hundi.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes, the House took part in trading business also. The Dutch account says that the Jagat Seth took the retail trade business of the four main kinds of spices to them outside the European settlement.<sup>46</sup>

Ghulam Hosain relates that the wealth of the Jagat Seths was so great that no banker could compare with them and all the bankers in Bengal at that time were either their associates or members of their family.<sup>47</sup> Ahmad Shah Abdali when entered Delhi in 1757, could truly visualise the important position of the Jagat Seth. He accorded his representative great honour, because he alone could be the surety of the nobles.<sup>48</sup> Though it is difficult to have any exact idea about

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45. Sinha, op.cit., p.151.

46. Ibid.

47. Seir Ul Matakherin (Calcutta, 1902) (tr.), vol.2, pp.457-58.

48. Sinha, op.cit., p.151.

their wealth some glimpses can be had from the accounts of contemporary writers who say that in 1742 at the time of Maratha raid the House became their target in particular.<sup>49</sup> They carried away two crores of Arcot rupees from the House alone.<sup>50</sup> The loss of this huge sum affected the House little. Even after this the House continued to give government bills of exchange at sight of full one crore rupees at a time.<sup>51</sup>

### Political Control

With their enormous wealth and influence the Jagat Seths were able to acquire a very important position in the politics of Bengal. Their influence in Delhi was also very great. As has already been mentioned Manick Chand had been a close associate of Murshid Quli Khan and one of his close advisors. During its heyday, the House was involved in almost all important happenings in Bengal. On many occasions, Jagat Seth played the chief mediator's role in settling the dispute between the Nawab and the English. William Bolts asserts that the Jagat Seth "acquired an influence at the Durbar little inferior to that of the Nawab himself".<sup>52</sup>

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49. Riyaz (tr.), 341; Yousuf Ali, op.cit., p.34.

50. Seir ul Mutakherin, vol.I, p.432; Little, op.cit., pp.120-21.

51. Seir ul Mutakherin, vol.I, pp.432-33.

52. W.Bolts, Considerations on Indian Affairs (London, 1772), pp.157-58.

Indeed, the role of the Jagat Seths in Bengal politics had become dual: external or superimposing and internal. The House had been successful in establishing a good rapport with the court of Delhi, which gave it an unenviable status in the eyes of the contemporaries. Whenever any Khilats were sent from the court to the Nazims of Bengal, the Jagat Seth received the similar distinction. Little comments that "a striking influence of the power of the heads of this family at Delhi was, the manner in which they obtained farmans notifying the appointment of the Nawab. They were not mere agents between the Nawab and the court. Their cooperation appears to have been absolutely essential."<sup>53</sup> With this superimposing influence they could create problems for any Nawab, as it happened at the time of Siraj-ud-Daulah.

The strength of this influence was visualised in the interplay of Bengal politics. When Murshid Quli Khan tried to secure a farman in favour of his nominated grandson, Sarfaraz Khan, his efforts were fruitless. Rather Shujauddin Khan, who challenged the candidature of his son and set his foot against him, succeeded through the goodwishes of Fateh Chand, the Jagat Seth. From this time onwards the Jagat Seth occupied a more pronounced place in the politics. Shujauddin, after his accession to the throne, formed a Council<sup>54</sup> consisting of four

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53. Little, op.cit., p.50.

54. Seir, vol.I (tr.), op.cit., p.281; Riyaz, pp.291-93.

persons, in which Jagat Seth had a prominent position. Later, Alivardi was shrewd enough to realise the strength of Jagat Seth and utilised his services in his bid to capture the maghad of Bengal.<sup>55</sup> The role of the Seth in the battle of Plassey is well known. Sirajuddaulah brought about his own downfall by impolitically alienating the Jagat Seth. The delay of the Seth in getting a farman secured for Siraj and his failure to raise three crores of rupees angered the Nawab so much that he hit the Jagat Seth on the face.<sup>56</sup> The result was obvious. In the conspiracy against Sirajuddaulah the Seth took leading part to bring about his downfall.<sup>57</sup> "The House had been the main mover in all the revolutions of Bengal".<sup>58</sup>

In the whole range of activities starting from the banking business to the involvement in the politics of Bengal, the House of Jagat Seths dominated the scenario of Bengal during the period of our study. Beginning their career, as mere usurers, the Seths gradually but steadily emerged as the monopoly banking house of Bengal. They consolidated their

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55. Ibid., pp.332-33; K.K.Dutta, Alivardi and His Times (Calcutta, 1963), p.21.

56. Quoted in Little, op.cit., p.165.

57. Rajiblochah Mukhopadhyay, Krishnachandra Rayashya Charitang (Calcutta, 1347 Bengali year), pp.27-28, 35.

58. J.Law in S.C.Hill (ed.), Bengal in 1756, vol.III (London, 1905), p.175.

position with the active support and help from the Nizam and backed by the trust and confidence reposed in them by the Centre.

In the given circumstances, the Nawabs were very much in need of money; they looked for a sort of security in case of contingency. There are many instances when the Nawabs sought the help of the Jagat Seths for money. The House by providing money to the Nawabs in times of need had been able to exploit it to their full advantage, to secure the ascendancy which, one may say, in the long run created a condition of mutual dependence. The sound financial base which the House gained under the direct patronage of the Nawabs in turn began to influence the course of politics in the province.

After the battle of Plassey, the fortune of the Seths was on rapid decline. There were many factors responsible for this, one of the potent factors being the removal of the political umbrella which acted as a shield under the patronage of the Nawab. It is an irony that the English, whom the House helped to capture power in Bengal, became instrumental in bringing about its decline. The privileges which they had hitherto enjoyed were taken away gradually. If the Nawab's position rested on Jagat Seth's wealth, the trajectory of the House was too bounded up with his fortunes.

Chapter IVThe English East India Company and the Nizamat

The first half of the 18th century witnessed the phenomenal rise in the volume of English East India Company's trade in Bengal, with its exports reaching an average of about 60 per cent of the total exports from India. As the trade expanded rapidly, the Company became involved more and more in the political network of Bengal. The more the authority of the Mughals waned and the power of the Nawabs increased, the greater the Europeans' contact was with the Nizamat. Instead of dealing with the distant Mughal authority, the English had to face a strong and intractable Nazim who succeeded in maintaining law and order and thus promoting conditions positive for trade and commerce. As the Nizamat became increasingly free from imperial control, it sought to impose its dictates and directives upon the Europeans. Visualising the enormous growth of the English East India Company's trading activities the Nawabs, - very often alleging infringement of the given privileges, demanded financial contributions, which the Company, by falling back upon their privileges, refused to comply with vainly. As a matter of fact, the Nawabs' demand for money and the Company's refusal to pay had so surcharged the atmosphere that its impact augured ominous signs in Bengal.

With the expanding volume of trade and the growing interference by the Nizamat, the Company felt the necessity

of its involvement in Bengal politics. According to B.K. Gupta, it was the consideration of economic interest which led the European Company to interfere in Bengal body politic. This involvement was either through the use of force, political manoeuvring, intermediation or corrupt means, culminating ultimately in the battle of Plassey in 1757, to defend its interests.<sup>1</sup>

Whether this involvement was direct or indirect that was immaterial. What was important was that, given this background, trade had become inseparably associated with politics. To protect and promote their rights and privileges the Company did not hesitate to fall back upon the use of force, though they preferred to settle their score amicably as it served their interests most. The relationship between the Nizamat and the Company hinged on a number of issues including dastak, private inland trade, outrage of the Company's servants, jurisdiction over the subjects, neutrality of the Nawabs' port.

#### The Company's Trade in Bengal: Policies and Actions

Since the union of the two East India Companies in 1702, three factors had largely contributed in the demand for Indian goods. First, was the immense improvement in

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1 The first attempt tried in this direction was war with Shaista Khan in 1688-89, which led to their temporary disaster. Even after the grant farman the Company had to bribe in the Nawab's officials. In fact, the East India Company's relations at the time of Shiyā-uddin Muhammad Khan was marked by this activity, which later grew to a menacing proportion.

the Company's American and African Commerce. Second, the great increase in Calico printing business, and lastly, the almost universal introduction of the use of tea in Britain and its dependencies.<sup>1a</sup> The search for goods brought the Company from one place to another. Following the decline of Western and South Indian markets caused by a number of factors, English turned their attention increasingly towards Bengal.<sup>2</sup> Its cheapness of goods, high quality of products, and easy way of communication, supplied through innumerable waterways radically changed the course of trade-routes in favour of Bengal. Marshall points out the importance of political factors, i.e., relatively stable conditions and its immunity from social upheavals in comparison to the other regions.<sup>3</sup> According to K.N. Chaudhuri the development of European trade in Bengal in the late 17th century had the effect of shifting the balance radically in favour of the sea-borne trade.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that the European trading carved out a sizeable share in Bengal's trading organisation. It would, however, be too much to point out that

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1a William Bolts, Considerations on Indian Affairs, p. 69 (London, 1772).

2 For a discussion of why Bengal became so important in Company's trade see, K.N. Choudhuri: Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, pp. 237-38; (Cambridge 1978); S. Chaudhuri, Trade and Commercial Organisation in Bengal (1650-1720), pp. 20-21, Calcutta, 1975.

3 P.J. Marshall, The East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the 18th Century, (Oxford, 1976), p. 29.

4 K.N. Choudhuri, op.cit., p. 247.



Europe's contact with Bengal changed its trade-route; even after that huge quantity of goods were exported through interprovincial and interregional trade.

Cotton textiles, piece goods, silk, sugar, saltpetre etc. were the chief articles of trade exported by the Company. Besides this, a large volume of inland trade was carried on in agricultural produce, such as rice, sugarcane, indigo, betelnut, tobacco, poppies etc. Trade in salt conducted by the Company's servants which initially was a necessary adjunct to trading by sea and was to obtain goods for exports and to dispose of imports, quickly became an object in itself for many Englishmen. This was to cast its ominous shadow in the years to come.<sup>5</sup>

When the English appeared on the trading field of Bengal, they had to adjust themselves with the prevalent system of procuring goods, i.e., advance contract or the system of dadni. The great bulk of commodities procured for long distance markets was almost procured through advance contract by the latter half of the 17th century. The system was operated through two ways. One was under the direction of the chiefs and Residents at its subordinate factories of Chittagong, Luckipore, Kasimbazar, Dacca, Burdwan, Midnapore etc. The Company sent native gomastas into the interior parts of the country. The second was the method of posting the native gomastas at the other aurungs or manufacturing towns under the direction of a

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5 Marshall, op.cit., p. 109.

member of the Board of Council at Calcutta, who held the post of export of the warehouse keeper. They procured goods for the Company.<sup>6</sup> This system was called dadni-advances and the merchants, who received advances, were known as dadni-merchants. This system of dadni assumed the complex character of a multi-tier system, percolating down to the weavers' level and involving definite obligations on both sides. In a letter dated 1676, Strey~~n~~sham Master also gives an account of how the system operated. The dalals, appointed by the government 'having tooks money, deliver it to the picars, who carry it from towne to towne and deliver it to the weavers, soe that the only security of the picars are the weavers, of the broakers are the picars and the Honourable Companey's money, the Broakers'.<sup>7</sup> This system continued till 1756, when in the wake of Maratha invasions the system failed and the Company devised the scheme of direct purchase.

The advent of the European Companies in the area of Bengal's trade foreshadowed a noticeable change and far-reaching impact in many ways. Their entry into the commercial life of Bengal, as buyers and sellers of goods, created problems in the supply and delivery of the same. The Bengal merchants, who had experience of dealing with indi-

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6 William Bolts, Considerations, London, 1772, pp. 70-71.

7 The Diaries of Strey~~n~~sham Master (1675-80) and other contemporary papers relating there to ed. R.C. Temple (vol. I & II) (London, 1909) pp. 14-15, quoted in Cambridge Economic History of India, vol. I, p. 345.

vidual traders from various parts of Asia, had now to deal, for the first time, with the foreign Companies of monopolistic merchant Capital.<sup>8</sup> But the most tangible change was in the treatment accorded by the officers of the Mughal Empire to these foreign merchants. The Corporate structure of these commercial groups gave them a collective strength and unity of purpose, not available to say individual group of merchants trading or resident with the Mughal Empire. Their control over sea gave them additional strength and this political reality was recognised by treating the heads of factories as co-equals of the Mughal ruling elite.<sup>9</sup> This superiority in strength over sea placed them at an advantageous positions in their trading activities in Asia, which they sought to utilise through 'the use of force' and it was 'an implicit part of European trade with Asia'. The model set up by the Portugese, and better known as 'redistributive enterprise' was soon taken up by the English East India Company as well.

Though the Company was opposed to large-scale use of force and their chief concern was trade, given the prevailing situation, the English realised that without the show of power, it was difficult to carry on trade successfully. As the Company was liable to numerous financial exactions, imposed on goods, by various imperial officials at different entre-pots and places, the Company felt

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8 S.K. Chaudhuri, op.cit., p. 61.

9 K.N. Chaudhuri, op.cit., p. 109.

vulnerable without fortified settlements in the Indian subcontinent. This they did partly because they wished to avoid payments to the local redistributive enterprises, and partly because the Directors wanted the Company to become a redistributive enterprise in its own rights. Thus a device which was earlier a mean towards an end, i.e., maximisation of commercial profits, became for a time an end in itself, with the installation of a person to the governorship of Company's affairs.<sup>10</sup> This proposition first expounded by Gerald Aungier (President at Surat and Governor of Bombay in 1669), in a lengthy despatch to the Directors in 1677, said that, 'Justice and necessity of your estate now require that in violent distempers, violent cures are only successful, that the times now require you to manage your general commerce with your sword in your hands.'<sup>11</sup>

With the accession of Sir Joshiah Child to the governorship in 1681, it became the accepted policy of the Company, and continued for almost till the end of the century. Child held the view that successful trading required sufficient military strength. The ultimate goal was to establish "such a policy of civil and military power and create and secure such a large revenue as might lead to 'the foundation of a large well grounded sure

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10 K.N. Chaudhuri, op.cit., p. 115.

11 Cf. S. Bhattacharya, The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal (1704-40) (London, 1954, Reprint Calcutta, 1969), p. 14.

English dominion in India for all time to come".<sup>12</sup> The growing difference between the Empire's officials and the Company's factors made them think of a fortified military settlements near the mouth of the Ganges to ensure the movement of their trade. This line of action received active encouragement from Joshiah Child and the outcome was war with the Mughals, in which the purpose of the English was badly shaken.<sup>13</sup> The failure of the war policy brought the English to their knees, 'begged pardon for their faults' and petitioned for allowance to trade freely in Bengal as formerly. The imperial orders of 10 February, 1691, permitted the Company to carry on its trade in Bengal on an annual payment of as. 3,000 in lieu of customs.<sup>14</sup>

Following the debacle, there ensued a period of full and peaceful trading. The rebellion of Shobha Singh in 1696 threw the country into the welter of anarchy, and the decisive success of the Dutch at Chinsura, arresting his progress, demonstrated the superiority of the European forces in Bengal.<sup>15</sup> This did not go unnoticed to the English. It afforded them an opportunity to fortify their

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12 Ibid.

13 The war broke out in 1686 and continued for two years. The English were completely defeated and forced to retreat to Madras. But they again came back in 1690.

14 Steward, History of Bengal (Delhi, 1971), p. 543; Riyaz-us-Salatin (Reprint 1975), p. 232; C.R. Wilson, Early Annals of the English in Bengal, vol. I, (1895), p. 124.

15 A. Roy, "The Rebellion of Shobha Singh - A Case Study" - Bengal Past and Present (1969-70), p. 70.

settlements. Further, the enveloping disorder and anarchy, in the closing years of Aurangzeb's reign also did not escape their attention.<sup>16</sup>

Soon an attitude which aimed at projecting the Company as a victim of political oppression was adopted. The desire to control the local resources and the freedom from paying tribute to the Asian redistributive enterprises remained. But the methods of attaining these aims shifted from the use of force to diplomatic manoeuvring, persuasive approach and resorting to corrupt means. It became the mainstay of Company's stated policies and objectives. Force was to be applied only in the last resort and as a deterrent to intimidate the authority. As a matter of fact, in Bengal, under the strong and efficient rule of Murshid Quli Khan, the English had little scope to intermeddle in its affairs. Again, trading activities had reached such a high scale that in the event of any warfare, the possibility to lose than to gain was more. The policy of enhancing the scope of commercial privileges and acquiring bases was, however, never lost sight of. But in the next fifty years, the English tilted their policy to dabble in the provincial politics which resulted ultimately in the battle of Plassey.

#### The Farman of 1717: The Company and Murshid Quli Khan

The difficulties which the English had to face in conducting smooth and free trade, had made them aware of

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16 K.N. Chaudhuri, op.cit., p. 118.

the necessity of having a farman to overcome these problems. This ultimately led to the sending of an embassy under Sir John Surman in 1715 and the securing of a farman in 1717 to the great joy of the English.<sup>17</sup> Along with the farman several hasbulhukms, appended to the farman, were also issued, granting the English some other privileges. Its main provisions were: the English got the right to duty-free trade on payment of Rs. 3000 annually; the renting of Calcutta, Sutanati and Gobindpur was confirmed and 38 new villages adjacent to Calcutta were conferred, subject to the permission of the diwan and Subahdar. If any merchants or weavers or others became debtors or accountable, they should be handed over to the Company's agents, no persons would be suffered to injure and molest their gomastahs, their rights and just demands; that the Madras rupees should pass without discount, provided they were of same quality of the Surat mints.

The hasbul Hukums granted a dastak, exempting Company's goods from being checked at the toll houses; permission was given for coining at Murshidabad mint; to settle new factories at any place as per custom.

Historians widely differ in regard to the importance of the farman of 1717 for the history of Bengal. While some historians consider it as Magna Carta of the English trade and acquisition of extraordinary privileges,<sup>18</sup> other

17 Bengal Public Conscriptions, (BPC) P/1/3, Stewart,  
History of Bengal, Appendix, pp. 543-45.

18 S. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 21.

deem it as just a privilege and liable to opposition and regulation of the Nizamats.<sup>19</sup> There is no doubt that the farman placed the Company at an advantageous position in comparison to the other traders and was the watershed of Company's success in Bengal before 1757. Prof. A. Das Gupta observes that the British domination of Indian Sea would not have been possible unless they could have acquired some political power in the eastern Hinterland of Calcutta after 1717.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever may be the case, privileges granted in theory, could not be put into practice in many matters, mainly due to the opposition of the Nawabs who were 'positively opposed to the strengthening of the English position in Bengal' Salim Allah writes that Murshid Quli Khan was 'jealous of the growing power of the Europeans in Bengal'.<sup>21</sup> Since the farman was not clear in many respects, it afforded the Nizamats an opportunity to put the English under pressure and coerce them into submission. In fact, the relations between the Nizamats and the Company ran on this wave-length, in which both the Nawab and the Company, endeavoured to squeeze out maximum benefit: the Nawab by trying to control the English influence and keeping them under his thumb; the English by striving to safeguard their newly acquired privileges and extending it to their best

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19 S. Chaudhuri, op.cit., p. 43.

20 A. Ray (ed.), 'Upakuler Bharatbarsha' in Madhya Juger Bharat (Calcutta, 1987), p. 49.

21 Salim Allah, Tarikhi-e-Bangala (tr. F. Gladwin, 1788), p. 81.



advantage. The outcome was one of constant friction and attrition, in which the Nizam was the ultimate loser. In this sense, the farman opened the way for the establishment of the commercial and political supremacy of the English in India . The behavioural pattern of the English was directed in such a way, where collision became inevitable. Apart from that, by this time private inland trade of the Company's servants being a matter of reckoning, had further complicated the issue.

Soon after the grant of farman, the English made attempts to execute it by sending 20 chests of treasure to get it coined at Murshidabad.<sup>22</sup> Attempts were also made to purchase those 38 villages granted in farman. But to their surprise, the Kassimbazar Council noted that though 'they had shown Jaffer Cawn, the copy of the royal Phir-mound (farman) and of the hasbulhukums about the mint and for the towns, which after he read, he positively said we shall not have the use of the mint, nor liberty to purchase more towns'.<sup>23</sup> The English were taken by surprise at this sudden development as they were totally unprepared to meet such contingency. They got an inkling of the fact, that even the securing of the farman did not augur the end of impediments. The English began to view these developments as deprivation from having enjoyed their legally-earned privileges. It, also, brought into their mind that howsoever legal, be their privileges, they were not free

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22 1st July, 1717, BPC, P/1/3.

23 30th July, 1717, BPC, F/1/3.

from the authority of the Nawab. This made them aware of the necessity of cultivating good relations with the officers and men of influence at the Court. Henceforth, involvement in politics to keep their trading activities streamlined. As a matter of fact, most of the troubles, generated out of the opposing views held by both the contending parties in regard to the farman. From the English point of view the farman gave them unqualified charter to trade in Bengal, while the Nawab witnessed in all these an implicit danger to the security of the Nizam. The same applies to the concession regarding the free use of the mint'.

Not being able to materialise their privilege, the English adopted the dubious means by purchasing most of these villages in the name of Company's brokers and others dependent on them, which resulted 'in confusion and unsettling of their revenues between 1717 and 1757'.<sup>24</sup> Very soon there arose a problem when the English decided to set up a new house at Hooghli in 1718; the Nawab, thinking it as their venture to build a fort, ordered the pulling down of the house, which led the English to stop all countryship up and down the river from an octagon at Sutanuti'.<sup>25</sup> But the English failed to extract the permission to erect the house. In 1723, in view of the growing business, the Company decided to settle factories at Dacca and Maldah. The Nawab demanded Rs. 40,000 to

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<sup>24</sup> S. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> BPC, 1718, P/1/3.

issue a Perwanah. Though the Nawab allowed the English to open factories at Dacca, in the case of Maldah factory, the English faced opposition from the people of zamindar, Darpa Narain, of that place, due to their failure to pay the stipulated amount. Despite, petition, persuasion and threat of force, the English could not get through. In a manner, the English were dealing with the case, it demonstrated that they were not to be tamed easily.

The growing mood of temper of the English was amply seen in 1726-27, when Abdul Rayhim (Rahim), the Nawab's Steward for his Jagir, demanded on their towns of Calcutta, Govindpur and others, an amount of Rs. 44,000. On the failure of the English to pay the amount, their wakil at Murshidabad was interned, their gomasthas were arrested and their brokers and merchants were intimidated. The Calcutta Council decided very firmly not to pay or comply with the demand, as, "it would be of most pericious consequence and occasion a further demand was ever he or a new steward should think proper to make one."<sup>26</sup> They expressed their anguish at the allowance of the Nawab to such behaviour and talked about the application of force. The Company seemed to be hesitant to take any prompt action 'on account of their Hon'ble Masters investment', not being all out of the country, that might hinder the despatch of the ship Dawson and Barrington, in the case of the stoppage of the river. Secondly, the Company and the

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26 B.P.C., P/1/5, August 26, 1723.

Dutch, being in treaty with the faujdar of Hooghli, to prevent the Ostenders from having any footing in Bengal, were sceptic, quarrel with the Nawab, might entirely overset the negotiation'.<sup>27</sup> This probably explains why the Company used force in the last resort. But considering the gravity and importance of the issue, the English decided to mobilise all their strength to get out of this entanglement. The vakil was asked to 'give the king's duhoy (drawing attention) in the most public manner' of their grievances. Side by side, steps were taken to enlist "Europeans, Portugese and others," and endeavour "by strategem or other to get the vakil released, send an arzedash or representation and lastly, finding no other alternative "to stop all the Moor and Vessels that are going out."<sup>28</sup>

Fateh Chand, through whom, the English were trying to settle the issue, hinted that 'for Rs. 30,000 a perwannah might be obtained to prevent any like demand for the future'. The English were ready to offer the Nazim Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 20,000 on consideration that he would let them resettle the factory at Maldah, build the house at Dacca, or finish the house at Hooghli. They could not give their money unless they have some benefit.<sup>29</sup> The Council threatened that 'our investment and all other business had much better be impeded and our affairs entirely at

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27 Ibid.

28 B.P.C., P/1/6, 13 February, 1727.

29 Ibid., 13 March, 1727.

a stand than tamely or easily comply with the every unjust and unreasonable demand'.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately through the good office of Fateh Chand, the matter was settled on payment of Rs. 20,000, who asked the English to regard it as a favour, because as the Kasimbazar Council reported the Calcutta Council, that the Nawab was very much incensed against them on account of complaints made about their dealing in rice and grain, and numbers of gomastahs to the aurungs who dealt in many other things to the detriment of the Nawab's revenues. It was said at Murshidabad that more than two hundred thousand mounds of rice were sent down to Calcutta and their servants had sold it on their own account.<sup>31</sup> It is therefore possible to establish correlation between the demands of Nawab and the inland trade of the Company's servants for whom the Company was responsible.

The rapid increase in the volume of trade and the abuse of dastak by its servants, bring to light that the working of the farman was found to presage troubles and assume greater magnitude in the years to come. Whatever may be the case, the Abdul Rahim affair points to the position and behavioural pattern of the English in Bengal. That the English had gained a strong foothold and were not to be coerced to any unjust demand easily, that they were ready to be up in arms to defend their rights if the

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 20 March, 1727.

situation required so. But they were shrewd enough to realise that war or force was to be used very cautiously and only in the last resort. Given the politico-economic conditions, the settling of dispute, by peaceful means was thought to be more effectual than resorting to arms.

The Company and Murshid Quli Khan's Successors

But they never failed to take advantage of the situation, whenever it afforded them an opportunity and keenly watched the ongoings in Bengal to utilise it best to their interests. This attitude of the Company was clearly seen after the death of Murshid Quli Khan. The Calcutta Council directed the Kasimbazar Council 'to make the best use they can of the change of government' for the interests of the Company and to prejudice the interests of the Ostenders. The Company also hoped to get the farman of 1717 and other privileges procured through Sarfaraz Khan, the new Nawab.<sup>32</sup>

That the authority of Sarfaraz Khan, was not stable and the threat of a war of succession did not escape the close observation of the English. Hence they were very careful to see that dealing did not fall in any wrong hands. The Company instantly took advantage of the situation to permit the Kasimbazar Council to give as far as 8 to 10 thousand rupees to obtain leave for building the houses and resettling the Maldah factory. But as it was still uncertain whether Sarfaraz Khan or Shuja-ud-Din Khan

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32 BPC, P/1/6, 17 July, 1727.

would be appointed subahdar from the Court, the Calcutta Council ordered the Kasimbazar authority "that whatever sum is to be given is on condition of its not being paid till the person or persons who are to receive it be confirmed from the great Mogul in their posts."<sup>33</sup>

In the long run, Sarfaraz Khan had to abdicate power in favour of his father and Shuja-ud-Din Khan became the Nawab of Bengal. 'During the twelve years of his Nizamat Shuja-ud-Din Khan did not go an inch further than Murshid Quli Khan in the execution of the provisions of the farman of 1717. The relationship between the Nawab and the Company was far from friendly and on many occasions they were at logger heads as to the sphere of the privileges. Their relationship strained to such an extent that the English even thought of leaving the Kasimbazar factory despite the assurances of his favour and encouragement to go on with their business.<sup>34</sup> Very soon the quarrel started over the question of trading in salt.

The Nawab's Officers captured the Company's Patna fleet with salt at Bhagalpur and forced the Company's servants to sign a muchalka (written undertaking) that they would not deal in that article in future.<sup>36</sup> When the Kasimbazar Council made a representation to the Court to settle the issue they were retorted, The farman privi-

33 BFC., P/1/6, 31 July, 1727.

34 Ibid., 18 September 1727.

35 Ibid., 9 October, 1727.

leged them only to import and export, and not to anything customs-free. They should remain satisfied with that, because neither the Europeans nor even the Muslims were even favoured with that. It further said that the Company's trade being very much increased lately and their involvement being in many more commodities, it very much decayed the foreign trade of the natives. If they did not put an effectual stop to their encroachments on the inland trade, the English would undersell all others, engross the whole trade of the province and thereby deprive the vast numbers of the natives of the means of a livelihood.<sup>36</sup> The English apprehended that the matter might not be made up without expense and an obligation of not to indulge in that trade. When the Company sent an arzdasht, it again met with the same rebuff.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, the English had to acquiescence with the Nawab's demand of Rs. 10,000 and observance of the instructions. The Patna fleet case proves that, to the Nawab, the Company's duty-free trade meant only export and import of articles and not by any means inland trade and that he would not suffer their involvement in the inland trade and would not step back to take stringent action to safeguard the interests of the native merchants who were already at odds in business competition with the English.

Again, there were problems when it came to the notice of the Nawab that the merchants of the Company were abus-

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36 Ibid., 1 October, 1727.

37 Ibid., April, 1728.



ing the dastak and defrauded him of his customs. The Nawab ordered the placing of peons upon the Company's merchants, stopped movement of all goods and took an undertaking from the merchants not to have dealings with the English.<sup>38</sup> At this time, a quite different affair aggravated the relations between the Nawab and the English. The English in collusion with the Dutch hatched a plan to attack the Ostenders' ship to root them out from Bengal. Attack were launched on two Ostend ships near Hooghli - Sea Horse and Nepture and had it captured. Since the attack at Nawab's territory was a violation of the neutrality of his ports he ordered military preparation against both the Companies and the movement of English boats was actually stopped at Murshidabad.<sup>39</sup> The tangle was solved only after the allied Companies acquiescenced to pay the Nawab Rs. 325,000.

In 1730, a serious case occurred when, Kantu Babu,<sup>40</sup> the broker of the English East India Company, having borrowed a sum of Rs. 2,15,000 from Fateh Chand had failed to pay the amount. The matter involving the two parties came to such a pass that the Nawab even ordered the movement of Company's Patna boats, to be stopped<sup>41</sup> and the English were about to leave Kasimbazar factory.<sup>42</sup> At length, through the good offices of Coja Owan Armenian

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39 BPC, P/1/8, 18 November, 1728.

40 For an account of the case see Chapter III.

41 BPC, P/1/8, 17 July 1730.

42 Ibid., 25 August, 1730.

and Indian merchants, the matter was solved.

The killing of 2 men at the Chauki of Barrigazza (?) in the Maldah river, following a skirmish, by some Company's men was yet another instance which spurred the Nawab violently.<sup>43</sup> The Nawab ordered several parties of the Company in Berhampore, Katwa and most of the aurungs to stop all their business.<sup>44</sup> Orders were also sent to stop company's business at Dacca, Maldah, Jugdea and other places as well. The Kasimbazar Council had reported that the Nawab had these extraordinary orders to ingratiate himself with the king by procuring a present to him.<sup>45</sup> The Kasimbazar Council prevailed upon the Calcutta Council to pay the amount - as it leaked to them that the Nawab wanted one lakh rupees - than to counter the Nawab, with a small body of people and ultimately paying more. The news of stoppage of Company's business in many factories, harrassment of their merchants<sup>46</sup> and the grim prospect of their investment being not realised, brought the Calcutta Council to their senses; the Kasimbazar Council was given permission to deal with Fateh Chand, who was playing the role of an intermediary. The English got off ultimately by paying

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43 Ibid., 27 September, 1731.

44 Ibid., 11th October, 1731.

45 Ibid.

46 The Nawab sent 4 mansabdars to different aurungs to ascertain the volume of trade of the last five years enjoyed the zamindars to sign a muchlecca, not to suffer anything to pass under their dustak and to intercept their boats. (BPC, 11th October, 1731).

Rs. 180,000 and John Stackhouse, the Chief at Kasimbazar, factory, tendered a written statement on behalf of the Company. The statement runs thus: 'I will not trade in any goods, but what are proper for Europe and intermeddle with such part of trade as belong to the natives of Indostan either in Bengal, Orissa or Patna nor will I protect or give sanction to any goods either by land or water belonging to foreigners that the king may not be defrauded of his customs, nor will I trade for or provide any more goods at the aurungs than what is customary, that other traders may not make complaint against us, but provide their own goods themselves, Nor will I buy any of the natives either male or female for slaves.'<sup>47</sup>

The statement brings to light several important points. Firstly, the Company's business was not confined only to the trading activities as granted in 1717. Secondly, it was daily intruding into new areas and was posing serious menace to the rights and interests of the native merchants, besides the loss of the king's revenue. Thirdly, the involvement of the Company's servants in internal trade with the connivance of the Company was also increasing. In 1725, the Calcutta Council put the value of private sales and purchases at Patna at Rs. 200,000.<sup>48</sup> In fact, by the 1730, the private trade of the Company's servants became a cause of concern. Fourthly, in addition

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47 Ibid., 22 November, 1731.

48 P.J. Marshall, op.cit., p. 110.

to its economic impact it was creating problems in the social front as well. With the narrowing down of the scope of the native merchants, they were being eased out of the scene, thereby creating economic pressure and social tensions. The English influence was growing very rapidly and by 1735, Calcutta had an estimated population of 100,000.<sup>49</sup> As the English trade was expanding into more new areas, the more they were coming into contact with the natives and the more was escalation of tensions and conflicts. The expansion in the volume of their trade, hinted not only the expansion of their territorial spheres of influence, it also insinuated extension of their authority over the native population. That it became a cause of concern for the regime is obvious from the extraction of pledge from the Company of not making the natives slave.

What was Shuja-ud-Din Khan's attitude towards the English and how correctly he visualised the menace posed by the English, is amply demonstrated in his letter to Khan-i-Dauran in Delhi, when the latter's opinion was sought in regard to the grant of further privileges. In view of its importance in grasping the understanding of the Nawab it is quoted below.

'I am scarce able to recount to you the abominable practices of this people. When they first came to this country they petitioned the then government in a humble manner the liberty to purchase a spot of ground to build

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49 R.K. Mukherjee, The Rise and Fall of the East India Company (Bombay, 1973), p. 255.

a factory house upon, which was no sooner granted but they ran up a strong fort, surrounded it with a ditch which has a communication with the river and mounted a great number of guns upon the walls. They have enticed several merchants and others to go and take protection under them and they collect a revenue which amounts years to Rs. 100,000. In the reign of Aurangzeb their trade never exceeded three ships! cargoes and was well purchased with the province of Bengal. Their investments of late, have been immoderate and they both import and export other merchants' goods in their own names besides which they rob and plunder and carry great numbers of king's subjects of both sexes into slavery to their own country which hath obliged me to give very strict orders to all my phousdars (faujdars) about them... They now begin to farm several towns, which it is feared, may in time become strongholds, and consequently a difficult matter for the government to remove them. It is therefore, my opinion that if any favours are designed them by the imperial Court it may of ill consequence to give them a phirmound (farman) for any other privileges than they enjoyed in the reign of Aurangzeb.<sup>50</sup>

The Nizam and the Company became locked also in a dispute of jurisdiction over the subjects in Omichand - Gurbaksh case. Omichand, a merchant under English protection, following a dispute, was detained by Gurbaksh, an inhabitant of Murshidabad in his house. The English, in a bid to free Omichand, sent soldiers, resulting in the

death of six men and imprisonment of Gurbaksh. The Nawab demanded his extradition, which the English refused to do. However, the gravity of the case died down when Gurbaksh fled from the English prison.<sup>51</sup>

The raising of batta in 1736 on Madras and Arcot Rupees to 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  per cent uniformly for their conversion into Siccas in Bengal, had its adverse effect on the English. Despite having the privilege of farman, the English had to incur the loss. So they objected and thought tame submission would place the privilege in jeopardy. In

spite of their protests they could not secure any better deal and were subject to additional batta.<sup>52</sup>

The Company and Alivardi Khan: Search for Political Power

During the tenure of Shuja -ud-Din Khan, the English were always in low key and did not get the upper hand, because of his vigilant and rough handling with them. The English groaned under pressure but had little to do, which induced them to see the Nawab as a 'very rash and hasty', not at all regarding what he does to obtain his end. Though the Company and the Nawab had differed on many occasions the final breach was averted and a system of give and take policy had developed in their relations. But once the authority of government seemed loose and feeble, the English did not miss the opportunity to assure themselves,

51 Ibid., 27th August, 1733.

52 BFC, P/1/10, 11th October, 1737.

as it was witnessed soon after the accession of Sarfaraz Khan in 1739. When Haji Ahmad, on the Nawab's accession, demanded additional nazrana, pointing out the huge expenses which the administration had to bear to keep the country safe, the English refused and ridiculed the idea by saying rather it was the English army at Patna, which had saved the country from the Maratha menace.<sup>53</sup>

After the overthrow of Sarfaraz Khan, and the capture of power by Alivardi Khan, an efficient general, in the former's service, the unsettled condition was replaced by a strong rule. Alivardi Khan's relationship was marked by same degree of authority as it was witnessed during the previous regimes. With the accession of Alivardi Khan, 'the Company had to deal with a Nawab, who was as strong as he was upright and who had a keen insight into the economic condition of his state'.<sup>54</sup> The English had to be very wary in their dealings. But by this time Company's trading activities, had penetrated deep down in to the interior parts of the country and a vast network of factories had been established throughout Bengal. It could thus hardly remain confined to the trading activities merely. 'As the trade grew in opulence the profit motive outweighed all other considerations.'<sup>55</sup> The Company's

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53 BPC, P/1/12, 12th November, 1739.

54 K.K. Dutta, Studies in History of the Bengal Subah (Calcutta, 1936), p. 272.

55 Brijen K. Gupta, Sirajuddaulah and the East India Company (1756-57): Background to the Foundation of British Power in India: (Leiden, 1966), p. 18.

activities, cutting across trading field, was intruding into the political game, coupled with the strengthening of their military power. This was facilitated by the turbulent situation in the country.<sup>56</sup> The English were giving serious thoughts in enhancing their footholds in Bengal from this time as well.<sup>57</sup>

In 1744, the Nawab accused the English of having helped the Marathas against him and demanded two months' pay amounting to three million rupees<sup>58</sup> following the stoppage of their business at Dacca, Patna and other places, the Company settled the matter on a payment of about 400,000 lakh rupees.

In 1747, friction started over the right of the debtors. Coja Minhas, an inhabitant in the Company's territory in Calcutta died owing debts to the Nizamat. The Nawab sent a perwanah, asking the English to send padree Vigary and Coja See Saboor, gomastahs to Coja Minhas, with account books to settle the issue. The failure of the English to comply with the perwanah exasperated the Nawab to capture the Company's boats at Jellengee.<sup>59</sup> With much

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56 The invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 dashed the whole country into the ground and the sign of any effective link between the Centre and the province also blew off. Alivardi took advantage to stop paying tributes to the Centre.

57 Rajat K. Ray, Colonial Penetration in Bengal, Cyclo-styled copy, pp. 5-57.

58 Compare K.K. Dutta, op.cit. Letters to Court, 3 August, 1744, p. 274.

59 BPC, P/1/19, 5th January, 1747.



difficulty and expense, the Company had been able to secure the release of boats, but they had promised the appearance of Coja's executors to Murshidabad, failing which, there was again the threat of such measures.<sup>60</sup>

There occurred a serious trouble when the English seized some vessels belonging to the Armenian and Mughal merchants'. Upon the approach by the latter to the Court, the Nawab was furious and sent a perwanah to the President of the Calcutta Council. The perwanah is reflective of the Nawab's attitude towards the English vis-a-vis his concern for the safety and security of the native merchants as also for the maintenance of the neutrality. It says:

"The syads, Moghuls, Armenians and other merchants of Hooghli have complained that lakhs of goods and treasure with their ships you have seized and plundered and I am informed from foreign parts that ships bound to Hooghli you seized under pretence of their belonging to the French. The ship belonging to Antony with lakhs on board from Mochir and several curiosities sent me by the sheriff of that place on that ship you have also seized and plundered. These merchants are the kingdom's benefactor, their imports and exports are an advantage to all men and their complaints are so greivous that I cannot forbear any longer giving ear to them.

"As you are not permitted to commit piracies, therefore, I now write you that on receipt of this you deliver up all the merchants' goods and effects to them as also what appertains to me, otherwise you may be assured of a due chastisement in such a

manner as you least expect."<sup>61</sup>

The failure of the English to settle the dispute angered the Nawab, and repressive measures were taken against the English traders in difficult factories by setting peons at the aurungs, and stopping boats which were carrying down their goods.<sup>62</sup> There were also reports from Dacca that not only muchalkas were taken from all the tradesmen and podars, not to have any transactions with the English, but from the Moody's not to supply them with necessaries and provisions.<sup>63</sup> The English factory being stopped and the factory at Kasimbazar surrounded by Nawab's troops owing to that dispute, the English tried through the seths to propitiate him. At last after much negotiation through the Armenians the Nawab became reconciled. But the English got off only after paying to the Nawab Rs. 120,000.<sup>64</sup>

Recurring Maratha depredations and Afghan rebellions also caused severe damage to the interests of the Company, which ultimately impelled the Company to abandon the prevailing methods of business i.e. dadni and to ensure a policy of direct purchase. The Company also felt the necessity of strengthening their authority by fortifica-

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61 J. Long, Selections from the Unpublished Records of Bengal, p. 16 (BFC, May 15, 1748).

62 Compare K.K. Dutta, Studies, p. 279, Letter to Court, 27 January, 1749.

63 Long, Selections, p. 17.

64 Ibid., p. 19.

tions and digging ditches to ward off Maratha menace. It even tried to extend their area of authority and influence by encouraging weavers, artisans, merchants to have under Company's protection.<sup>65</sup> Apart from that the disturbances caused by the local rajas and zamindars very often claiming financial contributions had all been making their impact in the policy-formulations of the Company's policy. In 1754, Rajballabh, on becoming the deputy Nawab, demanded his presents; the English got off by paying Rs. 4300.<sup>66</sup> In 1755 following a dispute between the gomastah of the Burdwan Raj and an Englishman, the Raja stopped the Company's business within his jurisdiction.<sup>67</sup>

Over the years the difficulties faced by the Company from the Nawab, the officials, the local rajas, and zamindars in the transaction of their business had cast its ominous shadow in Company's policy-making. By this time there was the influence of another extraneous factor. As the French influence expanded in Southern India, the English Company felt threatened by the French in Bengal.<sup>68</sup> In the face of this disturbing phenomena, the Company was gradually being aware that unless they had some power - political and military, its position would be hardly secure. But the era of strong Nawabs had left little room for the English to do much. Occassionally, they tried to test

<sup>65</sup> Fort William- India House Correspondence, vol. VI, p. 84.  
<sup>66</sup> Long, Selections, p. 252.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58; K.K. Dutta, Studies, p. 296.

<sup>68</sup> B.K. Gupta, Sirajuddaulah, p. 35.

the strength of the Nawab, but in vain. By fortifying the settlements the English believed that such a show of power was the best way to keep the English in India free from native insults and would effectually off Peshkash (presents), the consequences of most quarrels.<sup>69</sup> Since the Nizamat was very firm in its dealings and behaviours with the English, the latter thought it wise to come to an understanding than to risk their ever-growing business, by waging war. Moreover, the shadow of their humiliating defeat at the hands of Aurangzeb still haunted them.<sup>70</sup>

As a result, during this period their policy become to heat up and cool down. But from Alivardi Khan's reign itself forces of distabilisation were, in sight. It was during his administration that the political, economic and social unity of his provinces broke down under the impact of the internal dissensions at his court, and the external invasions of the Marathas. The working of all these forces, coupled with the French menace provided the Company, the badly - felt necessity of arming itself. To this was added the insidious private trade of the Company's servants. By the 1750's the private trade of the Company's servants, was inalienably mixed up with the Company's trade.<sup>71</sup> In the 1750s, the remittances through the Eng-

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69 Fort-William - India House Correspondence, vol. I, p. 10.

70 B.K. Gupta, Sirajuddaulah, p. 35.

71 Marshall dwells, at length, on the role of British private trade and merchants in his East Indian Fortunes.

lish Company alone amounted to an average of £ 100,000 annually (they were £ 170,810 in 1753 and £ 117,240 in 1754), while the total emoluments received by the same remitters from their employers amounted to £ 2760 and £ 2840 in the respective years.<sup>72</sup> The assertion of the Company's authority seemed to be the only way. In view of this, it seems plausible why the Company, despite the orders from the Court of Directors not to give much emphasis on military expenditure and maintain neutrality, was doing the opposite.

The accession of Sirajuddaulah opened a new path before them. The opposition to Siraj's claim was not secret to them. The English naturally sought to fish in troubled waters.

As a matter of fact, the private trade of the British, became the final culmination of tensions between the British and the Nawabs. They did not hesitate to wreck down the position of Sirajuddaulah. Activities of some of the English factors even before his accession gave him an impression that they were in league with discontented elements' plan to kill him.

Despite repeated orders to stop fortifications, the English did not pay any heed to that. The relations further strained over the question of the abuse of dastak, which had assumed menacing proportions. In 1756 Sirajuddaulah alleged that in the 40 years period since 1717

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72 B.K. Gupta, op.cit. Sirajuddaulah, p. 14.

the Company had defrauded the Bengal government of £ 187,5000 in customs-duties.<sup>73</sup> Every attempt by the Court to stop private trade of its servants were blunted by saying, "If the Company allowed no private trade, their servants must starve. Confining the dastak, to the Company's trade would be giving up a great article in the farman (of 1717). The private trade of the Company's merchants become culmination of tensions between the Nawab and the Company. Besides the English refusal to extradite the fugitive Krishnadas, hotted up the relations. In fact, the power and influence of the Company had reached such a point where it signalled a pril to the state. Attack on Calcutta was only the lighting up of the gun-powder.

The attack on Calcutta and the Nawab's order for the sequestration of all the effects and merchandise of the English in all parts of the Bengal,<sup>74</sup> unshashed the chain of events. The English realised that with a hostile Nawab at the helm of affairs, there was little prospect of having their interests been protected. The faticidal quarrel, the rising discontent of his officers and generals, all prepared the most propitious ground. A conspiracy was set on foot to dethrone Sirajud-Daulah. In fact, Plassey was the culminating point of the working of all the forces that had been going on in Bengal, the bursting forth of the gathering cloud into a tempestuous storm. The English in 1757 were quite different from what they were at the beginn-

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73 B.K. Gupta, op.cit., p. 14.

74 C. Stewart, History of Bengal, p. 506.

ing of the century. The financial, military and political power of the Company had increased formidably. The Company's revenue from the settlements had increased from Rs. 11,071 to Rs. 107131 in 1754.<sup>75</sup> That is why the Nawab's attack on Calcutta was being seen as 'plunder of the town'.<sup>76</sup>

Plassey offered the English the most sought-after opportunity which they had been trying over the years to secure. The post-Plassey history illustrates all this phenomena. Commenting on the battle of Plassey Henry Vansittart who became governor of Bengal in 1760 observes, "We had now a Nawab of our own making and absolutely dependent upon us for his establishment and future security. By our influence in the country the Company's trade was freed from the impositions it was before liable to and they enjoyed the benefit of the farman in its fullest extent."<sup>77</sup>

Trade was the paramount consideration of the English East India Company in Bengal. As the volume of trade expanded, the Company had to face a more increasing pressure of financial exactions. To ensure the smooth and uninterrupted flow of trade, it had to pay the Nizamat regularly, failing which reprisals followed from the Nizamat. This tug-of-war dominated for most of the period

75 B.K. Gupta, op.cit., p. 9.

76 Vansittart, A Narrative of the Transaction in Bengal (1760-64), p. 6; A.B. Banerjee and B.K. Ghosh (eds.), Calcutta, 1976.

77 Ibid., p. 6.

involving the Mughal officials on the one hand and the Company and its servants on the other.' But this policy of tug-of-war passed through several stages. The first stage was marked by armed trading, which lasted till the end of the 17th century. At the second stage, the Company's policy was channellised through the show or the use of force, rather than actually using it. The third stage showed signs of its growing assertive tendency in 1750s on the rampant.

One interesting feature in Company's trading pattern is the wide-prevalence of bribery and corruption. Another interesting point is that, though the Nizam had for all practical purposes become independent, it did not try to set at naught the Company's privileges by envisaging its own independent policy. Does it indicate its weak foundation or its awareness of the inability to deal firmly with the foreign power or the sheer motive of extracting profit?



Chapter V

## SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Nizamat evolved a structure and ran the reins of administration, on the whole, successfully in the political fabric of Bengal for almost half a century. The fragmentation of the Mughal Empire did not necessarily foretell the fragmentation of the Mughal system; rather it was the beginning of a new era, in which regional identity was more pronounced and the composition and emergence of various social groups became more perceptible. Like elsewhere, the disappearance of the centralised Mughal authority in Bengal did not bring in its train political chaos and disorder. Under Murshid Quli Khan and then under his successors, the subah witnessed peaceful transition to a stable political order and the foundation of a strong Nizamat. As a result, new outlets were found in increasing economic activity, in production and maximization of revenue, in the development of trade and commerce and in the expansion of markets. In fact, during the Nizamat period, Bengal witnessed remarkable economic progress, revenues were realised ever-more, more and more ships visited Hooghly and Calcutta, and there was an ever-increasing demand for Bengal products.

The Nizamat which thus came into existence was unique in itself. But in the process, the Nizamat itself had undergone some changes. In the changed circumstances, the relations

of the Nizam with the centre became tenuous. For its strength, survival and, of course, resources, it thus became concentrated and dependent upon forces of the province. For manning the administrative hierarchy, for the generation of economic resources, the Nizam was in dire need of securing the help of the insulated Mughal officials, the landed magnates and the merchants-bankers. This afforded an opportunity and scope to these various interests to assert themselves and share a chunk of authority, which in previous time was not so readily accessible.

But the interesting point is that there was no attempt on the part of the Nizam to disown allegiance to the central authority and emerge as a full-fledged independent state. Even when Sirajuddaulah got the throne through nomination, he was eager to secure an imperial farman. The rough treatment meted out to the Jagat Seth for his inability to secure the farman is a glaring example of the limits of Nizam's autonomy. Nor was there any attempt, on the part of the various interests which went into the making of the Nizam, to object to the huge drain of wealth which went out of the province every year in the form of revenue to the Mughal Centre. It seems that they willingly participated with the Nizam in extracting revenue. In this sense, they acted as a tool in vertical exploitation of the masses. While this indicates a sort of cooperation between the two, at the same time it brings forth the question of the nature of mutual relationship between these two elements.

Was there any conscious attempts on the part of the Nizamat to share power with the 'local' elements as to forge a 'partnership'? In the preceding chapters, we have seen that the relationship between these segmented groups and the Nizamat was more of personal character. It had no institutional basis. It was an arrangement in which the new vistas of glory were open to efficient and successful adventurer by meeting up the state demand. The state on the other hand became assured of the help and support of those who got the benefit of it. A most striking example of the personalised nature of the tie was the House of Jagat Seth. Starting the career, as a mere usurer the House by developing a personal relationship with the Nizamat became the 'direct beneficiary' and built up the richest banking house in Bengal. Then the House ensured a political status by becoming a member of the Nawab's close cabinet.

Since the relationship was based on personal vested interests, the prime concern of these segments became to protect and promote them, even if meant change in alignments. The relationship was thus self-contradictory. The zamindar of Rajshahi did not feel the scruple of conscience, when he joined the conspiracy in favour of Alivardi Khan against Sarfraz Khan, the grandson of his greatest benefactor, Murshid Quli Khan. The nature of this relationship was more illustrated in the battle of Plassey when these lordlings

assembled in a conspiracy against the Nazim on the plea of his haughty and hasty actions. From the correspondences between the English and the different zamindars prior to Plassey it is all the more evident.

Calkin's characterization of the alliance between the Nawab and these elements as a "formation of a regionally oriented ruling group" is thus to be accepted with some reservations. Moreover, the tenure of the working of this group was so short-lived, that it could hardly be regarded as a ruling group. Admittedly, there was a possibility of formation of a ruling group, if the alliance were organized on institutional basis. Again, the process, if any, could not succeed due to the manoeuvring and machination of the English East India Company. The victory of the English East India Company at the battle of Plassey definitely checked the process and nipped it in the bud.

The English East India Company as the biggest trading concern had a close bearing on the vicissitudes of the Nizam. Exploiting all the advantages and trading privileges since the beginning of the 18th century, and outplacating the other European Companies, the English came up to claim a formidable share in political and economic power. The Company was too 'compact' to be neglected by the Nizam. This was reflected in the nature of the relationship between the two. When cracks and fissures appeared in the existing socio-political

framework of the province, in the 1740s the English threw in their lot for overt political control. The growing aggressiveness of the English was increasingly visible in its subsequent relations with the Nizam. The Plassey was the logical follow-up. A notable feature of the history of this period is that the alliance between the English and some of the anti-Nizam forces, again, proved transient. This is illustrated from the events which followed the battle of Plassey. The history of this phase is, however, beyond the purview of this dissertation.

Appendix IUnder Shuja Khan's Reign

Copy of a Sunnud Under the Seal of the Nawab Sesfraz Khan, Dewan of the Subah of Bengal.

"Be it known to the Mutsuddies and Managers, both present and future, the Canongoes, the Muccuddins and Ryots of the Parganah of Rajshahy and in the soubah of Bengal, the paradise of Regions, that - in compliance with the written request (Ferd Sawal) transmitted under the signature of eminent and noble Shujah ul Dowlah Mowtemunul Muluc, Shujah ul Deen Mahomed Khan Bahadur Assad, Jung Nazim of the Soubah and in conformity to which the Ferd Hackeekut and Mutchufca having also been duly signed agreeably to the several forms herein setforth - the office of zamindar of the above mentioned pargannahs from the demise of the late Raum Jewan, together with the obligation of Peshcush, the balances and annual assessment of the said pargunnahs as stated in the indorsement (zymn) shall devolve upon the distinguished of his family Raum Kaunt, the adopted son of the Defunct, who discharging faithfully according to custom the duties of that office shall not neglect even the most trivial cases or attentions belonging to it he shall remit the peshcush and the balances in stated instalments to the Treasury and realise the revenues (after taking credit to himself for the Muscoorat, Nankar and ~~ac.~~ ) from year to year in the customary manner and at the usual seasons conducting himself towards the Ryots and inhabitants in general in a conciliating manner and being

indebatigable in the expulsion and chastisement of the refractory - he shall be careful that no thieves, highwaymen, or disturbers of the public peace take shelter within the limits of his jurisdiction and he is otherwise to exert his endeavours to promote the comfort and security of the Ryots, the increase of cultivation, population and the revenue. - He shall be attentive to the protection of the high roads, that travellers may pass and repass without danger or molestation, but if a robbery should be committed he shall produce the perpetrators with their booty, which shall be restored to its owner, and the delinquents given up for punishment; if he fails to produce the culprits, he shall consider himself responsible for the amount plundered. He shall take especial care, that no individual within the boundaries of his zemindary shall practice any unlawful deeds or drunkenness, and he is strictly forbidden from levying any Aboabs (exactions) prohibited by the Imperial Edict. He shall transmit the requisite accounts of his district in the usual manner signed by himself and the Canongoes of the Soubah to the public exchequer. Therefore, let the above mentioned persons look upon him as established zemindar exercising the functions of that station and regard the papers under his signatures as valid. Considering the above as positive, let them act accordingly. Given this day the 27th of the month Ramzaun ul Mubarak, the 17th year of the reign" (i.e. Md. Shah's reign, 1735-36).

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Source: James Grant, An Enquiry into the Nature of Zamindary Tenures in the Landed Property of Bengal, London, 1791.

Appendix IITotal Imports from Asia

(Table C-2, Chaudhuri, K.N.)

Year	Imports from Bengal	
	Value	%
1700	237121	47.3
1701	249122	41.9
1702	246258	66.2
1703	65206	26.0
1704	12024	7.7
1705	65893	32.3
1706	74827	35.8
1707	97881	55.0
1708	60170	36.3
1709	105272	52.8
1710	173819	46.9
1711	271917	60.1
1712	225154	46.5
1713	234231	43.5
1714	174355	35.2
1715	163859	57.9
1716	216023	64.1
1717	209548	41.7
1718	235997	50.8
1719	253868	39.3
1720	332792	57.3
1721	299903	46.4
1722	101728	20.0



Year	Imports from Bengal	
	Value	%
1723	218262	29.3
1724	226195	28.8
1725	191117	42.4
1726	341474	56.5
1727	513249	73.7
1728	411763	76.0
1729	452640	61.1
1730	431581	70.5
1731	480090	66.4
1732	445340	61.1
1733	362339	63.5
1734	428932	59.6
1735	400998	53.4
1736	408551	66.6
1737	300671	51.0
1738	412805	70.4
1739	450019	59.8
1740	410163	69.3
1741	489889	62.6
1742	560395	64.3
1743	475281	61.4
1744	427068	65.2
1745	449152	57.1
1746	491955	63.9
1747	460690	58.1
1748	379342	57.1
1749	330360	50.2
1750	511177	50.4
1751	486012	56.1
1752	435796	50.4
1753	375449	44.7
1754	324482	41.5
1755	411505	44.1

Year	Imports from Bengal	
	Value	%
1756	3038938	42.1
1757	69219	11.1
1758	288587	44.9
1759	450384	61.0
1760	366872	51.6

Source: K.N.Chaudhuri, The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company (1660-1760), Cambridge, 1978.

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