

The Political role of East India Company in Awadh

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Abstract-

In this paper I examined basically The East India Company expanded its influence in Awadh through subsidiary alliances, Military protection, and increasing interference in internal administration, Awadh is regarded as one of the most successful political entities during the phase of decline of the Mughal Empire and establishment of British Empire in India in the eighteenth century. Simultaneously in the eighteenth century, there was an emergence and development of regional power groups, such as Awadh, Bengal, and Hyderabad. Hence the centralized power structure of the Mughal polity gave way to regional states. Awadh became one of the most important states in the areas previously under the Mughal rule. Awadh was one of the crucial regional states whose history covers the eighteenth century and ends with the revolt of 1857. The region of Awadh was a prosperous and fertile region.

The geographical location made Awadh important for the security of Company's territory in India from Rohillas and Afghans as Awadh was the only buffer state between British Empire in India and Rohillas and Afghan in the western frontier of India. Company was not ready to take direct possession in any region at any cost that is why they sold off the Badshah's Allahabad to Nawab on the payment of 50 lakhs, once Badshah deserted the land in 1771 and joined hand with Marathas in Delhi,¹ But the economic prosperity of Awadh has always caught the eyes of Company and thus they consistently aspired to extract from Awadh more than what they were getting. Dalhousie describes the kingdom of Awadh, as "one of the most fertile region of the globe." Colonel Sutherland claims that "there is no state in India with whose government we have interfered so systematically and so uselessly as with that of Awadh."² He continues to state that "this interference has been more in favour of men than of measures; a remark, by the way, applicable to almost every case in which our Government has intermeddled with Native State."³

After established complete control over Bengal, Awadh remained the principal territory in the eyes of the company which needed to be controlled as efficiently as possible. In the early 1780s British tried to control Awadh's internal administrative processes in order to increase extraction from the region failed. The only alternative was to restore the Lucknow regime's confidence in the alliance. The Nawab was given various concessions in form of reduction of British army that Nawab need to maintain in Awadh or revenue arrangement, removal of the monopoly on the saltpeter trade from the Company's representative in Lucknow etc. The successor of Hastings made no significant change in this settlement until the turn of the century.

In 1764 battle of Buxar the Nawab was defeated by the British Company. An arrangement was made with the Nawab by which the Emperor gave Ghazipur and Banares. The Court of Directors had objections to it. Finally, a political resident was appointed in the court of Awadh by the Company. The Nawab of Awadh was appointed as the *wazir* of the Mughal Empire and its most militarily powerful official. In many ways he could control the Empire through his hold over the person of the Emperor. His territorial ambitions had ranged across north India to Bengal and across the lands then controlled by the British who finally defeated him. However, despite the defeat the Nawab of Awadh was still extremely powerful in military and financial terms and in a reverse mode started cooperating with the British. Thus the Company Resident involved himself in the political affairs of Awadh from the time of this first appointment in the beginning of the nineteenth century

¹ C.U. Aitchison, *A collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, Vol. II, Treaty No. XXVIII, pp.73-74

² Malcolm Lewin, *Has Oude been Worse Governed by its Native Princes than Our Indian Territories by Leadenhall Street?*, London, 1857, p4

³ Sir Henry Lawrence, *Essays military and political*, London, 1859, p.63

he gradually to exercise indirect rule there.⁴

Gradually the number of residents were appointed to local courts. After the battle of Buxar Company inroads into upper India took priority and the Company began to erode the military organization, arsenals and factories of indigenous rulers, Frenchmen commanding critical military set-ups in Awadh. The Company also interfered in the appointments made by the Nawab who was pressured for the dismissal of the military commander Monsieur Gential in the service of Nawab Shuja- ud Daula of Awadh. In 1774, under pressure from the Company, Shuja-ud-Daula was forced to dismiss Gential from his service.⁵ In 1764 the king of Delhi transferred the province of Banaras to the Company and directed the Raja to pay his tribute directly to the British government. In 1766 the Company handed the province of Benaras over to the Nawab *wazir*, making the latter stipulate that he would continue Balwant Singh in his *zamindari*. The Nawab tried to break this condition and Balwant Singh had on several occasions to seek British protection.⁶

The Company's political connection with Awadh commenced in 1765 by the Treaty of Allahabad.⁷ By this treaty, Shuja-ud-Daulah got back Awadh except Kara and Allahabad. These two areas were given to the Mughal emperor.⁸ The emperor received a huge compensation and the Company got the *diwani* of Bengal with the right to collect revenue. The Residency or the official residence of the East India Company's agent (Resident), was created in when the Company started appointing, its representative to the court of the Nawabs of Awadh to protect its interest.⁹

Politically Awadh had been a buffer state, vital to the security of British India from 1765. For long it had served as a nursery for evolving patterns of British relation with the Indian states, as a source for rehabilitating the depleted finances of the East India Company and as a recruiting centre for the Bengal army. Henry Lawrence significantly observed that Awadh was "periodically used as a wet-nurse to relieve the difficulties of the East India Company's finances." It helped the growth of British political supremacy in India. Its strategic situation, fabulous wealth and rich natural resources had tempted the British and led to its exploitation by them. The humiliating treaties of 1798 and 1801 had deprived it of external sovereignty.¹⁰ Further their impact had been subversive to its internal sovereignty, detrimental to its Administrative efficiency, ruinous to its economic prosperity and harmful to the personal integrity of its rulers, to the loyalty of the landed nobility, to the uprightness of the administrative hierarchy and also to the morale of its subjects. Reduced to the half of its size with military strength, political power and economic resources crippled, subsidiary force maintained at its expense, Resident posted in its capital, inter-state relations controlled, Awadh became fully dependent on the British power. As the clout of the Resident increased in the Nawab's court, he became the main rival of the Nawab. As he gradually increased his influence, the Nawab was unable to rule his country. Thus demonstrating the rules source of authority he was also involved in exercising a form of diarchy or indirect rule of Awadh.

Role of Resident at the Court of Awadh

One of the major task of the residents was to ensure that the states does not expand their armies and they should maintain it just to carry out the normal policing in the state. A powerful functionary role played by the Resident. (the resident) to taking shape the British policy towards Awadh. Abdul Halim Sharar point out

⁴ Michael. H.Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India Residents and the Residency System 1764-1858*, Oxford University press, Delhi, 1991, p.50

⁵ Muzaffar Alam and Seema Alavi, *A European Experience of the Mughal court the I' jaz-i Arsalani (Persian letters, 1773-1779)* of Antoine –Louis Henri Polier, Oxford university press, New Delhi, 2001, p.19

⁶ Douglas Dewar, *A Hand-Book to the English pre-mutiny Records in the Government record rooms of the United Provinces of Agra And Oudh, Allahabad*, 1920, p.258

⁷ Safi Ahmad *British Aggression in Awadh*, Meenakshi prakashan, Meerut 1969,p.22

⁸ C U Aitchison *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanuds, Vol.1, Calcutta, 1863* p.229

⁹ *The Residency Lucknow, Archaeological Survey of India*, 2003, p.8

¹⁰ C U Aitchison, *A Collection of treaties Engagements and Sanuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, Vol.1 Calcutta, 1863*, p.118

that the Residence of the Envoy of the East India Company to the Court of Awadh. Officially described as Vakil, literally a lawyer but actually an envoy. Thus the British envoy was known as the Resident, for whom this was constructed by Sadat Ali Khan. As during the Mutiny of 1857 the entire British population in the area took refuge in it and it was attacked by the mutineers. The ruins of this building are still in existence.¹¹ As Colonel Munro held the office of Resident in Travancore, he assumed (with the full approbation of his own Government) the charge of the whole administration of the country. He pointed out that British Resident has of late ceased to direct the Government, and that in consequence affairs have relapsed into disorder.” He described that the subsidiary system is calculated to occasion misgovernment and oppression of the inhabitants, unless it is corrected by the influence of the British Resident.¹²

The Resident was the main pivot of the English policy towards Awadh and it is an interesting study to trace the different stages through which the influence of the resident evolved. The relationship between the Awadh ruler and the company determined to a large extent the shape of North Indian history over the entire 1764-1857 period. In 1764 the Nawab of Awadh joined hands with the Mughal emperor to restore the Bengal Nawab to the throne. But the combined forces defeated in the battle of Buxar and this conquest brought the British company into direct collision with the aggressive political ambitions of the ruler of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula. Thus the Nawab and his successor remained constricted in their action by the British represented by a Resident, making them the defacto rules of the province.

In the eighteenth century, the Resident’s position depended on the need for representations to a more or less equally. The officials of the company finally decided to use the title Resident for its agents only in 1772, the Calcutta Council discussed the legal right as well as the practicality of the company’s appointment of an ‘Ambasdor.’ Thus the company’s officials ‘are authorized to make Treaties, War and Peace with the Country powers in India, therefore they had the right to dispatch and receive political agents.¹³

In the treaty of 1773 it was decided to a permanent British Resident appointed at the court of the Nawab for the first time. This marked the beginning of the East India company’s control over Awadh. Fearing the Marathas and the Afghans, Shuja-ud-daula obtained special permission from the British to use their troops in this campaign. At the time Shuja-ud-Daulah’s revenues came to twenty-seven million rupees from which he paid eight million three hundred thousand rupees to the British.¹⁴

Fort William pointed out the result of the Resident’s efforts to assist the Nawab Vazir in ascertaining his “true and just” debts. “You will observe,” says the dispatch, among the papers now transmitted an account of Publick Debts to the end of Zelhejeh 1209 corresponding with the 18th July 1795, delivered to the Resident by Raja Tickait Roy, and amounting to Rupees 102, 40, 120.¹⁵ As the Governor General’s decision to neutralize an assurance unwisely given to the Nawab Vazir by the British Resident, that “unless asked the Governor General would not intrude his recommendation upon Excellency.” Under the intimate connexion which at the present subsists between the Vizier and the company, we deem it to be your indispensable duty to interfere whenever it shall be deemed necessary, not only with advice but with remonstrance, in order to bring about that effectual reform in his Administration, without which both his and the Company’s affairs must be constantly exposed to embarrassment.” Thus Sir John Shore was forced to abandon it in Awadh, and interfere actively in the internal affairs of that State.¹⁶

¹¹ Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow the last phase of an Oriental Culture*, Trans by E.S.Harcourt and Fakhir London, 1975, p.241

¹² Select Committee on the *Affairs of the East India Company*, *Minutes of Evidence*, Vol. VI, political or Foreign, Great Britain, parliament . House of commons, 1832, p.5

¹³ Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule In India Residents and the Residency System 1764-1858*, Oxford University press, Delhi, 1991, p.48

¹⁴ Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, Trans. By E.S.Harcourt and Fakhir London, 1975, p. 239

¹⁵ Father H. Heras, *Fort William-India House Correspondence*, 1796-1800 Vol.XVII, Delhi, 1974, p.27

¹⁶ Ibid, p.28

Heber describes that the company resident involved himself increasingly in the political affairs of Awadh from time of his first appointment, although only toward the beginning of the Nineteenth century gradually he exercised indirect rule there the number of Residents posted to local courts, and the scope of their activities, kept pace with the changing role of the company. Over the period from 1764, the company's defacto role shifted to that of a regional political and military power. The company settled both its retired and its wounded soldiers on the fringes of these Indian states there by making further inroads into their economies and political authority.¹⁷ The company's objective of monopolizing military force by recruiting a standing army of peasant soldiers was not entirely new. The Indian state of Awadh and Banaras had been experimenting with it since 1764, well before the company began to recruit from their territory. Thus the tendency of the company to centralize all power and political authority in its own hands came into conflict with the political views of many of its early luminaries, like Warren Hastings, who expounded the policy of preserving Indian traditions and institutions.¹⁸

Conclusion-

British Company expanded his power in Awadh region after the battle of Buxar appointed a Resident at Awadh Court. In 1764 battle of Buxar the Nawab was defeated by the British Company. An arrangement was made with the Nawab by which the emperor gave Ghazipur and Banaras to the British and got in return control over the Nawab's dominion. But the Court of Directors did not agree to this. Finally an arrangement was made by which a Resident representing the Company was appointed to the Awadh court. The Nawab of Awadh was appointed as the wazir of the Mughal Empire and its most military powerful official to control the Empire through his hold over the person of the Emperor. His territorial ambitions had ranged across north India to Bengal and across the lands then controlled by the Company.

After defeat at the hands of the Company, The Nawab of Awadh, still extremely powerful in military and financial terms, turned from opposition to the English to cooperation with them. Thus the Company Resident involved himself in the political affairs of Awadh from the time of this first appointment in the beginning of the nineteenth century he gradually to exercise indirect rule there.

¹⁷ Seema Alvi, *the Sepoys and the company 1770-1830*, New Delhi ,1995

¹⁸ Seema Alvi, *The Eighteenth Century in India, The article of P. J. Marshall, Economic and political Expansion : Oxford university press*, New Delhi, 2002, p.115

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