

Chapter VI

Resident's relation with other European Companies and Indian merchants.

1/ French

The English were not the only Europeans in the field of trade and commerce in India. 'They were only one of many rivers, all competing for the Indian trade, all equally ready to over-reach each other, all equally dependent on Indian Governmental favour'.⁽¹⁾ This was the nature of the relation of the European trading companies in India in the pre-Plassey period. After Plassey the position of the English somewhat changed in comparison with the other European Companies. The position of the English was further strengthened by the Grant of the Diwani in 1765. Thereafter the relation of the English East India Company with other European trading companies became not competitive but directive.

The Resident's relations with other foreign traders was one of the important aspects of the Commercial Residency. This relation of the European trading companies in India was determined by the political situation in Europe. In fact, the different companies in their relations to another company, were following the guidelines of their respective Governments. This was not the usual phenomenon. Sometimes they entered into conflict with each other due to local interests and circumstances.

(1) Spear, The Nabobs, A study of the social life of the English in 18th Century India, p.2.

Like the English and the Dutch, the French had also established an *aurung* at Malda. The French were the third European power to enter into the race for commercial transactions at Malda. The exact date of their establishment at Malda is obscure.

In Bengal, the French possessed factories at Chandernagore, Dacca, Kasimbazar, Balasore and Jugdea. Besides these, they had "Houses of Trade and other Agencies" at Soorpor, Keerpy, Malda etc. which were considered as "Subordinates to the original factories".⁽²⁾ But the French trade in Bengal was not in a flourishing condition in the first decade of the eighteenth century.⁽³⁾ In 1722, however, they succeeded in securing a Mughal *parawana* which placed them on the same footing with the Dutch.⁽⁴⁾

It is difficult to give any clear picture of the French trade at Malda in the first half of the eighteenth century, because the data regarding the matter is scarce. In the forties the French trade at Malda was obstructed by Fatechand, an influential money lender of Bengal, whose orders according to Dupleix, "carried more weight throughout the province than that of the Nawab himself".⁽⁵⁾ The boats of the French *Gomastah* at Malda were stopped at his order apparently because Dupleix had not replied to his letter.⁽⁶⁾

(2) Firminger, Rangpur District Records, Vol. V, Letter No.201.

(3) Sinha, N.K, op.cit, Vol. I.p.35.

(4) Ibid. quoted by N.K.Sinha, p.35.

(5) 'Some Aspects of French presence in Bengal : The Cossimbazar correspondence of Dupleix, 1731-40', Indrani Roy. Paper presented at Indian History Congress, Aligarh, 1975.

(6) Ibid.

The Anglo-French relations in India were determined by their relations in Europe. The war of Austrian Succession in 1740 led to deterioration in Anglo-French relations in India. However, by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle the French were entitled only to such places as were in their possession at the commencement of 1749. Accordingly, Chandernagor, Dacca, Jugdea etc. were delivered up to them including their "Houses of Trade", such as Malda, Mohanpur etc. (7)

In 1756 war broke out between France and England. It naturally led to the complete suspension of the trade of the French East India Company at Malda like their other places in India. On the return of peace in 1763, the French trade in Bengal slowly revived. In 1769 the Council of State in France passed a decree suspending the exclusive privilege of the French East India Company and declaring that French subjects might freely trade in different parts of India. This decree changed the position of the French East India Company. After this decree only the French private traders continued to operate in Bengal until 1778 when war again broke out between the French and the English.

In 1784, the Resident of Malda gave the following account of the French trade at Malda from 1763 to 1778. (8)

From the year 1763 to 1765 no business was carried on there in the name of the French. In 1765 a man named Sibcharan, an

(7) C.P.C. Vol. V, p.10, March 12, 1776.

(8) B.T.C. Vol. 44, 2nd July, 1784.

inhabitant of Badusigla in the Malda Zemindary, entered into a contract with the Chevalier at Chandernagor and purchased goods for him.

In the same year another persons named Kanai Sarker came to Malda to purchase cloth and trade in other articles on the part of Chevalier, not as a servant, but as a factor or contractor receiving a commission on his transaction. He hoisted the French Flag over the house of trade there just as the gomastahs of Englishmen did. He provided goods for the French private traders by contracts with the merchants and dealers of Malda, and also set up factories in the mofussil, one at Colliganj and another at Mahanandpore. In both these places he engaged some looms not belonging to the English Company.

Gour Mohan Seal, a gomastah of the Malda factory, then managed the English East India Company's business at Colliganj. Disputes arose between him and Kanai Sarker who wanted to carry on business according to his own pleasure. But Gour Mohan Seal told him that he must not meddle with the Company's weavers and 'assamies' and avoid all contract with them.

In the beginning of 1770, Bathoe, the Resident of East India Company at Malda compelled Kanai Sarker to take down the flag and told him that he might carry on business there but must not hoist a flag. He also persuaded the English-Gomastahs to get down their flags. Before Kanai Sarker's arrival, the French flags were never

hoisted at Malda nor did they have an established factory in that quarter. It was Kanai Sarker who purchased a piece of land in the year 1770 and erected a building in it for the French Company.⁽⁹⁾

In the year 1774 Kanai Sarker was recalled and after that the French did not send any gomastah or agent until 1784.

In March 1776, the Company's Govt. wrote to Muhammed Reza Khan about the activities of the French trader at Malda and other places. They complained that the French had stationed European Residents and employed sepoys. These Residents and sepoys of the French Company committed oppression upon the Country and seriously damaged the interest of the Company. They also requested the Naib Nazim for the removal of the sepoys engaged by the French and for issuing an order to the latter not to hoist their flag at places which were not allowed to them by treaty.⁽¹⁰⁾ Accordingly the Naib Nazim issued a parwana ordering the removal of the Frenchmen.⁽¹¹⁾ But the English Company told him that they had no objection to Frenchmen residing in any parts of the province provided they conformed to the general regulation of the Government and did not claim any exclusive privileges. It was to be noted that the French had established several Residencies in Bengal such as at Malda, Soorpur, Surul, Harial etc. without any sanction.⁽¹²⁾

(9) Foreign Deptt. Sec.Cons.No.2.4th March, 1776.

(10) C.P.C. Vol. V, p.10, March 12, 1776.

(11) Ibid. Vol. V.p.19, May 25, 1776.

(12) Ibid, N.K.Sinha. op.cit. Vol.I.p.41.

After the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles in 1763, the Frenchman who had as individuals taken part in trading activities in the East between 1769 and 1778, formed a new French East India Company. The Board of Trade in Bengal now apprehended a revival of rivalry and competition from the French and Dutch trade in Bengal.

The basic points of Anglo-French discord in the post Versailles years in Bengal were the following : - (1) the right of the Company's Government to collect duties or customs on the trade of the French; (2) the exercise of jurisdiction by the French Company within or without the limits of their factories; (3) the right of the French to hoist their flag at the factories and 'houses^{of} commerce', and (4) the employment of weavers by the French and the English for the provision of their annual investment. (13)

The latter two points directly affected the Malda factory. So we shall discuss here first the last two points.

Since Malda had for a long time been a centre of French trade they naturally returned there after the conclusion of peace. They also raised their flag over their factories and had it carried in the villages. Grant, the Resident of Malda, strongly objected to the display of flag in such a manner. (14) He considered it as an unwarranted pretension. (15)

This incident was of considerable significance. The policy adopted by the Bengal Council towards the French was at complete

(13) Progs. I.H.C.1949, 'Anglo-French differences after the Treaty of Versailles', H.R.Ghosal.

(14) B.T.C. Vol.51, 22nd August, 1786.

(15) Firminger, Bengal District Records, Dinajpur Vol.I.p.9.Charles Grant to George Hatch, 20th Sept., 1786.

variance with the policy which had been laid down by the Directors for their servants in India.⁽¹⁶⁾ The former was influenced by an apprehension of the "pernicious effect to the Company's interest and authority which might arise from any new power granted to the French Nations to hoist their flags" unconditionally.⁽¹⁷⁾

It is to be noted that after the conclusion of peace in 1763 the Directors had ordered the Council to 'assure to French subject a trade secure, free and independent, and to remove any occasion for dispute between the two countries'.⁽¹⁸⁾ Although the commercial treaty of 1766 made these instructions even more specific the Company's servants did not follow it properly. On the contrary they put their own meaning on the article of the provisional convention. They resolved that "the Flag of the most Christian Majesty should be hoisted only at the five original factories, belonging to the French at Chandernagore, Dacca, Patna, Cossimbazar and Balasore and at that factory which they have been permitted to establish in lieu of Jugdea."⁽¹⁹⁾ The Houses of Trade and other agencies such as those of Soorpore, Keerpy, Mohanpur, Serampur and Malda etc. were to be considered as subordinate to the said original factories and no permission should be granted to hoist flags in those places.⁽²⁰⁾ The Commissary was, therefore, directed to request the French Agents to discontinue the hoisting of the flags except

(16) Embree op.cit., p.81.

(17) F.W.I.H.C. Vol.XV, p.p. XX, Secret letter to Court, 11th Nov., 1766, para 33, No.79.

(18) Quoted in S.P.Sen, The French in India, 1763-1816, p.418.

(19) F.W.I.H.C. Vol. XV, p.p.XX, para 33.

(20) Ibid.

where they were permitted by this resolution.⁽²¹⁾

The difficulty which had arisen in regard to the French Native Agent at Malda related entirely to the privilege claimed by him of hoisting the French flag at his House in that place.⁽²²⁾ Probably he was guided by the instructions of Dangereux the French Chief at Chandernagar.

It is not difficult to trace the origin of the French claim at Malda. It was during the time of Bathoe that the French Native Agent had hoisted the French flag at his House at Malda. Bathoe had reported this to the Board of Trade at Calcutta. The Government in reply had instructed Bathoe to pull it down and this had accordingly been done.⁽²³⁾ But Henschman, the successor of Bathoe told Grant that he had seen a French flag flying at Malda in his time.⁽²⁴⁾ It was supposed that in the interval between Bathoe's departure from Malda and Henschman's arrival, the French had seized the opportunity of rehoisting their flag and Henschman seeing it displayed might have taken it as an established fact.⁽²⁵⁾ But the question is whether the French, when Bathoe pulled down their flag, made any remonstrances to the Governor-General-in-Council and whether in consequence the Governor-General-in-Council had confirmed or denied their right.⁽²⁶⁾ The French did not protest against it. On the other hand Henschman did

(21) Ibid, para 34.

(22) F.W.I.H.C. Vol.XV, p.711-12, letter to Court, 28th August, 1786 para 175-177.

(23) Ibid.

(24) B.T.C. Vol.51, 22nd August, 1786.

(25) Ibid.

(26) Ibid.

not inform the Board that he had seen the French flag flying there.

It must be presumed that Bathoe had acted on the supposition that the French had no right to hoist their flag at Malda. It is also to be noted that the flag was not displayed continuously during Henchman's time. Because during the greater part of his time there was no French Gomastah at Malda nor was there even an European Resident. (27)

In spite of the request of the Company's Government the French Gomastahs at Malda continued to hoist the flag. In October 1786 Charles Grant reported to the Board "the Gomastah has since not only hoisted there, but has one carried before him and his agents, when they travel into the country for the purpose of collecting cloths". (28) The flag thus became a refuge for other illicit traders.

In May 1787, the Resident informed the Board that the French Gomastah at Malda had already taken down the flag which had been hoisted in previous year. (29) The Board of Trade, however, sent to the Resident an extract of the Resolution of the Governor-General-in-Council on the subject of the permission granted to the French to hoist flags at different places. The Board decided that the French should not be allowed to hoist flag at Malda or at other specified places. If the French Agent acted contrary to this Resolution the Company's commercial servants were to remonstrate formally and if this

(27) Ibid.

(28) B.T.C. Vol. 52, 17th October, 1786.

(29) Ibid. Vol. 56, 31st May, 1787.

failed they were to report the matter. (30)

In May 1787 when the French Gomastah rehoisted the flag at Malda the Resident drew his attention to the order of prohibition and requested him to take it down. (31) The French Gomastah replied that he had displayed the flag on the order of the French Chief and could not take it down without his permission. (32)

This Anglo-French tug-of-war regarding the hoisting of flag came to an end when the Revolutionary war broke out in Europe.

Now, we shall discuss the second important point regarding the privileges of trade.

After the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, the Court of Directors had ordered Bengal Government to 'assure to French subjects, a trade, secure, free and independent; and to remove any occasion for dispute between the two countries'. (33) The provisional convention of 1786 reaffirmed the above instructions more specifically. But it was not implemented by the servants of the company in Bengal.

In a letter to the Board in June 1784 regarding the privileges of the French to trade at Malda, Grant, the Resident of Malda wrote that they had never had any 'national or peculiar privilege' (34) but like other individuals they were at liberty to buy goods from all excepting the manufacturers engaged to the Company. (35) But the French

(30) Ibid.

(31) Ibid.

(32) Ibid.

(33) Quoted in S.P.Sen. op.cit.p.418.

(34) B.T.C.Vol.44, 2nd July 1784.

(35) Ibid.

Gomastahs carried on clandestine purchase of cloths from the Company's weavers which were strictly forbidden by the Regulations of 1782.⁽³⁶⁾

Not only this, their agents went into the remote villages of the Company's weavers and purchased in cash from them cloths made with the advances of the factory.⁽³⁷⁾ They also offered most exorbitant prices to the weavers for their cloths far exceeding that paid by the Company.⁽³⁸⁾ This practice encouraged the weavers to carry on a clandestine trade with their cloths.⁽³⁹⁾ The result was that the weavers had become averse to work for the Company.⁽⁴⁰⁾

This state of things was not peculiar to Malda alone. In other places also the French tempted the weavers to break their engagements with the Company. But there was also a remedy. All who failed in the due performance of their agreements, could be prosecuted in the Court of law of the Resident-Contractors, and the Country Courts were subservient enough. But Udney and other Resident Contractors did not apparently consider that this was enough.

In May 1787, the Gomastah of the English Resident at Colliganj seized the French Gomastah's peons along with 21 pieces of cloths which they were carrying for their Houses of Trade at Malda.⁽⁴¹⁾ The French Commissary at Chandernagar requested the Governor-General to release the peons and also the seized pieces of cloths.⁽⁴²⁾ They also complained

(36) Ibid. Vol.52, 17th October, 1786.

(37) Ibid.

(38) Ibid. Vol.56, 2nd May 1787.

(39) Ibid.

(40) Ibid.

(41) B.T.C. Vol. 57, 15th June, 1787.

(42) Ibid. Letter to the Governor-General from Chandernagar.

that the Resident of Malda had also forbidden the weavers to work for the French Company.⁽⁴³⁾ He had also extended this embargo upon the bleachers.

On the other hand Udney took a very alarmist view of what he described as an invasion of the Company's rights by the French and restricted the movements of the Dellois employed by the French as much as he could.⁽⁴⁴⁾ He thought that they would otherwise 'sap the very foundation'⁽⁴⁵⁾ of the Company's trade. He reported that there was an illicit correspondence between some Armenian merchants working for the French and the Gomastahs of the Company's factory at Jaggennathpur.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Udney also pointed out that the French did not take 'rowanah' for all their goods. In order to hide their transactions the French followed this tactics.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The French claimed that the first establishment of trade in white cloths at Malda was due to them. Since 1778 the servants of the English Company had been employing the deserted workers who were once under the French Company. The French now wanted to regain their former position at Malda. But in every respect they were being obstructed by the servants of the English Company and this was hampering their business.

Udney proposed that the Frenchmen should employ 'uninitiated weavers' i.e. the child-weavers engaged by their fathers in weaving

(43) Ibid.

(44) Ibid. Vol.53, 24th July, 1787.

(45) Ibid.

(46) Ibid.

(47) Ibid.

coarse cloth.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Dangereux protested against this pretended right of employing the skilled weavers of Malda by the English Company to exercise their monopoly there.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The French demanded that either a reasonable number of good weavers should be assigned to them at Malda or every Company should be left at liberty to contract with any weaver they liked.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The French Agent General also pointed out that the French had twelve hundred weavers at Malda before the war.⁽⁵¹⁾ The total number of weavers or looms engaged in the different out-stations of the Malda factory was 7400. So it was not difficult on the part of the English to assign them a certain number of weavers. He concluded his letter to the Governor-General with the remark that a Frenchman might be as reasonable as an Englishman.⁽⁵²⁾

In a letter to the Board, Udny wrote that the number of the Company's looms in the five outstations of Malda viz., Colliganj, Surroupganj, Singhea, Jagannathpur and Nirschindapur was 4533 and not 7400.⁽⁵³⁾ These looms were called "Cautbundy" which means of long-standing, receiving money from the Company per month. ~~XXXX~~

Udny admitted that his own private investment and that of the Company's were inextricably blended.⁽⁵⁴⁾ After fulfilling the Company's contract he purchased only such cloths on his own account as were considered below the Company's standard. He pointed out that

(48) Sinha, N.K... op.cit.p.47.

(49) B.T.C.Vol.60, 22nd Sept, 1787, letter to the Governor-General-in-Council from Chandernagar.

(50) Ibid.

(51) Ibid.

(52) Ibid.

(53) Ibid.Vol.61, 19th Oct. 1787.

(54) Quoted by N.K.Sinha, op.cit.p.48.

in this way many new weavers were employed. It was only for this reason that the French objected. They believed that in the interest of the Company's servants' private trade more weavers were employed than the Company's investment required.⁽⁵⁵⁾ They also argued that the French competition was really with the English private traders not with the Company.

The other two points of the Anglo-French dissension were inter-related. The French E.I.Co. challenged the validity of the English E.I.Co's right to collect customs duty as they did not enjoy the full administrative power at that time. The French pleaded independence of the "Country" Government and wanted that their servants' dependents should be exempted from the jurisdiction of the Company's Courts.⁽⁵⁶⁾ And that they and their dependents real or reputed were amenable only to the King of France.

The Board of Trade refuted all the above mentioned claims made by the French. They argued in the following way. Firstly, the Treaty of Peace only placed them in the same position in which they were before the war. They had, then, no permission to engage the English Company's weavers, nor had they any specific proportion of the manufacturers allotted to them. Their right to a certain number of the weavers of Bengal was also fallacious. Because the number of weavers employed by the French at any given time must be wholly

(55) Ibid.op.cit.p.48.

(56) B.P.C.Vol.61, 19th October, 1937.

immaterial and irrelevant, unless it could be proved that their claim was based on a public grant of partition. (57)

Secondly, their plea for total independence of the Country Government was also untenable. The 'Firman' of the Emperor Farruksiyar was generally considered as the most ample grant given by any of the effective sovereigns of Hindustan to the European Companies in Bengal. Neither that 'Firman', nor the 'Sannud' from Siraj-ud-daulah, nor the Sannud of Jafar Ali Khan conveyed such vast privileges as the French claims implied. The right granted to the European colonies..... trying their own countrymen living under their flag was both as to its nature and extent a very different thing. A local jurisdiction \surd in their principal settlement was no doubt necessary for their welfare but such an 'Independence' of the laws and Government of the Country were incompatible with sovereignty in the Government. (58)

Thirdly, the administrative power which the English Company enjoyed over the country had been conferred on them by the Emperor Shah Alam and the Nabobs of Bengal subsequent to the treaty of 1763. But there was nothing in the famous Sanads to warrant this assumption of independence by the French.

The French were harping on two demands namely, a limitations of English private trade and a share of weavers for their trade. The Board did not agree to this and assigned the following reasons for this noncomplicance.

(57) Ibid.

(58) Ibid.

(1) The productive capacity of a worker who can weave a particular piece of cloth in six weeks can not be increased if the same worker is employed by different companies at the same time.

(2) The fixed (permanent) number of manufacturers in a country can not go beyond their capacity on demand. If they are much pressed they will turn to husbandry or some other means of subsistence.

(3) The English East India Company pointed out that the ex-employees of the French East India Company had either been employed by the English East India Company or by the Dutch, or by the Danes and individuals.

(4) They employ labourers from other trades at higher wages or they may engage inexperienced workers. (59)

The idea of any general and permanent system of grading skilled and unskilled labour was discarded by the English. The French then demanded the share of the general produce as they enjoyed before their departure. But this proposal also was not accepted by the English East India Company. Then the French contended that they would like to contract with the same weavers who were already in contract with the English East India Company i.e. they wanted the "labour of the same man".

The English East India Company rejected this proposal on the ground that it would give rise to complications which would not be beneficial to either party. Because a particular weaver is to supply

a particular amount of goods in a specified time. How can he work for both the parties at the sametime?⁽⁶⁰⁾

The Court of Directors was disgusted at the attitude of their servants towards the French. In 1788 they sent out a despatch to the Governor-General-in-Council to allow the French the freedom of trade.⁽⁶¹⁾ It was not only the policy of the British Government but also the plan of Henry Dundas who wanted to curtail the power and autonomy of the English East India Company. Dundas looked upon the French commercial competition in Bengal as a valuable ally in fulfilling his desire. Therefore, he insisted that the French traders should not be obstructed by the Company's servants.⁽⁶²⁾ But Charles Grant was the most formidable defender of the Company against the attempts of Dundas.⁽⁶³⁾

In 1789 the Revolution broke out in France and it greatly hampered French trade in India. Finally, the Revolutionary war which continued upto 1814 brought French trade to an end.

During the remaining years we do not find any reference to French competition in Malda.

II Dutch

Like the French, the Dutch also had considerable commercial transactions in the Malda area. The Dutch were the first European

(60) Ibid.

(61) Quoted by Embree, p.82.

(62) C.H.Philips, The East India Company, p.p. 47-48.

(63) Quoted in Embree, p.p. 160-77.

merchants at Malda. The exact date of their establishment at Malda is not known. The Diaries of Streyngsham Master recorded that "in 1676 the Dutch had six factories in Bengal, viz. Chinsura, Cossimbazar, Balasore, Patna, Dacca and Malda. (64) Richard Edward, the English merchant who visited Malda on 14th Oct. 1676 referred to the names of the Dutch merchants. (65) The investment of the Dutch at Malda in 1676 was only Rs. 50,000 a mere fraction of the investments of Indian merchants. (66) Grose also noted that the Dutch East India Company had factories at Malda, Dacca, and Hughly in Bengal. (67) In the year 1747 the Dutch East India Company held the following places in Bengal: Hughly, Balasore, Cossimbazar, Malda, Patna and Dacca etc. (68) They claimed 'premier rank' among the Europeans at Murshidabad Darbar. (69) The Dutch were, in fact, the principal commercial rival of the English in this province even in 40's of the eighteenth century. (70) Naturally there was a keen competition between them in the matter of procuring suitable articles of export from the different manufacturing centres. But the Dutch "attempt to establish an Indo-Batavian empire was foiled after Bedara. (71)

(64) R.C. Temple, op.cit. Vol. II, p.92.

(65) Ibid. Vol. I, p.25.

(66) Ibid. Vol. II, p.401.

(67) Grose, A Voyage to the East Indies, Vol. I, p.305.

(68) Macgregor, Commercial Statistics, Vol. I, p.823.

(69) S.C. Hill, op.cit. Vol. II, p.257.

(70) K.K. Dutta, The Dutch in Bengal and Bihar, p.8.

(71) Malleon, The Decisive Battles of India, p.124.

The Convention of August 1760 reduced the Dutch in Bengal to a humiliating and precarious position. It was in this background that we should discuss the English East India Company's relation with the Dutch at Malda.

The first Anglo-Dutch rupture at Malda after Bedara took place in 1763. The English Company's Resident at Malda complained to the Council in Calcutta that the Gomastahs of the Dutch Company had been greatly obstructing the company's investment and clandestinely procuring cloths from the weavers engaged by the English Company.⁽⁷²⁾ The unusual scarcity of weavers was the chief cause of the adoption of such a policy by the Dutch.⁽⁷³⁾ This scarcity of weavers greatly hampered the investment of all the European Companies in Bengal. This naturally led to competition among the Gomastahs of the different companies "to seduce the weavers" from the service of the others.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Lord Clive and Verelst, tried to bring about a settlement of the dispute.⁽⁷⁵⁾

The Dutch proposed a 'distribution of the tanti (weavers)' among the European Companies.⁽⁷⁶⁾ But Verelst was of opinion that the partition of the weavers would not only "be a difficult and lengthy business", but would also "bring the Nizamat into contempt".⁽⁷⁷⁾

(72) Home-Pub.progs.23rd June,1763.

(73) Letter from Verelst to Court of Directors, 17th March, 1767.

(74) Ibid.

(75) C.P.C.Vol.II,p.122.

(76) Ibid.

(77) Ibid.

The Dutch were, however, granted some new concessions as a result of which, it was hoped, "the output of the goods will increase."⁽⁷⁸⁾ After 1765, the Dutch Company reduced the number of its own Gomastahs and began to depend more and more on clandestine agreements with the English Company servants. In these dealings the Dutch Chief played an important part because even in the 1770's the English Company's servants did not dare to gather cloths openly for the Dutch. All these transactions were carried on secretly under the names of Indian Gomastahs who sold cloths to the Dutch Chief in private capacity.⁽⁷⁹⁾

As a result of this contract Ross, the Dutch chief at Chinsura made an enormous profit in collusion with the English servants at aurungs of Malda and Birbhum. Thomas Henchman, the Resident of Malda, had been in close association with Ross and Charles Grant himself had no scruples about continuing such business.⁽⁸⁰⁾ He was happily engaged in this until the war with the Dutch in Europe suddenly interrupted this kind of collaboration in Bengal.

After the conclusion of peace in 1783 the English East India Company's relation with the other European Companies entered a new phase. The old rivals of the East India Company had been practically ousted from the foreign trade of Bengal and the East India Company had attained a virtual monopoly.⁽⁸¹⁾

(78) Ibid.

(79) Holden Furber, John Company at work, p.p. 81-82.

(80) Ibid.

(81) Mazharul Haq, op.cit.p.205.

In August 1785 the Dutch Gomastahs of Malda complained to their authority at Chinsura about the impediments which they met at Malda in the manufacturing of cloth.⁽⁸²⁾ Their Gomastahs of Mohammadpur and Surrupganj aurungs had advanced some money to the dellols and weavers for cloths. But the English Resident at Malda ordered by sounding of drum that none of the weavers at Mohammadpur and the places adjacent to it should undertake to manufacture cloths for the Dutch. They also threatened that if anybody violated this order he would be punished.⁽⁸³⁾

Similarly, the Dutch Gomastahs of Badalgachi⁽⁸⁴⁾ reported that Jagmohun Bandopadhyaya, the English Gomastah, at Saumganj ordered by sounding the drum that the weavers should not manufacture a single piece of cloth for any foreign merchant.⁽⁸⁵⁾

The English Resident at Malda wrote to the Board that the complaint was unjust.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Because he had only repeated the standing orders of the Government against illicit trade with the weavers employed by the Company and had given necessary instructions for their prevention.

In Sept. 1785, the Dutch Gomastahs of Buddel and Jaggannathpore reported that the English Company's Gomastahs had threatened to burn their place of business within eight days.⁽⁸⁷⁾ They also alleged that on Grant's order six sepoy's under a Havildar had marched into

(82) B.T.C. Vol.48, 16th August, 1785.

(83) Ibid.

(84) A village in Naogaon. Subdivision of the Rajshahi district.

(85) B.T.C. Vol.48, 16th August, 1785.

(86) Ibid. Vol.48, 6th Sept., 1785.

(87) B.T.C. Vol.48, 20th Sept. 1785; Furbber, op.cit.p.87-88.

the villages to deprive them of the facilities for washing the Dutch Company's cloths; and to set spies upon the weavers. (88)

Grant denied these accusations and pointed out that he had done nothing but published the English Company's weaving regulations of 1775 and 1782. These regulations forbade the weaving of cloths for foreign companies by the English Company's weavers. Whatever may be the truth of the matter, it was clear that the English Company's Gomastahs possessed powers of intimidation which the Gomastahs of other European Companies did not have. (89)

After a perusal of the above events we can easily conclude that the chief cause of the Anglo-Dutch rupture of Malda was the clandestine trade carried on by the Dutch. The Dutch had no 'cautbundy' weaver in the Malda area like the English. All the weavers of the Malda area were practically the 'cautbundy' weavers of the English Company. Naturally the Dutch had no other alternative than to make clandestine purchases. In fact, the English East India Company had already established its monopoly of business in the Malda area as in manufacturing centres in Bengal after 1765.

III Armenians

Besides the English, the French, the Dutch, the Armenian merchants also carried on business at Malda during the first half

(88) Ibid.

(89) Ibid.

of the period of our study. As a commercial community they played an important part in the inter-Asian trade. In the economic history of Bengal they had a significant role in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Armenians were mainly concentrated at Dacca, Chinsura, Saidabad and Chandernagore.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In the Malda area they had no permanent establishments. They sent their agents to Malda to buy different assortments of cloths for export. But they were gradually ousted from the markets of Bengal due to the phenomenal expansion of English East India Company's investment. The private trade of the Company's servants also hampered their business. Bolts has given a vivid picture of British highhandedness against the Armenians.⁽⁹¹⁾

It was during the time of George Udny that a conflict began with the Armenian merchants at Malda. In July 1787, Udny wrote to the Board that the commercial rights of the company had been alarmingly invaded by the French and Armenian merchants,⁽⁹²⁾ particularly, the French merchants sapped the very foundation of the Company's establishment by carrying on an illicit trade in cloths with the Gomastahs of the Company's aurung at Jaggannathpore.⁽⁹³⁾ He mentioned that Sarkes Munasskar, an Armenian merchant, and his son had for several months been receiving from the Company's weavers of Jaggannathpore, cloths made for the company.⁽⁹⁴⁾ This diversion of cloths from the aurung of Jaggannathpore was further aggravated by the participation of the

(90) N.K.Sinha, Vol.I, op.cit.p.71.

(91) Bolts, op.cit.p.p.195-197.

(92) B.T.C. Vol.58, 24th July, 1787.

(93) Ibid.

(94) Ibid.Vol.59, 3rd August, 1787.

dellols of the English Company. It is to be noted that Jaggannathpore was one of the chief out-stations of this factory which supplied cloths to the Company. The result of this illicit trade resulted in a reduction of supplies to the Company and materially affected the investment of the Company in this zone.⁽⁹⁵⁾

On the other hand, Sarkes Munasskar submitted a petition to the Board in the same month about his own grievances.⁽⁹⁶⁾ He pointed out that since 1771 he had been stationed there as an agent of some Armenian merchants for the purchase of cloths to the amount of 30 to 40,000 / rupees a year in a commission of 5%.⁽⁹⁷⁾ He had carried on this business without any hindrance since the time of Thomas Henschman. But George Udny, the present Resident, without any proper reason had been disgracing, molesting and injuring his dellols, Hingunlall and Byzenath respectively. He pointed out that the annual production of Malda factory was more or less 1,50,000 piece of cloths of different assortments which was much in excess of the requirements of the English Company. So the surplus was available for sale by others without any detriment to the interests of the English Company and naturally there was no possibility of the reduction of the Company's investment.

But inspite of this Udny stationed sepoy's at the houses of every weaver and ordered the Company's seal to be affixed to the

(95) Ibid.

(96) Ibid. Vol.58, 24th July, 1787.

(97) Ibid.

cloths made by them. The result was that the servants of the Company seized every piece and carried them away pretending to have done so for the Company. In this way the Resident collected 52 bales containing 5200 pieces of cloth by depriving the private merchants. The privileges of the private merchants for the purchase cossases from 7 to 10 rupees a piece, was also disregarded. A peon of Sarkes Munasskar was also arrested by Creighton of Jaggannathpur outstation, subordinate to the Malda Residency.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Thus the condition of the Armenians at Malda was deplorable.

In conclusion we may say that in the face of organised monopoly by the English East India Company, the French, the Dutch and the Armenians were helpless. Because the English East India Company's servants were armed with administrative power backed by superior force which they relentlessly used whenever they thought it necessary. This practice of the Company's officers inevitably compelled the other merchants to adopt corrupt practices to carry out their trade. They sometime induced the weavers to accept their advances and offered higher prices. They also seduced the dellols and Gomastahs of the English Company's aurangs which were situated at distant places from the head factory for the clandestine sell of cloths. This was the common practice adopted by the Dutch, the French and the Armenians at Malda.

(98) Ibid.

On the other hand the servants of the Company often misused their power by arresting, seizing and imprisoning the dellois and peons of other companies and private merchants. They did not always follow the regulations of the Government. Sometimes they were guided by their own interest. The chief interest of the servants of the Company's Residencies was their own private trade. It was only for this interest that they wanted to eliminate the competition of the private merchants.