

Introduction

Stephen N. Ray once cautioned David Kopf while he was under his guidance at the University of Chicago, "selecting the major theme for your first work of scholarship is like selecting a wife". He further added "in either case, the better the choice, the more enduring and fruitful the relationship".⁽¹⁾

At the time of my own selection, I was well aware of the dictum of Stephen N. Ray and confidently expected that my "marriage" with the Malda factory will be fruitful.

"Of all varieties of history" wrote Sir John Clapham, "the economic is the most fundamental".⁽²⁾ So for the choice of the economic history research field I was guided by the above statement of Clapham. Again Ramesh Chandra Dutta, the well known historian remarked, "the history of India is not the history of the British and French wars, but the history of the people of India, their material and moral condition, their trades and industries, and agriculture".⁽³⁾ In fact the 17th and 18th Century India is of exceptional interest for two reasons. First, it saw the rise of a great number of manufacturing and trading centres under the aegis of the Mughal Empire. Secondly, it also saw the early phases of the penetration by the new European commercial interests, the English,

(1) David Kopf, British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance, pp. preface.

(2) Charles Wilson, Economic History and Historians, p.128.

(3) R.C. Dutt, The Economic History of India, Vol. I. Under Early British rule, (1757 - 1837), p.69.

the Dutch and the French into the Indian economy.⁽⁴⁾

The primary object of the present dissertation is to study the trade and organisation of the English East India Company's Factory at Malda mainly from 1757 - 1833. The Factories of the different European Companies played a dominant role in the history of India in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. But till now no serious attempt has been made by the researchers to reveal the nature of the commercial activities of the different European factories. This may be a key to the better understanding of the Economic history of Bengal. So a comprehensive work on this virgin and untouched field is urgently needed.

The second object is to trace the origin, growth and decay of Malda as an important trade centre of pre-colonial and post-colonial period. Dr. S.P.Sen urged, "A very useful contribution will be made if someone takes up a detailed study of the trade centres in Bengal". Because "the rise and fall of the trade centres reflected the changing currents of history".⁽⁵⁾ Again Dr. Jagadish Narayan Sarker advocated a detailed study of the settlements made by the European powers in India.⁽⁶⁾ The present study attempts to discuss these objectives.

(4) Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol.XV, part III. Dec. 1972 Article - Miscellaneous, B.G.Gokhale, p.311.

(5) S.P.Sen (ed). Studies in Modern Indian History, pp.176 - 177.

(6) Jadavpur University Journal of History, Vol.I. 1971 - 72, Article : Towns in Mughal India, Jagadish Narayan Sarker, p. 43 - 44.

Some explanation of the choice of the topic is called for.

Few cities in Bengal can claim like Malda such a romantic past as this Hindu and Muslim capital of Bengal. Although Malda, today, is not even the shadow of her former self, her name conjures up a picture of the magnificence, the grandeur, the splendour of a great Eastern Capital of bygone days. Hunter truly remarked, "Malda, the metropolis of Bengal, with its long line of kings, its gigantic walls and arches, its once stately palaces now the Kennels of Jackals and the vast untenanted city which has been left standing as a spectacle of desolation and warning to those who now are to India what its builders once were..... In a thin folio not a single page has been devoted to its history".⁽⁷⁾ But it is to be noted that my interest is confined here not to the political side of Malda, but to economic.

My first contention is that hitherto no detailed factory wise study of the East India Company's activities in Bengal has been attempted. The second reason is that Malda was the first place in North Bengal where the different European companies established their settlements. Thirdly, Malda was an important trade centre of the later medieval Bengal. Fourthly, the silk industry of Malda has a traditional past and is still the life blood of the district. Fifthly, all the previous works on the Economic History of Bengal dealt mainly with South Bengal only. They did not attach much importance to the

(7) Hunter, The Annals of Rural Bengal, p.11.

Economic History of North Bengal. In addition to these, this search will divulge the nature of the economic decline of Malda created by the impact of the English factory.

The period 1757 - 1833 has certain distinctive features which is important to Malda factory. During this period the East India Company's trade at Malda greatly flourished. Because the political revolution of 1757 and the grant of Diwani in 1765 removed all oppressions of of the Nawab's officers which were prevalent before Plassey. And now the oppressed became oppressors. During Grant's time the Company's investment through Malda factory amounted to £ 50,000 annually. In 1832 the Malda Residency who bifurcated between Jungipur and Bauleah Residencies and was closed down.

The period was also important for certain international events which indirectly affected the trade and commercial policy of the East India Company. The most important of them were the Industrial Revolution, French Revolution and the Revolutionary wars.

The arrangement of the thesis is topical not chronological. Basically it is an attempt to emphasize the study of regional history. Thus the dissertation is very modest in its claims and aims. I shall feel very happy if this work is accepted by my teachers and other scholars as a mere halting step of a beginner.