

Chapter II

History of the Malda Factory from 1680-1833

The establishment of a factory at Malda in 1680 by the English East India Company was a significant event in the economic history of North Bengal. Because, it was from this place that the Company gradually spread its economic tentacles all over North Bengal and the adjacent Himalayan States within the span of a century. Lord Palmerston had very truly remarked in another context "the original settlers began with a factory, the factory grew into a fort, the fort expanded into a District, and the District into a province"⁽¹⁾.

Now the question is why did the English select Malda as a place for their factory? The story behind the exploration of Malda as place of manufacture and trade by the English was curious. The Company's servants who had been sent to Rajmahal to superintend the coinage of English bar silver in the Mughal-mint there, had during leisure hours explored the neighbourhood. Some of the factors well acquainted with these parts chief among whom was probably John Marshall, gave their opinion that 'Malda on the other side of the Ganges, where the Dutch have lately built a factory', was a place eminently suitable for the provision of coarse goods proper for Europe⁽²⁾. Master^(2a) seized upon this information as a

(1) Quoted in R.C.Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol.I.p.5.

(2) R.C.Temple - The Diaries vol.I.p.25(Introduction)

(2a) An English Factor.

chance of carrying out the clause in his commission allowing him to purchase any goods suitable for the 'home' markets, not hitherto imported into England. So he proposed that some hundreds of rupees should be invested in samples of goods to be procured at Malda⁽³⁾. It was no doubt partly in the hope of creating a trade in Muslin that Master wanted to start a factory at Malda⁽⁴⁾.

The immediate cause was that as the Company sent its bullion to be coined at Rajmahal the advantage of a settlement near at hand was perceived. The nearness of Malda to the mint was important. Because the merchants thought that it would be very convenient to consign the silver bar there and therefrom to send it to Rajmahal for turning into coin⁽⁵⁾. Besides, the geographical and commercial position of Malda was very happy for the establishment of a factory⁽⁶⁾. In fact, it was the general policy of the East India Company to establish factory at a place which was connected with the river. There is a proverb that 'where there was a river there was a settlement of the East India Company'. Naturally, the Company's settlements and its sphere of influence had a tendency to develop in the valley of the Ganges and its tributaries⁽⁷⁾.

However, it appears from the Diary of Streyntsham Master that "on December 14, 1676, Mr. Edwards, being now going with the

(3) Temple. op.cit.p.25.

(4) Ibid.136.

(5) Ibid. p.25

(6) Vide Supra, chapter I,

(7) F.P.Robinson - The Trade of the East India Company.
(1709 - 1813), p.59.

Honourable Companey's treasure to the mint at Rajamall, it is thought fitt that, as soone as he shall put that business in a good forwardness, he doe make a step over to Malda and to inform himself well of the manner of the trade in the place and to give councell an account thereof in writing ...".⁽⁸⁾

In accordance with the instructions Edwards sent a report in December 1676, about the market prices of goods generally available at Malda and the persons who dealt in those commodities and the means of transport adopted for movement of the commodities⁽⁹⁾. Along with the report he also sent samples of some of those commodities amounting to Rs. 845 in value. The sale in England of Malda goods at once turned out to be satisfactory. On 12th December 1677, the Court of Directors wrote of Malda goods "we find the goods of which you sent us musters are very well and therefore we have ordered a large quantity thereof to be provided; to which end we order that you should invest thereof.... to the value of 80 or 100000"⁽¹⁰⁾.

Edwards' report was obviously considered to be favourable by the authorities of the English East India Company. Its first important feature was that it made provision for the establishment of a new factory at Malda. But the Council had come to the conclusion that there were not enough factors available to enable this to be done; and cloth from Malda required for England was,

(8) R.C.Temple - op.ci.vol.I.p.398-99

(9) Ibid.vol.I.p.25-26

(10) Ibid.p.26; Bengal and Madras Papers vol.I.p.142.

therefore, obtained through merchants at Kasimbazar⁽¹¹⁾. Master realished the need for more factors and wrote to England, and asked the Company to send additional recruits. Nevertheless, two factors, Fitche Nedham and Trenchfield as well as one writer Jonathan Prickman, were allotted to Malda as chief, second and third respectively⁽¹²⁾. On 13th December 1679 Master and his Council gave further directions for the establishment of the factory including the building of a house to be entirely of brick, on open and high ground, near the river⁽¹³⁾. It was intended to be place of defence⁽¹⁴⁾. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXPXXX

It was not until April 1680 that an attempt was made to found a permanent establishment of Malda. The factory was started under Vincent's own supervision. But the starting of the new factory at Malda which lies about twenty miles from Rajmahal, had its difficulties. The first thing to do was to hire a residence for the factors. However, they hired a house of brick "very much out of repair, the rooms being for blackness and darkness more like dungeons than dwelling houses"⁽¹⁵⁾. This house was within the town.

The endeavours of the factors to purchase a piece of ground for their factory at Malda failed⁽¹⁶⁾. At last Raja Roy Choudhury,

(11) Fawcett - The English Factories in India, 1670-1677 vol.IV
(New series) p.213.

(12) Ibid.p.214.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Firminger - Malda Diary p.5.

(15) Ibid.p.4.

(16) Ibid.p.81.

a zamindar , invited them to inspect a piece of his land lying on the other side of the river about two miles distant from Malda. "It is the highest land and lying conveniently by the river side which runs almost due south the extent of our ground by the river". There were no thatched houses of Indians in this place which endangered the Company's factory by fire etc⁽¹⁷⁾. So factors bought the site for the small sum Rs. 300/-.

In January 1681 the factors resolved to start building on the ground they had purchased, so as to provide facilities for storing, pricing and curing cloth there, which would save the tax that was levied on it at Malda⁽¹⁸⁾. Their evident intent to establish the factory outside the jurisdiction of that town naturally led to opposition. The person most affected was the Izaradar or farmer of the taxes, whose income was lessened by the removal of the factory. He held the firm from Haranarayan, Kanungo (customs officers) of Bengal who had taken Malda on lease from Shaista Khan. The zamindars of Malda and others complained that the building of the factory outside that place would prejudice their rents to the extent of some Rs. 20000. But Vincent pointed out that this claim was fallacious, as the rent of the place had been fixed before the establishment of the factory and without the prospect of an increase of revenue from it. But the local sub-lessee no doubt suffered from its removal.

(17) Ibid.p.82.

(18) Fawcett - op.cit.p.260.

In May 1681 the Fauzdar on behalf of the Izaradar called all the Company's dailals and pycars and forced them to give written undertakings that they would not price any goods for it, except those that were taxed at Malda⁽¹⁹⁾. Nedham, the chief of Malda did not pay much attention to it. He called the new factory 'Englezabad', signifying a town of the English making' and he got washers and other workers to come from Malda and settle near the new factory notwithstanding intimidation by the local officers.

In July 1681, Nedham had a conflict with Jamsher Beg, the head-revenue officer about the duty on cloth and the new factory⁽²⁰⁾. On 31st August a letter came from Ray Balchand ordering the factors to leave 'Englezabad' and go to Malda where they could buy and sell their goods⁽²¹⁾. Vincent blamed Hervey, another factor, for not obtaining orders from the Nawab to prevent interference with the 'Englezabad' factory. Hervey answered that the Company had ordered factory to be built at Malda whereas it has been built outside that place. This tug of war between the Company's factors at Malda and the Nawab's officials continued until the arrival of william Hedges in Bengal in 1682. Hedges secured three 'parwana' for the Company from the Nawab. The third 'parwana' was for relief of greivances at Malda.

(19) Firminger - op.ci.p.109.

(20) Ibid.p.124.

(21) Ibid. p. 131; Fawcett. op.cit.p.260.

In the year 1684 an untoward incident happened at the factory at Malda. Shaista Khan ordered its demolition due to the Anglo-Mughal rupture at Hughly. And the factory at Malda was pulled down in 1686 on a false information given by a 'Jammadar' that it was a fort⁽²²⁾.

Meanwhile, Baramal, a Hindu friend of the English, who had influence in the Nawab's 'darbar', tried to make peace between the English and the Nawab. By the end of December 1686, Watts accompanied by Baramal arrived at Sutanatee from Dacca. Baramal had power to accommodate, and through him Charnock sent up his demands to Shaista Khan⁽²³⁾. He asked that the Nawab should rebuild the factory at Malda which had been destroyed. The Nawab in reply appointed as his commissioners Baramal and two others, and allowed them to treat for peace⁽²⁴⁾. In three days they agreed upon twelve articles of which the Ninth article provided that the Nawabs should rebuild the Malda factory⁽²⁵⁾.

In August 1688, the Court of Directors wrote "Settle Malda factory again as soon as possible you can, it being certainly a very gainful factory"⁽²⁶⁾. But Charnock thought it unwise to start business in the outlying factories. However, the factory was re-established in the end of 1688. But the Court wrote to Charnock

(22) Quoted in N.N.Raye - Early Annals of the English Settlement in Bihar, p.95.

(23) Wilson and Carey - Glimpses of the Olden Times, p.60.

(24) Ibid.p.61.

(25) Yule - op.cit.vol.II.p.IX-LXII.

(26) Bengal and Madras Papers vol. I.p.505.

in 1693 to reduce the Malda and Dacca factories due to their exorbitant charge and instructed him to settle at Seerpur⁽²⁷⁾. Eyre, the new Agent had formed the opinion that the reduction of the subordinate factories had occasioned considerable difficulty in procuring investment to provide the ships of the season and that Seerpur could not furnish one quarter of the goods produced at Dacca and Malda⁽²⁸⁾. Therefore, the re-establishment of Malda and Dacca factories was recommended⁽²⁹⁾.

In 1696, Malda factory was captured by Rahim Khan, a rebellious Afghan chief⁽³⁰⁾. But it was soon recovered by Jabardast Khan⁽³¹⁾. In 1697, the English sent Khoja Sarhad, an influential Armenian merchant, with a present to the camp of Jabardast Khan to ask the property of the English at Malda, which had been recovered from the rebels, to be restored to its original owners⁽³²⁾.

These negotiations produced very little result. Jabardast Khan refused to restore any of the goods and the English had to turn to Azim-us-shan for redress. Towards the end of the year Khoja Sarhad, together with Stanley and Walsh, appeared in the camp of the prince at Burdwan, for the purpose of advocating the English claims. Here they met with partial success⁽³³⁾.

(27)C.R.Wilson - Old Fort William in Bengal, vol.I.p.12.

(28)John Bruce - Annals of the Honorable East India Company vol.III.p.171-172.

(29)Ibid.p.173.

(30)C.R.Wilson - The Early Annals of the English in Bengal , vol.I.p.148-49.

(31)Ibid.p.149.

(32)Ibid.p.150.

(33)Carey and Wilson - op.cit. p.III.

In 1699 the Court of Directors gave instruction for the re-establishment of a factory at Malda and to make the investment as large as possible⁽³⁴⁾. However, Sir Edward Littleton, who had established factories at Dacca and Balasore could not attempt to establish any factory at Malda for want of factors and writers⁽³⁵⁾.

In 1723 the Council decided to settle the factories at Dacca and Malda⁽³⁶⁾. They were aware that they must first have the permission from the Nawab and for this it was necessary to obtain his favour through presents. The Nawab demanded Rs.40,000 for issuing a parwana permitting the English to establish the Dacca and Malda factories. Frankland, the Chief of the Kasimbazar factory/ agreed to pay a sum of Rs.20,000 to the Nawab. Sometime later the Nawab issued a 'parwana' permitting the English to re-establish the Dacca factory, but he remained silent about the Malda one. The Council had sent Messers Bonket and Russell with Rs.20,000 to open their investment at Malda even before Frankland had started negotiations with the Nawab for securing his permission⁽³⁷⁾. But the English trade at Malda was obstructed by the people of Darpanatrayan, the Zamindar of that place. The Calcutta Council, therefore, decided to write a petition to the Nawab and at the same time they permitted Bonket and Russell to withdraw to ~~Makhdampur~~ Makhdampur which was adjacent to Malda and out of Darpa Narayan's jurisdiction.

(34) Bruce - op.cit. vol.III. pp.284-85.

(35) Ibid.

(36) Cons. 19th Jan. 1723. quoted in Abdul Karim, Murshid Quli and his Times, p.179

(37) Ibid.

In July 1723, the Nawab sent some officers to survey the English factory at Makhdampur. What reports the officers submitted to the Nawab is not known, but during the following months, the obstacles to their business from the Government and from Darpanarayan's people increased. The Fauzdar also ordered the English factors to leave the place.

In order to solve this problem the Calcutta Council took some important decisions. Firstly, they directed Frankland, "to endeavour to accommodate the difference either with Darpanarayan or the Nawab". Secondly, they sent a few soldiers to Makhdampur to meet the situation. Thirdly, they asked their Vakil at Hugly to make the public protestations against this injustice and warned that "unless we have redress we shall be obliged to stop their shipping, boats and their trade of Bengal"⁽³⁸⁾. The Calcutta Council took further action by sending soldiers to Makhdampur to reinforce the soldiers already sent.

On the other hand the Fauzdar of Rajmahal was proceeding against the English with a large force. Thus the English in Bengal were involved in a long dispute with the Nawab for the Makhdampur factory. The Company, therefore, requested Tuttichand to represent the Makhdampur affair to the Nawab, but it did not produce any good effect. The Nawab insisted that they should leave Makhdampur and return to Malda. So the council ordered Bonket to

(38) Cons. 26th August 1723, Karim, op.cit.p.181.

leave Makhdampur and Russell to endeavour to continue at Makhdampur. Nevertheless, the situation deteriorated.

The Calcutta Council, therefore, decided to stop all the Mughal shipping up and down the river Hugli. On the other hand the Nawab's force under the Fauzdar of Rajmahal was increasing so that the English soldiers at Makhdampur were surrounded. Stackhouse also reported from Dacca that the Nawab (the Deputy Nawab of Dacca) was sending a force in aid of Jafar Khan. At this prospect of a general war with the Government, the Calcutta Council decided to give way. They also ordered Bonket and Russell to leave Makhdampur but asked them to endeavour to settle at Malda⁽³⁹⁾. The result was just what might have been expected. The Nawab had permitted Bonket and Russell to return to Malda and had ordered the Fauzdar of Rajmahal not to molest the broker of the English in getting goods from Makhdampur⁽⁴⁰⁾. So Frankland renewed his application to the Nawab for permission to settle the Malda factory but the Nawab demanded Rs. 20,000 before issuing his parwanah⁽⁴¹⁾.

However, in 1727, the English paid Rs. 20,000 to the Nawab and got his parwana for the Malda factory⁽⁴²⁾.

For the following thirty four years the history of the new factory was uneventful except for some clashes with the Nawab's officers.

(39) Cons. 9th Jan. 1724. Karim, op.cit. pp.182-183.

(40) Cons. 13th Jan. 1724.

(41) Cons. 29th June, 1724. op.cit.p.186.

(42) Cons. 15th May, 1727. op.cit.p188.

In 1761 George Gray was appointed the chief of the Malda factory because the Gomastahs who were stationed there to transact the business of the Company did not discharge their duties properly⁽⁴³⁾. In 1763 he was dismissed from the chiefship of Malda due to his involvement in the intensive private trade.

George Brarwell, was the next chief of the Malda factory. The Court had expressed, their deep satisfaction about the conduct of Barwell⁽⁴⁴⁾. The provision of Malda goods had also turned quite good under his direction. The Court, therefore, was willing to retain Barwell in that position⁽⁴⁵⁾.

But the private trade of the Company's servants throughout the provinces created a serious problem. In 1768 the Court ordered the withdrawal of those Residents who were involved in the private trade⁽⁴⁶⁾. And the Malda Residency was closed down accordingly and was placed under the supervision of the Gomastahs.

In 1769 the Court of Directors wrote, "we shall not be averse to the restoring the Residency's where it is absolutely essential to the provision of the investment, if you therefore, deem it necessary to re-establish a company's servant in the Residency of Malda". But no other Residences were to be established without our express order⁽⁴⁷⁾.

(43) C.P.C. Vol.IF. 124, 28th Sept. 1761

(44) F.w.I.H.C. Vol.IV. Letter to Court 24th March 1766.p.409.

(45) Ibid. 17th May 1766 p.175.

(46) Ibid. Vol.V.Letter from Court 17th March 1769, p.175.

(47) Ibid.

In 1770, therefore, the Council decided to re-establish the Malda Residency and accordingly Bathoe was appointed the Chief of the Malda factory. He was a former sub-Export Warehouse Keeper, who had sufficient knowledge in the surung business.

Bathoe was succeeded by Thomas Henchman in 1771. It was during his time that the headquarter of the factory of Malda was transferred to English Bazar or Angrezabed⁽⁴⁸⁾. But now the question is why was the headquarter of the Malda factory transferred from Malda town to English Bazar ?

Towards the latter half of the 18th century the Company's factory at Malda was facing the problem of insecurity due to the continuous robberies and plunders of the sannyasi raiders⁽⁴⁹⁾. The headquarter of the Malda factory at Malda was not fortified. Naturally the factors felt the necessity of a fortified factory. In addition to this, there were other factors which also induced the Company's merchants to transfer the headquarter from Malda to English Bazar⁽⁵⁰⁾.

The new factory building at English Bazar was protected by a high wall, with bastions at the corners in which 8 cannons were located. The Residency building was called by the people the 'Bari-Kothi'⁽⁵¹⁾. The places adjacent to the Residency building are still known as 'Lakrikhana' (wood yard) and 'Murgikhana' (fowl yard)⁽⁵²⁾. The town that grew up around the factory was

(48) Abid Ali Khan - op.cit.p.156.

(49) Infra chapter V.

(50) Infra chapter VIII.

(51) Abid Ali Khan - op.cit.p.156.

(52) A.Mitra - District Census Hand Book, Malda, 1951.p.Appendix.I.

'Angrezabad' or English Bazar of the modern period.

Charles Grant, Secretary of the Board of Trade, was appointed Resident of Malda in 1780. He was called the pioneer of indigo plantation in the Malda area though on private accounts. Under his Residency the Company's investment of the Malda factory broke all the previous records.

Grant was succeeded by George Udny. He was also interested in the cultivation of indigo on private accounts. The Company's investment at Malda factory also increased under his Residency particularly in the field of filature raw silk.

Towards the beginning of the 19th century the Company's trade at Malda like in other factories of Bengal was flourishing. But from the second decade the investment on cotton piecegoods which covered the major share gradually diminished due to the competition of British machine made goods. Naturally the Company closed the cloth aurungs of the Malda factory.

In 1832 the Company bifurcated the Malda factory between Jungipur and Baileah⁽⁵³⁾. Naturally, Malda factory lost its former importance and was converted into an aurung of Jungipur.

In 1833 the East India Company closed down all the factories of Bengal winding up the business of the Company.

(53) B.T.C. vol.513.14th June 1882.