



Battle of Buxar: Its Causes and Consequences – A Political Analysis

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Abstract

Already he possessed rich administrative experience as the Faujdar of Rangpur and Purnea. In order to remain aloof from the English atmosphere and intrigues, he transferred his capital from Murshidabad to Monghyr. Mir Kasim also sought to introduce new vigour in the administration. He modernised his army on the European model. Efforts were made for manufacture of fire locks and guns at Monghyr. The Nawab had to take step to protect against Shahzada Ali Gauhar who was in Bihar and was a source of insecurity to the position of Mir Kasim. Mir Kasim also turned his attention for the economic development of the state. Old and corrupting officials were either heavily fined or replaced. Some new tax of 1-1/2 or 3/32 part of the original crown rent was originally imposed. He also took step to suppress the refractory Zamindars of the Bengal and Bihar who had earlier unfurled the flag of allegiance to the state. The notorious, Ramnarayan, the Deputy Subedar of Bihar was conspiring with English for defiance of the Nawab's authority. He never tolerated the Mir Jafars ascending to power. It was due to Clive's intervention that momentarily silenced Ramnarayan. He was most irregular in the payment of Revenue of Bihar. By 1803, when the EIC captured the Mughal capital of Delhi, it had trained up a private security force of around 260,000- twice the size of the British army – and marshalled more firepower than any nation state in Asia. It was "an empire within an empire", as one of its directors admitted. It had also by this stage created a vast and sophisticated administration and civil service, built much of London's docklands and come close to generating nearly half of Britain's trade. No wonder that the EIC now referred to itself as "the grandest society of merchants in the Universe". Yet, like more recent mega-corporations, the EIC proved at once hugely powerful and oddly vulnerable to economic uncertainty. Only seven years after the granting of the Diwani, when the company's share price had doubled overnight after it acquired the wealth of the treasury of Bengal, the East India bubble burst after plunder and famine in Bengal led to massive shortfalls in expected land revenues. The EIC was left with debts of £1.5m and a bill of £1m unpaid tax owed to the Crown. When knowledge of this became public, 30 banks collapsed like dominoes across Europe, bringing trade to a standstill

Key words: Battle of Buxar, Mir Jafar, Mir Kasim, East India company.

Introduction

In a scene that seems horribly familiar to us today, this hyper-aggressive corporation had to come clean and ask for a massive government bailout. On 15 July 1772, the directors of the East India Company applied to the Bank of England for a loan of

£400,000. A fortnight later, they returned, asking for an additional £300,000. The bank raised only £200,000. By August, the directors were whispering to the government that they would actually need an unprecedented sum of a further £1m. The official report the following year, written by Edmund Burke, foresaw that the EIC's financial problems could potentially "like a mill-stone, drag [the government] down into an unfathomable abyss ... This cursed Company would, at last, like a viper, be the destruction of the country which fostered it at its bosom." Mir Kasim could not tolerate the indiscipline behaviour of Ramnarayan and fortified by the support of Governor Vansittart. Mir Kasim suspended Ramnarayan and later dismissed him and put him to death. Mir Kasim also asserted his legal rights as the Nawab and refused to remain a puppet in the hands of the company. Shuja was restored to Awadh, with a subsidiary force and guarantee of defence, the emperor Shah Alam solaced with Allahabad and a tribute and the frontier drawn at the boundary of Bihar. In Bengal itself he took a decisive step. In return for restoring Shah Alam to Allahabad he received the imperial grant of the diwani or revenue authority in Bengal and Bihar to the Company. This had hitherto been enjoyed by the nawab, so that now there was a double government, the nawab retaining judicial and police functions, the Company exercising the revenue power. The Company was acclimatized, as it were, into the Indian scene by becoming the Mughal revenue agent for Bengal and Bihar. There was as yet no thought of direct administration, and the revenue was collected by a Company-appointed deputy-nawab, one Muhammad Reza Khan. But this arrangement made the Company the virtual ruler of Bengal since it already possessed decisive military power. All that was left to the nawab was the control of the judicial administration. But he was later persuaded to hand this over to the Company's deputy-nawab, so that its control was virtually complete. In spite of all this the East India Company was again in the verge of bankruptcy which stirred them to a fresh effort at reform. On the one hand Warren Hastings was appointed with a mandate for reform, on the other an appeal was made to the State for a loan. The result was the beginnings of state control of the Company and the thirteen-year governorship of Warren Hastings. The company could not tolerate and that it resulted in its conflict with the Nawab. Besides many other factors were also responsible for the conflict between company and the Nawab which ultimately resulted in the **Battle of Buxar**.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze a **decisive battle at the town of Buxar** in north-east India, which confirmed the East India Company's control of Bengal and Bihar. Followed by a treaty between the Indian states, Bengals, Awadh.

On the other hand the English succeeded in winning over many officials and feudatory chiefs of Sujauddaulah to their side. In 1764, Sujauddaulah entered the territory of Bihar. He suffered a reverse against an English army near Patna and retreated to Buxar where he wasted nearly five months in fruitless negotiation.

The final battle at Buxar took place on October 23, 1764, where the English Commander, Hector Munro completely defeated him. Sujauddaulah then sought the support of Malhan Rao Holkar but the joint forces of the two were defeated at Kara on May 3, 1765.

That settled the fate of Wazir, who now surrendered themselves to English. The Mughal emperor, Shah Alam had already surrendered himself to the British at Banaras while Mir Kasim had fled to Delhi prior to the Battle of Buxar where he died in 1777 under extreme poverty. Thus, the English were one more the victors.

Results of the battle:

1. The Battle of Buxar was one of the decisive battles in the Indian history for it demonstrated the superiority of English army over the combined army of two of the major Indian powers. The Battle of Plassey was won over by the English more by their diplomatic skill than by their strength of arms.

But the Battle of Buxar was won by them by their strength and skill in arms. The English with army of eight thousand defeated the army of the Avadh and the Mughal emperor which consisted of only forty to six thousand soldiers. Thus, the battle was the result of the superiority of the English military skill and the arms.

2. The battle of Buxar confirmed the decisions of Plassey. Mr. M. Broom wrote “Thus ended the famous battle of Buxar, on which depended the fate of India and which was gallantly disputed as was important in results.”

The English now became the undisputed masters of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It opened the way to extend the British frontiers towards the North East of Bengal. The prestige of English also stood very high now.

Of course, Mughal emperor was emperor in name only and wielded no power, yet he enjoyed prestige all over India. Now the English utilise his name for extension of imperial territory.

The Nawab of Avadh was not important ruler, yet he was master of an extensive and rich kingdom and enjoyed the rank of the Wazir of the Mughal emperor. His defeat was certainly creditable to the English and it enabled the British to bring Avadh under their enway though gradually.

The English now faced the Afgans and the Marathas as serious rivals in the final struggle for the empire of Hindustan. If Plassey had imposed the European yoke on Bengal the victory of Buxar riveted the shackles of bondage.

In addition to this, the Company and its servants got intoxicated by their new found powers and in the prospect of wealth and in their pursuit of riches, began to oppress and ill-treat the officials of the Nawab and, the poor people of Bengal. Companies and corporations now occupy the time and energy of more Indians than any institution other than the family. This should come as no surprise: as Ira Jackson, the former director of Harvard’s Centre for Business and Government, recently noted, corporations and their leaders have today “displaced politics and politicians as ... the new high priests and oligarchs of our system”. Covertly, companies still govern the lives of a significant proportion of the human race.

The 300-year-old question of how to cope with the power and perils of large multinational corporations remains today without a clear answer: it is not clear how a nation state can adequately protect itself and its citizens from corporate excess. As the international subprime bubble and bank collapses of 2007-2009 have so recently demonstrated, just as corporations can shape the destiny of nations, they can also drag down their economies. In all, US and European banks lost more than \$1tn on toxic assets from January 2007 to September 2009. What Burke feared the East India Company would do to England in 1772 actually happened to Iceland in 2008-11, when the systemic collapse of all three of the country’s major privately owned commercial banks brought the country to the brink of complete bankruptcy. A powerful corporation can still overwhelm or subvert a state every bit as effectively as the East India Company did in Bengal in 1765.

Corporate influence, with its fatal mix of power, money and unaccountability, is particularly potent and dangerous in frail states where corporations are insufficiently or ineffectually regulated, and where the purchasing power of a large company

can outbid or overwhelm an underfunded government. This would seem to have been the case under the Congress government that ruled India until last year. Yet as we have seen in London, media organisations can still bend under the influence of corporations such as HSBC – while Sir Malcolm Rifkind’s boast about opening British embassies for the benefit of Chinese firms shows that the nexus between business and politics is as tight as it has ever been. The East India Company no longer exists, and it has, thankfully, no exact modern equivalent. Walmart, which is the world’s largest corporation in revenue terms, does not number among its assets a fleet of nuclear submarines; neither Facebook nor Shell possesses regiments of infantry. Yet the East India Company – the first great multinational corporation, and the first to run amok – was the ultimate model for many of today’s joint-stock corporations. The most powerful among them do not need their own armies: they can rely on governments to protect their interests and bail them out. The East India Company remains history’s most terrifying warning about the potential for the abuse of corporate power – and the insidious means by which the interests of shareholders become those of the state. Three hundred and fifteen years after its founding, its story has never been more current.

Conclusion

They compelled the Indian officials and Zamindars to give them presents and bribes. They forced the merchants, artisans and peasants to sell their goods cheap and to buy dear from them. These years have been described by British historians as the period of open and unashamed plunder. Hastings's first important work was that of an organizer. In the two and a half years before the Regulating Act came into force he put in order the whole Bengal administration. The Indian deputies who had collected the revenue on behalf of the Company were deposed and their places taken by a Board of Revenue in Calcutta and English collectors in the districts. This was the real beginning of British administration in India. If the Battle of Plassey had made the English a powerful factor in the politics of Bengal, the victory of Buxar made them a great power in Northern India and contenders for the supremacy of the whole country. For the corporation – a revolutionary European invention contemporaneous with the beginnings of European colonialism, and which helped give Europe its competitive edge – has continued to thrive long after the collapse of European imperialism. When historians discuss the legacy of British colonialism in India, they usually mention democracy, the rule of law, railways, tea. Yet the idea of the joint-stock company is arguably one of Britain’s most important exports to India, and the one that has for better or worse changed South Asia as much any other European idea. Its influence certainly outweighs that of communism and Protestant Christianity, and possibly even that of democracy.

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