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Colonial Encounter with Traditional Social Elite Class
in Bengal :

Emergence of New Social Classes on the Ruins of the Mughal Empire*

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I. Introduction

Bengal, “the area comprising present-day Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, was settled in about 1000 B.C. by Dravidian-speaking peoples who were later known as the Bang. Their homeland bore various titles that reflected earlier tribal names, such as Vanga, Banga, Bangala, Bangal, and Bengal,”¹⁾ administered by Buddhist and Hindu sovereigns in succession. Muslim armies invaded the region in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and later concluded in the Mughal rule after 1576. Through the second half of the sixteenth century, British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese merchants contested for domination of profitable trade between the East Indies and Europe and by the beginning of the seventeenth century, European trade establishments had emerged in Bengal. To develop trade with India, the English government and the Far East chartered the East India Company in 1600 and by the mid-1700’s, the company had become the most powerful trading authority in Bengal. Later, England took over Bengal Administration in 1857. However, after the Mughal Empire waned by the first half of the eighteenth century, the Europeans boosted their control and the Mughal Nawabs, nobles, and generals contested for authority. The Europeans supported specific groups in many of these conflicts, extending their backing in return for leverage trade rights and other incentives. East India Company succeeded in buying the Diwani

1) Federal Research Division Library of Congress Edited by James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden, “Bangladesh: A Country Study,” Washington, September 1988, p.4.

(financial instrument to collect revenues and decide civil cases) of the large Bengal state that comprised Bihar, Orissa, and Assam from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam, sealing off the Muslim hold on the state forever.

The inauguration of British colonial rule in Bengal in 1757 had long-lasting aftermaths. Now the new ruler, British East India Company, through a different set of directions and rules transformed the socio-economic life of the populace in Bengal. In 1793, the Company imposed the new land tenure arrangements, known as the Permanent Settlement, to create a robust foundation of political backing from the landowning classes in India. Based on the British experiences, the colonial administration tried to establish a hereditary-based landed aristocracy, which would invest in agricultural enlargement. The rationale was to create a secure countryside with a prosperous peasantry through the formation of landlords.²⁾ By enforcing the Permanent Settlement Act, the British made the revenue-collecting zamindars the absolute owner and revenue collector over the land, to bestow the zamindars with the proprietary rights of land.³⁾ Moreover, “the peasant was dispossessed of the land which now became the ‘property’ of the zamindar.... the landlord became the landowner.”⁴⁾ Under the new system, the government demand for the revenue

2) Percival Spear, “The Oxford History of India,” 1984, Vol. II, 4th ed., p. 97.

3) M. Mufakharul Islam, “An Economic History of Bengal 1757-1947,” Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2012, p. 101.

4) Hanza Alavi, “India: Transition from Feudalism to Colonial Capitalism,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 10 (4), p.371; B. H. Baden-Powell, “Permanent Settlement of Bengal” *English Historical Review*, x, p. 285.

collections on the zamindars was never-ending, and there was no legal restriction on the zamindars to increase their percentage from the peasants. The peasants, consequently, became susceptible to lop-sided rent rises and became destabilized owing to their helplessness to assured ready cash to pay these new and increasingly unyielding demands.

The Indian society experienced the advent of many new classes after the initiation of the British rule. There emerged classes of Zamindars, tenants, peasant-landowners, moneylenders, and agricultural laborers in rural areas and capitalists, workers, petite merchants in the urban areas. There also emerged an educated middle class, and steadily these classes attained national character, which demonstrated in the development of all India organizations. The nonexistence of an all India economy and a unified administrative system was quite noticeable in pre-British India, that is why there were no all India classes. These new classes in Bengal began to tussle for the promotion of their factional benefits. Bengal was the foremost to steer in the two new classes the Zamindars and the tenants because British conquest started from Bengal and it was in Bengal where for the first time the Permanent Settlement Act was imposed which gave birth to the new classes of zamindars and the tenants.

Even the industrial enterprises which gave rise to the class of industrialists and workers were first set up in Bengal and Bombay areas. The professional and the educated middle class also came into being in these areas much ahead of the other regions. It was because of the introduction of a new administrative apparatus and the modern educational system. Gradually the whole country came under the British

control. So, the economic system, the administrative setup and the modern education system introduced by the British covered the whole of the country and became a countrywide phenomenon.

II. Traditional Social Class in Pre-British (Mughal) Period

1. Socio-economic Elite classes

Traditionally, the elite class of any society was able to squeeze its dominant social status through their economic base regarding possessing property in the form of land. For Marx, the study of social class, class structures and changes in those structures are essential to understanding capitalism and other social systems or modes of production. In the Communist Manifesto Marx, and Engels remark that the history of all up till now existing society is the history of class struggles. Analysis of class divisions and struggles is especially crucial in developing an understanding of the nature of capitalism. For Marx, classes are distinguished and shaped by the relations relating to (i) work and labor and (ii) ownership or possession of the property and the means of production. These economic factors more fully govern social relationships in capitalism than they did in earlier societies.

The contrast between the Asiatic economy and the economy that developed in the West is that, in the East, 'absolute private ownership' and 'feudalism' did not emerge on the patterns of the West. "A closer study of the Asiatic, especially of Indian forms of communal ownership,

would show how, from the different forms of primitive communism, different forms of its dissolution have developed. Thus, for example, the various original types of Roman and Teutonic private property can be traced back to the various forms of Indian communism.”⁵⁾

The answer to the different form of dissolution that gave birth to the “Asiatic economy” can be found in a famous letter written by Engels to Marx on June 6, 1853. Engels ask a straightforward question that, “how come it that the Orientals did not reach to landed property or feudalism?”⁶⁾ Moreover, try to answer, “I think the reason lies principally in the climate, combined with the conditions of the soil, especially the great desert stretches which reach from the Sahara right through Arabia, Persia, India, and Tartary to the highest Asiatic uplands. Artificial irrigation is here the first condition of cultivation, and this is the concern either of the communes, the provinces or the central government.”⁷⁾

Land and irrigation prompted a centralized bureaucracy upon which grew an authoritative state. Most of India being semi-arid, agriculture was dependent on monsoons and irrigation, and the state had to carry out and maintain strong irrigational networks. To control and oversee these public works the state had to station its employees at various centers throughout the country. Thus, a centralized bureaucratic state emerged by water economy and the royal officials and the army came

5) Karl Marx, “On Colonialism and Modernization”, (edited by S. Avineri), New York, 1971, p.38.

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid., p.451.

to occupy pivotal positions in the administration. The military monopoly of the royal power or state negated the growth of feudalism in Bengal in the Western sense. So, there was no decentralization of military or political power as in feudal Europe. In India, the feudal lords, unlike in the West, were not the legitimate owners of the land. Only, the King assigned the specific and individual rights of zamin (land), i.e., the revenue collecting power, to those who were very close to and necessary for the State machinery. These zamindars and jagirdars (revenue collectors) were appointed by the state and could be removed anytime at the wish of the state.

As, B.N. Ganguly points out that, “in the Mughal revenue administration, the zamindar was...an agent of the Emperor for making payable collections on behalf of the Emperor and was remunerated with a percentage out of his collections for his labour. The term ‘zamindar’ was a later development in the land system of the country. In the *Ayeeen-i-Akbari*, he was the *Amul-Guzar* or collector of the revenues and was directed annually to assist the husbandmen with loans of money and to receive payment at distant and convenient periods ... certain allotments of land were usually given to him rent-free for his maintenance known as *nankar*.”⁸⁾

Francois Bernier, who came to India in the seventeenth century, noted this unique nature of tax-farming that, “the King as the proprietor of the land, makes over a certain quantity to military men, as an equivalent for their pay. This grant is called *Jagir*, or as in Turkey, *timar*; the word

8) B. N. Ganguly, “Readings in Indian Economic History”, Delhi, 1964, p.126.

Jagir (ja means place, and gir means keeping or holding), indicates the place of salary. Similar grants are made to the governors, also for the support of their troops, on condition that they pay certain sums annually to the King out of any surplus revenue that the land may yield.”⁹⁾ These jagirdars and zamindars were not feudal lords as in the West, in the words of Max Weber, they were the holders of ‘office prebend.’ The distinctive characteristic of the land relationship in the East was that it was ‘prebendalization,’ not feudalization. Weber further elaborates that, “in India, as in the Orient generally, a characteristic seignory developed rather out of tax farming and the military and tax prebends of a far more bureaucratic state. The oriental seignory, therefore, remained a ‘prebend’ and did not become a ‘fief’; not feudalization but prebendalization of the patrimonial state occurred.”¹⁰⁾

One of the significant factors in the development of Western society was the rise of serfdom and the seizure of land by the feudal lords which led to a sharp division of interests between the feudal lords and the peasantry. In India, because of the absence of legal ownership, or the communal ownership of the village community, the tax collectors, as in the West, were not a part of the sovereignty of the State represented by the King. Therefore, there was almost no conflict between the peasantry and the landlord, “over the disposal and cultivation of the land and of labor services which agitated Europe from the twelfth to the eighteenth century.”¹¹⁾ The conflicts were restricted

9) Francois Bernier, “Travels in Moghul India,” 1914, p.320.

10) Max Weber, “Religion of India”, New York, 1967, p.7.

11) K. S. Shelvankar, “The Problem of India”, London, 1940, p.99.

to the share of the agricultural produce, and the agriculture segment was not disturbed on a significant scale. Industries grew in towns but to satisfy the needs of the courts, the nobility, the *faujdar*s (a title awarded to garrison commanders), *subedar*s (Governors), and so forth who were the managers of the autocratic state. So, when the court moved, the industries also moved, which made the merchants and artisans in the cities to remain satisfied with playing a role subordinate to the courts, noblemen, priests, and soldiers and the bourgeoisie thus failed to overcome the shackles of the state.

2. The Rise and Decline of an Emerging Bourgeoisie

However, just before the ascension of the British rule, in India, various industries in different cities were at par with the most thriving industries of Europe of that period. To refer a few cities like, Delhi, Agra, Meerut, Lucknow, Lahore, Patna Ahmedabad, Dacca and many other were great industrial centers in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The reason behind this development was that “these industries sometimes outgrew the needs of the court. Some peculiar manufacture had sometimes so firmly established itself as to survive the desertion, and these manufacturing towns sometimes threw out colonies.”¹²⁾

Based on the resources in abundance and easily available in different regions, various crafts group developed traditionally and locally. Generally, a certain industry flourished in a particular region or city. For

12) Henry Maine, “Village Communities in the East and West”, London, 1872. p.119.

example, muslins at Dacca, silk at Murshidabad, chintzes (initially a woodblock printed, painted or stained calico, popular for bed covers, quilts, and draperies) at Lucknow, shawls at Srinagar and so on were some of the well-known products of the time. The towns in Bengal, especially Dacca, Murshidabad, and Malda, manufactured some of the world finest products of both textile and silk. The muslin of Dacca was the finest and best known of all these. Robert Clive's, the first Governor-General of Bengal, observed that Murshidabad, the capital of Bengal, was more affluent than the city of London, with the dissimilarity that there were individuals in the former owning markedly greater affluence than in the latter City.¹³⁾ Also, Edmund Burke pointed out that, "there are to be found (in India) a multitude of cities not exceeded in population and trade by those of the first class in Europe: merchants and bankers who have once vied in capital with the Bank of England, whose money had often supported a tottering state and preserved their governments in the midst of war and desolation; millions of indigenous manufacturers and mechanics."¹⁴⁾ Thus, just before the British came to dominate, a new bourgeoisie was already coming into its own in the emerging trading cities of India.

However, this class grew without weakening the central bureaucracy of the State because India's social structure was undergoing a significant change during this period. As M. N. Roy points out that "in the latter part of the eighteenth century, there came into existence in India a prosperous trading class with considerable capital accumulated

13) R. P. Dutt, "India Today", Calcutta, 1970, p.21.

14) Cited in V. G. Kale, "Indian Economics", Vol. 1, Poona, 1930, p.59.

in its hands. This trading class was largely responsible for undermining the foundations of feudalism (office-prebend) in the days of the decay of the Mughal power. All the big landowners, as well as the rulers of the various independent states that sprang up on the ruins of the Mughal Empire, were heavily indebted to this class of usurious traders .”¹⁵⁾

Thus, a significant change was taking place through this period in land relations, especially, regarding the transition from prebendalization to feudalization. As per Weber, prebendalization can either transform itself into a sheer bureaucracy with the development of the money economy or into landlordism with the strengthening of power by the taxpaying farmers. In the case of England, France, and other West European nations, ‘the sale of office’ was gradually replaced by just bureaucracy but in India, the bureaucrats were transforming their ‘office prebends’ into hereditary estates.

So, it was not unpredictable that this rising merchant class would try to challenge the authority of the state. They tried to counter the State by aligning with the tax-farmers, or office-prebend holders turned into landlords. However, the weakening of the state did not lead to the solidification of power by the bourgeoisie. Before the bourgeoisie could become powerful enough to challenge the State, the internal struggle among the feudal lords and the subsequent weakening of the central authority created a power vacuum into which the British stepped in. Thus, the emerging bourgeoisie class of India was overwhelmed by the

15) M. N. Roy, “India in Transition”, Geneva, 1922, p.61.

established bourgeoisie of England which enjoyed the backing of its state power. The emerging Indian bourgeoisie could have succeeded in overcoming the impediments of the state power and the rising feudal elements if they could have kept up their economic predominance for some more time.

III. British Rule in Bengal: 1757-1947

1. The Victory of the British and its impact on the evolution of social classes in India

The most significant discontinuity in the history of Bengal region occurred on June 23, 1757, when the East India Company became the virtual ruler of Bengal. Territorial rule by a trading company resulted in the commercialization of power. The initial effects of the British rule in Bengal were highly politically and economically destructive. The victory of British power killed the indigenous capitalism in its embryonic stage and distorted the socio-economic structure forever. The trade which was being carried on by the East India Company, and for which England had to pay a considerable amount of bullion to the Indian traders and manufacturers, was transformed into organized plunder. The artisans were forced to accept whatever price the company and its agents paid to them. The loot was so severe that the Nawab of Bengal had to file a complaint to the Company's Governor in Calcutta pointing out that, "they (company) forcibly take away goods and commodities of the ryots, merchants, etc."¹⁶⁾

It is, in general, assumed that the plunder of Bengal directly

contributed to the industrial revolution in England. The capital amassed in Bengal was invested in the emerging British industries. Lack of capital and fall of demand, on the other hand, resulted in de-industrialization in the East Bengal region. The prime and prosperous muslin industry virtually disappeared under the British rule. One can imagine the depth of economic destruction that, “in the middle of the eighteenth century in the province of Bengal alone, there were several million people employed in one industry– that of cotton–spinning and weaving. Textile factories were employing more than 100 million workers. Woven cotton cloth formed a considerable part of the commodities exported from India by the East India Company, even towards the end of the eighteenth century.”¹⁷⁾

The plunder of Bengal, however, helped the capital formation in England at an unprecedented scale and ushered in the Industrial Revolution in England. Referring to this, Marx wrote in a letter to Engels on October 8, 1858, “we cannot deny that bourgeois society has experienced its sixteenth century a second time.”¹⁸⁾ The British domination in Bengal promoted both the forces of unity and division in the society, especially in Hindu and Muslim communities. The Machiavellian rule brought to surface the rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims, which had remained quiescent during the five hundred years of Muslim rule. Class conflict between Muslim peasantry and

16) Anonymous, Historical Sketch on the Taxes on the English Commerce in Bengal from 1633 until 1820, p.55.

17) M. N. Roy, Op. Cit., p.61.

18) Karl Marx, Selected Correspondence, p.111.

Hindu intermediaries called Boardwalks during Muslim rule was diffused by the fact that these intermediaries themselves were agents of the Muslim rulers.

The deindustrialization of Bengal led to the over-pressure on agriculture. The millions of artisans, spinners, weavers, smelters, smiths, and so forth, were ruined and before they could rise as a class and seize political power and usher Bengal towards capitalism, the British commercial and industrial strength overpowered these developments and turned into a colony. In this process, the British capital, in its interest destroyed the thriving manufacturing industry of Bengal and forced to uproot, to meet its capitalist demands. The new land system, introduced by the British, brought into existence new forms of land relations on the ruins of the village community.

The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 recognized the former revenue farmers as the owners of land but did not give them any magisterial or administrative powers over the ryots (Indian peasant or tenant farmer). This system prevailed in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and sections of Madras whereas the temporary Zamindari settlements were introduced in the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, and Punjab. While the British created in these parts landlords on the Western pattern, in other parts, it created individual peasant proprietorships which came to be known as Ryotwari system.

The primary motivations behind initiating the new land systems of the British rulers were (1) to create a class of landlords who would help protect their rule and, (2) to build a money economy in the rural areas through which they could extract the raw materials and sell the finished goods produced in Britain. As per the Permanent Settlement Act, the

former revenue farmers and the agents of the company (Baniyas and the Gomasthas) were made permanent landlords, in return, they were required to pay a fixed amount of money to the government treasury annually. Describing the impact of the Permanent Settlement Act on the peasantry, Wadia and Merchant observed that, “one result of the Permanent revenue settlement was the creation of a class of zamindars with vested interests. They became the proprietors of big estates which never belonged to them, for they were merely the hereditary tax farmers or rent collectors. Another result was the loss to the ryots of their rights to a customary rent and a permanent tenure. The zamindars degenerated into a selfish parasitic class of absentee landlords... It also increased rack-renting. One more consequence of the Permanent settlement in Bengal has been the subdivision of rights in the land. The zamindars leased out their interests, and the middlemen leased out in turn, thus creating a long chain of rent receivers who intervened between the state and the actual cultivators. In 1819, the absolute subjection of the cultivators of the soils to the direction of the zamindars was regretfully admitted...”¹⁹⁾

Thus, the British created a class of absentee lords and many intermediary rent-receiving interests who could spend the surplus generated in the villages, not for further improvement in agriculture, but for luxury goods produced in the factories in Great Britain. Under the ryotwari system, the settlement was made directly with the cultivator and was recognized as the owner of the land tilled. In theory, it seems

19) P. A. Vadia and K. T. Merchant, “Our Economic Problem”, p.283.

that British administration was in the advantageous situation regarding securing the entire spoils for its government. However, “in practice, through the process of subletting and the dispossession of the original cultivators by moneylenders and others securing possession of their land, landlordism has spread extensively and at an increasing pace in the ryotwari areas.”²⁰⁾

The British rule, however, in the middle of all these devastations and abuses had a rejuvenating role in originating for the first time a kind of “political unity ... more consolidated and extending further than ever it did under the Great Moghuls,”²¹⁾ which in turn, helped to generate some sense of national awareness which could not have come into actuality in a society which was divided into thousands of fragmented on religious, cultural and linguistic lines. The British rule proved to be the unintentional means of history in unfurling the Indian national awareness. As R.P. Dutt points out, “the people of Bengal had been used to tyranny but had never lived under oppression so far-reaching in its effects, extending to every village market and every manufacturer’s loom. They had been used to arbitrary acts from men in power but had never suffered from a system which touched their trades, their occupations, their lives so closely. The springs of their industry were stopped and the sources of their wealth dried up.”²²⁾

The British land policy made the population to solely dependent on agriculture and kept it backward. The first and most immediate

20) R. P. Dutt, Op. Cit, p.236.

21) Karl Marx, “On India,” p.59.

22) R. P. Dutt, Op. Cit, p.236.

objective of British economic policy was to retard the indigenous evolution of a modern capitalist economy. The British colonialists created a “non-competitive structure of society”²³⁾ and expanded the intensity of exploitation of the landless and small peasants. In the words of N. K. Sinha, “British attempts to establish a class of revenue farmers who would be helpful associates in extracting wealth from land failed completely. The zamindars continued to maintain their hold on the land. There was some sub-ifeudation but not on a very extensive scale. The relation of a ryot to zamindar was neither that of a proprietor nor a vassal but a compound of both.”²⁴⁾

In sum, a system of total and absolute property in land was created which was something new in Bengal. There was a deliberate attempt by East India Company administrators to create this situation which is reflected in a letter written by Lord Cornwallis dated 6 March 1793. He wrote, “..... the large capitals possessed by many of the Natives, which they will have no means of employing when the public debt is discharged, will be applied to the purchases of landed property as soon as the tenure is declared to be secure.”²⁵⁾ Thus, the land became the principal field of ‘native capital’ investment. “A formidable rival to British capital investment in India was thus removed.”²⁶⁾ The old feudal aristocracy was ruined completely and replaced by a more

23) Amiya Bagchi, “Foreign capital and Economic Development in India—A schematic view”; *Frontier* Vol. Nos. 24-26 Sep. 25, 1971.

24) N.K. Sinha, “Economic Background of the Century Studies in Bengal Renaissance” NCEB (Cal) Second Ed. 1977, p.

25) B. B. Misra, “The Indian middle classes: their growth in modern times”, p.129.

26) B.B. Misra, *ibid*.

“dehumanized new feudal aristocracy,”²⁷⁾ who were more acclimatized to economic benefits and became the leaches of their colonial master to assist the colonial goals.

2. The Demise of Traditional Hindu and Muslim Elite Class and Rise of Hindu /Muslim Political Rivalry

The intense economic exploitation of the British provoked a sharp reaction against the British regime in Bengal. The resentments against British rule varied from community to community. The Hindu middle class characterized itself as the Bhadrlok (a class of prosperous upper caste Hindu elite), most commonly termed as ‘gentlemen’ in the Western sense, was the highest beneficiary of British rule. This class primarily is the outcome of the system of property relations created by the Permanent Settlement²⁸⁾ originated from trading classes, intermediaries of revenue administration and subordinate jobs in the imperial administration.

On the contrary, the establishment of the British rule dispossessed the traditional Muslim aristocracy (Ashraf)²⁹⁾ of state patronage. The “Immigrant Muslim/Upper-Caste Hindu” coalition, which symbolized the Muslim rule, was replaced by a new faction of the British and Hindus. The new land settlement policy of the British destroyed the

27) Benoy Ghose, *Social Change in 'Renaissance Bengal' (1817-57)*, *Asiatic Society* 1912 p.9.

28) Joya Chatterji, “Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947,” p.5.

29) Md. Mahbub Ullah [ed], “The Chittagong University Journal of Social Science”, Volume-XX, Number 1, Chittagong, Homeland Press & Publications, 2001, p.5.

traditional Muslim landlords. The Muslim aristocracy which had up till now been scornful of their native co-religionists seek out the political support of the oppressed Muslim peasantry (Atraf)³⁰ who were exploited by Hindu landlords and moneylenders.

The conflict between Muslim peasants and Hindu landlords was strengthened by the competition between Hindu and Muslim middle classes for the support of the imperial rulers. In the 19th century, both Hindu and Muslim middle classes expanded significantly on the cost of the traditional Hindu and Muslim elite system. The Muslim middle class did not remain confined to the traditional aristocracy, which consisted primarily of immigrants from other Muslim countries.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British rule of Bengal contributed to the emergence of the indigenous elite from amongst the regionally converted Muslims. The newly created Muslim Jotedars (surplus farmers), who constituted the indigenous elite, and Muslim peasants (Atraf) resulted out of the economic and cultural domination of the Bhadrakok. This class was also furthered by substantial growth of jute cultivation in the Eastern region of Bengal (now Bangladesh). The increase in jute exports benefited the Jotedars in lower Bengal where the Muslims were a major group and the economic prosperity of jotedars encouraged the growth of secular education among Muslims in the region. For instance, the enrolment of Muslim students' educational institutions in Bengal saw an increase of almost seventy-four percent between 1882-1883 and 1912-1913.

30) Ibid. p.5

Regardless of their superficial unity, the alliance of numerous Muslim interest groups in Bengal remained brittle. The motivation and ideological orientations of these groups were very different. The indigenous Muslim elite and the Atraf identified themselves with the local culture and language, whereas, Islamic universalism fascinated the Ashraf. The inherent conflicts of the Muslim society in Bengal were unsurprisingly exposed in the political sphere. Initially, Ashraf group provided leadership to the Muslim community in Bengal for the following reasons- i) the size of the indigenous elite was tiny at the beginning of the 20th century, ii) because of the institutional void in rural areas, it was challenging to mobilize the Bengali Muslim masses politically. The most natural means of arousing such masses was to appeal Muslim identity and, iii) the leadership of the Muslim masses in Bengal remained with the Ashraf who monopolized the religious leadership.

The political rivalry between Muslim Ashraf and Hindu Bhadrakol first surfaced when the British partitioned the province of Bengal in 1905 for political and administrative reasons. The emerging Muslim middle class supported the partition in the hope of gaining the patronage of British rulers. However, the Bhadrakol class idolized the idea of 'Golden Bengal' and had wide-ranging economic interests on both sides of divided Bengal. The decision to separate the Bengali-speaking areas in East Bengal and Assam was a big blow as they viewed it as an evil strategy to weaken Bengal which was the forerunner of the struggle for independence. Though initially, the anti-partition movement was non-violent, later the anger of the Hindu middle class soon turned violent. The emotionally charged atmosphere concluded in communal

riots, and the British administration had to dismiss the partition in 1911.

To the Muslims, the secession of the partition was a significant disenchantment which almost trembled their confidence in the British rulers. To the Hindu Bhadrak of Bengal, the termination of partition was a big victory. The communal politics of confrontation and violence, which erupted during the partition of Bengal, were paused temporarily during the non-cooperation movement headed by the Indian National Congress and the Khilafat movement of the Indian Muslims in the first half of the twentieth century.

3. The New Urban Setting and the Emergence of the Educated Middle Class

The deliberate endeavor by the British to prevent the growth of entrepreneur strata compelled the 'new elite' to focus on land business. Once they find it almost impossible to put up any contest against British rule they focused their vigor and influence on cultural and social reforms. The anti-traditionalistic ideology advocated by the social reformers of the nineteenth century was congenial for the development and consolidation of the political interests. The Western legal and social ideology within the colonial set up was necessary for the efficient working of the colonial economy and to change old 'consumption patterns' and lifestyles. Middle-class intellectuals had to remain satisfied with an implicit monopoly of the several clerical jobs and other professions. Moreover, the landed aristocracy of Bengal became a class of rent receivers, and absentee landlordism became the key feature of the social structure. The continuation of feudal exploitation in the

villages kept the supply line of luxuries for the city-dwelling absentee landlords intact. It created a class of 'banias'³¹⁾ in the cities who thrived as a 'comprador' class having its economic interests "bound up with the stability of English trade and the Company's Government."³²⁾ S. B. Chaudhuri has specified three factors such as the Permanent Settlement, the English education, and business involvement, which "operated in quite a methodical way to bring into existence the new urban milieu, definitely pro-British in character."³³⁾

After the downfall of the Mughal Empire, the prevailing chaotic political, economic and social situations led to the decline of education in Bengal. After the battle of Buxar in 1764, the East India Company acquired territorial control and became political rulers but did not intervene in the educational field till 1813. After 1813, with the cooperation of a limited number of Indians, the British colonial rulers introduced the western system of education in India. Initially, the British adhere to a policy of a neutral stance or non-intervention in the affairs of religion and culture of the native population. During the beginning period of the nineteenth century, substantial dispute was going on concerning the nature of education and medium of teaching in schools and colleges. The Orientalists headed by Dr. H. H. Wilson and H. T. Prinsep supported in favor of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian as the

31) The Bania (also known as Baniya) is an occupational community of merchants, bankers, money-lenders, dealers in grains or in spices, oil producers and sellers, and in modern times numerous commercial enterprises. The term is used in a broader sense in Bengal than it is elsewhere in India.

32) S.B. Chaudhuri, *The Political Framework in 'Renaissance Bengal'(1917-57)* p. 19.

33) S.B. Chaudhuri, *ibid* p. 9.

medium of education. The Anglicists led by Charles Trevelyan, Elphinstone advocated the imparting of western education through the medium of English.

The Anglicists were supported by the reform-minded intellectuals, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy who advocated for the study of western education as the “key to the treasures of scientific and democratic thought of the modern west.” A general committee of public instruction was set up in 1823 to look after the development of education in India. Lord Macaulay, the Law member to the Supreme Council of Calcutta, was appointed Chairman of the Committee of Public Instruction.

Due to constant pressure from different sections - the Christian missionaries, the liberals, the utilitarian's, and the Anglicists - the British conceded and permitted to take up the responsibility of promoting Western education. In his famous Minute of February 1835, Macaulay gave his verdict in favor of English as the medium of instruction and western education, literature and sciences as the subjects of study for the Indians. There is also an interpretation that the educational policy was intended to legitimize the authority of the British colonial needs.

After Macaulay's Minute, the educational activities became dynamic than ever which is reflected in the establishment of twenty- Council of Education succeeded three schools by the Government between 1835 and 1839 and in 1842 Committee of Public Instruction. Also, Mr. James Thomason, the Lieutenant Governor of North Western Provinces had introduced a widespread program of village education during 1843-53. In this plan, some villages were clustered in as one unit, and all the Zamindars of the unit were made to pay one percent tax on the revenue

for the continuance of the schools in their dominion. Another development of Western education was Wood's Dispatch of 1854. Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control, his recommendations known as 'Wood's Dispatch of 1854' reorganizing the whole structure of education. Charles Wood recommended for the opening of universities at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, for the creation of a system of recognized schools, high schools, middle schools and the elementary schools, advancement of vernacular schools and the formation of teacher training institutions. Moreover, the introduction of grant-in-aid system to non-government schools opened by charitable bodies and individuals.

Because of the hampered growth of industries and primarily dependence on agriculture, minimal opportunity left in these areas created an immense competition for the administrative posts and the professions that came into being because of the British rule. The race for getting into the British administrative jobs naturally required the skills of English language and the local elite class turn its attention to educate itself in the British educational institutions in Bengal and elsewhere in India. In this race, the Hindus entered the field earlier than the Muslims and, by the second half of the nineteenth century they were able to monopolize most of the occupations. The Muslims witnessed the late emergence of the new classes because they stayed away from the trade and commerce and looked at the modern system of education with suspicion.

Under the Moghul rule, most of the higher administrative posts or office-prebends were with the Muslims. However, the majority of zamindars were Hindus, and the Muslims mostly held the higher

administrative posts, such as jagirdars, fauzdars, masrabdars, aumils, and sezawab, and so forth. However, as the British introduced a new administrative system which brought into a new bureaucracy and the Muslim aristocrats lost its political power. The loss of political power also implied, for the Muslims, loss of these traditional occupations. In the first one hundred years of their rule, the British reserved for themselves all the higher civil (covenantal posts) and military appointments. In this process, thousands of Muslims in Bengal and other places lost employment in the army. Some military chiefs or office-prebend holders who had grants of lands left the capital towns and settled down as landlords, with their followers and soldiers as peasants.

However, this situation did not last long or bring any betterment for the Muslim aristocracy. The Permanent Settlement Act gradually elbowed them out and replaced by Hindu Baniyas, bankers and traders who had ready money to buy the estates. Muslims were always unenthusiastic to take to trade although they had a very high proportional presence in various craft related occupations. Almost all the traders at the time of British ascendancy were Hindus, “most of the Company’s Gomasthas belonged to the Hindu community.”³⁴⁾ By buying landed estates, these big Hindu traders sought the security which was lacking in business. So, the Permanent Settlement Act not only secured an ally for the British rule in these landlords, but it also removed a potential competitor for the British merchant capitalists.

34) K.K. Dutta, History of Bengal Subah, p.105.

This decay of the Muslim aristocracy was completed when English replaced Persian as the language of the court and the medium of higher education. The positions in the judiciary and civil administration had been one of the significant sources of livelihood for the Muslim aristocracy. During the first fifty years of British rule, the Muslims held the dominant share in these positions. After Lord Cornwallis introduced reforms in 1791, the Europeans began to replace Indians in high administrative and judicial services. Almost all the covenanted posts were monopolized by the British, and they carried extraordinarily high remuneration. However, in the lower administrative posts, particularly in the judiciary, Muslims could maintain their supremacy until 1837. However, after the replacement of Persian by English as the official language started the acute deterioration in the socio-economic situation of the Muslims.

For the Hindus whose mother tongue was not Persian, it was not at all a problem to adopt English instead of Persian. Alternatively, for the Muslim aristocracy, it was a question of cultural attachment as Persian being the language of the Muslim political elite. Moreover, the Muslim aristocracy had a contempt for the vernaculars, which were the languages of the “subject race.” So, when the change came from Persian to English and the provincial languages, the Muslim upper class failed to adjust to this change. This trend continued until the end of the nineteenth century, and by the second half of the nineteenth century, the Muslim upper class was ousted from almost all employment under the government and professions by a rising Hindu middle class.

As mentioned before, the rising Hindu Bourgeoisie, despite its hindered growth, was making its presence felt in every sphere. So, it

was not surprising that the relatively more prosperous Hindus had better literacy rates than the Muslims. Moreover, the loss of political power, the introduction of the new land tenure system, the abolition of Persian as the official language, all contributed to the degeneration of the Muslim upper class.

IV. Conclusion

Bengal, under the East India Company and British rules, the shifting in the economic arrangement like introduction of new land relation, opening of Indian society for commercial exploitation by a more experienced capitalist class, introduction of a new administrative system, a modern education system and the establishment of modern industries were the factors largely accountable for the emergence of the new social classes. The creation of private property in land by the Permanent and Ryotwari settlements gave birth to the new classes in the form of large estate owners, the zamindars, and peasant proprietors. The class of tenants and sub-tenants were born with the creation of the right to lease land. The right to private property in land and the right to employ laborers to work on land created classes like absentee landlords and agricultural labor.

Though both Islamic and British rulers entered Bengal through invasion, one of the contrasting differences between these two different kinds of rulers was that Islamic rules settled down and made India their new country while the British had no intention to settle down in India. So, the change brought in social, economic, and political spheres by the

Islamic rulers was motivated by a long-term vision and local development by bringing the native population into the administrative system. On the other hand, the primary motivation of British rulers was to maximize the economic profit through deep exploitation as long as they can. Though, some of the policies did benefit India but had to pay a heavy price which had never been experienced before by the people of Bengal.

The British rule had changed the very rubric of the Bengal society and distorted the very DNA of the society. The British rule destroyed the traditional Hindu and Muslim elite class and was transplanted by new social elites who were played by the rulers for their economic benefits. The British administration also played the new Hindu and Muslim class against each other which led to the development of distrust between these two communities which resulted in communal riots. In sum, British rule led to abnormal and unbalanced developments in the social, political, and economic sphere in Bengal.

Key Words : Bengal, colonial rule, socio-economic class, traditional elite class, permanent settlement, zamindars, bhadrалока, ashraf, atraf

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Colonial Encounter with Traditional Social Elite Class in Bengal :

Emergence of New Social Classes on the Ruins of the Mughal Empire*

Historically, Bengal has gone through the successive rule of Hindu, Buddhist and Mughal rulers. Islamic culture and Persian language were introduced in Bengal through the Turkish conquests in the early thirteenth century. And, by the late sixteenth century when Mughals invaded Bengal, the Islam culture has become a part of local culture. But the Turkish and Mughal conquest of Bengal was completely different than the colonization of Bengal by East India Company in the late eighteenth century. The British under East India Company conceived and implemented different land revenue settlements as a colonial tool of exploitation in colonized Bengal. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze and to interpret the extents, and far-reaching consequences of the land revenue settlements, linguistic and educational policies adopted by the British administration during its rule over Bengal. Especially, the paper looks into the impact of these policies on the prevailing traditional Hindu and Muslim elite classes and socio-economic structure, and the changes or transformations brought in the social, political and educational spheres.

벵갈에서의 전통 사회 엘리트 계급과의 식민적 조우

- 무굴제국의 폐허에서 떠오른 신 사회계급

히리대 나라연

역사적으로 벵갈은 차례로 힌두교도, 불교도, 무굴 통치자들의 지배를 겪었다. 이슬람 문화와 페르시아어가 13세기 초 투르크의 정복을 통해 벵갈에 도입되었다. 그리고 16세기 후반에 무굴이 벵갈을 침공하면서 이슬람 문화는 지역 문화의 일부가 되었다. 그러나 투르크와 무굴의 벵갈 정복은 18세기 후반 동인도회사의 벵갈 식민화와는 완전히 다른 것이었다. 동인도회사 산하의 영국인들은 식민화된 벵갈에 착취를 위한 식민적 도구로서 상이한 토지세 정착지를 고안하고 이식했다. 이 논문에서는 영국 정부의 벵갈 통치기간 동안 그들에 의해 도입된 토지세 정착지, 언어 및 교육 정책의 규모와 그것이 가져온 막대한 결과를 분석하고 해석하고자 한다. 특히, 이 논문에서는 이러한 정책들이 전통적 힌두교와 이슬람 엘리트 계급과 사회경제구조에 초래한 영향과 그리고 사회, 정치, 그리고 교육계에 초래한 변화 또는 변형을 조망하고자 한다.

주제어 : 벵갈, 식민통치, 사회경제적 계급, 전통 엘리트 계급, 영구 정착지, 자민다르, 바드랄로카, 아쉬라프, 아트라프