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ASSESSING COLONIAL INTERVENTION ON TOBACCO ECONOMY: A STUDY OF COLONIAL BENGAL



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ABSTRACT

Tobacco smoking is one of the significant means of recreation. It is said that Tobacco was brought to India by the Portuguese merchant Class in the Sixteenth century. It was gaining popularity gradually. Yet the production of it (Tobacco) was not exceedingly. The total scenario was changed after the colonial intervention on tobacco economy. They (Britishers) brought superior Tobacco seeds from foreign countries. They adopted various measures like soil test, scientific examination of tobacco seeds and so on. As they realized the demand of tobacco made items like Cigar, Cigarette and Cheroot in both the foreign as well as local markets, they set up several Cigarette manufacturing companies and started exporting them to the different parts of the world. The native attempts were not far behind them. They (the Indians) also founded some manufacturing companies of tobacco related items.

KEYWORDS : *Assessing Colonial Intervention , Tobacco Economy , manufacturing companies , industrial productions.*



INTRODUCTION :

From its introducing period, tobacco occupied a significant place in society especially due to its recreational abilities. Therefore its economic aspects, including agrarian and industrial productions, trade and commercial activities are increasing gradually. With the native's initiatives, the Britishers played a vital role in the development of this economy during the period under review. The causes behind this British initiatives were both of its

exportation to Europe as well as for its local consumption. The present essay aims to highlight the measures adopted by both the Indians as well as the Britishers in the growth of Tobacco economy in colonial Bengal.

In 'Udbhid Bichar', forty types of tobacco plants are mentioned¹. It is said that among them, only three categories – Virginian, Syrian and Siraj tobacco are superior. Another broader division of tobacco is: 'deshi tamak' (Nicotina Tobaum) and 'Motihari Tamak' (Nicotina Rustica). The first one was of indigenous type and produced from a yellow flower and the later was of foreign type and originated from a red flower. During the period of my study, a huge quantity of tobacco was produced in the various parts of the Indian Subcontinent. Surat, Sambhal, Bihar, Madras, Bengal, Patna, Cuttack, Tamil

Nadu were notable among them.

As my concerned area in this paper is colonial Bengal, the present article aims to highlight a proper picture of tobacco's agrarian production. At the outset of this discussion, it is necessary to point out that the process of tobacco cultivation was more or less same to the other parts of the subcontinent. Generally, from November to April, tobacco was cultivated in our country. At first the field was chosen in the basis of soil. Sandy soil was favorable most to cultivate superior tobacco. Yet, tobacco was produced also in other soils. The land should be high which was handy to pass the water. The fields were manured with bill silt consisting of decomposing water plants and with well rotted cow dung. The colds were crushed with a ladder four times every month if possible with this, chemical fertilizers including phosphoric Acid were mixed with the soil of a particular quantity.

Like the other plants, tobacco cultivation was depended upon the quality of seeds. The seeds were grown up on the basis of climate as well as the condition of soil. The self-inter course was the medium of seeds. According to Charles Darwin, the self-intercourse of tobacco is taking place following the Natural Laws. Because both the male and female are existed within flower of tobacco.

Although the tobacco is a 'Rabi' Crop, its production was mostly depended upon the rainfall. The seeds were sown in nurseries on August and transplanted early on October. In Rangpur districts sometime, the tobacco seeds are sown in September and transplanted between Octobers to the middle of the December². The plants being placed about 18 inches apart and about the same distance apart in the rows. Immediately after transplantation they were watered, and they were generally provided two more watering later, once when the plants are about 6 inches high, and again in the first half of December some ten or twelve days before harvesting³. After eight or ten large leaves have formed the side and centre shoots were nipped off, to get larger leaf of better qualities.

In the whole subcontinent tobacco was cultivated in almost, 30, 3000 bighas. Among them, half of it was situated in Bengal and Bihar. By and large tobacco was produced in every districts of Bengal. But among them, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Jessore, 24-parganas were the main districts of tobacco production. In this connection, the assistant secretary of agriculture, industry and commerce, pointed out that Indian tobacco was grown more or less extensively in every districts of Bengal, with an exception of Noakhally⁴. The zaminders were the principal patrons of tobacco cultivation.

But it was the turning point of the history of tobacco production in India when the British Government realized the importance of it and started taking several drastic actions for its improvement. Among the districts of Bengal, the British Government was particularly more active in the districts of Rangpur, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. Initially, the soil and seeds were examined and then superior seeds were distributed among the cultivators. The secretary of the Government of India sent a letter to the secretary of Government of Bengal regarding the analysis of tobacco and soil which consisted of the following measures:

1. Having regard to the increasing export of tobacco from Bengal to foreign countries, and to the attention which is now being given to the cultivation of the plant in this country under European Governor – General in Council that a series of analysis of the constituents of the plant and of the soil in which it grows, carefully conducted by a competent chemist, would probably prove of much service to persons interested in the cultivation and trade by enabling them to avoid mistake, which would tend to discourage the development of what will probably prove an important industry.

2. Such a series of procedures would usefully supplemented the analysis made by Mr. Broughton, and he (Governor General of Bengal) was to suggest, for the consideration of the honour of the Lieutenant Governor that Mr. C.H. Wood, the Government quinologist, might perhaps be invited to undertake

similar investigations. He (Governor General of Bengal) was also to request that the drastic steps may be taken, in communication with Mr. C.H. Wood, for carrying it into effect.

3. The first analysis to be made would be of Bengal tobaccos. But later it may perhaps be possible for Mr. C.H.Wood to undertake the analysis tobacco from other parts of the country. The result of each analysis made should be published for general information⁵.

Another report is found which included same thing .The Governor General of Bengal accepted happily accepted the job to undertake the scientific analysis regarding tobacco. But he was not at all satisfied with the Laboratory and its related accommodation. In reply the Governor General of India ordered him (Governor General of Bengal) to submit a report of the cost of extra establishment. In addition to this he (Governor General of Bengal) was also told to inform me by what materials we shall able to help you by supplying⁶. Besides this, the acting assistant of Bengal demanded seeds from the commissioner of Rajshahye and Cooch Behar. This report includes the following theme:-

"I am directed to forward herewith copy of a letter no. 125, dated the 2nd March 1876, from the Govt. of India in the dept. of Revenue, Agriculture Commerce, transmitting 5th of Havana tobacco seed for cultivation and preparation of the leaf in Bengal, and to enquire how much of the seed can be advantageously sown in the districts of divisions. The quantity of the seed now remaining with this Government for disposal is 2tb, 90z"⁷.

Regarding this we find another report which from H.H.Risley, the acting assistant secretary of Bengal to the commissioner of Rajshaye and Cooch Behar. It was confirmed that Care should be taken that this seed is not mixed up with other seed, and that an accurate record is kept of all the particulars of the experiment from first to last⁸. But the experiment was to some extent in vain. The commissioner of Rajshaye and Cooch Behar division forwarded a letter to the Secretary of Government of Bengal which is consisted of the following theme. The seed was sent in the middle of August last year to the district officers in the Quantities noted marginally. As will be seen, the collector of Bogura received the largest supply, as he represented that he did not think or adequate experiment could be made with a smaller quantity.

| Districts Name | Quantity of Tobacco (in OZS) |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Dinajpore | 3 |
| Rajshahye | 2 |
| Pabna | 2 |
| Bogura | 12 |
| Rangpur | 5 |
| Darjeeling | 4 |
| Cooch Behar | 8 |

1. In the districts of Dinajpore and Rajshiahye, the experiment proved a complete failure, as it appears that, although the Lands were carefully prepared, none of the seeds germinated.

2. Out of the quantity sent to Pabna district, the collector reported that only 20 plants came to prepare weighted only 12 chittacks.

3. In Rungpore the matter was entrusted to Dr. Ghose, who reported that the seed germinated sparingly, and that subsequent continued wet weather and storm destroyed nearly all the young plants.

4. In the Julpaiguri district too, it is reported that the seedling were destroyed by the rains. Some of the seed was, however, kept for second sowings, and a further experiment was made. It is stated that the

growth of these plants was slow, and that the leaves looked inferior to the country tobacco leaves being small, narrow and thin. The sub – divisional Officer of Buxa reported the result of his experiment as being a poor outturn, but he considered the quantity of the leaves superior to country produce.

5. The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling sent the seed which was forwarded to him to the Tehsildar of the Terai, who distributed it among several respectable Jotedars; but through tried in different localities, it utterly failed everywhere. The Deputy Commissioner was, however, anxious to give the seed a second trail, and I accordingly requested the collector of Bogura to forward 4 ounces from the supply sent to him to Darjeeling, if he could spare it. The Deputy Commissioner has reserved this quantity for a future trail.

6. In Cooch Behar, the experiment was equally unfavorable, as the seeds germinated very sparingly, and the subsequent wet weather destroyed what had come up.

7. The collector of Bogura unfortunately was unable to give the seed any trail, as he could find no one willing to take the seed.

8. From the general failure of the experiments in all the districts, I am inclined to think that the seed must either have been very old, or have suffered in some way in transit; whether this is the case or not will be known by the results obtained in other divisions. It will be remembered that Rungpore and Cooch Behar are famous for cultivation of country tobacco⁹.

In 1829, the experiment about tobacco was done for the very first time by the English East India Company according to the order of the court of Directors. The Virginia tobacco and Maryland tobacco seeds were sent with the cultivation process of Captain Basil Hall. Then the samples were sent to London. The following drawbacks were pointed out about the Indian tobacco. These were: Firstly, it was attacked by fungus very soon during the export or import and became damage within a very short period;

Secondly, it was not favorable to produce Cheroot or Cigarette due to its colourlessness; and Last but not the least, it had no sweet smell.

In continuation of the tobacco cultivation, a good numbers of tobacco industries were came into existence in the area under review. Though the industries somewhere took the shape of big and one of the main industries, in other districts it remained as one of the cottage industries. Primarily in Bengal cottage industries like bids and so on were grown up. Later on big industries were set up by the British government in the various parts of the subcontinent. In 1870 a tobacco company was constructed in Gazipur in the united province. Then in the mid Nineteenth century, attempts were made by 'Messrs. Begg Dunlop company' to establish at Musa in Darbhanga district. After that the 'Peninsular tobacco Company' built up another company in Monghyr. At the initial stage, this company was an Anglo-American Concern. But then it gone under the British government totally¹⁰.

All these above activities of the Britishers affected the thoughts of the Bengalese as well as Indians. As the Swadeshi movement was going on at that time, the people realized that something should be done to meet with the challenges. Several people began to oppose cigarette waste on the basis of health. But the most significant action was to develop the native industries by applying the western method of curing tobacco. Cigar, cigarette and bidi were three new items enlisted with the traditional methods of tobacco use like, khaini and zarda .

In continuation to this, a good number of factories were set up by the indigenous entrepreneurship. These were too managed and owned by the Indians. The factories began to manufacture cigarettes. Among them the following were notable:

1. The Globe cigarette Company (20, Tangra Road, Calcutta).
2. The Bengal Cigarette Manufacturing Company. (42, Shampukur Street, Calcutta)
3. The Calcutta Cigarette Company¹¹.

Narendranath Mitra was the manager of these companies. These companies made cigarettes of various brands i.e., the Apple, Cricketer and so on. Within a very short period, these companies gained popularity. The principal reason behind it was that these companies were able to supply superior quality cigarettes in a cheapest rate¹². After a short break, another company known as the 'Swadeshi Cigarette Company' at Tala, Calcutta, established the month between January – February, 1907.

When the 'Indian Cigarette Manufacturing Company Limited' was come into existence in Jiaganj near Berhampur, the Sadar town of the district of Murshibabad, It became popular within a few months of its establishment mainly because of its cigarettes manufacturing¹³. Beside this, the 'Naidu Cigarette Company' was constructed at 79, Howrah Road, Salkia; the 'Capital Cigarette Company' of 23/A, Coloota Street; the 'Nation tobacco Company Limited' situated at 42, Shampukur Street, Calcutta were also deserve to Mention. Among them, the first two companies were known for their smooth supply. On the other hand, the last one was popular for its 'Kohinoor' brand cigarettes as well as 'Bengal Club' brand tobacco mixture. Because both of them were known for their richness of quality and flavour¹⁴.

Apart from the aforementioned, Cigars were started making by the indigenous people through the setting up of Cigar factories. 'Messrs. B.L. Daw and Company' located at 52, Canning Street, was one of them. It was famous for its 'Moham Cheroot'. Beside this, there was also 'R. Paul Company' of 52, Frazer Street, Rangoon.

In spite of this, it is noteworthy here that both the 'East India Cigarette Manufacturing Company Limited' and the 'Rangpur tobacco Company' played a key role to combat the challenges of the Britishers. Therefore both of them deserve some discussions.

The East India Cigarette Manufacturing Company Limited: It was registered on 23 September 1908. Its registered office was situated at 17, Beliaghata Road, Calcutta. M. Omari, a Turkish gentleman was the managing Director. The other directors of that very company were (a) M.L. Laik; (b) J.N.Sircar; and (c) A.H.Johur¹⁵. The chief managing Director shifted the factory to 19, Dum Dum Road and began to manufacture in a full swing. It is evident to us that it was a Indo-Turkish joint venture company. It was the largest non-British tobacco Company in India. From a report we get a statistics that it had 2000 Indian Labourers, both men and women. Beside this man power they challenged the others with capital power. The company had a dealership in tobacco, cigars and cigarette. Its manufactured cigarettes had a great demand in the country particularly its Jorha Pan. Though it had other shareholders, a huge quality of the net profit was drawn to the government.

Rangpur Tobacco Company: The 'Rangpur Tobacco Company' was registered on 2nd September, 1907 with the capital of Rs. 2, 50,000 and introduced making cigarette. This company used to get tobacco from three sources. The first one was that there were the tobacco cultivators themselves from whom the company used to buy tobacco. Secondly tobacco from the different district's government like, Rangpur and Burirhut. And thirdly to get tobacco was to grow it itself. At the outset, the company met with profit. By the year 1908-09, a dividend of 2.5%¹⁶ was declared. On 12 November 1912, the paid up capital was raised to Rs.1, 04,389 – an increase of Rs.1650 – while the subscribed capital stood at Rs.2,00,000¹⁷. On 22 October 1913, it was again raised to Rs.1, 05,644 – an increase of Rs.1,25518.

But it should be pointed out here that this success was not stayed for long time. The company had to face competition from the British, American and Egyptian origin companies like 'Peninsular Tobacco Company'; 'British India tobacco Company.' of Mounghyr and so on. These foreign companies began to buy tobacco in a huge scale that the rate of tobacco was increased high from Rs.3/- to Rs.3-8-0 Rs.8/- Rs.9/- per lb. Sometimes they used to sell their products in cheaper rates in compare to the Indian tobacco Company. Beside this, they (foreign Tobacco Company) brought the Indian tobacco sellers to their fold in this way the whole Indian tobacco market was handed out to the foreign tobacco companies.

In this serious moment, the 'Rangpur tobacco Company' took some necessary actions to stay in the market. It firstly decreased the rate of cigarette from Rs.2-8-0 to Rs.1-4-0 per 1000. Yet the company ruined. Because, the company faced a great loss due to gradual decrease of the rate of Cigarette. The total loss amount was Rs.75,000 to Rs.80,000. In spite of all these another matter should be here noteworthy that several indigenous elite persons began to manufacture the Cigarette or Cigar by importing the technology and machines from the foreign countries. Although their success was limited in that field, the attempt was quite significant in the sense that it was a swadeshi response.

Apart from the Cigar, Cigarette and other items made off tobacco became very trendy particularly among the Indian masses. That was known as bidi. The vital cause of it was that it was of low prices. It was most probably the direct products of Swadeshi movement²⁰. Among the districts of the area under assessment, the districts of Burdwan, Murshidabad, Hooghly, Howrah and Birbhum, bidi gained the place of Cigarette within a very short period²¹. It had another aspect that the bidi marking industries, both the cottage as well as big, the poor people got a new means of earnings.

In continuation to this, the Hookah and Zarda related small industries were grown up. The 'Messrs. Mokbul & Company' of Zarda²² and in Bishnupur town the Hookah making industries were came to the light. However with the both types like, agrarian and industrial products led to the flourishing of tobacco trade and commercial activities. In spite of this, both the inland and external trade was going on relating tobacco. In the first phase, tobacco was sent to Narayaganj and Calcutta for export to Burma. Tobacco was also exported from Jalpaiguri to Calcutta in a considerable quantity. Tobacco was also grown for Maldives. The tobacco of Chittagong hill tracts was too sent to Burma for Cigarette manufacturing. Bengal also exported tobacco to Assam totaling 1,54,171 mds to the value of Rs.9,31,194 in 1898-99, and 1,30,549 mds. To the value of Rs.8,35,202 in 1899-1900. Rajshahi sent tobacco of 5,65,223 mds. in 1898-99, which in 1899-1900 increased to 6,41,310 mds. On the other hand, Bengal imported tobacco from Assam to Falling 147 mds. of the value of Rs.1,278 in 1898-99 and 231 mds. of the value of Rs.3,589 in 1899-1900²³. From the different parts of India Calcutta use to import tobacco in a huge quantity.

Sofar as the external trade in tobacco is concerned, it can be mentioned that India conducted trade and commercial activities with the various parts of the world like Egypt, America, England, Maldives, Singapore, China, Holland (now-a-days Netherland) and so on. According to the government report, tobacco was first exported from India about 1866-67 amounting the Rs.89, 13, 98. It reached in 1906-07 to the total amount of Rs.30, 95978. Tobacco leaf was mainly sent to Holland (now-a-days Netherland) and China. In addition to this, Cigar was too exported from Bengal. In 1876-77, the total export was Rs.117445 and increased in 1901-02 to Rs.1640427 to Rs.997489 in 1906-07.

The total value of the product exported meanwhile from Bengal, according to the custom House returns of late years, is stated to have been as follows :-

| Year | Value | CW |
|---------|-------------|----------|
| 1871-72 | 11, 72, 154 | 94, 769 |
| 1872-73 | 14,10, 648 | 183, 375 |
| 1873-74 | 22, 96, 045 | 260, 349 |

Source: Growth and manufacture of tobacco in Bengal, February 1875, General Department and Revenue branch, WBSA(West Bengal State Archives).

In contrary, Bengal imported a large scale of tobacco till the twentieth century. Particularly Bengal was used to bring tobacco from England, America and others countries. But in the first decade of the twentieth century, the emergence of Swadeshi movement led to the boy COH of British goods and development of indigenous tobacco production which finally helped to decrease in the quantity of imported cigarette. In 1908-09 the observable decline in tobacco importation. In the same time the value of tobacco was decreased by 11% than the previous years because of the increased to local making of Cigarette²⁴. Beside Cigarette, Cigar import was declined in 23% in quantity.

| Year | Imports of Unmanufactured tobacco in lbs. | Imports of Cigarettes | |
|---------|---|-----------------------|-------------|
| | | In lbs | in millions |
| 1903-04 | 1377 | 1648287 | N.A. |
| 1904-05 | 12172 | 1792824 | 584 |
| 1905-06 | 31636 | 2097181 | 666 |
| 1906-07 | 132498 | 1755852 | 563 |
| 1907-08 | 266231 | 1795827 | 613 |
| 1908-09 | 652732 | 1167470 | 471 |
| 1909-10 | 2119737 | 1094230 | 439 |
| 1910-11 | 163503 | 387018 | 155 |
| 1911-12 | 43225 | N.A. | 128 |

Source: Report of the maritime Trade of Bengal, 1910-11, Financial department (Custom Branch) File No. IR/1 Prgs. A 4-8, June 1911, RAB for 1911-12; Calcutta, 1913, p.218.

From the above chart, we may say the importation of tobacco was increased and reached its zenith in 1905-06. But after that, the quantity of tobacco import was declined gradually, with success of Swadeshi movement, the implementation of high custom duty was responsible for the decline in tobacco importation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

In the concluding paragraph we may say that centering tobacco the agriculture, industry as well as trade were grown up. Initially these steps were taken by the native people and then the British government intervened in the tobacco economy realizing the significant value of tobacco. As a result of this, the tobacco cultivation was developed. But on the other hand it helped to the establishment of indigenous tobacco industries. It also led to the rapid decline of tobacco importation especially in the closing years of the first decade of twentieth country. The origin of Swadeshi movement was a significant force there.

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