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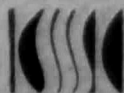
THE COLONIALIST PREMISE IN THE BRITISH OCCUPATION
OF BENGAL : CONTRIBUTIONS BY CLIVE AND
PITT, THE ELDER, DURING 1757-59

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is a first fruit of research for completing a book to be entitled The Westminster Parliamentary Model and Eighteenth-Century India. The Indian Council of Historical Research awarded me maintenance grant for ten days in 1973, and a Travelling Fellowship for three months in late 1977 to undertake necessary archival and library work at Oxford, London and Edinburgh for updating information about post-1961 finds of the scattered Melville Mss. This collection of private and demi-official papers was built up by Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville (on whose policies about India I had written my Oxford D.Phil Thesis), by his Secretaries, and by his son and successor in the control of Parliamentary consideration of Indian and naval affairs as well as Scots conservative politics, the 2nd Viscount. In 1977, I was also able to consult in the British Museum State Paper Room a new and rare multi-volume edition (by Sheila Lambert) of the House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century; as well as the steadily growing literature on the reign of George III. Most of this is not available in our Indian libraries. These enquiries will form part of an introduction to the volume to place the constitutional position regarding British India in proper perspective.

I am thankful to the Master and Fellows of St. Catherine's College, and to the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College, at Oxford for making visiting facilities available, which enabled me to

write in peace during the autumn of 1977. The Indian Institute section of the Bodleian Library at Oxford gave me excellent research facilities.

A first draft of this paper, in a different form, was presented to the Modern Indian History Section of the Indian History Congress at Bhubaneswar in December, 1977. For rushing that material into script, at that time, immediately after my return to India, I remain grateful to members of the typing pool and cyclostyling staff of the CSSSC; and, as always, in whatever I write, to V.A. Kutty. I am grateful to Asok Sen for his perennial encouragement and personal sustenance; and to Sunil Munshi for his gentle yet firm insistence on prising this script away from me for the Occasional Papers Series.

I. Premises

(a) Introductory:

The British imperial system in the mid-eighteenth century was loose and hazy in its outlines. It was more a set of specific conjunctures, created by British colonialists or traders, who interacted with local circumstances, in as far flung areas as the thirteen colonies on the Atlantic seaboard, tropical colonies in the West Indies, coastal settlements in India, such as Madras, Bombay and Calcutta (located in East India Company 'factories' since the seventeenth century), as well as not very successful trading points in the East Indies and on the China coast. Rays of trade relations emanated from British ports, such as Bristol and London interlinked by patterns of 'triangular trade'. This network flowed into lattice structure: re-export of the bulk of final imports, from the international entrepot of London to countries in Europe or the Americas, where such commodities were in demand.

Such mercantile relations, typical in variegated and somewhat moribund form in all other Western European commercial powers, did not have any particular constitutional format. There were sets of conventions, based on interpretation of existing statute book law. When new circumstances arose, reference was generally made by legal counsel to traditional precedents; references exceptionally latent, and hardly yet to be considered constitutional conventions.

New circumstances of change were faced in the late 1750s; then in quick succession during the 1760s and 1770s. The Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763 in which, allied with Frederick the

Great of Prussia, the British fought against the Habsburg monarch and the Bourbons, ushered in these changes. The British people's natural interest was the European war. But their real profits accrued in the domain of colonial trade. William Pitt the Elder, who had emerged as the dominant war leader with strong support from the West Indian merchant interest, developed a clear concept of holding and aggrandising the Empire in strong-points over the far-flung Atlantic and Indian Oceans, so as to give the British Navy striking power against France (Britain's major colonial rival since the Colbert's days in the seventeenth century).

The most resounding successes were gained along the Bay of Bengal coasts. Basing himself on successes against the French in a previous Carnatic War around Madras, Arcot and Trichinopoly, Robert Clive in 1757 thrust north-eastwards against Siraj-ud-daulah in command of a Telinga sepoy force led by East India Company officers, and naval transport led by Admiral Watson. The young Nawab of Murshidabad was embroiled in a usual mid-eighteenth century Indian provincial court succession-struggle. He had taken consequential punitive measures in 1756 against the company's factory in Calcutta, leading to his share of responsibility for the old Fort William atrocity. He was routed at Plassey. Clive installed Mir Jafar, the Nawab's uncle-by-marriage on the Murshidabad magnad. The Company's inevitable entanglement in the territorial affairs of the Bengal and Bihar subah, led to consideration by Clive the metropolitan imperial decision-maker Pitt the Elder, of what choices should be taken for stabilising the format and structure of the new conquest.

The arrangements took twenty-five years to complete and were part of a broader set within which the less successful imperial arrangements for colonists of British extraction on the North American Seaboard were also being attempted. While the measures of George Grenville, Rockingham, Charles Townshend, North, and Lord George Germain led to the American War of Independence in the 1770s, the Company's new Indian domain, was treated as if its population were the British people's subjects by conquest, prone to alien whims about constitutional innovation, although for expedient purposes the fiction of Mughal sovereignty was scrupulously maintained.

British mercantile colonialism's American policy met with disaster because it was clogged by traditional ideas of parliamentary representation. The same precedents were given different ideological forms by sets of people and parties on either side of the Atlantic, who had a common fund of memories about constitutional and legal history, from which they could draw opposite conclusions.¹ The trouble for the British Whig executive in the 1760s and early 1770s was that the North American colonial leaders had a fund of archaic Whig ideas, from which they could build a conservative as well as

1. John Brooke, King George III (Panther Edn. 1974, first published 1972) pp. 270-278.

revolutionary ideology.² On the other hand, British India in its embryonic form was treated by imperialist policy-makers and legislators, as a tabula rasa, on which arbitrary ideas of authority, derived not from the laws of peace, but from the laws of Western European conquest, could work its political will. Series of parliamentary enactments gave constitutional shape to this imposition. Henry Dundas, the linking-pin in the continuity and change which can be discerned in these enactments was much influenced in his ideas, by premises derived from Pitt the Elder and Clive, though the systemic work of both from which he learnt, was developed in 1765-67; and not in the period now being discussed. It is worthwhile considering what the initial arrangements were. Before analysing the data, it is worth noting the import of a recent historiographical trend in writing about this period.

(b) Historiography:

The late V.T. Harlow, Beit Professor of Commonwealth History at Oxford's posthumous publication, The Founding of the Second

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2. Brooke, loc.cit. explicates the way in which the old Whigs of Britain worked according to parsimonious principles of public expenditure, leaving a minimum of activity and revenue to the royal Civil List : On p.273, he writes: "...in general the Whigs were not imperialists. ...William Pitt .. at best no more than half a Whig (propagated) the theory that it was desirable to acquire colonies in order to spread the gospel according to the revolution of 1688 to the unconverted parts of the world. To the economic motive for colonization was now added a missionary zeal. Pitt the first imperialist in modern British history dug the grave of the Whigs. Britain was no longer to be a European but an imperial power". While the ideology and missionary zeal cannot be proved from what has been published about him, it is correct that this turned out to be Chatham's objective role in history.

British Empire, Vol. II³ treats the period from 1757 till 1780 merely as an interregnum in his own imperial tradition when British Indian empire-builders sought to find institutional safeguards against a rapacity and chaos in their own policies, which was detrimental to British national profit in the era of mercantilist crisis. Implicitly moving in the tracks of an early formulation, in 1930, by his predecessor as Beit Professor (of Colonial History), R. Coupland, that British imperialism in eighteenth century India was marked by two periods, colonialist rapacity till 1784 and noble trusteeship till Pitt's India Act,⁴ Harlow saw the emergence, in fact a few years earlier than 1784, of ideas of administrative reorganisation and efficiency, as well as of a swing, away from America, lost to mercantilist exploitation (after the Shelburne Treaty which marked the conclusion of the War of Independence) to the East. Harlow played down the premises of exploiting India for British national profit which Coupland, more of a pristine imperialist, had discerned in Robert Clive's already well known letter of 1759 to William Pitt, as well as in the Elder Pitt's response.

This new thesis - or rather the revival of the late nineteenth century type of bourgeois authoritarian historiography which believed

3. Vincent T. Harlow, The Founding of The Second British Empire 1763-1793 Vol. II, New Contents and Changing Values (London, 1964) pp. 5-6, particularly 6 : and in general, chapters II and III. It may be noted in Professor Harlow's massive researches on the problem of the development of the constitutional relationship between India and the British Parliament in the eighteenth century, he talks of Clive from 1757 and Pitt the Elder in 1766, but leaves out the crucial correspondence of the former with the latter in 1759, which would have been a key to the latter's stand in 1766 (vide pp. 26-27 and 43).
4. R. Coupland, The American Revolution and the British Empire (London, 1930).

that what was better ruled was best - is given concise and sophisticated form by Dr. P.J. Marshall of King's College, London, who in 1969, in his now characteristic low-keyed and modest vein of understating all determined aspects of 18th century British imperialism,⁵ sees in the growth of British responsibility for the control of the government of the Indian coastline, an initial lack of political will to penetrate into the actual arena of governance, of serpentine meandering and gently gradual assumption of responsibility, as a result of imperial and constitutional crises in 1782-84 in Britain itself. The Harlow-Marshall approach, common in current Commonwealth historiography, keeps not only early British rapacity in Bengal, but also political planning and determination of the policy-makers who first thought of guiding the exploitation of Bengal's natural resources into British metropolitan national channels of profit, out of the main focus of historical debate.

The impact of early colonialist rapacity on the disintegration of the breaking-down Mughal revenue system, has, in fact, been faced in a far more straightforward fashion by historians such as Narendra Krishna Sinha and Abdul Majed Khan. But their research concerns were revenue regulation, regional economy, and the expression and impact of the former within the transitional ruling class polity inside Bengal. In fact Khan in his seminal and excellent book, does deal with parts of the data given below, as part of the British imperial framework with which traditionalist Bengal

5. P.J. Marshall, Problems of Empire. Britain and India, 1757-1813 (London, 1968).

officials had to deal.⁶ The superordinate elements of policy, what I have called the colonialist premise, which runs like a red-white-and-blue tracer through the confusion of the British impact on eighteenth-century India, has been understated by British post-colonial historians and been relatively ignored by Indian and Bangladeshi post-independence historians.

Some straight political description may be useful to disrupt the over-specialised and narrowly limited constraints, which the new discipline of pure economic history sets in studying imperialism, starting up "England's Work in India".

II. The Data

Soon after the battle of Plassey, measures were taken to demarcate the British state's sphere of influence over the autonomy of the East India Company, so as to legitimate within the British constitutional system as it existed at the time, the potentially enormous increase of wealth and territorial influence. Before this,

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6. N.K. Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to the Permanent Settlement, Vol.II (Calcutta 1968), pp.23-25 which cursorily covers the period does not deal with the overall problem. Some of the events in 1759 discussed in the text of this Paper, with regard to a Delhi offer of Diwani of Bengal to Clive are noted by the keen eye of Abdul Majed Khan, The Transition in Bengal, 1756-1775 A Study of Saiyid Muhammad Roza Khan Cambridge, 1969), p.12 : his purpose of reference is to make the point that "Room had been found in the past for all nationalities in the (Delhi) imperial service; there was no reason why the English should not be found a place". Refuting Clive's cynicism about "Mussalman" faithlessness, Khan says "The Mughal attitude was that a working partnership was perfectly possible" Khan proves how British policies destroyed the partnership.

the state had cheerfully accepted the amorphous autonomy of corporate business enterprise, subject to normal early eighteenth century rules of excise and taxation which its charters had conferred on the Company's operations in India and the East Indies. The story of the events that led to the change may be recapitulated to emphasise the warlike conditions in which the change was considered.

From the 1740s, conflicts with French merchants - known as the First and Second Carnatic Wars - had started as parts of attempts for greater political influence by European merchants holding almost extra-territorial jurisdiction on the Carnatic coast⁷. The opposed Navaiyat, and Gopama Pathan, factions of Muslim nobility contested for power in the Mughal Subahdari of the south-eastern coast of India, south of the river Gundlekamma (bordering what might be called Andhra) notionally upto Kanyakumari. This territory was called Payanghat Carnatic and was de jure under the influence of the Viceroy of the Mughal Dakhin, the Nizam of Hyderabad⁸. These local wars

7. A good account of the origins of this process will be found in J.F. Richards "European City States on the Coromandel Coast" in the Felicitation Volume presented to Prof. H.K. Sherwani, ed. by P.M. Joshi (Hyderabad, 1975). I regret that the only copy of the volume that I know of in Calcutta, is not available, at the moment of preparing this script, for me to give the exact reference.

8. Mention will be found about the ethnic composition of the early eighteenth century Carnatic Mughal nobility in Raja R. Ram, The Nawabship of Arcot Trichinopoly, 1912). More details are given in K. Rajayyan, Administration and Society in the Carnatic, 1701-1801 (Tirupati, 1968) pp.4-16.

broadened into generalised conflict wherever English and French Companies traded on the Indian coastline. As a result the appetites of both were whetted for increased political influence in the highly fertile and potentially export-oriented Gangetic delta, where similar factional succession disputes existed among the Bengal Subahdari nobility. Here, an internally divided ruling class was crippled by Maratha raids and Afghan mercenary subversion. In 1755, died Alivardi Khan who had come to regional authority after usurping it in 1739-40 and had held together the provinces of Bengal and Behar. These had been truncated from geographical proximity to the Hyderabad coastal Sarkars by the loss, ratified by treaty in 1751, of Orissa to the Bhonsle family of Marathas of Nagpur.⁹

It was in Bengal, rather than the Carnatic, that the English Company hit the jackpot. Initial reverses in meddling in disputes between Alivardi's grandson and successor, Sirajuddaulah and a sub-regional officer in Dacca led to the Black Hole disaster of 1757. Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive sailed up the Hooghly river, recaptured Calcutta, stormed the French factory at Chandernagor, and corrupted the bureaucracy at the capital city of Murshidabad.¹⁰ Plassey was a walkover. Immediately after the reconquest of Calcutta, the London Directors of the East India Company applied to Pitt the

9. Details will be found in Kalikinkar Datta's compendium on Alivardi and His Times (Calcutta, 1939).
10. An excellent source book for this period is S.C. Hill, Bengal in 1756-57 (London, 1908).

Elder, one of King George II's Principal Secretaries of State (in the Southern Department and as such responsible for all decisions regarding colonial as well as East India Company affairs, as well as for diplomatic relations with France and Southern Europe, and as such for the conduct of the bulk of the war and diplomatic concerns of England's share of the Seven Years' War).¹¹ The Directors, interested in primitive accumulation of gains, as much as in regular mercantile activity, wanted Government sanction to take a "Moisty of the Booty" in the division of the plunder "from Moors". Claimants were the Royal Navy's Admiral, Watson and his officers on the one hand, and the Governor and Council of the Company at Fort St. George (Madras) who had despatched Clive and his troops, on the other. The decision was royal. Pitt asked the royal legal officers, the Advocate (G. Hay), the Attorney (Pratt, later Lord Camden) and the Solicitor-General (Charles Yorke) for their views.¹² Their report was much later printed by Order of the House of Commons in 1767 when

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11. Mark A. Thomson, The Secretaries of State, 1681-1782 (1932, new impression, London, 1968) p.2 - although this standard work shows no awareness that the Company's affairs were the concern of the Southern Department of the royal executive, vide Appendix XIII, Bibliography - but this is clear from S.C. Hill's Catalogue of the Home Miscellaneous Series of the India Office Records (London, 1927). The only other Secretary of State at this time was for the Northern Department : by his personality, Pitt had hogged the kudos for his Department.
 12. "Copy of H.M. Advocate, Attorney and Solicitor-General's Report, August 16, 1757" House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century, ed. by Sheila Lambert (Wilmington, Delaware, 1975) Vol.26 (George III, East India Company, 1767 and 1775) item 3054, p.1.

Pitt, then Earl of Chatham had become First Lord of the Treasury and was conducting enquiries regarding State control of the Company. ¹³

Their reply to the Secretary of State was that the case did not fall within the provision of an existing Statute "for the Encouragement of Seamen" since it related to the French War per se. The case pertained to a separate war between the Crown and "the Nabob of Bengal" and "must be judged by general Rules of Law and His Majesty's Prerogative". Distinguishing between the Company's "Old Dominion" of "the Town and Settlement of Calcutta" which should be restored, and, on the other hand :

"all such places, as may be newly conquered in this expedition (which) accrue to the sovereign, and are vested in his Majesty, by right of conquest"

the law officers concurred with the petition. All moveable goods, belonging to the Company, being retaken were held to have lapsed to the Crown and could be restored :

"by stronger Reason, all moveable and Plunder ... from the Enemy, are vested in his Majesty, subject to his power of disposing by virtue of his known Prerogative".

By the same logic, the Crown could dispose of such property to the Company. ¹⁴ On a further request from Pitt that they draft the legal

13. ibid, p.ii.

14. ibid, pp.1-2.

format for this grant, the law officers suggested

"Letters Patent under the Great Seal ..
most conformable to Usage in similar Cases".

They also suggested a special clause in these Letters Patent for
excepting (consonant to Equity and "present royal purpose") from
the grant to the Company

"Recapture of the Goods of private Persons
being His Majesty's Subjects, or others, trading
to the East Indies under His Majesty's Protection".¹⁵

The Secretary issued the Letters Patent on the 19th September, 1757.¹⁶

Subsequently, the Company humbly petitioned George II
directly, that above and beyond the moiety of spoils of war regained
in Calcutta, they had incurred heavy expenses in the war against
Siraj-ud-daulah. It expressed the hope that in the eventuality of
further wars in the pursuit of their business in the Indies, the
Charter of trade would be extended to include

"all such Fortresses, Districts and
Territories within the Limits of their Trade,
as they have acquired, or may hereafter acquire
from any Nation, state, or People by Treaty,
Grant or Conquest, with power to restore, give up

15. ibid, p.3; Report of Attorney, Advocate and Solicitor-General
of 31 August, 1757.

16. ibid, p.4.

and dispose of the same, as they shall from Time to Time, occasion subject nevertheless to your Majesty's Disposition and Pleasure, as to such Lands as may be acquired by Conquest from the subject of any European Power".¹⁷

The law officers were consulted again. On the 24th December, 1758 they replied that they had called in some of the leading Directors of the Company, and also studied earlier Charters : that whatever property was acquired on Indian soil was according to Indian potentates' grants to the Company. In the present situation, the Company could not pre-empt the title to future possibilities of accrual. The Crown held overall sovereignty over it, but its activities insofar as Charter rights permitted were self-determinatory. No decision of a newly declaratory nature was indicated at that juncture.¹⁸

Pitt, however, to relieve the finances of the Company which had helped in what was after all an imperial war, issued further Letters Patent delegating to the Company the privileges of retaining all booty gained from native enemies, exclusively using the Company's own troops, and of ceding, if necessary, according to treaties with native powers, fortresses and territories previously in the Company's possession. Although these Letters Patent did not explicitly admit the Company's right to administer and draw revenue from Indian

17. ibid., p.5, Humble Petition of the Honourable Company trading to the East Indies to the King (no date given).

18. ibid., p.6. Report of the Advocate, Attorney and Solicitor General to the King, 24 December, 1757.

territories, they went a long way towards the acceptance of this.¹⁹

The law officers of the Crown stated the precedents for British sovereignty and its reservation for purposes of future necessity over possibilities of British Indian Empire. Pitt the Elder was necessarily more pragmatical in granting leeway to the Company's colonialism. Already in 1757-8, long before British Commonwealth historians have dated the trend, the issue of the legal title of British state power over colonialist activity in India had been settled, in its intricate coalition of interests between the colonialist aspect of the metropolitan executive, the Company, and the free merchants (either subjects of the British Crown or foreign traders working under its protection). The company and the free merchants were technically subordinate to royal executive authority according to the Charters of the Crown in Parliament. This premise would guide all future eighteenth century British legislation regarding India.

The Company Directors had discerned the germs of a new Empire in accruals of territory in the 24 Parganas which surrounded Calcutta on three sides (with the Bhagirathi River, an offshoot of the Ganga, to its east), as well as of political influence gained over the Murshidabad Nawabi, through Mir Jafar's installation. Yet, there was no question of abrogating or overhauling the ancient

19. Basil Williams, Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham (London, 1913) Vol.1, p.29, quoting "Chatham Mss. 99 for the Law Officers' opinion and Pitt's instruction for the letters of patent of September 19, 1757 and January 14, 1758".

constitution of England in so far as extra-territorial necessities could be pre-visedged. The old traditions of the first British Empire which had been formulated in the Elizabethan and Stuart periods and were based on the culture of primitive accumulation by means of plunder, freebooting and settlement by rights of conquest still dominated state policy. In 1757, this was as much guided by the still tense fortunes of war in America and Germany, as it was encouraged by the fillip of the Bengal victories. Neither Pitt the Elder nor the Directors of 1759 were much removed from colonialism of the early variety as practised by Walsingham and Cecil in the time of Elizabeth I, or by Oliver Cromwell, or by the Earl of Halifax in the earlier years of George II's reign. There was nothing remarkably innovative in the Elder Pitt's measure.

Acknowledgedly traditionalist instruments of state action in mercantile expansion in the Indies permitted various types of outpost initiative - sharing out naval booty, protection of commercial intercourse of 'free merchants' (licensed by the monopolist company, to trade in sectors where there was a slack in its local market command). Such initiatives bred entrepreneurs, successful like Clive or Warren Hastings, or unsuccessful like Vansittart and - to a certain extent - George Pigot of Madras. They were part of a culture of British compromise between a gentry and landed magnate Parliament and a capitalism whose basic thrust in its early stages was to control the European re-export trade in luxury commodities. They were nothing out of the ordinary.

After Plassey, Clive remained in charge in Calcutta and appeared to Pitt the Elder in the tense fortunes of the Seven Years'

War as "Clive - that man not born for a desk - that heaven-born general".²⁰ He demolished a Dutch colonialist attempt to prise Mir Jafar out of the latter's gilded fetters (his assistant, Colonel Forde defeated the Batavian reinforcements to their Chinsurah factory at Biderra, halfway from the French settlement at Chandernagor). He threw back attempts by the young heir-apparent to the tottering Mughal throne at Delhi to assert Indian central authority over the Bengal Subahdari. And he sent Forde southward across Orissa and the Northern Sarkars to stall a new French thrust north-westwards from the Carnatic. It could be expected that in the new outpost of Empire, Clive would feel a perhaps comprehensible euphoria about the prospects of increasing his masters' income and profit. What was remarkable was his breadth of imperial vision which led to take a British national view instead of taking the astigmatical approach common to the Company. The general now rose to the stature of a policy formulator.

He believed that further walkovers would attend British efforts in a sub-continent, riven by internecine weakness and faction in each successor principality of the Mughal Empire. Dazzled by the prospects which opened up for national, as well as for corporate and private British aggrandizement in the Gangetic Plains, he saw a vista of British sovereignty over Bengal, sponsored by compromise with a grant of authority from the febrile Mughal imperial remnants in Delhi.

20. Williams, Life of Chatham, I, p.24.

The circumstances have to be recapitulated to appreciate the content of Clive's initiative-taken, to be noted, six years before he got Shah Alam to grant Mughal Diwani to the Company in Bengal. When Plassey was being fought, the de jure Mughal Emperor was Alangir II, the youngest son of Jahandar Shah (1712-13). Alangir II had been a seraglio parasite since 1713 during the reigns of his cousins and nephews. In his father's brief reign, the rot in their dynasty (begun in the last years of the latter's grandfather, Aurangzeb Alangir) had erupted. The senile Padshah was controlled by the Imperial Wazir (i.e. principal minister) Ghazi-ud-din Imad-ul-Mulk, a Turani nobleman, eldest son of Nizam-ul-Mulk whose younger sons had become Viceroys of the Deccan at Hyderabad. Imad-ul-Mulk had caused the imperial heir-apparent, the Shahzada Mirza Abdullah, who held the title of Ali Gauhar, to be exiled from the Delhi court. The Shahzada had sought refuge with the Wazir's rival, the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-daulah. The latter's predecessor, Safdar Jang had turned the Delhi imperial establishment into a pawn in the territorial politics of the North Indian Subahs using the help of the Marathas of the Southeast (under their Peshwa, Balaji Baji Rao, who directed the Maratha saranjam-holders of the muluk-giri lands of Central India, utilising the nominal sovereignty of the Satara Maharaja, from his official seat at Shivaji's old jagir headquarters at Pune. By 1759, also, the almost annual looting raids on the Punjab and on Delhi, launched from the northwest by Nadir Shah's successor, the Afghan dynast, Ahmed Shah Abdali had reduced to shambles the imperial heartland, populated by Jats and Rohillas Balaji Baji Rao allied with the Wazir. His brother Raghunath Rao (known to British readers of Captain Grant Duff's

later History of the Marathas as Rajhoba) in alliance with the Jats harried the Rohillas.

The Shahzada found short shrift in Fyzabad, the Awadh capital, where Shuja-ud-daulah was pursuing a policy of judicious non-alignment. In 1758, Ali Gauhar incited the Nawab's Persian relative, Muhammad Kuli Khan, the governor of Allahabad,²¹ to attack Mir Jafar in Behar with a view to establishing his own control over the riches of Bengal. Shuja-ud-daulah subjugated Muhammad Kuli's revolt: Ali Gauhar, who had indeed approached Clive for help against Mir Jafar, which the latter had refused, was joined in this and a second attempt in 1759 by some zamindars in Behar and the Western fringes of Bengal.²² But they were thrown back by Clive's troops under the command of Major Ranfurly Knox. In the account of the Shahzada's eastern expeditions, described as first "Hostile Reactions" against British rule, in Dr. R.C. Majumdar's History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol.I,²³ Dr. Majumdar is true to his ideological assumption that Bengalis, by whom he means Hindus and not Bengali Muslims; he does not mention any Bengali Hindu zamindars fighting for Shah Alam,

21. Details about Ali Gauhar's activities at this time will be found in W. Francklin, History of the Reign of Shaw Aulum (London, 1798).

22. The best account of the years from 1757 to 1759 from the Mughal viewpoint will be found in Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Fall of the Mughal Empire, Vol.II (Calcutta, 2nd edn. 1950, especially, pp.1, 152-3, 385).

23. R.C. Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol.I (Calcutta, 1971), Ch.III, Section IIA, pp.50-54).

though he does mention Awadhis, Biharis and Marathas (such as Sheobhat Sathe of Midnapore). Then he refers to ideas of "the traditional aversion to Muslim rule .. voiced by Raja Rammohun Roy"²⁴ a 19th century position which was taken seventy years after the events being discussed, by a man born about fifteen years after they took place! The actual historical facts are somewhat different : "Braja Binode Roy, grandfather of Rammohun served under Nawab Alivardi Khan, the grandfather and immediate predecessor of Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah with distinction and rendered useful service to the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II when the latter came to the Eastern Provinces as heir-apparent in 1759".²⁵

The Wazir Imad-ul-Mulk wrote at this juncture to Mir Jafar as well as to his protector, Clive, confirming Mir Jafar in the Nawabi, pleading for payment of revenues due to the Delhi treasury from Bengal and offering Clive the formal and personal post of Diwan (financial minister of the Subah) with the additional right to keep the excess of tribute. Historiography relating to 18th century India would have it that British entry into North Indian politics became possible only after the third Battle of Panipat in 1761, when the Afghans, Rohillas and Awadhis joined together in defeating and thus checking the Maratha bid for hegemony in the North. But internecine faction had already reduced the Indian princes, north of

24. Majumdar, Freedon Movement in India, I, p.46.

25. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Kumar Ganguli (ed.), Sophia Dobson Collet, The Life and Letters of Rajah Rammohun Roy (Calcutta, 1962) pp.11-12.

the Maratha lands into political impotence and the call had been given by a stooge of the Marathas to Clive to enter these territorialist games in person. Not Ali Gauhar, but the Wazir, following the Maratha precept of mulukgiri was the progenitor of the idea of British Dewani in Bengal, which in 1765 as Burke later said marked the entry of British imperialism into the Indian body politic.

This proposal led Clive to open direct correspondence with Pitt on 7 January, 1759, without knowing in Calcutta that the Letters Patent had already been issued to the company. The letter was meant to be delivered by Clive's secretary, John Walsh who was going home to organise an interest group acting under his direction on Clive's behalf in Parliament. Clive spoke of his hope that the Company would maintain in India.

"Such a force as will enable them to embrace the first opportunity of aggrandizing themselves... Such an opportunity .. will soon offer".

According to him, his own nominee as Nawab, Mir Jafar was faithless : the latter's son Miran (who had had Siraj-ud-daulah murdered in prison and was suspected of causing the deaths of other relatives of the Nawab).

"is so much worthless a young fellow and so apparently a enemy to the English, that it will be almost unsafe trusting him with the succession".

In case such unworthy minions of the Company wanted trouble, a force of two thousand Europeans would easily,

"enable the Company to take sovereignty upon themselves.. as the natives themselves have no attachment to particular princes, and as under the present Government, they have no security for their lives and properties, they would rejoice in so happy an exchange as that of a mild for a despotic government".²⁶

These sentences open up the entire vista of the later British imperialist rationalisation of Bengal (and in fact of India) which was to last till 1947 and even later in nostalgic historiography (such as the two volumes of Philip Woodruff's The Man who Ruled India). The conqueror presented a specious appeal to what he construed to be mass opinion, prone under years (in this case, only about seventeen) of semi-anarchy. Specifically, Clive appears to have referred to the time of troubles in Bengal, from Sarfaraz Khan whom Alivardi had unseated in the 1739 Battle of Giria, till Mir Jafar and Miran's "revolution" which could not have been possible without the British victory at Plassey itself. On a very narrowly mechanistic view, Clive's imperialist rationalisation might seem to devetail with Dr. R.C. Majumdar's use of Rammohun Roy's arguments in demanding liberalisation of Press laws in Bengal Presidency in the 1820s. It is such a view that Dr. Majumdar and

26. Sir John Malcolm, The Life of Robert, Lord Clive. Collected from the Family Papers of the Earl of Powis (London, 1836). This and subsequent extracts from Clive's letter to Pitt will be found in pp.127 seq.

his followers have propagated in their bid to emphasise at the cost of all else that British rule in 18th and early 19th century Bengal meant deliverance from Muslim tyranny, for its Hindu inhabitants.²⁷ What, of course, Dr. Majumdar leaves out is the fact that plans by colonialists like Clive and following him others like Vansittart and Hastings of a succession of coups d' etat, created a historical fait accompli.²⁸ A progressive Bengali such as Rammohun Roy, born and brought up in such a colonialist appendage of the Empire of Britain (which itself was going through the Industrial Revolution towards democracy, at that time) could have no alternative but to make the most modern use of the consequent realities, short of actually rising in revolt. The latter possibility is what none, but the scattered peasantry in different parts of Bengal, such as Midnapore, Rangpur and Mymensingh, and certainly not among the Hindu bhadralok intelligentsia and merchants in early 19th century Calcutta, envisaged.²⁹ What Rammohun himself surely took to be a given constraint in the political choices of a society which he and members of the Bengali middle class did not challenge is taken by R.C. Majumdar as a criterion for hind-sight. This is surely not a valid method for socially scientific analysis of historical motivation.

27. Majumdar, Freedom Movement in India, I, pp.43-49.

28. This point can be clarified by reference to Abdul Majed Khan, Transition in Bengal, 1756-1775 (loc.cit. footnote 6).

29. Pioneering accounts of peasant uprisings in 18th century Bengal have been written by S.B. Chaudhuri Civil Disturbances during The British Rule in India (1765-1859) (Calcutta, 1955), Suprakash Ray, Bharater Krishak Bidroha O Ganatantrik Sangran (in Bengali) (Calcutta, 2nd Edn., 1972).

To return to the direct topic of this period itself, Clive hoped to receive "the Mughal's sunnud (or grant)" confirming what he (in a rather flexible use of the term) called the Company's "sovereignty" on an annual payment of fifty lacs (Rs.5,000,000) out of Bengal, to the Delhi treasury. The "Vizier", i.e. Inad-ul-Mulk, had written asking him to get Mir Jafar to engage to supply this in accord with Alivardi's Khan's practice in the 1740s :

"Nay further : application has been made to me from the Court of Delhi, to take charge of collecting this payment, the person entrusted which is styled the King's Dewan, and is the next person both in dignity and power to the Subah. But .. I am unwilling to occasion any jealousy on the part of the Subah: especially as I see no likelihood of the Company's providing us with a sufficient force to support properly so considerable a employ, and which would open a way for gaining a subahship for ourselves".³⁰

Clive did not cast his employers, the Company, and certainly not himself, in the role of Governor of Bengal. He took the broader perspective of the national wealth which could accrue from Inad-ul-Mulk's proposal.

"But, so large a sovereignty may possibly be an object too extensive for a mercantile Company; and it is to be feared that they are not of themselves, without the nation's assistance, to maintain so wide a dominion ... Now I leave

30. *ibid.* Williams, *Life of Chathan*, I, mentions this on p.24 without reference (though on p.30 he contextually refers in footnote 1 to "*Malcolm, Clive* II, 127 seq."

you to judge whether an income yearly of upwards to two million sterling with the possession of three provinces abounding in the most valuable productions of nature and art be an object deserving the public attention and whether it be worth the nation's while to take the proper measures to secure such an acquisition ... which under the management of so able and disinterested a minister would prove a source of immense wealth to the kingdom, and might in time be appropriated in part as a fund towards diminishing the heavy load of debt under which we at present labour. Add to these advantages the influence we shall thereby acquire over the several European nations engaged in the commerce here, which these could no longer carry on but through our indulgence and under such limitations as we may think fit to prescribe. It is well worthy consideration, that this project may be brought about without draining the mother country, as has been too much the case with out possessions in America".³¹

The implications of this statement in the history of mercantile colonialism are obvious. Clive ended his epistle by predicting French defeat in Golconda (i.e. in the successor principality of this Mughal conquest - Hyderabad) and in the Carnatic at the hands of the Company's troops; reinforcements having been sent by from Bengal, "wholly affecting their ruin in that as well as in every other part of India".³²

31. Williams, p.30 ftnt. 2 mentions "the scheme of collecting taxes for the Great Mogul, for a consideration which Clive here calculates at £2,000,000". It appears that Basil Williams has confused between the figures of the income and of the land tax.

32. Malcolm, Life of Clive, II, loc.cit.

In those days it took more than eight months for letters from Calcutta to reach London. Before this one could have reached, Clive himself received a letter from one of his regular correspondents the young Company's factor, Warren Hastings who had made a mark for himself by helping in negotiations at the Murshidabad court. On the 17th April, 1759, Hastings remonstrated about Clive's prospective retirement from Bengal, before suspicions had been allayed about the breakdown of the alliance, newly made between the Company's officials and Mir Jafar :

"I am, and always have been of the opinion that the Nabob is both, by interest and by inclination, heartily attached to the English; but I think it is certain that the people about him, especially the Mutaseddies [in a footnote, the extractor of this passage, Sir John Malcolm translates this as "the plural term, as here employed describes all the subordinate civil officers of the government" 7 and the Seits, who are evidently great sufferers by the large acquisitions of power which the English have obtained in this Government, would gladly use every possible means to alienate his affection from us as your absence will encourage these people to throw off the mask, and the Nabob is but of an irresolute and unsettled temper..... I am the more apprehensive of their success, from the expressions, which he has frequently made use of, before the late attempt of the Shahzada, intimating that he knew nobody amongst the English but yourself to whom he has any obligations".

He expatiated on the fears about

"The dangers we are threatened with from our natural enemies the French, which by your resignation of the service will be doubled upon us".

Hastings continued,

"I know not in what light you may regard the proposal lately made from Delhi ... of the further advantages that they may result from a nearer connection with that Court (in which your intervention appears of indispensable necessity) ... nothing can contribute so much to establish the power of the English in this country on the most solid and lasting foundations as an interest properly established at that Court.³³

It has already been noted that recent exegetists of the 18th century British connection with India have found it to their use to veneer the starker realities of the conquest in terms of an "imperial relationship" somehow thrust upon metropolitan colonialists, rather than as acts of their natural volition. From this letter as early as 1759, it is clear that Hastings, then a callow junior yet entrusted with diplomatic relations in Murshidabad, wheeling and dealing in self-aware realpolitik with the Bengal bureaucracy, had gained an even more thrusting, though much the same broad perspective of conscious empire-building, as Clive working out policy parameters in Calcutta. He was already thinking of his own later premises about imperialist liens with the Mughal remnants, which he would follow with Shah Alam and the latter's Irani followers in the 1770s and 1790s. But his vision was more short-sighted than that of Clive and would remain so. He could never be as confident of French defeat as Clive was.

33. ibid, pp.109-10.

Basil Williams who wrote in the less apologetic early 20th century era, dominated by straight-forward imperialist historiography, noted then that the "scheme of collecting taxes for the Great Mogul .. was .. put into practice (in) 1765 during Clive's second tenure of office" when Ali Gauhar, (after the murder of Alangir II by Inad-ul-Mulk titular Emperor as Shah Alam II), set the seal on his third defeat, Shuja-ud-daulah's first one, at the Company's hands at Buxar (in 1763) by conferring in 1765 by the Allahabad Treaty, the jagir-altamgha or permanent and hereditary assignment of Bengal's Diwani on the Company, in return for being established by Clive (who had been sent back from Britain to India) as a pensioner in the territories of Allahabad, Kora and Kara. The Company carved this as a buffer appendage (one of two, the other being the Benares zamindari vested on Raja Balwant Singh, a rebel against the Awadh Nawab) out of Shuja-ud-daulah's subahdari domains. From this would follow the British economic penetration of Awadh by private traders and even Company servants,³⁴ the origins of the subsidiary system practised by Hastings,³⁵ and Hastings' forward policy with regard to Delhi and his main competitor in this regard, Mahadaji Sindhia, the Maratha saranjam-holder of Gwalior (from the time Shah Alam fled from British tutelage in Allahabad to Delhi in 1772 till Hastings own retirement to England in 1785).

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34. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, "Trade and Empire in Awadh" Occasional Paper No.16, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1977 is the best account of this process.
35. C.C. Davies, Warren Hastings and Oudh (Oxford, 1939) though written from a frankly imperialist standpoint, is still the clearest exposition of the origins and principles of this system, before it was radically overhauled by Lord Wellesley.

From Clive to Hastings runs a direct imperialist lineage, actively thrusting for direct or indirect exploitation of the richest sources of East India revenue and Middle Gangetic influence, British assertion of control over Bengal and competition with other Indian princes for control over the shades of Mughal sovereignty, both local and pan-North Indian. This was to become a tradition of interpenetration of a traditionally alien system of sovereignty with their own substance. Right from the political beginnings of the tradition, its protagonists were convinced that their policy was bound to be successful in contemporary Indian conditions. The only internal difference within it was that Clive, trained in the stable mercantile factory conditions of the Carnatic as well as in the recurrent and inconclusive Southern wars, was more cautious and committed to influence through indirect rule with general colonialist perspectives in mind, while Hastings, more recently trained in the Bengal outposts near Murshidabad, was more narrowly single-minded in his pursuit of political imperialism.

After Clive's death in 1773, there was bound to be conflict between these two outlooks. Even while Clive was in retirement in Shropshire and London and was then impeached, his erstwhile henchman of 1759, graduated through support of Vansittart in the Mir Kasim crisis and later involvement in the Nawab of the Carnatic's affairs at Madras to direct intervention in Murshidabad politics in the 1770s now was concomitant with the company's decision to "standforth as Diwan". The later taken in 1765, of opposing the activities of Company's officials in direct control of East Indian revenues was taken up first by Philip Francis (nominee of the British Parliament

on the Governor-General's Council set up by the 1773 Regulating Act of Lord North) and after his return to England, by the Scots Parliamentary lawyer, and Edinburgh M.P., Henry Dundas. From these origins grew the 19th century British imperialist tactic of "non-interference" in indigenous affairs, provided this did not clash with broader, more general, colonialist strategy. It was this strategy within which Pitt the Elder, Clive, Hastings, Francis and Dundas all played their parts.

But in 1759, in Britain, the risks appeared even more opaque and chancy; though fraught with welcome possibilities to be carefully monitored. Walsh delivered Clive's letter to Pitt in November, and then wrote his patron an account of his interview with the Secretary of State. According to his own account, he said to Pitt that he

"was apprehensive .. that (Pitt) looked upon the affair as chimerical : he assured me, not at all, but very practicable; but that it was of a very nice nature. He mentioned the Company's charter not expiring these twenty years; that upon some later transactions it had been inquired into, whether the Company's conquests and acquisitions belonged to them or the Crown, and the Judges seemed to think of the Company. He spoke of this matter a little darkly and I cannot write upon it with precision".³⁶

Either, Pitt did not clearly remember the report, which the Law Officers - Walsh with an inaccuracy not very common in eighteenth century mercantile affairs called them "the Judges" a serious

36. Malcolm, Life of Clive, II, 126-128 gives the relevant extract from a letter dated 26th November, 1759 from Walsh to Clive.

inaccuracy on Walsh's part since the matter had not arisen for adjudication in the courts at the time - had given two years previously. Or, and this seems more probable, he was hedging in face of a proposition that was indeed remarkably innovative. Clive's idea would, in 1759, have involved abrogation of chartered rights by Parliamentary action. It would also have meant the direct assertion of royal prerogative over Company rights in territorial, as well as in fiscal gains, offered by Imad-ul-Mulk to Clive (who, despite his title of Sabut Jang, gained from the Nawab, was after all no adventurer, but still a salaried official of the East India Company).

Basil Williams summarises this in his typically uncritical precis,³⁷ failing to comprehend the very real contradiction between eagerness for a revolutionary change in policy, on the part of men at the Gangetic outposts, and the opaqueness on the other hand of London ministers, who had to deal with global tensions of a French war and coincidental difficulties much closer to home, than the Ganges Valley. Williams wrote "Pitt evidently felt himself in a difficulty. While admitting that the scheme was practicable he put it off for the time on the ground that it involved questions of a 'very nice nature'".³⁸ The very bureaucratic "not at all" is by no means as positive as the biographer would have it. Pitt's reasons

37. Williams, Life of Chatham, 29 reporting the conversation does not mention Walsh's inaccuracy, and instead takes it for granted that 'law officers' were referred to

38. ibid.

for speaking "darkly" seem to be more specific than Williams was prepared to see. Legal and strategic tensions between metropolitan realities and colonialist aspirations operated throughout the rest of the eighteenth century (and for that matter throughout the colonial epoch) in the relations of British state power with its outposts.

Walsh continued to give Pitt's reactions about Clive's proposal to take Diwani as part of British paramountcy, in Bengal.

"... he said the Company were not proper to have it; nor the Crown, for such a revenue would endanger our liberties; and that you had shown good sense by your application of it to the public".³⁹

This was typical mid-eighteenth century Whig magnate rhetoric. The "balance" of the English Constitution was supposed to be so nicely poised since the 1689 Revolution Settlement between Parliament, Crown and the judiciary, as well as within the components of popular elements of sovereignty and the royal executive, that it was supposed that it would be toppled over by the accrual of excessive financial supplies in the hands of the Crown. Behind the rhetoric was perhaps a democratic - or at least oligarchic - fear in the

39. Malcolm, Life of Clive II, loc.cit. Williams, Life of Chatham 30 notes this point as an "objection which afterwards assumed larger proportions in his eyes that the patronage of the crown might be unduly increased thereby".

House of Commons of which Pitt was a popular leader that if the royal executive even honestly took such power over and above what the Civil List granted to the Crown, successors might use it to the detriment of the liberties prized by the landed gentry and magnates. This built-in-concern for rectitude and continuity of principles was a major element in the maintenance of British constitutional tradition as a corporate rather than individualistic force. This was what held back both Pitt and Clive from the personalised greed that had led Wazirs or military captains in India to carve out principalities for themselves and their own dynasties. This was the ideological element that helped the British nation as a whole to pass up individual, and opt for imperial, greed.

"Such a revenue would endanger our liberties" and yet it should be "applied to the public". Both "our" and "public" referred to what Sir Lewis Namier was two centuries later to call "the political nation" or "the nation-forming class".⁴⁰ This was that limited segment of the British nation represented in particularly the House of Commons of the mid-eighteenth century British Parliament

40. "For several centuries, the dream of English youth and manhood of the nation-forming class has remained unchanged - it has been fixed and focussed on the House of Commons, a modified, socialised area for battle, drive and dominion", Sir Lewis Namier, The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III (Second Edn. London, 1957, First Edn., 1925) p.1. The clearest account of Namier's self-identification of his subject of study with the consistency he saw in the narrow oligarchy of the eighteenth century House of Commons will be found in Julia (Lady) Namier's Lewis Namier: A Biography (London, 1971) pp.186-194, especially pp.187 and 194.

on the eve of the American Revolution. Actually Parliament represented a compromise between landed interests and the mercantile bourgeoisie. The revenue-payers of Bengal were to serve the interests of this segment of the British public. That was the assumption on which, the future Earl of Chatham, and Lord Clive as well as Warren Hastings - and for that matter many lesser soldiers, sailors and merchants' clerks who did not yet have the Parliamentary franchise - were united as early as 1759.

The real difficulty in Clive's suggestion appeared to be the instrumentalities and leadership necessary for extracting this newly accrued colonial surplus, somehow quarantined from contagion to British liberties under the Company's Charter :

"He said (went on Walsh) the difficulty of affecting the affair was not great, under such a genius as Lord Clive; but the sustaining it was the point; it was not probable he would be succeeded by persons equal to the task".

Would Clive continue the business to execution, as from his letter, Pitt concluded was his intent? Walsh

"answered .. that I believed your ill health would oblige you to return shortly. I then mentioned Van's abilities and that he was upon the point of being made Governor of Bengal".

Walsh appears to have tried to raise the discussion from a subjective to an objective plane - what eighteenth century politicians were already calling 'measures not men' - by continuing

"I observed to (Mr. Pitt) that it was necessary for him to determine whether it was an object for the Company or the State; for I was persuaded that if the State neglected it the Company in process of time would secure it; that they would even find themselves under a necessity to do it, for their greater quiet and safety, exclusive of gain. He seemed to weigh that, but as far as I could judge, by what passed then, it will be left to the Company to do what they please".⁴¹

Men, not measures, were still the order of the day, in terms of the constitutional realities sketched above. The question could not but be solved within the Whig constitutional balance, which Pitt for all his imperial statesmanship represented. It was of little moment whether Henry Vansittart was capable of carrying out Clive's viceregal vision, or whether he turned out to be a mere merchant, chaffering with Mir Jafar and Mir Kasim about fiscal gratifications to be extracted from these puppet Nawabs (the last, turned Frankenstein) on behalf of the senior officials of the Company, as distinct from the British 'political nation'.

British political decision-making was not yet prepared to upset the delicate balance between the Company's chartered autonomy, the limitations on the financial independence of the Crown to the extent Parliament was prepared to allow this at the beginning of each Hanoverian reign,⁴² and the legal forms of the English magnate

41. Malcolm, Life of Clive, II.

42. E.A. Reitan "The Civil List in Eighteenth Century British Politics : Parliamentary Supremacy versus the Independence of the Crown" The Historical Journal, IX, 3 (1966) seriatim.

class' reliance on the independent colonial initiative of its mercantile bourgeoisie. If the walk-over that Clive hoped for, was to come for the British in Bengal, it was the Company's concern - provided national profit accrued in the future.

Indeed Pitt, as befitted his immediate concern at the time, was more interested in the conduct of the Seven Years' War than in Indian sovereignty. Walsh had said that in case there was peace, French attacks were again feared :

"if not somehow restrained, they would pour men into India and be formidable in after times. He asked me about Mauritius, whether the reduction of that would not be laying the axe to the root, and how far it was practicable".⁴³

Even if Pitt was not as active an agent in the discussion, as his 20th century panegyrist Williams would have it, he certainly had, and continued to project, plans to cut the French sea-lines in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁴ This was a global and naval dimension, not the Gangetic political one that the Company's officials in Bengal had begun to dream of.

43. Malcolm, Life of Clive, II, 127-8 : "Williams, Life of Chatham, 27, writing in a different context dramatises the words quoted above." At the end of a long conversation ... with Walsh .. Pitt had suddenly flashed out at him : "What about Mauritius? Would not the reduction of that be laying the axe to the root? How far is it practicable".

44. "Before parting, Pitt hinted to Walsh, the prospects of naval and military reinforcements in 1759 itself for that purpose" ibid., 27-28 : also Malcolm, Life of Clive, II, loc.cit.

Metropolitan colonial policy withdrew for the next seven years, delegating all Indian concerns to the East India Company which its Bengal servants had sought to see subordinated. Issues of national profit receded into the background till there was an inflationary crisis in the Company's stocks when Diwani actually accrued to the company after Clive's initiative in 1765 and then there was a slump in profits leading to public concern after Chatham became First Lord of the Treasury and Prime Minister in 1765-66.

III. Interim Conclusions:

Sir John Malcolm, writing his biography of Clive in the early nineteenth century, in retirement after rising from the Company's lowest civil, and later political and military ranks to that of a Presidency Governors, summed up the purport of the 1758-59 Clive-Walsh-Chatham communications with a sure touch :

"The line of policy which subsequently marked our progress in India is strongly depicted in this conversation. Mr. Pitt saw, in their infancy, the difficulties which have so long prevented the final settlement of that country; and Mr. Walsh tutored in the school of Clive, already clearly discovered the future, inevitable extension of our dominions and power".⁴⁵

Malcolm comprehended the colonialist case far better than 20th century imperialist dons in their ivory towers, who failed to admit that certain basic premises were implicit from the very beginning.

45. Malcolm, Life of Clive, II, loc.cit.

The short-paced tactical vendettes, the broader view of the division commander and the long-run Fabianism of British metropolitan colonialist metropolitan strategy still tied to naval rather than tropical political considerations, all verged on fundamental changes in 1758-9. Yet they were restrained by mercantile and constitutionalist traditionalism of the pragmatic British variety. Missing this dialectical viewpoint, 20th century imperial and neo-colonial historians treat only Clive's letter as "one of the most significant documents in the history of the First British Empire"⁴⁶ but in isolation from its total-policy context.

For instance, Reginald Coupland analysed this document - several years after it had been utilised for description by Basil Williams - and that too merely on the basis of its quotation by another imperialist historian Ramsay Muir of Manchester. Coupland prefaced the analysis by an exegesis about why the East India Company was supposed to have had despite itself, - instead of did - to move into an India, internally weakened by "strife and anarchy". Yet close textual analysis of the correspondence shows that Clive, Walsh and Hastings felt that the Company should be pushed into the game by the British nation. Coupland chose to ignore Walsh's report of Pitt the Elder's stand, and he appears to have been ignorant of the correspondence of Pitt with the Law Officers. He reduced Pitt and Clive's views to banal triviality :

46. ibid., p.80.

"As Pitt saw nothing wrong in the political subjection of Ireland and the American colonies, so Clive saw no other argument, at least he stated none, for British India than the fact that it was a more paying proposition than British rule in America. It reveals - and this should make us more careful in our censure - how universal, how profound, how inspissated was the mercantilist obsession.

Whatever his principles, Clive's policy was of course right. In the situation in which she had drifted, the only salvation for India lay in the assumption by the British Government and Parliament of responsibility for her, and it was unfortunate for inadequate as they were left Pitt unconvinced".⁴⁷

The Beit Professor of Colonial History in the Oxford of the early 1930s wrote without checking his original sources for this passage. Clive's arguments were not meant for India's salvation. It is doubtful if his principles represented European mercantilism - rather they were meant for colonialist plunder of underdeveloped land.

47. R. Coupland, American Revolution and British Empire, p.78 "through various causes - the collapse of the Mogul Empire, the spread of internal strife and anarchy, the growth of French rivalry and intrigue - the Company striving now to maintain not only its own trade but its very foothold on Indian soil was forced from commerce into politics; and in a few years time mainly through the genius of Clive; its directors and agents were confronted with the astonishing .. fact that they, a body of respectable businessmen, had become without at all intending or deserving it the political masters of a gigantic area in Eastern India". This rhetorical scenario ignores the positive imperialism of the Company in the 1750s, to be discerned from a close reading of Hill, Bengal in 1756-57, loc.cit. The London directors were hardly pushed into a fait accompli by their outpost agents. They had a position of their own and relished it, as their application to Pitt bears out.

Pitt and Clive were indeed colonial aggrandizers in the era of late mercantilism. Both followed policies of increasing British mercantile capital and its safeguards in an age when one sector of this in the Thirteen Colonies was becoming restive under the traditional financial constraints of British Parliamentary sovereignty. Clive's idea of the reduction of the national debt was a mercantilist chimaera. But Pitt's policy of gaining naval and colonial strongholds, and Clive's tactics of exerting colonial political influence by means of indirect rule, were to become a quarter century later in Dundas' time under the names of the systems of Lord Chatham and of Lord Clive, part of a colonialism, at which even Adam Smith could not cavil.

Dundas' amalgamation of these systems and his control of the East India Company would buttress the expansion of the bases of British colonial capital in the transitional era of capitalism, which was beginning to dawn from the 1780s to about 1815. The booty of the Second Carnatic and First Bengal Wars and of the Seven Years' War was the previsage of this. Justification of the British conquest of Bengal by references to internal weakness alone, rather than by honestly comprehending the simultaneous existence of self-consciously planned colonialist drive for power and wealth meant for actual profits in the future, spotlights a progressional inversion in British imperialist historiography, from Malcolm's blatant frankness to Basil Williams' blandness, down to the apologetics of Coupland and his more recent successors.

To sum up, tensions and internal contradictions existed within metropolitan perspectives of conservatism, expressed by the Law Officers of the Crown, cautious expansionism, expressed by the Company's Directors, and consolidation expressed by Pitt, the Whig House of Commons demagogue, in London as well as within, and vis-a-vis, outpost empire-building elan in Bengal in 1759. The latter was already anxious to weld together British as well as delegated Mughal sovereignty in India. Yet these were internal contradictions. Inherent consensus and ultimate combination expressing the consciousness of common British advantage in exploiting Indian land revenue, led to an ultimately efficient compatibility among the contradictions. This flowed from their common location within emerging British capitalist ideology. Chatham's policy and Clive's system represented the strategy and tactics of early British Indian imperialism. Both converged during the colonial crisis, after the loss of the thirteen colonies, and the end of the American War of Independence in the period, 1780 to 1784, in the ideology of Pitt the Younger and Henry Dundas.⁴⁸ At this time, the Company was finally subordinated to the Crown cabinet, by now fully responsible to Parliament.

48. Coupland shows an imperfect awareness of this when he latches on to some words of the Younger Pitt's speech on 6th July, 1784 "commending the ... Bill of 1784 to Parliament". "Pitt, in fact, in proposing to do virtually what Clive had asked his father to do nearly twenty (sic) years before, was giving as his first reason for doing it the same reason that Clive gave - a reason which the father had rejected but the son could not reject because something had happened in the interval to make it irresistible". This was the substitutability of India for the troublesome American colonies: the fact that had happened was imperialist defeat in the American War of Independence. But Coupland failed to note that this strand was consciously mediated from Chatham to Pitt by Henry Dundas, whom Coupland does mention elsewhere, but not in such a linking-pin role. ibid. 208, 207.

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