



TRADE AND COMMERCE OF BALASORE DISTRICT DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

In the maritime history of India, Orissa has occupied a significant place since ancient times up to the colonial period. In the Colonial period, Balasore was a famous centre of trade and commerce. The name of the district is being derived from the name of the town, which is old and important.

KEY WORDS : Court-Martial, King Emperor, Defence Committee, National Upsurge, Prairie Fire, Chalo Delhi.



INTRODUCTION :

The name Balasore as a trade centre is recognised from the Persian word Bala-e-Shore which means "Town in the sea". The historical legend ascribes that the district has been named as per the Lord Baneswar (Lord Siva) of the town, which afterwards changed to Balasore during Mughal Rules.

TRADE AND COMMERCE OF COLONIAL MASTERS

'Banijye Basati Lakhmi' which means trade and commerce brings fortune. This dictum was lucidly understood by the colonial masters particularly the British in Orissa. True to their national character, they settled in Orissa as merchants long before they made their appearance as rulers. Their earliest factory in Bengal lay within its boundaries; but even this factory did not represent the first connection of Orissa with a European Power. Some important ports in the Colonial period are given below;

1) Calingapatam, 2) Sinevare (sonapur), 3) Carepare (Ganja), 4) Maneclapatam (manikpatna), 5) Caretore (Kushabhadra mouth), 6) Narsepore & Arsepore (near Devi mouth), 7) Cargore (Kunjanga near Mahanadi mouth), 8) Kanka (Dhamra mouth), 9) Churinga (near Gomei mouth), 10) Ballasore, (Burabalanga mouth), 11) panchupada and Sartha (Near mouth of Panchupada River), 12) Piplely (near Subarnarekha mouth).

In 1498 the Portuguese arrived in India via the Cape Camorin and during the next sixteen years established themselves on the Madras coast. The natives, alarmed by their growing importance, fell upon their principal fort, temporarily expelled the foreigners, and about 1514 A.D. pushed them northward to the mouth of the Subarnarekha in Balasore district of Orissa,¹ As observed by W.W. Hunter "Here they founded a fugitive colony at the town of Pippli, now a ruined and silt-locked village, about ten miles up the river, but then a fine harbour commanding a free approach from the sea. From a letter written by our servants, dated Patna, 1620, the Portuguese appear as still in possession of Pippli at that date. But they had during the previous fifteen years made themselves very unpopular with the Mughal Governor of Bengal.²

Among the ports on the coast of Odisha, Balasore was the best and the most prosperous and important port for the reception of ships from distant water. In 1724 Valentine's account testifies to the

prosperity of the port. For the loading and unloading of the ships plying from Balasore sailed for Nagapatnam, Batvia and Mallacca. In his 'Storia Do Mogor', Niccolao Mannucci mentions that the ship 'Foosom' from Mallacca reached Balasore. She sailed for Nagapatnam in 30th December 1704 while other two vessels started for Batvia.³

For a long time Balasore was the most important ship building centre and place of commercial activities.⁴ Provisions were collected from different parts of Orissa for the workers, working there in the factories. Artisans and ship builders were even recruited from various places of the country to work at Balasore. On 28th December 1644, Khan-i-Dauran wrote, "All the *Kalapatis* and *Nazars*, master craftsmen and blacksmiths living at the port of Harishpur and other places should be won over and sent to Balasore to engage in ship building."⁵ During the Mughal rule, the ports were opened for the export and import of goods in the state ships, for the export and import of the goods of individual business,⁶ and for the loading and unloading of the ships for the foreign merchants including the British, Dutch, Danish and Portuguese ships. Heavy ships were sent from Balasore and Pipili to carry on trade with Ceylon and Burma and other distant countries.⁷ A ship of Nidhiram on its return from Maldive and was loaded with *Kauries* was sold at the port of Balasore.⁸

In his "Travels in the Mughal India" Bernier describes that ports of Balasore on the coast of Orissa were frequented by sloops from Madras and Ceylon."⁹ Bowery in his account mentioned that Nawab's mercantile marine of twenty ships sailed with considerable burden that trade from Balasore, Pipili, and Dacca to Ceylon and Tensarim. He narrated, "English and the Dutch are the first to bring over land the textiles of Harishpur to their respective factories at Balasore."¹⁰ After the defeat, Murshid Kuli Khan II fled away from the port of Balasore in his friend's ship loaded with goods and grains which he had brought for the purpose of trade and commerce.

During the Mughal period Orissa had trade contact with East Asia. Balasore, more particularly, had trade relationship with the Indian Archipelago Merchants from Tenasarim brought elephants in ships to Balasore- For example. In March 1680 Kherchand, a merchant from that territory, brought a good number of elephants for trade at Balasore. The king of Siam had a trading unit at Balasore and employed some 'factors' for commercial purpose. The 'factors' he sent in 1762 carried on trade in elephants and lead. They had a large stock of lead in the factory at Balasore to be purchased by Indian merchants.¹¹ It may be noted here that the elephants of Siam were of a special variety and, therefore, had a demand in Indian markets. Balasore was great rice exporting port from where the stored rice was sent to Bengal and different ports of the Mughal empire. Rice was taken as the share of the Government from the people. Khan-i-Dauran writes thus to Muhammad Jan, a former diwan of the province, whom he had appointed about land-steward of factory (sahib-i-ihartarnan) for his fiefs from Bhadrak to southern limit of *Orissa*.¹² As far the Malangi boats for loading rice in, they have not been procured owing to the bad conduct of the darogha of the port. To get bond from Zamindars of the Mahal and send rice to the boats to be shipped in sailing season was difficult. Cloth and salt were two other articles which were exported in plenty.¹³

Bowery has described different types of boats found in the Bay of Bengal such as *Patillas* (great flat bottomed vessels), the cloak, boats, *Budgaroo* (a pleasure boat) and *Purgoos*. The *Purgoos* were found at Hughli, Balasore and Pipli and were used in loading and unloading ships.¹⁴ Another type of boat used in Orissa was the *Malangi* boat mainly required for transporting grains and such other things in the river to the ports. The ports on shore were a source of income to the Mughal empire. The local people used local boats or ships for trade in sea and were earning their livelihood in the ship-building factories at the ports and also deriving other advantages including fishing in the water. So a sort of ship money was imposed on them on the coastal districts.¹⁵

Thomas Bowery, an English traveller who travelled in India during 1669-1679 AD, gives a valuable description of shipping and maritime trade on the east coast of India. Shaista Khan of Bengal was imposing a ship money on the mercantile community to build up a naval defence and power of the country, "then not satisfied that all rich and poor should bow to him but wishing the ships in the water should do like the Nawab when every year sent down to the merchants in Hughli, Jessore, Pipli and Balasore for a ship or two

in each respective place of 400, 500 or 600 tons to be very well-built and fitted even as if they were to voyage to sea as also 10, 20 or 30 gallyes to attend them, the Moor's Governor having the strict order to see them furnishing with all speed and gunned and well manned, and sent up the Ganges as high as 'Dacca'.¹⁶ Another source of income from the ports was the customs duty or charge for anchorage. It is stated that in the year 1659 the Governor of Balasore began to impose exorbitant charges on the English for anchorage.¹⁷ Even though some foreigners were granted *firman* to trade in the boat, they had to satisfy the Governor by paying some amount. Shaista Khan, like Mir-Jumla, exacted 'annual offerings of three thousand rupees' and issued an order confirming all the privileges of the English Company in regard to the Junk episodes.¹⁸ Mir-Jurnla ordered the Governor of Balasore to impose a duty of 4% on the English export besides anchorage duties on ships, As a result of this the English trade suffered a great deal.¹⁹

ANDREW STERLING'S VIEW

Andrew Sterling in his account on Geographical, Statistical and Historical Orissa Proper or Cuttack in 1822 has given a picture of Balasore which he considered as a Town. He expressed that Balasore, distant about 105 miles from Cuttack was a large straggling town, containing several small brick houses inhabited by merchants, who carry on an inconsiderable traffic with Calcutta. Its situation was extremely unfavourable, on a low dreary plain, deformed by numerous unsightly ridges and hills, near the muddy banks of the BuraBalanga and it was considered in consequence unhealthy during the rainy season. The number of inhabitants did not exceed 10,000. Balasore was nevertheless the principal port of the district and was provided with dry docks on the banks of the river, to which sloops, drawing not more than 14 feet water, can be floated during the spring tides. It was frequented by these descriptions of country craft, viz. Maldive vessles, boats employed in transporting the company's salt to the Presidency and a class of sloops built at Contai and Hidgelly called Holas, which come in great numbers during the cold weather to carry off rice to Calcutta.²⁰

ENGLISH RESIDENCE AT BALRAMGARHI AND PIPILY

The importance formerly attached to this station, in the infancy of the commerce between the western hemisphere and Bengal is attested by the remains of the factories of four European countries English, Danish, French and Dutch. Traces of Portuguese establishment are also to be observed in the ruins of a small Roman Catholic Chapel within the town, having a wooden Cross over the principal doorway. The Dutch seem to have been settled here prior to 1660 as the date was mentioned on two curious monumental pyramids of masonry which raised near the factory. Bengal establishment at Pipely on the Subarnarekha, in 1640 A.D. and the 1684 A.D. was to be observed a tomb in the English burying ground which was erected on the memory of some English men. The English had likewise a fine country house surrounded with gardens at a place called Balaram garhi near the sea. And the remains of which was noticed by Andrew Sterling. This was an interesting place to see. This place Balaramgarhi provided temporary shelter for the East India Company servants when Calcutta was captured by the armies of Siraj-ud-Daula.²¹

The trade of Balasore was important as the Sannahs and fine muslins manufactured there and also at Bhadrak and Soro, the demand for which was entirely ceased then. The drugs and dyes imported from the hills constituted a considerable articles of export. However, Balasore, undoubtedly, derived its principal consequence, as the site of a factory, from its convenience for carrying on a trade and commerce with Bengal proper, before permission had been obtained to establish settlements within the province itself.²²

TRADE ACTIVITIES OF ORISSA

The manufactures and trade of Orissa were considerable. Sufficient coarser cloths were made for the use of the inhabitants in all parts of the Balasore district. The calicos of Balasore, Soro, Bhadrak, Jajipur and Hariharpur (present Jagatsingpur) were once much prized and sought after the name of Sannahs. But the demands for the finer fabrics of the description got declined due to lower quantity of the products manufactured in the local areas. At Pipily Niur a good sort of quality was made.²³

BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS

The province of Orissa had certainly afforded some encouragement to the resort of European traders besides large trade establishments at Balasore, the English had inferior factories or Kothis at the town of Cuttack itself, and at Hariharpur (present Jagatsingpur), a village between the station and the sea. At that time, the whole value of the exports and imports which pay duty was Rs. 2,97,285/- and the customs duty and transit duty collected at the several small ports and inland chokies from the Subarnarekha to the Dhamara river did not exceed Rs. 30,000/- per annum. The exports liable to duty were as follows:- Piece goods, bees-wax, oil, lac, stone plates, sal timber, congni wood, kurbeli, shurbeli and many petty articles.²³

A considerable exportation of rice takes place from the several small ports along the coast to Calcutta. The horned cattle and swine of the district also were carried out in large herds for the supply of the presidency market. The quantity of salt then transported from the district by private individuals. The trade in the course of legal and open traffic did not perhaps exceed 20,000 mounds annually. But fortunately, salt was an important article of export. By the way of the great road leading along the Mahanadi to Sambalpur and Berar, and likewise by that of the Bamanghati pass in Mayurbhanj, more than 3 lacs of mounds were exported annually. The dried fish and prawns of the Balasore district might be noticed as an article of traffic between the inhabitants of the hills, and those of the low country in that quarter.²⁴

IMPORTED AND EXPORTED GOODS:

Piece goods, silk goods, tobacco, and everything in the shape of a luxury are imported from the adjoining districts of Bengal and a small supply of couries, cocoanuts, coral and dried fish obtained from few Maldiva vessels which resort annually to Balasore and Dhamra to take on boards cargoes of rice and earthen pots.²⁵

IMPORTANCE OF BALASORE PORT

Balasore was one of the noted international port situated in East Coast of India - Orissa region. The port flourished during (1640-1700).²⁶ The importance of the port in international shipping was considerable. However, after establishment of English East Indian Company's. Factory at Chuttanutti. Calcutta was developed at the coast of Balasore. Number of ships were visiting Balasore from South East Asian countries, more specifically ships from Batavia and Bantam. One Dutch ship carrying Francois Martin - A French Factor in Pondichery as captive arrived at Balasore on 3 Feb 1684. The voyage records from Batavia to Balasore is very interesting. Important informations about the navigational activities prevailing in 17th century could be known from the account of Francois Martin.²⁷ In 18th century Balasore port had trade relation with Batavia port have been shown. Similarly Balasore river along with British and French Factory have also been exhibited based on Kempthorn's Sea View of 1689. Horseburg has demarcated the voyage track from Batavia to Balasore. Martin has given an account of conducting ships over Balasore River Bar in 1684. we also get information about procurement of experienced pilots at Balasore for piloting the ships in the Hugly River. The Dutch establishment was quite active till 1684. We get information from Balasore Factory Records that, Dutch have left Balasore in February 1687 during the great war between English and Muslim rulers at Balasore. But the Dutch Churgeon (Surgeon), who was engaged in curing injured persons in the town of Balasore was left behind. This shows that local people of Balasore as well as the Muslim rulers were giving full protection to European Doctor at Balasore in 17th century.²⁸

SHIPPING ACTIVITIES AT BALASORE:

In the shipping season of 1679-80, as usual, 4 Nos. of large British ships visited East Coast of India with Balasore port of Orissa coast as destination point. Similarly in the shipping season of 1680-81, another Fleet of four larger British Ships have stayed in anchor at Balasore Road. The ships of 1680-81 were (1) President (2) Eagele (3) Sampson (4) Berkley Castle.²⁹

The above 4 ships after conducting shipping activities at Balasore left for England before Jan 1681. So also in the shipping season 1681-82, another group of ships, namely, Golden Fleece, Pearl etc. again visited Balasore port in Aug - 1681. But the ship's Capt. in the subsequent voyage was. changed. The two captains of Ship Golden Fleece were Capt. Cooke & Capt. Cropley respectively. Orissa Coast had maritime activities with Arracan, Pegu, Tennassary, Siam, Mallaca, Acheen, Bantam, Batavia, Manila in 17th century. References are available in T.B.'s & Shouten's descriptions. Ship Logs, Balasore Factory Record, etc.³⁰

In 17th century, the shipping junction of Balasore was quite busy with ships sailing to and from various destinations of South East Asia. The port of Pegu in Berma, the ports of Tavoy and Mergui in Tennassary, the port of Kedah in Siam were usual destinations from Balasore. The geographical accounts of above places as stated in East India Gazetteer of Waiter Hamilton - 1828 have been quoted for better appreciation of trading and shipping activities of 17th century. We get lot of references of voyages by sailing ships in 17th century, where the ships were taking the route from Java to Balasore of Orissa Coast. Indicating the names of Kedah, Tennassary, Pegu etc. Tennassary was mainly famous for Tin and Elephants. The Asian ships were transporting huge quantities of Tin, Brimstone and Elephants. As per Balasore Factory Records, the local ships of Tennassary were also taking part in the trading activities with Orissa coast.³¹

CONCLUSION

Thus, Balsore and some ports of it flourished in trade and commerce during the colonial Period. From Balasore the English used to export different products in different parts of India like, Bengal, Patna, Masulipatnam and various parts of Corromandel Coast and also South-east Asian states. However the English fortune at Balasore did not stayed a long and they suffered strong opposition from the Dutch traders and faced the raids of the Arakan pirates. Besides the Portuguese were not completely abolished from the scenario, so they also tried to regain their lost position at Suba Bengal. On the other hand the deaths of some important English officials like Thomas Kohal in 25th Aug, 1633 gave English a setback. As a result the English officials of Fort St. George and Orissa were in search of another option which could give them much more security than the previous and in this time they shifted their view from Balasore to Hooghly.

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