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The Politics of Power: a Reassessment of Company's Relation with Awadh during Wellesley's Reign

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Abstract:

In the history of East India Company's relations with native states, Awadh¹ is having a distinct and debatable story. Company while dealing with native powers had certain well defined characteristics during different phases.² Under the 'Ring fence' or 'Buffer State' policy of Warren Hastings, Awadh was seen as an effective barrier against any invasion from North West³ or of Marathas. The native state, after its first engagement with Company at Buxar in 1664, had ever been loyal to the British. Awadh's importance being a fruitful source of income⁴ and one of the most important recruiting grounds for the army in India, led Warren Hastings, and Wellesley and, to a lesser extent, Cornwallis to interfere in the affairs of Awadh despite the general policy of non-interference laid down by the Court of Directors and made into law by Pitt's India Act. In a debatable manner⁵ the Nawab Vazier's were made to sign various treaties (if at all they can be termed as treaties!) and surrender their sovereignty step by step. Finally Nawab had to cede half of his territory and in 1801 was forced to sign the subsidiary alliance.

The present paper traces the situations and negotiations which led the then Nawab Vazier, Sa'adat Ali Khan to sign the treaty during the time of Lord Wellesley. It also tests the legitimacy of the means adopted by the British for the purpose.

HISTORY OF RELATIONS

Robert Clive who was re appointed as Governor of Bengal signed a treaty with the nawab Shuja-ud-daulah,⁶ on Aug 16, 1765 AD. The treaty said that Kora and Allahabad district will go to Company and Company will get 50 lacs rupees from Awadh as war compensation. Company was allowed to free trade in Awadh and promised help each other in case of war with other powers. Nawab was to bear the expenditure if such request was made from his side.

In 1773 Warren Hastings sold back Allahabad and Kara to Nawab in return for 50 lacs and a permanent subsidy for a garrison of the company's troops.⁷ In 1774 Nawab requested for company help to invade Rohilkhand and after the war it was annexed to the state of Awadh. With this annexation Nawab acquired the territory of 12000 sq km and population of 3 lacs.⁸ Since this war a detachment of British troops had been maintained in Awadh at the Nawab's expense of 2, 100,00 per month.⁹

By the treaty of Faizabad, which was concluded with then Nawab Vazier Asaf-ud-daulah, in the beginning of the year 1775, soon after his accession to the musnud, the Company came into possession of Banaras, Ghazipur, and Chunar;¹⁰ and it was stipulated that a regular brigade of the Company's troops should be stationed in the territories of the Nawab, for the defence of the Subah of Awadh, Cora, and Allahabad.¹¹ The Nawab agreed to pay the raised monthly amount of 2, 60,000 rupees for the services of this corps. Now maintenance of the Company's brigades in Awadh was made obligatory. After two years another brigade was raised by Company in Awadh. So by 1777 two brigades of the Company's army were posted in Awadh, which meant that the military duties as well as military authority in Awadh no longer remained exclusive to the Nawab, but was henceforward to be shared by the Company's government. These two brigades formed a considerable body of troops numbering 10,611 in 1785, strong and dependable, paid for by the Nawab but under the command of the Company's Officers.

During the time of Lord Cornwallis Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah requested the company to reduce the strength of British army in Awadh as its expenditure was proving a huge burden on his revenues.¹² From 1775 a brigade, known as permanent brigade, was placed at Kanpur and another, known as temporary brigade, was stationed at Fatehgarh since 1777.¹³ Cornwallis did not accept the request but reduced the contribution to 50 lacs.¹⁴

After the death of Nawab Asaf, his son Vazir Ali became Nawab but he was reported to have wished to be free from company's clutches.¹⁵ Mean while on 4th October the then Governor General John Shore received a letter from Sa'adat Ali claiming the masnad of Awadh on the ground of his being the eldest surviving member of the line of Safdar Jang. Shore decided to make use of the occasion to render Awadh, and thereby the Company's possessions, more secure. Shore had already contemplated, following the instructions from the Court of Directors, an increase of the subsidiary force in Awadh and the repair of and securing the control over the fort of Allahabad.¹⁶

On 21 February 1798 a treaty was signed between the new Nawab and the company based generally on the agreement signed at Benares. At Benares Sa'adat had agreed to (i) the cession of the Doab in lieu of the subsidy, (ii) the dismissal of the Nawabi troops, (iii) the discharge of the just debts of Asaf-ud-daulah, and (iv) pay Rs. 12 lacs to the Company for raising him to the masnad.¹⁷ The fort of Allahabad was shed to company. In treaty it was expressly stipulated, that the

"Nawab should possess full authority" over his household affairs, his hereditary dominions, his troops, and subjects."(Article17). In drawing up the treaty Shore relinquished the first, because it would have been a very unpopular step. He, therefore, deliberately substituted the vague terms about satisfactory security (Article 7)¹⁸, aiming at territorial cession when convenient. He also omitted the clause requiring the dismissal of the nawabi troops, as that might have given rise to rebellion and created a situation dangerous for a new ruler to start with.¹⁹ Instead he increased the subsidy to 76 lacs (Article 2), which he thought would compel Sa'adat to reduce his military establishment, thus indirectly securing the desired end.

LORD WELLESLEY AND AWADH

Historically this was the status of company's relation with Awadh when Lord Wellesley took over as governor general and there ensued between the new nawab and the new governor-general a long struggle. Wellesley differed from Shore almost as much as Sa'adat Ali differed from Asaf-ud-daulah. It should, however, be noted that Shore had anticipated practically the whole of Wellesley's Awadh policy, but he lacked the vigour and confidence of which enabled Wellesley to complete what Shore had only suggested.

There were two aims of his Awadh policy. First, disbanding of Nawab's own army and its replacement by Company troops under company's command which were to be paid by Nawab and second, to make Nawab Vazier cede territory in lieu of cash subsidy. Both led to long discussions, the first ending in the posting of a large British force in Awadh, and the second, in the cession of the Doab, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh etc., territories yielding a minimum of 135 lacs gross revenue, to the Company.²⁰

We shall examine both steps separately.

Demand of Military Reforms

In recent years, the internal administration of Awadh has been chaotic. The internal trade was ruined by the malicious Europeans.²¹ Administration meant absence of skill, corruption and extortion but it was also a well known fact that nawab continued firm to his engagements with the Company and most of the instalments of the subsidy, somehow, were paid in time. On Wellesley's part, it was not possible to charge nawab Vazier of disobedience or betrayal as was done with nawab of Carnatic.

Wellesley started with military reforms during June 1799. He conveyed to Sa'adat Ali about the immediate need for military reforms, both for the sake of guarding against foreign invaders and the internal tranquillity of Awadh. For the details of the plan of reform the nawab was referred to the Resident, Lt.-Col. William Scott²², who had in turn been referred to Mornington's letters of 23 December 1798²³ and 25 January 1799 to the late resident, Lumsden, for his guidance. In those letters the governor-general had expressed his strong belief that the only possible way to ensure the security of Awadh was the wholesale

disbandment of the nawab's army and its replacement by the Company's troops to be paid by the nawab but under the control of the Calcutta government.

The circumstances the governor-general referred to were the danger of an invasion of Awadh by Zaman Shah or some other power, and the inefficiency and utter unreliability of the nawab's own army whom he himself completely distrusted. In 1798 there actually existed a real alarm of Zaman Shah's invasion²⁴, but it passed off before the year was over. It is much more likely that he thought of probable enemies much nearer Awadh, namely Sindhia and Holker.

Nawab promised to consider the subject, in concert with Col. Scott, and invited advice on the subject. But later showing his reluctance to the proposals, on 12 December 1799, Sa'adat Ali proposed to abdicate the throne in favour of his son.²⁵ The agitation of this question put a temporary stop to the discussions respecting the projected military reform.

Governor General replied that the proposal is all good for the British interests in India. With same idea he wrote to directors 'it is my intention to profit by the event to the utmost practicable extent; '²⁶. Wellesley accepted the proposal but with some changes.²⁷ He did not want to raise the question of successor at this hour so suggested to the resident at Lucknow of a secret treaty between company and Nawab by which on a fixed date complete government of Awadh should be transferred to former.²⁸ Sa'adat Ali when came to know the terms of treaty, without successor, revoked his proposal of abdication and decided to continue.²⁹ Governor General expressed great disgust at the "duplicity" of Sa'adat.³⁰ The paper bearing date the 5th of November was now conveyed to him and without allowing him time to draw up a remonstrance which he declared himself to be preparing, the additional troops were actually ordered to march into Awadh and he was asked to pay money for the troops. The ground on which this measure was justified was that, the nawab was bound to maintain any number of troops, which the Company might station in his dominions (to protect him !); because one article of the treaty obliges him so to do, whenever an augmentation of his British auxiliary force should be thought necessary.³¹

Now again the nawab sent his proposals to Scott. This letter states very concisely the nawab's case.³² He admits his complete dependence on the British. He then states his objections to the replacement of his own army by British' troops. A good portion of his troops were faithful, he said, but were victims of a bad system; it would be unfair to deprive them of their subsistence owing to the misconduct of others. He also mentioned that this was the permanent increase while Article 7 of the treaty of 1798 provided for temporary increases in emergencies, which in his opinion had not arisen at the time of the negotiation. He then refers to Article 17 of that treaty which left the nawab in full control of internal matters. He concludes with a request to the governor-general to abide by the terms of the treaty.

Mornington received it on the 19th Jan but refused to accept it in reply to his letter of 5 November on the ground that it was not properly addressed and stamped.³³ It was termed as contempt to highest British officer in India and therefore, nawab

was warned and demanded for a formal letter.³⁴ Sa'adat readily apologised and wrote a proper letter. Meanwhile on 12th Nawab had again requested to resident Scott for some changes in the reform plan.

The nawab's revised letter and the report of the above correspondence between him and the Resident reached Mornington with several complaints from Scott as to how the nawab hindered the military arrangements by not issuing orders for the provision of grain, etc., for the extra incoming troops, and by not giving him the detailed account of his own. Scott was instructed to give an ultimatum to the nawab that unless he complied with what he was asked to do within an hour of receiving the ultimatum, friendly relations between the Company and Awadh would be considered to be at an end. Mornington also wrote a strong letter to Sa'adat.³⁵ Nawab ultimately accepted the inevitable, though not very graciously, and was reported to indulge in "more than ordinary excess of drinking."

The military reforms went on, and on 18 March 1800 Scott was able to inform Mornington that the nawab adopted without delay every proposition made to him relative to the reduction of his own troops and paid up as soon as demanded the expenses of the additional subsidiary troops. Scott went on steadily with the work of disbanding the nawabi army.³⁶

Action of Wellesley can not be justified because demand was unjust and was the violation of the treaty with Sir John Shore as it was a permanent increase in the British troops.³⁷

Demand for territories

Now started the second phase of Wellesley's policy towards Awadh which culminated in Nawab Vazier signing the subsidiary alliance on 10 November 1801. He wanted that Company must try to gain some territories in lieu of cash subsidy, the territories of Ruhelkhand and Doab.³⁸ Nawab himself gave a chance to company. The nawab wrote a letter to the Resident, in which he is said to have declared his probable failure to provide for the additional troops posted in Awadh during 1800.³⁹ Wellesley instructed to resident Scott⁴⁰ and also wrote to Sa'adat direct⁴¹ that the probability of his failure had arisen entirely out of his own negligence, and that only British rule could make Awadh solvent again; that, therefore, he should, for the welfare of his country, transfer Awadh to the Company. If this was not acceptable to him, he must, immediately cede sufficient territory to ensure the realisation of the total subsidy from their revenue after deducting the charges of collection and administration.

With the letter to the Resident was enclosed a draft treaty for the cession of Awadh. In the case of the nawab's accepting the second alternative, he was required to pay up immediately all arrears.⁴²

Nawab discarded the first option and for second he politely argued that as of now there is no arrear of subsidy which can validate the demand.⁴³ Wellesley argued that Sa'adat had declared his probable failure to pay the subsidy and

demanded the territorial security to which they were entitled by Article II of the treaty of 1798. He refused to accept any other security than the districts he had named. He decided to interfere decisively, up to any extent.⁴⁴

On the 10th of May 1801, the Nawab first communicated to Col. Scott and on a later date to Governor General, his memorable paper of requests.⁴⁵ This instrument contained a conditional assent to the proposed cession of territory. Several of the articles stipulated for the undisturbed administration of the nawab's reserved territories by his him. It was proposed, that the respective limits of the ceded and the reserved territories should be accurately defined and described in this treaty; and that nawab should be guaranteed against all farther claims in future, against all British interference, except by way of advice, in the government of his reserved dominions, and against any breach of the present treaty by any succeeding Governor General.

In response to this letter Governor General, in reply, threatened that the articles just specified " betrayed, the most unjustifiable, undignified and improvident jealousy of the Company's authority and power" and the nawab was again reminded, that he owes everything to the British.⁴⁶

Ultimately the hard-pressed nawab declared that he had neither the inclination nor the power to resist .Wellesley's demands, but he could never voluntarily consent to these proposals. Lord Wellesley was very eager to get acceptance from the nawab to save him from the charges of usurping the territories. In July 1801 the governor-general appointed his brother Henry Wellesley to reinforce Scott, expecting that the new agent's close relationship with himself would impress the nawab more. On 15 July the nawab gave his consent to the territorial cession, but on certain conditions. Henry Wellesley arrived at Lucknow early in September and opened negotiations with the nawab on the 6th. He tried once again to induce Sa'adat to abdicate, but the nawab absolutely refused.⁴⁷ Sa'adat put forward his case once more to Henry Wellesley, but was met with a firm refusal from the latter to accept anything less than the immediate territorial cession proposed. On 19 September nawab painfully delivered his formal acceptance.⁴⁸ It took some time to adjust the total demands of the Company and the revenue of the districts to be ceded, and on 10 November 1801 the final treaty was despatched to the governor general for ratification.

Evaluating the methods adopted

While evaluating the means and words used in Lord Wellesley's Awadh policy, one thing is evident that they can not be justified. Awadh was a sovereign protected ally of the company by the treaty 1798 and remained always loyal to the company. But Governor-General showed little patience, forbearance, or generosity.⁴⁹ There was a possibility of invasion, though meager, and the Company was by treaties bound to defend Awadh, but the measures proposed by Wellesley were more than adequate for mere defence, in fact enough for a decisive engagement with any power. The story of Zaman Shah's attack was used by Wellesley to veil his actual imperial designs.⁵⁰ In the whole process of

negotiations none of the Nawab's demands were considered. Whenever he had put a modification in British proposals he was threatened back.⁵¹

It also appears from the correspondence summarized above, that Sa'adat was not guilty of double dealing or hostility towards the English, of which Wellesley accused him. He had made an honest start towards civil and, as Scott also admitted, military reforms. The difficulties he had predicted in effecting the proposed military change in Awadh were found to be true. In spite of all his difficulties he had punctually paid the Company's subsidy, a thing which had been unknown for a long time. Marshman has opined that of all the treaties and expansion that took place at the time of Lord Wellesley, getting ceded provinces by exhorting continuous pressure on nawab was the most wicked of all.⁵² The logics and interpretations used during negotiations can simply be summarized as the logics of the strong man to weak.⁵³ The case of Awadh is testimony that WHEN a paramount power desires to find reasons in support of any measure it has thought beneficial to adopt, the very circumstance of its superior position gives it superiority in argument.

Works Cited:

¹ Awadh or Oudh or Oude – different spellings have been used for the native state in discussion. This paper goes with the more contemporary, Awadh.

² Warner, Sir W., Lee, *The Native States Of India*, London, 1910, pp. VII-XI

³ During late 19th century there were speculations that after subjugating Egypt Napoleon will attack on India. British believed that he was to be assisted by Tipu and Perron, the French commander of Sindhia. There was also a possibility of attack of Zaman Shah of Afganistan.

⁴ At a time when the financial position of the Company was far from comfortable because of its ongoing engagements with Tipu and Marathas.

⁵ This issue led to a controversy in England also and a debate on Awadh policy of Wellesley took place in House of Commons. Critics of the policy, to put forward their view, printed many pamphlets and advertisements describing the whole process of negotiation. These pamphlets contained very valuable information and contemporary views on the issue. One such pamphlet "*REMARKS ON THE OUDE QUESTION*", published by W. I. & I. Richardson, Royal Exchange and Printed by John Abraham, Printer, Clement Lane Dated 1806, have been used as one of the sources in this paper. Henceforth "Awadh pamphlet".

⁶ Nawab was defeated by the Hector Munro, the Company's army commander, at the battle of Buxar on 22 October 1764 where *nawab* fought alongside Mughal Emperor Shah Alam and Mir Quasim..

- ⁷ Roberts, P. E, *India under Wellesley*, London, 1929, p. 117
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 118
- ⁹ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 01
- ¹⁰ These were erstwhile possessions of Chait Singh. The areas yielded annual revenue of 23 lacs. See Irwin, H. C., *Chapters on Oudh History and Affairs*, London, 1880 p. 87
- ¹¹ Malcom, John, *The Political History Of India, From 1784 To 1823*, London, 1826, p. 100
- ¹² Ross, Charles, *Correspondence Of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, Vol I, 2nd Ed, London, 1859. p.250 Cornwallis to Nawab Vazier Asaf-ud-daulah dated 15 April 1787
- ¹³ Roberts, P. E, *India under Wellesley*, London, 1929, p. 117
- ¹⁴ Ross, Charles, op, cit., p. 257
- ¹⁵ Junior, Lord Teignmouth, *Memoirs Of The Life And Correspondence Of John Lord Teignmouth*, Vol I, London, 1843 p. 439
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 403-04
- ¹⁷ See Appendix 'B' of Awadh Pamphlet, op. cit., pp. 120. 'Treaty between the Nawab Vizier, Saadut Ali Khan Behadur, and the Honourable the English East India Company; 21st February 1798'
- ¹⁸ There will be no increase in subsidy unless such situation arrives. The decision will be of Governor General and increase will be in ratio of necessity and will prevail only till the time requirement exists.
- ¹⁹ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 04
- ²⁰ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 131 See the statement of Jamma in Sicca Ruppes of Oudh. The page contains information of possible collected revenue from different areas (*Mohauls*). The total Jamma is calculated 1,35,23,471.
- ²¹ Thornton, Edward, *History of the British Empire in India*, Vol III, London, 1842 , p. 162
- ²² Scott was originally appointed Lumsden's assistant especially to advise on military reforms in Awadh. He succeeded Lumsden after his resignation.
- ²³ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *The Despatches, Minutes, and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, KG, during his administration in India* (Hereafter Wellesley Dispatches), Vol I, London, 1836, pp. 386-9
- ²⁴ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol I, p. 262
- ²⁵ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 09
- ²⁶ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, p. 156
- ²⁷ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, pp. 159-167
- ²⁸ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 10
- ²⁹ Nawab's letter to Resident Scott dated 19 December 1799. Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 11
- ³⁰ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 13
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 15
- ³² It was actually a draft of a Memorial presented on the 11th January, 1800, to Mr Scott, Resident by Nawab. See Appendix 'A' in Awadh Pamphlet, op. cit., pp. 113-17
- ³³ Awadh Pamphlet, op. cit., pp. 117-18

- ³⁴ Mill, James, *History of India*, London, Vol VI, p. 155
- ³⁵ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, pp. 208-19.
- ³⁶ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 17
- ³⁷ Mill, James, *History of India*, Vol VI, pp. 142-143
- ³⁸ This was to serve two purposes. In the first place, it would make the subsidy secure, and in the second, it would give the Company a better frontier in view of their possible struggle with the Mahrattas. Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol I, p. 387 Mornington to Lumsden 23 Dec. 1798
- ³⁹ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, p. 422 Wellesley to Scott 22 Jan. 1801
- ⁴⁰ 22 Jan. 1801 Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, pp. 422-9
- ⁴¹ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, pp. 429-36
- ⁴² The arrears at that time amounted to one month's subsidy (about 10 lacs) and the extraordinary military expenses in connection with Zaman Shah's invasion and Wazir All's rebellion. The latter amount had originally been stated as just over 17 lacs, but was at this time increased to Rs. 38 lacs. The *nawab* was further required to pay a share of the expenses of the two missions to Persia as: their purpose had been to divert Zaman Shah from invading Awadh.
- ⁴³ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, p. 475 footnote.
- ⁴⁴ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, p. 478
- ⁴⁵ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 26
- ⁴⁶ Awadh pamphlet, op. cit., p. 28
- ⁴⁷ Awadh Pamphlet, op. cit., pp. 36-37
- ⁴⁸ Awadh Pamphlet, op. cit., p. 38
- ⁴⁹ Loyal, Sir Alfred, *The Rise of British Dominion in India*, London, p. 219 Writer also charges him of holding dictatorial negotiation with Awadh.
- ⁵⁰ Martin, Montgomery, ed., *Wellesley Dispatches*, Vol II, pp. 155-6
- ⁵¹ P E Roberts in his book has rightly named the chapter which deals with Awadh as THE COERCION OF AWADH. See Roberts, P. E, *India under Wellesley*, London, 1929, p. 116
- ⁵² Marshman, John Clark, *The History of India*, Vol II, 1863, p. 50
- ⁵³ Mill, James, *History of India*, Vol VI, p. 142-43