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“BIDI INDUSTRY IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT”

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Abstract: After the battle of Palashi, the power and the capital of Bengal was simultaneously transferred to Calcutta, due to this reason the glory and economy of Murshidabad gradually decreased. After the plundering of Palashi, Murshidabad went below the poverty line, but England gradually became a more capitalist country in the world. As a result, industrial goods entered Murshidabad very easily due to the improvement of transportation system when the Industrial Revolution took place in England. The financially distressed industries of Murshidabad were gradually destroyed. Actually the industries were gradually destroyed by the economic crisis. Disenchanted with the English policy, the unemployed laborers found the Bidi industry, which was made in fully indigenous technology, and they adopt it very easily. Bidi industry were flourished in different parts of Murshidabad including Aurangabad, Dhulian, Farakka.

Keywords: *bidi, industry, Murshidabad district*

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of Murshidabad in India from ancient to modern periods is undeniable. At the end of the middle ages in India, the modern era began from here. Similarly, the freedom struggle to build an independent India also started in Murshidabad district. From 1857. 1879, Murshidabad got its modern shape.

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As there is no 2021 census for carona, According to the 2011 census, Murshidabad has an area of 5324 sq km, population of 7103407, literacy rate is 66.59 percent, and population growth rate is 21.9 percent. Bhagirathi River flows from north to south in the district, the eastern side of the river is known as Bagri and the western side is known as Radha. Murshidabad district West Bengal in terms of location

Located almost in the middle of the state.¹ Murshidabad district has historical importance. Several household industries such as jute, silk, brass utensils, handloom etc. gradually increased the popularity of the Murshidabad district. But with time bidi industry took its place.²

Following were the main reasons to introduce and spread the Bidi industry in Murshidabad district:

Economic condition of Murshidabad district was very good from ancient period to medieval period. In fact Hiuen-tsang's description of Karnasuvarna (situated in Murshidabad district in west Bengal) city gives an indication of its size, prosperity, and excellence.³ The economic condition of this district deteriorated from the beginning of the modern era. This change was occurred mainly by the British's selfishness exploitation policy. Proletarian poor people of Murshidabad eventually adopted the profession of Bidi rolling. After the plundering of Palashi, Murshidabad went below the poverty line, but England gradually became a more capitalist country in the world. As a result, industrial goods entered Murshidabad very easily due to the improvement of transportation system when the Industrial Revolution took place in England. The financially distressed industries of Murshidabad were gradually destroyed. Actually the industries were gradually destroyed by the economic crisis. Disenchanted with the English policy, the unemployed laborers found the bidi industry,

made in indigenous technology, and they adopt it very easily. Bidi industry were flourished in different parts of Murshidabad including Aurangabad, Dhulian, Farakka.

1. Plassey Plunder

A top secret alliance (between nabab's relative and the East India Company) was signed against Nanab Siraj-ud Daullah, which resulted in the Battle of plessy on 23 June, 1757 AD. In that battle, Clive defeated Siraj decisively. The victory of the battle of Plessy marked the beginning of the political dominance of the English East India Company in India.⁴ After this what happened was what may be called the "Plassey Plunder". Soon after the war, the English army received a huge sum of money 27500 pound.⁵⁺⁶ Between 1757 AD and 1760 AD the company received 22500000 rupees from Mir Jafar. Lord clive himself got a Jagir worth 34567 pounds in 1759 AD. As a result, the English company got an opportunity to stand in a very advantageous position in the commercial competition with its European rivals.⁷ Removing one Nawab and installing another Nawab in the Masnad (throne) of Bengal became a very profitable business. Also, the employees of the company became the owners of huge wealth overnight by collecting gifts and rewards in various ways. Lord Clive himself was the guide in this regard. Intoxicated with money. In a frenzy, he said- "Money, money and money. No time to be made at all." Clive's example was gratefully followed by other employees of the company.

Between 1757 AD and 1766 AD, the English thus collected 50 crores rupees from Bengal. But not only from dowry, compensation or gratuity, but also from the private trade of company employees, the English made a lot of money. Company's employees repatriated / send their personal earning money to their own country through the following two ways. Firstly, various employees of the company, including Clive and Hasting, used to send a large part (money) part of their earnings through precious stones or diamonds. There is no account of how many diamonds went out of Murshidabad in this way. Second, they sent their money through French or Dutch company to their country. The company bought various goods from India, specially textiles and silk, and sold them in the European market. Before 1757, the total investment of the company was 3000000 rupees. Company buy the several goods by the gold or the silver coins of England. But the situation was changed after the battle of Plassey. From the business of making Nawabs in Bengal and by collecting the wealth of Bengal in various ways, the English used to earn money, from now on they started buying goods and sending them to England. It was possible to carry out the investment work with the money here. It was like frying fish in fish oil. In this situation, although the company and its employees are growing day by day, the economy of Murshidabad is facing an extreme breakdown.⁸ So the economic condition of Murshidabad became so deplorable that it was

not possible for Mirzafar to meet the company's demands. After the battle of Plessy, Mirzafar gave 17700000 rupees to the English company as compensation for Siraj's invasion of Calcutta. On this time the employees of company were given huge amount. Clive alone received over Rs 20 lakhs and Watts Rs 10 lakhs. Clive himself later calculated that the company and its employees received assets worth Rs 3 crore from Murshidabad sportsman Nawab Mirzafar. As a result, it can be easily guessed that the state of Bengal's exchequer became deplorable.⁹ Clive collected 234000 pounds for himself from Murshidabad-Nabab Mirjafar,s treasury. So a lot of money was drained from Murshidabad that the economy was completely shattered.¹⁰

Drain of Wealth:

The vast sums of money thus smuggled from Bengal to England, for which there was nothing in exchange or recompense, have been referred to by historians and economiest as "drain". At a time Bengal was popularly known as gold mine. Clive paved the way for 'plassey plunder'. Later Francis Skyes showed that Bengal is truly a gold mine by earning 12 lakh rupees from Murshidabad and 80 lakh rupees from gifts and various illegal ways. P.J. Marshman reckons that from 1757 onwards the annual remittances to England amounted to 500000 pounds. Dr. J.C. Singh in his book 'Economic Annals of bengal' states that 1757 and 1780 England received a total of 38400000

pounds from India. According to Dadabhai Naoroji the annual average of shipments between 1835 AD and 1839 AD was 5347000 pounds. Between 1855 AD 1859 AD the annual average stood at 7730000 pounds. It must be remembered that all the costly wars waged during this period in the interests of England's imperialism were borne from the Indian revenue. In 1840, Lord Ellen Bara, who became Governor General of India after Auckland, admitted that India was getting nothing in return for the amount of money being remitted from India to England. Madras Board of Revenue President John Sullivan said-“Our system acts very much like a sponge, drawing up all the good things from the banks of the Ganges and squeezing them down on the banks of the Thames.”¹¹ According to the English historian Percival Speer the post plassey era was popularly known as “Age of open and unshamed /shameless plounder”. At this time, the British extracted a large amount of gold, silver and wealth from Bengal, Brooks Adams called it as ‘plassey plounder’. Verelst wrote – From 1757 the English company started exporting gold and silver from Bengal to China for it trade. In the 60s, its average annual amount was Rs. 24 lakhs. Philip Francis said-the objective of the company's employees is to quickly extract wealth from Bengal and take that wealth out of the country. Thus Robert Clive who took the foremost role in amassing wealth through illegal means, followed by English servants received around five crore

rupees between 1757 AD and 1766 AD. In February 1765, by installing Mirzafar's illegitimate son Najam Uddaullah in the masnad (throne) of Bengal, high official such as Johnston, Senear, Leicester etc. received about 6250000 rupees. In their addiction to making illegal money, English employees embezzled huge sums of money without written evidence and no account was available. Burwell himself admitted-he earned a total of Rs. 80 lakhs during his stay in Bengal. Murshidabad Darbar resident Francis Sais earned Rs 12 to 13 lakhs in just two years from Bengal through salami and profits from privet trade. When Warren Hastings was the Governor General of Bengal, he paved the way for his cronies to earn huge sums fo money through illegal contracts. During the impeachment of Hastings, he was accused of making illegal contracts with his cronies to build dams or supply opium, horses, military equipment,etc. The public policy followed by the English company increased the amount of financial outflow from Murshidabad as well as Bengal. As a result of the commercial policy of the English company, the wealth of Bengal began to flow out at a rapid rate in the second half of the 18th century. James Grant wrote in his ‘Analysis of the finances of Bengal in 1786- 1 crore rupees of Bengal were sent abroad through ‘investment’. G.A. Princep has calculated the subsequent financial withdrawal. According to him, between1813-1822, the annual financial outflows of Murshidabad as well as Bengal amounted to 3 million to 4

million pounds. In 1838, Montgomery Martin wrote that this annual withdrawal of 3000000 pounds for thirty years at 12 percent compounded annually would amount to 723997917 pounds. Ramesh Chandra Dutta said about 'drain of wealth'- "so great an economic drain out of the resources of a land would impoverish the most prosperous countries on earth, it has reduced India to a land of famines....". Post plassey plunder and financial evacuation of Bengal damaged the economy of Bengal in many ways. There is no doubt that the financial outflow from Murshidabad as well as Bengal impoverished Bengal but enriched Great Britain. Rajani Pam Dutta said in the India Today (book) –modern England was built in the second half of the 18th century on the basis of stolen wealth from India. Karl Marx said in the third volume of his Capital-the wealth that came out of India went to England and was converted into capital. The wealth exported from this country made a class of people in England wealthy and they invested the savings in industry and commerce in England. So it cannot be denied that the wealth from India served as one of the sources of capital required for the development of the Industrial Revolution in England.¹²

Industrial revolution:

Several historians and economists like Brooke Adams, Victoria Miroshnik, Deepak Bose etc. have mentioned that the Industrial Revolution, which forever changed the world we live in, is indeed plassey plunder from Murshidabad as

well as Bengal by the British after the battle of plassey was fueled by money in 1757. This industry revolution is an umbrella term that dates back to the 1760s in Europe towards mechanization of factory production systems used to advance. At this time mechanization of the textile industry in England several inventions and discoveries were made for historian R.P. Dutta argues that after 1757 AD Bengal was the exploitation of the industry in England as a result for the emergence of the revolution, providing necessary funds for various research and production.¹³ Due to the lack of big industry Murshidabad district was mainly depended on the basis of agriculture. Cultivation of mulberry and sericulture, cocooning and weaving of silk are highly developed in the district. Historically, silk in Murshidabad district is well developed. It adversely affects mulberry production but still it is considered as an important source of economy. The small industry of ivory carving in Khagra and Jiaganj also dates back to the time of the Nawabs important economic activities. Apart from silk, the khadi and Muslin industries of the district are also in a very important position. 280 active Khadis in West Bengal, 96 of the societies are located in Murshidabad district. Even Khadi cloth and garments are exported. Jute goods, ornaments, brassware and ivory works are also associated with household industries in the Murshidabad district. They are well developed mainly in the northern part of the district, today's this area are

popularly known as Bidi Industrial area.¹⁴ But after the industrial revolution in England Murshidabad district was hit hard/affected by the availability of cheaper machine made textile.¹⁵ Not only textile but also other manufactured items are easily exported to India due to the well communication system between India and England.

Trade rout communication:

During the second half of the 15th century the Asiatic sea-routes have been linked on the basis of the old Chinese and Arab spice trade-route and the trade-route taken by the Portuguese traders. Latter the route was followed by Vasco da Gama, who touched the Indian soil at Calicut from Africa for the first time in 1498. These long and valuable routes were latter followed by several foreigner traders such as Dutch, French, and English adventures and traders.¹⁶ Applling of steam knowledge to transportation in the 19th century increased the speed of journey and increased the number and size of vehicles, making trips both quicker and more luxury and comfortable. Two major interoceanic canals such as the Suez canal in 1869 AD and the Panama canal in 1915 AD reduced journey times at sea by replacing the ocean trip around the tip of Africa or Northern Southern America with shortcuts through the Caribbean. At a time voyage from UK to India, which had taken months in the 18th century, was reduced to weeks in the 18th century. Railroads and aviation were also increased the

speed of journey and transportation system. These development in communication and transportation were established all over the world. Communications and transportations technological knowledge were both products of and contributions to the successive phases of the industrial revolution. With these development of communication a new economic construction was established on earth.¹⁷

De-industrialization:

Indian's foreign trade flourished in the second half of the 19th century as result of the expansion of railways, the construction of road and the improvement of communication. The main feature of this foreign trade were the export of raw materials from India and the import of manufactured goods from Britain. The expansion of the railways affected the textile industry, leather industry and pottery. Before the coming of the British, Murshidabad was full of several industries. Economist Amiokumar Bagchi while defining the second phase of deindustrialization, said that as a result of deindustrialization, the proportion of the population employed in the secondary industries gradually decreased.¹⁸ The most harmful result of the spread of British imperialism in India is the destroyed of traditional and traditional cottage industry or handicrafts of India. Colonialism destroyed Murshidabad's as well as India's industries and elevated England to become the most prosperous country in the world.¹⁹

Indian handloom industry is the oldest industry and India is considered as the birth place of cotton manufactures.²⁰ In the eighteenth century, India was one of the greatest and most prosperous country in the world. India's textile industry was famous in the world. Although the embroidery industry flourished in England in the early seventeenth century, it was not equal in value and quality to Indian cloath.²¹ Murshidabad district's as well as India's most valuable industry, viz, weaving was declined as a result of introduction of mechanical inventions in in the British textile industry. The year 1783 saw the introduction of the first sample of English muslin into Bengal and 1786 AD the complete cessation of the export of year from this province to England.²² The manufacturers of England continued to put pressure on the government to prevent the sale of Indian-made cloths in the English markets. A law was made by Parliament banning the use of Indian cloths. In 1797 AD – 1798 AD exported amount was 7908688 rupees. In 1808 AD-1809 AD this amount decreased to 5740455 rupees. In this early 19th century, the sale of Indian textile in Europe was thus greatly reduced. After the ending of the company's monopoly in 1813 AD, there was no control over Indian trade and the Indian market was flooded with English made goods. Due to the selfish policies of the British, the Indian market was also lost to the weavers of Murshidabad.²³ Murshidabad district was also popularly known as an important cotton textile centre. The

largest cottage industry in Murshidabad district was cotton textile industry. Several cotton textile related names such as Tantipara (weaver areas) Sujnipara (according to villagers of Sujnipara area, Sujni means one kind of bedshi), Suti (one kind of cloth) are informed us that at a time Murshidabad district was famous for cotton textile industry. The industry is scattered all over Murshidabad district. Samserganj, Domkal, Bharatpur, Farakka, Suti, Khargram, Barwan, and Raghunathganj were the main high concentration area in Murshidabad district. The yarns are collected from dealers of Salar, Nagar, Kandi, Barwan, Jangipur, Nimtita Dhulian, Hariharpara, Roypara, Domkal, Khagra (all places are situated in the district). Different colure or type of cloths are product from this district- for women's cores and colorful saris, for man's dhuti, Lungi, chadar etc. Some other cores cloths are made for both man and women such as blanket, gamchha etc. All kind of cloths are mainly sold in the local markets. But some time the native of Murshidabad sold their cloths in Assam and other parts of the country.²⁴ The total 46000 persons were involved in this industry. Aurangabad was popularly known as the principal seat of cotton industry.²⁵

Due to the selfish polies of the British, the weavers lost their markets in Murshidabad. Verelest informed the company bosses that the weavers were leaving their inborn cast trade and taking up other professions. But no one paid much attention to his words.²⁶ Dadabhai

Nauroji used the concept of the prevention of the wealth of drain to from the merchants guild in Bombay, to oppose this type of exploitation which in turn fulfilled the demand of the Swadeshi movement in the latter part of the 19th century.

Swadashi Movement:

The native of Murshidabad do not like the exploitation policy of the British. So they came under the influence of swadeshi-thinking. Krishnakumar Mitra's Sanjeevani newspaper had called for a boycott of British goods such as Manchester cloth, Liverpool salt and other European goods on 13th July 1905. They wanted to accept Sawadeshi industry such as swadeshi textile mills, leather mills, deslai, soap industry etc. instead of foreign goods. Rabindranath Tagore also called 'Atmashakti'. The boycott resulted in the biggest drop in imports of cigarette and footwear.²⁷ Commercial bidi industry was began/started from the early 1900s. It was rapidly spread during the 1930s by the expansion of tobacco cultivation at that time and also Mahatma Gandhi's support of swadeshi industry and products. Due to the reason Indian educated people also chosen bidi instead of cigarette. Mahatma Gandhi's view of swadeshi-product was suddenly spread in Murshidabad District.²⁸ Native of Murshidabad accepted Bidi instead of cigarette. Disenchanted with the English policy, they accepted the bidi industry which was made in fully indigenous technology, and they adopt it very easily.

Frakka Barrage Project:

Verelest informed the company's officers that the weavers were leaving their inborn cast trade and taking up other professions, specially agriculture. But anybody do not paid much attention to his words. Too much lands were destroyed due to the Farakka barrage project in Murshidabad district. Construction of the Farakka Barrage began immediately after the Sino-Indian war in 1962. It was ended in 1971. The 2.62 km long barrage has 109 gates. There is a feeder canal to trap the Ganga water and channel it into the Bhagirathi stream. The feeder canal comes out of Farakka and meets the main Bhagirathi river at Ahiran and thus Bhagirathi regains its life. Inadequate flow of water in Bhagirathi river has made the port of Calcutta moribund since the British period. In 1957, the internationally renowned river scientist Dr. Hensen came to India. As a result of various investigations and observations, the construction of Farakka Barrage started in 1963 as per his suggestion. The railway and road also constructed over the barrage. Both ways connected south Bengal with North Bengal. The Farakka Barrage project started in 1963 but the construction was completed in 1971. Then it takes another four years to build the feeder canal. The feeder canal is 38.30 km long. The water retained by the dam is taken through this canal and discharged into the Bhagirathi. This feeder canal is capable of holding and carrying 40 thousands cusecs of water. The barrage was inaugurated on April 21, 1975. Due to the

failure of the drainage system on the both side of the canal, thousands of acres of land were inundated, and the farmers were out of work for most of the year and began to devote their labor to the bidi industry. Due to the construction of Farakka barrage, the communication system improved and many sailors, laborers, coolies etc. employed in the Kheya crossing lost their jobs and joined the bidi rolling occupation in order to earn a living.²⁹

Erosion of Padma or Ganga River:

Specially northern part of Murshidabad district was situated beside the Ganga or Pasma rivers. Land erosion is the main problem of bidi rolling areas from before several centuries to the present century. Particularly early phase of the present century, eating up several tracts of land on the western bank, human habitations, markets, schools, health centers, police station and post office has not only destroyed, but also at the same time deprived them from other livelihood. In the 1994 flood affected Lalgola and its adjoining areas. In the 1998 AD and 2000 AD floods badly damaged the Jangipur sub-divisional area. Ganga's and Padma's erosion badly affected about one million people under seventy village panchayats of the district and in 1996 1200 meters wall of Padma disappeared due to the erosion. In 1997 AD about 90 km area of the Padma basin was badly affected due to the Padma-erosion. There are nothing any alternative chance of a quarter of the population of the district except shifting from their land. 30 According to view of head

teacher of Nimtita G. D. Institution, more than 15th km. areas of Farakka, Shamsheganj, Suti ps of Murshidabad are badly affected of furious Ganga-erosion in 2021 AD. Affected family took shelter at their nearest school such as Nimtita G. D. Institution, Lashkarpur Jr. High School, Chachanda High School, Saheb Nagar High School, Digri High School and other Gov. building of these affected areas. More than one year, they temporarily leave on these shelters area.³¹ Before 1942 AD most of the bidi workers of boarder adjoining areas of Murshidabad district were agriculturists, they had their own houses and agricultural land. In 1942 and several years later, their houses and cultivable lands were also washed away due to the Ganga-erosion. According to the reference of the Middle of the current of 1947 AD, during the delimitation of India and East Pakistan, most of their land went to Bangladesh, overnight several thousands of people became homeless, landless bidi workers. Permanent submergence under water of about 25/30 square kilometers of the Jangipur sub-division due to excess water from the Farakka feeder canal and the increase in the number of landless has led to an increase in the number of bidi workers. For their very survival, most of them include child and women were easily accepted the bidi occupation.³²

There are various other reasons for the development and gradual expansion of the beedi industry in Murshidabad. Once the well-connected zamindars of Dhulian and Nimtita of

Murshidabad received a lot of wealth from a king of Pakur-district in Jharkhand state and also imported many tribal Santal palanquins, barkandajs, piyada-lathiel (foot solders) forces from the Santal parganas to protect the zamindari. Bidi was given them due to entertain purpose. As the demand for beedi increases as an intoxicant among the Ganga's boatmen, fishermen, and other workers of Murshidabad, the prevalence of expensive cigarettes and complicated hookah consumption decreases. Earlier, drug addicts used to make chutti or bidi by themselves, but later some professional bidi artists started making bidis and sending them to the fields for workers of royal houses, Ganges river ghats and farmers. An intoxicated bidi artist began to develop. We all know that there is historical tradition behind the birth of any industry. Due to the First World War in 1914-18, the global political crisis led to a severe recession or stagnation in the economy. During 1930-1931, a large part of the people of Murshidabad, which was dominated by agriculture and small cottage industry, suffered an unprecedented economic depression. On the other hand, the demand for bidi is gradually increasing among the farmers of Bihar, the laborers of Assam and the locals. This led to the development of the bidi industry and gradually led to the prosperity of this industry. We know that the presence of the following factors is essential for any industry to develop in any place. a) Ease of supply or price of materials required for industrial production b)

Availability of market for sale of manufactured goods c) Adequate capital and d) Cheap and sufficient labour. Tobacco and kendu leaves are the main materials required for bidi industry. Other materials are thread, level, packing paper, gaddy, gauze, scissors, tin mould, charcoal etc. used as auxiliary materials. It can be seen that none of the main materials for beedi production are available in Murshidabad and Jangipur subdivisions. Kendu leaves come from Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar states and tobacco comes from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh. However, the reasons for the development of bidi production conditions

are- 1) Inexpensive labour: Most of the poor laborers belong to the poor Muslim community, Scheduled Castes, scheduled tribes who take bidi tying as a profession. The easiest way to earn money through bidi production attracts workers (including children and women) with just one week of training from childhood. 2) Adequate market advantage: This industry enjoys good market advantage in the initial stage of development. Bidi is generally used by farmers and workers. The bidi market of Murshidabad started for the chabagicha workers of Assam and the poor farmers of Bihar, but the bidi became very attractive to the gentry class due to other addictions such as the high price of cigarettes and the additional harmful addiction. 3) There is good communication system through rivers, railways and roads; 4) The farmers lost thousands of bighas of land due to the breach of Ganges and

became proletarians and engaged in the business of bidi making without capital; 5) As a result of the partition of the country, thousands of refugees entered Murshidabad without money, and they were forced to take up the bidi industry as a profession; Before independence, the bidi industry was limited to small areas, but in the 50s, due to the emergence of favorable conditions for the bidi industry, some brokers in the rural areas started making bidi with the help of a number of contract workers. Village-to-village bead making in Murshidabad started from then.

Apart from local small-scale bidi owners, some of the bidi owners from Assam and Bihar concentrated on bidi production to get very cheap labour. As a result, in the 1950s, the extent of bidi production spread throughout Murshidabad district and specially Farakka, Suti, Shamsheganj, Raghunathganj and Sagardighi of Jangipur sub-division (northern part of Murshidabad district).

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