

## From Childe's War to Plassey: How the English East India Company Gained Control over Opium Trade of Bengal Subah

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**Abstract:** The Battle of Plassey 1757 marks the beginning of British colonisation in India bringing into sharp focus the activities of the English East India Company in its formative years. P.J Marshall's paradigm, extremely popular in Indian Universities, is that Plassey was merely the result of a Court intrigue at Murshidabad, having nothing to do with the booming of the intra Asian opium trade, or the political developments in Gujrat and the Carnatic in the eighteenth century. On the other hand Marxists scholars who acknowledge that the British Empire and opium marched together *after* 1757, do not question if Child's War of 1689 and Plassey, were examples of 'the bloody birth of capitalism' when the English East India Company's efforts, spanning over 70 years, fructified, achieving monopoly in the Bengal opium trade, The article hopes to reconcile the two major strands of historiography, to achieve a less dogmatic master narrative on Plassey.

**Keywords:** Intra Asian Global Opium Trade, Battle of Plassey, Bengal, Eighteenth Century India, English East India Company

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## INTRODUCTION

The Battle of Plassey was fought on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1757. The immediate cause was Siraj ud Daulah the new Nawab of Bengal, defeated and killed his cousin Shaukat Jung in battle taking over the *faujdari* of Purnea in October 1756. This apparently riled up Jagat Seth, Mir Jaffer and the English East India Company (hereafter EIC) enough to plot the removal of the Nawab (Marshall, 1987:75). Purnea being an old opium growing district of the Bengal Subah was once directly under Mughal Imperial *faujdari* control but with the rapid weakening of the Mughal Empire after 1707, had effectively come under Nawabi rule (*East India Gazetteer*, 1815:138ff). According to Luke Scrafton's estimate in 1757, out of Jagat Seth's annual income of Rs.50 lakh, only 15 lakh came from minting and various banking charges. The rest came from investments made in opium and salt petre trades (S. Chaudhury, 1988).

According to Persian accounts Mir Jaffer and Siraj ud daulah had reached an agreement on the battlefield but Clive annulled the agreement and placed Mir Jaffer as the Nawab on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1757

with strict instructions that he must consult Jagat Seth in all matters like Alivardi had done (Marshall, 1987, p.78). The resentment of the Murshidabad Court directed at Clive was so strong that the plotters hastened to murder Siraj ud Daulah on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1757 to scotch the possibility of a counter coup. The absence of a public trial and beheading as befitted Siraj's rank indicates that the plotters of Plassey did not have justifiable charges against the young Nawab (Gupta, Brijen, 1966: 122ff).

Ever present in the Plassey narrative but hidden from the limelight is the mysterious character of Robert Orme, whose writings formed the backbone of Imperialist historiography. Observant, ambitious and unscrupulous, Orme was handpicked by Lord Holderness (one of the King's Cabinet Ministers) to act as his protégé in India, after long hours of interrogation about the Indian political climate. Lord Holderness was anxious not repeat the mistake Sir Josiah Childe (discussed below). Orme was then introduced to Robert Clive, in London. As Lord Holderness' protégé Orme pushed through (despite his junior rank and unpopularity) two key decisions upon the Madras Council. First was the decision that the English and French come to an agreement in the Carnatic, enabling the English to focus on defeating Siraj ud Daulah comprehensively. Second, it was at Orme's insistence that the command of the English troops was handed over to Robert Clive, though other names had been suggested by the Madras Council (Delgoda, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1992).

Robert Orme the historian completely eclipses Robert Orme the cartographer. Immediately after Plassey, Clive at Orme's insistence hired Rennell at great expense to map out the entire Northern India up to Delhi. But ever suspicious that Rennell will double cross Clive, which he eventually did, being a friend of French General Bussy, Orme had taken the precaution of simultaneously preparing his own set of detailed maps about the soil conditions, topography, mountain passes etc of Northern, Central and parts of Southern India (Delgoda, 1992). General Bussy and Orme's anxiety to rapidly map out India was to find out new regions of Mughal India where opium cultivation could be introduced and should be militarily acquired.

Generations of Indian historians have asserted that Clive's actions were impossible without support from the British Crown. Despite later Imperial portrayals of Clive as a cut throat adventurer, Clive always described himself as the 'King's Agent' in India (Philips, C.H, 1948). British historians have vehemently denied the complicity of the British Crown in Plassey but American historians such as Holden Furber, Rupali Mishra and others argue in their own ways, that the British Crown emasculated with the beheading of Charles I, was in no position whatsoever, by the time of Glorious Revolution in 1688 to control its over mighty subjects. The EIC being a cartel of opium and slave traders supported by powerful bankers of London was one such over mighty subject, which forced the British Monarchy to lend countenance to its opium trade operations and the accompanying hooliganism across the world (Mishra, 2018).

According to Mishra, the degree to which the British Crown was forced to act against its inclinations is indicated by the delayed response to the 'Massacre of Amboyna' of 1623. Even Cromwell had withheld the renewal of the EIC Charter until 1657 because Cromwell, like the Stuarts, was interested in colonies becoming national territorial acquisitions rather than Company's private properties (Mishra, 2018:312-314). The tussle between the EIC and Crown is exposed when the Crown feigned ignorance about the 'Black Hole Tragedy' in 1756 until March 1757, when jokes began to circulate in the French Court about how the English Crown had disowned its Company Servants. According to S.C Hill the avenging of the Black Hole Tragedy of 1756 was delayed because news had not reached London (S.C Hill, 1905, Vol.I, chap.7).

## PLASSEY AND OPIUM TRADE: THE SAGA OF ENGLISH, FRENCH AND DUTCH COLLUSION

Dutch accounts as early as 1624, mention how English captains trading opium (known as 'supercargoes' or 'country traders') ensured favourable trade treaty terms for themselves even at the expense of the profits of the EIC and its shareholders (Om Prakash 2007:63). By 1732, the rowdiness and insubordination of the English opium traders had reached such monstrous proportions that direct instructions from London were defied with impunity. When the Directors in London had suggested that Governor Deane should enquire how much young clerks in Calcutta were earning from their private investments in opium, it was categorically turned down on the grounds that the clerks would be 'affronted' at such investigations (Furber 1969).

By sheer piracy, British opium traders had established a stranglehold over the intra Asian opium trade as shipping partners by 1720s. Top rung Dutch, Danish and French officers in India actively collaborated with English captains for their private investments in opium trade. An example would be the personal trade partnership between English Governor William Wake of Bombay and Jacob Mossel, the second in command of the Dutch at Batavia in 1747 (Furber, 1969). Unsurprising that Dutch naval expedition of June 1759, launched from Batavia, to undo Plassey failed with the Dutch promising never to interfere in Bengal and handing over their old privilege of having the right of first refusal when buying opium stocks at Patna to the Patna Group of English Traders (Nick Robins, 2012: 78).

Francois Joseph Dupleix, as the Director of Chandannagore, in August 1731 had cultivated ties with Alivardi Khan (then Governor of Bihar) and his brother Haji Ahmed, who had extensive connections in opium trade at Patna. Dupleix befriended the EIC officials, Armenians and Mughal officials at Patna for the procurement of opium, establishing factories in Patna, Murshidabad and Qassimbazar (Ray, Indrani, 1976). By making Patna his base Dupleix hoped to establish trade relations with Nepal and Bhutan, which had since times immemorial, been carrying out overland trade with China. If Dupleix plans had fructified, the French would have access to inland Chinese markets, breaking the British and Dutch hegemony over sea borne trade routes of opium (Ray, Aniruddha, 2000). With the exit of Dupleix in 1754 on charges of corruption it was men like Bussy, a personal friend of Clive, who became de facto in charge of the French in India (Delagoda, 1992).

Count de Lally, was handpicked by Louis XIV and sent to India in 1758 to eradicate Anglo French collusion. Lally had to deal with ten separate instances of mutiny and insubordination to his authority. Once 200 French soldiers defected to the British at St. George and could be seen on the ramparts with wine bottles in one hand and heavy purses on the other encouraging their compatriots to desert the French army. De Lally was beheaded in 1766, on charges of deliberately losing the Carnatic War which later proved to be false and De Lally's execution was the result of intrigues by French officers in India who were annoyed at Lally's efforts to crack down on Anglo French collusion (hAnnracháin, E. Ó, 2004). Like Louis XIV, Siraj ud Daulah had received intelligence reports of Anglo French collusion in the Carnatic and reduce the Nawabs to a cardboard figure (Hill, 1905, Vol.III:383). The British sacking of French Chandannagore, prior to Plassey was to provide the French with a suitable alibi for their inaction during Plassey. Stepping back from Imperialist acceptance of Anglo French collusion prior to Plassey, Marshall's explanation for French inaction during Plassey was due to French Company's indebtedness to Jagat Seth (Marshall, 1987:66).

S.C Hill's explanation for the inaction of the Mughal Emperor in this whole episode rests on the ground that Alivardi Khan had not paid the Rs. 25 lakhs he had promised the Emperor as permission

to remain in Office as the Nawab. Therefore, Mir Jaffer, as a grandson of Emperor Aurangzeb on the matrilineal line was within his rights to wrest the Nawabi back from the Alivardi's heir. Mir Jaffer's marriage to Alivardi Khan's half sister had been solicited by Alivardi to lend legitimacy to the Afghan usurpation of Bengal in 1740 (Hill, 1905, Vol. I: 24ff).

Thus the only power left uncompromised and capable of undoing Plassey were the Marathas with whom Alivardi had acrimonious relations. The Maratha capture of Thana and Bassein marked the eclipsing of Portuguese power in the India. In 1737, the Marathas captured Malwa, Gujrat and Rajasthan establishing their hegemony over Malwa opium trade. Kota was a key depot for opium like Patna (Farooqui, *Scindhias and the Raj*: 112-129). By the Treaty of Durai Sarai (1738) the Marathas gained from the Mughal Emperor, control of all opium growing territories between Chambal and Narmada (Gupta, 1966:22-23). Alivardi bore the brunt of annual Maratha raids for ten years before he agreed in 1751, to cede Orissa and pay 12 lakh annually as *Chauth* (S.C Hill, 1905, Vol. I: 24ff). Alivardi tried compensating his own revenues by increasing the *abwabs*, demands on the EIC. By 1752, Robert Orme would be writing to Robert Clive that Alivardi Khan must be assassinated or else it was not profitable to remain in Bengal (Chaudhury, 1998). Unsurprisingly, one of the first things that the English did after Plassey, was to annul Alivardi's deal with the Marathas (Mukherjee, 1949:245-249)

## THE BEGINNINGS....

In the Indian subcontinent there were two main production areas of opium, the Malwa opium, exported from the ports of Gujrat on the Indian West Coast and a substandard variety was grown in the Eastern regions of India centred in Banaras and Patna. Malwa opium had a longer shelf life of four years, difficult to adulterate and had a mellow taste while the Bengal opium had a shelf life of two to three years, heavily adulterated with tobacco, poppy husks was the inferior product. Subsequently Bengal opium was never worthy of Mughal Imperial attention. Emperor Akbar conquered Gujrat but permitted Bengal to remain as a tribute paying province. Todar Mal's 1580 *bandobast* was based on earlier Afghan records and Mughal *mansabdari* system and tax collecting structures were not imposed thoroughly (Trocki, 1999:40ff).

Ralph Fitch's 1585 account informs us that Burma imported Malwa opium from the West coast of India and not the Bengal variety which was smuggled overland to Thailand, Burma and Malacca in relatively small quantities for military and ritualistic purposes. The Portuguese sold Malwa opium to China and were paying for their Chinese merchandise in silver (Trocki, 1999, p.25ff). The Imperial survey conducted in 1658 in Aurangzeb's reign increased the Imperial revenue demand on Bengal only by 22% as compared to an average hike of 69% on the rest of the Mughal subahs (Mc.Lane, 1993: 30-44). In 1660 Emperor Aurangzeb paid the Sidis admirals 4 lakh rupees annually to ensure that Mughal shipping carrying Malwa opium to client states in the Gulfs of Persia and Arabia from the Indian West Coast, were not molested by Portuguese or the Malabari pirates (Subramanian, 2016:40) No such similar measures were taken in the case of Bengal opium indicating that trade volumes of Bengal opium remained insignificant until 1660 (Trocki, 1999: 83).

The EIC, like all other European Companies began by trying to get a foothold on the West Coast for a share of the Malwa opium trade from their fort at Surat in 1604. The Mughals dominated the West Coast trade from Gujrat and Maharashtra while the Portuguese with their *Estado da India* at Goa dominated the southern parts of West Coast trade. Smaller players, Marathas, Mapillas also existed (Subramanian, 2016:25ff). The EIC's acquisition of Bombay from the Portuguese as a part of the dowry

settlement of Charles II in 1662, was a part of the master plan to replace the operational hegemony of the Portuguese who generated tremendous revenues by simply issuing 'passes' for Malwa opium trade (J.F Richards, 1993: 239).

But unlike the Portuguese, the British had no plans to work in alliance with local rulers, and smaller players. By systematically harassing Mughal and Portuguese shipping, criminalising the Indian 'Coolies' (small carriers working for a number of Indian and European opium traders) as 'pirates', John Childe of the EIC attempted to establish British monopoly over Malwa opium trade. British enclaves such as Junagadh, Bhavnagar, Nawanagar were specifically created to serve as exclusive gateways for Malwa opium under British passes (Subramanian, 2016: 25-55). Unsurprisingly, the English French and Dutch began facing non cooperation and were forced procure 'Malwa' opium and other merchandise at premium prices (Pearson, 1998: 406-27).

Pushed out of the Malwa opium trade on the West Coast, the French, Dutch and the English started buying Bengal opium. By 1680 opium pipes especially designed for smoking opium (instead of ingesting it) were introduced by the Dutch in the South East Asian archipelago and China making it possible for the addict to simply burn away the common adulterants such as poppy husks, nicotine etc to extract pure morphine. It meant that highly adulterated Bengal opium hitherto rejected became acceptable to upper class addicts because Dutch and the British systematically developed Bengal opium by introducing a number of strict quality control measures with severe punishments meted out to those adulterating opium (Trocki, 1999:70).

By 1688 the annual output of Bengal opium went up to around 8700 maunds, the production being centred around forty eight parganas near Patna. It has been estimated that 41-55% of the produce was earmarked for international markets. From the 1650s, the Dutch, supplied Bengal opium, to the entire South East Asia and China, and bought up about 11.5% of the produce (Om Prakash, 1985, p.57). At Patna the Dutch, being the largest buyers were offered the finest grade, thereafter offers were made to the English and French respectively (Richards, J.F, 1981).

In 1684, when Batavia, came under control of the Dutch other European trading Companies pragmatically moved north to Achin or south, the EIC moved to Bencoolen on the other side of the island which completely cut them off from trade with China and Japan. The geographic position of the British posts of Bencoolen and Bantam indicate that the English were, by c.1680, least interested in the China-Japan trade and instead were focusing on the opium trade between Bengal and the South East Asian archipelago (D.K Bassett, 1960, Part I).

By 1701, the English factors were buying up all the opium in Bihar left over by the Dutch even those of substandard quality to be shipped to Bencoolen. By 1708, the widespread addiction in South East Asia forced the Sultan of Palembang to ask the Dutch not to bring in more than three chests of the drug annually, an order which was revoked in 1724 under Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin (Trocki, 1999, p.26-54). Ashin Das Gupta mentions how the rising demand for opium in South East Asian markets by 1701, caught the attention of Gujrat merchants who began sending out as many as two to three ships annually to the South East Asian archipelago to meet the increasing demand there getting into a direct conflict with English (Ashin Dasgupta, In *The Mughal State*).

## **CHILDE'S MISADVENTURE IN 1686-89 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

From the 1680s, the English Company servants were suggesting to London Board Members that a military attack on the Mughal Empire was feasible for wresting political and trading concessions

(Chaudhury, 1989:153-165). Sir Josiah Childe, the most prominent Board member of the EIC misjudged the political situation and sent 12 Royal Navy battle ships in an all out attack the Mughal Empire, precipitating the First Anglo-Mughal War of 1686-1689 (also known as Childe's War). Aurangzeb, a contemporary of Cromwell, did not err in judging the rogue character of the EIC. Though advanced in years managed he managed to soundly thrash the British forcing them to surrender all the 29 cannons of the EIC. John Childe was made to resign and return to England for mischief making. The English paid heavy indemnities and were expelled from their factories and their goods confiscated all over India. Thus Job Charnock's expulsion from Hugli in the Bengal was not the voluntary migration of peaceful British merchants to Orissa, to evade uncalled for persecution and who were invited back by the Mughal authorities after realising their mistake (Wheeler, J. Talboys, 1906: 45-47). Unrelentingly in 1701, Norris was made to surrender another 12 light brass cannons as a 'present' to Aurangzeb (Richards, 1993:239ff).

Aurangzeb realized that he had underestimated the skyrocketing of volumes of Bengal opium that the French Dutch and English were purchasing from Patna from 1660 to 1680. In 1693, Aurangzeb, issued prohibitory orders on the maximum quantity of salt petre European Companies could purchase. Permission to settle at Fort William in Calcutta was withheld until in 1698. Aurangzeb sent his trusted revenue official Murshid Quli Khan in 1700 and granted him a free hand and a clear brief to maximise revenue of the Bengal subah (McLane, 1993:30-44). Murshid Quli Khan transferred his capital to Murshidabad from Dacca in 1704 because it was centrally located from the opium growing regions of the Bengal subah namely, Rajmahal, Rangpore, Purnea and Patna. Murshid Quli Khan demanded Rs 30000 as settlement from the English which they never paid when the news of Aurangzeb's death reached Bengal. As a countermeasure Murshid Quli Khan declared that Aurangzeb's *farman* invalid with his death in 1707 (Gupta, Brijen, 1966, p.7-10)

The *farman* of Farrukh Siyar in 1717, was finally brokered on behalf of the EIC by the House of Jagat Seth (Little,1960:xii-xiii). Prince Farrukh Siyar participating in the war of succession after Aurangzeb's death had raised a loan of one kror rupees from Jagat Seth by trading away Royal monopoly rights in opium, indigo and saltpetre and promising favours to the House of Jagat Seth in the future (Little 1960:13-36). It meant that the Mughal *faujdar*s' whose vigilance had hitherto protected the smaller players in the opium trade bowed out of the scene (J.F Richards, 1981). Instead Patna banking houses, such as Jagat Seth had become king makers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Leonard, 1979). The *farman* of 1717 caused English Company shares to skyrocket to levels, never to be achieved before or after (Robins, 2012:31)

## ON THE QUESTION OF BRITISH GUILT

If opium trade was not illegal and all political powers from the Mughals Afghans Marathas to the Portuguese, French and the English were playing the same game of capturing the opium growing regions of the Indian subcontinent for economic heft to establish political clout, why should the English be criticised for the hooliganism, famines, and wars they unleashed globally. Were the attacks on the Mughal State, such as the Childe's War of 1686-89 and Plassey, by the EIC simply where one form of 'crony capitalism' replaced another? To answer this certain facts need to be underscored.

First is N.K Sinha's observation that Mughal Imperial administration never attempted to enrich itself by encouraging opium cultivation though it could easily have done so because the system of granting monopolies in opium on the receipt of an annual payment or *peshkash* was in place (N.K.Sinha,

1965, p.200ff). There was also a thriving cash nexus to facilitate the trade of cash crops like opium, indigo, but this too was not permitted to grow beyond what was strictly necessary (Habib, 1995, p.33). It was a natural precaution against the danger of the over mighty subject, political subversion, famines and widespread opium addictions.

In contrast the EIC's unbridled greed resulted in the most heart wrenching famines in India history and two Opium Wars in China. According to Edmund Burke, the EIC having complete control over Bengal opium trade by 1761 forced peasants to uproot their food crops and cultivate opium, causing the Bengal famine of 1770 (which carried away one third of Bengal's population) and continued to doing so, inspite of scathing domestic criticism achieving a surplus production of opium the same year (*The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, p.116-119). Forcing cultivation of opium (referred to as 'other commodities') was one of the several charges against which Clive had to defend himself on floor of the Parliament (*Speech of Robert Clive*, 1772). From 1818, petitions from peasants and Awadh talukdars pleading against forced opium cultivation (which went up by two and a half times under Company Rule) began to reach London. But Company Servants insisted that these were petitions from jealous talukdars who did not wish to see their peasants financially empowered (Robb, Peter, 1992).

Second, opium was kept under strict Imperial control with the Mughal *faujdar* system especially constructed. Only Princes of the Imperial family aided by special task force officers, the *faujdar*s who supervised all aspects of the *sauda i khas*, had shares of profits from opium trade which was directly deposited to the Imperial Treasury. The *Ain-i- Akbari* informs us that *faujdar*s, were men chosen for their proven prowess and integrity, free from any interference from local potentates and Mughal officers and reported directly to the Princes. Opium growing regions being susceptible to outbreaks of widespread addiction were kept under the strict vigilance of the *faujdar*s (Siddiqi In *The Mughal State*: 234-251).

The Mughal State did not permit opium trade to go rogue and the case of Khan Jahan Lodi (1629) proves it. Just a few months before Jahangir's death, Lodi as the Governor of Deccan, handed over Balaghat to Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar by ordering all Mughal *faujdar*s to surrender their posts to Ahmadnagar officers and retire to Burhanpur. (J.F Richards, 1993, p.119ff). Balaghat was one of the prime opium producing tracts of Malwa opium (Chopra, 1939). When Shah Jahan killed Lodi and most of his family in 1630, there was not a whiff of political support for Lodi from other Afghan nobles (Richards, 1993: 119-121).

Even during the Alivardi's time, nothing less than an Imperial *faman* would suffice to bring about even the most minor adjustments in the trade structures of items which could bring about political subversion, such as opium, salt petre and slaves. Early attempts by the Dutch to confiscate salt petre refineries of those indebted to the Dutch Company were thwarted by the Mughal *faujdar*s who permitted the arrest of the debtor but not confiscation of the refinery (Om Prakash). Similarly Aurangzeb's restrictions of 1693 on the sale of salt petre imposed in the aftermath of Child's War aimed to curb mischief making of the East India Companies. (A. Ray, 2000).

Third, Mughal India never used opium as money to bring about a favourable balance of trade. The idea of using opium to buy goods apparently came from the Dutch who realized that a direct trade with China and Japan would bleed their bullion reserves. The powerful Chinese and Japanese Empires were capable of enforcing payment in bullion for the goods and services rendered. But the smaller, militarily feeble kingdoms of the South East Asian archipelago could be bullied and browbeaten to accept payments of opium and slave in exchange for spices, which were accepted in Japanese and

Chinese markets. This 'Dutch model' copied by the French and the English but not by the Mughals or Portuguese (Raychaudhuri, 1962:38-58)

Fourth is the feigned ignorance about the debilitating effects of opium. Opium was the only colonial product which was strictly banned in European domestic markets for recreational purposes, indicating that the debilitating aspects of opium addiction were too well known (Om Prakash, 1987). With the two Opium Wars in China (the major consumer nation of opium) and the Revolt of 1857 in India (the major producer nation under British coercion) occurring almost on top of each other, the British Monarchy was forced to investigate and curb the hooliganism of the English East India Company. The Royal Commission on Opium formed in 1893, submitted its 2500 page Report in 1895 outrageously suggested that opium addiction in China was due to *abuse* of the drug by the Chinese, rather than the sale of the drug by the Anglo American world into China (*BMJ*, 1893).

Fifth is the refusal to take responsibility for opium plagues across the world. Insisting that Chinese Royal Edicts passed between 1729-1839 banning opium had failed because of crony capitalism and degenerate racial proclivities, Britain, Netherlands, US and France justified their forced sale of opium. Stung by these attacks China began imposing draconian measures, such as beheadings of obstinate drug addicts, uprooting of poppy fields and achieved a remarkably rapid decline in opium addiction. Japan following China's example imposed fines, imprisonments, disenfranchisements to curb opium plagues. Finally when Chinese villagers began chasing every European out of their villages were two International Peace Conferences convened in 1899 and 1907 and the major opium selling countries Britain France, Netherlands, US were forced to acknowledge that 'free trade' policies cannot be applied to dangerous drugs like opium and advocated the re imposition of strict State control over the sale of opium was necessary (J.F Scheltema, *The Opium Question* 1910). The Mughals had done the same throughout their existence.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, Plassey in 1757 was possible because by 1688, the English Crown was in no position to control its over mighty subject, the EIC. Episodes such as the recalling of Dupleix in 1754, beheading of De Lally in 1766 show how little control even the French Monarchy had over its personnel in India and interracial, international, friendships of Mossel, Dupleix, Bussy, Clive and Jagat Seth, being cemented by the super profits of opium trade, rendered useless loyalties and patriotic feelings. While it is true that Stuart England, Cromwellian Protectorate, Mughal India received revenues from opium trade but because these Regimes always saw themselves as the Guardians of the citizenry and never permitted the kind of unbridled greed the world was to witness under the EIC which unleashed famines in India and widespread opium addiction in China and the South East Asian archipelago.

Under Aurangzeb, Bengal was 'a hell filled with bread' which was reduced to one of the most famine stricken regions of India under the EIC Rule post Plassey (Sarkar, 1912:333). Marx with his models of 'Oriental Despotism' 'Asiatic Modes of Production' had lulled the British public into believing that Indians were so used to coercion under Mughal Rule, that the hooliganism of the EIC Servants was nothing out of the ordinary. Marx had discredited the British aristocratic classes of the 1840s who criticised opium traders and their hooliganism for being motivated by their jealousy of the self made men of the EIC or 'Nabobs' (Irfan Habib, 1995, p.8ff). By delinking the story of eighteenth century India in general and Plassey in particular from contemporary global developments such as the booming of the intra Asian trade, by not connecting historical events such as the beheading of Charles



I, Childe's War, the beheading of de Lally to Plassey and suggest that Mughal Emperors operated in isolation and were not interested in European politics (Richards, 1993: 287) encourage 'Orientalist' writings and make the blunder which Marx had committed, which is, obfuscating academic debates until a 'watershed' event proves otherwise.

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