

**DELHI DURING SAYYED JAMAL-UL-DIN ASSADABADI'S TIMES : A CRITICAL  
ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION**

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The present paper deals with the economic, social and political situation of Delhi during the life and times of Sayyed Jamal-ul-Din Assadabadi (1838-1897 A.D.). India had a considerable interest for Central Asia and Persia, not only being neighbours beyond the Indus, but also because there had been a close link between these regions geographically, politically and economically. Across the river Indus, the rivers Syr, Amu, Kabul, and Helmand connected the vast regions of Central Asia and Persia. These rivers provided communication for the travellers, traders and the troops. Sometimes swollen with rains the rivers offered difficulties and prevented smooth communications. The Indus is the greatest river about 1800 miles long.<sup>1</sup> Rising in Tibet, flowing through Kashmir and north-west frontier and Sind, it meets the Arabian Sea in the south. It forms the boundary of the Punjab plains parallel to the Sulaiman hills. In medieval times, it used to receive the accumulated waters of the Punjab viz. Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej and was joined by other several smaller streams from the western mountains. The Indus has been

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recognized as the great Indian barrier on the north-west due to its tortuous and circuitous course.<sup>2</sup>

To the west of the north-west frontier region and Sind, there was the land of Persia before the emergence of Afghanistan as a nation. Roughly it was bounded by Arabian Sea on the south, Persian Gulf in the south-west, river Tigris in the west, Caspian sea and Transoxiana on the north and Hindukush ranges in the north-east.<sup>3</sup> the eastern Persia known as Khurasan in medieval times and now Afghanistan can be divided into two halves, the upper half of which comprises the mountain system and the lower half is the desert of Baluchistan.<sup>4</sup> In the south-eastern and eastern region of Persia in Baluchistan which had been almost unproductive. It consisted of great belts of barren-saline and mud-hills and had no towns of note or size except Quetta and Qalat. It has been termed as the province of torrid deserts by the modern scholars. To the west of it were the provinces of *Fars* and *Kirman*. The region around the Persian Gulf had always been important in the history of world commerce.<sup>5</sup>

Being connected through passes with the neighbouring countries Persia played prominent role in the trading activities. Persia had always been of great interest for Indians. Besides

ethnological affinity, its geographical location enabled it to develop commercial and cultural contacts with India in the past.<sup>6</sup>

The economy of India namely trade and industry during nineteenth century was divided into two branches – unorganized and organized.<sup>7</sup> The Mughal age from 1526 to 1707 A.D. was a period of renaissance in India. While trade and industry flourished, fine arts like sculpture, music, painting reached perfection.<sup>8</sup> The Mughal conquest of Northern India brought radical changes in socio-cultural, political milieu. Technological advancement also influenced the economic life of the people of Hindustan. Large number of immigrants and many celebrities of central Asia and Persia came to India, settled down in Delhi. Many foreigners including merchants contributed to the administration and the economic set up.<sup>9</sup>

The nature of India's trade, inland and foreign has practically been same in the medieval ages and colonial period. During Medieval period the whole of Northern and Western India had commercial relations with West Asia and extending through it to the Mediterranean World, as also to Central Asia, South East Asia and China both over-sea and over land routes.<sup>10</sup> The commercial centres grew up on the highways, at the confluences of rivers, on

the waterways, at places of pilgrimage, in the vicinity of the sources of raw material and at other suitable places. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries commercial centres were integrated inseparably with the general flow of trade and commerce.<sup>11</sup> Kabul, Qandhar, Multan and Lahore in the North-West, Delhi, Agra, Allahabad, Jounpur, and Lucknow in the centre, Thatta and Bhakkar in Sindh, Burhanpur and Ujjain in the South, Cuttack and Balasor in Orissa, Sonagaon and Dacca in Bengal were among the important economic centres.<sup>12</sup>

Delhi was the greatest among the Indian towns which grew rapidly in nineteenth century. It was not only an imperial residence but also a key-centre of trade and industry. Delhi is known to us by various names right from the Indraprastha of Mahabharata times but the environs of the city during the period of our study are confined to between Qutub complex to the Delhi Gate. The centre of its activities economic, social as well as political continued to shift from time<sup>13</sup> to time the centre of its activities political as well as commercial and cultural continued to shift from time to time. These included Qila Rai Pithaura, Kilukhari, Siri, Tughluzabad, Jahanpanah, Firuzabad, Khizrabad etc.<sup>14</sup> Ibn Battuta at his arrival found lalkot a part of the fort of Rai Pithaura in a ruined and

wretched condition in the fourteenth century. The expansion of the city of Delhi had been towards the north and northeast of the Qutub Complex and on the side of river Yamuna, obviously to maintain a regular water supply to the ever increasing population. From *Qiranus Sadain* of Amir Khusrau it appears that in his times Delhi had three fortresses and a city wall with thirteen gates and was called *Qubbatul Islam* which was extended from river Jamuna to Lal Kot near Qutub Minar.<sup>15</sup>

Being the capital city and situated on the bank of river Yamuna, Delhi was well connected with number of towns through water and land routes. It was on the international trade route linked with Kabul and Kandhar via Lahore and Multan, Kabul and Qandhar being the gates of Hindustan. On the basis of the contemporary literature that the commercial intercourse of Delhi was brisk.<sup>16</sup> When the Portuguese discovered the sea-route to India by rounding the Cape of Good-Hope, and Vasco-da-Gama landed to Calicut in 1498, India became the centre of commercial activity of several European nations. During Eighteenth and the opening Nineteenth Century Portuguese became a strong naval power and enjoyed sovereignty over the Indian seas.<sup>17</sup>

The bazaars and markets of Delhi were flooded with goods from various regions and climes. Each commodity had its separate markets. Particularly the fine rice of Sarsuti, Sugar of Kanouj, Wheat from Marh, (Gwalior), and betel -leaf from Dhar on sale in Markets. Big markets were built in it where sellers and buyers were doing brisk translations.<sup>18</sup> Delhi was considered self-sufficient in almost every respect. It had always enough goods for internal consumption and also for export. But no state or country cannot fulfill its needs by herself. So they had to make some trade treaties between themselves for the use of the upper class.<sup>19</sup> There is a long list of various commodities which find references in the items of import and export during nineteenth century. One can classify these items of trade into two main categories - luxury and non-luxury items. On the basis of the accounts left and contemporary Persian chroniclers horses, furs, precious stones, silk stuffs and slaves were among the chief luxury items of imports from central Asia and Russia. Among other goods were various types of clothes, fruits, plants and herbs, gold, silver, olive oil, rose water, glass etc.<sup>20</sup> In exchange India exported numerous articles which were in demand not only in central Asia and Persia, but also in other Asian and European countries. Among luxury goods, there were very few

except some varieties of cloth, pearls, elephants, peacocks etc. non-luxury products, included spices, aromatic roots, cotton, Indigo-cakes, iron, swords, musk, different types of woods, sugar candy and grains, fruits and dry-fruits, dye products etc.<sup>21</sup>

With the coming of Europeans in India, the export of a new beverage called *Chai* or tea started and its use was limited. To horses from Kabul and furs, shawls, tobacco and a number of other spices from various Asian countries were also imported to India.<sup>22</sup> During nineteenth century, the marketing organization including the commercial scene of Delhi, was dominated by a heterogeneous body of merchants and financiers, great and small. The European companies records show that the commercial community of Delhi engaged in marketing and was prosperous and enterprising.<sup>23</sup> The foreign traders were the chief cause of the economic development of Delhi. Well-established commercial relations implied the existence of well-known routes. Provincial governors and district officers were responsible for the safety and improvement of roads. The policy of making such men responsible for the maintenance, repair and safety of roads seems to have succeeded, greatly easing the movement of caravans and travellers.<sup>24</sup>

The available historical evidences during the life and times of Sayyad Assadabadi suggests that there was open markets or free trade activities without any significant restrictions from the State. We do not come across any fact regarding whether any step- was taken by the state to protect the local merchandize or industries in Delhi. However, it is a question to be investigated as to what developments pressed the state to follow the policy of protection for their own products and restricting of free flow of the foreign goods in the subsequent period.

The purpose of this paper is also to explain Assadabadi's views on the society and individual and their mutual relation. It also includes study of rights and responsibilities of the individual and society of Delhi. As we shall see in the study of Assdabadi's ethical ideas he places social values above everything else while judging individual conduct. For Assadabadi, individual is the foundation stone upon which the whole structure of society rests.<sup>25</sup> Explaining the position of the individual in society he gives primary importance to human emotions which, being natural play on essential role in deciding the direction of human conduct. About the Muslim society of India during his travells Assadabadi remarks that the Indian Ulama had classified knowledge into two groups.

Muslim sciences, on the one hand and European sciences, on the other. He appealed to the Indian Ulama to study modern sciences and inventions like electricity, magnetism, steam power, wireless, gramophone, photography, telescope and microscope<sup>26</sup> During his first visit to India he visited several cities and acquainted himself with modern European sciences.<sup>27</sup>

The developments in society were affecting all aspects of the social life of all sections of Indian population, Muslims, Hindus alike in Delhi in nineteenth century. Growth of trade and industry, developments of towns, technological inventions in industry and agriculture affected the Muslims and Hindus equally. 19th Century was a period of Renaissance in India because many social, political, economic, cultural, and literary changes took place during this period. It was not only witnessed the expansion of the British empire but also witnessed an unprecedented awakening and progress in social, economic, political, cultural and scientific fields.

The Hindu society of Delhi was divided on the basis of Varna ashram, but an unabated process of change continued affecting the caste structure in nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Muslims in India remained divided, between the rulers and the ruled. Among the small ruling elite were military aristocracy of various ethnic segments and the

Ulama a little lower in status. Majority of the Muslim population however, remained divided on the traditional pattern based on professional guilds.<sup>29</sup>

During this period changes were taking place in the different strata of society. Hindu and Muslim scholars regarded their communities as homogeneous entities -actual or traditional or imagined, and not on neighborliness or territorial propinquity in Delhi this type of society began to give way under the stress of economic, political and cultural forces under British rule.<sup>30</sup> Along with the European traders the Christian missionaries also came to Delhi. In early eighteenth Century Roman Catholic missionaries worked for the propagation of Christianity in Delhi and country. The problem before the leaders of India was to effect revolutionary change in the attitude of the people. The seed of nationalism germinates under certain social conditions blossoms into all consuming passion when the climate is favourable, but it assumes different hues and shapes on account of a variety of historical causes.<sup>31</sup> The Muslim community in Delhi had sets of leaders-modernists and traditionists. The Rajputs, Jats, Marathas and other racial communities among the Hindus. The identities and differences between the Hindus and Muslims had existed for

hundreds of gears in Delhi but in the Pre-British times there was no political significance attached to them. Between the two communities differences were more marked among the higher classes in Delhi during the early nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

In the early stage of British rule, the British administrators in India and the conservatives in Britain did not want to intervene in the socio-religious affairs of Indians. The cementing factor was the propagation of modernism and all that it connotes – nationalism, rational thought – science, techniques of industry, trade and administration.<sup>33</sup> Sayyed Jamal-Ul-Din Assadabadi reached Bombay via Karachi in 1879. After a brief stay in Bombay he proceeded to Hyderabad, the capital of the Nizam's state the largest Muslim princely state of India. In Hyderabad he did not participate in any political activity, although his anti British views could be clearly noticed in his articles. His movements watched by the government and he left India in late 1882.<sup>34</sup>

Western Hastings, the first Governor-General, being guided by orientalist ideology as well as pragmatic considerations, resisted Anglicization and wanted to rule the Indians in traditional way. But early in nineteenth century, the Evangelicals and Liberals in urged upon the British Government the need for intervention in Indian

social affairs. One of the earliest measures of social reforms the British attempted was the abolition of infanticide. In 1802 infanticide was banned by the Regulation VI, in Delhi even though it continued in several parts of India for a long time afterwards.<sup>25</sup> Abolition of the Suttee or Widow-burning by legislation was another important act of state intervention in social matters of Delhi. William Carey made considerable efforts to suppress this practice. By Regulation XVIII passed on 4 December, 1829 Suttee was declared "illegal and punishable by the criminal courts."<sup>35</sup>

Abolition of slavery by the British Government in Delhi was of great social significance. In 1843 Act V was passed liberating about 9 million slaves. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act (Act XXI of 1850) enabled a person who had lost his caste to inherit his paternal property. Earlier in case of conversion to other religions, a Hindu lost his caste as well as his right to inherit paternal property. This act protected those who became converts to other religions like Christianity or Islam. It did not affect those who remained within the frame of Hinduism.<sup>36</sup> In 1856 the Widow Remarriage Act was passed. Ostensibly it was a bold and revolutionary social reform permitting Hindu Widows many of whom were in the pre-puberty stage to marry again. Practically, however, the act had little bearing

on the Hindu society, because the Hindus considered marriage indissoluble except by death and stigmatised the marriage of widows. The establishment of British rule, annexation of Delhi and laws and judicial administration had considerable bearing on Delhi's social life.<sup>37</sup>

The political situation in Delhi was rapidly transforming in the early years of 19th century. In the eighteenth century Delhi was passed under the sway of Britain. First time in history of Delhi an alien people whose homeland lay at a distance of several thousand miles from India assumed the reins of government. Such an occupation of Delhi was a new experience. For although in the past Delhi had suffered many invasions, and from time to time parts of the Indian territory had fallen temporarily under the dominion of the conquerors, the occasions had been few and their duration short. The only conquerors who established permanent empires over the greater part of India were the Turks in the early middle ages and the Chaghtai ughals later.<sup>38</sup> Politically the units of feudal hierarchy were loosely linked together. Each unit was economically self-sufficient and autonomous in its administration. During Assadabadi's times Delhi comprises the cities of Delhi (which

encompasses the area popularly known as old Delhi) and New Delhi India's capital from 1912) to the south and adjacent rural areas.<sup>40</sup>

The British conquest of Delhi was different in Character from all the previous conquests of the Delhi. In the past the change of rulers implied merely a change of the dynasty that exercised political authority over the people, but it did not effect the social, fabric, the productive organisation, the property relations or the political system of administration. Under the British rule all this was altered, and a socio-economic revolution was started which culminated in the destruction of the old institutions and in the emergence of new social classes and political forces.<sup>41</sup>

Warren Hastings proceeded on the assumption that all land belonged to the sovereign, and that the intermediaries were merely agents who were entitled only to a commission for collecting the rents from the cultivators. The result was that most of the lands in Delhi were framed out to the new bidders. Thus many of the old political families were ousted and the old relationship between the political families and the sovereign seriously impaired.<sup>42</sup>

The change in the status and functions of the Nobles and landholders also affected the political organization of Delhi. Two principal results of the change were – the creation of absolute

property in land and its transfer into the hands of the new moneyed class which had no interest in land other than that of getting the maximum return on the investments and the sub-infeudation of estates and holding so that as the competition for land increased, there emerged a chain of middle men and intermediary rent receiving interests between the original land lord and the cultivator.<sup>43</sup>

The earlier years of British rule the period upto the middle of the nineteenth century- were marked by a spirit of cooperation between the British rulers and the new rich landlords, traders and money lenders. But this cooperation could not last long the national movement in India was an expression of the conflict between the middle class of India and British Government.<sup>44</sup> A new phase of relations began with the coming of Lord Hastings. He wanted to establish British Paramoury over Indian Princely states. Theoretically the existence of princely states as separate political entities was recognized and guaranteed in the treaties, practically, many princely states were annexed. In 1841 the court of directors directed the government of India not to abandon any "just and honourable accession of territory or revenue." Lord Dalhousie annexed princely states on two grounds: Doctrine of

Lapse and misgovernment of the native rulers. His annexation policy proved to be an important political cause of the Revolt of 1857.<sup>45</sup>

The beginning of the rise of modern political awakening are intimately associated with the spread of the Western education in Delhi. People of Delhi, who had been uprooted from their normal avocations when the city was got vacated to the last man, evinced on resettlement greater interest in education, because that was the only thing that could not be wrested from them.<sup>46</sup> In 1792, a Madarsa was established for the education of Muslims in Oriental literature, science and arts. In 1824 the Government took over the Madarsa, added an English department and thus made its foundation for a superior college, the Delhi institution. In 1829, the College thus formed though under the control of the Government.<sup>47</sup> The revival of old Delhi College in 1858, was an event of great significance. It was ask bushed to meet the on rush of students from deferent parts of Delhi. The writings of Thomas Paine, Locke, Burke, Macaulay, Mill, Bentham, the exponents of English liberalism, individual liberty and national freedom, those of Rousseau, Voltaire and other pioneers of the French Revolution had an electrifying effect which aided and accelerated the national

upsurge.<sup>48</sup> The war of American 'Independence, Italian struggle for liberation, achievement of German Unity and Irish struggle for freedom all had a bearing in moulding the mind of Delhi's intelligentsia. In the light of new political consciousness born out of spread of western education and rise of the press, economic disparity and injustice appeared more glaring and fully exposed.

During his extensive travels in India Sayyed Jamal-Ul-Din Assadabadi on the one hand, he criticized western hostility towards Islam in religious and political spheres and on the other have laid lays equal emphasis on Islam as a modern and democratic religion.<sup>48</sup> He vigorously attacked European political theories and religious attitudes towards India and in comparison with Islamic polity. He dismissed the current political theories of England as incapable of satisfying the needs of Indian society.<sup>49</sup> At the time of Assadabadi's arrival in India (1879) the Indian Muslims had not recovered from the shock of frustration and defeatism which had overtaken them after failure of the war of Independence in 1857. According to Assadabadi the Indian Muslims, who had been deprived of their power and authority, had not become reconciled to the loss of their empire and that, as long as they were firm in their

religious faith, it was not possible to make them acquiesce to foreign domination.<sup>50</sup>

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