Awadh under the British Residents

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ABSTRACT

Awadh area was always the centre of power from times immemorial. This importance also had its impact on the policy towards Awadh under the British company also. The political importance was of Awadh forced the British company to keep a watch on the activities of the Nawab. For this purpose they placed a British Resident in Awadh, it was however done on the request of the Nawab. Gradually the position of Resident became an all important post in Awadh and Resident started to control almost all aspects of the administration. The expenses of the office of Resident also increased gradually from about 12000 annually to later partial share in the revenue of Awadh even the Nawab had to surrender few portion of the state to meet the expenses of the office of the Resident. Further to free the company’s regular troops for service elsewhere in India, the company also organized the forces at the ruler’s expense. Later the resident even played the role of appointing the Nawab even overlooking the legal heir for the throne. This weakened the position of Nawab to a very great extent and the Nawab could not even carry out any changes other then the direction given by the Resident. The company despite having control over almost all sections of governance disposed the Nawab on the charges of misgovernance in 1856 ending the rule of Nawab in Awadh. So the system of placing the Resident started with the purpose if liaisoning gradually took indirect control over the administration and later took the direct control over the State.

In India there were several Indian States which came up after the fall of Mughal Empire, Awadh was one of them. Politically the Kingdom of Awadh got the privilege of providing the Wazir to the Mughals continuously for quite a long time and was commonly known as Nawab’s Wazir as he served the office of both Nawab of Awadh and Wazir of Mughal Empire at the same time. The political situation changed with passage of time and so was the political head of the country and also there relation with the different states in the country. Each of the hundreds of Indian states had a unique history of relations with the company. The interaction of different states with its Residents underscores the importance of local factors as well as overall company policy. The kingdom of Awadh gained the importance over the other due to its strategic political prominence, population and geographical size. It was because of this Awadh was always in the centre of attraction for the East India Company and it important position continued with the passage of time was clearly evident during the freedom struggle which perhaps continued till date.

Resident of British India was usually a senior official of the British administration, who positioned in the capital of the Princely States of India, to conduct consular duties as well as liaison functions. The British Resident, also known as Political Agents of the British East India Company who was assigned a princely state where he had to stay and carry on several official diplomatic functions aided in the British indirect rule. He was also responsible for making the ruler to sustain the association and alliance. The Residencies of British India primarily was developed as a system of indirect rule which was cautiously managed and administered by the Resident of British India. The roles of the Residents included intervening in succession disputes, forming diplomatic alliances with other states and matters of governance of the states. One of the major task of the residents was to ensure that the states does not expand their armies and they should maintain it just to carry out the normal policing in the state. The British introduced the Residents in India in 1803 and it continued till 1857.
The kingdom of Awadh provided the finest example of an indirect rule by the British company through the help of their Residents. The relationship between the Awadh ruler and the company determined to a large extent the shape of North Indian history over the entire 1764-1857 period. The process started in 1764 when the Nawab of Awadh joined hands with the Mughal emperor to restore the Bengal Nawab to the throne and to punish the company which has deposed the Nawab. The combined forces got defeated in the battle of Buxar and both the Nawabs and Mughal emperor now threw themselves to the mercy of the company. This conquest brought the English into direct collision with the aggressive political ambitions of the current ruler of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula (1754-75). From this point, the Nawab and his successors remained constricted in their action by the British represented by a Resident, making them the defacto rules of the province. (Fisher, 1991)

Awadh escaped direct rule in 1764 due to the company’s inability to acquire direct rule due to shortage of funds or manpower garrison, the expertise or staff to administer. Another reason for not establishing direct rule in Awadh was that to develop it as buffer region between the company and hostile forces of the south and west – such as the Marathas. Further the company also realised the advantage of indirect rule as they could extract huge amount of money from the Nawab as an assurance of the loyalty of the Nawab towards the company. Thus, the Awadh regained his position even after losing the battle but this was done only after assuring loyalty by paying huge amount of money which was around Rs. 50,00,000.

The suspicion and mutual misunderstanding within the company surrounded the creation of a Residency in Awadh. It was also reflected in the uncertainties to its relationship with the Awadh ruler. Initially company did not consider of establishing even a permanent line of communication to the rulers of Awadh (Fisher 1991). The company preferred to transmit the occasional message through an officer in its army stationed near the Awadh court rather than to establish a permanent diplomatic link. It was rather the Nawab of Awadh who requested the company to place the officer for doing the liaisoning between the company and the Nawab on a permanent basis. It was only after this request that the Company thought of appointing a permanent officer in Awadh. This created suspicion in the company’s council, resulting in the recall of Capt. Harper the officer currently placed in Awadh, of any secret alliance with the Nawab.

In Oct. 1773 the Governer General, Warren Hastings, raised the issue of a Resident with the ruler at a private meeting. Hasting asked the Nawab ‘whether it would be agreeable to him that a person in whom I confide should be appointed by me to reside near his Person for the sake of perpetuating and strengthening the good understanding so happily begun, as well as for the transaction of such ordinary affairs as might not suit the Formality of a Correspondence by Letter, but which in their Amount are always found to be productive of important Effects.’

The Nawab replied that ‘it would be entirely pleasing to him’ (Jones, 1985) and it was agreed that the Governor General should nominate a suitable Resident. Hasting, however, had to face the opposition of the Council but eventually his view was accepted and a Resident was placed in Awadh.

Once established, the Residency began to intervene inconsistently in the internal affairs of Awadh. The Resident not only gradually moved to monopolies communications between the Nawab and the Company, he eventually intervened in virtually all aspects of the foreign and internal affairs of the state, thus establishing a system of indirect rule that would eventually extend across all of the ‘princely states’ of India. (Fisher, 1991)

In 1774 Nathaniel Middleton, an associate of Hastings and a merchant was sent as Resident to the court of Nawab at Faizabad with a salary of Rs. 1000 per month and captain’s double butta as well as travelling expenses. He was recalled by the end of 1774 and John Bristow was appointed in his place. Richard Barwell a councilor to Hastings defined the position of Bristow as a ‘weighty charge which has for its object the cementing of the Friendship between the Company and the Wazir (Shuja-ud-daula) and obtaining the large sum of money said to be due from him.’ Thus the position of Resident in Awadh was from its very inception an
anomalous one. The cost of the office of Resident increased throughout the nawabi period as the British entourage increased from one clerk in 1774 to a great army officials, clerks, messengers and servants, so that by 1856 the last Nawab, Wajid Ali Shah, estimated to have paid Rs. 60,000 annually to the British. (Jones, 1985).

The next Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula (1775-97) added magnificence to the court and shifted the capital of the Awadh to Lucknow in 1775. Asaf-ud-Daula’s arrival brought to Lucknow not only his personal retinue, but the headquarters of the administration and the army. The Resident and various European adventurers too, shifted their homes and patronage to Lucknow. Thus new section of the city developed around the court, the government, and the palace complexes of these notables. Populating the new quarters around these centers were an array of cultural development leading to the development of a legendary Lakhnavi style (Sharar, 1975). The British Resident Edward Otto Ives, continued in office for nine years and his tenure remained relatively peaceful for the relation between the Nawab and Company.

Lucknow, while, blossomed as a cultural centre, it did so in an increasingly isolated political environment. The East India Company incrementally cut Awadh off from political events out the province. All communication into and out of Awadh had to pass through the Residents hands. Such political isolation proved a central element in the establishment of indirect rule in Awadh and other part of the country. The increasing intervention of the Resident further accentuated the disputes between the Nawab and Resident which however, was the miniature manifestation of the disputes that raged between the Nawab and the Company over the wider political spectrum.

The Resident with passage of time was expected by the company to build up determining influence over the administration of Awadh. The company asserted its ultimate political and military control through its Resident. It guaranteed the protection of the ruler from external and internal enemies, and stationed troops in Awadh and in the surrounding territories. Further to free the company’s regular troops for service elsewhere, the company organized the ‘Oudh Auxiliary Forces’, at the ruler’s expense (Graff, 1997). By the treaty of 1768 the British limited the strength of the troops of the Nawab’s army. The military dependence of Nawab on the British made to accept the Company’s ultimate power over the Kingdom.

The Resident, most obviously using his power arbitrated succession in Awadh. The Resident deposed the Ruler, Wazir Ali and installed the company’s candidate, Saadat Ali Khan. Thereafter the Resident intervened in virtually all aspects of Awadh administration. By this time it was made clear for both the Ruler and the Resident that in a direct confrontation, the latter would win (Fisher, 1991).

Governor General Wellesley’s policies put further pressure on Awadh. Wellesley sent his brother, Henry to strengthen the Residency in forcing concessions from the ruler in 1801. The Resident further sought extensive information about the revenues and economy of Awadh, as part of deep intervention in the administration. This demand was reluctantly accepted by the Nawab and he had to even cede certain portion of his territory to fulfill the financial demands of the Company yielding annual revenue of Rs. 13 million. He also entrusted his Shi’ite religious buildings to the special protection of the Governor General (Aitchison, 1909).

The next Nawab Ghazi-ud-din haydar (1814-27) was selected by Resident from the potential heirs. In exchange for his elevation, Ghazi made numerous financial and political concessions to the company over the course of his reign. At the same time, Lucknow continued to express its own identity through the developing culture of its court and city. Ghazi-ud-din Hydar had himself crowned, in an elaborate and ritually complex ceremony, as ‘Emperor of the Age’ (Fisher, 1987). The coronation, for Awadh, expressed the unique and leading place of the dynasty in the Shi’ite political universe. For the British, this ritual simply demonstrated the demotion of the Mughal emperor to the mere King of Delhi, through the secession of one of his principal subordinates. To the people of Awadh the ceremony consisted of yet another remote and costly court escapade (Graff, 1997).
The next Nawab Nasir-ud-din Hydar (1827-37) worked against the wishes of the company to show his political prominence. But actually he could not act politically outside of Awadh due to company’s strictures, he apparently felt he had to make these assertions symbolically. On his accession, he rejected the Resident’s demand for a new ‘deed of Engagement’ which would bind him ‘to act agreeably to the advice of the Honourable Company in the affairs of Government.’ Instead he successfully negotiated a continuation of the current treaties in force. Nawab however, could not succeed in carrying out his desired changes and he had to work according to the path shown by the British Resident.

The Resident used his power once again and dethroned the designated heir to the throne Faridun Bakht, as he was ascending the throne without the permission of the Company, by using troops and placed Muhammad Ali Shah (1837-42) (Ahmad, 1971). Muhammad Ali paid the price for the favour he got from the British, he agreed to accept whatever treaty the company proposed to him.

Amjad Ali Shah (1842-47) the next Nawab continued the policies of his father Muhammad Ali Shah. Amjad Ali reduced the elaborate ceremonies and rituals of the court, channeling resources towards Shi’ite religious luminaries and scholars. But the political pressure on the incumbent of the office made the stability of tenure a very difficult task. The British appointed Wajid Ali Shah (1847-56) and he turned out to be the last Nawab as in 1856 on the ground of ‘misgovernance’ the Kingdom of Awadh was annexed under direct rule of the Company. The company claimed that Wajid Ali was more indulged in poetry, religion and pleasure rather than the affairs of the State. Little evidence, however, supports the British contention that condition in Awadh had particularly changed for the worse at that moment. The Governor General, Dalhousie justified his act on the grounds that the company had to protect ‘the people’ of Awadh from the abuse by the ruler rather debating his act of justifiable theoretical ground. The Nawab was pensioned off to Calcutta and paid Rs. 18 million annually for his maintenance. The Nawab appealed to the Gracious Majesty the Queen but no avail.

The company used the Resident to extract a range of resources from Awadh. The company as well as its officials personally saw Awadh as a source for quick wealth. Over all between 1764 and 1856, the company extracted at least Rs. 6 million under various penalties, some Rs. 52 million in loans made by several rulers to the company at low rate of interest and Rs. 7 to 8 million annually in subsidy for troops.

The Company in addition to this regarded Awadh as a prime recruiting ground for its army and administration. Numbers of Awadh's services elites took employment with the company. Member of various rural families often with small landholdings of their own, found service in the company's armies. Such services brought not only salaries, often not locally available, but also various privileges under the company's auspices against the Awadh administration. Soldiers and officers from Awadh formed the core of Company's Bengal army until 1857 (Mukherjee, 1984).

The British Resident maintained the formal relation with the Nawab but occasionally also indulged in the cultural activities of the Nawab. The Nawabs, the Residents and other Europeans like the wealthy Claude Martin maintained their social meetings. The Residents were hospitably invited by the Nawabs to attend Muslim celebration like Eid-ul-Zuha, when breakfast and dinner were held in Shah Manzil palace, followed by fireworks. In return the Nawabs was invited to Christmas parties by the Resident, where generous gifts were exchanged between host and guests. Musicians and dancers both Indian and English provided entertainment on festive occasions. This type of convivial relation however ceased with the worsening of the relation between the Nawab and the Company (Jones, 2000).

The relation between the British Resident and the Nawab of Awadh passed through various phases but it was the Resident who always had an upper hand in their relation. The Resident was appointed as the liaising officer between the Nawab and the Company but with passage of time the office of Resident became powerful and started intervening in the day today affairs of the Nawab. With passage of time the Resident became so powerful that he started choosing the Nawab and even dethroned the Nawab by using force. The annexation of
Awadh by British after the Revolt of 1856 on the ground of misgovernment was done without any justification, it just an imperialistic move. This resulted in the end of almost a century of indirect rule in India and so was the end of the rule of Nawabs of Awadh.

Notes
1. Nawab was an Arabic word used for deputy invariably assigned the role of a Governor of a kingdom
2. Wazir was given to a minister acting as the prime minister of the group of minister.
3. East India Company replaced the Mughlas, initially as defacto ruler and with the passage of time they gradually accured full control over the administration of country.
5. A military allowance
6. While his deposition and reposition went smoothly, Wazir Ali later expressed anti British resistance; in 1799, he led an unsuccessful revolt, killing the company’s Resident in Varanasi but was ultimately captured and imprisoned for life by the company.
7. Imposed on various Awadh rulers, for example, to cover the company’s ‘expenses’ in installing its candidate during succession disputes.
8. Mainly from the scribal ‘castes’ with tradition of administration under the Awadh and Mughal dynasties.

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