

Emergence of Balasore Port in the Eastern Coast of Orissa - A Study of Growth and Decline

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Abstract

Keywords

Balasore Port,
Subarnarekha River,
Hariharapur,
East India Company,
Dhamra Port,
Balasore Road,
Hugli

The Balasore Port was situated by the side of River Burabalanga in the eastern coast of India. In the 17th century it grew in to importance as a manufacturing and commercial center. With the coming of Europeans, it became an important centre for export and import trade. It was also a shipbuilding centre. It had trade link with all the European and Persian countries. Textile was main item of export from this port. Broad cloth, Scarlet, Copper, Quicksilver, Coral and Brimstone were also exported from this port. The Maldives and laccadive islanders depend upon this port for annual supply of grain: Silting of the Burabalanga River, opening of Coast Canal and opening of Bengal Nagpur Railway through Orissa in the last quarter of 19th century contributed to the decline of the ports.

Introduction

In this paper I have discussed the origin, growth and development of Balasore Port. It was located in the eastern coast of India and by the Subarnarekha River.' The coast of Balasore was very important in the maritime history of India from ancient times which was attested from Roman times There is wealth of historical evidence for the extensive use of this coastal hinterland from sixteenth centuries to nineteenth centuries. During the medieval period, the coast was acting as the thriving commercial centre for

export of cotton and silk. With the coming of several European companies like English, the French and Danes, again the ports received new commercial dimension. The European factory records, the accounts, and diaries of European traveler and Agents provide important information, regarding the Port of Balasore. In this paper I have discussed, location of port, hinterland of port and commercial relation of this port. The hinterland which facilitated the trade and commerce of this port were also discussed. Lastly, how, a thriving port was declined was also discussed in the last section.

One of the earliest maritime settlements in India was established at Hariharpur in Orissa in 1633. Subsequently other factories were established at Balasore in the river Burabalanaga and Pipli in the River Subarnarekha. These two Orissan harbors, writes Hunter "formed the basis of future greatness in Bengal." The British factory at Balasore was developed into thriving maritime trade. The pre-eminence of Balasore as commercial centre continued for a long time."

The East India Company conquered Orissa in 1803. In the first quarter of 19th century, Balasore, Chudamani and Dhamra port in Balasore District were used by sloops and vessels carrying rice and salt. In 1817, the Board of trade recommended for the establishment of port in the southern coast of Calcutta to offer assistance to vessels in distress and for the purpose of public utility. A beach establishment was also sanctioned by the Government. The record of 1820 refers to the port of Balasore receiving vessels coming from Laccavive Island, which brought coir, coconut and cowries and took back earthen pots. But maximum volume of foreign trade passed through principal ports of Balasore and other smaller ports of the District. In order further boost, the maritime trade of Orissa, an Act was passed in 1855 for the regulation of ports and port dues by the Government of India. Such port were Balasore, Chudamani, Lochanpur, Chonao, Sartha; Subarnarekha and Dhamra. The Act further provided that the said several ports shall be regarded as a single port. All sums received on account of port dues at any of the said ports shall be called Balasore Port Fund. So large volume of trade passed through the port and custom house of Balasore.

Emergence of Balasore Port

Balasore grow to importance as a manufacturing and commercial center and as a sea port from the thirties of the 17th centuries. The destruction of Portuguese settlements of Hugli in 1632 attracted the Dutch and the English to open trade north wards. At the same time growing scarcity of cloth at Mauslipattanam on account of famous and pervasive Gujarat famine of 1630-1, necessitated

opening of new centre of trade and the advance of the English from East Coast up to the Bay of Bengal. Ralph Cartwright, the leader of English expedition sent by John Norris, English agent at Masulipattanam, was granted freedom of trade in May 1633 by Mughal Governed of Orissa, Agha Muhammed Zaman. Equipped with a "parwana to trade free of all custom or duties, and to build houses or ships," the English merchants, Cartwright and Thomas Colley, returned from Cuttack to Hariharpur and started building a factory there. Leaving Colley in charge of it, Cartwright went to Balasore and established a factory there also, at the invitation of Mir Qasim, the Governor of the district. Like English the Danes also wanted to establish factories at Balasore, in order to escape from the oppressions of the Portuguese. Some Portuguese of Pipli complained before awab (Governor of Orissa) that the English wanted to drive them out of the port and the English had to defend themselves by observing that they really wanted was not Pipli but Balasore and Harisapur. The English factors early realized that for reaping advantages of Orissan trade they must maintain an armed fleet at Balasore and other places. The importance of Balasore grew as result of expulsion of the Portuguese from Hijli by the Moguls in 1636 and consequent decay of trade at Pipli and other neighboring Places. The silting up of the River Alanka and the Patua reduced the advantages of Harisapur harbors in comparison with the Road of Balasore. It also increased the difficulties of transporting down to the sea cotton manufacturers of Hariharpur which could be brought to Balasore on land without much difficulty. In 1634, the Dutch authority at Batavia endeavored to trade with Hugli. But it was not successful. In 1636 they moved to Pipli. Subsequently they demolished their house at Pipli and built a new one at Balasore. The Dutch were permitted to trade in Hugli, Pipli, and Balasore by the farman of Aurangzeb (Oct.1662) In 1676 Balasore was one of the six factories of the Dutch in Bengal, the other five being Hugli (Chinsura), Cassimbazar, Patna, Dacca and Maida." The chief of the Dutch factory of Balasore then was Vankewell. The Dutch had their flag staff and flag at the factory. The English Factory, established in 1633, stood a

little way from river side. Captain Brookhaven instructed James Bridgman (Dec. 14, 1650) that Company must not be put to unnecessary expenses by Building or repairing houses or by keeping many servants. The factory building was partially rebuilt in 1659 at a cost of Rs.1000.

The organization and control of the English factory was changed from time to time. In 1637 Balasore and Hariharpur the two settlements in the Bay were under John Yard, and these were under Gerald Pinston at Mauslipattnam, Agent in charge of the Coast factories. In 1650 James Bridgman was appointed Chief of all the factors in Bengal. In 1652 Paul Waldegrave, Edward Stephens and William Pitt were in charge of Balasore and Hugli. In 1655 Balasore was under the jurisdiction of the President at Fort St. George, Balasore was made distinct from Hugli and formed a separate factory.

Geographical Location and Commercial Importance of Balasore Port

The Balasore port consists of the portion of the Burabalanga River fronting the town of Balasore. The port was three quarter a mile in length. It is situated about seven miles from the coast in direct line. "The port was extended from the outer buoy at the mouth of the Burabalanga or the Balasore river along its course to a line drawn across it at right angles from the point where the west bank of the Hollandaiz nalla and thence up to Hollandaiz nalla for 50 feet including the southern bank of the aforesaid portion of the Hllandaize nalla for 250 feet the high water mark," But the river course was so twisting and winding that distance by water between same points was fifteen miles. A cut was actually made in 1863, which succeeded in shortening the course of the river by about a mile. Captain Harris had annually surveyed the entrance of the river. His survey report informs that in spring tides there was only a depth of one foot on the bar at low water but in high water it had thirteen feet. The channel from the Balasore buoy inwards was properly buoyed. The tides were signaled by the flagstuffs at the mouth. The course of the river was marked by beacons. A plan for making the course of the river

shorter and straighter by cutting through the narrow necks of land that divided the different loop was under consideration of the Government.

Balasore was a sea town where much shipping belonged and many ships and other vessel were built. It was also acting for loading and unloading the European ships for Bengal and Orissa. It enjoyed the predominance among the English factories on the Bay of Bengal. In the first half of the last century it was only major port of the province. By seventies, when many ports faced their ruin Balasore continued to transmit passengers vessels to the ports of the Red sea and Persian Gulf. The Port Act of XII, 1870 testifies that passenger ships used to ply from Balasore to Macula, Aden, Mecca, Haduda, Saukin, Yembo, Cassen, Suez, Muscat, Abbos, Abushire and Bosrah. The port Act of 1874 further describes that sea going vessels with a burden of 300 mounds and upward operated from Balasore and paid moderate duties" Maritime record says that the volume of export and import from here during 1897-1900 was much larger than that of all other ports in Orissa.

Geographical Hinterland of Balasore Port

Balasore port had a resourceful hinterland. Balasore was emporium of cotton yarn, cotton and Tassar manufacturer. In the north of the Balasore port, Mohanpur, Dantan, Jaleswar, and Olmara were important textile producing centre." Similarly, in the south of the port, Sannoos were collected from Soro. The area from Balasore to Bhadrak was richly endowed corn, iron, camin seeds, oil, and be wax. Secondly, the most important textile producing centre - like Jaleswar, Dantan, Radhanagar and Soro were situated on this routs 2 Similarly, after the decline of River Patus, the East India Company started transporting textiles from Hariharpur to Balasore Port by land without much difficulties. So, Balasore emerged as market for different varieties of corn, textiles, dairy products, and other exportable commodities. The Saltpeter was also exported from Bihar to Balasore Port. The Bengal cloths were also transported from Dacca and Calcutta to the Balasore Port. So due to this rich

and prosperous hinterland the port of Balasore thrived both before and after British conquest of Orissa.

Ship Building Centre

In the 17th Century Balasore was an important ship-building and repairing centre with suitable dockyards, which seemed to have developed further after the coming of English. In the thirties the English factor Bruton described it as "Boliatorye, a sea town where shipping was built". In 1634, the Governor of Balasore sold a small unfinished ship of his of about 100 tunns to the E.I.C's servants.

In 1638, the Musulipattam factors instructed Thomas Godfrey, Master of the Coaster to proceed to Balasore for re-fitting the shipping." In 1644 the Endeavour, coming from the Fort St. George "lost an anchor, beat off her rudder, and some of her sheathing" while passing the bar at Balasore, where it was expected that these damages could be easily repaired. In 1650-1, Captain Durson repaired ship of 200 tunns" in partnerships with a Moor of Balasore, so as to trade from port to port. In 1676, the Ketches of the English Ere, the Arrival and Ganges, damaged by a storm, were "new masted and rigged" at Balasore and then returned to Hugli."

Commercial Transactions of Balasore Port

The port of Balasore grew into importance as a commercial centre and an a port in the thirties of the 17th century. In 1676 Balasore was one of the ale factories of the Dutch in Bengal, the other five being Hugli (Chiusura), Cassimbazar, Patna, Dacca and Malda. The foreign trade of Balasore was continued to increase with the continued commercial activities of Halasore Port. The commodities imported by the English into Orissa, Hongal and Patna, through Balasore, were (a) Broadcloth of different colors (b) Scarlet (c) Copper (d) Quick silver (Lead) (e) Coral (f) Glasses (g) Brimstone." All the articles were not sold in Orissa, some of them were transported to Bengal and Patna. The articles of Bengal and Orissa exported from Balasore were (i) Local

product and cotton manufacturers of Balasore and neighboring centers in Orissa and goods produces from Dengal including Hugli and Patna. The general practice of shipments to England was that cotton goods and cotton yarn from Hugli and Balasore were embaled in factories, and according to the East India Company's order, the various articles were loads on the English ships coming yearly and anchoring in Balasore Road. From there these used to sail in November or December for Masulipatam and Fort St. George and after being finally laded and prepared there set out on the voyage to England about the end of January.

Persian Trade

There was an active trade between Bengal (and Orissa) and Persia through Balasore. The English Company's factor used to utilize the ocean going ships coming from England during their enforced idleness on voyages to and from Persia, carrying articles of Indian merchants in return for freight and investing the proceeds in gods suitable for Persia. In 1642-43 the English factors of Balasore sold or bartered their glasses, knives, lead, broadcloth etc for sugar, gurras, sannoes, cassaes, knives, iron, all except the last being intended for Persia. In 1644, the Surat factors sent the Balasore factors one chest of rials with orders to provide for persia 150 bales of sugar, 10 or 12 bales of gurras and the same quantities of coarse Sannas. The Dutch also had the trade relation with Persia. In April 1653, two Dutch ships from Balasore left Surat for Basra and Gom broon.

With the establishment of British rule, the trade relation of colonial Govt received a new boost. The ports which traded with Balasore Port were Calcutta. Secondly, the coastal ports from Bombay on the west to Arrakan on the east were received the attention of Colonial government, 21 Thirdly trade relation was established with Maldives Island, Ceylon, Mauritius and Cape of Good Hope. Further with the introduction of steamer service between Calcutta and Balasore port in 1871, the trade and commerce in the port was further stimulated. The principal articles of commerce in Balasore District were European cotton goods and metals among imports, Rice and

paddy were main items of exports Sloops from Madras coast, from Ceylon, and from Laccadive and Maldives Island, annually resort in large numbers to Balasore port, for cargo of rice. The port had a very animated appearance during the cold weather because it was crowded with vessels taking cargoes.²² The Laccadive and Maldives islanders depend principally upon Balasore port from their annual supply of grain. These sloops were bringing little cargo, occasionally a few cocoa-nuts, coir and matting. The largest native sloops which receive their full cargo in the river were four thousand maunds (about 145 tons) burden. Ships of larger size anchor at the Balasore buoy, and are loaded from cargo boats.

Causes of Decline of Balasore Port

Several factors contributed to the decline of Balasore Port. Silting in the River Burabalanga was a potential factor contributed to the decline of port. This phenomenon led Europeans to abandon every port they had selected earlier for trade and commerce. As Hunter had remarked, "An eternal war goes on between the rivers and seas, the former struggling to find vent for their columns of water and Silt, the latter repelling them with its mud load currents".

The second most important factor was construction of Orissa Coast Canal in 1885. This was opened in 1887. It ran all along the sea face at a distance varying between 2 to 10 miles. It was connected between the river Hoogly at Goenkhal 45 miles from Calcutta wit river Matai at Charbatia. The net result of its construction was that a portion of sea borne trade was diverted to this canal and consequently port transaction in Orissa was declined.

Thirdly, with the development of railway in Orissa toward the last part of the nineteenth century further contributed to the decline of ports.²⁶ The Bengal Nagpur Railway was entrusted to the task of constructing railway in Orissa. By the year 1899 the train service between Kharagpur and Bhubaneswar was completed. The railway competed ruthlessly with the natural and chief facility of water transport. The railway

attracted the business community due to its fair speed, safety and comfortable travel.

Lastly, the British Govt was interested in the financial success of railway, which was executed at the cost of other means of water transport .It provided maximum amount of money on railway. So railway became success in the country.

Conclusion

The port of Balasore port was one of the important Ports in eastern coast of India. It was located by the River Burabalanga. Its development is traced back to the 17th century as prominent manufacturing and commercial centre. Subsequently it became a commercial hub of the English, Portuguese, Dutch and the French. It was also ship building and repairing centre. It had trade relation with Calcutta, Bombay and Arrakan. It had also trade relation with foreign countries such as Maldives Island. Ceylon, Mauritius and Cape of Good Hope Construction of East Coast Canal, extension of railway to Orissa and silting of the port were main factors for the decline and of the port.

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Access this Article in Online	
	Website: www.ijarm.com
	Subject: History
Quick Response Code	
DOI: 10.22192/ijamr.2022.09.08.002	

How to cite this article:

Ganeswar Nayak. (2022). Emergence of Balasore Port in the Eastern Coast of Orissa - A Study of Growth and Decline. Int. J. Adv. Multidiscip. Res. 9(8): 4-9.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22192/ijamr.2022.09.08.002>