Defense Strategies Adopted by the Mughal in the 17th and 18th Centuries for the Protection of Dhaka

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Abstract
Dhaka was an important city during the Mughal period. The Mughals came to Dhaka to secure their eastern province. In order to protect Dhaka, the Mughal rulers built up a series of defense outposts in the neighborhood of Dhaka and many river forts, strategically located in different parts of Bengal. The Dulai River (now extinct) almost encircled the Mughal settlement. It was connected with the Buriganga River near the Mitford point to make a shortcut and enable Mir-i-Bahar (Mughal Admiral) to take steps quickly. The core of then Dhaka was Chawkbazar area. Thus, the Mughal Navy was stationed near Chandni Ghat–Swarighat area due to this strategic connection. As a result, they could move fast towards the Shitalakhya River via the Dulai River to intercept the invaders and intruders from east or north-east. The construction of a series of defense outposts in the neighborhood of Dhaka and many river forts (strategically located in different parts of Bengal) are indication of their well-thought defense strategy.

Key-words: Mughal, Dhaka, Suba-i-Bangala, Arakanese-Magh, Portuguese.

1.0 Introduction
The Mughal dynasty was one of the most important dynasties of the world. Its rulers left legacies that continue to inspire people of the modern world. The Empire ruled most of Indian sub-continent between the 16th and 18th centuries. The Suba-i-Bangala (Bengal province) was an important province of the Mughal Empire. The Suba-i-Bangala consisted of the present Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal and Orissa. The Bengal was conquered by the Mughal in 1576 AD. The development of Bengal continued under the different Governors from 1576 till 1707 AD.

The Bengal was the most fertile and resourceful province in the Mughal Empire. The region exported surplus food grains, fine cotton (muslin and silk), salt, ornaments, fruits, metals and pearls to the different countries of the world. The European companies established numerous trading posts in Mughal Bengal during the 17th and 18th centuries. Chittagong was the largest seaport, with maritime trade routes connecting the port city to Arakan, Ayuthya, Balasore, Aceh, Melaka, Johore, Bantam, Makassar, Ceylon, Bandar Abbas, Mecca, Jeddah, Basra, Aden, Masqat, Mocha and the Maldives (Taylor, 1840).

The ‘Bikrampur’ served as the ancient capital of Bengal in the Sena era. Later, Sonargaon was the capital of the medieval kingdom of Bengal. During the Sultanate period, there were some important administrative units or iqlims in Bengal. The most important iqlim was Sonargaon
which served as the capital city, the cultural center and inland port. But, the Mughals preferred Dhaka as the capital of Bengal instead of choosing Sonargaon as capital. Dhaka was the largest city in Mughal Bengal and the commercial capital of the Empire. Dhaka became the economic hub of the Mughal Empire, with half of its whole revenue of Bengal generated from the city alone. Dhaka predominantly was a city of the Mughals and became the Mughal Capital of Bengal in the 17th Century (GoB, 2012).

Due to a very wealthy province, the Bengal was frequently attacked by the Portuguese and Magh invaders and intruders in the Mughal era. Fray Sebastien Manrique (a Portuguese missionary and traveler) visited Dhaka in 1640 and described Dhaka as a ‘great and famous city’. He mentioned that there was a Magh raid in Dhaka, which had taken place twelve years before he went there. The Arakanese-Magh king Xandramax (Thriri Thudhamma) invaded Dhaka with the help of the Portuguese in 1626 without any resistance from the Mughal contingent. The Magh king spent three days sacking the city and setting fire to it. However, he left the city on the fourth day of hearing that a great force of Mughal cavalry was on the way to Dhaka (Allen, 1912).

The Mughal settlement in Dhaka was primarily based on defense considerations and followed a definite strategy and a city planning. They wanted to protect their eastern province from Portuguese and Magh pirates who use to plunder the Bengal on a regular basis (Begum, 2013).

2.0 Geographical Importance of Dhaka
Islam Khan became the Subadar of ‘Suba-i-Bangala’ in 1608. At that time, the capital of the Bengal Suba was Rajmahal. On being appointed as the Subadar of Bengal, Islam Khan decided to shift the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka. He renamed Dhaka as Jahangirnagar after Emperor Jahangir. He sent two of his officers along with their subordinates to Dhaka two weeks ahead of his arrival ‘to put the old fort into a good state of repair, and make it fit to receive the Governor’. Mirza Nathan was appointed as a commander of Islam Khan by Emperor Jahangir. He came to Dhaka in 1608. Islam Khan used to stay at the old fort (which is old Dhaka Central Jail) in Dhaka. During his tenure, Dhaka started growing as a capital (GoB, 2012).

During the Mughal period, Dhaka became the principal commercial hub of this region. This encouraged a much greater concentration of commerce: maritime trade brought industry, Islamic education and increasing sophistication in art (Musa, 2000). The Mughals built several mosques, palaces, caravanserais (accommodation for camel caravans), bazaars and gardens. All these establishments enhanced Dhaka’s prosperity significantly. This development began to attract European traders from southern India. The British East India Company established a trading post in Dhaka in 1666. As a capital of Bengal, Dhaka started flourishing in trade and commerce, which attracted many foreign traders. The city became the main center for muslin trade. Dutch, French, English, Armenian, and Greek traders gathered Dhaka to do business and established their own trading houses. With the traders also came the Christian missionaries. The topography of Dhaka shows that it was strategically as well as a commercially important center of Bengal. Dhaka remained the capital under the Mughals until they moved it to Murshidabad in 1704 (Bradley, 1906).
3.0 Growth of Dhaka under different rulers

Dhaka is the oldest metropolis of the Indian subcontinent. The settlement in Dhaka dates back to more than a thousand years according to many historians. Dhaka and its adjoining areas were then identified as ‘Bengalla’. It is often believed that Raja Ballal Sen of the Sen Dynasty of Bengal founded the Dhakeshwari Temple in the 12th century to mark the place of his birth and to pay tribute to the patron goddess of this region. The name Dhaka is believed to have originated from Dhakeshwari in the same way as Athens got its name from Athena, the patron goddess of the Greek city. Ikhtiar Uddin Mohammed bin Bakhtiar Khilzi defeated Laxman Sen (son of Ballal Sen) and the Sen Dynasty came to an end. Then Dhaka was successively ruled by the Turkish and Afghan rulers under the Sultanate before the Mughals arrived in 1608 (Mamoon, 1994).

The city of Dhaka was founded by the Mughals in the 17th century. Dhaka was the economic capital of the Mughal Empire. Dhaka came into prominence during the Mughal period when it held the position of the provincial capital of Bengal, and was destined to expand. During the beginning of Mughal rule in the year 1608, the city of Dhaka was promulgated as the capital of Bengal. Consequently, the development of townships, public works and a significant growth in population took place. Subedar Islam Khan was the first Subedar of the Bengal. The city was renamed as ‘Jahangirnagar (city of Jahangir)’ in honor of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (Hasan, 2004).

Prince Azam (son of Emperor Aurangzeb) started the construction of the Lalbag Fort in 1678. But before he could complete it, he had to leave Suba-i-Bangala. During his second tenure (1678-1680) as the Subadar, Shaista Khan continued the construction of the fort. The greatest expansion of the Dhaka city took place under Mughal Subedar Shaista Khan (1662-1677 and 1679-1689). At that time, the city was stretched for 12 miles in length and 8 miles in breadth with a population of nearly a million people. The historical Chawk Mosque was constructed in the Chawkbazar area of the old town of Dhaka, south of the current city center (Mamoon, 2016). Ibrahim Khan became Subadar of Bengal in 1689 and built the Jinjira Palace on the south bank of the Buriganga River. A wooden bridge on the river connected the palace to the north bank (Taifoor, 1956). Later, Dhaka showed rapid growth in urbanization during the British colonization in the late 19th and early 20th century (Rabbani, 1997).

4.0 Overview of Forts and Outposts in the neighborhood of Dhaka

Dhaka was located close to the ancient capital of Bengal ‘Bikrampur’ and Medieval capital of Bengal ‘Sonargaon’. So, it was only natural that this place was pivotal to the defense of these two capitals. As a result, Dhaka grew into a cantonment town as well as a business center. Mirza Nathan came to Bengal in 1608 AD as a commander of Islam Khan. Mirza Nathan mentioned in his book ‘Baharistan-i-Ghaybi’ that Dhaka had several mud fort/outpost in the pre-Mughal period. Afghan (Pathan) rulers governed the Bengal from the early 14th century until the late 16th century. At that time, it was on the outskirt of the old Dhaka confined by the river (Buriganga) and Dulai Khal. Later, the Mughals built a number of permanent Forts around Dhaka (Mamoon, 1994). These forts/outposts are briefly described as follows:
(i). There was a fort in Dhaka, before it became the capital of Suba-i-Bangala of the Mughal Empire. Sher Shah Suri built a fort at Bakshibazar area, which is known as an Afghan fort or Old Fort. The fort was occupied by the Mughal. The historian Mirza Nathan described the fort as “surrounded by mud walls and the largest and strongest in pre-Mughal era (Figure-1)”. Later, Islam Khan reconstructed the fort.

(ii). There were some outposts in different areas in then Dhaka, such as Tongi, Zafarabad (near Sat Masjid), Postogola. Among these outposts, Postogola was the most important outpost. The word ‘Postogola’ is said to derive from ‘Pusht Killa’ in Persian or ‘behind the fort’ in English. It was a watch post, built to oversee entries from the south within the Dulai canal confines.

(iii). Dhapa/Daapeka Kella (Fort): Dhapa Fort was located at on the east side of river Falluah. It was a pre-Mughal (Afghan/Pathan) Fort. Later, it was occupied by the Mughal (Dani, 1956).

(iv). Another Unnamed Killa: There was another Unnamed Killa on the west side of river Falluah. Later, it was occupied by the Mughal (Dani, 1956).

(v). Beg Murad Killa-1: It was located on the west side of Dulai canal, towards Farashganj. It was a pre-Mughal (Afghan/Pathan) Fort. It was occupied by Islam Khan. Ihtimam Khan was the in-charge of this fort. Now, this fort is non-existent

(vi). Beg Murad Killa-2: It was located on the east side of Dulai canal, towards Faridabad. It was a pre-Mughal (Afghan/Pathan) Fort. It was occupied by Islam Khan. Mirza Nathan was the in-charge of this fort. Now, this fort is non-existent.

(vii). The mughal Governors built two Palace-forts in Dhaka namely, Lalbagh Fort by Prince Azam and Shaista Khan in 1678–1684 (Figure-2) and Zinjira Fort by Ibrahim Khan II in 1689–1697 (Figure-3). Another palace was built at Posta of Dhaka, south of the Lalbagh fort by Prince Azim-us-Shan in 1697–1712. Later, the Posta Palace was washed away by the Burigana river.

(viii). A series of water forts were built on the side of various rivers in the 17th century with a view to protect Dhaka from the frequent attacks of the Magh and Portuguese pirates. Hajiganj Fort (Figure-4), Sonakanda Fort (Figure-5) and Idrakpur Fort (Figure-6) were built for the purpose of preventing the intrusion of the pirates, particularly the Arakanese and the Portuguese.

5.0 Adopted Defense Strategy by Mughal
Unlike other medieval cities in Indian Sub-continent, Mughal did not have to develop a walled city in Dhaka. The city was well-protected by a natural system of rivers and a network of canals and low lands (Begum, 2013). The Buriganga and her mother river Dhaleswari connected Dhaka to the major rivers of Bengal. These rivers played an important role in communication, trade and commerce. The Dulai canal taking off from the Balu near Demra flowed southwestward through Dhaka to join Buriganga near the modern Mill Barrack area. The Balu
river rises from the Lakhya near Kapasia and joins the same river at Demra. These water bodies had shaped the Mughal Dhaka (Mamoon, 2016).

Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb appointed Mir Jumla II as the governor of the then Bengal province in 1660 AD. He had advanced level skills in naval warfare. He was aware of the invaders and intruders who used to run a campaign of terror in the important cities of Bengal. After his appointment as the Subahdar, he shifted the capital of Bengal to Dhaka from Rajmahal. On a quest to protect the capital Dhaka from the invaders and intruders, Mir Jumla adopted a river-based defense strategy which comprised several layer of protections. The Mughal defense strategies are described below:

a) 1st layer
The 1st layer defense strategy was also known as a ‘triangular defense system’. Under this system, the Mughal built up three river forts outside of Dhaka to protect an attack from downstream through the Bay of Bengal. The ‘triangular defense system’ was based on the following forts:

i) Idrakpur Water Fort, Munshiganj
Idrakpur Fort was the center of Mir Jumla’s Defense strategy. Idrakpur was strategically very important point for Mir Jumla. As it was the intersection of Meghna, Shitalakshya, Ichhamati & Dhaleshwari rivers. *Idrakpur fort was built on the old bank of Ichhamati river which has now receded.* It was the main route of the Portuguese & Magh invaders and intruders. The erection of the fort was intended to protect the advance of the Magh and Portuguese pirates proceeding towards the capital of Bengal, Dhaka. The fort was also used as the naval base of the Mughal naval fleet of 200 ships with cannon under Mir-i-Bahar Abul Hossain (Chief of Mughal Navy).

ii) Sonakanda Water Fort at Narayanganj
The Sonakanda river fort was built by Mir Jumla to defend Dhaka and Narayanganj from pirates. It was located on the eastern bank of Shitalakshya River where the river Brahmaputta formerly met.

iii) Hajiganj/Khizirpur Water Fort at Narayanganj
The Hajiganj Fort is also called Khizirpur Fort. Hajiganj Fort was a small but strategically important fort. Because, the fort stands at the confluence of the Sitalakshya and the old Buriganga river. The fort was intended to intercept the raids of the Magh and Portuguese invaders and intruders.

b) 2nd layer:
The 2nd layer defense strategy was based on the two Forts at Fatullah such as:

i) Dhapa Killa (now extinct) at one side of Buriganga river.

ii) Another unnamed Killa (now extinct) at another side of the same river.
c) 3rd layer:
The 3rd layer defense strategy was based on the three Forts such as: ‘Pusht Killa’ at Postogola. Two more forts were (known as Beg Murad Killa 1 & 2) situated on both sides of the Dulai canal (connection point), a little south of the Gandaria (very near Dhaka) and bank of Buriganga river. These two forts built on either side of the point where the river Dulai divided into two branches (one branch joining the Lakhya at Demra and the other at Khizirpur). All of these Forts now disappeared.

d) 4th layer:
The last layer defense strategy was based on the three major Forts such as:

i) Old fort:
The fort was located at Dhaka central Jail area. Mirza Nathan mentioned in his book ‘Baharistan-i-Ghaibi’ ‘the old fort was surrounded by mud walls and the largest and strongest fort in pre-Mughal era’. Islam Khan used to stay in the old fort after arrival in 1608 AD.

ii) Lalbah Palace-Fort:
Originally, it was a Mughal palace-fortress which is located in the south-western part of the old Dhaka on the bank of the river Buriganga. The fort conceived as a palace-fort.

iii) Zinjira Palace-Fort:
The Zinjira Palace-Fort is situated on the southern bank of the Buriganga river in Keraniganj.

The adopted Mughal defense strategies to protect Dhaka are presented in Map-1:
6.0 Discussion

It is already mentioned that the Bengal was a very wealthy province during Mughal rule and frequently attacked by the invaders and intruders. The Portuguese and Magh pirates used this point to move forward to Dhaka through Shitalakshya River. On their way to Dhaka, they used to plunder other important cities of Bengal like Sonargaon and Bikrampur (Campos, 1919).

The Mughals established a Naval Headquarters at Chandnighat–Swarighat area in Dhaka during the reign of Emperor Akbar due to several strategic reasons. It was established mainly to guard against the incursion of independent and semi-independent ‘Bhuyan’ chiefs and to keep out Magh and Portuguese invaders and intruders coming from south and east who use to plunder major cities of Bengal frequently. Islam Khan added a canal in the topography of Dhaka to connect the Buriganga River near Pukur Teer (Pakurtali) with Dulai. It was to protect the Mughal capital and to create a shortcut waterway to Lakhya from Chandnighat Naval base (Dani, 1956).

The city could be approached from the south-east by the river. Hence, a series of forts were built on the way to Dhaka. Two forts (Beg Murad fort 1 and 2) were built on either side of Dulai Khal at Postogola in the 16th century, at the entry point of the city. The Postogola watch post was to oversee entries from the south within the Dulai Khal confines.

Mir Jumla was appointed the governor of Bengal in 1660. He was determined to protect Dhaka, Sonargaon and Bikrampur. The chance of most of possible attack was through the river. So, he came up with a naval defense strategy of several layers to protect the important cities from attacks of the Magh and Arakanese invaders and intruders. These several layers Mughal Defense System was based on Bikrampur (Mushtiganj) and Sonargaon (Narayanganj) to Dhaka through several Forts. The Mughals had a number of river forts, strategically located in different part of Bengal to control the waterways down streams i.e. Idrakpur fort, Sonakanda fort, Hajiganj fort etc.

According to the Mughal defense strategy, whenever the Magh-Arakanese invaders and intruders tried to move to Dhaka, the Mughal troops ordered to start firing their mortars from the Idrakpur Fort and the cannons of their 200 battleships from the river. In this situation, the pirates had no alternative, either to retreat from the place or to die in the river. However, any of the invader ships survived the initial attack and tried to move towards Dhaka. Then, the Mughal soldiers used to fire the invader ships again from Sonakanda Fort and Hajiganj Fort. As a result, there was no other way except to sink the ship and the death of all pirates in the river.

In addition to 2nd, 3rd and 4th layers of defense, Mir Jumla also built two massive cannons namely 'Kaley Khan Jam-Jam' and ‘Bibi Mariam (Figure-7)’ for the protection of Dhaka. He installed these cannons on both sides of the Buriganga river- one at ‘Swarighat’ area in front of ‘Barakatra’ and another on a sandbar near Zinjira of Keraniganj in Dhaka. These two cannons were used to intercept the invading forces at the periphery of the city during the Mughal era. But, one ('Kaley Khan Jam-Jam') fell into the Buriganga river and was lost forever. The other, called Bibi Mariam, was transferred to Chawk Bazar of present old Dhaka.
Appointing Governor of Bengal, Shaista Khan determined to invade Arakan and conquer Chittagong in order to put an end to the piratical raids of the Arakanese and the Portuguese. He formed a large fleet of 300 ships and a naval force of 13,000 men. A painting (by an unknown artist) depicting the battle between Mughal naval force of Bengal and the Arakanese Kingdom of Mrauk U in 1666 during the 1st Governorship of Shaista Khan. The result was Mughal Victory and suppression of Portuguese piracy in the Bay of Bengal (Hossain, 2012). The painting provides an idea of what the Mughal fleet for large mission used to be then (Figure-8).

7.0 Conclusion:
The topography played the most important part in the case of the fortification in Bengal. Dhaka was the eastern of capital Mughal. It is presumed that the fortification of Dhaka was provided by a natural system of rivers and a network of canals and lowlands from the ancient time. The river Buriganga, Turag and canal Dulai played an important role. During the Mughal era, Dhaka enjoyed the status of a provincial capital for little over a century. As a result, the defense of Dhaka has increased much at that time. The river forts were the main pillar of their defense strategy. The Mughals developed this river based defense system in Bengal not only to secure their eastern province, but also to expand their empire towards Assam, Tripura, Chittagong through these defense outpost and forts.

8.0 References

Appendix

Figure-1: Old Fort, Bakshibazar, Dhaka. (now extinct)

Figure-2: Lalbagh Fort, Lalbagh, Dhaka.

Figure-3: Zinjira Palace-Fort, Keraniganj

Figure-4: Hajiganj Fort, Narayanganj
Figure-5: Sonakanda Fort, Narayanganj

Figure-6: Idrakpur Fort, Munshiganj

Figure-7: Bibi Mariam (Mughal Cannon)

Figure-8: The battle between Portuguese and Mughals in Karnaphuli in 1666 AD.

About Author

M. Mahmud Ali is a Doctoral Student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. He attended to various workshops, training programs in USA, UK, Germany, Japan, Australia, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea, UAE, and Indonesia. He also studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA and University of Manchester, UK. He is a heritage lover, traveler, explorer and researcher.