General Bussy enjoyed an unassailable position in the Nizam’s court in Hyderabad

If Pondicherry was a colonial trading pocket for the French, Hyderabad by the middle of the 18th century became their nerve centre of great political activity much before the British could establish their power in this part of the country. The French were the first European power in Hyderabad state to have huge territorial gains when they were granted the Circars (present coastal Andhra) for their military support to the Nizam, thus becoming the forerunner for the Subsidiary Alliance the British replicated decades later. The architect of this French policy of Indirect Rule in Hyderabad was the indomitable General Bussy, the French commander, who at the express orders of Dupleix, the Governor of Pondicherry, arrived in Hyderabad in February, 1751 at the head of a strong French contingent. It was Bussy who declared Salabath Jung as the new Nizam, after the murder of Muzafar Jung. Bussy enjoyed an unassailable position in the Nizam’s court at Hyderabad.

War of succession

After the death of Nizam-ul-Mulk the first Asaf Jah, in May 1748, there was political turmoil in Hyderabad due to war of succession among his immediate descendants. The Nizam had six sons and an equal number of daughters. Ghazi ud din, the first son was a representative of his father at the Imperial Mughal court in Delhi and was not inclined to be his father’s successor. The second son, Nasir Jung therefore proclaimed himself as the Nizam of Hyderabad. But an ambitious, Muzafar Jung, grandson of the dead Nizam, (son of his favorite daughter, Khairunnisa begum) claimed the throne for himself.

The French governor at Pondicherry, General Dupleix, saw an opportunity to fish in troubled waters at Hyderabad. There was also a war of succession brewing at Arcot, where Chanda Sahib laid claims to the Nawabi as successor to his father-in-law, Anwar ud din, against the claims of Mohammad Ali, Anwar ud din’s son. Dupleix decided to side Chanda Sahib at Arcot and Muzafar at Hyderabad. He asked Muzafar Jung to come to Arcot to first settle the dispute there, promising to make him the Nizam at Hyderabad later. Muzafar and French armies under Dupleix defeated Anwar ud din in a battle at Ambur and Chanda Saheb was declared as Nawab of Arcot.

The British at Madras who wanted to arrest the growing French power, advised Nasir Jung, the Nizam to come to south to check Muzafar- Dupleix nexus. Nasir Jung accordingly went with his forces but when engaged in a fight, was killed in one of the minor skirmishes near Arcot on 25 December, 1750. Muzafar Jung immediately was declared the Nizam of Hyderabad by Dupleix.

Victorious Muzafar was taken in great pomp by Dupleix to Pondicherry where a grand Durbar for the new Nizam was held. Muzafar was toasted, feasted and entertained by the French General. In return, Muzafar was so pleased that he made Dupleix as a jagirdar of Villianallur with a personal grant of 80 villages. He also conferred the title, “Subedar”, and the French governor was happy to be addressed as Dupleix Sahib. After a month of festivities, and French hospitality, Muzafar set out to Hyderabad accompanied by a strong French contingent sent for protection by Dupleix headed by his close confident and an able commander, General Bussy.
However, on way back to Hyderabad, Muzafar Jung, 38 days after becoming the Nizam, was treacherously murdered in a spine chilling melodrama. As the contingent came close to Cuddapah and entered Lakkireddypalle pass, Muzafar was assassinated on February 3, 1751, by the Nawab of Kurnool, who earlier supported him but was disillusioned when the new Nizam, he thought, was not keen to keep the promises made. An astute diplomat that he was, Bussy continued his journey with his French armies to Hyderabad and made Salabath Jung, an younger brother of Nasir Jung as the new Nizam. The death of Muzafar and the march of French armies to Hyderabad through the territories carrying fire and thunder under Bussy, made him such an object of terror that even now in the Telugu States the mothers try to silence their crying babies with the arrival of “Booochi”, a corrupted version for Bussy!

Marquis de Bussy worked under Dupleix at Pondicherry for a long time. He married Marie, a step daughter of Dupleix. His arrival in Hyderabad marks a new era of French connections with Hyderabad and the northern Circars. Bussy wanted to make use of the opportunity to the best of the French advantage as the new Nizam, Salabath Jung was at his mercy. He decided to stay back with his army to give protection to the Nizam. His army consisted of 900 European and 4000 of sepoys and was a strong instrument of war fare. In order to meet the expenses for the maintenance of army, estimated at Rs. 21 lakhs a year, Bussy got the entire coastal Andhra, from Guntur to Srikakulam, which yielded an annual income of Rs. 31 lakhs. Masulipatam and Yanam were granted as personal jagirs to Bussy.

Charminar as home
When Bussy arrived in Hyderabad, as there was no immediate accommodation worthy of his position and importance, he decided to put up in the very Charminar, the majestic, sturdy and the “tallest structure in the entire city”, then. Huge curtains were tied on all sided making Charminar as his home. Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah who built Charminar in 1591 must not have ever dreamt that it would one day serve as home to a French General, Bussy. When the beautiful Charmahal on the banks of Musi got readied, Bussy shifted there and Salabath Jung built Khilwath Mahal (part of Chowmahal palace complex) for his own stay. Charmahal, where Bussy finally shifted to, was a multi floored beautiful palace with cloth of gold used as door curtains, (Charmahal stood on the grounds where now the High court buildings are located.)

When the Seven Years War (1756-73) broke out in Europe, the French and English armies in India also started to fight. Robert Clive buoyed by his stunning victory at Plassey in 1757, sent Col. Forde who with his armies occupied Northern Circars, held by the French. Count de Lally, the French General who arrived from France to fight the English, on reaching Pondicherry, recalled Bussy from Hyderabad to make a combined attack on the British at Madras. However, in the battle at Wandiwash, the French armies were defeated and both Lally and Bussy were taken prisoners. They were let off later and Pondicherry was returned to the French.

The French influence in Hyderabad steeply declined on the departure of Bussy. His name is immortalised in the Hyderabad dominions for his participation in the famous Bobbili battle that took place in January, 1757. Bussy supported Vijayarama Raju of Vizianagaram in vanquishing Bobbili. There is a street in Yanam today named after Bussy. He became the French governor at Pondicherry two years before he died in 1785. Thus, while Bussy’s rise in Hyderabad heralded the high watermark of French power in India, his withdrawal from here marked the collapse of its political power.

After the departure of Bussy from Hyderabad, the British with the tacit agreement with Shah Alam, the Mughal emperor, deposed Salabath in September and made his younger brother, Nizam Ali Khan as the new Nizam in 1762. Salabath Jung was imprisoned by the new Nizam in the fort at Bidar, and was killed a year later. By recognizing Nizam Ali as Asaf Jah II, the Mughal emperor has derecognized the three predecessors, Nasir Jung, Muzafar Jung and Salabath Jung who all had violent deaths as the rulers, though between them they had a rule of 14 long years from the death of Nizam ul Mulk in 1748 up to the accession of Nizam Ali II in 1762. If those three Nizams were also counted, there were ten Nizams who ruled Hyderabad; and the last Nizam, Osman Ali Khan must have been the Xth Nizam and not the VII, as he is generally considered.