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Advent of Europeans in India

1

Chapter

Even before the beginning of the formal rule of British in India, there was prevalence of trade between India and European countries. India and Europe had trade relations via land route through Syria, Egypt and also Oxus valley. The age of 15th century in Europe was an era of geographical discoveries of land and sea routes. In 1492, the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492 and Vasco da Gama of Portugal discovered a new sea route from Europe to India in 1498. After this discovery, many trading companies from all across Europe came to India and established their centers. The Europeans came to India in phases. The first to come to India as traders were the Portuguese followed by, the British, the Dutch, the Danes and the French, who subsequently developed designs to be the political masters of India.

Why Europeans Wanted to Discover New Routes to India?

The goods from India to Europe had to pass through many territories and hands as these were in great demand throughout the Europe. In turn, overlords in the Middle East and North Africa levied tolls and duties on these imported goods. So, to maximize the profits, European trading companies wanted to establish their trading centres within India and hence they sailed directly to India.

However, there were many obstacles to sea trade such as pirates and natural calamities. The old trade routes through Egypt and the Persian Gulf through Syria were closed in 7th century when Arabs conquered these countries. Thus, Indian trade was monopolized and Indian merchandise was carried to the markets of the Levant. Also, Constantinople was captured by Turks in 1453 and with this capture, the overland route was blocked. European-Asian trade became the monopoly of merchants of Venice and Genoa of Italian city and they refused to let the new nation states of Western Europe particularly Spain and Portugal have any share in the trade through these old routes. The other nations of Europe who had no ports on the shore of the Mediterranean were shut out from the participation in the lucrative trade with the east.

Arrival of Portuguese in India

Prince Henry, the Navigator, started a maritime school in Portugal and with that the European Age of Discovery started with the Portuguese navigators. As a result of the technical and scientific discoveries, Portugal developed the most advanced ships, including the Caravel, the Carrack and the Galleon and hence for the first time in history, maritime navigation was possible. The Portuguese Empire led the Portuguese Kingdom to discover and map most of the Globe, and find sea routes as far as the East and West, which led to some of the remarkable voyages like finding the sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope.

The first Portuguese mission was led by Vasco da Gama who reached Calicut via the Cape of Good Hope in May 1498 where he was favourably received by the local ruler Zamorin. In 1500, the Portuguese sent the second mission under Pedro Alwares Cabral. Hence, Portuguese Company became the first European trading company to establish its trade posts in India. They established their trading settlements at Cochin, Goa, Daman and Diu, Salsette and Bassein and Bombay.

The Portuguese developed the Cartaz System. Cartaz was a naval trade license or pass issued by the Portuguese in the Indian ocean during the sixteenth century (around 1502-1750), under the rule of the Portuguese empire. Portuguese employed this system after monopolizing the export-import via Indian Ocean. Tobacco cultivation, ship making (at Calicut and Gujarat) and the use of printing press began after the arrival of Portuguese. They also contributed in Gothic architecture and its influence in India.

In the beginning of 18th century, the influence of Portuguese in Indian trade had declined. There were various reasons for this decline. Their religious intolerance, excesses as sea pirates in the Bay of Bengal region, Albuquerque's weak successors, the decline of Vijaynagar empire, tensions with Spain, and arrival and growth of English and Dutch in India, etc., were some of the reasons for their decline.

Important Portuguese Personalities

Francisco de Almeida: He arrived as the first Portuguese Viceroy in 1505 and established four ports on South-western coast to establish Portuguese control over the trade via Indian Ocean. In 1508, he was defeated by a joint naval force of kingdoms of Egypt, Turkey and Gujarat in the War of Chaul. However, the very next year in 1509 he defeated the joint naval force in another battle fought near the port of Diu. His policies were famously known as 'Blue water policy'.

Afanzo de Albuquerque: He was the second Portuguese governor and is regarded as the real founder of Portuguese power in India. He captured Goa from the ruler of Bijapur in 1510, and extended Portuguese influence by acquiring an important market of Malacca in south East Asia in 1511.

Arrival of British in India

The ongoing trade with other European nations attracted the British traders. In 1599, a group of merchants established a company for this purpose and named it 'Governor of Company of Merchants of London Trading to the East Indies'. This company was granted the royal charter by Queen Elizabeth I on 31st December 1600, to trade exclusively with Eastern countries for 15 years.

British emperor James I sent Captain William Hawkins to the court of Jahangir in 1608, to seek permission to establish trading posts in India. He became the first British to enter India via sea route. Initially, the emperor was reluctant due to the opposition by the local traders of Surat and the Portuguese but was influenced by the defeat of the Portuguese naval contingent by English captain Middleton in 1611. Thereafter, the Mughal emperor by an imperial firman, gave permission to East India Company to establish their factory at Surat in 1613. Still, the British were unsatisfied and sent another mission under Sir Thomas Roe in 1615 to plead for more concessions. This time the Emperor Jahangir gave permission to establish factories in any part of the Mughal Empire. Consequently, the British established their factories at Agra, Ahmedabad, and Bharuch.



In Southern India, the British established their first factory outside Mughal empire in 1611 at Masulipattam, which was followed by Madras (1639) and Hooghly (1651). In eastern India, the factory was established at Balasore in Orissa in 1633. In 1691, the Company was given an exclusive privilege to carry out trade from Bengal without paying any custom duty in lieu of an annual payment of ₹3000. In 1698, the Subedar of Bengal, Azim ush Shan gave zamindari rights of Sutanuti, Kalikata, and Gobindpur to British on a payment of ₹12,00, where they established the modern town of Calcutta and a fort called Fort St. Williams. Meanwhile in 1662, the Portuguese had given Bombay to King Charles as dowry. The East India Company took Bombay on lease from the King of England.

In 1639, the King of Chandragiri gave the company a place to establish their factory near Madras where the British established Fort St. George. In 1717, Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar not only confirmed the privileges of the company but also issued several new privileges including permission to trade from Bengal without paying tax in lieu of an annual payment of ₹3000. It also gave them the privilege to issue their own coins from the mint of Bombay. These privileges have been called 'the Magna Carta of East India Company'.

Arrival of Dutch in India

The Dutch also established their trade centres in India. Cornelis de Houtman was the first Dutch citizen to arrive in India. The Dutch East India Company was formed in 1602, which was also known as Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie-VOC. They overpowered the Portuguese and established their control over the centres of spice cultivation in India. They established their trade posts in Gujarat, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

The first Dutch factory was established at Masulipattam in 1605. Other important factories were at Pulikat (1610), Surat (1616), Kasim Bazar, Patna, Balasore, Nagpattnam and Cochin. The first Dutch factory in Bengal was established at Peepli in 1627. The Dutch mostly traded in spices, indigo, raw silk, rice and opium. It was the Dutch traders who made India a centre of textile export. Pulicat was their main centre from 1616, but later it was replaced by Nagapattinam. The trading system of Dutch company was based on Cartel system. The Dutch company paid its shareholders a dividend of 18% which is considered a record in the history of commerce.

In 1741, they were defeated by king of Travancore Marthanda Verma in Battle of Colachel and in 1759, they were decisively defeated by the British in the Battle of Bedara, which was led by Robert Clive. The reasons for the decline of Dutch were deteriorating economic condition, high degree of centralization, primacy to spice trade, relatively weaker navy than British, etc.

Arrival of Danes in India

Danish or Danes refers to people from Denmark. Denmark held colonial possessions in India for 225 years. The Danish colonies in India included the towns of Tranquebar (Tamil Nadu), Serampore (Bengal) and the Nicobar Islands. Serampore was their headquarters in India.

Dutch adventurer Marcellis de Boshouwer provided the impetus for Danish involvement in the Indian sub-continent. He wanted military assistance against the Portuguese with a



promise of monopoly on all trades to the assisting party. His appeal convinced Christian IV, the King of Denmark-Norway who subsequently issued a charter in 1616 granting the Danish East India Company a monopoly on trade between Denmark and Asia for twelve years.

Serampore Mission Press was established at Serampore by the Danish missionaries in 1799 AD. The Danes ultimately failed to strengthen themselves in India and they sold all their settlement in India to the British in 1845.

Arrival of French in India

French were the last among the European companies to enter India. In 1664, during the reign of Louis XIV, the efforts of his minister Colbert resulted in the formation of the French trading company. It was established by the government and therefore was managed, funded and controlled by the government. The first French factory in India was established at Surat in 1667 by Francois Caron which was followed by the factory at Masulipattam by Marcara in 1669 after acquiring permission from the ruler of Golkonda. The foundations of Pondicherry were led by Martin in 1673. The trading post at Chandranagar was established at the place given by the Nawab of Bengal Shaista Khan.

The French power in India declined from 1706 to 1720 and this led to the reconstitution of the French East India Company in 1720. The French power in India was revived under governors Lenoir and Dumas between 1720 and 1742. They occupied Mahe in the Malabar, Yanam in Coromandal (both in 1725) and Karikal in Tamil Nadu (1739). The arrival of Dupleix as French governor in India in 1742 saw the beginning of Anglo French conflict (Carnatic wars) which resulted in their final defeat in India.



India in the 18th Century

2

Chapter

The 18th century was one of the most chaotic periods in the entire history of India. The Mughal Empire, which dominated the Indian subcontinent for more than 200 years, began to decline owing to the internal and external factors. Numerous local powers tried to assert their independence and foreign powers also attempted to make inroads into the Indian subcontinent.

Decline of Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire which was established in 1526 with Babur's accession to the throne began disintegrating with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. When Aurangzeb died, the empire was the largest in India. Yet, within about fifty years of his death, the Mughal Empire disintegrated. Aurangzeb's death was followed by the ascendancy of Bahadur Shah who after ruling for a very brief period died in 1712. He was perhaps the last Mughal ruler who wielded real authority. He was followed by a number of weak rulers who were incompetent administrators. As a result, the Mughal empire started crumbling and its rule came to an end in 1857 with the exile of the last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah II.

Causes of Decline of the Mughal Empire

The Mughal government was a centralized despotism with no institutionalized system of installing the most capable person as the monarch. It was a hereditary arrangement wherein the rulers were either chosen by the incumbent ruler from amongst his sons or in case the incumbent ruler failed to nominate his successor before his death, the heirs apparent would wage a war of succession and the one who was emerged victorious would accede to the throne. In some cases, the Mughal government was also controlled by powerful nobles, also infamous for being "king makers", who would crown a ruler of their choice and keep exercising arbitrary influence over the affairs of the state.

Further, due to the Mansabdari system, there was no bond of closeness between the emperor and the individual soldiers. The loyalty of the soldiers was to the Mansabdars and not to the emperor. As the later Mughal emperors were weak, the powerful nobles began to convert the assignments which they held for maintaining troops into hereditary possessions. With decline of the power of the later Mughal emperors, decline also set in the character of the nobility. The mansabdars and the nobles left no stone unturned to cheat the government. This dependency over the nobles was primarily because of the huge amount of money spent in wars (for example, Aurangzeb's Deccan campaign), on maintaining the splendour of the Durbar and also on building activities. These activities exhausted the state exchequer. Additionally, due to the heavy burden of taxation, thousands of cultivators began deserting their fields. Thus, the collection of land revenue started decreasing.

In addition to these factors, some of Aurangzeb's policies (religious) such as the imposition of Jizyah in 1679, ban on the construction of new temples and the war against Marathas alienated a sizeable section of the population and created distrust towards the

empire. Taking advantage of the weakness of the later Mughals, many ambitious provincial governors declared their independence. During Muhammad Shah's reign, Nizam-ul-Mulk proclaimed himself an independent ruler of the six subas of the Deccan. Sadat Khan established an independent dynasty in Awadh. Ali Vardi Khan became independent in Bengal. The Marathas had won their independence long before this time. They established their supremacy over the Mughal provinces of Malwa, Gujarat and Bundelkhand and sought to bring the entire country under their domination.

Last but not the least, some ruthless foreign invaders like Nadir Shah in 1739 during the reign of Muhammad Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1761, plundered and devastated the power, wealth and the prestige of the Mughal Empire. During the time of the 3rd battle of Panipat, the real authority of the Mughal Empire was largely reduced to the peripheries and boundaries of Delhi.

An unfortunate development in the later Mughal period was the rise of powerful nobles who played the role of 'king-makers'. The powerful nobles and leaders of different factions used the royal princes as pawns in their game and enthroned and removed princes to suit their interests. That is how Jahandar Shah became the emperor not by his own strength but because of the able generalship of Zulfikar Khan, a leader of the Irani party. Similarly, it was the Sayyid brothers who raised Farrukhsiyar to the throne in 1713 and pulled him down in 1719 when he ceased to serve their interests. The three puppet emperors, Rafi-ud-Darajat, Rafi-ud-Daula and Muhammad Shah were raised to the throne by the Sayyids.

Parties at the Mughal Court

William Irvine mentions the multiplicity of parties at the Mughal Court. Among these, four were prominent – the Turanis, the Iranis, the Afghans and the Hindustanis. The first three were descendants of foreigners from Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan who formed 'the backbone of the army of occupation'. Their number had greatly increased during the last twenty-five years of Aurangzeb's reign when he waged incessant war in the Deccan. Descendants from these foreigners held important military and civil offices in India. In opposition to the Mughal or Foreign Party was the Indian born or Hindustani Party.

The Hindustani Party mostly comprised Muhammadans born in India, whose ancestors though originally foreign immigrants had settled in India for generations. This party got the support of the Rajput and the Jat chiefs and powerful Hindu landlords. The Hindus who filled almost all the subordinate civil offices were on their side. However, it will not be correct to assume that the political parties were based entirely on ethnic or religious groupings.

Role of Sayyid Brothers in Later Mughal Politics

The Sayyid brothers – Abdulla Khan and Hassan Ali – were the most powerful players in the Mughal court and Mughal politics from 1713 to 1720. They were the leaders of the Hindustani Party and represented the anti-Mughal and quasi-nationalist interests.

The Sayyid Brothers became highly influential in the Mughal Court, they became kingmakers during the anarchy following the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707. They created and dethroned Mughal Emperors at their will during the 1710s. Aurangzeb's son Bahadur Shah I defeated his brothers to capture the throne with the help of the Sayyid Brothers and Nizam-ul-Mulk, another influential administrator in the Mughal court. Bahadur Shah I died in 1712, and his successor Jahandar Shah was assassinated on the orders of the Sayyid Brothers.