

FRENCH EAST INDIA COMPANY – IT'S FAILURE ON THE ANDHRA COAST

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During the period under study, Indian sea coast had always been an unflinching attraction for foreigners. Indian riches and luxuries found expression in various accounts, both literary and travel. Particular mention must be made to travel accounts which served as store houses of knowledge about different aspects of the continent. They were the main fountains of inspiration for many an adventurer. Excited thus by the offer bounty in the subcontinent there was almost a bee-line of foreign travelers land traders spread over longer periods of time extending from early medieval period. The admiration of textiles attracted the foreigners since ancient times.¹ The manufacture of Cotton Cloth was at its best in India until very recent times and fine Indian muslins were in great demand and commanded high prices both in Roman empire and medieval Europe.² As far as coromandel coast was concerned, it was Marco polo³ (1292 AD), who visited the coast and kept accounts about the place. For him, Coromandel coast was a great centre of pearl-fishing,⁴ lured by his account (Travels), several adventurers, merchants and above all ecclesiastical clergy found their way to India.⁵

The Coromandel coast and its surrounding area Which Andhra Coast was an integral part was a rich and fertile coast which had been always an attraction for traders. Natural creeks on the coast helped the development of several other important port-towns like Ganjam, Bimilipatnam, Visakhapatnam, Nizampatnam, Madras, Pondicherry, Karikal and Point Calimere which served as important entrepots and foreigners for over centuries.⁶ Trade relations were established soon and conducted without any hindrance through out centuries. The fall of Constantinople at the hands of Turks and the blockade of sea route to India encouraged European adventures to embark upon exploits on water in threading their

way to India.⁷ The excitement, India continued to create among European merchants and nations further added strength to geographical discoveries.

Vasco da Gama, one of the Portuguese navigators, braved the storms on seas on his ship, San Gabriel, round the cape of Good Hope and cast anchor off on 17th May 1498 A.D. in a village called Kappad near the port Calicut, under the Hindu ruler, whose hereditary title was Zamorin gave friendly reception to these strangers and invited Gama for trading activities in his kingdom. It is remarked that “when the Portuguese, at last rounding the cape of Good Hope, burst into the Indian ocean like a pack of hungry wolves upon a well stocked sheep walk, they found a peaceful and prosperous commerce, that had been elaborated during 3000 years by the Phoenicians and Arabs, being carried on along all its shores.”⁸ The honour here solely goes to Vasco Da Gama. It was an epoch-making discovery. Portuguese people ranked first among seafarers during this important period to establish connections as well as a settlement in India. It is rightly said that “the discovery of America and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind.”⁹ Perhaps, no other event during the middle ages had such far reaching repercussions on the civilized world as the opening of sea-route to India.¹⁰ The event had a revolutionary effect on the course of events and opened the flood-gates of European trade with India. Thus, in the initial stages, the Western Coast of India was brought under the control of the Portuguese who claimed maritime supremacy over the Indian Ocean. Later, the Dutch, the English, the French and the Danes appeared on the scene and involved themselves in active trade on the Indian coast.¹¹

The French company appeared late on the Indian coasts but they had a desire for eastern traffic since the early days of the sixteenth century. In 1667 an expedition was sent under Francois caron, who established French factory in India at Surat. In 1669 Marcara founded another factory at Masulipatnam by securing a patent from the Sultan of Golkonda.¹²

Among them, only the French could enter into trade transactions on Andhra coast and the others remained outside Andhra coast.¹³ Even the French

touched only upon the fringes of Andhra trade and had an isolated presence on the coast, that too during the early eighteenth century. Though the French secured trading facilities at Masulipatnam earlier, they were handicapped from the beginning owing to the lack of help from the French government. They also encountered the problem of securing proper trade concessions and privileges from the native rulers and the antagonism of the fellow European trading companies. Soon after their arrival, the French made an unsuccessful attempt to capture San Thome from the Golkonda ruler in 1674.¹⁴ But they were forced to surrender. However, the manner in which the French defended San Thome created a good impression on the minds of indigenous rulers of Andhra region. Meanwhile, in 1673 Francois Martin, Director of Masulipatnam factory obtained from Sher Khan Lodi, the Governor of Valikondapur a site in the old port of Pondicherry that became the nucleus of French trade and commerce in due course of time.¹⁵ Between 1647 and 1687, the French trade began to progress in coastal Andhra from the port of Masulipatnam. After the Mughal conquest of Golkonda, the French secured trading rights from the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. He issued a *Farman* which allowed the French to carry on duty free trade at Masulipatnam only after the French paid Rs. 10,000 to the Emperor. However, the French trade began to progress in coastal Andhra from the port of Masulipatnam. After the Mughal conquest of Golkonda, Aurangzeb issued a *Farman* which allowed the French for duty free trade at Masulipatnam only after the French paid Rs. 10,000 to the Emperor. The Dutch attacked Pondicherry in 1693. Francois Martin after defending himself there with great courage was compelled to capitulate and the town was given up. In 1699 this town became the capital of the French possessions in India.¹⁶ The status of the French at Pondicherry was similar to that of the English at Madras and the Dutch at Pulicat. By the turn of the seventeenth century, the French, under the leadership of Francois Martin, could obtain more concessions from the Moghuls. The Mughal general, Daud Khan, gave away a few more villages to the French at Pondicherry. A large port was constructed at the sea front and, by 1700 the port custom rose to 2791 pagodas. In spite of that, France was greatly exhausted by

wars in Europe which ended in 1713.¹⁷ As many as 500 weavers were employed by the French by the first decade of eighteenth century. Martin's most important contribution was to fortify Pondicherry. By 1706, there were five companies and thirty officers in the fortress. The French government was given a right to mint coins independently of the Mughal administration. It caused a great alarm among the authorities of Karnataka, and soon they blockaded Pondicherry. Francois Martin could successfully retaliate the same. But a great threat was already in the offing. Daud Khan after challenged the French and objected to the erection of brick bastions around the fortress on the ground that it violated the territorial authority of the Mughals.¹⁸

There was an unfavorable turn in the position of the French in India after the war of Spanish succession had broken out. They had to abandon their factories at Surat, Masulipatnam and Bantam by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Further deterioration came after the death of Francois Martin in 1706.¹⁹ The French gradually lost economic and political influence beyond the confines of Pondicherry. It is obvious from the fact that they could establish only one factory at Yanam near Kakinada on the Andhra coast. Thus, in seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Andhra became a region of prime importance and commercial interest for every European power. Among different companies, the Dutch East India Company and the English East India Company had many stakes in this region. These powers brought both naval and military powers which were gradually used in consolidating with economic and power. By the end of seventeenth century they had settled into a pattern of concentrating their activities on one or two of their settlements. The Europeans were encouraged and patronized by the hinterland powers of the region Andhra viz., the Qutb Shahi of Golkonda and the Moghuls. When the authority of the hinterland powers became weak with the progress of item, the Europeans tried to assert their territorial dominance by early eighteenth century. Their port settlements became centers not only of trade and commerce. Now, they were slowly growing as centers of political power and enveloped the entire region.

In was this process of their growth of economic influence which not only facilitated the incorporation of coastal Andhra and from beyond but incorporated the over all India economy into colonial economy in seventeenth century.

References and Footnotes

1. While the cotton industry in India was flourishing, cotton was still virtually unknown in Europe. At the beginning of the Christian Era Indian textiles figured prominently in the trade with Rome. The Roman historian Arrian testifies to the export of dyed cloth from Masulia i.e. Masulipatnam. *Periplus of the Enthrian sea* refers to Dhanyakataka (Dharanikota on the Krishna river, near Amaravathi) as an important centre of the textile industry and trade. Vijaya Ramaswamy: *Textiles and Weavers in medieval south India*, p.3, also see, Wilfred, H Schoff, *Periplus of the Erithrian sea, Trade in the Indian Ocean*, (ed). New York, 1912, p. 59.
2. Wilfred Schoff, *Periplus of the Erithrian sea*, p.1
3. MarcoPolo, a Venetian traveller visited the port of Motupalli in 1290 at the time of Kakatiyas and described the social and economic conditions of southern India. Dr. A. Ramapathi, *Videsee Yatrikulu*, Telugu Vani, (Telugu). Hyderabad, 1975, p. 79.
4. R.K. Mookerji, *Indian Shipping*, p. 190.
5. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Vol I, Delhi, 1975, p. xxviii.
6. Dr. R. Ramam. *Early European Settlements in the northern Circars*, pp. 144-145.
7. With the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by the Turks, the overland trade route to India was closed. From then onwards the commerce of the East became the monopoly of the Italian cities of Venice and Genoe. The other European nations became jealous of the Prosperity of Venice and Genoa and tried to discover a non-Mediterranean sea route to India. P.R. Rao, *History of Modern Andhra*, New Delhi, 1978, p.3.
8. The Portuguese following up their first triumph by Dagama's discovery of the cape route in 1497 had gained the start of a century fastening their hold on the most advantageous positions from the Persian gulf to Japan. In India they had severed a monopoly of trade by emperor's *Farmans*. For a hundred years they thus excluded all

European intruders. If any intelligent observer had appraised the situation of Europeans in Asia in the year 1600 he would have been able to give good reasons for concluding that the Portuguese would hold their own at the same time that he furnished further proof of the danger of prophesying under the shifting fortunes of mankind. Sir Theodore Morisson: *British India*. London, 1926, p. I, also see, E.F. Oaten, *op.cit*, p. 51

9. *Ibid*, p. 48

10. H.H. Dodwell, *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, Cambridge, 1929, p.1

11. It was the trade in spices which had originally brought the Portuguese to India and which in the early years yielded great profits, ultimately they gained most from their participation in the carrying trade of the Indian ocean and the China seas. Certain trade or maritime routes were declared a monopoly of the king of Portugal and on these routes no other vessel could ply other than Portuguese ships. When the Dutch appeared in Indian waters the picture had greatly changed. By 1610 the Dutch had established themselves on the coromandal coast where the English Company also opened a factory in the following year. Eventually, with the English hampered for funds and the Portuguese for reinforcements, the tide turned in favour of the Dutch. Owen C. Kail. *The Dutch in India*, *Op.Cit*, pp. 19-21.

12. P.N. Chopra, *The Gazetteer of India*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1973, pp. 358-359.

13. After a number of abortive attempts to develop an East Indian trade the *Companie Des Indes* was formed in 1662 and established a first factory at Surat in 1668 and in following year a *Farman* was obtained from the king of Golkonda permitting to a factory to be established at Masulipatnam with right to trade in his dominions free of import or export duty. C.J. Hamilton. *Trade Relations*, *Op.Cit*, p. 40, also see, P.R. Rao, *History of Modern Andhra*, p. 11.

14. In 1671 a French fleet arrived in India and in 1672. The French forces captured St. Throne from the Muhammadans, who had held possession of it since 1646. Shortly after this the Muhammadan army under the command of a general named Baba Saheb

endeavoured to recover the place. C.D . Maclean. *Manual of the administration.*

Op.Cit. p. 165.

15. H.K. Sherwani and P.M. Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan*, Vol.1, p. 387.

16. C.D . Maclean, *Manual, op.cit*, p. 174

17. In 1693 the Dutch seized Pondicherry and expelled the French garrison and merchants. The present happening badly effected the French at Masulipatnam. George Dunbar, *A History of India*, Delhi, 1987, p.313

18. We made it clear that Pondicherry was only an integral part of the Mughal empire and not an autonomous administrative unit. He demanded a payment of Rs.1,00,000 from the French. Martin could evade it for sometime, but was finally forced to yield. He gave away the stipulated amount of money as a present, and not as a tribute as demanded by Daud Khan. C.D.Maclean, *op.cit.* pp.152-156

19. P.N. Chopra, *The Gazetteer*, Opcit. p.359

