

# Early Settlements of the Europeans and Establishment of English Domination in Madras Presidency

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## Abstract

*The fall of the Vijayanagar kingdom was reverberated the whole of South India in a state of political chaos and consequent economic distress. From 1757 the British had used their control over South India to promote their own interests. But it would be wrong to think that the basic character of their rule remained the same throughout. It passed through several stages in its long history of nearly 200 years. The nature of British rule and imperialism, as also its policies and impact, changed with changing pattern of Britain's own social, economic and political development. To begin with ever before 1757, the English East India Company was interested only in making money. It wanted a monopoly of the trade with India and the East, so that there would be no other English or European merchants or trading companies to compete with it. The Company also did not want the Indian merchants to compete with it for the purchase in India or sale abroad of Indian products.*

**Keywords:** The Portuguese, The Dutch, The Danish, The French, The English, Company, Madras Presidency

## Introduction

The Europeans made their appearance on the Coast of Tamilnadu during the Vijayanagar period. With the advent of the European powers, the first to reach were the Portuguese and they were followed by the Dutch, the Danes, the English and the French. They presented problems because they could expect no single authority to deal with and no order in the land as to permit them to carry on their trade in a peaceful atmosphere. The British adopted various means and strategies in getting favours and privileges from the native powers which resulted in the establishment of several European settlements. Because of favourable factors like cheap labour, enormous availability of commodities and their demand in the international market, the Europeans found themselves actively engaged in an effective trade. This trend led to the extension of British power over other European countries. The design of British extension of power confronted with other local powers. On the conquest of the local powers, they consolidated their power applying the techniques of wars, alliances and diplomacy. Having consolidated their power in the Tamil country, the British framed their administrative policy to suit the existing political condition.

## **The Portuguese**

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Europeans -the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the French established their settlements. Among the various factors which favoured them for brisk trade were Anglo-French rivalry in Europe, abundance of goods and its international demand and inexpensive labour and the political necessity. The renaissance and keen nationalism led to a contest for Company expansion.<sup>2</sup> The ecclesiastical enthusiasm of the Christian missionaries, the invention of the mariners compass and the availability of sailing charts and maps boosted the work of exploration.<sup>3</sup> The publication of Marcopoli's Travelogue provided the Europeans with the needed information about the East and fascinated them to its fabulous wealth.<sup>4</sup> It resulted in the discovery of many sea routes to Asia and the formation of many colonies which ultimately led to the establishment of European settlements and flourishing of trade.

The Portuguese were the pioneers among the Europeans traders in the field of explorations. The geographical discoveries for navigation led to the establishment of companies and trading posts. They were the first modern Europeans to establish settlements and gain political authority in India. Zamorin, the Hindu ruler warmly welcomed Vasco-da-Cama. The exploration of Vasco-da-gama opened new prospects for the Portuguese in pursuit of their political, commercial and proselytizing activities. Thereafter he returned home in 1499.<sup>5</sup> Vasco-da-Gama's fleet for the second time reached Calicut in 1502 and Zamorin again welcomed him. In 1503 Alphonse-de-Albuquerque, Governor of Portuguese sailed towards the East and established Portuguese influence in India. They extended their power in Cochin in 1503 and Goa in 1510 in the West Coast. Albuquerque made Goa his headquarters in India. Its acquisition led to the establishment of settlements along the East Coast at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The European merchants were originally in the position of supplicants before the native rulers in India.

The Portuguese formed a settlement at San Thome near Madras in 1522. To begin with their interest was religious, for they wanted to build church near the place where St. Thomas was believed to have been killed. They founded factories in 1605 at Masulipatnam and at Pulicat in 1610. Afterwards they setup factories at Surat, Chinsura, Quilon and Nagapatnam and few other places.<sup>7</sup> They occupied Nagapattinam and other places by 1658 and gained control of the market and coast. They enjoyed the patronage of the Emperor of Vijayanagar and had a flourishing trade with that Empire till their monopoly was taken over by the Dutch.<sup>8</sup>

The conflicts of the Portuguese with the Nayaks and the Dutch changed their position and their influence began to decline. The forces of Vijayanagar attacked their settlement in the fishery coast. Raghunatha Nayak (1600-1634) of Tanjore undertook an expedition towards the Portuguese in support of the ruler of Jaffna, his ally. Though the expedition ended in failure, the Portuguese lost their influence on Tanjore. Consequently the Dutch occupied Nagapatnam and other settlements in 1658 and brought the East Coast including Tuticorin under their control. These developments caused the decline of the Portuguese sway in the Tamil country and led to the influence of the Dutch and the Danes on the east coast. Emerging as bitter rivals to the Portuguese, the Dutch and the Danes sought their fortunes on the coast. Motivated by commercial considerations, the Dutch challenged the Portuguese sovereignty into alliances with the Asiatic powers. They underwent experiments early in the Tamil country; but were bitter and disappointing. However, they took determined effort and stamped their influence in several regions.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Dutch**

In 1609 the Dutch founded a factory at Pulicat and they made it their stronghold in 1610. They took Nagapatnam from the Portuguese in 1658 and it became their chief settlement on the Coromandal Coast. In 1689 they made Nagapatnam the capital of their empire in India. They

fortified their settlements maintained their finances efficiently and gained large profits.<sup>10</sup> Later on, as they involved in slave trade and hatched plots in the courts, they became unpopular. Owing to the opposition of the British in India and the scope for profitable trade in the East Indies, they slowly withdrew from the Tamil country and moved to the East Indies. In India, they established factories at Surat, Machillipatnam and Petapoli and the other settlements were at Nagapatnam, Bengal, Masulipatnam, Bimilipatnam and Jaganathapuram. In the eighteenth century most of the Dutch settlements had declined due to the rivalry between the French and the English.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Danish**

Flushed by the success of other European traders in the Tamil country, Denmark also founded settlements there. King Christian IV of Denmark sent the Danes to Tanjore in 1620 and Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjore granted the port of Tranquebar (Taran-gambadi) to them. Encouraged by commercial and religious motivations, they indulged in trade and established the Danish Lutheran Mission. Constructing many churches, the mission began to pose threat to the Jesuit Missionary activities. However, when the supply of money and advent of ships from their home country became irregular, the Dutch lost their interest and influence. The Danes thus were not able to prosper in commerce and religion in the Tamil land.<sup>12</sup>

### **The English**

The English were the most fortunate of the European powers that came to this Tamil region. The English East India Company was granted a charter by Queen Elizabeth I on 31 December 1600. By 1612 they had obtained the settlement at Surat from Emperor Jahangir, consequent on their demonstration of superior sea power by defeating the Portuguese of Surat. The Madras settlement was started in 1639 where later on Fort St. George was built. Thereupon the English established a series of settlements all along the Coast as that area provided them with what they demanded.<sup>13</sup>

Negotiations were opened between Thomas Yale, Governor of Fort St. George and Raja Ram, the Maratha ruler of Senji for the acquisition of Tegnapatam (Fort St. David). He liberally paid tribute to the Brahmin minister and received a grant for Fort St. David at Cuddalore.<sup>14</sup> Located beside Pondicherry, this fort evolved into a hopeful settlement. The British exhibited a great interest to erect factories in Tanjore, but gave up the scheme as the local rulers became jealous and European rivalry seemed possible. The British strengthened their trade through their efficient administrative set up which they carried out victoriously in the form of contract between the East India Company and the merchants. They meted out severe punishments to their employees who had no interest in their works and neglected their obligations. They even annulled the licence of the merchants and contractors while found guilty and disloyal to the English East India Company. Under these effective service conditions, the British strengthened their trade. As trade enhanced in volume and profits exceeded, the British developed their political ambitions. The Tamil country underwent certain changes when their commercial policy turned into political.<sup>15</sup>

### **The French**

The French were the last European power to come to the Tamil country, followed by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the English. During the period of Louis XIV of France (1643-1715), his minister Colbert took the initiative for trade with the East through the French East India Company formed in 1664. They founded trading centres at Surat in 1665, at Masulipatnam in 1669, at Pondicherry in 1674 and Chandrangore in 1690. Pondicherry became the headquarters and developed into a prosperous settlement under Francis Martin in 1674.<sup>16</sup>

### **English Company in Madras Presidency**

Like other Europeans, Englishmen also were desirous of getting the things produced in India and the Far East. After their victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, their desire to trade directly began to increase. In September 1599, a resolution was passed under the chairmanship of Lord Mayor to form an association to trade directly with India.<sup>17</sup> The English East India Company emerged from a humble beginning marked by hardship and distress of great magnitude at Home and abroad to a height of opulence and power. The ascending came into existence when Queen Elizabeth on 31 December 1600, granted a Charter to some 220 gentlemen and merchants to engage in trade “as one body corporate and politic by the name of the Governor and Company merchants of London trading to the East Indies”.<sup>18</sup>

In the eighteenth century the Mughal power started to decline and it presented a situation where Indian powers that were adverse to the English East India Company, could take power. In order to protect its interests and profit making the Company needed to fill this power vacuum and expand beyond the traditional activities of a trading market share. Over the time, the responsibilities they assumed resembled a governing power more than a trading company. Originally the Company got concessions from the Mughal Emperors in Delhi and from local Indian rulers to set up a couple of trading settlements along the coast.<sup>19</sup> This arrangement allowed to conduct a lucrative trade and to have Indians to mind their own business and to maintain peaceful access to the exchange of markets for both Indian and British parties. The struggle for supremacy in the Deccan between the English and the French resulted in a number of conflicts till finally Madras became an English dominion, thus marking the turning point both in the history of Madras and that of the British in India. The officials of the British East India Company, who came here as traders, used Madras as a resourceful spring board for the conquest of Bengal which symbolised the conquest of the whole of India.<sup>20</sup>

The Madras Presidency had its beginnings in a few isolated trading settlements along the coast. Trade was their primary and only concern in the early period of their establishments. Since 1608, the English made attempts to secure a foot-hold on the Coromandel Coast. Their attempt to build a factory at Pulicot was defeated by the Dutch who had obtained exclusive rights from the ruler of Carnatic to trade in his dominions. However in 1611, they could establish a factory at Masulipatnam, the chief port of Golkonda. For some years, the factory flourished; but after 1624 declined due to the Dutch rivalry. In 1628 once again the English made it their trade centre. Their position at Masulipatnam was improved by the Sultan of Golkonda in 1632. The firman gave the English freedom of trade in the ports of the kingdom for an annual payment of 500 pagodas. With the acquisition of Madras Presidency, the British strengthened their position by way of revenue and judicial administration.

### **Conclusion**

In the last three decades of the seventeenth century, the English Company had to deal with another European rival, the French East India Company. In 1739 Dumas, the French Governor enlisted the support of Chanda Sahib and compelled king Sahujiof Tanjore to grant Karaikkal to the Company. Till 1742 the Company was mainly concerned with trade. There after it paid attention towards political affairs to expand its fortune. The French involved themselves in wars with the local and other European powers to conquer and occupy the utmost extent of territories. Following the sad failure of political fortune, their commercial decay commenced. Although the French had ventured into the east in the same century, in the beginning they could not make much headway. In the ensuing quadrangular contest for sovereign power in the Tamil country among the European powers, Portugal made a glorious retreat, the Dutch were driven out, the French power was crushed

and only the British emerged victorious. Till the Company established their rule in the Madras Province, they faced several difficulties from their European rivals and local rulers.

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