

Advent of the English East India Company in India and Foundation of Calcutta

Dr. Indra Kumar Mistri

Assistant Professor of History, Birbhum Mahavidyalaya, Birbhum

The geographical discoveries of the last quarter of the fifteenth century deeply affected the commercial relations of the world and produced far-reaching consequences in their history. First of all the Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama found out a new route to India. On the 17th May in 1498 he reached the famous port of Calicut of South India. He received friendly treatment from the Hindu ruler of Calicut bearing the hereditary title of Zamoria, brought the merchants of Portugal, On the 9th March in 1500, Pedro Alvarez Cabral sailed out from Lisbon in command of a fleet of 13 vessels. Also the Portuguese sailor Alfonso de Albuquerque was the real founder of Portuguese power in India. In 1503 he came to India as a commander Portuguese squadron. He was also appointed as Governor of Portuguese affairs in India in 1509. In November, 1510 he captured the port of Goa, then belonging to the Bijapur Sultanate. A number of important Portuguese settlements were gradually established near the sea by the successors of Albuquerque. These were Diu, Daman, Salsette, Bassain, Chaul and Bombay, SanThome near Madras and Hugli in Bengal. Their authority also extended over the major part of Ceylon.

In 1600 A.D. the English East India Company secured a royal charter granting them "the monopoly of commerce in eastern waters". Also in between 1591 and 1593 James Lancaster reached Cape Comorin and Penang; in 1596 a fleet of vessels under Benjamin Wood sailed eastwards; and in 1599 John Mildenhall, a merchant adventurer of London, came to India by the overland route and spent seven years in the East. It was the 31st December, in 1600 that the first important step towards England's commercial prosperity was taken. On that day the East India Company received a charter from Queen Elizabeth granting it the monopoly of eastern trade for fifteen years. The early voyages of the English East India Company were directed to Sumatra, Java and the Moluccas in order to get a share of the spice trade. In 1608 that the first attempt was made to establish factories in India.

In 1608 the English East India Company first attempt was made to establish factories in India. Captain Hawkins the governor of East India Company reached the court of Emperor Jahangir in 1609. He was at first well received by the Mughol Emperor. Hawkins expressed his desire to permit the English to settle at Surat and he had petitioned to the Emperor. But Jahangir refused his petition for the hostile activities of the Portuguese, and the opposition of the Surat merchants. Hawkins left Agra in 1611. In 1613 Jahangir issued Firman permitting the English to a factory permanently at Surat and the English Company sent an accredited ambassador of the king of England, James I, to the Mughul court with a view to a commercial treaty with the Emperor. According to R. C. Majumdar the King James-1 was chosen Sir Thomas Roe, who was "of pregnant understanding, well spoken, learned, industrious, and of a comely personage." Thomas Roe remained constantly at Jahangir's court from the end of 1615 to till the end of 1618. In February 1619, Thomas Roe returned to England then the English East India Company had established factories at Surat, Agra, Ahmadabad and Broach. English factories were also started from Broach Baroda with the object of purchasing at first hand the piece-goods manufactured in the localities and at Agra, in order to sell broad cloth to the

officers of the imperial court and to buy indigo, which was manufactured at Biyana. In 1668 Bombay was transferred to the East India Company by Charles II, who got it from the Portuguese as a part of the dowry of his wife Catherine of Braganza, at an annual rental of 10 pounds. On the east coast of India the East India Company had been started their factories at Hariharpur in the Mahanadi delta and at Balasore in 1633. A factory was established at Hooghly, under Mr. Bridgeman in 1651. There after they were opened at Patna and Cassimbazar. This period they were trade in Bengal silk, cotton piece-goods, saltpetre and sugar. In 1658 all the settlements in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and on the Coromandel Coast.

In 1651 Sultan Shuja the Subadar of Bengal issued a Firman granting to the East India Company to privilege of trading in return for a fixed annual payment of duties worth Rs.3,000. Suja also granted another Nishan in 1656, which its under the English Company be no more troubled with demands of customs for goods imported or exported either by land or by water, nor that their goods be opened and forced from them at under –rates in any places of government by which they shall pass and repass up and down the country, but that they buy and sell freely and without impediment. But the successor of Sultan Shuja did not consider the Nishan. After the company also procured a Firman from the Sultan Shaista khan in 1672. After the Emperor Aurangzeb issued Firman in 1680 ordering that none should molest the Company's people for customs or obstruct their trade, and they should be paid their usual custom 2 percent for their goods and more 1.5 jezia or poll-money.

The English East India Company at last decided to protect them by force, for which they thought it necessary to have a fortified settlement at Hoogly. It was here that the English, under the Governor of English East India Company Job Charnock sought a refuge after their abandonment of the Hoogly factory in 1686. In 1683 the Directors expressed themselves against the view of "our late Agent and some of our captains, that there is no way to mend our condition but by seizing and fortifying one of those pleasant island in the Ganges about the Braces." They despatched a fleet of six ships and three frigates, under Nicholson, with orders to take on board all their officers in Bengal, send an ultimatum to the Nawab, and if he failed to give a satisfactory answer, seize Chittagong, which was to be fortified and placed under Charnock as governor. After some reinforcements from Madras, brought up the strength of the forces under Charnock to 400 men. Hostilities broke out on the 28th October 1686, and Charnock soon realized that with such a small command, and such a distance from the sea. He also could not hold out against the overwhelming army which the Mughals could bring up. Accordingly after some fruitless negotiations, he embarked his forces on the 20th December 1686, and dropping down the Hooghly sought refuge at Sutanuti. In the January, 1687 he created some hovels on the river bank of Sutanuti, even hoped for permission to build a factory, and got the length of signing twelve articles with the Viceroy's agent, which confirmed the previous grants of trade to the English, customs free. But in February, the swamps having shrunk to their cold weather dimensions, the viceroy put an end to parleys by sending an army to crash the new settlement. The English had again to take to their ships and seek refuge seventy miles further down the river, where, amid the tidal flats and creeks of Hijili, its waters merge into the sea. On the way they stormed and took the fort of Tanna, which was near the present Botanical Gardens.

In September 1687, Job Charnock again came to Sutanuti and set to work to make a permanent settlement there. According to Hedges Diary "Charnock again opened negotiations for leave to build a factory and meanwhile huddled the remnant of his troops on the high eastern bank. For a

year he laboured at the double task of buying a permit from the viceroy and creating a factory in anticipation of it. With infinite labour and endurance of misery, through the hot weather and drenching rains 1688, he threw up a rough shelter for his ague-stricken followers, and began some poor defensive works to him arrived on September 20, 1688. Captain Heath, reproachful despatch from the directors, and orders to put the whole survivors on board ship and to sail for the conquest of Chittagong. The expedition sailed in November 1688, but was a lamentable failure. Nothing was done at Chittagong, and the fleet sailed back to Madras, where Charnock ate out his heart for fifteen weary months.

In February, 1690, the Emperor granted the English a new license for trade and the Viceroy of Bengal issued a permit authorizing them to return to Bengal, while in return for the payment of Rs. 3,000 Charnock received a guarantee that their trade should be free and exempt from local exactions. Charnock and his refugees at Madras made their way through the monsoon tempests of 1690 to the Hooghly River. At length on Sunday, August 24, 1690, at noon, the weather-beaten band anchored for the third time in the long pool of Calcutta. With a poor guard of 30 soldiers all told, they scrambled up the steep mud banks, which was thenceforward without a break to grow into the British capital of India. They found the place in a deplorable condition, nothing being left for our present accommodation, and the rain falling day and night. Charnock's own fellow-servants, huddled together on the malarias river bank, almost mutinied for a return to their houses and gardens in Hooghly town. But the old man new that the Company's goods never be safe so far beyond the guns of its sea-going ships. He had had enough of fenceless factories, and he resolved to create for his masters a stronghold which should be a surer guarantee than any Firman, even if he perished in the attempt. He perished, but not until by two more years of endurance he had he had founded Calcutta.

Throughout the pitiless monsoon months of 1690, Charnock struggled on, erecting such shelter as he could with mud walls and thatched till we can get ground whereon to build a factory. In the scorching summer of 1691, we still find him and his desponding followers dwelling in only tents huts and boats. It is no wonder that the weaker brethren continued to clamour for their profitable, easy hold habitations in Hooghly town. Nor it is surprising that Charnock sent home an incomplete cargo that year for which the superior Council, amid the comfort and plenty of Madras. Yet Calcutta grew. Its deep pool attracted the trade from the Dutch and French settlements higher up the river and Armenians began to flock to a place where they felt safe. But the fever haunted swamps which stretched behind the river bank exacted a terrible price for its prosperity. The name Calcutta was identified with Golgotha, the place of skulls. Within a decade after Charnock finally landed on the deserted river bank in 1690. It had become a busy mart with 1200 English inhabitants.

The English India Company succeeded in procuring a Firman from the Emperor by virtue of which they established a factory of Sutanuti on 24 August, 1690. The city of Calcutta grew out of these sleepy fishing villages of Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Calcutta. Which are purchased in 1698. In 1691 the Company acquired the zamindari rights of these trading villages. Company's briskly trade grew up around the factory in these villages. The trade in Bengal so large and profitable that a separate administrative centre had to be opened at Calcutta to regulate the vast volume of trade. In 1696 occurred the rebellion of Sova Singh a Zamindar of Chandrokona. It caused great panic and as a measure of security the English were permitted to fortified their new factory was named Fort William after king William III of England, it

become the seat of a presidency under a president and council. In 1698 the English East India Company obtained from Prince Azim-ush-shan, grandson of Aurangzeb, who had become Nawab of Bengal permission to purchase from their existing holders the right of renting the three villages of Calcutta, Gobindapur and Sutanuti. For this concession they paid the Prince Rs. 16000, and there by acquired a definite status as zamindar of the three villages, for which they paid an annual revenue of Rs.12000. they followed this up by an embassy to the Emperor Farrukhsiyar's court at Delhi, procure the recognition of their rights and permission to purchase property on the bank of the river Hooghly. The purchase of the Zamindari of Calcutta, Sutanuti and Gobindapur in 1698 by the East India Company ensured to it definite revenue which was regarded by Sir Josiah Child as the foundation of power. The mortality of the of the pioneer settlers is not be wondered at when it is remembered that the only place on which they could build their houses was a narrow strip of land on the river bank and that inland stretched a swampy jungle and brackish lagoons. It has before now been pointed out that the place seemed marked out by nature as unfit for human habitation. According to Marshman Job Charnock selected perhaps the unhealthiest site on the whole river. The Salt Water Lake on the east left masses of dead, putrid fish as the water receded in the dry season, while a dense jungle ran up to where Government House stands. The new settlement was situated about 160 miles from the sea. The south wind the only mitigation of the fierce tropical heat which prevails from the end of March to October blows over salt marshes and steaming rice lands on its way to the city. On 30th September 1737 a cyclone burst on the Calcutta then Calcutta 'looked like a place that had been bombarded by an enemy.' Great damage was done to the shipping. All the boats and small craft were destroyed. According to C. R. Wilson "the laid the whole black town throughout the Honourable Company's bounds, in so much that hardly 20 thatched houses were standing next day." It's almost uniform dead level with depressions lying below the level of high water in springs tides, renders it difficult to drain properly. While the soil on which the town is built possesses every quality which the site of human habitation ought not to possess.

The English East India Company consolidated their position in India by defeating the Portuguese in two naval encounters in 1612 and 1614. After defeating the Portuguese English East India Company was granted the permission to open factories in Surat, Ahmedabad and Broach. In 1615, Sir Thomas Roe received an imperial Farman to trade to trade and establishes factories anywhere in Mughal India. Because Roe was a physician and he succeeded in curing the Emperor Jahangir of a painful disease, and he being thus pleased with the English East India Company issued Farman. Roe's mission also indeed marked the beginning of a new era in History of the East India Company in India. After these one hundred years the English East India Company's trade was expanded in India. In between this period the volume of Company's import and export from Calcutta increased rapidly. By 1698 the Company had also acquired the zamindari of the villages –Sutanuti, Calcutta and Gobindapur. In spite of the period, this only created occasional, but not very serious, hindrances for it and were easily overcome. The most important event in the history of the Company during this period was its embassy to the Mughal court in 1715, sent with a view to securing privileges the throughout Mughal India and some villages round Calcutta. To gain certain additional concessions John Surman was sent in 1715 to Delhi to negotiate with Farruk Siyar the then Mughal Emperor. William Hamilton succeeded in curing the Emperor Farruk Siyar of a painful disease and he being thus pleased with the English issued Firman complying with their request and directed the governors of the provinces to observe them. The privilege enjoyed by the English of trading in Bengal, free of all duties, subject to the annual payment of Rs.3000 per annum was confirmed.

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