



A STUDY ON ADVENT OF EUROPEANS TO INDIA- A HISTORICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British all came to India at various periods of history. Some in search of new lands, some in search of trade and commerce and some to lay the foundations of an empire., Their major attraction was however for long remained the exotic spices that only India grew in abundance. For centuries each of these European powers had commercial relations with the countries of the East from time immemorial. But from 7th century A.D India's sea –borne trade passed into the hands of the Arabs, who began to dominate the Indian Ocean and the Red sea. Several factors led to the discovery of the sea-route to India by the European navigators.

The fifteenth century Renaissance and Reformation engendered a spirit of adventure and enterprise in European minds. This new spirit also manifested itself in new geographical discoveries and sailors undertook perilous voyages across high seas to discover unknown lands. The sailors of Spain and Portugal, being patronized by their kings, took the initiative in discovering a sea route to India.

Key Words: The Portuguese, The Dutch, Europeans adventure and European navigators.

THE PORTUGUESE

The Portuguese came to India primarily for trade. Simultaneously, they aimed at establishing their colonial empire and spreading Christian faith. They were confronted with powerful opposition from the Arab traders, who established themselves on the west coast of India. The muslim rulers of Egypt, Persia and Arabia made common cause to check the rising power of the Portuguese in the East. The Sultans of Bijapur, in South India and other Mohammedan rulers were also determined to stem the rulers tide of Portuguese expansion but the Rayas of Vijayanagara had a soft corner for the Portuguese and maintained cordial relations with them.

The arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar coast on western part of India constituted an important epoch in the history of India and other Oriental nations. Following that event, European commercial, economic and political interests found their way to the different countries of the east, subordinating their institutions, ideas, economy, culture, political system and practices, in short the whole way of life of people, to the needs and claims of each maritime power.

The Portuguese kings of the 15th century looked with envy on the riches of Venice, and eagerly desired to obtain a share in her profitable trade. Prince Henry of Portugal (1393-1460) encouraged the countrymen to take up the adventurous life of exploring the unknown regions in the world. He devoted his life to the discovery of a direct sea- route from Portugal to India and when he died in 1460, his adventurous captains had succeeded in passing rivers Senegal on the west coast of Africa. But much further effort was needed before the circum navigation of Africa, which could be accomplished. Ultimately, the feat was performed by Bartholomew Diaz de Novaes, who was driven by storms considerably to the south of the cape, and made land, half way between the Cape of Good Hope and Port Elizabeth in 1494 A.D. Foreigners could enter into India mainly through two routes—the well known land route across the northwest frontier and the sea-route, on the West Coast. The Muslims from Ghazni and Ghur, Samarqand and Kabul invaded this country through the land-route. The Mughul Empire took to maintain a large standing army to buttress its Authority; but it failed to realise the importance of guarding the sea-coast by building a strong navy, which, among the Indian powers of modern times, the Marathas alone tried to do. Evidently the Mughuls did not aspire to rule the sea, across which came to India the European trading nations, who ultimately gave a new turn to the history of this land.

India had commercial relations with the countries of the West from time immemorial. But from the seventh century A.D. her sea-borne trade passed into the hands of the Arabs, who began to dominate the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. It was from them that the enterprising merchants of Venice and Genoa purchased Indian goods. The geographical discoveries of the last quarter of the fifteenth century deeply affected the commercial relations of the different countries of the world and produced far reaching consequences in their history. Bartholomew Diaz doubled the Cape of Good Hope, or the Stormy Cape, as he called it, in 1487; and Vasco da Gama found out a new route to India and reached the famous port of Calicut on the 17th May, 1498. ” Perhaps no

event during the Middle Ages had such far-reaching repercussions on the civilized world as the opening of the sea-route to India.”

The Portuguese



Vasco-da-Gama

The discoveries of Vasco da Gama, who received friendly treatment from the Hindu ruler of Calicut bearing the hereditary title of Zamorin, brought the merchants of Portugal, who had always coveted the advantages of eastern trade, into direct maritime touch with India and opened the way for their commercial relations with her. On the 9th March, 1500, Pedro Alvarez Cabral sailed out from Lisbon to India in command of a fleet of thirteen vessels. But the Portuguese, instead of confining themselves within the limits of legitimate trade, became unduly ambitious to establish their supremacy in the eastern seas by forcibly depriving the merchants of other nations of the benefits of their commerce, and molesting them. This inevitably brought them into hostilities with the ruler of Calicut, whose prosperity was largely dependent on Arab merchants. The Portuguese on their side began to take part in the political intrigues among the States of Peninsular Indian and entered into alliances with the enemies of the ruler of Calicut, the chief of whom was the ruler of Cochin.



Alfanzo-de-Albuquerque

It was Alfonso de Albuquerque who laid the real foundation of Portuguese power in India. He first came to India in 1503 as the commander of a squadron, and the record of his naval activities being satisfactory, was appointed Governor of Portuguese affairs in India in 1509. In November, 1510, he captured the rich port of Goa, then belonging to the Bijapur Sultanate, and during his rule did his best to strengthen the fortifications of the city and increase its commercial importance. With a view to securing a permanent Portuguese population, he encouraged his fellow-countrymen to marry Indian wives; but one serious drawback to his policy was his bitter persecution of the Muslims. The interests of the Portuguese were, however, faithfully served by him, and when he died in 1515 they were left as the strongest naval-power in India with domination over the west coast.

A number of important Portuguese settlements were gradually established near the sea by the successors of Albuquerque. These were Diu, Daman, Salsette, Bassein, Chaul and Bombay, San Thome near Madras and Hugli in Bengal. Their Authority also extended over the major part of Ceylon. But in course of time they lost most of these places with the exception of Diu, Daman and Goa, which they retained until 1961. We have already noted how Qasim Khan captured

Hugli during the reign of Shah Jahan, and the Marathas captured Salsette and Bassein in A.D. 1739.

Though the earliest “intruder into the East”, the Portuguese lost their influence in the sphere of Indian trade by the eighteenth century. Many of them took to robbery and piracy, though a few adopted more honorable careers. Several causes led to their decline. Firstly, their religious intolerance provoked the hostility of the Indian powers, which became too strong for them to overcome. Secondly, their clandestine practices in trade ultimately went against them. Thirdly, the discovery of Brazil drew the colonizing activities of Portugal to the West. Lastly, they failed to compete successfully with the other European Companies, who had come in their wake. These were jealous of the prosperity of Portugal due to her eastern trade and would not accept her policy of exclusion and extravagant claims, though these were based on priority of occupation and a Papal Bull.



In A.D. 1600 the English East India Company secured a royal charter granting them “the monopoly of commerce in eastern waters”. The United East India Company of the Netherlands was incorporated for trading in the East by a charter granted by the Dutch States General on the 20th March, 1602, which also empowered the said Company to make war, conclude treaties, acquire territories and build fortresses. It was thus “made a great instrument of war and conquest”. The Danes came in A.D. 1616. The French East India Company, sponsored by the famous French statesman Colbert and formed under State patronage in A.D. 1664, was destined to have an important career in the East. The Ostend Company, organized by the merchants of Flanders and formally chartered in A.D. 1722, had but a brief career in India. A Swedish East India Company was formed in A.D. 1731, but its trade was confined almost exclusively to China. A bitter contest among these trading companies was inevitable, as the object of their ambition was the same. Their designs of territorial expansion increased the bitterness of their commercial rivalry. There was a triangular contest during the first half of the seventeenth century—between the Portuguese and the Dutch, between the Portuguese and the English, and between the Dutch and the English. The Dutch opposition to the growth of English influence in India finally collapsed owing to the former’s defeat at the battle of Bedara (Biderra) in A.D. 1759, but the Anglo-French hostility that had begun in the meanwhile continued throughout the eighteenth century.

The Dutch

With a view to getting direct access to the spice markets in South East Asia, the Dutch undertook several voyages from 1596 and eventually formed the Dutch East India Company in 1602.

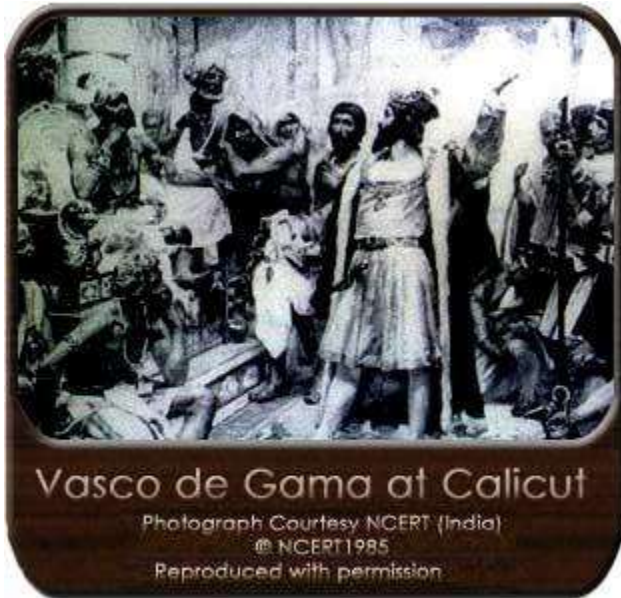
In 1605 the Dutch captured Amboyna from the Portuguese and gradually established their influence at the cost of the latter in the Spice Islands. They conquered Jacatra and established Batavia on its ruins in 1619, blockaded Goa in 1639, captured Malacca in 1641 and got possession of the last Portuguese settlement in Ceylon in 1658. The Dutch came to the islands of

Sumatra, Java and the Moluccas, attracted by the lucrative trade in pepper and spices, with which those Islands abounded, so that “the Archipelago was not only the strategic and administrative centre of their system, it was also their economic centre.”

British India - Advent of the Europeans

India's trade relations with European countries goes back all the way to the days of the Greeks. There was a thriving trade between the two countries along a number of routes. However there existed some monopolies. The Arabs controlled the goods on their way to Asia and the Italians controlled the goods en-route to Europe. Although there were so many middlemen in this trade, it still remained remarkably profitable.

The western European nations noticed this and were keen to get into the trade business. However, attempting to break the existing monopolies of the Arabs and the Italians proved to be very difficult. They began to search for another route to the spice islands of India and Indonesia. In 1492 Columbus set out to discover India but ended up discovering America instead. In 1498 Vasco da Gama of Portugal discovered a new route to India. He landed at Calicut and the goods

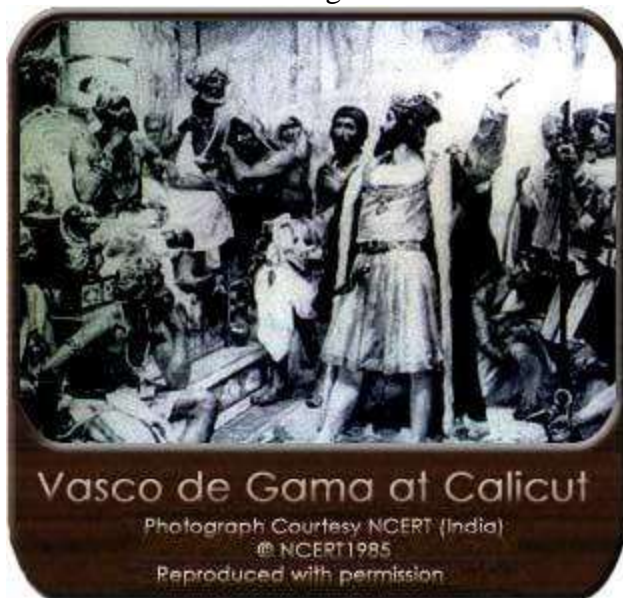


he took back with him were sold for sixty times the cost of the trip. These kinds of profits were absolutely fabulous and the English too were keen to gain a foothold in this lucrative trade. The Dutch meanwhile had established a base in India as well as monopolized trade to Indonesia. A couple of English merchants got together and formed a company called Merchant Adventures later to become better known as the English East India Company. They received a royal charter from Queen Elizabeth in 1600 to trade in the east. They set up a trading depot in 1608 and obtained Royal favours from the Mughal emperor Jehangir. They were then given permissions to open various trading depots along the west coast. In 1615 they succeeded in getting a farman which allowed them to trade

within the entire Mughal Empire. The Portuguese eventually ceased to be a power in India and the English made a deal with the Dutch, whereby the English would not interfere in Indonesia and the Dutch would stay out of India. The English East Indian Company was now the supreme foreign trading power in India

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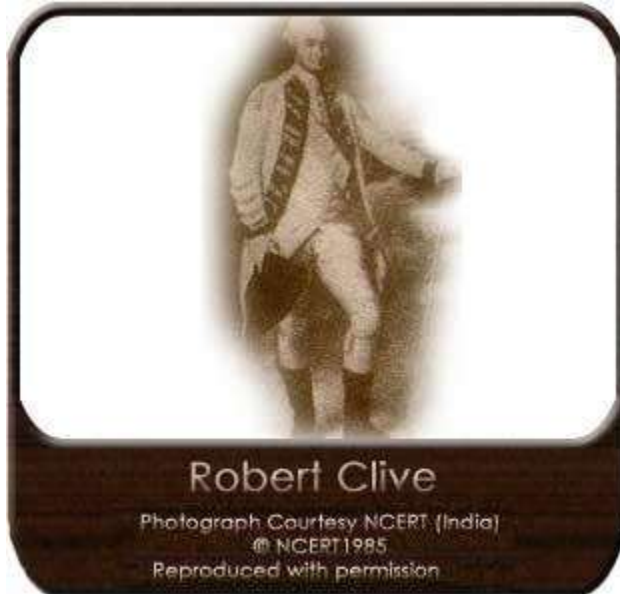
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The English East India Company had begun very humbly in India with a few factories. However, they always combined trade with diplomacy and actively worked to get favours from local rulers to give themselves an advantage. South India became a convenient base for them as they did not have to face a strong government. The Vijaynagar kingdom had splintered into many small petty kingdoms which were easy to overpower. They leased Madras which became the centre of their activities. They decided to fortify it but cleverly billed the expenses to the local residents on the pretext of protecting Madras from attacks from other kingdoms or the Dutch. They had acquired



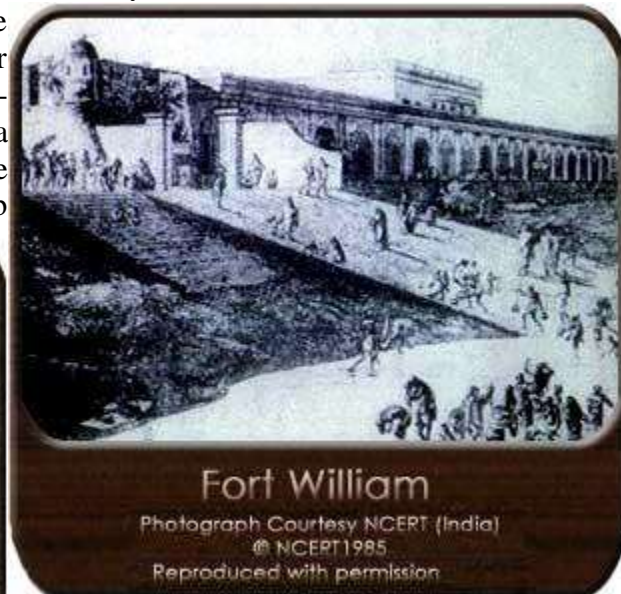
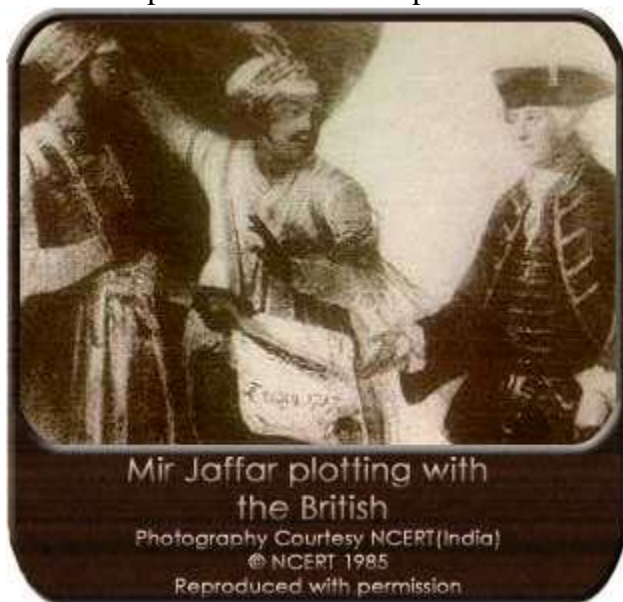
Bombay from the Portuguese and they fortified it as well. In Bombay they found a good and easy to defend port. Bombay soon became the western headquarters of the company. In 1651 they were given permission to trade in Bengal and dreamed of controlling it one day. They began seriously contemplating political power as this would give them a way to compel the Mughals to do their bidding. Hostilities broke out in 1686 between the Mughals and the



British. The English East India Company had underestimated the strength of the Mughal Empire and were defeated comprehensively in the war that followed and were forced to abandon their factories in Bengal. Their factories across the country were attacked. They realized that they could not take on the Mughal Empire yet. The English East India Company humbly begged for pardon which they got from the Mughals. The Mughals had no way of knowing that these harmless looking English traders would one day become the rulers of India.

The salaries were meagre but they were allowed to carry on private trade which was extremely profitable efforts were revived. It was not possible to penetrate either the West or the East as they had strong rulers. The South, however, presented a favourable place for foreign intruders to try their luck. The English East India Company faced competition from the French who had now established Bengal. Matters heated up when Siraj-ud-Daulah succeeded his grandfather, the ruler. He demanded that the English trade fairly and not have an undue advantage over Indian merchants. The English fresh from their victories over the French staunchly refused to listen to him. He then ordered the French and English merchants to de-fortify their possessions in Bengal

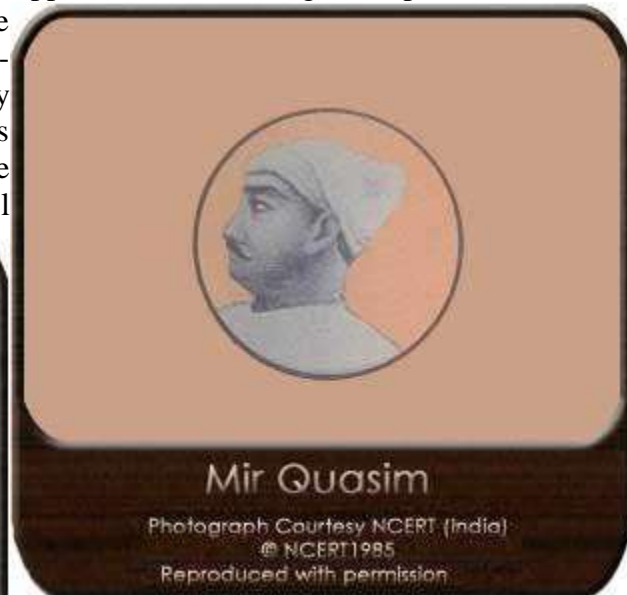
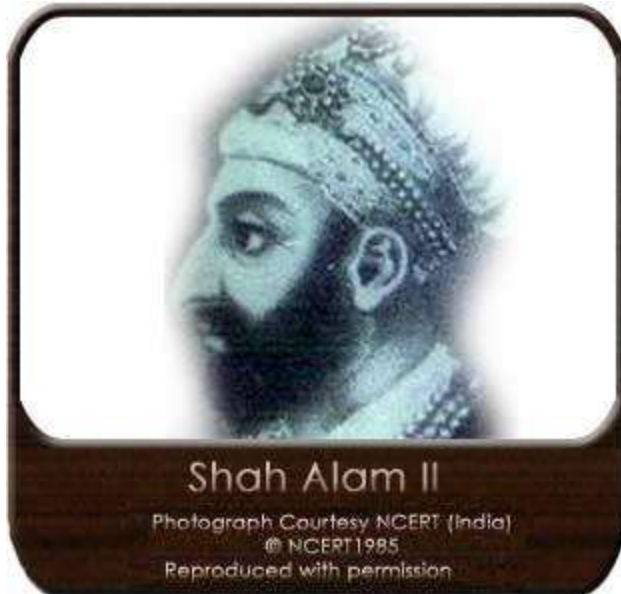
and quit fighting each other. The French complied with this order but the English refused to. Siraj-ud-Daulah invaded the English forts and comfortably defeated them. He then went back to Calcutta to celebrate the easy victory while the English escaped on their ships. Safe due to their naval superiority they waited for reinforcements. Meanwhile they started a campaign of treachery in the courts of the Nawab. A plan was made to replace the Nawab



with a man called Mir Jaffar, who happened to be the commander of the Nawab's army. They forced the Nawab into a war which was more or less a formality as only a handful of his soldiers actually fought since the rest were controlled by Mir Jaffar who had already made a deal with the British. The nawab lost and was killed, and Mir

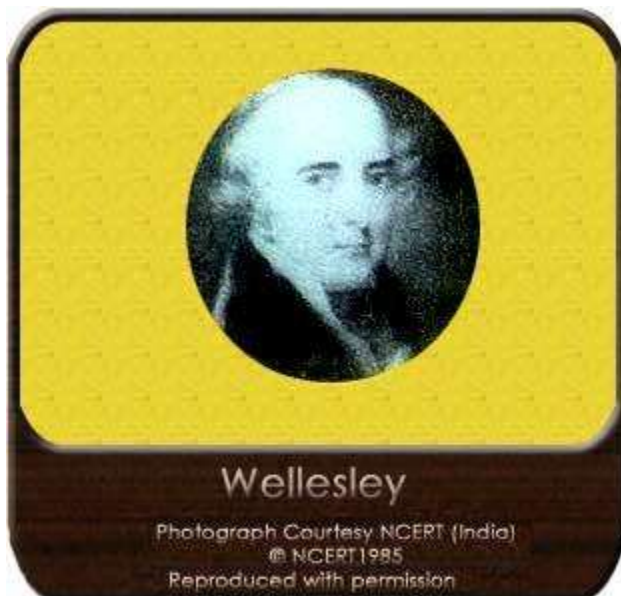
Jaffar was put on the throne.

The English now began to extort money and favours out of their puppet and soon the wealth of Bengal was being ruthlessly plundered. Mir Jaffar was finding it impossible to keep up with their demands. Eventually they forced him to abdicate in favour of Mir Quasim. Mir Quasim granted the British some favours upon getting appointed but his long term plans were to rid himself of the British. He began to improve the efficiency of revenue collection and re-organized the army. The British were totally against this and defeated Mir Quasim in series of wars. He fled and made an alliance with the Nawab of Awadh and the fugitive Mughal



emperor. Their combined forces fought at Buxar and the English defeated them comprehensively. This battle established the British as the supreme power in Bengal as well as a strong candidate to fill the vacuum of the Ruler of India, left open after the decline of the Mughals. The foundations for their empire had been laid.

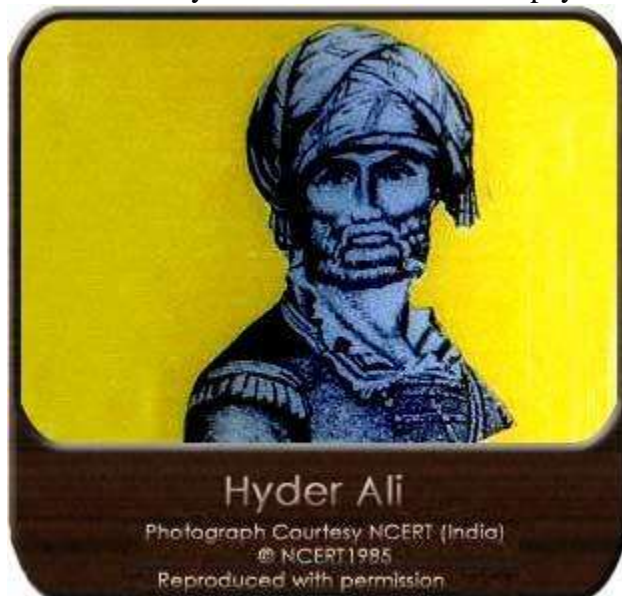
The conquest of Bengal was an important turning point, for the British now controlled one of the richest provinces in the world. With the tremendous wealth of Bengal at their disposal, and a puppet king made to saddle all responsibility, the British now were the most well positioned foreign power in India, and soon were able to drive their European competitors out of India. In addition the British used the massive wealth of Bengal to extend their territories. Such was the wealth of Bengal, that a large number of English East India Company officials became millionaires because of the 'gifts' that the Nawab would bestow upon them.



The British would use clever expansionist policies in order to conquer the country. The most ingenious and successful one was the subsidiary alliance. The brainchild of Lord Wellesley, that enabled the British to conquer the country at a relatively smaller financial cost. The Subsidiary alliance was offered to Indian states as a kind of alliance treaty, but actually the ruler was signing away his sovereignty. The important clauses of the treaty were:

- Mandatory stationing of British troops in his kingdom, for which he had to pay an annual fee
- Stationing of a British resident in his court
- Could not employ any other European without the prior approval of the British
- Could not enter into any negotiations with any Indian or foreign king without consulting the British
- That they would recognize the British as the paramount power in India .

The British in return agreed to protect the state from outside attacks, though it cleverly added a clause whereby the state would have to pay for the forces sent to its aid. As seen in the clauses above, an Indian king effectively lost his sovereignty. He now had little control over crucial matters of the state like defence and foreign relations. The high fee the British charged for maintaining their troops was a massive drain on the treasury and most rulers had to disband their armies (thereby reducing any scope of becoming independent) or cede parts of their territories to the British. From the British point of view, the treaty was an absolute



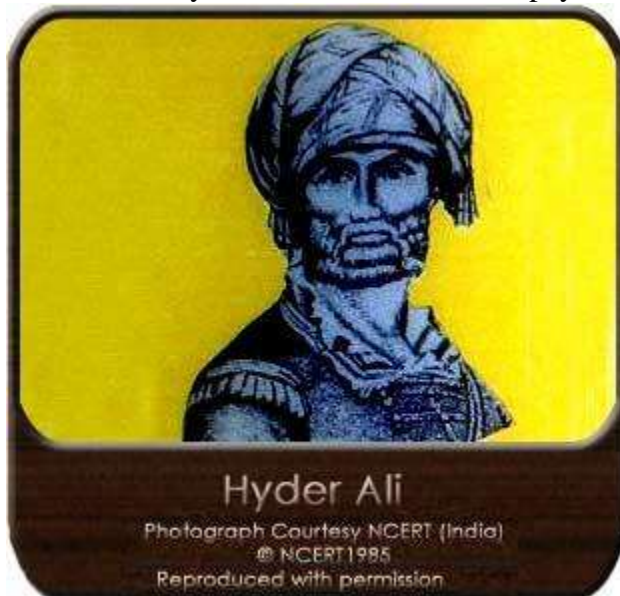
brilliant idea. Not only did they have political influence over the various 'allies', they also now had a large army maintained at the cost of the Indian kings. This army would prove invaluable in conquering the regions of the country where their Subsidiary alliance did not work. A combination of the Subsidiary alliance and military conquests brought most of India under the control of the British. They then implemented another set of plans, which would be used to bring most of the states under their direct control. In some cases they were able to do this by outright annexation, while for the other cases they implemented different tactics. One such tactic was the Doctrine of Lapse, whereby a kingdom would cede to the British if the king died without leaving a natural heir, or an adopted one approved by the British. In a number of states such a situation came up and the British were



able to take over them. In a few states, the British simply annexed it under the pretext that they were liberating the state from the cruel rule of the king. In reality, however, while many Indian kings were not very able rulers, the British were also partly to blame for they had played a key role in undermining their power by encouraging treachery and intrigue in their kingdoms. The only possible challengers to the British rule, the Marathas were hopelessly divided, and the British were eventually able to conquer them as well. In the south, the Sultan of Mysore Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan made a valiant attempt to maintain their independence, but they were defeated after a series of battles. The British ultimately eliminated all their opponents and emerged as the undisputed rulers of India.

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Conclusion

To conclude the advent of the Europeans in India, it enhanced its foreign trade which brought large economic profit to the Indians. The trade was also much favourable to India that the British had to impose heavy custom duties on Indian goods, particularly on cotton textile to check their imports. The same was the case with other countries. The Europeans opened markets for Indian goods, which were much in favour of India so much so that the later period of the 17th century and the early period of the 18th century, was regarded as the “Golden period” of Indian maritime trade with Europe. Thus the advent of the Europeans was mainly for the purpose of trade, but taking advantage of the weakness of the Indian people they established their empire.

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