Modern Indian History

Unit – I: An Era of Power Struggle

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3.1 Introduction

In 1498, when Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, arrived at Calicut on the south-western coast of India, he had discovered a new (all-sea) trade route, around Africa via Cape of Good Hope, to India. It was the culmination of efforts, which began in Europe, to search a new and all-sea trading route to India. It was precisely in this endeavor to search a new trading route to India that Christopher Columbus, a Spanish explorer, reached and discovered America in 1492. But you may now ask: why did the European nations, especially Portugal and Spain, embark on a journey to search all new trading routes to India?

3.2 Need for New Trading Routes

In popular western imagination, India was a fabled land of riches and of highly profitable trade. Many foreign rulers had invaded India for its fabulous wealth. Besides the plundering raids, a highly profitable trade between India and European countries dated back to the ancient times.

Since the days of the Roman Empire Indian cloths, spices and drugs were in great demand in Europe. Initially, this trade between East and West was carried on along several routes but in beginning of the late fourteenth century a number of changes in the geopolitical conditions in West Asia and Europe forced the traders to search for new routes. Now let’s look at the changes or causes which brought the search for new trading routes.

Geographical Causes

Unstable Land Route: In the Middle ages (5th century CE to 15th century CE) the land route from the Middle East to Europe was preferred by the traders but with the rise of Arabs in the tenth century and their plundering raids along the route, the land route became unstable and dangerous for trade.

Safe Passage through Water: While the land with a number of passes fell within the territory of one or the other kingdom, the oceans and seas had not yet been brought under control and thus offered a safe passage.

Technological Advancement

Navigation: The period witnessed a number of technological advancements. The advancements in navigation (astrolabe for fixing the height of heavenly bodies for navigation and mariner’s compass) by the Arabs and ship building by the Europeans at a time when land route had become unstable made waterways a natural choice.

Use of Gunpowder: By the end of thirteenth century gunpowder, which was invented in China in the ninth century, spread to Eurasia. As sea voyages gained popularity in the fifteenth century, canons and gunpowder began to be used on ships to protect them from attacks. The use of gunpowder made ships safe from attacks as it added more firepower, was easier to carry, was more stable and helped in making of most destructive weapons of the time.
Political Causes

**Monopolies:** The merchants of Venice and Genoa monopolized the trade between Asia and Europe. The western side, i.e. the Mediterranean area, was under the merchants of Venice and Genoa and eastern side, i.e. the Asian side, was under the Arab merchants. These merchants did not allow new merchants from other West European countries to trade through the old routes under their control.

**Ottoman Empire:** The Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 and established the Ottoman Empire in the area stretching from Syria to Egypt. This brought the old routes under the Turkish control. Moreover, expansion of Turkish power in eastern Europe and growth of Turkish navy alarmed the Europeans.

**Rise of New Nation States:** The latter part of the 15th century saw rise of centralised states with strong kings, like Spain and Portugal, who were keen to partake in trade with Asia. The Kings encouraged, often supported and sponsored geographical explorations and navigators.

Economic Causes

**Economic Growth in Europe:** The European economy was expanding rapidly due to expansion of land under cultivation, introduction of improved plough and scientific rotation of crops. As a result of this growth, there was rise of towns and an increase in trade.

**Demand for Spices and Pepper:** The economic revival in Europe increased demand for spices and pepper which were needed to make meat palatable.

**Tolls and Taxes:** The tolls and taxes were constantly increased on both the European as well as the Asian side of the trade, which reduced the profit margins.

**Profit Maximization:** Although the trade between Asia and Europe was carried on along several routes, yet it was highly profitable. However, raids along the land route and monopolies by various groups had been reducing the profits. Thus, there was attempt to maximize profit through new trade routes.
Psychological Causes

Renaissance: The cultural revival or Renaissance in Europe during the fourteenth century infused a spirit of daring and adventure among the people of Western Europe.

Glory: Above all the desire to achieve glory acted as inspiring factor for navigators and explorers.

Mercantilism: A set of economic doctrines and policies involving state intervention to promote national prosperity and strength known as mercantilism had gripped the European states in its clutches.

Religious Causes

Proselytizing Zeal: The explorers were motivated by zeal to spread Christianity into the new lands.

3.3 The Portuguese

Vasco da Gama, who reached Calicut in 1498, returned with a cargo, which sold for sixty times the cost of his entire expedition. After this, direct trade between India and Portugal grew, albeit slowly. In 1510, Albuquerque captured Goa from Bijapur. Hereafter, the Portuguese established trading settlements at Cochin and Daman and Diu. The Portuguese established their domination over the entire Asian coast from Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to Malacca in Malaya. They almost monopolized the highly profitable Eastern trade for nearly a century.

Portuguese Rise in India

Early Mover Advantage: Being the first in India they established their supremacy over the Malabar Coast. With Goa, Daman and Diu and Cochin under their belt, it took less than fifteen years for them to completely destroy the Arab supremacy of trade over the Indian coast.

Spanish Renouncing of Interest in East: The Spanish king Charles V renounced interests in the Indian ocean area giving Portuguese a monopoly in Eastern maritime empire.

Short Sightedness of Mughals: Another reason for the rise of the Portuguese in India is that they did not have to face the might of the Mughals as the Mughal empire was still in its formative stage. Moreover, when the Mughal empire was established they were not interested in developing the navy as their territories were not adjacent to coastal areas and they were not keen happenings in south India.

Naval Supremacy: The Portuguese navy controlled the sea with the help of its superior navigational technology and arms especially with the help of gunpowder.

Strategic Presence: Conquest of Goa, strategically located on the west coast of India, by Albuquerque in 1510, allowed the Portuguese to command and control Malabar trade and keep an eye on the policies of the rulers in the Deccan.

Cartaz System: The Portuguese rise in India could also be attributed to the Cartaz system - a system of license or pass for ships sailing to a destination not reserved by the Portuguese.

Portuguese Decline in India

Political Causes

Attachment to Spain: In 1580, Portugal got attached to the Spanish crown which linked it to the declining fortunes of Spain.

Aristocratic Dominance: The Portuguese society was dominated by aristocrats. The merchants lacked the social influence required to mould the state policy suitable to their interests.

Lack of Political Will: The Portuguese political masters were mainly concerned with establishing sea trading posts and not concerned in territorial expansion thus making them vulnerable to attacks on their trading posts.

Social Causes

Religious Conversions: The Portuguese were religious fanatics and resorted to forceful religious conversions in their spheres of influence. This led to a general sense of hostility among the locals against them.

Technological Causes

Rise of other Naval Powers: Rise of other naval powers like the Dutch and British increased the competition on the naval routes leading to armed conflicts with the Portuguese.

Loss of Spain’s Naval Supremacy: In 1588 Spain’s naval supremacy was challenged and busted by the British navy. This was a big jolt to Portuguese empire which had been attached to the Spanish empire.
Conclusion
With all these developments, the Portuguese were reduced in their sphere of influence to Daman, Diu, Goa, East Africa and Timor. In a way the Portuguese became the victims of their early mover advantage as they kept on establishing only trading ports and did not make any significant territorial expansion to protect their interest.

3.3 The Dutch
After the vacuum created by the fall of Portuguese in the East the Dutch took the charge of these territories. The Dutch had been steadily adding to their commercial and naval superiority in the sixteenth century by transporting goods brought to Lisbon by the Portuguese.

Dutch Rise in India

These ships helped in reducing its operating cost. Eventually these ships proved to be superior to the bulkier and slower Portuguese ships.

Indian Cloth Trade: The Dutch, who initially had interests in the spices trade in the Indonesian archipelago and Spice Islands, soon realised the importance and necessity of Indian cloths in trade with South-East Asia where they were in good demand.

Factories at Malabar and in Ceylon: Dutch factories in Malabar and their Cinnamon trade with Ceylon struck decisive blows to the Portuguese control of Goa. This presence also helped in blocking Goa in the trading seasons.

Dutch Decline in India
Agreement between Dutch and British: The exchange of Dutch EIC’s Indian holdings with that of the Indonesian holdings of British EIC in 1667 in an attempt to settle the intermittent conflicts between the two trading companies, left India to the British EIC.

Interests in Spice Trade: The Dutch main interest did not lay in India, but in the spice trade with Indonesian Islands. Thus, they failed to foresee the fortunes India held.

Corruption: With the declining fortunes of Dutch EIC in India due to continuous confrontations with British EIC, the Dutch EIC officials colluded with British EIC officials for safe passage. This made the Dutch EIC possessions weak in India and ultimately led to Dutch moving out from India.

Steady Increase in British Influence: The steady increase in British influence as a result of the privileges received by it, enabled it to establish hold
over trade in indigo, silk, among other items which resulted in decline of Dutch fortunes.

**Naval Setback:** With the failure of the Hugli expedition in 1759, the Dutch naval power received a severe setback.

### 3.4 The French

The French East India Company (EIC) was established in 1664. Though last to enter, the French gained considerable ground in India in a quick span of time. They established their first factory at Surat in 1668. Next year another factory was established at Masulipatam on the eastern coast of the country. Later, they established factories at Chandernagore near Calcutta and Pondicherry on the east coast (the factory in Pondicherry was fortified).

**French Rise in India**

**Backed by Government:** The French EIC was fully backed by the French government. The French government’s resources were at its disposal.

**Policy of Kingmakers:** The policy of kingmakers was first used by the French among Europeans during the succession wars of Carnatic and Hyderabad under the leadership of Dupleix. He aimed to secure monetary, commercial or territorial favours from the victor. Later, the policy was mastered by the British.

**Gains from War of Succession:** After the Carnatic and Hyderabad wars of succession. The French got the territories near Pondicherry and Masulipatam. Moreover, Dupleix was made the honorary governor of east coast from Krishna to Kanyakumari. The gains could fund French EIC.

**Lack of Central Authority in South India:** South India lacked central authority since the death of Aurangzeb. This coupled with raids by the Maratha chiefs resulted in politically unsettled conditions and administrative disorganisation, which created conditions for the French rise in India.

### French Decline in India

**Political Causes**

**Dependency on French Government:** The French EIC was heavily dependent on the French government. It was controlled by the French government which appointed its directors after 1723. The State control of the company smothered the drive, skill and initiative of the company.

**Weak Organizational Structure:** The French EIC suffered from weak organizational structure.

**French Continental Preoccupation:** The French government was preoccupied in continental ambitions, which involved the country into deeper political muddle in Europe and considerably strained her resources.

**Economic Reasons**

**Lack of Financial Autonomy:** The company’s finances were completely in the hands of French government. In addition to this the finances/revenue from south India were inadequate to meet the needs of company’s operation in India.

**Rampant Corruptions:** The company was riddled with corrupt officials who made it difficult for the company to face the British challenge in India.

**Static Society:** The French society lacked dynamism which was seen in the English society.

### 3.5 Anglo French Rivalry

The French were the last to enter the race for gaining trading ports in India but they were one of the most efficient ones. With Dutch out of the question due to skillful diplomacy by the British, Portugal and Spain out of the race due to internal conflicts, it was bound to be a confrontation between British and French.
The confrontation occurred during the Carnatic wars:

First Carnatic War
Though the French and British had cordial relation in India but in 1740 when the Austrian war of succession broke out, the relations turned bitter. Though the companies had strict instructions not to interfere into each other’s businesses in India, still in 1746 British Admiral Edward Peyton and French commander La Bourbonnais fought at Nagapatanam. The British lost and Madras came under direct control of French. Madras was returned to British after the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.

Second Carnatic War
Though war stopped between British and French but it continued between the French and British EIC in India. The war was fought between Nasir Jung, Muhammad Ali and British on one side with French Chanda sahib and Muzaffar Jung on the other end. Though this was won by Muzaffar Jung and Chanda sahib but it was short lived when British troops captured Arcot. This ended in the treaty of Pondicherry which recognized Muhammad Ali as nawab of Carnatic and sent Dupleix back to France. This action had sealed the fate of French EIC in India.

Third Carnatic War
With the outbreak of Seven Years’ War in Europe, the British French rivalry took to new heights in India. In 1756, the third Carnatic war started. In 1757, British forces captured French settlement Chandernagore. British under the leadership of Sir Eyre Coote decisively defeated French under Commander Comte de Lally at the battle of Wandiwash. This was concluded by the Treaty of Paris which returned the factory at Chandernagore and Pondicherry to France but forbade French traders to administer them. This ended the French dream of establishing it as a colonial power in India.

3.6 The British
The English East India Company (EEIC) was setup by a Royal Charter in 1600 with an exclusive trading right in the area east of the Cape of Good Hope. After seeing the returns on first few voyages from India the British wanted to establish factories in India.
Captain William Hawkins was sent to Jahangir’s court to obtain permission to open factory at Surat. His attempts were stopped by Portuguese. In 1611 the British navy helped Mughals defeat Portuguese at Surat and gained the right to establish factory at Surat. After this many factories were opened on east coast like Masulipatam.
In 1615, Sir Thomas Roe was sent as an ambassador to the Mughal court. He used his diplomatic skills to get a Royal farman (decreed) to open factory and trade in any part of Mughal Empire. Factories were set up at Broach, Ahmadabad. The factory at Surat was fortified. The British EIC after negotiations with the local raja gained permission to setup factory at Madras and fortify it.

In 1662, King Charles II received Bombay as dowry on marrying the Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza. It was transferred to the English EIC.
In 1667, after the successful negotiations of exchange of Dutch EIC’s Indian holdings with the British EIC’s Indonesian holdings the British became a formidable force in India. In 1680 during Aurangzeb’s rule
the British EIC got a farman to trade customs free throughout Mughal rule. After the Carnatic wars, the French aspirations ended and India was left to be ruled by the British. What started as a trading company took India under its charge.

**Reasons for Success of British East India Company**

The British EIC was a late entrant in the race of European powers. They had their own set of challenges. The various reasons that helped the British EIC emerge a clear winner among all the other European powers are as follows:

**Political Reason**

**Political Freedom:** One of the most important reasons for success of British EIC was the tremendous amount of political freedom given to them by their government which their peers did not. They were allowed to raise armies, wage wars, fortify forts and make treaties making them virtually a government in themselves.

**Simple Organisation:** The chief asset of the English Est India company was its simple organization. It had twenty-four directors elected annually by the general court of shareholders.

**Use of Diplomacy:** The English EIC appointed ambassadors to courts of Indian Rulers, e.g., appointment of Sir Thomas Roe to the Mughal court, held it secure right to open factory and trade in any party of Mughal Empire.

**Kingmakers:** Though this policy was introduced by French commander Dupleix during the Carnatic wars of succession, the British EIC used it to their advantage to gain control of major ports and high revenue generating areas. It’s because of this policy only the British EIC captured Bengal which acted as the base for Indian colonization.

**Aggressive Foreign Policy:** The State was willing to colonize and wage wars for economic benefit. Unlike her rivals it was willing to dedicate everything in her foreign policy to economic ends.

**Economic Reasons**

**Financial Security:** Unlike the other companies the British EIC was never starved of funds as it was backed by the British government. The British government was far better than its peers in terms of internal conflicts and corrupt administrators.

**Privileges:** The British EIC steadily spread its influence as result of privileges it received. The privileges enabled it to establish an increasing hold over trade of indigo, silk, cotton, among others. It also reduced the cost of trade in India.

**Social Reasons**

**Non-interference in the Society:** Unlike the other companies the British EIC treaded cautiously and did interfere in the social affairs of the country.

**Technological Advancements**

**Superior Navy:** The British EIC had a far more superior navy which not only helped them to carry cargo but also helped them to win and protect their frontier against other colonial powers.

**Superiority in Art of War:** The British EIC had more disciplined and professional fighting units. The British officials were also far more skilled in diplomacy and had won many wars before they were actually fought.

**Mechanized Military and Defence:** The British EIC had the most sophisticated machinery of the time. This coupled with the fortification of their establishments whenever they got the chance made them invincible.

**Geographic Advantage**

**Strategic Presence:** The British EIC had major strategic ports in its kitty which helped it keep in check trade and conflicts with other companies during the period. The ports of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta gave them strategic advantage over the whole of India’s coastline.
Reasons for Rise and Fall of the Portuguese in India

Rise
- Early Mover Advantage 06
- Spanish Renouncing of Interest in East 05
- Short Sightedness of Mughals 04
- Naval Supremacy 03
- Strategic Presence 02
- Cartaz System 01

Fall
- Attachment to Spain 06
- Aristocratic Dominance 01
- Lack of political will 02
- Religious Conversions 03
- Rise of Other Naval Powers 04
- Loss of Spain's Naval Supremacy 05

Reasons for Rise and Fall of the Dutch in India

Rise
- Vacuum created by Portuguese losses 05
- Nationalistic Feeling 04
- Factories at Malabar and in Ceylon 03
- Indian Cloth Trade 02
- Fluyt Ship 01

Fall
- Interests in Spice Trade 05
- Corruption 01
- Naval Setback 02
- Steady Increase in British Influence 03
- Agreement between Dutch and British 04
Reasons for Rise and Fall of the French in India

**Rise**
- Backed by Government
- Lack of Central Authority in South India
- Gains from War of Succession
- Policy of Kingmakers

**Fall**
- Static Society
- Rampant Corruption
- French Continental Preoccupation
- Weak Organizational Structure
- Dependency on French Government
- Lack of Financial Autonomy

Reasons for success of British in India

**Rise**
- Non-interference in the Society
- Financial Security
- Privileges
- Superior Navy
- Mechanized Military and Defence
- Superiority in Art of War

**Social**
- Financial Security
- Privileges

**Economic**
- Non-interference in the Society

**Technological**
- Superior Navy
- Mechanized Military and Defence

**Political**
- Superiority in Art of War
- Simple Organisation
- Use of Diplomacy
- Kingmakers
- Aggressive Foreign Policy
- Political Freedom