



THE FRENCH EAST INDIA COMPANY: GOVERNORS' INVOLVEMENT IN CARNATIC WARS

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ABSTRACT :

The advent of the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast constituted a beginning of an important age in the history of South 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 systems and practices, in short, the whole way of life of the peoples, to the needs and claims of each maritime power. The European age, began by Vasco da Gama, thus brought about a transition in the state system, economy and social order of Asian nations. This was made possible by the thrust of maritime power over the land masses, the imposition of a commercial economy over a simple, primitive economy based on agricultural production and internal trade and active interposition of imperialism. Following the Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, British and French trading companies came to India to trade in spices. They found South India the convenient ground to concentrate their early commercial activities, as it was there, and nowhere else in India that the products they wanted to procure in abundance were available. When the original desire for the monopoly of spice trade gave place to the necessity of securing textiles, tea and other commodities, and later to finding markets for European manufactures, and again to searching avenues for investment of capital, their attention turned to other places in India and Asia. The concentration of the commercial companies of both the British and the French paved the way for the Anglo-French Rivalry or the Carnatic Wars which affected the entire South India especially Hyderabad and the Carnatic Subha. This paper attempts to highlight the formation of the French East India Company and its officials involvement in the Carnatic Wars.

KEYWORDS : Carnatic , French, British, Dutch, Portuguese, Pondicherry, Surat, Nawab, Chanda Sahib , Duplex, Seven Years' War, Karaikal, Mahe, Anglo-French Rivalry.

INTRODUCTION

The French were the last to enter the race for trade with India. In 1664, the French East India Company was started by Jean Colbert, the Finance Minister of Louis XIV.¹ The French East India Company was given the power to conquer and occupy the territories. Due to the emergence of the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese power had fallen in India. Francis Caron who was appointed as Director General established the first French factory at Surat in December 1667 by getting permission from Aurangzeb. From Surat active trade was carried on with Persia and Madagascar. Another factory was established at Masulipatnam . In 1669 with the permission of the Sultan of Golconda.

In 1673, Francis Martin, a French officer



obtained the small village from the Muslim governor of Valikondapuram (one of the towns of Bijapur Sultanate) which ultimately grew into the famous city of Pondicherry, a great seat of French culture in India.² In 1674, Francis Martin became the governor of Pondicherry. He remained governor till his death in 1706. He developed Pondicherry into a beautiful city. He built the fort of St. Louis in Pondicherry. In 1674, the French received from Shaista Khan, the Governor of Bengal, the site which developed into the factory of Chandranagore of the Hugli, sixteen miles from Calcutta. Pondicherry was captured by the Dutch. In 1693. However it was returned to the French in 1697 by the treaty of Ryswick. In 1701, Pondicherry became the headquarters of the French possessions in India.³ Due to the efforts of Francis, a few other settlements were established at Balasore and Casim Bazaar.

The French company was reorganised under the wise and able management of Lenoir and Dumas, governors of Pondicherry between 1720 and 1742. The French occupied Mauritius, a strategic island lying between Africa and India in 1721 and Mahe on the Malabar Coast in 1724. Dumas became the Governor of Pondicherry in 1735. He cultivated friendly relations with the neighbouring Princes and thereby raised the prestige of the French in India. Thus Dumas for the first time started taking active part in the Indian politics. He gave shelter to the Nawab of Carnatic, Dost Ali and Chanda Sahib, son-in-law of Dost Ali who were attacked by the Marathas. As a reward for his help, Safdar Ali, the son and successor of Dost Ali presented him with his father's sword and gold and precious stones. Dumas gave some military equipment to the King of Tanjore and in return occupied Karaikal in 1739. He also got the right of minting coins from the Mughal Emperor.

Dupleix was appointed as the Governor of French settlements in India in 1741. Till Dupleix's appointment as governor, the French were concerned with trade. They maintained forts and troops for their safety and security. But this policy was changed by Dupleix. He wanted to establish a French Empire in India.⁴ It inevitably brought them in conflict with the British. This conflict ultimately ended in the defeat of the French. After 1760, the French were eliminated as a power in the Indian politics and their possessions in India were confined to Mahe, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam and Chandranagar.

ANGLO –FRENCH RIVALRY

In the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, the French and the British powers were active on South Indian scene. Steeped in the ideology of Mercantilism, the British and the French companies looked for a huge profit. To secure this, it was necessary to eliminate all competition of similar companies and get monopoly over trade. This necessitated substantial political control over the country they traded with. The British and the French wanted to establish their supremacy in South India. That led to the Anglo-French rivalry in the Carnatic. Anglo-French conflict in South India was merely a projection of the clash of political and Imperial ambitions of the two countries. It took a political turn when Alexander Dumas became the Governor of Pondicherry.⁵

In most of the European conflicts of the Eighteenth Century, England and France were ranged on opposite sides. South India was one of the theatres of these wars. At the time of struggle opened in South India, the French had their settlements at Pondicherry, Chandranagore, Mahe and Karaikal, besides factories at Calicut, Surat and Masulipatnam. The British had their settlements at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras besides factories at Surat, Masulipatnam and Hugli. The British East India Company was a private enterprise and a prosperous company. It carried out a lot of trade. On the other hand the volume of trade carried on by the French was not much and the French company was poor. It was also subject to tutelage from the Government of France.

The commercial rivalry between the British and French became acute in 1740s. The French Governors La Bourdonnais and Dupleix aimed to drive the British away from India. Assessing the situation, Dupleix, the French Governor of Pondicherry appealed to the British Governor, Morse at Madras to maintain peace in India, though their home countries were fighting in Europe. But the British Governor did not accept this suggestion.⁶ In 1745, a British fleet under Barnett appeared off the Coromandel Coast and captures some French ships. Dupleix sent an urgent appeal to La Bourdonnais, the French Governor of

Mauritius for help. He arrived at the Coromandel Coast in 1746 and seized Madras, both by land and sea. Several British men including Robert Clive, a young writer were taken prisoners. But the relations between La Bourdonnais and Dupleix became strained. La Bourdonnais received a bribe of one lakh *pagodas* and restored Madras to the British on promise to pay £40,000 to the French company. It was not at all accepted by Dupleix. La Bourdonnais was recalled to France. He spent three years in jail and died soon after his release.

The British approached Anwar-ud-din, Nawab of Carnatic to direct the French to leave Madras and maintain peace. The Nawab himself felt that the French and the British disturbed the peace of his kingdom. However, Dupleix promised to hand over Madras to Anwar-ud-din if the latter allowed the French to conquer it. The Nawab agreed and Dupleix recaptured Madras. But Dupleix refused to hand over Madras to Anwar-ud-din.

The Carnatic Nawab, Anwar-ud-din sent an army under his eldest son, Mahfuz Khan to compel the French to handover Madras to the Nawab. A small French army consisting of 230 Europeans and 700 Indian soldiers under Commander Paradise met a large Indian army of 10,000 under Mahfuz Khan at St. Thome, a place near Madras on the banks of the river Adyar and defeated it. The defeat of the army of Anwar-ud-din at the hands of a small French force proved the superiority of well disciplined European Infantry and European artillery over the large indisciplined Indian cavalry forces. This victory influenced French Influence in the native courts. It enhanced the prestige of Dupleix in the eyes of the Indians.

Dupleix could not satisfy with this victory and tried to capture Fort St. David, near Pondicherry. However the brave British officer, Stringer Lawrence successfully repulsed the French attack.⁷ Thereafter, the British under Admiral Boscawen laid siege of Pondicherry. The French offered fierce resistance and foiled all their attempts.

When the Austrian Succession War came to an end by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, the First Carnatic War also came to an end by the treaty of Aix-la-Chappelle in 1748.⁸ Though the French were successful against the British in India, they had failed in Europe and America. The defeat in one continent was balanced with the victory in another continent by the French and the British governments. Madras in South India was restored to the British in lieu of Louisburg in North America. This treaty marked an epoch in South India.

Though the first Carnatic War ended in peace, the Anglo-French rivalry was still there. The dynasties of Navayets and Wallajahs fought against each other in the second Carnatic war. Anwar-ud-din the founder of the Wallajah dynasty was supported by the British. Sadatullah Khan was the founder of Navayets family. He was succeeded by Dost Ali.⁹ This dynasty got the support of the French. The French also supported Muzaffar Jung against Nazir Jung in Hyderabad.

With the help of Dupleix, Muzaffar Jung and Chanda Sahib attacked Anwar-ud-din. The war took place at Ambur, near Vellore on 3rd August 1749. In that battle, Anwar-ud-din was killed. Mohammed Ali, the son of Anwar-ud-din fled to Trichirappalli. He took shelter in the fort of Trichirappalli.¹⁰ From there, he appealed to British for help. That led to the capture of Arcot by Robert Clive in 1752. After the victory at Ambur, Muzaffar Jung declared himself as the Nizam of Hyderabad and nominated Chanda Sahib as the Nawab of Arcot (1751).¹¹ The Victorious allies ceded to the French Masulipatam and Divy on the Orissa Coast.

The war took place between the Nazir Jung and Muzaffar Jung in Hyderabad. With the help of the British and the Marathas, Nazir Jung defeated Muzaffar Jung. Muzaffar Jung was imprisoned and Chanda Sahib sought asylum at Pondicherry. But soon the fortune of Nasir Jung changed. His own troops turned against him and they killed Nazir Jung and set free Muzaffar Jung. He was taken to Pondicherry. Muzaffar Jung was crowned in Pondicherry as the Nizam of Hyderabad. In order to show his gratitude, he appointed Dupleix as the Governor of all territories South of river Krishna. (Northern Circars). Chanda Sahib was recognized as the Nawab of Arcot.¹²

After Muzaffar Jung became the Nizam of Hyderabad, Dupleix sent Bussy, a French commander to Hyderabad in order to guide the Nizam in the Internal and external matters. He stayed in Hyderabad. But Muzaffar Jung was killed by his own men in 1751. Therefore Salabat Jung, the third son of Nizam-ul-Mulk was made the Nizam of Hyderabad by the French. He gave the Northern Circars to the French

Muhammad Ali took refuge in the fort of Trichirappalli . Chanda Sahib and French general law besieged Trichirappalli and it lasted for many months. The British were naturally alarmed and upset by the sudden and rapid increase of the French Influence in the Deccan. Saunders, the Madras Governor sent Clive to Arcot, the capital of Carnatic and captured it. When Chanda Sahib heard this news, he sent his son Raja Sahib to Arcot in 1751. But he could not recapture it. It was followed by wars which took place at Ami and Kaveripak. In these battles, Clive defeated Chanda Sahib and the French. The Maratha Chief named Morari Rao helped Clive very much. In 1752, a strong British force under Stringer Lawrence relieved Trichirappalli. Finally, Chanda Sahib surrendered. Later, Chanda Sahib was killed by the Raja of Tanjore.¹³ Muhammad Ali was made the Carnatic Nawab.

The French Government recalled Dupleix and Godeheu was appointed as the new French Governor. He signed the treaty of Pondicherry in 1755 with the British. By this treaty, the second Carnatic war came to an end. By the Treaty of Pondicherry , both the British and the French agreed not to interfere in the Internal affairs of the native kings. . They could retain their old territorial possessions. They should return the conquests made from each other and they should not build new forts In India. Muhammad Ali, the ally of the British, became the Carnatic Nawab. Bussy remained in the Deccan and continued to exercise his influence. By the treaty of Pondicherry, Godeheu sacrificed everything for which Dupleix had fought. This treaty made the British stronger. It weakened the French power in South India. The Second Carnatic war brought Clive to the forefront.

The Third Carnatic War was an outcome of the Seven Years' War in Europe in 1756. The Seven Years' War was fought between Austria and Prussia. France and Britain joined the Seven Years' War on opposite sides. The war between the British and the French companies commenced at once in Bengal. In November 1756, the British captured Chandranagore. In Carnatic, hostilities broke out only in April, 1758 with the arrival of the French general, Count de Lally. He besieged Fort. St. David and after a month captured fort St. David in Caddalore from the British. He also tried to capture Madras, but he couldn't capture it. Hearing the news, British sent an army under Sir Eyre Coote, the British commander. A battle took place in Wandiwash in 1760. In that battle, Lally was defeated by Sire Eyre Coote.¹⁴ The British captured Karaikal and Gingee in 1760. In 1761 the British captured Pondicherry and destroyed its forts and buildings. Lally was arrested and taken to England. After two years, he was released and allowed to go to France. But the French Government put him into the Bastille prison for two years and then he was executed. The Seven Years war ended in Europe by the treaty of Paris in 1763. This treaty brought the third Carnatic war to an end.¹⁵ As per the important provisions of the treaty, the French settlements were given back to the French. But they were not allowed to build forts in India. The French agreed not to keep troops in Bengal. The British were allowed to retain the Northern Circars. By this treaty, the British became supreme power in South India. The French East India Company was dissolved in 1770.

To conclude, the French were more interested in territory than in trade. The French took much interest in the Pondicherry region in South India and established trade settlements in and around Pondicherry. France is situated in the continent of Europe. Hence it had to take part in many European wars and also they fought many wars in India. They wasted a lot of money on wars. During the war times, they neglected trade. Therefore their financial position became very bad. In South India, Anglo-French rivalry began with the outbreak of Austrian war of Succession and ended with the conclusion of the Seven years War.

END NOTES

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