

THE PORTUGUESE IN SIND

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The Portuguese came to India at the end of the 15th century and soon established their commercial and political power in the sub-continent. The occupation of Goa in 1510 provided them the capital for their Eastern dominions. Diu, Daman, Salsette, Bassein, Chaul, Bombay, San Thome, and Hugli became the Portuguese settlements from where the Portuguese went to every part of India to explore the possibilities of trade, to convert people into Christianity, and to get employment at the different courts of Indian rulers. In the beginning of the 16th century they were powerful at the Mughul court and with the favour of the Mughul Emperors and the influential nobles, they got many commercial concessions. But soon they made themselves very unpopular as they controlled the sea and stopped all the merchants of other nations to pass without their permission. Even the Mughul ships of pilgrims were not safe and required the Portuguese pass for the safe conduct. They were also intolerant in religion and followed the policy of forcible conversion. Consequently this weakened their position at the Mughul court.

The Portuguese in Sind

The Portuguese were the first among the European nations who came to Sind. In 1555, they were invited by Mirza Isa (1567) to help him militarily against his rival. The Portuguese governor, who was at Bassein, looking for such opportunity to extend the Portuguese influence, readily accepted the invitation and agreed to send military help to the ruler of Sind. The Portuguese had already gained commercial and territorial advantages by giving such help to the Indian rulers. By helping Bahadur Shah of Gujarat (1526-1537) against Humayun, they occupied some important coastal towns in Gujarat. They expected, by giving military help, to get some political and commercial concessions from Mirza Isa.

Therefore, seven hundred Portuguese soldiers were sent in 28 ships under the command of Pedro Barreto Rolim. When the Por-

tuguese reached Thatta, they found that the civil war was over and their military help was not needed any more. The commander, however, asked for his expenses. As Mirza Isa was not present at Thatta, his request was not fulfilled. Barreto, in revenge, ordered to plunder Thatta, which was the capital of Sind and the emporium of trade. As a result eight hundred people were killed and the property of more than two million was captured and loaded to the Portuguese ships. On his way back, he also destroyed everything on both sides of the Indus. ¹ Thus, the Portuguese left bitter memories for the people of Sind.

The next reference about their presence in Sind, is found in a letter written by Robert Sherley, who pointed out that 800 banished Portuguese were in Bengal and Sind. They were those who were expelled by the English and took refuge in far off provinces. ² Sind, however, became an important commercial centre for the Portuguese. In 1633 more than 21 boats containing 200 Portuguese arrived in Sind. As there were no pirates in the Persian Gulf, the Portuguese boats had few soldiers. ³

The Portuguese, after their establishment in Hormuz, fully controlled the area of the Persian Gulf and Sind. The Mughul government in Sind benefited by their trade, patronized them and provided them many concessions and privileges. The Portuguese carried the trade from Sind to the Persian Gulf, Gujarat, and Goa. ⁴

The Portuguese, after getting the permission from the Mughul government, set up their factory at Thatta, where their factors resided and looked after their commercial interest. A Portuguese agent collected money on outgoing and incoming ships. ⁵ He also settled the disputes among the Portuguese community in Sind. The Portuguese government paid no salary to the agent. He had 40% income of what the local administration gave him. The rest was paid by the Portuguese living in Sind. However, his income was good as he was allowed by the local authorities to make wine and sell it in the market. However, it appears that the Portuguese were not respected because they treated the local population badly and threatened the local administration to call their navy and destroy the port. They also avoided to pay the custom duties by using various fraudulent ways. ⁶

In 1634, when Bantam was again raised to an independent Presidency, an agency was established at Thatta to promote the trade. ⁷

The presence of the Portuguese brought the people of Sind into contact with the Portuguese culture. The business community and the custom officers used to speak Portuguese language. An Englishman, who came with Robert (Sherleyer) in 1613, writes, "yet the officers being for the most part Banias, and spoke good Portuguese" ⁸

The Portuguese Missionary Activities

The Portuguese were the zealous Christians and wanted to convert the people of Sind to their faith. In Sind, we find the references about the Carmalite mission, which was founded in 1625 by Pere Johannes a Jesu Maria, who sent to Sind Pere Ludovicus, and Francisus a Matre Dei. ⁹ Pedro do Recende, who visited Sind in the 17th Century, writes about the mission and its followers whom he saw in Thatta:

In this great city of Sind there is a church of Carmalites who walk about bare foot and are well-behaved. They do not convert any natives because none becomes Christian. However they are a great help to the Portuguese. There are two Carmalite priests who live on alms from the Portuguese with which they live quite happily. ¹⁰

Manucci, who visited Thatta in 1655, saw a barefooted Carmalite father who resided in a little hermitage. ¹¹ Once the Muslim population of Thatta ransacked the church, probably due to the missionary activities of the mission, but later on the church and its property was returned to the mission. The mission was abandoned at some date previous to 1712. ¹²

The Portuguese also shared in founding the Augustinian mission in Sind. Manrique, who visited Thatta, met father Jorge de la Natividad who was superior to the mission. He discussed with him about the rebuilding of the church, which was destroyed during the persecution. ¹³

Rivalry Between the Portuguese and English

The First Englishman, who came into contact with the Portuguese in Sind, was Anthony Starkey, who died in 1612 at Thatta and whose papers were captured by the Portuguese and were sent to Lisbon. ¹⁴

The first English ship, which came to Laribundar in 1613, was the "Expendition". It was commanded by Christopher Newport and carried the famous adventurer, Robert Sherley, who was at that time Persian ambassador. Robert Sherley took the advantage of his position and negotiated with the Mughul governor for establishing a factory in Sind. While the conversation was going on between the governor and Sherley, the Portuguese were also in the room and disturbed the meeting by speaking against the English. The governor became angry on the interference and expelled them from the room. But it seems that the Portuguese had great influence in the government because the governor, later on, told Sherley that if the English give him assurance of good trade and profit, only in this case he would not care for the Portuguese. The governor further told the ambassador that the Portuguese trade brought him one lakh rupees annual profit. If the English trade bring more profit, then the permission to establish a factory would be granted. As Robert Sherley came to Sind accidentally and without any planning, he failed to give such assurances and the first attempt to set up an English factory in Sind failed. ¹⁵

The short stay of Robert Sherley brought the rivalry between the English and Portuguese into light. The Portuguese were naturally apprehensive in presence of the English to lose their trade, therefore, they used all possible methods to deter the English from coming to Sind. During his stay, movements of Robert Sherley were watched by the Portuguese. N. Whittington, who travelled from Surat to Thatta, to see Robert Sherley, met a Bania on his way:

Hee tould mee how Sir Robert had been much abused at Lowrybander, both by the governor and the Portugalles, and how the Portugalles came on shore in the night and fyled Sir Robert's house. ¹⁶

Besides diplomatic manouverings, the Portuguese also threatened militarily. They collected their frigates in order to block the sea mouth. ¹⁷ They also managed with the help of the custom officers, to harass the English by checking them. When Payton and Salbanck were searched thoroughly in the presence of the Portuguese, Payton became angry and said to the custom officers, "whatever the Portuguese might have done to ordain so bad fashion, yet English merchants did not, meazle like, hide money in their

shoes".¹⁸ At the time of their departure, there was a quarrel between the English and Portuguese. Payton rebuked them in Portuguese languages, which was understood by the Banias, who were present there:

and I told them that they were shameless and lying people in spreading of so many devised scandals and slanderous reports of our nation. . . Also, I told them that if they did not contain themselves hereafter, both in their sayings and doings, they should be rooted out of Indies and a more honest and royal nation placed in their rooms.¹⁹

The second phase of the Portuguese and English conflict started in 1616, after the arrival of the English ambassador, Thomas Roe, who advised the Company to trade with Sind. He emphasised to keep in mind the Portuguese influence. In 1617, he writes:

The river is indifferently navigable downe; but the mouth is the residence of the Portugalls; returns backe against the streame very difficult. Finally, wee must warrant their goods, which a fleet will not doe; neither did the Portugall ever lade or noise (sic) such goods, but only for these Sindie and Tetta, that traded by ther own junkes, they gave a Cartas or passe to secure them from their frigats, and traded with them; for which they payed a small matter.²⁰

He further writes that "The number of Portugells residing is a good argument for us to seeke it; it is a signe there is good doing."²¹

In 1620, Thomas Kerridge pointed out the strong influence of the Portuguese in Sind. Every ship from Sind required to have a pass from the Portuguese for sailing.²² In the same year, one English patrolling fleet in the Arabian sea, challenging the Portuguese Power and authority of the Portuguese, captured a Sindhian ship, which was going to Muscat and had the letters and passes from the Portuguese.²³

The English tried from 1616 to 1630 to establish commercial relation with Sind. But all their attempts failed because of the strong opposition of the Portuguese, who were favoured by the Sind administration and the business community as they brought large profit to them. They depended on the Portuguese ships to carry their

commodities outside Sind. They were, however, ready to welcome any European nation, which could give them guarantee for the profitable trade and safe conduct of their ships.

In 1635, a peace treaty was signed between the English and Portuguese which ended the hostility of both nations in India. After this the English attempted to trade with Sind, hoping not to face the Portuguese opposition any more. On their arrival, the English found the Portuguese firmly established in Laribundar. The Portuguese agent (Feytor) resided at the port along with 3 or 4 Padres. Who had "a very meane place to exercise their devotion in".²⁴

The Sindhi merchant welcomed the English in the hope to send their goods in their ships with a view to avoid the duty levied by the Portuguese. The Portuguese, on hearing the news that the Sindhi merchants were planning to send their goods by the English ships to Bundar Abbas, came to Laribundar with 4 frigates and warned the merchants not to load their goods in the English ships, otherwise they would capture them in the river before loading to the ships.²⁵

The English also did not interfere in the matter in order not to annoy their new ally. However, the establishment of the English factory in 1635 proved disastrous for the Portuguese, who in consequence lost their political as well as commercial privileges in Sind.

The Portuguese and Dutch Rivalry

The Portuguese also opposed the attempt made by the Dutch to establish commercial relations with Sind. On February 15, 1632, a Dutch vessel came to Sind to find out the possibility of trade. The Portuguese strongly reacted and threatened the governor that they would leave Sind if the Dutch were allowed to come to Sind for trade.²⁶ Recende, giving the Portuguese side of the story writes:

Soon the Nawab found them giving trouble and threatening the Mohammedans, he took help of the Portuguese. He said it was impossible for the Dutch and the Portuguese to live together there. . . The Dutch were being badly treated and they soon left the place.²⁷

It seems that the Portuguese losing their influence in other parts of India, were determined to keep Sind for them, therefore, they vehemently opposed the English and Dutch to enter Sind.

The Fall of the Portuguese

The Portuguese lost their position and monopoly of the Cape of Good Hope, in the Red Sea, and in the Persian Gulf after the fall of Hormuz in 1635. Consequently they lost their influence in the Eastern coasts to the Dutch and in the Western coasts to the English. In Sind, the Portuguese were replaced by the English who, with short intervals, continued commercial relations with Sind.

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