

ESTABLISHMENT OF FRENCH SUPREMACY IN PONDICHERRY

N. SUNDARAMOORTHY

Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.

Dr. C. NADARAJAN

Professor, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.

Abstract

The French were the last to come to India. “Nevertheless, though late in joining the race, the might and main of the nation and the genius of the French men swiftly enabled them to move abreast with the most securely planted of their European rivals”. It is said that the first French expedition to India took place during the reign of Francis I (1515-1547). In July 1527 A.D, about thirty years after Vasco da Gama had set his foot on Calicut, a Norman ship belonging to the Rouen merchants appeared at Diu. No expedition was undertaken after this for nearly three-quarters of a century, in spite of the Decree of Kings, Francois I in 1537 A.D and Henry III in 1578 A.D, exhorting the people to undertake voyages of long distances. Francois Martin expanded French trade to Bengal, Orissa, Kerala, and other areas of Tamil Nadu by obtaining the village of Kaveripumpattinam and concession for doing business in Karaikal.

Keywords: Pondicherry, Francois Martin, French, Dutch

INTRODUCTION

The modern history of Pondicherry is dotted with the influence of the foreign countries which increased in the beginning of sixteenth century. The reason for the foreign countries to grate Pondicherry was its potential site as an access point to the east coast of India. The foreign trades realized this fact when they had participated and enjoyed in maritime activities. The Commercial relationship between India and the western world can be traced back to the days of ancient Greece and Rome. Indian goods were highly prized in the European markets. In the middle ages, the spices of India and South East Asia were in great demand in Europe. But, there were no direct commercial relations between Europe on the one hand, and India and Southeast Asia on the other. Prior to the sixteenth century, trade between India and the west was being mostly carried on overland as well as sea routes, by the merchants of Arabia, Venice and Genoa. Unlike the Arab merchants, who had been sailing the coasts of India since time immemorial, the impact of European contact had far reaching consequences in terms of establishments and in the end, the occupation of the entire sub-continent from India, the Arab merchants imported various goods, and it is from them that the merchants of Venice and Genoa purchased those goods for sale in Europe. Several factors led to the discovery of the sea route to India by the European navigators. The fall of Asia Minor and Constantinople into Turkish hands in 1453 A.D, the expansion of Turkish power into Europe, and the hostility between Christians and Muslims, ultimately hampered this trading pattern that had been in vogue in the middle ages. Another factor which impelled the west European nations to open direct commercial dealings with India was the opposition of the Italians to the entry of the west

European merchants into trade with India along the traditional land sea routes. But since Indian spices were much in demand in Europe and to keep meat palatable for the winter months, and the trade in spices was highly profitable, the west European merchants tried to forge direct commercial links with India through alternative sea routes.

During fifteenth century, a lot of changes happened in the European states which also brought about a great spirit of adventure and enterprise to explore and seek for far destinations. The sailors of Portugal and Spain, patronized by their rulers first initiated to discover a sea route to India. The commerce and the economy of Pondicherry was highly benefited because of the presence of the foreign countries.

Influence of the Dutch

On September 7th, 1693 Pondicherry fell into the hands of the Dutch and remained five and half years in their possession until 1699 A.D. With the compulsory exit of the Portuguese, the Dutch made their entry Poetlitseri, Pollochire, Poulecere, and Pullicheri were the different names by which the Dutch called this coastal town. During that period the Dutch tried to develop Pondicherry into a great manufacturing centre. By entering into an agreement with Rajaram, the ruler of Gingee, they enlarged the territory under their control. The Dutch planned a large new town, on the western side of the establishment, with very regular geometric and rectangular blocks of houses separated by straight streets intersecting at right angles.

In 1601 A.D the East India Company was chartered, and the English began their first inroads into the Indian Ocean. At first, they were little interested in India, but rather, like the Portuguese and Dutch before them, with the Spice Islands. But the English were unable to dislodge the Dutch from Spice Islands.

Introduction of the English

In 1610 A.D, the British chased away a Portuguese naval squadron, and the East India Company created its own outpost at Surat. In 1624 A.D. they sent their ships to this port to establish their factory at Pondicherry.

During the period of French establishment, Puducheri was a low caste suburb or “cheri” of the Oulgarai Village. It was located on the crossroads connecting Cuddalore and San Tome with Gingee in the hinterland, having the fort of Valdavur to protect it. The river Gingee, locally called the river Bahour, which joined the sea port Keerapalayam, had a deep estuary that provided attractive port facilities to the loge. It had a number of temples as landmarks like the Vedapureeswara temple dedicated to Siva, the Manukula Vinayaka temple, the Thiruvegetiswara temple and the Bahour temple. A fishermen’s village, a weavers’ village, and a coral- polishers’ village, a textile painters’ village were growing up all around the French loge. Among the landmarks two mosques, indicating that there was a sizeable number of Muslims in the settlement. Most of the Hindus were non-Brahmins.

Contribution of Francois Martin

Francois Martin, an employee of the Compagnie des Indes, who was the son of a Parisian grocer, first set foot in the town of Pondicherry having been sent there by the fleet commander de la Haye. Martin worked with Bellanger de l'Espinay in good faith to overcome the difficulties and to manage the opponents. Martin was an assistant of Bellanger but he soon came to be known as Pondicherry's maker. With him in the loge were two Capuchin fathers who had been forced out of Madras by the English. They catered to the religious demands of six French soldiers whom the French were allowed to keep in the loge to guard their merchandise. On the strength of the letter issued by Sher Khan Lodi on April 1674, he built up the French factory strongly at Pondicherry and became the first Governor of that factory on the Coromandel Coast. After the establishment of the factory, trade began to grow rapidly at Pondicherry under the able administration of Francois Martin. In order to boost the Company's trade in the midst of evil designs of the Dutch and the English, Francois Martin brought with him an eminent merchant, called Thanappa Mudaliar from Poonamallee to Pondicherry, where the latter made his permanent settlement. He became the chief broker of the Company. Within a year, forty houses were built for a small number of weavers who were to develop and defend the factory.

When military conflicts erupted between Sher Khan Lodi and Nasir Mohammed of Gingee in 1676 A.D, Francois Martin allowed himself to be dragged into the conflict because of his close relations with Sher Khan Lodi. On 24th September 1676 by the concurrence of Sher Khan Lodi, Martin captured the fort of Valdavur with sixty French soldiers who were in Pondicherry on transit. At that time, Shivaji reached Gingee on his famous Carnatic expedition and captured the fort of Gingee at his first attack. He marched farther to the east and attacked Cuddalore, in the battle for which Sher Khan Lodi was completely defeated at Tiruvadi and forced to escape. Francois Martin discreetly accepted the advice of Shivaji to remain neutral and managed to win a firman dated 15th July 1677 granted by the Mahrattas. Later, he got another firman from Shivaji's son Sambhaji in 1689 A.D to defend the factory.

In 1677 A.D, the firman permitted the French to build god owns not only in Pondicherry but also in any other village or town within the Faujdari of Sher Khan Lodi for the purpose of storing merchandise. The control of trade in Pondicherry was vested with the French and it was clearly stated that although ships of other nations could call at Pondicherry, they could not engage in commercial transactions without French consent. The Maratha havildar at Pondicherry was to collect sales tax and customs duty over imports and exports. Local people like weavers, macouas textile dyers and servants who worked for the French Company were exempted from the payment of taxes which others had to make to the havildar. The Company's servants both Indian and French were to be tried only by the Company's courts.

In 1681 A.D, Francois Martin was summoned to Surat where he remained till 1688 A.D. In his absence, Pondicherry was left to the charge of Dehor, Martin's assistant. Martin returned to Pondicherry as Directeur General in 1688 A.D and remained in charge till 31st December 1706 the day on which he died. At the time of his arrival, the loge in Pondicherry was nothing more than "a large enclosure by the seashore where there were two bastions with eight pieces of

cannon”, according to Boureau Deslandes, son in law of Martin. However, Martin had developed it into an irregular rectangular structure with four round towers, which came to be called Fort Barlong. As Directeur General in Pondicherry, Francois Martin increased commerce between France and Bengal, Orissa, Kerala, and other regions of Tamil Nadu. He persisted in urging the traders and weavers to make a lot of clothing. As a result, commerce in and out of Pondicherry started to steadily flourish.

On July 16, 1686, Francois Martin acquired the hamlet of Kaveripumpattinam, three leagues north of Tranquebar, and a permit to conduct business in Karaikal from the Nayak of Tanjore in order to increase the Company's trade and import rice for local usage. Martin's efforts were halted on 23rd August 1693 when the Dutch started to bombard Pondicherry as part of their military campaign in the War of English Succession.

The Dutch then proceeded to buy Pondicherry from Ramaraja of Gingy for a sum of 23,000 pagodas. However, the Treaty of Rhyswick brought the war of English Succession to an end. Pondicherry was restored to the French. Yet the French had to pay a consideration of 16,000 pagodas to the Dutch before the restitution of Pondicherry could be agreed by the Dutch at Porto Novo. Francois Martin resumed his post of Directeur General in Pondicherry on 13th September 1699.

In 1703 A.D, the Mughal commander Daud Khan conquered the Gingee province; Francois Martin obtained the villages of Olukari, Kalapet, Murungapakkam, Olandai, Pakkumudayanpet and Karuvadikuppam from him. In 1708 A.D, Herbert who was the Governor of Pondicherry at that time acquired the village of Ariyankuppam from the Nawab of Camatic. The Five Governors ruled Pondicherry ineffectively from 1707 A.D to 1720 A.D. Then 1721 A.D to 1735 A.D, Pierre Christophe Le Noir became the Governor of Pondicherry. During his period, a court was established in 1728 A.D at Pondicherry to decide the European cases.

The French founded their settlements at Mahe on Malabar Coast in 1726 A.D and at Yanam on the Andhra coast in 1731 A.D. Governor Le Noir was succeeded by Benoist Dumas in September 1735 A.D and continued to 1741 A.D. During his period, the French took possession of Karaikal on February 14th 1739. Under Dumas, Pondicherry's boundary was gradually extended towards the south and the west expanded the Pondicherry area and made it a large and rich town. Later in the battle of Pennar on May 20th, 1740 between the Marathas and the Nawab of Carnatic, Dumas provided asylum in Pondicherry to the family members of the Arcot Nawab. Thus, in September 1740, Safdar Ali Khan the Nawab of Arcot granted to Dumas the villages of Theduvanatham, Abishekapakkam, Odiampattu, Thirukanji and Kottakuppam for the assistance rendered against the Marathas.

Contribution of Dupleix

In 1741 A.D, the most famous French Governor of Pondicherry and all of French India, Joseph Francois Dupleix began to cherish the ambition of a French Empire in India but his superiors had less interest. French ambition clashed with the British interests in India and a period of military skirmishes and political intrigues began. Under the command of the Marquis de Bussy-Castelneau, Dupleix's army successfully controlled the area between Hyderabad and Cape

Comorin. Under Dupleix, the boundary was further extended towards the west and the south. The additions were Villianur and Bahur including eighty adjoining villages granted to Dupleix by Chanda Sahib. It is in this way; the area of Pondicherry region came to be under the French territory. But the arrival of Robert Clive in India in 1744 A.D, a dare-devil British officer dashed the hopes of Dupleix to create a French Colonial India. In the war between England and France, the French defeated the English at Madras and the latter was brought under French control in September 1746. By 1750 A.D, French Pondicherry incorporated over hundred villages inhabited by Indians. The French acquired in the neighbouring areas around Pondicherry from the Nawab of Carnatic and the Mughal Emperor. The French settled down in these areas and had trading posts, which later became large settlement areas, like in Karaikal where there were eighty-one main revenue generating villages. This period marked the zenith of French power in Pondicherry.

In 1754 A.D, Charles Robert Godeheu de Zaimont gave up with the English the Indian territories, especially Madras, which had been conquered in 1746 A.D by Dupleix and left the French with the Deccan region. Dupleix never recovered from this blow and was superseded in August 1754 A.D by his director Godeheu, who made an unfavorable settlement with the British.

On 26th December 1754, he signed the Treaty of Pondicherry with Thomas Saunders, the English East India Company's resident at Madras, that forbade the British and French companies all political activities in India and the activity must be strictly commercial. In 1756 A.D, the war broke out with Britain, subsequently, France sent Lally-Tollendal to recover the lost French possessions and drive the British out of India. Lally-Tollendal was appointed Governor-general of French India and commanded a French expedition, made up of four battalions, of whom two were from his own Regiment of Lally of the Irish Brigade, to India. He reached Pondicherry in April 1758 A.D, and within six weeks he had pushed the British back from the coast to Madras, the headquarters of the English East India Company. And he had some initial success and razed Fort St. David in Cuddalore District to the ground in 1758 A.D, but the strategic mistakes of Lally led to the loss of the Hyderabad region, the Battle of Wandiwash, and the siege of Pondicherry in 1760 A.D. On 16th January 1761, the British razed Pondicherry to the ground in revenge for the French depredations; it lay in ruins for four years.⁷¹ The French had lost their hold now in South India too. But, the Treaty of Paris (1763) at the end of the Seven Years' War returned it.

CONCLUSION

In 1765 A.D the town of Pondicherry was returned to France after a 1763 A.D peace treaty with Britain. Jean Law de Lauriston, then Governor General set to rebuild the town on the old foundations and after five months 200 European and 2000 Tamil houses were built. In 1769 A.D the French East India Company, unable to support itself financially, was abolished by the French Crown, which assumed administration of the French possessions in India. During the next 50 years Pondichery changed hands between France and Britain with the regularity of their wars and peace treaties. The supremacy of France began to decline thereafter. There were

internal disturbances in Pondicherry and the Britishers utilized this opportunity to bring Pondicherry under their control.

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