

BEGINNING OF EUROPEAN COMMERCE

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- **India's trade** relations with **Europe** go back to **ancient times**.
- There were **various trade** routes to India both through **sea and water**.
- The **goods** passes through **several states** and hands and when **crossing each state, heavy duties** are to be paid by the merchants.
- Even though the **duty was high**, each **merchants** **earned huge profit in trade** due to the high demand of spices in Europe.

The main reasons for the interest of Europeans in India were

- ❑ 1. European food is very spicy and they need to store salted and peppered meat for future use. Higher demand for spices in Europe led to huge profit in trade with India.
- ❑ 2. Huge wealth of India and shortage of gold in Europe. Europeans needed gold as an exchange medium for uninterrupted trade and which was available in India abundantly.

Silk Route

- ❑ The **land route** that extended from China to Europe was known as the **Silk Route**.
- ❑ This trade route which connected the East with the West stretched around **6000 kms**.
- ❑ This route and its intervening resting places known as **Sarais**, helped the commercial, cultural and intellectual development of the regions like China, the Indian sub-continent, Persia, Europe and North Africa.

Silk Route

- The trade routes between India and other parts of the world during **15th century** was shown in the figure.
- The blue lines indicate sea route and the red line indicates the land route which is called as **Silk Route**.



Silk Route



Why find sea route?

- In 1453, Turkish Ottoman Empire captured the Constantinople and the Silk route was blocked.
- This event is famously known as **Fall of Constantinople**.
- When the silk **route was blocked**, European nations were **not able to trade with India** and they initiated steps **to find new sea route to India**. European nations like **Portugal and Spain** started voyages by the end of 15th century.

Discoveries

- In **1492**, **Columbus** of Spain set out to reach India and discovered **America**
- In **1498**, **Vasco da Gama** of Portugal discovered the new sea route to India.
- He reached **Kappadu beach in Calicut**, Kerala and went to meet **Samudiri** (Zamorin) King of Calicut.

The exploration route of Vasco da Gama is shown on the diagram below



Maritime trade beginning

- ❑ The close of the **fifteenth century**, when the **Portuguese** under the leadership of **Vasco da Gama** landed at **Calicut** (May 21, 1498), is a landmark in the history of **India's maritime trade**.
- ❑ The arrival of the Portuguese in India was **followed** by the **advent of other European communities** and soon **India's coastal and maritime trade** was **monopolised** by the **Europeans**.
- ❑ There was a **great change** in the **earlier participation** of other **foreign merchants**, who were settled in and conducted **brisk trade** from India, and the Europeans who came to India in the **sixteenth and seventeenth centuries**.

Motives

- The **earlier foreign merchants** had **mere commercial motives** and had very little or no support from their native governments.
- But the **European merchants** who came to India during this period had the political and military support of their respective governments.
- Moreover, they were not individual merchants but represented their respective nations and tried to establish and **safeguard their maritime trade on the strength of their superior naval power**.

Commercial Motives To Territorial Ambitions

- **Military superiority** was the backbone of their commercial enterprise.
- From the very beginning, the European trading companies began **to establish their fortified trading settlements, called factories**, on the coastal parts of India, immune from the administrative control of the local powers.
- In course of time the commercial motives turned into **territorial ambitions**, which pushed India into the jaws of the colonial dragon.

Change of trade

- No doubt, due to the tripartite participation of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English, **India's foreign trade grew phenomenally** in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it was the last spark of the dying lamp.
- By the close of the eighteenth century India, from a **bulk ex-porter**, turned into one of the **biggest importers of industrially manufactured goods**.

Conclusion

- Thus the beginning of European commerce was a bridge between India's medieval commercial affluence and the colonial deprivations and the resultant poverty during nearly two centuries long British rule in India.
- We describe the various stages of the growth of the European commerce in India—individually of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French.



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