

Review Article

Dr. Willem Floor, *The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Diewel-Sindh (Pakistan)*, Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, University of Karachi, 1993-94, pp.97; Price: Rs. 95.00 (US \$ 6.00).

This is a pioneer work aimed at a study of the Dutch trade with Sindh during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries based upon Dutch sources. This subject has so far not been touched by our scholars owing to linguistic difficulties and Dr. Willem Floor has indeed heightened our debt of gratitude by acquainting us with the activities of the Dutch East India Company, which by incidental references and illusions added to our knowledge the social and economic conditions of those times. This monograph is of abiding interest to us and the publishers do deserve compliments by also managing the addition of the following articles which are not only complimentary but also a well-meaning introduction to the subject; the discussion on the historical perspectives of Dutch trade in Sindh solve many mysteries and make our knowledge up-to-date.

1. Introduction by Mr. M.H. Panhwar, pp.1-30.
2. Dutch trade in Sindh in Historical Perspectives by Mr. Mazhar Yusuf, pp.31-42.
3. Additional Historical and Geographical Notes by Dr. Ansar Zahid Khan, pp.89-94.

An Analysis of the Introduction:

Mr. Mazhar Yusuf in his thirty pages' Introduction has enlightened us to understand the historical background of the

book under study in a clear and terse language — an account of the (1) items of import and export to Sindh and the (2) names of the countries to which goods were exported from Sindh, (3) some reflections on the law and order situation, (4) social and (5) economic conditions, (6) commercial rivalries of the English, Portuguese and the Dutch, (7) the attitude of local states towards these foreign traders, (8) custom duties, (9) weights and measures, (10) historical geography of Sindh in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, (11) grant of *Parwanas* for the establishment of trade, (12) opening up of new factories and last but not least, (13) names of Governors of ports and trading agents.

Portuguese in Sindh:

The Portuguese enjoyed a monopoly of sea trade because they had managed to master over the seas of the world with effect from the sixteenth century till about the end of the eighteenth century, i.e., immediately after the discovery of America by Columbus in 1494 and of India in 1498 by Vasco De Gama. Their power declined when England inflicted a crushing defeat on the Portuguese and Spanish Armada (1588), but the other causes of their annihilation was their extreme bigotry. However, it is interesting to note that the premier cause responsible for their disappearance as sea power was the absence of Portuguese and Spaniards woman power in the countries they had occupied in the East.

Portuguese-Dutch Rivalry:

The Portuguese, the small nation of a small country, could not handle the distribution of their vast East Indian produce in Europe and appointed the Dutch as their commission agents for this purpose. Portugal as a country ceased to exist in 1580 when Philip II of Spain succeeded in annexing it to his kingdom. Soon the Dutch rebelled against Spain. They ceased to be their commission agents in regard to the East Indian produce. They moved earth and heaven in multiplying their sea power. Soon they developed fast ships combining trade with piracy they even looted Portuguese ships trading in the East. They were contemptuously nicknamed as sea-beggars. With a fleet of 10,000 efficient sailors these sea-beggars became sea-kings. They

made their capital Amsterdam the Second Venice and replaced Lisbon and Seville as great centres of trade. It was the Dutch and not the English were challenged and subsequently extirpated them (Portuguese) from the Indian Ocean.

English Dutch Revating:

With the dwindling of the Portuguese Eastern trade since 1580, the Dutch captured the opportunity as a God-sent gift. The Dutch wasted no time in capturing the European market, but soon abnormally enhanced the price of spices in 1600. This was the most exasperating cause and the English east India Company was formed the same year. The English were more astute and diplomatic than the Dutch; the latter's follies were the opportunities of the former. The English everywhere caused harm to the Dutch in business and as a consequence the Dutch suffered financially so much so that by the middle and last quarter of the 18th century the Dutch were no longer a factor to be reckoned with.

Articles of Import in Sindh:

1. Powdered brown-white sugar (partially refined) was imported in large quantities from Java (Indonesia).
2. Pepper and spices imported from Indonesia.
3. Sindh also imported metals like iron, steel, zinc, tin and lead (iron and steel was only sold to the kings for making arms, shields and swords etc).
4. Import of Chinese gold in Sindh has been the practice since antiquity.
5. Mercury, fragrant sandal, coconuts, false glass pearls or commonly known as imitation jewellery, textiles.

Articles of Export from Sindh:

Rice, indigo, saltpetre, hides, skins, domestic animals for milk and meat, herbs, leather articles etc.

Taxes:

It was customary for the European traders to present gifts to the king every time when their ships landed in Sindh. There was a fixed custom duty on each item based on the sale

value. As for the weights and measures the learned M.H. Panhwar has enlightened us by calculating their equivalents with those vogue in Europe at that time.

Historical Geography of Sindh in 16th and 17th Centuries:

There is an interesting discussion on the origin and development of Diewel-Sindh or Deval or Debal and Karachi. The founding of a port on the Indus by prince Aurangzeb (then Governor of Multan) Aurangbander is indeed an attractive study.

Private Trade by Employees of the English East India Company:

It was responsible for an economic revolution in England also called English Revolution, which in turn led to the Industrial Revolution of mid-19th century.

Conquest of Sindh by Akbar:

The Mughal conquest of Sindh under Akbar was not beneficial as heavy taxes were imposed upon the population so much so that the people became exasperated and chaotic conditions prevailed throughout. By 1680 Mughals were compelled to accept the rule of tribal chiefs by giving them official designations, provided they paid regularly the taxes into the imperial treasury. Law and order situation was so dangerous that no trade or traffic could be operative unless taxes were paid from place to place to different tribal chiefs.

The Dutch Trade in Sindh in Historical Perspective, by Mr. Mazhar Yusuf.

According to Dr. Romila Thapar, the Dutch were the first amongst the European traders to bring into contact the West with India after the latter's discovery in 1498 by Vasco de Gama. Unlike the earlier Arab settlers who wished to settle in India for mere trading purposes the Dutch believed not only in settling as traders but also to make their presence felt by their warlike activities. They captured Goa in 1510. Soon after Francis Xavier the first Jesuit priest arrived in India and conversions to christianity began in a systematic manner on the Western coasts. They also earned an honourable place in Akbar's court. Akbar is also reported to have married a Christian lady. Also a

Christian grandee, Mirza Zulcarnain rose to a high position, became a Faujdar of Sambhar and later, Governor of Lahore. In the achieves of Holland, Iran and Portugal plenty of material is available on this context. In 1580 Portugal became a dependency of Spain and the latter's naval power consequently increased. With the defeat of Spanish Armada in 1588, Spain became feeble sea power and the Dutch started vastly developing their own sea power. The Dutch were acting as middlemen for Eastern goods in Europe. They bought goods like spices, aromatics and cloth for the Portuguese and resold them to Northern Europe. This resale made the Dutch prosperous and they developed better ships, sailing technique, and sufficient business acumen necessary towards empire building. In 1595 when for the first time from Dutch boats sailed to India via Cape of Good Hope, which venture proved very profitable and the Dutch east India Company was founded in 1602 with the main object of trade in spices and the target countries were Malayan States, Indonesia etc. By 1625 they had established themselves as prosperous traders and they had also trading stations in India viz., Surat, Cambay, Ahmadabad in Gujerat Cochin, Nagapatan in Madras, Masulipatan in Andra. Their prosperity excited jealousy of the English traders who after a hectic struggle managed the total expulsion of the Dutch from India in 1795.

The name of the Dutch East India Company formed in 1602 was Verenigde Ostindische Compagnie (United East India Company — commonly known as VOC and its Head Offices were at Amsterdam with several branches scattered in Holland. The Dutch Government had authorised VOC with a valid permission to sail to East India and to build fortresses; name Governors and send soldiers to her colonies. It had its own shipyards to build ships and carry out necessary repairs. The biggest ships were about 1000 tons and were 50 meters in length. The extent of its maritime power can be gauged from the fact that with only 26 ships sailing during 1692-1710, it had 400 ships sailing during 1692-1710 and this number multiplied to 4722 ships by the year 1795. In the 17th century the VOC needed about 40,000 persons (i.e., sailors, soldiers with a sprinkling of civil servants and merchants), but its requirements shot up to 87000 person by the end of 18th century.

The Dutch effort to enter Sindh for trade purposes in 1652 was detested by the English East India Company for obvious reasons but the Mughal Governor of Thatta (Mughal Khan) was favourably disposed towards them. However, by 1657 the Dutch became a serious competitor for trade in Sindh. Aurangbander was another trading station in Sindh those days. Our author Dr. Willem Floor (under study) could not locate the port in his dissertation, which is indeed strange. *Adab-i-Alamgiri* an invaluable Persian source on Aurangzeb wherein there is a clear mention of Shah Jahan's reprimand to Aurangzeb (then Governor of Multan) that he was making lot of money out of Aurangbander and the latter professing innocence that the newly-opened port had not yet yielded any appreciable income.

The account of the Dutch East India Company discussing its trading activities in Sindh as compiled by Dr. Floor makes an interesting study of our social, political and economic conditions prevailing at that time.

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Diewel-Sindh in the 17th and 18th Century

By Dr. Floor is a very informative study for us; its contents are also confirmed with reference to the English sources, the latter are, however, of the opinion that the Sindh trade was not as profitable as the English sources would have us believe. Sindh produced all kinds of textiles which were widely in demand in Iran and Basra. The VOC ships plied between Surat and Iran via Sindh. The Mughal Governor of Sindh appreciated the work of these foreign traders, because their presence was the source of appreciable income (in a form of Custom Duties) to the state from the pirates used to pay Rs. 12 to 14 thousand per annum to a certain Raja Ram, who commanded some 1000 men and resided in the inaccessible swampy coastal areas at the mouth of Indus. The Governor also paid from Rs. 10 to 12000 to a Baluchi Chief to secure the routes from robbers between his residency Thatta and Sindh.

VOC's Report on Trade in Diewel-Sindh 1757 presents an interesting reading. This Report was compiled and duly signed on board of the Dutch ship *Het Pasgeld*, by W.A. Brahe and N. Mahuij on 8 May 1757 and rendered into English by Dr. Floor

from the original text as literally and closely as possible. Following are its salient features:

This is an account of trade journey performed in a Dutch ship namely, *Het Pasgeld*. The journey started from Batavia (Jakarta) on 10 July, 1756 and ended at Masqat on 15 September 1756 i.e., after a voyage of two months and five days. These traders owing to linguistic troubles had to depend upon an interpreter well-versed in the Portuguese language and such persons were generally not available. They had pleasant surprise to receive a constant flow of visitors as they had never seen any Dutchman as yet in their midst. As for the sale of merchandise since its total price was not to be paid on the spot, either the interpreter or the broker had to stand as a surety for its safe payment. At the port Aurangbander where they had to sell their merchandise, for their residence they rented a house and the warehouse for Rs. 25/- a month, they also employed in accordance with Sindh's customs and usages, (a) doorkeeper, (b) sepoy, (c) one money changer, (d) two servants. The local customs officer assured them that they would not have to pay customs duties more than the English paid and they would also not be charged any customs for the unsold goods. The presence of English and the Dutch traders in Aurangbander provided the local traders with an opportunity to play off one against the other in order to squeeze lower prices of their merchandise from them. The English traders in their zeal to sell the merchandise at competitive rates unfavourable to us Dutch seemed to have outrem their discretion.

The Dutch East India Company had given a costly present to the Imam of Masqat Ahmad b. Said in order to procure trade concession from him, but on learning this, his son-in-law the king of Diewel-Sindh also squeezed a present from them. The king of Diewel-Sindh wanted the Dutch to transport his horses to Surat in VOC's vessels. Thus he latter politely refused.

The Dutch expected that the king of Diewel-Sindh after receiving his present, would also present them on a reciprocal basis, but what they actually received was letter of thanks plus the instructions to the customs officials of Thatta and Aurangbander that the said traders might be afforded all facilities during their stay in their midst.

With regard to prospects of the new trading centre (i.e., Aurangbander) and what kind of merchandise is widely in demand here, the VOC informed their Head Office that the articles of merchandise about which we did not learn from various merchants but we have learnt through our own observation, are as under:

Powdered sugar may be considered the main commodity, without it this nation cannot live. Next follow, pepper and spices. Sindhis appear to have no knowledge of camphor as yet. Then follows the long list of other commodities likely to be advantageous to them from our point of view. The VOC in its despatch to the Head Office also mentions that the (English) Governor of East India company at Bombay annually sends to his agents in Debal (who trade not for his Company but for his private interests) to buy articles at Debal in order to sell them at Bombay at much cheaper rates than ours though their quality is not better than ours, but the local people have no sense of distinction to judge the differences in quality. They also made a suggestion to their Head Office to station an agent who would stay here for one whole year to sell the goods keeping in mind the rise and fall of prices each day, each week and each month, as such a venture would certainly damage this English East Indian Company.

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