

CONCLUSION :

The survival of some isolated pockets along the Indian Ocean littoral stretching from Mozambique in East Africa to Macao in the South China Sea was a reminder, that, even in the late 18th century, when the Portuguese had long ceased to be a dominant power, their presence in the waters of the Indian Ocean was not completely a matter of the past.

To the Portuguese Crown these settlements invoked the existence of the Portuguese Estado da India. Orders were still issued for the whole of the empire in the name of the King, who was the 'Lord over conquests, navigation and trade with Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India.'

The empire again, in the Crown's vision, was a part of the greater network of colonies comprising the islands in the Atlantic, the settlements in West Africa and Brazil in South America. Goa, despite her own meagre resources continued to serve the imperial interests in Brazil by supplying the cloths to be used by the slaves working in the mines and plantations thereof. However, the overall value of the total exports from the port remained rather insignificant in the early part of the 18th century.

Towards the last quarter of the century, the Crown began to take a renewed interest in the further possibilities of trade not only from Goa but from the other ports of India as well. The reason behind this was Portugal's economic compulsions at home.

The Crown's concern for India in this period was born out of its struggle to reverse the adverse balance of trade at home which resulted in a continuous outflow of gold coming from the mines of Brazil.

Series of orders were issued by the state to regulate the trade from India and then from Portugal itself. The cloths thus taken from India in increased volume could now be utilised for two purposes. On one hand, their export to West Africa and Brazil was encouraged and on the other, they were to be further printed in the newly established factories in Portugal, and then to be exported to the other countries in Europe. The regulations, reflecting the mercantilist notion of state intervention into the working of the country's external trade, took, in this case, the form of liberalisation of duties on goods to be transported from India. Underlying the policy was the concern for selling, termed as the 'fear of goods' in the mercantilist literature. [1].

Inspired by the economic progress achieved at home, the Portuguese governors in Goa took up certain developmental projects. Similar to the case of trade, the initiative came from the higher level of administration. Development of internal economy of Goa was sought to be fostered by elaborately laid down governmental instructions regarding cultivation of fallow land and setting up of some small cotton weaving centres under the government supervision. Voluntary participation of the Goans themselves was not very encouraging. The overall effects of the state initiative, on trade, as well as on agriculture and industry were shortlived.

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1. The concept is explained by Eric Roll with illustrations and quotations from many mercantilist writers. Eric Roll, A History of Economic Thought London, 1938, p.68.

The regulations operated at two levels. At one level, there was always an insistence on the visible maintenance of the Estado da India as a whole. At another, there was an effort to realign the various zones to serve the overall interest of the Crown. Despite the Crown's concern for envisaging an integrated trade structure, there was no such economic oneness existing in the Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean during this period. The various zones had developed their own preferences and priorities, fracturing the imperial interests. Goa in this context was ill equipped to cope with the various shifts and orientations among hitherto subordinate but now assertive zones, such as Macao and Mozambique.

The scope of expansion of trade from Goa and its dependencies in India was limited. Whatever growth had resulted from the gradual liberalisation of duties was mostly on trade from outside the Portuguese settlements. The tendency on part of even the Portuguese traders - whether from Macao or from Lisbon was to bypass the capital and move on either to the North, to Bombay and Surat or to the Malabar, Coromandel and further East. But even this growth could not be sustained, as, within a few years of the initiation of the process of liberalisation, the cotton textiles exported to Lisbon turned out to be more than what Portugal could absorb. There were repeated complaints of gluts and falling prices in the metropolis.

The realities of the India Ocean trade in this period too, were not conducive to the reassertion of the Portuguese presence. Some fundamental changes had set in under the British who were already backed by their political foothold in Bengal.

The local business communities of Goa also were not enthusiastic about the new projects initiated by the Crown. The merchants were vocal about their own rights vis - a vis the administration and picked up some issues for a redefinition of their role in the system. But those were the old ones, which had recurred time and again in the past. They were more interested in retaining their economic importance in the old structure of administration, rather than search for new zones of operation.

Goa preferred to remain in old grooves and to follow the old channels. It remained, as if, a part of an 'archaic empire'. The maintenance of the old structure did not lead to any serious confrontation with the changing pattern of trade in the Indian Ocean. Its smallness, in nature and activities, provided the space for its continued existence.