

INTRODUCTION

V.M.Godinho wrote in 1958 that with the partial exception of Brazil, all or almost all remained to be done in the economic and social history of the Portuguese expansion. [1] Though he had failed to take into account the small number of serious studies then available on the Portuguese in Asia, the statement was, in general substantially valid. Since then, many significant works of magnitude on the economic history of the Portuguese expansion have been published, one of the most important among them being by Godinho himself.

Godinho's study of the economic structure and development of the early Portuguese empire, originally begun in 1949 in French, was published in 1969. Meanwhile, two volumes were published from Lisbon in Portuguese from 1963 to 1971. Finally, a modified and enlarged version of the Portuguese edition was published in four volumes from Lisbon from 1981 to 1983. The wide scope of the work is indicated by the title itself - Os Descobrimentos e a Economia Mundial (The Discoveries and the World Economy).

In this, Godinho has integrated Portugal's economic history for the period 1415 to 1640. In the context of the economic conditions that had initiated the expansion, he has discussed the worldwide repercussions and reactions caused or affected by it. In the process, he has drawn together the threads which connected Portugal's commercial and maritime empire and shown how its economic ramifications connected various places situated far apart across the many continents.

1. Quoted in A.R.Disney, Twilight of the Pepper Empire, Portugese Trade in Southwest Asia in the Early 17th Century, Cambridge Mss., 1978, Introduction, p.v.

C.R.Boxer's masterly summing up of the Portuguese experience in different parts of the world in the contexts of the policies pursued at home was published under the title Portuguese Seaborne Empire in 1969. In addition, numerous articles and monographs by him on the history of expansion, settlements, race relations, shipping and local governments are published and still being published regularly. Prof. Boxer's work is wider in scope than Godinho's in terms of the period covered. It comes down to the 18th century that he termed as the period of 'stagnation and contraction in the East (1663 - 1750). Further, he has also studied the religious, racial and social policies pursued by the empire in the colonies thereby giving a more human face and social dimension to the economic history of expansion.

Though the focus of these two sets of works, by Godinho and Boxer is diffused, encompassing the entire Portuguese world, these are indispensable to the study of any particular region under the Portuguese administration as they provide the broad canvas against which that small region is to be placed.

Coming down specifically to the commercial history of Portuguese Asia, there are the works of M.A.P. Meilink Roelofsz, K.S. Mathew, M.N. Pearson, A.R. Disney, G.B. Souza, Afzal Ahmad, etc. and of course the analysis of the nature of the Portuguese enterprise in Asia by Niels Steensgaard. Holden Furber's Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient (1976) is also a basic text providing useful comparison of the trading patterns of the Portuguese, Dutch and the English.

The appearance of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean was significant in history not only on account of the discovery of a new sea route from Europe to Asia but for the Portuguese claims of monopoly over the trade of the Indian Ocean as well. Portugal's attempt to enforce their supremacy on the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean by restricting the freedom of the others through issue of passes was by itself a novel concept. The impact of the policy, the reactions and repercussions in Asia, the nature and extent of the maritime empire thus built up and the causes of its failure in the face of Dutch competition have been the major thrust of most of the studies published so far. Accordingly, the first one hundred years or so of the Portuguese presence in Asia has received the maximum attention from the historians.

K.S.Mathew's and M.N.Pearson's monographs were among the earliest serious studies of the Portuguese commerce in India. Both of these deal mainly with the 16th century. While Mathew (Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century, 1983) describes the nature, volume and organisation of the trade carried on by the Portuguese in initial stage of their presence in India, Pearson (Merchants and Rulers of Gujarat, The response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century 1976) had tried to analyse the reaction of the merchants of Gujarat to the Portuguese claims of monopoly. Later, Pearson published several articles highlighting the social and economic aspects of the settlements and administration. Recently, he has put emphasis on the social aspects in his monograph on the Portuguese in India as a whole published as the New Cambridge History of India 1.1 in 1987.

Afzal Ahmad's study of the Indo Portuguese Trade in the Seventeenth Century 1600 -1663, (1991) is a descriptive account of the trade carried on from India during that period. He gives details of the export of cotton cloths and other items from India, the suppliers of these items and the financiers of the Portuguese in Goa but fails to reflect the economic, organisational and military crisis that had already set in in the Estado.

These crises, on the other hand, is the theme of A.R. Disney's Twilight of the Pepper Empire (1978). The book concentrates on the Viceroyalty of the Count of Linhares at Goa between 1628-1636. An attempt was made in this period to modernise the Lisbon Goa trade by forming a company on the Dutch and the English model for pepper trade from Kanara and Malabar. The collapse of the company in 1633 was followed by the signing of a truce with the English East India Company which ultimately spelt the abandonment by the Portuguese of their monopoly claims to the Cape trade route and their reluctant recognition that the Northern European nations in Asia were there to stay. The book broke a new ground in Indo Portuguese historiography by concentrating on the aspects of crisis rather than on the period of glory. Disney's article on the 17th century Goa, compiled in the First Portuguese Colonial Empire (1986) edited by Malyn Newitt describes the economic life in the port of Goa and the private channels of trade in the face of this period of crisis. These two, along with the work of Dr. Ahmad more or less complete the account of the Portuguese commerce in Goa in the 17th century.

Disney's study of the futile attempt at the formation of the company assumes particular importance in the context of Niels Steensgaard's analysis of the cause of Portugal's failure in the face of Dutch challenge. (Carracks, Caravans and Companies, 1973)

In doing so, he has used the new concept of 'redistributive enterprise' and has shown how the Portuguese enterprise had remained closer to the spirit and form of the Middle Ages rather than the emergent commercial capitalism represented by the joint stock companies of the Dutch and the English.

Among the very recent publications on the Portuguese history is the one by Sanjay Subramanyam. In this book, The Political Economy of Commerce : Southeren India 1500-1650, (1990) the author explores the relation between long distance trade and economic and political structure of Southern India. He also questions some traditional views regarding the relation between external trade and the precolonial economic growth in India. Though his approach is different from the traditional discriptive account of trade carried on by the Europeans, the focus is on the 16th and the early 17th centuries.

With regard to Macao, G.B.Souza's The Survival of Empire : Portuguese Trade and Society in China and South China Sea 1630-1754, (1986) is the study of the Portuguese enclave of Macao, surviving within the orbit of its own economic networks, its markets, traders and finally the relations with the headquarters of Estado in Goa. Despite such progress in scholarship, the history of the Portuguese commercial empire in the Indian subcontinent is far from complete. One obvious limitation of the existing publications is their preoccupation with the early period of the 16th and early 17th centuries.

Barring a few exceptions, the period from late 17th century onwards has remained more or less totally unrepresented. M.N. Pearson, in his bibliographical essay in the New Cambridge History of India has described the period from 17th to 20th centuries as terra incognita. The tendency to discard the period outright as one of decline and degeneration has been the trend for many years now. As early as 1912 all that the Cambridge Modern History had to say on the period after 17th century was :

'As the crusading spirit died down, corruption and incompetence made their appearance and from 1650 onwards, their annals form a dreary record of degeneration. The conquerors were absorbed and degraded by the conquered, for the Portuguese, more than other European nations intermarried with native races. By the beginning of the 18th century, petty disputes between the Viceroy at Goa and the English Governor at Bombay are almost the only visible records of the empire founded by Almeida and Albuquerque. [2]

Even authorities on the subject like C.R.Boxer is almost silent on what happened to the Portuguese empire of India in the 18th century. For him, the 'isolated settlements of Goa, Daman and Diu on the West coast of India, Macau in China and part of the island of Timor in the East Indies were all that remained of the once proud state of India after Mozambique had been made a separate government in 1752.' [3]

2. The Cambridge Modern History, vol v. eds, A.N.Ward, G.W.Porthero, Stanley Heathes, 1912.
3. C.R.Boxer, Four centuries of Portuguese Expansion - 1415-1825, A Succint Survey, Johannesburg, 1916, pp.79-80.

The Indo Portuguese history seminars have failed to fill up this gap in the historiography. Proceedings of the first seminar, Indo Portuguese History Sources and Problems (1981) contain articles by specialists in the field. The subject matter ranges from the theoretical discussion in general of the problems of reconstructing Indian history from European sources by Prof. Ashin Das Gupta to discussion of some specific works of documentations and translation by Prof C.R.Boxer, and others. But Both the problems and the sources of information are picked up from the 16th century itself. Only exception is the article by V.T.Gune who introduces the many volumes, particularly of the customs records from the Goa archives belonging to the 18th century and later.

The second volume of proceedings, Indo Portuguese History, Old Issues, New Questions edited, by. T.R.de Souza too selects the issues mainly from the early period alone. Hence, the 'new questions' too come from this period only. T.R.de Souza edited Goa Through the Ages, Vol.II, An Economic History, 1989 is wider in scope. Celsa Pinto's article on Goa based coastal and overseas trade is an attempt at covering both the 18th and the 19th centuries. The actual discussion about the 18th century, however, is rather sketchy, the author's strong point visibly being the 19th century alone. Rather, M.N.Pearson's article on the 17th and 18th centuries reveals more insight into the role of Goa in the international trade of Portugal.

Myra Pinto Masc^arhanas' unpublished M.A. dissertation on the Pombaline era in Goa is a refreshing break in the pattern of Indo Portuguese historiography.

Even though the main thrust of the work is political, it takes into account some other aspects of life of Goa as well. The chapter on agriculture is long and thorough but suffers from certain shortcomings arising out of the acceptance of the contemporary records on their immediate face value and unawareness of the controversy that had broken out on the issue. Despite its obvious shortcomings, the work is significant for placing Goa in the context of the rule of Pombal in Portugal.

In this dissertation we have concentrated on a relatively unexplored area by trying to study the Estado during the second half of the 18th century. In this period, the 'Empire' despite its obvious weakness lingered on within the changing structure of trade in the Indian Ocean.

The mere use of the words 'decline and degeneration' does not recognise the problem of lingering on and fails to explain the logic behind the occasional efforts to reorient itself within the new structure of trade. In order to understand the mechanics of this, we have of course taken only one aspect of it, granting that there might be many others. The thrust is on the trade structure and its networks.

The mid 18th century marked the height of the 'second' Portuguese empire in the Atlantic, based on slaves, sugar and gold, in which Angola and Brazil were the major partners. [4]

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4. Three distinct phases can be identified in the imperial history of Portugal. It is customary to regard the maritime and commercial enterprise in Africa and Asia beginning from 1415 as the 'first empire'. The 'second empire' based on Atlantic lasted until Brazil became independent in 1825 while the 'third empire' was founded in Africa at the time of the scramble. It survived until the Portuguese Revolution in 1974. Malyn Newitt in the Introduction to 'The First Portuguese Colonial Empire', Exeter, 1986, p.1.

The importance of the isolated pockets of settlements along the Indian Ocean littoral, though relegated to the background, was not yet totally exhausted. The study therefore is an effort to highlight the role played by the remnants of this 'first empire' for retaining the rate of returns from the 'second'. This was done through the supply of cotton cloths for the use of the slaves in the plantations of Brazil. In the last quarter of the century, these cotton cloths were used for a second purpose, that of meeting the adverse balance in Portugal's international trade.

In Portugal, it was the era of the Marques de Pombal, the dynamic minister and his immediate successors. The focus of the study therefore is on the repercussions of the policies pursued at home by Pombal and his successors in the Estado da India (The Portuguese Empire in Asia).

The theme of the Portuguese imperial connections and networks has been explored in part one of the first chapter and the second chapter.

In India this period is generally regarded as one of decline and degeneration that ultimately paved the path for the emergence of the British East India Company as the supreme power over the subcontinent. In part two of the first chapter we have discussed the fundamental changes brought about in the Oceanic trade of India by the political developments of the period and the emerging importance of the British private traders. Goa's position, in this structure has also been located in this. Afterwards, the specific trading connections of Goa with the other regions of the Indian Ocean during the second half of the 18th century have been discussed in chapter three. Chapters four

and five discussing the role of the local trading communities, their relation with the government and the futile experiments with cotton weaving centres and expansion of agriculture are included as a part of the story of Goa's survival.

We hope it will reveal the twists and turns growing out of the contradictions and conflicts at various layers and between the government and the social groups. It seems that the very strength of the weakness of the empire was characteristic of the oldest surviving empire in India.