

# History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

## The Rise of England

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If a businessman was searching for one word that would describe the emergence of England from its feudal past, it has to be wool. And if he was searching for a second word to explain the rise of the British Empire, which dominated much of the Islamic world for two hundred years, it has to be trade. Along the road, England was helped by her geography, the cast of history, which seemed to throw the dice in her favor at critical moments, and a steady stream of capable, pragmatic and at times ruthless first-rung leaders.

Notwithstanding the *Magna Carta* (1215), England was, until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a feudal society. Land was the principal economic resource, and it was divided into large estates, which had been bestowed by the king as a reward to his cohorts for riding with him in battle. Serfs worked each estate, consumed what they needed for their subsistence, and passed on the surplus to the landlord. The process for tax collection was simple but efficient. The Parliament had a say in raising new taxes. In times of peace, the landlords paid a portion of their income to the throne. In times of war, they provided the king with cavalry and foot soldiers. Land was relatively plentiful. The sprawling estates were separated by common land, which was used by the serfs to graze their sheep, generating in the process a little extra income for themselves. Almost everyone was either a landlord or “belonged” to a serfdom. This inefficient but stable social structure served England well for half a millennium, when Europe slept in the stupor of its Dark Ages.

The winds of change blowing in the western Mediterranean in the 15<sup>th</sup> century also swept across the English Channel. The first to wake up were the Iberians. Their long and bloody struggle with the Muslims in Spain brought them into contact with the more advanced culture and technology of the Islamic world. As early as 1085, when Toledo fell to the Crusaders, Islamic learning became available to Europe. Schools of translation were set up first in Spain, and later in France, England, Germany and Italy. By the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, Christian forces had captured the entire Iberian Peninsula except for Granada, and Islamic learning became diffused into the citadels of Europe. During the following two centuries (1248-1415), the level of technological know-how was approximately equal in the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco and there was a military equilibrium in the western Mediterranean.

The first break in this equilibrium came with the Portuguese capture of Ceuta in 1415. Taking advantage of internal squabbles among the Moroccan emirs, a small Portuguese force sacked the city, slaughtered its population, and converted its mosque to a cathedral. This was the first European conquest on African

soil. The pattern was to be repeated with increasing frequency in later years. The invaders were amazed at the wealth of the city, and the imported articles they found in the houses included porcelain from China, fine muslin from India, ivory and gold from Africa. The capture of Ceuta, and later of Tangier, provided the Portuguese with a springboard for raids along the Atlantic coast of Africa. After 1434 when Cape Bajador was successfully crossed, the Portuguese thrust forward into West Africa in search of ivory, gold, nuts, and slaves. In return, the Europeans paid the Africans with horses, iron bars, cowry shells, Andalusian ware and clothes. When Constantinople (Istanbul) fell to Sultan Mehmet II (1453), Pope Nicholas V declared a Crusade against the Turks. The Portuguese and the Spaniards responded, but instead of proceeding to the eastern Mediterranean where they would face the fierce Turks, they turned their wrath on North Africa. In 1471, the city of Arzila on the west coast of Morocco fell. Five thousand Muslims were enslaved and an immense treasure was captured. The discovery of America (1492), and the Portuguese onslaught in the Indian Ocean (1502-1515) brought Mexican silver and the highly coveted Indian pepper to the European market.

The arrival of products from Africa and India expanded trade throughout the North Atlantic. The Spanish set up a "factory" at Antwerp (Holland), which served as an outlet for their merchandise. The English were latecomers to this commerce, but they entered the fray and they soon became important players in it. England had very little gold or silver to buy the high value Indian pepper or the expensive Senegalese ivory. But there was one English product that was in demand. That was wool. As English participation in the North Atlantic trade grew, so did the demand for English wool. In addition to Antwerp and Lisbon, English traders were active in the interior of Morocco, trading wool, quicksilver and tin for sugar, gunmetal and gold.

The interests of England and Morocco converged at this time in history, as it was in their mutual interest to contain the Portuguese. This cooperation extended not just to trade, but also covertly to the supply of English cannon to the Moroccans. In 1541, it was English cannon that enabled the Moroccans to reclaim Fort Santa Cruz from the Portuguese.

As demand for wool increased, so did the pressure on grazing land in England. The landlords, sensing the profits that were available from the sale of wool, expanded their holdings into the common grazing grounds that had existed for centuries. The serfs who had depended on this land for their sheep were squeezed out. Surplus labor from the serfdoms poured into London and Liverpool where it was deemed a public nuisance. The earls and the barons could not tolerate the multitude of these untidy peasants. Laws were passed in the Parliament (1535) making it a crime for any unattached serf to loiter in London. The first time a person was caught, he was punished with servitude for two years. The punishment for a second offense was servitude for life. For a while capital punishment was also tried.

The desperation of the London slums gave birth to organized piracy. A return to the land was not possible, so the sea provided an outlet for the vast energies of a seething population. Piracy was not an English phenomenon, nor was it invented in the Atlantic. It was prevalent in the Mediterranean and in the Persian Gulf throughout the Middle Ages. Piracy was made particularly attractive at this time by the mushrooming Atlantic trade. The exploits of the Spanish in America and of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean were well known in Europe. Spanish ships loaded with pillaged silver from the Americas, and Portuguese ships carrying Indian pepper were prime targets for pirates.

There was treasure on the high seas. The Spanish and the Portuguese divided up the world into their spheres of influence (1494) and maintained a monopoly on trade. The western Atlantic was polarized between the "haves" and the "have-nots". The Iberians were the "haves" while the Moroccans, Algerians, English and French were the "have-nots". These poorer nations became bastions of piracy, which was financed by the rich merchants of Europe and North Africa. On occasion, even the monarchs

invested in these missions. The pirate ships would wait off the Atlantic coast of Africa and ambush vulnerable ships. The payoff was enormous. The silver looted from Spanish ships sustained the English pound during the Elizabethan era (1559-1602). The skills and talents developed in these adventures produced some of the best-known sea captains and admirals of the era. Names such as John Hawkins and Drake of England, and Khairuddin and Piri Rais of the Ottoman Empire became legends in history.

The infusion of wealth from this “trade” produced a rich merchant class in each of the participating states. Here we will focus on England. The newly rich merchants and successful pirates became the object of envy of the old feudal landlords. As the merchants made a dash for power, resistance from the feudal establishment was fierce. Until trade in the North Atlantic picked up momentum, political power in England had rested with the monarch, and it was supported by the landed gentry. With the entry of the merchant class into the fray, it became a three-way struggle. The Parliament became an arena for political battles. The forays were fierce but by 1680 the center of gravity of political power shifted decidedly in favor of the merchants. England had finally emerged from its feudal age.

The reign of Elizabeth I served as an historical hinge around which this transformation took place. In 1604, Queen Elizabeth I could look back on her long reign (1559-1603) and take satisfaction in her achievements. Principal among these were the consolidation of the United Kingdom after the defeat of the Scots (1587), the destruction of the Spanish Armada (1588), and the launching of the joint stock companies (1600). England demonstrated a burst of energy during this period as manifest in the creativity of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), and the voyages of Hawkins (d.1595) and Drake (d. 1596). It is true that most of her subjects lived in poverty in the slums of London and Liverpool, but this destitution served as a catapult to challenge the ocean and ultimately to conquer it. Prior to the year 1600, England was a marginal player in the affairs of the North Atlantic. After 1600, her influence grew steadily and inexorably.

It was the merchants of England who laid the foundation of the British Empire (1650-1799). The passage from a feudal society to an imperial power was not smooth, and we may identify only the major benchmarks in a broad-brush survey as they touch upon Muslim history. The Spanish and Portuguese monopolies lasted less than a century. Starting with the year 1530, the Ottomans challenged the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. The Red Sea was cleared of a Portuguese presence, and the Ottoman hold on Yemen was consolidated. Ottoman navies raided Portuguese strongholds in Hormuz, Oman and Gujrat. By 1540, more Indian pepper flowed to Europe through Alexandria in Egypt than through Lisbon, Portugal. In 1578, Ahmed Al Mansur of Morocco, helped by the religious zeal of the Jazuliya Sufis, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Portuguese at the Battle of al Qasr al Kabir. Sebastian, the young King of Portugal was killed. Two years later, in 1580, Portugal itself became a protectorate of Spain. Meanwhile, English and French corsairs continuously harassed Spanish shipping in the Atlantic. This nuisance, compounded by the Protestant religious views of the English, prompted a Spanish Crusade against England. The Spanish Armada set sail in 1588 with the best ships that Spain could muster, as well as ships commandeered from Portugal. The attempted invasion was a disaster. The English, under command of Charles Howard, destroyed the mighty Armada. Ten years later, in 1598, the Spanish attempted another invasion. This time they were thwarted by nature, and their navy was shipwrecked by a powerful storm in the Atlantic Ocean. Spanish naval power never recovered from these disasters.

These events opened up a window of opportunity in the northern Atlantic. The Dutch gained their independence from Spain in 1572, and became a magnet for enterprising mercenaries from the northern German counties. The Portuguese had long established a trading outpost in Antwerp and the Dutch learned the art of commerce from them. The Spanish had introduced shipbuilding into Holland. As Anglo-Spanish wars took their toll, and the losses were compounded by relentless piracy, a need arose

in Spain to build more ships and to do it faster. Spain could maintain the rate of production only at the cost of decreasing quality. On the other hand, the Dutch focused on shipbuilding improvements, increasing the agility and gun carrying capability of their boats. The Dutch had the advantage of access to timber in the Rhine valley while the Spanish forests were becoming denuded by centuries of shipbuilding. As the Dutch ventured into the Atlantic, the Spanish responded by closing all ports on the Atlantic to their shipping. This only forced the Dutch to move out further into the ocean, thereby increasing the range of their shipping. Whenever hostilities took place, the Dutch won because of their more robust ships and the superiority of their cannon. Gradually, Portuguese and Spanish outposts in West Africa, Brazil and the Indian Ocean fell to the Dutch. By 1640, the Indian Ocean became a Dutch preserve and the lucrative Indian trade flowed through Amsterdam and Antwerp. Cape Town, the hinge around which the Indian and Atlantic waters flow, was established in 1652 and became the nucleus of Dutch settlements in South Africa.

The rise of the Dutch, and later of the British, and their triumph over the Spanish-Portuguese monopolies, was due in no small measure to the development of a new institution. *The rise of the joint stock company, as an institution of trade, was the single most important political economic development of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.* What enables common people to achieve uncommon goals is their loyalty to institutions that pool together and channel their energies. The joint stock company proved to be far superior in harnessing the energies of men and material than the monarchical hierarchies of Spain and Portugal, or for that matter the despotic centralism of the Muslim world at that time.

*As we shall see, the eclipse of the Muslim world was due in large part to its failure to evolve institutions that could successfully compete with the joint stock company in a world that was increasingly shrinking.* Among the most successful of these companies were the English East India Company chartered in 1600, and the Dutch East India Company chartered in 1602. Given a stake in the overall profits, British interlopers found it more advantageous to join the joint stock companies than to fight them.

The mercantile zeal of Western Europe must be looked at in the context of new ideas sweeping the continent. In 1517, the German monk Martin Luther expounded his religious philosophy, which in time came to be known as the Protestant Reformation. Luther placed the center of salvation in faith based on the Bible. He conceived the Church to be a community of believers. These ideas are familiar to Sunni Islam where the Qur'an is the source of Divine Law guarded by the consensus of the community. Indeed, Sultan Sulaiman (1520-1565) gave protection to the Protestants in Hungary against the persecution of the Catholics. The support, while rooted in religious sympathies, was also motivated by a desire to weaken the Catholic powers. Luther's ideas were welcomed by a growing merchant class in northern Europe who found in it an escape from the heavy taxation laid by the Church for performance of obligatory religious rites. The monarchs saw in it a vehicle for implementing their state and personal agendas. The ideas of Martin Luther in Germany and Calvin (1535) in Switzerland swept across northern Europe where the merchant influence was the strongest. Sweden became Protestant in 1527, Norway and Denmark in 1536, Scotland in 1567, while the counties of northern Germany, Holland and pockets of France and Italy experienced the transformation in the same period. In England, the pace was dictated by the vagaries of King Henry VIII whose obsession for a male heir to the throne of England led him to divorce and marry multiple times, a cardinal sin in the eyes of the Church. When the Church declined to oblige him on his serial marriages and divorces, Henry responded by declaring the Church of England to be independent of Rome and made himself the head of the Church (1534).

The Protestant Reformation freed the mercantile energies of northern Europe. Since the sack of Constantinople by the Latin Crusaders (1204), wealth had displaced faith as the motivation for the Crusades. Nonetheless, rituals and the talisman retained a strong hold on the imagination of northern

Europe. The Church, as the sole keeper of the talisman and the dispenser of indulgences, maintained a stranglehold on temporal as well as religious affairs. Merchants begged and monarchs trembled before the heavenly power of the Church. The Reformation changed it all. No longer were the merchants bound by the constraints imposed from Rome. Money could be made-and kept-without buying indulgences from the Church. The Spanish and the Portuguese had sailed on the high seas with a dual burden of conquest and spreading Catholic Christianity. The Dutch and the English had no such pretenses. Their motives were entirely mercantile. If in the process of trading and capital accumulation they amassed world empires, it was a byproduct of their primary focus on money. Their cannons did not roar in the name of God. They belled out cannon balls in pursuit of profits.

The resolution of the dialectic between the Protestants and the Catholics was not without a fight. Religious warfare raged in Europe through much of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. When the dust settled, Norway, Sweden, England, Holland as well as the northern counties of Germany had become Protestant. In England, Henry VIII declared himself the head of the Church of England in 1534, and issued an edict that the clergy must submit to the crown. By 1540, most of the relics and shrines in England were destroyed. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a military alliance was formed between the English and the Dutch (1579) against the Catholic Iberian powers, Spain and Portugal. The alliance survived until 1650 when the British, alarmed at the growing power of the Dutch in the Indian Ocean (Sri Lanka, 1640; Cochin, India, 1641), and their occupation of the American mid-Atlantic coast (New York, 1626), switched sides, and a three-way rivalry between England, France and Holland began for control of trade with India and America.

The British East India Company was by far the most successful of the joint stock companies. Until the discovery of America (1492), the key to the riches of the world lay in the Indian Ocean trade. A look at a map of the world in the year 1500 would show that the Indian Ocean region was by far the most prosperous area of the world. Its combined output of raw materials and manufactured goods was many times that of the Mediterranean region. China, India, Indonesia and Persia were part of its littoral states as were the prosperous ports of East Africa and southern Arabia. Together, this region had a population in excess of three hundred million, while the total population of Europe and North Africa was about a hundred million. Black pepper from Malabar, cinnamon from Sri Lanka, sugar from Surat, ginger from the Malaccas, ivory and iron ore from Mombasa were traded as far away as Alexandria, Egypt, and Venice, Italy. World class manufactured goods included fine muslin from Bengal, cotton goods from Gujrat, silk and porcelain from China, carpets from Persia, perfumes from Arabia, finished steel from Basra and Bijapur.

The great empires of China and India maintained embassies in the littoral states. Freedom of navigation and trade on the high seas was guaranteed by consensus. On occasions, the emperors of the great littoral states, China and India, sent fleets to visit the major ports and promote their manufactured goods. Such was the case with the mighty fleets from China (1402-1415) under the Chinese Muslim Admiral Zheng Yi (also called Admiral Ho), who organized a series of expeditions to Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Calicut, Aden, Mombasa, Shofala and around the tip of South Africa. Sultan Muhammed bin Tughlaq of India made a similar attempt in 1335, but as it often happened with that hapless monarch, the fleet was caught in a storm off the coast of Malabar and perished. During the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Ming dynasty of China maintained a merchant fleet of over 3,000 vessels, of which 300 were the giant multi-deck, multi-mast ships that dominated the Indian Ocean.

India, in particular, was a pivot to this multi-national trade. Jetting out into the Indian Ocean, its fine harbors at Calicut, Cochin, Surat and Chittagong provided natural anchor points for the east-west trade. Endowed with bountiful natural resources, its harvest of spices was highly sought after. Its

manufactured goods included fine cloth, smelted iron, brassware, polished diamonds and carved ivory that were in high demand in the Mediterranean region and East Africa. The annual harvest of spices ensured that the balance of trade was always in favor of the vast subcontinent. Gold and silver accumulated in the treasuries of the Sultans and the maharajas, and these in turn attracted invaders hunting for gold, first from Central Asia and later from Europe.

The monsoons shaped the pattern of trade and commerce in the Indian Ocean. The word monsoon derives from the Arabic word "*mausam*", meaning climate and weather, and has been incorporated into Farsi, Urdu, Swahili and Malay languages. (Some linguists contend that it derives from the Arabic word "*maa-an-Chin*", meaning, water or rain from China). Celebrated in ancient ragas, in ballads of wandering dervishes, in songs of love and longing, as well as modern classics, the monsoons dictate the rhythm of life in South Asia. When the monsoons arrive on time, people rejoice. When they fail, they starve. In late summer, as the relentless sun bakes the dusty Indo-Gangetic plains, cooler air from south of the equator drives in. Moving roughly in the northeasterly direction, it is saturated with the moisture of the Indian Ocean. As it meets up with the majestic Himalayas and the high plateaus of Central Asia, the air rises, cools and parts with its moisture, drenching a parched earth. The floods replenish the soil, sustaining man and beast alike, and bring forth the fauna of the tropics. In January, when the northern hemisphere cools, the process is reversed. Cold air from the landmass of Asia pushes roughly in the southwest direction, bringing rain to the east coast of India. From ancient times, this drama of life and death has been played out, sustaining powerful empires and on occasions, destroying them.

In the year 1500, the Indian Ocean was an Islamic lake. Since the time of Harun al Rashid (786-809), merchants from West Asia and Persia had sailed forth, riding on the monsoons, to India, Africa, Sumatra and China. They had established themselves all along the rim of the Indian Ocean in an unending chain of trading posts extending from Shofala in Africa to Canton in China. Included among the more important towns were Zanzibar, Dar as Salaam, Malindi, Mombassa, Aden, Oman, Basra, Hormuz, Surat, Calicut, Cochin, Colombo, Tiruchi, Chittagong, Malacca, Acheh and Canton. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this trade had matured into a stable interchange of men and material.

The Indian Ocean also provided the highway for pilgrimage to Mecca. The Hajj is obligatory on every Muslim, who is physically and financially able. Muslims from Indonesia, Malaya and China could only reach the shores of Arabia by sea. Although many Muslims from the northwestern provinces of India traveled to Mecca by land, many others traveled by sea from the ports of Surat and Cochin. The peace of the Indian Ocean and its open etiquette guaranteed the safety of the pilgrims.

Muslim political influence dominated the Indian Ocean. The islands of Indonesia had accepted Islam. In India, Sufi shaykhs had penetrated into the Deccan, while in northern India, the interaction of Islam and Hinduism had produced a rich amalgam. East Africa was dotted with city-states, ruled by African Muslims. So pervasive was the Islamic influence, that Arabic became the language of trade and commerce. Even the Ming emperors of China, in pursuit of their commercial interests, saw it fit to appoint Muslims as sea captains. Admiral Zheng Yi (commonly known as Admiral Ho), who led multiple voyages in the Indian Ocean (1402-1415), was a Chinese Muslim. Freedom of the seas was guaranteed by consensus. Africans, Arabs, Persians, Indians, Sinhalese, Malays and Chinese were all active in this trade. Even though Muslim influence was dominant, Hindu merchants from Malabar or Buddhist priests from Canton traveled in peace and competed for trade and influence on equal terms. Thriving commerce produced a rich culture, giving birth to new languages such as Swahili in East Africa and transforming old ones such as Malay.

The peace of this commerce was shattered by the European invasions. What had been an ocean of trade and commerce for a thousand years became an ocean of piracy and destruction. Vasco de Gama sailed to the coast of Malabar (1496) guided by an Indian mariner, Ahmed Ibn Majid, whom he had met in Mombasa. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslims knew far more about the Indian Ocean than did the Europeans. As early as the year 1000, the Afghan historian Al Bairuni knew the shape of the tip of Africa. By contrast, European knowledge of the Indian Ocean was poor. They imagined that India extended all the way east of the Nile River to the Malaccas (Malaysia). They used the term "Greater India" to denote the Deccan. Northern India was called "Lesser India". The territories in East Africa were called "Middle India". Somewhere in Middle India, they imagined, there was a Christian King by the name of Prester John who was waiting for the Europeans to join hands with them in a holy war against the Muslims. The Portuguese and Spanish were not just out to find a new trade route to the Indian Ocean. Their aim, as explicitly stated in a letter from the Portuguese King Manuel to Sultan Qansuh al Ghouri of Egypt in 1507, was to invade Arabia from the territories of Prester John and destroy Mecca.

The Portuguese devastated the principal ports of the Indian Ocean (1504-1520). They succeeded in destroying the peaceful trade there, changing a life style that had existed for centuries. For twenty-five years, there was no answer to the Portuguese atrocities. Only after the Ottomans organized a credible naval defense did the Portuguese meet their match. In 1517, the Ottomans captured Egypt, moved the Caliphate to Istanbul and took on the burden of defending Muslim interests worldwide. Starting with the year 1530, the Ottoman navy challenged the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. One by one, the important trading centers of East Africa were won back. By the year 1540, Indian pepper flowed both on Muslim and Portuguese ships. Towards the end of the century, events in North Africa and Western Europe had a direct impact on the power balance in the Indian Ocean. After the Portuguese defeat at al Qasr al Kabir (1578), and the destruction of the Spanish Armada by the English (1588), Spanish and Portuguese power waned, while the English and the Dutch entered the fray.

Armed with superior guns mounted on larger and more efficient ships, the Dutch quickly overran Portuguese outposts in the Indian Ocean. In 1616, the Dutch East India Company obtained trading rights in Japan. In 1619, it founded a colony near Jakarta (Indonesia). In 1615, the Dutch wrested the Straits of Malacca from the Portuguese. The island of Mauritius was reinforced and a settlement was established at the southern tip of Africa (1640). Trading colonies were established at Isfahan (Persia), Surinam (South America) and New Amsterdam (later renamed New York, North America). They drove the Portuguese from Brazil and cornered its slave trade, but the Portuguese recaptured the colony after they won their independence from Spain (1648). The Dutch were almost as ruthless as the Portuguese, especially in their dealings with the Indonesians and the Malays, but their focus was primarily trade. As long as they obtained their spices, they did not force their Christian views on the local, predominantly Muslim populations.

A Dutch monopoly of the Indian Ocean trade was no more acceptable to England and France than was a Spanish-Portuguese monopoly. Judging correctly that India held the key to trade in the Indian Ocean, King James I of England sent an ambassador, Thomas Roe, to the imperial court of Jehangir. This was in keeping with the English desire to establish trade relations with the principal seats of power in Asia. For instance, in 1581, Queen Elizabeth I had sent Harborne as her ambassador to the Ottoman court of Murad III who conferred trade privileges on the English because the Ottomans needed English tin for their bronze cannons. Roe arrived in Surat in 1615 and proceeded to Agra to present his credentials to the Great Moghul. Each applicant to the imperial court was required to present gifts befitting his rank. According to his own admission, Roe's gifts were meager and consisted of frayed mirrors, moldy leather cases and faded velvet, some paintings and an old English coach. The Emperor politely accepted the

gifts, showing a good deal of interest in the paintings, a field in which the Great Moghul was a connoisseur. As for the coach, the Great Moghul had it immediately repaired and reupholstered with gold brocade. There is no evidence to support the position taken by some English writers that Roe befriended Jehangir and the two together indulged in bouts of drunkenness and opium consumption. The Emperor considered "the Franks" hardly worth mentioning in his great memoirs. (The word *Firangi* in Hindustani derives from the word Frank, and was used derogatively to refer to Europeans during the colonial era). The closest the English Ambassador got to the Emperor was at one of the royal send off ceremonies for a military campaign, and even that was at several arms length. Emperor Shah Jehan was more explicit in his derision of the Ferangis: "The Franks would be a great people were it not for three things. First, they are heathens. Second, they eat pigs. Third, they do not wash after they use the bathroom". Such smugness was characteristic of Asian rulers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it prevented them from accurately assessing the capabilities of these "Firangis" from across the world. In the long run, it proved to be their undoing.

The goods that the English brought to Surat-wool, mercury, red lead, vermillion, and drinking glasses-hardly caused a stir in the merchant community of Surat which was accustomed to getting paid in gold and silver. Nonetheless, Roe's observations are among the first by a European about life at the court of the Great Moghul. Roe records how Jehangir was weighed in gold and diamonds at one of his birthdays, and the gold was distributed to the poor. He notes that the royal military camp embraced a circumference of more than thirty miles, and was larger than any European city at that time. Roe stayed in India until 1619 and obtained from the Emperor a royal *Farman* (decree), giving the English trading privileges at Surat. The Farman of Jehangir was a turning point in history. It was the first instance of an Indian Emperor formally granting trading rights to a European company. It opened India to European influence.

A three-way rivalry between the French, English and the Dutch ensued. It was like the front-runner in a marathon race who is continuously challenged by two very versatile and agile competitors. The combined resources of England and France were far greater than those of Holland, even when the energies of the northern German counties are included in the Dutch effort. Moreover, the Great Moghuls preferred the English because they refrained from stepping on the religious sensibilities of the Indians. The Portuguese had instituted inquisitions in Goa, torturing Muslims and Hindus alike, and had captured many Bengalis to be sold as slaves in far-away Brazil. In 1635, Emperor Shah Jehan ordered the Governor of Bengal, Qasim Khan, to give the Portuguese a taste of their own medicine. Qasim Khan destroyed the Portuguese fortifications on the River Hooghly, captured several hundred of them and sent them to Agra, where they recanted, asked for mercy, and were pardoned by the Emperor.

The English demonstrated their sea prowess soon after they ventured into the Indian Ocean. In 1615, one year before Roe landed in Surat, an English fleet defeated the Portuguese off the coast of Bombay, and Roe could boast to Jehangir that the king of England would soon control the mighty Indian Ocean. Having surrendered mastery of the ocean to the Europeans, the land powers of the Indian Ocean had to depend on the European powers to ensure safe passage for pilgrims to Mecca. Until 1615, Indian pilgrims had to obtain a "passport" from the hated Portuguese, pay them a fee, and have their papers stamped with a presumed likeness of Jesus and Mary, for safe conduct through the Indian Ocean. Muslims honor Jesus as a great Prophet, and Mary as the mother of Jesus, and drawing their pictures is considered sacrilegious just as much as drawing a picture of Prophet Muhammed (p) or Prophet Moses. Ships that did not have a Portuguese passport were liable to be sunk. It was in part to offset the influence of the Portuguese that Jehangir had given the English trading rights in Surat.

Yet another opportunity presented itself to the English in 1622. Shah Abbas of Persia, fresh from his victories over the Ottomans in the silk producing district of Tabriz and his capture of the trading post of Qandahar (Afghanistan) from Emperor Shah Jehan of India, desired to get rid of the Portuguese who had remained in their fortress at Hormuz since 1515. They had bottled up trade in the Persian Gulf, harassed merchant shipping and tortured pilgrims to Mecca. The Portuguese Fort at Hormuz was impregnable from land, and the Shah did not have sufficient naval power to challenge the Europeans at sea. A deal was struck with the English East India Company. In 1622, Persian cavalry attacked from land, as the English bottled up the Portuguese from the sea. Hormuz was recaptured, and Portuguese power in the Persian Gulf came to an end. In appreciation of their service, Shah Abbas granted the Company preferred trading rights throughout the Safavid Empire. As the Company had already acquired trading rights in Surat, the events at Hormuz consolidated the Company position throughout the Arabian Sea.

Sri Lanka was the next major theater of operations. The Portuguese had ruined the economy of the island during their years of occupation. Its agriculture was stagnant, dams broken, plantations in disarray. Some of the Sinhalese had been captured and forced to serve as mercenaries in the Portuguese wars off East Africa. Raja Sinha of Colombo ardently desired to get rid of these unruly foreigners. Meanwhile, the Dutch had arrived on the scene and they saw in the island an ideal place to establish a colony. Raja Sinha, unaware of Dutch ambitions, appealed to them for help. In 1640, a Dutch expeditionary force defeated the Portuguese off Colombo and that city became a Dutch colony. The Dutch were as ruthless as the Portuguese in pursuing their commercial interests, which lay primarily in increasing the production of cinnamon and other spices. But they refrained from forcing the Sinhalese to convert. It was in Sri Lanka that the doctrine of *apartheid* (a Dutch word, meaning separation of races) was first practiced extensively. Colombo served as a transit point for ships of the Dutch India Company on their way to Indonesia and Japan. Dutch women were few, so some of the Dutch men took Sinhalese women as wives. However, any Dutch woman caught with a Sinhalese man was flogged, put in jail for life, and her children enslaved. The Dutch followed up their victory in Sri Lanka by establishing a presence at Cochin on the Malabar Coast (1641) and Masulipatam on the east India coast (1642). The Dutch held Colombo until 1795 using German mercenaries in their armed forces. During the Napoleonic wars (1795-1812), the English bribed the German mercenaries and their commander Pierre de Meuron to switch their loyalties, and Colombo surrendered to the English commanders sent from Madras (1798) without a fight. The fall of Colombo also tightened the isolation of the Kingdom of Mysore under Tippu Sultan, which fell a year later (1799).

The English position improved both in America and India as the 17<sup>th</sup> century rolled on. In 1620, the Pilgrims, Puritan refugees from a doctrinaire England, landed at New Plymouth, Massachusetts, after spending more than ten years in the tolerant social climate of Holland. In 1629, the Colony of Massachusetts was established. In 1639, the East India Company obtained the permission of the Nawab of Arcot to establish a factory at Madras. The following year, with the permission of Emperor Shah Jehan, they established Fort George near Calcutta. In 1651, the English felt strong enough to declare a monopoly on the lucrative slave trade with West Africa. Soon thereafter, they overran the Dutch colonies in America, seized New Amsterdam and renamed it New York (1664). In 1668, Charles II who had received the island of Bombay as a dowry when he married Princess Catherine of Portugal sold it to the East India Company for ten British pounds. By the year 1700, with Portugal defeated at sea, and the Dutch tiring, England was well positioned to dominate the Indian Ocean. The only rival left was France. While the Europeans fought for domination of the seas, and of world trade, the great dynasties of the Moghuls and the Safavids were exhausting themselves while expanding their land empires, and paid scant attention to building credible sea forces. Even the mighty Emperor Aurangzeb, in his advance towards Bijapur, Golkunda, Poona, Mysore and Arcot (1675-1707), bypassed the Portuguese stronghold of Goa.

An event of historical consequence occurred towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1696). With the help of soldiers from Baluchistan and Punjab (modern Pakistan), the Sultan of Oman laid siege to the strategic Portuguese Fort Jesus of Mombassa (Kenya). The siege started in 1694. Resistance was desperate. So was the determination of the Baluchis to expel the hated Portuguese who had terrorized East Africa for over a hundred years. Reinforcements arrived for the attackers from Oman and Baluchistan and for the defenders from Goa. The Sultan of Oman was determined to re-establish his sway over trade in East Africa. After a series of determined assaults, the Omani, Baluchi and Punjabi troops triumphed. Since the troops came from the territories of India, it may be inferred that the Emperor Aurangzeb knew of the attack and condoned it. Following this victory, Omani control over the East African coast was consolidated and it remained so until displaced by the British in 1850. The Sultanate of Oman played a key role in the decisive confrontation between the English and Tippu Sultan of Mysore (d. 1799). The fall of Fort Jesus signaled the end of the Portuguese Empire in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese hung on to Goa, as an appendage of the British Empire, until the Indian Army evicted them in 1962.

By 1713, the Dutch were exhausted, and competition between the English and the French sharpened. The rivalry was bitter both in India and in America. At stake was the wealth of Asia and America, perhaps the mastery of the world. The French and the British East India Companies both intervened in the wars of succession that raged in India after the death of the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb (1707) in which the Moghuls, Afghans, Rajputs, Marathas, Sikhs and Indian Muslims were all involved. In anticipation of the spoils, the British and the French fought each other on and off throughout the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The battles raged at sea and on two continents, in America and in India. Initially, the French held the advantage. With capable generals like Dupleix (1742-1754) in Pondicherry (India), they appeared to be winning the contest. But the British proved more resourceful, and generals such as Robert Clive proved to be more than a match for the French officers. The six year war of 1756-1763 was a disaster for the French. By the terms of the treaty that ended the hostilities, France ceded to England almost all of its holdings in India and most of its privileges in America.

The English triumph over their adversaries was due to several interrelated causes. In the ruthless competition for trade and slaves, the Joint Stock Company provided a far more efficient structure than the hierarchical structure under which the Portuguese and Spanish operated. The Portuguese governors had to refer every major decision to Lisbon. Sometimes, it took more than a year for a decision to arrive. By then, circumstances would have changed. By contrast, the governors of the East India Company enjoyed enormous leverage for local initiative, as evidenced by the activities of Robert Clive in India. Secondly, the Portuguese and the Spaniards were saddled with a religious burden, which worked to their disadvantage. Wherever they went, they brought with them their Inquisition, and their intense hatred of Muslims. In their dealings with the Sinhalese, Indians, Malays, and Africans, they were ruthless, cruel and merciless. They obliterated the civilizations of America, and would have done the same to the civilizations of Asia, were it not for the powerful dynasties of the Great Moghuls, the Safavids and the Ottoman Turks.

The English and the Dutch had no religious hang-ups. They were in the Indian Ocean strictly for profit. As long as their companies made money, they left the local populations alone. Exceptions were West Africa and Mozambique, which served as conduits for slaves. The English had the advantages of greater manpower and material resources over the Dutch. The population of England in 1600 was approximately five million while that of Holland was less than one million. The Dutch had to hire German mercenaries who could be bribed to shift allegiances, as happened during the British conquest of Colombo. The English demonstrated greater cohesiveness, resourcefulness, administration and

military acumen over the French. And lastly, history itself seemed to cast its vote for the English, as it did when the Spanish Armada was twice destroyed (1588 and 1598) and Robert Clive won over Siraj ud Dawla (1757) in Bengal against heavy odds.

The acquisition of Bengal turned the wheels of fortune in favor of England. Until 1757, the balance of trade was invariably in favor of Asia. The gold and silver captured from the Incas and the Aztecs flowed to Europe through the slave trade, and from there it found its way to Asia in return for spices and manufactured goods. Bengal opened for Europe the gates to the wealth of Asia. An immense booty was transported from Calcutta to London between the years 1757 and 1765. In addition, the East India Company imposed a heavy tariff of seventy percent on all cloth produced in Bengal, while flooding the Indian market with cheaper goods made in Manchester and Liverpool. Within eight years, what had been one of the most prosperous regions of Asia fell into depression, and famine set in 1765. The enormous capital acquired from Bengal triggered the Industrial Revolution, commonly dated with the first invention, the steam engine, in 1758.

The British position in India was not consolidated until the fall of Mysore (1799) and the end of the Napoleonic wars (1798-1812). But with the resources of America and the wealth of India at their command, the odds were increasingly in favor of the British. The loss of the American colonies (1776) allowed the British to focus on India. Within two years after Tippu Sultan of Mysore died fighting in battle (1799), and Napoleon was forced to withdraw from Egypt (1799), the British had defeated the Marathas (1802) and advanced towards Delhi.

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