

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRADE BETWEEN WESTERN EUROPE AND THE MUGHAL EMPIRE IN THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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### Introduction

The Contact between Western Europe and the Mughal empire was put into practice in the very beginning of the 17th century. The Portuguese, English, and later on, the Dutch were the ones to communicate with the Mughal empire. As the first Islamic power on the Indian subcontinent, the Mughal empire was more interested in assimilating the land, studying the history, customs and religion of the people occupying this area, and communicating with the other two Islamic empires – the Saffavid and the Ottoman Empires.

The Mughal empire was blessed with very strong leaders, however, very different in approach and strategy. Akbar the Great was known for his tolerance towards unorthodox Muslims and Hindus. The Akbarnama, a book written by Abu'l Fazl on the life and rule of Akbar, gives a lot of evidence on how Hinduism was viewed and explained by the Muslims. Along with being tolerant towards his Hindu and Muslim subjects, Akbar welcomed Portuguese Jesuits, which allowed Portugal to enter the trade with Indian goods.

At the very end of his rule, the British, Dutch, and Portuguese started trade with the Mughal empire as well. Even though the trade started during the reign of Akbar the Great, his son Jahangir was the one to strengthen this economic activity in the Indian subcontinent.

### Premises of Western Europe for the Trade

The English and Dutch were granted 21-year permission of monopoly in the “East Indies”, which followed by the retorted answer from the Indian landlords – they encouraged the establishment of coastal posts for trade. Half a century afterwards, the competition for trade in the Indian Ocean was enhanced by the setting up of the British East India Company in 1664.

It followed Jean-Baptiste Colbert's theory of Mercantilism that claimed to keep the national exports greater than the imports. In his Memorandum on English Alliances and Memorandum to the King on Finances written in 1669 and 1670 respectively, Jean-Baptiste Colbert defended his theory and tried to figure out a way of how to undercut the Dutch trade. This document gave evi-

dence on the strength of the Netherlands' trade in the 17th century not only in India but also in the Caribbean. Moreover, it gave the precise numbers of the Dutch superiority over both the British and the French – 15,000 to 16,000 vessels per year versus 3,000 to 4,000 for the British and 500 to 600 for the French.

The British managed to increase the trade with textile with 22.7 million square meters over a period of just twenty years. Ironically, they did that in the very same year that France intervened in the Indian trade.

### The Need for Alcohol Established the First Trading Contacts

One of the items traded was alcohol drinks. During Babur's and Jahangir's reign the trade was especially directed towards alcohol exchange. It probably was the same during the rest of the Great Mughals' reigns but the autobiographies and court chronicles had very little information about this issue. Moreover, these sources cannot be very reliable because the emperors reviewed them.

However, there are records and journals written by individuals that were either travelling or were members of the Mughal court, which strongly suggest the overuse of alcohol and its social connection within the people and castes.

The Great Mughals were not only connoisseurs of alcohol, they were often overusing it, too. Jahangir died of alcohol abuse. Alcohol was also considered a gift of goodwill, especially between sailors and merchants. Evidence of that were the records and journals of the British East India company.

Its employees often requested for wine supply for themselves and for gifts for the monarch. It was used not only for special occasions but also as a regular act of just revering the emperor. Jahangir was the emperor who was the most associated to alcohol but all the rest of the Great Mughals appreciated it too, with the exception of Aurangzeb (who loathed it). Wine and alcohol in general was as well used for negotiations and, was therefore a very important part of the trading process.

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## **The Implementation of Trade on the Local Level in India and the Various Trading Posts**

The trade in India was implemented mainly on the coast. During the 17th century there were two big countries. The detrimental outcomes of the trade on the Mughal Empire Two and a half centuries of trade between India and Western Europe led to the downfall of an initially agriculturally-orientated empire with strong military forces and tolerance towards its subjects and their different religious beliefs (with the exception of Aurangzeb). All three Islamic empires found either their collapse or a significant weakening by the 19th century. European countries, however, were growing, expanding, developing, and coming up with new movements, intentions, technology. Even though they were essentially separated by the Ottoman and Safavid Empire, the common interest, the trade, helped Europe to permanently settle into the Indian lands.

The most comprehensive and clear sources about the Mughal empire were the factory records of the British East India company, which suggests that trade was the only way of communication between Western Europe and the Mughal empire. The trade was carried out by the same countries, only there were variations of the proportion of import for those countries, depending on what was going on at that time in Europe and on the alliances the countries tight themselves into. The pattern of Globalization and World's entanglement was traced in 17th century through trade. This way the European countries found their place in the Mughal Empire, gradually gaining more power over the trade and, consequently, over the empire until the British colonized the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century. The European language was primarily spread amongst coastal regions, in particular large trading centres and sometimes throughout big commercial towns which were based inland.