

Colonial Expansion

The wonderful voyages of oceanic discovery in the sixteenth century are a mark of the cleavage between medieval and modern times. All over Europe, adventurous men, inspired by the Renaissance, set out across the wide oceans in search of wealth or liberty. England too joined the race, and soon became known as the 'Queen of the Seas'. She was so successful in her attempts at colonial expansion that, within a century or two, the British Empire became vast enough for it to be claimed that the sun never set on it.

The Tudors played a major role in the overseas expansion of

England. The first of the Tudors, Henry VII, did much to build up a merchant navy. He encouraged an Italian seaman called **John Cabot** in his voyages. Henry ordered several fine ships to be built at his own expense. These ships were much larger than any seen in English harbours till then, and could be used in war or trade. Henry VII thus laid the foundation for England's colonial expansion.

Henry VIII continued his father's work. He inherited seven ships from his father and he increased the number to fifty-three by the end of his reign. He was an enthusiastic ship builder. Till Henry VIII's time, ships were not divided into fighting ships and merchant ships. During his reign, special ships were built exclusively for war. It was these ships that helped Queen Elizabeth to defeat the Spanish Armada. Henry VIII is known as the 'father of the Royal Navy'.

The greatest social change in Elizabethan England was the expansion of overseas enterprise. Englishmen spent a lot of their time thinking about the ocean. An extensive literature arose in the Tudor period dealing with maritime stories—strange adventures of explorers, descriptions of distant lands, and accounts of unimaginable wealth. The Englishmen were inspired by these stories and made heroes of their sailors. In this regard, the most influential writer of the Elizabethan age was **Richard Hakluyt** who wrote a book named *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*. In it, the author narrated the deeds of English explorers and seamen. His book inspired many adventurous young men, scholars, statesmen and merchants to invest in overseas trade.

The Elizabethans never established a permanent colony in the New World. In spite of this, they were the pioneers of the movement which was to people the Atlantic Coast of North America with Englishmen. During Elizabeth's reign, three famous men were connected with colonisation—**Sir Humphrey Gilbert**, **Sir Walter Raleigh** and **Sir Richard Grenville**. Gilbert left England in 1578 to establish colonies in America, but his efforts were a failure. In 1583, after several false starts, he claimed Newfoundland for English sovereignty. On the return journey, Gilbert's ship, the *Squirrel*, was lost in a gale.

The task of planting a colony in America was carried out by

Sir Walter Raleigh. With the queen's permission, he set off on a voyage to America and made a settlement off the coast of what is now North Carolina. He named the colony Virginia, in honour of Elizabeth (who was known as the 'Virgin Queen'), but it was not a success.

Further attempts at colonisation were thwarted as the war had begun with Spain. Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins led the sea battle against Spain. Before the war, Sir Francis Drake had added another feather in England's cap by sailing around the world. Drake and Hawkins inflicted heavy damage upon King Philip's fleet and destroyed the Spanish Armada. This made England the undisputed 'Queen of the Seas'.

Voyages of commercial expansion became very popular. There was an expedition to Russia by **Sir Hugh Willoughby** and Richard Chancellor. They established trade between Russia and England which continued to flourish for many years. This was followed by a search to establish a trade route to Persia. **Anthony Jenkinson** opened a new trade route through the Volga River down to the Caspian Sea, and established trade relations with Persia. England was eager to establish trade links with India. Two Englishmen, George Raymond and **James Lancaster**, sailed for the East in 1591. Raymond's ship sank in a storm, but Lancaster reached the East Indies (southeastern Asia). This paved the way for the eastern project. The famous **East India Company** was formed in 1600, and Lancaster sailed again for the East in the following year. This venture was a great success, and he returned with plenty of pepper and spices from Java. The East India Company had begun its glorious career.

Trade connections with Africa paved the way for the establishment of British power in South Africa. Gold and slaves were the main attraction for Englishmen. As early as in 1562, Sir John Hawkins managed to capture 300 slaves from the Guinea coast.

It was during the Stuart era that England flourished and developed as an empire. There was mass migration to North America and the West Indies. In 1606, two companies were founded in Plymouth and in London to establish colonies in North America. The London Company planted a colony at Jamestown in Virginia which James I made into a Crown colony. Settlements were made along the coast

of Guyana which led to colonies in the West Indies.

In 1620, the Pilgrim Fathers sailed across the Atlantic aboard the *Mayflower* and founded a colony named Plymouth (after the city in England from which they sailed). Ten years later, some Puritans formed the Massachusetts Bay Company and founded the city of Boston. Persecuted by Laud, large numbers of Puritans fled to New England (in America). These men harboured a deep hostility toward England which became a part of the American tradition.

The reign of Charles II was very important in the history of the American colonies. North and South Carolina were founded and named after the king. New Amsterdam was renamed New York after James, Duke of York (who later became James II of England). The colonies of New Jersey and Delaware were founded by Lord De La Warr. Pennsylvania was founded by the Quaker, William Penn.

There were many causes for the colonial expansion. These may be categorised under three headings—economic, social and religious. With the development of trade, there was a desire for products that were not available at home, such as precious metals, cotton, tobacco, sugar and spices. Englishmen were inspired by the stories of the immense wealth of unknown lands and this desire took them across the seas.

England was becoming overpopulated. There were many beggars, and people felt that the colonies might drain off the surplus population. Another social cause was that in the New Land, all people could cross the social barriers that were so rigidly maintained in England. Anyone could become a rich landlord by merely fencing off as much land as he wished.

Persecution in the name of religion was becoming too difficult to bear. Especially at the beginning of the Stuart era, the Puritans were punished and fined in a most unreasonable manner. Therefore, they fled to the New Land in search of religious freedom.

Whatever the causes might have been, the colonial expansion of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries made England emerge as a European superpower for the next two hundred years. Apart from paving the way for England's political supremacy, colonial expansion had a great impact upon its literature too. Shakespeare and his contemporaries made several references to voyages, sailing and travelling. For example, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth*

Night and *The Tempest* begin with references to the sea. Sea-faring activities had captured the imagination of the people, as could be witnessed in the literature of the period. Later, during Queen Anne's age, when British overseas trade was at its zenith, there are several references to all the imported goods that were available to the people of England as seen, for example, in the famous toilet scene of Belinda in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

COLONIAL EXPANSION

Synopsis : Introduction – causes for colonial expansion – the three groups of colonies in the east coast of America – the story of Virginia – the Pilgrim Fathers and the New Plymouth colony – founding of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut – Maryland, the first Roman Catholic colony – the story of how New Amsterdam became New York – William Penn becoming founder of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey – three southern colonies North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia – colonies in Canada and West Indian Islands – circumstances leading to the establishment of British power in South Africa – British establishments in India – conclusion.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, for various reasons, many people left England and went to foreign lands like America. Some people were dissatisfied with life in their native country because of religious persecution which followed the Reformation. Some others who did not have their own land in England were inspired by the desire of possessing land in the New World. Some others found life in England dull, as there was no scope for adventures. After the Wars of the Roses wealth was increasing and this served as an incentive for overseas enterprise.

As a result of the hard work of the adventurers Colonies were founded in America and in the West Indian Islands. Important trade centres were established in South Africa and India. Thus by the early decades of the 18th century, there were thirteen colonies on the east coast of America, between Nova Scotia in the north and Florida in the south. These colonies were of three groups, namely, New England Colonies consisting of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island ; the Middle Colonies, consisting of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware ; and the Southern colonies consisting of Maryland, Virginia, North South Carolina and Georgia.

The first colony to be founded was Virginia. As early as in the Elizabethan period, Sir Walter Raleigh made several attempts to establish colonies. His first settlement was on Reanoke Island

off the coast of North Carolina. These adventures had the backing of Queen Elisabeth, and since she was called the Virgin Queen, part of the new land, was named Virginia in her honour. Later, Sir Walter Raleigh sold his rights to the two companies which were started to promote colonization. These two companies were the Plymouth Company and the London Company. In 1607, the London Company under the leadership of Captain John Smith made the first permanent settlement which they called Jamestown in honour of James I, the then King of England. The colonists were not used to hard labour and so they found life difficult as they had to do a lot of manual work, like cutting down trees and ploughing land. Later the problem of labour was solved by the purchase of Negro' slaves. King James gave them a Charter and the colony was governed under the terms of the Charter by the Company from London. As it was not found satisfactory, a representative assembly called the House of Burgesses met at Jamestown, Williamsburg, and this form of popular assembly governed Virginia up to the Revolution.

In 1620, a group of Puritans who had been living in Holland, decided to migrate to America and establish a religious society there. These "Pilgrim Fathers" set out from Plymouth harbor in England in a ship called the Mayflower and landed near Cape Cod. The place where they landed was named New Plymouth to commemorate the English port from which they had sailed. It remained independent until 1691 when it was united with the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

A few years later, a group of wealthy Puritans set up a colony in Massachusetts. They obtained a Charter from Charles I in 1629. Their chief town was called Boston, because many of the settlers came from Boston in Lincolnshire. Right from its foundation Massachusetts was the chief colony of New England, as the area north of Hudson River was now called. Two more colonies were founded in New England in the early part of the 17th century by the Puritan settlers in Massachusetts. Roger Williams believed in complete religious freedom for everybody, but his idea was opposed by the other Puritans. So in 1639 he founded a small settlement called Providence from which Rhode Island, the smallest of the colonies, grew. Charles II gave them

a Charter in 1663. Similarly Thomas Hooker, another religious leader, settled at a place which he called New Haven and the colony was named Connecticut. Similarly another colony called New Hampshire was formed later.

In 1632 Charles I granted to Lord Baltimore, a Roman Catholic, a block of land on the Potomac River. Thus in 1634 was founded the Maryland colony, the first Roman Catholic settlement in America. It was in honour of Mary, mother of Christ, that the Puritans, wanted to escape persecution at home and so came here. But many Protestants came with them and as a result a certain amount of strife followed; an agreement was drawn up later whereby anyone could worship as he chose. So religious tolerance became the cardinal principle of this settlement.

The Dutch had formed the settlement called a settlement of New Amsterdam near the mouth of the Hudson River. The King had assigned this Dutch colony, where there were already many English settlers, to the Duke of York. During the Dutch war in 1664 this area passed into the hands of the British and was named New York in honour of the Duke of York, the brother of Charles II, who later became James II.

In 1681 Charles II gave William Penn, a Quaker, a large tract of land west of the Delaware River. This land was named Pennsylvania, which means "Penn's Woods". The Quakers also had suffered persecution in England and so they were glad to come to America. Other Protestants later joined his colony. Penn founded the city of Philadelphia in 1682. As the Quakers were thrifty and law-abiding, Pennsylvania as a colonial experiment became a great success. Later on, Penn leased land in the south from the Swedes which became the Colony of Delaware, and land to the east which became New Jersey.

In 1663 Charles II granted to eight noblemen called "Proprietors" all the territory south of Virginia. This region was called Carolina. About 1670, the city of Charleston was founded. Later this colony was divided into two colonies, North and South Carolina. Georgia, the southernmost and the youngest of the thirteen colonies, was founded much later, in 1733. The colony was named after George II from whom James Oglethorpe, the

humanitarian, got the land between Carolina and Florida to settle the poor debtors who had been in English prisons.

In 1670 Prince Rupert founded the Hudson Bay Company which ruled a large province in Canada. Apart from these there were also colonies in the West Indian Islands. Barbados was occupied by the English in 1605. Other important islands, like St. Kith and Nevis were occupied in subsequent years. In Cromwell's time the island of Jamaica was taken from Spain by Admiral Penn and made a British colony in 1655.

Trade connections with Africa paved the way for the establishment of British power in South Africa. It was gold and slaves that attracted Englishmen to West Africa. As early as in 1562 Sir John Hawkins managed to get three hundred slaves from the Guinea coast. Three companies were established one after another but they were not successful. At last in 1672 the Royal African Company was founded with a monopoly trade from the Cape to Tangier which had come to England as part of the dowry of the Portuguese bride of Charles II. This Company brought home gold, Ivory and dyeing materials and shared in the slave trade with America.

The first important step towards England's commercial enterprise in the east was taken on 31st December 1600, when Queen Elizabeth granted a Royal Charter to the East India Company. But it was not till 1609 that the Company was able to open factories in India. The first factory was established at Surat. In 1639 they built Fort St. George in Madras. In 1661 Charles II gave to the East India Company the island of Bombay which he had received from Portugal as a part of the dowry at the time of his marriage to Catherine of Braganza. Calcutta was founded later in 1690.

By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 which followed the Spanish Succession War, England became the possessor of territories in all parts of the world. Her possessions included Gibraltar and Minorca, a large number of settlements in India, the islands of St. Helena, factories in Gambia, Gold Coast and Lagos ; many of the West Indian islands, the Atlantic seaboard from Florida to the mouth of the St. Lawrence, and the territories of the Hudson Bay Company. Hence, the Stuart Age may be considered as a period of colonial expansion.