INTRODUCTION

The 18th century in Indian history may be called a dark age in the history of India because there was lack of unity among the rulers, warriors, statesmen during this period. The decline of the Mughal Empire after the death of Aurangzeb "stirred the dormant feudal elements in the country and led to the formation of independent feudal states." 1

The Mughal Empire disintegrated chiefly due to its military and political helplessness, degeneration of the Mughal nobility, a centralised despotism and the progressive deterioration in the personality and character of the later Mughal Emperors. There was also an intellectual bankruptcy and mental despondency among the Mughal nobility and the middle class during that period. The weakness of the army, disunity among the Mughal nobles, lack of education, end of commercial system, defective administration, nepotism, corruption, absence of law and order, undeveloped agriculture, policy of religious intoleration, addiction to drugs, treachery, defective diplomacy all contributed to the decline of Mughal Empire. The decline resulted in general chaos and great anarchy in the whole of India.

In this great anarchy, the entire country became defenceless and was unable to defend its boundaries from foreign invasions. There arose a number of independent kingdoms and powers in India. The Marathas, the Sikhs, the Jats, the Rajputs and the Rohillas emerged after the downfall of Mughal Empire in India. Many powerful Mughal nobles established more or less independent and extensive kingdoms in Bengal, Oudh and Hyderabad. The raids of the foreign powers also continued on Indian soil. The gates of north-west of Punjab were unprotected and the kings of Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Abdali and his successors, invaded Punjab a number of times. Then, Ahmad Shah Abdali defeated the Marathas in the battle of Panipat (1761) who, under the leadership of Sindhia and Holkar, at that time, were growing their influence and power in northern India. So after the battle of Panipat, the Maratha power declined and they retreated towards South India.

Then, the European powers were also growing their influence in India particularly after the middle of 18th century. Some European powers (like the British and the French) had already taken advantage of the confusion and instability in India, and settled in India during this period.* These powers began to strengthen their bases and

* During that period, the East India Company had three settlements or "Presidencies" at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, each of which controlled dependent out-factories and was administered by a President and a Council consisting of the principal local servants of the company,
started to spread their influence in many parts of India by diplomatic relations with Indian rulers.

The Mughal royalty in the country was hopelessly imbecile. Many nobles were treacherous, inefficient, corrupt, selfish and short-sighted. Many rulers were addicted to vices like nautch girls, wine, opium and other drugs.** These factors contributed to the growth of the power and influence of European powers. The normal condition of these states were "that of ever-changing alliances and wars, the sudden growth and as sudden shrinking of an immense number of separate

and varying from 12 to 16 in number. In council, the President was merely primus interposer and each presidency was directly subordinate to court of Directors in London.


** In November 1778, the British Governor-General received a letter from the Emperor, Shah Alam II, requesting royal gift of many rarities and two maunds of the Patna opium for himself as well as for his minister, Abdul Ahad Khan. Similarly, Nawab Asaf-ud-daula also used to eat 64 grains of the strongest Turkish opium every day. He, every evening, spent a number of rupees in procuring entertainments like dancers, buffoons, beggars and all that class, with the fools, knaves and sycophants.++

principalities, whose ambition and instability made them entirely dependent on military adventurers. The civil and military administration of these states was in a still worse condition largely due to the lack of ability and skill of the chiefs.

European Adventurers in India

But this period is known for the entry of European military adventurers in India. We can say that, "It was a transition period during which large economic enterprises, European armies, native princes and ambitious, single-minded and courageous adventurers appeared to be particularly energetic in their search for the Pagoda tree." So, during this century, a large number of remarkable military adventurers flocked into India from the various European countries. According to Compton,

Their names are but as indistinct items on a long forgotten scroll, almost obliterated by the dust of time, yet upto a comparatively late period some of these forgotten personalities created vast armies, conquered kingdoms, overthrown princes and ruled provinces, winning such power and distinction as is now and forever impossible.

These military adventurers swarmed the courts of the various Indian chiefs in search of career and fortune.

Most of these adventurers were deserters from the service of army and navy of foreign countries. Even in earlier period desertion was common among these military adventurers. But later on these European deserters (military adventurers) in the service of Indians became very numerous.*

The position of these adventurers in India was that "some of them achieved reputation, power and wealth, while others were destined to remain in oblivion." Therefore, the ability and experience of these adventurers played an interesting part in the political situation of India after the disintegration of the Mughal Empire.

Many Indian chiefs of that time had difficulty in judging the capacities of these military adventurers or to distinguish them one from another. But, these foreign captains were trained in the European armies and had an intellectual leadership in them. Some of them were not trained in art of warfare, many of them came from lower grades of society and as such possessed no source of maintenance. Such type of soldiers were "dressed in uniforms

* Mr. Grey writes that in 1792, it was estimated that there were about 1500 Europeans from French and English armies.+

and trained within a few months for military duty."\(^6\)

They had been trained in drill and discipline, and given to them the knowledge of the art of warfare methods. Even during the training, they were given the usual payments for their personal expenditure of daily life. According to Sardesai, "These European adventurers with no fixed loyalties, were mere slaves of fortune and changed their masters as often as their interest dictated, one day serving Haider Ali, next day the Nawab of Arcot, or the Jat Raja or the Emperor."\(^7\) The Indian rulers employed these adventurers for their personal protection and safety from external raid by their enemies. These chiefs usually became more dependent upon these adventurers. So the armies of these adventurers, trained under the supervision of these chiefs, were called 'Mercenary'. They could not be called 'national'.

Those military adventurers, who were already trained in the military activities under the supervision of the European military officers in their countries, enjoyed an excellent status and place in the courts of the various Indian chiefs. These adventurers could directly join the service in the army of the Indian rulers by showing their abilities and military experiences which they had earlier got from their countries. They were warmly welcomed by these

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7. Ibid.
rulers and they were "employed for the purpose of drilling and disciplining the Indian soldiers," under their supervision.

During this period, there occurred several clashes between the Indian soldiers of various states and the troops commanded by European adventurers. The Indian commanders at that time were in a perplexed state. Though they had large powerful armies consisting of the soldiers from different races yet, when they "met ridiculously small armies from the two races of European traders who had been allowed to settle on their coasts and who were becoming increasingly ambitious and truculent, they were defeated, sometimes ignominiously." Thus, these white soldiers under the command of white officers overthrew the Indian armies in several skirmishes, because the Indian armies lacked discipline, unity, modern weapons and able leadership. That is why, the white soldiers exploited the weakness of Indian armies, and defeated them in a number of battles. The European soldiers usually had many weapons like swords, guns, muskets and a good artillery. These European military adventurers who came from various countries like England, America, Switzerland, France, Holland, Ireland, and Germany were brave, active, courageous, bold and fearless. They had strict discipline and skill in the art of fighting techniques.

The political confusion resulting from the disintegration of Mughal Empire in India was largely responsible for bringing a large number of these European adventurers. The various ruling powers in India gave them shelter and employed them. These chiefs wanted improvement and development of their weak, disorderly, undrilled and undisciplined armies into modern European pattern.

About that period the English East India Company was increasing its power firmly in certain territories of India by securing trading facilities and political advantages. The frequent invasions in the N.W. India contributed to the further weakening of the political situation of India. So, all the Indian states became alarmed from such shaky condition of India, and began to strengthen their armies to face any critical eventuality. Therefore, in this critical situation, the military adventurers were considered the most prominent force by the Indian rulers in their army. They employed these adventurers and gave them good salaries, generous facilities and high status. Some of them even adopted the customs and manners of the Indians. Many settled here. Many of them felt home-sick, and after serving in the native armies, they went to their countries. Some died here due to illness, and some of them were killed in the battles.

It is admitted that these military adventurers left their unforgettable impact on the history of India. Some of them were "devoted to the arts and to medicine and a few
others were money-lenders who found ready welcome at the
courts of petty potentates."\textsuperscript{10} They were honest and hard-
working; they possessed an excellent discipline. Some of them served for a very long time but many of them left earlier. These mercenaries sold their swords to the highest bidders.

It is said that "perhaps European military adventurers of 18th century contributed a good deal towards the British Conquest of India."\textsuperscript{11} Among these adventurers, those who left the service of the Indian rulers and joined the British forces proved to be helpful agents for the British government. From them the British were able to collect all sorts of information regarding every activity in the states of Indian chiefs. The British profited from the weakness and fragmentation of the native rulers, and they succeeded in their mission of establishing their rule in India. Ultimately, in the end of the 18th century, their dream became true when they became the master of India upto the Satlej river in northern Punjab after defeating the Marathas in 1803. Later on, they extended their rule to other parts of India.

As these military adventurers had greatly improved the fighting capacity of the armies of native rulers, the task of the British to establish their supremacy in the

\textsuperscript{11} Lester Hutchinson, \textit{European Freebooters in Mughal India}, (Bombay, 1964), p. 2.
country became somewhat difficult. Some of these adventurers, especially the non-English, put up a brave resistance against the English company.

These remarkable military adventurers have left their unforgettable impact in the form of written biographies or autobiographies, arms and weapons, art and architecture. The people still remember them by reading the names of some adventurers on their graves in various parts of India. There are scores of minor towns - some of them just tiny villages - named after these adventurers many of whom can now hardly even be recalled. Many European adventurers, who left their memoirs in the form of writings written by their contemporaries, were Gen. George Thomas of Hansi, an Irish raja of Haryana, Col. James Skinner and Maj. Lewis Smith etc.

The Indian soldiers learnt many fighting techniques, drill and discipline, mapping system, and they acquired knowledge about European weapons particularly in the field of artillery. The native rulers preferred those European adventurers for they were expert and experienced in the art of casting guns, shots, cannons and gun-powder.

In the armies of the native rulers, these adventurers increased the proportion of muskets to pikes, improved the

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number of troops, mobility and fire-rate of their guns. They also had good knowledge about infantry and cavalry tactics. Some of them had their own good war horses who were very quick in action, smart and fast in speed.

These Europeans were not only trained in the art of warfare, but they had also an excellent knowledge about art and architecture. They built many tombs, palaces, forts and beautiful buildings in many towns and cities of India. Mr. Srinivasan writes, "It may be news to some that the architect of the Taj was an European and not an Indian." Col. James Skinner built and repaired a number of churches in India. George Thomas built a town near Rohtak, Georgetown, now called Jehazgarh.

The remarkable European military adventurers who came to India in 18th century, were Gen. de Boigne, Gen. Perron, Gen. Raymond, Gen. Samru, Gen. George Thomas, Col. Louis Bourquin, Col. Dudrenac, Col. Sutherland, Col. Francklin, Col. Saleur, Col. Tone, Col. Shepherd, Col. Sangster, Col. Pohlmann, Col. HESSING, Col. Madac, Maj. Hearsey, Capt. Hopkins etc. Many of them enjoyed good salaries, high status and long service in the army of their chiefs. Some of them controlled military as well as civil administration. The majority of them belonged to the

13. V. Srinivasan, 'European Adventurers in Indian History', The Indian Review, vol. XXXVII, Jan. to Dec. 1936, p.677. However there is a controversy in regard to this. Some believe that the architect of the Taj was an Indian.
countries of France and England. Many of them were admired and respected in the courts of Indian rulers because of their knowledge of military as well as civil affairs.

Among these adventurers, George Thomas, an Irishman, was the most remarkable and extraordinary man. He came to India as an ordinary seaman in British navy, but later he deserted the British service. Thereafter he served a number of chiefs in India, and soon he became a general by his able, honest and brave activities. He served the armies of Nizam of Hyderabad, Begam Samru of Sardhana and some Maratha chiefs like Appa Khandi Rao, Vaman Rao and Bapu Sindhia. But later on, he became an independent king of Haryana where he established his civil and military administration. He made Hansi his capital. He ruled for more than three years. Later, he was defeated by the army of the Marathas. He died in India leaving his three sons and a daughter including his wife in the possession of Begam Samru of Sardhana. He was a brave and tactful adventurer who fought a number of battles during his life. No European adventurer in India became an independent ruler of a territory in India like George Thomas. The wonderful victories and the tragedies were unparalleled. He is a very fascinating character in the history of European military adventurers.
My aim is to investigate the life and times of Gen. George Thomas, the ex-raja of Haryana. Historians of modern India have not paid adequate attention to this remarkable personality. I have tried to fill the gaps in his life and activities which many writers, including the biographer, Col. William Francklin, have not done. Besides Thomas' life, I have also touched upon, in the course of this narrative, on other contemporary European military adventurers, social, economic and political conditions of India, particularly the conditions of northern India.

There are only two books on the life of Gen. George Thomas. Some account of his life is also given in a number of books, journals, Gazetteers and newspapers etc. But, there are serious shortcomings in the existing literature on George Thomas. The narratives in regard to his life and exploits are meagre, fragmentary, unarranged and contain numerous unverified dates. This should be evident from below:

1. **Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas**

This biography of George Thomas was written by Col. William Francklin who met Thomas personally at Benaras in 1802. Thomas narrated to him some account of his brilliant achievements. But this book contains a number of mistakes in regard to dates, location of towns and account of battles.
Then, the early life of George Thomas, so essential for understanding his character, is entirely missing. Even the account of his life and activities in India is rather patchy.

2. The Rajah from Tipperary;

This biography is written by Maurice Hennessy. No doubt the author has given Thomas' early life sketch, but the whole work is based on the books and journals of later time. Although written in an extremely racy and pleasant style, the book does not deal with his Indian career in all its richness and complexity.

Besides these biographies, there are other books which trace Thomas' life.


The book is a biography of Col. James Skinner written by his friend, J. Baillie Fraser. The greater part of the book deals with the battle of Georgegarh and Hansi as narrated by Col. Skinner who himself fought against George Thomas.

2. A Sketch of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Regular Corps, Formed and Commanded by Europeans in the Service of the Native Princes of India:

This book is written by Capt. Lewis Smith who himself fought against George Thomas in the battles of Georgegarh and Hansi. It contains an excellent account of these two battles by an eyewitness.
3. A Particular Account of the European Military Adventurers of Hindustan - 1784-1803:

This book is written by Herbert Compton who wrote Thomas's life sketch along with other European adventurers. But the description regarding Thomas's life is taken from the books of Francklin and Fraser.

4. Swords for Hire:

This book is written by Shelford Bidwell who wrote Thomas's life along with other famous European Adventurers. This book is entirely based on previous books on Thomas's life. But, it gives some additional information regarding Thomas's life, character, and administration. The battles of Jaipur, Cis-Satlej Sikhs and Hansi are also well explained.

5. European Adventurers of Northern India, 1785 to 1849:

Mr. C. Grey is the author of this book. It has a life sketch of Thomas along with the lives of other European adventurers. It is very sketchy and George Thomas's Indian career is not described in all details.

6. The Rajas of the Punjab:

This book is written by Lepel Griffin who wrote Thomas's expeditions against the Cis-Satlej chiefs as well as Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una.

7. History of the Sikhs, Cis-Sutlej Sikhs (1769-99), 2 vols:

These volumes written by Dr. Hari Ram Gupta trace Thomas's life sketch which is mostly based on Persian and Urdu sources. This book describes a few important events of Thomas's Cis-Satlej battles and administration.
8. Hindustan Under Free Lances, 1770-1820:

It was written by H.G. Keene who gives the life sketch of George Thomas along with other few European adventurers. This book is mostly based on some earlier accounts of Thomas's family and life.

I have consulted, over the years, all available sources for a full comprehensive biography of Gen. George Thomas of Hansi. I have used: Imperial Record Department records like Foreign & Secret, Foreign & Political, Miscellaneous etc.; Calendar of Persian documents, volumes; contemporary biographies and books; later biographies and books; some Maratha, Urdu, Persian and other sources; some travellers books; Maratha sources like Poona Residency Correspondence volumes; Punjabi books; Asiatic Annual Registers; contemporary journals and magazines; Modern Reviews; later journals; few newspapers; Gazetteers and other sources.

The scheme of the chapters is as below:

Chapters I and II deal with the history of the European military adventurers who visited India from 16th century to 18th century. What led the Indian rulers to employ these Europeans has been discussed. Their role in affecting improvements in battle tactics, equipment and organisation of the armies is described. In Chapter II brief life-sketches of a number of adventurers is mentioned.
Chapter III deals with the early life of George Thomas. In this chapter, his service in British navy, his desertion and his service in the armies of Polygars as well as the Nizam of Hyderabad all are fully discussed.

Chapter IV deals with the activities of George Thomas in Northern India where he had joined the services of various rulers like Begam Samru, Appa Khandi Rao, Vaman Rao and Bapu Sindhiia. His battles, the treachery of his masters, rescue of the Emperor as well as the Begam, his marriage and his conquest of many cities as well as towns has been described.

Chapter V deals with the political condition of Punjab and the life of George Thomas as an independent King of Haryana territory. His battles against the Bhattis, the Gosains, the Rajputs and the Sikhs and the Marathas are discussed.

Chapter VI deals with the Sikhs-Marathas alliance against George Thomas, his fall in the battles of Georgegarh and Hansi, his meeting with Governor-General and his ultimate death.

Lastly in Chapter VII the history of his family, his character, civil and military administration as an independent ruler has been discussed.

My attempt is to write a detailed, comprehensive biography of perhaps the most celebrated and fascinating
European adventurer in India in the 18th century on the basis of all available source-material in the country. To recapture vividly the entire period, to describe the socio-political situation emerging as a result of the decline of Mughal Empire and to write Thomas' career in all its richness, details and complexity has been my constant endeavour.