



Distance Learning Programme

UPPCS Mains

Modern Indian History & Freedom Struggle





drishti

MODERN INDIAN HISTORY & FREEDOM STRUGGLE


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RISE & CONSOLIDATION OF BRITISH POWER

The British East India Company (EIC) increased its trading activities in India by getting permission from the Mughals and other local rulers. Simultaneously, the EIC designed strategies to become a political power in India taking advantages of the decline of the Mughal empire and rise of regional kingdoms in the 18th century. In order to become a paramount political power, the Britishers had to eliminate other European companies involved in expanding their trade and political influence in India. Besides, the Britishers had to wrestle with the regional powers like Marathas, Mysore, Sikhs and others to extend and consolidate their empire in India.

Anglo-French Rivalry

By the mid of the 18th Century, the rivalry between the European companies left English and the French East India Companies as the two important rivals in India. Soon, the political and economic ambitions of the French came in direct confrontation with the British interests and led to several Anglo-French wars also known as Carnatic wars.

First Carnatic War (1746-48)

The first Anglo-French war emerged as an extension of the Austrian War of Succession which had started in March 1740. Against the directives of their respective governments both the companies started fighting in India. The English under Barnett captured some of the French ships. Dupleix, the French governor general asked for an urgent help from La Bourdonnais, Governor of Mauritius. In September 1746, the French captured Madras, however, Dupleix's efforts to take over Fort St. David, a small factory near Pondicherry did not materialise.

The first Carnatic war is important for the Battle of St. Thome. In this battle, the French defeated the Nawab of Carnatic Anwar-ud-din. Actually, the Nawab of Carnatic had earlier issued directions to Europeans to not start hostilities and disturb the peace of his kingdom. Dupleix had pacified Anwar-ud-din that he would be giving Madras to the Nawab. When Dupleix showed no signs of fulfilling his promise, Anwar-ud-din sent his force but the Nawab's army was defeated.

The first Carnatic war came to an end with the termination of hostilities in Europe. The Austrian War of Succession ended with the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle and as per the terms of this treaty, Madras was returned to the English and in turn French regained their territories in North America.

Second Carnatic War (1749-54)

It happened due to the controversies which surrounded the accession in kingdoms of Hyderabad and Carnatic. The two rival European companies supported opposite factions to take advantage of the political situation. Dupleix started supporting Muzaffar Jung for the throne of Hyderabad and Chanda Sahib for the Nawabship of Carnatic. The English

meanwhile supported Nasir Jung and Anwar-ud-din. In 1749, Chanda Sahib defeated and killed Anwar-ud-din in the Battle of Ambur. On the other hand, in another battle Muzaffar Jung was defeated by Nasir Jung. However, after the death of Nasir Jung in 1750, Muzaffar Jung became the Subedar of Deccan and acquired the throne of Hyderabad. In 1751, Clive laid siege of Arcot which is regarded as the first major political and diplomatic victory of Clive.

Ultimately, the British managed to have an upper hand. The French recalled Dupleix in 1754 and send Godeheu in his place who signed the Treaty of Pondicherry with the British which ended the war.

Third Carnatic War (1758-63)

This war started because of the Seven Years War (1756-63) between Austria and Prussia. France took the side of Austria and British took side of Prussia. In 1757, the French deputed Count de Lally captured Fort St. David. But, in a more decisive battle, in January 1760, fought at Wandiwash, the English General Eyre Coote defeated Lally. Meanwhile, the English had achieved success in Bengal and the wealth of Bengal also played a crucial role in defeating the French. In Europe, the Seven Years War ended in 1763 and the Treaty of Paris was signed. By this treaty, the French factories like Chandernagore and Pondichery were returned back to them but they could no longer be fortified. The French agreed to support British client governments. The results of the war led to the end of French ambitions of an Indian empire, and cleared the way for the British as the dominant foreign power in India.

Acquisition of Bengal by the British

The British acquisition of Bengal was one of the most significant historical events in the later half of the eighteenth century.

Course of Events

With the establishment of the British factory at Balasore in 1633, the East India Company had begun its regular trade with Bengal and its trading ambition increased subsequently. Royal Charter (Shahi Farman) was issued by Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar in 1717. The Farman provided the right to grant 'dastaks' (permits to allow the passage of duty free goods through port authorities) and this was misused by the Company servants to carry out their private trade illegally. It resulted in a loss of revenue to the royal exchequer. The accession of Siraz-ud-Daula was followed by a disturbance in Bengal which was supported and propagated by the British in collusion with the likes of Jagat Seth, Amirchand, Mir Jafar, and Rai Durlabh. The Nawab of Bengal asked the English to do away with the fortifications of their factories located in the territory of Bengal but the English showed resistance. Thereafter, the Nawab attacked the Calcutta fort of the English. Meanwhile the "Black Hole tragedy" took place in which it was alleged that hundreds of British soldiers perished as a result of being held in an inhuman confinement. While the Nawab retreated to his capital after appointing a Subedar at Calcutta, Robert Clive initiated his march from Madras.

Battle of Plassey

The decisive Battle of Plassey took place on 23rd June 1757, between the fifty thousand strong army of the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daullah and the small army of Clive consisting of 1100 Europeans, 200 Indians, and a few irregulars. Clive began his operation from an

attack on the French colony of Chandernagore, a French settlement and then reached Plassey. Before the battle, Clive had built a secret alliance with Mir Jafar, Jagat Seth, and Rai Durlabh against the Nawab. Under this agreement, Mir Jafar was to be made the Nawab of Bengal and in turn he will reward company for its services. As per the pre-Plassey transactions, Mir Jafar ordered the retreat of Bengal forces in the thick of the battle. The retreating Bengal forces were attacked from behind by the Company's troops and defeated. Siraj was captured and executed by Mir Jafar's son Miran Bahadur. The defeat of the Nawab in the battle changed the character of the English company. Therefore it is said that 'there is no other battle so short with consequences, so vast, so immediate, and so permanent as the battle of Plassey'.

Significance of the Battle

Although the Battle of Plassey was not significant in military terms, its political and economic significances were far reaching for the fate of the East India company (EIC) in India.

■ **Political Significance**

- From being a trading company, the EIC transformed itself into a ruling power.
- The EIC emerged as a kingmaker in the politics of Bengal as it chose to depose the Nawab in favour of Mir Jafar and subsequently Mir Jafar in favour of Mir Kasim.
- As the Mughal emperor remained a mute spectator in the whole process, his claims over sovereignty and control over affairs of Bengal received a setback.
- The EIC became strong enough, both in military as well as economic terms, to decisively defeat other European powers like the French and the Dutch. Henceforth, it could depend upon the huge resources of Bengal to fund its wars and defences.

■ **Economic Significance**

- The battle paved the path for a continuous exploitation of Bengal. The English not only received free trading rights in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa but were also given the Zamindari rights of 24 paraganas.
- Several senior officials of the company received crores of rupees in gifts and bribes from the Nawab.

Developments Post Plassey

After the defeat of Siraj, his Commander in Chief Mir Jafar was installed as the Nawab of Bengal by the English Company. Mir Jafar promised huge money and territories to the English Company for being installed as the Nawab. When Mir Jafar failed to honour his promises, he was deposed and his son-in law Mir Qasim was installed as the Nawab of Bengal. Mir Qasim cleared all the dues to the Company, re-organized the army and administration of Bengal and began to assert his authority. He shifted his capital to Munger in Bihar, started an ordinance factory and attempted to model his troops on European lines. The Nawab also removed all the taxation on the internal trade in Bengal. This facility was earlier given only to the Company and therefore this policy hurt the profitability of the Company. When Mir-Qasim raised the issue of misuse of Dastaks by the private English merchants known as 'Interlopers', the company was annoyed. Mir Qasim was defeated by the English in the battle of Goria near Vardhaman after which Mir Qasim escaped to Awadh and formed a common front against the English with the Nawab of Awadh Shuja-ud-daula and the later Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II who was living at Patna. This led to the Battle of Buxar.

Battle of Buxar

The above actions of Mir Qasim made the Company wage a war against him and reinstate Mir Jafar as the Nawab of Bengal. The combined forces of these rulers were defeated by the Company army led by Hector Munro at the Battle of Buxar fought on 22nd October, 1764. The Battle of Buxar was one the most significant victories of the British East India Company since their very advent in India.

Significance: The Company secured its victory on the basis of superior military tactics and not with the help of court politics as in the Battle of Plassey. It transformed EIC from a 'de jure' to a 'de facto' power in Bengal. The victory brought more prestige to the company as a formidable power in Indian politics. After the victory of the Company, Lord Clive signed two treaties with the defeated powers known as the First and Second Treaty of Allahabad.

- **First Treaty of Allahabad (12th August 1765):** This treaty was signed between Clive, Mughal emperor Shah Alam II and Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula of Bengal on the following terms:
 - The company received the Diwani rights of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.
 - The company took the districts of Kara and Allahabad from the Nawab of Awadh and gave it to the Mughal emperor for the upkeep of his Allahabad Court.
 - The Mughal emperor was promised an annual pension of twenty six lakhs in lieu of the granted Diwani rights.
 - A provision of ₹53 lakh to the company in return for Nizamat functions (military defence, police, and judiciary functions).
- **Second Treaty of Allahabad (16th August 1765):** This treaty was signed between Clive and Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh. Its important terms were:
 - Awadh, except the districts of Kara and Allahabad was to be restored to the Nawab.
 - The Nawab was to maintain a British contingent at his own expense in Awadh.
 - The Company was granted free trading rights in the province of Awadh.
 - ₹50 lakh was to be paid to the company as war indemnity.

Diarchy in Bengal (1765-72)

Earlier the Nawab of Bengal used to carry out two functions-Nizamat which implied military power and criminal justice and Diwani which stood for revenue collection rights and administration of civil justice. The Treaty of Allahabad of 1765 resulted in dual administration or diarchy in Bengal. The British got the Diwani rights (the authority to collect revenue) and power to dispense criminal justice. Also, the administration of Bengal was to be left in the hand of a deputy Subedar who was nominated by the company and could not be removed without prior permission from the British. Thus, the British not only had the military power and the rights to collect revenue but also controlled judicial and police powers. This implied that the Company had all the powers but no responsibility while the Nawab had to bear all the responsibility without any actual power.

- **Why Diarchy in Bengal?:** The reasons behind the British policy to employ the system of Diarchy in Bengal were several. If the Company had directly taken over the administration in its own hands, its imperial designs could have been exposed before

the people. Secondly, the Company lacked the man-power and resources to take over the complete control of administration in its own hands as it required good knowledge of local customs and practices. The Court of Directors of the Company was more interested in the economic and material benefits without any administrative responsibilities on its shoulders. Further, the political power in the hands of the Company could have resulted in increased intervention and regulation by the British Parliament.

- **Results of Diarchy:** This diarchy created an inefficient and impractical system in the long run which led to anarchy and chaos in Bengal. The company relegated the responsibilities of the Nizamat to various sub-diwans due to which inefficiency in law and order started appearing. The company refused to accept any responsibility while the Nawab found himself lacking the necessary means to do so. The responsibility of revenue collection was auctioned off to the highest bidders and this affected the peasant the most. Development of agriculture was neglected which was one for the reasons of the disastrous famine of 1770s. The handicrafts (e.g. silk industry) were destroyed as they could not resist the onslaught of foreign products which were duty free while their own products were taxed. The resultant monopoly of the English in trade made it unprofitable for the artisans and small manufacturers to continue in their professions and they were reduced to the status of landless peasants.

By the time Warren Hastings was appointed the Governor of Bengal in 1772, the failure of the system of administration of Bengal introduced by Clive was already evident. Therefore, he did away with the dual administration and took the reins of administration directly in his own hands. Hence, in less than two decades, the Company emerged as the sovereign master of Bengal.

Anglo-Maratha Relations

The Maratha arose as a formidable force in the years of declining Mughal power. However, the defeat in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 gave a serious blow to their ambitions of emerging as an all-India power. Though they managed to regain some of their strength during the reign of Madhav Rao, disunity prevailed among them after his death. It was during a succession dispute that the British got a chance to interfere in the affairs of the Marathas.

First Anglo-Maratha War (1775-82)

Raghunath Rao, uncle of Narayan Rao hatched a conspiracy and got Narayan Rao murdered to claim the position of Peshwa. But other Maratha chiefs did not accept him as the Peshwa. Raghunath Rao appealed to the British and signed a treaty known as Treaty of Surat in 1775. This led to a war between the Maratha Chiefs and the British. The war went on for seven years and both sides received several setbacks. Ultimately peace was restored by the Treaty of Salbai in 1782. Raghunath Rao was pensioned off and Madhav Narayan Rao was accepted as the Peshwa by the British. In return, their claims over Salsette and Durg were recognized and it was promised that Marathas would not allow the French to establish their posts within the Maratha territory.

Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-1805)

In 1800, the death of Nana Fadnavis, the able Maratha minister who kept the English at bay with his diplomatic skills, dealt a severe blow to the Marathas. The East India Company under Wellesley tried to convince Peshwa Baji Rao II to sign the Subsidiary Alliance with the British which was initially rejected by him. However, when he was attacked by Jaswant Rao Holkar, the Peshwa was forced to sign a treaty with the English for his protection in 1802. The treaty came to be known as Treaty of Bassein and its main conditions were:

- The Peshwa must renounce his claim over Surat and Baroda.
- The Peshwa could not enter into any other treaty or declare war without first consulting the Company.
- A British force of around 6,000 troops would be permanently stationed within the territory of Peshwa.
- The Peshwa must exclude all Europeans from his service.
- Peshwa also transferred his right to recover 'Chauth' from the Nizam to the British.

This treaty was disgraceful for the Maratha chiefs. First of all, Bhonsle challenged the British, was defeated and was forced to sign the Treaty of Devgaon in 1803. Similarly, other Maratha chiefs also failed to present a united front and were defeated separately by the British and were forced to sign treaties. Scindhia was forced to sign the Treaty of Surji Anjangaon in 1803, while Holkar was separately defeated and signed the Treaty of Rajpurghat in 1805.

Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-19)

The British attack on Pindaris during the tenure of Governor General Hastings was seen as a provocation by the Marathas and it led to the beginning of this war. In 1817, the Marathas finally attempted to overthrow the British but were decisively defeated.

Results

The Peshwa was relocated to a small establishment of Bithur near Kanpur on a small pension and his territory was annexed. The Maharaja of Satara was restored as the ruler of his territory after the defeat. However, in 1848 this territory was also annexed by the Bombay Presidency under the Doctrine of Lapse policy of Lord Dalhousie. Bhonsle was defeated in the battle of Sitabuldi and Holkar in the battle of Mahidpur. The defeat of Bhonsle and Holkar also resulted in the acquisition of the Maratha kingdoms of Nagpur and Indore by the British. Along with Gwalior and Jhansi, all of these territories became princely states acknowledging British control.

Reasons for Defeat of the Marathas

The infighting among the Marathas and ambitions of separate and independent dominions weakened the Maratha Principalities. The court intrigues also allowed the British interference in the internal matters of the Maratha State. The Marathas were left with limited sources of revenue against the formidable enemies with far better sources of revenue. The Maratha army observed the rituals of caste differences. It did not allow the army to develop as a unified and formidable force. The Marathas had a highly deficient espionage system and their policy decisions in the war suffered as a consequence.