

BATTLE OF PLASSEY

1. Background of the Battle of Plassey:

- The weak central authority and rivalry between the regional kingdoms during 18th century provided the Europeans the opportunity to play important role in Indian politics. The political condition in Bengal, presented to the East India Company an opportunity for political interference. Death of Nawab Alivardi Khan of Bengal in 1756 led to a power struggle between three contenders. The succession of Siraj-ud-daula was opposed by his aunt Ghasiti Begum and his cousin Shaukat Jang who was the governor of Purnea. There was a dominant group in the Nawab's court comprising Jagat Seth, Umichand, Raj Ballabh, Mir Jafar and other who were also opposed to Siraj. Besides internal dissension within the Nawab's court, another serious threat to Nawab's position was the growing commercial activity of the English Company. The conflict between the Nawab and the English Company over trade privileges was nothing new. But during Siraj-ud-daula's reign certain other factors further strained the relations between the two. This included fortification around Calcutta by the English Company without the permission of the Nawab, the misuse of the Company's trade privilege by its officials for their private trade. The English Company at Calcutta had given shelter to Krishna Das son of Raj Ballabh who had fled with immense treasures, against the Nawab's will.
- The Company officials suspected that the nawab would cut down the privilege of the Company in alliance with the French in Bengal.
- The issue of fortification of the Fort William at Calcutta without the Nawab's permission worsened the relationship between the Nawab and the company. The Nawab saw this as sheer disobedience and moved in person against the English.
- On 20th June 1756, Siraj attacked and took over Fort William. He destroyed the fortification and left Calcutta in the hands of his officers. Many of the English prisoners, who were imprisoned during this attack died in a small room often referred to as the Black Hole tragedy.
- Meanwhile the English waited for the reinforcement from Madras.
- The troops from Madras led by Robert Clive and Admiral Watson retook Calcutta on 2nd January, 1757. The treaty of Alinagar was signed between the Nawab and the Company.
- Clive's troops captured the French settlement of Chandernagore.
- Clive tempted Siraj's general, Mir Jafar to ally with him in exchange for the Nawab's position.

Battle of Plassey and its outcome :

- On 23rd June, 1757, the Company troops marched against Siraj. Betrayed by his own men Siraj was defeated in the Battle of Plassey, which is said to have lasted only a few hours, causing limited casualties on both the sides.

- The Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula was defeated, captured and executed at his capital Murshidabad.
- It provided the British with immense political power in India and established the indirect British rule in India.
- Victory of the English in the Battle of Plassey was significant not only for the Company but was important for the whole of British Empire. The conquest of Bengal instilled in them a kind of greed for the unfathomed wealth of Bengal and its subsequent plunder.
- Siraj-ud-daula was replaced by Mir Jafar as Nawab of Bengal. The new Nawab was a stooge of the Company and had no independent power or existence.
- He English also registered territorial and commercial gains in post Plassey period. They got the territory of twenty-four Parganas in Bengal from the new Nawab. This made the settlement of Calcutta more prosperous. Their trade also received impetus. The trade and privilege so far enjoyed by them not only increased but also became more secure.
- The English Company utilized this opportunity and dispatched their agents to re-establish subordinate trading factories in the interior parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
- Moreover the Battle of Plassey enhanced the overall prestige of the Company. It placed them at a very advantageous position. They had now at their disposal resources that could be used in struggle against the French both within (in the Carnatic Wars) and without India (in Europe). They were no more dependent on the supply of resources from Britain which in turn helped the home country in channelizing its resources against the French power in Europe and America.
- The Battle of Plassey, therefore, was a turning point in the history not only of Bengal but in the history of the whole of India. It paved the way for the establishment of the British supremacy in India. It has been rightly remarked that "the Battle of Plassey marked the end of one epoch and the beginning of a new one". It in fact heralded the modern period of Indian history.

BRITISH OCCUPATION OF BENGAL: PLASSEY TO BUXAR (1757-1765)

- The history of Bengal from 1757 to 1765 is the history of gradual transfer of the power from the nawabs to the British. During this short period of eight years three nawabs, Siraj-ud-Daula, Mir Jafar and Mir Kasim ruled over Bengal but they failed to uphold the sovereignty of the nawab and ultimately the reign of control passed into the hands of the British.
- The British, unable to compete with the Asian merchants in business, resorted to force, taking control of Bengal in 1757 under the pretext of the "Plassey revolt". The result was that the British achieved victory in Bengal, for their use of force led to the decline of the very trade they so longed to control.

- By the time Siraj-ud-Daula succeeded Ali Vardi Khan as nawab of Bengal in 1756 trade privileges and their misuse by the Company and its officers had already become an issue of conflict.
- There was a privilege which had been granted to the Company for its export and import trade by the Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar.
- According to this Imperial farman, the Company had to pay Rs. 3000 a year and in return could carry on trade duty- free in Bengal.
- The Company's servants extended this privilege to their own coastal trade, inter- Asian trade and finally the inland trade. This was an obvious usurpation.
- Certain other factors like the fortification around Calcutta without the permission of the nawab and repeated defiance of the nawab's authority along with sheltering the offenders of the nawab were the acts on the part of the English Company which provoked the nawab. The Company officials also suspected that nawab was going to have an alliance with the French in Bengal. Siraj-ud-Daula's attack on Calcutta precipitated an open conflict. The British retaliation started with hatching a conspiracy against the nawab in alliance with his officers like Rai Durlabh, Amin Chand, Mir Jafar and Jagat Seth. So English victory in the battle of Plassey (23 June, 1757) was pre-decided. It was not the superiority of the military power but the conspiracy that helped the English in winning the battle.
- Mir Jafar, The commander-in-chief of the Nawab was awarded the Nawabship by Clive for his support to the English.
- Mir Jafar responded by paying a sum of Rs. One Crore and Seventy Seven lakhs (17,700,000) to the Company and large sums to the Company officers as bribe. But Mir Jafar could not support the ever increasing demands of the English who were also suspicious about his collaboration with the Dutch Trading Company. Mir Jafar, who was made nawab after the battle of Plassey, was deposed in 1760.
- Mir Kasim was placed on the throne by the British in the hope that he would be able to meet their financial demands. The new Nawab assigned to them the district of Burdawan, Midnapore and Chittagong for the expenses of the British army which was to help him. This alliance was of great help to the British in their campaign against the French in 1760-1761; the money paid by Mir Kasim helped the Calcutta Council to finance their war in South.
- The Nawab succeeded in establishing a better system of administration. But he came into conflict with the British in Bengal on the question of a privilege i.e. duty free private trade of the Company.
- Mir Kasim's proposed plan about equal trade duties for British and Indian traders was turned down by the British council at Calcutta. Mir Kasim, in the circumstances, remitted all duties on Indians and the British alike for two years. This measure deprived the British private traders of the privileged position they had created for themselves, they could not compete with Indian traders on equal terms.
- The Nawab's attempts to reorganize the army and shifting of capital from Murshidabad to Monghyr were also taken as unforgivable offences by the Company.
- In June 1763 under Major Adams British army defeated Mir Qasim the Nawab of Bengal.
- Mir Kasim fled took help from Emperor Shah Alam II and Shuja-ud-Daula (Who was Nawab of Awadh and also the Wazir of the Mughal empire).
- Matters came to a head when the chief of the Company's factory at Patna, tried to seize the city. This precipitated war. Mir Kasim, an excellent civil administrator, was no military leader. His army was defeated. When he was forced to withdraw to Awadh, the Nawab Wazir and emperor Shah Alam II decided to come to the defence of the eastern subas of the empire.
- The confederates advanced to Patna, and a battle was fought at Buxar on October 22, 1764. With a decisive victory at Buxar, the British army overran Awadh.
- The Nawab Wazir fled to the Rohilla country, but Shah Alam II came to terms with the British.
- Lord Clive, concluded treaty of Allahabad with the Shuja-ud-Daula Nawab Wazir of Awadh, who was to pay fifty lakhs of rupees for the expenses of the war and was given back his dominions. He entered into defensive alliance with the Company. Awadh became for the British a buffer state. Shah Alam II was now a fugitive-Delhi had now fallen into the hands of the Rohilla chief Najib-ud-daulah. The British gave emperor Shah Alam II possession of Kara and Allahabad, while he granted them the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in return for a regular annual payment of twenty- six lakhs of rupees.

Battle of Buxar- in Detail

1. Background of the Battle of Buxar: Strong and commanding position of English East India Company in Bengal was the most significant outcome of the battle of Plassey.

- The English were not satisfied with Mir Jafar and replaced him by his son-in-law Mir Kasim . The latter rewarded British with land as well as money.
- Kasim was comparatively more able, efficient and strong ruler. He tried to remove corruption from revenue administration and to raise a modern and disciplined army along European lines. In order to weaken the influence and interference of the Company on day to day affairs of his court and to assert his power and position he shifted his capital to Munger in Bihar. This further displeased the British.
- There was rise of differences between the nawab and the English over various issues. The new nawab was determined to free himself from foreign control and

in fact soon emerged as a threat to their positions in Bengal. Nawab's attempts to check the misuse of the dastaks which deprived the Nawab of an important source of revenue added fuel to the fire.

- Conflict broke out when Mir Kasim abolished all the duties on internal trade so as to provide a level playing ground to all the traders in his province. Since abolition of duties automatically checked the use of dastak, which otherwise allowed the British to trade without paying taxes/duties in the province of Bengal, the increase in the level of tension between the Nawab and the British was nothing unusual. This led to use of force by both the parties. The Nawab was defeated in a series of battles in 1763 and fled to Awadh.

2. Battle of Buxar and its outcome

- Mir Kasim formed a confederacy with Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam in a final bid to oust the English from Bengal.
- The combined armies of the three powers numbering between 40,000 to 60,000 met an English army of 7,072 troops under Major Hector Munro at the battlefield of Buxar on 22 October, 1764. The English won the day.
- The battle of Buxar was fought in strictest terms and is therefore, rightly considered as the most decisive battles of Indian history. The battle of Buxar was a closely contested battle in which the losses of the English numbered 847 killed and wounded, while on the side of the Indian powers more than 2,000 officers and soldiers were killed.
- The battle demonstrated the superiority of English arms over the combined army of two of the major Indian powers.
- Buxar confirmed the decisions of Plassey. As a result of this triumph, in 1765, Robert Clive signed two treaties at Allahabad popularly known as Treaty of Allahabad with the Mughal emperor and Nawab of Awadh respectively.
- The treaty effectively legalized the British East India Company's control over the whole of Bengal since Shah Alam II gave the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the British. They also managed to get the right of Nizamat from Mir Jaffar, the re-nominated Nawab of Bengal. In fact the battle of Buxar firmly established the British as masters of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and placed Awadh at their mercy. Now English power in Northern India became unchallengeable.

THE DUAL SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATION OF BENGAL

- The early mechanism of the establishment of Company rule in Bengal followed the administrative system under the Mughals. The Mughal provincial administration had two main heads - nizam and diwani.
- Broadly speaking, nizam meant administration of law and order and criminal justice; while diwani was the revenue administration and civil justice.
- The provincial Subadar was in charge of nizam (he was also called nazim) and the diwan was in charge of revenue administration.
- After the treaty of Allahabad the English East India Company was made the Diwan of Bengal but Lord Clive chose not to take over the administration of Bengal directly; this responsibility was left to the Nawab's Naib Diwan and Naib Nazim Muhammad Raza Khan.
- As Naib Nazim he was to represent the Nawab and as Naib Diwan he was to represent the Company. Thus the Nawab had to handle the entire responsibility for the civil and criminal justice administration. However, he had to function through Muhammad Raza Khan who was placed under the superintendence, direction and control of the British Company.
- As the Diwan, the Company directly collected its revenue, while through the right to nominate the Deputy Nazim, it controlled the nizam or the Police or Judicial powers. This arrangement is known as 'Dual or Double Government'.
- Under this system British had power and resources without responsibility while the Nawab had the responsibility of the administration without power to discharge it. Thus the Nawab had to take all responsibility for bad governance. The revenue remained the sole earning of the Company in lieu of a meager annual payment to the Mughal emperor.