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The Battle of Plassey and Buxar

The first major conflict of the British against an Indian power was in Bengal. 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 Qasim 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 Sirajud- 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 thenawab 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, Ami 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 Qasim 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 Qasim 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 Qasim's proposed plan about equal trade duties for British and Indian traders was turned down by the British council at Calcutta. Mir Qasim, 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 Qasim fled to Patna and took help from Emperor Shah Alam II and Shujaud-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 Qasim, 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, then British Governor in Calcutta, also 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.

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 - *nizamat* and *diwani*. Broadly speaking, *nizamat* 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 *nizamat* (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 choose 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 *nizamat* 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 emporer.