The British – from Traders to Rulers

Voyages of discovery

India had a flourishing trade with Europe both via land and sea route. Indian cotton and spices were very much in demand in Europe. Arab traders who dominated this trade, carried these goods to the ports of the Red Sea. Finally goods were taken to Europe.

In 1453, Turks took over Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Capital Empire and prevented the Arab Traders from carrying goods to Europe via the land and sea route. This disrupted the trade. Since the traditional route being followed so far was blocked, the Europeans were forced to look for a direct trade route to the East. In 1498 Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer discovered an Ocean route from Portugal to the East. At Malindi they met a local navigator and were able to cross the Indian Ocean and arrived in Calicut, India in less than a month.

European Trading Companies in India

The discovery of this new sea route led to a rivalry among the European Powers.

Fierce competition to control trade with India resulted in bitter trade wars between the British, the Dutch, the Portuguese and the French Companies.

The Portuguese

The first Europeans to arrive in India and set up their trading posts were the Portuguese. They drove the Arab Traders from the Indian Markets.

The Dutch

The Dutch East India Company was formed in 1602, with the purpose of lucrative trade in spices with India and the East.
The British East India Company

A group of enterprising business men in England formed the East India Company in 1600 and acquired a charter from Queen Elizabeth I which granted it the sole right to trade with India in return for a share of its profits. The company got the right to venture across the oceans to look for new lands for buying goods at a cheap rate and selling them in Europe at a high profit.

In 1608, Captain William Hawkins was sent to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir to seek permission to set up trading posts in India and was granted permission to set up ‘Factories’.

In 1615, King James I the ruler of England, sent Sir Thomas Roe to the court of Mughal Emperor Jahangir to seek further trade privileges.

In 1639, the British obtained a piece of land from the Raja of Chandragiri and founded the city of Madras which became their base on the East Coast. By 17th century, the East India Company exercised full control over Madras.

In 1668, the company acquired the island of Bombay from King Charles, who received it from the Portuguese as a part of his dowry.

In 1651, the first English Factory in Bengal was set up. In 1698, the Company acquired 3 villages in Bengal to form the City of Calcutta and built Fort William.

The French

The last European power to enter India was the French they formed their trading company 1664. The first French factory came up at Surat and they founded Pondicherry in 1674, which became their Capital.

The Trade Wars

All the European trading companies were interested in buying the things which were in great demand in Europe. The desire to secure markets led to fierce battles, known as trade wars. Their effort also resulted in conflicts with local rulers. The company found difficult to separate trade from politics. The Portuguese and the Dutch were ousted and the British and the French became dominant.
From Traders to Rulers – The British Conquest of India

Initially, the English East India Company only wanted privileges and trade concessions. They soon realized the need for establishing their dominance by occupying territories.

Anglo–French Rivalry

Clash of trade interest between Britain and France, lead to a series of war, known as Carnatic Wars. The rulers of Hyderabad, Carnatic and Mysore were in constant conflict with each other. Taking advantage of their rivalry, the French and the British allied themselves with their rival groups and fought 3 wars (1744-1763). The Carnatic wars ended with the defeat of the French. They were left with Pondicherry and Chandranagore and were not allowed to fortify these territories.

The British now focused their attention towards conquering Bengal for its silk and textiles.

The Conquest of Bengal

In the early 18th century, Siraj-ud-daulah the Nawab of Bengal refused to grant the Company concessions and demanded large tributes for the Company’s right to trade. He stopped the Company from extending its fortifications and denied it the right to mint coins.

To expand its trade it was necessary for the company to buy more villages to enlarge its settlements and fortify them. This situation led the conflict between the Company and the Nawabs of Bengal and culminated into the famous Battle of Plassey.

Battle of Plassey

In 1756 Siraj-ud-daulah succeeded Alivardi Khan as the Nawab of Bengal. He was also very powerful and refused to grant trade concessions to the British. So the company tried, to help one of Siraj-ud-daulah’s rivals to become the Nawab.

Siraj-ud-daulah was infuriated and asked the Company to stop interfering in the political affairs of Bengal, stop their fortification and pay their revenues. On their refusal to do so, the Nawab marched with 30,000 soldiers to the English factory at Kassimbazar and captured the company officials, locked their warehouse,
blockaded English ships and occupied Fort William. When the news reached Madras the Company sent forces and naval fleets under the command of Robert Clive. Finally in 1757 Companies army led by Robert Clive fought against Siraj-ud-daulah at Plassey and defeated Siraj-ud-daulah, putting him to death.

Reasons for the defeat of Nawab was that he was betrayed by Mir Jafar. He was one of the commanders who never fought the battle because Clive had promised to make him the Nawab, if he helped in defeating Siraj-ud-daulah.

**The Battle of Buxar**

Mir Jafar, the new Nawab of Bengal became a puppet in the hands of the English. He was not able to meet the demands, he was deposed by the Company and his son in-law, Mir Qasim was put on the throne. Soon he too had differences with the British. He forced the employees of the Company to pay duties for their private trade. He abolished duties on internal trade for Indians. This made the British unhappy.

In 1763, Mir Qasim fled to Awadh and entered into an alliance with Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah and the Mughal emperor Shah Alam. The combined forces of these 3 challenged the British at the Battle of Buxar in 1764. The British defeated the rulers and established their superiority.

Mir Jafar was once again made the Nawab of Bengal, but in return he was made to pay Rs 5,00,000 every month to the Company and was forced to give gifts and land to other officials of the Company.

**The Treaty of Allahabad**

The Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah and Nawab of Awadh entered into a treaty with the Company known as, the Treaty of Allahabad.

- The British became the virtual rulers of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
- Awadh was given back to Shuja-ud-daulah and he was made to pay 50,00,000 lakh rupees as war damages.
- Shah Alam II was recognized as the Mughal Emperor and given an annual pension of Rs 26 lakhs.
- In return the Emperor granted the British the Diwani from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
British promised to protect Awadh and in return the Nawab was supposed to pay for this protection.

**Dual Government in Bengal**

After the Battle of Buxar, the Company established Dual Government or Diarchy. The Company became the real rulers of Bengal and enjoyed supreme political power. Collection of revenues and control of military was under their control. It dispensed justice but didn’t take up the responsibility of administration. Small portion of the revenue was given to the Nawabs to run their administration and the Nawabs had no power to enforce the law and justice.

**Effect of Dual Government on Bengal**

The people of Bengal suffered miserably, law and order broke down and administration became corrupt. Artisans were forced to sell their wares to the British at cheaper rates and many of them fled from Bengal. Peasants were made to pay high taxes, thus agricultural production declined. In 1770 Bengal was struck with acute famine, neither the company nor the Nawabs took any steps to provide relief.

**Company Rule Expands**

Between 1765-1857 was the next phase of British conquest of India. This was achieved by various methods – Direct Annexations, Subsidiary Alliances, The Doctrine of Lapse, the Policy of Paramountcy, Pretext of Misrule and Wars.

The Company appointed Residents in Indian states to serve the interest of the Company. They began to interfere in the internal affairs of the Indian States.

**The Conquest of Mysore**

Mysore, a powerful state in the south, was important for the British because it controlled a large part of the spice trade. The powerful leaders of Mysore, Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan were opposed to the British as they had close ties with the French. Four battles took place between the British and the rulers of Mysore.
The Anglo-Mysore Wars

In the first Anglo-Mysore war (1767-1769) Hyder Ali defeated the forces of East India Company in Madras and British agreed to help Hyder Ali in case of attack from the Marathas.

The Second Anglo-Mysore war was caused because the British captured the French possessions at Mahe, which was under the protection of Hyder Ali. He died and his son Tipu Sultan continued to fight. Both the parties signed a Treaty of Mangalore.

Lord Cornwallis, the then governor general, Marathas and The Nizam of Hyderabad attacked Tipu Sultan. This was known as the Third Anglo Mysore War. The British took two of his son as hostages and defeated Tipu Sultan. Under The Treaty of Seringapatam, Tipu was made to give them half of his territory.

In 1799, Lord Wellesley defeated Tipu in the fourth Anglo Mysore war known as Battle of Seringapatam. Tipu died in this battle and British annexed half of his kingdom. Mysore was given back to the royal family and they were forced to enter into subsidiary alliance.

War with the Marathas

The Marathas had suffered a crushing defeat in the Third battle of Panipat in 1761. The British had to fight several wars with the Marathas to occupy their territory. In the First Anglo Maratha war there was no clear victory. The second Anglo Maratha war was fought on different fronts. The third Anglo Maratha war finally crushed the Maratha power. The Peshwa was removed and was sent to Bithur with a pension.

Direct Annexation

It means using force to take control of a neighboring territory. The British took control of the state in guise of protecting the state. Indian rulers stopped maintaining their army. Law and order situation deteriorated. The British collected more taxes to maintain their troops. British annexed the state on the pretext of misrule in the state.
**Subsidiary Alliance**

According to this, Indian rulers were allowed to have their independent armed forces. Company supplied troops for their protection. The rulers were supposed to pay a fixed sum to the company for maintaining the British troops, if failed then part of their territory was taken away as penalty. This allowed the British to maintain a large army. The local rulers got security but lost independence.

**The Doctrine of Lapse**

The Doctrine of Lapse declared that if an Indian ruler died without a male heir his kingdom would “Lapse”, and become a part of the Company territory. It will not pass to the adopted heir.

**Policy of Paramountcy**

The British were the supreme power. Their power was greater than the power of the Indian states. In order to protect their power, they were justified in annexing or threatening to seize any Indian Kingdom.

**Pretext of Misrule**

Dalhousie annexed Awadh in 1856 on the pretext of misrule and misgovernment creating a lot of unrest among the Indian Soldiers in the British Army.

**Anglo-Sikh Wars**

Punjab managed to remain independent under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. After his death in 1839, 2 wars were fought with the Sikh Kingdom. Punjab was annexed in 1849 and Maharaja Dalip Singh was given pension and sent to England.

**Reasons for the Success of the British**

- Indian rulers didn’t want to forego their comfortable lifestyle. Without fighting with the British they chose Subsidiary Alliance.
- Absence of strong central leadership.
- Lack of unity among the Indian Rulers.
- British had superior army and navy.
Assessment Zone

1. Explain the terms.
   - **Mercantile Company** - A company that makes profit through trade. It buys goods at cheap rates and sells them at high rates.
   - **Factory** – A factory usually had a store house for storing goods for export. It also housed the offices of the British traders.
   - **Diwani** – The right to collect Taxes.
   - **Farman** – A royal edict, a royal order.
   - **Diarchy** – A form of government introduced by the British in India where the British had all the power i.e. right to Diwani, control of army and dispensing justice. On the other hand, Nawabs had all the administrative responsibilities and no power to enforce law.
   - **Subsidiary Alliances** – Indian rulers within the alliance were not allowed to have their own army and instead relied on the Company to provide protection. For this the rulers were supposed to pay a fixed sum to the Company.
   - **Resident** – The political or commercial agent in Indian states to serve the interest of the company.
   - **Doctrine of Lapse** – If an Indian ruler of the subsidiary state died without a male heir, his kingdom would lapse and become a part of Company territory and will not pass to his adopted heir.
   - **Paramountcy** – The British were the supreme power and in order to protect their supremacy they were justified in annexing or threatening to seize any Indian kingdom.

2. Fill in the blanks:
   - The main Centre of British East India Company in the beginning was **Surat**.
   - **Mahé** was not a trading post of the French.
   - In AD **1600** the British East India Company received exclusive rights from Queen Elizabeth to trade with India.
   - The **Diwani of Awadh** was not granted to the British by the Mughal Emperor.
• The system of Subsidiary Alliance was introduced by the Governor General Lord Wellesley.
• The Battle of Plassey was fought between Siraj-ud-daulah and the British.
• Lord Dalhousie annexed Satara, Nagpur and Jhansi under the Doctrine of Lapse.
• King James I sent Sir Thomas Roe as an ambassador to the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir.
• The Battle of Buxar took place in 1764.
• The 4th Anglo-Mysore war is also known as Battle of Seringapatam.
• Under Subsidiary Alliance, the rulers were supposed to pay a fixed sum to the company for maintaining the forces.
• If an Indian Ruler died with a male heir, under the Doctrine of Lapse, the kingdom could not go to his adopted heir.

3. Answer the following.
• Why were the Europeans keen to find a direct sea route to India?

In 1453, Turks took over Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Capital Empire and prevented the Arab Traders from carrying goods to Europe via the land and sea route. This disrupted the trade. Since the traditional route being followed so far was blocked, the Europeans were forced to look for a direct trade route to the East.

• What do you understand by the system of Dual Government? How did it affect the people of Bengal?

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The people of Bengal suffered miserably, law and order broke down and administration became corrupt. Artisans were forced to sell their wares to the British at cheaper rates and many of them fled from Bengal. Peasants were made to pay high taxes, thus agricultural production declined. In 1770 Bengal was struck with acute famine.
• Why was Siraj-ud-daulah defeated in the Battle of Plassey?

Reasons for the defeat of Nawab were that he was betrayed by Mir Jafar. He was one of the commanders who never fought the battle because Clive had promised to make him the Nawab, if he helped in defeating Siraj-ud-daulah. As a result the British force managed to defeat the Nawab’s army.

• How did the Treaty of Allahabad benefit the company?

The Treaty of Allahabad was a turning point for the British. The Diwani allowed the Company to use the vast revenue resources of Bengal. Earlier the Company was buying most of the goods in India with gold and silver brought from Britain. Now revenues from India could be used to purchase cotton and silk textiles in India, maintain company troops and meet the cost of building their force and offices. It also gave the British plenty of resources for their next round of expansion.

• What was the system of subsidiary alliance? In what ways did it effect the rulers?

Indian rulers within the alliance were not allowed to have their own army and instead relied on the Company to provide protection. For this the rulers were supposed to pay a fixed sum to the Company. If they failed to make the payment then a part of their territory was taken away as penalty. This system allowed the British to maintain a large army at the expense of local rulers. The local rulers lost security but lost independence.

• Briefly describe the following. Name the states which were annexed by the British through the following methods:
  a) Direct conquest: Surat and Travancore.
  b) Doctrine of lapse: Satara and Jhansi.
  c) Policy of Paramouncty: Punjab and Sindh.

• Who were the parties in the battle of Buxar?

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• Write short notes on:

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Siraj-ud-daulah was infuriated and asked the Company to stop interfering in the political affairs of Bengal, stop their fortification and pay their revenues. On their refusal to do so, he captured the company officials, locked their warehouse, blockaded English ships and occupied Fort William. When the news reached Madras the Company sent forces and naval fleets under the command of Robert Clive. Finally in 1757 Companies army led by Robert Clive fought against Siraj-ud-daulah at Plassey and defeated Siraj-ud-daulah, putting him to death.

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