

Chapter: 2

The Establishment of British Empire in India

In the eighteenth century, European trade had become very important. Many scholars and kings sought to increase their wealth which reflected their national power and influence in the world. New trade routes had already been discovered during the voyages in the fifteenth century. Mercantilism, as a theory, suggested that government played a greater role in the economy of the colonies. Mercantilism, in short, came to be associated with building empires in the colonies. It was considered necessary for the emergence of imperialism. It was in this pursuit that even small European countries like Portugal carried out voyages of discovery to secure raw material for domestic industry. Later, other European nations like Spain, Dutch, France and Germany also participated in this quest. The establishment of British empire in countries of Asia resulted primarily from trading and commercial activities.

Coming of the East India Company

The English East India company obtained a charter from Queen Elizabeth I in 1600. The charter granted the English East India Company the sole right to trade with the East. Due to this charter no other trading group could compete with it in the East. This charter helped the company to buy goods at a cheap price and sell them at higher prices in Europe. It also meant that the other trading groups of England were eliminated and there was no competitor to East India Company.

Mercantile trading companies in those days made profits by excluding competitions, so that they could buy cheap and sell high. However, the royal charter could not prevent other European countries in entering the markets of the East. By the time the English crossed the Indian ocean the Portuguese had already established their presence. They entered India through

Mercantile

A business enterprise that makes profit primarily through trade, buying goods cheap and selling them at higher prices.

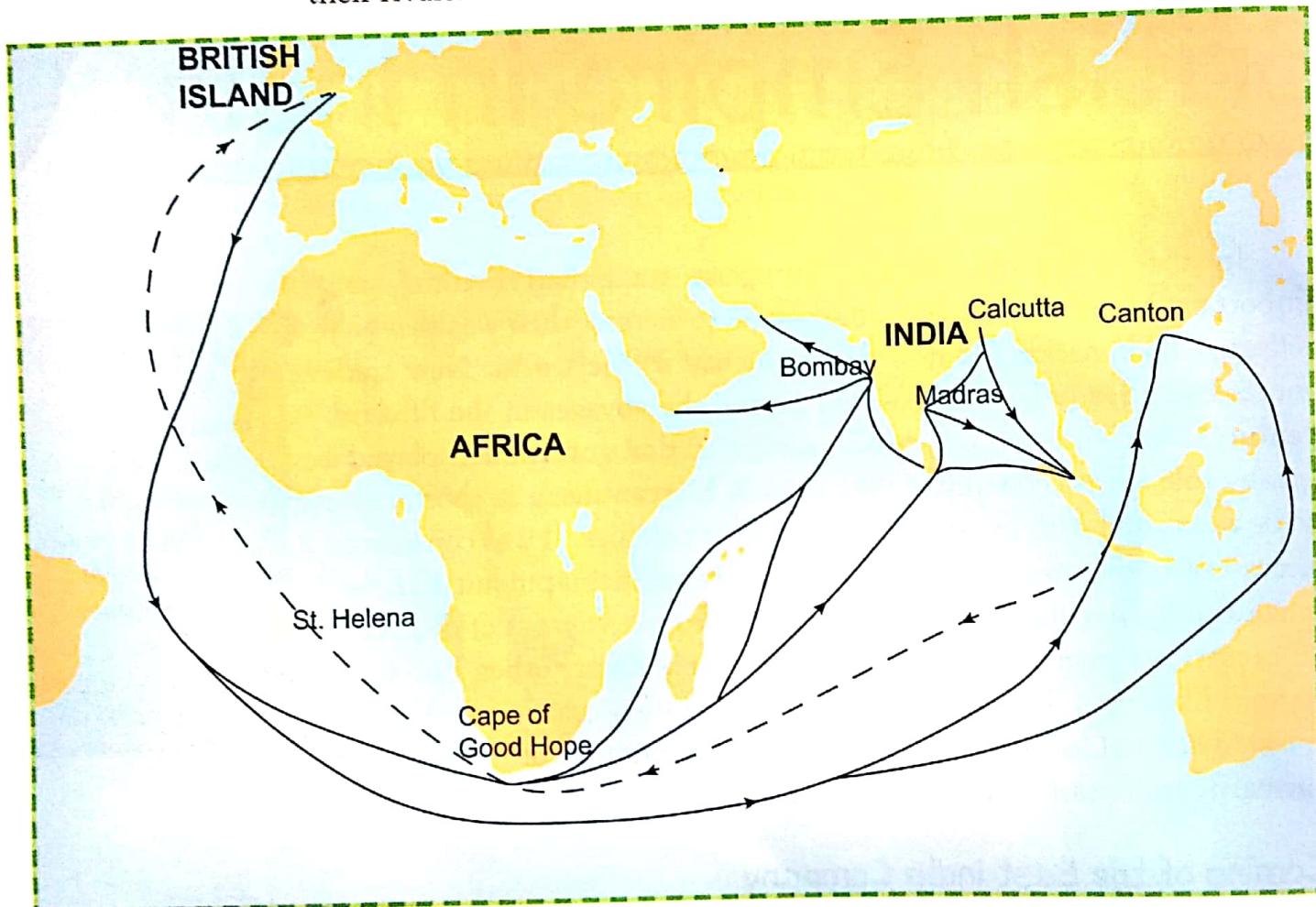
Source: NCERT



John Hawkins

the western coast and made Goa their base. It was Vasco Da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, who had discovered the sea route.

All the companies wanted to buy the same things such as five qualities of cotton, silk, pepper, cloves, caradamom and cinnamon from the Indian market. Due to the competition between these companies the prices of the products were pushed which resulted in reduced profits. The only way by which the trading companies could flourish was by eliminating their rivals.



Rivalry among Europeans

Initially, the Portuguese and the Dutch were in control of the sea routes. The British gained mastery over the Indian Ocean trade routes in the beginning of the eighteenth century. In India, factories were fortified to defend themselves against armed attacks, not so much by the local people or rulers as by the rival European trading companies. After AD 1600, each of the main European powers – the English, the French and the Dutch had formed their own trading companies and enjoyed the backing of their respective governments to carry on trade in the East. The European trading companies began providing soldiers to local rulers and in turn gained concessions from these Indian rulers. It stimulated rivalries among the European powers. They were, thus, fully equipped to face any eventuality, and finally used this armed might against the local rulers.

East India Company begins trade - Bengal

In 1651, the first English factory was set up on the banks of river Hugli. It worked as a base for the company traders. The company made its warehouses and by 1696 it began building a fort around the settlements. Within two years the company bribed the Mughal officials into giving Zamindari rights of three villages to the company. One of the village was Kalikata which is now known as Kolkata. The company also persuaded the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to issue a farman granting them the right to trade duty free.

The employees of the company also carried on their private trades, and so were expected to pay duty. But they refused which ended up causing an enormous loss of revenue for Bengal. This angered the Nawabs of Bengal and led to fierce battles.

Trade led to Battle

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Bengal Nawabs asserted their power and autonomy. They refused to grant the company any concessions. Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) was Nawab of Bengal and was a strong ruler who started protesting against it. He was first Nawab of Bengal, then came Alivardi Khan (1740-56) and his successor was his grandson Sirajuddaulah. The nawabs demanded huge tributes from the company to continue trading and prevented it from minting coins and extending its fortifications.

All these conflicts between the nawabs and the company eventually resulted in the famous Battle of Plassey, which marked the beginning of the company rule in India.

The Battle of Plassey

Sirajuddaulah became the Nawab of Bengal in 1756. He at once ordered British to pay revenue and stop fortification. With the help of his 30,000 soldiers he captured the officials of the English factory of Kassimbazar. He then marched to Calcutta to establish control over the company's fort there.

After the fall of Calcutta and unsuccessful negotiations with the Nawabs the company sent forces under the Robert Clive. Finally, Robert Clive led the army against Sirajuddaulah at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The Nawab was defeated by the British despite having a large force. Robert Clive ensured victory by bribing the Nawab's army commander Mir Jaffar, who was placed as Bengal's Nawab after the battle.



Robert Clive

The British first openly started misusing the trading privileges granted to them by the Nawab of Bengal. When Mir Jafar could not satisfy the company with wore and grants they removed him and placed his son Mir Qasim over the throne as the Nawab. Under him the company was granted undisputed right to free trade in Bengal. But soon, the nawab refused further rights. This led to the Battle of Baxar. It resulted in the, Mir Jafar becoming the Nawab again. This time he was asked to pay ₹500,000 per month to the company, but it was insufficient as the company wanted more money to finance its wars.



Sirajuddaulah

When Mir Jafar died in 1765 the company decided of becoming nawab itself, so in year 1765 the Mughal emperor declared the company as the diwan of Bengal province. The revenue it received through Diwani was of a great help, as they could now be used for buying cotton and silk and also building forts.

The 'Nawab'

With span of time the company acquired more power and authority. The company officials wanted to lead a luxurious life like the Nawabs of India. They began to imagine themselves as Nabobs or Nawabs. 'Nabobs' is an anglicized version of the Indian word Nawab as British were leading a lavish life similar to nawabs and everyone was on the mercy of British. Some of the British soldiers who survived war and saved some riches went back to Britain to flaunt it. They were known as Nabobs and were often made fun of through plays and cartoons.

Company Rule Expands

East India company adopted a different method in expanding its rule in India. It did not initiate a direct military attack immediately on any Indian territory. Rather it used various political and economic methods to extend its influence.

After the Battle of Buxar the company appointed residents in Indian states. They were mainly political and commercial agents whose aim was to further the interest of the company. Through them the company started interfering in the internal affairs of Indian states. One such interference of the company was 'the subsidiary Alliance'. It was basically a treaty between the British East India Company and the princely states.

According to this alliance, the Indian rulers were not allowed to have their independent armed forces and accept British forces in their territory. They also had to pay for the maintenance of the British army. If they failed to make the payment, a portion of their territory would be taken away. In return, The British would protect the Indian state against any attack. The alliance was framed by Lord Richard Wellesley, The Governor General of India from 1798-1805.

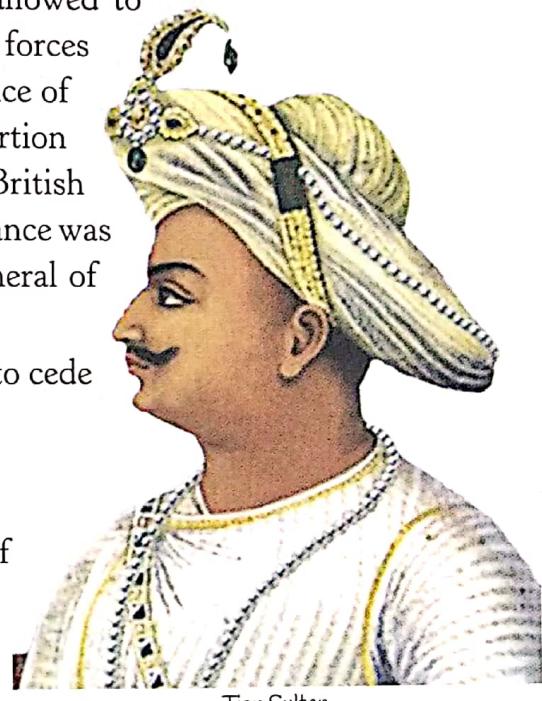
The Nawab of Awadh and Hyderabad were forced to cede territories on this ground.

The 'Tiger of Mysore'

Mysore had become powerful under the leadership of powerful rulers like Haider Ali (1761-1782) and his son Tipu Sultan (1782-1799). Mysore controlled the trade of the Malabar Coast. Tipu Sultan discontinued the export of pepper, cardamom and sandalwood in 1785 through the ports of his kingdom. He also stopped the merchants from trading with the company. Instead, he maintained close relations with the French Company in India. And with their help he modernized their army.

The British were enraged. They wanted to suppress the power of Mysore. The Anglo-Mysore wars were series of four wars between the British and the kingdom of Mysore (1761-69, 1780-84, 1790-92 and 1899). In the fourth war the British emerged victorious and Tipu Sultan was killed defending his capital, Seringapatnam. The kingdom was restored to the Wodeyar dynasty.

Mysore entered into a subsidiary Alliance with the British.



Tipu Sultan



Tipu toy Tiger

This is the picture of a big mechanical toy that Tipu possessed. You can see a tiger mauling a European soldier. When its handle was turned the toy tiger roared and the soldier shrieked. This toy tiger is now kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The British took it away when Tipu Sultan died defending his capital Seringapatam on 4 May 1799.

Wars with the Marathas

During the late 18th century, the Marathas were divided into many states under different chief. These chiefs belonged to different dynasties such as Sindhia, Gaikwad, Bhonsle and Holkas. These chiefs held together in a confederacy under a Peshwa. The Peshwa has the effective military and administrative head of the confederacy and was base at Poona. There were three Anglo-Maratha wars fought between the British and the Marathas from the late 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century.

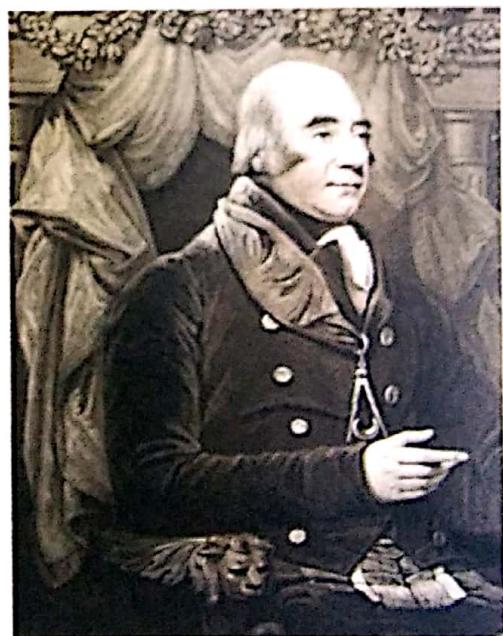
- First War – Treaty of Salbai in 1782.
- Second War (1803-05) – British gained Orissa and territories North of Yamuna river including Agra and Delhi.
- Third War – The Maratha power was finally crushed in 1817-19. Resulted in the Company's complete control over the territories south of the Vindhya range.

Chain to Paramountcy

East India Company, under the leadership of Lord Hasting, initiated a policy of paramountcy (supreme power). The policy claimed, the East India Company was greater than the Indian states. Also it could annex or threaten to annex any Indian state to protect its interest.

Rani Channamma : She was a ruler of small state in Kitoor (modern Karnataka). She led an anti-British resistance, she was arrested in 1824, and later died in prison in 1829. Later a Chowikar of Sangoli in Kitor continued the resistance. He was caught and later hanged.

Annexation of Punjab: The company feared a threat from Russia in the late 1830s. Due to which they tried to secure the North-West frontier of India by fighting a prolonged war with Afghanistan between 1838-1842 and established an indirect rule. The company took over Sindh in 1843. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the company fought two prolonged wars between and finally annexed Punjab in 1849.



Lord Hastings

Doctrine of Lapse

The British Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, employed the Doctrine of Lapse to annex more territories. According to this doctrine, any dependent state whose ruler died without leaving a biological born male heir would automatically pass into the hands of the company.

The territories annexed under this doctrine included satara, Jaitpur, Udaipur, Sambalpur, Nagpur, Bhagat, Jhansi, Karnataka and Tanjore. The titles of their rulers were abolished and some of them were also given pension. The abolition included misgovernment, which was applied in the case of Awadh which was annexed in 1856.



A Statue of the Queen of Kitoor (Karnataka)

Setting up Administration

Governor General Warren Hastings played a significant role in the expansion of the power of the Company in India (1773-1785). He introduced several administrative reforms, notably in the sphere of justice. In 1772, a new system of justice was established. He divided the administration into three presidencies, namely Madras, Bombay and Bengal.

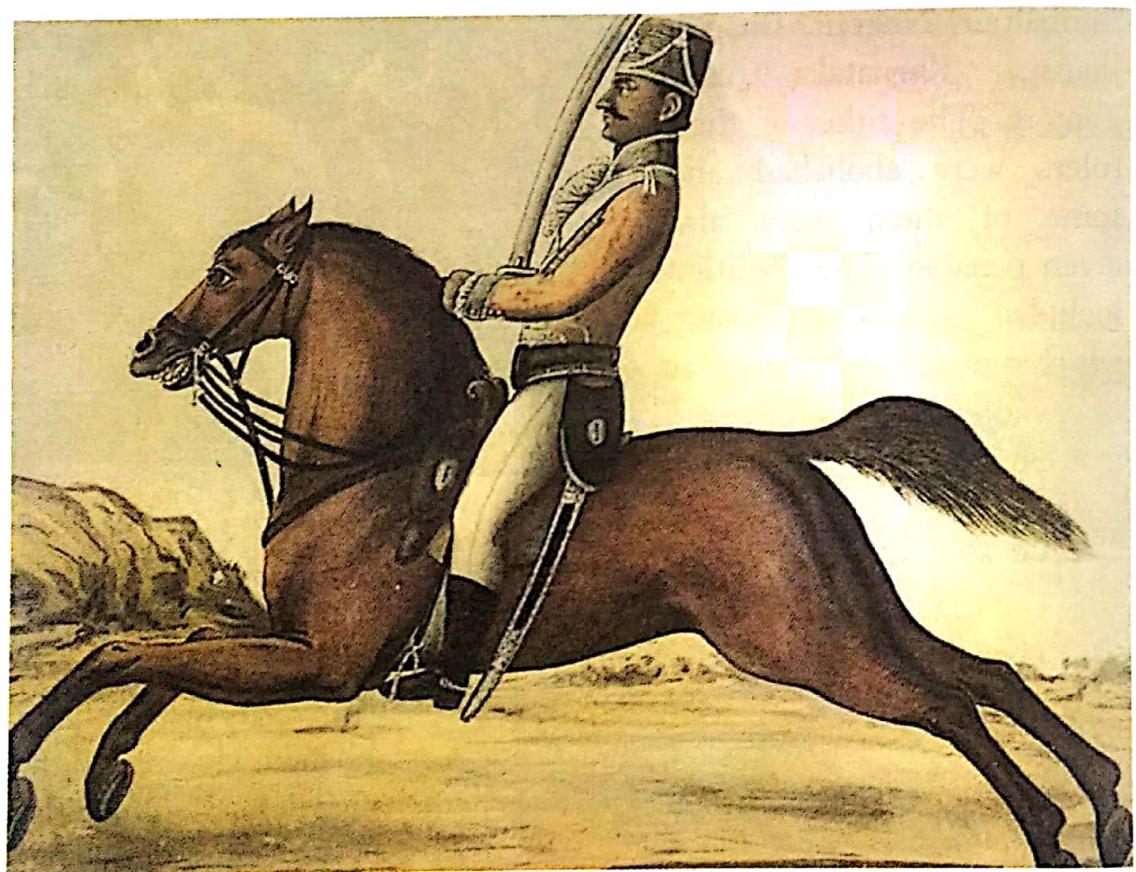
The codified laws with the help of Hindu pandits and Muslim muftis and qazi in order to do justice as per the prevailing laws in India. He appointed collectors to collect revenue and maintain law and order. He also established courts such as criminal court (faujdari adalat) and civil diwani (diwani adalat).

A supreme court was also established under the Regulating Act (1773). A court of appeal, the Sadar Nizamat Adalat was also set up at Calcutta.

The collector was the principal figure in an Indian district. His main job was to collect revenue and taxes and maintain law and order. His office was called the collectorate. The collectorate became the new center of power and patronage. Gradually, it replaced the previous holders of authority.

The Company Army

Several new policies were introduced in company's administration but the power of Britishers was also dependent on a strong army. Hence, they started recruiting Indian peasants and workers to their own army. By the passage of time new techniques were introduced such as muskets (heavy guns) and matchlocks (guns ignited by a match). There arose a need of developing new techniques among Indian soldiers with uniformity and discipline which challenged their culture and religion. This created a discontent among Indian soldiers in 1857. It would be discussed in the next chapter.



A sawar of Bengal in the service of the Company, painted by an unknown Indian artist, 1780.

After the battles with the Marathas and the Mysore rulers, the Company realised the importance of strengthening its cavalry force (Source NCERT).

Assessment

A. Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct option:

1. Who was the last powerful emperor of the Mughal empire?
 (a) Akbar (b) Jahangir
 (c) Shah Jahan (d) Aurangzeb
2. What do you mean by Diwani?
 (a) Right to food collection (b) Right to land collection
 (c) Right to revenue collection (d) None of the above
3. When was Battle of Buxar fought?
 (a) 1764 (b) 1789
 (c) 1775 (d) 1725
4. Who was Hyder Ali?
 (a) Ruler of Bengal (b) Ruler of Delhi
 (c) Ruler of Lucknow (d) Ruler of Mysore
5. When was Battle of Plassey fought?
 (a) 1723 (b) 1796
 (c) 1757 (d) 1745

B. Fill in the blanks:

1. Tipu Sultan fought _____ wars with the British.
2. After the death of Tipu Sultan Mysore entered into a _____ alliance with the British.
3. After the battle of Buxar _____ was made the Nawab of Bengal.
4. _____ initiated the policy of paramountcy.
5. The Company annexed Punjab in _____.
6. _____ was the ruler of a small state in Kitoor.

C. State whether True or False.

1. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the company fought three prolonged wars with Punjab.
2. The policy of Paramountcy claimed that the company was greater than small kingdoms of India but not by the Mughal empire.
3. Doctrine of Lapsus was one of the important policies of the British to annex more territories.
4. Tipu Sultan had a joint alliance with French and English East India Company.
5. The first English factory was set up in 1651.
6. The assumption of Diwani benefited the East India Company in various ways.

D. Answer the following questions in one word or sentence:

1. Who fought the battle of Buxar?
2. Name the country which had already established base in India before the East India company.
3. In which year the battle of Plassey was fought and between whom?
4. Name the three presidencies of British India.

5. Who was known as the 'Tiger of Mysore'?
6. What was 'Farman'?

E. Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Battle of Buxar.
2. Why did the conflict between Sirajuddaulah and the Company intensified?
3. Describe the policy of paramountcy.
4. How did the East India Company rapidly rise to power in India?
5. How did the British gain foothold in India and how did it consolidate its power?

F. Long Answer Questions

1. Describe the doctrine of Lapse.
2. Who was Mir Qasim? What was his role in the Battle of Buxar (1764)?
3. What were the causes of the rise of the British in India?
4. What is meant by Subsidiary Alliance? Who introduced it? State its five main features and effects.

G. Map/Activity:

On an outline map of India, name and locate the following:

- (a) The territories held by the French
- (b) The Portuguese
- (c) The English towards the close of 1856.