

Modern period

The history of Modern India can be studied by dividing it into the following sections-

- 1- History of 18th century
- 2- Colonialism
- 3- Nationalism
- 4- India after independence

History of 18th century

We shall analyse it by dividing it into two parts -

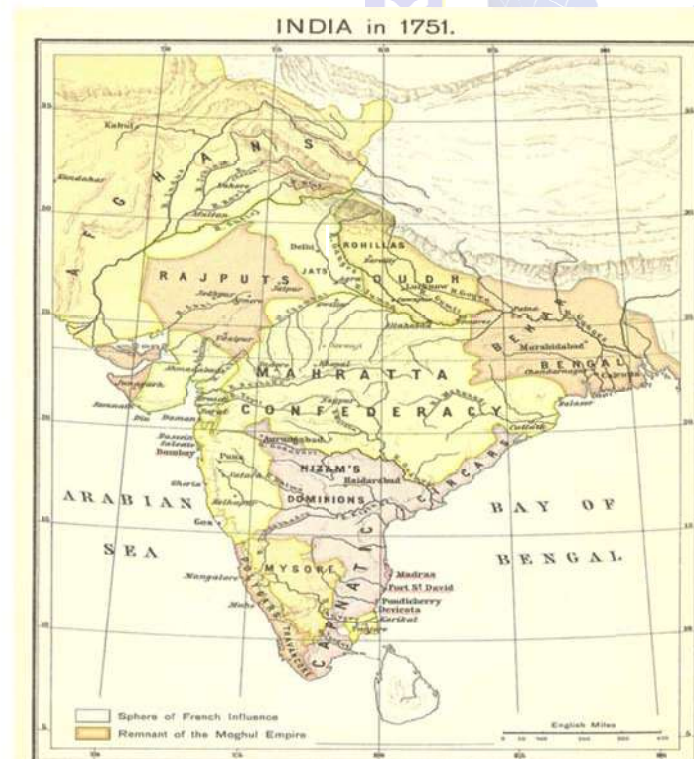
- 1- First half of 18th century
- 2- Second half of 18th century

First half of 18th century

During the course of our, our emphasis will be on the following aspects:

- 1- Decline of the Mughal Empire and establishment of regional states.
- 2- Why did the Marathas fail to displace the Mughal Empire?
- 3- Whether the first half of 18th century should be considered a 'Dark Age' or it a period of new possibilities?

Political scenario of India after disintegration of the Mughal Empire



After disintegration of the Mughal Empire, many regional states were established. These states can be divided into the following subgroups -

1. Successor States:-

Founders of these states were former officials of the Mughal Empire. Weakness of the Mughal Empire allowed them to behave like an independent ruler. These states have been discussed below-

Bengal: The founder of Bengal as independent state was Murshid Quli Khan, who was initially appointed as the Diwan of Bengal by Aurangzeb. However, by taking advantage of Aurangzeb's death, he assumed the post

of Subedar of Bengal, but he did not formally sever links with the Mughal empire. Since the beginning, there were two separate posts in the Mughal provincial administration i.e. Subedar and provincial Diwan. These two officers were expected to maintain mutual check and

balance. But, Murshid Quli Khan later, assumed the post of Subedar as well and thus, he became the virtual Nawab.

Then, in 1727 AD, he was succeeded by his son-in-law Shujauddin (1727-1739 AD) who in turn succeeded by his son Sarfaraz Khan (1739-40 AD). Then, after killing Sarfaraz Khan, Alivardi Khan captured the throne in 1740 AD and continued to rule till 1756 AD. He established an efficient administration in Bengal. However, he was frustrated with constant Maratha invasions. So, in 1751 he signed a treaty with the Marathas whereby he surrendered a large territory of Orissa province along with paying Chauth to the Marathas.

Awadh: By 1722 AD, the Mughal Wazir, 'Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk' made Awadh an independent state but he did not make any formal announcement regarding it. He received the title 'Burhan-ul-Mulk' from the Mughal Emperor. In 1723, he introduced a fresh revenue settlement and fixed a fair rate of land revenue on peasants. After his death in 1739 AD, he was succeeded by Safdarjung, who was also appointed on the post of Mughal Wazir. Hence the Nawab of Awadh was called 'Nawab-Wazir'. Safdarjung was succeeded by Shuja-ud-Daula who participated in the Battle of Buxar.

Hyderabad: Nizam-ul-Mulk was the founder of Hyderabad state. His real name was Chin Qilich Khan, but title of Nizam-ul-Mulk was conferred upon him by the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah. He assumed the post of Mughal Wazir from 1722 to 24. But due to petty court politics, he turned to Hyderabad in 1724 AD and there he founded his independent state. Similar to Bengal and Awadh, he did not sever his links with the Mughal imperial centre. He ruled as a virtually independent ruler till 1748 AD.

2. Rebel states:-

These states came into existence within the territory of Mughals by revolting against the Mughal Empire. These states were-

The Sikh State: - Sikhism was founded in 16th century by Guru Nanak. The 5th guru, Guru Arjandev established Golden Temple in Amritsar and organized the Sikh religion and even introduced some kind of a religious tax. In fact, since the very beginning, this religion promoted the feeling of togetherness due to its two elements-

- 1- Sangat (True Congregation)
 - 2- Langar (Community Kitchen)
- Further, this state fell into conflict with the Mughal Empire and then the Fifth and the Ninth Sikh gurus were martyred against Jahangir and Aurangzeb respectively. However, the Sixth Guru Hargobind Singh attempted to militarize the Sikh religion, but it could only be realized by Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, who laid the foundation of a strong military organization in the form of Khalsa. After him, Banda Bahadur tried to challenge the Mughals, but neither Guru Gobind Singh nor his disciple Banda Bahadur proved successful in establishing a Sikh state.
 - Then, in order to fill the void created by the Third Battle of Panipat (1761), an independent Sikh state was established in Amritsar in 1764. It extended from the river Satluj to

Peshawar in the north-west and Kashmir in the north. Later, under Ranjit Singh, the Sikh state emerged as a powerful state in India.

The Maratha State: - Marathas were organized under Shivaji into a separate Maratha state despite the opposition of Bijapur Kingdom and the mighty Mughals. The Maratha state turned into a large empire under the Peshwas. There was a time when the Maratha state emerged as a strong regional challenge to the Mughals but could not sustain the momentum. By the time of Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao, a Maratha confederacy had come into existence. The Peshwa of Poona was at the helm of this confederacy and its other constituents were the Scindias of Gwalior, the Holkars of Indore, the Bhonsles of Nagpur and the Gaekwads of Vadodara. The Marathas not only established their supremacy over Delhi, but also tried to drive out Afghans from Punjab region. However, after their defeat in the Third Battle of Panipat, the Marathas returned to the south.

The Jat State: - Jats were a farming community in Delhi, Agra, Mathura, Bharatpur etc. Gokul was a Jat leader who revolted against the Mughals in 1667 AD. But this rebellion was suppressed. Then, Rajaram Jat rebelled in 1685, and met the same fate. Later, Jat state was established under the leadership of Churaman Jat and Badan Singh.

The Afghans: - The Rohilla state was established in the north of Awadh by the Rohilla Afghans. This state was located in the Terai region of Himalayas. The Rohillas were constantly in conflict with Delhi and Jats. Najib-ud-Daulah and Hafiz Ahmad Khan were some of the most important Rohilla chieftains. Muhammad Khan Bangash founded an independent state of Farrukhabad in Uttar Pradesh.

Independent States

Mysore: - It was a successor state of the Vijayanagara Empire and being ruled by the Wodeyar dynasty. But Haider Ali, a military commander, led a coup and became the ruler of Mysore. He modernized his army with the help of France and also established modern armories. He even captured spice producing Malabar region. In fact, Mysore became a powerful state under Haider Ali and his successor Tipu Sultan.

Calicut: - Calicut was an important coastal state, ruled by Zamorin. This state was known for its foreign trade.

Travancore: - Kerala region remained outside the Mughal Empire. There were many states present in this region including Travancore state, established under the leadership of Martanda Varma and Rama Varma. Marthanda Varma brought economic reforms and modernized the army. The credit for defeating and washing out the Dutch from India goes to Martand Varma.

Controversy regarding the 18th century:

The basis of portraying this era as the Dark Age:

- 1- This period (first half of 18th century) is marked by political disintegration.
- 2- It was also considered as the period of economic decay.

But recent studies present a different view in the context of 18th century. According to this view, instead of calling this period as a period of decay and disintegration, it should be seen as a period of new possibilities and opportunities. On the following grounds, the concept of Dark Age has been discarded -

- 1- Multiple-state system has always remained an important feature of Indian polity. This multiple state system suits the geographical and cultural diversity of India.
- 2- Even though the Mughal Empire was on the verge of decline, but the successor states as well as some other states established competent administration in their respective territories. They ensured law and order situation and encouraged commercial activities. Examples are Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore etc.
- 3- Economically, it should not be considered as a period of decay due to following reasons -
 - There was increase in trade due to involvement of the European companies. During this period, huge amount of bullion, in form of gold and silver, was flowed to India.
 - Due to contact with the European Companies, tobacco, potato and maize cultivation started in 17th century.
- 4- On one hand, although the Mughal Empire disintegrated, but the tradition of Mughal art, architecture, painting and music remained at regional level. Even the regional rulers promoted the policy of religious harmony.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, the second half of the 18th century is now considered as the Early Modern period.

Question: Why did the Marathas fail to provide a political alternative to the disintegrating Mughal Empire?

Answer: The Maratha kingdom expanded rapidly from Southern India to North India and was beginning to acquire feature of an all India Empire. Apart from this, the Maratha state seemed to challenge to the authority of Mughal Empire. But due to its structural weakness and policy discrepancies, it failed to emerge as a consolidated empire. This can be explained as follows-

- 1- **Feudal character of Maratha confederacy:** - The Peshwa was at the helm of Maratha confederacy and its other constituents were Scindia, Bhonsale, Holkar and Gaekwad. High aspirations for powers among chieftains led to the weakening of Maratha state.
- 2- **Weak financial base:** - Economic structure of the Maratha state was very fragile. Thus, they were dependent on Chauth and Sardeshmukhi for additional income. Consequently, the Maratha state became military and feudalistic in nature.
- 3- **Economic activities were not promoted by the Maratha state-** The Maratha Empire, similar to the Roman Empire, relied on the money received from outside. It did not show any interest in the growth of agriculture, while they had direct control over the fertile plains of Krishna-Tungbhadra doab and Ganga-Yamuna doab regions.
- 4- The Maratha leaders failed to form a united front even during the time of crisis. A vivid example of it is the Third battle of Panipat .

Question: Clarify how mid-eighteenth century India was beset with the spectre of a fragmented polity? (150 words, UPSC 2017)

Answer: The emergence of multi-state system remained to be a striking feature of political scenario of mid-18th century India. In fact, on one hand the powerful Mughal Empire disintegrated and on the other hand, many regional states came into existence. We can divide these states into the following two groups:-

- 1- Successor States
- 2- Rebel States

In the first group, we can include the states like Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad. These states had been established by the Mughal officials. Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad were established by Saadat Khan, Murshid Quli Khan and Nizam-ul-Mulk respectively. As far as the Rebel States are concerned, it included the states like the Sikh state, the Maratha state, the Jat state and the Afghan state as well.

Once these states had asserted their independence, the Mughal power remained only symbolic in nature. In fact, the Mughal Empire lost its real sovereign power. Above all, there was competition and enmity among these states. However, the British company took advantage of this situation and established itself as a political power.

Thus, we can conclude that India in the 18th century was under the shadow of fragmented polity.



The Second half of the 18th century

The characteristic of this period is arrival of the European trading companies in India, their relations with each other and with the Indian states, and the transformation of the British Company from a trading company into a political power.



Arrival of European companies in India

1- Portuguese company: -

- After discovering an alternative route to India, the Portuguese established their trade relation with India. First of all, they built a fort in Kochi (Kerala) and created the post of governor in 1505. De Almeida became the first Governor and later he was succeeded by Albuquerque.

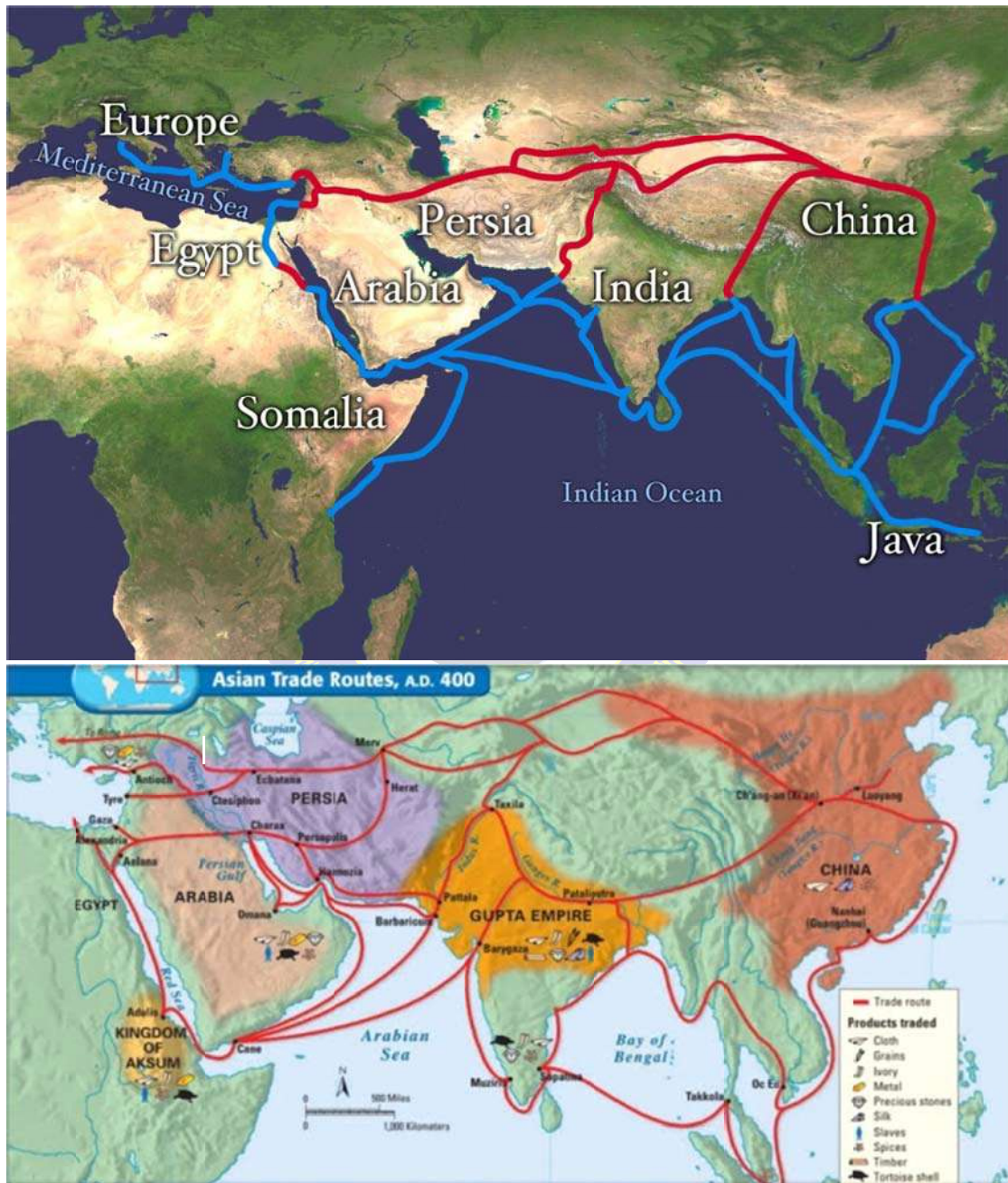
- The Portuguese captured Ormuz in 1509. In 1510, they conquered Goa. Then they built a fort at Bhatkal. The Portuguese established a large maritime empire from Ormuz to Malacca and called it 'Estado da India'. Above all, the Portuguese violated the Asian open sea policy and tried to control all the activities in the ocean. The Portuguese merchants tried to establish their monopoly over trade of spices, horses, ammunitions and of some other goods. They established a new system, known as the Cartaz system. It was a kind of passport which was obtained by Indian merchants from the Portuguese as a permit to take their ship into the ocean, otherwise their ship would be considered as a war ship and would be plundered. Main interest of the Portuguese was spice trade and their primary objective was limited to collecting duties on sea voyages.

2- The Dutch and the British company: -

- The Portuguese trade monopoly ended when the Dutch and the British arrived in the early 17th century. Initially, like the Dutch, the British Company also came with the purpose of spice trade. Later, there was intense competition between the British and Dutch companies.
- The British company had a different structure from the Portuguese Company. While the Portuguese Company functioned under the state monopoly, the British and Dutch companies were joint stock companies, which can be considered as the predecessors of present day MNCs. These companies received support from their respective nations. Their government itself granted trading charters to them and when needed, provided military support.
- By 1622, the British seized the region of Ormuz from the Portuguese and thus, the British company established its control over the trade of the region from Ormuz to the Bay of Bengal, while the Dutch established their control over the region from Bay of Bengal to Malacca. These joint stock companies were the companies of modern age.
- The Battle of Chinsurah (Battle of Bedara):** The Battle of Chinsurah of 1759 was fought between the British and the Dutch. In this battle, the Dutch had to face defeat.

Consequently, the Dutch power left India and remained confined to the islands of East Asia.

- Main interest of the Portuguese Company was in spice trade, while the Dutch and the British companies established a large market for Indian cotton and silk textiles in South-East Asia and Europe respectively. Apart from this, the British and the Dutch companies also exported indigo, opium, salt petre etc. They significantly boosted exports from India, which came to be termed as the '**Mercantile Revolution**'.



3- French company: -

- The French Company was established in 1664 AD. It was the last European company to come to India, and it established its first factory in Surat in 1668. There on, its factories were established in Masulipatam, Pondicherry and other parts of India. The most interesting fact

about the French company is that, although it was the last to come, but it expanded in India very quickly and posed a big challenge for the British. Following reasons can be attributed for this-

1. France established as a powerful state in Europe and gave a strong challenge to the British Company on the front of building a global empire.
2. Like the British Company, the French Company also received the support of its Government.
3. The struggle between the British and the French companies in India was part of global Anglo-French struggle.

Foundation of British rule in India

Why did the British Company move from commercial activities towards gaining the political power?

- 1- The company was desperately in search of additional resources to finance its trade in India.
- 2- The British Company intended to eliminate other European rivals from Indian trade.

The Carnatic Wars

The Carnatic Wars were not merely a conflict between the British Company and the French Company; rather, it was a conflict between the two Empires i.e. the British Empire and the French Empire. Thus, these wars not only decided the future of French Company in India but also the balance of power in Europe and America. More than one factors were responsible for the Carnatic wars, these are as follows-

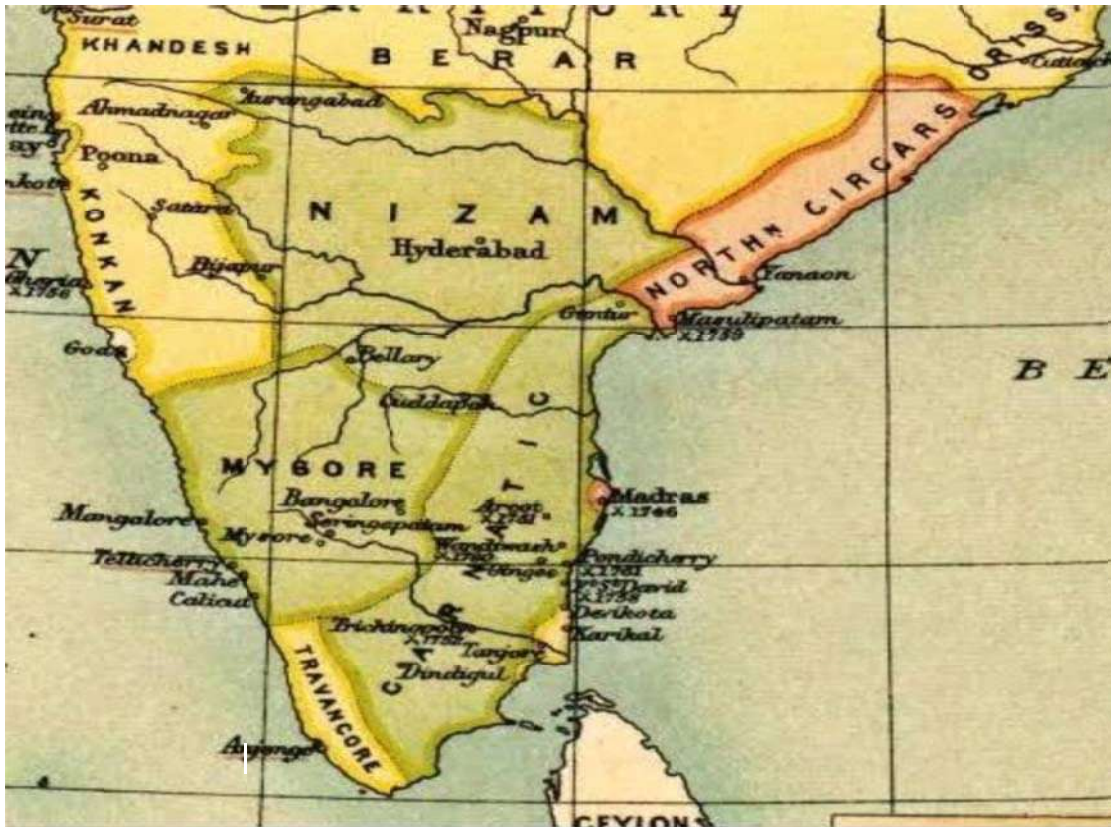
1. These wars were linked to the European politics where Britain and France were imperial rivals trying to expand their sphere of influence.
2. These wars were also linked with the political ambition of the French and the British Company.
3. Both the companies were constantly making efforts to take advantage of the rivalry between the Indian states.
4. One of the objectives of both the companies behind the Carnatic wars was to establish control over the southern trade.

First Carnatic War (1744-48 AD)-

- This war started on the issue of Austrian succession and was indecisive in its outcome.
- In fact, under the influence of continuous wars in Europe, a British Commander captured French warships in enmity. In response to this incitement, French governor Dupleix called French forces from Mauritius and captured Madras. However, as peace was restored in Europe through the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle in 1748. The war also ended in India and Madras was returned to the British.
- This war is famous particularly for the Battle of St. Thomas which proved the superiority of European warfare technology over that of the Indians.

Second Carnatic War (1749-54 AD):-

The second Carnatic war was also an extension of Anglo-French rivalry, but this time political ambitions of the French company was a major reason. During this war, French governor Dupleix tried to take advantage of rivalry between the Indian rulers to increase the political influence of France in India. In fact, the second Carnatic war was linked with the war of succession in Hyderabad and Carnatic which started immediately with the intervention of Dupleix into these wars of successions. At the end, Hyderabad came under the control of France and Carnatic came under the influence of British.



Third Carnatic War (1758-63 AD):-

- The Third Carnatic War broke out again on the European matter, as it was an extension of the Seven Years' Wars in Europe. Due to the absence of a visionary administrator like Dupleix and excess intervention of the French government, the French Company weakened and finally it faced decisive defeat in the Battle of Wandiwash in 1760.
- On the other hand, during the Seven Years' War in Europe, the defeat of French Empire at the hands of the British Empire shattered its dream of establishing a global empire, as defeat of France in this war resulted into the loss of important regions like Canada and India.

Establishment of British rule in India

Reasons behind the success of British in India

- The British Company was more professional and successful in its trade and commerce.

- Unlike the French Company, the British Company was a joint stock company, so there was negligible undue interference from the British government and also it could take decisions independently.
- The British Company was served by able military commander such as Robert Clive and Sir Eyre Coote etc.
- After the Battle of Plassey, the British Company gained plenty of resources in Bengal.
- The superior naval power of Britain as compared to that of France, also played a significant role in establishing British supremacy over India. Then, engagement of France in the European politics was also significantly responsible for their defeat.

Correct sequence of advent of European companies:-

- **Portuguese-Dutch-British-Danish-French**

Question: "The Carnatic wars not only decided the future of the British and French companies in India, but also decided the future of the British and the French Empires outside India." Examine the statement.

Answer: Although the Carnatic Wars were fought in India, but its roots lay in Europe. These wars were an extension of the struggle between France and England to establish a formidable empire. Therefore, future of the French Company in India depended on the future of French Empire.

Dupleix, the French governor in India, turned the French Company towards the goal of political domination. This policy became visible during the Second Carnatic War when Dupleix made efforts to establish French control over the states of Hyderabad and Carnatic. But due to unnecessary interference of the French government, and efficient management and better resources of the British company, the French company lagged behind after losing the battle of Wandiwash (1760 AD), its dream of empire-building was completely shattered.

On the other hand, the French Empire itself had lagged behind the British Empire. This was due to the structure of the British government and successful mercantile policy of Britain. Finally, after losing the Seven Years' War, France lost Canada in the American continent and India in Asia.

Thus the Carnatic war shattered the dream of both the French Company and the French Empire together.

Question: Do you agree with the statement that the government intervention was responsible for the failure of the French Company against the British Company in India? Answer in favor of your opinion.

Answer: The Carnatic Wars of the 18th century were the outcome of a prolonged struggle for political supremacy between the British Company and the French Company within India, and between the British Empire and the French Empire outside India.

Definitely, undue government intervention in the decision making of the French Company was one of the most important factors responsible for the French Company to lag

behind the British Company in India. But there were some other factors as well which resulted into the defeat of the French Company.

1. The decision of sacking a capable administrator like Dupleix and sending Count de Lally directly from Paris to lead in battle proved disastrous for the Company.
2. Mercantile policy of the British Company was more successful than that of the French company and also the British company had able commanders like Robert Clive and Sir Eyre Coote.
3. The British company procured abundance resources from Bengal.
4. The French Empire lagged behind the British Empire in global politics.

In this way, more than one factor were responsible behind the defeat of French Company.

Bengal

- Bengal was the most prosperous province of India. Around 40% of goods exported from India were produced in Bengal.

What were the reasons responsible behind the Battle of Plassey?

Important reasons for the Battle of Plassey as follows -

- 1- Misuse of Dastak had been a burning issue right from the reign of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. It was misused in two ways. First, the Dastak was given to the British Company, but the British officials were using it for their private trade. Secondly, the Company official used to sell this Dastak to the Indian merchant also. However, Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah took an aggressive stand on this issue since the time of his coronation.
- 2- Similarly, factionalism and petty politics in the court of Nawab and discontentment among the merchants and bankers of Bengal was also not a new thing.

Immediate Reason: - However, the situation in Bengal continuously deteriorated due to following two reasons-

- 1- Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula, since his coronation, had a personal grudge against the British Company. Therefore, any mistake committed by the British was enough to instigate the Nawab further. For example, Siraj-ud-Daulah, invaded Fort William on the issue of fortifications in June 1756. Then, in March 1757 the British forces captured the French region, Chandranagore.
- 2- The new Nawab was too inexperienced to understand court politics and the British company, while taking advantage of this precarious court situation, influenced officials of the Nawab to favour the British.

The Battle of Plassey: A Battle or a Betrayal?

In fact, it was not a real battle, rather this battle was based on a betrayal and its outcome was predetermined. Mir Jafar, the Mir Bakshi of Nawab, and one more military official Rai Durlabh, both had joined their hands with British. Therefore this battle was nothing more than a skirmish. At the end of this battle, Siraj-ud-Dualah was assassinated and Mir Jafar became new the Nawab of the Bengal.

Impact of the Battle of Plassey:

- The Company established its supremacy over the Nawab of Bengal.
- The Company was able to get easy access to vast resources of Bengal to finance its trade.
- After this battle, Mir Jafar was compelled to pay a large sum of 1 Crore 77 lakh to the Company. Also, Robert Clive at a personal level received a sum of 20 lakh rupees along with the Jagir of 24 Parganas.
- The British Company became more powerful and capable to drive out its European rivals from Bengal.

New Nawab of Bengal in 1760:

- Nawab Mir Jafar was replaced and Mir Qasim became the new Nawab of Bengal, because Mir Jafar was not able to meet the monetary demands of the British Company. Also, the Company itself used to bear the cost incurred for Nawab's security. Thus, Vansittart made Mir Qasim as the new Nawab of Bengal. In return the Company received a sum of 50 lakhs and Midnapore, Chittagong and Burdhaman districts as gifts from the Nawab.
- The British Company portrayed this event as the 'Bengal Revolution'. However, it was far away from being a revolution.

Conflict between Mir Qasim and the Company and the Battle of Buxar

- 1- New Nawab was strongly determined to act as an independent ruler-
 - He shifted his capital from Murshidabad to Munger in Bihar.
 - There, he established a Gun Factory.
 - He sought help from the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II.
- 2- Further, he put restrictions on the misuse of Dastaks. Thus, finally it led to the Battle of Buxar on 22 October, 1764. In this battle, along with Nawab Mir Qasim, Nawab of Awadh Shuja-ud-Daulah and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II were also defeated. Consequently, this battle established the supremacy of the Company over the Indian powers.

Treaty of Allahabad

- Robert Clive signed two separate treaties with the Nawab of Awadh and the Mughal Emperor. The Nawab of Awadh was compelled to pay war indemnity of 50 lakhs rupees along with surrendering the region of Allahabad and Kara.
- On other hand, the region of Allahabad and Kara was given to the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II along with amount of 53 lakh rupees as administrative expenditure and 26 lakh rupees for personal expense. In return, the Company received the Diwani rights of Bengal from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II. Thus, the Nawab of Bengal was now reduced to merely an administrator whereas the Company became real Nawab of Bengal with the Diwani rights.

Impact of Battle of Buxar

- After the Battle of Buxar, the Company attained a higher stature as it emerged as a dominant political power apart from a trading company.
- The events set in motion by Battle of Plassey were concluded with the Battle of Buxar. The Battle of Plassey was a betrayal but the Battle of Buxar proved military superiority of the British.
- With this battle, the sphere of Company influence did not remain limited over Bengal but also expanded to Awadh and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II.
- As the Company received the Diwani rights of Bengal, it resolved the problem of financing Indian trade.



Question: The Battle of Plassey was not a great battle but was a great betrayal. Examine this statement.

Answer: The Battle of Plassey was not an open struggle. There was no similarity between the army of Nawab and that of the Company. In the battlefield, the larger section of Nawab's forces under Mir Jafar remained to be mute spectators. Due to the treacherous suggestions of Mir Jafar, Nawab's army collapsed soon.

In fact, the Battle of Plassey is often referred to as a skirmish or 'pre-fixed match'. But nonetheless, its impact cannot be dismissed entirely because-

- a) A large war indemnity received by the company.
- b) Established control over Bengal's trade
- c) Greater control over local artisans via dastak.

Question: Do you agree with the statement that, as the Battle of Plassey was not an open conflict, so it should be considered as an insignificant event. Should only the Battle of Buxar be considered as the decisive battle?

Answer: It is true that the Battle of Plassey was not an open conflict. It was a great betrayal rather than a great battle. It did not prove military superiority of the British Company. Similar to a pre-fixed match in cricket, its result was already decided. Moreover, it is also true that if the British lost any war after this, they would have been deprived of the benefits they had received.

But there is other remarkable side of the picture as well. The British Company had received many direct and indirect benefits from the Battle of Plassey. These benefits are as follows -

- 1- After the Battle of Plassey, the British Company received a large amount which was invested in Company trade.
- 2- The Company could establish its control over Bengal trade and was able to oust other rivals.
- 3- Due to the Company's control on Bengal artisans, the Company could purchase items at a cheaper rate.

As a result of these strategic benefits, it became victorious in the battle of Buxar comfortably. Therefore, instead of considering the Battle of Plassey and Buxar as two separate events, it should be considered as two stages of a single war.

Question: - The British victory in the Battle of Plassey was confirmed by the Battle of Buxar. Examine this statement.