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## BRITISH COLONIALISM IN INDIA

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**To know the truth about the British colonialism**, we have to trace the course of history. In the ancient and medieval times there were three routes through which Indo-European trade was carried on, the northern route passing through the Oxus and Caspian sea and Black sea, the middle route through Syria to Mediterranean shore, the southern sea route to Egypt and thence to Europe.

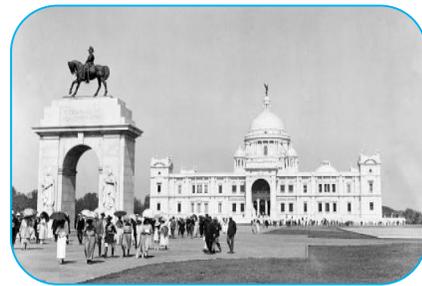
**The secret of prosperity of Venice and Genoa (Italy)** in the medieval days was that both the cities were distributing centres of Indian spices, metal works, gems, textile and silk. When the overland routes and sea-route became unsafe due to the occupation of the Turks, then the Europeans had to discover new sea route to India.

**Coming of the Portuguese to India** . The highly profitable trade with India drew the attention of the Portuguese traders also. When the overland route became unsafe because of raids by the Turks and the Mongols, the Portuguese traders decided to discover a new sea-route to India. King Emmanuel of Portugal entrusted this work to Vasco da Gama a Portuguese. He sailed round the African continent and reached Calicut in 1498. He signed a treaty of friendship with the ruler of Calicut and sailed back to his country. The rich cargo that he carried with him tempted many other rich merchants of his country. They too entered upon their Indian enterprise in a big way. For a century they remained the masters of trade with the Asian countries.

**Coming of the Dutch, the French and the British Traders.** The fabulous wealth of India attracted a host of European traders to this country. The Dutch, the French and the British merchants became formidable rivals of the Portuguese with regard to Indian trade. Mr. Ralph Fitch, on his return to England after completing his tour of India and Burma, presented the rosy prospects of trade with the East. A number of British merchants resolved on 22nd December, 1599, to form a trading company. On the last day of December, 1600, Queen Elizabeth I issued a Royal Charter to the Company which came to be known as the British East India Company. The objective of the Company at the time of its formation was not to establish colonies but simply to make money by trading with India and other Far-East countries.

**The Dutch East India Company** came into existence in 1602. It was followed by the French East India Company in 1664. The first French factory was set up at Surat in 1667 and the second at Machalipatnam in 1669. The British started their factories at Surat, Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. The British East India Company fared better than her rivals because unlike their companies, it did not invoke the hostility of native powers by resorting to military adventures.

**Struggle amongst European Traders to Monopolise Indian Trade.** Rivalries between European traders became deeper and more pronounced day by day. Serious competition for monopolising Indian trade led inevitably to violent hostilities and wars. The Portuguese Company received a great setback



when Spain annexed Portugal in -1580. Another reason of its downfall was the deep-rooted enmity to the Muslims. The Portuguese crusaders against Islam, displeased the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan so much that he adopted a stern attitude towards them. The final and fatal blow was given to the Portuguese Company by the British traders.

After the exit of the Portuguese from the field, the English turned to deal with the Dutch traders. The commercial rivalry between the Dutch and the English culminated in the massacre of the latter at Amboyna in February, 1623. Cromwell, however, avenged the massacre by defeating Hoi land in 1654 and recovering £85,000 from the Dutch as compensation. The defeat of Holland in Europe further weakened their power in India also.

Now the only formidable rival of the British trade interests in India was the French Company. Dupleix, who came to India in 1742, as the Governor of Pondicherry, conceived the idea of establishing a French dominion in this country. With that end in view/ he began to intervene in disputes among the native princes.

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF BRITISH SUPREMACY IN BENGAL : FIRST PHASE OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM**

Conquest of Bengal by Britishers and acquisition of Diwani rights by treacherous means. The last powerful Mughal ruler Aurangzeb died on 3rd March, 1707 at Ahmadnagar (Maharashtra) while chasing the Marathas. He had marshalled all the resources of the empire and devoted 25 years (half of the period he ruled) to crush the Marathas after the death of Shivaji but could not achieve any success against them because of their guerilla tactics. After him, there was a war of succession amongst his sons, intrigues and conspiracies of the nobles which shattered the Mughal empire to pieces. Alivardi Khan taking advantage of the chaotic conditions at Delhi, declared the independence of Bengal. After his death in April 1756, he was succeeded by his daughter's son Siraj-ud-daulah.

The English exploited the situation for fortifying their settlement in spite of the strict orders of the Nawab not to do it. Not only that but they started to abuse their trade privileges granted to them by the *firman* of Emperor Farukhsiyar in 1717. Besides that, they began to conspire with Mir Jaffar, son-in-law and commander of Siraj-ud-daulah in order to instal him as the Nawab of Bengal in place of Siraj-ud-daulah.

As the English refused to obey the orders of the Nawab not to fortify their settlement in Bengal (Kasim-Bazar), so the Nawab had to take some stern action against them. That ultimately led to the battle of Plassey on 23rd June, 1757. Lord Clive had concluded secret pact with Mir Jaffar (son-in-law of the Nawab) and Raja Durlabha Rai who commanded large armies of the Nawab and left Siraj-ud-daulah in the midst of fighting. Consequently, Siraj-ud-daulah had to run for his life but he was beheaded by the son of Mir Jaffar. Thus the British won the battle of Plassey by treacherous means. After this the British installed Mir Jaffar on the throne of Bengal and extracted many concessions from him. Mir Jaffar became tired soon with the bullying tactics of the British, so he was deposed. After this Mir Qasim was installed on the throne of Bengal. He paid all the dues which the British wanted to extract from him but he, too became restless of the real British control. So he ran towards Oudh and met its ruler Shuja-ud-daulah. Shuja-ud-daulah, Shah Alam (fugitive Emperor of Delhi living in Allahabad at that time) and Mir Qasim then proceeded towards Bihar but they were defeated in the battle of Buxar on 22nd October, 1764.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE BATTLES OF PLASSEY AND BUXAR**

The battles of Plassey and Buxar are totally unimportant from the military point of view but are politically very important because they made the British virtual master of Bengal Bihar and Orissa. They also made Shah Alam, the pensioner of the British East India Company. Besides that these three provinces served as a base for the East India Company to conquer the rest of India. Ramsay Muir sums up the whole thing very nicely in these words : *"Buxar completed what Plassey had begun. It finally riveted the shackles of the Company's rule on Bengal. It amounted not only the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal but that of the Emperor as well as the Nawab Wazir of Oudh. The Empire passed into the hands of the company and Oudh lay at its feet"*.

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