



PLASSEY: THE BATTLE IN NAME, BUT THE REVOLUTION IN NATURE

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Abstract:

In 1599, John Mildenhall reached India. He was the First English trader who landed in India. In the very next year (1600 A.D), the English East India Company was established in Britain to trade with India. It took them almost first one and half centuries (1600-1757) to come into the limelight. However, the mid-eighteenth century witnessed the transformation of the English East India Company from a commercial enterprise to a status of mighty political power. The main reason behind this transformation was the decline of Central Power in India. About Bengal, it was mainly the commercial rivalry between the British and the Nawabs of Bengal, which plotted the battle of Plassey (1757). The deterioration in the administration provided a chance for the English Company to play a significant job in the politics of Bengal. After an easy success at Plassey, the company's priority shifted towards establishing an extended empire in India rather than collecting revenue. The fertile and prosperous region of Bengal played a vital role to maintain its trade and military strength. Moreover, the changing economic condition in Europe, like the advent of the industrial revolution and the weakening of political authority in India provided the Company with a perfect atmosphere to deepen its root in Bengal and then spreading its jurisdiction to other parts of India. In a nutshell, it can be said that the annexation of Bengal upgraded the overall status of the Company in India. The result of Plassey not only multiplied the financial growth of the company but also magnified its political and diplomatic tactics. This is all we have witnessed when they outperformed all their competitors, either they were Indian traders and political powers or European trading companies. Battle of Plassey changed the course of Indian history. It marked the beginning of Modern India [political changes] with the establishment of political hegemony of East India Company in India.



Keywords: *Nawabs of Bengal; Battle of Plassey; Conquest of India; East India Company; Exploitation of India.*



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Introduction:

East India Company came in India with the motive of trade and commerce. over the time, Company gradually grew in size and gathered immense wealth from Indian trade. In 1613, the English Company was permitted, through an official order by Mughal Emperor Jahangir, to establish a permanent factory at Surat. in 1651, company set up another factory at Hooghly. In 1696, the English were given the zamindari of the three villages of Bengal, Sutanuti, Kalikata and Govindapuri. These villages later grew into the city of Calcutta. Bengal was one of the most self-dependent and rich provinces of Mughal Empire. The richness of this resourceful province became the reason of many battles and conquests. Whoever gained power in Indian subcontinent, had dream to control this province on any cost. It was due to the resourcefulness and self-sufficiency of this province that it started acting, from first half of 18th century, as an independent province from rest of the Mughal empire under nawab. By an official Farman, issued by Farrukhsiyar in 1717, the East India Company got the right to reside and trade within India. From the mid of 18th century, the English East India Company became the real master of Bengal. This free movement of trading activities were becoming major headache and a challenge for the nawabs of Bengal. Therefore, they started protesting and tried to regulate their unwanted trading and exploiting practices. On the other hand, East India company had already rooted itself deep in Bengal province and not was not ready to sign and follow any kind of instructions or agreement. In 1757, Nawab of Bengal took a stand to taught them a lesson with sword. But unfortunately, he miscalculated his own strength and the cunningness and might of company. And got defeated and killed in the battle at Plassey. The victory of east India company in this battle, decided not only the fate of Bengal but of whole India. Bengal became the first province which set the stage for the British to kicked off the conquest to rest of India.

Battle of Plassey was not just a military combat which was fought and forget but it has its importance as an event which initiated a revolution in India. A revolution that changed the whole system of ruler and ruling class. This was the year when another chapter of Indian



history was opened and we know it as modern Indian history. In other words, the process of colonization of India by British was started with the victory of Plassey in 1757AD, and it was only after the revolt of 1857 when it got the formal recognition.

Trade to Territory:

Writing in triumph to the Company's directors on 26 July 1757, Clive concluded that "*After this great revolution, so happily brought about, seems complete in every respect*".

The conquest of the Indian sub-continent by British Empire has different stages and phases and it evolved throughout the history. Every European came India as traders. Over the time, they transform themselves and expand their business as well as influence in Indian economic and political life. Amongst all, the British were not ready to satisfy with trade only. The more they spent their time in India the more they learnt about the weaknesses and strengths of Indian people and ruling class. Disintegration of Indian political powers and decline of central authority during 1st half of eighteenth century, created the most favourable circumstances for British traders to sneak into internal affairs of Indian. These circumstances provided them an opportunity to think and be more than just a trader.

Being a successful trader, they had their direct relations with ruling class. This close relation helped them to understand the loop and holes of Indian ruling class. French being a late comer were somehow did lack in experience and boundness as compare to Britishers. Another thing that made Britishers more effective and stronger with the passage of time, their backup by British empire at home and their attitude towards learning about Indian cultural, social and political system.

In its initial phase the company was only engaged in trade and commercial activities in Bengal. Bengal was one of the most resourceful provinces of Mughal India. A huge chunk of revenue to Delhi came from this province. This wealthy nature led it to be an independent province from the Mughal dominance of Delhi during first half of eighteenth century. And it came under the control of nawabs of Bengal from Alivardi Khan to Siraj Ud Daula.

But the story did not end here. Almost every emerging power either it was from within India or from foreign soil, wished to get control of this province. In this race, English were on four-front. From the mid of the eighteenth-century, English East India Company succeeded to get the permit for movement of free trade in Bengal. They started misusing this permission and started acting as a free and independent trader with no restrictions. Seen them getting out of



control, Nawab of Bengal Siraj Ud Daula, felt a threat to his dominance. So, he put some terms and conditions before them, but it had been too late to regulate them by these means. Left with no other option, Nawab of Bengal planned to teach them a lesson with military conquest. The result of all these conflict and confusion yielded as a famous battle of Plassey, fought on 23rd June 1757 at Plassey.

East India company won the battle with the conspiracies and diplomacy more than their militia strength and combat. This victory paved the way for the English to annex Bengal and then conquest of whole India. This battle raised their morale to become the main contender of the ruler of India to be. After getting control over the revenue of Bengal, English got an opportunity to organise a strong and smart army to conquer rest of India. Similarly, the trade and other privileges enjoyed so far by them were not only increased but became safer and sounder. According to Sir Alfred Lyall, *Clive's victory in 1757 was followed by the occupation of Bengal*. However, victory at Plassey passed the Bengal in the possession of company, which received a formal transfer from the Mughal in 1765. Achariya says in his work, *Codification in British India*, that authorities in England determined that the inhabitants of this town (Calcutta) are all British subjects, because the town was conquered by Admiral Watson and Colonial Clive. The territorial ambitions of the company were not viewed as much trustworthy in England.

Road to the conquest of India:

After the battle of Plassey, Clive wrote on 7th January 1759 to one of the Principal Secretary of the state, William Pitt. *"But so large a sovereignty may possible be an object too extensive for a mercantile company. I flatter myself.... that there will be little or no difficulty in obtaining the absolute possession of these rich kingdoms.... Now I leave you to judge whether an income yearly of two million sterling with the possession of three provinces ...be an object deserving the public attention"*.

It is true that English east India company did not hold the town of Calcutta on the terms of military conquest or any aggression. But they entered in Bengal as a revenue collector and got a *Sanand* from the nawab for the free trade movement in Bengal. This was the first and the basic stage, which latter become the footprint of English conquest of India. The revenue they collected from Bengal helped them to get a financial stability, confidence and sparked their greediness of loot and plundering day after day.



English east India Company did not follow the idea of free Exchange in India, instead they believed that they could only trade successfully if they will get the political powers in their hands. The battle of Plassey thus kicked off the political supremacy of the East India Company in India. The next phase followed hereafter is often known as “*Plassey plunder*”. English army and navy each received the hefty sum of £275,00 (27,62, 000.INR) for distribution among their members. The puppet nawab, Mir Jaffar offered the zamindari rights of twenty-four parganas to the company and paid a sum of Rs. 22.5 million from 1757 to 1760. Clive himself got a jagir worth of £34,567(3472710.INR). This made the settlement of company in Bengal stronger and more prosperous. Company decided to make some major changes in the structure of its trade. Before 1757, the trade of company was largely financed through import of bullion from England, but now that import of bullions from England not only stopped but bullion from Bengal was exported to China and other parts of India. Bengal became a home far away from the home for the company, which was an additional advantage for the English company over its European competitors.

R.C. Dutt aptly narrates that, “*the people of Bengal had been used to tyranny but had never lived under an oppression son far reaching in its effect, extending to every village market and every manufacture’s loom. They had been used to arbitrary acts from men in power but had never suffered from a system which touched their trades, their occupation, and their lives so closely. The springs of their industry were stopped, the sources of their wealth dried up.*”

This plundering and loot directly contributed to the industrial revolution in England. A parliamentary committee was set up to find out how Indian goods could be replaced by British goods. It directly affected the native industries of Bengal. From now, the company started promoting and selling British goods, and Indian goods were gradually replaced. In 1813, the British parliament decided that India should no longer be considered as an industrial nation but an agricultural nation.

In the eight years that followed Plassey, the Company placed four nawabs on the throne of Bengal. During these years, an amount of £2.2 million, along with another £3.8 million in reparations and lavish presents for leading Company executives, was credited to the company’s treasury. In 1760, Mir Jafar was dethroned by the Company in favour of his son-in-law Mir Kasim, who in turn was overthrown in 1763 when he tried to stop the miss use of the Company’s private trade. After the battle, the regulatory authority of the Nawab was broken,



enabling the Company to achieve its long-desired monopoly over the export trade, expand into the internal market and appropriate the public revenues of Bengal for its own benefit. One estimate suggests that in the decade after Plassey, Bengal lost two-thirds of its revenues to this commercial plunder.

Plassey allowed the Company to carry on trade with in all India, without sending out one ounce of bullion. The reversal of global economic eminence had begun. The ability of nawab of Bengal to enforce rules against the abuse of *dastaks* was severely weakened. At the same time Clive never acknowledge any kind of barrier in the way of his exploitation. Hence the fears of Bengalis that the English would ‘engross’ the market were soon, proved right.

By 1762, the Nawab Mir Kasim was protesting to the Company in Calcutta that *its gomastas ‘forcibly take away the goods and commodities of the riots, merchants etc for a fourth part of their value; and by ways of violence and oppression they oblige the riots to give five rupees for goods which are worth but one’*.

With the elimination of Bengal state and the possession of throne, the Company was able to remove the competitive threats posed by both the other European trading companies as well as local merchants. The French challenge had already been eliminated with the capture of Chandernagore in the wake of Plassey. As for the local merchants were concerned, the Key areas of the inland economy that had once been controlled by local merchants, were now formally transformed into a Company monopoly. In 1758, for example, Mir Jafar gave the Company the rights to the valuable saltpetre sector, a business that Amir Chand had himself once dominated. In addition, the Company pushed forward with the system of salaried *gomastas*, eliminating the need for local business partners.

The loot and plundering of the company were on full swing that even their puppet Nawab Mir Jaffer got tired of their deeds and demands. Finally, he was removed from the throne by company in 1760. Thus, a profit maker company of England became a “king-maker” of India. After the annexation of Bengal, the financial stability of the company created an excellent opportunity to raise the strength of their army. Within few years after the battle of Plassey, the army of the company became one of the most powerful army in India. And it was witnessed in 1764, when company’s army gave a death-blow defeat to the combine forces of Mughal emperor Shah Alam, Shujah- ud-daula of Awad and Mir Kasim of Bengal in the battle of Buxar.

**Conclusion:**

For about 250 years British East India company grew itself from merely a small trading company to a million dollars multi-national company that paved a comfortable way for the setup of British colonialism over Indian sub-continent. This British east India company transform its self in such a way that it out performed its all the competitors. either they were other European trading companies or merchants and traders. This journey for the company, *from trader to invader and then dictator*, went through various hitches and glitches. Number of battles were fought and several conspiracies were hatched. Among these incidents battle of Plassey was a game changer event in Indian history. It not only changed the fortune of East India company but at the same time it marked the beginning of Indian conquest by British. The battle of Plassey was fought between the Nawab of Bengal and East India Company. The victory in this battle paved the for the British annexation of Bengal and their conquest of the whole of India. With the victory, English company triumphally gain its two-fold interests. First, the protection of its trade in Bengal and the second, their control over Bengal's revenue. It established the military supremacy of the English in Bengal and raised them to the status of a major contender for the Indian empire.

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