

PAPER 1 DSE-A-1 SEM -5: HISTORY OF BENGAL(c.1757-1905)

I. POLITICAL HISTORY OF BENGAL UNDER THE NAWABS:RISE OF BRITISH POWER IN BENGAL FROM THE BATTLE OF PLASSEY TO BUXAR.

The beginning of British rule in India may be traced to the province of Bengal which emerged as the base from which the British first embarked on their political career that would last for almost two centuries. After the death of Aurangzeb various parts of the Mughal Empire became independent under different heads. Bengal became independent under the leadership of Alivardi Khan who maintained friendly relation with the English officials throughout his reign. However he did not allow them to fortify their settlements till the end of his rule up to 1756CE.

Alivardi Khan was succeeded by his grandson Nawab Shiraj –ud-Daulah who as soon as ascending the throne demanded of the English that they should trade on the same basis as in the times of Murshid Quli Khan. The English did not agree to the Nawab’s proposal rather they levied heavy duties on Indian goods entering Calcutta which was under their control. They also started fortifying their settlements against the order of the Nawab. All these amounted to a direct challenge to the Nawab’s Sovereignty. Shiraj-ud – Daulah in order to control the English activities and maintain the laws of the land seized the English Factory at Kasimbazar, marched on to Calcutta and occupied the Fort Williams in 1756 .As the Nawab went on to celebrate this easy victory of his, he made a mistake to underestimate the strength of his enemy.

The English with aids and allies from Madras as well as the leading men of the Nawab’s court under the leadership of admiral Watson and Colonel Clive re-conquered Calcutta in the Beginning of 1757.This was not all as the English were determined to put down the Nawab and place a more pliant tool on the throne of Bengal. They hatched a conspiracy with Mir Jafar. Both the side met at the battle field of Plassey, near Murshidabad on 23 June,1757. The English army emerged victorious under the leadership of Robert Clive. The Nawab was forced to flee and was put to death by Mir Jafar’s son Miran.

The Battle of Plassey paved the way for British mastery of Bengal and eventually the whole of India. It boosted the power of the British and made them a major contender for the Indian empire. The victory in this battle enabled the Company and its servants to amass untold wealth at the cost of the people of Bengal. Apart from all these it marked the beginning of the Drain of Wealth from India to Britain.

Although Mir Jafar had accepted the tutelage of the English, he was soon dissatisfied with their continuous dominance and interference in state affairs. His coffers were emptied by the demand of the Company's officials for presents and bribes. As a result the large sum of money that he had promised to pay to the Company could not be paid even after three years of his accession to the Throne of Bengal. He grew restless under financial pressure and the growing supremacy of the English. Meanwhile there was a tussle between Mir Jafar and his son-in-law Mir Qasim on a succession issue. The English replaced Mir Jafar by Mir Qasim as the new Nawab of Bengal.

After coming to power Mir Qasim realised that the farman of 1717 was misused by the Company's servants. He resented the stifling control exercised by the English in the internal affairs of the state administration as well as in the activities of the Indian merchants. The disputes arising out of trade interest became so serious that a conflict between the Nawab and the Company became imminent.

Mir Qasim was defeated in a series of Battle in 1763CE and fled to Awadh where he formed an alliance with Shuja-ud-Daula ,the Nawab of Awadh and Shah Alam II the Mughal Emperor. The three allies faced the English army at the Battle of Buxar in 1764 CE and was thoroughly defeated.

The Battle of Buxar made the British the *de facto* rulers of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The defeat in the battle made the Nawab of Awadh a dependent of the Company and the Mughal Emperor a mere prisoner, thus raising the prestige of the company. The Battle of Buxar significantly demonstrated the superiority of the English in military skills and army.

DUAL SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATION OF BENGAL(1765-1772 CE)

After the Battle of Buxar the East India Company became the real master of Bengal exercising sole control of its defence. The supreme political powers were reduced to the status of mere puppets at the hands of the British.

The English signed the Treaty of Allahabad with Shah Alam II in 1765 CE that secured the diwani rights on return for an annual payment of Rs, 26 lakh to the Emperor and a provision of Rs. 53 lakh for the nizamat functions. Prior to this treaty the English had signed another treaty earlier that same year with the Nawab Najam-ud-Daula who surrendered virtually all the nizamat powers, including military defence and foreign affairs to the Company. Thus the Company secured the diwani powers of the province from the Emperor and the nizamat i.e. military power and criminal justice from the Nawab. The Company exercised the diwani and the nizamat functions through its agents who were Indian but the actual power was in the hand of the Company. The English was thus given the complete control over the province but were not responsible for its administration. This system of administration -the rule of the Company and the Nawab was known as the Dual or Double Government of Bengal.
