UNIT 8: ADVENT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the coming of the Europeans to India,
- explain the establishment of the British rule in India,
- analyse the Constitutional and administrative changes under the foreign rule,
- describe the colonial economy of India,
- elaborate the causes and effects of the Revolt of 1857

8.2 INTRODUCTION

All of us know that before independence, India was ruled by the

British almost for two hundred years. The modern Indian history starts with the arrival of the British in India. They first came as a trading company known as the English East India Company.

This unit will introduce you how the English East India Company came to India and gradually built an empire of its own. Besides, this unit also deals with first major uprising against the British in India, the Revolt of 1857.

8.3 ADVENT OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

In this section we will discuss mainly about the advent of the English East India Company in India. But prior to that let us know the reasons behind the coming of Europeans to our country

8.3.1 Coming of the Europeans to India

It was the rich trading possibilities of India that attracted Europeans towards this country. India had a very long history of trade relations with the Europeans. But it was an indirect relation mostly guided by the Arab traders. Heavy demands for Indian commodities like different spices, *calico*, silk, various precious stones, porcelain, etc caught the imagination of the European traders. However, for a long periodthey failed to establish a direct trade relation with India as all the major land routes to India were controlled by the Arabs. The Arabs constantly resisted the European merchants to enter into the Indian markets. As a result, the western traders concentrated more on discovering a safe sea route to India. At last the Portuguese became successful in finding a direct sea route to India. In May, 1498, a Portuguese sailor named Vasco-da-Gama arrived at Calicut, an important sea port of South -West India. The discovery of a direct sea route also encouraged the other European nations to come and trade in India. Thus several European nations like Holland, Great Britain, etc got encouragement and came to merchandise in this country.

All the aforementioned European nations successfully took

part in Indian trade. Gradually, taking advantage of the weakness of the Indian rulers, they started to interfere in the internal politics of the native states. The next few sections will discuss how the British East India Company converted itself from a trader to a ruler of this country.



LET US KNOW

There were some other European states like Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, etc which wanted to establish commercial relations with India. But for varied reasons these countries failed in their endeavours.

8.3.2 The Growth of the English East India Company

We have already discussed the coming of the Europeans. Let us now know the motive behind the formation of British East India Company.The high profits earned by the Portuguese in

Eastern trade thrilled the English traders. So in 1599, a group of English businessmen called the Merchant Adventurers formed a company popularly known asthe East India Company. In

December 31, 1600A.D the Company was authorized by a royal charter from Queen Elizabeth to carry on exclusive trade in the East. You will be amazed to know that the Queenof England herself became a share holder of the East India Company. In 1612 the British had put their first factory at Surat in India.

In 1615, Emperor James I of England sent Sir Thomas Roe to Jahangir's court seeking more concession for the East India Company. Roe was successful in achieving a royal charter that allowed the Company to trade freely all over the Mughal Empire. The East India Company was prospering day by day. However, it was constantly challenged by the Portuguese and the Dutch. The East India Company within a few decades of its arrival in India set a firm footing in Western and Southern India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some Indian commodities which had huge demands in the European markets?

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Q 2: Name the Indian sea port where Vasco-da-Gama landed in 1498?

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Q 3: The name of the British ambassador sent by James I to the court of Jahangir.

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8.4 ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPANY'S RULE IN INDIA

The main focus of this section will be on the transformation of the East India Company from a trading corporation to a ruling power. But before going into the depth of this subject, we should know the circumstances that helped the British to become the supreme ruler of India for the next two hundred years. Let us now look at some of the factors in brief:

- The decline of the Mughal Empire after Aurangzeb resulted in the loss of central authority in India. Taking advantage of the weakness of the later Mughal rulers, subordinate provinces like Bengal, Hyderabad, Oudh, etc. shake off Mughal sovereignty and declared independence. The British took full advantage of such political disunity.
- The later Mughals were worthless rulers. They failed to control the activities of the foreigners like the British and the French in their domain. On the contrary, they were often influenced by these foreigners to extend extra privileges.
- The absence of political stability caused a sense of suspicion and insecurity among the Indian rulers. For their own security they started to look for the assistance of the foreign power like the British. This offered the Britishers a golden opportunity to meddle in the internal affairs of the Indian states.

8.4.1 Anglo-French Rivalry in South India

The political condition of Southern India helped the British to aspire for political power. But they were not the sole aspirant. After the Portuguese and the Dutch their new rival was the French. The French East India Company came to India in 1664. In fact, the French were the first who dreamt of establishing a political empire in India.

Three long battles were fought within a period of 20 years (1744-1763) between the British East India Company and the French East India Company. The chief aim was to gain commercial as well as territorial control in India. In the final battle fought between these two companies on 22 January, 1763 at Wandiwash the French were completely defeated by the British. Thus, the dream of the French to establish a political Empire in India remained unfulfilled. On the other hand the victory of the Wandiwash left the English East India Company with no European rival in India.

8.4.2 The British in Bengal

After gaining their ground in Western and Southern India, the Company turned its attention towards Eastern India. Subordinate provinces like Bengal, Hyderabad, Oudh, etc. shake off Mughal sovereignty and declared independence. The British took full advantage of such political disunity.

In 1698 the East India Company purchased three villages named Sutanati, Govindapur and Kolkota. They laid a factory there and also constructed the Fort William around the factory. On this site grew the famous city of Calcutta. In 1717, Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar granted the British through a royal *farman* (charter) some valuable trading facilities in Bengal. Through this *farman*the Company was permitted to export and import their goods in Bengal without paying taxes. It also authorized the Company to issue *dastaks* (passes) for the transportation of such goods. In this period the English maintained their outwardly innocent appearance. After

the death of Nawab of Bengal Alivardi Khan in 1756, the Company got the opportunities to fulfill its political ambitions.



LET US KNOW

After the virtual independence from the Mughal rule the rulers of Bengal styled themselves as Nawabs.

- ***The Battle of Plassey and the Battle of Buxar :*** These two battles have been considered as the basis of the political supremacy of the British in India. The first battle increased the power and the prestige of the British in India and the second one placed them as the master of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

  It has already been mentioned that Alivardi Khan died in 1756. He was succeeded by his grand sonSiraj-ud-daula. From the very beginning, the East India Company underrated the strengthof the young Nawab and thus conflict startedbetween Siraj and the Company. The British under the guidance of Robert Clive started a conspiracy against Siraj. The Battle between Siraj-ud-daula and the East India Company took place at Plassey in 23rd June, 1757 where Siraj-ud-daula was defeated at the hands of the British.

  The battle of Plassey has great historical importance. This victory gave the Company and its servants a golden opportunity to collect huge wealth from Bengal. Thus, the British East India Company became the king maker in Bengal. After Plassey, the East India Company placed Mir Jafar on the throne of Bengal. But he was soon replaced by his son-in-law Mir Qasim (1760). However, he did not want to rule under the Influence of East India Company. The activities of Mir Qasim made the Company doubtful of the attitude of the Nawab and conflict started between them.

Figure - 6.1



Siraj-ud-daula

Source : Google image

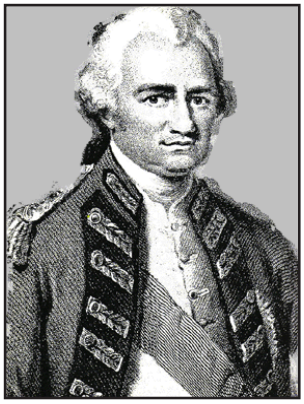
After some initial conflicts, Mir Qasim formed an alliance of Indian powers with Shuja-ud-daula, the Nawab of Oudh and Shah Alam II, the ruling Mughal Emperor. In October 22, 1764 the combined army met the British at a place called Buxar in Bihar. In the battle, the Indian combined force was badly defeated by the British. The result of the Battle of Buxar was a milestone in respect of the establishment of British power in India. The battle of Plassey was the result of a conspiracy. But this battle clearly proves the might of the British power over three of the strongest powers of India.

8.4.3 British Policy of Expansion

In the previous section we have discussed the advent, rise and growth of the British

East India Company. We have also observed how these foreigners converted themselves from merchants to masters of India. Here you should be informed abut some of the architect of the British Empire in India. Robert Clive was one of those architects who played an important role in bringing the East IndiaCompany into the political spotlight of India. In this respect few other names also demand mention such as Warren Hastings (1772-1785), Lord Wellesley (1798-1805), Lord Hastings (1813-1823), Lord Dalhousie (1848-1856), etc. Particularly, Wellesley and Dalhousie through their expansionist policies brought a huge number of Indian states under the direct control of Company's rule.

Figure - 6.2



Robert Clive

Source : Google image

The hunger of these politicians for more and more territories resulted in the bitterness of the common people as well as of the native princes. The mass revolution of 1857 reflects this kind of resentment of the people against the East India Company. We shall discuss about the revolution of 1857 in a later section.



LET US KNOW

The expansionist policies followed by Wellesley and Dalhousie were the Subsidiary Alliance and the Doctrine of Lapse respectively. By following these policies these two statesmen annexed huge territories.

8.5 COLONIAL ECONOMY

The East India Company basically was a profit loving company. The British treated India as a field for exploitation. British economic policy contributed to the decline of the Indian trade. The Industrial Revolution of England which started in the second half of eighteenth century affected the Indian trade and industry. Particularly the cotton textile industry of India was completely ruined.

The free trade policy announced by the British government in 1813 abolished the monopoly of East India Company in Indian trade. The policy proved disastrous for India. The export of raw materials showed tremendous increase but her industrial activity was on decline.

Under the British rule there had been continuous drainage of India's wealth. The British organized drain of wealth in three ways (a)

Through East India Company's officers. (b) Through the company's investment and (c) Through Home Charges. Various commodities werepurchased by the company in India out of the revenues of Bengal. These purchases were called as investment by the company. A large number of money was spent every year by the British government for the maintenance of British administration of India. The money thus spent was known as the 'Home Charge'**.**

Thus, the continuous drain of wealth from India impoverished the country and its people



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name two provinces which shook of Mughal sovereignty and declared their independence.

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Q 5: Name the battle that sealed the hope of the French East India Company in India.

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Q 6: Name the three villages that the Company bought in 1698.

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Q 7: Whom did the Company defeat in the battle of Plassey?

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ACTIVITY -8.1

Make a list of the British factories mentioned in the unit and then locate them in a map of India

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8.6 REVOLT OF 1857

The Revolt of 1857 opened a glorious chapter in the history of India. This popular revolt broke out in North and Central India and shook the very foundation of the British rule in India. Though it started with a mutiny of Sepoys, yet soon engulfed with other regions and people.

- **Causes of the Revolt :** The Revolt of 1857 was not a sudden incident. For over a century popular discontent and hatred against foreign rule had been gaining strength among the different sections of Indian society. It was this discontent that burst forth into a mighty popular revolt. There are several factors which contributed to the outbreak of this revolt.
  - **Political Cause :** The British policy of annexation created discontent

among the Indians. Lord Dalhousie evolved the policy of *Doctrine of Lapse* by which he occupied the territory of Jhansi, Satara, Nagpur etc. Dalhousie's refusal to continue the pension of Nana Sahib, the adopted son of ex PeshwaBaji Rao, was disliked by the Hindus. Moreover, his proposal to remove the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II from his ancestral palace in Delhi created suspicion among the Muslims. Oudh was annexed on the ground of maladministration. People of India thought it to be the most unjustified act of the British aggression.



Doctrine of Lapse

This principle was introduced by Lord Dalhousie. According to this principle when a native ruler died without a natural heir his state was not passed on to an adopted son but to the British Empire in India.

- **Economic Cause :** The economic exploitation of the Indian people was one of the most important causes of the revolt. The economic exploitation of the country, the huge drain of wealth from Bengal and the destruction of its industry impoverished the country. The ruin of Industry and commerce turned India into an agricultural colony of the British manufacturing capitalism. It is no wonder that there prevailed grave discontent all over India.
- **Social and Religious Causes :** The introduction of the western civilization through the medium of English language created imbalance in the traditional orthodox classes of the Indians. The people were also dissatisfied with the activities of the Christian Missionaries. The government had also encouraged missionary activities. The Indians started thinking that the British government had adopted a deliberate policy to destroy their religion and culture. Moreover, the suppression of *Sati* and infanticide, the legislation of widow remarriage, the promotion of western education at the expense of traditional learning etc. were not welcomed by the Indians. Thus tension was inevitable when new ideas and innovations of the west were to mingle with the traditional Hindu society.
- **Discontent of the Sepoys :** Discontent of the Sepoys was the most important cause of the Revolt of 1857. The Sepoys were treated roughly by the European officers. The highest post that an Indian soldier could expect was that of the Subedar. Moreover, the

salaries of the Indian and the European soldiers were not equal. Though the Indian soldiers were very particular in observing the caste rules, yet they were prevented to do so. They could not wear sectarian marks. All this made the Sepoys dissatisfied.

- **Immediate Cause :** When the atmosphere was thus charged with anti-British feelings, a new type of rifle (Enfield rifle) was introduced into the Indian Army. These rifles needed a special type of cartridge which had to be loaded after tearing it off by the teeth. A rumour soon spread that these cartridges contained the grease of pig and cow, which was unclean to both Hindus and Muslims. This worked as a spark in the magazine room and the revolt began.

- **Beginning and Spread of the Revolt :** On May 10th, 1857 the revolution started in Meerut, about 58 kilometers from Delhi. The city of Delhi was captured by the Indian Sepoys. The rebels declared Bahadur Shah II, the then nominal Mughal Emperor, as the Emperor of India. Soon the revolution was spread to Oudh, Rohilkhand, Bundelkhand, Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Jhansi and other places of northern India. At Kanpur Nana Sahib assumed the leadership of the rebels. Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi led her troops heroically against the British. However, she was killed while fighting with the British forces. Kunwar Singh was another outstanding leader of the Revolt of 1857. The British army however, crushed the revolt by the end of the year 1858. Bahadur Shah II was captured by the British and was exiled to Rangoon. Nana Sahib was also defeated by the British. Thus once again the British reestablished their superiority over India.

Figure - 8.3



A Scene of Revolt of 1857
Source : Google image



LET US KNOW

At Lucknow the mutiny broke out on 30 May, 1857. Sir Henry Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner, gave up the city and took shelter in the Residency with all his troops. The mutineers besieged the Residency and killed Lawrence on 4th July.

- **Causes of the Failure of the Revolt :** There were several causes for the failure of the Revolt of 1857—
  - The Revolt of 1857 remain disorganized from the very beginning
  - There was no proper leader to lead the people against the British. Bahadur Shah II, Lakshmi Bai Nana Sahib all were leaders outstanding only in their respective areas.
  - There was hardly any coordination among the forces fighting in different regions.
  - Powerful leaders like Holkar, Sindhia, Nawab of Bhopal etc. refused to join the revolt.
  - The British were militarily superior then the revolting Sepoys. The British force used machine-gun which helped to crush the revolt.
- **Results of the Revolt :** The results of the Revolt of 1857 are:
  - The British Parliament by an Act passed in 1858 formally brought an end to the East India Company's rule in India.
  - The administration of India was now directly taken over by the British Crown.
  - Changes were introduced in almost all branches of the administration.
  - Queen Victoria by a proclamation, announced on 1 November, 1858, at a *Durbar* held at Allahabad specifically mentioned the changes that would henceforth mark the British policy towards India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Who was the last Mughal Emperor of India?

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Q 9: Who was Lakshmi Bai?

.....

Q 10: When did the East India Company's rule in India come to an end?

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ACTIVITY – 8.2

Locate the following places in the map of India

a. Meerut b. Delhi c. Lucknow d. Kanpur



8.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt about,

- advent and establishment of the British rule in India.
- Initially the East India Company came to India for trading purpose, but in course of time they established themselves as a political power in the country.
- The economy of the country was totally made subservient to British economy. There was a continuous drainage of wealth impoverishing the country.
- the revolt of 1857, its causes, course and results in brief.



8.8 FURTHER READING

1) Bandyopadhyay, Sekhara. (2004). From *Plassey to Partition: A*

History of Modern India. New Delhi, India: Orient Longman.

2) Chandra, B., Mukherjee, A., Panikkar, K.N. & Mahajan, S. (Ed.). (1988). *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947.* Delhi, India: Penguin.
3) Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C. & Datta, K. (1978). *An Advanced History of India* (4th Ed.). New Delhi, India: Macmillan India



8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to the question no. 1: Spices, Calico, Silk, Precious Stones, etc

Answer to the question no. 2: Calicut

Answer to the question no.3: Sir Thomas Roe

Answer to the question no.4: Bengal and Hyderabad

Answer to the question no.5: The battle of Wandiwash

Answer to the question no.6: Sutanati, Govindapur and Kolkota

Answer to the question no. 7: NawabSiraj-ud-daula of Bengal

Answer to the question no. 8: Bahadur Shah II

Answer to the question no. 9: Rani (Queen) of Jhansi

Answer to the question no. 10: 1858



8.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q.1: Who for the first time discovered the sea route to India?

Q.2: In which year did the British government abolish trade monopoly of the East India Company?

Q.3: Who introduced *Doctrine of Lapes* in India?

Q.4: In which year Company's rule in India came to an end?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q.1: What were the common discontents of the Sepoys against the Colonial rule?

Q.2: Write a short note on the Battle of Plassey and the Battle of Buxar.

Q.3: What were the three ways to drain Indian wealth to Britain?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q.1: What were the causes of the revolt of 1857? Discuss.

Q.2: Discuss how the English East India Company established itself as a political power?

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