
UNIT 4 COLONIAL EXPANSION AND INDIAN RESISTANCE - II

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The history of British domination in India started with the subjugation of Bengal to the British imperialist system. After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the background of the British conquest of Bengal,
- learn about the transformation of power from the Bengal Nawabs to the British authority, and
- explain the factors that led to this transformation of power and its significance,
- about the way North, India, especially Awadh and Punjab came under the British rule,

- about the shifting policies of British in their strategy of conquest, and
- about the circumstances which aided the British to spread their rule over Northern India.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit introduces you to the gradual transfer of power from the Nawabs to the British in Bengal during the period 1757 to 1765. In this Unit an attempt has been made to show that it was mainly the commercial rivalry between the British and the Bengal Nawabs which largely decided the course of events in the 1750s. The personal failure of any Nawab was not an important decisive factor for this development, as some historians have tried to establish. However, the degeneration in the administration that started in the 18th century had no doubt contributed to the final collapse of the independent Bengal polity. Here we have first discussed the background of the British conquest of Bengal and the political developments from 1757 to 1765. Then we focus on the explanation for this transformation and the significance of the battle of Plassey and Buxar which were land marks in the process of British imperialist expansion in India.

British expansion in North India, particularly in the kingdom of Awadh, was a process of building an alternative hegemony by the British in opposition to the Mughal and the Awadh ruler's authority. The use of force in the battle field on the part of the East India Company, remained minimal after the Battle of Buxar in 1764, and no major confrontation took place until Awadh was fully annexed and made a part of Company's domination in 1856.

4.2 BENGAL BEFORE THE BRITISH CONQUEST

You have read that the changes in European economy i.e. from feudalism to capitalism and then from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism led to fierce competition among various European powers to establish colonial empire. In this process of imperialists expansion Bengal became since the 17th century, the hunting ground of the Dutch, the French and the English companies. It was mainly the rich resources and good prospects of trade in Bengal which attracted the various foreign companies. Referring to Bengal Francois Bernier, a traveler who visited India during Aurangzeb's reign wrote:

The rich exuberance of the country ... has given rise to a proverb in common use among the Portuguese; English and Dutch that the kingdom of Bengal has a

hundred gates open for entrance, but not one for departure".

In the 18th century exports from Bengal to Europe consisted of raw products, such as, saltpetre, rice, indigo, pepper, sugar, etc. and silk, cotton textiles, handicrafts etc. Bengal goods comprised nearly 60 per cent of British imports from Asia in the early 18th century. Commercial potentiality of Bengal was naturally the chief cause of the interest of the English in this province.

Regular contact of the English with Bengal started in the 1630s. First English company in the east was set up at Balasore in Orissa in 1633, then at Hugli, Kasimbazar, Patna and Dacca. By 1690s the acquisition of the zamindari rights of the three villages of Sutnati, Calcutta and Govindpur and the foundation of Calcutta by the Company completed this process of English commercial settlement in Bengal. The annual investment of the Company in Bengal turned to £ 150,000 in 1680.

Since the 17th century the English East India Company was allowed to trade freely in Bengal, in return the Company had to pay annually Rs.3,000 (£350) to the Mughal emperor. When the Company paid the Mughal Emperor annually (£350) for free trade in Bengal that time Company's exports from Bengal were worth more than £ 50,000 a year.

The provincial governors were not in favour of such a privilege for the Company because this meant a heavy loss to their exchequer. So there was always pressure from the provincial administration to compel the English Company to pay more for its trade in the province. The English on their part tried to establish its complete control over the trade through various means. Murshid Kuli Khan, who established his independent authority over Bengal, was not in favour of the special privileges enjoyed by the Company-because of the loss that resulted to the treasury. So the tussle between the English commercial interest and the local government in Bengal was already marked before the mid 18th century.

While the rising commercial interest of the English was becoming a serious threat for the Bengal polity, the provincial administration in Bengal itself had certain weaknesses. You have read in Unit 2 of Block I how an independent political authority emerged in Bengal, following the disintegration of the Mughal Empire.

The stability of this regional power was dependent on certain conditions:

- Nawab's rule depended on the support of powerful faction of the local aristocracy.
- He needed the support of Hindu *Mutaseddis* who were in control of the financial administration.
- The support of the big Zamindars was also very essential because they not only supplied revenues to the treasury but also helped the Nawabs with their own militia in times of need and by maintaining law and order in their areas.
- The co-operation and support of the bankers and business houses, particularly the house of the Jagat Seths; the largest financial house in Bengal was also needed.

All these different groups had different interests and expectations from the Nawab.

The stability of Nawab's regime depended on maintaining proper balance among these various

interest groups. The common people had no place in this power equation between the ruler and the interest groups. They were the victims of the growing demands of the Zamindars but there was no protection from the administration. There was no initiative on the part of the rulers to involve the people in the anti-imperialist struggle.

4.3 THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF BENGAL, 1757-65

The history of Bengal from 1757 to 1765 is the history of gradual transfer of power from the Nawabs to the British. During this short period of eight years three Nawabs, Siraj-ud-daula, Mir Jafar and Mir Kasim ruled over Bengal. But they failed to uphold the sovereignty of the Nawab and ultimately the rein of control passed into the hands of the British. We will now discuss the developments in Bengal from 1757 to 1765 and see how the British ultimately got control over Bengal.

4.3.1 Siraj-ud-daula and the British

Siraj-ud-daula succeeded Alivardi Khan as Nawab of Bengal in 1756. The succession of Siraj was opposed by his aunt Ghasiti Begum and his cousin Shaukat Jang who was the governor of Purnea. There was a dominant group in the Nawab's court comprising Jagat Seth, Umichand, Raj Ballabh, Rai Durlabh, Mir Jafar and others who were also opposed to Siraj. Besides this internal dissension within the Nawab's court, another serious threat to Nawab's position was the growing commercial activity of the English Company. The conflict between the Nawab and the English Company over trade privileges was nothing new. But during Siraj-ud-daula's reign, certain other factors further strained the relations between the two. They are:

- The fortification around Calcutta by the English Company without the permission of the Nawab.
- The misuse of the Company's trade privilege by its officials for their private trade.
- The English Company at Calcutta had given shelter to Krishna Das, son of Raj

Ballabh, who had fled with immense treasures against the Nawab's will.

Siraj-ud-daula was unhappy with the Company for these reasons. The Company on its part became worried about Siraj because the Company officials suspected that Siraj would cut down the privilege of the Company in alliance with the French in Bengal. Siraj-ud-daula's attack on the English fort at Calcutta precipitated an open conflict.

The arrival of a strong English force under the command of Robert Clive at Calcutta from Madras strengthened the British position in Bengal. The secret alliance of the Company with the conspirators of the Nawab's camp further strengthened the position of the British. So English victory in the battle field of Plassey, (June, 1757) was decided before the battle was fought. It was not the

superiority of the military power but the conspiracy of the Nawab's officials that helped the English in winning the battle. It is very difficult to ascertain why Shiraj failed to take appropriate action. He could not save himself ultimately and was murdered by the order of Mir Jafar's son Miran.

4.3.2 Mir Jafar and the British

Mir Jafar was promised the Nawabship by Clive before the battle of Plassey. This was his reward for his support to the British against Siraj.

The British now became the kingmakers of Bengal. Mir Jafar was made to pay a heavy price to his English friends for their favour. But the treasury of Murshidabad did not have enough resources to satisfy the demands of Clive and his fellow countrymen. Mir Jafar paid out about Rs. 1,750,000 in presents and compensation to the British.

Immediately after his accession Mir Jafar faced some serious internal problems. They were:

- Some of the Zamindars like Raja Ram Sinha of Midnapore, Hizer Ali Khan of Purnea refused to accept him as their ruler.
- Mir Jafar's soldiers who were not getting salary regularly were in a rebellious mood.
- He had doubts about the loyalty of some of his officials, specially of Rai Durlabh. He believed that Rai Durlabh had instigated the rebellion of Zamindar against him. But Rai Durlabh was under the shelter of Clive so he could not touch him.
- There was an attempt by the Mughal Emperor's son who later on became Shah Alam to capture the throne of Bengal.
- The financial position of the Nawab was also weak, mainly because of the demands of the Company and mismanagement of resources. All these made Mir Jafar more dependent on the English Company. But the Company was unhappy with the Nawab for some reasons.
- The English Company was under the impression that Mir Jafar, in collaboration with the Dutch company was trying to curb the growing influence of the English in Bengal.
- Mir Jafar also failed to respond to the ever increasing demands of the English.

Meanwhile the death of Miran, son of Mir Jafar, again created a conflict over the question of succession. The fight was between Miran's son and Mir Kasim, the son-in-law of Mir Jafar. Vansittart who came as Governor of Calcutta took the side of Mir Kasim, Mir Kasim in a secret agreement with Vansittart agreed to pay the necessary funds to the Company if they support his claim to the Nawabship of Bengal. Mir Jafar had already lost the

confidence of the English. The rebellion of [Mir Jafar's army for their due salary made it easier for the British to force Mir Jafar to step down.

4.3.3 Mir Kasim and the British

Mir Kasim's accession to the throne of Bengal followed the same way, the way through which Mir Jafar had come to power. Like his predecessor, Mir Kasim also had to pay large amounts of money to the English. Besides this he had given three districts of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong to the English Company. After assumption of power the two most important things that Mir Kasim did were:

- shifting the capital from Murshidabad to Monghyr in Bihar in order to keep a safe distance from the Company at Calcutta, and
- re-organising the bureaucracy by the men of his own choice and remodelling the army to enhance its skill and efficiency.

The first few months of Mir Kasim's reign went very well. But gradually the relationship with the British became embittered. Reasons for this were:

- Ram Narayan, the Deputy governor of Bihar, was not responding to the repeat requests by Nawab to submit his accounts. But Ram Narayan was supported by the English officials of Patna who never concealed their anti-nawab feeling.
- The misuse of the Company's Dustak or trade permit by Company officials for their private trade generated tension between the British and the Nawab.

The Company servants were not paying any duty on their goods. Whereas local merchants had to pay duty. While the Nawab lost tax revenue because of the nonpayment of duty by the Company officials the local merchant, faced unequal competition with the Company merchants. Moreover, the Company officials completely, ignoring the officials of the Nawab. They were forcing the local people to sell their goods at low prices, Mir Kasim complained against these practices to Governor Vansittart, but this had no effect.

As it happened in the case of Mir Jafar, in the case of Mir Kasim also when the British found that Mir Kasim had failed to fulfil their expectation they started searching for a suitable replacement of Mir Kasim. But Mir Kasim was not ready to surrender so easily, unlike his predecessor. He tried to put up a united resistance against the British with the help of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam and Shuja-ud-daula of Awadh.

However, Mir Kasim ultimately failed to protect his throne and the battle of Buxar (1764) completed the victory and the domination of the British in eastern India.

4.3.4 After Mir Kasim

Mir Jafar was brought back to the throne of Bengal. He agreed to hand over three districts-Midnapore, Burdwan and Chittagong to the English for the maintenance of their army and to permit duty free trade in Bengal (except a duty of 2% on salt). But Mir Jafar was in bad health and he died shortly after this. His minor son Najim-ud-daula was appointed Nawab. The real administration was carried on by a Naib-Subadar, 'who would be appointed or dismissed by the English.

In the summer of 1765 Clive came back as the Governor of Bengal. Clive now engaged himself in completing his unfinished task, i.e, to make the British the supreme political authority in Bengal. He approached the Mughal emperor Shah Alam who was practically a prisoner of Shuja-ud-daula, the Nawab of Awadh, since 1761 for an agreement. The emperor responded positively to Clive's proposal. An agreement was signed between Shah Alam and Clive on August 1765. By this agreement Shah Alam was given Allahabad and the adjoining territories, while the emperor granted by a firman, the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company. The right of Diwani gave the British complete control over the Bengal revenues or financial administration.

The responsibility for defence, law and order and the administration of justice remained in the hands of the Nawabs, But the Nawabs had virtually lost their military power after the battle of Buxar, So after the grant of Diwani the Nawabs were in reality reduced to a cipher.

The above discussion shows how the political events from 1757 to 65 gradually led to the transfer of power from the Bengal Nawabs to the British East India Company. In the following section we will try to understand the factors that led to this change.

4.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF BRITISH SUCCESS

We have seen in the earlier sections that how decisively the British established their political supremacy in Bengal by winning two battles, one at Plassey (1757) and the other at Buxar (1764). Apart from the overall significance of the British victory the two battles had certain specific significance of their own.

The success of the British in the battle of Plassey had a significant impact in the history of Bengal.

- The victory of the British, whether by treachery or any means, undermined the position of the Nawab in Bengal.
- Apparently there was not much change in the government and the Nawab still remained the supreme authority. But in practice the Nawab became dependent on the Company's authority and the Company began to interfere in the appointment of Nawab's officials.

- Internal rivalry within the Nawab's administration was exposed and the conspiracy of the rivals with the British ultimately weakened the strength of the administration.
- Besides the financial gain, the English East India Company was also successful in establishing their monopoly over Bengal trade by marginalising the French and the Dutch companies.

The battle of Buxar gave them the complete political control over Bengal. Actually, the process of transition started with the battle of Plassey and culminated in the battle of Buxar.

The battle of Buxar sealed the fate of the Bengal Nawabs and the British emerged as the ruling power in Bengal.

Mir Kasim was successful in forming a confederacy with the Emperor Shah Alam II and Nawab Shuja-ud-daula of Awadh against the British. This confederacy failed before the British force. The victory of the British in this battle proved the superiority of the British force and strengthened their confidence. This was a victory not against Mir Kasim alone but against the Mughal Emperor and the Nawab of Awadh also. The success of the British in this battle gave a clear indication that the establishment of the British rule in other parts of India was not very far off.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What was the nature of Bengal polity? Write your answer in 100 words .
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- 2) Why did the relationship become strained between the British and the Bengal Nawabs? Write your answer in 100 words.
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- 3) Read the following statements and mark-right (✓) or wrong (X) ..
 - i) The Bengal Nawabs did not object, to the free trade of the English Company in Bengal.
 - ii) The growing trade of the Company in Bengal, augmented the financial resources of the Bengal rulers.

- iii) Siraj-ud-daula objected to the misuse of trade privileges in Bengal by the Company officials.
- iv) Mir Jafar's army rebelled against him because he failed to pay their salary
- v) The British became critical of Mir Kasim because -he wanted to establish his independent authority.
- vi) The right of Diwani gave the British complete control over the financial and administrative affairs of Bengal.

4.5 DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE AND THE RISE OF THE SUCCESSOR STATES IN THE NORTH INDIA

You have already read earlier that the process of Mughal decline started in the beginning of the 18th century and the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 sealed the fate of Mughal rule.

Taking advantage of this weakness of the central authority, a large number of independent and semi-independent states arose all over India; some as a result of the assertion of autonomy by governors of Mughal provinces and others as the product of rebellion against Mughal authority. In North India, Awadh, Rohillas, Jats and Sikhs were the prominent examples. These powers competed and sometimes collaborated with each other and with the British in order to consolidate and expand their dominions.

Even though the actual power and authority of the Mughal house over its subordinate ruling groups declined, Mughal sovereignty was still universally recognized. All powers seeking to establish their rule in the 18th century India needed to acquire imperial titles and rights. Reasons for this were more material than simply a belief in the divine major tradition for the incumbent regional ruler trying to be king to imitate. Secondly, the Mughal rule had trained executive and financial officials which the regional rulers could not do. Thirdly, and this was more important in the states like Awadh, the local rule was initially established in the name of the Mughals and any formal repudiation of Mughal authority would have incited the *taluqdars* to assert their independence.

4.6 AWADH: FROM SUBSIDIARY ALLIANCE TO ANNEXATION

The Company's fortunes improved dramatically when Clive in collaboration with the influential Indian merchants and nobles, defeated the Nawab of Bengal Siraj-ud-Daula in 1757 at Plassey and installed a puppet Nawab, Mir Jafar, in his place. Bengal, one of the wealthiest provinces of India, proved an extraordinary advantage to the British. The massive Rs. 30 million land revenues, secured by good natural irrigation, were deployed not only to support the poorer presidencies of Bombay and Madras but also to recruit more army and enrich its servants. The

results were obvious when the Company's armies defeated a combined force of Mir Kasim, Shuja-ud-Daula (the Nawab of Awadh), and the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II. From that time the company became most dominant power in the sub-continent. By securing from the Emperor the grant of Diwani or the right to collect revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and by forcing a subsidiary alliance on the Awadh Nawab, the Company at once legitimised its position in India and created a buffer between its territories and the more turbulent regions of Western India.

The army which fought the British in Buxar in October 1764 was basically an Awadh army composed of the Mughal, Durrani and local Awadhi troops. Lacking in a centralized command and prone to mercenary activities like the looting of both the Company's and Nawab's baggage trains right in the midst of the battle, this army symbolised the Awadhi society as a whole.

The Awadh elites consisted of three basic strata, each different from the other in tradition and culture—

- i) the Awadh dynasty and many of its highest officials were Shia Muslims who were an insignificant part of the population and considered themselves as part of the Mughal imperial service elite;
- ii) the castes of scribes Kayasthas and Khattris, who predominated in the Awadh administration.
- iii) the Rajput and Brahmin landholders who were dominants as local zamindars though they had very limited place in the provincial administration.

It is not only the tensions between the central and local power, and also the assertion of independence, particularly by the zamindars, which tended to weaken the regime. About eighty percent of all the zamindars, both Hindus and Muslims, asserted that they had been established in their estates prior to the arrival of Saadat Khan, the founder of the Awadh dynasty. Thus, the vast majority of the landholders saw themselves as prior to, and largely independent of, the provincial rulers of Awadh.

In this situation, it was not surprising that Saadat Khan, upon his appointment as *subedar* of Awadh, acted always in the name of the Mughal Emperor and began his term of office with a punitive tour of his new province at the head of a military expedition. Thus, the dynasty derived its legitimacy from the Mughals, and enforced it locally through show of strength. When they were defeated and dominated by the British after 1764 and when they repudiated the Mughal authority in 1819, the Awadh rulers were left with little else to generate loyalty among their subjects. Even when they assumed the leadership of the revolt against the British in 1857 in Awadh, they had to act in the name of the Mughals.

4.7 THE BENEFITS OF SUBSIDIARY ALLIANCE TO THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

Although Shuja-ud-Daula was restored to Awadh, he was firmly bound to the Company by a treaty which provided for mutual defence (paid for by the Nawab), trade free of duty for the company in his territory, and his payment of Rs 5,000,000 as war debts. The ramifications of this treaty proved enormous for the history of not only the parties involved but of all of north India.

Under the subsidiary alliance, the Nawab agreed to the permanent stationing of a contingent of British force in his territory and paid Rs. 210,00 per month per brigade. He also agreed to the posting at his count of a British Resident and gave assurance that he would not employ any European in his service without the consent of the British.

Their system of Residency proved very crucial in the years to come. By the extension of extraterritorial protection, by the administration of guaranteed pension and by the provision of honours and preferment, the Resident attracted a circle of important dependents and so made himself a new power centre at the Awadh Capital.

Extraterritoriality, coupled with resources of manpower and money mobilised in Awadh proved crucial in redrawing the political map of India. The armies recruited from Awadh and Bihar and supported by the money exacted from the people of Bengal and rulers of Awadh helped the Company in winning repeated victories over the Marathas and the Sikhs and led to its emergence as the paramount power in India. It also helped the Company to keep Awadh in check by providing extraterritorial protection to the dissidents from the jurisdiction of the Awadh rulers thereby creating a constituency loyal to the Company.

The Company, through the Resident stationed at the Awadh capital, increasingly encroached upon the powers of the rulers so much so that by the beginning of the nineteenth century many of the high officials, courtiers and the large landholder of the province tended to repose their faith in the Company and considered it as the real source of power. Even reigns of the Nawabi family, like Asaf-ud-Daula and Saadat Ali Khan, relied on Company's intervention for securing the position of Nawabi. The Company, therefore, by manipulation and show of force, had acquired so much authority that the annexation of Awadh in 1856 became a logical conclusion.

4.8 ENCROACHMENTS BY THE COMPANY AND RESISTANCE BY THE AWADH REGIME: 1765-1775

In spite of their subordinate status within the subsidiary Alliance system, the Awadh rulers asserted their independence in many respects. Shuja-ud-Daula, despite company's protests, managed to raise an army of 100,000, all uniformed and trained in European fashion. He also retained the French officers, numbering

150 and controlling an advanced artillery unit. Moreover, he, with Company's help, annexed Rohilkhand and Etawah in 1774. His most important act of resistance, however, was in restricting the trade by the Company and other Europeans in Awadh territory. Even when the Treaty of Allahabad, between the British and the Nawab was drawn up in 1765, Shuja had objected strongly to Article 8, which allowed duty-free trade by English merchants and their agents in his territory. But he was persuaded to allow merchants and their agents who held Company *dastaks*, or permits, to enter and set up business. This soon led to abuses which Shuja had feared. These traders, although exempted from tariffs as such, increasingly refused to pay any transit and sales duties, interfered with indigenous markets and acted generally as if they were free from the Nawabi rule of law.

Faced with Nawab's strenuous protests, the Company banned all its own traders and agents and withdrew all protection from free merchants in Awadh and Benars in May 1768.

The profits from this trade were so good for the British merchants that some of them went back to England to agitate against the ban. Their pressure forced the East India Company Court of Directors in London to lift the ban in 1771. Shuja again objected and threatened to withdraw from the Alliance. The new Governor-General, Warren Hastings, had no option but to promise that "no English gentlemen should reside in his country and that I would never interfere in any disputes between the English *gumashtas* and his people".

The importance of this meeting between Warren Hastings and Shuja-ud-Daula in 1773 in Benaras was that it erected a trade barrier that closed Awadh to the commercial penetration of the East India Company until 1801.

4.8.1 Weakening of Awadh's Defences: 1775-1801

After the death of Shuja-ud-Daula in 1775, his son Asaf-ud-Daula tried to gain control of Awadh. Since the Mughal practice denied any dynastic continuity at the provincial level, Asaf-ud-Daula had to vie with other aspirants for the same position. In this struggle he struck a compromise with the East India Company which, while securing the Nawabi for him, proved to be very harmful for the state.

In the new treaty, Asaf-ud-Daula, in order to save his shaky position, made a number of concessions to the Company. He added to it the Benaras region, agreed to pay an increase of 50,000 rupees, nearly a quarter more than the previous sum, each month as subsidy for the Company's brigade in Awadh. He also agreed to the dismissal and expulsion of all Europeans in his service or living in Awadh, unless allowed by the Company. He had to place his relationship with the Company above his ties to the Mughal Emperor. Thus from the beginning of his reign, Asaf-ud-Daula had to admit and adjust himself to de facto dependence on the East India Company.

Thus, the Company took advantage of the dissension in the ruling clan to further consolidate its position in Awadh. Soon, its demands rose to such heights that the

Awadh ruler could not satisfy them. Now the Company demanded *tankhwahs*, or assignments of revenues for those territories would transfer them directly to the Company, thus bypassing the Awadh regime. This drew the Company deeply into the Awadh administration. The Company specified the districts it wished to be assigned, involved itself in the appointment of revenue agents in those districts, tried to oversee their activities and account books, and frequently enforced their demands through the use of the Company's troops.

Company's interference in the affairs of state became even more marked after Asaf's death in 1797. Wazir Ali, Asaf-ud-Daula's son and proclaimed heir, did not suit the Company because of his anti-Company view. He was deposed in January 1798 by the Company and a group of nobles in the Awadh Court. Saadat Ali Khan, the installed Nawab, thus became the second Nawab After Asaf-ud-Daula to assume power with the assistance of the Company. But his position was even more dependent. He initially agreed to cede vast territories to the Company. But later on the Company preferred cash payments to land. The annual subsidy to the Company's troops stationed in Awadh was increased by 20 lakh rupees bringing the annual payments to a minimum of 7,600,000 rupees. Further, the new Nawab was obliged to pay 1,200,000 rupees to the Company for the costs of its exertions in putting him in his nephew's place. Finally, the Nawab accepted that "...all correspondence between the Nawab Saadat Ali Khan and any foreign power of state, shall be carried on with the knowledge and concurrence of the Company." Thus, the new Awadh ruler was reduced financially and isolated diplomatically.

4.8.2 The Treaty of 1801

Not satisfied with this, the new Governor-General Lord Wellesley, forced the Nawab to sign a new treaty in 1801, according to which he had to cede the Doab, Gorkhpur and Rohilkhand to the Company.

Besides territorially isolating him, the new treaty had three important provisions which worked towards the final elimination of the Awadh regime:

- i) The Awadh army was drastically reduced to less than one-tenth of its previous size.
- ii) The Company took responsibility for defending the Awadh territories "against all foreign and domestic enemies.
- iii) The Awadh ruler was required to "establish in his reserved dominations such a system of administration, to be carried, into effect by his own officers, as shall be conducive to secure the lives and property of the inhabitants; and His Excellency will always advise with and Act in conformity to the council of the officers of the said Honourable Company.

This third provision was subject to various interpretations and formed the primary basis for annexation of Awadh in 1856.

4.8.3 Decline and Fall of the Awadh Dynasty: 1801-1856

Besides slowly annexing territories from the Awadh rulers the Company was also successfully building an alternative source of authority inside Awadh. Through the right of extending extraterritorial protection, the successive Residents tried to build a substantial constituency for the Company which extended from bottom to the top. The sepoys from Awadh, enlisted in or retired from the Company's armies, represented the lowest rung of it. The *taluqdars* who were displaced by the action of the Nawab and who successfully appealed to the Company for the restoration of their lands formed the middle of the ladder. The friends and relatives of the deposed or unsuccessful were the highest in order to which Company's protection extended. British legitimacy had become so convincingly established by the turn of the 19th century that as high a person as Bahu Begum mother of Asaf-ud-Daula, appealed to it and made a will in Company's name to the effect that all her property would go to the Company after her death, minus selected endowments for a tomb, dependents and the obligatory gift to the holy Shrine at Karbala. When the Nawab, Saadat Ali, objected to this indiscriminate use of protection, the Resident declared "that you Excellency's denial of my title to intercede is, in my judgement, totally inadmissible."

Thus, by creating an alternative and superior political position for itself in Awadh, the Company undermined the legitimacy of the Awadh rulers. It further sought to denigrate the Mughal status by urging the empire's constituent parts, the various regional rulers, to assert their juridical as well as actual independence from him.

Although Awadh had now become virtually dependent on the Company, the latter still needed a show of independence on the part of its rulers for its own large design. The Company official encouraged Ghazi-ud-Din Haider to declare his independence and repudiate the sovereignty of the Mughal Emperor in 1819. By declaring formal independence the Nawab set an example. He unwittingly cleared the coast for the British who were in a position to emerge as an alternative all-India source of authority replacing the Mughals. Now all that remained for the Company was to down-grade and humiliate the Nawab-emperor to prove its superiority. The imperial pretensions of the Awadh rulers were only in name, but they were forced to retract even in these matters. While Ghazi-ud-Din Haider had used the title, Padshah-i-Ghazi (Emperor of the Warriors for Faith) and Shah-i-Zaman (Lord of the Age), his son and successor Nasir-ud-Din Haider was forced by the Company to change these to the more circumscribed Padshah-i-Awadh (Emperor of Awadh) and Shah-i-Jahan (Lord of the World). The latter title was also objected to and the ruler was allowed to use it only domestic correspondences. This way the Company kept on encroaching on the material and moral domains of the Awadh rulers so much so that the annexation of 1856 became a logical conclusion. As we have seen earlier (See Section 11.5) the Resident took over administration of Awadh as the Chief Commissioner.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What were the sources of weakness of the Awadh regime? (10 lines).

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- 2) The vast majority of landholders in Awadh:
 - a) worked towards integration of the kingdom of Awadh.
 - b) worked towards stability of Awadh.
 - c) Wanted to unitedly defeat the Company forces
 - d) saw themselves as prior to and largely independent the provincial rulers of Awadh.
 - 3) Why did the East India Company thrust on the Awadh Nawab subsidiary Alliance?
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4.9 EXPANSION IN OTHER PARTS OF NORTH INDIA

After the conquest of Etawah and Rohilkhand by Shuja-ud-Daula in 1774 and the incorporation of Rohilkhand in the Company's territory in 1801, only the Punjab, besides Awadh, was left as the major power in north India.

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in June 1839, the Punjab was beset by political instability and rapid changes in the government. Kharak Singh, Nav Nihal Singh, Chand Kaur, Sher Singh and finally Dalip Singh were brought to the throne a major role in all these changes in the government. Prolonged and bloody battles were generally fought to bring the claimant to the throne or to dislodge the incumbent.

4.9.1 The British Interest in Punjab

Right since the 1830s the British were interested in the Punjab. When Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in Chief of the British forces was invited to attend the marriage ceremony of Ranjit Singh's grandson, he used this occasion to make an estimate of the forces necessary to overcome the Punjabi army. Again the possibility of a military occupation of the Punjab was discussed by the Governor-General Ellenborough with the Home Government in October 1843. But, because of the weak state of the British Indian army after 5 years' war in Afghanistan, any military action against the powerful Punjab army was considered inadvisable.

4.9.2 The Mode of Conquest of Punjab

The British, however, found their opportunity soon as the repeated changes in the government of the Punjab, the corruption among the officials, general indiscipline in the army and the disenchantment of the mercantile class and Lances population lowered the morals of the rulers and ruled alike. Moreover, they found important allies in the higher rungs of the Punjab government, e.g.,

Prime Minister Raja Lal Singh, the Commander-in-Chief Misar Tej Singh, a leading Sardar of the Lahore durbar Dogra Raja Gulab Singh etc.

This alliance with the high-placed men in the army and the government was to prove crucial for the British, when, the first war between the Company and the Punjab was declared on 13 December 1845. The Company's army was almost routed, but for the spinelessness of Lal Singh. Lal Singh, wrote Cunningham, failed the Sikh army at a critical moment. "When the artillery ammunition of the English had failed, when a portion of their forces was retiring upon Ferozepur, and when no exertion could have prevented the invaders from retreating likewise, if the Sikhs had boldly pressed forward."

Because of such failure of leadership, the formidable Punjab army was defeated in a series of encounters and was forced to sign the humiliating treaty of Lahore on 8 March, 1846. The British annexed the Jalandhar Doab and handed over Jammu and Kashmir to Raja Gulab Singh for a cash payment of five million rupees. The Punjab army was reduced to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry and a strong British force was stationed at Lahore. Later, another treaty was signed on 16 December 1846 which gave the British Resident at Lahore extensive authority (through a council of Regency) over all matters in every department of the state; the British stationed their troops in Punjab, and the expenses were to be paid by the Lahore government.

All these, however, did not satisfy the British. Their ultimate aim was direct rule over Punjab. So, when the Diwan of Multan rose in revolt (1848) against the every opportunity to spread. And when it did spread and others joined in, they welcomed it. They Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, wrote to the Home Government, "The rebellion of Raja Sher Singh, Followed by his army, the rebellion troops and of the Sikh population everywhere, have brought matters to that crisis I have for months been looking for; and we are now not on the eve, but in the midst of was with the Sikh nation and the kingdom of the Punjab."

In the Campaign of 1849 the Sikh forces were decisively defeated and Punjab was annexed. Thus the British swallowed up the very kingdom they were supposed to protect.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What were the means which the East India Company acquired political control in Awadh?

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- 2) What were the factors which helped the English to subjugate Punjab?

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- 3) Write a brief note on *tankhwah* or assignments.

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4.10 LET US SUM UP

We have traced in this Unit the process of political-developments that took place in Bengal between 1757 to 1765. We hope you have understood that the primary interest of the British at the initial stage was to tap the resources of Bengal and to monopolize the commercial potentiality of Bengal in the Asian trade. It was this growing commercial interest of the English East India Company and its officials which brought them indirect confrontation with the Bengal Nawabs. The weaknesses in the prevailing Bengal polity helped the British to win the battle against the Nawabs and the alienation of different groups from the rulers made the system vulnerable to external forces.

We have studied in this Unit the reasons why the English East India Company was able to subjugate two major regional principalities in the North India, Awadh and Punjab. While the ruling powers in Awadh capitulated readily to British pressures and through Awadh was annexed in 1856 by the British, it was not so easy to pacify the people who rose in revolt in 1857. The displacement which the slow penetration of the Company had caused all over the province and the shock which the annexation administered made large sections of Awadh population including the landholders, peasants and sepoys extremely resentful to the Company's rule.

4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should focus on the dependability of Nawabs on various factions and its limitations, lack of cohesion in the administration etc. See Sec. 4.2. '
- 2) Your answer should include the clash of interest between the Nawabs and the British the growing interference of the British in the internal affairs of Bengal polity, etc. See Sec. 4.3.
- 3) i) X ii) X iii) ✓ iv) ✓ v) ✓ vi) X

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec. 4.6;
- 2) d;

- 3) See Sec. 4.7

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sub-sec. 4.8.1
- 2) See Sec. 4.8. You would trace the role played by force, diplomacy and attempts to build an alternate legitimacy.
- 3) See Sub-sec. 4.9.2.

