

THE BATTLE OF BUXAR

CHALLENGES OF MIR JAFAR

- Military dissatisfaction - The army was unhappy with their performance at the Battle of Plassey. Furthermore the systematic "drain of wealth" from Bengal that began after the battle led to significant delays in salary payments for the troops, causing the army to lose loyalty to the Nawab.
- Rivalry & internal conflict - Powerful bankers & key court officials had already aligned themselves with the British, effectively undermining the Nawab's position from within his own administration.
- Loss of administrative control - Local officials began to defy the Nawab's authority. Because these elements were protected by the British, Mir Jafar felt unable to act against them, fearing further repercussions if he opposed the British.
- British presence - To ensure their interests remained secure, the British East India company stationed a contingent of 6000 soldiers in Murshidabad, the capital. This presence effectively intimidated the Nawab & kept him in a subservient position forcing the Bengal administration to gradually bow

to company demands.

PLUNDER & EXPLOITATION OF BENGA

- Financial drain - The wealth of Bengal was aggressively siphoned off by the company. This process involved not only the massive sums stipulated in the treaty signed before the Battle of Plassey which amounted to approx 3 crore rupees but also persistent, repetitive financial demands placed upon the administration of Bengal.
- Economic impact - These relentless demands were designed to extract max profit, effectively crippling the local administration & contributing to the broader drain of wealth from the region.

CONFLICT WITH THE DUTCH - Mir Jafar, facing British pressure, reached out to the Dutch East India Company. However, this initiative proved unsuccessful. The Dutch forces were ultimately defeated by the British in a series of skirmishes. This defeat served as the "final nail in the coffin" for Mir Jafar. While the company had already decided to remove him from power, they first needed to identify a suitable successor who could manage the Bengal administration while ensuring continued profits for the British.

TREATY WITH MIR QASIM

- Territorial concessions - Mir Qasim agreed to cede specific territories to the Company. This was a strategic move by the British to establish trade monopolies in these areas by appointing their own agents, known as Gombasthas.
 - Trade rights - The agreement included provisions regarding shared trade interests & the control of key resources like lime, which was essential for trade at that time.
 - Financial support - Mir Qasim promised Rs 5 lakh to support the company's ongoing military conflicts against the French in South India. The treaty allowed for the free movement of people between the Company's territories & those governed by Mir Qasim, ensuring flexibility for the company.
- Following the signing of this treaty in 1760, the Company officially replaced Mir Jafar with his son-in-law, Mir Qasim who possessed a keen vision & understanding of the Company's underlying strategies.

MIR QASIM'S ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

Mir Qasim recognized that the Company's true power lay not in land-based forces, but in its maritime dominance, which allowed them to retreat, regroup & return to attack even when they appeared defeated.

To reclaim sovereign authority, Mir Qasim undertook several administrative & military reforms between 1760 & 1763:

- Administrative Restructuring - He removed British agents from his court to diminish their oversight & direct influence over his administration.
- Military modernization - Recognizing the superiority of European military technology, he established a factory in Munger to manufacture modern cannons & firelock muskets.
- Suppression of rebellions - He personally addressed internal instability by suppressing rebellions led by local zamindars or anti-state elements to consolidate his control.
- Financial reforms - He focused on the overhaul of state finances as a critical component of his strategy to stabilize his administration. By reforming the financial system, he aimed to consolidate his authority & reduce the economic dependency that had previously made the Nawab susceptible to the company's influence. To reduce the Company's immediate surveillance & proximity, he shifted his capital from Murshidabad where British agents were deeply embedded to Munger.

CONFLICT OVER TRADING PRIVILEGES & DASTAKS

- Misuse of "Dastaks" - Mir Qasim challenged the company regarding their abuse of the dastak system. Company officials were using these duty-free trade permits for their own private trade & were even selling them to non-British merchants, which deprived the Nawab of significant tax revenue.
- Abolishing duties - When the company refused to stop these corrupt practices, Mir Qasim made a decisive move by abolishing all internal trade duties across Bengal. This was considered a master stroke because it challenged the unfair advantage held by the Company.
- Leveling the playing field - By removing the 10% duty that local Indian merchants were required to pay, Mir Qasim put everyone on an equal footing. Since the British no longer had a tax-exempt advantage over local traders, the dastaks became effectively useless, & the Company's monopoly on Bengal's trade began to collapse.

This aggressive economic policy was seen by the Company as a direct threat to their profits, ultimately leading them to adopt a more hostile stance towards the Nawab.

ROAD TO THE BATTLE OF BUXAR

- The breaking point & conflict - Relations between Mir Qasim & the British East India company had deteriorated significantly. Mir Qasim initiated reforms to limit British influence, including relocating the capital from Murshidabad to Munger to escape British surveillance. He destroyed the British competitive advantage provided by the Dastaks by abolishing all inland trade duties across Bengal. This economic defiance led to open hostilities in 1763.

- The formation of the Triple Alliance - After being defeated by the Company in Bengal in 1763, Mir Qasim fled to Awadh. There, he formed a powerful tripartite alliance to challenge the British.

1. Mir Qasim - Displaced Nawab of Bengal.
2. Shuja-ud-Daula - The Nawab of Awadh, who joined primarily to expand his own power & protect his territorial interests.
3. Shah Alam II - The Mughal emperor, who was seeking to regain his authority & status.

- The path to Buxar - The combined forces of the alliance planned to launch an offensive against the British. While they initially aimed to reclaim Murshidabad, the company forces successfully intercepted them as they retreated. This strategic positioning led directly to the Battle of Buxar in October, 1764.

THE BATTLE OF BUXAR

- The offensive strategy - The alliance initially targeted Murshidabad, the centre of British administration in Bengal. However, the city was heavily fortified, preventing the coalition from reclaiming it.
- The battle at Buxar - As the alliance retreated towards Awadh, they were intercepted near the fort at Buxar by the British commander, Major Hector Munro. The Indian forces had laid siege to the Buxar fort, utilizing bridges over the surrounding river to position themselves. Instead of staying on the defensive, Major Hector Munro opened the fort's gates & launched a direct assault on Shuja-ud-Daula's troops.
- The retreat - Facing the disciplined British military might, Shuja-ud-Daula fled the battlefield. In his panicked retreat, he ordered the bridges to be destroyed, effectively trapping his allies - Mir Qasim & Shah Alam II - on the other side, leaving them isolated & vulnerable to the British forces.

AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE

- Military decisiveness - The battle was a genuine, high-stakes military confrontation. The British East India company forces faced a coordinated challenge

which they successfully overcame through superior discipline & firepower.

- Strategic failure of the Alliance - The allied forces had failed to capture Murshidabad & were effectively trapped near Buxar. Major Hester Munro, the British commander, realized that 2 of the 3 allied wings - Shah Alam II & Mir Qasim were ineffective. He initiated a direct attack on Shuja-ud-Daula's forces, who were the only significant military threat.
- The Retreat & isolation - When Shuja-ud-Daula fled the battlefield, he ordered the destruction of the bridges behind him to prevent a British pursuit. However, this proved to be a critical tactical error as it left his allies, the Mughal emperor & Mir Qasim stranded on the opposite side, completely isolated & vulnerable to the British army.
- Post battle fates - While Mir Qasim escaped, British accounts from 1787 later claimed to have discovered his body in a slum, signifying a tragic end to his life. Conversely, Emperor Shah Alam II was captured by the company, marking a massive shift in the political authority of the Mughal empire.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

- Military scale & intensity - The Battle of Buxar involved significantly larger forces, with the British

East India company commanding 7,000 to 8,000 troops against a combined coalition of approx 40,000 to 50,000 soldiers. The battle resulted in heavy casualties with an estimated 2000 to 3000 deaths.

- British Military superiority - The conflict served as a definitive proof of the company's military effectiveness. By leveraging superior Western artillery & disciplined warfare technology, the Company proved that they were a force capable of defeating major Indian powers, including the Mughal emperor & the Nawab of Awadh.

- Decline of the Mughal empire - The capture & subsequent dependence of Emperor Shah Alam II marked the final collapse of the Mughal empire's political relevance. Stripped of his army & treasury, the Emperor was forced to rely on British generosity, turning his authority into a symbolic role controlled by the Company.

- Strategic territorial control - The Company established Awadh as a buffer state. By keeping a British presence in the region, they created a defensive shield that protected Bengal from external invasions. The British also gained control over the highly fertile Ganges-Yamuna Doab. This resource rich region provided the economic foundation that allowed the Company to transform from a trading

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entity into a formidable territorial power.

- Reinstatement of Mir Jafar - Following the conclusion of the Battle, the Company re-established Mir Jafar as the Nawab of Bengal in 1764. However his authority was strictly limited; the company imposed a provision that effectively stripped him of his own military, placing all responsibility for the protection of the state under the Company.

- Return of Robert Clive - Recognizing the immense political & territorial implications of the conflict, the British leadership in London sent Robert Clive back to India in 1765 to stabilize the situation & oversee the formal settlement of the new power dynamics.

THE TREATY OF ALLAHABAD

It was signed on August 1765 under the leadership of Robert Clive.

- Treaty terms with Shuja-ud-Daula - The Nawab was compelled to pay 50 lakh rupees to the Company to cover the costs of the war. British forces were stationed within the capital, Allahabad, to ensure the Nawab remained compliant & to keep the Company informed of court activities. A mutual defense pact was formed effectively turning Awadh into a buffer state.
- Treaty terms with Shah Alam II - The company offered the Emperor military protection & support, as

he had been a displaced ruler without his own effective army. In exchange for support, the Emperor formally granted Diwani rights - the legal authority to collect revenue - over the provinces of Bengal, Bihar & Odisha to the Company. The Company agreed to pay the Emperor an annual sum of 25 lakh rupees in recognition of his status & to maintain his court.

- **GEOPOLITICAL SHIFT** - The Battle of Buxar was more transformative for the British, as it brought 3 major powers under their direct political influence through treaties of friendship & administrative control. These events marked the beginning of a move towards the eventual conquest of the entire Indian subcontinent. By securing these regions, the Company gained the necessary revenue & military stability to sustain their expansion.