CHAPTER IV

The British Conquest of India

I. Expansion of the Empire, 1756-1818

British Occupation of Bengal

THE beginnings of British political sway over India may be traced to the battle of Plassey in 1757, when the English East India Company's forces defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal. The earlier British struggle with the French in South India had been but a dress rehearsal. The lessons learnt there were profitably applied in Bengal.

Bengal was the most fertile and the richest of India's provinces. Its industries and commerce were well developed. As has been noted earlier, the East India Company and its servants had highly profitable trading interests in the province. The Company had secured valuable privileges in 1717 under a royal *farman* by the Mughal Emperor, which had granted the Company the freedom to export and import their goods in Bengal without paying taxes and the right to issue passes or *dastaks* for the movement of such goods. The Company's servants were also permitted to trade but were not covered by this *farman.* They were required to pay the same taxes as Indian merchants. This *farman* was a perpetual source of conflict between the Company and the Nawabs of Bengal. For one, it meant loss of revenue to the Bengal Government. Secondly, the power to issue *dastaks* for the Company's goods was misused by the Company's servants to evade taxes on their private trade. All the Nawabs of Bengal, from Murshid Quli Khan to Alivardi Khan, had objected to the English interpretation of the *farman* of 1717. They had compelled the Company to pay lump sums to their treasury, and firmly suppressed the misuse of *dastaks.* The. Company had been compelled to accept the authority of the Nawabs in the matter, but its servants had taken every opportunity to evade and defy this authority.

Matters came to a head in 1756 when the young and qulck-tempct'ed Siraj-ud-Daulah succeeded his grandfather, Alivardi Khan. He demanded of the English that they should trade on the same basis as in the times of Murshid Quli Khan. The English refused to comply as they felt ■ strong after their victory over the French in South India. They had also come to recognise the political and military weakness of Indian states Instead of agreeeing to pay taxes on their goods to the Nawab, they levied heavy duties on Indian goods entering Calcutta which was under iheir control. All this naturally annoyed and angered the

young Nawab who also suspected that the Company was hostile to him and was favouring his rivals for the throne of Bengal The breaking point came when, without taking the Nawab's permission, the Company began to fortify Calcutta in expectation of the coming struggle with the French, who were stationed at this time at Chandernagore. Siraj rightly interpreted this action as an attack upon his sovereignty. How could an independent ruler permit a private company of merchants to build forts or to carry on private wars on his land? Moreover he feared that if he permitted the English and the French to fight each other on the soil of Bengal, he too would meet the fate of the Carnatic Nawabs. In other words, Siraj, was willing to let the Europeans remain, as merchant but not as masters. He ordered both the English and the French to demolish their fortifications at Calcutta and Chandernagore and to desist from fighting each other. White the French Company obeyed his order, the English Company refused to do so, for its ambition had been whetted and its confidence enhanced by its victories in the Carnatic. Tt was now determined to remain in Bengal even against the wishes of the Nawab and to trade there on its own terms. It had acknowledged the British Government's right to conttolall its activities, it had quietly accepted restrictions on its trade and power imposed in Britain by the British Government; its right to trade with the East had been extinguished by the Parliament m 1693 when its Charter was withdrawn; it had paid huge bribes to the King, the Parliament, and the politicians of Britain (in one year alone, it had to pay £ 80,000 in bribes). .Nevertheless the English Company demanded the absolute right to trade freely in Bengal irrespective of the Bengal Nawab's orders. This amounted to a direct 'challenge to the Nawab'-s sovereignty. No ruler could possibly accept this position. Siraj-ud-Daulah had the statesmanship to see the long-term implications of the English designs. He decided to make them obey the laws of the land.

Acting with great .energy but with undue haste and inadequate preparation, Siraj-ud-Daulah sejzed the English factory at Kasimbazar, marched on to Calcutta, and occupied the> Fort William on 20 June 1756. He then retired ,from Calcutta to celebrate his easy victory, letting the English escape with their ships, This was a mistake for he had underestimated the strength of his enemy.

The English officials took refuge at Fulta near the sea protected by their naval superiority. . Here they waited for aid from Madras and, in the meantime, organised a web of intrigue and treachery with the leading men of the Nawab's court. Chief among these were Mir.Jafar, the *Mir*

Bakshi, Mawck Chand, the Officer-in-Charge of Calcutta, Amichand, a rich merchant, Jagat Seth, the biggest banker of Bengal, and Khadim Khan, who commanded a large number of the Nawab's troops. From Madras came a strong naval and military force under Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive. Clive reconquered Calcutta m the beginning of 1757 and compelled the Nawab to concede all the demands of the English.

The English, however, were not satisfied, they were aiming high. They had decided to instal a more pliant tool in S i raj-vid-Daii! ah's place. Having joined a conspiracy organised by the enemies of the young Nawab to place Mu Jafar on the throne of Bengal, they presented the youthful Nawab with an impossible set of demands. Both sides realised that a war to the finish would have lo be fought between them. They met for battle on the field of Plassey, 20 miles from Murshidabad, on 23 June 1757 The fateful battle of Plassey Was a battle only in name. In all, the English lost 29 men while the Nawab lost nearly 500. The major part of the Nawab's army, led by the traitors Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh, took no part in the fighting. Only a small group of the Nawab's soldiers led by Mil Madan and Mohan Lai fought bravely and well. The Nawab was forced to flee and was captured and put to death by Mir Jafars son Miran.

The battle nf Plassey was followed, in the words of the Bengali poet Nabm Chandra Sen, by "a night of elei nal gloom for India."

The English proclaimed Mir Jafar the Nuwub of Bengal and set on I to gather the reward. The Company was granted undibpuled right 1o free trade in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa It also received the zamindari of the 24 Parganas near Calcutta. Mir Jafar paid a sum of Rs, 17,700,000 ascom-

Soldier in Uniform—Under the Mughal . Government in Bengal *Courtesy: Notional Archives of India, New Delhi*

pensation for the attack on Calcutta to the Company and the traders of the city. In addition, be paid large sums as 'gifts' or bribes to the high officials of the Company. Clive, for example, received over two million rupees, Watts over one million. Clive later estimated that the Company and its servants had collected more than 30million rupees from the puppet Nawab. Moreover, it was understood that British merchants and officials would no longer be asked to pay any taxes on their private trade.

Seapoy in Uniform—In the Service of East India Company's Government in Bengal
Courtesy. National Arckives of India, New Delhi

The battle of Plassey was of immense historical importance, it paved the way for the British mastery of Bengal and eventually of the 'whole of India. It boosted British prestige and at a single stroke raised them to the status of a major contender for the Indian Empire. The rich revenues of Bengal enabled them to organise a strong anny. Control over Bengal played a decisive role in the Anglo-French struggle. Lastly, the victory of Plassey enabled the Company and its servants to amass nntold wealth at the cost of the helpless people of Bengal. Asthe British historians, Edward Thompson and G.T. Garrett, have remarked:

To engineer a revolution had been revealed as the most paying game in the world. A gold lust un~ equalled since the hysteria that took hold of the Spaniards of Cortes' and Pizarro's age filled the English mind. Bengal in particular was not to know peace again until it had been bleed white.

Even though Mir Jafar owed his position to the Company, he soon repented the bargain he had struck. His treasury was soon emptied by the demands of the Company's officials for presents and bribes, the lead in the matter being given by Clive himself. As Colonel Malleson has put it, the single aim of the Company's officials was "to

grasp all they could; to use Mir Jafar as a gloden **sack** into which, they could dip their hands at pleasure." The Company itself was seized with unsurpassable greed. Believing that the *kamdhemt* had been found and that the wealth of Bengal was inexhaustible, the Directors of the Company ordered that Bengal should pay the expenses of the Bombay and Madras **Presidencies** and purchase out of its revenue **all** the Company's exports from India, The Company was **110** longer to merely trade with India, it **was** to use **iis** control over **the** Nawab of Bengal to drain the wealth of the province,

Mir Jafar soon discovered that it was impossible to meet the full demands of the Company and its officials who, on their part, began to criticise the Nawab for his incapacity in fulfilling their expectations. And so, in October 1760, they forced him to abdicate in favour of his son- in-law, Mir Qasim who rewarded his benefactois by granting the Company the xammdari of the districts of Burdwan, Midnapore, and Chittagong, and giving handsome presents totalling 29 lakhs of rupees to the high English officials.

Mir Qasim, however, belied English hopes, and soon emerged as a threat to their position and designs in Bengal. He was an able, efficient, and strong ruler, determined to free himself from foreign control, He believed thit since he had paid the Company and its servants adequately for putting him on the throne, they should now leave him alone to govern riengal. He realised that a full treasury and an efficient army were essential to maintain his independence. He therefore tried to prevent public disorder, to increase his income by removing corruption from revenue administration, and to raise a modern and disciplined army along European lines. All this was not to the liking of the English. Most of all they disliked the Nawab's attempts to check the misuse of the *farman* of 1717 by the Company's servants, who demanded that their goods whether destined for export or for internal use should be free of duties. This injured the Indian merchants as they had to pay taxes from which the foreigners got complete exemption. Moreover, the Company's servants illegally sold the *dastaks* or free passes to friendly Indian merchants who were thereby able to evade the internal customs duties. These abuses ruined the honest Indian traders through unfair competition and deprived the Nawab of a very important source of revenue, In addition to this, the Company and its servants got intoxicated by 'their new-found power' and 'the dazzling prospects of wealth'and, in their pursuit of riches, began to oppress and ill-treat the officials of the Nawab and, the poor people pf Bengal. They forced the Indian officials and zamindars to give them presents and bribes. They compelled the Indian artisans, peasants, and merchants to sell their goods cheap and to buy dear from them. People who refused were often flogged or imprisoned. These years have been described by a recent British historian, Pcrcival Spear, as "the period of open and unashamed plunder." In fact the prosperity for which Bengal was renowned was being gradually destroyed.

Mir Qasim realised that if these abuses continued he could never hope to make Bengal strong or free himself of the Company's control. He therefore took tbe drastic step of abolishing all duties on internal trade, thus giving his own subjects a

concession that the English had seized by force. But the alien merchants were no longer willing Lo tolerate equality between themselves and Indians. They demanded the reimposition of duties on Indian traders. The battle was about to be j'oined again. The truth of the matter was that there could not exist two masters in Bengal. While Mir Qasim believed that he was an independent ruler, the English demanded that he should act as a mere tool in their hands, for had they not put him in power?

Mir Qasim was defeated in a series of battles in 1763 and fled to Avadh where he formed an alliance with Shuja-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Avadh, and Shah Alam II, the fugitive Mughal Emperor. The three allies clashed with the Company's army at Buxar on 22 October 1764 and were thoroughly defeated. This was one of the most decisive battles of Indian history for it demonstrated the superiority of English arms over the combined army of two of the major Indian powers. It firmly established the British as masters of Bengal, Biliar and Orissa and placed Avadh at their mercy.

Clive, who had returned to Bengal in 1765 as its Governor, decided to seize the chance of power in Bengal and to gradually transfer the authority of Government from the Nawab to the Company. In 1763, the British had restored Mir Jafar as Nawab and collected huge sums for the Company and its high officials. On Mir Jafar's death, they placed his second sort Nizam-ud-Daulah on the throne and as a reward made him sign a new treaty on 20 February 1765. By this treaty the Nawab was to disband most of his army and to administer Bengal through a Deputy *Subaii- dar* who was to be nominated by the Company and who could not be dismissed without its approval. The Company thus gained supreme control over the administration (or *nizamat)* of Bengal. The members of the Bengal Council of the Company once again extracted nearly 15 lakhs of rupees from ihe new Nawab

Froni Shah Alam II, who was stilLthe titular head of the Mughal Empire, the Company secured the *Diwani*, or the right to collect revenue, of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Thus, its control over Bengal was legalised and the revenues of this most prosperous of Indian provinces placed at its command. In return the Comiv.n;. gave him a subsidy of 2 6 million rupees and secured i'nr him (lie dviics of Kora and Allahabad. The Emperor resided in ihc foil of Ulahabad foi <-:x years as a virtual prisonei of the English.

The Nawab of Avadh, Shuja-ud-Daulah, was made to pay a war indemnity of five million rupees to the Company. Moreover, the two signed an alliance by which the Company promised to support the Nawab against an outside attack provided he paid for the services of the troops sent to his aid. This alliance made the Nawab a dependent of the Company. The Nawab welcomed the alliance in the false belief that the Company, being primarily a trading body, was a transitory power while the Marathas and the Afghans were his real enemies. This was to prove a costly mistake for both Avadh and the rest of the country. On the other hand the British had very shrewdly decided to consolidate their acquisition of Bengal and, in the meanwhile, to use Avadh as a buffer or a barrier state between their possessions and the Marathas,

Dual System of Administration of Bengal

The East India Company became the real master of Bengal at least from 1765.

Its army was in sole control of its defence and the supreme political power was in its hands. The Nawab depended for his internal and external security on the British. As the *Diwdn,* the Company directly collected its revenues, while through the right to nominate ' the Deputy *Subahdar,* it controlled the *Nizamat* or the police and judicial powers. The virtual unity of the two branches of Government under British control was signified by the fact that the same person acted in Bengal as the Deputy *Diwan* on behalf of the Company and as Deputy *Subahdar* on behalf of the Nawab. This arrangement is known in history as the Dual or Double Government. It held a great advantage for the British: they had power without responsibility. They controlled the finances of the province and its army directly and its administration indirectly. The Nawab and his officials had the responsiblity of administration but not the power to discharge it. The -weaknesses of the Government could be blamed on the Indians while its fruits were gathered by the British. The consequences for the people of Bengal were disastrous: neither the Company nor the Nawab cared for their welfare. In any case, the Nawab's officials had no power to protect the people from the greed and rapacity of the Company and its servants. On the other han'd, they were themselves in a hurry to sxploit their official powers.

This Company's servants had now the whole of Bengal to themselves and their oppression of the people increased greatly. We can quote Clive himself:

> **I shall only "say that such a scene of anarchy, confusion, bribery,[1] corruption, and' extortion v*>as never'seen or heard of** in **any country but Bengal, nor such and so . many foFfuneaacquired j_n so unjust and rapacious a mannei. The three provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, producing a clear revenue of £ 3 millions sterling, have been under the absolute management of the Company's servants, ever since Mir Jafar'i restoration to the** *subahship',* **and they have, both civil and**
>
> **military, exacted and levied contribution*[1] from every wan of power and consequence, from the Nawab down to the lowest zamindar.**

The Company's authorities on thei r part set out to gather the rich harvest and drain Bengal of its wealth. They stopped sending money from England to purchase Indian goods. Instead, they purchased these goods from the revenues of Bengal and sold them abroad. These were knowu as the Company's Investment and formed a part of its profits. On top of all this the British Government wanted its share of the rich prize and, in 1767, ordered the Company to pay it £ 400,000 per year.

In the years 1766, 1767, and 1768 alone, nearly £ 5.7 million were drained from Bengal. The abuses of the Dual Government and the drain of wealth led to the impoverishment and exhaustion of that unlucky province. In 1770, Bengal suffered from a famine which in its effects proved one of the most terrible famines known in human history. People died in lakhs and nearly one-third of Bengal's population fell victim to its ravages. Though the famine was due to failure of rains, its effects were heightened by the Company's policies.

Wars Under Warren Hastings (1772-1785) and Cornwallis (1786-1793)

The East India Company had by 1772 become an important Indian power and its Directors in England and its officials in India set out to consolidate their control over Bengal before beginning a new round of conquests. However,

their habit of interfering in the internal affairs of the Indian States and their lust for territory and money soon involved them in a series of wars.

In 1766 they entered into an alliance with the Nizam of Hyderabad to help him in attacking Haidar Ali of Mysore in return for the cession of the Northern Sarkars. But Haidar Ali was more than a match for the Company's armies. Having beaten back the British attack, he threatened Madras in 1769 and forced the Madras Council to sign peace on liis terms. Both sides restored each other's conquests and promised mutual help in case of attack by a third parly. But when Haidar Ali was attacked by the Marathas in 1771, the English went back on their promise and did not come to his help. This led Haidar Ah to distrust and dislike them.

Then, in 1775, the'English plashed with the Marathas. An intense struggle for power was taking place at that time among the Marathas between the supporters of the infant Peshwa Madhav Rao II, led by Nana Phadnis, and Raghunath Rao. The British officials in Bombay decided to take advantage of this struggle by intervening on behalf of Raghunath Rao. They hoped thus to'repeat the exploits of tfyeir countrymen in Madras and Bengal and reap the consequent monetary advantages. This involved them ini a long war with the Marathas which lasted from 1775 to 1782,

Nana Phadnia (From a Portrait in Jagmohan Temple, Mysore)
Courtfjy: Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi

In the beginning, tbe Marathas defeated the British forces at Talegaon and forced them to sign the Convention of Wadgaon by which the English renounced all their conquests and gave up the cause of Raghunath Rao. But the war was toon resumed:

This was a dark hour indeed for the British power in India, All the Maratha chiefs were united behind the, Peshwa and his chief minister, Nana Phadnis. The Southern Indian powers had long been resenting the presence of the British among them, and Haidar Ah and the Nizam chose this moment to declare war against the Company.

Thus the British were faced with the powerful combination of the Marathas, Mysore and Hyderabad. Moreover, abroad they were waging a losing war in their colonies in America where the people had rebelled in 1776. They had also to counter the determined design of -the French to exploit the difficulties of their old rival.

'The British in India were, however, led at this time by their brilliant, energetic, and experienced Govern or-General, Warren Hastings. Acting with firm resolve and determination, he retrieved the vanishing British power and prestige. A British force under Goddard marched across Central India in a brilliant military manoeuvre and after a series of victorious engagements reached Ahmedabad which he captured in 1780. The English had found in the Marathas a determined enemy, with immense resources. Mahadji Sindhia had given evidence of- his power which the English dreaded to contest. Neither side won victory and the war had come to a standstill. With the intercession of Mahadji, peace was concluded in 1782 by the Treaty of Salbai by which the *status quo* was maintained It saved the British from the combined opposition of Indian poweis.

This war, known in history as the First Anglo-Maratha War, did not end in victory for either side. But it did give the British 20 years of peace with the Marathas, the strongest Indian power of the day. The British utilized this period to consolidate their rule over the Bengal Presidency, while the Maratha chiefs frittered away their energy in bitter mutual squabbles. Moreover, the Treaty of Salbai enabled the British to exert pressure on Mysore as the Marathas promised to help them in recovering their territories from Haidar All. Once again, the British had succeeded m dividing the Indian powers.

War with Haidar Ali- had started in 1780- Repeating his earlier exploits, Haidar Ali inflicted one defeat after another on the British armies in the Cariiatic and forced them to surrender in larger numbers. He soon occupied almost the whole of the Carnatic. But once again British arms and diplomacy saved the day. Warren Hastings bribed the Nizam with the cession of Gnntur district and gained his withdiawal from the anti-British alliance. During 1781-82 he made peace with the.Marathas and thus freed a large part of his army for use against Mysore. In July 1781 the British army under Eyre Coote defeated Haidar Ali at Porto Novo and saved Madras. After Haidar All's death in December 1782, the war was carried on by his son, Tipu Sultan. Since neither side was capable of overpowering the other, peace was signed by them in March 1784 and both sides restored all conquests. Thus, though the British had been shown to be too weak to defeat either the Marathas or Mysore, they had certainly proved their ability to hold their own in India. Not only had they been saved from extinction m the South, they had emerged from their recent wars as one of the three great powers in India.

The third British encounter with Mysore was more fruitful from the British point of view. The peace of 1784 bad not removed the grounds for struggle between ■ Tipu and the British; it had merely postponed the struggle. The authorities of the East India Company were acutely hostile to Tipu. They looked Upon him as their most formidable rival in the South and as the chief obstacle

standing between them and complete domination over South India. Tipu, on his part, thoroughly disliked the English, saw them as the chief danger to his own independence and nursed the ambition to expel them from India.

War between the two again began in 1789 and ended in Tipu's defeat in 1792. Even though Tipu fought with exemplary bravery, Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor-General, had succeeded through shrewd diplomacy in isolating him by winning oyer the Marathas, the Nizam, and the rulers of Travancore and Coorg. This war again revealed that the Indian powers were shortsighted enough to aid the foreigner against another Indian power for the sake of temporary advantages. By the treaty of Seringa- patam, Tipu ceded half of his territories to the qllies and paid 330 lakhs of rupees as indemnity. The Third Anglo-Mysore war destroyed Tipu's dominant position in the South and firmly established British supremacy there.

Expansion under Lord Wellesley (1798-1805)

The next large-scale expansion of British rule in India occurred during the GovernorTGeneraJship of Lord Wellesley who came to India in 1798 at a time when the British were locked in a life and death struggle with France all over the world.

Till then, the British had followed the policy of consolidating their gains and resources in India and making territorial gains only when this could be done safely without antagonising the major Indian powers. Lord Wellesley decided that the time was ripe for bringing as many Indian states 4S possible under British control, By 1797 the two strongest Indian powers, Mysore and the Marathas, had declined in power, The Third Anglo-Mysore war had reduoed Mysore to a mere shadow'of its recent greatness and the Marathas were dissipating their strength in mutual intrigues and wars. In other words, political conditions in India were propitious for a policy of expansion: aggression was easy as well as profitable. Moreover, the trading and industrial classes of Britain desired

further expansion in India- Hitherto they had favoured a policy of peace in the belief that war was injurious to trade. But by the end of the 18th century they had come to think that British goods would sell in India on a large scale only when the entire country had come under British control. The Company too was in favour of such a policy provided it could be pursued successfully and without adversely affecting its profits, Lastly, the British in India were determined to keep French influence from penetrating India and, therefore, to curb and crush any Indian state which might try to have dealings with France. The security of the Company's dominion in India was threatened by the impending invasion of Zaman Shah, the ruler of Kabul, who could expect support from the Indian chiefs in northern India and who was invited by Tipu to join in a concerted effort to oust the British from this country.

To achieve his political aims Wellesley relied on three methods: the system of Subsidiary Alliances, outright wars, and assumption of the territories of previously' subordinated rulers. While the practice of helping an Indian ruler with a paid British force was quite old, it was given a definite shape by Wellesley who used it to subordinate the Indian States to the paramount authority of the Company. Under his Subsidiary Alliance system, the ruler of the allying Indian State was compelled to accept the permanent stationing of a British force within his territory and to pay a subsidy for its maintenance. All this was done allegedly for his protection but was, in fact, a form through which the Indian ruler paid tribute to the Company, Sometimes the ruler ceded part of his territory instead of paying annual subsidy. The Subsidiary Treaty also usually provided that the Indian ruler would agree to the posting at his court of a British Resident, that he would not employ any European in his service without the approval of the British, and that he would sot negotiate with any other Indian ruler without consulting the Governor-General. In return the British undertook to defend the ruler from his enemies. They also promised non-interference in the internal affairs of the allied state, but this was a promise they seldom kept.

In reality, by signing a Subsidiary Alliance, an Indian state virtually signed away its independence. It lost the right of self-defence, of maintaining diplomatic relations, of employing foreign experts, and of settling its disputes with its neighbours. In fact, the Indian ruler lost all vestiges of sovereignty in external matters and became increasingly subservient to the British Resident who interfered in the day to day administration of the state. In addition, the system tended to bring about the internal decay of the protected state. The cost of the subsidiary force provided by the British was very high and, in fact, much beyond the paying capacity of the state. The payment of the arbitrarily fixed and artificially bloated subsidy invariably disrupted the economy of the state and impoverished its people. The system of Subsidiary Alliances also led to the disbandment of the armies of the protected states. Lakhs of soldiers and officers were deprived of their hereditary livelihood, spreading misery and degradation in the country. Many of them joined the roaming bands of *Pindarees* which

Phtdaree **Fort in the Neighbourhood of Varanasi** *Courtesy; National Archives of India, Ne*'Delhi*

were to ravage the whole of Tndia during the first two decades of the 19th century. Moreover, the rulers of tlie protected states tended to neglect the interests of their people and to oppress them as they no longer feared them. They had no incentive to be good rulers as they were fully pro- tected by the British from domestic and foreign enemies.

The Subsidiary Alliance system was, on the other hand, extremely advantageous to the British. They c6uld now maintain a large army at the cost of the Indian states. They were enabled to fight Wars far away from their own territories, since any war would occur In the territories either of the British ally or of the British enemy. They controlled the defence and foreign relations of the protected ally, and had a powerM force stationed at the very heart of his lands, and could, therefore, at a time of their choosing, overthrow him and annex his territories by declaring him to be 'inefficient'. As far as the British were concerned, the system of Subsidiary Alliances was* in the words of a British writer, "a system of fattening allies as we fatten oxen, till they were worthy of being devoured."

Lord Wellesley signed his first Subsidiary Treaty with the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1798. The Nizam was to dismiss his French-trained troops and to maintain a subsidiary force of six battalions at a cost of •£ 24Ij7I0 per year In return, the British guaranteed his state against Maratha encroachments. By another treaty in 1800,the subsidiary force was increased and, in lieu of cash payment, the Nizam ceded part of his territories to the Company,

The Nawab of Avadh was forced to sign a Subsidiary Treaty in 1801. In return for a larger subsidiary force, the Nawab was made to surrender to the British nearly half of his kingdom consisting of Rohilkhand and the territory lying

between the Ganga and the Jamuna. Moreover, the Nawab was no longer lo be independent, even within the part of Avadh left with him. He must accept any 'advice' or order from the British authorities regarding the internal administration of his state. His police was to be reorganised under the control and direction of British officers. His own army was virtually disbanded and the British had the right to station their troops in any part of his state.

Wellesley dealt with Mysore, Carnatic, Tanjore, and Surat even more sternly. Tipu of Mysore would, of course, never agree to a Subsidiary Treaty. On the contrary, he had never reconciled himself to the loss of half of his territory in 1792. He worked incessantly to strengthen his forces for the inevitable struggle with the British He entered into negotiations for an alliance with Revolutionary France. He sent missions 'to Afghanistan, Arabia and Turkey to forge an anti-British alliance.

Lord Wellesley was no less determined to bring Tipu to heel and to prevent any possibility of the French re-entering India. The British army attacked and defeated Tipu in a brief but fierce war m 1799, before French help could reach him. Tipu still refused to beg for peace on humiliating terms. He proudly declared that it was "better to die like a soldier, than to live a miserable dependent on the infidels, in the list of their pensioned, rajas and nabobs." He met a hero's end on 4 May 1799 while defending his capital Seringapatam. His army remained loyal to him to the very end. The taking over of the capital was described by Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, in the following words;

> Nothing therefore can have exceeded what was done on the night of the 4th. Scarcely a house in the town was left unplundered, and I understand that in camp jewels of the greatest value, bars of gold, etc., etc., have been offered for sale in the bazars of the army fey our soldiers?, sepoys, and followers... They (the people) are returning to their houses and beginning again to follow their occupations. , but the properly of every one is gone.

Nearly half of Tipu's dominions were divided between the British and their ally, the Nizam- The, reduced kingdom of Mysore was restored to the decendants pf the original rajas from whom Haidar Ali had seized

The Storming of Sermgapatam *Courtesy. Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi*

power. A special treaty of Subsidiary Alliance was imposed on. the new Raja by which the Governor-General was authorised to take over the administration of the state in case of necessity. Mysore was, in fact, made a complete dependency of the Company. An important result of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War was the complete elimination of the French threat to British Supremacy in India.

In 1801, Lord Wellesley forced a new treaty upon the puppet Nawab of Carnatic compelling him to cede his,kingdom to the Company in return for a handsome pension. . The Madras Presidency as it existed til1,1947 was now oreated, by attaching the Carnatic to territories seized from Mysore, including the Malabar. Similarly, the territories of the rulers of Tanjore and Sutat were taken over and their rulers pensioned off.

The Marathas were the only major Indian power left .outside the sphere of British control. Wellesley now turned his attention towards them and began aggressive interference in their internal affairs.

The Maratbft Empire at this time consisted of a confederacy af five big ichiefs, nftmely, the Peshwa at Poona, the Gaekwad at Barodat the Sindhia at Gwalior, the Holkar at Indore, and the Bhonsle at Nagpur, the Peshwa being the. nominal head of the confederacy. Unfortunately for the Marathas, they lost nearly all of their wise and experienced leaders towards the close of the 18th century. Mahadji Sindhia, Tukoji Holkar,

Ahilya Bai Holkar, Peshwa Madhav Rao I[, and Nana Phadnis, the man who had kept tbe Maratha confederacy together for the last 30 years, all were dead by the year 1800. What was worse, the Maratha chiefs were engaged in bitter fratricidal strife, blind to the real daoger from the rapidly advancing foreigner. Yeshwant Rao Holkar on one side and Dan la t Rao Sindhia and Peshwa Baji Rao II on the other wer^ locked in mortal combat,

Wellesley had repeatedly offered a subsidiary alliance to the Peshwa and

Sindhia. But the far-sighted Nana Phadnis had refused to fall into the trap. However, when on 25 October 1802, the day of the great festival of Diwali, Holkar defeated the combined armies of the Peshwa and Sindhia, the cowardly Peshwa Baji Rao II rushed into the arms of the English and on the fateful last day of 1802 signed the Subsidiary Treaty at Bassein. The British had finally realised their ambition. Lord Wellesley wrote on 24 December 1802:

> This crisis of affairs appeared to me to afford the most favourable opportunity for the complete establishment of the interests of the British pow er in the Maratha Empire, without the hazard ofinvolvmg us in a contest with any party.

The victory had been a little too easy and Wellesley was wrong in one respect: the proud Maratha chiefs would not surrender their great tradition of independence without a struggle. But even in this moment of their peril they would not unite against their common enemy. When Sindhia and Bhonsle fought the British, Holkar stood on the side-lines and Gaekwad gave help to the British. When Holkar took up arms, Bhonsle and Sindhia nursed their wounds. Moreover, the Maratha chiefs underestimated the enormously increased strength of the enemy and went into battle without adequate- preparation.

In the South, the British armies led by Arthur Wellesley defeated the combined armies of Sindhia and Bhonsle at Assaye in September 1803 and at Argaon in November. In the North, Lord Lake routed Sindhia's army at Laswari on the first of November and occupied Aligarh, Delhi and Agra. Once again the blind Emperor of India became a pensioner of the Company. The Maratha allies had to sue for peace, Both became subsidiary allies of the Company. They ceded part of their territories to the British, admitted British Residents to their Courts and promised not to employ any Europeans without British approval. The British gained complete control over the Orissa coast and the territories between the Ganga and the Jamuna. The Peshwa became a disgruntled puppet in their hands,

Wellesley now turned his attention towards Holkar, but Yeshwant Rao Holkar proved more than a match for the British. Using traditional Maratha tactics of mobile warfare and in alliance with the Jats, he fought British armies to a standstill, Holkar's ally, the Raja of Bharatpur,
inflicted heavy losses on Lake who unsuccessfully attempted to storm his fort. Moreover, overcoming his age-old antagonism to the Holkar family, Sindhia began to think of joining hands with Holkar. On the other hand, the shareholders of the East India Company discovered that the policy of expansion through war was proving costly and was reducing their profits. The Company's debt had increased .from £ 17 million in 1797 to £ 31 million in 1806. Moreover, Britain's finances were getting exhausted at a time when Napoleon was once again becoming a major threat in Europe. British statesmen and the Directors of the Company felt that time had come to check further expansion, to put an end to ruinous expenditure, and to digest and consolidate Britain's recent gains in India. Wellesley was therefore recalled from India and the Company made peace with Holkar in January 1806 by the Treaty of Rajghat giving back to the latter the greater part of his territories.

Wellesley's expansionist policy had been checked near the end. Ml the same

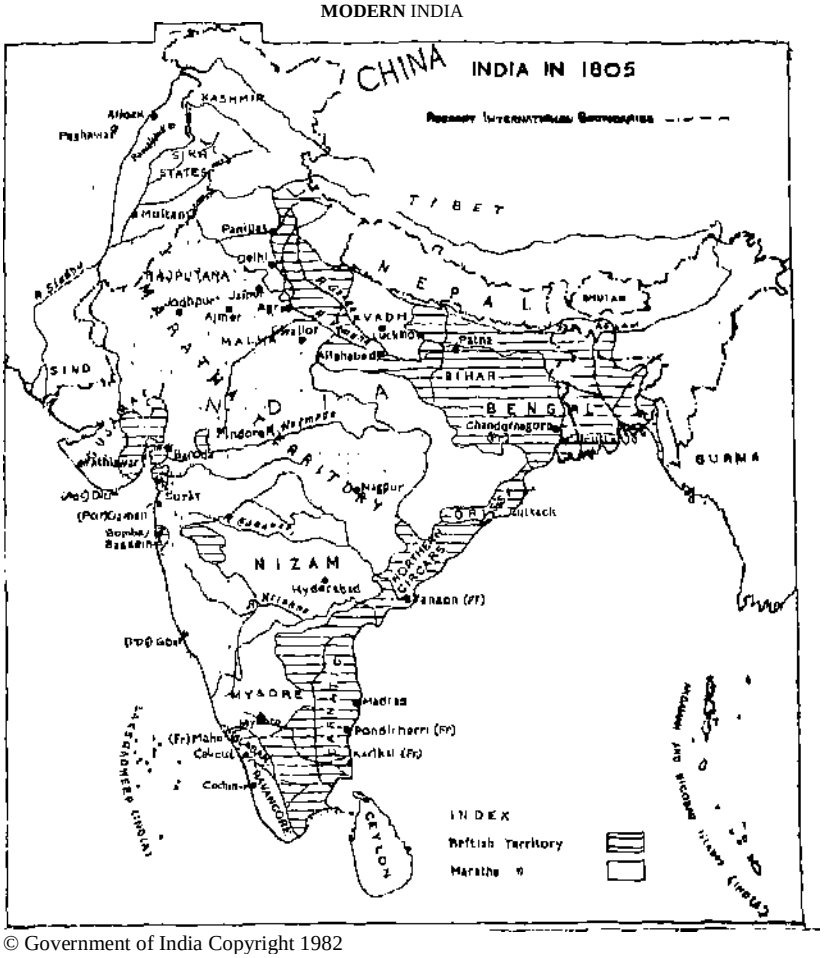
it had resulted in the East India Company becoming the pa 'a- mount power in India. A young officer in the Company's judicial servicj, Henry Roberclaw, could write about 1805:

> An Englishman in India is proud and tenacious, he feels himself & eojlqucror amongst a vanquished people and looks down with some degree of superiority on all below him.

Expansion Under Lord Hastings

The Second Angio-Maratha War had shattered the power of the Maratha chiefs but not their spirit. The loss of their freedom rankled in llieir hearts. They made a desperate last attempt to regain their independence and old prestige in 1817. The lead in organising a united front of the Maratha chiefs was taken by the Peshwa who was smarting under the rigid control exercised by the British Resident. However, once again the Marathas failed to evolve a concerted and well-thought out plan of action. The Peshwa attacked the British Residency at Poona in November 1817. Appa Sahib of Nagpur attacked the Residency at Nagpur, and Madhav Rao Holkar made preparations for war.

The Governor-General, Lord Hastings, struck back with characteristic vigour. He compelled Sindhia to accept British suzerainty, and defeated the armies of the Peshwa, Bhonsle and Holkar. The Peshwa was dethroned and pensioned off at Bithur near Kanpur. His territories were annexed and the enlarged Presidency of Bombay brought into existence. Holkar and Bhonsle accepted subsidiary forces. All the Maratha chiefs had to cede to the Company large tracts of their territories. To satisfy Maratha pride, the small Kingdom of Satara was founded out of the Peshwa's lands and giver, to the descendant of Chatrapati Shivaji who ruled it as a complete dependent of the British. Like other rulers of Indian



Based upon **Survey of India map with the** permission **of (he** Surveyor **General of India,**
The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to fi distance oftwelvo nautical miles measured from the appropriate bnsc line.

states, the Maratha chiefs too existed from now on at the mercy of the British power.

The Rajputana states had been dominated for several decades by Sindhia and Holkar. After the downfall of the Marathas, they lacked the energy to reassert their independence and readily accepted British supremacy.

• Thus, by 1818, the entire Indian sub-continent excepting the Punjab and Sindh had been brought under British control. Part of it was ruled directly by the British and the rest by a host of Indian rulers over whem the British exercised paramount power. These states had virtually no armed forces of their own, nor did they have any independent foreign relations. They paid heavily for the British forces stationed in their territories to control them. They were autonomous in their internal affairs, but even in this respect they acknowledged British authority wielded through a Resident. They were on perpetual probation. On the other hand, the British were now free to 'reach out to the natural frontiers of India.'

ii The Consolidation op British Power, 1815-57

The British completed the task of conquering the whole of India from 1818 to 1857. Sindb and the Punjab were conquered and Avadh, the Central Provinces and a large number oF other petty states were annexed.

The Conquest of Sindh

The conquest of Sindh occurred as a result of the growing Anglc- Russian rivalry in Europe and Asia and the consequent British fears that Russia might attack India through Afghanistan or Persia. To counter Russia, the British Government decided to increase its influence in Afghanistan and Peisia. It further felt that this policy could be successfully pursued only if Sindh was brought under British control. The commercial possibilities of the river Sindh were an additional attraction.

The roads and rivers of Sindh were opened to British trade by a treaty in 1832. The chiefs of Sindh, known as Amirs, were made to sign a Subsidiary Treaty in 1839. And finally, in spite of previous assurances that its territorial integrity would be respected, Sindh was annexed in 1843 after a brief campaign by Sir Charles Napier who had earlier written in his Diary: "We have no right to seize Sind, yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, useful humane piece of rescahty it will be." He received seven lakhs of rupees as prize money for accomplishing the task.

Tbe Conquest of the Punjab

The death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in June 1.839 was followed by political instability and rapid changes of government in the Punjab. Selfish and corrupt leaders came to the front. Ultimately, power fell into the hands of the brave and patriotic but utterly indisciplined army. This led the British to look greedily across the Sutlej upon the land of the five rivets even though they had signed a treaty of perpetual friendship with Ranjit Singh in 1809. The British officials increasingly talked of having to wage a campaign in the Punjab.

The Punjab army let itself be provoked by the warlike actions of the British

and their intrigues with the corrupt chiefs of the Punjab. In November 1844, Major Broadfoot, who was known to be hostile to the Sikhs, was appointed the British agent in Ludhiana. Broadfoot repeatedly indulged in hostile actions and gave provocations. The corrupt chiefs and officials found that the army would sooner or later deprive them of their power, position, and possessions. They conceived the idea of saving themselves by embroiling the army in a war with the British. In the autumn of 1845, news reached that boats designed to form bridges had been despatched from Bombay to Ferozepur on the Sutlej. Barracks for additional troops were built in the forward area and additional regiments began to be despatched to the frontier with the Punjab. The Punjab Army, now convinced that the British were determined to occupy the Punjab, took counter measures. When it heard in December that Lord Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, and Lord Haidinge, the Governor- General, were marching towards Ferozepur, it decided to strike. War between the two was thus declared on 13 December 1845. The danger from the foieigner immediately united the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. The Punjab army fought heroically and with exemplary courage. But some of its leaders had already turned traitors. The Prime Minister, Raja Lai Singh, and the Commander-in-Chief, Misar Tej Singh, were secretly corresponding with the enemy. The Punjab Army was forced to concede defeat and to sign the humiliating Treaty of Lahore on 8 March 1846. The British annexed the Jullundhar Doab and handed over Jammu and Kashmir to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra for a cash payment of five million rupees. The Punjab army was reduced to 20,000 infantry and

12,0 cavalry and a strong British force was stationed at Lahore.

Later, on 16 December 1846, another treaty was signed giving the British Resident at Lahore full authority over all matters in every department of the state. Moreover, the British were permitted to station their troops in any part of the state, From now on the British Resident became the real ruler of the Punjab which lost its independence and became a vassal state.

But the aggressively imperialist sections of the British officialdom in India were still unsatisfied, for they wanted to impose direct British rule over the Punjab. Their opportunity came in 1848 when the freedom- loving Punjabis rose up in numerous local revolts. Two of the prominent le volts were led by Mulraj at Multan and Chatter Singh Attanwala near

Lahore. The Punjabis were once again decisively defeated. Lord Dalhousie seized this opportunity to annex the Punjab. Thus, the last independent state of India was absorbed in the British Empire of India.

Dalhousie and the Policy of Annexation (1848-1856)

Lord Dalhousie came out to India as the Governor-General in 1848, He was from the beginning determined to extend direct British rule over as'large an area as possible. He had declared that “the extinction of all i native states of India is just a question of time”. The ostensible reason for this policy was his belief that British administration was far superior to the corrupt and oppressive

administration of the native rulers. However, the underlying motive of this policy was the expansion of British exports to India. Dalhousie, in common with other aggressive imperialists, believed that British exports to the native states of India were suffering because of the maladministration of these states by their Indian rulers, Moreover, they thought that their "Indian allies" had already served the purpose of facilitating British conquest of India and could now be got rid of profitably.

The chief instrument through which Lord Dalhousie implemented his policy of annexation was the Doctrine of Lapse. Under this Doctrine, when the ruler of a protected state died without a natural heir, his state was not to pass to an adopted heir as sanctioned by the age-old tradition of the country. Instead, it was to be annexed to the British dominions unless the adoption had been clearly approved earlier by the British authorities. Many states, including Sataia in 1848 and Nagpur and Jhansi in 1854, were annexed by applying this doctrine.

Dalhousie also refused to recognise the titles of many ex-rulers or to pay their pensions. Thus, the titles of the Nawabs of Carnatic and of Surat and the Raja of Tanjore were extinguished. Similarly, after the death of the ex-Peshwa Baji Rao II, who had been made the Raja of Bithnr, Dalhousie refused to extend his pay or pension to his adopted son, Nana Saheb.

Lord Dalhousie was keen on annexing the kingdom of Avadh. But the task presented certain difficulties. For one, the Nawabs of Avadh had been British allies since the Battle of Buxar, Moreover, they had been most obedient to the British over the years. The Nawab of Avadh had many heirs and could not therefore be covered by the Doctrine of Lapse. Some other pretext had to be found for depriving him of his dominions. Finally, Lord Dalhousie hit upon the idea of alleviating the plight of the people of Avadh. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was accused of having misgoverned his state and of refusing to introduce reforms. His state was therefore annexed in 1856.

Undoubtedly, the degeneration of the administration of Avadh was a painful reality for its people. The Nawabs of Avadh, like other princes of the day, were selfish rulers absorbed ia self-indulgence who cared little for good administration or for the welfare of the people. But the responsibility for this state of affairs was in part that of the British who had at least since 1801 controlled and indirectly governed Avadh. In reality, it was the immense potential of Avadh as a market for Manchester goods which excited Dalhousie's greed and aroused his 'philanthropic' feelings. And for similar reasons, to satisfy Britain's growing demand for raw cotton, Dalhousie took away the cotton-producing province of Berav from the Nizam in 1853.

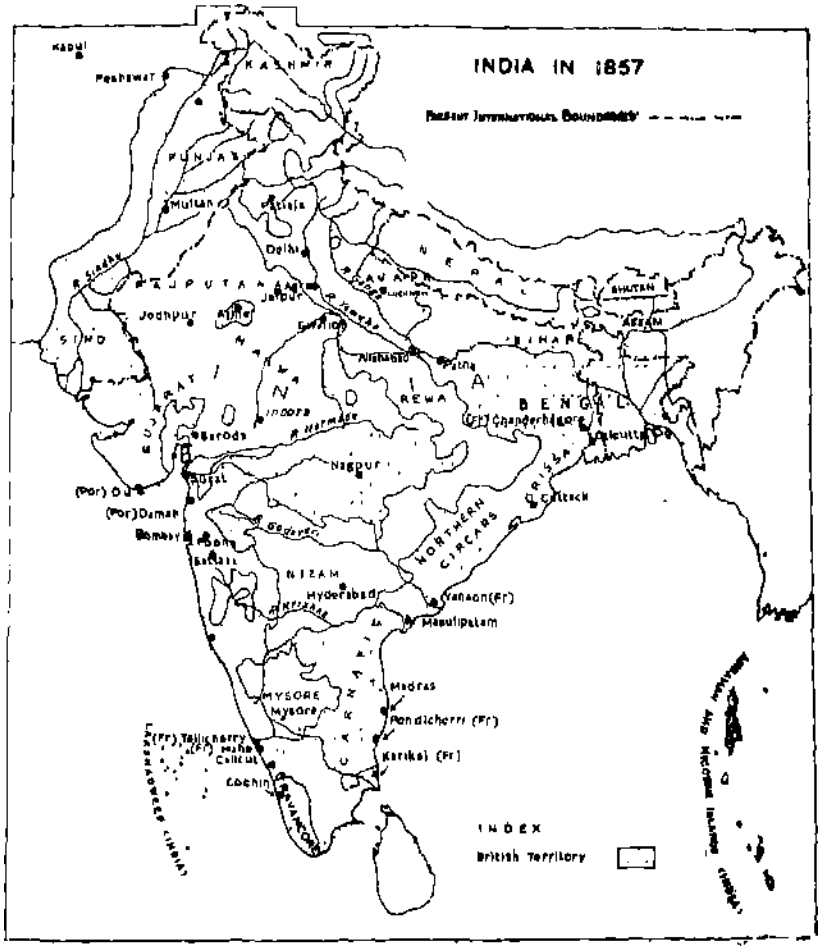
It needs to be clearly understood that the question of the maintenance or annexation of the natives states was of no great lelevance at this time. In fact, there were no Indian *States* in existence at that time, The protected native states were as much a part of the British Empiie as the territories ruled directly by the Company. If the form of British control over some of these states was changed, it was to suit British convenience. The interests of their people had httle to do with

the change.

EXERCISES

1. What were the causes of the war between the East India Company and Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah?
2. How was the Battle of Plassey fought? What were its consequences?
3. Discuss the clash between Mir Qasim and the East India Company.
4. Trace the course of British wars with Mysore.
5. Discuss the underlying factors and forces of Wellesley's policy of expansion. What were the basic methods he used to achieve his aims?
6. How did the British overpower the Maratha Confederacy[9]
7. Examine the policy of conquest and annexations followed by Dalhousie.
8. Write short notes on:

   (a) Mir Jafar, (b) Clive, (c) The Dual Government of Bengal, (d) Annexation of Sindh, (e) Annexation of Avadh.



Based upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor General dr India.

The territorial waters oflndia extend into the sea to a. distance oftwelvt nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line.