

# CONQUEST OF BENGAL AND ROBERT CLIVE

## SECTION I

### The Battle of Plassey, 1757

After the death of Aurangzeb (1707) there was confusion and disorder everywhere. Taking the advantage of such a state of affairs, Ali Vardi Khan,

the Mughal Governor of Bengal declared his independence in 1741 during the reign of Muhammad Shah Rangila. He ruled Bengal for some time with uncommon ability. In 1756, he, however, died and was succeeded by his grandson (daughter's son) Siraj-ud-Daulah, a youngman of 21. Soon after his succession to the throne he came into conflict with the English due to various causes.



*Siraj-ud-Daulah*

#### 1. Causes and Circumstances leading to the Battle of Plassey.

(1) *Fortifications.* In Bengal both the French and the English were strengthening their fortifications in the expectation that war would soon break out between them. When Siraj-ud-Daulah forbade them to do so, the French obeyed but the English blankly refused and sent an arrogant reply.

(2) *Misuse of Commercial Privileges.* In 1717, the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar, had granted a 'firman' to the East India Company to trade in Bengal duty-free in exchange for payment of Rs. 3,000 per year. But soon the English merchants had begun to misuse their trade privileges. In the name of

the English company they had themselves begun to trade duty-free and sometimes they even sold their passes to the natives to trade duty free. All this abuse of privileges meant a great loss to the state-treasury.

(3) *Instigating the Hindu Subjects.* There was a great discontent among the Hindus against the tyrannical Muslim rule and the English fully exploited this situation. They instigated the Hindus against the new Nawab and even gave them shelter. Once when a rich merchant of Bengal, Kishan Dass, got shelter with the English, they at once granted it and refused to surrender him when the Nawab demanded it. The Nawab was very furious at this.

(4) *Capture and Loss of Calcutta, 1756-57.* Thus enraged Siraj-ud-Daulah attacked and captured Calcutta (June 20, 1756). It is alleged by the English historians that the Nawab treated the English prisoners very badly. About 146 of them were thrown in a small room so much so that 123 of them died due to suffocation. But most of the modern historians believe this Black-hole Tragedy is a concocted story and nothing else. The whole thing was fabricated only to blame the new Nawab.

When the news of the capture of Calcutta reached Madras, Clive (the hero of the Arcot siege) and Admiral Watson were dispatched to recapture it. They at once appeared in Bengal and recaptured Calcutta (on January 2, 1757). As both the sides were not yet prepared to oppose each other openly, a treaty was signed between them (in February, 1757) by which both the sides offered to help each other. The trading privileges of the English were restored and they were allowed to fortify Calcutta.

(5) *Capture of Chandranagar, March, 1757.* Clive feared a coalition between the French and Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah. So in March, 1757, he attacked Chandranagar, the only French settlement in Bengal, and captured it easily.

(6) *Conspiracy against the Nawab.* In order to further weaken the position of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, Clive contacted his Commander-in-Chief Mir Jafar (also brother-in-law of the late Nawab Ali Vardi Khan) through one Amin Chand (a rich banker of Calcutta) and entered into a conspiracy with him for the overthrow of Siraj-ud-Daulah. When Amin Chand threatened to disclose all the secrets to the Nawab, he was calmed down by a false promise of thirty lakh of rupees.

(7) *Immediate Cause.* When all the conspiracy was got ready, Clive charged Siraj-ud-Daulah with violating the terms of treaty of January 9, 1757 and entering into conspiracy with the French. Without waiting for a reply, Clive marched towards Murshidabad. The Nawab, who was also ready with an army of 50,000, came out of his capital to give a battle to the English. Thus, both the armies confronted each other at Plassey, a town about twenty

miles north of Calcutta. At first, Clive was hesitant for an immediate action but a letter from the traitor, Mir Jafar assuring him of his help, prompted him to give a fight.

**2. The Battle of Plassey, 23rd June, 1757**—Thus was fought the famous Battle of Plassey on 23rd June, 1757, between the English on the one side and Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, on the other. The British artillery attacked the Indians but a large portion of the Nawab's army under Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh (another traitor) remained quite inactive. A few French officers and soldiers in the Nawab's army, however, offered a little resistance but soon it was over. When Siraj-ud-Daulah, who was barely a lad of 21, came to know that he had been completely betrayed by his own generals, he simply lost his nerves and fled. Thus, Battle of Plassey was lost. Only 23 men were killed on the English side and the Indian army lost 500. Siraj-ud-Daulah was soon caught and Mir Jafar's son Miran, got him murdered. Thus the English won the battle neither through their own valour nor by the superb generalship of Clive, but due to the treachery of Nawab's own officers.

**3. Results and Importance**—The Battle of Plassey ranks among the most decisive battles of the Indian history, not because any feats of valour were shown in the battle but because it produced far-reaching effects. (1) It made the *English masters of Bengal* from where they over-ran the whole of India within the next hundred years. In fact, it provided them with the key to the conquest of India. (2) *Mir Jafar was made the new Nawab of Bengal* in place of Siraj-ud-Daulah who was caught and murdered soon after the Battle of Plassey. (3) Mir Jafar got the Nawabship of Bengal through treachery and this very fact *adversely affected the administration* of that province. Loyalty disappeared on the soil and treachery prevailed everywhere. (4) The English got *huge sums* from the new Nawab. It is estimated that the English drained the Bengal treasury to the tune of some 1,73,96,761 rupees. Clive alone got about three lakhs of rupees. Apart from monetary gains the English Company got the territory of '*24 Parganas*'. It was mainly from the resources of Bengal that the English were able to *oust their European rivals, including the French, from India.*