

## Submission Guidelines

Collaborate with your team on your case study presentation. When it is complete, the team leader is responsible for submitting it in the Assignment Lab, or for making sure that another team member submits it. Please note that all learners should visit the assignment lab and provide feedback on at least 2 other team presentations, before the deadline.

As a reminder, your presentation should:

1. Be limited to no more than 750 words
2. Engage the materials in the case studies, lectures, and text.
3. You are free to import material from outside the course, but this is not necessary and may detract you and teammates from the task. Don't go overboard!

## Instructions

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Step 1: Read the case study introduction, background information, and the primary sources below.

Step 2: Work with your team to answer the challenge question for this case study.

Step 3: Go to the Assignment Lab to post your response, and to read and comment on other learners' submissions.

### Track C, Case study 4: The Battle of Plassey

#### STEP 1

#### Case Study Introduction

This case study looks at a turning point in the history of British imperialism on the Indian subcontinent. Political ambitions, divided loyalties, corruption, regime change, profiteering, and corporate governance informed the outcome of a battle that itself shaped the socio-political structure of India for the next hundred years and beyond. The battle that took place at Palashi (Anglicized to Plassey) near the Bhāgirathi-Hooghly or Hooghly River (called the Cassembuzer river by the British in reference to a local town, Cassim Bazar) in what is now West Bengal was a small fight for a big victory: it gave the British East India Company control of a region of India that gave it dominion over a large swathe of the Indian subcontinent and made global colonial power possible.

#### Background Information

From the mid-fifteenth century on, India was the site of unfolding battles for global power, with imperial entities including the Dutch, Danish, Portuguese, French, and of course, the English, hoping to capitalize on its riches.

Before 1750, England's bases in India were predominantly factories and trading posts owned and operated by the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies (the East India Company or EIC). The Royal Charter given to the EIC in 1600 included the right to maintain its own army. Over the course of the eighteenth century the EIC became increasingly entangled in local politics in India. It also built and operated a series of forts to entrench power and protect its assets (from the French, Dutch, and other mercantile powers rather than from the Indians themselves).

Around 1750, the competition between France and England ramped up. In 1750 Siraj al-Daulah became Nawab (ruler) of Bengal, and sided with the French, becoming increasingly hostile to British trading posts. The EIC felt a change of regime would better serve its political and financial goals, and transferred Robert Clive, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British army in India in December 1756, to Bengal to deal with the problem. Clive exploited discontent with the Nawab's ranks, identifying Mir Jafar, one of Siraj's army commanders, as a possible ally. He secretly offered to make Jafar the new nawab of Bengal if al-Daulah was defeated in battle.

Divisions among the Bengali rulers broke open – and gave the English their chance. The Battle of Plassey (23 June 23, 1757) gave Jafar his opportunity. The balance of forces favored al-Daulah (whose army, backed by the French, outnumbered the British significantly); Jafar was his Commander and occupied a powerful position in the battle. But the commander betrayed al-Daulah. By refusing to join the fighting with about a third of the Bengali forces, Jafar aided a British victory. While Bengal and French East India Company forces suffered significant casualties Clive lost fewer than fifty men.

The victory paved the way for British imperial ambitions in India. Jafar became the first dependent Nawab of Bengal, supported by the British East India Company and working in the interests of the British. (By 1758 the opportunistic Jafar was engaging in treaties with the Dutch, and by 1760 the British had withdrawn his military support and pushed him to abdicate. His successor proved less pliable, and Jafar was reinstated as Nawab in 1763. A massive famine in 1770 and years of misrule would soon cause a crisis for the EIC, which would be bailed out by the British government, with regulatory and other consequences). After Clive seized control of Bengal, the EIC used its private armies, composed primarily of sepoys (Indian soldiers), to control increasingly large areas of India. Britain would over the next century come to rule much of the Indian subcontinent.

A hundred years after Clive’s victory at the Battle of Plassey, simmering resentment at British claims on India and of Indians came to a boil in 1857, in what became known to the British as the Indian (or Sepoy) Mutiny and to the Indians as the First War of Independence. Thereafter, in June 1858, rule by the British East India Company was transferred to the Crown, with the proclamation of Queen Victoria Empress of India in 1876. The British ‘Raj’ ruled in India until 1947.

## **The Case Study**

This case study asks you to consider how one seemingly insignificant battle in a wider world war between empires in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia, a battle that shaped the modern world. How should we think about contingent events like the presence of a traitor in the ranks of the defending forces? A fascinating aspect of this battle, in which we see parallels with modern war, is that it was fought not between countries but by a mercantile interest sanctioned by an imperial government against what would become a colony of that government. Personal and corporate financial interest motivated both Robert Clive, the leader of the EIC army (which itself was comprised mostly of salaried Indian sepoys), and Mir Jafar, whose “treachery” determined the outcome of the battle and, ultimately, the global political positions of Britain and India for two hundred years.

## **Primary Sources**

Please refer to these primary sources, provided below, for this case study:

1. Letter from Robert Clive to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors of the British East India Company describing the Battle of Plassey, July 16, 1757
2. Robert Clive at Plassey
3. East India Company gross annual revenues, 1762–1859
4. Imperial Gazetteer Atlas of India 1765, 1805, 1837, 1857
5. Karl Marx, “The East India Company - Its History and Results,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 11, 1853

**Primary Source One: Letter from Robert Clive to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors of the British East India Company describing the Battle of Plassey, July 16, 1757**

I gave you an account of the taking of Chandernagore; the subject of this address is an event of much higher importance, no less than the entire overthrow of Nabob Suraj-u-Dowlah (Siraj al-Daulah), and the placing of Meer Jaffier (Mir Jafar) on the throne. I intimated, in my last, how dilatory Suraj-u-Dowlah appeared in fulfilling the articles of the treaty. This disposition not only continued but increased, and we discovered that he was designing our ruin, by a conjunction with the French. .... About this time some of his principal officers made overtures to us for dethroning him.

At the head of these was Meer Jaffier, then Bukhshee to the army, a man as generally esteemed as the other was detested. As we had reason to believe this disaffection pretty general, we soon entered into engagements with Meer Jaffier to put the crown on his head. All necessary preparations being completed with the utmost secrecy, the army, consisting of about one thousand Europeans, and two thousand sepoy (Indian soldiers serving under the British), with eight pieces of cannon, marched from Chandernagore on the 13th, and arrived on the 18th at Cutwa Fort, which was taken without opposition. The 22d, in the evening, we crossed the river, and landing on the island, marched straight for Plassey Grove, where we arrived by one in the morning. At daybreak, we discovered the Nabob's army moving towards us, consisting, as we since found, of about fifteen thousand horse, and thirty-five thousand foot, with upwards of forty pieces of cannon. They approached apace, and by six began to attack with a number of heavy cannon, supported by the whole army, and continued to play on us very briskly for several hours, during which our situation was of the utmost service to us, being lodged in a large grove, with good mud banks. To succeed in an attempt on their cannon was next to impossible, as they were planted in a manner round us, and at considerable distances from each other. We therefore remained quiet in our post, in expectation of a successful attack upon their camp at night. About noon, the enemy drew off their artillery, and retired to their camp, being the same which Roy Dullub had left but a few days before, and which he had fortified with a good ditch and breast-work. We immediately sent a detachment, accompanied with two field-pieces, to take possession of a tank with high banks, which was advanced about three hundred yards above our grove, and from whence the enemy had considerably annoyed us with some cannon managed by Frenchmen. This motion brought them out a second time; but on finding them make no great effort to dislodge us, we proceeded to take possession of one or two more eminences lying very near an angle of their camp, from whence, and an adjacent eminence in their possession, they kept a smart fire of musketry upon us. They made several attempts to bring out their cannon, but our advanced field-pieces played so warmly and so well upon them, that they were always drove back. Their horse exposing themselves a good deal on this occasion, many of them were killed, and among the rest four or five officers of the first distinction, by which the whole army being visibly dispirited and thrown into some confusion, we were encouraged to storm both the eminence and the angle of their camp, which were carried at the same instant, with little or no loss; though the latter was defended (exclusively of blacks) by forty French and two pieces of cannon; and the former by a large body of blacks, both foot and horse. On this, a general rout ensued, and we pursued the enemy six miles, passing upwards of forty pieces of cannon they had abandoned, with an infinite number of hackaries, and carriages filled with baggage of all kinds. Suraj-u-Dowlah escaped on a camel, and reaching Moorshedabad early next morning, despatched away what jewels and treasure he conveniently could, and he himself followed at midnight, with only two or three attendants.

It is computed there are killed of the enemy about five hundred. Our loss amounted to only twenty-two killed, and fifty wounded, and those chiefly blacks. During the warmest part of the action we observed a large body of troops hovering on our right, which proved to be our friends; but as they never discovered themselves by any signal whatsoever, we frequently fired on them to make them keep their distance. When the battle was over, they sent a congratulatory-message, and encamped in our neighbourhood that night. The next morning Meer Jaffier paid me a visit, and

expressed much gratitude at the service done him, assuring me, in the most solemn manner, that he would faithfully perform his engagement to the English. He then proceeded to the city, which he reached some hours before Suraj-uDowlah left it.

As, immediately on Suraj-u-Dowlah's flight, Meer Jaffier found himself in peaceable-possession. of the palace, I encamped without, to prevent the inhabitants from being plundered or disturbed; first at Maudipoor, and afterwards at the French factory at Sydabad. However, I sent forward Messrs. Watts and Walsh to inquire into the state of the treasury, and inform me what was transacted at the palace. By their representations I soon found it necessary for me to be present, on many accounts; accordingly, I entered the city on the 29th, with a guard of two hundred Europeans and three hundred sepoys, and took up my quarters in a spacious house and garden near the palace. The same evening I waited on Meer Jaffier, who refused seating himself on the musnud till placed on it by me; which done, he received homage as Nabob from all his courtiers. The next morning he returned my visit; when, after a good deal of discourse on the situation of his affairs, I recommended him to consult Jugget Seit on all occasions, who being a man of sense, and having by far the greatest property among all his subjects, would give him the best advice for settling the kingdom in peace and security.

Sir Robert Clive, July 16, 1757

Source: Robert Clive quoted in John Malcolm, *The Life of Robert, Lord Clive: Collected from the Family Papers Volume I*, (London: John Murray, 1836), 263-268.

#### **COMPASS POINTS**

- Observe how the Secret Committee of the EIC worked to interfere politically in the regions in which the EIC did business.
- Note Clive's specific interest and emphasis on the treasury and transactions at the palace: the English were in fact in control.
- Note the last paragraph: Mir Jafar is ostensibly in power but Clive still checks on him and moves to the city, as well as instructing him to take guidance from the wealthy Jugget Seit.

**Primary source Two: Robert Clive at Plassey**

**Image One: William Heath's 1821 painting, "Clive at Plassey, 1757"**



Source: National Army Museum, Study Collection, Accession Number: NAM. 1968-06-269-1. Public domain.

**Image Two: Robert Clive, 1st Baron Clive, meeting with Jafar after Plassey, 1757**

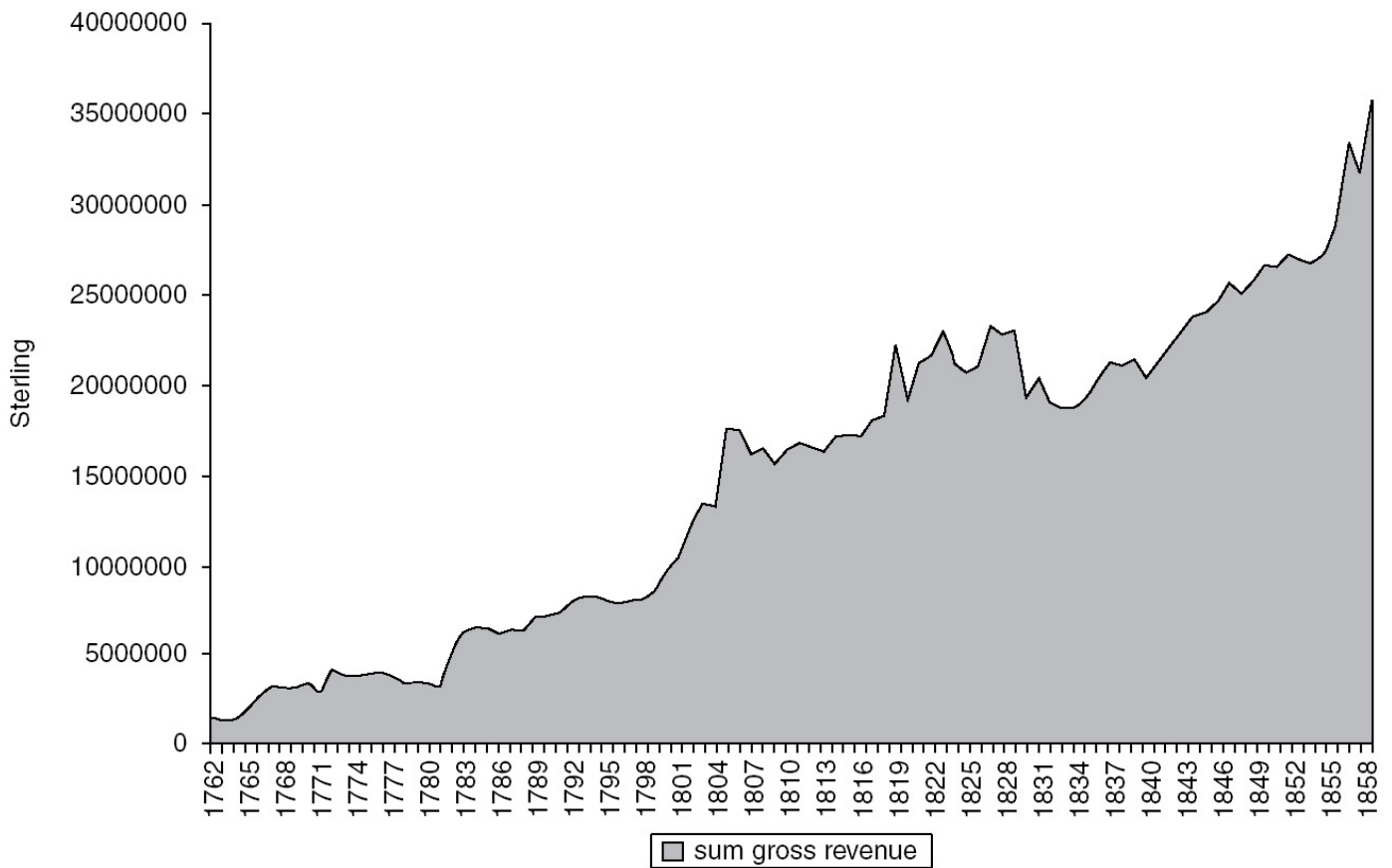


Source: Francis Hayman, *Robert Clive, 1st Baron Clive, meeting with Jafar after Plassey, 1757*, (c.1760). National Portrait Gallery, London. Public domain.

### COMPASS POINTS

- Look at how Clive is shown leading the charge in image one. Whose faces are clear and whose are blurred?
- Note how Clive's troops are depicted in image one and image two.
- Consider the demeanor of the men represented in Image Two.
- Look at the expressions on the face of the elephant and the horse.
- Note the contrasting clothing and the British Red Ensign, which is busy being hoisted. The exotic sumptuousness and wealth of India is represented in the clothing of Jafar and his men: Clive's company are well-organized, businesslike soldiers.

### Primary Source Three: East India Company gross annual revenues, 1762–1859

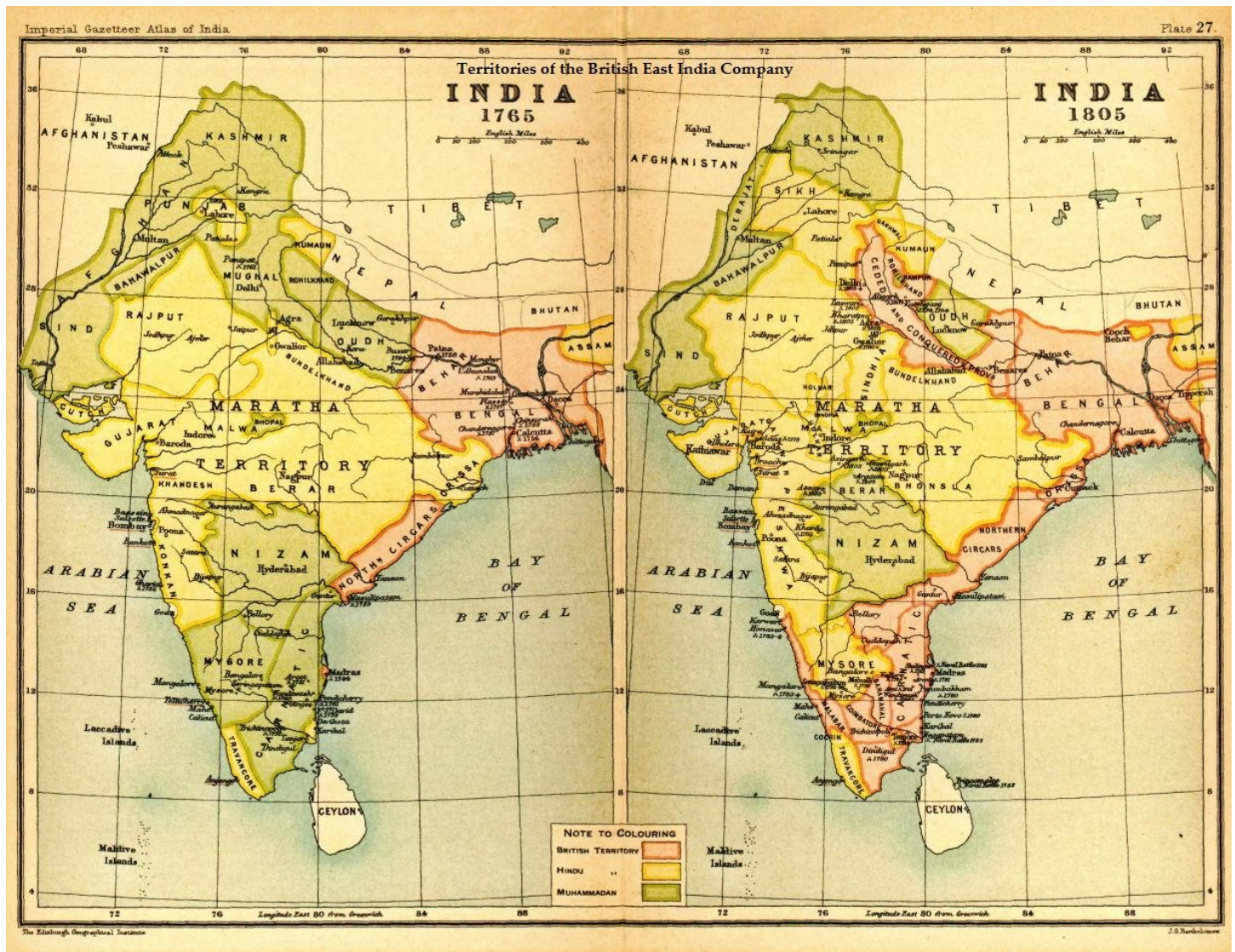


Source: John F. Richards, and Francisco Comín Comín. "Fiscal States in Mughal and British India, Figure 17.1" in *The Rise of Fiscal States: A Global History, 1500–1914*, edited by Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla and Patrick K. O'Brien, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 410–41.

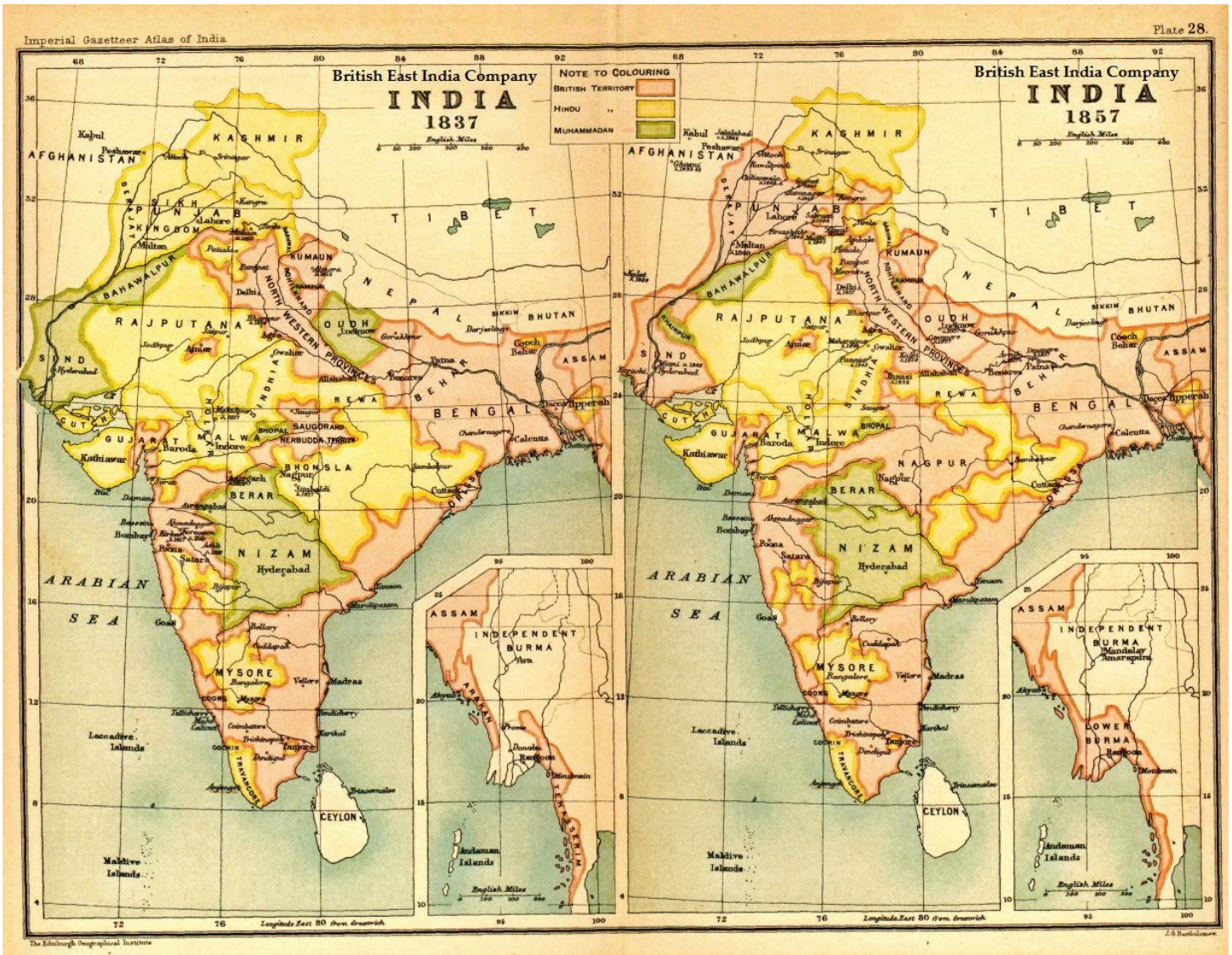
# Primary Source Four: Imperial Gazetteer Atlas of India 1765, 1805, 1837, 1857

## Background

The growth of the British Empire in India and British East India Company claims to Indian territories







Source: *Imperial Gazetteer Atlas of India*, Plate 27, “Territories of the British East India Company, India 1765, India 1805,” and Plate 28, “Territories of the British East India Company, India 1837, India 1857.” Edinburgh Geographical Institute. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Secretary of State for India in Council, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907). Public domain.

**COMPASS POINTS**

- Note the changing claims of territorial ownership from 1765 to 1857: think about how this may have affected (or not) the people who lived in those areas.
- The Battle of Plassey was fought in 1757. Look at the changes in territorial claims over the following century.

**Primary Source Five: Karl Marx, "The East India Company - Its History and Results," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 11, 1853**

We will now take a different view. The East India Company commenced by attempting merely to establish factories for their agents, and places of deposit for their goods. In order to protect them they erected several forts. Although they had, even as early as 1689, conceived the establishment of a dominion in India, and of making territorial revenue one of their sources of emolument, yet, down to 1744, they had acquired but a few unimportant districts around Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. The war which subsequently broke out in the Carnatic had the effect of rendering them after various struggles, virtual sovereigns of that part of India. Much more considerable results arose from the war in Bengal and the victories of Clive. These results were the real occupation of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the Eighteenth Century, and in the first years of the present one, there supervened the wars with Tippoo Saib, and in consequence of them a great advance of power, and an immense extension of the subsidiary system.<sup>2</sup> In the second decennium of the Nineteenth Century the first convenient frontier, that of India within the desert, had at length been conquered. It was not till then that the British Empire in the East reached those parts of Asia, which had been, at all times, the seat of every great central power in India. But the most vulnerable point of the Empire, from which it had been overrun as often as old conquerors were expelled by new ones, the barriers of the Western frontier, were not in the hands of the British. During the period from 1838 to 1849, in the Sikh and Afghan wars, British rule subjected to definitive possession the ethnographical, political, and military frontiers of the East Indian Continent, by the compulsory annexation of the Punjab and of Scinde. These were possessions indispensable to repulse any invading force issuing from Central Asia, and indispensable against Russia advancing to the frontiers of Persia. During this last decennium there have been added to the British Indian territory 167,000 square miles, with a population of 8,572,630 souls. As to the interior, all the native States now became surrounded by British possessions, subjected to British *suzeraineté* under various forms, and cut off from the sea-coast, with the sole exception of Gujerat and Scinde. As to its exterior, India was now finished. It is only since 1849, that the one great Anglo-Indian Empire has existed.

Thus the British Government has been fighting, under the Company's name, for two centuries, till at last the natural limits of India were reached. We understand now, why during all this time all parties in England have connived in silence, even those which had resolved to become the loudest with their hypocritical peace-cant, after the *arrondissement* of the one Indian Empire should have been completed. Firstly, of course, they had to get it, in order to subject it afterward to their sharp philanthropy.

Notes (from Footnotes from *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 12)

1. Marx lists a number of wars of conquest waged by the British East India Company. The war in the Carnatic (a principality in South-Eastern India) lasted at intervals from 1746 to 1763. The warring sides—the British and French East India Companies—sought to subjugate the Carnatic under the guise of supporting different local pretenders to the principality. The British, who in January 1761 took possession of Pondicherry, the principal French bastion in the south, ultimately won the day.  
In 1756, in an effort to avert a British invasion, the Nawab of Bengal started a war, seizing Calcutta, the British base in North-Eastern India. But the armed forces of the British East India Company under Robert Clive's command soon recaptured the city, demolished the Bengal fortifications of the French, who supported the Nawab, and defeated him at Plassey on June 23, 1757. In 1763 they crushed the uprising that broke out in Bengal against British rule. Along with Bengal, the British took possession of Bihar, a region on the Ganges, which was under the rule of the Nawab of Bengal. In 1803, the British completed the conquest of several feudal principalities of Orissa situated south of Bengal.
2. In 1790-92 and 1799 the British East India Company waged wars with Mysore, an independent feudal state in South India. Its ruler Tippoo Saib had taken part in previous Mysore campaigns against the British and was a sworn enemy of the British colonialists. In the first of these wars Mysore lost half of its dominions, which were seized by the East India Company and its allied feudal princes. The second war ended with the total defeat and the death of Tippoo. Mysore became a vassal principality.  
The *subsidiary system* or the system of so-called subsidiary agreements—a method of turning the potentates of Indian principalities into vassals of the East India Company. Most widespread were agreements under which the princes had to maintain (subsidise) the Company's troops stationed on their territory and agreements which saddled the princes with loans on exorbitant terms. Failure to fulfil them resulted in the confiscation of their possessions.

Source: Karl Marx, "The East India Company — Its History and Results," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 11, 1853. Article written on June 24, 1853. In Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected works. Volume 12*, ed. Jack Cohen, (London: Lawrence and Wishart), 1979.

### **COMPASS POINTS**

- Karl Marx was a prolific writer, best known for his political and economic theories. Note how he emphasizes that the British government was using the EIC at Plassey to fight in its name.
- Think about why this particular instance would have been important to Marx and his concerns with capital and politics.

### **Case study challenge question**

*Please answer the following question (750-word response):*

How did the Battle of Plassey bring together State and mercantile interests in the conquest of India by Britain?