



British Relations with Principal Indian States – Bengal, Oudh, Hyderabad, Mysore, Carnatic and Punjab

The establishment of British supremacy in India was marked by a series of strategic alliances, wars, annexations, and diplomatic manipulations involving various regional powers. The major Indian states that encountered British expansionist policies included Bengal, Oudh (Awadh), Hyderabad, Mysore, Carnatic, and Punjab. These interactions laid the foundation for British paramountcy in India.

1. Bengal

Initial Contact and Ascendancy:

- Bengal was the richest province under the Mughal Empire, attracting the commercial interests of the British East India Company.
- Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah's opposition to British fortification and misuse of trade privileges led to the **Battle of Plassey (1757)**, where he was defeated by Robert Clive with the aid of Mir Jafar's betrayal.
- This marked the beginning of British political power in India.

Consolidation of Power:

- The Battle of Buxar (1764) against Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daulah of Oudh, and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II consolidated British control.
- In 1765, the Company received **Diwani rights (revenue collection)** of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa from Shah Alam II.

Significance:



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- Bengal served as the base for British territorial expansion and revenue generation.
 - It exposed the exploitative economic practices of the Company that led to famines and administrative collapse.
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2. Oudh (Awadh)

Strategic Buffer State:

- Oudh was viewed as a buffer between British-controlled territories and the Maratha/Afghan powers.

Diplomatic Manipulation:

- After the Battle of Buxar, Shuja-ud-Daulah was reinstated as Nawab, but became a British ally.
- Successive Nawabs were reduced to dependence, especially under the Subsidiary Alliance system.

Annexation:

- The British deposed Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in 1856, citing **misgovernance**, a policy justified under the **Doctrine of Lapse** and **Dalhousie's annexation policy**.
 - The annexation created deep resentment and contributed to the 1857 Revolt.
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3. Hyderabad

First Indian State to Sign Subsidiary Alliance:

- Nizam Ali Khan of Hyderabad was among the first to seek British assistance against the Marathas and Tipu Sultan.
- In 1798, Lord Wellesley compelled him to sign the **Subsidiary Alliance**, relinquishing military independence.

British Control:

- British stationed troops in Hyderabad, effectively controlling foreign and defense affairs.
- Despite formal sovereignty, the Nizam remained under British influence till independence.

Significance:

- Set the precedent for indirect rule via treaty obligations and internal interference.
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4. Mysore

Resistance under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan:

- Mysore under **Haidar Ali** and later **Tipu Sultan** posed a significant military challenge.
- Four Anglo-Mysore Wars were fought (1767-1799).

Anglo-Mysore Wars:



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1. **First (1767-1769)** – Ended in Treaty of Madras.
2. **Second (1780-1784)** – Tipu emerged strong; Treaty of Mangalore ensured return of conquered territories.
3. **Third (1790-1792)** – British victory; Treaty of Seringapatam forced heavy indemnity and cession of territory.
4. **Fourth (1799)** – Tipu Sultan died defending Srirangapatna; Mysore fell to British.

Aftermath:

- A minor Wodeyar prince was restored under British control.
 - Mysore became a princely state under indirect British rule.
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5. Carnatic

Battleground of European Rivalry:

- The Carnatic was the stage for Anglo-French rivalry in South India, especially during the **Carnatic Wars (1746-1763)**.

Carnatic Wars:

- These wars were primarily fought between the French (under Dupleix) and the British (under Clive and others), with local rulers drawn in.
- By the end of the **Third Carnatic War (1763)**, the British had ousted the French from political influence in South India.



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Control Over Carnatic:

- British began controlling the Nawabs of Carnatic, reducing them to mere puppets.
 - The territory was eventually absorbed into Madras Presidency in 1801 after the death of the Nawab.
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6. Punjab

Rise of the Sikh Empire:

- Under **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**, Punjab emerged as a powerful and unified state with a strong military.
- Ranjit Singh maintained a neutral stance, signing the **Treaty of Amritsar (1809)** with the British, recognizing the Sutlej as the boundary.

Post-Ranjit Singh Period:

- After his death in 1839, succession struggles and internal instability weakened the state.
- British fought two **Anglo-Sikh Wars**:
 - **First War (1845-1846)** – Ended with the Treaty of Lahore; British gained Jullundur Doab and influence over Lahore.
 - **Second War (1848-1849)** – Resulted in the full annexation of Punjab in 1849.

Significance:

- Punjab became a key province for the British, contributing significantly to the military and



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administrative apparatus.

Conclusion

The British used a mix of **military force, treaties, subsidiary alliances**, and **doctrines like lapse and misgovernance** to subjugate Indian states. These encounters with states like Bengal, Oudh, Hyderabad, Mysore, Carnatic, and Punjab illustrate the gradual erosion of indigenous sovereignty and the imposition of colonial hegemony. The varied responses—ranging from resistance (Mysore, Punjab) to reluctant cooperation (Hyderabad, Oudh)—shaped the colonial political landscape leading up to the Revolt of 1857 and beyond.
