



Trademark IAS

Battle of Plassey

Pre-Plassey

- ▶ Dalrymple writes that the ‘news of the fall of Kasimbazar reached Madras on 14 July 1756’.
- ▶ And only on 16 August, Siraj-ud-daula’s attack on Fort William reached Madras.
- ▶ Incidentally, Robert Clive and his 3 regiments of Royal artillery had just arrived at Fort St David aka Cuddalore, along with the warships led by Admiral Watson.
- ▶ The force however, was to take on the French.
- ▶ However, providence would have different plans for them

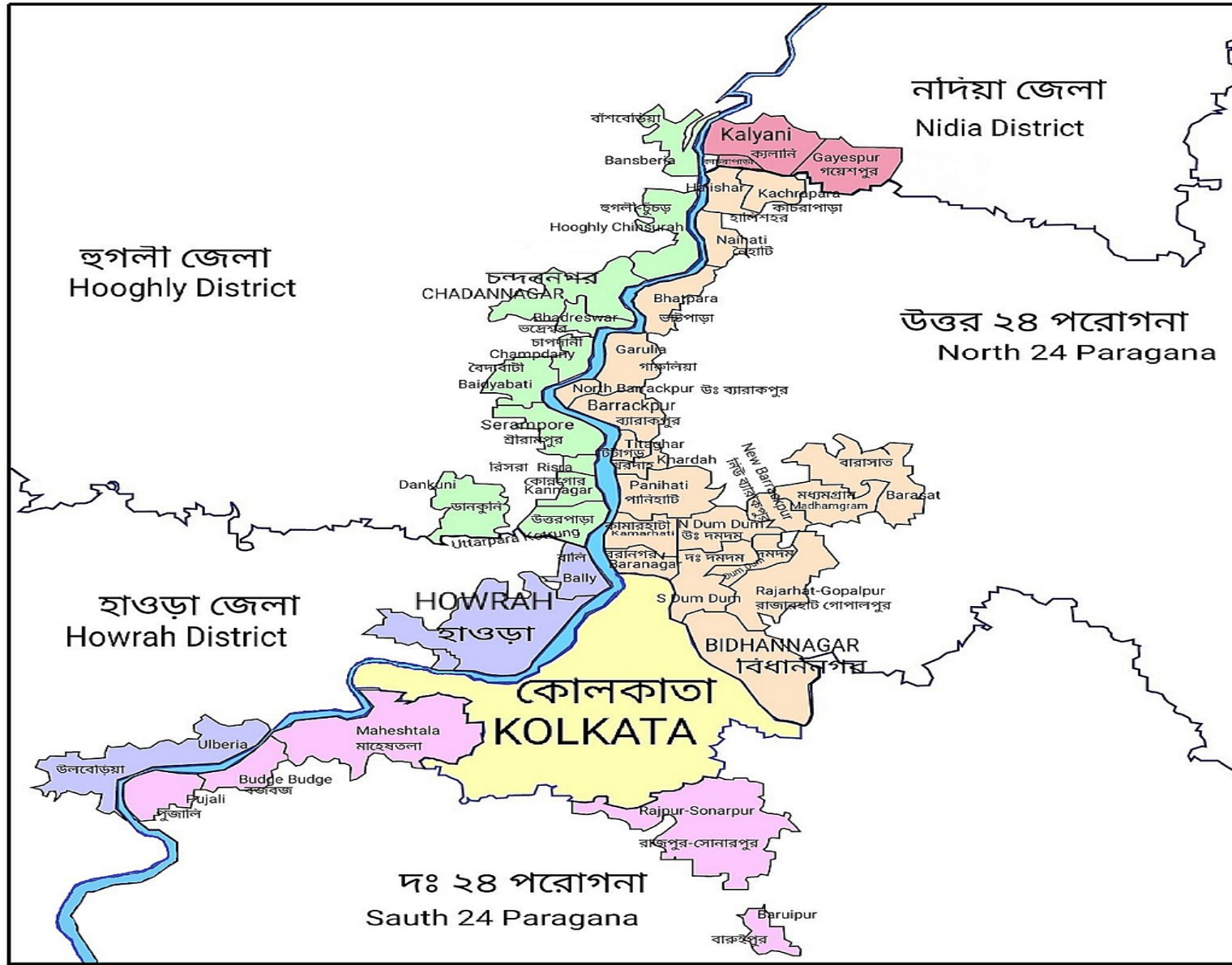
Pre-Plassey

- ▶ Watson was least interested in moving towards Bengal and defend the interests of the EIC because he was representing the Crown directly.
- ▶ However, Clive prevailed upon the Council members of the EIC at Madras and finally succeeded in persuading Watson to accompany him to Bengal.
- ▶ Clive was a far sighted individual.
- ▶ He knew that Bengal was a repository of wealth which if conquered could bail him out of his financial difficulties he was facing at that juncture due to his investments in EIC stocks.

Pre-Plassey

- ▶ It took almost two months for the EIC to get ready for the invasion of Bengal.
- ▶ Finally, as Dalrymple writes, on 13 October 1756, an expeditionary force of '785 European troops, 300 marines and 940 Indian sepoys' set sail towards Bengal.
- ▶ By the middle of December 1756, one of the ships Kent, anchored at Fulta - where the English survivors of the Calcutta fiasco had taken shelter.
- ▶ In fact, by then, almost 50 per cent of the original survivors had died of fever.





Pre-Plassey : Battle of Budge Budge

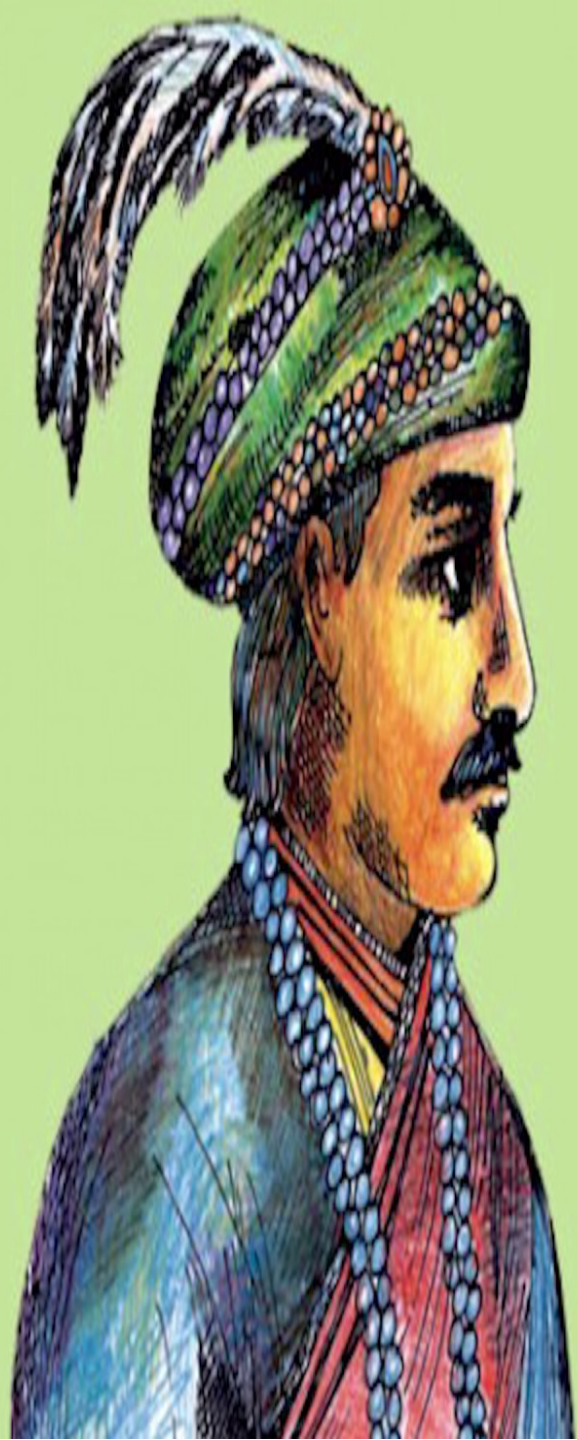
- ▶ Clive sent an ultimatum to Manikchand.
- ▶ However, the latter did not pay any heed to it.
- ▶ On 27 December 1756, Clive decided to move upriver.
- ▶ Near the Fort of Budge Budge, Manikchand in a surprise move, attacked Clive's entourage.
- ▶ Clive was about to order a retreat since he was taken aback.
- ▶ However, field artillery and rapid firing of the Brown Bess muskets saved the day for Clive.
- ▶ Manikchand was shot through the turban.

Pre-Plassey : Battle of Hughli

- ▶ On 02 January 1757, Clive and Watson's forces reached Fort William, Calcutta.
- ▶ Manikchand relinquished his position after a brief skirmish.
- ▶ On 03 January 1757, Clive declared war on Siraj in the name of EIC.
- ▶ Watson too did the same in the name of the Crown.
- ▶ On 9 January 1757, Clive and Watson proceeded to attack Hughli as a matter of revenge against Calcutta.
- ▶ They slaughtered the sleeping garrison inside the Hughli fort.

Pre-Plassey : Battle of Calcutta

- ▶ However, Siraj was not to give up.
- ▶ He gathered an army of 60,000 and attacked Calcutta once more.
- ▶ Though Clive wanted to settle the issue with Siraj through discussions, the latter treated Clive's negotiators with utter disregard and contempt.
- ▶ As a reaction, Clive decided to retaliate with a night attack against Siraj.
- ▶ Clive took about 500 sailors from Watson in order to carry the ammunition and draw the artillery guns.
- ▶ About 4 am on the 5th of February 1757, Clive and his troops were marching towards Siraj's camp.



Pre-Plassey : Battle of Calcutta

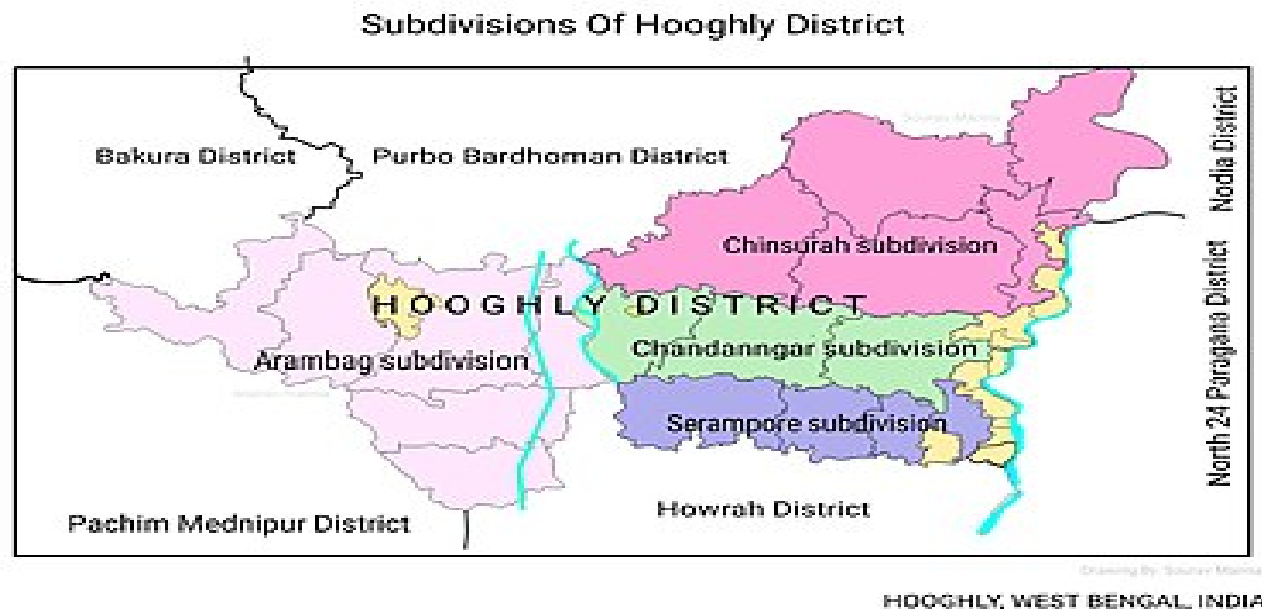
- ▶ Clive's men reached the centre of Siraj's camp after a brief resistance by the latter's forces.
- ▶ By 11 am on that day, Clive had lost about 150 soldiers. He returned to Fort William. Since there was thick fog on that day Clive's forces were unsure of hitting their target.
- ▶ Siraj on the other hand, lost about 2,000 men.
- ▶ Siraj's closest aide and commander Dost Mohammad Khan was disabled in the battle.
- ▶ In fact, Clive too had lost his secretary in the fight.
- ▶ Siraj nonetheless was petrified and retreated 10 miles.

Pre-Plassey : Battle of Calcutta

- ▶ On 06 February, Siraj sent an ambassador to Clive for drafting a peace proposal.
- ▶ On 09 February 1757, Treaty of Alinagar was signed. According to it:
 1. All trade privileges of EIC were restored
 2. All EIC goods were exempted of taxes
 3. EIC was allowed to establish a mint
 4. EIC was allowed to fortify
 5. Roger Drake was removed

Pre-Plassey : Battle of Chandernagore

- ▶ On 23 February 1757, Clive wrote to his father:
- ▶ “I expect to return very shortly to the coast [Madras], as all is over here.”
- ▶ However, the 7 years’ war erupted and under the command of EIC directors from London, Watson declared war against the French in Bengal.
- ▶ As fallout, Watson planned to attack Chandernagore.





- ▶ **Charles Watson**, reporting directly to the British Crown and in-charge of the English Navy in India during the 7 years' war

Pre-Plassey : Battle of Chandernagore

- ▶ On 8 March 1757, Clive began his march towards Chandernagore with an army of 2,700.
- ▶ Siraj did not object, with the tacit assurance of the EIC that they will help him if Ahmad Shah Abdali attacks Bengal.
- ▶ The French had 700 soldiers to defend their Fort d'Orleans.
- ▶ In a single day's fighting, the French lost about 200 men killed or wounded.
- ▶ The Director of the French factory at Kasimbazar, Jean Law wrote:
“with the fall of Chandernagore, the gate to the entire country was thrown open to the English.”

Pre-Plassey : Siraj & Mir Jafar

- ▶ Meanwhile, Siraj remained indecisive.
- ▶ He sent a relief force towards Chandernagore , then withdrew it.
- ▶ On 24 March, Siraj sent a gift of 2 leopards to Clive and congratulated him of his victory.
- ▶ Siraj at the other end had alienated many of Alivardi's old military commanders.
- ▶ Most disgruntled was Mir Jafar Ali Khan, who was sidelined by Siraj even after being instrumental in the victory over the EIC in Caclutta in 1756.
- ▶ Mir Jafar was a shia muslim belonging to the town of Najaf in Iraq.
- ▶ He was unhappy because instead of him, the governorship of Calcutta was granted to Manikchand.



Syed Reza
Ali Meerza,
grandson of
Nawab of
Murshidabad

Mir Jafar

- ▶ Mir Jafar planned to offer the EIC a sum of Rs 2.5 crores if the EIC in turn helps him to remove the Nawab.
- ▶ Analysis :

The interesting aspect here is not why Mir Jafar, Jagat Seth et al conspired against Siraj, who was by no means a worthy candidate for being the Subahdar of Mughal Bengal, but why did they seek the help of Clive to dislodge Siraj which they could have done themselves.

Probably, they were quite awestruck at the military prowess of the EIC and the leadership ability of Clive that they were unsure if they attacked Siraj, then EIC might come to his rescue.

Plassey

- ▶ On 01 May 1757, a Secret Committee made up of senior EIC officials in Bengal formally resolved to join the conspiracy.
- ▶ However, the sum assured was raised to 3 million pound sterling, the entire annual revenue of Bengal.
- ▶ In addition, Rs 1,10,000 a month were to be given for the payment of troops of EIC.
- ▶ Furthermore, the EIC was to get the zamindari rights near Calcutta.
- ▶ Moreover, by 19 May 1757, Mir Jafar agreed to pay the EIC a sum of 1 million pound sterling as compensation for the loss of Calcutta and another 0.5 million pound sterling as wergild to the European inhabitants.

Plassey

- ▶ Finally, on 13 June, Clive sent an ultimatum to Siraj-ud-Daula accusing him of breaking the Treaty of Alinagar.
- ▶ On the same day, Clive along with an army of 2,200 Telinga sepoys, 800 Europeans and 8 cannons, marched towards Murshidabad.
- ▶ But he did not receive any clear signals nor information of intent from Mir Jafar.
- ▶ Clive kept on sending missives to Mir Jafar elaborating his intent and expectatons.
- ▶ But Jafar remained unusually silent.
- ▶ In one of the letters, Clive wrote:

“Come over to me at Plassey or any other place you judge proper with what force you have - even a thousand horse will be sufficient, and I’ll engage to march immediately with you to Murshidabad. I prefer conquering by open force.”

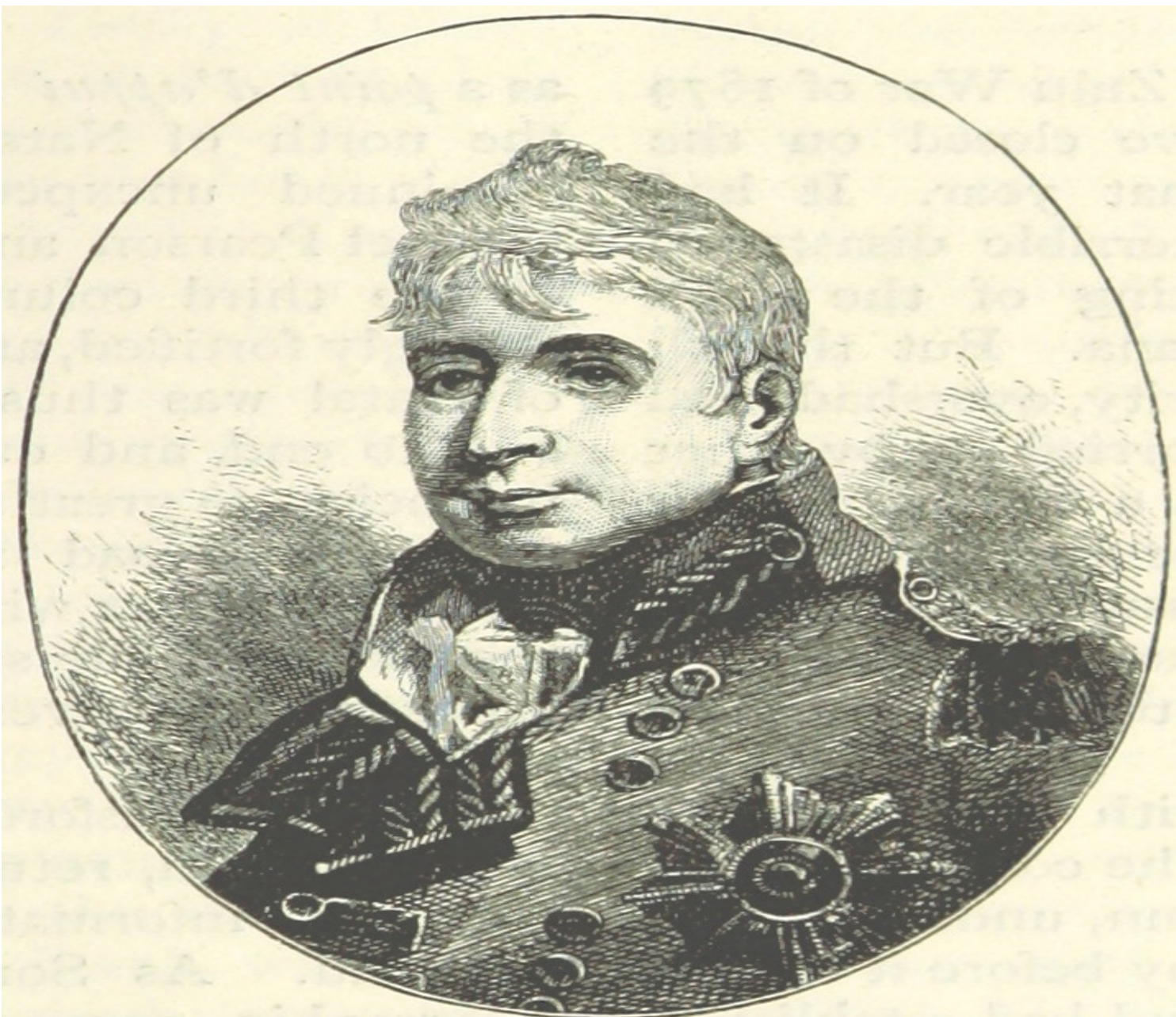
Plassey

► Analysis

1. This definitely showed the character of Clive vis-à-vis the treacherous Jafar Ali Khan and his cohorts.
2. At least Clive true to his spirit and character, wished to fight Siraj.
3. On the contrary, Mir Jafar and his co-conspirators were simple opportunists.
4. Perhaps, they were outrageously rational beings, trying to exact maximum benefit out of the money offered to the EIC.
5. They possibly had in their mind the simple arithmetic that in return to the hefty sum dished out to Clive and his men, they expected the entire fight to be done by the EIC and minimum harm was to be inflicted on the native troops of Jafar and co.

Plassey

- ▶ On 21 June 1757, Clive called a Council of War to decide whether to continue with the campaign as he was unsure of the intent of Mir Jafar and his lackeys.
- ▶ By then, Siraj's army of 50,000 had reached the mango plantations of Palashi (Plassey).
- ▶ And without Mir Jafar's express commitment, this decision was very crucial for Clive.
- ▶ 9 of Clive's senior officers voted.
- ▶ 7 of them were against immediate military action and only 2 were in favour.
- ▶ Out of 8 junior officers, 5 were in favour.
- ▶ So, total 7 were in favour of taking on Siraj, whereas the majority wanted to back out.
- ▶ Amongst the junior ranks, Eyre Coote was most vocal as he reasoned that any delay might dampen the spirits of the soldiers.



SIR EYRE COOTE.



Plassey

- ▶ At the same time, Clive received a letter from Jafar [Moxham, p 222] which read thus:

“When you come near, I shall be able to join you....When I am arrived near the army, I will send you privately all the intelligence....”

- ▶ Clive’s confidence was bolstered and he immediately proceeded towards Palashi and reached at 1 AM on 22 June 1757.
- ▶ They positioned themselves in a large mango orchard, surrounded by a ditch and a high bank.
- ▶ Clive occupied a hunting lodge between the orchard and the Bhagirathi river.

BATTLE OF PLASSEY

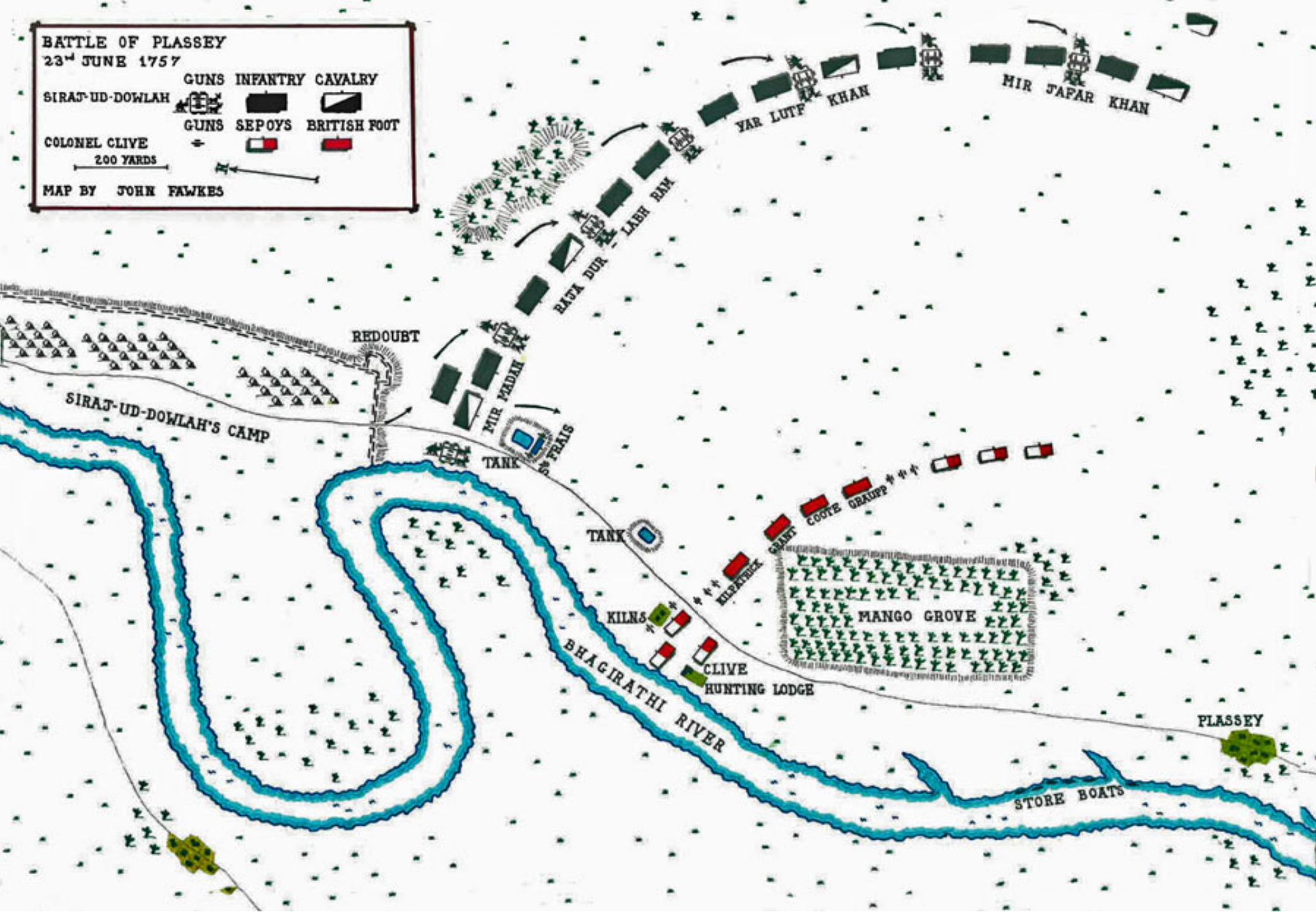
23rd JUNE 1757

SIRAJ-UD-DOWLAH GUNS INFANTRY CAVALRY

COLONEL CLIVE GUNS SEPOYS BRITISH FOOT

200 YARDS

MAP BY JOHN FAWKES



Plassey : Armed forces

- ▶ Robert Orme has estimated that Siraj's army numbered about 35 to 40,000 infantry armed mainly with matchlock guns, swords, pikes, rockets/bans.
- ▶ There were about 18,000 Pathan cavalry.
- ▶ Also, artillery consisted of 50 cannons, mostly 24 & 32 pounder field guns.
- ▶ These guns, along with their gunners were carried on six feet high platforms being driven by a yoke of 40-50 oxen and at times pushed by elephants from behind when they were stuck.
- ▶ A small artillery detachment under the command of St Frais (Sinfray) and 50 French soldiers took position beside the water tank near the mango grove.

Plassey : The day of the Battle

- ▶ At 8 am on the 23rd of June 1757, Siraj's artillery started firing at the EIC.
- ▶ In fact, it was St Frais who opened up the fire.
- ▶ In 30 min, Clive lost 10 Europeans and 20 sepoys.
- ▶ Clive ordered his troops to take defensive positions.
- ▶ Siraj's soldiers thought the EIC men were retreating and hence kept on firing at them by moving up their heavy guns.
- ▶ But the shots missed the EIC, rather hit the trees.
- ▶ Interestingly, was heard occasional explosions of ammunition amongst Siraj's artillery wing.

Plassey : The day of the Battle

- ▶ Moreover, casualties went down considerably for Clive since they took positions behind the embankments.
- ▶ The battle reached some sort of a stalemate.
- ▶ Clive called a meeting of his staff at around 11 AM.
- ▶ It was decided to continue with the artillery firing till the evening and attempt to attack Siraj's camp at midnight.

Plassey : The day of the Battle

- ▶ However, the crucial turn around for Clive took place at around 12 hrs with the onset of the monsoon rains.
- ▶ Siraj's artillery wing was so callous that they did not bother to bring adequate covers for the ammunition.
- ▶ At the other end, Clive's forces were disciplined enough to cover their guns and ammunition with tarpaulin.



Plassey : Mir Madan dies

- ▶ Without critical thought, Siraj's brave cavalry commander Mir Madan advanced towards the Company forces, assuming that his enemy's guns were also disabled like his, due to the downpour.
- ▶ Soon he would be surprised to find a cannon ball hit his stomach and his elite 5,000 Afghan cavalry face a barrage of cannon balls and array of bullets from the musket wielding infantry of the Company.
- ▶ Mir Madan was killed. Siraj was unnerved.



Plassey : Flight of the Pigeons

- ▶ Conspirators Mir Jafar, Raja Rai Durlabh and Yar Lutf Khan, who among themselves were marshalling troops to the tune of 35,000 and could have decided the fate of the war, counselled Siraj to withdraw from the battlefield by playing on his fears of the English.
- ▶ They goaded Siraj to quit and the latter escaped on a camel reached Murshidabad early next morning.
- ▶ The three traitorous generals then started retreating from the battlefield.
- ▶ Such a sight created confusion amongst the remaining rank and file of Siraj's forces

Plassey : The Lost Battle

- ▶ Mohan Lal and St Frais continued the fight, but it was already a lost battle.
- ▶ Without seeking formal approval of Clive, his junior commander Kilpatrick marched towards Siraj's remaining forces.
- ▶ Though Clive was angry initially, but later on after seeing the situation, admired Kilpatrick's presence of mind.
- ▶ Mohan Lal and St Frais fought valiantly till 5 pm and thereafter left Palashi [p 171, Sengupta]
- ▶ BY that time, the EIC were in possession of the whole entrenchment of the Nawab's forces and his camp.
- ▶ With 10 European soldiers and 20 Indian sepoy's killed, Palashi was won by the EIC.
- ▶ The victory made the EIC virtual masters of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha [p 67, Malleson]



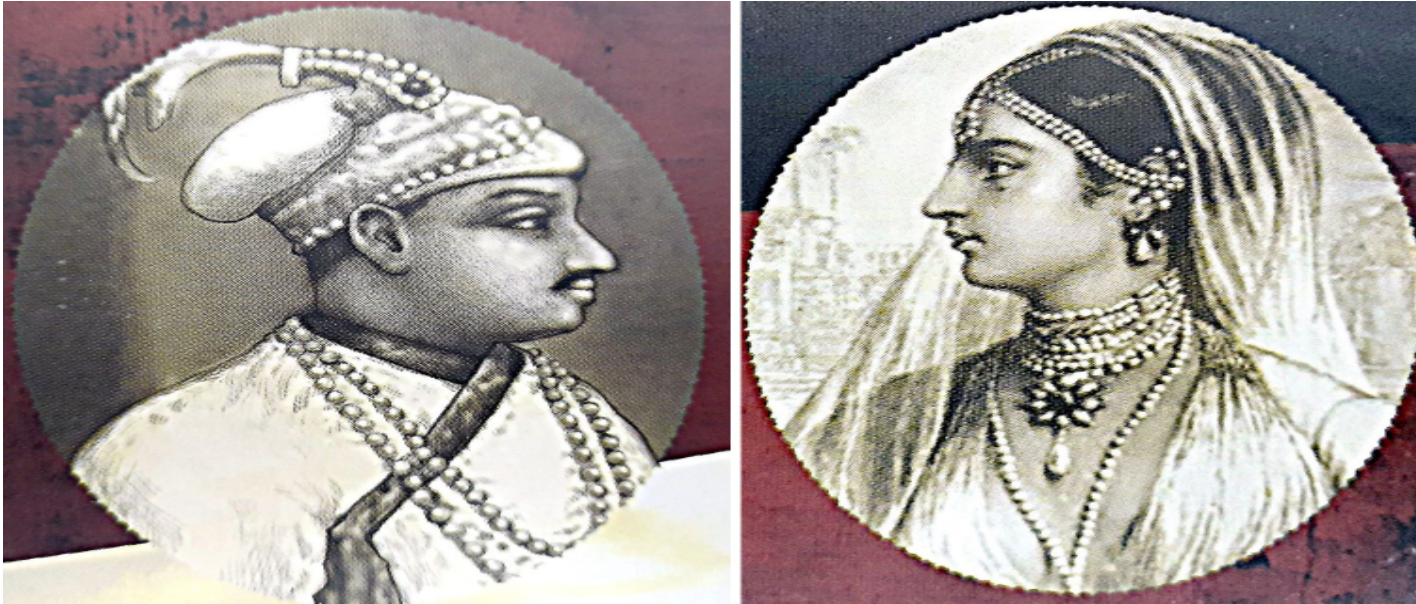
Post-Plassey

- ▶ The Jagat Seths warned Clive not to enter Murshidabad on 27th June [p 130, Dalrymple] since an attempt to assassinate was being planned.
- ▶ Finally, on 29th June, Mir Jafar and 500 guards escorted Clive into Murshidabad.
- ▶ Clive saluted Jafar and confirmed that the EIC would keep their activities restricted to trade and not interfere with the affairs of administration [p 130, Dalrymple].

Post-Plassey

- ▶ Siraj, on the other hand, on the 23rd June late night, left Murshidabad with his favourite consort Lutf-un-Nissa and with as many jewels and gold as possible.
- ▶ Unfortunately, when his entourage was preparing food opposite to Rajmahal as they were fasting for over two days, a fakir named Shah Dana passed on the information to Mir Qasim's men [p 132, Dalrymple]

Post-Plassey : Siraj murdered



- ▶ Mir Qasim imprisoned Siraj and carried him to Murshidabad.
- ▶ One Mahmady Beg (at the behest of Mir Jafar's son Miran) accepted the commission to kill Siraj [p 132, Dalrymple, p 172 Nitish Sengupta].
- ▶ He was butchered to death and his mangled carcass was put together and was carried throughout Murshidabad, on the back of an elephant.

Post-Plassey

► Analysis:

- This was possibly done by Miran not just as a matter of cruelty, which it of course was, but more so to tell the people of Murshidabad who the real power centre was - that is, Mir Jafar and his son.
- They were now the Nawabs and any allegiance to Siraj would be treated in a similar manner. This was a clear signal.

A twenty-five year old Nawab was brutally hacked to death.

Naturally, Siraj was later glorified by poet Nabin Chandra Sen, dramatists like Girish Ghosh and Sachin Sengupta, and historians like Akshoy Kumar Maitra during the days of the freedom movement, writes Nitish Sengupta [p 164, Sengupta].

Post-Plassey : Miran

- ▶ But Miran's cruelties knew no bounds.
- ▶ All the women of the house of Alivardi Khan were forcibly drowned in the middle of the Hooghly river.
- ▶ While, the remaining ladies were poisoned.
- ▶ Crossing all limits of decency, both Miran as well as Mir Jafar asked for the hand of Lutf-un-Nissa.

- ▶ She declined, and replied:
"...having ridden an elephant before, I cannot now agree to ride an ass."

Post-Plassey : the Loot

- ▶ The same day when Siraj's body parts were being showcased across Murshidabad, Clive received (by present standards) around 232 million pounds [p 133, Dalrymple].
- ▶ Incidentally, barely 3 months later, in September 1757, Clive had to return to Murshidabad from Calcutta in order to quell a growing violence and unrest.
- ▶ Mir Jafar's soldiers were not being paid properly and were openly mutinous.
- ▶ Dalrymple tells us that gradually there was a 'drift of troopers, merchants, bankers and civil servants' from the Bengal Nawab to the EIC [p 135, Anarchy]

Post-Plassey

- ▶ Moreover, with the turn of a year, Mir Jafar, notes Dalrymple, was changed man due to laziness and addiction to opium.

Clive wrote to London:

- ▶ That Jafar had now become “haughty, avaricious, abusive.....and this behavior has alienated the hearts of his subjects.”

[p 138, Anarchy]

- ▶ On 05 February 1760, Clive and his wife Margaret set sail to London.
- ▶ The Whig politician Horace Walpole wrote in his diary:

“The cost of living rose immediately with the coming of Clive.”

Post-Plassey : Financial Crisis

- ▶ Also by 1760, due to Jafar's mismanagement, rebellions broke out in Midnapur, Purnea and Patna.
- ▶ The Mughal nobility and army were not at all happy with Jafar's thoughtless commitment to pay Clive et al. astronomical sums of money to overthrow Siraj.
- ▶ They believed that such a foolish commitment was the cause for defaulting on the payments of salaries to the soldiers.

[p 141, Anarchy]

- ▶ Even the Jagat Seths refused to financially support Mir Jafar's regime.
- ▶ They went on a pilgrimage to the temple of Parasnath in Jharkhand.

Post-Plassey : The Loot

- ▶ At the other hand, Miran continued with his murderous spree and killed or poisoned more than 300 individuals belonging to Siraj's regime.
- ▶ The EIC did not thwart the rampant private trade of its clerks and officials.
- ▶ By 1762, at least 33 of these private businesses had set themselves up in more than 400 British trading posts around the province of Bengal.
- ▶ Then Governor Henry Vansittart, a friend of Warren Hastings, wrote:

“They [private businesses] began to trade in articles which were before prohibited, and to interfere in the affairs of the country...”

Post-Plassey : The Loot

- ▶ For instance, a private businessman Archibald Keir was employing 13,000 men to manufacture 12,000 tonnes of salt.

[p 143, Anarchy]

- ▶ Another case was of Chevalier, a French merchant who had managed to get hold of EIC dastaks / passes and also a battalion of sepoy so as to impose trade on the people of Assam.
- ▶ This was confirmed by his own compatriot Comte de Modave.

Post-Plassey : The Loot

- ▶ Modave further noted:
 - ▶ *“British soldiers and traders permit themselves all sorts of liberties in the pursuit of private profit.....they beat to death unfortunate Indians to extract money not owed to them.”*
- [p 144, Anarchy]

Post-Plassey

- ▶ Interestingly, taking advantage of the confused state of affairs in Bengal province, the Mughal prince Shah Alam encroached into the province with the aim of controlling it and extracting its huge revenues so that he could lay claim on his throne in Delhi, which was by then usurped by the young but psychopath Imad-ul-mulk.
- ▶ Shah Alam was welcomed to Patna by Mir Ashraf, the Kshmiri trader whose trade in saltpeter had suffered because of the arbitrary actions by EIC official Paul Pearkes, who had forcibly seized Ashraf's stocks of saltpeter.

Post-Plassey : Rebellion

- ▶ Meanwhile, Jafar had been losing his status in front of the EIC due to his demeanour, nature of character and of course because of his failed coup against the Company with the help of the Dutch forces in the Battle of Bedara in 1759 - a place roughly midway between Chinsurah and Chandernagore in Bengal.
- ▶ Finally, in July 1761, the Nawab's army mutinied as a whole for arrears of payments over some years.
- ▶ The soldiers laid a siege on the palace of Mir Jafar. Sensing the opportunity, Mir Qasim, Jafar's son-in-law, in cahoots with the Jagat Seths and the EIC, pretended to save Mir Jafar, brought him out of the palace safely and sent him to Calcutta and himself occupied the throne of Bengal.

Post-Plassey / Pre-Buxar

- ▶ Jafar pleaded to meet Clive or be allowed to go to Mecca.
- ▶ Rather, he was placed under house arrest in north Calcutta.
- ▶ Mir Qasim's story is all set to begin, followed by the Battle of Buxar

Questions

- ▶ Q1. Do you think Mir Jafar Ali Khan was really a traitor? Discuss. 10 marks
- ▶ Q2. Assess the character of Siraj-ud-daulah. 15 marks
- ▶ Q3. Why and how the EIC emerged victorious at Palashi/Plassey on 23rd June 1757? 20 marks