

Unit-II

[d] Lord Hastings and the Relations with the Indian States

1. Lord Hastings: Background and Historical Setting

- Francis Rawdon-Hastings served as Governor-General of Bengal from 1813 to 1823. He is commonly known in Indian history as Lord Hastings.
- His administration marked an important transition from a comparatively restrained Company policy toward Indian states to a more assertive policy aimed at establishing British supremacy or “paramountcy”.
- The political environment of his tenure was shaped by the weakening of the Maratha Confederacy, the rise of the Pindaris, the expansion of British influence in Rajputana and Central India, and the continuing strategic importance of Nepal.
- The end result was a major extension of British political control over the subcontinent, especially after the Anglo-Nepalese War and the Third Anglo-Maratha War.

2. Meaning of “Relations with the Indian States” under Lord Hastings

- The term refers to the East India Company’s political, diplomatic and military dealings with princely or semi-autonomous states, confederacies and frontier powers during 1813–1823.
- Lord Hastings sought to prevent rival powers from challenging the Company and to create a political order in which the Company was the dominant power.
- The policy combined diplomacy, treaties, military force, protection, mediation and territorial settlement.
- His policy is often described as a movement from the earlier idea of maintaining a balance among Indian powers toward an explicit doctrine of British paramountcy.

3. Main Objectives of Lord Hastings’ Policy toward Indian States

- Establishment of British supremacy: To make the East India Company the decisive political power in India and reduce the ability of other states to act independently.
- Security of British territories: To protect Bengal, Madras and Bombay Presidencies and their expanding spheres of influence from neighbouring powers.
- Suppression of the Pindaris: To eliminate armed bands whose activities affected large areas of Central India and were used by the British as a major justification for intervention.

- Containment of the Marathas: To break the remaining military and political power of the Maratha Confederacy and prevent the restoration of a strong anti-British coalition.
- Control of frontier politics: To create secure political arrangements in regions bordering British possessions, including Nepal and Rajputana.
- Use of subsidiary and protective treaties: To bring Indian states into a diplomatic system in which British protection came with restrictions on external relations and military policy.
- Recognition of British paramountcy: To move beyond mere treaty relations toward the idea that Indian rulers existed within a hierarchy headed by the Company.

4. Nepal and the Anglo-Nepalese (Gurkha) War, 1814–1816

4.1 Background to the Conflict

- The Kingdom of Nepal, ruled by the Gorkha dynasty, had expanded rapidly in the Himalayan region during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
- Nepal had extended its authority into areas adjoining British territories and into several hill regions where boundaries were poorly defined.
- The expansion brought the Nepalese state into direct territorial contact with the East India Company, especially along the north-western frontier of Bengal.
- Boundary disputes, local clashes and disagreements over possession of frontier tracts produced increasing tension.
- The British regarded Nepal as both a frontier problem and a strategically important Himalayan power.

4.2 Causes of the Anglo-Nepalese War

- Uncertain and disputed boundaries between British possessions and Nepalese territories.
- Nepalese expansion into areas claimed by the Company and allied local chiefs.
- Conflicts over the possession and administration of frontier territories such as Butwal and adjoining tracts.
- The Company's desire for a more secure Himalayan frontier and greater political control over the northern approaches to its territories.
- The increasingly assertive foreign policy of Lord Hastings, who was prepared to use military force to impose a more secure political settlement.

4.3 Course of the War

- The war began in 1814. British forces advanced from several directions in an attempt to penetrate the difficult Himalayan terrain.

- The Nepalese forces, especially their Gorkha soldiers, offered strong resistance in hill forts and mountainous terrain.
- British commanders suffered reverses in several early operations, showing the difficulty of fighting in the Himalayan environment.
- The British eventually improved their position through coordinated campaigns and sustained pressure on key frontier areas.
- The conflict demonstrated the military quality of the Gorkha forces and later contributed to the British recruitment of Gurkha soldiers.

4.4 Treaty of Sugauli, 1816

- The war concluded with the Treaty of Sugauli, signed in late 1815 and ratified in 1816.
- Nepal ceded substantial territories claimed by the Company, reducing the territorial extent of the Nepalese state.
- The treaty established a clearer political and territorial relationship between Nepal and the Company.
- A British Resident was accepted at the Nepalese court, strengthening British diplomatic influence.
- Nepal remained formally independent rather than being annexed into British India; therefore, the relationship was one of controlled diplomacy and strategic influence rather than direct colonial incorporation.
- The treaty created a comparatively stable Himalayan frontier and enhanced the strategic position of the Company.

4.5 Historical Significance of the Nepal Settlement

- It checked Nepalese territorial expansion and removed a significant frontier threat.
- It strengthened British influence along the Himalayan frontier.
- It contributed to the development of the British policy of maintaining buffer relationships with important frontier states rather than annexing every neighbouring kingdom.
- The war enhanced the reputation of the Gorkhas as formidable soldiers; Gurkha recruitment subsequently became an important feature of the Company's military system.
- It illustrated Lord Hastings' willingness to use war to reshape relations with a neighbouring Asian state.

5. The Pindaris and British Intervention in Central India

5.1 Who were the Pindaris?

- The Pindaris were irregular armed bands operating mainly in Central India, originally associated with the military systems of the Maratha period.
- They were not a single centralized kingdom or state; they consisted of mobile groups that lived largely by plunder and negotiated military patronage.
- After the decline of major Maratha military power, many Pindari leaders became increasingly autonomous.
- Their raids affected territories belonging to several Indian states and also entered areas under British control and British protection.

5.2 Why did Lord Hastings Target the Pindaris?

- Pindari raids threatened revenue, agriculture and internal security over large regions of Central India.
- The British feared that the Pindaris could become instruments through which Maratha rulers or other anti-British powers might operate indirectly.
- Their mobility made conventional frontier defence difficult.
- Lord Hastings used the Pindari threat as a justification for assembling a very large military force and reorganizing the political map of Central India.
- The campaign also served the broader strategic objective of eliminating armed groups outside effective British control.

6. Relations with the Marathas and the Third Anglo-Maratha War, 1817–1818

6.1 Background: The Maratha Confederacy

- The Maratha Confederacy remained the most important indigenous political force capable of challenging Company power in large parts of India after the decline of the Mughal Empire.
- Its leading chiefs included the Peshwa at Poona, Sindhia of Gwalior, Holkar of Indore, the Bhonsle of Nagpur and the Gaekwad of Baroda.
- Although these powers were linked by the broad Maratha political tradition, they were often divided by rivalry and conflicting interests.
- The British exploited these divisions while simultaneously weakening the military and diplomatic independence of individual Maratha chiefs.

6.2 Treaty of Poona and Changing British-Maratha Relations

- The Treaty of Poona of 1817 was concluded between the British and Peshwa Baji Rao II after a period of increasing tension.
- The settlement imposed serious restrictions on the Peshwa and weakened his position within the Maratha political system.
- The Peshwa's growing dissatisfaction with British interference contributed directly to the outbreak of renewed conflict later in 1817.
- The conflict thus grew out of the deeper contradiction between nominal Maratha sovereignty and the expanding British demand for political supremacy.

6.3 Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-1818)

- The war began in 1817 when the Peshwa attacked the British Residency at Poona and hostilities spread.
- British forces fought the Peshwa, the Bhonsle of Nagpur and the forces of Holkar, while Sindhia was prevented from joining the conflict on a large scale.
- Important engagements included the battles associated with Kirkee, Koregaon, Nagpur and Mahidpur.
- The British military advantage, better coordination, diplomatic isolation of individual Maratha chiefs and control of strategic territories proved decisive.
- By 1818 the Peshwa was defeated and his political authority was abolished. His remaining territories were absorbed into British rule or reorganized under new political arrangements.
- A reduced Maratha political order survived under British supervision, but the Confederacy as an independent power ceased to exist.

6.4 Consequences for the Maratha States

- The Peshwaship was abolished, ending the central institution of Maratha confederate politics.
- The British acquired extensive territory and increased their direct administrative presence in western and central India.
- The Maratha states of Gwalior, Indore, Nagpur and Baroda continued in princely form but operated under greatly increased British political control.
- The Maratha defeat removed the last major military coalition capable of contesting British supremacy over much of the subcontinent.

- The political geography of India was transformed: the Company emerged as the paramount power, while the remaining Indian states were increasingly incorporated into a British-controlled system of subsidiary and protective relations.

7. Relations with Sindhia of Gwalior

- Sindhia was one of the strongest Maratha chiefs and controlled an extensive territory in north-central India.
- Lord Hastings sought to prevent Sindhia from joining the Pindari campaign or creating a broad anti-British coalition.
- The Treaty of Gwalior (1817) imposed restrictions that limited Sindhia's freedom of action and strengthened British influence.
- Sindhia agreed to cooperate with the British against the Pindaris and accepted a settlement favourable to British strategic interests.
- The arrangement illustrates Hastings' use of diplomacy to isolate one Indian power before confronting others militarily.

8. Relations with the Holkar State of Indore

- Holkar was another major Maratha power, based in Malwa and centred on Indore.
- The Holkar state was weakened by internal conflicts and succession disputes, reducing its ability to resist British pressure effectively.
- The Battle of Mahidpur in December 1817 was a decisive British victory over Holkar's forces.
- The subsequent Treaty of Mandsaur (1818) placed the Holkar state under British protection and substantially restricted its independent foreign policy.
- Thus, Indore survived as a princely state, but its sovereignty was constrained within the British political system.

9. Relations with the Bhonsle of Nagpur

- The Nagpur branch of the Maratha political system was ruled by the Bhonsle family.
- Apprehension about British expansion and dissatisfaction with British interference led to conflict during the 1817–1818 crisis.
- The Bhonsle forces were defeated, and the British expanded their control over territories of strategic and economic significance.
- The Nagpur state was subsequently reorganized under British supervision, with a protected princely regime replacing independent political action.

10. Relations with the Rajput States

- Rajputana consisted of numerous princely states, including Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Kota, Bundi and others.
- These states faced pressure from Maratha exactions, Pindari raids and internal political difficulties.
- Lord Hastings used the opportunity created by the Pindari campaign and the decline of Maratha power to bring many Rajput states into treaty relations with the Company.
- A series of treaties in 1817–1818 established British protection over several Rajput states.
- The rulers generally retained internal authority, while the British gained control or decisive influence over external relations and defence.
- The British thereby created a strategic belt of protected states between their directly administered territories and areas formerly exposed to Maratha influence.

10.1 Why the Rajput Treaties were Important

- They ended much of the earlier Maratha political and fiscal influence in Rajputana.
- They reduced the possibility of large-scale political instability on the Company's north-western flank.
- They expanded the network of princely states tied to British power through treaty obligations rather than direct annexation.
- They demonstrated the practical operation of British paramountcy: rulers continued to exist, but within a framework defined by British strategic interests.

11. Relations with the Nizam of Hyderabad and Other Protected States

- The Nizam of Hyderabad had already entered into a subsidiary alliance with the Company before Lord Hastings came to power.
- Hastings did not need to create a new system in Hyderabad; instead, his administration worked within the existing subsidiary relationship and broader British framework.
- The main significance of the period was the strengthening of the overall network through which the British controlled external relations and security arrangements of major Indian states.
- The British increasingly acted as the superior diplomatic authority in disputes among princely states and between states and neighbouring powers.

12. The Principle of Paramountcy under Lord Hastings

- "Paramountcy" means the recognition of the British power as the supreme political authority in India, above the individual princely states.

- Under Hastings, paramountcy was strengthened not by a single constitutional proclamation but through wars, treaties, protection arrangements, political Residents and control of external relations.
- Indian rulers generally retained internal administration, customs and dynastic institutions, but their diplomatic freedom was sharply curtailed.
- The Company increasingly reserved the right to intervene when a ruler's actions were considered threatening to British security or the established political order.
- This system laid an important foundation for the later relationship between the British Crown and the princely states after 1858.

13. Lord Hastings' Methods of Dealing with Indian States

- Diplomacy and treaties: Treaties were used to isolate potential opponents, secure alliances and reorganize political relationships without annexing every state.
- Military pressure: Military force was employed when diplomacy failed or when British strategic interests were directly challenged.
- Subsidiary/protective relations: Indian rulers received British protection but surrendered important aspects of independent foreign policy.
- Political Residents: Residents acted as British diplomatic representatives and became important instruments of influence at princely courts.
- Exploitation of political divisions: The British negotiated separately with rulers whose interests conflicted, preventing unified opposition.
- Territorial settlement: Victories were followed by cessions, reorganizations and the establishment of protected states.
- Strategic buffer creation: Rather than annexing all territories, the British sometimes preferred dependent states that could act as buffers around Company territory.

14. Major Agreements and Events: Quick Reference

Year	Event / Treaty	Parties / Area	Historical Importance
1814–1816	Anglo-Nepalese War	Company and Nepal	Checked Nepalese expansion; led to Sugauli settlement.
1816	Treaty of Sugauli	Company and Nepal	Territorial cessions; British Resident; new frontier relationship.

Year	Event / Treaty	Parties / Area	Historical Importance
1817	Treaty of Gwalior	Company and Sindhia	Helped isolate Sindhia and secure cooperation against the Pindaris.
1817	Treaty of Poona	Company and Peshwa	Deepened British control over the Peshwa; tensions soon led to war.
1817	Battle of Mahidpur	British and Holkar	Major British victory in the Third Anglo-Maratha War.
1817–1818	Rajput treaties	Company and Rajput states	Expanded British protected-state network in Rajputana.
1817–1818	Third Anglo-Maratha War	Company and Maratha powers	Destroyed the political power of the Peshwa and ended the Confederacy as an independent force.
1818	Treaty of Mandsaur	Company and Holkar	Placed Indore under British protection and restricted external independence.

15. Overall Assessment of Lord Hastings' Policy

- Lord Hastings transformed British relations with Indian states from a policy focused primarily on limited treaty relationships into a much more comprehensive system of political supremacy.
- His wars against Nepal, the Pindaris and the Maratha powers were interconnected with a wider project of securing British interests across India.
- The defeat of the Maratha Confederacy was the decisive turning point: after 1818, no major indigenous power remained capable of seriously challenging the Company over most of the subcontinent.
- At the same time, Hastings did not simply annex all Indian states. Many rulers were retained as princes under British protection, which made indirect rule an important counterpart to territorial conquest.
- His policy therefore combined annexation, territorial cession, diplomatic isolation, subsidiary relations, protection and indirect control.

- The period 1813–1823 is consequently important for understanding the emergence of British paramountcy over the Indian princely states.

16. Significance for the Evolution of British Paramountcy

- It established a much wider British sphere of political influence beyond territories directly administered by the Company.
- It reduced the independence of Indian rulers in foreign affairs and military diplomacy.
- It created a dense network of treaties and protected states that later became a major component of the princely-state system under the British Raj.
- It demonstrated that indirect control could be as strategically valuable as direct annexation.
- It strengthened the British military and fiscal position and helped create the political conditions under which subsequent British expansion became easier.
- It also produced tensions that remained significant in later colonial politics, especially around the issue of princely sovereignty and British intervention.

17. Key Terms for Examination

- Paramountcy: The position of the British as the superior political power over the Indian princely states.
- Subsidiary alliance: A system under which an Indian ruler accepted British protection and generally surrendered independent external relations, often maintaining British troops at the state's expense.
- Protected state: An Indian state that retained internal authority but existed under British political and military protection.
- Pindaris: Irregular armed groups active mainly in Central India, whose raids became a major pretext for British intervention under Hastings.
- Gorkha/Gurkha: The ruling and military tradition of Nepal associated with the Gorkha expansion; Gurkha soldiers became important in British military service.
- Treaty of Sugauli: The 1816 settlement that ended the Anglo-Nepalese War and established a new Anglo-Nepalese frontier relationship.
- Third Anglo-Maratha War: The 1817–1818 conflict that ended the Peshwaship and destroyed the Maratha Confederacy as an independent political force.
- Treaty of Mandsaur: The 1818 settlement through which Holkar's state came under British protection.

18. Chronology at a Glance

- 1813 – Lord Hastings becomes Governor-General of Bengal.
- 1814 – Anglo-Nepalese War begins.
- 1815 – Preliminary agreement leading to the Treaty of Sugauli.
- 1816 – Treaty of Sugauli ratified; Anglo-Nepalese relations reorganized.
- 1817 – Treaties and preparations against the Pindaris; conflict with Maratha powers begins.
- 1817 – Third Anglo-Maratha War begins; British victories isolate the principal Maratha chiefs.
- 1817 – Battle of Mahidpur weakens Holkar decisively.
- 1818 – Peshwa defeated; Peshwaship abolished; Treaty of Mandsaur with Holkar.
- 1817–1818 – British conclude protective treaties with numerous Rajput states.
- 1823 – Lord Hastings leaves office; the British position as the dominant political power in India has been greatly strengthened.

19. Important Distinctions for Students

- Do not confuse Warren Hastings (Governor-General, 1773–1785) with Lord Hastings/Francis Rawdon-Hastings (Governor-General, 1813–1823).
- The Anglo-Nepalese War was directed against Nepal; the Pindari campaign was aimed at irregular armed groups; the Third Anglo-Maratha War was directed against the remaining major Maratha powers. These were distinct but interconnected elements of Hastings' wider strategy.
- British "protection" did not mean full independence for the protected ruler. In practice, foreign affairs and strategic decisions were increasingly subject to British control.
- The end of Maratha power in 1818 was more consequential for the overall political balance of India than any single treaty with a princely state.