

## Battle of Madras

The Battle of Madras took place from 7 to 9 September 1746 ending in a French victory against their British rivals. Taking place during the wider Austrian War of Succession in Europe, it was the sign of a growing rivalry between the British and Colonial powers.

The Battle of Madras would have wider implications in the European Colonialism of India for years to come.

This article will give further details about the Battle of Madras within the context of the IAS Exam.

### Battle of Madras - Background

Since the 1720s, there has been a growing rivalry between the British and French colonial powers. In India, both had set up their outposts in the East and Southern part of the country.

It finally culminated into open warfare when the War of the Austrian Succession broke out in 1740. France and Britain were both on the opposite sides. As a result, the war in Europe would spread to their holdings in India as well. The British sent a Royal Navy Squadron to raid French settlements in the region and disrupt commerce.

The French responded by sending a navy fleet of their own under Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais in 1745. Both ended up fighting an inconclusive battle, forcing them to withdraw for repair and refitting. The British retreated to Sri Lanka, with the French retreating to Pondicherry. Not keen on fighting another naval battle, the British commander, Edward Payton, decided to retreat to the safety of Benga. This move left British settlements off the Coromandel coast exposed to French attacks.

Not letting go of such a ripe opportunity, the French authorities in Paris authorised the French Governor of Pondicherry, Joseph François Dupleix, to attack the British settlement of Madras. Dupleix ensured that there would be no interference from the Indians by promising Madras to the Nawab of Carnatic in the event of its fall.

Soon a French fleet was on its way from Pondicherry to attack British Madras.

### Events during the Battle of Madras

On the morning of 7 September 1746, the French fleet appeared off the coast of Madras, unloading its contingent of troops on land, the fleet began shelling Madras, but the initial salvos were inaccurate as the current range was not adjusted by the cannoners. As a result, the garrison was lulled into a false sense of security.

Deciding to conserve ammunition and give time for its land forces to surround the city, the French navy stopped its naval bombardment. The following morning, they resumed their shelling. This time they were accurate.

The fortifications of Madras were inferior in its design and could not withstand the constant barrage of cannon shells. Soon, British casualties began to mount and morale began to fall. When a direct hit destroyed the liquor store, the soldiers abandoned their posts and instead drank themselves into a stupor with the remaining alcohol. Soon civilians were conscripted into manning the battlements, but it was clearly pointless by this point.

Finally, on 9 September, the Governor of Madras, Nicholas Morse sued for Peace. Surprisingly, the terms offered by the French were generous. While the French would take over the fort and warehouses, the rest of the town would be under the British. Dupleix was against these terms offered by La Bourdonnais as he favoured the total annexation of Madras. But La Bourdonnais prevailed, and peace agreements were signed.

## Aftermath of the Battle of Madras

The terms offered by La Bourdonnais were adhered to for a month, until a violent storm destroyed much of his fleet and forced him to withdraw to Pondicherry. When he left, Dupleix was left in full command of Madras, and he revoked the previous lenient terms and locked up most of the garrison and civilians. He then set about looting and preparing to destroy Fort St George.

A handful of these prisoners, led by Robert Clive, a young clerk, dressed up as natives and managed to slip out of their prison. Once outside, they were challenged by real Indians, who spoke to them in languages they didn't understand. Clive and his companions hurried on before they could be exposed.

After a three-day journey, made mostly by night, they reached Fort St David a hundred miles away, carrying news of the disastrous French attack on Madras. The story of Clive's escape was the first to bring him wider attention. It would not be long before Clive would become Dupleix's arch-rival in future conflicts between the British and the French in India.

The French occupied the town for the duration of the war. Despite Dupleix's promise earlier to hand the territory over to the Nawab of the Carnatic, Dupleix refused to do so. A force of 10,000 sent by the Nawab to enforce the agreement was routed by a small French force led by Captain Louis Paradis at the Battle of Adyar on 24 October 1746. The French subsequently tried to take Fort St David but found the resistance much tougher, and were ultimately forced to withdraw.

The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended the war made provision for Madras to be returned to the British in exchange for Louisbourg in Acadia which had been captured by British forces in 1745. The French besieged Madras again in 1759, this time without success.