

# BRITISH CAPITULATION OF CUTTACK, 1803

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Exactly two centuries back on 14th of October, 1803, Cuttack was capitulated by British thus resulting in the end of the Maratha misrule in Orissa and paving the way for the British march of civilization, as they claimed it for themselves in order to justify their ideologies of expansion in India. The capitulation was properly planned and brilliantly carried out. The whole credit of the successful operation goes to Colonel Harcourt.

The conquest of Orissa by the British was actually a part of the Second Anglo-Maratha War which started on August, 3, 1803. The operation started on Sept. 3, 1803 under the command of Colonel Campbell. The command was consisting of detachment of two companies of His majesty's 22nd regiment and a part of Bengal regiment numbering a total of about 573 Europeans, 2408 sepoy and a native cavalry of 60 me. Lt. Col. Campbell was accompanied by Captain Blunt, an experienced officer having sufficient knowledge about Orissa and John Melville, a civil servant to organise administration and stabilise the British conquest. Colonel Harcourt replaced Lt Colonel

Campbell as the commander of operations on Sept. 11, 1803, because the latter fell ill. Harcourt occupied Manikpatna on the Chilika coast near Banpur on September 14, 1803 and Puri came under his control on 18th September, 1803. No resistance was offered to the British in either of the places.

Colonel Harcourt started his march towards Cuttack on 24th September, 1803 from Puri. Before this he had stationed troops under the command of Lieutenant Ogilvie and Major Fletcher at Manikpatna and Puri respectively in order to keep his backward defence secured and fullproof. This was a strategic dent to keep constant watch on the Maratha Sardars, who might be trying to create trouble for the British in the rear. Harcourt during his onward journey to Cuttack faced stiff resistance from the Marathas at Ahmadpur and Mukundpur. Because of bad weather conditions and muddy roads, the movement of the army was slow but gradual. Finally, Harcourt. Cuttack reached on October 10, 1803. The date of the arrival of Harcourt in Cuttack remained a debatable question. W.W. Hunter on the basis of official documents available

in the Cuttack Commissioner's office stated that The British army entered the city of Lalbagh on October 8, 1803. They took possession of the entire town without absolutely any opposition. The Maratha army took shelter in the fort of Barbati. Sergeant Christopher Samuel Plummer who was one of the soldiers with the British troops described the fort as a "Stronghold, firmly fixed between two branches of the Mahanadi and formed the one difficult fortification in Orissa. Faced with stones, defended by eight small towers, surrounded by a high rampart and a deep moat, '20 to 30' paces broad' and in some places by a double ditch, its single weak point was the number of hollows in the neighbouring fields, which afforded good cover for the besiegers."

Harcourt initially thought of taking possession of the fort without any bloodshed by bribing the Maratha sardars. But the negotiations failed and on October 12 it was decided to storm the fort and besiege it by force. On 13th October at night, the British contingents started their preparations by fixing a battery with one twelve pounder, two six pounders and two howitzers at a distance of about

- 500 yards from the outergate of the fort. At 10 A.M. on 14th October firing was opened and heavy

bombardment from all canons resulted in the cracking of the outerwall of the fort. Sepoys led by Lt. Col. Clayton entered the fort amidst heavy firing from the Maratha defenders. In the process Col. Clayton received wounds in the neck and in the leg. From British side two or three British soldiers were killed and sixteen Europeans and thirteen Indian soldiers were wounded. From defending Maratha side about thirty soldiers were killed, many of them being drowned in the ditch while escaping from the British army. Their dead bodies were carried out in bullock carts to the river bank and dumped there to be eaten by wild beasts and birds. As a result, Cuttack was capitulated and the great province of Orissa with 23,907 square miles of territory having three million population passed under the British rule. This victory on the part of the British was an audacious one which was won by them with a small loss against overwhelming odds.

This capitulation speaks unequivocally about the vulnerability of the Indian against the British commitment to expand their territories as a mark of spectacular march to civilization.

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