

4 British Imperialism in India

TERMS & NAMES

- sepoy
- “jewel in the crown”
- Sepoy Mutiny
- Raj

MAIN IDEA

As the Mughal Empire declined, Britain seized Indian territory until it controlled almost the whole subcontinent.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

India, the second most populated nation in the world, has its political roots in this colony.

SETTING THE STAGE British economic interest in India began in the 1600s, when the British East India Company set up trading posts at Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. At first, India’s ruling Mughal Dynasty kept European traders under control. By 1707, however, the Mughal Empire was collapsing. Dozens of small states, each headed by a ruler or maharajah, broke away from Mughal control.

British Expand Control Over India

The East India Company quickly took advantage of the growing weakness of the Mughals. In 1757, Robert Clive led company troops in a decisive victory over Indian forces at the Battle of Plassey. From that time on, the East India Company was the leading power in India. The area controlled by the company grew over time. Eventually, it governed directly or indirectly an area that included modern Bangladesh, most of southern India, and nearly all the territory along the Ganges River in the north.

East India Company Dominates Officially, the British government regulated the East India Company’s efforts both in London and in India. Until the beginning of the 19th century, the company ruled India with little interference from the British government. The company even had its own army, led by British officers and staffed by **sepoys**, or Indian soldiers. The governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone, referred to the sepoy army as “a delicate and dangerous machine, which a little mismanagement may easily turn against us.”

“Jewel in the Crown” Produces Trade Products At first, India was treasured by the British more for its potential than its actual profit. The Industrial Revolution had turned Britain into the world’s workshop, and India was a major supplier of raw materials for that workshop. Its 300 million people were also a large potential market for British-made goods. It is not surprising, then, that the British considered India the brightest **“jewel in the crown”** — the most valuable of all of Britain’s colonies.

The British set up restrictions that prevented the Indian economy from operating on its own. British policies called for India to produce raw materials for British manufacturing and to buy British finished goods. In addition,

Tea from the Lipton plantation in Darjeeling is loaded onto an elephant for transport to Calcutta.





Western-held Territories in Asia, 1910



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Region** Which nation in 1900 held the most land in colonies?
- Location** How is the location of India a great advantage for trade?

Indian competition with British finished goods was prohibited. For example, India's own handloom textile industry was almost put out of business by imported British textiles. Cheap cloth and ready-made clothes from England flooded the Indian market and drove out local producers.

India became economically valuable only after the British established a railroad network. Railroads transported raw products from the interior to the ports and manufactured goods back again. The majority of the raw materials were agricultural products produced on plantations. Plantation crops included tea, indigo, coffee, cotton, and jute. Another crop was opium. The British shipped opium to China and exchanged it for tea, which they then sold in England.

Trading these crops was closely tied to international events. For example, the Crimean War in the 1850s cut off the supply of Russian jute to Scottish jute mills. This boosted the export of raw jute from Bengal, a province in India. Likewise, cotton production in India increased when the Civil War in the United States cut off supplies of cotton for British textile mills.

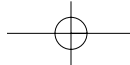
Impact of Colonialism India both benefited from and was oppressed by British colonialism. On the positive side, the laying of the world's third largest railroad network was a major British achievement. When completed, the railroads enabled India to develop a modern economy and brought unity to the connected regions. Along with the railroads, a modern road network, telephone and telegraph lines, dams, bridges, and irrigation canals enabled India to modernize. Sanitation and public health improved. Schools and colleges were founded, and literacy increased. Also, British troops cleared central India of bandits and put an end to local warfare among competing local rulers.

Vocabulary

jute: a fiber used for sacks and cord.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Summarizing On which continents are Indian goods being traded?



On the negative side, the British held much of the political and economic power. The British restricted Indian-owned industries such as cotton textiles. The emphasis on cash crops resulted in a loss of self-sufficiency for many villagers. The conversion to cash crops reduced food production, causing famines in the late 1800s. The British officially adopted a hands-off policy regarding Indian religious and social customs. Even so, the increased presence of missionaries and the outspoken racist attitude of most British officials threatened Indian traditional life.

Indians Rebel

By 1850, the British controlled most of the Indian subcontinent. However, there were many pockets of discontent. Many Indians believed that in addition to controlling their land the British were trying to convert them to Christianity. The Indian people also resented the constant racism that the British expressed toward them.

Sepoy Rebellion As economic problems increased for Indians, so did their feelings of resentment and nationalism. In 1857, gossip spread among the sepoys, the Indian soldiers, that the cartridges of their new Enfield rifles were sealed with beef and pork fat. To use the cartridges, soldiers had to bite off the seal. Both Hindus, who consider the cow sacred, and Muslims, who do not eat pork, were outraged by the news.

A garrison commander was shocked when 85 of the 90 sepoys refused to accept the cartridges. The British handled the crisis badly. The soldiers who had disobeyed were jailed. The next day, on May 10, 1857, the sepoys rebelled. They marched to Delhi, where they were joined by Indian soldiers stationed there. They captured the city of Delhi. From Delhi, the rebellion spread to northern and central India.

Some historians have called this outbreak the **Sepoy Mutiny**. The uprising spread over much of northern India. Fierce fighting took place. Both British and sepoys tried to slaughter each other's armies. The East India Company took more than a year to regain control of the country. The British government sent troops to help them.

The Indians could not unite against the British due to weak leadership and serious splits between Hindus and Muslims. Hindus did not want the Muslim Mughal Empire restored. Indeed, many Hindus preferred British rule to Muslim rule. Most

Daily Life



British Army

Social class determined the way of life for the British Army in India. Upper-class men served as officers. Lower-class British served at lesser rank and did not advance past the rank of sergeant. Only men with the rank of sergeant and above were allowed to bring their wives to India.

Each English officer's wife attempted to re-create England in the home setting. Like a general, she directed an army of 20 to 30 servants.

Officers and enlisted men spent much of each day involved in sports such as cricket, polo, and rugby. Athletics were encouraged to keep the men from "drink and idleness." The upper-class officers also spent time socializing at fancy-dress dances, concerts, and after-polo events.

Indian Servants

Caste determined Indian occupations. Jobs were strictly divided by caste. Castes were divided into four broad categories called varna. Indian civil servants were of the third varna. House and personal servants were of the fourth varna.

Even within the varna, jobs were strictly regulated, which is why such large servant staffs were required. For example, in the picture above, although both were of the same varna, the person washing the man's feet was of a different caste than the person doing the fanning.

The social life of the servants centered around religious festivals and ceremonies marking important life passages. These included a child's first haircut, religious initiation, engagement, marriage, or childbirth.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Recognizing

Effects Look back at Elphinstone's comment on page 701. Did the Sepoy Mutiny prove him correct? Explain your answer.



This English engraving shows the British troops defending the Royal Residency at Lucknow against a sepoy attack on July 30, 1857.

of the princes and maharajahs who had made alliances with the East India Company did not take part in the rebellion. The Sikhs, a religious group that had been hostile to the Mughals, also remained loyal to the British. Indeed, from then on, the bearded and turbaned Sikhs became the mainstay of Britain's army in India.

Turning Point The mutiny marked a turning point in Indian history. As a result of the mutiny, in 1858, the British government took direct command of India. The part of India that was under direct British rule was called the Raj. The term **Raj** referred to British rule over India from 1757 until 1947. India was divided into 11 provinces and some 250 districts. Sometimes a handful of officials were the only British among the million or so people in a district. A cabinet minister in London directed policy, and a British governor-general in India carried out the government's orders. After 1877, this official held the title of viceroy. To reward the many princes who had remained loyal to Britain, the British promised to respect all treaties the East India Company had made with them. They also promised that the Indian states that were still free would remain independent. Unofficially, however, Britain won greater and greater control of those states.

The Sepoy Mutiny fueled the racist attitudes of the English. The English attitude is illustrated in the following quote by Lord Kitchener, British commander in chief of the army in India:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

It is this consciousness of the inherent superiority of the European which has won for us India. However well educated and clever a native may be, and however brave he may prove himself, I believe that no rank we can bestow on him would cause him to be considered an equal of the British officer.

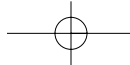
LORD KITCHENER, quoted in K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*

The mutiny increased distrust between the British and the Indians. A political pamphlet suggested that both Hindus and Muslims “are being ruined under the tyranny and oppression of the . . . treacherous English.”

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Recognizing

Effects In what ways did the Sepoy Mutiny change the political climate of India?



Indian Nationalist Movements Begin

Background

Hindu tradition called *suttee* called for a widow to be burned alive on the funeral pyre of her husband.

In the early 1800s, some Indians began demanding more modernization and a greater role in governing themselves. Ram Mohun Roy, a modern-thinking, well-educated Indian, began a campaign to move India away from traditional practices and ideas. Sometimes called the “Father of Modern India,” Ram Mohun Roy called for an end to widow suicide, which he believed was a murderous act. He saw child marriages and the rigid caste separation as parts of religious life that needed to be changed to bring India into a more modern frame of mind. He believed that if the practices were not changed, India would continue to be controlled by outsiders. Roy’s writings inspired other Indian reformers to call for adoption of Western ways. Roy also founded a social reform movement that worked for change in India.

Besides modernization and westernization, nationalist feelings started to surface in India. Indians resented a system that made them second-class citizens in their own country. Even Indians with a European education faced discrimination. They were barred from top posts in the Indian Civil Service. Those who managed to get middle-level jobs were paid less than Europeans. A British engineer on the East India Railway, for example, made nearly 20 times as much money as an Indian engineer.

A spirit of Indian nationalism led to the founding of two nationalist groups, the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the Muslim League in 1906. At first, such groups concentrated on specific concerns for Indians. Gradually their demands broadened. By the early 1900s, they were calling for self-government.

The nationalists were further inflamed in 1905 by the partition of Bengal. The province, which had a population of 85 million, was too large for administrative purposes. So the British divided it into a Hindu section and a Muslim section. Acts of terrorism broke out. The province was on the edge of open rebellion. In 1911, yielding to the pressure, the British took back the order and divided the province in a different way.

Conflict over the control of India continued to develop between the Indians and the British in the following years. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the same struggles for control of land took place between local groups and the major European powers that dominated them. You will learn about them in Section 5.

HISTORY MAKERS



Ram Mohun Roy
1772–1833

An extremely bright student, Ram Mohun Roy learned Persian, Sanskrit, and Arabic as a child. He spent many hours studying the religions of the world to understand people. He also studied the social and political ideas of the American and French revolutions.

Roy watched his sister-in-law burned alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. After that, he resolved to end practices that rooted India to the past. He challenged traditional Hindu culture and called for modernization of Hindu society.

The Hindu reform society he organized, Brahmo Samaj, shaped the thinking of the 19th-century Indian reformers. The society was the forerunner of the Indian nationalist movements.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

D. Analyzing

Motives Why would the British think that dividing the Hindus and Muslims into separate sections would be good?

Section 4 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- sepoy
- “jewel in the crown”
- Sepoy Mutiny
- Raj

2. TAKING NOTES

Re-create on your paper the cause-and-effect diagram below and fill in the effects of the three causes listed.

Cause	Effect
1. Decline of the Mughal Empire	
2. Colonial policies	
3. Sepoy Mutiny	

Which of the effects you listed later became causes?

3. ANALYZING

How did imperialism contribute to unity and the growth of nationalism in India?

THINK ABOUT

- the benefits of imperialism
- the negative effects of imperialism

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Empire Building How did economic imperialism lead to India’s becoming a British colony?

THINK ABOUT

- the role of the British East India Company
- the Sepoy Mutiny