

Discussion #1: British Rule in India: Causes and Consequences

1. Thesis:

Rather India's weakness and disunity that enabled British colonial rule over India much of the reasons lay in the arms of the British. Britain's pre-established wealth and dynamic commercial ethos, which gave them great importance in India's political system, allowed them a larger revenue base. With a larger revenue base, the Company could out match opposing Indian armies, and organize a more efficient state structure.

Evidence:

- At the time of the East India's Company establishment, the regional states revealed its strong network of trade and ever prosperous, rapidly expanding commercial society. Which the EIC saw and took full advantage of. "Jagat seths provided credit to the nawabs, and advances for the selling and moving of crops to zamindars and revenue farmers." (Middle of page 39)
- The English's key to success, their excellent superiority in banking and record keeping, was seen even prior to landing in India. No technique was "more crucial than the joint-stock corporation. Granted a monopoly of Britain's Asian trade... the Company sought entry into the hugely profitable spice trade." (bottom of page 44 to top of 45)
- Coupled with European settlement in India came a vast flow of great wealth into the state, which was sought after by many India rulers. Including, the Mughals who "welcomed English to offset other dominance of the Portuguese, and... relished the opportunities afforded for profitable trade." (middle of page 45)
- The British were welcomed by Indian rulers, not at all because India fell to their desires, but because trade was viewed as very profitable at both ends. For example, "trade was a grant awarded in 1617 by the emperor Jahangir to Sir Thomas Roe, James I's ambassador to Mughal court," thus establishing trade with the Europeans as lucrative. (top of page 47)
- As trade grew ever more profitable, so did the temptation to advance. "In 1717 the British secured from the emperor Farrukhsiyar the valuable boon of duty-free export of their good from Bengal." Yet again the British, with their high standings in India's political system, due to the flow of wealth the rulers' gained from their business, managed to ever more expand and grow into the ruling power they eventually would become. (pg. 49)
- Bengal proved itself strong and unified when in 1756, the British got their backs handed to them. On the outbreak of war, to deter French attack, the British began extending the fortifications of Calcutta. The new throne, Nawab Siraj-ud-duala, saw this move as a challenge to his authority. The incident of British defeat became known as the 'Black Hole' of Calcutta. Hey had to bribe their way to victory with Indian rulers. (pg. 51)
- In the name of profit, an ever wanting desire to expand their networks, the British were given "the right to free trade awarded to them by the emperor," only increasing their revenue to eventually aid them to colonial rule. (pg. 51)
- Setting British presence and dominance in stone was yet again another pact with India's rulers, which now reversed all flow of wealth toward the state. "In 1765, by treaty with the Mughal emperor, in return for an annual tribute the Company secured the diwani, or revenue collecting rights." These new rights halted the flow of silver and gold from Europe into India because now all wealth reaped from revenue collecting in India went straight back into Britain's network. Thus making it so India was no longer gaining the wealth it was and instead the British were essential having no 'loses' in terms of using their own money to create trade. (pg. 53)

- Britain saw this vast, profitable network of trade and wanted to take full advantage of it, gaining “close ties with newly powerful banking and financial groups such as the Jagat Seths... gave them unprecedented importance within the political system.” (Bottom of 54)
- Britain grew into a monopoly trade in India, due in great part to their “control of the sea, in an era in which export trade brought the greatest profit... gave Britain an edge over all rivals.”(pg. 55)
- With the superior military force they gained a huge advantage, giving “part of the reason for Britain’s success... in the fact that after 1757, by its conquest of Bengal, the East India Company had gained control of India’s richest province.” (Bottom of page 55)

2. Thesis:

Britain acquired an empire by accident. By accident because until the last minute; they were merely chasing profit. Trade was expanding in India, and to protect its trade Britain developed an army. An army that was fueled by India’s own men in order to continue the profitable trade throughout the subcontinent amongst the clashing regional state leaders, who were all vying for the upper hand. This regional ruler and British relation, involving political action and economic policy, came to mold Britain into heads of an empire.

Evidence:

- Britain’s presence in India was the ‘accidental’ empire because they were established as traders; having not even an inkling of becoming rulers of the subcontinent. Until the last minute they were merely chasing profits. This idea is witnessed since their landings in India, “the Company sought entry into the hugely profitable spice trade... however, they encountered a better org. and financed rivals... they quickly determined to centre their trading operations in India instead.” (pg. 45)
- Setting British presence and dominance in stone was yet again another pact with India’s rulers, which now reversed all flow of wealth toward the state. “In 1765, by treaty with the Mughal emperor, in return for an annual tribute the Company secured the diwani, or revenue collecting rights.” The Company largely ceased importing gold and silver, which it had hitherto used to pay for goods shipped back to Britain. In addition, as under Mughal rule, land revenue collected in the Bengal Presidency helped finance the Company’s wars in other parts of India. (pg. 53)
- Britain gained great wealth with its dealings with regional state leaders who wanted to get ahead; subsequently leading to confrontation. For instance, when general Mir Jafar approached the British promising “lavish payments in return for their help in placing him on the throne.” Britain could not resist, the result being the famous battle of Plessey, on June 23, 1757. (pg. 52)
- Through the acquiring of diwani and several military victories the British cemented their presence which made conflict inevitable. Mir Kasim sought to retrieve his authority over northern Bengal and in doing so threatened Britain’s trade and provoking “the final confrontation... and at Buxar, in a hard-fought contest unlike that of Plassey, the British made themselves the masters of eastern India.” (pg. 53)
- 1756 conquest of Bengal and control over India’s richest province, gave EIC the resources to dominate the other players in continuing contests among India’s regional states. (pg. 55)
- Conquest and settlement supporting the idea political action led to the Company as ‘master of India’. (pg. 68)
- Britain’s accidental empire was so because they revealed themselves, initially, as merely traders doing business. The subsidiary alliance system with princes supports the idea of Indian

ruler/British alliances for the purpose of mutual gain and security. "Prince could be sure of a powerful ally, while the British could meet their enemies at a safe distance from their own territories, and share with others the cost of maintaining their expensive army." (pg. 72)

- Placing local administration rajas was cheaper than expensive British staff. The continuation of princely rule further aided the British. Could "veil their power behind that of rulers whose ceremonial and ritual authority remained visibly intact." (pg. 75)
- Own goods in market. India was able to export new resources that Britain could trade for their own goods - demand for foreign goods increased, and it opened a new foreign market for British goods, increasing their wealth. (pg. 76)
- In 1176, Philip Francis, on the Bengal council, put forward a plan for a 'rule of property' for Bengal. "Zamindars were given full proprietary right in their estates with a revenue assessment fixed in perpetuity." Making it so the zamindars collected 'rent' from the peasantry, and, after deducting a share for his own maintenance, passed on the remainder as 'revenue' to the state. Thus, increasing British profit like never before.(pg. 78)

3. Thesis:

As British economic and political power grew in India they began to seek out groups and individuals to aid them in their expansion. Knowing who was already at the top of India's class system there was no surprise when they turned to the leaders of Indian society. Classes employed by the company flourished and had good reason to support this new political authority in India, while others reaped the unfortunate consequences and had bad feelings towards the "Company Raj."

Evidence:

- Disposed rulers and some landlords were not happy with Britain's "Company Raj." (pg. 78-79)
- Even religious leaders, after "Anglican" ideas were introduced, came to despise colonial rule. (pg. 81-82)
- With Britain's use of auctioning revenue holders, peasants were hurt. Forced to pay what they did not have at rates the landholder saw fit or necessary to fill their amount owed to the British. "Peasantry found themselves reduced to the status of tenant without rights." And were struck by terrible famines. (pg. 76 78 79)
- Princes sure of a powerful ally, enjoying the benefits of such great allies. (pg. 72)
- The continuation of princely rule further aided the British. Could "veil their power behind that of rulers whose ceremonial and ritual authority remained visibly intact." (pg. 75)
- Local rajas elevated for their lack of strain on British profit with employment. (pg. 76)
- The land was reorganized under the comparatively harsh Zamindari system to facilitate the collection of taxes. In certain areas farmers were forced to switch from subsistence farming to commercial crops such as indigo, jute, coffee and tea. This resulted in hardship to the farmers and increases in food prices. (pg. 78)
- Wandering forced to settle and become peasant cultivators. (pg. 80)
- Educated flourished with Britain's movement of establishing schools. (pg. 83)
- As Britain's Orientalists sought to re-interpret and define Indian 'tradition,' they managed to simplify its people. They placed Indian's into the two categories of Hindu and Muslim, essential igniting the feud, which would ensue for years to come. Creating anger and revealing the "emerging divide between Hindu and Muslim." (pg. 88)

- Calcutta's educated elite, known as the "bhadralok (respectable people), these were merchants, clerks, government employees, rentiers, and the like, mostly of upper castes," prospered under the British. (pg. 88)
- Warrior aristocracies elevated to landlords (pg. 91)
- Orientalists such as William Jones were sought after to read and interpret Indian 'tradition', creating new laws for the land. (pg. 81-82, 87-88)
- Brahmins elevated when Britain looked to seek out the old tradition of India, because they were the educated 'heads' of society. Brahman pandits, "attached to the courts as 'law-finders' until 1864, an unprecedented role in decision making." Of course interpreting texts that favored them. The Madu Smriti was favorable to Brahmins. (pg. 59 91)
- The economic policies of the East India Company were also resented by the Indians. (pg. 91)

4. Thesis:

The Company Raj brought with its colonial rule civilizing influences in terms with both policies of social and economic reform. All in all, one of the most damaging aspects of British rule was the destruction of any indigenous national leader. But the good mark was the laying of sound infrastructure on a national scale. The Company Raj, with its actions, had diverse political, economic, military, religious and social causes, which set into motion a ripple effect, causing waves of opinion, including resentment for the destruction of 'tradition.'

Evidence:

- Part of Britain's 'laying of sound infrastructure' was their enforcement of western ideas, which not only built up India's infrastructure but created a class not previously know, that of the westernized Indian. The "print culture" fueled these ideas and the Company Raj inevitably established the "self-sufficient Indian village." (pg. 89-91)
- Regulating Acts, this endeavored to subordinate the company to the British Government, and to impose upon its agents the obligation of ruling. (pg. 57)
- Cornwallis Reforms characterized by the payment of high salaries, a monopoly of senior positions, and guaranteed pensions, and a reputation for incorruptibility and impartiality. Influenced economic life. (pg. 60)
- Subsidiary Acts created networks of trade amongst the competing regional states and build an infrastructure of trade networks that would not have developed if the British had not arrived. (pg. 72)
- The land was reorganized under the comparatively harsh Zamindari system to facilitate the collection of taxes. In certain areas farmers were forced to switch from subsistence farming to commercial crops such as indigo, jute, coffee and tea. This resulted in hardship to the farmers and increases in food prices. (pg. 78)
- 'Rule of Property' permanent settlement (pg. 78)
- Reform Agenda Abolition of sati 1829 revealed the destruction of old ways, not supported by many. (pg. 82)
- Education set by the British allowed India to flourish. New schools and higher education. (pg. 83)
- Indian revolts against the Raj reveal the "depth of enduring, if rarely effectively organized, discontent that accompanied the imposition of British rule over India." (pg. 85-86)
- Not accepted because of tradition (pg. 82-84 91)
- Bentinck's abolition of sati objected, colonial government's interference in Indian domestic and family life. (pg. 88)

- Print culture self-sufficient less committed (pg. 88-89)
- Serve needs of a larger world capitalist order law and property rights social reform (pg. 91)
- Interpretation of Indian 'tradition' by the orientalist was viewed as misinterpreted by many. (pg.91)
- Women, once able to inherit property, found themselves excluded by British determination to uphold 'Hindu' law. (pg. 91)
- South India temple, once great sources for the redistribution of wealth, found their assets taxed and, shorn of government patronage, their management constantly scrutinized for 'corrupt' practice. (pg. 91)

Optional Question

O1.

The social group that is conspicuously missing from the history we have studied so far is that which is missing from almost all histories, the women. It is not much of a surprise, for women held no political power in society. And those who documented history were individuals who had standing in the class system. The Manu Smriti is a prime example which revealed that women were placed at the bottom in India.