

Nineteenth Century Colonialism in India

Nineteenth century colonialism was motivated by a number of factors including a nation's desire for economic prosperity as well as recognition as a world power, and the aftermath can still be felt today. One example of this nineteenth century colonialism is Britain's colonization of India.

Reasons for Colonialism

Many motivations pushed Europeans towards colonizing foreign lands. Primarily, nations established colonies to gain economic profits. In the early 1800's, the Industrial Revolution was beginning in such places as Great Britain, and new markets and raw materials were needed to uphold the new industries. Nations depended on their colonies for raw materials to be used in their factories so that they could produce a growing number of manufactured goods. They then hoped to sell the manufactured goods to their colonies, which served as new markets.

In addition to a desire for economic profit, nationalism also served as a reason for colonization. After the French Revolution, European nations had a strong sense of national pride, and felt that in order to prove themselves as a strong world power, they would need to gain control of other countries. By obtaining power over foreign lands, nations were also able to strengthen their military. This further increased their status as a world power.

Europeans used the ideas of the "White Man's Burden" to help justify their colonization of foreign lands. The White Man's Burden was the idea that as supreme beings, it was the job of the white people to spread their superior ways of living to the inferior people of other places. As stated by Englishmen Cecil Rhodes, "I contend that we Britons are the first race in the world, and the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race. I believe it is my duty to God, my Queen, and my country..." In keeping with the ideas of white supremacy, Europeans also colonized to spread their religion to nations that they felt were inferior.

Britain's Colonization of India

In the mid eighteenth century, India became one of Great Britain's most important colonies. Great Britain relied heavily on India as a source of raw materials. Britain profited from India's vast supply of tea and cotton. Beginning in 1757, the East India Company, which was overseen by the British government, ruled India. This system was very successful, until one hundred years later, when the Sepoy Rebellion occurred. In 1857, the Sepoys, or Indian soldiers, revolted against the British East India Company. The Sepoys, who were Muslims and Hindus, were upset to learn that the British used beef and pork to seal the rifle cartridges, as eating cows and pigs was forbidden by the Islamic and Hindu religions. Numerous bloody battles occurred between the Sepoys and the East India Company over the span of about a year. Then, after helping the East India Company regain control of India, Britain took direct rule of the nation.

A Battle during the Sepoy Rebellion.

While Great Britain felt that they were being very generous to the Indian people in colonizing and modernizing the nation, the Indians did not always agree with this. Under British rule, many new roads, railways, and harbors were built, and a telegraph system was created. While the Indians were forced to do much labor in the construction of these things, they were often kept from enjoying and benefiting from the finished products. In fact, the Indian people were treated as second class citizens in their own nation. They were banned from many government positions, and had little rights. They often received lower wages than Europeans working in the same job, and their educations did little for them. The Indians eventually came together to fight against the way that they were treated influenced by the same sense of nationalism that had prompted the British to colonize India more than a century before. After much hard work, India finally gained independence from Great Britain in August 1947.

The Consequences of Colonialism

The effects of nineteenth century colonialism can still be felt today. These effects can be felt on many different levels of life and culture in India. When Britain colonized India, the English language quickly spread, and the indigenous languages of the natives began to be wiped out. In addition, the traditional culture of India was altered, taking on a more European style. With such changes to its culture, language, and way of life, the newly independent country was forced to rediscover itself in a fast-paced world.

Under colonial rule India often depended on Great Britain for such things as technological advances and manufactured goods. Once it became independent, India slowly fell behind the rest of the world, as it had to learn to depend less on other nations and more on itself. The nations that were once under colonial rule, such as India, are for the most part the nations that are currently undergoing industrial revolutions.

In addition to colonization changing the culture of India, it also affected that of the mother country, Great Britain. Colonization led to an increased diversity of culture in Great Britain. This was because many people from India began to move to Great Britain. Today, Great Britain is still home to many Indian people.