

History of Modern India

HS132: Assignment #1

Due on Wednesday, February 28, 2021

Siddharth Charan 190101085

Provide a rich description of the political, economic and cultural landscape of 18th Century India. To what extent does it unsettle our perception of India as one homogenous unit and enable us to remain at ease with the heterogeneity that is India?

Introduction:

Indian in the eighteenth century was a picture of many contrasts and contradictions. It has to endure one of the most chaotic periods in its entire history. Generally it was seen as a period of transition in which the Mughal empire gave way to the power of the British empire. But, in reality many things were happening at that time.

In this assignment we will try to understand political, economic and cultural land-scape of 18th Century India and based on that we will argue how much India was united at that time or was she heterogeneous ?

A. Political Landscape :

The eighteenth-century political formations in India were very dramatic and the country was changing at a very rapid pace. During the first half of the century, the Mughal Empire was shrinking due to the emergence of independent kingdoms. In the second half, the British had started creating a strong presence in eastern India. But, between that there were many states emerged and many interesting things were happening in that some kind of politically imbalanced period. We will try to study political situation of India in four parts:

1. The decline of Mughal Power:

We see that in the 18th century the Mughal Empire which had dominated the Indian subcontinent before the 18th century, had to suffer from the chaos after the death of Aurangzeb; it not only had to experience a number of local powers emerging in the subcontinent but also underwent a series of invasions by neighboring countries, notably by Nadir Shah. Most importantly, the British East India Company extended its influence into the area, signaling the beginning of the colonization of the entire Indian subcontinent.



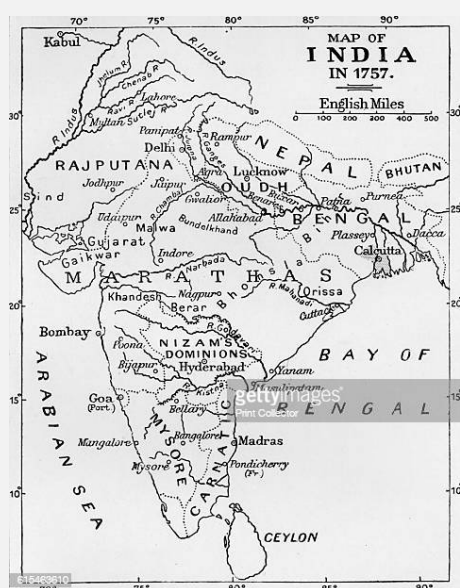
Decay of Mughal Empire Such domestic fragmentations as well as foreign invasions of India, clearly seem to derive partially from the exorbitant conquest and religious intolerance of the Mughal Empire that began under the reign of Aurangzeb. Enlarged territories gave the succeeding Mughal Emperors difficulty of maintaining the empire, and the harsh policies enacted toward local powers, particularly in terms of religion, severely

aroused their oppositions. The disordered situations in India enticed foreign powers into the territory, especially the EIC, which was equipped with a strong imperialistic urge to colonize the area.

2. The emergence of various powerful states:

Provinces like Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad while grew from the main body of the erstwhile Mughal empire. Powerful nobles and governors like Murshid Quli Khan in Bengal, Saadat Khan in Awadh and Asaf Jah in Hyderabad took advantage of the ensuing chaos and carved out their separate kingdoms and became autonomous states.

Warrior clans who were at war with the Mughals and had acquired statist ambitions in the process. The most prominent example were the Sikhs and Marathas. In fact, around mid century Marathas became most powerful force in India.



India in 1757

So, We can see in the map that after death of Aurangzeb, how badly was India divided into various powers, you can see around 1757 there are many powers already in map. So, politically India was not at balanced mode. All the powers like Marathas, Sikhs, other various states (like Bengal, Hyderabad etc) were there and were trying to expand their territory. So, there were many wars going around. First, all the warrior clans were fighting against Mughal empire, but as Mughal empire weakened by time. They started fighting each other and by end of century Marathas, Mysore, Frenchs and British East India Company were directly in situation of war and as we all know that East India Company was winner at end.

3. East India Company and other European companies:

The English East India Company was founded in 1600, as groups of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies. There were other European countries too. But, they left India because of either lose at war or treaty.

The East India Company's victory under Robert Clive in the 1757 Battle of Plassey and another victory in the 1764 Battle of Buxar, consolidated the Company's power, and forced emperor Shah Alam II to appoint it the diwan, or revenue collector, of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. The Company thus became the ruler of large areas of the lower Gangetic plain by 1773. In 1793, it took complete control of Bengal-Bihar region and the Nawabs stood as mere pensioners of the Company. It also proceeded by degrees to expand its dominions around Bombay and Madras. The Anglo-Mysore Wars and the Anglo-Maratha Wars left it in control of large areas of India south of the Sutlej River. With the defeat of the Marathas, no native power represented a threat for the Company any longer and rest is history.

B. Economical Landscape :

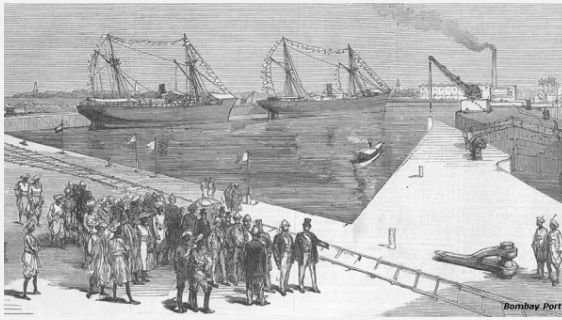
Total share of India in world GDP at starting of 18th century was nearly 25 percentage. But,

India of the 18th century failed to make progress economically. So, this was the starting of decline of Indian economy. Here we will try to study the economic landscape of Indian Economy in different parts.

1. Import and Export : Foreign trade was flourishing under the Mughals. India imported pearls, raw silk, wool, dates, dried fruits from the Persian Gulf region; Coffee, gold, drugs, and honey from Arabia; tea, porcelain, and silk came into India from China; luxury goods were also brought in from Tibet, Singapore, Indonesian Islands, Africa, and Europe. Indian exported raw silk, silk fabrics, indigo, sugar, pepper, and many other things. India's cotton textiles were famous all over the world.

2. Changes in economy and its' structure as century progressed:

As century progressed impact of decline Mughal Empire could be seen. Older Mughal centres like Delhi, Agra, Lahore declined, important port cities like Surat and Masulipatnam declined as well as international trade was wrested away from Indian merchants by European companies.



Bombay port in 18th century

Their place was taken by colonial cities like Madras, Bombay and Calcutta and the inland cities and capitals of regional kingdoms: Lucknow, Fyzabad, Benaras, Hyderabad, Srirangapatam and Bangalore. Trading cities like Mirzapur, Kanpur and Baroda also came into being to service trade. Also, other impact was that, India lost its' economic progress as century progressed, why it happened we will discuss in next parts.

3. How much variation was in distribution of wealth: India of those days, was also a land of contrasts. Extreme poverty existed side by side with extreme rich and luxury. On the one hand, there were the rich and powerful nobles steeped in luxury and comfort; on the other, backward, oppressed, and impoverished peasants living at the bare subsistence level and having to bear all sorts of injustices and inequities. This various could be seen both in Hindus and Muslims.

4. Economic status of various social groups:

- **Farmers:** Indian agriculture during the 18th century was technically backward and stagnant. The techniques of production had remained stationary for centuries. The peasants tried to make up for technical backwardness by working very hard. They, in fact, performed miracles of production; moreover, they did not usually suffer from shortage of land. Even though it was peasants' produce that supported the rest of the society, their own reward was miserably inadequate.
- **Zamindars and Jagirdars(landlords):** This group of people were wealthy and were on top level of society. They used to own a big area of land and some of them had right over whole village or more than one villages, So, they were like small kings. Hence, they were economically better.
- **Traders:** That time, many of Indian traders were very rich, at early stage of EIC, some of them were even richer than company. Because, India was exporting many things

to other countries. But, after EIC got monopoly, they started to fall. Apart from big merchants, there were small merchants too, but their conditions remained nearly the same throughout the century.

- **Handicraft Workers:** In the early part of the century, Indian handicraft was at its peak. But, at the end of the century they also suffered from western industrialization and many of them started to lose their jobs and they were forced to change their occupation.

5. Why Indian Economy failed to grow at rate of rest of world :

In spite of such a favorable balance of trade, India's economic condition could not improve because of constant warfare. Within the country, there were revolts of the Sikhs, Jats, Marathas and from outside, foreign invasions, like that of Nadir Shah (1739 A.D.) and Ahmad Shah Abdali (1761), were common.

By the eighteenth century, European countries like France, England, Portugal, and Spain were interested in trading with India. They helped in creating more political and economic instability in the country and ultimately they destroyed its economy. But, by this time, India's fame had spread all over the world as a land of beautiful handicrafts.

The increasing revenue demands of the state, the oppression of the officials, the greed and rapacity of the nobles, revenue-farmers, and zamindars, the marches and countermarches of the rival armies, and the depredations of the numerous adventurers roaming the land during the 18th century made the life of the people quite despicable.

Also, the latter half of the century saw one of the deadliest famine periods, the Bengal region which was that rich that it was producing 12 percentage of world economy, lost one third of its population in 1770 famine.

C. Cultural and Social Landscape :

The tendency during this period was towards that of greater diversity in terms of cultural and religious tradition, rather than trying to achieve homogeneity. We will see pointwise brief cultural landscape of India:

1.Social Structure: People were divided by religion, region, tribe, language and caste. The social life and culture of the upper classes was in many respects different from the life and culture of the lower classes.

2.Condition of Women: Women were respected in society. But, then also their life conditions were not good. Custom of Purdah(or pardah) was common in both Hindus and Muslims. Among the upper classes, the evil customs of incurring heavy expenses on marriages and of giving dowry to the bride prevailed. Two other great social evils of eighteenth-century India, were the custom of sati and the miserable conditions of the widows.

3. Art and culture: Arts and culture flourished at the regional level during the 18th century. Devotional cults remained popular among Hindus and Muslims. In the 18th century there were remarkable advances in music. Urdu started to gain popularity. Art of painting also started to change as now artists were promoted by local states, development of Kishangarhi (in Rajasthan) style of painting is an example of this promotion.

Architecture development was also made possible because of regional states, for example various world heritage sites in Jaipur were built in this period. Many of this type of artistic developments were made possible thanks to the interest and enthusiasm of regional states because, of decline of Mughal empire. But, then also the speed of overall development of art in this period was slow compare to era of Mughal emperors like Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan etc.



Jantar Mantar(Built in 1734)

4. Hindu Muslim Relation:In the religious sphere, the mutual influence and respect that had been developing in the last few centuries as a result of the spread of the Bhakti Movement among Hindus and Sufism among Muslims continued to grow, although period of Aurangzeb impacted it in bad way.

5. Others:The main weakness of Indian culture lay in the field of science. Throughout the eighteenth century, India remained far behind the West in science and technology. Art of Indian Handicraft items and Indian textile also started to decline at the end of century, because they were not able to face western products.

Conclusion:

A. Indian Political, Social and Cultural Landscape:

The eighteenth century occupies a special position in Indian history as it was the era between two empires. Among the most significant developments in the period, were regionalism and regional state formation that was based on local economic development and new revenue extracting mechanisms. The regional states were at war with one another and this created conditions of a war economy that in fact constituted the material basis for eighteenth century regimes. The second half of the century saw the gradual expansion and penetration of the English East India Company with serious consequences for regional polities and economies. This created long term social displacement and which was reflected in a series of popular uprisings as well. The century was in terms of cultural development, extremely vibrant. In fact this is one of the strange contradictions of the period – political change and fragmentation coexisting with cultural creativity and expression. This may be explained by the fact that regional patronage of the arts was vibrant in the period and it coincided with the emergence of talented artists who brought to their work a new sensibility.

B. So at what extent India had nature of heterogeneity in Eighteenth Century:

This was main purpose of assignment to come to final answer whether India was homogeneous unit or a heterogeneous society. As we have discussed above, India was heterogeneous, contrary to popular perception that India under Mughal Empire was one centralized state. In fact it was the very opposite of that- a very decentralized distribution of power existed, in which local rulers of various states were expected to acknowledge the Mughal empire as the supreme power, but still had considerable power under their command. Also, economically India was a place of contrast, Most of the land was under control of very few people. On one hand there, were many rich kingdoms and very rich merchants, On the other hand people were dying of hunger. Socially also, people were divided by religion, region,

tribe, language and caste. Similarly, this period marked a cultural and artistic shift towards greater diversity and acceptance of different cultures and tradition, rather than practicing a single form of culture.

Therefore we conclude that India did not function like a single homogeneous unit, rather as different heterogeneous units working in tandem. It was the era of cultural, social, political and economical differences. India indeed was a heterogeneous society. But this century leads India to British Raj and fighting against that, finally leads Indian society to a sense of unity.

To what extent was the revolt of 1857 a culmination of the discontent that had been brewing and spreading across the Indian sub-continent since the beginning of company rule?

Introduction:

As, most of the western historians like Sir John Lawrence, V.A. Smith believes that revolt of 1857 was only a military revolt. But, many of Indian esteemed historians like R.C. Majumdar and S.N. Sen, believes that maybe it started as a military revolt but actually it was supported by many non militant social groups. Many of them were already protesting against company, but they were not powerful enough to impact company, as they all were isolated. But, 1857 revolt was first time they were united. In Majumdar's words **"a series of isolated incidents, ultimately culminated in the Great Revolt of 1857"**.

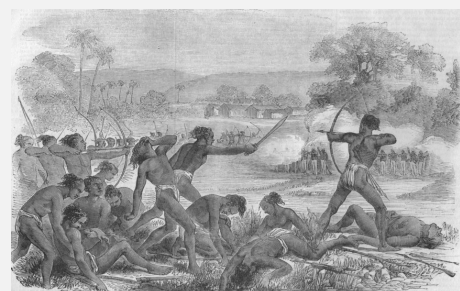
Here, in this assignment we will try to see some of the arguments and will try to conclude that to what extent 1857 was a result of culmination of the discontent that had been brewing across the Indian sub-continent since the beginning of company rule or it was a sudden military revolt.



A. Some revolts against EIC before 1857:

We can start our argument by stating that, 1857 was not the first time people were unhappy from company and were protesting, there were many revolts that happened before 1857, we can list some of them as follow:

1. Sanyasi Revolt (1763-1800)
2. Revolt of Moamarias (1769-99)
3. Revolt of Raja of Vizianagaram (1794)
4. Poligars' Revolt (1795-1805)
5. Ahom Revolt (1828)
6. Kuka Movement
7. Ho and Munda Uprisings (1820-1837)
8. Bhil Revolts
9. The Santhal Rebellion (1855-56) e.t.c



Santhal Rebellion

B.Causes of these revolts:

We can see that there were many revolts already going around there, all of them are from different people at different places for different reasons, but main cause of problems were company's different-different decisions, which were affecting these people's life, we need to know what were the reasons behind all of these movements or why people were unhappy, we can list them as follow:

1.Economical Reasons :This was main reason of conflict. India was largest economy of world under rule of Mughal empire in 1700, (contribution of nearly 24 percentage in world G.D.P.), but it went down (13 percentage in 1870). Major reason for this was incoming of company, as East India Company was in India for earning purpose, at beginning they used to buy from India, but later things changed and they started to sell, we will see how company impacted various groups of India economically.

- **Impact on Indian Textile:** In 1772, Henry Patillo, a company official, had ventured to say that the demand for Indian textile could never reduce, since no other nation produced goods of the same quality. Yet by the beginning of the nineteenth century, we see the beginning of the long decline of textile exports from India. In 1811-12 piece-goods accounted for 33 percent of India's exports; by 1850-51, it was no more than 3 percent. Because, of industrial revolution in Britain and heavy taxes on export of Indian textile to Europe. So, many textile worker had to leave their jobs.
- **Impact on Farmers:** The introduction of various settlement systems such as, Permanent Settlement system, Mahalwari system and the Ryotwari system impacted them badly. Commercialisation of agriculture, Ex: indigo and cotton. was other main reason as, these type of crops used to leave them without any cereals. They Forced the farmers to adopt mono-cropping systems, which proved to be dreadful for the land, as well as farmer incomes later on. Ex: indigo cultivators were compelled to grow it despite their reluctance. Revenue policies of Britisher were the main reasons that started revolts in modern India such as peasant revolts, Tribal revolts and Zamindari revolts. On the top of that, they had to face many famines also, in one of them 1770 Bengal's 1/3 population died.
- **Impact on merchants:** There were no taxes on British merchants and their goods, but Indian merchants had to pay it. So, they were not able to face British merchants anymore.
- **Impact on Zamindars and states :** EIC started new tax system, in which zamindars had lost their possession on land. Also, the states whom they won or helped in war like Awadh had to pay taxes or money to them, so eventually that was also coming from common people.

2. Political Reasons :The British expansion had led to the propagation of unjust policies that led to the loss of power of the Nawabs and Zamindars residing at various places of India. The introduction of unfair policies like the policy of Trade and Commerce, **the policy of indirect subordination (subsidiary alliance), the policy of war and annexation, the policy of direct subordination (doctrine of lapse), the policy of misgovernance (through which Awadh was annexed)** greatly hampered the interests of the rulers of the native states, and they one by one became victims of British expansionism. Therefore, those rulers, who lost their states to the British, were naturally against the British and took sides against them

during the revolt.

3. Social or Racial reasons : First thing was British people were very foreign to India. On top of that, there was visible racial exploitation wherein Indians were not allowed to mix with the Europeans. Also, in government or company services Indians were not allowed on Important posts.

4. Religious reasons: At the beginning of the 19th Century, the British began to support their bid of social reforms by the methods of legislation. Indians began to doubt the objectives of the British since the advent of these legislations. Some glaring examples of this period are the 1813 Charter Act which conservative Indians viewed as an imposition of Christianity over them. At the same time, when some of the social legislations were passed, like, the abolition of Sati, 1829 was passed by Lord William Bentinck (which was implemented across all presidencies across British India), Prohibition of child marriage, widow remarriage, etc. were all understood by Indians as a bid to impose Christianity over them.

5. Problems of Sepoys: The Indian military was already largely discriminated against in terms of salaries, pensions, promotions. Indians were subjugated in the military while their European counterparts faced no such discrimination. During the time of Lord Canning, two important laws were passed: Both these acts were passed in 1856, i.e. on the eve of revolt.

- General Service Enlistment Act: This act meant that if Indian military personnel were posted abroad, they wouldn't get extra allowances.
- Religious Disabilities Act: For Indian soldiers, the belief was that if they crossed the ocean, they would lose their religion. They would thus be socially ostracized. Thus, Hindu soldiers skipped appointments that involved serving in a foreign land. But, after this act they would have to take the appointment compulsorily. Otherwise, they would lose their job.

These reasons with some of rumors (We will see what were they in next part) made them to revolt against company.

6. Employees of company: Employees of company in India tried to earn as much as profit as they could. They were corrupt and used to have a feeling of superiority. So, even they caused a feeling of hatred in Indian people.

C.1857 Indian Mutiny:

Starting of 1857 revolt was with a sepoy named Mangal Pandey killing his senior British officer. Because of, rumours spread among the sepoys that the paper cartridges holding the powder and ball for the rifle are greased with either pig fat or beef tallow; the process of loading the rifle requires the soldier to bite down on the cartridge, and the soldiers believe that this would cause them to consume pork or beef — acts abhorrent to Muslim and Hindu soldiers for religious reasons. And sooner many sepoy regiments started rebellion.

But, most important thing to note that many states, zamindars, farmer, tribes also supported the movement and joined it. Even, rebellions gained support of Mughal empire.

So, we in this section will see major groups who supported the revolt and in short will describe why:

1. **Sepoys :** Majorly sepoys of Bengal and Oudh regiments participated in revolt. There, reasons were same as mentioned in sepoys part of section B and sudden rumor about cartridges.

2. **Religious persons and priests** : Many Hindu and Muslim religious personalities like Maulvi Ahmadullah, Maulvi Liyaqat Ali supported the revolt as, they were worried about spread of Christianity.
3. **Farmers of OUDH and nearby areas** : We already mentioned the reasons for them in farmers section.
4. **Many Indian Rulers**: Although very few rulers supported the revolt, but many states like Jhansi, Oudh, Gwalior, many Zamindars and Jagirdars and even Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah helped revolt, all of them had one of the reasons mentioned above in political section of Part B.
5. **Small traders** : They were also supporting revolt as they also had many problems like mentioned in economical reasons of Part B.
6. **Artisans and Handicraft workers**: Workers of textile industry and other handicraft industry workers were destroyed due to EIC's British goods. So, they were also participating.

D. Views of Historians:

In this section we will see views of some historian and will try to analyse them:

1. Western Historians: In order to hide the cause of the mutines broke out in Meerut and its spread to Delhi, the **British colonial officials** began to credited the grease cartidges which caused the break out of the revolt in terms to save their religious beliefs. This theory was challenged by **Benjamin Disraeli**, the conservative leader, in July 1857. He said: "The decline and fall of empires are not affairs of greased cartridges. Such results are occasioned by adequate causes and by the accumulation of adequate causes". Then he enquired: "Is it a military mutiny or is it, a national revolt?". **Karl Marx** linked the colonial exploitation of India to the anger that was displayed by people during revolt. Marx hailed the unity displayed by the different religious communities who opposed British colonialism.

2. Authors referring revolt as First war of Independence: Very soon after the break out of the mutinies, **Syed Ahmad Khan** wrote a tract called 'The Causes of the Indian Revolt' to counter this allegation that revolt was military revolt only. People started looking and examining the entire terminology and came to different conclusions.

V.D. Savarkar, in his book, The Indian War of Independence of 1857, gave a nationalist interpretation to the uprising, asserted that the revolt of 1857 was the "Indian War of Independence". Savarkar's views were supported by **S.B. Chaudhary**, who in his writings demonstrated that 1857 was a "rising of the people." In fact, the historiographic tradition in India soon accepted this line of argument. Even Indian government after independence in 1957 celebrated it as First try for Independence.

3. Further counter of above statement: Some of the important works are of **R.C. Majumdar's The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857**, **S.B. Chaudhuri's Civil Revolt in the Indian Mutinies, 1857-59** and **Theories of the Indian Mutiny**, **S.N. Sen's Eighteen FiftySeven** and, **K.K. Datta's Reflections on the Mutiny**. These historians were not uniformly comfortable with the idea that the 1857 Revolt was the 'First War of Indian Independence'. Moreover, they referred to ideas like nationalism that were supposedly witnessed during 1857 or saw the very inception of the national movement contained in the Revolt.

4. So, why they are not comfortable with idea to call it first try for independence :

Although revolt happened on big scale. Then also, it was not like whole India (where company was impacting) was against company. Most parts in south India was not at all impacted, even in north many kingdoms like in Panjab and Rajasthan helped company. Because, they were not harmed by company laws. In most of the war also only military

participated. So, this was not a protest in which whole country was involved. Also, many people were participating in the revolt on the name of religion. So, these reasons are most common among historians not to call it first try for independence.

5. So, which idea or view looks most promising in my opinion : The most important and widely read work produced after the independence was S.N. Sen's Eighteen FiftySeven. Sen tried to write on the basis of facts only. He said that "Although it was not independence revolt, it started as military revolt but, how it was progressed showed that people were not happy with company raj". So, what can we conclude here, we will see in conclusion.

Conclusion:

So, we can conclude that, revolt of 1857 started as military revolt, but as it progressed many other groups of people, who were unhappy with company's rule also supported and joined this revolt. **Whatever we study about the revolts, whatever we write about the causes of 1857, the last decision that many historians show that more or less the revolt of the 1857 was caused by the domination of the Company's colonial rule and the exploitation of the Indian people whether it might be the economic resources or social or cultural identities.**

This was first time that company rule was in danger, this was first time that many groups of people united on that big scale, this may not be considered (some historians even consider it) as first try of independence, but it was a sign that something is happening wrong in company rule, otherwise normal people and some states would not support this revolt. So, yes, "the revolt of 1857 was a culmination of the discontent that had been brewing and spreading across the Indian sub-continent since the beginning of company rule".