

# Assignment 3

Introduction to History, Monsoon 2020

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The Battle of Koregaon is often seen as a symbol of resistance of the Dalits against the oppressive upper caste. The war is said to be one of the first victories of the lower caste against the upper caste in India. The war saw an army of around 900 soldiers of the British East India Company led by Captain Francis Staunton fight and stand their ground against the 2000 men strong army of the Peshwa Baji Rao II of the Maratha Confederacy. The war was a part of the Third Anglo Maratha War that saw the fall of the Maratha empire and the East India Company gaining control of major parts of the West, Central, and South India.

The Peshwas, who were Brahmins, were known for treating the Dalits in an unfair manner. When the British waged a war against the Peshwa, the Dalits, who were ill-treated till then decided to side with the English troops. To the Dalits or Mahars, as they were called, it was the oppressed fighting against the oppressor. Indian history was largely a Brahmin history back then. And this history written by the upper class focused on the kings and the conquerors, not on the common man who struggled every day to make ends meet or who toiled in the farms for their country. And history, as perceived by the common man, was very different from the history perceived by the privileged. To the Dalits, history was being re-written and this time, it was not the Brahmins or the Peshwas who were in the center, but the outclasses who were the victors.

The Koregaon war memorial celebrated the victory of the British over the Marathas. But to the Dalits, it was a mark in history, a reminder to the upper class and the privileged that they could resist. On January 1, 1927, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had visited the memorial and he could not help but feel proud of the Mahar valor. The Mahars were the untouchables, the Dalits. And the untouchables had fought a war against the Brahmins alongside the British, that helped the East India Company conquer India. This was a reflection of how colonial rule had changed the social construct in India. Untouchability was etched onto the culture of Indians. The upper class had made a clear-cut social hierarchy. And the Koregaon war was one of the instances that show how the British had utilized the divided Indian society to their benefit. The British had empowered the outclasses. They were given a voice and a chance against their oppressors. The defeat of the Peshwas was perhaps a wake-up call to the upper class to rethink their social constructs.

Side note: A reference to the topic History and Amnesia

The war is said to be one of the final battles fought in the Third Anglo Maratha war. The Koregaon War is said to not have a decisive victor. However, the Company forces were praised for their courage as they managed to stand their ground despite being outnumbered. This, and

the war ending with the Peshwa's defeat lead to this war being 'remembered' as a Company victory.

## Bibliography

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