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EMERGING POWER AND EVOLUTION OF BRITISH EMPIRE

K S NAGARAJA*¹

Dr. BASAVARAJ*²

¹Research Scholar , ²SUPERVISOR

ABSTRACT

Generally Critics of British rule pointed out that all the benefits went to British ruling class and Indians gained little . India became the centre of world politics as Britishers started developing at increasing rate as they focused on economic development through their administrative system. British rule admirers safeguard their interest by pointing out most of Indians were poor and oppressed by their own leaders before British arrived.

INTRODUCTION

They even claim that that Indian princes were cruel on ordinary Indian . The main reason why the arguments are so heated and so complex is that India was very different from the other territories that made up the British empire. North America and Australia, for example, were sparsely populated and their populations were less economically developed than Britain. India, however, had a huge population and was just as developed as Britain when the British arrived. The rule of the British in India is possibly the most controversial and the most hotly debated aspect of the history of the British empire. Critics of British rule generally point out that all of these benefits went to a tiny British ruling class . The British were able to take control of India mainly because India was not united. The largest rebellion against British rule took place in 1857-58. It was known in Britain as the Indian Mutiny. This was because it began with a rebellion by Indian troops (sepoys) serving in the army of the British East India Company. British rule in India was handled by the East India Company. Indian historians dislike the term 'mutiny' because it suggests that only Indian troops were involved. In fact, once some of the Indian troops did revolt, the rebellion against British rule spread rapidly and involved many local Indian leaders who had a wide range of

complaints against British rule. The British preferred to think of the rebellion as a mutiny because this word disguised the huge scale of the rebellion. The word mutiny also covered up the involvement of ordinary Indians. The British preferred to keep this quiet as it suggested that British rule was not widely accepted in India.

The rebellion lasted about 18 months. It was brutal and vicious. The rebels committed many atrocities. They were, however, disunited and badly organised. Gradually British troops, along with the forces of Indian rulers who sided with the British, overcame them. There is a lot of evidence that the great majority of ordinary Indian peasants tried as hard as they could to stay out of the rebellion. They thought (probably rightly) that their lives would change little if they were ruled by the British or by the Indian leaders who were trying to get rid of the British. Eventually the British forces defeated the rebels. Their revenge was just as vicious as the rebels had been, and the British and their allies committed many atrocities. The rebellion/mutiny left a lasting legacy of mistrust, fear and hatred between the British and Indians, which continued throughout the British time in charge of India. After the rebellion the British government took direct control of India away from the East India Company.

BRITISH RULE

British rule from the time after the mutiny is often called the Raj. During this period a tiny number of British officials and troops (about 20,000 in all) ruled over 300 million Indians. This was often seen as evidence that most Indians accepted and even approved of British rule. There is no doubt that Britain could not have controlled India without the co-operation of Indian princes and local leaders, as well as huge numbers of Indian troops, police officers, civil servants etc.

Other historians point out that British rule of India was maintained by the fact that Indian society was so divided that it could not unite against the British. In fact, the British encouraged these divisions. The better-off classes were educated in English schools. They served in the British army or in the civil service. They effectively joined the British to rule their poorer fellow Indians. There are huge arguments about whether the British created or enlarged these divisions in Indian society (British society was deeply divided by class), or whether the British simply took advantage of divisions that were already present in Indian society. For much of the 1800s the average Indian peasant had no more say in the way he or she was ruled than did the average worker in the United Kingdom.

The British view tended to portray British rule as a charitable exercise - they suffered India's environment (eg climate, diseases) in order to bring to India good government and economic development (eg railways, irrigation, medicine). Modern admirers of British rule also note these benefits.

Other historians point out that ruling India brought huge benefits to Britain. India's huge population made it an attractive market for British industry. In the 1880s, for example, about 20% of Britain's total exports went to India. By 1910 these exports were worth £137 million. India also exported huge quantities of goods to Britain, especially tea, which was drunk or exported on from Britain to other countries. Then there were the human resources. The Indian army was probably Britain's single greatest resource. Around 40% of India's wealth was spent on the army. This army was used by Britain all over the world, including the wars in South Africa in 1899-1902 and the First and Second World Wars. It was the backbone of the power of the British empire. In 1901, for example, the British viceroy (governor) of India, Lord Curzon, said 'As long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall straightway drop to a third rate power'.

Two main lines of development worked to bring the British East Indies Company to India and make it a power there. For one thing, by 1600, Portugal was losing

control of the East Asian Spice trade. Therefore, in 1601, the British East Indies Company started sending ships to the Spice Islands to gain a share of this trade. At this point, there was no intention of even going to India, let alone of conquering it, since the Mughal Dynasty had a firm grip on the subcontinent. However, the Dutch also had designs on the spice trade and rebuffed any British efforts to take part in it. As a result, the British East Indies Company gained the right to set up trading posts along the coast of India. Later, some of these trading posts would grow into major cities such as Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta.

The other factor pushing the British East Indies Company toward conquest had to do with the Mughal Empire. This dynasty had ruled most of India peacefully and tolerantly for a century since the 1500's. However, during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) all that changed as he started persecuting Hindus. Not only did this trigger centuries of religious strife that still continues, it also began the decline of the Mughal Empire, which suffered from weak and corrupt government from this time on. The resulting turmoil forced the British East Indies Company to defend its trading posts against local princes, brigands, and a new European intruder, France.

The French, to compensate for the lack of European manpower so far from home, initiated the strategy of training and arming native recruits (*sepoys*) like European

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armies. Such forces were so effective that local princes would trade large tracts of land for French trained sepoys, thus giving the French control over much of Southern India. In response to this new threat, the British responded in kind by training their own sepoys. By the end of the Seven Years War (1756-63), British naval superiority and sepoys under the leadership of Robert Clive had virtually ended French involvement in India. Clive dramatically demonstrated the effectiveness of European trained sepoys at the battle of Plassey (1757) when his army of 2800 British soldiers and sepoys routed a Bengali army of 100,000 men. Clive's victories over the Bengalis and French made the British East Indies Company a major power in India, able to install its own candidate on the Mughal throne and claim the wealthy province of Bengal for itself. British dominance resulting from these victories had three main effects.

First, British power, plus the fact that their "honorable masters" in England were 7000 miles and nine months travel away, left India wide open to exploitation by the company and its employees. Many British took full advantage of the opportunity to "shake the pagoda tree", as they called the collection of "gifts" from grateful local princes (*nawabs*). While a noble in Britain could live well on £800 a year, even minor company employees were making huge fortunes. One merchant was given a profitable saltworks with 13,000 employees while another

was given his own mint. A certain Mr. Watts was awarded £117,000 for bravery at the battle of Plassey. And Clive himself received £211,500 for installing one nawab and another £27,000 a year from another grant. Such opportunities for making quick fortunes unleashed a flood of applicants back home for service in India, some applications being accompanied with bribes of up to £2000. Newcomers from England were often shocked when first encountering their colleagues already in India, since they typically mixed freely with the natives and had adopted their customs, food, and clothing. Service in India had its risks for the British, mainly tropical heat and diseases. As one local proverb put it, "Two monsoons is the age of a man," indicating that few Europeans survived conditions in India more than two years. Bombay was known as "the burying ground of the British".

Two other developments in the 1800s led to growing unrest among Indians. One was the growing number of Christian missionaries coming to India to preach Christianity, which clashed with the more flexible beliefs of the Hindu majority and the strong beliefs of Indian Muslims. Secondly, the British were bringing in modern technology (especially railroads) and business methods, which disrupted the traditional, slower paced culture and economy of India.

Things came to a head with the Great India Mutiny in 1857. Sparking it was a misunderstanding about what kind of grease was used on the bullets for the sepoys' new Enfield rifles. Muslim troops thought pig grease, which they abhor, was being used, while Hindu troops thought the British were using grease from cows, which they hold sacred. The resulting mutiny developed into a serious rebellion that the British finally managed to put down. However, this was the final straw as far as the British government was concerned, assuming direct control over India in 1858 and eventually dissolving the British East Indies Company. Just as one British queen, Elizabeth I had signed the charter forming the British East Indies Company some 260 years earlier, so another queen, Victoria, signed it into extinction. Ironically, its career had started with a group of merchants in search of nothing more than "quiet trade." For the next ninety years, direct British rule would prevail in India.

In 1858, British Crown rule was established in India, ending a century of control by the East India Company. The life and death struggle that preceded this formalisation of British control lasted nearly two years, cost £36 million, and is variously referred to as the 'Great Rebellion', the 'Indian Mutiny' or the 'First War of Indian Independence'. Inevitably, the consequences of this bloody rupture marked the nature of political, social and economic rule that the British established

in its wake. It is important to note that the Raj (in Hindi meaning 'to rule' or 'kingdom') never encompassed the entire land mass of the sub-continent.

Two-fifths of the sub-continent continued to be independently governed by over 560 large and small principalities, some of whose rulers had fought the British during the 'Great Rebellion', but with whom the Raj now entered into treaties of mutual cooperation.

The 'Great Rebellion' helped create a racial chasm between ordinary Indians and Britons. Indeed the conservative elites of princely India and big landholders were to prove increasingly useful allies, who would lend critical monetary and military support during the two World Wars. Hyderabad for example was the size of England and Wales combined, and its ruler, the Nizam, was the richest man in the world.

They would also serve as political bulwarks in the nationalist storms that gathered momentum from the late 19th century and broke with insistent ferocity over the first half of the 20th century. But the 'Great Rebellion' did more to create a racial chasm between ordinary Indians and Britons. This was a social segregation which would endure until the end of the Raj, graphically captured in EM Forster's 'A Passage to India'.

While the British criticized the divisions of the Hindu caste system, they themselves lived a life ruled by precedence and class, deeply divided within itself. Rudyard Kipling reflected this position in his novels. His books also exposed the gulf between the 'white' community and the 'Anglo-Indians', whose mixed race caused them to be considered racially 'impure'.

CONCLUSION

In particular period of 1757 to 1876, the British took a diametrically opposite attitude toward India as there was in previous years, changing it from a mere business relationship to a construction of a new colony. This change of attitude affected all spheres of India, from the shifts in the governance to the lives of ordinary people. This thesis depicts three fields in which it appeared most, the politics and administration, the introduction of the British educational system and the usage of Christianity as a useful tool in order to establish supremacy on Indian subcontinent. The main task of civil reconstruction took many years. The first step was an attempt at reconciliation. The princes, who had generally either sided with the British or had been neutral, were no longer threatened with annexation. Over the years that followed the Mutiny, every attempt was made to show them that their true interests lay with the British, and everything was done to give them a position - albeit empty of real power in the new Empire of India.

All the changes happened due to certain conditions in India and in Britain those days, While the British policy and their approach toward India did not have a particular shape yet, it is obvious that the role of Governor-Generals was quite open and therefore each Governor-General enriched different sphere according to his believes. These conditions led to a bit chaotic development while every Governor-General treated the reforms differently according to his intentions.

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