

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 4 | Issue 4

2021

© 2021 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com>)

This Article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestion or complaint**, please contact Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication at **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript at submission@ijlmh.com.

The Keys to British Success in South Asia

SANIKA JAVDEKAR¹

ABSTRACT

This piece is inspired from a very informative piece written originally by Colin Watterson. Capturing India bit by bit wasn't a one-day process and according to British historian Sir John Robert Seeley British acquired India in an "absence of mind." Though Britishers ruled and exploited the Indians for decades there underwent a lot of changes in the social, personal and economical aspects of people residing in India. As understood the Britishers did not have a primary motive of capturing India but as we read this article a lot of factors and circumstances unfold themselves for the end result of Indians being ruled by Britishers. It was a slow exploitation but there were few things which were abolished or introduced that resulted in new era of Indian society. This article talks precisely about what tricks and tactics did Britishers use for establishing their rule in India. With some opposition and some friendly ties, smart policies and crisp foresight the Britain overshadowed India. With an in-depth analysis and understanding of all prevailing and contributing factors of British India the article is bound to put the reader into thought.

I. INTRODUCTION

The article analyses how the British successfully took control over India and what fascinated them to do so. It wasn't a one-day process and according to British historian Sir John Robert Seeley British acquired India in an "absence of mind." A lot of factors contributed to this gradual invasion and some of the major contributors were, a crumbling central political power, fierce competition from European rivals, and Mughal neglect towards certain portions of Indian society. Britishers did not come in India with a motto to take control over it but the primary motive was to establish trade. Mughal emperor Jahangir granted a farm to Captain William Hawkins permitting the English to erect a factory at Surat in 1613. And hence began the settlement of Britishers in India.

II. POLITICAL AGENDAS AND INDIAN HISTORICAL APPROACHES

This section mainly focuses on the mindset of different Britishers during the early British era. There were a lot of differences between various historians, some scholars like William Jones

¹ Author is a Student at MIT-WPU School of Law, Pune, India.

praised the ancient Indian civilizations for the unique differences that existed in Indian culture and defended Indian culture. For example, Jones observed that Sanskrit seemed similar to Latin and Greek thus suggesting similarities between Indians and European. Some scholars found India laid back and stagnant with respect to modernization. In this early period arose Orientalism. Orientalism is the imitation or depiction of aspects in the Eastern world. These depictions are usually done by writers, designers and artists. Britishers were interested in Indian culture and hence took efforts to get acquainted with it. This fondness for the Indian culture led to various revelations which the British took advantage of.

Preconditions in India:

As understood from the previous paragraphs the British did not enter with strong political powers. During the time of British era there were Mughals who ruled the India. There were conflicts and difference of interests amongst these rulers which proved to be a big advantage for the Britishers to establish their colonies. Because there was no strong central power and uniformity between these rulers nor was there enough attention towards the kingdoms, establishing colonies became easier.

Decline of Mughal Empires

The Mughals originally came to India from Central Asia and were related to the Mongols that had conquered much of Asia in the thirteenth century. The expansion of Mughal Empire happened under the kingship of Akbar and Shah Jahan. Though at the time of Aurangzeb's demise the Mughal empire was strong and mighty but because of the constant conflicts and wars it started to shake. However, the primary reason for decline in the Empire was a gradual shift of power from a centralized imperial authority to a decentralized local rule of various principalities. It can be inferred that because of the inter-personal conflicts between various ministers or governors the Mughal empire gradually diminished. Advantage of such a situation was taken by the great Shivaji Maharaj and it added to the damage of Mughals. When Britishers entered India, they found havoc and weakened kingdoms which made their invasion process easy. They also encountered many newly independent regions that could be played against one another to prevent a large part of India working together in order to retaliate effectively. Another major aspect of the decline was that the Mughal Emperors were not concerned with the trade within their kingdoms. The base of power was concentrated in interior of the subcontinent and the government was not effective when it came to making decisions that affected the coastal regions. The Mughal elites who had jagir got revenue from taxation by exploiting the peasants. This neglect with the traders became advantageous to the Britishers.

III. COMPETITION WITH FOREIGN POWERS

Before Britishers came to trade in India there already existed some other European nations such as the Portuguese, Dutch and French who had made relations with Indian emperors. After the East India Company received the right of diwani in Bengal in 1756 then the Britishers were able to break these tie-ups of the Indian traders with other European nations. Like the Britishers the other nations were unsuccessful in establishing their political powers, while some nations such as Dutch had no focus on political powers and were solely concerned on the trade. With these British advantages, foreign powers quickly re-evaluated the wisdom of fighting a losing trade war with the British and eventually packed up, and left the subcontinent. This political control initially established by the British to best their European rivals started in port cities but eventually led to greater and political influence across most of India.

Urban cities/structures

When the Mughal power started to decline the oppressed native Indians were in a way set free and thus, the urban areas of the subcontinent and new groups began to grow. All the factors who were helpless in the kingdom of Mughals started to gain powers after its decline. Some of them were gentry, warriors, merchants, etc. British took the advantage of the situation and to their observations found that it was easier to trade routes and to use the merchants and gentry to help facilitate trade.

The Economy

Colonial India was known as the “Jewel of the British Crown,” appropriately because of the great wealth it brought to Great Britain. The British turned and twisted the Indian economy according to its own needs and this resulted in India being dependent on Britain for its trade, export or even shipping of produce. By this time the Britain was ruling India completely with regards to trade and commerce. These situations created various effects on the Indian economy and some of them are as follows:

a) The Drain Effect:

British followed a clear method of control called as, “The Drain Effect”. According to them a nations prosperity can be seen in the number of hard currency or capital it owns. As Britain started to evolve their trade and expand it, it affected the nation’s economy resulting it to cripple. We can even see that factors such as presence of merchants in parliament or different ways of trade in the two nations contributed to Britain’s success. merchants did not have the same kind of political support in India. They tended to be exploited and taxed heavily under

the Mughals instead of supported, as in Britain.

b) Trade advantages:

British indulged into a capitalist system rather than Indian merchants. This meant East India Company applied every tactic to get lower prices. Because of the monopolistic tricks export decreased drastically at the beginning of the 19th century.

Later on, the Europeans started to import from Britain rather than India. As the nineteenth century progressed, the primary Indian exports were cotton, jute, tea, and wheat; these products were used as raw materials of luxury items in Europe and were subject to sharp decreases in demand in times of economic strain.

c) Surplus and Scarcity of Silver:

British had control over another major import good that is the hard currency. Many European nations used silver to pay for the goods imported from India. Between 1757 and 1760, East India Company military and political advances led to direct control of Plassey, Bengal, Burdwan, Midnapore, and Chittagong. With these new possessions, the East India Company was able to collect huge territorial revenues and pay for their trade items with this revenue and thus stopped exporting silver into India. The use of silver caused inflation and also shortage of cash in Mughal Empire. The sudden cash shortages meant that it became impractical for the Mughals to continue making large expenditures. The decrease in bullion occurred so quickly that the Mughals were unable to meaningfully change their style of government before much of their territory had crumbled.

IV. BRITISH MILITARY POWER IN INDIA

East India Company did not spend a lot of time in just focusing on the trade and the armed conflicts started with India just in few years. After the treaty was signed which gave British the right to bring their own ships to the port to trade merchants of Surat immediately understood the threat of this treaty. The English vessels were much better armed than the Indian ships; Indian merchants were unable to stop British piracy and were faced with the choice of either keeping their ships at port or face the dangers of the open sea. The Mughals entered into these conflicts and tried to arrest these Englishmen but it was to no avail and Englishmen continued to threaten the Indian ships. Mughals had to give in to the demands of the British and sooner or later they took control of Indian merchants completely. We can even see the brutality of these Englishmen towards pilgrims or women in the Aurangzeb's era. It can be inferred that, even though Mughal emperors retaliated they could not stop British from establishing their

dominance as they played smartly by forming agreements with different emperors and prevent a strong central power to oppose them.

a) Naval Supremacy:

It can be seen that Britishers possessed a strong naval force. Though, Aurangzeb defeated Britishers on land they compensated this on the seas. There was some protection given by the Britishers to the Mughal Emperors on the land, this in itself could stop the dominant and strong Naval forces of the English men.

V. THE INVALID THANAHS AND BRITISH ARMY

These were soldiers who served for army over 10 years and had retired because of old age or some sort of diseases. They were influential in recruiting new army officers because people saw the perks enjoyed by these Thanahs. By inserting loyal native Indians, the British were able to destabilize some of the political control that the local principalities had built. It is said that the most unique feature of British army in India was the position of armed forces. Because the Britain's could not employ Englishmen as it was expensive, they turned to native Indians and recruited them into the English Army and gave them perks. These were known as Sepoys and benefitted English Army highly. The Britishers rooted a sense of individuality, pride and belonging in its soldiers which lead to loyalty to British colonization. But to our realisation this bond did not last long, the Britishers used cow fat for greasing their cartridges and this new led rise to revolts amongst the Indians. The consequence of this was distrust in sepoy and reduction of the same. British men turned to rural agrarian people to recruit in Britain army rather than higher castes of India. Their strategy was the get in people with less intelligence and no power to avoid betrayal and revolts.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the above paragraphs it can be inferred that Britishers though did not have a primary purpose of capturing India eventually exploited it and broke it down systematically. They lured people into being loyal to them, they took away trade completely from Indian merchants, they were insensitive about Indians and their cultures and saw India as their playground. Though Englishmen introduced a lot of foreign activities and lifestyle India proving some of it to be beneficial a large amount of their introductions caged and oppressed the Indians. India was rich in culture and as well as finance but the slow invasion by Mughals and Britishers left nothing behind.
