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# The Satyagraha and East India Company

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## ABSTRACT

*The East India Company was the main company for trade and was famous for the same as well its ability to know the culture of the places the traded and later on posed the dominant position on them. English east India Company was founded on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec, 1600 by John Watts and George White and The Dutch East India Company was created in 1602. Both the companies mainly traded cloth and spices. Their goal was not merely to achieve success in trade but also to occupy a control. East India became successful in this and became the dominant trading power of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century which helped in building of British Imperialism. The East India company understood that they can acquire the major power by controlling the agriculture especially in a country like India which is a rich source of most of the herbs, fabrics and much more. A similar kind of technique was used by Britishers in which they forced set of farmers of a particular place to indigo until the Satyagraha Moment broke.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The East India Company mainly traded items which were needed in the English kingdom and were easily available among the east indies, India being the successful producer of cloth and spices became the center of exploitation though it is claimed by British that this helped India to grow. England used all the tactics even force and gained what it needed by every means.

There were various problems East India Company had to face in the beginning

- Had small fleet
- People feared that it would not succeed
- They did not have a proper business plan

But very soon it became successful and grew up widely.

With the trade of products they also learned its production for their homeland. Once these products started to manufacture at their place they started to pay much less than the actual price to Indian people and with this started the early exploitation. Then sometime later they saw a great scope of fashion industry and understood the fact this industry is more profitable than

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dictatorship exercised by trade.

Below is the map providing the trade routes and center of English East India Company.

they took all the intelligent steps which would help the England to grow one of which was trade by sea navigation, England moved with time and this is the reason they built such strong and big empire.

While English East India company was flourishing in trade of cloths and fabric on the other hand Dutch East India Company dealt with the trade of spices.

After some time the ideas and mind of people started to grow and arguments for both why Trade should be stopped or should keep going.

In totality british focused on learning the culture, about people, laws, operations etc of every place they went and settled their trade and were knowingly and unknowingly ending up ruling up that place. They had a deep knowledge of administration and ways to tackle people which made the process even easier.

Often it is said that because of them India developed but looking at the reasons here we can see that English people were the ones who took resources from India to develop their land, found ways to grow.

## **II. CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA MOVEMENT**

Champanan is a district in North Western Bihar. It formed part of the Tirhut division in the province of Bihar and Orissa in British India. In 1972, it was divided in two districts, Pashchim (west) and Purbi (east) Champanan. The headquarters of the former is at Bettiah and the latter is at Motihari.

Indigo cultivation in Champanan goes back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was in 1813, however, that the first indigo factory was founded at Bara village. By 1850, indigo had become the predominantly produced crop in Champanan, replacing even sugar. It was the largest Zimidari Estate.

This whole movement was just dedicated to protect the farmers of Indigo Plantation.

What was so special about Indigo? Why was it grown? And what lead to the revolt?

Let us first understand the value of indigo, Indigo is a great source of natural blue dye, which was in great demand in Europe. They discovered its importance in the fashion Industry and declared it as a cash crop of commercial use and is highly profitable.

Now what was the reason of coming to India, India was once known as the King of indigo

cultivation, here it was available at very cheap prices not only the crop but labour as well. The climatic conditions were favourable. There was no shortage of man power and people didn't know much about the laws, also the governing power was in hands of Europeans. So from every angle it was feasible and profitable for them.

Now a problem arose when growing indigo was not a choice but compulsion, it was out of the league of farmers to deny growing it. Indigo is a cash crop and needs a lot of nutrients, once indigo has been grown one can not use that land to grow another crop at least for an year and it made the land barren very quickly. At this time Panchkathiya system was followed, in this system 5 Kathas of land in a Bigha had to be planted with Indigo. It would have been possible to follow this in long time if farmers would have got adequate amount of payment but only 2.5% of the market price was paid to the farmers and this same was happening when English East India Company started to trade for fashion Industry, they paid the amount they felt was enough but it was not exactly what was needed. Infact even to grow the crops there is some fund required for which farmers of Champaran had to take a loan called Dodon, this loan was another great way to exploit the farmers as moneylenders used to charge very high interest rates.

These pictures represent the condition of Indians and the Country land, as there was technology back then so it was even more hard to prepare that barren land again.

Then Rajkumar showed his concern about the matter to Gandhi ji and he came to Champaran with Rajkumar early in 1917, Gandhi cross-examined 8000 cultivators of India and understood their problems, lifestyles and tried to find out the possible solutions. Then Gandhi ji decided to start the 1<sup>st</sup> Civil disobedience movement, he along with the cultivators protested strikes against the landlords and signed an agreement granting more compensation and control over the farming after which they had to follow the takathiya system in which 3 Kathas of 1 bigha had to be planted with Indigo. After few months of this movement an Champaran Agrarian Bill was passed in which MSP, land use, loan interest were mentioned.

To conclude India has been a country full of resources and Britishers/ foreigners have been people full of opportunities, though sometimes it becomes difficult to tell that if it was just trade, business or formal relationships or if it was merely exploitation to the end. Be it the need of cotton in English east India company or the need of indigo by Europeans it has always been more than just the trade practices. At the same time it would be fair to say that they had a great knowledge of business and always moved with and ahead of time which made their homeland a developed nation