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1 How, When and Where

How Important are Dates?

There was a time when historians were fascinated with dates. There were heated debates about the dates on which rulers were crowned or battles were fought. In the common-sense notion, history was synonymous with dates. You may have heard people say, "I find history boring because it is all about memorising dates." Is such a conception true?

History is certainly about changes that occur over time. It is about finding out how things were in the past and how things have changed. As soon as we compare the past with the present we refer to time, we talk of "before" and "after".

Living in the world we do not always ask historical questions about what we see around us. We take things for granted, as if what we see has always been in the world we inhabit. But most of us have our moments of wonder, when we are curious, and we ask questions that actually are historical. Watching someone sip a cup of tea at a roadside tea stall you may wonder – when did people begin to drink tea or coffee? Looking out of the window of a train you may ask yourself – when were railways built and how did people travel long distances before the age of railways? Reading the newspaper in the morning you may be curious to know how people got to hear about things before newspapers began to be printed.

Fig. 1 *– Brahmans offering the Shastras to Britannia, frontispiece to the first map produced by James Rennel, 1782*

Rennel was asked by Robert Clive to produce maps of Hindustan. An enthusiastic supporter of British conquest of India, Rennel saw preparation of maps as essential to the process of domination. The picture here tries to suggest that Indians willingly gave over their ancient texts to Britannia – the symbol of British power – as if asking her to become the protector of Indian culture.

Activity

Look carefully at Fig.1 and write a paragraph explaining how this image projects an imperial perception.

All such historical questions refer us back to notions of time. But time does not have to be always precisely dated in terms of a particular year or a month. Sometimes it is actually incorrect to fix precise dates to processes that happen over a period of time. People in India did not begin drinking tea one fine day; they developed a taste for it over time. There can be no one clear date for a process such as this. Similarly, we cannot fix one single date on which British rule was established, or the national movement started, or changes took place within the economy and society. All these things happened over a stretch of time. We can only refer to a span of time, an approximate period over which particular changes became visible.

Why, then, do we continue to associate history with a string of dates? This association has a reason. There was a time when history was an account of battles and big events. It was about rulers and their policies. Historians wrote about the year a king was crowned, the year he married, the year he had a child, the year he fought a particular war, the year he died, and the year the next ruler succeeded to the throne. For events such as these, specific dates can be determined, and in histories such as these, debates about dates continue to be important.

As you have seen in the history textbooks of the past two years, historians now write about a host of other issues, and other questions. They look at how people earned their livelihood, what they produced and ate, how cities developed and markets came up, how kingdoms were formed and new ideas spread, and how cultures and society changed.

Fig. 2 *–Advertisements help create taste*

Old advertisements help us understand how markets for new products were created and new tastes were popularised. This 1922 advertisement for Lipton tea suggests that royalty all over the world is associated with this tea. In the background you see the outer wall of an Indian palace, while in the foreground, seated on horseback is the third son of Queen Victoria of Britain, Prince Arthur, who was given the title Duke of Connaught.

Which dates?

By what criteria do we choose a set of dates as important? The dates we select, the dates around which we compose our story of the past, are not important on their own. They become vital because we focus on a particular set of events as important. If our focus of study changes, if we begin to look at new issues, a new set of dates will appear significant.

Consider an example. In the histories written by British historians in India, the rule of each Governor-General was important. These histories began with the rule of the first Governor-General, Warren Hastings, and ended with the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten. In separate chapters we read about the deeds of others –

Hastings, Wellesley, Bentinck, Dalhousie, Canning, Lawrence, Lytton, Ripon, Curzon, Harding, Irwin. It was a seemingly never-ending succession of Governor-Generals and Viceroys. All the dates in these history books were linked to these personalities – to their activities, policies, achievements. It was as if there was nothing outside their lives that was important for us to know. The chronology of their lives marked the different chapters of the history of British India.

Can we not write about the history of this period in a different way? How do we focus on the activities of different groups and classes in Indian society within the format of this history of Governor-Generals?

When we write history, or a story, we divide it into chapters. Why do we do this? It is to give each chapter some coherence. It is to tell a story in a way that makes some sense and can be followed. In the process we focus only on those events that help us to give shape to the story we are telling. In the histories that revolve around the life of British Governor-Generals, the activities of Indians simply do not fit, they have no space. What, then, do we do? Clearly, we need another format for our history. This would mean that the old dates will no longer have the significance they earlier had. A new set of dates will become more important for us to know.

***Fig. 3** – Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General of India in 1773*

While history books narrated the deeds of Governor-Generals, biographies glorified them as persons, and paintings projected them as powerful figures.

How do we periodise?

In 1817, James Mill, a Scottish economist and political philosopher, published a massive three-volume work, A History of British India. In this he divided Indian history into three periods – Hindu, Muslim and British. This periodisation came to be widely accepted. Can you think of any problem with this way of looking at Indian history?

Why do we try and divide history into different periods? We do so in an attempt to capture the characteristics of a time, its central features as they appear to us. So the terms through which we periodise – that is, demarcate the difference between periods – become important. They reflect our ideas about the past. They show how we see the significance of the change from one period to the next.

Mill thought that all Asian societies were at a lower level of civilisation than Europe. According to his telling of history, before the British came to India, Hindu and Muslim despots ruled the country. Religious intolerance, caste taboos and superstitious practices dominated

Activity

Interview your mother or another member of your family to find out about their life. Now divide their life into different periods and list out the significant events in each period. Explain the basis of your periodisation.

social life. British rule, Mill felt, could civilise India. To do this it was necessary to introduce European manners, arts, institutions and laws in India. Mill, in fact, suggested that the British should conquer all the territories in India to ensure the enlightenment and happiness of the Indian people. For India was not capable of progress without British help.

In this idea of history, British rule represented all the forces of progress and civilisation. The period before British rule was one of darkness. Can such a conception be accepted today?

In any case, can we refer to any period of history as "Hindu" or "Muslim"? Did not a variety of faiths exist simultaneously in these periods? Why should we characterise an age only through the religion of the rulers of the time? To do so is to suggest that the lives and practices of the others do not really matter. We should also remember that even rulers in ancient India did not all share the same faith.

Moving away from British classification, historians have usually divided Indian history into 'ancient', 'medieval' and 'modern'. This division too has its problems. It is a periodisation that is borrowed from the West where the modern period was associated with the growth of all the forces of modernity – science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was a term used to describe a society where these features of modern society did not exist. Can we uncritically accept this characterisation of the modern period to describe the period of our study? As you will see in this book, under British rule people did not have equality, freedom or liberty. Nor was the period one of economic growth and progress.

Many historians therefore refer to this period as 'colonial'.

What is colonial?

In this book you will read about the way the British came to conquer the country and establish their rule, subjugating local nawabs and rajas. You will see how they established control over the economy and society, collected revenue to meet all their expenses, bought the goods they wanted at low prices, produced crops they needed for export, and you will understand the changes that came about as a consequence. You will also come to know about the changes British rule brought about in values and tastes, customs and practices. When the subjugation of one country by another leads to these kinds of political, economic, social and cultural changes, we refer to the process as colonisation.

You will, however, find that all classes and groups did not experience these changes in the same way. That is why the book is called Our Pasts in the plural.

How do We Know?

What sources do historians use in writing about the last 250 years of Indian history?

Administration produces records

One important source is the official records of the British administration. The British believed that the act of writing was important. Every instruction, plan, policy decision, agreement, investigation had to be clearly written up. Once this was done, things could be properly studied and debated. This conviction produced an administrative culture of memos, notings and reports.

The British also felt that all important documents and letters needed to be carefully preserved. So they set up record rooms attached to all administrative institutions. The village tahsildar's office, the collectorate, the commissioner's office, the provincial secretariats, the lawcourts – all had their record rooms. Specialised institutions like archives and museums were also established to preserve important records.

Letters and memos that moved from one branch of the administration to another in the early years of the nineteenth century can still be read in the archives. You can also study the notes and reports that district officials prepared, or the instructions and directives that were sent by officials at the top to provincial administrators.

In the early years of the nineteenth century these documents were carefully copied out and beautifully written by calligraphists – that is, by those who specialised in the art of beautiful writing. By the middle of the nineteenth century, with the spread of printing, multiple copies of these records were printed as proceedings of each government department.

Fig. 4 – *The National Archives of India came up in the 1920s*

When New Delhi was built, the National Museum and the National Archives were both located close to the Viceregal Palace. This location reflects the importance these institutions had in British imagination.

Source 1

Reports to the Home Department

In 1946 the colonial government in India was trying to put down a mutiny that broke out on the ships of the Royal Indian Navy. Here is a sample of the kind of reports the Home Department got from the different dockyards:

> Bombay: Arrangements have been made for the Army to take over ships and establishment. Royal Navy ships are remaining outside the harbour.
>
> Karachi: 301 mutineers are under arrest and a few more strongly suspected are to be arrested ... All establishments ... are under military guard.
>
> Vizagapatnam: The position is completely under control and no violence has occurred. Military guards have been placed on ships and establishments. No further trouble is expected except that a few men may refuse to work.

Director of Intelligence, HQ. India Command, Situation Report No. 7. File No. 5/21/46 Home (Political), Government of India

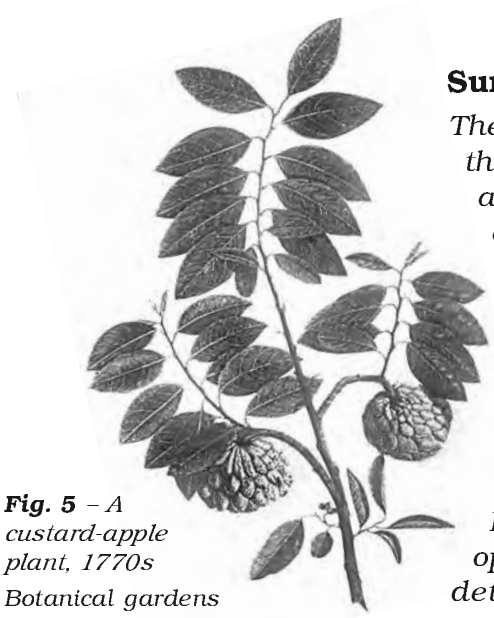


Fig. 5 *– A custard-apple plant, 1770s*

Botanical gardens and natural history museums established by the British collected plant specimens and information about their uses. Local artists were asked to draw pictures of these specimens. Historians are now looking at the way such information was gathered and what this information reveals about the nature of colonialism.

Surveys become important

The practice of surveying also became common under the colonial administration. The British believed that a country had to be properly known before it could be effectively administered.

By the early nineteenth century detailed surveys were being carried out to map the entire country. In the villages, revenue surveys were conducted. The effort was to know the topography, the soil quality, the flora, the fauna, the local histories, and the cropping pattern – all the facts seen as necessary to know about to administer the region. From the end of the nineteenth century, Census operations were held every ten years. These prepared detailed records of the number of people in all the provinces of India, noting information on castes, religions and occupation. There were many other surveys – botanical surveys, zoological surveys, archaeological surveys, anthropological surveys, forest surveys.

What official records do not tell

From this vast corpus of records we can get to know a lot, but we must remember that these are official records. They tell us what the officials thought, what

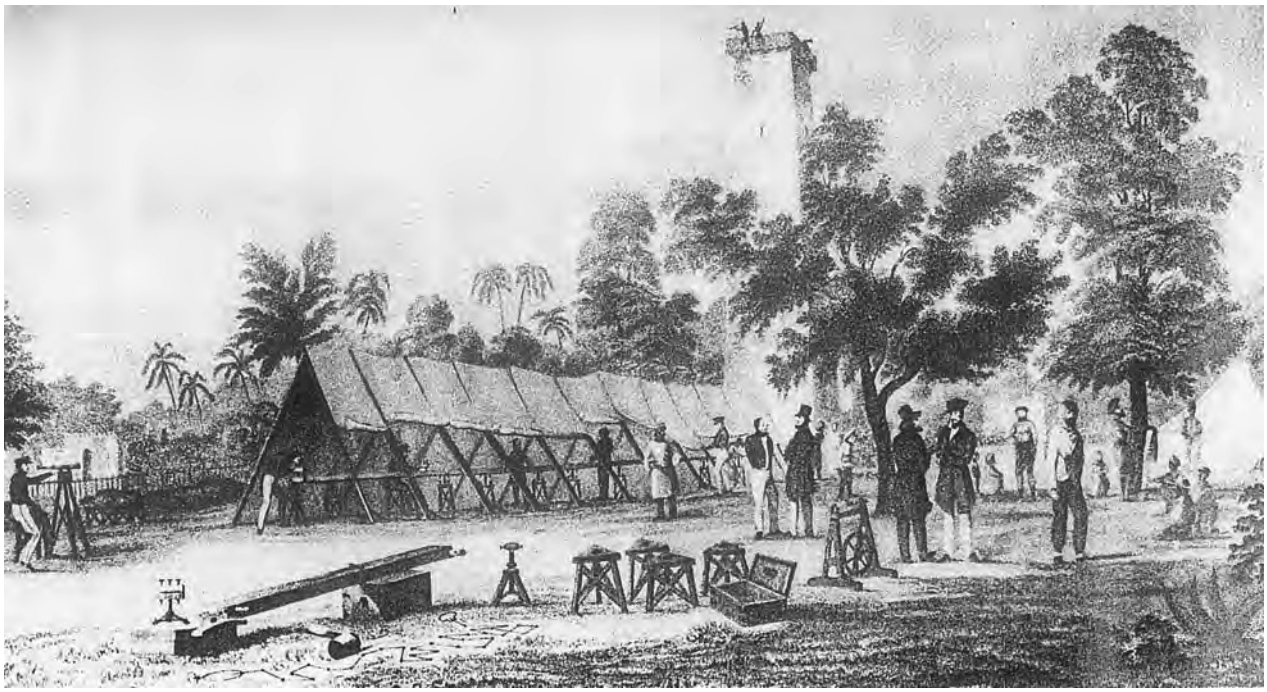


Fig. 6 *– Mapping and survey operations in progress in Bengal, a drawing by James Prinsep, 1832*

Note how all the instruments that were used in surveys are placed in the foreground to emphasise the scientific nature of the project.

Fig. 7 *– The rebels of 1857*

Images need to be carefully studied for they project the viewpoint of those who create them. This image can be found in several illustrated books produced by the British after the 1857 rebellion. The caption at the bottom says: "Mutinous sepoys share the loot". In British representations the rebels appear as greedy, vicious and brutal. You will read about the rebellion in Chapter 5.

they were interested in, and what they wished to preserve for posterity. These records do not always help us understand what other people in the country felt, and what lay behind their actions.

For that we need to look elsewhere. When we begin to search for these other sources we find them in plenty, though they are more difficult to get than official records. We have diaries of people, accounts of pilgrims and travellers, autobiographies of important personalities, and popular booklets that were sold in the local bazaars. As printing spread, newspapers were published and issues were debated in public. Leaders and reformers wrote to spread their ideas, poets and novelists wrote to express their feelings.

All these sources, however, were produced by those who were literate. From these we will not be able to understand how history was experienced and lived by the tribals and the peasants, the workers in the mines or the poor on the streets. Getting to know their lives is a more difficult task.

Yet this can be done, if we make a little bit of effort. When you read this book you will see how this can be done.

Source 2

"Not fit for human consumption"

Newspapers provide accounts of the movements in different parts of the country. Here is a report of a police strike in 1946.

> More than 2000 policemen in Delhi refused to take their food on Thursday morning as a protest against their low salaries and the bad quality of food supplied to them from the Police Lines kitchen.
>
> As the news spread to the other police stations, the men there also refused to take food ... One of the strikers said: "The food supplied to us from the Police Lines kitchen is not fit for human consumption. Even cattle would not eat the *chappattis* and *dal* which we have to eat."
>
> *Hindustan Times,* 22 March, 1946

Activity

Look at Sources 1 and 2. Do you find any differences in the nature of reporting? Explain what you observe.

Let's imagine

Imagine that you are a historian wanting to find out about how agriculture changed in a remote tribal area after independence. List the different ways in which you would find information on this.

Let's recall

1. *State whether true or false:*

   (a) James Mill divided Indian history into three periods – Hindu, Muslim, Christian.

   (b) Official documents help us understand what the people of the country think.

   (c) The British thought surveys were important for effective administration.

Let's discuss

2. *What is the problem with the periodisation of Indian history that James Mill offers?*
3. *Why did the British preserve official documents?*
4. *How will the information historians get from old newspapers be different from that found in police reports?*

Let's do

5. *Can you think of examples of surveys in your world today? Think about how toy companies get information about what young people enjoy playing with or how the government finds out about the number of young people in school. What can a historian derive from such surveys?*

2 From Trade to Territory
The Company Establishes Power

Aurangzeb was the last of the powerful Mughal rulers. He established control over a very large part of the territory that is now known as India. After his death in 1707, many Mughal governors (subadars) and big zamindars began asserting their authority and establishing regional kingdoms. As powerful regional kingdoms emerged in various parts of India, Delhi could no longer function as an effective centre.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, a new power was emerging on the political horizon – the British. Did you know that the British originally came as a small trading company and were reluctant to acquire territories? How then did they come to be masters of a vast empire? In this chapter you will see how this came about.

Fig. 1 *– Bahadur Shah Zafar and his sons being arrested by Captain Hodson*

After Aurangzeb there was no powerful Mughal ruler, but Mughal emperors continued to be symbolically important. In fact, when a massive rebellion against British rule broke out in 1857, Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal emperor at the time, was seen as the natural leader. Once the revolt was put down by the company, Bahadur Shah Zafar was forced to leave the kingdom, and his sons were shot in cold blood.

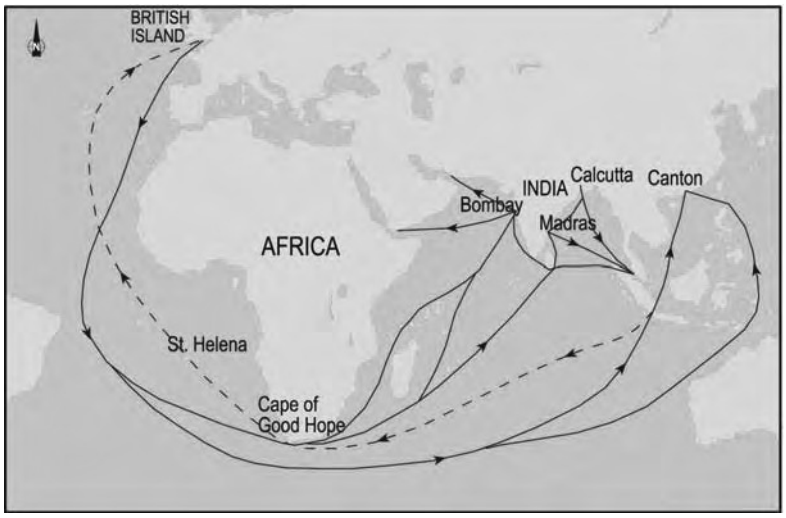


Fig. 2 – *Routes to India in the eighteenth century*

East India Company Comes East

In 1600, the East India Company acquired a charter from the ruler of England, Queen Elizabeth I, granting it the sole right to trade with the East. This meant that no other trading group in England could compete with the East India Company. With this charter the Company could venture across the oceans, looking for new lands from which it could buy goods at a cheap price, and carry them back to Europe to sell at higher prices. The Company did not have to fear competition from other English trading companies. **Mercantile** *trading companies in those days made profit primarily by excluding competition, so that they could buy cheap and sell dear.*

The royal charter, however, could not prevent other European powers from entering the Eastern markets. By the time the first English ships sailed down the west coast of Africa, round the Cape of Good Hope, and crossed the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese had already established their presence in the western coast of India, and had their base in Goa. In fact, it was Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, who had discovered this sea route to India in 1498. By the early seventeenth century, the Dutch too were exploring the possibilities of trade in the Indian Ocean. Soon the French traders arrived on the scene.

Mercantile – *A business enterprise that makes profit primarily through trade, buying goods cheap and selling them at higher prices*

The problem was that all the companies were interested in buying the same things. The fine qualities of cotton and silk produced in India had a big market in Europe. Pepper, cloves, cardamom and cinnamon too were in great demand. Competition amongst the European companies inevitably pushed up the prices at which these goods could be purchased, and this reduced the profits that could be earned. The only way the trading companies could flourish was by eliminating rival competitors. The urge to secure markets therefore led to fierce battles between the trading companies. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they regularly sank each other's ships, blockaded routes, and prevented rival ships from moving with supplies of

goods. Trade was carried on with arms and trading posts were protected through fortification.

This effort to fortify settlements and carry on profitable trade also led to intense conflict with local rulers. The company therefore found it difficult to separate trade from politics. Let us see how this happened.

East India Company begins trade in Bengal

The first English factory was set up on the banks of the river Hugli in 1651. This was the base from which the Company's traders, known at that time as "factors", operated. The factory had a warehouse where goods for export were stored, and it had offices where Company officials sat. As trade expanded, the Company persuaded merchants and traders to come and settle near the factory. By 1696 it began building a fort around the settlement. Two years later it bribed Mughal officials into giving the Company zamindari rights over three villages. One of these was Kalikata, which later grew into the city of Calcutta or Kolkata as it is known today. It also persuaded the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to issue a ***farman*** *granting the Company the right to trade duty free.*

Farman *– A royal edict, a royal order*

The Company tried continuously to press for more concessions and manipulate existing privileges. Aurangzeb's farman, for instance, had granted only the Company the right to trade duty free. But officials of the Company, who were carrying on private trade on the side, were expected to pay duty. This they refused to pay, causing an enormous loss of revenue for Bengal. How could the Nawab of Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan, not protest?

Fig. 3 *– Local boats bring goods from ships in Madras, painted by William Simpson, 1867*

Fig. 4 – *Robert Clive*

How trade led to battles

Through the early eighteenth century the conflict between the Company and the nawabs of Bengal intensified. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Bengal nawabs asserted their power and autonomy, as other regional powers were doing at that time. Murshid Quli Khan was followed by Alivardi Khan and then Sirajuddaulah as the Nawab of Bengal. Each one of them was a strong ruler. They refused to grant the Company concessions, demanded large tributes for the Company's right to trade, denied it any right to mint coins, and stopped it from extending its fortifications. Accusing the Company of deceit, they claimed that the Company was depriving the Bengal government of huge amounts of revenue and undermining the authority of the nawab. It was refusing to pay taxes, writing disrespectful letters, and trying to humiliate the nawab and his officials.

The Company on its part declared that the unjust demands of the local officials were ruining the trade of the Company, and trade could flourish only if the duties were removed. It was also convinced that to expand trade it had to enlarge its settlements, buy up villages, and rebuild its forts.

The conflicts led to confrontations and finally culminated in the famous Battle of Plassey.

Puppet – *Literally, a toy that you can move with strings. The term is used disapprovingly to refer to a person who is controlled by someone else.*

The Battle of Plassey

When Alivardi Khan died in 1756, Sirajuddaulah became the nawab of Bengal. The Company was worried about his power and keen on a **puppet** *ruler who would willingly give trade concessions and other privileges. So it tried, though without success, to help one of Sirajuddaulah's rivals become the nawab. An infuriated Sirajuddaulah asked the Company to stop meddling in the political affairs of his dominion, stop fortification, and pay the revenues. After negotiations failed, the Nawab marched with 30,000 soldiers to the English factory at Kassimbazar, captured the Company officials, locked the warehouse, disarmed all Englishmen, and blockaded English ships. Then he marched to Calcutta to establish control over the Company's fort there.*

On hearing the news of the fall of Calcutta, Company officials in Madras sent forces under the command of Robert Clive, reinforced by naval fleets. Prolonged negotiations with the Nawab followed. Finally, in 1757, Robert Clive led the Company's army against Sirajuddaulah at Plassey. One of the main reasons for

Did you know?

Did you know how Plassey got its name? Plassey is an anglicised pronunciation of Palashi and the place derived its name from the *palash* tree known for its beautiful red flowers that yield *gulal*, the powder used in the festival of Holi.

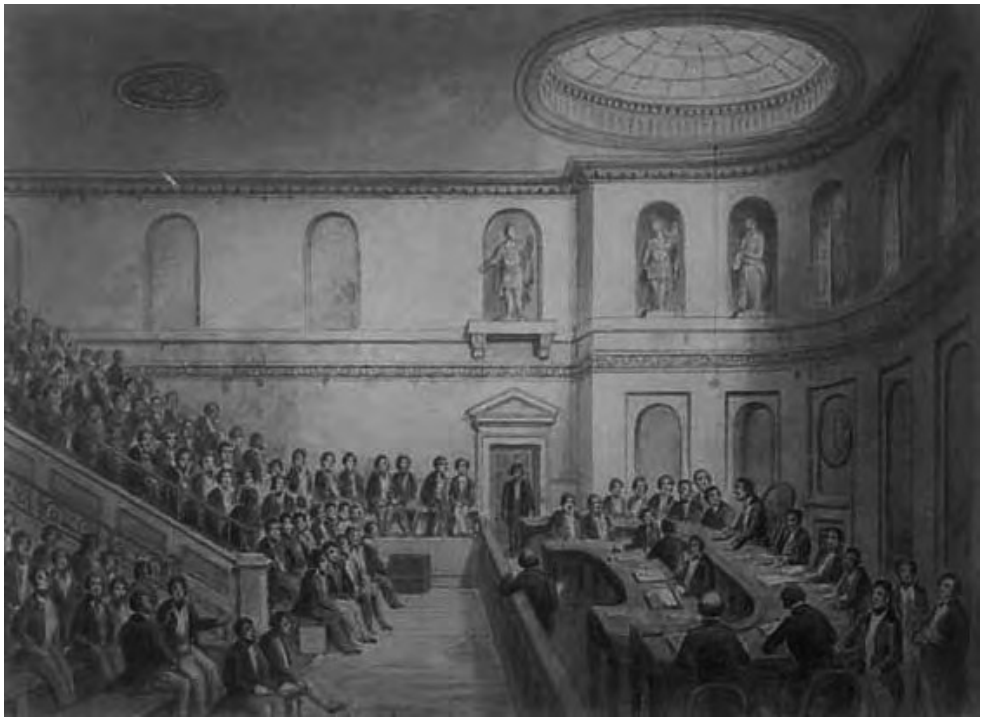


Fig. 5 *– The General Court Room, East India House, Leadenhall Street*

The Court of Proprietors of the East India Company had their meetings in the East India House on Leadenhall Street in London. This is a picture of one of their meetings in progress.

the defeat of the Nawab was that the forces led by Mir Jafar, one of Sirajuddaulah's commanders, never fought the battle. Clive had managed to secure his support by promising to make him nawab after crushing Sirajuddaulah.

The Battle of Plassey became famous because it was the first major victory the Company won in India.

Source 1

The promise of riches

The territorial ambitions of the mercantile East India Company were viewed with distrust and doubt in England. After the Battle of Plassey, Robert Clive wrote to William Pitt, one of the Principal Secretaries of State to the English monarch, on 7 January 1759 from Calcutta:

> But so large a sovereignty may possibly be an object too extensive for a mercantile Company ... I flatter myself ... that there will be little or no difficulty in obtaining the absolute possession of these rich kingdoms: ... Now I leave you to judge, whether an income yearly of two million sterling with the possession of three provinces ... be an object deserving the public attention ...

Source 2

The Nawab complains

In 1733 the Nawab of Bengal said this about the English traders:

> When they first came into the country they petitioned the then government in a humble manner for liberty to purchase a spot of ground to build a factory house upon, which was no sooner granted but they built a strong fort, surrounded it with a ditch which has communication with the river and mounted a great number of guns upon the walls. They have enticed several merchants and others to go and take protection under them and they collect a revenue which amounts to Rs 100, 000 ... they rob and plunder and carry great number of the king's subjects of both sexes into slavery into their own country ...

After the defeat at Plassey, Sirajuddaulah was assassinated and Mir Jafar made the nawab. The Company was still unwilling to take over the responsibility of administration. Its prime objective was the expansion of trade. If this could be done without conquest, through the help of local rulers who were willing to grant privileges, then territories need not be taken over directly.

Soon the Company discovered that this was rather difficult. For even the puppet nawabs were not always as helpful as the Company wanted them to be. After all, they had to maintain a basic appearance of dignity and sovereignty if they wanted respect from their subjects.

What could the Company do? When Mir Jafar protested, the Company deposed him and installed Mir Qasim in his place. When Mir Qasim complained, he in turn was defeated in a battle fought at Buxar (1764), driven out of Bengal, and Mir Jafar was reinstalled. The Nawab had to pay Rs 500,000 every month but the Company wanted more money to finance its wars, and meet the demands of trade and its other expenses. It wanted more territories and more revenue. By the time Mir Jafar died in 1765 the mood of the Company had changed. Having failed to work with puppet nawabs, Clive declared: "We must indeed become nawabs ourselves."

Finally, in 1765 the Mughal emperor appointed the Company as the Diwan of the provinces of Bengal. The Diwani allowed the Company to use the vast revenue resources of Bengal. This solved a major problem that the Company had earlier faced. From the early eighteenth century its trade with India had expanded. But it had to buy most of the goods in India with gold and silver imported from Britain. This was because at this time Britain had no goods to sell in India. The outflow of gold from Britain slowed after the Battle of Plassey, and entirely stopped after the assumption of Diwani. Now revenues from India could finance Company expenses. These revenues could be used to purchase cotton and silk textiles in India, maintain Company troops, and meet the cost of building the Company fort and offices at Calcutta.

Company officials become "nabobs"

What did it mean to be nawabs? It meant of course that the Company acquired more power and authority. But it also meant something else. Each company servant began to have visions of living like nawabs.

After the Battle of Plassey the actual nawabs of Bengal were forced to give land and vast sums of money as personal gifts to Company officials. Robert Clive himself amassed a fortune in India. He had come to Madras (now Chennai) from England in 1743 at the age of 18. When in 1767 he left India his Indian fortune was worth £401,102. Interestingly, when he was appointed Governor of Bengal in 1764, he was asked to remove corruption in Company administration but he was himself cross-examined in 1772 by the British Parliament which was suspicious of his vast wealth. Although he was acquitted, he committed suicide in 1774.

However, not all Company officials succeeded in making money like Clive. Many died an early death in India due to disease and war and it would not be right to regard all of them as corrupt and dishonest. Many of them came from humble backgrounds and their uppermost desire was to earn enough in India, return to Britain and lead a comfortable life. Those who managed to return with wealth led flashy lives and flaunted their riches. They were called "nabobs" – an anglicised version of the Indian word nawab. They were often seen as upstarts and social climbers in British society and were ridiculed or made fun of in plays and cartoons.

Company Rule Expands

If we analyse the process of annexation of Indian states by the East India Company from 1757 to 1857, certain key aspects emerge. The Company rarely launched a direct military attack on an unknown territory. Instead it used a variety of political, economic and diplomatic methods to extend its influence before annexing an Indian kingdom.

After the Battle of Buxar (1764), the Company appointed Residents in Indian states. They were political or commercial agents and their job was to serve and further the interests of the Company. Through the Residents, the Company officials began interfering in the internal affairs of Indian states. They tried to decide who was to be the successor to the throne, and who was to be appointed in administrative posts. Sometimes the Company forced the states into a "subsidiary alliance". According to the terms of this alliance, Indian rulers were not allowed to have their independent armed forces. They were to be protected by the Company, but

Source 3

How did Clive see himself?

At his hearing in front of a Committee in Parliament, Clive declared that he had shown admirable restraint after the Battle of Plassey. This is what he said:

> Consider the situation in which the victory at Plassey had placed me! A great prince was dependent on my pleasure; an opulent city lay at my mercy; its richest bankers bid against each other for my smiles; I walked through vaults which were thrown open to me alone, piled on either hand with gold and jewels! Mr Chairman, at this moment I stand astonished at my moderation.

Activity

Imagine that you are a young Company official who has been in India for a few months. Write a letter home to your mother telling her about your luxurious life and contrasting it with your earlier life in Britain.

Fig. 6 – *Nawab Shujauddaulah of Awadh, with his sons and the British Resident, painted by Tilly Kettle (oil, 1772)*

The treaties that followed the Battle of Buxar forced Nawab Shujauddaulah to give up much of his authority. Here, however, he poses in regal splendour, towering over the Resident.

Injunction – *Instruction*

Subservience – *Submissiveness*

had to pay for the "subsidiary forces" that the Company was supposed to maintain for the purpose of this protection. If the Indian rulers failed to make the payment, then part of their territory was taken away as penalty. For example, when Richard Wellesley was Governor-General (1798-1805), the Nawab of Awadh was forced to give over half of his territory to the Company in 1801, as he failed to pay for the "subsidiary forces". Hyderabad was also forced to cede territories on similar grounds.

Source 4

What power did the Resident have?

This is what James Mill, the famous economist and political philosopher from Scotland, wrote about the residents appointed by the Company.

> We place a resident, who really is king of the country, whatever **injunctions** of non-interference he may act under. As long as the prince acts in perfect **subservience**, and does what is agreeable to the residents, that is, to the British Government, things go on quietly; they are managed without the resident appearing much in the administration of affairs ... but when anything of a different nature happens, the moment the prince takes a course which the British Government think wrong, then comes clashing and disturbance.
>
> *James Mill (1832)*

Fig. 7 – *Tipu Sultan*

Tipu Sultan – The "Tiger of Mysore"

The Company resorted to direct military confrontation when it saw a threat to its political or economic interests. This can be illustrated with the case of the southern Indian state of Mysore.

Mysore had grown in strength under the leadership of powerful rulers like Haidar Ali (ruled from 1761 to 1782) and his famous son Tipu Sultan (ruled from 1782 to 1799). Mysore controlled the profitable trade of the Malabar coast where the Company purchased pepper and cardamom. In 1785 Tipu Sultan stopped the export of sandalwood, pepper and cardamom through the ports of his kingdom, and disallowed local merchants from trading with the Company. He also established a close

***Fig. 8** – Cornwallis receiving the sons of Tipu Sultan as hostages, painted by Daniel Orme, 1793*

The Company forces were defeated by Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan in several battles. But in 1792, attacked by the combined forces of the Marathas, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Company, Tipu was forced to sign a treaty with the British by which two of his sons were taken away as hostages. British painters always liked painting scenes that showed the triumph of British power.

relationship with the French in India, and modernised his army with their help.

The British were furious. They saw Haidar and Tipu as ambitious, arrogant and dangerous – rulers who had to be controlled and crushed. Four wars were fought with Mysore (1767-69, 1780-84, 1790-92 and 1799). Only in the last – the Battle of Seringapatam – did the Company ultimately win a victory. Tipu Sultan was killed defending his capital Seringapatam, Mysore was placed under the former ruling dynasty of the Wodeyars and a subsidiary alliance was imposed on the state.

***Fig. 9** – Tipu's toy tiger*

This is the picture of a big mechanical toy that Tipu possessed. You can see a tiger mauling a European soldier. When its handle was turned the toy tiger roared and the soldier shrieked. This toy-tiger is now kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The British took it away when Tipu Sultan died defending his capital Seringapatam on 4 May 1799.

The legend of Tipu

Kings are often surrounded by legend and their powers glorified through folklore. Here is a legend about Tipu Sultan who became the ruler of Mysore in 1782. It is said that once he went hunting in the forest with a French friend. There he came face to face with a tiger. His gun did not work and his dagger fell to the ground. He battled with the tiger unarmed until he managed to reach down and pick up the dagger. Finally he was able to kill the tiger in the battle. After this he came to be known as the "Tiger of Mysore". He had the image of the tiger on his flag.

Activity

Imagine that you have come across two old newspapers reporting on the Battle of Seringapatam and the death of Tipu Sultan. One is a British paper and the other is from Mysore. Write the headline for each of the two newspapers.

Confederacy – *Alliance*

War with the Marathas

From the late eighteenth century the Company also sought to curb and eventually destroy Maratha power. With their defeat in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, the Marathas' dream of ruling from Delhi was shattered. They were divided into many states under different chiefs (sardars) belonging to dynasties such as Sindhia, Holkar, Gaikwad and Bhonsle. These chiefs were held together in a **confederacy** *under a Peshwa (Principal Minister) who became its effective military and administrative head based in Pune. Mahadji Sindhia and Nana Phadnis were two famous Maratha soldiers and statesmen of the late eighteenth century.*

The Marathas were subdued in a series of wars. In the first war that ended in 1782 with the Treaty of Salbai, there was no clear victor. The Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-05) was fought on different fronts, resulting in the British gaining Orissa and the territories north of the Yamuna river including Agra and Delhi. Finally, the Third Anglo-Maratha War of 1817-19 crushed Maratha power. The Peshwa was removed and sent away to Bithur near Kanpur with a pension. The Company now had complete control over the territories south of the Vindhyas.

The claim to paramountcy

It is clear from the above that from the early nineteenth century the Company pursued an aggressive policy of territorial expansion. Under Lord Hastings (Governor-General from 1813 to 1823) a new policy of "paramountcy" was initiated. Now the Company claimed that its authority was paramount or supreme, hence its power was greater than that of Indian states. In order to protect its interests it was justified in annexing or threatening to annex any Indian kingdom. This view continued to guide later British policies as well.

Fig. 10 *– Lord Hastings*

This process, however, did not go unchallenged. For example, when the British tried to annex the small state of Kitoor (in Karnataka today), Rani Channamma took to arms and led an anti-British resistance movement. She was arrested in 1824 and died in prison in 1829. But Rayanna, a poor chowkidar of Sangoli in Kitoor, carried on the resistance. With popular support he destroyed many British camps and records. He was caught and hanged by the British in 1830. You will read more about several cases of resistance later in the book.

In the late 1830s the East India Company became worried about Russia. It imagined that Russia might expand across Asia and enter India from the north-west. Driven by this fear, the British now wanted to secure their control over the north-west. They fought a prolonged war with Afghanistan between 1838 and 1842 and established indirect Company rule there. Sind was taken over in 1843. Next in line was Punjab. But the presence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh held back the Company. After his death in 1839, two prolonged wars were fought with the Sikh kingdom. Ultimately, in 1849, Punjab was annexed.

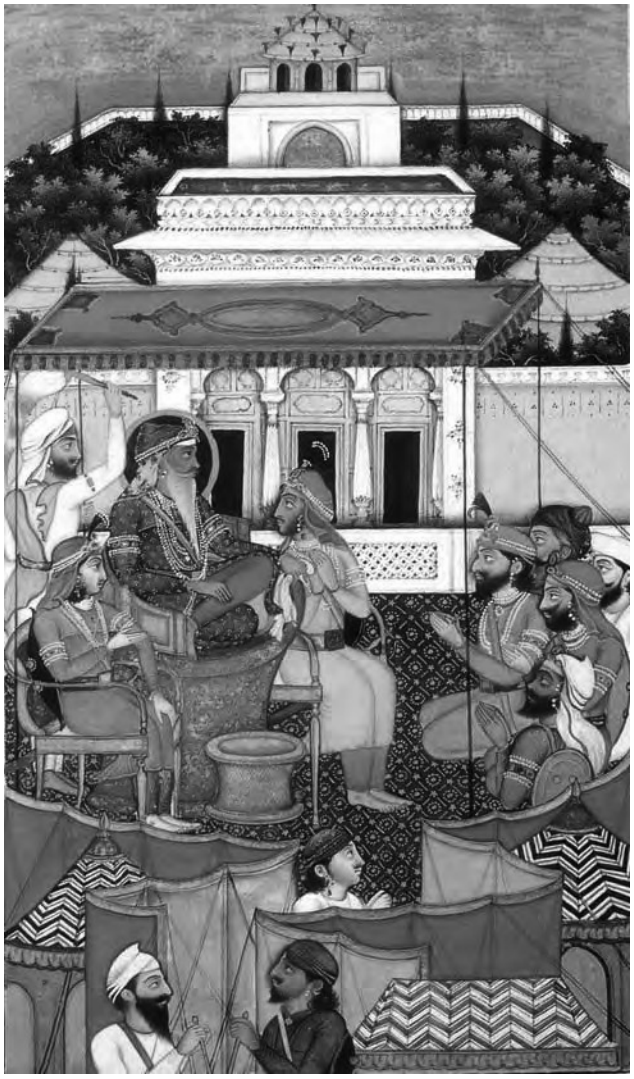


Fig. 11 *– Maharaja Ranjit Singh holding court*

The Doctrine of Lapse

The final wave of annexations occurred under Lord Dalhousie who was the Governor-General from 1848 to 1856. He devised a policy that came to be known as the Doctrine of Lapse. The doctrine declared that if an Indian ruler died without a male heir his kingdom would "lapse", that is, become part of Company territory. One kingdom after another was annexed simply by applying this doctrine: Satara (1848), Sambalpur (1850), Udaipur (1852), Nagpur (1853) and Jhansi (1854).

Finally, in 1856, the Company also took over Awadh. This time the British had an added argument – they said they were "obliged by duty" to take over Awadh in order to free the people from the "misgovernment" of the Nawab! Enraged by the humiliating way in which the Nawab was deposed, the people of Awadh joined the great revolt that broke out in 1857.

Activity

Imagine that you are a nawab's nephew and have been brought up thinking that you will one day be king. Now you find that this will not be allowed by the British because of the new Doctrine of Lapse. What will be your feelings? What will you plan to do so that you can inherit the crown?

Fig. 11 a

Fig. 11 b

Fig. 11 c

***Fig. 11 a, b, c** – Expansion of British territorial power in India*

Look at these maps along with a present-day political map of India. In each of these maps, try and identify the different parts of India that were not under British rule.

Setting up a New Administration

Warren Hastings (Governor-General from 1773 to 1785) was one of the many important figures who played a significant role in the expansion of Company power. By his time the Company had acquired power not only in Bengal, but also in Bombay and Madras. British territories were broadly divided into administrative units called Presidencies. There were three Presidencies: Bengal, Madras and Bombay. Each was ruled by a Governor. The supreme head of the administration was the Governor-General. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General, introduced several administrative reforms, notably in the sphere of justice.

From 1772 a new system of justice was established. Each district was to have two courts – a criminal court (faujdari adalat) and a civil court (diwani adalat). Maulvis and Hindu pandits interpreted Indian laws for the European district collectors who presided over civil courts. The criminal courts were still under a ***qazi*** *and a* ***mufti*** *but under the supervision of the collectors.*

Qazi *– A judge*

Mufti *– A jurist of the Muslim community responsible for expounding the law that the qazi would administer*

Impeachment *– A trial by the House of Lords in England for charges of misconduct brought against a person in the House of Commons*

Fig. 12 *– The trial of Warren Hastings, painted by R.G. Pollard, 1789*

When Warren Hastings went back to England in 1785, Edmund Burke accused him of being personally responsible for the misgovernment of Bengal. This led to an **impeachment** *proceeding in the British Parliament that lasted seven years.*

Source 5

"I impeach the common enemy and oppressor of all."

Here is a passage from Edmund Burke's eloquent opening speech during the impeachment of Warren Hastings:

> I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose rights he has trodden under his foot and whose country he has turned into a desert. Lastly in the name of human nature itself, in the name of both the sexes, in the name of every age, in the name of every rank, I impeach the common enemy and oppressor of all.

A major problem was that the Brahman pandits gave different interpretations of local laws based on different schools of the ***dharmashastra****. To bring about uniformity, in 1775 eleven pandits were asked to compile a digest of Hindu laws. N.B. Halhed translated this digest into English. By 1778 a code of Muslim laws was also compiled for the benefit of European judges. Under the Regulating Act of 1773, a new Supreme Court was established, while a court of appeal – the Sadar Nizamat Adalat – was also set up at Calcutta.*

The principal figure in an Indian district was the Collector. As the title suggests, his main job was to collect revenue and taxes and maintain law and order in his district with the help of judges, police officers and darogas. His office – the Collectorate – became the new centre of power and patronage that steadily replaced previous holders of authority.

The Company army

*Colonial rule in India brought in some new ideas of administration and reform but its power rested on its military strength. The Mughal army was mainly composed of cavalry (****sawars****: trained soldiers on horseback) and infantry, that is, paidal (foot) soldiers. They were given training in archery (teer-andazi) and the use of the sword. The cavalry dominated the army and the Mughal state did not feel the need to have a large professionally trained infantry. The rural areas had a large number of armed peasants and the local zamindars often supplied the Mughals with paidal soldiers.*

A change occurred in the eighteenth century when Mughal successor states like Awadh and Benaras started recruiting peasants into their armies and training them as professional soldiers. The East India Company adopted the same method when it began recruitment for its own army, which came to be known as the sepoy army (from the Indian word sipahi, meaning soldier).

As warfare technology changed from the 1820s, the cavalry requirements of the Company's army declined. This is because the British empire was fighting in Burma, Afghanistan and Egypt where soldiers were armed with **muskets** *and* **matchlocks***. The soldiers of the Company's army had to keep pace with changing military requirements and its infantry regiments now became more important.*

In the early nineteenth century the British began to develop a uniform military culture. Soldiers were

Dharmashastras *– Sanskrit texts prescribing social rules and codes of behaviour, composed from c. 500 BCE onwards*

Sawar *– Men on horses*

Musket *– A heavy gun used by infantry soldiers*

Matchlock *– An early type of gun in which the powder was ignited by a match*

Fig. 13 *– A sawar of Bengal in the service of the Company, painted by an unknown Indian artist, 1780*

After the battles with the Marathas and the Mysore rulers, the Company realised the importance of strengthening its cavalry force.

increasingly subjected to European-style training, drill and discipline that regulated their life far more than before. Often this created problems since caste and community feelings were ignored in building a force of professional soldiers. Could individuals so easily give up their caste and religious feelings? Could they see themselves only as soldiers and not as members of communities?

What did the sepoys feel? How did they react to the changes in their lives and their identity – that is, their sense of who they were? The Revolt of 1857 gives us a glimpse into the world of the sepoys. You will read about this revolt in Chapter 5.

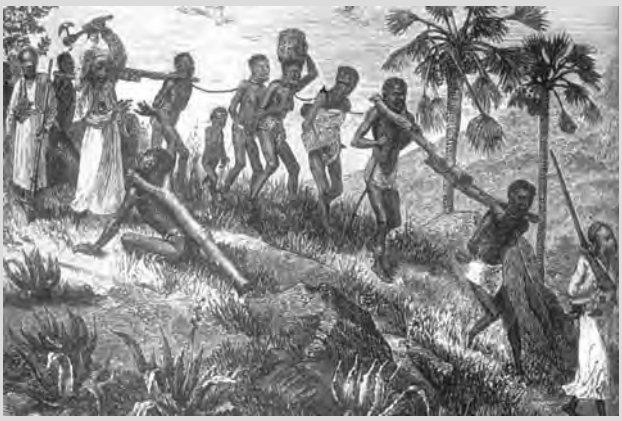
Conclusion

Thus the East India Company was transformed from a trading company to a territorial colonial power. The arrival of new steam technology in the early nineteenth century also aided this process. Till then it would take anywhere between six and eight months to travel to India by sea. Steamships reduced the journey time to three weeks enabling more Britishers and their families to come to a far-off country like India.

By 1857 the Company came to exercise direct rule over about 63 per cent of the territory and 78 per cent of the population of the Indian subcontinent. Combined with its indirect influence on the remaining territory and population of the country, the East India Company had virtually the whole of India under its control.

ELSEWHERE

Slave Trade in South Africa



The Dutch trading ships reached southern Africa in the seventeenth century. Soon a slave trade began. People were captured, chained, and sold in slave markets. When slavery ended in 1834 there were 36,774 privately owned slaves at the Cape – located at the southern most tip of Africa.

A visitor to the Cape in 1824 has left a moving account of what he saw at a slave auction:

> Having learned that there was to be sale of cattle, farm-stock, etc by auction, ... we halted our wagon for the purpose of procuring fresh oxen. Among the stock ... was a female slave and her three children. The farmers examined them, as if they had been so many head of cattle. They were sold separately, and to different purchasers. The tears, the anxiety, the anguish of the mother, while she ... cast heart-rending look upon her children, and the simplicity and touching sorrow of the poor young ones while they clung to their distracted parent ... contrasted with the marked insensitivity and jocular countenances of the spectators

Quoted in Nigel Wordon et. al., *The Chains that Bind us: a History of Slavery at the Cape, 1996.*

Let's imagine

You are living in England in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. How would you have reacted to the stories of British conquests? Remember that you would have read about the immense fortunes that many of the officials were making.

Let's recall

1. *Match the following:*

Diwani	*Tipu Sultan*
"Tiger of Mysore"	*right to collect land revenue*
faujdari adalat	*Sepoy*
Rani Channamma	*criminal court*
sipahi	*led an anti-British movement in Kitoor*

2. *Fill in the blanks:*

   (a) *The British conquest of Bengal began with the Battle of* _____.

   (b) *Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan were the rulers of* _____.

(c) *Dalhousie implemented the Doctrine of _____.*

(d) *Maratha kingdoms were located mainly in the _____ part of India.*

3. *State whether true or false:*

(a) *The Mughal empire became stronger in the eighteenth century.*

(b) *The English East India Company was the only European company that traded with India.*

(c) *Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the ruler of Punjab.*

(d) *The British did not introduce administrative changes in the territories they conquered.*

Let's Discuss

4. *What attracted European trading companies to India?*
5. *What were the areas of conflict between the Bengal nawabs and the East India Company?*
6. *How did the assumption of Diwani benefit the East India Company?*
7. *Explain the system of "subsidiary alliance".*
8. *In what way was the administration of the Company different from that of Indian rulers?*
9. *Describe the changes that occurred in the composition of the Company's army.*

Let's Do

10. *After the British conquest of Bengal, Calcutta grew from a small village to a big city. Find out about the culture, architecture and the life of Europeans and Indians of the city during the colonial period.*
11. *Collect pictures, stories, poems and information about any of the following – the Rani of Jhansi, Mahadji Sindhia, Haidar Ali, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lord Dalhousie or any other contemporary ruler of your region.*

3 Ruling the Countryside

Fig. 1 *– Robert Clive accepting the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal ruler in 1765*

The Company Becomes the Diwan

On 12 August 1765, the Mughal emperor appointed the East India Company as the Diwan of Bengal. The actual event most probably took place in Robert Clive's tent, with a few Englishmen and Indians as witnesses. But in the painting above, the event is shown as a majestic occasion, taking place in a grand setting. The painter was commissioned by Clive to record the memorable events in Clive's life. The grant of Diwani clearly was one such event in British imagination.

As Diwan, the Company became the chief financial administrator of the territory under its control. Now it had to think of administering the land and organising its revenue resources. This had to be done in a way that could yield enough revenue to meet the growing expenses of the company. A trading company had also to ensure that it could buy the products it needed and sell what it wanted.

Over the years the Company also learnt that it had to move with some caution. Being an alien power, it needed to pacify those who in the past had ruled the countryside, and enjoyed authority and prestige. Those who had held local power had to be controlled but they could not be entirely eliminated.

How was this to be done? In this chapter we will see how the Company came to colonise the countryside, organise revenue resources, redefine the rights of people, and produce the crops it wanted.

Revenue for the Company

The Company had become the Diwan, but it still saw itself primarily as a trader. It wanted a large revenue income but was unwilling to set up any regular system of assessment and collection. The effort was to increase the revenue as much as it could and buy fine cotton and silk cloth as cheaply as possible. Within five years the value of goods bought by the Company in Bengal doubled. Before 1865, the Company had purchased goods in India by importing gold and silver from Britain. Now the revenue collected in Bengal could finance the purchase of goods for export.

Soon it was clear that the Bengal economy was facing a deep crisis. Artisans were deserting villages since they were being forced to sell their goods to the Company at low prices. Peasants were unable to pay the dues that were being demanded from them. Artisanal production was in decline, and agricultural cultivation showed signs of collapse. Then in 1770 a terrible famine killed ten million people in Bengal. About one-third of the population was wiped out.

***Fig. 2** – A weekly market in Murshidabad in Bengal*

Peasants and artisans from rural areas regularly came to these weekly markets (haats) to sell their goods and buy what they needed. These markets were badly affected during times of economic crisis.

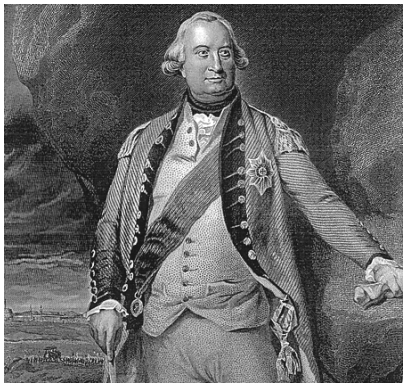


Fig. 3 *– Charles Cornwallis*

Cornwallis was the Governor-General of India when the Permanent Settlement was introduced.

Source 1

Colebrook on Bengal ryots

In many villages of Bengal, some of the powerful *ryots* did not cultivate, but instead gave out their lands to others (the under-tenants), taking from them very high rents. In 1806, H. T. Colebrook described the conditions of these under-tenants in Bengal:

> The under-tenants, depressed by an excessive rent in kind, and by usurious returns for the cattle, seed, and subsistence, advanced to them, can never extricate themselves from debt. In so abject a state, they cannot labour in spirit, while they earn a scanty subsistence without hope of bettering their situation.

The need to improve agriculture

If the economy was in ruins, could the Company be certain of its revenue income? Most Company officials began to feel that investment in land had to be encouraged and agriculture had to be improved.

How was this to be done? After two decades of debate on the question, the Company finally introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793. By the terms of the settlement, the rajas and taluqdars were recognised as zamindars. They were asked to collect rent from the peasants and pay revenue to the Company. The amount to be paid was fixed permanently, that is, it was not to be increased ever in future. It was felt that this would ensure a regular flow of revenue into the Company's coffers and at the same time encourage the zamindars to invest in improving the land. Since the revenue demand of the state would not be increased, the zamindar would benefit from increased production from the land.

The problem

The Permanent Settlement, however, created problems. Company officials soon discovered that the zamindars were in fact not investing in the improvement of land. The revenue that had been fixed was so high that the zamindars found it difficult to pay. Anyone who failed to pay the revenue lost his zamindari. Numerous zamindaris were sold off at auctions organised by the Company.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century the situation changed. The prices in the market rose and cultivation slowly expanded. This meant an increase in the income of the zamindars but no gain for the Company since it could not increase a revenue demand that had been fixed permanently

Even then the zamindars did not have an interest in improving the land. Some had lost their lands in the earlier years of the settlement; others now saw the possibility of earning without the trouble and risk of investment. As long as the zamindars could give out the land to tenants and get rent, they were not interested in improving the land.

Activity

Why do you think Colebrook is concerned with the conditions of the under-ryots in Bengal? Read the preceding pages and suggest possible reasons.

On the other hand, in the villages, the cultivator found the system extremely oppressive. The rent he paid to the zamindar was high and his right on the land was insecure. To pay the rent he had to often take a loan from the moneylender, and when he failed to pay the rent he was evicted from the land he had cultivated for generations.

Mahal – *In British revenue records mahal is a revenue estate which may be a village or a group of villages.*

A new system is devised

By the early nineteenth century many of the Company officials were convinced that the system of revenue had to be changed again. How could revenues be fixed permanently at a time when the Company needed more money to meet its expenses of administration and trade?

*In the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency (most of this area is now in Uttar Pradesh), an Englishman called Holt Mackenzie devised the new system which came into effect in 1822. He felt that the village was an important social institution in north Indian society and needed to be preserved. Under his directions, collectors went from village to village, inspecting the land, measuring the fields, and recording the customs and rights of different groups. The estimated revenue of each plot within a village was added up to calculate the revenue that each village (**mahal**) had to pay. This demand was to be revised periodically, not permanently fixed. The charge of collecting the revenue and paying it to the Company was given to the village headman, rather than the zamindar. This system came to be known as the mahalwari settlement.*

Fig. 4 – *Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras (1819-26)*

The Munro system

In the British territories in the south there was a similar move away from the idea of Permanent Settlement. The new system that was devised came to be known as the ryotwar (or ryotwari). It was tried on a small scale by Captain Alexander Read in some of the areas that were taken over by the Company after the wars with Tipu Sultan. Subsequently developed by Thomas Munro, this system was gradually extended all over south India.

Read and Munro felt that in the south there were no traditional zamindars. The settlement, they argued, had to be made directly with the cultivators (ryots) who had tilled the land for generations. Their fields had to be carefully and separately surveyed before the revenue assessment was made. Munro thought that the British

Activity

Imagine that you are a Company representative sending a report back to England about the conditions in rural areas under Company rule. What would you write?

should act as paternal father figures protecting the ryots under their charge.

All was not well

Within a few years after the new systems were imposed it was clear that all was not well with them. Driven by the desire to increase the income from land, revenue officials fixed too high a revenue demand. Peasants were unable to pay, ryots fled the countryside, and villages became deserted in many regions. Optimistic officials had imagined that the new systems would transform the peasants into rich enterprising farmers. But this did not happen.

Crops for Europe

The British also realised that the countryside could not only yield revenue, it could also grow the crops that Europe required. By the late eighteenth century the Company was trying its best to expand the cultivation of opium and indigo. In the century and a half that followed, the British persuaded or forced cultivators in various parts of India to produce other crops: jute in Bengal, tea in Assam, sugarcane in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), wheat in Punjab, cotton in Maharashtra and Punjab, rice in Madras.

How was this done? The British used a variety of methods to expand the cultivation of crops that they needed. Let us take a closer look at the story of one such crop, one such method of production.

***Fig. 5** – A kalamkari print, twentieth- century India*

***Fig. 6** – A Morris cotton print, late-nineteenth-century England*

Does colour have a history?

Figs. 5 and 6 are two images of cotton prints. The image on the left (Fig. 5) shows a kalamkari print created by weavers of Andhra Pradesh in India. On the right is a floral cotton print designed and produced by William Morris, a famous poet and artist of nineteenth-century Britain. There is one thing common in the

two prints: both use a rich blue colour – commonly called indigo. Do you know how this colour was produced?

The blue that you see in these prints was produced from a plant called indigo. It is likely that the blue dye used in the Morris prints in nineteenth-century Britain was manufactured from indigo plants cultivated in India. For India was the biggest supplier of indigo in the world at that time.

Why the demand for Indian indigo?

The indigo plant grows primarily in the tropics. By the thirteenth century Indian indigo was being used by cloth manufacturers in Italy, France and Britain to dye cloth.

However, only small amounts of Indian indigo reached the European market and its price was very high. European cloth manufacturers therefore had to depend on another plant called woad to make violet and blue dyes. Being a plant of the temperate zones, woad was more easily available in Europe. It was grown in northern Italy, southern France and in parts of Germany and Britain. Worried by the competition from indigo, woad producers in Europe pressurised their governments to ban the import of indigo.

Cloth dyers, however, preferred indigo as a dye. Indigo produced a rich blue colour, whereas the dye from woad was pale and dull. By the seventeenth century, European cloth producers persuaded their governments to relax the ban on indigo import. The French began cultivating indigo in St Domingue in the Caribbean islands, the Portuguese in Brazil, the English in Jamaica, and the Spanish in Venezuela. Indigo **plantations** *also came up in many parts of North America.*

By the end of the eighteenth century, the demand for Indian indigo grew further. Britain began to industrialise, and its cotton production expanded dramatically, creating an enormous new demand for cloth dyes. While the demand for indigo increased, its existing supplies from the West Indies and America collapsed for a variety of reasons. Between 1783 and 1789 the production of indigo in the world fell by half. Cloth dyers in Britain now desperately looked for new sources of indigo supply.

From where could this indigo be procured?

Britain turns to India

Faced with the rising demand for indigo in Europe, the Company in India looked for ways to expand the area under indigo cultivation.

Plantation – *A large farm operated by a planter employing various forms of forced labour. Plantations are associated with the production of coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, tea and cotton.*

Fig. 7 – *The Slave Revolt in St Domingue, August 1791, painting by January Scuhodolski*

In the eighteenth century, French planters produced indigo and sugar in the French colony of St Domingue in the Caribbean islands. The African **slaves** *who worked on the plantations rose in rebellion in 1791, burning the plantations and killing their rich planters. In 1792 France abolished slavery in the French colonies. These events led to the collapse of the indigo plantations on the Caribbean islands.*

From the last decades of the eighteenth century indigo cultivation in Bengal expanded rapidly and Bengal indigo came to dominate the world market. In 1788 only about 30 per cent of the indigo imported into Britain was from India. By 1810, the proportion had gone up to 95 per cent.

As the indigo trade grew, commercial agents and officials of the Company began investing in indigo production. Over the years many Company officials left their jobs to look after their indigo business. Attracted by the prospect of high profits, numerous Scotsmen and Englishmen came to India and became planters. Those who had no money to produce indigo could get loans from the Company and the banks that were coming up at the time.

How was indigo cultivated?

There were two main systems of indigo cultivation – nij and ryoti. Within the system of nij cultivation, the planter produced indigo in lands that he directly controlled. He either bought the land or rented it from other zamindars and produced indigo by directly employing hired labourers.

The problem with *nij* cultivation

The planters found it difficult to expand the area under nij cultivation. Indigo could be cultivated only on fertile lands, and these were all already densely populated. Only small plots scattered over the landscape could be acquired. Planters needed large areas in compact blocks to cultivate indigo in plantations. Where could they get such land from? They attempted to lease in the land around the indigo factory, and evict the peasants from the area. But this always led to conflicts and tension.

Nor was labour easy to mobilise. A large plantation required a vast number of hands to operate. And labour was needed precisely at a time when peasants were usually busy with their rice cultivation.

Slave – *A person who is owned by someone else – the slave owner. A slave has no freedom and is compelled to work for the master.*

Nij cultivation on a large scale also required many ploughs and bullocks. One **bigha** of indigo cultivation required two ploughs. This meant that a planter with 1,000 *bighas* would need 2,000 ploughs. Investing on purchase and maintenance of ploughs was a big problem. Nor could supplies be easily got from the peasants since their ploughs and bullocks were busy on their rice fields, again exactly at the time that the indigo planters needed them.

Bigha – A unit of measurement of land. Before British rule, the size of this area varied. In Bengal the British standardised it to about one-third of an acre.

Till the late nineteenth century, planters were therefore reluctant to expand the area under *nij* cultivation. Less than 25 per cent of the land producing indigo was under this system. The rest was under an alternative mode of cultivation – the *ryoti* system.

Indigo on the land of *ryots*

Under the *ryoti* system, the planters forced the *ryots* to sign a contract, an agreement (*satta*). At times they pressurised the village headmen to sign the contract on behalf of the *ryots*. Those who signed the contract got cash advances from the planters at low rates of interest to produce indigo. But the loan committed the *ryot* to cultivating indigo on at least 25 per cent of the area under his holding. The planter provided the seed and the drill, while the cultivators prepared the soil, sowed the seed and looked after the crop.

Fig. 8 – Workers harvesting indigo in early-nineteenth-century Bengal. From Colesworthy Grant, Rural Life in Bengal, 1860

In India the indigo plant was cut mostly by men.

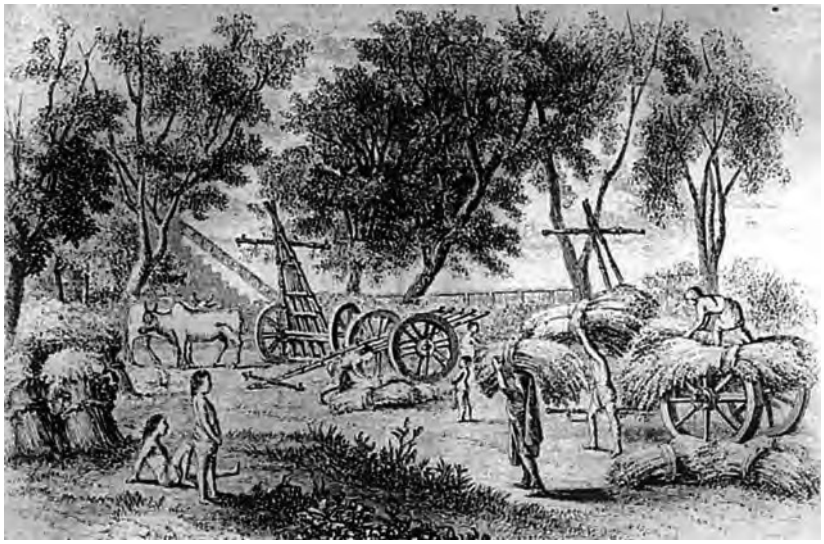


Fig. 9 – The Indigo plant being brought from the fields to the factory

How was indigo produced?

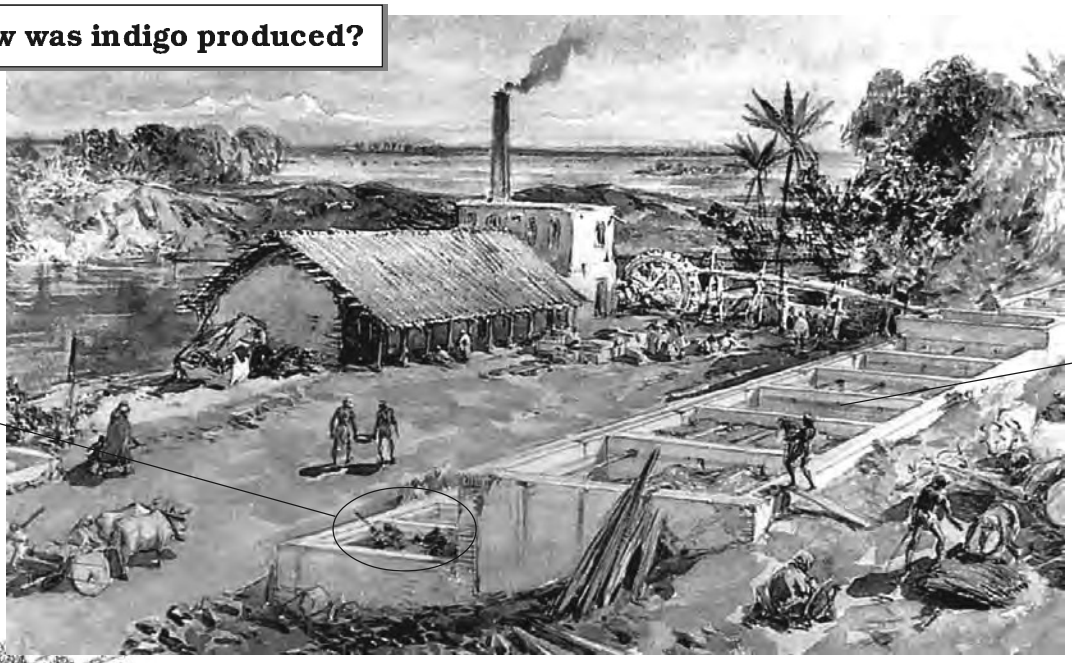


Fig. 10 *– An indigo factory located near indigo fields, painting by William Simpson, 1863*

The indigo villages were usually around indigo factories owned by planters. After harvest, the indigo plant was taken to the **vats** *in the indigo factory. Three or four vats were needed to manufacture the dye. Each vat had a separate function. The leaves stripped off the indigo plant were first soaked in warm water in a vat (known as the fermenting or steeper vat) for several hours. When the plants fermented, the liquid began to boil and bubble. Now the rotten leaves were taken out and the liquid drained into another vat that was placed just below the first vat.*

In the second vat (known as the beater vat) the solution was continuously stirred and beaten with paddles. When the liquid gradually turned green and then blue, lime water was added to the vat. Gradually the indigo separated out in flakes, a muddy sediment settled at the bottom of the vat and a clear liquid rose to the surface. The liquid was drained off and the sediment – the indigo pulp – transferred to another vat (known as the settling vat), and then pressed and dried for sale.

Fig. 11 *– Women usually carried the indigo plant to the vats.*

Fig. 12 *– The Vat-Beater*

The indigo worker here is standing with the paddle that was used to stir the solution in the vat. These workers had to remain in waist-deep water for over eight hours to beat the indigo solution.

Fig. 13 *– The indigo is ready for sale*

Here you can see the last stage of the production – workers stamping and cutting the indigo pulp that has been pressed and moulded. In the background you can see a worker carrying away the blocks for drying.

Vat – *A fermenting or storage vessel*

When the crop was delivered to the planter after the harvest, a new loan was given to the ryot, and the cycle started all over again. Peasants who were initially tempted by the loans soon realised how harsh the system was. The price they got for the indigo they produced was very low and the cycle of loans never ended.

There were other problems too. The planters usually insisted that indigo be cultivated on the best soils in which peasants preferred to cultivate rice. Indigo, moreover, had deep roots and it exhausted the soil rapidly. After an indigo harvest the land could not be sown with rice.

The "Blue Rebellion" and After

In March 1859 thousands of ryots in Bengal refused to grow indigo. As the rebellion spread, ryots refused to pay rents to the planters, and attacked indigo factories armed with swords and spears, bows and arrows. Women turned up to fight with pots, pans and kitchen implements. Those who worked for the planters were socially boycotted, and the gomasthas – agents of planters – who came to collect rent were beaten up. Ryots swore they would no longer take advances to sow indigo nor be bullied by the planters' lathiyals – the lathi-wielding strongmen maintained by the planters.

Why did the indigo peasants decide that they would no longer remain silent? What gave them the power to rebel? Clearly, the indigo system was intensely oppressive. But those who are oppressed do not always rise up in rebellion. They do so only at times.

In 1859, the indigo ryots felt that they had the support of the local zamindars and village headmen in their rebellion against the planters. In many villages, headmen who had been forced to sign indigo contracts, mobilised the indigo peasants and fought pitched battles with the lathiyals. In other places even the zamindars went around villages urging the ryots to resist the planters. These zamindars were unhappy with the increasing power of the planters and angry at being forced by the planters to give them land on long leases.

The indigo peasants also imagined that the British government would support them in their struggle against the planters. After the Revolt of 1857 the British government was particularly worried about the possibility of another popular rebellion. When the news spread of a simmering revolt in the indigo districts,

Source 2

A song from an indigo-producing village

In moments of struggle people often sing songs to inspire each other and to build a sense of collective unity. Such songs give us a glimpse of their feelings. During the indigo rebellion many such songs could be heard in the villages of lower Bengal. Here is one such song:

> The long lathis wielded by the planter of Mollahati / now lie in a cluster
>
> The babus of Kolkata have sailed down / to see the great fight
>
> This time the *raiyats* are all ready, / they will no longer be beaten in silence
>
> They will no longer give up their life / without fighting the *lathiyals*.

the Lieutenant Governor toured the region in the winter of 1859. The ryots saw the tour as a sign of government sympathy for their plight. When in Barasat, the magistrate Ashley Eden issued a notice stating that ryots would not be compelled to accept indigo contracts, word went around that Queen Victoria had declared that indigo need not be sown. Eden was trying to placate the peasants and control an explosive situation, but his action was read as support for the rebellion.

As the rebellion spread, intellectuals from Calcutta rushed to the indigo districts. They wrote of the misery of the ryots, the tyranny of the planters, and the horrors of the indigo system.

Worried by the rebellion, the government brought in the military to protect the planters from assault, and set up the Indigo Commission to enquire into the system of indigo production. The Commission held the planters guilty, and criticised them for the coercive methods they used with indigo cultivators. It declared that indigo production was not profitable for ryots. The Commission asked the ryots to fulfil their existing contracts but also told them that they could refuse to produce indigo in future.

Source 3

"I would rather beg than sow indigo"

Hadji Mulla, an indigo cultivator of Chandpore, Thana Hardi, was interviewed by the members of the Indigo Commission on Tuesday, 5 June 1860. This is what he said in answer to some of the questions:

W. S. Seton Karr, President of the Indigo Commission: Are you now willing to sow indigo; and if not on what fresh terms would you be willing to do it?

Hadji Mulla: I am not willing to sow, and I don't know that any fresh terms would satisfy me.

Mr Sale: Would you not be willing to sow at a rupee a bundle?

Hadji Mulla: No I would not; rather than sow indigo I will go to another country; I would rather beg than sow indigo.

Indigo Commission Report, Vol. II, Minutes of Evidence, p. 67

Activity

Imagine you are a witness giving evidence before the Indigo Commission. W.S. Seton Karr asks you "On what condition will *ryots* grow indigo?" What will your answer be?

After the revolt, indigo production collapsed in Bengal. But the planters now shifted their operation to Bihar. With the discovery of synthetic dyes in the late nineteenth century their business was severely affected, but yet they managed to expand production. When Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa, a peasant from Bihar persuaded him visit Champaran and see the plight of the indigo cultivators there. Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1917 marked the beginning of the Champaran movement against the indigo planters.

ELSEWHERE

Indigo making in the West Indies

In the early eighteenth century, a French missionary, Jean Baptiste Labat, travelled to the Caribbean islands, and wrote extensively about the region. Published in one of his books, this image shows all the stages of indigo production in the French slave plantations of the region.

***Fig. 14** – Making indigo in a Caribbean slave plantation*

You can see the slave workers putting the indigo plant into the settler vat on the left. Another worker is churning the liquid with a mechanical churner in a vat (second from right). Two workers are carrying the indigo pulp hung up in bags to be dried. In the foreground two others are mixing the indigo pulp to be put into moulds. The planter is at the centre of the picture standing on the high ground supervising the slave workers.

Let's recall

1. *Match the following:*

ryot	*village*
mahal	*peasant*
nij	*cultivation on ryot's lands*
ryoti	*cultivation on planter's own land*

Let's imagine

Imagine a conversation between a planter and a peasant who is being forced to grow indigo. What reasons would the planter give to persuade the peasant? What problems would the peasant point out? Enact their conversation.

2. *Fill in the blanks:*

   (a) *Growers of woad in Europe saw* _____ *as a crop which would provide competition to their earnings.*

   (b) *The demand for indigo increased in late-eighteenth-century Britain because of* _____.

   (c) *The international demand for indigo was affected by the discovery of* _____.

   (d) *The Champaran movement was against* _____.

Let's Discuss

3. *Describe the main features of the Permanent Settlement.*

4. *How was the mahalwari system different from the Permanent Settlement?*

5. *Give two problems which arose with the new Munro system of fixing revenue.*

6. *Why were ryots reluctant to grow indigo?*

7. *What were the circumstances which led to the eventual collapse of indigo production in Bengal?*

Let's Do

8. *Find out more about the Champaran movement and Mahatma Gandhi's role in it.*

9. *Look into the history of either tea or coffee plantations in India. See how the life of workers in these plantations was similar to or different from that of workers in indigo plantations.*

4 Tribals, *Dikus* and the Vision of a Golden Age

In 1895, a man named Birsa was seen roaming the forests and villages of Chottanagpur in Bihar. People said he had miraculous powers – he could cure all diseases and multiply grain. Birsa himself declared that God had appointed him to save his people from trouble, free them from the slavery of dikus (outsiders). Soon thousands began following Birsa, believing that he was bhagwan (God) and had come to solve all their problems.

Birsa was born in a family of Mundas – a tribal group that lived in Chottanagpur. But his followers included other tribals of the region – Santhals and Oraons. All of them in different ways were unhappy with the changes they were experiencing and the problems they were facing under British rule. Their familiar ways of life seemed to be disappearing, their livelihoods were under threat, and their religion appeared to be in danger.

What problems did Birsa set out to resolve? Who were the outsiders being referred to as dikus, and how did they enslave the people of the region? What was happening to the tribal people under the British? How did their lives change? These are some of the questions you will read about in this chapter.

You have read about tribal societies last year. Most tribes had customs and rituals that were very different from those laid down by Brahmans. These societies also did not have the sharp social divisions that were characteristic of caste societies. All those who belonged to the same tribe thought of themselves as sharing common ties of kinship. However, this did not mean that there were no social and economic differences within tribes.

***Fig. 1** – Women of the Dongria Kandha tribe in Orissa wade through the river on the way to the market*

How Did Tribal Groups Live?

By the nineteenth century, tribal people in different parts of India were involved in a variety of activities.

Some were *jhum* cultivators

Some of them practised jhum cultivation, that is, shifting cultivation. This was done on small patches of land, mostly in forests. The cultivators cut the treetops to allow sunlight to reach the ground, and burnt the vegetation on the land to clear it for cultivation. They spread the ash from the firing, which contained potash, to fertilise the soil. They used the axe to cut trees and the hoe to scratch the soil in order to prepare it for cultivation. They broadcast the seeds, that is, scattered the seeds on the field instead of ploughing the land and sowing the seeds. Once the crop was ready and harvested, they moved to another field. A field that had been cultivated once was left **fallow** *for several years.*

Shifting cultivators were found in the hilly and forested tracts of north-east and central India. The lives of these tribal people depended on free movement within forests and on being able to use the land and forests for growing their crops. That is the only way they could practise shifting cultivation.

Fallow – *A field left uncultivated for a while so that the soil recovers fertility*

Sal – *A tree*

Mahua – *A flower that is eaten or used to make alcohol*

Some were hunters and gatherers

In many regions tribal groups lived by hunting animals and gathering forest produce. They saw forests as essential for survival. The Khonds were such a community living in the forests of Orissa. They regularly went out on collective hunts and then divided the meat amongst themselves. They ate fruits and roots collected from the forest and cooked food with the oil they extracted from the seeds of the ***sal*** *and* ***mahua****. They used many forest shrubs and herbs for medicinal purposes, and sold forest produce in the local markets. The local weavers and leather workers turned to the Khonds when they needed supplies of kusum and palash flowers to colour their clothes and leather.*

Fig. 2 *– Dongria Kandha women in Orissa take home pandanus leaves from the forest to make plates*

From where did these forest people get their supplies of rice and other grains? At times they exchanged goods – getting what they needed in return for their valuable forest produce. At other times they bought goods with the small amount of earnings they had. Some of them did odd jobs in the villages, carrying loads or building roads, while others laboured in the fields of peasants and farmers. When supplies of forest produce shrank, tribal people had to increasingly wander around in search of work as labourers. But many of them – like the Baigas of central India – were reluctant to do work for others. The Baigas saw themselves as people of the forest, who could only live on the produce of the forest. It was below the dignity of a Baiga to become a labourer.

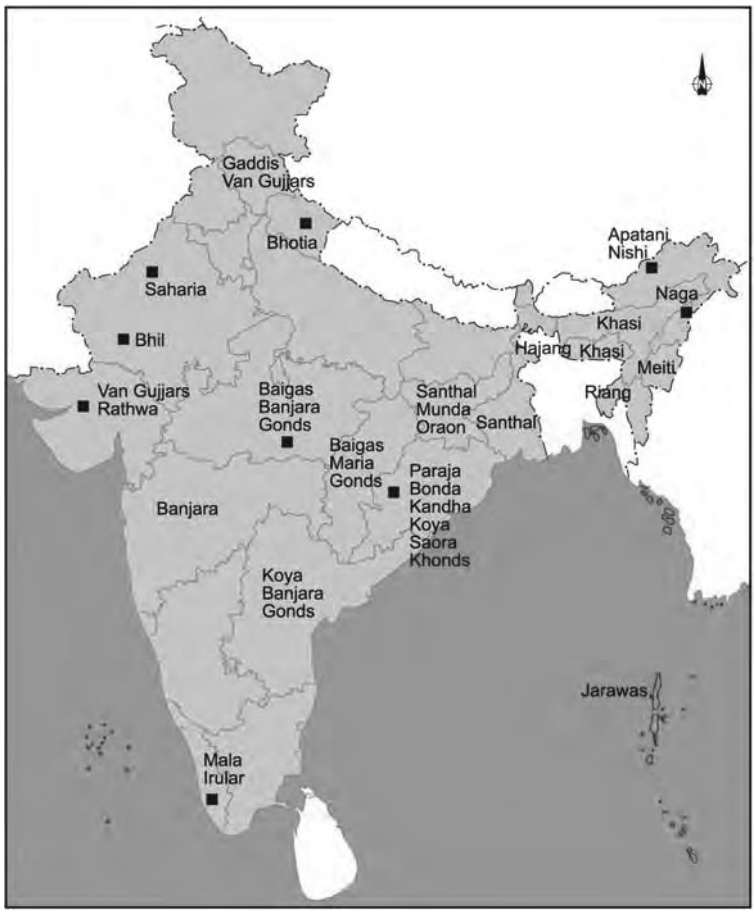


***Fig. 3** – Location of some tribal groups in India*

Tribal groups often needed to buy and sell in order to be able to get the goods that were not produced within the locality. This led to their dependence on traders and moneylenders. Traders came around with things for sale, and sold the goods at high prices. Moneylenders gave loans with which the tribals met their cash needs, adding to what they earned. But the interest charged on the loans was usually very high. So for the tribals, market and commerce often meant debt and poverty. They therefore came to see the moneylender and trader as evil outsiders and the cause of their misery.

Some herded animals

Many tribal groups lived by herding and rearing animals. They were pastoralists who moved with their herds of cattle or sheep according to the seasons. When the grass in one place was exhausted, they moved to another area. The Van Gujjars of the Punjab hills and the Labadis of Andhra Pradesh were cattle herders, the Gaddis of Kulu were shepherds, and the Bakarwals of Kashmir reared goats. You will read more about them in your history book next year.

Source 1

A time to hunt, a time to sow, a time to move to a new field

Have you ever noticed that people living in different types of societies do not share the same notion of work and time? The lives of the shifting cultivators and hunters in different regions were regulated by a calendar and division of tasks for men and women.

Verrier Elwin, a British anthropologist who lived among the Baigas and Khonds of central India for many years in the 1930s and 1940s, gives us a picture of what this calendar and division of tasks was like. He writes:

> In *Chait* women went to clearings to ... cut stalks that were already reaped; men cut large trees and go for their ritual hunt. The hunt began at full moon from the east. Traps of bamboo were used for hunting. The women gathered fruits like sago, tamarind and mushroom. Baiga women can only gather roots or *kanda* and *mahua* seeds. Of all the *adivasis* in Central India, the Baigas were known as the best hunters ... In *Baisakh* the firing of the forest took place, the women gathered unburnt wood to burn. Men continued to hunt, but nearer their villages. In *Jeth* sowing took place and hunting still went on. From *Asadh* to *Bhadon* the men worked in the fields. In *Kuar* the first fruits of beans were ripened and in *Kartik kutki* became ripe. In *Aghan* every crop was ready and in *Pus* winnowing took place. *Pus* was also the time for dances and marriages. In *Magh* shifts were made to new ***bewars*** and hunting-gathering was the main subsistence activity.
>
> The cycle described above took place in the first year. In the second year there was more time for hunting as only a few crops had to be sown and harvested. But since there was enough food the men lived in the *bewars*. It was only in the third year that the diet had to be supplemented with the forest products.
>
> *Adapted from Verrier Elwin,* Baiga *(1939) and Elwin's unpublished 'Notes on the Khonds' (Verrier Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)*

Fig. 4 *– A Santhal girl carrying firewood, Bihar, 1946*

Children go with their mothers to the forest to gather forest produce.

Activity

Look carefully at the tasks that Baiga men and women did. Do you see any pattern? What were the differences in the types of work that they were expected to perform?

Some took to settled cultivation

Even before the nineteenth century, many from within the tribal groups had begun settling down, and cultivating their fields in one place year after year, instead of moving from place to place. They began to use the plough, and gradually got rights over the land they lived on. In many cases, like the Mundas of Chottanagpur, the land belonged to the clan as a whole. All members of the clan were regarded as descendants of the original settlers, who had first cleared the land. Therefore, all of them had rights on the land. Very often some people within the clan acquired more power than others, some became chiefs and others followers. Powerful men often rented out their land instead of cultivating it themselves.

British officials saw settled tribal groups like the Gonds and Santhals as more civilised than hunter-gatherers or shifting cultivators. Those who lived in the forests were considered to be wild and savage: they needed to be settled and civilised.

How Did Colonial Rule Affect Tribal Lives?

The lives of tribal groups changed during British rule. Let us see what these changes were.

What happened to tribal chiefs?

Before the arrival of the British, in many areas the tribal chiefs were important people. They enjoyed a certain amount of economic power and had the right to administer and control their territories. In some places they had their own police and decided on the local rules of land and forest management. Under British rule, the functions and powers of the tribal chiefs changed considerably. They were allowed to keep their land titles over a cluster of villages and rent out lands, but they lost much of their administrative power and were forced to follow laws made by British officials in India. They also had to pay tribute to the British, and discipline the tribal groups on behalf of the British. They lost the authority they had earlier enjoyed amongst their people, and were unable to fulfil their traditional functions.

What happened to the shifting cultivators?

The British were uncomfortable with groups who moved about and did not have a fixed home. They wanted tribal

Bewar *– A term used in Madhya Pradesh for shifting cultivation*

Fig. 5 *– A log house being built in a village of the Nishi tribals of the Northeast.*

The entire village helps when log huts are built.

Fig. 6 *– Bhil women cultivating in a forest in Gujarat*

Shifting cultivation continues in many forest areas of Gujarat. You can see that trees have been cut and land cleared to create patches for cultivation.

groups to settle down and become peasant cultivators. Settled peasants were easier to control and administer than people who were always on the move. The British also wanted a regular revenue source for the state. So they introduced land settlements – that is, they measured the land, defined the rights of each individual to that land, and fixed the revenue demand for the state. Some peasants were declared landowners, others tenants. As you have seen (Chapter 2), the tenants were to pay rent to the landowner who in turn paid revenue to the state.

The British effort to settle jhum cultivators was not very successful. Settled plough cultivation is not easy in areas where water is scarce and the soil is dry. In fact, jhum cultivators who took to plough cultivation often suffered, since their fields did not produce good yields. So the jhum cultivators in north-east India insisted on continuing with their traditional practice. Facing widespread protests, the British had to ultimately allow them the right to carry on shifting cultivation in some parts of the forest.

Fig. 7 *– Tribal workers in a rice field in Andhra Pradesh*

Note the difference between rice cultivation in the flat plains and in the forests.

Forest laws and their impact

The life of tribal groups, as you have seen, was directly connected to the forest. So changes in forest laws had a considerable effect on tribal lives. The British extended their control over all forests and declared that forests were state property. Some forests were classified as Reserved Forests for they produced timber which the British wanted. In these forests people were not allowed to move freely, practise jhum cultivation, collect fruits, or hunt animals. How were jhum cultivators to survive in such a situation? Many were therefore forced to move to other areas in search of work and livelihood.

But once the British stopped the tribal people from living inside forests, they faced a problem. From where would the Forest Department get its labour to cut trees for railway sleepers and to transport logs?

Sleeper – *The horizontal planks of wood on which railway lines are laid*

Colonial officials came up with a solution. They decided that they would give jhum cultivators small patches of land in the forests and allow them to cultivate these on the condition that those who lived in the villages would have to provide labour to the Forest Department and look after the forests. So in many regions the Forest Department established forest villages to ensure a regular supply of cheap labour.

Source 2

"In this land of the English how hard it is to live"

In the1930s Verrier Elwin visited the land of the Baigas – a tribal group in central India. He wanted to know about them – their customs and practices, their art and folklore. He recorded many songs that lamented the hard time the Baigas were having under British rule.

In this land of the English how hard it is to live
How hard it is to live
In the village sits the landlord
In the gate sits the Kotwar
In the garden sits the Patwari
In the field sits the government

In this land of the English how hard it is to live
To pay cattle tax we have to sell cow
To pay forest tax we have to sell buffalo
To pay land tax we have to sell bullock
How are we to get our food?
In this land of the English

Quoted in Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hivale, Songs of the Maikal, *p. 316.*

Fig. 8 – *Godara women weaving*

Many tribal groups reacted against the colonial forest laws. They disobeyed the new rules, continued with practices that were declared illegal, and at times rose in open rebellion. Such was the revolt of Songram Sangma in 1906 in Assam, and the forest satyagraha of the 1930s in the Central Provinces.

The problem with trade

During the nineteenth century, tribal groups found that traders and money-lenders were coming into the forests more often, wanting to buy forest produce, offering cash loans, and asking them to work for wages. It took tribal groups some time to understand the consequences of what was happening.

Let us consider the case of the silk growers. In the eighteenth century, Indian silk was in demand in European markets. The fine quality of Indian silk was highly valued and exports from India increased rapidly. As the market expanded, East India Company officials tried to encourage silk production to meet the growing demand.

Hazaribagh, in present-day Jharkhand, was an area where the Santhals reared cocoons. The traders dealing in silk sent in their agents who gave loans to the tribal people and collected the cocoons. The growers were paid Rs 3 to Rs 4 for a thousand cocoons. These were then exported to Burdwan or Gaya where they were sold at five times the price. The middlemen – so called because they arranged deals between the exporters and silk growers – made huge profits. The silk growers earned very little. Understandably, many tribal groups saw the market and the traders as their main enemies.

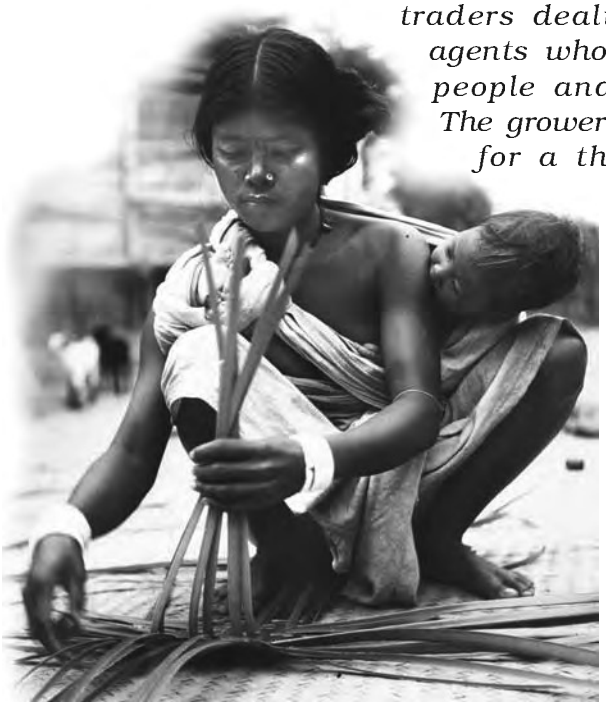


Fig. 9 – *A Hajang woman weaving a mat*

For women, domestic work was not confined to the home. They carried their babies with them to the fields and the factories.

Fig. 10 *– Coal miners of Bihar, 1948*

In the 1920s about 50 per cent of the miners in the Jharia and Raniganj coal mines of Bihar were tribals. Work deep down in the dark and suffocating mines was not only back-breaking and dangerous, it was often literally killing. In the 1920s over 2,000 workers died every year in the coal mines in India.

The search for work

The plight of the tribals who had to go far away from their homes in search of work was even worse. From the late nineteenth century, tea plantations started coming up and mining became an important industry. Tribals were recruited in large numbers to work the tea plantations of Assam and the coal mines of Jharkhand. They were recruited through contractors who paid them miserably low wages, and prevented them from returning home.

A Closer Look

Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tribal groups in different parts of the country rebelled against the changes in laws, the restrictions on their practices, the new taxes they had to pay, and the exploitation by traders and moneylenders. The Kols rebelled in 1831-32, Santhals rose in revolt in 1855, the Bastar Rebellion in central India broke out in 1910 and the Warli Revolt in Maharashtra in 1940. The movement that Birsa led was one such movement.

Activity

Find out whether the conditions of work in the mines have changed now. Check how many people die in mines every year, and what are the reasons for their death.

Source 3

'Blood trickles from my shoulders'

The songs the Mundas sang bemoaned their misery.

Alas! under [the drudgery of] forced labour
Blood trickles from my shoulders
Day and night the emissary from the zamindars,
Annoys and irritates me, day and night I groan
Alas! This is my condition
I do not have a home, where shall I get happiness
Alas!

K.S. Singh, Birsa Munda and His Movement, *p.12.*

Vaishnav – *Worshippers of Vishnu*

Birsa Munda

Birsa was born in the mid-1870s. The son of a poor father, he grew up around the forests of Bohonda, grazing sheep, playing the flute, and dancing in the local akhara. Forced by poverty, his father had to move from place to place looking for work. As an adolescent, Birsa heard tales of the Munda uprisings of the past and saw the sirdars (leaders) of the community urging the people to revolt. They talked of a golden age when the Mundas had been free of the oppression of dikus, and said there would be a time when the ancestral right of the community would be restored. They saw themselves as the descendants of the original settlers of the region, fighting for their land (mulk ki larai), reminding people of the need to win back their kingdom.

Birsa went to the local missionary school, and listened to the sermons of missionaries. There too he heard it said that it was possible for the Mundas to attain the Kingdom of Heaven, and regain their lost rights. This would be possible if they became good Christians and gave up their "bad practices". Later Birsa also spent some time in the company of a prominent **Vaishnav** *preacher. He wore the sacred thread, and began to value the importance of purity and piety.*

Birsa was deeply influenced by many of the ideas he came in touch with in his growing-up years. His movement was aimed at reforming tribal society. He urged the Mundas to give up drinking liquor, clean their village, and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery. But we must remember that Birsa also turned against missionaries and Hindu landlords. He saw them as outside forces that were ruining the Munda way of life.

In 1895 Birsa urged his followers to recover their glorious past. He talked of a golden age in the past – a satyug (the age of truth) – when Mundas lived a good life, constructed embankments, tapped natural springs, planted trees and orchards, practised cultivation to earn their living. They did not kill their brethren and relatives. They lived honestly. Birsa also wanted people to once again work on their land, settle down and cultivate their fields.

What worried British officials most was the political aim of the Birsa movement, for it wanted to drive out missionaries, moneylenders, Hindu landlords, and the government and set up a Munda Raj with Birsa at its head. The movement identified all these forces as the cause of the misery the Mundas were suffering.

The land policies of the British were destroying their traditional land system, Hindu landlords and moneylenders were taking over their land, and missionaries were criticising their traditional culture.

As the movement spread the British officials decided to act. They arrested Birsa in 1895, convicted him on charges of rioting and jailed him for two years.

When Birsa was released in 1897 he began touring the villages to gather support. He used traditional symbols and language to rouse people, urging them to destroy "Ravana" (dikus and the Europeans) and establish a kingdom under his leadership. Birsa's followers began targeting the symbols of diku and European power. They attacked police stations and churches, and raided the property of moneylenders and zamindars. They raised the white flag as a symbol of Birsa Raj.

In 1900 Birsa died of cholera and the movement faded out. However, the movement was significant in at least two ways. First – it forced the colonial government to introduce laws so that the land of the tribals could not be easily taken over by dikus. Second – it showed once again that the tribal people had the capacity to protest against injustice and express their anger against colonial rule. They did this in their own specific way, inventing their own rituals and symbols of struggle.

Let's recall

1. *Fill in the blanks:*

   (a) *The British described the tribal people as* _____.

   (b) *The method of sowing seeds in jhum cultivation is known as* _____.

   (c) *The tribal chiefs got* _____ *titles in central India under the British land settlements.*

   (d) *Tribals went to work in the* _____ *of Assam and the* _____ *in Bihar.*

ELSEWHERE

Why do we need cash!

There are many reasons why tribal and other social groups often do not wish to produce for the market. This tribal song from Papua New Guinea gives us a glimpse of how the tribals there viewed the market.

We say cash,
Is unsatisfactory trash;
It won't keep off rain
And it gives me pain

So why should I work my guts
From coconut trees
For these government mutts;

Cash cropping is all very well
If you've got something to sell
But tell me sir why,
If there's nothing to buy;
Should I bother?

Adapted from a song quoted in Cohn, Clarke and Haswell, eds, *The Economy of Subsistence Agriculture*, (1970).

Let's imagine

Imagine you are a jhum cultivator living in a forest village in the nineteenth century. You have just been told that the land you were born on no longer belongs to you. In a meeting with British officials you try to explain the kinds of problems you face. What would you say?

2. *State whether true or false:*

   (a) *Jhum cultivators plough the land and sow seeds.*

   (b) *Cocoons were bought from the Santhals and sold by the traders at five times the purchase price.*

   (c) *Birsa urged his followers to purify themselves, give up drinking liquor and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery.*

   (d) *The British wanted to preserve the tribal way of life.*

Let's discuss

3. *What problems did shifting cultivators face under British rule?*

4. *How did the powers of tribal chiefs change under colonial rule?*

5. *What accounts for the anger of the tribals against the dikus?*

6. *What was Birsa's vision of a golden age? Why do you think such a vision appealed to the people of the region?*

Let's do

7. *Find out from your parents, friends or teachers, the names of some heroes of other tribal revolts in the twentieth century. Write their story in your own words.*

8. *Choose any tribal group living in India today. Find out about their customs and way of life, and how their lives have changed in the last 50 years.*

5 When People Rebel
1857 and After

Fig. 1 *– Sepoys and peasants gather forces for the revolt that spread across the plains of north India in 1857*

Policies and the People

In the previous chapters you looked at the policies of the East India Company and the effect they had on different people. Kings, queens, peasants, landlords, tribals, soldiers were all affected in different ways. You have also seen how people resist policies and actions that harm their interests or go against their sentiments.

Nawabs lose their power

Since the mid-eighteenth century, nawabs and rajas had seen their power erode. They had gradually lost their authority and honour. Residents had been stationed in many courts, the freedom of the rulers reduced, their armed forces disbanded, and their revenues and territories taken away by stages.

Many ruling families tried to negotiate with the Company to protect their interests. For example, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi wanted the Company to recognise her adopted son as the heir to the kingdom after the death of her husband. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of

Peshwa Baji Rao II, pleaded that he be given his father's pension when the latter died. However, the Company, confident of its superiority and military powers, turned down these pleas.

Awadh was one of the last territories to be annexed. In 1801, a subsidiary alliance was imposed on Awadh, and in 1856 it was taken over. Governor-General Dalhousie declared that the territory was being misgoverned and British rule was needed to ensure proper administration.

The Company even began to plan how to bring the Mughal dynasty to an end. The name of the Mughal king was removed from the coins minted by the Company. In 1849, Governor-General Dalhousie announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the family of the king would be shifted out of the Red Fort and given another place in Delhi to reside in. In 1856, Governor-General Canning decided that Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the last Mughal king and after his death none of his descendants would be recognised as kings – they would just be called princes.

The peasants and the sepoys

In the countryside peasants and zamindars resented the high taxes and the rigid methods of revenue collection. Many failed to pay back their loans to the moneylenders and gradually lost the lands they had tilled for generations.

The Indian sepoys in the employ of the Company also had reasons for discontent. They were unhappy about their pay, allowances and conditions of service. Some of the new rules, moreover, violated their religious sensibilities and beliefs. Did you know that in those days many people in the country believed that if they crossed the sea they would lose their religion and caste? So when in 1824 the sepoys were told to go to Burma by the sea route to fight for the Company, they refused to follow the order, though they agreed to go by the land route. They were severely punished, and since the issue did not die down, in 1856 the Company passed a new law which stated that every new person who took up employment in the Company's army had to agree to serve overseas if required.

Sepoys also reacted to what was happening in the countryside. Many of them were peasants and had families living in the villages. So the anger of the peasants quickly spread among the sepoys.

Activity

Imagine you are a sepoy in the Company army, advising your nephew not to take employment in the army. What reasons would you give?

Responses to reforms

The British believed that Indian society had to be reformed. Laws were passed to stop the practice of sati and to encourage the remarriage of widows. English-language education was actively promoted. After 1830, the Company allowed Christian missionaries to function freely in its domain and even own land and property. In 1850, a new law was passed to make conversion to Christianity easier. This law allowed an Indian who had converted to Christianity to inherit the property of his ancestors. Many Indians began to feel that the British were destroying their religion, their social customs and their traditional way of life.

There were of course other Indians who wanted to change existing social practices. You will read about these reformers and reform movements in Chapter 7.

***Fig. 2** – Sepoys exchange news and rumours in the bazaars of north India*

Through the Eyes of the People

To get a glimpse of what people were thinking those days about British rule, study Sources 1 and 2.

Source 1

The list of eighty-four rules

Given here are excerpts from the book *Majha Pravaas*, written by Vishnubhatt Godse, a Brahman from a village in Maharashtra. He and his uncle had set out to attend a *yajna* being organised in Mathura. Vishnubhatt writes that they met some sepoys on the way who told them that they should not proceed on the journey because a massive upheaval was going to break out in three days. The sepoys said:

> the English were determined to wipe out the religions of the Hindus and the Muslims ... they had made a list of eighty-four rules and announced these in a gathering of all big kings and princes in Calcutta. They said that the kings refused to accept these rules and warned the English of dire consequences and massive upheaval if these are implemented ... that the kings all returned to their capitals in great anger ... all the big people began making plans. A date was fixed for the war of religion and the secret plan had been circulated from the cantonment in Meerut by letters sent to different cantonments.

Vishnubhatt Godse, Majha Pravaas, *pp. 23 24.*

Source 2

"There was soon excitement in every regiment"

Another account we have from those days are the memoirs of Subedar Sitaram Pande. Sitaram Pande was recruited in 1812 as a sepoy in the Bengal Native Army. He served the English for 48 years and retired in 1860. He helped the British to suppress the rebellion though his own son was a rebel and was killed by the British in front of his eyes. On retirement he was persuaded by his Commanding Officer, Norgate, to write his memoirs. He completed the writing in 1861 in Awadhi and Norgate translated it into English and had it published under the title *From Sepoy to Subedar*.
Here is an excerpt from what Sitaram Pande wrote:

> It is my humble opinion that this seizing of Oudh filled the minds of the Sepoys with distrust and led them to plot against the Government. Agents of the Nawab of Oudh and also of the King of Delhi were sent all over India to discover the temper of the army. They worked upon the feelings of sepoys, telling them how treacherously the foreigners had behaved towards their king. They invented ten thousand lies and promises to persuade the soldiers to mutiny and turn against their masters, the English, with the object of restoring the Emperor of Delhi to the throne. They maintained that this was wholly within the army's powers if the soldiers would only act together and do as they were advised.

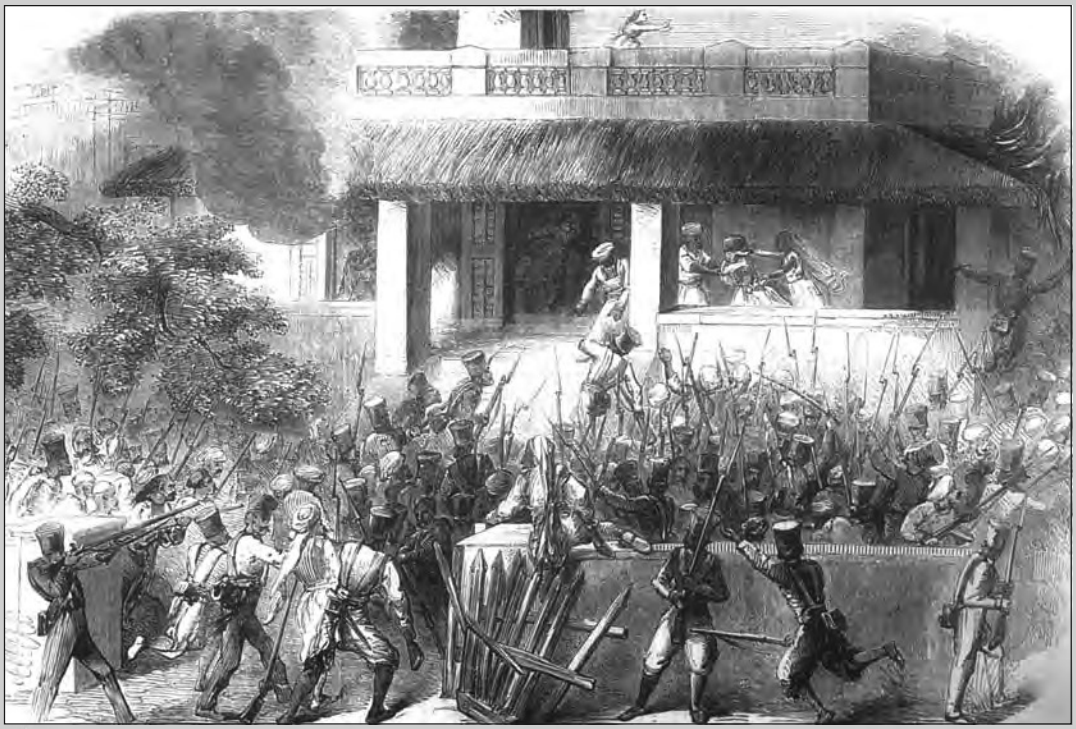


Fig. 3 *– Rebel sepoys at Meerut attack officers, enter their homes and set fire to buildings*

Source 2 contd.

Source 2 contd.

It chanced that about this time the Sarkar sent parties of men from each regiment to different garrisons for instructions in the use of the new rifle. These men performed the new drill for some time until a report got about by some means or the other, that the cartridges used for these new rifles were greased with the fat of cows and pigs. The men from our regiment wrote to others in the regiment telling them about this, and there was soon excitement in every regiment. Some men pointed out that in forty years' service nothing had ever been done by the Sarkar to insult their religion, but as I have already mentioned the sepoys' minds had been inflamed by the seizure of Oudh. Interested parties were quick to point out that the great aim of the English was to turn us all into Christians, and they had therefore introduced the cartridge in order to bring this about, since both Mahommedans and Hindus would be defiled by using it.

The Colonel sahib was of the opinion that the excitement, which even he could not fail to see, would pass off, as it had done before, and he recommended me to go to my home.

Sitaram Pande, From Sepoy to Subedar, *pp. 162 63.*

Activity

1. What were the important concerns in the minds of the people according to Sitaram and according to Vishnubhatt?
2. What role did they think the rulers were playing? What role did the sepoys seem to play?

A Mutiny Becomes a Popular Rebellion

Though struggles between rulers and the ruled are not unusual, sometimes such struggles become quite widespread as a popular resistance so that the power of the state breaks down. A very large number of people begin to believe that they have a common enemy and rise up against the enemy at the same time. For such a situation to develop people have to organise, communicate, take initiative and display the confidence to turn the situation around.

Mutiny – *When soldiers as a group disobey their officers in the army*

Such a situation developed in the northern parts of India in 1857. After a hundred years of conquest and administration, the English East India Company faced a massive rebellion that started in May 1857 and threatened the Company's very presence in India. Sepoys mutinied in several places beginning from Meerut and a large number of people from different sections of society rose up in rebellion. Some regard it as the biggest armed resistance to colonialism in the nineteenth century anywhere in the world.

Fig. 6 *– The battle in the cavalry lines*

On the evening of 3 July 1857, over 3,000 rebels came from Bareilly, crossed the river Jamuna, entered Delhi, and attacked the British cavalry posts. The battle continued all through the night.

From Meerut to Delhi

On 29 March 1857, a young soldier, Mangal Pandey, was hanged to death for attacking his officers in Barrackpore. Some days later, some sepoys of the regiment at Meerut refused to do the army drill using the new cartridges, which were suspected of being coated with the fat of cows and pigs. Eighty-five sepoys were dismissed from service and sentenced to ten years in jail for disobeying their officers. This happened on 9 May 1857.

The response of the other Indian soldiers in Meerut was quite extraordinary. On 10 May, the soldiers marched to the jail in Meerut and released the imprisoned sepoys. They attacked and killed British officers. They captured guns and ammunition and set fire to the buildings and properties of the British and declared war on the ***firangis****. The soldiers were determined to bring an end to their rule in the country. But who would rule the land instead? The soldiers had an answer to this question – the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar.*

The sepoys of Meerut rode all night of 10 May to reach Delhi in the early hours next morning. As news of their arrival spread, the regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion. Again british officers were killed, arms and ammunition seized, buildings set on fire. Triumphant soldiers gathered around the walls of the Red Fort where the Badshah lived, demanding to meet him. The emperor was not quite willing to challenge the mighty British power but the soldiers persisted. They forced their way into the palace and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar as their leader.

Firangis *– Foreigners The term reflects an attitude of contempt.*

The ageing emperor had to accept this demand. He wrote letters to all the chiefs and rulers of the country to come forward and organise a confederacy of Indian states to fight the British. This single step taken by Bahadur Shah had great implications.

The Mughal dynasty had ruled over a very large part of the country. Most smaller rulers and chieftains controlled different territories on behalf of the Mughal ruler. Threatened by the expansion of British rule, many of them felt that if the Mughal emperor could rule again, they too would be able to rule their own territories once more, under Mughal authority.

The British had not expected this to happen. They thought the disturbance caused by the issue of the cartridges would die down. But Bahadur Shah Zafar's decision to bless the rebellion changed the entire situation dramatically. Often when people see an alternative possibility they feel inspired and enthused. It gives them the courage, hope and confidence to act.

The rebellion spreads

After the British were routed from Delhi, there was no uprising for almost a week. It took that much time for news to travel. Then, a spurt of mutinies began.

Regiment after regiment mutinied and took off to join other troops at nodal points like Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow. After them, the people of the towns and villages also rose up in rebellion and rallied around local leaders, zamindars and chiefs who were prepared to establish their authority and fight the British. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the late Peshwa Baji Rao who lived near Kanpur, gathered armed forces and expelled the British garrison from the city. He proclaimed himself Peshwa. He declared that he was a governor under Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. In Lucknow, Birjis Qadr, the son of the deposed Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, was proclaimed the new Nawab. He too acknowledged the suzerainty of Bahadur Shah Zafar. His mother Begum Hazrat Mahal took an active part in organising the uprising against the British. In Jhansi, Rani Lakshmibai joined the rebel sepoys and

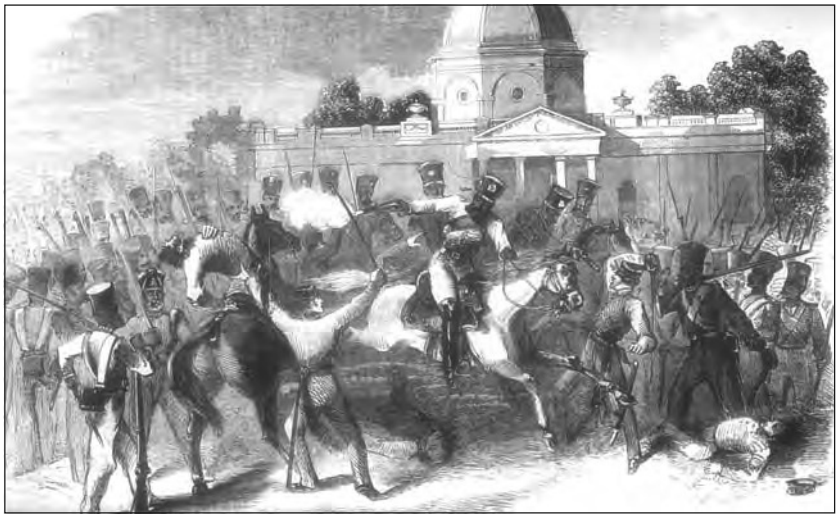


***Fig. 5** – As the mutiny spread, British officers were killed in the cantonments*

Activity

1. Why did the Mughal emperor agree to support the rebels?
2. Write a paragraph on the assessment he may have made before accepting the offer of the sepoys.

fought the British along with Tantia Tope, the general of Nana Saheb.

The British were greatly outnumbered by the rebel forces. They were defeated in a number of battles. This convinced the people that the rule of the British had collapsed for good and gave them the confidence to take the plunge and join the rebellion. A situation of widespread popular rebellion developed in the region of Awadh in particular. On 6 August 1857, we find a telegram sent by Lieutenant Colonel Tytler to his Commander-in-Chief expressing the fear felt by the British: "Our men are cowed by the numbers opposed to them and the endless fighting. Every village is held against us, the zamindars have risen to oppose us."

Many new leaders came up. For example, Ahmadullah Shah, a maulvi from Faizabad, prophesied that the rule of the British would come to an end soon. He caught the imagination of the people and raised a huge force of supporters. He came to Lucknow to fight the British. In Delhi, a large number of ghazis or religious warriors came together to wipe out the white people. Bakht Khan, a soldier from Bareilly, took charge of a large force of fighters who came to Delhi. He became a key military leader of the rebellion. In Bihar, an old zamindar, Kunwar Singh, joined the rebel sepoys and battled with the British for many months. Leaders and fighters from across the land joined the fight.

The Company Fights Back

Unnerved by the scale of the upheaval, the Company decided to repress the revolt with all its might. It brought

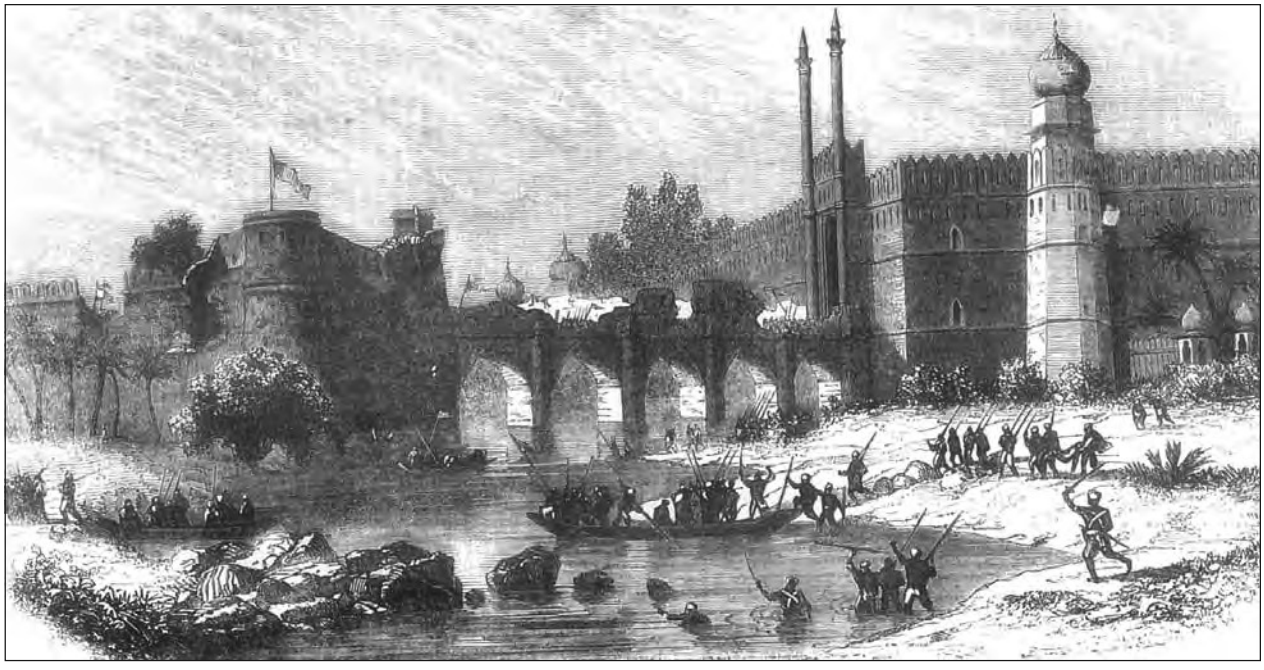


***Fig. 7** – British forces attack the rebels who had occupied the Red Fort (on the right) and Salimgarh Fort in Delhi (on the left)*

Fig. 4 – *The siege train reaches Delhi*

The British forces initially found it difficult to break through the heavy fortification in Delhi. On 3 September 1857 reinforcements arrived – a 7- mile-long siege train comprising cartloads of canons and ammunition pulled by elephants.

reinforcements from England, passed new laws so that the rebels could be convicted with ease, and then moved into the storm centres of the revolt. Delhi was recaptured from the rebel forces in September 1857. The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar was tried in court and sentenced to life imprisonment. His sons were shot dead before his eyes. He and his wife Begum Zinat Mahal were sent to prison in Rangoon in October 1858. Bahadur Shah Zafar died in the Rangoon jail in November 1862.

The recapture of Delhi, however, did not mean that the rebellion died down after that. People continued to resist and battle the British. The British had to fight for two years to suppress the massive forces of popular rebellion.

Lucknow was taken in March 1858. Rani Lakshmibai was defeated and killed in June 1858. Tantia Tope escaped to the jungles of central India and continued to fight a guerrilla war with the support of many tribal and peasant leaders. He was captured, tried and killed in April 1859.

Just as victories against the British had earlier encouraged rebellion, the defeat of rebel forces encouraged desertions. The British also tried their best to win back the loyalty of the people. They announced rewards for loyal landholders would be allowed to continue to enjoy traditional rights over their lands. Those who had rebelled were told that if they submitted to the British, and if they had not killed any white people,

Activity

Make a list of places where the uprising took place in May, June and July 1857.

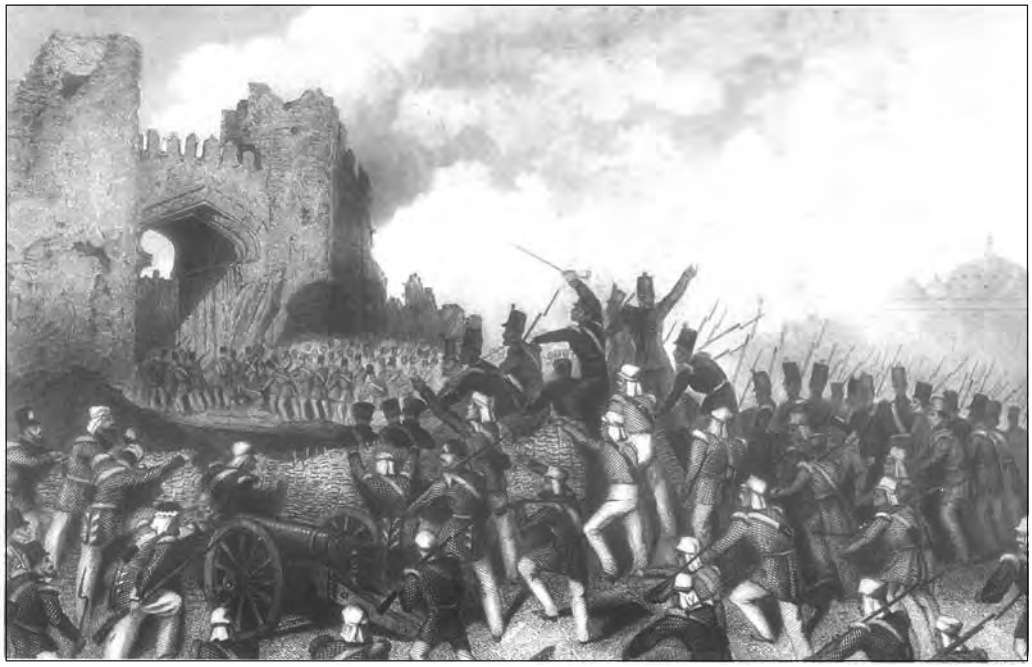


Fig. 8 – *British troops blow up Kashmere Gate to enter Delhi*

they would remain safe and their rights and claims to land would not be denied. Nevertheless, hundreds of sepoys, rebels, nawabs and rajas were tried and hanged.

Fig. 9 – *British forces capture the rebels near Kanpur*

Notice the way the artist shows the British soldiers valiantly advancing on the rebel forces.

Aftermath

The British had regained control of the country by the end of 1859, but they could not carry on ruling the land with the same policies any more.

Given below are the important changes that were introduced by the British.

1. The British Parliament passed a new Act in 1858 and transferred the powers of the East India Company to the British Crown in order to ensure a more responsible management of Indian affairs. A member of the British Cabinet was appointed Secretary of State for India and made responsible for all matters related to the governance of India. He was given a council to advise him, called the India Council. The Governor-General of India was given the title of Viceroy, that is, a personal representative of the Crown. Through these measures the British government accepted direct responsibility for ruling India.

2. All ruling chiefs of the country were assured that their territory would never be annexed in future. They were allowed to pass on their kingdoms to their heirs, including adopted sons. However, they were made to acknowledge the British Queen as their Sovereign Paramount. Thus the Indian rulers were to hold their kingdoms as subordinates of the British Crown.

3. It was decided that the proportion of Indian soldiers in the army would be reduced and the number of European soldiers would be increased. It was also decided that instead of recruiting soldiers from Awadh, Bihar, central India and south India, more soldiers would be recruited from among the Gurkhas, Sikhs and Pathans.

4. The land and property of Muslims was confiscated on a large scale and they were treated with suspicion and hostility. The British believed that they were responsible for the rebellion in a big way.

5. The British decided to respect the customary religious and social practices of the people in India.

6. Policies were made to protect landlords and zamindars and give them security of rights over their lands.

Thus a new phase of history began after 1857.

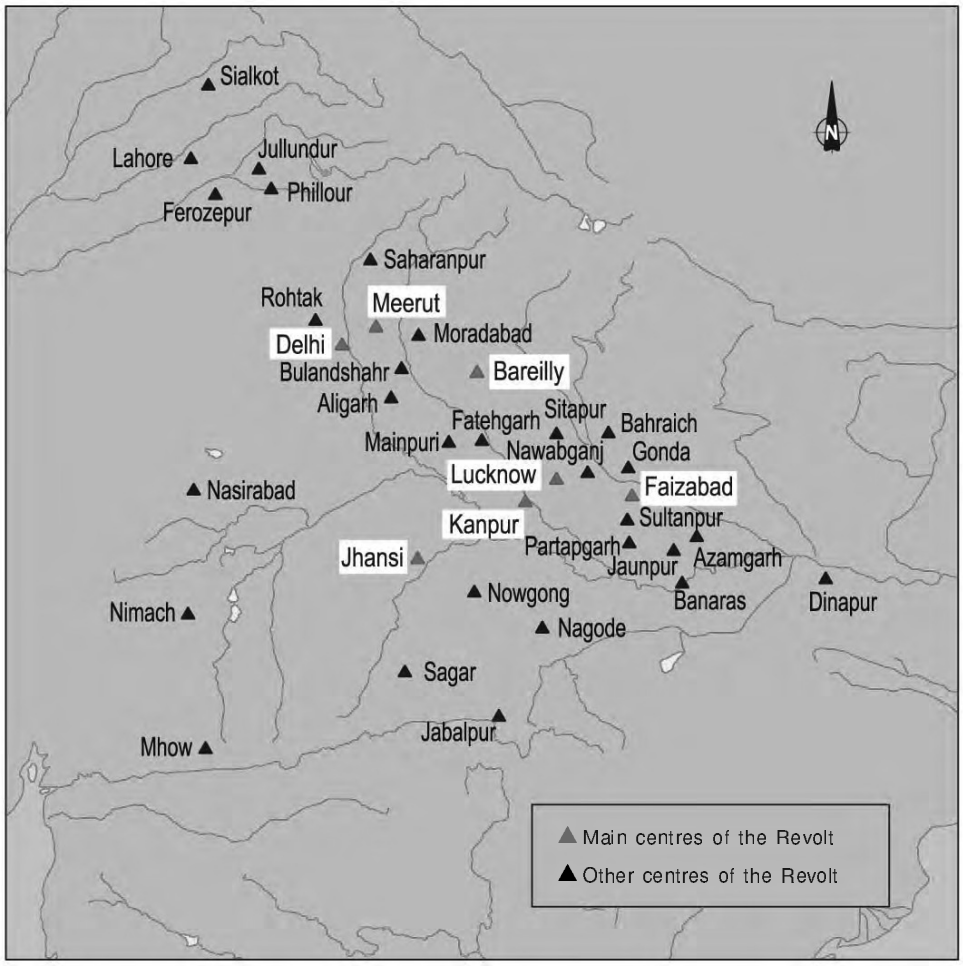


***Fig. 10** – Some important centres of the Revolt in North India*

ELSEWHERE

For a Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace

Fig. 11 – *Taiping army meeting their leader*

While the revolt was spreading in India in 1857, a massive popular uprising was raging in the southern parts of China. It had started in 1850 and could be suppressed only by the mid-1860s. Thousands of labouring, poor people were led by Hong Xiuquan to fight for the establishment of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. This was known as the Taiping Rebellion.

Hong Xiuquan was a convert to Christianity and was against the traditional religions practised in China such as Confucianism and Buddhism. The rebels of Taiping wanted to establish a kingdom where a form of Christianity was practised, where no one held any private property, where there was no difference between social classes and between men and women, where consumption of opium, tobacco, alcohol, and activities like gambling, prostitution, slavery, were prohibited.

The British and French armed forces operating in China helped the emperor of the Qing dynasty to put down the Taiping Rebellion.

Let's imagine

Imagine you are a British officer in Awadh during the rebellion. What would you do to keep your plans of fighting the rebels a top secret.

Let's recall

1. *What was the demand of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi that was refused by the British?*
2. *What did the British do to protect the interests of those who converted to Christianity?*
3. *What objections did the sepoys have to the new cartridges that they were asked to use?*
4. *How did the last Mughal emperor live the last years of his life?*

Let's Discuss

5. What could be the reasons for the confidence of the British rulers about their position in India before May 1857?
6. What impact did Bahadur Shah Zafar's support to the rebellion have on the people and the ruling families?
7. How did the British succeed in securing the submission of the rebel landowners of Awadh?
8. In what ways did the British change their policies as a result of the rebellion of 1857?

Let's Do

9. Find out stories and songs remembered by people in your area or your family about *San Sattavan ki Ladaai*. What memories do people cherish about the great uprising?
10. Find out more about Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. In what ways would she have been an unusual woman for her times?

Fig. 12 *– Ruins of the Residency in Lucknow*

In June 1857, the rebel forces began the siege of the Residency. A large number of British women, men and children had taken shelter in the buildings there. The rebels surrounded the compound and bombarded the building with shells. Hit by a shell, Henry Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of Awadh, died in one of the rooms that you see in the picture. Notice how buildings carry the marks of past events.

6 Colonialism and the City
The Story of an Imperial Capital

What Happened to Cities Under Colonial Rule?

You have seen how life in the countryside changed after the establishment of British power. What happened to the cities during the same period? The answer will depend on the kind of town or city we are discussing. The history of a temple town like Madurai will not be the same as that of a manufacturing town like Dacca, or a port like Surat, or towns that simultaneously served many different functions.

In most parts of the Western world modern cities emerged with industrialisation. In Britain, industrial cities like Leeds and Manchester grew rapidly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as more and more people sought jobs, housing and other facilities in these places. However, unlike Western Europe, Indian cities did not expand as rapidly in the nineteenth century. Why was this so?

***Fig. 1** – A view of Machlipatnam, 1672*

Machlipatnam developed as an important port town in the seventeenth century. Its importance declined by the late eighteenth century as trade shifted to the new British ports of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

In the late eighteenth century, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras rose in importance as **Presidency** *cities. They became the centres of British power in the different regions of India. At the same time, a host of smaller cities declined. Many towns manufacturing specialised goods declined due to a drop in the demand for what they produced. Old trading centres and ports could not survive when the flow of trade moved to new centres. Similarly, earlier centres of regional power collapsed when local rulers were defeated by the British and new centres of administration emerged. This process is often described as de-***urbanisation***. Cities such as Machlipatnam, Surat and Seringapatam were de-urbanised during the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, only 11 per cent of Indians were living in cities.*

Presidency – *For administrative purposes, colonial India was divided into three "Presidencies" (Bombay, Madras and Bengal), which developed from the East India Company's "factories" (trading posts) at Surat, Madras and Calcutta.*

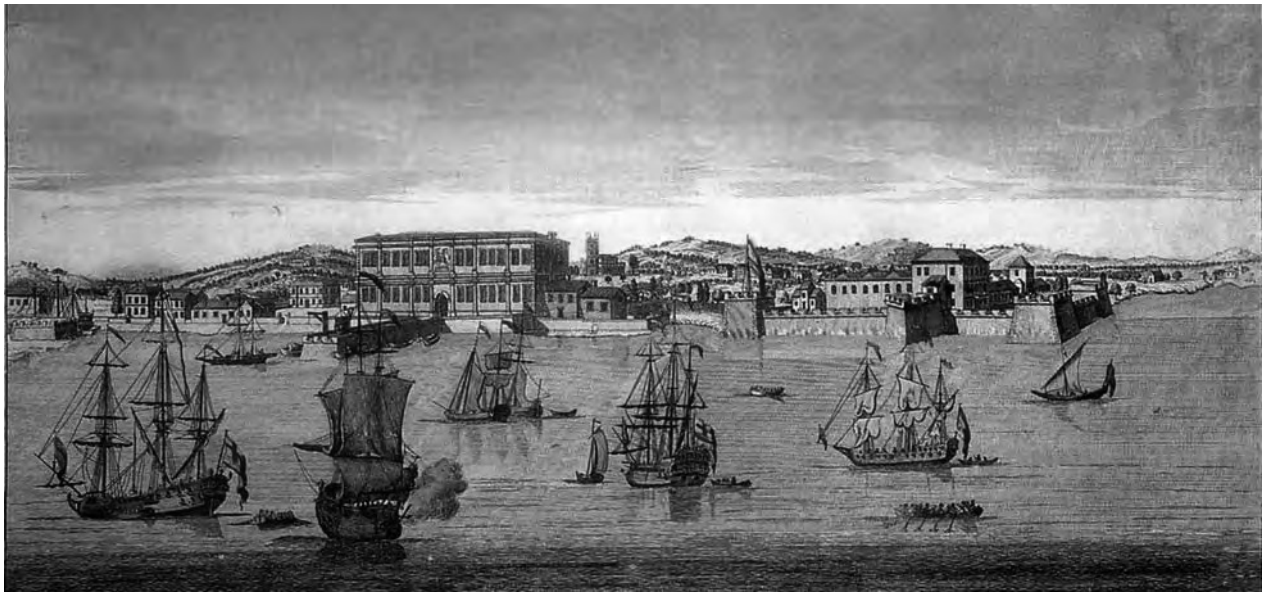


Fig. 2 *– Bombay port in the eighteenth century*

The city of Bombay began to grow when the East India Company started using Bombay as its main port in western India.

The historic imperial city of Delhi became a dusty provincial town in the nineteenth century before it was rebuilt as the capital of British India after 1912. Let us look at the story of Delhi to see what happened to it under colonial rule.

How many 'Delhis' before New Delhi?

You know Delhi as the capital of modern India. Did you also know that it has been a capital for more than a 1,000 years, although with some gaps? As many as 14 capital cities were founded in a small area of about 60 square miles on the left bank of the river Jamuna. The remains of all other capitals may be seen on a visit to the modern city-state of Delhi. Of these, the most

Urbanisation – *The process by which more and more people begin to reside in towns and cities*

Fig. 3 *– Image of Shahjahanabad in the mid-nineteenth century, The Illustrated London News, 16 January 1858*

You can see the Red Fort on the left. Notice the walls that surround the city. Through the centre runs the main road of Chandni Chowk. Note also the river Jamuna is flowing near the Red Fort. Today it has shifted course. The place where the boat is about to embank is now known as Daryaganj (darya means river, ganj means market)

Dargah *– The tomb of a Sufi saint*

Khanqah *– A sufi lodge, often used as a rest house for travellers and a place where people come to discuss spiritual matters, get the blessings of saints, and hear sufi music*

Idgah *– An open prayer place of Muslims primarily meant for id prayers*

Cul-de-sac *– Street with a dead end*

important are the capital cities built between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries.

The most splendid capital of all was built by Shah Jahan. Shahjahanabad was begun in 1639 and consisted of a fort-palace complex and the city adjoining it. Lal Qila or the Red Fort, made of red sandstone, contained the palace complex. To its west lay the Walled City with 14 gates. The main streets of Chandni Chowk and Faiz Bazaar were broad enough for royal processions to pass. A canal ran down the centre of Chandni Chowk.

Set amidst densely packed mohallas and several dozen bazaars, the Jama Masjid was among the largest and grandest mosques in India. There was no place higher than this mosque within the city then.

Delhi during Shah Jahan's time was also an important centre of Sufi culture. It had several ***dargahs, khanqahs*** *and* ***idgahs****. Open squares, winding lanes, quiet* ***cul-de-sacs*** *and water channels were the pride of Delhi's residents. No wonder the poet Mir Taqi Mir said, "The*

streets of Delhi aren't mere streets; they are like the album of a painter."

Yet, even this was no ideal city, and its delights were enjoyed only by some. There were sharp divisions between rich and poor. Havelis or mansions were interspersed with the far more numerous mud houses of the poor. The colourful world of poetry and dance was usually enjoyed only by men. Furthermore, celebrations and processions often led to serious conflicts.

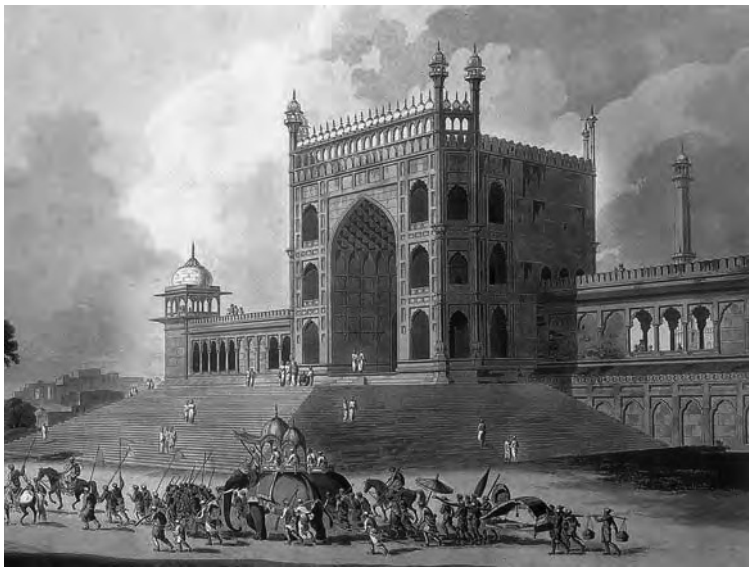


Fig. 4 – *The eastern gate of the Jama Masjid in Delhi, by Thomas Daniell, 1795*

This is also the first mosque in India with minarets and full domes.

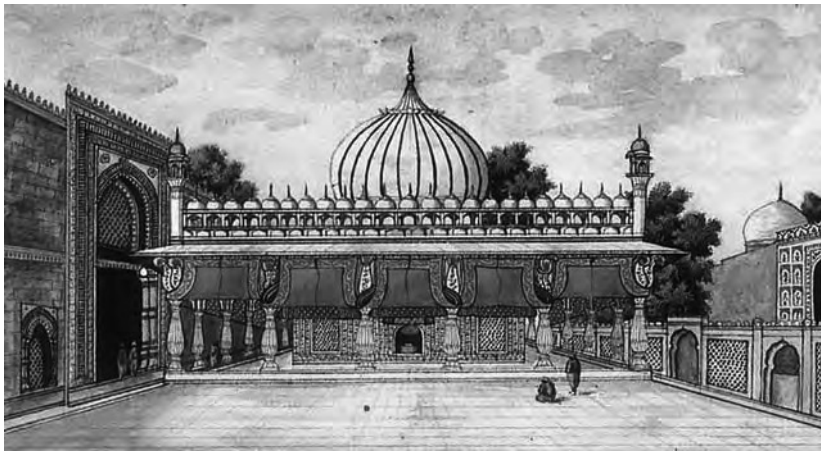


Fig. 5 – *The shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi*

The Making of New Delhi

In 1803, the British gained control of Delhi after defeating the Marathas. Since the capital of British India was Calcutta, the Mughal emperor was allowed to continue living in the palace complex in the Red Fort. The modern city as we know it today developed only after 1911 when Delhi became the capital of British India.

Demolishing a past

Before 1857, developments in Delhi were somewhat different from those in other colonial cities. In Madras, Bombay or Calcutta, the living spaces of Indians and the British were sharply separated. Indians lived in

Source 1

"Dilli jo ek shahr tha alam mein intikhab..."

By 1739, Delhi had been sacked by Nadir Shah and plundered many times. Expressing the sorrow of those who witnessed the decline of the city, the eighteenth-century Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir, said:

Dilli jo ek shahr tha alam mein intikhab,
...
Ham rahne wale hain usi ujre dayar ke

(I belong to the same ruined territory of Delhi, which was once a supreme city in the world)

Gulfaroshan – *A festival of flowers*

Renaissance – *Literally, rebirth of art and learning. It is a term often used to describe a time when there is great creative activity.*

the "black" areas, while the British lived in well-laid-out "white" areas. In Delhi, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British lived along with the wealthier Indians in the Walled City. The British learned to enjoy Urdu/Persian culture and poetry and participated in local festivals.

The establishment of the Delhi College in 1792 led to a great intellectual flowering in the sciences as well as the humanities, largely in the Urdu language. Many refer to the period from 1830 to 1857 as a period of the Delhi **renaissance**.

All this changed after 1857. During the Revolt that year, as you have seen, the rebels gathered in the city, and persuaded Bahadur Shah to become the leader of the uprising. Delhi remained under rebel control for four months.

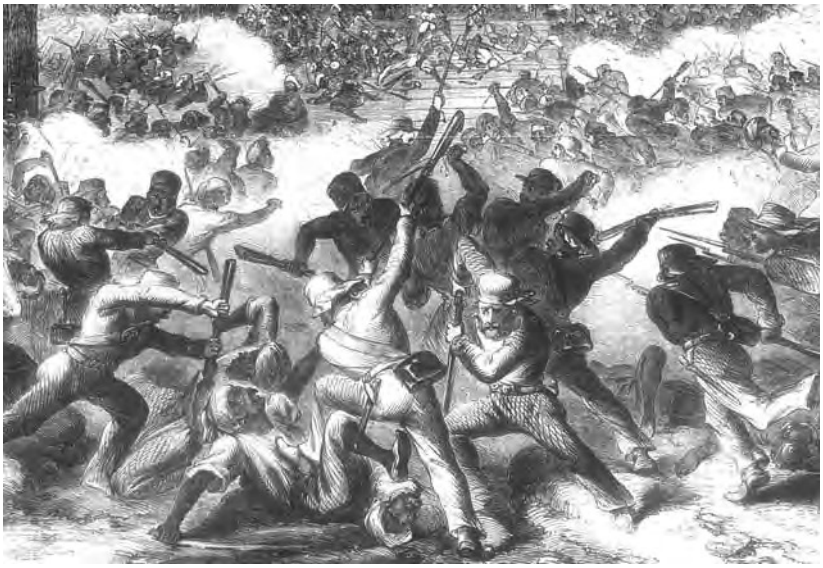


Fig. 6 *– British forces wreaking vengeance on the streets of Delhi, massacring the rebels.*

When the British regained the city, they embarked on a campaign of revenge and plunder. The famous poet Ghalib witnessed the events of the time. This is how he described the ransacking of Delhi in 1857: "When the angry lions (the British) entered the town, they killed the helpless ... and burned houses. Hordes of men and women, commoners and noblemen, poured out of Delhi from the three gates and took shelter in small communities, and tombs outside the city." To prevent another rebellion, the British exiled Bahadur Shah to Burma (now Myanmar), dismantled his court, razed several of the palaces, closed down gardens and built barracks for troops in their place.

Source 2

"There was once a city of this name"

Ghalib lamented the changes that were occurring and wrote sadly about the past that was lost. He wrote:

> What can I write? The life of Delhi depends on the Fort, Chandni Chowk, the daily gatherings at the Jamuna Bridge and the Annual ***Gulfaroshan***. When all these ... things are no longer there, how can Delhi live? Yes, there was once a city of this name in the dominions of India.

The British wanted Delhi to forget its Mughal past. The area around the Fort was completely cleared of gardens, pavilions and mosques (though temples were left intact). The British wanted a clear ground for security reasons. Mosques in particular were either destroyed, or put to other uses. For instance, the Zinat-al-Masjid was converted into a bakery. No worship was allowed in the Jama Masjid for five years. One-third of the city was demolished, and its canals were filled up.

In the 1870s, the western walls of Shahjahanabad were broken to establish the railway and to allow the city to expand beyond the walls. The British now began living in the sprawling Civil Lines area that came up in the north, away from the Indians in the Walled City. The Delhi College was turned into a school, and shut down in 1877.

***Fig. 7** – Looking out from Jama Masjid, photograph by Felice Beato, 1858-59*

Notice the buildings all around the Masjid. They were cleared after the Revolt of 1857.

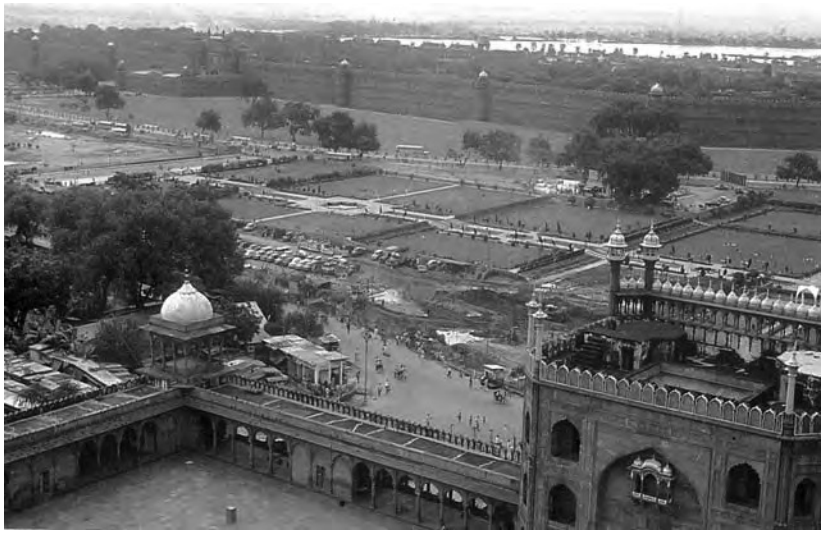


***Fig. 8** – View from the Jama Masjid after the surrounding buildings were demolished*

Activity

Compare the view in Fig. 8 with that in Fig. 7. Write a paragraph on what the changes depicted in the pictures might have meant to people living in the area.

Planning a new capital

The British were fully aware of the symbolic importance of Delhi. After the Revolt of 1857, many spectacular events were held there. In 1877, Viceroy Lytton organised a Durbar to acknowledge Queen Victoria as the Empress of India. Remember that Calcutta was still the capital of British India, but the grand Durbar was being held in Delhi. Why was this so? During the Revolt, the British had realised that the Mughal emperor was still important to the people and they saw him as their leader. It was therefore important to celebrate British power with pomp and show in the city the Mughal emperors had earlier ruled, and the place which had turned into a rebel stronghold in 1857.

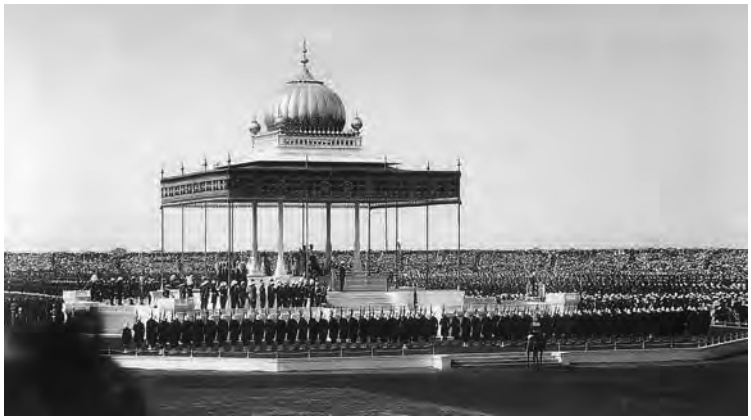


***Fig. 9** – The Coronation Durbar of King George V, 12 December, 1911*

Over 100,000 Indian princes and British officers and soldiers gathered at the Durbar.

In 1911, when King George V was crowned in England, a Durbar was held in Delhi to celebrate the occasion. The decision to shift the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi was announced at this Durbar.

New Delhi was constructed as a 10-square-mile city on Raisina Hill, south of the existing city. Two architects, Edward Lutyens and Herbert Baker, were called on to design New Delhi and its buildings. The government complex in New Delhi consisted of a two-mile avenue,

***Fig. 10** – The Viceregal Palace (Rashtrapati Bhavan) atop Raisina Hill*

Kingsway (now Rajpath), that led to the Viceroy's Palace (now Rashtrapati Bhavan), with the Secretariat buildings on either sides of the avenue. The features of these government buildings were borrowed from different periods of India's imperial history, but the overall look was Classical Greece (fifth century BCE). For instance, the central dome of the Viceroy's Palace was copied from the Buddhist stupa at Sanchi, and the red sandstone and carved screens or jalis were borrowed from Mughal architecture. But the new buildings had to assert British importance: that is why the architect made sure that the Viceroy's Palace was higher than Shah Jahan's Jama Masjid!

How was this to be done?

New Delhi took nearly 20 years to build. The idea was to build a city that was a stark contrast to Shahjahanabad. There were to be no crowded mohallas, no mazes of narrow bylanes. In New Delhi, there were to be broad, straight streets lined with sprawling mansions set in the middle of large compounds. The architects wanted New Delhi to represent a sense of law and order, in contrast to the chaos of Old Delhi. The new city also had to be a clean and healthy space. The British saw overcrowded spaces as unhygienic and unhealthy, the source of disease. This meant that New Delhi had to have better water supply, sewage disposal and drainage facilities than the Old City. It had to be green, with trees and parks ensuring fresh air and adequate supply of oxygen.

Activity

Imagine yourself walking up Raisina Hill, looking towards Rashtrapati Bhavan. Do you think Baker was right in thinking that looking up to the building would create a sense of awe and emphasise the power of the British?

Source 3

The vision of New Delhi

This is how Viceroy Hardinge explained the choice of Delhi as capital:

> The change would strike the imagination of the people of India ... and would be accepted by all as the assertion of an unfaltering determination to maintain British rule in India.

The architect Herbert Baker believed:

> The New Capital must be the sculptural monument of the good government and unity which India, for the first time in its history, has enjoyed under British rule. British rule in India is not a mere veneer of government and culture. It is a new civilisation in growth, a blend of the best elements of East and West ... It is to this great fact that the architecture of Delhi should bear testimony. (2 October 1912)

Activity

Can you find at least two instances from this chapter that suggest that there were other ways of thinking about the image of the capital city?

Life in the time of Partition

The Partition of India in 1947 led to a massive transfer of populations on both sides of the new border. As a result, the population of Delhi swelled, the kinds of jobs people did changed, and the culture of the city became different.

Days after Indian Independence and Partition, fierce rioting began. Thousands of people in Delhi were killed and their homes looted and burned. As streams of Muslims left Delhi for Pakistan, their place was taken by equally large numbers of Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan. Refugees roamed the streets of Shahjahanabad, searching for empty homes to occupy. At times they forced Muslims to leave or sell their properties. Over two-thirds of the Delhi Muslims migrated, almost 44,000 homes were abandoned. Terrorised Muslims lived in makeshift camps till they could leave for Pakistan.

At the same time, Delhi became a city of refugees. Nearly 500,000 people were added to Delhi's population (which had a little over 800,000 people in 1951). Most of these migrants were from Punjab. They stayed in camps, schools, military barracks and gardens, hoping to build new homes. Some got the opportunity to occupy residences that had been vacated; others were housed in refugee colonies. New colonies such as Lajpat Nagar and Tilak Nagar came up at this time. Shops and stalls were set up to cater to the demands of the migrants; schools and colleges were also opened.

The skills and occupations of the refugees were quite different from those of the people they replaced. Many of the Muslims who went to Pakistan were artisans, petty traders and labourers. The new migrants coming to Delhi were rural landlords, lawyers, teachers, traders and small shopkeepers. Partition changed their lives, and their occupations. They had to take up new jobs as hawkers, vendors, carpenters and ironsmiths. Many, however, prospered in their new businesses.

The large migration from Punjab changed the social milieu of Delhi. An urban culture largely based on Urdu was overshadowed by new tastes and sensibilities, in food, dress and the arts.

***Fig. 11** – Thousands stayed in the refugee camps set up in Delhi after Partition.*

Inside the Old City

Meanwhile, what happened to the old city, that had been Shahjahanabad? In the past, Mughal Delhi's famed canals had brought not only fresh drinking water to homes, but also water for other domestic uses. This excellent system of water supply and drainage was neglected in the nineteenth century. The system of wells (or baolis) also broke down, and channels to remove household waste (called effluents) were damaged. This was at a time when the population of the city was continuously growing.

***Fig. 12** – A famous baoli near the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi*

The broken-down canals could not serve the needs of this rapidly increasing population. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Shahjahani drains were closed and a new system of open surface drains was introduced. This system too was soon overburdened, and many of the wealthier inhabitants complained about the stench from roadside privies and overflowing open drains. The Delhi Municipal Committee was unwilling to spend money on a good drainage system.

At the same time, though, millions of rupees were being spent on drainage systems in the New Delhi area.

***Fig. 13** – Chandni Chowk in Delhi in the late nineteenth century*

Activity

Think of the life of two young people one growing up in a *haveli* and the other in a colonial bungalow. What would be the difference in their relationship with the family? Which would you prefer to live in? Discuss your views with your classmates, and give reasons for your choice.

The decline of *havelis*

The Mughal aristocracy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lived in grand mansions called havelis. A map of the mid-nineteenth century showed at least a hundred such havelis, which were large walled compounds with mansions, courtyards and fountains.

A haveli housed many families. On entering the haveli through a beautiful gateway, you reached an open courtyard, surrounded by public rooms meant for visitors and business, used exclusively by males. The inner courtyard with its pavilions and rooms was meant for the women of the household. Rooms in the havelis had multiple uses, and very little by way of furniture.

Even in the mid-nineteenth century Qamr-al-din Khan's haveli had several structures within it, and included housing for the cart drivers, tent pitchers, torchbearers, as well as for accountants, clerks and household servants.

Many of the Mughal ***amirs*** *were unable to maintain these large establishments under conditions of British rule. Havelis therefore began to be subdivided and sold. Often the street front of the havelis became shops or warehouses. Some havelis were taken over by the upcoming mercantile class, but many fell into decay and disuse.*

Amir *– A nobleman*

The colonial bungalow was quite different from the haveli. Meant for one nuclear family, it was a large single-storeyed structure with a pitched roof, and usually set in one or two acres of open ground. It had separate living and dining rooms and bedrooms, and a wide veranda

Fig. 14 *– A colonial bungalow in New Delhi*

running in the front, and sometimes on three sides. Kitchens, stables and servants' quarters were in a separate space from the main house. The house was run by dozens of servants. The women of the household often sat on the verandas to supervise tailors or other tradesmen.

The Municipality begins to plan

The census of 1931 revealed that the walled city area was horribly crowded with as many as 90 persons per acre, while New Delhi had only about 3 persons per acre.

The poor conditions in the Walled City, however, did not stop it from expanding. In 1888 an extension scheme called the Lahore Gate Improvement Scheme was planned by Robert Clarke for the Walled City residents. The idea was to draw residents away from the Old City to a new type of market square, around which shops would be built. Streets in this redevelopment strictly followed the grid pattern, and were of identical width, size and character. Land was divided into regular areas for the construction of neighbourhoods. Clarkegunj, as the development was called, remained incomplete and did not help to decongest the Old City. Even in 1912, water supply and drainage in these new localities was very poor.

The Delhi Improvement Trust was set up 1936, and it built areas like Daryaganj South for wealthy Indians. Houses were grouped around parks. Within the houses, space was divided according to new rules of privacy. Instead of spaces being shared by many families or groups, now different members of the same family had their own private spaces within the home.

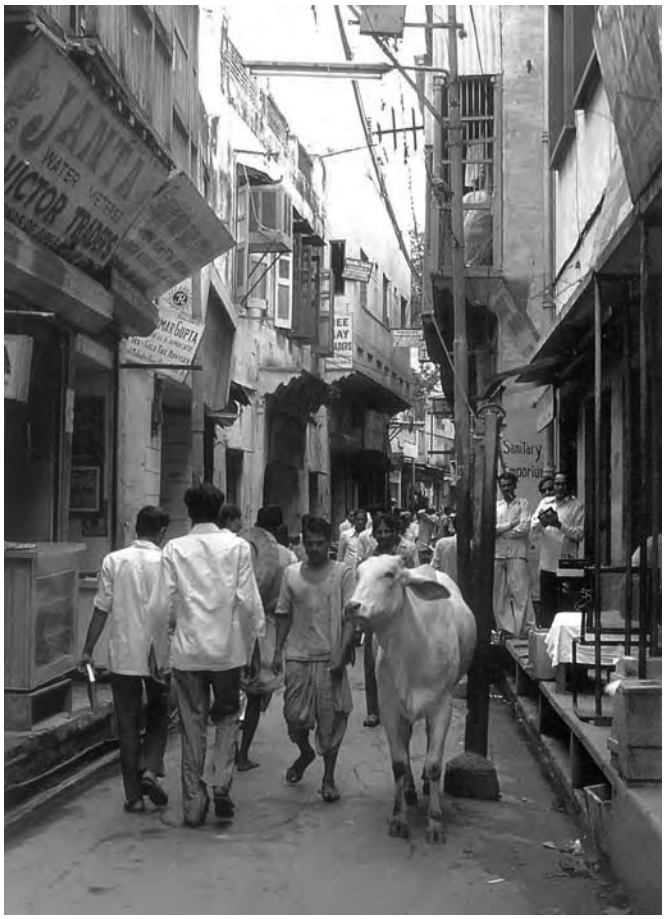


***Fig. 15** – A street in Old Delhi*

ELSEWHERE

Herbert Baker in South Africa

If you look at Fig.16 and Fig.17 you will find a startling similarity between the buildings. But these buildings are continents apart. What does this show?

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

In the early 1890s, a young English architect named Herbert Baker went to South Africa in search of work. It was in South Africa that Baker came in touch with Cecil Rhodes, the Governor of Cape Town, who inspired in Baker a love for the British empire and an admiration for the architectural heritage of ancient Rome and Greece.

Fig. 17 shows the Union Building that Baker designed in the city of Pretoria in South Africa. It used some of the elements of ancient classical architecture that Baker later included in his plans of the Secretariat building in New Delhi. The Union Building was also located on a steep hill as is the Secretariat Building in New Delhi (Fig. 16). Have you not noticed that people in positions of power want to look down on others from above rather than up towards them from below? The Union Building and the Secretariat were both built to house imperial offices.

Let's imagine

Imagine that you are a young man living in Shahjahanabad in 1700. Based on the description of the area in this chapter, write an account of your activities during one day of your life.

Let's recall

1. State whether true or false:

(a) In the Western world, modern cities grew with industrialisation.

(b) Surat and Machlipatnam developed in the nineteenth century.

(c) In the twentieth century, the majority of Indians lived in cities.

(d) After 1857 no worship was allowed in the Jama Masjid for five years.

(e) More money was spent on cleaning Old Delhi than New Delhi.

2. *Fill in the blanks:*

   (a) *The first structure to successfully use the dome was called the _____.*

   (b) *The two architects who designed New Delhi and Shahjahanabad were _____ and _____.*

   (c) *The British saw overcrowded spaces as _____.*

   (d) *In 1888 an extension scheme called the _____ was devised.*

3. *Identify three differences in the city design of New Delhi and Shahjahanabad.*

4. *Who lived in the "white" areas in cities such as Madras?*

Let's Discuss

5. *What is meant by de-urbanisation?*

6. *Why did the British choose to hold a grand Durbar in Delhi although it was not the capital?*

7. *How did the Old City of Delhi change under British rule?*

8. *How did the Partition affect life in Delhi?*

Let's Do

9. *Find out the history of the town you live in or of any town nearby. Check when and how it grew, and how it has changed over the years. You could look at the history of the bazaars, the buildings, cultural institutions, and settlements.*

10. *Make a list of at least ten occupations in the city, town or village to which you belong, and find out how long they have existed. What does this tell you about the changes within this area?*

Notes