Example of british imperialism in india and german imperialism in africa term pap...

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Imperialism is a subject which draws very strong opinions and emotions from historians and it offers a lot of scope for arguments and discussions. Today's generation view imperialism to be inhumane and an arrogant activity undertaken by a strong nation to exploit the people and resources of a weaker nation. This is mostly true because the conquering European powers did utilize the mining and agricultural potentials of the African and Asian nations, to benefit the economy of their homeland rather than for the welfare of the countries they occupied. But one should not forget that, there were also a few benefits attached to imperialism like, spread of education, sanitation, medical facilities and communication development (though most of it was installed primarily for the benefit of the ruling nation).

The age of imperialism officially took off by the middle of the nineteenth century, with most European nations either warring among themselves or the military forces of the countries they want to colonize. Undoubtedly Britain was the leader of the pack with more colonies than any of its contemporaries. There was a famous saying that " The sun never sets on the British empire". This saying was true literally too, because with so many colonies under its control throughout the world, the sun was up in one colony or the other of the British. The other European nations were not one to be left behind and they too followed suit with Germany being the last of the pack and took to imperialism later than any other European nation. Thought the basic aim of all these nations were same – to utilize the

excessive natural resources in the colonies, for control over sea and trade routes and for political supremacy, each European country had its own secondary aims and modality of occupation and governance. This essay aims at analyzing those differences particularly with reference to British imperialism in India and German imperialism in Africa.

Reasons for imperialism

The very basic difference of British occupation of India and German occupation of Germany starts from the reasons behind their imperialist designs. First let us take a look into how British made inroads into India. The primary aim of Britain's rule over India is trade. The Age of Discovery which was prevalent during 15th and 16th centuries saw many new places being discovered and occupied by European powers mainly by Portugal and Spain. Looking at the immense wealth generation such expeditions produced for these countries, other nations like France, Dutch and the Britain joined the quest for colonies. The British were mighty at their peak and they had almost 33, 700, 000 km2 of land under their control around the world, which is equivalent to one fourth of the earth's total land area (1).

It first set foot on Indian soil mainly for trade without any explicit political interest. The East India Company spear headed the British expansion in India. The Industrial revolution and the resultant need for raw materials provided a new reason for western countries to look for more colonies. India not only provided an opportunity for Britain to procure raw materials like tea, spices, cotton and spices, but also served as a big market for the British Textile industry with its huge population. The Mughal Empire which had a

stronghold on India in the Seventeenth century granted permission to East India Company for trading in its territory in the year 1617. Though it was primarily a trading company, the East India Company also had a military arm. It joined forces with the Royal navy to aid in capturing many of the key territories in the Indian sub-continent including Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma.

With the fall of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century, there was a power vacuum in India and it was ruled by many small dynasties and local groups. The East India Company slowly established their hold by capturing key territories through force and by forcing the other local rulers into sub ordinance by way of threats and coercion. The Great Indian Rebellion of the year 1857 – a mutiny organized by Indian soldiers serving in the British Army opposing the infringement in their religious faith, ended the rule of the company officially and the crown took direct control over India. The upheaval lasted for over six months with both sides sustaining heavy losses. After quelling this rebellion, the British Government passed the Government of India act in 1858, whereby the queen became the empress of India and the country was ruled by a Governor-General appointed by the crown. Let us dwell into the model of administration little later in the essay.

Now the German motivation behind colonizing Africa was anything but trade. For Germans the imperialistic advances in Africa in the late nineteenth century was more about national or racial pride than for any other reason. Until the year 1871, when the ' unification of Germany' took place, Germany did not have a strong naval force, which is the primary reason behind in its late entry into the quest for colonies. Up until then, the separate German

states had different political aim and goals and the foreign policy mainly focused on unification and consolidation of German interests in European soil. But Germans had trade interests overseas from as early as the Hanseatic League but these trades were concluded by the trading houses independently. They individually signed treaties with tribal members and local politicians without involving the German government. But these trade agreements and purchase of lands laid the foundation for the future annexation treaties and other imperialistic designs by the German empire. Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of Unified Germany, had no interest in colonization initially. But in parts of German media and the general public the acquisition of colonies in Africa and Pacific region was seen to be a matter of nationalistic pride and a way of realizing the High Seas Fleet dream. The many influential German leaders like Friedrich Fabri, Wilhelm Hribbe-Schleiden and Hugo zoller exerted pressure on the Government for the so called ' Place in the Sun' and finally Bismarck succumbed to the pressure and started the process of acquiring overseas protectorates.(2) In fact, Bismarck repeatedly stated that colonies were a burden and an unwanted expense of governance.

So German's first step towards imperialism in Africa was taken reluctantly and was done so with the primary motive of satisfying national pride, though the official reasons given by Bismarck were to protect trade and explore opportunities for capital investment. This is so much in contrast with the British motive to conquer India whereby they were doing it for out and out economic reasons. They already had a huge empire in America (known as the first empire) and had foothold in almost every part of the globe and very

much the forerunners in the imperial race. The national pride was already running high, with her majesty's rule reaching every part of the globe. Germany on the other hand was looking for identity. It wanted to be identified as one of the major powers in European politics and acquiring colonies was one way of doing it. Thus was the rise of German imperialism. It started at the last phase of what is famously known as ' Scramble for Africa'. Germany's imperialism was spear headed by Karl Peters, a private German adventurer who acquired land through treaties signed with local chieftains near Zanzibar. On March 3, 1885, Bismarck approved Peters' company to become an imperial charter and establish German colonies in East Africa. The sultan of Zanzibar protested and was countered by use of force whereby Bismarck sent in five warships to handle the situation. Later Germany and England decided to split the mainland between them and the Sultan was left with no choice. Thus began German's imperialism in Africa.

Method of acquisition of territory

Though both Britain and Germany used force to expand their imperial interests, there is a difference in terms of the modality used to gain control over the targeted country. In India, the British strategy was a mix of both use of force and politics. The British as we discussed earlier entered India as businessmen coercing and almost pleading (3) with the powerful Mughal Empire for trade relationship in the 1600s. Having got the license to trade with a flourishing state of India the British businessmen grew in wealth and power and built a military arm. In the 1700s the Mughal Empire became weak and various European powers tried get their foothold in India. India had

a big geography and a large and diverse population and was almost a continent in itself. So occupying India cannot be done through flexing one's military muscle alone. There were many small kingdoms with varied political goals and some with powerful military and some with terrains, which are difficult to approach let alone invade, under their control.

Even though the British did get some important military victories, like the one in battle of Plassey in 1757, under the leadership of Robert Clive, they also had some important political alliances too. The British profited out of the indifference that existed between the Indian princes. (4) These princes were just rich royalty, who profited from the hard work of peasantry with very little unity among them. British adopted what is popularly known in India as a ' Divide and Rule policy'.

" Divide et impera was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours"(5) this was the response of the Bombay Governor Lord Elphinstone to the investigating committee of the 1857 uprising. The people of India belonged to various religions, castes and languages and there was a lot of diversity. The British chose to manipulate these diversities and their politics was mainly based on exploiting these differences among Indian ruling class to their advantage throughout the 1800s.

Comparing it with German mode of conquering Africa, you would find a huge gaping difference. It was a different ball game one which was not played with nuances of political schemes but with the power of military. The opposition is militarily weak, show them the guns, acquire their lands and force them into submission, end of the game. This was pretty much the motto of the Germans in Africa. We by no means mean that the British were subtle in

their approach or they did not use force. But their approach was combinations of business tactics, political manipulation and of course their fancy weaponry. Germans did not go through all this trouble to acquire the territories of New Guinea, German South-west Africa, and Cameroons which were their colonies in Africa

Colonial Administration

There were considerable differences also in the way in which Britain and Germany administered its colonies. While Britain retained complete control of India and ruled from London via the Governor General and other bureaucrats posted in India, Bismarck enforced mostly an indirect rule on the German colonies in Africa.

The British had a Secretary of state for India who functioned from London and made the policy decisions regarding the governance of the colony. He had a ' Council of India' which is a fifteen member body and comprised of people who have earlier served in India. Though the policy decisions were taken in consultation with the group the final authority rests with the Secretary of State. The chain of command started with the imperial Government in London which controlled the Central Government at Calcutta, in India. The Governor General was the head of the Central Government and he had various provincial heads under his control. (6)

If the Central Government wants to introduce new laws or make amendments to existing ones it required the vote of a legislative council. This council is made up of British officials, Indians and domiciled British people. But only the British officials had the right to vote. The Indians were

chosen to the council as an aftermath of the 1857 uprising and mostly consisted of Indian royalty who were loyal to the British and as such did not add any value to the council, but were there just for namesake. But any policy decision required the final nod from the imperial Government in London headed by the Secretary of State for India. The Indian representation in the council was just a way to put a check on the public opinion which boiled to a bursting point during the rebellion.

Germany on the other hand gave vast powers to the Governor General of its African province and he was the only link between Berlin and its colony. The Governor General had many provincial commanders and European officials reporting to him. But each of these subordinates had considerable authority vested in them and mostly was able to make individual policy decisions regarding their province. The military was a powerful body in the German administration and many military officials also took up the role of provincial administrators (7). The local African chiefs reported to these provincial administrators. They mostly acted according to the whims and wishes of the colonial authority and performed duties such as collecting taxes and representing the Government to the local tribes. Africans were not allowed higher position in the official ranks and thus their progress over the political chain was limited.

The whole colonization of Africa was Bismarck's idea of winning an election mandate rather than any long term strategy. In fact he was quoted saying " this whole business is a swindle, but we need it for election". (8)

Effect on the colonies

Both British rule and German rule had many disagreeable and some advantageous effects on their respective colonies. It is a known fact that, under imperialism the ruling nation gets all the benefits by way of absorbing the resources and the labor of the people of the occupied nation. There are large scale scandals reported in both the above cases where racial atrocities and power misuse resulted in millions of deaths of the native people. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre (9) which happened in India under the British rule and the Herero and Namaqua Genocide(10) which took place in German South-West Africa were well publicized and criticized. But even apart from such events which received a lot of attention there were racial discrimination and social atrocities committed by ruling European powers all throughout the imperial regime.

In Africa for example Africans were forced to adapt German language, culture and in fact this region which belonged to native Africans were called " New Germany". The Germans forced the native culture into irrelevance and did not provide any opportunity for the people to move up the social or economic ladder.

Under the rule of British there were many incidents which resulted in religious unrest in India (given that the country had many religions it was a huge social problem) and this was the main cause behind the 1857 uprising. Also, there was the existing class system in India, whereby the forward class consisted of Elite Indian nationals and the backward class consisted of people with lesser educational credentials. The British Government recruited mostly the educated forward class Indians for Government jobs and this left

the vast majority of the backward class economically struggling with only agriculture as a profession that too was heavily taxed. British also almost killed the local Indian industry by forcing the Indians to buy British made clothes and prevented them from making salt by the imposition of salt tax which led to the famous Salt Satyagraha led my Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1930(11). It was one of the milestones in the Indian fight for independence. But there were some positive effects too. Like the British brought in many social changes in India like the abolition of infanticide and suttee. They also enacted laws to encourage widow remarriage which was considered a crime in the then Indian society and took huge steps in improving education particularly among the backward community of India. The Germans on the other hand brought immense improvement in the area of sanitation and hygiene in Africa. They also introduced the natives to many life saving medicines and to new technologies of farming. The missionaries from Germany were a great influence in the West African society and had a huge role to play in civilization of certain backward native communities.

Thus we see from this discussion that the imperialism practiced by the British vastly differs from their German counterpart. The primary aim of Britain colonizing India is for economic reasons and their reign over the land was methodical and organized and lasted for more than two decades. German on the other hand was late entrant in the imperial race and was rather trying to gain political mileage than anything else, as reflected by their early eviction from their colonies.

Notes

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