

# Condition of india before arrival of british history essay



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British controlled India for a period of over one hundred years. British Acquired Empire gradually piece by piece because of the conditions that were present in India before the arrival of British, weak central political power, competitions with European rivals, Military forces, and Mughal negligence were the major reasons that led to the colonization.

### Condition Of India Before Arrival Of British

The British had no political power in India before entering in India but it was a gradual process that took more than two hundred years to produce British political power in India. The colonization of India was caused due to the conditions existed before arrival of British. British just took advantage of these conditions. As British started to enter India, Mughal empire started to decline. This decline, due to the internal problems, led to increase regional powers. There was lack of centralized power that led British face less resistance and They quickly managed to gain power in subcontinent.

### How And Why Mughal Empire decline

The Mughals came to India from central Asia and they are related to Mongols. Mongols in thirteen century conquered major part of Asia. Mughal established their empire in subcontinent under Timurid Prince Babar in 1526. The Mughal empire was one of the greatest Muslim empire of that period. Until the end of seventeenth century Mughal empire was considered as one of the most powerful one. In the year 1707, when the empire Aurangzeb died, the empire was at its largest size. In this year the empire began to decline.

Aurangzeb fought many battles against the last remaining independent kingdoms to put down resisting provinces, but in these series of battles the empire went out of finances. And the empire was also facing the number of tensions from the nobles over the appointment of jagirs. But the primary cause of the empire decline was the shift of power from a centralized imperial authority to a decentralized local rule of various principalities. This decentralization began due to the clashes between old military elite rank-holders also called as "Mansabadars" and local "Zamindars". To keep check on the power of mansabadar, Mughal Empire provided more opportunities for tax collection and to participate in government bureaucracy to the local Zamindars. This led to the rise of number of conflicts between the two groups which played part in decentralization of power. These conflicts rise to great extend so that the central government was not able to react effectively so, the empire gave regional Governors more power and control in order to maintain the situation. Because the Imperial government was unable to respond to the problems of the regional territories, elites or former regional bureaucrats were forced to establish independent rule and thus broke away from the empire.

One example of destabilizing revolt is the revolt of Shivaji. Shivaji was a warlord which led his armies to grab the major part of Surat. Shivaji revolt shattered the empire's authority which result in more troubles for empire.

The East India Company began to push political power to the subcontinent and they came to know that the central control is missing which can resist the British advances. The also encountered several independent states the

could be played against each other to prevent a large part of India working together in order to retaliate effectively.

### India And The Foreign Powers

British faced tough competition with other European nations that wanted to benefit themselves from trade with India. Also the East India Company not entered to exert any political control in the subcontinent, but The Company was more concerned with turning a profit and thus pursued policies that maximized these earnings. Facing a tough competition with European countries British realized that by establishing political control in India they can have full benefit of trade with India and also they can keep other countries from trade.

In sixteenth century Portuguese managed to dominate trade in Indian Ocean and after their decline in trade in late seventeenth century British still faced competition from Dutch and French.

In reaction the East India Company tried to obtain a political control so that the Indian merchants could have power to decide to whom they will sell their goods. In 1765, The East India Company received the right of " Diwani" in Bengal, they were able to control the trade, and they prevent textile owner to sell their goods to Dutch and French. Dutch never tried to establish these controls but French did.

### Mughals And Merchants

The another precondition in India was the way power was organized, Mughal empire was more concentrated on interior of subcontinent and was not  
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actively participating in making decisions that affected coastal regions because most of the empire didn't care about merchants as well as the ocean. The thing on which Mughal concentrated was to gain revenue from taxes collected by the jagir, who were held by the empire himself. Thus the empire concentrated to obtain vast land to get more revenue.

The fact that the Mughal government could have had little involvement with the merchants had important repercussions when European powers began to trade in India. The Europeans were able to aggressively insert themselves into the Indian Ocean trade; it was often more advantageous for the Indian merchants to work within the trade structure established by the British rather than the lack of support they received under the Mughal empire which was kept busy putting down revolts from groups like the Marathas. Because trade was a relatively low priority for the Mughal rulers, they did not act assertively to stop the British from gaining a foothold and alliances with Indian merchants in port cities such as Surat.

### Structure Of City

The urban areas and new groups of native Indians began to grow as the traditional Mughal began to decline. With decentralized system of government the movements was greatly liked and a new rule arises that bureaucracy will no more decide that which resources would be allocated where. This means that new groups emerged to facilitate trade and merchants, gentry and warriors were given more power on later stage in eighteenth century. The establishment of trade links was favorable for British

to obtain control and they realized that it was easier to operate within those trade links and to use merchants and gentry to facilitate trade.

### The Economy

Because India brought great wealth to Britain, it was called “ The Jewel Of The British Crown”. The British altered the economy of India in the way it suits British so, India become dependent on British for shipping and markets for export. As a result British drained money from India making it more dependent on British. They also control the flow of hard currency into India.

### The Drain Effect

The British Employed a method of control on India and that was “ The Drain Effect”. British Knew that the prosperity of a nation depends on the amount of capital and they started draining this amount by maintaining a firm position in trade and to have more exports than imports. British gained as much favor as they could from trade with India. According to an estimate 400 rupees went in favor of British while in another estimate 1, 335, 000, 000 rupees in favor of British. Many members of British parliament was also merchants they were also linked with trade and they knew how to engage merchants in trade. To the end the adapted policies that favor trade and this might be one of the reason of British’s economic success.

The Mughals on the other hand did not encourage trade nearly as effectively as the British. India was not by any means a poor country but the Mughals tended to spend money on frivolous projects, a prime example being the TajMahal. Also, merchants did not have the same kind of political support in

India. They tended to be exploited and taxed heavily under the Mughals instead of supported, as in Britain.

### Advantages Of Trade

The East India company always tried to get low prices. For example in Tellicheery East India Company representations will trade pepper. They relied on a single Indian merchant because they knew that if they deal with many merchants the price would have gone very high. And the greater economic purpose helped British make more money without causing any trouble to Indian merchants.

In nineteenth century, due to the changes in Indian exports, the shipping drastically decreased. Before the Napoleonic wars, India exported finished clothes in huge number. But after the Napoleonic wars, the Indian merchants were unable to export their goods continental Europe due to blockade of Royal Navy. And then the industrialization of England pushed all the trade favor on British side, after the blockade, the Europe started importing from British instead of India. Then in order to maintain their economic condition India started exporting the raw material which was highly used to produce luxurious items in Europe. This raw material includes, cotton, jute, tea etc.

India started import of yarn and cloth, when the Charter act 1813 ended the East India Company's monopoly of trade with India. This led to the de-industrialization of India. Indian weavers were facing a tough competition in markets due to import of yarn and cloth from England, and England also dominated the European markets where once the Indian clothes were

imported. Then in same period started the British industrialization, and their <https://assignbuster.com/condition-of-india-before-arrival-of-british-history-essay/>

huge production advantage out edged the remaining cloth producers with in the subcontinents. The decline of Indian weaver industry led to the dependence on manufactured European cloth goods.

### Surplus And Scarcity Of Silver

British also controlled the hard currency of India. England, Portugal, France and Netherlands used silver to pay for the goods they imported from India. European were interested in buying the opium, silk and spices from India but India was not interested in importing any of the goods they were offering. In between 1756-1760, due to the military and political advances of East India Company, they controlled Plassey, Bengal, Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong, So the company was able to collect huge territorial revenues and used these revenues to pay for goods the import and stopping the export of silver into India. The constant flow of currency led to inflation and sudden cease of currency created huge shortage of cash in Mughal Empire. This caused a very prominent impact on Mughals because their lifestyle was disturbed. The Mughals were used to but precious thing and waste their money on lavish projects like Tajmahal and they were also used to enforce their command through warfare. And shortage of currency led to the decline of territory.

### British Military Power In India

The use of force began early in East India Company's interaction with Indians and the armed conflicts were common until the second half of nineteenth century. The first conflict arose after few years when the British started trade negotiations in subcontinent. British first gained the right to trade in India in <https://assignbuster.com/condition-of-india-before-arrival-of-british-history-essay/>



treaty negotiated by Sir Thomas Roe and Prince Khurram in port of Surat in 1624. As soon as the treaty was signed and British had right to bring their ships to the port, the merchants realized that they would had to compete with British in trade in Red sea and their trade through Red sea will be affected. Then in reaction the merchants boycott to sell their goods to English and submitted a petition to prince Khurram to revoke the treaty signed earlier with British. In response to this boycott British employed " Gun Boat Diplomacy", which consisted of well-armed soldiers with British ships that stops the Indian ships to pass Red sea. Indian also started to arm their ships but the British ships were well-armed than Indian ships so now the Indians only had two choices either to stop their ships at port or survive the danger of open sea.

In response to this act of British, Mughals arrested Englishmen in Surat, this led to the more difficulties and troubles, but British continued to threaten the Indian vessels. Now at this point Mughals were regretting this dealing with British. Mughals could remain Englishmen imprisoned and continue removing them from India but they didn't do so because they knew that in response they would have to face British piracy. The Mughals opted to appease the British and allow them the concessions they desired. These concessions gave the English permission to trade in Surat, freedom from English judicial retaliation, and the ability to acquire property. These concessions opened the door for the British and the accumulation of these sorts of rights in ports across the subcontinent to establish such an enormous shipping advantage as to completely eliminate trade competition from Indian merchants.

In the seventeenth century the English trade expanded and this period was known as the period of relative peace between East India Company and the Mughals, but this peace was not maintained. In this period tensions arose between British and Aurangzeb over the issue of custom duties in Bengal. The British refused to refund money paid by the emperor for ammunition and they also annoyed the Aurangzeb because they attempt to fortify Bombay and to attract settlers to the island. The final revolt between the British and Aurangzeb was on the incident of piracy in 1688 when they attacked on a ship named " Gunj-I-Suwae", which was carrying aristocratic pilgrims. The pirate stolid almost £180, 000 and raped some women on the board. Emperor was furious and launched full-scale war against British in which he was blessed with victory. Despite this advantage, Emperor was more interested in war against Marathas in Deccan, in fact emperor reinstated all the trade privileges English had before the war began.

This was not the end of British military actions in India but this is an example of use of force in early period of colonization. British fought many battles to dominate areas in subcontinent. British always become victorious, an alliances of prince could have beat British despite of their superior weapon because British were small in number, but British somehow managed not to defeat. For example, in battle of Plassey, British offer Mir Jafar the throne of Bengal if his forces didn't fight in the battle, and for British this was a huge victory. These types of agreement prevented British from facing united Indian nation.

Naval Superiority

Another important aspect of British use of military force in India was navy. Aurangzeb commended a large army and was able to defeat British on land, but was unable to respond to British piracy. While on the other hand the East India Company was able to retreat British navy. Without navy, Aurangzeb was unable to respond piracy. Eventually, British agreed to provide security to Indian vessels for yearly fee. The British navy was always dominant and when it comes to sea, Indians always had to rely on British.

As the Mughal Empire decayed, the power was distributed from centralized authority to decentralized authority. The newly independent regions, in particular in rural northern India, lacked the same political stability that they had enjoyed while under direct control of the Mughal Empire. The East India Company and its military forces was seen as the only force for stabilization in these regions. Then East India Company recruited from these regions. Those Indians who didn't joined the Company learned about and participated the western culture and helped British to establish a foothold before gaining the control of entire population of the region.

#### The Role Of Invalid Thanahs

Another thing that British did was the creation of invalid Thanahs. Invalids were the old Indian soldiers that had served army for more than ten years and was discharged due to old ages or some other disability. When these soldier were retired they were given plot of lands. And these communities were known as Thanahs. The Thanahs served several important functions. The invalids were often influential for recruiting purposes-young men heard about and saw the success enjoyed by the invalids because of military

service under the company and were thus encouraged to enlist. The military laws as well as the political and judicial laws were not applicable on the invalids, and they were given indecency from many other laws that govern civilians, therefore social desire of participating in army increased.

The Thanahs were located in the more remote areas and were controlling these area with ease- by putting spoyes(native soldiers that were given European style military training) on these area and these spoyes controlled these areas very well that even Mughals were not able to control these areas. The Thanas were also an important method for undermining the power of different principalities not controlled by East India Company. By inserting some loyal native Indians British were able to disturb some of the political control that local principalities has built.

#### The European army In India

East India Company needed a large army to maintain civil order in subcontinent but it knows that it was very expensive to maintain army of native Britons. Another problem that British faced in India was the presence of two British armies, the regular army run by British government and the army run by the East India Company. The East India Company encountered many difficulties in recruiting because they lacked the ability to officially punish their soldiers under a court-martial system, the ability to provide the same sorts of material compensation, an inability to recruit as widely as the regular army. The government also restricted the size of the company army because no government would be comfortable with a corporation that possessed a military force that might rival its own.

The East India Company's solution was to recruit native Indians and give them European-style military training. These native soldiers were known as sepoyes and were crucial factor in British control over the subcontinent. They allowed the British to protect the borders of the subcontinent from possible invasions as well as maintain civil disorder. The Sepoys system was so effective because it also benefited the Indians that served as sepoyes, in fact, service in the British army was a highly sought after position in particular among some of the higher castes.

Service in the British military by native Indians was entirely voluntarily. This was an important source for its success-conscripted soldiers are less effective than soldiers who serve out of their own will. Indians often enlisted in the army for economic reasons. A typical enlistee came from an agrarian background and joined the army because of crop failure or other inabilities to make a sufficient living through agriculture. The army guaranteed its soldiers good clothing, food, and shelter, which is often more than they had in their civilian lives. Career soldiers also had the opportunity for advancement in rank and pay and to earn themselves a fairly decent living, the older career soldiers were even granted good pieces of land, which was an extremely proposition for many young, poor men.

The British army was also sensitive to the culture of the Seopys. In peacetime, soldiers were given the opportunity to go on leave to participate in religious ceremonies. The army also was always particularly careful when it came to religion and gave the sepoyes adequate freedom and leave to practice their religion. One of the most important qualifications for any

British officer in charge of a sepoy unit was a firm understanding of the <https://assignbuster.com/condition-of-india-before-arrival-of-british-history-essay/>

cultural background of his soldiers. All officers were expected to tour the region from which they recruited to learn about the religion and culture of the men that would serve in his unit. British officers might also participate in religious ceremonies to develop an understanding of his soldiers' beliefs.

Indians were also encouraged to foster an "esprit-de-corps," a sense of identity and pride that each soldier felt for his individual unit. Developing this spirit made the Indians more loyal, if not directly towards the British colonial government, than towards their own particular units. The British actively fostered this sense of pride through competitive games and sports or a drill competition between the different sepoy regiments. The different divisions of the sepoys were purposefully organized so that soldiers from the same region, religion, and caste served together in the same unit. This also helped the various companies form a sense of identity and sense of pride. The soldiers tended to unite because of their common backgrounds and worked and fought harder because they thought of themselves as representatives of their given community.

Rebellion of 1857 served as a stark reminder of the fact that the native soldiers were by no means docile subjects. The Sepoy Rebellion also illustrates how critical it was that the British understood the culture and societal divisions of the soldiers. The sepoys in the Bengal army had been made up of primarily high caste Indians until the Punjab was conquered in 1849. After the region was conquered, many of its former soldiers were absorbed into the Bengal army partly because the British had been impressed with the way they fought and partly to avoid the potential dangers of allowing nearly a hundred thousand unemployed former soldiers

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roam across the countryside. The new additions were over half Sikh and were highly resented by the high caste members of the army. Thus tension over the mixing of the two religious groups was an important underlying tension that contributed to the revolt.

A more immediate cause was a new shipment of guns. The East India Co. had just issued new Enfield rifles to the sepoys in Bengal. In order to load the new rifles, the cartridges had to be greased so that each bullet could be pushed all the way inside of the cartridge. Rumors (which very well may have been true) began to circulate that the cartridges were being greased with cow and pig fat. Cows were considered sacred to Hindus while Muslims believed that because pigs were unclean and could defile anyone that came into close contact with them. All things considered, the resulting revolt could have been worse for the British. It was localized almost entirely within the army and did not spread to the surrounding countryside. It was put down quickly and stability returned relatively easily.

The revolt had few serious consequences but it made a permanent mark on the minds of British authorities. The fact that the forces the British relied on to create stability in India had the potential to rise up and threaten to overturn that stability was absolutely terrifying. It also changed the British mindset towards the Indians—they no longer believed the Indians were content or at least passive citizens—post-revolt, the many British believed the Indians were constantly scheming and planning further civil discord. The British thus resolved to reform the sepoy ranks to minimize the possibility of revolt.

The British knew that they were providing the native people with the knowledge and technology that could be used to potentially overthrow their own rule. The constant fear of revolt in the sepoy ranks was foremost on the minds of British authorities when making any decision in regards. After 1857, British military authorities acted with the lessons of the Sepoy Rebellion in mind to reform the army in order to minimize the possibility of a future mutiny.

The first step enacted by the British was to remove the East India Company from power over military forces in India and to put control of the armies directly under the British government. This step was enacted so that the government would be able to establish direct oversight over the military operations in India and to avoid blunders such as the rifle incident. The British also moved to rearrange the proportions of native to European soldiers present in India. In 1857, sepoy ranks had numbered 226, 000; the Peel Commission, a body created to recommend changes to prevent a repeat of The Sepoy Rebellion, recommended a reduction to 190, 000 sepoys. From this point on, the British attempted to maintain a 2: 1 sepoy to European soldier ratio. The Peel Commission believed a lower ration of sepoy to British soldiers would give the British more of a guarantee of victory in the event of another revolt.

The British attempted to minimize the possibility for revolt amongst by recruiting soldiers that were both effective but lacked rebellious tendencies. The basic guideline for this recruitment process was the "Martial Race Theory." The theory stated that some ethnic groups were physically better suited for war. The British went about trying to determine which of the many

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different ethnic groups of India would best fulfill these qualifications. The British tried to find ethnic groups with potential soldiers who were manly and would not fail to throw themselves into the thick of a battle, possible recruits that were physically powerful, and that were somewhat less intelligent and thus more likely to unquestioningly follow orders.

While it is unlikely that certain races are imbued with more “ martial” qualities than others, the recruiting strategy worked for the British primarily due to social and cultural factors. For example, the British tended to recruit from the more rural agrarian parts of India, so many of these recruits tended towards illiteracy but were not unintelligent because of some sort of ethnic deficiency. The British also recruited from castes that were traditionally made up of warriors and were thus more likely to act with valor on the battlefield so as not to disgrace their caste.

The British maintained an active army even after they had established firm control of the subcontinent. Its purpose was two-fold: the army was a force used to protect the borders of India from possible attacks from other foreign nations, Russia in particular, was believed to be a dangerous threat. The army’s second purpose was to maintain the civil order and to prevent uprisings such as The Sepoy Rebellion from occurring again.

The British armies had two primary purposes after the mid nineteenth century-to protect the borders and occasionally putting down the occasional riot or minor civil disturbance (after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, there were few instances of civil disorder that required military force). Throughout the history of India, a constant threat to those that held political power was

invasion from the north. The British were not concerned that they would face an invading barbarian horde from Central Asia, instead they believed they would face armies from Afghanistan or Iran that had received European-style military training from the Russians, who were also perceived as a significant threat to the British holdings in India. Thus in 1839, the British army marched from India into Afghanistan and deposed the ruler Amir Dost Muhammad and replaced him with Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk. Despite their initial success, harsh winters and the Afghan peoples' refusal to Shuja-ul-Mulk's rule led the British to abandon the occupation of Afghanistan. This was the most significant military operation involving the British Indian army and a foreign power-generally the army simply patrol led the borders and served as a deterrent to possible foreign incursions from the Russians, French, or other foreign powers.

So, in this way British slowly and steadily colonized India.