

# British Imperialism in India

## MAIN IDEA

**EMPIRE BUILDING** As the Mughal Empire declined, Britain seized Indian territory and soon controlled almost the whole subcontinent.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

India, the second most populated nation in the world, adopted some of its modern political institutions from the British.

## TERMS & NAMES

- sepoy
- “jewel in the crown”
- Sepoy Mutiny
- Raj

**SETTING THE STAGE** British economic interest in India began in the 1600s, when the British East India Company set up trading posts at Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. At first, India’s ruling Mughal Dynasty kept European traders under control. By 1707, however, the Mughal Empire was collapsing. Dozens of small states, each headed by a ruler or maharajah, broke away from Mughal control. In 1757, Robert Clive led East India Company troops in a decisive victory over Indian forces allied with the French at the Battle of Plassey. From that time until 1858, the East India Company was the leading power in India.

## British Expand Control over India

The area controlled by the East India Company grew over time. Eventually, it governed directly or indirectly an area that included modern Bangladesh, most of southern India, and nearly all the territory along the Ganges River in the north.

**East India Company Dominates** Officially, the British government regulated the East India Company’s efforts both in London and in India. Until the beginning of the 19th century, the company ruled India with little interference from the British government. The company even had its own army, led by British officers and staffed by **sepoys**, or Indian soldiers. The governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone, referred to the sepoy army as “a delicate and dangerous machine, which a little mismanagement may easily turn against us.”

**Britain’s “Jewel in the Crown”** At first, the British treasured India more for its potential than its actual profit. The Industrial Revolution had turned Britain into the world’s workshop, and India was a major supplier of raw materials for that workshop. Its 300 million people were also a large potential market for British-made goods. It is not surprising, then, that the British considered India the brightest **“jewel in the crown,”** the most valuable of all of Britain’s colonies.

The British set up restrictions that prevented the Indian economy from operating on its own. British policies called for India to produce raw materials for British manufacturing and to buy British goods. In addition, Indian competition with British goods was prohibited. For example, India’s own handloom textile industry was almost put out of business by imported British textiles. Cheap cloth from England flooded the Indian market and undercut local producers.

## TAKING NOTES

**Recognizing Effects** Use a diagram to identify the effects of the three causes listed.

Cause	Effect
1. Decline of the Mughal Empire	
2. Colonial policies	
3. Sepoy Mutiny	

▼ A sepoy in uniform



**British Transport Trade Goods** India became increasingly valuable to the British after they established a railroad network there. Railroads transported raw products from the interior to the ports and manufactured goods back again. Most of the raw materials were agricultural products produced on plantations. Plantation crops included tea, indigo, coffee, cotton, and jute. Another crop was opium. The British shipped opium to China and exchanged it for tea, which they then sold in England.

Trade in these crops was closely tied to international events. For example, the Crimean War in the 1850s cut off the supply of Russian jute to Scottish jute mills. This boosted the export of raw jute from Bengal, a province in India. Likewise, cotton production in India increased when the Civil War in the United States cut off supplies of cotton for British textile mills. **A**

**Impact of Colonialism** India both benefited from and was harmed by British colonialism. On the negative side, the British held much of the political and economic power. The British restricted Indian-owned industries such as cotton textiles. The emphasis on cash crops resulted in a loss of self-sufficiency for many villagers. The conversion to cash crops reduced food production, causing famines in the late 1800s. The British officially adopted a hands-off policy regarding Indian religious and social customs. Even so, the increased presence of missionaries and the racist attitude of most British officials threatened traditional Indian life.

On the positive side, the laying of the world's third largest railroad network was a major British achievement. When completed, the railroads enabled India to develop a modern economy and brought unity to the connected regions. Along with the railroads, a modern road network, telephone and telegraph lines, dams, bridges, and irrigation canals enabled India to modernize. Sanitation and public health improved. Schools and colleges were founded, and literacy increased. Also, British troops cleared central India of bandits and put an end to local warfare among competing local rulers.

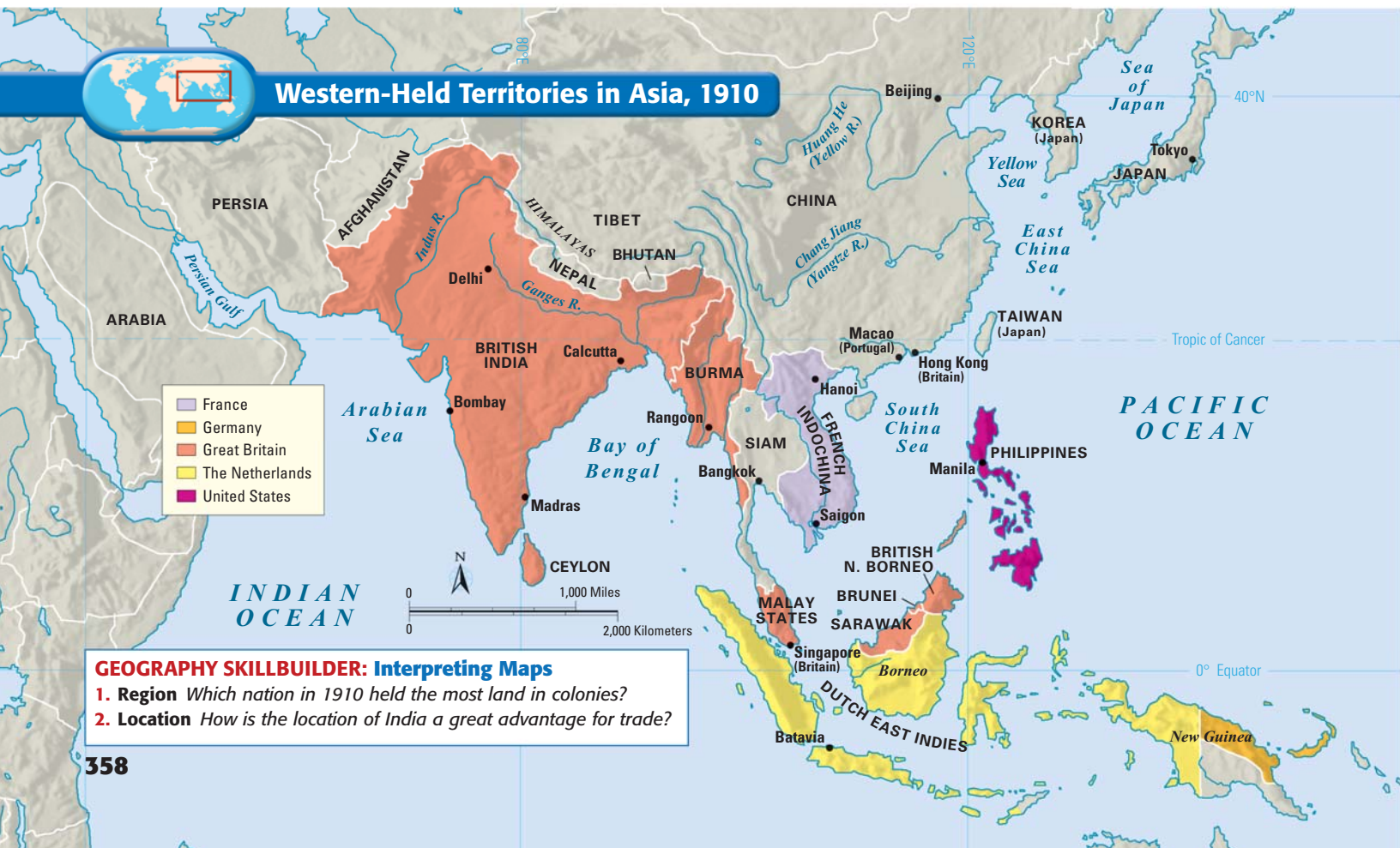
**Vocabulary**

*jute*: a fiber used for sacks and cord

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**

**A** On which continents were Indian goods being traded?



## Social History

### Social Class in India

In the photograph at right, a British officer is waited on by Indian servants. This reflects the class system in India.

### British Army

Social class determined the way of life for the British Army in India. Upper-class men served as officers. Lower-class British served at lesser rank and did not advance past the rank of sergeant. Only men with the rank of sergeant and above were allowed to bring their wives to India.

Each English officer's wife attempted to re-create England in the home setting. Like a general, she directed an army of 20 to 30 servants.

### Indian Servants

Caste determined Indian occupations. Castes were divided into four broad categories called varna. Indian civil servants were of the third varna. House and personal servants were of the fourth varna.

Even within the varna, jobs were strictly regulated, which is why such large servant staffs were required. For example, in the picture here, both servants were of the same varna. Although the two servants were from the same varna, they had different jobs..



## The Sepoy Mutiny

By 1850, the British controlled most of the Indian subcontinent. However, there were many pockets of discontent. Many Indians believed that in addition to controlling their land, the British were trying to convert them to Christianity. The Indian people also resented the constant racism that the British expressed toward them.

**Indians Rebel** As economic problems increased for Indians, so did their feelings of resentment and nationalism. In 1857, gossip spread among the sepoys, the Indian soldiers, that the cartridges of their new Enfield rifles were greased with beef and pork fat. To use the cartridges, soldiers had to bite off the ends. Both Hindus, who consider the cow sacred, and Muslims, who do not eat pork, were outraged by the news.

A garrison commander was shocked when 85 of the 90 sepoys refused to accept the cartridges. The British handled the crisis badly. The soldiers who had disobeyed were jailed. The next day, on May 10, 1857, the sepoys rebelled. They marched to Delhi, where they were joined by Indian soldiers stationed there. They captured the city of Delhi. From Delhi, the rebellion spread to northern and central India.

Some historians have called this outbreak the **Sepoy Mutiny**. The uprising spread over much of northern India. Fierce fighting took place. Both British and sepoys tried to slaughter each other's armies. The East India Company took more than a year to regain control of the country. The British government sent troops to help them. **B**

The Indians could not unite against the British due to weak leadership and serious splits between Hindus and Muslims. Hindus did not want the Muslim Mughal Empire restored. Indeed, many Hindus preferred British rule to Muslim rule. Most of the princes and maharajahs who had made alliances with the East India

### MAIN IDEA

#### Recognizing Effects

**B** Look back at Elphinstone's comment on page 357. Did the Sepoy Mutiny prove him correct?

Company did not take part in the rebellion. The Sikhs, a religious group that had been hostile to the Mughals, also remained loyal to the British. Indeed, from then on, the bearded and turbaned Sikhs became the mainstay of Britain's army in India.

**Turning Point** The mutiny marked a turning point in Indian history. As a result of the mutiny, in 1858 the British government took direct command of India. The term **Raj** referred to British rule after India came under the British crown during the reign of Queen Victoria. A cabinet minister in London directed policy, and a British governor-general in India carried out the government's orders. After 1877, this official held the title of viceroy.

To reward the many princes who had remained loyal to Britain, the British promised to respect all treaties the East India Company had made with them. They also promised that the Indian states that were still free would remain independent. Unofficially, however, Britain won greater and greater control of those states.

The Sepoy Mutiny fueled the racist attitudes of the British. The British attitude is illustrated in the following quote by Lord Kitchener, British commander in chief of the army in India:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

It is this consciousness of the inherent superiority of the European which has won for us India. However well educated and clever a native may be, and however brave he may prove himself, I believe that no rank we can bestow on him would cause him to be considered an equal of the British officer.

LORD KITCHENER, quoted in K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*

The mutiny increased distrust between the British and the Indians. A political pamphlet suggested that both Hindus and Muslims "are being ruined under the tyranny and oppression of the . . . treacherous English." 🗣️

#### MAIN IDEA

##### Recognizing Effects

🗣️ In what ways did the Sepoy Mutiny change the political climate of India?

▼ This engraving shows sepoy attacks the British infantry at the Battle of Cawnpore in 1857.



## Nationalism Surfaces in India

In the early 1800s, some Indians began demanding more modernization and a greater role in governing themselves. Ram Mohun Roy, a modern-thinking, well-educated Indian, began a campaign to move India away from traditional practices and ideas. Ram Mohun Roy saw arranged child marriages and the rigid caste separation as parts of Indian life that needed to be changed. He believed that if the practices were not changed, India would continue to be controlled by outsiders. Roy's writings inspired other Indian reformers to call for adoption of Western ways. Roy also founded a social reform movement that worked for change in India.

Besides modernization and Westernization, nationalist feelings started to surface in India. Indians hated a system that made them second-class citizens in their own country. They were barred from top posts in the Indian Civil Service. Those who managed to get middle-level jobs were paid less than Europeans. A British engineer on the East India Railway, for example, made nearly 20 times as much money as an Indian engineer.

**Nationalist Groups Form** This growing nationalism led to the founding of two nationalist groups, the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the Muslim League in 1906. At first, such groups concentrated on specific concerns for Indians. By the early 1900s, however, they were calling for self-government.

The nationalists were further inflamed in 1905 by the partition of Bengal. The province was too large for administrative purposes, so the British divided it into a Hindu section and a Muslim section. Keeping the two religious groups apart made it difficult for them to unite in calling for independence. In 1911, yielding to pressure, the British took back the order and divided the province in a different way. **D**

Conflict over the control of India continued to develop between the Indians and the British in the following years. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the same struggles for control of land took place between local groups and the major European powers that dominated them. You will learn about them in Section 5.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**D** Why would the British think that dividing the Hindus and Muslims into separate sections would be good?

### SECTION

## 4

### ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- sepoy
- "jewel in the crown"
- Sepoy Mutiny
- Raj

#### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which of the effects you listed later became causes?

Cause	Effect
1. Decline of the Mughal Empire	
2. Colonial policies	
3. Sepoy Mutiny	

#### MAIN IDEAS

3. Why did Britain consider India its "jewel in the crown"?
4. Why didn't Indians unite against the British in the Sepoy Mutiny?
5. What form did British rule take under the Raj?

#### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **MAKING INFERENCES** How did economic imperialism lead to India's becoming a British colony?
7. **EVALUATING DECISIONS** What might the decision to grease the sepoys' cartridges with beef and pork fat reveal about the British attitude toward Indians?
8. **SYNTHESIZING** How did imperialism contribute to unity and to the growth of nationalism in India?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **EMPIRE BUILDING** Write an **editorial** to an underground Indian newspaper, detailing grievances against the British and calling for self-government.

#### CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A POLITICAL CARTOON

In 1947, India was divided into two countries: mostly Hindu India and mostly Muslim Pakistan. However, the two countries maintain a tense relationship today. Research to learn about the cause of this tension and illustrate it in a **political cartoon**.