***The Raj – Colonial India***

In 1858, British Crown rule was established in India, ending a century of control by the East India Company. The life and death struggle that preceded this formalisation of British control lasted nearly two years, cost £36 million, and is variously referred to as the 'Great Rebellion', the 'Indian Mutiny' or the 'First War of Indian Independence'.

The new government of India was called the Raj, a Sanskrit word meaning to reign or rule. Its first steps were to ensure that no future rebellion would take place. The ratio of English soldiers in the army was greatly increased. Sepoys of various castes, religions and regions were assigned to separate units to prevent possible **conspiracy**. The population was disarmed. Ownership of guns was allowed by license only. Generally, Indians had no rights and no voice in their own rule.



The Raj expanded the rail and road system which allowed **duty-free** British products to be sold all over India. This, unfortunately, caused the collapse of major native industries such as cotton textiles.

Tax revenues from agriculture and industry that should have benefitted India instead went to England

. Between 1770 and 1857, mismanagement worsened the effects of twelve major **famines** and many minor ones. According to official figures, 28 million Indians starved to death between 1854 and 1901. India’s share of world income shrank from 22.6% in 1700 to 3.8% in 1952.

As early as the 1820s, many Indians wrote about the need to end British rule in India. The peaceful demand for freedom by nationalist political organizations continued decade after decade, at times turning into violent but unsuccessful uprisings.

It is important to note that the Raj (in Hindi meaning 'to rule' or 'kingdom') never encompassed the entire land mass of the sub-continent. Two-fifths of the sub-continent continued to be independently governed by over 560 large and small principalities, some of whose rulers had fought the British during the 'Great Rebellion', but with whom the Raj now entered into treaties of mutual cooperation. Indeed the conservative elites of princely India and big landholders were to prove increasingly useful allies, who would lend critical monetary and military support during the two World Wars. Hyderabad for example was the size of England and Wales combined, and its ruler, the Nizam, was the richest man in the world.



They would also serve as political bulwarks in the nationalist storms that gathered momentum from the late 19th century and broke with insistent ferocity over the first half of the 20th century. But the 'Great Rebellion' did more to create a racial chasm between ordinary Indians and Britons. This was a social segregation which would endure until the end of the Raj, graphically captured in EM Forster's 'A Passage to India'.

While the British criticised the divisions of the Hindu caste system, they themselves lived a life ruled by precedence and class, deeply divided within itself. Rudyard Kipling reflected this position in his novels. His books also exposed the gulf between the 'white' community and the 'Anglo-Indians', whose mixed race caused them to be considered racially 'impure'.

**Government in India**

While there was a consensus that Indian policy was above party politics, in practice it became embroiled in the vicissitudes of Westminster. Successive viceroys in India and secretaries of state in London were appointed on a party basis, having little or no direct experience of Indian conditions and they strove to serve two masters. Edwin Montagu was the first serving secretary of state to visit India on a fact-finding mission in 1917-1918.

Broadly speaking, the Government of India combined a policy of co-operation and conciliation of different strata of Indian society with a policy of coercion and force. The empire was nothing if not an engine of economic gain. Pragmatism dictated that to govern efficiently and remuneratively, 1,200 Indian civil servants could not rule 300 to 350 million Indians without the assistance of indigenous 'collaborators'.

However, in true British tradition, they also chose to elaborate sophisticated and intellectual arguments to justify and explain their rule. On the one hand, Whigs and Liberals expounded sentiments most iconically expressed by TB Macaulay in 1833: 'that... by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government, that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. ... Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history.'



On the other hand, James Fitzjames Stephen, writing in the 1880s, contended that empire had to be absolute because 'its great and characteristic task is that of imposing on Indian ways of life and modes of thought which the population regards without sympathy, though they are essential to its personal well-being and to the credit of its rulers.'

What was less ambiguous was that it was the economic interests of Britain that were paramount, though as the 20th century progressed, the government in India was successful in imposing safeguards. For instance, tariff walls were raised to protect the Indian cotton industry against cheap British imports.

**Financial gains and losses**

There were two incontrovertible economic benefits provided by India. It was a captive market for British goods and services, and served defence needs by maintaining a large standing army at no cost to the British taxpayer.

However, the economic balance sheet of the empire remains a controversial topic and the debate has revolved around whether the British developed or retarded the Indian economy.

Among the benefits bequeathed by the British connection were the large scale capital investments in infrastructure, in railways, canals and irrigation works, shipping and mining; the commercialisation of agriculture with the development of a cash nexus; the establishment of an education system in English and of law and order creating suitable conditions for the growth of industry and enterprise; and the integration of India into the world economy.

Conversely, the British are criticised for leaving Indians poorer and more prone to devastating famines; exhorting high taxation in cash from an impecunious people; destabilising cropping patterns by forced commercial cropping; draining Indian revenues to pay for an expensive bureaucracy (including in London) and an army beyond India's own defence needs; servicing a huge sterling debt, not ensuring that the returns from capital investment were reinvested to develop the Indian economy rather than reimbursed to London; and retaining the levers of economic power in British hands.