

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



The Reach of Imperialism, 1800–1914

Lesson 3 British Rule in India

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What are the causes and effects of imperialism? How do some groups resist control by others?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

civil involving the general public or civic affairs

estate a landed property with a large house; one of the three classes into which French society was divided before the revolution: the clergy (First Estate), the nobles (Second Estate), and the townspeople (Third Estate)

Content Vocabulary

sepoy an Indian soldier hired by the British East India Company to protect the company’s interests in the region

viceroy a governor who ruled as a representative of a monarch

TAKING NOTES: *Determining Cause and Effect*

ACTIVITY Use a chart like this one to identify some causes and effects of British influence on India.

Causes	Effects
British manufactured goods	
cotton crops	
school system	
railroad, telegraph, telephone services	

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The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network pattern.

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The British brought order and stability to India, but India paid a high price for British rule. There was a lack of trust between the British and Indians. There were also cultural differences. These problems help create an independence movement among the Indians. There was also renewed interest among Indians in their culture and history.

The Great Rebellion

Guiding Question *What was the source of conflict between the British and the Indian people?*

British power in India had increased in the eighteenth century, and the power of the Mogul rulers had declined during that time. The British East India Company was a trading company. The British government gave it power to become involved in India's political and military affairs. For example, the British East India Company had its own soldiers and forts in India. It also hired Indian soldiers known as **sepoys** to protect the company's interests in the region.

Events Leading to Rebellion

In 1857 a growing Indian distrust of the British led to a revolt. The British call the revolt the Sepoy Mutiny. Indians call it the First War of Independence. Neutral observers label it the Great Rebellion.

The immediate cause for the revolt was a rumor about new rifle cartridges. The rumor was that the troops' new cartridges were greased with cow and pig fat. The cow was sacred to Hindus, and the pig was taboo to Muslims. Soldiers had to bite off the end of the cartridge to load a rifle. To the sepoys, touching these greased cartridges to their lips would mean that they were polluted and that they were doing something against their religion.

A group of sepoys at an army post in Meerut, near Delhi, refused to load their rifles with the cartridges. The British charged them with mutiny, publicly humiliated them, and put them in prison. This treatment enraged the sepoy troops in Meerut. They went on a rampage, killing 50 European men, women, and children. Soon other Indians joined the revolt, including princes whose land the British had taken.

Within a year, Indian troops loyal to the British and fresh British troops crushed the rebellion. Indian troops fought bravely. They outnumbered the British by about 230,000 to 45,000, but they were not well organized. Rivalries between Hindus and Muslims kept the Indians from working together.

Violence was terrible on both sides. Indians massacred 200 women and children at Kanpur (Cawnpore), in a building known as the House of the Ladies. The British recaptured Kanpur and killed the Indians in revenge.

Effects of the Rebellion

As a result of the uprising, the British Parliament gave the powers of the East India Company directly to the British government. In 1876 Queen Victoria took the title Empress of India. The people of India were now her colonial subjects, or ruled by her. India became her "Jewel in the Crown."

The Great Rebellion had failed, but it helped fuel Indian nationalism. The rebellion was the first major attempt by the people of South Asia to get rid of British Raj (rule). Later, a new generation of Indian leaders would take up the cause.

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Reading Progress Check

Determining Cause and Effect What were the effects of the Great Rebellion in India?

British Colonial Rule

Guiding Question *What were the consequences of British rule in India?*

The British government ruled India directly after the Great Rebellion. It appointed a British official known as a **viceroy** to rule. A viceroy was a governor who acted as a representative of a monarch. A British **civil** service staff, or group of government officials, helped the viceroy. This staff of about 3,500 officials ruled almost 300 million people, which was the largest colonial population in the world. British rule had both good and bad results for Indians.

British rule in India had several benefits for colonial subjects. It brought order and stability to Indian society, which was badly divided into many states with very different political systems. British rule also led to fairly honest and efficient government.

The British administrator and historian Lord Thomas Macaulay helped established a new school system in India. The new system used the English language. Macaulay explained that the English language was more important to learn than Arabic or Sanskrit.

The goal of the new school system was to train Indian children to work in the government and the army. However, the new system served only elite, upper-class Indians. Ninety percent of the population remained uneducated and illiterate.

The British hired Indians and built roads, canals, universities, and medical centers. The British introduced a postal service only shortly after a postal service started in Great Britain. India's first rail network opened in 1853. It began in Bombay, and by 1900, 25,000 miles (40,225 km) of railroads crisscrossed India. Health and sanitation conditions also improved in the area.

However, the Indian people paid a high price for the peace and stability brought by British rule. Perhaps the greatest cost was economic. British business owners and a small number of Indians gained financial benefits from British rule. However, it brought hardship, or difficulties, to millions of others in the cities and the countryside. British manufactured goods destroyed local industries. For example, British textiles put thousands of women out of work. It also severely damaged the existing Indian textile industry.

In rural areas, the British sent the zamindars (local officials) to collect taxes. The British believed that using these local officials would make it easier to collect taxes from the peasants. However, the zamindars in India took advantage of their new power. They increased taxes and forced the poorer peasants to become tenants or even to lose their land entirely. Peasant unrest grew.

The British also encouraged many farmers to grow cotton instead of food. As a result, food supplies could not meet the needs of the growing population. Between 1800 and 1900, 30 million Indians died of starvation.

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Finally, British rule was degrading for Indians. This was even true for the newly educated upper classes who benefited the most from it. The best jobs and the best housing were reserved, or kept, for the British. Many British colonial officials worked hard to improve the lives of the people in India, but British arrogance and racial attitudes hurt the pride of many Indians. This led to the rise of an Indian nationalist movement.



Reading Progress Check

Analyzing Information What was the price Indians had to pay for the increased stability of British rule?

Indian Nationalists

Guiding Question *What led to an Indian independence movement?*

The first Indian nationalists were upper-class and English-educated. Many of them were from urban areas, such as Bombay (Mumbai), Madras (Chennai), and Calcutta (Kolkata). Some were trained in British law and were members of the civil service.

At first, many Indian nationalists wanted reform instead of revolution. However, the pace of reform was slow. This convinced many Indians that relying on British goodwill for change was useless. In 1885 a small group of Indians met in Bombay to form the Indian National Congress (INC). The INC did not demand immediate independence. Instead, it asked to share in the governing process.

The INC had difficulties because of religious differences. The INC wanted independence for all Indians, regardless of class or religious background. However, many of its leaders were Hindu, and they reflected Hindu concerns. Later, Muslims called for the creation of a separate Muslim League. This league would represent the interests of the millions of Muslims in Indian society.

In 1914 a young Hindu returned from South Africa and brought new life to India's struggle for independence. Mohandas Gandhi was born in 1869 in Gujarat, in western India. He studied in London and became a lawyer. In 1893 he went to South Africa to work in a law firm that served Indian workers there. Gandhi soon learned of the racial mistreatment of Indians living in South Africa.

On his return to India, Gandhi became active in the independence movement in India. He used his experience in South Africa to begin a movement based on nonviolent resistance. Its aim was to force the British to improve the lives of the poor. It also wanted independence for India. Ultimately, Gandhi's movement led to Indian independence.

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Reading Progress Check

Identifying Central Issues What difficulties did the Indian National Congress face?

Colonial Indian Culture

Guiding Question *How did British rule influence Indian culture?*

From the beginning of their rule, the British often showed a lack of respect for India’s culture. The Taj Mahal, for example, was built as a tomb for the beloved wife of an Indian ruler. The British used it as a favorite site for weddings and parties, and many partygoers even brought hammers to chip off pieces of the building as souvenirs.

Tension in India arose from British control. Indians admired some parts of British culture, but they did not like some others. This led to a cultural awakening. The cultural revival began in the early nineteenth century with the creation of a British college in Calcutta. A local publishing house was opened. It published textbooks on a variety of subjects, including the sciences, Sanskrit, and Western literature. The publisher also printed grammars and dictionaries in various Indian languages.

This revival soon spread to other regions of India. It led to a search for a new national identity and a modern literary expression. Indian novelists and poets began writing historical romances and epics. Some wrote in English, but most were uncomfortable with a borrowed colonial language. They preferred to use their own regional languages.

Newspapers were used to get mass support for nationalist causes. The newspapers were printed in the different regional Indian languages, and they reached the lower-middle-class populations. This group of tens of thousands of Indians had never learned English. The journalist Balwantrao Gangadhar Tilak had a newspaper called *Kesari* (“The Lion”). His writings in this newspaper sometimes suggested negative feelings about the British, but he never wrote anything directly disloyal about the British.

The most famous Indian author was Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Tagore was a great writer and poet, but he had many other talents. He was also a social reformer, spiritual leader, educator, philosopher, singer, and painter. He became an international spokesperson for the moral concerns of his age. Tagore liked to invite the great thinkers of the time to his huge country home, or **estate**. There he set up a school that became an international university.

Tagore’s goal was to promote national pride in India in the face of British domination. He wrote a widely read novel. In it he showed the love-hate relationship of India toward the British. The novel reflected Indians who admired and imitated the British, but who were struggling over how to create their own national identity.

Rabindranath Tagore, however, was more than an Indian nationalist. His life’s work was one long prayer for human dignity, world peace, and understanding between East and West. Tagore once said that Indians would gain their India when they fought against the idea that any one country is greater than the ideals of humanity as a whole.

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Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions How did newspapers and literature help shape the nationalist movement?

Connections to Today

Commonwealth Games

One legacy of imperialism is evident in the Commonwealth Games. Participation in the games is limited to amateur athletes who come from one of the countries of the British Commonwealth, the free association of states that includes many former parts of the British Empire. A more recent addition to the games is cricket, which the British brought to their colonies. Cricket is especially popular in India.