

Introduction.

Around the 18th Century a number of significant events took place in the world. One such event was the Industrial Revolution which took place in England. It gradually spread to other countries of Europe also. You must have read about the Industrial Revolution that took place in England, and also read about the discovery of new sea and trade routes. One such sea route to India was discovered by a Portuguese called Vasco da Gama in 1498. As a result, the English, French, Portuguese and the Dutch came to India for trade. They also used it to spread missionary activities in India. Do you know that the beginning of the modern period in the Indian history began with the coming of these European powers to India? In this lesson you will be reading about the coming of the British to India and the impact it had on the economic, social and cultural spheres as well.

I. Reasons for Coming to India.

The European and the British traders initially came to India for trading purposes. The Industrial Revolution in Britain led to the increase in demand for raw materials for the factories there. At the same time, they also required a market to sell their finished goods. India provided such a platform to Britain to fulfill all their needs. The 18th century was a period of internal power struggle in India and with the declining power of the Mughal Empire, the British officials were provided with the perfect opportunity to establish their hold over Indian Territory. They did these through numerous wars, forced treaties, annexations of and alliances with the various regional powers all over the country. Their new administrative and economic policies helped them consolidate their control over the country. Their land revenue policies help them keep the poor farmers in check and get huge sums as revenues in return. They forced the commercialisation of agriculture with the growing of various cash crops and the raw materials for the industries in Britain.

With the strong political control, the British were able to monopolise the trade with India. They defeated their foreign rivals in trade so that there could be no competition. They monopolised the sale of all kinds of raw materials and bought these at low prices whereas the Indian weavers had to buy them at exorbitant prices. Heavy duties were imposed on Indian goods entering Britain so as to protect their own industry. Various investments were made to improve the transport and communication system in the country to facilitate the easy transfer of raw materials from the farms to the port, and of finished goods from the ports to the markets. Also, English education was introduced to create a class of educated Indians who would assist the British in ruling the country and strengthen their political authority. All these measures helped the British to establish, consolidate and continue their rule over India.

II. 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.

III. British Expanding 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.

1. East India Company (EIC) 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."

2. 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 and ready-made clothes from England flooded the Indian market and drove out local producers.

3. British Railroads in India.

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.

IV. Social Classes in India.

British Army.	Indian Servants.
• 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.	• 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.

