

F. The British Conquest of South Asia (c.1756-1858)

1. The destiny of India was permanently changed by the arrival of the British, who engaged in a colonial war with France called the *Seven Years War* from **1756 to 1763**. (Students of American history may recall that this war also determined the fate of North America: Canada became part of the British Empire, and America soon rebelled to become independent when taxes were raised to pay for the war!)
2. At the time, Britain was not interested in conquering India. The mission of expanding trade had been delegated to a company called the *East India Company*, which proceeded to make deals with local princes called “rajās” and create relationships that led to “company rule” over parts of India. Often the deals were struck as a way to get rid of Muslim overlordship. In other cases, bargains were made by power-hungry rajās who wished to take over their neighbors lands. The British were adept at taking advantage of local politics in order to expand their power, until, amazingly and almost accidentally they had become the single dominant force in India.
3. Through a series of wars that ended in 1857, the British either directly took over the rule of various regions, or forged alliances with princes who accepted their overlordship.
4. In 1858, by the **Government of India Act**, Great Britain became the imperial ruler of India. Queen Victoria, the famous English queen, became Empress of India.
5. The number of separate conflicts starting with the *Seven Years War* up until 1858 presents a dizzying spectrum of minutiae in which it is easy to get lost. The key is not the details, but the overall trend, so we will use the *entire period* of the **British Conquest of South Asia (1756-1858)** as our anchor fact.

G. The Tutelary Imperialism of the British “Raj”

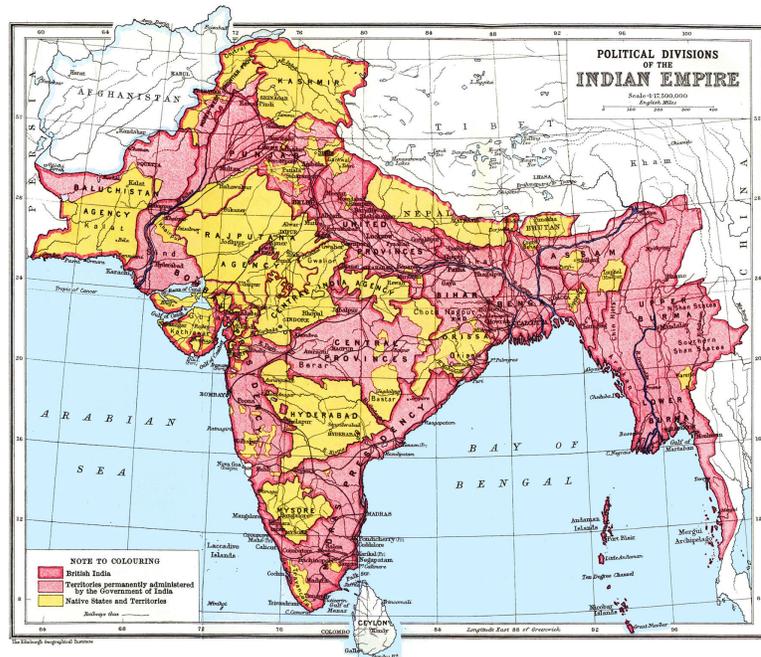
1. Britain took over a politically un-integrated South Asia that was still at a very low level of technological development. Britain itself was a politically integrated country with a successful record of democratic and constitutional government, and it was in the middle stage of the industrial revolution (which had started there).
2. The natural function of empires, as they have been built over human history, is to provide resources of every kind (“natural resources” and human labor, especially). Countries conquer others in order to take advantage of the resources the conquered region has to offer.
3. Although the British certainly wanted to take advantage of South Asia’s resources, they also proposed to do something more. They proposed to help the people they had conquered, to serve their needs, and promote progress in their society.
4. This kind of altruistic imperialism can be called “*tutelary* imperialism.” (The word “tutelary” means “educational.” It shares the same root as the word “tutor” and “tutelage.”)
5. Among the legitimate improvements enacted by the British in India was a vast railway network, and a system of universities (and associated schools). Wealthy Indian families could also send their children to universities in England, to receive professional training.

6. The outcome of Britain's tutelary efforts were that Indian society adapted itself to British rule, and grew into a culture that could manage its own affairs as an integrated unit.



South Asia experienced political integration for the first time under the British Raj, which stretched from Pakistan to Burma (Myanmar today).

(The regions in yellow were princely states that had some autonomy, but were ultimately controlled by Britain).



H. The World Wars and the Push for “Swaraj”

1. When **World War I (1914-19)** arrived in Europe (a war caused mainly by Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, but also involving allies such as France and Britain), India became entangled despite being completely outside Europe.
2. India, like every part of the British Empire, was technically required to participate. India was notified of its required role, and the enlistment of a million soldiers was undertaken.
3. Being forced to participate in the war created a greater desire for “swaraj” (*self rule*) in South Asia.
4. The champion of this movement was Mohandas Gandhi, a lawyer trained in England.
5. As the war came to a close in 1919, a protest in the city of Amritsar resulted in the massacre of protesters by British troops.
6. Gandhi became an advocate of non-violent resistance as a way to avoid bloodshed of this sort. He referred to this type of protest as “satyagraha,” which literally means “truth-force,” but it often figuratively translated as “non-violent resistance.” Gandhi believed that this type of resistance would “force” the oppressors (the British) to see the truth and give up their power.
7. The first satyagraha was a general strike after the Amritsar Massacre. It was at this point that Gandhi began to dress differently, in very humble garb, as a way to symbolize a refusal to participate in the British imperial system of trade.



Mohandas Gandhi, dressed in very simple Indian garb, invented a simple spinning wheel to make thread, which became a symbol of Indian independence.

The point of the humble dress, and the practice of making clothes in a traditional way, was to peacefully resist the British imperial system of trade.

8. Another famous satyagraha was the “Salt March” or “Salt Satyagraha” of 1930. Again the target was the British imperial system, which imposed a monopoly on salt. Indians had to buy authorized salt from stores and pay taxes. Gandhi marched 240 miles to pick up a handful of sea salt, in a symbolic protest.
9. The British had no direct answer to satyagraha, but it also did not produce any quick or decisive outcomes.
10. When **World War II (1939-45)** also required India’s participation, the desire for “swaraj” mounted.
11. Gandhi’s satyagraha against the war was known as the “Quit India” movement. He gave a speech against helping Britain. He hoped to bargain for independence by promising to help *after* being given independence. The British had no tolerance for bargaining. Gandhi and tens of thousands of his supporters were immediately imprisoned. He was kept in prison for two years—and only released to prevent him from becoming a martyr, when he became very ill.
12. The efforts of Gandhi and others at satyagraha did not directly result in independence. The most obvious impact of the wars was on the imperial ruler, Britain, which was exhausted by fighting for its national survival against Germany in the two wars, and ultimately decided that it was not practical or proper to retain control of India.