

HISTORY

The English Rule India



A module from the book
Social Studies

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CHAPTER 1

The English Establish their Rule over India

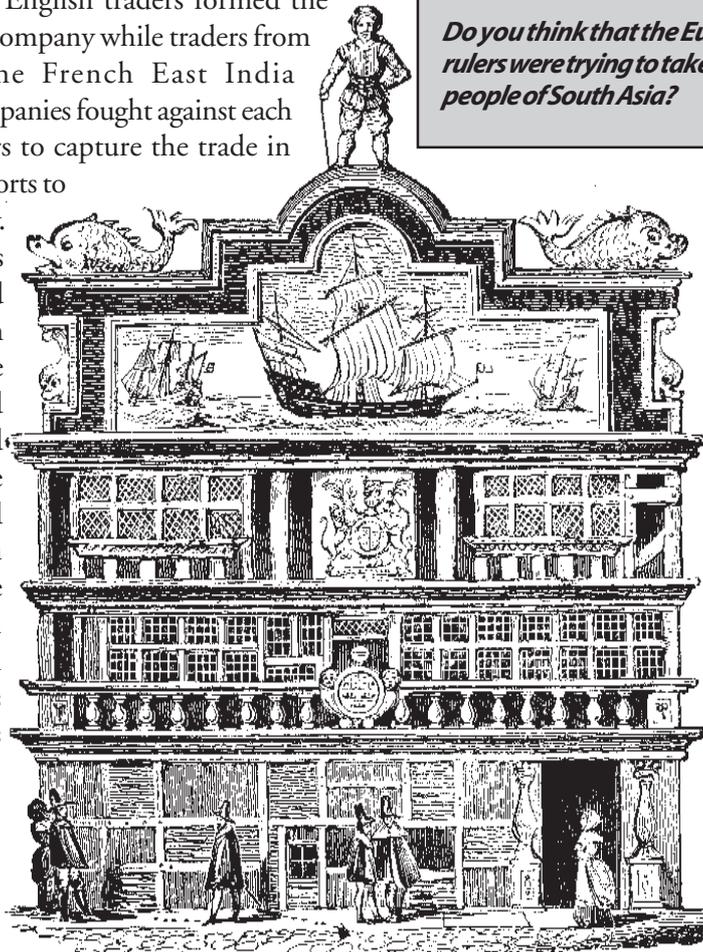


You may have heard people saying that the English came to India to trade, then conquered the country and set up their empire.

Let's understand how this happened.

Armed Traders

European traders formed their own companies to trade in India. The English traders formed the English East India Company while traders from France formed the French East India Company. Both companies fought against each other for many years to capture the trade in India. Each made efforts to drive the other away. They brought armies from England and France to help them in their fight. The kings of England and France also backed their respective companies and helped them in many ways. The companies acquired land in India and built their own forts to wage battles against each other.



Why did the European companies trade in India?

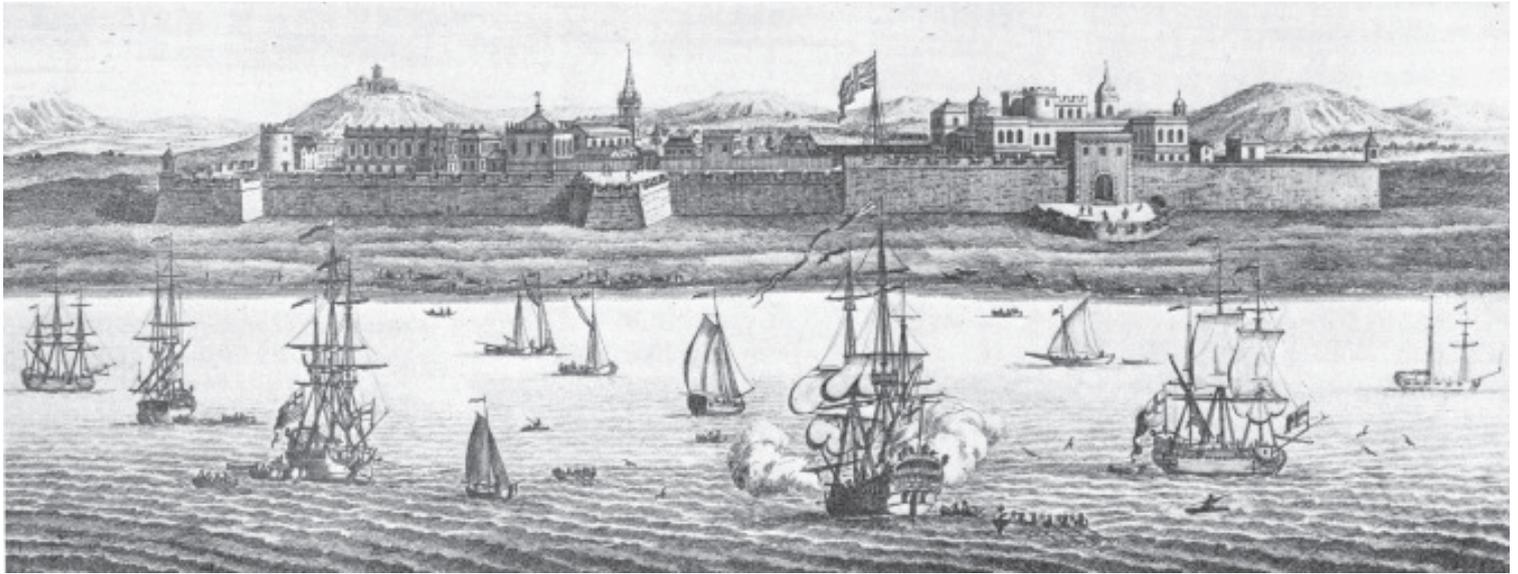
What risks do you think the European traders might have faced in trading with India? What did they do to earn more profit?

Discuss and share your experience of present day traders and how they try to prevent losses and make gains.

Do you think that the European companies and rulers were trying to take unfair advantage of the people of South Asia?

The wealth that was accumulated in this way was one of the most important factors that enabled England to begin developing industries and establishing their dominance in the world.

The headquarters of the East India Company in London.



The harbour at Chennai with a fort built by the English

This was the time when England as well as some other European countries, like Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, and Germany were acquiring colonies in North and South America, Africa, and Asia. The colonies contributed to the power and wealth of these European countries.

The Mughal emperors as well as many rajas and nawabs began to realise how dangerous it was to let such traders maintain armies, build forts, fight battles and use military force to establish their economic power in their kingdoms.

Can you explain what kind of danger these rulers saw in all this?

As long as the Mughal empire was strong, it had not been possible for the European companies to establish their own military power in India. In

fact Emperors Shahjahan and Aurangzeb had fought and defeated the European companies on a number of occasions.

However once the Mughal empire broke up into small kingdoms. such as Avadh, Bengal, and Hyderabad, the companies found their chance to assert their power. Though the rajas and nawabs wanted more trade they tried to check the growing military strength of the companies.

For example, in 1764, Nawab Anwaruddin Khan of Karnataka sent his army to fight against the French company. However, to the astonishment of all, the small French army managed to defeat the large army of the nawab. Now a small European army had gotten the better of a large Indian army. The European traders became bolder after this victory and felt they could do whatever

they wanted in India because of the strength of their armies.



An English officer arrives in India around 1820

How were the European armies different from the armies of Indian rulers in the 1700's? The soldiers of European armies were better trained and received higher and more regular salaries. They

also had better cannons and guns. The European armies held parades and drills every day. With such regular exercise, Indian soldiers enrolled in these armies also became quite skilled in battle.

The English training Indian soldiers



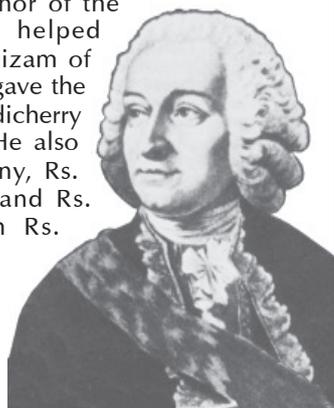
Growing European Interference in the Kingdoms of India

The companies used their military advantage to increase their profits from trade. On many occasions when they saw two Indian rulers fighting among themselves, they would take sides and get involved in the fight. They would lend their army to one side to help them defeat their rivals. But, in return, the companies would demand and extract many trade concessions from the rulers. The rulers also 'gifted' the companies large amounts of money in return for their military help. This money helped the companies increase their trade even more.

The companies also began to acquire small parts of kingdoms as 'gifts' from the local rulers. They would collect land tax from the villages and towns in these areas and use the money for their trading activities. They also used this money for maintaining and improving their army.

Slowly, the English company began emerging victorious over the French company in the struggle for dominance in India.

For example, Dupleix, a governor of the French East India Company, helped Muzaffar Jang to become the Nizam of Deccan. In return Muzaffar Jang gave the French some territories near Pondicherry and the town of Maslipatnam. He also gave Rs. 50,000 to the Company, Rs. 50,000 to the French troops, and Rs. 20,00,000 and a Jagir worth Rs. 1,00,000 per year to Dupleix.



Misuse of the Company's Power

The Indian rulers soon found that the burden of giving 'gifts' to the English East India Company and bearing the expenses of its army was becoming very heavy. They were also troubled by many other things the company was doing.

Some Indian rulers exempted the company from paying taxes on many of the goods it purchased from their kingdoms. However, people began taking advantage of these concessions. For example, employees of the company would do their own private trading. But they would show their own goods as belonging to the company to escape paying taxes. In this way, while the company got richer, its employees and officers also made a lot of money in India and returned home wealthy men. Many Indian traders and *seths* helped the company in its trade. They, too, showed their goods as belonging to the company to escape paying taxes.

Thus, there was much looting and swindling taking place in the kingdoms under the company. So proud was the company of its military strength

that it began working with great impudence. It forced craftsmen to sell their goods at low prices. In the areas it had acquired, the company tried to squeeze revenue from the peasants beyond reasonable limits. When the rulers protested against such practices, the English fought against them. They even went to the extent of dethroning kings and anointing successors who would be only too willing to remove any obstacles in the way of their trade.

Traders need money to buy the goods they sell to others. List three sources of money that helped the English to buy goods in India.

What advantages did the Indian rulers get from the English?

The English Impose their Rule

The English gradually began to feel that they could make fuller and freer use of India for trade if they themselves ruled the country. So they began removing the nawabs and rajas and ruling themselves.

In 1757, the English defeated Sirajuddaula, the Nawab of Bengal, at a place called Plassey and established their rule over Bengal. The Battle of Plassey is an important event in Indian history. After that, the English started conquering many of the kingdoms of India, big and small.

Many rajas and nawabs saw through the British plot and fought hard against them. They included Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, the Maratha sardar Mahadji Scindia, Nana Phadnavis and others. But their kingdoms were small and, one by one, they lost to the English.



Tipu Sultan



In 1765 the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam granted Robert Clive the right to rule Bengal.

Among those who played an important role in the British success on the battlefield were generals Robert Clive, Warren Hastings and Lord Wellesley.

Slowly, large areas of India came under the direct rule of the English. In many places, the rajas and nawabs continued to rule, but they were under the sovereignty of the English. An English official (known as the 'resident') would be assigned to stay in the court of these kings or nawabs so that the British government could keep an eye on how they ran their kingdoms.

While carrying on trade with India, why did the English East India Company start thinking of establishing its rule over the country?

Look at the map. How far did English rule spread by 1857?

Make a list of those kingdoms where Indian kings still ruled in 1857.

South Asia in 1857



KEY

-  Indian Kingdoms
-  English Empire

Discontent with English Rule

The English had to fight with many kings and nawabs to establish their rule. You will learn more about their policies and administration in later chapters. They constantly faced resistance from the people of India.

The royal families resisted them because the English would anoint or remove rulers as and when it suited their purposes.

Farmers and landowners resisted them because the English imposed very high taxes on them and collected the taxes very strictly. So they lived in constant fear of failing to pay the taxes and losing their lands as a result.

Tribal people also offered resistance, because of the new rules and laws the English began implementing. As a result, many tribal people lost their rights over jungles and land. You will read more about this in the later chapters.

Many Hindus and Muslims feared that the English would destroy their religions and convert them to Christianity.

The English faced their toughest battle in 1857 when, for a period of a few months, their rule was uprooted over almost the entire northern Indian region. This revolt was started by Indian *sipahis* or soldiers, who were soon joined by royal families, landowners, farmers, tribal people and craftsmen.

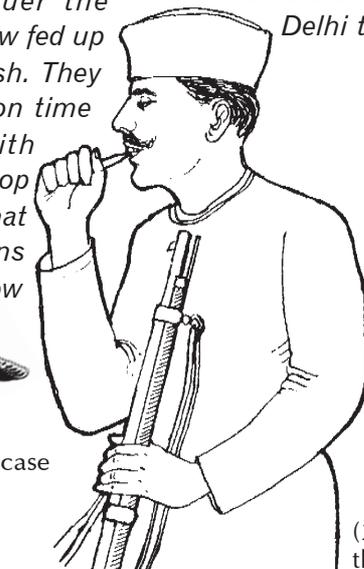
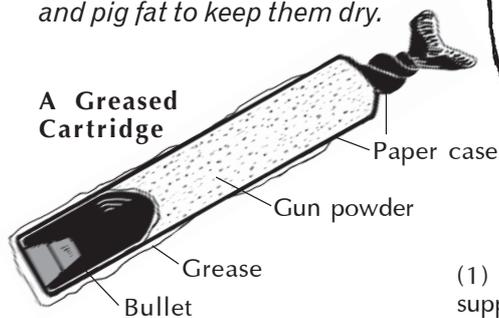
The Revolt of 1857

Place: *The military cantonment at Meerut, where the British army had camped*

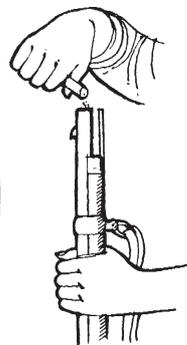
Date: *Sunday, May 10, 1857*

The sun was about to set when the Indian soldiers began firing their guns on their English officers. These were the same soldiers who had helped the English to conquer the kingdoms of India. They were now fed up with the behaviour of the English. They were not getting their salaries on time and they were not treated with respect in the British army. On top of this, the *sipahis* suspected that the cartridges for their new guns (rifles) were being coated with cow and pig fat to keep them dry.

They felt that their religious faith was being violated. Based on this suspicion, a similar uprising had occurred at Barrackpur, near Kolkata in March 1857. The sense of discontent at Meerut was widespread and on this day the soldiers opened fire on their English officers. The rebellious soldiers marched towards Delhi this very night.



(1) The soldier was supposed to tear open the paper case with his teeth.



(2) He would pour the gunpowder into the rifle.



(3) He would then ram the bullet wrapped in paper into the rifle.

Indian soldiers preparing for attack



Place: Meerut town

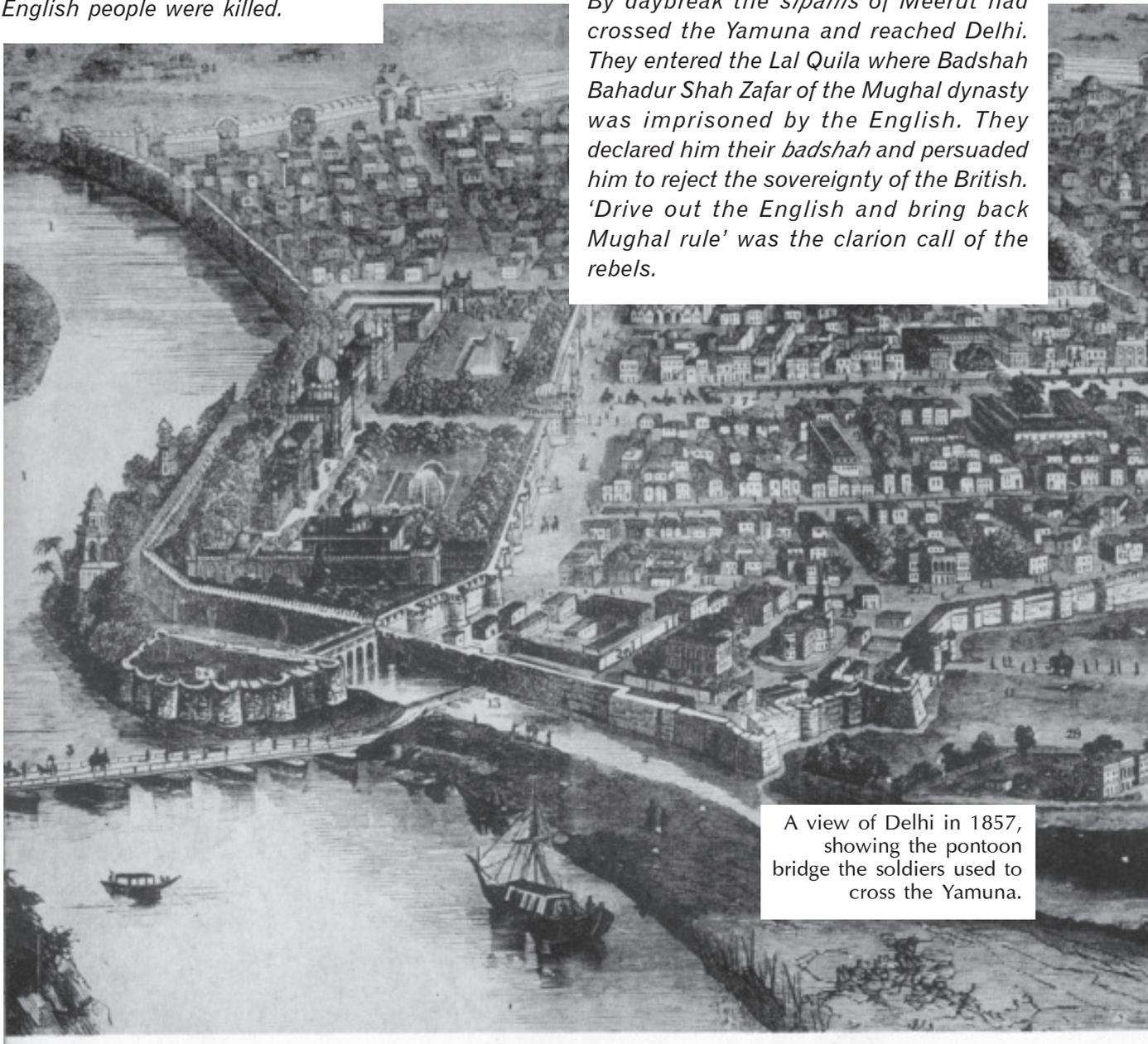
Date: Sunday night - Monday, May 10-11, 1857

News of the *sipahi* revolt spread like wildfire in Meerut. The whole town was in ferment. A wave of people came from the bazaar and began attacking the bungalows of the English. Policemen joined the mobs and, before long, the bungalows and offices of the English were set afire. Many English people were killed.

Place: Delhi, the Lal Quila

Date: Monday, May 11, 1857

By daybreak the *sipahis* of Meerut had crossed the Yamuna and reached Delhi. They entered the Lal Quila where Badshah Bahadur Shah Zafar of the Mughal dynasty was imprisoned by the English. They declared him their *badshah* and persuaded him to reject the sovereignty of the British. 'Drive out the English and bring back Mughal rule' was the clarion call of the rebels.

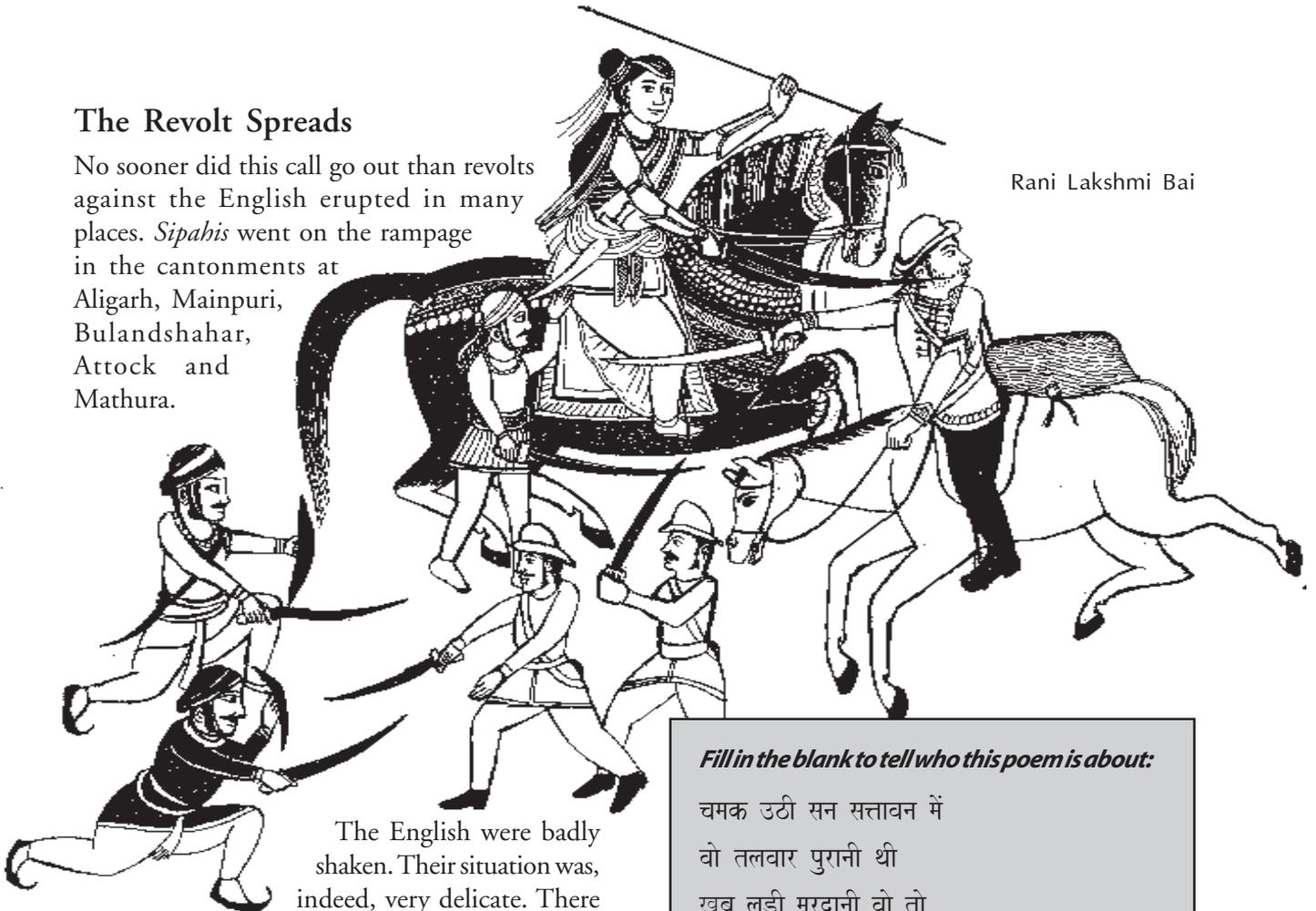


A view of Delhi in 1857, showing the pontoon bridge the soldiers used to cross the Yamuna.

The Revolt Spreads

No sooner did this call go out than revolts against the English erupted in many places. *Sipahis* went on the rampage in the cantonments at Aligarh, Mainpuri, Bulandshahar, Attock and Mathura.

Rani Lakshmi Bai



The English were badly shaken. Their situation was, indeed, very delicate. There

were a mere 45,000 English officers and soldiers in India. Against this, the number of Indian soldiers in their army was two lakh and thirty two thousand! It was these very *sipahis* who revolted. So who would now protect the lives and property of the English residents in the towns? The Indian sections of their army could not be relied on. Consequently, many English soldiers were kept back to protect the English families. As a result, the revolt could not be suppressed immediately and it spread from place to place.

Many royal families, whose kingdoms had been taken away by the English, joined the revolt. Among them were the former Nawab of Avadh and the Maratha peshwa Nana Sahib.



Fill in the blank to tell who this poem is about:

चमक उठी सन सत्तावन में
वो तलवार पुरानी थी
खूब लड़ी मरदानी वो तो

थी

Armies of rebel sipahis and rulers from different corners of the country marched towards Delhi. Hope was in the air that the English would be driven away and Mughal rule and the earlier political order would be restored.

Discuss why the idea of the Mughal empire brought the rebelling Indian people together.

When you oppose something, you need an alternative in its place. Think of an example from your experience that brings out this need of an alternative.

Every Village in Revolt

The flames of revolt spread from *kasba* to *kasba* and village to village in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The peasants and *zamindars* took up arms together and had the English and their officers on the run. They stopped paying taxes to the British

government. They tore up railway lines, burnt down police stations, post and telegraph offices and courts and uprooted the telegraph wires. These were the new things the English had introduced in India. As defeat stared the English in their faces, the Indian people became more and more courageous in their fight against British rule.

The rebels looted the houses and burnt the documents of many moneylenders. These moneylenders had become very powerful in the villages with the help of English laws.

The Revolt is Suppressed

Despite the widespread success of the revolt, the English slowly gained control over the situation.

The rebels fought bravely. But there were two major weaknesses among them. In every town or region, different groups of rebels fought separately against the English. They did not fight together. There was no combined and well-planned effort. So the English were able to tackle the rebels one by one in each area.

The rebels also faced a shortage of modern arms. The guns and cannons, cartridges and gunpowder they required were brought from outside India. Consequently, the rebels had to fight with old guns, arrows, spears and swords. How long could such weapons last in a contest against the more modern arms?



The English Point of View

The above cartoon shows the way the English imagined one of their brave women killing Indian "mutineers" in 1857. Compare this picture to the one of Rani Lakshmi Bai on the opposite page. What are the two different points of view they show?

Different people have used different words for the same event in history. Find out the meanings of each of the following and tell who you think might have used each one:

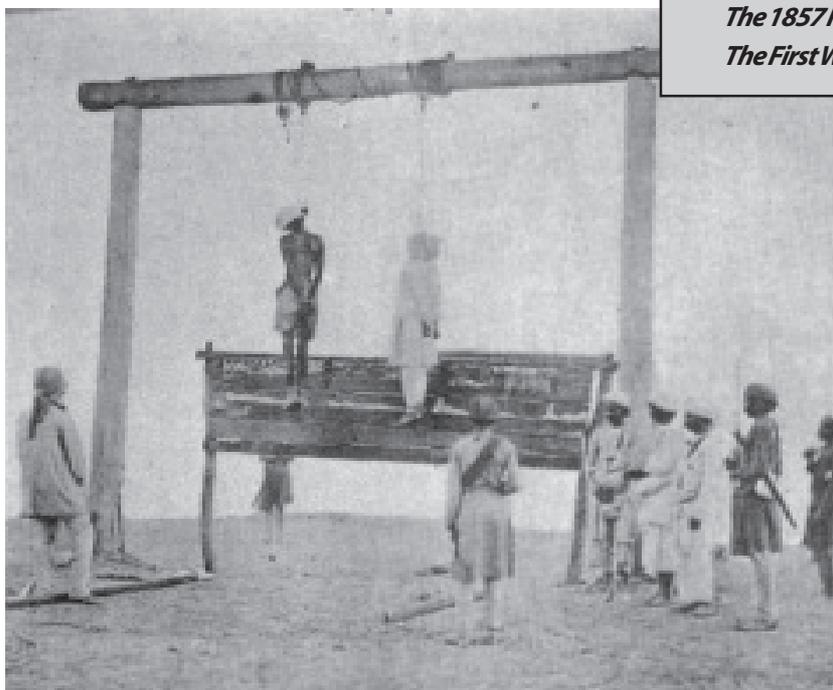
The Mutiny of 1857

The 1857 Uprising

The 1857 Revolution

The 1857 Rebellion

The First War of Independence



Even then, the speed with which the revolt spread frightened the English. So they behaved with great cruelty whenever they suppressed a rebel group. They killed the rebels in a most inhumane way and hanged their bodies from trees in the villages so that the village folk could 'understand' the consequences of revolt.

They tied some rebels to the mouths of cannons and blew them to bits. Many rebels went into hiding, moving from place to place to avoid being caught by the English. Many of them even went to places like Nepal to hide.

The English deported Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar to a far away place (perhaps Rangoon) and it was there that the last Mughal emperor died.

The revolt of 1857 was the biggest revolt to challenge the might of the English. After suppressing it, their hold over India became stronger and they ruled the country for the next 90 years.

Choose the correct alternative:

- a) *The rebels of 1857 wanted to (restore/remove) _____ Mughal rule.*
- b) *The weakness of the English army was that most of its soldiers were (European/Indian) _____.*

What were the weaknesses of the rebel Indian armies?

Many Stay Away from the Revolt

There were many Indians who did not participate in the revolt. They had their reasons for staying away. For example, the revolt was not so intense in Punjab, Bengal and South India. Many kings who still retained their kingdoms supported the English and did not join the revolt. They included kings like Scindia of Gwalior, Holkar of Indore, Nizam of Hyderabad, the Rajput kings of Rajasthan, the Nawab of Bhopal etc.

Many *zamindars* and moneylenders who had increased their wealth with the help of British laws also did not fight against the English. There were many villages where the English had built canals for irrigation. Those villagers who benefited from this facility also supported the English.

In addition, there were many social reformers and scholars in Bengal and Maharashtra who believed that the science, education and law brought by the English were good. They believed that the true

welfare of Indians lay in adopting these ways to reform their society. They believed that rather than resisting the English, efforts should be made to learn from them. They felt that if the rule of the Mughal *badshah*, nawabs and rajas was re-established, India would be taking a backward step. These scholars, too, did not oppose the English.

After the Revolt

It took the English more than a year to suppress the revolt of 1857. During this period, they changed many of their policies and adopted new ones.

In 1858, Queen Victoria of England made an important declaration. She said Indian kings should rule their own kingdoms without anxiety because the English would not try to dethrone them. In this way they established a close collaboration with the royal families of India. Similarly, the *zamindars*, too, were given many concessions and were assured that their property would be protected.



Queen Victoria, crown in hand, became Empress of India in 1876.

The *pundits* and *maulvis* were assured that the British government would not interfere in matters relating to Indian religions and would let the old traditions continue. There was also a promise that Indians would be included in the government.

The truth is that the English had seen their Indian empire being snatched away in 1857. Now they directed their efforts towards giving all kinds of concessions to some of the elite powerful Indians, to conciliate them and ensure that they continued to support the English.

Exercises

1. **Why did the European trading companies maintain armies in India? What role did these armies play in the business of the companies?**
2. **Why do you think the European armies were able to defeat the Indian armies in the 1700's and 1800's?**
3. **Imagine that you are a villager living at the time when the Mughal Empire has been declining and the English are beginning to establish their rule (sometime around 1800). Write a first person account telling your opinions about the Mughals and about the English.**
4. **In 1857, who were the people of India who revolted against the English, and who were the ones who stayed away from the revolt? Explain why they each acted the way they did.**
5. **In 1857, which soldiers felt their religious faith was being violated, and why?**
6. **In what ways did people revolt against the British in 1857?**
7. **What did the people who revolted in 1857 want to achieve?**
8. **In Queen Victoria's declaration of 1858, what complaints of the rebels did she try to address?**
9. **What are some similarities and differences between the way the Mughals came to power in India and the way the English came to power in India?**

The English disarming Indian soldiers in 1857

