East India Company to Raj

History

Lesson 1 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

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The East India Company

Since 1600, a British company had played an increasingly **dominant** role in India. It was called the East India Company and was originally created in order to organise trade between Britain and India. At first the East India Company had to get permission from the ruler of India who was known as the **Mughal** Emperor. The Mughal Emperors allowed European trading companies, like the East India Company, to buy and sell Indian luxuries and transport them back to Europe. All these luxuries were transported by ship so the East India Company was originally just located in Indian ports. Meanwhile the Mughal Emperors ruled India from the capital city of Delhi.

Company control

In the eighteenth century the Mughal Emperors became weaker and local Indian princes started making their kingdoms independent of the Emperor. During this period of change, the East India Company made itself more powerful. The Company started employing an army made up of Indians soldiers and British officers. The Indian troops who fought for this army became known as **sepoys**. The Company then started governing some Indian ports rather than just organising trade. From the 1760s onwards the East India Company gradually took more and more control of India as the Mughal Emperors became weaker. By the 1850s the East India Company ruled most of Northern India and collected taxes from the Indians who lived there to fund the Company.

Governing India

Today, it might seem surprising that a company started ruling a large part of a country. The East India Company had been established to organise trade and make money. As a result, when historians say the company 'ruled' parts of India we should not assume it acted like a modern government across India. In some places, the East India Company ruled directly and built schools and post offices but in other places it allowed local leaders to collect taxes and govern their areas. However, during the nineteenth century some Britons thought the Company should not just try to make money from ruling India but should try to **civilise** India. What they meant by 'civilise' was: make India more like Britain. India has always been an amazingly diverse country and previous rulers, like the Mughals, had avoided passing laws which made all Indians the same. For example, different religions like Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism had long been accepted.

1857 Turning point

The East India Company was attempting something dangerous by trying to change how some Indians lived. In 1857 a conflict broke out which took the Company by surprise. **Sepoys** refused to follow orders and rebelled against British officers. A year long fight then took place to restore order. The conflict shocked people in India and Britain. As a consequence of the conflict, the British government took over control of India and made Queen Victoria the Empress of India. The period after the East India Company stopped ruling India and the British government took over, is known as the **Raj**.

The events of 1857 are therefore hugely important. However, they have also been remembered in different ways by historians. Over the next three lessons we will explore what happened in more detail and find out why historians continue to debate the events of 1857.

Glossary

Civilise: to change something to try to make it more advanced

Dominant: having power or influence

Mughal: the name given to the empire which controlled large parts of modern day India and Pakistan

Sepoy: an Indian soldier serving in the British Indian Army

Raj: a word used to describe the British government's control of India between 1858 and 1947

Comprehension Questions

1. How did British soldiers execute some Indian men in 1857?

Sentence starter: In 1857, British soldiers executed some Indian men by....

2. What was the name of the Empire that ruled India before the East India Company gradually took over?
3. What was the name of the Indian soldiers who fought for the East India Company's army?
4. What was a consequence of the 1857 conflict for the East India Company?
5. Challenge question: Why was it dangerous for the East India Company to try to 'civilise' India ?

Extension Question

6. How did the British relationship with India change between 1600 and 1858?

Use the sentence starters and key words below to answer this question

Sentence starters:	Key words
In 1600 India was ruled by…. *During the eighteenth century….* *After 1857….*	-East India Company -trade -merchant -business -profit -govern -Empire -weaken -Mughal -control -Raj