Candidate 5 evidence

The British Empire: Benevolent or Brutal?

Stripped of his uniform, which was once the sole reason for his pride, with his ankles chained, he sat there, waiting desperately for someone to put an end to the humiliation, which other 4000 soldiers were forced to witness. He looked around and saw other soldiers, who he had rebelled for freedom with a mere hour ago, meeting the same fate. However, no punishment could ever be 'brutal' under the British Empire. Allegedly. It was far too liberal, humane and progressive for that. Though the question arises, was the chaining of a few Indian soldiers, who revolted against the British rule to canons, and blowing them up to pieces really civilised? The brutality India witnessed in its First War of Independence in 1857 is enough evidence to prove that the British colonial rule made situations much, much worse.

India, the land of diversity, culture and prosperity. India was not some poverty-stricken backwater before the authoritarian British rule, but a culturally and economically glorious civilisation. In ancient times, India was famously known as the "Golden Bird" because it was so prosperous. India was wealthy and attractive enough for thousands of rulers to invade and loot for years before the British Empire. Some powerful rulers such as Nader Shah, the emperor of Iran, even mentioned that they wanted to conquer India because it was so rich and abundant in its resources. The British themselves came to India for trade- they saw India as a jewel perfectly fit for the crown of the British Empire. To claim that India's economic condition was unstable and weak before the colonisation is absurd. Comical even. Before the British set foot, India contributed a total of 35% to the world's economy, which was brutally reduced to a mere 2% in 1947, by the time the colonial rule ended. India, before the British rule, was a dominant exporter of handicrafts and textiles. Indian handicrafts were renowned internationally and strongly in demand, having a huge market in Europe and Asia. However, these industries witnessed a painful downfall and diminished under the British regime. India went from being a worldwide exporter of handicrafts and textiles to being an importer of British goods, where the British imposed heavy taxes on Indian exports while none on British imports. Indian goods were forcibly sold 15-20% less than the actual cost. While Britain was being industrialised, the imperialists cleverly de-industrialised India. Some people boldly claim that the Indian economy flourished under the regime, which is absolutely not true. Poverty, starvation, malnourishment, physical abuse, discrimination and death of around 35 million people is too generous of a price to pay for any made-up thriving economy anyway.

The self-declared "glorious" regime of the British was also responsible for more than twenty-four major famines causing 30 million deaths. Unbelievable. How can any perfectly capable governance not stop millions of people dying from hunger? Were the famines inevitable or strategically ignored? The British enforced growing of cash crops and commercialised the agricultural industry for their self-interest. For instance, farmers in India

were forced to grow indigo, a type of crop that produces dye which left the land barren for years. Prioritising growing mostly.cash crops instead of food crops led to many unfortunate famines due to food shortages, one of the most poignant of these being the Bengal famine of 1943 which resulted in approximately 3 million deaths. It was caused by an utter policy failure of the then prime minister of Britain, Winston Churchill. When made aware of the horrifying conditions in Bengal, he unabashedly asked why Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent Indian freedom fighter had not died. He also held the people accountable for the famine saying they were "breeding like rabbits." He chose to pay no heed to the matter, causing the streets of Bengal being littered with dead bodies.

Moreover, the supposed virtuous reign of the British silently permitted massacres. The most noteworthy and tragic being the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. In 1919, in the state of Punjab 379 innocent people were ruthlessly murdered. Some 10,000 people gathered, including women and children to protest peacefully against the Rowlett Act. The act allowed the police to arrest anyone without a reason, with the hidden intention to crush down any nationalists. Soldiers opened fire at unarmed civilians, without warning. 1650 rounds of bullets were shot continuously. This is absolutely monstrous, despicable and sickening, yet astonishing claims of intellectuality and humanity have been made by the British. Physical and verbal abuse along with racial discrimination was nothing unusual. India was promised its independence in exchange of its help and support in World War One. 1.3 million Indian soldiers fought while 54,000 died in a war their country was not responsible for. India supplied 70 million rounds of ammunition, 3.7 million tonnes of supplies, 600,000 machine guns and 42 million stitched garments. A loan of £2 billion was given to the ungrateful British government which did not keep its word after emerging victorious in the war. This proves Dr. Sashi Tharoor, an Indian cabinet minister's words "The sun never set in the British Empire because even the gods could not trust British in the dark." The Empire was built on deception since the very beginning.

Furthermore, the British shrewdly made use of the divide and rule policy. Through this, they promoted disunity and conflict amongst groups of people. One way of doing this was by giving better treatment to a particular religion which led to bitterness and resentment in the others. This gave rise to religious tensions especially between Hindus and Muslims in India. The imperialists did benefit from this as dispute amongst groups of people meant they could prevent a certain group from getting too strong and challenging them. They were successful in stirring up conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The impact of this policy is still apparent- it scarred the Indian society forever.

The British Empire in India was marked by violence, oppression, discrimination and suffering. People arguing that the regime propelled India into being one of the world's leading countries now, seem to forget that other countries underwent growth and progress without having to sacrifice the lives of 35 million people. India was governed solely to uplift

and benefit the British economy and to serve Britain's self-interests. After 200 years of atrocities and torture, India was left with- a literacy rate of 16%; a life expectancy of 32 years; a crippled economy and its domestic industries in ruins. Brutality buried under years of false stories should never have been or should be mistaken for benevolence.

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