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The Making of Early Colonial India:
A Geographical Synthesis of Early European Colonial Engagements in
India, 1498-1857

By

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In popular opinion, the “colonial period” of Indian history is said to have begun in the mid-19th century with the Sepoy Mutiny or Indian Rebellion of 1857, after which the control of India was transferred from the hands of the British East India Company to the British Crown to be governed directly as a Crown Colony: the British Raj. However, it is clear to scholars that the seeds of colonial rule had been planted in India well before 1857, as the East India Company had begun to establish administrative, military, economic, and social control over the subcontinent nearly a century earlier. India was already unified when the Crown took over, yet the geographical processes that went into making India whole are often taken for granted. The Battle of Plassey in 1757 is considered another pivotal point in Indian history, when the British victory over the French allowed them to obtain the ability to tax the enormous Mughal provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Yet another perspective places the start of the colonial period much earlier, in 1498, when the first European explorer landed on shores of the southern port of Calicut (Kozhikode). The debate among scholars will likely continue, but it is clear to many in the field that it is inadequate to consider 1857 the beginning of colonial rule. Pre-1857 colonialism was inextricably tied to some of the greatest transformations in colonial India’s geography and history, from the fall of the Mughal Empire to the rise of the British East India Company to the formation of modern Indian identities. To understand the subcontinent the British Crown inherited, it is critical to study in detail the foundations that led up to the Crown’s takeover.

Crucially, studying this period through the perspective of historical geography helps us gain a better understanding of its spatial dimensions through an examination of scale, structure,

tension, and change in the landscape. For example, environmental factors like natural resources, coastlines, waterways, and physical barriers compelled European and Indian powers to adapt to the environment by arranging themselves the way they did. India's position as one of the largest trade hubs in Afro-Eurasia and its access to numerous valuable resources such as spices, textiles, and precious metal incentivized Europeans to compete fiercely to acquire colonies in India on a completely unprecedented level. The intercontinental exchange of people, goods, and ideas from Europe and European colonies like British North America, the Dutch East Indies, and Portuguese Brazil facilitated the acceleration of a global maritime commercial culture, drastically changing relationships between different parts of the world. National and provincial level state formation in 20th-century India had its roots in the organizational considerations made by the British, French, and Portuguese in the 18th and 19th centuries to agree with their imperial strategies, influencing conceptions of nationhood and statehood nearly a century later. The spatial distribution of natural resources in pre-colonial India informed socioeconomic conditions throughout its various regions, influencing colonial policies such as land revenue reforms and industrial development projects, which further exacerbated socioeconomic disparities within and between regions. The European dependence on naval technology meant that ports came to be the new centers of power, attracting people and wealth away from pre-colonial urban centers inland. The economic exploitation of natural resources like timber, minerals, and agricultural resources for pure capitalistic profit had several detrimental and permanent effects on the well-being of the environment, from depleting the forest cover to contaminating towns to exacerbating the likelihood of floods.

There are several other examples, but what remains consistent among all of them is that a geographical study of early colonial India has much to offer in the way of novel insights. The purpose of his study is to use principles of historical geography to gain a better understanding of

the spatial dimensions undergirding pre-1857 colonial India. Through a study of administrative divisions, settlement patterns, intercultural interactions, resource exploitation, and environmental manipulation, I aim to provide a nuanced understanding of colonial processes occurring across the subcontinent, a perspective infrequently used in studying this time and place. Of the existing geographic literature, I draw from frameworks and insights from scholars like Donald W. Meinig, P.E. Roberts, Charles Joppen, K.M. Panikkar, and Joseph E. Schwartzberg.

Donald W. Meinig, in the first volume of his *The Shaping of America* series, offers a comprehensive, spatial perspective on United States history, referring to its geographic expansion as a historical development that transformed minor European settlements into a transcontinental nation whose geographic character, structure, and system were not natural phenomena but a result of the human creation of places and the networks of relationships between them.¹ He outlines six fundamental principles undergirding his analysis that are used in the rest of his series: geographic context, coverage, scale, structure, tension, and change, all of which form the essential conceptual scheme employed in any study of historical geography. Meinig's work involves a thorough study of the regions of origin of American settlers, sectors and circuits in the Atlantic world, geographic interaction models, racial encounters, enslavement, migrations, coasts, water bodies, populations, regional societies, the reorganization of North America, the destabilization of tropical America, the unification of the US, the disintegration of empires, problems of federation, nation-building, and US expansionism. His influential volume serves as the preliminary inspiration for this study, stemming from a question of whether such analytical tools can be applied to study colonialism in other parts of the world.

¹ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 1, pp.xv-xix

However, since Meinig's framework is centered on the geography of settler colonialism, I adapt his principles to the exploitative colonialism typical in the Indian context. One notable adaptation to be confronted is the lack of "implantations" in the Indian case, that is, the widespread settlement of white colonists. While there were European settlements across the Indian coasts between 1498 and 1857, there were little efforts to implement any grand imperial projects to open the subcontinent to settlers en masse, as in the New World, where the low population density and greater land availability were far more favorable to settler colonialism. Another caveat to address is the definition of "settlement," which, for this study, includes forts, factories, and their immediate peripheries in the early years, and provincial administrative divisions and vassal/puppet states in the later years. Meanwhile, among several concepts I maintain unchanged from Meinig's work is "imperialism," which he defines as the "aggressive encroachment of one people upon the territory of another, resulting in the subjugation of the latter people to alien rule," a phenomenon that applies to the Indian case.² Therefore, while imperial projects may have differed vastly across space, the fundamental dynamics of subjugation and alien rule remains a concept relevant to the Indian context or any other case of colonialism.

As Meinig writes, geography and history are not just analogous but complementary and interdependent, intricately interconnected by the nature of the world, such that geography enhances our understanding of history by proportionately emphasizing "localities and regions, networks and circulations, national and intercontinental systems" rather than the traditional focus on people, events, and ideas.³ In the Indian context, the subcontinent's highly diverse topography allows for great variations in the characteristics of various localities and regions. Its strategic location in the Indian Ocean means it has always played an important role in global networks and circulations of

² Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 1, pp.xv-xix

³ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 1, pp.xv-xix

goods, people, and ideas. Besides having participated in large-scale commercial, social, cultural, and military endeavors with its neighbors for centuries, the sheer scale of the subcontinent means it also enjoys highly complex regional systems of networks whose inner workings warrant detailed studies in their own right.

That geography played a pivotal role in Indian history is clear to P.E. Roberts when he writes the first comprehensive historical geography of the subcontinent in 1921. He studies the physical geographical factors that have affected Indian history eternally, spurring the development of distinct regions with various climates and resources, and consequently, diverse economic and social systems. The complicated caste system, religious pluralities, and linguistic complexity all influenced social structures, political alliances, and cultural practices in India as well, producing unique regional identities and political dynamics. Roberts' *Historical Geography of British India* gives us a detailed view of early European settlements in India and their growth, the most important reforms and wars, and expansions and annexations, however his book leans more into political and military history than historical geography.

In Charles Joppen's atlas, he writes that geography can be used to explain why Europeans prioritized the acquisition of certain districts over others, and how patterns of military invasion directly corresponded with natural barriers in the physical landscape.⁴ For example, European traders and colonists preferred establishing ports at bays, as they formed natural harbors for ships to dock at, and India was almost never invaded from its northeast border with China throughout history, for the Himalayan Range made it nearly impossible to do so.

K.M. Panikkar asserts in his atlas in 1969 that the Indian landscape has always been and will continue to be characterized by human engagement in "a perpetual struggle to achieve a

⁴ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.1

harmony between the Gangetic Plain and the Deccan,” two regions so contrasting as to have evaded thorough unification for centuries.⁵ Indeed, the presence of dense river networks up the Ganges Delta and fertile soils from the Himalayas meant that the north and east were the earliest regions of access to Europeans. As river transportation was relatively inexpensive, river systems like the Ganges, Yamuna, and Brahmaputra allowed the Mughals, Marathas, and Europeans to set up intensive agricultural programs in these regions. Meanwhile, the presence of the Deccan Plateau and the Western and Eastern Ghats down the subcontinental peninsula, characterised by elevated topography and an arid climate, meant that the southern interior was difficult to penetrate and was one of the last regions to be conquered by Europeans. Geography then served as a protective shield for numerous southern kingdoms from the Mughals, Marathas, and Europeans, allowing them to preserve their autonomy for much longer than elsewhere in India.

Perhaps the strongest spatial dichotomy characterizing the history of early modern India – a theme that repeats itself throughout the literature – is the dialectic between land and sea, a struggle that allowed the Europeans to accomplish what others could not. Panikkar argues that the sea was the vehicle by which the Portuguese controlled trade in India, Indonesia and Burma, and it was later the very same sea that the Dutch, French, and English used to dethrone the Portuguese hegemony.⁶ He notes four crucial aspects of European naval imperialism in the region. Firstly, the European emphasis on ports reorganized India’s economic structure, attracting labor and wealth from interior cities to coastal ports, permanently restructuring India’s socioeconomic landscape.⁷ Secondly, land powers with no previous need for developed navies were easily overpowered by European forces when battles moved to waterways, a move that served to be a game-changer for

⁵ Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, p.46

⁶ Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, p.83

⁷ Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, pp.86-89

the European attempts to control territories and economies.⁸ Thirdly, while land powers were hindered by distances and natural barriers, naval powers were relatively free from such constraints, and this advantage of mobility allowed Europeans to project influence across the subcontinent in a completely new way.⁹ Lastly, indivisible and unfragmentable, the sea allowed naval powers to maintain stable, direct, and continuous connections with their European metropolises, allowing them to draw upon resources, support, and reinforcements from their home governments.¹⁰ While the Himalayas had functioned as a natural barrier for millennia, hindering land-based invaders entering from all directions, the arrival of European naval trade opened up a new theatre of competition in a setting that most land-based Indian kingdoms were unable to adapt to. One notable exception to this were the Marathas, who maintained a vast, formidable empire for more than a century with a powerful, capable navy that often overpowered attacking European fleets.

Examining a geographic area as vast as India across a range as wide as 1498-1857 entails studying a vast expanse of literature focusing on a wide range of questions over space and time. Numerous historians have so far explored themes in the relevant time and space, but this literature focuses on economic, legal, and social elements rather than spatial. These fields often overlook the “big picture” factors of analysis that geography emphasizes. With little to no works written on this time and place specifically from a geographical lens, there remains a wide gap in our knowledge of early colonial engagements in India. Existing historical geographies typically take on either ancient or medieval periods, if not more recent post-1857 timeframes. The few works on early modern Indian geography look exclusively at the effects of physical landscape on colonization, centered on naval trade, physiographical barriers, exploitation of resources, and the north-south

⁸ Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, pp.86-89

⁹ Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, pp.86-89

¹⁰ Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, pp.86-89

divide. An exception to this is the remarkably comprehensive reference atlas compiled by Joseph E. Schwartzberg in 1988 and 1992, an incredibly rich source of cartographic material on the evolving Indian landscape through time, which this study makes great use of, directly and indirectly.

This study intends to provide a fresh, spatially intensive perspective with which to reframe the nature of colonial settlements in India in 1498-1857 by synthesizing what research is available. To this end, I offer a critical analysis of the different ways in which Indian geography was utilized and represented by colonial powers, reconceptualizing the ways in which we understand the nature of early colonial India. I argue that the transformations in the configuration of European colonial powers in India between 1498-1857 and the rise of the British over other European powers were informed by differentiations in spatial elements such as settlement patterns, natural land usage, imperial policies, economic development, and urban evolution. Examining these phenomena will allow us to draw insightful conclusions on the greater geographical interactions and processes that typified European colonial projects across India.

Chapter 2

Europeans in the Indian Maritime Economy

European influence in India in the 16th and 17th centuries was contingent on the Europeans' ability to dominate naval trade and technology, transform coastal towns into central markets, and maintain naval links with their metropolises via the sea, while the predominantly land-based Indian empires were unable or unwilling to capitalise on the importance of waterways and develop their navies. From the very beginning, European imperial motivations were driven by a race to dominate trade in the Indian Ocean world, one of the most actively commercial regions on the globe in the early modern period. While India had been trading with the world for centuries, the naval trade networks created by the Europeans in coastal India connected them to a far greater intercontinental trade network on an unprecedented scale, allowing for the exchange of people, goods, and ideas from across the world. In fact, changes in dominance between the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British in India were inexplicably tied to contemporary changes and cycles of trade globally.

Early modern colonial powers shaped a significant part of their economic strategies based on a need to build trade on the Indian coasts. They were well aware of the strategic advantages the subcontinent provided, so multiple powers invested heavily in attempts to reach India first. The Ottoman Empire's blockade of overland trade routes from Europe to India to cut off European trade compelled Europeans to find an alternative naval route, which they indeed did. The race to find a naval route to India was pioneered by the Portuguese, who dispatched several explorers to lead expeditions around the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, circumventing the entirety of Africa from its southern end. In 1486, notable Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias embarked on the first attempt to round the Cape of Good Hope, but only got as far as the Cape

Colony (in present-day South Africa). Even though he did not make it to the eastern coast of Africa, much less India, his expedition paved the way for Vasco da Gama's successful journey to India soon after.

Da Gama is credited with being the first European to find a naval route to India, in 1497, under the patronage of the Portuguese Crown, which initiated European commercial expansion in the Indian Ocean, establishing Portugal as the supreme naval power in the Arabian Sea until being dethroned by the Dutch in the early 17th century.¹¹ Competitors to the Portuguese, such as the Dutch and French, began desperate attempts to establish their own trade routes following da Gama's route. Access to India would allow Europeans to acquire a range of valuable commodities like spices and textiles, which could be sold in Europe for lucrative prices. The significance of the opening of trade routes to India cannot be overstated, for it opened up new possibilities for economic expansion, challenged existing trade networks, and ultimately laid the foundations for colonial undertakings in India.

Soon after da Gama set foot in Calicut, India, in 1498, more European expeditions led to the establishment of several trade posts or forts along the east coast of India, primarily the southern half, well-endowed with resources that had regularly been exported to the Indian Ocean world long before the Europeans arrived. Prior to the establishment of reliable roads or railways traversing the hilly terrain, the western coast had always maintained stronger cultural and economic connections to the Middle East and East Africa than to the Indian interior.¹² Over the next decade, an average of fifteen European ships arrived on the southwest coast annually, competing with rival European companies to establish as many forts as possible.¹³ The Portuguese Crown's agenda was clear from

¹¹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.1, pp.48-49

¹² Menon, "Houses by the Sea," pp.1995-2003

¹³ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.23

the start, for it was just six years after da Gama's expedition that Portugal set up an administrative state, *Estado da Índia*, negotiating treaties with smaller local rulers to expand its territorial reach.

The governance of this new colony was entrusted to the Viceroy, first Tristão da Cunha, then Francisco de Almeida, and most importantly, the third Viceroy, Afonso de Albuquerque, 1st Duke of Goa, credited with the consolidation of Portuguese control in Goa. Under Albuquerque's strategic vision and military prowess, Portuguese India expanded rapidly to brutally conquer key ports on the southern half of the coast, conquering Goa, Mangalore (Mangaluru), Cannanore (Kannur), Calicut (Kozhikode), Cochin (Kochi), and Quilon (Kollam).¹⁴ The Portuguese presence in Goa came to serve as a launching pad for further expansion along the Indian coast and for the establishment of even more trade posts. The Portuguese were driven by a desire to control trade routes and dominate regional commerce through customs duties, and Goa's convenient location on the western coast made it a prime location for ships stopping over, bringing the Portuguese great profit.

The Portuguese settlements usually consisted of a compound with a fort (or "factory"), housing, and usually a Catholic mission, whose proselytizing mission was deeply intertwined with Portugal's ventures worldwide, including the Americas. In Albuquerque's last years, influential missionary Saint Francis Xavier, founder of the Jesuit Order, forcibly converted the Indians from around the settlements to Catholicism. Due to the close link between the civil administration and Catholic missions in the Portuguese colonies, the distribution of missionary activity in the colonies was almost always coterminous with the distribution of the civil settlements.¹⁵ The result of this observation is that today the greatest concentrations of Catholic Indians exist along the southeastern coast, a region with a substantial number of monuments memorializing Francis Xavier.

¹⁴ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.1, pp.48-49

¹⁵ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.1, pp.48-49

This enduring geographic footprint of the colonial-era Catholic missions illustrates the connections between religion, colonialism, and demographics in history and serves as a reminder that history has far-reaching consequences.

By 1600, the Portuguese claimed to have a firm grip on their Indian possessions, mainly on the western coast, but often local merchants were able to ignore them and circumvent their frustrating directives; nonetheless, one significant way in which trade on the northern west coast did change under Portuguese policies was its shift towards the Red Sea trade, at the expense of the Persian Gulf routes that had previously been prominent.¹⁶ Shortly after the Portuguese, four other European naval powers, namely Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark, joined the race to establish more trade posts along the Indian coast, erecting forts (“factories”) down the western coast and up the eastern, and some more in Sri Lanka along the way. The European traders in India in fact received great financial support from their own governments, and often direct endorsement, as in the Portuguese case. The Portuguese possessions were clearly colonies. As for the English, the British East India Company was not only “an organization of merchants with government sponsorship,” but “the agent of English royal power in Asia,” driven by not just commercial interests in Britain but also intertwined with broader geopolitical agendas.¹⁷

Nevertheless, more teams were sponsored to sail to India in the early 17th century, using a variety of funding, to continue innovating their state’s trade routes. The newly-popular concept of a joint-stock trading company, as exemplified by the East India Companies, allowed Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark to project their economic ambitions via corporate bodies not liable to the accountability expected of other imperial projects – this is not something explored in detail in this paper, as there is extensive literature on the nature of these joint-stock ventures,

¹⁶ Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, p.55

¹⁷ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.36

but it is sufficient to say, the peculiar relationship between the joint-stock companies and their governments' broader ambitions illustrates the intricate relationship between commerce and the projection of power.

In their earliest stages, these trade ventures in India remained relatively undeveloped or insignificant, but as competition intensified, they began to engage in a broad range of activities beyond trading commodities, such as buying, selling, destroying, and exchanging factories through agreements or violence, all the while gradually encroaching upon lands belonging to local rulers.¹⁸ The Portuguese, Dutch, British, French, and even the Danish and Austrians created a patchwork of settlements along the coast, and to some extent, even inland, further interacting with Indian rulers to make alliances and enemies.¹⁹ It is important to note that Indian rulers were far from powerless in their encounters with the Europeans, for each exercised their own agency to varying degrees and, for the most part, made decisions on their own accord based on their perception of what would be most beneficial to them. Clearly, Indian rulers had been playing the complex geopolitics game for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans, possessing their own unique dynamics and political relationships with each other that the Europeans had to work with.

As Europeans expanded inland, they encountered a variety of forms of governance, from feudal lordships to kingdoms to empires, each with their own pre-colonial configurations, part of a greater web of complex political relationships. The Europeans sought to establish economic and political ties, while Indian rulers leveraged their own political resources to protect their interests and to use the Europeans as required. Thus, European traders were nothing more than pawns to Indian rulers just as much as the other way around. European traders were not immune to existing

¹⁸ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

¹⁹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

geopolitics and were compelled to navigate this political landscape by interfering in indigenous power struggles, forging alliances with kingdoms, and constantly reassessing strategies.

However, the Europeans were not acting out of benevolence either when establishing peace or mediating between two Indian rulers, rather nearly all of their actions were made to benefit their trading goals, with the exception of the unique Portuguese position. Portugal's peculiar case came from the importance of religion to the imperial plan, which meant that, unlike the other companies, Portuguese traders had to work closely with the Catholic missions, which could even mean making commercial losses in favor of more cultural goals. For the British, French, and Dutch, their primary focus was to secure business interests and maintain monopolies over specific commodities of interest to Europe, to use rivalries between Indian rulers to secure said monopolies, and to control newer, more lucrative trade routes. The takeaway here is that the pursuit of monopolies, specific resources, and trade networks incentivized European traders to leverage existing political divisions and power dynamics among Indian rulers to secure their own economic interests.

Prior to the 18th century, the relatively small number of European merchants generally got along with Indian rulers as long as trade operations continued smoothly; likewise, Indian rulers were not pleased with non-compliant foreigners unless it served their own interests. For example, the Mughal general Shaista Khan, who was also the Governor of Bengal, tolerated and maintained cordial ties with British merchants, as long as the British were willing to accept the terms and conditions of Mughal authority and to make compromises, especially when it allowed them to entrench themselves within the Mughal system at the expense of the other companies.²⁰ The dynamics of Indian-European interactions were shaped by the pragmatism of both sides, illustrated by the English willingness in these years to concede to Mughal demands. On incurring significant

²⁰ Stern, *The Company-State*, p.43

trade losses during their several skirmishes with the Mughals in the 1680s, the English were far more concerned about the Dutch taking advantage of the situation to secure profits than they were about seeking retribution against the Mughals, which is why they accepted a less-than-generous peace settlement with the Mughals after several humiliating defeats.²¹

Because the subcontinent was so vast and rich in resources, reaching the interior allowed Europeans to establish land-based supply chains to the rest of the subcontinent and to tap into new markets in the new kingdoms they encountered, all while attempting to recognize the strategic advantages distributed across the diverse physical and human landscape. While coastal settlements were usually established from scratch by Europeans, the interior was densely populated with a number of large Indian cities, a great deal of which were part of the powerful Mughal Empire. This meant that Europeans could not establish new settlements in the interior but instead had to rely on the pre-existing historical trade networks of India's established, prospering inland cities. Mughal cities served as vital nodes in the intricate web of trade routes, facilitating the flow of information, goods, and capital across India. Thus, the size of the subcontinent, presence of diverse kingdoms, and existing urban centers shaped the choices available to Europeans.

Given these implications, early European trade networks in India consisted of three broad types of towns that formed a complex supply chain for the import and export of monopolized materials. The largest, most important, and longest lasting of the three were coastal European port cities like Bombay, crucial for exporting valuable resources extracted or bought from inland to the Middle East and Europe, such as cotton cloth, silk, and armor.²² The second type were mid-sized manufacturing centers and regional inland hubs, controlled by either the Mughals, Marathas, or local rulers, such as Rajapur on the central west coast, Benares (Varanasi) in the central-north, and

²¹ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.46

²² Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

Sirohi in the northwest, where raw materials from smaller towns were processed or refined before being transported further.²³ Lastly, there existed a number of small trade towns, each monopolized by a particular Indian power or European company as the source of particular raw materials, from where producers directed these resources on to the regional hubs for further processing or export.²⁴ This was not a clear-cut supply chain but generally resembled a hub-and-spoke model involving extraction and exportation of materials outwards from the northern-central region, particularly the fertile, resource-rich Indo-Gangetic Plain, which served as the backbone of the pre-colonial Indian economic system.

Schwartzberg divides the supply chain system for European commodities into seven major economic regions split across the two coastlines and the island of Sri Lanka, each uniquely based on its location: the Konkan Coast, Kanara Coast, Malabar Coast, Ganges Delta, Northern Circars, Coromandel Coast, and Ceylon (see Fig. 1).²⁵ Each of the zones produced their own peculiar types of goods depending on the geographical differences between them and were each dominated by specific ethnicities of traders, constantly in competition to gain monopolies on the more valuable commodities.

²³ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

²⁴ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

²⁵ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

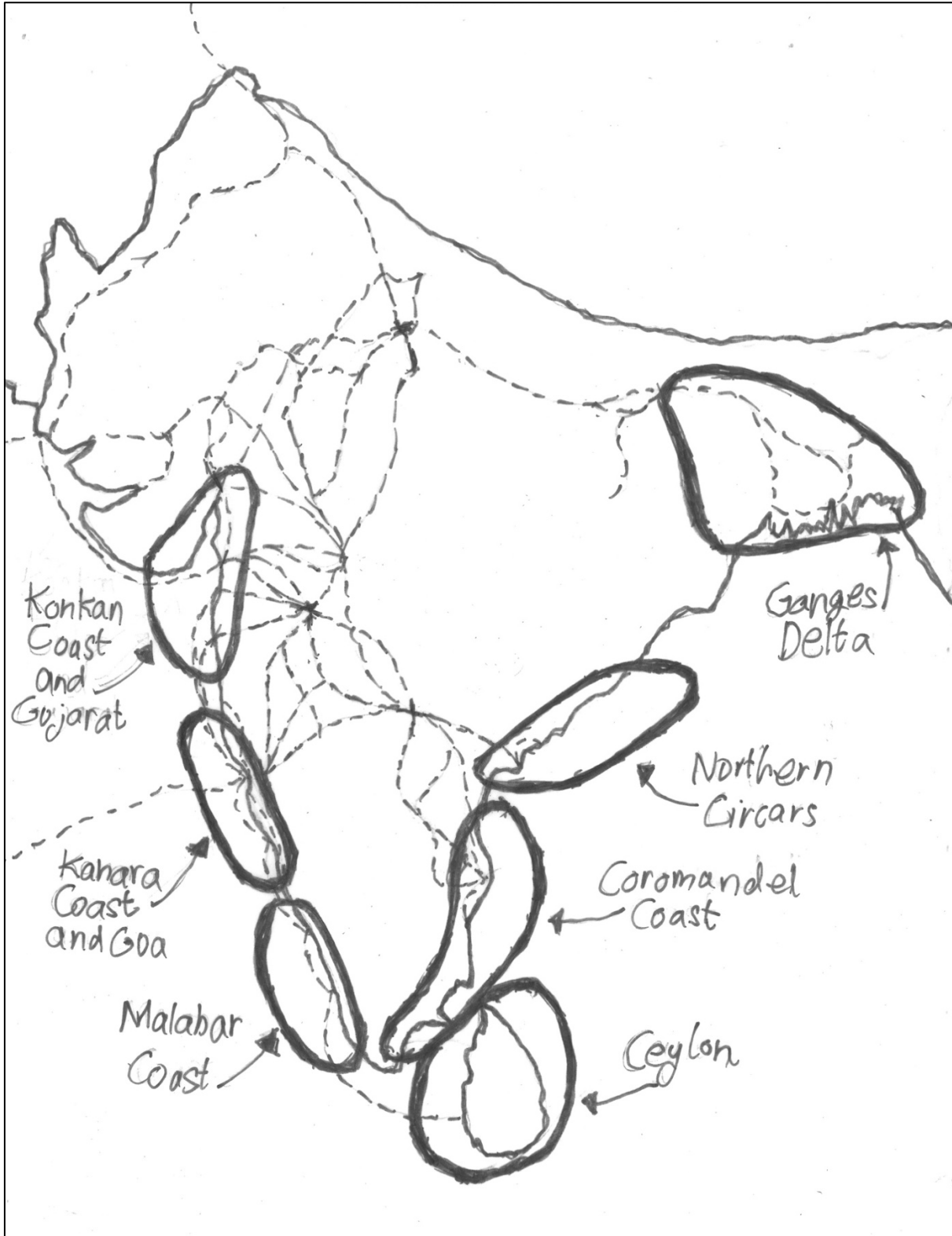


Figure 1. The major European trade routes in India in the 16th-18th centuries²⁶

²⁶ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

The most north-western economic region is the Konkan Coast, encompassing the present-day state of Maharashtra, particularly the areas around Bombay, which, along with Gujarat, formed a region known for its production of textiles, particular highly-valued cotton cloth (see Fig. 2). Further south along the west coast is the Kanara Coast, which, along with Goa, specialized in the production of spices and other commodities – Goa also held strategic importance as a Portuguese stronghold and a significant center for cultural activities (see Fig. 3). Even further south exists the Malabar Coast, renowned for its abundant supply of spices, mainly peppers, timber, coconuts, and other tropical products, which European powers vied for control over fiercely, making Malabar a hotbed for frequent violent skirmishes and intense competition for monopolies (see Fig. 4).



Figure 2. Major European settlements on the Konkan Coast (including Gujarat)²⁷

²⁷ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

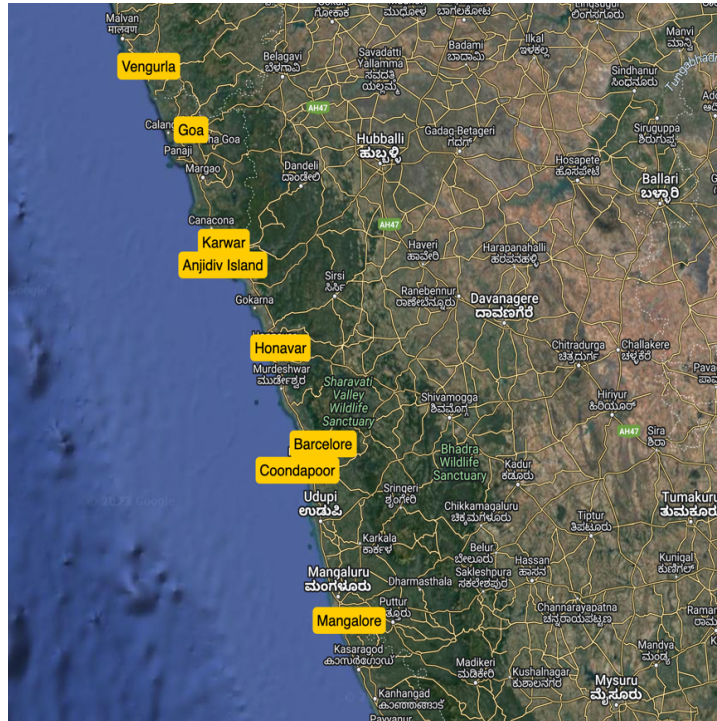


Figure 3. Major European settlements on the Kanara Coast (including Goa)²⁸

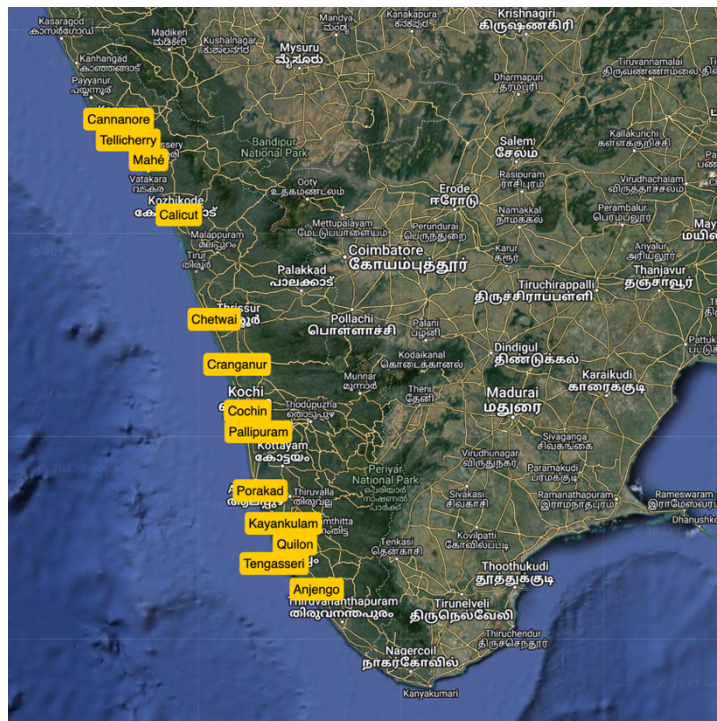


Figure 4. Major European settlements on the Malabar Coast²⁹

²⁸ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

²⁹ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

On the eastern side of the subcontinent exists the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta, a region that includes Bangladesh and the present-day Indian states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, characterized by their fertile alluvial plains, which served as significant agriculture production zones for valuable crops like rice, jute, and indigo (see Fig. 5). Further south along the eastern coast lies the Northern Circars, a region encompassing parts of present-day Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, known for its textile production, particularly intricately hand-designed cotton fabrics, highly valued in European markets for their aesthetic value and fine craftsmanship (see Fig. 6). Even further south, we have the Coromandel Coast, spanning the present-day states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, known for its diverse range of commodities such as textiles, precious stones, spices, and rice, and sharing deep commercial ties with Sri Lanka for centuries (see Fig. 7).



Figure 5. Major European settlements in the Ganges Delta³⁰

³⁰ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

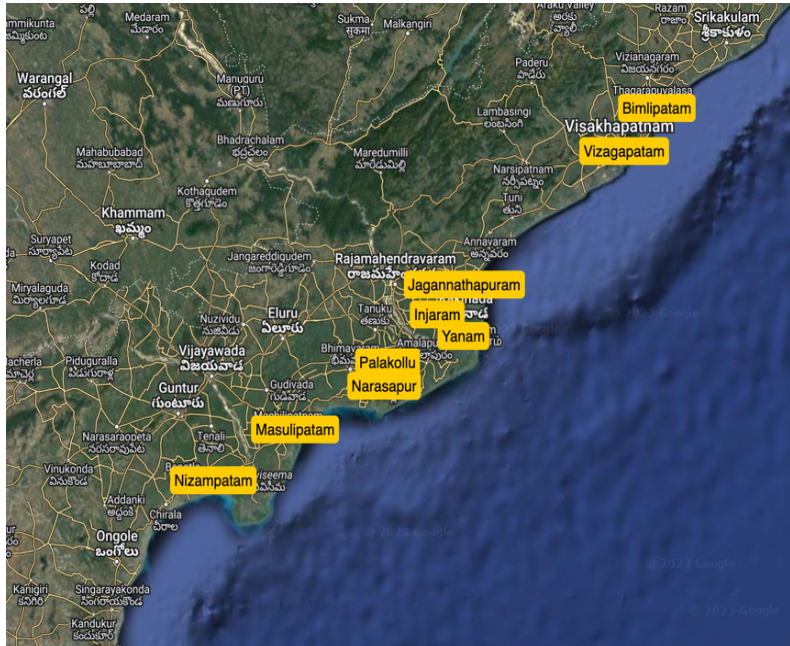


Figure 6. Major European settlements in the Northern Circars³¹



Figure 7. Major European settlements on the Coromandel Coast³²

³¹ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

³² Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

The seventh major economic region is Ceylon (Sri Lanka), a large island off the south-eastern Indian coast, renowned for its production of commercially valuable spices, particularly cinnamon, which came to be dominated first by the Dutch and later by the British (see Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Major European settlements in Ceylon³³

The Portuguese and Dutch trade hegemony in the Indian Ocean world lasted for about two centuries, the 16th and 17th centuries. Portuguese imperial designs in India were complicated by increasing Crown bankruptcy and an obsession with violent Catholic proselytization missions that hindered mobilization of the Indian population. Meanwhile, Dutch trade, which was concerned greatly with their complex spice and textile networks in South Asia and Southeast Asia, declined due to negligence and unprofitability in India. There is a great deal to be said about the 16th-century Portuguese trade hegemony, joint-stock trading companies, exports from Europe, the generation of purchasing power in the Asian market, the 17th-century usurpation of the trade hegemony by the Dutch, and growing competition from the English and French, but each of these topics warrant

³³ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.2, p.50

their own detailed studies, many of which exist in abundance in the field of economic history. The economic geography of these two centuries was fascinating and insightful as well, but this study focuses on the geography of territorial acquisitions by the British and French, which first began in the 18th century.

Chapter 3

Early European Settlements in India

Early European coastal towns were small forts or trade outposts constrained greatly by geographical barriers and the consent of major Indian rulers. Depending on the ideological bent of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Danish, and British, interactions with local Indian civilians varied, usually restricted to only the bare minimum required to sustain the settlements and to trade. In later years, when the Indian populations in and around European settlements had grown larger, Indian-European cultural contact became much more frequent, though the residents were still segregated by race and caste. This allowed neighborhoods to develop differentially, organized organically by functional specialization of trade based on traditional caste roles.

To demonstrate examples of early coastal European settlements in India, Schwartzberg uses early illustrations of Portuguese Goa, French Pondicherry, Dutch Cochin and Palikol, British Bombay, and Masulipatam, which was jointly operated by the Dutch, British and French. A look at the layouts and sketches of these towns illustrates their distinct “flavors,” each distinguished by differences in morphology, depending on the company operating within it and the extent to which urban organization mattered to governing officials. Since European jurisdiction did not extend beyond the trading posts, jurisdiction in these cases comprised solely of the fort and its immediate vicinity, though there were also instances of unruly Company servants stepping beyond the boundaries of the agreed treaties and engaging in problematic and violent violations of nearby Indian villages.



Figure 9. Portuguese Goa in the mid-17th century³⁴

A vibrant, multifaceted town under the Portuguese, Goa was governed by its Viceroy and Archbishops in tandem, owing to the close integration of church and state in Portuguese political culture, which also explains the thirteen Catholic churches of all sizes dotting the town (see Fig. 9).³⁵ Goa was the largest Portuguese city in all of Asia at its time, rivalled only by Bombay or Calcutta, and its sheer size can be gauged from its numerous markets (like Saint Francis's Market), plazas and streets, public hospital, town hall, wood and fish markets, dockyard, timber wharf, and

³⁴ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

³⁵ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

custom's house.³⁶ The town was centered around the central market, close to the Viceroy's Plaza and the churches of Misericordia, Saint Marco, and Nuestro Senor de Serrai, and newer parts of town were built nearly concentrically around this core, with a few smaller plazas outside the main one, such as Terros dos Gallos and Saint Anthony's Plaza.³⁷

By the early 16th century, it was populated by 800 white and 2,200 Indian Catholic or "black" townspeople, titled *casados* or "married men," a term used to describe colonial settlers in the Portuguese world, who spent most of their time trading or violating locals.³⁸ Native Indians, mostly forcibly-converted Catholics, made up a good portion of urban life, centered around the church and market, and this is especially peculiar of the Portuguese, as they were more inclined to mingle with and intermarry Indians, creating a variety of mixed-race Goans, though this also involved rape, as in the Americas. A majority of urban elements from 17th-century Goa were subsequently demolished or repurposed and are no longer part of the landscape, however Goa today continues to display a peculiar human geography, with its high concentration of Catholics and presence of Portuguese architectural traces, particularly the grand cathedrals in Velha Goa.

By the 1530s, Negapatam (Nagapattinam) and São Tomé (Mylapore) on the Coromandel Coast, both in present-day Tamil Nadu, were also sizeable Portuguese cities, each with about forty Portuguese houses, increasing by the decades.³⁹ By the mid-16th century, there were about 2,000 Portuguese traders living around the Bay of Bengal, trickling further northeast into China.⁴⁰

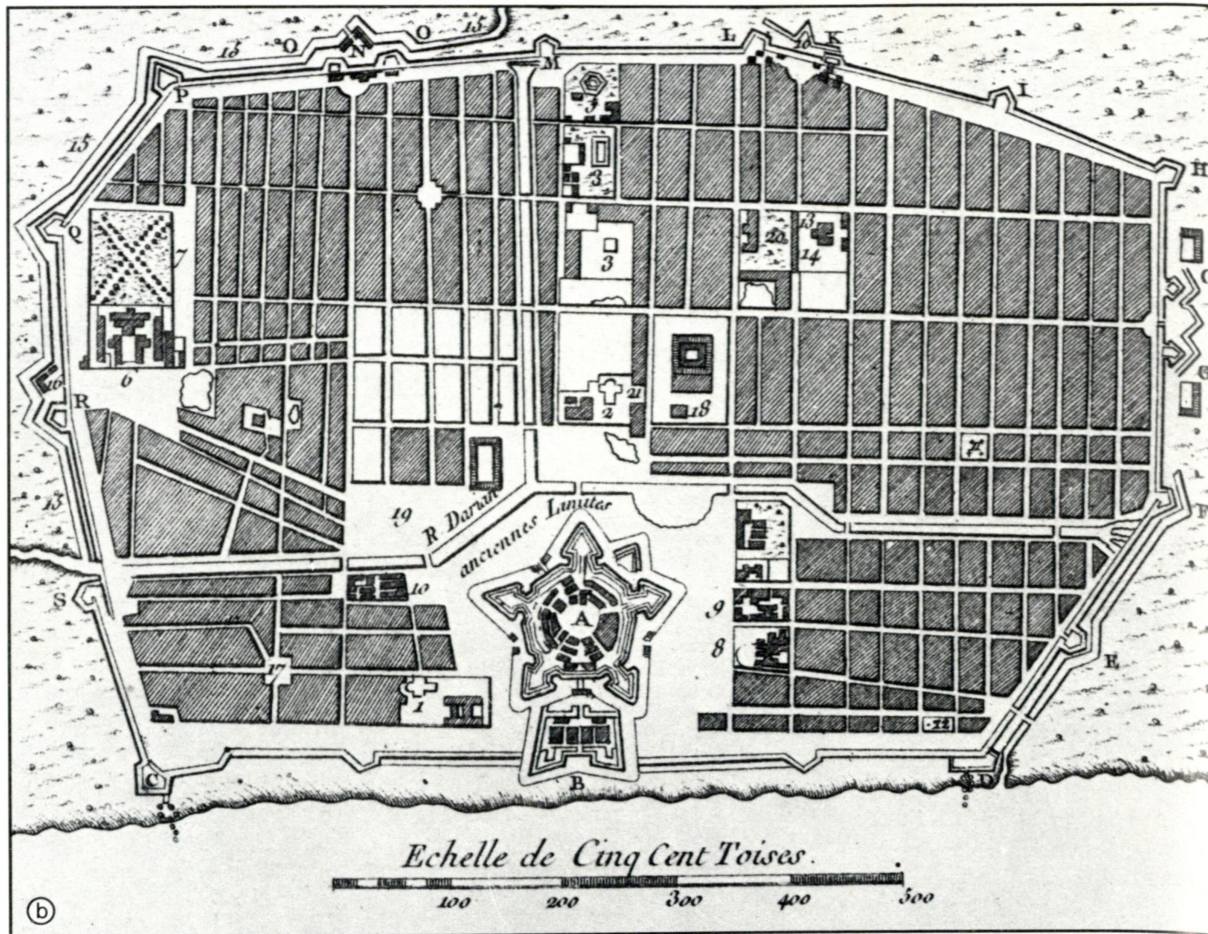
³⁶ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

³⁷ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

³⁸ Subrahmanyam and Thomaz, "Evolution of Empire," p.322

³⁹ Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, p.60

⁴⁰ Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, p.60



PONDICHERRY IN THE MID-18th CENTURY (North is to the right.)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| A. The Fort | K. Valledaur Gate | 1. Capuchin Church | 12. French Cemetery |
| B. Horn Work | L. Valledaur Bastion | 2. Jesuit Church | 13. Great Market |
| C. St. Lawrence Bastion | M. Fearless Bastion | 3. Company Gardens | 14. Malabar Prison |
| D. St. Louis Bastion | N. Villenour Gate | 4. Jesuit Gardens | 15. New Works made in 1740 & 1741. |
| E. Anjou Bastion | O. Villenour Bastion | 5. Capuchin Gardens | 16. Works of 1740 |
| F. Orléans Bastion | P. Queens Bastion | 6. Hospital | 17. St. Lawrence Mkt. |
| G. Madras Bastion | Q. Hospital Bastion | 7. Old Company Gdns. | 18. Woolen Market |
| H. N.W. Bastion | R. Goudelour Bastion | 8. Company Hospital | 19. Place du Mas |
| I. St. Joseph Bastion | S. Little Bastion | 9. Governor's House | 20. The Missionaries |
| | | 10. The Mint | 21. Great Pagoda |
| | | 11. Malabar Cemetery | |

Source: Jacques Nicolas Bellin, *Le Petit Atlas Maritime*, Vol. III, [Paris], 1764.

Figure 10. French Pondicherry in the mid-18th century⁴¹

French Pondicherry, which remains a lot more intact than Velha Goa today, was smaller but far more organized, influenced by distinct French urban planning principles. The settlement was confined to the compact fourteen-bastion fortification, with an even smaller core fort located on the coast (see Fig. 10). Pondicherry's urban morphology was exemplary of the typical French

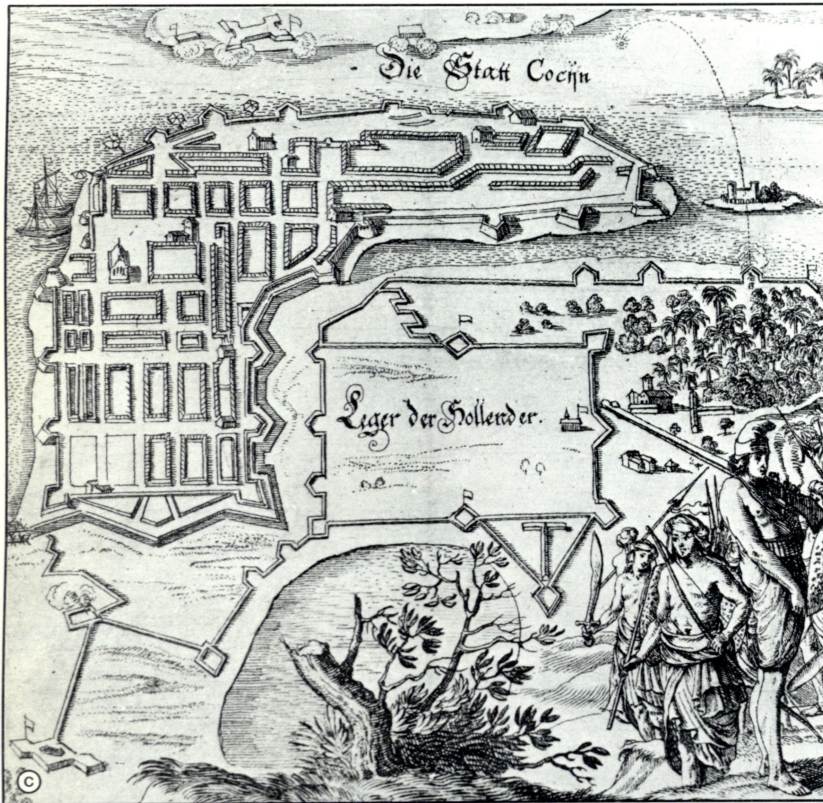
⁴¹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

style of gridded blocks across four distinct quarters surrounding the core fort, a design seen elsewhere in the French colonies, such as New Orleans, for example. A majority of the blocks in the four quarters were residential, exclusively for Europeans, creating a distinct separation between the Europeans in the town and Indians outside the fort. Designated public areas such as churches, gardens, hospitals, cemeteries, markets, and plazas (such as the Place du Mas), as well as a designated governmental area for the Governor's House, the Mint, and Malabar Prison, all showcase the influence of French urban planning practices in India.⁴² Interestingly, compared to Goa, Pondicherry was much smaller and more closely packed, likely because it was exclusively European and thus heavily fortified to keep Indians out, much like English forts at the time. Owing to this, Pondicherry today, which still retains its French flavor, consists of tightly packed houses reflecting the distinctive French architectural style, however, due to the lack of miscegenation between the French and Indians, the town's racial component was eliminated once the white Frenchmen left when Pondicherry was returned to India in the 1960s.

The Dutch town of Cochin was also quite small, situated on the northern tip of a peninsula extending inwards into a small bay connected to the Arabian Sea via a thin strait on Cochin's northern banks. The Dutch, like the English and French, remained segregated from the Indians in their settlements, leaving them outside their fort, however Indians affiliated with the Company were accommodated outside in a series of more fortifications (see Fig. 11). Cochin's multiple fortifications were constructed in multiple phases in no particular shape or layout. The blocks within the inner settlement were gridded, with minimal public features, with the exception of a decently sized port complex on the peninsular tip and a few settled islands in the gulf.⁴³

⁴² Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

⁴³ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53



Source: Awnsham Churchill (Compiler), *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London: Henry Lintot & John Osborn, Vol. III, 3rd Ed., 1745. (This work incorporates a translation of that of Baldaeus cited below, including copies of the original engravings. The above map is one such copy.)

PLAN OF COCHIN, MID-17th CENTURY Sources Philippus Baldaeus, *Naauwkeurige Beschryvinge van Malabar en Coromandel* (Exact Description of Malabar and Coromandel), Amsterdam: J. Janssonius van Waasberge & J. van Someren, 1672.

Figure 11. Dutch Cochin in the mid-17th century⁴⁴

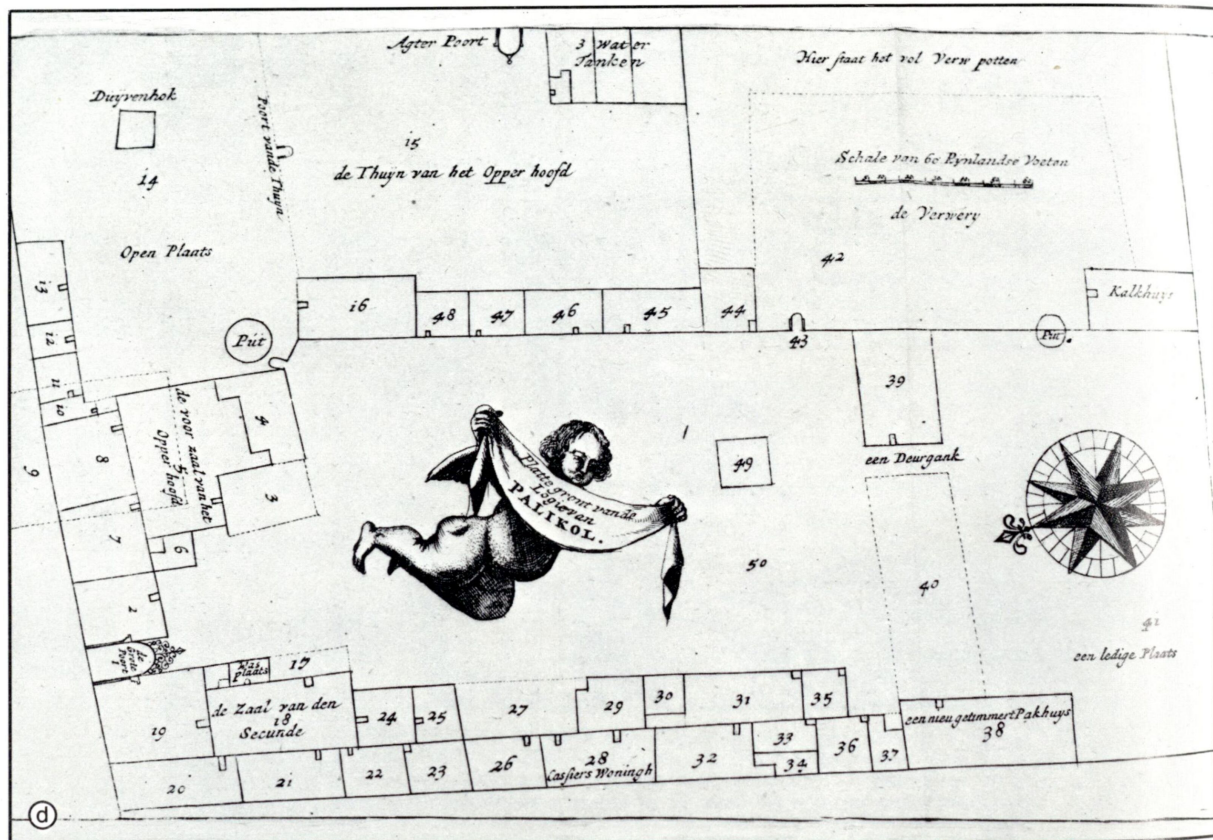
Another typical Dutch settlement, exemplified by the factory at Palikol (Palakollu) demonstrates the bare-bones nature of the Dutch Company's cloth-trading venture: nearly all the infrastructure was geared towards the trade, including living quarters and offices for employees, as well as warehouses, processing rooms, and dyeworks for cloth (see Fig. 12).⁴⁵

Part of the reason these towns today do not retain the same cultural remnants of the Dutch settlement relative to the British or French or Portuguese is precisely that Dutch urban organization was so geared towards its cloth production, characterized by its transactional approach, minimal interaction with Indians, small enclosed accommodations, and low emphasis on cultural exchange. However, the Dutch did employ numerous Indians outside of their core settlement. By 1689, the

⁴⁴ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

⁴⁵ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

population of Dutch settlements in Coromandel numbered about 450, of which about half were Indians, working as clerks, blacksmiths, carpenters, servants, palanquin-bearers, stableboys, and torch-bearers, while the Dutch served as soldiers at Fort Geldria, clergymen, medics, trumpeters, governors, factors, and book-keepers.⁴⁶



DUTCH FACTORY AT PALAKOLLU (PALIKOL) IN THE LATE 17th CENTURY

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Great gate to living quarters. | 14. Open area, w. pit & pigeon house | 38. New warehouse |
| 2. Guardroom for native soldiers; place where the clock hangs. | 15. Garden, w. tanks of water in case of fire | 39. Cloth warehouse |
| 3. 17. Paved areas (3 is below a shed). | 16. 23. Galleys | 40. Cloth processing area. |
| 4. Raised room, w. masonry tank below. | 18. Anteroom, w. adj. washroom | 41. Empty space, w. half a pit. |
| 5. Front hall. | 19. Office | 42. Dyeing area, w. dye-pots, limehouse and pit. |
| 6-8. Chief's rooms | 20-22. Rooms for 2nd-in-charge | 43. Gate to dyeworks |
| 9. Raised gallery | 24. Porch | 45-47. Storage rooms. |
| 10. Stairway to gallery | 26, 27, 44, 48. Assistant's rooms. | 49. Base for flagpole |
| 11. Pantry | 28, 29. Cashier's dwelling | 50. Courtyard |
| 12, 25, 34. Toilets. | 30. Cashier's office | |
| 13, 22, 33. Bottling rooms. | 31, 32. Married ass't's dwelling | |
| | 35-37. Assistants' commons rooms | |

Source: Daniel Havart, *Op- en Ondergang van Coromandel (Rise and Decline of Coromandel)*, Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1693.

Figure 12. Dutch factory at Palakollu in the late 17th century⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, p.128

⁴⁷ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

By the early 17th century, the Dutch East India Company had several factories in Gujarat (at Surat, Ahmedabad, Bharuch, and Vadodara), Agra, Bengal, and Malabar (mainly Cochin). In the 1680s, the employees working in Gujarat and Agra numbered about 78 Dutchmen and 150 Indians, a number that grew through the mid-18th century.⁴⁸ In Bengal, the Dutch East India Company's factory operators numbered 64 Dutchmen and 341 Indians, the Dutch mostly assigned to commercial duties and law enforcement under the chief enforcer.⁴⁹ The Dutch Malabar establishments exporting monopolized pepper through Cochin housed, in 1680, about 162 Indian and 561 European employees, of which more than 423 were military officers and soldiers brutally enforcing the monopoly.⁵⁰

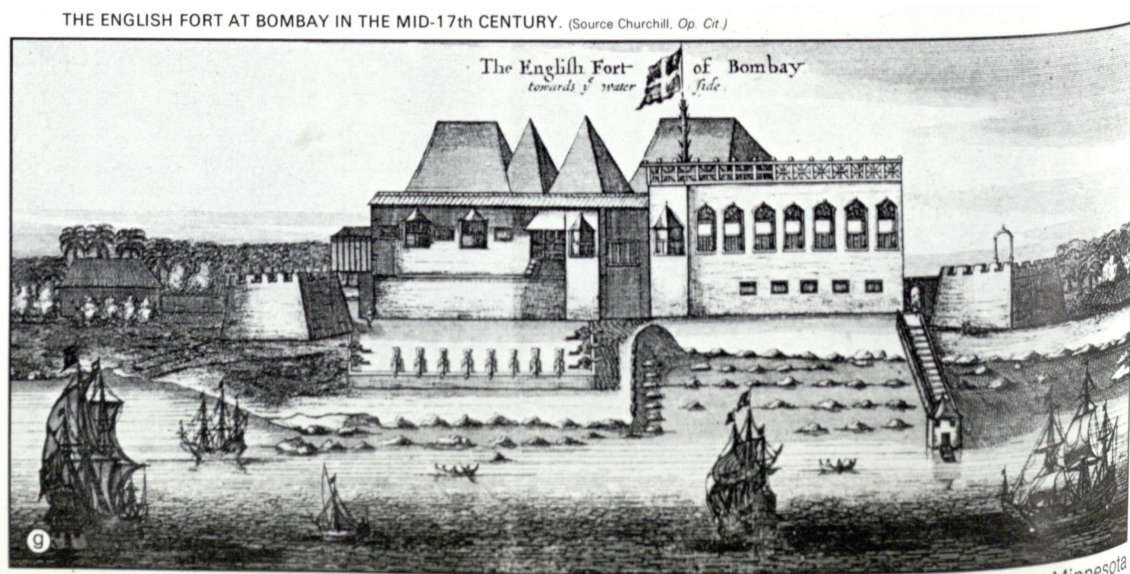


Figure 13. The English fort at Bombay in the mid-17th century⁵¹

The greatest example of a British boom city that skyrocketed to success was Bombay (Mumbai), today the commercial capital of India, a position that it arguably held from at least the mid-17th century owing to its exceptional location as a peninsula on the Arabian Sea with a natural

⁴⁸ Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, p.131

⁴⁹ Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, pp.133-34

⁵⁰ Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, p.135

⁵¹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

harbor (see Fig. 13). The presence of Europeans in Bombay transformed it into a bustling centre of trade and commerce.

Another example is that of Calcutta, founded as an English fort in 1680, when the Mughals granted the English company a tract of land along the Hughli River in Bengal for demonstrating loyalty to them and leasing them a substantial number of British soldiers in Mughal military campaigns against rival powers. Besides the initial tract of land that would grow into Calcutta, the English bought several more parcels of land from surrounding landholders to extract resources and also began to offer their fortifications as protection to European and Indian merchants and traders, which led to rapid financialization in their settlements.⁵²

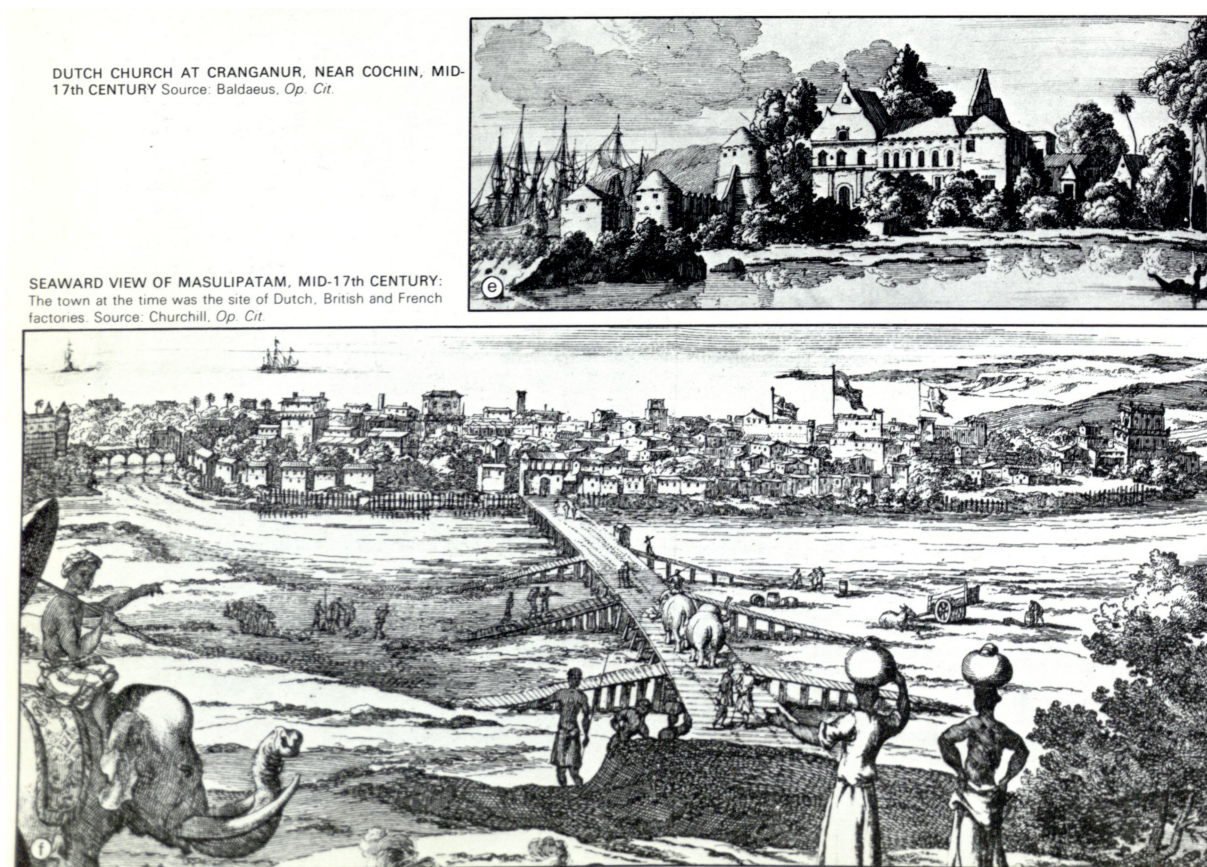


Figure 14. The Dutch church at Cranganur, near Cochin, and a seaward view of Masulipatnam, both mid-17th century⁵³

⁵² Wilson, *India Conquered*, pp.53-54

⁵³ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VI.B.5, p.53

A contrasting view of the Indian colonial landscape is offered by sketches of towns from the time, already inhabited by Indians, that were appropriated by the Europeans upon arrival: while the exclusively-European settlements created from scratch along the coasts were bare-bones and miniscule, the presence of existing Indian fishing towns such as Cranganur and Masulipatam allowed Europeans to benefit from the basic social and economic infrastructure already existing in the societies (see Fig. 14). The extent to which Europeans were responsible in developing such towns is variable, but their presence certainly catalyzed the evolution of flourishing coastal villages into booming towns and eventually cities, beginning a process of rural-to-urban and inland-to-coastal migration of labour and wealth that permanently changed India's economic organization and continues to occur today.

Chapter 4

Imperial Struggles

In the early 18th century, as the Mughal Empire began fragmenting due to external threats from neighboring powers, internal factionalism, and rebellions from its regional governors and nobles, European traders began to harness unprecedented levels of military power in response to occurrences elsewhere in the world.⁵⁴ By the mid-18th century, Britain and France were locked in an intense global rivalry for imperial dominance, starting with the War of the Austrian Succession and resulting in several Anglo-French struggles in North America, Europe, and South Asia. This period marked great changes in cycles of power, resulting in the rise of the British and Marathas, and the fall of the Mughal and French. The four rival empires were locked in direct conflict over the subcontinent throughout the mid-18th century, using a variety of techniques to assert their own diplomatic and military authority. India thus became a battleground for imperial struggles between the Mughals, Marathas, British, and French, reshaping the political geography significantly.

Upon the effective disintegration of Mughal control, former vassals in the fragmented political landscape began to assert their own autonomy or complete independence, shifting the way politics functioned in India. For example, Murshid Quli Khan, the *nawab* or Mughal viceroy of Bengal in the early 18th century, was able to assert his own authority and turn Bengal into a semi-independent polity, only nominally under Mughal suzerainty.⁵⁵ While traditional Mughal centers of power in the North Indian River Plain lost their economic and cultural power, urban life thrived in other regional court cities like Aurangabad, Hyderabad, Lahore, Jaipur, Lucknow, Pune, Arcot, and Murshidabad as local rulers let their own preferences in architecture, literature, and music

⁵⁴ Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*, p.2

⁵⁵ Marshall, *Bengal, the British Bridgehead*, pp.48-69

shape their urban cultures.⁵⁶ The lack of imperial control over smaller kingdoms allowed these fragmented kingdoms to evolve into new kinds of fiscal-administrative states that were far more bureaucratic and militarized than before. Attempts by smaller polities to consolidate power in their own urban centers, whether Indian lords or European companies, were easily suppressed by the new administrative states that emerged in the 18th century.⁵⁷ This period marked a great political transformation as fluctuations in the power dynamics of these administrative states changed the balance of power and governance structures in their regions.

One notable example of an administrative state was Savanur (Savanuru) in the southwest, just south of Hubli-Dharwad in present-day Karnataka, which achieved success by strategically moving from a military-oriented approach to a trade-centered one when the rulers recognized that conditions in the early 18th century were favorable to economic growth and thus developed close ties to European traders.⁵⁸ This shift in strategy allowed Savanur to leverage its connections and resources to drive economic prosperity and to establish itself as an influential state in its region. Meanwhile, in Bengal, the Nawab, or the Mughal viceroy, took a proactive approach to attract businesses and to stimulate economic development, investing in the construction of infrastructure such as markets, roads, and police stations, while his governor implemented a sophisticated system to track grain prices and accordingly made strategic moves to substantially enhance land revenue in the 1720s-30s.⁵⁹ These efforts contributed to Bengal's growth as the regional hegemon in the east. In southeast India, the Nawab of Arcot exerted a strong, forceful control over his territory than previous rulers had, violently suppressing any threats to the kingdom rather than forming

⁵⁶ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.61

⁵⁷ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, pp.23-40

⁵⁸ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.62

⁵⁹ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, pp.46-48

alliances through diplomacy.⁶⁰ This approach allowed him to maintain stability within his realm through coercion and to establish Arcot as the leading militaristic state in the south, in present-day Tamil Nadu. The rise of these smaller fiscal-administrative kingdoms resulted in a reconfiguration of India's political geography such that European companies controlled the maritime trade routes in the south, while small but mighty states inland, like Savanur, Bengal, and Arcot, held sway on the peninsula. Their ability to adjust their approaches, to forge alliances with Europeans, and to control their territories through a variety of strategies had a deep impact on the regional dynamics of power and trade in 18th-century India.

Along the Kanara and Malabar Coasts, the Western Ghats mountain range hindered the expansion of more large-scale centralized polities, resulting in a patchwork of various overlapping political authorities whose rulers relied on forging temporary, dynamic relationships with peasants and warriors to maintain their credibility as rulers.⁶¹ The interactions between European traders and these local polities were characterized by tension and negotiation, but their dependence upon each other for facilitation of the pepper trade necessitated functioning relationships.⁶² European traders relied on local rulers for access to the supply of pepper, while the rulers benefited from the economic opportunities and military protection offered by the Europeans.

This created interesting precarious situations for both sides. For instance, Queen Aswati of Attingal, a kingdom at the very southwestern tip of the peninsula that controlled a good portion of the pepper supplies on the Malabar Coast, had allowed the English in the 1680s to establish a factory in the coastal town of Anjengo (Anchuthengu) in present-day Kerala.⁶³ This strategic move was aimed at counterbalancing the Dutch presence and protecting pepper prices, and did serve its

⁶⁰ Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Trade and Politics in the Arcot Nizamat," pp.339-80

⁶¹ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.73

⁶² Menon, "Houses by the Sea," pp.1995-2003

⁶³ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.74

purpose for a while. When the fragile political equilibrium of the region was broken in the late 18th century and conflicts broke out between several states, the state of Attingal, unable to defend itself against internal and external challenges, collapsed under pressure, while its neighboring kingdom, Travancore (Thiruvithamkoor), managed to maintain autonomy and to preserve its sovereignty despite being surrounded by entrenched British operations.⁶⁴ Hence, the fragmented nature of political authority in the south, the interdependence between traders and rulers, and the resilience or vulnerability of different states in the face of pressures, all owed to the collapse of the fragile political balance in place.

The political geography was different on the Konkan Coast, where the rising Marathas exhibited a growing imperial grip. The Marathas, technically vassals of the Mughals, had started growing into a powerful kingdom of their own at the end of the 17th century and had become major players in Indian geopolitics, strategically maneuvering their alliances with the British and French as suited their interests. The Marathas were renowned for being clever military tacticians, using well-developed strategies that capitalized on the knowledge of their native terrain, the arid Deccan Plateau and coastal Maharashtra. A key element of their approach was evading direct confrontation with opponents on the field and instead raiding enemy supply lines, cutting off their resources, and retreating to the mountains, leaving their enemies to navigate the rough terrain and to sustain their force without appropriate supplies.⁶⁵ Adopting defensive guerilla warfare strategies, the Marathas were able to leverage geographical advantages of the Deccan, using their intimate knowledge to place enemies at a logistical disadvantage, which allowed them to successfully challenge Mughal authority and to create significant disruptions for European powers vying for control.

⁶⁴ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.79

⁶⁵ Gordon, *The Marathas*, p.75

The rise of the Marathas as a major player in the 17th century marked a significant turning point in India's political geography. The Mughals first started considering them a serious threat when, upon the death of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in the 1670s, the Maratha king Shivaji I Bhonsle defeated the Mughal general Shaista Khan and sacked Surat in Gujarat, a crucial Mughal port responsible for the export of valuable commodities such as cotton, opium, and tin.⁶⁶ Shivaji embarked on a tedious fort-conquering campaign in the 1670s, those previously confiscated from him as well as newer ones, starting with the capture of Sinhagad Fort south of Pune and four other forts, followed by another raid on Surat, raids into economically vital Mughal districts such as Khandesh, Berar, and Baglan, the reconquest of Maratha cities like Nasik and Pune, and then a move southwards to defeat the Bijapur Sultanate, sack Hubli and acquire more forts in Bijapur and on the southern Konkan Coast.⁶⁷ Shivaji's younger half-brother, Venkaji, simultaneously led a separate campaign southwards, ending with him conquering the kingdom of Tanjore (Thanjavur) and setting up the younger branch of the Bhonsle dynasty to rule there, effectively adding another vassal state to the empire. The Mughals, once the dominant power across northern India, were now faced with a formidable challenger, one that disrupted traditional Mughal administrative structures and challenged their imperial dominance by acquiring strategic positions and resources. The shift in the balance of power, trade routes, and territorial control in the region also threatened European ambitions, particularly as the Marathas came to exert a stronger influence over the flow of goods and placed economic pressure on their rivals.

In the pandemonium following Emperor Shah Jahan's death, between dealing with break-away vassal states like the Maratha Empire and the Bijapur and Golconda Sultanates, the Mughals had hardly been able to pay attention to the presence of the minute numbers of European merchants

⁶⁶ Gordon, *The Marathas*, p.71

⁶⁷ Gordon, *The Marathas*, pp.79-80

and soldiers arriving on the coasts. Meanwhile, the British East India Company, having established fortified strongholds along the western coast, had found itself at odds with the emerging Maratha power. By the beginning of the 18th century, as the Mughal grip over the subcontinental kingdoms began to disintegrate, creating a power vacuum, the British and Marathas found themselves in tight competition to double down on their own control and to expand further. The Marathas, from the 1710s onwards, adopted a more open approach towards foreign traders, allowing them to export goods from Maratha ports in exchange for heavy customs duties and were more willing to negotiate with European traders, recognizing the mutual benefits of such interactions. The British East India Company's refusal to comply with the Marathas on multiple accounts led to intensifying hostilities between the two. However, given the far reach of the Maratha Empire and some mutually detested enemies, the two sides were also at times forced to cooperate with one other, particularly against the French, a common adversary whose growing influence posed a threat to both sides. These interactions between the Marathas and English were shaped not just by their territorial aspirations but also by the broader political geography that required them to navigate a delicate balance of competition and cooperation.

In the 1710s, under the reign of Shivaji's grandson, Shahu I, a great deal of governmental power came in control of his prime minister, the *peshwa*, effectively turning the state into a rapidly-expanding hereditary military empire. What had originally been a series of patrimonial territories possessed by Emperor Shivaji in the late 17th century, stretching from the coast of present-day Maharashtra to about 120 km inland to the cities of Pune, Satara, and Kolhapur, had by the mid-18th century transformed into an expansive empire encompassing nearly the entire northern half of India.⁶⁸ After 1751, when the position of *peshwa* was made hereditary and the Maratha capital was

⁶⁸ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.1, p.54

moved from Satara to Pune, these great territories were divided amongst their most powerful noble dynasties to form an enormous confederation (see Fig. 15). Each of the families exercised regional autonomy and the freedom to collect taxes in their own territories as long as they paid heavy tribute to the imperial core. This included the Gaikwads, who controlled present-day Gujarat from Baroda (Vadodara); the Holkars, who controlled parts of present-day Madhya Pradesh from Maheshwar; the Sindhias, who controlled parts of present-day Rajasthan from Ujjain; the Bhonsles, the nearly-powerless descendants of Shivaji, who ruled from Nagpur and controlled the remaining territories all the way to Bengal; the vassal states of Kolhapur, Savanur (Savanuru), Gooty, and Tanjore (Thanjavur), the last one ruled by Venkaji's descendants; and at the imperial core, the Bhats, the ruling family of the *peshwas* themselves, who ruled Shivaji's original domains from Pune.⁶⁹

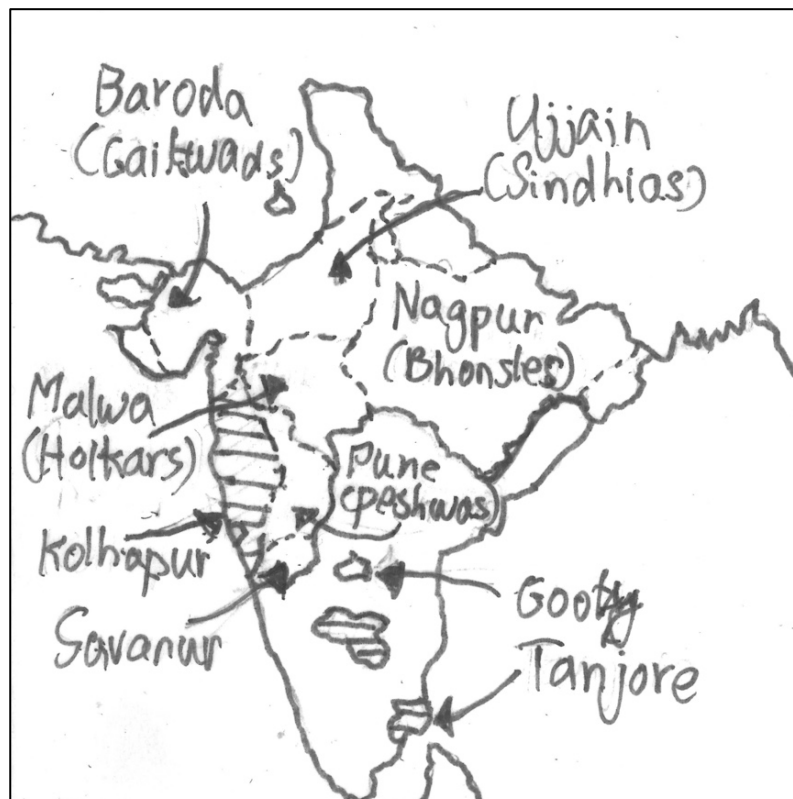


Figure 15. Territories and vassals of the Maratha Confederacy in the 18th century.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.1, p.54

⁷⁰ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.1, p.54

The Maratha territories stretched from coastal Maharashtra to the northern reaches of India, spanning several different ecological zones, from the fertile North Indian River Plain to the arid central Deccan Plateau to the rugged Western and Eastern Ghats mountain ranges. Governing such a massive territory necessitated a complex administrative structure, characterized by overlapping spheres of influence, shared military objectives, distribution of administrative powers among noble families, and eventually a breakdown of the confederacy in the early 19th century over dynastic feuds. However, while at the peak of power, the confederate structure allowed the Marathas to effectively govern vast territories, harness great amounts of resources, and mobilize a highly formidable military to respond to foreign threats.

The only few powerful kingdoms that remained besides those in the Maratha Confederacy were Bengal in the east and Hyderabad, Arcot, Mysore (Mysuru), the Carnatic, and Travancore (Thiruvithamkoor) in the south, which were the only few openings the Europeans found to expand their control in the first half of the 18th century. Part of the reason the British could obtain Bengal, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh after the Carnatic Wars was because the rest of the territories were hardly in reach – most of the territories north and west of there were firmly under Maratha control, invincible to the meagre number of European soldiers available to the British and French. The truth was, the European companies, even with metropolitan backing, lacked the necessary financial resources, manpower, and strategic knowledge to effectively take on the formidable Maratha navy. Despite suffering one crushing defeat after another, the British East India Company attributed its own failures to the incompetency or disloyalty of its Indian allies rather than critically examining its own decision-making processes.⁷¹ In fact, it was only in 1755 that the company defeated the Marathas for the first time, after half a century of consistently failing to make any strides. Even

⁷¹ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.68

so, as Jon Wilson argues, this victory was only made possible because the Maratha admiral Kanhoji Angre had passed away and the Company had by then worked with the Marathas enough to take advantage of them.⁷² The presence of the Marathas was, for an entire century, the single greatest factor affecting India's political geography, and several of their administrative boundaries, which built upon the Mughal divisions in the first place, would later carry on to the British administrative system and affect the state borders found in South Asia to this day.

When the Persian ruler Nader Shah invaded northern India and sacked Delhi in 1739, he triggered another period of immense political turmoil as northern India's power dynamics began to unravel further. The chaos produced an increasingly pseudo-anarchic system of states as Mughal subsidiaries, local rulers, and their competitors began to expand themselves, wipe each other out, and secure alliances with one another. Despite being surrounded by violence, European settlements remained protected due to their heavily fortified strongholds and armed forces, allowing European companies, particularly the British East India Company, to continue to prosper under relative security in the 1740s-50s while local kingdoms took each other apart.⁷³ This also allowed the British and French to rise to relative political and military importance, leasing out their troops to Indian rulers for warfare and protection. Their competitiveness was taken to another level by the War of the Austrian Succession in the mid-18th century, which had immense reverberations across the world, from the Seven Years' War in Europe, to the French and Indian War in North America, to the Carnatic Wars in South Asia, to the Anglo-Spanish War in South America. The Anglo-French struggle transformed the nature of European relations with Indian rulers from irrelevant trade partners to major territorial, diplomatic, and military actors who leased out mercenaries, built

⁷² Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.72

⁷³ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.84

fortifications, expanded territorially, administered populations, intermediated between warring rulers, and formulated coherent imperial projects.

The mid-18th century was thus a pivotal point in India's imperial geography as it resulted in greatly curtailing French imperial designs for a grand continental empire in India and clearing the way for the English to rise to ascendancy without any further European interference. The fall of the French was associated with the Carnatic Wars, a series of three large-scale wars involving a number of mighty kingdoms, so that, throughout the mid-18th century, the French and British constantly found themselves in conflict with each other as they allied with rival Indian kingdoms. These alliances were instrumental in shaping the course of the Carnatic Wars, as choices made by the British and French affected the military support they received from their Indian allies and ultimately affected who performed better on the battlefield.

There were two major outcomes of the Carnatic Wars: firstly, the French defeat at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 forced them to abandon most of their imperial plans in India, giving the British East India Company the opportunity to consolidate itself as the sole European power on the subcontinent; secondly, the British East India Company received a number of land concessions from Indian rulers in return for British military assistance, marking the moment after which the company transitioned from merely operating trade posts with soldiers to becoming a territorial, militaristic polity with administrative responsibilities and landholdings. The effective removal of the French, the shift in the nature of British control, and the erosion of Indian political authority resulted in profound changes in administrative units, revenue systems, and governance structures in India, laying the foundations for the establishment of the British Raj in subsequent years.

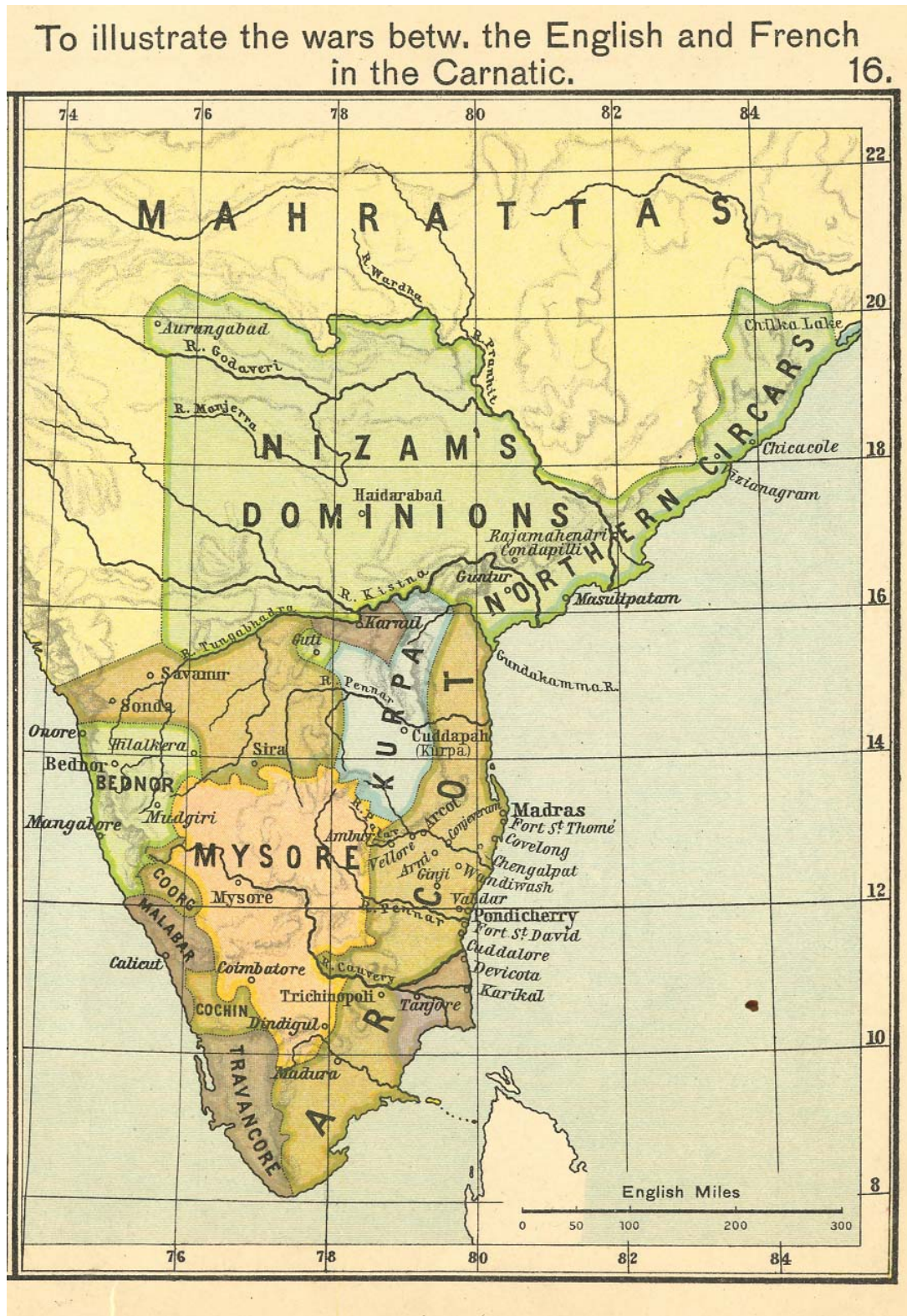


Figure 16. Polities in southern India just before the Carnatic Wars⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.16



Figure 17. Politics in India as a result of the Second Carnatic War⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.18

The Second Carnatic War (1749-54) began with a succession dispute between the Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan of Arcot and his rival, the French ally Chanda Saheb, over the right to the throne of Arcot, a south-eastern kingdom just inland from Madras, in present-day Tamil Nadu (see Figs. 16-17). Because Chanda Saheb and the French alliance appeared to have the upper hand until 1751, the Nawab of Arcot secured the assistance of the British East India Company's military forces in exchange for a 25-mile tract around Madras and a substantial sum of 20,000 rupees, effectively increasing the size of Madras by multiples and providing the company with a stronger foothold in the Carnatic.⁷⁶ The turning point in the war came when, five months after the French siege of Arcot, the Nawab's alliance, consisting of the British East India Company, the Maratha Confederacy, and the kingdoms of Tanjore (Thanjavur) and Mysore (Mysuru), killed Chanda Saheb in battle, but Jon Wilson argues that it was specifically the Marathas, not the British, who were responsible for the turning the tide in favor of the Nawab of Arcot.⁷⁷

The Third Carnatic War (1756-63) unfolded against the backdrop of the Nawab of Bengal, Alivardi Khan's death, which allowed the vast Mughal territory of Bengal to once again fragment into several competing factions. Bengal descending into conflict gave the ever-powerful Marathas an opening to begin incursions into the east, but like in southern India, the British East India Company was left in a favorable position, given its fortified port of Calcutta, which could continue to thrive as a refuge for Indian merchants and nobles fleeing the escalating conflicts in Bengal.⁷⁸ In 1757, at the Battle of Plassey, the most critical battle of the third war, British forces led by Robert Clive achieved a decisive victory against the French and their ally, Siraj-ad-Daula, Alivardi Khan's successor as the Nawab of Bengal.

⁷⁶ Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic Under the Nawabs*, pp.147-50

⁷⁷ Wilson, *India Conquered*, pp.88-89

⁷⁸ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.92

The British victory rid the British East India Company of the French menace, relegating the French to their five small colonies of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam, Mahé, and Chandernagore for the rest of their time in India, until they were returned to the independent India two centuries later. Thus, 1757 can be said to be the end of French imperial ambitions in India and a permanent reconfiguration of its political geography, solidifying British control over Bengal and facilitating British expansion into other regions in the following years.

In 1759, the British East India Company secured a substantial land grant of 30,000 square miles from the Nizam of Hyderabad, transferred in exchange for military assistance against the French alliance in the war, resulting not only in a robust alliance between the company and the Nizam, but more importantly, with the British acquiring the Northern Circars (a corruption of the word *sarkar*, meaning district), the first major region to fall under direct British control.⁷⁹ The Northern Circars, consisting of parts of present-day Andhra Pradesh on the central eastern coast, provided the British with another strategic foothold and access to valuable routes and resources, and with the Nizam in alliance, they finally had a contiguous, secure territory connecting Calcutta and Madras, covering nearly the entire east coast.

⁷⁹ Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, pp.126



Figure 18. The polities of India in the mid-18th century after the Carnatic Wars⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.1, p.54

The most important outcome of the Carnatic Wars, however, was the *diwani* of 1765, a Mughal order that granted the British East India Company official tax collection rights in the Mughal province of Bengal, which encompassed all of present-day Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa (see Fig. 18). The *diwani* rights effectively turned the company into a bureaucratic, tax-collecting, administrative empire with a population of more than 20 million living under its control, transforming the nature of British colonialism in India. It is important to note that the company's military prowess in battle did not necessarily grant them the ability to administer the population they found themselves in control of after the war, and as a result of their inability to acquire and exercise effective power in Bengal, their takeover after the Battle of Plassey only prolonged the period of political turmoil in the region.⁸¹ However, the post-1757 political landscape gave the British a new-found vision, one that involved it becoming the sole proprietor of the subcontinent through a carefully thought-out strategy to subjugate and absorb existing Indian polities through a variety of spatial tactics.

⁸¹ Wilson, *India Conquered*, pp.102-03

Chapter 5

Consolidation of British Power

Upon receiving the *diwani*, the British East India Company's stocks skyrocketed to double the corporation's value, prompting its directors to push the representatives in India to maximize their production of goods to export to Britain in an attempt to liquidate as much wealth from Bengal as possible.⁸² They were well-aware of the labor and resources Bengal could provide with its population of 20 million, which could be immensely beneficial to the British economy. However, not only did the administration neglect the opinions of all the Indians it sought to exploit, but it also let its actions be informed by dangerously uninformed notions of India held by the directors in London.⁸³ These ill-informed perspectives, entangled with partisan political games in the British Parliament, came to affect the Indian subcontinent halfway across the globe. Ultimately, it all came down to the flow of commodities that the directors in London cared about; it was the possibility of exploiting wealth, labor, and resources from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and the Northern Circars that brought to Britain the idea of building a wide-spanning exploitative empire.

However, despite granting the company the authority to tax Bengal's population, the *diwani* did not lead to any significant improvements in the corporation's financial situation. This was because the company's expenses associated with revenue collection grew at a similar pace to its ability to generate income, and to make matters worse, the outbreak of more conflicts in the late 1770s consumed the revenues the company had already derived from the *diwani*, nearly pushing the company to bankruptcy by 1780.⁸⁴ Financial mismanagement under the company meant that

⁸² Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.118

⁸³ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.119

⁸⁴ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.111

there were stronger incentives to pursue the extraction of wealth and resources to channel to Britain, leading to the further exploitation of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and the Northern Circars,

It was only by the 1770s that the British had some semblance of control over Bengal, however this was only because the financial troubles of the bankrupting company had prompted the British Parliament to intervene. To bail out the East India Company, Parliament passed the Regulating Act in 1773, declaring all of the company's territorial acquisitions to be the property of the British state and establishing a Governor-General of India and Supreme Council for the Bengal Presidency, with powers to govern the Bombay and Madras Presidencies.⁸⁵ This marked the first significant step taken by the British government to control Indian administration through the company, and hereafter, parliamentary oversight only increased. The act aimed to streamline governance and ensure greater control over the company's Indian territories through administrative and military support from the British state.

The East India Company's newfound backing from the British government enabled the development of an extensive civil administration system in Bengal and elsewhere in the British empire, one that created an elite class of imperial bureaucrats imported from all over the British colonies to form the backbone of the Indian civil service.⁸⁶ Civil servants and military officers now became the central actors of the new administrative infrastructure, making decisions on policy implementation over taxation, justice, and the civil code. In addition to access to new military technology, the number of soldiers in the British Indian army were also upgraded significantly, to 28,000 in Bengal, 18,000 in Madras, and 6,000 in Bombay, of which Bengal alone had about half of the 1,560 British commanders available in India.⁸⁷ This allowed the company to create a Bengal

⁸⁵ Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*, p.213

⁸⁶ Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*, p.220

⁸⁷ Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*, p.221

administration of about 250 British civilian servants, a few hundred British military officers, and more than 3,000 British soldiers.⁸⁸ The establishment of centralized governance structures, the expansion of military presence, and the importation of imperial bureaucrats all contributed to reducing the distance between Britain and India and entangling India in imperial Britain's global network of connections.

It cannot be understated how incredibly disastrous early British governance in Bengal was. The new subjects needed demonstration that the British regime could safeguard their well-being, protect the borders from external threats, promote local agriculture and industry, and ensure a satisfactory standard of living.⁸⁹ If maintaining legitimacy as competent rulers was the company's goal, it fell short in nearly every aspect, failing to account for the people's needs when it mattered, and instead placing their livelihoods and lives in jeopardy. The British administrators, who were often independently contracted to work on extraction projects, focused more on resource extraction than the sustainability of their extractions. Preoccupied with cutting down on costs, they invested inadequately in defending their borders, making the strategically-located and resource-rich Bengal vulnerable to external attacks from rival European and Indian polities. Their policies disrupted traditional agricultural practices and undermined local industries, causing a decline in agricultural productivity, loss of livelihoods, and economic instabilities. All these socioeconomic problems were compounded by exploitative policies such as the imposition of high taxes and negligence over unfair British trade practices. Unsurprisingly, the result was mass distrust in the regime's abilities, instability in the socioeconomic landscape, job insecurity, and a growing disillusionment and resentment among Indians.

⁸⁸ Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, pp.15-16, 218

⁸⁹ Wilson, *India Conquered*, pp.16-17

The most radical transformations under the British administration were economic in nature, to the extent that the institutionalization of numerous detrimental land revenue systems, neglecting pre-existing functional economic traditions, often reproducing inequality in rural areas. While the Mughal elites had maintained a degree of harmony by employing a flexible imperial structure catering to the unique needs of different communities differentially, the East India Company's structural overhauls and insistence on fixing trade privileges in pursuit of pure capitalistic profit challenged the essentially informal nature of Indian social relations, disrupting the socioeconomic equilibrium that had been maintained under the Mughals for so long.⁹⁰ The informal networks and relationships that had historically facilitated economic and social stability were replaced by a landscape privileging private interests and profits. The utilitarian British perspective delegitimized previous forms of dispute resolution and legal authority in the name of centralization, turning Indian society into one dominated by lords with private landed estates under the oversight of a unified administration.⁹¹ This had a particularly severe impact in rural areas, where agriculture was the primary economic activity, leaving farmers vulnerable to predatory landlords and to cycles of debt and poverty. The unique socioeconomic and environmental conditions of the various regions meant that different areas experienced varying degrees of devastation, some more severely than others.

Perhaps the most disruptive of these changes was the transformation in the nature of land ownership upon the implementation of the Permanent Settlement, an act mirroring the enclosure of common lands in Scotland a decade earlier. Designed to enhance land revenue, the Settlement turned feudal landlords, or *zamindars*, into permanent proprietors of land, turned peasants into freeholding renters who could be evicted, and allowed the British to confiscate newly privatized

⁹⁰ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.17-19

⁹¹ Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*, p.23

land when zamindars defaulted on agricultural taxation. Since agricultural output was in constant flux, enclosures became common in this period, leading to growing inequality in landownership and the frequent eviction of peasants from their traditional agricultural plots. The British would auction off the revenue collection rights for confiscated lands to the highest bidders, often the wealthiest zamindars and British administrators, who ended up accumulating far more vast expanses of land than had been previously possible. The land reforms, coupled with crop failures, droughts, and peasant evictions, led to a horrifying period in Indian history. Between 1770 and 1792, the British caused an extraordinary number of famines in India, killing of starvation and disease about 32 million people out of a population 180 million, or nearly 18% of the entire Indian population in just 22 years: an estimated 10 million in 1770, 11 million in 1783-84, and 11 million in 1791-92. These often-overlooked dark years might very well be one of the greatest man-made catastrophes in modern world history.

The vastness and diversity of the subcontinent, with its uncountable regions, languages, and cultures, meant the East India Company needed to create a cohesive administration capable of dealing with spatial variations in the socio-political landscape. Mismanagement, corruption, and growing debt meant that the company was more often financially strained than not. As the British engaged with Indian society, cultural exchanges and interactions became unavoidable, meaning questions on British values and ideals, cultural assimilation, and Indian customs and practices were bound to arise. All of these situations brought great issues to the forefront of conversations. Robert Travers argues that the company's challenges in dealing with the administration of new territories, financial instability, and ethical dilemmas increased British anxieties on the nature of their broader global imperial project, resulting in a shift towards an absolutist, militant, expansionary approach

that necessitated the use of violence to pacify states, particularly those perceived as threatening.⁹² In a way, India served as a testing ground for British ambitions of global dominance, the breeding ground for the very same mindset and instruments of British imperialism that would be used years later to secure and expand their dominance over their other colonies across the world, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia.

By the late 18th century, post-Mughal states were rapidly commercializing, expanding their economic reaches, nurturing a class of powerful landowning notables, and evolving even further into centralized and militant fiscal-administrative type governments with ever-growing standing armies and governance structures.⁹³ The new commercial classes and taxation instruments gave states economic and military influence and made the British ever more anxious. To the British, groups like the Sikhs, Nepalese, and Burmese, known for their military prowess, were threatening opponents attempting to consolidate their own power and expanding to nearby regions. In Punjab in the north, the Sikh Confederacy emerged as a powerful regional force with a well-organized military and strong martial tradition. In Nepal in the northeast, the formidable and strategic Gurkha Kingdom was expanding its territories to what would become the present-day boundaries of Nepal. To the east, the Burmese Empire had a well-developed, centralized government that repeatedly engaged in conflicts on India's eastern frontiers. Given the spatially strategic locations of Punjab, Nepal, and Burma, the British saw it fit not only to neutralize these threats but to also take over.

Punjab, the fertile and agriculturally-productive region in the northwest characterized by its five rivers from the Indus Valley, was home to twelve *misls*, or sovereign states, that banded together to form the Sikh Confederacy. The Misls were voluntary bands bound together politically and spiritually, enjoying a shared Sikh faith and military culture that had evolved from historical

⁹² Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*, pp.5-6

⁹³ Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*, p.11

attempts of the Sikh Gurus to protect their followers from external threats. Prior to the British expansions, the Sikh Confederacy had already been a destabilizing force against the Mughals, but after the mid-18th century, it proved to be an especially strong center for resistance against Mughal, Maratha, and British imperial designs, particularly in the face of military threats. It is easy to see why the Sikh Confederacy was one of the last strongholds of Indian resistance to be broken by the British, determined to defend its sovereignty and to resist external domination.

The Sikh Confederacy was a collective of twelve Misls, each representing a sovereign martial community in Punjab. These were the Phulkian, Ahluwalia, Bhangi, Kanhaiya, Ramgarhia, Singhpuria, Panjgarhia, Nishanwalia, Sukerchakia, Dallewalia, Nakai, and Shaheedan Misls, home to enormous cities like Lahore, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar.⁹⁴ The Misls were not easy to overcome, and it took the British two Anglo-Sikh Wars with prolonged resistances and fierce battles to finally subdue them and establish control in Punjab. However, more than anything else, the British got lucky and capitalized on internal divisions within the Misls. The Confederacy was forced to an end in 1799 when the Sukerchakia Misl, under the leadership of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, formed the Sikh Empire and annexed six other Misls. Meanwhile, as the spoils of war, the Nishanwalia Misl was annexed directly by the British, the Singhpuria Misl was partitioned between the Sikh Empire and the British, and the three other Misls allied with the British to become semi-autonomous princely states. The end of the Sikh Confederacy marked a significant change in Punjab's political landscape, bringing centralized authority under the Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikh Empire in the northern half, and growing British influence and control in the southern half.

⁹⁴ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.2, p.55



Figure 19. The territorial extent of the Kingdom of Mysore under Sultan Hyder Ali⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.1, p.54

The largest force in the south still out of British reach, Mysore (Mysuru) prevented much British expansion into the south well into the late 18th century, and its partitioning in the 1780s-90s changed the theatre completely, for it completed the British pincer movement to take over the continent. The rise of Mysore as a threat began after the Carnatic Wars, during which a military officer named Hyder Ali, serving under the ruling Wodeyar family of Mysore, stood out as an exceptional leader and rose to become the army commander, fighting alongside Chanda Sahib and the French. In 1761, he assumed the role of Sultan of Mysore and expanded greatly to take over a substantial portion of southern India (see Fig. 19). Through the 1760s, Sultan Hyder Ali remained engaged in the long, drawn-out Maratha-Mysore Wars with the Maratha Confederacy, which had allied with the Nizam of Hyderabad and the British East India Company to reclaim land it had lost to Mysore earlier.⁹⁶

Through the 1780s-90s, his successor, the equally brilliant Tipu Sultan, allied with the French, continued resistance against invasions from the British, Hyderabadis, and Marathas, which involved complex geopolitical maneuvers to defend the enormous kingdom against multiple adversaries on multiple frontiers. Whittling away at Mysorean territories bit by bit, the British alliance executed a pincer movement overwhelming the Mysorean army, ending the Anglo-Mysore Wars with the Treaty of Seringapatam (Srirangapatna) in 1799, which dealt a final blow that reduced Mysore to a puppet state under British control (see Fig. 20).⁹⁷ The four Anglo-Mysore Wars resulted in the loss of a great deal of Mysore's territories, which were then partitioned between the British East India Company, the Peshwas of the Confederacy, and the Nizam of Hyderabad, though the Marathas ultimately forfeited their claim (see Fig. 21).

⁹⁶ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.2, p.55

⁹⁷ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.2, p.55



Figure 20. Politics in southern India in the 1790s involved in the Anglo-Mysore Wars⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.19

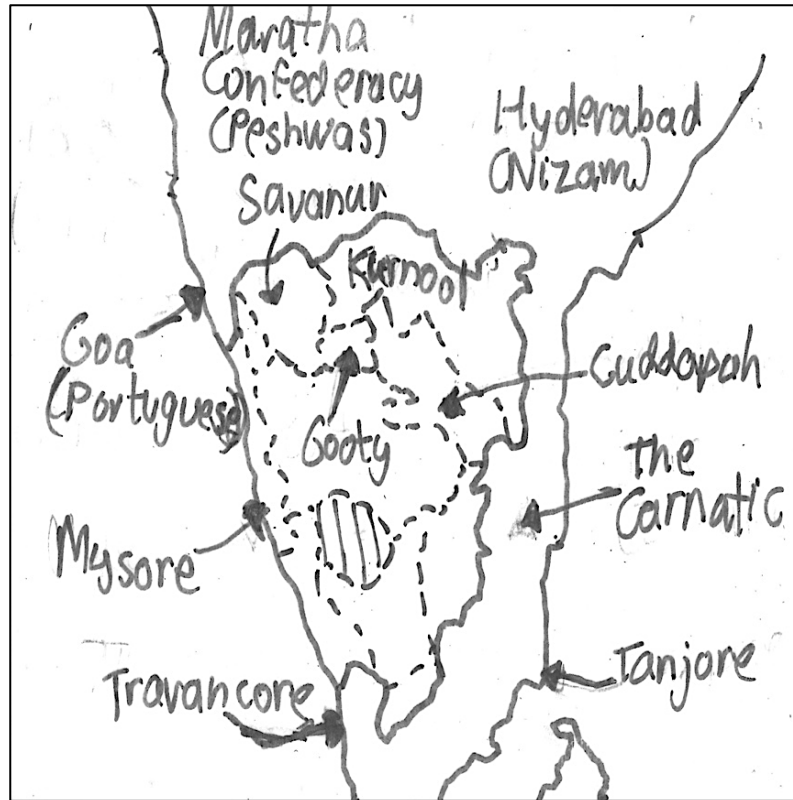


Figure 21. The partitioning of the Kingdom of Mysore at the end of the 18th century⁹⁹

The Nizam, who had entered an alliance with the British for military assistance against Mysore, needed to pay for the British soldiers used in the wars, but could not fulfil his payments to the British. As a means to settle his debt, the British annexed his half of the partitioned territory, setting a precedent for the instrument they would employ to annex princely kingdoms in the future: “subsidiary alliances.” According to the system, kingdoms entering subsidiary alliances with the British would have to dissolve military alliances with any other powers, take on British soldiers to protect their kingdom from foreign incursions, and pay for the maintenance of these British troops, failure of which resulted in British annexation of the kingdom. The clever caveat here was indeed the financial responsibility that Indian rulers had to take on, for it was nearly impossible to pay for the British troops immediately after wars had depleted kingdoms’ treasuries. The Nizam’s failure

⁹⁹ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.2, p.55

to fulfill his debt was a major mistake that affected numerous rulers all over the subcontinent, but they can only be blamed minimally, given their desperate need for military reinforcements in times of crisis. Essentially a protection racket executed through forced treaties, the subsidiary alliance system became a common instrument used by the British to expand northwest from Bengal to Delhi, annexing Rohilkhand, Oudh (Awadh), and other small kingdoms on the North Indian River Plain in that direction. It provided a means for the British to expand northeast and encircle any remaining kingdoms until they gave in, securing crucial trade routes, natural and human resources, and political influence along the way.

Another issue was that kingdoms under subsidiary alliances were essentially puppet states whose foreign policy and martial decisions were more or less controlled by the British. A great deal of the alliances had to take on a British Resident, a representative of the East India Company who acted as an advisor to the Indian ruler, however in practice in most cases, the Resident was virtually in control of most administrative decision-making, ensuring that actions were taken in accordance with the British government's wishes. In cases where rulers under alliance resisted or refused cooperation, the Residents steered decision-making towards neutrality, keeping the rulers out of the East India Company's way and often indulging them in luxurious distractions. Beyond that, it was often through coercion that the British forced kingdoms to enter subsidiary alliances, meaning the British often got to choose whom to annex, based on strategic calculations, and ensured the kingdoms they chose were doomed from the start.

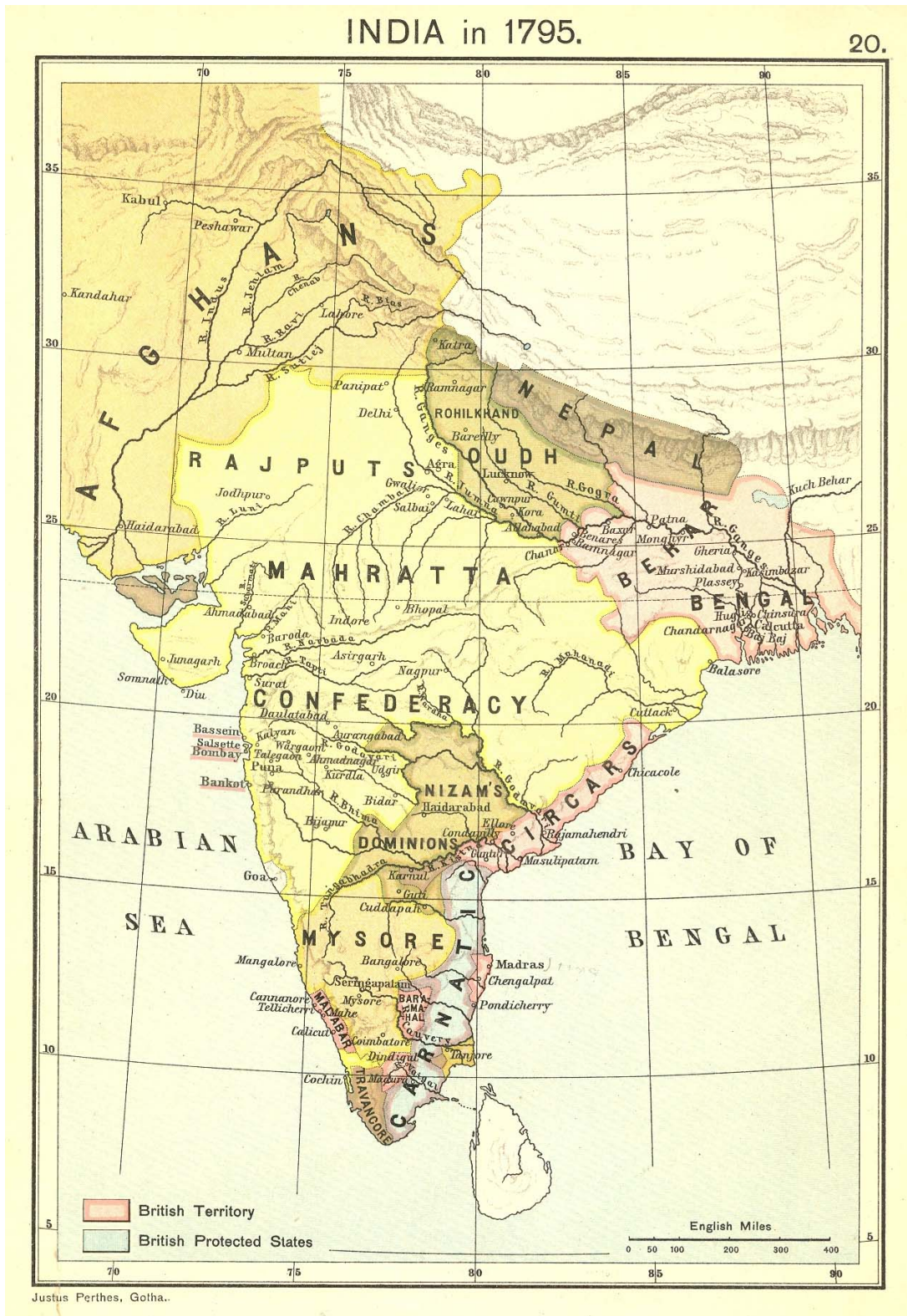


Figure 22. Polities in India at the end of the 18th century.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.20

By the end of the 18th century, the British had covered nearly every Indian territory that was not under the control of a princely state; most princely states had also submitted to the suzerainty of the British by then (see Fig. 22). This marked a turning point in Indian history, for it ushered in a period of rapid changes, one where legal, financial, and bureaucratic authority became paramount. With most of India either unified under the British domain or part of the “autonomous” princely states by the 1790s, the British set up a larger, ever-more bureaucratic civil administration that gave them a legal framework to justify exploiting the newly unified India, but as in Bengal, their policy changes often disrupted the informal systems of life that had ensured stability in the past, resulting in more frequent unrest across India.¹⁰¹ The growing Indian landowning class allowed corporate bodies, including the British administration, to collect revenue through land taxes extensively, to enter into contracts with landowners to produce cash crops using exploitative peasant labour, and to extract resources through plantations and mining operations.

The exploitation of land and resources was often concentrated in areas with fertile lands, suitable climates, or valuable mineral deposits, so these regions became targets for British revenue collection and resource extraction activities. The exploitation of peasant labour further exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities and led to the exploitation and impoverishment of the rural poor. The emphasis on cash crops like indigo and cotton disrupted the more sustainable agricultural and resource management practices that had maintained the conditions of the natural environment responsibly for centuries. British changes would eventually lead to the ruination of the same natural and human resources that India had been prized for throughout centuries of history.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.123

Chapter 6

The New Era of British Supremacy

In the early 19th century, a majority of Indian polities were either directly ruled by the British or indirectly as “princely state” protectorates; the only major threats remaining were the Marathas, Sikhs, Burmese, Nepalese, and Rajputs (see Fig. 23). British efforts now went into imposing orderly administration in their new direct domains through tactfully-designed Western institutions, integrating the princely states into their direct domains using legal and military tools, eliminating enclaves of Indian resistance through conscious, spatially-strategic pincer movements, and reorganizing resources, labor and industries based on comparative advantage. This allowed them to consolidate their position of supremacy in and to focus on spurring industrialization and urbanization, all of which came with several detrimental side effects.

This was the period in which the commercial urban ports of Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai), and Bombay (Mumbai), grew at an unprecedented rate. The East India Company administration, with expanded oversight from the British state, began investing heavily in developing communication and transportation technologies, such as the construction and improvement of canal and road systems, telegraph and postal infrastructure, and the railroad network, resulting in growing capital and financialization, changes in land use patterns, and the functional localization of industries. Unfortunately, they were incredibly detrimental in multiple ways, producing and reproducing poverty in rural areas and allowing for the exploitation of human and environmental resources.

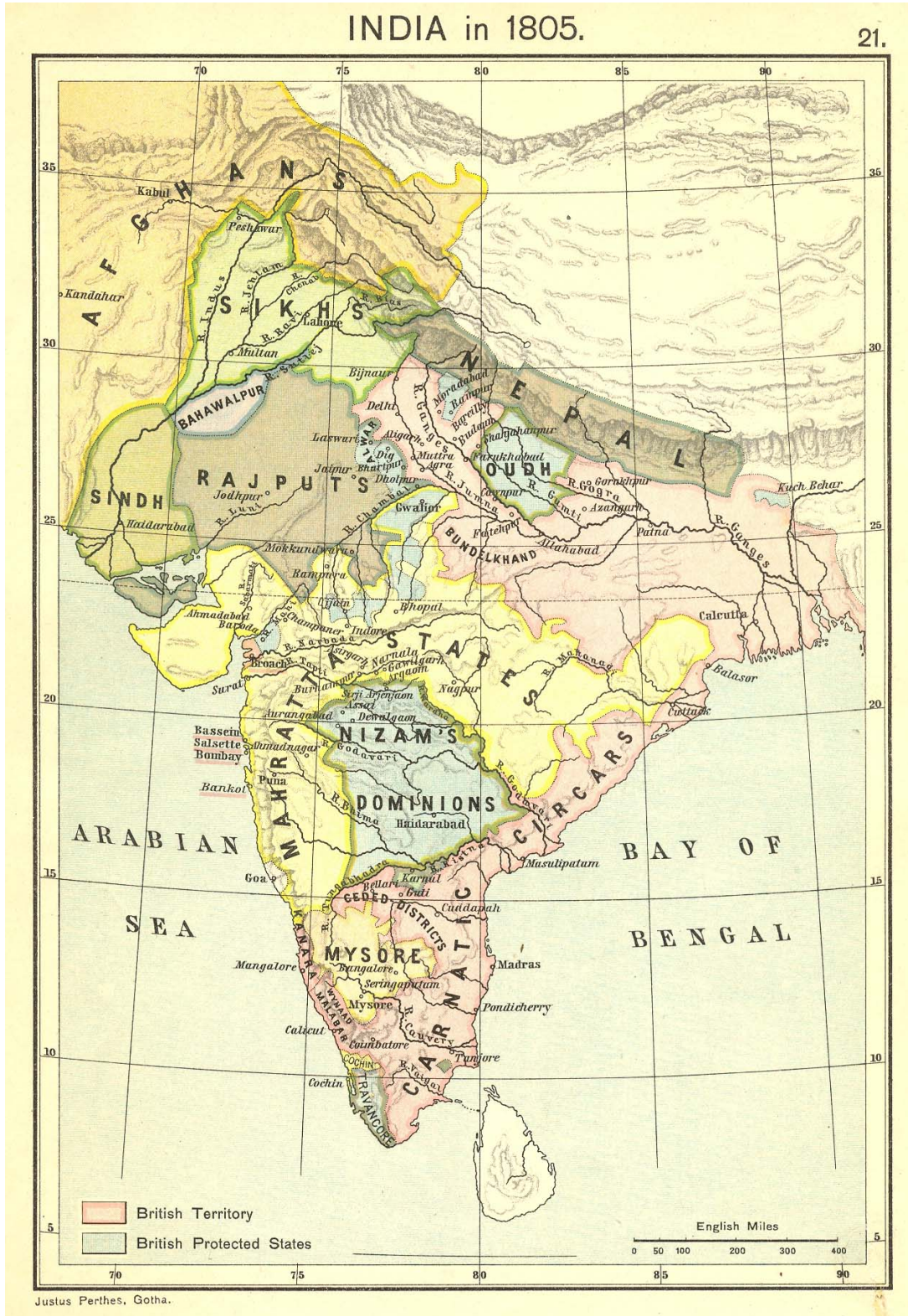


Figure 23. Politics in India at the beginning of the 19th century¹⁰²

¹⁰² Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.21

Since the First Anglo-Maratha War (1775-82), the Maratha Confederacy had been in a state of disarray from internal disagreements between the five major ruling dynasties: the Bhonsles, Holkars, Sindhias, Gaikwads, and Bhats. The imperial core was now led by the Peshwa Baji Rao II, an ally of the British, but his authority was limited and the Confederacy was losing cohesion. After the signing of the Treaty of Bassein in 1802 and the end of the Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-05), divisions between the five houses became more pronounced and created a serious schism between them. The Sindhia and Holkar houses emerged as major rivals, but the Sindhias won out, gaining ascendancy within Maratha ranks while the British stepped in to fill the resulting power vacuum.

After the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-19), the Maratha Confederacy, entirely weakened and ineffective, was dissolved completely, allowing the British to annex most of its territories, including the twenty or so former Maratha vassal states of Rajputana. The British ally, the Peshwa Baji Rao II, entered a subsidiary alliance with the British that relegated the remaining Maratha pockets to the status of princely protectorates. With this arrangement, the Marathas and Rajputs permanently ceased to be a threat to the British. The dissolution of the Maratha Empire was greatly important, as it allowed the British to annex the vast territories of western and central India, permanently reshaping the political geography of the subcontinent yet again (see Fig. 24).



Figure 24. Politics in India after the dissolution of the Maratha Confederacy¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.22

With large-scale sources of political instability out of the picture, the British now had to contend with dispersed, fragmented pockets of aggravated communities with their own grievances and concerns. Given how aggrieved and resistant some communities were to their rule, the British needed to stabilize and control them individually to prevent the possibility of localized movements turning into widespread violent rebellions against British authority. Therefore, from the 1830s, the British became increasingly reliant on absolute coercion monopolized by the state police and military forces, buttressed by “legal” control legitimizing their actions, from rampant corruption to violent subjugation to unjust annexations.¹⁰⁴ This was their attempt to become the exclusive and paramount source of power, control, and authority on the entire subcontinent.

The British Parliament’s Government of India Act of 1833 (not to be confused with the Regulating Act of 1773) transformed the East India Company from a commercial to administrative structure with a “Government of India,” the central authority with legislative powers superseding provincial autonomy and a strict, hierarchical civil service that now included Indians by necessity of scale. To establish a direct chain of command from the British Parliament to the Governor-General and Council in India to their provincial subordinates, the British created an absolute legal system aimed at standardizing governance and ensuring consistent exercise of Parliament’s desires over the entire subcontinent.¹⁰⁵ Under the new system, British administrative-soldiers called Collectors, rather than local lords, became responsible for collecting taxes from entire villages, though they were often obliged to cooperate informally with local authorities who possessed the resources and knowledge to make collection possible.¹⁰⁶ As Jon Wilson writes, this transformed the space within which India was conceptualized as an entity, because now, “rather than being

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.176

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, pp.133-60

¹⁰⁶ Washbrook, “South India,” pp.479-516

conceived as a collection of different political authorities India began to be seen as a single terrain on which the consistent and unaccountable exercise of British power became to be imagined”.¹⁰⁷ The reorganization of states was a precarious task, for there were more than 600 princely states to be reorganized, and the British had to navigate the complexities of local politics to ensure that the reorganization process respected existing structures of power. While integrating princely states, the British did not always accurately assess the true hierarchy of power divided among local rulers, which led to some strange cases where they failed to recognize royalty where it existed and instead handed over “royal” status to non-princely families, turning them into “princes.”

As they imposed orderly administration on their new direct domains, integrated princely protectorates into existing domains through Residents or annexation, eliminated remnant enclaves of independent territories, and expanded northwest and east to counter external threats, the British systematically organized and reorganized administrative boundaries as they saw fit. Thus, when the Bengal Presidency, stretching all the way from Delhi to Calcutta to Hyderabad, grew so large as to encompass nearly half the subcontinent, the territories between Delhi and Bihar were carved out and merged into the new North-Western Provinces in 1833, coinciding with present-day Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The North-Western Provinces excluded the areas around Allahabad, Lucknow, and Ayodhya, which constituted the princely protectorate of Oudh (Awadh). Creating the North-Western Provinces allowed the British to execute more effective governance and ensure better coordination of resources. The reorganization of the administrative structure influenced the distributions of power, resources, and governance across India’s different regions, serving strategic interests and administrative efficiency. Most importantly, it contributed bit by bit to the process of integration by which the British unified India into a singular polity.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, *India Conquered*, p.212



Figure 25. Territories and vassals of the Sikh Empire in the 1840s.¹⁰⁸

During the 1840s, the Sikh Kingdom in the north reached the peak of its territorial extent, extending beyond Punjab to encompass the areas of Baltistan, Ladakh, Jammu, and Kashmir and bordered by the enormous states of Afghanistan to the northwest, Sind to the southwest, India to the southeast, Tibet to the east, and China to the northeast (see Fig. 25).¹⁰⁹ The raja of Jammu, Ghulab Singh from the Rajput Dogra family, initially served as a vassal to the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh, however, following Ranjit Singh's death, began asserting more sovereignty and making incursions into Kashmir and Tibet.¹¹⁰ In the 1840s, multiple conflicts and power struggles unfolded in the region as Afghans invaded the Sikh Empire from the northwest, the Sikh-Dogra alliance attempted to expand imperial influence in all directions, and the British pressed through southeast

¹⁰⁸ Prepared by Ishaan Anavkar, adapted from Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.3, p.56

¹⁰⁹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.3, p.56

¹¹⁰ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.3, p.56

Punjab to expand India's frontiers. The Sikhs found themselves caught in a volatile geopolitical environment surrounded by belligerent competitors for land.

At the end of the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-46), Ghulab Singh signed the Treaty of Amritsar with the British, which allowed him to purchase Jammu back along with Kashmir, creating the new princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, while the British occupied the rest of the Sikh Empire (see Fig. 26).¹¹¹ Following intense unrest in Punjab and increasing border pressures, the region broke out into the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49), as a result of which the British annexed the entire polity into India as the new state of Punjab in 1849. It is interesting how the decisions made by the British to favor one side or another affected the legitimacy and perceptions of a state's right to exist more than a century later. While the Dogras were only nobles and not royals, the British recognition of Jammu and Kashmir as legitimate to form an alliance in the wars against the Sikh Empire allowed the Dogras to be seen as an entrenched Hindu royal family. Their reign over the majority-Muslim population of Kashmir is, in fact, the root of the immensely bloody Kashmir conflict that persists to this day. Certainly, there is an intricate interplay between politics, geography, and identity that affects long-term power dynamics and geopolitical factors.

¹¹¹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.3, p.56

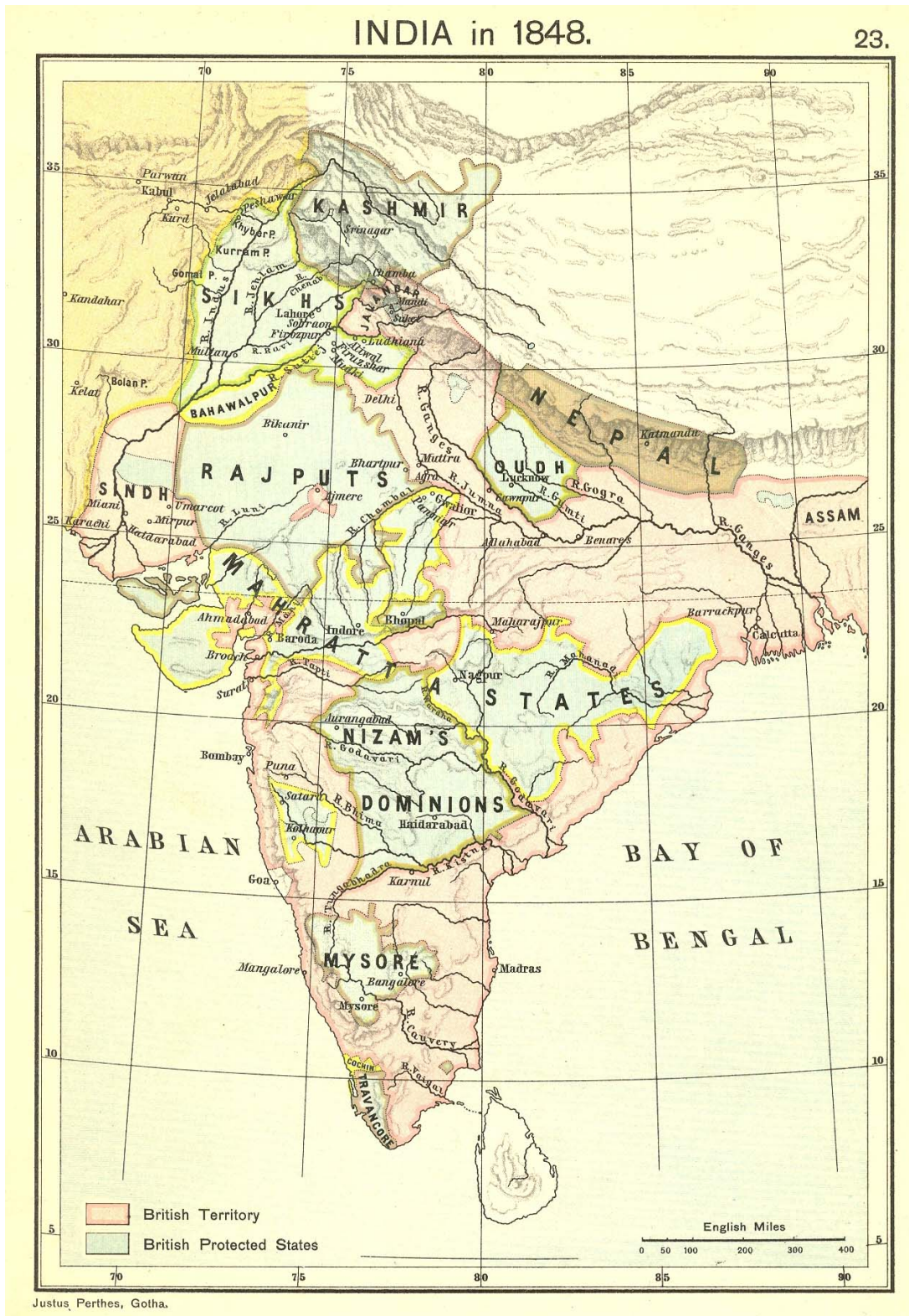


Figure 26. Politics in India as a result of the First Anglo-Sikh War¹¹²

¹¹² Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.23

After the British had established stable administrative control over its direct domains, they embarked on a campaign to integrate the semi-autonomous princely states into their direct domains through legal and military tools. Even though the princely states were in theory already puppet states, the British goal was to annex as many of them as possible into the existing territories to erase any other sources of legitimate authority. Since the princely states had a legal basis to remain autonomous on paper, the British had to find other methods to justify annexing them and removing the royal families from power. They employed four techniques to justify their annexations of the princely states: the “doctrine of lapse”, allegations of misgovernment, the settlement of debts (in lieu of payments on British troops), and mutual exchanges of land parcels with rulers by treaty.

The doctrine of lapse was a unilateral policy devised by the British that allowed them to abolish the princely status of a kingdom and turn it into a direct dominion if the ruler died without an explicitly-recognized male heir. Rulers without children or brothers were not allowed to choose a successor either and would have to give up their kingdom. The British disregarded existing lines of succession and imposed their own desires over Indian rulers, which undermined the entire point of the princely state system. In Satara, which was the miniscule remnant state of the Marathas, the Raja Shahaji Bhonsle had an adopted son but when he died in 1848, the British refused to recognize the son as a natural heir and annexed Satara. Sambalpur, annexed in 1849, had its own traditional line of succession, but the British chose to set up a puppet outside the line, and after uncontrollable unrest from the ruling family, ended up taking over Sambalpur. In the case of Jhansi, the Raja Gangadhar Rao had a legally-recognized, officially-adopted son and a highly accomplished queen, the Rani Lakshmibai, who the British had agreed to give the throne to; however, after Raja Gangadhar Rao’s death in 1853, the British reneged and annexed Jhansi, killing Rani Lakshmibai in the assault, a story that has immortalized her a national feminist icon today. In Nagpur, another

weak remnant of the Maratha Empire, Raghuji III Bhonsle, the nearly-powerless descendent of Shivaji, too died without an heir despite having eight wives, leaving Nagpur to be taken over when he died in 1853. All of these cases illustrate that not only was the doctrine of lapse already divisive but was also repeatedly misused by the British.

Wherever possible, the British also accused rulers of incompetency and misgovernance to confiscate kingdoms, in accord with the doctrine of lapse, which allowed for the annexation of kingdoms with “manifestly incompetent” rulers. Often, British allegations were crafted for ulterior motives rather than genuine concerns about governance. In 1831, the now-partitioned Mysore, under the rule of a British puppet from the Wodeyar family, the Maharaja Krishnaraja III, was annexed under claims of maladministration after growing local insurrections. The protectorate of Coorg, whose raja had come to power with the help of the British by allying against Mysore, was in the clear until 1834, when he broke his alliance with the British and got annexed in return. The princely state of Oudh (Awadh) was not a threat to the British but was economically strategic, so they deposed their ally, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, on the false pretense of misgovernment in 1856, citing his indulgence in pomp and splendor as evidence of negligent administrative capacities.

The British also acquired land from bankrupting states in lieu of the payment of debts, as in the acquisition of the Hyderabad Assigned Districts, districts ceded to the British in 1853 by the Nizam of Hyderabad, Afzal-ud-Daulah, Asaf Jah V.¹¹³ The Nizam, a longstanding ally who had maintained cordial relations with the British since the Carnatic Wars, often required large numbers of British troops to help control his enormous swathe of territory in the central Deccan Plateau. With the rising costs of countering insurrections in certain districts, he was repeatedly unable to make payments for the maintenance of British troops, and as a result, ceded to the British by treaty

¹¹³ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of India*, Plate VII.A.3, p.56

the regions of Berar in the north and Raichur Doab in the southwest. These became the Hyderabad Assigned Districts, directly administered by British India while still nominally recognizing the Nizam as a ceremonial figurehead. This arrangement allowed the British to make all the important decisions while maintaining the traditional stability the Nawab's authority provided to the Deccan. The acquisition of the Hyderabad Assigned Districts was also useful because Berar was known for its fertile agricultural lands and the Raichur Doab was a crucial waterway between the Krishna and Tungabhadra Rivers in the south, adding to the British territories yet another spatially strategic location.

Lastly, there was the question of colonial settlements controlled by other European powers. By this period, the British had substantially limited the presence of its rival colonial powers, confining the French to their five settlements of Pondicherry, Mahé, Karaikal, Chandernagore, and Yanam, and the Portuguese to their three settlements of Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu. Even more limited, the last few Dutch settlements were at Nagapattinam, Tranquebar, and Pulicat, and the Danish at Serampore. The British began purchasing the four settlements until the Dutch and Danish were completely eliminated from the continent by 1845,

The acquisition of these settlements marked the culmination of the entire process by which the British unified the subcontinent. By 1857, India was entirely under the control of the British state, governing the territories either directly through the East India Company or indirectly through native rulers who had accepted or had been forced to accept British suzerainty under the princely state arrangement (see Fig. 27).

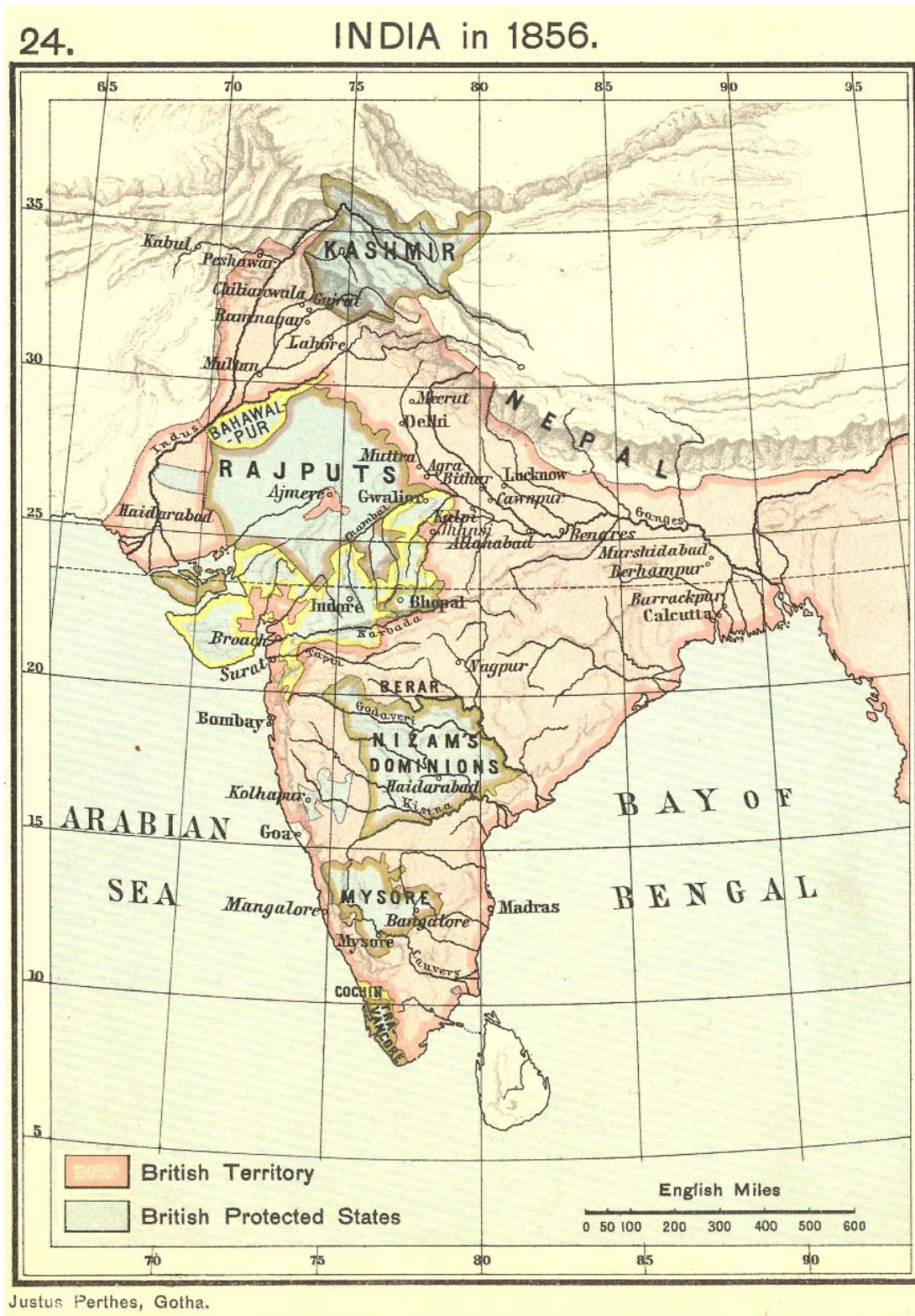


Figure 27. Politics in India just before the Indian Rebellion of 1857¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India*, p.24

The administrative structure implemented by the British was dynamic, constantly evolving to integrate polities in a variety of ways. The hierarchy of jurisdiction under the British East India Company, and later the British Raj, was by nature perplexing, born out of human improvisation for more than a century. Territories under direct British rule were divided into Presidencies and Provinces, of which the Presidency designation was only reserved for the three enormous, principal territories of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta (see Fig. 28). The three Presidencies held immense political and economic influence within their borders, governing the entirety of the subcontinent. Of the indirectly-ruled princely states, the approximately 500 smaller kingdoms were grouped into administrative collectivities called State Agencies, while a few large kingdoms were designated as Residencies, each with their own “Resident” British advisor to control their foreign and military policy (see Fig. 28). States Agencies and Residences were responsible for ensuring the kingdoms’ adherence to British policies and interests and acted as liaisons between the British and Indian rulers. Each of these presidencies, provinces, state agencies, and residencies was further divided into districts or sub-divisions for English administrative use, while many continued to retain their indigenous divisions too. While this description is grossly oversimplified, the total administrative system was incredibly comprehensive, strategic, and flexible, accounting for efficient governance over a vast, diverse geography through variations in structure.

To confound the hierarchy further, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was administered directly by the British Crown well before 1857, unlike subcontinental India, and was part of British South Asia but not British India (see Fig. 28). Also governed as part of India were outlying overseas territories on the Arabian and Malay Peninsulas, including Aden, Malacca, Singapore, and some other minor tracts.¹¹⁵ Another complexity in geographical organization was that the Presidencies were spatially

¹¹⁵ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, p.60, Plate VII.B.1

dispersed across the entirety of India to encompass the princely states, such that the “autonomous” kingdoms were simultaneously inside and outside of British jurisdiction (see Fig. 28).¹¹⁶

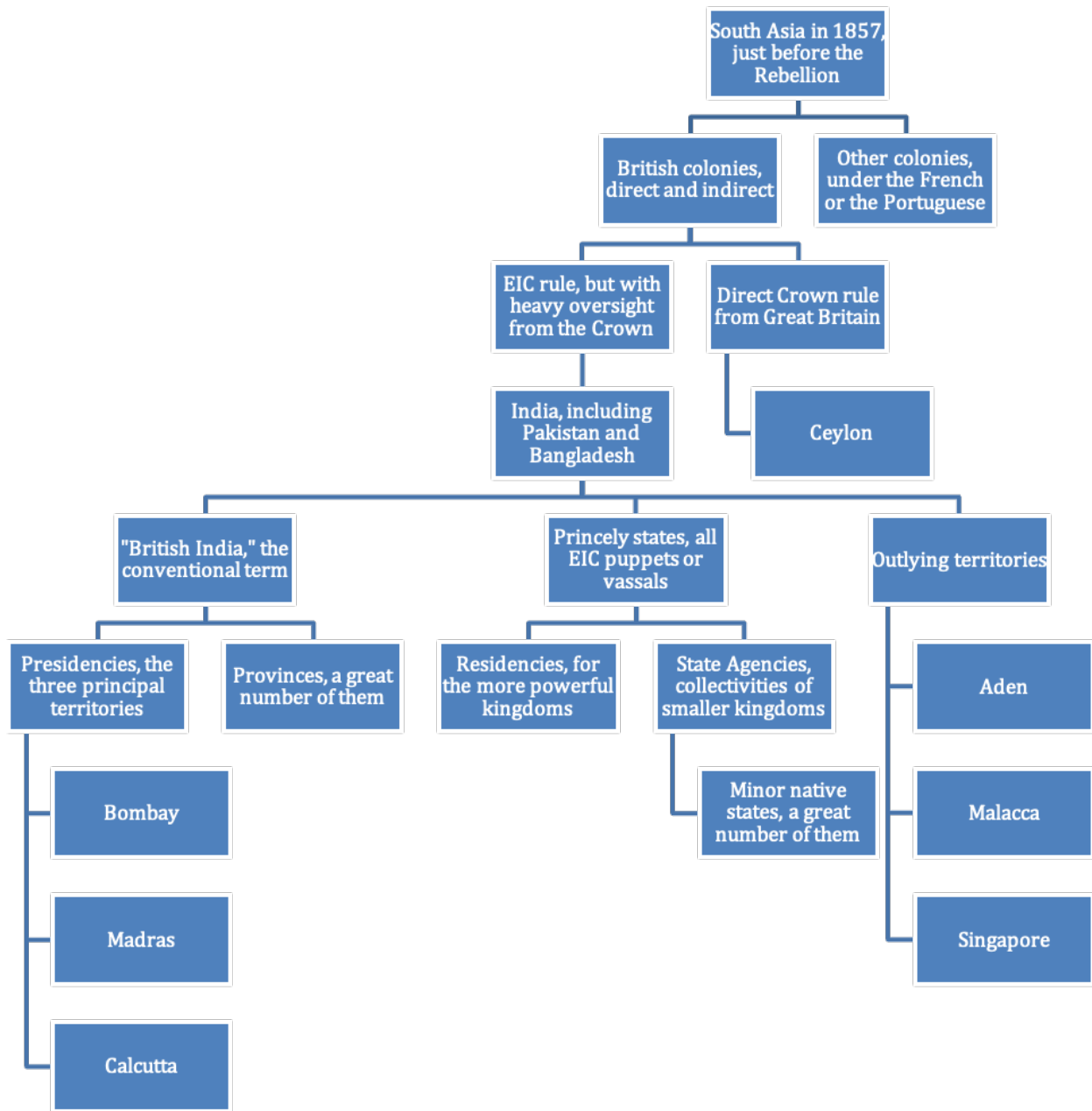


Figure 28. A simplification of administrative divisions in India just before the Indian Rebellion of 1857

¹¹⁶ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, p.60, Plate VII.B.1

Shortly afterwards, India would break out into the Sepoy Mutiny or Indian Rebellion of 1857, challenging British authority and marking the beginning of a new phase in Indian history. The Indian Rebellion is sometimes called the First War of Independence, and rightly so, given the subcontinental scale of uprisings, from northern to central India, in both urban and rural areas, with violent altercations in Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, and Jhansi. After quelling the rebellion, the British Crown abolished the East India Company's role in administration and assumed direct control over India as a Crown Colony informally called "The British Raj." The rebellion sparked discussions in both Britain and India on national identities, anti-colonial sentiments, and the future trajectories of the Indian independence movements.

1857 thus marked the beginning of the official "colonial period" in India, though one may argue it had begun much earlier in 1757. No matter which point one considers to be the start of the colonial period, it is impossible to comprehend the events of post-1857 India without recognizing the political, economic, environmental, social, urban, and demographical landscapes that typified India's geography before 1857. There is no doubt, then, that pre-1857 colonialism was inextricably tied to some of the greatest geographical and historical transformations on the Indian subcontinent in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

If geography complements history by emphasizing localities and regions, networks and circulations, and national and intercontinental systems, the Indian colonial context is rich with spatial phenomena to be studied. The subcontinent's diverse topography and strategic location in the Indian Ocean world historically fostered substantial variations in its localities and regions, facilitating its vital role in intricate regional systems and global networks for the exchange of goods, people, and ideas. Physical and environmental factors had a long-lasting impact on India's historical trajectory, shaping diverse regions with distinct climates and resources, varied social and economic systems, intricate caste distinctions, religious pluralities, and linguistic complexities, resulting in unique regional identities and political landscapes. This was further shaped by human agency driven by a variety of motivations and strategies, transforming the splintered and disparate post-Mughal Indian polities into one of the richest, most important colonies in the world.

The perspective that historical geography provides us helps us gain a better understanding of the scale, structure, tension, and change seen in Indian geography between 1498 and 1857. Thus, to gain novel insights into colonial processes in pre-1857 India, one must examine differentiations in various spatial aspects such as administrative divisions, intercultural interactions, settlement formation, environmental manipulation, and resource exploitation, some of which I briefly touched upon. Each sub-topic, among many others, from infrastructural development to urban morphology to economic organization, warrants its own detailed study. To conclude, the following are the spatial insights developed through this study that enhance our understanding of Indian geography.

Firstly, early European influence in India in the 16th and 17th centuries was contingent on Europeans' ability to dominate naval trade and technology, to transform coastal towns into central

markets, and to maintain naval links with their metropolitan governments via the sea. In contrast, the inability or negligence of land-based Indian empires to evaluate their geographical advantages led to them underestimating the importance of waterways and failing to developing their navies. This played a vital role in the vast amount of wealth that European traders were able to acquire and explains why so many early European settlements were concentrated in the Ganges Delta system. The exception was, of course, the Marathas, whose naval supremacy was capable of annihilating European fleets throughout the 18th century.

Secondly, the maritime trade networks created by Asian and European traders in coastal India connected them to the intercontinental network of transformations and human interactions, allowing for the greater exchange of people, goods, and ideas. In fact, global connectivity was so interconnected that contemporary changes and cycles of trade and power in other parts of the world greatly informed changes in the dominance of the Dutch, Portuguese, Danish, French, and British in India. The failure of the Portuguese in India can be traced to the Crown's worsening bankruptcy in Portugal, a turn towards the colonization of Brazil, and the Catholic Church's proselytization schemes that prevented the mobilization of Indians. Meanwhile, the downfall of the Dutch can be attributed to their inability to manage their spice and textile networks between South, Southeast, and East Asia, and an enhanced focus on the Dutch East Indies upon acquiring the nutmeg trade from the British in exchange for New York City.

Thirdly, Mughal decline in the early 18th century was characterized by a period of intense turmoil, an increasingly pseudo-anarchic system of states and the collapse of imperial cohesion, as local rulers, Mughal subsidiaries, and external competitors began to fragment into independent or semi-autonomous states, expanding their imperial territories, eliminating or absorbing rival states, and creating alliances and vassal states. This gave the British and French a window to enter

the geopolitical landscape as diplomatic actors, intermediating between conflicting Indian empires and kingdoms in exchange for privileges in trade. However, the fragmentation of Mughal imperial power also allowed regional empires to rise to power, notably the Maratha Confederacy, Carnatic Sultanate, Hyderabad Nizamate, and Kingdom of Mysore.

Fourth, the global Anglo-French rivalry in the mid-18th century transformed the nature of European relations with Indian rulers from irrelevant trade partners to major territorial, diplomatic, and military actors who leased mercenaries, built fortifications, expanded territorially, collected taxes, intermediated between Indian rulers, administered populations, and formulated an imperial project. This was a result of the Carnatic Wars, at the end of which the British received from the Nawab of Bengal a *diwani*, or tax collection rights, to the Mughal provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. This was the first time the British could legally extract wealth from an Indian population, and the incentive to profit from more revenue prompted more expansions and annexations of Indian land.

Fifth, the British instituted detrimental land revenue systems in late 18th-century Bengal that neglected pre-existing informal but functioning traditions in favor of standardization and pure capitalistic profit. Their inflexible requirements for land revenue and inability to account for agricultural fluctuations reproduced debt cycles, exacerbated inequality, and often led to famines throughout rural India, killing millions from starvation. The enclosure of common lands, evictions of peasant farmers, and auctioning of the newly-privatized lands allowed land to be concentrated in the hands of a few British and Indian landlords, creating a new property-based farming system primarily benefitting the landowning class. This allowed the British to collect extensive revenue through land taxes, to contract landlords to produce indigo and cotton using exploitative peasant labour, and to extract resources through plantations and mines.

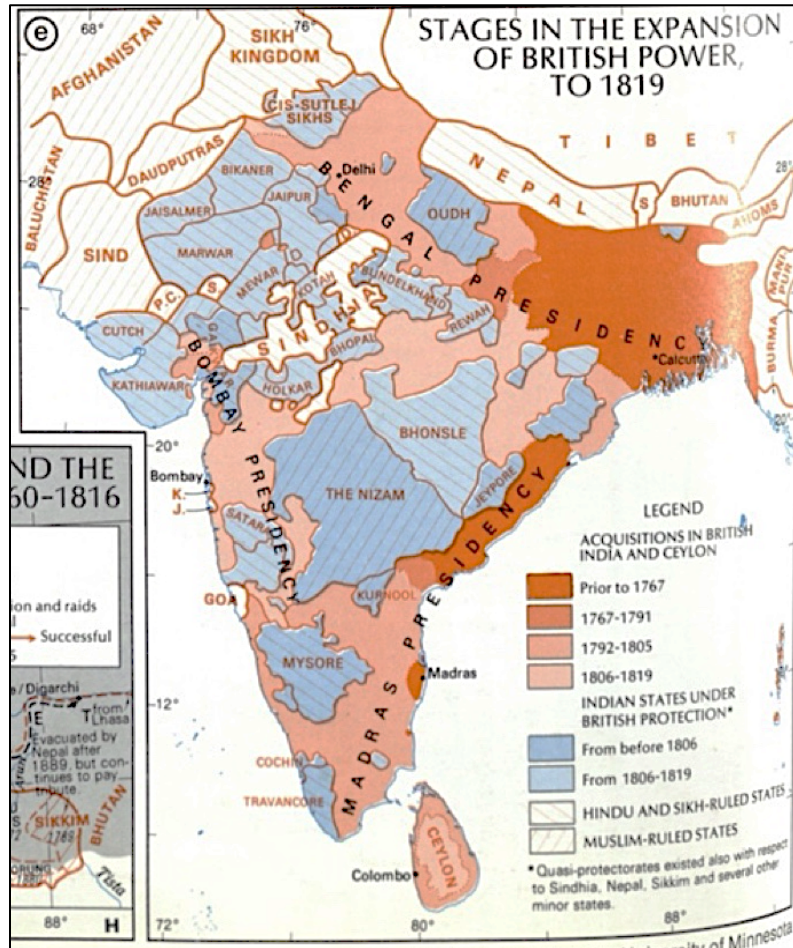


Figure 29. The spatial evolution of British territorial acquisitions in India, from 1767 to 1857¹¹⁷

Sixth, British efforts in the late 18th century went into expanding their territories northwest towards Delhi and southwest down the east coast to surround and attack any remaining imperial competitors, such as the Marathas, Rajputs, Sikhs, Mysoreans, and Gurkhas. Over the rest of the century, over multiple expansionary phases, the British continued to contain threats, eliminate or absorb smaller kingdoms, and integrate more territories into their domain of direct rule (see Fig. 29). Indian kingdoms that wished to retain autonomy became princely state protectorates, advised by British Residents, but they were autonomous on paper only. The British agenda was to annex and integrate as many princely states as possible into their direct domains.

¹¹⁷ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.2, p.55



Figure 30. The spatial evolution of British territorial acquisitions in India, from 1767 to 1857¹¹⁸

Seventh, British efforts in the early 19th century went into imposing orderly administration in their new directly-ruled domains through the use of absolutist legal and military force, coercing the princely states into joining their direct domains using legal and military tools, eliminating any remaining enclaves of resistance through conscious spatially-strategic pincer movements, and reorganizing resources, labor and industries differentially based on comparative advantages. One by one, the British absorbed a great number of princely states through the doctrine of lapse, debt settlements, allegations of misgovernment, and mutual exchanges, until total unification was achieved by 1857 (see Fig. 30).

¹¹⁸ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.A.3, p.56



Figure 31. The major administrative divisions of India in 1857¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Plate VII.B.1, p.60

The spatial expansion of British India across the subcontinent can be seen as a story of geographic integration, transforming the region from a series of diverse, fragmented polities into a uniform and unified subcontinental polity (see Fig. 31). Through decades of administrative reorganization, infrastructural development, standardization of the legal and educational system, demographic changes, economic integration, cultural and social transformations, and violent subjugation of resistance, the British politically unified the subcontinent. The British were not the first to unify India – that had been done several times before – but the sheer scale of their transformations was unprecedented and remains unparalleled to this day.

The legacies of colonial engagement with Indian empires and kingdoms become evident when looking at the creation of places and the networks of relationships between them today, from the organization of administrative divisions to the importance of coastal cities like Bombay to the economics of the national transportation network. The modern-day nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, as they exist today, reflect in their geographies the distinct character, structures, and systems of colonialism that dominated their landscapes for centuries. This study then leaves us with the recognition that human interventions shaped world geography as much as the other way around. Modern states are thus the product of decades of interactions between humans and the landscape, and to take up a rigid view of nationality and belonging is to ignore the realities of state formation.

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