

## DA COLONIZAÇÃO À INDEPENDÊNCIA DA ÍNDIA BRITÂNICA<sup>1</sup>

### *From Colonisation to Independence of British India*

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#### **Abstract**

The present work entitled "From Colonization to the Independence of British India" proposes to make known all the process that led to the colonization of India by the English. The encounter of cultures, situated in a time and a space, where British rule dictated the laws of human coexistence between two peoples and two cultures, testifies to the colonialist praxis that, over three centuries, the English ethnocentrically imposed on the Indians, whose negative discrimination made them the subjects of His Majesty's second class. The awareness of its humiliating situation, the emergence of new international winds that in the mid-twentieth century were favorable to the self-determination of peoples under the leadership of spiritual guides led India to inevitable decolonization. The declaration of independence came at a cost: Indians had to deal with a heavy British heritage, where establishing a physical and cultural boundary to accommodate Indians and Pakistanis might be feasible, in an equation acceptable to the Kashmir problem.

#### **Resumo**

O presente trabalho intitulado "Da Colonização à Independência da Índia Britânica" propõe dar a conhecer todo o processo que levou à colonização da Índia pelos ingleses. O encontro de culturas, situado num tempo e num espaço, onde o domínio britânico ditou as leis da coexistência humana entre dois povos e duas culturas, testemunha a práxis colonialista que, ao longo de três séculos, os ingleses impuseram etnocentricamente aos indianos, cuja discriminação negativa os fez súbditos da segunda classe de Sua Majestade. A consciência da sua situação humilhante, a emergência de novos ventos internacionais que em meados do século XX foram favoráveis à autodeterminação dos povos sob a liderança de guias espirituais, levou a Índia à inevitável descolonização. A declaração de independência teve um custo: os indianos tiveram de lidar com uma pesada herança britânica, onde o estabelecimento de uma fronteira física e cultural para acomodar indianos e paquistaneses poderia ser viável, numa equação aceitável para o problema de Caxemira.

**Key Words:** *British India; Colonization; Descolonization*

**Palavras-chave:** *Índia Britânica; Colonização; Descolonização*

**Data de submissão:** janeiro de 2021 | **Data de publicação:** dezembro de 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> Trabalho realizado para a Unidade Curricular de *Cultura Inglesa (Pós) Colonial* ministrada pela docente Maria Isabel Carvalho Gomes Caldeira Sampaio Aidos.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This work is part of the UC "Cultura Inglesa (Post) Colonial", taught by Professor Isabel Caldeira, in the academic year 2018-2019, Degree in Modern Languages, at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Coimbra.

According to the title, "From Colonization to the Independence of British India," some of the major landmarks that characterize and frame the entire process leading to the colonization of some parts of India by the British since the arrival of the first English Company of the East Indies in 1612, until 1947, the year in which India achieved independence.

The first refers to the arrival of the British to India, namely the relations between the English and the Indians, particularly the encounter of two cultures so different; The second will be the national campaign for independence of the Indians and the whole process that led the colony to independence.

## **2. THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH**

In 1498, Vasco da Gama discovered the sea route to India. From there the European countries began to control territories in the Asian subcontinent, where they settled their colonies. Könemann states that the British will have arrived in India between 1611- 1612, stating that in the early eighteenth century the British exerted their influence in three regions: in the region of Bombay, Madrasta and Bengal (Könemann, 2010).

Bruno de Campos mentions that the British arrived in India in a context of decadence: the medieval Christian world of the West was not only in crisis, but was finishing the period of almost a thousand years we call the Middle Ages. So the personal motives that have led British citizens to venture to and from the East are the most diverse: from adventure, statehood, business interests and plunder, all the British have found motivational pretexts for embark on that adventure (Campos, 2000, p. 3). The British soon realized the need to establish a territorial base. This need became imperative because the British immediately perceived the urgency of having representatives to reside in India to buy the cheaper products and more in the time of the harvests. For this reason, says Moore, the British quickly established large warehouses in India, from which they began to expand their territorial domination in India (Moore, 1983, p. 13).

In the year 1600, in the reign of Elizabeth I, the English created the East India Company (EIC), under the auspices of His Majesty, with the aim of promoting trade with the India. It was informally known as the "John Company". Their splendor, the organization of their own army, transformed it into a kind of State within State: "they were involved in the Company, owners of ships, merchants and private buccaneers, loosely united by a council of directors" (Magnoli & Serapião Junior, 2006). and "offered financial support to the viceroys who accepted the highest interest rates and promised to favor their business" (Panikkar, 1977). The English Company was headquartered in London, and Governor-General established in Calcutta. He had a delegation of powers from the British government and operated with the professionalism of a company specializing in colonial trade. If in the sixteenth century trade was limited mainly to the transaction of spices, in the century. In the 17th century a revolution took place: "many products of the fertile valley of the Ganges converged on the ports of Bengal through the Marwars merchants scattered throughout North India, who would soon be the holders of royal power" (Campos 2015, p. 5).

In the following centuries, the Company's competences were widened and its power, similar to that of a state-owned state, grew:

Between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Company organized several tax collection systems, which did not hide from being of great concern to the same. In Bengal, tax collectors were zamindar (tax collectors in Mongolian times, now recognized as private rural landowners, of whom peasants became renters); in the south, through the ryotwari (each peasant was personally responsible in the tax field); in the northeast, through the Mahalwari (tax collectively on the villages) (Campos 2015, p. 5).

This monopoly of the Company had a consequence for the popular classes, not only for the alteration of the status of the soil, until then prerogative of the state, began to allow the privates to seize it, but other measures were taken:

New economic relations were introduced in the villages, a demand that impoverished the peasants and placed them dependent on moneylenders in poor harvest years, with a tendency also to commercialize the production, corroding the balance and the autarkic character of the peasant economy. The major manufacturing cities of the interior, such as Dhaka, Patna, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, suffer population losses, unlike the port regions where the process of subordination of the Indian economy to British imperialism, such as Calcutta and Bombay, takes place (Campos 2015, p. 5).

To illustrate this practice, Davis transcribes the testimony of an American journalist who in 1877 passed through India and states that "English influence in the East is just another name for English tyranny. There is no greater despotism nor more absolute than the government of India. Powerful, irresponsible, cruel ... [the] money that England draws from India every year is a serious drain on the country, and is among the causes of its poverty "(Davis, 2002, p. 14). Campos corroborates this thesis by stating that "the English not only extracted a large part of the capital that foreign trade had brought to India, returning to Europe between 1757 and 1780, about 40 million pounds" (Campos 2015, p. 8).

### **3. NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE**

In the year 1847, the last independent Indian state, the Punjab<sup>3</sup> was conquered by the East India Company troops, and later became a British colony. Despite the military power of the British, this occupation was not peaceful, as Campos says:

the Indian people charged their freedom with the Revolt of 1857-58. A revolt that was led by the old ruling classes, who wished to regain their lost powers, and even relying on the support of enthusiastic masses over vast territories, had no powers and organization to fight against the British, and was defeated in 15 months (Campos, 2015, p. 9).

Panikkar reports that since the end of the uprising until 1919 the British empire was no longer threatened by India (Panikkar, 1977). Chesneaux explains that this failure of the Indians is due, on the one hand, to the heterogeneity of the rebels and their lack of understanding among them, and, on the other, to the technical superiority of the British troops (Chesneaux, 1976).

The Indian resistance was unable to return the lost independence. The policy change of the British authorities moderated the attitude of the English towards the Indian principalities, trying to maintain them instead of destroying them.

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<sup>3</sup> Punjab "or" Panjab "is a state of northwest India. It borders the Pakistani Punjab to the west, Jammu and Kashmir to the north, Himachal Pradesh to the northeast, Haryana to the south and southeast, Chandigarh to the southeast and Rajasthan to the southwest. The total surface area of the state is 50,362 km<sup>2</sup>. From [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab\\_\(%C3%8Dndia\)](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_(%C3%8Dndia)). Retrieved 10/01/2019.

This political change has caused greater resilience in Indians. The national movement came to be led by Westernized intellectuals and the moderate Indian bourgeoisie who believed that the development of India needed the experience of the British and therefore gave the British the benefit of the doubt by acting constitutionally within the limits of the law. Campos says that these ideas were present "in the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the future nationalist and revolutionary party; of a very moderate posture, calling for greater Indian participation in the British Legislative Councils (from Calcutta and the provinces), or the admission of Indians to the main posts of the Indian Civil Service (Campos, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Chesneaux says that this moderate posture had no practical results. It was necessary to wait for the reaction of congressmen like Tilak who criticized the posture of the westernistas and the alignment of the moderate congressmen, having provoked an internal confrontation. It was in this debate that the Indian national movement renewed itself and gained a new impetus (Chesneaux, 1976), but this impulse was not very limited practically until World War I. With the war and the Soviet Revolution the Indian national movement suffered a major transformation

Formerly exclusively political, it began to incorporate economic and social issues, adopting even the idea of plans. The intellectual life until then of strong western influence began to be contested among the intellectuals themselves. The development of European socialist parties (much more revolutionary than now) has also had its contribution, such as the English Labor Party, supporting the Indian national movement since its founding (Campos 2015, pp. 9-10).

At the end of the war, we saw a renewal of the Indian movement, to which various factors contributed: the emergence of the figure of Gandhi, with his ideas of "non-cooperation" and "nonviolence", Congress, the formation of various trade unions, the emergence of the Indian Communist Party and its influence on workers 'and peasants' organizations (Chesneaux 1976; Panikkar 1977).

Debates on independence became part of the agenda of the Indian national movement: supporters multiplied, popular forces and trade unions mobilized, the issue of independence debates became inevitable. The British repressed these movements with force, brutality, with arrests and murders. Nehru was arrested eight times, Tilak was arrested at least twice (Chesneaux 1976). Gahandi becomes the central figure either within the Indian national movement, or in the party of Congress that would lead the Indians to independence.

The English soon realized that independence was inevitable. For this reason, the great goal of the English in relation to India, has become: to gain time to achieve independence more convenient to their interests. Of the various attempts to divide the Indians and shake the unity of the national movement for independence, it would be the religious division that opposed the Hindus to the Muslims that ended up revenge:

The British contributed to religious dualism when in 1905 they divided the region of Bengal, highlighting Muslim areas, and with the electoral reforms of 1909, 1919 and 1935, which among others, decided to separate representation for Muslims. When independence was actually achieved in 1947, the Muslim majority regions formed the new state of Pakistan (Campos, 2015, pp. 9-10).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The elaboration of the present work allowed me to investigate, to reflect and to understand some of the contours that characterize and frame the process that led to the colonization of India by the English. Under the title "From Colonization to the Independence of British India," I divided the present paper into two parts: the first, dedicated to the arrival of the English in India, I try to make known the historical circumstances in which the British arrived in India and the role played by the English East India Company in imposing the British model of colonization on the Asian subcontinent, where economic, military and cultural hegemony emerged that dictated the rules governing relations between the two peoples for three centuries.

Secondly, I try to make known the role of the national movement that emerged in the 19th century, in order to shake off the yoke imposed by British imperialism: from the first failed initiatives, to the revitalization of the movement that, following the First World War, the leadership of charismatic figures such as Nehru, Tilak, Gahandi, the Indians were able to lead India to independence. The price India paid for independence was a lot!

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