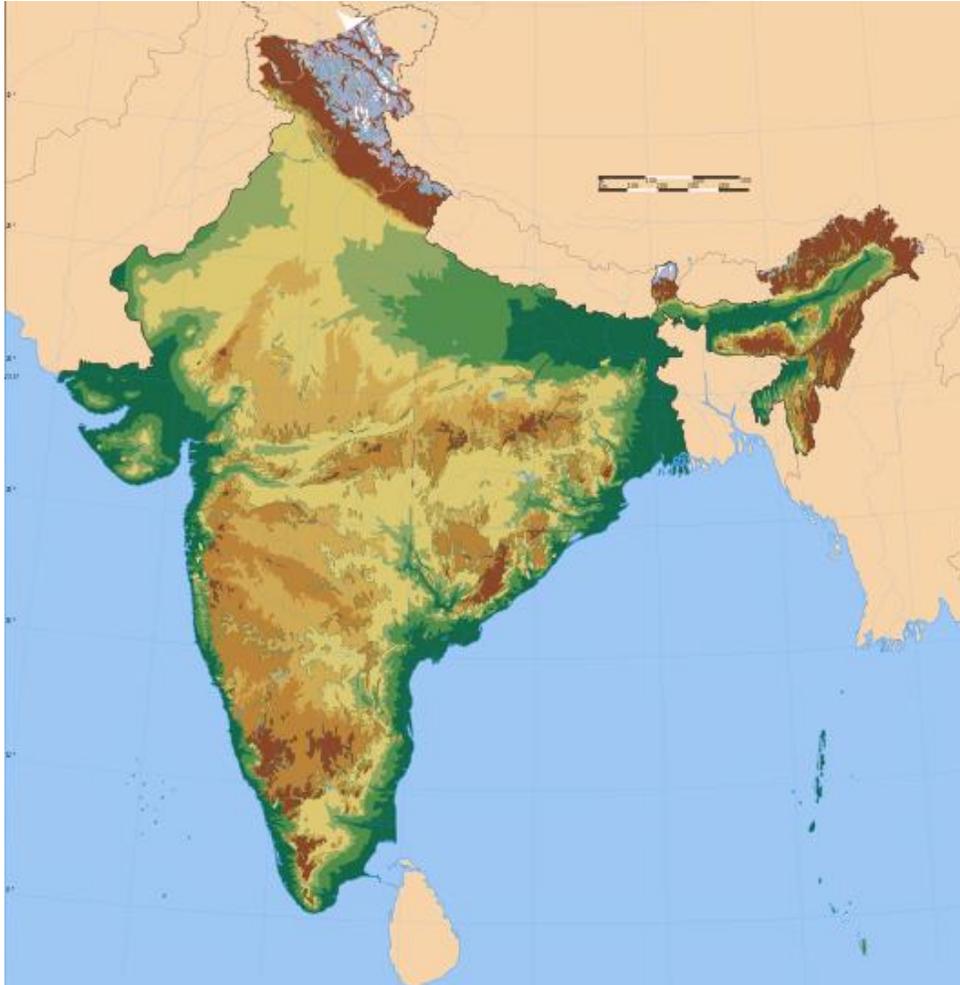


Concise Essay on the Gupta Kingdom (320-550) and Mughal Empire (1526-1858) in India

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The Gupta Kingdom (4th-6th centuries) and the Mughal Empire (16th-19th centuries) in India

Origins. How did India's Gupta Kingdom and Mughal Empire originate?



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_physical_map.svg

Physical Geography of India

Both states began with a strong warrior founder-king.

Chandragupta I, an Indo-Aryan Hindu from Magadha (in

northeastern India), founded the Gupta Kingdom (320-550) by reunifying North India through military force, replicating the formation of the earlier Mauryan Kingdom (324-184 BCE).

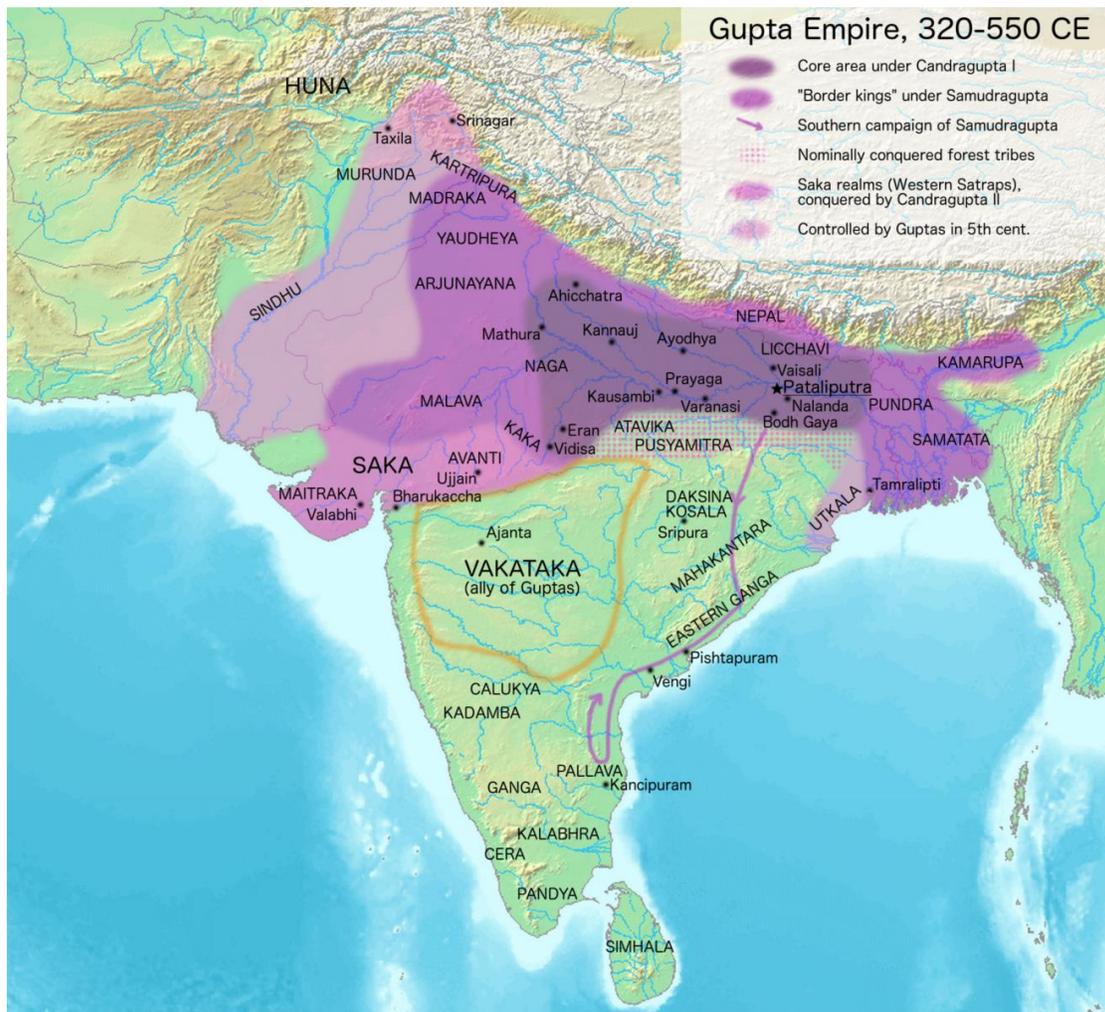


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maurya_Empire,_c.250_BCE_2.png

Mauryan Kingdom (326-184 BCE) – c. 250 BCE

Zahiruddiin Muhammad Babur, a Turcomon Muslim from Ferghana (in Central Asia) led the Mughal military invasion of

India and set up the Mughal Empire (1526-1858) with cannons and cavalry. Both states reached their full strength and territorial apogee under their third rulers who were brilliant militarists and effective administrators – Chandragupta II (ruled 375-415) and Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar (ruled 1555-1605).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gupta_Empire,_320-550_CE.png

Gupta Kingdom (320-550 CE)

Both empires controlled about two-thirds of the Indian subcontinent (all except South India), and the Mughal Empire incorporated much of current Afghanistan as well.

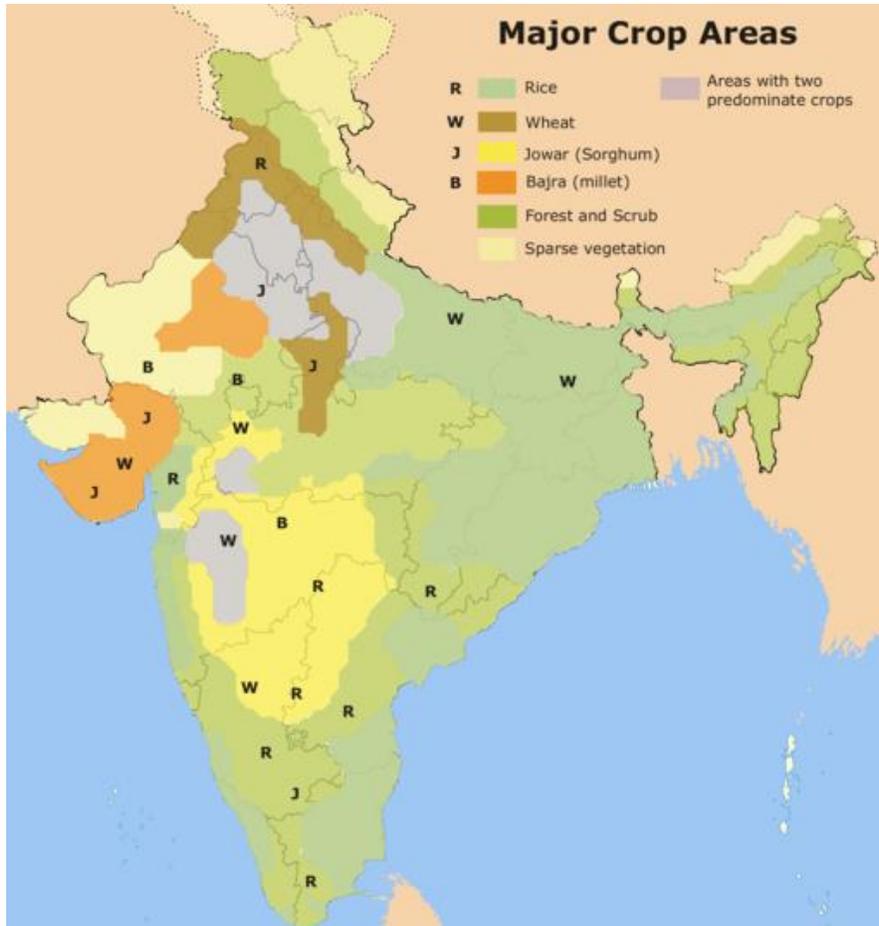


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mughal_Empire,_1605.png

Mughal Empire Under Akbar, 1605

Wealth. What were their sources of wealth and power – agriculture, foreign trade, or foreign conquest? The taxation of

crop agriculture was the main source of wealth for all early Indian empires. In both instances, agriculture prospered because of political stability, improved roads, and increases in areas farmed rather than new techniques that gave higher crop yields.



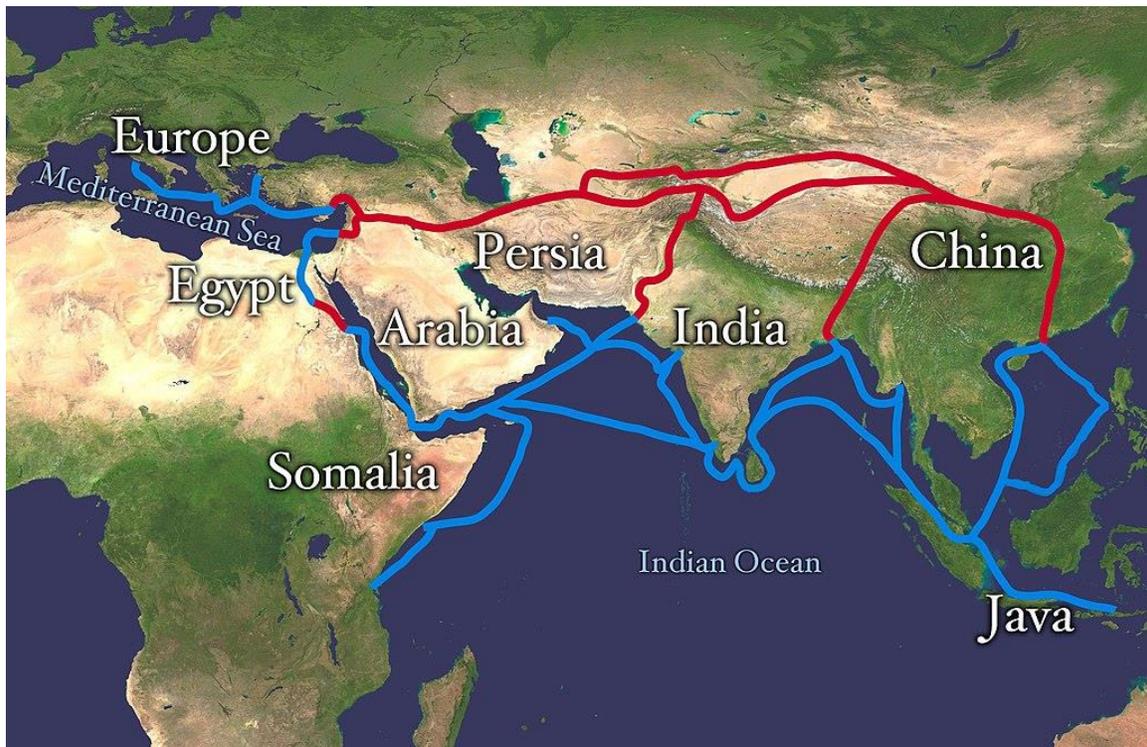
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Major_crop_areas_India.png

Agricultural Cropping Zones in India

Guptan administrators taxed their agriculture at high rates – one-fourth of cereal harvests and one-sixth of cash crop produce. The

Mughal emperors used the *zabt* system of agricultural taxation and charged pre-set tax rates for each farm plot according to ten years of historical data on yields and revenues. The Mughal method was especially effective because it reduced tax avoidance and corruption.

Taxation of foreign trade provided a secondary source of wealth for the Gupta Kingdom and Mughal Empire.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silk_route.jpg>

The Spice Trade Route (Blue Lines) Complemented the Silk Road Trade Route (Red Lines) – India Traded on Both Routes

Merchants from both empires engaged in long-distance international trade with Europe and China and in inter-regional maritime trade with Southeast Asia and land-based trade with Central Asia. Although more than a millennium separated these two empires, both traded the same kinds of commodities – exporting cotton textiles and pepper and importing gold and silver. Neither government established state trading monopolies, and both preferred to tax private merchants.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:16th_century_Portuguese_Spanish_trade_routes.png

Global Trade Routes to India, 16th-19th centuries

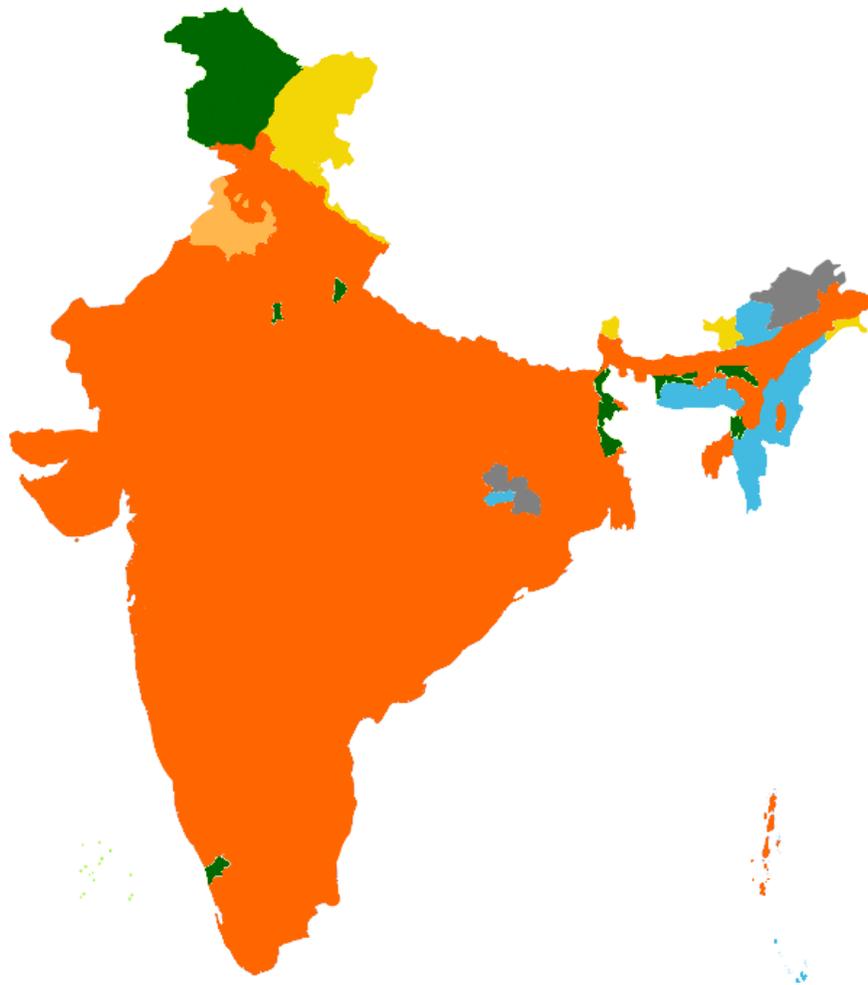
During the Mughal period, about nine-tenths of government revenue came from rural taxes on agriculture and the remaining

one-tenth from urban taxes on trade. After their initial expansions within northern and central India, neither empire extracted significant wealth through foreign conquest. For both, foreign conquest was limited to the subcontinent because neither state had an effective navy and both faced powerful competitors in China and Persia to the north.

Control. What forms of political organization and religious persuasion did the two Indian empires use to extract wealth for the elite and maintain imperial power? Both Guptan and Mughal monarchs ruled much of their empires indirectly, allowing local rulers to govern so long as they paid taxes and provided troops and war elephants. Following Akbar's lead, the Mughal emperors adroitly accommodated the Rajput-Hindu culture to maintain key allies in Rajasthan.

For the Guptan leaders, the Hindu religion provided a very effective political control mechanism over the Indian masses. The principles represented by *kharma* (good actions so that Hindus could be released from endless re-birth) and *dharma* (strict

obedience to social rules) gave Hindu governments a strong buttress for their norms and actions. The Mughal emperors had to tread carefully because less than one-fourth of their population followed Islam. They introduced religious tolerance of non-Muslims and promoted a sacred aura surrounding the emperor.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons, available at*
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Religions_map_of_India.png>

Religions in India – Hinduism (Orange), Islam (Green), Buddhism (Yellow), Sikhism (Light Orange), Christianity (Blue)

Decline. What combination of internal revolts and external incursions caused the early Indian empires to decline? The Gupta Kingdom fell in the mid-6th century because of internal weakness – succession crises and local rebellions – and external invasions by Huns, predatory nomads from Afghanistan. Disputes over who would succeed to rule the empire caused political and military weakening at the center and fomented local rebellions. The Huns began periodic predatory raids into northern India in the mid-5th century. Efforts to defend against those incursions gradually drained the Guptan treasury and weakened their military capability to defend their territory.

The collapse of the powerful Mughal Empire in the early 18th century was nearly as sudden. Aurangzeb's 25 years of fruitless fighting in the Deccan were very costly in lost lives and war materiel, and the government was not able to collect substantial tax revenues from the region. Central administration atrophied and revenues declined. The central weakness in revenue collection was

exacerbated by four bloody succession struggles in the thirteen years following Aurangzeb's death in 1707.

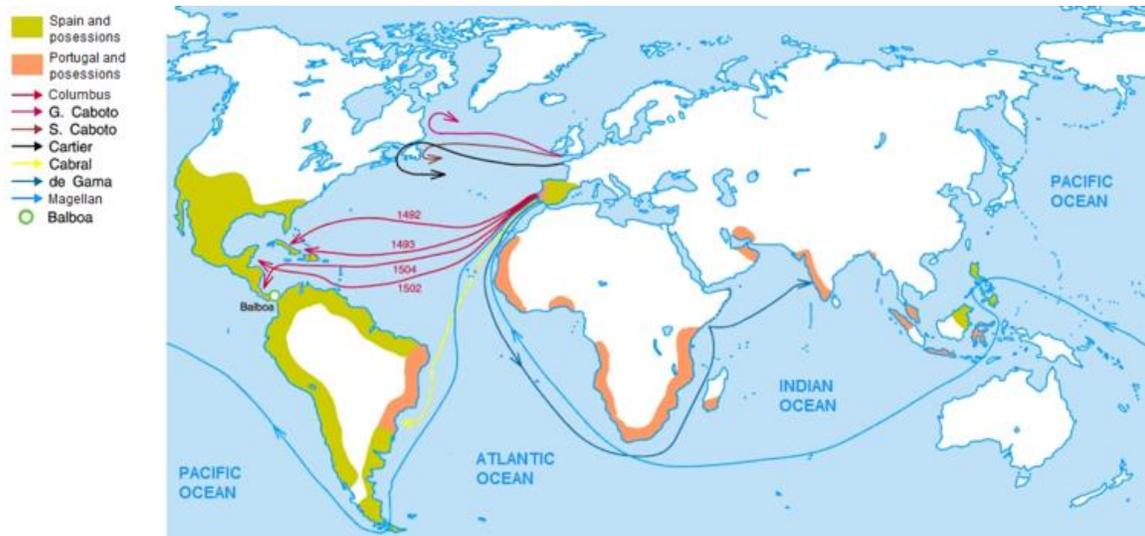


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mughal-empire-map.jpg>

Maximum Size of the Mughal Empire, 1707

Aurangzeb had abandoned the practice of religious tolerance and Hindu-Muslim equality of treatment. Weakness at the center

of the empire permitted local rulers to break imperial ties, refuse to transfer tax revenues to the center, and become virtually independent small kingdoms. European chartered companies controlled key ports and much of India's foreign trade.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Age_of_Discovery_explorations_in_English.png

The Age of European Exploration, 15th-16th centuries

Military weakness made the empire ripe for foreign plundering. In 1739, Nadir Shah of Persia raided Delhi and annexed the Afghan and Punjabi portions of the Mughal Empire.

Aftermath. After the fall of these two states, what local or foreign groups succeeded to power and how successfully did they wield power? After the dissolution of the Gupta Kingdom in 550,

Northern India disintegrated into small kingdoms and chieftaincies and remained fragmented for another five centuries. From the early 11th century through the mid-18th century, Northern India was ruled by Islamic dynasties that originated in Central Asia. The Ghaznavids, Turkic people from Afghanistan, invaded the Punjab, implanted their Perso-Islamic culture, founded Lahore as their capital, and ruled North India between 1022 and 1192. The Ghurids, another Turkic people from Afghanistan, gained control of Lahore in 1192 and Delhi in 1199. The Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526), led by four different Turko-Afghan dynasties, controlled the Indo-Gangetic plain.

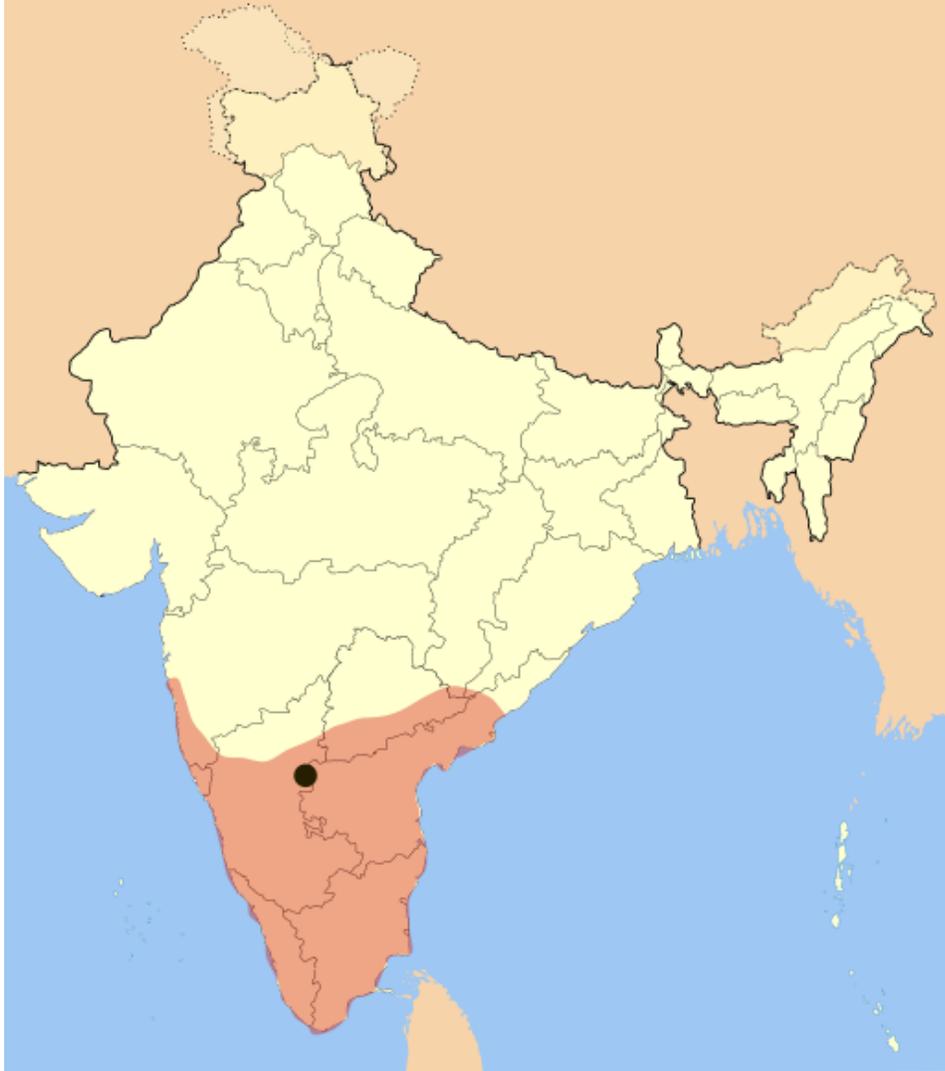


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tughlaq_dynasty_1321 - 1398 ad.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tughlaq_dynasty_1321_-_1398_ad.PNG)>

Delhi Sultanate – Peak Under Tughlaq Dynasty, 1321-1398

But southward expansion was limited by the opposition of two strong kingdoms – Muslim Bahmani in the Deccan center and

Hindu Vijayanagara in the Dravidian south. The Bahmani kingdom divided into five successor states in 1518.

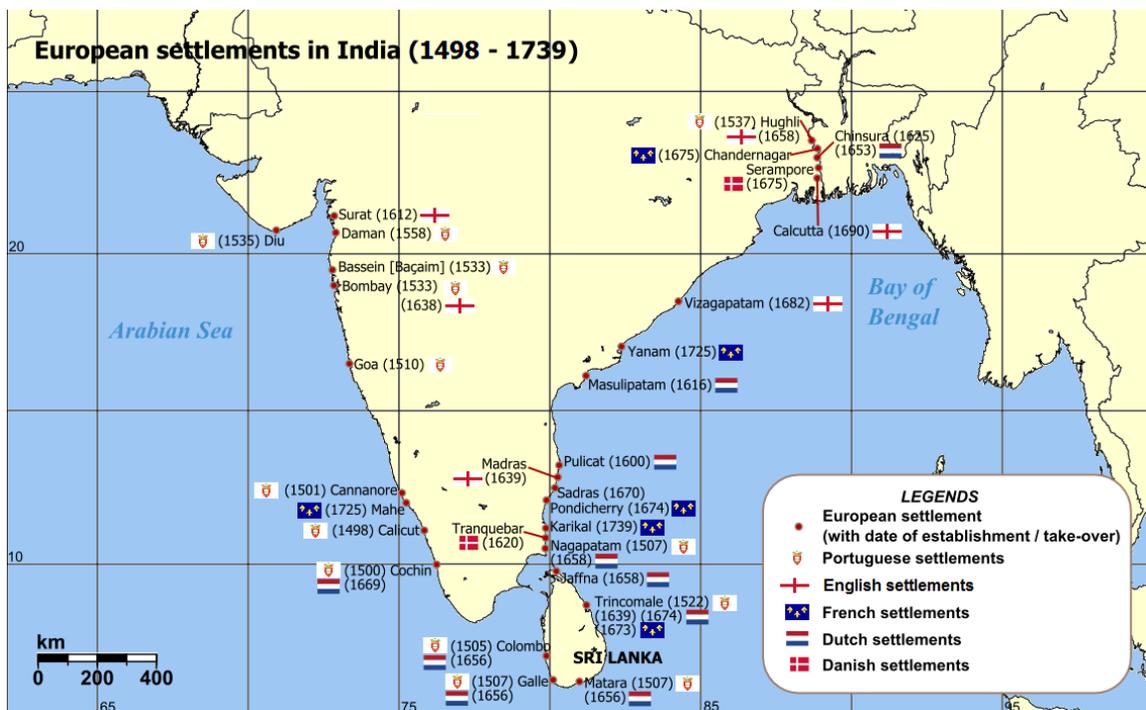


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vijayanagara-empire-map.svg>>

*Vijayanagara Kingdom (1336-1646, Red Area) –
After the Fall of the Bahmani Kingdom, 1518*

The Mughal Empire (1526-1858) was the last of the Central Asian Islamic dynasties in India. It had effective power for nearly

two centuries and then was a figurehead state during its final century and a half when Great Britain gradually assumed control of India. Britain's early interest in India was commercial. The English East India Company (EEIC) established factories in three regions that specialized in producing cotton or silk textiles for export – Surat (1619), Madras (1639), and Calcutta (1690).



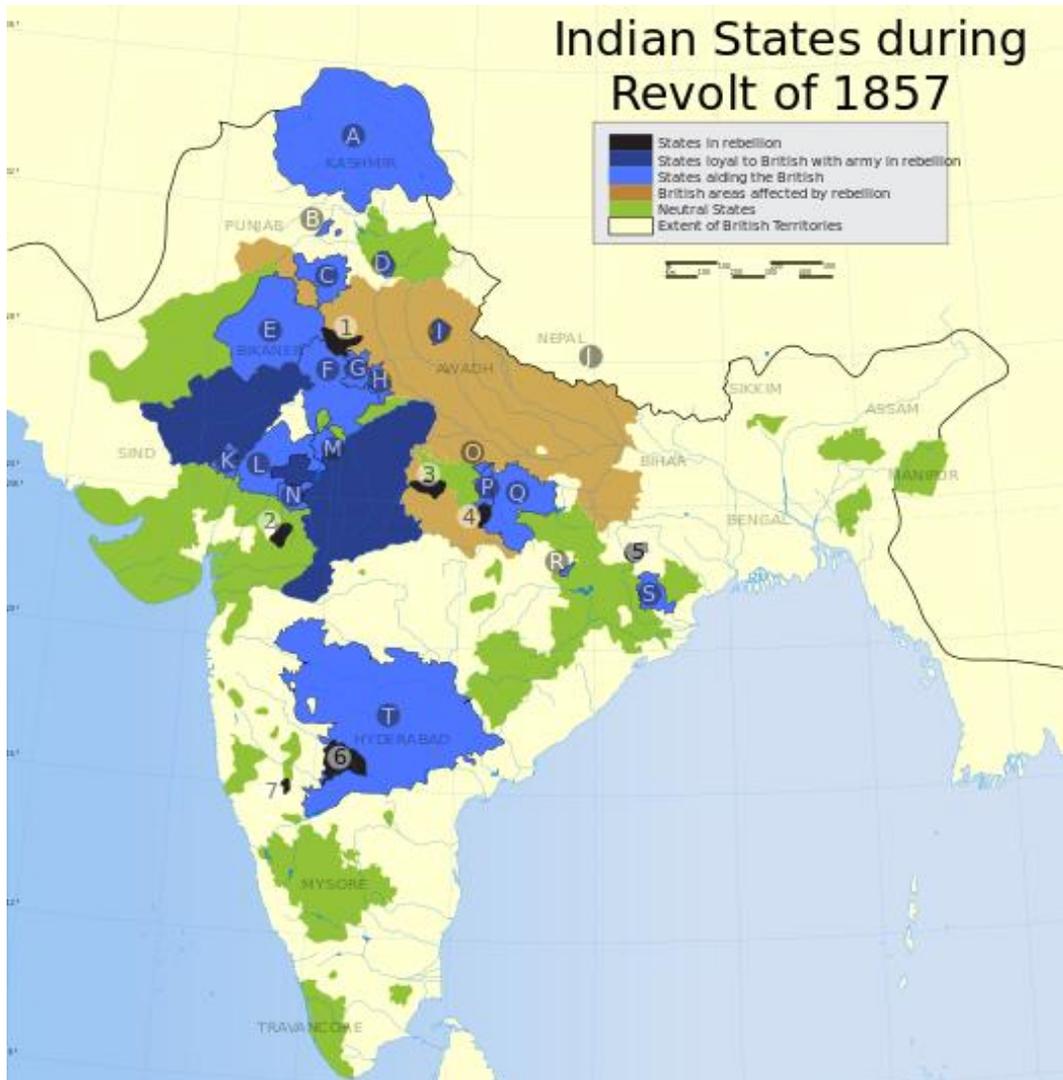
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:European_settlements_in_India_1501-1739.png >

European Trading Posts in India, 1501-1739

The EEIC then became a tax collector by renting out its mercenary army of *sepoys* troops. The EEIC used Bengali tax

revenues to purchase Indian textiles for export and to finance armies to permit the British conquest of other parts of India.

During the first half of the 19th century, British imperial policy in India shifted from tax plundering to conquistador imperialism. The EEIC's 200,000-man army was the largest in Asia. The Company conquered many former Mughal areas and subjugated princely states, extracting land revenue from both.

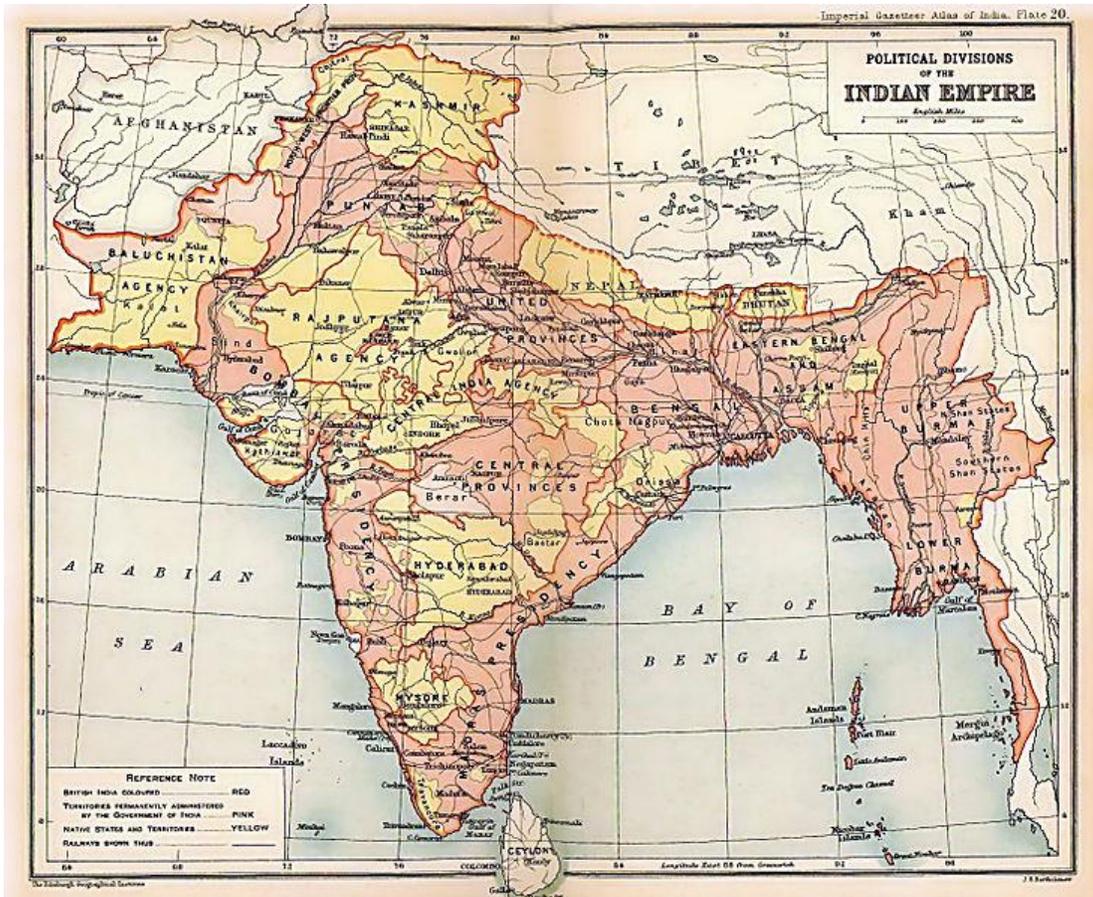


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_revolt_of_1857_states_map.svg

The Sepoy Revolt, 1857- 1858

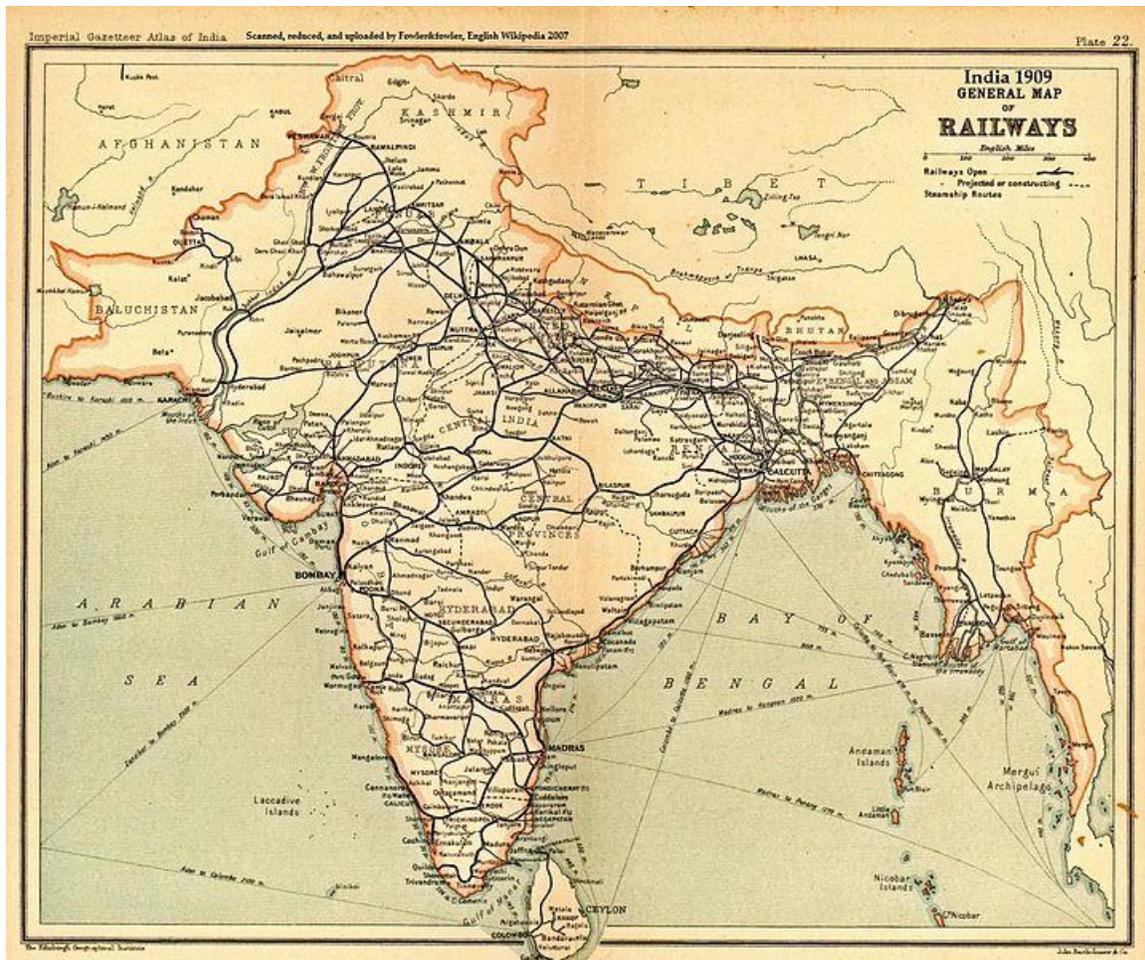
The Sepoy Revolt (1857-1858), a massive rebellion against British rule by more than half of the EIC army, ended the Mughal Empire, and the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was exiled to Burma. In 1858, the British Parliament abolished the

EEIC, imposed crown rule, and changed imperial policy – from conquering Indian princely states to wooing all 560 into alliances.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Indian_Empire_1909_Imperial Gazetteer of India.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Indian_Empire_1909_Imperial_Gazetteer_of_India.jpg)

The British Indian Empire At Its Peak, 1909

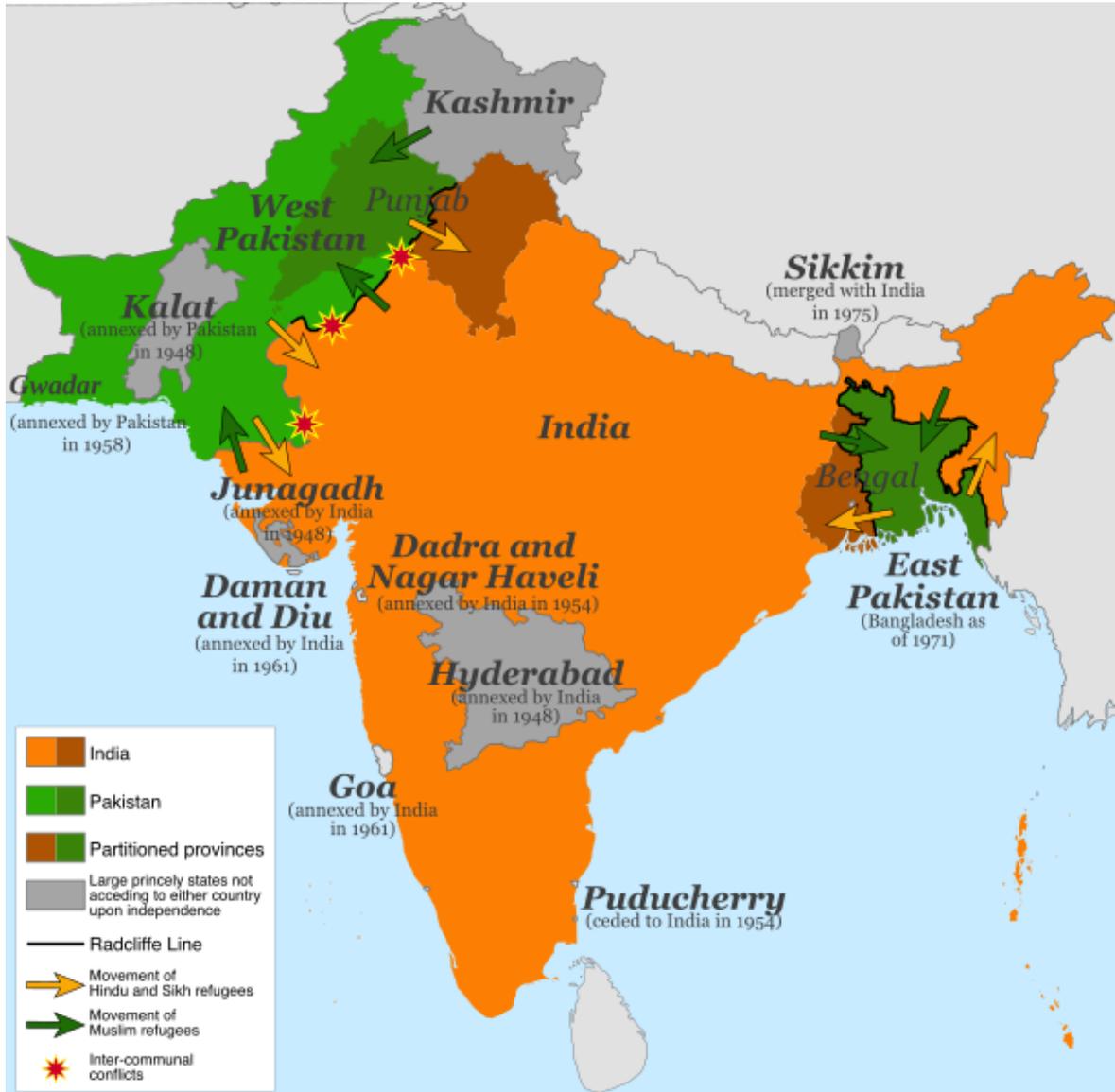


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_railways1909a.jpg>

Railways in India, 1909 – Britain Constructed 50,000 miles of Railways in India, the Fourth Largest Network in the World

In 1942, the leaders of the Indian Congress Party withdrew from the British colonial government, organized the Quit India Movement, and led urban and rural workers to demonstrate for independence in the largest protest since 1857. When World War II ended, Britain was anxious to grant independence to India.

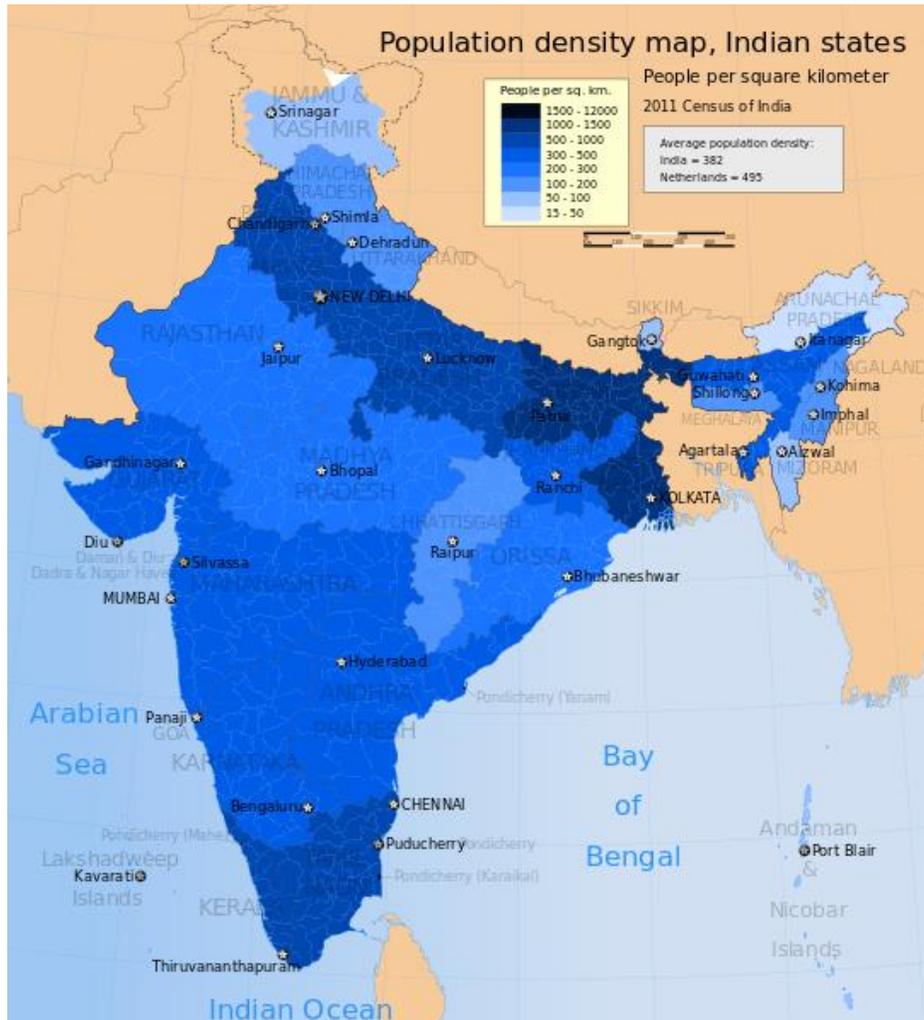
English leaders wanted a contented ally, and India offered war-torn Britain limited economic benefits. Following the partition of India and Pakistan, India received its independence in 1947.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Partition_of_India_1947_en.svg>

Partition of India and Pakistan, 1947

By 2019, India's population had grown to 1.4 billion. The highest concentrations of people resided in the Indo-Gangetic Plain of northern India and in the coastal regions of southern India.

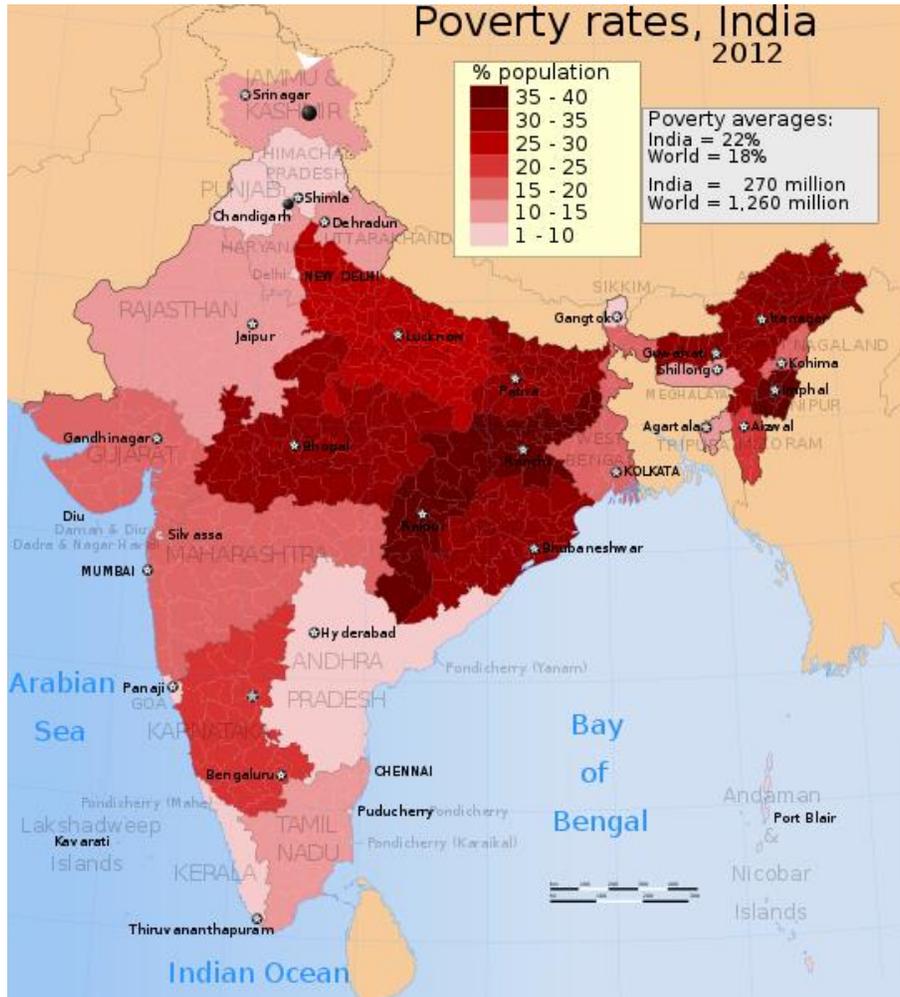


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2011_Census_India_population_density_map_states_and_union_territories.svg

Distribution of India's 1.4 Billion People, 2011 Census

India's level of income per capita (adjusted for purchasing power) had increased at an annual rate of 4.6 percent for 20 years to reach

\$7,034. But the regional distribution of recent income growth within the country was very unequal, and one-eighth of Indians earned incomes less than the national poverty line.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2012_Poverty_distribution_map_in_India_by_its_states_and_union_territories.svg

Poverty Rates in India, 2012

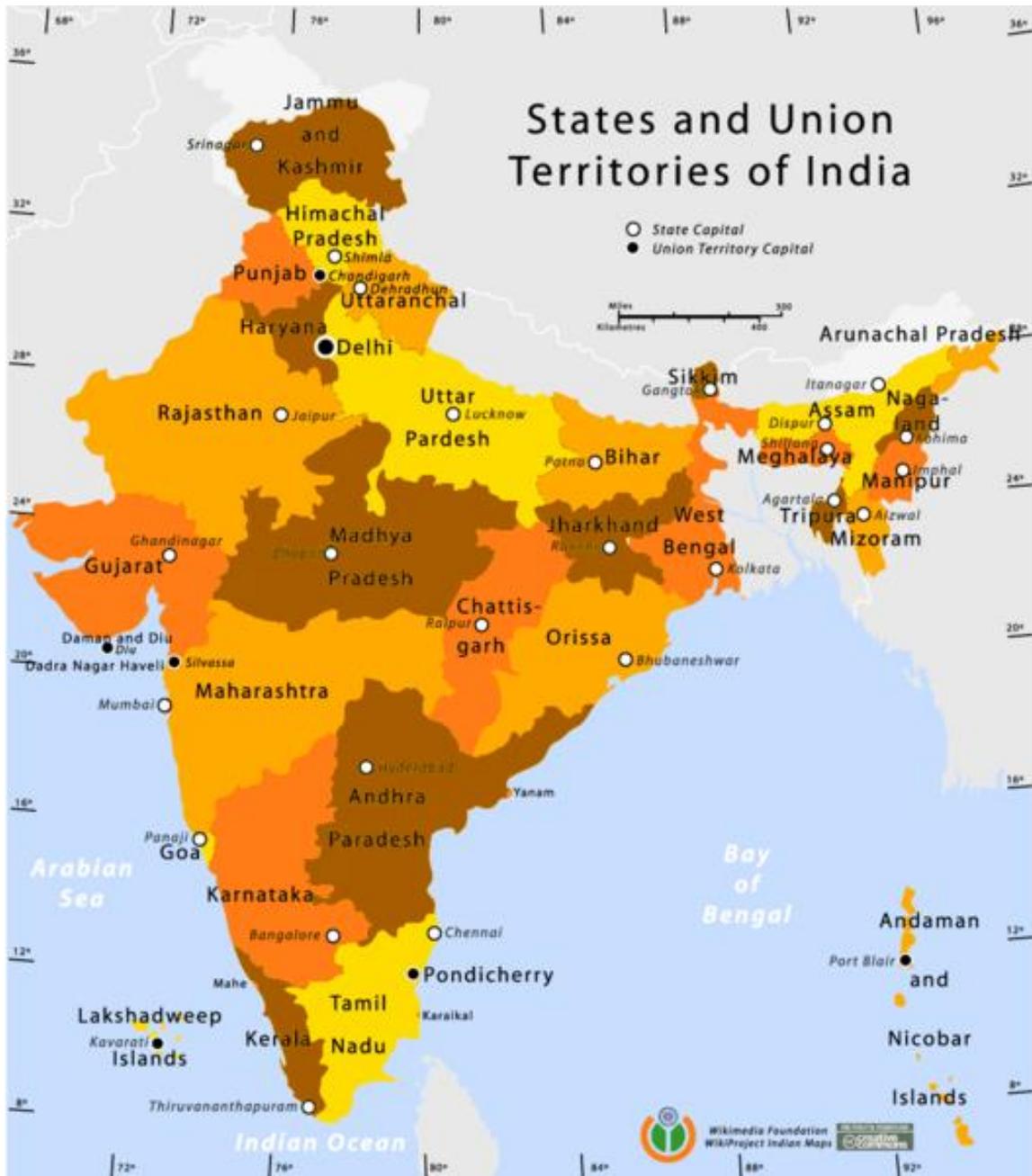
Lessons. What lessons for contemporary powers can be drawn from the experiences of these two early Indian empires?

Two lessons arise from the experience of the Gupta Kingdom. The first is to organize rules and procedures that will lead to a peaceful succession of rulers. Succession struggles foment palace intrigues, drain the treasury, cause military disaffections, lead to civil wars, and undermine efforts to defend against foreign raiders. The second is to resist the temptation to buy off foreign invaders, because they will continue to raid and pillage so long as they have greater military strength and maneuverability. Accommodation of more powerful enemies is a dangerous game that rarely is sustainable.

The decline of the Mughal Empire in the early 18th century is a classic instance of a hegemonic power unnecessarily weakening itself by obsessively fighting the wrong battle – winning Pyrrhic victories and undermining imperial strength. In his three-decade struggle to control the Deccan region of central-south India, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb violated the imperial principle that an empire should not attempt to subjugate another state unless the tax benefits will outweigh the conquering costs. Aurangzeb and his

weak successors also made the mistake of ending the earlier Mughal policy of religious tolerance and of arrogantly attempting to impose their own fundamentalist version of Islam on their Hindu allies and vassals. Even the Hindu leaders of Rajputana, who had been the loyal allies of the Mughals for nearly two centuries, rebelled against this Muslim cultural imperialism and took advantage of Mughal military decline to declare their independence from Mughal control and taxation.

A third lesson from the Mughal decline is more subtle. The Mughals had failed to perceive the importance of having a strong navy and merchant marine. Their narrow focus on land-based militarism and commerce permitted European nations, notably Great Britain, to gain a toehold, first in international trade, later in nabobism (renting their mercenary armies to local rulers in return for tax-collecting rights), and finally in conquistador imperialism. Self-inflicted, internal Mughal weakness thus precipitated the British takeover of India.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:State_and_union_territories_map.png

States in Contemporary India