

India and Burma: A Case Study in Democratic Movements vis-à-vis Colonialism

By: Emily Wolfe

## **Abstract**

Great Britain set out for many countries during the colonial expeditions. One of these countries was India. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Burma was also incorporated in to the British Raj. While India and Burma were under the same colonial rule, their norms and practices previous to this could not have been more different. When the British Raj ended, India and Burma regained their independence. However, there is a clear distinction between the two during their course of colonization. India was able to form a cohesive democratic movement, and eventually form the Indian National Congress. Burma did not see the rise of a democratic movement. This is important, because it arguably changed the course of the countries' respective futures. India became a democracy, and Burma became a hybrid regime. The factor that gave way for the rise of India's democratic movement must be explored.

## **Introduction and Framing:**

Great Britain was a colonial power for a grand portion of its history. The British Empire spread far and wide, and included the massive continent of India. The British Empire also included what is known today as Myanmar (formerly Burma). India and Burma share the same colonizer, yet there is a clear dichotomy in their histories. India was able to form a democratic movement while under colonization and become a democracy — Burma was not.

Today, India is the world's largest democracy. With a population of 1.3 billion, India is expected to surpass the population of China within the next ten years (BBC News, 2018). India is a parliamentary democratic republic and has both a president and a prime minister. The role of the Indian president is to be the head of state, and the prime minister is the head of government. During the national election process in India, the citizens vote for members of the Lok Sabha —

this is the lower house of the bicameral legislature also known as the House of the People (Panda, 2014). The upper house in the bicameral legislature is known as the Rajya Sabha (Panda, 2014). The prime minister is appointed by the Lok Sabha, he or she is not elected by the citizens directly (Panda, 2014). India's democratic system of governance is largely based on western (mainly British) notions, but it is a democracy nonetheless.

Burma, known officially today as Myanmar (although the United States does not recognize this change) is also, on paper, a parliamentary republic. This seems extremely similar to India's system of governance upon first glance. However, the two could not be more different. India's elections are democratic and free— citizens can actively participate in the future of their country. Myanmar was under the rule of a military junta from 1962 to 2011 which was extremely oppressive (BBC News, 2018). While partially free elections were held recently in 2012, the military is known to have an extremely strong presence in Myanmar's government. Myanmar however, does have a president. Since the end of formal military rule in 2016, the role of the president is more or less ceremonial (BBC News, 2018). The most recent elections in Myanmar took place in 2015, and these have been deemed as the most free (BBC News, 2018). The leader of the government is Aung San Suu Kyi. She had been a leader for the pro-democracy movement for many years (BBC News, 2018). However, her reputation was recently tarnished due to the way her government treated the Rohingya. This includes the ethnic cleansing that took place against the Rohingya by the Myanmar military— it is clear that the Myanmar government has no plans to tackle the atrocities that befall their minority populations.

It is clear that there is a difference in the histories of Myanmar and India even though they were under the rule of the same colonizer. This difference is the fact that India is a democracy, and Myanmar had turned in to a hybrid regime. The struggles that befell Burma and

India during colonization caused a dichotomy in their routes to solve their individual issues. India managed to form a democratic system of governance while under the shadow of colonization, while Burma was not. Respectively, the ability and inability for India and Myanmar to form democratic movements deeply affected their futures. India's democratic movements while under British rule provoke a question: *what explains why India saw the rise of a democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Burma did not have this experience under the same colonial power?*

I have chosen to do this case study because as economic power grows for India and Burma, it is important to understand the process they each went through that landed them where they are today. Understanding these dynamics will be important to maintaining relationships with both countries.

### **Democratic Movements: What Are They and Why Do They Form?**

In order to better understand why India saw the rise of a democratic movement, it is essential to know what democratic movements are and a few of the reasons scholars have cited as to why they form.

For purposes of this paper, I will define a democratic movement in basic terms. Therefore, a democratic movement is a social and political movement in which the people of a certain country have a desire to change the system of governance under which they live, and use the social and political means such as protesting, peaceful resistance, and forming their own democratic system of governance in order to create the new democratic government they desire. I will also be framing the democratic movements in relation to the denoted answers to the research question.

In the *Southern Economic Journal*, Jenny Minier discusses how democratic movements are a possible result of higher incomes (Minier 2001, 997). She also makes the point that, "...the demand for democracy is increasing in both income and education." (Minier 2001, 999) These are important points as they denote the fact that democratic movements do not pop up in random fashion, but that there must be some sort of causal mechanism for them. Minier labels democracy as a "normal good" due to the fact that in the case of democratic movements, they are produced as a result of increasing incomes (Minier 2001, 1005). This paper offers a more economic reason as to why democratic movements form, and this is arguably an important facet of them in general. This correlates to the potential answer in which India saw the rise of a democratic movement for economic reasons. There is no doubt that India produced a great deal of wealth while under the British Raj, and obviously the Indian princes were very wealthy. Since Indian princes were able to keep their rights and Indian citizens had been assured that they would be given the same rights as British citizens, it would make sense that even while under colonial rule, India was able to generate a massive amount of wealth (Gopal 1965, 3-4). Contritely, Burma was not awarded these same supposed benefits to being a British colony. The heads of the Burmese villages were essentially stripped of their power, and the villages were made to perform tasks in order to benefit the British (Charney 2009, 7). It makes sense here that Burma would not be able to form a democratic movement while under British rule because they could not accumulate the same amount of wealth that India was able to. Additionally, as Minier states, while higher incomes and democratic movements seem to be correlated, education is also a factor here. The rise of a democratic movement in India was certainly the result of wealth (as well as education, of course), while in Burma the lack of the societal facets did not create the environment in which a democratic movement could form.

Another important facet of democratic movements is the governments under which they form. Edward Gibson discusses the importance of domestic leaders in government and the ways in which they can change the tide of a regime. In order to analyze this, Gibson looks at seemingly authoritarian provinces in Mexico, which has a democratic system of governance (Gibson 2005, 101-132). The provinces he looks at are Oaxaca and Santiago del Estero, and he explores how, “subnational authoritarian leaders perpetuate provincial authoritarian regimes.” (Gibson 2005, 103) While the example in Gibson’s article takes place in an already democratic country, it has implications for my research. This article exhibits the importance of local leadership and the fact that local leaders can change democratic systems of governance in to authoritarian regimes within their own jurisdiction. This is also relevant as to why Burma was not able to form a democratic movement, yet India was. Local leadership in India was not diminished in the same way that local leadership was in Burma after the British arrived in the respective countries. It is clear that the removal of village leaders in Burma had a profound impact on the lives of the villagers as well as Burmese society overall. Meanwhile, the autonomy of the princes in India allowed for local governments to continue (to some degree) their normative practices. Local and domestic politics are deeply intertwined with democratic movements, particularly in the case of India and Burma, as demonstrated through this article.

There are many important aspects of democracy to consider, and one of these is why democratic movements are able to form in different social settings across the globe (Markoff 1996, 1-11). John Markoff discusses this in an article that addresses this question by analyzing the “history of democracy.” (Markoff 1996, 1) In his article, Markoff describes democratic waves and why they are important in society:

*“During a democratic wave, the organization of governments is altered...in ways that are widely held to be more democratic. During such a democratic wave, there is a great deal of discussion of the virtues of democracy, social movements often demand more democracy, and people in positions of authority proclaim their democratic intentions.”* (Markoff 1996, 1-2)

This is an important quote because it implies a lot about democratic movements. The author is discussing the details and nature of democratic movements according to what has been seen throughout the past. Democratic movements are possible in almost any place, and Markoff is making the point that these elements of democratic movements are present, or can be in all of them. This article is certainly relevant to the research question because India formed a democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, during India’s democratic movement, the organization of government was altered, people were discussing democracy, and there were social movements that were demanding more of a democratic government. All the aspects of Markoff’s article play in to India’s democratic movement quite well in this context.

In an article written by two professors at Stanford University, the authors Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl discuss precisely what democracy both is and is not. They note that, “...democracy does not consist of a single unique set of institutions.” (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 76) What Karl and Schmitter stress in their paper is the fact that democracy can take hold in many forms with varied outcomes (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 76). Additionally, they argue that, “The specific form democracy takes is contingent upon a country’s socioeconomic conditions as well as its entrenched state structures and policy practices.” (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 76) This is interesting, as it very much plays in to the fact that India had been able to form a cohesive democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet Burma was not under the same colonizer. Another important point that Schmitter and Karl make about democracies is that they, “...cannot be reduced to the regular holding of elections or equated with a particular notion of the role of

the state...” (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 85) This is representative of the fact that throughout the article, the authors discuss the many facets of democracies and democratic societies and how they may have different processes or outcomes, but in the end they are still democratic societies. Additionally, India had very different institutions than Burma did during the British Raj. This article then plays in well as to why a democratic future was possible for India, but it was not within Burma’s range.

It is safe to say that according to the evidence, democratic movements may arise due to a number of reasons. These reasons may be economic, as when income and education increase, the demand for democracy goes up (Minier 2001, 999). This would make sense in the case of India and Burma, as the local governments India were certainly wealthier than those in Burma. Local leadership is also important when it comes to forming a democratic movement, as it has been made clear that local leaders can change the tide of democracy within their own regime (Gibson 2005, 101-132). This adds to the argument as to why India was able to form a cohesive democratic movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as their local leaders were able to have a greater impact on their societies. Lastly, while democratic movements have many facets, India’s democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century certainly meets every marker. It is clear then that the reasons for India’s forming of a cohesive democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century stemmed from empowered local governments as well as economic advantages.

### **Potential Answers**

There are a few possible answers to the research question, and according to the evidence, they are as follows:

*Even though Burma was part of the British Raj, it is geographically removed from the subcontinent of India. Ergo, the democratic movement was not able to spread east to Burma.*

*Local and regional leaders in India were more prevalent, had more influence, and were given more autonomy by the British than their Burmese counterparts. Therefore, Burma was not able to form a cohesive democracy in the same fashion as India.*

*India is the exception to the pattern of underdevelopment (both in infrastructure and systems of governance) seen in post-colonial nations, whereas Burma follows this pattern. Ergo, Burma could not break the mold of colonial history and form a democratic movement.*

*The subcontinent of India produced more wealth than Burma did, thus making its people more apt to push for democracy.*

While all of the factors stated above are plausible, some are more likely explanations as to why India was able to form a democratic movement while under the shadow of colonialism than others. I believe that a combination of the explanations regarding the prevalence of local and regional leaders as well as India having more wealth than Burma did are the most convincing reasons as to why India was able to form a democratic movement, yet Burma was not.

### **Geographic Isolation**

Burma's natural isolation from the mainland of the Indian subcontinent is a plausible explanation as to why there was no large push for democracy in Burma under the British Raj. It could be that due to the fact that the democratic movements in India were so physically far away from Burma that it was unable to culminate east of the subcontinent. Being it that Burma was far away from and not as large as India, a democratic movement just may not have been socially

possible unless they had heard of the resistance happening in India. Which, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would have been difficult information to obtain for the Burmese.

### **Local Government**

Perhaps the reason for India's rise in democratic movements was due to their local governments, directly correlating to Burma's lack of autonomy with local governments. The princes in India were given more autonomy than the village leaders in Burma. This lack of autonomy as well as higher levels of control in Burma could be the reason for the lack of a democratic movement in the region. Whereas in India, the autonomous nature of the princes and local governments created the space in which a democratic movement was possible. Delegating power to the Indian princes would generate democracy because it increases their legitimacy. This is not to say that the princes had no legitimate authority before, however. Rather that by delegating power, it created a space in which the princes in India were able to garner more legitimacy even though the Indian subcontinent was under the control of the British. By increasing the legitimacy of the princes, the British Raj gave more and more fuel to what would spark the fire of a democratic movement in India.

### **Common Patterns of Underdevelopment**

As it is seen with many post-colonial nations, underdevelopment is a problem that remains in their societies. India, being highly industrialized in most respects, seems not to follow this pattern of underdevelopment. It is potentially possible that India is an exception to this common pattern of underdevelopment, whereas Burma is not. It could be explained that India is an outlier in the system and Burma is within this system. This implies that during India's time

under Crown Rule, the process of decolonialization occurred differently than most. This occurrence being the formation of a democratic movement.

### **Economic Implications**

The Indian subcontinent was undoubtedly wealthier than Burma was during their shared colonial history. It was annexed prior to Burma, and was the primary target of the British, whereas Burma was incorporated simply to protect India (Pillalamarri, 2017). Many regions in India were governed or headed by wealthy princes, and India definitely produced a great deal of wealth during this time. Burma, on the other hand, was a country with many village communities with village leaders and was not as wealthy as India. Not to mention, the British did not treat the Burmese villages with the same dignity they treated the Indian states with. It is likely then that due to India's economic dominance over Burma, the right environment was created in order for a democratic movement to occur.

### **Evidence: Possible Explanations**

In order to understand why economic implications and local government are the key factors being looked at as to explain why India was able to form a cohesive democratic movement and Burma was not, each of the possible explanations must be addressed.

In regard to geographic isolation, this potential explanation is lacking in evidence. While theoretically, it is plausible, Burma being geographically isolated from the Indian subcontinent is not a viable enough explanation as to why India saw the rise of a cohesive democratic movement, yet the same was not true for Burma. Of course, the democratic movement that

occurred in India was physically far away from Burma, it does not offer a sociopolitical explanation for the lack of a democratic movement in Burma during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Common patterns of underdevelopment could offer a different perspective on the issue as to why Burma was not able to form a cohesive democratic movement. It is well known that nations which were formerly colonized tend to be those which are underdeveloped or are still continuing in their development process in to the modern day. As it would be that India is mostly highly industrialized, the potential for India to be an exception to this common pattern of underdevelopment is quite possible. Whereas Burma would simply be a follower of this typical pattern of underdevelopment. However, this is not entirely convincing. If this were the case, India would quite literally be the only former British colony that was able to do this during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, this standpoint is important to consider, yet not entirely plausible.

The importance of local government and economic implications then cannot be downplayed. As geographic isolation and common patterns of underdevelopment do not offer a substantial explanation to this phenomenon, local government and the implications of economics do. As aforementioned, the Indian subcontinent was wealthier than Burma because India was the focal point for British colonial rule in that area, whereas Burma was annexed to protect the British holdings in India (Pillalamarri, 2017). Being it that the states in India were run by wealthy princes and Burma was primarily governed by village leaders, the Indian states were undoubtedly wealthier than the Burmese villages (Charney 2009, 6). This is due to the fact that local governments in India were given more autonomy than those in Burma. As the British officials delegated much power to the Indian princes, whereas the village leaders in Burma became dependent on the British officials (Charney 2009, 6). This is a crucial difference between

India and Burma during the British Raj, because the levels of autonomy given to the local governments in the respective countries has a direct effect on the economic implications. As it would appear, local governments are crucial during the British Raj, as they can have an effect on the economy, and will ultimately be a key factor in whether or not a cohesive democratic movement is able to form.

### **Local Governments and Economic Implications: India and Burma**

As mentioned before, Indian princes were given more autonomy to run their regions of the Indian subcontinent during the British Raj than the Burmese village leaders were. In order to understand why local government and economics not only play in to each other, but also the formation of cohesive democratic movements, one must understand the trajectory of the British Raj and how it effected local governments and their economies in India and Burma.

The British Raj began in India in 1858. Once Crown Rule began, the hegemony of the British East India Company ceased. However, the beginning of British rule in India did not come without resistance. This resistance is known as the “Great Rebellion” or the “Indian Mutiny” (Kaul, 2011). The Great Rebellion lasted for two years, and the ending of it marked the beginning of British rule in India for the next 90 years. At that time, India had approximately 300-350 million inhabitants (Kaul, 2011). This means that the number of English men who presided over the subcontinent would never be enough to truly rule over the Indians with a watchful eye. Therefore, what the British had to do was form allies with the Indian elite in order to enforce their rule more effectively, and even gain the trust and loyalty of some Indians (Kaul, 2011). The elites of India would later prove to be instrumental in monetary support and military aid during both World Wars (Kaul, 2011). When the Crown assumed the Indian government, the

announcement was written and read in every Indian language and Indian princes received copies (Gopal 1965, 3-4). Indian princes were assured that their rights and positions were to be respected and Indian citizens were to be given the same rights that British citizens had (Gopal 1965, 3-4). It is important to note however, that the British Government in India conducted search and seizure operations in the North West provinces of India, such as Oudh (Gopal 1965, 10-11). Indian homes would be searched for weapons (guns, bayonets, and the like) and these weapons would be taken away in order to ensure that another massive revolt, such as the Great Rebellion, would not occur again (Gopal 1965, 10-11).

It certainly makes sense then that the local governments in India were deeply involved in the British Raj, even though they were technically subject to it. However, it would also appear that the British were a bit dependent on the cooperation of the wealthy elite in India if they wanted the British Raj to be a success. This is important, as it highlights the attention to which local Indian governments were given. Additionally, it is known that the prince-run states were given decent amounts of autonomy, as they were assured that their rights would not be taken away and they were to be given the same rights as British citizens (Gopal 1965, 3-4). Clearly, local government in India played a large role during the British Raj, and was ultimately a deciding factor in the formation of a cohesive democratic movement. The autonomy of the local governments in India was absolutely essential in the rise of India's democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Burma, however, is a different story. The Burmese villagers and village leaders did not enjoy the same levels of autonomy that those peoples in the Indian states did.

A central part of Burmese life before they were colonized by the British was the village, according to Michael Charney (Charney 2009, 6). He discusses how, "Colonial rule disrupted

traditional reciprocal relationships between the landed gentry and the peasants.” (Charney 2009, 6) Burmese villages typically had a headman who acted as the leader and intermediary, as well as the one who saw to it that village needs would be fulfilled (Charney 2009, 6). However, under British rule, the role of the village headman disappeared and the village populations of Burma were much more susceptible to mistreatment by the British (Charney 2009, 7). In fact, the Burmese had to fully submit to British authority under the Village Act (Charney 2009, 7).

Charney explains the details of this act:

*“Under its terms, all Burmese, except for Buddhist monks, had to shikho (a salutation reserved for important elders, monks, and the Buddha) British officers, as a demonstration of their recognition of submission to British mastery.”* (Charney 2009, 7)

Village life in Burma was drastically disrupted under British rule. The village headman now relied on the colonial state for his income and general welfare, and the village people were required to provide services like food and transportation to British officers (Charney 2009, 7). The British undoubtedly have a great deal of power and influence in Burma and over the Burmese people. It is clear here that the British essentially wanted total subordination from the Burmese people.

Essentially, when the British arrived in Burma, the Burmese villagers’ way of life was completely changed. Before the British arrived in Burma, local villagers relied on their headman. However, Burma being colonized meant that the village headman no longer had the autonomy he needed to look after the people in his village. The arrival of the British and their subsequent takeover of the Burmese villages meant that the village headmen lost their autonomy and were therefore not able to instill their usual peaceful rule in the areas which they formerly governed.

This is in stark contrast to what happened in India, where the princes were still more or less able to enforce their rule. Local government is then extremely important in both India and Burma because the autonomy of the princes allowed for them to resist British rule more so than the overarching subjugation that the villagers in Burma faced. The subjugation in Burma did not create space in which a cohesive democratic movement could form, but the autonomy in India did.

Additionally, the aspects of local government in India and Burma play in to the economic implications of why India saw the rise of a cohesive democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To whom the British gave more autonomy to were the Indian princes, who were obviously a part of the Indian elite. Meanwhile, the British subjugated those in the Burmese villages, who were clearly not in the same economic standing as those in India. Moreover, the British ended up having a decent enough relationship with the Indian elite so much so that they ended up being of great help during the World Wars (Kaul, 2011). Having more economic freedom allowed for the princes of the Indian states to be more independent of the British even when they did arrive, as the British knew they would need to work with the Indians, rather than against, in order to foster a relationship that would ultimately benefit the British. Yet this is not the case with Burma. As the clear subjugation of the Burmese villages demonstrates, the British did not need to foster the same kind of relationship with them in order to keep the British Raj running. The economic implications of the British Raj during the 19<sup>th</sup> century definitely relate to why India was to form a cohesive democratic movement, but Burma was not able to do this under the same colonizer. It is also clear that local government and economics play in to each other, as they are not facets that act alone in the case of India and Burma.

## **India: Historical Analysis While Under British Rule**

The history of India began long before the British arrived. However, for purposes of this paper, only the colonial history of India will be discussed. While colonial rule in India formally began in 1858, the British East India Company dominated the region for over a hundred years prior.

The East India Company was founded in Great Britain on 31 December in the year 1600 (Erikson 2014, 3). The East India Company was initially made up of a small group of merchants funded by Queen Elizabeth I; she granted them a monopoly on trade for lands west of Cape Horn and east of the Cape of Good Hope (Erikson 2014, 3). The East India company was given a great deal of autonomy to function in its trading business, and became a major economic player with a substantial amount of political power in both Asia and Great Britain (Erikson 2014, 4). It is important to keep in mind that the British East India Company was not always the major player in the region. The Dutch East India Company was the trading hegemon in the region prior to England's dominance. Although, the Dutch East India Company was dissolved long before the British East India Company's power came to an end (Erikson 2014, 4). The Dutch East India Company came to a formal end in 1799 (Erikson 2014, 5), thus creating a space for the British East India Company to become a hegemon. It is often noted that the British East India Company paved the way for the British Raj in India. In her book about the British East India Company, Emily Erikson discusses this point:

*“Many of these arguments explicitly state that the private trade allowed English traders to penetrate in to local markets and commercial networks, and that this penetration and partnership with Asian merchants was the foundation of British commercial success.”* (Erikson 2014, 14)

Erikson notes that the rise of private trade is directly correlated to British success in the East (Erikson 2014, 13). The trading that takes place between Great Britain and India clearly allowed for the rise of British rule in India. Erikson also points out that English private traders, “...entangled the English Company—and eventually the British government—into political conflicts that led to colonial rule.” (Erikson 2014, 13) It is clear then that the British East India Company gave way for the succeeding British rule in India.

Crown Rule in India was formally set in stone with the Act of 1858 (Gopal 1965, 2). The Act of 1858 set out the way in which India would be governed, “...directly by and in the name of the Crown, acting through a Secretary of State.” (Gopal 1965, 2) S. Gopal’s book, *British Policy in India, 1858-1905* outlines the system of governance that Great Britain installed in the subcontinent;

*“He [the Secretary of State] would be aided by a council of fifteen members, of whom at least nine should have served in India for not less than ten years and have left India not more than ten years before their appointment to the council. This body would be presided over by the Secretary of State, who could if necessary overrule their decisions.”* (Gopal 1965, 2-3)

The Secretary of State appointed to India had a great deal of power. They were not even required to inform their council of certain things, such as when he communicated with the Government of India (Gopal 1965, 3). In India, the Governor-General in Council remained in charge of central administration (Gopal 1965, 3). This position was now meant to represent the British Crown rather than being an acting position, so it became more ceremonial than anything, and the Governor General was given the title of Viceroy (Gopal 1965, 3). The system of governance that

Great Britain set up in India was meant to ensure that Crown Rule would have a lasting impression on Indian society.

The system of governance that the Crown installed in India once the British East India Company was dissolved was meant to enforce direct British rule in India. The subcontinent would continue to be ruled this way until India eventually gained independence in 1947.

### **Burma: Historical Analysis While Under British Rule**

Burma was set up as a British colony in 1824, and was actually part of Great Britain's Indian Empire (Pillalamarri, 2017). Interestingly enough, Burma was only annexed by Great Britain in order to protect India (Pillalamarri, 2017). In 1785, Burmese forces seized Arakan— a kingdom on the coast. This gave the Burmese a border with British Bengal. After this, the Burmese forces invaded a region called Assam, which was north of British Bengal (Pillalamarri, 2017). British India saw this invasion as a threat and it caused the first Anglo Burmese War, which lasted from 1824 to 1826 (Pillalamarri, 2017). This allowed Great Britain to acquire sections of Lower Burma— succeeding wars in 1852 and 1885 led to the annexation of the remaining parts of Lower Burma, as well as Upper Burma (Pillalamarri, 2017). This essentially means that the entirety of Burma was not colonized by the British until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

While under colonial rule, British Burma had relations with British India. However, these relations did not necessarily (or at all) benefit the Burmese people. Merchants and traders from British held territories in the region were allowed to travel the length of the Irrawaddy River without any restrictions via the Burmese authorities (Nisbet 1901, 26). While similar trading opportunities were given to the Burmese along the other end of the river, it was clear that they were not ready to accept their new colonizers. The British wanted to continue trade in this

region, so they abolished a few customs duties they levied on the south of the region (Nisbet 1901, 27). The Burmese, however, still did not take kindly to this and continually delayed their trading “performance” (Nisbet 1901, 27).

It is important to note that Burma was treated as a part of Great Britain’s Indian Empire and was ruled as such. As previously stated, the whole reason that Burma was annexed by the British in the first place was to protect the British Raj in India. In order to better conceptualize just how grand and expansive the British Empire was in this region of the world, I have provided a map below (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Map of the British Raj in 1914.*

## **The Indian National Congress**

The Indian National Congress (INC) was a result of the democratic movement that formed in India. It was founded in 1885, and, “...is widely regarded as a key turning point in formalising opposition to the Raj.” (Kaul, 2011) The Indian National Congress has its roots in in

the “elite intellectual middle-class” and in its later years becomes a huge organization that would ultimately change the fate of Indian governance for the better (Kaul, 2011). The INC represented the diversity of the Indian subcontinent while simultaneously achieving consensus on the issues facing their country decade after decade (Kaul, 2011).

The Indian National Congress was a major component in weakening the grip the British Raj had on India. While there was a split between the moderate and more extremist wings in the INC, they reunited again in 1917, and more parties with different ideologies about how to separate themselves from the British Raj appeared in the 1920s. There were also those politicians in the INC who believed that violence was a tactic which needed to be used in order to end “imperial oppression” (Kaul, 2011). Of course, there were also those who did not advocate for violence and instead pressed the methods of non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi was a central figure in the Indian push for independence. He was the main advocate for nonviolence and had substantial influence on the end of the British Raj. Gandhi was able to mobilize the Indian people and form three major movements from 1920-1942 (Kaul, 2011). Gandhi was a member of the Indian National Congress, and formed the ideal of “satyagraha” while he was involved in politics (Kaul, 2011). The ideals of “satyagraha” contain the components of “truth or soul” (Kaul, 2011). As Gandhi was able to spread this message of acceptance to people, he was also able to continue his political agenda of independence from Great Britain. Gandhi was arrested in 1942 (along with other members of the INC) for promoting the idea of independence from Great Britain (BBC, 2009). Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, just one year after the British Raj was formally dissolved. Nevertheless, he was able to mobilize massive populations of an entire country and was an extremely important figure in the democratic movement in India.

The Indian National Congress and Mahatma Ghandi were essential facets in the democratic movement that occurred in India during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The democratic movement in India certainly needed the INC and Ghandi in order to truly gain the strength in needed for the British Raj to dissolve. It is important to note that the formation of the INC plays in to the idea that wealth is needed in order for a democratic movement to form. This is due to the fact that the member of the Indian National Congress were elites, and Ghandi was a part of this group. This demonstrates further the explanation that level of wealth matters when it comes to forming a democratic movement.

## **Conclusions**

India and Burma were both colonized by Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While Burma was annexed by Great Britain in order to protect the British Raj in India, they were run as part of the British Raj. During their respective colonial histories, India was able to form a cohesive democratic movement, whereas Burma was not.

I have argued that this was mainly due to the fact that India was a wealthier country than Burma, thus allowing for the people to form a democratic movement. This democratic movement resulted in the Indian National Congress and Mahatma Ghandi as the face of the nonviolent aspect of the movement. Additionally, local government is important when it comes to the formation of democratic movements. As discussed, Burma's village leaders were taken out of power and the villages were made to produce goods for and serve the British (Charney 2009, 7). The Indian princes, however, were treated far differently. When the British Raj had originally begun, the Indian princes were assured that none of their rights would be taken away, nor would they be removed from their positions (Gopal 1965, 3-4). The way the British treated the Burmese

is very much in contrast with the way the British treated the Indian people. India was certainly a powerhouse of wealth and tradeable goods for the British, while Burma was amassed in order to protect India under British rule.

It is clear in both the cases of India and Burma that accumulation of wealth and local governments are extremely important determinants of a democratic movement. India and Burma had very different colonial histories, regardless of the fact that they were colonized by the same nation. It is clear then that the Indian subcontinent experienced a democratic movement due to the autonomous nature of local and regional leaders, as well as the amount of wealth that was concentrated within the region. On the contrary, Burma was not able to form a democratic movement due to the fact that their local and regional leaders were removed or stripped of their power, and that Burma was not the same economic powerhouse that India was. Therefore, in the cases of India and Burma, wealth and regional governments are determining factors in whether or not a democratic movement can form.

It must be said that in order for India to have been able to form a cohesive democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they needed autonomous local governments as well as the upper hand in economic advantages— which they had. Being it that the princes in India were able to keep their autonomy, even though they were under colonial rule, they were still able to generate wealth as well as have some sort of influence that created a space for a cohesive democratic movement to form in India. Burma, on the other hand, did not have this option. Since the villages were overtaken and completely subjugated by the British, there was really no opportunity for local Burmese leaders to generate wealth or have influence over their villages anymore. These are important differences, as they are the deciding factors of whether or not a democratic movement is able to form. As the evidence shows, democratic movements form

because of an increase of wealth and education and influence from local leaders who can change the fate of their country. Democratic movements can form in any place, and, while democracies can take many forms, the social and economic facets of the society they take place in will have great impact on the goals of a democratic movement. It is certainly true then that when discussing democratic movements vis-à-vis colonialism in the case study of India and Burma, their respective local governments and the economic implications thereof were absolutely deciding factors as to why India was able to form a cohesive democratic movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Burma was not.

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