Name: _____

Date: _____

The Europeans in India

During the late Middle Ages, European rulers dreamed of finding a shortcut to the riches of Asia. Europeans bought valuable goods from Asia, including spices, cotton, and silk, but these goods passed through many merchants before reaching Europe, making them expensive.

The Race to India

Portugal was determined to reach India by sea. In 1497, Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama set out with four ships to circumnavigate Africa. A year later, his arrival in India promised enormous profits, and other European nations soon followed.

Overseas trade was expensive and difficult, so wealthy European investors pooled their money to form huge trading companies, sharing the costs of ships, sailors, and supplies as well as any profits. These companies answered to their investors, unlike governments, which can be accountable to ordinary citizens.

The Dutch East India Company

The Dutch East India Company was founded in 1602. The Dutch are the people of the Netherlands, a small European nation that had become a center of international trade. When rival Dutch merchants competed against each other, their profits fell. The Dutch government solved this by giving one company total control—a monopoly—over all Dutch trade with Asia.

But this was no ordinary business. The company could build forts, make treaties, maintain its own army, and even wage war. Driven solely by profit for investors, it grew into one of the most powerful businesses in the world.

The British East India Company

In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I granted a similar charter to form the British East India Company. At first, British merchants could trade in India only with permission from the powerful Mughal rulers. But the balance of power changed as the Mughal Empire weakened during the 1700s. The British East India Company built its own army, hiring thousands of Indian soldiers called sepoys.

In 1757, company forces defeated the ruler of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey. Over the next century, the company used wars, alliances, and treaties to conquer most of India. A corporation that had come to India to make money now ruled it.

A century later, an 1857 uprising swept northern India. After crushing the rebellion, Britain replaced company rule and exiled the Mughal emperor. Nineteen years later, Queen Victoria became Empress of India.

Changing Indian Customs

The British initially had no interest in changing the Indian way of life, but they eventually made many reforms. They outlawed sati in 1829. Sati was the practice of a widow dying with her dead husband, usually by burning on his funeral pyre. The practice was never widespread throughout India, although British accounts sometimes presented it as a symbol of Indian society. Indians themselves disagreed over abolition. Some Indian reformers supported the ban, while others argued that colonial rulers had no right to change Indian customs.

The British built Asia's largest railway network, paved roads, and dug irrigation canals. While officials claimed trains brought famine relief, the tracks primarily extracted wealth and moved troops, including hauling grain away from starving peasants for export. Colonial trade policies also favored British industry, crushing India's textile weavers by forcing the subcontinent to export cheap raw cotton and import British manufactured cloth.

The Fight for Independence

Driven by deep anger over foreign exploitation and heavy taxation, a powerful independence movement arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although millions of Indians paid taxes and served in the British military, colonial authorities denied them basic voting rights and excluded them from high-ranking government posts. After decades of struggle, India won its independence from Britain in 1947.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

European interest in I__d__a began with the search for a c__e__p__r route to Asia's valuable goods. After V__s__o da Ga__a reached India by sailing around A__ri__a, European m__r__h__nts formed powerful t__a__i__g companies to pursue the enormous p__o__i__s available in Asia. The D__t__h East India C__m__a__y received a m__n__p__ly on Dutch trade with Asia and became so p__w__r__ul that it maintained an a__my and waged w__r. The B__i__i__h East I__d__a Company developed s__m__l__r power. As the Indian M__gh__l Empire w__a__e__ed, the c__m__a__y hired thousands of Indian s__po__s and used wars, a__l__a__c__s, and t__e__t__es to c__n__u__r most of India. After an u__r__s__ng in 18____, Britain ended company rule and took direct control.

British rule brought r__i__r__a__s, roads, and i__r__g__t__on, but it also brought heavy t__x__t__on and economic ★e__p__o__t__t__on. British policies damaged Indian t__x__i__e producers and helped move Indian r__s__u__c__s to ★f__r__i__n markets. Over time, r__s__n__m__nt of f__r__i__n rule grew into a powerful movement for self-★g__v__r__m__nt. After d__c__d__s of struggle, India gained i__d__p__n__e__ce in 19____.

Answer in Complete Sentences

★1. The first paragraph states that "In 1497, Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama set out with four ships to circumnavigate Africa." What do you think circumnavigate means?

_____

_____

_____

2. Why did the Netherlands give the Dutch East India Company a trading monopoly?

_____

_____

_____

3. How did the Dutch East India Company and the British East India Company ack as if they were nations?

_____

_____

_____

★4. What was Sati? Were the British right to outlaw sati in India? Defend your opinion.

_____

_____

_____

_____

★ This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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