

British Opium & Salt Monopoly Trade in Rajasthan Doc

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Abstract:

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the British East India Company established a powerful trade monopoly in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the region of Rajasthan. This monopoly centred around the production and distribution of opium and salt, two highly lucrative commodities at the time. The opium trade, in particular, played a significant role in shaping the economic and social landscape of Rajasthan, as well as the broader Indian economy. The British East India Company's control over the opium and salt trade had profound implications for the local population, leading to widespread social and economic changes. The extraction and cultivation of opium became a central part of Rajasthan's economy, with many farmers and landowners relying on opium production for their livelihood. At the same time, the British monopoly over these commodities exerted immense pressure on local producers and traders, often leading to exploitation and economic disparity. This complex and often exploitative system of trade had far-reaching consequences for the people of Rajasthan, shaping their daily lives, economic opportunities, and social structures. Understanding the dynamics of the British opium and salt monopoly trade in Rajasthan is crucial for unravelling the region's historical development and the lasting impact of colonial economic policies.

Keywords: British East India Company, Rajasthan, opium, salt, trade monopoly, economic impact, social change, exploitation

Introduction:

During the era of British colonial rule in India, the British East India Company established a monopoly over certain commodities, including opium and salt ([Sharma, 2020](#)). This meant that the British controlled the production, distribution, and trade of opium and salt in the region of Rajasthan. This monopoly gave the British a significant advantage in terms of economic dominance and control over the local economy. The British monopoly on opium and salt in Rajasthan allowed them to exert control over the production, distribution, and trade of these commodities, giving them a significant source of revenue and influence in the region. This economic dominance had far-reaching implications for the people of Rajasthan. The British monopoly over opium and salt in Rajasthan had far-reaching consequences for the local population. The control of these commodities not only provided the British with economic dominance but also had a profound impact on the social and cultural fabric of Rajasthan. The production and distribution of opium affected the livelihoods of local farmers and created a dependence on opium cultivation, which had detrimental effects on the

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agricultural practices and the overall economy of the region. Furthermore, the control over salt production and trade had significant implications for the local population. The British imposition of a salt monopoly led to increased prices and limited access to this essential commodity for the people of Rajasthan. This resulted in widespread resentment and opposition to British rule, as the local population suffered from economic hardships and scarcity of essential resources. The economic dominance of the British East India Company in Rajasthan was not just about controlling trade and revenue; it also had profound social, cultural, and political implications for the region. The exploitation of local resources and the imposition of monopolies directly impacted the lives of the people in Rajasthan, shaping their experiences under British colonial rule. The British East India Company's monopoly on opium and salt in Rajasthan during the era of British colonial rule had a lasting impact on the region's economy and the lives of its people.

The Opium Monopoly under British Rule

The British East India Company's monopoly on opium production and trade in Rajasthan during the era of British colonial rule had profound economic and social consequences. It allowed the British to exert control over the production, distribution, and trade of opium, resulting in a significant source of revenue for them. This economic dominance enabled the British to maintain their grip on Rajasthan and exert control over its resources and economy ([Farooqui, 2016](#)). The company already established a monopoly over Bengal opium. In Rajasthan poppy from which opium is derived was cultivated on a large scale in south-eastern states of Rajasthan such as Mewar, Pratapgarh, Dungarpur, Kota, Bundi and Jhalawar ([Farooqui, 1995](#)).

The demand for consumption in various parts of Rajasthan and export to the Chinese market by Portuguese traders gave competition to Bengal opium brought by the East India Company. As a result, the British East India Company sought to establish its monopoly over opium production in Rajasthan as well.

Trade of opium from Rajasthan to China was a lucrative business for the British, as it allowed them to profit from the growing demand for opium in China and control the trade routes through which it was transported ([Farooqui, 2016](#)). They enforced strict regulations and licenses, effectively monopolizing the opium trade in Rajasthan. They also imposed high taxes and levies on opium production and exports, further exploiting the local population and hindering their ability to benefit from this industry. The trade was done from Malwa through Ajmer, Pali, Jaisalmer, Karachi Port to Daman.

The monopoly on opium in Rajasthan had significant social and cultural implications as well ([Farooqui, 1995](#)).

British Interference in the trade of opium of Rajasthan disrupted existing trade networks and practices, as the British replaced local traders and merchants with their own controlled system. This resulted in the displacement and marginalization of local communities that had traditionally been involved in the opium trade. After knowing the importance of Malwa opium the East India Company sought to eliminate competition and establish their dominance over the trade ([Deshpande, 2009](#)).

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Malwa opium by implementing strict regulations and monopolizing the trade routes. The British monopoly on opium in Rajasthan allowed them to exert control over the production, distribution, and trade of opium, resulting in significant economic dominance.

In order to keep strict vigilance on the export so that no opium left the states and entered the British territories without paying British duty scales of weight established at Udaipur

Year	No. of chests weighed at Udaipur
1869-70	444
1870 -71	4488
1875-76	9873
1880-81	6534
1882-83	2809

The fall shows in trade due to:

- General depression to due the increased population in China
- Opening of railway lines diversion to various centres.
- Opening of scales nearer to opium-producing states.

Colonial Control of Salt Production

The British Raj maintained a strict monopoly over the production and trade of opium and salt in the region of Rajasthan. Lt. Colonel James Todd explained in his book, "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan," "This Productive branch of the industry still employs thousands of hands and hundred of oxen is entirely in the hands of that singular race of beings called *Banjaras*. The Sambhar salt exported to every region of Hindustan from the Indus to the Ganges with the name of Sambhar Lun. The British monopolized these commodities as a means of exercising control over the local population and generating revenue for the colonial government ([Deshpande, 2009](#)).

Salt resources in Rajasthan: The region of Rajasthan was known for its abundant salt resources, particularly in areas such as Sambhar, Phalodi, Didwana, Pokaran, Luni and Pachpadra. Salt was manufactured in large quantity in Parganas of Bharatpur, Kumbher, Deeg. Production being around 1.5 lakh maunds yielding income of 3 lakh rupees. The British East India Company took control of these salt resources and established a monopoly on their production and trade. This monopoly allowed the British to regulate the salt market, fix prices, and ensure that all salt production and trade was under their control. The Jodhpur state earned about 7.15 lakh annually according to Todd, from five salt resources

- Pachpadra Rs. 2 lakh
- Sambhar Rs. 2 lakh
- Didwana Rs. 1.15 lakh
- Phalodi Rs. 1 lakh
- Nawa. Rs. 1 lakh

British interference

The treaties concluded in 1818 between the East India Company and the princely states of Rajasthan in salt production directly impacted the traditional salt industry in Rajasthan, as local salt manufacturers lost their autonomy and were forced to adhere to British regulations. Company power to imposed transit duties and customs. The increased duty was so heavy that the salt traders refused to purchase the salt Hence, Salt produced remained unsold due to the high taxes imposed by the British.

Salt treaty with Jaipur state 1869-1870: The treaty signed between the British East India Company and the Jaipur state in 1869-1870 further solidified the British monopoly on salt in Rajasthan. The treaty granted exclusive rights to the British for the production, trade, and export of salt in Jaipur, further consolidating their control over the salt resources in the region. The British East India Company utilized treaties and regulations to establish a monopoly on salt production and trade in Rajasthan, specifically in areas such as Sambhar, Phalodi, Didwana, and Pachpadra.

Conditions of Treaty:

1. States leased its right of manufacture and sale of salt for 2.75 lakh annually within Jaipur share of joint jurisdiction of Sambhar lake
2. The lease was to remain in force until the desire of British Government to terminate it with a notice of two years before termination
3. The state lost its right to levy any duty or tax on salt production and trade within its territories.
4. The state was entitled to receive the annual quantity of salt of 1.72 lakh maunds of salt from British Government and royalty of 20% on salt sold per maund in excess of 8.25 lakh maunds.
5. The state also received annually 7000 maund of good salt-free of charge for the use of its subjects.

Salt treaty with Jodhpur State 1870:

The salt treaty signed between the British East India Company and the Jodhpur state in 1870 further solidified the British monopoly on salt in Rajasthan.

Conditions of Treaty:

1. Lease of Rs. 1.25 lakh of Jodhpur share of joint jurisdiction of Sambhar lake (held jointly by Jaipur and Jodhpur).
2. Royalty of 20% on salt sold per maund in excess of 8.25 lakh maunds .
3. The state also received annually 7000 maund of good salt free of charge for the use of its subjects.

In april 1870 a second treaty was signed by which jodhpur state leased its right of manufacture and sale of salt to the British East India Company in Nawa and Gudha salt fields annual rent of Rs. 3 lakh with a royalty of 40% on sale in excess of 9 lakh maunds of salt.

Impact of British Salt Monopoly in Rajasthan

Firstly, the British monopoly on salt in Rajasthan allowed them to control and exploit the production and trade of salt, which was a vital commodity and essential for daily consumption and various industries. Salt was a mart of Salt which was manufactured in large quantities in parganas of Bharatpur, Kumbher, Dig. Production being around 1.5 lakh mounds yielding income of 3 lakh rupees and gave employment to various people and Naniak Ka katia was a wealthy and flourishing part of the city but the suppression of this salt industry led to disaster for the subjects of Bharatpur city .

Secondly, The banjaras who carried this trade on the pack of animals adversely affected particularly because of the train and railway network in Rajasthan. Jodhpur -Bikaner Railway to Balotra the salt stored and loaded directly into railway wagons it was largely consumed in United province, Central India, Bihar, Nepal.

Thirdly, the important one was the increase in the revenue of British government from salt.

Conclusion:

To sum the possession of monopoly of salt trade and opium trade in varying degrees by british government adversely affected the local economy and the livelihoods of the people in Rajasthan. The economic and financial position of states concerned and depleted source of their permanent revenue with humiliating treaty clauses.

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