

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316147084>

# BRITISH ANNEXATION OF SINDH: THE OPIUM ECONOMY FACTOR

Article · December 2015

CITATIONS

0

READS

3,002

3 authors, including:



Muhammad Qasim Sodhar  
Shanghai University

7 PUBLICATIONS 2 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Ghulam RASHID Memon  
University of Sindh

1 PUBLICATION 0 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



RESEARCH JOURNAL [View project](#)

**BRITISH ANNEXATION OF SINDH:  
THE OPIUM ECONOMY FACTOR**

*Muhammad Qasim Sodhar  
Ghulam Rashid Memon  
Dr.Ghulam Akbar Mahesar*

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper is divided into two sections. First section deals with the importance of opium economy with reflection of conflicts between indigenous traders and British authorities over Malwa opium. In this section, British monopoly over opium crops will also be highlighted. The second section focuses on British purposes to annex Sindh. In this section, the importance of Sindh with regard to opium trade will be dealt.*

---

**Keywords:** East India Company, Conquest of Sindh, Annexation of Sindh, Economic Factor, Malwa Opium

**INTRODUCTION**

Sindh was one of the last regions annexed by British. There are some different viewpoints about annexation of Sindh, for some scholars it was because of Sir Charles Napier's willingness to annex this region in order to get prestige among British authorities. On the other hand, it is most famous viewpoint currently found in Sindh that Sindh was economically rich so British annexed it for the sack of controlling natural resources of Sindh. Likewise, for some historians, Sindh had been strategically important because the Ameers of Sindh had good relations with Afghanistan, and it was tragic for British who were defeated by Afghanistan in 1842. Therefore, British wanted to control over Sindh so that they might use this region strategically to wage a war against Afghanistan.

There is another opinion as well which narrates the economic factor relating with Malwa opium which was exported China through routes of Sindh. Malwa opium was exporting via Bombay port and also via Karachi so British decided to annex Sindh in order to stop and ultimately annihilate exportation of Malwa opium via routes of Sindh. This last viewpoint will be mainly focused in this paper, which is one of major causes of British annexation of Sindh.

**BRITISH MONOPOLY OVER OPIUM ECONOMY**

The opium use in China was common and India was one of countries who were exporting it to China. The opium had great importance in the

economy of revenue because it was third largest source of generating revenue from India. It was also a source of domestic economy, on which millions of peasants belonged to countryside, relied as one of major sources of living (Newman, 1989). As British annexed most of states of India so definitely the resources of those states were also came under control of British, opium was one of those resources which were monopolized by British specifically East India Company. It was seventeenth century, when Surat emerged as a major hub of the opium trade. Before it's shifting to Bombay, East India Company was fully involved in this trade and it was the period of 1770s, when opium in small quantities, was being exported to China (Markovits, 2009).

On one hand British had control over Bengal opium, but on the other hand Malwa opium was produced in Central Indian states which exported to China through different routes without any interference of British. But in 1803 as British came to know about this, the then Governor General of India Marquis Wellesley ordered an immediate inquiry. Wellesley decided to take steps in order to preclude the growth of opium, and also its obliteration (Wong, 1997). Malwa opium was actually a serious threat for British with regard to the importance and prices of Bengal Opium in Chinese market. It was obvious that Malwa Opium was also main reason created competition in market, because before its export, Bengal opium had monopoly in Chinese markets, which was under control of British. Due to introducing Malwa opium, this was possible a cause of reducing prices of Bengal opium, which definitely was not bearable for British authorities.

The one of routes for export of Malwa opium was Bombay port. The East India Company decided to forbid the passage through Bombay port, but British authorities were wrong in the sense that it was not only Bombay Port from where Malwa opium was being exported to China, there were other important routes specifically Portuguese' Daman port. Governor General of India negotiated with Portuguese authorities but he was not successful to convince them for stopping export of Malwa opium from their route.

The sales of Malwa opium were increasing fast which is evident in these figures that in 1821-22, its sales in China were 1,715 chests, and during the decade of 1820s, its sales extended up to 4000 chests. It was time when East India Company now decided to charge fees on export of Malwa opium. For this purpose 'Malwa Opium Agency' was established in 1823 (Ibid:227). But again Company was not succeeded in her objective because the competition in Chinese market was not eliminated through this way. Now company applied three different tactics to eliminate competition in Chinese market which were:

1. The Bengal opium production was increased so that it might compete in Chinese market. For this purpose all the efforts like machinery and use of more fields were applied.

2. The Company decided to purchase whole Malwa opium from producers, and then it export to China by her own. But company failed in this tactic, because when the opium producers of independent states came to know about company's this tactic, they increased its production.
3. After failure of previous tactics, company decided to sign treaties with some independent states who were allowing Malwa opium export to china, for blocking routes to sea.

But again Company could not succeed because majority of those states did not sign any agreement. Those who signed an agreement were also not able to follow it because of pressure from economic groups within their states (Ibid:228).

After failure of almost all tactics, in 1830 East India Company again decided to charge fees on export of Malwa opium. As Claude Markovits writes that the Company charged a tax of 175 rupees per chest on Malwa opium which was passing through Bombay. In 1835, because of continuing smuggling of opium through Damao, the fees of opium passing through Bombay, was reduced to Rupees 125 (Markovits, 2009). The new route through Sindh came in use from 1819; it was noticed by company officials in 1821. Claude Markovits points out that according to official reports, the new route through Sindh began in Pahli, situated in the areas of Maharaja of Jodhpur. He states about the sale of opium to China from the routes of Sindh that the passage of carry opium on camelbacks was started from Pahli to Jaisalmir, and it reached Karachi by crossing Thar Desert via Umarkot and Hyderabad in the Indus valley. After reaching Karachi, it was sent to Damao by small boats, and then it shipped to Macao from Damao, and finally it was sold in the markets of China (Ibid:93-94).

#### **BRITISH ANNEXATION OF SINDH AND OPIUM TRADE**

There are different schools of thoughts about the British Annexation of Sindh as renowned scholar of Sindh, Hamida Khuhro writes in introduction of Sir William Napier's book titles 'The History of General Charles Napier's Conquest of Sindh' that "the fact was that the stage in Sindh had been set well before Napier's arrival on the scene. Ever since Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798, the British had feared first a French invasion of India and then, after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, 'the Russian menace' from the North-West Frontier of India. In order to forestall any such designs of Russia, the British had started to keep an eye on the countries of North West: Sindh and Kelat, and further west beyond the mountains, Iran and Afghanistan (Napier, 2001)."

There was an economic factor as well. Sarah Ansari argues that it was economic strength and potential of Sindh, specifically gateway of River

Indus to Central Asia and its importance with respect to trade, which attracted British (Ansari, 2005). There is another viewpoint with regard to economic factor as well that narrates that British annexed Sindh because of controlling the routes of Sindh via Malwa opium was exported to China. Because Sindh was not in an agreement with British so it was easy way to export Malwa opium via routes of Sindh. Claude Markovits points out that it was the time period of 1819-1839, when Malwa opium was illegally smuggled to Damao through Sindh. The reason behind smuggling of opium in larger quantity, through Sindh was that, Sindh was only coastal state in sub-continent at that time, which was out of every such treaty which could restrict the smuggle of opium. The other major reason was that Karachi had safe maritime links with Damao which was most helpful at that time (Markovits, 2009).

J. Y. Wong strongly suggests that economic perspective with regard to opium trade was one of the major causes of British annexation of Sindh (Wong, 1997).

The annexation of Sindh gave much benefit to British in order to increase the fees charged per chest, because after controlling over Sindh, the Bombay was only route from where Malwa opium could be export. Hence, now it was on British choice that how much they regulate fees on per chest. After the annexation of Sindh, the tax reached up to Rupees 200 per chest, and within the period of two years, it increased to Rupees 300 per chest. The rate reached to Rupees 400 per chest within next two years. It happened because during these years, there was acute shortage of Bengal opium (Ibid: 231-32). Before British invasion of Sindh, and between 1820s and 1830s, Malwa opium economically benefited as a revenue source to Sindh. The Opium remained a major source of income for merchants of Karachi, Hyderabad and Shikarpur, during this period (Markovits, 2009). Claude Markovits sees British annexation as a matter of strategic importance of Sindh for British, but at same time, he admits that because of Malwa opium trade, Sindh became a part of political sphere (Ibid:108).

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite this fact that Sindh had strategic importance but at the same time the economic factor was more dominant as compare to strategic one. The history of Sindh shows a clear picture that even before British annexation of Sindh, there were many alien powers that captured Sindh because of its economic importance.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century opium had great importance in China and India. In China it remained officially illegal crop until 1880, but latter it was decided by Peking government to internally produce this crop in order to prevent its importation from India. In this condition, it can be understood that how much

it was important, even governments from both sides China and India were allowing its usage. There was contradiction between local producers of Malwa opium and British authorities. In this conflict, Sindh had enormous importance for both locals and British as well. It was one of economic factors which attracted British to annex Sindh.

It is vivid that after annexation of Sindh, the British authorities were not succeeded to annihilate Malwa opium, but they surely benefited through charging huge fees on its exportation. Hence, it would be incorrect to say that it was only major cause for British annexation of Sindh, but besides some other causes it was one of major causes which also compelled British to annex the region.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Ansari, Sarah, 'The Sind Blue Books of 1843 and 1844: The Political 'Laundering' of Historical Evidence', *The English Historical Review*, 2005.
- Markovits, Claude, 'The Political Economy of Opium Smuggling in Early Nineteenth Century India: Leakage or Resistance?', *Modern Asian Studies*, 2009.
- Napier, Sir William, *The History of General Sir Charles Napier's Conquest of Scinde*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Newman, R. K., 'India and the Anglo: Chinese Opium Agreements, 1907-14', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1989.
- Wong, J. Y., 'British Annexation of Sindh in 1843: An Economic Perspective', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1997.
-