

Title—Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence 1600-1850
Author—Prasannan Parthasarathi
Year—2011

Categories: World History, Economics

Place: The World (Esp. India & Britain)

Time: 1600-1850

Argument Synopsis:

Prasannan Parthasarathi's *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence 1600-1800* follows Kenneth Pomeranz's lead and attempts to craft an alternative narrative of modernization that does not rely on the fallacy of European exceptionalism, instead posing comparisons between India and Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His focus on India is partially in response to the belief of India as an unchanging monolith. While Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* focuses primarily on the similarities between China and western Europe, Parthasarathi directs his focus to India and makes comparisons primarily with Britain. Parthasarathi criticizes Pomeranz for still operating within the framework of presences and absences, of things that Europe possessed but Asia did not. While Pomeranz argues that the West diverged because the New World and coal allowed the West to counteract the ecological problems of a growing population and deforestation better than China, Parthasarathi claims that Britain's divergence can be explained by two unique pressures facing Britain that forced innovation: shortages of wood and competitive challenge of Indian cotton textiles. According to Parthasarathi, India did not struggle with deforestation and was the onus of economic pressure on the British, thus they had no need to innovate in the same way.

The main argument of his book rests of the role that coal and Indian cotton textile competition played in encouraging innovation and provided the necessary energy economy to utilize it. Parthasarathi highlights the influential role of Indian cotton textiles on the development of British cotton spinning technologies, claiming that India's place as the center of cotton manufacturing encouraged British efforts of imitation. This process of imitation, according to Parthasarathi, led to the development of superior industrial technology and caused Europe to supplant India as the center of cotton manufacturing; a shift that Parthasarathi argues is profoundly important in explaining the divergence. However, without the new energy economy of coal, the rise of cotton alone would have represented a fairly shallow economic transformation. The truly revolutionary industrial development of nineteenth century Europe would not have been possible without coal and the new energy economy to which it gave rise. He argues that a focus on social needs, economic pressures, and political responses is necessary to explain the different paths of change and development in the eighteenth century between India and Britain. Unlike Pomeranz who highlights things that Europe uniquely possessed, Parthasarathi underscores the importance of state policy and economic pressures in spurring change and development.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Title implies a much broader scope, when in reality the book is mostly concerned with India and Britain
- Brought India into the global divergence conversation, doing for India what Pomeranz did for China