

Modern History Mains Index

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01. British Expansion in India (1757–1857)

Introduction

The Battle of Plassey (1757) was a watershed event in Indian history that laid the foundation of British colonial rule. The Battle of Buxar (1764) legitimized this dominance, bringing Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa under British control. Over the next century, the British gradually extended their authority across almost the entire subcontinent.

Causes

1. Decline of the Mughal Empire led to political fragmentation, creating opportunities for British intervention.
2. Rivalries among Indian powers like the Marathas, Sikhs, and Nawabs weakened collective resistance.
3. Superior naval strength and disciplined military organization gave the British a decisive edge.
4. Through diplomacy and alliances with local elites, the Company consolidated its position.

Objectives :-

The primary British objectives were to protect their **commercial interests**, control India's natural resources, and convert the country into a colonial market supporting British industries.

Phases of British Expansion in India (1757–1857)

1. Dominance in Bengal (1757–1772)

- The Battle of Plassey (1757) marked the beginning of British political dominance through Robert Clive's diplomacy and military strategy.
- After the Battle of Buxar (1764), the Company defeated the combined forces of Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daula, and Shah Alam II, securing Diwani rights (revenue collection).
- This made Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa the first regions to come under British administration, marking the start of colonial control.

2. Expansion in Madras and South India (1760–1805)

- After defeating the French in the Carnatic Wars (1746–1763), the British established dominance in South India.
- The Third Carnatic War ended French political ambitions in India.
- Later, the four Anglo-Mysore Wars (1767–1799) against Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan ensured British supremacy across Southern India.

3. Expansion in Maharashtra and Northern India (1802–1818)

- The three Anglo-Maratha Wars (1775–1818) reflected the struggle for supremacy between the British and the Marathas.
- While the first war ended indecisively, the second and third wars brought decisive victories to the British, making them rulers of Central and Western India.

4. Expansion in Punjab and North-West (1845–1849)

- The First and Second Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845–1849) led to the annexation of Punjab.
- Under Lord Dalhousie, the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Duleep Singh was dissolved in 1849, extending the British frontiers to the Afghan border.

5. The Deccan and Southern Conquest (Up to 1856)

- Under Lord Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse, several Indian states were annexed, including Satara (1848), Jhansi (1854), Nagpur (1854), and Awadh (1856).
- This expansionist policy deepened resentment among Indians and became a major cause of the Revolt of 1857.

Significance

British rule introduced **political and administrative unity**, laying the groundwork for Indian nationalism. Institutions like railways, telegraphs, and modern education helped integrate India's diverse regions under a single administrative framework.

Impact in India

5. Politically, princely states lost autonomy, and British supremacy prevailed.
6. Economically, India suffered deindustrialization and became a raw-material supplier for Britain.
7. Socially, traditional hierarchies declined, but Western education fostered reformist thought.
8. Culturally, Western ideas influenced Indian thought, sparking a socio-religious renaissance.

Conclusion

The period from 1757 to 1857 was an **era of transformation and transition**. British rule brought administrative modernization and unity but also economic exploitation and subjugation — contradictions that eventually fueled the Indian freedom struggle.

02. Subsidiary Alliance and Doctrine of Lapse

Subsidiary Alliance

Introduction

- The Subsidiary Alliance system was one of the most influential policies used by the British to establish supremacy in India.
- It was introduced by **Lord Wellesley (1798–1805)** with the aim of bringing Indian states under indirect British control through the guise of military protection.

Causes

1. There was political instability and mutual rivalry among Indian princely states.
2. The British sought to expand their influence without engaging in major wars.
3. Ensuring British security against strong powers like the Marathas, Mysore, and Hyderabad was essential.
4. A desire to control the political structure of India completely.

Objectives

1. To bring Indian rulers under British subordination.
2. To maintain the permanent presence of the British army in India.
3. To expand the British Empire in India without military confrontation.
4. To gain indirect control over India's resources and revenues.

Significance

1. Through this policy, the British gained control over many Indian states without waging wars.
2. The expenses of the British army were extracted from Indian states.
3. Indian states retained nominal independence, but actual power rested with the British.
4. The Subsidiary Alliance created a strong political and military base for the British Empire in India.

Impact in India

1. **Political Impact:** -The independence of Indian rulers ended, and British supremacy was established.
2. **Economic Impact:** - Indian states had to bear the cost of maintaining British troops, which caused financial distress.
3. **Military Impact:** - Native armies were disbanded, making Indian rulers militarily dependent on the British.
4. **Social Impact:** - The policy increased public resentment and sowed the seeds of rebellion against the British.

Conclusion

- The Subsidiary Alliance was a fine example of the British policy of “conquest through diplomacy.”
- It enabled the British to establish supremacy over India without direct wars.
- Although it strengthened British administrative control, it also fueled Indian resentment, eventually leading to the **First War of Independence in 1857**.

Doctrine of Lapse

Introduction

- The **Doctrine of Lapse** was one of the most controversial policies of British imperial expansion in India.
- It was implemented by **Lord Dalhousie (1848–1856)**.
- According to this doctrine, if an Indian ruler died without a natural heir, his state would automatically be annexed to the British Empire.

Causes

1. To accelerate the territorial expansion of the British Empire.
2. To exploit political instability and succession disputes among Indian states.
3. To increase the Company's revenue and access to resources.
4. To eliminate independent princely states and establish centralized governance.

Objectives

1. To expand British dominion without military confrontation.
2. To curtail the political independence of Indian rulers.
3. To challenge traditional Indian rights of adoption and succession.
4. To establish a unified and efficient administration across India.

Significance

1. The doctrine represented the clear face of British imperialism.
2. Under this policy, several major princely states were annexed.
3. The British presented it as an “administrative reform,” but it was essentially an expansionist tool.
4. The policy expanded the British Empire’s frontiers deep into Northern and Central India.

Impact in India

1. **Political Impact:** - Through this doctrine, states like **Satara (1848)**, **Jhansi (1854)**, **Nagpur (1854)**, and **Awadh (1856)** were annexed. The sovereignty of Indian rulers came to an end.
2. **Economic Impact:** - The resources and revenues of annexed states were taken over by the British.
3. **Social Impact:** - The Indian population grew deeply resentful as the policy insulted traditional customs and adoption rights.
4. **Political Consequence:** - The doctrine played a decisive role in sparking the Revolt of 1857.

Conclusion

- The **Doctrine of Lapse** was the peak of British policy of **imperialism through diplomacy**.
- While it strengthened British imperial control, it also ignited discontent and the spirit of nationalism among Indians.
- This very policy gave rise to brave leaders like **Rani Lakshmi Bai**, who fought fearlessly against British domination.
- Thus, the policy ultimately became one of the major causes leading to the downfall of British rule in India.

03. Economic Impact of British Rule in India

Introduction

British rule dismantled India’s traditional economic system and turned it into a colonial economy. After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the East India Company gained political control and framed policies to serve British interests. The primary goal was to use India as a supplier of raw materials and as a market for British finished goods.

Causes

1. **Effect of the Industrial Revolution:** The Industrial Revolution in England increased the demand for raw materials and markets, and India became the ideal colony to fulfill this need.
2. **Trade Monopoly:** The East India Company established a monopoly over India’s foreign trade, destroying Indian traders and artisans.
3. **Land Revenue Systems:** Permanent Settlement, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari systems imposed heavy land taxes on farmers.
4. **Raw Materials and Finished Goods:** India exported raw materials such as cotton, jute, indigo, and opium to Britain and imported finished British goods.

Objectives

1. To make India a **source of raw materials** for British industries.
2. To make India a **market for British manufactured goods**.