



British Colonialism in the Subcontinent & War of Independence: Impacts on Politics

Introduction

- ▶ British colonialism in the Indian subcontinent (1757-1947) profoundly impacted its socio-economic and political structures. The 1857 War of Independence marked a significant turning point, leading to the end of the East India Company's rule and the start of Crown rule.
- ▶ The period of direct British rule over the Indian subcontinent from 1858 until the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. The raj succeeded management of the subcontinent by the British East India Company, after general distrust and dissatisfaction with company leadership resulted in a widespread mutiny of sepoy troops in 1857, causing the British to reconsider the structure of governance in India. The British government took possession of the company's assets and imposed direct rule. The raj was intended to increase Indian participation in governance, but the powerlessness of Indians to determine their own future without the consent of the British led to an increasingly inflexible national independence movement.

Historical Background

- ▶ Though trade with India had been highly valued by Europeans since ancient times, the long route between them was subject to many potential obstacles and obfuscations from middlemen, making trade unsafe, unreliable, and expensive. This was especially true after the collapse of the Mongol empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire all but blocked the ancient Silk Road. As Europeans, led by the Portuguese, began to explore maritime navigation routes to bypass middlemen, the distance of the venture required merchants to set up fortified posts.

British Colonialism in the Subcontinent

- ▶ East India Company (EIC): Established in 1600, initially for trade. Expanded its influence through military and political means.
- ▶ Battle of Swally (1612): First major conflict between the EIC and the Portuguese, securing British trade rights in India.

Early Phase (1757-1857)

Major events include:

- ▶ Battle of Plassey (1757): Robert Clive's victory against Siraj-ud-Daulah, leading to British control over Bengal.
- ▶ Battle of Buxar (1764): EIC's victory over the combined forces of Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, Shuja-ud-Daula, and the Marathas. Consolidated British control over Bengal and marked the beginning of British supremacy in India.

Impact on Economy

Agriculture:

- ▶ British policies led to the commercialization of agriculture, with a focus on cash crops like cotton and indigo. This shift often led to food shortages and reduced agricultural diversity.

Decline of Traditional Industries:

- ▶ British industrial policies and competition led to the decline of traditional industries, such as textiles. Indian handloom weavers faced severe hardships due to the influx of cheap British-manufactured goods.

Economic Drain:

- ▶ The theory of the "drain of wealth," articulated by Dadabhai Naoroji, estimated that around £100 million per year was transferred from India to Britain by the late 19th century. This drain contributed to India's economic impoverishment.

References:

- ▶ Dadabhai Naoroji, Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901): Naoroji's work outlines the economic exploitation under British rule.
- ▶ Tirthankar Roy, The Economic History of India 1857-1947 (2000): Provides a detailed analysis of economic changes in colonial India.
- ▶ Shashi Tharoor, Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (2016): Explores the economic impacts of British rule on India.

Social and Cultural Impacts

Education:

- ▶ Introduction of Western education under Macaulay's Minute (1835), which promoted English and Western curricula.

Cultural Changes:

- ▶ Western influence altered social structures and cultural practices. The spread of English and Western legal systems was significant.

Political Impact

Political Consciousness:

- ▶ The formation of political bodies like the Indian National Congress (1885) and the All India Muslim League (1906).

Divide and Rule:

- ▶ Policies that exacerbated communal divisions, leading to communal tensions and partition.



War of Independence & Its Impact on Politics

Introduction to War of Independence

- ▶ 1857 Revolt: Also known as the Sepoy Mutiny. Key causes include resentment against the British East India Company's policies and cultural insensitivity.
- ▶ Outcome: Suppression of the revolt led to the end of EIC rule and the start of direct Crown rule under the British government.

The 1857 Rebellion Begins: Mangal Pandey and the Meerut Uprising

- ▶ In late March 1857, an Indian soldier named Mangal Pandey attacked British officers in Barrackpore and was executed in April. Later that month, Indian soldiers in Meerut refused to use new cartridges they believed were greased with animal fat, which was against their religious beliefs. As punishment, they were jailed and harshly treated. This led to a rebellion on May 10, where the soldiers killed their British officers and marched to Delhi, where there were no European troops.

Immediate Aftermath of the Mutiny

- ▶ The mutiny led to major changes: the East India Company was replaced by direct British rule, finances were modernized, and the Indian army was reorganized. Additionally, the British began consulting with Indians more, recognizing that ignoring Indian views had contributed to the crisis

Impact on Indian Society

- ▶ The mutiny showed that traditional Indian society couldn't resist Western influences. Princes and leaders largely failed or stayed away, and hopes of returning to old ways faded. Traditional structures began to break down, giving way to a Westernized class system and a new, strong middle class with growing Indian nationalism.

Causes of the War of Independence

Political Causes:

- ▶ The Doctrine of Lapse (annexation of Indian states without heirs) and other annexation policies.

Economic Causes:

- ▶ High taxes, exploitation of resources, and economic policies detrimental to local industries.

Social & Religious Causes:

- ▶ Cultural and religious interference, such as attempts to reform Hindu practices and the introduction of new laws perceived as intrusive.

End of EIC Rule

- ▶ The Government of India Act 1858 ended the East India Company's rule, and India was governed directly by the Crown.

Changes in Administration:

- ▶ The British Raj introduced reforms in administration, military, and law, leading to a more centralized governance structure

Long-Term Political Impact

Rise of Nationalism:

- ▶ The revolt intensified nationalist sentiments, leading to the growth of the Indian independence movement.

Formation of the Indian National Congress (1885):

- ▶ A key political organization advocating for self-rule and later independence.

Communal Tensions:

- ▶ The British strategy of “divide and rule” deepened communal divisions, setting the stage for future conflicts.

Conclusion

- ▶ British colonialism had a lasting impact on the socio-economic and political fabric of the subcontinent. The War of Independence was a critical event that reshaped the colonial rule and laid the groundwork for the eventual struggle for independence.