

Essay on British India

The British entered India as traders and their primary objective was to earn profits by carrying on trade in India. In order to earn maximum profits from Indian trade and commerce and to develop monopoly of trade and commerce they competed with other European powers.

By the beginning of the middle of the 18th century, the British crippled the French interests in India and became a dominant trading power.

The British also developed political interest to push in their monopoly of trade and commerce and initiated the process of expanding their political power in Bengal by the victory in the battle of Plassey and obtained the power of Diwani by the victory of Buxar through the treaty of Allahabad of 1765.

From then on till 1857, the British East India Company through wars, diplomacy and administrative measures made it a policy to obtain more and more of economic benefits by fleecing the Indian farmer, artisan and small and medium traders. This process is called colonialism and India became a colony of the British.

This colonialism bled the Indians and made India a de-industrialized power. In this span of seventy-five years from 1772 to 1857, the process and pattern of colonialism underwent different stages because the Charter Act of 1813 made by the British Parliament and Crown abolished the monopoly of the British East India Company and opened the gates of trade and commerce to every British citizen.

Further, by Charter Act of 1833, the Governor General of Bengal became the Governor General of India with control over the presidencies of Bombay and Madras and the British citizens were permitted to own property in India and thereby we come across British landlords and planters of tea, coffee, indigo and cotton and also British capitalists investing surplus capital in Colonial India. Both these measures hastened the process of draining of the wealth of India by the colonialists with their colonial policies.

Along with the colonialist measures, the British introduced ideology of mercantilism, orientalism, evangelicalism, utilitarianism and liberalism to justify their colonialist policies in India. In the name of 'improvement', 'progress' and 'Whiteman's burden' the British administrators made it their avowed objective to introduce British laws and revenue measures into India. Added to the

above ideological and philosophical views, the modernization process of Dalhousie also acted as the last straw on the camel's back, and the substance of colonialism remained the same throughout the period of seventy-five years.

The colonial administrative apparatus from top to bottom was controlled by the Crown and Parliament through their Acts and Charter Acts. The British East India Company enjoyed a unique position at England as King George III patronized it and its friends – fought with the help of the parliament. The British decided to control the company's Indian administration in the interest of Britain's influential elite group as a whole. The company was allowed to have monopoly "of the trade and Directors of the company" were given the control of Indian administration.

Before we take up in detail the administrative set-up of the colonial administrative apparatus, we have to bear in mind the fact that the pre-colonial India had well established administrative structure at different levels – centre, provincial and local, suited to the needs and demands of the time, relevant to the socio-economic formations. Another factor to be noted is that all the earlier invaders who established their power in India like the Indo-Greeks to Sakas, the Kushans and the Muslims added their principles of administration and modified the administrative structure and thus we notice the process of continuity and change in our administration in theory and practice.

The major factor of difference to be noticed is that the British East India Company replaced the old Indian administrative policies and introduced their system of law, justice, education, revenue and intellectual and social theories, in India. All these changes created a new value system. We also notice an evolution of the colonial administrative apparatus as per the reforms introduced by the earliest regulating Act of 1773 and ending with the Government of India Act of 1858.

The regulating Act of 1773 introduced provisions for the effective supervision of the executive of the company. It introduced changes in the constitution of the Court of directors of the company and the company affairs were put under the control of the government.

It is an important change to be noticed by everyone. The Charter Act of 1813 allowed the British subjects, access to Indian shore with their ships. By now the company's power spread over the whole of India except the Punjab, Nepal and the Sindh. To whatever political and economical philosophy the British subscribed, every Britisher was interested in the stability and security of the British territorial power in India. The most important development to be recorded is the deprival of the monopoly of trade and commerce of the British East India Company.

Owing to the rapid growth of industrial revolution in Great Britain, the British followed laissez-faire philosophy in India which ultimately benefited the British industrialists and capitalists at the cost of the Indian farmers and artisans. There was a great demand in India for the abolition of the company rule and assumption of authority by the crown.

In this backdrop the Charter Act of 1833 was passed which made the Governor General of Bengal, the Governor General of India. The president of the board of control became the minister of India and the board of control was given the power to supervise Indian affairs on behalf of the crown. Bombay, Madras and Bengal regions were placed under the direct rule of the Governor General in Council of India.

Central government was given the power to exercise full control over revenue and expenditure of the British territories in India. The Governor General in Council was given legislative powers over the rest of the Indian presidencies which are applicable to everyone in India. By this Act, a new member by name law member was added to the executive council and the strength rose to four. Lord Macaulay, the new law member played a very crucial role in influencing the educational policy of the British.

The number of members of the councils of the presidencies was reduced to two. Bombay and Madras were to keep their separate armies under the commander-in-chief and were kept under the control of the central government. The laws of India were codified by this Act through a law commission appointed by the Governor General. As a result of their effort, the Indian penal code and codes of civil and commercial law were enacted.

The most significant aspect of this Act theoretically was abolishing discrimination towards Indians in appointments to the British East India Company, and it was more violated by non-implementation and it provided for Indians a sheet anchor towards agitations for equality of treatment to Indians. In the next two decades the political consciousness of Indians increased due to the introduction of Western education and realization among the Indians.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Bombay Association and the Madras Native Association submitted petitions to the parliamentary select committee demanding for the end of the reactionary rule of the company. By 1853 Charter Act, one more member was added to the executive council of Governor General to enact laws. The consent of the Governor General was mandatory for all legislative proposals. They added one more member from each province to the central legislative body. The Chief

Justice of the Supreme Court of Calcutta was also made the ex officio member of the legislative council. The legislative council's membership was limited to 12 the Governor General, Commander-in-Chief, four members of Governor General's council and six legislative members. Thus, this Act separated the legislative body from the executive body and this legislative body became an Anglo-Indian House of Commons.

The 1857 Great Revolt opened the eyes of the British and made it clear how the Indians hated the British rule for all their evil deeds and an attempt was made by the British to rectify their blunder by the Government of India Act of 1858. The Act replaced the British East India Company as ruler and transferred the powers to the crown along with the army. It abolished the Court of directors and the Board of Control. Their place was filled up by the secretary of state and the Indian council. They were given the powers to rule in the name of Her Majesty. But yet the ultimate power rested with the Parliament.

India Council should consist of 15 members and it was to be an advisory body to the secretary of state. The Governor General is designated as Viceroy or Crown's representative and the Government of India's threads were in London.