

UPSC Civil Services Examination

Modern Indian History

Topic: Doctrine of Lapse

The Doctrine of Lapse was an annexation policy followed widely by Lord Dalhousie when he was India's Governor-General from 1848 to 1856. It was used as an administrative policy for the extension of British Paramountcy. Important for IAS Exam, aspirants should know the facts about the Doctrine of Lapse from prelims and mains perspectives.

This article will introduce the Doctrine of Lapse along with its feature and names of the states annexed under the policy.

Who was Lord Dalhousie & What is the Doctrine of Lapse?

Lord Dalhousie was Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856. He had been a famous Scottish statesman. In British India, there are various events that he witnessed as an administrator and executed. The doctrine of Lapse is one of the administrative policies used by the British to expand their dominion in India. Introduced, by Dalhousie, the Doctrine of Lapse has several features given below.

Note:

1. The doctrine of Lapse is not originated by Lord Dalhousie.
2. Dalhousie, though is related to this policy as during his governor-generalship several important cases arose in which the 'Doctrine' could be applied.

Features of Doctrine of Lapse

- According to this, any princely state under the direct or indirect (as a vassal) control of the East India Company where the ruler did not have a legal male heir would be annexed by the company.
- This was not introduced by Lord Dalhousie even though it was he who documented it and used it widely to acquire territories for the British.
- As per this, any adopted son of the Indian ruler could not be proclaimed as heir to the kingdom. The adopted son would only inherit his foster father's personal property and estates.
- The adopted son would also not be entitled to any pension that his father had been receiving or to any of his father's titles.
- This challenged the Indian ruler's long-held authority to appoint an heir of their choice.

The Doctrine of Lapse - States Annexed

The states that were annexed under this policy are given below in ascending order:

States Annexed by Doctrine of Lapse	Year of Annexation
Satara	1848
Jaitpur	1849
Sambhalpur	1849
Baghat Jhansi	1850
Udaipur	1852
Jhansi	1853
Nagpur	1854

- In 1824, before the time of Dalhousie, the princely state of Kittur was acquired by the East India Company by this doctrine.
- It was as per this policy that Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao II was denied his titles and pension.
- The final moment came and **Awadh** was annexed to the English East India Company under the terms of the **Doctrine of Lapse** on the grounds of internal misrule on 7 February 1856 AD. This annexation was one of the reasons for Mutiny of 1857.

Effects of Doctrine of Lapse

- Many Indian states lost their sovereignty and became British territories.
- This led to a lot of unrest among the Indian princes.
- A lot of people were unhappy with the 'illegal' nature of this doctrine and this was one of the causes of the Indian Revolt of 1857.
- Nana Sahib and the Rani of Jhansi had grievances against the British because the former's pension was stopped by the British after his foster father died, and the Rani's adopted son was denied the throne under the doctrine of lapse.
- Dalhousie returned to Britain in 1856. After the Indian Revolt broke out in 1857, his governance was widely criticised as one of the causes of the rebellion.