

GS Foundation 2024: Modern India

Handout 10: Doctrine of Lapse

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The Expansionist Policy of Lord Dalhousie (1848-56)

Greatest Imperialist of the Victorian Era

In 1848, Dalhousie arrived in India as the Governor-General. He followed a policy of expansion with great vigour. The annexation of the Punjab in 1849 was one of the first acts of Governor-General Lord Dalhousie (1848–56), and it was a portent. Over the next seven years Dalhousie enormously increased the area of British India and, with the exception of the Second Burma War in 1852, he did it with paperwork, as part of the relentless logic of paramountcy. As a result, the British imperialistic design reached its zenith and the British Indian Empire reached its greatest extent within a short span of time.

- Industrial capitalism
- Neo-Victorian imperialism
- Utilitarian ideas – better and efficient government

Lord Dalhousie was greatest imperialist in the history of British India and he used every method and opportunity to carry out the territorial expansion of British East India possessions.

Three-fold Policy of Dalhousie:

- Continued the British **policy of conquest** – Vast Territorial Expansion
 - Second Anglo-Sikh War (1849) – Annexation of Punjab
 - Sikkim fell into the clutches of Dalhousie's imperialist policy (1850)
 - Second Burmese war (1852) – pushed the eastern frontier to the Salween river.
 - Snatched Berar from the Nizam (1853)
- Dalhousie invented the policy of **Doctrine of Lapse**
 - This doctrine was enunciated with the objective of justifying the formal annexation of the territories of several princely states in the late 1840s and early 1850s. It was earlier vaguely used by Auckland in the past, but Dalhousie gave it a concrete shape.
 - Under this, the British claimed that they had the prerogative of taking over a state in the event of an unsatisfactory succession. If the ruler did not have a natural heir, his kingdom could be annexed by the British authorities (unless the adopted son was specifically approved by the British earlier). Thus, no succession was considered valid without the recognition of the Company.

Type of State	Doctrine of Lapse	
Independent and Friendly States	Not Applicable	Free to choose successors <u>without</u> any British intervention
States earlier subordinated by <u>Mughals or Marathas</u>	Not Applicable	In the matter of <u>succession</u> , these states had to seek British approval, which was <u>easily granted</u>

States created by the Company	Applicable	If there was <u>no legal heir</u> to the throne, the ruler was not permitted to adopt for <u>succession</u> purpose. As per the British, it <u>amounted to the delegated power</u> .
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- The Doctrine paid rich dividends to the Company. On this basis, Dalhousie annexed **seven states**: Satara (1848), Jaitpur and Sambhalpur (1849), Baghat (1850), Udaipur (1852), Jhansi (1853) and Nagpur (1854)
- This infamous doctrine is often considered to be one of the major factors responsible for the revolt of 1857.
- **Doctrine of Mis-governance**
 - **Awadh** had a great economic and strategic importance, but the doctrine of lapse was not applicable to it. So, Dalhousie invented another doctrine of mis-governance in context of Awadh – Company could annex any state based on mis-governance caused by an incompetent ruler. Thus, Nawab Wajid Ali of Awadh was removed from power on this pretext and Awadh was annexed in 1856 CE.
 - It is interesting however, that the British actually bred political uncertainty in the native states with their intervention.

Within 8 years of his tenure, Dalhousie increased the territories of British India by almost 50%. Since most of his annexation were carried out through peaceful methods in a very swift manner, it is said that the territorial expansion of Dalhousie could have not been matched by a military campaign.

The policies pursued from the late 1840s till the outbreak of the revolt had to be urgently **reconsidered in 1858**.

- Considering that a large number of princely rulers had actively assisted the British in the suppression of the revolt, it was felt that their support was vital for stabilizing the Indian empire on a long- term basis.
- Moreover, given that that most of the princely rulers and the ruling classes of princely states were politically and socially conservative, they were unlikely to encourage elements that might disturb the status quo. They would therefore be useful in keeping discontent in check.

For this reason, when the crown directly assumed control over the Indian empire in 1858, Queen Victoria issued a **Proclamation** (1 November 1858) guaranteeing to the princely rulers their autonomy and assuring them that they would not be divested of their territories. This amounted to **publicly disowning the policy of annexation** which had been so vigorously implemented during Dalhousie's term as governor general.

Balaghat and Udaipur were returned by Canning to the Indian rulers.
