*Indian Freedom Struggle - History 2.5*

*Humanities 9 – Social Movements*

**IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON**

**INDIA: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL**

**AND CULTURAL (1757-1857)**

. . .India provided such a platform to Britain to fulfill all their needs. The 18th century was a period of internal power struggle in India and with the declining power of the Mughal Empire, the British officials were provided with the perfect opportunity to establish their hold over Indian Territory. They did these through numerous wars, forced treaties, annexations of and alliances with the various regional powers all over the country. Their new administrative and economic policies helped them consolidate their control over the country. Their land revenue policies help them keep the poor farmers in check and get huge sums as revenues in return. They forced the commercialisation of agriculture with the growing of various cash crops and the raw materials for the industries in the Britain. With the strong political control, the British were able to monopolise the trade with India. They defeated their foreign rivals in trade so that there could be no competition. They monopolised the sale of all kinds of raw materials and bought these at low prices whereas the Indian weavers had to buy them at exorbitant prices. Heavy duties were imposed on Indian goods entering Britain so as to protect their own industry. Various investments were made to improve the transport and communication system in the country to facilitate the easy transfer of raw materials from the farms to the port, and of finished goods from the ports to the markets. Also, English education was introduced to create a class of educated Indians who would assist the British in ruling the country and strengthen their political authority. All these measures helped the British to establish, consolidate and continue their rule over India.

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**METHODS OF COLONIZATION IN INDIA**

When the industrial revolution started in Europe these small states did not have sufficient raw materials for their industries, or markets for their finished goods. These countries now started looking for markets in Asia and Africa. England succeeded in controlling trade with India and established the East India Company in 1600. This company was supported by the British government. With its help England was able to extend her territorial frontiers to the Indian subcontinent. The first factory was established at Surat in 1613. In 1615, Sir Thomas Roe got permission from the Mughal emperor Jahangir to open more factories at Agra, Ahmadabad and Broach. Their most important settlement on the southern coast was Madras where they built a fortified factory called Fort St. George. This was the first proprietary holding acquired by the company on Indian soil. Gradually the company expanded its trading network. By that time the company was well established in India. It had also succeeded in eliminating the other rival European powers from India. They also started interfering in the political affairs of the Indian rulers.

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**Impact of British Rule on India: Economic, Social and Cultural (1757-1857)**

[Each state in] Indian had its own rulers, economy, language and culture. These states were constantly at war with each other. It was not surprising that they fell an easy prey to the European powers especially the British. It was the battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) which provided the ground for the British success in India. Through these battles, a long era of British political control over India began. The Battle of Plassey was won by the English in Bengal. The British made Mir Jafar, the new Nawab of Bengal, in return for which they receive an enormous sum of money as well as the territory of 24 Parganas from the Nawab. But Mir Jafar was not able to make further payments to them. As a result he was replaced by Mir Qasim who proved to be a strong ruler. Mir Qasim was not ready to meet their demands for more money or control. As a result, Mir Qasim was removed and Mir Jafar was made the Nawab again. Mir Qasim then joined hands with the Nawab of Awadh, Shiraj-ud-daula and the Mughal emperor Shah Allam II in plotting against the British, the battle took place at a place called Buxar on 22 October 1764. Their defeat proved to be decisive. Though the British successfully gained control over Bengal, the imposition of British rule throughout India was not an easy task. A number of regional powers opposed them and tried to resist the efforts of territorial expansion of the British.

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**Anglo-maratha Wars**

The Marathas were another formidable power in western and central India during the second half of the eighteenth century. But the struggle for power among themselves gave the British an opportunity to intervene in their internal matters. Many wars took place between the British and the Marathas mainly on account of the Subsidiary Alliance (which you will read in 5.2.1). The Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-19) was the last war between them. The English defeated the Peshwa, dethroned him and annexed all his territories. The Peshwa was pensioned off and sent to Bithur near Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

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**Anglo-sikh Wars**

In north-west India, the Sikhs under their able leader Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1792- 1839) became an effective political and military force. The British power in India viewed the rise of the Sikhs as a potential threat. The British thus wanted to bring the Sikhs under control. After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, lawlessness prevailed in Punjab. The British took advantage of this and the First Anglo-Sikh War broke out in 1845 which ended with the defeat of the Sikhs. In the Second Anglo-Sikh War in 1849, the British finally defeated them in the battle of Gujarat, a town on river Chenab (1849). The Sikh chiefs surrendered and Punjab was annexed by Lord Dalhousie. Maharaja Dalip Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was pensioned off and sent to England.

**Other Conquests, System of Alliances and Annexations**

The Third Battle of Panipat against the Marathas in 1761 had already provided the stage for the success of British in India. Soon many more native states came under British control. This was done by a system of alliances called the Doctrine of Lapse and Subsidiary Alliance. Doctrine of Lapse led to a number of independent kingdoms being annexed to the British Empire. These were the states that were enjoying British protection but their rulers had died without leaving a natural heir to the throne. Their adopted sons could now no longer inherit the property or the pension which was granted to them by the British. In this way Dalhousie annexed the Maratha States of Satara (1848), Sambalpur (1850), Udaipur (1852), Nagpur (1853), Jhansi (1854) and Awadh (1856). In Subsidiary Alliance, the Indian States that were under British protection had to suspend their armies and instead maintain British troops. They also surrendered their control on their foreign affair and let go of their right to make alliances with other foreign states for any purpose, economic or political. In return, they were given protection by the British from their rivals.

The policy of annexation affected not only the Indian rulers, but all those who were dependent upon them such as soldiers, crafts people and even nobles. Even the traditional scholarly and priestly classes lost their patronage from these rulers, chieftains, nobles and zamindars, and were thus impoverished. Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century,no single Indian power was there to challenge or resist the British.

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**ECONOMIC IMPACT**

The Industrial revolution has helped the English merchants accumulate a lot of capital from the countries of Asia, Africa and America. They now wanted to invest this wealth in setting up industries and trade with India. The mass production of goods through machines that we witness today was pioneered through the Industrial Revolution which occurred first in England during the late 18th and the early 19th century. This led to a massive increase in the output of finished products. The East India Company helped in financing and expanding their industrial base. During this time there was a class of manufacturers in England who benefited more from manufacturing than trading. They were interested in having more raw materials from India as well as sending their finished goods back. Between 1793 and 1813, these British manufacturers launched a campaign against the company, its trade monopoly and the privileges it enjoyed. Ultimately, they succeeded in abolishing the East India Company’s monopoly of Indian trade. With this India became an economic colony of Industrial England. Let us learn more about the economic impact on various Indian industries and trade.

**Textile Industry and Trade**

Earlier, Indian handloom had a big market in Europe. Indian textiles such as cotton, linen, silk and woolen goods already had markets in Asia and Africa. With the coming of industrialisation in England, the textile industry there made important headway. There was now a reverse of the direction of textile trade between Britain and India. There was a massive import of machine made clothes from English factories to Indian markets. This import of large amount of products manufactured by mechanical looms in England led to increase threat for the handicraft industries as the British goods were sold at a much cheaper price. The British succeeded in selling their goods at a cheap price as foreign goods were given free entry in India without paying any duty. On the other hand, Indian handicrafts were taxed heavily when they were sent out of the country. Besides, under the pressure of its industrialists, British government often imposed a protective tariff on Indian textiles.

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Therefore, within a few years, India from being an exporter of clothes became an exporter of raw cotton and an importer of British clothes. This reversal made a huge impact on the Indian handloom weaving industry leading to its virtual collapse. It also created unemployment for a large community of weavers. Many of them migrated to rural areas to work on their lands as agricultural laborers. This in turn put increased pressure on the rural economy and livelihood. This process of uneven competition faced by the Indian handloom industry was later dubbed by the Indian nationalist leaders as deindustrialisation.

The main aim of the British was to transform India into a consumer of British goods. As a result, textile, metal work, glass and paper industries were soon out of work. By 1813, the Indian handicrafts lost both their domestic as well as foreign market. Indian goods could not compete with the British factory-made products where machines were used. These markets were now captured and monopolised by Britain by means of war and colonisation. From an exporter India became an importer of these goods. They extracted money from the Indian rulers, merchants, zamindars and even the common people. Added to this drain were the profit made through trade and also the salaries of the officials. It was evident that their economic policies were meant to serve the interests of the East India Company and later the British Empire.

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**Land Revenue Policy and Land Settlements**

Since ancient times, the main source of livelihood for the people were agriculture. Hence, land tax had formed a principal source of revenue for all the emperors all over the world. In the 18th century, the main occupation of the Indian people were agriculture. During British rule, revenue from land kept on increasing, and the reasons for this were many. Earlier the British had come to trade with India. Gradually they wanted to conquer the vast territory of India for which they needed a lot of money. They also needed money for trade, projects of the company as well as for the cost of running the administration. The British carried out a number of land revenue experiments which caused hardship to cultivators. They extracted taxes from the farmers to finance their policies and war efforts. Direct and indirect means were carried out to bring about this collection of revenue for the British. This affected the lives of the people who could not meet their daily needs because they had to provide the landowners and the collectors their share in the produce. Local administration failed to provide relief and natural justice to the rural poor.

Lord Cornwallis introduced the **Permanent Settlement** in Bengal and Bihar in 1793. It made the landlord or zamindar deposit a fixed amount of money in the state treasury.

In return they were recognised as hereditary owners of land. This made the zamindar the owner of the land. The amount of revenue to be paid to the Company was fixed for a period of time which made the British financially secured. Now they knew in advance as to how much revenue was coming in form the State. The zamindar also knew how much revenue was to be paid. So to get surplus revenue for themselves they asked the peasants to increase production. But, if the zamindar failed to pay the fixed revenue on time his land was sold off to another zamindar. The British stood to benefit from this settlement as the new class of zamindars that emerged became their political allies. They supported the British in times of need and acted as a buffer between them and the peasants. This class, in fact, supported the British against the freedom movement.

In 1822, the British introduced the **Mahalwari Settlement** in the North Western Provinces, Punjab, the Ganga Valley and parts of Central India. Here the basis of assessment was the product of a **mahal**or estate, which may be a village or a group of villages. Here all the proprietors of mahal were jointly responsible for paying the sum of revenue assessed by the government*.* Unfortunately it brought no benefit to the peasants as the British demands were very high.

The **Ryotwari Settlement** was introduced in the beginning of the 19th century in many parts of Bombay and Madras Presidencies. Here the land revenue was imposed directly on the **ryots**, the individual cultivators, who actually worked on the land. The peasant was recognized as the owner of the land as long as he was able to pay the revenue but the exploitation continued with the high revenue demands.

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**Commercialisation of Agriculture**

Another major economic impact of the British policies in India was the introduction of a large number of commercial crops such as tea, coffee, indigo, opium, cotton, jute, sugarcane and oilseed. Different kinds of commercial crops were introduced with different intentions. Indian opium was used to balance the trade of Chinese tea with Britain in the latter’s favor. The market for opium was strictly controlled by British traders which did not leave much scope for Indian producers to reap profit. Indians were forced to produce indigo and sell it on the conditions dictated by the Britishers. Indigo was sent to England and used as a dyeing agent for cloth produced in British towns. Indigo was grown under a different system where all farmers were compelled to grow it on 3/20th part of their land. Unfortunately cultivation of Indigo left the land infertile for some years. This made the farmers reluctant to grow it. In the tea plantations ownership changed hands quite often. The workers on these plantations worked under a lot of hardships.

Commercialisation of agriculture further enhanced the speed of transfer of ownership of land thereby increasing the number of landless laborers. It also brought in a large number of merchants, traders and middlemen who further exploited the situation. The peasant now depended on them to sell their produce during harvest time. Because the peasants now shifted to commercial crops, food grain production went down. So, less food stock led to famines. It was therefore not surprising that the peasants revolted. You would read about it in detail in the coming chapters. There was an enormous drain of wealth from our country to Britain due to the various economic policies. Additional financial burden was placed on India due to expenditures on salaries, pensions and training of military and civilian staffs employed by the British to rule India. If this wealth was invested in India it could have helped enormously improved the economy in this country. Let us learn how the economic policies implemented by the British changed the social structure of Indian society.

**Rise of the New Money-lending Class**

Time bound and excessive demand of revenue by the British government forced the peasants to take loans from the moneylenders. These moneylenders often exploited the peasants by charging high interest rates. They often used unfair means like false accounting, forged signatures and thumb impressions. The new legal system and the policy introduced by the British only helped the moneylenders who were either local merchants or landlords. In most cases, the peasants failed to pay back the loan with full interest. Thus, their lands gradually passed into the hands of the money-lending class.

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**Rise of the New Middle Class**

A major impact of the British rule in India was the beginning of a new middle class. With the rise of the British commercial interests, new opportunities opened to a small section of the Indian people. They often acted as the agents and intermediaries of the British traders and thus made huge fortunes. The new landed aristocracy, which came into being after the introduction of Permanent Settlement, also formed a part of this new class. A major section of the old landowning aristocracy lost ownership of their land and in many cases were replaced by a new class of land owners. These people got some English education and became the new elite. With the spread of British power, new job opportunities were also created. Indian society witnessed the introduction of new law courts, government officials and commercial agencies. The English educated people naturally got the necessary patronage from their colonial rulers. Thus, a new professional and service-holding middle class was also created by the British, apart from those with landed interests.

**Transport and Communication**

The means of transport in India at that time were bullock carts, camels and pack animals. England on the other hand needed railways that connected the raw material producing areas with the exporting ports and to facilitate the movement of British goods to different parts of the country as well as bring raw materials to the ports.

The vast network of railways that you witness today was pioneered during the latter half of the 19th century. This opened avenue for British bankers and investors to invest surplus wealth and material in the construction of railways. Railways benefited the British capitalists in two important ways. First, it made trading in commodities much easier and profitable by connecting the internal markets with the ports. Secondly, the rail engines, coaches and the capital input for building of rail lines came from Britain. The British capitalists who invested in railways were also guaranteed a minimum profit of 5% by the government. These companies were also given free land with a lease of 99 years. Although the railways were set up for the advantage of British trade, they also played an important role in the national awakening of the country. Though the British had never anticipated, the extensive transport network and improved education brought people and ideas closer.

During British rule, India took ideas of liberty, equality, human rights, science and technology from the West. This accelerated the process of modernisation. Now we will read about the impact of modern idea on Indian society.

**BRITISH IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

Indian society underwent many changes after the British came to India. In the 19th century, certain social practices like female infanticide, child marriage, sati, polygamy and a rigid caste system became more prevalent. These practices were against human dignity and values. Women were discriminated against at all stages of life and were the disadvantaged section of the society. They did not have access to any development opportunities to improve their status. Education was limited to a handful of men belonging to the upper castes. Brahmins had access to the Vedas which were written in Sanskrit. Expensive rituals, sacrifices and practices after birth or death were outlined by the priestly class.

When the British came to India, they brought new ideas such as liberty, equality, freedom and human rights from the Renaissance, the Reformation Movement and the various revolutions that took place in Europe. These ideas appealed to some sections of our society and led to several reform movements in different parts of the country. At the forefront of these movements were visionary Indians such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Aruna Asaf Ali and Pandita Ramabai. These movements looked for social unity and strived towards liberty, equality and fraternity. Many legal measures were introduced to improve the status of women. For example, the practice of sati was banned in 1829 by Lord Bentinck, the then Governor General. Widow Remarriage was permitted by a law passed in 1856. A law passed in 1872, sanctioned inter-caste and inter-communal marriages. Sharda

Act was passed in 1929 preventing child marriage. The act provided that it was illegal to marry a girl below 14 and a boy below 18 years. All the movements severely criticized the caste system and especially the practice of untouchability.

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The impact of the efforts made by these numerous individuals, reform societies, and religious organisations was felt all over and was most evident in the national movement. Women started getting better education opportunities and took up professions and public employment outside their homes. The role of women like Captain Laxmi Sehgal of Indian National Army (INA), Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Aruna Asaf Ali and many others were extremely important in the freedom struggle.

**Social and Cultural Policy**

The British had come to India with the idea of making immense profits. This meant buying of raw materials at very cheap rates and selling finished goods at much higher prices. The British wanted the Indians to be educated and modern enough to consume their goods but not to the extent that it proved detrimental to British interests. Some of the Britishers believed that Western ideas were modern and superior, while Indian ideas were old and inferior. This was, of course, not true. Indians had a rich traditional learning that was still relevant. By this time in England there was a group of Radicals who had a humanistic ideology towards Indians. They wanted India to be a part of the modern, progressive world of science. But the British government was cautious in undertaking rapid modernisation of India. They feared a reaction among the people if too much interference took place with their religious beliefs and social customs. The English wanted perpetuation of their rule in India and not a reaction among the people. Hence, though they talked about introducing reforms, in reality very few measures were taken and these were also half-hearted.

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**Education Policy**

The British took a keen interest in introducing the English language in India. They had many reasons for doing so. Educating Indians in the English language was a part of their strategy. The Indians would be ready to work as clerks on low wages while for the same work the British would demand much higher wages. This would reduce the expenditure on administration. It was also expected to create a class of Indians who were loyal to the British and were not able to relate to other Indians. This class of Indians would be taught to appreciate the culture and opinion of the British. In addition, they would also help to increase the market for British goods. They wanted to use education as a means to strengthen their political authority in the country. They assumed that a few educated Indians would spread English culture to the masses and that they would be able to rule through this class of educated Indians. The British gave jobs to only those Indians who knew English thereby compelling many Indians to go in for English education. Education soon became a monopoly of the rich and the city dwellers.

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**Impact of the Reform Movement**

How did the socio-religious reform movements led to the national movement? The persistent efforts of the reformers had immense impact on the society. The religious reform movements instilled in the minds of Indians greater self-respect, self-confidence and pride in their country. These reform movements helped many Indians to come to terms with the modern world. The reformers felt that modern ideas and culture could be best imbibed by integrating them into Indian cultural stream. They helped other countrymen to appreciate that all modern ideas were not against Indian culture and values. The introduction of modern education guided the Indians towards a scientific and rational approach to life. People became more conscious of their identity as Indians which was ultimately responsible for their united struggle against the British in the freedom movement of India.

**British Administration and Judicial System**

The Indians found it difficult to adjust to the new system of administration introduced by the British. The Indians were denied political rights and the British officers treated them with contempt. Indians were excluded from all higher positions in the civil administration and military.

The British also introduced a new system of law and justice in India. A hierarchy of civil and criminal courts was established. The laws were codified and attempts were also made to separate the judiciary from the executive. Efforts were made to establish the ‘Rule of Law’ in India. But this only helped the British to enjoy arbitrary powers and to interfere with the rights and liberties of the Indians. The law courts were not easily accessible to the common people. Justice became a costly affair. The new judicial system also discriminated between Europeans and Indians.

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**PROTEST MOVEMENTS**

The adverse impact of the British rule on the political, economic and social spheres resulted in sharp reaction of the Indian people against the foreigners. This led to a series of the anti-British movements throughout the country. Peasants and tribes rebelled against exploitative rulers. During the British rule, the number of famines recorded in India was unprecedented. During the first half of the 19th century, 7 big famines were recorded which led to the death of 15 lakh people. Similarly, in the latter half of the 19th century there were 24 famines causing over 200 lakh deaths. The most devastating was the Bengal Famine of 1943 which killed 3 to 4 million Indians. Peasants burdened with taxation, eviction from land and survivors from the Bengal famine joined the rebel groups of Sanyasis and Fakirs. In 1783, rebels stopped paying revenues to company agents. However, rebels were finally forced to surrender. Similarly, Poligars of Tamil Nadu, Malabar and Coastal Andhra, Mappilas of Malabar revolted against the colonial rule. In North India, the Jats of western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana revolted in 1824. In Maharastra and Gujarat, the Kolis revolted.

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**Impact of the Revolt of 1857**

The economic decline of peasantry and artisans were reflected in 12 major and numerous minor famines from 1770 to 1857. All these factors only helped to spread anti-British feeling which ultimately culminated in the revolt of 1857. The British were not very sensitive to the feelings of the masses they ruled ruthlessly. Hence, reforms introduced by them to put an end to some social customs made the people believe that the Government wanted them to be converted to Christianity. As a result, the English East India Company’s rule in India witnessed a large number of uprisings and rebellions. In a later lesson you will read about some important and popular uprisings and also analyse the nature and significance of these uprisings. You will also read about the Revolt of 1857 which had a major impact on our national movement. For the first time it unified and brought together people having different ethnic, religious and class background against the British rule.

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