
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON INDIA

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Abstract

British traders initially came to India for trading purposes. Increasing demand for raw material due to industrial revolution and need for a market to sell their finished goods was the reason behind their entry in India. But over the time their administrative and economic policies helped them to increase their control over almost every sphere. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study the impact of British rule on India's Economy, Society and Culture.

Key words- Traders, Society, Handicraft, Manufacturing, Commercialization

Introduction

British came to India in 17th century as a trading company and set up their first factory on the banks of Hughli river in Bangal. The primary function of this trading company i.e. British East India company was to earn huge profit by selling Indian products in British market as these products like spices , cotton and silk etc had large market in Britain. But after industrial revolution with an intension to acquire greater control over the company's earnings, the Charter Act of 1813 was passed by British parliament. This act resulted into free access to India and thus ended the monopoly enjoyed by the company in India. This free trade policy completely changed the nature of Indian colony though a dual strategy. Firstly, with very little or almost no tariff barriers Indian market was opened for the entry of cheap machine-made goods. Secondly, Indian colony was used as a source of raw material and food for Britain. Infact, it was this new strategy that laid the foundations of a colonial economy in India.

In the present paper we will be discussing the impact of this strategy on Indian colony.

Objectives

The present paper will focus on the following two objectives:

1. To analyse the economic impact of British rule on Indian Economy.
2. To study the impact of British rule on Indian society and culture.

To analyse the economic impact seven areas (Textile Industry, Indian Handicrafts, British Land Revenue Policy, Commercialization of Indian Agriculture, Drain of Wealth from India to Britain, effect on India's share in World Manufacturing and transport and communication) and to analyse impact on society and culture, three areas (Women, Education policy and Reform Movements) have been chosen.

Economic Impact

The primary interest of Britain was to exploit Indian resources by having more raw materials and flooding Indian market with cheap British products. This policy adversely affected Indian Economy by affecting its various industries; through British land revenue policy, by affecting Indian manufacturing sector and by destroying Indian domestic market and local craftsmen.

1. Impact on Textile industry

Around 1750 India was world's largest producer of cotton textile. In fact Indian textiles such as cotton, linen, silk and woollen goods had huge markets in Asia, Africa as well as in Europe. The free trade policy reversed the direction of textile trade between India and Britain. Huge import of machine made cloths from England at cheaper price increased the competition for Indian textile industry. Moreover, heavy duties were imposed in Britain on Indian Cloths. Within a short span of time India became an exporter of raw cotton and importer of clothes due to British government policy of imposing protective tariff on Indian textile.

2. Impact on Indian Handicrafts

Free duty entry of British goods in Indian market and heavy taxes on Indian handicrafts when they were sent out of country, completely destroyed Indian handicrafts. They lost both the domestic as well as foreign market. Moreover, the same goods produced in industries were cheap as well as the better in quality and quantity when compared to a craftsman's product, which was also a reason behind slowly dying Indian handicrafts.

3. Effects of British land revenue policies

The three British land settlement policies (Permanent settlement, Mahalwari settlement and Raiyatwari Settlement) resulted in to large scale exploitation of Indian farmers. Where the permanent settlement resulted into birth of zamindars to exploit the farmers, mahalwari and ryotwari settlement resulted into high British revenue demands.

4. Commercialization of Indian Agriculture

The colonial administration encouraged the commercialization of Indian agriculture by enhancing the production of cash crops like indigo, cotton, opium, tea, coffee, jute, sugarcane and oil seeds. As the profit generated by the export of these crops was huge due to the heavy demand of these commodities in foreign market and the profit went to British business houses. Although, the commercialization is considered as a forced process, it is believed that it improved the position of peasants in many areas of Indian colony.

5. Drain of wealth from India to British

The salaries, pensions, expenditure on training of military, civilian staff of the British as well as profit earned by international market going to British business houses resulted in to enormous drain of wealth from India to Britain.

6. Impact on India's share in world manufacturing

Due to British dual free trade policy India transformed from a net exporter to net importer country, which resulted into decline in Indian share in world manufacturing output. It is clearly evident from the following table.

Table-1

India's share in World Manufacturing output (1750-1938)

(In percentage)

Year	India' s Share
1750	24.5
1800	19.7
1830	17.6
1880	2.8
1913	1.4
1938	2.4

Source: Simmon 1985, Table. 1, P.600, based on bairoch 1982, Table. 10 and 13, P296 and 304

Note: India refers to entire sub continent

It is evident from the data in table-1 that share of Indian manufacturing in total world manufacturing continuously declined during 1750 to 1938. A huge decline from 24.5 percent in 1750 to 2.4 percent in 1938 has been recorded.

7. Transport and communication

The credit to introduce transport and communication facilities in India goes to British colonial rule. Though these facilities were introduced to benefit British trade and other British interests, they also played an important role in the national awakening of

country. The transport and communication network resulted in the process of modernisation of Indian society.

British Impact on Society and Culture

During British rule Indian society underwent many changes. British brought ideas of freedom, equality, liberty and human rights to India and resulted in to changes in following areas:

1. Condition of Indian Women

In India, women were discriminated at all stages of life. Practices of female infanticide, child marriage, sati and polygamy etc prevailed in Indian society. The new British ideas resulted in to several reforms movement in different parts of the country for the improvement of conditions of Indian women. Many legal measures to improve the status of Indian women were introduced. For example sati was banned in 1829, a law was passed in 1856 to permit widow remarriage and to prevent child marriage, Sharda act was passed in 1929.

2. Education

British took a keen interest in educating Indians as by educating Indians they could have good educated labour force at less wages. With this strategy they opened universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay in 1857. Some English schools and colleges were also being opened. Though, the British half hearted education policy did not reach the masses, it helped in transformation of India towards a more modern, liberal and democratic country.

3. Reform movement

British idea of freedom, equality, liberty and human rights along with western education resulted in to massive social-religious, reform movements and had great impact on the society. It brought a more scientific, rational and modern approach to life among Indians. Although, during the East India Company, the Christian missionary activities became wide spread, due to the advent of western civilization fast growth of reform movements in modern time took place.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the results of present paper that in the economic sphere, the British rule proved as exploiter from the very beginning. Although, the British rule introduced modern transportation and communication system, but it ruined the basic structure of India. On the other end in the social sphere British impact proved to be beneficial. The prohibition of sati, introduction of widow remarriage act, abolition of child marriage, checking of infanticide, polygamy etc. eradicated age old social evils from the Indian society.

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