

STAGES OF COLONIALISM

- Colonialism does not mean a static societal relationship, though the subordination of the Colony to the interest of Metropolis remains a constant theme. The dynamism of colonial structure and colonial relationship lay exactly in the continuous shifts and counter-shifts in the imperialist stand with a visible shift in the underlined pattern of colonial society or even in the societal structure of metropolis. One can outline the following factors that can be (a) responsible force (s) behind such shift:
 - a. The gradual and continuous change in world capitalist system;
 - b. The changing pattern of the concerned imperialist power,
 - c. The underlined pattern of Change in colony itself.
- On the basis of these three variables, historians have divided the colonialism in India till the end of Second World War into three distinct stages, each having its own specifications:
 - i. Mercantilist Stage (1757-1813)
 - ii. Free Trade Colonialism (1813-1857)
 - iii. Finance-Colonialism (1857-1914 & onwards)
- This categorization does not mean, however, that in one particular stage, the characteristics of other stages were totally absent; the period only conveys the dominant pattern in that stage.

1. Mercantilist Stage (1757-1813)

- It was a period of monopoly trade and direct appropriation wherein India was conquered by the East India Company with two distinct aims:
 - a. To acquire a monopoly of trade with India; and
 - b. To directly appropriate the revenues by control over state power.

Characteristics of the First Stage

- a. The move was made to eradicate all the competition provided by other monopolistic foreign companies to the English EIC, as also to end all native challenges to its trade and profit.
 - b. This enabled the EIC to buy cheapest from Indians and to sell them at the highest price in the world market resulting in bigger profit ratio.
 - c. To eradicate foreign competition they had to fight wars with the foreign companies; and to end native challenge, they had become a territorial power by conquests and annexations.
 - d. To minimize the cost of the trade and conquests and annexations, they had to capture the finances of this continent so that its revenue could be used to meet these costs. Thus, the much needed financial resources were raised in India only and that too from Indian people.
- a. The agrarian structure of India was sought to be transformed in a capitalist direction through various settlements.
 - b. Continuous flow of raw materials and consumer goods was sought to be maintained by improvement in communication system.
 - c. Many changes were brought about in administrative field. It was made more elaborate and comprehensive so that it could reach down to the villages and out-lying areas.
 - d. Legal and judicial structure of India was overhauled to promote capitalist commercial relations.
 - e. All these changes called for a liberal tinker of Indian politics.

2. Free trade Colonialism

- The First phase of colonialism proved very beneficial of English economy. 'Drain of Wealth' from India in this phase contributed to two to three percent of British income and played a crucial role in Industrial revolution; it provided the required capital which the British economy badly needed to become industrialized, In other words, Industrial Revolution in England was sponsored by Indian colonial economy.

- i. The Industrial Revolution in England, which was in it a logical culmination of 'mercantile' colonialism outdated and, therefore, monopolistic nature of the EIC was very forcefully attacked by the protagonists of Industrial Revolution including Adam Smith.

- ii. The spokesmen of this 'new' economy demanded that the colonial administration and its policy in India should serve their interests which were altogether different from those of East India Company. Their interests lay in the vast Indian market that could consume the mass production of their industries resulting in large and greater profits. They also needed colonial economy to serve as a source of raw-materials required by their industries.

- iii. But it was not very easy to make India the market of consumer goods produced in British factories overnight, nor was it possible to transform this flourishing economy into a mere supplier of raw-materials. To fulfill both of these ends, the colonial government required significant alterations and modification in the socio-economic and politico-cultural structure of Indian society accordingly.

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3. Colonialism in the Era of Finance-Imperialism

- The Third phase of colonialism resulted due to several major changes in world economy. They were:
 - i. Spread of industrialization in other countries, notably in the US and Japan, resulting in the end of British monopoly in industrial field and advent of competition.
 - ii. Extension of the application of scientific knowledge especially in the field of chemical industry, fuel use, internal combustion engine and use of electricity for industrial purposes.
 - iii. The factors, mentioned above, resulted in the further unification of world market in which revolution in the means of transport played a crucial role.
 - iv. Again, the development of trade and industry resulted in capital accumulation in the mother country and that to, in the fewer hands only which finally led to the export of capital.
- Characteristics
 - i. As the British position in the world context lost its previous supremacy, there arouses a vigorous efforts to consolidate its control over India to maintain international equilibrium.
 - ii. Concentration of wealth in fewer hands gave birth too many contradictions in the metropolis-societal structure resulting into their notion of a “colonial over-class” in the backdrop of class-antagonism in the British society.
 - iii. All these resulted in a peculiar colonial ideology that favoured trusteeship over self rule for Indians.
 - iv. Colonial government continued a neutral stand over social and cultural issues.

