

History of India (c. 1757–1947 CE)

UNIT: Expansion of British Power and Colonial Governance

(a) The Growth and Expansion of Sikh Power under Ranjit Singh & British Occupation of Punjab

Rise of Sikh Power

Background

- The Sikh community was founded by Guru Nanak (1469–1539).
- After the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, Sikh political power gradually increased.
- During the 18th century, Punjab was divided into several Sikh confederacies known as Misl.
- Constant invasions by Ahmad Shah Abdali weakened Mughal authority in Punjab.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839)

Early Life and Rise

- Born in 1780.
- Became leader of the Sukerchakia Misl.
- Captured Lahore in 1799.
- Proclaimed Maharaja of Punjab in 1801.

Expansion of Sikh Empire

- Unified various Sikh Misl into a strong kingdom.
- Established a powerful centralized state.

Territorial Expansion

- Lahore (1799)
- Amritsar (1802)
- Multan (1818)
- Kashmir (1819)
- Peshawar (1834)

Administration

- Maintained efficient civil administration.
- Appointed governors in provinces.
- Collected land revenue systematically.
- Encouraged trade and commerce.

Military Reforms

- Modernized the army on European lines.
- Employed French and Italian military officers.
- Created regular infantry, modern artillery, and cavalry units.
- Army known as Khalsa Army.

Religious Policy

- Followed secular principles.
- Included Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in administration.
- Protected religious institutions of all communities.

Significance

- Created the strongest indigenous state in North India after the Mughals.
- Prevented British expansion into Punjab during his lifetime.

Relations with the British

Treaty of Amritsar (1809)

- Signed between Ranjit Singh and the British.
- River Sutlej became the boundary.
- British recognized Ranjit Singh's authority west of Sutlej.
- Ranjit Singh agreed not to expand eastward.

Decline after Ranjit Singh

Causes

- Death of Ranjit Singh in 1839.
- Court intrigues and succession disputes.
- Weak rulers.
- Increasing influence of the Khalsa Army.
- British interference in Punjab affairs.

First Anglo-Sikh War (1845–1846)

- Political instability in Punjab.
- British military preparations near Punjab.
- Mutual distrust.
- Major Battles: Mudki, Ferozeshah, Aliwal, Sobraon.
- Sikh defeat.
- Treaty of Lahore (1846).
- British Resident appointed in Lahore.
- Kashmir transferred to Gulab Singh.

Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848–1849)

- Revolt at Multan.
- Anti-British sentiment.
- British desire for annexation.
- Important Battle: Battle of Gujrat (1849).
- Complete defeat of Sikhs.
- Punjab annexed by the British in 1849.

- End of Sikh sovereignty.

Importance of British Annexation of Punjab

- Completed British control over North-West India.
- Punjab became an important recruiting ground for the British Indian Army.
- Strengthened British frontier security.

(b) Lord Dalhousie and the Doctrine of Lapse

Lord Dalhousie (Governor-General: 1848–1856)

- Territorial expansion.
- Administrative centralization.
- Strengthening British authority.

Doctrine of Lapse

Meaning

- If an Indian ruler died without a natural male heir, his kingdom would “lapse” to the British.
- Adopted heirs were not recognized for succession.

Purpose

- Expand British territory.
- Eliminate independent Indian states.

States Annexed under Doctrine of Lapse

- Satara (1848) — First state annexed.
- Jaitpur (1849).
- Sambalpur (1849).
- Baghat (1850).
- Udaipur (Central India) (1852).
- Jhansi (1854) — Rani Lakshmibai's adopted son not recognized.
- Nagpur (1854).

Annexation of Awadh (1856)

- Not under Doctrine of Lapse.
- Annexed on grounds of "misgovernment."

Importance

- Created widespread resentment.
- Contributed significantly to the Revolt of 1857.

Criticism of Doctrine of Lapse

- Violated Indian traditions regarding adoption.
- Viewed as unjust and aggressive.

- Increased hostility toward British rule.
- Alienated princes and nobles.

Impact

- Political: Rapid expansion of British territory.
- Economic: Greater revenue for British administration.
- Social: Created fear among Indian rulers.
- Historical: One of the major causes of the Revolt of 1857.

(c) Wars against Afghanistan and Burma (British Frontier Policy)

British Frontier Policy

- Policy to secure India's borders from external threats.
- Particularly aimed at checking Russian influence in Central Asia.
- Known as part of the "Great Game."

First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842)

- Causes: Fear of Russian influence in Afghanistan; British desire to install a friendly ruler.
- Events: British deposed Dost Mohammad; installed Shah Shuja as ruler.
- Result: Afghan resistance increased; British retreat from Kabul (1842) ended in disaster; almost entire retreating force destroyed.
- Significance: One of the greatest military failures of the British Empire.

Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880)

- Causes: Renewed Russian influence; British concern for frontier security.
- Treaty of Gandamak (1879): Afghanistan accepted British control over foreign affairs.
- Result: British withdrew after securing strategic objectives; Afghanistan remained a buffer state.

Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919)

- Causes: Afghan demand for full independence.
- Result: Treaty of Rawalpindi (1919); Afghanistan gained control over its foreign policy; British recognized Afghan independence.

First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826)

- Causes: Border disputes in Assam and Manipur; Burmese expansion into Northeast India.
- Treaty of Yandabo (1826): Burma ceded Assam, Manipur, Arakan and Tenasserim.
- Importance: Beginning of British influence in Northeast India.

Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852)

- Causes: Commercial disputes; British imperial ambitions.
- Result: Annexation of Lower Burma.

Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885)

- Causes: British fears of French influence; commercial interests.
- Result: Annexation of Upper Burma; Burma became part of British India in 1886.

Significance of Burmese Wars

- Expanded British influence in Southeast Asia.
- Opened new markets and trade routes.
- Increased strategic control over India's eastern frontier.

(d) Colonial State and Policies of Governance: Army, Police, Law

Colonial State

- Highly centralized administration.
- Bureaucratic governance.
- Primary aim: maintenance of British rule.
- Focused on revenue collection and law and order.

Colonial Army

- Objectives: Protect British interests; suppress internal revolts; defend frontiers; support imperial expansion.
- Presidency Armies: Bengal Army; Madras Army; Bombay Army.
- After Revolt of 1857: increased proportion of European soldiers; reduced number of Indian troops; 'Divide and Rule' recruitment policy; recruitment from so-called 'Martial Races' – Sikhs, Gurkhas, Pathans, Rajputs.
- Importance: Main instrument of colonial control.

Police Administration

- Police Act of 1861: introduced after Revolt of 1857.
- Features: uniform police system; District Superintendent of Police (SP); Inspector General (IG) at provincial level; police under executive control.
- Functions: maintain law and order; detect crime; control political movements.
- Criticism: repressive and authoritarian; served colonial interests rather than public welfare.

Colonial Legal System

- Objectives: establish uniform administration of justice; strengthen colonial authority; facilitate commercial activities.
- Charter Act of 1833: Law Commission established.
- First Law Commission (1834): headed by Thomas Babington Macaulay.
- Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860: uniform criminal law.
- Civil Procedure Code: standardized civil courts.
- Criminal Procedure Code: standardized criminal procedures.
- Indian Evidence Act (1872): regulated admissibility of evidence.

High Courts Act (1861)

- Established High Courts in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

Impact of Colonial Law

- Positive: uniform legal framework; codification of laws; development of modern judiciary.
- Negative: favoured colonial interests; expensive and complex legal procedures; limited access for common people.

Examination-Oriented Key Points (Very Important)

1-Mark Questions

- Who signed the Treaty of Amritsar (1809)?
- Which state was first annexed under the Doctrine of Lapse?
- When was Punjab annexed?
- Who introduced the Doctrine of Lapse?
- Which treaty ended the First Anglo-Burmese War?
- In which year was the Police Act passed?
- Who chaired the First Law Commission?
- When was the Indian Penal Code enacted?

2-Mark Questions

- Mention two military reforms of Ranjit Singh.
- State two provisions of the Doctrine of Lapse.
- Mention two causes of the First Anglo-Afghan War.
- Write two features of the Police Act of 1861.
- Mention two impacts of British annexation of Punjab.

Long Questions

- Discuss the growth of Sikh power under Ranjit Singh.
- Explain the Doctrine of Lapse and its effects.
- Discuss the structure and role of the colonial army and police.
- Examine the development of the colonial legal system in India.