Colonialism: Notes for IAS Exam

Colonialism is a policy where one country seeks to extend political or economic authority over the people and physical territory of another country. Generally, economic dominance and exploitation of resources is the primary aim of a country indulging in colonialism.

This article will further explain the concept of colonialism. The information gained through this article will be of immense use for candidates attempting the IAS Exam.

Definition of Colonialism

The origin of the word 'colonialism' can be traced back to the Latin word "*colōnia"* meaning "a place for agriculture". The standard definition of colonialism is "a policy and practice of a power in extending control over weaker peoples or areas". Even though the policy has been used by multiple civilizations in different continents since ancient times, it is broadly used today to refer to European economic and political domination in different continents that began roughly in the late 16th century and lasted until the early 1970s.

Although colonialism and imperialism are often used interchangeably between each other, there are certain fundamental differences between the two terms. Visit the Difference Between Colonialism and Imperialism article to know what these differences are.

Types of Colonialism

Historians have classified four different types of colonialism that have been practised throughout the ages. They are as follows:

1. **Settler Colonialism:** This involves immigration on a grand scale, with political, religious and economic factors being prime motivators. The outcome is that any local existing population will be largely replaced. The colony in question will be exploited for mainly agricultural purposes. The erstwhile colonies of Australia, United States of America and Canada are examples of settler colonialism.

2. **Exploitation Colonialism:** Exploitation colonialism focuses on the exploitation of natural resources and the local population as cheap labour that benefits the mother country economically. An example of this is the use of local labour in India and South East Asia where the indigenous population was used as slave labour to cultivate cash crops such as tea and rubber.

3. **Surrogate Colonialism:** Surrogate colonialism involves a settlement project supported by a colonial power, in which most of the settlers do not come from the same ethnic group as the ruling power. South Africa and Rhodesia (Modern-Day Zimbabwe and

Zambia) were examples of Surrogate Colonialism, where large numbers of British settlers became the dominant group despite being in minority as compared to the local indigenous population

4. **Internal Colonialism:** It is a notion of uneven or even discriminative power structure between different areas of a state. This is demonstrated in the way control and exploitation may pass from whites from the colonising country to a white immigrant population within a newly independent country.

To know about the general pattern of the History optional in the UPSC Mains Exam, the UPSC History Syllabus page will be of immense use.

History of Colonialism

The early Assyrian empires and the Roman Empires of early antiquity period (484 BC - 250 AD) can be considered the precursors to the practice of colonialism when both the empires expanded their border with the view to assert cultural domination and exploitation of resources.

Modern colonialism began with the age of exploration during the early 15th century when explorers like Christopher Columbus and Francisco Pizzaro made voyages to the American continent. Soon many European explorers from Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and Netherlands would have their own colonies in the Americas with the British dominating North America and the Spanish and the Portuguese holding the Southern half of the Americas.

Aspirants can find History Questions for UPSC Mains by visiting the linked article.

By the late 19th century, the Industrial revolution would see Britain and France take over many countries in the Middle-East, South and Southeast Asia, whose resources would be exploited by the colonial powers well into the 20th century. It was after the end of World War II in 1945 that the erstwhile colonies gained independence due to multiple factors, chief among them being local independence movements (The Indian Freedom struggle and Independence Movements in Vietnam and Indonesia are notable examples) and the colonial powers themselves being economically weakened due to the devastation caused by the Second World War.

Global political solidarity projects such as the Non-Aligned Movement were instrumental in the decolonisation efforts of former colonies along with the United Nations setting up a Special Committee on Decolonisation in 1962, to encourage this process. The last colony to gain independence was the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, which became the new nation of Zimbabwe on 18th April 1980.