



Mains Practice Question

Q. "The First World War marked a watershed moment in India's relationship with the British Empire, fundamentally altering both economic and political dynamics." Discuss. **(250 words)**

04 Nov, 2024 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce by highlighting the period of First World War and its overall influence
- Delve into the Impact of First World War on India's Relationship with British Empire
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The **First World War (1914-1918)** significantly transformed India's relationship with the British Empire, leading to **profound economic and political changes** that would lay the groundwork for the **country's eventual independence**.

Body

Impact of First World War on India's Relationship with British Empire:

- **Economic Impact:**
 - **Increased War Expenditure:** To support the war effort, the **British government raised taxes and imposed new tariffs**, leading to inflation.
 - The war expenditures led to a burden on Indian taxpayers and increased the cost of living, **exacerbating poverty among the masses**.
 - **Supply Chain Disruptions:** The war disrupted trade routes and agricultural production, leading to **food shortages and famine**, highlighting the vulnerabilities of an economy tied closely to colonial policies.
 - **Emergence of Indian Industries:** The war effort necessitated increased production of war materials, which led to the growth of Indian industries, particularly in **textiles and munitions**.
 - This industrial expansion **marked a shift from a primarily agrarian economy and initiated the rise of a nascent capitalist class** that would later support nationalist movements.
 - **Economic Nationalism:** The war experience and economic hardships fostered a sense of economic nationalism.
 - Indian business communities began to realize the **importance of self-reliance and started advocating for Indian-made goods**, laying the foundation for the Swadeshi movement.
- **Political Awakening:**
 - **Military Recruitment and Expectations:** Over **1.3 million Indian soldiers** served in the British Army during the war.
 - Their contributions **raised expectations for political concessions in return for their service**. However, the post-war period saw disappointment when the British

failed to deliver promised reforms.

- **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919):** The British government, in response to growing discontent, introduced these reforms, **which aimed at increasing Indian participation in governance.**
 - However, the **limited nature of the reforms led to widespread disillusionment**, further fueling the desire for greater self-governance.
- **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919):** The brutal **suppression of peaceful protesters in Amritsar** was a turning point in the Indian political landscape.
 - It galvanized public opinion against British rule and united various factions within Indian society against colonial oppression.
- **Rise of Nationalist Movements:**
 - **Formation of New Political Alliances:** The Indian National Congress (INC), previously dominated by moderate leaders, **began to adopt more radical approaches.**
 - **Increased Awareness and Activism:** The war years saw the rise of a **politically conscious middle class and student movements**, which actively participated in protests and advocacy for rights.
 - Women also became increasingly involved in the nationalist movement, demanding greater rights and participation.
 - Gandhi's return from South Africa in 1915 and his leadership during the **Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922)** was somewhat influenced by the war's impact.

Conclusion

The First World War was indeed a watershed moment for India's independence, characterized by **economic strain, political awakening, and the rise of nationalist movements**, not only highlighted the flaws of colonial rule but also fostered a **collective consciousness** that ultimately culminated in the quest for independence.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/mains-practice-question/question-8527/pnt>