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Indian Economy on The Eve of Independence

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ABSTRACT

The structure of India's present economy is not just of current making; it has its foundations saturated with history, especially in the period when India was ruled by Britishers, which lasted for almost two centuries before India finally got independent on 15 August 1947. The only purpose of the British colonial rule in India was to limit India from being a raw material provider for Great Britain's own rapidly growing modern industrial base. India had an independent economy prior to the approach of British rule. However, agriculture was the major source of income for the public, and the country's economy was identified by different types of manufacturing industries. India was popularly known for its handicraft industries or business in the field s of cotton and silk materials, metal and precious stone works, and many more. These items enjoyed a global market based on recognition of the marvelous quality of materials used and the high standards of craftsmanship found in all imports from India.

Keywords: economy, India, eve, independence, britishers, business, imports, quality, current

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic policies adopted by the colonial government in India were more concentrated on security and promotion of the economic interest of the nation rather than the development of the economy.[1] Such policies brought about a major change in the construction of the Indian economy — transforming the country into providers of raw materials and customers of finished industrial products from Britain.[2] Obviously, the colonial government never made an honest attempt to estimate India's national and per capita income. A few individual attempts were made to measure such incomes yielded clashing and conflicting results. Amongst the notable individual estimators — Dadabhai Naoroji, William Digby, Findlay Shirras, V.K.R.V. Rao and R.C. Desai, it was Rao,[3] whose estimates, during the colonial period were considered very important. However, most research did find that the country's growth of aggregate real output during the beginning of the twentieth century was less than 2 percent, coupled with a mere half percent growth in per capita output per year. Indian economy is Agrobased, or we can say that India is an agrarian economy[4]. This is clear from the fact that the national income of India comprises 70% of the income generated from agriculture. Before independence, 95% of the economy was based on agriculture, and the income was generated from agriculture. Besides, around 85% of the population was living in small-town or villages, and the only means of subsistence was agriculture[5]. On the eve of independence, the condition of the Indian economy in terms of agriculture was demoralizing. Agriculture, even after being the most important sector, was facing economic degradation and stagnation in the economy. The following were observed with the changes in agriculture:

- High Vulnerability[6]
- Low Productivity

High vulnerability means a response to any situation regarding a change in the agricultural elements. If the country faces low rainfall in a month, then the resulting impact will be lower levels of output and high rates of crop failure. Low productivity levels were noticed, and the levels of output declined regardless of the large area for cultivation. Some variables that led to the stagnation of the agriculture sector are:

- The Indian economy was confronting the adverse effects of the zamindari system, which is the act of making farmers work and collect rent as tax, irrespective of the circumstances.
- The shortage of agricultural resources led to the stagnation of agriculture.
- The commercialization of agriculture implied moving from developing goods for their consumption to developing for the market. The presence of middlemen prevented the development of the economic condition of the farmers, which caused stagnation in the agricultural area.[7]

As in the case of agriculture, in manufacturing, India was not able to develop a suitable industrial base under colonial rule. Even though the country was widely known for handicrafts, industries declined, and no related modern industrial base was permitted to come up to take pride in the place enjoyed by the formers for so long. The main purpose of the colonial government regarding this policy of deindustrializing India was two-fold. The main aim was to limit India to an exporter of important raw materials for the coming modern industries of Britain, and to transform India into a sprawling market for the finished products of those industries so that their continued growth could be assured to the maximum advantage of their home country — Britain[8]. In the present economic scenario, the fall of the native handicraft industries resulted in huge unemployment in India and new demand in the Indian consumer market, which was currently denied the supply of locally made goods. This demand was profitably met by the expanding imports of cheaply manufactured products from Britain. Foreign trade refers to the exchange of goods and services between two or more nations/boundaries or territories of the world. Since the time of independence, India has been one of the major trading nations, exporting essential items like cotton, raw silk, sugar, wool, jute, indigo, etc. Additionally, it is an importer of finished consumer goods, such as woolen clothes, cotton, silk, and capital goods, like light machinery made in Britain. During this interval, Britain held a monopoly over India's imports and exports. Therefore, the majority of foreign trade was limited only to Britain, while the rest half was permitted to trade with other nations, like Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China, and Persia (Iran).[9]
India was a huge exporter in the colonial period. However, it did not influence the country's economy. Items like food grains, clothes, kerosene, etc., hit the country hard with its shortage. The details of the Demographic Condition in regards to the public of British India were primarily acquired through a census in 1881. However, suffering from several circumstances, it unveiled the unevenness in the development of the Indian population. Subsequently, in every ten years, such census procedures were conducted. Before 1921, India was in the initial step of demographic change. The second step of transformation began after 1921. Neither the total population of India nor the increase in the rate of the population at this point was high. Also, many social development signs were not really encouraging. The comprehensive literacy level was under 16%, out of which the female literacy level was low, at around 7%. Public health facilities were either inaccessible to extensive parts of the population or when obtainable were highly lacking.[10]
The overall death rate was high, and the life expectancy was very low, about 32 years in comparison to the present 69 years. In the absence of reliable statistics, it is difficult to define the intensity of poverty at that time. In such a poor demographic condition, water and air-borne diseases were widespread and badly affected the lives of people.[11]

DISCUSSION

The occupational structure of a country means the percentage of its workforce employed in various economic ventures. In other words, articulating the number of total people engaged in agriculture and related activities and the number of them involved in the manufacturing and service areas can be recognized from the occupational structure of the country.[12] During the colonial phase, the occupational structure of India, i.e., the allocation of working individuals across different industries and sectors, explained small hints of progress. The agricultural sector is esteemed for the highest share of the workforce, which generally prevailed at a high percentage of 70–75%, while the manufacturing and service areas are estimated for only 10 and 15-20%, consecutively. Another extraordinary point of view was the growing geographical variation. Portions of the then Madras Presidency (including areas of the present-day states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), Bombay, and Bengal noticed a drop in the dependence of the workforce on the agricultural areas with a corresponding increase in the production and the services areas. However, there was an increase in the share of the workforce in agriculture during a similar time in the states like Rajasthan, Odisha and Punjab.[13]

Infrastructure is referred to as the basic physical operations of a country/nation or a business-like communication, transportation, water, sewage, and so on. This operation can be a highly expensive investment and an important aspect of the economic development of a country. During the colonial time period, in India, basic infrastructure such as water transport, railways, posts and telegraphs, and ports were developed, but it served the colonial interest instead of serving the general public. Roads constructed were not good for modern India as it could not connect rural areas, and the lack of well-constructed roads, especially in the rainy season, was the biggest drawback.[14]

However, in the year 1850, the introduction of railways was one of the major contributions of the British. This proposal transformed the Indian economy in two ways. One, it led people to travel long routes and break the geographical barrier, and second, it commercialized Indian agriculture unfavourably and influenced the self-sufficiency of the economies of the small towns in India. With the advancement of railways and roads, the colonial regulation also took steps for the development of sea lanes and inland exchanges. However, the postal services, though it was useful assistance for the public, remained insufficient.[15]

At the time of British rule, Indian economy was transformed into a colonial, backward, semi-feudal, stagnant, depleted, and amputated economy by the Britishers.[16]

1. Colonial Economy: India has faced colonial exploitation for over 200 years. By supplying raw materials from India to facilitate the growth of British industry, British rulers drained a huge wealth of India. The Britishers also encouraged commercialisation of Indian agriculture in order to transform the Indian economy into a British colony. Besides, even at the time of independence, the British colonial policy had a deep impact on India.[17]

2. Semi-feudal Economy: By the end of British rule, there were two aspects of the Indian economy; i.e., the Introduction of the Feudal System and the Introduction of the Capitalist System. Introduction to Feudal System or land settlement system initiated feudal relations; i.e., landlord-tenant relations. [18]The landlords were cruel to the cultivators and used to charge high Lagaan rates to them. Also, the introduction of the Capitalist System increases modern industries resulting in the creation of two classes, which are labourers and capitalists.

3. Stagnant Economy: An economy that is growing at a very low rate is known as a stagnant economy. On the eve of independence during the first half of the 20th century, India's growth of aggregate real output was less than 2% and its growth per capita output was only 0.5%.

4. Depleted Economy or Depreciated Economy: A depleted economy is one where there are no arrangements to replace the physical assets which are depreciated because of excessive use. The Indian economy at the time of independence was a depreciated economy. Besides, at the time of the 2nd World War, the Indian industries had to work beyond their capacities in order to fulfill the increased demand for machinery, plant, etc., for the war. However, the Britishers did not make any arrangements for replacing the depleted assets, because of which the British rulers left a seriously depleted economy.[19]

5. Backward Economy: At the end of British rule, India was an underdeveloped and backward economy. The main reasons behind the Indian economy's backwardness were Low Productivity Level, Low per Capita Income, Mass Illiteracy, Traditional

Methods of Agriculture, High Birth rate, and High Death Rate.[20]

6. Amputated Economy: Britishers had a policy of divide and rule, which quickly gave rise to discrimination between different groups based on caste, culture, language, and religion. Because of this policy, at the time of independence, India was geographically divided into two different parts; Indi and Pakistan. This partition of the country into tw parts virtually disrupted the Indian economy becaus of two main reasons. Firstly, there was a shortage c raw materials for cotton and jute mills because most c the areas where cotton and jute used to grow went t Pakistan. Secondly, the partition gave rise to th problem of rehabilitation of a large number of refugee from Pakistan.[21]

Not only the industrial and agricultural sectors of th country were affected, but foreign trade was als affected. Foreign trade plays an essential role in th development and earnings of a country. In fact, it i great to be a self-maintaining and independent country foreign trade, and globalization are crucial to country's success. Indian economy on the eve c independence in relation to foreign trade was extremel poor. Due to the rules forced by the British, none c India's products or skills had any acknowledgmen and hence, it badly affected the structure, compositior and volume of the country's foreign trade and income.

3. RESULTS

Ancient India flourished in every sphere of life. The Indian economy on the eve of independence started to drop as quickly as the British stepped foot on Indian soil. The rural, manufacturing and other sectors of India's economy and planning were all exploited. The nation could not supply sufficient food for its population due to diminishing soil fertility. Even India's few sectors weren't enough to keep the country's economy afloat.[23]

The infrastructure was decaying, and the British government's primary goal was to increase revenue. The resources that remained were devastated by the Second World War. To achieve freedom, the Indians had to forsake all other areas of existence. The actions of the colonial authorities seemed to be the nail in the coffin for the Indian economy.[24]

The British dispersed well before Asia's long-running cloth manufacturing industry. Industrialization arose as a result of this. Indians were obliged to import British products, which sparked the revolution. During the British occupation of India, the industries began to disintegrate.[25]

- Poverty is widespread in the country, with many individuals unable to meet their food, shelter, and clothes. Poverty and illiteracy were two more difficulties that the government had to deal with.
- Communication, transportation, power, and energy infrastructure were all undeveloped.
- Significant reliance on imports due to the country's industrial backwardness, various consumer items, including medications, were imported overseas.
- Limited urbanization because the bulk of the public resided in villages, they had fewer options outside of agriculture.
- Because India was a British empire, the British exploited the Indian economy and planning.[26]
- The country's economy grew slowly or not at all. There was poverty, death, and misery due to stagnation's lack of food.
- Even though agriculture employs 70% of the population, it only contributes 50% of GDP. Productivity and production were also at an all-time low.
- The country's manufacturing industry was underdeveloped, with a scarcity of primary and key sectors.[27]

Agriculture was the first considered source of income and occupation in the Indian economy on the eve of Independence, with over 72.7 percent of the working population employed in this industry. Only 10.2 percent of the working population, on the other hand, worked in the industrial sector. Aside from that, 17.2% of the workforce was employed in the service or tertiary area of the business. On the eve of Independence and later, this resulted in modest growth of the Indian economy's tertiary or service sector. On the eve of Independence, the Indian economy had an imbalanced boom.[28]

On the eve of Independence, India's economy was characterized by high birth and death rates. This meant that the citizen's life expectancy was poor, hovering about 8% per year. The rate of average lifespan was likewise relatively low. On the eve, the Indian economy was described and demonstrated a lack of health care facilities, awareness, and all means for health care for 32 years. Only 16 percent of the population was literate. This demonstrated our country's social and economic backwardness.[29]

It is a well-known fact that agricultural practices account for more than 70% of India's national income. Before 1947, agricultural activity provided almost 95 percent of the country's income. Over 85% of the country's people lived in communities where agriculture was their sole source of income. In terms of agriculture, the Indian economy on the brink of Independence was depressing. One of the most significant Indian sectors stagnated and deteriorated for a long time.[30]

When the British arrived in India, they intended to stifle its flourishing industrial phase. They began to gain control of the apparel industry and attempted to stifle the work of artisans. The British devised a strategy to decentralize these thriving businesses. With decentralization, the British attempted to accomplish two goals.[32]

- India's export volume was elevated to the forefront. India's raw ingredients were shipped directly to the United Kingdom. Whereas India used to be a significant exporter of manufactured handicrafts, it is now mostly a supplier of raw materials.
- The British misrule in India contributed to the decline of the handicraft sector. The Indian handicraft sector suffered as a result. The British used a discriminatory tariff to undermine the Indian handicraft sector, allowing unrestricted export of raw materials through India to Britain and uncontrolled importing of finished items from Britain to India. The export of handicraft products from India, on the other hand, was subject to a hefty tariff.[33]
- The finished goods produced in the United Kingdom were machine-made and were of higher quality and lower cost than the Indian handicraft ones. Many businesses in India have closed as a result of this.
- During this time, the British also built railways in India, which helped them extend their market for low-cost industrial goods. This results in a drop of demand for higher-priced handcrafted items and the Indian handicraft industry's demise.[34]

Foreign trade is critical to a country's economic development and earnings. Although being self-sufficient and independent is desirable, overseas trade and globalization are essential for a country's success. On the eve of Independence, India's economy and planning was in dire straits in foreign commerce. Due to the British-imposed laws, none of India's products or skills were recognized. As a result, the structure, composition, and amount of the country's foreign commerce and income are negatively impacted.[35]

The Indian economy comprises of all the production activities and distribution activities that relate to people. It also comprises of economic activities which related to people and hence determines their appropriate standard of living. However, in this article, we will discuss the status of the Indian economy on the eve of independence. It is important for every Indian to know that on the eve of our independence, the economy of the country was in a very bad shape. The end of the colonial rule left the nation in bits. We picked it up and placed it in order. This bad condition of the country was the outcome of every policy of the British. Since every policy that they were framing was constantly focusing on favouring their nation, we had very little left towards the end.[36]

Therefore, in 1947, when British gave us back India to us, we took back our torn nation.

During the decades of British colonial rule in India, there were no efforts made to calculate India's per capital income. Similarly, the British rulers never found it necessary to calculate our National Income or our Gross Domestic Product. Upon gaining independence, some Indian individuals did try to measure India's incomes. But the attempts tragically failed due to inconsistency, lack of expertise and inaccuracy. But the contributions of VKRV Rao and Dadabai Naoroji was very significant in this field.Our economy had been a victim of enormous exploitation. Our natural resources, iron ores, gold mines, wealth and manpower was subject to intense exploitation[37]. Due to these atrocities, the Indian economy on the eve of independence showed poor/low economic growth. Immense efforts and knowledge were essential in order to move ahead.Although India was a very independent economy before the British rule, towards the end, it was exhausted. [38]The Indian economy on the eve of independence was struggling to find the path. Since all the policies that the British were framing only promote their interests, we were diverging from prosperity. We were mere raw-material suppliers to the British. They made use of our labour without treating them well. The 200 years of British rule also took away our will to gain knowledge and awareness. Since we were their slaves, we never got the right to proper education. And as a result of these actions, towards the end of their reign, we were illiterate. The Indian economy on the eve of independence was full of people who had absolutely no plan as to how to help the nation.It is a known fact that over 70% of India's National Income comes from its agricultural activities.[39] Back then, before 1947, over 95% of the country's income came from its agricultural activity. And over 85% of the country's population lived in villages where livelihood completely depended on agriculture. The Indian economy on the eve of independence with respect to agriculture was disheartening. The most important Indian sector was facing massive stagnation and continuous deterioration.[40]

Hence the resulting situation of the sector was as follows.

Low productivity level. Productivity and output per hectare of land were very low. This situation led to a very low yield of output irrespective of the large cultivation area.[41]

High vulnerability level. Agricultural activities are dependent on climatic factors. Because a poor rainfall generally led to a low output level and high crop failures. And no efforts were made by the British to eradicate irrigation issues. Hence making it vulnerable to external factors.

- The Indian economy on the eve of independence suffered and continues to suffer the effects of zamindari system. In this system, the main focus of the landlords is to extract rent regardless of the economic conditions of the farmers. This is one of the focus reason for stress among farmers and fear to take a chance to grow. Hence, leading to a stagnant agricultural sector.[42]
- The lack of resources, be it financial or otherwise, is a critical factor leading to a stagnant agricultural sector.
- Extensive commercialization of agriculture refers to the shift from cultivating for self to cultivating for sale in the market. This has not been helpful in improving the condition of farmers due to the existence of middlemen. Hence, the stagnation or retardation of the Indian agricultural sector.[43]

Before the British period, India's well-known industry was the handicraft and textile industry. India was well-known for its industries in cotton and silk textiles as well. And in addition, Indians were excellent in metal and precious stonework as well. When the Britishers came, they were followers of de-industrialization in India. They did this by creating situations which were conducive to the decay of the handicraft and textile industry. They also did not make any effort to promote to permit the continuation of the metal and precious stone works.[44]

The decay of the Handicraft Industry. The traditional handicraft industry in India initially was in high demand. But the British rule completely discriminated the practice. The prevalence of discriminatory tariff policy and the competition from machine-made products was very critical for the downfall. Also, the introduction of railways in India was the reason for market expansion. Consequently, the demand for the handicrafts began to fall. All of these directly led to the downfall of our prominent industry.[45]

Slow Growth of the Modern Industry. Due to the limited growth of the PSEs and the lopsided industrial structure, the growth of the modern industry was slow. In addition, there was a lack of basic and heavy industries.[46]

Not only was the industrial and agricultural sectors of the country affected but so was the foreign trade. Foreign trade plays a crucial role in the development and earnings of a country. Although it is great to be a self-sustaining and independent country, foreign trade and globalization are critical to a country's success. Indian economy on the eve of independence in relation to the foreign trade was very poor. Due to the rules imposed by the British, none of India's products or skills had any recognition. And hence, adversely affecting the structure, composition and volume of the country's foreign trade and income.[47]

4. CONCLUSIONS

The condition of the Indian Economy on the eve of independence was not good. We, as a country, had to start from scratch and all over again in order to have a better future for ourselves and the coming generation. Mentioned below are the conditions of each sector as mentioned in chapter class 11 Indian Economy on the eve of Independence.

- There was a low level of agricultural production and productivity due to land settlements introduced by the Britishers and their government. The reason was the zamindari system back in the days when all the profits went to the Zamindars instead of the farmers and cultivators. This definitely leads to discouragement amongst the farmers to produce more. [48]
- High dependence on the monsoon showers and no efforts were being made under the British rule to develop proper irrigation canals and irrigation systems.
- Lack of proper input such as low technology, lack of irrigation facilities and poor usage of fertilisers, all contributed to the dismal level of agricultural productivity.
- Hence, the agricultural sector's condition by the Indian economy on the eve of Independence was severely poor.[49]

- Indian economy on the eve of independence lacked modern machinery and equipment. The Industrial Revolution in Britain gave stiff competition to India's handicraft sector and hence due to better quality of goods that can be produced at lower costs by machines; it forced the Indian handicraft industry to shut down.
- In the days, the British government allowed tariff-free export of goods and raw materials from India, which made raw materials extensively cheap. They imposed high tariffs on the imports from Britain to India of the finished goods. [50]
- New patterns of demand could be seen in the market. Due to the British influence on our economy and lifestyles, a new class of people emerged here in India, which certainly had changed the pattern of demand in the Indian markets. Their demands also changed for the Indian produced goods and handicrafts and, hence, favoured the superior quality of goods and products produced by the British.
- The market for British goods eventually increased in the Indian economy. The railways facilitated transportation for British goods and products and made the goods reach different parts of the country. Eventually, the market size for the low cost and good quality British products expanded; on the contrary, the market for Indian high-cost goods reduced and shrunk.[51]
- Hence, the Indian industrial sector's condition following the Indian economy on the eve of Independence was also in bad shape and state.

- Due to the discriminative tariff policies that were being adopted by the Colonial government, India became a net exporter of raw materials and other primary products and goods.
- We also became the net importer of all the finished products that were produced by the British Industry.
- Exports and imports were largely restricted and constrained to Britain only due to the policies and measures that were being adopted by the British government.
- All the surplus profits that were made on account of foreign trade during the British rule were only distributed among administrators and on war expenses as well.
- Hence the foreign trade sector of India in accordance with the Indian economy on the eve of Independence was also in bad shape and state. [52]

- In the Indian economy on the eve of Independence, agriculture was our principal source and sector of occupation with almost 72.7% of the working population engaged in this sector of the economy.
- On the other hand, only 10.2% of the working population were engaged in the manufacturing or industrial sector.
- Apart from this, about 17.2% of the working population were engaged in the service or the tertiary sector of the economy. This provided slow growth to the tertiary or the service sector of the Indian economy on the eve of Independence and afterwards.
- Eventually, there was an unbalanced growth of the Indian economy on the eve of Independence. [53]

- This implied a low survival rate of the population, which was nearly around 8 per thousand annum.
- Life expectancy rate was also quite low. It was 32 years that depicted and showed a lack of health care facilities, lack of awareness and lack of all means for health care in the Indian economy on the eve of Independence.
- The literacy rate was as low as 16% only. This showed the social and economic backwardness of our country. [54]

- Although the Indian economy on the eve of Independence was in a very bad state and shape, there was some major infrastructure-related development during the British rule in India such as in the areas of transportation and communication.
- The introduction and development of the railways was a major development and breakthrough that was followed by the development of ports and development of roadways as well.[55]
- But behind all these infrastructure developments that took place in India, the main motive of the Colonial government was to actually foster the interest of the British government rather than to accelerate development and growth of the Indian economy.
- Furthermore, there was also a transition from the old lived and used the barter system of exchange to the monetary system of exchange using money. This further facilitated the division of labour and large scale production in the Indian economy. [56]

Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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