

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

History Optional

Early Structure of the British Raj

Paper 2 · Unit 3

From the diwani to the Crown, the civil service, police, army, law and education: 50 marks in four years and the machinery that everything else in Paper 2 runs on.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

Early structure of the British Raj: the early administrative structure; from diarchy to direct control; the Regulating Act (1773); the Pitt's India Act (1784); the Charter Act (1833); the voice of free trade and the changing character of British colonial rule; English utilitarian and India.

From dual government to direct control

The 2026 paper asked why the Crown assumed direct control in 1858 and what new arrangements followed. The full answer starts ninety years earlier.

- **Diwani in 1765** gave the Company revenue without administrative responsibility, and the resulting **dual government** left the Nawab accountable for a government he could not fund.
- **Bengal famine of 1770**, in which perhaps a third of the population of affected districts died while revenue collection continued, discredited the arrangement completely.
- **Warren Hastings** abolished dual government in 1772, moved the treasury to Calcutta, and made the Company the direct collector, which is the true beginning of British administration in India.
- **Regulating Act of 1773** created a Governor-General of Bengal with a council of four, subordinated Bombay and Madras to Bengal in matters of war and peace, and established a Supreme Court at Calcutta.
- Its defects were immediate, since the Governor-General could be outvoted by his own council, which produced the paralysing conflict between Hastings and Philip Francis.
- **Pitt's India Act of 1784** created the **Board of Control** representing the Crown alongside the Court of Directors, establishing the dual authority that lasted until 1858.
- **Charter Act of 1813** ended the Company's Indian trade monopoly, admitted missionaries, and allocated one lakh rupees annually for education, which is the first state commitment to Indian education.
- **Charter Act of 1833** ended the Company's commercial functions entirely, made it a purely administrative body, created the **Governor-General of India** with legislative power over all presidencies, and declared that no Indian should be disqualified from office by religion, birth or colour.
- That 1833 non-discrimination clause was never honoured in practice, and its repeated citation by Indian nationalists from Naoroji onward made it a standing indictment.

The transfer to the Crown, 1858

The 2026 question asked for the reasons and the new arrangements, so give both halves in roughly equal measure.

- **Reason one** was the demonstrated failure of Company government, since the revolt of 1857 showed that a commercial corporation could not be trusted with the government of a subcontinent.
- Accountability was the second driver, because British opinion demanded direct parliamentary responsibility for a possession of that size once the scale of the violence became known.
- Third, the Company had already lost every commercial rationale in 1833, so by 1857 it survived only as an administrative anomaly with no argument for its own existence.

- **Government of India Act 1858** abolished the Company and the Board of Control, vested government in the Crown, and created a **Secretary of State for India** in the Cabinet with a **Council of India** of fifteen members.
- The Governor-General became additionally the **Viceroy**, representing the sovereign, and the change of title carried real symbolic weight in dealings with the princes.
- **Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1 November 1858** promised religious non-interference, respect for princely treaties and adoption rights, equal treatment in appointments, and an end to territorial expansion.
- **Doctrine of Lapse was abandoned**, and the princes were converted from targets of annexation into the props of the regime that Canning called breakwaters in the storm.
- **Army reorganisation** under the Peel Commission raised the European proportion, reserved artillery to Europeans, shifted recruitment to the so-called martial races, and mixed regiments to prevent combination.
- **Financial reorganisation** followed, with the Indian Councils Act of 1861 adding Indian non-official members to the legislative council in an advisory capacity, and a decentralisation of finance beginning under Mayo in 1870.

The civil service

The steel frame of the Raj and the target of the earliest nationalist demands. Its exclusions are as examinable as its structure.

- **Cornwallis** created the covenanted service and simultaneously **excluded Indians from all higher posts**, on the theory that every native of Hindustan was corrupt, which is the origin of the racial bar.
- **Fort William College**, founded by Wellesley in 1800, and later Haileybury in England trained recruits in Indian languages and law before posting.
- **Competitive examination** replaced patronage after the Charter Act of 1853 and the Macaulay Committee, and the examination was held **only in London**, which was itself an effective exclusion.
- **Satyendranath Tagore** became the first Indian to enter the service in 1863, and by 1870 only a handful had followed, so the practical bar remained.
- **Maximum age was lowered from twenty three to nineteen in 1878**, which made Indian entry even harder and became one of the first all-India political grievances, taken up by Surendranath Banerjee's Indian Association.
- **Simultaneous examination in India and Britain** became a standing Congress demand from 1885 and was not conceded until 1922, with the first Indian examination held in Allahabad in 1922.
- **Statutory civil service** of 1879 and later the provincial services offered Indians subordinate positions with lower pay and prospects, which preserved the hierarchy while appearing to concede the principle.
- **Lee Commission of 1924** set a target of parity in recruitment, and by 1947 Indians formed a substantial proportion of the service, which is why the administrative machinery could be transferred intact.

Police, army and law

Three institutions built for control rather than for service, and the syllabus expects you to know how each was structured.

- **Police Act of 1861**, following the Police Commission of 1860, created the provincial police under an Inspector General with district superintendents, and it deliberately modelled the force on the **Irish Constabulary** rather than on the British civil police.
- That model matters, because the Irish Constabulary was designed for a disaffected population, and the Indian police accordingly emphasised control and intelligence over prevention of ordinary crime.
- **Village police** remained under the zamindar or the village headman, so the reformed force reached the district but not the village, which left rural policing largely unchanged.
- **Army** after 1857 was recruited increasingly from Punjab, Nepal and the northwest under the **martial races** theory, and Bengal and Madras recruitment fell sharply.
- Indians were excluded from the officer corps until the twentieth century, with the first King's commissions granted after the First World War and the Indian Military Academy founded at Dehradun in 1932.
- **Codification** was the Utilitarian achievement, and the **First Law Commission under Macaulay** from 1834 produced the Indian Penal Code, enacted in 1860 and in force from 1862.
- The **Code of Criminal Procedure of 1861 and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872** completed the criminal law, and the Indian Contract Act of 1872 the commercial.
- **Personal law was deliberately left uncoded**, with Hindu and Muslim law applied in matters of marriage, inheritance and religious endowment, and that decision entrenched community-based legal identity.
- **Ilbert Bill of 1883** exposed the limit precisely, since the proposal to let Indian judges try Europeans in the mofussil provoked an organised European agitation that forced its dilution, and Indian observers drew the obvious conclusion.
- **Rule of law** was the claim and the reality was partial, since the criminal law applied unequally, Europeans enjoyed procedural privileges until the Ilbert Bill controversy, and executive discretion remained wide.

KEY TERMS

Martial races — The post-1857 doctrine that certain communities were inherently suited to soldiering, used to reshape recruitment towards Punjab, Nepal and the northwest.

Free trade and the changing character of colonial rule

Named explicitly in the syllabus. The shift from monopoly trading to free trade imperialism is the economic key to the whole nineteenth century.

- **Mercantilist phase** to 1813 rested on monopoly, on the purchase of Indian goods for European sale, and on the direct plunder of Bengal revenue.
- **Industrial phase** after 1813 reversed the flow, since Lancashire needed India as a market for machine-made cloth and as a source of raw cotton, and the Company's monopoly obstructed both.

- **Free trade lobby** in Britain, organised through the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the Glasgow and Liverpool interests, campaigned for the abolition of the monopoly and won in 1813 and 1833.
- **Tariff policy** made the change concrete, with Indian cotton goods facing prohibitive duties in Britain while British goods entered India at nominal rates, and India losing tariff autonomy entirely.
- **Infrastructure** followed the same logic, since railways, ports and the telegraph were built to move raw materials outward and manufactures inward, financed by the guarantee system at Indian expense.
- **Finance imperialism** developed later in the century, with British capital in railways, plantations, mining and jute earning guaranteed or high returns remitted home.
- The **three phases** framework, of mercantilism, industrial free trade and finance imperialism, comes from **Rajni Palme Dutt** and remains the standard organising scheme for this question.
- Its qualification is that the phases overlapped considerably and the periodisation is clearer in retrospect than it was at the time, and saying so shows judgement.

The Utilitarians and India

Named explicitly in the syllabus, and India was genuinely a laboratory for Utilitarian ideas in a way Britain never allowed.

- **James Mill** worked at India House from 1819 and rose to Examiner of Correspondence, and his **History of British India** of 1817 was required reading at Haileybury despite his never having visited India.
- Mill's History dismissed Indian civilisation comprehensively and periodised Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British, a communal periodisation whose consequences long outlived his book.
- **Bentham's** influence reached India through Mill and through his own correspondence, and his principle of the greatest happiness justified rational legislation imposed by an enlightened authority.
- **Legal codification** was the clearest Utilitarian achievement, since Bentham had argued for codified law all his life and India permitted the experiment that Britain resisted.
- **Ryotwari settlement** applied **Ricardo's rent theory** through Munro and through Mill's influence, treating the state as the ultimate landlord entitled to the economic rent.
- **Free trade** and non-interference in the market were Utilitarian orthodoxy, and they shaped famine policy directly through the refusal to interfere with the grain trade.
- **Education** was the contested field, with the Anglicists led by Macaulay against the Orientalists, and Macaulay's **Minute of 1835** and Bentinck's resolution deciding for English.
- The **Orientalist-Anglicist controversy**, asked about in 2026, is best answered by noting that both camps agreed on the need for state-directed education and differed on the medium, and that the practical outcome was **downward filtration** which reached almost nobody.
- **Downward filtration** assumed that educating a small elite would spread learning to the masses by imitation, and it demonstrably did not, since literacy at the first census after independence stood at around sixteen per cent.
- **Wood's Despatch of 1854**, sometimes called the Magna Carta of Indian education, created departments of education, universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857, and a grant-in-aid system, and it formally abandoned filtration in favour of mass education that was never funded.

- The critical assessment: Utilitarianism gave India codified law, a rational revenue theory and a modern education system, and it also supplied the intellectual justification for authoritarian government by experts accountable to nobody in India.

How the questions come

Three questions in four years, on the Indian Councils Bill of 1861, on utilitarianism prompting reform, and on the Crown's assumption of control. All three are institutional.

- The 2023 quotation about a despotism controlled from home is asking about the **limits of the 1861 reform**, so give the Indian Councils Act's advisory non-official members and explain why that was not representation.
- On utilitarianism, the 2024 question wants the **link from theory to statute**, so name Bentham, Mill, Macaulay's Law Commission, the IPC and the ryotwari application of Ricardo.
- For 1858, give **reasons and arrangements** in balance, and the arrangements are the Secretary of State, the Council of India, the Viceroy's title, the Proclamation, the end of Lapse and the army reorganisation.
- Across all of them, the analytical thread is the movement from **commercial to territorial to bureaucratic** government, and stating that thread early organises the answer.
- **Decentralisation** of finance under Mayo in 1870 and Ripon in 1882, and the local self-government resolution of 1882 that earned Ripon the title father of local self-government in India, belong in any answer on the structure's evolution after 1858.
- Add the nationalist reading wherever it fits, since Naoroji, Dutt and later Congress built their case precisely on the gap between the 1833 and 1858 promises and the practice that followed.

Last-mile revision

- Diwani 1765, dual government to 1772, famine 1770; Regulating Act 1773; Pitt's India Act 1784 and the Board of Control.
- Charter Acts: 1813 ends trade monopoly and funds education, 1833 ends commerce and creates the Governor-General of India with the non-discrimination clause.
- 1858: Company abolished, Secretary of State and Council of India, Viceroy title, Proclamation 1 November, Lapse abandoned, Peel Commission army reform.
- Civil service: Cornwallis excludes Indians, exam in London only from 1853, Satyendranath Tagore 1863, age lowered to 19 in 1878, simultaneous exam only in 1922, Lee Commission 1924.
- Police Act 1861 on the Irish Constabulary model; IPC drafted 1834 by Macaulay's commission, enacted 1860, in force 1862; CrPC 1861, Evidence Act 1872.
- Free trade phases from Rajni Palme Dutt: mercantilist to 1813, industrial free trade after, finance imperialism late century.
- Utilitarians: James Mill at India House from 1819, History 1817 with the communal periodisation, Macaulay's Minute 1835, Wood's Despatch 1854 and the universities of 1857.

Common errors to avoid

- Saying the Crown took over because of the revolt alone. The Company had lost its commercial rationale in 1833 and parliamentary accountability was the second driver.
- Treating the Indian Councils Act of 1861 as representative government. Its Indian members were nominated and purely advisory.
- Dating the Indian Penal Code to 1834. It was drafted then and enacted in 1860, coming into force in 1862.
- Forgetting that personal law was deliberately left uncodified, which entrenched community legal identity and has consequences to this day.
- Presenting the Orientalist-Anglicist debate as liberals against reactionaries. Both sides accepted state-directed education and the outcome was filtration that reached almost nobody.
- Omitting the 1833 non-discrimination clause. Its non-implementation is a standing nationalist argument and examiners reward the reference.

Mains Practice

Why did the British Crown assume direct control over the Indian Government in 1858? Mention the new administrative arrangements.

20 marks · 250 words · 2026

While introducing the Indian Councils Bill of 1861, the British thought the only Government suitable for India 'is a despotism controlled from home'. Comment.

20 marks · 250 words · 2023

The values of utilitarianism prompted the Company administration to attempt reform of Indian society.

10 marks · 150 words · 2024