

UNIT 1 IMPERIALISM AND COLONIALISM: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit presents a broad discussion of the phenomenon of imperialism and colonialism and tries to show how this can be helpful in understanding the basic features of historical development in India under the British colonial rule over a period of two centuries.

After going through this Unit you will be able to learn:

- what is colonialism, its nature and its various stages,
- the links between colonialism and the world capitalist system, and
- how under colonialism the Indian economy and society were completely subordinated to British economy and political control.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Imperialism refers to the process of capitalist development which leads the capitalist countries to conquer and dominate pre-capitalist countries of the world. Under this head, we deal with the development of capitalism in advanced capitalist countries, the mutual relations among advanced capitalist countries, and the subjugation of pre-capitalist countries by a capitalist country (also described here as metropolis or metropolitan country). More narrowly, the term imperialism is used to denote or describe the relations of political and economic domination between metropolis and the country it subjugates or dominates.

The country which is so subjugated by a metropolitan capitalist country is described as a colony, and what happens in a colony is colonialism. The total system of imperialist domination of a pre-capitalist country is colonialism. The study of imperialism and colonialism is closely co-related and, in a way, we shall be discussing both. But here we shall concentrate more on the study of colonialism while leaving major aspects of imperialism to be taken up in the study of development of capitalism.

1.2 COLONIALISM: VARIOUS VIEW POINTS

What does colonialism mean? Is it merely the political control by one country on another, or does it indicate a process of economic subordination of one country to another? The understanding of colonialism has varied from one scholar to another. In this section we will introduce you to various view points on colonialism as well as other related aspects: