

**P.R. GOVERNMENT COLLEGE (A), KAKINADA**  
**NAAC Accredited “B++” Grade Institution (CGPA**  
**2.82)**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

**Study Material for students**



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**TOPIC: Doctrine of Lapse.**

## **Doctrine of Lapse.**

### **Features.**

The doctrine of lapse was widely regarded as an imperialist approach by Indian rulers. They opposed this policy because it increased the power of the British government. The Doctrine of Lapse had several key features that defined its implementation:

**Annexation of States without a Male Heir:** The primary feature of the Doctrine of Lapse was the automatic annexation of any princely state where the ruler died without a natural male heir. The British refused to acknowledge adopted heirs, which was a common practice among Indian rulers.

**British Approval Required:** Even in cases where adoption was previously accepted, the doctrine required that such adoptions receive explicit British approval before being considered valid for succession.

**Inheritance:** According to the Doctrine of Lapse, an adopted heir could inherit only the prince's personal belongings and property, not the ruler ship of the kingdom. Thus, it directly challenged the traditional Indian practice of adopting an heir to succeed to the throne.

**Pension and Titles:** Under the Doctrine of Lapse, the adopted son of a princely state's ruler would be ineligible to receive any pensions previously granted to his father. It also prohibited the usage of titles that his father might have received earlier.

**Selective Application:** The policy was not uniformly applied to all princely states. Its implementation often depended on strategic and economic considerations. It applied to states without a competent ruler or legal heir to the throne.

**Legal Rationale:** The Doctrine of Lapse was publicly portrayed as being grounded in Hindu law, but this was misleading. While Hindu law allowed for the adoption of a son to ensure succession, the annexation policy under the Doctrine of Lapse did not recognise adopted heirs, leading to their exclusion from succession rights.

**Misgovernance Clause:** In some instances, states were annexed on the pretext of misgovernance, even when succession was not an issue.

The Doctrine of Lapse led to the annexation of several key princely states, significantly expanding British territories in India. Some of the most notable annexations include Satara (1848), Nagpur (1854) and Awadh (1856).

## **Doctrine of Lapse Effects.**

- The Doctrine of Lapse had profound effects on British India. It led to significant territorial expansion but also incited widespread resentment among Indian rulers. Its implementation contributed to the unrest that culminated in the Indian Rebellion of 1857.
- **Expansion of British Territories:** The doctrine of lapse led to the annexation of key states, expanding British control and increasing administrative responsibilities.
- **Loss of Sovereignty for Princely States:** Indian princely states lost sovereignty, sparking unrest. Rulers like the Rani of Jhansi and Nana Sahib were denied their thrones.
- **Erosion of Traditional Practices:** The rejection of adopted heirs disrupted succession traditions, destabilised the political landscape and weakened India's cultural fabric.
- **Prelude to the Indian Rebellion of 1857:** The annexations and policies like the Doctrine of Lapse fuelled discontent, contributing to the 1857 rebellion.
- **Change in British Policy:** After the rebellion, the British Crown assumed control, abandoned the doctrine, and adopted a more conciliatory approach toward Indian rulers.
- The Doctrine of Lapse, though short-lived, significantly expanded British control and revenue, but it alienated Indian rulers and fuelled the 1857 rebellion. Its abandonment marked a shift from aggressive annexation to a more conciliatory approach toward princely states.