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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. The First World War altered the economic and political situation in India. Comment.
(250 words)

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Approach:

- Highlight the economic and political conditions before World War I in British India.
- Highlight the changing conditions during World War I and what led to them.
- Conclude with the significance of these changes towards nationalist freedom struggle

Introduction

World War I (1914-18) was fought between colonial powers of Europe. It changed the course of freedom struggle by changing social and economic situation in India which was hitherto limited to certain class as witnessed in Swadeshi Movement and Congress Split at Surat Session.

Body

- As British forces were active participants in the war, it led to an increase in defence expenditure of the government. To compensate for the rising fiscal deficit, the government increased taxes on all class alike including business class. Thus, increased expenditure and rising demand led to price rise leading to difficulties for common people.
- As war created a demand for industrial goods, business class reaped immense profits due to declining imports in India. Thus, Indian businesses expanded during the war period, subsequently demanding greater opportunities for their development from the government.
- Due to the need for soldiers villagers were forced to get recruited into armed forces and serve overseas. When they returned they brought back experience and understanding of how colonial powers were exploiting people of Asia and Africa.
- The Russian Revolution at the end of the War inspired many towards socialist ideals and power of masses residing in peasants and workers.

Conclusion

These events created the ground for discontent against British Raj among across class divide. These conditions were then exploited by newer nationalists led by Gandhiji evident in Rowlatt Satyagraha, Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement and further changing social, political and economic scenarios in the 1920s like the formation of Communist Party and Government of India Act, 1919.