

High imperialism and colonialism in india



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India's volatile history with colonialism, dictated by predominantly imperialist European powers, and other manifestations of external intervention operated in a way that has contributed to instability in today's context. The study of colonial rule in India depicts a situation wherein colonialism was used as a tool, by the British, as a means to extract resources, manipulate foreign industries and to consolidate power. The political and social structures that were put into place and enforced during British colonial rule continue to have lasting influence on the modern context of India. Through the implementation of their own Eurocentric ideals and perspectives into India's societal framework, the British were able to enforce their cultural hegemony over the Indian population.

In order to accurately characterize the nature of British colonialism in India, it is important to acknowledge Britain's intentions and the historical process in which they asserted colonial dominance over India. Following the successful occupation of Africa's Cape of Good Hope, by the Portuguese, various other European powers set out to acquire and claim their own trading posts within Asia. At first, the British were interested in the trading potential that would be brought about through colonisation, however over time, they became more invested in acquiring territory to add to their empire. Starting from 1600, Britain had developed trade relations with India, as they had trading points among the coast on the borders of the Mughal empire. However, during the 1750s, the British began waging war in an attempt to claim land in the affluent province of Bengal. The 18th century was a period of an internal power struggle within India, as the Mughal empire was slowly losing support and power. The British officials, within the East India Company, saw

this period of weakened government as an opportunity to strengthen their grasp over Indian territory (Chatterjee, 2012, p. 12). After the Battle of Plassey, in 1757, which pitted the British East India Company troops against the newly appointed Nawab of Bengal, Siraj ud Daulah, and his unsuccessful troops, the British started to establish and consolidate their colonial rule over all Indian states. Previous to British rule, the East India Company's only purpose was to trade in cotton, silk, tea and opium however following the Battle of Plassey, the company gained military authority in developing sections of India (Szczepanski, 2018). The imperialistic ideals of acquiring territory encompassed the notion of the 'White Man's Burden', which is the justification of imperialism as an obligation and selfless attempt to provide guidance to 'primitives' cultures existing outside of Europe (Arendt, 1950, p. 306). This belief portrays the British as the only 'politically mature people' and therefore are 'burdened with the welfare of the world', (Arendt, 1950, p. 305) which feeds into the justification of European powers' imperialist tendencies. The term, coined by Rudyard Kipling, describes the British colonisers' belief in their supposed 'duty' to impart their superior ways of living, culture and government onto 'inferior beings' who are unable to formulate correct decisions on their own. This ideology plays into the colonial discourses of 'lack', wherein British imperialists argued that the Indian population lacked civilization, intellectual knowledge and rationality. This argument became the foundational reasoning for colonisers to pursue a 'civilising mission' that ultimately shaped the nature of British imperialism in India. The element of race is the crux of the 'civilising mission', as non-Europeans were perceived as 'the Other' due to racial differences therefore tying in notions of orientalism (Pekanan, 2016, pg. 1). However, despite

British imperialists' emphasis on the various facets of Indian society that were seemingly lacking, it is important to acknowledge the commodities Britain was lacking during that time. Before colonizing India, under the guise of a 'civilising mission' to aid the Indian population, Britain was lacking in natural resources and raw materials, as well as indentured labour to provide such commodities. In addition to this, amidst the European pursuit for colonies in Asia, Britain needed to claim foreign territory in order to signify their status as a major key European power amongst the other nations in the world system. Thus, despite their true intentions of wanting to drain the resources and economic industries of other nations, the principle justification provided by the British, for their colonisation of India, was the ideological and technological superiority of the western world.

The consolidation of British colonial in India allowed the British Parliament to introduce and implement their government system, irretrievably affecting Indian society as a result. Following the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal and his troops, the British began controlling the political and economic organisations within India in order to assert their own ideologies and way of life. Their initial consolidation of power started with the abolishment of the Mughal Dynasty, which had ruled India for more than three hundred years. Following this, control of India fell into the hands of a British Governor-General, who reported back to the British Parliament (Szczepanski, 2018). This allowed the British Parliament to efficiently introduce their own governmental system and enforce these laws. Through the newly introduced British political systems and economic policies, which helped consolidate their control over the country, India's economic situation changed drastically.

A major incentive for the British to occupy India, in the first place, was the opportunity to utilize India's natural resources and raw materials for their own benefit. As they were able to assert political dominance over the nation, the British began a monopolization of trade with India. They monopolised the raw materials and resources market, allowing Britain to purchase these goods at low prices whilst the Indian majority would be over-charged.

Various Indian handicraft products were taxed heavily when being exported however British, industrially-produced goods were allowed to be exported into India without tax. The main aim of this process was to convert India into a consumer of British, factory-made goods and as a result, various Indian handicraft industries struggled as they could not compete with Britain's imports. This monopolization of Indian trade ultimately resulted in the destruction of Indian industry and their production capabilities (Maddison, 1971, pp. 13-17). In addition to this, the British implemented land revenue policies that monitored poor Indian farmers and to ensure the commercialisation of agriculture. This process involved governing agricultural patterns in accordance to commercial consideration. The British introduced commodities, such as raw cotton, tea, coffee, indigo and opium, that were to be grown for industries back in Britain (Lawrence, 2002, p. 383). They forced this process by growing cash crops, as opposed to food crops, since this method allowed the British to produce for sales and exports that solely benefitted them (Khan, 1982, p. 7). However, this process ultimately led to a loss of self-sufficiency for the majority of the Indian population as they were forced to produce resources for British use rather than growing food crops. The combination of heavy taxation and the commercialization of agriculture, at the hands of British colonisers, India experienced a severe

famine in the late 1800s (Maddison, 1971, p. 12). As Britain continued to drain India's resources through industry exploitation, between fifteen to thirty million Indians died as a result of starvation as they were unable to sustain themselves under rigid colonial rule (Tharoor, 2015). Thus, the colonial extraction of resources, commodities and land restructured India's economic situation, for the purpose of benefitting the British colonisers and therefore established India as a periphery state.

As a result of British occupation, Indian society underwent various changes, in terms of religion, language and education, which instigated tensions between British imperialists and

Indian nationalists. British imperialism was originally motivated by economic ambitions, however as time went on, British officials sought to revolutionise Indian social institutions in an attempt to westernize India (Maddison, 1971, p. 4). The British introduced Western education systems into India as a means to create a class of educated Indians who would assist in ruling the expanding nation and bureaucracy, as well as strengthening the political legitimacy of the British. This tactical strategy was aimed at reducing the expenditure on administration, as hiring native Englishmen for clerk work was more expensive than hiring English-speaking Indians (Bejgam, 2015). Pioneering for the first imperial education policy in British India was Lord Thomas Macaulay, the first law member in the Governor General's council. He proposed the concept of introducing a new group of Indians who would act as interpreters, " a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, morals and in intellect" (Bailey 1991, p. 138). Macaulay regarded the existing education system as ' oriental' and inferior

to western forms of education, depicting Edward Said's notion of 'orientalism' where white Europeans viewed non-Europeans from the 'orient' as lesser and subordinate (Said, 1979, p. 7). This idea of intellectual colonisation would ultimately work to diminish the Indian culture, language and social practices, through the use of an English-based education system. This process was used to train Indian natives to learn to obey white British colonisers rather than to educate them to question and critically reflect on issues. However, despite the forceful imposition of a British education system, Indian society became influenced by ideas of liberty, freedom, democracy and equality. Due to the fount of philosophical ideas and knowledge, provided via education systems, various reformers were able to modify the unethical and morally incorrect social and religious practices of that time. Through the use of English as a universal medium of communication, Indian populations from different regions could now communicate which created a sense of unity and gave rise to a growing sense of nationalism. As a united front, educated Indians came to realise the hypocrisy of British colonial rule and power structures, thus starting a nationalist movement in pursuit of independence. Nationalist leaders of this movement included Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a prominent activist who employed nonviolent methods of civil disobedience to break away from British colonial rule (Nanada, 2018). Gandhi challenged the colonial discourse surrounding the Indian population's innate 'inferiority' and adapted them into a political strategy of nonviolent resistance against British power structures. This involved rejecting the British discourse that Indians were weak and inferior due to their geographical origins, which followed the idea that populations who live in hotter environments are considered

weaker. Gandhi's nationalist movement had challenged the ideals and justifications of British imperialism by encouraging the Indian population to turn away from British power structures set into place to enforce colonial authority. This included rejecting British products and goods, clothing, mannerisms and innately European concepts of civilisation, in order to start a campaign of civil disobedience and passive resistance (Trueman, 2015). However, despite their independence in 1950, India has maintained the use of British institutions such as democracy, parliamentary government and the rule of law through a judiciary system, into the modern context. Thus, the influence and presence of past British colonial rule continues to linger in India's post-independent state and their political infrastructures.

Despite India's independence from British colonial rule in 1950, the effects of colonial rule continue to permeate into India's modern context through the political, economic and social facets of Indian society, resulting in their underdevelopment and periphery status as a nation in the world-system. As a consequence of the implementation of British political and education systems, the cultural identity of India's population has become based on a euro-centric perspective of knowledge and ideology. This sense of divided identity pertains to the idea of 'the Other', a theory coined by Frantz Fanon to describe the divided self-perception of colonised subjects who have lost their native cultural identity and embraced the colonisers' culture. As a direct consequence of imperialism, Fanon articulates that colonisers and the colonised are inextricably linked to relational process of racialization and subjectification (Fanon, 1967). He asserts that colonial subjugation is solely responsible for the feelings of self-division and the idea of double

consciousness, a term describing the nature of colonised subjects and how they simultaneously embrace two different cultural identities. This concept of double consciousness manifested following the implementation an English-based education system in British India, as a large majority of Indians who started working with British officials as government clerks were painted as traitorous and disloyal to their own people. Throughout their rule, the British gradually eroded traditions as they started to define Indian communities based on what they perceived was their religious identity and political representation (Dalrymple, 2015). Scholars, such as Yasmin Khan, describes how the British ‘ ruptured community evolution, distorted historical trajectories and forced state formations from societies that would otherwise have taken different and now unknowable paths’ (Khan, 2007, p. 128). The economic devastation that was brought about by the British, ultimately resulted in India’s current underdevelopment as well as their status as a periphery state. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, India’s share of the world economy stood at a substantial twenty-three percent, clearly indicating their worldly status as a flourishing and wealthy state. However, by the end of British colonial occupation, India’s share had decreased to less than four percent (Sahni, 2015). During the colonial period, British intervention in India’s trade and handicraft industries, ultimately resulted in economic exploitation, destruction of successful industries and the systematic political enforcement of placing restrictions on the Indian market, all in an attempt to gain profit for the British. Pre-colonial India’s prosperous economy was thriving through the trade of high quality manufactured products, made from materials such as silks and linens (Tharoor, 2017). However, Britain’s draining of resources from India and destruction of

thriving industries continues to affect India in the modern context. After the British left India, the state still remains underdeveloped due to the economic hardships they faced during colonial occupation. Their status as a periphery state was established by the systematic British extraction of resources and raw materials, out of India, through unequal trade relations and the destruction of native industries. The exploitation of India's resources, at the hands of the British, determined their course of underdevelopment as they were forcefully integrated into the world-system as a periphery state. Despite India's current status as a key world power, they remain as a semi-periphery state due to their economic hardships that continued even after gaining independence, as a result of British colonial rule.

The impacts of British colonial rule affected the political, economic and social facets of Indian society, changing the nature of their future development. The implementation of British political power structures allowed colonisers to effectively further their imperialistic ideologies and plans of economic extraction. As a result, Indian industries, markets and farming habits were destroyed, all for the betterment of Britain's trade market. The effects of British economic exploitation in India, during the colonial period, continue to contribute to India's current status in the world system as a semi-periphery state and their continued underdevelopment despite their economic position. The social changes included the implementation of a British, English-based education system that aimed to educate Indians to create a class of English-speaking cheap clerks and civil servants. However, this essentially caused a sense of divided identity as English-speaking Indians were rejected by their own people but also deemed inferior to white British colonisers. A

culmination of these effects ultimately irretrievably decelerated India's development, as a state, resulting in continued instability in the modern context.

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