



The Transformation of Social and Cultural Structures in Colonial India: A Case Study of British Rule

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Abstract- The article focuses on the analysis of how social and cultural organization of colonial India changed during the British rule, with particular attention paid to the interdependency of the economic restructuring, intervention in the form of education, cultural reformation and political mobilization. It also claims that British colonialism was not just administrative control but it re-organized the social structures of India, destabilized the local economies, transformed cultural identities, and created new ways of public consciousness. The paper follows the development of deindustrialization, land revenue settlements, commercialization of agriculture and the proliferation of Western education on transforming the traditional institutions and creating a novel educated middle class. It also discusses how the religious reform movements, artistic adjustment and cultural revivalism helped in redefining Indian identity in the face of colonial pressure. The article also demonstrates the role these changes played in resistance movements, politicization of social reform and also the development of Indian nationalism. Lastly, it evaluates the postcolonial after-effects of the British rule regarding education, class construction, religious background, and state institutions. The paper shows that colonialism was characterized by coercion and cultural re-arrangement, and anti-colonial reactions selectively utilized both the native traditions and colonial modernity to create modern Indian identity.

Keywords: Colonial India; British Rule; Social Transformation; Cultural Identity; Indian Nationalism; Postcolonial Legacy

Introduction

1.1. Overview of British Colonialism in India

The British colonial rule in India, which spanned between the mid-18th century, and 1947, is a time of dramatic social, cultural, political, and economic change. The history of British Empire, which started with economic exploitation of its territories by the East India Company, was able to extend its influence to the subcontinent and transform the political and social picture of India (Sarkar, 2019). The introduction of the British legal, educational, and economic systems into Indian traditions brought incredible transformations to the traditional formats, which led to their fall as well as to the rise of the novel forms of government and social organization.

The establishment of the centralized, bureaucratic state in the British colonial rule produced the long-term effects concerning the structure of the society and the Indian economy. Nevertheless, it was no longer just an economic exploitation but also a cultural, religious, and social conquest that was intended to transform the Indian lifestyle, employing the means of the Western education system, technologies, and policies (Brown, 2017).

1.2. Purpose and Scope of the Study

This paper looks at the change in social and cultural system in colonial India and specifically how the British applied their economic policies, educational reforms and its effects on social hierarchies. It seeks to offer an insight in the way British colonialism transformed the identity of Indian people that established conflict and collaboration among the indigenous societies and the colonial government. The study will also attempt to assess the role played by the British rule in the development of Indian nationalism that culminated into the independence struggle.

1.3. Problem Statement

The influence that British colonialism had on the social, cultural and economic life of the Indian state has been a long debated topic of the scientific community. Although the colonial policies were aimed at destroying the Indian traditional institutions and systems, they led to the establishment of new social formations that later contributed to the establishment of the modern Indian identity. The issue is in the interpretation of the dual character of these changes: How the British policies both broke and gave rise to new social stratifications, cultural identities and movements of opposition. The gap in the literature will be filled through this study by examining the level to which the Indian society was shaped by the colonial rule in terms of economic policies, changes in education, and the consequent social dynamics which led to the emergence of Indian nationalism.



1.4. Research Questions

The research questions that are covered in the study include:

1. What were the effects of the British economic policies to the traditional Indian social structures, which included land revenue systems and industrialization?
2. How did western education influence the Indian social stratification and culture?
3. What impact did colonial rule have on the formation of Indian nationalism and the new political awareness?

2. Historical Context and the Rise of British Colonial Rule

2.1. Pre-Colonial Social and Cultural Structures

Until the development of British colonialism, the Indian system of social, economic, and cultural life was well grounded in the traditional beliefs that existed on the Indian territory throughout the millennium. The Indian society was organised in a complicated network of orders, religious faith, and community. The caste system was one of the most important aspects in the Indian social structure according to which the functions, privileges, and obligations of people were determined by their birth. This rigid system, even though criticized by some scholars as being too rigid, offered some social order, which strengthened the community roles and responsibilities (Dumont, 1980). Although the caste system was very powerful, it was not a unitary phenomenon, local deviations and dynamic nature of the caste dynamics enabled certain level of social mobility in certain regions, especially among artisans and merchants (Ghurye, 1950).

Pre-colonial India had an economy that was mainly agrarian, and the feature of local self-sufficiency was one of the main features. Rural life was centred around villages and they were generally governed by local chieftains or headman, referred to as zamindar or mukaddams in some areas who would collect tax and redistributed the land (Chaudhuri, 2001). The role of the state in the rural administration was very low and this resulted into localized governance. Moreover, India was a land of great cultural diversity where the tradition of art, literature and crafts had a strong connection with religion. Local economies were supported by artisans and other craftsmen who had a level of skills in preserving various traditional crafts like textiles, pottery, and metallurgy (Bhattacharya, 2002). The prevailing religions, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and some local religions were also critical in determining the cultural manifestation, be it in festivals and rituals or in social norms and legal frameworks.

The decentralized aspect of the governance in pre-colonial India though giving way to regional autonomy also led to divisions which will be used in the future by the British colonial government. However, this decentralized mode of governance did not come without its share of complications especially as far as internal wrangles, caste discrimination and fragmentation of the regions was concerned (Bayly, 1996).

2.2. The British Arrival and Establishment of Control

The invasion of the British in India can be dated back to the foundation of the East India company in 1600 which did not set up military takeovers but rather trade. The Company was interested in realizing the profit of Indian huge resources, with cotton, spices, and textiles being the most important to the European markets (Metcalf, 1995). The East India Company started off as a business however, as time went it started increasing its power with the help of strategic alliances, military operations and political intrigues.

The Battle of Plassey in 1757 was a breakthrough in the British intervention in India because the forces of Siraj-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal, were beaten to death by the East India Company, under the command of Robert Clive. This triumph granted the Company a lot of political and military jurisdiction over Bengal which was one of the richest and most populated States in India. Then, the Company started to enlarge its territorial influence in the Indian territory, tactfully playing on the separations between Indian rulers and acquiring territorial claims by means of the treaties and warfare (Roberts, 2002). The British policy of divide and rule gave them an opportunity to hold on to vast territories by creating conflicts between the competing rulers and thus making it hard to disenfranchise them.

One of the most significant efforts to fight against the British rule was the First War of Indian Independence commonly known as the Sepoy Mutiny that took place in 1857. The British could however, subdue the rebellion with the help of military power, which saw the East India Company dissolved and direct British rule of India to be instituted by the British Crown in 1858. This was the start of the British Raj that continued until the year 1947 when India got its independence (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006). This was the time when the British rule was extended, and the colonial regime concentrated on gathering political and economic force with the help of a centralized government.



2.3. Colonial Administration and Governance

The British rule in India was marked by a centralization of power where the British Crown assumed direct rule on Indian areas. The British rule was based on a very formal and strict hierarchy of bureaucracy, which was supposed to cater to the needs of the empire and help preserve order in the colonial system (Ghosh, 2019). The British were eager to have a stable effective administration which could raise revenue, uphold order and economic exploitation.

One of the important issues of the British rule was the establishment of the centralized system of taxation. The British government introduced the Permanent Settlement of 1793 by Lord Cornwallis where the intention was to ensure a stable stream of revenue in the agrarian economy of India. According to this system, permanent assessment of land was done and land owners were held accountable to the payment of taxes to the colonial government. Nonetheless, the system caused serious issues: it gave a heavier load to farmers, failed to reflect the agricultural productivity changes, and contributed to the concentration of the land in the possession of the select few landowners with many of them being absentee landlords (Roy, 2014). This widened poverty among the peasants and led to agrarian unrest during the colonial era era (Maddox, 1997).

Another important tool that the British applied to demonstrate control over the Indian society was taxation. British tax products were extremely high on land, trade, and industry which only increased pressure on the Indians. Meanwhile, the colonial policies destroyed the local systems of governance and laws systematically, substituting them with the British laws and courts. This transition to a foreign body of law weakened native social institutions and made it complex between the state and the local community (Chaudhuri, 2001).

Another important feature of colonial rule was the introduction of western education especially in the 19 th century. The British aimed at producing a group of educated Indians who would be used as intermediaries between the local people and the colonial government. It is referred to as orientalism, which was focused on shaping the Indian society to convene with the British standards of rule and culture, as well as creating a faithful civil service (Said, 1978). The western education formed a new generation of middle-class Indians, who were exposed to European notions of governance, science, and culture, and helped to make a new social elite (Ghosh, 2019).

There were also attempts by the British colonial government to regulate the economy of India, and in this case, it was mainly through the formation of a colonial trading system which favored the British industries. The trade policies put in place by the British gave preference to British manufactured goods which seriously affected the local industry and the Indian handicrafts. Another important part of the development of colonial infrastructure was the introduction of the railway in the 19 th century, but this was meant to help extract the resources and transport the British goods rather than cater to the interests of Indians (Kohli, 2013).

Table-I

Key milestones in the expansion of British colonial rule and the growth of Indian anti-colonial politics, 1757–1947

1757-1765	1793	1857	1858	1885	1905	1919	1930	1947
Plassey Diwani	Permanent Settlement	Revolt	Crown Rule	INC founded	Swadeshi	Gandhi era	Civil Disobedience	Independence

Source: Authors compilation

3. Economic and Social Transformation

3.1. The Economic Impact of British Policies

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3.2. The Decline of Traditional Crafts

The traditional crafts and industries in India were greatly ruined by the policies of the British colonies. India used to have a rich economy before the British rule which was founded on the artisanal and craft based industries. Handicrafts such as Indian textiles, metal, pottery and others were very popular around the world (Kohli, 2013). Nevertheless, the introduction of colonial economic policies, such as the tariff system, free importation of British manufactured goods, and so on, weakened the local crafts over time.

Indian market was filled with British industrial products that were mass-produced and cheaper than the locally produced goods. This led to the fall in demand of traditional Indian crafts that reduced the artisan industries on a large scale (Chandra, 2016). The downfall of these industries in most regions caused the poor artisans and craftsmen to be poor because they could not match with the amount of goods produced by the British. The British also monopolized some of the industries further limiting the expansion and sustenance of the local craft-based economies. The loss of the textile industry in Bengal, in particular, is an obvious illustration of how the British industrial products sabotaged the Indian traditional crafts (Roy, 2015).

An increase in the cash-based economy with the introduction of the British currency, and with the export-oriented economy also pushed out the ancient barter systems which had been so common in India. On the one hand, the cash economy helped to expand markets, but on the other hand, it destroyed the traditional economic systems that were founded on the local and craft production framework. This caused a general socio-economic dislocation especially in the rural community as a result of the transformation of an agrarian and self-sustaining economy into a monetized economy (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006).

3.3. Land Revenue Systems

The colonial British government in India made great alterations in the land revenue system; the most notable reforms being made by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. This system which was initiated by Lord Cornwallis was meant to establish a stable and dependable toll of income to the British Crown. With the Permanent Settlement the British pegged land revenue assessments at a rate that was not always reasonably high, regardless of agricultural productivity. Since the peasantry had to pay these taxes, landlords, who now had to pay them, were supposed to shift the cost onto them and this resulted in exploitation of farmers.

The British also introduced other systems of land revenue including the Ryotwari System, and the Mahalwari System each of which implied a difference to the landowners and the peasants. The Ryotwari System was introduced in regions like Bombay and Madras and was based on the cultivators (ryots) and they had to pay taxes irrespective of crop yields. The Mahalwari System which came later tried to partition land into smaller units and held the whole village culpable of paying land revenues, something that resulted in division and disintegration in the rural society (Kohli, 2013). These revenue systems helped in entrenching economic inequality and developing a group of poor peasants who extremely relied on their land to survive.

4. The Role of Education in Shaping Cultural Identity

4.1. Introduction of Western Education



The cultural and intellectual dimension of India changed with the introduction of the Western-style of education by British people. Education to the colonial government was a means of binding the rule and producing a brood of Indians that would act as the connection between the British government and the people. The western education especially via the English language became a part of British colonial policy and the intention was to shape the Indian society to British ideals of governance and culture (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006). The growth of learning institutions such as the University of Calcutta in 1857, and the adoption of the English language as the medium of instruction, had a central place in the intellectual structure of the new Indian middle class.

In the first place, Western education was supposed to qualify Indians to work in the colonial government. But as it progressed, it permeated into the administrative elite, into all classes of Indian society, especially the urban, educated middle-class. Towards the end of the 19th century education, starting to act as a window on new ideas, and which included those of European philosophy, literature, and science. The western style schools, mainly financed by the British or the Christian missionaries, were more inclined to having a curriculum that focused in subjects such as history, literature, science as well as philosophy, with a European outlook. This however, had an extensive impact on the Indian society whereby, it led to the formation of an educated elite who were gradually becoming detached with traditional Indian knowledge systems (Sarkar, 2000).

The British education system also saw the birth of the class of Indians who were introduced to the way of thinking and governance of the West, but at the same time they were culture oriented to their native identities. This intellectual contradiction between Western and Indian ideas became the center of the discussion concerning the future of Indian society, and it also helped in the emergence of Indian reform movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Western education in India was in essence not only a means of control, but also a means of intellectual opposition.

4.2. Cultural Imperialism vs. Indigenous Knowledge

Western education was also a form of control as well as a form of cultural imperialism. The British viewed the British culture as a superior one and through education, they wanted to discard the traditional Indian systems of knowledge and replace them with the Western scientific and philosophical systems. Educational policies in Britain especially during the 19th century aimed at civilizing the Indian society through enforcing the western values which were more rational and progressive according to the British (Chatterjee, 1986). This was done through what was termed as cultural imperialism with the view of eliminating the indigenous knowledge systems that had over the centuries constituted the Indian society.

A systematic undermining of traditional Indian modes of learning was one of the most important elements of the British educational reform. The ancient Indian scientific, mathematical, astronomy and philosophical practices were discredited in their favor of European ones. The contributions of scholars like Aryabhata, Charaka and Bhaskaracharya who had contributed radically to subjects like mathematics and treatment were pushed to the periphery (Kumar, 2003). European rationalism and secularism became the focus of the British system of education, and this was a stark contrast to the religious and philosophical traditions much of traditional Indian learning was based upon.

This cultural imperialism influenced the culture of India very seriously. The British system relegated indigenous knowledge and promoted a feeling of cultural inferiority to the educated elite by elevating the Western thought. The individuals who had attended western educational institutions tended to embrace the European concepts of development, societal order and government and forget their own culture (Bhattacharya, 2007). Such cultural alienation resulted in the rise of dissatisfaction in educated Indians, especially when they started to see the inconsistency in their education: they were being taught to appreciate the Western rationality/science, but they were also being instructed to denounce the intellectualism of their own culture.

But this imposition of western education also resulted in the ultimate rediscovery and reappraisal of the traditional Indian knowledge systems. This as a response to the cultural superiority of the British saw a number of Indian intellectuals start to engage with the history and culture of India critically, in an attempt to find a balance between the two worlds. Rajaraj Mohan Roy, the champion of social reform who converted to Western education, and Swami Vivekananda, the synthesist of Hindu philosophy and the newer western scientific thought, all helped in this intellectual resurgence (Sarkar, 2000).

4.3. Emergence of Indian Nationalism through Education

The Indian nationalism was among the most important results of western education in India. The introduction of a new breed of educated Indians who were exposed to the concepts of liberty, democracy and nationalism through the influences of western education formed the intellectual base to launch the fight against British rule. The educated Indians especially those who had studied in the British schools and universities started criticizing the colonial system and demanded more political and social rights.



Indian nationalism could be traced to the educational institutions in which the early nationalist leaders used to be trained. Setting up of institutions such as the Indian National Congress in 1885 gave the educated elites a platform through which they could express their concerns about the British rule. The importance of education in the rise of nationalist movements was greatly realized through such leaders as Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak whose education enabled them to oppose the British imperialism (Chatterjee, 1986). Most of these people who had attended institutions that were molded on the western style started to doubt the validity of the British rule and demanded some changes in governance and teaching.

Western education did not just affect the Indian nationalist movement in a limited way to the elites. With the spread of education in India, it started to reach more sectors of the population especially in the urban centers. The dissemination of the concepts of freedom, human rights, and autonomy led to a wider independence movement. The development of Indian nationalism with the help of education was therefore not the work of elite intellectuals alone but it was a more popular influence on all social classes (Ghosh, 2019).

The emergence of the Indian National Congress and the involvement of the educated elite in the struggle for freedom were directly connected with the exposure to the Western ideas. The Western educational curriculum gave the ideas of self-determination and freedom which influenced the demands of political changes, more representation, and, finally, independence by the Indian National Congress (Gandhi, 2017). The products of the Western education such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose contributed significantly to leading India towards independence.

5. Cultural Changes: Religion, Art, and National Identity

5.1. Religious Reform Movements

This was the era of the great religious reform movements in India, which were supposed to solve the problems of the colonialism and increasing number of Western ideas. Such movements, of course, were not just responses to the colonial pressure but certain indicators of some of the underlying social and cultural changes in Indian society. The most famous of them were the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj which were two of the most powerful movements of reform in 19th century India, both of which attempted to redefine and rejuvenate Hindu identity in reaction to colonialism and the incursion of Western religious and cultural values.

One organization that particularly helped to question the orthodoxies of traditional Hinduism was the Brahma Samaj, which was created by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828 and attacked such factors as Sati (the practice of widow-burning) and child marriage. The Brahma Samaj was aimed at reinterpreting Hinduism through monotheism, reason and social reform. Roy was exposed to Western Enlightenment and he thought that Hinduism had to be cleansed and brought into conformity with the rationalist Enlightenment ideas founded in Europe. He encouraged the abolition of superstitions and practices, which he saw as not fitting in modernity and reason (Gandhi, 2017). By so doing, the Brahma Samaj was an attempt to redefine Hinduism by recovering the progressive side of the religion and separating it with its traditional activities which were then becoming an embarrassment in the colonial environment.

Equally, a similar movement was Arya Samaj, which was established in 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati with the intention of reforming Hinduism to be based on the Vedic scriptures, disregarding the idol worship and caste system. In contrast to the Brahma Samaj who subscribed to some Western values, the Arya Samaj focused on restoring to the ancient Hinduism though in a reformed and rationalized approach. Cries of purification of Hinduism and the restoration of Vedic teachings by Dayananda Saraswati became inspirational to a generation of the reformers and nationalists (Ludden, 1996). These two movements helped redefine the Hindu identity as it fought back against the colonial rewritings of India as a country of the superstitious and backwardness.

The modern Hindu identity owes much to these religious reform movements that provided new forms of understanding Hinduism to deal with colonial pressures. They also preconditioned the wider Indian Renaissance, a cultural re-awakening that aimed at the reconciliation of native traditions and the modern, progressive thought.

Table-II
Major Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India

Movement	Founder/Leading Figure	Year	Core Ideas	Response to Colonialism	Historical Significance
Brahmo Samaj	Raja Ram Mohan Roy	1828	Monotheism, rational religion, social reform, opposition to sati	Engaged with Enlightenment thought while reforming Hindu practices	Helped shape modern Indian reformist discourse



Arya Samaj	Swami Dayananda Saraswati	1875	Return to Vedas, rejection of idolatry, social purification	Asserted indigenous religious authenticity against colonial and missionary critique	Reinforced Hindu revivalism and educational activism
Ramakrishna Mission	Swami Vivekananda	1897	Practical Vedanta, service, spiritual universalism	Reframed Hinduism as philosophically sophisticated and socially engaged	Strengthened cultural self-confidence and national consciousness
Aligarh Movement	Sir Syed Ahmad Khan	Nineteenth century	Modern education among Muslims, reconciliation of Islam and modern knowledge	Encouraged adaptation to modern institutions under colonial conditions	Influenced Muslim social reform and political thought

Source: Developed from Kopf (1979), Ludden (1996), Sen (2000), and Sarkar (1983).

5.2. British Influence on Art and Architecture

Another significant influence of British colonialism on Indian art and architecture was the fact that local aesthetics, techniques and other cultural manifestations were influenced. The British colonial architecture especially had an indelible mark on the cityscapes of India. The cultivation of the neo-classical and Gothic styles of architecture in the 19th century was to convey the strength and influence of the British Empire. In cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi, there was construction of large colonial structures including government buildings, railway and church buildings, which served to portray the western ideals of imperialism and domination (Mukherjee, 2008).

The presence of British architecture in India can be best exemplified by Victoria Memorial at Calcutta and the Gateway of India at Bombay. These monuments were built in European styles and represented the British colonial power and were a component of the larger effort of creating a visual history of British dominance. Nevertheless, such buildings were not only the reminders of British superiority; they turned into the locations of cultural negotiation. Indian architects and craftsmen tried to incorporate European styles into their works, but still they added the local features to these buildings, producing the hybridized architecture that composed the British colonial features and the indigenous elements (Koch, 2014).

British colonialism also helped in the emergence of another genre of Company drawing in the area of art. The combination of European and Indian styles was typical of these art pieces, usually created by Indian artists under the patronage of the East India Company. Indian artists also borrowed Western styles like perspective and shading but the subject matter of such works was usually based on Indian traditions, such as royal portraits or religious images (Hughes, 2017). This Western artistic style mixed with Indian culture can be regarded as a kind of opposition against introducing the Western culture since the Indian artists applied these techniques to show their own culture in the colonial world.

Although the British art and architecture had its impact on the Indian artists, the artists opposed the colonial rule by restoring and encouraging the traditional Indian arts. The Bengal School of Art headed by the author of this article, Abanindranath Tagore, aimed to revive the Indian tradition of art which had been outcast by the colonialism influence. Tagore and his fellow artists did not only adopt the traditional Indian aesthetics including the miniature painting style and the Indian mythological themes but also embraced the modernist techniques (Bose, 1993). This movement represented a bigger movement to restore the cultural identity of the Indians amid the colonial rule as a sign of the survival of native art forms.

5.3. Nationalism and Cultural Revivalism

Indian nationalism was also closely connected with the attempts to reconstruct Indian culture, languages, and traditions. Since the indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices were disabled by the colonial policies, intellectuals and reformers started to consider the need to preserve and revive the Indian culture as a critical component of the independence struggle. The nationalism that developed during the late 19th century and early 20th century was at least partly fuelled by the quest to regain cultural independence against the British imperialism.



Nationalist leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Subhas Chandra Bose viewed the maintenance of the Indian culture and heritage to be key in the struggle to gain independence. To them, Indian cultural identity demolition by the colonists was as detrimental as the political and financial domination of India (Ghosh, 2019). Nationalism was a revivalism tool, where the Indians needed to affirm their identity against the colonial rule.

This cultural revivalism was mainly carried through language. The British also had put English as the language of administration, law and education that further disassociated Indians with their own cultural practices. This led to the nationalist leaders encouraging the nation to use the vernacular languages especially the Hindi and Bengali as a symbol of resistance and identity (Nayar, 2008). The use of language was a way of making cultural claims of independence since it was strongly connected to upholding of traditional value, religious beliefs, and national pride.

The Indian literature also contributed to the cultural revival movement. Authors such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu took the chance to glorify Indian culture and history as well as their mythology in order to condemn British colonialism. An example of this is the poetry of Tagore, which was a mix of the Western literary trends and Indian spiritual and philosophical issues, which served as a strong instrument in establishing Indian identity (Tagore, 1917).

The Swadeshi movement (1905-1908) also showed religious and cultural revivalism by developing a push towards the consumption of Indian goods and boycotting British goods. Swadeshi movement focused on the value of economic self-reliance that was regarded as one of the main elements of restoring the cultural autonomy under the British economic dominance (Chatterjee, 1986). Through adoption of indigenous products and cultural symbols, the movement gave a feeling of unity and national pride and this paved way to the greater struggle of independence.

Cultural revivalism and nationalism in colonial India was therefore complex, multi faceted, process of restoring cultural identity. The opposition to British colonialism was not merely political and economic but also highly cultural because Indians wanted to restore their intellectual, artistic and spiritual cultures against the colonial domination. These movements played a very important role in forming the national identity that would lead to the struggle to independence by India.

6. The Rise of Resistance Movements and the Political Transformation

The social order that was created by the British colonial rule was not a passive one. Since the end of the eighteenth century, colonial expansion produced stratified types of opposition, which were social, religious, agrarian and political. Such reactions were products of material dispossession, cultural encroachment and centralization of the administration. In the course of time, the resistance in the form of small-scale opposition was united into nationalism. The constitutional reform and elite politics cannot explain the political change of colonial India, which should be placed in the broader context of the social protest, anti-colonial movement and reformist criticism which transformed the Indian popular life (Bayly, 1988; Sarkar, 1983).

6.1. Social Movements Against Colonial Rule

The first opposition of British authority was usually in form of localized rebellions against taxation, land alienation, missionary intrusion and administrative usurpation. Peasant uprisings, tribal insurrections, city demonstrations, and so on, showed that colonial domination was not being felt as an abstract constitutional issue but as a direct rearrangement of daily life. The agrarian policies and commercial exploitation of the colonies were destructive as indicated by movements like the Santal Rebellion of 1855-1856, the Indigo Rebellion of 1859-1860 and many peasant agitations in western and eastern India (Guha, 1983; Stokes, 1978).

The most significant early anti-colonial revolt is the 1857 Revolt. It was a challenge to British power on a large scale in much of north and central India although understood in different ways as a sepoy mutiny, feudal reaction, peasant rebellion or proto-nationalist war. The uprising started with the Indians who were in the Bengal Army but quickly spread as the dispossessed princes, taluqdars, peasants, artisans and urban populations joined in with their grievances that had piled up under colonial administration (Mukherjee, 2002). The policies of British annexation, discrimination and settlement of land by the British military and the perceived threats of religion and custom were some of the factors that made the rebellion so intense. In places where there was an imbalance in the coordination, the revolt disarmed the colonial rule and revealed the vulnerability of imperial authority.

The social and cultural impacts of 1857 were high. The direct rule of India was taken over by the British Crown in 1858, which replaced the rule of the East India Company. There was an enhancement in colonial governance which became more centralized, surveillance was intensified and the regime got a wary stance on the native elites and the religious institutions. Meanwhile, the uprising turned into a nationalist myth later in the history of



nationalism. Not a contemporary national movement, but not yet, 1857 provided an anti-colonial discourse of sacrifice, betrayal and resistance which would be appropriated and re-packaged by later political forces (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2012).

Social resistance took on different forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Swadeshi movement which occurred after the partitioning of Bengal in 1905 had made anti-colonial protest into a more social campaign, full of boycott, local industry, popular mobilization and symbolic cultural assertion. The protest was no longer a solo rebellion, but a civil movement and economic nationalism was connected to national pedagogy and revival of culture (Sarkar, 1973). This extended the social base of the anti-colonial politics and set the stage of subsequent mass movements through Gandhi.

6.2. Role of the Indian National Congress and Early Political Movements

The establishment of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 was a turning point in the institutional change in the politics of India. During the first decades of its existence the Congress was dominated by educated middle-class elites who followed constitutional practices, petitions, legislative overhaul and negotiation with the colonial state. These so-called Moderates such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjee and Gopal Krishna Gokhale did not originally insist on absolute independence. Their agenda focused on administrative change, more Indian involvement in government, fiscal equity and civil rights (Brown, 1994).

Although its social base was weak, the early Congress had a historical importance since it established an all-India political platform, voiced an opposition to colonial economic exploitation, and contributed to the development of the common political language. One of them, the drain theory by Naoroji, interpreted colonialism as an organization of economic exploitation, as opposed to benevolent rule, and thus connected political inferiority with material poverty (Naoroji, 1901/1962). This was a significant change in the discourse of anti-colonialism where the discourse was no longer grievance but critical.

Political development of the Congress in the direction of moderate constitutionalism and militant nationalism was not a linear and systematic one. It was also an expression of more profound social transformations, such as the emergence of educated publics, the vernacular press, the associational life, and the city politics. The Congress acquired a mass organization shape with the entry of Gandhi after 1919 which linked the elite politics with the peasants, workers, women and the marginalized groups. Anti-colonial nationalism also took the form of a broad-based movement instead of the elite platform through Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India (Brown, 1994; Sarkar, 1983).

6.3. Influence of Social Reformers

The political change in colonial India could not be discussed outside of the efforts of social and religious reformers who tried to rebuild the Indian society internally. These characters were not just reacting to the colonial criticism; they re-constructed social identity and ethics of the people, and understanding of themselves as civilized. Their interventions formed the moral and intellectual basis of the anti-colonial nationalism.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is the founder of this tradition of reforms. He attacked idolatry, caste discrimination, and tyrannical practices like sati and championed the rights of women, modern education, and reinterpretation of Hinduism based on monotheism. Roy did not just reformism as a mere imitation of Europe but it was an effort to create an Indian society that was ethically rejuvenated and able to participate in modernity intellectually (Kopf, 1979). His work foretold subsequent nationalism in trying to reconcile reform, religion and rational critique.

Swami Vivekananda also made another, yet no less significant contribution to cultural reconstruction. He brought about a Hinduism that was universal, rational and deeply spiritual through his re-reading of Vedanta. Vivekananda associated religion with social service, regeneration of the nation, and moral power. His work reinstated a sense of cultural pride in the face of colonialism where the Indian civilization was commonly portrayed as passive or being decadent and the nationalism gained a spiritual and moral sense (Sen, 2000).

Widow remarriage, caste oppression, education, and Muslim social reform were dealt with by other reformers such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule, Syed Ahmad Khan, etc. Their works enlarged the political landscape as they demonstrated that the anti-colonial emancipation demanded not only transfer of power, but also social change. Reform movements are also a revelation of tensions in the Indian society, particularly, caste, gender and religious community tensions. These strains which had continued into the nationalistic era were to continue (O'Hanlon, 1985).

Combined, resistance movements, political organizations, and reformist interventions changed the colonial India, which consisted of a group of subject populations, into a politically mobilized society. This revolution did not remove internal divisions, however, it provided the ideological and organizational preconditions of a modern anti-colonial country.

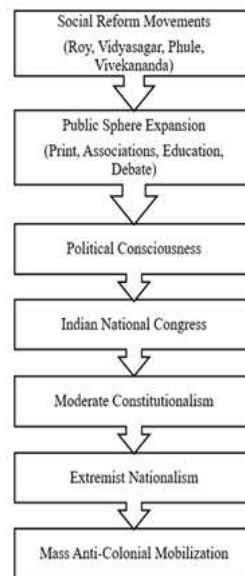


Figure-1: The progression from social reform and public debate to organized nationalist politics in colonial India.

7. Colonialism Legacy: Postcolonial Change

With the termination of the formal colonial rule in 1947 there was no total break with the colonial past. After the British left India, institutions, social division, administrative systems, and epistemological systems were transferred to independent India. Postcolonial change was thus a two-fold process: it was necessary to undermine colonial hierarchies, but it did it on the basis of most of the structures that colonialism had developed. Colonialism did not end with political domination, but also continued in the fields of education, law, creation of classes, economic planning and the discussion of national identity (Chatterjee, 1993; Kaviraj, 2010).

7.1. Postcolonial Continuities and Disruptions

The unification of new divisions of classes was one of the most persistent colonial legacies. Colonialism changed the Indian society during the form of revenue settlements, commercial agriculture, bureaucratic employment, and urban education. Such processes made certain elites stronger, others weaker, and created an unevenly distributed middle class. These stratifications were not eliminated after independence. The disproportionate power of landed interests, urban elite and professional classes in the democratic state remained (Frankel, 2005).

The aspects of religious identity were also hardened through census classification, codification of the law, and representation of the people during colonialism. Although religious distinction existed even before the colonial rule, the contemporary political institutionalization of communal classification became heightened under the British rule. The dismembering of India in 1947 showed the devastating nature of such processes of the colonial era. Secular constitutionalism was embraced in postcolonial India and communal tensions were not eradicated in the lives of people demonstrating that even after the empire, colonial modes of categorization survived (Pandey, 2001).

Independent India inherited an economy in the economic sector that was underindustrialized, rural poor, had regional inequalities, and colonial patterns of infrastructure. Railways, ports and bureaucratic administration were left but the economy had been historically organized around extraction as opposed to balanced development. The state reaction in the postcolonial state was planning, industrialization by the state, and development intervention. Nevertheless, numerous economic perversions designed during the colonial rule persisted in determining the regional disparity, agrarian crisis, and work insecurity (Bagchi, 1982).

7.2. Legacy of the British Educational System

One of the longest term institutional legacies in India was left by the British educational system. Colonial education had produced a group of English-educated intermediates who were to serve in administration, law and professional service. This system did not entirely or completely decolonize after independence. Rather, India kept most of its organizational characteristics: culture of examination, university system, legal training, and status of English as a state, higher learning, and social lift (Bénéï, 2008).

The continuity had conflicting effects. On the one hand, inherited educational system facilitated the operation of a modern democratic state as it generated administrators, professionals and intellectuals. In another, it reproduced social inequality since the quality of education was still uneven based on the classes, caste, regions, and languages. The education of English language, especially, remained as a privilege and a mode of mobility, which strengthened the division between metropolitan and vernacular publics (Kumar, 2005).

Postcolonial India was faced with the issue of epistemic reliance at the curricular level. Colonial education had favored the Western types of knowledge and marginalized most of the indigenous traditions. Independent India tried to revise its curriculum, scale up vernacular education and to include national history but the underlying structure of educational prestige tended to be colonial in its origin. The outcome was a blended intellectual order where the modern scientific and administrative rationality was in co-existence with the ongoing attempts to reclaim the indigenous intellectual traditions (Viswanathan, 1989).

7.3. Postcolonial Identity

The Indian identity that was formed in the postcolonial period came out of negotiation and not mere recuperation. The nation-state needed to identify with the colony domination as it also needed to use institutions, languages, and ideas of the colonial rule. This gave rise to a stratification of identity where democratic constitutionalism and developmental modernity, civilizational memory and regional pluralism existed in tension with each other (Chatterjee, 1993).

The postcolonial popular space tried to reconcile between the colonial histories and the native traditions. Democracy, secularism, equality, and citizenship were acknowledged in the Constitution, but social life remained dominated by caste, religion, and lingual community. This was not a failure of modernization but a historical process by which India was modernized in a particular way. Colonialism did not eliminate precolonial identities, it altered them and reshaped in new legal, administrative and political structures (Kaviraj, 2010).

The postcolonial Indian identity was thus still in dispute. Certain currents were pluralist nationalism based on civic belonging and anticolonial struggle. Other stressors were the religious majoritarian or civilizational conceptions of the nation. This debate has been ongoing indicating that colonialism did not only establish institutions but also left behind unanswered questions concerning community, sovereignty and historical belonging. Postcolonial identity was created by adapting, fighting and selective recovery of tradition instead of returning to a precolonial past.

Colonialism in India has its legacies, therefore, best described as a framework of continuities and discontinuities. The colonial rule had great changes in the Indian society although the changes were to be re-done by the democratic politics, social struggle, and reinterpretation of cultures after independence.

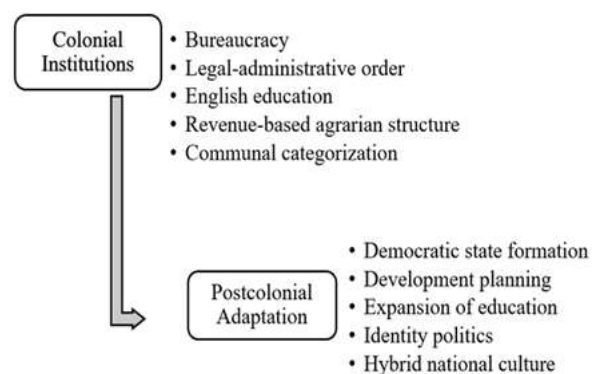


Figure- 2: Major colonial inheritances and their transformation within postcolonial India

8. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed how the social and cultural systems in colonial India were changed with the influence of the British rule, and specifically economic change, education intervention, religious reformation, cultural production, political mobilization and continuity in the postcolonial era. As shown in the analysis, colonialism was not a pure political system of foreign domination. It re-modeled the material and symbolic bases of Indian society. The policy of revenue by the British, deindustrialization, and commercial restructuring broke the old economic relations. Elite formation and cultural self-understanding was transformed through Western education.



The reaction to the colonial critique was the creation of communal and civilizational identities which was a response of religious reform movements. Both accommodation and resistance were found in art, architecture and literature. The nationalist politics and resistance movements transformed the diffuse grievances into the anti-colonial consciousness.

The main thesis to be discussed here is that the British colonialism not only displaced the traditional structures but also produced new patterns of social organization. This is a dual process that plays a critical role in the postcolonial analysis. The power of colonialism was both extractive and coercive, yet it had created institutions, categories and publics that were consumed, disputed, and transformed by the subjects of colonization. Anti-colonial nationalism has not sprung up outside colonial modernity; it has been constructed by active interaction with the structures that imperialism had put in place. This makes linear explanations of domination and resistance difficult and endorses postcolonial scholarship of viewing colonialism as a zone of unequal but interactive historical production (Chatterjee, 1993; Dirks, 2001).

The implications of the findings to the modern India are also present. The discussions of the contemporary inequality of classes, the communal identity, the hierarchy of education, and the authenticity of the culture are still under the influence of the colonial past. The continued privilege of the English language, the salience of the census-based communal categories and the institutional persistence of the colonial form of bureaucracy all suggest that independence did not eliminate imperial forms. The contemporary India is the embodiment of both the colonial change and the postcolonial redefinition.

Three areas of inquiry should be elaborated in further studies. To begin with, the localized studies should be carried out more in order to investigate the variation of the colonial transformation in the territories of provinces, princely states, and linguistic populations. Second, more focus on subaltern experiences of educational, religious, and economic change outside the elite discourse should be taken. Third, the historical analysis of how the colonial categories persist in defining social inequality and cultural conflict would be valuable to the current discussion of education, identity, and development policies. Colonial India will always be a significant part of the history of explaining the form of modernity after colonisation.

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