



Review Article

The Tentacles of Colonialism: Analysis of Socio-Economic and Political Dimensions

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Abstract

Colonialism was not a singular or uniform phenomenon but a complex process shaped by diverse socio-economic, political, and cultural forces. This paper critically examines the multiple dimensions of colonialism, highlighting its conceptual ambiguities and varied interpretations across time and space. Drawing on the works of Hobson, Lenin, Schumpeter, and other scholars, the study explores economic exploitation, settlement colonization, technological superiority, socio-psychological impacts, and cultural imperialism as integral components of colonial practices. The analysis emphasizes how colonialism disrupted indigenous social and economic structures, imposed alien cultural norms, and legitimized domination through ideologies such as the civilizing mission. It further discusses the role of industrialization, education, and missionary activities in shaping colonial encounters. The study concludes that no single factor can fully explain colonialism; rather, it emerged as a convergence of economic motives, political ambitions, technological advancements, and cultural justifications, leaving behind enduring legacies that continue to influence post-colonial societies.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no history of colonialism per se, just histories of individual colonialisms. Historians have attempted to determine the terminological accuracy of the word "colonialism," but have not been entirely successful, as it carries multiple connotations. Though there are several studies on various notions of colonialism as they were understood in their time and space,

there has been no entry of the word colonialism in seven seven-volume encyclopedic work – "Basic Historical Concepts ^[1]."

Sir Moses Finley, an American-born British scholar, attempted to provide a conceptual framework for the colonialism of the modern era ^[2]. Colonialism etymologically implies the term "colony," derived from the Latin word "colonia," and "colonization" denotes the establishment of colonies; therefore, a colony originally means a newly built settlement, which may

be independent or controlled by the political system from which the settlers have come.

However, the term is used in a different context; it refers to the territory that is physiologically separated from the original polity, so, in short, colony means settlement or rule ^[3].

Another difficulty in defining colonialism is the difference between colonization and colonies. These two terms cannot be closely linked because colonization can occur without colony building, and, in some cases, colony building may not follow colonization ^[4].

To substantiate, we can quote the simplest definition given by historian Philip Curtin -“Domination of the People of Other Culture.” Though it contains two important elements, Dominant and Cultural dissimilarity, it needs to be made more precise for a better understanding.

Colonialism is not just any relationship between the colonizers and the colonized; one society, mainly the colonized, loses its historical line of development, transforms according to the needs of the colonial rulers, and gets externally manipulated.

It is extremely difficult to place colonialism in the history of thought; it cannot be merely understood by generalizing the views of the colonizers across the places and times because not all whites in a colony were the colonial rulers; analyzing colonialism, the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi pointed out in 1957 that “not every colonizer became a colonialist” and that “there was also the colonizer with good intention.” Who tried to avoid the crass exercise of power or even fought against the colonial system ^[5].

A classic example may be of George Orwell, the police officer in Burma between 1922 and 1927, who authored many books (Burmese Days, Shooting an Elephant, and A Hanging) on his experiences in Burma; most of these were critical of colonialism. For another example, both Aime Cesaire and Octave Mannoni, the French authors, in their works respectively, “Discourse on Colonialism” and “Psychology of Colonialism,” emphasized the psychological aspects of the colonial situation while discussing the master-servant relationship marked by ethnic difference; they suggested that the masters also suffer deformation of their personalities and are dehumanized ^[6].

Wolfgang Reinhard used the word colonialism to mean ‘one people’s control over the others through economic, political, and ideological exploitation of a development gap between the two.’

Concepts of Alterity and Differential Development are very imperative for the definition of colonialism, to be a colonist, the rule that is experienced must be alien, and complete assimilation ends the colonial character; not all foreign rule is colonial; the concept of developmental gap helps us to distinguish colonist and non-colonist exercise of power, alterity can be seen within the homogeneous societies, colonialism that occurs within the border of unified polity may be called as Internal Colonialism ^[7].

The existence of different types of colonies constitutes the differences in the practice of colonialism as well; there were colonies established for settlement, such as British North

America, Australia, New Zealand, French Algeria, etc. Similarly, some colonies were directly or indirectly administered; these colonies were established mainly for economic exploitation, and no significant settlement existed; British India and the Dutch East Indies are examples ^[8].

Economics of colonialism:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars, ideologues, and intellectuals had tried to provide a comprehensive explanation of colonialism, and it was during this time in Europe that different ideologies were taking shape—monarchism, liberalism, social democracy, and left-wing Marxism, and every political perspective had some views on colonialism.

By the theories of two great personalities, we can infer some ideas about the economic aspects of colonialism; John A. Hobson and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin both basically suggested that monopoly capitalism reached its height towards the end of the nineteenth century, paving the way for the sudden expansion of colonial acquisition ^[9].

Hobson, in his work *Imperialism: A Study*, published in 1902, advocated that imperialism was an inevitable and undesirable result of the inability of the people to purchase the surplus of production because of the low wages, industries with abundant production, and being unable to find a market for their products in Europe, decided to seek new markets and investment opportunities in the colonies. This problem of imperialism, according to Hobson, could only be solved by enabling the people at home with higher purchasing power (wages).

Hobson argues that imperialism did not make good political sense; it was expensive as a national policy, and economic returns were less than the national outlay spent on conquering and holding overseas possessions ^[10].

However, this argument may not be correct in the case of a relationship between Britain and India; many theories advocated by the economic nationalists of India have proved that an enormous amount of economic wealth in India was drained to England without any quid pro quo.

These views of Hobson influenced the thinking of Lenin, who, after a few years, published his work *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* in 1916. Lenin argued that capitalism outgrew its territorial limits in Europe to which colonialism provided protected the outlet; there were opportunities of threefold in colonies; since the colonies were starting from scratch, there were investment opportunities in infrastructure development such as railways, ports, and telegraphs; these opportunities were available in Europe in the early phase of the industrial revolution and were exhausted towards the mid-nineteenth centuries.

Secondly, colonies were the source of raw materials like rubber, indigo, jute, cotton, oil, mineral ores, etc., and investment in infrastructure like railways and automobiles facilitated the appropriation of local resources by being the means of transportation.

Finally, colonies served as profitable markets for European goods, which were not profitable in the home markets.

Ultimately, Lenin said colonialism would not safeguard capitalism, but “it was merely a siren voice leading capitalism to its doom rather than its salvation ^[11].”

Settlement, Colonization, and Agriculture

Settlement colonization is a form of colonialism, which means imposing what was said to be the superior form of agriculture over the ‘other’ land. A question that arises in this form of colonization is, were those lands where the superior form of agriculture was imposed uninhabited before? Rather, they were inhabited by the so-called ‘others’ who were less developed, who now had no options other than leaving their land or serving the colonial masters, in most cases, this type of colonization resulted in the displacement of hunters, gatherers, and previously inhabited people, it might have also resulted in inhabitants being more or less turned into dependent laborers or the inhabitants being replaced by the imported laborers ^[12].

There was a twofold impact that the colonial conquest left behind on agriculture; it forcibly seized rural means of production and persuaded the commercialization of agriculture ^[13]. Colonial states converted agriculture into a potential export economy, and its two efficient bases were the farm household and the plantations; the farm household cultivates its own land and a portion of rented land by involving family members and, in some cases, a small number of paid workers. Whereas the plantations are large-scale enterprises that require an investment of a substantial amount of capital in land, machines, and plants, they are managed by wage laborers under the direction of foreign management; these plantations are owned by foreign stock corporations, which not only manage the production but also the processing and marketing of the products, the plantations are presumably capitalist ^[14].

The plantations are based on the combination of two things: the high capital investment and the exploitation of cheap laborers. In some instances, it gave rise to the extensive annexation of land and displacement of tribal and local peasants; the cases of Africa and India can be mentioned as classic examples ^[15].

Industrial revolution and technological innovations: New Sense or Nuisance of Technical Superiority?

Inventions of the Industrial Revolution had a far-reaching effect on the process of colonialism; steam power helped fulfill their dreams, which hitherto were considered impossible, by providing transport opportunities for goods and people. Advancements in the fields of science and manufacturing provided new weapons, constructive and destructive in nature. Missionary activities were also increased due to the advancement in the field of transport and communications; explorers and missionaries were the early guards of formal colonization.

Up to the period of industrial inventions, the technological gap between the European colonizer and the Indian colonized was not too wide; both depended on soil power and fought each other with arms of a similar type, except in some instances, the colonizer monopolized the firearms. Now, the industrial inventions enabled the colonizer with technical advantages; this

distinct capacity had an effect that was more than purely political. This new sense of technical superiority infused an attitude of contempt in the minds of colonizers; this was an unchanging attitude of colonial relationship ^[16].

The Industrial Revolution enabled the colonizers not just in terms of appropriating the resources of the colonies but also to achieve their socio-religious motives.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the nature of European colonialism was changing; other European countries followed Britain on the path of industrialization, began to envy Britain's imperial dominance, and now positioned themselves to compete with Britain; this marked the beginning of New Imperialism ^[17].

The astonishing thing about the new imperialism was that the pace and range of expansion of colonialism were breathtaking; in the three decades before World War I, an average of about 600,000 square kilometers of the global south was colonized by the global north annually, and at the end of this period, major parts of the earth's surface was controlled by Europe ^[18].

Socio-psychological aspects of Colonialism

The sociological core of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was ethnic and social distance. To understand whether there existed the practice of social distancing in colonial India, we need to look at the colonial cities; since India was not a settlement colony, we had no colonial cities of New England type, whereas, we come across the presidencies and towns built by them, the basic organizing principle of the colonial cities or towns was segregation of residential quarters along the racial lines, in the eighteenth century Calcutta which was founded by the British in 1690 bringing together the three villages; Sutanauti, Kalikata and Gobindpur a white and a black towns sprang up adjacently, even in old Mughal. In the city of Delhi, the British settled within the city walls, and only from 1870 onwards did they start building separate residential districts ^[19].

Contrary to the arguments of Hobson and Lenin, who saw colonialism as primarily economic activity, Schumpeter, a sociologist, and economist, argued that colonialism was a result of the natural disposition on the part of the state to expand its own territory in his essay, the sociology of Imperialism he proposed the non-economic theory of colonialism, while not dismissing the economic significance, he suggested that the root causes of colonial expansion lie in the human history than transitory economic cycles; he further argued that capitalism could not even provide a temporary rescue to colonialism, it had no tangible economic returns for the imperial powers, and the resources of the imperial powers drained into military adventures without any meaningful returns ^[20].

In Schumpeter's view appeal for colonialism lay in the darker passage of human experiences, where a tendency for conflict and conquest had developed. It was not a human instinct but a learned behavior from the remote past, where the dominant warrior caste protected communities from destruction ^[21].

According to Schumpeter, modern societies have backward-looking attitudes (Atavistic); this results in old-fashioned social forces; to put it precisely, anachronistic social forces continue

to determine the future course of social and political action. Military leaders of the nineteenth and early twentieth century came from conservative aristocratic families, whose personal and professional world views were shaped by typical antique warrior attitudes; they were not committed to the imperial conquest because of the rational advantage it might have brought, because they were programmed for it.

Civilizing Mission

Perhaps the unwillingness of the colonial rulers to assimilate with the native culture because of the superiority complex, racial or cultural, should be taken into consideration while defining colonialism in a sociological context; there was no counter-acculturation, European cultural superiority was supported by their beliefs such as the European arrival in distant land was for the salvation of the pagans, to civilize the uncivilized and white man's burden etc., ever since the sixteenth century English theorists called European expansion as fulfillment of Universal mission and march of civilizations [22]. Sir Charles Callwell defined colonial war as an "expedition against savages and semi-civilized races by disciplined soldiers." Even the methods of war that were morally and legally incorrect were considered legitimate in the case of the enemy who did not seem to subscribe to the same cultural code; even the pacifists justified this "other" types of war [23].

Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, civilizing missions emerged as a powerful force in shaping public attitudes towards colonialism; colonization in a real sense was considered a 'duty.' This notion was widespread and influential. Where did this mindset come from? When so much was connected to colonialism at that time, this idea of a civilizing mission was an indirect outcome of industrialization.

The Industrial Revolution widened the gap between colonizers and colonized and altered the colonial relationship; technological advancement paved the way for a cult of progress wherein the Europeans and North Americans developed a self-aggrandizing attitude in relation to the rest of the world, which may be because of their notion that they have an apparently limitless capacity for improvement.

Another thing that added to this sense of technical superiority was that a wider proportion of the population in the societies that were being industrialized in Europe became preoccupied with the feeling of social and cultural superiority and respectability on the part of colonizers towards the barbarians being colonized [24].

Social dislocation of industrialization was also responsible for the rise of interest in Christian evangelism; whatever gifts the respectable middle class was bestowed with by providence was now thought to be imposed upon either in the slums of industrial cities or across the world. This was the base of the civilizing mission, at least as conceived in Britain.

Other European countries, France, had offered a different variant, mission civilisatrice. At the end of the eighteenth century, France tried to implant the social and intellectual virtues of its revolution in its European neighbors, having met with little success, France now sought to impose them in the

tropics. Essentially, the underlying presumption of both the British and the French variants of the civilizing mission was the same. In conclusion, the civilizing mission was nothing but a "White man's burden" to be borne with spunk and altruism by the superior race [25].

This concept was brought to common usage in 1899 when Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem following the American occupation of the Philippines from Spain; it was directed to the masters of the new imperial project; colonialism here was portrayed as a joint effort taken by the so-called white races as a service, forgetting their imperial rivalry. No matter what had been happening to the world economy, at this particular time in Europe, where public opinion was emerging as a new political force, this cultural mission became a justification for the colonial project.

Cultural Imperialism and Colonialism:

Another argument about colonial rule was that Cultural Imperialism was inseparable from alien rule- imperialist attempted to destroy the local culture and establish their own because compliance with European norms was necessary for the process of subordination; thus, colonialism not only intended to deprive the local people of their freedom and wealth but also of its character, leaving them morally and intellectually disoriented [26].

Although the process of Westernization started before colonization and continued after independence in some parts of the world, the colonial period was an important phase in the process of Westernization; in some instances, Westernization took place in societies that were not subjected to colonial rule, for example, Japan.

Undoubtedly, the mass media and the Western consumer supplies have played a vital role in transforming non-European civilizations than centuries of colonial rule could have. Yet, colonial rule initiated the process of cultural modifications by intervening in indigenous cultures with varying degrees of intensity depending on their intent and strategy of colonizing [27].

The decisive variable was the role of the Christian mission; in the new world, it served the state as a powerful instrument of cultural penetration. Until 1813, the English East India Company strictly did not intervene in the religious affairs of the region it ruled. It was true that sometimes missionaries were brought in on warships, and their call for help offered a welcome reason to intervene; nevertheless, it's not advisable to sweepingly condemn the missionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a tool of colonialism.

Generally, missionaries of all faiths supported the colonial annexations. They carried a sense of cultural superiority and emphatically endorsed the colonial system in principle, but, sooner (after World War I) than other Christian missionaries, realized and recognized the unrelenting trends towards emancipation and tried to indigenize the clergy, secular cultural values of the West transmitted as a byproduct of their primary intention to Christianize [28].

Educational Institutions as Mediators of Cultural Values: Values and Language

A very notorious bone of contention in the education system was language; which language should be the medium of instruction? Whether the "Cultured" language of the colonizer or the native language? Teaching the language of the colonizer would open up and provide access to subversive ideas and falsely suggest that the status of the natives was equal to that of the colonizer, so it was feared to make the language of the colonizer a medium of instruction in some instances. Though Dutch was taught in the schools of Indonesia, the natives were forbidden from using it whenever their colonial masters wished to assert their racial superiority.

The educational value of the native tradition was the main concern of the colonial powers, which lurked behind the language problem; among all the colonial powers, at least in theory, the French were the first to assert the primacy of their tradition in a kind of cultural chauvinism. When a major debate unfolded in the first quarter of the nineteenth century between the Orientalists and Anglicists in India, and eventually English prevailed as a medium of instruction in higher education, it was certainly an expression of European Cultural hegemony.

Language was used as a political tool to shape an identity; in a country like India, which is more diverse in regional and social respects, more powerful this tool became more powerful in 1939 with the support of American Colonial Power, and the regional language Tagalog became a national language in the Philippines. This step anticipated political movements in many countries; in India, there arose a movement for the formation of states on a linguistic basis after its independence ^[29].

In the case of India, where there was no single language comprehensible to all, leaders of the national movement clung to English, and the collective use of this language provided a base for the coordination in their struggle for independence. It permitted the "two Indians to talk to each other in a tongue which neither party hates" ^[30]

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to say that one single factor provided the impetus to colonialism; much intellectual energy has been spent on delivering one comprehensive theory, no doubt, a rapid industrialization and technological innovation was happening in the Western Europe, but this alone cannot be held as a single controlling factors of colonization, again, international capitalism might have impacted the colonial policy, but there is no enough proof to prove that only capitalism determined the process of colonization, it was a time a fundamental social changes were taking place in Europe, political power changed, moreover, European population acquired the sense of racial superiority and respectability this attitude influenced them to provide cultural justification for colonization. In short, many factors contributed to conceptualizing the process of colonialism, but none was the single controlling factor.

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