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The Lingering Impact of Colonization on Pakistan: Negative or Positive?

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ABSTRACT

The British rule had a lasting Impact on the lives of the Indian people. They exploited the Indian territory for their own interests and left the land in more disorder and confusion than they found it in as (1) their attitude of superiority shattered the confidence of the people, (2) their agrarian revolution did not help improve yield and caused landholdings to become more fragmented, (3) the Indian industry was not protected and many traditional ones were ruined , (4) education was not made easily accessible , (5) construction of railways although improved transportation however was not done keeping the Indian interests but the British interests in mind and (6) the new political system which lacked personal element was not more effective than the old one.

KEY WORDS: The British, India, Pakistan, Colonization, the Indian people.

The Lingering Impact of Colonization on Pakistan: Negative or Positive?

Fifty-six years after independence, Pakistan remains very much a third-world country. These days the youth of the country sometimes express the belief that we would have been better off under British colonial rule for our undeveloped status clearly shows that we are unable to manage our own affairs. This is a dangerous trend of thought promoted by Western propaganda. This academic report aims to disprove this illusion and restore a measure of national pride in our history. In the course of this report, pre-partition Pakistan will be referred to as India and historical examples from the land forming the current states of India and Pakistan will be used in view of the shared colonial past.

It is true that colonial rule did promote the development of the subcontinent, yet often rule by an alien power proved a hindrance to development. In the eighteenth century, at the eve of the British takeover, India was more disorganized and helpless than it had been for centuries. The rulers were weak and the nation was ripe for takeover. The seeming ease with which the British managed to do this was partly due to the fact that no one viewed them as serious contenders for the Indian throne, so ridiculous was the notion of *feringhi* rulers. People assumed that East India Company only wanted India's vast riches. If the British had not taken over, perhaps the Mughals might have reformed themselves or perhaps yet another conqueror from the neighbouring states might have become India's ruler. The tragedy lies in the difference between conquerors and colonialists. Conquerors develop the territory as part of their country, and colonialists only exploit according to their own interests.

In his book *Discovery of India* (1961), Jawaharlal Nehru comments with his characteristic sarcasm that "We are often reminded, lest we forget, that the British rescued India from chaos and anarchy". They did indeed restore orderly government after the period that the Marathas have called the 'time of terror'. But much of the disorder was caused, in the first place, by the East India's own strategies. "It is also conceivable that even without the good offices of the British, so eagerly given, peace and orderly government might have been established in India after the conclusion of the struggle for supremacy. Such developments have taken place in India, as in other countries, in the course of her 5000 years of history." (p. 281).

Perhaps the bitterest legacy of colonial rule is the scar left on the people's psyche. Indians had been used to regard rightly themselves as a highly evolved and intellectual people. British officials treated Indians with undisguised contempt. This treatment was especially offensive to Muslims who for centuries past had been used to receiving special honour and privileges. Racialism was of such an extreme quality that any European (even if he was in the lowliest position in his own country) regarded himself as superior to the 'natives'. As Nehru (1961) reveals, there existed exclusively English clubs who did not allow any Indian (even if he was a prince) except in the capacity of a servant. Railway carriages, benches in parks, etc., had signs of 'For Europeans Only' posted on them. These policies of apartheid are appalling enough for people like Gandhi to bear in South Africa but to be forced to tolerate them in one's own land is a "humiliating and exasperating reminder of one's enslaved condition". (p. 295) Indian history boasts some of the world's earliest civilizations. We were not exactly barbarians.

Long subjection of a people and the denial of freedom bring many evils and, perhaps the greatest of these lies in the spiritual sphere – demoralization and the sapping of spirit of the people. (Nehru, 1961, p. 302).

The racist ideology of *herrenvolk* implied that the English master race had the god-given right to rule the incapable Indians who had to obey. Racial memories are long and this psychological scar has remained. What is most shameful that we submitted to this degradation for so long. The indoctrination of Indians to regard themselves as inferior and subservient shattered their national confidence and perhaps, this forms an obstacle to Pakistani development today. Many Pakistanis cannot believe that they can use their own considerable talents to progress to the level of the developed nations and so they continue to hanker after the Western style of living. What they do not realize is that American or European passports are not going to procure for them anything but third-class citizen status.

In 200 years colonial rule impacted society so greatly that it came apart at its very seams. India had been ruled by foreign invaders before but they all accepted the basic structure of Indian society and blended their cultures with it. The British always stayed aloof, in a superior world of their own and thus created two worlds in India. The following quote illustrates the utter confusion the Indian people were plunged into when two completely alien cultures met:

We must form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect.
- Thomas Macaulay, seen as the father of Western education in the subcontinent.

Macaulay's aim was to create a nation of clerks, half westernized, half native, who could economically man the offices of the British Raj. Much of the weakness of the education system still stems from Macaulay's attempts at reform. (Hussain, 1997, p: 321) At first, the Muslims refused to get western education. In the time it took Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to convince them otherwise, Hindus had progressed far ahead and Muslims consequently had few economic opportunities.

All this contributed to a distortion of the Indian class structure. By getting western education, the Hindu middle classes emerged much sooner than the Muslim. Also, there were two kinds of Muslim middle classes when they belatedly emerged: those who studied English and those who did not. The result was that education could not spread to the masses for a linguistic and cultural gulf was created. In the past it had not been so hard to get education. One already knew the main language. All one had to do was refine it and directly gain knowledge. The British made the knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Urdu seem redundant. Thus education today remains a monopoly of the middle and upper classes in the urban areas. The roots of the growth of Islamic fundamentalism are found in the introduction of English education and customs. The efforts of Christian missionaries to convert people also exacerbated this.

There is an impression even now that the English benignly desired the spread of education when the very idea was anathema to them. They did not want Indians to imbibe modern ideas and attempt they overthrow. It was actually individual

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English educationists, journalists and missionaries who opened India's horizon to the world of analytical literature and science. To this day we have much to thank them for.

In the economic sphere the British carried out certain policies which were partly beneficial but led to the further stagnation of the subcontinent's economy.

As British control of the Indian states grew, the powers of the original ruling families were curtailed. Especially after 1857, when the Muslims were seen as the main culprits in the rebellion, extensive Muslim lands were confiscated. The old ruling families were thus reduced to beggary. Land holdings became smaller and increasingly fragmented. The burden of agricultural tax grew and ownership of land often passed to moneylenders. Millions of labourers became landless. (Nehru, 1961,: 300).

The root cause of this was Warren Hastings' policy of auctioning the right of revenue collection to the highest bidders. By 1815, half of the landed property in Bengal had been transferred from the old Zamindars to merchants and other moneyed classes.

These absentee landlords had no sympathy for the tenants and increased the rent as much as possible. There was stagnation and deterioration in agriculture. The Zamindars did not invest any money in their lands and the actual cultivators had no means to do so. Therefore the yield from land continued to decrease. (Mahajan,: 598).

According to Barbara Ward (1961), applying British economic philosophy to India had some advantages. Previously land revenue was collected in the form of agricultural produce. Now this had to be paid in cash. This meant that the farmer had to sell his crop in order to pay the taxes. Thus the Indian farmer was brought into the market economy. This brought some innovation in farming methods as communications also improved. Cash crops for export and domestic consumption expanded. By 1947, even though the majority of farmers still worked for subsistence, a substantial number of Indian farmers had entered the market. (Ward, 1961,: 125-139).

However, Barbara Ward (1961) proceeds to point out in *India and the West* the negative effects of market influences: "Applying British concepts of debt and property made land a saleable commodity". This it had never been before. It could now be mortgaged for credit and courts could foreclose. Indian peasants had an old habit of living on borrowed money and paying it back when the harvest was good. The situation remained under control because usury was banned under Muslim law; and by Hindu custom, the emphasis was on payment in instalments rather than interest. Under the British system of huge interest payments, the peasant found he could borrow more than ever, and the money lender or bania could then bleed him dry. Thus any surplus the peasant earned for producing efficiently for the market was instantly drained off to the bania and he had no money to improve the farm. The pressure on land was growing because peace meant a rapid increase in the Indian population. Zamindars had been drawn into the game of usury and

land speculation and despite huge profits, they had no interest in investing to improve the farms. Despite improved methods of farming, agricultural productivity did not improve much for most parts of India. (Ward, 1961,: 125-139).

The produce there available there was not even used to satisfy the population's needs in many cases. It is true that there were famines in pre-colonial India but their frequency increased by 11 times under British rule despite the improved transport facilities. One main reason for this was that even while people were suffered from famine, the Raj refused to stop the export of food grains to England. (V.D. Mahajan,: 603-604).

British interference in Indian agriculture had produced a system of partial modernization. To break away from this kind of stagnation, major land reform needed to be implemented, but as an alien power, the British govt. could not adopt such a solution in India for fear of arousing hostility. Its failure on the land impeded efforts of modernization in other sectors. Progress in agriculture leads to economic growth in other sectors. This failed to happen in India. (Ward, 1961,: 125-139).

Today, in Pakistan despite the fact that the British developed extensive agricultural infrastructure, we still suffer from these disadvantages. The British did bring about an agrarian revolution but undermined both the traditional agrarian economy and village system of the pre-British period. Because of this, the average farmer is demotivated. The trend is that rural to urban migration is popular even though prospects in the city are quite bleak too.

One region which certainly benefited from agricultural colonization was the Punjab and especially its western parts. Canal construction and immigration led to the extensive restructuring and economic growth of this region. Employment and commercial opportunities soared up in the revenue, irrigation and public-works department. The economic growth provided opportunities for not only farmers, but also for doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs. For this reason, the Punjab has often been called the "favoured child" of the British. One reason for this is the fact that the province supplied the greatest number of mercenary soldiers to help Britain subdue the subcontinent. From the 1880s the British tapped the province's generous water resources to form perennial canals. By 1947, one of the world's largest irrigation networks had been created here. These laid open vast tracts of land further from the rivers and thus began the canal colonies. Massive migratory settlement followed to exploit the potential of the area to the full. New market towns sprang up along the lines of road and rail communication. Many have since developed into major marketing centres, which being a century ago they were either non-existent or inconsequential habitants eg. Faisalabad (Lyalpur), Sargodha. Pakistan inherited the canal colonies, and experienced a much greater continuity in the dominance of large landowners over its political and agrarian structure. Bolstered by its gains from agricultural colonization, this class has remained a major force in the political and economic scene in the country,

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hindering any implementation of an effective land reform nor a workable system of electoral representation (Imran Ali).

In the agricultural sector, positive examples of colonial legacy can be found but no such thing can be said for the industrial sector. The English introduced a system of market economics and free trade which worked in England but was unsuitable for Indian needs.

There is a general impression currently that locally produced goods cannot be as good as foreign goods. V. Anstey has written that right up to the eighteenth century “Indian methods of production and of industrial and commercial organization would stand comparison with those in vogue in any other part of the world.” India exported manufactured goods all over the world. Indeed trade was the actual reason the East India Company came here. The economy of India was thus advanced to as high a level as possible before the Industrial Revolution. It cannot be said if the static Indian society would then have had enough initiative to meet the challenge of the industrial age. It had to industrialize itself or foreign economic (and then political) domination would follow. The chance was not even given – the coming of the British destroyed the current economy and prevented anything positive taking its place.

The initial damage to industry started with the fall of the royal houses. The Indian specialty had small businesses. The talented and creative artisans were generally dependant on the patronage of the court. Mahajan declares that “The fall of the royal houses... cast adrift in the world a huge body of people, both high and low, who had hitherto earned their livelihood by service, both civil and military, in those defunct states. People found it difficult to adjust to a radically different system of administration. Thus the traditional small crafts industries suffered an irrecoverable loss (p. 711).

The initial purpose of the East India Company was to take Indian manufactured products back to England where they were in great demand. Later after the English industrial revolution, a new policy emerged: the British market was to be closed to Indian products and the Indian market opened to British ones. India was to supply only the raw material and Britain the finished goods. It is interesting to observe that this exact situation continues till this day. While British goods had free entry, tariffs were placed on Indian goods not only abroad but within the India itself! Indian industry was thus completely without protection. Indian enterprise always had to compete against experienced, established British firms, whose products was cheaper and better known. If the cloth trade had not been wiped out by cheap textiles from Lancashire, it could have become the nucleus of a purely Indian development. Factory competition destroyed the old handicrafts experts. The Indian government was allowed to establish tariff protection only after 1919. Similar protection earlier would have given Indian industry a large base. They would at least have captured more of the internal market. Pressure in Britain soon added an equivalent levy on local cloth. The effect was protection for Lancashire. The Indian textile Industry collapsed, leaving

thousands of weavers and artisans unemployed. Governor-General William Bentinck reported 1884 that 'the misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India'. This policy continued throughout the nineteenth century and destroyed other old industries such as ship building, metal working, glass, paper and many crafts (Ward, 1961; Nehru, 1961).

There were no attempts to introduce the new industrial techniques in India and the import of machinery was banned. Poverty grew and the standard of living kept falling. A forced back-to-the land movement of these unemployed artisans increased the disproportion between agriculture and industry. India became more ruralized instead of industrialized. In the mid-nineteenth century fifty-five percent of the population was dependent on agriculture; in the 1930s this was around seventy-four percent. This is the real cause of Indian poverty; excessive population also contributes but please note that Britain some of Europe is more densely populated than Pakistan today. It is all a question of development. The industry dealing with the damascening and inlaying of arms weapons and shields which were common in Kutch and Sindh suffered by removing the necessity for it and the prohibition of the use and possession of arms by Indians. The structure of industry was such that its further development depended in Britain the field of technology. No technological research was carried out in the country. The trend was not towards an Indian industrial capitalist economy but towards the dependant and underdeveloped colonial economy. Most banks were foreign and concerned with foreign trade. There was no central bank until the 1920s. Thus, even if more Indians would have been interested in investment, they would have found it hard to find the right channels. Even in the case of railways, all the equipment was brought from England, and provided no stimulus to local industrialization beyond a few railway workshops, and even then the engineers were mainly British. Another spur to industrial growth the arms industry failed to develop. Artillery was procured from Britain. India's few ordnance establishments remained too small to boost local engineering. Ship building was not carried on in India at all. India thus missed these main nineteenth century boosts to growth. India suffered all the ills of modern capitalism without any of the benefits. The cost of English industrialization was borne by India. It is not that India did not have the managerial and technical ability to advance. Indeed, when she has been given the chance to develop (e.g. during the World Wars), she has shown tremendous progress. India proceeded to miss some twentieth century accelerators as well. Roads remained inadequate. Technical and scientific education expanded hardly at all. At independence, the number of students graduating in engineering was only about 3000 a year. The British always maintained that India's main strength was her agriculture and she should not be distracted as such things as industry. Their concern for the Indian peasant was gratifying but unnecessary. Industry and agriculture must go side by side. Some heavy industry did finally develop in India

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but very belatedly. In 1939, India was essentially an economy with a nineteenth century framework (Ward, 1961; Nehru, 1961,: 297-301).

Some progress was made in the sphere of infrastructure. The economic effect of the railways was immediate and widespread. It broke down provincial isolation and made for better transport of raw materials and goods within the country and to the ports. However, there was inefficiency involved in the construction of railways, the cost of which was borne by India. They were built more for strategic than anything else. Railway lines, for example, were laid to transport troops and to bring local products and raw materials to the main ports of the subcontinent for export to Britain. To improve transport of food to more distant parts of the country was not considered. Therefore, famines became an even more regular feature of Indian life.

The most usual criticism today is not that foreign investment in developing countries remains too small, but that it tends to engross too large a share of the country's resources and opportunities. Foreign capital comes in and develops a concession and then ships the entire earnings overseas. All that remains in the host country is a small sum for wages and some money spent on local suppliers. In the case of the subcontinent, this can be seen as the direct result of British obstacles to Indian industrialization. India became and Pakistan remains the economic appendage of another country.

The British are often credited with (or they credit themselves with) the introduction to the subcontinent of British law, administrative institutions and political system. Yes, they are indeed excellent in their own right but are they really adequate for our nation's needs?

Some of the supposedly beneficial legacies of British rule are said to be their constitution and their administrative institutions. Yes, they were indeed excellent in their own right but are they really adequate for our nation's needs.

The British judicial system has had a most lasting impact on Pakistani law. Our constitution is based on the British blueprint and especially the 1935 Act of India. The original Muslim law has become completely distorted and the confusion is such that there are two legal systems existing simultaneously: the British one and the Shariat court. In an effort to adapt the constitution to current needs of Pakistani Muslims, Zia rather misguidedly chose a Middle-East style legal system which is again not fitting for local needs. This action has also exacerbated sectarian tension.

Before the British law was implemented, a more personal form of justice existed in the subcontinent. Civilians went to the *durbars* of the ruling classes with their issues and they were settled according to the personal judgment of the ruler. About the question of the extent of British law to apply to India, Warren Hastings was in favour of keeping to more local law. Muslim law of the 18th century was more tolerant and humane than English law. The English are horrified at the Muslim rule of amputating a thief's hand, but in England at the time there were 150 offences punishable by death. He was overruled and a strong dose of English

entered our lives. (J. Hussain, 1997, : 287) One of the most positive legislations passed by the British is seen as the ban of *Suttee*. What is seldom known is that it was actually Ram Mohan Roy who pressurised the British to apply this ban and they reluctantly did so. The rule of this written law instead of personal law did not bring much material benefit to the poorer and weaker sections of society because the masses could not understand the complicated procedure. Hiring a lawyer involved long delay and unaffordable expenses. English officials were not accessible to the people who could not lay their grievances personally before them as they could under the native rule. The administration operated like a machine and the lack of the personal element was disliked by the people.

It is this very judicial policy which had continued to this day. The people were uncomfortable with it then and they don't find it very much better today. The judicial was characterized by a high level of discrimination – of white against native then – and of rich against poor now. It is of no use to the common man who finds it a tough system to follow.

The English Orientalists who were in favour of sticking to existing Indian law succeeded to an extent and elements of this law were forever frozen into the constitution. This was also not good – there was no allowance for change. Under a local leader, we could have slowly modernised our laws to suit the needs of time but under an alien rule, this was impossible. Any attempt to tamper with local custom would have caused an uproar and to the English, this was not worth the bother of a fuss. Thus the judicial system is still in shambles.

As far as the political system was concerned, the British strengthened the feudal structure of the country. The old Zamindars were ruined and new people loyal to the British Crown were made the landholders. This was a more rapacious breed that had no prior knowledge of how to manage the estate. The old tradition of the landlord taking care of the peasants was abandoned. The British ruled the colony through these landlords which meant that the powers of the feudals were increased.

Today we have come to the point where the feudals mainly form the government and they have become so strong that their actions cannot be challenged and the common man cannot get away from their oppressions.

As far as the bureaucracy is concerned, Indians were left out from all high offices both in civil administration and army during British Raj which meant that they had no experience of holding the highest positions of responsibility. In 1947, suddenly the nation became a democracy from a colony. It is impossible to get used to such a drastic change overnight and Pakistanis are still struggling.

Under the British, we learnt the principles of democracy and equality under law in theory but not in practice. The British are said to have brought the concepts of liberty, equality, freedom and democracy. It says a lot for Western propaganda that the latter principles can actually be attributed to an imperialist power! Of course, the British did not encourage the development of true democracy because it would have rebounded on them. Also the policy of divide and rule contributed

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much to the partition of India. Who knows otherwise India might still be united. Even if partition could have been organized with sincere care, all the bloodshed of the wars over Kashmir may have been avoided. Today, military expenditure has bled dry the economies of both Pakistan and India.

At the conclusion of this research paper, it appears that although they are positive legacies of colonial, the negative impact outweighs them. Many of our current problems can directly be traced to colonial policies.

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