

The Adverse Effects of British Colonialism on the Culture and Psychology of the Indians: A Postcolonial Study

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Abstract

Colonization implies an all-inclusive and all-pervasive process that brings under its occupation not only the land and wealth of the colonized country but exercises domination over all facets of the life of the people – economic, political, social, educational, cultural and psychological in their exteriors and interiors. With full knowledge of how to perpetrate the colonial rule on the colony permanently, the British colonizers went for superimposition of their own culture on the culture of the colonized with the colonized ultimate object of destroying the native age-old and proverbially rich culture of India. Education being the sure and certain weapon to win the battle of superimposition of a certain culture upon another, the colonialists clamped down an Education Policy on the Indians – a policy potent enough to subjugate the Indians under the yoke of colonialism. They propagated their culture through various cultural mediums including dramatic productions, particularly “promoting Shakespeare’s work in colonial Calcutta reproducing the metropolitan culture as a part of the civilizing mission of the British Raj (Sing, 1996, P. 122). The conquest of the civilizational mission of the British Raj so disrupted the cultural and psychological aspects of the life of the Indians (Bangalis) that the elite (so-called advanced section of the population) gloated in the thought that the colonizers had rescued them from backwardness and it was their duty to prop them in all ways possible to continue their regime free from opposition, intervention and rebellion. This was how colonialism thrived on the subservient mindset of the privileged class resulting in the prolongation in the sub-continent of the British domination that had to be annihilated by waging tremendous struggle by the people who could not be gained over by the rosy picture of immense prospects hung up by the colonizers.

Keywords: Colonization, British Education Policy, Superimposition, Subjugation, Sepoy Mutiny

Introduction

The New Encyclopedia Britannica defines colonialism:

The exercise of political and economic sovereignty by a country on a country or territory outside its borders. Colonies have often been established by military conquest followed by an occupation and settlement that places the colonized peoples in a subservient position.

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An analysis of the definition shows that colonialism occupies foreign land by military force and establishes settlement of the colonial race there. Colonialism entrenches domination over the colonized virtually relegating them to a subservient position by means of cultural, economic and territorial subjugation. Colonialism, thus, pervades the entirety of life in the colony and the measures it enforces results in unprecedented changes there assuming to itself the role of the absolute determinant to bring perceptible and imperceptible changes in the currents and cross-currents of life of the people of the land colonized including psychological and socio-cultural constituents in conjunction with other segments thus installing a totalitarian dispensation to destabilize and demoralize the life of the native people in its entirety. The paper is a humble attempt to study the adverse effects of policies, measures and arrangements of the colonizers particularly on the cultural and psychological domains of the colonized Indian life.

The psychological and cultural upshot of colonization may be weighed in the context of the Sepoy Mutiny as considered by both the Englishmen and the privileged Indians. Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim* has identified the Sepoy Mutiny (First Independence Struggle of India) as 'madness' in which the roguish Indians resorted to reckless killing of English women and children. Said has countered:

Its author is writing not just from the dominating viewpoint of a white man in a colonial possession but from the perspective of a massive colonial system whose economy, functioning, and history had acquired the status of a virtual fact of nature. Kipling assumes a basically uncontested empire (Said, 1994, p. 162).

The Kipling syndrome found its echo in the reactions of the 'bhadrolks' of Kolkata to this revolt. Debendra Nath Tagore subscribed to Kipling identifying the British rule as systematic, normal and usual while the Sepoy Mutiny chaotic, abnormal and unusual. Ranjit Guha comments: The connection between the urge for education and the consolidation of the Raj... had ideological effects which were soon to be made explicit by the bhadralok's response to the Mutiny (Guha, 1988, pp. 18-19).

These reactions found their admirable placement in the contemporary influential newspapers like the *Sambad Provakar*:

The subjects of Bengal in particular are thoroughly loyal to the rulers, they long for the abundance of the rightly graceful Queen so that the deity guiding the royal officers of England abides permanently in India; they

are single-mindedly desirous of it, never cherishes its ill-luck even in dream on the ground that the weak and timid Bengalis have been gloating in the enjoyment of ease and riches that they had never had. Is it not the realm of Rama?...Of late the foolish soldiers have out of delirium resorted to deeds that cannot be called a deed but some happening very insignificant to the world conquering British nation just as something of a vase compared to the universe (Ghosh, 1962, pp. 226-228).

Not only newspapers but also books of the period contained report of similar vein. For example:

During our duties (teaching) in schools we used to put on dhuti under pantaloons so that just at the arrival of the Sepoys we put off pantaloons and chapkan and exposing dhuti and chador we would go out. The Sepoys had a great anger and hatred for pantaloons. ...it was decided earlier which to escape away...we used to dream of the Sepoys in red uniform during sleep (Bose 1961, p. 66).

It is not a least regret to note that the educated and well-to-do Bengalis of the time had such despicable hatred for the rebellion that has come to be recognized as the First Independence Struggle of the sub-continent. This condemnable attitude has been very strikingly brought out:

The difficulty of reconciling that response with the nomination of our educated nineteenth-century forbears as pioneers of a freedom movement is a conundrum on which the problematic of Indian History under British rule will continue to turn for a long time yet (Guha, 1988, p. 19).

The English and the English knowing Bengalis shared the same attitude towards the Sepoy Mutiny and they congregated in the same line. This condition finds its eloquent testimony in the following:

Bengalis who learn English may become bad subjects and servants, and (if permitted to do so) they may write any account of treason; but I do not in the least apprehend their acting upon it. The classes most advanced in English education, and who talk like newspapers, are not yet those from whom we have anything to fear; but on the contrary, they are those who have gained everything by our rule, and whom neither interest nor inclination leads to deeds of daring involving any personal risk. For a long time to come, if we incur any political danger, it will be from enemies of the original native stamp (Stokes, 1959, p. 254).

This clearly underscores that the educated Bengalis and the English made similar assessment of the Sepoy Mutiny. Surprisingly enough, the ruled adopted the attitude of the rulers and spoke the same language. This peculiar situation has been identified as the psychological and cultural colonization which outstrips beyond the occupation of the economic and physical resources. The colonization theoretician Thiong'o has divined the relationship of the two facets of colonization – the economic and the psycho-cultural:

Its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others (Thiong'o, 2007, p. 16).

The process of this psycho-cultural colonization starts, according to Thiong'o, with the degradation and subordination of indigenous culture to the foreign one – the process that more often than not results in the annihilation of the former. Fanon has very aptly described it in his *Black Skin White Mask* as “an inferiority complex...created by the death and burial of the local cultural originality”. The age-old values of India and its wealth of knowledge were subverted by the English education to strengthen the process as noted below:

The newly graduated youth from the Hindu College embraced Macaulay's discipleship. They echoed, “the knowledge contained in a single shelf of English books far exceeds what is available in the whole of Indian and Arab Literature”. Thenceforth Kalidas disappeared from their team, Shakespeare was installed there; the moral education of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana was degraded and then replaced by Edgeworth's *Tales*, the Veda and the Geeta could not counterstand the Bible (Shastri, 1957, p. 144).

The degradation trend also aggravated by another means of propaganda by the local newspapers. For example, the *Samachar Darpan* was dedicated to the depiction of the foibles and frivolities of the natives thus presenting a demeaning picture of the Indians. Frequently it carried sketches and articles on local superstitions and inconsistencies in social behavior (Kamal, 1977, p. 25). The vituperative propaganda consistently launched against the social behavior of the people on long term basis could well conspire a condition that might powerfully generate the idea as noted below by Bose:

Now that we know it for certain that we are incapable of self-rule, we have to be under foreign rule for quite a long time. One master may make room for another but the new master may not be as beneficent as the present master. That is why, our heart and soul supplication is that the English rule be permanent in our land (Bose, 1402, p. 333).

The inferiority complex was so much ingrained in the mind of the Bengali elite that foreign domination was the sine qua non to their very existence. This state of affairs found reflection in the writings and activities of almost all the educated Bengalis. For example, the forward looking Rammohun writes:

Among other objects, in our solemn devotion, we frequently offer up our humble thanks to God for the blessings of British Rule in India and sincerely pray that it may continue in its beneficent operation for centuries to come (Roy, 1906, p. 230).

In 1831, Prasanna Kumar made a vaunting assertion: "If we were to be asked, what Government we would prefer, English or any other, we would, one and all reply, English by all means, even in preference to Hindu Government" (India Gazette, July 4, 1831). Dwarkanath Tagore's exuberance of emotion in singing his admiration for the English spontaneously noted:

It was England who sent out Clive and Cornwallis to benefit India by their counsels and arms. It was England that sent out to that distant nation the great man who had succeeded in establishing peace in the world, and who was the first who first introduced a proper and permanent order of things in the East (Mitra, 1870, p. 94).

History records that the nationalist spirit of the Great Rebellion of 1857 was inversely counterbalanced by the Bengali babus subservient loyalty to the British colonizers because they presumed that the success of the Rebellion might bring back Muslim rule – a presumption ostensibly arising from the participation of a number of moulavis (Muslim clerics) who believed that they would overthrow the British rule leading to the restoration of the Mughal Empire in India. The British Company had overthrown the Muslim and the British Orientalists like Nathaniel Halhed, William Jones, Thomas Colebrook, Charles Wilkins et al opened up the possibilities of resurrecting the glorious Hindu past. The anti-Muslim attitude of the British helped generate and sustain similar tendency among the Bengali babus some of whom were imbued with the sense of cultural rediscovery. The British Orientalists by dint of their formulation could infuse among the Bengali literati a strong sense of pride in the Indian antiquity which manifested itself in the trend of frequent transla

tions of the Sanskrit plays into Bengali and performances thereof. At the instance of Governor General Warren Hastings the East India Company could realize the necessity of knowing the Indians in order to rule them stressing the dictum that 'Knowledge is power' i.e. knowledge about the Indians would confer on the British power over the Indians. Halhed wrote Grammar of the Bengali Language—the first book of Bengali grammar published by Wilkins in 1788 with the set of Bengali types he had invented. Wilkins also published Hickley's Gazette, the first ever English newspaper in India in 1780. He also made the first translation of the Bhagavadgita into English in 1784. Jones translated, among others, not only Institutes of Hindu Law; or the Ordinances of Menu and the play Sacontala by Kalidas from Sanskrit but also founded the Asiatic Society turning it to be the foremost British oriental institution. The Society discovered many 'unknown and obscure facts about ancient India', translated Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic books and carried out analytical research, thus contributing to the Hastings principle of gaining knowledge about the colonized. Hastings' governance practice and scholarly contribution of intellectuals like Jones set the policy of acculturation of civil servants as well as started a period of 'sympathetic colonialism' to undo the 'brute imperialism' of Clive, ultimately to gain acquiescence of the Indians to the domination. Governor General Wellesley followed the suit of Hastings by establishing the Fort William College and the Serampore Mission primarily 'to codify the knowledge about the Indian languages' and educating the growing number of British civil servants coming from England. Hastings and Wellesley contrived to govern better and more acceptably by indoctrinating the British officials through acquaintance with the life and culture of the colonized. Behind the fascination of the Orientalists including the Governors General Hastings and Wellesley for ancient India lay their motive to gain knowledge and information that would empower them 'to rule the contemporary India'. The 'sympathetic colonialism' or orientalism of the British could successfully create an illusion among the babus— persons who could come into close contact with the British and serve them faithfully—that the British had genuine respect for them. British Orientalism could infuse among the Bengal native literati a sense of Sanskrit revivalism of an all-round Hindu India. Chatterjee writes on the implication of sympathetic colonialism:

Initiated in the eighteenth century by British Orientalists, it was picked up and consolidated by native scholars who were desperately 'constructing' a 'satisfactory' past that would console them and liberate them from their ignoble present. Sympathetic colonialism had, at one level, directly or indirectly, given the Bengali intelligentsia clear and open access to materials it would use continually to 'fashion' a sense of cultural inheritance that would infiltrate all modes of Hindu cultural expression, from language to literature to art to music to theatre (Chatterjee, 2007, p. 78).

But this Orientalist acculturation theory was going to give in to the emerging Anglicanism—a debate that raged for quite a long time to be settled with the triumph of Macaulayism in 1835 signaling the dominance of Indophobia over Indomania as identified by Trautmann (1997) in his *Aryans and British India* (p.107). There was, however, no real antagonism between the two—Indomania and Indophobia, between Orientalism and Anglicanism; they were apparently contradictory but really complementary. The British Orientalism was wedded to the rediscovery of Indian antiquity which proved that the British were as sophisticated and liberal as to infuse in the Bengalis a sense of their glorious past as against their ignominious present. This sophistication, in its turn, covertly proved the civilizational and racial superiority of the British to the Bengalis. Indomania inexorably resulted in Indophobia. It was presaged in the work of the Anglicans like Charles Grant who as early as in 1796 underscored that India and Britain mutually needed each other. He postulated that Britain's need for India's colonial tribute was matched with India's need for Britain's culture and civilization for its development and modernization. He wrote:

The true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindoos err, because they are ignorant; and their errors have never been fairly laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them, would prove the best remedy for their disorders; and this remedy is proposed, from a full conviction that if judiciously and patiently applied, it would have great and happy effects upon them, effects honourable and advantageous for us (Trautmann, 1997, p. 107).

The Oriental scholarship of the British posed to be the communication of light and knowledge of the British civilization along with English education as 'its attendant panacea' 'for disorders' of the natives. The victory of Anglicanism gained through the implementation of Macaulayism ignited the Bengali literati "to colour its fashioned Indianness with the progressive hue of Westernization". The two opposite administrative policies of the British resulted in the hybridity of Sanskrit revival and Westernization originating from the Indomania and Indophobia of the British rulers. The revivalism of the Bengalis found its reflection in the Bengali literati's propensity for translation of Sanskrit dramas. On the other hand, Westernization manifested itself in the adoption of western style dramatic composition and performance—the Sanskrit plays were translated in keeping with western dramatic techniques and staged in the manner of the English drama.

The contemporary literati's view of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is very strikingly reflected in the essay of Michael Madhusudan Datta (1854) entitled 'The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu' which justifies the colonial

occupation of Bengal”

...who is this fair-headed stranger that has, in the course of a solitary century reared among us a fabric of power, the most wondrous and glorious? Who is this stranger that is lord of our sunny fields, of our shady groves, of our woody hills, of our wells of crystal water, of our mossy fountains, of our bowers of roses? Who is this stranger, for whom the most radiant diamonds are sought from the sunless depths of our mines; for whom the gold and silver, hidden in our treasure-caves, are brought forth to blush in the light of the sun? Who is this stranger that has bound us, as it were, with chains of adamant, and whose bright sword gleams before our eyes like a fiery meteor—terrifying us into submission and humbling us to the dust? Who is this stranger that has come to our dwelling? (Datta, 2012, p. 596).

Despite the end-note suggestive of wariness, Datta is not only all admiration for his fair-headed Anglo-Saxon but also enamored of the language and literature of England and strongly defensive of Christianity:

It is the glorious mission... of the Anglo-Saxon to renovate, to regenerate, or—in one word, to Christianize the Hindu. How he is fulfilling that mission, must, with your permission, form the subject of a future discourse (Datta, 2012, p. 608).

Datta’s argument is quite paradigmatic of the mesmerizing influence the English exerted over the educated elite with the economic benefits accorded to them by the East India Company acting as allurement. The colonizer’s strategies of socio-economic control, allurement into submission along with the technique of mass-mesmerism resulted in the induction of ‘a sense of awe for the colonial spectacle in the collective mind of the native literati’.

In fact, the success of colonialism depended on whether the educated natives yielded to this two-pronged strategy of political control. That they not only yielded but generously championed the cause of British presence in India can be seen quite clearly in a speech by Rammohun Roy (Chatterjee, 2007, p. 84).

Rammohun made the following comment in his address at the city of London Tavern on 6 th July 1831:

Before the period at which India had become tributary to Great Britain, it was the scene of the most frequent and bloody conflicts. In the various provinces of the Eastern dominions, nothing was to be seen but plunder

and devastation; there was no security for property or for life, until, by the interference of this country, the great sources of discord were checked, education has advanced, and the example of the British system of dominion had a conciliating effect upon the natives of the East (Majumder, 1987, pp. 46-47).

Even Karl Marx speaks indirectly of the beneficial impacts of the British dominion of India:

England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerative – the annihilation of the Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia (Said 1979, p. 154).

The colonial super-imposition of culture gave birth to the modern Bengali intelligentsia. They were agog with enthusiasm to imbue the culture of the colonizers setting a trend for a reversal of the process of acculturation that had been in place during Hastings' rule. The elite were privileged with the founding of the Hindu College in 1817 to educate themselves and their children in bilatikaida (English style) that ensured opportunity for climbing up the social echelon.

The fascination engendered by the force of the western culture was so irresistible that Rammohun Roy was induced to write to the Governor General Amherst in 1823 strongly opposing the establishment of the Sanskrit College by the Company government:

The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness.... But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, with other useful sciences, which maybe accomplished with the sums proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments, and other apparatus.

In presenting this subject to your Lordship, I conceive myself discharging a solemn duty which I owe to my countrymen, and also to that enlightened sovereign and legislature which have extended their benevolent care to this distant land, actuated by a desire to improve the inhabitants (Bary, 1958, p. 43).

The Orientalists had to lose to the Anglicans whose victory was heralded by

the memorable statement of Macaulay (1835) in his Education Minute where he envisaged to create from among the Indians a class of people 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect (Bary, 1958, p. 49). Devoid of all senses of humility Macaulay obdurately proclaimed the superiority of the Western (European) culture over the Eastern (Indian) ones:

I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic— But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia (Bary, 1958, pp. 44-45).

One cannot, however, fail to note that even the Orientalists, while paying high regard to the ancient literature of India, did not dissuade themselves from covert attempts to perpetuate in India the British colonial domination which was deeply rooted in their mind—the mind gratifying to exert their superiority over their racial Others. Colonization found its legitimacy in the mission of 'civilizing' the subaltern barbarians: "We are ruling you, but also, we are giving a knowledge of what you were; hence, our presence in your land is justified, because we are (also) showing you the light of knowledge".

Said comments:

The modern Orientalist was, in his view, a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished (Said, 1979, p. 121).

The great Orientalist William Jones himself sums up the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Orientalist estimations of the Indians of the past and the present:

...how degenerate and abased so ever the Hindus may now appear... in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government; wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge (Kopf, 1979, p. 39).

They, therefore, launched the project of 'improving the natives' by imparting English education i.e. a process of training that would disseminate the Western mode of thinking among the native bourgeoisie to inculcate in them attitude and behavior conducive to the prolongation of the colonizers' rule:

The success of the training, the colonizer hoped, would set off a chain reaction among the natives, a 'Downward Filtration' of Western knowledge that would keep reinforcing the cause of the colonizer (Chatterjee, 2007, p. 99).

Formulated by the two most distinguished law-makers of British India, Thomas Macaulay and James Mill (the latter being son of the great political philosopher J.S Mill), the Downward Filtration Theory provided for disseminating English education in India among a small portion of Indians who were moneyed and placed at the higher echelon – the babus. Viswanathan comments:

...though only this class would receive an English education, their more important function would be to act as teachers and translators of useful books, through which they would need to communicate to the native community 'that improved spirit' they had imbibed from the influence of European ideas and sentiments. The theory required the few to teach the many (Viswanathan, 1989, p. 149).

The theory of Downward Filtration installed a politico-cultural strategy that extended the impact of the colonial regime even much after the cessation of the presence of the colonizer in the colony territory. Macaulay, the progenitor of the theory, believed that English educated elite would be influential enough to impart permanence to all the changes that the education and administration effected in India virtually contributing to the safety, security and continuance of the colonial dispensation. The English educated Indians would be endowed with 'a new character'.

Praises and adorations were a regular utterance from the platform of the Congress for a long period after its foundation in 1885. Examples are not hard to find where newspapers stooped to extol even the nefarious activities like smuggling of wealth from India to England. "The Hindu Patriot looked upon this annual payment as India's tribute to England for the blessings of civilized rule" (Chandra, 1975, p. 116).

Language played a powerful role in the creation of the cultural condition of accepting the foreign domination. Thiong'O (2007) observes it as a conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer (p. 16). The language here connotes not simply the language of Bengali or English or French or any other of the sort. The language here signifies the cultural contents. This language includes the codes which both the rulers and the ruled can share (Nandy, 1989, p. 2). This brings in oblivion to the standing culture with the inauguration of the colonial hegemony. Nandi goes on to say:

The culture of colonialism presumes a particular style of managing dissent. Obviously, a colonial system perpetuates itself by including the colonized, through socio-economic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories (Nandy, 1989, p. 3).

Benefiting from long standing practices the trend creates colonial hegemony as propounded by Gramsci, the Italian Marxist theoretician:

Hegemony is economic-ideological domination, always-incomplete, always-becoming vulnerable, flexible, and hospitable to change, enacted as it is by dialectic of both consent and coercion. Hegemony is generally consensual; but hegemony can also be coercive if coercion itself can be reproduced as consent (Hussain, 2003, p. 205).

In the colonized society particularly in India both the elements of consent and coercion were at work in collaboration. The sense of dominance and superiority of the colonizers and that of subordination and inferiority of the colonized led to the perpetration of hegemony that yielded colonialized psychological and cultural language. This cultural language finds its manifestation through people's fashions and taste, clothing and dress, speech and communication, manners and behavior as noted below:

Some of our representatives of the new Bengali elite looked exactly like the Indian 'gentlemen' whom Macaulay had wanted to produce; now that they actually existed well dressed and polished and speaking better English than their British masters (Kulke & Rothermund, 1999, p. 242).

The English language saturated with English culture infiltrated so pervasively in the life of the Indian elite that they accepted it as the normal way of life. Their ideals and philosophy of life were all determined by almost a servile imitation of the colonizers. The English rule initiated a regime of ceaseless progress and development for the Indians – that was what could be identified as an expression of the mindset of the privileged Indians. Thus the notion of the white man's burden of civilizing the black Indian came to maturity with both adoption of, and adaptation with, the English ways and manners that were considered a great boon by the elitist youths of the day. Ashish Nandy says, "Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all. It handicaps the colonizer much more than it handicaps the colonized" (Nandy, 1989, p. 11). This observation elucidates how the total scenario of the Indian civilization inclusive of its cultural and psychological components was led into oblivion yielding place to the superimposed colonial culture and civilization.

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