

**Discipline Course-1**  
**Semester- 1**  
**Paper : Colonialism in India**  
**Lesson : The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On**  
**Colonialism**  
**Lesson Developer: Dr. Abdul Rahman Ansari**  
**College/Department: Gargi College,**  
**University of Delhi**

# The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

## Table of Contents

- Chapter 2: **LIBERAL & MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON COLONIALISM**
  - 2.1: LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE: COLONIAL INTERPRETATION.
    - 2.1.1: LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE: NATIONALIST INTERPRETATION
  - 2.2: MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF COLONIALISM.
  
  - Summary
  - Exercises
  - Glossary
  - References

## LIBERAL & MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON COLONIALISM



FIGURE 2.1

Source [https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Picture+of+colonialism&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gws\\_rd=cr&ei=XPhXUpqiMo-GrAexj4DQDw](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Picture+of+colonialism&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gws_rd=cr&ei=XPhXUpqiMo-GrAexj4DQDw)

*“Liberal reformers who were frustrated at home saw immense opportunity in the imperial project in India as a subject peoples had little means of protesting. As a result India became a laboratory for liberal experimentation as cherished measures such as state sponsored education, the codification of laws, and a competitively chosen bureaucracy were all introduced in India first, and then implemented in Britain after success became apparent “*

Thomas R. Metcalf, 1995, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press : 28-29.

### 2.1 LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE: COLONIAL INTERPRETATION

The Battle of Plassey (1757) is the dividing line in the colonial history of modern India as it led to the foundation of formal colonial rule. However, the establishment of colonial administration in India was a long drawn process. This establishment coincided with the emergence of a school of thought in Europe which was sympathetic to the ideas of empire and colonialism. The fact that it was a foreign rule colonial administration needed some kind of justification both for the people they were ruling, the so called 'natives', and people back home (Sullivan Eileen P 1). In order to gain legitimacy, the British Administration promoted this kind of history writing which was sympathetic to their mission in India. It portrayed colonial subjects as trapped in time, if not as savages, who needed some kind of external force to liberate themselves and make them modern and civilised. The group of thinkers and historians belonging to this school also projected the Indian National Movement, whether vide the 1857 rebellion or later the rise of Congress and other organisations, as mere cover of elites. This particular school of colonialism is known as colonial school of history.

The colonial perspective on Indian history developed through phases. When it was realised that understanding Indians is important for an efficient colonial administration, it launched projects to study Indian history and culture. In fact, it is important to note that from early 19<sup>th</sup> century, reconstruction of Indian history was the main agenda of colonial power. Warren Hastings argued in 1784 that "every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise dominion, founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state...it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence" (as quoted in Metcalf and Metcalf 2: 62). Among the early writings on Indian history and culture were the works of Christian missionaries already active in various parts of India by that time. As it is very clear from the nature of their project, these Missionaries had an agenda to highlight the backwardness and primitiveness of Indians in order to justify their presence. For them Indian history was stagnant since ages and made no progress altogether for a very long time. Apart from Christian Missionaries there were several trained Orientalists and philologists writing about Indian past and culture. Most of the sources used by these colonial historiographers were old Sanskrit texts like *Vedas* and *Smritis* and their conversations with *pundits* and *Sashtiries* in

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

different parts of India. The Missionaries and Orientalists did find ancient similarities between Indian and European cultures. It was more so in their language. However, they argued that since a very long time where Europeans have moved much ahead, Indians have remained stagnated and there is nothing progressive in recent Indian history. According to them, the 'backwardness' of Indian society and culture was due to the dominant Hindu beliefs. Based on the writings of some missionaries and Orientalists, earlier colonial administration initiated some 'reforms' from above and gave the Missionaries free hand to spread their faith and ideology.

Company administration soon realised the limits of Christian Missionaries and their kind of history writings. In later parts of their rule, they gradually relied on works of Orientalist historians like Sir William Jones, Sir Wilson, H.T. Colebrooke, and Rajendra Lal and another. These historians based their research on different sources. Unlike missionaries who relied only on *Sanskrit* sources, Orientalists used works of foreign travellers in India like Megasthenes, Al Baruni and others as well. Some of them did visit India too and collected primary data.

Orientalists tried to relook at ancient Indian history and discover its so called greatness. They also tried to locate a 'glorious golden age' in that history. This attempt was both a reflection of influence of romanticism and classism on them. According to Orientalist interpretations during this 'golden age' the essence of Indian civilisation was formed. They identified the essence of the Indian civilisation in the form of richness of its language and religious texts. They argued that the ancient Indian civilisation had quite a developed form of Law and other political institutions which have been lost due to corruption in the last century. Historian William Jones of *Asiatic Society* explored the linguistic link between *Sanskrit* and Greek and Latin. Not only that, they also tried to link Indian history with the Biblical stories. For example, they saw the story of Noah's Ark as an almost parallel to the story of Manu (Thapar Romila 3). Despite the glorification of the Indian past, Orientalists viewed contemporary India as inferior and backward as compared to its past. Some of the adherents of this school, like Elphinstone and Thomas Munro, had their sympathy towards Indian society and its structures and argued that British should not try to disturb it. The Oriental school in Britain was not, however, immune from its biases. Most of them projected the necessity of the British rule in India as they found Indians lacking in discipline and modernity. The backwardness of contemporary India was a result of centuries of stagnation, they reiterated.

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

Despite the fact that Utilitarians were opposed to any kind of external colonies for the empire they did make an exception in the case of India. The reason given was the backwardness of Indian economy. Here the Utilitarians differed greatly with the Missionaries and other Orientalists who had the habit of highlighting cultural backwardness of Indians as the reason of external rule as a 'civilising mission'. Adam Smith, known as a Utilitarian, even emphasised the need to support Indian economy so that it becomes a vibrant partner in future for Britain (Sullivan Eileen P 1)



FIGURE: 2.1.1

### CARICATURE OF ADAM SMITH

Source: [https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Caricature+Adam+Smith&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gws\\_rd=cr&ei=7d5XUvKWJoWErAe7jYGoDg](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Caricature+Adam+Smith&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gws_rd=cr&ei=7d5XUvKWJoWErAe7jYGoDg)

When liberalism, as a dominant source of history writing, started gaining ground by early nineteenth century Orientalist started losing its charm. They were now questioned by some of the imperial historians themselves. A new school called Utilitarianism represented by James Mill, T.B. Macaulay and others became important source of Indian history. Their approach was quite different from Orientalists as they opposed the view that Indian past was glorious. According to Sullivan, unlike rest of the liberals, J S Mill was the first to argue that Indians were culturally backward and therefore needed British rule for their modernisation and development. He argued that Indian social, economic and legal system needs the support of England. For him, "England would ensure order and security to the Indians and prepare them to enter eventually into a higher stage of civilisation" (Sullivan Ellen P 1).

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism



John Stuart Mill

FIGURE 2.1.2

Source: [http://www.google.co.in/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/PSM\\_V03\\_D380\\_John\\_Stuart\\_Mill.jpg&imgrefu-----](http://www.google.co.in/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/PSM_V03_D380_John_Stuart_Mill.jpg&imgrefu-----)

In other words, whereas Orientalist had glorified India's past, the Utilitarian had condemnation for it. The Utilitarians emphasised the weakness of Indian civilisation and society. They argued that there was tremendous need for rationality and individualism if the society was to progress. In order to draw a dividing line between ancient India and modern India, one of the proponents of this school, James Mill, divided the history of India into three parts namely, Hindu civilisation, the Muslim civilisation, and the British period. He argued that the pre-British Hindu and Muslim civilisations were not only backward and stagnant but conformed to the image of 'oriental-despotism' (Thaper Romila: 4).

In Europe the dark ages gave way to Modernity. Twin processes of Renaissance and Enlightenment made the modern west. "in India and other dark continents", as the utilitarian saw it, "this transition never took place". "India had remained unchanged, constrained by the social institutions that defined it – caste, village community and Oriental despotism" (Kumar Keshvan: 5).

According to postcolonial historians, most of these writings are perfect examples of ethnocentrism where all things European is considered to be 'modern' and native culture is seen and compared from these 'modern' standards (Chatterjee Partha: 6). Colonial School was trying to show the superiority of European culture

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

and civilisation and at the same time attempting to portray the Indian society as inferior. According to them India has not gone through the transition to modernity and it is basically a stagnant society. In this context, colonialist historiography was a justification of British rule in India. If Indians cannot manage their affairs because of their backwardness and stagnation, if they do not catch up with time they need someone to guide or even force them into modernity and development. The foreign rule in India was doing the same and therefore it was legitimate. British should be appreciated as they are carrying the 'the white men's burden.' This ethnocentrism and racism became the source of Colonialists' criticism of 1857 rebellion and any subsequent national movement for independence. These historians believed that the rise of Indian nationalism was not a result of British colonialism. Instead they believed that what is called 'India' in fact consisted of religious castes, communities and interest. There is no Indian nation and therefore there is no Indian nationalism (Chandra Bipan: 7). They argued that the basis of political organisations in India is caste and religion and not a sense of nationalism. This line of thinking logically concludes that national movement was not a movement of common people but was a product of the needs and the interest of the elite groups. These elite groups were only interested to serve their own selfish and narrow interests. That is why; their needs and interest are the driving force behind the idea, ideology, and movement of Indian nationalism (Chandra Bipan: 7).

Broadly, "the colonial historians tried to show that Indian nationalism was nothing more than an unprincipled, selfish, amoral bid for power by a few Indian elites". And "these elites had used the traditional bonds of caste and communal ties to mobilise masses for their own ends" (Kumar Keshvan: 5). Nationalism was used as a mere ideology by these elite groups to legitimise their narrow ambitions and to mobilize public support. Anil Seal argued that, "what from a distance appears as their political striving were often, on close examination, their effort to conserve or improve the position of their own perspective groups" (8). According to Pannikar, "the colonial historians conceived India as a country of communities in conflict to which a sense of unity was imparted by the operation of colonial administrative institutions" (9).

In Brief, Colonialist perspective on colonialism was based on the justification of the colonial rule. It tried everything to prove the worth of external administration of the various societies in Asia and Africa and elsewhere. For colonialist historians, India needed colonial administration in order to realise its potential



## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

and its long due modernisation. "Essentially colonial perspective on India is Eurocentric and imperialistic in nature. The tendency to read Indian history in terms of a lack, an absence, or incompleteness that translates into 'inadequacy' is obvious in these excerpts" (Pannikar K N: 9). According to Bandyopadhaya, the history writings all colonial powers "escaped serious interrogation outside of the specific contestations of the nationalist struggle" as they had the monopoly over the literature. It was only when "new critical inquiries were initiated by figures as various as Bernard Cohn, Edward Said, and Ranajit Guha" that the colonial historiography got exposed (Bandyopadhyay Sekhar: 10).

### **2.1.1 NATIONALIST INTERPRETATION.**

This school was represented by political activist such as Dada Bhai Naoroji, Lala Lajpat Rai, A.C.Mazumdar, R. G Pradhan, S.N. Banerjee, and B.R. Nanda and so on. This school of thought emerged in response to Colonial interpretation of Indian history and tried to expose the exploitative character of British colonialism. Early nationalist challenged the colonial view that British government has brought to the subcontinent modern political system and political unity. Instead, they argued that colonialism had harmful effects on economic and cultural development of India. Modernity and political unity are in fact fruits of struggle undertaken by the Indians themselves against the imperial rule (Bandyopadhyay Sekhar: 10). Though, they accepted some of the interpretations of Orientalist historians such as the idea of classical golden ages of India and its decline, but they refused to accept the colonialist interpretations that they were responsible for India's unification and modernity. Further, they found British responsible for India's decline.

In order to highlight the glorious past of India, many nationalist historians went a step further to classify pre-colonial history through the prism of religion. Contextually, for them, ancient India was Hindu India and medieval India could be defined as Muslim India. This categorisation was based on the belief that a single religion could pervade the whole age and the whole society. In other words, nationalist school of thought was a product of national movement by which they tried to establish the superiority of the past over the present while using the categorisation of James Mill. Mill viewed the remote past, as Hindu civilisation and projected it as the golden age (Thaper Romila: 3).

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

Propagators of this school tried to discover roots from where we have descended. They did this by answering questions such as 'who they are', 'where we began', 'what we are' and how we have arrived at and the like. By discovering their glorious past, they tried to prove their superiority that was under attack as a result of colonial interpretations (Thapar Romila: 3). This attempt to establish superiority was based on a dichotomy between spiritual India vs. materialist West. Thinkers like Aurobindo Ghosh particularly emphasised this. However, nationalists' attempt to rediscover their glorious past in ancient Hindu India gave rise to communal historiography. This communal interpretation was a result of religious nationalism which stressed on related communal identities such as Hindu or Muslim (Thapar Romila: 3). Additionally, nationalist historians, in contrast to colonial interpretation, tried to view national movement as peoples' movement. They argued that the national movement emerged as a result of consciousness generated due to the idea of self-determination amongst people. Consequently, various leaders of Indian national movement from Dadabhai Naoroji to Gandhi accepted India as a nation in the making. They also advocated the emergence of a 'Pan-Indian National Identity' while recognising the local and regional identity (Chandra Bipan 7: 23).

### 2.2. MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF COLONIALISM

Marxists conceptualise the nations as aggregate of groups of people which are divided on class lines. They highlight the differences among those classes and emphasis that nationalism's claims of commonality are superficial. Hence, Marxist school of history writing engages with the aspirations of the marginalised sections of society. According to them, the struggle, both explicit and latent, between the affluent and poor is the core of the historical developments. Proletariat (the working, poor classes) in India or colonised societies elsewhere, was a by-product or an unintentional contribution of colonial administration. Marxists historians talk about how colonial processes bring consciousness among certain classes of peasants and workers through shaking the historical links between them and their exploitators. According to Marx, for example, the material destruction caused by British loot in India would create conditions on which marginalised classes will built their own sources of emancipation (16). In other words colonialism makes the poor classes aware enough to ask about their role and place in the history of their societies. Though there is a criticism about the fact that Marxist historians overemphasised the class division in the Indian context, which somewhat marred their study of different other sections of the society such as Dalits, Adivasis, and

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

women. Nevertheless, Marxist historians have been able to put forward certain vital questions and have been able to generate debates which have enriched our knowledge of colonial history. On the issue of colonialism and nationalism in India, there are several works done by Marxist historians. Rajni Palme Dutt and A. R. Desai are the two most prominent historians coming from this school.



KARL MARX  
FIGURE 2.2

Source: <https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Picture+of+Karl+Marx&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:enUS:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gwsrd=cr&ei=ftIXUsbtGIvOrQfl8oDoBg>

Marxists have conceptualised "the nation on the basis of its secular character and explored its strengths and weaknesses as evolved during the colonial and post-colonial periods" (Pannikar K N: 9). Marxist historians saw colonialism as a way of capturing the raw materials of the colony. They refuted the arguments of colonialism being a 'civilising mission' for Marxist believed that any kind of cultural change is directly related to the dominant mode of production. According to Marxists, colonialism is the highest phase of imperialism. Its origin is in the capitalists' nature of expansion for profit. Colonies were created to tackle the problem of constant and cheap supply of labour, raw materials and availability of markets for the manufactured goods. There was no doubt in the minds of the

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

Marxists that colonial occupation was not guided by any philanthropic motive as claimed by colonial historiography.

V I Lenin (the leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917) worked Marxist ideas and gave the theory of imperialism in the midst of an intensification of control over colonies by the European countries in different parts of the world. This intensification had begun during the second half of the 19th century. Lenin argued that, domestically, capital was concentrating into the hands of large monopolistic corporations led by a few large financial oligarchies. These oligarchs are big bankers and industrialists who control finance capital.

DO YOU KNOW  
THE VIEWS OF VLADIMIR LENIN ?

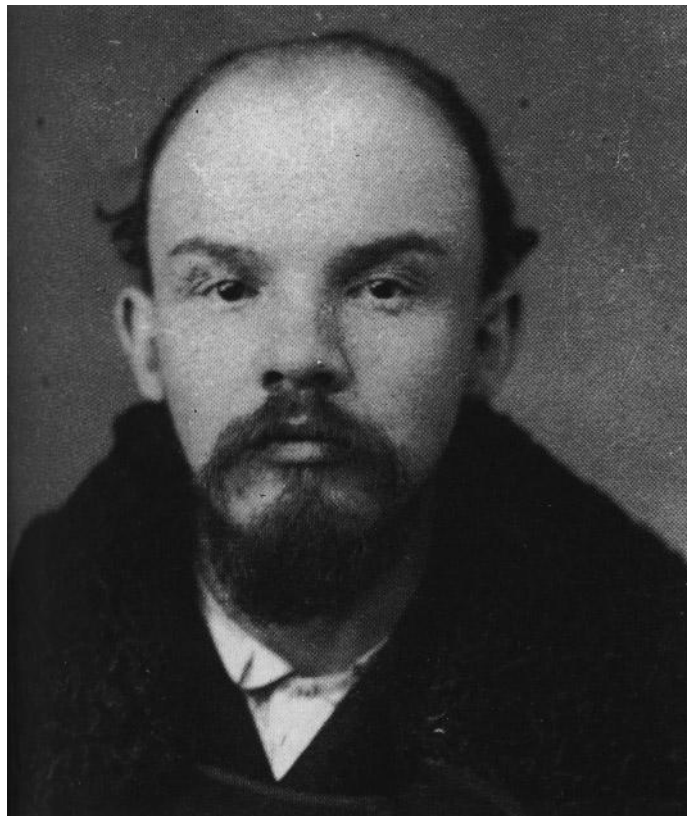


Figure 2.2.1 Source:<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/photo/1895-1917/index.htm>

Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capitalism is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

The concentration of capital in fewer hands created massive inequalities in these societies. Inequality in these European countries which are also known as 'core' controlled total demand levels from rising. The domestic market made of common people with limited or no demand, could not absorb all the commodities produced there. It was uneconomical to lower the production as high investments were made to create latest and advanced capacities of production in the form of machines and other technologies. Hence, the insufficiency of demands created continual crises in nascent capitalist societies which compromised the profit of capitalist class. The increasing prices of basic raw materials, such as coal and cotton further threatened the profits margins. Therefore, in order to maintain the levels of profit some kind of creativity and expansion was required. The specific needs of expansion were felt in the regions, other than the conventional continental Europe, for investment in addition to cheaper sources of raw materials and unexploited markets. Ultimately this led towards imperialism. Lenin identifies that imperialism gave birth to a new capitalist class which was based on 'the export of capital' rather than on the goods exchange as in the case of old capitalism.

According to Lenin imperialism started in the form of finance capital. He also proclaims that this form of capitalism is 'the highest stage of capitalism.' He identifies capitalism's latest and most highly developed form due to the reason that instead of soiling their hands in primary goods production, now capitalists are sitting and enjoying and their wealth is creating further prosperity for them. He defined capitalism as "commodity production at its highest stage of development, when labour-power itself becomes a commodity" and imperialism as 'monopoly capitalism'. He argued that modern capitalism is basically 'monopoly capitalism'. He argues unlike Hobson, that capitalist aspire not for market but for investment. In other words, Lenin believed that in the era of 'monopoly capitalism' the export of capital took place rather than commodities and capitalist aspired for investment opportunities and not for market in other countries. This leads towards imperialism. It became possible because in modern capitalism, there is uneven development and accumulation of surplus of capital in the advanced nations under the control of a financial oligarchy of bankers. This finance capital reigned supreme over all other forms of capital. This is highest stage of capitalist development. That is why Lenin said that Imperialism is the 'Last Stage of Capitalism' (11).

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

According to Lenin, the 'monopoly capitalism' creates cartels, syndicates, and trusts that divide the domestic market and take control of industry in their own countries. But capitalism also creates a world market. Monopoly capitalism led towards the division of the colonial world into spheres of influence which reflect the struggle of finance capital for raw materials and of the export of capital. Lenin stressed that the "rise of 'national financial-industrial' combines that struggle to divide and re-divide the world amongst themselves through their respective nation-states. The rivalry among these competing national capitals led to inter-state competition, military conflict and war." (11)

Lenin states that the political control over other countries facilitates for the capitalists from the developed world to freely exploit the working classes of colonised countries. This profit is largely kept by the capitalists. However, a part of this profit is spent in the domestic industries and production activities which increase the wages and living standards of the workers in the developed countries. This is done, according to Lenin to "pacify the working class to not go for revolution at home" (11). In this way capitalist are able to keep the revolution at bay. This perpetuated the imperialistic ambitions of colonial powers. This theory is, in its earlier versions was also used by the 'drain of wealth theorists' namely Dada Bhai Naoroji in the nineteenth century. In a way this explains the growing pauperisation of the Indian masses and slow, but steady, economic well-being of the conditions of the workers in Britain.

Lenin's idea of imperialism is criticised on the ground that it focuses only on economic aspects of it. He refuses to acknowledge that Imperialism has any other purpose than serving the interest of finance capital. The political control over other states, as a form of security and territorial gains, had also been a motive of creating empires. Imperialism was declared as the highest form of capitalism however, it has survived the end of direct imperialism. Nevertheless in the present era of indirect imperialism it is finance capital which rules the world empires.

Despite the fact that Lenin and other Marxists believed in the idea of colonialism being just a stage of imperialism, where one imperial power occupied another country for its raw materials and market, they too believed that in most of the cases colonial occupation had been helpful in modernising the occupied societies. The Marxist school of thought sought to analyse the class character of the

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

nationalist movement and tried to explain it in terms of economic development of the colonial period, primarily the rise of industrial capitalism and the development of a market society in India (Bandyopadhyay Shekhar: 10). According to them the national movement in India was led by rising national bourgeoisie which gradually found foreign rule adverse to their interests.

Marxists identify the process through which the national bourgeoisie comes into existence. According to Marxist historians, the rise of national bourgeoisie in most of the colonies including India was due to establishment of modern industrial production and modern education system introduced by the colonial masters for their own compulsions. They agree that the reason for the establishment of modern industry and education had nothing to do with the so-called civilisation mission and benevolence of the colonial administration. It was done due to the need of having local support base for their rule and also for getting skilled cheap labour. This bourgeoisie, however, gradually became the enemy of colonial administration. According to Marxist historians, the Congress in India was a party of big landlords and industrial bourgeoisie, and despite its progressive contribution in Indian history, its leadership was basically an elite grouping. According to Marxist historians this bourgeois leadership directed national and anti-colonial movement to suit their own class interest and neglected the interest of masses and to some extent betrayed them (Dutt R P: 12). Marxists do not buy the nationalist argument that India is a homogeneous entity. According to them India has never been one. They highlight, instead, the heterogeneity in Indian society and emphasis on the changes brought by the resisting masses throughout the history of the country (Dirks Nicolas: 13). They argue that the hostile class relations in India, as like any other society, were the reasons of 'unequal and uneven development' which could neither be overcome by colonial rulers nor the successive nationalist rulers.

According to Marxists, various streams within the national movement adopted different strategies and modes of struggles. This was first, a result of their own understandings of the situation and second, an attempt to ensure their long overdue and rightful inclusion in the idea of 'Indian nation'. Most of these groups are different classes organised on caste and religious lines. They all have articulated their interests differently which is a mere manifestation of the diversity of Indian masses. Nationalism would, ideally have brought all these people on one front together irrespective of their differences. Freedom struggle and nationalist upsurge was able to overcome some differences and was also able

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

to create some common interests. Nevertheless, those differences were so deep and wide that it failed to create a real unity of cause beyond a point among all the sections of the Indians. According to Dirks it was limitation of the 'liberal project' in India (Dirks Nicolas: 13). Marxists' views were based on the above understanding, that neither colonialism nor nationalism is structurally capable of modernising the Indian colony.

According to Marxist historians, though India was impoverished due to colonial exploitation, it became more modernised in the process. Colonial power did create new identities and India was more socially divided. However, due to education and secular bureaucracy, brought by the British, oppressed sections became more aware of their conditions. Colonialism made feudal elements weak and emerged new industrial working class due to introduction of capitalism. The industrialisation and establishment of administrative units created urbanisation in colonial societies. The new working class there in the urban areas had the potential to revolutionise the colonial society including India. R. Palme Dutt, emphasised the need of forming extra territorial solidarity between Indian and British proletariat as neither the colonial masters nor the national bourgeois could address their issues (Dutt R P. 14). Sumit Sarkar in his book, 'Modern India' argued that there were two levels of anti-imperialist struggle in India; one elite and the other was populist. Understanding of Indian history demands the study of both as their interaction formed the backbone of Indian national movement (15). In other words, in modern India there were two levels of anti-imperialist struggle. One struggle was elitist and another struggle was the struggle of the common people. In order to understand the full picture of the Indian national movement there is a need to look in to the interplay of both, elitist and populist movements.

Bipin Chandra, countering the Marxist understanding of colonial Indian history, argued that Indian national movement was a popular movement of various classes, not exclusively controlled by the bourgeois. It was a national movement based on the primary contradiction between the interests of Indian masses and British rule. However, he accepted that, apart from the fact that independence was for every one, there were also several secondary contradictions within Indian society of different classes, castes, and religious communities (Chandra Bipan: 7).

R.P Dutt pointed out that the nature of British colonialism in India changed historically. In the beginning it was basically an agricultural economy that offered



## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

raw materials' reserve. It was also seen as a market for some of the British and European products. Restrictions on Indian industries hampered their development and these were deliberately imposed to facilitate the uninterrupted growth of British Industries. The limited liberty, which Indian bourgeoisie got was also an attempt of give enough outlets to British capital. Politically the essence of the new imperialist policy (during post First World War) was taking Indian bourgeoisie as a junior partner. The cornerstone of British 'reforms' in India were limited "industrialisation and diarchy", leading it to "dominion status" (Dutt R P: 14). Romila Thapar argued that in the 1970s, the question was whether there had been incipient capitalism in India prior to the colonial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What was the state of the Indian economy? The famous 'drain theory' came into play here, the argument being that with industrialisation in Britain and the latter's need for resources and markets, much of India's wealth was drained away into Britain, fundamentally impoverishing Indian society (Thaper Romila: 3).

As far as the goal of independence is concerned, Marxists viewed that real emancipation of India as a nation is not possible until there is a kind of social and economic emancipation of the peasants and workers too. R.P. Dutt argues that "the demand for independence needs to be combined with the demand for the repudiation of the foreign debts and expropriation of foreign concessions and capital holdings in India" (Dutt R P: 14). In other words, the independence of India is of no use to its proletariat, unless they get their equal share in the society.

### **Summary**

- The establishment of colonial administration in India was a long drawn process. This establishment coincided with the emergence of a school of thought in Europe which was sympathetic to the ideas of empire and colonialism.
- In order to gain legitimacy, the British Administration promoted history writing which was sympathetic to their mission in India. It portrayed colonial subjects as trapped in time, if not as savages, who needed some kind of external force to liberate themselves and make them modern and civilised.
- Orientalists tried to relook at ancient Indian history and discover it's so called greatness. They also tried to locate a 'glorious golden age' in that history. This attempt was both a reflection of influence of romanticism and classism on them.

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

- , Where-as Orientalist had glorified India's past, the Utilitarian had condemnation for it. One of the proponents of this school, James Mill, divided the history of India into three parts namely, Hindu civilisation, the Muslim civilisation, and the British period. He argued that the pre-British Hindu and Muslim civilisations were not only backward and stagnant but conformed to the image of 'oriental-despotism'. The Utilitarian and Economists, such as Adam Smith, had their own logic about the benefits of empire for people of England. They somehow agreed that empire is a liability rather than an asset. For details see Sullivan Eileen P (1983), *Liberalism and Imperialism: J S Mill's Defense of the British Empire*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (4): 599-617.

- According to postcolonial historians, most of these writings are perfect examples of ethnocentrism where all things European is considered to be 'modern' and native culture is seen and compared from these 'modern' standards.

- A school of thought represented by political activist such as Dada Bhai Naoroji, Lala Lajpat Rai, A.C. Mazumdar, R. G Pradhan, S.N. Banerjee, and B.R. Nanda etc. emerged in response to Colonial interpretation of Indian history and tried to expose the exploitative character of British colonialism. They argued that colonialism had harmful effects on economic and cultural development of India. Modernity and political unity are in fact fruits of struggle undertaken by the Indians themselves against the imperial rule. Further, they found British responsible for India's decline.

- According to Marxists, the struggle, both explicit and latent, between the affluent and poor is the core of the historical developments. Proletariat (the working, poor classes) in India or colonised societies elsewhere, was a by-product or an unintentional contribution of colonial administration. Marxists historians saw colonialism as a way of capturing the raw materials of the colony. They refuted the arguments of colonialism being a 'civilising mission' for Marxist believed that any kind of cultural change is directly related to the dominant mode of production. Despite the fact that Lenin and other Marxists believed in the idea of colonialism being just a stage of imperialism, where one imperial power occupied another country for its raw materials and market, they too believed that in most of the cases colonial occupation had been helpful in modernising the occupied societies.

### Exercises

1. " In order to gain legitimacy, the British Administration promoted history writing that was sympathetic to their mission in India." Elucidate.

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

2. What views were articulated by the Utilitarian thinkers as regards British Colonialism in India?
3. "The attempt by Nationalist historians to establish superiority was based on a dichotomy between spiritual India vs. materialist West. Thinkers like Aurobindo Ghosh, particularly, emphasised this." Do you agree with this view? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Write a critique on the Marxist understanding of colonial Indian history.

## Glossary

- 1 Benevolence: kindness.
- 2 Christian Missionaries: Religious group committed to the spread of the religion of Christianity, as their main mission.
- 3 Orientalists: Scholars of the history, art, language and culture of the East {Middle East and Asian countries} as opposed to that of the West or the Occidental.
- 4 Proletariat: The working class, usually the poor.

## References

- 1 Sullivan Eileen P (1983), Liberalism and Imperialism: J S Mill's Defense of the British Empire, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (4): 599-617.
2. Metcalf Barbara D and Thomas R Metcalf (2006), *A Concise History of Modern India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Thapar, Romila, "Interpretations of Colonial History: Colonial, Nationalist, Post-Colonial" in Peter Ronald deSouza, (2000), ed. *Contemporary India: Transition*, Delhi: Sage Publication: 25-36.
4. Oriental despotism became the key concept in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to explain the situation in India prior to the coming of the British. Thapar, Romila, Ibid: P-30.
5. Kumar, Kesava, P, (2008) "Indian historiography and Ambedkar: Reading history from Dalit perspective", *International Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.1 (1): 1-122.

## The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

6. Chatterjee, Partha (2010), *Empire and Nation: Essential Writings, 1985-2005*, Permanent Black: New Delhi.
7. Chandra Bipan, *et al*, (1988), *India's Struggle for Independence*, Delhi: Penguin Books India: 18.
8. Seal, Anil, (1968), *Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and collaboration in the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
9. K.N. Panikkar, "History as a site of struggle", *The Hindu*, August 15, 2007.
10. Bandhyopadhyay Sekhar (2009), *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, Orient BlackSwan: Hyderabad.
11. Lenin, V.I. (1967), *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
12. Dirks, Nicolas, (1992), *Colonialism and Culture*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
13. Dutt, R.P., (1928), "Indian Awakening", *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 10, June No. 6: 323-341
14. Sarkar Sumit (1983) *Modern India, 1885-1947*, Delhi: Macmillan
15. Hussain, Iqbal (ed), (2006) *Karl Marx On India*, New Delhi: Tulika Books

Read "An Empire of Good Intentions: Liberalism and the Justification of Britains's Empire in India."

[http://www.academia.edu/1545698/An\\_Empire\\_of\\_Good\\_Intentions\\_Liberalism\\_and\\_the\\_Justification\\_of\\_Britains\\_Empire\\_in\\_India\\_c.1820-1905](http://www.academia.edu/1545698/An_Empire_of_Good_Intentions_Liberalism_and_the_Justification_of_Britains_Empire_in_India_c.1820-1905)

### Web Links.

Figure2.1

Source

[https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Picture+of+colonialism&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gws\\_rd=cr&ei=XPhXUpqiMo-GrAexj4DQDw](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Picture+of+colonialism&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gws_rd=cr&ei=XPhXUpqiMo-GrAexj4DQDw)

# The Liberal & Marxist Perspective On Colonialism

Figure 2.1.1

Source: <https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Caricature+Adam+Smith&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox>

Figure2.1.2

Source: [http://www.google.co.in/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/PSM\\_V03\\_D380\\_John\\_Stuart\\_Mill.jpg&imgrefu-----](http://www.google.co.in/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/PSM_V03_D380_John_Stuart_Mill.jpg&imgrefu-----)

Figure 2.2

Source: <https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Picture+of+Karl+Marx&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:enUS:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp&gwsrd=cr&ei=ftlXUsbtGIVOrQfl8oDoBg>

Figure 2.2.1

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/photo/1895-1917/index.htm>