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British Colonial Rule in South Asia: The Transformation of Traditional Administrative Institutions and Power Relations

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Abstract

The establishment of the colonial state in South Asia under British dominion is a significant shift in political control, regulation, and institutional development. The study examines how British colonial structures modified existing political structures and how they helped to establish the modern state in the region. It goes into the methods by which the colonial administration established a system of government, law, bureaucracy, finances, and representative institutions that changed the relationship between the government and the people. The study argues that the creation of colonial states was not merely a process of external domination, but also a process of institutional change that produced new forms of political power and governance. The establishment of the Indian Civil Service, district administration, formalized legal structures, census operations, law enforcement, and legislative assemblies created the basis for a modern centralized state. At the same time, these institutions produced new political identities, political elites, and political engagement, which influenced later nationalist movements and postcolonial governments. The research also examines the tensions between colonial rule and indigenous governance systems, focusing on the relationship and negotiation between local elites, communities, and emerging political structures and colonial systems. It examines the paradoxical characteristics of colonial administration: although it implemented ideas like constitutionalism, bureaucratic efficiency, and representative bodies, the colonial regime also upheld hierarchical and exclusionary mechanisms of authority. The study is valuable to the larger debates on state formation, institutional endurance, and political change in South Asia as it demonstrates the trajectory of political power from the colonial to the postcolonial era. It shows that the several existing political entities in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh can be understood only in the context of their colonial past and the evolution of state power in the countries.

Keywords: British Raj, South Asia, colonialism, modernism, Governance, Institutions, transformation, authority, and power culture

Introduction

Under direct British rule and indirect control over the princely states, South Asia had a unified colonial political system across the Indian subcontinent during the British Raj (1858–1947). The areas which are now part of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and parts of modern-day South Asian states were

shaped by British rule, law, economy and politics that influenced their post-colonial development. The political system in South Asia has a range of systems that have been developed over the centuries, in the context of imperial, regional and local traditions, before the British. The political systems comprised of imperial administration, regional government, princely states, landed gentry, village communities, religious authorities, and customary organizations. Centralized government with a high degree of local autonomy was established by the Mughal Empire, regional kingdoms, and municipal governments (Sarkar, 1920, p. 40; Srivastava, 1995, p.132). Land and conflicts were managed by zamindari networks and village councils, and revenue and social order by community-based organizations.

Prior to the British colonization of India, the nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives had their own political systems. The Mughal imperial system of administration (1526–1857) was structured by provinces (*subahs*), revenue districts and a system of *mansabdars*, *zamindars* and local officials that influenced India and Pakistan. The semi-independent Nawabs of the eighteenth century made Bengal (now Bangladesh) a rich province of the Mughals, having well-structured revenue institutions and potent local elites (Marshal, 2005, p. 243). The Kandyan Kingdom in the central highlands and coastal regions was under royal administration, village administration, and local chiefs (rate *mahatmayas*) and was affected by Portuguese/Dutch rule prior to the British conquest in 1815. Bhutan developed a dual system of government between the Druk Desi and Je Khenpo, with political and religious power, and Nepal was unified in the eighteenth century by military conquest and a centralised monarchy backed by aristocratic families and regional administrators (Fischer-Tiné & Framke, 2021). The Maldives was an Islamic political, island-level government and maritime trade sultanate before it became a British protectorate in 1887. Before colonial rule, there were kingdoms, aristocratic elites, religious institutions, customary laws, and local communities that governed South Asia. British colonial institutions restructured these diverse systems through centralization of administration, codification of legislation, revenue systems, and bureaucratic control.

Before the coming of the British to South Asia, royal authority was established by royal legitimacy, military strength, social status, customary practices, and local elites. Intermediaries connected the center to the periphery and facilitated the relationship between ruler and subject. Governance consisted of negotiated relations between monarchs, nobility, landlords, religious leaders, and groups of villagers (Malik, 2016, p. 209). Social and economic issues were left to local institutions and imperial rulers ruled through collaboration and accommodation. The British expansion that began in the seventeenth century and continued thereafter created a new political structure that greatly changed the existing political institutions. Direct Crown rule was further to be expanded after 1857, with an increase in bureaucratic control. This was the case when the British East India Company gradually replaced the local political authorities by establishing a unified colonial government. Traditional structures of power were transformed as a result of the establishment of colonial institutions such as the Indian Civil Service, district administration, modern courts, police organizations, and new tax systems. There were many local elites and traditional institutions that were incorporated into the colonial system, but with new functions as vehicles of colonial rule (Willson & Chester, 1957). These alterations resulted in the formation of new kinds of political power and changed the connections that existed between the state and society.

In order to understand the bases of the present-day political entities in South Asia, a scholarly study of colonial change is essential. British rule did not simply replace native institutions; it changed, restructured, and even kept old institutions in line with colonial goals. Colonialism and pre-existing political traditions and practices influenced the development of modern bureaucracy, legal systems, political leadership, and

administrative procedures. These changes can be analysed to gain insight into the historical roots of governance and political power in the countries of South Asia.

The research objectives, questions and Scope of Study

This research aims to examine how British colonial rule affected the traditional political systems in South Asia and how these changes helped in the emergence of modern political systems. It focuses on the interaction between colonial governance and indigenous forms of authority, particularly in terms of changes in administration, land relations, legal systems, and political authority.

The major issues that need to be explored in this research are:

1. What were the political institutions like in pre-colonial South Asia, and what were the power structures that affected governance?
2. What changes did British colonial institutions bring to the traditional political system?
3. What role did colonial policies play in the lives of local leaders, communities and indigenous institutions?
4. How have the changes in colonial institutions affected the political development of the colonies in the postcolonial era?

The study covers the 18th century, when British influence began to grow, to the end of colonial rule in 1947, and the implications of colonial institutional changes on the political systems of contemporary South Asia.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative historical study that is used to investigate the change in traditional administrative structures and power in colonial India. It also looks at the influence this colonial institutional legacy has had on the institutionalization of postcolonial South Asian states. The study recognizes differences in their postcolonial institutional trajectories, but focuses on areas that were part of the British Indian Empire, particularly the ones that came to be Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. Official correspondence, government reports, institutional papers, colonial administrative documents, and other relevant historical sources are used extensively in the empirical research. Two complementary methods are used for framing the inquiry: political economy analysis and comparative institutional analysis. While political economy analysis looks at how colonial administrative arrangements and economic structures facilitated the region's integration into international markets and influenced later patterns of political and institutional development, comparative institutional analysis is used to find continuities, adaptations, and transformations in administrative and political institutions across the chosen postcolonial states. The gathered archival material is qualitatively studied with special emphasis on institutional continuity, institutional change, political power, administrative procedures and the relationship between political and economic institutions.

Limitations

The study is limited in its empirical aspects. It is geographically confined mainly to the areas of British India which formed the nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It, therefore, does not provide a similarly comprehensive empirical evaluation of other South Asian countries with different colonial and political pasts. Colonised by the Portuguese and the Dutch, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was later colonised by the British. The Portuguese colonized Maldives and it was subsequently a protectorate of the British. Nepal and Bhutan were never colonized by a European power, but had treaty relations and varying levels of British influence. They are not as comparable to the institutional path of British India, and are therefore not within the scope of analysis of this study. Secondly, although the study is comparative, there is no uniformity of archival material across the countries studied, and British India has extensive colonial archives. Third, the study covers a long

history from the establishment and consolidation of the British colonial institutions to the adaptation of postcolonial institutions, which makes it difficult to conduct an empirical analysis of all institutions, provinces or administrative sectors. The discussion is therefore predominantly thematic, rather than institution/country by country. It covers the major themes of administrative transition, institutional continuity, political power, economic integration and postcolonial adaptation. Lastly, the study relies heavily on official and archival sources, which in turn may reflect colonial governments' attitudes, classifications and priorities. Therefore, historical data may underrepresent peasants/labourers, women, indigenous populations, and other oppressed groups. These limitations are recognised when considering comparative data and appraising British colonial institutional legacies in postwar South Asia.

Historical Background: traditional political institutions of pre-colonial South Asia

Pre-colonial South Asia had a diverse political landscape with a hierarchy of rulers and complex relations between the rulers and the ruled. Unlike the modern state system with its unified and homogeneous state and administrative structures, political authority in pre-colonial South Asia was spread across complex networks of power, with the authority of the emperor, regional chiefs, aristocrats, landowners, village communities, religious leaders, and traditional institutions all being intertwined. Governance was not only formal and administrative, but also social, political, customary, and interpersonal, between leaders and their followers (Stein, 2010).

The Mughal Empire (1526–1857) was a major paradigm of government in pre-colonial South Asia. However, Mughal rule was not the result of absolute control over society, but a result of a joint effort of imperial powers and local power holders. The Mughals integrated centralization of power with a decentralized administration, allowing local elites and intermediaries to become involved in administration. The balance of the empire relied on the bureaucratic organization, financial systems, and ties with the regional powers that connected the imperial heartland with the agrarian communities (Richard, 1993).

The Mughal and Regional Political Administration and Power Relations

The Mughal administrative system peaked under the rule of Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) who introduced the system of military organization, finance, and regional control. The empire was divided into provinces (*subahs*), districts (*sarkars*), and smaller administrative units (*parganas*). Within this framework, there were three authorities that supervised financial, military, and judicial affairs to maintain the supremacy of the emperor and to handle political problems. The Mughal system was a model of central control and local flexibility. Provincial governors, military leaders, tax collectors, and local agents were essential to the efficient administration of the empire, which was the ultimate source of political power (Farooqui, 2011, p. 268). The mansabdari system created a hierarchical structure of military-administrative officials whose jobs were linked to imperial tasks, while the jagir system provided revenue assignments to officials for their administrative and military duties.

In the regions outside the Mughals, local governments set up their own systems of government and maintained links to the old ways of administering affairs. The Governmental forms in eighteenth-century South Asia were diverse, as seen in the regions of Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, Mysore, the Maratha Confederacy and Sikh domains. These regional authorities were not only legatees of the Mughals, but also had developed their own forms of government that were shaped by their local environment, military organization, and aristocratic networks (Habib, 1999, Alam, 1986).

The role of local rulers, zamindars, village communities, and customary authorities.

Pre-colonial South Asia was administered on a daily basis by indigenous institutions. Local chiefs, landowners, and community groups were able to facilitate political power by connecting rural communities to wider imperial structures. Of these groups, the zamindars were a prominent one. They were not only landowners, but also political facilitators, with social influence and administrative responsibilities, and often with military power. The relationship between zamindars and the state was based on negotiation, as the imperial powers tried to assert their authority over the zamindars, but also depended on the cooperation of the zamindars for tax collection and political stability.

There was also a level of political organisation at the village level. Traditional institutions were often established within agrarian communities to manage land relations, settle disputes and organise community life. The village leaders, municipal officers and community elders were important in maintaining social stability and representing the village's interests with higher-ranking authorities. Despite the differing levels of autonomy throughout areas, village institutions continued to be significant components of social and political structure (Habib, 1999).

Political dynamics were also affected by religious leaders, caste groups and tribal chieftains. They were more a result of society's recognition, tradition and community support than governmental designation. Consequently, in pre-colonial South Asia, political authority was allocated among several institutions instead of being primarily centralized inside state apparatuses (Stein, 2010).

Political Legitimacy and Social Organization in Pre-colonial rule

In pre-colonial South Asia, political legitimacy was derived from a number of sources including royal lineage, religious ritual, military success, administrative skill and the ability to maintain social order. Leaders legitimized their power by cultural customs, emblematic rituals, networks of patronage, and affiliations with prominent social factions. The Mughal emperor was the icon of imperial power, but the practice of power was founded on the basis of collaboration with nobles, regional elites and local populations.

Interconnections of caste, faith, familial relationships, profession, and property ownership had an impact on social structure. These structures determined who had access to political power and how leaders and their constituents interacted. Local elites often spoke up on behalf of community issues, as well as on behalf of central authorities. Political power, therefore, was a process of continual negotiation, not just a simple hierarchy of control. Political South Asia in the eighteenth century was a complex network of traders, officials, landlords, armed groups and local rulers (Habib, 1999, Richard, 1993). These networks enabled political power to operate via collaboration and flexibility instead of via inflexible institutional frameworks.

The Central Authority and local institutions

Central rulers and local institutions in pre-colonial South Asia worked together, negotiated and were dependent on each other. Local intermediaries were needed to collect taxes, provide security, and govern far-flung areas for imperial governments. Local elites were rewarded with recognition, privileges, and opportunities to retain their power in their communities. For instance, the Mughal state had indirect control over rural life through administrative appointments, revenue arrangements, and political alliances, but not through direct bureaucratic control over all aspects of rural life (Srivastava, 1995, p.132).. This flexible system enabled the empire to rule a variety of people in a large area. Local institutions were thus not detached from the state structure but rather were integral parts of political governance (Mahajan, 1960, p. 196-197).

British colonization brought these pre-existing relationships to an end, as it introduced new ideas of central government, codified law, bureaucratic authority, and territorial government. It is therefore crucial to

understand the nature of pre-colonial institutions if one is to study the impact of colonial rule on traditional political institutions and on the development of modern political authority in South Asia.

3. Growth of British rule and reorganization of political power

From 1857 Crown Administration took over from the EIC.

British Dominion in South Asia brought a significant shift in the nature of political power and governance. Initially, British control was established through the East India Company which gradually evolved from a trading organisation into a sovereign power with political and administrative control over Bengal after the Battle of Plassey (1757) and the Battle of Buxar (1764) (Lane-Poole, 1894, p. 327). The Company expanded its power through military conquest, diplomatic treaties, economic deals and alliances with local elites. By mid-nineteenth century, the EIC had become the dominant power in a vast area of the Indian subcontinent, establishing new administrative structures and relying on pre-existing political intermediaries.

The Insurrection of 1857 marked a turning point in the development of colonial government. Although the insurrection had many causes, ranging from military grievances, political encroachments, economic troubles, to social unrest, it challenged the legitimacy of Company rule. The British Parliament passed the Government of India Act 1858, which transferred authority from the EIC to the British Crown. This transition created a new imperial system of government whereby the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy became key players in the management of the colony (Chandra, 1961).

The previous Company's administration methods and measures were not completely abandoned by the Crown administration of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Instead, it restructured and improved them. The colonial government expanded its bureaucracy, raised the level of surveillance and created new political control mechanisms to counteract any potential challenges to imperial rule. The post-1857 government was more interested in stability, efficiency of administration and cooperation with certain Indian leaders, while maintaining British supremacy (Copland, 2005).

Replacement and Adaptation of Indigenous Systems of Governance (ISG)

Many of the indigenous political institutions were transformed, incorporated and redirected by the British in order to serve their colonial agenda. Prior to the British expansion, monarchs, zamindars, local groups, religious leaders and customary institutions engaged in complex political relations in South Asia. These flexible systems were replaced by formal, bureaucratic institutions, following the British model, in many of them. Significant changes were made in the revenue administration. The British introduced the Permanent Settlement in Bengal (1793), the Ryotwari system in southern and western India, and the Mahalwari system in the northwestern part of India (Guha, 1963; Cohen, 1996). These agreements changed state-landholder-agricultural community interactions. Traditional intermediaries were legally recognized as property holders or revenue agents, and the village communities were regulated more.

Colonial administration reorganized judicial and administrative systems, introduced codified laws, courts and professional attorneys. Colonial law was the primary political instrument, albeit customary customs continued to have some impact on local affairs. The British government sought to impose uniformity of administration and power over territory and people. Government in the colonies was also adaptive. British policymakers and social order-keepers were dependent upon local elites, royal kings, landlords, and community leaders. Indigenous institutions were altered by the process of colonization and were incorporated into the imperial system (Stokes, 1978).

The establishment of political centralization in the Colonial State.

One of the hallmarks of British colonialism was the ever-increasing concentration of political power. The colonial state established a more centralized administrative system with bureaucracy, law and surveillance, as opposed to many pre-colonial systems in which rulers relied on negotiated relationships with local intermediaries. The colonial government extended its control over the large territories through institutions like the Indian Civil Service (ICS), district administration, police and modern courts (Doyle, 2018, p. 99).

The district was an important administrative unit of colonial rule. The district officer, or collector/magistrate, was a position that had several functions, including revenue, judicial and administrative functions, and was one of the most powerful symbols of colonial authority. It enabled the colonial state to have direct control over taxation, law enforcement, and local administration, and to diminish reliance on traditional political structures.

The census, surveys, mapping projects, and classification of populations further bolstered colonial administration. These practices enabled the state to gather data on society and then to control communities, manage resources and establish governance. Bernard Cohn (1996) contends that colonial knowledge systems were not only descriptive, but also were used as tools for the British to build and assert their authority. Centralisation of power also altered the concept of sovereignty in South Asia. The power of the ruler was more and more linked to the control of space, the establishment of bureaucracy, and the application of law. This change helped to establish the modern state system in the area.

Changing Power Relationship between Colonial Officials and Local Elites

Colonial rule brought about a major shift in the relationship between the British officials and the local elites. Pre-colonial political systems frequently featured elites like zamindars, nobles, chiefs, and regional rulers with autonomous authority and who engaged in negotiation with the central government. During the colonial period, many of these groups were brought into the colonial system but had some boundaries set by the British administration. Local elites were relied upon by the British as they were socially influential, had local knowledge, and were able to keep order within rural communities. Zamindars and landlords were often employed to collect revenue and to communicate with the people. Their authority was however, subject to more and more restrictions under colonial laws and administration, and they were less autonomous than before (Bayly, 1988, Guha, 1963).

The relationship between states and princes is another illustration of this evolving relationship. British rule was achieved through a system of subsidiary alliances and indirect rule, which allowed many princes to have an internal control while restricting their sovereignty under imperial supervision. The British acknowledged chiefs, but made them junior players in the colonial political system. Meanwhile, the reforms of colonial education and administration produced new classes of political elites. The educated, lawyers, journalists and civil servants became influential actors who later played a role in the nationalist politics. Therefore, the colonial rule also helped to create new political classes which influenced modern South Asian politics and transformed the existing elites.

4. Traditional Administrative Institutions' Transformation

The administration of South Asia underwent a radical transformation under the British rule. British government stressed on bureaucracy, territorial administration, uniformity of law, centralization. The district administration system, on which colonial rule rested, was one of the most innovative developments. The Collector and Magistrate (or district official) was responsible for collecting taxes, administrative law, law enforcement and government. This was a concentration of power in colonial officials, which contrasted with

previous power-sharing systems where monarchs, local elites, village groups and customary authorities shared power. The district was the primary means of land, people and resources control in the colonial state. The Indian Civil Service (ICS) was a strengthening of the colonial bureaucracy. The ICS was originally part of the administrative services of the Company, but was later developed into a well-structured and professional bureaucracy which carried out imperial policies in India. The ICS was described by British administrators as the 'steel frame' of colonial administration because it provided continuity of administration, political control and institutional discipline. The ICS helped to increase administrative efficiency and professional administration, but for the majority of the colonial period, British bureaucrats dominated it (Stoddart, 2011, p. 20; Doyle, 2018, p. 99). Colonialism increasingly made local kings, chiefs and traditional authorities subject to the colonial system, which had political power. Their strength was only in the service of imperial administrative ends.

Colonial administration changed established political officials' positions. Indirect control and political agreements brought many local kings and chiefs under the control of the colonial authority. The monarchs were internally autonomous rulers, but were supervised by the British. The village headmen and elites stayed behind to administer, and colonial administrators grew more and more powerful. The British did not eradicate indigenous institutions; they were changed to support a centralized colonial state. This created a dual administrative structure with the old institutions operating within a new administrative framework. Administrative relations were changed by the colonial revenue systems. Land income collection has been the mainstay of all South Asian state-building, but it was formalized and legalized by the British. Revenue settlements determined the landholder, imposed obligations and established new rights to the land (Sharma, 1996, pp. 179-189). These changes affected the relationship between state and landowner and cultivators. Traditional mediators turned into revenue collectors or landlords and the colonial government acquired authority over the rural society. Administrative institutions were employed to govern, reform the economy and control politics.

5. Colonial Land Policies and the Evolving Status of Rural elites

One important area of change in rural politics and society under British colonial rule was the land revenue policies. Agricultural taxes were the primary source of state income and the British had a number of land revenue structures in place to guarantee revenue stability. The Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793) recognized zamindars as hereditary landlords who fixed their income with the colonial government. The direct income relations between the state and the peasants were, however, established in certain parts of Madras and Bombay Presidencies under the Ryotwari system. The Mahalwari system of tax collection was practised by the local communities or landholding groups in the northwestern region of India and in the state of Punjab. The forms of these structures were different, but they all strengthened the state's control of land relations and rural production in the colonial period. These land reforms had a significant impact on rural South Asian authority. In older political systems, zamindars and local elites exercised power by controlling land, through social prestige, military influence and customary obligations (Guha, 1963; Sharma, 1996, pp. 242-249). The colonial practices had a legal impact on the zamindars as the legal definition of property holders whose validity was becoming increasingly reliant on the colonial state. A few of the landed aristocracy benefited from the British policies and those who did were loyal to British rule, while others lost power due to lack of revenues. The colonial state altered the power balance in rural areas by creating economic dependence and political allegiance.

The village institutions also shifted as did the zamindars and rural elites. Governments intruded more into traditional village communities that traditionally dealt with local issues. Revenue surveys, definitions of property ownership and colonial courts restricted customary land links. The leaders and authorities of the villages turned into mediators between the colonial authorities and the rural people instead of political actors. British administration encouraged individual ownership and formal legal rights, undermining village organization and social relations. The land policy of the colonies changed the balance of economic and political power. Colonial policies were linked to land ownership and legal rights and political influence and thus gave greater importance to landlords, moneylenders and commercial agricultural organisations in rural life. A small number of wealthy landowners, who were able to sway colonial administration, later took to politics in various locations. Colonial land policy altered economic relations and established new rural elites that continued to exert their political power after the colonies (Copland, 2005, Metcalf, 2012).

7. The Rise and Fall of Customary Authority in the Colonies

Colonial legal systems had a significant impact on the political power structure in South Asia. Legal practices were influenced by customs, religious beliefs, royal restrictions, and community-based conflict resolution prior to British rule. The British gradually supplanted this diversified legal system with formal courts, codified laws, and qualified judges. Much of British India was legally uniformed with the Indian Penal Code (1860), Civil Procedure Code and Criminal Procedure Code. These institutions reinforced the colonial state and concentrated law.

Customary authority and conflict resolution were impacted by colonial legal innovations. The village council, caste association and elders were the ones to settle disputes and maintain social order. Although they were unofficial, colonial courts slowly undermined these organizations. British officials frequently saw customs as contradictory, and felt they needed institutional legal supervision. The relationship between people, communities, and political authority was transformed as conflicts that used to be resolved in communities now went to the state-run courts (Mahajan, 1960).

Colonial administration established a class of judges, attorneys, and administrators. Courts symbolized colonial power because they were a means for the state to create rights, enforce contracts, and regulate social relations. Access to these institutions was also uneven because of the need for money, knowledge and colonial experience to undertake legal procedures. The legal system grew and entrenched the power of the state, and split society into the people who could use colonial law and those who could use traditional justice (Singha, 1998; Metcalf, 1994). Colonial law was used to settle disputes and to reorder social and political relations. The colonial state created new relationships of ruler and subject and new social categories in administrative, property and legal classifications. Law transformed citizenship, authority and ownership through the imposition of legal frameworks. Colonial legal systems were an amalgamation of modern jurisprudence and government control over society, and were used to serve the interests of the empire. Colonial legal and administrative structures were retained in postcolonial South Asian countries, and continued to have an effect (Sharma, 1996, pp. 297-319).

Colonial Reforms, Education and the development of modern political institutions and political elites

British Raj in South Asia brought colonial reforms, which transformed political power and facilitated the emergence of modern political institutions. British reforms initially strengthened imperial control but later led to political participation and institutional development. Legislative councils were formed under the Indian Councils Act of 1861, Morley–Minto Reforms, the Government of India Act of 1919 and the Government of India Act of 1935, which restricted the representation and consultation of the colonies

(Sharma, 1996, pp. 335-339). These institutions did not result in a true democratic administration, but they did offer a forum for the Indian elites to discuss issues, articulate political demands and acquire legislative politics skills (). So the colonial state unwittingly created political institutions which would support postcolonial government. Representative bodies transformed the relationship between the existing elites and new political parties. Initially, princes, landowners, zamindars and other elites assisted colonial authorities in keeping the political situation stable and administrative cooperation going. The power of lawyers, professionals, journalists and educated middle-class groups to engage in politics was growing with constitutional changes. The Indian National Congress (1885) and the All-India Muslim League (1906) were important forums for the emergence of new political leadership. These organizations combined public meetings and petitions, elections, and constitutional demands with social influence and elite authority. Political leadership was transferred from inherited and traditional to contemporary forms of organization, due to colonial changes.

Colonial education played a significant role in the social bases of the present-day political consciousness in South Asia. There was a new class of educated Indians, familiar with modern political concepts, legal notions, administrative practices and intellectual traditions, as a result of the introduction of Western education through institutions such as universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. The policies of the British educational system were initially developed to produce a class of intermediaries for colonial rule, but ended up producing groups that opposed colonial rule and demanded greater political rights. The educated, like lawyers, teachers, journalists, and civil servants, became influential in public life and provided leadership to the developing political movements (Stoddart, 2011, p. 20; Doyle, 2018)..

The rise of the educated middle classes led to a change in the basis of political legitimacy and authority in colonial South Asia. Political power was once based on such things as royal birth, ownership of land, military force, or social status. In colonial times, new forms of political power were found in education, career, law, and participation in public institutions. The educated elite used newspapers, associations, political groups, and legislative bodies to influence public discussions and challenge colonial policies. This new political class, however, did not completely replace the traditional elites, but instead, colonial politics created interactions and alliances between landlords, princes, professionals, and educated activists. These connections shaped the nature of political movements and helped to shape the development of the nationalist leadership.

There was also a conflict between old colonial institutions and democratic aspirations in the post-independence reconfiguration of political institutions. Colonial institutions introduced some features of modern administration and constitutional government, but this was not to encourage broad political participation. To promote citizenship, accountability, and democratic representation, postcolonial republics were required to alter institutions that were geared towards colonial rule. The continuity of colonial administrative practices and new democratic aspirations is one of the basic features of the political development of South Asia.

Institutional Analysis: Colonial Legacies and the Continuity of Political Institutions in Postcolonial South Asia

The institutional structures that have been inherited from British colonial rule are essential to understanding the political evolution in South Asia since the war. Colonial institutions such as bureaucratic structures, legal framework, administrative processes, policing systems, and representative institutions were bequeathed to newly constituted governments such as India and Pakistan when they gained independence in 1947. Colonial countries did not create new institutions, but adapted many to the new political challenges. Thelen (1999)

and Mahoney & Thelen (2010) argue that institutional research can be used to understand how the past governance patterns affected political relations, administrative practices, and state-society relations, which in turn affect how governments function today (Kaviraj, 2010; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

The colonial bureaucratic structure continued to exist, which was one of the most important institutional continuities. Many features of colonial administrative organization remained even after the Indian Civil Service was replaced by national administrative bodies such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in India and the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) in Pakistan. However, the district administration system, centralized decision-making processes and hierarchical administrative culture had an impact on governance after independence. These institutions not only preserved bureaucratic power traditions, often placing officials in a prominent position in state-society relations, but they also provided administrative capability for state-building (Stoddart, 2011, p. 20; Doyle, 2018, p. 99)..

Moreover, the institutional angle is important in understanding the political evolution in the context of route dependency. Later political decisions were impacted by the established patterns of power, expectations, and administrative procedures established by colonial institutions. For example, the Westminster model of legislative institutions, centralized administrative systems and a legal framework based on colonial rules were the foundations of postcolonial government. But the adaptation of these institutions was different in various South Asian governments due to the changes in inherited institutions made by political actors according to local conditions, constitutional arrangements and societal pressures.

Old colonial institutions and democratic aspirations were also factors in the post-independence restructuring of political institutions. Colonial institutions introduced elements of modern administration and constitutional government, but were originally for the purpose of imperial control and not for general political participation. To promote citizenship, accountability and democratic representation, postcolonial republics needed to transform institutions geared towards colonial control. A central feature of the political development in South Asia has been the persistence of colonial administrative institutions and traditions and the emergence of democratic aspirations.

Political Economy Approach: Colonial Economic Structures and Postcolonial Power Relations

Political economics analysis examines how colonial economic systems affected the power, inequality and political control in postwar South Asia. British colonial rule remodeled the nature of economic relations through land revenue, commercialization of agriculture, fiscal policies, and integration into global markets. Such changes impacted who got rich and who got power in society. Post-independence, a number of economic structures continued to influence the political dynamics, particularly through the influence of landlords, industrial groups and the bureaucracy.

Land relations is an important area where colonial economic policies had an effect on postcolonial governance. Colonial land settlements created legally recognised property rights and consolidated the power of some groups of landlords, zamindars and large landowners. In Pakistan, the prominent landholding families continued to have a strong influence in the provincial and national politics while in India land reform programmes aimed to reduce the influence of landlords, but with varying success in different regions. Rural elites and their political influence are an example of how colonial economic structures can influence post-colonial political structures. Colonial economic policies also shaped the relationship between government and people, with a centralisation of power over resources. Fiscal governance, tax structure and administration developed modalities of governmental participation in economic affairs which continued after independence. Postcolonial governments inherited economies which were unequal, with regional

disparities and dependent on agriculture (Bose & Jalal, 2011; Frankel, 2005). Thus, economic modernization and state formation became interwoven processes in the political dynamics of South Asia.

The political economy approach focuses on the effects of colonial institutions on the creation of new economic and political elites. Western education, bureaucratic jobs, business opportunities and professional careers helped to create new middle classes, which became more prominent in the postwar political arena. These factions interacted with the traditional power holders (landowners, local officials, etc.) and developed complex political alliances. Thus, the postcolonial political power came about as a result of the interaction between the legacy colonial structures, economic inequalities and changing social relations.

The Colonial Institutional Legacy, Administration and Economic Structure in Postcolonial South Asia

The institutional and economic structure inherited from British colonial rule has had a significant impact on the postcolonial development of the South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. These countries inherited many administrative institutions after independence, such as a centralized bureaucracy, district administration, a legal system, police and a fiscal framework, all geared towards colonial rule. Colonial institutions were not completely eliminated by postcolonial administrations, rather they made some changes in some organizations for the sake of nation-building and economic governance. For example, the district administration system was retained in India through the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) while in Pakistan, the colonial bureaucratic system was continued through the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and later administrative reforms. After independence in 1971, Bangladesh also inherited some administrative practices from Pakistan, which were also part of the British colonial rule. Similarly, on gaining independence in 1948, Sri Lanka retained significant elements of the British-dominated civil administration and parliamentary systems. These institutional consistencies helped to build administrative capacity and, at the same time, centralised governance structures, with bureaucracies often dominating local governance structures (Alavi, 1972; Bose & Jalal, 2011). The endurance of these institutional frameworks exemplifies the notion of route dependence, wherein historically rooted structures survive in shaping political and administrative results much beyond the dissolution of their initial colonial setting (Hay, 1988; Dirks, 2001).

Colonial economic structure had a very significant impact on the postcolonial political economies of South Asia. British rule changed the nature of agriculture through land tax systems, commercialization of agriculture and integration into world markets, leading to unequal distribution of land and wealth. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, there were large families of landowners who continued to wield considerable political influence even after independence, which reflects the colonial transformation of the zamindars and the agrarian elite into powerful political figures. Land reform measures in India aimed to reduce the influence of landlords but had varying outcomes across different states. Sri Lanka developed a plantation-based export economy based on tea, rubber, and other colonial products, while smaller countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives developed an economic system based on their historical interactions with regional and global markets, but not directly under British colonial rule. State policies, class dynamics, and political coalitions in the postcolonial period were shaped by the economic patterns that were inherited. The continued importance of agriculture, rural aristocracy, and differential regional development indicates that colonial economic structures continue to have an impact.

After independence, South Asian countries gradually shifted from a colonial economy to an economy more integrated with the global market, especially through economic liberalization, which began in the 1980s. In 1991, India's economic reforms opened up markets, encouraged foreign investment, and boosted exports

of services, particularly in information technology. Bangladesh entered into the international manufacturing system through the ready-made garment industry while Sri Lanka diversified its economy through trade and tourism. Pakistan made efforts to industrialize and to shift its focus to export-oriented growth, but continued to experience problems due to political instability and external financing. Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives have integrated into the global economy through tourism, hydropower, migration and remittances. In 2024, the overall GDP of South Asia was approximately US\$4.5 trillion, with India making the largest contribution to the region's GDP, and trade in products and services was a significant part of the economic activities in the region (Asian Statistics Portal, 2024). However, the process of assimilation into international markets is not consistent, as colonial administrative centralization, economic inequality, and dependence on foreign markets, which still determine the course of development, continue to have a strong impact. The postcolonial political economy of South Asia, therefore, is a story of adaptation and persistence, of modernization and globalization, and of governments operating in institutional and economic frameworks of the colonial era.

Institutional analysis and political economy, from a holistic perspective, demonstrate that colonial governance had an impact on South Asia in the post-colonial period not only through the administrative legacy, but also through economic reconfiguration. Colonial government created entities that influenced the organization of governments, and economic policies influenced the distribution of power among social groups. The connection between institutional stability and political-economic change helps to explain why some of the features of the modern South Asian state are colonial in nature and others postcolonial.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the conventional political structures of South Asia were greatly affected by British colonial rule, which restructured administrative, authoritative, legal, and economic structures. The main findings are that the colonial government did not simply replace native institutions, but rather changed and incorporated them into a new system of centralized state power. Conventional political actors like monarchs, zamindars, local elites and traditional authorities were reworked in colonial political arrangements. New governance structures such as district administration and the Indian Civil Service, formal legal structures and modern revenue systems were created that strengthened the authority of the colonial state. At the same time, changes in the education and representation of the colonies led to the emergence of new political elites and new forms of political activity.

The development of traditional institutions under British rule was thus a complex process, both in terms of stability and development. Colonial powers instituted bureaucratic government, codified laws, and representative institutions, but these were largely designed to maintain colonial control and not to promote democratic autonomy. The reorganization of the colonies changed the nature of political legitimacy, moving it from inherited status and traditional influence to bureaucratic status, legal recognition, schooling, and participation in modern political institutions. However, native structures and social networks remained significant as the colonial government depended heavily on working through local elites and community organizations. Colonial entities and indigenous systems of governance led to mixed political configurations that had an impact on the development of the current state systems in South Asia.

The consequences of colonial reorganization continued to influence the evolution of politics after independence. South Asian countries inherited administrative, legal, territorial governance, and economic systems that were put in place during colonial times. Although the changes have been introduced by the governments of the post-colonial era to make these institutions in line with the national goals, some features

of colonial control remained in the work of the state. An understanding of these historical continuities provides valuable insights into the formation of South Asian states, as modern political institutions reflect colonialism and postcolonial changes. This study contributes to the broader debates on state formation by providing an example of how the modern state in South Asia emerged out of a long history of state formation in which colonial institutions transformed existing power relations, and also laid the foundations of the modern state.

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