



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE

E-ISSN: 2664-603X
P-ISSN: 2664-6021
IJPSG 2021; 3(2): 26-30
www.journalofpoliticalscience.com
Received: 22-05-2021
Accepted: 24-06-2021

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Has India been neo-colonised again even after two centuries of being colonised?

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Abstract

Even after embarking on a journey of independence after being under the shackles of colonial rule for over 200 years, India today seems to be inclined towards western culture and civilisational practices more and more each day. After 75 years of independence and with a history of being one of the 5 key founders and pillars of the Non-Aligned Movement which aimed to provide the newly decolonised countries with their long-lost identity, the players of the politics have changed and so has the population. This paper has been written in an attempt to throw light on how far India has been neo-colonised after colonisation for 2 centuries and how differently India is dealing with this indirect control now.

Keywords: decolonisation, non-aligned movement, neo-colonialism, imperialism, theories of neo-colonialism

1. Introduction

“In place of colonialism, as the main instrument of imperialism, we have today neo-colonialism. [which] like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries^[1].”

Neocolonialism can be described as the subtle propagation of socio-economic and political activity by former colonial rulers aimed at reinforcing capitalism, neo-liberal globalization, and cultural subjugation of their former colonies. In a neocolonial state, the former colonial masters ensure that the newly independent colonies remain dependent on them for economic and political direction. This paper talks about how internationally neocolonialism holds the developing countries under its paws of advanced technology, development, western culture superiority, economy, global culture inclusive processes, and ways to sell it while simultaneously demeaning the culture of these developing countries. Developed countries have a way to turn things around in their favour, first, they colonised and established a direct control and now, consequently have “neo-colonised” which simply means that they have now established an indirect control through their products and so on. This paper also provides an understanding of all are the effects on the developing countries in terms of the superiority which is posed on the ethnic practices of the neo-colonised countries. It focuses on India and attempts to give explanations to the various prevalent practices and goods which neo-colonialism has provided it with and also how the occurrence of a western culture homogenisation can be prevented and how Indian culture can be preserved in the wake of newer demands and needs of the country of international goods. This paper also talks about various theories of neo-colonialism which seem to be the best way to understand why and how developing countries let their economies be controlled.

2. Historical background

Neocolonialism means the control of less-developed countries by developed countries through indirect means.

India has a history of colonisation. Before the advent of colonial rule, India was a self-sufficient and flourishing economy. Our country was popularly known as the golden eagle. India had already established itself on the world map with a decent amount of exports. Although primarily it was an agrarian economy, many manufacturing activities were budding in pre-colonial India.

Indian craftsmanship was widely popular around the world and garnered huge demands. The economy was well-known for its handicraft industries in the fields of cotton and silk textiles,

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metal and precious stone works etc. Such developments lured the British to paralyze our state and use it for their home country's benefits. The British came to India with the motive of colonization. Their plans involved using India as a feeder colony for their flourishing economy back in Britain. This exploitation continued for about two centuries, till we finally got independence on 15 August 1947. Consequently, this rendered our country's economy hollow. But gradually, as India's economy started growing again, it had to again turn to the west for its technology and fine products. And this is a simple way to introduce 'Neo-colonialism' and explain how we got neo-colonised after being colonised for about two centuries. In simple words, it is a 'new' means of colonisation of low-income countries by developed countries. The term "neo-colonialism" generally represents the actions and effects of certain remaining features of the colonial era in a given society.

Kwame Nkrumah, former president of Ghana (1960–66), coined the term, which appeared in the, and 1963 preamble of the Organisation of African Unity Charter was the title of his 1965 book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). He talked about how after colonisation, the countries had no other option other than yet again turning to the west because of the lack of all the so-called 'worldly pleasures' that the west had and that they lacked.

Post-colonial studies have shown extensively that despite achieving independence, the influences of colonialism are still very much present in the social and political realities of most former colonies. Practically, every aspect of the ex-colonized society still harbours colonial influences. *In a neo-colonial state, the former colonial masters ensure that the independent colonies remain dependent on them for economic and political direction.* The dependency and exploitation of the socio-economic and political lives of the now independent colonies are carried out for the economic, political, ideological, cultural, and military benefits of the colonial masters' home states. This is usually carried out through indirect control of the economic and political practices of the newly independent states instead of through direct military control as was the case in the colonial era. This can be further understood through the following example:

One of the most prominent examples of neo-colonialism is French influence in its former colonies in Africa following World War Two.

During the Imperial Age, much of Africa was colonized by the European powers. After World War Two, came the decolonization of the colonized African Nations, many of which were under French rule at the time. Following their decolonization, post-colonial ties remained between the nation of France and her former colonies. After all, African nations were faced with a great number of issues.

- Forcing the former colonies to pay for the infrastructure that France built during colonisation;
- Automatic confiscation of national reserves, which must be deposited into the France Central Bank;
- Right of first refusal by France on any raw or natural resource discovered in the country;
- Priority to French interests and companies in public procurement and public bidding;
- Exclusive right to supply military equipment and train the country's military officers;
- Right of France to pre-deploy troops and intervene in the country to defend its interests;

- Encouragement to make French the official language of the country and the language of education;

Now, in India, the opening of the economy of India after colonisation began in 1991. In the book, *Investment Strategies in Emerging Markets*, chapter 5 of Foreign Direct Investment in India by PL Beena, Laveesh Bhandari, Sumon Bhaumik, Subir Gokarn and Anjali Tandon tell us that for the first four decades after achieving independence from British colonial rule, the economic policies of the Indian government were characterized by planning, control and regulation. There were periodic attempts at market-oriented reform, usually following balance of payments pressures, which induced policy responses that combined exchange rate depreciation and an easing of restrictions on foreign capital inflows. However, the latter was relatively narrow in scope and had little impact on actual inflows, which remained small. Nevertheless, there were foreign shareholdings in many companies, partly as a result of their pre-independence origins. Indian trade policy before the 1990s focused on import substitution. Restrictions on imports were imposed in different forms. In concurrence to attain self-reliance, import licensing was imposed to exercise control over the importers. Further, imports were canalized, which meant that certain commodities could be imported by only one agency, which was generally a public sector company. It was a two-way relationship in India's context. In simple words:

~India wanted to stretch her legs and expand her business and grow economically as a country. It had a lot of potentials. The country's geographic location is one of prominence too, close to the markets of South East Asia, Middle East and also Europe making it a constant desirable centre of commerce and trade. The biggest advantage of investing in India for foreigners was and is the lower cost of production due to lower labour rates in the country and its projected growth, foreign investment has been made easier by the Indian Government's constantly evolving investor-friendly policies. Foreigners can directly invest in India either on their own or as a joint venture, with a few exceptions concerning investment limits and sectors. While this all seemed to favour the multinationals and foreigners, India was slowly turning things around in its favour. These surely gave a boost to the Indian economy and brought in the much needed foreign exchange, but it also helped in promoting the start-ups in the country, as new ideas were continuously coming up. In the initial years, India was simply ignoring how their economy was yet again being exploited because their economy was having newer investments and technological developments and it was in the true western sense being modernized.

3. Neocolonialism and Globalization have a very intimate relationship.

There are three ways how it functions most prominently, *hard power, structural power and soft power.*

Hard power means the relations, patterns and balances of military capability between countries. This creates a sense of domination of developed countries (colonizers) over developing (colonised) in buying military goods for their safety.

Structural power denotes how the economies of developing countries are targeted by developed countries for more of their benefit because there are abundant opportunities in the

developing countries but lack of ways to utilize them. Soft power denotes how the ethnicity and culture of a country are westernized and modernized with the advent of the introduction of the influence of western culture and the notion of it being attached with a sense of superiority.

Very simple examples can be a preference for jeans and t-shirts over kurtas and suits, preference of McDonald's over doses and other Indian foods, preference of English over our regional languages.

These show us how we are running towards being westernized yet simultaneously running away from our ethnicities and Indian identities.

4. Theories of Neo-colonialism

Theories of neo-colonisation have often found their basis in Marxist thinking. Writing in the late nineteenth century, Karl Marx argued that capitalism represented a stage in the socio-economic development of humanity. He believed that ultimately and inevitably, the capitalist system in industrially developed countries would be overthrown by a revolution of the working class; this would result in the establishment of socialist utopias. In 1916, Vladimir Lenin however, modified this thesis, claiming that the rapid expansion of European imperialism around the world in the last decade of the nineteenth century had marked the highest stage of capitalism. With the granting of independence to colonies, a theory of modernization took hold. This suggested that independent countries would begin to develop very rapidly, politically and economically, and would resemble "modern" Western countries. It soon became clear, however, that this was not happening.

4.1 Dependency theory

Dependency theory declares that by the penetration of multinational corporations, economic sanctions, partnerships, and the like, developed countries intentionally foster and enforce a culture within developing countries that is economically dependent on their own. Dependency theory contends that the weaker nation is further impoverished to the benefit of the stronger country due to the subsequent capitalist use of the weaker country's resources and labour. This practice continues because of the strong hegemony of the colonizing power. Dependency theory first gained prominence as a way to explain the underdevelopment of Latin American economies in the 1960s. It proclaims that underdevelopment persisted because highly developed countries dominated underdeveloped economies by paying low prices for agricultural products and flooding those economies with cheap manufactured goods. This resulted in a perpetually negative balance of payments that prevented underdeveloped countries from ever becoming competitive in the global marketplace.

4.2 World system theory

A concept that is similar, yet more functionalist than dependency theory is the world systems theory. This theory says that the world is divided into segments including a powerful "core", a moderate "semi-periphery", and a weak "periphery" group of nations. The three categories of nations each engage in neo-colonialism with varying degrees of success in the other two kinds of nations. Essentially, world-systems theory explains how the core can dominate and take control of the resources and labour supplied by the periphery for a profit. Just as in dependency

theory, the core benefits because of these mechanics. Dissimilar to dependency theory, however, the periphery's marginal benefits are acknowledged since they are provided with some economic gain. World-systems theory can be extended to the broader methods of neo-colonialism if we think of the cultures of the core and periphery in the same way we would otherwise think of their economies.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964)^[2] contains the first recorded use of the term neo-colonialism. The term has become an essential theme in African Philosophy, most especially in African political philosophy. In the book, Sartre argued for the immediate disengagement of France's grip upon its ex-colonies and for total emancipation from the continued influence of French policies on those colonies, particularly Algeria.

4.3 Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism

Nkrumah views neo-colonialism as a new form of subjugation of the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the Africans. He postulates that European imperialism of Africa has passed through several stages, from slavery to colonization and subsequently to neo-colonialism being the last stage of the imperialist subjugation and exploitation process. Nkrumah's (1965) classic, *Neo-colonialism. The Last Stage of Imperialism*, is an analysis of neo-colonialism about imperialism. The book emphasizes the need to recognize that colonialism had yet to be abolished in Africa. Rather, it had evolved into what he calls neo-colonialism. Nkrumah reveals the methods that the West used in its shift in tactics from colonialism to neo-colonialism. In his words: "without a qualm it dispenses with its flags, and claims that it is 'giving' independence to its former subjects, to be followed by 'aid' for their development.

Nkrumah contends that neo-colonialism is usually exercised through economic or monetary means. As part of the methods of control in a neocolonial state, the imperialist power and control over the state are gained through contributions to the cost of running the state, promotion of civil servants into positions that allow them to dictate and wield power, and through monetary control of foreign exchange by the imposition of a banking system that favours the imperial system.

Nkrumah further explains that neo-colonialism results in the exploitation of different sectors of the nation, using different forms and methods: "[t]he result of colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world" (Nkrumah 1965).

On the link between Neo-colonialism and Imperialism, Nkrumah writes that neo-colonialism is the worst and most heightened form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it ensures power without responsibility and unchecked exploitation for those who suffer it. He explains that neocolonialist exploitation is implemented in the political, religious, ideological, economic, and cultural spheres of society. He further provides details of the infiltration and manipulation of organized labour by agencies of the West in African countries. He discusses how the mass media is used as an instrument of neo-colonialism in the following statement: "while Hollywood takes care of fiction, the enormous monopoly press, together with the outflow of

slick, clever, expensive magazines attends to what it chooses to call 'news'" (Nkrumah 1965). Religion too, according to Nkrumah, is distorted and used to support the cause of neo-colonialism.

R. Hodder-Williams has written in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2001.

Political independence, however, was not matched by full local control. At the Bandung Conference of non-aligned states in April 1955, the Indonesian president, Ahmed Sukarno, claimed that colonialism 'has also its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control...by a small but alien community within a nation.'

This perspective, similar to Said's, gave birth to the idea of 'neocolonialism' and fitted well with the growing strength of Marxist scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s.

Charges of neocolonialism were not limited to the great colonial powers but were extended to any state from the rich and developed world exerting influence over the policies of poor and less developed countries. Several forms have been identified. Political, economic, and cultural forces have been said so to constrain the choices available to such countries that they are determined by the interests of the stronger states. Further, it has been argued that the rapid decolonization was a calculated policy to move from overt colonial rule to indirect control through political superiority in the international community, economic dominance, and cultural influences. While the evidence for such a conscious policy is weak, the poorer ex-colonies were undoubtedly constrained by their political, economic, and cultural inheritances. Some states responded more robustly and effectively than others to their weaknesses.

Sushma Swaraj said that Neocolonialism has permitted western countries to continue enriching themselves at the expense of developing countries in the post-WWII era. If combating neo-colonialism is going to be a dominant theme in India's foreign policy, then it would require a multi-pronged strategy. First, since some countries in Southeast Asia are still modicum experiencing state-building challenges, there is a need for a clear definition.

A clear definition will enable mapping and designing appropriate responses. Second, the imperative of equal economic outcomes should animate not just trade discussions but also various focused conversations in academia as well as other foreign policy platforms. Third, care should be anti-free institutional frameworks that should be created and fostered. It is through such a multi-pronged strategy that India will be able to create a discursive framework, in consonance with its interests, to ensure that the conversations on neo-colonialism do not act as a barrier to regional cooperation. And finally, new trade rhetoric can generate and sustain the discussion on neo-colonialism.

5. Analysis

Now let us try to understand only in the Indian context how neo-colonialism has affected India. Geographically placed, India has an upper hand when it comes to the availability of resources. I would not like to go into detail about the geographical point of view but this aspect is also one of the main reasons why there's so much foreign investment in India. But has India been forced to become a neo-colonial country? Why did it not follow the applied rules of NAM (Non-aligned movement), but those do not apply in this scenario without partaking in the process of 'isolationism' which we as a developing country cannot risk-taking.

We have seen how our handloom industries and widespread businesses were destroyed by the British colonists and how we became an importer from an exporter. But when they left, they looted and left our country hollow.

So when India opened its economy in 1991, it was eagerly waiting to fly overseas with its businesses and let the foreigners yet again inside its territory. But in the long run, yes exploitation did happen but India established itself as one of the leading countries in Asia and made a remarkable place for itself in the world economy. It also has a tremendously gigantic population, and this gives us a favourable position as well as a risky one because it is only stars and rainbows if India knows how to make its youth an asset for itself which it seems to have done. The biggest boost to start-ups has been because of neo-colonialism. This is so because foreign investors are looking and browsing for newer inventions and innovations and in return, they have also invested in the start-up market which has, in turn, made the aspiring youth work for the country. Also, Indian students are studying in some of the best universities globally and this is pretty natural to believe that education has also faced an effect of neo-colonialism. Several student exchange programmes are functioning between India and other countries. There are 100,000 Indians in Silicon Valley and NASA has a high number of Indian scientists and likewise, Indians now have businesses everywhere around the globe. But no matter how greatly neo-colonialism might have helped India, there has also been exploitation and misuse but developing countries face a dilemma. Since they are developing, they have a dependency on the developed countries for aids and resources, and that is something the latter rolls on.

But there should be a balance which should be established between how much and what is to be made open for modernization and westernization because otherwise, we might end up becoming one brown whitewashed country where all the traditions and cultures lay buried.

6. Conclusion

"If by their fruits we shall know them, they must first grow the fruits."

6.1 Disadvantageous face of neo-colonialism

Neocolonialism leaves formerly/currently colonized countries in disarray. The instruments of neocolonialism (the use of capitalism, business globalization, and cultural imperialism to control a country, through either direct military control or indirect political control are a direct cause of impoverishment across the globe. As a result of this, many nations seek help from their former colonizers, which creates a permanent dependence between (neo colonizer and the colonized. One of the many disadvantages of it is the creation of economic dependency on foreign western nations and also creates a great amount of debt on these nations to be paid off to the foreign banks. There is also a militarized face of neocolonialism which has been seen in the form of troops being sent to control oil wells in Iran. This creates a hostile environment for the foreigners which leads to communal disturbances and even violence at some sites of siege.

And the economy simply falls into the hands of the west and culture gets taken over and slowly gulped down.

6.2 The way forward

In today's time, India is slowly moving towards becoming a world-class society. Present India is splendidly different from the 90s India because of the presence of remnants of colonialism like neo-colonialism and globalization etc. The only possible way to look forward and not repeat the mistakes of the past is to not let history repeat itself. Bruisers exploited us and instilled in all of us a feeling of inferiority and for ourselves and our culture. And now India still seems to be learning to demolish the premises of these remnants but also at the same time accepting some parts of it. Like one of the examples of cultural inferiority is linked with our skin colour and how in old times, being fair was linked with being powerful and superior. And even now, being fair to girls is a sacredly important thing if they want to be seen as beautiful. The noteworthy fact is that India is a country of colour and being fair is not natural or normal, it is sometimes hereditary and that is it. There are so many other examples that find a place even in contemporary India which shows that they have trickled down the memory lane and have the power to still establish themselves in modern India. Another important issue is that the services and goods that neo-colonialism brings with themselves are not affordable by the people at the lower edge of the society, like the daily-wage workers and small farmers etc. But at the same time, their condition has become a little better because of neo-colonialism too. Surely the exploitation continues but they have access to some of the international services like the internet, which helps them quite a lot. And change is coming but extremely slowly and to hasten this India needs to start with the practice of embracing our own identities and cultures which will, in turn, create a balance between the acceptance of western culture and embracing and prioritizing their own culture.

This is simply and holistically how the effects of neo-colonialism can be restricted only with accepting goods and practices to an extent that does not let India become a part of western culture homogenisation.

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