



## COLONIAL STATE

When Britain assumed the sovereignty of India i.e. the supreme power, the imperial-colonial relationship had to be established through or explanation of British rule over India proving the local Indian rules as incompetent or backward in order to curb their legal authority. The political authority of the colonial state gathered upon many instruments for preserving and enforcing its power which was a pre-condition for the formulation of the colonial policy. It is important to know that how the rule over people was legitimized and how was the power of the colonial state made visible to the common people subjected to foreign rule.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you would be able to:

- understand the meaning and nature of the colonial state;
- recall the colonial objectives in India;
- identify the instruments of colonial control and
- explore the symbols and effects of the colonial rule

### 32.1 THE BACKGROUND

The Mughal Empire declined in the first half of the eighteenth century. The political vacuum was filled by the rise of regional states like Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, Punjab and Maratha Kingdom. But these regional powers could not provide political stability resulting into a shameless chance for the British East India Company to establish a territorial empire in India. Now a set of institutions and regulations were required to govern India through colonial machinery.

#### (i) Meaning of Colonial State

Prior to the British conquest, relations between regional people and the sovereign power had never been defined wholly by religion. A web of economic and social relationship had survived periods of imperial consolidation, crisis and collapse, to bind the subcontinent into a loosely layered framework of interdependence. Despite a long history of creatively accommodating multiple levels of supreme powers, the renegotiation of the terms for sharing power in an independent India saw the special opportunity of a rigid and massive conception of territorial sovereignty based on a



singular and gathering together idea of the 'nation'. The colonial state means the assumption of sovereignty (legally independent power to govern and control) of a country by a foreign political entity. The colonial state has to design a theory of sovereignty in the special context of the imperial-colonial relationship. This is done through a two way process (1) process of legitimization of the colonial state i.e. justification of the legal existence of a foreign entity, which automatically leads to the second process i.e. (2) the subversion of delegitimization of pre-colonial indigenous political authority.

### (ii) Nature of Colonial State

The British consolidated their Colonial regime in India according to their ideas of what a colonial state could be and a modern state with some modern characteristics emerged. As in a modern state, the colonial government had a monopoly of force, a centralized administration for tax – collection, a centralized legal system, a professional staff of administrators and bureaucrats, and clearly defined territorial boundaries. British colonial administrators aimed for a rule based on law, administered according to regulations. At the lowest levels, however, where policy implementation took place, the ties of caste, clan and kinship and patron-client relations played major roles in how the colonial state affected local society. After Independence in 1947, the new nation built its government on institutions inherited from the colonial, with all of their strengths and their weaknesses.

### (iii) Colonial Objectives in India

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a British royal or imperial ideology emerged in which the British, as the wealthiest and most progressive nation in the world, had a duty to help rest of the world to prosper and improve. The rule of law would create the conditions for civilized living and the creation of wealth. In India the governing ideology was:

1. Indians were not capable of governing themselves.
2. Britain had the duty to supply good government which would be based on the rule of law, without interfering in or attempting to manage Indian economy and society.

The main responsibilities of imperial government were seen as:

- a) Collecting land revenue and
- b) Execution of legal administration.

The type of revenue settlement which the East India Company made, varied according to the prevailing ideology of how to create wealth in India, according to the Company's security needs and according to experience which the Company gained as new areas came under its control.

The colonial state was working with two aims (1) the complete subordination of the Indian colony to needs of British metropolis and (2) economic exploitation of the Indian colony or the appropriation of the colonies economic surplus by the British metropolis. But the nature of the imperial interests in Indian did not remain the same through-out and it changed according to the requirements of the Mother country and in interest of the different social group in Britain. During the first stage of British rule in India till 1813, British interests lay mainly in (i) the East India Company's monopoly of trade with India, and the elimination of other European competitors, (ii) the control over financial resources, through taxation.

Both these objectives could be fulfilled without having to disturb the existing institutions and administrative apparatus. British rulers at this stage were not very different from that of traditional rulers, interested mainly in receiving agricultural surplus.

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No attempt was, therefore, made to create a uniform administrative structure or even to renovate the old one at this stage. No basic changes were introduced in the judicial system and administration. Whatever little changes were made in the field of administration were only made at the top of the revenue collection and were linked to the objective of smooth revenue collection. A modern judicial system or uniform administrative structure for India was not seen as necessary at this stage, since it was not considered relevant for the fulfillment of British objective during the first stage of British rule in India.

This scenario changed considerably after 1813. The British economy and society were going through a major transformation, caused mainly by the Industrial revolution. The commercial trading corporations were now giving way to industrial ownership which had become the dominant force in the British society. The East India Company was gradually losing its monopoly over Indian trade. The British interests in India no longer represented the interests of the Company but of the industrial capitalist class. The interest of the British industrialists lay in using India as (a) a market for their manufactured industrial goods, (b) a source of raw material like (jute, cotton etc.) for their industries and food grains, opium etc. for export.

All this required much greater penetration into the India economy and society and control over India trade not only with British but with other countries also. India was now expected to play a new role. It was perhaps not possible to perform the new role with the traditional administrative institutions. They had to be changed and transformed to suit the new requirements. Thus started the process of transforming Indian administration. Similarly, the entire legal structure had to be overhauled to promote modern business, create a market economy, free commercial relations and to regulate the various economic transactions smoothly with the help of modern laws.

British interests were of several kinds. At first the main purpose was to achieve a monopolistic trading position. Later, it was felt that a regime of free trade would make India a major market for British goods and a source of raw materials, but British capitalists who invest in India, or who sold banking or shipping service there, continued effectively to enjoy controlling or dominating privileges. India also provided interesting and lucrative employment for a sizeable portion of the British upper middle class, and the remittances they sent home made an appreciable contribution to Britain's balance of payment and capacity to save. Finally, control of India was a key element in the world power structure, in terms of geography, logistics and military manpower. The British were not averse to India economic development if it increased their markets but refused to help in areas where they felt there was conflict with their own economic interests or political security. Hence, they refused to give protection to the Indian textile industry until its main competitor became Japan rather than Manchester, and they did almost nothing to further technical education. They introduced some British concepts of property, but did not push them too far when they met interests.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 32.1**

Fill in the blanks:

1. The Mughal Empire declined in the first half of the \_\_\_\_\_ century.
2. During the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of British rule in India till \_\_\_\_\_ British interests lay mainly in the East India Company's monopoly of trade with India.



3. The British economy and society were going through a major transformation, caused mainly by the \_\_\_\_\_ revolution.
4. The interests of the British industrialist lay in using India as a market for their \_\_\_\_\_ goods.



*Fig. 32.1 Writers Building*

**32.2 FORMS OF LEGITIMACY**

As you know, immediately before the British rule the Indian sovereignty was lying with the Mughal dynasty. Till the early nineteenth century the British did not interfere with the symbols of kingship of the Mughal dynasty. By 1835 Persian remained the official language and name of the Mughal emperors kept on appearing on coins. The highest gun salute was reserved for the Mughal dynasty only till 1837. Withdrawal of these symbols of sovereignty was a symbolic act on the part of the British East India Company signifying that it had captured the sovereignty of India. The Prior Presence of the British in the presidency capitals and then in chosen inland locations, meant that the institutions which were to be the shorthand symbols of the empire would also be built in this order. Thus the island of Mumbai and some villages of the Hooghly delta became the grand capitals of the company’s Bombay Presidency, and then the Indian empire. The advanced, sophisticated heartland of the Mughal Empire became the provincial interior. The re-inscription of centre and periphery was done with the tools of a new architecture. New institutions marked a new power. Buildings were the most corporeal or physical, material, and impressive forms of the new institutions. What was visible in the capital city, say, in Bombay, was exactly what the provincial town lacked in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Company (itself a servant of British crown, running its affair through an Imperial charter) wanted to make the Indian emperor a subordinate. The terminology of sub-

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ordination included 'paramountcy', 'Protection', 'subsidiary alliance', 'indirect rule', 'collaboration', drawn mainly from British experience in India. By the beginning of the nineteenth century 'protection' arrangements were established through a series of treaties between the Company and various Indian Princely States. Governor General Lord Wellesely prepared a system which came to be known as Subsidiary Alliance System. This system enlisted in quick succession Hyderabad (1798), the Maratha Peshwa (1802), the Bhonsle of Nagpur the Scindia of Gualior (1803), Jaipur (1803), the Gaekwads of Baroda (1805), Travancore (1805), Cochin (1807), Kota (1817), Jodhpur (1818), Bikaner (1828). The essence of the system was the assurance of the British protection which the native state paid for by or more of the following means (a) cost of maintaining a contingent of Company's troop in cash, (b) cession of the part of the state's territory to the Company, (c) partial or complete demilitarization i.e. doing away with armed force of the state, (d) restriction on relation with other political powers and warfare without the Company's approval, (e) acceptance of the Company's Resident at the court to offer advice and instructions.

Once the subjection was achieved through coercion, state practices had to be made visible to all the subjects. The practices adopted for visibility of the colonial state were like the trial of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in his own palace in 1858 or the Delhi Durbar of 1877 when Indian subordination to the British sovereign was publicly enacted. The symbolic cultural construction of the colonial state for the common masses was done through the remote agencies of the state and everyday experiences- the daroga and constabulary; the patel, the amin, the patwari and the quanungo, in the Collector's cutchery; the new court of law where unknown people wearing black gowns, speaking an unknown language (English) taking decisions in favour of the powerful, the massive colonial monuments making colonial power visible in the cities, the occasional sights of soldiers coming out of the cantonments on flag march and ultimately the sight of the native social superior bowing and bending to members of the white race were few symbols making images of the colonial rule in the Indian mindset.

**32.3 BEGINNING OF THE COLONIAL CONTROL**

During the Initial phase of colonial control, indigenous civil administrator was continued with. This arrangement worked reasonably well before the conquest of Bengal, but was inefficient as a way of remunerating the officials of a substantial territorial Empire because (a) too much of the profit went into private hands rather than the Company's coffers, and (b) an over greedy short-term policy was damaging to the productive capacity of the economy and likely to drive the local population to revolt, both of which were against the Company's longer-term interests. Clive had operated a 'dual' system, i.e. Company power and a puppet Nawab. Warren Hastings displaced the Nawab and took over direct administration, but retained Indian officials.

**32.4 BELIEF IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGUES OF COLONIALISM**

There was a strong streak of Benthamite radicalism in the East India Company administration. James Mill became a senior company official in 1819 after writing a monumental history of India which showed a strong contempt for Indian institutions. From 1831 to 1836 he was the Chief Executive Officer of the East India Company and his son John Stuart Mill worked for the Company from 1823 to 1858. Malthus was professor of economics at Haileybury, and the teaching there for future company officials was strongly influenced by Utilitarianism. Bentham himself was also



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consulted on the reform of Indian institutions. The Utilitarians deliberately used India to try out experiments and ideas (e.g. competitive entry for the civil service) which they would have liked to apply in England. The Utilitarians were strong supporters of laissez-faire and hated any kind of state interference to promote economic development. Thus, they tended to rely on market forces to deal with famine problems, they did nothing to stimulate agriculture or protect industry. This laissez-faire tradition was more deeply embedded in the Indian civil service than in the England itself, and persisted very strongly until the late 1920s. The administration was efficient and non corrupt, but the state apparatus was of a watchdog character with few development spending was for the military, justice, police and jails, and less than 3 per cent for agriculture. One of the most significant things the British did to Westernize India was to introduce a modified version of English education. Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education had a decisive impact on British educational policy and is a classic example of a Western rationalist approach to Indian civilization. Before the British took over, the Court language of the Mughals was Persian and the Muslim population used Urdu, a mixture of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit. Higher education was largely religious and stressed knowledge of Arabic and Sanskrit. The Company had given some financial support to a Calcutta Madrassa (1718) and a Sanskrit college at Benares (1792), Warren Hastings, as governor general from 1782 to 1795 had himself learned Sanskrit and Persian, and several other Company officials were oriental scholars. One of them, Sir William Jones, had translated a great mass of Sanskrit literature and had founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1785.

But Macaulay was strongly opposed to this orientalism, "I believe that the present system tends, not to accelerate the progress of truth, but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are less value than the paper in which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology ... But I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic ... But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value ... Who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabic ... all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England".

For these reasons Macaulay had no hesitation in deciding in favour of English education, but it was not to be for the masses, "It is impossible for us, with our limited means to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in mind. To that class we may leave it to refine the local dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western name, and to render them by degrees, fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population".



## INTEXT QUESTIONS 32.2

Tick out ( ) whichever is correct:

1. By \_\_\_\_\_ Persian remained the official symbol of the Mughal dynasty. (1831, 1833, 1835)

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2. What was visible in the capital city, say, in Bombay was exactly what the provincial town lacked in the second half of the \_\_\_\_\_ century. (17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>)
3. James Mill became a senior Company official in \_\_\_\_\_ after writing a monumental history of India (1719, 1819, 1919)
4. Sir William Jones, had translated a great mass of Sanskrit literature and had founded the Asiatic society in \_\_\_\_\_ (1785, 1835, 1885)

**32.5 THE COLONIAL APPARATUS**

In 1785, Cornwallis created a professional cadre of Company servants who had generous salaries, had no private trading or production interests in India, enjoyed the prospect of regular promotion and were entitled to pensions. All high-level posts were reserved for the British, and Indians were excluded. Cornwallis appointed British judges, and established British officials as revenue collectors and magistrates in each district of Bengal. From 1806 the Company trained its young recruits in Haileybury College near London. Appointments were still organized on a system of patronage, but after 1833 the Company selected amongst its nominated candidates by competitive examination. After 1853, selection was entirely on merit and the examination was thrown open to any British candidate. The examination system was influenced by the Chinese model, which had worked well for 2,000 years and had a similar emphasis on classical learning and literary competence. The Indian civil service (i) was very highly paid; (ii) it enjoyed political power which no bureaucrat could have had in England.

In 1829 the system was strengthened by establishing districts throughout British India small enough to be effectively controlled by an individual British official who henceforth exercised a completely autocratic power, acting as revenue collector, judge and chief of police (functions which had been separate under the Mughal administration). This arrangement later became the cornerstone of imperial administration throughout the British Empire. As the civil service was ultimately subject to the control of the British parliament, and the British community in India was subject to close mutual surveillance, the administration was virtually incorruptible.



*Fig. 32.2 steam Engine*

The army of the Company was a local mercenary force with 20,000- 30,000 British officers and troops. It was by far the most modern and efficient army in Asia. After the Mutiny in 1857, the size of the British contingent was raised to a third of the total



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strength and all officers were British until the 1920s when a very small number of Indians were recruited. Normally, the total strength of the army was about 200,000. This army was very much smaller than those of Mughal India, but had better training and equipment, and the railway network (which was constructed partly for military reasons) gave it greater mobility, better logistics and intelligence.

The higher ranks of the administration remained almost entirely British until the 1920s when the Indian Civil Services Examinations began to be held in India as well as England. In addition, there was a whole hierarchy of separate bureaucracies in which the higher ranks were British, i.e. the revenue, justice, police, education, medical, public works, engineering, postal and railway services as well as provincial civil services. India thus offered highly-paid careers to an appreciable portion of the British middle and upper classes (particularly for its peripheral members from Scotland and Ireland).

From the 1820s to the 1850s the British demonstrated a strong urge to change Indian social institutions, and to westernize India. They stamped out infant killing and ritual burning of widows (sati). They abolished slavery and eliminated dacoits (religious thugs) from the highways. They legalized the remarriage of widows and allowed Hindu converts to Christianity to lay claim to their share of joint family property. They took steps to introduce a penal code (the code was actually introduced in 1861) based in British law, which helped inculcate some ideas of equality. Under the new law, Brahmin and Sudra were liable to the same punishment for the same offence. Thus rule of law and equality before law were the new norms.

Until 1857 it was possible to entertain the view that the British may eventually destroy traditional Indian society and westernize the country. But activist Westernizing policies and the attempt to extend British rule by taking over native states rulers had left no heirs provokes sections of both the Hindu and Muslim communities into rebellion in the Mutiny of 1857. Although the Mutiny was successfully put down with substantial help from loyal Indian troops including the recently conquered Sikhs, British policy towards Indian institutions and society became much more conservative. The Crown took over direct responsibility and the East India Company was disbanded. The Indian Civil Service attracted fewer people with innovating ideas than had the East India Company and was more closely controlled from London.

The British forged an alliance with the remaining native princes and stopped taking over new territory. Until the end of their rule about a quarter of the Indian population remained in quasi autonomous native states. These had official British residents but were fairly free in internal policy, and the effort of westernization came to a standstill.

The education system which developed was a very pale reflection of that in the United Kingdom. Three universities were set up in 1857 in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, but they were merely examining bodies and did no teaching. Higher education was carried out in affiliated colleges which gave a two-year B.A. course with heavy emphasis on rote learning and examinations. Drop-out ratios were always very high. They did little to promote analytic capacity or independent thinking and produced a group of graduates with a half-baked knowledge of English, but sufficiently westernized to be alienated from their own culture. It was not until the 1920s that Indian universities provided teaching facilities and then only for M.A. student. Furthermore, Indian education was of a predominantly literacy character and the provision for technical training was much less than in any European country. Education for



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girls was almost totally ignored throughout the nineteenth century. Because higher education was in English, there was no official effort to translate western literature into the local nor was there any standardization of Indian scripts whose variety is a major barrier to multi-lingualism amongst educated Indians.

Primary education was not taken very seriously as government obligation and was financed largely by the weak local authorities. As a result, the great mass of the population had no access to education and, at independence in 1947, 88 per cent were illiterate. Progress was accelerated from the 1930s onwards, but at independence only a fifth of children were receiving any primary schooling. Education could have played a major role in encouraging social mobility, eliminating religious superstition, increasing productivity, and uplifting the status of women. In stead it was used to turn tiny elite into imitation Englishmen and somewhat bigger group into government clerks.

**32.6 CHANGES UNDER COLONIAL STATE**

The main changes which the British made in Indian society were at the top. They replaced the wasteful warlord nobility by a bureaucratic-military establishment, carefully designed by practical technocrats, which was very efficient in maintaining law and order. The greater efficiency of government permitted a great reduction in the fiscal burden, and a biggest share of the national product was available for landlords, capitalists and the new professional classes. Some of this upper class income was sent off to the United Kingdom, but the bulk was spent in India. However, the pattern of consumption changed as the new upper class no longer kept harems and palaces, nor did they wear fine muslins and well decorated swords. This caused some painful readjustments in the traditional handicraft sector. Government itself carried out productive investment in railways and irrigation and as a result there was a growth in both agricultural and industrial output. The new elite established a western life-style using the English language and English schools. New towns and urban amenities were created with segregated suburbs and housing for them. Their habits were copied by the new professional elite of lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists and businessmen. Within this group, old caste barriers were eased and social mobility increased. As far as the mass of the population were concerned, colonial rule brought few significant changes. The British educational effort was very limited. There were no major changes in village society, in the caste system, the position of untouchables, the joint family system, or in the production techniques in agriculture. British impact on economic and social development was, therefore, limited. Total output and population increased substantially but the gain in per capita output was small or negligible.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 32.3**

Fill in the Blanks:

1. All high level posts were reserved for the British and Indians were \_\_\_\_\_.
2. As the civil service was ultimately subject to the control of the British \_\_\_\_\_, and the British community in India was subject to close mutual surveillance, the administration was \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The British army was very much \_\_\_\_\_ than those of Mughal India, but had better training and \_\_\_\_\_.



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4. The \_\_\_\_\_ took over direct responsibility and the East India Company was \_\_\_\_\_.

The British state in India developed its own ethos. The British did not intermarry or eat with the lower (native) classes. The state was maintained not just through the conquests and alliances but also through the development of new institutions which symbolically made the sahibs distinct from the natives. The small creole class of Anglo-Indian were outcasts unable to integrate into Indian or local British society. The British kept to their clubs and bungalows in special suburbs known as cantonments and civil lines. They maintained the Mughal tradition of official pomp, large residences, and a large number of servants. The elite with its classical education and contempt for business were quite happy establishing law order, and keeping 'barbarians' at bay on the frontier of the raj. They developed their own brand of self-righteous arrogance, considering themselves suppliers not of popular but of good government. For them the word 'British' lost its geographic association and became a nickname signifying moral decency to govern the colony of India.



## WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

The Mughal Empire declined in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the eighteenth Century. The British efforts, through the East India Company to establish a territorial empire in India. The colonial state means the assumption of sovereignty of a country by regime in India according to their ideas of what a colonial state could be. In a modern state, the colonial governments had a monopoly of force, a central administrative and clearly defined territorial boundaries.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British royal or imperial ideology emerged in which the British, as the wealthiest and progressive nation in the world, had a duty to help the rest of the world to prosper and improve. The main responsibilities of imperial government were run as collecting level revenue and execution of legal administration.

Once the subjection was achieved through coercion, state practices had to be made visible to all the subjects. During the initial phase of colonial control, indigenous civil administration was continued with.

In 1785, Cornwallis created a professional code of Company servants. All high level posts were reserved for the British and Indians were excluded. The army of the Company was local mercenary force with 20,00-30,000 British officers and troops

The high rank of the administration remained almost entirely British until the 1920s when the India Civil Service Examinations a strong age to change Indian social institutions and to westernize India. They stopped import killing, ritual burning of widows (sati), legalized the remarriage of widows and allowed Hindu converts to Christianity. Besides three universities were set up in 1857 in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay.

The British kept to their clubs and bungalows in special suburbs known as cantonments and civil lines. However, there were no major changes in village society, in caste system, the position of untouchables, the joint family system or in the production techniques in agriculture.

**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the meaning and nature of the colonial state.
2. What was the ideology and ideologue of colonialism?
3. Highlight the Colonial Appartus.
4. Mention the changes under Colonial state.

**ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****32.1**

1. Eighteenth
2. 1813
3. Industrial
4. Manufactured

**32.2**

1. 1835
2. 19<sup>th</sup>
3. 1819
4. 1785

**32.3**

1. Excluded
2. Parliament, non corrupt
3. Smaller, equipment
4. Crown, disbanded

**HINTS FOR TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. See Para 32.1
2. See Para 32.4
3. See Para 32.5
4. See Para 32.6

**Notes**