
UNIT 8 DYNAMICS OF STATE FORMATION IN COLONIAL ERA

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to familiarise you with the reasons underlying the establishment of the Colonial State in countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, its various forms, nature and functions.

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- trace when and how the colonial state was established;
- explain the nature and functions of the colonial state; and
- recall different colonial models.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The colonial state was the structure of governance established by Europeans who conquered large parts of the non-European world between the fifteenth and nineteenth century. It was meant to uphold the economic and political interests of the colonial power and subordinate those of the natives if necessary with the use of force. Different European Powers followed different ways in the formation of their colonies. The methods adopted by the British, French, Portuguese and the Belgians were not the same. They followed different approaches and set up different colonial models. The colonial states had specific features, and performed functions that were detrimental to peoples of the colonies. In this unit you will read about different models of colonial state.

8.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLONIAL STATE

Modern colonialism has been through a number of phases beginning with the 15th century onwards. The establishment of formal colonies and of the colonial state took place much later in the 19th century and is the product of historical

development of a world capitalist system. In the fifteenth century long oceanic voyages became possible due to invention of better ships. This prompted leading European countries such as Portugal and Spain and later Britain and France to conquer new lands in Asia, Africa and America. This was an early period of conquest, plunder, looting and piracy to amass wealth and led to redistribution of surplus wealth to the advantage of the Europeans, but was not a period in which formal colonies were formed. This surplus in the long run gained from the silver mines of Latin America, spice trade in the Far East, and the slave trade in Africa, was to play a role in financing the industrial revolution. This stage was followed by a second in which trade and mercantile interests, rather than simple conquest and rivalry between European countries to protect their interests in different parts of the world became important. A good example is the rivalry between the French and the British on the Indian subcontinent in which the British eventually ousted the French and established their own colonial state in India.

8.2.1 Onset of the Industrial Revolution

It was the onset of the Industrial Revolution in mid eighteenth century in Britain and a little later on the European continent, which changed the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world and made the establishment of a colonial state a necessity to look after the interests of the industrialised European states. The rapidly industrialising countries of Europe required large quantities of raw materials such as cotton, rubber, palm oil, etc. to produce machine-made goods. These were available or could be grown in large plantations in the colonies most of which fell in the tropical areas of the world. This led to rivalry among the Europeans for control over the colonial areas. By the early nineteenth century the rising industrial bourgeoisie also felt the need for external markets as well, where these goods could be sold. Their home markets had already been covered and it was essential to find an outlet if the rate of profit from machine manufacture was to be maintained. Hence it was now necessary to have "captive markets" i.e. markets under their tight control of the European Powers, where they could sell their goods without facing competition from similar goods produced by other European powers. A third factor was the need to invest the surplus capital that was being generated in the capitalist system of production. It was felt that investment in captive colonies would lead to high profit as monopoly methods could be employed. Although the major impulses were definitely economic, an important supporting political factor was the rise of nationalism and a spirit of competition in Europe following the unification of both Germany and Italy and especially after Germany's defeat of France in 1871. This led to the various European powers carving out clear-cut geographical areas of control between themselves in Asia and Africa and establishing direct control through formal structures of political domination, namely the colonial state. These colonial states then became part of the empires built by the European nations, as for example, India was made a part of British Empire.

8.2.2 Colonial State in Asia

The actual establishment of the colonial state is different in the various parts of the globe, and it is necessary to take a look at how this happened. In Asia large areas were already under the control of various private trading companies such as the East India Company in India, and the Dutch of the Netherlands in South-East Asia which had a charter from their respective Sovereigns and enjoyed a monopoly in trade. Hence in areas such as India the shift from rule by the East India Company to that of the British Crown in 1858, i.e. establishment of formal empire did not entail much change. The actual demarcation of the area of geographical control under the British on the Indian sub-continent had already

been settled during the wars with the French and with the native Indian states who accepted the suzerainty of the Company during the eighteen and early nineteen centuries. The wars in the Carnatic and the battle of Plassey provide good examples. In Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka) the British had managed to replace the Dutch in 1795 itself and the same is true of areas such as Malaya, where the British had managed to displace the Portuguese. In these areas the establishment of the colonial state, began much earlier than in Africa.

8.2.3 Colonialism in and Scramble for Africa

The story is very different in Africa. Colonialism came late to this continent and was more oppressive. Within the short period between 1880 and 1900 all of Africa, except Liberia and Ethiopia, was divided between and occupied by the European imperial powers namely, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Italy. It has been described as the "partition" of Africa or "scramble" by the European powers to occupy their areas of influence and trade. By 1910, in place of numerous independent states a completely new and numerically smaller set of some forty artificially created colonies had emerged, and the colonial system had been firmly imposed upon Africa. In 1879 the French sent missions to push French imperial interests inland into Upper Senegal, and the Belgians attempted to intrude into the Congo Basin. The Germans also planted their flag in Togo and the Cameroon in 1884. This alarmed the British who also began preparations to move into the interior of Africa. It was with a view to avoid any armed confrontation among the imperial powers that an international conference was held in Berlin under the chairmanship of Bismarck, the Chancellor of Germany. This Berlin conference was attended by every west European nation except Switzerland, but not by even a single African state, and it lasted from 15th November 1884 to 31st January 1885. Four main rules were agreed upon by all the powers. First, before any power claimed an area, it should inform the other signatory powers so that any that deemed it necessary could make a counterclaim. Second, that all such claims should be followed by annexation and effective occupation before they could be accepted as valid. Third, that treaties signed with African rulers were to be considered as legitimate titles to sovereignty. Fourth, that each power could extend its coastal possessions inland to some extent and claim spheres of influence. These rules were embodied in the Berlin Act ratified on 26 February 1885. It must be clarified that the Berlin conference did not start but merely accelerated race for empire building that was already in progress.

The scramble was carried out in three stages. The first stage was the conclusion of a treaty between an African ruler and a European power under which the former was usually accorded protection and undertook not to enter into any treaty relation with any other European power, while the latter was granted certain exclusive trading and other rights. Thus between 1880 and 1895 the British concluded treaties with many rulers for example northern Ghana, Yorubaland, Benin and offered protection to the King of Asante, and the French with the king of Dahomey, and rulers of the Congo basin. The second stage was a series of treaties between the imperial powers themselves recognising and delimiting their spheres of interests and boundaries. Thus the Anglo-German treaty recognised British claims to Zanzibar, Kenya, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, and eastern Nigeria; the Anglo-French treaty of the same year recognised French claims to Madagascar and the western boundary of Nigeria; the Franco-Portuguese treaty of 1886 and the German-Portuguese treaty of 1891 accepted Portugal's supremacy in Angola and Mozambique and delimited Britain's sphere in central Africa. These treaties, it should be emphasised, were concluded without any consultation with any African state. The third stage was that of conquest and occupation. Though termed by the Europeans as "pacification" it was the most

brutal of all from the Afrocentric viewpoint. Thus from 1885 the French began their invasions and occupation in western Sudan, the British occupied Asante in 1896, Ijebu in 1892, Benin in 1897 and Sudan between 1896 and 1899 and the Germans occupied East Africa between 1888 and 1907. The African rulers welcomed the treaties, which the European powers signed with them but resisted the actual occupation, which they had not anticipated. They used three methods: submission, alliance and confrontation. The third was not rare and all African states did resort to it when the other alternatives failed. No African State was economically or militarily powerful enough to resist the Europeans, the exception being Ethiopia who defeated Italy late in nineteenth century. But, even their defeat was merely a matter of time. It was only after this that the colonial state was established in Africa.

8.2.4 Colonial State in Latin America

The Latin American experience is totally different to that of Asia and Africa and needs separate mention. The colonial period on this continent lasted from about the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, though Spain and Portugal the two major powers began to take active interest and established a formal colonial state only in the seventeenth century. The Spanish and Portuguese adventurer-conquerors took this region by force, killing a large number of the local inhabitants or reducing them to slaves on plantations and mines. A large number of slaves were also transported here from Africa.

In contrast to Asia and Africa, large number of people from Spain and Portugal and also Italy settled permanently in these countries as a result of which they have a large European and a mixed population. Some like Argentina, due to immigration is almost ninety nine per cent white. While the Portuguese occupied Brazil, the rest of the continent came under Spain. Since this took place long before the Industrial Revolution, establishment of agricultural estates (called latifundia in Latin America) and opening of mines was the major activity and these areas supplied the home countries with raw materials. As a result export-led growth based upon primary goods became firmly established in the colonial period.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Identify the factors that led to the establishment of colonial state.

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2) How did Asian countries come under the European rule?

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- 3) Trace briefly the scramble for Africa.

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- 4) Mention four decisions of Berlin Act of 1885.

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8.3 THE FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COLONIAL STATE

The colonial state had certain features that distinguish it from the state in Europe and the post-colonial state in the developing countries. Firstly, it was an instrument of control and oppression over the local inhabitants. To this end it established strong bureaucracies, police and military forces to maintain order. Hence unlike Europe it was an authoritarian and not a liberal democratic state. Highly centralised and modern systems of administration were established. Secondly, it was expected to uphold the economic and political interests of the European colonial rulers and their home country and not that of the local inhabitants. Thirdly, the colonial rulers also believed that they had a "civilising mission" to perform and attempted to transplant their culture and values in the colonies. They hence saw colonialism as a "white man's burden".

The role played by the colonial state can be best understood if divided into two major phases that are common for all colonies due to changes taking place in the world economy. These are: (1) An early phase of consolidation from mid nineteenth century to 1920 (1880s in the case of Africa); and 2) A second phase from the end of the First World War to de-colonisation after the Second World War, which saw the gradual decline of colonialism. The first phase saw the establishment of a strong colonial state and policies supportive of the interests of the rulers. It has been described as the "golden period of colonialism" because the demand as well as the price of raw materials remained high throughout, as many countries in Europe one after the other began to industrialise. As the colonies produced these required materials, in many there was a "sharing of gains" i.e., the natives also profited though this was limited to a small class which owned land or was involved in production or marketing of these goods. For example farmers producing cotton and sugarcane in India, cocoa in Ghana, groundnuts in the Ivory Coast or coffee in the neo-colony of Brazil, or rice in Indonesia etc., which were cash crops grown mainly for export and fetched high prices in the international economy.

To obtain these profits the colonial state erected new legal and land systems to maintain order and obtain revenue, the Zamindari and Ryotwari land systems established in India are a good example. The colonial state invested in railways, ports, roads, harbours etc., to open up the colonies in order to gain greater profits. There was monetisation of the economy and an attempt was made to create a labour class that would work in the plantations and mines. This was done by means of policies such as the "hut tax" imposed upon every person in parts of Africa, and the requirement to pay land revenue in cash in India, which forced

the natives to work for cash wages. These changes were needed to integrate the colonial system into the international economy and the capitalist structure of the colonial rulers.

8.3.1 Retardation of Development

Scholars such as A.G. Frank and Amiya Kumar Bagchi have argued that the economic policies followed by the colonial state, created underdevelopment and retardation of the colonial economies. The former means that the colonies were reduced to being merely exporters of primary raw materials feeding the rapidly expanding industries of Europe; the latter viewpoint argues, that the normal pattern of growth of these colonies was disrupted and progress prevented by the intrusion of the colonial state which implemented policies favouring the home country. For example, the infrastructure introduced was both inadequate and very unevenly distributed in the colonies. The railways and roads were meant to facilitate transport of raw material for export to the coast and not to link up and promote development of all parts of the economy. Similarly there was a shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture to produce items needed for export. As a result monoculture i.e., cultivation of a single crop for export and economic dependency on it arose which continued into the post-colonial period, for example cocoa in Ghana, cotton in Uganda etc. Thus a model of export-led growth which, catered to the needs of the international and not the national economy became the pattern and there was little attempt to introduce diversification of the economy. The outcome has everywhere been uneven regional economic growth, which has been a major stumbling block to nation building in the post-colonial era.

The colonial system also led to delay of industrial and technological developments as the colonial rulers did not want any form of competition with finished goods produced by the home country. This led in some colonies to "de-industrialisation" i.e. local industry was killed due to the lower prices of machine produced goods from Europe. Protection was also given to home industry by not granting permission for setting up local industry. However the impact of colonialism was a mixed one and a number of benefits must be mentioned. The European powers introduced western education in their colonies, though this was initially meant to produce an educated class to assist in the governance of the colony. Urbanisation, transport and communications, irrigation works, modern technology, employment opportunities, social reforms, the gradual introduction of self-government in many colonies and development of a small middle class are some of the other benefits. Some of these measures, like promotion of technology, were taken in a very limited way.

8.3.2 Decline of Colonialism

Colonialism reached its highest point before World War I and then began to decline due to changes in the international economy, rejection of colonialism in Europe and emergence of national movements in the colonies demanding independence. After the First World War the demand and price of raw materials fell and colonialism was no longer a profitable venture and there was little further investment in the colonies. The economic depression of the 1930s and the Second World War, further weakened the imperial powers. During this second phase there was merely an attempt by the colonial state to maintain the system as it worked and finally to find a way to transfer power into native hands.

Although all the Latin American states attained independence in the early nineteenth century, they share many of the experiences. This is because at independence, many of them became neo-colonies of Britain upto at least the First World War, and the policies adopted by the newly established post-colonial

states were beneficial to it. An authoritarian state was established, export-led growth continued and industrialisation was delayed until almost the early 1900s by their ruling classes, which did not introduce any substantial changes in the economy and polity. It is for this reason that Latin America is today included among the developing countries and shares their characteristics.

Check Your Progress 2

Note:i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What were the main features and functions of the colonial state?

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2) Mention briefly the benefits of colonialism in Asia and Africa?

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8.4 MODELS OF COLONIALISM

As there are wide variations in colonial policy, four major contrasting models of colonialism can be briefly described: British, French, Belgian and Portuguese.

8.4.1 British Colonial Policy

British colonial policy by regarding the colonies not as integral parts of the home country but as countries with their own civilisation and values, allowed and facilitated in some ways the greatest amount of autonomous development. There was far greater "sharing of the gains of colonialism" between the colonial masters and the native peoples. The latter were, gradually over a period of time, accorded an increasing share in the system of governance and their views were taken into consideration in important matters affecting them. For example, this was done through various Acts passed by British Parliament, such as Indian Council Acts of 1892 and 1909 etc. As a result there was less disruption and greater accommodation of traditional values and ways of life. The British invested a great deal in some colonies such as India, Ceylon and Malaya. By the 1940s there was a feeling that colonial rule imposed responsibility for the wellbeing of the dependent peoples and greater acceptance of the need to end colonialism speedily.

8.4.2 French Colonialism

French colonialism adopted in contrast a policy of economic, political and cultural assimilation i.e. the colonies specially in the case of Africa, were seen as part of the mother country. For example, political leaders from the colonies could stand for election to the French National Assembly, the lower House of Parliament, the best example being Humphrey Boigny from the Ivory Coast who became a member of the French Communist Party. There was greater disruption in the

traditional culture. The French continued to invest in the colonies even after the Second World War and found it very difficult to adjust to the idea of decolonisation until the revolution in Algeria in 1958. Even then they decided on retaining close ties and aid to their former colonies leading to many of them being described by their neighbours in Africa as “neo-colonial satellites” of France. Yet French colonialism is similar to British in so far as it did not rely on use of force to govern, compared to our two other models.

8.4.3 Portuguese Colonialism

Portuguese colonialism provides in some ways the greatest contrast. It is based much more on use of force and even as some have pointed out, racial prejudice. Oldest among the colonial powers, it hung on to some of its colonies till 1975, long after the other colonial powers had departed from their colonies. It created a small “civilised” class among the large number of “uncivilised natives” and depended on them to help control and govern their colonies. The overwhelming majority of the colonial inhabitants remained illiterate and untouched by modernity, they were largely trained to work as labourers on land, industry, or in the mines. There was also competition, and in fact violence between the local Africans and Portuguese labourers who emigrated in the hope of gaining good jobs. It was only after uprisings such as the one in Angola in 1961, that reforms were announced and attempts made to provide some elements of self-governance.

Although investment took place in the colonies, it was rarely for the benefit of the colonial peoples. The underlying reason was that Portugal remained technologically a backward power in Europe and had to use direct and often oppressive methods of governance to control its colonies and prevent them from falling into British or French hands. It had a dictatorial form of government at home and was unable to overcome its own problems of poverty and illiteracy. Many scholars feel Portugal and Spain transplanted authoritarianism into Latin America which is evident even today in the lack of democracy on that continent, and frequent military take over in some of the Latin American countries.

8.4.4 The Belgian Case

The Belgian case falls somewhere in between. The Belgians established a strong, paternal and centralised administration, which they controlled directly from the home country. However the colonial government was assisted in the Belgian Congo by large private Belgian companies that were allowed to exploit the natural resources, and the Church, which had a strong presence. Unlike the British they did not associate the local inhabitants in self-governance, or attempt cultural assimilation like the French. While the Congo was rapidly modernised and there was much investment in infrastructure and mining, very little was spent on education or improvement in the life conditions of the people who remained backward and poor and no small westernised educated middle class emerged as in the British or French African colonies. As a result when Belgian rule ended abruptly in the Congo there were no trained officials who could take over the country creating massive problems.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the French model of assimilation.

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2) What were the features of Portuguese colonialism?

8.5 LET US SUM UP

The colonial state was the product of historical development of an expanding world capitalist system that created industrial capitalism in Europe and colonialism in the non-European world. Until the industrial revolution, trade was the basis of colonialism but the advent of machine-made goods led to formal colonial structures.

It was different from the state in Europe in having strong, centralised and authoritarian features, in providing very little participation to the local inhabitants and upholding the interests of the colonial rulers.

The actual establishment of the colonial state took place in different ways in different colonies but everywhere it was the result of conquest and subjugation of the local inhabitants. In Asia private charter companies were involved, in Africa the European powers carved out geographical areas amongst themselves and used force to establish their claims. In Latin America it was born out of conquest by the Spanish and Portuguese adventurers in the name of the Crown.

The policies of the colonial state created underdevelopment and retardation in the economic sphere. There was also oppression and suppression of the interests and demands of the local inhabitants. There were some benefits of colonialism such as education, employment, urbanisation, infrastructure, transport and communication, new technology etc. However the impact everywhere was different.

Four models of colonialism can be identified: British, French, Portuguese and Belgian. While the former two were not openly oppressive and provided some measure of development and self-government the latter two were based upon use of force to extract profit with little consideration of its impact upon the natives.

8.6 KEY WORDS

Neo-colonialism: The continued and indirect influence, or in few cases control, by the ex-colonial powers over their former colonies through unequal trade, interference in governance, MNCs etc. It is also used interchangeably with imperialism to suggest that even after the end of formal colonialism, the European countries still have many informal channels of control over the non-European world.

Piracy: This term is generally used for robbery committed on high seas. Before the advent of civil aviation (travel by air) most people travelled by sea, from one country to another, and goods were also sent by sea. When robbers managed to board a ship and looted the travellers or stole the cargo, they were known as pirates and the practice was called piracy.

8.7 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Michael Barrat Brown, *After Imperialism*

Bipin Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in India*

A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*

B. Sutcliffe & R. Owen, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (Longman, London, 1972).

L.H. Gann & Peter Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960 vol 2. The History and Politics of Colonialism 1914-1960* (CUP, 1970).

Frank G., *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America Historical Studies of Brazil and Chile* (New York 1969).

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Colonialism and the colonial state is the product of the historical development of a world capitalist system since the fifteenth century. Initially this process began with trade and conquest by the Europeans in parts of Latin America, Asia and Africa. However the industrial revolution by creating first a need for raw materials and later markets for finished goods, led to competition and conflict between the great powers over control over these regions. The latter therefore felt the need to create formal colonies under their direct control over clearly demarcated geographical areas from which they could gain economic benefits. Thus the colonial state is a product of the historical logic of capitalist development and of competition among the European powers. (For details please see Section 8.2).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The colonial state was constructed to uphold the interests of the colonial power and not that of the natives. Its purpose was to open up the colony for exploiting its material resources and providing goods for export that would benefit the colonial rulers. Hence it was a centralised, authoritarian state based upon use of force and which suppressed the demands and desires of the local inhabitants. While it provided a modern bureaucratic structure, the policies of the colonial state led to de-industrialisation, retardation of its economic growth and political backwardness of the people, which created problems in nation building in the post-colonial period. (For details please see Section 8.3).
- 2) Some of the benefits included introduction of western education, urbanisation, development of means of transport and communication, irrigation works and modern technology. (For details please see Section 8.3).

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Colonies were seen as part of France politically, culturally and economically. Political leaders in the colonies could seek election to the French Parliament (For details please see Sub-section 8.4.2).
- 2) The Portuguese often used force mainly in Latin America and tried to "civilize" the natives; most of the natives in Portuguese colonies remained illiterate and untouched by modernity. Portugal itself remained technologically backward under dictatorial regime. (For details please see Sub-section 8.4.3).