

Afro Asian colonization: Should European repent for an on going third world underdevelopment

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ABSTRACT

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European colonization in Asia and Africa in the past had fully destroyed the economy and culture of those continents in various ways. It is evidenced that the economic resources of many colonial countries of Asia, Africa as well as Latin America were extracted unscrupulously for the benefit of the Europeans who had simultaneously oppressed the people of these continents to secure their wealth and resources. As a matter of fact, the merciless subjugation of the colonial powers initially began with the destruction of agriculture when the Europeans compelled many of the farmers of these colonial countries to forcibly abandon producing their food crops and instead, compelled them to go for cash crop production. This eventually contributed to the development of a European infrastructure which benefitted and glorified their nations with enormous economic development. While delivering a lecture at Oxford, as recently as in July 2015, Dr. Soshi Tharur, an eminent Indian parliamentarian and a former Minister, raised his voice by blaming specifically the British for colonizing India and extracting its resources which created severe underdevelopment and later having famine there during the Second World War. To corroborate this view, I venture that the British and other colonial powers in Europe during the 16th through 20th century had unrelentingly tortured Asian and African nations causing total destruction of their economic resources. This subjugation is the main cause for the underdevelopment of many of the Third World nations, putting them in real socio-economic crises. Based on the evidence and discussions, the paper finally concludes by posing a question as to whether these colonial nations should repent for their misdeeds in the past and also promise to provide some form of compensation to these colonial nations.

Keywords:

Asia, colonization, culture, economy,
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1. Introduction

Based on a broad economic categorisation, the world has now been divided into a few classifications to identify their socio-economic status referring them with the terms like, 'First World', 'Second World' and 'Third World'.

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This classification also corroborates the connotations formulated by Wallerstein [11] who provides a framework for understanding the development of a capitalistic system in the grouping-titles of 'Core' 'Semi Periphery' and 'Periphery', which according to him had started in the sixteenth century with the process of colonisation. The designated groupings of First, Second and Third worlds have been conceptualised almost in the same manner to show the economic performances and prosperity where the techno-economic progress and improvement is the principal criterion for such classification of the global system.

The term Third World thus is designated to identify those nations which remain fully undeveloped and underdeveloped mostly located in the Asian and African continents. This so-called terminological identification of the Third World mostly includes the countries which once were the colonies of the European nations in the 16th through 20th centuries.

It is evident that the economic resources of many of such colonial countries of Asia, Africa and also Latin America were extracted unscrupulously for the benefit of the European nations who during the colonial time also simultaneously had oppressed the people of these continents from socio-political and cultural contexts to secure their wealth and resources.

By drawing examples from Latin America, Andre Gunder Frank [3] propounded his theory of 'the development-of-underdevelopment' clearly mentioning that certain degree of subordination and impoverishment of many peripheral countries is due to the extraction of their resources, which benefitted the prosperity of the West. Although a few Western economists like William Rostow [8] wanted to rationalise the improvement of the Western economy by showing a developmental progression of some stages where each underdeveloped nation will have to pass through some stages following a cycle, but we disagree with such a proposition as it is untenable to attribute this underdevelopment retaining it as part of development cycle.

This paper does not however instigate any such debate, rather it relied on the evidence to prove that it is the colonisation effects which are fully responsible for the underdevelopment of Third World colonised nations. In this context, the paper refreshes our memories of the past and also raises a voice that the colonizers should repent and compensate the colonised nations of Asia and Africa in the form of reparations.

As indicated, I have conceptualised this hypothesis being inspired by the lecture of Dr. Soshi Tharur, who spoke on a similar issue by blaming the British for colonising India-Pakistan and the Bangladesh subcontinent for two hundred years in the past until 1947. Contextually, the paper provides very brief information at this time, mostly sourced from Asian and African situations.

2. Global Colonial Situation: A Centre-Periphery Relationship

If we look back to the 'five-hundred-year' history of the 'world system', it points out that there are some historical phases where a 'core-peripheral' colonial relationship between the countries of the world had started in the three continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

It envisaged that although mercantile capitalism started during the middle of the 15th century but it culminated in the later centuries by making some administrative settlement at the colonial nations where they stayed until the Twentieth century. Almost all the West European countries including Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, Germany and a few others are the ones which had developed tremendously with the exploitation of raw materials and accumulated resources from the peripheral colonised nations.

These resource accumulations allowed the colonial countries, especially Great Britain, to emerge as a hegemonic power after the Napoleonic Wars. The centre-peripheral views are the most dominant geographical concept where the rich industrial core nations treated the global

peripheries as their hinterlands. According to Gunnar Myrdal [6], once the growth has been initiated in favoured locations with labour support, resource accumulation and exporting economic capital, the cumulative development of these places becomes quite spontaneous.

3. Colonial Exploitation in Asia and Africa: Strategic Resource Mobilisation

The colonial countries in the past entered the continents of Asia and Africa evolving some strategies to exploit them in multifarious ways. First, they chose agriculture as the most important source of extraction by grabbing the best land for producing cash crop which they needed to run their industries in Europe.

To rationalise their involvement in agriculture, the colonial power initially bluffed the native farmers saying that they are still using the most backward farming system which does not allow them to get the total benefit of the agricultural production and at the same time lack potential technical knowledge of farming. This plea was proven wrong when an appointed British agricultural scientist in India named A.J. Voelkar in the 1890s applauded the Indian farmers for having fantastic intuitive knowledge about soil appropriateness, rotation systems of mixed crops and also having expertise on land-fallowing [9].

Yet, after gaining political control, the British East India Company in the Indo-Pak-Bangladesh subcontinent forced many peasants to grow cash crops in the form of indigo cultivation, in lieu of their diversified traditional agriculture. It also happened in the case of Sri Lanka, as after its occupancy, the British designated all the central part of the island as crown land for the plantation of coffee in 1815. Java is also another glaring example where the Dutch colonial power seized all uncultivated waste land declaring them as government land and putting them in private foreign investors at a very cheap rate in 1870 [5].

A similar situation also had existed in the case of African agriculture where prior to the European intervention, the Africans also were engaged in producing diversified food crops, which was halted, forcing them to go for single cash crop. To give a specific example from Africa, we may mention here the case of Gambia where rice farming once was very common but the colonial masters took the best land for producing peanuts having found its wide market outside [5].

Northern Ghana once had predominant reputation for producing yams and other food stuffs which they had to sacrifice for forced production of cocoa and thus, the country slowly became dependent on this cocoa production. In his book, 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa', Walter Rodney [7] clearly documented that the colonial power often literally compelled the African farmers to grow cash crops in their fertile land through guns and whips.

One of the most significant reasons for such stringent control of the farming system is to consolidate the economic gain of the colonial power which effectually affected the colonised nations having full dependence on importation of food. Under these circumstances, Europe was still developing very rapidly; its economy flourished, industrial plants expanded as they could easily procure their raw materials abundantly from their colonial source. While the Europeans were prospering economically, the colonial nations of Asia and Africa were downgraded tremendously. It was found that when the British arrived at the shore of the Indian subcontinent at the early years of the seventeenth century, its economic share in the world market during the time was 23 per cent, and by the time they left in 1947, it drastically came down to four per cent [10].

It is also evident that during the Muslim Mughal Rule in India, there were no ethnic conflicts among the Muslims and the Hindus, but the adaptation of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British abruptly accelerated this differentiation. The European powers could also be blamed and held responsible for sowing the seeds of intra-country ethnic conflicts among many nations of Asia and

Africa as they imported alien nationals to work as labour force in their plantation farms and other works, thus creating an internal tension among the existing groups within the nations.

The best example of such prevailing inter-ethnic tension can be cited from Sri Lanka where the Tamils and Sinhalese had still remained in direct confrontation until very recently. In the same manner, the British imported a huge bulk of manpower to Malaysia from India and China. These situations created problems in the socio-structural and cultural situations of these countries once forever and directly impacted on their economy and geo-politics.

4. Conclusion

Both Asian and African continents had abundant resources to supply export crops and raw materials which were necessary for the resourceful development of the colonial countries in Europe. Throughout the colonial era and even prior to that, an overwhelming majority of the people in Africa depended entirely on agriculture; this was also the case for many Asian countries as well [2]. These Asian and African countries in the past exclusively depended on integrated farming, living in traditional village communities and tribal band organisations, and maintaining the principle of social relations with kinship network of land distribution which has undergone a transformation due to colonial interference; many of them had to switch over to cash crops needing cash and coins for the payment of all taxes [1,7]. These are the curses of colonialism which had forced the total destruction of the colonised people's socio- structural environment as well as the economy.

Had colonialism never existed in Asia and Africa, the ethnic harmony and internal geo-political integrity of many nations of these regions would have been different. In regards to African underdevelopment, Walter Rodney [7] identified two important factors where the resources of the nations were grabbed by capitalist Europe, which at the same time restricted African capacity to make the maximum use of their economic potential. Now, it is up to the audience to decide whether colonial Europe should repent or/and compensate the colonised nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America some kind of reparations which Britain paid to the Maoris in New Zealand and Japan to Korea. It may not necessarily be the money; it can be anything in terms of consolation and good gesture.

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