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***Theoretical Organ of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party***

# The Poor

*Roberto Sosa*

The poor are many  
and so—  
impossible to forget.

No doubt,  
as day breaks,  
they see the buildings  
where they wish  
they could live with their children.

They  
can steady the coffin  
of a constellation on their shoulders.  
They can wreck  
the air like furious birds,  
blocking out the sun.

But not knowing these gifts,  
they enter and exit through mirrors of blood,  
walking and dying slowly.

And so,  
one cannot forget them.

*(English translation: Spencer Reece)*

## *Editorial*

The long delayed local government elections that were held in February did not produce many surprises. But its outcome disappointed the ailing “Good Governance” regime. The overall voting pattern in the South has not changed much since the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015, except for the ruling alliance losing some of the support of the minority nationalities. The mixed system of election comprising ward-wise election of 60% of the members on the first-past-the-post basis (as in elections before 1978) and 40% according to the proportion of the votes received by each party or group helped the newly formed Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna led by Mahinda Rajapaksa to appear strong.

The troubles of the opportunist “Good Governance” alliance, dogged by squabbles from early on and the lack of discipline in the two parties were aggravated by differences between the President and the Prime Minister.

Thus the “Good Governance” alliance was too divided to contest the elections as partners. The outcome was a bitter disappointment to the President, as the performance of the official SLFP led by him was even worse than its humiliating electoral defeat in 1977, driving home the hard truth that the bulk of the SLFP support base still looks up to Mahinda Rajapaksa as the one who could lead the party to electoral success. The seeming loss of credibility of the government as evident from the local election results only deepened the inter-party and intra-party divisions.

The Joint Opposition seized the opportunity to propose a motion of no confidence (NCM) against Premier Wickremesinghe. Several SLFP MPs including ministers thought of using the NCM to express resentment against their coalition partners. Although the media made a big fuss about the prospect of the NCM being carried through Parliament, the NCM was highly unlikely to succeed since the parties of the minority nationalities would not risk defeating the Premier only to benefit the Joint Opposition which was still peddling a chauvinist agenda. What was possible was a narrow victory for the NCM, which the Joint Opposition

could have exploited. The President by failing to stand by his Prime Minister and not making public his position weakened himself further by losing confidence on both sides of the government. The comfortable margin by which the Premier survived the vote has strengthened his position within his party as well as in relation to the President, but much needs to be delivered to improve on earlier electoral performance, and even more to salvage the country from its economic and political crises.

Local elections in the North delivered a potent message to the Tamil nationalist parties, especially the TNA, that people are tiring of their political bankruptcy. The limited success of independent groups representing the toiling masses drove home a stronger message than what the parliamentary election of 1970 did to the then dominant Federal Party. Some of the minority nationalist opportunists too lost on the deal, so that all the minority nationalist parties now prefer reverting to the earlier system of election. That goes to confirm that the minority nationalist parties are only interested in securing positions for themselves and not in addressing the problems faced by the people. This was reaffirmed when the TNA made a deal with its once arch rival, the EPDP, which it once denounced as traitors to the Tamil cause, to secure the mayoralty of the Jaffna Municipal Council.

The anti-Muslim violence unleashed in Ampara in late February, followed by violent attacks and arson targeting Muslims in Teldeniya and Digana in the District of Kandy are grim reminders of the reality of chauvinist politics which the parties of the ruling classes are willing to challenge or overcome, and the reluctance of minority nationality leaders to stand up for their people.

The challenge facing the Left is to politically mobilise the people to advance against the chauvinist menace that has been set in motion. Their stand should reflect a firm commitment to address the national question so that the national minorities and the oppressed Sinhala masses could be united in the struggle to free the country of oppression by imperialism and its reactionary allies at home.

# Colonial Rule in Asia

European capitalism needed colonies as they provided the cheap natural resources and labour essential to the survival and growth of capital. This essay offers an overview of colonisation in Asia illustrating the different manners in which the process occurred, the circumstances that enabled it, and the impact of colonial rule on the socio-political and economic development of Asian countries, most of which underwent long periods of direct or indirect colonial domination. The essay concludes with a brief assessment of the implications of colonisation for the social and economic development in the post-colonial period.

## 1. The Background

Asia had some of the mightiest empires known, that matched the Roman Empire in quest for territory. While means of expansion varied, armed aggression nearly always played a role as did religion. While religions associated with South and East Asian empires were non-proselytising, there has been religious persecution against minority faiths.

Colonialism has lost its early meaning referring to the settlement of people from a country in other lands, like the Americas and Australia, and now refers to prolonged direct rule over a people by a powerful state or its agency that is alien to them. European states imposed such rule on Asia and Africa, and the US and Japan became colonial powers only in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Colonial conquest was essential to the colonial powers to develop their capitalist economy and then become imperialist powers. Religious conversion and, later, social and economic modernization that once provided excuses for the use of force to capture alien territory became unnecessary once the purpose openly coincided with the interests of capital in the metropole.

Conquest of the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century followed by French and British conquests comprised the first modern forms of colonization, which were brutal and even genocidal. Native societies were thrown into slavery and Black slavery entered the Americas with the maturing of capitalism in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, with merchants entering mass production of goods by supplying materials and paying wages. The merchant became a capitalist with ownership and control of the means of production becoming the source of profit.

Relationship between the metropole and colonies involved unequal terms of trade imposed on the colonies and obtaining labour at negligible cost from peasants and workers. Plunder of natural resources and direct and indirect capitalist exploitation of the colonised people was common to all colonialism, although the ways varied. The huge sums of money made by Europeans from their network of colonies and plantations of sugar, cotton and tobacco provided the capital to industrialise Europe. Thus, transatlantic slave trade and plantation wealth helped the rapid growth of capitalism in Europe. Since Spain and Portugal, the pioneering colonial powers, failed to develop as capitalist powers, their colonial expansion slowed and they ceded colonial territory to new rivals.

Colonial expansion in the Indian Ocean between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries was by the Dutch East India Company (1602–1799), French East India Company (1664–1769 and 1785–94) and the British East India Company (1601–1858, with the state playing a major role from 1773). Developments close to home and the limitations of the companies that made company-driven operations unprofitable persuaded the respective governments to take charge in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

While European imperial expansion and power grew amid rivalry, changes in the economic and political circumstances made possession of large colonies unattractive by the mid-1850s, when Britain was producing two thirds of the world's coal and a half of all cotton cloth and iron. Freeing up of trade let this dominance continue and exports increase. The only notable conflict over colonial possession in Africa in this period was

between the British and the Dutch in 1895 over the Cape Province and the Boer Wars (1880–81 and 1889–1901) to seize remaining regions of South Africa from the Boers, of Dutch origin. This tendency was also evident in the virtual absence of armed conflict between colonial rivals in China.

Britain's command of the seas, its industrial head start and unrestricted access to most countries enabled it to contain its rivals without resorting to further territorial expansion, bringing with it the burden of controlling a large and restive colonial population. This approach changed, however, during the European scramble for Africa (1881–1914) to grab the wealth of mineral resources needed by the fast growing European industries. But it was free of armed conflict among colonial powers. Although the risk of intense scramble leading to inter-imperialist conflict was averted by the Berlin Conference (November 1884 to February 1885), accommodation among colonial powers was short-lived. Poorer access of late arrivals like Germany to markets and mineral resources and growing imperialist rivalry in Europe led to the First World War (WW1) in 1914.

Against this background, let us look at the pattern of colonial expansion in Asia by the maritime powers in rough sequence of their arrival in the Asian scene up to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **2. The Colonial Order in Asia**

Colonisation of Australia and the Americas involved settlements, while Africa had no major colonial settlement except in South Africa. Africans were, however, resettled as slaves in other continents. Although Asia shares these features, colonisation was prolonged amid colonial rivalry, and forms of conquest and control varied widely.

The phases of colonial expansion roughly match the nature and purpose of the dominant colonial power. Portugal, besides religious conversion, aimed to dominate the trade in commodities like spices, and benefitted from the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) with Spain, that limited Spanish expansion in Asia. Industrial advances in Europe meant old colonial powers yielding to the new. The Dutch, Danes, French and British

entered the fray as trading companies which secured territorial control and fought each other in the process. Where possible they made allies of local forces. However, unlike in Africa, colonial conquest in Asia was limited to naval powers, but for Russia, which expanded eastwards in Asia to occupy the largest land mass on earth.

The way colonialism established itself in Asia depended on the state of the local system of governance at the time of colonial intrusion and on the motive and military might of the intruder. Portugal was the oldest and longest lived European colonial conqueror in Asia, whose quest to control Indian Ocean trade started in early 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It ceded its last colonial possession much after the collapse of the empire in 1974.

Asia, during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, had three mighty empires based on Islam, namely the Ottoman Empire based in Turkey, the Safavid Empire based in Persia (now Iran), and the Mogul Empire covering most of South Asia. China was an empire in its own right under the Ming Dynasty.

### ***Portugal in South Asia***

Portugal benefitted from its control of the East African coast throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. By 1502, Portugal held trade monopoly across the Indian Ocean through a licensing system granting merchant ships protection against pirates and rival states. In that year, it used the rivalry between the rulers of Kochi and of Calicut (both in Kerala, India) to establish the first European settlement in India, and a fort and a trading post in Kochi. The first Portuguese government in Asia was set up in 1505. Portugal made contact with the ruler of southern Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in that year, and followed it with using rivalry for power to enhance its influence and build fortifications at strategic coastal locations. Direct Portuguese rule in the coastal region started in 1597. The Jaffna Kingdom in the north lasted until 1624 before submitting to Portuguese rule, while the Kandyan Kingdom based in the central highlands remained unconquered. Portuguese rule ended in 1640 with defeat by the Dutch East India Company, invited by the King of Kandy to expel the Portuguese.

Portuguese presence in coastal India comprised coastal settlements from Daman and Diu through Cochin on the west to Hoogli and Chittagong in the east. By the 17<sup>th</sup> Century most were either ceded to Dutch and French rivals or lost to local rulers. However, Portuguese India lasted as three districts on the western coast until India seized them by force in 1961. But it took Portugal until 1975 to recognise Indian control of the territories.

Following establishment in the Indian subcontinent, Portugal in 1514 forced the Kingdom of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to be its vassal, leading to a century of Portuguese domination of the region from 1521 to 1622 when Hormuz was captured by an English–Persian alliance.

### ***Portugal in Southeast Asia***

Eastward expansion took the Portuguese to Malacca (in Malay Peninsula) in 1511, followed by treaties to trade in cloves and nutmeg in the Moluccas (or Spice Islands) at the eastern end of today's Indonesia. The Portuguese frustrated Spanish bids for the Moluccas, but the Dutch expelled them from Malacca in 1641 and deprived of their lucrative trade in the Moluccas. The Portuguese arrived in the island of Timor around 1511, and established themselves in 1556 after the arrival of Dominican friars. East Timor was made a Portuguese colony in 1702. Conflict with the Dutch who held the west of Timor from mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century was settled only in 1859. Portugal ruled East Timor until after the fascist regime in Portugal fell in 1974. Portugal's offer of independence was subverted by Indonesian military occupation in 1975; and Timor became 'independent' only in 1999, after a complex struggle and the fall of Suharto in 1998.

### ***Portugal in East Asia***

The Portuguese arrived in war-torn Japan in 1543. Their firearms attracted rivals vying for supremacy, and provincial leaders eagerly traded with them. Portuguese vessels also brought in Jesuit missionaries, whom Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), the first of three unifiers of Japan, welcomed to counteract militant Buddhist monasteries opposed to his rule. Subsequent rulers saw the missionaries as a threat to stability, and

Christianity was banned in 1587. The Tokugawa shogunate of 1600–1868, the last feudal military government, confined the Portuguese to the man-made island of Deshima in Nagasaki in 1636 and expelled them in 1639.

Portugal–China relations developed from 1540 when Portugal rid China of coastal pirates. China ceded Macau to Portugal in 1557 to set up a trading post. The economy of Macau grew despite the expulsion of the Portuguese by Japan, but weakened as Hong Kong (under the British from 1841) overtook Macau as a financial hub. The Portuguese legalised gambling in 1844 and Macau soon became a prime gambling centre. Portugal declared Macau a free port in 1845 and expelled Chinese soldiers and officials. In 1887, a weakening China granted Portugal perpetual sovereignty over Macau by treaty.

The main impact of Portuguese arrival in Asia comprised the growth of Roman Catholic Christianity in Asia and the breakdown of a stable trade network, which until then was not a monopoly of any state.

## *Spain*

The Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 allowed Spain access to the Pacific Ocean only via the Americas. The arrival of Spanish explorer Magellan in Manila and his killing in March 1521 was followed by a several unsuccessful Spanish expeditions. Explorers arriving from Mexico in 1565 were the first European to settle in the Philippine archipelago. They repelled the Portuguese between 1566 and 1558, and set up the Spanish Colonial Government in Manila in 1571 after defeating the ruler of Manila, a vassal of the Sultanate of Brunei. The Moros of the Sultanates of Maguindanao, Lanao and Sulu in Mindanao resisted Spanish expansion until in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when Spain defeated the Sulu Sultanate to take Mindanao under nominal suzerainty. The Spanish also held a number of islands in the Pacific from 1565 to 1899 and a part of north Formosa (now Taiwan) between 1626 and 1642 amid strong Dutch presence.

Administration of the Philippines was by the Viceroyalty of New Spain based in Mexico City until Mexican independence in 1821, after which it

was directly from Spain. Following the Spanish–American War in 1898, control of the Philippines and most islands of Spanish East Indies passed to the US, but for 6 000 small islands sold to Germany by treaty in 1899.

### *The Dutch in Indonesia*

Dutch naval power rose rapidly since late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and Holland (the Netherlands) dominated global commerce in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Despite arrival in Ceylon in 1602, the first Dutch colonial conquest was the Spice Islands of Maluku (Moluccas, Indonesia). The Dutch East India Company (VOC Amsterdam) drove the Portuguese from Maluku in 1605, established a fortified base in Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1610, and gained control over much of the Indonesian archipelago. The bankruptcy of VOC in 1800 led to the nationalisation of territory under it as the Dutch East Indies. Dutch territorial control expanded during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and by early 20<sup>th</sup> Century extended to the boundaries of modern-day Indonesia.

Holland became a client state to France between 1795 and 1814 following defeat by France during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802), and many of its colonial possessions passed to the British. The Netherlands was reinstated in 1815 and Britain returned Indonesia to it in 1816. Following the entry of Dutch commercial interests later in the century, the plantation economy in Indonesia expanded to grow, besides sugar, new crops like tea and cinchona, and later rubber yielding vast profits. Oil from Sumatra and Borneo (Kalimantan) proved valuable in industrializing Europe.

Japan conquered Indonesia during WW2 and following the end of the war in 1945 Indonesia declared independence. The Dutch bid to regain control failed since the Dutch lacked influence in their former colonies for want of an elite class to whom power could be transferred.

Although Holland took Malacca in Malaya (now West Malaysia) from the Portuguese in 1641, it ceded Malacca to Britain in 1806 by treaty. Control returned to the Dutch in 1816, but was again ceded to Britain in 1824.

### *The Dutch in South Asia*

Dutch presence in the Indian subcontinent from 1605 to 1825 was in coastal settlements and trading posts of the VOC reaching into Burma (Myanmar). The VOC traded in textiles, precious stones, indigo and silk across peninsular India, saltpetre and opium in Bengal, and pepper in Malabar. Indian slaves were taken to Spice Islands and Cape Colony (in South Africa). On capturing Ceylon in 1656, the Dutch took over Portuguese forts on the Malabar Coast to pre-empt Portuguese attacks. Efforts at political control in India failed, and influence waned rapidly from mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century despite restoration of Dutch Coromandel and Dutch Bengal to them by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814, which reverted to British rule under the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824.

The Dutch, invited in 1636 by the King of Kandy to oust the Portuguese took over coastal Ceylon in 1658. Ceylon was valuable to the Dutch as a half-way point between settlements in Indonesia and South Africa and for its cinnamon and elephants (sold to Indian princes). Dutch failed to capture the Kandyan Kingdom, but used coastal Ceylon as a trading post until the British, at the urging of the King of Kandy, took over in 1796.

### *The Dutch in East Asia*

The Dutch controlled south Formosa (now Taiwan) in 1624 and used it to trade with Chinese merchants until expulsion in 1662 by the forces led by Koxinga, a military leader at the end of the Chinese Ming Dynasty.

Dutch presence in Japan endured the Shogunate government's restrictions on the entry of Westerners and further tightening of the ban on Christianity imposed in 1587. Japan broke ties with Spain in 1624, Britain left Japan the same year, and Japan expelled the Portuguese in 1639. But the Protestant Dutch who pledged not to proselytise were allowed to trade freely from 1609 to 1641 and granted a trade monopoly from 1641 to 1853, but solely on Deshima, an artificial island off the coast of Nagasaki.

## *Denmark*

The first expedition of the Danish East India Company, founded in 1616, arrived in Ceylon in 1618. The Danes occupied the site of the rock temple in Trincomalee in May 1620, based on a treaty with the Kandyan Kingdom, but the Portuguese, who controlled coastal Ceylon at the time, promptly expelled them. The Danes were more successful in India where they made a treaty with the Tanjore Kingdom (in today's Tamilnadu) in 1620 to trade in the Kingdom and to possess the town of Tranquebar (Tharangampadi), where they built a fort and installed a governor of Danish India. The treaty was renewed and confirmed by Shivaji, founder of the Maratha Empire, in May 1676. The Danish East India Company and Swedish East India Company, at their peak, bought more tea than the British East India Company, smuggled 90% of it into England, and made a huge profit. In 1624–36, Danish trade extended to Surat and Bengal in India, Java and Borneo. Danish involvement in subsequent European wars ruined the Company, and trade in India declined from 1643, leading to the loss of all acquisitions but Tranquebar. Trade was rescued in 1669, and a second Danish East India Company, founded in 1670 and re-founded in 1730 as the Asiatic Company, and opened trade at Canton (Guangzhou) with the Qing rulers of China. In 1779 Danish India became a crown colony. Denmark lost its entire fleet in its war with Britain in 1807, and sold its remaining Indian settlements to Britain in 1845.

## *French India*

French colonisation too began with commercial activities, starting with a trading post in Surat in 1668. Expansion followed in 1673 with the purchase of land at Chandernagore from the Mogul Governor of Bengal, and then the acquisition of Pondicherry from the Sultan of Bijapur. Besides these centres of maritime commercial activity, the French also had trading posts in Mahe, Karikal and Yanaom. French authority was, however, isolated on the peripheries of a British-dominated territory, and French hopes to control the Indian subcontinent were dashed by defeat in

the Seven Years' War (1756–63) in Europe. The Treaty of Paris (1763) restored French possessions but confined French control to those areas.

The French bid to build a fort in Trincomalee in the east of Ceylon, where they arrived in March 1672, was allowed by the King of Kandy in May. The French, driven out by the Dutch in July 1672, succeeded in a second attempt in August 1782 and drove out the British who took Trincomalee from the Dutch in January 1782, but they were compelled to cede Trincomalee to the Dutch under the Treaty of Versailles in 1783.

With French presence in the Philippines (1845–46) and Taiwan (1884–85) proving unsustainable, Indochina (comprising Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) remained the key Asian colony of France.

### *French Indochina*

French interest in Indochina was driven by rivalry with Britain, which excluded France from India and shut it out of most of Southeast Asia. The French desired to establish commerce in this region with much untapped wealth as well as sought to rectify the Vietnamese state persecution of Catholic converts, whose welfare was a stated aim of French overseas policy. They first intervened in Vietnam in 1777 in favour of Prince Nguyễn Ánh who was fleeing the Tây Sơn uprising. Nguyễn Ánh took control of the entire Cochinchina (now Southern Vietnam) in that year. The next was an attack on Da Nang in 1858 to prevent the expulsion of missionaries. French forces, backed by Filipino troops sent by the Spanish, captured Saigon in 1859. The French policy, thus far confined to the protection of the faith, changed in 1862, and France forced the Emperor of Vietnam to cede three treaty ports in Annam and Tonkin, and all of Cochinchina, later declared French territory in 1864, to which three more provinces were added in 1867. Vietnam became a French protectorate by the treaty of Hue in 1883 after the capture of Hanoi in 1882 and armed conflict in Tonkin and Annam. Efforts to make Vietnam a colony were retarded by local resistance and the Sino-French War of 1884-85. French Indochina, formed in 1887, comprised Annam, Tonkin,

Cochinchina (which constitute Vietnam) and the Kingdom of Cambodia. Laos was added after the Franco–Siamese War in 1893.

French rule in Vietnam lacked a coherent colonial policy but for ensuring French possession and profit. Political management was left to governors with arbitrary powers. Local resistance was kept down by a 'divide and rule' strategy pitting local mandarins, communities and religious groups against each other. Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina were administered separately. With profit as the driving force, colonial officials and French companies transformed Vietnam's subsistence economy into an export-oriented rice and rubber plantation economy. Vast tracts of land were seized, and smallholders were forced either to stay on as plantation labourers or relocate elsewhere. Shortfall of labour was met by voluntary labour lured by false promises or by conscription. The French also built trading posts and developed mines to tap into Vietnam's deposits of coal, tin and zinc, mostly for export.

French involvement in Cambodia started in 1863 when King Norodom sought French support to make Siam (Thailand) to disown suzerainty over Cambodia. The French invested far less in its protectorate of Cambodia than in Vietnam, but developed rubber plantations in its east. Cambodia under French rule also exported substantial amounts of rice. Besides making Cambodians pay the highest taxes per capita in Indochina, the French did little to transform Cambodia's rural agricultural economy.

In 1885, the French set up a consulate in Luang Prabang (part of Laos), which with the royal province of Vientiane, was a vassal to Siam, whose king, fearing French plans to annex Luang Prabang, signed a treaty with them in 1886 conceding Siam's suzerainty over the Lao kingdoms. Following attack on Siam and Luang Prabang by a Chinese band of warriors called the Black Flags, the French intervened to protect the Lao royal family, and Luang Prabang became a French protectorate in 1889 on the request of the Lao king. This led to war between Siam and France in

1893 and Siam yielding territory to the French, to whom French Laos was only a buffer between their possessions and Siam under British influence.

Placed between the British ruled Burma and French controlled Cambodia, Siam, although not colonised, was forced by treaty in 1855 to accept British dominance in the region and open up to the possibility of British trading activity free from heavy trade tariffs. Siam failed to benefit from rivalry between the two colonial powers and in fact ceded territory to the colonial possessions of France and Britain.

French colonial possessions in Asia were less profitable than those in Africa and expensive in the face of popular resentment. However, French cultural legacy lingers in Vietnam and parts of former French India.

### ***British India***

The British Empire actively expanded in Asia only in mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, although the British East India Company, founded in 1600, had trade relations with Indian rulers in Machilipatnam on the east coast in 1611 and Surat on the west in 1612. British colonial expansion in Asia, which occurred when Britain was the leading European power, was deterred by the presence of strong Asian states, so that its colonies were mainly in the Indian sub-continent and the western part of Southeast Asia. Domination elsewhere was mostly by unequal treaties.

Confronting the Mogul Empire was unsuccessful and even humiliating to the British East India Company until the Mogul Empire began to undo in 1707 amid the rise of the Maratha Empire (1674-1818). Breaking away of Mogul states helped expansion. The Company, which was in rivalry with French and Dutch interests until 1763, thrived at the expense of the Mogul dynasty to gain control over almost all of India in the century following the subjugation of Bengal at the 1757 Battle of Plassey, in which it overcame the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies. Britain, however, let several local rulers continue in the so-called Princely States (numbering 565, and of varying sizes) covering 40% of the land area of pre-partition India, in which Britain had suzerainty and right to revenue.

Three conflicts called the Carnatic Wars (1744–63) fought on territory under the Nizam of Hyderabad in South India led to British dominance along the east coast and the end of French ambitions in India. Most notable of resistance by local rulers were the four Mysore Wars (1767–99) between the British and the Kingdom of Mysore ruled by Hyder Ali and then his son Tippu Sultan. British victory was aided by alliances with the Nizam of Hyderabad and with the Maratha Empire in 1799, which fought three wars with the British from 1775 to 1818 before its collapse in 1818 and the British capture of Delhi and control over large parts of India. Two Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845–46 and 1848–49) fought in the north west of the sub-continent between an expanding Sikh empire and the British, led to the fall of the Sikh Empire and British annexation of Punjab.

British domination was strongly resisted by local chieftains in the Madras Presidency, from Pulithevar of Nerkattum Seval in 1726, the poligars such as Kattabomman (1799) and ending with the failed declaration of independence by Marudhu brothers of Sivagangai in 1801. The Vellore mutiny of 1806, the first large-scale mutiny by Indian sepoys, was confined to the garrisons, unlike the Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 with wider mass impact.

Adverse economic impact of colonial rule also led to revolts such as the Faqir and Sanyasi Rebellions (1770–1820s) following the 1770 Bengal famine, the Indigo Rebellion (1859-1862) in response to effects of the forcing peasants to grow commercial crops, particularly indigo, and the revolt of the Mappilas of Malabar, mainly Muslim tenant farmers, landless labourers and fishermen, starting in 1836 and ending in the bitterly violent Malabar rebellion of 1921.

The livelihood of the tribal people was adversely affected by intrusion of commercial interests backed by the British; and rebellion started as early as 1774 in regions with large tribal populations and went on until late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The issues still remain, if at all in more intense form.

The surge in mass production enabled by the Industrial Revolution urged the British to undercut local cottage industries in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

to expand sale of British goods in India, to the detriment of the Indian economy. The British East India Company (to which Indian textiles were once a major attraction for trade), in order to make India a dumping ground for its products, even had the hands of hundreds of weavers in Bengal cut off so that they would not continue their profession.

By early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, European colonialism ventured into cash-crop plantation cultivation in their new colonies. Manpower need could not be met locally owing either to the regions being sparsely populated or to the reluctance of the local population to toil in the plantations. The British resorted to a form of slave trade, helped by the ruin of the rural economy that made poverty endemic to British ruled regions. Migration under a system of indentured labour from Madras to the French colonies of Reunion and Mauritius in 1825 was followed by the emigration of over 525 000 workers between 1842 and 1870 to British and French colonies, stretching from the Mauritius to the present day Caribbean. Indentured labour, mostly from present day Tamilnadu, was sent in large numbers to Ceylon from around 1840 into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to work in plantations and in railway construction. Malaya received Indian labour since 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and Indian labour toiled in sugar plantations in Fiji from 1879.

The British, who manipulated rivalry among Indian rulers to gain and sustain control of the entire sub-continent, found it beneficial to leave the oppressive feudal caste system intact, while cultivating a class of English-educated administrators from among the upper castes. While national bourgeois challenge to British rule was resented and dealt with severely, entrepreneurs who supplemented colonial interests were encouraged. Industrialization, starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, although patchy, was ahead of most other British colonies in Asia and Africa.

### *Ceylon under British rule*

The British, invited by the King of Kandy to be rid of Dutch in coastal Ceylon took control of the coastal region in 1796, and then sought to bring the whole island under their control. The Kandyan Kingdom which

survived Portuguese and Dutch bids to conquer, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries, respectively, fell to the British in early 19<sup>th</sup> Century owing to intrigue combined with British military might and became part of British Ceylon under the Kandyan Convention of 1815. Rebellions against British rule in 1817–18 and 1848 were quashed and the country, ruled with the support of an elite class favoured by the British, soon became a plantation economy with tea (initially coffee), rubber and coconut as export crops.

### ***Burma***

Eastward British expansion involved the Anglo-Burma Wars of 1825, 1852 and 1885, and annexation of territories at different times. Tenasserim and Arakan were taken in 1826 and the Irrawaddy delta in 1852. The annexed territories called British Burma became a minor province of British India in 1862. Resistance persisted in northern Burma until 1890, and the British responded with systematic destruction of villages and appointment of new officials. After annexation of Upper Burma in 1885, the Province of Burma became a major province of British India in 1897.

The secular state following the end of monarchy wrecked traditional Burmese society. As the economy changed to meet the growing demand for Burmese rice, much land was opened up for paddy cultivation. But, to cultivate, the farmers had to borrow from Indian moneylenders at high interest rates. Most farmers defaulted on their loans and were evicted. Arrival of cheap Indian immigrant labour led to rural poverty and social disorder. Burma was also a major source of timber, mainly teak, from 1826 with adverse implications for the Karen minority. Petroleum extraction since 1853 mostly met the needs of British India. Amid rise in militancy and crime, the British chose to rule Burma separately, from the Burma Office under the Secretary of State for India and Burma.

### ***Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan***

British rivalry with Nepal over the princely states adjoining Nepal led to the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814–16. Defeated Nepal ceded a large part of its territory including Sikkim to the British under the Treaty of Sugauli of

1816, in exchange for autonomy. Sikkim became a British protectorate after ceding territory to British India.

The Rana autocracy of Nepal isolated Nepal from external influences to ensure national independence, but at the expense of modernization and economic development. The pro-British Ranas, however, assisted the British during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and in WW1 and WW2.

In Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck, the hereditary ruler, was installed as head of state in 1907. King Ugyen and the British signed the Treaty of Punakha in 1910, which assured non-interference in the internal affairs of Bhutan if it accepted British advice in its external relations. Thus Bhutan survived as a British protectorate with minimal British interference.

### ***British Malaya and Borneo***

British expansion in what is Malaysia followed from where the Dutch left. British companies traded in the Malay Peninsula from mid-18th Century. Britain secured Penang Island from the Sultanate of Kedah in 1786. Penang, Singapore, Malacca and Labuan (off the coast of North Borneo) were governed as British Straits Settlements, since the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1924, which set the boundaries between British Malaya and Dutch East Indies.

British Malaya was governed as separate units comprising the Straits Settlements, the protectorate of Federated Malay States (Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang) and the protectorates of Unfederated Malay States (Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu). In April 1946, all of them (excluding Singapore which became a separate Crown Colony) were incorporated into the Malayan Union, which became the Federation of Malaya in 1948 and gained independence in 1957.

Colonial Malaya was a major exporter of tin and rubber. Poor economic conditions in southern China induced large-scale immigration of Chinese labour between 1810 and 1941, a sizeable section of whom worked in tin mines and rubber plantations. South Indians arrived from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century as indentured labour and many found work in rubber

plantations. Immigration in large numbers affected the ethnic balance of Malaya and had an adverse impact on community relations.

Britain acquired regions, known as British Borneo, in the north of Borneo (Kalimantan) between 1841 and 1882 when Brunei and other Southeast Asian sultanates were on the decline amid battles over royal succession, disruption of traditional trading patterns by the rising influence of European colonial powers, and the weakening of their economies. The Sultanate of Brunei, then comprising Brunei, Labuan, Sabah, and Sarawak in the north of the island of Borneo ceded much of its territory to the British, with Brunei left as a small territory and a British protectorate from 1888 to 1984. Malaya united with North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore in 1963 to become Malaysia and in less than two years Singapore was expelled from the federation. For historical reasons, Brunei was not integrated with Malaysia.

### ***Britain and Afghanistan***

Westward British expansion from India was to pre-empt Russian influence in Afghanistan. Although the British won the First Anglo-Afghan war of 1839–42 and installed former Emir Shah Shujah, the Afghans massacred the entire retreating British and Indian force of sixteen thousand. Shujah was assassinated later in 1842. The Second Anglo-Afghan War of 1878–80 led to the Treaty of Gandamak by which Afghanistan ceded much power to Britain to avert British occupation of a large part of the country. However, in 1919 the Afghan government used the opportunity of the October Revolution in Russia to secure Russia's diplomatic support in its aim to achieve autonomy. Afghan attack on the British in May 1919 led to the Third Anglo–Afghan war which became a stalemate as Britain was still counting the costs of WW1. Armistice near the end of 1919 rid Afghanistan of British influence.

### ***British Influence in the Persian Gulf and Iran***

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the Qawasim tribal confederation which controlled the Strait of Hormuz, the entry point to the Persian Gulf

levied toll on all trade through the Strait. The British deemed the tribes as pirates and destroyed their fleet in 1820 to become the dominant power in the Persian Gulf. The British-imposed the General Treaty of 1820 on the Arab rulers in the region who, by the Perpetual Maritime Truce of 1853, formally surrendered their right to wage war at sea in return for British protection against external threats. Bahrain in 1880, Muscat and Oman in 1892, Trucial States (precursor of the UAE) in 1892, Kuwait in 1914 and Qatar in 1916 became British protectorates.

The Treaty of Paris following the Anglo-Persian War of 1856–1857 led to Persian withdrawal from Herat in Afghanistan and a commercial agreement allowing Britain greater access to the Persian market. Britain, which regarded Persia as a potential colony within her sphere of influence, was watchful of Imperial Russia's expansion in Central Asia. Thus Persia was caught in imperialist rivalry between Russia and Britain.

### *Imperial Russia*

Although Russia fought territorial wars with European rivals to expand in Europe, its geographic location averted conflict with European rivals in its eastward expansion starting in 1550 and almost complete by 1700. Armed resistance from the nomadic tribes of the steppes was minimal. This enabled Russian presence in North America from 1732 to 1867 for purpose of fur trade. Alaska, controlled by the Russian-American Company in 1799 was sold to the US in 1867. Russia also had a short presence (1812–41) in North California, then part of Mexico.

Amid rivalries with Germany, France and Britain, Russia captured Georgia, Dagestan, Azerbaijan, and northern parts of Armenia from Persia between 1804 and 1813. Kazakh steppes and Central Asian Muslim states were annexed in 1864–65 as Russia advanced across Central Asia. War with the Ottoman Empire (1877–78) led to Russian control over the Caucasus and the establishment of client states in the Balkans.

Russia annexed territory in northeast China during the Second Opium War (1856–60); and Outer Mongolia became a Russian protectorate after

the fall of the Qing dynasty in China in 1911. Between 1853 and 1875 Russia took control of Sakhalin Island at the east of its Empire. But defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) led to Japanese occupation of the southern half of the island and ended Russian expansion in the Far East.

Although Russia's colonial possessions were comparable in extent with those of France and Britain, Russia as an imperial state was far behind the capitalist powers of Europe. Its imperialism significantly differed from that of its West European rivals in many ways. Even at the outbreak of WW1, advanced capitalism in Russia was limited to a few pockets, and Russia, for lack of over-accumulation of capital, was a large-scale international borrower. Yet, the tsarist empire was a major interventionist force in European politics.

Stalin's observation of Russian imperialism is illuminating: *"In fact, Tsarist Russia was the home of oppression under every form, capitalist, colonial and militarist, of oppression in the most barbarous form. The omnipotence of capital was allied there with the despotism of Tsarism, the aggressiveness of nationalism with the most ferocious oppression of non-Russian peoples, the economic exploitation of whole regions of Turkey, Persia, and China, with the military conquest of these regions by Tsarism. Lenin was quite right in saying that Tsarism was 'feudal-militarist imperialism!' Tsarism was the quintessence of the most negative sides of imperialism."*

### ***The Ottoman Empire***

Turkey had limited interest in marine trade and was slow to industrialise. It lacked the resources for capitalist colonial expansion, which took off in earnest in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Ottoman Empire's control of the Arab World, however, deterred European expansion in West Asia.

The Ottoman Empire, on the decline from 1828, came to an end following defeat in WW1 at the hands of Russia, Britain and France in 1918, and Turkey was reduced into a semi-colony ready for partitioning among the victors. However, the Turkish National Movement (1919–23) liberated Turkey, prevented partition, and made Turkey a secular republic in 1923.

## *Imperial Japan*

Japan, the only Asian country to avoid colonial rule, expelled Europeans and closed its ports to foreign trade except with the Dutch. It was, however, persuaded to sign a Treaty of Peace and Amity with the US in 1854. The Meiji Restoration of 1868, aiming to make Japan a strong capitalist state, replaced the feudal shogunate with rule by an emperor. Capitalist development went together with the building of a modern army and the emergence of imperialist Japan seeking territorial expansion. Early expansion led to the conquest of the northern island of Hokkaido and other small islands. It defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) to secure investment rights in China and gain its first colonies, namely Taiwan and the Penghu Islands. Japan also forced China to give up its suzerainty in Korea, which it annexed in 1910.

Later, Japan invaded Manchuria in the northeast of China in 1931 and established the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932, with the last emperor of China, Puyi, as its puppet ruler. China's appeal to the League of Nations resulted in a report condemning Japan's incursion into Manchuria and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations. But no action was taken against Japan. Japan declared war on China in 1937 and Japanese occupation continued through WW2. Also, during WW2, Japan gained control over all European colonial territory east of India, and anti-colonial forces played a key role in defeating Japanese aggression.

## *The United States of America*

The US, since independence seized territory from Spain and Mexico to expand across North America. Following victory over Spain in 1898, it occupied island colonies of Spain in the Caribbean and the Pacific to make them its colonies. It supported the Philippine Revolution of 1896-98 against Spanish rule only to make the Philippines its colonial possession. This led to the Philippine–American War of 1899–1902 which the US won. Resistance to US rule persisted, and led to the US pledge in 1935 that independence will be granted in 1945. But Japanese invasion in December 1941 meant that formal independence came after WW2 in 1946.

US occupation of the Philippines had a cultural impact on religion as Roman Catholic Christianity ceased to be state religion, and English was made the official language and the main medium of communication. The US has continued to dominate the Philippines even after independence.

### **3. Semi-Colonies**

It is said that Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan were free of colonial rule at least until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Although not under direct colonial rule, most of them were subject to hegemony by a neighbouring empire or a colonial power, and forced to concede territory and/or subject their foreign policy to the dictates of a colonial power. Nepal and Bhutan, for instance, were client states to Britain, with independence akin to that of the larger princely states of British India.

Iran was simultaneously dominated by British and Russian empires; and the rulers of Afghanistan were dominated by the British for seven decades. Thailand, much under British influence, also made territorial concessions to France. Outer Mongolia was a protectorate of the Chinese Qing Empire until 1911, and Korea, under Qing domination until conquest in 1905 by Japan, was annexed by Japan in 1910.

Turkey and Japan were imperial powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and were not colonised. The Turkish Ottoman Empire lost territory in North Africa and the Balkans to European powers and to nationalist movements during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Meanwhile, the cultural and economic influence of European powers grew in parts of the Middle East, leading to further erosion of control, and at the start of WW1 (1914–18) the Ottoman Empire comprised Turkey and what comprises the Middle East, which After WW1 was carved up by Britain and France, with Britain also having client states on the Arabian Peninsula. British and French control lasted until WW2 with grave implications for people of the Middle East well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## *China*

Attempts to colonise China were less successful than those in South and Southeast Asia. Demand for Chinese goods, especially silk, porcelain and tea, caused the flow of European silver into China in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The British East India Company offset the imbalance and strengthened its trading influence by auctioning Indian-grown opium to traders in exchange for silver. Opium entered China through local middlemen to reverse the Chinese trade surplus, depleted its silver, and cause opium addiction on a large scale in China.

The First Opium War (1839–42) comprised battles between Britain and the Qing Dynasty over diplomatic relations, trade and administration of justice in China. China's refusal to legalise opium and its confiscation of opium in 1839 led to a British naval attack that imposed the Treaty of Nanking on the Qing Dynasty in 1842, granting Britain indemnity and extraterritoriality, plus the opening of five treaty ports to foreign merchants and ceding the island of Hong Kong to Britain. Britain, supported by the French, waged its Second Opium War (1856–60), when the Qing government faced the Taping Rebellion (1850–64). The net outcome was providing residence in Beijing for foreign envoys, opening of several new ports to Western trade and residence, the right of foreigners to travel in the interior of China, freedom of movement for Christian missionaries, and legalization of opium import. Further, China ceded to Britain a part of the Kowloon Peninsula adjacent to Hong Kong.

China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 forced China to recognise the independence of Korea, over which it held suzerainty and to cede Taiwan among other territories to Japan, pay a large sum as indemnity to Japan, and to open several ports to Japanese trade.

Foreign concessions (territories under foreign control) were established in Shanghai and other coastal cities between 1895 and 1900; and Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and US possessed enclaves in China.

The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) was a revolt by peasant movements in response to the humiliation of Qing rule by European colonialists and its defeat by Japan. An international team of troops from Japan and Russia as well as Britain, the US, France, Austria-Hungary and Italy put down the uprising. The defeated Chinese endured foreign military occupation and paid a huge indemnity — more than twice the annual national income of China. The Chinese revolution of 1911 overthrew the Qing dynasty and the First Republic of China was declared in 1912.

Thus, between 1870 and 1914, Western powers carved spheres of influence in China, with France gaining territory in south-western China, Germany in the Shandong Peninsula in the north, the British controlling the Yangzi valley and Russia controlling Manchuria and having leasehold over Port Arthur.

Britain, seeking to make Tibet its protectorate at the tail end of the Qing dynasty brutally invaded Tibet in 1903–04 using mostly Ghurkha and Pathan troops to impose the Anglo-Tibetan Agreement of 1904, making Tibet an effective British protectorate. But Britain was forced to accept China's claim to Tibet in 1906, and British designs for Tibet faded in the context of events in Europe leading to WW1.

#### **4. Colonial Powers in the Middle East**

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in WW2, Britain and France divided the Middle East between themselves. Britain's control of the Suez Canal let it play an active role in Egypt as well as acquire the militarily valuable island of Cyprus to secure oil resources.

Iraq and Palestine were made British mandated territories and Syria and Lebanon French mandated territories. Iraq, which became the Kingdom of Iraq, included large populations of Kurds, Assyrians and Turkmens, who had been promised independent states by European powers.

The British Mandate for Palestine was later divided by Britain into Mandatory Palestine and the Emirate of Transjordan. Britain, by the

Balfour Declaration of 1917, also pledged to the international Zionist movement support for re-creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine (where Jews were fewer than 8% of the population in 1918), and gave Jews free rein to immigrate, buy land from absentee landlords, set up a shadow government in waiting and establish the nucleus of a state under the protection of the British Army, which suppressed a Palestinian revolt in 1936. Zionist expansion, covertly facilitated by Britain, went on even after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

Most of the Arabian Peninsula fell to a British ally, Ibn Saud, who created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. British protectorates of Bahrain (since 1880), Muscat and Oman (since 1892), Trucial States (precursor of the UAE, since 1892) and Qatar (since 1916) remained under British control until 1971, while Kuwait (a protectorate since 1899) became independent in 1961. Despite Britain relinquishing direct control over the region, political, economic and military links between Britain and the Gulf States have remained strong.

The Middle East, with its vital waterways, was important to imperialism as a strategic location relative to Europe, Asia and Africa as well as for and major oil resources (discovered in Iran in 1908 followed by Iraq in 1927, and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the 1930s). Thus, Britain secured concessions in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain to build pipelines in the region.

Persia (renamed as Iran in 1935) was by late 19<sup>th</sup> Century a weak state dominated by tsarist Russia and Imperial Britain. The Persian Parliament was established by the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) under the Qajar monarch Mozaffar ad-Din Shah. But the Constitution was nullified by his successor Mohammad Ali Shah. A pro-constitutional movement forced Ali Shah's abdication in favour of his son Ahmad Shah Qajar and restoration the constitution in 1909. The Persian Empire collapsed after WW1, and Colonel Reza Khan seized power to establish the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. The Constitution was amended to make the Pahlavi dynasty legitimate sovereigns. Shah Reza Khan, who accelerated

industrialization, modernization and cultural westernization, and crushed the power of the Islamic judges and priests, unsuccessfully sought the help of the US for his project. Thus he increasingly turned to Germany, which gradually gained monopoly of Iranian business. The Iranian army was also modernised and strengthened. But WW2 broke out before completion of the project. Although the Shah did not support Nazi Germany in WW2, his refusal to antagonise Germany led to a British–Soviet invasion in August 1941 and his abdication in favour of his son Shah Reza Khan.

At the time, Iran had just begun to develop its petroleum industry, and Britain depended largely on oil from the US. A treaty was signed in 1942, by which British and Soviet troops were allowed into Iran to defend Iran from possible German attack, but will leave six months after the end of the war. In 1944 Britain and the US began to press the Iranian government for oil concessions, whereupon the USSR demanded concessions on its own. By 1945, with the war nearing its end and the oil issue still unsettled, US attitude toward the USSR turned hostile under Harry S. Truman who succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died in April 1945, as President of the US. Truman sought to expand US influence in Iran. The USSR withdrew from Iran in 1946 April, following the grant of an oil concession in Iran. Soon after, Iran, under US pressure, reneged on the deal with the USSR. This was among events that set the course for the Cold War, during which the Shah established himself as an indispensable ally of the West.

The Shah took advantage of the attempt on his life by a religious extremist in 1949 to blame it on the Tudeh Party, a pro-Soviet communist party, ban the party and persecute its supporters, as well as to expand his constitutional powers. Mohammad Mosaddegh, Prime Minister of Iran from July 1952, who introduced a number of progressive social and political reforms, nationalised the Iranian oil industry, under British control since 1913. In August 1953 the Shah tried to dismiss Mosaddegh, but was forced by Mosaddegh's supporters to flee. Days later, Mosaddegh was removed from power in a coup organised and executed by the CIA at the request of British MI6. The US and Britain restored the

Shah to power, and the US was his patron through his highly repressive rule and after his overthrow by the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

The impact of Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule was restricted by their weak industrial capitalist economy. The colonists sought monopoly of trade and their overall economic impact on the colonies was moderate. There was significant cultural influence, including the effect of religious conversion especially under the Portuguese, but forms of production relations remained intact except for the development of plantations under the Dutch. There was some development of technology relating to trade and transport, and Dutch architecture too made an effect. The Dutch modernised the legal system in the colonies, but without excessive transgression of traditional legal systems.

Colonial exploitation of Asian countries by industrial capitalism hastened the disintegration of their subsistence economies and stimulated the growth of European capitalist production. Colonialism hindered the development of national capitalist industries in the colonies, which were made into sources of raw materials and markets for European industrial goods; and later into spheres of investment for foreign capital. Unable to compete with imported goods, local handicraft production fell by the wayside. Imperialist colonial powers set up industries in the colonies, laid long lines of rail tracks and established financial systems only to make quick profit and to fully exploit the available resources. This policy of systematic exploitation drained the wealth of the colonies and greatly contributed to poverty and backwardness. A negative outcome of colonial industrialization is the notion of economic development that prevails in the colonies, which confuses national interests with those of imperialism.

British colonial rule had a strong impact on Asia because it coincided with the rapid growth of industry in Britain. The Indian experience is most illustrative, as colonization of India was the key driver of Britain's

Industrial Revolution. As a colony, India was forced to supply raw materials accelerate the industrial revolution in Britain. Colonization forced open the Indian market to British goods, sold without tariff in India, unlike the heavily taxed Indian goods. India, a country of combined agriculture and manufacture, thus became an agricultural colony of British capitalism. Industrialization picked up in India from early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but not in ways that matched India's potential or met the needs of India. The overall impact of colonialism on the Indian economy is clearly evident from the fact that India, which in 1750 produced nearly 25% of the world's manufacturing output and only second to China, which produced 32.8%, produced in 1880 only 2.8% of the world exports. At independence in 1947, India was among the most poverty-stricken regions in the world. The plight of other colonies was essentially the same, although the misery of the local population varied.

The semi-feudal economies of most Asian countries neither industrialised nor developed into fully fledged capitalist countries. Differences between the colonies and semi-colonies lay in the mechanism of exploitation and the cultural impact of the colonial power. Industrial development in semi-colonies was further impeded by lack of investment by European capitalists for want of state protection and support for expansion.

It is true that sectors like transport and communication were modernized and developed under colonial rule. It is also claimed that the colonies owe modern systems of administration to colonial rule. Regardless of conditions, it will be xenophobic to deny the contribution by other nations to the social development of a nation, but to plead that the people of the colonies should be grateful to colonial rule for such development is being slavish. What need to be considered are the context and purpose of any such development and the options that would have been open to the colonies without colonial interference.

Pre-capitalist forms of rule also survived, more in the semi-colonies, and included absolute monarchy, vestiges of theocracy and elements of feudal authority. Obsolete forms of social consciousness endured in the sphere

of ideology, the psychological vestiges of feudalism being the most tenacious.

Among the legacies of colonial rule are slavery and indentured labour (and now forced migration of populations under conditions of civil war, natural disaster, famine and poverty) which have added obstacles to the unity of oppressed people by highlighting issues of race and ethnic identity.

Colonial rule also led to racial segregation, as the European rulers treated their culture as superior and sought to impose their culture on Asians. Even worse was the attitude of racial superiority which led to discriminatory laws against local people. This policy of racial segregation combined with existing discriminatory systems like the caste system in South Asia has reinforced local prejudices base on caste and skin colour.

Colonial rule had serious consequences in the social and cultural spheres. Firstly, it adversely affected the religions of the local people who were encouraged by Western Missionaries to embrace Christianity by offering material benefits, although they provided some valuable community service. However, conversion on a large scale led to communal divisions.

Among unforeseen outcomes of colonial rule is the unification of large territories with diverse linguistic and cultural identities such as India and Indonesia. But, on the other hand, in the Middle East, colonial take over from the Ottoman Empire callously divided nationalities like the Arabs and Kurds among competing states.

Some plead that imposing English by the colonial rulers as the language of administration and higher education helped to unify India. But that is doubtful since an equally diverse Indonesia was unified without the help of the Dutch language. It is true that access to modern education in the colonies came mainly through the agency of the English language, and that modern political concepts entered through English and French. But that cannot mean that the people of the colonies are incapable of developing modern thought unaided by English or French.

It should, however, be noted that the real beneficiaries of the spread of the English language in the colonies were the US and British imperialists, because that made their language the global link language. Besides, over-reliance of the colonial elite on English for access to information and even communication hampered the development of the linguistically elegant languages in the colonies from developing into modern languages. The myth of English being the window to knowledge is exploded by the fact that many capitalist countries of Europe, Japan and semi-colonies like China, Thailand and the Arab countries do not rely on English for the purpose, although they use English in the context of its position as the global link language.

Liberation from colonialism is not complete with the removal of colonial rule. It demands the freeing of the people from a colonial mindset. That has not happened, except rather superficially. A key factor has been the inability and reluctance of both comprador and national bourgeois classes that took charge of the state from the colonial rulers to undertake the fundamental social changes necessary to make the independence of their country meaningful.

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# Leninism and National Liberation

*The excerpt below from “the Foundations of Leninism” by JV Stalin summarises the Leninist approach to the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples and the proletarian revolution:*

In solving the national question Leninism proceeds from the following theses:

- a) the world is divided into two camps: the camp of a handful of civilised nations, which possess finance capital and exploit the vast majority of the population of the globe; and the camp of the oppressed and exploited peoples in the colonies and dependent countries, which constitute the majority;
- b) the colonies and the dependent countries, oppressed and exploited by finance capital, constitute a vast reserve and a very important source of strength for imperialism;
- c) the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed peoples in the dependent and colonial countries against imperialism is the only road that leads to their emancipation from oppression and exploitation;
- d) the most important colonial and dependent countries have already taken the path of the national liberation movement, which cannot but lead to the crisis of world capitalism;
- e) the interests of the proletarian movement in the developed countries and of the national liberation movement in the colonies call for the union of these two forms of the revolutionary

movement into a common front against the common enemy, against imperialism;

- f) the victory of the working class in the developed countries and the liberation of the oppressed peoples from the yoke of imperialism are impossible without the formation and the consolidation of a common revolutionary front;
- g) the formation of a common revolutionary front is impossible unless the proletariat of the oppressor nations renders direct and determined support to the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples against the imperialism of its "own country," for "no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations" (*Engels*);
- h) this support implies the upholding defence and implementation of the slogan of the right of nations to secession, to independent existence as states;
- i) unless this slogan is implemented, the union and collaboration of nations within a single world economic system, which is the material basis for the victory of world socialism, cannot be brought about;
- j) this union can only be voluntary, arising on the basis of mutual confidence and fraternal relations among peoples.

Source:

*JV Stalin. The Foundations of Leninism, Chapter VI: The National Question*

Access:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/foundations-leninism/ch06.htm>

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## **Asia: Colonialism to Neocolonialism**

Colonization of Asia occurred under a variety of historical circumstances, although, on the main, it involved fewer European powers than in Africa. Colonial conquest also involved the transfer of power from one European power to another as well as overcoming existing empires like the Ottoman Empire, the Persian Empire, the Mogul Empire and the Maratha Empire in the Indian subcontinent and the Chinese Empire. The Russian Empire in Asia expanded southwards, unchallenged by European rivals. Initial colonial rivalry in Asia was between the Portuguese and the Dutch, for monopoly over trade and trade routes. With the emergence of capitalist powers in Europe, rivalry was mainly between the British and the French, the dominant maritime powers.

Colonial rule had a modernizing impact on Asia but its overall impact was negative. Colonialism had neither intention nor need to modernise Asia more than necessary to facilitate exploitation and maximise profits. Colonial control earned the dislike of the people, and there was resistance, including instances of spontaneous violence; and colonialism developed ways to handle opposition and resistance using sections of the colonial population to subdue resistance. How anti-colonial resistance evolved and manifested itself varied from colony to colony as did the way colonies gained independence. However, two global events were most influential in determining the course of struggles for independence. The October Socialist Revolution of 1917 inspired those who were already struggling for independence and induced others to fight for freedom. The Second World War (WW2) weakened both France and Britain, the two main colonial powers in Asia. Humiliation at the hands of Japan, although defeated eventually, shook their credibility as great powers in

the eyes of the people in Asia, and accelerated independence from colonial rule. But freedom did not come easily, and how it arrived influenced the way things developed in each former colony.

This essay contains a summary of the anti-colonial struggles across Asia and identifies the interests each anti-colonial struggle represented. It identifies the conditions under which colonies won independence and the factors that robbed independence of its meaning to replace colonial rule with neo-colonial rule.

## **Anti-Colonial Struggles**

During the imperialist upsurge from 1870 to the First World War (WW1), the larger European states, the US and Japan competed for territory. That led to war between the imperialists as well as to growing opposition to foreign domination and exploitation in the colonies and semi-colonies. The way resistance manifested itself depended on context.

The October Revolution of 1917 freed all nations subject to tsarist Russian oppression and made them equal partners in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) founded in 1922. Geographical proximity helped revolution in Mongolia, and the Communist Party of Mongolia (founded in 1920) played a key role in the revolution of 1921. The October Revolution also inspired anti-colonial struggles to overcome their setbacks and to mobilize for more militant resistance.

Despite growing anti-colonial feeling and militancy, colonies in the rest of Asia had to wait until the end of WW2 for freedom, since colonial control was strong and national movements took time to mobilise the masses. The path of the anti-colonial struggle in each colony depended on socio-economic factors and the class nature of the anti-colonial movement.

Communist parties founded in the third and fourth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century played an active role in keeping alive the anti-colonial struggles in their respective countries, amid colonial oppression. Decolonization was helped by the economic weakening of the European colonial powers,

but was driven by anti-colonial militancy, growing mass appeal of the anti-colonial campaign and in some cases the rise of a revolutionary left.

Following the outbreak of WW2, Britain, France and Holland, to resist the fascist German-Japanese alliance, were forced to seek the support of their colonial subjects, including opponents of colonial rule. But, after the war, the colonies still had to wage struggle to be freed of the colonial yoke. While Japanese victories in the Pacific War had a positive impact by showing the people of Asia that the colonial powers were not invincible, the net impact of invasion by fascist Japan was negative.

Strong regional similarities exist in the decolonisation process. Thus, the account below is presented on the basis of regions, namely South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East and Iran, in that order.

### ***South Asia***

***India.*** As said earlier, Afghanistan took advantage of the post-WW1 climate to be rid of British dominance in 1919. Controlling India was not easy. Following the 1857 mutiny, the colonial government imposed a repressive regime. The Indian National Congress (Congress) representing national bourgeois interests was founded in 1885 and sought a bigger role for the Indian elite to administer India. The Congress remained pacifist despite murderous repression including the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh (in Punjab) in 1919. By the time the call for independence came in 1929, the British had sowed seeds of Hindu-Muslim division and developed strategies, like the partition of Bengal in 1905 (annulled in 1911), to divide the people on religious lines.

Mass resistance forced the British to make concessions including granting Indians political rights at the provincial level in 1935. Provincial elections in 1937 led to overall success of the Congress. However, the outbreak of WW2 in 1939 changed the course of events. The Congress was divided in its reaction to the British request for support in its war effort. Congress Socialists and SC Bose (Netaji) argued that they should exploit the situation to secure freedom by starting a civil disobedience movement.

Nehru, who saw the choice to be between democracy and fascism, argued that India should neither join the war nor weaken Britain by starting a struggle. Gandhi, who led the Congress, declared that India could not be a party to the war while freedom was denied. Thus the Congress demanded the promise of independence in return for support, which the British refused to consider.

The Communist Party of India, founded abroad in 1920 and established on Indian soil in 1925, suffered colonial repression all along and was banned for a second time in 1939 for its anti-war stance. It changed its position on the war when the German attack on the USSR in June 1941 transformed WW2 from an imperialist war into a war against fascism.

However, following Japanese success in Southeast Asia and the retreat of the British from Malaya and Burma, the Congress adopted in August 1942 the well known "Quit India" resolution calling for an immediate end to British rule and the setting up of a provisional national government that would cooperate with the allies in their war efforts and allow the stationing of their armed forces in India, accompanied by the threat that if the offer was rejected the Congress would resort to non-violent struggle. The Congress had no plans, but the public, inspired by the call, resorted to violence, which Gandhi denounced. Yet, Congress leaders censured the Communists later for betraying India in the interest of the USSR.

The British agreed to Indian independence only after it was clear that the cost of retaining India as a colony was more than the benefit of holding on to it. They, however, ensured that power was transferred to a friendly force, namely the Congress, in August 1947 while the religious divide that they fostered and the inability of the Congress to adequately address issues of religious, linguistic and caste hegemony facilitated the partition of India into India and Pakistan.

The Indian elite who took control of the state soon asserted themselves as the expansionist successors to the British Raj, and not only annexed all principalities within the borders of the Raj but also Kashmir, Manipur and Nagaland, without the consent of the people.

*Ceylon.* Anti-colonialism in Ceylon, with a few exceptions, was attended by shades of ethno-religious chauvinism based on rivalry among the elite for position and dominance of business. Call for total independence was first made in 1930 by the Jaffna Youth Congress in the North, inspired by developments in India but was not taken forward at national level until the Left Movement emerged in 1935. The war years hurt the Left, which seriously sought national independence. The British, considering the developments in post-WW2 India, chose to grant independence in February 1948, with power handed over to the United National Party, a party of the elite put together in September 1946, and loyal to the Empire.

*The Maldives.* The British protectorate of the Maldives, under British control from 1887, gained independence in July 1965, a little after Britain let go of its colonies in Southeast Asia.

### *Southeast Asia*

Japanese expansion in Southeast and East Asia during WW2 distorted the course of freedom struggles. In Vietnam, Korea, Indonesia, Burma and Malaya, communists were key contributors to anti-Japanese resistance.

*Burma.* Nationalism in Burma emerged around 1920 in two distinct forms. One demanded Burma's independence. Dobama Asiayone (We Burmans Association) founded by young intellectuals in 1930 was most prominent. The other opposed centralization of power in Burma. It came from ethnic minorities, with whom the colonial interaction was minimal. The Karen and Shan minorities persisted in struggle for decades and their "guerrilla states" still exist in parts of what make their ethnic territory.

The trade union movement started in the oil refineries in 1933, and nationalist students helped the peasantry to resist colonial abuse. Young members of Dobama who were influenced by Marxist ideas founded the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1939. The outbreak of WW2 altered the course of the independence struggle. Leaders of the CPB, despite imprisonment for organizing resistance to British rule, took the stand that

WW2 was anti-fascist and that communists should side with Britain against Germany and Japan, even before the Nazi invasion of the USSR.

Aung San, a co-founder of CPB along with several young members of Dobama, however, sought the support of the Japanese, who helped them to form the Burma Independence Army (BIA) in 1941 and used the BIA to occupy Burma in 1942. Burmese "independence", declared in August 1943, was a sham, and many young nationalists went on to join cadres of the CPB to fight Japanese fascism. In August 1944, the CPB, the People's Revolutionary Party (later Socialist Party) and the Burma National Army (BNA, earlier BIA) formed the Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO), a united front headed by Aung San, which in March 1945 became the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), which fought for freedom from the British colonialists who took over from defeated Japan.

The British who promised to Aung San, who was Premier of the Crown Colony of Burma in 1946–47, that they would grant independence to Burma began to waver. But reality gave them little choice as they had to deal with a state apparatus that had functioned for three years in their absence, and had an army at its disposal. In January 1947 the British promised independence within an year, but Aung San and most of his cabinet were assassinated in July 1947 with British connivance. U Nu led the AFPFL government of independent Burma from January 1948 until the military coup of 1962 that led to a prolonged military dictatorship.

*Malaya.* Britain lost its colonies of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak to the Japanese who also captured the British protectorate of Brunei. British defeat in the region was helped by the incapacitation of the US Pacific Fleet by the bombing of the Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and by British preoccupation with the war in Europe. The Japanese took two months to drive the British out of Malaya and two more weeks to get the British-led forces that retreated to Singapore to surrender.

The Communist Party of Malaya (MCP) founded in 1930 was illegal in Malaya and the colonial regime harassed communists. However, when

Japan invaded Malaya in December 1941, the authorities accepted the MCP's standing offer of military co-operation against Japan and released all left-wing political prisoners. The British military hastily trained MCP members to form the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), which for lack of equipment and training went on the defensive, but grew in size owing to the cruel treatment of the Chinese by the Japanese, which also made many young Chinese join the MPAJA guerrillas. Notably, the MPAJA offered the only significant resistance to Japanese occupation.

The Japanese, however, sowed the seeds of future unrest by pursuing a policy of divide and conquer, favouring Malays and harassing Chinese. The consequent Malay–Chinese friction lasted even after the return of the British. Unlike communists, the Guomindang, with widespread following among Malayan Chinese, did not offer much resistance to the Japanese.

Malaya was important to the British economy for long, but with WW2 nearly bankrupting Britain, tin and rubber from Malaya became even more important. The British Military Administration (BMA) took control in Malaya in September 1945. It saw the MPAJA guerrillas as a hindrance to its rule and acted to demobilize the MPAJA. The NCP reacted with an anti-British insurgency from June 1948, which was brutally put down by British and Malayan forces supported by Commonwealth forces from Australia, New Zealand and other British colonies. Under the notorious Briggs Plan to isolate the MCP, 500 000 people, mostly ethnic Chinese villagers, were corralled into concentration camps called "New Villages". The communists lost initiative by 1953 and the struggle ceased in 1960.

***British Borneo.*** There was weak resistance to Japanese occupation in British Borneo (comprising the present Labuan, Sabah, and Sarawak in East Malaysia and Brunei) especially in Sarawak. Japanese forces of occupation were overcome only after Japan's surrender in August 1945.

***Indochina.*** The earliest organised resistance to French colonial rule in Indochina was in Vietnam in the 1880s. The "Vietnam Restoration

League” formed in 1912 by Vietnamese exiles in China was unsuccessful too. The Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, the first Marxist organization in Indochina, was founded in Guangzhou (China) in 1925 by Ho Chi Minh. The Vietnamese Communist Party (later renamed the Indochinese Communist Party, ICP) was founded in Hong Kong in 1930 by uniting three separate units of communists that developed in the late 1920s. The ICP faced severe repression under French colonial rule and revived rapidly from 1941 owing to the active resistance of the Việt Minh Front, a broad front led by the ICP to liberate Vietnam from French rule as well as resist Japanese occupation.

Japanese troops occupied Tonkin in northern Indochina in September 1940 with the consent of the Vichy France regime (a collaborator with Nazi Germany) to blockade China, and invaded southern Indochina in July 1941 to prepare for an invasion of the Dutch East Indies. French troops and civil administration were allowed to remain, but under Japanese supervision. Vichy France collapsed in late 1944, and Japan deposed the French authorities in Vietnam in March 1945. Under these conditions, the ICP sided with the French in Indochina against Japan, which it saw as the main enemy. The Việt Minh was in control of all of Vietnam when Japan surrendered to the allies. Vietnamese independence was declared on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1945 and the Việt Minh won a massive victory in elections held in January 1946.

However, France, returned in strength to Vietnam in October 1945 to take charge of Indochina, and proclaimed the Republic of Cochinchina (South Vietnam) in June 1946. The Việt Minh was forced to retreat to the jungle and resort to guerrilla warfare in November 1946. The war of liberation continued until French defeat in 1954. France, however, granted independence to Cambodia and Laos in 1953. The Geneva Conference agreed in July 1954, that Vietnam will be temporarily partitioned along the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel with elections scheduled for July 1956. But that was not to be the end of Vietnam’s agony. The US entered South Vietnam with military advisors in 1955 and escalated armed conflict in the name of

halting the spread of communism. The Vietnam War, the cruellest war imposed on a people by a modern imperialist power, lasted until US aggressors were humiliated in May 1975 by the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, backed by North Vietnam, China, North Korea and USSR among others. The US had as its military allies Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan, besides covert support from the UK and Canada, among others.

*Indonesia.* A nationalist movement that started in October 1908 became the mass movement, Sarekat Islam, in September 1912. The Indies Social Democratic Association founded in 1914 by the exiled Dutch socialist Henk Sneevliet became the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) in 1924.

After WW1, Indonesian communists gained influence in the nationalist movement, and with Sarekat Islam focussed more on religious matters from 1921, the communists were the only active nationalist organization. Dutch opposition to social change led to the growth of the PKI. Dutch repression of political activity forced the PKI underground in 1926, and the Dutch East Indies government outlawed the PKI in 1927. The PKI worked in various broad front organisations, and remained opposed to all foreign occupation, including that by Japan, which invaded Indonesia at the start of 1942 and took control from the Dutch by March 1942.

Although Japan used Indonesia to attack Australia, Indonesia itself was not a scene of WW2 battles. The Indonesian nationalist leaders Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta worked with Japan to set up numerous Indonesian mass organizations as well as a Japanese-sponsored home defence corps, the first Indonesian armed force. When it was clear that the Japanese would lose the war, they declared Indonesian independence on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945, under pressure from radical nationalists, and with tacit support from Japan to pre-empt a Dutch take over after the war. Japanese occupation was, however, a decisive factor in independence of Indonesia.

The British arrived in September 1945 to take control of Indonesia, but failed, and were persuaded in November by their allies to come to terms

with the newly declared Republic of Indonesia. The Dutch, who followed in the wake of British departure to retake Indonesia, were forced to agree to transition to independence. But fighting continued into 1949 amid Dutch atrocities against resistance to colonial rule. The Dutch eventually conceded Indonesian sovereignty on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1949, but took until August 1995 to accept 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945 as Indonesian Independence Day. They, however, held on to what was Dutch New Guinea until 1961.

The PKI played an influential, but not dominant, part in Indonesian government under Sukarno. The fascist coup of 1965 sponsored by the British and the US led to the biggest post-war human tragedy comprising the killing of between 500 000 and 1 000 000 people suspected of being communists and their sympathisers. The US-backed fascist military rule of General Suharto lasted 33 years until overthrow in 1998.

*The Philippines.* The struggle for independence began well before the US troops arrived in 1898. Philippine revolutionaries declared independence in June 1898. But, by the Treaty of Paris of December 1898, Spain, defeated in the Spanish–American War provoked by the US, sold the Philippines to the US. The revolutionary government refused to recognise the treaty, and in February 1899, the US unleashed a cruel war of aggression known as the Filipino–American War, using 126 000 troops to conquer a nation of 7 000 000 people and killed close to 250 000 according to Western imperialist sources and up to 1 000 000 according to others.

Opposition to annexation of the Philippines was strong in the US for several reasons besides anti-colonialism. To keep the Philippines as a colony, the US set up military bases at strategic locations and organized an armed group of stooges that later became the Philippine Constabulary. Relentless demand for independence forced the US in 1935 to offer nominal independence in 1946 after ten-years under a government of the Philippine Commonwealth.

The National Defence Act of 1936 passed by the government made the Constabulary the First Regular Army, which was indoctrinated, equipped

and trained by the US Army which controlled it. On the eve of WW2, it was made a constituent of the US Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). In 1941, the US lost the Philippines to Japan, which occupied the country up to 1945. Backed by USAFFE guerrillas, the US recovered control. Nominal independence was granted in 1946, with power passing to loyal Filipino leaders on whom the US imposed the Treaty of General Relations, assuring the continuance of US military bases and property rights of US citizens and corporations. Having made a semi-colony of the Philippines, the US intensified aggression and exercised military control through various agreements; and bound the Philippines to a mutual defence pact and a US-controlled regional security pact, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). It also manipulated the outcome of presidential elections in favour of the candidate most compliant with US imperialist interests. The fascist dictatorship imposed by President Ferdinand Marcos in 1972 was a rash move to protect super profits by US corporates, bureaucratic corruption and the big landowners.

### *East Asia*

*Korea.* Japan's colonial rule over Korea began with annexation in 1910. Japan secured ownership in all key branches of Korean industry and in agriculture, and maximised profits by harsh exploitation of local labour. Plunder of resources and manpower by Japan kept Korea as a backward, agrarian, semi-feudal country. Resistance to Japanese rule started in 1919, but Japanese repression forced the leaders flee to China and work with support from the Chinese Nationalist Government. Mass struggles that gained momentum in Korea between 1920 and 1925 were not sustained.

The Korean Socialist Party founded in 1918 was East Asia's first socialist organisation, but the left movement was badly divided. The unity achieved in April 1925 leading to the foundation of the Communist Party of Korea (CPK) was short-lived owing to factional strife, and the CPK was dissolved in 1928. However, the communists functioned as small cells and worked with the Communist Party of China to conduct guerrilla

activity against the Japanese in the early 1930s. Eventually Korean resistance guided by communists led by Kim Il Sung defeated the Japanese and liberated Korea in August 1945.

US State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee decided to divide Korea and its people artificially on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1945, four days prior to Korea's final liberation to avert socialist rule in Korea. Fearing the popularity of the Korean revolution, the US created the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) south of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel as the sole legal authority in the South until the Republic of Korea (ROK) was formally set up on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1948. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was formed in North Korea on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1948. The Korean War was instigated by the US puppet regime in South Korea in June 1950 ended in 1953 Korea. But Korea is kept divided by the US to ensure its military presence in East Asia.

*China.* The overthrow of the Qing dynasty by revolution and the declaration of the First Republic of China in 1912 did not end foreign domination. Although US concessions were merged with British concessions by 1902, US influence remained strong. The Austro-Hungarian and German concessions ceased because of defeat in WW1, and the Russian concession ceased in 1920 after the October Revolution. The Belgian concession was withdrawn in 1931 owing to its insignificant benefit to Belgium. The rest remained until after WW2, and Hong Kong remained British and Macau Portuguese for another half century.

European imperialists adopted a soft approach towards Japan's bids to seize Chinese territory until after Japan became a threat to their interests in Asia. Japan's invasion of China led to the anti-Japanese war (1937–45), which was fought alongside attempts by the Nationalist Government (Guomindang) to destroy the communists, despite the formation of a united front in 1937 to fight Japanese aggression.

During WW2, the US was actively involved in China, and from late 1941 gave massive military and financial aid to the Guomindang. Although the

US and Britain revised their earlier unequal treaties with China in January 1943, the US signed a new agreement soon after with the Republic of China to station US troops in China for the war against Japan.

The US policy, designed to make China a strong ally in post-war East Asia, failed amid intensifying civil war between the Guomindang and the Communists. Following the surrender of Japan, Taiwan was transferred from Japan to the Republic of China in October 1945. When the Guomindang was defeated by revolutionary forces led by the Communist party of China in 1949, the US extracted its pound of flesh by assisting the Guomindang to flee the mainland and set up government in Taiwan, but and recognising it as the sole legal government of China until 1972.

### *The Middle East and Iran*

Opposition to colonial rule and settlement in the Middle East and North Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries was widespread but varied in form and content. Response to European colonial domination in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria, was inspired by developments in Egypt, the first Arab country to rid itself of a monarchy subservient to European rulers, notably its bold step to nationalise the Suez Canal.

*Iraq.* Iraq had a major uprising against British rule in 1920 that represented a wide cross section of the population. The monarch, Faisal I of Iraq was legitimised and proclaimed King following a plebiscite in 1921. Although independence was granted at the official end of the British Mandate in 1932, Britain retained its right to military intervention through a defence treaty imposed on Iraq prior to independence. Revolts by tribal populations of southern Iraq and the Kurds in northern Iraq — to whom the British had promised autonomy — persisted until 1935. A military coup in 1936 led to political instability, and a pro-Nazi nationalist coup in April 1941 overthrew the pro-British regime, giving the British pretext to invade and reoccupy Iraq. Negotiations with the British in 1947 resulted in a treaty in January 1948 agreeing to British withdrawal subject to the creation of a British–Iraqi joint defence board to

oversee Iraqi military planning and British control of Iraqi foreign affairs. British domination of Iraq went on until the overthrow of the monarchy by the revolution of July 1958 led by Abd al-Karim Qasim who was supportive of Iraqi communists.

The Left was slow to emerge as a significant political force in much of the Middle East amid colonial repression, hostility of Arab nationalists (the Ba'athists especially) and conservative Islamic ideology. Regardless of Arab nationalist attitude towards them, the communists were firm in their opposition to colonial and semi-colonial rule. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), formed in 1934, was a notable anti-imperialist force and, amid state repression, took part in many important national uprisings and demonstrations in the 1940s and 1950s. The overthrow of Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1963 by the radical pan-Arab Ba'athists supported by sections of the armed forces led to a repressive regime which, despite a significant anti-imperialist content, was harsh on the ICP.

*Syria.* France, despite its mandate over Syria took Damascus by force in 1920, removing King Faisal from the throne to which he was elected by the General Syrian Congress in 1920, and carved out the state of Greater Lebanon. It further divided Syria into three autonomous regions in 1922. The nationalist uprising of 1925–26 against the French failed. France rejected the constitution for Syria drafted by the constituent assembly elected in 1928. This sparked nationalist protests in which the Communist Party played an active role in the mid-1930s. In 1936 France agreed to Syrian independence with terms ensuring French military and economic dominance. Following the founding of Vichy France in 1940 under German domination, British and Free French troops occupied Syria in 1941, and General De Gaulle promised to end the French mandate. The last French troops left Syria in 1946.

Following a period of political instability, an army coup in 1954 enabled the return of civilian government. In February 1958, Syria and Egypt joined to form the United Arab Republic (UAR). Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt, who also headed UAR, to the shock of the Ba'ath

Arab Socialist Party founded in 1947 and had campaigned for the union, ordered the dissolution of Syrian political parties. This led to an army coup and the scrapping of UAR in 1961. A new group of Ba'athist military leaders seized power in 1964. The Ba'athist party, taken over by its more radical wing in 1966, produced a new constitution in 1969. A group of moderates under General Hafiz al-Assad seized power in 1970. Assad became president in 1971, and the constitution promulgated by him in 1973 remains largely current.

**Lebanon.** France created the State of Greater Lebanon as a safe haven for the Maronite Christian population of Lebanon. Greater Lebanon became the Lebanese Republic in May 1926. Initially a majority of the Muslims in Greater Lebanon rejected the creation of the new state, but by late 1930s they accepted the idea of being Lebanese citizens. All French troops withdrew from Lebanon by the end of 1946.

**Palestine.** Palestinian resistance to the British Mandate started with the realization that the British Mandate established and implemented a policy of unlimited immigration of European Jews that would ensure that Arab Palestinians became a minority in the next few decades, despite assurances that the 1917 Balfour Declaration did not seek to displace the indigenous population. By the time the State of Israel was established in 1948, Zionist militias had forcibly displaced nearly 80% of the Arabs who were 92% of the Palestinian population (as opposed to 6% Jewish) in 1917. The Zionist state implemented a settler-colonialist project of preventing the return of displaced Arab Palestinians by passing discriminatory laws and using force. Israel, as part of its Greater Israel project, expanded its territory by waging war and encouraging unlawful settlement of Jews in the Palestinian West Bank.

After the Suez War of 1956 initiated by Israel (and soon joined by British and French), the US made Israel its main agency in the Middle East to defend US imperialist interests in the oil-rich Middle East and North Africa. The US continues to support Israel financially and militarily as well as protect Israel from UN resolutions against Israeli crimes against

humanity. Reactionary regimes in the Middle East which are clients of the US for their own survival have warmed up to Israel and act to subvert the 70-years long struggle of the Palestinian people for their right to return, by undermining Palestinian unity and Arab solidarity with the Palestinian people.

*Yemen.* The feudal Shiite imam Yahya ruled the mostly tribal North Yemen from 1918 after the end of Ottoman rule. Yemen was a founding member of the League of Arab States comprising the independent states of Egypt, Syria, Transjordan (later Jordan), Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Yemen, while Southern Yemen was still a British Protectorate and the port of Aden served as a strategic refuelling station for the British Navy. The Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) was declared in 1962 after a coup by military officers inspired by Nasser. Egypt assisted the YAR militarily and materially against the royalist opponents supported by Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Following defeat in the Six-Day War with Israel in 1967, Egypt withdrew troops from Yemen and Saudi Arabia withdrew support for the royalists. A military coup in 1974 installed a pro-Saudi regime.

The Federation of South Arabia (later South Yemen) was an organization of states formed in April 1962 under British protection. In January 1963 it was merged with the Crown colony of Aden. The Upper Aulaqi Sultanate was added to it in June 1964. The Anti-British rebellion, inspired in part by Nasser's pan-Arab nationalism, that began in October 1963 led to the declaration of a state of emergency in Aden. Growing protests led to the end of British rule and the proclamation of the People's Republic of South Yemen in 1967. A pro-Soviet regime took over in June 1969 and changed the name of South Yemen to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1970, and the ruling National Liberation Front became Yemeni Socialist Party in 1978. The regime was affected by internal conflict and tribal tensions as well as the decline of the USSR, and in May 1990 South Yemen merged with the North into the Republic of Yemen.

*Iran.* The left and progressive forces played an active role in the politics of Iran despite some loss of the appeal of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party

during 1944–46 owing to Soviet demands for a petroleum concession in northern Iran and Soviet support for ethnic revolts in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. There was a crackdown on the Tudeh Party in 1949, based on the false charge of attempting to murder the Shah. Following the transformation of Iran into a client state of the US after the coup of 1953 and increased repression under the police state under the Shah, forces of the Islamic Revolution benefitted most from mass resentment. The Islamic Revolution, following its success, became most repressive towards all left and progressive forces and eliminated them from mainstream politics, despite unstinted support of the Tudeh Party for the struggle against the repressive regime of the Shah.

## **Shift to Neocolonial Control**

After WW2, colonial rule gave way to a new form of imperialist domination. An imperialist alliance thus emerged that controlled or even obstructed economic growth in developing countries in order to retain them as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labour. The system was dubbed semi-colonial by some and neo-colonial by others. Much has changed since mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the current system of imperialist domination lacks many key characteristics of old colonial rule. Debate continues, however, on the choice of the term to describe the condition of the former colonies and semi-colonies. The dispute is partly semantic and partly ideological, based on potential implications for the revolutionary strategy to confront imperialism

The term semi-colony once served to distinguish countries under direct colonial rule from countries like China, Iran, Thailand and even Turkey that were subject to indirect colonial domination. Old colonialism effectively drew to a close by the 1960s, and imperialism uses more subtle methods to control former colonies and semi-colonies. This shift in method was not one where the way colonies like India, Ghana and Algeria were controlled changed to the way semi-colonies like China and Iran were controlled. The new system uses strategies that are equally applicable to former colonies and semi-colonies. Thus, the term neo-

colonialism seems more suitable to depict how imperialism dominates and exploits the Third World.

The Left in many colonies quickly sensed that the colonial rulers offered only a façade of independence behind which their indirect control could continue. Neocolonialism as a phenomenon was, however, first mapped out in detail by Kwame Nkrumah in the African context. The features of neocolonialism identified by him apply to all former colonies. Nkrumah summed up the essence of neocolonialism thus:

*"The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."* (Kwame Nkrumah, in Introduction, Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism, 1965)

Neo-colonialism, like colonialism, is prolonged control over a people by a powerful state or its agency that is alien to them. But, since the former exercises control through a formally independent state, control is indirect. Neocolonialism is more than a new strategy of a former colonial power and not confined to former colonial powers. Control of former colonies of Britain and France passed on in whole or part to the US, the dominant imperialist power. Also Germany and Japan became bigger players than their former rivals. One should also note that the imperialist state is not the sole outfit that protects the neo-colonial order, since multinational and transnational corporations (MNCs and TNCs) are now more powerful than many countries and even dictate policy to imperialist powers on key issues.

Since the weakening of the USSR, and particularly its collapse in 1991, the limited sovereignty of the neocolonies has visibly shrunk, and weaker partners of the imperialist system have been effectively reduced to neocolonies. On the other hand, some former colonies and semi-colonies have developed as capitalist countries and nurse regional hegemonic ambitions, which they seek to achieve either as a client or partner of an imperialist power or, on occasion, in conflict with an imperialist power.

While neocolonialism has its variants, economic penetration is the central method by which neocolonialism controls neocolonies, aided by devices such as trade agreements and aid programmes as well as regime change by subversion or military intervention when necessary. However, neo-colonial control is exercised through economic or monetary means.

In the colonial era, colonial rulers confined industrial development to sectors that served colonial purposes, and deterred competition with their exports. Much has changed since, and Asian neocolonies are now a source of cheap labour for imperialists who, driven by greed for profit shifted their industries to the poorer countries of Europe, Asia and Latin America. With very few exceptions, such industrialisation has hardly helped the economies of the poor countries, which are now virtual sweatshops for investors in US and Europe, with the burden of debt rising and the economy even more closely bound to imperialism. The neocolonies are also dumping grounds for surplus non-essential goods forced upon the neocolonies by systematic promotion of consumerism. Fixing of prices of minerals, cash crops and other primary goods, and financing of development (as defined by imperialism) adversely affect balance of payments and increase the debt burden of the neocolonies.

Socio-cultural control, which existed from the beginning of colonialism, has assumed more sophisticated forms that influence society, mainly through the urban middle class, using the entertainment industry, the mass media and now the Internet, to condition them to accept the imperialist world view. Ethnic, religious and cultural identities are increasingly used by parochial social forces, especially in South and Southeast Asia, to stir communal tension, often supported by agents of imperialism; and imperialism now uses the national question and the right to self determination to undermine the unity of sovereign states.

Economic control of a state by a neo-colonial power demands political control, and imperialism uses a powerful network of subversive forces in its pay to destabilise governments through stirring civil unrest.

## **Neocolonialism in Asia**

The US once needed a strong military presence in Asia during the Cold War to “contain Communism” and led the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), founded in 1954 and disbanded in 1977, with Britain, France, Australia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and New Zealand as members. The US joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) formed in 1955 by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and Britain as an associate member in 1959, the year Iraq quit the alliance. CENTO collapsed when Iran’s withdrew after the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. The US, however, retains military treaties with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Israel and is now seeking to bring India into its orbit at the expense of its ally, Pakistan, and still has a strong military presence in Asia, mostly in West Asia, East and South East Asia, and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Its base set up in Kyrgystan in Central Asia in 2001 was, however, closed in 2013, in the face of regional hostility.

The relationship between a former colony and its neocolonial master depended on several factors. The path to independence has been decisive in the transformation of a colony into a neocolony. Where the Left was the driving force of national liberation, as in China, Korea and Vietnam, the end of colonialism led to a socialist state. Also, where there was sustained armed struggle for freedom, as in Indonesia and Burma (now Myanmar), anti-imperialist feelings endured for decades. Transfer of power to a friendly elite group did not always mean sustained loyalty of the former colony, as in India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

Imperialism was harsh on communists and did all it could to suppress the Left. Malayan communists were eliminated militarily, and between half a million and a million Indonesian communists and suspected sympathisers were murdered by the fascist military government of General Suharto with support from British and US imperialists.

Anti-imperialism was strong in Arab countries that resisted British and French colonial control, and influenced the governments of Iraq and Syria, even when anti-communist, to turn to the USSR.

The Islamic revolution of Iran, despite its anti-communism, was about the tyranny of Shah Reza Pahlavi and his patron the US. People of Iran still identify the US with the Shah, and the enduring hostility of the US towards the Islamic state only helps to sustain theocratic rule.

The anti-colonial wave that swept Asia and Africa in the 1950s and 1960s caused the emergence of Afro-Asian friendship organizations with strong anti-imperialist tendencies. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), whose anti-imperialist vigour weaned with time, was an outcome of Third World anti-imperialism. People of Asia and Africa responded strongly to events such as the US-sponsored killing of Patrice Lumumba, Zionist oppression in Palestine, and the Vietnam War. The anti-imperialist momentum, however, declined from the late 1970s along with the global weakening of the left and the failure of nationalist governments to defend national independence and eventually submitting to imperialism.

Besides taking advantage of the irresoluteness of the national bourgeois class in the former colonies, imperialists use a variety of techniques to divide the people of the former colonies and undermine governments that dare to defy neocolonial domination. When subversion fails, imperialism uses proxies, like Iraq against Iran (1980–88), Saudi Arabia in Yemen (from 2015) to wage war. When every attempt at regime change fails, it wages war in the name of peace, democracy and human rights.

Loyalty of some Asian states to US imperialism is driven by hegemonic ambitions, which they cannot fulfil in isolation. Japan and Turkey were accommodated within the US-led imperialist camp. Since the emergence of Iran's challenge to US hegemony in the Middle East, the Saudi regime, which needs US support for its survival, has been encouraged by the US to become a regional hegemon and has in the process moved close to Zionist Israel, despite its earlier anti-Zionist posturing.

India's hegemonic ambitions have roots in the British Raj. Since the Sino-Soviet rift of the 1960s India allied with the USSR and took advantage of it to pursue its hegemonic ambitions by intervening in East Pakistan in 1971. It annexed Sikkim in 1975, dominates over Bhutan and interferes

blatantly in the affairs of Nepal. Its meddling in Sri Lanka in the 1980s proved counterproductive. In recent years, India has increasingly come under the influence of the US, which seeks to use it to isolate China.

Socialist China inspired the anti-colonial movement, especially in the context of the betrayal of the socialism by the USSR in the 1960s. Betrayal of socialism by China since 1978 in the name of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” hurt the anti-imperialist momentum in Asia, which has suffered further since China’s grew into a capitalist power. Betrayal of revolutionary Marxism by China was a blow to revolutionary struggles. Although Marxist Leninist (and Maoist) Communist Parties in Asia are weakened and even divided, they are still at the forefront of anti-imperialist struggle in South and South East Asia, notably India, Nepal and the Philippines. The overthrow of the Nepali monarchy was mainly the outcome of the revolutionary mass struggle of 1996–2006, although the struggle stopped far short of its revolutionary goal.

The economies of Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea grew rapidly from the mid-1960s to the 1990s to be placed among high per capita income economies. The adverse impact of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and to the global financial crisis of 2008 on their economies was due to the reliance of their economies on the export market and their being subject to imperialist domination. Middle East countries whose wealth grew rapidly after the jump in oil prices in the 1970s remain subservient to US imperialism since their ruling classes rely heavily on the US to keep themselves in power.

Asia failed to develop strong regional alliances with a common identity owing to internal problems, interstate distrust among Asian countries and a strong US presence in the region. Although ASEAN, founded in 1967 as a pro-Western alliance comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand to ward off domestic communist revolt and the impact of the war in Indochina, is successful as a regional economic partnership, prospects for economic integration are weak and political integration even weaker despite enlargement of membership to

ten. ASEAN is still much under US influence. The SAARC alliance of South Asia founded in 1985 has for some years been in crisis owing to concerns about Indian domination.

The growth of China into an economic power made East Asia and the Indian Ocean region the focus of US interest. The US tries everything within its reach to isolate China and weaken it geopolitically. But the decline in US economy and political influence impede its impact. The US seeks partnership with India and Japan to contain China. Meanwhile, China has developed counter strategies such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS and the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

Diplomatic gains by the US in Myanmar have been more than offset by setbacks in Thailand and the Philippines; and US moves to use disputes over the islands in the South China Sea to assert itself in the region failed in the face of Chinese defiance. The emergence of China, India and Iran as major players in Asian affairs, the renewed role of Russia and the souring of relations between the US and Turkey have weakened the hand of the US in Asia despite India's warming up to the US from early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Concluding Remarks**

As governments in the neocolonies executing the imperialist programme, the liberation struggle needs to link its anti-imperialist strategy with strategies to restore democratic and fundamental rights and assure an acceptable and sustainable quality of life for the masses. Such struggles will necessarily draw on strategies of national liberation movements of the colonial era, including the concepts of the united front and revolutionary mass struggle.

Historical links between anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles make the abolition of feudalistic agrarian relations important to national liberation. Most of the post-independence Asia has addressed the economic aspects of the anti-feudal objective, with feudal production relations destroyed either by bourgeois reforms or by revolutionary struggle. In the former, elimination of feudal vestiges in the dominant

ideology was rarely a priority. The abolition of feudal hierarchy and feudal production relations has, however, been uneven within countries, depending on the correlation of class forces as well as on international factors. Thus, regardless of whether one considers the residual feudal features of a former colony justify calling the country semi-feudal, what matters is to correctly assess how feudal hierarchy, feudal production relations and feudal ideology function in society, in order that people can be politically mobilised to combat them.

Also, regardless of whether one calls a former colony a neocolony or a semi-colony, one needs to understand how imperialism exercises control over a country to the detriment of the toiling masses in order that the masses recognise imperialism as the main oppressor and dare to resist it.

The neo-colonial context also demands addressing contradictions that did not attract much attention during anti-colonial struggles. They include national contradictions within a multi-ethnic country, national rights of tribal people, caste discrimination and oppression, religious persecution and, above all, gender issues. It is important to bear in mind the link between various social contradictions and the fundamental contradiction, namely the class contradiction, and grasp class struggle as the key link.

Damage to the human environment has reached crisis levels, threatening human survival on the planet. Capitalism has no answer to the crisis, and Green politics fails to show capitalism as the prime cause. This places the burden on the oppressed people and nations. Consumerism and the proliferation of waste are results of capitalist greed for profit, and are imposed on the Third World by MNCs with imperialist backing. Thus, resisting consumerism has a central role in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Imperialism, besides waging war for global control, also induces and sustains war and civil war in the Third World to divide the people. An important benefit of conflict to imperialism is that it a major source of profit through the sales of arms. Conflict has led to displacement of people at unprecedented rates. Displacement from the Third World induced by poverty and conflict has been a source of cheap, docile labour

in developed capitalist countries. But with capitalism in economic crisis, displacement has led to the revival of racism and modern day fascism profiting from it.

The new found imperialist concern for oppressed communities needs careful scrutiny, as imperialism has in recent decades taken advantage of genuine grievances of sections of the people to selectively undermine the sovereignty of countries, promote civil war and effect regime change to its advantage. Taking up any just cause should thus be in a spirit of internationalism, more precisely proletarian internationalism, so that just struggles support each other and are not manipulated by imperialism and its agents, to divide the oppressed masses. In this context, caution is necessary about the bogus anti-imperialism chauvinistic bourgeoisie who pursue oppression of national minorities. While declaring anti-imperialism when imperialism is in conflict with parts of their chauvinist agenda, they go along with the imperialist neo-colonial agenda of liberalization, selective open economy and globalisation.

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# Mao Zedong on Neo-colonialism

Victories of great historic significance have already been won by the national liberation movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This no one can deny. But can anyone assert that the task of combating imperialism and colonialism and their agents has been completed by the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America?

Our answer is, no. This fighting task is far from completed.

However, the leaders of the CPSU frequently spread the view that colonialism has disappeared or is disappearing from the present-day world. They emphasize that “there are fifty million people on earth still groaning under colonial rule”, that the remnants of colonialism are to be found only in such places as Portuguese Angola and Mozambique in Africa, and that the abolition of colonial rule has already entered the “final phase”.

What are the facts?

Consider, first, the situation in Asia and Africa. There a whole group of countries have declared their independence. But many of these countries have not completely shaken off imperialist and colonial control and enslavement and remain objects of imperialist plunder and aggression as well as arenas of contention between the old and new colonialists. In some, the old colonialists have changed into neo-colonialists and retain their colonial rule through their trained agents. In others, the wolf has left by the front door, but the tiger has entered through the back door, the old colonialism being replaced by the new, more powerful and more dangerous US colonialism. The peoples of Asia and Africa are seriously

menaced by the tentacles of neo-colonialism, represented by US imperialism.

Next, listen to the voice of the people of Latin America. The Second Havana Declaration says,

*“Latin America today is under a more ferocious imperialism, more powerful and ruthless than the Spanish colonial empire.”*

It adds:

*Since the end of the Second World War, . . . North American investments exceed 10 billion dollars. Latin America moreover supplies cheap raw materials and pays high prices for manufactured articles.*

It says further:

*. . . there flows from Latin America to the United States a constant torrent of money: some \$4,000 per minute, \$5 million per day, \$2 billion per year, \$10 billion each five years. For each thousand dollars which leaves us, one dead body remains. \$1,000 per death, that is the price of what is called imperialism.*

The facts are clear. After World War II the imperialists have certainly not given up colonialism, but have merely adopted a new form, neo-colonialism. An important characteristic of such neo-colonialism is that the imperialists have been forced to change their old style of direct colonial rule in some areas and to adopt a new style of colonial rule and exploitation by relying on the agents they have selected and trained. The imperialists headed by the United States enslave or control the colonial countries and countries which have already declared their independence by organizing military blocs, setting up military bases, establishing “federations” or “communities”, and fostering puppet regimes. By means of economic “aid” or other forms, they retain these countries as markets for their goods, sources of raw material and outlets for their export of capital, plunder the riches and suck the blood of the people of these

countries. Moreover, they use the United Nations as an important tool for interfering in the internal affairs of such countries and for subjecting them to military, economic and cultural aggression. When they are unable to continue their rule over these countries by “peaceful” means, they engineer military coups d’etat, carry out subversion or even resort to direct armed intervention and aggression.

The United States is most energetic and cunning in promoting neo-colonialism. With this weapon, the US imperialists are trying hard to grab the colonies and spheres of influence of other imperialists and to establish world domination.

This neo-colonialism is a more pernicious and sinister form of colonialism.

*From:*

*Apologists of Neo-Colonialism: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU, October 22, 1963*

*Source:*

*Editorial Departments of Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily) and Hongqi (Red Flag), Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1963.*

*Access:*

*<https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/polemic/neocolon.htm>*

## **Asiatic Modes of Imperialism**

The subjectivity of Eurocentric narratives of imperialism has yielded skewed views of Asian history by underplaying the institutional as well as the military power of polities such as Ottoman Turkey, Persia, Mogul India, and Qing China that made it hard for the European colonial powers to displace Asian political, economic and cultural systems. Thus, emphasis on dominant trends based on a European perspective has sidelined indigenous systems of governance, with the dominant historical narrative being that European imperialism modernised Asian polities by drawing them into a Europe-based political and economic world system.

There are, however, serious historical studies that take due account of indigenous systems of governance in Asia, Africa and the Americas and recognise how they shaped systems of rule, culture and commerce over vast regions until the colonial era. The impact of these systems has to varying degrees survived colonial interruption to influence the shaping of Third World societies even under neo-colonialism. While that does not mean that they hold the key to overcoming imperialism, they cannot be ignored in figuring out how Third World countries develop under neocolonialism or even become capitalist powers. The ruling classes of emerging Asian capitalist powers have, however, successfully drawn on ancient glory, both real and imagined, to stir nationalist sentiments to divert public attention from class oppression and economic problems.

In Asia, only Japan grew into a fully-fledged capitalist country in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Elsewhere, for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, colonialism decided how society adapted to capitalism under the yoke of imperialism.

Purely economic arguments are inadequate to explain how Japan became an imperialist power in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Industrial capitalism in Japan developed in the Meiji Period (1868–1912), much after Europe. The strong

bond between the state and family-controlled monopolies known as the zaibatsu that were at the core of economic and industrial activity within Japan strongly influenced Japan's national and foreign policies. The resilience of the hierarchical social structure ensured that capitalist development did not lead to a total break with feudal values. Thus, the feudal concept of loyalty still holds sway in industrial relations in Japan, and the status of women in society is far behind that in the West.

Japan's imperialist expansion began with the annexation of Hokkaido (1876) and Okinawa (1879), and went together with growing Japanese nationalism. Expansion into China and Korea later in the century, in response to Russian expansion in East Asia, was also motivated by access to resources. Japanese militarism with origins in the feudal era too was a driving force and nationalism is more potent in Japan than in Western capitalist countries, and obstructs good relations with China and Korea.

The former empires of Turkey, Iran, India and China are now capitalist countries, and some call them imperialist. The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War (WW1), and restored Turkey's territorial integrity. However, there is nostalgia for the lost empire among Turkey's ruling classes, which nurse imperialist attitudes towards minority nationalities, particularly the Kurds. Turkey is an important member of the imperialist military alliance of NATO, but denied entry to the European Union for reasons relating to the rule of law and human rights. Besides Turkey's outstanding territorial disputes with neighbours, its invasion of Northern Cyprus in 1974 reflects expansionist motives since Turkish forces are still in occupation, despite the original declared intention of protecting the Turkish minority in Cyprus. Recent Turkish aggression in the Afrin District of Syria is part of the Turkish policy of national oppression of the Kurds, enabled by US intervention in support of Kurdish nationalists in Syria.

Iran was under the tutelage of the US since the coup of 1953 that restored the Shah in power in 1953 until the Islamic revolution. The US was most supportive of the repressive Iranian regime, and by 1969 Iran was the

single-largest arms purchaser from the US. The Shah also was a close ally of Israel despite public resentment of Zionist aggression. Now there is tendency to accuse Iran of expansionist, if not imperialist, ambitions in the context of its role in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. Part of this is in response to Iran's political gains in four Arab countries, namely Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria by supporting the Syrian government in the civil war imposed on Syria by the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Israel, with Islamic extremists as proxies. That is to be expected from the allies of the US. But for sections of the Left to call Iran imperialist, is to be insensitive to context, when the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel are out to enfeeble Iran. Iran can at worst be accused of expansionist ambitions but not of imperialist ambitions, since it is not within reach of the reactionary Islamist regime to transform Iran into an imperialist power.

If at all, Saudi Arabia and Israel, encouraged by the US, have shown hegemonic ambitions in the region, and meddle in the internal affairs of countries and wage wars of aggression.

India's hegemonic tendencies derive from the British Raj. Besides unlawful occupation of Kashmir, Nagaland and Manipur India annexed Sikkim and continues to meddle in the internal affairs of its South Asian neighbours. It is militarily strong and its capitalist economy, although unevenly developed, is growing fast. India's expansionist ambitions are, however, confined to South Asia and it seeks US support to achieve its regional hegemonic goal, but at the risk of being used by the US to achieve its larger objective of encircling China.

China is close to becoming the world's biggest capitalist economy, and will be an imperialist power, unless socialist revolution intervenes. Its capitalism did not grow out of a capitalist economy so that the five characteristics of imperialism as set out by Lenin and listed below do not apply very much to China.

1. Concentration of production leading to monopolies.
2. Merging of bank capital and industrial capital to form finance capital used by the monopolies

3. Finance capital being used to export capital, which gains prominence over the export of commodities
4. Development of international capitalist associations that divide the world
5. The territorial division of the world is completed

Chinese capitalism came about by subversion of socialism. The Chinese economy is largely state capitalist to the extent that some, although wrongly, call it socialist. China's export of capital does not have primacy over commodity export, despite its growing investment abroad in various development projects. As things are, Chinese capital has yet to reach the stage where it needs to export capital to sustain growth. But things could change. Again, China is some way away from integrating itself with imperialist cartels that carve up the world among themselves. China's moves like the BRICS and the "One Belt One Road" initiative are more of protective strategies designed to escape US hegemony. As for territorial division of the world among capitalist powers, China has a cleaner record than not only the US, Japan or any European imperialist power, but also Australia and India that meddle in the internal affairs of countries.

While there is nothing to prevent Chinese state capitalism from growing into imperialism, attempts to force fit China into Lenin's description of imperialism following its emergence from capitalism in crisis will be an exercise in futility. Some even use without question malicious anti-China propaganda to establish that China is imperialist.

It will be useful to examine why countries in Africa and Latin America see China as a healthier alternative to the West as trade partner, investor and provider of development aid. At the same time, it will also help to examine if China can sustain this role as apparent benefactor without hurting capitalist interests at home. It is important to explore the likely routes that Chinese capitalism could take in the course of its growing presence in the Third World.

It is unlikely that China, to fulfil its imperialist ambitions, will follow in the footsteps of Western imperialism, at least in the near future. Two

factors militate against it. Firstly, US-led imperialism is too deeply entrenched in its ways to allow China into its camp. Secondly, China has taken a route that is visibly different from that of Western imperialism.

The US is particularly hostile to China and Russia, which are obstacles to its continued domination of the world. Unless the US loses dominance in the imperialist camp, China and Russia, even if they conform to the present imperialist order, will remain outsiders if not hostile rivals.

What seems to attract China to the Third World, Africa in particular, is its approach to 'partnership', especially non-interference in the internal affairs of countries and sensitivity to the needs of its 'partner'. This has been assisted by state control over Chinese capitalism.

A serious study of the way overseas trade and investment and foreign relations of potential/emerging imperialisms are developing is important in order to determine what each such imperialism, when it comes of age, will mean for the oppressed people and countries of the world. It is thus important to recognize historically the differences between them and existing imperialism led by the US.

Threat to the sovereignty of Asian countries and to the rights of people vary regionally, and involve US-led imperialism and local hegemony like Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and India, which are not imperialist powers in their own right. Thus the response of the affected people will be in terms of the short and medium term implications of foreign meddling. If other considerations are important, they need to be presented in ways that people can recognise the issues.

Marxist Leninists should guard against subjective interpretation of the role of potential imperialists without paying due attention to the role of imperialism as it exists.

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## *Notes from Correspondents*

### **Local Government Election Results**

The election of candidates from independent groups to local bodies marks the representation of toiling masses and oppressed layers of society.

The NDMLP contested as independent groups in the Pradeshiya Sabhas of Valikamam East (Jaffna District) and Ukuwela (Matale District). Besides Comrades K Kathirgamanathan (Selvam) and David Suren, the two leading candidates, S. Nixon, T. Sasinandhini and Sivalekha Latchumanan won seats in Valikamam East. Notably, the TNA candidate was defeated by an overwhelming 1000 vote majority by Comrade Selvam.

Three from the Social Advancement Society were elected to Karainagar PS and two from the Social Advancement Alliance to the Valigamam West PC. A total of eighteen from the People's Organisation for Equality and Social Justice, led by M Chandrakumar former MP, were elected to three Pradeshiya Sabhas in Kilinochchi and one to Point Pedro Urban Council.

The success of the independent groups is a victory for the ordinary oppressed people and a heavy blow to the hegemony of the caste and class elitist political parties that have thus far dominated electoral politics in the North. Notably, the successful independent groups, while differing in character, were not groups of lumpen elements but represented the aspirations of the people.

The lesson of the victory is that the people should mobilize in one front to shatter the visible and invisible chains that bind them. It is only then that they will defeat their oppressors and make progress. It is thus important that the toiling masses should not be intoxicated by electoral success and treat it as just one form of struggle and think beyond it to seek solutions to problems that confront them. That will be possible only through the people winning political power. It is our bounden duty to unite along the path of mass struggle.

*(Reported in Puthiya Neethi April 2018)*

## **Press Release**

*14<sup>th</sup> April 2018*

### **NDMLP May Day Rallies will be held on 1<sup>st</sup> May in Different Parts of the Country**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party made the following announcement at the May Day preparatory meeting with parties, trade unions and mass organisations.

The vast majority of the toiling masses face various hardships as a result of the continuous increase in prices of essential food items and other daily consumables and the rise in cost of living. The burden on the people is rising beyond bounds by the indebtedness and government taxation.

Three years have lapsed and the Maithri-Ranil 'Good Governance' regime has not come up with a solution or remedy for the problems. The basic reason for the problems is the opening up of the country to liberal imports, privatisation and consumer markets. This is a reflection of the neo-colonial, neo-liberal globalised economy. Those who benefit from them are not the ordinary working people, but the foreign multi-national giant companies and the local comprador capitalists. The two main ruling class parties and their leaders cloaked in Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism have vied with each other to preserve governmental power to protect this capitalist system.

The ruling class led by the Maithri-Ranil leadership are continuing to carry forward the ruinous liberal economic system. If the erroneous neoliberal policies and practices that bring ruin to the country and the people are not stopped, a situation will arise where there could be no salvation for the people. It is essential for all to realise this on a political and economic basis.

Hence the Party calls upon all to mobilise on the forthcoming May Day, the day international struggle of the workers of the world, to secure power for the toiling masses.

The Party also strongly condemns the government's making an excuse of the day of Vesak and accompanying celebrations to shift the International Workers' Day to the 7<sup>th</sup> of May. Thus the Party urges that the International Workers' Day events conducted on 1<sup>st</sup> May worldwide should be conducted on the same day in Sri Lanka.

Today President Maithripala and Prime Minister Ranil are contending former President Mahinda in the political arena. Their conflict is not about resolving the problems engulfing the country and the people, but instead to keep in their control the comprador capitalist elite state in order to serve foreign capital and their local colleagues. That is why the biggest rogues and thieves in the country hold position in the name of parliamentary democracy. Events thus far have shown that, against public expectation, none of them will be investigated or punished for the massive crimes carried out by them in the past, because in elite politics they are all brothers.

Likewise, in the politics of the Tamils of the North and East, Hill Country Tamils and Muslims, capitalist political forces among them are only keen to have dominance and power through securing posts. This was clear in the recent elections to the local authorities and in securing control in the councils. That was ample evidence of the upper class elite reactionary hegemonic politics of the leaders of the North and East, Hill Country and Muslims.

Hence, the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party calls upon the people to mobilise at the May Day processions and rallies to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> May in Puththur in Jaffna, Vavuniya town in the Vanni and Ragala in the Hill Country in order to reject these careerist forces and secure power for the toiling masses.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMNLP

## **Press Release**

*9<sup>th</sup> March 2018*

### **Anti-Muslim Violence**

**Those attacked in Kandy were not only Muslims but all oppressed nationalities and toiling masses.**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party.

The chauvinist ruling classes of the country have from time to time set ablaze the systematically created and cultivated inter-ethnic and inter-religious hatred. Inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence has also been unleashed on occasion against Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils in order to secure and ensure retention of governmental power. The attack on Muslim shops and a mosque in Ampara on 26<sup>th</sup> February was one in that series. Its continuation comprised attacks on Muslims and acts of arson that started in Teldeniya in the District of Kandy on 4<sup>th</sup> March and spread to Digana. The chauvinist rulers under the Maithri–Ranil regime in the name of ‘good governance’ as well as those who add fuel to the fire of chauvinist violence under the leadership of Mahinda are responsible for these events.

Unless the toiling masses of all nationalities should politically reject these destructive chauvinist forces, what happened in Digana today will be repeated in another region another day. Hence, the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns the planned acts of violence and arson targeting the Muslims and appeals to the entire toiling masses and all genuine left, democratic and progressive forces to raise their fists and voices against such acts.

In the past, the two ruling chauvinist parties and their partners had been behind each chauvinist attack against Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils. Unable to fulfil the pledges made to the people, the coalition government wearing the mask of good governance and goodwill is as

usual desperately seeking refuge in chauvinism to divert the attention of the people. Anti-Muslim communal flames are also being used in the bout between Maithri, Ranil and Mahinda Rajapaksa.

On the one hand, the country and the people are being swallowed up by neocolonial neoliberal globalization. On the other hand, the forces of the ruling classes are vying to open up the resources of the country to foreign forces in order to secure and retain power. The ruling classes and the foreign forces who are their masters are actively engaged in concealing this reality and confining people to their respective identities. Thus they protect their upper class elite interests.

It is important for the working people to realise this and think poetically about transcending differences of race, religion and language and uniting to advance on the basis of class. At the same time, the Party urges the genuine left, democratic and progressive forces of the country to mobilise the people to advance against the chauvinist menace that has been set in motion.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMNLP

## **Press Release**

*1<sup>st</sup> March 2018*

### **Anti-Muslim Violence in Ampara**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued on behalf of the Politburo of the Party the following statement on the attack on Muslim-owned shops and a mosque and the burning of vehicles in Ampara town on 26<sup>th</sup> February.

Attacks on Muslim-owned shops and a mosque and the burning of vehicles in Ampara point to the continuation of chauvinist rampage under the current coalition government donning the mask of 'good governance'. Information received reveals that the police arrived on the scene of violence nearly an hour late. That raises questions as to whether

the attacks were undertaken with a chauvinistic motive with police connivance. The incident is one in a series of attacks against Muslims, and the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly denounces the chauvinistically perverted attacks in Ampara.

As in the past, chauvinistic acts of today are being carried out directly and discreetly, and lawfully and unlawfully. As a result, the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils of the country are severely affected. Neither the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil representatives who are members of the government nor the Tamil National Alliance, which is supposedly a party of the opposition, do not express firm opposition to chauvinist activities that occur behind the scenes of good governance, goodwill and peace. They issue token statements of protest whenever such incidents occur and stay on in their posts and enjoy the privileges. Muslim leaders who arouse identity politics to be elected to parliament and secure positions for themselves do not and will not address the problems face by the ordinary Muslims.

Hence, the best way before the minority nationalities who encounter chauvinism to overcome chauvinism is to transcend narrow stands to think in terms of linking with the toiling Sinhala masses on mass platforms. The forces of the ruling classes will never abandon their chauvinism. Likewise the forces of identity politics among the nationalities have as their aim and tendency the sustenance of the people within narrow confines in order to pursue their politics of dominance. It is essential that the toiling masses on all sides understand this.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMNLP

## **Women's Day Events**

Revolutionary cultural events were highlights of the International Women's Day programs organized on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018 by the Women's Liberation Thought Organisation in Matale, and jointly by the Women's Liberation Thought Organisation and the Kalaimathi Women's Village Development Society in the Puththur Kalaimathi People's Auditorium.

# Vultures

*David Diop*

In those days

When civilization kicked us in the face

When holy water slapped our cringing brows

The vultures built in the shadow of their talons

The blood stained monument of tutelage

In those days

There was painful laughter on the metallic hell  
of the roads

And the monotonous rhythm of the paternoster

Drowned the howling of the plantations

Of the bitter memories of the extorted kisses

Of promises broken at the point of a gun

Of foreigners who did not seem human

You who knew all the books but knew not love

Nor our hands which fertilize the womb of the earth

Hands instinct of the root with revolt

Inspite of your songs of pride in the charnel houses

Inspite of the desolate villages of Africa torn apart

Hope lived in us like a citadel

And from Swaziland's mines to the sweltering sweat  
of Europe's factories

Spring will be reborn under our bright steps.

*Certitude*

*David Diop*

*To those who fatten themselves on murder  
And measure the stages of their reign by corpses  
I say that days and men  
That the sun and the stars  
Are shaping out the rhythmic brotherhood of all people  
I say that heart and the head  
Are joined together in the battle line  
And there is not a single day  
When somewhere summer does not spring up  
I say that manly tempests  
Will crush those who barter other's patience  
And the seasons allied with men's bodies  
Will see the enactment of triumphant exploits.*

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