

# **IMPACT OF BRITISH COLONIALISM ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH**

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## **Abstract**

This paper contextualizes the problem of the colonial legacy of British rule over India to some of the current problems Bangladesh is facing in its education, management and corruption issues. It looks to highlight these issues from a management, organization theory, epistemological and educational perspective.

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**Keywords:** Colonization, Bangladesh, Education, Management, History

## ***I. Introduction***

Colonial conquest was not just a result of the power of superior arms, military organization, political power or economic wealth – as important as these things were. Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest. (Cohen, 1996, p. xi)

Bangladesh, as a former colony of the United Kingdom, has a legacy of institutions, culture, ideology, language and education. The purpose of this paper is to look at that impact, and to see how it continues to affect Bangladesh in a number of ways, such as education, corruption, language, management. How this education system, designed for a colonial purpose, is causing dysfunction in the system.

## ***II. Background***

Colonization of South Asia started as a business enterprise of the East India Company. The East India Company was one of the most sophisticated companies in the world at that time, and among the most forward thinking; it was one of the earliest information-centric companies of the world (Drucker, 1988, pp. 3-4). While the information-centric business enterprise has become the dominant means of competitive business, and has moved from the command-and-control model they borrowed from the military 100 years ago (Drucker, 1988, p. 3), the British built such an information-centric organization via the East India Company in India, where the “information technology” quill pen and the “telecommunications” involved barefoot runners.

Drucker thus feels that the East India Company was the pioneer of this type of organization, and in fact, “the best example of a large and successful information based organization is the British civil administration in India”. (Drucker, 1988, p. 6)

Cohen (Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India, 1996) gives greater insight into this, noting how the British employed a sophisticated operation of diplomats and linguists, such as those that knew about local governments, diplomatic and political rules, and key individuals. *Akhunds*, *Dubashi*, *Vakils*, among others were specialists with multilingual skills and specialized language skills for the various levels of communication required for the British to effectively interact with Indians. (Cohen, 1996, p. 17)

The *Akhund*, for instance, was qualified to provide diplomatic missions to the Mughal court, the *Dubashi* specialized in language, particularly Persian and the *Vakils* had more technical language skills needed for diplomatic and legalistic work. These were often used as negotiating agents, familiar with court formalities and personalities. (Cohen, 1996, p. 17)

### ***III. Specific Impact of the Colonial Legacy***

Using this information-centric organization, the British managed to run India using merely one thousand colonial British civil servants for 200 years. In contrast, during the same era, China, with a similarly sized population used legions of mandarins and eunuchs. Most of these British civil servants were quite young, with many being merely in their early 30s. Many of them lived alone, a day or two travel away from their nearest countryman. (Drucker, 1988, p. 6)

#### **Impact: Organization Structure and its Alignment with its Goal**

However, despite this revolutionary organizational competency, the organization was designed for a specific purpose, which may now be defunct; The Indian civil service, the district

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officer was supposed to look after the entire district. To help him achieve this, various government services arose, but these were isolated from the district officer, meaning that the district officer became increasingly isolated from the activities with the greatest impact – be they in forestry, agriculture, roads, sanitation, or healthcare. Thus, those being served by these facilities had little interaction or say in matters of management and governance (Drucker, 1988, p. 9).

Thus, while the British established an effective government system, the system by design is a colonial one, designed to dominate and exploit the local population. As such, they were designed with diametrically the opposite purpose of what a government of a democratic country are; whose government is designed to serve its people.

### **Impact: Education & Indoctrination**

Additionally, the small number of British administrators was possible because of the information network that the British administrators had, as well as the local employees and organization capacity built by the British. This in turn was dependant on an effective education and indoctrination system, to educate and indoctrinate the indigenous population. Thomas Babbington Macauley (1800-1859) laid the foundation of the education and indoctrination system needed to sustain this system. In his *Minute on Indian Education*, he advised that:

*Official funds should only be spent on English and Western Education in India to produce a class of persons who would be racially Indian, “But English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” Such people would also be loyal to the British out of recognition of their moral worth. (Sharp, 1965, pp. 107-117)*

This laid the basis for an information and education centric organization structure. As the British departed after 1947, these institutional structures continued to function in similar capacity. While the flags changed, these organizations largely maintained the same culture, process, procedures and values.

The local elite that Macauley's education plan created came ultimately to play a key role, and English continued to be the primary language for employment and status. Additionally, in the post-colonial period, the British Foreign Office officials created the "British Committee for Relations with Other Countries", popularly known today as the British Council, to support English education abroad, promote British culture. The British Council is in fact an explicit propaganda and political tool, stating in its own website that it was created to "...lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy, whatever for the moment that policy may be and from whatever political conviction it may spring". (British Council, 2018)

Combined with a two hundred year colonial legacy and supported by the education provided via the British Council and British universities, a neo-colonial order has continued in the post-colonial Subcontinent, including in Bangladesh. The general perception is that, to be successful, we must speak English, disregarding that virtually all the innovation and industrial powerhouses of the world today, such as Russia, France, Germany, Japan, use their own language for their education and official needs.

### **Impact: Corruption**

Meanwhile, this neo-colonial education system and the legacy colonial institutions have created a self-perpetrating elite who, as Macauley explained, are "...English in taste, in opinions,

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in morals, and in intellect”. This has meant, again, as Macauley predicted, that this elite will “be loyal to the British”, and more generally, to the West. (Sharp, 1965, pp. 107-117)

It is no surprise therefore, that major assets and children of numerous South Asian politicians are kept in the West in general and the United Kingdom in particular (Freeman, 2016); the necessary corollary for being loyal to the British is being disloyal to one’s own countrymen, which in turn fuels corruption. This link between colonialism is well discussed, for instance by Angeles and Neanidis in *the Persistent Effect of Colonialism on Corruption*. (Angeles & Neanidis, 2015, pp. 319-349)

### **IV. Conclusion**

In essence, management structures, cultures, practices, rules, regulations, philosophy, have not been rethought since the colonial era, but instead, they have been replicated. Management continued to be based on colonial organization, doctrine and philosophies. This has negatively impacted Bangladesh in terms of eroding its culture, values, language and, one may argue, development.

It has had a diverse set of impacts, including that of accentuating corruption, while, indoctrinating an elite for continued neo-colonialism. It may be the cause of a lack of innovation and expertise, a point which may need further research. Ultimately, this system can potentially be considered a threat to Bangladesh from the perspective of Toynbee, in the sense that, as Toynbee notes, “...civilizations perish through suicide, but not by murder” (Sorokin, 1956, p. 175)

The methodology of solving this civilizational threat is also a concern, as solutions from other cases cannot be solved. Bennabi finds a distinction in solving problems in a country with a

single cultural universe; as compared to countries with a dual cultural universe with ex-colonized countries have to share the ideology of not only the host cultural universe but also the alien cultural universe. He finds that solutions for one cannot easily be translated to solutions for the other (Bennabi, 2003b, pp. 81-82).

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