CHAPTER VI

INTERPRETATION OF BRITISH RULE

American scholars have started recognizing India not only as the homeland of one of the world's greatest and historic civilizations, but also an area of concern to the modern world. India's territorial extent, population, resources and strategic location made it certain that she would have an increasing importance in world affairs and the rest of the world's nations would have to educate themselves about its modern life so as to establish and maintain profitable relations with it. Thus, the major thrust by American scholars like W. Norman Brown, Robert I. Crane, Stanley Wolpert, T.R. Metcalfe, Ainslie T. Embree and many others in the last half-century or so has been on Modern India. American accounts about this period are impressive in size and theme. Several useful studies devoted specifically to the problem of evaluating British rule have been undertaken by Americans since 1947.

American historians have done remarkable work by trying to tackle many problems of critical importance in the interpretation of British rule which had formerly been neglected so as to make satisfactory reappraisal of this important facet of Indian history. The impact of British imperialism on India and the Indian response and reaction
to it are universally recognized as events of great historical significance in the shaping of the modern world. Abundant material on this theme of Modern India has been made available by scholars though historians have yet to achieve consensus on many aspects of British rule. The debate continues. Was British rule destructive? Was it exploitative? Did it lead to the impoverishment of India? Or, on the other hand, was British rule creative? Did it actually lay the foundations of a modern India by infusing dynamism into a hitherto stagnant and backward Indian society? Or, was British rule simultaneously both constructive as well as destructive? In short, the discussion is focused on whether the raj was a benevolent guardian or imperialist exploiter of India and if India was irredeemably inert or a potentially dynamic country.¹

It is inevitable that the views of British and Indian writers vary sharply in their assessment of British rule in India. This was mainly because in the pre-independence period, any attempt to interpret the nature and effects of British rule had important political ramifications. Historians of the two nations "spoke from different viewpoints, they misunderstood each other’s

motives, and what seemed self-evident to the one seemed absurd to the other."²

There was a polemical difference of opinion between the English historians and the Indian historians. Although the output of the British historians was prolific, their writings suffered from certain biases. They regarded India as the "white man's burden" and did not possess an indepth understanding of the Indian viewpoint or psyche. Also, "the British histories of India have tended to underemphasize Indian social history or Indian economic history. In the period of British domination, all too little has been written about the life, thought, institutions and behaviour of the Indian people."³ Similarly, "among Indians there has been a strong tendency to glorify the alleged virtues of India's past civilization and to deprecate all that the English did."⁴

It would however be a gross over-simplification to suggest that there are just two distinct views of British rule in India - a "British interpretation" on the one side, and an "Indian interpretation" on the other. While many

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3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Ibid., p. 7.
Englishmen have justified and defended their rule, from the beginning there were some who were sharply critical of British imperialism in India. The ideas and works of these critics have played a significant role in the Indian nationalist analysis of British rule. Similarly, among Indian writers too, there were many whose views differed sharply from the position of the Indian National Congress.

Historians have to be objective while trying to assess the impact of colonialism upon India and the questions that need to be examined are: "What were the economic, political, social, cultural, and intellectual forces retarding economic development before 1947? How were they evolved or generated? What was their inter-relationship?... Could India have developed to a greater extent if colonial rule had not intervened?"5

Amongst the Indian writers who were critical of British policies in India, the noteworthy ones are Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (1946); Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule* (1950); Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today* (1940). The writings of all three concentrated upon "the swift destruction of handicrafts, the steady enfeeblement of agriculture, in the persistent frustration of industry."6


Jawaharlal Nehru wrote *The Discovery of India* while he was incarcerated at the Ahmadnagar Fort during 1945. He wrote "those parts of India which have been longest under British rule are the poorest today... and there can be no doubt that the poorest parts of India are Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and parts of the Madras Presidency;... Bengal certainly was a very rich and prosperous province before the British came." But British rule in Bengal began with its outright plunder and led to an utter dislocation of Bengal’s traditional economic framework reducing the province to a "miserable mass of poverty-stricken, starving and dying people." 

Quoting from Thompson and Garratt’s *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, Nehru stated, "a gold-lust unequalled since the hysteria that took hold of the Spaniards of Cortes and Pizzaro’s age filled the English mind. Bengal in particular was not to know peace again until she had been bled white..." This admission from Thompson and Garratt is noteworthy in view of the fact that otherwise their monumental work is all praise for the British rulers,

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
and their administrative policies which according to the authors, laid the foundations of a modern progressive India.

The British reduced India to the status of a political and economic appendage of Great Britain. India had no doubt been conquered many times before, but these invaders eventually settled within her frontiers and became completely Indianized. The previous rulers had all "accepted the structural unity of India's social and economic life and tried to fit into it."\(^{10}\) The British, from the outset never contemplated making India their home. India had been conquered purely for economic considerations and was therefore to remain a mere colony. The British rulers were aware of the vast and unbridgeable gulf between themselves and their Indian subjects - "a difference in tradition, in outlook, in income and ways of living,"\(^ {11}\) and therefore strove hard to maintain their separate identity "by keeping aloof, exclusive, apart from Indians,..."\(^ {12}\)

The British made vigorous attempts to restrict and crush Indian manufacturers by various measures and internal duties... The result was a complete collapse of the Indian textile industry which affected a large number of weavers

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 259.
\(^{11}\) Ibid.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.260.
and artisans led to unemployment on a prodigious scale. This in turn induced a back-to-the-land movement of artisans and craftsmen because of which there was acute disproportion between agriculture and industry and increased pressure on land. India was progressively ruralized.

British rule destroyed India’s industry and led to the decay of her agriculture. "The crisis in industry spread rapidly to the land and became a permanent crisis in agriculture. Holdings became smaller, and fragmentation proceeded to an absurd and fantastic degree. The burden of agricultural debt grew, and ownership of the land often passed to moneylenders. The number of landless labourers increased by the million."13

India’s traditional village community which had so far been self-sufficient and was the backbone of Indian economy, disintergrated completely due to British policies. To further consolidate their hold over India, the British followed a policy of divide and rule and created a new breed of classes like zamindars, absentee landlords, money lenders, princes, etc. to cater to their needs. It is no exaggeration when Nehru says that "nearly all our major problems have grown up during British rule and as a direct result of British policy"14 - economic backwardness,

13. Ibid., p. 257.
famines, communalism, a lack of social services and the abject poverty of the masses.

In *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule*, Romesh Dutt, while acknowledging the beneficial effects of British rule on India like the introduction of modern western education and ideology, a sound and uniform administrative machinery and rule of law, categorically stated that no fair-minded scholar of modern India can absolve the English for certain ills prevalent in Indian society. "The poverty of the Indian people at the present day is unparalleled in any civilized country; the famines which have desolated India within one last quarter of the nineteenth century are unexampled in their extent and intensity in the history of ancient or modern times...." 15

Romesh Dutt rejected the official British viewpoint which blamed the meteoric rise of the population of India and the Indian money-lender for the ills of Indian society as mere "superficial" eyewash. On deeper analysis the author placed the blame on selfish commercial policies of the East India Company and British Parliament which "discouraged Indian manufacturers in the early years of British rule in order to encourage the rising manufacturers of England.

Their fixed policy, ... was to make India subservient to the industry of Great Britain, and to make the Indian people grow raw produce only. This policy was pursued with unwavering resolution and with fatal success. Indian artisans were forced to work in the Company's factories; prohibitive tariffs excluded Indian silk and cotton goods from England; English goods were admitted into India free of duty or on payment of nominal duty.16

Using their superior political strength, the English strangled all competition to safeguard their vested interests. Similarly, in the realm of agriculture, the land tax was prohibitive and no concessions were extended to the tillers even in times of natural calamities. The rigorous and inhuman manner in which the land tax was collected reduced the agricultural worker to utter poverty and indebtedness. Under British rule no steps were taken to improve agricultural output or introduce modern technology in the industries and agricultural sectors.

Rajani Palme Dutt, the author of India Today, with his Marxist approach saw three distinct stages in the establishment and consolidation of British imperialism in India. "The first was the period of Merchant Capital, represented by the East India Company, and extending in the general character of its system to the end of the eighteenth

16. Ibid., p. viii.
century. The second was the period of Industrial Capital which established a new basis of exploitation of India in the nineteenth century. The third was the modern period of Finance Capital, developing its distinctive system of the exploitation of India on the remains of the old, and growing up from its first beginnings in the closing years of the nineteenth century to its fuller development in the most recent phase..."17

During the first phase, the East India Company sought to make a profit by securing a monopoly over the Indian trade. But the major hurdle the East India Company faced was that it had no valuable commodities to offer India in exchange for the latter's goods. Therefore, goods from India could be purchased only by making payment in the form of precious bullion. Hence, from the outset, the East India Company sought to devise a system of round about trade whereby Indian goods could be secured at little or no cost. Also, the Company's establishment costs in India were to be met from the plunder of the English colonies in Africa and America.

But with the grant of Diwani of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa to the East India Company in 1764 "a new field of

relentless direct plunder was opened up... Then began a process of wholesale unashamed spoliation... The dearest dream of the merchants of the East India Company was thus realised: to draw the wealth out of India without having to send wealth in return.\textsuperscript{18}

Infact the Industrial Revolution in England was made possible by the wealth and spoliation of India. Once the Industrial Revolution had been achieved the English began looking for means to find adequate markets for the produce of British factories. This led to the evolution of the second phase of industrial capital exploitation of India. By the Charter Act of 1813 the monopoly of the East India Company's Indian trade was ended and the stage was set to transform India from an exporter of cotton goods into an importer of British products. Prohibitive duties were imposed on Indian commodities entering Great Britain and it was this tariff discrimination which led to the destruction of the Indian manufacturing industry. The British capitalism, supplying raw materials and buying manufactured goods. To develop the Indian market it was necessary to develop the production and export of raw materials from India.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 99-101.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 118.
In 1833 the British Government granted permission to English men to acquire land and set up plantations in India. A salient feature to note is that the original planters in India were all slave drivers from the West Indies. The condition of the Indian plantation workers was therefore naturally pitiable and was exposed by the Indigo Commission of 1860.

The export of raw materials was stepped up after 1833 and despite the recurrent famines, foodgrains were relentlessly exported from a starving India.

The development of free-trade capitalism in Europe during the nineteenth century forced the British to reassess and draw up a new policy vis-a-vis India. It was now necessary to establish direct administration of the British Government over India by abolishing the East India Company. The process of transfer of power was initiated by the Charter Act of 1833 and finally completed in 1858. But more important, the British took definite steps for the systematic commercial penetration and exploitation of India by building a network of railways and roads. The evolution of a proper irrigation policy, the introduction of a modern posts and telegraph system, the beginnings of western education and the introduction of the European banking system, were all designed to cater to the vested interests of Great Britain and complete the economic exploitation of India.

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These developmental activities witnessed the growth of British capital investments in India. "But in reality the export of capital from Britain to India was more than counter balanced many times over by the contrary flow of tribute from India to England... Thus the British capital invested in India was... first raised in India from the plunder of the Indian people, and then written down as debt owed by India to Britain, on which she had thenceforward to pay interests and dividends."20

Also, in actual fact, British capital did not in any way lead to the establishment of modern technology or industry in India. 97 per cent of British investment capital in India was devoted to the intensified economic exploitation of India.

A markedly different view has naturally been taken by British historians while making an assessment of their rule in India. In 1945 Sir Reginald Coupland stressed the benefits of peace, order, and good government which the British had brought to India. He claimed that British rule was responsible for India’s modernization and economic development, and that India remained a stagnant poverty-stricken country on account of her backward social customs coupled with a high rate of population growth.21

20. Ibid., p. 127.
The general tendency amongst British historians has been to imply that "India's underdevelopment was traditional in character... a remnant of the ... pre-British past." This train of thought was probably borrowed from Karl Marx who wrote a great deal about India during the nineteenth century. "Marx recognized that the pre-conditions of Western conquest lay in Indian rather than in British society. His major premise was the peculiar multi-cellular character of Indian society that made it both highly resistant to change in its social and cultural aspects and ipso facto subject to constant political change and to conquest from without." An important consequence of this "extreme compartmentalism" or the "dissolution of society into stereotyped and disconnected atoms was the discontinuity between the social base and the political superstructure." 

The British viewpoint was that although theirs was an alien government in India, they transformed India into a modern, progressive nation state. The list of books written on India by British historians is impressive. Unfortunately these works generally tend to follow the official government viewpoint and contain mainly a chronological narrative of

political events to the virtual exclusion of an indepth account of Indian life, institutions, the social and economic structure, etc.

One of the earliest general texts on India was Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India (London, 1934), by Edward Thompson and G.T. Garratt. This book is organized in a lucid, easy to read style, and is "one of the best in terms of breadth of coverage, balance of judgment, and craftsmanship."24 Despite being a fine specimen of English scholarship, and making attempts at being objective, a certain bias is discernible while going through the volume. The authors are full of praise for the British administrative system and the land revenue reforms that were introduced by the East India Company especially by Warren Hastings, Cornwallis and William Bentick. "The arrival of Lord William Bentick marked the beginning of a new era in numerous ways... His instincts were those of a Liberal reformer... He touched nearly every side of Indian life and formed the basis of the paternal Government of the Victorian era. He was able to turn his attention to the civilization of savage tribes and the abolition of certain religious and social customs, such as suttee and female infanticide."25

With the transfer of power from the Company to the Crown after the Mutiny, the British introduced an era of vigorous reforms. A definite famine policy was evolved by the Government. Peace, security and the rule of law too were introduced. A point to note in this volume is that special praise is reserved for Lord Curzon, whose tenure as Viceroy has otherwise been criticized by most historians. The writers commend Lord Curzon for making the "bureaucratic machine function as it had never functioned before."\(^{26}\)

During his term, conditions were created which gave impetus to nationalism in India as educated Indians learnt "to think politically, and to see their country in relation to the rest of the world."\(^{27}\) The rise of Japan in the twentieth century shattered the myth of European invincibility and stirred and nationalistic aspirations of the Indian people. "The political awakening was accompanied by a widening of horizons and the quickening of spirit which follows the discovery of new worlds, but it was also embittered by the most vehement dissatisfaction with India's condition and the standing of her inhabitants."\(^{28}\)

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26. Ibid., p. 567.
27. Ibid., p. 576.
28. Ibid., p. 577.
was the discovery of the fact that they were held in extremely low esteem abroad.

The British left an indelible imprint upon India. They bequeathed to Indians the largest irrigation system in the world, a good network of metalled roads and railway tracks, fine educational institutions imparting both Western and Oriental learning, innumerable buildings including government offices and legislative complexes, a trained bureaucracy, besides taking other steps to modernize the economy.

A monumental account of Indian history from the earliest times up to 1919 is the well-known Cambridge History of India, edited by H.H. Dodwell. Unfortunately, its scope is somewhat limited because it is mainly a chronological record of wars, dynasties, court intrigues and miscellaneous political events. Volume VI which covers the British rule in India is heavily infused with the official viewpoint. At the outset Dodwell praises the East India Company for ushering in an era of administrative reforms and dismisses the belief that the "Company’s Government was obscurantist or reactionary." On the other hand, he feels that the Governors General all had a high sense of responsibility and discharged their duties seriously; the servants of the East

India Company regarded themselves as the foremost servants of India.

After the Mutiny, the Queen's Government exercised more thorough control over India. It took the initiative for the introduction of western and professional education, the economic reorganization and modernization of India and "created the conditions under which nationalist sentiment could arise."\textsuperscript{30} Dodwell scoffs at the "drain of wealth" theory and says "debt was incurred mainly for productive works which increased the wealth of the country in a degree incomparably greater than their cost. Irrigation, railways, agricultural improvements, co-operative credits, all helped to create an India in which wealth was more widely diffused than it had been for many centuries...."\textsuperscript{31} According to Dodwell the British attempted a political experiment in India on an unprecedented scale and showed India the path to nationhood for the first time. Prior to this, although India was the cradle of one of the world's ancient civilizations, its political organization had generally remained primitive and confined to the village or community level.

Another useful and informative book, especially on the pre-mutiny period is \textit{The British Impact on India}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. vii.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
(London, 1952), by P.J. Griffiths. This book contains valuable information on the economic changes that took place in India under British rule. But, otherwise this work by Griffiths is highly biased against India. He sees Great Britain as "the catalytic agent by which Western influence was brought to bear on India"\(^{32}\) and emphatically reiterates the profound impact of European thought upon India in the realm of ideas, especially in so far as the rise of nationalism is concerned. Great Britain was that "dynamic force" that was "needed to engender that group consciousness and that communal pride on which nationality depends."\(^{33}\)

According to Griffiths, the British provided India with a strong and efficient central government, modern western education including scientific knowledge, and encouraged the growth of the Press with newspapers in English and the vernacular languages being printed in large numbers. The British introduced a "new dynamic impulse" especially in the intellectual sphere.

A two-volume set written in the same vein is *The Men Who Ruled India* by Philip Woodruff (London, 1954-55). Woodruff’s material is well-researched and solid but his


\(^{33}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 243-244.
expression has a tendency to become terse and to the point, lending a certain amount of dryness to his account. He also stresses too much on the issue that in England's relations with India there has been "more reason for pride than for shame."

Some of the other important books which are highly pro-British while making an assessment of the nature of British rule in India are *Oxford History of India* (London, 1958) by Vincent Smith; *India: A Modern History* (Michigan, 1961) by Percival Spear; *Modern India and the West* (London, 1941) edited by LSS O'Malley; and *British Achievements in India* (London, 1948) by H.G. Rawlinson. L.S.S. O'Malley's *Modern India and the West* is a collection of essays covering a wide range of topics including the Indian economy, education, Hindu society, and literature. Though it is a good introduction to India under British rule, it is not a purely historical or systematic account.

The imperialistic bias is carried to great heights in H.G. Rawlinson's *British Achievements in India*. The tenor of the book seems to be set by the following words of Lord Curzon (1904): "To me the message is carved in granite, it is hewn out of the rock of doom - that our work is righteous and that it shall endure." Rawlinson too impresses upon

his readers the blessings of peace, good government, the establishment of the rule of law, the introduction of western education and the appreciation of liberal institutions that were made possible in India due to British rule.

H.G. Rawlinson rejects all criticism that is levelled against the British regarding the economic exploitation of India. His simplistic justification is that "Men do not found empires for philanthropic motives." The British had no intentions to establish an empire in India, they came solely for trade. But due to the political vacuum in India and the bitter Anglo-French rivalry for controlling the colonial markets, had the British not established their paramountcy over India, the latter would have become a French possession. Similarly, the "so-called 'drain' of wealth consisted of money remitted to England to pay for the salaries and pensions of the civil and military officials employed in establishing law and order, and protecting the country from invasion, for the purchase of stores unobtainable in the country, and finally, for paying the interest on loans raised for the construction of irrigation works, roads and railways." If the country still remained

35. Ibid., p. 233.
36. Ibid., p. 234.
poor and backward despite the efforts of Great Britain, it was due to the inherent social structure of Indian society - caste divisions, outdated policies of the Indian peasant and the phenomenal increase in the population.

No perceptible change in the attitude of the imperialist historians is seen towards India even after over forty years of independence from Great Britain. Penderel Moon has written a voluminous book of over twelve hundred pages entitled, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*, London 1989. This volume is divided into two parts covering the period 1747 to 1857 and 1857 to 1947, respectively. It begins with the Carnatic wars which gave the European powers, especially Great Britain and France an opportunity to get political concessions for their home-countries and generally play the role of king makers in the Deccan.

A pro-Britain stance is obvious and Penderel Moon states that the establishment of the Britain empire in India "was an achievement that certainly ought to excite wonder. How was it possible for a mere handful of foreigners from a distant island to make themselves masters of a large sub-continent, the inhabitants of which numbered many millions?"37

According to the author, the British introduced far-reaching administrative and economic reforms as a result of which India was modernized. Although the British conquest was unplanned and unpremeditated and came about by the operation of natural human instincts," and there was definitely some drain of wealth from Bengal, on the whole the British made "proper provision for the well-being of the people" who paid revenue. The British gradually developed a missionary zeal "and made serious, honest attempts to provide good government" and implant western ideas and institutions for the betterment of India.38

Despite the tremendous output of books, especially by the imperialist historians, the perspectives on Indian history remained narrow. Before 1947 historians did not have free access to documents relating to India as vast collections of official records in India were treated as classified and therefore remained "out of bounds" to serious students. Outside India the "collections tended to be isolated and unpublicized" and properly documented. Further, due to the advantageous position of the imperialist historians, the emphasis of history writing was largely on the beneficience and benevolence of British rule. The British historians "portrayed government in terms of an"iron

38. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
frame" and a cohesive bureaucratic system run by those with common ideals and purposes. Attention to the formal nature of rule permeated studies of British administration."

The Indian historians on the other hand largely "shunned the British entirely and wrote instead on problems central to Indian daily life, producing histories of caste groups, martyrs, or a religious community. Others sallied forth to battle commonly held views about foreign rule." ... In short, "The raj became a symbol of oppression or of the permanence and civilizing nature of imperialist rule, depending on one's perspective."\(^40\)

Despite their different conclusions, the British and Indian historians focused on identical themes and relied on the same documents. Both groups "portrayed developments in terms of all-India events, all-India organizations, and important individuals (Viceroys, Secretaries of State, and Gandhi)."\(^41\)

However, since the end of World War II in 1945, the historiography of modern India has undergone a marked

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40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 388.
change. This has been made possible largely due to "two invigorating impulses: the influence of American historians with their high regard for cultural anthropology, and the studies produced by Indian historians themselves,"42 in the light of this new dynamic force in historical writing.

As already mentioned in an earlier chapter of this dissertation, in the United States vast amounts of federal funds were made available after 1945 for language and area studies. Consequently major centres of higher learning were able to train historians of modern Indian who in turn have developed smaller programs spread across the United States of America.

The new historians "are trained in Indic languages and value the use of non-official, indigenous documents ... their underlying concern has been with the history of the Indians themselves rather than primarily with British rule."43 Although the main emphasis is still on politics, it is now viewed from new perspectives and a close relationship is seen between economic and political advance.


43. N.G. Barrier, "India: Recent Writing on the History of British India," in George C. Iggers and Harold T Parker, eds., International Handbook of Historical Studies - Contemporary Research and Theory, p. 388.
Also, the establishment of British rule in India is not regarded merely as a geographical expansion, "but a penetration of the Indian social system."\textsuperscript{44} Being primarily an agrarian society, historical studies naturally tend to concentrate more on the origin and effects of British land revenue policy. But in this sphere, interpretations of the nature of British rule have been greatly revised. The American historians with their innovative approach, no longer concentrate exclusively on "British land-revenue policy and the minute chronicling of debates about settlements. Instead Indian Society (is) ... seen in terms of the control of land, as a hierarchy of social groups who had rights and power over the produce of the villages. The introduction of the anthropological concept of a dominant caste group, locally controlling land, made the interpretation of eighteenth and nineteenth century rural history much richer."\textsuperscript{45}

Students of British India after 1945, have concentrated their research mainly on studying the "dynamics of administration". Attention is now paid to the study of the "informal nature of control and the strikingly

\textsuperscript{44} H.L. Wesseling and P.C. Emmer, eds. \textit{Reappraisals in Overseas History}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 30-31.
decentralized fashion in which the government operated... on the alliance between the government and various support groups" whose cooperation was necessary to give an accurate feedback to the Central Government from the remotest administrative unit, to collect land revenue, help run offices, carry out watch-and-ward duties, etc. Much of British imperial history is now being cast in terms of how the government manipulated or worked with specific classes and how its perception of support changed or became implemented in particular policies"46 depending upon how "friendly", "hostile", or "useful" these native groups were to the English.

Doubts are expressed about the extent of real change initiated by the British in India. The older belief that the British had a profound impact on Indian society "either by destroying the landed classes and ‘deindustrialisation’... or by the introduction of the benefits of western society has given way to the theory that the effects of British rule perhaps never percolated down to the villages or small towns. "What mattered more was persistence or change in dominant land-controllers"47 on

46. N.G. Barrier, "India: Recent Writing on the History of British India," in George C. Iggers and Harold T Parker, eds., International Handbook of Historical Studies, Contemporary Research and Theory, p. 390.

47. H.L. Wesseling and P.C. Emmer, eds., Reappraisals in Overseas History, p. 31.
whom the British were too dependent in the rural areas to have much effect.

While studying the socio-economic dimension of Indian history, "the notion of the West having an "impact" on a dormant, unchanging society has been replaced by a more complex view of cultural contact."\(^48\) Prior to the advent of the British, Indian society was by no means a stagnant one. Regional and local events led to a constant change in Indian society. But, "the appearance of foreigners and their domination of the political system only added another variable, though an important one, to the pattern."\(^49\) Certain enterprising groups in India who took advantage of the changed conditions were able to prosper, while those who remained aloof and did not respond in a positive manner to the new challenges, eventually lost their economic and social pre-eminence. Studies on social and economic history of the Indian sub-continent now focus on this aspect of British rule and its impact on different groups at the local or provincial level. Similarly, in the cultural sphere, historians are attempting an analysis of the "transfer of

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49. Ibid.
institutions and ideas as well as the type of associations emerging from cultural interaction .... Careful thought is paid to what "modernization" meant in terms of concrete situations rather than as an abstract notion.\textsuperscript{50}

One of the earliest works which gave a multi-dimensional approach to the study of modern India and the interpretation of British rule was Holden Furber's \textit{John Company at Work} (1948). This book was "greatly in advance of its time" and has advanced our perception of the economic forces which lured the English merchants to trade with India. The significance of \textit{John Company at Work} lay in the fact that it was published at a time when conventional historical writing was still largely concerned with the "strategic and institutional imperatives" of the British empire.

Holden Furber acquainted the reader "with the lives of those thousands of European men and women who sought economic security for themselves and their children through contact with the East."\textsuperscript{51} Holden Furber did not write about conquests and annexations and neither did he believe in any large scale "drain of wealth" from India. The net profit was marginal because the cost of maintaining imperialism proved

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.


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expensive for eighteenth century European capitalism which "transcended national boundaries." And since Great Britain alone "possessed the sea power to conquer this empire and the strength to withstand the deleterious effects of imperialism when they came",\textsuperscript{52} she found herself the mistress of India. This book proved to be the basis for a new economic interpretation of British expansion in India which was a great refinement over the earlier arguments.

Another book which is considered to be a landmark in the American historiography of India is \textit{The United States and India, Pakistan, Bangladesh} by W. Norman Brown (1972). Born in June 1892, Prof. W. Norman Brown was an Indologist of great renown who needs no introduction. When the first edition of this book appeared in 1953 it was acclaimed as "unquestionably the best and most balanced account of the history and contemporary conditions of the two nations that then divided the Indian subcontinent."\textsuperscript{53} Brown with his over seventy years' association with India and its cultural heritage was amply equipped to write authoritatively about this country, including on its contemporary political and social set-up.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 324.

\textsuperscript{53} W. Norman Brown, \textit{The United States and India, Pakistan, Bangladesh}, Massachusetts, 1972, p. vi.
Writing on the effects of British rule, Brown was of the opinion that the British were undoubtedly, though inadvertently, responsible for India's modernization and "political unity, administrative and judicial efficiency, inner economic coherence, a fairly modern system of education, a public health service, and an acquaintance with western industrialism, scientific research, technical accomplishment, and social thinking." Much of this was achieved due to the introduction of the English language as a universal "lingua franca".

Brown's account was objective and free from bias. He did not hesitate to acknowledge the fact that the British maintained their imperialism in India by a systematic policy of "divide and rule".

However, the most profound impact of British rule was felt in the economic sphere and that too in agriculture since more than 80% of India's population was rural-based and therefore dependent upon farming. In India the relationship between its rural population and land is extremely intricate and complicated, "this has seriously affected the village, and, therefore, the basic social structure." Despite a vast area under cultivation, India has witnessed unprecedented famines and food scarcity. "In

54. Ibid., p. 39.
55. Ibid., p. 49.
fact no single problem has so persistently aggravated
domestic tranquility, threatened international peace,
frustrated efforts of governments, thwarted the work of
administrators and development planners, and defied all
attempts at solution ... as poverty."56

This aspect of India's socio-economic history under
British rule has received the attention of notable American
historians like R.E. Frykenberg, Burton Stein, Thomas
R.Metcalf, Ainslie T.Embree, Bernard Cohn and others. The
concern and efforts of these historians culminated in a
colloquium on the influence of Social Structure on Land
Control in Indian History which was held at the University
of Wisconsin in the spring semester of 1964. This was
followed by the Indian Land Tenure Symposium at the
University of California, Berkeley, the same year. The
shortcoming of research pertaining to this field of Indian
history were identified as the "absence of adequate
categories and concepts for analysis, inadvertent confusion,
of data relating to ideal rather than real conditions, and
failure to perceive developmental and causal elements and to
distinguish between static and dynamic factors of movement
and process....57

56. R.E. Frykenberg, ed., Land Tenure and Peasant in South
Asia, New Delhi, 1977, p. 1.

57. R.E. Frykenberg, Land Control and Social Structure in
Indian History, (enlarged Indian edition) Delhi, 1979,
p. vii.
Papers presented at the Symposium were published and incorporated in a book, *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, edited by R.E. Frykenberg in 1969. The enlarged Indian edition came out in 1979. The essays contained in this volume depict the use of fresh data and insights and draw heavily upon regional sources requiring a thorough understanding of local folklore and the ability to undertake a comparative analysis of these local area studies. A serious attempt to correctly analyse the relationships between social structure and the control of land has been made "especially with respect to relationships between change and social structure, and therein with reference to relationships among land holding, landholders, land labour and land laborers."  

Burton Stein's essay "Integration of the Agrarian System of South India" sums up the goal of this volume. He uses the term "agrarian system" as a concept that allows him to treat the relationship between "people, groups of people, and the land as a systematic unity, a whole."  

This concept demands recognition of the manifest dependence of power, livelihood, and status upon control of land... and the general

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59. R.E. Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, p. 175.
conclusion is that in predominantly agrarian societies, "political, economic, and social institutions are related to and integrated with the control of land."^{60}

The British sought to exercise control over land by introducing certain institutions into India in the nineteenth century as they believed in James Mill's theory that "the ruler must be the owner, since otherwise it is impossible to show to whom property belonged."^{61} As a consequent to this belief, the British encouraged the rise of regional elite groups who gained positions of eminence and dominance during the nineteenth century. "The result was the distortion of the old system into a form that bore little resemblance to what had actually existed before"^{62} as the British tended to look at everything from the point of view of English law and terminology.

The effects of the British policy are studied by Bernard Cohn in his long essay entitled "Structural Change in Indian Rural Society, 1596-1885." It was a very valuable and stimulating piece of research and the central question Cohn asked was, "What happened to the controllers and cultivators of land dispossessed by the new groups who

60. Ibid., p. 176.
61. Ibid., p. 44.
62. Ibid., p. 50.
obtained absolute proprietary rights in the land in the early years of British rule?"63 The area of study is confined to the old Benares Province comprising modern Ballia, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Benares and parts of Mirzapur in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

T.R. Metcalf has reviewed the rise of regional elites in his two papers which are included in this volume edited by Frykenberg. These are "From Raja to Landlord: The Oudh Talukdars, 1850-70" and "Social Effects of British Land Policy in Oudh." The first paper traces the changes in status and in behaviour of the taluqdars once the English recognized them as landlords. The British deliberately encouraged the taluqdars, as against other subordinate landholders, by granting them certain legal rights and patents (Sanads) that endowed them with full proprietary rights, and other forms of political and administrative support.

In the second paper T.R. Metcalf traces the rise and consolidation of the taluqdars of Oudh as a "cohesive landed aristocracy" under British patronage. To achieve their objective, the English created the British Indian Association of Oudh, which the British hoped would help bring about cohesion among the taluqdars, often described as

63. Ibid., p. 55.
the "Barons of Oudh." Metcalf traces the history of the British Indian Association of Oudh and reasons for its failure which are attributed to the attitude of the taluqdars who remained divided by caste, communal lineage, and other powerful social divisions. Compartmentalization prevented joint action on a number of important issues. They were only interested in defending their legal rights as heirs. Otherwise, they were a divided, inert and obstructive body who did not develop any meaningful intimate social relationships among themselves.

Other important works by TR Metcalf on Modern India are Modern India: An Interpretive Anthology (1971); Land, Landlords, and the British Raj—Northern India in the Nineteenth Century (1979); and An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj (1989).

Modern India: An Interpretive Anthology is a collection of essays by different writers. The book is divided into four parts. The first section which is entitled "The Sense of Identity", contains five essays, and poses the question "What is distinctive about India and the India experience. What shapes the Indian view of himself."64 The essays by Jawaharlal Nehru, W. Norman Brown and McKim Marriot trace the unifying strands of Indian civilization,

while the essays by Bernard Cohn and J.H. Broomfield discuss the nature and importance of "persisting local ties and loyalties."  

The second part, "The Sense of the Past" acknowledges the impact of British rule on "traditional" India which led to a radical transformation of the country. But India's past heritage and the traditional values were not completely eradicated. T.R. Mecalf's basic premise is that India's modernization and the degree of British impact cannot be understood without adequate knowledge of her traditional institutions.

In Part III, "The Sense of Urgency" essays pertaining to the zeal with which the British administrators set out to modernize India are included. This desire for reformation rubbed off on enlightened Indians and made them "set in motion a searching re-evaluation of their own cultural heritage."  

The fourth part, "The Sense of the Future" traces the rise of nationalism in India, the desire to create an India "that would be the master of her own destiny."

65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. 143.
67. Ibid., p. 221.
In Land, Landlords, and the British Raj - Modern India in the Nineteenth Century (1979), the study revolves around the taluqdars and zamindars who dominated rural society by virtue of the fact that they owned vast tracts of land. Besides tracing the origin, position and role of the taluqdars, a major concern of T.R. Metcalf was to trace the policy conflict among British officials over the method of rural administration to be adopted. The importance of Metcalf's work lies in the fact that for the first time estate records have been studied and interviews conducted by the author to trace the problems faced by the estate managers, village zamindars and certain aspects of land investments.

Thomas Metcalf's "An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj (1989) traces the close relationship between culture and power as expressed in British colonial architecture. He specifically asks the question "how political authority took shape in architecture and how buildings helped shape the discourse on Empire in the late nineteenth century." Metcalf aims to show how colonial architecture was greatly influenced by ancient Rome and was representative of the Empire. It was vastly different from the current European model and required an indepth knowledge of India's past, an ability to reconstruct her society and culture which would clearly establish the link or relationship between the colonizer and colonial
subject. Through architecture the British sought to create an impact on the Indian psyche and reiterate their superior position in India.68

Going back to the extent of transformation witnessed by rural India under British colonial rule, no study can be complete without making an assessment of the contribution of Eric Stokes in his stimulating and original essays contained in The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India (1978). Though an English man, Eric Stokes revolutionized the study of the Mutiny of 1857 and was able to impress a large number of American historians to follow his line of thought. He rejected the theory that it was the disgruntled Brahmins, aristocrats and petty rajas, who finding their supremacy challenged, joined hands to shake off the foreign yoke. Instead, in the four main chapters that form the core of the book, Stokes has focused on the rural dislocations due to colonial rule which drove these people into the rebel camp.

Stokes has put forward two general hypotheses while making a fresh assessment of the causes of the revolt and its spread in rural India. The first is the resentment of

the peasants at the rise of the money-lender, and at the unequal imposition of land taxes which smacked of favouritism and nepotism. Second, what led people to either support or condemn the revolt was the "presence or absence of a thriving magnate element heavily committed by interest to British rule." In short, those landlords who were innovative and flourished by taking advantage of the British land settlements of Robert Bird and James Thomason by introducing cash crop cultivation, supported the British during the revolt. Others, who were displaced and came to constitute the "declining aggrieved aristocracy", fermented rebellion against British rule. Although the hypotheses of Stokes have their critics, his essays are rich and provide a new provocative insight into the causes of the revolt. He has inspired later writers, including Americans, to emphasize on factors like "the establishment of private property in land, the creation and proliferation of a class of 'parasitic' landlords, the increasing burden of rent and rural indebtedness... With the result that peasants ceased to be "self-possessing, self-working and self-sufficient" producers and increasingly depended for their subsistence on agricultural wage labour and sharecropping."  

70. Ibid., p. 204.  
Professors Robert I. Crane, Ainslie T. Embree and Stanley Wolpert are notable American historian who have greatly enriched the historiography of modern Indian by their contributions. Their writings are not confined merely to assessing the nature of British rule in India. The books written by them and the topics covered are too numerous and diverse to be analyzed in a few pages. What stands out is their tremendous overall contribution to modern Indian historiography which gives us indepth knowledge and helps us in understanding various facets of this country’s culture and civilization. This stems from a genuine love for India and a lifetime’s involvement with the Indian sub-continent, besides having W. Norman Brown as their mentor at some point of their academic career.

Robert I. Crane’s writings cover a multitude of topics on Indian history. Some of his works are, The History of India: Its Study and Interpretation (1958) - (Revised edition - A History of South Asia, 1973); Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study (1967); Area Handbook on J&K (1956); India’s Role in Asia (1955) etc.

On the British impact on India, Crane finds new parameters being introduced into the "Indian political arena" with the advent of the English. A cornerstone of their policy in India was "the precise, legal demarcation of
territorial boundaries and their sanctity.\textsuperscript{72} This precision of demarcation encompassed the provincial and district administrative levels, zamindari estates, etc. "These served to transform society, the economy, and the character of 'politics' in South Asia. The effects changed the relationships among traditional entities or groupings."\textsuperscript{73} English law became supreme all over the country and the judicial powers of Indian leaders were subordinated to, if not taken over by, the British courts and magistrates. This had far-reaching implications for India, especially at the regional level where sentiments and loyalties underwent momentous changes. The resultant regional consciousness became an important factor in the rise of nationalism and later, communalism.

Some of Ainslie Embree's reputed works are Charles Grant and British Rule in India (1962); The Hindu Tradition (1966); India's Search for National Identity (1972); India in 1857: The Revolt Against Foreign Rule (1987 - A reprint of the 1963 edition), and Imagining India (1989).

Ainslie Embree "has spent a lifetime imagining India for himself (and) for other people." Imagining India

\textsuperscript{72} R.I. Crane, "Spillover Problems: Recent South Asia" in Peter Gaeffke and David A. Utz eds., The Countries of South Asia: Boudaries,Extensions and Interrelations, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 106.

\textsuperscript{73} Ainslie T. Embree, Imagining India: Essays on Indian History, New York, 1989, p. 1.
is a collection of essays which touch upon many themes but basically seek to study "the relationship of Indian culture and civilization to the nation state that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."\textsuperscript{74} Here he finds religion, and more especially Brahmanical ideology instrumental "in the articulation of the modern state of India, that is, in the joining together and the interrelating of complex components."\textsuperscript{75}

The most valuable essays focus on the nature of British Raj in the nineteenth century and the introduction of the concept of private property in the rural areas which eventually led to the growth of early nationalism.

Stanley A. Wolpert's works which have been greatly acclaimed are \textit{Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India} (1967); \textit{A New History of India} (second edition - 1982); \textit{Roots of Confrontation in South Asia: Afghanistan Pakistan, India and the Superpowers} (1982); and \textit{An Introduction to India} (1991).

Wolpert approaches the study of "Indian civilization from many perspectives: linguistic, cultural, geographic, ethnographic, social, political, economic, administrative, and primarily, historical."\textsuperscript{76} His views on

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 4.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.  
the nature of British rule in India can be gleaned from Morley and India, 1906-1910 which is an absorbing and vivid biographical study of John Morley as Secretary of State for India and the steps taken by him to tame the autocratic and unsympathetic bureaucracy in India. Wolpert systematically analyzes the contradictory nature of British imperialism in India and finds British rule highly exploitative, racist and hypocritical.

Despite the vast literature, no consensus has been reached among historians while analysing the nature of British rule in India. The debate is an ongoing one and research indicates that "no simplified black-and-white view of Indo-British relations is historically tenable. British rule was not monolithic, nor were its conduct and policies undirectional. There were contradictions, ambiguities, indecision, shifts, and compromises - due to conflicts... And, ... underlying the whole historic process was the basic fact that the expansion and consolidation of British rule generated in India new forces, aspirations, movements which... were bound to press for modernization, decolonization, and independence."77