

## THE COLONIAL POLICY OF THE BRITISH RAJ IN INDIAN PRINCELY STATES: A CASE STUDY OF DEWAS STATE

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### Abstract

*In 1947, at the time of partition of India, Dewas state was merged in Madhya Pradesh, a central province of India. However, it remained a victim of colonial policies during the British Raj. The English appeared on the scene of Dewas state on December 12, 1818, when a treaty was signed between the ruler of Dewas and the East India Company and Dewas State was taken into the possession of East India Company. In fact it was a treaty between the subjugators and subjugated; the British colonizers controlled the Indian sources and resources and the Indians are treated as "half citizens" During the colonial period, the British Empire had adopted a policy of "Direct and Indirect Rule" in the states of the colonized India. The colonizers brought the rajahs and maharajahs and their states in their control through various tactics and with the help of local European agents. In this way an entire stratum of the traditional ruling class in India was drawn into the colonial project. Some of these states where the policy of indirect rule had been adopted were Gwalior, Bhopal, Baroda, Udiapur, Indore, Kolhapur, Poonah, Nagpur, Simla and Dewas. In this research paper the colonial policy of the British Raj in the state of Dewas has been discussed.*

### Key words

Colonial Policy, British Raj, Indian Princely states. Dewas

### Introduction

The Indian state Devas remained a victim of colonial policies during the British raj. This Indian state had archeological, geographical and historical importance. Archeologically, it was a record of vanished civilization; geographically it was situated in the middle of India surrounded by the states of Kolhapur (The major Maratha state), Baroda, Gwalior, Dhar and Indore. During the political struggle of the

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Indian colonized people the British rulers threatened the prince of the state to avoid the policy of opposition and resistance with the British government. Following this policy, the Maharajah of Dewas supported the Great Britain during the First World War and thus, at the end of First World War, the political ties between the ruler of Dewas and British were quite congenial and the prince was held in high esteem. Forster states, "Politically things were excellent. He had remained loyal to the British and enthusiastically loyal to the King-Emperor."<sup>1</sup> However, with the passage of time the colonial policies were imposed with cruelty and the British hierarchy entered into palaces intrigues against the prince of Dewas. Thus the state and prince remained victims of colonial policies during the British raj.

### **History of Dewas State**

In 1947, at the time of partition, Dewas state was merged in Madhya Pradesh province of India. The state was established by Maratha with the permission their religious Pashwa. The English appeared on the scene of Dewas state on December 12, 1818, when a treaty of friendship was signed between the ruler of Dewas and the East India Company. According to the treaty, Dewas State was taken into the possession of East India Company. Forster has used the word friendship but in fact it was a treaty between the subjugators and subjugated.<sup>2</sup>

### **Colonialism**

Colonialism, as a socio-political, cultural and ideological phenomenon has been informed, controlled and determined by the Western imperial project. This is a common knowledge that the colonizers not only controlled and exploited materials and human resources but also, in order to prolong their occupation, resorted to social and ideological engineering of the colonies. For this purpose they employed various discourses embedded mostly in the educational system, culture, literature and languages imposed on the colonized. Thus the new-found, imported prosperity resulted in several socio-economic and cultural changes in metropolitan centres. Imperialism, as an ideological factor, was a policy of extending the power through diplomacy or military force. McLeod states that colonialism has link with a history and thus changes according to the time and place. It infers that some nations remained in the clutches of others at various times.<sup>3</sup> During this period of subjugation the socio-political and ideological systems were affected to a great extent. The focus of colonialism is the attitude of the colonizers towards the colonized. Said

differentiates between imperialism and colonialism and states that imperialism is an ideological force and colonialism is a practice.<sup>4</sup> Imperialism is a mode of thinking but in colonialism that mode of thinking is implemented and expressed during the time span of subjugation. The colonizers keep in control the colonized nations and justified their policies in the light of their so called superior ideology. The view point of controlling the weak nations by force and justifying the occupation is very basis of colonialism. For the justification of imposition, the weakness and inferiority complexes of the colonized have been exploited. Loomba illustrates this justification and states that attitude about the inferiority of non-Europeans provided a justification for European settlements, trading practices, religious missions and military activity.<sup>5</sup> Thus colonialism is a consequence of imperialism with the settlement of the colonizers in distant territories. Childs argues that imperialism is an ideological concept which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military control of one nation by another.<sup>6</sup> Colonialism is concerned with the settlement of a group of people in a new location. However, imperialism is not concerned with the issue of settlement. It is only the extension and expansion of trade and commerce under the protection of political, legal and military controls.

In Young's opinion, Western affluence was predominantly indebted to the large-scale exploitation of the colonies rich in natural resources. He says, "The West's capitalist development during the nineteenth century was directly connected to colonialism. Whilst enforced migration became part of the colonial system, it also acted to alter western domestic culture. As a result a wave of anxiety concerning racial difference and miscegenation dominated western thought."<sup>7</sup> The motivation of the colonizers was for economic benefit and a strong trading position. This is also Loomba's point who observes that in whichever direction human beings and materials travelled, the profits always flowed into the so called mother country.<sup>8</sup> However, the establishment of a strong military location is also a point of the strategy. Brun adds that the colonies were beneficial for the military establishment and proved useful to military forces of the imperialist nations.<sup>9</sup> The economic, social and strategic control and occupation of the colonies made the colonizers powerful and gave them a sense of pride. Loomba further argues that colonialism expanded the contract between Europeans and non-Europeans, generating a flood of images and ideas on an unprecedented scale. However, this contract was only for the benefits of the colonizers. The colonized were marginalized and kept at a distance which created a gulf between the

two communities. McLeod observes that colonialism resulted in a sense of superiority in the colonizers which is reflected in their attitude and behavior.<sup>10</sup> The consequences were the rise of extremism, intolerance, hatred, and resistance. Subsequently, the colonized rose against the colonizers and organized the freedom struggles and movements in their respective regions and countries.

The colonizers adopted various strategies for settlement in the colonies. The strategies for settlement were different in different countries as colonialism was not an identical process. In different parts of the world everywhere it locked the inhabitants and the new-comers into the most complex and traumatic relationship in human history. The strategy of occupation and control for different countries was different.

In European countries, industrialism brought wealth and prosperity; however, raw materials were needed for the factories and mills. Therefore, Brunn links colonialism with industrialism and states that the Industrial Revolution increased the wealth of the European nations. They were in search of raw materials for their factories and new markets for their products. The weak nations were made slaves and western civilization and culture were imposed upon them. Between the colonizer and colonized, a specific line is drawn, demarcating their culture, history, art, language, social conventions, political achievements, attitudes, and psychological behaviour. The colonizers targeted these fields through the colonial discourse. The imperial culture is represented as supreme in the discourse of literary works.

The British colonizers controlled the Indian sources and resources and the Indians were treated as “half citizens.” During the colonial period, the colonizers wanted to inculcate their policies in the future rulers of the states. Macqueen (2007) observes that over time the rulers of various states and their children were educated in the elite schools and universities of the imperial ‘motherland’ for further brainwashing and keeping them in their clutches to make them ‘typical’ English gentlemen. According to this policy, a British civil servant, Malcolm Darling was appointed as tutor for the education of the young prince of the state Tukoji Rao III (1888-1937). Malocom Darling (1880- 1969) was a British civil servant. Most of his career lay in the Punjab. Three of his books, *The Punjab Peasant, Wisdom and Waste, Rusticus Loquitur* deal with rural conditions of India and Pakistan. His last and perhaps most fascinating book *At Freedom's Gate* describe a ride from Peshawar to the Nerbudda, after the British withdrawal. Malcolm and Tukoji Rao had a clear vision about the future. Forster states, “In those early years with the promise of an important public career opening, the young Englishman and the still younger Indian

were full of hope and feel themselves to be symbols of their respective countries, and the pledge of happier political union".<sup>11</sup> As a tutor Malcolm had a background of Eton, King's college, Cambridge, with a feeling of racial superiority. Tukoji was brilliant student at Indoor and Ajmere. At the end, however, Tukoji Rao or Tukky (Bapu sahib) becomes a victim of colonialism. On certain occasions, Malcolm fails to prove his sincerity and friendship. When Maharajah was in trouble (1921), he requested Malcolm to become his private secretary; however, he declined.

At the completion of the learning period, Malcolm submits a confidential report about the attitude, behaviour, capacity and grooming of the prince. The main features of the report were:

- Loyalty to the British and support to their policies
- Rigidity to women
- Generosity to the men
- The Brahmins never became important in the court
- The notable religious ceremonies were not priest-ridden but ruler-ridden.<sup>12</sup>

Forster has linked the first point, the support to the British policies with the First World War. During the First World War the Maharajah of Dewas supported the British Empire and Allied Forces. Thus he got a place in the good books of the British rulers and was certificated as one of the most enlightened of all the Indian princes.<sup>13</sup> The attitude of the English press was also quite friendly and Sir Valentine Chirol, a notable journalist had signalized him as one of the most enlightened of the younger princes. However, the same press became hostile and severely criticized him when he turned against the inhumane policies of the British Government. The press exploited the personal matters of Maharajah and scandalized them to make the Maharajah a villain.

The first marriage (1908) brings problems for the Maharajah. The marriage of Tukoji Rao III, took place with the daughter of the Maharajah of Kolhapur. However, there was an appalling domestic disaster and the Maharajah sent his wife back to Kolhapur in 1916. There were also rumours that she had fled from him. However, the Maharajah was devoted to her and his letters to her prove all this. His wife become a victim of her hostile relatives and they separated from each other. The consequences of the estrangement were extremely horrible and led to political catastrophe. When the friends of the Maharajah contacted the editor of the paper and pointed out the realities, the editor declined to publish them. Similarly, after the death of the Maharajah in 1937, *The Times* of London carried an

obituary article and declared him a failed ruler. The newspaper added that the Maharajah came of an ancient and renowned dynasty, he had an ungovernable temper and his self-indulgence led to serious deterioration. The press ignored the fact that he was lovable, brilliant and witty and charming.

The confidence of the Maharajah was, shattered by the British hierarchies of power. The British officers become hostile for their vested interests. Forster reveals the facts in the light of his own experiences. He states that he has a personal experience of the attitude of the British officers. They were insensitive, or, if they were clever and tried to beat him (Maharajah) at his own tricks and policies. The flaws of the prince were his personal weakness and family disputes. On personal level, the Maharajah of Dewas state had several issues with relatives and family members. These flaws were exploited by the colonizers against him. Forster has also used the word cad for colonizers which mean "The men who do not behave in a civilized manner". Thus the irresponsible attitude and ill will of the colonizers were the root cause of the bitterness.

Forster has mentioned several narratives and occasions of the cruel and arrogant behaviour of the colonizers. The demands of the British officers had to be quite childish. For instance, the British officers, during their visits, insist on to stay and get accommodation inside the palace. This reflects the superiority complex of the colonial officers. He has mentioned the three days visit of Colonel Adams along with his family. In his letter of April 28, 1921, Forster writes that three days visit of Colonel Adams, his wife and daughter is mercifully over. Both the ladies were quite impolite and unpleasant and colonel Admas himself was quite uncivilized. Forster has used the words 'whiskified, fishy-faced and bully' for him. During their stay at the state Guest House, a special cow had to attend them and be milked in their presence. Forster states that the British officers had to demand for cash money as well.

Forster has mentioned that the Indian Government used to interfere in the personal matters of royal family and used to exploit the personal relations of the family members for political motives. He has given the example of the Maharajah and the Yuraj (Crown Prince). There was a misunderstanding between the father and son. The British Government was keen to probe into a personal matter through a Commission of Inquiry. The Maharajah was accused, by son, of being part of a conspiracy to give him (his son) poison. However, Forster writes that he does not know about any case at Dewas State either of poisoning or of attempted poisoning. However,

there were three poisoning scares and the people were talking about them. Thus the Maharajah become a victim of conspiracy. The elder son of Maharajah, Vikramsinha (Vikky), after his marriage, due to certain restrictions, fled away from Dewas State, (December 2, 1927) declaring that he was being poisoned by father. Instead of proceeding to Jath or Kolhapur, he went to Indore (The office of the Agent to the Governor-General was in Indore). In Indore, the crown prince sought the protection and asylum of the Indian Government. The young prince took refuge with the Agent to the Governor General, Reginald Glancy. He (the Agent to the Governor-General) accommodated the young prince and arranged a dialogue with his father for reconciliation. However, the Maharajah set certain conditions:

- Forbidding the prince to go to Jath or Kolhapur (His wife was from Jath and mother from Kolhapur)
- The prince should be considered as a Political Offender
- No official enquiry to the case
- The Indian Government should take his guardianship

The Indian Government and Glancy raised objections to these provisions. They framed the following conditions to probe the matter:

- (a) The acceptance of an Account Officer, appointed by the Indian Government, to check and examine the financial situation and submit a report.
- (b) The acceptance of a Dewan (Prime Minister) imposed by the Indian government, who could not be dismissed in any case by the Maharajah

In a communication of 24 July, the Maharajah of Dewas was ordered to decide, about the options, within a fortnight. It was a bitter political step for Maharajah and he was in a fix. The colonial net was ready for him. The British officers take the matter in their hands and used this opportunity against the Maharajah and dethroned him. Forster writes, "The wheels of western righteousness rolled on and crushed the Maharajah."<sup>14</sup> But there are certain other factors which are responsible for the decline of the Maharajah. Some of them are given as:

- The lavishly expenditure on the marriage of his son
- Allocation of a huge sum for the secret-service agents at Delhi
- The failure of crops and decrease in production
- Over-taxation of the cultivators.<sup>15</sup>

The natural calamities and family matters were exploited by the British Indian Government, for political intervention. The colonizers amalgamate the political issues with the domestic or personal matters. In the meanwhile, the Maharajah requested for a loan but no heed was

given to his appeal. The government further becomes sterner and imposes a Commission of Inquiry under Government of India Resolution No 426 R of 1921. The stick of colonialism was used against the Maharajah which compelled him to take an extreme step; the step of self-exile to Pondicherry, as a protest. The Government was furious and commanded his return. He was to be back in Dewas by 10 November. He refused, and ordered his State Council to dissolve itself if there was any external interference. He also dispatched an immense telegram to the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon: his swan-song in telegrams. 'I at the very outset beg your Excellency to forgive this rather lengthy wire,' it begins, recapitulates the dispute, refuses to make any concession, asks for a loan, refuses to leave Pondicherry, and concludes, after one thousand words, with 'Situated as you are in the highest position of trust for the British prestige and honour and for the welfare, dignity, and rights of the Indian Rulers, I have no other course left open and beg to be excused for the same.' Lord Willingdon's secretary replied that His Excellency saw no reason to modify the decision already made. The wheels of western righteousness rolled on and crushed him. The decision of exile becomes fatal for him and consequently he met his end in December 1937. Thus the British colonial policies did destroy the Maharajah of Dewas state. The destruction was not with a single blow but slow and gradual policy was adopted and the Maharajah became a victim of colonialism.<sup>16</sup>

The Maharajah of Dewas was confident that his British friends would come to his rescue but he did not know that the norms of friendship in east and west are different; and colonialism is a system which doesn't care for individuals. Malcolm, as a friend, came forward for his role, but all in vain. His appeals to various officials, high and low, were rejected and the Maharajah became a victim of colonial system.

Forster ignores the political movements and freedom struggles in India and writes that the people were supporting the British policies. He observes that there is no anti-English feeling. It is Gandhi whom the people of Dewas are afraid of they hate him. This observation indicates that the people were aware of the political activities of Congress and its leadership.

Another political development is the framing of a constitution for the Dewas state. However, ironically, the framing of the constitution was not for the betterment of the people and state but to make happy the British Empire. The structure of the constitution was tripartite:

- The Ruler
- A state council of six members nominated by the ruler
- A representative Assembly of about seventy members.

All chapters and clauses of the constitution are against the true spirit of democracy. The British government was not sincere in the implementation of the constitution. Therefore, the Prince of Wales cancelled his visit to Dewas state. Lord Reading didn't take any interest in the matter and the proposed constitution was never promulgated in the state. The economic resources have not been mentioned however, there is a contradiction in Forster's statement and observation about the economic condition in Dewas state. For instance, he states that once they brought bags of rupees in a car which reflects that Dewas state was rich in natural resources.

### **Conclusion**

The above discussion is based on the themes of politics, policies and relationship in a colonized Dewas state India. E.M. Forster's book *Hill of Devi* reveals the colonial policy and the life style of the Indians in a colonized Indian state. The colonial attitude, behaviour, narratives, point of view, and ideologies are expressed through from his own observation and experiences as visitor and private secretary. Forster has not mentioned any political movement, leader or party, though the two strong political parties; Indian National Congress (1885) and All India Muslim League (1906) were working for political achievements. At the same time there were also arm struggles in some areas of the British colonized India. However, he has not discussed any prominent freedom fighter. The prince of the state did not like to join any political party to offer resistance to the British rulers rather he went into exile to Mau and Pondicherry and thus could not challenge the colonial system.

## References

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