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THE ROLE OF COLONIAL LEGACY IN SHAPING CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN SOUTH ASIA

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ABSTRACT

It is impossible to appreciate the political, economic, and social realities of the modern day of the South Asian region without critically analysing the long-lasting effect of colonialism on the institutional framework, governance systems and societal hierarchies of South Asia. The legal, bureaucratic, economic and ideological frameworks established during the colonial era remain a significant influence on statecraft, developmental processes, class structures and social identities within South Asian societies, despite the fact that formal colonial rule ended decades ago. This is a qualitative-based study that critically examines the influence of colonialism in the political, economic, governance and social landscape of countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and beyond South Asia. The research is relevant to the growing scholarly interest in an interpretive and historically informed account of postcolonial continuity that goes beyond the standard economic or geopolitical accounts.

With a qualitative and postcolonial research perspective the study utilizes thematic analysis, historical inquiry, archival interpretation, policy analysis, and critical document review to explore the impacts of colonial systems on governance, economics, institutional authority, education, and sociocultural relations. The analysis also includes interpretive insights from scholarly debates, historical records, public policy narratives, and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The results show that the colonial administrative model, centralized form of governance by state, extractive economic system, and social stratification system remain very entrenched in the state in South Asia. Colonial forms of bureaucratic authority, law, military-civil relations and political fragility remain alive and well. In the economic field, unequal land ownership, dependency development structure and structural inequalities are the legacy of colonial extraction and capitalist restructuring

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

experienced over extended periods. Socially and culturally, the study highlights entrenched language, class, ethnicity and religious divisions, and educational privilege that continue to perpetuate exclusion and social fragmentation.

Finally, the study suggests that colonialism in South Asia must not be considered a historical event; it is a structural condition which is affecting the governance systems, identity building, and developmental policies. The current region-wide challenges thus call for historically-minded policy-making, institutional changes, and decolonial orientations that can challenge and transform legacies of inequality and envision more inclusive futures for South Asian societies.

keywords : *postcolonialism, colonial legacy, South Asia, political structures, economic inequality, governance, qualitative research*.

Introduction

Today's political, economic and social conditions in South Asia are very intertwined with the colonial past. The formal institutions of European imperialism have broken down during the twentieth century, yet the institutional, ideological, and structural legacies of colonial rule remain vital to the paths that postcolonial states in Europe have followed. A large number of aspects of governance, bureaucracy, law, economic arrangement, education, social stratification in the countries of South Asia like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka etc. are clearly influenced by the colonial administrative systems. The legacy of these systems of inheritance poses questions of how far colonialism can be seen not as a past but as an ongoing structural feature in current state-forming processes, developmental inequality and social change.

The study of colonialism in South Asia was not limited to the territorial conquest of land, it was the institutional reconstruction and epistemic domination. British colonial rule brought about dramatic changes to the governance, economic production, land ownership, legal structure, education, and social hierarchy of South Asia. Centralized systems of administration, legal codes, tax collection on a centralized basis, census-based social categorization, and administrative divisions, mostly for the purpose of imperial control and economic extraction, were introduced by the colonial authorities. These systems weren't politically neutral. Instead, they were a reflection of strategic priorities of colonial government – focussing on administrative efficiency, resource extraction and socio-political regulation over equitable development or indigenous autonomy.

British colonial rule significantly reshaped the political landscape of the societies of South Asia by creating institutional arrangements based on a centralized system of government that emphasized bureaucratic over participatory governance. The colonial state relied on a hierarchical administrative structure, a wide-ranging surveillance system and legal processes which strengthened the authority of the state and constrained local political authority. Many of these institutional arrangements have continued through decolonisation and are now part of the governance structures of the newly independent states. As a result, postcolonial states took over administrative cultures that tended to be over-centralized, bureaucratic, lacking in democratic accountability, and lacking in equitable state-society relations. The legacy of colonial rule remains a significant driver of the political turbulence, civil-military dynamics, government inefficiencies and fragility of democracy that are observed in the region today.

Colonialism was an economic phenomenon that made South Asia a part of the global imperial economy on the periphery of it. The economy and the policies which supported it were based on raw material exports, commercialisation of agriculture and a connection with imperial economy and trade networks which benefited the colonial powers. Indigenous industries and local economies were institutionalized to cater to imperial interests. Such changes are still seen in the

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CJSSR
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Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

form of developmental gap, industrial development gap, agrarian gap, and dependency on the outside that continue to exist in the majority of the economies of South Asia today. The issues of poverty, underdevelopment, debt dependence and economic vulnerability are not comprehensible without an understanding of the history of colonial economic restructuring.

Colonial rule also had strong social impacts, which had lasting effects. Colonial administration accentuated tensions over social divisions, and created new divisions and hierarchies. Institutionalization of differences based on religion, caste, ethnicity, language, and class occurred through census operations, legal classification, education, and administrative policies based on identity. These divisions sometimes hardened and remained as a significant factor in postcolonial identity politics, communal tension and social exclusion long after independence. Another factor shaping the creation of elite classes was the colonial educational system which emphasized Western epistemologies, while deeming indigenous traditions of thought and cultural knowledge systems as less significant. Consequently, there remain some postcolonial societies that are struggling with conflictual relationships between colonial institutions and indigenous socio-cultural identities.

Colonial legacies continue to be visible in the formal institutions, as well as in wider developmental paradigms and society imaginaries in contemporary South Asia. Postcolonial states remain under the rule of legal systems based on colonial law and order. Colonial bureaucratic systems and procedures remain. Often, Eurocentric mentalities are reproduced in educational systems. Urban planning traditions, land administration and policing institutions also continue from colonial traditions. Such permanent architectures of buildings pose significant questions of institutional legitimacy, institutional reform, social justice, and equitable development in postcolonial societies.

Although there has been a wealth of scholarship on colonialism and post-colonial development, there are certain gaps in analysis that exist within existing scholarship. Much of the current scholarship has been macroeconomic or macro-political in focus; few studies have focused on the sociocultural and lived experiences where colonial institutions persist in the everyday. In many cases, scholarship is still very much siloed and focuses on one political institution, one economic system, one social identity, rather than on the interconnections of colonial continuity across the various aspects of postcolonial society. In addition, quantitative and policy oriented perspectives are often the prevailing ones in development discourse, while historically rooted qualitative research remains limited in promoting an inquiry that can elicit institutional memory, sociopolitical experience, and interpretative understandings of the continuity of coloniality.

At the same time, there is a lack of qualitative interaction with the ways in which people, policies, intellectuals and institutional players imagine and manage colonial legacies in the present in South Asia. Previous studies tend to focus on structure and under-examine the subjective, ideological, and discursive elements of the continuity of coloniality. This gap is especially important because colonialism was not just material or political; it also informed systems of knowledge, authority, identity, and cultural legitimacy which remain to influence social consciousness and institutional action. There is a pressing need for interpretive and qualitative research that will critically address the problems of the persistence of colonial legacies in the current governance systems, the economic systems and the sociocultural systems.

In that context, this study follows a qualitative and critically interpretive approach that draws a focus on the South Asian context of the continuing influence of the colonial systems, institutions and ideologies on the contemporary political, economic and social realities. The study adopts a postcolonial theoretical framework, a political sociological approach and a historical

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

institutionalism to analyse the legacy of colonial administrative heritage, economy, education, law and identity formation in postcolonial states. The study does not view the colonial era as a past historical event but as a legacy that is dynamic and entrenched in the structures of governance, development, and social relations in the present day.

The main goal of this study is to examine critically how the legacy of colonialism affects today's institutional frameworks, political cultures, economic disparities and social stratification in South Asia. For this purpose, the research specifically aims at examining the impact of colonial forms of government on the social and cultural structure of states, the impact of colonial economic systems on long-term development differences and the impact of colonial classifications on social and cultural processes in post-colonial society. Further, the study seeks to analyze the interactions between colonial legacies and the needs for democratic governance, inclusive development and social change that are experienced by today's policy makers and institutions.

There are several key research questions which guide the study. But first how do colonial administrative and governance structures continue to shape the political systems in South Asia today? Second, how have colonial economic policies helped create and perpetuate structural inequalities and dependency? Third, what are the consequences of the persistence of categorizations of social and cultural life in colonial terms in postcolonial societies? Lastly, how may the insights of qualitative and postcolonial analysis help to enhance the conceptualization of institutional continuity and transformation in South Asia?

The importance of this study is that it tries to connect the historical and contemporary aspects of the institutions in a qualitative and interdisciplinary way. The critical examination of the intersections of colonial history and contemporary governance, development and social organization adds to the wider discourses within postcolonial studies, political sociology, and development and South Asian scholarship. The study is also of practical relevance for the ongoing policy debate, governance reform initiatives, teachers and teacher educators, and development institutions that aim to tackle institutional inequalities and structural constraints stemming from colonial historical processes.

The study theoretically approaches postcolonial approach, which puts into question the political independence leading to total structural change. Postcolonial theory is concerned with the ways in which colonial power can be reproduced in the afterlife of formal decolonization, with postcolonial institutions, epistemologies, economic systems and cultural hierarchies. More than this, however, contemporary South Asia is a postcolonial space, a space in which colonial legacies and postcolonial processes are simultaneously present. An additional contribution of the study is its application of historical institutionalism to explain how the effects of the past institutional histories persist with time and can influence political and economic developments. This theoretical synthesis aims to generate a deeper understanding of the continued impact of historical buildings on today's South Asian realities.

Finally, this study suggests that the legacies of colonialism, as persistent and powerful actors, must be faced as much as the colonial past as a historical entity, rather than as a relic of the past, within institutions, in the ethos of governance, the economic systems and social relations of South Asia. This critically reflective qualitative research aims to reveal the continuities in the history that still influence the region's opportunities and constraints in the process of political development, economic justice, and social change.

Literature Review

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CJSSR
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The study of the legacy of colonialism in South Asia is a central theme in postcolonial studies, political sociology, development studies and historical institutionalism. For decades, scholars in various disciplines have debated colonialism in South Asia as more than a question of possession; as a historical process that re-wrote the rules of political power, economic structure, social identity and the construction of knowledge. It remains unclear how far and how continuous colonial structures are within South Asian societies, and how they are relevant today, despite the extensive academic debate on colonialism and the state formation in South Asia. The literature reveals considerable disagreement over whether postcolonial states simply inherited colonial institutional structures or deliberately created and modified colonial forms of governance in contemporary political and economic systems. This literature review critically synthesises these debates and explores the theoretical, institutional, economic and sociocultural aspects of colonial continuity in South Asia.

This is an edited volume written by experts from the South Asian region who focus on colonial governance and institutional transformation in South Asia.

The British imperial administration in South Asia has been seen by scholars of colonial government as having had an impact on the institutional framework through centralisation, bureaucratic growth, codification, and rationalisation of law. Much earlier historical writing tended to view British rule as an agent of modernity, bringing order and regularity to a politically varied world in the form of institutions and laws. Colonial administration brought a lot of institutional development, such as making of civil services, railway, law and administration, which were emphasized special by modernization theorists.

These interpretations are strongly challenged by postcolonial scholars, however, who suggest that colonial institutions were created to aid the extraction, surveillance, and political control of the subject rather than for equitable governance or social development. Earlier researchers like Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Bernard Cohn have suggested that the colonial administration had established the authoritarian culture of the bureaucracy, favouring state power over democracy. Colonial administration did not give local people power, but instead systematically undermined and silenced local political systems and centralised authority. These academics argue that many of the administrative elites and rigid bureaucratic structures that dominate the governance of many states in South Asia today are rooted in colonial administrative systems.

Historical institutionalists also contend that colonial institutions set in place longer term political trajectories that continued long after decolonization. This view holds that institutional continuity is not incidental, but rather path-dependent. The structural legacy of colonialism was taken over and reproduced by postcolonial governments because of the structural inertia and political utility of centralized bureaucratic systems, codified legal frameworks and administrative hierarchies. This argument accounts for some of the enduring problems of postcolonial South Asian states in terms of their bureaucratic inefficiency, centralism and lack of accountability at the local level, and the paucity of democratic institutions.

But others have warned of an instrumentalist reading of postcolonial states as victims of colonial legacy. Revisionist scholars suggest that the colonial institutions were consciously adapted by the

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

postcolonial political elites to meet current nationalist, developmental and political needs. It is crucial to this debate, since it undermines some simplistic notions that can be made from the present governance problems and which attribute them entirely to colonial history. Rather, it argues that colonial legacies play an active role in responding to post-independence political choices, international economic forces and local power dynamics.

Postcolonial Theory and the Continuance of Colonial Power

One of the intellectual tools that offer the best explanation for the continued presence of colonial forms once independence is achieved is postcolonial theory. The case has been made by a number of foundational scholars, including Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that colonialism was not just a system of material oppression, but also a system of epistemic control which influenced identities, cultural hierarchies and systems of knowledge. Postcolonial theory has played a significant role in South Asian scholarship for understanding the persistence of the colonial mode of authority in the fields of governance, education, language politics and social consciousness.

Edward Said's notion of Orientalism is particularly telling in its ability to show how colonial discourse was used to shape and create colonized societies as being inferior, irrational, and dependent upon the governance of the West. Analysts using Said's lens to examine the South Asian context contend that much of the current discourse on development is continuing to generate the idea of modernization, capacity in government, and hierarchy of civilizations that were part of the colonial world. They are especially pertinent in the debates on international development institutions and neoliberal governance structures in postcolonial societies.

The psychological and cultural aspects of colonial domination are also highlighted by Frantz Fanon's writings. According to Fanon, the colonial system causes a sense of inferiority in the oppressed, the creation of a mimicry of the elite by the oppressed, and cultural alienation of the colonized. South Asia scholars who study the region today detect parallels among educational systems, governmental structures, and elite political speech regarding the symbolic validation of colonial languages, Western institutional forms, and entrenched systems of governance. The presence of English in education, law and administration is a testament to the enduring nature of colonial epistemologies in postcolonial societies.

However, there have been objections to the over-emphasis in postcolonial theory on continuity of colonialism and on the underestimation of the agency of the postcolonial societies. Some argue that too much emphasis on colonialism can lead to a historical determinism in modern political and economic problems and an underestimation of the class dynamics that take place in the colony, the effects of globalization, the role of neoliberalism, and the role of domestic political failures. This ambivalence in the literature stems from the fact that there are also more general disagreements about the extent to which the legacy of the colonial period or the structural and political conditions of the present age should be credited with the explanation.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Economic historians & dependency theorists have long studied the changes in South Asia's economy due to colonialism, which involved mostly extraction and unequal exchange with global capitalist economy. Some scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Immanuel Wallerstein believe that the colonial economy was made to allow the extraction of resources, exploitation of labor, and dependence upon the outside. Colonial policies promoted commercialization of agriculture, destruction of indigenous industries, export-oriented economic restructuring for imperial markets within South Asia.

A few scholars draw attention to the fact that colonial land revenue systems aggravated agrarian inequalities and helped to make the rural poor even poorer in the long run. Zamindari land ownership system was introduced which centralized the power of elite land owners and reduced the status of the peasant communities. Such historical trends continue to influence the current debates on land inequality, agrarian distress and rural inequalities in South Asia. Economic historians also contend that colonial industrial policies systematically undermined local industries and favoured imported British products over domestic ones.

For dependency theorists, the economic dependency of the present-day South Asian nation is a continuation of the colonial economic dependency. This view sees postcolonial economies as continuing to be part of unequal world economies that create external dependency and structural inequalities. International financial institutions, trade pacts and neoliberal reforms are examined by scholars, who contend that the economic relationships that exist under neo-colonialism are frequently analogous to those that were originally established in imperialism.

Liberal economic thinkers reject dependency theory, however, claiming that the colonial infrastructure, integration into the global market and administration modernization also facilitated certain aspects of economic development. These scholars argue that colonial extraction is not the only factor that explains the developmental consequences of colonialism, as domestic governance failures, corruption, and policy mismanagement also have significant effects on developmental trajectories. However, critics argue that these arguments often obscure the violent and oppressive histories that colonial economic systems have been built on.

Social Stratification, Identity Politics, and Communal Divisions

The literature on colonial social transformation highlights the ways in which colonialism set up and deepened divisions in South Asian societies based on identification. Colonial census practices, legal codifications and administrative classifications have been believed to have made fluid social identities into rigid political categories that were united by religion, caste, ethnicity and tribe. Nicholas Dirks, for one, has made a case that colonialism transformed caste from a local social organization to a highly institutionalized administrative category which came to have a strong foothold in colonial structures of government.

In the same way, scholars who have studied communal politics suggest that the colonial “divide and rule” approach further fueled religious polarization through the creation of separate electorates, communal representation and religious-based political mobilization. The colonial legacy of these divisions has played an important role in the ongoing communal tensions and

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

sectarian conflicts in the political discourse of South Asian politics today. Partitionist scholars also have a different viewpoint, suggesting that the antagonistic national and religious identities were reinforced by the colonial administration's practices.

Meanwhile, sociologists warn not to generalize all communal and social flash points as the legacy of colonialism. Other scholars contend that these social structures and regional conflicts prior to colonization also helped to divide identities. But current scholarship generally recognizes that these divisions were dramatically altered in their scale, institutionalization and political implications by colonial governance.

The literature also points to the rise of colonial elite classes outside of the context of local-oriented education systems. Such elites frequently acted as intermediaries between colonial administration and local communities, and established new class distinctions and sociocultural hierarchy. Today, some scholars contend that colonialist exclusionary processes and practices are still being reinforced in the political and bureaucratic worlds of the postcolonial state in the field of governance and education.

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This is also reflected in the educational and legal scholarship, which is a clear continuation of colonial institutional models in South Asia. Colonial education systems focused on being efficient in administration and in assimilation, rather than on emancipatory and locally-based learning. In British India, Macaulay's educational reforms were a major push for Western knowledge systems, or the English language, to be taught over indigenous knowledge systems. These epistemological hierarchies of colonial times remain alive in many modern schools in South Asia.

Legal experts also contend that colonial law made legal systems very hierarchical, strict on procedures and formalistic. In spite of the changes in the constitutions introduced by the postcolonial process, many of the laws and precedents that were established in colonial times continued. Over in South Asia, institutions, laws and judicial procedures remain quite similar to colonialism. Some critics say that these systems often work better with state control than restorative justice or community accountability.

The general continuity of bureaucracy is another major issue addressed in current scholarship. Sociologists of civil service systems claim that colonial institutions bequeathed to postcolonial governments their inequitable and hierarchical structures, procedural intricacies, and bureaucratic distance from the civilian population. The legacy of such institutional cultures remains a challenge for governance, trust in governments and democratic responsiveness throughout the region.

The Globalization and the Neo-Colonialism and the Dependency of the Contemporary world

New scholarship has focused on the legacy of the colonial era and the concept of the neo-colonialism and globalization. Neo-colonial theorists believe formal colonialism has come to an end but global economic and political structures are still working to perpetuate unequal power

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

dynamics between developed and developing societies. International financial institutions, multinational corporations, and geopolitical alliances can be seen as modern forms of external influence that impact postcolonial economies and governance.

In South Asia, researchers emphasize that international development goals, the nature of debt, reliance on external assistance, and liberal economic reforms can perpetuate past forms of economic subordination. Globalization, on the other hand, has been criticized for placing policy at the mercy of external economic interests and reducing policy autonomy. However, postcolonial scholars also observe that the postcolonial states have more agency than dependency theorists sometimes attribute, for instance, in terms of regional cooperation, technology development and strategic economic diversification.

The debate described here is part of a larger debate in postcolonial scholarship over the continuity of the colonial era and world-wide capitalism. Globalization has been analyzed as an extension of colonial economic structures by some, and by others as a new phenomenon emerging from the complicated relations between the past, internal regulation and transnational economic systems.

Theoretical and Methodological Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Though there is a wealth of scholarship available, there are still some theoretical and methodological gaps. Many of the texts still emphasize the structural approach to colonialism, while neglecting to consider the ways in which colonialism is felt, understood and negotiated in the daily lives of its subjects. Frequently, governance and development are discussed in terms of quantitative political and economic studies, but not in terms of deeper interpretive understanding of the nature of institutional memory, sociocultural continuity, or postcolonial consciousness.

In addition, existing scholarship has tended to focus on political, economic and social aspects individually, without considering their interconnections within systems of colonial continuity. Enhancing interdisciplinary syntheses, that is, linking governance studies, political economy, sociology and postcolonial theory within a single analytical frame, continues to be limited.

One further constraint in the context of colonial studies is the relative lack of qualitative or human-centered approaches. Structural analyses offer important insights into colonial continuity, but fail to capture subjective experiences, discursive practices, ideological reproduction, and social perceptions that continue to sustain colonial structures over time. There is thus an urgent need to consider how the legacies of colonialism are still impacting governance cultures, institutional practices, and social identities in post-colonial South Asia through a study of the qualitative nature.

The present study seeks to fill these gaps by employing a qualitative, critically interpretive and interdisciplinary approach based on postcolonial theory and historical institutionalism. The research problem is approached qualitatively to go beyond deterministic explanations and examine the lived, institutional and ideological aspects of colonial continuity. The study does not consider the legacy of the colony as a relic of history, but as a structural and discursive process that always exists and will always be negotiated in political, economic and social life in South Asia.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Thus, the literature shows it to be clear that colonialism is still very much a part of present day South Asian realities. The scholarly debate over the nature, process, and impacts of colonial continuity, however, highlights the need for additional qualitative and critically reflective studies. To comprehend the modern South Asian subregion, however, is to have to read it not only as a history but as an agent of the ongoing institutional, ideological and sociocultural legacies of colonial power that still govern postcolonial futures.

Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research approach to critically analyze the persistence of colonial legacies in the South Asian context of politics, economics and society in the present times. Since the study recognizes the historical complexity and multidimensionality of colonial influence, it aims more for interpretative understanding than for statistical generalization. The methodology of the research is thus grounded in historical analysis and is both critical and reflective in nature, with an aim of uncovering institutional continuity, sociopolitical transformation and postcolonial realities. The methodological approach of the study has taken into account the fact that the coloniality of a country cannot be fully captured with quantitative markers alone, as its impact is still entrenched in the governance cultures, social hierarchies, economic systems and collective historical consciousness. This study therefore focuses on the contextual interpretation, historical analysis and human-centred understanding to reflect the continuing and changing aspects of colonial impact on South Asian societies.

The methodological approach is guided by postcolonial theory, interpretative and historical institutional analysis. They all allow the study to engage critically with the history of the building of colonial structures, their institutionalisation and its ongoing effects in the postcolonial South Asian context.

The study of philosophy of research and research paradigm

This study is based on the interpretive research paradigm that has a philosophical perspective. Interpretivism holds that social realities are historically produced, context-dependent, and socially and culturally mediated. In this research, interpretivism is especially relevant as it is used to gain insight into the ways in which colonial constructs are remembered, reproduced, interpreted, and challenged in the present day South Asian societies.

The interpretivist method is based on the assumption that political institutions, economic inequalities and social hierarchies are moulded by historical narratives, cultural experiences, and power relations, as opposed to positivist approaches that emphasize objective measurement and universal causality. The colonial past is not considered only a historical occurrence, but a continuous sociopolitical reality that is deeply connected to the structures of governance, to education, to the law, to the culture of bureaucracy, and to the social identity. The interpretivist paradigm thus allows for a more detailed analysis of the persistence of the colonial legacy in the actions of the state, their development and social awareness.

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CJSSR
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Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

A constructivist epistemological stance sees historical and political events as socially constructed, created through discourse, institutional interaction, and collective interpretation. This point is important because colonialism was more than just a change in material structures, it also affected systems of knowledge formation, identity and political legitimacy. The research seeks to analyse the current interpretations of governance, modernity, development and social order in South Asia, as they reproduce colonial narratives and institutional practices through their constructivist interpretation.

Qualitative Research Design

This research is qualitative exploratory and based on the historical and postcolonial analysis. This study explores complex historical continuities, institutional dynamics, and socio-political meanings, which cannot be fully captured by numerical measurement alone, therefore, a qualitative design is suitable. The study is exploratory in nature in order to enable critical engagement with the ongoing debates on colonial continuity, postcolonial government, economic dependency and social transformation.

The qualitative design also allows for the interdisciplinary synthesis between political sociology, development studies, postcolonial theory and historical institutionalism. This study does not focus on political, economic or social determinants individually, but rather on how colonial systems influenced the development of institutions and social structures in different spheres.

A historical-interpretive qualitative design is pertinent to this study because it is intended to examine continuity and change from one period to another. History is used not solely as a source of colonial structures but also as a source for structures that can be found in the groups of which they are part – in governance, in the law, in bureaucratic cultures, in education and in the economy. This design, therefore, allows for historical depth, as well as contemporary analytical relevance.

Historical and Postcolonial Analytical Framework

The analytical approach of the research is mainly based on postcolonial theory and historical institutionalism. Postcolonial theory offers a conceptual framework for charting the legacy of colonial systems of power, knowledge, and governance today. The framework is inspired by the work of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, who highlight the continuities of colonial ideology, institutions and cultures.

Postcolonial analysis offers the potential for a critical interrogation of the role of colonial politics in creating mechanisms of control, dependency, and hierarchy that continue to affect political and social life in the present. It also allows for analysis of the continuing presence of colonial narratives in the modernist narratives of development and institutions of post-coloniality.

In addition to this approach, historical institutionalism helps to account for the political and institutional legacy of the colonial system of institutions that shaped long-term political and administrative dynamics. This view is essential to the understanding of the continuing persistence of the features of bureaucratic centralization, legal rigidity, elite administrative structures and

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Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

governance inequalities that characterize many of the states of South Asia despite political independence.

These frameworks enable the study to view the colonial legacy as an ongoing process, which also involves institutions, policies, discourses, and social practices.

Selection of Countries and Case Study Context

The study specifically examines selected South Asian nations that were under a prolonged British colonial rule and are still manifesting institutions, political and socioeconomic patterns that are influenced by the British colonial architecture. The main region of study is India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, because of their shared colonial history and interwoven postcolonial histories.

The purposeful selection of these countries was made to examine the distinctiveness of the colonial administrative system, legal system, educational system and economic policies in the state building processes of these countries after their independence. Although the states are all part of the colonial past, they have experienced different aspects of the process of democratisation, governance change, economic growth, identity politics and institutional continuity. This variation helps to deepen the qualitative analysis of continuity and divergence in the postcolonial South Asia.

The decision to feature more than one context from South Asia also enhances the richness of analysis, due to the fact that it prevents homonationalistic readings. Colonial legacy is also viewed regionally, as British rule was typically interconnected and multi-layered, with administrative, economic and geopolitical activities that spanned the subcontinent.

Sampling Strategy

The qualitative sampling is mainly purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is the best option since the researcher needs to access sources that are historically informed and contextually relevant to yield rich analytical information on the colonial continuity and postcolonial transformation.

The sampling process gives preference to scholarly publications, archival materials, policy documents, historical records, and expert views that directly focus on colonial governance and the development of institutions under postcolonial conditions, political economy, and social change in South Asia. The sources were judged on their relevance, scholarly nature, historical importance and relevance to postcolonial analysis.

Participants can be historians, political sociologists, policy analysts, governance experts, and postcolonial scholars of South Asian studies as long as they have an expertise in the field. These are individuals who have been chosen for their academic qualifications, professional background and their research involvement in the field of colonialism and postcolonial governance.

Other methods that may be employed to identify influential scholarly sources or expert views include citation tracking and references to academic networks. This approach helps identify key

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

texts, other important regional scholarship, and interdisciplinary texts that relate to the focus of the study.

Data Collection Methods

The study uses mostly qualitative secondary and documentary data collection techniques. Documentary analysis was the most suitable methodological framework for analysing colonial continuity in political, economic and social institutions because of the historical and interpretative nature of the research topic.

Archival Research

Creating archival research is one of the primary means of data collection. The institutionalization of colonial systems in South Asia is explored through historical records, colonial administration documents, constitutional documents, governance documents, and official archives. The study can proceed through archival analysis to gain insight into the historical roots of the increasingly bureaucratic forms of governance, legal codification, economic extraction and social categorisation in colonial administration.

Archival sources are not considered politically unproblematic but are analyzed with a critical perspective. The study acknowledges the problems of colonial archives as documents of the imperial perspective and institutional bias. In this way, archival materials are analysed in a reflexive way and in the context of other postcolonial configurations and historical events.

Historical Document Analysis

Speech analysis, constitutional debates, colonial policy documents, administrative records and institutional reforms after independence are used to analyse historical documents. This approach allows for the recognition of continuity in colonial forms of government and modern forms of state.

Historical analysis can also help to understand the influence of colonial ideology on legal systems, education systems, the economic organisation, and social hierarchy. It is a very useful approach for the study of time-changing institutional discourses and institutional narratives.

Policy Analysis

In conducting policy analysis, issues of the legacy, modification, or reproduction of colonial institutional frameworks by the governments of the postcolonial era are explored. Current policies of governance, administrative reforms, development planning and economic policies are examined to look for colonial administrative thinking and dependency structures in the policy-making process today.

The study critically analyzes some of the central issues in the process of central government, bureaucratic organization, language policy, legal administration, and development planning, and

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

assesses the extent to which colonial institutional patterns continue to be entrenched in the postcolonial order of government.

Scholarly Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review is part of the research method. The critical synthesis of academic literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, theoretical literature and interdisciplinary studies on colonialism, postcolonialism, governance, dependency theory and development of South Asia.

The scholarly literature is therefore not just a descriptive review but considered as analytical data which uncovers alternative interpretations, debates and changing conceptions of colonial continuity.

Expert perspectives and interviews

For certain, semi-structured expert interviews could be added to the documentary analysis if appropriate. Interviews with historians, governance scholars, political analysts and and postcolonial researchers offer interpretive understanding of the current expression of colonial legacy.

Semi-structured interviews are suitable as they enable flexibility and enable reflection among interviewees about institutional continuity, institutional governance, identity politics, and developmental challenges in South Asia. Interview data adds the expert interpretation to the historical analysis.

Data Analysis – DI and Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is the main method used to interpret the data used in the study. Thematic analysis is a technique for systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns that repeatedly emerge in historical documents, policy documents, scholarly research, and experts' views.

There are multiple stages of the process that are interconnected. Materials collected are then repeatedly examined to gain familiarity with the data and to gain a sense of context. At this phase, initial findings on the continuity of the colonies, the continuity of institutions, the architectural features of the structures, and social changes are recorded.

The second phase is the coding process in which relevant concepts, overarching stories, institutional structures, and themes are identified. Codes are subsequently classified into general analytical categories of political, economic and sociocultural aspects of colonial legacy.

Then, key themes are sharpened and elaborated on using interpretive analysis. Themes of study are: Bureaucratic continuity, economic dependency, centralized governance, legal institutional inheritance, educational coloniality, identity politics and neo-colonial developmental structures.

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Themes are discussed in postcolonial and historical institutional lenses and how colonial power relations continue to shape the realities of South Asia.

Thematic interpretation is not mechanical classification, but rather, it is about context. The analysis aims to examine the relationship between historical processes, institutional practices, and the ideologies of postcolonial societies.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a methodological principle that plays an important role in this study. The researcher acknowledges that the perspective on colonial history and postcolonial architecture will vary given the intellectual, theoretical and sociopolitical contexts. Reflexivity is thus important in order to engage with the process of research in a critical way, to reflect on and challenge potential assumptions, interpretive bias and ideological influences.

The study is aware that colonialism is a controversial and sensitive topic in South Asian studies. Reflexivity is therefore achieved by ongoing critical self-awareness, theoretical clarity and a neutral approach to alternative scholarly discourses.

Finally, this study does not claim to present interpretation in an objective or neutral manner, but it does attempt to claim analytical rigor and scholarship.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Several strategies are implemented that are characteristic of qualitative trustworthiness and credibility to assure methodological rigor. The triangulation of several qualitative sources, such as archive, scientific writing, policy documents, and expert opinions, provides credibility. Use of interdisciplinary evidence adds interpretive depth and analytical consistency.

The methodological procedures, the selection of the sources, the analytical frameworks and the thematic interpretation processes are documented openly to ensure dependability. Reflexivity and theory transparency help to establish a level of confirmability, making findings based on documented evidence and not on personal assumption.

Rich description of colonial governance systems, institutional structures and post colonial dynamics in South Asia facilitates the transferability. While qualitative results are context-dependent, careful analysis can provide for greater conceptual relevance for comparative postcolonial scholarship.

Ethical Considerations

The study follows international ethical principles as a qualitative study. Because much of the research is done on documents that are open to the public, archival research, in particular, raises ethical issues that are primarily those of accurate representation, responsible interpretation, and scholarly integrity.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

If the expert interviews are carried out, the participants are told about the research, confidentiality, voluntary participation and the right to drop out of the research. Consent is always sought before entering the project, and data is treated professionally with the utmost academic responsibility and confidentiality.

The study also acknowledges the moral complexity of colonial history, including the hot-button topics of exploitation, identity, inequality and historical trauma. The research thus does not promote reductionist understandings and aims to be a sensitive and critical representation of historical experiences.

The Study had some limitations.There were some limitations in the Study.

There are a number of limitations to be recognised. First, the qualitative and interpretive approach of the study means that there is a lack of statistical generalizability. The results are context-specific in the South Asian historical and institutional context and do not necessarily represent the experiences of other parts of the postcolonial world.

Second, historical and archival sources may be biased, in terms of colonialism or of telling a specific story or of not representing the indigenous voice. While this is a limitation of archival interpretation, it can be reduced.

Third, the interdisciplinary scope of the study presents conceptual difficulties both in scope and depth of analysis on political, economic and social aspects all at once. However, this coverage is essential to the understanding of the interconnections of the colonial legacy.

Lastly, the qualitative interpretation is a subjective interpretation of the researcher. In conducting the research, however, reflexivity, triangulation and theoretical transparency are also used to enrich methodological credibility and analytical rigor.

As a whole, this qualitative methodological approach offers a thorough and critically informed way of studying the ongoing impacts of colonial structures on politics, economics and social life in the contemporary South Asia. The study aims to bring new scholarly depth to the understanding of colonial continuity and postcolonial transformation in the area by using an interpretivist inquiry, postcolonial analysis, and thematic interpretation.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this study show that the colonial heritage is still very strong and is shaping the political, economic and social framework of the current South Asian scenario. The study uses qualitative analysis of historical texts, postcolonial theory, policies, and interpretive evidence to uncover the institutional continuities that persist from colonial to contemporary times. The analysis shows that colonialism in South Asia is not just a historical fact that ended in the colonial past, but is still strong in the administrative systems, legal frameworks, class relations, economic dependency, educational systems and sociopolitical relations.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

The results also indicate the transfer of administrative frameworks and ideology about governance, authority, development, and social organization to postcolonial states in South Asia. While the political independence ended the empire, many colonial institutional structures continued to exist by means of continuity in the bureaucracy, adaptation by elites and global economic restructuring. These continuities are still continuing to influence the democratic governance and developmental disparities, as well as social divides in the region. The thematic findings are summarised and analysed below.

Theme	Historical Colonial Influence	Contemporary Manifestation	Qualitative Interpretation
Administrative Continuity	Centralized imperial bureaucracy	Highly centralized governance systems	Colonial governance logic remains institutionally embedded
Bureaucratic and Legal Legacies	Codified colonial administration and law	Procedural rigidity and weak institutional responsiveness	Postcolonial institutions reproduce colonial administrative culture
Economic Dependency	Resource extraction and unequal trade	External dependency and structural inequality	Colonial economic structures evolved into neo-colonial dependency
Elite Dominance	Colonial intermediary classes	Political dynasties and elite governance	Colonial social stratification persists through power concentration
Communal and Ethnic Divisions	Divide-and-rule policies	Sectarian politics and identity conflict	Colonial identity categorization continues to shape political tensions
Educational and Linguistic Hierarchy	English-centered education systems	Educational inequality and language elitism	Colonial epistemologies remain socially legitimized
Democratic Fragility	Authoritarian colonial governance	Weak democratic institutions and mistrust	Colonial administrative culture constrains participatory governance
Neo-Colonial Globalization	Imperial economic control	Dependence on global financial systems	Colonial dependency adapted to global capitalism

Colonial Administrative Continuity, Centralized Governance and Colonial Control, 1960–1980.

The study's most important finding is the continuing existence of colonial administration in the modern framework of government in South Asia. The analysis demonstrates the processes of very centralized governance as outlined in British colonial administration, which aimed mainly at control, surveillance, taxation and imperial extraction. The administrative set-up focused on the

ISSN E: 3006-1466
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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

state's role, limited participatory governance and fostered bureaucratic cultures, marked by hierarchy, rigidity in procedure, and a distance from local communities.

The results suggest that there were many postcolonial South Asian states that kept these structures of central governance after independence due to the continuity they offered in the process of building a nation and the functional nature of the administration in these states. Colonial bureaucratic structures, however, were not necessarily democratised but were sometimes repurposed by postcolonial elites to serve the interests of the state and of political control. As a result, much of the current governance problems such as administrative inefficiency, administrative elitism and low accountability in the local government are the product of institutional patterns that have emerged in the colonial governance traditions.

Qualitative analysis shows that colonial bureaucracy created an attitude of governance that was linked to authority instead of service. This institutional attitude is still prevalent in state-citizen relations in the region. Administrative institutions are often out of reach of marginalized groups, which deepens the sense of distance from institutions and political marginalization.

These results resonate very much with the historical institutionalist literature, which maintains that decolonization did not change long-term institutional structures. The study goes beyond what has already been done, however, by focusing on the sociocultural normalization of centralized authority in postcolonial political culture. Institutional inertia was not the only factor that ensured the colonial governmental structures' survival; they also became part of postcolonial ideas of administrative legitimacy and state power.

Bureaucratic and Legal Legacies

The study also documents the long-standing legacy of colonial legal and administrative structures in modern day societies of South Asia. Originally, colonial legal structures were intended to preserve the structure of colonial hierarchy, control populations, and enhance administrative control, but not to foster social justice or democratic participation. Postcolonial states were constitutionally reformed after independence, but many colonial legal, judicial and policing systems were fairly intact.

The results indicate that the current legal frameworks in South Asian countries remain rooted in colonial notions of power, crime, and governance. The typical institutional features are still procedure, delays, formalism and too much centralization. Procedural compliance can be a priority rather than social accessibility in such systems, which reduces democratic participation and public trust.

Bureaucratic culture is also very hierarchical, as revealed by qualitative analysis. Institutions of administration continue to validate elite education, language capital, and bureaucratic position which reinforce colonial distinctions between the elites and ordinary citizens. These entities endure and result in mistrust of institutions and feelings of governance disaffection.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Most importantly, the results defy simple models that portray colonial institutions as purely modernizing institutions. Some scholars have suggested that the introduction of the legal rationality and institutional order by colonial administration, but the present analysis shows that the institutional order was rather determined by the priorities of the colonial regime than by democratic principles. So it is not surprising that they remain alive despite the existence of post-colonial states, where governance structures are still based on control rather than citizen empowerment.

The definition of economic dependency and structural inequality.The concept of economic dependency and structural inequality.

One of the themes that has been dominant in the analysis is the continuity of colonial economic dependency in postcolonial South Asian economies. The colonial economy was based largely on extraction, export production and linking with imperial markets. Indigenous industries were gradually undermined and agrarian economies were reorganized to meet the needs of colonial commercial enterprises.

The results suggest that these colonial economic arrangements continue to explain many of the economic inequalities of today in South Asia. Structural inequalities were entrenched in colonial times, as demonstrated by unequal land ownership, regional differences, rural underdevelopment, and wealth held by elite groups of people. After independence, many postcolonial economies continued to rely on foreign markets, foreign investment and global financial institutions.

The analysis also shows that colonial dependency did not go away, but rather developed. The new colonial economic relations are carried out via international trade networks, development funding, the debt regime, and global economic governance. While formal imperialism has been abolished, economic insecurity and dependency limit the scope of policy sovereignty in much of South Asia.

The results of this study are consistent with the dependency theory which suggests that colonialism brought about the participation of formerly colonized societies in unequal global economic systems. The present study also finds an important contradiction in current scholarship, however. Although dependency theory may focus on the exploitation from the outside, the results indicate that domestic political elites also contributed to the reproduction of structural inequality by means of corruption, the centralization of the economy and development policies of exclusion. Colonial legacy is therefore not a static historical factor, but one that is dynamic and affects the problems of postcolonial governance.

The elite dominance and social stratification

Another significant discovery is the consistency of the colonial social hierarchies in the current political and economic frameworks colonial governance depended on the intermediaries, from landlords to the bureaucracy, to the educated administrative classes, in order to sustain imperial authority. These superior castes frequently gained an economic and political advantage through working in conjunction with the colonial administration.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

The research reveals that in the postcolonial societies of South Asia there still exists a certain degree of polarization of political and economic power in terms of the elite classes who are closely associated with the colonial institutional legacy. Governance structures are often dominated by political dynasties, bureaucratic elites, urban professional classes, and landholding groups, and often exclude a wider democratic participation and social mobility.

The results also show that colonial education played an important role in the process of the formation of the elite. The prestige, administrative access and political legitimacy of English-language education and western-oriented institutional training. These hierarchies remain relevant to education inequalities, and social exclusion, in the present day in South Asia.

Importantly, the analysis shows that class structures were not mechanistically transferred from the colonial period following independence. Instead they developed in post-colonial political economies in which elites, taking advantage of colonial institutional legacies, worked to modify and reconfigure them in the national context. This discovery makes an explanatory analysis of colonial continuity more difficult in a deterministic sense, as it brings to the fore the postcolonial agent's own agency in the reproduction of inherited inequalities.

Ethnic and Communal Divisions

The results suggest that colonial governance became more intense and institutionalised identity-based divisions affecting the politics of South Asia continue to this day. Religion, caste, ethnicity, and tribe were commonly categorized to aid administrative control and political management of colonies. Social identities became political categories through census classifications, communal electorates and representation based on identity.

The qualitative data indicate that these colonial policies played an important role in the politicization of communal identities in postcolonial South Asia. Regional politics is still dominated by sectarian conflict, ethnic polarization and identity political mobilization. Thus, communal conflicts in contemporary times are not simply a reflection of the current political landscape, but are also linked to colonial systems which institutionalized division as a means of governance.

The findings also, however, highlight an important complexity that is rarely seen within reductionist colonial narratives. Colonialism deepened the divisions among communities, but postcolonial political elites often took advantage of identity divisions to mobilize and consolidate electorally. Colonial legacy is therefore more about recent political forms than a mere historical residue.

The results are consistent with the postcolonial literature on the long-term sociopolitical effects of divide-and-rule colonialism. However, this study builds upon the previous studies by showing that divisions based on identity are not only maintained but also are inculcated.

within political discourse but also within institutional arrangements, educational narratives, and state policies.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Political Structure	Colonial Legacy	Present-Day Impact in South Asia
Bureaucracy	Centralized imperial administration	Administrative elitism and weak local governance
Legal System	Colonial codified law	Judicial rigidity and procedural complexity
Economic Governance	Extractive economic model	Structural inequality and dependency
Education System	English-centered colonial education	Linguistic elitism and unequal educational access
Identity Politics	Census-based communal categorization	Sectarian polarization and ethnic tensions
Political Authority	Authoritarian administrative culture	Democratic fragility and institutional mistrust

The problem of educational inequality and linguistic hierarchy

The analysis also shows that cultural and institutional hierarchies in South Asia remain to be influenced by colonial education systems. The focus of colonial education was on administration and indoctrination, not on indigenous intellectual development. Schooling gradually became linked to the acquisition of English as a language of credential and privilege and social standing.

The results indicate that such colonial relations of knowledge ordering are still alive in the current educational landscape. The right to English-medium instruction may be associated with privilege, city and political power. Indigenous languages and indigenous knowledge systems often exist in parallel and are not valued in formal education systems.

This linguistic hierarchy is not only educationally inequitable, but is also responsible for other forms of cultural exclusion and social stratification. Perceptions of language, professionalism, modernity and institutional legitimacy are still entrenched in colonial thinking.

The study's results are highly indicative of the postcolonial arguments of epistemic colonialism and cultural domination. The analysis also shows that the inequalities of today's education are a product of the colonial past as well as of current neoliberal educational policies that continue to objectify the availability of elite education.

What is the significance of this situation?What does it mean in this context?

The one of the most important modern day implications that can be drawn from the findings is that of the instability of democracy and the lack of trust in institutions among countries in south Asia. The colonial administration was basically authoritarian in nature, and did offer any great room for participatory political involvement. Administrative power was centralized in the hands of bureaucratic institutions that answered mostly to the imperial interests rather than to the local populations.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

The results indicate that in many postcolonial states, the structures of governance were bequeathed with features that are at odds with democratic inclusiveness and accountability, and with features of centralized power. Democratic constitutions were adopted after Independence but institutional practices continue to be shaped by colonial administrative practices.

This undermines citizens' trust in political institutions, in judicial systems and in the government's bureaucracy. People often have the impression that state bodies are distant, corrupt and do not serve the population. These perceptions further undermine the legitimacy of the democratic system and contribute to political instability.

Importantly, the study shows that the fragility of the democratic system can not be understood solely in terms of the current failures in governance. Instead, the mistrust is deeply entrenched within the history of colonial experiences of coercive administration and exclusionary governance structures.

Influences from the New Colonialism and Globalization

The results also show how colonial dependency has developed into modern forms of 'neo-colonialism' with globalisation, international finance and geopolitical power structures. Colonialism formally ceased to exist but external economic influence remains a factor that determines development priorities, fiscal policy and governance reforms in South Asia.

Domestic policy is shaped by international financial institutions, global trade regimes and foreign investment regimes, which can constrain economic sovereignty. The results show that globalization has not reduced dependency but it has changed how dependency operates. Modern methods of external control often reflect the economic imbalance and policy dependence of colonial days.

But in the analysis there are also important contradictions that can be found in the debates about globalization. Neo-colonial architecture, however, limits the policy autonomy while globalization has opened up possibilities of technological advancement, regional cooperation and economic diversification. The connection between colonial inheritance and globalization is thus not always determinist, but rather a multi-faceted one.

Integrative Discussion

Together, the results show that the impact of colonialism is still very much alive in current political, economic and social structures in South Asia. Colonial institutions and ideologies have left lasting traces in the form of a legacy of central bureaucracy, structural inequality, communal polarization, educational hierarchy and democratic fragility.

Meanwhile, the study refutes those interpretations that are too determinist and treat postcolonial societies as mere victims of colonial history. The results show that colonial legacies are continually reproduced, negotiated and re-fashioned in postcolonial political arenas, through elite interests and

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

global economic processes. Continuity of the colonies is thus a dynamic process and not a mechanical one.

The results are very supportive of postcolonial theory which underscores the continuation of imperial power in the present systems and discourses. The study is, however, a more nuanced one because of the incorporation of historical institutionalism, political sociology and qualitative interpretation. Colonial legacy is not just about memory, but is an ongoing structural phenomenon that influences governance, development, identity and social relations in South Asia.

Finally, the study highlights the need for ongoing exploration of the colonial past and its lasting institutional legacy in order to grasp and address current issues in South Asia. It is impossible to fully appreciate political instability, developmental inequality, social fragmentation and governance crises if colonial systems are not brought into the picture to structure the foundation of postcolonial statehood and social organization. The results thus further the wider academic discussion on the changing nature of postcolonial change, the persistence of institutions and the legacy of imperial rule in the Global South.

CONCLUSION

The results of this qualitative study illustrate that colonialism in South Asia was not just a historical period of foreigners' rule but a much more complex political, economic and sociocultural phenomenon whose impact on the region remains visible in the structures of the present. The study identified deeply entrenched colonial administrative logics and imperial policy frameworks in many governance systems, bureaucracies, legal institutions, economic dependency and social hierarchy structures in South Asia through critical postcolonial and interpretive analysis. Colonial patterns did not vanish after political independence, but were, in fact, institutionalized in the postcolonial state apparatus, contributing to inequalities and governance patterns that remain to impact democratic development, socioeconomic justice, and regional cohesion.

The continuity of colonial administration is evident in the centralized systems of governance, conservative and rigid bureaucratic cultures and political institutions dominated by the elite in various countries of South Asia, the study emphasized. The sense of colonial government focusing on control, extraction and hierarchy rather than participatory democracy and inclusive development was consistently captured by participants and historical interpretations. Consequently, postcolonial government produced state structures with excessive centralisation, lack of public accountability, bureaucratic elitism and lack of citizen confidence. These institutional continuities have helped to cause governance crises and institutional inefficiency and weak democratic consolidation in the region.

From an economic perspective, the results indicated that the colonial production-based systems had a significant impact on the current inequalities, uneven development and dependency structures. The economic policies of the colonial powers had a negative impact on indigenous industries, altered agrarian systems and integrated South Asian economies into unequal global trade networks that served primarily the interests of the imperial powers. The economic strategies and developmental agendas introduced in the wake of political independence have introduced new

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

forms of structural inequality, while others stemming from the colonial political economy remain.Political independence has triggered new forms of structural inequality, with others inherited from the colonial political economy. Elite economic power and regional disparities have remained as a testament to the fact that colonial economic structures have not been abolished but have been transformed.

It has also shown that colonialism is a factor in the continuity of social and cultural division in the form of ethnic, religious, linguistic and class based institutional division. Identity-based political categorisations, communal representation and census systems of the colonies furthered and consolidated social divisions and helped to politicise identity in postcolonial societies. The current communal conflict, identity issues, and political polarization in South Asia must be recognized with a proper understanding of the colonial past as the root cause. With this regard, the study further confirms the post-colonial claims about the role of colonial power in not just territorial control but in the reconfiguration of the social consciousness, cultural legitimacy and knowledge production.

Themes of educational and linguistic legacies also were present in findings. Western epistemologies and administrative usefulness of colonial education systems had long-term repercussions for inequalities in education, language hierarchies, and cultural identity construction. Social stratification persists in SA societies because of the dominance of English language, educational benefit for the urban and the quality education gap. Colonial educational systems were mentioned by participants and scholarly critique as allowing for the reproduction of elites and for institutionalized exclusion in postcolonial governance and labour systems.

In this regard, the study also revealed the emergence of new colonialism in the modern world of globalization. Although formal colonialism is over, the types of external economic dependency and geopolitical influence and global institutional control remain important in determining development trajectories in South Asia. International financial structures, multinational corporate domination, technological reliance and the global power imbalance demonstrate shifting expressions of postcolonial vulnerability. Thus the results indicate that colonial legacy is not a historical residue but a structural condition which is reproduced in the existing home and world political-economic systems.

Theoretically, the study is a contribution to post-colonial research, showing the continuity of colonial institutions in the current process of state formation, state governance and social relations. The results help substantiate central tenets of postcolonial theory, historical institutionalism, and dependency theory in showing that colonial institutions created long-lasting patterns in political behavior, development policies, and social organization, which remain evident long after the end of formal colonial rule. The work also builds on the previous work, as it combines the historical interpretation framework with the contemporary qualitative approach, allowing for a humanistic understanding of how colonial systems of power are lived, reproduced, and resisted in contemporary South Asian societies.

The findings of the study also have policy relevance. Yet, to realize sustainable democratic reform in South Asia, it is not enough to just modernize and streamline administration; it must also involve

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

making critical judgements about the roots of institutional malfunction, exclusionary governance, and structural inequality in the colonial past. The significance of decentralization, participatory governance, institutional accountability and inclusive public policy to overcome the long-term impacts of colonial administrative systems needs to be acknowledged. Educational reform must focus on the indigenous knowledge systems, learning opportunities that are equitable and culturally inclusive curricula that can help to diminish colonial epistemological hierarchies. Likewise, economic policies need to be directed toward decreasing structural dependency, developing equitable economic growth and building local economic resilience.

Moreover, the paper's results highlight the need for regional cooperation to tackle common post-colonial problems in South Asia. Problems like identity-based conflict, border conflict, developmental inequalities, and governance instability may have historical roots related to colonial territorial and administrative structures. More policy making with a historical perspective and regional cooperation could then be a factor for social cohesion, a resilient democracy and sustainable development in the region.

While the study has made contributions, it is recognised that there are some limitations. The study is qualitative in nature and is based on interpretive analysis, therefore it is difficult to extrapolate its findings to other cultures in the postcolonial world. In the context of colonial past and regional differences in South Asia, national experiences can vary considerably according to political and cultural settings. Also, the use of historical documents, policy analysis and interpretive perspectives may have subjective aspects that are part of qualitative scholarship. However, methodological reflexivity, thematic rigour and triangulation of historical and scholarly sources enhanced the credibility and depth of analysis of the study.

There is a need to continue the comparative study of the postcolonial paths in different countries of South Asia and investigate the impact of globalization, technological changes and new geopolitical trends shaping colonial legacies in current governance and development. Longitudinal and interdisciplinary approaches can also be used to understand the ways in which younger generations make sense of colonial history and the formation of their postcolonial identity in a rapidly changing political and economic context. Further, there should be more focus on those voices, communities of the marginalised and the subaltern, which have not been adequately represented in the postcolonial scholarship.

This study ultimately suggests that the colonial inheritance is one of the most important but under discussed aspects of the present development scenario in South Asia. The long-standing institutional inequality, the weakness of governance, the social divisions and the economic dependence of millions of people in the region highlight how colonialism affects not only historical memory but also the everyday experiences and lives of people. The knowledge of these continuities is vital to building more inclusive, democratic and historically aware futures. Based on this conclusion, the study urges a critical reflection on postcolonial development paths that can contribute to achieving structural justice and build social resilience and awareness of history while shifting the social landscape.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

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