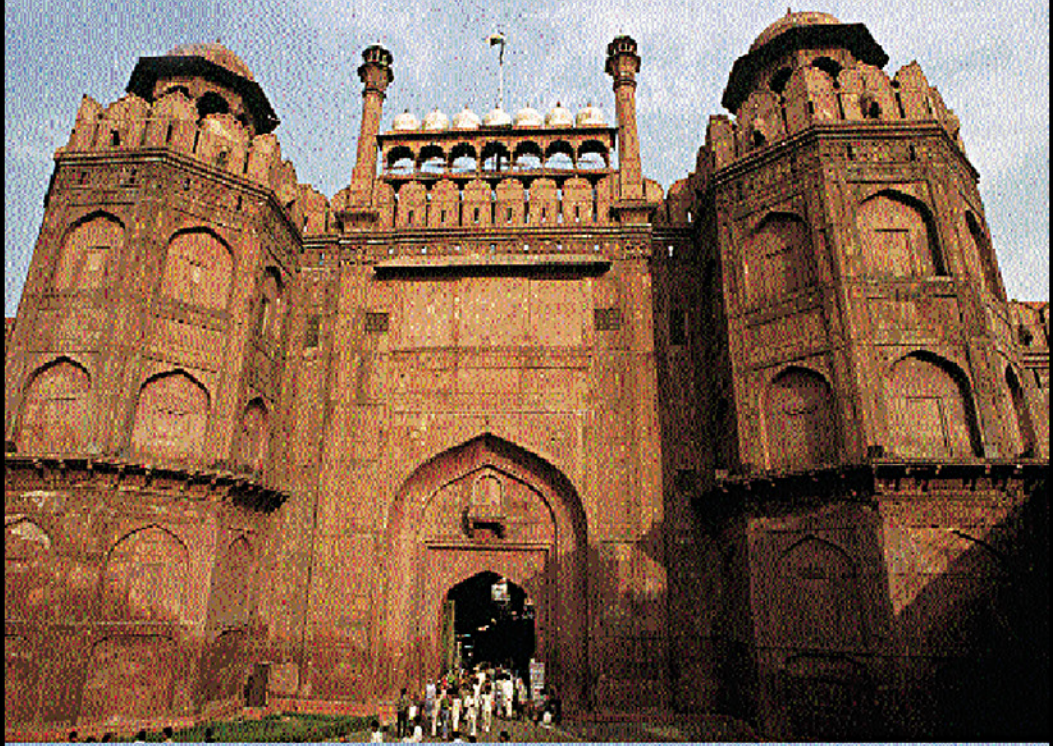
# MODERN SOUTH ASIA

## History, Culture, Political Economy

SECOND EDITION



SUGATA BOSE AND AYESHA JALAL

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materials from the hinterlands to the port cities. Since most of the equipment was imported from Britain, the building of the railways did not stimulate the growth of other ancillary industries. The deployment of British capital in this sector was a striking example of private investment at public risk, with investors receiving guaranteed interest payments whether the railways made profits or not. In the 1870s the outflow of interest actually exceeded the inflow of fresh capital into India.

British monopoly over the upper echelons of the institutions of the state and over the reordering of the political economy to their advantage did not mean that colonial rule was sought to be sustained without the support of Indian collaborators. The search for reliable collaborators began soon after the end of the mutiny-revolt of 1857. The rebellion had been the last gasp of resistance by disaffected Indian princes. The crown raj took calculated steps to make sure that the preservation of ceremonial trappings and a measure of internal autonomy transformed the princely states into solid bulwarks of empire. The colonial state juxtaposed to its own conception of monolithic, unitary sovereignty at the centre a shallow, if not fake, version of sovereignty reposed in the persons of 'traditional' rulers. This kind of sovereignty, which was merely the other side of the coin on which the supremacy of British sovereign power was clearly engraved, was later extended from the subcontinent to the coastal polities of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.The colonial reinvention of 'traditional' authority as part of its ideology of state had large consequences, helping transform princely India into a reliable base of support for the empire and freeing rulers legitimized by colonial 'tradition' from the trouble of seeking popular sanction. The crown that adorned the princely head was by no means a 'hollow' one when it came to the pact of dominance between ruler and subject. While the princes may have been weakened in relation to the paramount power, the British guarantee of personalized sovereignty, for example, of the Dogra ruler of Jammu and Kashmir vis-à-vis his subjects, obviated the need for the ruler to seek legitimacy through the time-honoured practices of material munificence and cultural patronage. The buttressing of princely autocracy was then one of the key changes brought about by colonialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, involving a very dramatic shift in ideas about sovereignty and legitimacy. Having imported the notion of unitary sovereignty from post-enlightenment Europe into colonial India to replace pre-colonial India's view of layered and shared sovereignty, the crown raj made certain it stymied any move towards the acquisition of substantive citizenship rights. In colonial India there were to be no citizens, only subjects of the empire and of 'traditional' princes.

The British search for collaborators did not stop with the princes. Those taluqdars of north India who had remained loyal in 1857 were extended economic protection. Elsewhere, the nurturing of the landlord class as potential friends of the raj was balanced by an effort to promote export-oriented

agriculture and preserve peace in the countryside by affording a measure of protection to peasants. The deepening financial troubles of the government of India and the increasing pressures brought to bear upon it by the metropolis led the colonial state to make institutional innovations that might widen the network of collaborators. One way to try and soften the blows dealt by the metropolis on Indian society was to push for the introduction of local self-government. This brand of representative government was not quite substantive democracy, but rather its obverse.

Beginning with the Indian Councils Act of 1861, provincial councils were created in Bengal, Madras and Bombay. In these councils British officials had a majority but a few nominated non-official Indians were consulted on legislative matters. In 1882 the viceroy, Ripon, extended the principle of granting Indians a measured say in local affairs; municipal and local boards were formed in most of the provinces. The costs of running these local government bodies and financing local development works were met by raising new taxes in the localities and provinces. This, it was hoped, would insulate the central state from the charge of imposing new taxes. It was also a convenient way of lowering administrative costs. And while most of the members of the boards were to be nominated, the British partly accepted the notion of elected representatives by agreeing to seriously consider the recommendations of certain Indian organizations. The proportion of non-official Indians in the councils was increased by another Indian Councils Act of 1892. But it was only in 1909 that the Morley–Minto reforms extended the links between the higher and lower councils, thus building bridges which local men with power and pelf could hope to cross to reach the provincial and, in exceptional cases, even the governor-general's legislative council at the centre.

More importantly, British social engineering through censuses helped create supra-local caste and religious categories to whom the colonial state could distribute differential patronage. The 'depressed classes' and the 'Indian Muslims' were such constructs. They were respectively accorded reservation of seats and separate electorates for election to local and other representative bodies set up by the Morley–Minto reforms of 1909. This principle not only survived but was extended under the 1919 Montagu–Chelmsford reforms and later incorporated into the Government of India Act of 1935. While dividing and categorizing their subjects according to new principles of social enumeration, the raj also had, in the words of Rajat Kanta Ray, 'the overriding character of an imperial power which set apart its subjects in a block with interests fundamentally antagonistic to those of the rulers'.

If at the turn of the nineteenth century the Wellesley generation had brought to bear a new British national pride on their attitudes towards Indian society, the Curzon generation at the turn of the twentieth century exhibited a fully developed form of racial superiority and arrogance which

*Figure 12* British Majesty. The Victoria Memorial in Calcutta started under the patronage of Lord Curzon (Courtesy Sugata Bose)

had gathered momentum in the middle and late Victorian era. The British had hoped that the diamond jubilee of Victoria's reign in 1897 would be an occasion for the display of imperial pomp based on a sense of quiet confidence. But there were too many strands of insecurity flowing from the intense competition with European rivals for supremacy in relatively new and semi-colonies in Africa as well as South East and East Asia. Adding to the feelings of insecurity was the new assertiveness of nationalist opponents, some of whom were talking back to the colonial masters in their own language. The general condition of the colonial subjects was dismal in 1897. 'The shadows darkened and deepened in their horrors as the year advanced,' Mahadev Govind Ranade recorded grimly, 'and it almost seemed as if the seven plagues which afflicted the land of the Pharoahs in old time were let loose upon us, for there is not a single province which had not its ghastly record of death and ruin to mark this period as the most calamitous year of the century within the memory of many generations past.' As famine and pestilence stalked the land, the radical critique of moderate nationalism grew more strident. By the time Curzon was building a marble monument in Victoria's memory on the sprawling green of Calcutta, Indian nationalists were already discussing *swaraj* (self-rule) and planning to turn the raj itself into a bad memory.