
UNDERSTANDING INTERNAL COLONIALISM

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Abstract

In present times along with progress, technique and new inventions we are witnessing violence, blood-shed, communal hatred in every part of the world. Modern times are replete with the tales of oppression, subordination, repression and subjugation of one class by the dominant one. Internal colonialism is a phenomenon that describes how people, communities, marginalized classes etc. are victim domination in independent nations. It helps us to understand how the powerful class works and subordinate class is produced on the pretext of race, class, gender, skin color etc. The theory of internal colonialism is mandatory to comprehend the discrimination faced by people in their own lands. Its forces work in disguise like under the name of welfare schemes, policies, and other facilities provided the 'have not's' sections of society. The present paper is an attempt to explain the theory of internal colonialism and to peep into its wide realms to realize its present relevance.

Key words: Internal Colonialism, Oppression, Marginalization, Domination and subjugation etc.

In modern times it has become necessary to interrogate the inner patterns of a nation. By this I mean the relationships among different communities, political parties, educational institutions, police and public, government and people, NGOs, welfare schemes etc. What we are daily witnessing is hate crimes, mob violence, riots, strikes, rapes of women and girls especially who belong to minority or marginalized class, increasing number of missing persons and above all the Justice that is either not served at all or delayed intentionally. All these realities of all our times are actually directing us towards a very important aspect of domination and subordination working under the guise of progress and modernity and i.e. are internal colonialism. By this I mean powerful and dominants are colonizing people internally, suppressing their voices and stifling their whole existence with intent. Internal colonization is a fact therefore its impact and results needs be examined carefully.

The past couple of decades have witnessed a great debate on the issue of colonialism, its impact and aftermath. Colonialism generally refers to the regions that are used for the "imperialistic expansion and governed by another state." (Peterson, 118) Colonialism was mainly triggered by the desire to control the lands of particular regions for the benefit and expansion of the imperial state. The strategic exploitation of economic, political and cultural resources, thus, became an inseparable part of colonialism to prevent the growth of the controlled territory in favor of the empire. This tendency resulted in the disparity in power structures that has made the history of colonial world replete with bloodshed, violence, tales of oppression and force, abuse and armed control. But the sudden fall of colonial control has brought a striking change in the present scenario. It is equally surprising that though the imperial preponderance has ended but the gap in power structures has rather widened. The acute class conflicts and struggles have become order of the day. The oppression and the

subjugation of humans are still persistent in the modern world. Colonialism is still manifesting itself in one way or other in many parts of the world. It is undoubtedly true that it is working in new forms and the form we will be interrogating here is “internal colonialism.” The division of colonist/colonized, superior/inferior, have one’s/ have not’s, master/ slave has managed to exist through the internal colonization.

It is also argued that colonialism was never abandoned rather it has changed its form. It is from these positions that the concept of internal colonialism has emerged. The term ‘internal colonialism’ is used to indicate the subjugation of the natives of an independent nation by the settlers or the immigrants. It was in 1960 when this phenomenon became popular to explain the ethnic inequality, conflict and the desire of land expansion by the settlers prevailing in the modern world. It is basically a system of intra-national inequality where minority classes/distinct cultural groups are exploited and marginalized by the dominant power. The dominant group exerts its influence in such a way that it not only destroys the subordinate’s values and way of life but also compels them to reject their culture and identity. The word ‘internal colonialism’ was first used by Leo Marquard in his book *South Africa’s Colonial Policy* written in 1957. But the word gained popularity when Pablo Gonzalez Casanova used the term again in his article “Internal Colonialism and National Development” published in 1965 in which he says:

Originally the term colony was used to designate a territory occupied by emigrants of the mother country...then colony was understood... as a territory in which the . . . emigrants dominated the indigenous peoples. (29)

And this new phenomenon of domination was called internal colonialism by him where the minority class is made to believe that their culture and values are inferior to their White dominating superiors. “Internal colonization,” succinctly defined by Casanova is “that process of encroachment and subsequent subjugation of Aboriginal peoples since the arrival of the Europeans. From the Aboriginal perspective, it refers to loss of lands, resources, and self-direction and to the severe disturbance of cultural ways and values.” (30)

It also means that subordinate group depends economically, politically and socially on their superiors. The consequences of this exploitative marginalization can be seen in unequal and biased nature of policies and practices including social, public and educational institutions etc. Internal colonialism is the main tool to examine and to understand the problems related to racism, resistance, identity and cultural space. Internal colonization also means the forced invasion of native’ lands, deliberate conversion, annihilation of indigenous way of life, administrative authority of the colonizer and above all utilization of racial discrimination to suppress the colonized socially, psychologically, economically and politically.

Chavez in his article “Alien in Their Native Lands” while defining internal colonialism writes, “In short, internal colonialism seeks to explain the subordinate status of a racial or ethnic group in its own homeland within the boundaries of a larger state dominated by different people”(786).

He further states the importance of the theory and mentions:

Internal colonialism is the domestic subset of a larger colonial (or imperial) paradigm, including formal colonialism, neocolonialism, post-colonialism, border lands theory, and post-nationalism, that explains broader relationships of ethnic inequality across history and geography, thus suggesting more appropriate solutions to that inequality than other

theories. Internal colonialism is applicable globally to dynastic and national states, as well as contiguous empires, from antiquity to the present- a breadth that attests to this theory's importance. (786-7)

Internal colonialism in fact tries to explain the invasion and expansion of territories and the rise of ethnic conflict. The forces of colonialism made many people face each other in the world where the powerful dominates the subaltern. The subjugation of the native population divides the country internally. It happens within the boundaries of the nation but the domination of the superior and the colonization of the lower class and its lands remain unchanged. The colonization is often coupled with the greed, tyranny, insensibility and fear to the dominant and it works under the guise of welfare and betterment of the downtrodden. Fanon is of the view that colonialism in its every form is a heinous crime as it denies the natives their right to self government, economic independence and dignified social status; it also has a weakening effect on the individual, cultural and psychological self-esteem of people. These effects prove deadly when they are exerted after the independence of these territories. It is imperative to understand that the internal colonialism is not only the exploitation of one working class by the dominant that has control over means of production and their collaborators instead it is a kind of super exploitation where one whole class is dominated and marginalized by the another that has a working class of its own.

Albert Memmi in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* points towards the same difference where colonized is 'intentionally' created to maintain the dominance. For this dominance the subjugation of colonized is a necessary precondition. Memmi has also said that this difference destroys both parties though in different ways and through different mechanisms. He stresses that the colonized is always negatively valued and the colonized emerges as the replica of all that the colonizer can't be. Nancy Hartsock while referring to the ideas of Memmi says that as far as the colonized is concerned:

Every negative quality is projected onto him/her. The colonized is said to be lazy, and the colonizer becomes practically lyrical about it. Moreover, the colonized is both wicked and backward, a being who is in some important ways not fully human (192).

The domination of the White ruling class creates not only the 'other' but also in Edward Said' words the 'orient'. Orient then becomes a symbol of western way of dominating, reconstructing and marginalizing others. Memmi voices the same ideas:

...the colonialist stresses those things that keep him separate rather than emphasizing that which might contribute to the foundation of a joint community. In those differences, the colonized is always degraded and the colonialist finds justification for rejecting his subjectivity. But perhaps the most important thing is that once the behavioral feature or historical or geographical factor which characterizes the colonialist and contrasts him with the colonized has been isolated, this gap must be kept from being filled. The colonialist removes the factor from history, time and therefore possible evolution. What is actually sociological point becomes labeled as being biological, or preferably, metaphysical. It is attached to the colonizer's basic nature. Immediately the colonial relationship between colonized and colonizer, founded on the essential outlook of two protagonists, becomes a definitive category. It is what it is because they are what they are, and neither one nor the other will ever change. (As qtd in Hartsock 193)

Internal colonialism has been interpreted in many ways by the critics while applying it to understand the situation of one particular country hence the theories and models do vary. It is maintained by many writers that the question of racial identity and underdevelopment of Natives is affected by state's basic internal colonial policies. The Natives and Blacks in America not only constitute a minority class, but are also made powerless so that they can be used as social, political and chiefly economic colonies. The manifestation of anguish, riots and unrest among these communities is actually their reaction to the colonial status of their existence.

Internal colonialism emerged when the native elite class started to reign and manage the newborn countries while the imperial states exerted their influence to control the international laws, market and other relationships. Many countries across the globe have seen the outcomes of internal colonialism. Many were reduced to the status of mere exploited colonies for the sake of the dominant ones. South Africa is another country that has witnessed the inseparable connection of manipulation and exploitation between the imperialist states and its colonies. It is pertinent to see Africa as an internal colony to understand the state of their oppression. America as a dominant group has tried its best to maintain its authority over the Blacks. The treatment meted out to the blacks i.e. the invasion of their lands, the destruction of their own life style, the cultural, linguistic, economical exploitation and above all the violation of their fundamental human rights not only gagged their voices but also made them submissive and subordinated.

In India Jharkhand is considered the house of the unwanted, downtrodden and oppressed sections of the nation. Jharkhand is one of the most profitable areas of the country as it produces 40% coal, 100% copper and 40% of bauxite of India. Industries are blooming on the fringes of it and it is considered the richest area of nation but the caste system, extreme economic exploitation and monopoly of the proletariat over the production as well as politics have pushed these people into poverty and darkness. Even the advent of Railway in 1894 was destined to drain the coal and copper of Jharkhand. It is the policy of internal colonization that the tribal people have no land rights, no jobs, no education and all other basic human rights are completely denied to them. They are forced to sell themselves to the dominant to work in brick kiln. This clearly reminds us the slavery Africans have gone through and same is the fate of Jharkhandis. The freedom of India and the liberation of Jharkhand have become two different issues within the boundaries of a free and sovereign state.

Columbia comes out as an entirely different case while examining the class relation with the theory internal colonialism. It is interesting and ironic as well that the dominant and the subjugated are of the same racial origin. In Wales, Scotland and Ireland the nuances of internal colonialism could be understood by keeping in mind their hierarchal division of labor and employment.

The case of South Africa has been considered unique by many as it provides a ground where the interaction of the capitalist and many pre-capitalist modes of production have changed the relation between wages and cost in favor of the capitalism. So here the focus is not on racial identities and policies but on how the capitalist sector used the non capitalist one as reserves to benefit economically for its continuation at low wages and cheap costs. In black South Africa unending poverty, mounting population, backward agrarian techniques and denial of shouldering any responsibility regarding wages forced these people to rebel. The



period of segregation to apartheid was a direct outcome of White capitalists' attitude towards the non whites.

However it is important to keep in mind that though internal colonialism exists/ed in many parts of the world but the effects and the experiences were/are diverse in nature. It is undoubtedly true that the discrimination based on ethnicity, imposed social inferiority, systematic economical subjugation, extreme political dependence and incapability to deal with the biased judicial system are the main tenets of internal colonialism.

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