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COLONIAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF BRITISH RULE AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract
This article examines British colonial rule in South Asia as a historical process of institutional construction, layering, rupture, and adaptation. Rather than estimating a measurable colonial effect, it traces how territorial administration, executive-bureaucratic authority, legal institutionalization, agrarian political power, coercive institutions, and constrained representation developed from Company rule through Crown rule and into the postcolonial period. The analysis gives particular attention to the institutional rupture of 1857–1858, the consolidation of the district state and Indian Civil Service, police and military reorganization, the evolution of courts and codified law, indirect rule through princely states, and the gradual expansion of representative government from the late nineteenth century to the Government of India Act 1935. It then compares how India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka inherited and reworked these structures under different conditions of party organization, federal conflict, constitutional development, and civil-military relations. The central argument is that the colonial state simultaneously enlarged administrative capacity and entrenched executive supremacy: it created durable organizations capable of taxation, policing, adjudication, and territorial coordination while limiting downward political accountability. Postcolonial divergence therefore cannot be reduced either to colonial determinism or to complete institutional rupture. It is better understood as the outcome of inherited structures interacting with new political coalitions, constitutional choices, social mobilization, security pressures, and projects of state-building. Economic institutions are considered where land, property, taxation, and infrastructure redistributed political resources and shaped elite power.

1. Introduction
British rule transformed the institutional architecture through which political authority was exercised across much of South Asia. The colonial state did not consist only of foreign rulers at the apex. It was reproduced through districts, revenue offices, courts, police stations, military cantonments, civil-service hierarchies, legislative councils, municipal bodies, censuses, records, and relationships with princely rulers. These institutions were assembled over time for changing purposes: revenue extraction,

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territorial conquest, the maintenance of order, commercial regulation, the management of social difference, and, increasingly, the controlled incorporation of Indian political participation. Historians have therefore treated the Raj not as a single institutional design but as a changing political order whose administrative reach, legal forms, and representative practices developed unevenly across regions [1–5].

The central historical problem is one of simultaneous continuity and transformation. Independence ended imperial sovereignty, but it did not erase the institutional machinery through which colonial government had operated. Successor states inherited territorial boundaries, administrative routines, legal codes, police organizations, military establishments, civil services, revenue records, and constitutional practices. Yet these inheritances acquired different meanings after 1947. India placed much of the inherited administrative apparatus within a durable electoral and constitutional framework; Pakistan experienced a different relationship among representative institutions, civil bureaucracy, the military, and the provinces; East Bengal passed through Pakistan before becoming Bangladesh; and Sri Lanka followed a distinct constitutional trajectory shaped by its own colonial history [6–10].

This article contributes to the literature by bringing five institutional processes into a single historical explanation: territorial administration, executive-bureaucratic authority, legal institutionalization, agrarian political power, and constrained representation. It argues that these processes were mutually reinforcing but not identical. Revenue institutions connected the state to landed society; district administration concentrated executive authority; law standardized some forms of rule while extending the state's classificatory power; police and military institutions supplied coercive capacity; and representative reforms gradually opened political arenas without immediately displacing executive supremacy. The article then explains why common elements of this inheritance were reworked into divergent postcolonial political orders. The purpose is interpretive rather than quantitative: institutional persistence is treated as a historically contingent process of inheritance, contestation, layering, and conversion.

2. Research Methodology

This article is a synthetic historical-institutional analysis rather than an archival monograph. It draws on established historical and political scholarship and cannot reconstruct every provincial, princely, legal, military, or agrarian variation across South Asia. British rule also changed substantially over time, so concepts such as "colonial bureaucracy" or "colonial law" should not be read as describing fixed institutions across two centuries. The analysis addresses this problem by emphasizing institutional sequences and turning points rather than treating colonialism as a single intervention.

The comparison is intentionally asymmetric. India and Pakistan receive the greatest attention because the institutional division of British India makes their divergence especially useful for the argument; Bangladesh is treated through Bengal, Pakistan, and post-1971 institutional layering; Sri Lanka is included as a distinct British colonial trajectory; and Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives serve mainly as boundary cases. Future research could deepen the analysis through focused archival comparison of particular institutions—for example district administration, police law, judicial practice, or civil-service recruitment—across selected provinces and successor states.

3. Historical-Institutional Approach and Historiographical Debate

Historical institutionalism directs attention to sequences, critical junctures, institutional layering, and the ways in which organizations created for one purpose can later be converted to another. Institutions persist not simply because they are efficient, but because they organize authority, distribute resources, generate vested interests, and provide routines that later governments may find costly or

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politically difficult to replace. At the same time, wars, constitutional crises, partitions, mass mobilization, and changes in political coalition can redirect institutional development. This perspective is especially useful for South Asia because colonial rule itself changed repeatedly and because decolonization combined a sharp change in sovereignty with extensive organizational continuity [1,2,6].

The historiography contains a productive tension over how the colonial state should be characterized. One line of interpretation emphasizes extraction, coercion, racial hierarchy, and the authoritarian purposes of colonial administration. Work on colonial knowledge, law, policing, and everyday state power shows how apparently regularized institutions could make society more legible while strengthening imperial control [3–5,11,12]. A second literature emphasizes the growth of bureaucratic coordination, legal regularity, infrastructure, and administrative capacity, while cautioning that capacity should not be confused with democratic accountability [13,14]. A third body of scholarship focuses on bargaining, provincial politics, princely states, and constitutional reform, showing that the Raj increasingly governed through negotiated and layered arrangements rather than through a single centralized command [6,15–17].

These interpretations need not be treated as mutually exclusive. The same institution could regularize administration and strengthen authoritarian power; representative councils could broaden participation while preserving executive vetoes; and a professional civil service could provide continuity while remaining insulated from popular accountability. The historical question is therefore not whether colonial institutions were simply "good" or "bad," but what kinds of political capacities they created, which actors they empowered, how they constrained participation, and how successor states subsequently reworked them.

4. Company Rule and the Fiscal Foundations of the Colonial State

This section examines how the East India Company converted commercial and military expansion into durable institutions of territorial government. It focuses on the connection between revenue collection, property relations, district administration, and political authority, showing how fiscal institutions became foundations of the emerging colonial state.

4.1 Revenue, property, and territorial authority

The East India Company's transformation from commercial corporation to territorial power made revenue administration central to state formation. After acquiring revenue authority in Bengal, the Company required institutions capable of financing armies, maintaining officials, adjudicating disputes, and translating territorial conquest into regular fiscal claims. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 formalized one solution by recognizing zamindars as proprietors responsible for remitting land revenue. Elsewhere, ryotwari and mahalwari arrangements developed different relationships among the state, cultivators, villages, and intermediaries. These systems were economic institutions, but they were also political: they defined who could speak for rural society, whose claims the state would recognize, and through whom fiscal authority would be exercised [18–20].

The political consequences were uneven. Colonial revenue settlements interacted with precolonial hierarchies, caste, kinship, ecology, and commercialization rather than simply replacing them. Nevertheless, the legal recognition of proprietors, tenants, and revenue-paying cultivators altered access to courts and administration and could consolidate particular local elites. Agrarian institutions thus became one of the earliest channels through which colonial government penetrated everyday political life. Later struggles over tenancy, landlordism, land reform, and rural representation were fought on an institutional terrain partly created by these settlements [18–20].

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4.2 Early administrative centralization and its limits

Company government also developed a territorial bureaucracy organized around collectors, magistrates, judges, and provincial authorities. The district gradually became the practical meeting point of fiscal, judicial, police, and executive power. Yet early colonial government remained thin in personnel and dependent on Indian intermediaries, subordinate officials, landed magnates, and local knowledge. The result was not a fully centralized modern state but a layered system in which formal hierarchy coexisted with negotiation and delegated authority [3,13].

5. 1857 and the Reconstitution of Colonial Authority

The upheaval of 1857–1858 marked a critical institutional turning point in British rule. The transfer from Company to Crown government reshaped imperial sovereignty, relations with princely states, military organization, and the governing strategies through which colonial authorities sought to secure political order.

5.1 From Company sovereignty to Crown rule

The uprising and rebellion of 1857 was a decisive institutional rupture. It exposed the political fragility of Company rule and prompted the transfer of sovereignty to the British Crown in 1858. The change was more than symbolic. The post-1857 state sought greater political supervision from London, more reliable administrative coordination, and a governing strategy less willing to disturb established social and princely hierarchies where those hierarchies could support imperial order. Crown rule therefore combined centralization at the top with a more explicit politics of alliance, caution, and differentiated authority [3,13,15].

5.2 Princely states and the politics of paramountcy

After 1857, princely states became more securely embedded within the imperial system. British paramountcy limited their external sovereignty while preserving substantial internal authority. This arrangement allowed the Raj to govern a large part of the subcontinent indirectly, through dynasties whose legitimacy was increasingly tied to the imperial order. Indirect rule was therefore not an absence of colonial institutions; it was a distinct institutional form in which residents, treaties, succession policy, ceremonial hierarchy, and political supervision connected local rulers to imperial power [15,16]. The integration of princely states after 1947 would consequently become a major task of postcolonial state formation rather than a simple administrative handover.

5.3 Military reorganization and the coercive state

The rebellion also transformed military organization. British authorities reorganized recruitment, command, and the distribution of forces with the aim of reducing the possibility of another army-wide revolt. Recruitment increasingly drew on regionally and ethnically classified "martial" populations, while artillery and senior command remained tightly controlled. The colonial army thus became both a coercive institution and a social institution, linking particular regions and communities to military service. These patterns mattered after independence because India and Pakistan inherited personnel, regimental traditions, cantonments, and command structures from the colonial armed forces, although they subsequently developed them in different strategic and political settings [21,22].

6. The Executive State: Civil Service, District Administration, Police, and Local Government

The consolidation of Crown rule depended on an executive-centered administrative structure capable of governing territory through hierarchy, information, coercion, and supervised local institutions. This section considers how the civil service, district administration, police, and local government together expanded state capacity while preserving strong forms of bureaucratic and executive control.

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6.1 The Indian Civil Service and executive authority

Late nineteenth-century colonial rule increasingly identified administrative competence with a professional, hierarchical civil service. The Indian Civil Service occupied the upper levels of this system and became closely associated with the ideal of an impartial but powerful executive administration. In practice, senior officials exercised authority through a broader apparatus of provincial services, subordinate officials, clerks, revenue staff, and local intermediaries. The district officer embodied the executive character of the Raj because revenue, magisterial functions, coordination, and supervision converged at the district level [13,23].

This administrative structure created a durable distinction between state capacity and political accountability. Officials could collect information, implement orders, maintain records, and coordinate territorial administration without being responsible to a fully enfranchised electorate. Even when elected institutions expanded, the bureaucracy retained reserved domains and channels of upward accountability. This institutional asymmetry became especially consequential at decolonization, when successor governments inherited a comparatively organized executive apparatus but representative institutions whose authority and organizational depth varied sharply across territories [6,8,23].

6.2 Police and the institutionalization of order

Policing was central to the colonial state's understanding of order. After 1857, police organization became more standardized and closely connected to district administration. The police were expected not only to investigate crime but also to gather intelligence, manage protest, enforce executive orders, and protect the political stability of the Raj. Historical scholarship therefore treats colonial policing as a key site where law, coercion, and administrative discretion met [11]. The institutional legacy was significant because independent states retained much of the basic organizational architecture and legal framework of policing, even as constitutional sovereignty and political purposes changed.

6.3 Local government: participation under supervision

Municipal and local institutions expanded during the later nineteenth century, particularly under reform initiatives associated with decentralization. Yet local self-government developed within a supervisory administrative framework. Municipal boards and district bodies could create opportunities for Indian participation and elite political apprenticeship, but provincial executives retained substantial powers of oversight. Local government therefore illustrates the broader colonial pattern of institutional layering: participatory forms were added to, rather than substituted for, an executive-centered state [13,23].

7. Law, Judiciary, and Colonial Governance

Colonial rule produced an extensive architecture of courts, codes, procedures, and legal professions. Codification sought greater uniformity in criminal and civil administration, while courts translated social relations into categories recognizable to the state. This could make official action more predictable in some domains, but it also expanded the reach of colonial authority and embedded racial and political inequalities within legal practice. The historiography of colonial law consequently rejects a simple opposition between "rule of law" and "despotism": legal regularity and coercive sovereignty often developed together [4,5,12].

The judiciary also became an arena in which property, personal law, criminal responsibility, and administrative power were contested. Indian lawyers and litigants learned to use colonial legal institutions strategically, and the legal profession later became important to nationalist politics. At independence, courts did not disappear; they acquired new constitutional functions within sovereign states. This continuity of organization alongside transformation of political purpose is a particularly clear example of institutional conversion. In Pakistan, later conflicts over

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executive authority, constitutional dissolution, and military rule made the judiciary an especially important arena in the struggle over the boundaries of state power [24].

8. Representation and Constitutional Layering, 1861–1935

Colonial constitutional development proceeded through successive layers of limited consultation, electoral representation, provincial responsibility, and executive safeguards. Rather than replacing bureaucratic rule, these reforms gradually inserted representative institutions into an existing executive state, creating tensions that shaped late-colonial politics and the constitutional inheritance of independence.

8.1 Councils and controlled consultation

Representative government emerged incrementally rather than through a single democratic transition. The Indian Councils Acts of 1861 and 1892 widened consultation and created limited opportunities for Indian participation, but the executive remained dominant. These councils were not sovereign legislatures; they were institutional additions to a bureaucratic state. Their importance lay partly in creating arenas in which political elites learned legislative procedure, petitioned government, and developed claims to representation [6,13].

8.2 The reforms of 1909 and the institutionalization of political categories

The Indian Councils Act 1909 expanded elected elements while also institutionalizing separate electorates for Muslims. Representation was therefore widened through categories that connected political participation to community. The reform reflected both pressure for greater inclusion and the colonial preference for managing political claims through differentiated constituencies. Over time, constitutional representation, census classification, provincial politics, and communal organization interacted in ways that made identity increasingly relevant to access to political power [6,25].

8.3 Dyarchy and provincial politics after 1919

The Government of India Act 1919 enlarged legislatures and introduced dyarchy in the provinces, dividing subjects between ministers responsible to legislatures and executive authorities who retained control over reserved fields. Institutionally, dyarchy made the contradiction of late colonial government unusually visible: representative responsibility expanded, but executive supremacy remained protected. Indian politicians gained experience in governing departments and mobilizing electorates while governors and officials retained decisive powers in key areas [6,13].

8.4 Provincial autonomy and the Government of India Act 1935

The Government of India Act 1935 represented the most extensive pre-independence reorganization of constitutional government. Provincial autonomy widened the scope of ministries responsible to elected legislatures, and the elections of 1937 made party organization and provincial governance more consequential. Yet governors retained discretionary and reserve powers, and the projected all-India federation was never fully realized. The Act therefore deepened representative government without eliminating the executive safeguards characteristic of colonial constitutionalism [6,25]. Its institutional significance extended beyond 1947: both India and Pakistan initially governed through constitutional arrangements that drew heavily on the 1935 framework while new constitutions were being made.

9. War, Late Colonial Crisis, and Partition

The Second World War intensified the contradictions of the late colonial state. Wartime mobilization expanded executive power, military recruitment, fiscal demands, and administrative intervention while constitutional conflict sharpened between the Raj and nationalist parties. The war also enlarged the Indian armed forces and altered the political context in which decolonization occurred [21]. By the mid-1940s, the question was no longer whether constitutional

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participation would expand, but how sovereignty would be transferred and to what political units.

Partition in 1947 was therefore both a territorial rupture and an institutional division. Administrative services, military assets, records, financial resources, transport systems, and personnel had to be divided while mass displacement and violence created immediate pressures on the new governments. India inherited the central capital and a larger share of established all-India institutions, while Pakistan had to construct central governmental capacity across geographically separated eastern and western wings. The political consequences of this unequal starting point were not predetermined, but they shaped the conditions under which inherited institutions were adapted [7,8].

10. Postcolonial Institutional Reconstruction

Independence transformed sovereignty but left successor governments with substantial administrative, legal, coercive, and constitutional inheritances. Comparing India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka reveals how similar institutional forms were reinterpreted under different political coalitions, federal arrangements, security pressures, and constitutional projects.

10.1 India: converting an imperial state into a constitutional republic

India retained much of the territorial and administrative machinery of the Raj while placing it within a new constitutional order. The civil service was reorganized rather than abolished, district administration remained important, and courts, police, and revenue institutions continued to operate. The decisive political change lay in sovereignty and accountability: universal adult franchise, competitive elections, federal institutions, and a republican constitution created new sources of legitimacy and new mechanisms for constraining and directing inherited organizations. The Congress organization and the Constituent Assembly also supplied political continuity at the center during the transition [6,7].

This was not a simple democratization of every colonial institution. Emergency powers, preventive practices, centralized administrative habits, and coercive laws continued to generate debate. Nor were agrarian hierarchies immediately erased. Land reform, linguistic reorganization, federal bargaining, and electoral mobilization gradually altered the environment in which inherited institutions operated. India therefore illustrates institutional conversion: organizations created under colonial rule survived, but their political location and purposes were progressively redefined.

10.2 Pakistan: state-building, federal conflict, and the bureaucratic-military balance

Pakistan inherited important elements of the colonial bureaucracy, military, judiciary, revenue administration, and district state, but it did so amid severe institutional disruption. The new state faced the creation of a federal capital, division of assets, refugee settlement, conflict over Kashmir, and the political challenge of governing two wings separated by Indian territory. The Muslim League had mobilized successfully for Pakistan but did not possess equally deep organizational structures across all the territories incorporated into the new state. These conditions increased the importance of officials capable of maintaining administrative continuity [7–9].

A major historiographical debate concerns how far Pakistan's later bureaucratic and military dominance should be understood as a colonial legacy. Alavi's influential account described the postcolonial state as "overdeveloped" relative to society and emphasized the autonomy of the bureaucratic-military apparatus [26]. Jalal, by contrast, placed greater emphasis on the interaction of inherited institutions with the strategic, fiscal, federal, and international pressures of state construction after 1947 [8]. These approaches converge on the importance of the inherited executive apparatus but differ in how they explain its postcolonial political ascendancy. A historical-institutional interpretation treats colonial inheritance as a

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resource and constraint whose significance was amplified by the specific crises of the new state rather than as a sufficient cause of authoritarianism.

Constitutional development illustrates this interaction. Pakistan initially adapted the Government of India Act 1935 as an interim constitutional framework. Conflicts over representation between East and West Pakistan, the distribution of federal power, the role of the governor-general, and the relationship between elected leaders and senior officials repeatedly delayed constitutional consolidation. The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, judicial responses to executive action, and the eventual military coup of 1958 marked a shift in the balance among institutions rather than the simple survival of an unchanged colonial order [8,24,26]. Security pressures and the organizational strength of the armed forces further increased the political weight of institutions that had inherited professional structures from the colonial state.

10.3 East Bengal and Bangladesh: representation, federalism, and institutional layering

East Bengal brought into Pakistan a distinctive history of Permanent Settlement, peasant politics, communal representation, and provincial mobilization. After 1947, conflicts over language, representation, fiscal distribution, and federal authority increasingly challenged the institutional balance of Pakistan. The crisis that culminated in the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 cannot be explained by colonial institutions alone, but colonial and Pakistani administrative forms shaped the organizations through which political conflict was governed [9,27].

Independent Bangladesh retained elements of district administration, land records, civil-service organization, courts, and legal procedure inherited through both British India and Pakistan. Yet these institutions operated within a new national political project. Bangladesh therefore demonstrates institutional layering across three regimes: colonial Bengal, Pakistan, and the sovereign Bangladeshi state. Continuity in administrative form coexisted with profound changes in sovereignty, political identity, and constitutional purpose [9,27].

10.4 Sri Lanka: a distinct constitutional path

Sri Lanka should not be treated as a minor extension of the British Indian case. British Ceylon developed a distinctive administrative and constitutional trajectory. The Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of the nineteenth century established executive and legislative councils and reorganized administration, while later reforms gradually widened political participation. The Donoughmore Constitution introduced universal adult franchise and the State Council before independence, giving Ceylon an unusually extensive experience of electoral politics within the colonial period. The Soulbury constitutional settlement then provided the immediate framework for independence in 1948 [10,28,29].

This trajectory highlights the value of comparison. Sri Lanka inherited centralized administration and British constitutional forms, but the timing and structure of representative development differed substantially from British India. Postcolonial conflicts over language, ethnicity, constitutional design, and executive power subsequently transformed these institutions. The case therefore reinforces the article's central claim: colonial inheritance shaped institutional starting points, but later political coalitions and conflicts determined how those inheritances were used.

10.5 Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives as boundary cases

Nepal and Bhutan were not incorporated into British India as directly administered territories, while the Maldives occupied the position of a protected state. They are therefore best treated as boundary cases rather than as equivalent units in a common colonial institutional field. Their presence clarifies the geographical limits of the argument: the article concerns institutions created or deeply reshaped under British imperial authority, not

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a binary classification of all South Asian states as colonial or non-colonial.

11. Economic Institutions as Political Institutions

Although the analysis is not an economic history in a narrow sense, land, property, taxation, and infrastructure cannot be separated from political institutions. Revenue systems determined how the state financed itself and through whom it governed rural society. Property law allocated legally recognized claims. Irrigation, railways, ports, and commercial regulation changed the spatial organization of authority and connected some regions more closely than others to administrative centers. These institutions redistributed political resources by strengthening particular landed, commercial, professional, and bureaucratic groups [18–20].

The historical significance of agrarian institutions is therefore best understood through political power rather than through numerical estimates of later economic performance. Landlords, tenants, cultivators, village bodies, and revenue officials occupied different institutional positions under zamindari, ryotwari, and mahalwari arrangements. Postcolonial land reform and electoral competition could modify these relationships, but they did so against inherited legal categories and patterns of local authority. Economic institutions thus form part of the explanation of elite formation, state capacity, and state-society relations.

12. Discussion: Persistence, Adaptation, and Divergence

The historiography of colonial institutions is divided less by disagreement over whether the Raj built durable organizations than by disagreement over how those organizations should be interpreted. Scholarship emphasizing colonial knowledge, criminal law, policing, and emergency power treats administrative regularity as inseparable from conquest, racial hierarchy, surveillance, and coercion [3–5,11,12]. By contrast, work on imperial ideology and state formation draws attention to the expanding capacity of the colonial state to classify, coordinate, adjudicate, and administer territory, while not equating those capacities with democratic government [13,14]. A third literature stresses provincial bargaining, princely-state politics, and constitutional negotiation, showing that imperial authority was layered and frequently mediated rather than uniformly centralized [6,15–17]. The evidence reviewed here suggests that these interpretations illuminate different dimensions of the same institutional order rather than mutually exclusive alternatives.

This synthesis changes how institutional persistence should be understood. Persistence did not require colonial institutions to remain functionally unchanged. Organizational continuity preserved offices, records, territorial jurisdictions, personnel, and chains of command; legal continuity preserved categories of property, procedure, emergency authority, and public power; and professional or elite continuity carried administrative practices across the transfer of sovereignty. Yet these inherited forms were repeatedly converted to new purposes. A district administration designed for imperial supervision could operate within electoral government; courts rooted in colonial law could acquire constitutional-review functions; and armed forces created for imperial defence could occupy very different positions in postcolonial politics. Historical institutionalism is therefore most useful when continuity is treated as adaptation and conversion, not institutional stasis [1,2,6,12,23,24].

The central historiographical dispute is consequently the relationship between state capacity and political accountability. Colonial rule strengthened particular capacities—revenue collection, territorial administration, policing, adjudication, record keeping, and military organization—inside a political order in which ultimate authority was not derived from a mass electorate. Late-colonial reforms did not simply replace that executive state with representative government; they layered legislatures, elections, provincial ministries, and limited responsible government onto it [7,13,17,25]. This helps

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reconcile apparently contradictory assessments of the Raj. Administrative institutionalization could be real while remaining coercive and racially unequal; legal regularity could widen predictable procedure while preserving exceptional powers; and representation could expand while governors and executives retained decisive authority. The relevant historical question is therefore not whether colonial institutions represented either 'capacity' or 'coercion,' but how those qualities were combined within particular institutions and subsequently rebalanced after independence.

The India–Pakistan comparison makes the analytical payoff clearest. Jalal explains their divergence through the interaction between inherited state structures and the different political conditions of postcolonial state formation, whereas Alavi's influential formulation emphasizes the relative strength of the postcolonial bureaucratic-military apparatus [6,8,26]. Read together rather than as interchangeable claims, these interpretations identify different causal emphases: one foregrounds historical sequencing, territorial and security pressures, and political organization; the other foregrounds the structural weight of inherited state institutions. Newberg's account of courts and constitutional politics further shows that inherited legal institutions could become arenas in which executive power was both legitimated and contested [24]. The broader comparison with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka reinforces the point: colonial inheritance structured institutional starting conditions, but party systems, federal conflict, social coalitions, constitutional choices, war, and civil-military relations shaped the direction of subsequent change [9,10,27–29]. Postcolonial divergence therefore does not negate institutional persistence; it specifies the political processes through which persistence was transformed.

13. Conclusion

British colonial rule reshaped South Asian political development through a layered institutional order built around fiscal extraction, territorial administration, executive bureaucracy, law, coercion, indirect rule, and constrained representation. Company rule tied revenue and district administration to territorial authority; the rupture of 1857–1858 transferred sovereignty to the Crown and altered the balance among central supervision, princely alliance, policing, and military organization. Later constitutional reforms widened participation incrementally while leaving substantial executive authority intact.

Decolonization changed sovereignty more abruptly than it changed the organizational terrain of government. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka inherited different combinations of administrative, legal, coercive, and representative institutions and then reworked them under different political conditions. Their divergence is therefore analytically important: it shows that a shared imperial genealogy can coexist with different constitutional settlements, party systems, federal conflicts, and civil-military relationships.

The article's central conclusion is one of conditional institutional persistence. Colonial institutions mattered because they distributed authority, created durable organizations, defined legal categories, and supplied successor governments with established instruments of rule. They did not mechanically determine postcolonial outcomes. Their significance was produced through subsequent political struggles over representation, constitutional design, land, federalism, security, and executive power. Historical institutional analysis is valuable precisely because it can explain both persistence and transformation without reducing either to a single colonial effect.'

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