

Colonial Economy Adversely Impacted on Zambian and Indian Women

Dr.Kamini Krishna¹ and Dr. Dorothy Mwansa²

The University of Zambia, School of HSS
Dept of Historical and Archaeological Studies
Lusaka, Zambia

(1.Senior Lecturer and 2. Lecturer, in the Dept. of Historical and Archaeological Studies)

Introduction:

Industrialization in Europe, particularly in England, led to the colonization of countries such as Zambia and India. These two countries are in two different continents but had a common colonizers the British. Before the arrival of the British rulers both countries were flourishing in trade and agriculture, in their own pace. This meant that the two countries had a stable economic development. Because, England needed market for its manufactured goods, it had to target the countries that had what it needed in terms of natural resources, raw materials especially cotton and labour power. This was tactfully summed up into 'trade' when in actual fact it was a way of colonizing the areas. In the long run this led to the freezing of cloth industry and agriculture sector in India. They even captured land to control the agriculture system in Zambia and outraged the staple food by introducing the cash crop entity. It is however, sad to note that economically the most affected population in both countries were the 'women'. Before the coming of the British in both India and Zambia, women played a notable role in the growth of the economy in their societies. This article sets out to bring out the economic status of women in colonial times in India and Zambia. A pre-colonial scenario is essential in order to know the whether or not the coming of the British had any effect on the economic status of women in the above countries.

Keynotes: Pre-colonial, industrialization, cash crop, land alienation, settler economy, indigo

Pre-Colonial Women

Pre-colonial India: In pre-colonial India, women had access to education and played a role in industrial and mercantile sectors. Pre-colonial India was a country predominantly depended on land for survival. This article focuses on the rural women of India, engaged in economic sectors like agriculture, animal rearing, weaving industries and so forth, who were from the lower strata of the society. They were creative too. They made a lot of things including toys using terracotta. Since they had land rights, agriculture was easily practiced for family consumption. These women mostly lived in the villages who were outnumbered the rich women who mostly lived in the urban cities.

As mentioned above the women from rich family, were fewer in numbers than poor women and were not seen in these sectors. If we look into the society much before the pre-colonial period, the ancient Indian society and cities like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, the rich women too were engaged in spinning cloth in homes and traded internationally.¹ Generally, India had developed industries such as pottery, carpentry, goldsmiths, dyeing, weaving, jewelery, Ivory work and blacksmith. The poor were satisfied with agriculture as an occupation. This was so because they would feed on their produce. This gave rise to the population growth, good health through distribution of food. This was possible because women had access to land and had rights over it.

Pre-colonial Zambia: women were seen as potential sources of income because of various factors. Women had access to land and used it for agricultural purposes. Traditionally certain crops were associated with certain piece of land and the variety of soils was mainly for food security. Also women took care of the homes and brought wealth to the family in form of bride price.² With their artistic crafts they would make various things such as baskets, mats and pots for exchange with other things they did not have in their area. As such, batter system was popular and accepted in the society. This is an indication that women's economy was stable.

Economic Exploitation

Indian Scenario: India was considered the 'Jewel in the Crown' for the British Empire due to India's resources and location, its colourfulness in terms of jewels, precious stones, gold, silver and other attractive natural resource. This can be proved from the rich culture of the Indians for instance in Verdic as well as in Mogul regimes. B.V. Rao alludes that women of India prior to the colonial period enjoyed freedom and status in the society. Many of them were fond of fashions and luxurious articles. This included ornaments they adored

themselves with. Wealth women wore gold, silver, ivory, faience and precious stones including earrings, nose rings, anklets and bangles. The poor women were happy with ornaments of beads, which were in great demand.³ In addition to this India was a wealthy country. For a long time, India was well developed with highly skilled craftsmen, intensive agriculture in the northern river valleys and considerable concentration of wealth in the hands of local potentates and of the bankers who financed trade in luxury goods and the personal and military expenses of the princes.

Britain exploited India's natural assets. They traded Indian pepper, cotton, Chinese silk, porcelain, fine spices, tea, and coffee. During the Industrial Revolution, Britain needed raw materials and new markets, which India had. Bentley and Ziegler highlights that India's value of raw cotton exports increased from 10 million rupees to 60 million rupees in 1849 to 1869 and to 410 million rupees in 1913. India also imported more because of their growing exports: The value of finished cotton products imported into India rose from 50,000 in 1814 to 5.2 million in 1829 and 30 million rupees in 1890 (see Bentley and Ziegler, *Traditions and Encounters*, 2011, pp. 736&749). It is important to note that it is India's wealth that incited western European commercial groups, already expanding beyond their own frontiers, to vie with each other in an effort to capture as much of the Indian trade as possible. The Europeans found it easy as the Mongul Empire was disintegrating. They set up trade with India but to their own advantage. The British had to come up with ways of completely taking over or controlling trade in India. Since they had taken over India politically, they set up rules in their favour. They maintained the caste system in order to put themselves as a 'higher' caste. This brought about social segregation and special legal and political privileges, top jobs were reserved for British personnel. This made the Indians feel inferior to the Europeans.

British froze Indian cloth makers, it used every means at its disposal to kill the clothing industry which produced high quality of material, so that Britain cloth could be marketed everywhere including India. Similarly, in Africa, Britain did the same. It benefited from its external trade contracts. African and Indian trade strengthened British Industry when in turn crushed whatever industry existed in what is now called the "underdeveloped countries".⁴

Colonial rule destroyed the pre-capitalist economy by 'draining wealth', which continued throughout the colonial period but was particularly important in the late eighteenth century. Private loot and the East India Company's treatment of the administration as a profitable business resulted in a shortage of specie, leading to recession in agriculture and dislocation of trade and industry. Also, after the Napoleonic wars there was a decline of handicrafts through factory competition. Urban handloom industry was more or less totally destroyed. The destruction spread to rural weavers as well, but many lingered on partly through market imperfections and partly by cutting into subsistence only to fall victims of the famines. The exhaustion of land, the increase in rents and the fall in the wages of rural labourers, suggest a large population being thrown out of employment.⁵

When the Europeans took over most of India's industry and land, women were affected badly. The land they used for cultivation of food was taken away, their industry was destroyed. This was so because manpower responsible for contributing their skill for cultivation was taken to other sectors in favour of the Europeans. Additionally cash crop, like growing of cotton, was enforced to grow to feed the British cotton manufacturing industry. Additionally, cultivation of indigo (was in high demand to dye cloths, manufactured in Europe) was colonial order which was disastrous for both the land and for the Indian farmers. Growing indigo means losing the fertility of land. This contributed to the extreme hunger and poverty among those who planted it. Initially, farmers did not realise that indigo which fetched good income proved to be so ruinous to their food growing industry. This affected rural women both directly and indirectly. Now women depended on their husbands leaving them helpless since education was denied to them. This gave rise to early marriages since they could no longer fend for themselves. Most rights that they possessed were taken away. Most women when their husbands died, they would 'Immolate' themselves.⁶

From the above-mentioned conditions, the economic status of women during the colonial period was not pleasant. The rights of women were taken away such as land right. They were taken to work in the factories with less pay compared to those of men. This meant slavery and poverty on their part. The woman was regarded as a lesser being or a slave of man or his subservient mate, a thoroughly domesticated, childbearing drudge.⁷

Zambian Scenario: Colonization of Zambia took a similar course as that of India. Northern Rhodesia as Zambia was called before its independence, was colonized in about 1890. At about this time, Zambia had become active in agriculture, trade and industry. Initially, Europe introduced trade with Africa, Zambia inclusive before the nineteenth century. But it important to note though that Europe had superior ships to target trading places though called international trade, it had extended overseas for its own interests. They owned and directed the great majority of the world's sea-going vessels and contributed to financing of trade between four continents.⁸

The Portuguese were the first Europeans who entered this territory of the then Northern Rhodesia. Their activities were not significant. But between 1851 and 1873, David Livingstone a British missionary encouraged European interest in the area. He had a desire to start up missionary work and trade and so he established relationships with the African chiefs. Later, significant intrusions occurred. One such intruder was John Cecil Rhodes. This one had interest in the mine in diamond at Kimberly in South Africa and who sought to extend his hold on over the regions to the north. He founded the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1889, and obtained from the British Government a royal charter for the company giving it the powers of government.⁹

It can be noted that when the British took over government, there was neglect on agriculture and the African population because mining interests had dominated them. This was effectively done together with active discrimination against the African population. This did not mean well for the women because neglect of agriculture meant a fall in the economic status of women automatically.¹⁰ With the aid of money, the BSAC gained mining rights throughout Barotseland, which became a protectorate in 1891. Later it took possession of North-Western Rhodesia in 1897 and established Mongu as a headquarters. Cash taxes were introduced which forced adult males to migrate to urban areas for employment. Subsequently restrictions on African farming, the prevention of Africans from selling their produce freely, and the alienation of some of the best land to European settlers, further weakened the African peasants. It should be borne in mind that this was made possible by using 'white supremacy' rule.¹¹ There was very little productive re-investment within Northern Rhodesia during the colonial period. Profits, salaries and savings of the expatriate community left the country. There only existed small internal market for manufactured goods and higher priced foods. Africans were not consumers of the goods produced. The small internal political base for the maintenance of these relations of production received support from the body of expatriate management and skilled workers needed to operate the mines. Many of them came from South Africa and readily identified with the colonial/capitalist structures of Northern Rhodesia. In this way, the mining enclave, coupled with the small settler and expatriate population, was able to set a pattern on society, which remained until independence.¹² All this had an impact on the women folk. A consideration is vital in order to know how they fared during the colonial period economically.

Women played an important role in wealth creation in the home. Since they had access to land, they used it for cultivation and this was a pride to men in that if he married more wives then he would become a very wealthy man. This is typical of Tonga men. However, when the Europeans came, there was economic exploitation of Women and this was intensified. The division of labour was disrupted. Traditionally, African men did the heavy labour of felling trees, clearing land, and building houses, apart from conducting warfare and hunting. Women on the other hand used the land to grow crops to feed the family but there was a change when the Europeans came. Rodney further stated that:

When they (Men) were required to leave their farms to seek employment, women remained burdened with every task necessary for the survival of themselves, children and their husbands as far as foodstuffs were concerned. Moreover, since men entered the money sector more easily and in greater numbers than women, women's pay became greatly inferior to that of men within the new value system of colonialism. Men's work was "modern" and women's was "traditional" and "Backward". Therefore the deterioration in the status of African women was bound up with the consequent loss of right to set indigenous standards of what work had merit and what did not.¹³

Firstly, women were affected by the alienation of land experienced by most Africans. They were personally affected by this land alienation because they lost access and control of land and became more dependent on men. This led to an intensification of domestic patriarchy, reinforced by colonial social institutions. Women were the major food producers and thus not only had ready access to land but also authority over how land was cultivated. The advent of the British colonialism and their settler economy negatively impacted on women because the loss of land meant loss of access and authority over land. Also they found that they no longer had the variety of soils needed to grow indigenous crops. Continuous cultivation of land on a restricted small piece of land led to soil exhaustion and nutrient depletion which ultimately adversely affected crop yields.¹⁴ Land alienation reduced the economic independence enjoyed by women by compromising their economic production.

Secondly, colonialism negatively impacted women by introducing wage labour. They were required by law in some cases to provide wage labour for the European plantation economies. Chiefs and district officers were commanded to procure women and juvenile labourers for private and public works. Women were drawn away from their usual activities and duties at home. Women and children made up the major casual labour in coffee and tea fields. This produced conflict in women as they were forced to leave their duties to work for Europeans. This forced labour was followed by acts of physical and sexual abuse, which were often committed

by African men against their own women. One woman by the name of 'Bwanikwa' serves as a good example of women who were taken as slave girls during the colonial period in Zambia. She lived between the early 1870s and the late 1920s in the present-day Shaba of Zaire (Congo) and Luapula province of Zambia. She was assimilated into a household, as a slave concubine then became an uprooted person being subject to sale, making escapes and seeking protection at heavy costs.¹⁵

Thirdly, the introduction of wage labour affected women through its denial of African women to African male labour. The colonial economy forced men to seek employment in European economic ventures and took them away from their responsibilities they used to have in the traditional Africa economy. This had an impact on women, since they had to take up the duties previously carried out by men.¹⁶ Loss of male labour was in form of migrating to urban areas to look for employment. This meant led to social- economic impacts on women. They hired labour to substitute for absent members of the family. This added to the economic strain already felt by the Zambian women.

Fourthly, problems posed by male migrant labour were exacerbated by changes in bride wealth arrangements. In many parts, bride wealth changed from exchange of livestock to cash exchange. As a result, bride wealth was inflated and became a monetary value of bride wealth. It no longer was affirmed a woman's worth but it judged her worth. This meant that most young males were unable to pay it and they had to go to urban areas in order to earn enough to make the payment. Women lost their husbands' economic support at the onset of marriage thus not empowering them economically at the beginning of marriage. Bwanikwa too because of such treatment had to free her self from her husband by paying back what the husband paid as bride price. She cultivated and planted, kept chickens, sold eggs and traded the surplus, with the result that in course of time she had gathered together sufficient money to buy an elephant gun. She bought it at Nkomba's village on the Luapula and adding an expensive shawl, which she had bought as interest, she went to her husband, paid her debt and redeemed herself.¹⁷

Fifthly, taxes were introduced by the colonial economy. In most cases taxes were to be paid by men to the colonial authority. Women could be taxed from the age of fifteen. This was seen as a nuisance since most did not have enough economic responsibilities of sustaining their household in the absence of males. This too had effect on the bride worth exchange. In the 1930s, Zambian patriarchs in particular had become extremely preoccupied with controlling bride wealth. Fathers and guardians had come to regard the payment of bride wealth as a fair means of accumulating cash to pay taxes and meet their financial obligations. This change represented a woman as a commodity to hare family. Though in the past woman retained a measure of control over their bride wealth which economically empowered her. Men were weighed down with heavy taxation so bride wealth became a source of income that males sought to control. Once more women were excluded from traditional provisions that had previously given women some measure of economic independence.¹⁸

The sixth way was the introduction of cash crops economy. Initially Zambians were not allowed to grow cash crops because the settlers feared that primitive African agricultural practices would spread crop disease and contaminate their plantations. But eventually the colonialists permitted Africans to grow cash crops. Women were adversely affected. Men intended to control the cash crops and their proceeds. Women were to continue with subsistence farming except in the cases where subsistence crop became cash crops with a market value. Men swiftly took control of the crops proceeds although the women continued to do all the work around its cultivation. As the cash crop economy grew the European imposed new cash crops such as coffee, cotton and tea on men and because of their market value, men accepted to cultivate them. So although women were expected to grow foodstuffs, their labour was also required to grow cash crops. This doubled the agricultural load on women.

Introduction of new technology especially the plough had negative impacts on. The plough enabled men to cultivate more land. But men left backbreaking labour, intensive work of sowing and weeding to the women. Thus the women's load was increased. The plough made men more directly involved in crop cultivation thereby increasing the men's right over proceeds earned from the cash crop. To many men, this meant they could dispense with the money earned without consulting the earning the money. Hence women once although women were working more, their economic dependence on men increased.

Finally, colonialism led to complete loss of access to land of women. The colonialists brought with them the idea of private ownership of land. Women were completely excluded from this ownership. Men benefited from the registration and consolidation of land and were granted titles. This weakened rural autonomy in the economy. Colonials had devastating economic impacts on women. Women's labour was exploited and levels of dependence on males increased.

It can be said that land is always valuable than any other natural resource. This is because from it, one can produce food, mine different minerals, dig clay for pottery, get timber for production of furniture and charcoal and many other uses imaginable. Evidence of small-scale mining was seen in India, prior to coming of colonisers. As the women would adorn themselves with golden and silver earrings. Some wore precious stones,

rings and chains including pottery. Women would start up industries in cloth manufacturing, dyeing, potters of terracotta toys for children. All this was a proof of having been a wealthy country, India. So taking away of land meant taking away the industries that existed in pre-British India. Women's economic status came to a stand still. Similarly the Zambian women once enjoyed the running of their farms in terms of food production and processing. Surplus produce would be traded with others who seemed not have what they had and also got what they did not have. Places like Ingombe Ilede has proof of trade and women of then seemed wear necklaces of beads, shells and bracelets of ivory and some of gold. All this came to stand still when the Europeans came. The women especially were affected economically.

Now it has been established that the women of India and Zambia were adversely affected when land was taken away from them. This became worse when the men were asked to look for employment in the British economic ventures. Women became slaves to their own men. The men would procure women and children to work in the European plantations and factories. The conditions of services were harsh in that the wages were low and working hours was too long. This had a social-economic impact on women because they had to fend for their families and those who worked for them back home.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the economic status of women in both India and Zambia during the colonial period was not the same as that one in pre-colonial times. Women in India for instance took good care of themselves and family. They cultivated land and surplus food would be used for trade with other goods they did not have. Wealthy women would even trade internationally. Their culture was rich and lived colourful lives. Women adorned themselves with ornaments like gold, silver, shells, ivory, different hairstyles and various cosmetics. All in all they were satisfied with the kind of life they had. They could eat from their produce and would trade with others showing that there was economic development. In Zambia, women too played a role in making the economy of the country pick. They were women farmers, traders and industrious. They had enough land to cultivate different crops and this would sustain their families and the population grew.

It is the wealth that India accumulated that made the Europeans take over its trade. This was purely done to satisfy its interests. The Europeans used the racial factor to completely take over the political sector of India. They promoted the Caste system in order to make themselves the higher caste. They took over the top jobs and this went on for one hundred and fifty years. The people who suffered the most were women because they were left with burdens of responsibilities at home and depended on their husbands' income. They were forced to look for jobs in the factories but their pay was very low compared to the men's wages. Women were asked to start work in plantations to grow cotton in for the Europeans. Most of them were taken as slaves.

During the colonial period in Zambia, women faced challenges in making ends meet. To start with, land was taken away from them. This meant that they depend on their husbands' income. One problem led to another. Land was grabbed from them, in turn wage labour was introduced. Payment of taxes followed thereafter and this indirectly had an effect on bride wealth. The colonial government later introduced cash crops. These included coffee, cotton and tea. Men had the advantage of growing these crops since they knew how to use the 'plough'. This meant that women do the weeding and this led to their devastation and high levels of dependence on men.

At present too, agriculture is considered as the backbone of the Indian and Zambian economy. Women play a vital role in building this economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their vital contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors.

Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. Statistical data are available regarding their participation in the agricultural sector and allied activities but their impact on the home environment has been completely ignored.

It is therefore, sad to note that women in both India and Zambia who had enjoyed economic liberty, before the arrival of colonial masters. The colonial economic policies indeed adversely impacted on them.

Endnotes

- ¹R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri, and K. Datta, *An Advanced History of India* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 809.
- ²M.J. Kelly, *The origins Development of Education in Zambia: From pre-colonial times to 1996* (Lusaka: Image Publishers, 1999), p. 292.
- ³B.V. Rao, *This Modern World* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2000), p. 51.
- ⁴Walter Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publishers, 1982), p. 104.
- ⁵R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, *Studies in the theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), p.211.
- ⁶Self immolation was practiced by widowed wives. Since most Indians burnt bodies of the dead, the wives would throw themselves to avoid the harsh conditions widowed wives faced.
- ⁷J. Hammerton (ed) 'Emancipation of woman' *Practical Knowledge For All.* vol. 3 pp. 113-114.
- ⁸Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, p.104.
- ⁹M.J. Kelly, *The origins Development of Education in Zambia*, p. 22.
- ¹⁰Afrikan eye, *The Effect of Colonialism on African Women*, (Nairobi: African eye, 2006), <http://afrikaneye.blogspot.com>
- ¹¹M.J. Kelly, *The origins Development of Education in Zambia*, p. 23.
- ¹²M.J. Kelly, *The origins Development of Education in Zambia*, p. 28.
- ¹³Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, p.227.
- ¹⁴Afrikan eye, *The Effect of Colonialism on African Women*, <http://afrikaneye.blogspot.com>
- ¹⁵Marcia Wright, 'Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest Among Slave Women in Central Africa, 1886-1911', *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life –Stories from East/ Central Africa* (New York: Lillian Barber Press, 1993), p. 153-156.
- ¹⁶Afrikan eye, *The Effect of Colonialism on African Women*, <http://afrikaneye.blogspot.com>
- ¹⁷Marcia Wright, 'Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa, 1886-1911', p.167.
- ¹⁸Afrikan eye, 'The Effect of Colonialism on African Women', <http://afrikaneye.blogspot.com>

Bibliography

- [1]. Afrikan eye, *The Effect of Colonialism on African Women*, (Nairobi: African eye, 2006), <http://afrikaneye.blogspot.com>
- [2]. Hammerton, J. (ed) 'Emancipation of woman' *Practical Knowledge For All.* vol. 3 pp. 113-114.
- [3]. Kelly, M.J. *The origins Development of Education in Zambia: From pre-colonial times to 1996* .Lusaka: Image Publishers, 1999.
- [4]. Majumdar, R.C. Raychaudhuri, H.C. and Datta, K., *An Advanced History of India* London: Macmillan, 1967.
- [5]. Owen, R. and Sutcliffe, B. *Studies in the theory of Imperialism.* London: Longman, 1972.
- [6]. Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.* London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1982.
- [7]. Rao, B.V. *World History.* New Delhi: Sterling publishers, 2000.
- [8]. Snellgrove, L. E. *The Modern World since 1870.* 2nd ed. London: Longman Limited, 1981.
- [9]. Wright, Marcia. 'Bwanikwa: Consciousness and protest Among Slave women in Central Africa, 1886-1911', *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/ Central Africa.* New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1993.