

Science and Technology in Colonial India



This book is a significant contribution to the socio-political history of science and technology, combining the all-India perspective with a strong regional flavor. It has tried to explore some of its aspects in colonial India. It refers not merely to British motives and goals of incorporating the component of instruction in scientific knowledge in their educational policy and its utilization as a tool for territorial expansion but also for developing technologies of governance in Michel Foucault's phrase. The British rulers had acknowledged an explicit connection between instruction of Indians in science and vigour of the industrial revolution in England and growth of its capitalist economy. In their view, this link has a crucial role in fulfilling the needs of the nascent colonial state in India. Their vision had influenced the nature of transfer of science and technology from Britain to India and direction as well as purpose of its diffusion to some extent. Broadly speaking, the book revolves around two basic issues. One is the role of science and technology in empire-building in Asia specifically in India and financing its maintenance through maximum exploitation of its human, natural, agricultural and other resources by launching and executing a number of exploratory projects, termed as field sciences. Such an imperial focus was undergirded by a crucial objective i.e. acquisition of hegemony through social control based on intimate knowledge of horizontal and vertical divisions in Indian society around the axes of religion and caste. Formalised as colonial ethnography by the administrators, it was institutionalized as a discipline in the British universities. Second concerns the decoding of the complex response of the Indian intelligentsia including the English-educated as well as the experts and advocates of classical and regional

languages which were the key to indigenous knowledge in indigenous sciences, arts and literature. As an integral part of this issues was their varied perceptions of the rich texture of the long relationship between European scientific knowledge and Indian epistemological traditions from seventeenth century onwards. It was initially dialogic turning into domineering, tinged with hegemonic overtones, after the acquisition of almost absolute political power through conquest or subterfuge by the mid-nineteenth century. However, British claims to superiority in physical power, civilisational achievements and scientific knowledge were fiercely contested. Honest self-introspection coupled with pragmatic considerations not only enabled the farsighted intellectuals of different hues to acknowledge the adventurous spirit of Western science and its achievement but also to choose the path of learning and selective borrowing for revitalising indigenous knowledge-systems whether Hindu or Islamic. For resolving religious conflicts, these intellectuals followed a negotiatory strategy wherein science became a neutral terrain for exchange of ideas. The book also discusses the innovative use of print technology by Arya Samaj in recasting Hindu consciousness and its alternative of seeking historical guidelines in the past.

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