



Beyond Utilitarianism: Nineteenth Century South Asian Economic Crises and Sleeman's (1788-1856) Necessitarianism

¹ Muhammad Shafique, Muhammad Yasir Ali, Imtiaz Ahmad Warraich

¹ Professor, Department of History and Civilization Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan: muhammadshafiq@bzu.edu.pk

² Lecturer, Department of History and Civilization Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>History <i>Revised format: 30 Nov 2019</i> <i>Available Online: 31 Dec 2019</i></p> <hr/> <p>Keywords <i>Utilitarianism, Necessitarianism, Sleeman, Beyond utilitarianism, Nineteenth Century Indian Economy, Colonial Economic Policy in India</i></p> <hr/> <p>JEL Classification: <i>O17, O19</i></p>	<p>Emerging out of eighteenth-century enlightenment, utilitarianism led a view of earth and human centric economic view of society, resulting not only in the formation of theories of racial superiority and legitimacy of imperialism, but also in the development of modern theories of economy grounded in Adam Smith (1723-1790), Malthus (1766-1834) and Recordo (1772-1823). However there were a few people those tried to fix the challenges beyond utility into the concept of instinctual and evolutionary necessity or priority. Sleeman (1788-1856) was one fundamental exponent of the theory against tyrant colonial economic policies to plunder the colonial subjects and destroy the colonized political elites. He not on challenged the Recordian theory of Revenue but also tried to convince the colonial policy makers for the development of a policy of agriculture, industry and taxation and revenue based on and keeping in considerations the needs and necessities and priorities of the colonized subjects.</p>
<p>© 2019 The authors, under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0</p>	

Corresponding author's email address: muhammadshafiq@bzu.edu.pk

Recommended citation: Shafique, M., Ali, M. Y. and Warraich, I. A., (2019). Beyond Utilitarianism: Nineteenth Century South Asian Economic Crises and Sleeman's (1788-1856) Necessitarianism. *Review of Economics and Development Studies*, 5 (4), 847-852

DOI: 10.26710/reads.v5i4.916

1. Introduction

The eighteenth century Enlightenment and Rationality preached a sort of deistic thought system which was systematized by Historicism and Utilitarianism at the end of eighteenth century and beginning of nineteenth century. Emerging out of this contest, utilitarianism led an earth and human centric view of society, especially, governance and economy. The trend resulted in the formation of theories of racial superiority, legitimacy of imperialism and economic exploitation as a utility to make the world civilized. The utilitarian philosophy worked potentially in the development of modern theories of economy grounded in Adam Smith, Malthus and Recordo's thought system. The Utilitarian theorists challenged the romance of India and focused on the utility of what the British were doing in South Asia. As the British had penetrated in India as a trade company, therefore, for them trade benefits were the major utility of the British pursuits and imperial struggle. What was the impact of the British Imperial economy on the local population was not the concern of the British policy makers. This utilitarian theory found a number of challenges, which were being synthesized by then contemporary Elphinston (1779-1859) School of thought trying to harmonize indigenous culture and economy with the western models and modalities of reformists, missionaries and utilitarians,

However, among this dominant school, a small fraction of Britishers working in India strongly resisted the argument and the policies. Constructing their arguments on antiquarianism, cultural romance and natural consequentialism, they focused on the theory of economic necessitarianism. Necessitarianism is a doctrine to believe that 'all events, including acts of the will, are determined by antecedent causes' and are determined. The concept interlinks the natural concept of consequences and causation to form necessitarianism. It is constructed on the claim that all truth is necessarily true. (Nous, 2012, p. 418–448) They argued that India had a natural necessitarian culture and economy and the British policy had resulted necessarily in the destruction of India society and economy. William Henry Sleeman was the major exponent of this argument in the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century. This paper tries to highlight some of the major ideas of Sleeman in this context.

2. William Henry Sleeman (1788-1856).

Major General Sir William Henry Sleeman was an officer in the services of the popular trade company East India Company. He is well known for his sympathy with the indigenous Hindu culture. He has been considered as one of the most efficient officers of the company. He is known as "thuggee Sleeman". (Tucker, 1961) Philip Woodruff in *The Founders* calls him "The Titans" of the British Empire. (Ibid, p. xi) He has been praised by the Hindu natives of India as well as by the imperial masters. Sleeman's thoughts were dominated by a very passionate romance of necessarily knitted with each other good and bad of Indian culture and history. Born in an age, when romanticism was emerging out of enlightenment, Sleeman was brought up in a naturally determined environment, congenial to the development of the faculties, necessarily varying and contrasting in their nature. Sleeman's selection for the services of the company was a great honour for the family involved in the illegal trade. At the time of his arrival British supremacy in India had been established, but the problems of maintenance of the law and order had become complex in the form of Pindaris, Bagree dacoits and Thugs. Sleeman was impressed by the Indian tradition and became plunge into close relations with the natives. He became well-versed in local languages such as Pushto, Persian, Arabic and Hindustani (Urdu) and also in some other secret languages of decedents. Sleeman spent all his service of forty-seven years as an officer to maintain law and order against Gorkhas and Marathas and other groups. (Ibid, p.1-33) For him, the major problem in British India administration was application of British utility model of economy. Therefore he emerged as a strong enemy of the utilitarian philosophy. He criticized the utilitarian concept of economy taking its eminent form in the ideas of Ricardo, Malthus, James Mill, Adam Smith, Say and T. R. McCulloch.¹(Sleeman, 1837) Sleeman objected to the concentration and accumulation of wealth in the hands of the British East India Company and thus destruction of India Economy and Society. For him national stocks were the criteria to evaluate the economic condition of India. Her strongly rejected the idea that accumulated wealth could indicate the economic condition of the masses. (Gordon, 1967, p. 28-29) Therefore, he strongly criticised the attitude of analysing India's economic conditions and problems on the model of British utility. In that sense he was the only figure resisting the utilitarian logic of political economy.² (Gordon, 1974, p.59-74)

As a necessitarianist, Sleeman believed in the deterministic view of religion and nature He saw a sort of uniformity in the nature of Universal phenomena In that sense historical process was determined for him with natural consequences and results. His *Rambles and Recollections* highlight his concept 'the proper study of mankind is man' but for him human will and action were determined be a necessary chain of causation.

3. Sleeman's Bais Unit of Understanding

Sleeman's major concern was confined to the maintenance of law and order, yet, in his *Rambles and Recollections* of an Indian Official he analyses the Indian society in its state of civilization However, his basic focus remains on the degenerating elements in then-current state of Indian society. He worked hard to eliminate the evil elements from the society. However, he finds the evil necessarily emanating from the religious, moral, social and economic structure of the Indian society through the historical practices. These evils were a constant source of problems for

¹ W. H. Sleeman wrote two books on the issues related to the utilitarian debates. One work was *On Taxes of Public Revenues, The Ultimate Incidence of their Payment, their Disbursement and the Seats of their Ultimate consumption*, Calcutta, 1827. This book was reprinted from London in 1829 and New York in 1888. Second work was *Analysis and Review of the peculiar Doctrines of Ricardo or New School of Political Economy* Serampore, 1837.

² Barry J. Gordon, has treated Sleeman as one of the five theorists producing non-Recordian economic theories. Collison Black in his article "Parson Malthus, the General and Captain", in *Economic Journal*, Vol. LXXVII, pp. 59-74, compares Sleeman with Malthus.

the British administration.³ (Sleeman, 1836) On the one hand, if administration's credibility and support from the subject people was at stake, on the other hand, such type of internal problems were creating difficulties in relations with princely states and frontier countries. The attachment of evils to the religion was a big hurdle for a real assessment of Indian situation for Sleeman. Adopting the pattern of "issues" or "strictures" of William Tennant, Sleeman selects the economic historical material from romanticists, evangelicals and travellers and places these facts to stabilize his arguments.

Sleeman believed although the law and order situation was grounded in the Hindu culture, yet the economic predation of the British in India through systematic policies necessarily contributed to the emergence of plundering groups. The economic depravity, famines, officials plunders, trade plunders and such other activities on the part of British East India company Sleeman's attitude was determined by imperialist motives, geo-cultural concept of nationalism, romantic thought and anti-utilitarian economic attitude. However he seeks the application of all these views in the Indian society in such a way that may strengthen the British rule and economic concerns in India.

4. Sleeman and the Political Economy of Religions

Sleeman links all walks of life with economy: religion, law and order, imperialism etc. therefore his political economy combines religion and rule and establishes necessitarian link between the Indian people, moral evils and economic crises and deprivation. Dividing dominant majority of Hindus as subjugated and Muslim minority as suppressive ruling elite, Sleeman depicts Muslim rule as the cause of the destruction of Indian moral and economy. Impressed by the novelty of Hindu customs, traditions, fairs, fiction and culture, on the testimony of Bishop Heber (Heber, 1828) and Thomas Munro, (Gleig, 1831, p. 175) Sleeman tries to prove the cultural, civilizational, chivalrous and Inclusive nature of Hinduism and indigenous Hindu society. The destruction of cultural and economic heritage on the part of the non-indigenous ruling elites was the major cause of the immoral character and economic deprivations of the Indians. For Sleeman the major cause of the promotion of fictitious and mythological strength of superstitious structure was economic crises and plundering. (Sleeman, 184, p.7, 54)⁴

As a ruling elite and masters of political economy, Muslims have occupied a dominant space in the Sleeman's necessitarianism. For Sleeman two major communities of India were similar to each other sharing rituals of birth and marriage and even superstitions ⁵(Matthews, 1809) and emanate necessarily from the Hindu and Muslim religion. Same is the nature of their economic attitude in which booty, plunder, dacoity, thuggy, everything is justified, not through the empirical sciences rather with irrational superstitious behaviour. (Sleeman, 1844, p.36-37) pointing to the mutual cultural influences, Sleeman highlight the muslim following of the concept of Avagon⁶ and custom of Suttee⁷ (Ibid, p.34.40) Muslim focus on life after death and suppression of Muslim women has minimized the economic re-productivity. (Ibid, p.198-200)

3 Sleeman wrote some major reports and published books on the issue of Indian evils. Some of these writings are:

Ramaseena or a Vocabulary of the Particular Language used by the Thugs with an Introduction and Appendix, Calcutta, 1836; A Report on the System of Megpunnaism or the Murder of Indigent Parents for Their Young Children's (who are sold as slaves) as it Prevails in the Delhie Territories and the Native States of Rajpootana, Ulwar, and Bhurtpoor, Calcutta, 1839; Thugs or Phansigars of India: Comprising a History of Rise and Progress of that Extraordinary Fraternity of Assassins, Two Volumes, Philadelphia, 1839; Report on the Depredations Committed by the Thug Gangs of Upper and Central India, Calcutta, 1840; Report on Budhuk Alias Bagree Dacoits and Other Gang Robbers by Hereditary Profession and on the Measures Adopted by the Government of India for their Suppression, Calcutta, 1849.

4 Although it is a fabulous concept, but was propagated by a number of romantic and missionaries to strengthen their arguments. Romanticists propagated it to create a sense of harmony between the Europeans and Indians. On the other hand Roman Catholics propagated it just to get the attention of local population. Through this concept they seem to be trying to highlights that what the Christian missions were propagating was not a new thing. It was the revival of true Indian religion.

5 Mishkat ul Masabih is a collection of the most authentic traditions of the Prophet (PBUH). Author os using the translation of Matthews under the title of *Mishkat ul Masabih or the Collection of most Authentic Traditions Regarding the Actions and Sayings of Muhammed Exhibiting the Origin of the Manners and Customs; Civil, Religious and Military Policy of the Musalmans*, from Culcutta in 1809-10.

6 The concept of rebirth among the Hindus. According to this concept every person comes back to this world after his death. If he does good acts in the first life he comes into good form other wise he appears in the form of some animals or insects.

7 Suttee was a custom among the Hindus. According to this custom a good women had to burn into ashes with the body of her deceased husband alive.

Property rights are considered one of the major areas of political economy and Sleeman's narrative on the state of property rights in India is closely associated with necessitarian arguments. Sleeman binds the superstitions and evils as the consequential necessity of social and cultural ceremonials that lead to economic crises. However, the social thrust to ceremonial life he considers as a result of political-economic suppression. He is of the opinion that under an unsettled and despotic government people do not feel their property secure. Therefore, they feel it better to spend their earnings on superstitious rituals and ceremonials that promise them a psychological satisfaction and advantage for life-hereafter. (Ibid, p. 38-39) In this context, Muslims emerge as an imperial community with despotic political behaviour, establishing an economic structure to defend their imperial and despotic attitude. The militant and martial nature and status of Muslim community left no hurdle in the way of their plundering of Hindu wealth and establishing a state owned economy in the name of 'mansabdari system'.

However he confess that this has been the common nature of all imperial elites (Ibid, p. 144) yet the Muslim rulers were very kind to their subjects and treated the Muslims, the Hindus, the Dutch and the English, alike. (Ibid, 137) In this regard, he praises the policy of Akbar the great (Ibid, p. 318-324) and Shahjahan (Ibid, p.52) and was very impressed by the beauty of the Muslim constructions and the generous and kind way they treat their subjects in times of trouble. That is why the indigenous population does not indulge in the feelings of hatred against their superiors and rulers. (Ibid, p.152) Sleeman see reversal of Akbar the Great's policy of tolerance as a major cause of economic decline as well as the decline of the Mughal power in India.(Ibid, p.48-49) The Rajput blood had contributed a lot in the strength of the Mughal Empire, but Aurangzeb's policy created a sense of enmity among the Hindus and the Muslims and a long series of wars actually destroyed the economy of India. This enmity and economic destruction became a blessing for the British rule in India.

5. Indian Institutions and Political Economy

Sleeman establishes a close relation between state institutions and political economy. For Sleeman strong political institutions provide a strength for the economic and social stability. He believed that the Indians had never established any sound system of social, economic and political laws. The Indian society lacked institutions, like that of the European senate, assembly, bar or bench or even stock exchange and joint stock companies. The absence of any law of political succession among the Hindus and the Muslim was an important cause of political instability in India resulting in wars and feuds, causing huge damages to public exchequer. The culture established norms even for the most obedient subjects and nobles to change their allegiance from one candidate of succession to the other or even to predators for economic gains and promote political chaos in the country. Sleeman finds the footing of Nineteenth century economic depression and political unrest as the necessary outcome of this attitude.(Ibid, p. 239-240) He points out the rise of Pindaris, Freebooters and Thuggs as a result of this trend. (Ibid, p. 491-492) However what kept the Indian society functional and integrated inspite of despotism and degenerated political economy was its efficient system of local government. (Ibid, p. 394) The system not only provided strength to the central administration rather looked into the minimum economic needs of the community at village, tribe and caste level.

In this context Sleeman draws lesson for the British political economy in India. As government policies bear a necessary relations with the conditions of the people and the deteriorated state of India economy was the result of political policies bearing impact on economy, therefore, Sleeman advised the British East Indi Company government not to look into economic utility of the political policies only for the British profits and gains rather assess the necessities of the indigenous people and culture. He proposes the establishment of good terms with local population and levying tolerant taxes on trade and. (Ibid, p. 482-83)

6. Conclusion

The nineteenth century Indian economic crises have been analysed in terms of communal relations between Muslims, Hindus and eth British. The major stress of the time has been on the positivist political economy with utilitarian model and morality. With this model, if on the one hand, introduction of Western institutions was justified, on the other hand, the exploits and plunders of the British Indian Subjects on the part of British East India Company and its employees were vindicated. Sleeman believed that the major cause of decline of Indian Economy was the British utilitarian policies which were necessarily bound to produce such results. Political-economic policies were bound to produce necessary results. Sleeman strengthens his arguments with the evidences from the Indian past and pleaded that a major difference in the utilities of rulers and ruled during the Muslim era was the major cause of economic depravity. In this context, Sleeman integrates the emergence of superstitions, lawlessness,

thuggy, Bagree dacoities, and Pindaries and other decedents as a necessarily determined result of foreign yoke in India. Sleeman highlights not only economic impact of the political economy and economic deprivation on society, rather binds it as a necessity with the moral and cultural decadence of society. Simultaneously, Sleeman integrates the economic policies with determined necessitarian impacts and argues that rather than commercial interests, necessities of the subjects should be priority of the political economic policy. Deprivation of basic necessities could produce a moral and political crises that can destroy the social and political fabric of even a highly civilized society such as India.

References

- Gleig, G.R. (1831) *The Life of Sir Thomas Munro*, London
- Gordon, Barry J. (1967) *Non-Recordian Political Economy, Five neglected Contributions*, Boston:
- Gordon, Barry J. *Parson Malthus, the General and Captain*, *Economic Journal*, LXXVII, pp. 59-74
- Heber, Reginald (1828) *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, London: John Murray
- Matthews. (1809) *Collection of most Authentic Traditions Regarding the Actions and Sayings of Muhammed Exhibiting the Origin of the Manners and Customs; Civil, Religious and Military Policy of the Musalmans*, Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press
- Nous (2012), *Rationalism and Necessitarianism*, *Martin Lin Rutgers*, 46(3), pp. 418-448
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1836) *Ramaseena or a Vocabulary of the Particular Language used by the Thugs*, Calcutta
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1837) *Analysis and Review of the peculiar Doctrines of Ricardo or New School of Political Economy*, Serampore
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1839), *A Report on the System of Megpunnaism or the Murder of Indigent Parents for Their Young Children's (who are sold as slaves) as it Prevails in the Delhie Territories and the Native States of Rajpootana, Ulwar, and Bhurtpoor*, Calcutta
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1839), *Thugs or Phansigars of India: Comprising a History of Rise and Progress of that Extraordinary Fraternity of Assassins*, Philadelphia
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1840), *Report on the Depredations Committed by the Thug Gangs of Upper and Central India*, Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1844) *Rambles and recollections of an Indian official*, London: J.Hatchard and Son
- Sleeman, Willium Henry. (1849), *Report on Budhuk Alias Bagree Dacoits and Other Gang Robbers by Hereditary Profession and on the Measures Adopted by the Government of India for their Suppression*, Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press
- Tuker, Francis. (1961) *The Yellow Scarf: The story of the Life of Thuggee Sleeman or Major General Sir William Henry Sleeman*, K. C. B. 1788-1856, London: J. M. Dent & Sons

