

# **SOCIAL IMPERIALISM – And how it was applied in the Bombay Presidency 1895-1925**

**PhD. thesis by Henrik Chetan Aspengren, Department of Politics and International Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis traces how British imperialism, as an ideology of empire, developed a social dimension by the turn of the twentieth century. Drawing on archival sources, the thesis explores what motivated British social imperialism, how knowledge and political thought operated within it, and how it translated into local colonial policy in the Bombay Presidency, British India, between 1895-1925. The study uses Michel Foucault's concept of bio-politics to engage the ways in which emerging social liberalism, and British sociology, enabled the conceptualisation and politicisation of a distinct social domain, and helped putting 'the social' into British imperialism. Sociology and social liberalism defined the social in vague terms. Yet, I will show, it was seen as key to stability and progress. It was perceived by contemporaries as contingent of, but not determined by, industrial capitalism and the emergence of modern industrial society. Liberalism, the thesis points out, had always been closely related to British imperialism in general, and the British administration of India in particular. The introduction of a social element in liberalism did not end that relationship; rather, it enabled a shift in preferred domain of intervention from the moral to the social. I outline what constituted social liberalism and how it influenced imperial thought. Sociology, in turn, delineated the social domain and made it known. I revisit turn of the twentieth-century debates within British sociology and trace how these debates informed the official introduction of sociological research into colonial India. The study examines various angles of how social imperialism translated into the Presidency. It shows how administrators began to frame interventions through social-political language, and how they utilised sociological methodology and research. It analyses actual social interventions of sanitation, education, and housing. I suggest that social interventions, invoked in the name of stability and progress, formed as measures to draw on and channel movements and tendencies within colonial society, while simultaneously promoting the state as vehicle for reform. Social interventions widened the scope of colonial state action, and so limited society- and market based approaches to conditions of life.