

Soft Colonization in the Age of Globalization: The Socioeconomic and Cultural Influence of the US and Europe on Post-Colonial India

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Abstract

Globalization has changed India's economic, cultural, educational and technological linkages with the western countries to a great extent. But these connections also bring into focus debates about the persistence of colonialism in the forms of economic, cultural, institutional and technological relations today. This secondary research paper investigates the concept of soft colonization in the post-colonial India, especially the United States and Europe. The study employs secondary statistical analysis and published academic research to address the issues of economic integration, foreign investment, digital expansion, cultural transformation, education, language, migration and knowledge production. The official secondary data has been analysed descriptively, comparatively and the literature has been analysed thematically with respect to India's trade and investment relationship and digital integration. The analysis reveals that India has been further entangled in the western economic and technological networks, especially through growing connections in trade and investments, as well as digital networks. Meanwhile, the integration of this kind cannot be taken as proof of colonization by itself. Instead, it implies that the relationship is more complicated than that, encompassing economic interdependence, cultural exchange, institutional influence, and technological integration and dependency. Indian reactions to these are also quite assertive in terms of adaptation, negotiation and the maintenance of national/cultural identity. The study thus does not represent an extension of the territorial colonialism, but rather a process of soft colonization, which is multi-dimensional and contested in the context of globalization.

Keywords: Soft Colonization, Globalization, Post Colonial India, United States, Europe, Cultural Influence, Economic Integration and Neo Colonialism.

1. Introduction

Globalization has changed the nature of the relationship between nations, and expanded the flow of goods, capital, technology, knowledge, people and cultural practices across national borders. However, in post-colonial societies globalization cannot just be perceived as a matter of economic integration or modernization. It also poses questions about the persistence of historical power relations in today's economic, institutional, cultural and technological frameworks. The importance of colonial legacy because the colonial legacies have shaped and established patterns of development, urbanization and institutional dependency that can continue to impact the post-colonial societies even as they have attained formal political independence. (Oanta & Pascariu, 2025) stress the need to look at the colonial heritage and path dependency in development patterns of post-colonial countries. India's globalisation therefore needs to be viewed in the context of its ongoing process of building an independent national identity and its struggle for a place in the international system. India is now assuming its role as a developing country that is a part

of the global economy, and also a self-defined civilisational entity with a unique historical and cultural identity.

In her book, **(Chakrabarti, 2024)** explores India's future as a civilisation state and the correlation between nation branding, cultural identity and the quest for recognition in international politics. This view offers a picture of India's relationship with external powers that is far from purely one-sided, for it is not a process of cultural assimilation on its own, but rather a possibility of India becoming a part of global economic and cultural networks, while simultaneously building its own national identity. From the decolonial point of view, the contemporary influence from outside can also be analysed. Decolonial scholarship calls into question the ongoing hegemony of knowledge systems, institutions and practices created in historically powerful Western contexts. **(Sauerbronn et al., 2024)** illustrates how decolonial thinking confronts Eurocentrism and explores other types of knowledge and institutional practice.

The present study is relevant to this perspective for the following reasons: first, soft colonization is not confined to direct political control; second, the same concerns for direct political control also apply to soft colonization. Institutions, knowledge systems, professional practices and internationally dominant frameworks are other ways in which influence can be exercised. The influence of history and the present is another channel in which language plays an important role. English has a prominent place in the Indian Educational, Professional, Scientific and International sphere. **(Zeng & Yang, 2024)** study focuses on the issue of English-language hegemony and its ongoing significance in international communication and knowledge systems.

However, **(Rind, 2023)**, in his post-colonial analysis of globalization and privatization in the field of education, notes that international policies in education or market-oriented strategies can also be responsible for cultural and institutional dependency. This view also is significant for India, because of the internationalization of higher education, which, at the same time, can enrich opportunities for the international sphere, while also posing questions about the priorities and autonomy of national education. The formal colonialism relationship of political control can exist whereas neo-colonialism can exist through economic structures, investment, trade and unequal power relationship in the international arena. Neo-colonialism and economic dependency in the post-colonial world are still relevant, according to **(Mallick, 2026)**. This is significant for India as it is a country with a growing trade and investment ties with the western world, giving them opportunities for development but also raising issues of economic autonomy and dependency. Other aspects of the post-colonial influence are questions of identity and citizenship. Race, identity and post-colonial citizenship in global contexts is explored by **(Schueller, 2009)**. These perspectives can inform and clarify how historical categories and current global interactions can influence notions of belonging and identity.

(Nagla, B. K., & Choudhary, 2024) explore the changing culture of India using the lens of intellectual traditions, institutions and regional experiences. It is impossible to limit cultural change to the process of Westernization, their work indicates. External influences are continually negotiated in Indian society within the context and history of the region, leading to continuity and change. Global influence and national identity are significant in higher education institutions. **(Van Haaften, 2025)**



The figure illustrates the major channels through which globalization has shaped post-colonial India. Economic integration through trade and investment, together with cultural, educational, linguistic and technological exchanges, has strengthened India's connections with the United States and Europe. These interactions create opportunities for development and global participation while also raising concerns regarding dependency, cultural transformation and external influence.

2. Literature Review

(Behera, 2021) explores the concepts of globalization and deglobalization as well as knowledge production, which refers to a variety of knowledge construction and dissemination processes. This is significant as globalization has increased the knowledge exchange within the international knowledge network, but has also posed questions on the recognition of unequal knowledge systems. Global knowledge networks can thus offer the potential for development to post-colonial societies but may also re-create existing intellectual hierarchies.

(Edwards et al., 2022) discusses globalization, privatization and the role of the state in post-colonial education. Their work is an example of the way that international policy models and market-oriented approaches can shape education reform. This applies to India because internationalisation and privatisation could lead to an increase in formal education but also cause concern about the price, equity and the role of education within the country.

(Capstick, 2020) explores the connection between empire, colonialism and English. English's historical association with colonialism and the contemporary significance related to international communication, migration, education and employment. English is therefore used as a means of engaging with the world, and as a legacy of colonial language systems in India.

(Sulaiman et al., 2024) have explored the concept of neo-colonialism which is a current external influence on the country after political independence. Their analysis offers conceptual framework for the distinction between political sovereignty and the economic and cultural autonomy. It is especially important to note when looking at the contemporary relationship between the powerful western economies and India.

(Yuni et al., 2025) look at the socioeconomic impact of colonial heritage and highlight the fact that colonial institutions can affect development after the formal period of colonisation. Their analysis centres on Africa, but it is a post-colonial analysis which can serve to understand how historical institutions and economic relations can influence current development processes.

(Sadaka & Fares, 2026) investigate the connection between colonialism and global neoliberalism. They identify the importance of market-oriented structures and institutions in the current world relations. This view is significant for India because globalization of the economy is not merely about trade and investment, but also the models of governance and institutional organization.

(Kacowicz & Wajner, 2021) analyse alternative reactions to globalization and show that states are not just a passive object of global structures. India is also an integral part of the world's economic and political systems with a desire to preserve strategic autonomy and its own developmental agenda. This helps to develop a case for what Samir Amin has called 'negotiated globalization' or 'agency globalization' as opposed to 'unilateral western globalization'.

(Sadiq & Tsourapas, 2021) review the postcolonial migration state and show how the past is playing a role in the governance of migration today. For India, the process of international migration opens up economic, professional and cultural relationships with the Western countries and shapes transnational identities and social relationships.

3. Research Gap

The post-colonial globalization has been dealt with in the literature in several dimensions such as economic dependency, education, language, migration, culture, knowledge production and neoliberalism. These measurements, however, are typically studied independently. In contrast, comparatively little analysis attempts to link more broadly the current economic and digital integration of India with the United States and Europe with other aspects of cultural, educational and institutional influence.

4. Aim and Objectives

4.1 Aim

This study will critically explore the concept of soft colonization in the modern era of globalization from the socio-economic and cultural perspective of the United States and Europe on post-colonial India.

4.2 Objectives

- To explore the idea and key aspects of soft colonization in post-colonial Indian context.
- To examine India's socioeconomic linkages with the U.S. and Europe based on select secondary indicators.
- To explore the impact of Western culture, education and technology on India.
- To evaluate the reactions of India to outside influence by adapting, negotiating, resisting and asserting its cultural and developmental identity.

5. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a secondary-data-based descriptive and analytical research design to examine the socioeconomic and cultural influence of the United States and Europe on post-colonial India in the context of globalization. The study relies on existing quantitative and qualitative secondary information rather than primary data collection. Quantitative data related to trade, foreign direct investment and digital integration are used to identify major trends in India's global economic and technological engagement, while published academic literature is used to examine cultural, educational, linguistic, institutional and identity-related dimensions.



5.1 Research Design

The design of the current study is descriptive and analytical type of secondary data analysis. It explores the socioeconomic, cultural, educational and technological aspects of the impact of the west on India with the help of available statistical data and published academic research. There was no primary data collected by questionnaires, interviews or field surveys.

5.2 Nature and Type of Data

The study is based on secondary data which is both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative information is gained from trade indicators, foreign investment indicators and digital-integration indicators, and qualitative information is gained from academic literature about colonialism, neo-colonialism, globalization, education, language and culture, migration and knowledge production.

5.3 Sources of Data

Official or internationally recognised data (such as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, U.S. trade statistics, World Bank/other international databases etc.) are used to get quantitative data. For academic analysis, use of selected literature as given in the synopsis is required. Official sources in India also record cooperation between institutions with both the United States and European Union (EU), encompassing trade and technology mechanisms.

5.4 Study Dimensions

Four dimensions are explored: economic, cultural, educational and technological/digital influence. The economic dimension is included because it is highly associated with trade and investment, while the cultural, educational and technological dimension is studied by analyzing existing academic literature and secondary indicators.

5.5 Variables and Indicators

The major quantitative indicators include U.S.–India trade, India–EU trade, foreign direct investment and internet/digital integration. These indicators are not analysed independently and are not considered as evidence of soft colonization, but as indicators of international integration.

5.6 Data Collection and Analysis

The secondary data used are obtained from official statistical data, analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods. Selected tables and graphs show year-wise trends, changes and differences. The

academic literature is examined thematically to relate the quantitative results to cultural, educational, institutional and post-colonial aspects.

5.7 Analytical Framework

The study combines quantitative evidence with qualitative interpretation. Economic and technological indicators demonstrate India's degree of integration into global systems, while the literature is used to examine questions of power, dependency, cultural influence, knowledge, education and identity. This allows the study to distinguish globalization and interdependence from the stronger claim of soft colonization.

6. Secondary Data Analysis and Results

6.1 U.S.–India Economic Integration

India and the United States' economic ties have grown significantly over the last few years. In 2023–24, India and the United States made merchandise and services totaling US\$190.08 billion. When taken together with services, the same source accounts for exports to India of US\$69.98 billion to the U.S. The data illustrate how much the economies of both countries are interdependent.

Table 1. India–U.S. Total Bilateral Trade

Financial Year	Total Bilateral Trade
2018–19	US\$141.55 billion
2019–20	US\$146.05 billion
2020–21	US\$121.85 billion
2021–22	US\$159.10 billion
2022–23	US\$191.44 billion
2023–24	US\$190.08 billion

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India; U.S. Department of Commerce/U.S. Bureau of Census.

In 2020–21, bilateral trade dipped and picked up considerably after that, as indicated by the trend. Total trade increased from approximately US\$121.85 billion in 2020–21 to US\$190.08 billion in 2023–24. This is a sign of the rising economic significance of the United States to India. However, the increase in cross-border trade signifies economic integration and interdependence and not direct evidence of soft colonization.

6.2 India–European Union Economic Integration

The European Union (EU) is also one of the significant economic partners with India. According to the Government of India data, trade and technology is one of the areas of interest for India and EU engagement, including India–EU Trade and Technology Council. The EU is also one of India's biggest bilateral trade partners, as evidenced by more recent international data, where the total bilateral trade in goods is estimated at c. €120 billion in 2024.

Table 2. India's Merchandise Exports to Major European Markets

Year	India's Exports to Europe
2021	US\$78.37 billion
2022	US\$96.93 billion

2023	US\$98.62 billion
2024	US\$101.60 billion
2025	US\$94.07 billion

Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India, Trade Intelligence and Analytics.

The figures reveal that the trade with Europe has grown significantly in India from 2021 to 2024 and again fell in 2025. This highlights the continued significance of European markets for the export economy of India. It is not a unidirectional relationship, as in both the economies are engaged in an economic relationship, and in addition Indian companies also show themselves to be active in the European markets, using it as an opportunity for the economy.

6.3 Foreign Direct Investment and Economic Globalization

FDI is an additional measure of India's involvement in international economic networks. According to the data from the Government of India, the total FDI inflows rose from US\$71.28 billion in FY 2023-24 to US\$81.04 billion in FY 2024-25, marking an increase of 14%. Services received 19% of FDI equity inflows and computer software and hardware received 16%. Manufacturing FDI also increased by 18% to US\$19.04 billion.

Table 3. India's FDI Inflows

Financial Year	Total FDI Inflow
2023–24	US\$71.28 billion
2024–25	US\$81.04 billion

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry/Press Information Bureau.

Press Information Bureau/Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India. The increase demonstrates India's continued attractiveness as an international investment destination. It further provides an example of the double aspect of globalization: foreign investment can be beneficial for the creation of capital, the provision of jobs, technology and economic growth; and high reliance on foreign capital may also create doubts about the autonomy of the economic system. Hence, it is important that FDI be seen as part of a broader theoretical context and not as a standalone sign of neo-colonialism.

6.4 Digital Integration and Technological Influence

The digital globalization is a growing aspect of the India global systems association. Internet access has revolutionized communicating, learning, business, entertainment and the sharing of knowledge. This technological integration provides great opportunities in the field of economic and social development as well as exposure to global platforms, technologies and information systems. It is important, therefore, to understand the digital dimension when it comes to understanding contemporary ways of influencing everyday behavior and communication patterns without political control. But it is important to remember that greater access to the Internet can be read as a sign of globalization, not necessarily soft colonization.

7. Discussion

The secondary findings show that the India–European Union and India–U.S. relations have become a part of the current globalization. India-U.S. trade is growing and European market share remains strong, while foreign investments are on the rise, all of which shows significant economic integration. Literature also

suggests that economic integration can entail unequal power dynamics with more powerful actors dominating the structure of markets, institutional practices and knowledge systems.

The results also bring out the fact that India's relations with the western countries are not merely dependent. India has been an active player in international trade and investment and has come up with a set of economic and technological skills of its own. India's investments in the United States and the involvement in international value chains indicate the economic relationship between the two countries. For instance, the India–U.S. brief states that Indian companies have invested significantly in the United States, which is not a one-way street. The cultural/educational aspect is more complicated. English language dominance, international education, migration, global consumption and exchange of knowledge can enhance India's access to the opportunities at global level while also exerting pressure towards standardization or westernization.

There is therefore literature to support the understanding of soft colonization as a process of influence and not direct control. India's response too is an example of agency. Cultural adaptation, selective adoption of global practices, increased national identity and involvement in other international structures represent negotiated external influence, not just imposed. Hence, globalization can generate integration, opportunity, cultural hybridisation and dependency at the same time.

8. Conclusion

The study in this context took upon the soft colonization of the post-colonial India in terms of its socioeconomic and cultural influence of the United States and Europe. The secondary evidence shows that there is a significant degree of economic integration, by means of trade and foreign investment, and that globalization has also increased India's educational, technological, cultural and knowledge links with Western societies. Yet the results do not lend themselves to the easy equation of globalization or greater western trade with soft colonization. Rather, the evidence suggests an interdependent, opportunity, influence, and potential dependency relationship exists. India's engagement with international markets and institutions shows a lot of agency, and its ongoing attempt to retain cultural identity shows that external influence is negotiated and adapted.

Soft colonization can thus be interpreted as a multiple and conflicting process, which can manifest itself in economic structures, knowledge systems, language, education, technology and culture and not necessarily in territorial control. The globalization has provided opportunities for development and issues of autonomy and cultural identity have arisen in the case of India. It is not, however, an easy dichotomy between globalization and colonization, but rather a study of power and agency in the current global relations in India.

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