Difference Between Colonialism and Imperialism

Colonialism often sees many people moving permanently to these colonies. However, they still maintain allegiance to their mother country. Colonialism is a form of Imperialism, but the latter is broader in scope. The imperial powers seek to expand their empire and spread their dominance far and wide.

Below, you will learn about the difference between colonialism and Imperialism in detail along with a brief detail about the two.

What is Colonialism?

Colonialism is the practice of expanding control over a foreign region by setting up colonies or dependencies within the area. Colonialism is exercised for the economic exploitation of the host country. Colonizers also often propagate their culture, language, and religion to these colonies. The British Raj in India from 1858 till the country's independence in 1947 is an example of Colonialism.

Colonialism can be of various kinds:

- **Settler Colonialism**: Where one country settles over another, seeking to replace the native population of that region.
- **Exploitation Colonialism**: Where a powerful country seeks to exploit weaker nations' natural resources and labour by force.
- **Surrogate Colonialism**: Where a ruling power encourages and supports a nation to overtake and control another nation.
- **Internal Colonialism**: Where a powerful group in society dominates the weaker group within that society.

What is Imperialism?

Imperialism is a nation's policy of extending power and influence over other countries through diplomacy or force. It is the ideology behind Colonialism. A country can rule over another country through soft power (political or economic power) or hard power (military force).

The three major types of Imperialism besides Colonialism are

- **Protectorate**: In this type of Imperialism, although a country has its government, a stronger foreign government decides for them.
- **Sphere of Influence**: It occurs when a foreign government, through its power, claims certain rights and benefits, including trade and investment privileges.
- **Economic Imperialism**: Economic Imperialism is when private businesses control and influence a country's economy.

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The major difference between Colonialism and Imperialism based on their meaning, aim, features, focus, eco-political aspects, and examples is given in the table below-

Basis of Difference	Colonialism	Imperialism
Meaning	Colonialism is the practice of dividing the region into colonies to assume physical control over those regions.	Imperialism refers to the political or economic suppression of one nation by another through soft or hard power.
Aim	Colonialism aims to exploit the resources of the conquered countries for the benefit of the conqueror.	Imperialism seeks to create an empire, expand into neighbouring regions, and exert its dominance far and wide.

Feature	In Colonialism, many people from one region move to another territory to build colonies. The colonies gradually alter the region's social, physical, and economic structure.	Such mass movement is not a feature of Imperialism.
Eco-political Aspects	The native people have to give up on their way of life as it is usually destroyed.	The native people are allowed to continue with their own way of life.

Focus	Colonialism focuses on gaining economic access by exploitation.	Imperialism also focuses on developing those regions through economic and political control.
Settlement	The settlers come together and form colonies.	The settlers do not live in the country they are dominating.
Example	Settlement and control of Europeans in India, Australia, North America, Algeria, Brazil, etc., is an example of Colonialism.	The United States looking to become a world power is an instance of Imperialism.

This was the major difference between Colonialism and Imperialism. In Colonialism, there is an establishment of the colony of dominators on the foreign land while in case of imperialism, a country takes over a region or whole country. Nowadays, Imperialism is not a common practice.