

Impact of Britishers in Indian Culture

Dr. Abhilasha Jaiman

Assistant Professor in History, Government Girls College, Chomu, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: The Britishers were instrumental in introducing Western culture, education and scientific techniques. Through those means, they gave traditional Indian life a jolt and galvanized the life and culture of its people. Undoubtedly, the Seventeenth Century marked the zenith of Indian medieval glory. It gave way to the Eighteenth century which was a spectacle of corruption, misery and chaos leading to political helplessness. Right from 1498 when Vasco da Gamma set his foot on Indian soil, the European powers entered into Indian scene one after another. The Portuguese power had no comparison to French and English. Ultimately in the conflict between the French and English, the latter became successful and planted the victorious banner of England in India in 1757 with the victory of Robert Clive.

KEYWORDS: british, Indian, culture, conflict, western, soil, instrumental, introduced, education

I. INTRODUCTION

Western influence became effective in India mainly through the British who were the pioneers of a new technological and industrial civilization. They represented a new historic force which was later to change the world and thus were the torchbearers of a revolutionary change. India accepted the suzerainty of the British authority coming under its iron grip. Intellectually indifferent, spiritually subdued and psychologically weak at that time, [1,2] India had to adopt with the British authorities. That is why the British impact was abiding and lasting on the Indian people. Indian response to Western impact was a first noticed in the field of religion. Of course, Christianity was not a new thing in India before the arrival of the British. During rule of East India Company, the Christian missionary activities in India became widespread. As complications in Vedic religion gave way to the rise of heterodox religion and the impact of Islam had given encouragement to the Bhakti Movement in medieval times, the advent of Western civilization caused the growth of reform movement in modern times. The first torch-bearer of Indian cultural renaissance was Raja Rammohan Roy. With the foundation of 'Brahmo Samaj', in 1828 began a new chapter in the Indian reformation movement. It was the synthesis of some of the main elements in Hinduism and Christianity. To synthesize the culture of East and West, it encouraged rationalism and social reforms. Besides a religious reformer, Rammohan was known to all as an ardent social reformer, staunch patriot, pioneer of modern education and above all the father of modern Indian renaissance. [3,4] He was followed by Keshab Chandra Sen who established 'Pratthana Samaj'. In the middle of the Nineteenth century, a reaction set in and thoughtful men began to wonder if they strayed too far from the traditions of their ancestors. Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the chief apostle of this new school of thought, founded 'Arya Samaj' and gave a clarion call to all – "Go back to the Vedas".

He advised people not to be influenced by religions like Islam and Christianity but to return to the pure teachings of the Vedas where lies the essence of Indian culture. The religious reaction against surrender to Western and Christian influence was to go still further. Rama Krishna Paramahansa and his great disciple Swami Vivekananda preached the purest form of Hinduism. [5,6]

II. DISCUSSION

Vivekananda was a novel blend of East and West and his words – "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached" definitely instilled nationalism into the nerves of the people. Aurobindo, Vidyasagar, M.G. Ranade etc. were other social reformers. In this way the Western influence was largely felt so far as the religious and social reformation movements were concerned.

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Rule of Law:

The political instability of India was put an end to by the establishment of an orderly and centralized government by the British. It demolished the traditional personal rule and later brought about the development of 'Rule of Law'. The multiplicity of governmental functions gave rise to an organised bureaucracy which eclipsed the self-governing village Panchayats. The new concept of India introduced by the British authorities was 'Equality before Law'. This idea was definitely in variance with the Hindu thought. The insistence of British courts on dealing equally with a Brahmin and an outcaste was at first resented by the Indians and accepted in the long run. A Brahmin, a Muslim, a Christian and a member of any sect – all became equal before the law. A hierarchy of judicial officers was created to impart justice to one and all.[7,8]

Constitutional Development:

In the sphere of constitution, the idea of human equality, human rights and liberty were the gifts of British influence. It leased a nation coughed, choked and groaned under the British hegemony which got soothing balm in the form of liberty in speech, action, religion and so on and so forth. Even the Indians could criticize the activities of the British government. The Government Acts of 1919 and 1935 were pointers in these directions.

Reorganization of Indian Civil Service:

The Indian Civil Service was carefully built up during the British rule into a powerful and efficient bureaucratic force. In the last decade of Eighteenth Century, Cornwallis set himself to purity and reorganized the administration and filled all the key posts with men from Britain. With the gradual march of time, other more specialized services were established and the Public Works Department, Indian Police Service, Indian Forest Service, Indian Medical Service followed each other in succession. Thus, the British authorities undertook the process of converting India into a modern state. The present Indian administrative system is a legacy of the British rule.[9,10]

Social Sphere:

In the social sphere British impact proved to be beneficial. The prohibition of Sati, abolition of child-marriage, introduction of widow remarriage, checking of infanticide, polygamy, untouchability etc. eradicated age old social evils from the Indian society. Further, the undermining of caste and sex distinctions were certain other commendable measures of the British which encouraged the Indians to incorporate all these ideas while framing their constitution. Thus, many social evils had come to their logical end long before India became independent. Thus, catholicity was introduced to Indian society by the British authorities.

III.RESULTS

In the economic sphere, the British people were regarded as exploiters from the very beginning. Before the British colonialism, India had a flourishing export trade in silk, cotton, salt, sugar etc. However, the British rule ruined the basic economic structure of India. Indian rural economy was transformed to suit the new modes of industrial Britain. This altogether changed the community structure and Indian way of life. In industrial sphere, Indian manufacturing skill, in spinning, weaving, ivory, gold and silver works, filigree and luxury goods suffered a set back because of British industrial policy. Indian traditional agriculture was converted to cultivation of cash crops like indigo and tobacco which left stigmas of poverty on Indian peasants. Besides, the raw materials from India was exported to England what Dada Bhai Naoroji rightly called as 'The Drain of Wealth'. This made India poorer. The other side of the coin is also to be taken into consideration. The inflow of Western capital, development of a modern banking and communication system, the establishment of textile, jute, sugar, cement, glass and other factories led to rapid industrialization in India which brought modern industries into existence. The growth of modern industry and commerce brought urbanization. Further, the artistic skill of Indians for elegance, balance [11,12] and beauty increased and it brought refinement in their attitude and taste. The demand of Indian coffee and tea in European countries led to plantation and that legacy India still continues which enables her to meet a great part of her economy. Rapid industrialization brought modern system of transport and communication. During Lord Dalhousie's period, the first railway line was built and the train ran between Bombay and Thane in 1853. Then the Calcutta-Raniganj railway line was built and later on the Madras-Arcot railway. Similarly, right from the time of Lord William Bentinck, the highway building activities were carried on. In 1839, the Grand Trunk Road was built, that connected Delhi and Calcutta. Later on it was connected with Lahore and Peshawar. Lord Dalhousie also galvanized the activity of Postal Department by introducing Penny Postage System in India. Further, he was instrumental in bringing the telegraph system in India. All

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these modern systems of transport and communication, all in a sudden, took India to a modern world. The impact of this modernisation was largely felt on every walk of Indian life. This acted as a boomerang for the British authorities in India[13]

Education:

The lasting impact of the West on Indian culture was the introduction of English system of education in this country. In the Eighteenth century, India was intellectually stagnant. She was untouched by the new scientific development of the west. The historic decision taken by Lord Macaulay in 1835 was a turning point in India history which opened the flood-gates of European thought and literature for Indian intellectuals. This broke the intellectual isolation of the Indian mind and brought it into contact with Western science, literature, philosophy, history and so on. The 'Downward Filtration Theory' of Macaulay, 'Woods Despatch' in 1854 and 'Hunter Commission' in 1882 expanded the intellectual horizons of Indians. It eradicated the spell of mythical geography, legendary history and pseudo science from the Indian mind and acquainted them with new scientific knowledge of the west. This was really a lasting impact of the west of Indian culture.

The British help in rediscovering the glorious past of India is certainly memorable. The distinct contribution of the European scholars to Indian historiography was ideological studies which began with the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 by Sir William Jones. Then a band of British scholars were dragged to the research on Indian history and culture. Sir William Jones, by identifying Chandragupta Maurya with Sandrakottas of the Greek historians established the first fixed point on Indian chronology. James Prinsep, by his careful examination of Asokan inscriptions[14,15], was able to decipher it. Other European scholars like V. A. Smith, Macdonell, Elphinstone, Grand Daff, Colonel Tod etc. carried on their research on Indian history and culture. Their view points were many times contradicted by Indian scholars like Mahamahopadhyaya, H.P. Sastri, R.G. Bhandarkar, K.P. Jayswal, H.C. Raychaudhuri and several others. In this way research was further carried on Indian history by Western and Indian scholars as well. Further, the establishment of the Department of Archaeology by Lord Curzon created another milestone for opening of new horizons in 1921 -22 unearthed the remains of a flourishing culture by their excavations at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. This changed the course of Indian history.

Nationalism:

The Western impact on Indians was responsible for arousing nationalism in them. By going through the high ideals of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" of the French Revolution of 1789, Proletarian Revolution of Russia in 1917, and American War of Independence of 1776... the Indians were surcharged with the spirit of nationalism. That nationalism, on the other hand, gave birth to Indian National Congress which carried on protracted struggle against the British Raj till it was evacuated from Indian soil. The fairy call of Bal Gangadhar Tilak – 'Freedom is my birth right and I shall have it' inspired millions of Indians to carry on their freedom struggle against the British Raj.[16,17]

IV.CONCLUSIONS

The Western impact had spread into every sphere of Indian life. The same was also extended to the sphere of art and architecture. No doubt, Indian artists retained their traditional value but they could not remain uninfluenced from the British mode of architectural designs. The British people built many forts, buildings, cathedrals, factories and bungalows. Fort William, St. George, Bombay government office, Lahore railway station, Victoria Memorial in Calcutta were but a few examples of European architectural style. Later on, the Indian artists made a novel blend of Hindu, Mughal and Victorian style which were reflected in their architectural designs.

Food, Dress and Style:

The Western impact on Indian food, dress and style was largely felt. Bread, toast, fruits, mixture, boiled eggs in tiffin what the Europeans were consuming were followed by the educated Indians. The use of tea, coffee, dining tables, bars etc. were imitated by the Indians. Full pants, shirts, shoes, tie etc. were used by the educated Indians too. The modern etiquettes like showing gestures in the form of 'good morning', 'good afternoon', 'good night', 'good bye', 'see you', 'Best of luck', 'ta-ta', 'bye-bye' etc. were the contributions of the West to Indian culture.[18,19]

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Literature:

The impact of Western literature on Indian literature was intensive. The composition of poetry was a Rig Vedic practice. However, with the influence of English literature, novels, short-stories, essays and modern drama Indian writings developed, Shakespeare became an integral part of Indian study curriculum and his works were translated into several Indian languages. Similarly, other Western literature, particularly novels were translated into Indian languages. In the light of Western literature, Indians attempted to write and thus Indian literature was enriched by the Western impact.

Psychological attitude:

Attitudinal change among the Indians occurred due to Western impact on Indian tradition. Being a self-contained and agricultural community, Indians were conservative, hospitable, tolerant and somewhat fatalist. Coming under the grip of the British rule, they became rebellious, self-reliant and vindictive. With the gradual march of time, they launched their struggle for freedom against the British Raj.[20,21]

Dance and Music:

Of course, the two hundred years of British rule in India could not bring any drastic change in her dance and music. Certain change, however, were noticed in popular music, especially in Indian cinemas. Modern musical compositions adopted Western techniques. Among Indian composer, Akbar Khan occasionally incorporated a certain amount of harmony and Western melodies into his improvisations. In due course of time, Western dance was imitated in Indian cinemas with a very limited extent.

Negative Aspects of Western Impact:

If the Western impact brought out the best in Indian society, it also made worst damage to its culture. The policy of 'Divide and Rule' which the British authority adopted on Indian soil brought sharp division among the Hindus and Muslims which finally destroyed the political unity of this country resulting in the creation of India and Pakistan. Next, it created clerical attitude which barred the progress of India for a long time. Besides, it introduced sophistication in food, dress and manners which buried Indianans to a great extent. In these ways, it cast its ugly shadow over the culture of India. The Western impact produced radical and lasting changes in Indian society and culture. The new technologies, institutions, knowledge, values and temper which the British people had brought with them, transformed the Indian society and culture a lot. Due to Western impact, India was more progressive in out-look and attitude. In every possible way, the Western impact uplifted Indian society and enriched Indian culture.[22,23]

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