

Decolonising Indian Minds

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Abstract

India is a country of myriad culture, religion, ethos & living. Recent developments have posed serious challenges to its all encompassing ideas and way of living. Hinduism as a weapon of an ideological hegemony has turned to rigidity and obscurantism. Colonialism may have ended in traditional sense, but efforts are being made to sub-verse reasoning to ideological leanings. Though word 'Hindu' is of an Arabic origin which has more geographical connotations than religious. It has always been a way of life and not a religion in dogmatic sense. No priest or prophet has been behind the origin of this religion or the way of life. You can be a Hindu whether you bear a sacred thread around your neck or not, whether you pray to any god or not. You are a Hindu till you don't claim an allegiance to any other religion. Gandhiji personified the concept of Hinduism in the best possible way. He was not an idol worshipper yet he was deeply religious. He discarded castes based society and other dogmas prevalent in India at his time yet he practised Hindu way of living.

Keywords: Decolonisation, orientalist, Dharma, Semitic

Introduction

The greatest event of world history in the 20th century has been the event of decolonisation. The process of de-colonisation began after the Second World War. The world-wars in quick succession have weakened the colonial powers and they were finding it hard to stretch their resources to far of lands. This allowed the colonised countries to break the bondage, not to say about the nationalist movement which was encouraged by the western concept of liberty, equality and right to self-determination. Colonialism ended in traditional sense but it continued in various forms i.e. neo-colonialism, imperialism, ideological hegemony etc. It is in this background that we need to understand our culture and rich heritage. we need to prevent colonial influence while studying India. We should focus more on what happened in the last 5000 years rather than just 19th century. Did you know that in 1661 the islands of Bombay were given in dowry to King Charles II of England when he married Catherine de Braganza of Portugal¹. It was only in 1920 that women in U.S. earned the right to vote & contest, whereas Indian women were given a higher status long before. Orientalist might have been the agents of colonial projects. Their studies do not necessarily mean that they come here to know about our societies but also to interpret the society in a way that suits colonisation. The imperialist have essentially based their modus-opendi in governance and administration on the pursuance of their colonial interests. Two centuries of colonial rule has left indelible impact on our Indian society ranging from the way people walk, talk and dress to the manner in which society is regulated by rules, laws and directions. Foreign rulers redefined India social, cultural and political landscape. As a result we, the followers of Dharma have become defensive on certain issues and importantly several misconception have arisen in our minds. Because of this we are forever measuring ourselves against western concepts without knowing and understanding the Indian one.

The fact that today English is the lingua franca of India shows the influence that British had as colonial rules of India. The education system right from KG to PG was patterned on the basis of report of Lord Macaulay. Many of laws that regulate lives of Indians today were formed during the colonial rule ranging from Indian penal code to constitution and criminal penal code. The political system prevalent in India is also a reflection of colonial influence. India's founding fathers were trained in parliamentary politics and hence found it comfortable to follow it after independence. The British governance and administration gave birth to a new middle class, who were educated and trained in colonial culture. These neo-rich were Indian in blood but British in thought. This elite culture continued even after independence because we were unable to dismantle

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British laws and administration. In fact civil-services are still holding strong and running the government. It is still a dream job for every aspiring student. The exploitative administration which was put in place by the Britishers continued as we were unable to provide any indigenous system as an alternative. Feudalism which impeded the growth of our spiritual and cultural ethos continued in new form.

Now question arises what went wrong with us in our development that we lost the initiative of the ancient era to the western world. We need to be careful while analysing our past and comparing it with the civilisations of western world. Till the advent of Renaissance in Europe India and western world were more or less at par with each other. Medieval period which symbolised feudalism and primacy of religion impeded the growth of new energies and thought and thus old structures remained entrenched. Renaissance in Europe released mind of its old fetters and destroyed many idol that it had cherished, a new spirit of objective inquiry was making itself felt, a spirit which not only challenged old established authority, but also abstraction and vague speculation. On the other hand Asia has become dormant, exhausted, as it were by its past efforts Europe backwards in many ways was on the threshold of vast changes. It is here where India lost its inner vigour and was slowly overpowered by the Britishers.

The two centuries of British rule gave birth to a new middle –class who were educated and trained in colonial culture. These neo-rich were Indian in blood but British in thought. Committed bureaucracy which was created by the Britishers for exploitation continued even after independence. The elite culture of bureaucrats gave rise to callousness and corruption and there was no attempt to change the very nature of the administrative class. Thought there has been far reaching changes in the parent civil services in Britain long ago. It reformed its structure to better incorporate the specialists' need of effective modern governance.

In fact one of the reasons for India's limited progress is that post independent India is at odds with its true nature. It is actually a Dharma Yudh between secular /colonial India vs Dharma/Barat. From time immemorial, the great aim of human endeavour in India was dharma, artha, Kama and moksha roughly translated as righteousness, wealth, worldly pleasures and salvation. While Artha has a much wider significance than merely wealth, making profit was never a dirty word. What mattered was how the wealth was earned and spent. When a nation of human being behave in a manner i.e. alien to their inner nature, long term progress is impossible. The day Indians are guided by Indian thought is the day India will be truly free. I am inspired by these words of swami-Vivekananda."India must conquer the world and nothing less is my ideal. Our eternal foreign policy must be the export of the shastras to the nations of the world. One of the reasons for India's downfall was that she narrowed herself, went into shell, as the oyster does and refused to give her treasures and jewels to the other races of mankind outside the Aryan fold"².

We need to seek our identity in our past i.e. that is Vedic era. This past is something not to be contemplated but to be felt, not only in their thinking, but should also reflect in their writings. The past should be dug up with all its roots and then felt in the blood stream. Our country has three names, Bharat means the land of Knowledge, Hindustan means the Hindi speaking areas of Indian subcontinent, India is of Greek origin Greeks who probably gained their first idea of India from Persians, dropped the hard aspirate and called Hindus 'indoi'. Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote "The people on the Indian side of the Sindhu were called Hindu by the Persians and the later western invaders"³. "The term 'Hindu' according to Dr. Radhakrishnan had originally a territorial and not a creedal significance. It implies residence in a well defined geographical area"⁴. had originally a territorial and not a When we say knowledge it means about the inner self and its relationship to the external world. (OF Hindustan, Hindu and Hindi). Western democracy is based on the rights and duties of man. It cherishes ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity. Dharma is the Indian conception of way of life and conduct. In Dharma rights and duties lose the artificial antagonism created by views of the world, which makes selfishness the root of action and regain their deep and eternal unity. Dharma is the basis of democracy which Asia must recognise, for in this lies the distinction between soul of Asia and soul of Europe. Democracy is here to stay in India but what is needed is a change in attitude. Most interpret the meaning of world "right" as what is in it for me. Dharma is about practicing righteousness at all times. It is where rights and duties lose their relevance. Instead, then it is transformation from asking what you can do for me to what I can do for you. When one removes I and Me from one's mind one eliminates ego and hatred towards fellow human beings.

What is religion? Sri. Aurobindo wrote "There is no world as plastic and uncertain in its meaning as the world religion. The word is European....."⁵. Religion is a Semitic concept, believes in a historical prophet and lives by a holy book. Thus a combination of Jesus and Bible or Mohammed and the Quran establish the

distinct identity of Christianity and Islam. According to them salvation is possible only if you accept the authority of their prophet and holy book.

Conversely, Hinduism does not have a prophet or a holy book and does not claim that one can achieve self-realisation through only the Hindu way. Open-mindedness and simultaneous existence of various schools have been the hall mark of Indian thought. -----Hindi----cultural ties with these countries.

We are so influenced by western thought that we created religions where none existed. Today Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are treated as Separate religions when they are actually different ways to achieve self-realisation. We need to disengage ourselves with the western world. We shall not let our culture to stand like an accused in an alien court to be tried under alien law. We shall not compare ourselves point by point with some western ideal, in order to feel either shame or pride ---we do not wish to have to prove to any one whether we are good or bad, civilised or savage (world ----- that we are ourselves is all we wish to feel it for all we are worth.

During an independence struggle Gandhi was largely successful because he did not descend from the top, he seemed to emerge from millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to our rich philosophical and cultural heritage. He was essentially a man of religion a Hindu to the inner-most depth of his being, and yet his conception of religion had nothing to do with any dogma or custom of ritual. Indian 'culture' he wrote is neither Hindu, Islamic nor any other, wholly. It is a fusion of all. Again he said 'I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to live in other peoples house as an interloper, a beggar, or a slave'⁶. Influenced by modern thought and current, he never let go his roots and cling to them tenaciously.

He thus set about to restore the spiritual unity of the people and to break the barrier between the small westernised group at the top and the masses, to discover the living elements in the old roots and to build upon them, to weaken the masses out of their stupor and static condition and make them dynamic. In his single track and yet many sided nature the dominating impression that one gathered was his identification with the masses, a community of spirit with them, an amazing sense of unity with the dispossessed and poverty stricken not only of India but of the world. Even religion as everything else took second place to his passion to raise these submerged people. A semi-starved nation can have neither religion nor art, nor organisation. Whatever can be useful to starving millions is beautiful to my mind. Let us give today first vital things of life and all the graces and ornaments of life will follow..... I want art and literature that can speak to millions. These unhappy dispossessed millions haunted him and everything seemed to revolve round them 'for millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal traces his ambition he said was 'to wipe every tear from every eye'.

Gandhi challenged the western world and colonial ethos by digging deep in the roots of Indian culture and philosophical values, mending and changing them according to the demand of time. He discarded castes based society and other dogmas prevalent in India at his time. He was not an idol worshipper yet he was deeply religious. Religion means purity, spiritualism, right means, detachment and sacrifice. Western concept of secularism, industrialisation, atheism and economic development never appealed to him. He gave his own concept of secularism, economic development, cottage industry, society and religion. He not only preached Indian culture and values but practised them in front of the world and in the process he broke the hegemony of colonial ideology and western superiority and subdued them with Indian concept of detachment, truth, self belief and renunciation.

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