CC-12:HISTORY OF INDIA(1750s-1857)

III. COLONIAL STATE AND IDEOLOGY:

(B). IDEOLOGIES OF THE RAJ AND RACIAL ATTITUDES.

In a post-Enlightenment intellectual environment, the British also started defining themselves as modern or civilised vis-à-vis the Orientals and this rationalised their imperial vision in the nineteenth century, which witnessed the so-called 'age of reform'. In other words, British imperial ideology for India was the result of such intellectual and political crosscurrents at home. Sometimes, "sub-imperialism" of the men on the spot, regarded by some as the "real founders of empire",' and pressures from the ruled-in short, the crises in the periphery-led to adjustments and mutations in the functioning of that ideology. The nature of the imperial connection also changed over time; but not its fundamentals.

The government of the East India Company functioned like an "Indian ruler", in the sense that it recognised the authority of the Mughal emperor, struck coins in his name, used Persian as the official language and administered Hindu and Muslim laws in the courts. Lord Clive himself had recommended a system of "double government" as a matter of expediency under which the criminal justice system would be left in the hands of nawabi officials, while civil and fiscal matters would be controlled by the Company. This policy of least intervention, which had emanated from pure pragmatism to avoid civil disturbance. The Anglicisation of the structure of this administration began, but it progressed, as it seems, gradually. It was not, in other words, a revolutionary change, as the officials looked at themselves "as inheritors rather than innovators, as the revivers of a decayed system".

The early image of India in the West was that of past glory accompanied by an idea of degeneration. There was an urge to know Indian culture and tradition, as reflected in the endeavours of scholars like Sir William Jones, who studied the Indian languages to restore to the Indians their own forgotten culture and legal system-monopolised hitherto only by the learned pundits and maulvis (Hindu and Islamic learned men). By establishing a linguistic connection between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin-all supposedly belonging to the same Indo-European family of languages-Jones privileged India with an antiquity equal to that of - classical West. This was the beginning of the Orientalist tradition that led to the

founding of institutions like the Calcutta Madrassa (1781), the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) and the Sanskrit College in Banaras (1794), all of which were meant to promote the study of Indian languages and scriptures.

Orientalism in practice in its early phase could be seen in the policies of the Company's government under Warren Hastings. The fundamental principle of this tradition was that the conquered people were to be ruled by their own laws-British rule had to "legitimize itself in an Indian idiom". It therefore needed to produce know ledge about Indian society, a process sometimes referred to as "reverse acculturation". It informed the European rulers of the customs and laws of the land for the purposes of assimilating them into the subject society for more efficient administration. It was with this political vision that Fort William College at Calcutta was established in 1800 to train civil servants in Indian languages and tradition. Orientalism also had another political aspect. By establishing a relation of kinship between the British and the Indians , the latter were sought to be morally bound to colonial rule through a rhetoric of "love". But if the Orientalist discourse was initially premised on a respect for ancient Indian traditions, it produced a knowledge about the subject society, which ultimately prepared the ground for the rejection of Orientalism as a policy of governance. These scholars not only highlighted the classical glory of India-crafted by the Aryans, but also emphasised the subsequent degeneration of the once magnificent Aryan civilisation. This legitimated authoritarian rule, as India needed to be rescued from the predicament of its own creation and elevated to a desired state of progress as achieved by Europe.

Hastings's policy was therefore abandoned by Lord Cornwallis, who went for greater Anglicisation of the administration and the imposition of the Whig principles of the British government. Lord Wellesley supported these moves, the aim of which was to limit government interference by abandoning the supposedly despotic aspects of Indian political tradition and ensuring a separation of powers between the judiciary and the executive. The state's role would only be the protection of individual rights and private property. The policy came from a consistent disdain for "Oriental despotism", from which Indians needed to be emancipated. Despotism was something that distinguished the Oriental state from its European counter- part; but ironically, it was the same logic that provided an "implicit justification" for the "paternalism of the Raj". From the very early stages of conquest, the Company state tried to curb the local influence of the rajas and zamindars, the local remnants of the Mughal

state, in order to ensure a free flow of trade and steady collection of revenues. And ostensibly for that same purpose, it took utmost care in surveying and policing the territory and insisted on the exclusive control over the regalia of power, e.g., flag, uniform, badges and seals. This indicated the emergence of a strong state, based on the premise that natives were not used to enjoying freedom and needed to be emancipated from their corrupt and abusive feudal lords. Men like William Jones typified such paternalist attitude exhibited by many British officers at that time. Radical at home, attracted to the glorious past of India and its simple people, they remained nonetheless the upholders of authoritarian rule in India.

Both the systems, it therefore appears, were based on the same fundamental principles of centralised sovereignty, sanctity of private property, to be protected by British laws. This authoritative paternalism rejected the idea of direct political participation by Indians." Respect and paternalism, therefore, remained the two complementing ideologies of the early British empire in India. And significantly, it was soon discovered that imperial authoritarianism could function well in conjunction with the local elites of Indian rural society-the zamindars in Bengal and the mirasidars in Madras whose power was therefore buttressed by both the Cornwallis system and the Munro system, both of which sought to define and protect private property. If the Awadh taluqdars lost out, their agony caused the revolt of 1857; and after the revolt they were again restored to their former positions of glory and authority.

Around 1800 the Industrial Revolution in Britain created the necessity to develop and integrate the Indian markets tor manufactured goods and ensure a secured supply of raw materials. This required a more effective administration and the tying up of the colony to the economy of the mother country. There were also several new intellectual currents in Britain, which preached the idea of improvement and thus pushed forward t issue of reform both at home and in India. While the pressure of the free trade lobby at home worked towards the abolition of the Company's monopoly over Indian trade, it was Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism, which brought about a fundamental change in the nature of the Company's administration in India. Both these two schools of thought asserted that the conquest of India had been by acts of sin or crime; but instead of advocating the abolition of this sinful or criminal rule, they clamoured for its reform, so that Indians could get the benefit of good government in keeping with the "best ideas of their age". It was from these two intellectual traditions

"the conviction that England should remain in India permanently was finally to evolve".

Evangelicalism started its crusade against Indian barbarism and advocated the permanence of British rule with a mission to change the very "nature of Hindostan". In India the spokespersons of this idea were the missionaries located at Srirampur near Calcutta; but at home its chief exponent was Charles Grant. The principal problem of India, he argued in 1792, was the religious ideas that perpetuated the ignorance of Indian people. This could be effectively changed through the dissemination of Christian light, and in this lay the noble mission of British rule in India. Grant's ideas were given greater publicity by William Wilberforce in the Parliament before the passage of the Charter Act of 1813, which allowed Christian missionaries to enter India without restrictions.17 The idea of improvement and change was also being advocated by the free-trade merchants, who believed that India would be a good market for British goods and a supplier of raw materials, if the Company shifted attention from its functions as a trader to those of a ruler. Under a good government the Indian peasants could again experience improvement to become consumers of British products. Fundamentally, there was no major difference between the Evangelist and the free-trade merchant positions as regards the policy of assimilation and Anglicisation. Indeed, it was the Evangelist Charles Grant who presided over the passage of the Charter Act of 1833, which took away the Company's monopoly rights over India trade.

This was also the age of British liberalism, one of whose offshoot s was Utilitarianism, with all its distinctive authoritarian tendencies. Jeremy Bentham preached that the ideal of human civilisation was to achieve greatest happiness of the greatest number .Good laws, efficient and enlightened administration, according to him, were the most effective agents of change. With the coming of the Utilitarian James Mill to the East India Company's London office, Indian policies came to be guided by such doctrines. In The History of British India, published in 1817, he first exploded the myth of India's economic and cultural riches, perpetuated by the "susceptible imagination" of men like Sir William Jones. What India needed for her improvement, he contended in a typical Benthamite fashion, was an effective schoolmaster, i.e., a wise government promulgating good legislation .It was largely due to his efforts that a Law Commission was appointed in 1833 under Lord Macaulay and it drew up an Indian Penal Code in 1835 on the Benthamite model.

The Utilitarians differed from the liberals in significant ways, especially with regard to the question of Anglicisation. While the liberal Lord Macaulay in his famous Education Minute of 1835 presented a strong case for the introduction of English education, Utilitarians like Mill still favoured vernacular education as more suited to Indian needs. In other words, dilemmas in imperial attitudes towards India persisted in the first half of the nineteenth century. This predicament was epitomised by Lord Bentinck himself. An ardent follower of Mill, he abolished sati and child infanticide through legislation. But at the same time, he retained his faith in Indian traditions and nurtured a desire to give back to the Indians their true religion. The official discourse on the proposed reform of sati was, therefore, grounded in a scriptural logic that its abolition was warranted by ancient Hindu texts. The Indian Penal Code drafted in 1835 could not become an act until 1860. The dilemmas definitely persisted the mid-nineteenth century, in spite of Lord Dalhousie's determination to take forward Mill's vision of aggressive advancement of Britain's mission in India.

The statements of racial superiority of the rulers were not for the first time being made in the mid-nineteenth century. If we look at the actual functioning of the empire, such statements were made rather loudly since the late eighteenth century, when Cornwallis transformed the Company's bureaucracy into an "aloof elite"', maintaining physical separation from the ruled. The Company's civil servants were discouraged from having Indian mistresses and were urged to have British wives and thus preserved the English exclusiveness. Any action undermining that exclusiveness, according to Henry Dundas, the first President of the Board of Control would surely "ruin our Indian Empire." Such over statements of physical segregation between the ruler and the ruled as an ideology of empire were quite clear in the very way the human environment of the imperial capital city of Calcutta developed in the eighteenth century. In the early eighteenth century, this spatial segregation along racial lines had been less sharply marked, as there was a White Town and a Black Town, intersected by a Grey Town or an intermediate zone, dominated by the Eurasians (the children of mixed marriages), but accessible to the natives as well. The position of the Eurasians-the children of mixed marriages continually went down in the imperial pecking order since 1791, when they were debarred from covenanted civil and higher-grade military or marine services. The racial polarisation of colonial society was now complete. By the early nineteenth century, "the social distance" between the people and the ruling race became an easily discernible reality in Calcutta's urban life. However, during the first half of the nineteenth

century along with racial arrogance, there was also a liberal optimism, as expressed in Lord Macaulay's ambition to transform the indolent Indian into a brown sahib, European in taste and intellect-though Indian in blood and colour. It was this very optimism that was broken by the rude shock of 1857.

REFERRENCE

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