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The Intersection of Philosophy and Acculturation : Colonial Influences on Indian Thought

Abstract : This essay aims to highlight the intricate relationship between Cultural change (Acculturation) and Philosophy during the time the British colonized the Indian Subcontinent. The two major perspectives taken into account are that of the Dominant Group (the British) and the Non-Dominant group (The Indians) to which correspond, the fourfold model of acculturation by J.W Berry being put in a philosophical context namely (a) Philosophical Assimilation (b) Philosophical Separation (c) Philosophical Integration (d) Philosophical Marginalization.

The two points of view of assimilation and marginalization can be grouped under the response by the dominant group and the remaining two under the non-dominant group. This essay thus argues that philosophy being the way of life cannot be separated from the culture and time it was developed under. And when the British captured India there was a rapid cultural change thus giving rise to the change in the Philosophical Paradigm, which continues to be the case even after Independence. The cultural change enabled the natives to the process of forced assimilation of Western philosophical ideals with those of

the East and finally marginalizing Eastern philosophy. Thus, due to continuous dominance and subjugation the natives (the non-dominant group) compelled the integration of the Western ideas and principles for it was imperative for its survival but eventually separating the ideals to retain its Identity, culture, and Philosophy.

Keywords : Acculturation, Colonialism, J.W Berry, Time.

Introduction : The British colonial era marked a very important period in the Indian history. Indian colonization did not just include political and economic domination but that of intellectual as well. Throughout the early colonial years, India underwent into significant cultural transformation. This essay tries to look into the relationship between the process of acculturation and philosophy during the colonial transformative period. This will be done by examining the role of British domination and the local Indian population. Their engagement with the intellectual traditions will play a huge role in understanding the process.

To understand the process, the article takes the help of J.W Berry's fourfold concept of acculturation¹. The essay makes the case that philosophy is inextricably linked to the historical and cultural context in which it was formed. The philosophical paradigm was changed

as a result of the swift cultural change brought about by the British invasion of India. The effects of these colonial experiences have persisted in shaping Indian thought even after the country attained independence. The imposition of Western standards and the marginalization of Eastern philosophy compelled Indians to adapt new survival strategies while attempting to maintain their philosophical and cultural identities.

1. Acculturation and Philosophy

The Indian Subcontinent was colonized by the British for about 200 years and in the process of their dominance there was a major cultural exchange but it was not a two-way process. A new culture was imposed on the Indigenous population. It was not by choice but was made an imperative to live and interact with the new culture to survive. The host country not only subjugated and conquered India but it forced its culture, values, and language upon the Indians. The conquest was not a simple process. It began with understanding the language till every aspect of the intellectual tradition. The British tried and to an extent succeeded in capturing not only the Indian land but also the mind, they colonized the minds of the indigenous. The changes were brought in about all aspects of life, including philosophy. I believe because, Philosophy cannot be separated from

culture and the time it was developed, therefore as the culture changed, so did philosophy.

India being a multi-cultured country, had to imbibe the British culture for its survival. But did it? Were the British able to dominate and marginalize the indigenous cultures to establish their superiority? I dare to say both Yes and NO. J.W Berry a cross-cultural psychologist in his article 'Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation' published in the year 1997 gave a four-fold model on different types of acculturation namely Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalization to which I have attempted to give a philosophical context to when colonized the British dominated and tried to marginalize Indian Philosophy, whereas Indian Philosophers tried to assimilate western philosophy, but then separate upon feeling continuous sense of exclusion and subjugation of the same.

Tosam and Takov believe that each way of thinking arises as a response to or as an avocation for a specific culture and it is consequently that way of thinking may vary starting with one culture and then onto the next². When Western culture came in contact with the Indian multi-culture society instead of trying to understand and accept its values and philosophy, what it did was criticize

and call India an uncivilized country. The West had no intent of trying to understand the core values and ideals of the holistic philosophy that India has, But, instead, they tried to manipulate the Indian minds into believing that Indian philosophy was inferior and required changes.

2. Dominant Group

- Philosophical Assimilation and Marginalization :

Acculturation and Freedom go side by side, but when it comes to colonialism then the question of freedom is thrown out of the room because colonialism entrails dominance hence the lack of freedom to choose whether they wish to assimilate or integrate or separate or marginalize. The indigenous in the beginning had to submit to the rules and regulations created by the West to ensure their safety and survival. The host culture or the West wanted to establish their superiority and thus they could choose either of the two options which are: (1) Be the best or (2) To prove that India was primitive, uncivilized, and unsophisticated and therefore in dire need of being educated and civilized. Their incapability of understanding the core Sanskrit-based Indian philosophy led them to maneuver to demoralize and undermine the same.

To demonstrate and achieve

change Thomas Macaulay's 'Minutes on Education' was presented in 1835, which set up English as the mode of guidance and put Protestant preacher teachers responsible for philosophical schooling in Indian schools and Universities³. Changing the language was a big step and this brought about huge change in all the fronts of life. Macaulay took this as his mission of making India a civilized country with the help of Western knowledge and science and in doing so he felt the need for: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population"⁴

At the point when we talk about science and innovation, Kulkarni notes that science was not a part of modern schooling in India when the British introduced modern education. Science was utilized to demonstrate the West's predominance over the East. This is apparent in a letter from Sir Richard Temple kept in touch with the Viceroy

Northbrook in 1875⁵.

"No doubt the alumni of our schools and colleges do become as a class discontented. But this arises partly from our higher education being too much in the direction of law, public administration, and prose literature, where they may possibly imagine, however erroneously, that they may approach to competition with us. But we shall do more and more to direct their thoughts towards practical science, where they must inevitably feel their utter inferiority to us". (p.58)

The British utilized all potential techniques to sabotage Indian culture and its way of thinking. The University educational plan was detailed in such a way in our rich style Indian way of thinking was not coordinated in the way of thinking prospectus in the Universities that were set up at Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay⁶. Along with the change of the language, philosophical texts that were written originally in Sanskrit were insufficiently translated believes Malhotra & D.Babaji.⁷ During those colonial days, Indian philosophy was not a part of Indian academics and even when they were, it was negligible very small. Then Deshpande notes Datta and highlights that advanced Indian scholars like S.Radhakrishnan, S.N. Dasgupta, K.C. Bhattacharya, R.D. Ranade, and others

came to get information on Indian Philosophy through private investigation⁸. This was no mistake on the part of the host culture, but was a well-planned trick to destroy everything that was Indian.

Although the Orientalists believed that India should be governed through their principles and laws it was they who blurred the line between philosophy and religion in India. The oriental talk turned the thorough philosophical quest embraced by the native Darsana custom into a discourse that is strict, religious, and philological (Ibid). Therefore, Indian philosophy started to be seen as intrinsically related to religion⁹. Therefore, one can say during colonialism, when the natives should have had the freedom to choose how they wanted to acculturate they were denied and forced to forget their own philosophy and cultural identity to assimilate and be forcefully marginalized by the West. "The modern Indian philosophers who were taught by the western professors, in western philosophy, and in Indian universities had to fuse the alien past to their alien present" (Ibid.:12). And for this, they had to be grateful to the British because what they taught them was the superior Western scientific, civilized, and reasonable knowledge in comparison to the uncivilized, unscientific, primitive Indian Knowledge, culture, and

philosophy.

3. Non-Dominant Group :

- Philosophical Integration:

The process of acculturation is very long and slow. People need time to adjust and be familiar to the new setting, but most of the time when a new culture is suddenly imposed the first basic instinct is to reject the alien culture and that is what happened when the British colonized India. There was a major cultural shock. The East and the West were vastly different from each other and where a key feature of the acculturation process is the freedom of the people to choose the process or how they want to acculturate but dominance and power as we know give very little room for the dominated to choose and to be free. The British forced upon the Indians their culture, education, and language and it was necessary to accept if they wanted to survive. So, the natives could do either of the two things: (1.) They could forget their own culture completely and assimilate with the dominant culture, in this case, the Western culture, or, (2.) They could both maintain their own cultural identity as well as interact with Western culture. J.W. Berry defined the second option as the process of Integration. He gave this process a positive connotation for the reason that it rarely gives rise to any conflict, the

people can uphold their culture and also learn and accept the other culture. In this case, neither of them is rejected or abandoned.

Because culture and philosophy cannot be separated, when culture changed so did its philosophy. The natives during colonialism started integrating. Although the modern Indian philosophers like S. Radhakrishnan, S.N. Dasgupta, K.C. Bhattacharya, R.D. Ranade etc were born and brought up in an English setting they acquired the knowledge of Western philosophy from the Indian universities and gained the knowledge of the classical Indian philosophical traditions through private study (Ibid.:12). What is worth noting here is that even after Indian philosophy was marginalized in the University curriculum in India but still they did not forget their indigenous philosophy and acquired scholarship through private study. But this was not true for everybody, some people could not forget the sense of exclusion and inferiority complex created in the minds and hearts of the natives by the British. They believed and integration would only benefit the westerners, thus there is a serious need of separation and rejection of anything that is western. The process of separation will be discussed in the following section.

Now, coming back to the

integration process, the advanced Indian rationalists during the pioneer period wrote with regard to social combination produced by the British provincial principle of India (Ibid:16). They tried to write in a way in which their own cultural identity remains intact along with the western context they were writing in. Some of the prominent scholars who believed in the integration process were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda etc

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) also known as the "Father of modern India", who his entire life fought against social evils like Sati, caste rigidity, polygamy, and marriages (Bandyopadhyaya, 1933) and believed in the process of integration. He was not against British ideals, instead, he believed that British humanitarian ideals should be accepted wholeheartedly but what should be remembered is that the natives should not forget their own age-old rich humanitarian values contained in the Upanishads which can help to create a society that is free from all sorts of evils. In 1822, Roy discovered the Anglo-Hindu school, followed four years after the fact by the Vedanta school; where he demanded that his lessons of monomystical regulations be joined with "present-day western educational

program¹⁰ thereby maintaining both the cultures.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), was a great poet, philosopher and social reformer "Who never subscribed to an exclusionary politics or an exclusionary philosophy"¹¹ For him, the rejection of other cultures was not required to maintain his own cultural identity. What was necessary was a critical engagement with the 'other' and not just mindless copying or mindless rejection (Ibid.). Keshub Chandra Sen (1843-1884) envisaged the synthesis and harmony of the West and India and the mutual absorption of their cultures and religions. He talked of England "sitting at the feet of hory-headed India" to "learn ancient wisdom from India", "to gather the priceless treasures which lie buried" in "Vedism and Buddhism", and India sitting at the feet of England to learn "modern art and science". (p. 30)¹²

Discussing philosophical joining will stay deficient on the off chance that we don't refer to Swami Vivekananda, he was a profound pioneer and reformer in India who endeavored to consolidate Indian otherworldliness with Western material advancement to keep up with the two enhanced one another¹³. His view of not excluding any culture while upholding his view is commendable. The wholehearted inclusion of Western

philosophy while upholding the Indian tradition can be termed as the process of 'Philosophical Integration'. But this process eventually got replaced by the process of separation because the natives felt the need to attain freedom from the dominance of the British.

- Philosophical Separation:

"India has lost touch with her culture. She has not only lost touch with whatever was worth in her own civilization" "she has lost "the great honour of being able to contribute to the civilization of Humanity"¹⁴. India during colonialism was exploited so much that it lost its vital rich identity. There are always two sides to the same coin, where in one side some of the intellectual Indians believed that exclusion creates division and therefore, we should integrate but on the other side there were scholars who believed India has lost its identity, culture, and philosophy because of the subjugation, exploitation, and dominance by the British. Therefore, if India wants to retain its Identity she needs to be rid of colonialism, she needs to attain Independence. British dominated Indian philosophical traditions by marginalizing the core Indian concepts and bringing their categories. Because they could not understand the multi-faceted meaning of the Sanskrit terms, they roughly translated the terms thereby limiting

them.

The process of separation, defined by Berry is how the natives try and hold onto their own culture and avoid all types of interaction with the alien culture. Because Indian culture was dominated and marginalized in her own country, the Indian intellectuals instead of integrating started separating their own culture from that of the dominant one. It is not the case that there were no positive ideals in the Western culture but those humanistic ideals were used to suppress the native culture and maintain their superiority over the East. They used their Western ideals as a spectacle to view the rich Indian philosophy to finally undermine it. Can we call it an honest mistake? Or was it a well-thought-out decision to serve the colonial purpose? I believe in the latter, the West had no plan on helping India, the only thing they wanted to do was rule it and serve their selfish purpose. Which they did for a long time, but could not continue forever. And thus, the separation process began.

To name a few Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai, K.C. Bhattacharya, and Dayakrishna were prominent Indian scholars who strived to uphold their rich cultural identity and avoid interactions with the West. Gandhi during the fight against the British used the word "Swaraj", "to advocate India's

disposing of British political, monetary, regulatory, lawful, military, and educational organizations"¹⁵. He believed that using anything western would become a hindrance in the peaceful battle against the British.

K.C Bhattacharya then again felt the need to accomplish 'Swaraj in Ideas', to show how predominance was unmistakable in the circle of thoughts. A kind of subtler control exercised in the circle of thoughts by one culture on another, a mastery even more genuine in result since it isn't normally felt (Ibid). He believed that a subtler domination exists in our minds even after attaining independence in 1947 and to be completely free one must also be free from this 'colonized mind' and attain what he calls swaraj in ideas.

Daya Krishna an eminent scholar and thinker of Indian philosophy takes quite a rather rigid stand and says: "Anybody who is writing in English is not an Indian philosopher. . . . What the British produced was a strange species—a stranger in his own country. The Indian mind and sensibility and thinking [during the colonial period] was shaped by an alien civilization. [The British] created a new kind of Indian who was not merely cut off from his civilization, but was educated in a different way. The strangeness of the species is that their terms of reference are the West. . . . They

put [philosophical problems] in a Western way" (Ibid)

Therefore, separation was inevitable, to retain the cultural identity and be free from domination and rejection of the Western ideals was the only way left. Malhotra & D. Babaji in their very recent article talks about how it's high time that the indigenous people should be in charge of their civilization and have "the *adhikara* (authority) to interpret the world on their terms. (Ibid.:3). Taking back the control of the civilization, philosophy, and life by the natives does not mean snatching away the power that once was lost but instead, it is separating the ideals that do not belong to this place. The Western lenses are incapable of evaluating Indian concepts. The Eurocentric bias on the Indic terms needs to be gotten rid of. Indian philosophy should be understood for what it is and not through others lenses.

Conclusion : About the British, Tagore most famously says: "I have a deep love and a great respect for the British race as human beings. . . We have felt the greatness of this people as we feel the sun; but as for the Nation, it is for us a thick mist of a stifling nature covering the sun itself"¹⁶. British dominance over the East, created by choice this thick mist over India's cultural identity and

philosophy to subjugate the Indigenous and instead establish their superiority. This thick mist was somewhat cleared when the fight for Swaraj started and finally, India gained its Independence, but a lot remains to be done. This mist needs to be cleared totally. The process of separation started during the colonial era but is not complete yet. Swaraj in our ideas, freedom in our views is yet to be achieved. There is an urgent need for decolonizing the mind. The Eurocentric bias in the philosophical discourse is in dire need to be separated from mainstream Indian Philosophy. Indian philosophy is working towards retaining its cultural and philosophical identity and our responsibility here is to separate this bias and retain 'Indian Philosophy Proper' or 'Darsana'.

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