

The Emergence of Modern Japan: from early period to contemporary times

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Abstract: Japan consists of a group of islands. There are about 3900 islands. The four most important islands are Honshu, Hokkaido, Shikoku and Kyushu. The Position and size of the Japan lies in Eastern part of Asia. The Sun rises first over Japan, then over the rest of Asia. So it is called the 'Land of the Rising Sun'. Japan is changing, becoming a more modern world. It's a time of immense social and cultural change in Japan its effects were being felt well into the early twentieth century. It is the time of the great discoveries and the globalization of our planet, identities are more than ever flying, shifting, changing places and forms, moving around numerous locations. During the twentieth century, the global strategies of western nations came to encompass the rest of the world. The constant change, flux, nobility, powerlessness, displacement, inability to solve problems without the assistance of the western in the life of modern man are seen. Japan's contact with the West includes various ups and downs. This contact is at least few centuries old has brought about and is still bringing about a number of social-cultural changes in the Japanese society.

Key Words: Globalization, Modernization, Westernization, Modern Period, Contemporary period etc.

1. INTRODUCTION.:

Japanese History is divided into three periods: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern History. The earliest human settlements in Japan are estimated to date from the Ice Age, about 30,000 years ago. At that time all four main Japanese islands were linked. The southernmost island of Kyushu was joined to the Korean peninsula and the northernmost island to Hokkaido to Siberia. The early history of Japan is full of myths and the legends. The Japanese believe that their land was born out of the union of God Izanagi and Goddesses Izanami. They also believe that Jimmu, the grandson of the Sun Goddess, became the first emperor of their the nickname, "the land of the Rising Sun". The first named civilization, the Jomon era, began in about 10,500BC and lasted till about 300BC. Jomon refers to the distinctive rope pattern decorations on the pottery of the era. The people of the time being hunter-gatherers, augmented by a rudimentary form of agriculture. From the third century BC came waves of the Yayoi people eastward from northern China. Japanese society changed crucially with the coming of the Yayoi. Along with rice culture, iron and bronze making, metallurgy, new styles of pottery, was introduced from China and Korea. Metal edged tools allowed the cultivation of drier land, and increased rice production led to population explosion. With the development of Yayoi culture, a predominantly agricultural society emerged in Japan. Yamato period (250-710) this period includes Kofun period (250-538) and Asuka period (538-710). In this period Japan traded and maintained diplomatic relations with Korea and China, receiving wave's immigration and many cultural influences. Power was centralized and society became stratified and a government administration was set up resembling that of the Chinese Tang dynasty. A written language developed using Chinese script. Buddhism was prompted by the ruling class and became dominant by 600. Many Buddhist temples were built during Yamato period.

In the Kofun period a new wave of cultural influence hit Japan in the 6th century AD. Japanese began to introduce the weapons. This indicates that a militarized aristocracy had come into the ascendant. During the Nara period (710-784) of the eight century marked the first emergence of a strong central Japanese state. Buddhism dominated, and artisans produced refined Buddhist sculpture and built great Buddhist temples. Shotoku Taishi, a Japanese emperor of the Nara period, spread Buddhism in his country for which he is described as "Asoka of Japan".

By the eight century A.D, feudal type of government existed, and Japanese society became feudal. Heian period (794-1185) during this period, the Japanese imperial court reached its peak. Chinese influence effectively ended with the last imperial mission. Japan developed an indigenous writing system, Kana, derived from Chinese script. Japanese history saw the shifting of the seal of the capital from Nara to Heian-Kyo or Kyoto. The new capital was associated with Heian culture which was a mixture of Chinese and Japanese cultures. The Japanese court came to be known for its splendor and glory. The Japanese rulers patronized fine arts, calligraphy, poetry, literature, the construction of Buddhist monasteries, and the laying of beautiful gardens. A highly cultured and aristocratic society existed like the one during the period of French King Louis XIV. The most powerful clan Fujiwara from the humble beginning in the tenth century reached great heights of popularity and prestige. By the eleventh century it gave the country able administrators and diplomats. After the fall of the Fujiwara, Japan came to be dominated by the two powerful military clans, namely, Taira and Minamoto. These two struggled for supremacy and finally Yoritomo of the latter became the shogun (military commander). During Kamakura period (1193-1333) Japan was ruled by a hereditary military Shogun, and the political power of the court was destroyed. Yoritomo ruled a major part of Japan

from 1192 as a dictator the Japanese Emperor recognized this fact and showered gifts of money and land on Yoritomo. The government of the shogun, known by the name Bakufu (Tent government), replaced the Emperors authority and set up its headquarters at Kamakura.

The country developed a military culture and tradition from this period. The Yoritomo's successors Hojo gave Japan a clean and efficient administration. It was a period known for spiritual fervour. Hojo's rule was deeply disturbed by the army of Kublai Khan in 1274 and 1281 and Ashikaga Takauji member of one of the ruling clans took advantage of the opportunity and declared himself as the shogun and he replaced the Emperor in 1338. After two centuries 1573 the Ashikaga rule became unpopular and faced stiff opposition from the provincial overlords of Japan. This situation was followed by a civil war, with feudal lords supporting the rebellious and independent Sastuma on the one side, and the Mikado (the Emperor) supported by the shogun on the other.

Ashikaga Shogunate failed to control the feudal warlords(daimyo), and a civil war erupted (1467-77) followed by a century of military struggle known as the age of the country at war. We see the rise of the military caste of Japan known as the samurai during the period of Ashikaga Shogunate and the spread of Zen Buddhism (austere form of Buddhism). The feudal society of provinces merged with the new civilian society of the imperial capital. It was during this period of deep crisis that the Europeans began to knock at the doors of Japan. The first to set foot on the soil of Japan was the Portuguese governor of Malaca, named Antonio Galvano(1542). He was the famous Jesuits led by Francis Xavier came to spread Christianity. They followed by Portuguese traders who entered into trade relations with the feudal lords. The political crisis in Japan ended in 1573 after Oda Nobunaga destroyed the power of the Asikaga Shogunate. He kept control over the rebellions feudal lords and Japan witnessed peace and prosperity. Nabunaga permitted the Christian missionaries to propagate their faith and many Japanese were converted to Christianity. In 1582 the Japanese government maintained good relations with the foreigners. Nabunaga was assassinated and the task of strengthening the country fell on the shoulders of his commander Toyatomi Hideyoshi.

Hideyoshi a great patriot and statesman heard that the Europeans were arming their camps and bringing gunships and Christian missionaries were bringing about mass conversions and provoking the local population without his permission. He decided to halt all this by taking drastic steps. During this time more than 20,000 Japanese Christians died. The government issued two decrees by which all foreigners were forbidden from entering Japan and no Japanese would be permitted to go out of the country. Those who violated these two decrees were to be executed. Some Dutch traders were allowed to trade under severe conditions to keep a small window open for the west.

Japan was totally isolated from the rest of the world and shut the doors for the Westerners for the next centuries. In July 1853 Commodore Perry with his American naval squadron started knocking at her doors. After Hedeyoshi death Tokugawa Leyasu of the Tokugawa succeeded him as the Shogun in 1603. During the next 265 years Japan came to be ruled by the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Japanese Emperor Mikado retired from active political life. The people and the Shogunate always treated the Japanese emperors with greatest respect. They were considered divine. Under the Tokugawa Shogunate Japan turned in to a highly centralized feudal state. Japan's Tokugawa (or Edo) period,(1603-1667), final era of traditional Japanese government, culture and society before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Tokugawa Leyasu's dynasty of Shoguns presided over 250 years of peace and prosperity in Japan, including rise of a new merchant class and increasing urbanization. They worked to close off Japanese society from Westernizing influences, particularly Christianity. The Neo-Confucian theory that dominated Japan during the Tokugawa period recognized only four social classes they are warriors (samurai), artisans, farmers and merchants and mobility between the four classes was officially prohibited. Tokugawa government acted to exclude missionaries and eventually issued a complete ban on Christianity in Japan. Japan's deliberate isolation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created a strong cultural homogeneity. Under Tokugawa rule, Japan enjoyed internal peace, political stability and economic growth. They began to view Christian missionaries as threat to their rule. This feudal system took deep roots in Japanese society until the advent of the Meiji revolution (1868). In July 1853 Commodore Perry with his American naval squadron started knocking at her doors.

The changes that were introduced in Japan after 1868 are called Meiji Revolution. The ruling classes with the approval of the emperor introduced reforms in all fields. Feudalism was abolished. Samurai and other feudal classes surrendered their land holdings. They received compensation. A written constitution was adopted in 1889. The rise of capitalism in Japan can be traced back to the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Meiji Restoration helped Japan to welcome modern science and technology and to develop as a rich industrial nation. After modernizing herself i.e., Japan embarked on an expansionist policy on the pattern of other European imperialist powers. The new found prosperity turned Japan into an expansionist nation. It conquered Korea and defeated China in 1895.

Meiji Japan had flourished under the steadfast rule of the emperor who reigned for more than 40years. Now his first son, Yoshihito ascended to the throne and took name Taisho, ushering in the next era. The reformers embraced change. The early twentieth century saw a brief period of "Taisho democracy" overshadowed by the rise of Japanese expansionism and militarization. By the time First World War broke out, Japan had become a dominant power in Far East. Japan also saw the rise of mass movements advocating political change. Labor unions started large scale strikes to protest labour inequities, political injustices, and Japanese involvement in First World War. The Emperor Taisho died on December 18, 1926, following tradition, his son Hirohito ascended to the throne and chose

the name Showa, meaning “Peace” and “enlightenment”. Hirohito neither suffered from physical or mental ailments like his father nor held the commanding presence of his grandfather.

The Showa Period (1926-1989) The Showa period was longer than the reign of any previous Japanese emperor. The first part of Showa, from Hirohito’s enthronement in 1926 to the end of the World War Second in 1945 is known as the early Showa period. It was a rise of militarism in Japan. It refers to the ideology in the Empire of Japan that militarism should dominate the political and social life of nation, and the strength of the military is equal to the strength of a nation. Second World War was one of the most abhorring events of human history. It demonstrated to the world the dimensions of human destruction which men capable of. The dropping of Atom Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only completely destroyed the two cities it also won the war for the Allies. Defeat in the Second World War brought about radical change to Japan. It led to the end of the emperor’s status as a living god and the transformation of Japan into a democracy with a constitutional monarch. The post-war Showa period also led to the Japanese economic miracle. In the Post War period most significant changes occurred in political, social, economic, educational, social, cultural fields which culminated in the modernization and westernization of Japan. The post war history of Japan gives us an insight into the remarkable recovery of a country which had suffered the worst holocaust in modern times. This “New Japan” was in the making from 1945. Heisei is the current era in Japan

2. CONCLUSION:

Hence I would like to conclude by saying that during the Japan’s modern period the country has been engaged in efforts to attain development and growth in various areas such as building infrastructure, production of food grains, science and technology and spread of education. The life expectancy has increased and many diseases have been controlled. However, there are many areas in which Japan’s society is experiencing a variety of problems. Some of these problems have their roots in our colonial past while others are related to demographic changes, socio-political conditions and cultural processes. Efforts have been made to put nation on the path of socio-cultural development. The transformation of nation as a self sufficient and cohesive political entity has proved to be difficult challenge. The colonial past, socio-cultural disparities in the society and raised aspiration have culminated in a complex situation. For some traditional people, however, modernity was not identified with civilization. Since they only viewed modernity as materialism, they believed in the spiritual superiority of the east over west.

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