

Indian Renaissance: Impact of West on East

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***Abstract:** Indian Renaissance was a part of a world-wide upsurge which was the birth, growth and expansion of remarkable political and cultural movements in Europe and parts of the world. They helped forward the cause of human progress. It was the epoch of large ideas, grand visions and vast hopes. Man began to feel that a new world was taking birth. It looked like a fresh adventure of the soul of man towards a fulfilling future. The western impact revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse of the people to force them to turn to their past and recover their spiritual heritage. In the absence of genuine urge from within aiming at the revival of what was noble and elevating in India's past and also at the redemption of her people from the crushing load of unreason, social abuses and political servitude, spread of western education could not by itself have fostered and promoted the Renaissance. The primary force responsible for advent and growth of the Indian Renaissance is the inherent power of the spirit of India. Unlike western Renaissance, revival of ancient cultural heritage of Hinduism was an important adjunct of Indian Renaissance. Indian Renaissance emphasised the spiritual dimension of dharma and considered it a pre-requisite of any worthwhile social, cultural, political or economic transformation*

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1. INTRODUCTION :

The Renaissance marked the re-emergence of humanistic and a scientific outlook. It indicated a new consciousness of life and a new sense of liberty. Achievements in the field of art, literature and science threw off medieval forms and looked new values. Inspiration was derived from the models of classical world. Renaissance informed that man is the measure of all things or the proper study of mankind is man. It rejected the whim of otherworldliness of the medieval age. It developed interest in studying man's relation with his own fellow beings. Humanism and naturalism took the place of celestialism and supernaturalism. Pre-occupation with human problems and efforts to find their solutions cleared the superstitions of supernatural or metaphysical authority. Renaissance reasserted the worth and significance of man by moving him once more in the fathomless universe. Renaissance was the birth of emotions and scientific outlook which had remained dormant during the last one thousand years or so. It was something more than a mere revivalism of the antiquity. The renaissance transferred the interest from to the matter of from supernatural to natural and dominated the thought of men. Man's return to himself was characteristic of the development of the renaissance. It developed a humanism that was changed into a feeling of humanity, self-sufficiency and without need of appeal to religious concepts.

2. WESTERN RENAISSANCE:

Burckhardt must be credited for the spread of the idea of Renaissance as an age of liberation from shackles of medievalism and as the beginning of the era of individualism. Politically the Renaissance saw the rise of the modern nation state. Economically it witnessed the development of early capitalism and emergence of a new leisure class. These political and economic changes were a part of the general transformation. At the same time these served to inaugurate and intensify certain other aspects of the general culture and intellectual change. The Renaissance did not find expression so much in definite theories or firmly established values. It is on the basis of new evaluations that concept were found insufficient to interpret the changes brought about in social and individual life, whereas others acquired an independent significance. This was the characteristic of thirteenth century Italy. The problem was not of new system or even of a conscious negation of medieval Christian values. The fact was that the traditional medieval ideas no longer gave satisfactory meaning of life. Men now attempted to represent and understand their existence without recourse to the concept of God. In the medieval world view it was unnecessary to go beyond the view of life as autonomous and humanly constituted. Secular human values were given an independent interest for their own sake. Man could now live and understand himself without recourse to the traditional religious concepts. However, it was only during the later period, that there developed a new conception of the world and man, independent of the Christian medieval world view.

New conceptions involved the creation of new social types. Men looked to a sort of intellectual aristocracy. Its claims to social primacy were no longer based on feudal sovereign rights but rather superiority of culture. The education ideal of the Renaissance led to the process of consolidation and legitimization of a new upper class. At the same time, the medieval hierarchical classification of priestly and lay groups were also materially modified. In the place of the ascetic priest divorced completely from worldly life, there emerged the intellectual and secularized man. Thus the new man identified himself with this world and filled his place in it. In place of the saint, there appeared the philosopher, who symbolised pure spirituality. At this stage, the mankind reaches the highest achievement of the contemplative life. It was in the English Renaissance alone, however, that human activity in the modern sense of the word manifested itself.

The Renaissance brought not only a new science of man in real sense but also became the source of the development of new models and standards. Works of art, myths, stories, autobiographies, philosophical reflections, all served to awaken the self-consciousness of man. Man then looked to himself for answers to questions which tradition no longer served to explain.

It would be incorrect to underestimate the importance of tradition in the development of the renaissance spirit. Classical ideas and theories had wielded a steady influence all through the middle ages. But the man of the renaissance found available in ancient philosophy a secular view of life. Such view was independent not only of religious pre-conceptions but also in a large measure of all metaphysical ideas.

Greco-Roman philosophy transmitted to the renaissance a comprehensive and thoroughly secularized view of life. It is wrong to suppose that man of the renaissance was conceived simply as an independent and self-determining individual who displaced the medieval belief in authority with the principles of autonomous thought. In fact the Renaissance man was always in search of evidence which he could call upon for support of his own views. In this way, the foundation for a secularized view of antiquity in place of the Christian view of life was established. The ancient ideas of the soul as found in Plato and Plotinus came to hold the ground as against the specifically Christian conceptions of a personal God of the concrete form of the Christ and of the Christian account of the redemption as an actual historical event. The medieval Christians looked upon the world as the transitory one. In the renaissance the cosmological conceptions of the ancients received renewed significance. In the renaissance the world was simply taken for granted looked upon as all embracing.

During the renaissance there was a new realization of the concrete multiplicity of things. The new scientific spirit progressed but slowly. The Counter Reformation led to a reorganisation of the world upon an ecclesiastical Christian basis. It is a difficult task to apprise the significance of the renaissance in the history of European cultural development. The Renaissance may be interpreted in different ways, depending on whether this epoch is more closely associated with the world of faith the middle ages or with the scientifically grounded approach of modern times. In the same way, it is apparent that the Renaissance was not a definitely fixed and time-bound epoch.

3. BIRTH OF INDIAN RENAISSANCE:

At a time, when the flood gates of western civilization with its basis in rationalism and liberalism were thrown open by the rise of the British power in India, culture of the society in India was in a highly decadent state. Any other nation would have perished soul and body under the great pressure of this impact. But India was saved by her innate spirituality. Because of the working of this ancient spirit India did not slavishly accept the new civilization. Nor did it modernize herself as Japan did at a later date. Of course, her national mind turned a new eye upon her past culture and re-awoke to its sense and import. Out of this awakened vision and impulse the Indian Renaissance was born. Thus Renaissance was the product of the way in which Indian spirituality reacted to the powerful impact of the west.

4. THE IMPACT OF THE WESTERN RENAISSANCE ON THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE IN DIFFERENT PHASES:

The first phase of the impact of the west on India was highly destructive. Hinduism as it was understood and practised in those days, was unable to withstand the western onslaughts. Many of its ideas, institutions and practises were unable to stand a close scrutiny. These were, therefore, rejected by those among the India who had received western education. They became English in taste, opinion, words and intellect in hundreds. The dream of Macaulay was being realised to some extent. The educated youth became denationalised. They began to follow European manners. They started looking with irreverence, if not with contempt, upon the past civilization of Hinduism. But fortunately this spirit did not spread. Because of the direct impact of Europe in India, an ever increasing spirit of criticism pervaded the atmosphere. So far philosophical speculation was valid only so long as it could relate itself to the scriptural authority and thus limiting the scope of criticism. But now the sacred texts, the ancient books came under the sway of critical test. Caste system which so long had been thought to be sanctioned by Vedas was exposed as something which came to settle down as an imposition, it stood devoid of any Vedic approval.

There arose men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal and Mahadev Govind Ranade in Maharashtra who has some knowledge of the past. They reached differently to the west. They began to look upon the past culture from a new angle. They tried to understand and reshape it in the light of new ideas and knowledge. It was out of their awakened vision and impulse that the Indian renaissance arose such persons who were highly appreciative of the new civilization. They tried to imbibe as much of it as they could. They became the pioneers of social reform. They initiated liberal tradition in Indian thought. This may be regarded as the first phase of the Indian renaissance. It was the outcome of the western impact on Indian spirituality.

The second phase of the renaissance may be said to have started with Swami Dayanand Saraswati. He was a great Sanskrit scholar and knew not a word of English. He was uninfluenced by the new knowledge and civilization. He asked his countrymen to go back to the purity of the Vedic civilization. The swami was not only a unique renovator of Indian tradition but a remarkable creator too.

Then there arose a great figure, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, in Bengal. He laid stress on the recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in the field of religion. His great disciple Swami Vivekanand, carried out the mission of his master. He gave a new form to the Indian renaissance. Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh may also be regarded as expressive of his tendency, though in a somewhat different way. In them the Indian Renaissance becomes fuller and more conscious and nationalism purer and nobler. Mahatma Gandhi was also one of the greatest figures of reascent India. He contributed immensely towards giving new direction and form to the Renaissance movement. He adopted an actual life of the old and characteristic features of the ancient culture, truth and non-violence.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF INDIAN RENAISSANCE

Renaissance in India gave rise to nationalism. Which is a phenomenon of modern age. It denotes the growth of political and social awakening and will to be free. With the advent of british rule, India became politically united. But the mere emergence of this political unity did not lead to the growth of nationalism. In fact, nationalism in India was not the natural outcome of the people's will and political consciousness. The growth of the national consciousness in India is linked with the development of a unified national economy. This unification emerged out of the destruction of the ancient and medieval pre-capitalist methods of production and the replacement of the former by modern capitalist economic techniques. Another factor which did much in awakening national consciousness was the imparting of western education. It served as an instrument of disseminating modern western nationalism and democratic ideas to Indians. It brought the class of Indian intelligentsia in contact with the ideologies and philosophies preached by enlightened poets and political philosophers.

The introduction of modern education gave access to modern English literature. Indians became aware of how western people laid down the foundation of modern democratic, scientific and rationalist culture. They started thinking in terms of a free national existence imbued with the democratic values. The demand for the freedom of the press, expression and assemblage, representative government with widened adult franchise and the executive responsible to the people who were to be entitled to be fully sovereign in the expression of their will. All this reflected faith in democratic spirit. With the help of the press they were able to familiarize the masses with doctrines and ideologies like representative form of government, individual liberty, democratic framework or Swaraj.

Journals like Samachar Darpan, Friend of India, Bombay Samachar, Enquirer and Gyananveshan, Banga Dut, Bombay Darpan and Digdarshan were established to popularize the various social and cultural movements in the 19th century. In 1868 Moti Lal Gosh founded the Amrita Bazar Patrika. In 1879 the Bengalee was acquired by Surendranath Banerjee. Both these papers advocated the cause of Indian nationalism. In 1877, The Tribune and in 1879, The Hindu was sponsored by the liberal nationalists. With the growth of militant nationalism there came to be published, the Kesari and the Maratha in Maharashtra by Lokmanya Tilak. In 1890 the Indian social reformer was launched in Bombay. The impact of British rule and modernization also reflected in the sphere of literature. Poets and writers were no longer bound to display hypocritical praise to the princes and aristocrats. The new formative forces like the press, the rise of the middle class intellectuals as well as the infusion of modern scientific ideas, gave birth to certain broad features recognizable in most of the Indian languages. These features included the introduction of political, social and psychological issues, literary themes, to give vent to individualist expression and the emergence of realism.

In Bengal, the renaissance in literature came in the very beginning of the 19th century. The Bengali writers, through their prose and poetry, played a significant role in fostering cultural nationalism. The social evils like the caste system, the low treatment meted out to their womanhood, especially widows, the vices of untouchability, child-marriage, child-widowhood, the age disparity in the marriage and the various taboos, superstitions and orthodox practices were now treated as outmoded and were pledged to remove through the satirical writings as well as by other social activities. Along with the revitalization of the Indian literature in various native languages, there grew the practice of Indian writing in English. In 1857, a great upheaval came in India. It was a powerful expression of the unorganized yet intense national sentiment. It was a historical landmark in our national evolution. During this uprising there emerged folk songs manifesting the growth of national consciousness in the people. After the suppression of the struggle for national struggle

of 1857, the process of exploitation and draining of national wealth was intensified. This is the theme of the famous Hindi play *Bharat Durdasha*, written by Bhartendu Harishchandra.

The literary developments in various languages of India displayed the common tendencies in the development of the Indian mind all over the country. The Indian mind was receptive to western thought and western outlook and techniques of expression. Yet it remained deeply attached to its traditional heritage. At the same time, it assimilated from the west what was essential for building up a new society.

The another aspect of Renaissance in Indian society was the emergence of socio-religious reform movements. This renaissance was a rationalist, liberal and progressive humanitarian movement. During this period, the philosophy of renunciation which was strongly based on the belief that Brahma is true, this world is an illusion and transient. It believed in god as an eternal truth and the entire world merely an emanation. More stress was laid upon quietism and retirement from the world. Such ideas sapped the energies of the people and encouraged them to escape knowingly from the difficulties of the life instead of grappling with them. Influenced by this philosophy of renunciation, Indian remained indifferent towards the day to day political and social events. Reared on such ideas Indians could not differentiate between independence and slavery. Instead of fighting the disasters heaped on their country by the foreign invaders and repudiating the evils social customs, they considered worship in the temples for salvation, the highest goal of their existence.

The cultural renaissance in India awakened the indigenous people from their long slumber. The leaders of renaissance recognised that the greatest blunder in their entire history was escapism from the realities of life. The knowledge of the revolutionary doctrines enunciated in Europe made the Indian intellectuals aware of the assault on their sovereignty by an alien power. They realised that the Europe was awakened not only because it possessed new weapons but also because of its attitude of acquisitiveness towards worldly life. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian renaissance, devoted his efforts to the reorientation of the religion which had been monopolised and commercialized by the corrupt priestly class. This class was interested in keeping the general masses ignorant. Roy had come to be acknowledged not only as the initiator but the authentic voice of a many-sided movement of reformation. A direct challenge to the philosophy of renunciation also came from Swami Vivekanand the founder of Rama Krishan Mission. He tried to awaken national consciousness through his preachings on the philosophy of Karma Yoga.

In the initial stages, the emergence of national consciousness also found its expression in the sphere of religion. Almost all the leaders of the renaissance expressed their deep faith in the fundamental unity of the various religions prevailing in India. The stress on the equality of all religions led to pacification of antagonism and distinctions between various religious creeds. Through their newspapers, periodicals and educational institutions, the leaders of renaissance spread enlightenment among the people, awakening them to a new consciousness. Mahadev Govind Ranade was not influenced by mystic and obscurantist ideas of religion. That is why the future of India, which formed the great vision of Ranade, was that of a great nation proud of its past and marching on towards a bright future with the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty. Thus the leaders of Indian renaissance through historically progressive techniques tried to create a new outlook conducive to the process of forming a national unification of the various communities Hindu, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs and all of others. They had the motive of building a sound basis for the solution of common national problems.

The contact with western socio-political ideas brought about a new social consciousness among people. Principles like the equality of opportunity for all made a great impact on Indian political thinking. This had the effect of creating a national and scientific outlook towards the existing problems. During this phase, the socially conscious intelligentsia acted for an equitable distribution of social power. Its first expression was reached with the rise of the Brahma Samaj Movement under the leadership of Raja Ram Mohan Rai. Later, it was sustained by the Rama Krishna mission led by swami Vivekananda and number of the other similar movements. It reached its climax in the Indian National Social Conference set up in 1887.

The organizers of the various socio-religious movements devoted themselves to social propaganda all over India. Their writings and speeches pointed out that Indian could not remain content with the unity of segmented but privileged fraction at the top of the social hierarchy. In the early 20th century, the servants of India society and the national reforms conference were established to further social renaissance. They mainly concentrated on the problems relating to the caste system, the depressed classes, women, the Brahmin domination and religious oppression, the preference to individualism over collective spirit and the problem of precedence of social reform over political progress or vice-versa.

6. DIFFERENCE IN WESTERN RENAISSANCE AND INDIAN RENAISSANCE:

Western Renaissance was both a historical and a cultural entity. It spanned the period from 13th to the 16th century. It was marked by religious conflict between Protestantism and roman Catholics. The main thrust of Renaissance was individualism, rationalism, secularism, humanism and scientific temper. The Renaissance in the west symbolised a reaction against the medieval feudal set up and Christian empire, represented by the Roman Catholic Church. The

Renaissance rejected the other worldly Christian world view and substituted the great ideal of multi-sided development. Renaissance man navigated the oceans, discovered new sea routes, added new continents and scanned planets. Renaissance affirmed the dignity and significance of man. Culturally it was an age of liberation from the shackles of medievalism. Politically it saw the rise of the modern nation state. Economically it paved the way for earlier capitalism and rise of a new leisure class. But political and economic changes brought about by the Renaissance were a part of the new transformation.

Indian Renaissance, however bore the unmistakable mark of western liberalism and rationalism. Because of the working of the ancient spirit, Indian society did not slavishly imitate the western model and processes. Apart from secularism which the moderates presented as an article of their faith-equal respect for all religions was no less an important basis of the nationalist struggle under the leadership of Gandhiji. Scientific rationalist and humanist legacy of the western Renaissance had a profound impact on Indian Renaissance. Adoption of democratic institutions, acceptance of planning and socialistic ideas in the economic sphere indicated as to how deep had been the influence of Western Renaissance on the architects of modern Indian polity. The renaissance in India came to signify the revival of the dominant creativity of the life force of the people. An attempt was made to relate man to be infinite which wraps him. India underwent a shock therapy under the impact of western civilization and the activities of the Christian missionaries. It roused the creative activity of the soul of India after a long period of inactivity and sleep.

Restoration of pride in their past heritage was the first essential condition of natural awakening or Renaissance. Various social and religious reform movements sought to achieve this goal. Without the recovery of faith in the wisdom of the past and its glories there could be no hope for future greatness. Instruction in western history, philosophy and science could not possibly generate this needed consciousness. It could only come from the recovery of the great spiritual truths. Thus unlike western renaissance, revival of ancient cultural heritage of Hinduism was an important adjunct of Indian Renaissance. The latter emphasised the spiritual dimension of Dharma and considered it a pre-requisite of any worthwhile social, cultural, political or economic transformation. It is strange that while initially it seemed that Indian culture faced an inevitable displacement later however, it was India and Hinduism which emerged triumphant. The India that projected itself in 1947 was a nation upholding its culture and historical entity. The Hindu religion emerged stronger more united and self confident after its encounter with the west. Out of sects, groups and castes a community arose which could form an undying basis for an Indian nation.

7. IMPACT ON INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT:

Under the impact of western imperialism Indian society underwent significant transformation which had a great bearing on Indian political thinking. In the sphere of politics the Western thought and administration have taught us the concept of political unity and constitutional law. It also preached the gospels of liberty and equality. Western thought have fostered in India the growth of the spirit of deep nationalism, political consciousness and aggressive nationalism that tremendously affected the course of Indian history. We received inspiration for the intense nationalism from Washington, Cromwell, Mazzini, Garibaldi and Napoleon etc. Political awakening and growing nationalism unified heterogeneous elements in our country.

The uniform British administration, political unity, universal peace, constitutional development and spread of western political ideas led to the increasing emphasis of democracy and institution of Local-self government in India. The emphasis of institutional democracy brought new temper in the minds of Indians that generated the idea of discontentment in the soil of India. Consequently the middle class people became restless aggressive, self assertive to vent their grievances against political subjugation in the light of Western political ideologies of socialism, individualism and humanitarianism. This threatened the political edifice of British imperialism.

8. THE INDIVIDUAL, SOCIETY AND THE STATE:

It is true that there is hardly a theory of state developed by our thinkers comparable to those of Aristotle or Rousseau in western political thought. It is surprising how much ground the leaders of Indian renaissance who discussed political and social covered on the essentials of a social philosophy. Thus Gandhi ji spoke of the welfare of all in preference to the utilitarian conception of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, C. Rajgopalachari, would set definite limit to the authority of the State, lest it should assume a totalitarian character. Inevitably more than one trend of thought is traceable in the leaders of the period, e.g. those who justified an extension of state activity in that the freedom of all might be preserved and extended and as a safeguard against the exploitation of many poor by the rich few and those who argued against an extension of state interference. Democracy, freedom, equality, socialism and communism alike were debated by leaders of nationalist struggle. While the arguments used for and against are familiar in western political thought. There is an Indian use them which can be explained only on the basis of the environment with which they were familiar and the tradition which they had inherited. The influence of the West had been beneficial

for uprooting our social evils. Inspiration for social reforms has been derived from the West. The liberation of womanhood from the bonds of social tyranny became a possible due to the impact of western way of social life.

9. RELIGION AND POLITICS:

Religion was felt to be an important factor in Indian nationalism. Gandhiji's whole social philosophy was based on the need to have faith in God and trust in Him to guide man in the right path. M.N. Roy, on the contrary, would put authority on a secular rational basis and none other. Again the idea of secularism, one of the fundamentals of Nehru's conception of State in India, is clearly connected with the need to keep religion out of politics, while Jinnah thought that both Hinduism and Islam being regulators of social life, it was possible to divorce religion from politics.

10. INTERNATIONALISM AND UNIVERSALISM :

Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru are perhaps the most outstanding thinkers who included both of these ideas in their thought. The disadvantages of nationalism as developed in the west are analysed by Tagore. To Sri Aurobindo the ideal of world unity was implicit in recent social and political developments and Nehru added his support to the idea of world government.

11. IMPACT OF THE PAST ON THE PRESENT:

Sri Aurobindo in his 'The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity' argued that the Indian thinkers of the previous generation had slavishly copied western concepts and had contributed few original ideas to the sum total of political thinking. Perhaps a more balanced view would be that political thinking in India during the last one hundred years is a blend of Indian tradition. Indian experience under British rule and western political experience and thought M.N. Roy, Sri Aurobindo himself, and Gandhiji stand out among the thinkers who evolved their own views on the basis of Indian tradition and experience, while being fully aware of the trends of thought in other parts of the world.

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