

Contemporary India --11

Social Legacy of Colonialism;

The colonial legacy had not only affected the political and economic life of the Indians but also it had affected the social life of the Indians. Hence, different aspects of social legacy of colonialism are discussed below;

A. Appearance of a new elite class

A new elite class appeared with Western life-style using the English language and English schools. New towns and urban amenities were created with segregated suburbs and housing for them. Their habits were copied by the new professional elite of lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists and businessmen. Within this group, old caste barriers were eased and social mobility increased. As far as the mass of the population were concerned, colonial rule brought few significant changes. So, the new elite class is a legacy of British colonialism. The British educational effort was very limited. There were no major changes in village society, in the caste system, the position of untouchables, the joint family system, or in production techniques in agriculture. British impact on economic and social development was, therefore, limited. Total output and population increased substantially but the gain in per capita output was small or negligible. It is interesting to speculate about India's potential economic fate if it had not had two centuries of British rule.

B Change in the social structure

The biggest change the British made in the social structure was to replace the warlord aristocracy by an efficient bureaucracy and army. The traditional system of the East India Company had been to pay its servants fairly modest salaries, and to let them augment their income from private transactions. This arrangement worked reasonably well before the conquest of Bengal, but was inefficient as a way of remunerating the officials of a substantial territorial Empire because (a) too much of the profit went into private hands rather than the Company's coffers, and (b) an over-rapacious short-term policy was damaging to the productive capacity of the economy and likely to drive the local population to revolt, both of which were against the Company's longer-term interests.

C Change in the Indian social institutions:-

From the 1820s to the 1850s the British demonstrated a strong urge to change Indian social institutions, and to Westernize India. They stamped out infanticide and ritual

burning of widows (sati). They abolished slavery and eliminated dacoits (religious thugs) from the highways. They legalized the remarriage of widows and allowed Hindu converts to Christianity to lay claim to their share of joint family property. They took steps to introduce a penal code (the code was actually introduced in 1861) based on British law, which helped inculcate some ideas

of equality. 'Under the old Hindu law, a Brahmin murderer might not be put to death, while a Sudra who cohabited with a high-caste woman would automatically suffer execution. Under the new law, Brahmin and Sudra were liable to the same punishment for the same offence.

D. Appointment of British officials

Clive had created a 'Dual' system of administration i.e. Company power and a puppet Nawab. Warren Hastings displaced the Nawab and took over direct administration, but retained Indian officials. Finally, in 1785, Cornwallis created a professional cadre of Company servants who had generous salaries, had no private trading or production interests in India, enjoyed the prospect of regular promotion and were entitled to pensions. All high-level posts were reserved for the British, and Indians were excluded. Cornwallis appointed British judges, and established British officials as revenue collectors and magistrates in each district of Bengal. However, the present official system in India is a legacy of British colonialism.

E. Indian civil service

From 1806 the Company trained its young recruits in Haileybury College near London. Appointments were still organized on a system of patronage, but after 1833 the Company selected amongst its nominated candidates by competitive examination. After 1853, selection was entirely on merit and the examination was thrown open to any British candidate.

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