

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

***Dr. Rakesh Sinha**

Abstract

Since the modern formation of nation states is the result of contestation and not consensus, the dynamics of relationship between nations is bound to change with the passage of time. In contrast, the dynamics of civilisations need persistence and consistent comparative study. Such studies are not mere academic exercises, but are vital components of civilizational dialogue. In this context, two primary criteria are taken into consideration; one, its longevity or eternity, and secondly, its contributions in the peaceful transition of human society. Such studies should be free from polemics and rhetoric of political programs. In the ancient and medieval world, the nature of historiography was not what we have in the modern world. Memoirs, stories, travelogues, spiritual texts and orators were truly recognised tools of history. They were more empirical accounts than normative and thus less biased. Travelogues and observations have proven very useful texts to comprehend the past. We procure invaluable information of the Indian and other civilisations of the world through them. Needless to say, the contributions of our civilisation, its Lakshmi (wealth), Saraswati, (knowledge and wisdom), Philosophy and Way of Life have won recognition and acclaim in the annals of world history. Unfortunately, the modern Western system of knowledge halted the process of comparative study of civilisation and unwittingly made a split in the philosophical sequence of different time periods. What is known as European identity or the West is collectively and historically a civilisation whose roots can be traced to the ancient Greek and Roman ancestry. Their main counterpart could be Indian civilisation. Although comparatively and historically India might have geographically shrunk, it still represents the continuation of an ancient civilisation since the advent of Indus Valley. It is a journey continuum.

Contemporary debate however, displays unremitting hostility to India by drastically altering the schedule of time framework. Europe's knowledge system primarily takes pride in its Post-Enlightenment era along with its emphasis on contemporary philosophisation to create a parallel with the ancient philosophy of Indian civilisation. This is nothing more than intellectual conceit. Such is evident when Harold Coward compares Derrida with Shankaracharya and Abhinavagupta. This is arrogance and escapism, besides being a wholly unproductive comparative study. No doubt, there can be comparison between any two scholars or sets of scholarly opinions and constructs, but the comparison cannot be only on the basis of arguments and selective texts. Coward exactly does this. There is an obvious reason for it. Europe and the US dominated the modern world through their

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

economic and military might. Social sciences are an important tool to justify the domination and also turn domination into hegemony. The West has to answer to the world for many of its odious contributions to humanity. The destructive ideologies like Fascism, Nazism, the two World Wars, identity-based conflicts, colonialism and religious wars have been their yields. The West cannot escape its responsibility in downgrading of civilizational discourse and dialogue. In seeking to do so, it has been creating new international institutions and professing counter-narratives after every invention of destructive ideological weapons. The sole intent of this silent but potent ideological thrust in a seemingly post-colonial world is to exploit, dominate and later undermine world unity.

The 20th century remains a memorable era in the history of human civilisation for many reasons. It witnessed the two World Wars leading to an unimaginable destruction. It was also during this era, the mighty Empires of the Western world crumbled. Suppressed nationalities and masses raised their voice against imperialism and achieved the goals of national freedom. These liberation movements were not merely conflict of interests or alien rule versus self-rule, but it further engaged itself in more serious questions concerning fundamental rights and universal human values like equality, dignity and liberty of human society. It concomitantly declaimed the civilizational superiority of the West discarding the western notion of 'White Man's burden'.

The 19th and 20th century narratives, as well as that of the present century, show that foundational principle of the Western civilisation, *i.e.* 'self-aggrandisement',¹ remains unchanged. It is reflected in their colonial policies to the newly formed idea of neo-liberalism. Therefore, no discourse on imperialism or neo-liberalism can be objective, constructive and impactful without questioning the civilizational foundations of Western society. As we say, events do not occur in vacuum; they are reflections of ideas and philosophies of an individual or race/nation which is nurtured in their sub-consciousness. Therefore, national liberation movements and their powerful resistances could be seen as a clash of civilisations. They reflected the dichotomy of ideologies about different civilisations and the natives residing therein. In this context, the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America were denied freedom of expression and will and were meted with savage treatment. They thereby, collectively emerged as almost the genuine spokespersons for an egalitarian world order and opposed the civilizational ills like, Fascism, Nazism, Apartheid, racisms and un-spiritualised Evangelism, which intended to debase indigenous cultures and free evolution of spiritualism. Charles Grant² (1746-1823) pleaded that Evangelical system of education in English would provide colonialists a "sense of personal identity as we know it." He advocated partial reforms, which according to him would produce semi form of "the imitation of English manners which will induce them to remain under our protection"

The imperialistic era of thought propelled the leadership in West that witnessed symbiotic relationship between politics, trade, Evangelism and philosophy. It was only the proportion of each element that varied from one individual to another. The tragedy of Indian Social Sciences is also reflected in its non-comprehensive understanding of the Western epistemology and philosophers. Many political thinkers, who have been quoted and studied for their progressive ideas, civil polity and individual's rights in the textbooks of social sciences, had been officers under tyrants or despotic

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

rulers, with underlying commercial interests in colonialism. Interestingly, they have greatly influenced the formative ideas of students of social sciences. Bhikhu Parekh highlights two representative thinkers John Locke and J. S. Mill who are considered champions of liberalism and democracy. John Locke (1632-1704) was of course relatively progressive than Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), another English philosopher, who justified despotism. But relative and contextual progressiveness does not qualify him enough to be taught as a prophet of universal liberalism. His biographer, Maurice Cranston has revealed Locke's zeal for commercial imperialism with reference to his patroniser Earl of Shaftesbury who had strong financial interest in the New World, *i.e.* North American colonies. Locke provided the most articulated and philosophical justification of colonisation. He argued that Indians were not entitled for territorial integrity which, on the other hand, was held ideal and respected by 'Other' West in this case. For him, Indians were 'wild' and 'savage', lacking the capacity to raise themselves to the level of 'civilised part of the mankind'³ if unaided.

J.S. Mill (1806-1873), who spent a good deal of his career as an officer in Indian office, authored *Liberty and Representative Government*, argued that his views on man's liberty and elected government could not be applied to India because they were civilisationally inferior. Mill worked in the East India Company from 1813 to 1858, *i.e.*, for more than four decades. He propounded that India was incapable of self-development and only foreigners could regenerate them since he regarded Indians as backward people, similar to children who justifiably face parental despotism. In this line of thought, Bhikhu Parekh explains the phenomena as "liberals stressed the virtues of individuality, autonomy and moral self-development, but they vigorously supported the 19th century capitalism that made these virtues unrealisable for masses of men and women, and they often resisted the attempts by the state to regulate the evils capitalism produced." He further opines, "Liberals thought and practice have revealed similar paradoxes and contradictions" even in recent times⁴ they were both sectarian and liberals according to their respective contexts. The cherished ideas of liberty, equality and freedom were hailed essential as per the context, which liberals regarded fit to be spaced into and affirming the colonised as inherently in need to be colonised by the superior breed of western entities. Their universalism was deterred by their own presumption of perennial inequality based on race, civilisation, nature and pattern of human beings which naturally, according to them, divided the world community into superior and inferior races or nationalities.

The end of colonial rule has not obliterated the Western rots that are repackaged as 'modernity'. Their hegemony has still not ended. There are two primary reasons for this: one, the economic inequality between the West and the rest of the world. Colonialism was a system to drain wealth from the colonies, which ruined one set of the nations whereas it strengthened the material foundations of a few. In the post-colonial era, this economic imbalance gave positional superiority to the ex-colonialists and their civilizational fraternity. They created international institutions to mask their hegemony from direct contestations. Their earlier paradigm of 'civilising mission' was transformed into 'developing mission'. Earlier justification as 'White Men's burden' was supplanted by 'West's responsibilities and duties for backward nations.'

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

Second, the Western policies, politics and philosophies of suppressing, plundering, subjugating people whom they contemptuously characterised as 'Others', also faced some feeble theoretical counter narratives on their soil. Though, they could not influence the colonialist policies. However, once the civilizational experiment of imperialism collapsed, the counter narratives from the 'Others' emerged, the marginalised thoughts in the West advocating liberal and egalitarian approach became the mainstream theoretical position. This enabled them to perpetuate their leadership and to control ideas in their ex-colonies. They increasingly influenced history writings, parameters of international relations and also the opinion industry of the non-western world. They created institutions and patronised academics of non-western societies. This west cooptionism created generations of clones of western thoughts. It was a carbon copy and at times replica of inbuilt thoughts of the ormer with a layered and packaging from non-western scenarios. The history of liberation struggles primarily is void of actual history. It is because they are written with considerations, both psychological and philosophical, imposed by the western thought industry on western writers and historians. and historians. This had an effect, wherein a false sense of unity and harmony led the authors to dilute imperialistic events. These struggles characterised the extreme form of sacrifices by the people who were not materially advanced as Western nations were, but at the same time were not incapacious in their moral strength and values. The reactions from the colonialists to these struggles were full of brute force and extreme forms of atrocities. Instances from India and Africa are illustrations of this western cruelty and insensitiveness. Frantz Fanon says, "colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state"⁵. As, stated by Albert Memmi, in his book *The Colonizer and Colonized* that "Conquest occurred through violence, and over-exploitation and oppression necessitate continued violence, so the army is present. There would be no contradiction in that, if terror reigned everywhere in the world, but the coloniser enjoys, in the mother country, democratic rights that the colonialist system refuses to the colonised native"⁶ reveals the remorselessness of colonialists. The Britishers were not only unfazed but rejoiced killing of even unarmed school boys. On 11th August 1942, W. G. Archer, district Collector of Patna in Bihar, ordered to fire on school boys who were just holding the tricolor. Six boys were deliberately killed, with one of the martyrs as a college student.⁷ Such instances were not exceptional and rare. They were repeated in every nook and corner of India. Thirteen unarmed freedom fighters were killed indiscriminately in an unprovoked firing at Dhekia Juli (Assam) on 13th September 1942. In Andhra Pradesh, on 12th August 1942 seven non-violent freedom fighters were shot dead in broad day light by the colonial police.⁸ Eighteen-Nineteen years old young men were hanged without any remorse.⁹ There was an unbounded and limitless immortality of suppression. Atrocities were no less in other parts of the globe. The following poem David Diop aptly portrays the demonised character of the colonialists:

"The white man killed my father
Because my father was proud
The white man raped my mother
Because my mother was beautiful

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

The white man
Wore out my brother in the hot sun of the roads
Because my brother was strong
Then the white man came to me
His hands red with blood
Spat his contempt into my black face
Out of his tyrant's voice:
Hey boy, a basin, a towel, water."¹⁰

There are two related questions before us that remain unexplained but form a major part of our collective conscience. Why do we need to revisit colonial conflicts when the world has entered into an accelerated process of globalisation? This interwindily gives birth to another question, i.e., whether the process of decolonisation is complete or is it still being perpetuated in one form or another? It also speculates that the phenomenon of globalisation is an innocent /non-intended outcome of a faltering attempt at decolonisation. They are ontologically related to each other.

It has been proven a misnomer to assume that political independence provided full and free opportunities for the regeneration of a nation's self. Colonialism was not merely a physical suppression of people, but also caused deconstruction of indigenous culture on the one hand, and psychological subjugation on the other hand, of the people who became intellectually laidback. Ashis Nandy in his book, *Intimate Enemy* discusses this viewpoint that how the colonisers used psychological tools to subjugate the natives of colonies and to sell the moral justification back home for the brutality and atrocities on the colonies. The colonisers demeaned the native culture to promote their own racial and masculine superiority on the otherwise defenceless persons.¹¹ Colonial ideological impacts have been on culture, literature and political institutions. The thought process has become an outcome of nothing but the colonisation of mind. However, the will, desire, efforts to erode such impact along with alternative constructions is decolonisation of the mind. To put in other words, empowerment of a nation's self, mutation from uncritical to critical perspectives to see Western world views, and resurrecting civilizational narratives beyond the Western time zone of Modernity and Post-modernity will be a complete cycle of decolonisation. Fanon points out that "Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well." A Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) puts it in another way that there is a natural tendency among oppressed to resemble the oppressors. He uses 'liberation literacy' to create mass political awareness along with literacy teachings. Therefore, political decolonisation is not as difficult as the challenge of rejuvenating ourselves to recreate our ideas which have remained suppressed and uncontextualised. It would be a narrow interpretation to say that decolonisation is merely de-Westernisation. Rather, it has far wider objectives and ideals. As Frantz Fanon aptly says "Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with grandiose glare with history's floodlights upon them."¹²

The most fundamental ideological feature of colonialism was its conviction that there are two sets of nations. One, comprising economically, politically, culturally and civilisationally more advanced and the other of the backwards, which were in turn, need to be colonialized. The terms changed to define the relationship between the two sets of countries over a period of time, but the intent and objectives of the West still remain unaltered. Earlier, it was categorisation of the victor and the vanquished; colonial masters and their colonies; civilised and the uncivilised/ barbarians, and in present scenario the modern and the backwards. The ideology emanating from the West has strong affiliation with their ancient civilizational content. The trait of expansionism is inbuilt in a society or civilisation which considers materialism and accumulation of possession as sine qua non. St Augustine (354-430 CE), one of the most respected Church Fathers in Western Christianity, had moralised expansionism of Roman Empire. He concluded that 'to carry on war and extend ruler-ship over subdued nations seems to bad men a felicity, but to good men a necessity.'¹³ This clearly shows that imperialism cannot be understood merely as a modern phenomenon or in economic terms as Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) defined it as 'the highest stage of capitalism'. History has proven him wrong and St Augustine right. It is a civilisational creed, emanating from the Semitic social-cultural and political system. This is the reason why imperialism has not only drained the wealth but also consciously ruined the culture and changed the demographic character of the space it encroached.

Decolonisation is a universal factor without symmetry. It is proportionally related to the country's own culture, history and intellectual treasure. There are no history-less and culture-less societies. But the length of civilizational history, quantum of intellectual and cultural legacies, along with contributions to the knowledge system of the world, varies from one nation to another. Here the question of decolonisation of Indian mind assumes much more significance. India inherited centuries old civilisation with immense historical tradition, cherishing her cultural legacy. There is a common understanding that Indian civilisation has a history, even before the formation of the European identity or birth of Christianity took place. It has played very significant and made unparalleled contributions to the knowledge system of the world. The claim of Modernity by the West in the fields of science and technology or mathematics is juvenile, a shameless, and self-aggrandised certification. This 'modernity' existed in the Indian system of knowledge thousands of years ago.¹⁴ The Look-West-Intellectuals (LoWeIntel), born in Macaulay-Marxist knowledge system mocked these contributions of ancient Indian science and technology and mathematicians, with a reluctant and often superficial mention of such contributions: as it is they were viewed to be a burden on the syllabus. Kautilya's Arthshastra published by Shamsastri but Indian textbooks have shown non-openness to bring his work to centrality. Aryabhatta, Baudhayan, Brahmagupta, Bhaskaracharya, Kanad, Nagarjuna Susruta and Varahmihira have been best used for general knowledge only. Their contributions and ancient Indian achievements have not been theorised in civilizational context. However, India has been emerging from the shadow of the (LoWeIntel). This is the beginning of identifying India's Self which has so far been imprisoned in the context of few hundred years, depicting our social dichotomies and

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

contradictions. This has been identified as the only and real Indian story to perceive India or to define the nation. Native civilizational content and length both have been suppressed as a western civilizational program. Here, it assumes significance to make a difference between the meanings of decolonisation for India on one hand, and for Africa and Latin America or other parts of the globe on the other. In the latter case, the challenge was to protect localism through indigenous values and traditions by eroding the impact of Western notions, cultures and languages, say English. Dehumanized form of political domination and cultural suppression of African people was an effort to uproot them from their own self. Although there has not been suppression on the part of Westerners to the ancient cultural and philosophical contributions of Africa but they did everything to civilisationally different Africa to fit in their constructed social, cultural and religious image. It was an application of Procrustean bed phenomena with African civilisation which philosophically differed from Europe. This can be proved by their foundational ideology reflected by Ubuntu, which is a humanist philosophy of affirming others and existence. In brief, it can be described as "I am because you are." But Africa experienced altogether opposite to what the African people had witnessed during the colonial regime. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his essays uses a metaphor 'cultural bomb' for colonial politics of cultural engineering in the colonies.

***Director
India Policy Foundation
New Delhi**

References:

1. Golwalkar, M. S. (2000) "*Bunch of Thoughts*", Bangalore, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan, p 3.
2. Grant was motivated by Evangelical Christianity and had been in India during (1767-1790) holding responsibilities in military and the East India Company. He was also a Member of British Parliament (1802-1818). He wrote, *Observations on the state of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* (1792), seasonal papers of the EIC, Vol X, No 282 (1812-13). He described Indian society as 'corrupt and uncivilised'.
3. Parekh, Bhikhu (1995) "Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill" In Pieterse, Jan Nederveen & Parekh, Bhikhu (eds) *Decolonisation of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, London, Zed Books Ltd. p 81. I have taken accounts on Locke from Parekh's essay.
4. Ibid. p 81.
5. Fanon, Frantz (1963) "*The Wretched of the Earth*", New York, Grove Press, p 61.
6. Memmi, Albert (1991) "*The Colonizer and the Colonized*", Boston, Beacon Press, p 20.
7. Umakant Prasad Sinha, Ramanand Singh, Devipadma Choudhry, Ramgovind Singh (all class 9th students) Satish Prasad Jha and Rajendra Singh were class 10th students and only Jagatpati Kumar was a college student.

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha

8. Majeti Subba Rao, Srigriri Lingam, Lakshminanryan, Tamminani Subba Reddy, Gali Ramkotaih, Pragma Raghavaiah, Jasti Appaiah.
9. Khudiram Bose was hanged in 1907 when he was only 18 years old, so were Badal Gupta, Gopinath Saha was hanged in 1924 again an 18 years old student, Hemu Kalani , Kartar Singh Sarabha all were hanged when they were only 19. Prafull Chaki was hanged at the age of 20.
10. Diop, David "Le temps du martyre" quoted by Frantz Fanon in Nayar, Pramod. K (2016) (eds) *Post-Colonial Studies: An Anthology*, Sussex, Willy Balckwell, p 29.
11. Nandy, Ashis (1983) *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonial-ism*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
12. Fanon, Frantz (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, p 36.
13. Quoted in Hagerman, C. A. (2013) *Britain's Imperial Muse: The Classics, Imperial-ism, and the Indian Empire, 1784-1914*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p 85.
14. In the recent past contributions of India in science and technology in Mathemat-ics and the Statecraft have been increasingly highlighted. Invention of Zero, the Decimal System, Numerical Notations, Fibonacci Numbers, Binary Numbers, Al-gorithms, Theory of Atom, The Heliocentric Theory, Plastic Surgery, Ayurveda are some of the examples of umpteen contributions.

Western Hegemony: An Interpretation

Dr. Rakesh Sinha