

The Influences of Westernization

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In simple words, the term westernization mainly explains the changes that have taken place in the Indian society and culture due to the Western contact through the British rule.

M.N. Srinivas criticizes Lerner's concept of "modernization" on the ground that it is a value-loaded term. According to him, "Modernisation" is normally used in the sense that it is good. He therefore, preferred to use the term "Westernisation". He describes the technological changes, establishment of educational institutions, rise of nationalism and new political culture, etc., as almost the by-products of westernization or the British rule for about two hundred years in India. Thus, by Westernisation, Srinivas, primarily meant the British impact.

"During the 19th century, the British slowly laid the foundations of a modern state by surveying land, settling the revenue, creating a modern bureaucracy, army and police, instituting courts, codifying the law, developing communications, railways, posts and telegraph, roads and transport establishing schools and colleges and so on...."

The British brought with them the printing press which led to multipronged changes. Books and journals made possible the transmission of modern as well as traditional knowledge to a large number of Indians. Newspapers helped the people living in the remote corners of the country to realize their common bonds and to understand the events happening in the world outside.

Urbanisation is not a simple function of "industrialization" and there were cities in pre-industrial world also.

There are cases of rural people who are more urbanized than urban people.

Main Features of the Process of Westernisation

Westernisation compared to Sanskritisation is a simple concept. As already made clear, it explains the impact of Western contact (particularly of British rule) on the Indian society and culture.

Westernisation mainly refers to the changes that took place in the areas such as technology, institutions, ideology and values. The changes that took place in these areas had their impact on other areas of our social life. "Westernisation is an inclusive, complex, and many-layered concept" – Westernisation, education and "life-styles" had a great impact on Indians daily life. Due to Western influence the Indians may drop some of their traditional customs in some areas of life and accept many of the new practices and make a compromise between the old and the new in some other areas of life.

Among the Indians-

People who served in the houses of British officials / citizens as domestic servants.

People who got converted to Christianity.

Those Western educated Indians who served in the government bureaucracy;

Those who worked as advocates, engineers, doctors etc and those highly educated Indians with almost aristocratic life such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ravindranath Tagore, Pandit Nehru, Sir Syed Ahmedkhan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and others functioned to accelerated the Westernisation process.

The form and pace of Westernisation of India varied from region to region and from one section of population to another (Srinivas 1985) :

Some of the groups became Westernised in their dress, manners, speech, sports and in the gadgets they used. While other groups absorbed Western science, knowledge and literature, remaining people relatively free from certain other aspects of Westernisation.

Effects of Westernisation on the life of Indians

According to M.N. Srinivas the impact of Westernisation on the culture and society is very profound. It brought out changes in the material culture as well as non-material culture, in social conditions and spiritual system.

The impact of Westernisation was felt upon caste system, joint family system, and institution of marriage untouchability, education, economic structure, social awakening and political awakening. These specific changes are as follows.

Influence on Caste System:

There was a breakdown of the distinction of high and low castes.

- a) Westernisation has brought out industrialization. In the industrial factories members of all castes work together. In order to work together they should come close to each other. This created the dilution of caste customs and practices and the breakdown of the differences between the castes.
- b) Westernisation has not only brought industrialization, but also urbanization, industrial expansion created new townships (Westernisation has also brought urbanization, in terms of industrial expansion and creation of new townships). People from the villages flooded to these townships in order to earn livelihood. In towns members of different castes came together and sense of separation could not be sustained. This led to the relaxation in the caste system.
- c) Westernisation also created improved means of transport. With the improvement in the means of transport there was acceleration of Westernisation. Buses, trains and other means of transport helped people of different castes to travel together. This led to watering down of caste distinctions.
- d) Due to dress, the visible distinction between people was not that of caste, but of class.
- e) When the first medical college was set up in Calcutta, the dissection of a cadaver for even educational purposes was considered to be an irreligious act, but gradually it came to be accepted and morally permissible if the purpose was education.
- f) The supply of water through pipes and eating in restaurant also helped to diminish the feeling of untouchability. When water pipes were filled in Kashi, the project was opposed on the ground that members of low castes may operate the water works, but now everyone makes use of them.
- g) The spell of Westernisation also helped eradication of untouchability.

The rapid development of means of communications, urbanization and industrialization helped in the eradication of untouchability because one cannot choose his companions, while travelling in buses or trains. Western education encouraged the sentiment of equality and there was also social and political awakening in the country.

Influence on Marriage

The institution of marriage has undergone several changes.

The basis of traditional marriage had been a sacrament. Under the impact of Westernisation it had become secular. Mutual love and married bliss constituted its basis today.

Changes in rituals at marriage were also reduced. The civil marriage received gradual acceptance.

Under the impact of Westernisation, the youth were free to choose partners. In the past the wishes of bride and groom had no place in the scheme of marriage. It was an exclusive affair between parties. But no boy or girl at least meet each other before marriage.

Eradication of child marriage is another result of Westernisation. By law child marriages were banned in British India. On account of the influence of the British, there was spread of education among girls and there was general realization that child marriage is detrimental to health.

Eradication of concretion and post-concretion(SATISAHAGAMANAM) is also the result of Westernisation.

Under the influence of the Westernisation, divorce was permitted and widows were permitted to remarry.

Influence on Family

Westernisation had weakened, modified and disintegrated the joint family system.

On account of Westernisation, in terms of industrialisation, urbanization, education and employment joint family has sometimes weakened or disintegrated; sometimes it has adopted itself to the changing conditions in the society.

Westernisation separated residence from workplace, provided different occupations for the members of the same family.

Weakened the child training practices by introducing new child rearing practices.

Dispersed the members of the family whereby the children were in the school, the parents were in the offices and the maid servant was looking after the house.

Influence on the Economic Sphere

Introduced land reforms in 1793 and new measures in land management in terms of Zamindar, Mahalawari and Ryotwari systems or permanent classes of landlords and owner cultivation.

Land was made to come into the market and became a saleable commodity. Hence land started changing the hands. As many landlords and owner cultivators raised cash crops, local Jajimani system became weakened, many artisans and service caste people migrated to towns, which were enlarging and provided demand for their services.

As the frontiers of industrial economy expanded and every nook and corner had been exposed to the market economy and trade had become a thriving activity everywhere. Especially liquor trade in isolated areas had become a thriving business and many traders had invested their income in land and became landlords.

Emphasised merit system in terms of achieved status, but not ascribed status.

Impact on Political Sphere

Westernisation introduced a uniform statutory Panchayat system. This system replaced the traditional caste and tribal Panchayats; a uniform law was to be followed by all castes and tribes instead of diverse traditional laws.

Introduced western types of laws courts, legal system and judicial systems.

Introduced uniformed administration system; and voting system based on land ownership and payment of land tax.

Brought out geo-political changes; created a sense of belongingness to a nation or national consciousness.

Promoted democratic values and emphasized secularism, nationalism and new political culture and leadership.

Impact on Religious life

Emphasised materialism rather than spiritualism.

Impact of Westernisation on Dress, Art and Literature

Westernisation deeply influenced the Indian languages. The English words used in Indian languages outnumbered the words of all other foreign languages. All mechanical devices and instruments used in daily life in Indian are the gift of the west.

Westernisation has also influenced Indian literature, The romanticism, existentialism and psychoanalysis have so much influenced Indian literature that most Indian stories are written under their impact. Short stories and one-act dramas have become common in Indian literature. Further, the influence of ideologies of atheism, secularism, personal freedom, humanism appear in Indian writing.

Art is another area, which has undergone several changes due to westernisation. In Indian cinema, the use of western dance and music is quite common. Musical instruments like violin and guitar have influenced Indian music and movies. Modern art is also very much influenced by the British way of life.