

British Imperial Ideology Handout

Question] Many Englishmen honestly considered themselves as the trustees of India.

I- Orientalism

- Conquest of Ireland in 16th century led to this belief among the English that they are responsible for civilising the rest of the world.
- In the post-Enlightenment era (post 18th century), the English thought of themselves as modern and superior to Orientals (i.e. those from the east) and that they were the agents of reform of the 19th century in India.
- In the beginning the image of India was that it was a great ancient civilisation which has now decayed due to Pundits & Maulvis and it is responsibility of Englishmen to restore that glory to India. Men like William Jones studied ancient Indian culture and languages and proposed that European and Indian languages are part of the same family (i.e. Sanskrit, Greek and Latin). Thus elevating the status of Indian civilisation to that of the west. This ideology led to Orientalism.
- Institutions were established to study Indian languages and Indian scriptures viz
 - Calcutta Madrasa (1781)
 - Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784, pioneer William Jones)
 - Sanskrit College (also known as Hindu College), Benaras (1791)
- Grain of cultural colonialism and benevolent colonialism is there in Orientalism since the leadership of this project of restoration of glorious past is with the foreigners and not Indians. Pandits and Maulvis were mere participants in the project. It was a top down phenomenon and the English interpretation of our past was to be the final authoritative interpretation.
- **Warren Hastings (1792-85)** adopted Orientalist policies i.e. the idea that Indians need to be ruled by Indian laws and customs. Thus he sanctioned gathering of as much knowledge of Indian traditions as possible. This would result in ease of administration, the Englishmen would mingle with the locals well and the weight of the chains of colonialism which bind the Indians would be lighter. Thus Orientalism involved **Rhetoric of Love (Benevolent Colonialism) to reduce opposition to colonial rule.**
- **Fort Williams College, Calcutta (1800)** was thus established to train the EIC officials in Indian languages and tradition and many Indian language books were

translated to English. Another objective was to reduce the influence of ideas of French republicanism on EIC officials (overthrow of Monarchy in France by Jacobians in 1792 after the French revolution in 1789).

II- Authoritarianism: Orientalism of 1700s soon gave way to Authoritarianism as the study of ancient India strengthened the realisation that the past was glorious and present is degenerated. Thus, it is only through the authority of the British that the Indians can be civilised via imposition of the British political culture.

- **Cornwallis (1786-93)** was an authoritarian who imposed British Politico-administrative culture viz
 - Separation of power between Executive & Judiciary
 - Role of the state is to protect individual rights and private property.
 - Anglicisation of administration
 - Establishment of rule of law
 - Ensuring monopoly of political power to State by display of flags, uniforms and seals; by greater policing of the country; by reducing the influence of local power magnets like local Rajas.
 - Permanent Settlement (1793) in Bengal was to move India towards English like agriculture which was based on the enterprise of capitalist big landlords.
 - Authoritarianism was based on the narrative that British are saviours of Indians from the abusive feudal lords. Lord Wellesley (1798-1805) was also an authoritarian. Both their administrations were control oriented.
- **Thomas Munroe:** a Hybrid of Orientalism and Authoritarianism
 - He was of the view that India should be governed in line with its own traditions. However, it would be the British who would govern and there would not be any leadership given to Indians in governance. Thus, there would be concentration and centralisation of power in EIC and hence authoritarianism.
 - This was reflected in his **Ryotwari Settlement** (1801) in Madras Presidency.
 - Ryotwari Settlement was inspired by ancient Indian model of revenue collection where the state directly collected the revenue from the peasant without reliance on intermediaries (zamindars). However, in the ryotwari settlement the revenue was to be collected by EIC officials with no lead role to Indians.

- Men like Elphinstone, John Malcolm and Charles Metcalfe belong to the same school of thought. Elphinstone, a disciple of Munroe, implemented Ryotwari Settlement in Bombay.

IV- Liberalism (of 1800s)

- Its theme was that British have conquered India through acts of sins and now it is time to transition to motto “civilise and not conquer”. Macaulay was a liberal.

V- Utilitarianism (of 1800s)

- Its motto is “civilise via good laws and good government with focus on maximising the good for the majority”. Thus, focus is on using the tools of policy, law and administration to effect socio-political reforms. Thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and James Mill were leaders of this school of thought. **James Mill** joined EIC in London and wrote the book “**History of British India (1817)**” where he claimed that India’s rich past is a myth; that what India needed was an effective schoolmaster i.e. good government and good laws; and thus he was against Orientalism.

VI- Evangelicalism (of 1800s)

- Its motto is that christianity is the path to civilisation. They also believed that English have conquered India through acts of sins. The **Charter Act 1813** allowed unrestricted entry of Missionaries in India. It was Charles Grant who led in the discussions on the Charter Act of 1813. He was an EIC official and later a Member of Parliament as well.

VII- Implications of Liberalism, Utilitarianism and Evangelicalism of 1800s

- All advocated reform of the colonial state and thus the push was towards Benevolent Colonialism. They advocated that Indians should get benefit of good government and best ideas of the age.
- Evangelicalism implied that Indians are barbarians and thus British rule is must civilising them. The agents of change would be the missionaries. Charles Grant argued that main problem of India is its religion which promotes ignorance, idolatry, superstition, tyranny of priests and prevents scientific temperament.
- Utilitarianism-
 - Efforts of James Mill resulted in setting up of a **Law Commission in 1833** under Liberal Macaulay. It drafted the Indian Penal Code in 1835 that came into effect in 1860.

VisionIAS

- **Lord William Bentick** (1828-35; a hybrid of Orientalism and Utilitarianism)- He brought laws to ban Sati and female infanticide. However, he used the ancient Indian scriptures to justify these laws.
- **Nature of Education:**
 - Utilitarians wanted education in vernacular languages as it would have more utility and give better results in effecting change.
 - Liberals wanted english education in english language due to focus on civilising Indians by imposing english culture. Thus, Macaulay's Education Minute (1835) argued for english education.
 - Evangelics converted Bible into vernacular languages to maximise reach of christian religion. They were also agents of english education (in english and vernaculars).

VIII- Impact of 1857 Revolt

- the violence by Indians led to the belief that Indians are beyond redemption.
- Thus now authoritarianism increased. India was inferior and also different.
- Now there was to be more separateness between Indians and the English. The rise of racial sciences in Europe led to focus on physical features rather than language as the criteria for classifying races and civilisations. Thus, Indians were no more the kins of Europeans. The Aryan Theory was invented viz the Europeans founded the Vedic civilisation, however since they procreated with the indigenous Indians, they lost their civilisational superiority and degraded. Thus racism increased.
- The goal to civilise Indians took a backseat. however, the reforms continued due to political pressures of the Indian national movement and for ease of administration.