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Xenocentrism in Pakistan

*Sajid Mehmood Awan**

Cultural patterns of different societies are naturally diverse from one another. All the cultures keep changing with the social change of their respective societies. The researcher is concerned with the change that occurs in both the structure as well as culture of the society. An identical distinction between social and cultural change is not a sharp one, because most changes are the outcome of both cultural and structural forces. Sometimes the term socio-cultural change is used to include change of both kinds. William F. Ogburn (1933:122-166) and Alvin (1970 & 1981) have counted the factors of discovery, invention and diffusion among the most vital sources of social change. Most of the social changes in all the known societies have occurred through diffusion —— the spread of cultural traits from group to group. Whenever, diverse cultures come into contact, some exchange of cultural traits always takes place. Such a cultural contact inaugurated between the areas included in Pakistan and other civilizations of the world with the foreign invasion. This area indeed, has been subject of influences of people through out its history. People of this area kept absorbing the impact of these infusions, because they were receptive to assimilate or tolerate foreign ideas and people (Lalif; 1894:21). Potential outsider who came to South Asia include the Greeks under Alexander the great, the Kushanas from Central Asia, the Mongols under Gengis Khan, Muslim, traders and invaders from the Middle East and Central Asia, and finally the Britisb and other Europeans. They all bore some or the other influences on the political, social, economic or religious institutions of the society in one-way or the other. Focus of this study is not to cover them all but only the latest one i.e. the British.

A direct cultural contact between the two civilizations i.e. the Indian and the British lasted up to three centuries, which initiated a cultural exchange. The researcher sees it as an intercultural exchange resulting in cultural diffusion. India adopted so many things earlier through British impositions, later due to its own xenocentric attitude. The British, actually, ruled this region for a long time. They brought many changes in both the material as well as no material elements of Indian culture in order to the strengthen and prolong their rule in this region. Non-material element of culture could not match with the change in material elements of culture. The result of this disparity is a cultural lag. (Ogburn, 1922:200-213).

Owing to this situation it is hypothesized that a cultural lag in the local culture led it towards the xenocentrism.

The term xenocentrism means a preference for the foreign. It is the exact opposite of ethnocentrism (Shills, 1972, Wilson et al, 1976:271-274). It, indeed, is the belief that our own products, style or ideas are necessarily inferior to those, which originate

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elsewhere. It is basically, the conviction that the exotic has a special charm, which the familiar can never attain. It is based on the glamour of the strange and faraway and prestige of distant centers. Having such enticement of the foreign culture, the people living in xenocentric societies incline to assure that they are superior because of the lure of the foreign label.

Brass (1999), Hutchinson and Smith (1996), Saran and Eames (1980), Inayatullah (1998), Amin (1988) and many others have enquired the phenomenon of ethnocentrism in South Asia and declared it a culture of ethnicity. They all were addressing the issue in political context not in the social or cultural one. They indeed were noting the extrovert not the introvert or *ideal* not the *real culture* of the society. The *ideal culture* includes the formally approved folkways and mores, which people are supposed to follow i.e. the cultural norms. The *real culture*, consists of those which are actually practiced i.e. the statistical norms (Warriner, 1958:165-168). The same clash between the real and ideal cultures is observed by the present researcher as a clash between ethnocentrism and xenocentrism in Pakistan. This society claims to be ethnocentric but as a matter of fact has become xenocentric towards its colonial master i.e the British.

In order to draw the contours of the British and Pakistani cultures the researcher has marked the institutions of both the cultures. Institutions, indeed, are among the most formal and compelling among the norms of a society. Organized clusters of folkways and mores of any society dealing with highly important activities are embodied in the social institutions of that society. (Horton and Hunt (1984:62). In most complex societies there are five basic institutions i.e. familial, religious, governmental, educational and economic.

In the contemporary cultural scene, England's contribution to British culture is too vast for anything. English culture certainly tends to dominate the cultural life of the Britain, but Wales, Scotland and Ireland have also made some important contributions. All these areas share fully in the common culture but they also preserve the lively traditions that pre-date political union with England (Britannica, 1994-2002).

Political institution presents Britain as a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. The country's head of state is the reigning king or queen. The head of government is the Prime Minister, who certainly is the leader of the majority political party in the House of Commons. The main elements of the British government are the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Sovereignty lies in parliament, which comprises the head of state, House of Lords and House of Commons.

Economic institution of the Britain is the representative of capitalism based upon the laissez-faire [French, "Let things alone"] theory of Adam Smith (1776) and is following the policy of consumerism since 1893 under the England's Sale of Goods Act of 1893. Consumerism means the policies aimed at regulating the products, services, methods and standards of manufacturers, sellers and advertisers in the interest of the buyer (Nadir, 1965).

Concerning religious institution, the various Christian denominations in Britain have emerged from schisms that divided the church over centuries. The greatest of these happened in England in the 16th century, when Henry VIII challenged the supremacy of the pope. This challenge facilitated the adoption of some protestant tenets and the establishment of the Church of England, which is still the state church in England. Whereas, the Roman Catholicism has retained adherents. In Scotland, the reformation elevated the Church of Scotland. This was run by presbyteries——local bodies composed of ministers and elders——rather then by bishops as in England. The official religion of the Britain is basically the religion of the Churches of England and Scotland. These churches are protected by the state but are not "official"(Collinson, 1982).

The British tradition of religious tolerance has been particularly important, since the 2nd World War, when the immigrants started introducing a great variety of religious beliefs. There are considerably large and still growing communities that practice Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism (Havighanst, 1985). The largest number of Muslims migrated from Pakistan, Bangladesh, with a sizable group from India. There are also many Buddhist groups. In total Muslims constitute 2.6% Hindus 0.6% and Sikhs 0.5% of the total population of the Britain and total immigrants from South Asia count 4.5% of the total population (Britannica, 1994-2000). All this diversified people.

The formal institutions, agencies and organization that transmit knowledge and promote cultural, social and intellectual growth of the individual constitute the educational institution of that society. Some countries have centralized while other have decentralized education system. A third type of system is hybrid of these two. National and local authorities share administration and control in this system. Such is the case in Britain, where education laws originate in parliament but actual administration is in the hands of local government. In some cases private schools and other educational facilities may be controlled but not financed by the central authority. Sometimes, private institutions may receive full or partial subsidies with varying degrees of autonomy. The same type of educational system was inherited and is still prevailing in Pakistan.

Quite like all institutions, the family is a system of accepted norms and procedures for getting some important job done. British society has been characterized by a great diversity of family organization, since medieval times. This diversity has had several interrelated aspects, including geographic region, occupation, social class and whether the family in question was rural or urban. There were considerable differences between different areas in the country. Aristocrats and commons established family customs and values peculiar to their respective social classes, as did merchants and peasants (Anderson, 1980).

The base of the unit of family is, however, neolocal marriage rather than patrilocal or matrilocal marriage. The British folklore warns against in-laws and urges the couple to set up a household of its own through neolocal marriage (Ibid, 1980), which is promoting the conjugal or nuclear family.

The traditional culture of Pakistan is predominantly rural, traditional, conservatives and religious in outlook. It changed somewhat in the last 150 years under the impact of British rule. Among other factors of change include western education, technological development and political change, all brought by the British (Maloney, 1974).

Most of the people of Pakistan live in villages and follow the traditional pursuits of an agricultural economy (weiss; 1991:20-23). Economic model of the country is the same as inherited from the British i.e. Capitalist economy with the application of the same Laissez-faire theory of Adam Smith (1776).

Similarly, the same west minister model of parliamentary democracy is the base of the political institution of the country. This model of parliamentary democracy is being implemented at the cost of the local political institution i.e. *Jirga, Panchayat,* or *Biradari* etc.

Religion is the central force controlling the life of the people of Pakistan. Islam the faith of about 97 percent of the people is the official religion of the country. Hinduism and Christianity from the leading minority religious, other religious groups include the Sikhs, the Parris, and a small number of Buddhists. The Constitution of Pakistan 1973 defines Pakistan as an Islam country, but guarantees freedom of religious. Life in Pakistan revolves around religious beliefs and practices. Belief in supernatural entities is strongest among the tribal communities. Such kind of superstitious thinking however, got a breakthrough earlier with the arrival of Muslims in the 8th century AD and later by the British in 17th century. Religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence of the diverse religions is the outcome of the intercultural and inter-religious exchange between the local and British cultures (Griffiths; 1995: 4-6).

The educational institution has also been transformed from local to the Western orientation. The traditional religious institutions are being replaced with the modern ones. The overall educational system is the same legacy of the British. The English language as a medium of education is also part of the British legacy (*Ibid*; 1952:76).

Family setup in this region, however, is somewhat different from the British. Being an agricultural society, joint family system still is popular in Pakistan. In the urban centers, however, this system is being replaced with the nuclear family (Weiss; 1991:2). The trend of nuclear family system is, however, more popular in the western oriented societies, mainly impressed by the British style. This, indeed, is the outcome of that very intercultural exchange (*Ibid*; 1952:81).

All the above-mentioned and many others, like popularity of English dress and of western ideas of population control, human rights, women rights and child labor etc. are also the manifestation of that very xenocentric attitude of the people in this country. Xenocentrism has, actually, both negative as well as positive implications. There is nothing wrong in adopting good things, ideas and products from other cultures. But enticement of the foreign at the cost of one's own culture, both material as well as non-material makes it xenocentric.

Such kind of xenocentrism is a social problem, which can eliminate some of the cultures, their heritage and cultural identity. The researcher recommends that the followers of any culture should not take their culture inferior as compared to that of the foreign. The researchers should promote the idea of cultural preservation. At last but not at all least, the government should accept or borrow different policies and models from the foreign after the necessary modifications, better suiting with the local structure of the society and that of the culture.

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