

**ASSIMILATION OF FOREIGNERS IN INDIAN SOCIETY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NORTH-WEST INDIA; A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

No society is static. It changes according to the nature of challenges it has to respond to and the requirements it has to answer. From the tribal society of the Rigvedic period to the feudal society of the early medieval period, Indian social structure underwent numerous changes. Politico-economic factors, changes in the mode of production, demographic changes, a continuous and large influx of foreigners etc were largely responsible for the social changes. But these phases of change mainly related to the history of North-West India. Those who migrated from other parts of the world were completely and swiftly absorbed within the indigenous social system. Some of them absorbed in the Hindu fold that they have virtually lost their separate entity and they are known as Indian or Hindustani. They followed common customs both with regards to the dress and eating habits. The paper is to find out new facts, to search out the causes responsible for the assimilation of foreigners and the development of the synthesis of Indian culture. Archaeological remains, the vast corpus of secular and religious literature are the main source of information.

Key words: Assimilation, ancient, culture, foreigner, diversity, mankind, races, religion.

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1. Introduction

India is a vast country which possesses a rich variety of races. A number of races of mankind are found in India since the early historical period. The vast population of India consists of the tribes, the Greeks, the Sakas, the Kushans, the Hunas, the Mongolians, the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans etc. The physical features and the colour of the Indian people also different from region to region. India not only possesses racial diversity but also linguistic diversity. In the religious sphere also India possesses great diversity. They were completely and swiftly absorbed within the indigenous social system. They have virtually lost their separate entity and they are known as Indian. They followed common customs both with regards to the dress and eating habits. Large influxes of foreigners were also largely responsible for the social changes. Some section of the foreigners the process of Indianisation started as early as the second quarter of the second century B.C. It is still a mystery as to whom or from what sources India was first populated. However from the remains of bone and plants of the same kinds are more similar with that of Africa. (25,000 B.C.- 10,000B.C, Kurnul District A.P.; Belan Valley Mirzapur District, U.P., Cave and rock shelter ; the valley of River Soan ,Punjab; Bhimbetka, Bhopal, M.P. Many scholars believed that the first traces of human beings in India are found in the Deccan and central India. In subsequent years people of various races like Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Sakyas, Yuchis, Huns, Muslims and Europeans also poured in India.

2. Objective and methodology

The objectives of the paper are to find out new facts, to search out the causes responsible for the assimilation of foreigners and the development of the synthesis of Indian culture. Archaeological remains, religious rituals and literary sources provide very valuable information. The vast corpus of secular and religious literature is the main source of information. Historical events and other valuable information both secular and religious are obtained from literature.

3. Discussion

3.1 The Aryans: The Aryan migration into India was gradual. They did not enter India in one stream. The immigration was a prolonged process. 2000-1500 B.C. The Aryan migration to India was not a single concerted action, but one covering centuries and involving many tribes. In the Rigveda the land where the vedic Aryans lived is called by the name of Sapta-Sindhu or 'the land of seven rivers'. The region of Sapta-Sindhu witnessed the composition of the sacred hymns. They established small kingdoms in the N-W India (Kurus, Bharatas, Purus, Kauravas, Panchalas, Usinara, Matsyas, Srinjayas etc.) In the north-East India smaller principalities and republic gradually merged with the Magadhan Empire.

3.2 Iranian Invasion: In the North-West India there was no any powerful kingdom to protect the region during the 1st half of the 6th century B.C. several small independent principalities fought one another. Darius I, the Achaemenian ruler of Iran penetrated in the North-west India in 516 B.C. and occupied it. This area constituted the 20th provinces or satrapy of Iran. Xerxes, the successor of Darius, employed the Indians the long war against the Greeks. It appears that Indian continued to be a part of the Iranian empire till Alexander's invasion of India. Results of contact: The Indo-Iranian contact lasted for about 200 years—developed trade & commerce, art & architecture, sculpture and language. It seems that through the Iranians the Greeks came to know about the great wealth of India, which whetted their Greek and eventually led to Alexander's invasion of India. For the first time India came into contact with the western world. (round bell shaped and lion capital.)

3.3 Macedonian invasion: In the 4th century B.C., the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander of Macedonia destroyed the Iranian empire and conquered whole portion of west and central Asia. He invaded India and defeated many independent monarchies and tribal republic of N-W India including Porus whose kingdom (kingdom of Abhisara) lay between the Jhelum and the Chenab. He restored his kingdom to Porus and made his ally. Alexander remained in India for 19 months (326-325 B.C) and most conquered states were restored to their rulers who submitted to his authority. Alexander invasion produced certain important results. It was the first occasion/event of closed contact between ancient Europe and ancient India. It was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in different fields. It led to the establishment of trade and commerce, more Greek settlements in this area and continued to live in this area. (art and architecture, sculpture, Gandhara school of Art- improvements on the Indian coinage system.)

3.4 Indo-Greeks: a series of invasions took place from about 200 B.C. in N-W India. The Greeks who ruled Bactria (lying south of the Oxus river in the area covered by north Afghanistan). The invaders come one after another. Demetrius, ruler of Bactria invaded India around 190 B.C. and occupied N-W India. In the beginning of the second century B.C. the Indo-Greeks occupied a large part of North-West India and ruled for about 150 years and left a deep impact on the Indian culture. The most famous Indo-Greek ruler was Menander (165-145 B.C.) also known by the name Milinda. Sakala, modern Sialkot, Punjab was his capital. He also invaded the Ganga Yamuna doab. Indians learnt the art of coining

from the Greeks, Greeks exercised deep influence on the Indian art, sculpture, painting and architecture. The Gandhara school of Art is the best specimen of the admixture of the Indian and Greek culture.(Hellenistic Art).

3.5 The Sakas: The Greeks were followed by the Sakas. The Sakas were the nomadic tribe. They defeated the Indo-Greeks and the Indo-Parthians. Five branches of the Sakas ruled in different parts of India (Afghanistan, Punjab(Taxila as capital), Mathura, Western India and Upper Deccan. They ruled for about three centuries. Famous Saka ruler in India was Rudradaman (130-150 A.D.) of western India.

3.6 The Parthians(Persian): The Parthian lived in Iran from where they moved to India and occupied only a small portion of north –western India in the 1st century A.D. The most famous Parthian king was Gondopernes. In course of time the Parthians like Sakas before them, became an integral part of Indian polity and society.

3.7 The Kushans: The parthians were followed by the Kushans who were also called Yuechis or Tocharians. The Kushans were one of the five clans into which the Yuchi tribe was divided. They were originated from North-central Asia living in the neighbourhood of China. They defeated The Greeks, the Sakas, the Parthians and finally setup their authority over the lower Indus basin and the great part of the Gangetic basin. Their empire extended from the Oxus to the Ganga from Khorasan in central Asia to Varanasi in U.P. (A portion of Iran, a portion of Afghanistan, the whole of Pakistan, almost the whole of North India were brought under one rule by the kushans.). In the first half of the 1st century A.D. under the leadership of Kujula and his son Vima Kadphises established their control over North-West India. Kadphises-I,II, Kanishka(who started Saka Era 78 A.D.) their successor ruled till about 230 A.D. in Northern India. Developed art and architecture, issued gold coins, Sanskrit literature, finalized the Doctrines of the Mahayana form of Buddhism and it came into existence.

3.8 The Gujara Pratiharas: They were originally of central Asiatic people who came to India towards the close of the 5th century A.D.

3.9 Impact of central Asian contact: 1. New elements in Indian Society. The Greeks, the sakas, the Parthians, & the Kushans came as conqueror and settled in India. Later they absorbed in Indian society or became an integral part of Indian society (as a warrior class). They became completely Indianized in course of time and lost their identity in India. Around 7th century A.D. numerous castes, mixed or sub-castes were created (came into existence) due to inter castes marriage(anuloma- between the male of a higher caste & female of a lower caste; Pratiloma- marriage of women of high caste with the men of lower castes.) and foreign settlements. These castes were outside the regular classes. Subsequently number of foreigners like Greeks, Parthians, Shakas, Kushans etc. also absorbed by the Indian society either as Kshatriyas or Sudras. Ancient Indian society was divided into four classes-Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishyas and Sudra. Sudras was formed amongst the aborigines or non Aryan tribes.(the term Sudra came to be applied to the community of the aborigines) Thus large scale settlement in India brought with them a new social order. 2. Contribution: used of turban, trouser, fine fabric, red pottery technique, riding horse on a large scale, food habits, religions etc.

3.10 Arab invasion of Sindh: (lower Indus valley from Multan to the Sea, Baluchistan in the West and bounded by Indian desert in the east). At the time of the Arab invasions Sindh was under the dynasty founded by the Brahman Chach. Muhammad ibn Kasim invaded and defeated Dahir, king of Sindh in 712 A.D. Sindh was completely conquered in 723 A.D.(under Khalifa Hisham(724-43A.D.) Spread of Islam & they learnt many things from the Hindus(like astronomy, mathematic etc.)

3.11 The Turkish & Mughal invasions: A series of invasion from 1000-1027 A.D.: Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India and plundered the big town & rich temple of their

wealth. During the course of his expedition he annexed Punjab & North –west India. (Hindushahi ruler- Jayapala) 1206 A.D. Another Turkish invasion under Shihabuddin Muhammad Ghori led to the foundation of the Sultanat of Delhi. Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, who defeated Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526 A.D., and founded the Mughal Empire in India.

There were four original castes with several subcastes. These subcastes were further subdivided into numerous subsections. Many new communities which are known to us by the generic term Rajputs were also recognized as Kshatriya during the period. Rajputs began to emerge from the 7-8th century A.D. by 12th century there were 36 clans of Rajput. The foreign elements which could not be put in any three higher classes were naturally designated as the Sudra. Their number increased from age to age. Some of them have been regarded as mixed castes because of hypergamous unions. The growth of a composite culture i.e., Indo-Islamic culture, as a result of contact, intermixing and assimilation of the cultural traditions of India and the Islamic world during the Medieval period.(the fusion of the cultural traditions of Hinduism and Islam gave birth to a composite or Indo-Islamic culture.) Many Arab merchants were happily settled in different part of the country, especially in the coastal areas and had formed their small colonies. A number of Muslim saints and preacher came to India to spread Islamic religion and permanently settled. The Muslim who came to India as invaders or settlers, adopted the country as their own. Turks treated India as their own home and not as a colony of a foreign country. They came to live here & share the life of the land of their adoption. Muslim adopted a variety of Hindu tradition and customs in their day to day life. In course of time the Hindus & Muslims forget their fundamental differences & the spirit of mutual harmony, co-operation & toleration began to grow among them. Religious missionary, a large group of Sufism from different Islamic country migrated to India and established themselves in many parts of India.

4. Conclusion

The above discussion it reveals that the people of India are not the descendents of any particular races, but are the descendents of many races which have got mixed up in the course of time and it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Invasions and Migrations (religious, political and economic factors) are the most important causes of assimilation. Those who migrated from other parts of the world were completely and swiftly absorbed within the indigenous social system. They followed common customs both with regards to the dress and eating habits. Some section of the foreigner the process of Indianisation started as early as the second quarter of the second century B.C. and the process continued during the medieval and modern period also.

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