



DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

THE HINDU

(5th March, 2019)

**Topic: GS4/Essay : Intellectual
Autonomy**



THE HINDU
Daily News Paper

The loss of intellectual autonomy

Intellectual Autonomy:-

- Intellectual autonomy is **a willingness and ability to think for oneself.** The young are particularly keen to have the **freedom to decide which beliefs to form.**
- Intellectual autonomy is widely considered to be an important value.
 - A person with this virtue is not a mere receptacle for information and ideas deposited by Others. The intellectually autonomous person is capable of forming her own judgements, initiating reflection and asking probing questions.
- Of course, intellectual autonomy needs to be balanced **intellectual humility** and **intellectual trust.**
- This was probably not true in the past when large numbers of people were illiterate, knowledge was produced and stored by a few, and there was wider social legitimacy for submission to those with power and authority.
- Since the end of the 18th century, as technologies of knowledge production became increasingly available to larger sections of society, intellectual autonomy has been threatened not only by state power, but in other invidious ways.

Undermining of Intellectual Autonomy in British Colonialism:-

- The British strategy of intellectual control was implemented by crafting a system of education rather than brute coercion.
- Although the best of our thinkers outmanoeuvred this system.
 - For example, our most original thinker of this period, Gandhi, was a product of this very education
- However this system created acute anxiety among self-reflexive thinkers.
 - For example, Sri Aurobindo lamented the “increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect” in the face of new knowledge imposed by European contact. “Nothing is our own, nothing native to our intelligence, all is derived,” he complained. “As little have we understood the new knowledge; we have only understood what the Europeans want us to think about themselves and their modern civilisation.

Impact of Intellectual Control By Colonialism:-

- Undermine the Capacity of Critical Thinking and Non Influential Decision Making: Indians has become “authority”, blind acceptance of ideas coming either from outside, from Europe, as was the case of the then English-educated Indians, or from inside, from fossilised traditions, as was the case of traditional pundits.

- It was as if the only choice before Indian intellectual elites was a hyper-westernised modernism or ultra-traditionalism. The absence of real choice was a symptom of an undermined capacity to think on one's own, the power of humans to accept or reject nothing without proper questioning.
- **Cultural Subjugation instead of Creative Assimilation:** Indian philosopher, K.C. Bhattacharya in 'Swaraj in Ideas', feared that Indians might suffer from a subtler form of domination "when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost."
 - When two cultures come into sustained contact with one another, there is bound to be give and take. One culture might even give to the other more than it takes from it. However, all creative assimilation involves a real conflict of ideas, and elements of an alien culture can be accepted only after "full and open-eyed struggle has been allowed to develop" between the two encountering cultures.

Present Alien Ideas which Challenges our Collective Consciousness without critical Analysis:-

- **European Idea of Religion Based on Exclusive Ethical Norm:** Religion, as a demarcated system of practices, beliefs and doctrines, is largely an early modern European invention and begins its existence in and through the theological disputes of the 16th and 17th centuries.

- Under the impact of colonialism, this category came to India and obliged Indians to think of themselves as members of one exclusive religious community, not just different from but opposed to others.
 - In India, people did not think of themselves as belonging to a single system of belief and doctrine in competition with and opposition to all others. Indeed, mobility across communities and multiple allegiances were common.
 - As a result, most people refused to be slotted into rigid, compartmentalised entities.
 - They were religious but did not belong to a religion. This has virtually ceased to be the case.
- **Particular conception of the nation based on Ethnic Identity:** Religious belief or practice, or adherence to a doctrine, was never viewed as a condition of membership in a wider national community. One's religious or linguistic identity made little difference to one's belonging to the nation.
- An exclusivist conception of the ethnic nation which is entirely against the spirit of local Indian religions or conceptions of nationhood is devised first in Spain in 1492, developed further during the European wars of religion, and perfected in the 18th or 19th century has seized the Indian mind.

Conclusion:-

- To define one's identity or community in terms of a single, exclusive religion such as Hindu, Muslim or any other, is a perverse European notion, a mark of our cultural subjugation, a symptom of the loss of our intellectual autonomy.
- To have done so is to have uncritically abandoned our own collective genius for something ill-suited to our conditions.
- This need to be reversed by building our collective intellectual autonomy and critical analysis.