

Que : British vision of India had no single coherent set of ideas. On the contrary, the ideas were beset with contradictions and inconsistencies. Discuss.

Ans: India was conquered by the British through the sword, so they needed the support of some ideology to legitimize their position in India. But due to changing interests and compulsion, they could not maintain consistency in their ideology rather they shifted their ideological position from time to time.

Earlier, British scholars supported the ideology which is characterized as orientalism. Orientalism reflected a deep penchant for Indian past and culture and tried to convey that the Indian culture was different from the western one but not inferior to it.

But this euphoria for Indian antiquity vanished soon under the compulsion of underling the relevance of the British rule in India. Then, they tried to establish that although Indian antiquity was glorious but present is declining and India could have been restored to its past glory only under British rule.

Not simply that switching over of the British colonial interest from commercial capitalism to industrial capitalism and the need to develop India as a market for British manufactured products brought a major shift in British ideological position.

Liberalism and utilitarianism were the product of British Industrial capitalism. Supporting the need to carry reforms they made a trenchant attack on Indian past and culture as regressive and decadent. Then liberalism gave assurance that through introducing English education and British institutions India would go on the path of progress and civilization and a time would come when India would even attain freedom.

But that argument did not suit the interest of utilitarian thinkers like Jeremy Bentham, who was not in a mood to give too many concessions to Indians. Therefore, utilitarianism rejected civilizing mission in India and simply prioritized the foundation of efficient government.

In this way, the British vision of India did not have a coherent set of ideas rather it remained to be inconsistent.

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