

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

Mrinal Chandra Das¹

¹Ph.D Scholar

Department of History,

Raiganj University

P.O.-Raiganj,Uttar Dinajpur,West Bengal

Email: mrinalnbu1962@gmail.com

***Abstract:** If we cast a glance of our eye into the history of mankind, we will find that most of the ancient civilizations were developed in Asia. And Asians have contributed in the field of science and philosophy and in other various fields in the so long human history. In the past Asians were known for knowledge, art craft and scientific innovation before the rise of west. The knowledge current that flowed and reached rest of the world and lighted them, but with the passage of time the glory was lost due to a numbers of reasons. Now to get back this ancient glory again for our continent is the demand of time. This article is intended to analyse thinker Mohendranath Dutt's views on the revival of ancient glory of Asian continent. Mohendranath Dutt remarks that if Asia wants to develop commerce, science and medicine, she is bound to modify social ideas, as the fossilized state of society will be a bar to the onward progress of the other ideas. The social advancement must proceed pari passu with the development of other ideas. It is quite certain that Asian social system should be remodelled.*

***Keywords:** Asia, Backward, Continent, Civilization, Decolonization, Mohendranath Dutt, etc.*

Date of Submission: 17-05-2022

Date of Acceptance: 25-05-2022

Introduction

Asia is the largest continent on this planet. Most of ancient developed civilizations were born in this continent and rest of the world was familiar with its enriched cultures and civilization. Asia was immensely prosperous in terms of economy, trade, and commerce. However, as time passed, Asia's splendour faded away and it was invaded by western powers. Decolonization began in Asia in the 1950s, but it left behind a slew of socioeconomic issues. On this circumstance how condition and ancient glory of Asia as whole be restored will be discussed on the light of Mohendranath Dutt's

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

thinking. Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) was younger brother of Swami Vivekananda, besides; he was a thinker, writer on several social and philosophical concerns.¹ He wrote a number of treatises that reflect his broad understanding of a variety of topics. *New Asia*, *National Wealth*, and *Federated Asia* are a few of his writings in which he exhaustively considers how to restore Asia's historic splendour.

He travelled large part of Asia and Europe and keenly observed different civilizations and cultures and remarked that early civilization and early empire were formed in Asia. Judging by the ancient history, we take the Asians to be the one family as distinct from the non-Asian people. Asian people have settled down in different parts of Asia and developed their peculiar customs according to climatic effect, but their general culture is the same. From Japan, China, Mongolia to Morocco and Abyssinia, all the Asians have common culture, common manners and the same mode of expression.² But all these peoples are now in a slumbering state and the new non-Asians are dominating over the Asian races.³

For reason of the awkward and backward state of Asia Mohendranath observed that people of Asia think themselves as isolated and separated from the surrounding nations. Every people is busy with the welfare of his own people, and the broad aspect of looking upon the whole of Asia as a common family with different branches settling down in different places is scarcely to be met with. Due to this isolated and cooped-up habit, the Asian races are overcome by the non-Asians.⁴

How the condition of Asia will be improved? On the matter thinker Mohendranath Dutt suggested many means.

Education for Asia

Education is key toll for the development of any nation. Therefore on this issue he was of the opinion that focus should be given on elementary primary education. The main object of education will be to open up the mind and the intelligence of the boys and the girls that they might get information and be in touch with the whole country and the outside world. Furthermore for earning bread and butter children should be trained up as to be commercial people that would enable them on their living. He means, industrial education should be introduced in every village and in every country of Asia that the Asian youths might come out as practical trained men to take up the field in the world market.

Agriculture, cattle farming, book-keeping, account business and similar subjects, which are of practical use in after-life, should be written in some scientific form in an easy local language and are to be graduated according to the class and age of the boys and the girls, so that the village boys and the girls will be better scientific farmers as to utilise the manure and other elements of cultivation.⁵

In regard to higher education Mohendranath says that chemistry and electricity are the crying needs of the period. In every factory and place of industry, chemists are much required to develop the business concern as to how from the raw materials articles might be manufactured. Along with chemistry, electricity is another prominent feature in commercial life. Electricity now-a-day, much governs the commercial world. The system of education must be remodelled and changed according to national requirements.⁶

He says that the Asian universities should invite the students and teachers of different universities of Asia to attend their lectures in some convenient season of the year. By this exchange of

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

students and professors all over Asia, a federation will develop, and every Asian nation will feel the kinship and family tie for other Asian races.

He suggested, within the country itself, all the educational heads should meet once in a year to discuss the new devices to develop and quicken the intellect of the nation in a practical way. Then in every decade the national system of education should be remodelled as to suit the advanced state of society and world. Then in every decade a conference of educational heads of Asia, might be held that the whole system of education might be remodelled according to the change of time and circumstances.⁷

There must have a common language for communication for Asian people. Unless an Asian language is developed English should be the language of communication. But when any Asian language is properly developed, English should be avoided.⁸

Unification of Asians through Communication

To develop the unity of all Asian nations and of every particular nation, roads should be made for conveyance of goods as well as passenger traffic that the people might freely mix with each other and exchange their thoughts.

Motor roads with broad spans are much needed in all Asian countries. By motor Lorries the goods are transported to different parts of the country in less time. In all Asian countries motor roads are to be constructed for easy transit of goods and passengers.⁹

He said that it is necessary that the Asian countries should be united through a net-work of railways. The former apathy of the Asian communities and the aversion for the neighbouring people should be eliminated. Asia is Asia, and all the Asian countries should stand shoulder to shoulder, as the culture and civilization is very much the same. Frequent intercourse with foreigners and exchange of thought with each other will bring out a sympathetic and common understanding with each other so that a new era of civilization and solidarity among the different races of Asia will come up in future. Through exchange of thoughts and goods the shyness, backwardness, the racial apathy of the different nations will be filed off and be smoothed down through constant intercourse with each other; and the goods from one market will be easily conveyed to the required market in a short time so that the Asian production might get a good market for sale.¹⁰

Agriculture of Asia

Regarding agricultural development Mohendranath has provided the following suggestions. Mohendranath says that in the present state of Asia, the majority of people are agriculturists. It is seen that in Asia the agriculture is carried on in a stereotype pattern. Besides, the quality of the produce is much deteriorated. The ordinary wheat is of smaller size that the same in other countries. The American wheat and the wheat of some other countries are of big size. He emphasised that better seeds should be introduced into the Asian fields so that crops might be of better kind and also of bigger quantity due to better modes of cultivation.¹¹

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

Cereals such as rice crop, which is a staple article of cultivation in Southern and Eastern Asia, should get equal and proper attention, so also the pulses which are much consumed in India and in small quantities in other parts of Asia.¹² In America there are varieties of vegetables, and they are of bigger size than what we find in Asian countries. American seeds should be introduced in Asian fields so that the crop might be of better class. We must exchange our cereals, etc. with the different countries of Asia as well as with the advanced non-Asian countries so that the harvest and the crop might be of better kind.¹³

In the Himalaya region many classes of fruits might be reared up. Ispahan is the best fruit-rearing country in Asia; next is Damascus. If the plants and seedlings from Ispahan, and say from Damascus or from Kandahar, be introduced and transplanted in the Himalaya region, varieties of fruits can be reared up in uncultivated lands.

The Americans have made many seedless fruits which we do not generally find in Asia, except the small seedless grapes. These seedless fruits or rather the plants might be introduced in different parts of Asia so that Asian fruit-rearing might be a respectable business.¹⁴

Seeing the dominance of foreigners in jute industries Mohendranath suggested that along with jute cultivation Asian countries require to set up big machinery and open factories for the production of jute articles such as carpets, shawls etc. it will be of much profits.¹⁵ Persia, Egypt, and the Damascus province produce cotton to some extent. The Persian and the Damascus cotton are supposed to be of better fibres. Now if these cotton seeds and seedling be introduced into the different countries of Asia along with the introduction of cotton seeds from America and other countries, the Asian cotton business might thrive well.¹⁶

If the Asian people introduce the cultivation of beet-root in their own countries and learn the process of making sugar out of beet-root, it will be a profitable business.¹⁷

Artificial beehives may be introduced in Himalayan region where various types of flowers grow in wild, and the honey thus obtained would be superior to that grown in the plains.¹⁸ Better and scientific methods of breeding of cow, buffalo, goat, sheep, pig and also cross breeding with similar foreign male species are to be introduced. They are to be reared carefully and fed with good nourishing food to increase that number and improve the quality.¹⁹

He says, old sort of manure is not sufficient to stimulate and fertilise the soil for better production. Therefore, along with organic fertilizer, chemical manure is now introduced on a limited scale, the quality and the quantity and the size of the crop might be improved. Experts with chemical knowledge as to manure and composition of the soil are to be requisitioned that the industry might be a paying one.²⁰

By co-operative system, tractors or similar improved implements be employed and all the fields be brought under one trust, the expenses of production might considerably be less. He means that the property rights will remain the same, only the crop will be divided according to shares, and the method of tilling will be a combine one. New kind of ploughs and other new devices might be introduced so that cultivation will be cheaper and also that in the adjoining villages several big plots might be cultivated by the same tractor in one season, and the crop might be gathered in a shorter time.²¹

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

Improvement of Mountainous Regions

In the Himalaya regions a number of rivers are of strong currents flowing all through. Now, if in the narrowest parts of the rivers, dams be laid out, the water of the stream will be made into a big reservoir, and the water might be raised up in the upper region for the utility of cultivation and factory.²²

Now the electric power might be generated at a cheaper cost by using the current of the stream as propeller. The electricity power might be transmitted to distant parts of the country by cables, where factories might be worked by that power. Labour being cheap and the people hardy, the factory will thrive well at a cheaper cost in the said regions where electric power will be the chief motive force.²³ He suggests that all the universities in the mountains should have boring institutions. Different parts of the mountains should be bored down, so that mineral deposits of different classes of stone might be found out. Geological institutes should be started by the people themselves, not only to study the formation of different classes of stones but also to find out some quarries from which stones for buildings and other purposes might be found out. This might be applied to all Asian countries.²⁴

Botanical Research Institution

Forests and trees of many types abound in the Himalayan highlands. Botanical research institutes should be established in various forest locations to study vegetation and its utility for human benefit. If botanical chemists can find an opening to conduct research, the medical characteristics of vegetation will be identified first, followed by the commercial value and several other features of the plant. The Himalayan and plains regions will provide excellent opportunities for botanical research.²⁵

Commerce & Industry

Mohendranath enunciates that in every cluster of village chambers of commerce and industry should be opened, as the village productions do not always find a proper outlet for exchange. The productions are consumed within the locality and do not bring reasonable profit to the producers. It is for this reason that these organizations should be opened. The chamber of industry will regulate prices etc., and the chamber of commerce will distribute the produces to the different centres. From the village clusters, the line will be extended to the provincial towns and ultimately to the central places of commerce so that the whole country might be organised on industrial and commercial basis. Here indoor and out-door factories should be fostered so that every bit of raw material and every ounce of energy might be utilized for the benefit of the people.²⁶

It is now needed for improvement of Asia to bring out a new civilization where everyone will find employment and be put out of grip of starvation and poverty. It is necessary that the whole country should be organised on industrial and commercial basis. Agriculture, cattle farming, sheep grazing, poultry rearing and even artificial bee-keeping should be turned into industry and put into scientific method.²⁷

Exhibitions of Arts and Handicraft should be held in the big towns in different countries, and so on the national Exhibitions of national handicrafts and arts. There ought to be a national exhibition in a

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

big town so that it might be made known to the people. But when the national exhibition is completed, an all-Asian exhibition should be held in the different big towns of Asia.²⁸

Industrial & Agricultural Banks

To make any commercial undertaking successful, national banks should be established in every commercial centre that the industrialists might get easy loans from the banks. As the commerce is developing in every country and a big fund is required to carry on, industrial banks should be established in a large scale, so that on the security of goods or on the credit of the industrialists a big sum might be available to the commercial people that they might carry on the work. Bank on commercial line is considered as the cash room of the factory, or rather it might be called the payment office of the factory. This is one aspect of looking at a banking business. The other aspect is that agricultural banks should be started to help the agriculturists or husbandmen to facilitate their work. The agricultural banks will advance money to the husbandmen at a very low rate of interest, repayable when the crop is harvested and sold in the market.²⁹

Need of Organization for Asia

Mohendranath stated that the Asian people, though they have abundance of raw-materials, for want of proper organization and training do not utilize these as commercial commodities, which other nations of the world, like European, Americans, Australians, and also Japanese and Russians, utilise by employing organizational and national energy and thus they are more prosperous and advanced than the Asian people.³⁰

Here comes the question of organization. Our society must be organised through and through so that the economic organizations might smoothly work, grow and prosper. People must realise the value of organization. Even the small industries and handicraft should learn to work in organization before they can think of any patronage or help from the State to save themselves from the over-sweeping tendencies of the big industrial concerns. For these organizations should be raised from bottom to top and not from top to bottom.³¹

Annual Conference of Asian Women

He states that annual conference of Asian women should be called in. These conferences of women will bring friendly feeling and stabilize racial affinity in the whole Asian family. First of all there will be the conferences of women of the different provinces of the country and then of the whole of Asia. It is thus many isolated, narrow-minded prejudices will be washed off. This sisterhood of Asian women will bring out the solidarity and unity amongst Asian nations.³²

Federation of Asia

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

The students and the professors of different countries of Asia should resort to the other universities to attend lectures there, so that a federation of students might grow up. First this line of action should be enforced in the country itself. Then this process of exchange of student should be applied to all the Asian universities. This will bring out a federation of students all over Asia.

The talented women of all the countries of Asia should meet in a conference in some big town of Asia to exchange their views about social progress and female education and their difficulties in the advancement of nation. Through this sort of conference of women, Asian federation of women will develop.

The conferences of merchants should be held in big commercial places, so that the commercial aspects in national life should be known to one another. The production and the distribution of wealth, where to get suitable markets etc. should also be found out. Therefore, federation of Asian merchants is a necessary element for the prosperity of all the Asian nations.

There is a need of a federation of scientists. By making a federation of Asian scientists, the Asian people might get prominence to make their discoveries and devices known to all the Asian nations.

Asia being the oldest continent in the world has developed different schools of medicines. Now by making a federation of medical men of Asia, a new school of medicine and treatment of disease will be developed.

The federation of Asian social thinkers is necessary to infuse a new spirit of advancement into the hearts of Asian youths, both men and women.³³

Conclusion

Mohendranath Dutt remarks that if Asia wants to develop commerce, science and medicine, she is bound to modify social ideas, as the fossilized state of society will be a bar to the onward progress of the other ideas. The social advancement must proceed *pari passu* with the development of other ideas. It is quite certain that Asian social system should be remodelled. But one point to be noted is that hasty innovations are not desirable. People must be trained to accept innovations congenial to their national life, but no innovation should be thrust down through their unwilling throats. Social thinkers and reformers are must needed in Asia to get the solidarity, the unity and consolidation of all Asian races.³⁴

Note and References

1. Chatterjee, Anjona, *Mohendranth Dutt: A Versatile Genius*, Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, 2004, p. 5
2. Dutt, Mohendranath, *Federated Asia*, Calcutta: The Mohendra Publishing Committee, 1949, pp.1-3
3. *Ibid*, p.2
4. *Ibid*, p.4
5. *Ibid*, pp.26-27
6. *Ibid*, pp.31-32

Asia in the Eye of Mohendranath Dutt (1869-1956) and His thought of Reviving the Ancient Glory of Asia

7. *Ibid*, pp.34-36
8. *Ibid*, pp.34-36
9. *Ibid*, p.51
10. Dutt, Mohendranath, *National Wealth*, Calcutta: The Mohendra Publishing Committee, 1952, p.93-94
11. *Ibid*, p.63
12. *Ibid*, p.64
13. *Ibid*, p.65
14. *Ibid*, pp.67-68
15. *Ibid*, p.69
16. *Ibid*, p.70
17. *Ibid*, p.74
18. Dutt, Mohendranath, *Labour and Capital*, Calcutta: The Mohendra Publishing Committee, 1954, pp.38-39
19. *Ibid*, p.39
20. *National Wealth*, *op.cit*, p.81
21. *Ibid*, pp.77-78
22. *Federated Asia*, *op.cit*, p.57
23. *Ibid*, p.59
24. *Ibid*, pp.103-104
25. *Ibid*, p.95
26. Dutt, Mohendranath, *New Asia*, Calcutta: The Mohendra Publishing Committee, 1954, pp.32-33
27. *Ibid*
28. *Ibid*, p.37
29. *Federated Asia*, *op.cit*, pp.106-107
30. *Labour and Capital*, *op.cit*, pp.8-10
31. *Ibid*, pp.8-10
32. Dutt, Mohendranath, *Nation*, Calcutta: The Mohendra Publishing Committee, 1954, p.89
33. *Federated Asia*, *op.cit*, pp.117-120
34. *New Asia*, *op.cit*, pp.40-41