

UNIT I

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY -DAVID CRABTREE

The word history is derived from the Greek word "istoria", meaning "enquiry", so the meaning of History can be an enquiry into the past. In this particular essay the author wants to say about how people gave importance to history in the olden days and how the present generation people give least importance to history. According to him, in olden days people used to tell about their family history to their children. But nowadays it is no wonder that the present generation youngsters do not even know about their own family history. So, the author here emphasizes the importance of history.

The author here opines that by knowing the past one can know the problems that are faced by their forefathers and the solutions to those problems. By knowing history one can have the knowledge of the life led by one's ancestors and solutions to the problems. Author strongly feels that "A person who controls the past controls the future". Further, he gives examples for this statement. He states the greatness of great Russian Leaders like Stalin and Lenin as examples of people who controlled past and ruled their country.

The Russian revolution that occurred in 1917 brought Lenin and Stalin into the limelight. Every citizen of Russia felt no other person other than Lenin and Stalin would help them to improve their lives. As per the official history, Lenin and Stalin were portrayed as the leaders who worked for the betterment of Russia. But, Gulag Archipelago written by Solzhenitsyn in 1970s revealed that these so called great leaders were so cruel and did not even hesitate to kill people brutally. This book brought the injustice done by Lenin and Stalin to the Russian people. So, the author says that one has to give importance to history but one must only study the real history rather than what is just written in the chronicles.

Next the author says that one should not be under prejudice when one reads or writes about history. As how a criminal is judged on the basis of strong evidences, history too should be judged by strong evidences. But he again says that there are gaps in the history of mankind which need to be filled up by conjectures. On the whole the author opines that history teaches values to its true readers. If one reads true history one gets true values and if it is a false one, one gets false values. So, one must always give importance to true history.

QUESTION AND ANSWERS:

1. What is the status of history in modern times?

A: The status of history in the modern times is almost nil. The generations of the present time find it as just a time waste activity to spend time on knowing one's history.

2. Why do the people in modern times discard history?

A: People in the present generation live in a period of rapid change. Everybody is busy with their own life. People do not find time to spend hours and hours on knowing history. And the most important is they want to define in terms of where they are going rather than where they come from.

3. What is the main reason according to the author for our ignorance of the past?

A: The main reason for the present generation's ignorance of the past is that the modern time is a period of rapid change. The change is so fast that anything from the past is treated outdated and irrelevant. Nowadays nobody gives importance to know even the recent past. It is just because of indifference that people are giving least importance to know the history.

4. What example does the author give to prove his point about the importance of history?

A: The author here states the example of Russian Revolution to say that knowing history is very essential. By studying the history of Russian revolution one can know the crisis and the sufferings of the people during this revolution. Actually it is known that the revolution started against the rulers of Russia known as "Tsars", who are stamped as the most cruel rulers. The Communist leaders like Lenin and Stalin are given a great place in the Russian history. But when they came to power they too treated the people brutally. So, by this revolution one can know the problems faced by the Russians and the solutions they sought to curb this revolution.

5. What does the author mean by "official history"?

A: While explaining the Russian revolution the author gives the words, "official history and the actual history". According to the text the official history is the one which is maintained by the country. Everything is given a positive tone in this history. But the actual or real history may be a different one. The author gives the example of Gulag Archipelago written by Solzhenitsyn in 1970s revealed that these so called great leaders as Lenin and Stalin were so cruel and did not even hesitate to kill people brutally while they are pictured as the great communist leaders in the official history.

THE MOTHER OF MODERN CORPORATISM

The meaning of the word corporatism is “the organization of a society into industrial and professional corporations serving as organs of political representation and exercising control over persons and activities within their jurisdiction”. In short it can be said as where a company takes over the political issues of a place or country.

In this particular essay the author Nick Robins, tries to list out how the East India Company became the mother of modern corporatism especially in India. The East India Company entered India in 1757 and lasted till 1857, the year that marked upraise of the First Revolt of Indians called the SEPOY MUTINY over the Britishers. It actually came to power with the Battle of Plassey by winning over the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula. He says that it has been sixty years since India got independence from the British Raj.

He then opines the East India Company which is otherwise called as the John’s Company, exploited the Indian economy and became a wealthy one by doing so. Again, he says that the company cannot be simply marked as a fallen empire. Then the brutality of the company or the British Raj is brought to picture. Some of the main reasons for the downfall of the British Raj are Malpractice and Monopoly. The example for their economic exploitation is the BENGAL BUBBLE, where the Britishers have hiked the prices of the food grains during the time of a famine in Bengal. For them India was just a land of extraction of raw materials. They cared only for money but not for people.

Slowly protests were started against the British Raj in India as well as abroad. The East India Company was the most powerful Trading Company in the Universe which is well versed with tyranny, plunder, oppression and bloodshed. On the whole he says that we should look at the John’s Company as a profit-making company. The idea of the author is to say that when we are analyzing any company we should take into account the core business rather than the charitable causes. If we are to fully understand our corporate present, we have to understand our corporate past. So, history is important here.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Why does the author call the “East India Company”, the “Mother of modern Corporatism”?

A: According to the author, the East India Company is the most powerful company which ruled over many countries with its tyranny, plunder, oppression and bloodshed. It was the first company to sow the seeds of Corporatism across the world.

2. What was at the core of the East India Company’s motives?

A: The main motive of East India Company was to rule over the world by introducing the policy of divide and rule. It started its rule in India by winning the Battle of Plassey and turned India into a land of extracting the raw materials.

3. How does the author use statistics to demonstrate the exploitative nature of the East India Company?

A: The author describes the John’s Company as the most powerful company that extracted all the wealth in whichever country it entered. The East India Company was first established on New Year’s Eve in the 1600s, Mughal India commanded 22% of global GDP, with Britain producing less than a tenth as much. By the time British finally left India it’s national income was more than 50 percent greater than its former colony.

4. What are the modern day’s corporates that are seen as being similar to the East India Company?

A: The companies that are seen being similar to the East India Company are Enron’s Dabhol Power Project, Union Carbide’s Bhopal factory and Wal –Mart.

5. How did the East India exploit India?

A: The East India Company exploited India to such an extent that India turned into a poor country from a rich country. The company used oppressive measures and started collecting heavy taxes from its colonies in India. By the time British finally left India it’s national income was more than 50 percent greater than its former colony. He gives the example of Bengal Bubble which occurred during a famine in Bengal. When there was a famine in this area, the East India Company stored all the food grains and started to sell at a high price.

6. Who were the critics of the East India Company?

A: The critics of the Company were none other than the people who faced its atrocities. Also the historians of other nations and the leading minds of the age as said by the poet Richard Clarke in 1773 were critics of the East India Company. It was said by an American activist who is against the East India Company as they were facing the most of the powerful trading company of the universe.

7. How did people from the other countries react to the East India Company?

A: People from the other countries started protesting against the East India Company. There is an instance given in the lesson for this. The Americans dumped the tea product of the East India Company at Boston harbor.

8. What does the author mean by “corporate accountability”?

A: The author says that East India Company is the best example for a company which could not maintain the corporate accountability. It always gave importance to its personal passions rather than public interest. Corporate accountability is “ a company to be answerable for one’s conduct and one’s responsibility to discharge the duties that are assigned.”

9. What is the emphasis of ‘our histories’ usually?

A: The author gives emphasis on ‘our histories’ that they usually concentrate on the actions of states and individuals, politics and culture, rather than on their corporations, their executives and the consequences of their activities.

10. What were the lessons that the legacy of the East India Company can teach contemporary India and modern corporate?

A: The legacy of the East India Company taught the lessons that no company should follow the monopoly and malpractice. It also shows that a company should value the public interest rather than giving importance to their personal passions. Most importantly, it taught the modern corporate that if are to fully understand our corporate present, then we must know our corporate past.