



The British Raj and Modernization of Indian Society: A Critical Analysis



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Abstract

This article examines two major aspects of Indian society, that is, the construction of India's lengthy and diverse society that developed from Dravidian and Indo-Aryan families that is 'Indian Society' with multi-languages. It also argues how the British dismantled Indian social fabrics after the introduction of western education, land settlements, legislation against social evil. The Christian Missionaries were used as a tool for making change in Indian society. This article also discusses about conflicting ideas that emerged between the English and the Indians scholars on the issue of Modern education. Indian society is a complex society which has a number of religions, languages, customs and traditions with regional variation that has been developed from ancient past. This society went on changing under various empires and finally it formulated as "Indian Society" with multi-culture and languages. However, the British on their arrival to India realized the evils of Indian society which was pointed out by Charles Grant in his pamphlet, Observation and he suggested that the key to modernization of Indian society was the English education. Karl Marx has also pointed out the dual role of the British the 'destructive' and 'regenerative' phase of British India. For almost two centuries, the British had effective control over the Indian subcontinent directly and exercised a considerable influence over it.

In the course of governance, the British realized the necessity for the introduction of modern education in India, as the oriental education was, in no way, beneficial for the people of this country, as they alleged. Contrary to it, Indian nationalists, especially in the first quarter of 20th century, were critic to modern education as it had devalued the cultural traditions of India. As a result, a large volume of literatures came into circulation during freedom struggle that provoked Indians of their core cultural values. However, in this article, the British education policy has been fiercely debated and re-examined in the light of 'banned and controversial literature' that put emphasis on the preservation of Indian culture. This article is based on textual analysis that tries to prove that the ultimate goal of the British education policy was to debase the cultural values of Indian people under colonial rule.

Keywords: Indian society; Colonial rule; Christian missionary; Education; Modernization; Proscribed literature

Introduction

Since the establishment of British rule in India, various arguments have been put forwarded social scientists regarding image of the British from the Western and Indian perspectives. The British scholars have projected their image of a 'civilized nation' in one hand and they declared India as 'backward and uncivilized' country on the other hand. By doing so, the English had psychologically prepared Indian educated minds to accept the superiority of the West and they further prepared Indians to accept their hypothesis that the development and modernization of India was badly needed for which the English had come all the way from Britain to India to make the Indians civilized. Charles Grant, a servant of the English East India Company, on his return to England published a pamphlet entitled, 'Observation' wherein he made a critical analysis of the state and society among the Asiatic subjects of the Great Britain, particularly with respect to morals and on the means of imparting knowledge. He began with the description of various evils of Indian society.

While discussing about Indian society, he charged the Hindus of Bengal with dishonesty, corruption, fraud mutual hatred and

distrust and described their custom such as sati, as barbarous. Even the Indian accepted this position and it is evident from the letter of Ram Mohan Roy to Lord Amherst, the then Governor-General, in 1824, pleading for the introduction of modern education as the cultural world of the intelligentsia was shaped by British education. The Indian traditional system of education, as compared to the western knowledge, was considered inadequate and stagnant, even if its accessibility was fairly satisfactory. The traditional system of education in the words of Ram Mohan Roy loaded 'the mind of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the possessors or to society'. Contrary to it, a large number of pamphlets and leaflets published in the first half of the twentieth century at various places in the Northern India narrate vivid pictures of the British rule.

One such leaflet entitled, 'Bhartiyon' of Ramsubhag [1] gives an account of the sufferings of Indians under the British Raj and it conveys a message to the people to unite for the welfare of the country. In doing so, the Hindus, Muslims, Sikh, Parsis, Christians and others would come to know the real nature of the British rule and that would help them in shaping their policy for the development

of the country. According to Ramsubhag, the British Government was continuously doing injustice with Indians everywhere through various sorts of acts that had undermined Indians and it had made them uncomfortable; in view of this, the Mother India was lamenting with utmost grief and asking her son to think of it. The other point of criticism was from cultural perspectives that the introduction of Railways, Steamer and the use of Motor had destroyed the traditional system of Indian transportation that had undermine the position of cows and buffaloes which were sacred in India from time immemorial.

1. Come, come let us consider together over the welfare of India, O Indians!
2. Let Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, and Christians come and embrace each other, O Indians!
3. Due to the horrible injustice of present Government, the mother India is lamenting, O Indians!
4. By enforcing various sorts of acts, (they) made us uneasy, O Indians!
5. By opening Railways, Streamer, Daaks and Motors, (they) made us uncomfortable, O Indians!
6. By sacrificing cows, bullocks and buffaloes, (they) destroyed India, O Indians!

Narrating about the Punjab incident of 1919, the leaflet Bhartiyan says with great pain and grief that our heart got stabbed whenever we recall Punjab incident where unarmed children, young and old men and women were killed in the name of efficient administration. Even all those who were sticking to peace, non-violence and truth were not spared off and were sent to jail. In view of this, one could not believe on the nature and character of the British, as the English were acting like Ravan and Kansa. Praising Mahatma Gandhi, Shaukat Ali, Lala Lajpat Rai, Jawahar Lal Nehru, C.R Das and others, Ramsubhag (the author of the leaflet) argues that they were working for the welfare of people of this country for which they were facing troubles in the Jail.

While Satyandra Nath Majumdar in his Bengali pamphlet entitled, Svadhinar Dabi [2] (claim to Independence) argues that India's claim to independence as put forward by the Indian National Congress was based on 'justice' and 'reasonableness'. To refute Congress arguments the British imperialists' writers advanced their arguments against this claim that the Indians were unfit to govern themselves. To counter British hypothesis, the pamphlet also gave an account of British policies that were implemented in India for the last two hundred years of the English rule. As a result, India witnessed a number of movements and conflicts in various parts of the British Empire in India and in England itself by reason of the people desire to assert their rights.

It has been argued that the demand for independence or self-government in various parts of the empire were not made all of a sudden, but it was an outcome of the problem Indian had been facing and when the people were driven to despair as regards to justice and good government, as the tyranny and apathy was the

cardinal policy of the British imperialists. The case of India was said to be no exception hence, the writer gives a brief account of the political history of India of the Hindu and Muhammadan periods to make a comparison with the British regime. The pamphlet further examines that the British Government of India did not stop with merely depriving the Indian of their independence but by establishing itself on the exploitation of the masses, they had brought disastrous effect on the Indian civilization, economy, political and spiritual progress of India; hence it was our belief, says pamphlet writer, that India had no other course open to her than attaining Purna Swaraj, that is, complete independence by severing the British connection. Never was the political condition of India as miserable as it had become under the British rule.

The pamphlet went on saying that the position of India had become bad to worst under the British Raj and therefore, the writer consider it to be a sin against humanity and God to remain for a moment under the British administrative system which had inflicted on our country the 'four gold' evils: the transformation of nationalism that we clearly perceive today everywhere in the country in the form of literature, science, music and art and industry. The powerful efforts of the British have made India restless in order to build a new society out of a traditional and inert social life-all those were nothing but precursors of independence, they were preludes to the triumphal march!

Similarly Sri Mukhtiv in his Hindi leaflet entitled, Gaurang G [3] (Bande Matram) perceives the British with much suspicion and he narrates an account of the deeds of the whites and calls the British with various nomenclature and argues that the British were: deceitful, cunning, oppressors, dishonest, mischievous, murderers, dogs of hell, selfish, cruel, unfaithful, evil-doers, Dacoits, thieves, pickpockets, tyrants, irreligious, looters, loafers, bloodsuckers, parrot-eyed, betrayers bastards, robbers, oppressors, asses. It also discusses how did the English come to India and having seen our wealth how they became greedy to snatch our wealth. To exploit our resources, they taught us a formula of deceit and forgery, and made us to fight amongst our brethren and having taken possession of our all and they taught us subtle ways. This kind of indecent words used by writer of the pamphlet to attract innocent Indian minds against the British.

One another hand written leaflet, "Bande Mataram Swadhin Bhatat Ki Jai" [4] addressed to the lovers of the country, argues about the sufferings of the people under the British rule. The writer at the outset asks the lovers to find out and take the addresses of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the cause of motherland. To awake Indian regarding true nature of British rule, the pamphlet argues that how the blood of innocents was shed, the slaughtering of females and children had taken place and the naked pictures of the demonical tyranny of foreign demons and purify your eyes with tear drops in the name of the martyrs. It also argues that the present British Government proscribed and seized the pious books- Hindu Punchi, "Balidan" Ank, Chand ka Phansi" and Bharat men Angrezi Raj" which enumerated the murderous acts of this demonical Government in clear words. The main features of these books had been the reproduction of British atrocities that can be found in

talky films. Some leaflets like “Ranbheri” (Clarion call) in the name of the seditious leaflet circulated by the same organization which smilingly faced the gallows or underwent lifelong imprisonment and deportation.

But Mahadeo PS [5] in his poem entitled, “Purbi, dhun-deora yogia” in Kunti Biyog, a Hindi pamphlet highlights some other aspects of British rule, for example, the British system of justice especially in the context of Indian handicraft industries where he argues that there was deindustrialization in the country under the Raj that affected people in large numbers, the people engaged in small industries lost their means of livelihood and therefore, to take revenge from the British he had decided not to touch British cloth and instead he would prepare motia [6] cloth and by doing so he would reduce the Manchester and Lancashire mills into dust. For making rough cloth he would introduce charkha. He further admits that earlier Indians were ignorant of British rule but now they had realized the reality of the British rule.

The British system of justice has also been questioned by Mahadeo Prasad in his Kunti Biyog. Discussing about the Punjab incident Mahadeo Prasad says that in Jallianwala Bagh, men, women and children were massacred in large numbers without any reason that affected the sentiments of Indians to the extent that the Indian and more particularly the Punjabies became alert from the British Government. In spite of this great massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh Indian did not become violent against the British Government as Gandhiji had taught them the philosophy of wisdom (non-violence).

- a) Alas o cruel; you committed injustice.
- b) Since Gandhi Baba has taught wisdom.
- c) Alas o cruel; we became alert.
- d) When we remember the Punjab incidents.
- e) Alas o cruel: our heart bursts.
- f) You did not feel pity on little children.
- g) Alas o cruel; God is the witness.
- h) To whom are we to tell your doings?
- i) Alas o cruel; hearing them, our hearts break.
- j) You made the public crawl on their bellies.
- k) Alas o cruel; you did not feel pity, o rustic.
- l) You perpetrated oppressions in the Baisakhi Fair.
- m) Alas o cruel: you uprooted the tents.

Pandit S [7] in his Urdu leaflet entitled “Shaitan aur Iman Ki Jhapat” (A rush between Shaitan and Faith) argues that whatever the oppression the English would afflict with Indians, it would not affect them as they had developed resistance to bear the cruelty of the British. At the same time Pandit Sharma warns the British that the time was about to come when they would realize their fault and weep till then they could make us to weep through their oppressive policies. Criticizing the British, Pandit Sharma further says that

the dagger, a weapon of oppression, would be reduced to dust and therefore, they did not mind even if British destroy them to ashes. Narrating the British atrocities, Pandit Sharma curses them and says that the grief of Indians would shake the seven heavens, so they could use their power as they like it. The writer questions the British glory and eminence and warns them that whatever they had earned would be destroyed and burnt like candle very soon. He further says that Indians had been hard pressed since long and suffering grief after grief but still the English were not satisfied as Indians were pricking their eyes.

- A. O tyrant! Afflict the hearts of the poor as much as you like.
- B. No sign will come out of the heart, oppress as much as you like.
- C. Tyrant, some day you will also weep with your hand on your forehead.
- D. unjust one, you may make us weep for the present as much as you like.
- E. Some day you and your dagger will be reduced to dust.
- F. Reduce me to ashes now as much as you like.
- G. My lamentation too will someday shake the seventh heaven.
- H. Exercise whatever power you like on this land now.
- I. Your eminence, position and magnificence will be annihilated in a moment.
- J. Otyrant, annihilate me now as much as you like.
- K. Some day at least you too will be burnt up like a candle.
- L. Burn me in the fire of grief as much as you like.
- M. We have been pressed for a long time.
- N. We have suffered grief after grief.
- O. They went on pressing and pressing and ground us to antimony powder.
- P. Still they are not at ease, because we are pricking their eyes (lit. dwelling in eyes).

The leaflet entitled “Give up the use of foreign cloth- Mahatma Gandhi’s behest.” had a great blow on the minds of the people as it had affected the feeling of both the communities resulted in the decline of imported clothes. The decline of imported cloth was a great concern for the British officials and particularly for District officials of Aligarh as this leaflet was published from Aligarh. Therefore, to contradict the statement given in the leaflet by Lakshmi Narayan Sharma, the Secretary, District Congress Committee, Aligarh, the District officials managed to create a group of loyalists at Aligarh. They were- Babu Amjad Ali, Babu Ramdayal Fuller, Babu Maluk Chand, Chotey Lal Bhargava, Ibrahim Ali Khan, Jawala Babu Chatterjee, Shevaraj Singh, Udraprakash, Shamshad Ahmad Khan Barrister, T. N. Chatterjee, Babu Chunni Lal, A. N. Chatterjee, Maulvi Mohammad Ibrahim Khalaq, Maulvi Mohammad Ismail, Dube

Lakshmi Narayan, Abdul Rauf, who signed on one another leaflet issued in Hindi and Urdu challenging the statements of Lakshmi Narayan Sharma, and of Pandit Kali Prasanna Kavivisharad that mischief and rumour were being spread against British cloths. They have also assured the people that for the last one hundred and fifty years we had continuously been using foreign clothes and that we never heard of the use of such fat in the foreign clothes. But it has been proved that there was use of tallow in the foreign cloths.

Another Hindi pamphlet entitled, "Bande Mataram-Bharat Udhar" [8] tried to awaken people that they were fighting for their own rights and fighting for their rights were not at all unfair, it was a reasonable demand of Indians. Instead of granting the rights, the English had been committing tyrannies and making stringent laws. Criticizing the British system of justice, the pamphlet argues that God is with the just and Indians were fighting for their rights, for them it was no matter whether they would be put on the gallows or they had to face Dyer Shahi oppression in the Jallianwala Bagh. The pamphlet further exhorts the people that they were ready to face all the consequences to get their demands fulfilled. The poem runs thus:

1. We are standing for our own rights; this is not at all unfair.
2. Give us these very rights; this is but a reasonable demand of ours.
3. For this, your tyrannies and pass stringent laws.
4. What a policy is yours! You are doing injustice.
5. Even God does not ever do good to the unjust.
6. We are standing on the path of truth, (no matter) whether you spare or out of our necks.
7. You pay no heed to the Dyer shahi oppression,
8. You mind very little about what is justice and what is otherwise.
9. You are (engaged) in your own (course of action) we have nothing to do with it. You may do as you like.
10. You have kept the noose of the gallows ready; let us end all our troubles by putting our neck at once into it.
11. Though you are one, you take the lives of hundreds of us.
12. Hear in mind that our God is just.
13. What a policy of yours, fie upon much a policy.
14. A hundred times fie upon him as well who lives under such policy?
15. After an education for ten years, we get a pay of rupees twenty only.
16. (But) there is no hesitation in (you are getting) a hundred or two though you receive education only for a couple of years.
17. In spite of your being a foreigner; give up evil policy.

18. Make over to use the right of swaraj which we are demanding Surya.

Madan MK [9] also expresses his desire for freedom through his Hindi leaflet, "Rashtriya Gayan". In his leaflet he raises a number of questions what he wanted was freedom from slavery for which he was treated as offender and was punished. For him the country was suffering from pain that needs medicine of sympathy from the heart. His only desire was to see the ruined India, a flourishing one. He was also critic to the British that the Indian had trust on them, but they were suffering. Therefore, he prays to god to help Indian in their mission. Madan Mohan further expresses his hopes and aspiration that the good times for the country were about to come and the message of freedom were about to sound everywhere in the country as it was beyond the English power to kill his soul. The British could put a check on his lips, but his heart was free from restriction. He also assures the Mother India that she should not feel worry, good time were about to come.

At the end he argues that many travelers came in India and at the end they went away, similarly these foreigners would also leave for London within few days. Madan Mohan while visually mapping the position of Independent India in his dream, he proclaims with enthusiasm that sometimes back India was at the zenith of progress which came to decay under the British, now it would once again achieve its success and our motherland would be free from the clutches of the "fowler" the British. He wishes to teach a lesson to the British who were responsible for the misery of happy India and he believes that India would bloom again under its own rule where both land and sky would be of India. In doing so he further believes that there would be a large number of executions and the people had to go to the gallows for which he was not worried at all as on the funeral pyres of the martyrs there would, annual fairs to remember them and this would be sign of those sacrificed for the cause of motherland.

1. Should I tell you what we want.
2. We want freedom from slavery.
3. We are punishable only for this offence.
4. That we want medicine for the countries pain.
5. Those who wish ill of us helpless people.
6. We want their welfare even from the heart.
7. Probably the pitcher of sin is now full to the brim.
8. The tyrants are about the disappear from the age.
9. Again, we wish to see this ruined garden of India flourishing.
10. The poor have refuge in you alone.
11. God, won't you kindly look on us.

Radha KS [10], "Premi" through his Hindi leaflet Swarajya Digidarshan, reminds the youth about their duty towards the nation and convince them to become soldiers to save our motherland

India from the trouble. But for those who were lethargic towards their duty, calls him “cowards” and asks them to throw the mask of cowardice and become like Jawahir and Subhas. Premi, also teaches the youth to die in the battle field to become free, the ship loaded with Machine guns could not create a fear among them as they were ready to expose their breast to them. He further exhorts the youth to arise as “good sons” taking the flag of freedom in your hands. He also focuses on the use of Charkha in every home as it was a great weapon to drive British away from India to London.

- A. Become soldiers all now, time is awakening you.
- B. Motherland India is in trouble, there is awakening of all.
- C. Cowards throw off your mask, become like brave Jawahir, Subash.
- D. Brave that of royal election, is teaching reform.
- E. We will die in the fight becoming free we will not fear you.
- F. Even if there be a ship load of machine guns, we will expose our breast to them.
- G. Arise good sons, take up the flag, and protect the encampment “Premi”.
- H. In your homes work the swaraj charkha this will drive the foreigner to London”.

One another red pamphlet in Bengali, entitled “Biplabi Snarme” [11] (In memory of the revolutionaries) begins with the following couplet in Bengali “those who have sung songs of their lives - victory at the gallows have come and standing invisibly - do what sacrifice you can make.” It contains an exhortation to the youths in very strong and objectionable terms to complete the unfinished mission left by these “Worshippers of Independence” and with whose blood the country’s soil has become futile by bringing about an armed revolution in India for the establishment of a socialist republic. Gandhi and his principles have declaimed, and violence has been preached all through this pamphlet. Referring to the futility of the idea of armed revolution as maintained by some section on the ground that revolutionaries are few in number and want in arms and means specially on the face of great strength possessed by the English, it says, that they shall have to bring about a mass revolution in the country by organizing students, labourers, peasants, police and soldiers from the last of whom, it says, they would be able to secure arms for an armed revolution.

An appeal is made to the students to take up this organization. Regarding the means it says that it should be contributed by the rich, who, if decline to give willfully; money would be taken away from them by force. The mode of warfare which has been preached is “Guerrilla warfare”. One Balbir Gupta & Khatta Mitha Chatni [12], a Hindi leaflet, points out how did the English change Indian minds in the name of modernization. It also examines how did the British destroy the language, customs and tradition including Indigenous industries of the Indians and at its place they introduced their own culture which had affected the basic fabrics of Indian society which Indian had established for last many centuries. The leaflet says

thus:

- a) O! You foreigner, why you forcibly took away our art (Refrain).
- b) First coming to India, you did trade.
- c) Taking only span of land, became Sarkar.
- d) Taking away cotton from India made profits 8 times over.
- e) Giving us in return rings, pins ruined us.
- f) Took away the Dacca artisans beyond the sea.
- g) Learning the art cut their thumbs, killed them.
- h) The India full of gold, ruined it.
- i) Carried away gold and silver, introduced paper.
- j) Allured by wheat, ghee, cloth, India became beggar.
- k) Made put on hat, coat, but helpless for food.
- l) Made the brave Indians women.
- m) Took away the sword from the hand, snatched our kingdom.
- n) Removed Charkha from every home, took away our business.
- o) Broke our looms, made us unemployed.
- p) Made us give up dhoti, chaddar, snatched turban & sword.
- q) Over hat, pant, collar, put necktie.
- r) Made us give up ka, kha, ga, gha of Hindi, ruined us.
- s) Teaching A. B. C. D made us slaves.
- t) Wine, today, an intoxicant, the Government sells.
- u) When become intoxicated with drinking, then ready to arrest.
- v) Fine is more than the price of the wine drunk.
- w) Lost money and also received kicks, the punishment is imprisonment.

Pandit Prabhu Narayan Misra tries to awaken youth through his Hindi pamphlet “Rashtriya Talwar” [13] high lighting the fragile condition of India under British rule. Comparing India with England, he says that the children of India were starving and dying for the want of food while in England dogs take biscuits and milk and the reason for this scarcity of eatable items was the plunder that the English had been committing since long. Misra while addressing the youth as “lion of India” calls them to awake to free your motherland. For those cooperating with the British, Misra asks them, the food of this country was forbidden for them. At the same time, he asks them by cooperating with the British, they were unnecessarily disgracing the mother. He further asks them to come ahead and become volunteers, for him swing from the gallows was equal to heaven.

- A. The children in India are starving, crying, while.
- B. The dogs in England, friends, eat milk, biscuit.
- C. Oh, they have left nothing the tyrants plundered everything.
- D. ye lion of India awake, the times have now changed.
- E. (You) have to make the dear motherland free at once.
- F. Do not let cowardice abide in you.
- G. After all the soul will have some time to go to eternity.
- H. For those who are cooperating with foreigners at present o ye etc.
- I. It is forbidden for them to take the food of India.
- J. You are unnecessarily disgracing the mother's womb o ye etc.
- K. Become volunteers give up all excuses, o ye etc.
- L. Do not waver in your heart, step forward.
- M. It is equal to heaven to swing from the gallows o ye etc.

Rup Narain Lal [14] of Patna through his Hindi pamphlet "Rashtriya Kajri", reminds the youth about the atrocities of the foreigners and says that we cooperated with them knowing our well-wisher, but they could not be trusted. Whenever we think of Punjab atrocities it pained us where children were killed with cruelty, the women were dishonored and forced to creep on their belly. Besides, Rup Narayan Lal challenges the foreigner that they were not afraid of the tyranny of the British, as our leader Mahatma Gandhi had no fear of death, send us to jail or put us on the gallows, we would not retrace back as we had taken vow to serve India. He went on saying that Gandhiji was not afraid of you; he has blazed the flame of fire that would not be eliminated. He would not be afraid of your cannon and pistol because he had achieved the soul force with the knowledge of the teaching of Gita.

1. Foreigner why have you done oppression.
2. Knowing you as a well-wisher, we cooperated with you, o ye deceiver.
3. Whenever recollection of the Punjab comes it pains the heart.
4. You killed with bullets cruelly little children.
5. You knowingly dis-honored chaste women.

It may, thus, be noted that almost every aspect of the British rule has been debated in the pamphlet. It has also been argued how did the British come to India and how did they dismantle the basic

fabrics of Indian Social system in the name of modernization. A critical appreciation of the contents helps in discerning the trends that were growing among subaltern classes who were getting increasingly involved in the freedom struggle spear headed by Indian National Congress under the overall guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. In view of the seditious nature of pamphlets mentioned above, the British government proscribed these literatures under section 124-A and 153-A of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and 99-A of Cr. P.C as they were creating hatred against the British. The documents reproduced in the above discussion would hopefully, be interpreted by the scholars studying the history of the freedom struggle of India. Irrespective of the angle from which these might be studied by the individual scholars a critical and scientific analysis of the information furnished therein would inevitably bring into focus the important role of the subaltern classes in the freedom struggle.

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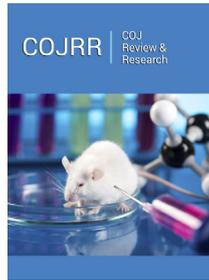
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4. Jai K (1932) The leaflet Bande Matram Swadhin Bhatat. Indian Youth League and printed at the Shambhu Press, Chatgaon, Maharashtra, India.
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6. The term Motia (rough) cloth has been used here for Khadi cloth.
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