The Importance Of Enlightenment For Modern Society

The enlightenment was an intellectual movement of writers and thinkers that emerged in the 18th century. The enlightenment talked about how important it was to make decisions by using one's rationality. I think that we live in an 'Age of Enlightenment' rather than an 'Enlightened Age' because in modern times even though we follow several enlightenment ideals such as skepticism, focus on rationality, etc. dogmatic beliefs still tend to prevail in some areas.

The enlightenment philosophes challenged a range of views and ideas such as the absolute power of monarchs, the role of religion, etc. which were widely accepted beliefs at that time. According to the enlightenment thinkers, society should be based on reason rather than on superstition and tradition because reason has an equalizing effect on humanity. I liked how they stressed that people needed to be skeptical and use critical thinking, which means using our reason to make decisions rather than solely relying on what authorities tell us.

The enlightenment was characterized by scientific knowledge, empiricism, individualism, secularism, religious tolerance, etc. The enlightenment ideals posed a threat to the existing authorities as they challenged the prevalent status quo. Their religious tolerance, skepticism, and claim that the church was corrupting and intolerant challenged the power of the Catholic Church. The philosophes were anti-clerical and wanted science to replace religion. They were also skeptical regarding the absolute power of the monarchy. They considered all humans as equal and free and a monarchical system refuted this idea. The enlightenment also wanted legal and constitutional reform. Montesquieu, an enlightenment philosopher proposed the idea of separation of powers in which there would be legislation, judiciary, and an executive so that check and balance would exist and everyone would be accountable. (Hazo,1968). They also wanted a constitution to limit the supreme power of the kings.

Philosophes challenged everything that society at that time stood for. These enlightenment ideals tend to be followed in modern societies too. Most countries have a democracy, a constitution, absolute autocracy has decreased and also the role of religious clergy, etc. has vastly decreased. People have started to question things rather than blindly trusting whatever authorities tell them. Furthermore, this intellectual movement also aided in the creation of Social Sciences, which has played an important role in shaping modern society. This science emerged because the enlightenment thinkers were preoccupied with critical rationalism. They applied reason to different spheres, for example, politics, society, etc. with a concern for progress, freedom, the betterment of society. Also, being critical of the status quo. The philosophes wanted a moral science that used scientific methods and was concerned with gaining a more in-depth understanding of human problems and society. Social science has helped in liberating mankind from the shackles of illiteracy, superstition, and prejudice to a great extent. After having read, multiple texts about Enlightenment, I feel that as a society we still have a long way to go.

Enlightenment is a whole process, and we are still in one of its stages. Even though our modern society places a lot of emphasis on science, critical reasoning, skepticism, etc. which all (hamilton, 1992) represent ideals of enlightenment. Things like dogmatic reasons still prevail. People have dogmatic and inflexible assumptions regarding several things, such as beauty standards, religion, etc. They tend to believe certain things blindly, without any critical evaluation

and tend to act upon it. People residing in both the west and east have certain fixed notions regarding beauty standards which they tend to follow unthinkingly. In the west, women with honey-colored, clear complexions, long hair and athletic and curvy physiques are considered ideal. The obsession with such a type of figure has led many women to resort to cosmetic surgery such as fillers and Botox etc. In the eastern context, such as Southeast Asia there is a huge fixation with fair, white skin. The East equates beauty with balance and symmetry. The ideal type of beauty is one in which the girl is thin, petite, has facial symmetry, big, almond-shaped eyes, with silky, long hair, and rosebud lips. There is an intense desire of the girl to have porcelain pale skin. This obsession with having pale skin is a product of colonialism which has produced a deeply embedded relationship between whiteness, power, wealth, intellect, and beauty. (cite)This obsession is further sustained by the Bollywood media industry who through their movies and dramas indicates that a girl will only be deemed as beautiful if she has a white complexion and is thin. Thus, several girls resort to using whitening creams such as Fair&Lovely, bleaching, and even whitening injections. People tend to do this without even once questioning who created these beauty standards, where did they come? Having looked at both sides of the argument. I think that enlightenment is a process and modern societies are to an extent enlightened as they display certain ideals such as being considerably more tolerant. Moreover, there is more focus on science and rationality compared to olden times. However, dogmatism still tends to prevail in some areas, due to which we haven't achieved enlightenment.