CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION: JAPAN'S INHERITED SOCIAL ORDER AND TRADITION
CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION: JAPAN'S INHERITED SOCIAL ORDER AND TRADITION

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 is regarded as a line of demarcation between feudal and modern Japan, as it sealed the fate of centuries old feudal rule of the Shogun and marked the beginning of a new and vibrant Japan. Modern Japan, however grew out of a historical context, and not as a consequence of the arrival of the West in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century. The efforts made by the Meiji leaders in the direction of modernization would not have yielded fruits, if dynamism and innovation at practically all levels, though undesignedly, but nevertheless effective, had not been there in the preceding Tokugawa period (1603-1867) specially during the latter part. Urbanization, spread of education and learning and common cultural base, growth of a market economy all paved the way for rapid modernisation. Due to a long period of peace and isolation from the outer world, it was the Tokugawa period that witnessed the growth of a stable unified state and maturing of an intrinsic Japanese civilization. A strong sense of cultural identity nurtured during this period of rapid modernization enabled the Japanese to preserve their traditional culture and social values tenaciously. Some of
the national traits of the Japanese, like conformity, group ethics, community solidarity, diligence etc. that survived the vagaries of change have their roots in the Tokugawa era.

The modern transformation of Japan, of course, involved an attack on traditional institutions, hiterto accepted attitudes and cultural patterns, yet many of these continued to influence Japan's development even after the process of modernization had begun. At times, they were even looked upon as assets for building new Japan. It would, therefore, be appropriate to look into the social order and traditions inherited by Meiji Japan, before delving into the changes brought about by the new regime.

INHERITED SOCIAL ORDER AND TRADITION

(a) **Tokugawa Administration**

A complex, multi layered administrative system comprising the nobility, monasteries and warrior houses existed during the medieval period (12th-15th centuries). The nobility were the descendants of the aristocratic class who served as high officials of the Imperial administration in the ancient period. The monasteries were the spiritual anchor of the nobility and the imperial state. In the ancient period, they were allotted large tracts of land and subsequently came to possess considerable political authority in their respective territories. The military
houses came into existence at the end of the twelfth century and with the passage of time, using military force they assimilated the monasteries and the territories of the nobility. The powerful military houses established their political authority in their respective regions and were known as Daimyo. Some of them did manage to temporarily create their own centres of power. Following a long drawn out civil war for supremacy among the Daimyos, Oda Nobunaga and his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi unified the country in the latter half of the sixteenth century. However, it was Tokugawa Ieyasu who completed the process of national unification and created the Bakufu (Shogunate) in Edo in 1603, which lasted for fifteen generations until 1867. With this, the Imperial authority which had already lost its power to rule the country, was relegated to a nominal one.

The Tokugawa system, usually known as the Bakuhan system (Bakufu, the Shogunate and han, the fiefs), was a federation of Daimyos under the direct supervision of the Tokugawa house. It simplified the multi-dimensional system that existed heretofore. Tokugawa divided the Daimyos in a status hierarchy depending on the nature of relationship each had with the Tokugawa house. They were divided into three groups: the fuqai or loyal vassals, the shimpan or collateral daimyo and the tozama or allied daimyo. The Bakufu monopolized the right to command the army, diplomatic
rights, the rights to issue currency and the authority to supervise the Imperial court. Each Daimyo was responsible for public works such as building forts, temples, shrines on embankment of rivers etc. in his fief. To prevent Daimyos from conspiring against the Shogun, each Daimyo had to go to stay for four months in Edo every alternate year and during his period of absence from the capital had to leave his family behind as hostages with the Shogun (known as the Sankin Kotai system). The cardinal feature of this policy was to not let Daimyos gain too much financial strength or conspire against the Bakufu.

The Daimyos enjoyed considerable freedom to run their territories in matters like judicial rights for tax collection, issuing of laws, raising of military forces and other administrative matters, but were governed by the laws and orders of the Shogun. A continuous vigil was, however, maintained on each Daimyo and a Daimyo could be deprived of his fief or obliged to exchange it for another fief for strategic reasons. The whole administrative policy of the Bakufu was centered around consolidating his power and keeping Daimyos in their place. The isolation policy promulgated through three decrees issued in 1633, 1635 and 1639 which put an abrupt end to the flourishing foreign trade, was basically aimed at not letting Tozama daimyos, who were in remote provinces but who profitted the most by
foreign trade, to grow strong enough to endanger the authority of the Bakufu. Tokugawa's decision to keep out the influence of Christianity was also motivated by the same reason. It was seen as a potential threat to national unity.

In the Tokugawa administrative structure which was of a highly bureaucratic nature, decisions regarding national administrative matters were made by the Council of Daimyos called Roju (Senior Elders) assisted by Wakadoshiyori (Junior Elders) and Hatamoto or Bannerman i.e., the minor vassals who were Shogun's direct vassals and whose status was below 10,000 koku,¹ served as Ometsuke (Great Censors) spying on the activities of the daimyos. Tokugawa relations and major Daimyos were excluded from Roju. Major Daimyos if they were loyal vassals could be appointed as Tairo (Great Elders), the highest official of the Tokugawa administration. In short, the principle that governed the appointments was "the higher the status, lesser the authority", or "lower the status, greater the authority". This worked as a good mutual check on the Daimyos against any act of conspiracy to overthrow the Bakufu.

1 Koku: the unit used to calculate the rice yield of a domain, equivalent to 4.96 bushels.
(b) **Class Structure and Norms of Social Life**

The hereditary status system was an important pillar of the socio-political constitution of the Tokugawa state. Essentially there were four classes based on occupation namely, Samurai (*Shi*), farmers (*no*), artisans (*ko*) and merchants (*sho*). And then there were the untouchables called **Eta** or **Hinin** people engaged in menial jobs. These classes were further subdivided into finer distinctions within their own group.

The warrior-cum-administrative class were the descendants of the Samurai of the medieval ages who lived heretofore on landed fiefs. However, once the Daimyos appeared on the scene, they assimilated their holdings and enrolled them as their retainers and in return gave them annual stipends of rice, that determined their rank. During the Tokugawa period, as there was unbroken peace and no wars to be fought, these samurai were used as administrative officials. Within the samurai class, there were several ranks stretching from the great retainers of the Shogun, or the large daimyo, who had incomes of the size of a small daimyo, to country samurai who barely managed to sustain themselves. The social distance between the upper and lower samurai ranks and differences in wealth, political influence, access to office and opportunities for education
were enormous.\textsuperscript{2} Usually the higher posts were reserved for the upper and middle ranks and these ranks were mostly hereditary, but within this framework there was opportunity for a skillful or talented person to rise in the world.

Farmers constituted the majority of the populace (nearly 80 per cent) and Japan being essentially an agrarian economy till recent times, peasantry was regarded as tax-producing machines by the rulers. They were very heavily taxed, leaving just enough for them to survive. Although in the social hierarchy, they were accorded the second rung next to that of the samurai, their life was far from comfortable. They were forbidden by law to buy or sell land or change their occupation. Agriculture was labour intensive and peasantry was an exploited lot.

Artisans and merchants were mostly unsettled communities during medieval times, but as the fiefs were firmly established, they too settled down in the castle towns of some daimyo. In the subsequent years, with the growth of national markets and expansion of economic activity, as will be seen later in more detail, it was the merchants who gained the most, to the extent that towards the end of the Tokugawa period most of the daimyos and samurais were in debt to wealthy merchants. Status-

\textsuperscript{2} Duus Peter, \textit{The Rise of Modern Japan} (Boston, 1976), p.35.
conscious ruling class neglected and ridiculed the merchants. There was general dislike among the samurai for doing something for the sake of profit which allowed the merchants to accumulate wealth.

Inter-class mobility between the samurai and the commoners was difficult, but between other classes though initially forbidden it was rather easy and the rigid class distinction that formed the basis of the Tokugawa state blurred as the years passed.

The samurai were set apart from the commoners in every sphere of life by special privileges conferred on them such as the right to carry weapons, use of palanquins and surnames, the new sumptuary regulations issued during this period. The distinction extended from hair style to criminal law. A samurai could cut down a commoner for rude behaviour without fear of punishment (Kirisute-gomen). However, the samurai on their part had to follow a rigid code of behaviour. Their duties and conduct were legislated in great detail and any act of disobedience was punished with great severity. They were obliged to set an example in fulfilling the moral obligations of loyalty and filial piety, and provide intellectual and moral guidance to the people. As long as the inferiors fulfilled their ethical obligations, the superiors were expected to act with benevolence. It was the very essence of the moral code of
the Bushido (The way of samurai). Thus, there was a well-knit web of mutual and interlocking social obligations based on confucian ideology that sustained the hierarchical Tokugawa social order for so long.

(c) Confucian Ideology

The most pervasive stream of thought during the Tokugawa period was the Neo-Confucianism of Chu-Hsi. During medieval times, with the emergence of warrior houses, Buddhism had declined, as its teachings were in conflict with the virtues of the warrior society. Shinto cult was weak and Christianity, the alien religion, had been rejected by the Bakufu, as it aimed at a secular state and Christianity was feared to be detrimental to it. Bakufu, therefore, turned to Confucianism for theoretical support to justify the maintenance of the feudal hierarchy and moral code to govern the people in the vertical socio-political system, where individuals did not enjoy rights but had several obligations.

The foremost task before the Bakufu was to evolve ethical principles for the administrative class of samurai for two reasons - one a highly disciplined bureaucracy was a necessary prerequisite for the absolute rule that it was aiming at, and two to justify the paramount position of the samurai in the society who accounted for no more than 6% of
the population on the basis of their moral qualities and character and virtuous conduct. It was also necessary as the ethos of the samurai had undergone a definite and qualitative change. The samurai were no longer mere fighters who were expected to sacrifice their lives for their lord. They were now to serve as officials and be warriors in the hour of need. Therefore, in addition to earlier virtues of discipline, courage and loyalty, they were expected to possess virtues like merit, fortitude, magnanimity towards subordinates, self-obliteration for a greater purpose, and national consciousness.

It was in the moral doctrines of Neo-Confucianism that the Bakufu found the secular code and ideology by which he could maintain social order. Tokugawa Ieyasu's adviser Hayashi Razan was a Confucianist and is believed to have played a crucial role in the political decisions of Ieyasu. Buke Shohatto (The Rules for the Military Houses) issued in 1615 and revised from time to time, were based on the doctrines of Confucianism and paved the way for Confucian ideology to play an important role in the intellectual life of Tokugawa Japan, at least in the first half of the period.

Moral doctrines of Neo-Confucianism focus upon man and his Five Relationships; between father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, older and younger brothers and
between friends. This theory of Five Relationships encompasses all members of the feudal society and their essential obligations. For fulfilling these social relations, cultivation of five innate virtues namely, Humanity, Righteousness, Ritual behaviour, Wisdom and Good faith is necessary.

Confucianism provided a framework within which the development of these virtues could be accomplished. For that, it must begin with self cultivation in the individual and then extend outwards into society, first in the regulation of the family and next in the ordering of the feudal society.

There were many schools of Confucian thought in Japan but the social theory propagated by them was, by and large identical in essence. The Family theory (popularly known as the Ie system) that already existed in Japan was extended to the social theory and further to the State Theory. To be more precise, the national trait of the Japanese to weigh the Ie far more heavily than an individual, was extended to embrace all social relations. Unquestioned submission and

---


obedience to the head of the family was extended to cover the relation between the lord and his vassals, and further, to that with the sovereign. Goals of the group whether family, village or state were regarded more important than those of an individual. These virtues along with other national traits of the Japanese such as public morality, industry, conformity, group ethic and community solidarity that are believed to be tremendous assets in the building of modern Japan, have an obvious stamp of Confucian ideology.

To begin with, these confucian based codes of behaviour were supposed to be practiced by the samurai and were hardly understood outside of learned circles, but, later on an attempt was made to make the essence of Confucianism intelligible to the ordinary people by Kaibara Ekken who formulated a simple code of everyday morals. Besides, children of samurai who attended fief schools, and children of commoners who attended Terakoya (Temple schools) received formal education in the basics of Confucianism. Thus till around 1800, Confucianism held its sway on the thought pattern of one and all, but its influence declined once the Kokugaku (National learning) and Rangaku (Dutch learning) gained strength.

THE WEAKENING OF THE OLD ORDER

In the latter half of the Tokugawa period, specially after 1800 various inherent contradictions in the Tokugawa
socio-political system began to surface as a result of various new intellectual currents and thought, and also due to various changes in the society. Let us briefly recapitulate them here.

(i) Intellectual Currents

Owing to emphasis on learning and merit due to unbroken peace, heterodox schools of thought and scholarship developed during the Tokugawa period. These intellectual currents were largely responsible for Japan's successful attempt at modernization during the Meiji period, and were also instrumental in the evolution of the national ideology and the downfall of the Tokugawa regime.

(a) Kokugaku (National Learning) and Mitogaku (Mito School of Thought) Movements

Encouraged by the popularization of publishing through wood block printing, and availability of printed books on Japanese classical literature, and also as a reaction against excessive sinophilism, a number of individuals like Kamo no Mabuchi (1687-1769), Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) to name only a few, devoted themselves to the study of ancient Japan and her intellectual and cultural features. The basic aim was to strengthen the national consciousness of the people, as these intellectuals denounced the excessive influence of
Confucianism and Chinese ethical values. Through in-depth study of native Shinto traditions and representative works of Japanese history and literature such as Kojiki, Nihonshoki, Manyoshu, Genjimonogatari etc., they discovered that the Emperor was the core of national identity. They, therefore, emphasized upon the Emperor as the symbol of historical continuity and unity of Japan, and denounced the tendency to belittle Japanese heritage vis-a-vis Chinese culture and civilization. They stressed on the sacredness of the Japanese as their country was founded by the Sun Goddess, and the Japanese people enjoyed the special blessing and protection of the gods.\textsuperscript{5} Emphasis on the 'Japanese past' and the 'Imperial tradition' created popular reverence for the Imperial throne later on, when the Kokugaku movement became an active political movement from an essentially intellectual one, and in the process, undermined the authority of the Bakufu and led to its decline.

Another group of scholars which contributed in no mean terms towards the revival of popular interest in the Imperial institution was Mitogaku (The Mito School of Thought). Intellectuals like Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1629-1700), Fujita Yukoku (1773-1806), Fujita Toko (1806-55),

\textsuperscript{5} Duus, n.2, p.23.
Aizawa Seishisai (1782-1863) and Tokugawa Nariaki (1800-60), through their historical research tried to prove the legitimacy of imperial rule in Japan. Unlike Kokugaku scholars, they used Confucianistic principles to justify Japanese tradition and called for protecting Japan from excessive external influence and restoration of the throne to the Emperor. The popular slogan Sonno-jo (Revere the Emperor and expel the Barbarians) was given by this school.

(b) **Rangaku (Dutch Learning) and Yogaku (Western Learning)**

During the long period of isolation, only the Dutch, among the Europeans, were permitted a limited contact with Japan through Dejima in Nagasaki. As a result, Rangaku that strived for the adoption of western learning through the study of Dutch language became popular in Nagasaki and some other cities of Western Japan in the 18th century. It later aroused interest in Yogaku specially in fields like medicine, anatomy, physics, chemistry, mathematics, geography etc. Its popularity was though much restricted, as the Bakufu came down heavily on the Rangaku/Yogaku scholars like Aoki Kenyo (1697-1769), Maeno Ryogoku (1723-1803), Hiraga Gennai (1728-79), Takahashi Sukuzaemon (1785-)

---

1829) and Takashima Shuhan (1798-1866). They were also the target of criticism of other schools of thought who called them unpatriotic and traitors, though the Dutch scholars like Takashima Shuhan (1798-1866), Yokoi Shonan (1809-66) and Sakuma Shozan (1811-64) too believed that the Westerners were not superior to Japanese in respect of morality and civilization and they too advocated the philosophy called Wakon Yosai (Japanese morals and Western science) later on. It was only in the last few decades of the Tokugawa period that Yogaku came to have official backing and subsequently enjoyed popular interest. With the advent of westerners in Japanese waters, Bakufu realized that the westerners could not be kept out for ever and that the mastering of western 'superior techniques' was necessary to ward off any threat to Japanese sovereignty. It established Yogakusho (School of western studies) in 1855 later renamed as Bansho Shirabesho (Institute for the study of Barbarian literature) in 1856 and yet again as Yosho Shirabesho (Institute for the Study of Western sciences) in 1862. It specialized in translation of Western, Dutch works, study of western sciences and the teaching of foreign languages. In the final count, Yogaku was also instrumental in undermining the authority of the Bakufu, as it generated debate among xenophobic Japanese for a political change to ensure
national unity and independence. At the same time, it was a vital factor in preparing Japan for modernization, as it led to accumulation of Western knowledge which enabled Japan to understand and evaluate correctly the power of the West during the Meiji period.

(ii) Spread of Education

During the Tokugawa period, there was considerable growth and spread of education among the masses, as there was emphasis on learning and merit. There was, however, a definite distinction between the policy towards education of the samurai and that of the commoners. Bakufu took keen interest in the education of the samurai, as they were to supply the talent required to run the administration. Most of the daimyos set up schools for their vassals in their respective fiefs for the same reason. In these fief schools, which were mostly under the charge of a competent Confucianist master, children of samurai origin received instruction in Confucian classics, Chinese and Japanese history, poetry and jurisprudence, and later at the higher level, training in martial arts and civil matters.

In addition to these fief schools, various private schools (Juku) played an important role in the

7 ibid, p.79.
popularization of education. These private schools were set up by specialists in the field and offered training in a wide range of subjects.

The most remarkable feature of Tokugawa education was the spread of literacy and education among the commoners and that too in the absence of a definite policy towards their education. In villages, knowledge of three R's came to be regarded as indispensable for securing a high ranking job in a samurai house, or a trader's house, or for doing transactions with traders, and also for having an increasing say in the matters of the village. As a result of such general awareness about education, a large number of Terakoya (literally temple schools) run by individuals like Buddhists, Confucianists, Shintoists or Ronin (masterless samurai) were set up and at the time of the Meiji Restoration, there were 11,000 such schools all over Japan\(^8\) and nearly 40 per cent of boys and 15 per cent of girls could read and write, knew elementary arithmetic and understood Japanese history and geography. These figures are not much different from those for Western Europe around the same time. From around late 18th century, Bakufu encouraged commoners' education as he came to regard that submission to authority could be achieved through teaching

\(^8\) ibid, p.76.
of morals and discipline, which in turn would contribute to maintaining the existing social order. However, spread of education weakened the raison d'etre of feudal class system and bared its inherent contradictions and thus set in motion forces of social change.

(iii) Economic Change

Establishment of a unified state after 1600 put an end to a long period of destructive warfare and the subsequent years witnessed unprecedented economic activity and growth of nation-wide market economy. Construction of castles, movement of samurai into castle towns, and concentration of merchants and artisans in and around the castle towns generated demand for all kinds of goods. The Sankin kotai system which made it mandatory for Daimyos to maintain residences and staff in Edo, besides their fiefs, increased movement of goods, people, ideas and techniques throughout the country, encouraged inter-regional trade and led to the growth of Edo and Osaka as national markets. Substantial social mobility also promoted urbanization which proved detrimental to the hierarchical feudal society. Thus, it is a paradox that the Sankin Kotai system which was introduced to weaken the Daimyos, undermined the authority of the Bakufu in the long run. Steady growth of the economy brought about a change in the character of the rural
economy. Between 1600 and 1800, area under cultivation increased two-fold. Daimyos, on their part, were forced to encourage agriculture and industries within their fiefs to earn more revenue to meet their increased expenditure. By the 18th century, commercial agriculture was widely practiced and small-scale rural industries had come up all over the country. There was demand for whole variety of agricultural products like tea, cotton, tobacco, mulberry, vegetable oil and industrial goods like fabrics, silk, lacquerware etc. Collection and distribution of goods, specially rice, required a large number of merchants and intermediaries. The merchants engaged in rice trade soon amassed considerable wealth. The wealthy ones took to money lending as the profits were lucrative (interest rates were as high as 15-18 per cent per year), lending money to daimyo or samurai. Soon quite a few daimyo and samurai were in debt to these wealthy merchants. Alarmed by the situation, on a number of occasions, Bakufu confiscated the wealth of merchants to save the Daimyos from the clutches of the merchants.

Urbanization, and the rise of the merchants class gave birth to what is called chonin (bourgeois) culture, characterized by gay and extravagant pattern of life. Edo

---

9 Duus, n.2, p.40.
and Osaka witnessed mushrooming of places of entertainment, theatres, restaurants and gay quarters, frequented by pleasure seeking prosperous bourgeoisie. Bakufu tried to check this "moral decadence" through a number of edicts but without much success.

SOCIAL UNREST

Such far reaching changes in the social situation threw the antiquated Tokugawa social order into complete disarray. Confucian ideology was anachronistic with the social reality and was no longer effective enough to hold the hierarchical social system together. All the classes, with the possible exception of merchants, were discontented with the feudal arrangement and a revolution from within seemed to be the only solution by the early nineteenth century. Though pressure from without triggered off the downfall of the Bakufu, there is no scope for doubt that long-standing discontent with the Tokugawa order shaped the way for the Restoration.

The samurai class, though a privileged group by birth and law, got increasingly impoverished as the years passed. Confucian training of the samurai made them ill-equipped to gain from the economic growth, as is evident from a popular saying of the time - *Bushi wa Kuwanedo Takayoji* (The samurai glories in honourable poverty). However, the social reality
was much different. The cost of living had increased while the stipends of samurai remained by and large unchanged. Even many high rank samurai found it increasingly difficult to maintain a lifestyle befitting their status. They were, therefore, forced to contract a debt with wealthy merchants. It was one of the contradictions of the Edo society that money, albeit perhaps despised in essence, was much appreciated in reality.\(^{10}\) The Edo economy became thoroughly monetised and the social philosophy *Kikoku-Senkin* (revere grain and despise money) was rendered meaningless as the years passed.

Going was tougher for middle or lower rank samurai, because while the position of the upper class samurai was hereditary, they had to face the brunt of changing social reality where they lost their privileges with each passing day. And then there were also the Ronin (unemployed samurai) who rose in revolt from time to time specially in the seventeenth century. They were the retainers of daimyos whose fiefs were confiscated by the Bakufu throwing them out of service. Since the samurai-daimyo relationship was that of personal loyalty, it was difficult for them to find an alternative job. The number of such Ronin is said to have

been 500,000 around 1650.\textsuperscript{11} They lived with their backs to the wall, often in penury and a future that bordered on uncertainty without any incentive. Many of the fortunate ones found jobs like teaching calligraphy, swordmanship, horse riding, fencing etc. Yet quite a few lower ranks of the samurai even took to menial works like handicrafts, spinning silk, making umbrellas etc. Some for want of funds went so far as to adopt the son of a townsman in return for a cash payment, thus conferring upon him the status of a samurai.\textsuperscript{12} They were too willing to enter into matrimonial alliances with wealthy merchants, something inconceivable only a couple of generations ago.

As such, unbroken peace had weakened the raison d'etre of samurai existence, and with the decline in their moral qualities as they led a quiet and simple life in towns, the prestige of samurai sagged considerably in the eyes of the commoners.

On the other hand, Tokugawa period witnessed considerable growth of agriculture in both quantity and range, but land got increasingly concentrated in the hands of rich farmers and the gap between rich peasants and poor continued to widen. Though compared to early Tokugawa

\textsuperscript{11} Sansom, n.4, p.32.

\textsuperscript{12} ibid, p.187.
period, farmers were no longer at the subsistence level but ordinary peasants continued to toil hard. Many small land holders in case of famine or a crop failure were forced to borrow from these wealthy farmers mortgaging their lands and when unable to repay loans, lost their lands to them. For this reason, riots and rebellions by the poor peasants, which were more frequent from around late 18th century, were less directed against samurai authorities than against wealthy peasants within the villages.\textsuperscript{13} Many migrated to cities and took to other professions despite legal prohibitions.

If such large scale migrations to cities were disruptive in many ways on one hand, the acquisition of wealth by farmers and merchants was instrumental in blurring the class distinction on the other. They began to adopt the life style of the samurai. They educated their sons, took up intellectual and cultural pursuits and gradually began to assert their superior social position.

\textbf{COLLAPSE OF THE POLITICAL ORDER}

The failure of the Bakufu to handle the social crisis effectively revealed its grave weaknesses and although many felt the need for a political change, it did not become a

\textsuperscript{13} Duus, n.2, p.48.
mass movement for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the Japanese had a highly provincial view of the outside world and for most of them the concept of 'country' began and ended with the fief they lived in. Such a tendency can be attributed to the Bakuhan system which acted as a deterrent to the rise of a sense of nationalism from below. Bakufu for selfish gains had successfully kept one Daimyo away from the other and used the jealousies and conflicts between them to strengthen its stranglehold over the country. Secondly, division of the society into a hierarchy of four classes also kept the people sharply divided, with a distinct lack of sense of togetherness in respect of inter-class relationships. Thirdly, Japan's insularity, long seclusion from the outer world, and lack of exposure to cultural and intellectual activity had made the masses ignorant and narrow in their outlook and they could not think of the world beyond their immediate surroundings.

However, once the westerners began to knock at the Japanese doors for economic and commercial reasons in the last decade of eighteenth century, fears of invasion by the 'barbarians' united the xenophobic Japanese and suddenly the whole nation was unanimous in one respect that the foreigners must be kept out at all costs. Bakufu was, therefore, faced with a paradoxical situation, where it needed to strengthen its relation with the daimyo and unite
the country to face the foreign challenge, while although it had followed a policy of provincialism. It gave considerable political concessions to daimyo to buy their support but without much success as it further eroded Bakufu's prestige. Between this time and 1853 when Japan was forced to open her doors by Commodore Perry, there was continuous debate over how to deal with the foreigners and how to unite the country politically.

In the political movement that followed, on one hand there were men like Aizawa Seishisai and Fujita Toko from Mito who advocated continuation of seclusion, moral reinforcement of the society along Confucian lines and making the Emperor the symbol of national unity, on the other, there were the scholars like Takashima Shuhan, Sakuma Shozan, Takano Choei who advocated the philosophy of Wakon Yosai (Japanese spirit and western science) but favoured seclusion. Then there were Tokugawa Nariakira of Satsuma, a coastal fief in southern Japan and his supporters who advocated opening of country but building up military and economic strength, the philosophy of Fukoku Kyohei (rich nation strong army). The Bakufu and his followers also favoured strengthening the defense to meet the foreign challenge.

With the passing of each year, confidence in Bakufu leadership declined and one sentiment that emerged most
strongly out of this debate was that the Emperor was the only source of unity of Japan. But this did not lead immediately to the overthrow of the Bakufu and its fate hung around how it tackled the foreign pressure. Japanese hostility and suspicion increased when the news about the Opium war spread. Bakufu, on its part, first undertook military reforms to deal with the problem realistically but when it realized that it was impossible to resist the might of westerners, it decided to open the country in order to avoid direct clash. In January 1858, first a treaty was signed with America and later similar agreements were signed with the Dutch, British, Russians and the French. These treaties were rejected by the Emperor in Kyoto which led to polarization of opposition and as Bakufu had failed to defend the nation, the idea gained ground that it should return the authority to rule Japan to the Emperor.

The anti-Bakufu movement that unfolded after 1858 was spearheaded by young men like Yoshida Shoin from the middle and lower rank samurai who advocated the philosophy of Sonno-jo (revere the Emperor and expel the barbarians). Being youth, these loyalists resorted to considerable violence and terrorism to drive away the foreigners. The climax came in 1863 when they tried to 'free' the Emperor from his gilded cage to lead a military expedition against
the foreigners.\(^{14}\) They were, however, put down by the troops of loyal daimyos. Crushing of the loyalist movement provided no respite to the Bakufu. Convinced that Bakufu was no longer competent to lead or unite the country, Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, Aizu and Kuwana joined hands to continue the anti-Bakufu movements under a new slogan namely *Sonno Kaikoku* (revere the Emperor and open the country). While this movement was gaining momentum in the fiefs, Tokugawa Keiki, the new Bakufu tried to strengthen its position through a series of sweeping reforms but without much success. Keiki and his leaders realized the futility of their attempt to turn the tide and therefore, decided to return the political authority to the Emperor.

Tokugawa Keiki resigned in November 1867 and two months later Meiji Restoration was announced which brought about the shift of power from the shogun to the Emperor without much bloodshed after nearly seven centuries.

\(^{14}\) ibid, p.67.