

The Concept of Counterculture: A Study

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Abstract

The movement of Counter Culture marks its historical significance in America. It came as the result of post World War II. This movement brought new trend of eccentric look, loud music, consumption of drug, sexual liberation. It happened first time in the history of American culture that young generation was moved towards mental peace rather than material gain. Even India has witnessed Counter Culture movement in the fields of music, films and literature. The Beats have also played an important role to voice against the tendency of American society through art during 1950. Later in 1960 the Hippie generation followed Beats and named the movement 'Counter Culture'. The Beats remained limited to the groups of writers where as the Hippies reached far into the society with their counter culture movement. The tone of this cultural storm was that if you want to do something than just go for it. There are the instances where it seems that Henry David Thoreau may have inspired the counter culture movement through his *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*.

Keywords: Counter Culture, Peace, Materialization

The counter culture movement marks its rise in America in the later part of 1960. The specific duration of this movement was 1964 to 1972. This movement was against the conventional social model and America's involvement in the Vietnam War. This movement is notable for eccentric look, loud music, consumption of drug, sexual liberation. The young generation of the United States indulged in 'peace, music, meditation and yoga, love, harmony and psychedelic drugs.' The American dream had broken after World War II when the young generation of America realized that their America has turned towards excessive materialism. They believed that America has lost its originality that was based on exploration. Now in a run for material gains it had become senseless and emotion less towards the appeal of heart. The youngsters of America wanted absolute freedom and so poets and writers like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac expressed their resistance through art

and literature. Allen Ginsberg in his poem *Howl* expresses his views against materialism and advocacy of counter culture. He says “I have burned all my money in a waste basket”.

The economic prosperity of the United States was better than ever after World War II. They exploited countries like Cuba, Japan and Vietnam. The movement started against the imperialist hegemony of the United States and its interference in a political matter of other countries. The younger generation of the White students fought against the racial discrimination. Further this movement was leaned towards sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. They advocated sexual liberation from the Puritan prudery. Men and women both were free to think about their sexual relationships. Influenced by the idea of freedom and free thinking, the younger generation took the shelter of drugs. Timothy Leary, the American psychologist was close to Allen Ginsberg and Richard Alpert (later became Ram Das). He advocated psychedelic experiments. In his 1967 BBC interview openly said, “Supreme Court will be smoking marijuana within fifteen years. It’s inevitable, because the students in our universities are doing it now. There’ll be less interest in warfare, in power politics. You know, politics today is a disease-it’s a real addiction.”

Psychedelic rock has played a vital role to instill the spirit of “Peace and Love”. The function of rock music was not mere entertainment but it was a transcendental experience that gave wings to the counter culture idea of peace. The blues, folk, jazz, and classical genre became popular in practice. The eminent musicians who rejected contemporary music and embodied Psychedelic rock music, were The Beatles, The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, The Rolling Stones, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, and Pink Floyd. Sigmund Freud’s theory of ‘sexual repression’ was rejected and Jung’s theory of ‘collective consciousness’ came into the light during this era. In the idea of ‘unconscious’ from psychoanalytical studies has been defined as the ‘love and peace’ by the hippies.

The printing and circulation of ‘Underground Newspapers’ increased tremendously. These newspapers voiced the zeal of counter culture generation. "Los Angeles Free Press" and “The Rag” were the most influential underground newspapers that supported the practices of counter culture generation. The films such Psych-Out (1968), Acid Delirium of the Senses (1968), The Committee (1968), Eggshells (1969), Jigsaw (1968), Hallucination Generation (1966), The Acid Eater (1968), Candy(1968),The Guru (1969), La Vallee(1972), Ghetto Freaks (1970),Woodstock (a documentary of music festival) (1970)etc. exhibited the practices of the movement.

Counterculture Movement and India

As we discussed in the first part, the generation was fed up with materialization and wanted peace of mind so they turn towards eastern philosophies of Buddhism that believes in ‘Harmony, Peace, Mediation and Renunciation’. The idea of inner tranquility and brotherhood is deep rooted Buddhism. Richard Alpert was one of the eminent role player of counterculture movement who gave up his excellent career and came to India and was so

impressed by the country and its spiritual practices that he changed his name to 'Ram Dass'. His popular book "Be Here Now" was like solution of the essential question of the Counterculture "the meaning of life, the meaning of human existence" In his book, he narrates his experience of his travel in India with one young man from California, the dialogues read,

"While travelling in India:

"Did I ever tell you about the time that Tim and I..."

And he'd say "Don't think about the past. Just be here now."

Silence.

And I'd say "How long do you think we're going to be on this trip?"

And he'd say "Don't think about the future. Just be here now".

I'd say "You know, I really feel crummy, my hips are hurting..."

"Emotions are like waves. Watch them disappear in the distance on the vast calm ocean."

He had just sort of wiped out my whole game. [...] I was, after all, a great story teller."

The Beats and The Beatles groups of band were influenced by the Indian philosophies of free spirit and they visited India. The album called The White Album (1968) by the Beatles has the influence of India. Reji Varghese writes about the influence of eastern philosophy and culture on the literature during counter culture era, "Two decades after his Nobel Prize, Herman Hesse's book made it to the main stream, thanks to counter culture, hippie movement of the 60s and 70s. Books such as *Siddhartha*, *Journey to the East*, *Narcissus* and *Goldmund* were about soul searching and enlightenment: popular themes of Flower Power and Woodstock Generation.

Bengal faced hard times after the independence and the life of the people became miserable due to poverty and hunger. In 1961, the young poets from middle class families of Bengal raised their voice against the government with pen and brush. This literary movement is known as Hungryalist movement in Bengal. The torchbearer poets of this movement were Malay Roy Choudhary, Debi Roy, Samir Roy Choudhary and Shakti Chattopadhyay. The term *Hungryalism* is derived from Geoffrey Chaucer's poetic line "in the sower hungry tyme." The movement made noteworthy change in the literary vocabulary and language and appealed reader's mind that was dominated by the colonial ideology.

The effect was that the upper class and government opposed this movement. The young army of poets was later joined by Utpal Kumar Basu, Binoy Majumdar, Sandipan Chattopadhyay, Basudeb Dasgupta, Falguni Roy, Tridib Mitra and other poets. They were charged for profanity and eleven poets were arrested in 1964. This incident was reported worldwide. The Beat poet Allen Ginsberg paid visit to Malay Roy Choudhary. Other poets who visited him were Octavio Paz, Ernesto Cardenal. The influence of this movement has

been nationwide too and so it affected Marathi, Assamese, Urdu and Telugu literature. Later Debi Roy admits in one of his interview that they also received support from India, “Almost all the major magazines and newspapers across the nation started publishing gossip and news about us. Dharamveer Bharti, Khushwant Singh, Pupul Jayakar, all of them came out in our support, collected funds for us, and pulled strings to secure our freedom.”

The 1971 film *Hare Krishna Hare Rama* represents the mood of that era where Kathmandu was the epicenter for wild parties by the drug and marijuana addicts. They were the believer of keeping the company of any nymphet. They indulge in heavy dose of drugs and dance in a loud music. However the ISKON movement was on the opposite front. Swami Bhaktivedanta, who is the pioneer of ISKON, advocated only saintly way to gain the ultimate happiness. They rejected the ideas of drugs and sex and advocated spiritualism and vegetarianism. Brian Morris, in his book, *Religion and Anthropology*, states, “As the Hare Krishna movement in the United States seemed to appeal particularly to young and affluent middle-class Americans in the late 1960s, it has always been linked to the ‘counterculture’ movement. The latter movement was especially associated with the widespread use of ‘psychedelic’ drugs to achieve radical visions. The Hare Krishna movement specifically targeted such educated and privileged youth, whom Daner suggested were culturally isolated and alienated and engaged in a ‘search for identity’ and self-affirmation..” he believes that Hare Krishna movement was rather ‘Counter counter culture movement’ in its practices.

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