

MODERNIZATION OF INDIAN TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION:

Tradition, by which we mean value—themes encompassing the entire social system of Indian society prior to the beginning of modernization was organized on the principles of hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence. These four value-themes were deeply interlocked with other elements of Indian social structure. Hierarchy was engrained not only in the system of caste and sub-caste stratification but also in the Hindu concepts of human nature, occupational life cycles (ashrams), and moral duties (dharma). Holism implied a relationship between individual and group in which the former was encompassed by the latter in respect of duties and rights; what had precedence here was community or sangha and not the individual. This subsumption of individual by collectivity persisted all along the line of traditional social structure, e.g., family, village community, caste and political territory or nation. Communalism in traditional social system was reinforced through the value system of continuity which in Hinduism was symbolized by principles of karma, transmigration of soul and a cyclical view of change. The principle of transcendence also posited that legitimation of traditional values could never be challenged on grounds of rationality derived from the non-sacred or profane scales of evaluation. It formed a super-concept contributing to integration as well as rationalization of the other value-themes of tradition.

Transformation Towards a Universal and Homogeneous Form of Modernization

The organization of tradition based on these value-components could not be called typical only of the Indian society, since at one level similar phenomena also existed in the traditional West. The divergence between the two traditions, however, arose from their unique social heritage, existential situations and historicity of circumstances. From this a question follows: will the historicity of modernization in heterogeneous societies and traditions result into their transformation towards a universal and homogeneous form of modernization? This question assumes significance especially for India which has a hoary past and has been the centre of civilizations with great temporal depth.

Transformations in The Social Structure and Culture

This temporal depth of civilization in traditional Indian society has relevance not only for analyzing the direction the process of modernization might eventually take through major transformations in the social structure and culture, but it is also important for understanding causality and sequence of events through which modernization has made its impact on the traditional Indian society. It might reveal also the manner in which initial structural and cultural conditions of modernization in India might contribute to such institutional adaptations which may be universalistic in orientation yet particularistic in form. The form of traditional institutions may remain intact but their substance might undergo major transformations incorporating modernization.

The Principle of Holism

Historically, social structure and tradition in India remained impervious to major elements of modernity until the contact with the West began through colonization. The earlier encounters with Islam only reinforced the tradition since Islam despite being exogenous to the Hindu tradition was basically organized on value-themes which were traditional; ideally, Islam had no place for hierarchical differentiation of individuals within its community of believers; its world-view was messianic-historical in contrast with the Hindu view of continuity; the principle of transcendence

in Islam was strictly monotheistic and here too it differed from Hinduism. The principle of holism which no doubt was present both in Islam and Hinduism also varied in sociological meaning in the two civilizations. In Hinduism, holism implied individual's social and moral subordination to the group without theocratic implications, so basic in Islam.

Traditional Character of Indian Society

Despite these dissimilarities in ideal value-themes of the Hindu and Islamic traditions, there took place a synthesis between them which reinforced the traditional character of Indian society without significant breakdown in its organization. Islam, in its Persian transformation had already from there, and in the midst of the caste-stratified Hindu society, more so, owing to large-scale conversion to Islam by caste Hindus, Islamic social structure in this country soon developed its own pattern of caste hierarchy. In political structure too feudal monarchial system followed by the Muslim rulers was not fundamentally different from those of the traditional Hindu rulers, and even where variations attempt was made to accommodate Hindu norms of political order through institutional adjustments. Hindu princes and administrative functionaries held important offices at the courts of Muslim rulers in the North. Consequently, there took place a high degree of cultural as well as institutional syncretism between the two systems without major breakdowns. From the view-point of modernization, therefore, the Islamic contact was more tradition-reinforcing than otherwise.

Social Changes in Traditional India

It is necessary to draw a distinction between social change and modernization, especially to evaluate changes in the traditional society. In traditional India there were continual instances of social change without implying modernization. These changes were from one traditional structure to another, without, however, transcending them for a qualitatively distinctive evolutionary differentiation. The changes were initiated both through orthogenetic and heterogenetic causal sources, and related to social structure as well as culture, but these were essentially pre-modern in nature and quality.

Impact Traditional Cultural Structure On Political and Economic Structure

The traditional cultural structure comprising the Little and Great traditions in India experienced many changes before the beginning of the Western contact. Buddhism and Jainism emerged as protest movements against the Hindu caste system; their growth led to formation of new caste-like segmentary groups which later degenerated into castes contributing further to pluralistic tradition. These movements had their impact also on political and economic structure of the Indian society. Jainism particularly was an urban movement, and both Jainism and Buddhism led to the emergence of new mercantile castes in urban centres. Orthogenetic movements also formed the bases of Sikhism in north India, of Bhakti movements in north and south India, of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj during the British regime, and finally of the Gandhian movement in the contemporary times that culminated in India's political independence. With the partial exception of the Bhakti movements in north India which projected egalitarian values and sought for a synthesis between the Hindu and Muslim traditions, all other movements were either break-away processes to establish parallel Great traditions or reiterated the established Great tradition of Hinduism.

Bhakti Movements

The changes which thus occurred were confined to differentiation within the framework of traditional social structure and values; structural changes were very few, and those which took

place were limited in respect of the types of roles. Mention may be made of the priestly roles and monastic organizations which emerged with the rise of Buddhism. Similar developments in religious role-structures and organizations partially followed the emergence of other traditions. But these changes by no means could be alter the system as a whole. The role differentiations also had an elitist character since all of there were led by members of the upper class and caste. Only a few Bhakti movements were an exception, but these were invariably reiterative rather than innovative in significance. None of them had a meaningful impact on political system, the stratification system or the caste order against which they propagated.

Value-Themes of Islam

The Islamic tradition in India came from a heterogenetic source; its establishment by conquest introduced a complex emotional variable right from the beginning which has continued through time. Value-themes of Islam were holistic but the principle of hierarchy or caste was not accepted in theory; the idea of continuity was also less pronounced as Islam, like all religions of Semitic origin, was based on the conception of historical time; its value-theme on transcendence too was rooted in the principle of absolute monotheism. These contrasts of history and value-themes could not, however, render Islam as a systematic exogenous source for radical transformation in the Indian tradition. Despite the apparent dissimilarities, the contact between the Great traditions of Hinduism and Islam was only a contact between two traditional systems. Large-scale conversions to Islam during the Muslim rule in India might be said to have offered a structural outlet for the deprived Hindu castes for social, economic and cultural mobility. But the extent to which the convert Muslims and in most cases traditional occupations and caste rituals were also maintained. Yet, it is reasonable to believe that there must have been some advantages; being a Muslim in a political set-up where Muslim kings and chiefs were the rulers did offer security and other peripheral benefits to these groups.

Structural Changes and Sanskritization

Endogenous changes in the cultural tradition of Hinduism were mainly confined to Sanskritization before the beginning of Western contact. Sanskritization took place in two different forms throughout this period; first, as a historical process by collective recognition of lower castes to the ranks of upper castes as a result of their acts of chivalry, rise in economic and power status and political alliances. In most such cases mobility was legitimized by consensus of the dominant castes and came into being as a historical necessity. Such legitimation to status upgrading was provided by the established higher castes, even by king through royal decrees, and by other formal means of admittance to higher rank recognized by the priestly castes. Here, Sanskritization had a wider historical implication. Although its impact was confined to a region or a sub-region the implicit political and economic relationship in its background gave it a new dimension of importance. In the second form, Sanskritization has a contextual or local meaning and generally amounts to unilateral attempt of a caste or sub-caste to move upward in hierarchy. Some lower caste groups begin to emulate customs and styles of upper castes in their region, give up some of their own low-rank customs and seek to get recognition for higher caste status within the system. A major difference in this process from the historical context of Sanskritization is the absence of consensus. Often the opposite of it, that is, resistance by the dominant castes, prevails. Sanskritization in this form is seldom legitimized within the caste system. The maximum empirical cases of Sanskritization refer to this type of change.

ISLAMIZATION

For social change the Islamic influence on India was limited and not conducive to modernization. However, its diffusion gave birth to the emergence of new Great and Little traditions, although it is not clear to what extent Islam led to innovations in the micro and macro-structures too it did not set out any basically new forms. Islamic polity and judicial administration were essentially feudal and patrimonial; the legal principles and norms were also hierarchical and did not fully recognize principles of equality and equity in political and civil rights. This explains why Islamic impact unlike that of the West failed to contribute to modernization.

The cultural changes which the impact of Islam initiated emerged from the growth of Islamic Great tradition on Indian soil. Since Islam established itself in India by conquest some element of force in the spread of this tradition cannot be ruled out, but a more important reason for its growth can be attributed to structural factors which in early Hindu tradition motivated castes towards Sanskritization. It is revealing that both Sanskritization and conversion to Islam or Islamization had been most popular among the lower castes of India. The structural pre-requisites for Islamization too were the re-definition of self-image, frustration from the closure of existing system of stratification and anticipation that conversion would improve social changes; the same factors were active also in Sanskritization. Important difference, however, was in the reaction of the Hindus to such changes which presumably was of definite hostility and isolation. Islamization at every stage might have meant an active and hostile reaction from the original membership group towards the converts and their complete exclusion from its membership. This was not the case in Sanskritization.

Islamization Developed Structural Similarities with Sanskritization.

Hence, Islamization also led to some structural changes through continual differentiation and segmentation of new castes who got converted to Islam. As the sub-culture of these Muslim castes even to this day suggests, they did not renounce many of their former rituals and practices. This led to formation of little traditions of Islam. These traditions were remarkably syncretic and worked out a synthesis between the Hindu and Muslim cultural patterns and beliefs. With formation of Little traditions of Islam, Islamization further developed structural similarities with Sanskritization. The lower caste converts began to strive for the status of Ashrafs (the Muslim upper castes or groups) and a caste of pseudo-Ashrafs emerged. As in Sanskritization, here too the claim for higher status is not recognized by the upper Muslim castes. Such cases of Islamization are widespread and have been reported from different parts of the country.

Islamization as A Cultural Process

Thus, we see how Islamization as a cultural process has completed a full cycle in India. It began as a process of external impact and conversion of low caste Hindus to Muslim Great tradition, then it emerged as a process of status mobility within the Islamic social structure very much like Sanskritization, and finally it regained its earlier orthodoxy; sub-cultural frills which are outside the tradition of Islam are purposely renounced with the view that Muslims must consolidate themselves into an organic whole irrespective of divergent Little traditions of language, caste and sub-caste and region, etc.). This turn in the process of Islamization corresponds with the new movement among the lower Hindu castes to form caste associations and establish horizontal solidarity instead of seeking status mobility within the caste system through Sanskritization. The causal background for both seems to be structurally identical. It emanates from the realization that in a democratic society power and status mobility would more easily be gained by consolidation of one's rank and formation of effective power and protest groups rather than by imitating a

traditionally defined higher status which is difficult to get and is also becoming rapidly obsolescent in the new social dynamics.

Forming Horizontal Communal Solidarities & Modernisation

It may well be that latent reasons for such changes both in the Hindu and Islamic cultural tradition are disguised protest movements against the established system of stratification and power. Attempt is not only towards forming horizontal communal solidarities but also to give them organizational shape of modern corporate groups, based on rational norms, allocation of duties and obligations and rational means of communication and propaganda. This aspect of the movements which may apparently seem to be traditionalizing is highly relevant to our analysis of modernization.

PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION

Modernization in India started mainly with the Western contact, especially through establishment of the British rule. This contact had a special historicity which brought about many far reaching changes in culture and social structure of the Indian society. Not all of them, however, could be called modernizing. The basic direction of this contact was towards modernization, but in the process a variety of traditional institutions also got reinforcement. This demonstrates the weakness of assuming a neat contrariety between tradition and modernity. This polarity may be more heuristic than real. However, only after the establishment of British rule in India, modern cultural institutions and forms of social structure were introduced. In this respect the impact of Western tradition fundamentally differed from that of Islam, although both were heterogeneity and both began with political domination and rulership. The Western tradition at the time of contact had itself undergone fundamental transformations through Industrial Revolution and social reformation. Its traditional principle of hierarchy in stratification represented both by Church and feudalism were shaken; its medieval holism of value system was seriously jeopardized by emergence of Protestantism, and was on the way out. Its place was now being taken by rational-individualism in economy and society. The basic dynamism to all these processes was imparted by cumulative chain of innovations in science and technology. It was a period of extreme optimism and ever more accelerated rate of social change in the West, particularly Britain.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND BREAKDOWN IN MODERNIZATION

The questions are: Under what structural or cultural conditions does modernization lead to integrative transformation of society? What are the structural pre-requisites for institutionalization of modernizing changes without breakdown? How far does the Indian case warrant the possibility of institutionalization of modernity or alternatively of structural breakdown in the process?

Answers to these questions are related to the way modernization is conceptualized. Significantly, there is still no unanimity on concepts and evaluative standards of modernization among social scientists, and each approach can be charged with having latent ideological bias. Sociologists having a Marxist approach to modernization might deem the very concept of 'breakdown' as employed by sociologists from the 'free world' bloc; for Marxists 'breakdown' may be a vulgarized conceptual substitute for 'revolution' which is a pre-requisite for modernization in all developing as well as developed capitalist societies. It is, therefore, necessary that we try to evaluate some important theoretical presuppositions of modernization which may have a bearing upon modernization in India.

Most approaches to modernization could be grouped under two broad categories: structural and evolutionary. The structural approach is rather preponderant in social sciences. It seeks to analyse modernization with the help of selected social or normative variables. Such variables as ‘social mobilization growth of communication, ‘media exposure’ ; democratic political institutions and values, morals and norms conducive to modernization, technological and economic resources or society, and ‘initial conditions’ of society with respect to presence of cultural and structural autonomy of parts within the social system, have been taken into consideration. Modernization is supposed to follow as a result of the presence of these variables in the social system; their intensity and proportion would determine the nature and extent of modernization in specific situations.

Approaches To Modernization

Evolutionary approach to modernization, on the other hand, is based on more systematic theoretical assumptions. It treats modernization as an evolutionary stage in the life of human society. There are, however, differences in formation of the process of evolution and its direction. Its methodological formulation may either be structural-functional or dialectical; similarly direction of evolution may also be either unilinear or multiline. A major difference between dialectical (Marxist) and structural-functional evolutionary approaches to modernization is that the former treats ‘breakdown’ in the established political, economic and structural framework of a society as a necessary and inevitable condition for development towards modernization. Class-struggle and its international form of struggle between the rich and poorer nations are here assumed as necessary processes for such evolutionary achievements. Even modernization as a concept is understood differently, its focus is upon changes in stratification system, system of property ownership and ownership of productive resources in a orientation’, ‘psychic mobility and ‘rational hedonism’, etc., common among the treatments of many social scientists. Individual characteristics are here treated as bye-products of major aggregates of changes in institutional structure of society and its structure of power and property relationship.

CONCLUSION:

It may be doubted whether this ideal of political democracy with political power based on free elections and with freedom of assembly, press, and other civil liberties—should be given weight in formulating the modernization ideals. This is not because the ideal is at present not very fully met, and may not be met in the future: value premises represent merely an angle from which actual conditions are viewed and need not be ‘realistic’ in that sense... This democratic ideal is not essential to a system comprising all the other modernization ideals. Despite these limitations which emanate from value premises of modernization, Parsons’ formulation is theoretically powerful and could be used to explain many structural and cultural contradictions of modernization in under-developed countries. Stratification is one important factor which causes bottlenecks in rapid modernization of India by its rigidity and no egalitarian character. His model also delineates a course of modernization hypothetically, which would involve least conflict through stages of transition.

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