

Modernization of Indian Tradition

Indian tradition, prior to the beginning of modernization, was organized on the basis 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 (*gunas*), occupational life cycles (*ashrams*), and oral duties (*dharma*). Holism implied a relationship between individual and group in which the former was encompassed by the latter in the respect of duties and rights. In other words, community had precedence over the individual. This subordination of individual by collectivity persisted all along the line of traditional social structure, e.g., family, village community, caste or nation. Communalism in traditional social system 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 implied that legitimization of traditional values could never be challenged on the grounds of rationality derived from the secular or non-sacred (profane) scales of evaluation.

The modernization discourse in India, emerged during the national movement for independence from the colonial rule. Its normative and structural ideals were reconstruction of India to make it an economically developed, socially just and an egalitarian republic. These ideals were widely debated and were ultimately enshrined in the constitution. Of course, Gandhi and Nehru, the two architects of modernization discourse and modern India had differences in their perception of what a future Indian model of modernization should be like, even though both were aware of the need for synergy and accommodation between their two world-views. The Indian constitution reflects this effort.

Nevertheless, the normative foundation and strategy of modernization was deeply influenced by India's historical encounter with the West and its trauma of having been colonized by a Western power. This issue was long debated in the course of the national movement and reform movements launched during colonial period. Also, most of the prominent leaders of the national movement had been educated in the British and European universities and were sensitive to the contributions that the republican and scientific-industrial revolution in Europe had made to their growth as global imperialist powers. The significance of these factors in designing the Indian strategy for modernization, therefore, could not be minimized.

Modernization as a process refers to the rational transformation of social, economic, political and psychological aspects of society. M.N. Srinivas prefers the

term 'Westernization' to 'Modernization'. Westernization is defined by Srinivas as, "the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule. The term subsuming changes, occurring at different levels i.e. technology, institutions, ideology and values". Emphasis on humanitarianism and rationalism is a part of Westernisation which led to a series of institutional and social reforms in India. Establishment of scientific, technological and educational institutions, rise of nationalism, new political culture and leadership in the country, are all by-products of Westernisation.

According to Yogendra Singh, modernization in India started mainly with the Western contact, especially through establishment of the British rule. He argues that it was only after the establishment of British rule in India that modern cultural institutions and forms of social structure were introduced. Singh has analyzed the impact of the Western contact on the culture and social structure of the Indian society at two levels: Little tradition and Great tradition.

Please note that the approach to analyse social change with the help of the concepts of Little and Great traditions was used by an American anthropologist Robert Redfield in his studies of the Mexican communities. Influenced by this model, Milton Singer and McKim Marriott have conducted some studies on social changes in India utilizing this conceptual framework. These scholars argue that the social structure of any civilization operates at two levels, first that of the folks or unlettered peasants, and second, that of the elite or the 'reflective few'. The cultural processes in the former comprise the Little tradition and those in the latter constitute the Great tradition. In other words, the Little tradition refers to the culture of the folk or rural societies which are small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous. The Little tradition, thus, is limited and localized in character. The Great tradition, on the other hand, refers to the culture of the elite which is largely formal, codified and uniform in character. For example, in India, the great tradition consists of the traditions contained in epics, Puranas, Brahmanas and other classical sanskritic works.

McKim Marriot in his study of Kishan Garhi village in Northern India found that in the structure of the village culture and its social organization, which consists both of the Little and Great traditional elements, there is a constant interaction of cultural forms. Elements of the little tradition, indigenous customs, deities and rites circulate upward to the level of the Great tradition and are 'identified' with its legitimate forms. This process Marriot calls 'universalization'. Likewise, some elements of the Great tradition also circulate downward to become organic part of the Little tradition, and lose much of their original form in the process. He used the term 'parochialization' to denote this kind of transaction between the two traditions. Parochialization is defined as the "process of limitation upon the scope

of intelligibility, of deprivation of literary form, of reduction to less systematic and less reflective dimensions” of the elements of the Great tradition. The Little tradition consists of local customs, rites, rituals, dialects and the Great tradition contains legitimate form of all these things.

Yogendra Singh argues that the initial contact with the British (also called as Primary Westernization) was selective in terms of scope and limited in terms of consequences. It led to the growth of a modernizing subculture or Little tradition of Westernization, especially during the seventeenth century in Bengal, Madras and Bombay. Please note the term ‘Little tradition’ has been used here in a limited and specific sense implying the limited and localized impact of the initial contact with the British. This implies that during initial years a small nucleus of interpreters, traders-cum-middlemen emerged who were slowly being socialized to Western ways. Subsequently, there also emerged sects which emphasized assimilation of Western cultural norms, and Western modes of learning such as Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, etc. In other words, Primary Westernisation was characterized by the emergence of a western subculture pattern through a minority section of Indians, who first came into contact with Western culture. This also includes the subculture, represented by those Indian intellectuals and scholars, who not only adopted many western cognitive patterns and styles of life, but also supported its rapid expansion. The influence of this westernized subculture was limited and localized. Thus, the impact of the initial contact with the British was very limited and localized in character. Hence, these developments have been called as the Little tradition of Westernization.

However, according to Yogendra Singh, various religious reform movements as well as the consolidation of the British power towards the middle of the nineteenth century led to the institution of a modernizing Great tradition. Its components were: a universalistic legal system, expansion of Western form of secular education, urbanization and industrialization, new forms of political mobilization (political parties, pressure groups, etc.), spread of new means of communication and transport, development of science and technology and social reforms. Along with these modernization norms, structural modernization also took place. For instance, rational bureaucratic systems of administration and judiciary, army, and industrial bureaucracy, new classes of business elite and entrepreneurs came into being. Thus, leading to the establishment of rational macro-structures (pan-Indian), such as the political system, bureaucracy, elite structure, industry and economy. These were accompanied by emergence of political elite and a nationalist leadership by the middle of the nineteenth century. Growth of industrial entrepreneurship also contributed to the emergence of industrial working class and trade unions organized on corporate lines as in the West. These modernizing structures had a uniform character throughout the country. Their development led,

therefore, to articulation of nationalist aspirations in the country which itself was a major step in the growth of modernization. This marked the beginning of the phase of Secondary Westernization where the impact was wholistic in nature encompassing social, economic and political structures throughout India. Secondary Westernization had a pan-Indian character and has contributed to the growth of various forms of cultural structures which outcross the local or regional boundaries and extend to the country as a whole.

There was however one important feature of Indian modernization during the British period. The growth of this process was selective and segmental. It was not integrated with the micro-structures of Indian society such as family, caste and village communities. At these levels, the British by and large followed a policy of least interference, especially after the 1857 rebellion.

Following Independence, modernization process in India has undergone a basic change from its colonial pattern. As an integral part of development strategy now modernization has been envisaged for all levels of cultural and structural systems. Discontinuity in modernization between macro structures and micro structures and between the Little and Great traditions, as during the British regime, has now been consciously abolished. Introduction of adult suffrage and a federal parliamentary form of political structure have carried politicization to every sector of social organization. Conscious legal reforms in Hindu marriage and inheritance laws have deeply affected the foundation of traditional Hindu family structure. Community Development Projects have carried the cultural norms and role-structures of modernity to each and every village in India, and this, coupled with introduction of land reforms and elective village panchayats has initiated villagers to a bureaucratic form of participation in local level management and administration of justice. Caste has in the process undergone radical transformation of roles, developed new functional adaptations and activated aspirations unleashed by democratization of polity and power structure.

The Secondary Westernisation got a boost after India gained independence. The Indian leadership had recognized early during the movement for freedom from colonial regime that imperatives of modernization of the Indian society involved a radical structural transformation of Indian society and elimination of many of its cultural evils. Following independence, many radical measures of reforms were introduced. The feudal system of Zamindari, princely estates and various other forms of intermediary control on land and peasantry were abolished. This led to agrarian transition through which ownership rights over land were accorded to peasants. Consolidation of land holdings, land development programmes and massive irrigation programmes were launched. The hereditary control of village panchayats was removed and replaced by a system of electoral participation of all

citizens within a village community. This empowered most villages which were traditionally deprived of freedom of choice in policies and programmes of management of village affairs.

At the macro level, the constitution adopted in 1950 had already declared India a democratic republic with electoral civil rights to all its citizens irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender or caste distinction within a framework of quasi-federalism with distribution of powers between the central and the state governments. These were radical measures with potential for basic structural transformation of Indian society. These reforms were integrated with an industrial policy of mixed economy with the state controlling most of its crucial sectors (heavy industries) where intensive capital investment with long gestation period was involved. A National Planning Commission was set up to guide and prioritize investment in social, infrastructural, economic and other related development policies. All this task necessitated the availability of scientific data for policy intervention, and social scientists participated in this endeavour including sociologists and social anthropologists.

It may be recalled that soon after independence following the partition of the country, India was confronted with numerous geopolitical and internal social tensions. Regional protests for new states within the Union were triggered by the claims and counter-claims before the States Reorganization Commission. Quasi-separatists and left movements were active in southern states and agrarian problems including the dire food shortages were a perpetual problem. Structural changes, particularly in the agrarian economy and positive discrimination in favour of the traditionally marginalized, poor and exploited communities were imperative. To attain this, provisions were made in the Constitution for reservation in jobs, educational opportunities, and political participation, etc., for these communities labelled as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Later, socially and educationally backward classes were also incorporated in the scheme of positive discrimination.

The first phase of modernization and social change that these measures ushered in India could be placed from 1950s to 1970s. During this period, the state was a prime source of reform and investments to bring about the development. Its results were witnessed in the agricultural field which had invited substantial investments in education and research, irrigation projects and innovations in agricultural technologies and inputs, such as new high yield variety of seeds, new methods of credit, marketing and management, etc. This brought about, what is known in India, as a 'green revolution'; productivity in agriculture increased manifold and soon the country became self-sufficient in food grains. These changes led to several long-term sociological consequences. A vigorous rural

middle class comprising middle caste peasants (traditional cultivators) came into existence in all parts of India. Since this caste/class base also had a substantial numerical presence (about 27% of the population), it soon acquired political power through electoral process in the states and realized a positive discrimination in its favour. They became the new 'Backward Classes' of India. Green revolution also changed the traditional pattern of authority and process of decision making, particularly in matters concerning economic, political, techno-managerial, marketing and investment. It was passed down to the younger generation. However, in matters of gender relations and relations with the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the attitude of the backward classes remained authoritarian. Several studies of the consequences of green revolution on women have found that women were displaced from a variety of occupational niches, consequently lowering their social status. Similarly, the social and cultural conservatism of the backward classes also meant their overbearing or even hostile treatment of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in villages often triggering conflicts and violence. This particularly was reflected in the village level elections to Councils or Village Panchayats. The new structural changes had twofold implication: on the one hand, they augmented the modernization process in villages, on the other, they also seeded many sources of contradictions and conflicts in the rural communities.

This phase of social change (during the first two decades since 1950) also introduced revolutionary changes in the political power structure that was not confined only to the villages but had regional and national implications. The traditional monopoly on power held by the upper castes and landed gentry and the priestly caste was severely eroded. The change was more radical in South India where the upper caste comprised only a minority of about 3 per cent. But, in the North Indian states too, where they were in minority compared to the backward classed, their monopoly on power came to an end. The republican electoral process thus changed the power landscape of India. The castes and communities which were traditionally marginalized, such as the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes and the Muslims gained tremendous electoral advantages as no single caste including the backward classes could enjoy absolute majority on their own.

On the other hand, as time passed, the reservation policy in favour of marginalized castes began to show results, primarily and significantly it augmented the process of their social mobility and political influence. Taken together, these forces of social change also released tremendous entrepreneurial energy and upsurge of aspirations for more and more social and political mobility. Throughout this period, the state remained a prime mover in the matters of economic, social, and developmental policies. It did succeed in creating a basic infrastructure and foundational resources for the first stage of modernization in India.

The second phase of modernization began in 1990s with a radical thinking on economic policies. For the first time, effective economic reforms and opening up of the economy to enlarge participation from the Indian and foreign corporate groups were made possible. Liberalization policy increased the level of capital investment, import of new technologies of production and enlarged the market for the Indian goods within the country and abroad. This coincided with the revolutionary new developments in information technology and growth of the information economy. India's investment in higher technological and scientific education since independence gave it a natural advantage and more than in manufacturing sector (where growth remained slow due to historical reasons), in the information sector it has an edge over others. India achieved phenomenal growth in the information sector of economy with a large measure of globalization of its services and manpower. As the capital investment of the private sector in various sectors of the economy increased in a large measure, it released the resources of the government for investment in the social and welfare sectors essential for balanced and sustainable economic and social growth.

The contemporary processes of modernization and social change reflect these phenomena. Consistently during the past decade, the rate of economic growth has been around 7 per cent making incremental growth in per capita and national income. The quantum of investment of capital in various sectors of Indian economy has sustained a high rate and continues to generate employment for the educated manpower. All this has added to the size of the Indian middle class, which is estimated to be about 300 million now.

Yogendra Singh highlights several inconsistencies in the structural changes that India has undergone during the post-colonial phase of modernization. Micro-structures like caste, family and village communities have retained their traditional character. Caste has shown unexpected elasticity and latent potential for adaptation with modern institutions such as democratic participation, political party organization and trade unionism, and it persists unabatedly. It forms the paradox of the Indian democracy which on the one hand celebrates civil principles and on other, gets increasingly embedded into institutions of primordiality, such as religion, ethnicity and caste. Joint family loyalties and particularistic norms continue to prevail. These contradictions are, however, further magnified at the level of macro-structures, such as the political system, bureaucracy, elite structure, industry and economy. The colonial period of modernization had a homogeneity in elite structure. These elites from industrial, civil and military bureaucracies, as well as political spheres came from similar class-caste stratum. They had equitable exposure to Western education and socialization. They also had uniformity of ideologies and aspirations. This was because the social base for recruitment of these elites was limited. The social base of elites has fairly widened in post-

Independence period. It may not be equitable in terms of stratification system, but in cultural background there is enough representativeness which leads to many contradictions. A gap is especially coming into being between the political elite and non-political elites (i.e. intellectuals). The former are less Westernized, and externally at least identify with traditional cultural symbolisms more strongly than the latter. Heterogenization of political elites is often marred by difficulties in forming value consensus and thus, giving rise to various conflicts.

Contradictions are also growing in the federal structure of the Union as one party government is being replaced by multi-party government in States, having divergent ideological policies (Communist-led united fronts in Kerala and West Bengal, D.M.K. in Tamil Nadu). There is also evidence that, in the course of economic planning in the last few decades, the additional income generated by economic investments has gone in favour of only the well-to-do classes to the detriment of poorer sections. Planning has thus accentuated and sharpened the gaps in social stratification. This along with the slow rate economic growth and rapid increase in population has created additional intensities for structural tensions. Despite the years of efforts and industrialization, India continues to be a rural-peasant dominated society with general poverty of living standards.

Thus, major potential sources of breakdown in the Indian process of modernization, may in one form or another be attributed to the structural inconsistencies, such as:

- Democratization without the spread of civic culture (education)
- Bureaucratization without commitment to universalistic norms
- Rise in people's aspirations without proportionate increase in resources and distributive justice.
- Verbalization of welfare ideology without its diffusion in social structure and its implementation as a social policy
- Over-urbanization without industrialization.
- Modernization without meaningful changes in the stratification system

Gunnar Myrdal refers to similar impediments to modernization in India and other Asian countries in his work *Asian Drama*. Nationalism and democratic institutions themselves, according to him, have grown in a structurally uneven form in these countries. Myrdal argues that in Europe, strong independent State

with a fairly effective government and a common pattern of law enforcement preceded nationalism, and both preceded democracy. However, in South Asian countries, democratic ideology, due to special historicity (colonial character), preceded strong and independent State. This uneven historicity goes along with the economic dependence of these countries on developed nations and slow rate of economic growth and still slower pace of institutional changes. Particularly in India, which, according to Myrdal, has a more viable size of intellectuals and middle classes necessary for democracy, planned economic growth has not made as deep an impact towards liberalizing the structural bottlenecks for modernization as should have been expected. According to Myrdal, India's 'soft state' policy after Independence inhibited its leadership from going to the root of the problem, that is, introduction of basic changes in the institutional structure of the society. Similarly, another eminent sociologist Dipankar Gupta calls Indian modernity as 'mistaken modernity'. Gupta argues that technological modernization has been readily adopted in Indian society, but it has not led to a corresponding cognitive modernity. Rudolph and Rudolph argue that modernity in India has come as a process of assimilation and has not resulted in the replacement of tradition. Traditional structures have been adopted for modern needs. For example, while social justice is a modern value, but in India, the policy of protective discrimination is largely based on caste and religious criteria.

S.N. Eisenstadt has talked about the phenomenon of 'multiple modernities'. The notion of multiple modernities denotes a certain view of the contemporary world that goes against the view long prevalent in scholarly and general discourse. It goes against the view of classical theories of modernity and of the convergence of industrial societies prevalent in the 1950s and indeed against the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim and even to some extent Weber. They all assumed, even if only implicitly, that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations (socio-economic-political) that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing societies. In other words, with the expansion of modernity, they would prevail throughout the world. The reality that emerged after the so-called beginnings of modernity, and especially after World War II, failed to bear out these assumptions. The actual developments in modernizing societies have refuted the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of this Western programme of modernity.