

Tradition

What is meant by tradition? DP points out that tradition comes from the root 'tradere', which means "to transmit". The Sanskrit equivalent of tradition is either *parampara*, that is, succession or *aitihya*, which has the same root as *itihasa*, or history.

Traditions are supposed to have a source. It may be scriptures, or statements of sages (*apta vakya*), or mythical heroes with or

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without names. Whatever may be the source, the historicity of traditions is recognized by most people. They are quoted, recalled, esteemed. In fact, their age-long succession ensures social cohesion and social solidarity.

Dynamics of Tradition

Tradition, thus, performs the act of conserving. But it is not necessarily conservative. DP asserts that traditions do change. Three principles of change are recognized in Indian tradition: *Sruti*, *Smriti*, *Anubhava*. It is *anubhava* or personal experience, which is the revolutionary principle. Certain Upanishads are entirely based on it.

But it did not end there. Personal experience of the saint-founders of different sects or *panths* soon blossomed forth into collective experience producing change in the prevailing socio-religious order. The experience of *prem* or love and *sahaj* or spontaneity of these saints and their followers was noticeable also in the *Sufis* among the Muslims. The traditional system gradually accommodated the dissenting voices. Indian social action has given latitude to align rebel within the limits of the constitution. The result has been the caste society blunting the class-consciousness of disadvantaged.

Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity

The strength of the Indian tradition lies in its crystallization of values emerging from past happenings in the life-habits and emotions of men and women. In this way, India has certainly conserved many values: some good and others bad. The point, however, is that of utilizing the forces, which are foreign to Indian traditions, e.g., technology, democracy, urbanization, bureaucracy, etc.

DP is convinced that adjustments will certainly occur. It is almost guaranteed that Indians will not vanish, as primitive tribes have done, at the touch of western culture. They have sufficient flexibility for that. Indian culture had assimilated tribal culture and many of its endogenous dissents. It had developed Hindu-Muslim cultures and modern Indian culture is a curious blending,

varansankara. "Traditionally, therefore, living in adjustment is in India's blood, so to speak".

DP does not worship tradition. His idea of "complete man" or "well-balanced personality" calls for a blend of (1) moral fervour and aesthetic and intellectual sensibility with (2) the sense of history and rationality. The qualities of the second category are emphasized more by modernity, than by the Indian tradition. Hence, the dialectics between tradition and modernity herein lies in the need for understanding the tradition. DP observes that "the knowledge of traditions shows the way to break them, with the least social cost".

DP's most popular and significant writings on 'tradition and modernity' help us in understanding the authentic measuring of these two bipolar concepts. He argued that there is dialectical relation between India's tradition and modernity, British colonialism and nationalism and individualism and collectivity, i.e., Sangha. His concept of dialectics was anchored in liberal humanism. He argued all through his works that traditions are central to the understanding of Indian society. The relations between modernization which came to India during the British periods and traditions are dialectical. It is from this perspective of dialectics that, DP argued, we shall to define traditions.

The encounter of tradition with modernization created certain cultural contradictions, adaptations and in some cases situations of conflict also. Describing the consequences of the tradition-modernity encounter, Yogendra Singh (1986) writes:

In D.P. Mukerji's writing we find some systematic concern with analysis of Indian social processes from a dialectical frame of reference. He mainly focuses upon the encounter of the tradition with that of the west which, on the one hand, unleashed many factors of cultural contradictions and, on the other, gave rise to a new middle class. The rise of these forces, according to him, generates a dialectical process of conflict and synthesis which must be given a push by bringing into play the conserved energies of the class structure of Indian society.

The encounter between tradition and modernity, therefore, ends up in two consequences: (1) conflict, and (2) synthesis. Indian society, as DP envisages, is the result of the interaction between tradition and modernity. It is this dialectics, which helps us to analyse the Indian society.

DP's concept of tradition appeared for the first time in the year 1942 when his book *Modern Indian Culture: A Sociological Study* was published. His characterization of tradition in the context of Indian culture runs as below:

As a social and historical process.... Indian culture represents certain common traditions that have given rise to a number of general attitudes. The major influences in their shaping have been Buddhism, Islam, and western commerce and culture. It was through the assimilation and conflict of such varying forces that Indian culture became what it is today, neither Hindu nor Islamic, neither a replica of the western mode of living and thought nor a purely Asiatic product (1948: 1).

The central thesis of the book was that the key to the history of India was cultural synthesis – creative response to the internal and external political and cultural challenges – and that the history of India was more than its past notwithstanding the views of Hegel and Marx on the subject. DP did not regard the disruptiveness of the British rule as a permanent injury: it was only an interruption. He recognized that the Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis was the weakest at the level of cognitive categories, but stressed shared economic interests, and applauded achievements in music, architecture and literature. DP did not consider the partition of the sub-continent as more than an event in its geopolitics. The future, he was almost confident, would transcend the present in a true dialectical movement. Let us not politicize culture, he used to say.

The Tagore study restates DP's thesis about the importance of roots. Comparing Tagore with Bankimchandra Chatterji, he writes: "His [Tagore's] saturation with Indian traditions was deeper; hence he could more easily assimilate a bigger dose of western thought." And again: "The influence of the West upon

Tagore was great ... but it should not be exaggerated.... At each stage in the evolution of his prose, poetry, drama, music and of his personality we find Tagore drawing upon some basic reservoir of the soil, of the people, of the spirit, and emerging with the capacity for larger investment" (Mukerji, 1972: 50).

Composition of Traditions

Indian tradition is the resultant of certain historical processes. They actually construct the structure of Indian culture. These traditions belong to several ideologies such as Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, tribal life and western modernity. The process of synthesis has, therefore, constructed these traditions. In this respect, it would be mistaken to believe that traditions are Hindu only. In fact, they combine traditions of various ethnic groups of the country. How the principles of various religious ideologies shaped the Indian traditions has been interpreted by T.N. Madan as under:

In this historical process, synthesis has been the dominant organizing principle of the Hindu, the Buddhist and the Muslim, who had together shaped a worldview in which according to D.P., 'the fact of being was lasting significance'. His favourite quotation from the Upanishads was charaivati, keep moving forward. This meant that there had developed an indifference to the transient and the sensate and a preoccupation with the subordination of the 'little self' to the ultimately its dissolution in the 'supreme reality' (1948: 2).

DP tried to provide a classification of Indian traditions under three heads, viz., primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary traditions have been primordial and authentic to Indian society. The secondary traditions were given second ranking, when the Muslims arrived in the country. And, by the time of the British arrival, Hindus and Muslims had yet not achieved a full synthesis of traditions at all levels of existence. There was a greater measure of agreement between them regarding the utilization and appropriation of natural resources and to a lesser extent in respect of aesthetic and religious traditions. In the tertiary traditions of conceptual thought, however, differences survived prominently.

Sources of Traditions

Indian sociologists have talked enough about traditions but little effort has been made to identify the sources and content of traditions. And this goes very well when we talk about D.P. Mukerji. Admittedly, traditions occupy a central place in any analysis of India's traditions and modernization. But DP has not given the contents of these traditions. The major sources of traditions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and western culture, but what traditions, for instance, of Hinduism or Islam constitute the broader Indian traditions has not been made specific by DP. His weakness in this respect has been identified by T.N. Madan who says that the general make up of Indian traditions according to DP could be a synthesis of Vedanta, western liberation and Marxism. But, what about the synthesis of Islam and Buddhism? DP fails to provide any such synthesis of other major traditions. Madan (1993) comments on this failure of DP as under:

An equally important and difficult undertaking would be the elaboration and specification of his conception of the content of tradition. Whereas he establishes, convincingly I think, the relevance of tradition to modernity at the level of principle, he does not spell out its empirical content except in terms of general categories.... One has the uncomfortable feeling that he himself operated more in terms of institution and general knowledge than a deep study of the texts. A confrontation with tradition through field work in the manner of the anthropologist was, of course, ruled out by him, at least for himself.

Writings

DP was a versatile scholar. He wrote nineteen books, including *Diversities* (1958); ten in Bengali and nine in English. His early publications include: *Basic Concepts in Sociology* (1932) and *Personality and the Social Sciences* (1924). Some of the other publications are: *Modern Indian Culture* (1942, revised enlarged edition in 1948), *Problems of Indian Youth* (1942), and *Views and Counterviews* (1946). *Modern Indian Culture* (1942) and *Diversities* (1958) are known as his best works. His versalities can be seen from his other contributions such as *Tagore: A Study* (1943), *On Indian History: A Study in Method* (1943), and *Introduction to Music* (1945). Apart from these, he also enjoys a unique place in Bengali literature as a novelist, essayist and literary critic.

Personality

DP once told with a sense of humour that he propounded the thesis of 'purusha'. The 'purusha' is not isolated from society and establishes the relationship with others as an active agent and discharges responsibilities. His argument is that the 'purusha' grows as a result of his relations with others and, thus, occupies a better place among human groups.

DP admits that the Indian social life is like the life of bees and beavers and the Indians are almost a regimented people. But "the beauty of it" is that the majority of us do not feel regimented. DP doubts whether the western individual man dominated by the market system has any freedom at all. He is exposed to the manipulation of advertisements, press-chains, chain stores and his purse is continuously emptied. All this does not leave much scope for individual's right of choice and consumer's sovereignty. Contrastingly, the low level of aspiration of an average Indian, which is moderated by group norms, results into greater poise in life. This should not be missed in our urge for uplifting the level of wants. The Indian sociologist thus will have to accept the group as his unit and eject the individual. For that is the tradition of India. The Indian sociologists will have to understand the specific nature of this tradition.

Modern Indian Culture

Emphasis in his works has changed through passage of time. DP was very sensitive and was influenced by environment around him.

He drew from traditional culture as well as modern. *Modern Indian Culture: A Sociological Study* was first published in 1942 and its revised edition in 1947 – the year of partitioned independence. Synthesis has been the dominant organizing principle of Indian culture. The British rule provided a real turning point to the Indian society. The middle class helped in the consolidation of British rule in India, but later challenged it successfully. DP's vision of India was a peaceful, progressive India born out of 'union' of diverse elements, of distinctive regional cultures. Reorientation to tradition was an essential condition of moving forward. DP denied that he was Marxist; he claimed to be only a 'Marxologist'.

The national movement was anti-intellectual, although it generated idealism and moral fervour. He concluded: "Politics has ruined our culture." DP believed that no genuine modernization is possible through imitation. He feared cultural imperialism. Modernization is a process of expansion, elevation, revitalization of traditional values and cultural patterns. Tradition is a principle of continuity. It gives us freedom to choose from different alternatives. Modernity should be defined in relation to, and not in denial of, tradition.

DP's arguments have been criticized. Saran has pointed out that DP does not subject the socialist order itself to analysis and takes its benign character on trust. He fails to realize that a technology-oriented society cannot easily be non-exploitative and not anti-man; and the traditional and the modern worldviews are rooted in different conceptions of time. DP's concern is seen as that of westernized Hindu intellectual. There is a need to read DP, reprint his works and examine his ideas (Madan, 1993).

Role of the New Middle Classes

The urban-industrial order, introduced by the British in India, set aside the older institutional networks. It also discovered many traditional castes and classes. It called for a new kind of social adaptation and adjustment. In the new set-up the educated middle classes of the urban centres of India became the focal point of the society. They came to command the knowledge of the modern social forces, that is, science, technology, democracy and a sense of historical development, which the west would stand for. The new society of India calls for the utilization of these qualities and the services of the middle classes have been soaked with the western ideas and lifestyles. And they remained blissfully, and often contemptuously, ignorant of Indian culture and realities. They are oblivious to the Indian traditions. But traditions have "great powers of resistance and absorption". Even "on the surface of human geography and demographic pattern, traditions have a role to play in the transfiguration of physical adjustments and biological urges".

In India, for example, things like city planning and family planning are so tied up with traditions that the architect and the social reformer can ignore them only at the peril of their schemes. India's middle classes, thus, would not be in a position to lead the masses to build India along modern lines. They were uprooted from their indigenous traditions. They have lost contact with the masses.

India can move on to the road of modernity only by adapting it to her traditions if the middle classes re-establish their link with the masses. They should not be either apologetic for or unnecessarily boastful of their traditions. They should try to harness its vitality for accommodating changes required by modernity. A balance between individuation and association will be achieved thereby. India and the world will be enriched with the new experience.