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Modernization and Its Contradictions: Contemporary Social Changes in India

Abstract: History of the discourse goes back to the national movement for India's Independence. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, though differed in their perceptions about future of India, they contributed immensely for modernization of India. Gandhi was for preservation of India's diverse cultural values and traditions with resilience, and Nehru was for a India which was free of barriers of caste, region, religion, etc. However, a large number of studies indicated that Indian tradition did not blur the path of progress which India had set up for itself in the Constitution, Five Year Plans and other such means for a new India. Resilience has been a strong hallmark of the dynamics of Indian society. Both categorical and instrumental values have coexisted in the long history of Indian society and civilization. During the course of India's modernization, perspectives such as structural-functionalism and historical materialism have been critically viewed in terms of their relevance for knowing India's ground reality. Today, it is realized that there is no uniform pattern of modernization, rather the idea of "multiple modernities" has gained currency in contemporary India.

Structural transformation of Indian society on the one hand, and changes in culture, values and norms on the other, signify a semblance of modernization in India. In domains like economy, politics, education, and media, it is not difficult to work out different phases of change and development. One can see correspondence in different phases relating to these basic structural and cultural domains. The issues of growth, development, weaker sections, human rights, social justice and distributive shares have attracted attention of scholars and concerned people and organizations, including the civil society. Contradictions at the cognitive as well as substantive levels are integral to the process of modernization. The question of cultural identity has surfaced prominently even in the face of considerable growth, development and education.

Keywords: Caste, Class, Development, Discourse, Education, Folk Culture, Globalization, Identity, Materialism, Modernization

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 and socially just an egalitarian republic. These ideals were widely debated and were ultimately enshrined in the Constitution. Of course, we may recall that Gandhi and Nehru, the two architects of the 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 worldviews. The Indian Constitution reflects this effort, even though there would be many who may disagree from this interpretation. 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 course of the national movement and reform movements launched during the colonial period. Also, most of the prominent leaders of the national movements 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 imperial powers. The significance of these factors in designing the Indian strategy if modernization, therefore, could not be minimized.

The colonial experience not only made Indian leadership conscious of the need to emulate the scientific and technological skills in which the West had gained leadership but also made them acutely self-conscious of the Indian identity, its tradition and culture which they universally acclaimed to be of enduring significance. Both Gandhi and Nehru not only reiterated this but made it an integral element in the strategy of modernization of India. Their visions envisaged the growth of a future modernized India in keeping with its traditions which had through centuries enjoyed a unity within enormous diversities. Both Gandhi and Nehru were proponents of preserving the local diverse traditions and cultural values, protecting the religion and culture of the minorities and other ethnic and regional communities. This of course had to be in keeping with the overarching values of a secular, welfare oriented republican polity which ensured basic human rights, freedom and equality of opportunities to all its citizens in consonance with the normative framework laid down in the Indian constitution. Nehru persevered with his espousal of a modernization model which promoted humanistic-spiritual values which could easily outcross the barriers of religion, caste or ethnicity within India and could build bridges of cultural and aesthetic linkages with the world community at large. Gandhi, a devotee and practitioner of the ideology of Ahimsa or non-violence cherished a vision of modernity and processes of modernization which along with justice and empowerment to the people promoted a life-world-view which promoted values of non-aquisitiveness, non-consumerism-hedonism and spiritually self-regulated way of life. These were contained in his principles of Ahimsa. Both Gandhi and Nehru were champions of internationalism based on a global order founded upon the commitment to peace, equality and non-exploitation. Both rejected war and were emphatic about rejection of the uses of nuclear technology for warfare.

Sociology and Modernization Discourse

Sociology, including other social sciences in India developed with the establishment of the university system by the British regime which had support of the Indian national leadership of the time. But the shadow of colonial experience and the self-consciousness about the identity of India and its tradition among the intellectuals did deeply impact upon the discourse of modernization. Most of the “pioneers” of sociology and social sciences questioned the western construction of the Indian society and its tradition as being partial or erroneous. For instance, Max Weber’s emphasis on Hinduism as solely promoting “other-worldly asceticism” in India which could not contribute to its industrialization and modernization or Karl Marx’s use of the metaphor of “sack

of potatoes” to characterize the ancient Indian society (implying India as segmental society without inter-linkages among the segments) were rejected because neither of these formulations were in consonance with the empirical realities as several studies conducted later established (Singh 1973, 1986). Yet, several studies of the Indian institutions by western sociologists and social anthropologists on religion, caste, family and kinship etc. continued to postulate the viewpoint that supremacy of traditionalism came in the way of Indian modernization. Louis Dumont’s thesis that the Indian social structure legitimized the principle of “hierarchy” rather than “equality” hence by implication was a hurdle to modernization was in tune with such formulations (Dumont 1970). Such formulations motivated a spate of studies of the Indian institutions, particularly religion, caste, family, village communities and tribal and ethnic minorities regarding their role in the acceptance of the programmes of development and modernization launched through the 1950’s and 1960’s by the Indian states and the Planning Commission.

The findings of most these studies do not support the thesis that the Indian tradition and traditional institutions were an obstacle to promoting or acceptance of measures to modernization of the Indian economy, or hindered the entrepreneurial spirit for innovation and change. On the contrary, most these institutions successfully adapted their traditional mode of thinking and institutional practises to bring them in tune with the demands of modernization. Studies of the entrepreneurial behaviour both among the Hindus and the Muslims in selected regions and towns revealed that continual flexible interpretation of religious ethic made it possible to override the stereotypical presumptions about these religions being an obstacle to entrepreneurial calling. Studies of entrepreneurship came up with similar findings and several of them invalidated the hypothesis of Max Weber that Hindu religion did not promote entrepreneurship. Family system was held to be another obstacle to innovation and enterprise, based as it was on the joint kinship obligations devoid of individual initiatives. But the study of the Marwaris in India, a very successful business community revealed, in fact, that the principle of joint-ness and cooperation in the families of Marwaris helped them to journey to far off places to promote their trade and investment without anxiety about as to who will look after their wife and children in their absence. The continuation of the family mode of corporate ownership and management in many of the most capital intensive and modern business enterprises in contemporary India bear testimony to this reality (Timberg 1978). Similarly, about caste. Traditionally, caste defined occupation by birth for an individual. With revolutionary changes in the economy and social initiatives taken by the state to promote the processes of modernization, caste now could no longer be identified by one’s occupation in most cases (Singh K. S. 1991). Yet, in some case, however, it also contributed to modernization. For instance, the peasant castes, with their traditional loyalty to farming led the acceptance of modern agricultural practices with innovations and new entrepreneurial business ethos. Similar is the case of the artisans and skilled castes. The “Green Revolution” in agriculture during the 1970’s which made India self-reliant in food production was led by the peasant castes in all parts of the country (see, Singh Y. 1993).

In addition, the view that traditional value system inhibited the motivation for not only innovation but consumption of material goods and commodities for expanded needs or for pleasure has been contested by a survey by the Anthropological Survey of India which reports that among most communities in India (estimated 4634 major communities) the lifestyle accepts meat eating, drinking and smoking. Not only men but a substantial majority of women in India smoke. In most regions the communities have reported that migrated from other regions and there exists a very degree of co-sharing of cultural traits across religions all over the country. This phenomena which was not unknown to the Indian intellectual community explains the resilience of India as it has met with the challenges and adapted innovatively to the institutional and behavioural demands of modernization (Singh K. S. 1992).

Modernization was often confused with westernization without taking into account its historicity primarily, the initial structural and cultural attributes of societies in their first encounter with this process. The significance of the historical factors, particularly in India with its own cultural and civilizational exposure of the centuries old history to other cultures with diversities enabling it to make adaptive accommodation with them was lost in such analyses. We have to take note that India in the past had evolved an and an economy with deeper roots in trade, manufacturing having linkages with other economies at the international scale. It had its own principles of division of labour, training of skilled manpower and accommodation of innovations. As I have attempted to argue in my *Modernization of the Indian Tradition* (1973) the weaknesses in this assumption were both logical and substantive. Assuming that “new” modernization process that was inaugurated in the west by its industrial and republican revolution was driven by a worldview of science and technology and it formed an essential element in any country’s project of modernization is valid. However, the subtext in this assumption that assimilation of the scientific worldview would lead to the erosion of most traditional values and beliefs was only partly true, since this assumption primarily affected the instrumental cultural values and it traditional forms but could not make an impact on the “fundamental values” that individuals and societies cherished. The validity of the instrumental values exists in the domains of making rational choices where means-end relationships are involved, such as the spheres of economic choices, adaptation to and innovations of new technology, health care, education and acquisition of skills etc. where their validity or optimum results could be verified. As evidence suggests, most instrumental values which are modern have been not only widely accepted but also innovated upon in India. This has indeed shrunk the scope for many traditional values which axiomatically held sway over people’s faith and behaviour in the past but now encounter credible challenges from more rational and scientific alternatives. But also at the same time, the values emanating from the faith in the supernatural or divine forces not only prevails but seems to have enlarged its hold on people’s mind.

This peculiar coexistence of the instrumental and fundamental values in the process of modernization is not peculiar to India but tends to be a universal phenomenon. As a consequence of this mix we witness, on the one hand, commonalities of institutions and behaviour patterns across nations and cultures which are reflected in

increased pace of globalization and homogenization, yet at the same time there is an increasing self-awareness and celebration of the sense of uniqueness and historicity among nations. As in the decades following the 1950's, 1960's the empirical evidence for this multiplicity in the forms of modernization in societies gained in substance a rethinking on the nature of modernity and its grounding in diverse societies and cultures became inevitable. This coincided with theoretical concerns about positivistic foundations of earlier modernization theories such as structural functionalism and historical materialism of the radical positivistic orientation fell under critical review or new forms of inter-mixing of paradigms.

Symptomatic of this development is the serious rethinking on forms of modernity and its historical roots in societies throughout 1970's onwards. In a symposium on modernity a decade ago the recognition both of the need to explore the nature of the early modernities, their historicity, variety and transition (Wittrock 1998, Subramanyam 1998) as well as the processes of continuities or likages with its contemporary forms in various societies together with the phenomena of 'multiple modernities' drew social scientists attention a major theme. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt writes:

The notion of "multiple modernities" denotes a certain view of the contemporary world—indeed of the history and the characteristics of the modern era—that goes against the view long prevalent in scholarly and general discourse. It goes against the view of the "classical" theories of modernization and of the convergence of the industrial societies prevalent in the 1950's and indeed against the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and (to a large extent) even of Weber, at least in one reading of his work. They all assumed, even if only implicitly, that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing societies; 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 program of modernity (see, Eisenstadt S. N. 2000, p. 2).

Modernization and Structural Transformation

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 the Indian society and elimination of many of its cultural evils. Following Independence, many radical measures of reform 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 landholdings and land development and massive irrigation programs were launched. The hereditary control on village panchayats was removed and replaced by a system of electoral participation of all citizens within a village community. This empowered most villagers who were traditionally deprived of freedom of choice in policy and programs 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 or caste distinctions within a framework of quasi federalism with distribution

of powers between the central and the state government. These were radical measures with potential for basic structural transformation of the Indian society. These reforms were integrated with an industrial policy of mixed economy with state controlling the most of its crucial sectors (heavy industries) where intensive capital investment with long gestation periods 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 availability of scientific data for policy intervention, and social scientists participated in this endeavour including sociologists and social anthropologists. Social science research got substantial impetus from this initiative. Moreover, new institutional structures, such as the University Grants Commission (to invest and promote college and university education), Councils to promote research and teaching in technical and scientific branches of knowledge, in school education, agriculture, medicine, technology and several other crucial sectors of knowledge received a very high priority as growth in these sectors and availability of skilled personnel was essential to realize the objectives of development.

It may be recalled that soon after Independence following partition of the country India was confronted with numerous geo-political and internal social tensions. Regional protests for new states within the Union were triggered by the claims and counter claims before the State Reorganization Commission; quasi-separatist 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 an 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 the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Later, socially and educationally Backward Classes were also incorporated in the scheme of positive discrimination. The policy interventions we have outlined above were intended to meet with these numerous challenges.

The first phase of modernization and social change that these measures ushered in India could be placed from 1950's to 1970's. During this period the state was a prime source of reform and investments to bring about development. Its results were first witnessed in the agricultural field which had invited substantial investment in education and research (establishment of research councils and agricultural universities), irrigation projects and innovations in agricultural technologies and inputs, such as new 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 multi-fold and soon the country became self-sufficient in matters of food grains. This change 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 population) it soon captured political power through electoral process in the states and realized a positive discrimination in its favour. They became the new "Backward Class" (BCs) of India. In a subtle manner "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 over to the younger generation. However, in matters of gender relations and relations with the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, (SCs/STs) the attitude the BCs remained authoritarian. Their views about women remained conservative with acute gender biases. Several studies of the consequences of “green revolution” on women have found women were as a consequence displaced from a variety of occupational niches consequently lowering of their social status. Similarly, the social and cultural conservatism of the BCs also meant their over-bearing or even hostile treatment of the SCs and STs 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 and a half decades since 1950) also introduced revolutionary changes in the political power structure that was not confined only to the villages but had regional and the national implications. The traditional monopoly on power held by the upper caste and landed gentry and the priestly castes was severely eroded. The change was more radical in south India where the upper caste comprised only a minority of about 3%. But in the north-Indian states too, where they were in minority compared to the BCs 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 SCs/STs and the Muslims gained tremendous electoral advantages as no single caste including the BCs could enjoy absolute majority on their own. On the other hand, as time passed, the reservation policy in favour of the 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 aspiration for more and more upward social and political mobility. Throughout this period, state remained a prime mover in 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.

However, the limits of the state policies in many crucial areas also began to show by the end of the 1970's. Indian economy, throughout this period remained burdened with controls; the policy of import substitution and over emphasis on state control of capital investment, exports and imports and markets etc. It succeeded in creating only a thin base of state favourite capitalism confined mainly to market standards. Indian export market thus shrunk to only within the nation's boundary and to a few other socialist countries which had identical economic policies. The result was that other Asian countries such as South Korea and few others advanced at much faster rate leaving India far behind. China too introduced measures of liberal reforms in its economic policy by the middle of the 1970's. In India, all this did trigger a measure of rethinking. Committees to reform policies were set up. But no significant action

followed. In addition, the positive outcome of the “green revolution” and agrarian changes in villages also began to fade as it could only benefit a minority of the middle class farmers but not the vast number of marginal peasants with land ownership of less than two acres. In many regions of India, due to lack of alternate avenues of employment the dependence on land led to partition and fragmentation of family land holdings as family size increased. The SC/ST classes in villages too encountered distress and felt more alienated economically and socially from the fruits of growth and development. Not only the inequalities in rural social structure increased but also the awareness among the deprived sections about their relative deprivation contributed to a crisis of lag between aspirations and achievements.

The 1970’s were also a period which witnessed several geo-political crises: Indo-Pakistan conflict and emergence of new nation Bangala Desh which broke away from Pakistan; declaration of Emergency in India by the ruling Congress party, its electoral defeat and the end of its monopoly of decades since Independence from political power, the mobilization of the BC movement and emergence of coalition rule at the level of the Central government and subsequent political instability. For these reasons, with some exceptions in the sphere of social welfare and minor steps in economic reforms no systematic policy interventions could be introduced. The policies pursued in the earlier decades had constricted the scope of export earnings for India and contributed to a crisis of foreign exchange and balance of payment.

The Congress party’s return to power towards the end of 1990’s occasioned a radical rethinking on economic policies. For the first time, effective economic reforms and opening up of the economy to enlarged 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 the manufacturing sector (where growth remained slow due to historical reasons) in the information sector it had 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 changes reflect these phenomena. Consistently during the past decade the rate of economic growth has been around 7% making incremental growth in per capita and national income. This has given new energy to the local markets and there is phenomenal rate of growth in consumer industries linked with processes of globalization. The local consumer brands have withstood the penetration of global industries and a widespread process of “glocalization” that is branding of the local products for global market is going on together with globalization. The quantum of investment of capital in various sectors of the Indian economy has sustained a high rate and continues to generate

employment for the educated man power. All this has added to the size of the Indian middle class variously estimated from two hundred to over three hundred millions now. Most of this mobility is in technological and information sectors of economy and has been possible because of long duration investment in higher technical and professional education. This is slowly changing the processes of urbanization and the growth is now no longer confined to the metropolitan or bigger urban centres. It is now percolating to the medium and smaller towns of India. Rapid urbanization is not without social problems such as growth of slums and migration not fully integrated with policies of rehabilitation. A remarkable growth is in evidence in the uses of information technologies, particularly use of cell phones now widespread both in villages and cities which has increased connectivity for communication for people for social, commercial and other purposes. Internet use is slowly spreading not only to the towns but also in villages on the roadside which is used increasingly for governance, trade and utility conveniences on a large scale. Computers are replacing the traditional style management of records in government offices all over India and process of governance and information retrieval etc. now are almost largely computerized. All this adds to the processes of modernization and harbingers significant social changes.

The traditional structures and functions of institutions such as caste, village community and occupational profiles have undergone basic changes not only in cities but also in villages across India. Most castes now no longer pursue the traditional ascribed occupations for which they were known (Singh K. S. 1992). Caste has, with the exception of the rules of endogamy lost most of its traditional attributes not only in cities but also in villages. Village communities have lost their traditional character of village centric integrative relationship of patronage and reciprocity but have become political communities with centrifugal inter-linkages. New changes in the village Panchayat (Council) electoral processes (with 30% reservation of seats for women and reservation at the village level for SC/ST and BCs) with Constitutional obligations increasingly renders the traditional notions of caste and community in villages almost redundant. The politicalization of castes has, however, not minimized but increased the uses of castes as electoral vote bank by political parties all over Indian. It forms the paradox of the Indian democracy which celebrates civil principles on the one hand, and on other gets increasingly embedded into institutions of primordiality, such as religion, ethnicity and caste (see, Singh 2009).

This forms one of the contradictions of the contemporary modernization of India. There are many other serious social structural contradictions from which the processes of modernization suffer. The growth so far has remained skewed in favour of the highly educated and professional categories of population. Those less educated or illiterate who constitute more than 40% of the population have not benefited to the same degree. The poverty estimates now put the number of people below the poverty line to about 37% which is abnormally high. The inequalities in access to the fruits of development have triggered violent movements in several regions of India, mainly those populated by the tribes, forest dwelling communities who find their social and economic conditions intolerable. Variously known as the Naxal or Maoist movements led by the radical left wing ideology, these violent movements are today putting a lot

of pressure on institutions of governance and development. One added reason for the inequitable growth and modernization in India has been the states failures to remove illiteracy and make schooling up to the secondary grade available to most of its rural, tribal and ecologically isolated communities. The state has, however, recently taken some strong steps to move forward in this domain by making right to education constitutionally mandatory and has launched a massive movement for “education to all” which would take time to bear fruit. In the sectors of economy, the basic contradiction is now being faced by the crisis in agriculture as the shine of the “green revolution” of the previous years has worn off and agriculture now faces scarcity of investment in technology, infrastructure, access to market and new practices of production and management. More than 55% of population is even today dependent mainly on agriculture. There is a need to provide alternative integrated avenues of employment to a majority of this population outside, mainly in the agro-industrial or other modern sectors of economy. Despite its realization the priorities of the states in the federation which are mainly charged with responsibilities in this sector remain fuzzy. To take India indeed towards an integrative and integrated direction of modernization the resolution of these contradictions has to be resolved and prioritized.

Cultural Changes and Responses to Modernization

The significance of cultural modernization of India was realized by the Indian leadership as a part of the national movement. As we have mentioned, in the cultural encounter with the West, the need to accommodate many of the Western institutional and normative principle in the central domains of the Indian traditions and cultural values was recognized. Apart from Gandhi and Nehru, most other renaissance leaders were of the view that the best elements of the Indian culture (which were a plenty) had not only to be institutionalized and augmented for modernization but these had a valuable contribution to make in the integrative and sustainable response of India to emergent forces change at the global level. A philosopher-saint and a great poet, Aurobindo Ghosh wrote “the future civilization of India will be no more Asiatic modification of European Modernism like the present Japanese civilization but something truly Indian, and at the same time something of first-rate importance for the progress of humanity” (Aurobindo, in Sarma 1944). This vision for reconstruction of the global architecture of culture had a central place in both Gandhi and Nehru’s projects of India’s cultural modernization.

The national movement had generated several discourses on culture in India; not all of them were such as to promote harmonious cultural development. There was a Islamic discourse which led to partition of the country. As a counter point, a Hinduttva discourse of cultural nationalism emerged; the Gandian discourse of culture aimed at a harmonious cultural modernization with focus on those religious aspects of culture among all religions in India which manifested principles of unity and convergence rather than those highlighting differences. This perspective on reconciling the religious differences in India at the level of their commonality emerged as the

vision of a “composite culture” for India. This finds largely a reflection within the “constitutional discourse” of culture as enshrined in the Indian Constitution (see, Singh 2010, Bipan Chandra and Mahajan 2007). Constitution not only gave religious freedom to minority religions but also ensured protection and promotion of their cultures and traditions. New major projects for institution building to preserve and promote the cultural heritage were undertaken. National academies and institutions were established to promote the classical and folk traditions of fine arts, dance, drama, music and literary forms by the federal and state governments; facilities for training, teaching and research were created. A national film institute was also established for training, research and archival responsibilities since the film industries already had a substantial cultural acceptance by people and were growing. The institutional and establishment aspect in all these measures of cultural support were intended to preserve tradition, but with nuances of modernization.

The institutional support to augmentation and protection of the literary and classical traditions of the Indian culture went hand in hand with efforts to strengthen regional cultures embedded in ethnicity and community. The real cultural resilience of India was provided by the continuity and adaptive capacities of the folk cultures and folk traditions. Sociologists made several studies of the significance of folk culture and its linkages with the classical literary cultural forms and traditions ever since 1960's and 1970's; it formed an essential part of the numerous village studies that were conducted during this period. Much theorizing was also undertaken to use conceptual framework to capture the vitality of the folk tradition and its linkages with the classical (elite) traditions. Several studies of folk culture and communities revealed how elements from the classical traditions (also called the “great traditions”) were continually being borrowed and were integrated into the folk cultural traditions (also named as “little traditions”) of India, and similarly elements of the folk culture found a way to penetrate and get integrated with the cultural forms and styles of the classical elite traditions Mackim Marriott, an American anthropologist, termed it as the processes of “parochialization” and “universalization” (Unnithan et. al 1965). Comparative empirical studies of folk cultural traditions undertaken later also established that many styles and forms of cultural expression and celebrations, particularly of the family and caste rituals had similarities across regions and were not were not entirely “parochial” in character. Both the folk and the elite or literary forms of cultural organizations had, therefore, a pan-Indian linkage and presence.

The studies of folk culture and its relationship with the classical traditions continued to engage the attention of sociologists and anthropologists through the following decades, and theoretical contributions continued to follow based upon intensive empirical and ethnographic studies. Guy Poitevin provides us a new perspective on the relationship between the folk and the elite cultural forms in his numerous studies conducted recently. He posits this relationship as between traditions of “orature” and of “literature” which have survived in India through millennia right from the ancient period of history. The relationship between the two, the culture congealed in writing and that which found manifestation through the ‘power of orality or vocality’ existed in India in varying proportion throughout history and had not only an integrative

but also contestational or even conflictual mutual relationship from time to time. He identifies this dialectical relationship that the “power of vocality” had in India in four-fold dimensions: first, he posits that in ancient India orality had an overwhelming role; “the modernist decoy of the superiority of writing over speech is an imported lure” he says; indeed, “the excellence and prominence of the phonemes of utterances over the written signs was a distinctive and general feature of ancient India;” second, there has traditionally existed “an unbounded nexus of orality and writings which provided space for creativity for the folk culture in India.” Thirdly, oral tradition provided local communities a “quiet resilience” which strengthened them and this manifests itself even today in India. The local communities through the power of their orality successfully contested many discriminatory elements in the “sastric” or classical Brahmanical traditions. Finally, Poitevin opines that this opposition between the “letter” and “the voice” is poignantly explicated through the “outspokenness of women” in the oral traditions. His own empirical studies adequately provide confirmation to these observations (see, Poitevin 2010: 33–41).

Implicit in this analysis is the latent class character that the power of the written text assumed as the new technologies of production, marketing and industrialization began to dominate the newly independent nations. The folk tradition as an alternate discourse of knowledge became largely redundant to most aspects of social change we characterize as modernization. Despite this shrinkage in the space for folk-culture and oral tradition of knowledge which is now largely in evidence in India, it retains its resilience in several areas of culture such as the graphic and plastic art forms, music, theatre and street plays etc. There is evidence that such expressive aesthetic media have been effectively used in India to articulate protest as well as to popularize new discourses in knowledge related to the areas of science, technology and healthcare and other concerns for social reforms and economic development. The irony of ‘illiteracy’ which continues in substantial measure in contemporary India is also that much of this has resulted from the essential demands of modernization (of economy, production systems and the tools of communication of knowledge etc.) which render orality as irrelevant to its scripted discourses. It is noteworthy that illiteracy is predominant among the poor, the rural based and marginalized sections of society. These are also the sections where the folk cultural traditions remain active and articulate the power of vocality. The miss-match between folk culture and textual or literary forms of culture continues to persist in India despite its rapid leaps towards modernization and globalization.

The folk cultural traditions are also rooted in the sacred and secular domains of culture. This has, however, changed rather fast during the past few decades. A major factor, is the penetration of new technologies of production and communication all over India. In the spread of mass media of communication the elements of the folk culture are increasingly and selectively being integrated in the programmes of television, telephone and internet discourses. Some vital aspects of this culture are also being lost, mainly those which were embedded in the order of nature, ecology and manual processes of production in agriculture. Women who constituted the strongest and popular media of these cultural expressions have been displaced from many

aspects of their traditional modes of participation. The decline is also noticeable in several of the religious rituals which were a part of the folk culture. The penetration of market forces has brought a variety of products of folk art and culture into the national and global market which finds wider acceptance among the people. Similarly impact of new medicines and health care techniques has made the role of the traditional healers and medicine-men extremely marginalized.

Yet, most these changes do not as yet have meant total replacement of the past forms. The new technology, new middle classes and metropolitan-globalized cultural styles of life that are emerging as an influential factor do not imply that most people who have accepted it are totally detached from the traditional religious and ritual moorings of their culture. Not only is the emergent global culture in India linked with the local forms but it is also reshaping several of the traditional modes and forms of culture towards increasingly adaptive accommodation. Similarly, the power of the new media of communication, the internet, the computer and television not only extend towards the new goals of modernization but also celebrate and extend the reach of religious cultural forms and values with a new power of diffusion they have acquired. Thanks to progressive increase in migration, increasing strength of the Indian diaspora on the global scale and the increasing trends of multi-cultural and multinational nature of social and cultural contacts and the globalization of market and work-culture noticeable changes in culture are imperatives and manifest. But these also demonstrate the resilience and adaptive qualities of traditional culture through accommodation of innovations and changes.

Identity, Culture and Modernization

An important contradiction that the cultural discourse on modernization is today confronted with at the global scale is the new resurgence of religio-cultural self-awareness playing a central role in the formulation and definition of cultural identities. This exists in addition to the manifestation of cultural identities which have existed at the level of diversities of local and regional communities on the basis of differences of caste/tribe, ethnicity and region etc. These latter expressions of self-awareness of cultural identities which have existed since centuries have no doubt sharpened with the coming into contact with new cultural attributes of modernization and globalization. But their encounter with modernization is embedded into a discourse which is far different from the religio-cultural manifestation of contradictions or even conflicts. These unlike the identities based on the diversities of caste, ethnicity etc. are loaded with ideological pronouncements of counter modernization discourses of different hues, with even pan-national linkages with formulations of multiple civilizational distinctions and differences. When we deal with the significance of cultural identities in the wake of forces of modernization and globalization it would be analytically conducive to deal with them separately, even though, as we would like to argue, the manner in which such identities conflict or conflate with modernization are determined largely by the historicity of each culture and its civilization.

India, with its enormous cultural diversities at the local level did enjoy a unity of cultural ethos through times immemorial. At the local level, some recent studies have detailed the nature of these social and cultural diversities. It is reported that measured on the basis of cultural traits, India has six to seven distinct cultural zones, there are more than four thousand major communities with caste like features, and none of its major minority religions, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism constitute a socially homogenous category as each of them is divided into hundreds of caste-like communities. It also reports that the shared cultural traits between several religious communities of the minorities with the mainstream religion, Hinduism is very strong. It reconfirms the concept of "composite culture" being a significant feature of the cultural tradition of India overriding the diversities (see, Singh 1992). Hence, among the contemporary global scene of the clashes based on religio-cultural formulations of differences which generates anxieties of 'clash of civilizations' India remains largely unaffected from conflicts emanating from such ideologies. This remains so despite India having a very sizable proportion of minority religions such as Islam, Christianity and others.

This could probably be explained by the historicity of the traditional Indian social structure and its cultural tradition. Unlike in many other countries, India through centuries had provided for significant 'inter-structural autonomy' to its communities and people which also included the local and regional cultural domains. The significant structures were, first, the elements of social stratification such as caste and ethnic groups; second, the religious and ritual practices and their enforcement in society and finally, the political power and control over its administration and enforcement. India had a long history of several Empires which had extensive political control over the entire nation. But the rulers, probably as a matter of policy did not enforce control over the cultural practices of the local and regional social entities, castes, ethnic groups and regional communities. Castes enjoyed sufficient autonomy to carry on their cultural traditions, customs and ritual practices under the supervision of the caste councils (panchayats). Their network extended beyond a single village and they functioned as power centre of a sort with their collective mobilization of protest on issues which hurt their interest. The priestly class, similarly enjoyed full autonomy on religious matters in which the state and the rulers did not generally intervene. The power of the state, in the like manner was exercised by and large without interference from the priestly classes. This arrangement continued until the end of the medieval period. Even the British colonial rulers, who were more inclined towards significant cultural and social reforms did more or less abide this convention.

The process of modernization, however, began slowly to erode this autonomy as major social reforms movements and policies of empowerment of the marginalized castes and communities, the tribes and minorities became a priority for the state after Independence. Rapid strides were made towards expansion of higher education and research in most areas related to scientific and technological knowledge crucial to successful modernization of economy and industry. Since the existence of major social and economic inequalities was recognized, measures were simultaneously taken for all round social welfare and accelerated positive discrimination in favour of the poor, the

minorities and the marginalized groups. Steps were taken to empower the women by a policy of reservation of seats for them in local councils, together with establishment of institutions for protection and enforcement of their human rights. Simultaneously, the rapid expansion of mass media, information technology, the television, telephony, computers and internet etc., not only extended the exposure to communication for most people across rural and urban divides, but it also enlarged the scope of people's quality and intensity of participation in political and cultural activities. Most aspects of the information technology, particularly telephony has proved to be neutral to the divide between so called literacy and illiteracy. Being skill based, mobile phones have empowered not only the educated middle classes but also the poor and illiterate citizens who have adopted it extensively for access to jobs, markets and economic activities together with extension of private and public communicative relationships.

All this has contributed to enlargement of the scope of modernization in its generic normative and operational domain, but at the same time it has also sharpened the consciousness of cultural identities embedded into the diversity of Indian social categories, communities, castes, tribes, women and other local interest groups. Its impact on political culture has been such that on the one hand, it strengthens people's national awareness and sense of participation but on the other it reinforces the bonds of regional and sectional interests based on religion, caste, ethnicity and gender. The empirical studies of the televised programs on multiple channels reveals the vigour with which a variety of them operate successfully with large audience appeal which reinforces their social, cultural and political identities even though in content these programmes may range from kindling the values of modernization-globalization, nationalist viewpoint, religious traditions to sectional interests. The nature of these sectional identities does not, however, confront or challenge the normative principles and institutions of modernization or globalization. It is true that during the initial decade after 1991 when policies of economic liberalization opened the gates for rapid acceleration of the pace of modernization and globalization there was some initial resistance among the various communities and interest groups. The debate focused mainly on whether globalization would pose a serious threat to local cultures and local communities. As it turned out, the cultural resources of the local communities successfully met with most of the challenges that global exposure to other cultures brought in their wake. They synergized with processes of market exposure of several of their cultural resources and also realized that globalization simultaneously opened up opportunities for their cultural empowerment (see, Singh 2000). The traditional resilience of the Indian culture continues to persist with new adaptive responses to modernization even though it simultaneously reinforces people's cultural identities.

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