

Modernity and Tradition

Synopsis: Change is the law of nature but it cannot be separated from continuity as both merge and meet at some point. The need to harmonies modernity with tradition can hardly be over-emphasized. Indian culture has many valuable and healthy traditions which has merged well with modernity. At the same time many aspect of Indian way of living have been degrading and dead. Hinduism has been one of the oldest and noblest of religions. Rituals have been extraneous to it and so have been castes. Its theory of moksha is based on the scientific theory of cause and effect. Hinduism has many traditions and practices of great value and significance and yet suffers from many evils which need to be eradicated. Indian culture is amenable to change and modernity but the wholesale imitations of western manners are undesirable.

Changes are the law of nature and change is another name of modernity. Life and things are in flux and nothing stands still. Change is always there either for better or for worse. Change is the watchword of progression but sometimes of decay and degradation as well. It is said you cannot dip your finger twice in the same river because by the time you dip your finger for the second time a lot of changes would have taken place both in the river and yourself and yet there is a continuity of modernity and tradition is eternal like time and space and cannot be understood without understanding the other. As such, it is difficult to draw a definite line between new and old, change and continuity. They are stages in progression and decay, history and time. They both meet and merge into each other at certain point. While the tradition continues in some form or the other, the modernity finds its roots in old and traditional.

What is modern and new today will turn into old and traditional tomorrow. What is old and traditional today was modern and new yesterday. The need is to harmonies modernity with tradition, change with continuity. We should preserve, cherish and protect what is valuable, rich, good and beneficial in the old and adapt it to the changing situations in respect of the progress and growth in the fields of science, technology, economics and philosophy.

Neither old is always gold nor new always a fad and trash. Take, for example, Indian culture, way of life and philosophy which present a mixed and complex pattern. There are many traditions, values, customs and practices, inherited from past, which are good healthy, valuable and cherish able and have formed part of the new. At the same time there are many aspects which are harmful and degrading and yet continue in spite of our modern technologies, scientific advancements and economic growth. Likewise, many new changes

have had good and bad effects. The conflict between old and new is nothing new, but it should be avoided or at least minimized to the extent possible. What is needed is the healthy and smooth synthesis, a transition which takes care of good elements both of new and old. Modernity and tradition should go together in harmony taking life to a new horizon of progress, development and spiritual growth.

We must protect and preserve what is good and valuable in tradition but at the same time be cautious to see that healthy elements of change and modernity are not crushed under the dead weight of tradition. This implies an objective, scientific and dispassionate enquiry and analysis of the structure and functioning of each of our major institutional—family, caste, marriage, religion, educational institution, political setup etc.

Hinduism is one of the oldest and noblest religions of the world. It has been a living force in the life of millions of people in the country. Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism etc. can be regarded as the offshoots of Hinduism. Hinduism has been basically non-sectarian, mono-theistic and humanistic but many of its ideals and fundamental principles are today lost in the trappings of mumbo-jumbo rituals and practices. In essence, Hinduism has never been dogmatic units approach to human problems and their possible solution. It regards religion as matter of personal realization and allows the individual to seek God and realize Truth according to his or her capacity.

Hinduism allows free enquiry, reasoning, rational approach and does not believe in dogmatism, but then enquiry and reason have their limitations, authoritarianism, regimentation and blind faith. Rituals, traditions and customs are extraneous to religion. These are mere trappings and non-essentials. But sometimes they are essential for common men to establish some contact in some manner with God the Creator. Religion and reason are not incompatible but a stage comes when reason is left far behind on the path of realization. The Hindu view of God is that of unman, fest, Supreme, impersonal Universal Soul. He is both transcendental and immanent; Mahatma Gandhi said Truth is God is truth in the sense that the law and the lawgiver are one and the same. He is without second and Creator of all, animate and inanimate. He is one but called by many names, Like God, individual should is also eternal and imperishable. The Hindu theory of moksha or liberation is based on the scientific principle of cause and effect. The path of moksha lies through good karmas or actions.

Traditionally caste in Hinduism is hereditary but originally it was not. Originally there were classes and not castes. These were based on division of labour and there was no rigidity, for example, Valmiki, the author of the

Ramayana has been one of the greatest rashes and yet he was of a low caste. Caste was extraneous to religion and social functions alone determined one's calling and class. Superiority could not be claimed on the basis of birth and caste alone. The work and character of the person only determined whether one was a priest, soldier craftsman or a farmer. But later things changed and deteriorated and castes became rigid hereditary and marks of distinction so much so that Shudras became untouchables and Brahmins a superior class in itself. This attitude was repugnant to many religious gurus, saints and teachers. Mahavira and Buddha were the first great religious heads to protest against it. In later times Ramanujacharya. Ramananda etc. preached the equality of men and said caste had nothing to do with religion. There have been great saints who were not Brahmins. Namdeva, Tukaram, Mirabai, Kabir etc. were not Brahmins at all.

During the last 50-60 decades there has been a long struggle to free Hinduism from the evil of castes. Reform movements led by Swami Daya Nanada, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi etc. have been there to bring about a renaissance in Hinduism and to revoke and root out the excels of caste-system. Now, legally there is no untouchability, scientific technological and industrial advancements, coupled with spread of education, liberalization and modernization, the people of various castes mix up together willingly. They dine together and there are inter-caste marriages. Castes are still there only because of vested political and economic interests. The old division on the basis of labour no more holds good and as such caste is no more a working principle.

Tolerance has been one of the fundamental characteristics of Hinduism. It has been at the root of great assimilation of other thoughts and concepts and adjustment with other religions and cultures. Today it has been renamed as secularism. India is a secular State and there is no State religion. State is neither anti-religious nor it favors any particular religion. All religions are equal before the law. The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of religion, conscience and worship to all its citizens. No one can be discriminated on the grounds of religions. Here the traditional element of tolerance of Hinduism can be seen suitably merging and then emerging as secularism, modernity.

Time was when children were regarded as divine ornaments of a woman, but now 2 children family norm is gaining ground. People are willingly adopting family control and planning measures. In olden times mortality rate was very high and there were frequent deaths during maternity, but now the medical advancements and researches have revolutionized things. Dowry system, child marriages, gender bias etc. are some of the other traditional evils which are a spot on the face of Hinduism and humanity and should be eradicated. In the

name of tradition no evil can be tolerated and perpetuated. Hinduism believes in evolution and progress of man from high to higher levels of spiritual position leading to ultimate liberation. Change for the better has always been its benchmark. Therefore, any continuity which retards progress, evolution and onward march is incompatible with Hinduism.

Values and attitudes have radically changed in Indian society since independence. Sati system has long vanished, widow-marriages are too common and child-marriages are legally banned. There is no untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste and religion. The winds of change have swept away many old, traditional and useless concepts and values. Employment and education are on the increase among women and soon there may be real empowerment of womenfolk; the 33 per cent reservation of seats for them in legislatures is just a matter of time. In Hinduism liberation was given the highest value a no man or woman was thought unfit to achieve it because of a certain caste or birth. The essential and fundamental elements of Hinduism have never been adverse to change and modernity. It was the non-essentials and trappings that have been a drag and they are being shed. But the indiscriminate and wholesale imitation of western manners and styles of living is an area of major concern. Consequently, simple living and high thinking is no more and gross materialism is spreading its tentacles viciously. We should not ape the West and run after such of their values, manners and traditions which do not suit our culture, human values and ideals.

India has always accorded the highest regard and value to our rishis, men of wisdom and intellect,

philosophers, reformers and scholars. Brahmins were held in highest respect not because of their birth and caste but because of their great learning, wisdom, intellectual attainments, austerities and repugnance towards material gains. Wisdom has nothing to do with caste or birth. There is no room for authoritarianism, regimentation or uniformity. Unity in diversity has been the Indian ideal.

It is in the fitness of things that our scholars, professors, teachers, intellectuals, scientists, artists, technologists etc. are given the due pride of place because in them lies the heart of modernity, change and evolution. At the same time, they are also the guardians of our time-honored traditional values, culture and humanity. They represent the spirit of relentless search and enquiry into truth. Our great traditional values like non-violence, truth, simplicity, compassion, co-existence, cooperation, charity etc. should be protected and encouraged and blended and synthesized with modern researches, technological advancements and scientific achievements. There should be no hesitation in

change and modernization of our institutions and the ways of thinking in the light of modern research and studies. Our universities, colleges, schools, training institutions, establishments, business enterprises etc. should be reorganized and restructured so as to make them vital centers of modern and traditional values that really matter and are of far reaching significance,. Our values, attitudes and thoughts should be adapted accordingly to suit the modern conditions so as to make life more valuable, meaningful and worth living. Material welfare and progress are never inconsistent with spiritual growth and evolution. They help and supplement one another. There is no room either for hypocrisy, cynicism or complacent. No one is superior or inferior before God. He does not make any distinction between man and man as we do in the name of religion and nationality. The external trappings are in no way the essence of a culture; however, they may reflect the internal. Indian culture and tradition, in no uncertain terms, inculcate equality, brotherhood, toleration, non-violence, adaptability and preparedness for change and modernity, when they help on the path of real progress. Hindu religion teaches the path of rejections and acceptances, of selection and elimination. Discrimination between good and bad is its essence. Reason has to be strengthened by faith in values because faith works like the sixth sense in matters which are beyond the purview of reasoning.

We have to create a brave new world, an order just and equitable where change and continuity, modernity and tradition, enquiry and faith, domestic and foreign, material and spiritual can co-exist and benefit from intercourse with one another. Gandhiji once said, "To me I seem to be constantly growing. I must respond to varying conditions, yet remain changeless within." This should be our guiding principle. We should hold strictly to our great cultural and spiritual values and yet change in the light and guidance of modern wisdom and scientific findings and researches. The flowing water never stagnates; it is the law of nature. Modernity consists in further and greater progress and tradition in consolidation of what has been already achieved.