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Tradition in modern India

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TRADITION IN MODERN INDIA¹⁾

The changes which the image of India in the western mind has undergone would in themselves offer a worthy object of study. While seventeenth century observers used to be impressed by India's riches, India is now mostly known for its desperate need of economic development. The land which the romantics visualized as the home of philosophers and sages is now predominantly considered as a backward area, whatever its potentialities. It seems obvious that the reason for these changing viewpoints about India lies with the subject rather than with the object of observation. Western perception has been conditioned by the changing conditions in the west. Not only has the western world gone, and is still going, through a process of fundamental changes, but it can also be held that western civilization attaches high value to change, in contradistinction to traditional civilizations where change, though present, is not valued.

In recent times, especially since the Second World War, a new image of India has come to the fore, an image in which the emphasis is on rapid change, on development and transition from tradition to modernity. It seems, however, justified to ask whether this new image of India is again influenced by our own outlook, that is by the avidity for change that is proper to western civilization. This avidity for change is coupled with the idea of simpler harmonious societies apparently free from the strains and stresses that are believed to be the almost exclusive privilege of our own changing society — in short the Paradise lost. This dual attitude can not but have an impact on our thinking when we contrast tradition and modernity. We are prone to overstress the stability of traditional society and the upheaval caused by modernization. On the other hand we are apt to play down the capacity of tradition for internal change and accommodation to modern circumstances. This readily leads us to the foregone conclusion of an all but unbridgeable chasm

¹ In a different form this contribution has been read as paper at the XVII Huishoudelijk Congres of the Oosters Genootschap in Nederland (Sept. 1962). Another version was read at a symposium on "La Tradition et le développement économique" organized by the Centre du Sud-Est Asiatique, Université Libre de Bruxelles (4-6 Dec. 1962).

between tradition and modernity. Thus, for instance, it is said that "It was not until the British invaders introduced the new technological forces of the modern age, that the powerful solidarity of the society was undermined", or when the traditional village economy is described as "... a paradise of contentment", into which "there crept in forces from an inconceivable distance — the upheaval wrought by the Industrial Revolution."² Of course there is no doubt that changes are taking place, but the real issue is how these changes look from within the civilization in question and whether or not they fit themselves into its traditional pattern. In other words, in how far the dichotomy between tradition and modernity is a workable instrument in interpreting the present day situation.

It is an indication of the degree to which our perception of other civilizations is conditioned by our own experiences, that modernization is to a very large extent treated as synonymous with westernization.³ Of course the best known examples of modernity are furnished by western civilization and we tend to take the familiar for granted. But this should caution us against conceiving of a modern India in our own image. However, our conception of what a modern India is to be like seems still very much in the strain of the notorious words of Lord Macaulay: "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." In this perspective it is unavoidable to think in terms of an all out conflict between tradition "that dies hard," "that takes a lot of beating," and alien modernity destined to take over.

Indeed the Indian intellectual often seems to feel this conflict as a painful reality. He often gives vent to a feeling of uprootedness, of being split between the conflicting demands of tradition that rules a large part of his life and the modernity of his training and work,⁴ or

² The quotations are from A. D. Ross, *The Hindu family in its urban setting*, Toronto 1961, p. 296, and R. D. Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Deccan*, 1818-1839, Bombay 1955, p. 24 (the latter statement criticized by M. D. Morris, *Recruitment of Labor*, *Comp. Studies in Soc. and Hist.* II, p. 309 n. 14).

³ In this connection it seems significant that, e.g. in the field of economic history, practically all studies stress the impact of European trade and administration, whereas the nature and operation of the Indian economy itself has to a surprising degree been neglected, as has been noted by M. D. Morris and B. Stein (*Economic History of India*, *Journal of Economic History*, June 1961, p. 198).

⁴ For a perceptive analysis of the situation of the Indian intelligentsia "between tradition and modernity," see E. Shils, *The Indian Intellectual*, The Hague 1961. On the feeling of uprootedness, p. 76f.

he labours under the impression that traditional values are collapsing before the onslaught of alien modernity.⁵ He naturally feels the urge to preserve the essence of his traditional culture so as to save his Indian identity under the changing circumstances; in other words to create an authentically Indian type of modernity which can both stand up to alien modernity and is in keeping with Indian tradition.

But here we come up against another difficulty: what exactly are the contents of the Indian tradition? We usually speak of "Hinduism", meaning a vague and proverbially elusive conglomerate of social and religious customs and beliefs. It is significant that whereas e.g. Islam (in a way also an Indian religion) can be defined in terms of its own orthodoxy, the term Hinduism is of alien make, a blanket term dependent for its meaning on its being different from other religions — Islam, Christianity or even "animism". Although it is possible to take an unified view of Hinduism, our thinking about it is still largely in terms of elements whose interdependence often escapes us, not in terms of a coherent system. For our knowledge of Hinduism we still rely mostly on the brahmanic Sanskrit sources. They, however, nowhere offer a coherent code of orthodoxy, but represent often conflicting currents and developments. Moreover these sources manifold though they are, do not offer a complete picture. They give different forms of brahmanical *theory* that do not cover and often even contradict brahmanical *practice*, not to mention the living practices and beliefs of non-brahmanic Hindus. The importance of brahmanical theory — which for the sake of brevity we may call brahmanism — lies in the fact that it is recognized by the Hindu as the hierarchically highest form of Hinduism which carries greatest prestige. It has developed out of the living practice of Hinduism through a process of abstraction and intellectualization. The earliest instance of this process can be seen in the development of the old Vedic ritual. Rites, originally often of an orgiastic nature, were transmuted into a refined, highly technical ritual code, which was to be handled only by a small band of liturgical specialists. The ritual became "purified", but by the same token it lost its contact with the religious and social life of the community as a whole.⁶ It gained prestige but its importance became largely theoretical. Similarly we can say that brahmanism bears the same relation to the

⁵ The feeling of spiritual crisis is frequently expressed by the eminent neo-hindu thinker S. Radhakrishnan (cf. P. Hacker, *Or. Litt. Zeitung*, 1961, p. 567).

⁶ Cf. J. C. Heesterman, *Vrātya and Sacrifice*, *Indo-Ir. Journ.* VI, p. 37.

living practice of Hinduism as the ritual code of the Vedic specialists bears to the popular festivals.

When leading Hindus in Bengal as far back as the first half of the last century, and somewhat later in the Bombay Deccan, were exposed to what presented itself at that time as western modernity, and started the first attempts to bolster up their Indian identity, it was only natural for them to turn exclusively to brahmanism. Brahmanism offered them the so to say purified, intellectualized and therefore prestigious form of Hinduism which they were looking for in their attempts to revalidate Hindu tradition. At the same time it enabled them to relegate living Hindu practices which did not tally with either brahmanical theory or the demands of modernity to the background as less pure, hierarchically inferior (or "decadent") forms of Indian tradition.

The exclusive stress on brahmanism involved, however, the heavy price of losing contact with the living practice of Hinduism. Moreover, since brahmanical theory does not present a clear cut orthodoxy a further difficulty was to find one's way through the contradictions of the texts, or even to become fully acquainted with the texts themselves. It is therefore no matter of wonder that the Hindu reform movements of the last century in their knowledge and interpretation of the texts run closely parallel to the gradual growth of western-inspired Sanskrit philology. Thus the reformist Brāhma Samāj of Calcutta in the first half of the 19th century held the Vedas to be the sole standard of its faith but later, on closer acquaintance with its contents — to obtain this acquaintance a delegation had to be sent to Benares —, had to give up its stand on the unrestricted authoritativeness of the Vedas for their ideas⁷; the Ārya Samāj, founded half a century later, was in a far better position to deal with the contents of the Vedas. The influence of western indology is also illustrated by Hacker's recent demonstration how the important reformer Vivekānanda was dependent for his Hindu ethics, via Deussen, on Schopenhauer's misinformed application of the upaniṣadic "that art thou" phrase.⁸ These circumstances reveal an even more serious handicap. The neo-hindu movements mostly did not participate in the traditional channels of communication. For his knowledge of brahmanical lore the neo-hindu, more often than not, had to depend on written or printed texts and for the propagation of his ideas on the printing press. However, oral

⁷ Cf. J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, New York 1915, p. 40.

⁸ P. Hacker, Schopenhauer und die Indische Ethik, *Saeculum* XII, 4.

tradition was, and to a great extent still is, far more effective than its written form. The spoken word, even in our time, carries more weight than the written or printed word. The wandering sādhu, the sectarian guru, the professional story-teller and interpreter of mythological and devotional literature make a greater impression than the writings of leading neo-hindus, which are often better known in the West than in India.

It would seem therefore that the conscious efforts of the neo-hindu reformers to revalidate Hindu tradition, to harmonize it with what was felt to be the demands of modernity and to create an authentically Indian modernity — a type of modernity that would not only be valid for India but universally meaningful — were doomed from the outset to remain a largely marginal phenomenon: a restricted brahmanism of limited importance.⁹

If these conscious attempts at saving and revalidating tradition failed in their ultimate object, it does not follow that tradition is helpless before the advance of alien modernity. Apart from these conscious, organized efforts and largely uninfluenced by it traditional Hinduism has not only held its own but seems to have strengthened and developed itself. An illustration of this tendency can be seen in the Marāṭhī speaking area (the present Bombay or Maharashtra State). There we find the relatively old sect of the Vārkaris. Their sacred literature is formed not in the first place by religious Sanskrit texts — though the Bhagavadgītā is held in high esteem —, but the emphasis is on the religious poetry of the old Marāṭhī “saints”. Their most spectacular manifestation is the yearly pilgrimage, when groups of pilgrims from all over Maharashtra trek along the roads converging on the religious centre Pandharpūr.¹⁰ Alongside the Vārkaris there existed in Bombay and Poona in the second half of the last century an influential Hindu reform movement, the Prārthanā Samāj, connected with the earlier Bengal reformism. Although its members gave more prominence to

⁹ It is to be noted that the neo-hindu reform movements belong mostly to North-India and Bombay. They made practically no dent in South India. Perhaps the reason is to be found, at least partially, in the lesser strength of the institutional framework of tradition, weakened by indifferent or even hostile Moslim rule. In the South this framework, resting on often richly endowed temples and maṭhs, continued to function. Another feature of the neo-hindu movements which made them particularly relevant to North India is that they represent not only the reaction to the western impact but can also be viewed as the perpetuation of the interaction with Islam, which had already in the pre-British period produced a number of sects and movements in North India.

¹⁰ On the Vārkaris, cf. G. A. Deleury, *The cult of Viṭhoba*, Poona 1961.

the Sanskrit religious literature and were generally inclined to eclecticism, they invoked especially the Vārkarī tradition, incorporating their religious poetry in their worship. Among their leaders were found influential and eminent men such as R. G. Bhandarkar and M. G. Ranade. They were active in the field of social reform, especially in education, the widow-remarriage question and the uplift of depressed communities.¹¹ The Vārkarīs on the other hand were at that time only a rural sect of mostly uneducated peasants and artisans. For the contemporary observer the future clearly lay with the Prārthanā Samāj reformers. However, the Vārkarī movement has since the last fifty years spread further, the organization of the pilgrimages has been expanded and strengthened and the movement has, through the influence of some intellectuals, gained a foothold among the urban intelligentsia of Poona, next to Bombay the cultural and educational capital of the area.¹² The reformist Prārthanā Samāj on the other hand is scarcely heard of any more.

The vitality of traditional Hinduism is also evidenced by militant anti-reform movements. The integral defense of tradition, as it stood, by B. G. Tilak proved to be a powerful instrument in organizing mass support and instilling it with nationalist fervour. The instauration of the modern public Gaṇapati festival, celebrated annually since 1893 and added to the festive calendar of Maharashtra largely through the efforts of Tilak, is a case in point. Its celebration is organized along traditional lines, but at the same time it provided an effective manifestation of a new Hindu religious and political consciousness.¹³

This does not mean that India would be incapable of change or that modern developments would be no match for the power of tradition. There is no doubt that India is changing but the question is whether these changes have necessarily to move in the direction of westernization. The emphasis on recent changes in India in sociological studies — not primarily concerned with historical data, if all available, and requiring for their analyses of change only comparatively recent base

¹¹ On the Prārthanā Samāj cf. Farquhar, *o.c.* p. 78 ff. and Deleury, *o.c.* p. 19. f.

¹² Cf. Deleury, *o.c.* p. 5. According to Deleury the number of disciples from among the intellectuals remains small. The influence of the Vārkarī panth on the Poona intelligentsia may however far exceed the number of formal adherents. At any rate it is clear that the traditional literature of the Vārkarīs and oral expositions of its tenets, such as are given at the time of the yearly pilgrimage, do attract the interest of the Maharashtrian intellectuals.

¹³ Cf. S. A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, Berkeley 1962, p. 67 ff. V. Barnouw, *Am. Anthropol.* 56, 1, pp. 74-86.

lines — should not make us lose sight of the historical perspective, that is the commonplace truth that Hindu tradition has throughout the course of its history been subject to change. To mention only a few examples that seem relevant to present day developments: shifts in the caste hierarchy and even protest against it are not the monopoly of modern development; the traditional organization of the village, the immobility of which tends to be taken for granted, has, at different times and places, undergone incisive changes in pre-British times through government action or otherwise¹⁴; the growth of an Indo-Muslim culture, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, though still little investigated, may be no less significant than more recent developments.¹⁵ Whether the impact of modern western civilization will cause as incisive a breach with the past as one would suppose from the western point of view, is open to doubt. It seems possible that modern developments will not undermine Indian society and culture, but will fit themselves into the pattern of change that Hindu tradition has shown throughout its history. Seen in this perspective the conflict between tradition and modernity loses much of its importance.

Modern developments more often than not go to strengthen tradition and give it a new dimension. To take a well known example: modern means of mass-communication such as radio and film give an unprecedented spread to traditional culture (broadcasting of Sanskrit mantras or of classical Indian music, films on mythological and devotional themes). At the same time the traditional cultural performances have not lost their importance as is shown by the fact that the government as well as the political parties try, often successfully, to enlist dance drama, story-telling and such like traditional media for their propaganda.¹⁶

If we want to go deeper into the impact of modern circumstances on Indian tradition we can best concentrate on two fundamental aspects

¹⁴ Land revenue policy has been an important lever in changing village organization, long before the advent of British rule (Cf. M. Marriott, *Little Communities in an indigenous Civilization*, in M. Marriott, ed., *Village India*, p. 187; also B. H. Baden Powell, *The origin and growth of village communities in India*, London 1908, pp. 107-9).

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. H. Goetz, *The crisis of Indian civilization in the 18th and early 19th centuries; The genesis of Indo-Muslim civilization* (Calcutta Un. Readership Lectures, Calcutta 1938). Cf. also above n. 9.

¹⁶ For a description of the role and development of traditional cultural media in an urban centre (Madras), see M. B. Singer, *The Great Tradition in a Metropolitan Center*, in M. B. Singer, ed., *Traditional India*, Philadelphia 1959, pp. 141-79.

of Hinduism: the caste system and its opposite, the institution of world renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*). In a remarkable essay L. Dumont has recently demonstrated that "the secret of Hinduism lies in the dialogue between the renouncer and the man-in-the-world."¹⁷ The interaction of the two complementary spheres — the world of caste and the world renunciation — appears to be fundamental for Hinduism.

Let us first consider the caste system. Although it is under attack from many sides it has remained vital. We can describe the caste system briefly as a number of endogamous groups, economically, politically and ritually interrelated and hierarchized according to the opposition pure-impure. In a given village, district or area we usually find a particular caste which possesses a large part of the sources of wealth, i.e. primarily land, and thus is in a position to dominate the other lower castes.¹⁸ The other castes — tenants, servants, artisans, barbers, washermen, scavengers etc. — are partly or wholly dependent on the dominant caste in a client-patron relationship. At the top of the pure-impure hierarchy are the brahmins. Their function is the sanctioning of the status of the dominant caste through the acceptance of food or presents from the members of this caste and thus attesting to their purity. The dominant caste, though often according to strict brahmanical theory of originally low status, obtains in this way hierarchical prestige in exchange for material goods. In the classical texts this relationship corresponds to that between king and brahmin.¹⁹

Modern means of communication enabled castes to organize and consolidate themselves over larger areas, mostly up to the limits of the linguistic areas. Democracy gave this development a special significance: caste found a new way of expressing itself in political parties and

¹⁷ World renunciation in Indian religions, *Contrib. to Indian Sociology* IV, pp. 33-62.

¹⁸ The dominant caste was defined by M. N. Srinivas (in McKim Marriott, ed., *Village India*, p. 18) as follows: "a caste may be said to be dominant when it preponderates numerically over the other castes and when it also yields preponderant economic and political power." Whether numerical strength is as important as Srinivas' definition suggests, seems open to doubt. D. Pocock more cautiously calls it "the caste... which politically and economically and usually numerically dominates the other castes" (*British Journ. of Soc.* VIII, p. 297). Anyhow it is worthwhile to note that the importance of numbers does not seem to have come solely as a modern democratic innovation.

¹⁹ Cf. L. Dumont, *Contrib. to Ind. Soc.* V, p. 35; for the equation dominant caste — king cf. *Contributions* ... I, p. 38.

factions.²⁰ Broadly speaking, it can be said that formerly social relations were to a large extent confined within the limits of the kingdoms and that the castes usually did not extend beyond the boundaries of the kingdom.²¹ The sprawling provinces under British rule threw together the various traditional units with their localized caste systems. When India achieved independence, however, the traditional pattern re-established itself in the form of the reorganization into linguistic states. The boundaries of these linguistic states tend to coincide with the geographical limits of the dominant castes of the area.²² Thus it would seem that under the traditional as under the new dispensation caste is the backbone of the polity.

One may, however, reasonably wonder whether this development of caste in the political field does not imply a fundamental difference. Thus K. Davis states that "... the caste spirit now has a new element in it. It is competitive, pointed in the direction of social mobility and is therefore contrary to the old static conception of caste."²³ The critical point here is the "static conception of caste." This static conception is based on brahmanical theory which does not account for change. However competition between castes and shifts in caste ranking are well-attested in pre-British times.²⁴ A different line is adopted by E. R. Leach who holds that "wherever caste groups are seen to be acting in competition against like groups of different caste, then they are acting in defiance of caste principles."²⁵ Such defiance of caste principles does not seem to be a new phenomenon, but the emphasis here is on the competition between castes, in contradistinction to competition between rival factions of the same caste. The dividing line between traditional and modern would then amount to intra-caste as

²⁰ For the political role of caste cf. M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India*, *Journ. of Asian Studies* 16 (1956-57) p. 530 ff.; M. L. P. Patterson, *Caste and Politics in Maharashtra*, *Economic Weekly* (Bombay), July 21, 1956; L. I. and S. H. Rudolph, *The political role of Caste Associations*, *Pacific Affairs*, 33, 1. p. 5-22. The Rudolphs conclude that "it is the caste association which links the mass-electorate to new democratic political processes and makes them comprehensible in traditional terms..."

²¹ Cf. M. N. Srinivas, *Sociological Bulletin* 5, 2 (Sept. 1956). Cf. also E. J. Miller, *Caste and Territoriality in Malabar*, *Am. Anthropol.*, 56, pp. 410-19.

²² Cf. S. S. Harrison, *India*, Princeton 1960, p. 98 ff. on the correspondence between linguistic and caste boundaries.

²³ *The Population of India and Pakistan*, Princeton 1951, p. 175.

²⁴ Cf., for instance, T.V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Society under Vijayanagar*, Madras 1940, ch. VIII, section I.

²⁵ E. R. Leach, ed., *Aspects of Caste in S. India, Ceylon and N.W. Pakistan*, Cambridge 1960, pp. 6-7.

against inter-caste competition. Indeed inter-caste rivalry preponderates on the modern political scene, the general tendency being for region-wide consolidation and even fusion of subcastes, but both forms of rivalry seem to be in principle possible under the old as under the new circumstances. The difference between segmentation and consolidation of single castes has a particular importance with regard to the dominant caste. In the traditional system, as F. G. Bailey points out,²⁶ the dominant caste tended to segment into "institutionalized hostile groups (chiefdoms, kingdoms)," whereas nowadays, though there may be factions and conflicts, they do not. "The struggle is no longer between clans or chiefdoms or kingdoms but between castes." In other words the seat of power has, broadly speaking, shifted from clan (clan monarchy) to caste. The chief or king is replaced by the dominant caste. This shift of emphasis from clan to caste does not seem out of step with the built-in tendency of Indian tradition.²⁷

The important point here is the question whether the dominance-dependence pattern, the patron-client relationship will not break down. It can be argued that whereas formerly only the dominant caste had a fully corporate political existence, nowadays any caste with sufficient numerical strength to make its demands heard can function as a corporate political body.²⁸ Now for one thing, numerical strength seems not to be altogether absent from the traditional system.²⁹ But the point at issue is, however, whether the dominant caste retains the resources to maintain the dependent castes. Conflict is likely to arise when it is no longer able to do so. Here overpopulation and pressure on the soil may be weightier factors than the introduction of political democracy.³⁰ On the other hand modern developments not

²⁶ *Tribe, Caste and Nation*, Manchester 1960, p. 262; cf. also p. 190.

²⁷ It may be interesting in this connection to recall G. J. Held's theory of the origin of the caste system from clan organization (*The Mahābhārata*, thesis Leiden 1935, ch. II Social Organization). Bailey's (*o.c.*) materials and careful analysis of the situation in the Kondmals offers an interesting case study of the interaction between the clan organization of the Konds and the caste organization of the Oriyas. Being drawn unto the larger political scene the Kond clan organization is giving way to something approaching the organization of a dominant caste, competing with Oriyas. Baily stresses the fact that here we have caste in its *modern* sense. In a wider historical perspective (with which Bailey is not concerned) it would however seem that this process may be analogous with what has happened throughout the history of India and which may be called "hinduization."

²⁸ F. G. Bailey, *o.c.* p. 191.

²⁹ Cf. above n. 18.

³⁰ For instance E. K. Gough's study of a Tanjore village indicates that population

necessarily go to break up the patron-client relationship. A recent study of the impact of irrigation on village life seems to suggest that the resulting growth of the economy in a village which profited directly from the irrigation scheme enabled the landowning dominant peasants better to employ and to remunerate a greater number of members of the dependent lower castes. The patron-client relationship in that village remained largely the same as before.³¹ Conversely, in order to rise and assert itself a caste must become economically independent, mostly through the acquisition of landed property. If this condition is fulfilled the situation may arise where the dominant caste is challenged and two or more castes are seen to compete for dominance. It is generally acknowledged that land reform and development programmes have as a rule benefited the small farmer or well-established tenants; only few landless Harijans seem to have profited.³² This means that either the already dominant peasant castes have been strengthened or that new aspirant castes of tenant farmers are becoming better qualified for competition with older dominant castes. Modern circumstances thus may accelerate shifts of dominance and foster competition, but these are of the nature of the traditional process.³³ They do not by themselves cause the collapse of the dominance-dependence pattern.

pressure, the break-down of service relationships and search for work were important factors in the rise of organizations of combining non-brahman clean castes and similar developments among Adi Dravidas (Caste in a Tanjore village, in E. R. Leach, ed., *Aspects of Caste*, pp. 44, 58). Bailey (*o.c.*, p. 151), dealing with the conflict between the untouchable Pans and their patrons in an Orissa hill village notes that the latter were complaining that there were too many Pans and that the village could no longer afford to support them.

³¹ T. Scarlett Epstein, *Economic Development and Social Change in South India*, Manchester 1962, esp. p. 314 ff. This study is concerned with the comparison of two villages in the same area; one in the newly irrigated stretch, the other on the dry fringe. Irrigation strengthened the traditional farming economy in the "wet" village; in the "dry" village diversification of its economy, resulting from the nearby irrigation scheme, changed economic roles and relations and thereby its social system.

³² Cf. Lelah Dushkin, Scheduled Caste Policy, *The Economic Weekly* (Bombay), Nov. 4, 1961, p. 1705.

³³ A case in point is A. R. Beals' descriptions of "Change in the leadership of a Mysore village" (in M. N. Srinivas, ed., *India's Villages*, pp. 132-143). In this village landowning Lingayat cultivators were at one time the most powerful caste. They had however lost much of their economic power. The largest caste in the village are the Kurubas ("shepherds"), who are generally landowning cultivators and thus independent from the Lingayats. In a year of drought and unrest (1952) the Lingayat patel tries to assert the superiority of his caste. A conflict ensues, the upshot of which is that the Lingayats are humbled and the patel replaced by a member of the Kuruba caste. Though

Considering all this it would seem that the caste system, far from melting before the sun of western modernity, has become even more strongly entrenched. It is, however, often held that urbanization and industrialization will destroy the caste system. As to urbanization, we again take too much for granted by unwittingly equating urbanization and westernization. The city remains an Indian city,³⁴ and it has been observed that the atmosphere of the modern Indian city is not necessarily hostile to caste.³⁵ As to the effects of urbanization there is, however, still a lack of reliable data: the Indian city — in contradistinction to the village — is still very much treated "en parent pauvre". The same applies to the effects of industrialization, but the indications which are available do not seem to justify the conclusion that industrialization breaks up the caste system.³⁶ As to modern com-

allowance can be made for Dr Beals' view that "the reaction of the educated middle class group to this (the patel's) attack and the manner in which they defended their modern ideals is a significant illustration of the extent to which progressive urban ideals are capable of penetrating into the life of an Indian village," these modern ideals may have been no more than a flag to rally round. On the other hand the conflict as it emerges from Dr Beals' description seems to have been fought along traditional lines, at a traditional occasion (village festival), over traditional stakes of caste honour and precedence. The upshot of the conflict seems to be the consolidation of a shift in power that has been a long time in the making: the replacement of the originally dominant Lingayats, who had already lost much of their power, by the landowning and numerically strong Kurubas. What in a short run perspective impresses the observer as a break-down of the caste order before modern forces of change, may on the long run appear to be a traditional shift in power. Though such a shift necessarily involves a shake-up (and eventual realignment) of loyalties, it does not mean by itself that the system as such is collapsing. In this long run perspective the Dravida movement in Madras State may not be as revolutionary as it would seem. The removal of brahmin dominance by those who are qualified to take over, seems an important aspect of this movement. (It is interesting to note that Dr Gough, in her contribution to M. N. Srinivas, *India's Villages*, p. 92, notes that it is not the very poor Konar tenants but rather the somewhat wealthier and more independent non-brahman landlords who support the anti-brahmin Dravida movement).

³⁴ Cf. D. Pocock, *Sociologies: Urban and Rural, Contributions*... 5, p. 81.

³⁵ This is noted by K. Davis, *o.c.*, p. 174. M. B. Singer in his Introduction to a series of articles (Urban politics in a plural society: a Symposium, *Journ. of Asian Studies* 20, pp. 265-299) notes that at the symposium it was generally agreed that "urbanization has not yet destroyed the traditional associations based on family, caste, village origin, religion, or language." (Cf. also H. Hart's contribution to this series, esp. p. 273).

³⁶ On the role of caste in labor recruitment in the Bombay textile mills, cf. M. D. Morris, The recruitment of an industrial labor force in India, *Comp. Studies in Soc. and Hist.*, 2 p. 305 ff., esp. p. 324 f. (I have not had the opportunity to consult M. D. Morris, Caste and the Evolution of the Industrial Workforce in India, announced for publication in *Proc. of the Am. Philosophical Society*).

mercial and industrial entrepreneurship the role of caste is well-known.³⁷ Finally, whatever the eventual development in India's cities will be, it should not be forgotten that more than three quarters of the electorate live in the rural districts. One might even say that instead of being urbanized — the 1961 census seems to indicate a diminishing rate of urban growth — India is being "countryfied". It is the rural districts that dominate politically, socially and culturally.

Now we may suppose that the caste system loses in its religious and cultural function what it gains in the political field, to wit that the hierarchical principle, the essential religious opposition pure-impure, vanishes to be replaced by a class order based on wealth and political power. It is clear of course that the pure-impure opposition can be fully effective only in the limited dimensions of village life, where all know each other. On a greater stage it loses its sharp edges, becomes more diffuse. Nevertheless the hierarchy in the sense of a religious and cultural principle of ranking seems to continue to govern the caste system. Here I have in mind the phenomenon of sanskritization or brahmanization,³⁸ that is the adaptation of customs, diet, ritual and means of subsistence to brahmanic norms, which involves also giving up impure occupations such as scavenging, toddy-tapping, leather-working. The best known features of brahmanization are vegetarianism and teetotalism. I mentioned already that in order to rise in the hierarchy and eventually to acquire a position where competition with the dominant caste becomes possible, economic independence is an important condition (in itself this already rules out impure occupations since these usually involve dependence on patrons). Its unavoidable corollary is brahmanization; unavoidable because the status strived for needs the sanction of the brahmins. The food and gifts from the aspirants must be acceptable to the brahmin and this is possible only on condition that they conform to brahmanical norms

³⁷ Cf. Helen B. Lamb, *The Indian Business Communities and the Evolution of an Industrial Class*, *Pacific Affairs* 28, pp. 101-115.

³⁸ The term sanskritization has been introduced in this sense by M. N. Srinivas (*Religion and Society among the Coorgs*, Oxford 1952, pp. 30-31; 212-17) which he prefers to the term brahmanization since he associates the latter with the performance of Vedic rites. For a critical survey of the use of the term sanskritization cf. J. F. Staal, to be published shortly in *Journ. of Asian Studies*. For a proper understanding of this process it may be useful to recall Dumont and Pocock's observations that sanskritization does not consist in the imposition of a different system upon an old one, but in the acceptance of a more distinguished or prestigious way of saying the same things (*Contrib...* III, p. 45).

of purity and respectability. Aided by modern developments, this traditional mechanism of hierarchical rise has in recent times expanded considerably. For rising castes, especially for untouchable castes, modernization and sanskritization go hand in hand.³⁹ Western modernity apparently has not provided here an independent standard, alien to tradition.⁴⁰ On the contrary the brahmanic ideal has been expanded into the national ideal of respectable behaviour, part of which (teetotalism) is even enforceable by law.⁴¹

It is clear that brahmanization is not an attack on the hierarchy but an implicit recognition. It might be supposed that in this way, through this tendency towards cultural and religious uniformity, the hierarchy will tend eventually to abolish itself. But here we should keep in mind that the same developments which accelerate brahmanization give to the higher castes new possibilities to document their cultural and religious superiority. It is here that elements of western modernity⁴² and especially Hindu reformism find their natural place within the traditional pattern. Although reformism failed in its ambition to regenerate Hinduism as a whole its stress on brahmanism made it participate in brahmanic prestige. Thus it was in a position to furnish new emblems of superiority for the higher castes, such as widow-remarriage, higher age of marriage for women and female education, by which they can distinguish themselves from brahmanizing lower castes. Thus we can observe the seemingly contradictory fact that lower castes adopt customs such as prohibition of widow-remarriage, lower age of marriage, restriction of the freedom of women, customs that brahmins and high caste Hindus are shedding.⁴³ It would seem therefore that on the whole the hierarchical caste society, availing itself of new opportunities, continues to function and even to strengthen itself.

At the other pole of Hinduism, opposite to the caste system, we find the institution of world renunciation. The particularistic caste

³⁹ Cf. B. S. Cohn, The changing status of a depressed caste (in: *Village India* ... pp. 53-76, esp. 74-5. Also M. N. Srinivas, *F.E.Q.* 15, p. 495).

⁴⁰ Cf. M. N. Srinivas, who notes that members of low castes who hold official positions also show a tendency to sanskritize their ways (*Village India*, p. 17).

⁴¹ As Dr Bailey observes (*o.c.*, p. 190): "Sanskrit culture... is a claim to respectability in the local caste structure but also before a wider audience." To gain acceptance in the body politic it is necessary to conform to this national ideal.

⁴² For instance with regard to alcoholic beverages toddy is definitely "low," whisky is "high" and may socially rank even higher than teetotalism.

⁴³ Cf. M. N. Srinivas, *F.E.Q.* 15, p. 490. For a discussion of this phenomenon see also Dumont — Pocock, *Contributions to Ind. Soc.* I (1957), p. 36.

society has its counterpart in the world of freedom through renunciation of worldly ties and interests. Freedom, not to be understood in the western individualist sense but on the contrary in the sense of fusion with a supra-individual absolute. Although on the face of it renunciation goes against the grain of all that modernity is taken to stand for, this institution has lost nothing of its actuality. The wandering swāmi or sādhu with his staff, begging bowl, water-vessel and saffron garb is a living and ubiquitous reminder of this other way of life. The path of renunciation is of course limited to the few. But the tension between worldly life in the caste society and the traditionally given possibility, even if not realized, to transcend its limitations seems to determine the Hindu ethos. The western observer cannot but be struck by the muting of individuality, the capacity for a feeling of oneness with all being and the desire to merge in a greater whole — be it brahma or the "people", or "humanity", or any other absolute —, which often mark the Hindu and not in the last place the Hindu intellectual with a modern education of western type.⁴⁴ When the Indian intellectual gives vent to his feeling of uprootedness, his alienation from the people or from traditional culture, one will be inclined to view this as the conflict between tradition and modernity. But this may be only superficially so; its base seems to lie deeper, in the traditional tension between the strictures of life-in-the-world and the possibility to transcend them. It is here, too, that the universalism of neo-hindu thought, its ambition to propound not only the true Hindu religion but universal religion, finds its explanation — as an attempt to rise above cultural and religious particularism.

It would be erroneous to interpret samnyāsa as a negative escape from the world, as a modern western observer might be inclined to do. It is positively valued and held in high esteem. It cannot be accidental that eminent and successful leaders like Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh, M. N. Roy and more recently J. P. Narayan opted for the path of renunciation. Renunciation does not necessarily remove him, who opts for it, from the worldly scene. He enjoys unquestioned prestige; he has transcended the social, political, communal and religious divisions of life in the world. This enables him to influence, from his own sphere of freedom, the worldly scene. It would also seem that the prestige of the brahmins — which is at the heart of caste society — is based

⁴⁴ Cf. E. Shils, *o.c.*, p. 65: "The oceanic feeling, the feeling of fusion with all being... which in the West are only to be found among the virtuosi of religious experience, are much less uncommon in Indian educated circles."

largely on his being a repository of renunciatory values. The ideal brahmin as he is depicted in the *smṛti* texts does not seem to be the priest who performs rituals on behalf of others for his own livelihood — which in fact he can only do with great peril to his own purity⁴⁵ —, but the one characterized by non-attachment to worldly concerns.⁴⁶ The typical brahmanical emblems of vegetarianism and teetotalism seem to have arisen in *saṁnyāsi* circles. Thus there is an interplay between the two spheres of life in the world and renunciation. In this way it is understandable that the nationalist movement became a deep-rooted mass movement under the guidance of Gandhi, a *saṁnyāsi* in the traditional Hindu sense. He could connect the modern concept of political freedom with the concept of freedom as it has always been understood in Hinduism: freedom from the ties of worldly life and merger with the absolute. He translated political freedom into emancipation from the limitations and deficiencies of life in the world, thus making it meaningful in terms of Hindu tradition.

It is clear that in this way the *saṁnyāsa* ideal was stretched too far, it tended to absorb life in the world. This may have been possible only because the counterpole, i.e. worldly life, was represented by alien rule. When alien rule fell away the original polarity re-established itself; a polarity as between "Saint and Secretariat". A "saint", like Vinoba Bhave, whose land redistribution campaign and similar undertakings⁴⁷ are based on the renunciation ideology; on the other hand the "secretariat", the governmental machinery with its modern planned economy. Their respective ideologies are diametrically opposed to each other. Bhave — like his master Gandhi — aims at the "change of heart" and their ideal for India is in fact the *āśram*, the self-sufficient hermits' colony based on the ideology of renunciation. The government on the other hand aims at worldly goals with worldly means.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁵ Cf. J. C. Heesterman, *Indo-Ir. Journ.* VI, p. 24f.

⁴⁶ According to the *Manu smṛti* 4, 7-8 the best brahmin is the one who has no provisions for the next day. The brahmin's relations with the king seem to be particularly dangerous. He should not accept presents from a non-*rājanya* king (4, 84), but elsewhere this qualification is given up and the acceptance of presents from any king is forbidden (4, 91, cf. 4, 218), the king being equated to ten brothels or to a keeper of ten thousand slaughterhouses (4, 85-86). Accordingly service with a king is forbidden (3, 64 and 153) and the *purohita* is held in low esteem.

⁴⁷ On Vinoba Bhave see D. J. Hoens, *Sarvodaya*, inaugural lecture, Utrecht 1961.

⁴⁸ It has been suggested by J. T. Marcus (*Time and the Sense of History: West and East, Comp. Studies in Soc. and Hist. III*, pp. 123-139, esp. p. 137f.) that "like the Gandhian message of political independence, Bhave's campaign

central point, however, is that both respect and accommodate each other and try to collaborate in steering India's course.⁴⁹

The interplay between these two poles of India's tradition has been decisive for the changes and developments that Hinduism underwent in the course of its history. In the past it has enabled Hinduism to remain vital and to renew itself.⁵⁰ Under modern circumstances it has found new ways and opportunities to express itself. Perhaps we may say that this interplay holds the secret of India's continuity, the retentiveness and the capacity for absorption that is so striking a feature of India's civilization. There is no doubt that today India and its tradition are changing. This process to all appearances will again be determined by the interplay of the two poles of Hinduism, as has been the case in the past. This means that we will have to think of Indian modernity in terms of the continuity of India's ever-changing tradition.

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for land redistribution can have meaning only within the realization of a historic reality." In this and in the "concentration on political and socio-economic goals" Dr Marcus sees the consequences of the "historicization of ideals, which is one of the most significant aspects of a new world view affected by western frames of reference." By contrasting the Indian conception of history (or its supposed indifference to it) with western frames of reference the fundamental traditional opposition between the worldly and the *saṃnyāsa* views is blurred. The "historicization of ideals" is not necessarily new to India; on the other hand the ideal India of Vinoba Bhave is outside time and history. In this connection it may be interesting to note that Prof. S. Radhakrishnan (*The Hindu Views of Life*, 7th impr., London 1948, p. 63ff.) conceives history as a gradual process towards ultimate perfection and deliverance from birth and death, thereby collectivizing the essentially individual *mokṣa*. Thus progress means to him progress in the sense of the *saṃnyāsa* ideology. The goal is not projected in, but beyond history.

⁴⁹ It is perhaps significant that a distinguished administrator and politician like K. Santhanam eloquently pleads for the importance of *satyāgraha* values for the state (*Satyagraha and the State*, New York 1960).

⁵⁰ Cf. L. Dumont, *World Renunciation...* (*Contrib...* 4, p. 47), who suggests that "the agent of development in Indian religion and speculation... has been the renouncer."