

ORTHOGENETIC CHANGES IN THE LITTLE TRADITION

Sanskritization

Cultural renaissance and reformations as processes of change have relevance for the Great tradition. Their significance has been both textual and contextual. Sanskritization as a process of cultural change has primarily a contextual significance; it is particularistic in origin and therefore belongs to the Little tradition. Sanskritization, above all, describes an empirical process in cultural change, and has been most widespread. It reflects an important process of cultural mobility and social change in India. As we mentioned above, Srinivas defines Sanskritization as "the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice born' caste."⁸³ Looked at from an ideal-typical value frame, Sanskritization is a form of protest against the normative structure and principles as laid down by the Great tradition. It amounts to a rejection of the Hindu theory of *karma* which integrates the various levels of role-institutionalization supposed to be ascribed by birth; it is thus a process of usurpation of a position higher in *hierarchy* as defined by the Great tradition, by rejection of the fundamental principle of *hierarchy* (Great tradition) itself. This, however, is when we evaluate the significance of this concept in the context of the cardinal norms of the Great tradition, and from a purely logical point of view.

This would, however, reveal the extent to which Sanskritization is not a cultural response to the *hierarchical* world-view of the Hindu Great tradition, but to a set of empirical existential situations which provide motivation for status enhancement through emulation of the customs, rituals and ideologies of the upper castes. They emulate the customs of the groups or castes which are higher in status and prestige, because they positively value *higher status* and not because they value *hierarchy*, which constitutes its rationale. This is why, there is not one particular caste at a higher status scale which works as reference group for such Sanskritizing castes. Srinivas says, "Not any particular caste is imitated, or even the higher caste; Pocock is essentially right when he observes, a non-Brahmin caste of relatively low status does not (or did not before the advent of books) imitate the *idea* of Brahmanism nor did it have a *general* notion of secular prestige. For it the models of conduct are the castes higher than itself with which it is in close proximity. Properly speaking, we may not even speak of one caste imitating another but rather *one local section of a caste imitating another local section* [italics mine]."⁸⁴ Two points become clear from this observation: first, that Sanskritization is outside the pail of Great tradition and second, as cultural movement Sanskritization is a manifestation of a highly localized process of cultural change; secondly, the causal forces behind Sanskritization are existential rather than sacerdotal. This is clear from the extent to which dominant castes have invariably served as reference models for

Sanskritization. Ritually higher status is only one of the four criteria of dominance as defined by Srinivas; the other three are, education, economic strength and numerical majority.^{84a} He says: "Even in the traditional system, a caste which acquired economic or political power did generally succeed in improving its ritual status"⁸⁵ inferring thereby that not the ritual but the existential factors determined the success or failure in Sanskritization. Also the motivation in Sanskritization is "to imitate the dominant caste's own prestigious style of life,"⁸⁶ the aspiration for which, more often than not, emerges when other structural pre-requisites for strengthening of such motivations come to exist; for instance when due to economic prosperity or educational achievements a lower caste wants to emulate customs of the higher caste or when legislative changes through providing franchise rights add to the numerical dominance of a caste the power of political dominance.⁸⁷

Our purpose in analysing the nature of motivation in Sanskritization is to bring out the non-Sanskritic elements in Sanskritization, which have a crucial significance for an evaluation of the qualitative direction of social change in India. It would appear that in Sanskritization the objective of the groups involved is to give manifestation to their new identity in respect of social status and power. The customs, manners and styles, religious and social, of the upper castes are imitated as *means* for this end (identity formation) and not as an *end* in themselves, which a sacred world-view might imply.

As a process of cultural change, Sanskritization has been going on throughout the history of India. Historians point out that from time to time various invading groups and aboriginal populations were assimilated, according to their social position, in the appropriate hierarchy of castes; invading rulers would become Kshatriyas and powerful trading groups, Vaisyas and so on. This process of assimilation of alien ethnic and cultural groups within the Hindu system of role-institutionalization had only been a variant of Sanskritization.⁸⁸ Such processes also led to either formation of a new sub-caste, *jati*, or assimilation of the new group into some existing *jati* or sub-caste. More important than this historical aspect of change is the contemporary phenomenon of Sanskritization and its impact on cultural change.

Sanskritization, as analysed by Professor Srinivas and others, might take many forms. It may symbolize an effort on the part of the lower castes to adopt the name of a higher caste and claim higher socio-cultural status; it may also reflect itself in mere emulation of certain customs and styles of life, so far being the preserves of only the upper castes; in rare cases it might also represent a situation where the lower castes so re-adapt their customs and social practices as to claim even higher purity than that of the twice-born castes; in some cases, finally, Sanskritization might take the form of a process of regression from earlier Westernization by the upper castes, specially when rendered politically and culturally less feasible owing to changed circumstances. Such castes might "re-Sanskritize" themselves

in the quest of new identity. This process may also be called traditionalization.

Traditionalization

The first aspect of Sanskritization started with the census operations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In some sections, census was considered to be an excellent opportunity for improvement of a caste's social standing and was similarly exploited by the leaders of various castes;⁸⁹ in some parts the purpose of census was misunderstood and about the Bengal census of 1911, the following observations of Srinivas on O'Malley's report may be noted:

There was a general idea in Bengal that the object of the census is not to show the number of persons belonging to each caste, but to fix the relative position of different castes and to deal with questions of social superiority. . . . Hundreds of petitions were received from different castes—their weight alone amounts to one and a half maunds (100 lbs. = one maund)—requesting that they might be known by a new name, be placed higher up in the order of precedence, be recognized as Kshatriyas and Vaisya, etc.⁹⁰

As the study of Srinivas reveals, between 1911 and 1931, thirteen castes continuously attempted to claim higher caste position; the nature of claim itself progressively rose in order of hierarchy. If in one census a caste claimed the status of a Vaisya, in subsequent censuses the claim would progressively rise for the status of Kshatriya and Brahmin, respectively.⁹¹ In the census of 1931 alone 175 claims were made, of which the maximum—that is 101—were from the Shudra or lower castes, 46 were from untouchable castes and 8 were from the tribal groups.⁹² The rest were from amongst the Muslim castes. It is also interesting to note that the caste status claimed was in maximum cases (80) that of Kshatriyas; next (33 claims) in favour of Brahmins and in the third place (15 cases) claim was made for Vaisya status. This might indirectly prove that the major motivation in the claim for high status and consequent Sanskritization of these castes was not governed by religious or ritual but social-cultural considerations. Kshatriyas, in all the states to which this census figure refers (U.P., Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces and Berar, Bengal and Sikkim) constituted the ruling group with maximum economic prosperity and social prestige. This vindicates our inference. These census claims and counter-claims subsequently proved so irksome for the administration that at the 1941 census and thereafter the column of caste was eliminated from the census schedule.

Apart from the census, major case studies of Sanskritization have been reported by social anthropologists doing field work in various parts of the country. Srinivas reports as to how in southern Mysore, smiths claim the status of Vishvakarma Brahmins, Coorgs emulate customs of Brahmins and Lingayats too identify with Brahmin ritual status.⁹³ The emulation

of Rajput customs by the lower castes has been reported by Cohn, Pocock, Rowe and of both Rajput and Vaisya model by Shah and Shroff in their study of Gujarat. In the eastern region of Uttar Pradesh both Cohn and Rowe have found that low caste Chamars and Nonyas have started emulating the customs of Rajputs, some even claiming to be new Chauhan Rajputs.⁹⁴ Rajputs used to resist this change in customs before the abolition of their status as landlords, but now they look at this process with indifference. Pocock too mentions that in Gujarat where thirty years back, when a lower caste Baria tried to emulate the style of Patidar castes, he was victimized, but nowadays such emulation is looked at with indifference;⁹⁵ The study of A. M. Shah and R. G. Shroff reveals that formerly in Gujarat both Kolis and Patidars used to emulate the Rajput style but with changing social situation and value-scales now Patidars identify more with the Vaisya model. This is because, nowadays, in place of the former supremacy of the 'kingly model' of Rajputs, there is a dominance of "business model" in Gujarat, and accordingly this change in the Sanskritization model has followed.⁹⁶ Similar notes might be found in the study of this process by other social scientists. In such cases of borrowing and emulation of customs of the upper castes, change follows through re-adaptation of aspirations, values and cultural performances.

The third pattern in Sanskritization is even more important from a sociological point of view. Sanskritization in such cases takes place through increased puritanism and traditionalism in a caste along with rejection of the superiority of the 'twice-born' castes. The Koris of eastern Uttar Pradesh refused to accept water even from the Brahmins, considering them less pure than themselves.⁹⁷ In the case of many other lower castes too, the process of Sanskritization includes the rejection of some models of the Great tradition. Referring to the Chamars of northern India, Cohn writes:

Literacy has enabled the Camars to relate to aspects of the Hindu Great tradition, through reading stories available in vernacular books. Urban employment has enabled Camars to participate in rituals, derived from the Hindu Great tradition, at low caste temples in the cities. Simultaneously, there continues an earlier movement, the Siva Narayan sect, whose goal was Sanskritization. Another strand is represented by the celebration of Rai Das birthday, which now is in the hands of Chamar college students, who are, among other things, urging political action. Their stories about Rai Das have an anti-Brahmin tint to them and they stress right action and right principles rather than the more orthodox activities of worship and ritual.⁹⁸

Such processes of deliberate reaction against Sanskritization, also called 'de-Sanskritization', have been recognized by many sociologists.⁹⁹ This process might take many forms of expression but the most crucial element is the emphasis on subcultural-identity and rejection of cultural form of the

upper castes derived from the higher traditions. In structural terms this contributes to new horizontal solidary groups and greater economic and political mobilization. Culturally, however, its traditionalizing element remains supreme, although it might indirectly advance the objectives of modernization.¹⁰⁰

The last process in Sanskritization may be called re-Sanskritization, a case where a formerly westernized or modernized group discards many of the cultural symbols of modernization, such as dress, spoken language, food habits and style of living and political ideologies and reverts to traditional Sanskritic symbols and beliefs. As we have pointed out, this process is easily discernible in the Great tradition of elites in many Asian and African countries. But this process also persists in the Little tradition of specific groups. In the study of an eastern U.P. village it was found that Rajputs, who before independence were highly identified with the Western culture and its ideologies have after independence discarded this pattern of culture and deliberately identify with orthodox Hindu cultural symbolisms and the political ideology of Jana Sangh, a conservative political party with Hinduistic leanings.¹⁰¹ This process is not only empirically existent but also logically possible; only in this case re-Sanskritization should not be equated with non-modernization in the same manner as de-Sanskritization may not be equated with lack of traditionalization. Singer has stated, "Sanskritization and de-Sanskritization are cyclical processes, in this sense. And while in general we should expect modernizing changes to be de-Sanskritizing and traditionalizing change so be Sanskritizing, this need not always be the case. *In final analysis these processes are relative to the position from which they are being compared [italics mine].*"¹⁰²

This cyclical, or more correctly, the wave-like movements in the process of Sanskritization, have been a great source of cultural mobility and continuity in the substantive domain of the orthogenetic Hindu tradition. Unlike the movements in the Great tradition, Sanskritization did not have a pan-Indian pattern. Neither in respect of the sources for cultural emulation, nor in regard to the pattern and direction of emulation of cultural forms has there been a universal Indian character. Sanskritization and its various forms thus belong to a series of particularistic cultural responses by specific castes or even sub-castes to the Hindu Great tradition. But the process itself has a localized and specific rather than pan-Indic character. Nevertheless, it is a change at the grass-roots level and potentially more stable and meaningful even in comparison to the orthogenetic changes in the Great tradition. It may be correct to say that Sanskritization in its various forms is a response of India's Little traditions to modernity through the process of traditionalization.

The significance of such changes could be explained through the concepts of existential and cultural closures, which channelize aspirations for innovations and change into a limited series of manifestations.¹⁰³ The phenomenon of closure is itself existentially and culturally determined. Depend-

ing upon the intensity of aspirations and the existential and cultural resistance encountered for the realization of these aspirations, this process may result into certain forms of deviance, may be pathological, may be positive from a sociological point of view. It may happen, that a society might reinforce similar pattern of aspirations for all its members though they may be located in differential socio-economic (existential) situations as Merton¹⁰⁴ has mentioned about the universal prevalence of 'success theme' in American society or as Myron Weiner¹⁰⁵ writes about India being in the throes of the crisis of 'high aspirations'. In both cases the result for groups not situated in viable existential circumstances is to attempt a realization of the aspiration-directed goals through non-institutionalized, even negative, means: for instance, through crime in America and through casteism, liguism, regionalism and other factious mobilizations in India.

The attempt towards cultural mobility through Sanskritization may be also an expression of those aspirations for change which might be better understood through the theory of cultural closure. In this connection a point is worth taking note of, that if we analyse the cultural and structural situations of various caste groups which have been reported to attempt Sanskritization, a few very significant general principles come to our view. These general principles could also be called sociological pre-requisites of Sanskritization. These are: (1) that the groups or castes whose customs are being emulated are, more often than not, economically better off than the emulating caste or group itself; (2) that the group or caste which attempts Sanskritization, has high aspiration to improve its social status; (3) that such a group is in close proximity of the higher group or the reference group for Sanskritization and has many occasions to interact with it at social, cultural and economic levels; (4) that such a Sanskritizing group is generally less politicized, in other words, it still positively values the customs of the upper castes, thus indirectly accepting their cultural superiority and covets for vertical mobility rather than horizontal solidarity and identity-projection which generally follows the phenomenon of politicization. De-Sanskritization may be an expression of high politicization; this might reflect itself in anti-Brahmin movements in the southern part of India.¹⁰⁶ and in mass conversion of the low scheduled castes to Buddhism in Maharashtra.¹⁰⁷ In the light of these pre-requisites it may be clear that Sanskritization is a form of cultural response to aspirations for higher status mobility for a group under special sociological conditions as determined by these pre-requisites which close other avenues for status mobility for the groups concerned. In such conditions where the groups are not numerically very dominant (unlike in Tamil Nadu and Andhra), are economically also dependent on the upper castes and are culturally (educationally) and politically not advanced, they accept the traditional status symbolism of the upper castes as valuable and covet for that.

This implies that Sanskritization is in fact a disguised form of modernization; its foundation is rooted in the same structural soil which given proper

conditions would lead to not merely emulation of the customs of the upper castes but also the adaptation of their other practices in the spheres of political initiative, economic enterprise and quest for modern education and developmental innovations. The reason why some castes are Sanskritizing rather than modernizing lies in the many structural bottlenecks and limitations from which these castes suffer and owing to which the other alternative is closed to them. Looked at from this view-point, Sanskritization should be deemed to have already set in a radical process of cultural and social change in India. Sanskritization like modernization poses a real challenge to the ideal-typical cultural attributes of traditional Hinduism. But ironically, it owes for its genesis to the orthogenetic tradition.

Renaissance and Sanskritization as two orthogenetic processes of change in the Hindu tradition are oriented to different directions. The renaissance or reformation movements, with few exceptions, have been focused to the need of maintaining the basic values of the traditional world-view by marginal adaptations. The core values are never compromised. Adjustments are proposed at the periphery. This has been true from Shankaracharya to Mahatama Gandhi. Orthogenetic renaissance changes are not neutral to modernization; it is always relegated to the bottom scale of the hierarchy of goal-orientations, that of *artha* and *kama*, which though necessary should never be made central to the goal-orientation in life. Apart from this renaissance forms the part of the dynamics in the literate-elite tradition of Hinduism. It is more ideational than existential. Sanskritization is more existential than ideational. Unlike the renaissance changes in the tradition, Sanskritization is a process of change oriented to cultural synthesis rather than resistant encounter.

The relationship between Sanskritization and modernization is, thus, indirect yet in a way it is positive. A question may arise: how far does the structure of the Great Hindu tradition, through its various vicissitudes of orthogenetic changes, tally with modernization? Strictly, from a theoretical point of view, its value-themes of hierarchy, holism and predestination, do not appear to be consistent with many cultural pre-requisites of modernization, such as values of equalitarianism as opposed to hierarchy, atomism as opposed to holism, and a kind of progressive evolutionary world-view as opposed to Hindu theory of predestination. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that Hinduism has no strict dogmas, and orthogenetic changes in the Great tradition themselves suggest that its ethical norms have always been viable and elastic and assimilative. It only sets the outer limit of behavioural choices for individuals, without ever confounding the inner freedom of man. Though itself always setting neat logical categories of ethical norms and codes of behaviour, Hinduism has always tolerated dissent which ranged from atheism to agnosticism to devoted ritualism. Above all, its ethos is finally oriented to renunciation which discourages men from passionate hedonism and reinforces the attitudes of neutrality, tolerance for pluralism in values and objective curiosity in life. These attributes of the

Great Hindu tradition may finally triumph and work out a pattern of selective synthesis with modernization. As we shall elaborate later, this in fact is happening in contemporary India.

To sum up we have made an attempt to analyse the changes in the Great and Little traditions of Hinduism from orthogenetic sources. In order to evaluate these changes in a meaningful context some ideal-typical attributes of the Hindu Great tradition have been formulated. These ideal-typical attributes are hierarchy, holism, cyclical-devolutionary conception of change and emphasis on continuity. Since many of these attributes may be present in any traditional culture, the substantive-historical nature of these attributes in the context of the Hindu tradition has been illustrated and explained. Successive stages of major changes in the tradition have then been analysed in the light of the modifications which these sought to introduce in the meaning and value system of the ideal attributes. In this context, two major processes of change in the Great tradition, one by re-interpretation and re-adoption of the ideal-typical attribute and the other by formation of breakaway traditions like Buddhism and Jainism, have been analysed. In the sphere of the Little tradition, it has been found that Sanskritization as a concept adequately illustrated the nature of changes that have been going on. Whether treated in a linear or cyclical sense of the term, Sanskritization involves processes of diverse kind, which may stretch from de-Sanskritization to re-Sanskritization. The important element in this process is that all forms of its manifestations have a disguised reference to a protest against the basic ideal-typical value syndromes of the Great tradition. In a latent form, therefore, Sanskritization is an orthogenetic response of the Hindu culture to the forces of modernization.