

CHAPTER IV

THE WESTERN IMPACT AND CULTURAL MODERNIZATION

THE ENCOUNTER between the cultural traditions of Hinduism and Islam was essentially of two *traditional* world-views. As we have analysed above, the value systems of hierarchy and holism were predominant in both traditions. The normative elements which came into contact through these cultural traditions were pre-modern and served only to perpetuate the traditional outlook and social system. But the contact of the Indian (Hindu) tradition with the West was of a different and radical sociological significance. Historically, it was a contact between a pre-modern and a modernizing cultural system. By the time the Western tradition could bear meaningfully upon the cultural, political and social systems of India, its own structure had undergone radical internal metamorphoses; its traditional hierarchical and holistic character had broken down;¹ its value-structure was rendered more open, liberal, equalitarian and humanistic;² and this tradition was imbued with a new-found sense of confidence in the scientific and technological world-view based on rationalism, equality and freedom.³ These values had both positive as well as negative reactions among the many Western intellectuals;⁴ yet, the great historical importance that this contact had for initiation of a new era of change in the Indian cultural tradition can hardly be overemphasized.

The mode of the Western cultural impact on the Indian tradition had distinctive features, in historical as well as substantive terms. Historically, the distinctive element was in its gradual expansion through succession and replacement of various forms of Western traditions differing in political and cultural orientation and influence. The earliest (fifteenth and sixteenth century) contact, of which sociological consequences were marginal, was with the Portuguese. In orientation, their impact was proselytizing and predatory⁵ and brought with them pre-modern values and religious prejudices. They were followed by the Dutch and the French in the 17th and 18th century. Neither the Dutch nor the French had Christianization as their main objective. The Dutch were mainly interested in commerce. The French had political goals, but their influence was marginal. Only the British⁶ finally emerged as a dominant power in India. The Western impact on the Indian culture has, therefore, been primarily of the British.⁷

The consolidation of the British power in India, which started in early seventeenth century, was complete only towards the end of the nineteenth

century. Behind this political power was the cultural tradition of the West. There were basic differences between this politico-cultural tradition and the Indian. Some of these have been sketched by Max Weber with great lucidity and historical objectivity.⁸ According to him, emphasis on formal rationality, experimentation, codification, verification, and rational-utilitarian orientation in behaviour and thought, are some of the unique substantive qualities of the Western cultural tradition. He admits that in isolated forms many of these cultural traits also existed in the Oriental civilizations of India and China, but in the absence of other requisite structural features of the Western society, these cultural elements failed to develop systematically in these societies.

The cultural tradition of the 19th century West which overwhelmed the Indian scene was in its ethos and structure fundamentally different from the traditional cultural patterns of Hinduism and Islam. Its basic tenets were in contradiction with most of the essential attributes of the contemporary Indian tradition. The form of legal rationalism on which the Western tradition was based (by the time it came into contact with the Indian tradition), recognized a contractual-individualistic relationship between man and society. In matters of legal justice and civil rights, it encouraged the values of equality, equity and universalism and not those of status and hierarchy. In contrast with communal and familistic status allocation system of India, the Western tradition through various bureaucratic structures, administrative, legal and military, and through educational and cultural innovations, introduced new criteria for social stratification which were based on achievement and not ascription and allocated status only on individual performance and not on charismatic qualities. Together, these new orientations posed a serious challenge to the two cardinal attributes of the Indian tradition—those of *hierarchy* and *holism*.

Gradually, the Western impact has led to acculturative and innovatory changes in the cultural pattern of India. Its processes, therefore, bring to light not only how far modernizing acculturation has taken place in the Indian tradition, but also the extent to which such acculturation reinforces the endogenous tendencies for change and modernization, and how far these changes do or do not pose a threat to the cultural identity of the Indian tradition. The two aspects of the problem are in a way inter-related: the first relates to the process of cultural synthesis and the second to the phenomenon of cultural identity. The two processes are disparate. The question, however, is: can there be a point of convergence for these processes? In the following pages we shall examine this question.

Following the analytic scheme we developed for the study of cultural changes in India through exogenous sources (Cf. Chapter I), we shall describe the ramifications of Western impact—both on the Little and Great cultural traditions in India. We shall use the term 'primary westernization'⁹ for changes induced by the Western impact on the Indian Little traditions. Such changes generally are of two types: first, the emergence of a westernized

sub-cultural pattern through a minority section of Indians who first came into contact with Western culture. This also includes the sub-culture represented by those Indian intellectuals and scholars who not only adopted many Western cognitive patterns and styles of life, but also supported its rapid expansion. As the influence of this westernized sub-culture was localized, it may also be treated as a part of the primary stage of Westernization. This process forms part of the Little and not the Great tradition, because its mode of expansion and adaptation did not develop a systematic world-view. It was primarily sub-cultural. Sub-cultural Westernization has always been characterized by an eclectic and fragmentary process of acculturation; it lacks an organized structure and exists only in the marginal sphere of the accepted cultural pattern.

The second type of primary Westernization in the Little tradition refers to the process of general diffusion of Western cultural traits, such as the use of new technology, dress, food, and changes in the habits and styles of life of people in general, resulting from the cultural contact with the British. This form of Westernization differs from the sub-cultural form in two respects: first, it does not have its basis in the assimilation of values or cognitive categories but merely in imitation of external forms of culture. Secondly, it is, unlike the first process of primary Westernization, diffused both among the laymen as well as the scholars, among the villagers as well as the urban dwellers.

Besides 'primary Westernization', there has also been going on in India another form of Westernization, which is not confined to the Little tradition alone. This form of Westernization has a pan-Indian character and has contributed to the growth of various forms of cultural structures which out-cross the local or regional boundaries and extend to the country as a whole. These cultural structures are representative of a coherent normative system and have their basis in an organizational structure which is far different from the normative system of the Little tradition. Some examples of such cultural structures are: education, law, science and technology, new forms of politicization, urbanization, industrialization and finally new media of cultural transmission through press, printing and facilities of transport and communication. The emergence of these institutional foci may be called the process of cultural modernization.

These forms of cultural innovations in India make a substantial contribution to the emergence of a new Great tradition of modernization, parallel to the classical Great tradition. This leads us again to the problem of coexistence between the traditional and modern value systems in the changing cultural tradition of India, and the question of, how far it could be realized. In the following pages we shall evaluate these problems. First we shall discuss the cultural changes introduced by early sub-cultural forms of Westernization. This will be followed by an analysis of the emergence and continuity of the Great tradition of cultural modernization in India. Then we shall analyse the trend of modernization in the Little traditions

of India. The evaluation of the problem of synthesis and identity formation in Indian culture shall be analysed in the last section.

SUB-CULTURAL FORMS OF WESTERNIZATION

The historical point at which the Hindu tradition came into contact with the Western tradition, the former was engrossed in and burdened by centuries of stagnancy and foreign domination, whereas the latter had just emerged invigorated and triumphant with its achievements through Renaissance to Industrial Revolution. At this point in history, the Hindu tradition was at its lowest ebb of internal resilience and external strength. In contrast, the Western tradition was steeped in philosophies of optimism, of universal progress, rationalism and hedonism. The spirits of Condorcet and Jeremy Bentham were reigning supreme. Despite these relative disadvantages the Hindu tradition was still resistant and the early Western impact remained peripheral and localized.

These peripheral or localized forms of Western impacts were the Little traditions of Westernization. Its first manifestation was in the growth of a Westernized sub-culture of middle-class elites specially in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, where the contact with the Western tradition first started. Gradually, however, this sub-cultural tradition grew into a Great tradition of modernization, but in its initial form it was represented by a small community of scholars, writers, commercial-middlemen, entrepreneurs and administrator-politicians who imitated the Western culture, for material benefit and only partly on account of commitment.

The sub-cultural form of Westernization also grew in stages. Its first manifestation could be found in the emergence of a commercial middle-class in the 18th century. Its social composition was different from region to region. In the Calcutta region, which during this period was the most important centre of British influence in politics and commerce being the seat of the Company's Government, the new middle-class came mostly from the *Banyan* (merchant) or *Sarkar* caste. In Madras region most of them were Brahmins and in Bombay the majority of them consisted of the Parsis.¹⁰ The members of this class served as middlemen for the European traders and had generally a lower class origin. Some of them were petty clerks (*gomashah* or *munim*), others were interpreters (*dobhash*), cashiers (*shroffs*) and petty contractors (*paikars*), who went from one part of the country to another to make purchases for the European trading companies.¹¹

Culturally, these middlemen were not Westernized to any significant extent. Like the *Kayasthas* and the *Khatris* during the Muslim period, these commercial groups were only partly Westernized. They spoke the language of their European masters and did not hesitate in emulating some of their customs and ways of living too. In June 1673, one European who observed these middlemen flocking aboard the ship at Masulipatam (Madras Presidency) remarked that: "Unlike the boatmen who carried the English

treasure to the shore, they were clad in a more stylish garb, with a head-dress of calico-coiled turban, light vest, and loose trousers. They all spoke English, offered their services for small wages, and waited on the passengers to execute their business."¹² About the last quarter of the 18th century the number of such interpreters-cum-middlemen in Bengal was estimated to be one thousand.¹³

What was important in the growth of this class of quasi-Westernized middlemen and traders was not their numerical strength but the cultural breakthrough which was initiated by them. Their jobs required specialized training and education. It also required learning of new professional skill in trade and commerce, and the ability of rational-managerial¹⁴ administration far different from traditional mode of transacting business. Soon these middlemen were transformed into a new commercial middle-class. As in size and magnitude this class was a mere ripple in the ocean of Indian humanity, its greater significance lay in being the forerunners of Westernization. To this process this class contributed in diverse ways, though not always in an organized form; through them a sub-culture of Westernization was gradually established in India.¹⁵

Commercial middlemen were probably the earliest groups to come in contact with the Western cultural pattern. This sub-culture of Westernization continued to expand in India throughout the eighteenth century and only in the early part of the nineteenth century new sub-cultures of Westernization began to emerge. These were represented by the new generation of middle-class professional groups and groups of social reformers. Western educational institutions which contributed to the growth of this class were still localized in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay regions. These institutions were reinforced by the effort both of the Government and of the missionaries. In 1859, there were 13 government colleges containing 1909 students, and 4 aided colleges with 878 students; 74 superior government schools containing 10,989 students, and 209 aided schools of the same or somewhat lower grade with 16,956 scholars; 25 normal schools containing 2,241 students; and 16 colleges for special subjects containing 1,154 students.¹⁶ A year later, however, the number of Anglo-Vernacular schools went up to 193 with 23,963 students.¹⁷

The result of educational changes was two-fold: first, the interjection of the Western values and ideologies among the members of the new educated class, and secondly, the rise of social and cultural reformation movements.¹⁸ Coupled with the expansion of Christianity, these changes gave a further push to the process of Westernization. Most of the early educational expansion was confined to the upper and middle class urban people. Their interaction with the Western cultural tradition led, in the initial periods, to an exaggerated effervescence for all that was Western. This was specially true of the early Westernized middle-class in Bengal. Of this trend in Calcutta Spear writes:

The... reaction was the move of a radical group in Calcutta to accept

the West *in toto*. They accepted the Western claim to have found the secret of progress based on the principle of reason; they accepted Western humanist values. The only way to mend the abuses of Hinduism, they believed, was to end them. They were much influenced by the French and English rationalists, whose representative in Calcutta was David Hare, the watchmaker. A section of them, influenced by Alexander Duff, the Scots missionary, went further and accepted the religion as well as the philosophy and philanthropy of the West. Pains were taken to symbolize the break with tradition by ritual meals of beef, and one poet could boast of dreaming in English.¹⁸

The Western influence was not only confined to ethics and philosophy; it had also in some quarters extended to habits and customs, specially amongst the members of the upper middle class. It was about them that Horace Mackenzie (1831) said, "Judging from Calcutta, there has been, I think, a very marked tendency among the natives to indulge in English luxuries; they have well-furnished houses, many wear watches, they are fond of carriages, and are understood to drink wines."¹⁹ The sub-culture of Westernization was also reinforced by literary tradition in Bengal. Among the early 19th century Bengal poets there was a rush for emulating the contemporary model of poetry and rhyme from the English literature; the characters of the novelists conversed in the idiom of Western philosophy;²⁰ many novels were modelled after the Western classics and the new Bengali school of drama had a deep impress of the Western theatrical style and form.²¹

The emergence of this literary sub-culture of Westernization was not typical of only Bengal. Tamil in Madras, Telugu in Andhra and Marathi in the central peninsular India were equally influenced by the English literary tradition.²² These literary works created an indigenous medium for the transmission of many Western values to the Indian people. Marathi writers not only translated the works of Shakespeare, Johnson and Bunyan, but some of them consciously imitated the style of Gibbon, Johnson and Macaulay and many of them had deeply imbibed the rational-positivistic values of Bentham, Mill and Herbert Spencer. The same was true of the Tamil and Telugu literatures, and also of many other regional literary traditions.

The process was confined not only to the world of literature but also took an organized form in various reform movements. One such movement was led by Raja Rammohan Roy in Bengal. He was a profound scholar and a linguist. He was a pioneer in introducing humanistic social reforms. In his judgment the cause for the moral and material decadence of India was formalism of Hindu religion. He was, therefore, for innovations in Hindu culture and pleaded for radical Westernization. Underlying his faith in the Western values was his passionate desire to revitalize India and credit it with the social, cultural and economic dynamism which he observed the Western societies possessed. His position as a reformer and thinker has best been summarized by Miss Collet:

The Raja was not merely occidental, no Hindu polished into the doubtful semblance of European, just as little was he, if we may use the term without offence, a spiritual Eurasian. If we follow the right line of his development, we shall find that he leads the way from the orientalist, into, but through Western culture towards the civilization which is neither Western nor Eastern but something vastly larger and nobler than both.²³

Rammohan Roy was a passionate advocate of Western values, ethical systems and spirit of positivism for Indian culture. He campaigned for the introduction of Western form of institutions of learning in India and sent a petition to the Governor-General against the establishment of the Sanskrit college in Calcutta since he thought "the pupils will there acquire what was known 2,000 years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtleties since produced by speculative men..."²⁴ Traditional education was, according to him, out-dated for the present needs of the Indian society.

As a student of comparative religion Rammohan Roy founded the Brahmo Sabha (later *Samaj*) based on his conception of theism and ethical precepts. This Society met every Saturday for two hours in the evening when passages from the scriptures (*Shastras*) were read out followed by a sermon in Bengali and then by the singing of the hymns. The kind of theism propagated by the Brahmo Samaj was a syncretic form of rational-humanism plus monotheism as found in Hindu Vedanta philosophy and Christianity. The overall orientation was apolitical, since Rammohan Roy believed that "the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindoos is not well calculated to promote their political interests"²⁵ and hence religion must be reformed first. After the death of Rammohan Roy, Brahmo Samaj was led by Keshub Chandra Sen. His commitment to Western values and his admiration for the Christian ethics was even stronger than that of Rammohan Roy. He considered the contact of the Indian society with the West as a source of cultural and moral redemption for India and pleaded for whole-heartedly emulating the Western cultural values of humanism, rationalism and science.²⁶

These movements of primary Westernization were led by men who, though being uncompromising in their advocacy of the need for rapid assimilation of aspects of Western tradition and culture were yet men who were self-made, had strength of character and sound grounding in the Hindu tradition itself. But, the generation of their followers which later emerged from among the college youth, was far different in orientation. It was 'denationalized and hyper-Westernized',²⁷ being completely uprooted from its own indigenous tradition. Though short-lived, this wave of the so-called Western way of life and thought pattern led to many excesses. "Most extreme were the students of the Hindu College at Calcutta who adopted an aggressive attitude to everything Hindu and openly defied the canons of their inherited religion, while some of them offended public opinion by their youthful exuberance, such as drinking to excess, flinging beef-bones into the houses

of the orthodox, and parading the streets shouting 'we have eaten Mussalman bread'.²⁸

The impact of these protestant sub-cultures of Westernization was limited indeed. Often the groups which represented these cultural ideologies were self-alienated and failed to make substantial impact on the contemporary society. "Intellectually they were children of the English, socially they were a class apart, divorced on their own initiative from orthodox Hindu society. There was little sympathy either between them and their countrymen, or between them and the English; they had been raised out of one society without having a recognized place in another."²⁹ This extremist movement apart, even the Brahmo Samaj could not succeed in striking roots in the cultural soil of India. It is said, "The tenets of the Samaj were too refined and eclectic to be popular, it was widely separated from Hinduism by its denial of the doctrines of metempsychosis and incarnations, and never became a Hindu sect."³⁰ Hence, the value of these movements was not in the extent of its spread, but in the new cultural awareness which it generated in the society.

Similar movements for Westernization were also going on in Bombay and Madras regions. The prototype of the Brahmo Samaj in Madras was the Veda Samaj and in Bombay the Prarthana Samaj. Both Societies were devoted to reformatory theistic movements in Hinduism and propagated the discontinuance of harmful social usages and customs prevalent in the contemporary Indian society. They opposed the custom of child-marriage and exploitation of women. As in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras too had the hyper-westernized youth movements, but their scale was not the same as existed in Bengal. In Bombay this form of Westernization was confined only to the Parsis.³¹ Otherwise, in emphasis and orientation primary Westernization process in Madras and Bombay was deeply embedded in the emergent nationalistic aspiration.

Localized and elitist as these movements were, they made more than expected impact on the policies pursued by the British government during the early nineties and succeeded in carrying through many radical-humanistic social reforms. These reforms related to the social practices generated by the Little tradition of the Hindu culture. For instance, we may mention the practice of widow-burning (*Suttee*) which in Bengal alone consumed the lives of about 600 widows annually.³² On the steadfast initiative of Rammohan Roy this custom was abolished in Bengal in 1829; Bombay followed suit in 1830 and some Rajasthan states abolished it in 1846.³³ Laws were also passed banning infanticide, stealing of children for slavery (1774) and claims of legal rights on slaves (1843). Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856 for the first time, according legal sanction to such marriages. These changes in the social customs and institutions of the Hindu society were forerunners of basic cultural readaptations to follow later in this society. The underlying values from which the rationale of these reformations emanated were those of humanism, universal equality, dignity and

freedom of man. Logically, the ethos of this value system was not embedded in the notion of hierarchy but in equality; theory of pre-destination had no relevance in the ethical context from which these reforms were conceived and implemented. Thus, a beginning in howsoever elementary form had been made towards the process of cultural modernization in the Hindu tradition.

Moreover, a number of changes in other realms of the Indian society were introduced as British control extended on the Indian soil. Lawlessness, banditry, private armies and *thugae* (an institutionalized form of deception³⁴ and killing) which were common in the 18th and 19th century India were abolished and controlled.³⁵ Foundation was also laid for the expansion of education, means of transport and communication, and for a society based on rational legal justice following "the principle of equality and the creation of a consciousness of positive rights."³⁶ Most of these reforms started in the early part of the 19th century, later became the foundations of modernization in India.

Despite the high qualitative significance that these sub-cultural movements for Westernization had for the process of culture-change, the movements did not have the institutional bases to spread far and wide as the macro-processes of the Indian cultural structure. Its normative categories were recondite and its organizational base was weak and limited to the urban-dwelling middle-class, and student population. Its importance in mobilizing the forces of cultural changes, therefore, was more qualitative than quantitative.

THE GREAT TRADITION OF CULTURAL MODERNIZATION

The change from sub-cultural or primary mode of Westernization to secondary Westernization or modernization with interlinkages in the Great tradition of India was caused by factors partly historical and partly cumulative. Historically, an important dividing line was the revolt of 1857. It brought about a radical change in the response-pattern of educated Indians to the phenomenon of Westernization; in orientation and ideology now Westernization increasingly meant a sense of nationalism and secularism. The short spell of xenophilic identification with all that was Western now gradually started to wane and give way to a cultural reaction, the motto of which was, "to draw level with the West in achievement and Western estimation and at the same time to be loyal to... Hindu past."³⁷ The writings of John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Condorcet, David Hume, Pain and Bentham, which inspired Indians to look at the West with a sense of adoration also enthused them with a feeling of nationhood and quest for liberty and freedom.

The other aspect in the new phase of Westernization lay in the cumulative social effects of some of the policies that the Company and British government pursued in the fields of education, legislation, commerce and industry,

etc. One impact of these policies was the growth of a new consciousness and structure of values. It is true that the revolt of 1857 dampened the zeal and self-confidence of the British administration for reforms in the Hindu customs and institutions, yet the real foundation of modern India was laid in the post-Mutiny (revolt) period. O'Malley says, "Modern India may indeed be said to be practically a post-Mutiny creation owing to the alterations in the conditions of life which have followed the establishment of the *Pax Britanica*, an immense increase in population, the extension of State activities, the development of trade and industry, and the introduction of the adjuncts of modern Western civilization . . . called the three great engines of social improvements, which science had already given to the West, the railways, the postal system, and the telegraph."³⁸

The developments in these fields had the consequence of extending the communication network and structural foundations of the institutions of modernization. In addition to this, the process of modernization in other aspects of culture continued unabated, and with an increased momentum. Some of the institutional developments which have directly been instrumental in the creation of a Great tradition of modernization in India are: (1) the growth of a universalistic legal superstructure; (2) expansion of education; (3) urbanization and industrialization; (4) increased network of communication; and (5) growth of nationalism and politicization of the society. Each of these factors had a pan-Indian significance and was not a sub-cultural or localized process as primary Westernization was.

The Growth of a Universalistic Legal System

If we follow Emile Durkheim, law is a "visible symbol"³⁹ of the invisible fact of social solidarity in a society; society being a moral phenomenon eludes measurement or observation through other (than law) objective indices. He also maintains that, "custom is not opposed to law, but is, on the contrary, its basis,"⁴⁰ and these two together provide an indirect measure of the nature of social solidarity or the extent of internal differentiation within a particular society. In exceptional circumstances, however, a conflict between customs and law might arise, but this, according to Durkheim, is mainly due to 'force of habit' which drives a wedge between custom and law. However, Durkheim did not anticipate the conflict between custom and law, as in India, based on the historical processes of cultural encounters and diffusion of heterogeneous traditions of legal norms. However, his emphasis on law as being the objective effect of the causes of social solidarity and (we might add) social processes, adds a new significance to the study of change through the study of transformations in the customs⁴¹ and laws of the Indian society.

In fact, diffusion of new legal norms and gradual emergence of a universalistic form of positive law in India does itself mark the beginning of a new tradition . . . a change from status to contract,⁴² from hierarchy to universal-equity and equality. In the Great tradition of both Hinduism and Islam,