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Traditions

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D P Mukerji on Tradition and Modernity

- Reading : Madan, T.N. 2010, „Search for Synthesis: The Sociology of D.P Mukerji“ in Patricia Uberoi, Satish Despande and Nandini Sundar (ed) *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology, New Delhi: Permanent Black*

Introduction

- D P Mukerji is considered one of the founding fathers of Indian sociology, born on 5 October 1894 in middle class Bengali Brahmin family with a long tradition of engagement with the higher education. He had postgraduate degrees in History and Economics from Calcutta University.
- D P turned to sociology because of his dissatisfaction with Indian history and economics.

Centrality of society in India

- DP gives primacy of social groups for the understanding of Indian society. He argues that Indian culture and society are not individualist as in Western societies. It is the first and foremost duty of Indian sociologists to study the social traditions of India.
- He wrote “...it is not enough for the Indian sociologist to be a sociologist. He must be an Indian first, that is, he is to share in the folkways, mores, customs and traditions for the purpose of understanding his social system and what lies beneath it and beyond it.”

Meaning of tradition

- The root meaning of tradition is to ‘transmit’. Its Sanskrit equivalents are *parampara*, that is, succession or *aitihya*, which comes from the same root as *itihas* or history.
- For him the study of tradition is not only about the past, but it should also incorporate the sensitivity towards the change.

Principles of change in Indian traditions -I

- DP pointed out that economy is the internal sources of change in Western societies, but it has not been as effective in India.
- For him, class conflict had been “smoothened and covered by caste tradition” in the Indian context, where new class relations had not been clearly visible. Hence, the task of Indian sociologists is to search for the non-economic internal sources of change.

Principles of change in Indian traditions -II

- According to DP, there are three principles of change recognized in Indian tradition such as *shruti*, *smriti* and *anubhav*. The last one is *anubhav* or personal experience is the revolutionary principle, which in the Indian context gets transformed into generalized *anubhav*, or the collective experience of groups.
- *Smriti* and *shruti* are associated with the higher tradition of knowledge, but they used to be periodically challenged by the collective experience of groups and sects, as for example in the *Bhakti* movement, *Sufi* movement.

Principles of change in Indian traditions -III

- For DP, *buddhi-vichar* or discursive reason is not the dominant force of change, *anubhava* (experience) and *prema* (love) are considered to be the superior agents of change.
- Resilience in tradition accommodates the strain of conflict. For example, resilience of caste as a tradition inhibits the formation of class and class consciousness in India.

Dialectic of tradition and modernity -I

- It is not that tradition is always worshiped or ignored without giving a critical thought to it , likewise modernity is need but not be adopted blindly.
- According to DP Mukerji, a 'living tradition' maintains links with the past by retaining something from it, and at the same time incorporates new thing. For example, continuity and change in various types of cultural practices in India.
- For him, progress is a problem of balancing of values, and so is modernization.

Dialectic of tradition and modernity-II

- For the quest of fundamentals of values, DP turned to *Upanishads*, to *shantam*, *shivam*, *advaitam*, that is peace, welfare, unity.
- DP denied that he was a Marxist, but he claimed himself to be Marxologist. By this, he meant that “the Marxist approach to be grounded in the specificity of Indian history”, as Marx himself had focused on capitalism, the dominant aspect of Western society.

Dialectic of tradition and modernity-III

- DP's view on modernization was that there could be no genuine modernization through imitation. He was aware of the onslaught of cultural imperialism more than any other.
- In his study of Tagore published in 1943, DP formulated the dialectic of tradition and modernity. He appreciated Rammohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore for their approaches to synthesise Indian and western traditions.
- For him, modernity must be defined in relation to tradition.

Concluding remarks

- DP's central focus on tradition and modernity, which was relevant during the nineteen forties and remained so until the end, was in fact a particular concern of Westernized Hindu intellectuals.
- This concern was related with the emerging pattern of Hindu renaissance. Hence, the desire for a synthesis of Vedanta, Western liberalism and Marxism.