

# Tradition and Modernity

*Dr. K. L. Raman*

*Retd. Asst. Secretary, Tamilnadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram, Madras - 28*

The word that often crops up while referring to the greatness, antiquity and heritage of any race or country is tradition, which is embedded in it inseparably and also in no smaller measure. To exact and precise, by tradition, we mean transmission of statements, beliefs, customs, procedures, practices or long established conventions etc. that are being orally passed on or handed down from one generation to another. Theologically it is a doctrine to have divine authority but not originally committed to writing; especially among the Christians, from the earliest times.

Modernity is a term generally developed to refer any new and experimental forms either artistic or literary or persons of the present or recent times with modern tastes, styles and views. To be more explicit, it refers to new fashioned concepts and ideas which are not antiquated. It is closely connected with the school subjects and not concerned with classics. Modernity or modernism, pure and simple, connotes contemporary or up-to-date events that take place in the world in several facets of human life.

Customs, conventions, norms, beliefs, ideologies, procedures and practices were well thought of and laid down by our ancestors in various walks of life. Traditions, probably, could have been the outcome of the precepts and practises adopted by our ancestors through a process of community living and by a process of trials and errors encountered by them while leading their life in groups and communities. But these beliefs, procedures and practices were not backed up by any written code in the early stages of human evolution.

Before the advent of human civilisation and till it was bestowed with the facility of noting and recording, these concepts of traditions were orally passed on from generation to generation for millions of years. Then they were inscribed on palm leaves, stones and metals. Gradually when the writing age dawned, all

these concepts began to be incorporated in books. Traditions, beliefs, customs etc. which have withstood the ravages of times are not susceptible to any abnormal or violent changes. Moreover modern technological advancement has hardly had any significant impact on them. But they may differ from one society to another. However certain basic concepts or tenets relating to traditions and customs remain the same even now despite vicissitudes of time and age, different nationalities and countries.

Modern inventions and discoveries have in their wake have not brought out any considerable change in our outlook and tradition. Therefore it looks imperative that modernity does not have any force to change the traditional ethos of the people of the world. It would be an absurd proposition if any one opines that tradition is greatly influenced by the induction of modern concept and inventions. Every country has evolved its own tradition, customs and beliefs and has maintained its distinct culture. Time and age have not diluted the efficacy of tradition and culture. Terms, tradition and heredity are not dissimilar in conception and usage. What is inherited from the past becomes a tradition of the present. Therefore it may not be a fallacy to contend that all the evolved traditions and customs of any society or country are the culmination of the inheritances made from the past.

The most salient feature of any tradition is its social relevance and applicability at any time of human existence. It never becomes obsolete by efflux of time. The culture of any society or country mainly hinges on its precept and practise of traditions evolved since time immemorial. As has been said earlier, beliefs, customs, ideologies, procedures and practices are not normally prone to great and visible changes. Even the growth of civilisation and development of modern technology and science have not brought out any impact and change in the precept and practise of tradition in the diverse activities of human life. However

the style and the mode of life of the people have considerably changed in consonance with the trends caused by modernity.

According to anthropologists, man is a social animal. He can never isolate himself from the society in which he happens to live in. Therefore it becomes compelling on him to live, move and interact with his fellowmen and neighbours of his locality. Naturally he has to bend or submit himself either willingly or unwillingly to the beliefs, customs, procedures and conventions set out by the society.

Tradition may be in any facet of human life, be it art, culture, education, religion, philosophy, science etc. with which the human society is closely associated with. The excellence shown by any country in the tradition bound values and cultural ethos will naturally command the attention and appreciation of other countries.

Followers and believers of tradition want to preserve continuity with the past and so tend to resist change. The positive value of this loyalty subsists among them even if they are easily blown in every direction by changing fashions, concepts, styles and views in any discipline, be it religion, art, architecture, philosophy etc. They can be counted to evaluate carefully new concepts and ideas in any human discipline. This is an important safeguard when the standard of human values are in the declining trends, though the tradition believers and followers are usually quick to assume that they are. The hazard of this approach is that it gathers round it other forces of conservatism which have no necessary connection with the purpose of their ideology and doctrines.

Modernists will welcome change and in the time of social and national upheavals, their leadership can harness the forces of change to give clear goals and purposes. The systematic or organic approach is to make a provision for continuous adaptation or change. This style is one of the evolutionary process as opposed to the charismatic one of revolution. There are two significant factors for giving impetus to change the purpose of life and state of society around. As people grow

older, they tend to find changes more difficult barring some personalities of all times who would prefer or opt for change. The elderly people get absolutely bewildered and disoriented. They find it difficult to adapt themselves to the changing environments and situations.

We are living in an age of phenomenal and accelerated change. Champions of the concept of modernity will often be faced with older generation who have problems in adapting to change and a younger generation who are pressing for it, they need to help each other and to understand the view points of others. In addition to factors of age, personality and social upheaval, there may be an underlying insecurity or other psychological factors behind resistance to change. Change may entail confrontation and conflict. The wise way would be to follow a via media policy to the changing trends of morals, traditions and conventions.

The present is a transition period which an average Indian does not know to cope with. "Programmes of Development" can and do result in upsets, confusion worst confounded, as seen in many countries of the world. Therefore a degree of harmonisation is felt imminent. Traditions cannot be said to have a mythical stature. Whatever there is coercion in terms of values or simply technology, there will be disaster and chaos. But whenever the utility value of either tradition or modernisation is taken up with utmost understanding and sensitivity, it results in mastery and control over the present. The net result is a strengthening of economy and an increase of efficiency.

Parambara or heredity mainly dwells on tradition; but it is a tradition of dissent, of protest and reform. Our saints and philosophers had understood that our holy treatise and scriptures have to be communicated to the common masses, as they cannot understand them of their own accord and hence they must have a symbiotic relationship with the people. More than a total dedication to the will of God, they looked to overcoming social pressures. We all need encouragement to develop the strong points and overcome the weak ones.

Modern civilization is now facing a crisis. The nations who are in the vanguard of this civilisation are assiduously applying their wonderful scientific knowledge to make worldly life more and more glorious and happy. The triumphs of technology have been marvellous and spectacular. New realms of knowledge are being unfolded day by day, but there is no peace or happiness. The secret of happiness is even a sealed book to the masters of science. The prime reason for lack of peace, happiness and mental tranquility amongst us is due to lack of faith and conviction in the ethics, morals and traditions inextricably imbedded with our Indian culture.

A solution to our present day problems can be found only if we can derive the necessary moral strength from our cultural traditions and heritage which is second to none in the history of mankind. Our ancestors had

gone through various stages of development and have left us an imperishable treasure house of lofty traditions, practices, customs, literature, arts, science and philosophy.

The values of tradition are recaptured for each generation by a subtle process of reinterpretation, reintegration and adaptation. When the traditions are living, the promising young man and woman of the generation receive the impact of its fundamental values. The sensitive and vigorous among them become each a human laboratory, which purifies the fundamental values relating them afresh to the central idea, stimulates them to meet the needs of the times, reintegrates the subsidiary values with the fresh vigour of the new interpretation and shapes the traditions and institutions not only without impairing the strength of the collective will but also by giving it a new edge.

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