

Cultural Conflict in Modern India.

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Sociology, as any other science, has been defined in various ways. The definitions alone, given by leading sociologists, would fill many pages. But I think the best way to define our subject would be to take a group of people, a community, or a nation, study its social life in all its manifold aspects and then distil out of the materials thus presented a definition of sociology. We shall take the example of contemporary India, make a general survey of the totality of her life, of her entire culture-complex and then define our subject at the end.

By culture we mean something more than what Matthew Arnold meant, "the study of perfection, the disinterested search for sweetness and light", which consists "in becoming something, rather than in having something, in inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in outward set of circumstances". Culture, in sociological parlance, means, as Tyler defined it, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." By culture, we mean the totality of group-life, both in its objective as well as subjective aspects. Culture is the tool-making, institution-making, value-making ability of man. Culture is a human product;

no species of animals is known to have culture in this sense.

Now, two types of cultures with vastly different ideologies and values have come face to face in India, and are engaged in a deadly combat. India, with her rural, agricultural, handicraft culture, with an integrated view of life, with its emphasis on indefinable, qualitative values, on individual uniqueness, on Dharma, on self-imposed poverty, on social synthesis, on a subjective, broad-based nationalism, on man and not the machinery of the government, on a life of religious experience and unfoldment, is confronted by a culture that stands for science and machine, for an urbanised, industrialized order, for an analytical view of life with its emphasis on neuroses and complexes, for mass-production, for quantitative values, for struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, for accumulation of wealth and economic imperialism, for assertive, arrogant nationalism, for democracy and dictatorship, for religion of scientific humanism and rationalism. India has sought the vision of the Whole, not of the parts; she has been interested in living not merely in the means of life. She has combined philosophic contemplation with action; she has stood for beauty and dignity, not

mere utility. But, today, the culture of science and machine has taken a firm grip of India and is slowly seeping into her soul.*

This conflict of cultures, this process of acculturation, is producing a considerable amount of social disorganization. Let us take an example. When the steam-engine, material trait of culture of the West, came to India, it not only served to knit the various geographical regions into an organic whole, but also affected our social attitudes and organization. It struck a death-blow at our caste-system. All castes, high and low, began rubbing shoulders at the railway station and in the train compartment. The process of communication became accelerated, and social distance between various communities and groups of people, artificially maintained by tradition and custom, began to take wing. Our static society began to yield before the machine of the West. The caste-system began to run away on the wheels of the train, the street-car and the automobile. Communication is the heart and soul of all social and cultural change, as Professor Cooley pointed out many years ago.

India's life has gone through a considerable transformation during the last hundred years or so. The culture of science and machine has

* A fuller analysis of the two cultures is given in the writer's forthcoming book, "India: A Conflict of Cultures."

come to us, with all its products and social processes. Cheap Manchester fabrics and prints ousted the village weaver, and now Manchester itself is ousted by the Indian Manchesters of Ahmedabad, Bombay and Madras. Village sugar industry was crushed out by imported sugar; that, in its turn, is replaced by indigenous sugar industry, with enormous capital invested in it. The American oil replaced oil from the hand-press of the village. Village pottery and brass-ware have yielded their place to aluminium and enamelled iron-ware of local and foreign makes. Every industry of the village has been affected. Mechanized, large-scale agriculture is beginning to make its appearance and the signs of its displacing the peasant are on the horizon. The village smithy is being replaced by the modern repair shop. The village craftsmen are leaving their hereditary occupations on account of foreign competition. There is migration of labour to the cities. The railways have destroyed the economic self-sufficiency of the village. The old system of barter and payment of wages in kind has given place to money-economy. The village, which has been the basic unit of our culture, is in ruins, and unemployment is rising everyday.

The city has prospered at the cost of village. Our cities are growing in number and size. They combine financial, educational and industrial functions, as do the cities of the West. The mill-centres, the engineering workshops, the leather

factories, the jute mills, these and other specialized centres of industry are rising in India very rapidly. The machine has raised its mausoleums of coal, smoke, iron and steam, of dirt, squalor and over-crowding; of coolie-lines and human ware-houses, in India also. The voluntary, spiritual co-operative communism in which all groups worked together for the welfare of whole village, has disappeared, and India is today being broken up into two camps, arrayed against each other: capital and labour. Look where we will, we meet with this one problem in one form or another. The big landlord, the zemindar, the petty Rajah, the industrialist or the capitalist on one side, and the hari, the peasant, the kisan, the jat, the wage-earner on the other. Strikes, lock-outs and sabotage are as common here as in the industrialized West. Conflict, not co-operation, is the pattern of our economic life today. India is fast being dominated by Marxian philosophy of class struggle. The capitalistic class is undoubtedly a formidable group already opposed to the interests of labour. Some of the legislation of socialistic hue, rushed through the various provinces, and the amount of opposition it has given rise to, bears testimony to the extent to which class conflict has gone in India. Industrialism, capitalism, class-war, this is the natural sequence. Once science and machine have gained admission into a nation, they must move on in their relentless course. There is no retreat, no matter

however much that nation may shut its eyes. More science and more machinery, both yoked to the nation's welfare, is the only sane attitude.

Another very powerful factor, contributing to our general disorganization, is the rapid increase in our population. Our population has doubled during the last hundred years or so, and if the statistics may be relied upon, it may be double of what it is at present by the close of the present century. The life expectancy is very poor. The average in India is 25 years, while it is 55 years in the U. S. A. and 58 in New Zealand. The average stature and weight of an Indian is decreasing. The average cultivated land is less than an acre per individual in India, while it is 2.3 acres even in Britain. Such a great pressure of population on land must mean a steady decline in fertility of the soil as well as low standard of living. The vital statistics of our nation reveal some appalling tendencies. But we still continue to multiply indiscriminately and export our surplus population abroad, creating thereby serious international complication.

With the rural life uprooted and the land-man ratio upset, struggle for existence must become keener. Science and machine, in their present uncontrolled state, are no friends of the family institution. They are dealing sledge-hammer blows to the sanctity of marriage wherever they have gone. Divorce and abortion put in their appearance, and woman clamours for rights. The modern

movie, a new contraption of science and machine, takes a hand in the game and puts virtue on the defence. Under such circumstances, the woman of a mechanized India will be a replica of her sister of the West. Cinema actresses of Hollywood and Gaumont brand will soon replace Sāvitrī and Sītā. Glamour so graphically depicted on the screen and the seductive arts so well portrayed on the stage must mean a good-bye to modesty that has characterized India's womanhood. The joint family system is breaking up, as it broke up in Europe with the advent of industrial civilization. Family, like the village, is a group of primary contacts. An individual finds his place, his *locus standi*, there and becomes a person. Torn from the moorings of these primary groups, he becomes a physical and spiritual nomad. Walking, cycling, motoring round the world, are all signs of restlessness in a mechanized order of life. Fantastic experiments in marriage,* disintegration of joint family, increase in divorce, abortion, all have their roots in machine and science.

Social diseases, which came to us from the West, are now no longer confined to sea-ports and large cities, but are invading our rural regions as well. The health and vitality of

* See an essay on companionate marriage in India, submitted by a student as his thesis for M. A. degree in the Department of Sociology in the University of Bombay.

our nation are at a very low ebb. Fortunately, we are just waking up to the greater value of our indigenous systems of medicine which are comparatively more efficacious and economical than those of the West. But the day is still far off when every man, woman and child in need of medical attention will get it. Cancer, known to be the disease of civilization, is beginning to be common in India. Malaria, plague, cholera and Kala-azar, though partially controlled, still claim a heavy toll of mortality. Artificial rejuvenation is beginning to be quite common in India.

Movie-houses multiply by the dozen in large cities, and the travelling picture-shows are invading our rural life. The Rāsa-līlā is fast being forgotten. Our people witness the movies screened in India or abroad, but they are cast in alien spirit; and there is an emotional reaction which is not Indian in tone. Everything is being westernized, vulgarized, mechanized. Profit-making motive is taking possession of arts and entertainment. Our daily metropolitan newspapers give more space to sports, games, stocks and shares, races, sex and cinema than to the actual news.

Crime, which is the unfailling index of social disorganization, is on the increase. Train and mail robberies, rape, kidnapping, traffic in women and children, are quite common in India now, and the papers publish the news in flaring headlines. If we read the official reports submitted during the last year by the Inspector-

Generals of Police of the various provinces, we find one and all complaining of the rise in crime. The criminal in India emulates his colleagues of the West whose exploits he sees in the cinema and presses science into service. Hatchets and daggers are fast being replaced by pistols and guns, stolen from the government armouries. It will be quite a different story when the embargo over arms is removed by the government and the volatile temperament of the tropics gets control of them.

Amidst this wide-spread social disorganization, there is very little intelligently organized social welfare work. We have yet to learn how to organize our charities so as to make every rupee go the longest way. Social welfare work is a science, and not mere soft sentimentality.

Our education cannot help representing the success of philosophy of science and machine. In the first place, all our institutions of higher learning, universities and colleges, are situated in cities, creation of machine and science. The success of physical sciences has led to our indiscriminate homage to the philosophy they represent. Consequently, the philosophy of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest has fought its way into our educational theory. There is no adjustment between education and life around us. While unemployment increases, while the village is in the process of disintegration and men herd together in cities in search of work, the universities continue to receive and send out

graduates by the thousand. Meanwhile, the proportion of possible employments to the number of claimants grows narrower, and there is a wide-spread dissatisfaction.

The number of subjects in our universities has certainly been increased; sometimes, one feels that the syllabuses are unnecessarily overburdened. A want of idealism still clings to our educational system. Our students are compelled to develop a mania for success in examination. They want the largest number of marks with the strictest economy of knowledge. Annotations abound. There is a great emphasis on natural sciences, and the social sciences are offered in a truncated manner. There is no binding link between them, they function in isolation and without reference to the realities of larger group life. The younger generation does not leave the halls of learning sufficiently strengthened to adjust itself to the new environment created by machinery and science, and discharge its duties to community on its return to the life of the world. When every boy and girl from the village comes running and seeks admission to the college and the university, the professors must be over-worked. The emphasis is on quantity, all along the line. There can be neither creative study on the part of the students, nor efficient teaching on the part of the teachers. Both must work under pressure and for a set purpose.

The philosophy of machine and science is conflict, and the relationship

between the student and the teacher is based on conflict. The teacher can no longer be considered as one who imparts knowledge and should therefore be revered; and the student is no more a candidate for wisdom. Both become cogs in the machine, the former to earn a living, the latter to pass an examination and get out. Consequently, there is a continuous friction between the teacher and the student. The students have learnt to go on strikes in exactly the same way as the industrial workers do in the mills and the factories. They demand the dismissal of teachers and officials whose lives have been dedicated to India's service for decades. There is not a day that we do not come across a report of school and college strikes or leakage of examination papers, which is another form of sabotage. This is a sad commentary indeed on a country whose educational ideals and institutions have been models for imitation by other civilizations of early times.

The commercialized entertainment, the movie, the radio and the race course surround our young men and women in our cities; it is only natural that there should be a craving for sensation. False ideals of "getting rich quick" dominate the minds of the students, wealth becomes the criterion of appraising the greatness of individuals. The seeds for scramble for worldly goods are sown in the early school and college days of the students. Our younger generation is no longer prepared to accept the social and the religious controls which the

last generation has known, the link with the past is being quickly broken. Sex is already rearing its head and becoming a major problem in our educational institutions. In a situation such as this, it is only natural that our higher educational system should come in for a good deal of criticism, and the demand for its over-hauling become insistent.

When we come to view India's political scene, the effects of conflict with the western culture assume alarming proportions. Democracy, a child of science and machine, is being transplanted in India, with all its appalling futilities. We, like the West, are beginning to believe in the hallucination of numbers. We must have large electorates, legislatures with large numbers of representatives, whether these representatives attend the sessions regularly, look upon their tasks as grave responsibilities, and whether they have the brains to fully understand and appreciate the significance of the complex problems of a changing social order or not, is another matter. We judge the strength of our political organizations by their size. Quantity reigns supreme; quality is at a discount. It is the mob psychology that prevails. Those who wear a particular kind of headgear or have been to jail for a few months, have earned the right to sit in the deliberative bodies of a nation that places one Brahman, one man of wisdom, above the heads of "the madding crowd". Our National Congress has a tremendous task before it if it only realized its significance.

The modern technique of propaganda is throwing up into lime light a new type of leader, who is very much like the political boss of the West. With the printing press and the platform at his disposal, he exploits the enthusiasm of the masses under the cloak of patriotism. Self-interest, not service of the people, is what counts. We have developed a plethora of parties, in one province alone, there are no less than nine. Our politicians are picking up the art of lobbying and jobbery. The capitals, provincial and federal, will soon be peopled by representatives of high-pressure groups who will always want some "protection".

One of the most interesting fields for study of effects of the new culture of machine and science is that of inter-provincial relationships. Fate called India to a synthesis of peoples, races, religions, philosophies. People moved freely from province to province, made their residences far away from their homes. This free mingling of people was further augmented by railways and other mechanical devices of the machine-culture. But by a curious twist in our psychology, we have become victims of petty provincialism, division, isolation. Our petty provincialism is very much analogous to the aggressive nationalism of the Western nations, some of which are smaller than our districts. If the Congress High Command has been compelled to accept this balkanization of India, it is because the philosophy of conflict and self-interest has come to stay with us. We are subverting the processes of history, and with our limited vision,

we are segregating people into their respective provinces. The Provincial Public Service Commissions advertise widely for applications for Government posts, but they don't fail to make it clear that only the residents of the province need apply! We are sacrificing talent for the sake of provincial preferences and nepotism. But when viewed as processes of social life, they are exactly the same as those national hatreds that have made Europe a shambles and produced the present holocaust of blood and flames. Only we have no weapons to carry on warfare, but the conflict-patterns, both in India and the West, have a family-likeness. To look upon India as a part of the world and envisage her problems from national and international points of view is something very much different from thinking of it in terms of a community, a party and a province. That way lies death. The nemesis that has overtaken the West will be India's fate. Mobility, spatial and social, that is, migration of people from one province to another and along the sliding scale of social hierarchy, is one of the most vital elements of social progress.

The philosophy of rights, aggressive and assertive, is a creation of mechanical civilization. The possessors and the dispossessed are always engaged in a mutual war. We, in India, are immortalizing these legal fictions in our Constitutions. Duty, Dharma, an intelligent adaptation to environment, with one's feet firmly fixed in the eternal verities, finds no place in our life. Our future generations, drilled in these dogmas

of rights and privileges, in this philosophy of success at the cost of the other fellow, will rush at each other's throats, as will these provinces fight with each other. The repetition of Europe's history, in a slightly different form, is not a remote possibility in India. No matter how stable our political organizations and party programs, the process of national disintegration can slip through and clutch at our very souls. The present struggle between the Indian National Congress and the States gives us a foretaste of what can come in the near future.

How can any higher feelings or spiritual values supervene when the educational institutions give no attention to the problem, when social, economic and political institutions and ideologies are based on conflict? Religion which smoothens social life, helps the individual to find his niche in the social cosmos and fulfil his Dharma, which imparts enthusiasm to his efforts for service of fellowmen, which softens the blows of fate, enriches and expands his inner life and sustains him in his sorrow, that religion has no place in a mechanical *milieu*. Money-making becomes the *summum bonum* of life, people are all the time goaded on to success. The sources of friction, however trivial, between the two major communities of India, begin to multiply, and there is a continuous fear of a general disruption. Separation, Pakistan, is only an echo of the provincial balkanization sanctified by the National Congress. They are all phases of the machine-mind. We are in danger of

accepting a materialistic philosophy of life and a rationalistic religion of the same type and on the same scale as the West. The modern barbarian has his habitat here as in any other part of the world. Evidences of a new materialism in India are not wanting.

The present social disorganization that we are witnessing in India is born of conflict of two cultures and has to be intelligently understood and controlled. But how are we to do it?

Our first task would naturally be to understand the history, evolution and functioning of these two types of cultures. We must get a clear grasp of the underlying social processes that eventually incarnated into these two cultural patterns or configurations. We shall have to begin with the study of the relationship between the organic and the inorganic environments and their relationship to and effect on man and his group life. Next would come the cultural history of the people, their ways of thinking and acting, their folkways and *mores*. We would then have to close in and concentrate our attention on man, his original nature, his biological endowments, the human nature acquired through the process of interaction between him and society, on the development of his social attitudes and ideas, on the processes of competition, conflict, accommodation, and final assimilation into the social order, on the mechanisms of social control by means of which society controls the centrifugal tendencies of its members, on the collective behaviour of people, men in

mass. The problems of population, both in the quantitative and qualitative aspects, the standards of living, are significant aspects of social life. The techniques of propaganda and the formation of public opinion, would form another branch of study. Social mobility, both horizontal and vertical, that is, from one calling to another and along the sliding scale of social hierarchy, would give us a clue to the dynamics of the social order. The major social institutions, such as education, marriage, family, economics, politics, religion, arts and sciences, their evolution and adaptation to the changing order, and the process of their maladjustment or atrophy, would give an idea of the direction in which the social life of the people is moving. Further, we would study the two types of communities, the rural and the urban, in which people live, their effects on man and the trend of civilization. An interesting phase of study would be that of social change, evolutionary or sudden, the anatomy of revolution, the problem of social disorganization, the techniques of social repairs, and social reconstruction.

Finally, we would have to face the problem of values, and answer the question whether there is such a process as social progress, consciously willed and planned, or whether human life must drift along like an uncontrolled boat on an uncharted sea. If we attempted this procedure of understanding life of any group or nation, we would be studying Sociology.

We have a long road to travel and the sooner we begin the better. India's method of social adjustment and reconstruction has a world-wide significance. Civilization is still in the making, and the whole world is looking toward India for guidance. The world is interested in seeing how India will carry herself through this cultural assault. If our educational institutions set their hands to the task, study and understand the trend of India's destiny and the place she occupies in the economy of the world, then every moment will be considered as sacred. The foundations of India's new cultural synthesis must be laid in the universities. For this mighty and majestic task, the study of Sociology is indispensable.

The Problem of Life.

Our life is but a moment's wakeful slumber,
From eternal sleep.
A life-like dream in Dream itself. Remember,
All the while Asleep.

—V. Sundaram.
