

ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY TO MODERN MASS SOCIETY

This paper is confined to Indian, more specifically Hindu, society. It tries to assess the process of change going on in this society from the point of view of new needs and old values. In doing so, it draws on an unscholarly but inside acquaintance with the situation and makes no claim to completeness either of analysis or treatment.

I. THE SETTING

I happen to be writing this from the campus of the University of Poona which only twelve years ago was the summer residence of the Governor of Bombay. Shortly after Independence, the Governor made over his imposing residence and spacious lawns to the University. Today, masons and professors are still busy adding new wings to it. Seen from here, there is much evidence of the change that is taking place in India. Within a short distance is the National Chemical Laboratory, one of a series of well-equipped

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

scientific institutions which the Indian Government has established in different parts of the country. The results of its applied research are available to all industry, not least to some of the big industries in the capital city of Bombay. Across the railway line and along the road, as indeed all round Poona, there are big and small structures, few of them more than ten years old, in which small and medium entrepreneurs are busy manufacturing all manner of things from nuts and bolts to tractors and oil engines. At the foot of the hill, a Polytechnic Institute is being built; it will train the foremen and technicians so badly needed today. By its side is an Electric Sub-station; and midway up the hill is a temple of the Mother Goddess. The Sub-station transmits insufficient electricity to the suburbs and nearby villages. The temple is old, but the very large number of people who go to it is, I am told, a new phenomenon. That this number is on the increase may well betoken improvement not in religion but in transport.

The last time I visited the temple was with a Vice-President of the World Bank. There was an important fair connected with it and the hillside was studded with stalls and booths. The Vice-President wanted to get the feel of the populace in holiday mood. They seemed to him vital and, considering their poverty, inexplicably gay. The World Bank was not unconnected with the Sub-station. For it was financing the Koyna Hydro-Electric Project, one of the biggest under the Second Five Year Plan, which today engineers of the Bombay State are working overtime to complete. In a year or two there will be sufficient electricity for all important towns around here. But will there be enough for the farmers and artisans in villages who want to pump water to their fields or weave cloth on power-looms? I accompanied the Vice-President over a two-hundred mile route through the Southern Maharashtra country. Everywhere the villagers and small industrialists said to him, "You have lent money to our Government for the Koyna Project. Please also give them enough for a transmission line which will bring electricity to *us*."

To go back to the temple. The farmers of even quite distant villages, including those who asked for electricity, trek here with their wives and children, or travel in bullock carts, on days of special holiness or festivity. But in Poona itself the worshippers are drawn from all classes. They come on bicycles, in cars and on

buses; give coins to the beggars who line up at the temple; and lay flowers and fruits before the Mother Goddess. Some of them know English. But most of them do not.

Something rather different happens in a Mandir Hall of Worship—built only two years ago, a stone's throw from the hill and overlooked by the temple. The Mandir is built in simple style and is like any other house in the locality. Indeed it is lived in by the disciple of a departed sage. Himself now a teacher, he conducts evening worship for a rapidly increasing circle of men and women whose interest ranges from spiritual discipline to intellectual curiosity. What distinguishes them from the congregation at the temple is that every one who comes here knows English. The talk itself is in very good English. It is on the Gita and is interspersed with Sanskrit verses and phrases. The Guru is also a musician of some note. He illustrates his lectures by snatches of Bengali song from Ramprasad and Tagore. The audience joins in devotional songs in Hindi and Marathi at the end of the discourse when "Arati" or lighted camphor is waved before the image of Krishna. Among the devotees are Sindhis, Punjabis, Maharashtrians, Kannadigas, Bengalis and Tamilians: for Poona offers many more job opportunities than in the past and to this as to other important cities, people come from all over India to seek those opportunities.

Somewhere between the Mandir and the temple is a cooperative housing colony for Harijans (untouchables) who work as labourers in and around Poona. The Municipal Corporation is alive to social obligations. It made available the site for the Harijans—a few of them, so few as to be merely token—and gave them other facilities for building the neat little group of houses in which they now live. Just across the road is another housing colony, but there is no comparison between the two, for the latter belongs to people who retired from senior Government jobs, military and civil. In no village would such proximity have been possible between high caste and Harijan. Poona is a city and, therefore, different.

Last, there is an adjoining site on which a building is yet to come up. It will house a college for Co-operative Training. For a whole range of activity in rural areas—credit marketing, processing and so forth—is to be organised on a co-operative basis. This is an important part of the Plan. Personnel must be trained, and the senior ones for the whole of India will be trained here.

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

So much for a cross section of the change that may be witnessed in almost any part of India. It is no more than a coincidence that most of the things I have mentioned are situated within a mile or so of the campus of the University of Poona.

II. CHANGE AND NO CHANGE

The change *is* there. With the energies liberated by independence, with the conception of planning translated into five-year plans, with help received from abroad after the war and fortunes made at home during it, Government, businessmen and industrialists alike set to build an impressive structure of industrial production for the country. In agriculture some progress was made but largely by engineers who started building works of irrigation. There had been Indian industrialists of vision like Jamshedji Tata, a pioneer in steel and electricity. After Independence, a number of hydro-electric and thermal projects were planned and today the power generated is 2½ times what it was in 1951. Electric grids span the country and demand outruns the supply. Steel will soon be produced in large quantities at the different steel mills in the establishment of which Germany, Britain and Russia have helped. Industrial production has increased severalfold in other ways. Thus, chemicals, cement and paper are more than two times, sugar just under two times, and machine tools and other engineering parts as many as three times their level of production only nine years ago, i.e. at the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan. There is an unmistakable air of prosperity among industrial workers and generally in towns and cities. In the country-side too, where irrigation is available, or cash crops are grown, or the food crops are surplus to requirements, there is agricultural prosperity. The cultivator, especially the one who owns more than just a few acres of land, is, on the whole, better off than in the past.

Nor is the progress merely quantitative. Industries have shown that they can adapt themselves to new technical and managerial techniques at all levels. Skilled workers in factories and workshops have surprised competent observers by the degree of craftsmanship which they have acquired within a short period in lines with which they were unfamiliar only a few years ago. Nor does this apply to the bigger industrial units only—textile, engineering or chemical—but to numerous medium and small concerns which

are rapidly being set up all over the country. One may visit any exhibition of small industries in any part of India and be amazed at the number of small manufacturers working with improvised equipment who have produced marketable goods, some of which are finding markets outside the country. Educated young men, as well as the older ones, who had previously worked with British businessmen and manufacturers, have proved themselves fit to occupy posts of managerial and administrative responsibility. In the State-managed departments and institutions, including corporations which are in charge of the manufacture of aircraft, machine tools, electrical goods and so forth, officials have not been wanting who have the highest capacity for planning, execution and management. It might seem that here is a traditional society which, given the opportunity, has not only seized it but has made a success of adapting its own ways of life to the requirements of a modern industrial context.

And yet in a sense the change is *not* there. The old ways persist and there is considerable maladjustment, perhaps best illustrated by comparison between the urban and rural sectors. In the half a million villages of India live 80 per cent of its people. Nearly all of them, as also a portion of the townfolk, make their living from the produce of the land and things made out of that produce. Half the national income is derived from agriculture. Yet, even a cursory visit to the villages will reveal that the prosperity of a few is deceptive if it is equated with the even reasonable well-being of all. Where disparities existed, they have remained. The inequalities of caste persist. The abolition of untouchability is statutory, not actual. It is easy enough for a Government or a Local Authority to make an impressive gesture here and there and provide houses for a few Harijan families. It is quite a different matter to ensure in practice that sections of the population who have for centuries been denied the bare necessities of life are rehabilitated socially and economically. There is no reason to think that the under-privileged have benefited to any appreciable extent. Indeed, a truer picture of reality can be had in the result of a recent investigation in the Bombay State which showed that out of 70 villages surveyed, in not even one had the Harijans been allowed to take water from the common well. Community development and National Extension have been responsible for some good

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

work, but recent evaluation report emphasizes the fact that in some parts of the country the benefits offered have passed to the more powerful sections of the community and where this has happened the rich have tended to become richer while the poor have remained more or less where they were. A more telling set of facts emerges from a survey of Rural Credit which was made some years ago. Co-operative Credit societies had been established at the beginning of the century. The movement progressed. The number of societies grew steadily and in order to finance them banks were set up at district headquarters and at the capitals of the States. Members were everywhere encouraged to come together and guarantee one another's liabilities on lines which Raiffeisen had found suitable for the Germany of the early 19th century. There was much administration and supervision which, while indifferent in some States, was competent in others. Nevertheless, the survey revealed that for India as a whole, the total loans which co-operatives gave to the farmers were 3 per cent of the total borrowings from all sources. Indeed some 80 per cent of the finances still came from moneylender, trader and landlord. Investigating the reasons, the Committee came to an interesting conclusion about the social economic structure of rural India. They said in effect that two major factors, one the operation of a colonial economy for 150 years, and the second the implications of the centuries-old institution of caste had so affected this structure that the weak had become very weak and, in comparison, the strong, very strong. In their words, "the failure of co-operative credit is explicable in terms of the total impracticability of any attempt to combine the very weak in competition with the very strong and expect them by themselves to create conditions, firstly for their emancipation from the interests which oppose them, and secondly for their social and economic development in the context of the severe disadvantages historically imposed on them by a structure of the type described. The problem is not so much one of reorganisation of co-operative credit as of the creation of new conditions in which it can operate effectively and for the benefit of the weaker."

III. COLONIAL ECONOMY AND ITS EFFECTS

What, it may be asked, is the exact relevance of a colonial economy in this context? In reply, I will quote from the same report of the All-India Rural Credit Survey.¹ I make no apology for giving a rather extensive quotation, for it constitutes at the same time a concise statement of an aspect which is not readily recognised:

In India today there is an aggregate of private financial power, which in point of location is largely urban and—what is more important—in point of bias, that is to say, of the practices, attitudes, preferences and interests of the individuals and institutions who share the power, is almost wholly urban-minded. In appreciable degree, this may be regarded as the heritage of a colonial economy, which, seated in the bigger ports and cities, drew to itself for export abroad the raw materials—the “cash crops”—of the rural area, and which, in that process, signified also the advent of the cash economy to the country-side; certainly, in the details of its interpenetration from city to town and from town to village and in its main ramifications in the rural area it drew sustenance from the hoary inequities of caste and class and privilege. The cash economy brought with it changes which had inevitably to come to the rural area; for, the advent of the economy itself—irrespective of the historical accident of its colonial origin in this country—was inescapable in the conditions of the modern world. Money and the use of money assumed much larger significance than before even in those “subsistence” areas, usually also the remoter rural areas, where payments and transactions in kind, including a residual extent of barter, were significantly prevalent. As a rule, however, the powerful interests of export succeeded in imposing the cash economy only within the periphery of their own transactions with the rural economy. In the cities and towns grew up bodies which were ancillary to the main institutions of export trade and finance.

These subsidiary elements consisted of banks, firms, trading houses and individuals—agents, financiers, etc.—representing the indigenous interests which found it profitable to work for or in conjunction with the more powerful foreign institutions, into many of which, indeed, they later found entry and which in some instances they even replaced. Lower down in the rural area was the village moneylender and the village trader, often the same individual, as well as the small-town moneylender and the small-town trader or commission agent, again often the same individual, who also aligned themselves to, for indeed they were the necessary instruments of, the new economic system which rapidly invaded the old. Where there was self-sufficiency before, these forces of commercialization worked for the larger production and outflow of the particular commodities—cotton, jute, etc.—which were originally needed for export to the big manufacturing centres abroad and at a later stage for the urban industries which had meanwhile grown up within the country itself. Large tract of the country retained their character as food crop or subsistence economies. But they too were affected in varying degrees

¹ P. 274-275 of the General Report, 1954 (published by the Reserve Bank of India).

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

by the new cash needs imposed on them through the gradual disruption of the older self-sufficiency. At the same time, the banking institutions of the commercialized economy were little interested in these areas, and in them the moneylender, as distinguished from the trader in cash crops, assumed greater power and importance than elsewhere. In its industrial aspect, rural self-sufficiency had been affected even earlier, since, for one thing, the products of cottage industries had to compete with those of organized industry, foreign and indigenous. The reaction of those who sought to advocate a return to the old order was wholly unrealistic. Much more to the point would have been a planned and determined attempt on the part of the State to minimize the socio-economic effects of the new and inevitable forces on the millions of people adversely affected by an unplanned transition from one order to another.

Elsewhere, discussing the same subject of the relative failure of co-operative credit in India, the Committee adds:

The main causes are much deeper. They are largely socio-economic in character and are relatable to certain fundamental weaknesses which have developed in the rural structure. Some of the factors making for weakness, such as caste, have always been there; some of the weaknesses are inherent in most agricultural economies, especially those which consist of small units of operation together covering a vast area; but the features most significant in this context are those which have emerged from the combined impact of commercial colonialism, industrialization and urbanization on these pre-existing conditions. As a result of all the three has been imposed for nearly one hundred years, a powerful, urban and highly monetized economy on a rural structure which had economically been self-sufficient and which socially continued to be based on caste. In its origin, the monetized economy was associated with colonial commerce; the latter was supported by colonial rule and administration; with such commerce and administration were associated big financial institutions such as banks and trading houses. In its development, this monetized economy derived strength and support from all these and in particular from the financial institutions which indeed were its accompaniment. The colonial rule underwent transformations; it became more and more beneficent in its objectives as well as more and more democratic in its character, till finally it gave place to full independence and democracy. However, the financial institutions associated with it or growing under its auspices have in character and functioning remained substantially unaltered. In their effect on the rural economy, in their relations to it and in their attitudes towards its real interests, there has been little change of any significance in the powerful institutions of industry, trade and finance.

IV. CASTE AND THE RURAL STRUCTURE

In the social and economic structure of the village, caste has a most important part to play. The village is by no means the homogeneous entity which it is sometimes imagined to be. It has classes as well as castes. It has the landed and the landless; the

rentier, the tenant and the labourer; the cultivator and the artisan; the petty official, the moneylender and the trader. Quite often the landless and the labourer are one caste, the landlord and the moneylender another and so on. Class, caste and occupation are usually interrelated. The economic and administrative implications of all this is brought out in the following passage from the report of the Rural Credit Survey:

It is not only the urban-induced power of the private moneylender and the private trader that affects the success of co-operatives when it manifests itself either inside or outside the society. Affinity is not confined to these two; it extends to the leadership in the village, whether this is based on property or derived from connection with the administration. The bigger landlord has ways which conform with those of the moneylender, and indeed, as we have said, he is often the moneylender or trader himself. The village headman is also drawn from the same class, and it is usual for these to have connections which link them not only to the sources of finance but to the seats of administrative power. ...Acting in concert with these (the more powerful elements in the village), the subordinate official, whose functions take him to the village, creates for the benefit of the superior officers what might be called the illusion of implementation woven round the reality of non compliance. Several factors in the village help to create this effect, not least among them the powerful influence of caste. If the leader is of a particular caste, it is unusual for others of the same caste in the village to report to superior authority that things are otherwise than as reported by the leader and the subordinate official. This marked tendency towards the promotion of an impression of change around changelessness, of active obedience to behests around stolid resistance to instructions, which only the most persistent and detailed supervision from above can check, has always to be taken into account in assessing the worth of reports that the policies of Government have been put into operation in the village.The *status quo* and the non-compliance are often achieved conjointly and at great effort by the leading elements in the village and the subordinate agencies of Government. The balance attained may be the result of some completely new alignment of forces, of some new distribution of perquisites or of some new passing of "consideration." The persons who suffer in this process are the weaker and disadvantaged elements of the village for whose benefit the directives and policies are conceived. Among the combinations of factors which thus operate against the interests of the bulk of those who reside in the village is the rigidity of caste feeling in conjunction with the power derived from money, land, leadership, and above all the affiliation with the superior forces of urban economy. The rigidity of caste loyalty remains, while the original division of caste functions no longer does. The result is that the landlord who may also be moneylender, the moneylender who may also be trader and the educated person who may also be subordinate official, all these through their association with the outside urban world of finance and power wield an influence in the village which at many points is diverted from the good of the village to the benefit of the caste or even of a close circle of relatives.

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

I may perhaps add a couple of quotations, one from "Ambassador's Report" by Mr. Chester Bowles and the other from the unofficial report of an experienced social investigator:

In general, tenancy regulations are unworkable because the landlord is still left in a powerful position. Often he is the only literate man in the village. In the Punjab, where tenants who have tilled a certain plot for five years were finally given permanent tenure, I have been in villages where the records show that no tenant has tilled the same piece of land for more than two or three years! The village head and his associates, who owned most of the land, were able to juggle the books because he alone knew how to read them.²

The existing rigid social, stratification should not be forgotten. For centuries, land-owners and tenants may live nearby but have no close intimacy for sympathetic understanding of their day-to-day needs. Nearness alone does not impart mutual knowledge. Again, close contacts among castes create an affinity which cuts across cooperative loyalties ...Backward communities are tied to their old-world ceremonies, priests and caste rules. Their range of contacts is little. They are less susceptible to new ideas. They have little desire to improve their standard of life.³

V. CASTE IN THE TRADITIONAL FRAMEWORK

It is no part of my task to explain, justify or condemn caste. While its persistence, rigidity and ubiquity make the institution peculiar to India, comparable divisions of society are, of course, not unknown in other countries, especially of the East. The divisions are hereditary, often specialise in some one occupation, and rarely marry outside the group. What distinguishes India is that *all* society can be so divided, that the divisions are numerous and that in origin at any rate, if not in present operation, they can be fitted into one integrated framework which is at once social, religious and traditional. It is these divisions or "sub-castes" which should be studied in the context of a transition from one set of social purposes and objectives to another. The study would be fascinating. It would include an examination of the loyalties within each sub-caste, the loyalties between sub-castes, in either case the duties and obligations involved and the sanctions behind them, and finally the forces—religious, social and economic—which fasten groups and individuals to, or on occasion loosen

² P. 195 of "Ambassador's Report".

³ Quoted from the late Mr. K. G. Sivaswamy on page 55 of the General Report of the All-India Rural Credit Survey.

them from, their special compartments in the framework as a whole. All I can do here is to pick up a few strands and instances and illustrate my meaning.

According to one estimate there are (or at one stage were) some 3,000 sub-castes in India. Each of them is an endogamous group with prohibitions not only against inter-marriage (strictly), but also against inter-dining (not so strictly) with members of other groups. These in a sense are the real castes, for their classification into the four main occupational groups of Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaishya (merchant) and Sudra (worker) is more a logical than a sociological categorisation. But taking the bigger group, say Brahmin, not in terms of India—but of a region in which one common language is spoken, the subdivision into smaller endogamous groups or sub-castes is along three specific lines; first sectarian, second territorial and third occupational. We may consider the concrete instance of the Andhra Brahmin, who belongs to the Telugu-speaking State called Andhra Pradesh. There is first a two-fold sectarian division into Vaishnavites and Smarthas, that is broadly speaking, worshippers of Vishnu and Siva respectively. Each of these can then be sub-divided in accordance with the territory of origin. Thus the “Venginadus” among Smarthas claim to have migrated from the Vengi country in the State, whereas the “Telaganyas” give their original home as the Trilangam country in the same State, and so forth. Each of these, in turn, may be classed as either “Vaidikis” (i.e. priests, the word itself being derived from “veda”), or “Niyogis” (i.e. those who pursue secular professions, being village accountants, revenue officials, etc.). The final sub-caste may thus consist of all those Telugu-speaking Brahmins whose ancestors were priests (occupational), came from Vengi (territorial), and were worshippers of Siva (sectarian). The attributes thus belong to one’s ancestors, not necessarily to oneself. Nevertheless, the loyalties which then took shape may continue through generations, diminishing, no doubt, but not quite disappearing, even though one may meanwhile have forgotten one’s place of origin, changed one’s ancestral occupation and long ceased to worship either Vishnu or Siva. My illustration concerns the Brahmin, but similar examples can be cited of Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras.

But is there any underlying principle which broadly integrates the innumerable sub-groups and the four compendious main groups together? There can be no simple answer. Indeed, there must be many answers. But in illustration of one of these I will cite the legend of Kanyaka Parameshwari or the "Girl Goddess". She is the presiding deity of Komatis, that is the Vaishyas (merchants) of Andhra Pradesh. The young girl, so runs the legend, was intensely religious, treated Brahmins with reverence and every one with consideration. She was remarkable in many ways, not least for beauty. The neighbouring king, a Kshatriya called Vishnuvardhana, wanted to marry her and was prepared to enforce his wish by force. She said that she would immolate herself rather than break the integrity of caste. Among the leaders of the Komati community, some actively supported the stand taken by the young girl, some were indifferent, while still others were afraid of the ruler. The legend goes on to say that before she threw herself into the fire Kanyaka Parameshwari divided all Komati families into the existing sub-castes among them. This she did on the basis of those who helped her, those who had remained neutral and those who had been found wanting in courage. She also gave the Komatis a code of conduct defining their duties towards Brahmins, their respect for other communities and finally the rules of behaviour and social intercourse which should govern the sub-groups *inter se*. To this day, the code attributed to this deified young woman, Kanyaka Parameshwari, is held in high esteem by the entire community of Komatis and regulates the conduct of the more orthodox among them.

To complete the picture, one might consider the two begging sub-castes of "Viramushtis" and "Mailaris" who live in the same part of the country. Much lower in the social hierarchy, they are nevertheless attached by tradition in a very special manner to the Komatis. Legend has it that these two sub-castes are descended from the messengers whom Kanyaka Parameshwari sent in protest to the neighbouring Kshatriya ruler. The most interesting fact, however, is that at stated seasons of the year, coinciding with different festivals in honour of the Goddess, people of these begging castes visit the houses of Komatis in different parts of the State, carry images of the Goddess from house to house and sing traditional songs in her praise. Their hereditary function, in other

words, is to keep the memory of the Goddess and, therefore, the essence of the tradition alive in such a manner that not only the educated men of the community, but also the illiterate, the women and the children are periodically reminded of the religious and traditional background.

All this adds up to merely one small instance of a kind which can be multiplied a thousand-fold for different communities in different parts of India. Underlying the relationship between groups and sub-groups, castes and sub-castes, is an integrating principle based on the religion and values of the Hindus. Implicitly, if not explicitly, the social organisation is knitted together for the preservation of these objectives and values. The sanctions are social and religious while the values and the culture are reinforced by song, dance, myth and legend carried to the doors of every individual family within each relevant division of the organisation.

VI. TRADITIONAL VALUES

What are the traditional values which may be regarded as generally and more specifically Hindu? Any attempt to set them out briefly must, of course, involve a large amount of over-simplification. It would also raise the question whether the values are shared by a large number of people, illiterate and educated, rural and urban. It is very necessary to make one clarification at this stage. The values of the religion and philosophy of the Hindus are far from being confined to a small coterie, priestly, learned or other. Mass communication, which I have tried to illustrate by a few examples, has operated through the centuries and throughout the country. Indeed, the illiterate farmer in the village and the uneducated grand-mother in the family often know more about the saints and their deeds, the philosophers and their concepts, than the educated town-dweller or westernised businessman. Few who know India will dispute the statement that some of the most abstruse schools of philosophy such as *advaita* (non-dualism) are by no means unfamiliar ground to the Indian villager. Moreover, whether villager or townsman, the temperament of the Indian has, throughout the ages, responded readily to saintliness of character. This does not, of course, mean that the average Indian is either

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

more spiritual or more ethical than the rest of the world. A man may be no more moral than his neighbour, and indeed may be worse; but when it comes to what moves him most, the answer might be: not a successful businessman, not a great commander, nor even a great politician, but one who has renounced for the sake of helping others. This may be no more than a feature of the temperament, but it is an important feature and has to be taken into account in any assessment of the values held dear by Hindu society as a whole.

The emphasis is first of all on individual liberation (*mukti*). Man is part of the same process as brought forth the universe. Being part of the process he shares in some measure the nature of the creative force behind creation, just as, being part of the result of the process, he partakes of the nature of manifested creation. Far from being a stranger in a world he has not made, he is himself the maker, himself the world. His religion teaches him that progress involves not only a direction but a starting point. His starting point is himself. He is what he is today because of his past. But he is infinitely perfectible and perfection consists in that full development of his spiritual faculties which will make him in some ineffable way once more a part of the creative force of the universe. This is *mukti* which is both his goal and his destiny.

Since the starting point is himself, his religion depends on himself. The approach to progress must be pragmatic. If he is emotional, it will be the way of *bhakti*; if intellectual, the way of *jnana*, and if given to works, the way of *karma*. There is no need to go out and seek a formula of salvation; the sect of religion in which he is born is good enough; all that is necessary is that he practise his particular religion to the utmost.

Since all men will ultimately be liberated, all men are potentially equal. If they start now at different points and have different handicaps, that is the result of the past. It is the past that has determined their caste, their status and their individual equipment, spiritual, moral and intellectual. One must be practical and build upon this the best way one can. Sometimes the developed spirit breaks through all these and a saint manifests himself whatever the caste or the station. But that does not nullify either the fact or the value of the hierarchy of caste.

Dharma, or "duty" as it is loosely translated, has relation both to where one stands in the universe and to the direction in which one has to proceed. It takes into account the total environment of caste, parentage, inner qualities and so on. But it is nevertheless in the final analysis intensely individual. Granted the reality of a spiritual goal, what should one do in a given situation so as to proceed towards and not away from the goal? The milieu and the moment are no less internal than external to man. These being given, what he ought to do constitutes the *dharmā* of the man.

The values which the Hindu must most prize are partly those which go with his station in life, such as courage if a warrior, austerity if a Brahmin and so on. There are others which are universal. Among the most important of these are tolerance, detachment and loving-kindness. Since men are situated differently and are bound to progress differently there must be tolerance for all. One has to act, but the results of action are not important. One must be detached in one's attitude towards results. Since all men are united in origin and united in destination, one must have an attitude of "equal-mindedness" (*samabuddhi*) towards all. This applies not only to human beings but to all living things and indeed to all created things.

Some of the implications of these attitudes, however noble or praiseworthy in themselves, are not difficult to see. The tolerance can become mere passivity: the detachment, indifference; and the loving-kindness, sentimentality. Most important of all, the emphasis on individual development and liberation, coupled with the small group within which social loyalties are exercised, may result in the lack of a social purpose and a social philosophy, as distinguished from the merely religious and ethical. It would seem that at different stages in India's long history something like this has indeed happened. Equality at the philosophical level has not meant social equality, much less the positive aim of readjusting economic inequalities. It is also a comparatively new thing for Indians to think in terms of economic objectives as worthwhile goals in themselves, not only for individuals but for society as a whole. To work with one's hands, to produce, to organise production for the community, to take pride in increase in production, all these are values which are only slowly being adopted.

We have here then the picture of a society hierarchical in

structure. Each part of the structure is fitted into the whole with what would seem an underlying purpose basically connected with the objectives and values of the Hindu religion. The sanctions which preserve the structure and its individual parts are primarily social and religious. It is this structure that has now to be geared to socio-economic values instead of purely religious ones. It is to be actuated by new objectives, hitherto foreign to it, such as individual liberty, economic welfare and social justice. There is no use slurring over the fact that these are indeed new values and objectives for which the historical development of the structure had not prepared it. At the same time, on the credit side, it has to be recognised that the philosophical concepts of the tradition are in no sense and at no point antagonistic to these values. Indeed, in their own plane they may be said to be complementary to the new socio-economic objectives of plenitude and equality.

Another point may be mentioned. Hindu philosophy and religion are uniquely consistent with the most modern trends in science. The Hindu need have no dichotomy of mind, one of blind faith and the other of rational thought. He is brought up to believe that the material and the spiritual grow out of one another and that he himself partakes of the nature of both. There is no specific formula which he is asked to adopt as part of his belief. There is spiritual reality around him even as there is physical reality. It is up to him to understand the laws of both, and in conformity with those laws, strive for self-fulfilment. Since the moral laws of development and the physical laws of process are derived from the same reality, at no point of time can there be an irreconcilable inconsistency between the two. Nor, in a universe so integrated, can one in being true to oneself run the danger of being false to someone else.

But even if one has succeeded in discovering the moral or spiritual laws of individual development (as in the principles of yoga), what about the corresponding laws which govern society? Individual *dharma* may be all right, but in a world of social groups may it not prove to be as notional as a point in three-dimensional geometry? Is there no need in the modern world to pursue the complementary line of enquiry and discipline which concerns social *dharma* and institutional *dharma* as distinguished from individual *dharma*? And if the spiritual world is worthy

of study because the physical world is implicit in it, is not the physical world as worthy of study because the spiritual world is implicit in it? Briefly, the Hindu has yet to realise that the values of his philosophy are in tune with only a part of the infinite and that the parts to which it is yet to be attuned are precisely the ones which the modern mind has most explored and to which modern development is most beholden, namely the relationship between man and the universe which has given rise to the physical sciences, and the relationship between man and men which has given rise to the social sciences.

VII. TRENDS

No one can hope to discern the contours of the future without looking back at the formations of the past. In India's long history there have been rebels against priestly monopoly, reformers of religion and society, and re-interpreters of those values and loyalties which transcend sect, cast and occupation. The greatest of them all was Buddha; but he is only the most outstanding peak of a whole range of heights which never ceases through the centuries down to the present day. The rebels and reformers were at the same time saints or seers or the singers of the glory of God. Most of them attempted to reconcile caste with human brotherhood at the spiritual, emotional or philosophical levels. But there were signal exceptions like Basava (12th century), himself a Brahmin, who hoped to get immediate and practical results. He founded in the South an important sect which disowned the Brahmin. Basava tried to abolish caste through inter-marriage, but found the forces arrayed against him much too strong. In the 14th century Ramananda (North India) sang:

Jati panthi puchchai nahi koi

Hari ko bhaje to Hari ka hoi

(Let no one ask a man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man is devoted to Hari [God] he becomes Hari's own.)

Kabir, the weaver, also of the North, whose songs of the 15th century move men and women throughout India up to this day, said in one of his compositions:

I have forgotten both caste and lineage...

I have given up both the Pandits and the Mullahs...

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

From neither have I received advantage...
My heart being pure, I have seen the Lord :
Kabir having searched and searched himself, hath
found God within him

There may also be cited Sankaradeva, whose work for the re-establishment of the worship of God and affection for all men had a tremendous impact on Assam during the latter part of the 15th and the earlier half of the 16th centuries. Vemana, the Telugu poet of the South, whose poems have passed into proverbs, said in the 16th century :

Food or caste or place of birth
Cannot alter human worth
... ..
Empty is a caste-dispute
All the castes have but one root.⁴

Also in the 16th century lived Eknath of Maharashtra whose practice of the equality of men is remembered today, not only through his songs, but in the many legends handed down about his life. Examples can be multiplied of this philosophical and individual rejection of caste by seers and teachers throughout the centuries. It will suffice to give one more quotation. This is from Narayana Guru of Nerala who died in 1928 and whose teachings and following today constitute one of the strongest ethical forces in that State :

One of kind, one of faith, and one in God is man;
Of one womb, of one form, difference herein none.
... ..
The community of man thus viewed to a single caste belongs.

The trend I have illustrated was not only indigenous, but represented the reaction to something, viz. caste, which was internal to the structure itself. It is necessary to consider another set of reactions namely those which originated in response to the impact of a strong foreign culture, the one which the British brought with them to India in the form of western thought and literature and political forms. Some four or five stages can, I think, be discerned in the reaction of Hindu society to this tremendous

⁴ Gover's translation : "South Indian Folk Songs".

impact. It might seem fanciful, but it was almost as if the awakening took place by degrees and that different centres of the dormant culture came back to awareness one after another.

Chronologically, the influence of the West was first felt in Bengal, for Calcutta was the capital of India and English education on a significant scale, was earlier organised there than elsewhere in the country. To start with, there was complete absorption in the culture of the rulers. Educated Indians adopted and imitated that culture in all its aspects, spiritual, literary and so forth. This soon gave way to a positive reaction against the foreign culture. The first awakening that took place was in what one might describe as the spiritual layer of the country's consciousness. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Devendra Nath Tagore (the Poet's father) and others, exemplified this earliest phase of spiritual awakening of India's self. Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and others, continued and completed the process in later years.

Meanwhile, the second phase of the reaction had already begun. Indians were no longer content to imitate the literary forms of England and write verses and novels in a foreign language. The languages of the people, each of which had a rich heritage behind it, began to assert themselves. The second phase of the reaction was literary. Rabindranath Tagore was a good example of this phase. It must be remembered that he wrote in Bengali and the songs, many of them still untranslated, are sung by villagers in all parts of Bengal.

The third phase was social. Social reform became the slogan of the day. Questions such as caste, untouchability, remarriage of widows, pre-puberty marriage of girls, and so forth, assumed great importance. Educated Indians began to say that they should first reform their own society before entertaining political aspirations for responsible Government. "Should social reform or political reform come first?" was a favourite topic for debate in schools and colleges and the answer usually was "social reform".

The fourth phase of the reaction was definitely political. Tilak, Gandhi, and those who followed, were typical of this phase. Without independence, it was asserted, nothing could be achieved, not even social reform. Indians must be their own masters, and from the self-respect thus created everything else would follow. Yet here again, as particularly under Gandhi, the political struggle

took a uniquely indigenous form, that is to say, a shape that was deliberately moulded after the thoughts and aspirations of Hindus in particular, and Indians generally. Intolerance for the foreign rule was to be combined with tolerance for the foreigner. There was to be neither hatred nor anger against him. Gandhi also insisted on *ahimsa* and non-violence though this was perhaps a Buddhist or Jain idea rather than a specifically Hindu one. The Gita teaches the pursuit of duty without desire for the fruits of action. And, in the Hindu context, this pursuit might well be violent as in the instance of Arjuna himself. It was Jainism and Buddhism that emphasised non-violence as an absolute virtue. Thereafter, the ideal did get interwoven, though the strands still show here and there, into the texture of Hindu thought and belief. Thus it was that Gandhi, deriving inspiration from his own culture and support from Christianity and Tolstoy, put *ahimsa* in the forefront of his political struggle.

The fifth phase commenced some years ago. From the spiritual, the literary, the social and the political, the stage now reached may be described as the awakening of the economic consciousness of the country. War, Independence and Planning, all these have combined to bring it about. More wealth is postulated as the aim, but along with it and not less importantly, better and more equitable distribution of wealth. There is thus for the first time, in India, a recognition of the social and economic objectives of what might be very broadly described as a "welfare state". It is no longer "mukti" or individual salvation which will suffice. The basis is no longer the individual, but the group and the society. The explicit objective is economic good, and no longer—or at any rate not necessarily—spiritual good.

VIII. TRANSITION

This last phase of all, the phase of economic development and equalitarianism, is also the most difficult. It poses issues which India has evaded throughout its long development. It raises problems of production and distribution which, for the time being at any rate, are more exigent in India's villages than in its cities and town. The production of more wealth is easy enough when it takes the form of a textile mill or a steel mill or even constructing

a big irrigation dam or a hydro-electric project. If sufficient initial help is forthcoming from abroad, in machinery mainly, and skills secondarily, India can take all this and much more in its stride. Undoubtedly, there will be many and by no means insignificant difficulties; but they will by and large add up to something which, though not resolved, is yet familiar, namely, the problem of readjustment of labour to urban conditions. Arising from this will be the major issue of decentralisation of industry: the question of taking industry to where the worker is situated—the small town and the village—rather than the worker to where the industry is situated. One is hardly entitled to assume that such decentralisation can happen on any large scale, for limits are set by technical feasibility and the economics of scarce capital. Nevertheless, it is a vital issue and needs study and investigation with specific reference to Indian conditions. But the main problem, the one which concerns the bulk of the population, will still remain, namely, how the underfed and the underprivileged—the small cultivator in his millions and the small industrialist in his hundreds of thousands—can be given the know-how, the resources and the incentive to produce more. The know-how perhaps presents the least difficulty. National Extension, Community Development, Small Industries Service Institutes, all these have been fairly successful in organising and passing on the know-how, though it is true that a great deal has yet to be done. In particular, it will be education itself, i.e. the conversion of the illiterate into the educated—not the unskilled into the skilled—that is the big task still to be completed. Along with this lack of education, then, must be taken the other main impediments, which are lack of incentive and lack of resources.

The question may now be put: how are these three lacks being met, viz. lack of education, lack of incentive and lack of resources, all of which stand directly in the way of increased production? On the answer to this question more than on anything else will depend the effectiveness of India's transition from a traditional to a modern mass society. But the question of course cannot stop there. We shall further have to ask whether in the process of meeting these requirements: 1) the weak and the underprivileged are being helped; 2) bridges are being built across the old divisions of caste and sub-caste; and 3) traditional values such as tolerance, non-injury and reverence for the other-worldly are not losing their importance.

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

The problem is by no means simple. For one thing, it is not posed in the manner stated above by many of those who are most concerned with its different aspects, namely, the politician and the legislator, the planner and the administrator, the educationist and the social worker. Nevertheless, one can observe trends and, however faint these may be for the moment, one can try and pick up from among them such as seem significant for the future. One may start with almost any of the aspects mentioned above. Caste, for example, evokes different responses from different sets of people. There are those who, in effect, exploit caste to gain temporary ends. Others ignore it or pretend it does not exist. Still others believe it will vanish under the impact of economic forces. Lastly, there are those who realise both the strength and ubiquity of caste divisions and seek to establish newer loyalties across, instead of along, them.

An obvious example of exploitation of the existing divisions is what happens during elections. The candidate may not always have willed it to be so, but it is common knowledge that in most elections the voting tends to take place along the lines of caste. In other words, caste, as one of the strongest existing loyalties, is something which no electioneering agent is likely to lose sight of.

There are those who ignore caste or believe that it will succumb to economic forces. They minimise the problem. It is true that the forces of economic development, including urbanisation, are on the whole hostile to caste. Broken up into individual elements, the loyalties of caste, we have seen, are principally sectarian, territorial and occupational. The hold of sectarian religion is getting less in the towns, but not necessarily nor on any appreciable scale in the villages. Territorial loyalty counts for less in the villages and much less in the towns than in the past. But there is a vicious circle. Caste restricts the mobility of the society; lack of mobility keeps people at home in their occupations; and those who remain at home tend to have a stronger territorial loyalty than others. The same remarks apply to occupational loyalty. In all these respects, therefore, the old loyalties of caste and sub-caste are only slowly weakening and it is by no means clear that they will disappear with the mere efflux of time and economic change.

Those who ignore caste instead of recognising it and dealing with it are doing a disservice. This applies to those who believe not

only that a village can in due course be made into a homogeneous entity, but that it is one here and now. They read into the village community a social cohesion and a common purpose which ought to be created, but which quite often are not there today. The fallacy involved in this attitude is dangerous because it may lead the administration to impose schemes of welfare on the village in the expectation that its leadership has the same interests at heart as the small farmer, the landless labourer and the harijan. Where this is not the case a well-meaning scheme may lead to greater exploitation along the lines of caste by those who are more powerful in the village. The result will be an accentuation, not a reconciling of differences.

There is no alternative but to make positive, purposeful and persistent efforts to build bridges, to create new loyalties or invoke traditional loyalties which transcend these divisions. Such efforts are in fact being made; many of them are humble and obscure; some are well known, while still others have to be brought to light from between the covers of official records and publications. A few of them may be cited. The illustrations are also concerned with the lacks I have mentioned before, viz. education, incentive to produce and resources for production.

In regard to education, I will confine my illustration to one of many pioneers in different parts of India who, during the last fifty years, and more especially after Independence, have rendered signal service in this field. I refer to an educationist⁵ of Maharashtra, who before his death a few years ago succeeded in giving schools to the rural area on a scale which neither government nor school boards had achieved in the past. What is more important, he was able to get Harijan and high caste boys to live, work and study together. At a very early stage in the experiment, he abandoned the idea of having separate hostels for Harijan boys. Ignoring the divisions of caste, sub-caste and out-caste he postulated poverty as the line of demarcation and said that every poor student in the countryside would be the beneficiary of his scheme. He also insisted on the contribution of voluntary labour by his students and maximum self-help on the part of each particular area. In this way he

⁵ Bhaurao Patil: See his biography by Dr. A. V. Mathew, *Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil*, Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, Satara, 1957.

built schools and hostels which, for both number and usefulness, are today among the most significant institutions in Western India. In these institutions, which include about 200 primary schools and a dozen or more boarding houses, the experiment is being successfully tried of students habitually and purposefully ignoring the divisions of caste and recognising the uniting factors of poverty and self-help. This remarkable man was rooted in the soil, had an essentially religious outlook, and renounced wealth in the best Indian tradition. Examples can also be cited from other parts of the country of the attempt to organise education as a unifying force. These attempts are usually not all-India. They are indigenous to the area or the State and have done much to spread literacy in the language of each particular region. And, it must be remembered, that for each of the big States of India as they exist today, its own language and literature are great unifying forces which cut across the barriers of rank, caste and occupation.

Incentive for production explains much of the agrarian legislation which, after Independence, has taken place in India. Feudal tenures have been abolished, rents have been regulated, ceilings are being placed on what a landlord may own and "land to the tiller" has been the formula generally adopted by State Governments. What is laid down in the statute is not necessarily what takes place in the field, as I have already indicated. Allowing for evasion and non-fulfilment, the fact still remains that it has been possible to bring about a radical re-adjustment of agrarian rights without recourse to violence.

Another development, and one directly in keeping with India's traditional values, is the mission undertaken by Vinoba Bhave to receive gifts of land (*bhoodan*) for distribution to the landless and, if all the land of the village was given (*gramdan*), to place it under the management of the village council for the benefit of all. The whole world is watching this experiment which, from the point of view here set out, constitutes one of the most significant endeavours in India for bridging the differences of caste and class and community. It has not yet touched the town and the city. The Saint's appeal is to persons. In the villages of India today one still deals with persons. In cities and towns the individual is merged in the impersonal masses. There is big business, not the individual trader; big banks and not money lenders; and large ownership of

capital, not just a handful of landlords. Also people are much more hardened against the traditional values of life. This perhaps explains why Vinoba Bhave, in his attempt to employ an essentially religious technique for bringing about social and economic justice, has hitherto avoided the cities of wealth and citadels of power and confined his mission to the village. Another observation may be made. The redistribution of lands, however motivated, is in the end a concrete administrative process. It requires supporting legislation, administrative staff and legal documents in which intentions are reduced to enforceable form as in any other administrative measure, whether such measure emanates from a Saint or a Secretariat. Will India be able to show that the Saint and the Secretariat can work together? The question is still open.

My next illustration is in fact taken from Government. It concerns the policy of State partnership in co-operatives for the purpose of meeting the last of the requirements I have mentioned, namely resources or capital. Lacking these, the village co-operative, whether credit or marketing, is powerless against the competition of landlord, moneylender and trader. Yet it must be rendered strong in order that the small producer's interests are looked after and production as an aim is promoted. Lacking initial momentum the weak society falls back to ground; there has to be a force which will help it to get into orbit after breaking through a whole field of gravitation. In India the experiment is being tried of supplying this initial force through State partnership. The partnership is reversible; also it does not imply State interference. Since the society starts strong, it is in a position to render service at the very commencement; people will test it for a little while and then increasingly come in and buy shares; this will in due course enable the society to buy off Government's shares. This has not only been the theory but the practice as well. And, so far as one can judge, it appears to work. But the points I am concerned to make are these. India has not chosen the path of liquidating the moneylender and the landlord in order that their hold may disappear or competition cease. That would have been wholly repugnant to temperament and tradition. Nor has it thought it right, on the one side, that the State should run these institutions itself or, on the other, that the weak should be left to their own devices. My illustration, then, concerns a joint attempt of the State and

Traditional Society and modern Mass Society

the people, especially the weaker sections, to institutionalise services of great importance to production; and to do so in a manner which conforms both to the values of tradition and the principles of sound organisation.

One other aspect remains to be noticed. Built on the basis of State partnership there is a large number of producers' co-operatives today—such as sugar factories owned by the canegrowers or lift irrigation societies run by the riparian farmers—which are infusing a new type of loyalty, the loyalty of production, across the older stratification of caste. The producers are of many castes; but they combine in order to increase their production, or to process their produce for the market; they have no problem, as in a credit society, of apportioning scarce resources (often along the lines of caste or other extraneous loyalties); their status is purely that of producers: it is as producers that they put forth a common effort and it is as producers that they derive a common benefit. This again is a very significant way in which the newer co-operatives, with assistance from the State, are helping to build bridges across the old divisions and are doing so in the very context of modernising the methods of production, processing and preparation for the market.

IX. CONCLUSION

How can India, without losing anything of value in her ancient traditions, adapt herself to the modern context of efficient production, economic welfare and social justice? The transition is taking place. It is largely uncharted. I am conscious that, in pointing to a current here and a current there, I have given no answer to the question itself. It seems permissible to doubt whether a definitive answer can, in fact, be given. If there is no chart of the transition, there can be no blue print of the future. But there is one thing which, in accordance with one's own predilections, it may be possible to indicate, and that is the spirit in which India, if true to her traditions, ought to conduct the transition. I quote from the Rural Credit Survey Report.

...Assuming this larger purpose to have the twofold aspect of achieving wealth and securing its equitable distribution, the programme ...becomes inseparable, in its underlying concepts, not only from the end which is economic good, but from

the means to be employed in the attainment of the end. Those means, to be significant for India, have to conform to the values for the Indian tradition. One feature of that tradition may be recalled. At widely different times and in widely different parts of the country there have arisen religious leaders in India whose aim was spiritual good and whose endeavour it was to place within the reach of all the means of achieving such good. Each such effort was non-violently conceived and non-violently conducted; it had the appeal and motive force of a mission; and, not infrequently, its organisation bore signs of careful forethought and attention. Essentially the same means, employed in the pursuit of economic good, have perhaps this difference, that they hold greater promise of attaining the object postulated. For one thing, there is nothing yet in human history to disprove—just as there is nothing in it yet to demonstrate—that economic welfare in its highest sense cannot be achieved, even where it is most lacking, by the planned, deliberate and organised effort of a Government, relentless as to purpose but not ruthless as to means, provided the effort is not only emotionally impelled but is scientifically guided. In this latter aspect, a whole apparatus of technique, knowledge and research, comparatively recent and painstakingly accumulated, is available to Governments if only they will make use of it, through the development of the social sciences of economics and sociology and of the science no less than art of public administration. It is irrelevant whether economic good is or is not a lesser objective than spiritual good. The fact remains that economic good is the highest practicable objective so far as Governments are concerned. In India, the process of increasing and more equitably distributing the economic good must, on purely rational grounds, be conceived in terms of rural India. The larger thesis... is that what India most needs today is a comprehensive and determined programme of rural regeneration which has the ethical impulse and emotional momentum of its highest traditions; which has, moreover, the calculated design of a project that is scientifically conceived and scientifically organised; and which, above all, attempts to render to rural India, in the economic realm, those opportunities for growth and fulfilment which, without distinction between man and man, but with especial compassion for the weak and the disadvantaged, more than one religious leader at more than one period of the country's history attempted to render to the masses of India in the realm of the spirit.