

THE RELIGIOUS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

I am sure that there is need to define at least provisionally what we mean by Traditional Culture. There are many cultural groups in South India and though each one of them has its own unique pattern yet they have their own spiritual and religious and social traditions. We have secondly to consider what kinds of industrial developments, if already present in sufficiently advanced stages, have had their impact on these traditional modes of life and personal and social conduct and religious experience. We have also to take into consideration what social ideas have reference to the socio-religious philosophy of the traditionalists on the one hand and to the industrialists on the other.

I for myself can speak of the Hindu community in particular. The type of life that men have lived through the centuries has been multi-sided, according to the religious sentiment that had throughout dominated all aspects of human behaviour-cultural and creative as well as practical and political. It had been keeping the members of the community together. Whether it was Vaishnava or Saiva (or even Buddhist and Jaina in the earlier period) we have had great religious tradition. The composite nature of this tradition also has to be admitted,

as it tried to imbibe the best of the Vedic (Nigama) and the Agama. Through its genius for synthesis it had made for the collaboration of the two Vedantas: though this is specifically the name of the system of Ramanuja, this term (ubhaya vedanta) could in some measure be extended to denote all the systems of South India, for they doubtless claim accord between the northern Sanskrit tradition and the Southern Tamil tradition. The social tradition has been despite the difference between the Vedic (politico-social) organic conception of the four-castes and the one-class of spiritual society of the Alvars and Nayanmars, to live a corporate life of unity and functional difference. It led to the sharing of the moral and spiritual and material goods of the world. This however cannot survive without a constant and continuous awareness of the spiritual tradition on the part or the large part of the community. The kind of life was a theocentric or temple centered one. Industries and fine arts were yoked to the spiritual ideal, contemplation of perfection of divine attributes and so on. The goal was salvation through devotion. The mass of the members of all communities lived this kind of life. The otherworldly bias alleged is not quite the fact against which the present day recoil is seen. This world was sought to be enjoyed as part of the Divine plan, but that meant disinterestedness in the performance of duties rather than indifference to them. The present day recoil cannot be

explained on the neat pattern of criticism to which we are accustomed, that it is a recoil from the otherworldly and pessimistic view of life of tradition so far imbibed by all.

The Vaishnava and Saiva are them most important religious approaches and the majority of the community in South India are worshippers of both. The earlier tradition of exclusive devotion (ekanta-bhakti) has undergone changes during the recent period of impact from modern mystics, a more original and earlier tradition of the Veda having replaced the sectarian or puranic dualism or trinitarianism.

The moral and ethical tradition is common to all the communities, and in fact the need to live a life of Godliness has meant a life of inner purity and tolerance and love for all. Ahimsa has greater appeal to the Southern Tradition, for south India had fewer occasions for resorting to fighting in self-defense of hearths and homes and gods. There have unfortunately been internecine warfares. But the great Tradition of the Alvars and Nayanmars (South Indian Tamilian Mystics) as well as the philosophies of Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and the Samayacharyas with their illustrious continuous stream of disciples (Guruparampara-sampradaya) made the practice of ahimsa and satya very necessary and habitual. Wherefore the south Indian tradition is less violent in temperament. It was easier for

it to restore periodically ancient religious and spiritual tradition through tolerance and understanding and assimilation, which are today recognized as the most genuine principles of Hinduism.

We have to reckon with this important fact that the traditional spirit of Religion has again and again returned to restore the permanent qualities of south Indian tradition. The more violent and pragmatic adaptations of north Indian religious schools are not available in south India. The way of life went unchanged through ages, at least less drastic have been the changes. There has also been a great stabilizing force in the combination of philosophic adaptation and religious experiences from the intellectual groups who had the initiative and the power to command reverence. Whilst the northern Indian tradition remains a shapeless unity and is more and more becoming a sentimental and emotional unity, the southern Indian tradition has a shape and intellectual pattern to sustain its unity.

The brahmanic tradition in the south is an integral tradition, and has with the help of the upper groups served to maintain this cohesion and permanence in the face of the severe environmental changes, political and social and economic. There is resistance to change, on the one hand but there is also the awareness of the inevitable character of the change to come. There is however a psychological struggle in the mind of the

tradition governed communities. It is likely to become more and more acute as the demand for adaptation or uprooting from tradition becomes urgent and inevitable.

There is no question of an unchanging tradition now. In every sector of life there have happened changes thanks to the slow but unbroken penetration of other modes of life; or at least the educational and social changes incident to foreign rule have had a large part to play.

A reaction against this encroachment of western modes of life has grown in volume. The reaction is witnessable in growing urban communities in cities where the uprooted or partially uprooted educated men live and have their being. Here tradition is revolting against its absorption in modern social modes through recourse to Kalaksepa etc. Adaptation has, however, come to stay. It may be quite difficult to reverse this trend. The civilization of hotels and culture through films has displaced the civilization of hotels and culture through films has displaced the civilization of asramas and culture of the gurukulas. Family arrangements have broken, thanks to the diffusion of the present employment possibilities. Ties of the joint family life are slowly untying. It has entailed even the giving up of family modes of traditional worship and living. Family members in different trades and professions have set up different modes of routine of life adapted to their professions. Religion at home has ceased to be a force,

as the ideals of life of the parent or his own hopes of professional career for his children have changed.

The old agraharam civilization has collapsed not directly due to the growth of any industry (for such industries have come only after the village economy has collapsed) but because country life does not present any attractions and the city does. The urbanization of the people has also led to the breakup of and breakaway from the traditional modes of employment. Everybody is looking forward to state employment and is indeed being encouraged to look to it. Enquiries in all walks of life reveal this significant fact. This tendency started almost with the incoming of the empire builders. Office allurements on the one hand and failures of their hereditary professions at home on the other, had driven all to the town for clerical and other trades.

The growth of industry is the second point. It has attracted young men to the several lines of engineering and they have found it advantageous in the monetary sense. Humanities have hardly this temptation or attraction. There is no money in it. But the cultural background has along with this abandonment of the ancient traditional vocations by those who were following it, led to the depletion of traditional knowledge. There has been failure of religious cohesion and unity, for education too was very early divorced or severed from religion and religious ideals. Thus the

Western impact through industry and culture has made for a reversal from traditional standards and aims of life. This failure of religious tradition in respect of vocation and profits of profession has brought about the present crisis.

The condition of traditionalists has only to be looked into. Pundits have almost ceased to have spiritual and social influence on the community. The purohita instead of being a leader has become a follower. The opportunities way of life has replaced the sampradaya modes of life, and learning. The apathy of the large mass of men to things spiritual has grown thanks to the caricatures on the stage and film and text books (so called socials) on the one hand, and on the other to the educated uninformed secularists. But behind this surface apathy there is a lurking sense of need of religion and spiritual solace in almost every serious student of life. There is a sense of loss of one's moorings and one feels as if one is adrift. This can be seen in the increasing interest in unorganized and pseudo religious literature displayed by all kinds of people. This interest has to be canalized. How that can be done without the help of pundits of tradition has yet to be determined. There is hope that we could secure some of the eminent of these to help this revival of reverence for real spiritual aims of the modern society, however much it might have suffered disintegration or industrial adaptation.

University men are not as a rule, at the present moment at any rate, traditionally minded except in a very superficial way. It is perhaps true to say that they are inheritors of a new tradition, a short tradition so to speak. Perhaps it is too soon to say that the modern civilization is already a tradition to them. We must however make a sharp distinction between what we have inherited from the immediate past, and the tradition that is of ages past which is strictly religious and social tradition. The British and Islamic influences cannot be classed as tradition however much they might have influenced us and formed a behaviour-pattern which is of a mongrel character, being as yet not integral to the common people as a whole, not to speak of the advanced sections of the community. Can the University men become substitutes for the pundits of tradition? If they cannot, the leadership in adaptation to the changing shape of things will inevitably pass out of their hands. Nor will the restoration of traditional spirit be possible unless the University men can become in some plausible sense the repositories of it. The dangers of easy adaptation by some pundits to the new modern way of life cannot be exaggerated too much. The University men themselves are having a double inheritance and the alien supersedes the indigenious. Science perhaps demands outlooks in consonance with the Western patterns of thought, but does it entail also social and spiritual atrophy and

disinterest? Humanism at least could be more of the spiritual tradition of the East in every way. No one can really influence anybody unless the genuinely sincerely is loyal to the spiritual tradition of the people of this country. The case in point is Gandhiji himself. When Gandhiji adopted the way of life of the common people of this country and even their traditional spirit and approach to problems of every day, it was not only a wise way but the only way to leadership. Other examples are of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Sivananda. University men are not in a position to become leaders of the country in tradition; of course they are not yet leaders in industry, and may never be.

If University teachers should seek to wrest the spiritual leadership they should seek traditional roots. The Pundit who abides by his tradition should not merely be encouraged to play his important role but also his livelihood, economic as well as social, must be assured and ameliorated. There is a tendency to treat pundits, even as the teachers of Humanities or intellectuals as 'lazy' non-working or non-productive class. Only it has to be recognized and emphasized that they are preservers and transmitters of cultural values which are much more necessary for the country and the world than economic values. Else it would be a great tragedy, for it a difficult to find a nucleus of them again. The true safety of the socialistic pattern of society on the economic level

depends on the trans social life of the few individuals of tradition and of serious religious purpose. The graft of men who have hardly any roots in the tradition of the country, such as may be engendered by the exchange programmes of the immature men may lead to very undesirable results at every level of life, leading to hybridizations of culture which are unsatisfactory to everybody concerned.

A gradual process of bridging the gulf between the way of life of the traditional class and the University educated secular types has to be attempted sympathetically and reverentially. So that in the long run, at least two generations hence, the diversity of these two would not be as pronounced as it is at present.

Regarding the difficulties inherent in the geo-cultural pattern of South Indian culture communities which comprises all types of possibilities, these could certainly be solved with understanding and patience. It should be gradual, but not necessarily snail-slow, evolution that we seek. The tempo of modern types of movements may only be quickened and sustained by an integral understanding which sees not only the pattern of culture here but also aims at integrating it with world Culture that is being born. The communal tension and racial tension problems are not inherent in the social formation as such in Society, but should rather be properly traced to the political pressure groups and to the break up of the

traditional modes so called of the community. It is only remotely (and only recently) that we would trace it to the growing volume of industrialization. Due to rapid absorption of the alien model of behaviour and thought in an uncritical spirit (attractions of novelty and fashion undoubtedly playing an important role) by the large mass of educated men and University products too (and teachers are by no means an exception to this), it has meant an uncritical sacrifice of ancient patterns of value and culture. The fact that these acceptance of Western and alien modes have been popularized in indigenous languages (regional and other languages) has not reduced but rather has increased the difficulties of real integration of social life on the best possible lines. It has created conflicts of an altogether irrational nature in the large mass of uneducated men or partially educated men, who are workers in the several fields of social life.

The changeover from rural economy and civilization to an urban industrial civilization in Britain and America did not mean the breakup of the religious and social traditions as such or a breakaway from them. The so called socializing process has not entailed the breakup of the traditional spirit of society. Industrial civilization goes along with a certain amount of socialization of the individual and his knowledge, but beyond a point it is bound to be not only difficult and undesirable but also to be resisted.

It must be recognized that though religion is a socializing force, it aims at the trans-social life of the individual. Society must constantly serve and help this trans-social existence and life of all its members if it wills to retain their social loyalties. If tradition stands for anything in a religious society it is for this goal. Humanistic aims try to contain the individual within the purely socialistic patterns of life, for in its conception the individual is obviously to realize that social life is his goal and without it he is nothing and ought to be nothing. But this is a short-sighted view. The modern ideal of socializing the property and work of man at first and finally man himself completely can obviously not succeed. Sooner or later the inner urge in man for his trans-social life (though not his individual life) and values would assert themselves. And is it not better to guide and plan in such a way that the socializing process would be through out guided by the trans-social way of life (which is the traditional spiritual way)? Should we not realize before it is too late that the ideals by which revolutions are being made are not hugged in a spirit of abstraction and extremism? Are we aiming at Society or Socialism, which I submit are two different things? There can be no antagonism between spirituality and industrialism provided we carefully reorganize our social and political and individual life on the basis of spiritual freedom and social conformity which only an organic conception can

provide at least as working principle (and not as metaphysical theory). This has been achieved in a spirit of cooperation in regard to the reorganization of village and cottage industries, which avoids the evils of industrial concentration and robotisation.

Therefore our present challenge lies in the complexity that has arisen in the traditional life of the different classes of the community. Firstly there has happened the collapse of the traditional social patterns. An apathy to the ancient forms of worship and moral restraints has also become the feature of worship and moral restraints has also become the feature of the people. The earlier subjugation by foreign rule has made the situation worse. This has however rendered adaptation to industrial (unspiritual?) modes of life easy. But moral and religious restraints have surely suffered a severe setback. This is the most dangerous feature of the modern situation. **One important problem awaiting solution is how to restore confidence in moral standards and religious values.** Leadership certainly is needed to get the moral and traditional values accepted by the large part of the industrially employed and minded. Social changes of a far reaching nature have been legislatively undertaken, and these have been sought to be explained not so much as a restoration of the ancient Vedic way of flexible social existence as the answer to the demands of modern conditions (a pragmatic social theory at best). It tends to

forget that history is eradicable so easily or so absolutely. We cannot skip over all that has transpired in our evolution; (historical realism may well be called for: revolutionary thought need not mean revolutionary practice or adoption of revolutionary means). A fundamental condition of real and integral revolution or evolution in the spiritual (traditional) way depends on the firm bases of moral and spiritual life in the members of the teaching class from the lowest to the highest. A firm insistence on the basic moral and spiritual values would help both the teacher and the taught to have faith in the trans-social goal of society. An equally clear understanding of the trends of home and social life would effectively help the individual thinking based on the universal concept of human dignity and unity in all walks of life. There is needed a reverence for intellectual attainments on the part of the public which is essential for social transformation. A public that is fascinated by other faculties than the intellect and has no reverence for moral principles, is almost half way down and lets down values that count. The strict moral approbation of values that count for pure and honest living, and disapprobation uniformly and consistently of all those that contravene such trans-social and spiritual values, seem to be called for. Practiced with scrupulousness, earnestness and faith, by the educational institutions and the government from the very bottom to the top (as in ancient traditions both

in India and in Plato), it is likely that the traditional spirit will grow into the life of the industrialised community and be its living soul.