Conceptualizing Tradition

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Originating from the Greek word 'tadere', the term 'tradition' means 'to transmit'.It refers to values, norms or normative patterns, structure, institution or a systemof beliefs which is socially transmitted from one generation to another and continuing at least for three consecutive generations, i.e., one century. (Shills: 1981). It is a kind of ethos of any society influencing all dimensions of structural as well as cultural features. Any society is identified with its tradition and therefore, tradition acts as a defining variable of the society. In a recent historical study of the term, Prickett tracing out the historical etymology of the term affirms that at there has little change in the meaning of the word "tradition" itself from thetime when Tertullian and the Church Fathers took the Latin traditio, in its legal meaning of "handing over" or "delivery", and wrote by analogy of the Traditio evangelica – or Catholica. This standard ecclesiastical definition, that "of bequeathing any Doctrine to posterity from age to age" remained more or less unaffected by its translation into English. (Alexander:2016)

The term has been pivotal in Sociological analysis where Tradition was used in association to the beliefs and practices handed down from the past whereas traditionalism is the psychic attitudes that glorify past beliefs and practices indispensible for the society. A traditional society is characterized by the dominance of once traditions, organization based on kinship, ascriptive status and hierarchical social order. This understanding of the term led to the uprising of various Sociological view points on the concept of tradition. The Western as well as Indian thinkers have been attempting the conceptualization of the term in their own distinct way.

The classical Sociological tradition of Marx, Weber or Durkheim has never clearly defined tradition as a concept separately. However, through their writings some of their views on tradition can be drawn. Whilst Marx talks in terms of

reproduction of past and history, for Durkheim tradition reflects in mechanical solidarity controlled by repressive law. Weber analyses tradition in a bit detail while drawing a typology of social action and mentions tradition as a social aspectperformed out of compulsion(Shills: 1981). He distinguishes between traditional and rational actions and claim that traditional actions are not rational as rational actions are another type of action. Moreover traditional actions are not even consciously thought of rather performed just for the sake of being performed. Here Weber differentiates between value – oriented and traditional actions and points out that though traditional actions implicitly entail values but there is no choice of selection of values and these values are handed down from one generation to another whereas value – oriented actions involve proper calculation of ends-means-values.

Weber (Shills: 1981) has extended his idea of tradition to the analysis of authority. According to him power can be legitimized through legal enactments, charisma or traditional norms and values. When power is legitimized it helps in maintaining the social order, tradition in this sense creates and maintains an order in the society. In this respect it can be said the Weber presents some kind of a functional analysis of tradition where tradition is treated as a source of maintaining social order in the society.

Following Weberian analysis of tradition as a type of social action Parson's () alsodraws a typology of social action involving three types of action – Instrumental, Traditional & Affectual. (Ritzer: 1993).

Reviewing the entire Western Sociological Literature on the concept of tradition, Edward Shills (1981) through his

book 'Tradition', conceptualizes tradition in depth and detail. He begins with an understanding of tradition in social sciences as opposed to modern, rational and progress.

Shils understands tradition in terms of tradita - things which are handed over. These can be objects, or beliefs, or simply the ways things are done. He defines tradition simply as "anything which is transmitted or handed down from past to

present". His understanding on the concept of tradition prevalent in the entire Western sociological thinking depicts that tradition has been taken opposite to modern and rational thereby hindering the progress of any society. It is characterized by intolerance, dogmatism, regress and is regarded as a consequence of religious dominance or hierarchical intention, superstitions etc. It is on these grounds that in the aftermath of enlightenment tradition was heavily criticized. Moreover Shill argues that in Classical Social Science, tradition has not been given a conceptual consideration, i.e., a concept for society instead it was just treated as a dimension of social structure and culture and has been characterized with stability, status-quoits and continuity and has been presented as a residual category. He therefore attempts the conceptualization of tradition as a sociological category. For him tradition mainly refers to the values, norms or normative patterns, structure, institution or a system of beliefs which are socially transmitted from one generation to other generation and continues at least for three generations. He defined tradition as a self-conscious deliberate affirmation of traditional norms in awareness of their traditional nature. The traditional norms derive their merit from a sacred origin. If traditional norms are believed to related to a sacred objects in the past these norms would be more opposed to alteration than if the norms were not grounded on sacred object. Norms transmitted traditionally are accepted because of their non observance involves sanctions they fill. The need to have rules in a given situation and thus performs a stabilizing function in the society. He defined tradition as a self-conscious deliberate affirmation of traditional norms in awareness of their traditional nature. These traditional norms derive their merit from a sacred origin. If traditional norms are believed to related to a sacred objects in the past these norms would be more opposed to alteration than if the norms were not grounded on sacred object. Norms transmitted traditionally are accepted because of their non observance involves sanctions they fill. The need to have rules in a given situation and thus performs a stabilizing function in the society as they have been transmitted from the past.

In this backlight, it is pervasive to mention that Indian Sociology right from the emergence of Lucknow School of Sociology has been discussing and analyzing the rationale of tradition. The writings of D.P. Mukerji (1948), A.K. Saran (1964), Yogendra Singh(1986), Nagendra () have been a classic example of this history.

D.P. Mukerji asserts that Indian Culture is a replica of some common traditions which get reflected in the prevalence of common and general attributes of the people. He said that it is not correct to distinguish between modernity & tradition rather it would be more appropriate to focus on the distinction between Indian & Western tradition. He therefore talks in terms of modernity in India rooted in Indian rather than western tradition and does not create a separation between tradition & modernity. He sees tradition as a dimension of continuity and explains it as an ethos consisting of essence of values, ideas, views & principles. It is some kind of an organizational principles of any society found in collectivity, collectiveethos and as a mentality of people thereby informing the behavioural patterns.

In agreement with thinkers like Radha Kamal Mukherji and others; D.P. (1948) accepts that there exists fundamental unity in India and this unity is reflected in rituals particularly public performance of rituals in all ceremonial occasions. He equates tradition with Giddings' concept of *'Consciousness of kind',* that is, sociality of a given society or community or group. For D.P. tradition of a given society influences the day to day behaviors, action and thinking. In other words it informs behavioural normative pattern of the people and act as a source of cooperation, competition and conflict in the society. In this context, being influenced by Giddings he distinguishes between three groups and traditions. He classifies tradition in three categories:

➢ PRIMARY: norms, folkways, customs, ways of behavior, mores.

➢ SECONDARY: aesthetic and religious rituals, beliefs, morals.

➢ TERTIARY: broad cultural principles, abstract theories. It is a philosophical tradition; a tradition Tof abstract cultural principles.

D.P. (1948) opines that in a diverse society like India primary traditions despite variations unite the country and therefore the can be considered as the basis of fundamental unity. If any cultural group comes in contact with the

Indian society then the exchange of primary traditions take place which ultimately leads to assimilation of culture. One can therefore see the routes of cultures.

Secondary traditions in D.P. opinion are characterized by competitions and conflicts which may percolate down to the first level. In certain circumstances aesthetic traditions have the possibility of coming together but as far as the religious traditions are concerned they are generally the sources of differentiations and oppositions. Not only are they the reason of conflict and opposition but are also the factors of distinct identity. In fact sometimes people define themselves as a different nation in terms of their religious traditions. In this way traditions not only operates as a source of fundamental unity but also becomes the base of modern identity.

Tertiary tradition for D.P. is a conceptual tradition of society. These traditions may be common but not similar. They are basically informed by past and history.

Having classified tradition into these broad categories D.P. (1948) argues that they should be detailing of tradition in terms of its plurality, variety and diversity. In this context he considers the analysis of secondary tradition and has infact focused his entire analysis on the secondary tradition. He considers Pareto's model of residues and derivation useful for analyzing the nuances of tradition particularly religious tradition.
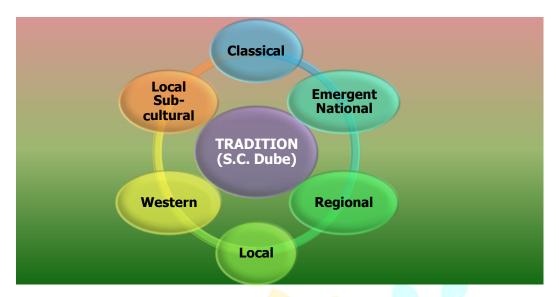
A.K. Saran(1964) like D.P. considers the importance of tradition particularly traditional thought but rejects the use of sociological perspectives to analyze tradition and traditional thought. For him tradition is basically related with traditional thought and thought is subject matter of sociology of knowledge. He discussed and evaluates the ideas of Mannahiem () and Stalk () on sociology of Knowledge and on the logical grounds concludes that the sociology of Knowledge is incapable of analyzing tradition and traditional thought and thereby rejects the very idea of sociology of Knowledge to study tradition particularly the Hindu tradition and Hindu traditional thought. He claims that tradition is value, belief, behavior pattern, ideals and norms that guide the human behavior and therefore the most important component of tradition is traditional thought and there is a distinct discipline of study of traditional thought which can only be found in traditional weltanshuaang (outlook).

Apparantely, the concept of tradition has been influential in the analysis of the process of social change in India. Going by the ethos term it can be asserted that the usage of the term became indispensable in all the studies of social change in the aftermath of British rule as indicated via processes of Westernization, Secularization, Sanskritization, Islamization etc. Where D.P. (1948) saw, tradition as a binding force of Indian unity; Srinivas and Yogendra Singh witnessed the processes of changes and continuity in context to tradition. Yogendra Singh's Modernization of Indian Tradition(1986); exemplifies how tradition is instruemental in modernizing India. Influenced by Redfield's concept of Little and Great Tradition, Milton Singer and McKim Marriot studied social change in India in context to civilization and structure of tradition. They opine that the structure of tradition develops in two stages:-

• orthogenetic or indigenous evolution;
• heterogenetic encounters or contacts with other cultures

The social structure of these structures in turn operates at the folk (or the unlettered peseants) and the elite level (the reflective few). The former is labeled as the Little tradition whereas the latter is called as the Great Tradition but there exists a continuous interaction and interface between the two.

Along these lines, the scholars like S.C. Dube (1990) advocated for the existence of hierarchy of traditions in Indian society. He believes that one neds to deeply analyse each level of hierarchy to comprehend various dimensions of social change in India. He offers the following six-fold classification (Singh:1986) of traditions in India that are to be analysed in rural as well as urban structures:-

Source: Original

Tradition thus forms a very important basis of the social structure and social sciences while studying the processes and role of social change should take into consideration this dimension of the social structure which is so dominant.It contributes to a sense of belongingness and brings families together thereby developing a reconnect with friends and acquaintances. The values of freedom, faith, integrity, a good education, personal responsibility, a strong work ethic, and selflessness are reinforced by Tradition.

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