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Socio-Cultural Context of Modernisation and Development: Japan and India.*

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There is a general consensus amongst the scholars of social sciences that the socio-cultural context plays an important role in the process of development and modernisation. But the difficulty arises when they ponder as to what constitutes the ideal socio-cultural context conducive to the development process. The element of universalism inherent in the western model of development and modernisation fails to explain the traditional way in which modernisation was achieved in Japan. It also perpetuates the false notion that the traditional socio-cultural context obstructs the process of development in India. In fact, what prevails in present day India is not a traditional cultural pattern but a superimposed version of alien cultural traits, which is neither traditional nor modern. First, with the establishment of Muslim domination and second, under the onslaught of British imperialism the creative and regenerative elements of India's ancient traditional culture gradually receded to the background. Therefore, it is erroneous to compare the traditional cultural context of Japan with that of India, as traditional cultural spirit in India is no longer guiding the economic activities and behaviour of people.

It was Max Weber who, as a reaction to Karl Marx's economic determinism, tried to analyse, with theoretical insight, the relationship between cultural elements and economic growth. In his major work, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber explained the role of Protestant values in the growth of western capitalism. According to Weber, many values and orientations of Protestant religion such as pragmatism, work as a virtue, concept of calling, asceticism and spirit of learning and inquiry led to the emergence of economic behaviour among people that was conducive to the growth of capitalism.[1] By citing examples from India and China, Weber supported the view that similar elements conducive to economic growth may be found in other religions and cultures.

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The present day paradigms of modernisation and development, propounded by the western scholars in the 1950's are extensions of the Weberian argument. But, unlike the Weberian model, they conclude that there is one universal cultural pattern, prevailing in western societies, which is conducive to economic growth in all societies. According to Henry Bernstien, development denotes the achievement of social progress by transforming conditions of underdevelopment i.e. low production and poverty in Third world countries. The developed countries are termed as modern and underdeveloped countries as traditional. Modernisation theories view development as a process of diffusion, adoption and adaptation from a benign environment in western countries and explain underdevelopment in terms of tradition prevailing in poor countries.[2] The core values of these approaches are primarily derived from the development experience of European countries beginning from the post-Renaissance period. The individual is viewed as a rational being: one who uses his rationality to achieve material prosperity. A capitalist path of growth inspired by possessive individualism is viewed as the destiny of human civilisation. Inspired by the scientific spirit of a behavioural revolution in social sciences, these approaches 'renewed' the dwindling faith in social engineering. They tried to universalise the western development experience at the global level. For them, the history of Europe was the history of mankind. These ethnocentric paradigms explained the stagnation in developing countries in terms of their traditional culture and archaic social structure. At the same time, however, they fail to take into account the impact of these factors while prescribing the direction of the modernisation process in developing countries.

The fall of communist regimes in Soviet Russia and eastern Europe seems to have encouraged the notion of universality of the western path of development, as there is a renewed effort to illustrate the virtues of capitalism and the free market. Alex Hadenius, on the basis of his empirical study of 132 developing countries 'discovered' that a capitalist path of development would lead to economic efficiency, a reduction of the gap between rich and poor, higher living standards for larger groups and a general economic and social modernisation. What is more, he suggests that it would reduce the level of social conflict and create conditions for harmony in political life.[3] But what really happened in the developing countries? As the dynamics of modernisation and development gradually unfolded with the appearance of modern ideas and institutions, there appeared contradictions, conflicts and breakdowns in different aspects of individual and social life.

By the beginning of the 1970's, voices of disenchantment and discontent surfaced from various quarters. Expectedly, the reaction has come from scholars of the third world. This is now gradually crystallising into a search for alternative models of development and modernisation.[4] These scholars agree that models and theories derived from European developmental experience cannot, and should not, be applied uncritically because socio-cultural contexts and development problems are different in Third world countries. The sequences of, and interlinkages between, various components of development are ambiguous. Modernisation is presented as an end product of a process on the assumption that what western countries have achieved in the last three hundred years, would be achieved by developing countries in a few years. However, this genre of criticism is directed less against the core values of modernisation (i.e. its view of individual and society), and more against the suitability of the concept itself.

Even before the effective onslaught of modernisation, leaders of the Third world like Mahatma Gandhi and Mao-tse-Tung warned against its evil impacts on traditional societies. Mahatma Gandhi decried materialistic individualism, and suggested Indian solutions for Indian problems. Mao-tse-Tung underplayed the universal appeal of Marxism and claimed proudly that since Russian history has produced Russian communism, Chinese history would produce Chinese communism. He advocated, and effectively utilised, the strength of traditional Chinese values—selflessness, asceticism, concern for collective welfare rather than material incentives—in the process of modernisation of China.[5] This kind of appeal to, and successful utilisation of, traditional values and questioned the fundamentals of the western concept of modernisation.

The champions of liberalism and capitalism may argue that modernisation in China is now being pursued at the cost of democracy and human rights. Let us see, how western countries have initiated their own modernisation process? The modernisation of western society is a post-Renaissance phenomena. The Renaissance redefined the goal of man from that of 'salvation' to material prosperity , which was to be realised with the help of human reason. The reason which moderated the relationship between individual and society, became the instrument of self-interest. But on the social plane, the rising middle class found the feudal structure to be an obstacle to its growth. This obstacle was removed with the help of absolute monarchical states, which were anything but democratic. Distributive equality and social justice were sacrificed at the altar of the economic prosperity of the few.[6] As wealth accumulated in a few hands, the problem of its security also increased.

This gave rise to the central idea of liberal democracy incorporating the sanctity of individual property rights. A.D. Lindsay rightly remarks, 'Capitalism first supported the 17th century totalitarian state, then revolted against it....When he (capitalist) praised individualism and freedom of enterprise, he was thinking of freedom of himself and his kind...'[7]

Thus, democracy and individualism did not precede but followed the development process in European countries. If it is so, why should one criticise China when it seeks to solve its developmental problems in terms of its own constraints and tradition? The experience of development can not be universal but has to be context specific. This brings home the point that the socio-cultural context should be fully appreciated in determining the goal, direction and strategy of development. This is the way in which Japan has succeeded in modernising herself.

Japan: Modernisation through Tradition

The paradigms of modernisation and development have viewed 'Modern' and 'Traditional' as two dichotomous categories—one replacing the other and ignoring the fact that they are continuous processes: each compromising and adjusting with the other. Tradition should not be taken simply as something which existed in olden days but something which has been existing for a long period and continues to define the present socio-cultural context. The example of Japan demonstrates that its antiquity is not its weakness or backwardness, but its strength and maturity.

The Japanese way of modernisation has baffled western theorists. A leading American expert on Japanese society, R.P. Dore, finds the study of modern Japan an increasingly 'whodunit' exercise. In Japanese industrialisation, he is looking for lessons as to how the trick might be repeated elsewhere.[8] American scholars, under the auspices of the Association of Asian Studies, USA, have produced six volumes between 1967-71 on different aspects of Japanese modernisation.[9] The general tone of these studies illustrates two points. First, the focus seems to have shifted from the question of how Japan developed economically to the question: what is the impact of industrial progress on the politics and society of Japan? The shift is a device to escape from the inconvenience caused in answering the first question. Second, the dissimilarities inherent in the process of development in Japan and the west are glossed over and the formal similarities and extent of western influence are exaggerated. Now they consider Japan to be a

'western' country rather than an Asian society.

This is the view held by most western scholars even now. But, if one understands the role of traditional socio-cultural patterns in Japanese development, the western view appears far from true. Japan is an ancient society and throughout her social evolution, she has experienced continuity and change alike without any serious disruption from the past. She has successively transited through tribal, monarchical, feudal and democratic political orders. Monarchy was introduced in Japan in AD 604 on the pattern of the Confucian monarchy of China with Confucian principles like centralised administration, harmony, subordination of inferiors to superiors, diligence and honesty and the tradition of public service. These principles and values have gradually permeated into the culture and society of Japan.[10] With the publication of two politico-religious documents, '*Kojiki*' (*Record of Ancient Kings*) and '*Nihongi*' (*Record of Japan*) in AD 712 by the royal court, the monarchy received divine trappings which lasted till the defeat of Japan in World War II followed by Allied occupation in 1945. But the centralised monarchy of Chinese origin went against the native tradition of clan privileges and local autonomy, which asserted themselves in the 10th century and led to the growth of feudalism. The Fujiwara clan managed to monopolise the royal court and by 1192 it emerged as the real ruling clan of Japan. The king became a nominal head. During the Fujiwara monopoly, which lasted till the Meiji restoration in 1868, the feudal-military class (*samurai*) dominated politics and administration down to the lowest level.

The Meiji restoration of 1868, brought about by the threat of foreign powers, eliminated feudal institutions and restored the monarchy to power of its past glory and centralised administration. The Meiji rule from 1868 to 1945 witnessed three dominant but complex tendencies which, though apparently being contradictory to each other, did not negate but instead reinforced each other. The first tendency was that for the second time in her history (first being Confucian influence from China), Japan came under the influence of alien western ideas, institutions, industrial processes and technology. The difference between the two external encounters was that the latter was in contradiction (as modernisation theory would view it) to the Japanese socio-cultural tradition. The second tendency was the revival and reinforcement of Japanese nationalism, cultural values and tradition with increased vigour. The third tendency was the beginning of the process of development and modernisation which made Japan a modern nation within a period of hundred years. Our purpose is to

understand the impact of western influence on the Japanese socio-cultural context. It is precisely here that traditional societies, including India, have to learn from Japanese experience.

The Japanese socio-cultural context consists of social institutions and practices and their underlying values. We begin with Japanese religion which is the result of a historical assimilation of Shinto, Confucian and Buddhist religious traditions. Shinto is a polytheistic religious tradition, which literally means the 'way of Kami' or God. Confucianism was introduced in Japan from China in the 6th century and its fundamental values like loyalty, duty, filial piety and harmony were regenerated by the Imperial Rescript of Education, 1890—the new education system of Japan introduced by Meiji rulers. Buddhism was also introduced in Japan through China in the 7th century, and has been so closely integrated with native religious tradition that in every house, even today, Lord Buddha is worshipped along with Shinto deities.

Religious unity along with linguistic homogeneity has enabled the Japanese people to develop a sense of identity, patriotism and nationalism. Japanese nationalism, primarily directed against the western powers, is also manifested in the form of economic patriotism. A reading of the prospectus of the first Japanese business company 'Maruya', written by Fukuzawa, the prominent economic thinker of the 19th century, reveals that business and trade was not considered merely an economic activity but a patriotic duty in order to achieve the goal of an independent and prosperous Japan.[11] This duty and patriotism proved crucial in achieving the goals and formulating a coherent strategy of development. Loyalty to the monarch as a symbol of the nation, even at the cost of individual self-interest, was further strengthened during the Meiji period. M.E. Berry observes, 'Meiji leaders focused on the creation and projection of a national government . . . and much of this labour was cultural in emphasis.'[12]

The Japanese view of life can be explained by two words—'*Makato no Kororo*' and '*Magokaro*'. These translate respectively as 'sincerity' and 'uprightness' or 'purity of heart'. Along with filial piety and faithfulness, it generates an attitude of doing one's work with sincerity and faithfulness, which is, no doubt, the most essential pre-requisite for progress and development. The notion of '*yo*', meaning human life, denotes an individual's integration with society—vertically with ancestors and horizontally with other individuals and groups. This emphasises the primacy of social interest over individual self-interest. Compare this view of individual and society with that of the European view of self-seeking modern man. Again, the concept of '*Naka-ima*'

(middle present) gives primacy to the present stage of life rather than the past and the future. The idea of sin is conspicuously absent in Japanese religion.[13] These elements of religion forge national solidarity and promote the ethic of hard work and sincerity.

The institution of '*ie*', or family, plays a very important role in an individual's life. The family is characterised by filial piety, cohesion, respect for elders and the subordination of individual members to the welfare of the family. The system of primogeniture in rural families prevents the division of family land to uneconomical size. But, more important is the extension of this familism to secondary groups—school, workplace, factory or business organisations and finally to the nation.

The group consciousness or '*kaisha*' generated by familism persists in the form of group identities which are termed '*uchi*', that is a colloquial form of '*ie*' or family. This group consciousness, permeating industrial and business organisations, facilitated the availability of a committed and hardworking workforce. Chie Nikane comments, 'The characteristics of Japanese enterprise as a social group are, first, that the group is itself family-like and, second, that it pervades even the private lives of its employees, for each family joins extensively in the enterprise. These characteristics have been cautiously and consistently encouraged by managers and administrators from the Meiji period.'[14]

Not only in Japan but also in China, the strong Confucian emphasis on familism was the primary motivation behind economic growth and development. The industrialisation of Japan through traditional familism disapproved the western argument that strong family obligation and modern economic activity cannot go together. Robert Bellah terms it 'bourgeois Confucianism' and for S.L. Wong it is 'entrepreneurial familism'[15] In fact, it is the Asian counterpart of what Max Weber called the 'Protestant ethic' in Europe.

One of the many spin-off effects of familism has been the remarkable level of harmony and co-operation between workers and industrialists in Japan, which is quite different from the trade unionism of the west or from Marxist 'class consciousness'. In Japan, trade unions are organised on the basis of individual industrial concerns, and employers and employees sort out their problems in a spirit of mutual faith and understanding. Moreover, the workforce remains stable and worker turnover is negligible due to a strong sense of loyalty. The Japanese style of industrial management is becoming a world-wide phenomena.[17]

T. Fukutake, in his survey of Hitachi Ltd.—one of the pioneers in the field of industrialisation—notes that within Hitachi the familistic attitude that the company is one big family, is quite strong. If workers

labour hard for the company, the latter in turn takes care of their welfare. This kind of co-operation and familism is seen in every group activity. In village communities or *burakus*, irrigation work and other community work is done collectively. Even now, each family has to contribute the labour of one person towards community work.[17]

Japanese class structure is unique in the sense that the producing class (peasants and industrialists) are placed above merchants and businessmen in the social hierarchy. This encourages the development of entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, the Japanese are by nature hardworking people and their leisure activities are rather restricted. Their attitude towards leisure is—'work hard and enjoy your leisure when it cannot be helped'.[18] There are only eleven public holidays in Japan.

Ichiro Nakayama finds three factors crucial in Japanese industrialisation which were produced by the very nature of traditional society. First, the value of thrift and austerity encouraged a high rate of saving and ensured the much needed supply of capital; second, familism and self-discipline provided a cheap and committed labour force; and third, the traditional nature of society ensured the peaceful co-existence of big modern industry alongside traditional, small enterprises—each serving the needs of the other.[19]

But, the moot question is, how Japanese tradition encountered western ideas and institutions from the 19th century onwards? The answer lies in the Japanese quality of innovation and adaptation which, I think, is the most modern trait of their cultural tradition. Theodore McNelly lists twelve characteristics which are present in, and nine traits which are absent in Japanese culture. Accordingly, it is characterised by the presence of an ability to adapt borrowed institutions to local conditions and the absence of political and economic individualism and the cult of material wellbeing.[20] In the field of technology, Japanese innovation followed two paths—improving an indigenous system or modifying a foreign device to suit native conditions. Besides industry, the ability of innovation and experimentation can be seen also in the agricultural sector: in the practice of using new seeds, new fertilisers and new weeding methods.[21] The unique mode was to adopt alien forms and introduce into them a Japanese spirit. How the Japanese faced the paradox of modernisation amidst the traditional social environment is best summed up by Masao Maruyan: 'There was but one way to escape from this paradox: adopt only western industry, technology and armaments—the material civilisation of the west—and restrict the various undesirable political influences such as Christianity and liberal democracy. This solution was "differential

usages" classically expressed by Mashimoto Sanai (acquire material arts from others, retain righteousness, sympathy and filial piety as our own) and by Shakuna Shozan. (Eastern morality—Western technology)'.[22]

India: Modernisation Beyond Tradition

The foregoing discussion of Japan's modernisation suggests three points. First, the universal application appeal of the modernisation paradigm lacks validity. There are other ways of modernisation and development than the western way. Second, individualism and capitalistic democracy do not seem to be the pre-requisites of development; rather they may be the product of economic development. Japan is economically developed but individualism is nearly absent and democracy is yet to take roost. Third, the socio-cultural context imparts distinct characteristics to the development process. The conceptual tendencies of post-modernism also support this suggestion. The socio-cultural context and development process display three patterns of interaction: reinforcing each other, going parallel with each other in different arenas, and contradicting each other. The third pattern undermines the development process and leads to tensions and conflict between individuals, between groups and between individual and society.

India falls in the third category. There are two popular notions about the development experience in India. First, that traditional social institutions and structures like caste, religion family and cultural values resist modernisation and development. Second, that the process of modernisation and development is eroding our traditional social structures and social values. The first tries to explain the cause of failures and the second tries to explain the impact of the success of development. The underlying assumption of both is that traditional and modern are incompatible. But both offer inadequate explanations as they view Indian tradition in such a way that it becomes irrelevant in defining the socio-cultural context of contemporary Indian society. Do Indian traditional social forms embody that spirit which originally marked their origin and development? Do such institutions and values as the '*varnashrama*' order, caste, religion, toleration, spirit of renunciation and selfless duty really define contemporary Indian society? Or, is it the case that these forms are traditional but the underlying spirit is quite different? Otherwise, how have we failed even in those modern endeavours whose ethos was compatible with the basic elements of Indian culture and society? With a long tradition of collectivism, selfless duty and religious tolerance how have we failed

in the cooperative movement, in the '*Bhoodan Andolan*' and in forging religious harmony? The answer is that when we needed these endeavours to succeed, the spirit required for their success was no more a part of our socio-cultural context.

Thus, traditional social forms and cultural values do not adequately define the present socio-cultural context or the actions and behaviour of individuals in India. The dominant elements of the present socio-cultural context are: (i) individualism directed towards materialism, thereby undermining collective efforts for the achievement of social causes; (ii) escapism, lack of boldness and initiatives in the public domain undermining entrepreneurship and innovation. The lack of success on the development front is the combined effect of these two factors. Both these factors are alien to the traditional culture of India but have permeated down to all aspects of its socio-cultural context due to the superimposition of external cultural patterns and values.

Take the example of caste and religion in India. Caste and religion in India have become tools in the hands of a few to further individual self-interest. The present polarisation on caste and communal lines does not prove our affinity to them but demonstrates a desperate attempt to obtain social, economic and political privileges. The spirit of escapism and lack of initiative prompt us to take shelter behind caste or religion. It is a common assumption that diversity on the lines of language, region, caste or religion hampers the processes of development and nation-building in India. This cultural diversity *per se* is not the cause of lack of development. Recent studies have proved that diverse societies develop as rapidly, and enjoy as much political stability as homogeneous one.[23] In fact, nationalism in India has not been able to break these forms and short-cut tools because of underlying individual self-interest. Indian nationalism was a 'nationalism of crisis' and has now become a 'nationalism in crisis'. The family is the only institution which, to some extent, moderates the spirit of possessive individualism. The family, however, but it is not merely a social product but a bio-social product.

How have these alien elements succeeded in replacing ancient cultural values and in penetrating the present socio-cultural context? The process, it has been suggested, started during the medieval period. According to A.L. Basham, 'Hinduism was already very conservative, when lieutenants of Mohammad of Ghor conquered the Ganga valley. In the middle ages, for every tolerant and progressive teacher, there must have been hundreds of orthodox Brahmins who looked upon themselves as preservers of immemorial 'Arya Dharma' against barbarians who overran the land of 'Bharat Varsha'. Under their

influence, the complex rule of Hindu way of life became if anything stricter and more rigidly applied.'[24]

If Muslim rule was the consequence of this degeneration, it further intensified the trend of conservatism. India of the 18th century was, if anything, more conservative than it has been in the days of first the Muslim invasion. One positive reaction that served to rejuvenate Indian culture was the *bhakti* movement led by Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Tulsi and others. Again, the appearance of Islam in opposition to the conservative Hindu society of medieval times hampered the process of assimilation between the two.[25] This was so different from the manner in which Buddhism has been assimilated with Shintoism in Japan.

As Indian society and culture felt the full impact of Islamic values, several of its significant elements were pushed into the background. The Islamic socio-cultural context was characterised by the spirit of mysticism rather than rationalism, love for splendour and luxuries among royal and noble classes, lack of a spirit of inquiry and investigation, absence of a rising middle class, and the neglect of scientific and technical education. By the end of the 17th century, the combined impact of this cultural orientation stifled entrepreneurial activities and siphoned away capital for unproductive activities. Meera Singh rightly concludes, 'since the ruling classes as also the bureaucracy spent a substantial proportion of their income on the purchase of consumer goods, often wasteful and superfluous, there was no incentive for economic productivity. The economic stagnation, with the rise in cost of prices widened the gap between rich and poor. Consequently, India of the beginning of the 17th century comprised of a small extravagant upper class, a small and frugal middle class and a very numerous lower class on the whole worse off than now.'[26] More striking was the lack of scientific temper and spirit of investigation which obstructed the emergence of capitalism and industrial revolution, leaving India far behind European societies in terms of economic growth and development.

On the other hand, the Renaissance in Europe altered the basic parameters of development. Henceforth, material progress replaced spiritual salvation as a goal of individual and social development. The same spiritual excellence, for which India was known as a developed country in the ancient period, was considered as a sign of backwardness. It is this notion of individual and society which has been synthesised as the basic element of the western concept of modernisation and development. It was this idea of individual and society which was introduced in India during the 19th century by the British as a part of

the modernisation mission in the background of the prevailing cultural passivity. It was again, this cultural onslaught which brought about the so-called Indian renaissance in the 19th century. The message of the Indian renaissance lacks coherence and unity. It ranges from support western modernism to outright revival of the ancient tradition.

Modified Indian cultural forms came into contact with western cultural patterns characterised by possessive individualism, materialism, consumerism and concern for self instead of the community. These values may have been conducive to economic growth in Europe but the same were not compatible with Indian conditions. The British themselves ruled this country as a business class in their own self-interest. In fact, the industrial revolution in England was in considerable measure itself a consequences of the plundered wealth of India. The British authorities not only failed take any steps to protect the declining Indian industries but actually discouraged Indian manufactures in order to protect those of England. The decay of Indian trade and industry set in towards the close of 18th century and its ruin was complete by the middle of the 19th century.[27] The impact of western culture was more pronounced on the indigenous business class which resorted to short-cuts for personal benefits. In its essence, the modern structure of the Indian state also evolved from the western cultural roots, which was destined to play a dominant role in the development process

Thus the western idea of materialistic individual and atomistic society became a part of the Indian socio-cultural context. After independence when the development process was launched in this background, it resulted in the furtherance of individual self-interest at the cost of social causes.[28] In fact, it is not the traditional culture of India but the core idea of modernisation—materialistic individualism—which obstructs collective and committed efforts for development. The traditional Indian culture forged a harmony between material and spiritual aspects of individual life on the one hand, and integrated individual self-interest with social interest on the other. The very absence of Indian cultural spirit of harmony and integration allows individualistic self-interest to prevail upon the general welfare. The social violence, conflict and corruption are just manifestations of this tendency. Let us see how other nations have induced suitable individual behaviour to achieve collective goals. At the initial stages of development, Europe controlled individual self-interest with the help of authoritarian rule, If Japan has exploited strength of tradition, China is using both-tradition and state authority.

Is there any alternative left for India? Indian scholars have criticised the western idea of modernisation and development and have suggested some alternative strategies, but so far the core of the western concept about individual and society has not been challenged. Any initiative for devising an alternative path of development should start from an alternative definition of individual and society.[29] With a growing population and scarcity of resources, material well-being would continue to hold the central place. But that is not the end but the beginning of development. Aggressive individualism has to be converted into social commitment in order to bring about a prosperous and egalitarian society. This calls for nothing short of a second cultural renaissance. This involves not merely the reinterpretation of culture but also its effective resurrection in a manner that would pervade the thoughts and behaviour of the people. In this respect, the following proposals may be considered: (i) protection and promotion of the diverse cultural identities as they define the federal character of Indian society. These cultural identities provide opportunity for the genuine expression of our social self and commitments; (ii) ensure and encourage the voluntary participation of individuals in various movements/groups emerging in the fields of environment, women liberation, literary etc., because they tend to orient individual efforts towards collective goals; and (iii) the content, process and techniques of education are to be restructured to suit our cultural requirements. The prevailing intellectual passivism needs to be replaced by intellectual activism in the form of continuous dialogues between intellectuals and society.

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