

SANSKRITISATION

Meaning of Sanskritisation

The “term “Sanskritisation” was introduced into Indian Sociology by Prof. M.N. Srinivas. The term refers to a process whereby people of lower castes collectively try to adopt upper caste practices and beliefs, as a preliminary step to acquire higher status. Thus it indicates a process of cultural mobility that is taking place in the traditional social system of India.

M.N. Srinivas in his study of the Coorg in Karnataka, found that lower castes, in order to raise their position in the caste hierarchy, adopted some customs and practices of the Brahmins, and gave up some of their own which were considered to be "impure" by the higher castes. For example, they gave up meat-eating, drinking liquor and animal sacrifice to their deities. They imitated Brahmins in matters of dress, food and rituals. By doing this, within a generation or so they could claim higher positions in the hierarchy of castes. In the beginning, M.N. Srinivas used the term “Brahminisation” (in his book “Religion and Society among the Coorgs” -1971) to denote this process. Later on, he replaced it by “Sanskritisation”.

Definition of Sanskritisation

M.N. Srinivas, in fact, has been broadening his definition of the term ‘Sanskritisation’ from time to time. Initially, he described it as- “the process of mobility of lower castes by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism to move in the caste hierarchy in a generation or two” - (1962). Later on, he redefined it as “a process by which a low caste or a tribe or other group changes in caste” - (M.N. Srinivas in his “Social Change in Modern India - 1971). The second definition is much broader for it includes ideologies also (which include ideas such as ‘Karma’ ‘dharma’, ‘papa’ (sin), ‘punya’ ‘moksha’ etc.).

Sanskritisation and Brahminisation

Sanskritisation is a much broader concept than Brahminisation. M.N. Srinivas preferred it to Brahminisation for some reasons:

Sanskritisation is a broader term and it can subsume in itself the narrower process of Brahminisation. For instance, today, though by and large, Brahmins are vegetarians and teetotalers,

some of them such as Kashmiris, Bengalis and saraswath Brahmins eat non-vegetarian food. Had the term ‘Brahminisation’ been used, it would have become necessary to specify which particular Brahmin group was meant.

Further, the reference groups of Sanskritisation are not always Brahmins. The process of imitation need not necessarily take place on the model of Brahmins. Srinivas himself has given the example of the low castes of Mysore who adopted the way of life of Lingayats, who are not Brahmin but who claim equality with Brahmins. Similarly, the smiths (one of the lower castes) of Mysore call

themselves Vishwakarma Brahmins and wear sacred threads and have sanskritised some of their rituals. (Still, some of them eat meat and drink liquor. For the very same reason, many castes, including some untouchable castes do not accept food or water from their hands).

The lower castes imitated not only Brahmins but also Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Jats, Shudras, etc. in different parts of the country. Hence the term Brahminisation does not completely explain this process. M.N. Srinivas himself acknowledged this fact and wrote: "I now realise that, I emphasized unduly the Brahminical model of Sanskritisation and ignored the other models Kshatriya, Vaishyas and Shudra..." ("Social Change in Modern India - 1971).

WESTERNISATION

The role 'Westernisation' has been very significant in understanding the socio-cultural changes of modern India. British rule produced radical and lasting changes in the Indian society and culture. The British brought with them, (unlike the previous invaders) new technology, institutions, knowledge, beliefs, and values. These have become the main source of social mobility/or individuals as well as groups. It is in this context, M.N. Srinivas, a renowned sociologist of India, 'introduced the term' 'Westernisation' mainly to explain the changes that have taken place in the Indian society and culture due to the Western contact through the British rule.

Definition of the Term "Westernization"

According to M.N. Srinivas, 'Westernisation' refers to 'the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels - technology, institutions, ideology, values (Ref.: "Social Change in Modern India" By M.N. Srinivas).

M.N. Srinivas criticises Lerner's concept of 'modernisation' on the ground that it is a value loaded term. According to him, "Modernisation" is normally used in the sense that it is good. He, therefore, prefers to use the term 'Westernisation'. He describes the technological changes, establishment of educational institutions, rise of nationalism and new political culture, etc. as almost the bye-products of Westernisation or the British rule of two hundred years in India. Thus, by Westernisation, Srinivas primarily meant the British impact.

"During the 19th century the British slowly laid the foundations of a modern state by surveying land, settling the revenue, creating a modern bureaucracy, army and police, instituting law courts, codifying the law, developing communications - railways, post and telegraph, roads and canals-establishing schools and colleges, and so on..." (Srinivas). The British brought with them the printing press which led to many-sided changes. Books and journals made possible the transmission of modern as well as traditional knowledge to large number of Indians. Newspapers helped the people living in the remote corners of the country to realize their common bonds and to

understand the events happening in the world outside.

More than any other thing the Western education had an impact on the style of living of the people. They gave up their inhibition towards meat-eating and consumption of alcohol. They also adopted Western style of dressing and dining. As Gandhiji wrote in his "Autobiography", educated

Indians undertook the task of 'becoming English gentlemen in their dress, manners, habits, choices, preferences, etc.'" It included even learning to appreciate Western music and participating in ball dancing. Western education resulted in a big change in the outlook of those educated.

M.N. Srinivas says that it is necessary "to distinguish conceptually between Westernisation and two other processes usually concouilait with it. - Industrialization and Urbanisation." He gives two reasons for this: "(i) Urbanization is not a simple function of 'industrialisation'" and there were cities in Pre-industrial world" also. "(ii) There are cases of rural people who are more urbanised than urban people".

MAIN FEATURES OF WESTERNISATION

In comparison with Sanskritisation, Westernisation is a simpler concept. As it is already made clear, it explains the impact of Western contact (particularly of British rule) on the Indian society and culture. M.N. Srinivas defends the uses of the term when he says that there is "need for

such a term when analysing the changes that a non-Western country undergoes as a result of prolonged contact with a Western one".

Westernisation Implies, according to Srinivas, "certain value preferences". The most important value, which in turn subsumes several other values, is "humanitarianism". It implies "an active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex". He further observes that equalitarianism and secularisation are both included in humanitarianism. Humanitarianism underlay many of the reforms introduced by the British in the first half of the 19th century. As British rule progressed rationality and humanitarianism became broader, deeper and more powerful. The humanitarian outlook among the Westernised elite led first to social reform movement and later on to the independence movement. They were actually aware of existing social evils like child marriage, taboos against widow remarriage, seclusion of women, hostility to women's education, taboos against intercaste marriages, intercaste dining, untouchability etc. Social reform movements started with the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy who founded the "Brahma Samaj", Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Sri Ramakrishna Mission and such other movements that followed later, too had imbibed in them the humanitarian values.

Westernisation not only includes the introduction of new institutions (for example, newspapers, elections, Christian missionaries) but also fundamental changes in old institutions. For example, India had schools long before the arrival of the British. But they were different from the British-introduced schools in that they had been restricted to upper caste children and transmitted mostly traditional knowledge. Other institutions such as the army, civil service and law courts were also similarly affected.

The form and pace of Westernisation of India varied from region to region and from one section of population to another. For example, one group of people became Westernised in their dress, diet, manners, speech, sports and in the gadgets they used. While another absorbed Western science, knowledge and literature, remaining relatively free from certain other aspects of Westernisation. For example, Brahmins accepted the Western dress habits and educational systems and also used gadgets such as radio, television, car, telephone etc. But they did not accept the British diet, dancing, hunting and such other habits. This distinction is, however, only relative and not absolute.

According to Srinivas, Westernisation pervades political and cultural fields also. He writes “In the political and cultural fields, Westernisation has given birth not only to nationalism but also to revivalism communalism, ‘casteism’, heightened linguistic consciousness, and regionalism. To make matters even more bewildering, revivalist movements have used Western type schools and colleges, and books, pamphlets and journals to propagate their ideas”

As M.N. Srinivas claims, “The term Westernisation unlike ‘Modernisation’ is ethically neutral. Its use does not carry the implication that it is good or bad, whereas modernisation is normally used in the sense that it is good.”

According to Srinivas, “the increase in Westernisation does not retard the process of Sanskritisation. Both go on simultaneously, and to some extent, increase in Westernisation accelerates the process of Sanskritisation. For example, the postal facilities, railways, buses and newspaper media, which are the fruits of Western impact on India render more organised religious pilgrimages, meetings, caste solidarities, etc., possible now than in the past”

The term Westernisation is preferable to ‘Modernisation’, M.N. Srinivas asserts. “He contends that modernisation presupposes 'rationality of goals' which in the ultimate analysis could not be taken for granted since human ends are based on value preferences and "rationality could only be predicted of the means not of the ends of social action". He considers the term "Modernisation" as subjective and the term 'Westernisation' as more objective. (Whereas writers such as Daniel Lerner, Harold Gould, Milton Singer and Yogendra Singh consider the term 'Modernisation' as more preferable in place of Westernisation).