

DIALECTIC OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF D. P. MUKERJI*

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For the important and immediate task of reconstructing Indian culture through intelligent adaptation to and assimilation of the new forces in the light of a reinterpreted past, Sociology is the most useful study.

D. P. MUKERJI (1952 : 13)

In this essay I make an attempt to briefly examine some central ideas in the work of the late Professor Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji (1894-1961).¹ He was one of the founding fathers of sociology in India and taught during the second quarter of the century at the Lucknow University, where it was my privilege to have been his student. I do believe that if an intellectual is worth commemorating through the means of a memorial lecture, then his work is worthy of serious consideration. It is an obligation, an expression of the sincerity of the gesture of commemoration and, in fact, the best homage we may pay such a scholar and thinker. This should not, however, mean uncritical acceptance of the ideas under examination. DP (to refer to Professor Mukerji by the 'name' by which he was best known among his friends, colleagues and students alike) would have never approved of that.

I should like to mention here that I have another reason for wanting to turn to DP's own work. It so happens that considerable misrepresentation of this work has occurred in recent years; one would ignore what is said informally, but some grievous distortions have appeared in print.² In fact, two tendencies are noticeable. The more general of these has been to simply ignore DP's work. His books are out of print and not readily available in libraries, but where they are to be found they are not read. They rarely find a place in courses of studies. A reason for this may well be the contemporary concern with immediate goals and with a narrow empiricism. Be that as it may, this neglect is quite unjust and not only to him but, in fact more so, to ourselves, precisely because he ever was a critic of

narrow dogmatisms. Moreover, how can we hope to build sound scholarly traditions in India if we do not take the work of our predecessors seriously? Surely, their experience should be as relevant to our tasks of today, if not more so, as the concerns of intellectuals in other parts of the world.

Then there is the misrepresentation I mentioned, arising out of a casual acquaintance with DP's work. It would seem that not only his critics but also some of his admirers have arrived at evaluations of his work without studying it closely. This is harder to explain and, needless to stress, it is the more dangerous tendency.

DP's work demands to be seriously examined as was done, for instance, in his life-time by one of the very ablest of his students and colleagues, Professor A. K. Saran (see Saran 1959 and 1965). I undertake here to make a small contribution to this important task in the hope more of perhaps persuading others to do the same, and do it better, than in the conviction that I personally can do it well.

II

The theme I have chosen for discussion is the relationship of tradition and modernity in DP's thought. It is true that this bipolarity is now becoming quite outmoded. Yet, I think, there would be a consensus among intellectuals and policy-makers in defining our endeavours today as a nation as the quest for modernization : or, as DP would have put it, the effort to give a push to history towards the next higher stage. We may have become weary of the concept of modernization, but the important question is, have we carefully formulated the reasons for this weariness? And did we earlier develop adequately the argument for modernization and examine its nature and scope?

I am not sure we have done these things; and it is my belief that DP is an excellent guide not only in the clarification of the concept of modernity but also in this self-questioning. He drew attention to some of the hazards that attend the task; and his own work illustrates others. Thus, he would have argued that our modernity is spurious, a sham, and indeed a major obstacle in the path of genuine modernization; but his criticism ultimately fails to point to a satisfactory solution. I should like to construct this argument in some detail.

Let me begin with DP's early work to examine the seeds of his ideas regarding tradition and modernity that came to flower later on. It is interesting to note here that he considered his first two books. *Personality and*

the Social Sciences (1924) and *Basic Concepts of Sociology* (1932), "personal documents"—products of his endeavour to formulate an adequate concept of social science. From the very beginning he organized his ideas around the notion of Personality. He took up the position that the abstract individual should not be the focus of social science theories, and pleaded for a "wholistic", psycho-sociological approach. It was this "synthesis of the double process of individuality and the socialization of the uniqueness of individual life, this perfect unity" that he called Personality (1924 : ii).

Looking back at his work of a lifetime, he said in his presidential address to the first Sociological Conference in 1955 that he had come to sociology from economics and history because he was interested in developing his personality through knowledge (1958 : 228). The office of a comprehensive social science, transcending the prevailing compartmentalization of social sciences, was conceived to be the development of an integrated though many-faceted personality. This is an idea which, as A. K. Saran (1962 : 167) has pointed out, is "in some ways parallel to the ideal suggested by Moore in his *Principia Ethica*".

Thus, at the very beginning of his intellectual career DP committed himself to a view of knowledge and of the knower. Knowledge was not, as he put it, mere "matter-of-factness" but ultimately, after taking the empirical datum and the scientific method for its study into account, philosophic (1932 : iv-v). Economics had to be rooted in concrete social reality, that is it had to be sociological; sociology had to take full cognizance of cultural specificity, that is it had to be historical; history had to rise above a narrow concern with the triviality of the gone-by events through the incorporation in it of a vision of the future, that is it had to be philosophical. Given such an enterprise, it is obvious that the knower had to be a daring adventurer with a large vision rather than a timid seeker of the safety of specialization. He pointedly asked in the mid-forties (1946 : 11) :

We talk of India's vivisection, but what about the vivisection of knowledge which has been going on these years in the name of learning, scholarship and specialization? A 'subject' has been cut off from knowledge, knowledge has been excised from life, and life has been amputated from living social conditions. It is really high time for Sociology to come to its own. It may not offer *the* Truth. Truth is the concern of mystics and philosophers, Meanwhile, we may as well be occupied with

the discipline which is most truthful to the wholeness and the dynamics of the objective human reality.³

The philosophical approach which DP wished cultivated was that of rationalism, of "Practical and Speculative Reason". Reason was to be understood as a tool, "not of understanding merely, but of the development of Personality" (1932 : x). It seems a reasonable conjecture, though one could hardly assert it, that at this time DP may have been under the influence of the teachings of Hegel. In fact, such an influence seems to have persisted till the very end, prominently in his concern with reason and human dignity, his attitude towards the past, wanting to preserve whatever was judged as valuable in it, and his fascination with dialectics. But, then, these values could also have been imbibed from the Hindu Upanishadic tradition.

III

DP's concern in the nineteen twenties and thirties was with the mental make-up of modern Indian intellectuals and their world-view, which he rightly judged to be a borrowal of the Western liberal outlook with its various preoccupations, most notably the notions of "progress" and "equality". These and the related concepts of "social forces" and "social control" were subjected to critical analysis in *Basic Concepts of Sociology*. It is in his discussion of the relation of "progress" to "personality" that, it seems to me, we come across early intimations of his later view on the nature of modernization.

Rejecting the evolutionist notion of "progress" as a natural phenomenon, DP stressed the element of "purpose" in the life of human beings. Development is not growth, he admonished us, but the broader process of the unfolding of potentialities (in this he followed Hegel and Marx though he did not say so explicitly), and added that the "emergence of values and their dynamic character" must receive adequate consideration (1932: 9). He further wrote (1932 : 15) :

Progress can best be understood as a problem covering the whole field of human endeavour. It has a direction in time. It has various means and tactics of development. Fundamentally, it is a problem of balancing of values.

The scope of the problem is as wide as human society, and as deep as human personality. In so far as human values arise only in contact with

human consciousness at its different levels, the problem of progress has unique reference to the changing individual living in a particular region at a particular time in association with other individuals who share with him certain common customs, beliefs, traditions, and possibly a common temperament.

It seems to me permissible to derive from the foregoing statement the conclusion that "modernization" is the special form which "progress" takes for people in the Third World countries today. If this is granted,⁴ then the following words need to be pondered (1932 : 29-30) :

Progress . . . is . . . a movement of freedom . . . What is of vital significance is that our time-adjustments should be made in such a way that we should be free from the necessity of remaining in social contact for every moment of our life. This is an important condition of progress. In leisure alone can man conquer the tyranny of time, by investing it with a meaning, a direction, a memory and a purpose. Obstacles to leisure, including the demands of a hectic social life, often mistaken for progress, must be removed in order that the inner personality of man may get the opportunity for development. This is why the Hindu philosopher wisely insists on the daily hour of contemplation, and after a certain age, a well-marked period of retirement from the turmoil of life. The bustle of modern civilization is growing apace and the need for retirement is becoming greater.

The above passage has a contemporary ring; and it is very relevant. If we paraphrase it, using words and phrases that are in use today, we get a succinct reference to the unthinking craving for and the human costs of modernization, including alienation, to the values of individual freedom and human dignity, and to social commitment. For DP progress was, as I have already quoted him saying, a problem of balancing of values; and so is modernization. When we introduce values into our discourse, and the rationalist perspective that DP recommended will have it in no other way, we are faced with the problem of the hierarchy of values, that is with the quest for ultimate or fundamental values. For these DP turned to the Upanishads, to *shantam*, *shivant*, *advaitam*, that is peace, welfare, unity.

The first is the principle of harmony which sustains the universe amidst all its incessant changes, movements and conflicts. The second is the

principle of co-ordination in the social environment. The third gives expression to the unity which transcends all the diverse forms of states, behaviours and conflicts, and permeates thought and action with ineffable joy . . . On this view, progress ultimately depends on the development of personality by a conscious realization of the principles of Harmony, Welfare and Unity (1932 : 35).

This appeal to Vedanta, while discussing the Western notion of progress, is a disconcerting characteristic of DP's thought throughout. He sought to legitimize it by calling it "synthesis", which itself he described as a characteristic of the historical process, the third stage of the dialectic triad. He thus evaded, it would seem, a closer examination of the nature and validity of synthesis. Its existence was assumed and self-validating. One's disappointment and criticism of DP's position is not on the ground of the source of this trinity of values—I am reminded of the research student at an Indian university who told me of her deep disappointment that DP was at heart a Hindu—but on the ground that Harmony, Welfare and Unity are too vague and esoteric, as they make their elusive appearance in DP's discourse; and he does not show how they may be integrated with such values of the West as are embodied in its industrial civilization. On the positive side, however, it must be added that DP's preoccupation with ultimate values should be assessed in the light of his deep distrust of the installation of Science as the redeemer of mankind and of Scientific Method (based on a narrow empiricism and exclusive reliance on inductive inference) as the redeemer of social sciences.

IV

I have heard it said that DP's intellectual life reveals a striking lack of continuity between his early work, when he was interested almost exclusively in broad conceptual issues rather than in understanding the nature and problems of Indian society, and his later work, when he became increasingly immersed in India. Also, it is asserted that, this transition in his ideas was marked by a growing salience of a Marxist, or pseudo-Marxist (depending upon the critic's own ideological position), orientation in his work. That the emphases in his work changed with the passage of time may not be denied—and what is wrong with that?—but to maintain that there is a sharp break in the two phases of his work would seem to be an overstatement.

DP, it would seem, was always and deeply influenced by the social environment around him. To the extent to which the society in which he lived was undergoing change, to that extent there was a discernible change in his intellectual concerns also, and he was conscious of this. He even wrote about it : "In my view, the thing changing is more real and objective than change per se" (1958 : 241). He was a very sensitive person, and many of those who knew him intimately will recall how a turn in events—whether of the university, the city, the country or the world—would cast a gloom on him or bring him genuine joy. He had an incredible capacity for intense subjective experience : it perhaps killed him in the end. (One of his favourite books was Goethe's *Werther*). In all his writings he addressed himself to his contemporaries: he had an unstated contempt for those who write for posterity with an eye on personal fame and some kind of immortality, and I think he was right in this attitude.⁶

It would seem that what DP was most conscious of in his earlier writings was the need to establish links between the traditional culture of which he was a proud though critical inheritor and the modern liberal education of which he was a critical though appreciative product. The two—Indian culture and modern education—could not stay apart without each becoming impoverished—as indeed had been happening—and therefore had to be synthesized in the life of the people in general and of the middle classes and the intellectuals in particular. In this respect, DP was a characteristic product of his times. He was attracted by the image of the future which the West held out to traditional societies and, at the same time, he was attached to his own tradition, the core of which was the Hindu tradition. The need to defend what he regarded as the essential values of this tradition thus became a compelling concern, particularly in his later writings.

Dualities never ceased to bother DP, and he ever sought to resolve the conflict implicit in persistent dualism through transcendence. This transcendence was to him what history was all about—or ought to be. But history was not for him a tablet already etched on, once for all, and for each and every people. Hence his early criticism that, in the hands of Trotsky, Lenin and Bukharin, history had degenerated into "pure dialectic" (1932 : 184). This criticism was repeated by him again and again. In 1945, he complained that the Marxists had made the "laws of dialectics" behave like the "laws of *karma*"—

predetermining every fact, event and human behaviour in its course; or

else, they are held forth as a moral justification for what is commonly described as opportunism (1945 : 18).

For DP historiography was meaningless unless it was recognized that the decision to "write history" entailed the decision to "act history" (1945 : 46). And history was being enacted in India in the 1930s, if it ever was during DP's life-time, by the middle classes and, under their leadership, by the masses. What they were doing increasingly bothered him, for history had not only to be enacted but to be enacted right. The question of values could not be evaded. The middle classes whose intellectual life was his concern in his earlier work were also his concern in his later work, but now it was their politics that absorbed him. In this respect his concern avowedly with himself was in fact sociological, for he believed that no one is an island unto himself but embedded not merely in his class but in his total socio-cultural environment. The focus was on modern Indian culture and the canvas naturally was the whole of India.

Modern Indian Culture : A Sociological Study was first published in 1942, and a second revised edition was completed in 1947, the year of independence, but also of partition. It was written under the impending shadow of the vivisection of India; anguish and sorrow are the mood of the book. The problem, as he saw it, was first to explain why the calamity of communal division had befallen India, and then to use this knowledge to shape a better future. Sociology had to be the hand-maiden of history and it was no mean role; indeed it was a privilege. His analysis led him to the conclusion that a distortion had entered into the long-established course of Indian history and crippled it. The happening responsible for this was British rule. But let me first quote DP's succinct statement of the character of modern Indian culture (1948 : 1):

... As a social and historical process . . . Indian culture represents certain common traditions that have given rise to a number of general attitudes. The major influences in their shaping have been Buddhism, Islam, and Western commerce and culture. It was through the assimilation and conflict of such varying forces that Indian culture became what it is today, neither Hindu nor Islamic, neither a replica of the Western modes of living and thought nor a purely Asiatic product.

In this historical process, synthesis had been the dominant organizing principle and the Hindu, the Buddhist and the Muslim had together shaped a world-view in which, according to DP, "the fact of Being was of lasting significance". His favourite quotation from the Upanishads was *charaiveti*, keep moving forward. This meant that there had developed an indifference to "the transient and the sensate" and a preoccupation with the subordination of "the little self" to and ultimately its dissolution in "the Supreme Reality" (1948: 2). This world-view DP called "the mystical outlook". He maintained that Islam could have on its arrival in India shaken Hindu society in its very roots but Buddhism served as a cushion. Buddhism itself had failed to rend Hindu society asunder and had succeeded only in rendering it more elastic. Muslim rule was an economically progressive force but, on the whole, it brought about only a variation in the already existent socio-economic structure (1948 : 65-67) and provided no real alternatives to native economic and political systems. "The Muslims just reigned, but seldom ruled" (1948 : 24).

British rule, however, did prove to be a real turning point in as much as it succeeded in changing the relations of production, or to use DP's own words, "the very basis of the Indian social economy" (1948 : 24). New interests in land and commerce were generated; a new pattern of education was introduced; physical and occupational mobility received a strong impetus. Overshadowing all these developments, however, was the liquidation of an established middle class and "the emergence of a spurious middle class"

who do not play any truly historical part in the socio-economic evolution of the country, remain distant from the rest of the people in professional isolation or as rent receivers, and are divorced from the realities of social and economic life . . . Their ignorance of the background of Indian culture is profound . . . Their pride in culture is in inverse proportion to its lack of social content (1948 : 25).

It was this middle class which helped in the consolidation of British rule in India but later challenged it successfully; it was also this same middle class which brought about the partition of the country. Its rootlessness made it a "counterfeit class" and therefore its handiwork (whether in the domain of education and culture, in the political arena, or in the field of economic enterprise) had inevitably something of the same spurious quality. "The politics and the culture of a subject country", DP wrote, "cannot be separated from each other" (1948 : 207). To expect such an

"elite" to lead an independent India along the path of genuine modernization, DP asserted with remarkable prescience, would be unrealistic. He warned that before they could be expected to remake India, modernize it, the elite themselves must be remade. And he wrote a forthright, if not easy, prescription for them : "conscious adjustment to Indian traditions and symbols" (1948 : 215), for "culture cannot be 'made 'from scratch" (1948 : 214).

It is important to understand why he made this particular recommendation, why he wanted the withdrawal of foreign rule to be accompanied by a withdrawal into the self which, let me hasten to add, was quite different from a withdrawal into the past or inaction. DP was not only *not* a revivalist, he was also keenly aware of the imminent possibility of revivalism and its fatal consequences. He noted that it would be the form that political hatred disguised as civil hatred would take after independence. But he was not hopeless, for he fondly believed that revivalism could be combated by giving salience to economic interests through a "material programme" that would cut across communal exclusiveness. He envisaged India's emancipation from the negative violence of the constrictive primordial loyalties of religion and caste through the emergence of class consciousness (1948 : 216). He was silent on class conflict, however, and his critics may justifiably accuse him of not seeing his analysis through to its logical conclusion. His optimism was the sanguine hope of an Indian liberal intellectual rather than the fiery conviction of a Marxist revolutionary.

In any case, we know today, three decades after DP's expression of faith on this score, that class does not displace caste in India. Nor do they coexist in compartments : they combine but they do not fuse. DP's vision of a peaceful, progressive India born out of the "union" of diverse elements, of distinctive regional cultures, rather than out of the type of "unity" that the British imposed from above, however, remains eminently valid even today. The *accommodation* of various kinds of conflicting loyalties within a national framework, rather than national *integration*, is the strategy which new African and Asian states faced with cultural pluralism are finding to be both feasible and advantageous. We all know how Pakistan broke up in 1971 (see Madan 1974).

DP's plea for a reorientation to tradition was, then, of a positive nature—an essential condition for moving forward, for restoring historical dynamism, for reforging the broken chain of the socio-cultural process of

synthesis. Employing Franklin Giddings's classification of traditions into primary, secondary and tertiary, he suggested that by the time of the British arrival, Hindus and Muslims had yet not achieved a full synthesis of traditions at all levels of social existence. There was a greater measure of agreement between them regarding the utilization and appropriation of natural resources and to a lesser extent in respect of aesthetic and religious traditions. In the tertiary traditions of conceptual thought, however, differences survived prominently.

It was into this situation that the British moved in, blundering their way into India, and gave Indian history a severe jolt. As already stated, they destroyed indigenous merchant capital and the rural economy, pushed through a land settlement based on alien concepts of profit and property, and established a socially useless educational system. Such opportunities as it did create could not be fully utilized, DP said, for they cut across India's traditions, and "because the methods of their imposition spoilt the substance of her need for new life" (1948 : 206).

VI

At this point it seems pertinent just to point out that, while DP followed Marx closely in his conception of history and in his characterization of British rule as uprooting, he differed significantly not only with Marx's assessment of the positive consequences of this rule but also with Marx's negative assessment of the pre-British traditions. It is important to note this because some Marxists have claimed DP on their side, despite his repeated denials that he was a Marxist; he claimed to be only a "Marxologist" (Singh 1973 : 216). Some non-Marxists also have, it may be added, described DP as a Marxist.

It will be recalled that Marx had in his articles on British rule in India asserted that India had a long past but "no history at all, at least no known history"; that its social condition had "remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity"; that it was "the British intruder who broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning-wheel"; that it was "British steam and science" which "uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindustan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry". Marx had listed England's "crimes" in India and proceeded to point out that she had become "the unconscious tool of history" whose actions would ultimately result in a "fundamental revolution". He had said (Marx and Engels 1959:31):

England had to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive and other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in India.

Thus for Marx, as for so many others since his time, including Indian intellectuals of various shades of opinion, the modernization of India had to be its Westernization.

As has already been stated above, DP was intellectually and emotionally opposed to such a view about India's past and future, whether it came from Marx or from liberal bourgeois historians. He refused to be ashamed of or apologetic about India's past. The statement of his position was unambiguous (1945 : 11):

Our attitude is one of humility towards the given fund. But it is also an awareness of the need, the utter need, of recreating the given and making it flow. The given of India is very much in ourselves. And we want to make something worthwhile out of it..

Indian history could not be made by outsiders: it had to be enacted by Indians. In this endeavour they had to be not only firm of purpose but also clear-headed. He wrote (1945 : 46):

Our sole interest is to write and to act Indian History. Action means making; it has a starting point—this specificity called India; or if that be too vague, this specificity of the contact between India and England or the West. Making involves changing, which in turn requires (*a*) a scientific study of the tendencies which make up this specificity, and (*b*) a deep understanding of the Crisis [which marks the beginning no less than the end of an epoch]. In all these matters, the Marxian method... is likely to be more useful than other methods. If it is not, it can be discarded. After all, the object survives.

"Specificity" and "crisis" are the key words in this passage: the former points to the importance of the encounter of traditions and the latter to its consequences. When one speaks of tradition, or of "Marxist specification", one means, in DP's words, "the comparative obduracy of a culture-pattern". He expected the Marxist approach to be grounded in the specificity of Indian history (1945 : 45, 1946 : 162 ff), as indeed Marx himself had done by focusing on capitalism, the dominant institution of Western society in his time. Marx, it will be said, was interested in precipitating the crisis of contradictory class interests in capitalist society (1945 : 37).

DP, too, was interested in movement, in the release of the arrested historical process, in the relation between tradition and modernity. He asked for a sociology which would "show the way out of the social system by analysing the process of transformation" (1958 : 240). This could be done by focusing first on tradition and only then on change.

The first task for us, therefore, is to study the social traditions to which we have been born and in which we have had our being. This task includes the study of the changes in traditions by internal and external pressures. The latter are mostly economic . . . Unless the economic force is extraordinarily strong—and it is that only when the modes of production are altered—traditions survive by adjustments. The capacity for adjustment is the measure of the vitality of traditions. One can have a full measure of this vitality only by immediate experience. Thus it is that I give top priority to the understanding (in Dilthey's sense) of traditions even for the study of their changes. In other words, the study of Indian traditions . . . should precede the socialist interpretations of changes in Indian traditions in terms of economic forces (1958 : 232).

This brings us to the last phase of DP's work. Before I turn to it, however, I should mention that Louis Dumont also has drawn our attention to an unresolved problem in DP's sociology. He points out that one's "recognition of the absence of the individual in traditional India" obliges one to "admit with others that India has no history" for "history and the individual are inseparable"; it follows that "Indian civilization [is] . . . unhistorical by definition" (Dumont 1967 : 239). Viewed from this perspective, DP's impatience with the Marxist position is difficult to justify. In fact, it is rather surprising that, having emphasized the importance of the group as against the individual in the Indian tradition, and of religious values also, DP should have opted for a Marxist solution to the problems of Indian historiography (see Dumont 1967 : 231) and for a view of India's future based on synthesis. He hovered between Indian tradition and Marxism and his adherence to Marxist solutions to intellectual and practical problems gained in salience in his later work which was also characterized by a heightened concern with tradition.⁷

VII

For DP the history of India was not the history of her particular form of class struggle because she had experienced none worth the name. The

place of philosophy and religion was dominant in this history, and it was fundamentally a long-drawn exercise in cultural synthesis. For him "Indian history was Indian culture" (1958 : 123). India's recent woes, namely communal hatred and partition, had been the result of the arrested assimilation of Islamic values (1958 : 163); he believed that "history halts unless it is pushed" (1958 : 39).

The national movement had generated much moral fervour but, DP complained, it had been anti-intellectual. Not only had there been much unthinking borrowal from the West, there had also emerged a hiatus between theory and practice as a result of which thought had become impoverished and action ineffectual. Given his concern for intellectual and artistic creativity, it is not surprising that he should have concluded : "politics has ruined our culture" (1958 : 190).

What was worse, there were no signs of this schism being healed in the years immediately after independence. When planning arrived as state policy in the early fifties, DP expressed his concern, for instance in an important 1953 paper on Man and Plan in India (1958 : 30-76), that a clear concept of the new man and a systematic design of the new society were nowhere in evidence. As the years passed by, he came to formulate a negative judgement about the endeavours to build a new India, and also diagnosed the cause of the rampant intellectual sloth. He said in 1955 (1958 : 240):

I have seen how our progressive groups have failed in the field of intellect, and hence also in economic and political action, chiefly on account of their ignorance of and unrootedness in India's social reality.

The issue at stake was India's modernization. DP's essential stand on this was that there could be no genuine modernization through imitation. A people could not abandon their own cultural heritage and yet succeed in internalizing the historical experience of other peoples; they could only be ready to be taken over. He feared cultural imperialism more than any other. The only valid approach, according to DP, was that which characterized the efforts of men like Rammohun Roy and Rabindranath Tagore, who tried to make

the main currents of western thought and action . . . run through the Indian bed to remove its choking weeds in order that the ancient stream might flow (1958 : 33).

DP formulated this view of the dialectic between tradition and modernity several years before independence, in his study of Tagore published in 1943, in which he wrote (1972 : 50) :

The influence of the West upon Tagore was great . . . but it should not be exaggerated : it only collaborated with one vital strand of the traditional, the strand that Ram Mohan and Tagore's father . . . removed for Tagore's generation. Now, all these traditional values Tagore was perpetually exploiting but never more than when he felt the need to expand, to rise, to go deeper, and be fresher. At each such stage in the evolution of his prose, poetry, drama, music and of his personality we find Tagore drawing upon some basic reservoir of the soil, of the people, of the spirit and emerging with a capacity for larger investment.⁸

This crucial passage holds the key to DP's views on the nature and dynamics of modernization. It emerges as a historical process which is at once an expansion, an elevation, a deepening and a revitalization—in short, a larger investment—of traditional values and cultural patterns, and not a total departure from them, resulting from the interplay of the traditional and the modern. DP would have agreed with Michael Oakeshott, "I think, that the principle of tradition "is a principle of continuity" (1962 : 128).⁹ From this perspective, tradition is a condition of rather than an obstacle to modernization; it gives us the freedom to choose between alternatives and evolve a cultural pattern which cannot but be a synthesis of the old and the new. New values and institutions must have a soil in which to take root and from which to imbibe character. Modernity must therefore be defined in relation to, and not in denial of, tradition.¹⁰ Conflict is only the intermediate stage in the dialectic triad : the movement is toward *coincidentia oppositorum*. Needless to emphasize, the foregoing argument is in accordance with the Marxist dialectic which sees relations as determined by one another and therefore bases a "proper" understanding of them on such a relationship.

Synthesis of the opposites is not, however, an historical inevitability. It is not a gift given to a people unasked or merely for the asking: they must strive for it self-consciously, for "Culture is an affair of total consciousness" (1958 : 189), it is a "dynamic social process, and not another name for traditionalism" (1958 : 101-02). History for DP was a "going concern" (1945 : 19), and the value of the Marxist approach to the making of history lay in that it would help to generate "historical conviction"

(1958 : 56), and thus act as a spur to fully awakened endeavour. The alternative to self-conscious choice-making is mindless imitation and loss of autonomy and, therefore, dehumanization, though DP did not put it quite in those words.

Self-consciousness, then, is the form of modernization. Its content, one gathers from DP's writings in the nineteen fifties, comprises nationalism, democracy, the utilization of science and technology for harnessing nature, planning for social and economic development, and the cultivation of rationality. The typical modern man is the engineer, social and technical (1958 : 39-40). DP believed that these forces were becoming ascendant:

This is a bare historical fact. To transmute that fact into a value, the first requisite is to have active faith in the historicity of that fact. . . . The second requisite is social action ... to push . . . consciously, deliberately, collectively, into the next historical phase. The value of Indian traditions lies in the ability of their conserving forces to put a brake on hasty passage. Adjustment is the end-product of the dialectical connection between the two. Meanwhile is tension. And tension is not merely interesting as a subject of research; if it leads up to a higher stage, it is also desirable. The higher stage is where personality is integrated through a planned, socially directed, collective endeavour for historically understood ends, which means ... a socialist order. Tensions will not cease there. It is not the peace of the grave. Only alienation from nature, work and man will stop in the arduous course of such high and strenuous endeavours (1958 : 76).

In view of this clear expression of faith (it is that, not a demonstration), it is not surprising that DP should have told Indian sociologists (in 1955) that their "first task" was the study of "social traditions" (1958 : 232), and should have reminded them that traditions grow through conflict.

It is in the context of this emphasis on tradition that his specific recommendation for the study of Mahatma Gandhi's views on machines and technology, before going ahead with "large scale technological development" (1958 : 225), was made. It was no small matter that from the Gandhian perspective, which stressed the values of wantlessness, non-exploitation and non-possession, the very notions of economic development and underdevelopment could be questioned (1958 : 206). But this was perhaps only a gesture (a response to a poser), for DP maintained that Gandhi had failed to indicate how to absorb "the new social forces which the West had

released" (1958 : 35); moreover, "the type of new society enveloped in the vulgarised notion of Rama-rajya was not only non-historical but anti-historical" (1958 : 38). But he was also convinced that Gandhian insistence on traditional values might help to save India from the kind of evils (for example, scientism and consumerism) to which the West had fallen prey (1958 : 227).

The failure to clearly define the terms and rigorously examine the process of synthesis, already noted above, reappears here again and indeed repeatedly in DP's work. The resultant "self-cancellation", as Gupta (1977) puts it, "provided a certain honesty and a certain pathos to DP's sociology". In fact, he himself recognized this when he described his life to A. K. Saran as "a series of reluctances" (Saran 1962 : 169). Saran concludes: DP "did not wish to face the dilemma entailed by a steadfast recognition of this truth", that the three world views—Vedanta, Western liberalism, Marxism—which all beckoned to DP "do not mix".¹¹ One wonders what his autobiography would have been like.

VIII

I hope to have shown in this necessarily brief presentation that, despite understandable differences in emphasis, there is on the whole a remarkable consistency in DP's views on the nature of modernization. Not that consistency is always a virtue but that in this case it happens to be true. Genuine modernization, according to him, has to be distinguished from the spurious product and the clue lies in its historicity. The presentation of the argument is clear but it is not always thorough and complete, and may be attacked from more than one vantage point.

Professor Saran (1965), for instance, has rightly pointed out that DP does not subject the socialist order itself to analysis and takes its benign character on trust, that he fails to realize that a technology-oriented society cannot easily be non-exploitative and not anti-man, that the traditional and the modern world-views are rooted in different conceptions of time, that traditional ideas cannot be activated by human effort alone, that given our choice of development goals we cannot escape Westernization, and so forth. It seems to me that DP's principal problem was that he let the obvious heuristic value of the dialectical approach overwhelm him and failed to probe deeply enough into both the requirements of theory building and of the examination of empirical reality. He fused the method and the datum,

I do want to suggest, however, that DP's approach has certain advantages as compared to the others that are current in modernization studies. An examination of modernization theories in general is outside the scope of this essay; I will therefore make only a rather sweeping generalization about them. They seem to me to fall into two very broad categories. There are, firstly, what we may call the "big bang" theories of modernization, according to which tradition and modernity are mutually exclusive, bipolar phenomena. This entails the further view that before one may change anything at all, one must change everything. The examples that come to mind are many, but Gunnar Myrdal's *Asian Drama* (1968) is notable. This view is, however, unfashionable now, and to that extent sociology has moved forward.

Secondly, there are what we may call the "steady state" theories of modernization, according to which modernization is a gradual, piecemeal process, involving compartmentalization of life and living; it is not through displacement but juxtaposition that modernization proceeds. Examples are too numerous to be listed here (but see Singer 1972 and Singh 1973). As a description of the empirical reality, the latter approach is perhaps adequate, but it creates a serious problem of understanding, for it in effect dispenses with all values except modernity; and modernity is defined only vaguely by reference to what has happened or is happening elsewhere—industrialization, bureaucratization, democratization, etc.

By this latter view, one is committed to the completion of the agenda of modernization; and hence the boredom, the weariness and the frustration one sees signs of everywhere. The gap between the "modernized" and the "modernizing", it is obvious, will never be closed. No wonder, then, that social scientists already speak of the infinite transition—an endless pause—in which traditional societies find themselves trapped. Moreover, both sociology and history teach us, if they teach us anything at all, that there always is a residue, that there always will be traditional and modern elements in the cultural life of a people, anywhere, anytime.

The virtue of a dialectical approach such as DP advocated would seem to be that it reveals the spuriousness of some of the issues that the other approaches give rise to. At the same time, it may well be criticized as an evasion of other basic issues. I might add, though, that *it* does provide us with a suggestive notion, one which we may call *generative* tradition, and also a framework for the evaluation of on-going processes. All this of course needs elaboration, but the present essay is not the place for such

an undertaking. Suffice it to say, the notion of generative tradition involves a conception of 'structural' time more significantly than it does that of 'chronological' time. 'Structural' time implies, as many anthropologists have shown, a working out of the potentialities of an institution. Institutions have a duration in 'real' time, but this is the surface view; they also have a deeper duration which is not readily perceived because of the transformations they undergo.

IX

To conclude: the task I set myself in this essay was to give an exploratory exposition of a selected aspect of D. P. Mukerji's sociological writings, using as far as convenient his own words. I chose to organize some of the available materials around the theme of "tradition and modernity" because it occupied an important place in his work and also because it survives as a major concern of contemporary sociology. Taking DP's work as a whole, one soon discovers that his concern with tradition and modernity, which became particularly salient during the nineteen forties and remained so until the end, was in fact a particular expression of a larger, and it would seem perennial, concern of Westernized Hindu intellectuals. This concern, manifested in a variety of ways, was with the so-called apologetic patterns of the Hindu renaissance (see Bharati 1970). Hence the urge for a synthesis of Vedanta, Western liberalism and Marxism.

I have referred very briefly to DP's fascination with the Marxist method as also his insistence that he was not a Marxist. This needs a deeper examination than I am competent to undertake. What is clear, however, is that DP should not be claimed to be on this or that side of the fence without actually demonstrating such a stance. In this regard, his overwhelming emphasis on synthesis needs to be examined.

An equally important and difficult undertaking would be the elaboration and specification of DP's conception of the content of tradition. Whereas he establishes, convincingly I think, the relevance of tradition to modernity at the level of principle, he does not spell out its empirical content except in terms of general categories, such as those suggested by Giddings and already quoted above. One has the uncomfortable feeling that he himself operated more in terms of intuition and general knowledge than a deep study of the texts. A confrontation with tradition through fieldwork in the manner of the anthropologist, was, of course, ruled out by him, at least for himself. His tribute to G. S. Ghurye as the "only Indian sociologist

today", whilst others were "sociologists in India" (1955 : 238), is to be understood in this light. Also required is an examination of the general indifference of Indian sociologists to DP's plea for the study of tradition. Mukherjee (1965) has a suggestive first essay on this problem, but much more needs to be done. There is work to do for many of us.

NOTES

* This is a revised version of the first D. P. Mukerji Memorial Lecture delivered under the auspices of the D. P. Mukerji Memorial Lecture Endowment Committee at the Lucknow University on 25 February 1977. I am grateful to the Committee—particularly its Secretary, Professor V. B. Singh—for the honour they did me by asking me to give the Lecture. The spoken text was later published in the *National Herald* at the initiative of its editor, Shri M. Chalapathi Rau, who was a close friend of the late Professor Mukerji. I owe Shri Rau warm thanks for his thoughtfulness and courtesy.

I was able to reread Professor Mukerji's works in preparation for the Lecture during two quiet and rewarding months which I spent at the Australian National University as a Visiting Fellow in the middle of 1976. I am grateful to Professors Derek Freeman and Roger Keesing of the Anthropology Department, Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies Wang Gungwu, and Vice-Chancellor Anthony Low for their many acts of kindness.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. K. P. Gupta and Professors Ramkrishna Mukherjee, A. K. Saran and K. J. Shah for their comments on the earlier text. I have benefited from these.

1. As is well known, D. P. Mukerji wrote both in Bengali and in English, but I have read only his English works. In this essay I have drawn mainly on four of his five monographs and three of his four collections of essays. The excluded books are *Problems of Indian Youth* (1946), a collection of essays and addresses, and *Introduction to Indian Music* (1945). References to his works are by date alone; references to other sources are by author's name and date.
2. See, for example, Srinivas and Panini (1973). This fairly long essay contains only two paragraphs about D. P. Mukerji (pp. 189-90), and nearly every statement in them is either factually incorrect or otherwise misleading. It is indeed surprising that the authors should suggest that DP "viewed the processes of change under British rule as similar to changes under earlier alien rulers" or that they should think that he changed his views about "synthesis" in his later writings. His concern for the cultural "specificity" of India is misrepresented as an emphasis on "uniqueness", and this after they have themselves drawn attention to the influence of Marxism on DP.
3. Cp. Eliot (1940), *Two Choruses from the 'Rock'*: "Where is the Life we have lost in living?/ Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?/ Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

I would like to record here that the most lasting impression that DP made on me,

as indeed on many other students of his, was of his luminous conviction that genuine scholarship was socially useful no less than personally satisfying, that the life of ideas was not for the contended and the lazy but only for the sceptical and the restless, and that the life of an intellectual was an honourable life and intellectuals were the very salt of the earth. Given the contemporary cynicism about and among intellectuals, DP's faith needs reassertion. The rewards he sought were large, and so were the risks. I have often heard him criticized as a dilettante; I only wish these critics would go beyond DP and examine the costs of their own narrow concerns and the little underlying faiths. He himself would have asked for no more.

4. K. P. Gupta (1977) objects to such a formulation:
I think it is undesirable to link the concepts of "social progress" and modernization ... because it [the linkage] provides a convenient bridge to legitimize the shift from the universal concern with progress in all societies to the narrower and prejudicial concern solely with the Third World development.
5. I am reminded of R. G. Collingwood who wrote in his famous autobiography that good writers always write for their contemporaries (Collingwood 1970 : 39).
6. As is well known, Marx owed this judgement about India to Hegel.
7. Ramkrishna Mukherjee writes in a personal communication (1977) that my analysis does justice neither to Marx's views on Indian history nor to DP's "basic adherence to the principles of Marxism".
8. DP drew an interesting and significant contrast between Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore. He wrote (1972 : 75-76):

[Bankim] was a path-finder and a first class intellect that had absorbed the then current thought of England. His grounding in Indian thought was weak at first; when it was surer . . . [it] ended in his plea for a neo-Hindu resurgence. Like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim the artist remained a divided being. Tagore was more lucky. *His saturation with Indian traditions was deeper, hence he could more easily assimilate a bigger dose of Western thought* (emphasis added).
9. Marx, it will be recalled, had written (in 1853) of the "melancholy" and the "misery" of the Hindu arising out of the "loss of his old world" and his separation from "ancient traditions" (Marx and Engels 1959 :16). The task at hand was to make the vital currents flow. That this could be done by reestablishing meaningful links with the past would have been emphasized, however, only by an Indian such as DP. I suspect DP would have sympathized with Oakeshott's assertion that the changes a tradition "undergoes are potential within it" (1962 :128), his fascination with Marxism notwithstanding.
10. Many contemporary thinkers have expressed similar views. See, e. g., the motto of this essay taken from Popper (1963: 122). Or Schneider (1974 : 205):

Social life is meaningful; new meanings are established with reference to old meanings and grow out of them and must be made, in some degree, congruent with them; and exchange, whenever and wherever it occurs, must be articulated with the existing system of meanings.

Shils puts it somewhat differently (1975 :203-04):

One of the major problems which confronts us in the analysis of tradition is the fusion of originality and traditionality. T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and Individual Talent", in *The Sacred Wood*, said very little more than that these two elements coexist and that originality works within the framework of traditionality. It adds and modifies, while accepting much. In any case, even though it rejects or disregards much of what it confronts in the particular sphere of its own creation, it accepts very much of what is inherited in the context of the creation. It takes its point of departure from the "given" and goes forward from there, correcting, improving, transforming.

Cp. also Husserl's relatively more complex notion *Stiftung*, that is foundation or establishment, which, as Merleau-Ponty has pointed out, helps us understand the rich and enduring character of cultural creations. Merleau-Ponty writes (1964 : 59):

It is thus that the world as soon as he has seen it, his first attempts at painting, and the whole past of painting all deliver up a *tradition* to the painter—that is, Husserl remarks, *the power to forget origins* and to give to the past not a survival, which is the hypothetical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory.

11. It may be noted though that in his earlier writings DP had shown a greater wariness regarding the possibility of combining Marxism with Hindu tradition. Referring to the "forceful sanity" of the "exchange of rights and obligations" on which Hindu society was organized, he had written (1932 : 136) :

. . . before Communism can be introduced, national memory will have to be smudged, and new habits acquired. *There is practically nothing in the traditions on which the new habits of living under an impersonal class-control can take root* (emphasis added).

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