

ANTHROPOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL CULTURES*

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Professor Ehrenfels, who is the Head of the Department of Anthropology in the University of Madras, makes out a good case in this paper for preserving traditional cultures which are faced with rapid disintegration.

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Social and Cultural Anthropology is primarily concerned with Traditional Cultures: *firstly* by describing or analysing their structures, functions, origins and the diffusion of their constituent elements in the past; *secondly* by investigating into their changes in the present (acculturation, enculturation, deculturation-processes). Traditional cultures are now in danger of rapid disintegration though they are believed to contain values, worth preserving, inspite of adverse trends. Traditional cultures being the prime subject of Social Anthropology, one should naturally expect that one particular branch of anthropological endeavour should concern itself with the task of assisting traditional values in their "struggle for survival. I mean by that branch, Applied Anthropology.

The platform of this seminar offers the opportunity to discuss the guidance of all these efforts which fall under the heading Applied Anthropology in so far as these are related to Traditional Cultures.

One or two general observations may in this connection be pointed out as being of common concern to all anthropologists or "borderline anthropologists from neighbouring disciplines" (Psychology, Human Geography, etc.) who feel interested in this task.

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(a) The commonest whip, used against anthropologists in general and applied

anthropologists in particular is the allegation that we are trying to prevent "progress" and the spread of "civilization", to "backward peoples" in order to have "primitive civilizations" available for study like museum pieces or guinea pigs in a laboratory. Without wishing to discuss the intelligence of those who formulate and propagate this persistently repeated allegation, it is a fact that it is being held in and out of time *against* every kind, school and type of anthropological endeavour, and no doubt our efforts will make no exception in this respect.

Which are our replies?

(b) In *our country*, more than in many others where anthropologists work, such as the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and Australia, three major concepts merge into one: the Traditional Culture of India, Tribal Cultures in India and the pattern of a new Indian society which is hoped to have a definitely Indian accent, and may form a new approach to the problems of mechanization, overpopulation, urbanization with which we are faced, much as the rest of this planet.

Which are our possible contributions?

In part reply to the second ('b') of these two questions, one aspect of research and of action is here indicated for seminary discussion which appears peculiarly characteristic of both: the background of Indian traditional culture in contact with "primitive" civilizations, *and* for the specifically anthropological approach.

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This is the role of diffusion through example-setting. Indian culture generally and the value systems of Indian religion, and religious systems in particular, have been diffused through the mechanism of example-setting, rather than by other means. Example-setting as a method is the strongest agency for acculturation even now, as I have tried to show elsewhere.

Unless people and their leaders (charismatic, political, economic or religious) are prepared to *practise and live* culture ideals and the aims of their theory—in the way Gandhiji and recently also Vinoba Bhave do,—there is little hope of translating them into the daily routine of life; there is little hope for achieving practical results.

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A few cardinal themes for discussion in this respect are proposed under the following four heads:

- (a) Family planning (a recognised feature in various traditional tribal civilizations);
- (b) Co-operation of both sexes in education, work, recreation and art, a more characteristic feature of ancient Indian, and

tribal cultures, than of mediaeval and European dominated-India;

- (c) Folk arts and their characteristic styles (architecture, interior decoration, pottery, wall-painting, jewellery-designs, dance, and music); and

- (d) Forms of dress, suitable to the Indian tradition and climate.

Unless the foreign *taboo* on at least partial nakedness of the body is removed from the Indian scene, a balanced style of dress, suitable alike for workers in open air and closed rooms, can not be evolved. Without this, the unhappy dichotomy between official European cold country forms of "dress and indigenous truly Indian (not Moghul, Persian, Seythian or Chinese) styles of behaviour is bound to continue. This dichotomy sets different, even incompatible standards for behaviour in urban, as contrasted to rural areas, and in office or public road, as contrasted to the home. Such double standards of behavioural patterns tend to create split personalities and are not conducive to the development of genuine civilization, let alone the renaissance of Traditional Cultures.