SANSKRITISATION, MODERNISATION AND WESTERNISATION

Introduction:

India presents one of the oldest, continuous and uninterrupted living civilizations in the whole world known as Hinduism. One of the prominent features of Indian civilization is its 'Caste-system'. Caste system is a unique way of stratifying the society. It has been conceptualized, originated and practiced exclusively in India. It has given a distinguished identity to Indian society.

Caste-system is one of the prominent features running through the entire social fabric of India. Castes have its ethnic roots as denoted by "*Jati*", and a ritualistic and symbolic significance in its Varna aspect. It has greatly influenced the culture of the whole of India. Caste system has maintained its continuity without interruption. It has survived the vicissitudes of time, saved itself by erosion from within and assault from outside only because of the adaptability. Its absorptive nature has internalized alien influences. It has taken different shades and meaning with the changing times and places. Its character during Indus Valley Civilization was altogether different from what exists today. It is still in a transient phase. Its shade is different in the context of village, locality, region or religion. Once changed, the system never returned to its original form. Its absorptive nature has internalized alien influences.

Though the Indian Society which is based on caste system is often regarded as "closed society", it is not altogether changeless. Within the framework of the caste itself, some kind of mobility is observed. The socio-cultural changes that has taken place in India can mainly be categorised into these processes namely; sanskritisation, westernisation and modernisation. These three process reflect an attempt on the part of Indian masses to achieve some amount of mobility both within and outside the framework of the caste system.

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, this indicates a process of cultural mobility that took place in the traditional social system of India.

Meaning of Sanskritisation

Sanskritisation is not a new phenomenon. It has been a major process of cultural change in Indian history, and it has occurred in every part of the Indian sub-continent. It denotes the process in which the lower castes try to imitate the life-styles of upper castes in their attempt SANSKRITISATION, MODERNISATION AND WESTERNISATION to raise their social status. The process seems to be associated with the role of local "dominant caste".

Definition of Sanskritisation

The definition of Sanskritisation was given by M.N. Srinivas in his "Social Change in Modern India" published in 1971. It means "a process by which a low caste or a tribe or other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and a way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, twice born caste."

An analysis of the process of Sanskritisation:-

⬚ Sanskritisation denotes the process of upward mobility. In this process, a caste is trying to increase its position in the caste hierarchy not at once, but over a period of time. It would take sometimes, a period of one or two generations.

⬚ Mobility that is involved in the process of Sanskritisation results only in "positional changes" for particular castes or sections of castes, and need not necessarily lead to a "structural change". It means, while individual castes move up or down, the structure as such remains the same.

⬚ The castes which enjoyed higher economic and political power but rated relatively low in ritual ranking went after Sanskritisation for they felt that their claim to a higher position was not fully effective.

⬚ Economic betterment is not a necessary pre-condition to Sanskritisation, nor economic development must necessarily lead to Sanskritisation. However, sometimes a group (caste/tribe) may start by acquiring political power and this may lead to economic development and Sanskritisation.

⬡ Sanskritisation is not necessarily confined to the castes within the Hindu community, it is found in tribal communities also. The Bhils of Western India, the Gonds and Oraons of Middle India and the Pahadiyas of Himalayan region have come under the influence of Sanskritisation. These tribal communities are now claiming themselves to be Hindus.

⬡ The process of Sanskritisation serves as a "reference group". It is through this process a caste group tries to orient its beliefs, practices, values, attitudes and "life-styles" in terms of another superior or dominant group, so that it can also get some recognition.

⬡ Sanskritisation does not take place in the same manner in all the places.

Impact of Sanskritisation:-

⬡ Modern education, Western literature and philosophy of people widened, and as a result the mental horizons and visionary of people changed. They welcomed rationality and other good features of and made good use of liberal, and humanitarian ideas and thoughts.

⬡ Vedas has been conceived through intellectual contemplation and empirical observation and used Upnishads (speculative interpretation of Vedas or Mythology) for the creation of human imagination.

⬡ Reformists and their organizations had purely an economic and social thrust. They aimed at establishing a social order based on Vedic teachings and practices. They criticized the mumbo-jumbo of rituals and superstitions created by some selfish people to entangle the ignorant and poor masses. They laid emphasis on interpreting Vedas in a rational and scientific way.

⬡ It reduced or removed the gap between the ritual and secular rankings. It also helped upliftment of weaker persons. The lower caste group which successfully got into the seat of secular power also tried to avail of the services of Brahmins especially at the time of observing rituals, worshipping and offering things to God.

Criticisms of Sanskritisation:-

⬡ According to J.F Stall, Sanskritisation as used by Srinivas and other anthropologists is a complex concept or a class of concepts. The term itself seems to be misleading, since its relationship to the term Sanskrit is extremely complicated.

⬡ Yogendra Singh opines that sanskritisation fails to account for many aspects of cultural change in past and contemporary India as it neglects the non-sanskritic traditions.

⬡ Sanskritic influence has not been universal to all parts of country. In most of northern India, especially in Punjab, it was the Islamic tradition which provided a basis for cultural imitation.

⬡ When we try to interpret certain changes that have taken place in the field of social mobility in the light of Sanskritisation, we face certain paradoxes. According to Dr. Srinivas, political and economic forces are normally favourable for Sanskritisation. But the "policy of reservation" a poltico-constitutional attempt to elevate the status of lower caste, and class people, presents here a different picture. Theoretically, the policy of reservation must be supportive of Sanskritisation. But paradoxically it goes against it.

Those who avail of the "reservation benefits" have developed a vested interest in calling themselves "dalits" or Scheduled Caste people. They want to be called so in order to permanently avail of the benefits of reservation.

WESTERNISATION:-
The process of Westernization of caste-system in India began with the frantic efforts of missionaries to convert as many Indians as possible into Christianity and coming of East India Company in India first to trade and later on to increase its political power in India. East India Company successfully established 'British Imperial Rule' in India by 1958.

British rule produced radical and lasting changes in the Indian society and culture. The British brought with them new technology, institutions, knowledge, beliefs, and values. These have become the main source of social mobility for individuals as well as groups. It is in this context, M.N. Srinivas, introduced the term "Westernisation" mainly to explain the changes that have taken place in the Indian society and culture due to Western contact through the British rule.

Definition of Westernisation:-

According to M.N. Srinivas, "Westernisation" refers to "the changes brought about in the 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 and values."

Meaning of Westernisation:-

In comparison with Sanskritisation, Westernisation is a simpler concept. It explains the impact of Western contact (particularly of British rule) on the Indian society and culture. M.N. Srinivas used the term "Westernisation" to describe the changes that a non-western country had undergone as a result of prolonged contact with the western one. It imples, according to Srinivas, "certain value preferences", which in turn subsumes several values, such as "humanitarianism". It implies an active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex.

Westernisation not only includes the introduction of new institutions, but also fundamental changes in old institutions. For example, India had schools long before the arrival SANSKRITISATION, MODERNISATION AND WESTERNISATION of the British, but they were different from the British introduced schools. Other institutions such as army, civil service and law courts were also similarly affected.

However, 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 compared to the past.

Impact of Westernisation:-

▪ *Opened up the doors of the knowledge – M*odern education opened up the doors of the knowledge flourished in Europe after Renaissance movement of Middle Ages. It had widened the mental horizons of Indian intelligentsia.

▪ *Education for all* - During second half of the nineteenth century, British government in India opened the doors of education to all the sections of Indian society, irrespective of caste or creed. Still, very few amongst the general public could avail the advantages of formal modern education. Education remained confined within a small section of society.

▪ *Highlighted evil practices* – Modern education had highlighted the evil practices and weaknesses developed into the system like rigidity and harshness of many social customs and practices prevalent at that time for the weaker sections of the society i.e. un-touch-ability and inhuman treatment to women, Sati, Polygamy, child marriage etc. etc. prevalent at that time.

▪ *Attracted attention of social reformers* – Modern education had attracted the attention of intellectuals and social reformers towards real issues evils caused by ignorance, irrationality of mumbo-jumbo of rituals and superstitions created by some selfish people to entangle the ignorant and poor masses. They suggested remedies for social, political and economic ills of the country. They took upon themselves the responsibility to build a modern, open, plural, culturally rich, prosperous and powerful India out of a fragmented, poverty stricken, superstitious, weak, indifferent, backward and inward looking society. As a result of such efforts, it led to the ***abolition of Sati System and slavery***. Female infanticide practice lowered to a great extent.

▪ *Realization of the worth of liberty and freedom* – It equipped national leaders with intellectuals tools with which they fought the oppressive British Raj. Indians realized the worth of liberty and freedom. They got exposure to the philosophies of thinkers like Locke, Mill, Roussseau, Voltaire, Spencer and Burke etc. They understood the reasons and impact of English, French, American revolutions.

Criticisms of Westernisation:-

▪ The concepts of Sanskritisation and Westernisation primarily analyse social change in "cultural" and not in "structural" terms. This denoted that these terms have limited range of application and use.

▪ Srinivas's model explains the process of social change only in India which is based on the caste system. It is not useful for other societies.

▪ Though Srinivas claimed that the concept of Westernisation is "ethically neutral", it is not really so. The Western model which Srinivas has eulogised has its own contradiction. Mention can be made of the facts of Western life such as racial prejudice, colour segregation and exploitive nature of the Western economy, etc. These facts contradict humanitarian ideals or rational outlook on life.

It is also commented that the Western model which Srinivas has eulogised has its own contradiction. The western model sometimes conveys values that are contrary to the ones referred by Srinivas. In this context, mention can be made of the facts of Western life such as racial prejudice, colour segregation, and exploitative nature of Western economy, etc. These facts contradicts humanitarian ideals or rational outlook on life.

 Daniel Lerner has raised some objections to the use of Westernisation as conceived by Srinivas:

a. It is too local label and the model which is imitated may not be western country; but Russia.

b. One of the result of prolonged contact with the west is the rise of the elite class whose attitude towards the West is ambivalent is not invariably true. In this context, Lerner refers to the appeal of Communism in non-western countries.

c. Westernisation in one area or level of behaviour does not result in Westernisation in another related area or level.

d. While there are certain common elements in Westernisation, yet each represent a particular variant of a common culture and significant difference exists between one country and another.

Difference between Sanskritisation and Westernisation:-

1. *Sanskritisation* process promoted the sacred outlook; while *Westernisation* process promoted secular outlook.

2. *Sanskritisation* is a process of upward mobility by a process of imitation while *Westernisation* is a process of upward mobility by a process of development.

3. *Sanskritisation* implies mobility within the framework of caste while *Westernisation* implies mobility outside the framework of caste.

4. While *Sanskritisation* puts a taboo on meat-eating and consumption of alcohol, *Westernisation* promoted meat-eating and consumption of alcohol.