DYNAMICS OF IMITATIVE BEHAVIOUR: A REVIEW OF SOCIAL LEARNING & AMALGAMATION OF ETHNICITY

Dr. Debahuti Panigrahi,
Professor, Department of Sociology (Arts & Humanity),
Kalinga University, Raipur, India.

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the adaptation of imitative behaviour as one of the ways of social change and social learning that helps socialization of the child or humans into the social system and of formation of new social system and culture. It interprets the Evolutionary Diffusion Theory that all cultures imitate ideas from one of a few original and dominant cultures and thus giving a trend of diffusing cultural inclinations. It also tries to find out the influencing factors causing the change or amalgamation of culture in the process of M.N. Shrinivas's Sanskritization and Yogendra Shingh's Modernisation.

KEYWORDS

Socialization, Imitation, Amalgamation, Ethnicity Evolutionary Diffusion, Sanskritization, Modernisation

INTRODUCTION

Adaptation of Imitation as a form of social behaviour that enables the children or humans to imitate or
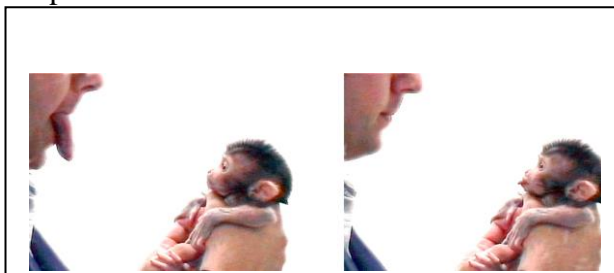

Figure -1 The Makak Neo-natal imitation
Source –science direct

copy the behaviour of others is a part of socialization process and of the development of traditions, and ultimately our culture. It allows for the transfer of information (behaviours, customs, etc.) between individuals and down generations without the need for genetic inheritance." (Fig-1)

The concept of imitation was initiated by Gabriel Tarde in France and later, but independently, by Professor J. Mark Baldwin. The word **Imitation** (from Latin *imitatio*, "a copying, imitation") is an advanced behavior whereby an individual observes and replicates another's behavior. More specifically, these behaviors are usually unique to the species and can be complex in nature and can benefit the survival of the individuals. Consistently M. Tarde declares that all the activities of men in society, from the satisfying of simple organic needs to the inventions of science and art, are in one way or another outcomes of the process of imitation.

Socialisation and Child Development

Professor Baldwin gathers that children learning is by imitative absorption of the actions, thoughts, expressions of other persons; "further, that "all his personal absorption from his immediate associates is through his tendency to imitate; " and, therefore, that " imitation is the personal progress," "the essential method of his growth." Social learning is required for socialization process of the child. (Fig-2) Socialization is inevitable a process in the social system, as it embeds a child into the institutional behaviour patterns of the society.
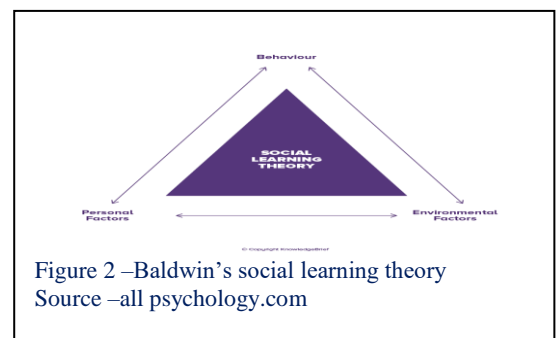

Figure 2 –Baldwin's social learning theory
Source –all psychology.com

In sociology, *socialization* is the process of internalizing the norms and ideologies of society. Socialization encompasses both learning and teaching and is thus "the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained". Socialization is strongly connected to developmental psychology.

Social Psychologist Kenneth Kayeshowed that infants' ability to match the sounds or gestures of an adult depends on an interactive process of turn-taking over many successive trials, in which adults' instinctive behavior plays as great a role as that of the infant. These writers assume that evolution would have selected imitative abilities as fit because those who were good at it had a wider arsenal of learned behavior at their disposal, including tool-making and language.

IMITATION AS SOCIAL PHENONMENON
M. Tarde's Suggestion-Imitation Process

M. Tarde reached his theories from the sociological side, through study of the phenomena of crowds, crazes, fads, fashions, and crime. He saw that the underlying fact in these social phenomena - namely, the process of suggestion and imitation- could be generalized and used as the basis of a system of social philosophy. The repetition of the act of one person by another under the influence of suggestion offered, he thought, "the key to the social mystery."' The influence of one mind upon another was explained by this suggestion-imitation process, and consequently all changes and movements in society."Society is imitation," he says, imitation is "the elementary social phenomenon," "the fundamental social fact;" it is the criterion of the social and alone constitutes society. "The unvarying characteristic of every social fact whatsoever is that it is imitative. And this characteristic belongs exclusively to social facts." The unity of society, both on its functional and structural sides, M. Tarde argues, is wholly due to the process of imitation.

Professor Baldwin quite properly generalizes his theory of personal growth by imitation and applies it to society. "Society," he tells us, "grows by imitative generalization of the thoughts of individuals." Therefore, "imitation is the method of social organization," and all progress takes place through society's generalizing by imitation the inventions of individuals. Thus we have a circular process: the individual develops intellectually and morally by imitating the mental attitudes and actions of those about him, while society changes through the continued imitation of the thought of some individual, a " leader" or a " genius."

Professor Baldwin's theory may be thrown into four propositions, namely: (i) the matter of social organization is thoughts; (2) the method of their organization is imitation; (3) these thoughts originate with the individual (4) later certain of these thoughts are imitated, and so generalized, by society.

In the mid-20th century, social scientists began to study how and why people imitate ideas. Everett Rogers pioneered innovation diffusion studies, identifying factors in adoption and profiles of adopters of ideas. Imitation mechanisms play a central role in both analytical and empirical models of collective human behavior.

Sanskritisation As A Process Of Imitation

The concept 'Sanskritization' was first introduced by **Prof. M.N. Srinivas** the famous Indian sociologist. He explained the concept of sanskritization in his book **"Religion and society among the Coorgs of South India"** to describe the cultural mobility in the traditional caste structure of Indian society. Defining Sanskritization Srinivas writes, "Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste.

Sanskritization is a process of **imitation** in Indian society, the social status of an individual is fixed on the basis of caste hierarchy. So in order to improve the status, the lower castes people imitate the life style of the upper caste people."In his study of the Coorgs of Mysore, he came to know that the lower castes were trying to raise their status in their caste hierarchy by adopting some cultural ideals of the Brahmins. As a result they left some of their ideals which are considered to be impure by the Brahmins. To explain this process of mobility, Srinivas used the term 'Brahminization'. Later on he called it 'Sanskritization' in a broad sense.
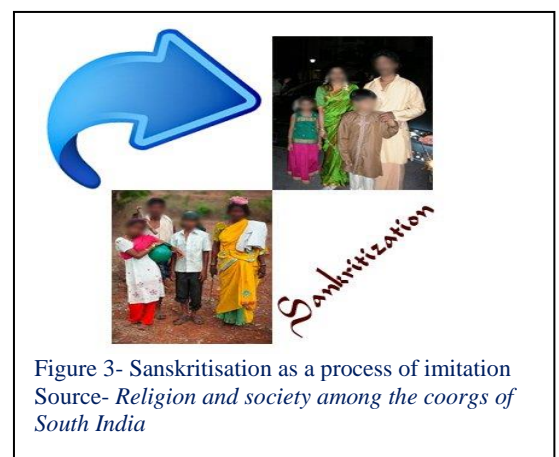

Figure 3- Sanskritisation as a process of imitation
Source- *Religion and society among the coorgs of South India*

Models of Sanskritization

Economic betterment and sanskritization

Economic betterment and sanskritization is another related issue. The lower caste people have given up un-cleaned occupation to raise their economic status because clean trades are a symbol of social light.

Sanskritization in religious field:

Sanskritization also can be observed in the religious field. Like Brahmins many of the lower castes people put on sacred thread. They also go to their temple regularly and perform Arti and Bhajan. They have left prohibited food and un-cleaned occupation. Even they have specialised in performing ceremonies like Brahmins.

Sanskritization in living patterns:

The living patterns of lower castes have also Sanskritized. Like higher caste they also get Pucca houses built for them. Now they sit along with the higher caste on the cots without any fear or hesitation. They also keep their houses clean and put on dresses like higher castes.

De-Sanskritization

The concept of Sanskritization has also given rise to De-sanskritization. There are some instances in modern times, some of the higher castes are imitating the behaviour pattern of lower caste, and for example Brahmins have started taking meat and liquor. This process is called De-sanskritization.

Thus, while analysing the process of Sanskritization this paper very well correlates it with the group behaviour of imitation in Indian society. Shrinivas tried to exemplify the caste hierarchy whereas the class hierarchy can be taken as a factor of social mobility and people trying to move in groups or along with their culture are taking the help of imitation process. The slum culture for example in the city is fast imitating the role of the city bourgeois. If they can not buy a Mercedes, they are buying one second hand Maruti Suzuki, which their fellows that are still left in the villages can not even think in their dreams. To purchase a second hand Maruti car they may work hard in the streets from early morning to late at night selling chats or samoshe and their per capita income per month may exceed a local administrative government officer.

It clarifies that the people in the society always are in search for role models that are found in a particular environment. Once they find out a role model that appeals to them or are suitable for them, they start initiating their life ways. It always has been observed that the people who follow consider themselves as low or inferior and the role model is placed in a superior position. It can be seen in the industry of sports, fashion, media, and cinematography as well. Every teenage boy start comparing himself to Sachin Tendulkar or M.S. Dhoni. And every teenage girl replicates Aliya Bhatt or Deepika Padukone. Here also one can see the gender difference of imitation. The boys being allowed to exhibit their fads and role models can declare their fascination regarding the sports figures whereas the girls being not permitted takes on the hidden ways of copying the Aliya Bhatt's attire or shoes and commands appraisal from their girl friends or boyfriends- Oh, my, you are looking like Aliya today. And she would smile and blush away saying - really, who is Aliya any way? -all in a triumphant way. Therefore, one can draw the inference that the behaviour of imitation comes natural to humans and helps in achievement of new found status and formation of new groups, new culture or amalgamation of culture.

Modernization of Indian Tradition

Modernization is a composite concept. It is also an ideological concept. The models of modernization co-vary with the choice of ideologies. The composite nature of this concept renders it pervasive in the vocabulary of social sciences and evokes its kinship with concepts like development, growth, evolution and progress.

In the book on Essays on Modernization in India Yogendra Singh has analyzed the varied and complex processes involved in the modernization in India, the forces released by it and their bearing on the stability, creativity and development in India as a dynamic nation and composite civilization.

The emphasis on historicity in preference to universality defining the context of modernization the pre-eminence of structural changes in society to render the adaptive process of modernization successful in the developing countries particularly India and the eclectic nature of cultural and ideological response of India to the challenges of modernization represent some of the unifying principles. Singh portrays the challenges and contradictions that India encounters in the course of its modernization.

Yogendra Singh, in his book Modernization of Indian Tradition, identifies three major streams of traditions in Indian society, namely, Hindu, Muslim and tribal. Yogendra Singh has identified the key forces of modernization and analyzes their impact on Indian society and tradition. He has tried to bring out the changes which have come as a result of modernization.

The sources of modernization are either internal or endogenous or from outside society. These two sources of modernization need to be analyzed both at the levels of social structures and traditions. The processes of modernization which result in social change are depicted in Figure 1.
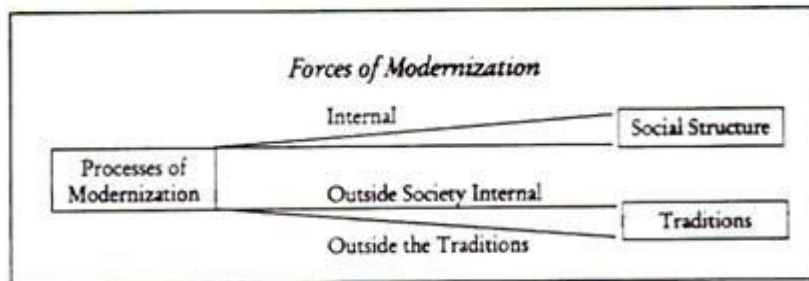

Figure 4- Forces of Modernisation
Source-Modernisation of Indian Tradition

Yogendra Singh makes his point very clear when he says that it is not necessary that the processes which bring social change in the society also bring change in the traditions. And, on the other hand, the processes which affect change in traditions, also necessarily change the society.

Hindu traditions
According to Yogendra Singh, Hindu society consists of certain traditions which are in fact value themes. Before the emergence of modernization, the Hindu society was based on the prime value components such as 1. Hierarchy, (2) Holism, (3) Karma, and (4) Transcendence. Hierarchy was based on the caste and society was divided accordingly in the traditional society. With the onset of modernisation that comes along with the industrialisation, urbanisation, renaissance, modern education and development in communication rationalisation, globalisation, and technological advances people have started following indigenous and extrogenous modern ways changing the whole social structure of the traditional society. These imitation process of the Indian culture as a whole that copies the western world results in many adjustments in the social structure of the society. But the core tradition remains rooted in most institutional ways. Though one can find new modern sub-cultural ways as live-in, gay marriages etc.

Tribal Communities
Similarly, tribal communities of India has also undergone several social changes just because their social interaction with the non-tribal communities. The tribal traditions are different from Hindu and Muslim traditions. Each tribal group is endogamous. And, there is no hierarchy in the tribal society. The value component of the tribal society is rooted in its religion. The core of tribal tradition lies in their tribal religion, that is, animism and ancestor worship. The tribals do not have faith in the Hindu value of moksha, salvation. Nor do they believe in the concept of heaven or hell. What is important or which concerns them most is the 'present'. If they have enough for today, they do not care for the future. Saving has no meaning for them. PoI reports the "all tribal communities except three are non-vegetarians, they eat. However due to recent Govt. policies of development and safeguards are forcing them to take on the ways of no-tribal societies. The development officials are introducing education, health and nutrion and awareness among these aboriginal communities that is changing their hunting and food gathering patterns. Being influenced by the Hindu ways they have changed their worship patterns and have started erecting deities corresponding to Hinduism. The conversion into Christianity is another angle. Here for some monetary benefits they have stopped following their own religious patterns and have adapted the Christian ways of rationality and economic upliftment and believe themselves to be uplifted.

Modernisation has carved it'signature in both - internal forces or external forces upon the social structure as well as in the tradition of Indian society. This all has become possible because of the imitation behaviour of the individual at local level and groups at intermediate level and society at macro level.

CONCLUSION

Adaptation of imitative behaviour refers to both a process and its outcome, leading to many interpretations and much debate. Adaptation became a central concept in several major social disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology and geography, as well as in many fields of biology. In each discipline, the environment is strongly linked to the concept of adaptation. Imitation is a simple behavior that has two basic ingredients. One needs to be able to observe what others have done and one needs to be capable of doing what they have done. Often one is also able to observe the consequences of their choices. However, one does not need to understand why someone observed has made this specific choice nor understand how this choice has generated the observed performance. To imitate means to economize on explicit or implicit costs of evaluating each possible choice. Its virtues are clearest when others have superior information. Not much theory is needed to explain why imitation is valuable under such circumstances. If someone else knows what is best and faces the same situation, then it is best to (unconditionally) imitate this person. Legare has rightly said-We are socially oriented in ways that other species are not, and we are very well equipped to acquire and adapt to the culture and skills of previous generations,"

"The core insight here is that children adapt their imitative and innovative behavior to different goals, even at very young ages, demonstrating that humans as a species are flexible, social learners. Legare said-"Our research demonstrates that the early-developing distinction between instrumental and conventional behavior is fundamental to cultural learning in our species."

Figure 5-Transition of Culture by imitation process
Source-Sociologyguide.com
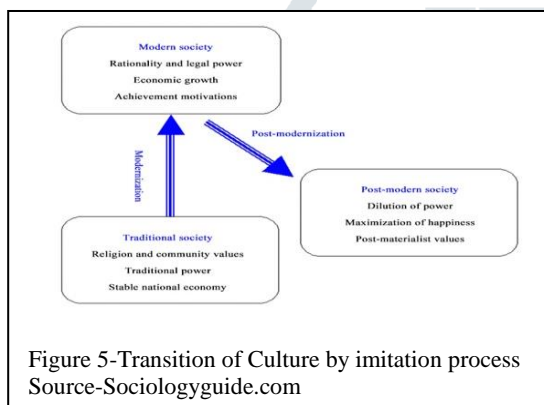
In summary, there is more to imitation than simply copying behaviour of others. To be an effective social learning rule, thus to induce the group over time to choose superior actions, each individual has to look at differences in performance before deciding whether to imitate. A very simple rule that determines when to imitate and only relies on the ability to observe behavior of one other, yields effective learning even when there is variation in individual performance. Learning becomes possible as society functions as a storage of what has been successful, more successful choices being adapted by more individuals.

Tarde was rightly had postulated over a century ago, by facilitating communication and transmission of information, technology adds an exponential effect to the adoption of innovation. Using Tarde's framework, the exponential rate of unique adaptations and imitations which are the result of users' active participation and proliferation of new communication channels lead to further innovations.These innovations are usually in the form of modifications or enhancements to existing products, processes, or systems even Amalgamation or cultural assimilation (merging) of racial or ethnic groups.

Reference

1   Singh Yogendra - Modernization Of Indian Traditions –Rawat Publicatiom
2   Srinivas M.N. - "*Religion and society among the coorgs of South India*"- Oxford University Press; First Edition edition (1952)
3   **^** imitation, Online etymology dictionary
4   ^ **a b c** Hopper, Lydia M. (2010). "Deferred imitation in children and apes". Psychologist. **23** (4): 294–7.
5   **^** Moss, Ellen; Strayer, F. F. (1988). "Imitation is the Greatest form of Flattery". PsycCRITIQUES. **33** (11): 970–971. doi:10.1037/026218.
6   ^ **a b** Braha, D., & de Aguiar, M. A. (2017). Voting contagion: Modeling and analysis of a century of U.S. presidential elections. PLoS ONE 12(5): e0177970. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177970
7   **^** Chartrand, T.; Bargh, J. "The Chameleon Effect: The Perception-Behavior Link and Social Interaction" (PDF). yale.edu. New York University. Retrieved September 28, 2014.
8   **^** George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self, and Society; Kenneth Kaye, The Mental and Social Life of Babies, U. Chicago Press 1982[page needed]
9   **^** Susan Blackmore, The Meme Machine, Oxford U. Press 2007[page needed]
10   **^** Jared Diamond, The Third Chimpanzee, HarperCollins 1992.[page needed]
11   **^** In M. Bullowa, ed. Before Speech: The beginning of interpersonal communication, Cambridge U. Press 1979[page needed]
12   **^** Kaye, Kenneth; Marcus, Janet (1981). "Infant imitation: The sensory-motor agenda". Developmental Psychology. **17** (3): 258. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.17.3.258.
13   **^** Rogers, EM (2010). "Diffusion of innovations". Simon and Schuster.
14   **^** Castellano C, Fortunato S, and Loreto V (2009) Statistical physics of social dynamics. Rev Mod Phys 81(2): 591–646.

15 **^** Braha D (2012) Global Civil Unrest: Contagion, Self-Organization, and Prediction. PLoS ONE 7(10): e48596. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0048596

16 **^** Iacoboni, M.; Woods, RP; Brass, M; Bekkering, H; Mazziotta, JC; Rizzolatti, G (1999). "Cortical Mechanisms of Human Imitation". Science. **286** (5449): 2526–8. CiteSeerX 10.1.1.555.8075. doi:10.1126/science.286.5449.2526. PMID 10617472.

17 **^** Rizzolatti, Giacomo; Craighero, Laila (2004). "The Mirror-Neuron System". Annual Review of Neuroscience. **27**: 169–92. doi:10.1146/annurev.neuro.27.070203.144230. PMID 15217330.

18 **^** Ramachandran, V.S. "Mirror Neurons and imitation learning as the driving force behind 'the great leap forward' in human evolution". Edge Foundation.

19 **^** Dinstein, Ilan; Thomas, Cibu; Behrmann, Marlene; Heeger, David J. (2008). "A mirror up to nature". Current Biology. **18** (1): R13–8. Bibcode:1996CBio....6.1213A. doi:10.1016/j.cub.2007.11.004. PMC 2517574. PMID 18177704.

20 **^** Krützen, Michael; Mann, Janet; Heithaus, Michael R.; Connor, Richard C.; Bejder, Lars; Sherwin, William B. (2005). "Cultural transmission of tool use in bottlenose dolphins". Proceedings of the National *Academy of Sciences. 102 (25):   8939– 43. Bibcode:2005PNAS..102.8939K. doi:10.1073/pnas.0500232102. PMC 1157020. PMID 15947077.*

21 **^** *"Wild dolphins teaches others tail walking tricks". WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society*