# Modernization without Demolishing Cultural Roots: The Role of Transformational Leadership

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Abstract. *A general assumption is often made that modernization of a society or a group requires throwing away all their traditional beliefs and cultural artifacts and instead adopting those of the apparently advanced societies and groups. This paper argues that such an assumption is antithetical to the objectives of enduring and successful transformations. Transformational leadership--the leadership that transforms societies and organizations--attempts to bring to the conscious what lies in the unconscious of followers. It is about expressing the true aspirations of people in a way that is better than how they themselves are able to express. Such a truly transforming leadership requires two distinct steps. The first step is to identify the core components of the culture and ensure that those cultural roots are not demolished in the name of modernization. The second step is to look at the various cultural artifacts that need to be modernized to keep in line with the changing environment. The radicals who strike at the roots and the conservatives who refuse to change artifacts are both not contributing to effective transformation. The paper concludes that knowing what is to be preserved and what is to be changed is the secret of effective transformational leadership. Transformational leaders bring about enduring change by presenting the cultural roots in an inspiring way and mobilizing followers' support to modernize existing practices.*

The importance of modernization needs no elucidation. Modernization is something that every society or group has to definitely resort to, and no one would even ask for a reason to modernize. Modernization is after all using the modern or most advanced means for achieving one's goals. It is therefore but natural that transformational leadership or the leadership that brings about change would have everything to do with modernization. This paper discusses how transformational leaders can bring about authentic and enduring change through modernization.

## Modernization

Modernization literally means adopting new or the latest ways of doing things. Black (1966: 7) defined modernization as the "process by which historically evolved institutions are adapted to the rapidly changing functions that reflect the unprecedented increase in man's knowledge, permitting control over his environment." According to modernization theory, societies could be classified as either modern or traditional, and modernization is the process

by which a society would move away from being traditional. Thus, modernization came to be defined as being in direct contrast to traditional.

The concepts at the core of modernization theory centered on several overlapping assumptions: (a) Traditional and modern societies are separated by a sharp dichotomy; (b) Economic, political, and social changes are integrated and interdependent; (c) Development tends to proceed toward the modern state along a common, linear path; and (d) The progress of developing societies can be dramatically accelerated through contact with developed ones (Latham, 2000: 4).

Weber (1904-5) highlighted the role of the Protestant ethic in economic development and viewed the rise of Protestantism as a crucial event in the modernization of Europe. Protestantism was uniquely western, and therefore modernization and westernization have come to be looked upon as almost synonyms. However, equating modernization with westernization is ethnocentric and is not supported by prevailing evidence. Modernization is not confined only to the west; on the contrary, the process is global and in some ways, East Asia is now leading the process of modernization (Inglehart, 1997: 11).

Latham (2000) analyzed the way the core assumptions of modernization theory influenced the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress with Latin America, the creation of the Peace Corps, and the strategic hamlet program in Vietnam. The modernizers not only insisted on the relevance of America's experience to the dilemmas faced by impoverished countries, but they also argued for benevolent American intervention to accelerate the natural process through which traditional societies would move toward the enlightened modernity most clearly represented by America itself. The United States was presented as a force capable of guiding a destitute world along the transformative path it once traveled.

Modernization is most commonly operationalized in terms of economic development. Inglehart and Baker (2000) used the World Values Survey data to show that the worldviews of the people of rich societies differ systematically from those of low-income societies across a wide range of political, social, and religious norms and beliefs. The two most significant dimensions that emerged were traditional versus secular-rational orientations toward authority and survival versus self-expression values. Thus economic development has systematic and, to some extent, predictable cultural and political consequences. Inglehart and Baker (2001) concluded that economic development tends to push societies in a common direction, but rather than converging, they seem to move along paths shaped by their cultural heritages. Therefore, the forces of modernization are not likely to produce a homogenized world culture in the foreseeable future.

Thus, modernization has two clearly visible aspects. Changes take place to be in line with increasing knowledge base. At the same time, societies seem to be moving along paths shaped by their cultural heritages, rather than converge and produce a homogenized world culture. Hence, the leaders who bring about change have to know what needs to be changed and what need not be changed. The leaders who change other human beings and organizations are called transformational leaders.

## Transformational Leadership

James MacGregor Burns (1978) defined leadership as inducing followers to pursue common or at least joint purposes that represent the values and motivations of both leaders and followers. The problem of addressing the values of both leaders and followers could be handled in two ways. Burns termed the first one as transactional leadership and the second as

transforming or transformational leadership. Transactional leadership, which involves an exchange of valued things, is based on current values and motivations of both leaders and followers. Transformational leadership on the other hand, does not take the current values and motivations to be fixed, but rather seeks to change them.

According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership "occurs when one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (page 20), and results in a transforming effect on both leaders and followers. The purposes of leaders and followers that might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused. Leadership is nothing if not linked to collective purpose. Leadership is a process of morality to the degree that leaders engage with followers on the basis of shared motives and values and goals--on the basis, that is, of the followers' "true" needs as well as those of leaders. The transformational leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower.

Transformational leaders broaden and change the interests of their followers, and generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group. They stir their followers to look beyond their self-interest for the good of the group. They articulate a realistic vision of the future that can be shared; they stimulate subordinates intellectually and pay attention to the differences among the followers. Transformational leaders change the organizational culture. Superior performance or performance beyond normal expectations is possible only by transforming followers' values, attitudes and motives from a lower to a higher plane of arousal and maturity. Studies have found significant and positive relationships between transformational leadership and the amount of effort followers are willing to exert, satisfaction with the leader, ratings of job performance, and perceived effectiveness (Bass, 1998). Transformational leadership contributes significantly to effective organizational performance. Transformational leadership assumes even greater importance considering that organizations face a rapidly changing environment today.

### *Components of Transformational Leadership*

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was developed to measure the factors in transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). Bass began with Burns's (1978) definition of a transformational leader as an individual who raises the followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of reaching them; gets the followers to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of the team, organization, or larger polity; and raises their level of need from lower-level concerns for safety and security to higher-level needs for achievement and self-actualization.

Bass (1985) administered the MLQ to subordinates who were asked to rate their military or industrial supervisors. The items describing transformational leadership behaviors emerged as four factors--charismatic leadership, inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Bass found charisma to be the most important component in the larger concept of transformational leadership. Followers described their charismatic leaders as those who made everyone enthusiastic about assignments, who commanded respect from everyone, who had a special gift of seeing what was important, and who had a sense of mission that they transmitted to their followers. Inspirational leadership, the second of the four factors, involves the arousal and heightening of motivation among followers. Envisioning a desired future state, making followers see that vision, and showing followers how to get to that state are part of the inspirational process. Intellectual stimulation, the third factor, arouses in followers the awareness of problems and how they may be solved,

and stirs the imagination and generates thoughts and insights. Transformational leaders enable followers to think about old problems in new ways, and provide followers with new ways of looking at things that used to puzzle followers before. The last factor, namely individualized consideration, involves giving personal attention to followers who seem neglected, treating each follower individually, and helping each follower get what he or she wants (Bass, 1985).

### *Elevating Power of Leadership*

According to Burns (1978: 4), "the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents." Transformational leaders throw themselves into a dynamic relationship with followers who will feel elevated by it and become more active themselves, thereby creating new cadres of leaders. Transformational leadership alters and elevates the motives, values and goals of followers through the vital teaching role of leadership, enabling leaders and followers to be united in the pursuit of higher goals. Transformational leaders raise their followers up through levels of morality.

The issue of moral leadership concerned Burns (1978) the most. He considered moral leadership as emerging from, and always returning to, the fundamental wants, needs, aspirations, and values of the followers. Satisfaction of followers' authentic needs is the primary objective of moral leadership. Burns held that transformational leadership "ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (page 20).

Mobilized and shaped by gifted leadership, sharpened and strengthened by conflict, values can be the source of vital change. At the highest stage of moral development persons are guided by near-universal ethical principles of justice such as equality of human rights and respect for individual dignity. This stage sets the opportunity for rare and creative leadership. Such leadership is transformational and it reaches into the need and value structures of followers, mobilizing and directing support for such values as justice and empathy. Such leadership has two characteristics. First, it is the kind of leadership that operates at need and value levels higher than those of the potential follower (but not so much higher as to lose contact). In its most effective form it appeals to the higher, more general and comprehensive values that express followers' more fundamental and enduring needs. Second, it is the kind of leadership that can exploit conflict and tension within persons' value structures. Contradictions can be expected among competing substantive values, such as liberty and equality, or between those values and moral values like honesty, or between terminal values and instrumental values (Burns, 1978).

The crux of moral leadership is taking followers to a higher level and not to a lower level. Followers are transformed irrespective of whether they are being taken upward or downward, but taking others downward cannot be really termed leadership. There is an implicit assumption that true leaders lead others to a better place, while taking others to a worse place is a form of manipulation or treating others as objects to be used. We could thus distinguish between two types of transformational leadership--authentic transformational leadership that takes followers upward, and pseudo-transformational leadership that takes followers downward. Pseudo-transformational leadership is in reality no leadership at all since it is a form of manipulation, and manipulation is at the opposite end of a continuum from leadership.

Cultural ideals provide a yardstick to distinguish between authentic and pseudo transformational leadership. Authentic transformational leadership brings to the conscious

what is in the unconscious of followers. It tries to express the ideals of followers in a manner they could not do by themselves. The true aspirations of followers are expressed better. On the contrary, pseudo-transformational leaders would not mind uprooting people and sending them along a path that might not address their real long-term needs. Since culture represents the collective unconscious of a society, it cannot be ignored if transformational leadership has to be authentic.

Culture consists of a set of basic assumptions that are shared by the people belonging to that culture. It also includes the various artifacts through which those basic assumptions are expressed. Authentic transformational leadership requires that one first learn the distinction between the essentials and the non-essentials in everything. The essentials are eternal, the non-essentials have value only for a certain time; and if after a time they are not replaced by something essential, they might be positively dangerous. The essentials represent the enduring needs; if they are not addressed, the being will not survive in a healthy fashion. Uprooting people and making them adopt an alien culture ignores the essentials, while refusing to change certain non-essentials that need to be changed to keep pace with the changing environment ignores their non-essential nature. The radicals who strike at the roots or essentials and the conservatives who refuse to change artifacts that are non-essentials are both not contributing to effective transformation (Radhakrishnan, 1927). Authentic transformational leadership requires finding our way between the Scylla of old superstitious orthodoxy and the Charybdis of blindly imitating someone else. These two have to be taken care of. In the first place, certain artifacts and practices have to be changed, for they may no longer be relevant to the times and could even be actually harmful. Secondly, we cannot become someone else; therefore imitating another culture is useless. Indian culture is presented in the next section as an example to show how modernization can take place without demolishing the cultural roots.

## Example of Indian Culture

The Indian Weltanschauung or worldview is termed as Hinduism, though the word Hinduism is used in common parlance rather incorrectly in the sense of a religion. Indian way of life or worldview, in the course of a long history, has preserved at its core, certain fundamental assumptions, and those together comprise Hinduism. There are several religions in India that fully subscribe to the Hinduism worldview. Even Christians and Muslims in India share this worldview to some extent.

Two basic aspects of the Indian worldview are spirituality and tolerance. Human beings are not mere bundles of matter that are born and are destroyed at death; they are actually spirit, though apparently dwelling within the confines of physical bodies or matter. This gives rise to the doctrine of rebirth, by which human beings die only to be reborn in some other form or physical body. Tolerance, the second basic aspect, arises because the final goal of knowing one's real nature as spirit can be realized in many different ways. All the different religions or the ways of knowing the reality are equally acceptable because people are in varying stages of evolution in life (Prabhavananda, 1960). These are the essentials of Indian culture, and the primary reason why the Indian civilization, which is the oldest of the existing civilizations, is still alive and vibrant is perhaps that these essentials have continued to exist. Various non-essential aspects of the culture have been modified or even removed to keep in tune with the changing times, but the essentials have remained intact.

There are two sorts of truth according to the Indian worldview, one that is based upon the eternal nature of man--the one that deals with the eternal relation of God, soul, and nature; the other, with local circumstances, environments of the time, social institutions of the period,

and so forth. Accordingly, there are two sets of scriptures in Hinduism--primary and secondary. The first class of truths is chiefly embodied in the primary scriptures, and the second in the secondary scriptures. Throughout the evolution of the Indian worldview, it is found that for all periods, the primary scriptures are the final goal and authority, and if the secondary scriptures differ in any respect from the primary scriptures, that part of the secondary scriptures are to be rejected without mercy. It is found, then, that in all these secondary scriptures, the teachings are different. One secondary scripture says, this is the custom, and this should be the practice of this age. Another one says, this is the practice of this age, and so forth. Now this is one of the most glorious doctrines, that eternal truths, being based upon the nature of human being, will never change so long as human being lives; they are for all times, omnipresent, universal virtues. However, the secondary scriptures speak generally of local circumstances, of duties arising from different environments, and they change in the course of time. The existing customs and practices have been changed several times in the past. They will continue to be changed, and other secondary scriptures will come. This is one fact in the Indian Weltanschauung, that the primary scriptures being eternal will be the same throughout all ages, but the secondary scriptures will have an end. As time rolls on, more and more of the secondary scriptures will go, leaders will come, and they will change and direct society into better channels, into duties and into paths which accord with the necessity of the age, and without which it is impossible that society can live (Vivekananda, 1972). Mahatma Gandhi was a recent example of one such leader. He supported the caste or the class system in India (which is an essential, being based on the assumption that people are in different stages and hence have to be hierarchically ordered), but at the same condemned the practice of untouchability that had somehow been attached to the caste system.

### Conclusion

Knowing what is essential and hence is to be preserved and what is non-essential and hence is to be changed is the secret of effective transformational leadership. Transformational leaders bring about enduring change by presenting the cultural roots, which are part of the collective unconscious, in an inspiring way. They also mobilize followers' support to modernize existing practices that are non-essential or perhaps even detrimental. Modernization does not mean uprooting people from their culture and making them adopt the culture of some other society. On the other hand, transformational leadership would be authentic only if it takes followers to a better place without demolishing their cultural roots.

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