**Milton Singer’s contribution to the study of civilization**

**Keywords: Heterogenetic city, Sacred center, Joint family study.**

Milton Singer is of the view that the pre-existing folk or regional culture fashioned India’s primary or indigenous civilization. He observed the cultural continuity between the Great and Little traditions as being the cause and product of sharing common cultural consciousness and the expression of similar Indian outlook and ethos. Singer observed this common consciousness and expression of similar ethos in India’s diverse regions, villages, castes, tribes, sacred books and sacred geography of sacred centres. His contribution to the study of civilization includes: (i) his observation on how the great traditions of Hinduism work in a heterogenetic city; and (ii) his method of studying Indian joint family system in urban and industrial setting in understanding social and cultural change in Indian civilization.

(i). **Observation on the great traditions in a heterogenetic city**

He tried to find out *how* the great traditions of Hinduism work in a modern heterogenetic city, e.g., his study on Madras city (1958, 1972). He studied this aspect through three methods:

(i). study of its cultural centres;

(ii). Study of its professional representatives; and

(iii). Study of its cultural performances including religious rites and ceremonies.

He made his study in the context with the historical continuity and territorial extensions. For him (along with Redfield), the cities performed their ‘orthogenetic’ function of converting folk culture into its civilized dimension. These were the meeting places of various cultures and influences and also the centres for the transformation of such influences.

Through his study regarding the impacts of urbanization on the traditional items of cultural performances, performers, cultural stages, media and value, he pointed out how various kinds of sacred rites are taking place at the specific sacred centres, e.g., in Madras city.

(ii). **Method of studying Indian joint family system in urban and industrial setting.**

In studying joint and extended family structure, Singer (1958) favoured the use of family histories in understanding social and cultural change, including change in family systems. This method, known after W.H.R. Rivers as the ‘genealogical method’, has been used by the sociologists and historians and also in genetics and medicine to trace pedigree patterns in the inheritance of selected traits. For Singer, Rivers’ genealogical method, if freed from the synchronic restriction, did indeed offer a powerful means of collecting social data for the study of both structural change and structural continuity of family systems and of other kinds of social structure. He understood this method as an especially appropriate method for the study of what happens to the Indian joint family in as urban and industrial setting as in Madras city. Applying this method to study a group of outstandingly successful industrial leaders in Madras city, Singer found that, while these have been striking changes within three generations in residential, occupational, educational and social mobility, as well as in patterns of ritual observances, these changes have not transformed the traditional joint family structure into isolated nuclear families. On the contrary, the urban and industrial members of a family maintains, Singer observed, numerous ties and obligations with the members of the family who have remained in the ancestral village or town or moved elsewhere (Singer, 2001: 444).

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