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## Distillers of fermentation

EDITORIAL NOTE

Selective Reception and  
Transmission As a Process  
of Religious Ferment

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Analogy, though useful, leads one along treacherous paths of thought. Since we speak of ferment, it is natural to consider extension of the term and to attempt to draw an analogy between fermentation of grapes and fermentation of ideas in an individual mind. But such an analogy may lead us astray; we are, after all, dealing with a process occurring in a structure more comparable to an electronic device that is constructed to accept certain signals and to reject others—in short, the human ability to be selective. This ferment does not simply bubble around in a container—it is created or utilized or stopped in human minds by the presence of conflicting ideas, commitments to goals, and access to information.

Thus with the individuals considered in the chapters in this section. They are set to receive and transmit, perhaps in altered form, certain signals. From a possible range of alternative ideas that might have been chosen, they chose only a limited number. In electronic terms, their selectivity was high. Each person discussed in this section is, possibly, a unique case. Taken collectively, they suggest that religious ferment begins in an individual—or a group—with the triggering of a response to impinging noise, from which selection must be made. In our specific cases, the noise is in the form of Christian ethics or organizational models. In the more immediate present, as discussed by Bharati, the noise is internal but, in large part, traceable to prior and present external transmissions.

Access to information about many religious doctrines and organizational models is characteristic of the men discussed and of their contemporary parallels. From these available resources they select for retransmission only *particular* concepts, principles, or imperatives to action. As national and communal feelings become articulate in Asia, there is increasing emphasis on selec-

tion of signals from indigenous traditions for reinterpretation, followed by transmissions of new basic information after selective processing.

One of the distillers was a carrier of noise into an ongoing system. Sam Jordan, a Christian missionary to Iran, selected for transmission from Christian religious imperatives the emphases on work, dignity of labor, individual responsibility, equality of opportunity, and adherence to principle. These and other values derived from the social gospel he introduced into Iran as a hoped-for beginning of a fermentation process leading to changed attitudes and to moral uplift if not to conversion. Exhortation alone was not his only mode of transmission; action and exemplary behavior were also involved. It is significant that Jordan, like the subjects of other essays in this section (Keiu, Gandhi, Ch'oe, and contemporary Hindu reformists), reached into indigenous tradition for parallels and support for the ethic he promoted. In all these cases, selectivity by the distiller formed the basis for emergence of an eclectic doctrine. Such a doctrine, though sometimes far removed from a total and formal religious system, presupposed an audience tuned to receive the signals in a context of universal basic morality.

By the nineteenth century the ferment-stimulating signals that a Sam Jordan transmitted were being filtered through the minds of indigenous Asian intellectuals. Nakamura Keiu, M. K. Gandhi, and Ch'oe Che-u exemplify those who saw the path to national spiritual regeneration through change in the behavior of individuals. Each had sampled the wares of at least one religious tradition different from his own. While Keiu and Gandhi constructed models for action and transmission from ethical and religious concepts preselected by pious *secular* Christians, Ch'oe looked at the model that Christianity in China and Korea was transmitting, and then he directed his selective channels to reception of indigenous signals. Chong suggests, however, that even Ch'oe did not entirely tune out the noise of Christian signals.

For each individual discussed by our authors, religion was not an abstract. It was an imperative to action according to belief. Each asked for the translation of an idea, once received, into behavior. Gandhi and Ch'oe in some respects are the more modern in their eclecticism, in their selectivity, and in their attempts to reinterpret and retransmit Indian and Korean traditions. Both had access to the vast range of religious concepts



from which they could draw elements to construct a new doctrine. Each translated his doctrine into a model for behavior and personally attempted to put it into practice. Each synthesized and simplified what he had taken from the various sources. Each led others to reexamine and reinterpret their own traditions, rather than to tune to external channels.

Bharati's essay, "The Language of Modern Hinduism," though utilizing other theoretical concepts, fits the electronic model sketched above. Instead of a single individual who is selecting and processing information for transmission, Bharati discusses the range of simplifiers, the modes of selectivity, and the actual media and technology employed by modern-day Hindu saints and religious modernizers. All attempt to spread an eclectic Hindu ethic, and the process evident in these attempts is not different in principle from that illustrated in previous papers. At one point, Bharati suggests that even the organizational prototypes and social actions that the reforming Hindu sects use are drawn in fact from models projected earlier by Christian missionaries.

Bharati prepares us for the next section, in which the signals, distilled, simplified, and selectively received (by an audience with less access to the originals in most cases), are reprocessed. They reverberate through organizations and societies, producing new religious ferment, and offer competing models of the good society.