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# **DIALOGUE**

**QUARTERLY**

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## Editorial Perspective

### **Kashmir Valley in Turmoil: Difficult Choices**

By now the Kashmir Valley has been in turmoil for nearly a year, beginning with the death of Hizbul Mujahideen Commander Burhan Wani in a security forces (SF) action in July 2016. Stone pelting at the SF and to thwart SF actions against the militants, shut downs, anti-India demonstrations and rising trend of attacks on the security forces and the police personnel across the valley, have defined the situation since then. Mob lynching of Dy. S.P. Mohd. Ayub Pandit on June 22 at Jama Masjid, Srinagar, and earlier killing of police S.I. Dar and 5 other policemen in Anantnag distt. in June 2017 are worrying developments, I do not remember an incident in which a mob had lynched a police officer on duty. The movement is led by leaderless youth, with, widespread use of social media to radicalise the youth and organize shut-downs demonstrations and stone peltings. In a way it's the longest lasting campaign unlike in 2008 and 2010. A perception of wider alienation of Valley Muslims and consequent rising helplessness of the state govt., are causes of serious concern. Early end to the current situation is essential as it affects our international standing.

With muscular policy option being exercised by the govt., and refusal to talk to the secessionist leaders, including the Hurriyat leaders, no immediate way out or options are visible. The present situation in the Valley is a function of several developments in the state, since the last Assembly elections, resulting in the formation of the BJP-PDP coalition govt. Combined with the refusal of govt. of India (perhaps rightly so) to talk to Pakistan unless it stops terrorist actions in India, the ever existing sub-liminal alienation in the Valley got further exacerbated. Earlier the situation was managed between over ground political groups like NC, PDP & Congress etc., being active and the carrot of negotiations with Hurriyat and secessionist groups and with Pakistan to resolve the so-called Kashmir problem provided some kind of political space, hope and movement. In effect since 1996 when the

Govt. of India engaged with the secessionists, no progress has been made, but it created an environment of optimism in the Valley which were further enhanced by the Govt. of India's engagement with Gen. Musharaff. Briefly the Valley was thriving in an environment of hope and expectations, however, impractical and improbable. The myth of solution was being sustained by all the stakeholders, situation, though always remained fragile.

Whatever we say or do Pakistan is always a large brooding presence in minds of the Valley muslims; besides the apprehension of outsiders (including political parties like the Congress & BJP) having a say or influence in the Valley and the state. All this, was since the 1989-90 defined a by strong communal underpinnings which have not diminished. The Islamic element of the Valley politics, disclaimers notwithstanding, is currently driving the discontent and violence in the Valley. Use of social media to radicalise the youth is the latest phenomenon and has sinister potential to involve IS etc. who are adept at using social media to recruit and radicalise.

In this background of no talks with the secessionists in the Valley and Pakistan, the induction of BJP in the govt. was like a red rag to the bull in the Valley and aroused the dormant fears of pre-1947 Dogra, and Jammu (read Hindu) domination. It can be said with conviction that the entry of BJP in a coalition govt. in the state is an important factor in the present situation in the Valley, whatever may have been the considerations, given the environment in the Valley. The experiment seems to have backfired. The revival of the dormant armed militancy is another consequence, but that can be dealt with as by itself it is not serious yet. It is also not clear as to how much control Pakistan and United Jihad Council (UTC) led by Salahuddin exercises on the new crop of radicalised militants. A successor Commander of Burhan Wani of the Hizbul Mujahideen had resigned saying he was fighting for Islam and not Pakistan.

Now there is no easy exit and perhaps the PDP has hurt its political prospects rather seriously. The hardline towards Pakistan is justified, but the same approach to the Valley separatists requires correctives. While no quarter need be given to the armed militants, and its supporter Pakistan, the same stand vis-à-vis Hurriet and others of the kind needs a nuanced approach. After all they are Indians and doors need to be kept open, for if nothing else, to wean moderates among them from Pakistan.



More difficult is to engage the agitating youth, who do not seem to have an identifiable leadership or organization or clear set of demands. They have no faith either in the Hurriet or other over-ground political parties like the NC, PDP, Congress etc. In present stand of the govt. they see denial of existence of the “Kashmir problem needing solution” (a long held view in the Valley) and hence their frustration and its manifestation in defiant and violent actions.

Pakistan, and the militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen are taking advantage of it. Engaging the youth remains the most difficult and desirable step. Another important point is to ensure that in the current conflict the mainline political parties do not become irrelevant or are side-lined, as they remain the best bet to defuse the situation. It happened in early 1990’s when the militancy broke-out and it took years to manage their come back. Another lesson from the past is that between 1987 and 1989, the NC led state govt. in the face of growing alienation and loss of credibility progressively became irrelevant till the armed militancy broke out and centre had to intervene. Of course, the ground situation is not the same with the police and security forces in control. It is the political management which remains problematic. All these years since the Independence, significant number of the Valley Muslims have nurtured a belief that Kashmir problem is yet to be resolved and Pakistan and Islam form an important element of it. For them acceptance of status quo as final, poses an existential threat to the Muslim majority state. It is this fear of domination of outsiders and presence of BJP in the Govt. which is driving the current unrest. It is a difficult dilemma and engaging the youth remains the key to defusing the crisis.

### **Mob Lynchings: Need to address the Deeper Malaise**

The incidents of mob-violence or lynchings in the recent past cutting across caste, communal and social divides, instead of arousing our conscience and start an introspection on the causes and remedies has led to mutual recriminations, accusations and seeking bizarre kind of justifications from the past. Some of the social media postings and TV channels are indulging in a blatant deflectory manner which would put any civilised society to shame. This unseemly blame game is preventing deeper analysis of the causes and immediate curative measures. On the contrary it seems to be encouraging the lynch mobs messaging that no

action will follow and perhaps it is justified. It is becoming difficult to have an objective and unbiased debate and solutions, amidst efforts to confuse and mislead about the basic issues and concerns.

Let us be clear that these incidents have not only communal, caste or regional causes, but are also reflection of a deeper social malaise we have fostered for long and political parties have used these for electoral politics which is coming home to roost. It is not only about muslims and beef, it is also about a woman in West Bengal being lynched on suspicion of child-trafficking; an e. rickshaw driver for objecting to public urination; a handicapped person, being thrown out of train for objecting to smoking; a dalit being assaulted for his son falling in love with a muslim girl; several attacks and stabbings of women in full public view without any help from citizens etc. All these emanate from the same reason of deadening of our conscience and self-serving tolerance of successive govt.'s doing nothing about it. The one evening protest of "Not in My Name" (June 28) only served to momentarily touch our dormant social conscience and showed a mirror to the society about what we have become. It was more about us as citizens and society than 17 year old late Junaid who was only a reference point like scores of such hapless victims on varying pretexts and situations. It also reflects failure of the system due to which some groups feel emboldened to take law in their own hands with impunity. We have to reflect how lumpenised our society is becoming due to political indulgence.

What we see today is not about beef-eating only. There are as many non-muslim beef eaters in India as muslims. No political party or group is blameless and has clean hand – hence pointing of fingers at each other as fellow culprits. All have presided over communal, caste and mob and social violences and are equally to be blamed from the CPM linked goons controlling communities and villages, to anti-sikh riots in 1984, post Babri Masjid Mumbai riots to 2002 Gujarat communal riots are the products of same social and political mindsets. A section of media are being used to divert attention and accountability.

This is not an overnight development. Even during our independence struggle, Gandhi, Tagore, Ambedkar and several others were of strong view that "social swaraj" must precede "political swaraj" if we were to emerge as a noble nation and a cohesive society. They were aware of our deep social fault-lines, and wished to address these by various means, most of all by educating us about these. All these pertain to our

being a multi-cultural society and country. These concerns found reflection in our Constitution but not in our society and actions. Political parties on various pretexts, over the years, instead of narrowing and eliminating these fault-lines rooted in communal, caste, region and linguistic fields, only used these for electoral advantages and in the process they deepened these divisions and even encouraged mob pressure tactics to achieve political and social goals. There is no state which has not seen use of violence over economic and social issues, having some overt or covert political support. Hence erosion and gradual collapse of criminal justice system apparatus was a logical outcome. Today no-one fears the consequences of breaking the law, including lynchings, rioting, burning houses etc. as some group or the other, including some in media, will find some justification for it. No wonder we are where we are. Well meaning citizens are worried, but they are also divided and feel discouraged.

A politics of confrontation with purely electoral objectives, defines our political culture of the day. World over there has been a decline in the moral/ethical core of the politics, although pretences are maintained and concerns respected. But our situation is little worse. Here it promotes divisiveness without any pretence of right or wrong and justification of violence in its pursuit is only the next step. The political class does not seem to be in mood to retrace its steps and think of the society and the country. We need a political culture where the Govt. of the day instead of seeking alibi in the past has the courage to stand and say under my watch we will ensure rule of law and not allow anyone to take law in its hands and support strong police action and ensure speedy justice in cases of hate crimes by mobs. But in current environment of power driven partisan politics it is a pipe dream. If you protest visibly the one political class or the other, will suppress and silence you by various means. This encourages and legitimizes lumpens and undermines the rule of law.

Failure of criminal justice system to act decisively in such cases, beyond arrests under public pressure, further complicates the situation. Then what are we to do? Visible strong police action and public and political support to it, can still save the day for us in immediate terms. In long term only the pressure from people can moderate if not change the political culture. Even failed Anna Hazare movement had its positive side. “Not in My Name” only demonstrated that people are concerned – evoking some, political response in form of PM’s statement from

Sabarmati Ashram. They (Not in My Name) organised (July 11) an other citizens protest against the attack on Amarnath yatis in Jammu & Kashmir in which seven pilgrims were killed. But unless as a society we do not take care of our social fault-lines, and address these in a cohesive social campaign, we cannot expect our politicians of the day to refrain from using these to their advantage. The real causes leading to and condonation of mob violence can only be checked by a determined administration but can be eliminated only by a social movement, rooted at home and in schools to shed petty biases and prejudices. There is a dire need of a Gandhi today who can show a mirror to us and shame us into action. Besides, in a claustrophobic environment it is essential to keep courage and keep protesting. Silence is no option. Only pressure of public opinion will change things and frighten the political parties to act strongly and fairly.

—**J.N. Roy**

**North-East Scan**

## Language, Culture, Communication and Identity

Patricia Mukhim\*

When talking about Language, Culture and Communication one cannot leave out Identity from the triad since all the three ultimately define our identity. Indeed language is the foundation upon which our cultural identity is built.

Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture. It is the soul of communication and is not an instrument of coercion or an excuse for linguistic chauvinism. Language is a means for communicating values, beliefs and customs and has an important social function. It also fosters feelings of group identity and solidarity. It is the means by which culture and its traditions and shared values may be conveyed and preserved. Hence language is fundamental to cultural identity. This is true of people everywhere.

In this respect I am a great admirer of Prof Ganesh Devy the tribal scholar and activist who has worked on the conservation of languages in this country. According to Devy, in India in the census report of 1961, a total of 1,652 mother tongues were mentioned. The 1971 census mentioned only 108 languages. This was because the government decided not to disclose languages that are spoken by less than 10,000 people. As per latest government figures, there are 22 scheduled languages and the remaining fall under the “all others” section or the non-scheduled languages.

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\* The writer is editor, The Shillong Times and an eminent social activist, journalist and member of National Security Advisory Board.

Devy observes that at least 300 languages are no longer traceable since independence. Most languages that are not disclosed are those spoken in the peripheries of the country including the voices of tribals and other poor people that usually get suppressed. In 2007, the Union HRD (human resource development) ministry formed a committee for non-scheduled languages and Prof Devy was made its chairperson. The Planning Commission even provided a generous grant of Rs 240 crore under Bharat Bhasha Vikas Yojana. Sadly this project could not be implemented as the Government did not have an official, authentic list of languages.

The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-90) then mooted a language survey, but it covered only four states in the last 20 years. Later the Mysore-based Central Institute of Indian Languages proposed a survey in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2007–12) and asked the Central Government to provide 2,000 linguists for 10 years. The Government approved this plan and also allocated a budget of Rs 600 crore. But yet again due to some internal wrangling this project too was dropped in 2010. It was at this critical juncture that Prof Devy stepped in and mobilised about 3,500 people, including 2,000 language experts and social historians to conduct the survey which was completed under less than Rs 1 crore. This is the kind of commitment that is needed to conserve language. The last time a linguistic survey of India was completed and published was in 1923, under Sir George Abraham Grierson, an Irish linguist. Isn't this ironic for a country with so many diverse languages?

Why is language so important? Language gives a unique world view and no two languages have the same world view. A world view is how one looks at time, space and man's relationship with oneself, society, nature and God. It's a collective view of people of the same culture and language. It is a social bond that promotes bonhomie and social cohesion.

Prof Devy speaks of a lady belonging to the Bo community in the Andaman Islands who was the last speaker of her language also called the Bo language. She died on 26 January 2010. It is said that she was talking to birds in her last days as no one else could understand her. Sadly, along with her, the continuous line of wisdom of 65,000 years was also gone. Then there is the Sidi community living in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka which is of African origin. This language is no longer spoken. Sanskrit is also under threat. In recent times the UNESCO has listed the Khasi language as being under threat of going

into oblivion and this is not surprising as more and more Khasis, especially the middle class switch to English to communicate with their kids. Parents argue that they are helping to build the vocabulary of the kids so they can do better in their examinations. Most Khasis today find it easier to converse in English than in Khasi. Many take pride in the fact that they cannot speak on a television programme because they don't know 'good' Khasi. This is a matter of great concern.

How rich language is can be gauged from the fact that in the Himalayan region there are over 130 words for snow. In the Andamans the tribes have several words to define waves. Hence according to Prof Devy if the glaciers start melting or if there is a tsunami it would be of immense help to decipher the phenomenon if one knows the nuances of each word.

Language is therefore integral to our culture. It allows us to pass on ideas, knowledge, and even attitudes to the next generation. Language allows cultures to develop by freeing people to move beyond their immediate experiences. If we did not have language we would have very little memories. This is because we associate experiences with words and then use words to recall the experience. Without language we would have a very rough time with communicating dates and times. Because of language, we are able to plan activities and events with one another. "Language allows culture to exist." Language is also very important because it builds social cohesion. Hence it would be true to say that, "language is the basis of culture."

Within multilingual societies, the maintenance of the languages of the various ethnic and cultural groups is critical for the preservation of cultural heritage and identity. The loss of language means the loss of culture and identity and one's roots. In many societies throughout history, the suppression of the languages of minority groups has been used as a deliberate policy in order to marginalize those cultures. As a result a large number of the world's languages have been lost because of colonisation and migration. With the death of several languages the world becomes a less interesting place. But we also sacrifice raw knowledge and the intellectual achievements of millennia.

Let me now come to culture. Culture may be broadly defined as the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings, which is transmitted from one generation to another. Every community, cultural group or ethnic group has its own values, beliefs and ways of living. Some of the more prominent aspects of culture such as food,

clothing, celebrations, religion and language are only part of a person's cultural heritage. The shared values, customs and traditions shape the way a person thinks, behaves and views the world. Cultural and linguistic diversity is a feature of most nations today as people from different groups live together as a consequence of historical events and human interface.

Coming to communication, everything that we do not only involves communication, but comes from communication. We convey our deepest feelings and emotions through words which are the basis of communication. Language presents us with two functions to consider: one being an instrument of communication and the other as a way of asserting a person's or nation's identity or distinctiveness from another, accepting the argument that language is intrinsic to the expression of culture. Every language has its nuances and only those who speak the language understand those nuances. Trying to interpret those nuances in another language is often a tall order.

Sadly, English has almost become the language of communication even in a multi-linguistic country like India where especially the young and upper class place undue importance on it and wear it like a badge of honour. English is fine for communication but communities cannot forget that they owe their identity to their language. Without language there is no identity.

Culture is perceived as a society's software, which is cumulative and ongoing and adapts and evolves over time with members having multiple identities and having membership to multiple sub-groups in society. As such evolution takes place, new societal and cultural identities are formed. Language is a robust marker of social and cultural identity at many levels in society (Jaspal, 2009) with the capability of binding and dividing groups in society. Unless we are careful this could result in ethno-centrism and exclusiveness that then leads to 'othering.' That is not the purpose of language.

Alternatively, the loss of language, through either lack of resources for maintenance or as a deliberate policy of suppression by the dominant language groups affects a person's and a nation's cultural heritage and social identity. Hence language is also an important social and cultural marker of identity. Preservation of community languages is therefore critical and is not a threat to national unity.

However, while arguing that the language of one's community is important and should be conserved one is not suggesting that other



languages are less important. It is in fact important to learn as many languages as possible to better understand cultures other than one's own. The most important thing we gain when learning a language is that we create a bridge between our mother tongues and that of others. This bridge is essential in communication and mutual understanding among diverse nations and varied cultures.

When we learn a new language we find ourselves exposed to a different culture; a different method of thinking and a different heritage. This contributes to the widening of our own knowledge base and helps us become more flexible and resourceful. With language, we can express our hopes, desires, dreams and fears. With language, we can pass our knowledge, experience, skills and points of view. That's why we can say that when we learn a new language we gain another life and communication with others who don't speak our language becomes easier. We see things from their perspective and read their history from their prism. This makes us more tolerant of their views and beliefs. This is important in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic country like India.

The importance of a language is best understood by people who have lost their language and have to speak in a language of the dominant or ruling group. Nowhere is this more visible than among the aborigines of Australia who have lost everything they hold dear about themselves and are left living and promoting the culture of their conquerors.

Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya was not only the honest custodian of the Assamese language but he continually enriched it and promoted it to the hilt. It is fitting that the present generation read this great literary mind and add to the repertoire of literature, poems, short stories etc., That would be the most fitting tribute to this doyen of Assamese culture and journalistic endeavour.

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## The Manipur BJP government must now look to heal democracy

Pradip Phanjoubam\*

Thus far, it has clearly been a favourable tail wind for the new BJP-led coalition government in Manipur. Much water has flowed down the Imphal River ever since the masterstroke of the party's Central campaign managers in the immediate wake of the February election in bringing the BJP to power although the party won only 21 seats in the state's 60-member Assembly, using its clout as the ruling party at the Centre to beat arch rival Congress which bagged 28 seats to emerge the single largest party. Now that the ruling coalition is firmly on track, it is time for it to start thinking of nurturing democracy back to health after the understandable, though not desirable, bruises delivered to it in the rough and tumble of the electoral battle.

Indeed, nobody can claim everything was played by the rules in the government formation process in Imphal in mid-March. The breach began with the manner Governor Najma Heptulla rather enthusiastically decided to invite the BJP first to form the government, putting her faith in the party's claim of support of all other non-Congress winners. These were four MLAs each of the Naga People Front and National Peoples Party, and one MLA each of the Trinamool Congress and Lok Janashakti Party, bringing up the total to a hairline majority of 31. There was also one independent MLA, who has since joined the ruling coalition, but whose political allegiance at the time was still uncertain.

This is as eminent jurist Fali S. Nariman pointed out commenting on a very similar situation in Goa where election was held at the same time as Manipur, against norms set by the Sarkaria Commission. According to him, in the event of a hung Assembly (or Parliament), where no single party has managed a majority, the Governor should be inviting a pre-poll alliance with the required majority. If there are no such alliances, then the single largest party with claims of support by other parties should be invited whether or not the party is the first to stake claim to form the government. Only when these options have been exhausted, should other post-poll combinations be tried.

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This was not all. During the trust vote for the newly formed coalition, for unthinkable reason, the voting was done by a voice vote. How could anybody have allowed a hairline majority in a splintered Assembly be decided by voice vote. Yet, the spin was so successful that most national newspapers reported the BJP-led coalition won the confidence motion 32-27, with one early Congress defector reportedly having lent his voice to the ruling formation. It must have taken the ears of a master conductor of a choral symphony to distinguish individual voices in the din of 60 voices saying “aye” or “nay”.

Probably the result would have still been 32-27 by any other means but this should have been nonetheless determined officially by ballot voting to know exactly who voted which way, and if disqualification questions arose, to ensure irrefutable evidence or the lack of it to decide these cases.

But now let whatever happened be. In all probability, the Congress, though the single largest party then, would not have had the chance to return under any circumstance, given the fickleness of loyalty of Manipur politicians, most of whom are perpetually sniffing for the buttered side of the bread and have no compunctions about betraying their parent parties and the ideologies they fought for and won their seats in the Assembly, just so they are in the camp which wields power. Politicians here are also always acutely aware the real power in the case of financially weak and dependent states like Manipur lies with the Centre.

True to this image, once it became certain the Congress was out of the contention for power, the party's once self-declared loyal servants began abandoning the party to flock into the waiting arms of the ruling BJP. In four batches, seven Congress MLAs have crossed the floor so far, the last coming as a cross vote in the election to fill the state's lone vacant Rajya Sabha seat on May 25, leaving the Congress candidate with just 21 votes against the BJP candidate's 38.

As a generation brought up to abhor betrayal and treachery, something in the general sense of justice and fair play jars when politicians defect so casually. This is so even when defections happen before elections, but these cases will remain only a matter of repulsive moral stains. However when politicians defect after elections, the question goes beyond the morality of their actions, and acquires legal implications as well. No doubt politicians are still free to leave their parties and join another, but they have to forsake their membership in the Legislative Assembly, as clearly specified by the 10<sup>th</sup> Schedule of

the Indian Constitution. The government is now poised to complete its third month in power, yet there is a confounding silence on whether there has been any defection at all, not to talk about initiating the process of disqualifying those who have defected to prepare for by-elections to the seats they thus vacate.

It is still too early to make any conclusive verdict on the performance of the current set of leaders, but there can be no denying they have made a good start under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister N. Biren. Practically each day there is a new and innovative policy announced. The push for transparency, accommodation of public opinion, effort towards equitable development, and fight against corruption are quite starkly visible and welcome too. Not all of these initiatives may succeed in the end, but one thing is certain – nobody can accuse this government of lacking in intent and energy to take governance forward.

At this moment the people are indeed loving the promise of change this young set of leaders have given them, helped of course by the lingering hangover of anti-incumbency sentiments against the ousted Congress which ruled the state for 15 long years. But at this juncture, it will do well for all to remember the lesson from the great bard, William Shakespeare in his historical play “Julius Caesar”. Marcus Brutus who was a close friend of Caesar, join the conspiracy to kill Caesar, and his reason was: “I love Caesar, but I love Rome more.” In other words, he decided to go against Caesar because he believed Caesar, loved as he was by the all, was destroying Rome’s unique proto-democratic establishment of rule by the collective leadership of the Senate of Nobles, by inching on towards becoming emperor.

Let the people of Manipur likewise insist this government, appreciated though their style of governance may be for the moment, to restore democratic rule. Let the matter of defection be dealt with as per law. The government too will do well to remember the saying: “What goes around comes around”. If as law makers and law enforcers they begin their innings by breaking the law, they would have forsaken the strength of moral legitimacy governments need so vitally in dealing with law breakers in the days ahead. This has been Manipur’s endemic problem for a long time. Let this government not add to perpetuating this condition.

## Connectivity Improvements in Northeast India: the Role of Two Bridges

M. P. Bezbaruah\*

When more than two decades had passed with 'Look East' Policy delivering precious little for the Northeast, the expectation it aroused in the region was almost completely fading out earlier in the decade. In 2014, when Prime Minister Narendra Mody spoke of giving the policy a more practical orientation by calling for 'act east' than merely 'looking east', the expectations were rekindled. But sustaining the hope required visible changes in the ground level. The most visible impact of 'Act East' in the Northeast during last three years can be seen in the form greater urgency in implementation of various connectivity improving projects some of which had been languishing for quite some time. Since connectivity deficit within and out of the region is often cited as a major constraint for its economic development, these connectivity improvements measures can be expected to translate into faster improvement in the quality of life of the inhabitants of the region.

One prime illustration in this regard is the Luming-Silchar broad gauge railway project which was completed in 2015 after prolonged time overrun and consequent cost escalation. The new broad gauge railway has now replaced the old meter gauge rail lines laid way back in the colonial period across a difficult hilly terrain. The lines have restored rail connectivity with much enhanced capacity between the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak valley, and thereby greatly eased transportation between the entire northern part of the region with its southern part comprised of the Barak Valley of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram and a part of Manipur. Similarly, the second bridge over the Brahmaputra near Guwahti opened earlier this year, not only decongested traffic in the city, which is the nerve centre of the region, but also eased commuting between the south and the north banks of the river.

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The Dhola-Sadiya Bridge is the latest major boost in this direction. This bridge over the Lohit, joins Dhola on southern side with Sadiya – a town in the northeastern corner of Assam. A few kilometers downstream from this bridge, the confluence of Lohit with Siang (also known as Dihong) and Dibang forms the Brahmaputra which flows south-westward splitting the Assam Valley into two long stripes down the middle. The bridge has since been rechristened as Bhupen Hazarika Setu, after the great music maestro hailing from the region who incidentally was born in Sadiya.

When the bridge was dedicated to the nation by the prime Minister of India Sri Narendra Modi on 26 May 2017, it captured the imagination of the nation for its remarkable length. With 9.15 kilometer of length, the bridge is India's longest. While within Assam it connects the isolated pocket of Sadiya subdivision with the rest of the state, the major beneficiary of the bridge is the Eastern Arunachal Pradesh which has suddenly become much more accessible across the bridge. But the real game changing character of the bridge will be unfolded once the Bogibeel Bridge couple of hundred kilometers downstream over Brahmaputra will also be completed. The work is now nearly complete and the bridge is scheduled to be opened in a few months time. It will connect Dhemaji, the calamity prone flood ravaged and once the poorest district of Assam on the north bank of the Brahmaputra with the relatively prosperous districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Sibsagar on the south bank. This connectivity is expected to open up new economic opportunities and radically improve access to various basic facilities for the people in Dhemaji. But the benefits that the bridge is expected to deliver will spread well beyond Dhemaji and materialize largely in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh in the western part of the state. Indeed, the Bogibeel Bridge and the Bhupen Hazarika Setu together will greatly improve connectivity of entire eastern Arunachal Pradesh with its western parts, and in particular, with the seat of the State Government in Itanagar. Apart from bringing administration closer to the East Arunachalis, this new link will have huge economic benefit in terms of reduced travel time and cost, and improved viability of latent economic activities. The nation as a whole will derive additional strategic benefit from improved access of security agencies to its sensitive border areas.

# Improving Course-Content and Textbooks at the School Stage

Prof. H. S. Srivastava\*

## Historical Overview

Until the fifties of the last century, there was a kind of anarchic diversity in education in the country. Its constitutional status as a state subject promoted this and even hampered strides towards establishing uniformity. The only common feature was that everybody took school education as a preparatory step for entering Universities, even though a very small proportion of students actually pursued higher education. The examination at the end of the school stage too was then called Entrance Examination. A part of those who cleared the Examination but did not enter the Universities went to serve the government departments and the rest found other employments.

In this background, the need for quantitative improvement of education for containing illiteracy and for qualitative uplift for enhancing empowerment of children, weighed heavy on the minds of the Indian visionaries. Immediately after independence, therefore the government of India set up the Radhakrishnan Commission for University Education (1948) and Mudaliar Commission for Secondary Education (1952)

It needs to be mentioned that Mudaliar Commission was the only Commission for the implementation of the recommendations of which the Government of India established a special autonomous organisation called the All India Council for Secondary Education (AICSE). As the recommendations of the Commission were many, the AICSE conducted

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a nation-wide survey for identifying priorities to initiate intensive work on. As a result the three areas of Science Education, Examination Reform and In-service Teacher Education were identified. It was in fact, the intensive nation-wide fieldwork in these areas that made the Union Government proud, as it also established for it, valuable educational foot-holds In the States. The Examination Reform Programme among these proved to be an outstanding example of Centre-State collaboration in the field of education. Three full-fledged divisions were then created within AICSE with academic specialists, supporting administrative staff and related infrastructure.

In addition to these, three special sectors, the AICSE continued working on other important areas of School Education as well. The earliest initiative aimed at bringing about educational uniformity was the development of a Draft Syllabus for Secondary Classes. It was circulated to State Governments and Examination Boards. The move was highly appreciated. This and other activities of the AICSE earned such a resounding reputation, that the Government of India decided to make it a Governmental organisation on April 1, 1959 after renaming it as Directorate of Extension Programmes for Secondary Education (DEPSE) This was one of the organisations that merged to constitute the NCERT and it was also here that NCERT was conceived and planned.

### **Preparation of a High Value Curriculum**

With the establishment of NCERT on September 1, 1961. Attempts at systematizing education and bringing about a certain degree of uniformity started through vigorous programmes. This was particularly so because there, no doubt, was education in India, but not Indian education.

A country-specific perspective was therefore necessary to be first developed and this was done as a primary priority. The vision of School Curriculum of which Course content is a part, was decided was drawn from Our Social Order, Our Economic Structure, Our Political Ideology, Our Cultural Heritage, the Developmental Norms of our children and The Existing Store of Human Knowledge. These were relevant yesterday, are so To-day, and are not likely to become very irrelevant to-morrow.

To develop a curriculum and its course content, imbued with the above vision presumes the deployment of expertise of a variety of



kinds. Experts in this situation cannot and should not work independently but as members of a team with the common agenda of realising the objectives of the curriculum, so that the curriculum and all its parts do not, in totality, give any impression of a patchwork, but present the picture of coherence and unity. Furthermore, these experts and specialists ought to have experience in preparing instructional material as such an onerous task as the preparation of textbooks can never be entrusted to any inexperienced novices.

A background in Pedagogy particularly in what is taught at the Bachelor's level in Teacher Education Courses is very relevant for preparing curriculum and text-books. In this context NCERT as a specialist organisation needs to seriously consider recruiting Professors, Readers and Lecturers in specialised technical areas of education, rather than simply as Professors, Readers and Lecturers in Education. Also in view of the responsibilities they have to shoulder, they ought to possess both a Bachelors and a Master's Degree in Education.

The following attempts to present the contributors to the development of curriculum and curriculum material and their teams

#### Contributors to the Development of Curriculum and Curriculum Materials

##### Core Anchors Curriculum Specialist Evaluation Expert

##### Academic Team

Subject-matter Expert  
Pedagogue  
Practising Teacher

##### Technical Team

Educational Technologist  
Educational Psychologist  
Educational Administrator

##### External Influencers

Science  
Technology  
Trade  
Commerce

The above presentation clearly dispels the commonly held notion that the development of curriculum and curriculum material is the

responsibility and prerogative of the content or the subject- matter expert only.

In the final analysis curriculum is a compendium of 1. Instructional Objectives (in the Cognitive -Affective. and Psychomotor-Domains of human development). 2. Content (aligned to the curriculum and targeting the realisation of objectives). 3. Content material (faithfully reflecting the objectives and the content - (print, non-print and technological). 4. Methodologies of Curriculum Transaction (conventional and unconventional). 5. Infrastructural Support (manpower, machines, apparatus etc.). 6. Evaluation techniques, tools and procedures (covering both scholastic and co-scholastic aspects of pupil growth)

Curriculum and text-books are expected to reflect some basic characteristics particularly those of continuity and change, espousing the goals of national integration and international harmony, respect for inter-faith and inter-cultural values, shunning ideological tilts and projecting them in balanced and objective ways.

As education admits only evolutions and no revolutions, any drastic changes can only be detrimental to the health of education. Examples of attempts of introducing new untried ideas and ideologies are there, but they tapered off as quickly as they were introduced. New Mathematics which is useful for researchers was found to be not relevant for school curriculum. The ill-planned implementation of the glorious concept of Comprehensive and Continuous School-based Evaluation (CCE) making it a part of external examination, has brought about its exit from CBSE. Schools. There should in fact have been two separate supplementary certificates, one for external examination and another for School-based Evaluation as both test different things. Even academic achievement which is tested by both, is treated differently in the two situations. In external examinations we test this area through questions and question papers, in CCE, we test the same areas through projects, surveys, assignments etc. Post haste introduction of the scheme without adequate training of teachers or a trial-run, were other shortfalls that hastened the debacle.

So far as the improvements in curriculum content are concerned, some more things could be said. Only a few examples are proposed to be picked up for being cited here.

We start teaching abstract concepts and mechanical operations of Mathematics to our children without first introducing them to its interest-

capturing uses in solving problems of day-to-day life. Even otherwise our general concept of literacy is limited to reading and writing and Mathematical Literacy somehow, stands locked-out of the frontiers of our thinking.

The overriding principle that governs all aspects of education is the one that stipulates the movement of the journey of the educational process from known to unknown or familiar to unfamiliar. It is therefore strange that in some cases this logic is reversed and a beginning is made with facts, terms concepts, events, names of persons and places, unfamiliar and foreign to children. Such instances that way lay the desired process of thinking deserve to be contained. Content also deserves to be optimally enriched in all the ways we can. In fact the old practice of having supplementary books in languages with biographical sketches, moral exhaling stories deserves to be revived.

All parts of the curriculum including content and text-books are also expected to reflect some basic characteristics, particularly those of continuity and change, espousing the goals of national integration and international harmony and peace, and respect for inter-faith and inter-cultural values.

Content deserves to be optimally enriched through stories and pictures, events etc. Picture of Rameswaram Temple finds a place in almost all Social Studies text-books. It is usually mentioned that Rama established the Shiva Linga there for winning the war against Ravana. But it is missed to be mentioned that for solemnising such a ceremony a Brahmin priest was required. In that entire area, at that time, Ravana was the ablest and the most scholarly Brahmin. So Rama sent him a request and responding positively, Ravana came and got the ceremony solemnised. At the close of the ceremony, as customary, Ravana as the priest blessed Rama to be successful in his mission, which meant that Rama may win the war against him. Such high standards of morality would surely make a dent on the delicate minds of children,

Similarly the stories of Abu Ben Adam, Casablanca, Raja Harish Chandra, Shravan Kumar, etc. could easily succeed much better than any formal lessons in Moral Science text-books. Inculcation of desirable values has become urgent in view of the dangerous crisis in values that has come to engulf our lives to-day. To counter the situation a variety of innovative approaches have been devised and used including some ridiculous ones like entrusting the total responsibility of Value Education to the Physical Training Instructor, because he was the only one in the

school, authorised to cane students. (in those days)

As Religions are the fundamental source of values and their tenets the embodiment of desired ways of life and since all of them are roads converging to the same point, it appears appropriate to suggest that at the Secondary Stage, it may be made compulsory for a student to study about the Religion that s/he follows and another Religion of his choice as an examination subject, as in the United Kingdom. Accepting and practicing values as a way of life in the home, the school and the society, is the most appropriate way for inculcating values.

So far as the prospect of improving content and filling the gaps is concerned, a few more observations could be made for shortfalls to be corrected or avoided.

In classes one and two, we have forgotten to include content and corresponding activities for satisfying child's curiosity about physical and natural phenomenon or for satisfying his urge to express. There is also little or nothing for whetting his creative thinking.

In classes three and four for example, our focus mainly is on mechanical and semi-mechanical abilities like writing, spellings and pronunciations. We must address the gap about voluntary creative reading, a habit which is rewarding throughout life.

In classes seven and eight charts, diagrams and tables used, mainly serve a decorative purpose. Their reading and interpretation for drawing conclusions, neither finds a place in the content nor its related activities.

The Course Content also somehow alarmingly ignores the unignorable ability of observation which is a lifelong asset for an individual to navigate life.

Incorporation in the Course Content, items like Picture Composition and other activities for the improvement of active vocabulary of children, are serious omissions which deserve to be duly made good, for augmenting and strengthening communication abilities of children. Practical work as the soul of Science Courses highlights not only the genesis of Science but enables an appreciation of its contribution to the welfare of the society. Somehow only lip-service is given to it and science is taught by the word of mouth unsupported by experimental work by hands. Children therefore are unable to acquire the abilities related to the complexities of process and product of performance and proficiencies of making observations and drawing conclusions. This crucial shortfall has got to be overcome.

In the course of a seminar the following time distribution between

theory and practical work in different sub-stages of School Education was suggested:

<b>Educational Stage</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Practical Work</b>
Primary.	30 %	70 %
Upper Primary	50 %	50 %
Secondary	70 %	30 %

The proposal does deserve some serious thought.

### **Improving Textbooks**

Textbooks faithfully reflect the content of the curriculum and are the main vehicles carrying its messages, to reach out to the learners in letter and spirit.

The Department of Textbooks of NCERT, developed detailed subject wise Documents on the Principles of Preparation and Evaluation of Textbooks. These textbooks on textbooks, enunciated the basic principles and determinants of textbook preparation in regard to their varied constituents as also tools for evaluating them. The contents of these documents were used by the NCERT, the State Governments and the Private Publishers.

This reference appeared necessary as a starting point for a discussion on school textbooks of the NCERT which have all along reigned supreme in the highly competitive textbook market. They have been the undisputed favourites of the candidates preparing for the Indian Administrative and Allied Services Examination.

In spite of all these reassuring references there are ideas that could further improve different aspects of textbooks. The first suggestion in this regard that can be offered is that besides taking care of the prescribed course content, the textbooks should also take cognisance of the host of incidental curricula that impact education and its outcomes. These are the Curricula of the HOME, Curricula of the IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT, Curricula of the PEER GROUP, Curricula of the TELEVISION, Curricula of the INTERNET and Curricula of the WWW.

Of these, the Television, it can be mentioned, often projects enlarged images of negative aspects of life, brain-washing children and convincing them to believe, that they have a right to be wrong. Curriculum and curriculum material, therefore, are expected to judiciously play both

positive and negative roles of encouragement and discouragement in regard to desirable /undesirable values and behavior.

Technology too has to be optimally used not only as a subject of study, but more so as a methodology of curriculum transaction, for all subjects. In this context, there will remain no need for having special teachers for Information Technology, as every teacher will be an IT Teacher.

In day-to-day educational programmes videos deserve to be liberally used for enriching and reinforcing the content of text books. Videos of industrial installations which are not possible for students to visit or of scientific experiments which cannot be demonstrated by the teachers or performed by the students, or of natural, physical, chemical and biological phenomenon can prove to be valuable support material for internalisation of learning and for rendering it unforgettable, easy and meaningful.

Pictures, Diagrams and Tables in textbooks often play only a decorative role or as a means for presenting a semblance of authenticity. These, however often fall short of projecting and demonstrating their powerful potential as an instrument for making learning an insightful acquisition. This grave casualty tends to be a repeatedly recurring one, only for want of supporting explanations, which could without much effort enlighten the content and process of education.

Such leaking holes in our intentions and tireless strivings, do need to be plugged for deriving full gains from our educational initiatives. In this crusade of carrying the meaning and significance of the enunciated facts, concepts, trends etc. to the learners, the elaborations have but to be succinct and simply worded, displaying a step-by-step progression starting, so to say, from a seedling and moving on to a fruit-bearing tree. The so acquired learning is likely to prove to be Enabling, Empowering and Enriching and impart to the individuals, abilities and proficiencies related to process and product of performance, as also of making observations and drawing conclusions. Crucial as these shortfalls are, they cannot be ignored.

Anecdotes have a special potential for making learning abiding and textbooks must explore and exploit them. Let me take an example. While taking children round on an excursion to the Zoological Park, located in Delhi's Old Fort, the teachers should not forget to point out even from a distance the entrance to the library from the stairs of, which, Humayun had slipped and died. Students will never ever

forget it. Such interventions transform the otherwise pleasure trips into an educational excursions.

The end-of-the- chapter section of textbooks usually gives some recapitulatory questions. This is utterly inadequate now as change is the key concept of modern times, where knowledge is growing fast and becoming redundant faster, becoming only a temporary asset to possess. And we have only been feeding our children on knowledge, for preparing them for the future, which in the past used to be only unknown, but has now become unpredictable. It has therefore, become a compulsive necessity not to remain content with making our children a storehouse of knowledge, which is transient, but to develop in them competencies which are permanent and multi-use.

Towards this end, the end of the chapter section of the textbooks has to be expanded by giving a list of possible chapter related assignments, surveys, projects, experiments and explorations for the teacher to choose from.

Internet and video references for self-directed learning by the pupils may also be given along with those for library research. The CDs prepared for the pocket of the cover-page may have end-of-the-topic tests for the chapters complete with Designs, Blueprints, Tests, Marking Schemes and Question -wise Analysis.

### **Evaluation of Textbooks**

The evaluation of textbooks has normally been a subjective and a descriptive exercise in qualitative terms. The result of this used to be in the form an individual or a collective conclusion, reached on the basis of a process of intensive browsing of the content in the context of the purpose for which it may have been undertaken. For example the most elaborate and comprehensive exercise of textbook evaluation was undertaken at the NCERT from the point of view of national integration under the Chairmanship of Mr. G. Parthasarathi.

Now, however, some Methodologies of quantifying qualitative outcomes have been evolved. The easiest of these consists of the following steps: 1. Listing of the Evaluative Criteria for the item to be evaluated. 2. Pin-pointing the Purpose of Evaluation. 3. Selecting the Evaluative Criteria aligned to the purpose 4. Evaluating the item on each on the purpose aligned Evaluative Criteria, on a five point scale. Calculation of the GPA which will be the index of evaluation

for the item.

In case the purpose is to compare text books for say prescribing them, numerical GPA will be the appropriate index to go by. If books have to be selected for the library a broad symbolic index can be used.

### **Conclusion**

Through the above initiatives the frothing ambition within us is, to make our children adventurers, explorers and discoverers through a transformation from being objects of education to becoming subjects of education; from being dependent to becoming autonomous; from being consumers of knowledge to becoming producers of knowledge; from being human beings to becoming human resources; from being just persons to becoming personalities with motivation to learn more, inquisitiveness to know more and capacity to do more.



## Envisioning Education for New India: Curricular Reforms [Reflections on the Curriculum Renewal in School Education 2000-04]

J.S. Rajput\*

*The process of curriculum renewal initiated by the NCERT in the year 1999-2000 relied upon widespread nation-wide consultations as the world was entering in to a new millennium that was to usher in the 'age of accelerations'. The challenge before education systems worldwide was to remain in tune with the unprecedented pace of change. It was globally realized that education in every country must be rooted to culture and committed to change. Professionally-sound recommendations were made to include emerging concerns before education in its content and pedagogy. Realizing the needs of future generations that would be making their productive contributions in a world confronting erosion of humanistic, ethical and moral values, certain areas were identified for special emphasis. These included inculcation of the core values of Truth, Peace, Nonviolence, Righteous Conduct (Dharma) and Love. Awareness of the basics of all religions was also recommended*

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as it could strengthen the traditionally practiced secularism in India. Textbooks must be free from biases and ideological compulsions of the authors. They should also know about India's contribution to world civilization, apart from its primacy in the realm of spirituality.

## 1. The Context

The twentieth century witnessed unprecedented changes practically in every sector of human endeavour. As the advances in sciences dominated the scene it was also mentioned to children in schools and classrooms that we were all living in the age of science. Subsequently the term science and technology became the part of common academic parlance. As the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was around, practically everyone was making attempts to visualize 'what would be the shape of 21<sup>st</sup> century'? Responding to the same, UNESCO had appointed an independent Commission to visualize what would be the shape of education in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Report of this Commission, known as Delors Commission- (October, 1996) was titled "Learning: The Treasure Within". It encompasses, in a sublime sense, all that every human being needs to get out of education during the process of growing up. The chairperson of the commission Jack Delors introduces report under the title 'Education the Necessary Utopia'<sup>1</sup>:

*"In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempts to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. As it concludes its work, the Commission affirms its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development. The Commission does not see education as a miracle cure, a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and War."* Those familiar with the tradition of knowledge quest in Indian tradition; and civilization, the expression 'Learning the Treasure within' appears an endorsement of the ancient wisdom that could create great historical centres of learning; including Nalanda, Vikramshila, Taxila; and many others. These presented a great example of the visualizing the canvas of education that was not confined only to philosophy and *Dharma*; but included

the study of mathematics, history, astronomy, maritime, and even the laws of economics and public administration. *The Chhandogya Upanishad* mentions eighteen different subjects of study that included natural disaster management, mineralogy, linguistics, science of elements, and science of defense. It was this dexterous pursuit of knowledge and the keen desire to understand life and after life on one hand and to comprehend the sensitive nature of man-nature relationship, that India developed its great tradition of respect for diversity and its acceptance.

It has been a long journey in the realm of knowledge and wisdom. It has undergone toils and turmoil and also appreciations and adulations at various points of history. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century; in the globalized world; Indian education has to create a pattern firmly based on the knowledge pursuit in Indian tradition and, simultaneously, ready to absorb all that appears relevant, acceptable and necessary in the current times. Globally acknowledged as the leader in the field of spirituality, social cohesion and religious amity, India has added responsibility to prepare a generation of young persons who would bring solace to the strife-torn and violence-prone world a healing touch of comfort, solace and peace. Only a dynamic system of education; rooted to culture and committed to progress' can confront these challenges. Education must prepare the young to ensure attainment of national goals enshrined in the Constitution of India; these include democracy, secularism, equality of opportunity, liberty, fraternity, justice, patriotism, national integration, social cohesion and religious harmony. Curriculum formulation, thus; becomes the most crucial and critical component of every dynamic system of education.

## **2. The Process**

Immediately after Independence, the challenges before education system were delineated. What was left as a legacy was a transplanted system which had objectives defined by alien rulers? India needed to universalize elementary education, to bring in the local elements of curriculum in its initiatives; it had to take note of diversities of various kinds that had reduced a large chunk of its populace to the fringe, suffering marginalization in socio-cultural and economic terms. The transformation of the education system began in right earnest and several institutions were created; or revamped; at the national and state level to make the system current and make it function on levels comparable to international institutions. Particularly relevant to school education

was the establishment of the NCERT at national level and SCERT, Textbook Corporations, Institutes of Education technology; and several others. The NCERT emerged as the national advisory body on all aspects of education, particularly school education and teacher education. It brought out curriculum framework for ten-year school in pursuance of the decisions contained in the National Policy on Education – 1968. This policy was formulated based on the recommendations of the National Commission on education, generally known as the Kothari Commission. Taking cognizance of the diversities in the country, the NCERT recommended that its curriculum framework and textbooks were to be redone by State level agencies to ensure the inclusion of the 'local elements of the curriculum'. It was however to be ensured that the level and standards of the content and process, as also of learner attainment remain comparable and no students are put to any disadvantageous position in any part of the country. One of the singular contributions of this curriculum was of introducing a common ten year curriculum for boys and girls, making science and mathematics compulsory for every child. It had paid rich dividends. The next phase was taken up in 1985 and India got new National Education Policy in 1986. A new curriculum framework was prepared in 1988. Taking into account global developments, the areas of computer education and information technology were also brought in focus. This policy was revised in 1992. Technically, the India still follows the NPE 86/92. In 1999, the NCERT undertook the task of developing a new curriculum framework for school education. There was demand, toward from various quarters to update its textbooks and make these responsive to the changing times, emerging national needs and also global policy initiatives. A widespread consultation process was initiated by the organization. A paper indicative of challenges ahead was prepared in consultation with the faculty members working in the various department/units of the NCERT; and also in its constituent units. The paper was circulated to about 200 eminent educationists and Scholars seeking their opinion on how the organization should proceed to prepare a new curriculum framework for school education. The response received was very impressive. Simultaneously, ten eminent scholars of national and international repute were invited on different dates by the organization to have a detailed free and frank discussion with the faculty members of the NCERT. All this was converted in to a discussion document which was made available to institutions and organizations throughout

the country. Simultaneously, it was also made available to all those interested in educational reforms. Every response received was studied by a specially created curriculum group. Based upon widespread national consultations, the national Curriculum Framework for School Education<sup>2</sup> (NCFSC-2000) was prepared. It was released on November 14, 2000; the National Children's Day.

### **3. Major Concerns**

The NCFSC- 2000 summarized the major concerns that were received as inputs from various stakeholders, and were considered relevant in developing a vision for future and its incorporation in curriculum and textbooks. Several documents; published nationally and internationally; that were considered relevant were studied in depth and examined in light of suggestions received for changes in the Indian system. These included The Kothari Commission Report, National Education Policies of 1968 and 1986/92, Challenges in Education of 1985, A Nation at Risk (USA 1983), Learning to Succeed (UK 1993) and several publications of the UNESCO including the Delors Commission Report (1996).

Global efforts to universalize elementary education were finding reverberations in India on priority basis. Extending access to education to every child was a target that was indeed tough but had to be achieved at the earliest. In this the major issue was to bring every girl child to school. Furtherer focus was also to create a curricular response to the education of learners with special needs; and also those from disadvantaged groups. No nation can move ahead unless and until it also takes note of nurturing; with special provisions; the gifted and talented. Another challenge that was widely pointed out referred to the preservation of India's history, culture and heritage; and how to make children familiar with it. Indian thinkers, scholars and philosophers had concretized the concept "*The World is but one family*" far ahead of other civilizations. It was necessary that every child internalizes the values inherent in this philosophy and is ready to put it in practice in his active life. They must develop respect for diversity and otherness and realize the beauty of Indian heritage that values 'unity in diversity'! Education must develop non- sectarian attitudes amongst young children and create a capacity for tolerating differences arising out of caste, religion, ideology, region, language, sex and others.

It was also necessary to prepare children as a generation that shall have to respond to the impact of globalization, now visible all around in demographic displacements, cultural, ethnic and linguistic interactivity on an increasingly vast scale. Apart from 'connecting the globe', the emerging challenges of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could no longer be neglected and ignored. The Year 2000 was the right time to visualize the increasing impact of ICT in the education which also prepares people to earn a livelihood, get a job and, as such, it had to be linked to acquisition of creative and productive skills, as also the life skills. With its goals fixed on total personality growth and development, the NCFSE-2000 took special note of the recommendations of justice JS Verma Committee on teaching fundamental duties to citizens, as contained in article 51 A of the Constitution of India. This Article indicates what the nation expects from its citizens and hence, it must find a prominent place in the total process of imparting education, of teaching and learning. The school curriculum of 1988 expected the learner to acquire knowledge to develop concepts and inculcate values commensurate with the social, cultural, economic, and environmental realities at the national and international levels. The social values aimed at friendliness, cooperativeness, compassion, self discipline, courage, love for social justice, and blocks in creating a value-based society. These were part of the recommendations of the SB Chavan Committee<sup>3</sup> that submitted its Report to both the Houses of Parliament on February 26, February 1999.

The Chavan Committee also dealt with a very sensitive issue pertaining to teachings of the basics of different religions. The NCFSE took note of the recommendations and included the essence of the following two paragraphs in its stipulations:

8. *“Truth (satya), Righteous conduct (Dharma), Peace (Shanti), Love(Prem), and Non-violence (Ahimsa) are the core universal values which can be identified as the foundation stone on which the value-based education programme can be build-up. These five are indeed universal values and respectively represent the five domains of human personality: intellectual, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. They also are correspondingly co-related with the five major objectives of education, namely, knowledge, skills, balance, vision, and identity.”*

13. *“Another aspect that must be given some thought is religion, which is the most misused and misunderstood concept. The process of making the students acquainted with the basics of all religions, the values inherent therein and also a comparative study of the philosophy of all religions should begin at the middle stage in schools and continue up to the university level. Students have to be made aware that the basic concept behind every religion is common, only the practices differ. Even if there are differences of opinion in certain areas, people have to learn to coexist and carry no hatred against any religion.”*

The NCFSE-2000 was of the view that every child must be made aware of the different religions as practiced by people of India and commonalities amongst all religions and should also learn to respect differences wherever these exist. The NCFSE-2000 very specifically intended that its recommendations would strengthen secularism – equal respect for all religions – that India has practiced for ages and which, at this juncture of history, has acquired great urgency in view of the growth of insecurity, fundamentalism and bigotry. What was recommended was ‘education about religions’ and not religious education.

#### **4. The Legal Verdict**

As the NCFSE-2000 clearly intended to give an indigenous base to the curriculum, it made recommendations on making children familiar with the basics of all religions, it emphasized value education and pleaded that every teacher was, indeed, also a teacher of values and, hence, must remain conscious of it along, remembering that he is also the role model for the learners under his charge. Recommendations were also made about celebration of national and religious festivals, place of Sanskrit in understanding India, its culture and heritage, utility of Vedic mathematics, and focus on humanistic, moral, ethical and democratic value inculcation, development and nurturance to ensure their internalization at a young age. The effort to envision future and analyze incisively the present and, simultaneously, learning from the past experiences in socio-economic and cultural context, the recommendations were made to meet the existing and emerging challenges in all the areas of human endeavour and activity. However,

these were contested; not necessarily only on professional and academic grounds; by a group that had apprehensions about the intent of the recommendations. The issue was examined by a three-Judge Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. The judgment<sup>4</sup> was delivered on September 12, 2002. The Court rejected all the procedural "lapses" pointed out by the petitioners, and made some far-reaching observations on academic recommendation, These, when studied and analyzed with objectivity would reveal a professionally sound plan of educational transformation that would be relevant in future planning in education; not only in regard to its content and process, but in creating society conscious of its fundamental duties; as also of human rights; and which values and attempts to preserve the sensitive man-nature relationship as the key to the very survival of the planet earth!

**4.1 Value Education and education about Religions:** None can contradict the historical tradition practiced in India for 'ages' that religions and faiths do not divide people as the goal in each case is same i.e., the search for the ultimate reality. It was this philosophy put to practice at grassroots levels that resulted in Indians according welcome to the followers of all religions including the Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others. Education is the most powerful means to empower every citizen to realize the meaning of universal brotherhood. It would be prudent to recall the supportive directions contained in the National Policy on Education NPE-86/92 which laid considerable emphasis on value education in the specific Indian context. It stated:

"Apart from this combative role, value education has a profound positive content, based on our heritage, national and universal goals and perceptions. It should lay primary emphasis on this aspect."

It was in the light of the above that recommendations were made about teaching the basics of religions and inclusion of five universal core values of Truth, Peace, Nonviolence, Righteous Conduct (Dharma) and Love. Those who practiced the 'political version' of secularism made sustained efforts to malign and misinterpret these recommendations. The Supreme Court, however, read between the lines and rejected the objections totally and completely. Following are some of the observations of the learned Judges<sup>5</sup>:

1. The objective of value-based education is to fight as a nation against all kinds of fanaticism, ill-will, violence, dishonesty,



corruption, exploitation and drug abuse;

2. In a pluralistic society like India, which accepts secularism as the basic ideology to govern its secular activities, education can include a study based on the religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is opposed to Exclusivism and encourages inclusivism.
3. The lives of Indian people have been enriched by integration of various religions and that is the strength of the nation. Whatever kind of people came to India either for shelter or as aggressors, India has tried to accept the best part of their religions... This happened in India because of the capacity of Indians to assimilate thoughts of different religions. This process should continue for the betterment of the multireligious society, which is India.

It was petitioned that if philosophy of religions spills into teaching of religious tenets, it would, in all likelihood, become 'religious instruction'! The Court quashed this contention with the following remarks: "*In our view, the submission is hypothetical, premature and without any basis, as it is on the assumption that under the guise of religious philosophy, religious instruction would be imparted*". What was intended and included by the Curriculum Group in the final version of the NCFSE-2000 was, in fact, very precisely articulated by Justice MB Shah in the Judgment: "*...it appears to be totally wrong presumption and contention that knowledge of different religions would bring disharmony in the society. On the contrary knowledge of various religious philosophies is material for bringing communal harmony as ignorance breeds hatred because of wrong notions, assumptions preaching and propaganda by misguided interested persons*".

**4.2 Samskrit:** The NCFSE-2000 had mentioned about the special place that Samskrit enjoys in India. It has been used for thousands of years and is even today inextricably linked with the life, rituals, ceremonies and festivals of the Indian masses. Apart from its widespread appeal all over India, it is internationally accepted as the most scientifically structured language and is being increasingly acknowledged as the language most suited for computer applications. On such grounds, the need to provide for and encourage the study of Samskrit was made. Nowhere any recommendation to make it compulsory was made. Responding to the accusation that through NCFSE-2000, Samskrit was "imposed in an unjustified manner", the Court ruled: "*For Samskrit language being imposed, it has been pointed out that the allegation is*

*wholly wrong. The Provisions only enable this language to be taught to those students who wish to study it.... We entertain no doubt in our mind that teaching of Samskrit alone as an elective subject can in no way regarded as against secularism....Encouragement of Samskrit is also necessary because of it being one of the languages included in the Eighth Schedule".* The Court noted the importance of Samskrit in nurturing our cultural heritage and also highlighting of the need to study Samskrit in the National Education Policy. In view of all this it concurred with the view that "making Samskrit alone as an elective subject, while not conceding the same status to Arabic and/or Persian would not in any way militate against the basic tenet of secularism. Petitioners, driven by an agenda, forgot, that the Persian Arabic are not in Eighth Schedule.

**4.3 Vedic Mathematics:** Even those who vociferously plead the need to nurture and develop scientific reasoning and logic, often shun it under the constraints of ideological compulsions. It was argued against the NCFSE-2000 that it recommended teaching of Vedic Astrology. The Court also noted - as everyone else who read it carefully -that the NCFSE-2000 had made no mention of Vedic Astrology or Astrology anywhere! What it had said about Vedic Mathematics was: "The students may be encouraged to enhance their computational skills by the use of Vedic mathematics". At no other place, or in any other context, Vedic mathematics was mentioned. The petitioners, however, distorted an honest academic reform initiative in many ways including the imposition of Vedic mathematics! The Court observed: "*It is submitted that there is no question of imposition of Vedic mathematics. It has not been made part of the curriculum but suggested as a computational aid. In teaching of mathematics, the teachers are free to merely use it or not as an available idea.* The most significant sentence in the Court's ruling in this context was; "*It is pointed out that merely because the epithet 'Vedic' is used, the petitioners have attempted to attribute something of religion to it. The word Vedic in this context indicates only time factor*". As pointed out earlier.

**4.4 Celebrations of Festivals:** In its efforts to create a cohesive social structure that accepts religious diversity with respect and dignity to each religion and its prophets, the NCFSE-2000 made the recommendation; "*Schools may organize joint celebrations of the important occasions and festivals of major religions and cultural groups. This would generate better understanding and appreciation and respect for one another and create a tolerant and cohesive society*". In fact

many schools are already doing things this way and the intention of the recommendation was to strengthen it and let everyone realize how important could be the outcomes based upon such systemic initiatives. In their keenness to bring in religious angle somehow, the petitioners contended that this was an attempt to give a national status to Hindu festivals and to impose it on the entire country. This plea was dismissed as a clear distortion of facts mentioned in the NCFSE-2000. The Court incisively examined the allegations of several ‘communal references’ and observed: *“It is contended that instead of emphasizing development of scientific temper and imparting knowledge to children, to help them develop their own views something contrary is tried to be implemented. There is no distortion of version of history by using the words “Mughals invaded the country as against Britishers conquered the country”. The aforesaid submission does not deserve any consideration, hence rejected”*.

## **5. The Gap and the Road Ahead**

After the judgment, new textbooks were prepared and, one could rightfully claim, were received, scrutinized and commented upon very enthusiastically by the teachers and students. These had several new features in terms of structure, content, load and relevance of curriculum in total personality development, skill acquisition and ‘learning to learn’ in a fast-changing national and global scenario. The Court confirmed that the NCERT is fully authorized to present its perceptions before the nation. The contention on the inadequacy of the consultation process and failure to have prior approval of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) were dismissed as these were just not tenable. The Court judgment contains: *“There is nothing in the constitution of the NCERT or in any other Rule, Regulation or Executive Order to suggest that that NCERT is structurally ‘subordinate’ or ‘inferior’ to any other body in the field”*. Most of the organizations are familiar with this situation and hence, after the verdict, most of the State government agencies began the process of curriculum renewal and preparation of new textbooks on the basis of the NCFSE-2000. At the national level, the process was junked 2004 onwards. A new curriculum framework was prepared in 2005, and books developed on its basis are still in use.

And this indicates systemic slackness in responding to universally acceptable pattern of curriculum change. The process of curriculum

renewal after every five years, if not earlier just cannot be kept in limbo for over 13 years. How could a book on computers, prepared in 2005, be continued in classrooms in 2018? It should apply to every textbook. Whenever this process begins, it must take note of the pace of change and keep provisions for trends like ‘frontline curriculum’ that may incorporate inclusion of changes that must be passed on to learners without any delay. Further<sup>6</sup>, “*Curriculum change no more remains confined to educators and educational experts only. It is imperative to ensure detailed consultations with general public and local experts and newly emerging areas which are impacting life and labour market in a globalized world. It would require considerable ingenuity to balance the priorities of various groups*”. The NCFSE-2000 could still be examined; along with other similar efforts and their outcomes; to re-evaluate its utility in the envisioning education that India needs for its generations ahead. The complexities are growing in various dimensions, peace, social cohesion and religious amity are to be restored and re-established. Young people must be equipped to achieve attitudinal transformation and recreate a work-culture of efficiency that aims at excellence. Only they can create a value-based society that would practice ‘sharing and caring’ in everyday life. India has; very rightly; accepted new knowledge in the area ICT and is playing a leading global role. It has to realize that it has a prime responsibility to lead the world in spiritual acquisitions, without which violence, exploitation, accumulations, and such other tendencies just cannot be confronted. The process begins in the schools where children learn to respect diversity of varied kinds and become part of a culture of inclusion. In the final analysis, it is the political will that ensures change reaching the grassroots level and people receiving the desired benefits.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> UNESCO, Learning: The Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO; Paris, 1996
- <sup>2</sup> NCERT, National Curriculum Framework for School Education; NCFSE-2000; NCERT, New Delhi, 2000
- <sup>3</sup> Under the chairmanship of S.B. Chavan, the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resources Development,

in its 86th Report submitted to both Houses of Parliament in 26 February, 1999, made very specific recommendations on value education and teaching of religions in schools.

These were included in the NCFSE-2000, giving necessary reference to the Report. These committees have members from all the political parties and this report was unanimous in its recommendations.

- <sup>4</sup> Ms. Aruna Roy And Others vs. Union Of India And Others on 12 September, 2002
- <sup>5</sup> Curriculum Renewal in School Education; a Meaningful Step toward Education Reform; National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, 2002.
- <sup>6</sup> J.S. Rajput, Curriculum Concerns – 2012; The Journal of Governance – July 2012, New Delhi, 2012

# The Textbook Vision of Indian History

Ashish Dhar\*

Let me start on an abrupt note and say that I take an exception to the use of the word 'science' to grant the study of human societies and social relationships, popularly called Social Science, an aura of false authority. That is certainly not to say that social studies have no role to play in the intellectual development of an individual. However, let us not delude ourselves that the conjectures derived from an assessment of fragmentary information are anything akin to the scientific models of particular aspects of the physical Universe built through a critical examination of data subject to ruthless reasoning.

One of the fundamental philosophical attributes of 'science' is the open admission of the possibility that the most powerful of theories can be proven false, and thus discarded or suitably modified, in the face of non-conforming facts. In reality, this is exactly how science progresses. When a theory is propounded, it is subject to the test of empirical evidence and it gets accepted only in the sense that it is the best explanation for a physical phenomenon, among all the other explanations that compete with it. There is no finality of conclusion and therefore, science is always careful, tentative and 'negationistic' in its approach. Unwittingly, in the Vedantic spirit of '*neti neti*', science denies much more than it affirms.

In contrast, the cockiness of social studies is jarring, whether we're talking about the picture of the lives of an ancient people that historians paint for us or the narrative of the religious code of an unfamiliar tribe that anthropologists stitch together. There is an inherent tendency, a

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barely concealed eagerness, to pass a moral judgement from the pulpit of the researcher's own social setting. The tone of discourse in social studies is far from tentative, the tenor unabashedly patronizing. Yet this is not the gravest among its flaws.

In a perfect world, social studies would be conducted without any pretensions of being a science. Given their undeniable role in shaping the collective self-image of a society, they would still be regarded as terribly important. The research would anyway wield a great influence on the policies and laws governing the conduct of a nation's citizenry. It would only be more honest about its limitations and more encouraging of healthy skepticism. Alas, we do not live in a perfect world and therefore, social studies, by appropriating the authority of science, tend to get hijacked for ideological ends. They end up being mere tools in the service of the political ideals that people subscribe to.

### **Ideologies and Visions**

An ideology is a comprehensive set of beliefs that characterizes a social group. It is a belief system that can be coherently articulated and its explanatory power comes from the internal logical structure connecting its constituent ideas. An ideology can be tested by facts even though ideologues are known to be remarkably averse to them. A vision, on the other hand, is the underlying feeling, an intuition about how things are. A vision, consequently, can give birth to multiple ideologies. So, while an ideology has a well-defined semantic element, a vision is often vague and hazy. In academic circles, people debate ideologies, owing to their predisposition toward theorizing but laymen, usually, having neither the time nor the inclination for philosophical speculation, tend to align with visions.

Like so many other cause-and-effect chains, the relationship between vision and ideology is not linear but circular. A vision, as we have noted above, gives rise to ideologies and these ideologies then compete with each other to modify the vision that gave birth to them. Thus, an ideology influences its parent vision and helps it evolve according to the political environment of the times. For example, a vision of equality, which vaguely endorses egalitarian ideals, may give birth to the ideology of feminism, which may go back to influence the vision of equality to disregard the biological differences between the two genders. As a result, ordinary citizens who unconsciously subscribe to the new vision

of equality may start feeling strongly that “gender is a social construct”, to the extent that they would feel severely threatened by any evidence to the contrary. This new vision further strengthens the sway of feminism on the population as it finds an ever increasing numbers of ready unthinking sympathizers.

From the above, it is easy to see how this mutually reinforcing cycle can be easily misused for political expediency. An ideology is a great asset, a tool to interpret the workings of society from a certain perspective but it can also turn into a liability if it is turned into a medium through which societal knowledge is imparted to students of an impressionable age. For then, we are promoting a skewed vision of humanity, severely constrained by a straitjacket of political compulsions. A vision, as we have noted above, is characterized by vague ideals and an ideology is but a sophisticated defense of these ideals. As Joseph Alois Schumpeter famously remarked, “The first thing a man will do for his ideal is lie.”

### **Indian academia**

Ideologies are formulated not in the din of the crowded street but in the intellectually stimulating environs of the University. A freshman’s traditional family values and vague ideals soon meet the sophisticated vocabulary of the professors and find expression in the student politics of the campus. Many of these students go on to join the academia as lecturers themselves, and as a part of their mentoring role, they cultivate a fresh crop of ideologues from among their students.

It is well known that the Indian academia has been overwhelmingly dominated by Marxist intellectuals. Many of the professors in the field of Humanities are still members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). They are also, due to the weight of their academic credentials, invited to be a part of committees that formulate the curriculum for school textbooks. Some of them actually write the books that our children read as a part of their formal school education. It is only expected that an academician of a certain ideological persuasion will further the interests of his own vision. Let us now examine the visions that our school history books implant in the pliable minds of the nation’s future adults. In this article, we will limit our analysis to barely examining just two broad themes – nationhood and society.



## Nationhood

Nationalism is a powerful idea but like any other political concept, it can mean different things to different people. For one, it may convey an allegiance to the constitution, and for another, it may invoke feelings of superiority and chauvinism with respect to other countries. In that sense, nationalism is a vision, and not an ideology, because it is not a product of systematic reasoning. It springs from the hazy impressions people have of the legitimacy of their nationhood. Let us see what kind of impression the NCERT history textbook for Class 7 gives to the students regarding India's claim to nationhood.

*“Take the term ‘Hindustan’, for example, today we understand it as ‘India’, the modern nation state. When the term was used in the thirteenth century by Minhaj-i-siraj, a chronicler who wrote in Persian, he meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and the lands between the Ganga and the Yamuna. He used the term in a political sense for lands that were a part of the dominions of the Delhi Sultan. The areas included in this term shifted with the extent of the Sultanate but the term never included south India. By contrast, in the early sixteenth century Babur used Hindustan to describe the geography, the fauna and the culture of the inhabitants of the subcontinent. As we will see later in the chapter, this was somewhat similar to the way the fourteenth century poet Amir Khusrau used the word Hind. While the idea of a geographical and cultural entity like India did exist, the term Hindustan did not carry the political and national meanings which we associate with it today.” – NCERT, Class 7 p3*

An unsuspecting reading of the above reveals nothing that is particularly contentious. It is true that under the Delhi Sultanate, a foreign chronicler visiting the area would restrict his descriptions to the geographical spread of the empire in question, which in this case did not extend to South India. But does that mean that “the term never included South India”? Further, by drawing attention to another foreigner's description from a few centuries later that included a larger area, the passage seems to suggest that the territory was first consolidated only in the interim. It conveniently brushes aside the fact that large parts of India, from the north to the south, were consolidated under various dynasties like the Mauryas, Guptas and Chalukyas, thousands of years before the first Muslim invader set foot on the soil. Finally, the last line stating that “the term Hindustan did not carry the political and

national meanings which we associate with it today” is only an exercise of stating the obvious. The question to ask is which modern nation is an exception to this rule and we find that there is none. The essential argument being forwarded here is that India is somewhat a geographical entity that lacked political cohesion till foreigners enforced it upon the natives. As already observed, this is blatantly false.

### **Society**

The vision of society imparted by NCERT textbooks can be gauged from the following excerpts from the Class 7 history book states:

*“There were, however, other kinds of societies as well. Many societies in the subcontinent did not follow the social rules and rituals prescribed by the Brahmans. Nor were they divided into numerous unequal classes. Such societies are often called tribes... Sometimes they clashed with the more powerful caste-based societies.”*

The word ‘tribe’ comes from a colonial description of certain sections of the Indian society. As I explained in an earlier essay elsewhere, the British colonial administration faced formidable challenges in controlling the vast territory of the Indian subcontinent, not the least among which was finding potential collaborators among the natives for assisting the government with various administrative tasks. The heterogeneity of Indian society also brought them considerable hostility from certain groups who did not take kindly to the uncalled for intrusion into their affairs, which they were hitherto unaccustomed to under the rule of native kings or chiefs. To the colonialists, these hostile communities did not seem to match the impression they had of some of the more ‘compliant’ groups that they came across. Viewing it from the dominant paradigm of race, they imagined the hostile people to have different origins from the more friendly ones. In order to control these aggressive groups, the infamous criminal tribes act was passed that deemed entire populations such as the Maghyar Doms in Bihar or the Bowries in the Narmada valley as habitually criminal. In keeping with their prejudices, they understood criminality to be an inherited tendency and true to the spirit of ‘European Science’, anthropometry was used in the Police Department as a means of identifying criminals until the introduction of the Berthillon system of finger-printing, at the cusp between the 19th and 20th centuries.

It must be pointed out that even though it was the British who

designated certain communities as tribes, many of these so-called tribes existed even before they set foot in India. These 'hostile' communities were often comprised of ordinary rural people who were forced to seek shelter in jungles and highlands to escape enslavement by the Islamic invader. Over a few generations, their lifestyle acquired the distinctness that made the Britishers identify them as 'tribals'.

Clearly, the textbooks don't just show a lack of nuance but in fact, wholeheartedly endorse the spurious colonial depiction of Indian society. This brings us to the unquestioning acceptance of another colonial term, caste. As indicated above, the colonial definition and categorization of certain exceptional 'criminal' communities was wholly arbitrary and was justified by invoking bogus race theories. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to investigate the classificatory scheme used while conducting census surveys of the pliant (non-criminal) part of the population. It turns out that census officials had a really tough time in getting a reliable answer to the question, "What is your caste?" to which the response would vary from one of the four varnas to some endogamous sub-caste to what the officials called "vague and indefinite" entries. Evidently, Hindus were not mindful of their own 'caste' and their place in the purported 'hierarchy' of varnas.

Similarly, the NCERT history books don't have a very optimistic view of the place of women in traditional Indian society. Sample this from Class 6, p68:

*"Most Upanishadic thinkers were men, especially Brahmins and Rajas. Occasionally, there is mention of women thinkers, such as Gargi, who was famous for her learning, and participated in debates held in royal courts. Poor people rarely took part in these discussions."*

#### **Again from the same book, p55-56:**

*"Some people such as those who were regarded as Shudras by the priests, were excluded from many rituals. Often women were also grouped with the Shudras. Both women and Shudras were not allowed to study the Vedas."*

Poor people not taking part in intellectual discussions implies that Brahmins were rich, a view that vehemently disagrees with the traditional understanding of the lifestyle of the Brahmins who lived as frugally as humanly possible. Nevertheless, they did enjoy the patronage of the kings in the sense that they were respected for their knowledge. Another

thing that is striking in the above-quoted passages is the visible inconsistency between the assertion that women were not “allowed” to study the Vedas and the fact that some of them, grudgingly admitted as “occasional” women thinkers, directly contributed to the Vedic cannon. The possibility that women had certain vital functions in society that excluded the necessity of learning the Vedas is not even speculated upon. This is like saying that the near-exclusive representation of men in today’s armed forces is an evil conspiracy by the high priests of democracy. Just the fact that the ancient Indian books own up to having been authored by humans as opposed to the supernatural agency ascribed to scriptures of Abrahamic faiths is reason enough to celebrate the Indic tradition. But the authors of these textbooks will have none of that.

### **Making sense of the errors**

These mildly suggestive excerpts are not a conspiracy by some academicians but a natural outcome of viewing the past through the lens of their preferred ideology. In the Marxist scheme of things, history is not just a study of the past for its own sake but an undertaking for achieving the Marxist ideal of a classless society. Convinced as they are of the nobility of their political goals, they realize that the utopia can only be achieved when a critical mass of population works towards it. Now, people in large numbers will only devote their energies to create such a future only if they see their past as intolerably savage.

Marx writes in his article ‘The British Rule in India’ in June , 1853:

*“I share not the opinion of those who believe in a golden age of Hindostan, without recurring, however, like Sir Charles Wood, for the confirmation of my view, to the authority of Khuli-Khan. But take, for example, the times of Aurangzeb; or the epoch, when the Mogul appeared in the North, and the Portuguese in the South; or the age of Mohammedan invasion, and of the Heptarchy in Southern India[6]; or, if you will, go still more back to antiquity, take the mythological chronology of the Brahman himself, who places the commencement of Indian misery in an epoch even more remote than the Christian creation of the world.”*

Indian antiquity, when depicted as a scene of eternal conflict and violence, provides an unmistakable luster to the ultimate Marxist purpose

of achieving their classless utopia via revolution. Empirical evidence, when it sticks out like a sore thumb on that path, must be duly ignored. Students exposed to this ideologically motivated reading of history are likely to develop a very apologetic view of India's nationhood and the implications for our territorial integrity are grave. It is no small coincidence that the separatist movements in states like Jammu and Kashmir or Chhatisgarh and the quasi-seditious Dravidian pride politics in Tamil Nadu bank on Marxist scholars for intellectual fire-power.

### **Remedying the situation**

There are no shortcuts in reforms of this order but certain steps need to be taken on an urgent basis to prevent lethal indoctrination of school-going kids. A white supremacist doctor who lets his ideology interfere in his treatment of patients, letting a black man suffer, would be booked for the crime of racism. A Marxist textbook author, who distorts facts to achieve political ends, is capable of causing havoc in the minds of an entire generation, and yet, goes scot-free. Evidently, there is a need to link the professional reputation of the academicians with the quantity of their scholastic output as well as its intellectual durability on the anvil of empirical evidence.

As an immediate curative measure, the government must intervene and appoint a diverse panel of experts, who can facilitate an overhaul of the social studies narrative propagated by the current textbooks. The said overhaul must be carried out on a war footing basis with no political interference of any kind. The aim is not to replace one ideological lens with another but to do away with all ideological influences. While this may not be practically achievable in the absolute sense but if we manage to strip off the cocksure conclusions of these subjects and replace them with multiple perspectives, the biases are likely to cancel each other out. In other words, education must be recalibrated to pursue truth, and not a rose tinted vision of the future.

Author's note: The excerpts from the NCERT textbooks used in the article have been directly plucked from the book, 'Brainwashed Republic' by Neeraj Atri and Munieshwar A Sagar. The author recommends this book to anyone interested in exploring the issue in greater depth.s

## Teaching to Hate

Neeraj Atri\*

Ever since the advertisements promoting liquor were outlawed constitutionally, the advertising agencies have started resorting to surrogate advertising. For the uninitiated, an advertisement designed to promote a product or a brand, in the guise of another product is known as surrogate advertisement. For this purpose, the companies in the liquor business ask the advertisers to design ads for phoney products like soda or music c.d. having packaging identical to that of their liquor brand. The companies resorting to such unethical advertising are there to make money, therefore expecting them to be ethical will be unrealistic. Unfortunately, such unethical practices have found their way into our democratic institutions. Institutions like National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which are expected to be academic, secular and upright in their approach are resorting to such deceptive methods in order to promote their biases and prejudices. Just like surrogate advertisements, the current history text-books use propaganda techniques to propagate a biased and factually incorrect version of history.

The genocide of more than 8,00,000 human beings that took place in Rwanda in 1994 seems far away, in time, as well as space. For a casual reader in India, these are just statistics which have nothing to do with India. But those who have studied the unfortunate but avoidable genocide, the academic template that was at play in Rwanda is at work in India also. The resemblance is uncanny.

Consider this. According to the historical narrative that was being taught in Rwandan schools since colonial times, and right up to the

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time of genocide, one section of the population had been portrayed as the 'invader class'. This class called Tutsi was depicted as 'greedy', 'wily', 'cunning' and 'deceitful' who had descended on 'simple minded' original inhabitants, Hutus, of the land. The same template has been in operation in India also. The difference is only in nomenclature. Replace Tutsi and Hutu with Aryans and Dravidians respectively and you have the Indian history being taught by NCERT to the children of India. The theory depicting Indian population as Aryan-Dravidian binary is known as Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT).

During the colonial times, the Europeans concocted various 'invasion theories'. It was a template designed to legitimize the colonial invasion that projected Europeans as the latest invaders in a series of incursions. According to these theories, each invader pushed the indigenous population down the social order, establishing themselves at the top of the hierarchy. The result was a stratification of society into antagonistic groups.

Unfortunately, these socially disruptive theories have survived the colonial era and still dictate the political discourse of many erstwhile colonies. In Rwanda, this disruption led to large-scale bloodshed and rapine. The Indian version of this template is the Aryan Invasion Theory. It has produced a distorted version of 'self-identity' for many social groups. These groups have a magnified sense of victimhood, resulting in simmering discontent, which can be, and is being, used by parochial politicians and subversive forces.

Considerable research has been carried out to find out the reasons behind the massacre of 8,00,000 Tutsi at the hands of another section of the population.<sup>1</sup> This exhaustive research has established that the genocide was not a sudden or spontaneous incident but a result of a long-drawn process. A process in which history textbooks were used as a tool to create exclusive identities among the people of Rwanda. The Rwandan population consists of three sections, Hutus, Tutsis and Twas. In 1930s, when the population of Rwanda was registered on the basis of these identities, about 84% of them were Hutu, 15% Tutsi and remaining 1 % Twa.<sup>2</sup> Although these terms were in use since antiquity, this classification never had any racial origins or overtones. It was a social classification depending on the number of cattle owned by a person or a group. A review of major educational policies and programmes implemented between 1962 and 1994 reveals that the content and structure of schools reflected and amplified horizontal

inequalities in society and contributed to categorising, collectivising, and stigmatising Hutu and Tutsi into exclusive groups.<sup>3</sup>

Although the period of 1962-1994 corresponds to post-colonial Rwanda, to delink the contents of this time from the colonial historiography will be a fatal mistake because it was during the colonial era that such binary identities were frozen. After the colonial rulers left, the indigenous Rwandan academicians picked up the threads from there itself. This process of segregating identities into watertight compartments contributed to a foundation on which violent intergroup conflict became possible.

The concept of ethnicity and the version of Rwandan history propagated by missionaries, over a period of time, affected how the Rwandans perceived their own identities.<sup>4</sup> A thorough analysis of the Rwandan textbooks shows that the version of history created by missionaries during the colonial rule ignored the spiritual and traditional aspects prevalent in ancient Rwanda — including their agriculture, livestock and handicrafts. Their religion, their beliefs and even their dance forms were underplayed since the aim of history writers was to convert Rwandans to Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

During the German colonial rule and after the First World War, during the Belgian colonial times, missionaries were the first to start writing the history of Rwanda. Their aim was to convert the natives to Christianity, as quickly as possible.<sup>6</sup> Till then, the Rwandans had relied primarily on oral history.

The European clergy and academics collaborated to produce the first written histories of Rwanda. The collaboration resulted in a sophisticated and convincing, but inaccurate history that simultaneously served interests of the elites of Rwanda and validated European assumptions. According to these accounts, the contemporary population of Rwanda consisted of three sections of society. The indigenous residents were called Twa, who were hunters and gatherers. The Hutu cultivators then arrived from North and as they were more enterprising, they displaced Twas, cleared the forests and settled in Rwanda. The next invasion was by another group called Tutsis, who were smarter and militarily more capable. These ‘ruthless Tutsi’ descended from the north and conquered simple-minded Hutus by their wickedness and superior arms.<sup>7</sup>

Belgians simply created a registry of their subjects in 1930s. This ended the fluidity in which a Hutu could become a Tutsi and vice



versa. The identities lost their flexibility and over a period gained so much permanence and rigidity that Europeans started considering them as 'castes'.<sup>8</sup>

The Hutu regime in post-colonial Rwanda used history textbooks to further strengthen these identities in order to generate hatred against Tutsis. According to this history, the Tutsis were projected as cunning and deceitful who had perpetrated atrocities against Hutus in the past. Three decades of propagation of this version of history created sufficient discontent against imaginary atrocities that it culminated in the unfortunate genocide that the world witnessed in 1994 and after.

The undertone of prevalent NCERT books is not much different. Different identities antagonistic to each other are being fostered and fossilised to create social unrest. Everything belonging to ancient India is either being downplayed or denigrated. This has been done by systematically targeting every aspect of ancient heritage of the country, which can be a source of pride and respect.

This version of history, which was in circulation since colonial times, has gained more currency due to the current text-books which were introduced in 2006. It is strengthening stereotypes created by evangelists and colonial masters. This interpretation of Indian history, which supported and served the purpose of missionaries, emphasizes separate origins of Brahmans – racially, as well as, geographically. Brahmans are portrayed as outsiders who took control of the region and became de facto rulers by their cunningness. The rule that they fostered on the subjugated population was feudal, exploitative and oppressive to 'lower castes', 'Dravidians', and 'tribals'. Regional politicians added another element to this false narrative that Brahmans were in league with colonial rulers, or vice versa. Exactly same historiography was used in Rwanda to create fissures in society by portraying one section of the population as invaders who had displaced the original natives.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Modus Operandi**

The AIT became part of the mainstream curriculum when the British administrators took over the reign from East India Company and imposed the new education policy in India. This theory came under severe criticism from Indians well versed with the traditions and history of India. But there was also a vast section of society that bit the bait

of AIT, hook, line and sinker. The success of the proponents of AIT lay in creating more such individuals as they could be used as indigenous mouthpieces for the propagation of the mythical history. Such persons have been liberally quoted on the subject by NCERT authors.

The NCERT authors are smart enough to know that if they will teach this theory directly, it will be challenged in a court of law and they might have a tough time defending it. They have found a way around it. They insert it through backdoor.

E.V. RamaswamyNaicker, or Periyar, as he was called, came from a middle-class family. Interestingly, he had been an ascetic in his early life and had studied *Sanskrit scriptures* carefully. Later, he became a member of the Congress, only to leave it in disgust when he found that at a feast organised by nationalists, seating arrangements followed caste distinctions – that is, the lower castes were made to sit at a distance from the upper castes. Convinced that untouchables had to fight for their dignity, Periyar founded the Self-Respect Movement. He argued that untouchables were the true upholders of an original Tamil and Dravidian culture which had been subjugated by Brahmans.

NCERT, class 8<sup>th</sup>, p 119

“One of the most vocal amongst the ‘low-caste’ leaders was Jyotirao Phule. Born in 1827, he studied in schools set up by Christian missionaries. On growing up he developed his own ideas about the injustices of caste society.... Phule claimed that before Aryan rule there existed a golden age when warrior-peasants tilled the land and ruled the Maratha countryside in just and fair ways. He proposed that Shudras (labouring castes) and Ati Shudras (untouchables) should unite and challenge caste discrimination.”

NCERT, class 8<sup>th</sup>, p 117,

The above passage is a typical example of surrogate advertising. When the NCERT was confronted with the fact that they were pedaling a discredited theory via a writ petition in Punjab and Haryana High Court, the reply given by NCERT to the petitioners was on expected lines. According to them:-

The textbook is citing Jyotiba Phule's views here, not stating the views of the author/s who wrote the chapter. Students ought to be knowing what an important historical figure like Phule thought<sup>10</sup>.

At the face of it, the above reply appears a genuine response. But, it is academically fallacious on at least two counts.

Firstly, there are numerous instances in the NCERT history books which propagate the AIT but not a single instance of 'important historical figures' who have refuted this theory (we will come to that later). Secondly, nowhere in the books is there a disclaimer that the views of Jyotiba Phule were based on an obsolete colonial construct. Coming back to the divisive contents of NCERT:-

"Phule was also critical of the anti-colonial nationalism that was preached by upper-caste leaders. He wrote: The Brahmans have hidden away the sword of their religion which has cut the throat of the peoples' prosperity and now go about posing as great patriots of their country. They ... give this advice to ... our Shudra, Muslim and Parsi youth that unless we put away all quarrelling amongst ourselves about the divisions between high and low in our country and come together, our ... country will never make any progress ... It will be unity to serve their purposes, and then it will be me here and you over there again."

NCERT, class 8<sup>th</sup>, p 117

Such wicked portrayals are bound to create problems in inter-group relationships. Highlighting imaginary social divisions and then trying to establish them as historical truth, has a tendency of entrenching collectivised and stigmatised social groups.

This portion was contested by the petitioners with the objection that:-

The biased opinions of an under informed person are being presented as history. It creates an impression as if Brahmans were some kind of a power hungry race, whereas all the evidence available indicates that the persons who dedicated their lives for betterment of society while living a frugal life were called Brahmans. Anyone willing to offer such lifelong service to humanity could become a Brahman.

The reply from NCERT highlights how identity politics is used to divide the population:-

This is a grossly unjustified attack on Jyotiba Phule, someone who is regarded as one of the founders of the dalit movement and the progenitor of the Ambedkarite tradition. No supporting evidence has been cited by the authors of the “objections” to show that Mahatma Phule was “under informed”. Nor is there any supporting evidence to prove the point that the author of the objection has made about the selflessness of brahmans. This “Objection” of the petitioners only legitimates the authority of the Brahmans and the caste system. In any case, the textbook is only presenting the ideas of Jyotiba Phule and telling the student what he thought. This is not the opinion of the author of the textbook. On Phule the most authoritative historical work is Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press, 1985. The history of Phule’s life and ideas may be easily assessed from this book.

The truth, however, is that the petitioners had cited supporting evidence in their petition. The evidence was an excerpt from the book ‘Indica’ written by Megasthenes, the greek ambassador who lived in India for more than twelve years and wrote extensively about the socio-cultural matrix of those times. The supporting document no. P – 49 is reproduced below:-

### **Relevant Extract**

Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian, by J.W.McCrimdale.

Published by Trubner and Co. London

Pp 208 – 210

In India the whole people are divided into seven castes. Among these are the sophists who are not so numerous as the others, but hold the supreme place of dignity and honor, - for they are under no necessity of doing any bodily labour at all... nor indeed is any duty absolutely binding upon them except to perform the sacrifices offered to the gods on behalf of the state. If anyone again has a private sacrifice to offer, one of

these sophists shows him the proper mode...to this class the knowledge of divination exclusively restricted, and none but a sophist is allowed to practice that art. These sages go naked, living during winter in the open air to enjoy the sunshine...they live upon fruits which each season produces...

Pp 213

...It is permitted that the sophist only be from any caste: for the life of the sophist is not an easy one, but the hardest of all.

Megasthenes is not the only source which can be used to contest the assertions of NCERT. Most of the educational institutes and historians concur that the colonial theory of 'Aryans' being invaders was an artificial construct to sow seeds of conflict among the 'natives' – yet, this disruptive theory, with all its implications, is being taught to impressionable young minds. Interestingly, while the NCERT authors use the artificial Aryan-Native divide to project that Shudras were exploited by Aryans, there are several hymns of Rigved regarding the welfare of Shudras. Obviously, NCERT doesn't pass this on to the students.

“O King! By providing the gift of true knowledge to those born to Shudra parents, make them enlightened and provide them with all sorts of wealth and comfort and provide happiness by getting rid of our enemies<sup>11</sup>.”

The description of Megasthenes, as well as, the verses from Rigved establish the fluidity of social system and the meritocracy associated with it. The aim of providing these verses is to establish that, in theory, Brahmins had designed a system based on the propensity and ability of an individual. Megasthenes witnessed the practical application of this theory during his times. There may have been instances where an individual or a group of individuals may have deviated from this system. Such deviations may have led to exploitation of some sections of society. Such deviations should be considered as aberrations and not taught as a rule. Thus, we do not defend or condone any atrocities that might have been committed by rogue individuals for their selfish aims, but at the same time teaching such perverted history to suit the political agenda is against the principles of academic honesty.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar belong to different time epochs in our history. They are not only separated by time and space, their thoughts also diverge from each other on a large number of issues. And yet, they have a very

strong convergence on the issue of AIT. All of them have refuted it in their own styles. The NCERT authors have included their names in their books as social reformers but have deliberately suppressed their rebuttal of this theory.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati had thoroughly exposed the hollowness of AIT by highlighting that if Vedas had been created by invading and victorious 'Aryans', then they must have glorified such a huge victory and they must have given some account of their homeland. Both these are natural tendencies for any victorious 'race' or 'community'. But the silence of Vedas on both these major counts indicates that there were never any 'invading Aryans'. In fact he has written the most logical and strong rebuttals to the biased interpretations of Vedas done by colonial administrator Max Mueller.

Swami Vivekanand, who was familiar with the academic atmosphere of his times, rubbished the concept of 'invading Aryans' in his own charismatic style.

“According to some, they came from central Tibet, others will have it, they came from central Asia. There are patriotic English men who think that the Aryans were all red haired. If the writer happens to be a black haired man the Aryans were all black haired. Of late, there was an attempt to prove that the Aryans lived on the Swiss lakes. Some say now that they live at the North Pole. Lord bless the Aryans and their habitations. As for the truth of these theories, there is not one word in scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryans ever came from anywhere outside of India and in ancient India was included Afghanistan. There it ends. And the theory that the Shudra castes were all non-Aryans and they were a multitude, is equally illogical and equally irrational<sup>12</sup>.”

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar had studied these issues in depth and saw through the designs of the missionaries and evangelists in peddling this theory. The current NCERT officials invoke the name of Dr. Ambedkar and Ambedkarite movement, as long as it suits their agenda. It will be fitting to read his words about AIT:-

“That the theory of Aryan race setup by western writers falls to the ground at every point goes without saying. This is somewhat surprising since Western scholarship is usually

associated with thorough research and careful analysis. Why has the theory failed? It is important to know the reasons why it has failed. Anyone who cares to scrutinize the theory will find that it suffers from a double infection. In the first place, the theory is based on nothing but pleasing assumptions and inferences based on such assumptions. In the second place, the theory is a perversion of scientific investigation. It is not allowed to evolve out of facts. On the contrary the theory is preconceived and facts are selected to prove it. The theory of Aryan race is an assumption and no more<sup>13</sup>.”

Although Dr Ambedkar has been given some space in the NCERT books but his views regarding AIT are completely suppressed. In contrast, those who had views in line with the agenda of NCERT authors are given disproportionately wide space in the books. Instead of enlightening the students with the views of Dr. Ambedkar, Naicker’s views are being given priority. Naicker was a politician whose politics was based on “Dalits” and hatred for Brahmins. His political career has many acts which make him a poster boy for Hindu baiting. His act of breaking an idol of Lord Ganesh was termed as ‘foolish’ by the court of law of India. He threatened to burn the national flag. He exhorted his followers to attack Brahmins. He burnt parts of Constitution of India. He was charged with contempt of court. He was arrested for his public agitation of burning the pictures of Rama at all public places. He was sentenced to undergo imprisonment for 6 months by the District Sessions Court at Tiruchirapalli. In short, Naicker was everything that Dr. Ambedkar was not.

In the books for class 8<sup>th</sup>, this imaginary conflict is repeated *ad nauseum*.

“In the early twentieth century, the non-Brahman movement started. The initiative came from those non-Brahman castes that had acquired access to education, wealth and influence. They argued that Brahmins were heirs of Aryan invaders from the north who had conquered southern lands from the original inhabitants of the region – the indigenous Dravidian races. They also challenged Brahmanical claims to power.”

NCERT, class 8<sup>th</sup>, p 119

By the time student moves on to class 9<sup>th</sup>, he/she will have internalized AIT as a truth. So far, the NCERT authors were using the quotes of

‘social reformers’ like Phule and Periyar to peddle this theory. But in class 9<sup>th</sup>, they shun the subtle tactics and state it as a fact. They move on to associate AIT with brutality of Nazis.

Nazi ideology was synonymous with Hitler’s worldview. According to this there was no equality between people, but only a racial hierarchy. In this view blond, blue-eyed, Nordic German Aryans were at the top, while Jews were located at the lowest rung. They came to be regarded as an anti-race, the arch-enemies of the Aryans.

NCERT, class 9<sup>th</sup>, p 61

A class 9<sup>th</sup> student might miss the point, therefore, it is repeatedly hammered in with the help of a box which explains the meaning of this ‘new’ word:-

Nordic German Aryans – One branch of those classified as Aryans. They lived in north European countries and had German or related origin.

NCERT, class 9<sup>th</sup>, p 61

Any historian worth his salt will vouch that “Nordic German Aryans” are not a historical fact but an artificial construct that was a product of the politics of the colonial period. Yet, children of our country are forced to read it as history.

It is not only Brahmans that are being vilified in the text-books. Sanskrit language, Ancient Indian culture, rulers, geography, religion, social system and scriptures, all are being demonized. Every entity which can instill a feeling of enrichment is systematically being targeted and undermined. The students are being deracinated by using those very democratic institutions which should act as bulwarks against such dishonest academic practices.

It has been more than three years since the political regime changed. Unfortunately, the toxic books have not been rewritten. Perhaps the priorities of the ruling regime are different. The sooner they pay attention to this task, the better it will be.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide\\_in\\_rwanda.htm](http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm))

<sup>2</sup> (Leave None to Tell the Story, p. 38)

<sup>3</sup> (From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda, p. 107)



- <sup>4</sup> (Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda, p. 65)
- <sup>5</sup> (MÉMOIRES ET HISTOIRE SCOLAIRE :LE CAS DU RWANDA DE 1962 À 1994, p. 76)
- <sup>6</sup> (GASANABO, 2004, p. 73)
- <sup>7</sup> (Forges, Alison Des, 1999, p. 37)
- <sup>8</sup> (Leave None to Tell the Story, p. 38)
- <sup>9</sup> (Paper commissioned for the EFA (education for all) Global Monitoring Report 2011, The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education, p. 231)
- <sup>10</sup> Reply given by NCERT, p. 51, article no. 76
- <sup>11</sup> (Rigved, p. 6/22/10)
- <sup>12</sup> (CWSV, volume 3, pp. 292 – 293)
- <sup>13</sup> (Who Were The Sudras, Volume 1)

# Why Modern Mind Finds It Difficult to Understand Classical Indian Thinking

Dr. Binod Kumar Agarwala\*

**Abstract:** The thesis of this essay is that it is impossible for the modern mind to understand the classical Indian thinking, unless one learns to think as per the rules/dharma of classical Indian thinking transcending the laws of thought accepted by the modern mind.

## I. Introduction

The 'classical Indian thinking' is referred to the act of thinking as one finds in the texts like Vedic Saṃhitās, Brāhmanas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads, Sūtras, Tantras, especially Śaiva, and texts of orthodox Śaḍadarśana, heterodox schools especially Buddhism and Jainism, Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās & Āgamas, and Nāṭyasāstra etc., i.e. Sanskrit and Pāli texts from the beginning of Indian civilization up to the late medieval period. By 'Modern Mind' is understood the mind shaped by thought that has emerged after renaissance in Europe, i.e. mind shaped by Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant and subsequent European thought exemplified in empirical sciences. Although modern thought is identified with the thought of a historical period which emerged through Renaissance in Europe, it is not a historical category but an analytic category, so that this modern thought in rudimentary form is visible in Sophism of ancient Greece and Judaism of Old Testament also. *The thesis of this essay is that it is impossible for the modern mind to understand the classical Indian thinking, unless one*

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*learns to think as per the rules/dharma of classical Indian thinking transcending the laws of thought accepted by the modern mind like law of identity, contradiction and excluded middle etc.*

Let me begin with an anecdote regarding my encounter with a renowned scholar of Indian philosophy in the beginning of my career as a teacher. The famous scholar had a great reputation as a Nayāyika. He 'knew' every text in Nyāya and Navya-nyāya and 'knew' about every aspect of Nyāya. He could deliver excellent lectures about any topic of Nyāya. My encounter with him was after he had delivered a lecture on abhidhā, lakṣaṇā and vyañjanā and we were talking in the free time. I said something, which, to the best of my memory, was quite meaningful, but that celebrated scholar became very angry and started scolding me that I do not know how to use language and am making mere meaningless sentences. I had to tell him, "Sir, you had explained that if abhidhā of words yield no meaning one resorts to lakṣaṇā and if that too fails, one resorts to vyañjanā. In interpreting my sentence you did not follow the rules of Nyāya to get at what I am saying." The established scholar got angrier and his face turned red and he stopped the conversation abruptly and left the novice in me wondering as to what aparādha he had committed. That novice, when he has greyed after enjoying more than sixtytwo saradas, has now understood his aparādha. The aparādha of the novice was that he was following the rules of thinking of ancient Indian tradition while the recognized scholar was thinking like a modern scholar. He was a modern scholar and as a modern scholar knew objectively everything about the object of his study, which we can designate as Nyāya school of Indian Philosophy, but he did not grasp an iota of Nyāya-thought. He had the reputation of being a Nayāyika without actually being a Nayāyika at all. In the writings of modern commentators on classical Indian Philosophy, like J. N. Mohanty, B. K. Matilal, Arindam Chakravarty, and N.V. Benrjee not only the modern thought is writ large as a medium of presentation of classical Indian ideas, but also it is apparent that there is an attempt to present the classical Indian thinking as modern thought, and where it cannot be done so, there is an attempt to reinterpret classical Indian thinking in consistency with modern dogmas. All the three trends turn the presentation of classical Indian thinking into a farcical satire of that thinking.

Unless we learn the dharma of classical Indian thinking and think in that way, we may know a lot about each and every classical Indian

text, yet we can learn nothing from them, if we continue to think about the text and their content according to modern thought, which conforms to the three laws of thought as mentioned above.

The laws of thought followed by modern mind apply to non-temporal static snapshot of instantaneous system of thought, describing the logical relations of each thought with itself or other, which is available in unambiguous fixed concepts, in the total system.

In contrast thinking is an activity, like bodily activity and activity of speaking in classical Indian texts. In actuality thinking in classical Indian texts is movement of *prāṇa* itself played out at the level of *citta*, *manas* or *buddhi*, and hence it has the structure of life. Life is nothing but primordial division and differentiation of itself from itself and still continuing to assert itself as a unity and continuity in division and differentiation. This thinking involves time, and as the thinking evolves in time, with it evolve the ideas that are involved in thinking. Hence, in thinking is disclosed the rolling of actuality (*bhāvavṛtta*), and consequently the *dharma* of classical Indian thinking is different from the laws of thought followed by modern mind.

On April 22, 2016 (Friday, Vikram Samvat 2073, Caitra Pūrṇīmā, Hanumāna Jayanti), *Siddha-Sidhānta-Paddhati* of Gorakṣanātha was being read by me. There a line in caturtha upadeśa passage 26: “in śiva’s inside is śakti; in śakti’s inside is śiva”<sup>1</sup> caught my attention. There are similar contradictory lines in mantras of Ṛgveda (10.72.4), e.g., Daksa was born of Aditi, and Aditi was Daksa’s Child<sup>2</sup>. One may be tempted to say that such contradictions have to be reinterpreted following the laws of thought accepted by the modern mind to render them consistent and meaningful to modern mind.

If one is tempted to think like this then let us look at the following important verses in the progression of thinking in the Bhagavadgītā VI.29-30: “The Self abiding in all existents, and all existents (abiding) in the Self, sees he whose self has been harnessed by Yoga, who sees the same everywhere. He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, for him I do not get destroyed, nor for Me does he get destroyed.”<sup>3</sup> These verses are echoing Īśopaniṣad (Kāṇva) 6: “Who however sees all existents in the self and the self in all existents – thereupon he does not shrink away [from any activity of the self].”<sup>4</sup> This is stated again in sixth century AD in Ādiśeṣa’s *Paramārthasāra* 1:” I measure out in words refuge/shelter (*śaraṇam prapadye*), the one who has pervaded/entered all (*viṣṇam*), which is You (*tvām*) alone

(*eva*), who are Supreme (*param*), who is beyond (*parasyāḥ*) the manifest-work/creation (*prakṛter*), who are One (*ekam*) with no beginning (*anādim*), who stay (*niviṣṭam*) in the caves (*guhāsu*) in many ways (*bahudhā*), who are the Abode (*ālaya*) of all (*sarva*) (and) who resides (*stham*) in all moving and unmoving (*sarva-cara-acara*).<sup>5</sup> This was repeated again in eleventh century AD by Abhinavagupta in his work with the same title as that of Ādiśeṣa, i.e. *Parmarthsara* 1: “I measure out in words refuge/shelter (*śaraṇam prapadye*), the well-being (*śambhum*), which is You (*tvām*) alone (*eva*), who are Supreme (*param*), who reside (*stham*) beyond (*para*) the thicket/depth (of water) (*gahanāt*), who are One (*ekam*) with no beginning (*anādim*), who stay (*niviṣṭam*) in the caves (*guhāsu*) in many ways (*bahudhā*), who are the Abode (*ālaya*) of all (*sarva*) (and) who resides (*stham*) in all moving and unmoving (*sarva-cara-acara*).<sup>6</sup> This kind of contradiction is not to be removed but to be accepted as a fundamental principle of classical Indian thinking, which is the defining principle of consciousness (*cit*), which states a circular relationship of whole and part so that the whole is in the parts and every part is in the whole. This principle is not only utilized in metaphysics as stated above but also in aesthetics in understanding *rasa dhvani* in *kāvya*, and in grammar to understand a *kriyā* (action designated by a verb) vis a vis its subordinate parts, sentence vis a vis its constituents, *dvandva samāsa* vis a vis its constituents, *śabda* vis a vis its uttered constituent *nāda*, the language as a whole (*śabda brahma*) vis a vis every finite speech (*vaikhari vāk*) etc.

The circularity of thinking in which is disclosed the rolling of actuality was accepted in the idea of sudarśanacakra. The significance of this *cakra* can be understood from a series of epithets of Viṣṇu in *Tripādvibhūtim Upaniṣad* 7, 42: “hail for who is possessed of circle of holistic insight (vision), hail for who is possessed of well undertaken circle<sup>7</sup>. According to Nṛsiṃha-pūrva-tāpinī Upaniṣad 5.2 “The *cakra* of Viṣṇu is sudarśana.” When we put these ideas together we have the idea of *dhīcakra* or circle of holistic insight (or vision), which is *sucakra* or well-undertaken circle, and it is the *sudarśana* or good vision. The well-undertaken circle of holistic insight or vision is the completed circle of movement of thought from the whole to its parts and from the part to the whole till all the parts are integrated in the whole to unify the meaning to disclose the actuality. In the classical Indian thinking *darśana* is disclosure of actuality. *Īśa Upaniṣad* (*Kāṇva*) 15 says: “The

face of the eternal-ethical-actual is hidden by a golden pot. *Pūṣanna* that you uncover to put sight on whose dharma is eternal-ethical-actual.<sup>8</sup>

Modern mind cannot make sense of circular statements or the circular thought process, because for them thought is linear as induction or deduction, and yet they cannot dismiss the circular statements or the circular thought process of classical India, so, they declare these circular statements and circular thought process to be a description of mystic experience of oneness of all etc. Mysticism is bewilderment got up to look like an answer. Acknowledgement of mysticism in classical Indian textual sentences and thinking is in fact acknowledgement of modern minds inability to make sense of such statements and thinking behind it. These exemplary apparently contradictory statements point to the metaphysics behind the classical Indian thinking, which is radically different from the metaphysics accepted by the modern mind. The metaphysics of modern mind is that of substance-attribute, while the metaphysics behind the classical Indian thinking is radically different and not available in the modern thought, as it is not a metaphysics of substance-attribute but metaphysics of what may be termed as that of 'belonging to whole of collective actuality' like 'belonging to an institution' or 'belonging to anything to which one can belong.' Hence, the very dharma of classical Indian thinking is different from modern thought. This difference prevents the modern mind from grasping the classical Indian thinking.

The actuality, seen from the classical Indian thinking, is fundamentally different from how modern mind thinks about it from its own point of view. The actuality, available to the classical Indian thinking, is even more contradictory when seen from the modern point of view, than what modern mind is inclined to think.<sup>9</sup> The actuality, available from the point of view of classical Indian thinking, is the actuality of the institution as person, which is a cosmic institution, i.e. the whole cosmos conceived as an institution, to which we all along with everything else belong, and in reverse the institution as person belongs wholly to each existent which belong to it. The reality available from the point of view of modern mind is just an abstraction, which is a limited abstraction, of an objective nature out of the cosmic body (*viśvasarīra*<sup>10</sup>) of the cosmic institution as person, for control and manipulation by the modern mind. It is the actuality of the cosmic institution as person, which appears horribly contradictory to the modern mind, and makes it abstract away (like juice being abstracted from the

whole fruit for packaging for the market) only a so-called consistent reality of controllable and manipulable dead objective nature out of the living cosmic body of the actual cosmic institution as person.

The modern thought, seen from the point of view of classical Indian thinking, is, to borrow a word from Hegel, an inverted perverted (*Verkehrte*<sup>11</sup>) and, to borrow a word from Heidegger, an enframed (*Gestell*) form of thinking. The modern thought enframes itself to limit itself and self-consciously methodically distorts itself to turn itself upside down.

## ***II. Yoga and Svātantrya Śakti***

**The classical Indian thinking requires *Yoga* as an important operation, which involves *svātantrya śakti* of the thinker, transforming him from modern mind to classical mind with its eternal dharma of thinking.**

Here *yoga* is neither *saṃyoga* (contact) nor *viyoga* (separation), it is in between the two holding together the two.

How is *yoga* involved in classical Indian thinking? The movement or action called thinking in classical Indian literature involves seven basic operations and four fundamental ideas none of which is prior or posterior to the other logically or temporally. The seven operations recognized are three operations of distinctions (*viyoga*) : distinction between operation and content (what it operates on), distinction of one operation from another operation, distinction of one content from another content, and corresponding three operations of holding the distinguished items together (*saṃyoga*): holding together of operation and content, holding together of distinguished operations, and holding together of distinguished contents and the seventh operation of oscillation of *buddhi*. Be it noted that of the seven operations three are pairs and one operation is alone. First pair of operations is that of making distinction (*viyoga*) of content and performance/operation and holding them together (*saṃyoga*). The second pair of operations is that of making distinctions (*viyoga*) in performances/operations and holding together (*saṃyoga*) of the distinguished performances/operations. The third pair of operations is that of making distinctions (*viyoga*) in content and holding together (*saṃyoga*) of the distinguished contents. The seventh operation is that of oscillation of *buddhi*. *Buddhi* oscillating between each pair of operations of making distinctions (*viyoga*) and holding together

(*saṃyoga*) of the distinguished items brings about a balance (*yoga*) of the distinguished items. This capacity to oscillate between each pair of operations of making distinctions (*viyoga*) and holding together (*saṃyoga*) of the distinguished items brings about a balanced relation (*yoga*) of the distinguished items. It is this capacity for yoga that is known as **the *svātantrya śakti* of self according to Abhinavagupta.**

**Abhinavagupta defines *svātantrya śakti* in *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vimarśinī* 1.1.2: “separating the non-separate and undoing by inner connection the separation of what is separated...” or to put differently, “And its [i.e., of the self] *svātantrya* is: bringing separation in the non-separate [which at the same time remains fundamentally non-separate], and undoing by inner connection the separation of what is separated [which in a sense appears separated].”<sup>12</sup>**

It is the *svātantryaśakti* of the thinker of thinking in classical Indian thinking, which gives dynamism of life to thinking, which prevents the modern mind, who is habituated to only deduction and induction involving fixed concepts, from grasping the classical Indian thinking, which creates concepts along with the progression of thinking.

### **III. *Apohana-Śakti***

The three pairs of distinctions and conjunctions mentined above are recognized by Abhinavagupta in *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vimarśinī* 1.3.7 under what he calls *apohana-śakti* ‘power of delimitation’: “What ever is made to shine, is separated from consciousness, and consciousness [is separated] from it, and one consciousness [is separated] from another, and the one object of consciousness [is separated] from another object of consciousness.”<sup>13</sup>

### **IV. *Svātantrya Śakti*: Power of One’s Own Loom**

The *Svātantrya Śakti* involved in classical Indian thinking is not to be understood in the modern way as power of independence or power of autonomy or power of freedom of will, rather it is literally the power (*Śakti*) of one’s own (*sva*) loom (*tantra*). In the classical Indian thinking the agent of activity, whether the activity is that of body (external physical activity), or that of speech (activity of speaking) or that of mind (activity of thinking) is taken as an weaver (*tantuvāya*) who has



his own (*sva*) loom (*tantra*). The Grammarians confirm our statement. Pāṇini Sūtra 1.4.54 states: “the *svatantraḥ* is the *karṭṛ*”<sup>14</sup>. Patañjali in his Mahābhāṣya says commenting on this Sūtra: “Is a *svatantra* a person who has his own warp (*sva-tantra*)? And what follows from that? It would result that [*svatantra* means] ‘weaver’.”<sup>15</sup> Modern Sanskrit Grammarians fail to understand why weaver (*tantuvāya*) is introduced here in the Bhāṣya. Patañjali explains: “This is not a shortcoming. Certainly the word *tantra* is employed in the sense of ‘extended [cloth]’, e.g., *āstīrṇaṃ tantram* ‘the warp has been stretched’, *protam tantram* ‘the warp has been strung’. [In such cases] ‘extended [cloth]’ is meant but [the word *tantra*] might also be employed in the sense of what is principal, e.g. when one says ‘this *brāhmaṇa* is *svatantra*’, it is meant that he is self-principal (i.e., that the principal [thing] for him is himself).”<sup>16</sup> But unfortunately the modern grammarians do not find Patañjali’s explanation adding in understanding the Sūtra of Pāṇini. They continue to understand that Patañjali accepts the meaning of *svatantra* as ‘independent’. They fail to notice that in the very next Sūtra of Pāṇini (1.4.55) it is said: “Its [*karṭṛ*’s] promoter, the *hetu*, also [is called *karṭṛ*].”<sup>17</sup> If there is a *hetu*, i.e. promoter, of *karṭṛ*, then how can *karṭṛ* be independent? But the *agent*, which has a *prompter* is still *svatantra* as per Pāṇini Sūtra 1.4.54, therefore, *svatantra* does not mean ‘independent’ but one who has his own loom, i.e. a weaver.

## V. The Thinker of Thinking in Classical Indian Literature

The thinker of thinking is identified and explained in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.10-11: “The one deity who covers himself, like a spider, with threads born from *pradhāna* according to own-being, may he bestow us obtaining of *Brahman*! The one deity hidden in all existents, all-pervading, the inner soul of all existents, the overseer of actions dwelling in all existents, the witness, the sole thinker, and devoid of strands (*nirguna*).”<sup>18</sup> *Īśopaniṣad* 1 echoes this idea too: “All this, whatsoever is moving in the world of movement, is for habitation [as a cloth] by the Sovereign Lord. You enjoy by that by renouncing; do not covet; [inquire] whose is fruit [that is] born?”<sup>19</sup> The thinker, who is a weaver, in each of us is the Sovereign Lord (*Īśvara*). This Sovereign Lord (*Īśvara*) in us, who is the thinker in us, is the collective person (Puruṣa) in us. The first two mantras Puruṣa Sūkta, i.e. Ṛgveda 10.90.1-2 explain the Sovereign Lord, who is the infinite collective person

(*samaṣṭi puruṣa*): “A thousand heads has Puruṣa, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. On every side grasping earth by ten fingers he stays transcending. That has been and that will be, and this all too is Puruṣa, the sovereign of life which waxes greater still by food.”<sup>20</sup> The one deity, who is the inner soul of each existent mentioned in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.10-11 is the collective person (*samaṣṭi puruṣa*) of Puruṣa Sūkta is confirmed by the fact that the two mantras Ṛgveda 10.90.1-2 are quoted verbatim in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* as mantra 3.14-15.

The significance of what we are saying is that the thinker in all of us according to the classical Indian thinking is not an individual ‘I’ (*ahaṃkāra*) but the one collective person in all of us.

## **VI. Thinking Involves Co-operation of *Prāṇa* (Lifebreath) and *Citta* (Faculty of Ideation)**

Classical Indian thinking is based on the co-operation of *prāṇa* (life breath) and *citta* (faculty of ideation). In the movement of *prāṇa* it is never a *prāṇa* of one man as distinguished from another man that moves; rather it is the universal common cosmic *prāṇa* that moves, for it is one and the same undifferentiated *prāṇa vāyu* that flows through the body (*deha*) of each man. At the level of feeling of *prāṇa* there is no self-consciousness-of-I or *ahaṃkāra*. It is only later that when one takes thinking in one’s own individual hands and reflects the thinking back on thinking to control thinking through some regulations to create methodic certainty for oneself that self-consciousness of, or self-conscious unity of ‘I think’ emerges giving rise to *ahaṃkāra*. At the level of feeling due to movement of *prāṇa* even when it gets cooperation of *manīṣā*, the seminal thinking by *manas*, there is no distinction of I and thou. Hence the thinking at the level where *prāṇa* and *citta* cooperate, there can only be one thinking in multiple centers, i.e. bodies. But multiplicities of opinions emerge when thought is with *ahmkāra* of ‘I think’, then one presents an opinion of an ‘I’ to be opposed by another opinion of another individual ‘I’. In the modern context all such opinions, produced self-consciously, aspire to disclose actuality, but being product of *ahmkāra* of ‘I’ of each individual, can never be able to disclose actuality, as the opinion does not belong to actuality of the cosmos, which is the actuality of the cosmic institution as person. Opinion is subjective thought, such that subjective thought and objective reality stand alienated and reality appears as object (*gegenstand*=standing

against). Hence modern thought takes knowledge to be nothing but an opinion backed by the numerical strength of the number of individuals who accept that opinion as the opinion has lost touch with the actuality, to which knowledge once belonged.

## VII. Marking Distinction by Cooperation of *Citta* and *Prāṇa* Together

The classical Indian thinkers marked the distinction with svātantrya śakti required in thinking by *citta* and feeling by *prāṇa* in cooperation. Unless these two *citta* and *prāṇa* operate in concert and cooperate there can be no understanding, i.e. *bodha* of anything, there will be no proper distinction of anything by *buddhi*. We have *viveka buddhi* (*medhā*) when *citta* and *prāṇa* help each other<sup>21</sup> and due to this co-operation one has grasp (*bodha*) of actuality. That is to say understanding involves making of distinction (*viyoga*) between ideation by *citta* and feeling by *prāṇa*, and holding the two together (*saṅgyoga*) and balancing the two equally in relation (*yoga*) by *buddhi* (intelligence).

The classical Indian thinkers clearly recognized that distinctions made by *viveka buddhi* is correct when both conscious articulation by *citta* and discrimination by feeling of life (*prāṇa*) work in cooperation. But somehow the modern Indian thought lost touch with actuality when modern individualist expounders of classical Indian thinking, took upon themselves the task of turning classical Indian thinking into conflicting systems to quibble with each other. They had lost the capacity for making correct distinctions (*viveka buddhi*) through feeling of life (*prāṇa*) and ideation of mind (*citta*) working together. They were quibbling with each other as *ahaṃkāra* of 'I think' and *mamakāra* of 'my *mata*' had taken hold on them. The distinctions they made became distinctions for quibbling with others to win arguments and not distinctions, which were consciously articulated as felt by life to conduct oneself in the cosmic institution.

Modern thought, till Kant had some inkling of the capacity for distinction through feeling of life like taste or gusto, but afterwards started conceiving distinctions purely only consciously and intellectually without any confirmation by feeling of life. For example pleasure pain distinction is a function of predominantly feeling of life even if some conscious articulation is involved. But when an economist tries to construct a measure of distribution of pleasure in society, how will he

go about distinguishing pleasure and pain? It will be purely on some intellectually made operational definition sans all confirmation by feeling of life. The discrimination by feeling of life will subjectivise his data rendering it unusable for objective measurement of the distribution of pleasure in society according to modern thought. Modernity articulates and accepts as valid only those distinctions, which are purely intellectual. But even the most intellectual distinctions like the distinctions of posts, distinctions of their corresponding powers, liabilities to powers, liberties, immunities in institutions cannot be a function of mere intellectual articulation, it must be made with feeling of life as people will be manning them with intellect and feelings. Creating, maintaining and running institutions only on basis of a thought dependent on a vocabulary based on only consciously articulated intellectual distinctions is an impossibility and no doubt we see all the manifest institutions in ruins and a constant effort at creating a structure that can run smoothly albeit without direction, but alas that effort too is in vain. The eternal institution has withdrawn. We forget that we are both *puruca paœu* (animal person) and *dhīra puruṣa* (person with holistic insight) with both capacity for distinction through feeling of life and conscious distinction, which need to work in tandem to create distinctions, which can maintain institutional unity of the best to fill the body, i.e. institutional person is the best person to fill the body.

Modern mind may object that I am either ludicrous or indulging in mysticism. But it is neither. Let me draw attention to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. "To apprehend a regular and appropriate building with one's cognitive faculties, be the mode of representation clear or confused, is quite different thing from being conscious of this representation with an accompanying sensation of delight. Here the representation is referred wholly to the subject, and what is more to its *feeling of life* – under the name of the *feeling of pleasure or displeasure* – and this forms the basis of a quite separate faculty of discriminating and estimating, that contributes nothing to knowledge. All it does is to compare the given representation in the subject with the entire faculty of representations of which the mind (Gemüt) is conscious in the feeling (Gefül) of its state."<sup>22</sup> Kant recognized two capacities of discrimination: one faculty of conscious discrimination by articulation but another faculty of discrimination by feeling (Gefül) of life whose functioning was obscure to him.

Similarly Kant having constituted the transcendental ego through the transcendental unity of apperception in the *First Critique* tried to overcome the effective individuation in the *Third Critique* by introducing the *sensus communis* ‘the sense that founds the community’ and hence common to all not as a common denominator of everyone’s ‘I think’ but as overcoming of ‘I think’ for all individuals and failed miserably. No doubt the modern mind cannot grasp the classical Indian thinking.

According to Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā X. 9-10<sup>23</sup> to make discrimination properly is what *viveka buddhi* is, therefore making of proper distinction is itself the manifestation of *buddhi* and hence *buddhi yoga* for us takes place. Once we have *buddhi yoga* we obtain the collective person (*Puruṣa*, i.e. *Puruṣottama* as *avasthita* in *buddhi*).

To put it in our modern language proper distinction, made feelingly and consciously, is the manifestation of intelligence, which is simultaneously both intellectual and emotional, in us, and proper distinction is one where it is distinction of one, which maintains the unity even with the distinction. When we can make proper distinction, i.e. when we have intelligence, the possibilities of distinction is infinite and hence the infinite one in its fullness is in our intelligence as consciousness (*Puruṣa*) or feeling of language (*śābdibhāvanā*, *śābdabrahman*).

To put it little simplistically all proper distinctions in thought presuppose the unthought felt unity of consciousness, i.e. focus is on or thematisation is of distinction but the unthematised and out of focus is the felt infinity and unity of collective consciousness. Same thing is the case with language. When we speak or write focus is on or thematization is of the distinctions in words but out of focus and nonthematised and unspoken is the felt infinity and unity of the whole of language, which is a collective language and not a private language of an individual.

*Thinking of something* according to classical Indian literature involves the cooperative functioning of *citta* and *prāṇa* with *svātantrya śakti* through seven simultaneous operations involving *apohana śakti* as explained above. Since thinking involves multiple operations according to Indian *ṛṣis*, thinking is an activity and not a mere static something as it is in the modern mind, where thought is just an idea in the mind a static representation like a picture projected on a screen. Hence, the

modern thought being static intellectual snapshot cannot fathom the classical Indian thinking which is action emerging in time with cooperation of *citta* and *prāṇa*.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *śivasyābhyantare śaktiḥ śakterabhyantarāḥ śivāḥ/*
- <sup>2</sup> *aditer dakṣo ajāyata dakṣād v aditiḥ pari*
- <sup>3</sup> *sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmani / ikṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ// yo māṃ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati / tasyāhaṃ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati //*
- <sup>4</sup> *yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmany evānupaśyati |sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṃ tato na vijugupsate ||* In the Mādhyandina recension in the last quarter vicikitsati replaces vijugupsate of Kāṇva recension and the mantra in Mādhyandina is: *yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmany evānupaśyati sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṃ tato na vicikitsati ||* “Who however sees all existents in self and self in all existents – thereupon he does not doubt (/ hesitate from) [the being(actuality) of the self].”
- <sup>5</sup> *param parasyā prakṛteranādimekaṃ niviṣṭaṃ bahudhā guhāsu | (sarvālayaṃ sarvacarācarasthaṃ tvāmeva viṣṇuṃ śaraṇaṃ prapadye||*
- <sup>6</sup> *param parasthaṃ gahanādanādimekaṃ niviṣṭaṃ bahudhā guhāsu | (sarvālayaṃ sarvacarācarasthaṃ tvāmeva śambhuṃ śaraṇaṃ prapadye||*
- <sup>7</sup> *Om sucakrā ya svāhā / Om dhīcakrāya svāhā//*
- <sup>8</sup> *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṃ mukhaṃ / tat tvaṃ pūṣann apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye //* The same verse occurs with some modification as mantra 17 in the Mādhyandina recension of *Īśa Upaniṣad* : *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṃ mukhaṃ /yo śāvāditye puruṣaḥ so śāvahaṃ /aum khambrahma //* The *Īśopaniṣad* (Kāṇva) 15 occurs verbatim in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.15.1. This mantra also occurs with modification (*viṣṇave* substituted for *dṛṣṭaye*) in the *Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad* 6. 35: *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṃ mukhaṃ /tat tvaṃ pūṣann apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya viṣṇave /yo śā āditye puruṣaḥ so śā aham / eṣa ha vai satyādharmo yadādityasya ādītvaṃ tacchuklam puruṣam aliṅgam nabhaso ’ntargatasya /* What being told in these various formulations of the same idea is that the face of the satya, that which is sat, where sat means ‘ethical (good)-eternal (or timeless) - actual (pertaining to action)’ all the three together rolled into one concept, is covered by the golden pot. So, when *Pūṣanna* ‘the nourisher’ is asked to uncover the golden pot, to put his sight on that which is characterized as eternal-ethical-actual.

<sup>9</sup> I cite just one example of how the modern mind thinks regarding the classical Indian thinking, where classical Indian thinking is that of Abhinavagupta, and the modern mind is that of Edwin Gerow, who is a famous modern sanskritist, “Logically, Abhinava’s is a very risky thesis, for it appears to admit multiplicity and variety into the supreme principle. Abhinava appears to abet this ambiguity by speaking of two powers (śakti) which together characterize the absolute: that of knowing (jñāna) and that of acting (kriyā)... The absolute, in its guise of “knowing” is manifested in the subjective world of awareness and reflection; in the guise of “acting,” in the objective world of presentation, typology and change. Indeed, these postulates would appear to “realize” activity in a more satisfying...but at the expenses of positing an inconsistency in the character of the absolute itself.” In “Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,” (Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 114, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1994), p.189. In fact the contradiction is in the very conception of *jñāna* itself, for Abhinavagupta in his *Tantrasāra, saptamamāhnikam*, which is entitled *deśādhvā* quotes from an unknown source: *na prakriyapara jñānam...* / “there is no knowledge beyond the manifest activity...” So, the classical Indian thinking, looked from the modern mind is contradictory, through and through, which cannot be given any consistent meaning as required by modern mind, without destroying the very classical Indian thinking which functions differently than the modern thought.

<sup>10</sup> *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya of Kemarāja*, ed. J. C. Chatterji, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies 3, 1911, p.9. (English translation Jaideva Singh, Motilalbanarshi Dass, Delhi, 1963)

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hegel’s ‘Inverted World’”, in his *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five hermeneutic Studies*, tr. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1976, p.35.

<sup>12</sup> *svātantryam ca asya [ātmano] bhede bhedanaṃ bhedite ca antaranusaṃdhānena abhedanaṃ /*

<sup>13</sup> *yat kila tat ābhāsyate tat saṃvido vicchidyate, saṃvic ca tataḥ, saṃvic ca samvidantarāt, saṃvvedyaṃ ca saṃvvedyāntarāt /*

<sup>14</sup> *svatantraḥ kartā*

<sup>15</sup> *kiṃ yasya tantram sa svatantraḥ? kiṃ cātaḥ? tantuvāye prāpnoti.*

<sup>16</sup> *naiṣa doṣaḥ / ayaṃ tantrasābdo’styeva vitāne vartate / tadyathā / āstīrṇaṃ tantram / protaṃ tantramiti / vitānamiti gamyate / asti prādhānye vartate / tadyathā svatantra’sau brāhmaṇa ityucyate / svapradhāna iti gamyate // tadyaḥ prādhānye vartate tantrasābdastasyedaṃ grahaṇam /*

<sup>17</sup> *tatprayojako hetuḥ ca*

<sup>18</sup> *yas tantu-nābha iva tantubhiḥ pradhānajaiḥ svabhāvataḥ /deva ekaḥ svam āvr̥ṇoti sa no dadhātu brahmāpyayam //eko devaḥ sarva-bhūteṣu*

*gūḍhaḥ sarva-vyāpī sarva-bhūtāntarātmā /karmādhyakṣaḥ sarva-  
bhūtādhivāsaḥ sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇaś ca //*

<sup>19</sup> *īśā vāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ yat kiñca jagatyāṃ jagat |tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā  
mā gṛdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam ||* This mantra with substitution of *ātmā*  
for *īśā*, *viśvaṃ* for *sarvaṃ*, and *kiñcij* for *kiñca* occurs as mantra 8.1.10  
of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* : *ātmāvāsyamidaṃ viśvaṃ yat kiñcij jagatyāṃ  
jagat |tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam //* “All this  
is for habitation by the Self, whatsoever is moving in the world of  
movement. You enjoy by that by renouncing; do not covet; [inquire]  
whose is fruit [that is] born?”

<sup>20</sup> *sahasraśīrṣā puruṣaḥ sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt / sabhūmiṃ viśvato  
vṛtvātyatiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam //puruṣa evedaṃ sarvaṃ yad bhūtaṃ yac ca  
bhavyam / utāmṛtatvasyeśāno yad annenātirohati //*

<sup>21</sup> *cittā prāṇā bodhayantaḥ parasparam* (Bhagavadgītā X.9).

<sup>22</sup> *Critique of judgment*. §1. Italics added by the present author.

<sup>23</sup> *tecāṃ satatayuktānāṃ bhajatāṃ prītipūrvakam / dadāmi buddhiyogaṃ  
taṃ yena mām upayānti te //*



## Tagore's India

Saradindu Mukherji\*

After a gap of many centuries of intellectual decay, destruction and stagnation, situation started changing in India since the time of Raja Rammohan Roy. There emerged a galaxy of intellectuals of highest caliber, social and religious reformers and various other categories of nation-builders in India. One very important centre of this intellectual and creative effervescence was the British controlled Bengal Presidency. Calcutta, now Kolkata was the capital city, with a rich hinterland which very soon came to occupy an important role in the social, cultural and political history of modern India. There were all kinds of influences—both from Europe, and in this case, we are looking right now, they emanated primarily from England, and then there were indigenous factors, that set in motion an unprecedented churning never seen before and even afterwards.

One can see various trends in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India in the intellectual firmament as represented by Raja Rammohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Ishwar Chandra, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Rama Krishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak among many others. I have no desire to further expand the list or elaborate the implications of such an intellectual effervescence, often called the “Bengal Renaissance”. In short, Tagore was one of the greatest products of this phase of momentous happenings.

As for the scenario prevailing in Calcutta, Nirode C Choudhury puts it like this, “Life in Calcutta was the symbol and epitome of our national history, a true reflection of the creative effort in our modern

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existence as well as of its self-destructive duality. To live in Calcutta was to be reminded at every turn of the cultural history and to be aware of modern India and to be aware of every significant activity of the present.” As for the other side of the city, “public life in Calcutta cried without, it uttered its voice in the streets”.<sup>2</sup>

Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941) was part of this emerging cultural-socio-political milieu. In this brief essay, we would try to understand how Tagore looked at the panorama of Bharat. The subject is vast and Tagore was a prolific writer. This article is based on the essays he wrote in Bangla, and specifically excluded are the poems, songs (Rabindra sangeet) and dance-dramas he composed. Similarly, I have not drawn any example from the short stories and novels he wrote, though many of them contain a lot of historical truth and socio-political vision as all great writers-whether Bankim Chandra Chatterjee Bharatendu Harishchandra, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee or Premchand have.

One outstanding feature of Tagore’s world-view was that his vision was spread far and wide, and he was very cosmopolitan, yet conscious and proud of his civilizational heritage, and not at all oblivious of its major fault-lines. For a ten year old boy, who was asked by his father to get up very early in the morning at Dalhousie to learn Sanskrit grammar and join him thereafter when he recited the slokas from Upanishada, later an admirer of Gladstone’s speech in House of Commons, who moved about from the red soil of Shanti Niketan to the steppes of America, enjoyed a boat ride on Padma, marvelled at the sight of Thames, had appreciated the medieval Hindi and Sikh bhajans, and grasped some of the most recondite thoughts in our ancient literature and at the same time, felt bad realizing that Tennyson’s *De Profundis* had received a bad deal from the critics, the universe that he experienced was limitless. For a genuine seeker of truth nurtured in the best of Vedic and Upanishadic thoughts, reminding the world about the eternal message from the Holy Gita and a carrier of a “wounded civilization” a la Naipaul, remembering the trauma of cultural humiliation, Tagore had a keen sense of observation and a capacity for enjoying aesthetic beauty.

No wonder, he wrote on varied themes-the Santhal uprising- the “Hul” (in Bihar/Jharkhand 1855-56), the attacks on the Boers in South Africa, the political detenus shot at Hijli to Hindu temples of Orissa, commented in detail on the Maharashtrian scholar, Ramabai and the

condition and rights of women, including the Muslim women. While he admired certain aspects of European culture, yet he was forthright in saying the brutal truth. He points out that when the Europeans landed in America and Australia, they were Christians taught to love their neighbours, but actually they mercilessly uprooted the indigenous people of these lands. He also talks of Cecil Rhodes, Anglo-Irish relationships, concept of “Little Englander”, brutal sufferings of Blacks and Chinese at the hands of the white people in South Africa and China, genocide of Jews in Russia and atrocities inflicted in Congo by the Belgians. He cites these lines from the “Daily News”, “After all, no great power is entirely innocent of the crime of treating with barbarous harshness the alien races which are subject to its rule”. He attributed the unjust hanging of Tantiya Tope to the cruel animal instinct of the British, and challenged their commitment to sense of fair-play and justice! Tagore realized that there were important lessons to be learnt from human experiences, and then dutifully conveyed to the people he cared for. To understand some such facets, we would begin with some of the very fundamental issues he had dealt with in his inimitable way.

### **Beauty and Sacred Geography of India**

Tagore finds an immense source of beauty in the ageless Bharat- calling it Prachin (ancient) Bharatkhanda-adorned with beautiful names of the rivers, hillocks and the towns – like Avanti Bidisha Ujjaini, Bindhya Kailash Debgiri, Reba Shipra Betrabati. One may note that there are no hyphens-they are all (3x3) joined together. These names embody “Shobha”, “Sambhram” and “Shubhrata”, and how with the passage of time – there was a steep fall in the standard, and the new names that ones find were not that refined and sophisticated.<sup>3</sup>

If we just look at his vivid description of the various places he visited in India, leaving aside all that he saw abroad, it makes a fascinating reading. Whether he is visiting the Konkan coast and visiting an abandoned fort of Chhatrpati Shivaji Maharaj or a derelict Shiva temple on the Arabian coast, or his experience of living with his elder brother in the Shahibag Palace in Ahmedabad and the dried up river-bed near by or the lush green paddy fields of Bengal (spread over both West Bengal and what is now Bangladesh), or the rhododendron flowers in the hills of Shillong and the majestic Himalayas, his sense of admiration never ceases. He is euphoric over the natural beauty, grandeur

and the sense of past they convey. Very few, except of course in our classical literature have described the immense beauty of Indian landscape as Tagore did.

Next he asks as to how does one know about this ancient land of Bharat? Obviously through literature, was his response. He pointed out that in seeking to unify the country, the principal role was to be played by the literature people produce.<sup>4</sup> He wrote not only on the medieval Maithili poet Vidyapati and medieval Bengali poet Chandidas and that of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengali poet Michael Modhusudan Dutt, a convert to Christianity, Kalidasa but also on the Baul songs and the Dhammapadam—nothing escaped his admiring gaze and scholarly scrutiny.

### **Role and Use of history**

But to have that sense of belongingness, he desired that Indians have an authentic history of India.<sup>5</sup> The theme of “Slavery of thousand years”, continue to recur time and again in his writings: The history of India that we read and cram to seat at the examination, Tagore pointed out, was just like a bad dream that was full of invaders, blood-letting, feud between sons and fathers, brothers and brothers. Sometimes there are Pathan-Mughals, and sometimes there are the Portugese-French-English to disturb our dreams.

But is this the only past we have, Tagore asks? For him, this was not real India. There are no Indians in all in these convulsions, because these were only marauders and assassins. Tagore brings out the positive side when such horrific incidents were going on. How does one explain the emergence of Nanak, Chaitanya, Tukaram and Kabir, he asks? Besides Delhi and Agra, India also had Kashi (Varanasi) and Nabadwip. The flow of life and noble efforts made by people were lamentably missing from the distorted history that people were taught, Tagore regretted to tell.<sup>6</sup>

He further says, once we thought that repression wrought by thousand years of slavery had destroyed the patriotism, bravery, and fighting skills of Rajputs and Maharashtrians but this was not so. He rejected the official version, written by the British on the Queen of Jhansi.<sup>7</sup>

Tagore affirmed that this India, which mattered, was missing in the text-books, and it was that India which connected us in thousands of ways to the heart and soul of this land. He regretted, that unfortunately,

our children were studying a history which kept them ignorant of its main life-springs. Naturally this had created a mindset which marginalized their own contribution and heritage. In the process, people of India had tended to put the alien above their own. Such a portrayal of India's dismal past was a matter of shame for all, Tagore would tell.<sup>8</sup>

He regretted that history as it was taught, beginning with the invasion of Mahmud and stretching up to Lord Curzon prevented people in understanding the authentic history of India. So he asks, where then lies the significance of Indian history? What we see in India is this-to establish unity in diversity, and to put together all paths in one direction and to see Oneness transcending external differences, and this attempt to unify and put all together in an orderly fashion had been as enshrined in Gita, which offered an unique synthesis of "Gyan", "Prem" and "Karma".<sup>9</sup>

Hence, in his scheme of things, he wanted historians who would portray the whole of Bharatvarsha, who would rekindle "Shraddha"/ respect in Indians by their sense of duty, restore their lost position and banish their penchant for self-flagellation till Indians attained high respect that had once belonged to them. He reminded that, our salvation did not lie in politics and commerce but in the path shown by our "Rishi"-grandfathers – a path, which was to be attained by "Bramhacharya", "Bairagya" and "Daridya". Such an idea about how the history of India needed to be looked at was intimately linked to a collective commitment to certain values and a definite world-view.<sup>10</sup>

For Tagore, to call Ramayana-Mahabharata as "Mahakavya" (classics) was just not enough, it was also India's history, and for him Bharatvarsha had shown that over thousands of years.- they have been a perennial source of education and pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

Tagore's fulsome admiration for Shivaji, Guru Gobind Singh, other Sikh Gurus, Rani of Jhansi brings out clearly the role such figures have played in the history of this land. The destruction of Hindu temples by Muslim rulers of India had appeared many times in his writings, and even as he was travelling in Japan he recalled that.<sup>12</sup> Only when we compare his views on them with what our sarkari historians are still writing, we understand the vision of Tagore in correcting our understanding of some of the most relevant issues in our past.

Tagore had made his views very clear on both the nature and consequences of Islamic imperialism in India as well as the European/ British rule. His attitude to Buddhism was very positive. Lack of space

prevents me from mentioning a few observations of Tagore on “Buddhadeva” in a longish essay he wrote.<sup>13</sup>

His emphasis on the real strength of our past and its relevance is further substantiated when the key concepts of nation and nationalism were defined by him.

### **Nation and Nationalism**

Tagore had no hesitation in accepting the term “Nation”. This, he admitted, without any hesitation were learnt from the British. Just as the term “Bramha” of Upanishad, “Maya” of Shankara and “Nirbana” of Buddha, cannot be translated into English, and similarly Nation can not be translated in our language, he reminded.

Giving examples from all over the world and pointing out some of the basic problems about the prevailing definition of nation and various ways it had been sought to be explained, Tagore suggests, it is “a state of mind”/ “mental stuff”, a thought- pattern not bound by territorial limits. If it was not Jati, language, material interests, religious unity and geographical location, then what constituted it? Nation is, indeed a living entity/ “Sajibsotta”, which have gone into the making of this –which resides partly in the past, while another component lies in the present times. He explains it further, “our collective memories of the past and the desire to live together”.<sup>14</sup>

Next, we look at some of Tagore’s observations and understanding of certain social-cultural practices and new initiatives out of many that he had in his repertory, which throws more light on his imagination of Bharat. In the process, we have taken up some not so common examples from his writings as mentioned below.

### **Commemoration -”Smriti Raksha”**

He criticized the emerging tendency in his time of erecting statues of celebrities after their death. This, Tagore pointed out was an European practice and did not make any sense in India. He pointed out that the Egyptians once used to mummify their dead, and so was done by the Europeans by burying the dead. Indian practice of last rites testify to our belief that we have no craving for things which do not last for ever.

Hence, Tagore explained that we have annual “Shraddha” ceremony, while Europeans did not have it. This was because, we believed in the principle, it’s the work left behind that speaks- “Kirti jasyasa Jibati”. He reiterates that we must remember the Great people- not just because it was our duty, but it was also in our interest to do so. Our way of remembering the Great is through “Melas/fairs. Suppose, we had bothered to build statues-what would have happened to them-languished in some forsaken forest, being put in a museum or fallen to some iconoclast fanatic (He calls it “Kala Pahar”, a synonym for an Islamic destroyer of Hindu/Buddhist temples ).

Tagore pointed out that the usual practice was of building a library or a school to commemorate the great people, but then, such structures were not everlasting. But fairs “melas” are the only means of spreading their messages to the common people, well beyond the handful of the city-based educated people.<sup>15</sup>

### **Hindu “Mandirs”/ Temples**

Next, he takes up the philosophy of life as conveyed by Hindu “Mandir”/ temple.<sup>16</sup> This was based on his first visit to the temple at Bhubaneshwar (Odisha), and that opened a new book of knowledge for him, when he realized that they have been telling a story for centuries. There were many temples, lying broken and shattered where no Puja was offered any more, but depicted so much of our culture. The walls of the temple have engravings-just not of the sacred-”Dashaabataras” and “Pauranik” stories but also describing the every day happenings in human life, and one, initially felt that such portrayals were inappropriate for a temple. These depict everything-the trivial and the profound, and has everything-the sacred and the profane together.

Tagore reminded that nothing like this are to be found in a Church, based as it was on a binary concept of earth and heaven, mundane life and the sacred, as if they were two distinct separate domains, but this was not so in the Hindu philosophy.

Tagore was shocked initially when he saw that kind of engravings on the temple wall at Bhubaneshwar, being trained in the English ways from childhood. But then, he sensed a deep message from this where the human beings – mobile, active and dust- laden are found so close to the Deity. The message coming out loud and clear is- “God is not very far from us- not in a Church but within us”.<sup>17</sup>

### **On Sister Nivedita**

We get another perspective on what Tagore thought should be most welcome in the India of his dream. For example, we may take up his very interesting experiences with the famous multi faceted personality of Sister Nivedita, originally Margaret Nobel (1867-1911) of Irish stock, whom she met soon after her arrival in India. Initially, he took her as a typical English lady missionary, and met her to request if she could teach his daughters. When she wanted to know from him what sort of education he expected from her, he told that it was to be the English language and whatever was usually taught in that medium. She responded by saying that an external imposition in the name of education was not a good idea and real education must re-kindle the inherent genius of a human being and that cannot be achieved by an alien system.<sup>18</sup>

On the whole, Tagore admitted that there was hardly any difference between her opinion and his own thinking on such matters. He again requested her to teach according to her own ideas, but she again turned it down saying that this was not her kind of job. By then, she had already started a school for the girls in Baghbazar. Even when Tagore admitted that her path was not his, yet praised her for transcending her European upbringing, and dedicating herself to our people - an unique and rare feat that was to be seldom found. Having suffered the neglect of her relatives, her own society back in England, and then being confronted with the callousness and timidity of the people for whom she had sacrificed herself, she had completely committed herself to the people of India. She highly deserved our respect- not because she was a Hindu but she was Great- and called her "Lokmata". Furthermore, Tagore said, that when she spoke of "our people" she really meant it.<sup>19</sup>

This "Sati Nivedita has been engaged in "Tapsaya" day after day in an ill-ventilated and stuffy room in the hot and humid summer despite the earnest request of doctors and friends not to live there. But then, she had found her Shiva in the poor man's hut," as Tagore noted with great admiration.<sup>20</sup>

### **On the setting up of a Hindu University**

Tagore held that the Western education, when it was first introduced in the country, was contemptuous of eastern system, "Prachya vidya" and this aversion had continued to grow ever since, and went on to cause



a rupture with the house of Mata Saraswati – the Goddess of Learning. Tagore bemoaned that while the east had shut its window to the west, the latter had closed its window to the east. Fortunately, things were changing fast and people were realizing the importance and value of the eastern knowledge system.

His emphasis on the revitalization of the Hindu psyche and Hindu mindset comes out repeatedly. He regretted that once upon a time, the Hindus had been creative and had crossed the high seas, had carried on trade and commerce all over the globe, were endowed with a conquering nature, and had encouraged all kinds of innovation and progressive ideas. Its womenfolk possessed heroism and knowledge. Unfortunately, the static had become a synonym for the Hindu Samaj. Hence the idea of a Hindu University sounded positive, and Tagore wanted the idea of Hindutva to bloom.

Tagore reiterated that it was all the more necessary because many people still held the view that when the Hindus already got Tols and Chatuspathis where was the need for an university ? But fortunately, such people are declining in number, and he welcomed such a positive change of attitude. On the whole, Tagore was sympathetic to the idea of a Hindu university, a thought which he felt was even unthinkable fifty years back.<sup>21</sup>

### **Bihar Earthquake 1934**

Tagore had differences with Gandhi, which had first surfaced when Gandhi had launched the Non-cooperation Movement in 1920-21, and that is too well known. But then, both had maintained a cordial relationship throughout. Tagore was a God-fearing great romantic poet, but he would never support superstition and orthodoxy of any kind. Hence it caused him painful surprise to find Gandhi accusing those who blindly followed the pernicious practice of untouchability “of having brought down God’s vengeance upon certain parts of Bihar, evidently specially selected for his desolating displeasure. It is all the more unfortunate, because, this kind of unscientific view of things is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen—”. Tagore said further, “If we associate ethical principles with cosmic phenomenon, we shall have to admit that human nature preaches its lessons in good behavior in orgies of the worst behavior possible”.

While remaining “immensely grateful to Mahatmaji for introducing, by his wonder-working inspiration, freedom from fear and feebleness in the minds of his countrymen, feel profoundly hurt when any words from his mouth may emphasize the elements of unreason in those very minds, which is fundamental source of all the blind powers that drive us against freedom and self-respect”.<sup>22</sup> Tagore had made his stand clear- that there must be a rational basis for our mundane existence.

There is another dimension of Tagore-his interest and involvement in the on-going freedom movement.<sup>23</sup> Various actions in his life, from inspiring those opposing the first partition of Bengal to his renouncing knighthood after the massacre at Jallianwala bagh throw much light on his political commitment. Distressed and shocked at what the British had wreaked on the hapless people there, Tagore protested to Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy of India,

“The enormity of the measures taken by the government in Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The very least I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to my protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguished terror. The time has come, when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings”.<sup>24</sup>

Encouraging Gandhi with his “Eklacholo Re” or feeling hurt and coming out on the side of Subhas Chandra Bose when he was thrown out by the Congress came easily to this iconic savant. We may now look at another unwarranted debate which erupts from time to time regarding our national anthem: “Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka”. There has been much speculation on the origin of this song penned by Tagore. In a letter written to one Pulin Bihari Sen (20, Nov 1937), he wrote that the concept of “Bharata Bhagya Bidhata” (Thou Dispenser of India’s Unity) can’t be a V<sup>th</sup>, or VI<sup>th</sup> or any George, and he composed this song only after a high official of the Raj had requested him to compose paens of praise to welcome the Emperor of India, who was about to visit India, This had caused him both surprise and anger. This preposterous proposal had impelled him to compose this, affirmed Tagore.<sup>25</sup>

### **Socio-Economic Dimensions in Tagore's Thoughts**

Tagore's India was just not the glory of ancient culture, its scenic beauty, trauma and anti-colonial movement and course-correction he would occasionally suggest. He was pained at the assassination of Swami Shradhanand by a Muslim in Delhi, and was shocked at the genocide of Hindus by the Moplahs.<sup>26</sup>

Tagore was more than a philosopher, poet and a prophet. He had some of the most original ideas regarding the reconstruction of the country and the moulding the character of the people. That stretched from setting up cooperatives in rural India to help the peasants, getting involved in anti-Malaria drive to setting up the ideal school and higher centres of learning like setting up Vishwa Bharati to lending his voice in support of Benaras Hindu University- as we have referred before.

### **His Ideas on non-Indian matters.**

Before we conclude this essay, we will very briefly sketch some of his other ideas relevant to his conception of India and his expectations from Indians.

Decrying the habit of many Indians blindly imitating the British like dressing up like them, taking up their dietary habits, doing and speaking, as if every thing done by the them were good, he pointed out such a behavior pattern kept us away from what he described the authentic Englishness. After all, English people themselves were not the imitating types. They have progressed because of their "independent thinking and effort. Hence, just enjoying things and imitating the habits of other people did not go into the making of Englishness. So if we just want to be seen as Englishmen, real Englishness would elude us".<sup>27</sup>

### **Towards a Conclusion:**

Gurudev was a polymath, a rare genius who was always on the move mentally, spiritually and physically engaged in an unending cross-country race-appreciating the best from every corner, conscious of the fault-lines whether Indian or non-Indian. In Tagore's eventful career spanning over 80 years, he had travelled extensively to various parts of the world, lived for long periods there, and met with various sections of the people and pondered deeply over various matters. It is a remarkable

testimony to the unique genius of Tagore that he could find time to observe so many things and reflect so well on a wide variety of issues and write it down for posterity. There is much we may still learn from Tagore to bring about a qualitative improvement in our national life and the mindset of its people.

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> R.C. Majumdar, History and Culture of Indian People. British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance. Part, I and Part ii. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1963/1968 and 1965./1991. David Kopf, British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969.  
Anil Seal, Emergence of Indian Nationalism, Cambridge University Press, 1968. B.B. Mishra, Indian Middle Classes. Their Growth in Modern Times. OUP 1979. Kenneth Jones, Social Religious Reform Movements in British India, Cambridge University Press, 1989  
Rudra Pratap Chattopadhyaya, —————.  
Saradindu Mukherji, “New Politics, New Culture: An Exploration into the Origins of the Socio-Religious Ideas of Raja Rammohan Roy”, paper presented at the international conference on “Indian Pluralism and Warren Hasting’s Regime” at University of Wales Conference Centre, Gregynog, Powys, 18-20, July 2012.(Unpublished)  
I am grateful to Priyadarshi Dutta for helping me get the right expression for some Bengali words/used by Tagore into English, and various other interesting ideas from time to time.
- <sup>2</sup> Nirode Chandra Choudhury, Autobiography of An Unknown Indian. P.377 Jaico, Bombay, 1971. To have a flavor of the times, see Rajnarayan Bosu, “Se Kaal Aar E Kaal”, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, 1879. Writing to Romain Rolland (14 Oct 1919), Tagore wrote, “— you must know that in the Asia of the present age, intellect and all means of expression remain unorganized. Our minds are disunited and our thoughts scattered. The vocal sections of our countrymen is mainly occupied with mendicant politics and petty journalism. The cramping poverty of our life and its narrowness of prospect tend to make most of our efforts feel and our aims immediate. We greatly need some outside call to make us conscious of our mission. K. Dutta and A Robinson, Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology. Picador, London 1997. pp.166-67.
- <sup>3</sup> I have primarily based this essay on few volumes of Rabindra Rachanabali(in Bengali original), Vol. xii and vol. xiii in particular. Hereafter all references from them would be referred by vol. no. and

- page. Nos. RR. Vol. 13, Ancient Literature (Prachin Sahitya) p. 662 1-9).
4. RR. 13, pp. 863-867. Tagore further explains that with few examples from Europe. It would be fascinating to note his familiarity with the achievements of the Hungarian poet Maurus Jokai (1825-1904) and the Polish poet (Kraszeuski (1812-1888). He pays glowing tribute to them for the writings on children as well as on science, philosophy and history that inspired their people.
  5. "History of Bharatborsho" (Bharatbarsher Itihas), RR Vol.12. pp. 1027-1034.
  6. Ibid.
  7. R.R. 13, pp, 464-469.
  8. R.R. 12, pp, 1027-1034.
  9. Ibid.
  10. Ibid.
  11. R. R. 13, pp, 662(1)-662(7)
  12. R.R. 13, pp, 439-491. RR. 10, pp, 521.
  13. RR.10, "Buddhadeva" pp, 467-500, also Saradindu Mukherji, "Tagore on Non-violence and Buddhism" in Niraj Kumar, Lama Chosphele Zotpa, et al, ed., Tagore's Refuge Unto Buddha: Proceedings of National Seminar on Rabindranath Tagore's, Engagement with Buddhist Culture, pp.82-93. Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association & Sumedha Books, Delhi, 2012.
  14. R.R. 12, pp, 675-677.
  15. R.R. 13, pp, 139-140.
  16. R.R. 14, pp, 752-55.
  17. ibid.
  18. RR.13 Vol. pp. 192-199.
  19. Ibid.
  20. R.R. Ibid.
  21. Ibid.
  22. K. Dutta and A Robinson in Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology Picador, London 1997 op.cit pp. 234-235.
  23. R.R.10, "Mahatma Gandhi", pp. 441-465. "Tagore was not involved in politics" said Pearl Buck. Sahitya Akademi, A Centenary Volume. Rabindranath Tagore 1861-1961(Delhi, 1961, 1987), p.119. Bhikhu Parekh, Debating India. Essays on Indian Political Discourse, OUP, Delhi, 2015, "Gandhi-Tagore Debates, pp. 59-92.
  24. Tagore to Viceroy of India, 31 May 1919. Tagore wrote, when the freedom fighters were shot at, see "Hijli O Chottogram", RR.13, pp, 392 -394

- <sup>25</sup> RR.14, pp. 1013-1014.
- <sup>26</sup> Swami Shradhdhananda, RR.13,pp, 358-362.pp,318-320. Tagore also mentions Dr Moonje's report submitted to Sankaracharya.
- <sup>27</sup> RR 12 .p.681. Also see, "On Imperialism", the title is in English but content is in Bengali. RR.12 p. 963. Then there is his fulsome admiration for the likes of Gladstone, the liberal Prime Minister of England for four terms, well- known for his "liberal" policy towards India- whatever that meant in the overall imperial system of domination and subjugation of the colonized people. For the young Tagore, one of the cherished expectations of visiting England was to listen to the "oratory of Gladstone" amongst other things- like Max Mueller's scholarly discourse on the Vedas and Carlyle's lofty ideas. In fact, the poet was immensely impressed by the way Gladstone used to make speeches in the Parliament and there are eight references to him in his vivid portrayal of the proceedings of the Parliament. (RR. 10, pp. 254-55). He also noted as to how, just after Gladstone finished his speech, most of the members used to leave and only six to seven members were left sitting.

## What Gandhiji Tried to Achieve

Dharampal\*

GANDHIJI AND KASTURBA returned from South Africa to India on 9 January 1915. Within a day or two of their return he told journalists in Bombay: 'I propose to reside in India and serve the motherland for the rest of my life.'<sup>1</sup> And this turned out exactly as he had resolved: between the day of his arrival and the day he fell to an assassin's bullet in January 1948, he left India again only once for a period of four months to attend the second Round Table Conference on India organised by the British in London in 1931. Out of the total period of some thirty-three years, he spent about six years in British jails, about seven years in his Ashram at Sabarmati and a total of six years in his Ashram at Sevagram and at Wardha.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the period i.e. the balance fourteen years, he spent travelling around the country, whether it was as in the first year – to acquaint himself with his country and his people, or to prepare more or less single handedly for the Rowlatt Satyagraha or for the cause of *Khaddar* and Swadeshi, or of the Harijans or for Hindu-Muslim unity or for hundreds of other things which over the years demanded his presence or attention. The more prominent places that he visited during these thirty-three years exceeded 2000.<sup>3</sup>

Gandhiji's return to India was widely acclaimed by ordinary people as well as the elite. Many Indian newspapers carried long lead articles and news coverage of his visits to various places. For many of them, his coming was akin to that of a long-awaited *avatar*. The elite of Bombay, including its industrialists, financiers, members of the British Governor's council, judges and other public figures assembléd in hundreds to accord Gandhiji and Kasturba an unprecedented welcome.<sup>4</sup>

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\* Late Shri Dharampal, was a renowned scholar and Gandhian. The article was published in "Understanding Gandhi" by Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa (2003).

Within days of his return, people in many places insisted on themselves drawing the vehicle in which he was carried in procession. This first happened at Rajkot on 17 January and then again on 1 February; in Calcutta on 12 March; in Rangoon on 17 March; and in Madras on 17 April 1915.<sup>5</sup> At several other places he refused to be so treated and started walking instead.

Some of his public meetings during the very first month of return were chaired by the prime ministers (Diwans) of the respective states. Some of the Kathiawar rulers whom he visited paid him return visits: the ruler of Gondal embraced Gandhiji while he was being carried in procession there on 24 January while Gandhiji's wife, Kasturbai, was presented an address at a public meeting presided over by the Rani of Gondal.<sup>6</sup> A printed address in Gujarati at Jetpur (Kathiawar) on 21 January 1915 saluted him as 'Shriman Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi'. According to another report on 27 January he was addressed as 'Jagat Vandaneeya Mahatma' at Gondal.<sup>7</sup> He was honoured as 'Karmaveer Mahatma Gandhi in Gondal'.<sup>8</sup> Again in March he was addressed as Mahatma at Gurukul Kangri<sup>9</sup> near Haridwar, both centres of indigenous learning and associated with the sacred. He was once again addressed as 'Mahatma' at Gurukul Kangri on 10 April. Though he may not have been so addressed in print till 1917 or 1918 it seems that within a year of his return he was looked upon and addressed as 'Mahatma' generally.

The distinctiveness of Gandhiji when he returned to India was symbolised, firstly, by the theory and practice of Satyagraha which he had developed over the previous twenty years in South Africa, and secondly, by the views stated in *Hind Swaraj*. Perhaps far more potent elements that made innumerable people treat him with great affection and deference, and to insist, for instance, on personally drawing the vehicles in which he was carried in procession or spontaneously hailing him as 'Mahatma', were his simplicity in living as well as in manner and idiom, and the attributes of his saintliness. His method of resistance against injustice a method with which Indian society had traditionally been familiar even though it had forgotten its public use,<sup>10</sup> and its success against a modern, powerful and oppressive government like the Government of South Africa must also have made him appear as an illustrious hero.

In 1915 in India there were two principal sets of actors: the subjugated native population more or less at a loss and not knowing



how to regain their individual and social dignity and the British ruling power which till then firmly believed that India was its to keep for centuries. No doubt there existed other groups, communities, social movements, etc. But all these led largely parallel existences. While at times their actions may have even tended to split the people and dishearten them further, they had little lasting impact on the British rulers.

But from about 1916 three new actors entered the scenario. The first was Gandhiji himself. Within a year or two of his entry a deep conviction captured the Indian people that a man of destiny had arrived. The second was the transformation of the Indian National Congress a transformation complete by 1920 – into a broadbased political arm of a regenerated nationalism daring even to boycott. British-sponsored institutions, like the law courts, educational institutions, the civil service, the army and even attempting to set up alternate structures in their place. The success of such daring was represented by the emergence of innumerable national schools and vidyapeeths and the expansion of grassroots membership in the Congress by around 50 lakhs in mid 1921.<sup>11</sup> The third element which Gandhiji directly began to fashion was a growing cadre of well-trained, disciplined and ascetically inclined men and women who in subsequent years fanned out over the country, ever ready to do what Gandhiji willed.

It is the interaction of these three new elements on the two basic constituents (the people of, India on the one hand and the British rulers on the other) that holds the story of the Indian freedom struggle and what it aspired to achieve. As the direction of the struggle and the content of the aspiration were both largely defined by Gandhiji, he remained for nearly three decades – the prime mover on the scene. Not that there were no critics of what he propounded from time to time. These were in plenty and even from amongst the ascetic cadre and indeed, time and again, for one reason or another he himself seemed to lose confidence.<sup>12</sup> During these moments he publicly retraced and changed track, talked of his Himalayan blunders, tested himself allover again till he had regained his confidence and could return to his role at the helm fresh as ever.

The overt and more tangible outcome of these three decades the freeing of India from British rule came in historically tragic circumstances. While independence was welcome in itself, its structure was felt to be disappointing in many ways as it belied the hopes and

aspirations on which Gandhiji had based the struggle for freedom. On the other hand, the successes achieved were also quite surprising: not only the quitting of the British from India but the regeneration of a sense of dignity amongst the majority of India's people especially in the 1920s and 1930s and the widespread political consciousness even amongst those who still felt suppressed or ignored.

Thus a proper reappraisal of this period is essential in view of its significance to India's history. We need to understand not only its complexity but also the functioning of the mind of Gandhiji, the prime mover of the period. For nearly thirty years lakhs of people followed him whether in direct political roles or in other multiple tasks he entrusted them. While these individuals may have influenced him in formulating and coming to decisions, they remained essentially his pawns willing pawns no doubt in the battle for freedom not only against a specific and mighty adversary but against an entire world-view as well.

Mahatma Gandhi's long and eventful life may be divided into four distinct periods.

The first comprised his two or three years in England (1889-1891) and the years in South Africa (1893-1914). These were the years during which he tried to come to an understanding of how the world worked. He also tried to grasp the nature of the British as well as the South African European state and society. He also put to experiment and test his methods to resist and overcome the treatment received by Indians and other non-whites living in these Western societies.

From 1915-1919 (the second period), we find him largely trying to comprehend India and the mind and *svabhava* of the country's people and to enunciate his views on scores of matters. In a way it was during these five years that he gradually spelt out his views on the basis and structure essential for the renewal of Indian society. He now equated *swadeshi* with loyalty to the neighbourhood,<sup>13</sup> deprecated the use of English – a foreign language and stressed that each region of India use its own language as a medium of mutual communication.

The years 1920-1942 (the third phase) is the period during which he set out to consolidate and implement his vision. Undoubtedly, with the passing of time, there was a vast extension and multiplication of activities as well as institutions.

The period beginning from 1944 till his death was the final phase. As it unfolded, matters did not work out as Gandhiji would have

ferverently wished. What he had deplored in his preface to *Hind Swaraj* in 1910 came to pass: while the Englishmen retired, the British system gained the upper hand. Additionally the country was divided: there was a widening gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims, and great bloodshed.

### **Phase I: (1889 -1914)**

Gandhiji achieved fame at a fairly early age. By 1909, a biography had already been published by Joseph Doke entitled *Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*. By December 1909 he had written his most seminal text, *Hind Swaraj*.

As Gandhiji was defiant by nature when faced by injustice of any kind, he found himself gradually and by the force of events – assuming the role of leading the Indians in South Africa to assert their rights, to put aside their fear and to become courageous. He recreated the art of passive resistance (an ancient Indian attribute) and called it ‘*satyagraha*’. Over twenty years of this struggle is vividly described in *Pahila Girmitiya* (a new book recently published in Hindi).<sup>14</sup>

Along with his South African Indian colleagues, Gandhiji not only waged major non-violent campaigns against South African injustice and oppression, but continually argued the justice of the Indian stand before the South African as well as the British authorities. An understanding of the principled stand that Gandhiji adopted in these negotiations is provided in a letter by Lord Ampthill, a former British Governor of the then Madras Presidency, to General Smuts, representing the South African European Government. In it, Lord Ampthill wrote:

I went to see Mr. Gandhi yesterday afternoon and spoke to him in accordance with your suggestions, but without saying that they came from you. I found him as clear, convincing, and unyielding from his point of view as you are from yours, and after two hours of argument, in which we discussed the question from every standpoint, practical, political, legal and ethical, I came away in despair of any compromise.

Mr. Gandhi is contending for a principle which he regards as essential and, so far as I can judge, he is no more likely to abandon a cause which he considers vital and just than any of us are likely to abandon our life-long

principles of politics or religion. Indeed it seems to me that he is less likely to do so, for there are few of us who would sacrifice everything in order to secure a theoretical and unavailable right. It is impossible not to admire the man, for it is evident that he recognizes no court of appeal except that of his own conscience.<sup>15</sup>

What Gandhiji said and did between 1893-1914 during his days in South Africa created a great impression even in the world at large. He mobilised the people of Indian origin living in South Africa, gave them courage and a sense of self-respect to battle successfully with the South African European authorities for their honour and human dignity. His work made both the people and the political leaders of the enslaved and colonized countries wonder how this newly arisen group, small in numbers and without any arms, could stand up to the might of the Western world. Thus when Gandhiji finally returned to India on 9 January 1915, several Indian newspapers *The Hindu*, *The Leader*, *The Tribune* etc wrote long lead articles discussing his arrival and looked up to him for achieving great things for the country.

## **Phase II: (1915 - 1919)**

On his return to India in January 1915 Gandhiji accepted Gopal Krishna Gokhale's advice 'and decided that he would go over the country for one year, and, after studying things for himself, he would decide his line of work.'<sup>16</sup> He spent 1915 travelling extensively (going as far as Shantiniketan, Calcutta, Rangoon, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Delhi, Madras, Bombay, Poona and, of course, all over Gujarat critically observing his countrymen and acquainting himself with his country.

In February 1915 he took a vow to go bare-foot for one year;<sup>17</sup> After three months, on 10 April 1915<sup>18</sup> at Haridwar, he took a vow 'while in India, not to eat more than five things during 24 hours; no meal after sunset; water not included among five; but cardamom and the like was included; nut and its oil treated as one article.' The end of the year found him in Varanasi in time to join the inauguration festivities of the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916 being invited there by the university's founder, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, The inauguration and the main celebration lasted three days and was a glittering affair. It was attended by the powerful and the wealthy in India in addition to the students and teachers of the BHU. The

participants included the British Viceroy who laid the foundation stone of the university building, a large number of Maharajas and other representatives of Indian princely states and many of the leaders of Indian political parties.

At the invitation of Pandit Malaviya, Gandhiji also addressed this great gathering. During his speech he deplored the use of English and stated that if our education had been conducted through its own languages, 'we should have today a free India, we should have our educated men, not as if they were foreigners in their own land but speaking to the heart of the nation.' Referring to the unsanitary conditions of our cities, lanes and even temples, he felt anguished enough to ask that 'if even our temples are not models of roominess and cleanliness, what can our self-government be?' The finery and jewellery displayed at the gathering, especially amongst the princes and the Maharajas, creating 'a most gorgeous show' brought him further pain. Pointing directly to it, he declared that there would be 'no salvation for India' till the wearers stripped themselves of it and held it in trust for their countrymen. According to Gandhiji, India's salvation could only come through its peasants who had been ground down but comprised three-quarters of her population.

The last point he sought to make at which stage he was asked to sit down and had to abandon his speech was that if India were 'to conquer the conqueror', i.e. to regain its freedom, it could only be through fearlessness alone and not through secrecy or the methods of the anarchists. He declared himself 'horrified' by the presence of countless intelligence agents in the city of Banaras and felt that it indicated British distrust of Indians. He considered living in the midst of such security and distrust unbearable for anyone. It were better if the Viceroy 'should die than live a living death.' According to him 'we shall never be granted self-government but we shall have to take it.'<sup>19</sup> His principal exhortation was that Indians must allow India's reality to touch their hearts, and that their minds as well as their hands and feet should begin to move to redeem it.

His speech created such a stir that Mrs. Annie Besant asked him to sit down. But there were simultaneously requests from the audience to continue and explain himself His address never concluded however as the commotion was immense and many of the powerful and bejewelled began to leave the meeting seemingly as a protest to what they had heard him say.<sup>20</sup>

It did not take Gandhiji long to act according to what he had advocated at the Banaras Hindu University. He spent the next three years from 1916 to 1918 in publicly spelling out his ideas on the chief concerns of the period: Swadeshi,<sup>21</sup> Hindi as a language of communication between different parts of India,<sup>22</sup> the various Indian languages serving similarly in their respective regions and education being imparted in them,<sup>23</sup> the blot of untouchability,<sup>24</sup> Hindu Muslim amity,<sup>25</sup> and the imperativeness of a new system of education.<sup>26</sup> Gandhiji took several steps to achieve this agenda. From about 1918, he began advocating the primacy of the local language and then formally made the proposal a part of the constitution of the Indian National Congress by constituting Congress provinces on the basis of language. He led movements against untouchability, pressing for its complete abolition. He succeeded in attracting the support of the peasantry for his movements to regain freedom and to correct several of the major problems that were disrupting and disintegrating Indian society. It is on the basis of his views that the first Backward Classes Commission was constituted soon after independence, followed several years later by many other similar Commissions. All these eventually resulted in reservations in specialised education and public appointments for those who had been excessively deprived and removed from public life altogether during British rule.

All these ideas and programmes no doubt had previously been advocated from various platforms. Even the value of conscious self-suffering, noncooperation, and non-violent resistance in national regeneration had been discussed and variously admitted before 1915 especially by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.<sup>27</sup> Gandhiji however extended these concepts, giving them newer and wider meanings. Along with these, he continued to attend to various other issues. He corresponded with the railway authorities about the hardships of railway passengers etc,<sup>28</sup> interested himself in the civic problems in Gujarat and of great importance guided the organisation and structuring of the Sabarmati Ashram.

The peasant campaign against the indigo planters in Champaran (1917-1918), the no-tax Satyagraha in the district of Kheda (1918), the Ahmedabad Textile strike (early 1918) and, perhaps, even his efforts at army recruitment for the British empire gave him an opportunity to apply his ideas of conscious self-suffering, noncooperation, etc., in resolving these issues. Equally they provided him with opportunities to

experiment with and test his theories and learn how far he could go or expect ordinary people to voluntarily suffer and non-cooperate in the then given Indian situation.

An occasion for a major confrontation arose in February 1919 when Gandhiji was in the process of recovering from his six month old illness. In place of the war time restrictions on civil liberties that were soon to lapse, the Government of India was proceeding with the enactment of new legislation titled the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill commonly known as the Rowlatt Bills. The Bills were meant to curtail further whatever civic liberties the Indian people then had.

The first protest meeting against the Bills was held in Bombay, under the Chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, on 2 February 1919. As Gandhiji could not attend, he sent a letter instead saying, 'It was their duty to educate public opinion to oppose the Bills with patience and firm determination.' He also added that 'If he were not ill, he would surely have done his share in the agitation against the Bills.'<sup>29</sup>

The Bills, however, seem to have made Gandhiji come alive again. On 8 February he wrote to Pandit Malviya also a member of the Viceroy's Council that 'I at any rate hope that all the Indian members will leave the Select Committee or, if necessary, even the Council, and launch a countrywide agitation.' He further wrote: 'You and other members have said that if the Rowlatt Bills are passed a massive agitation would be launched the like of which has not been seen in India,' and added, 'I am not yet fully decided but I feel that when the Government bring in an obnoxious law the people will be entitled to defy their other laws as well.'<sup>30</sup>

The following day (9 February), he wrote to V. S. Srinivasa Sastri also a member of the Viceroy's Council that the speeches of the Viceroy and other British officers 'have stirred me to the very depths; and though I have not left my bed still, I feel I can no longer watch the progress of the Bills lying in bed.' He continued: 'If the Bills were but a stray example of loss of righteousness and justice, I should not mind them but when they are clearly an evidence of a determined policy of repression, civil disobedience seems to be a duty imposed upon every lover of personal and public liberty,' and 'for myself if the Bills were to be proceeded with, I feel I can no longer render peaceful obedience to the laws of a power that is capable of such a piece of devilish legislation as these two Bills, and I would not hesitate to invite those who think with me to join me in the struggle.'<sup>31</sup>

The same day Gandhiji wrote to Pragji Desai (who had been a fellow satyagrahi with him in South Africa): 'The Rowlatt Bills have agitated me very much. It seems I shall have to fight the greatest battle of my life. I have been discussing things. I shall be able to come to a decision in two or three days.'<sup>32</sup> On 12 February he wrote to the Government of India enquiring about the decision on the Ali Brothers who had been under detention for too long. On 16 February he informed the counsel for the Ali Brothers that 'I am, however, trying to speed recovery and I still hope that by the time I receive the reply from Delhi I shall be ready for work.'<sup>33</sup> On 20 February he wrote to the private secretary to the Viceroy telling him that 'I am not still out of the wood regarding my health,' hinted about his feelings on the Rowlatt Bills and then devoted the rest of the long letter to the subject of the detention of the Ali Brothers, concluding, 'I shall anxiously await your reply.'<sup>34</sup>

On 23 February he wrote to his former private secretary in South Africa: 'Passive resistance is on the topics regarding certain legislation that the Government of India are passing through the Council. The war council meets tomorrow at the Ashram.'<sup>35</sup> Still retaining his humor, he wrote to his youngest son the same day, 'a meeting of satyagraha warriors is to take place in the Ashram on Monday. The final decision will be reached after considering what weapons each has and how much of ammunition. If you have read Shamal Bhatt's description of Ravan's war council, Mahadevbhai will not have to recount Monday's history.'<sup>36</sup>

The following day (24 February), he drafted the Satyagraha pledge and signed it along with his colleagues<sup>37</sup> and the same day sent a 250-word telegram to the Viceroy informing him of the pledge, making an appeal to him and inviting an early reply.<sup>38</sup> The moment of which Gandhiji had written a year earlier had arrived fairly quickly: 'If India carries out my plan, the Government of India will be properly humbled; Hindus and Muslims, never united, will become so ... and we shall hear the triumph of non-violence proclaimed all over the world.'<sup>39</sup>

During the next few days Gandhiji was engaged in various preparations for the impending Satyagraha. On 1 March, he arrived in Bombay, on 4 March in Delhi where he also met the Viceroy who 'advised against Satyagraha'<sup>40</sup> He next visited Lucknow and Allahabad, returned to Bombay on 13 March and left on 16 March for Madras. From Madras he visited Tanjore, Trichinopally, Madurai (where he also visited the Meenakshi temple), Tuticorin, Nagapatnam, and Vijayawada. During this one month, large public meetings were held



wherever he went but as he was too weak to stand or to speak, his written speeches were read out for him to the respective audiences. On 19 March he decided that the Satyagraha should begin on Sunday 6 April 1919 as a day of fast, prayer and hartal. Delhi, somehow, observed the day a week earlier, on 30 March. The people of Delhi had organised an impressive and complete hartal and Swami Shraddhanand addressed a huge public meeting from the foot-steps of the Delhi Jama Masjid.

The preparations during the previous four to five weeks, the enthusiastic response which Gandhiji's call had received and the stir which had been created made the British central authority panic. In Delhi, the police and the military were called in and shot at assembled people, killing many. Retrospectively, given their outlook, the British had little option. If they had compromised or hesitated, they would have lost face. More or less predictably, they over reacted instead, the result leading to the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and similar killings in many other places. Whether the protest was so intended or not, the Rowlatt Satyagraha became a trap into which the British fell with their eyes open.

### **Phase III: (1920-1942)**

Having worked out a model of the 'desirable society' as well as being in love with experiments (whether on food or on problems of the soul or of society or of politics) Gandhiji greatly welcomed any opportunity of interacting with others either in cooperation or confrontation. This period thus saw the launching of several India-wide movements: the revival, promotion and widespread production of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, campaigns for abolishing the practice of untouchability and for treating women as equals of men and entrusting them with public responsibilities. They also included campaigns for boycotting British created schools' ana colleges, British courts of law and other British institutions and in their place establishing alternate indigenously structured and directed educational and other institutions. Other movements emphasised regional Indian languages, seeking to make them the medium of regional learning and communication. Still other initiatives sought to bring about hygiene and cleanliness in public places in towns as well as villages and restore Indian industries and crafts.

The period from 1920 to 1942 in a general sense may be taken to constitute several replays of the period 1915-1919. True, the issues

changed from period to period and so also their solutions and remedies, but essentially most of what happened in the later years is comparable to that which had gone before during 1915-1919. Undoubtedly with the passage of time there was a vast extension and multiplication of activities as well as institutions. But basically the model of these was the Satyagraha Sabha of March 1919,<sup>41</sup> the Ashram at Sabarmati established in March 1915<sup>42</sup> and of course the National Congress after 1919 to which Gandhiji had given an elaborate constitution in 1920.<sup>43</sup>

The years 1920 onwards was the period of Mahatma Gandhi's supremacy both within India and the world at large. He was now a king, a saint, an incomparable hero of the people (the *Karmaveera Mahatma*) all rolled into one.

#### **Phase IV: (1944-1948)**

The period beginning from 1944 is the final phase. Believing as he did that any single individual who had risen above his passions could on his own move the world, Gandhiji concluded that as events did not move in the direction he had planned and intended, this must be due to his own imperfection.<sup>44</sup> This led him into a period of much greater and intensified testing of himself to find out where his imperfection lay. On 24 February 1947 he said to Thakkar Bapa, one of his close colleagues: 'Ever since my coming to Naokhali, I have been asking myself the question, "What is it that is choking the action of my *ahimsa*? Why does not the spell work? May it not be because I have temporised in the matter of *brabmacharyai*?'

This state of self-doubt and the mode of the tests – especially as they did not appear to mend matters in any appreciable degree led to unhappiness and doubts about his godliness amongst many who had for decades been close to him in his various endeavours. They also eroded his standing and perhaps made him appear to some as a person who had lost his saintliness and his path of virtue.

There were other consequences: the loss of confidence in himself and the pain resulting from it and his overall feeling of being unhappy, cornered and seemingly helpless provided an opportunity to many who felt they had been kept on a tight leash for far too long. They had hitherto stayed by him due to lack of other options. They could now break free and return to their former ideological moorings.

The grief and anguish that Gandhiji faced during these years (1946-1948) must however be seen within the context of the time. While there was a certain sadness resulting from the fact that he had not been able to achieve all that he had set out to do, the anguish and grief were largely circumstantial. To an extent it was demanded of him by the situation as well as by the people to whom he expressed this grief and anguish almost daily. Gandhiji perhaps also hoped that by doing so he may be better able to calm the passions and anxieties of those days and bring some courage and comfort to those who heeded his words. Because of the volume of words devoted to it however, and also because of the Indian horror of bloodshed and chaos, the grief and anguish he went through has been allowed to overshadow everything else.

Though it was very disturbing when it actually arrived, Gandhiji had visualised just such a situation, though only speculatively, as far back as 1931. In a long interview to a British correspondent he had then stated: 'Very possibly there will be some serious communal strife when we have got Swaraj, but only for a little while. If you help us to stop it' in the way I suggest, then it may perhaps end itself in the exhaustion or destruction of the one community by the other. There may be jealousies and disputes between factions, interests and (if you insist on the point) even whole provinces.' And he then added: 'But it is not consistent with the self-respect of a country or a race that it should give *carte blanche* to the power of another nation or another race or individual members of it to say "These people cannot manage their own affairs so they gave us a free hand to do it for them".'<sup>45</sup> The fact that the terrible strife occurred in the presence of British power and that the Indians counted upon British intervention giving it *carte blanche* and all that it implied was the major cause of the anguish and despair that he felt, while reflecting on the nature of the people that had been with him now for nearly three decades.

What Gandhiji objectively felt about what was happening may be inferred from one of his published writings in May 1947. In it he observed: 'What is happening is this. With the end of slavery and the dawn of freedom, all the weaknesses of society are bound to come to the surface. I see no reason to be unnecessarily upset about it. If we keep our balance at such a time, every tangle will be solved.'<sup>46</sup> On 28 May 1947, referring to the senseless bloodshed, he told the Chinese Ambassador in India, 'But I feel it is just an indication that as we are throwing off the foreign yoke all the dirt and froth is coming to the

surface. When the Ganges is in flood, the water is turbid. The dirt comes to the surface. When the flood subsides, you see the clear blue water which soothes the eye.”? On 6 June, Gandhiji observed in a letter:

You are gravely mistaken in assuming that as soon as swaraj comes prosperity will flood the country. If, before assuming that, you had used your imagination a bit to see that after 150 years of slavery, we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection, you would not have found it necessary to ask me. I am sure you will understand what I mean, namely, that far greater sacrifices will be needed after the attainment of self-government to establish good government and raise the people than were required for the attainment of freedom by means of Satyagraha.<sup>48</sup>

Three weeks before the formal transfer of power to India, he said to a foreign questioner: ‘When such a mighty power is dislodged a country’s condition becomes even worse. We shall see this if we examine the history of the world. Compared to that nothing has happened in India.’ But he added, ‘That does not mean that an inhuman conduct is justified. It is really shameful. I am pained because we have sullied the noble method by which without shedding a drop of blood we made a great power leave in friendship. I also say that our countrymen are very simple at heart and that the British have taken advantage of that. We are so stupid.’<sup>49</sup> In November 1947 he told a Chinese delegation, ‘Peace in Asia depends on India and China. These two countries are large. And if they build their edifices on the foundation of Ahimsa they will become known among the great countries of the world?’<sup>50</sup> The following day, in a message to Malaya, he said, ‘The attainment of freedom by India has a unique importance in the annals of world history. Let Asia benefit from it.’<sup>51</sup>

From the above and from numerous other statements and observations of the years 1946-1948 it is evident that Gandhiji was not suffering from despair. He was largely aggrieved by what he termed ‘senseless killings’. His anguish was due to the breakdown of a certain discipline and sense of order that he believed he had been able to impart to the people of India. Alas, there was evident sadness also at the clear reversal of direction imperceptible to begin with on which his colleagues and followers had launched themselves. In another period

and place perhaps he would have immediately and openly disapproved of such a reversal. However, the fact remained that the country was going through a critical period and the British still held the upper hand. Some of his prominent colleagues thought they had already suffered enough and were no longer in a position to continue to resist, especially since they were not certain what was in store for them next. Gandhiji therefore surrendered to seeming inevitability. He had always believed in moving by stages in any case. So even a mere transfer of political power was not to be lightly dismissed. One could still keep striving for the rest.

### **Conclusion**

How then does one assess Gandhiji's impact over the three odd decades that he lived and worked in India? And how does one interpret such a full and complex life? It cannot be by enumerating each of the things he did including the famous Himalayan blunders even though such a course has its own value familiarising the avid seeker who wishes to know how Gandhiji moved from step to step. It is the approach that he brought to each and everything that he did and the manner in which he proceeded in the execution of his ideas that hold crucial lessons and insights.

The first point that one has to accept is that Gandhiji was an incomparable patriot, but of the type that did not feel there was a conflict between his patriotism and universalism as he understood it. According to him, only such a person who was true to himself could be true to his family, neighbour, friends and the world at large. In 1915 Lord Willingdon, the then Governor of Bombay Presidency told Gandhiji that he i.e. Willingdon 'since his coming to Bombay, had not come across a single Hindu or Muslim who had the courage to say "No" [to him].' After mentioning this, Gandhiji told his listeners:

The charge is true even today. We have 'No' in the heart but we cannot say so. We look at the other man's face to know whether he wants 'Yes' or 'No' and say what we think he would like us to say. Here, in this building, I could not make a little girl of three or four do my bidding. I asked her to sit on my lap, but she said 'No'. I asked if she would wear 'Khadi', she said 'No'. We do not have the strength which even this little girl has.<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, he believed that the civilisation of India removed of its later blemishes, disorganisation, etc. was far superior to the civilisation of the modern West. If he had been probed further on this and also properly informed about other civilisations in history, it is quite probable he would have put them at about the same level as the ancient civilisation of India as he himself perceived it. He considered the civilisation of the West to be based on self-indulgence and that of India, on self-control. According to him, 'If we (i.e. the regenerated India) commit violence, it will be as a last resort and with a view to Lok Sangraha. The West will indulge in violence in self-will.'<sup>53</sup> Though he stated this position in 1918, it does not seem that Gandhiji however much he deplored the senseless violence of 1946-47 would have expressed a different view even at the end of 1947 or at any point of time in between.

Gandhiji's constant emphasis on truth and non-violence should not make one overlook or ignore his other attributes. He not only had a vision of the 'desirable society' but was also a great 'law-giver' and an incomparable general. Those whom he moved to great deeds certainly had no known military armaments. They were soldiers nonetheless. To the extent they had adequate courage, discipline, and self-control they were successful in the task they undertook. Those who joined him in his Ashrams, whether in 1915 at Sabarmati or later in its innumerable prototypes in various parts of India, were trained through the practice of the Ashram vows which were founded on the ancient *yama-niyama-vratas* of India. This inevitably meant a life of austerity and hard work, and the imbibing of a spirit of brotherhood in common endeavours with others.

The task before Gandhiji was not only to generate courage and confidence but also toughness and tenacity (perhaps he succeeded better with the latter two qualities') in those who came to him or listened to him at all. His own exemplary conduct, the esteem he commanded, the self-denial and discipline which even ordinary people adopted at his persuasion, and the benefits and experience gained by them in the various battles they joined under his command or approval helped toughen, train and discipline the larger populace. To the extent this self-denial, training and toughening were deficient, they failed in their aims. Whether equipped thus with the most perfect self-denial, training, etc. they would have always succeeded in what they set out to do is debatable. But as Gandhiji would have said, in such an eventuality they

would have willingly perished to the last individual and that according to him would have been success enough.

A curious point needs to be noted here. Most people, indeed practically all of us in actual life, take up extreme positions to begin with and then move by stages on to more moderate positions. With Gandhiji it appeared to be the reverse. Having publicly announced his goal in *Hind Swaraj* and having conceded that the goal was more of an aspiration, he began moving in the most cautious manner. What he demanded at any given point – though it may have had very wide import – was in itself always most moderate and reasonable. Whether it was so intended we do not know, the probability is that his every move and its apparent reasonableness appeared to erode the moral basis of his adversary.

The different issues which Gandhiji undertook to advocate and for which he strived seem to have served the same central purpose. For example, he explained that *Swaraj* was to him like the *vata-vriksha* whose branches struck root in the earth all around it. Therefore, feeding any particular branch was like feeding the whole tree, but it was even better feeding, to change the branch- that was being fed from time to time.

This principle he sought to apply as well to the other issues he advocated and to serve his central purpose. If a battle were to be fought regarding an issue, whether with the alien government or with his own countrymen on the eradication of un-touchability or Hindu-Muslim amity it was seldom over in one strike. In fact it appears that before Gandhiji finally decided on a battle he did much experimenting and testing of all that he could put into the battle. This strategy did not merely apply to an external adversary. Gandhiji seems to have applied it to his own self or to those near him as is evident from his fasts and his experiments in *brahmacharya*.

Gandhiji is often labelled a shrewd Bania which he undoubtedly was but he also made himself a hard-working and innovative Shudra and Antyajya. In his great public roles he was much more of a Kshatriya and a Brahmana but finally it is as a great general that he can perhaps be understood best. A deeper insight into his mind which one may occasionally have from his discussions and letters and a reappraisal of his moves and what he set out to do will disclose that whilst moving from a central idea he would pick up whatever happened to be within his vision and suitable to the purpose he had in view. He would then

test it from time to time the more fragile it seemed, the more the testing. Such testing applied to the perfection of his own *brahmacharya*, as it did to the people's readiness for non-violent conduct, to the role of *khadi* or to the individuals assigned to various roles. Like any great general he had to look after his weakest defences.

If we look at Gandhiji from the point of view of his being a general-like Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata we will be able to account for practically all of his thinking and actions from 1915 to the end. Bringing about a transformation seldom before attempted by any individual required not only total dedication to the achievement of the task (or its varying constituents) but demanded even more a sort of communion with those for whom the end was really meant. It also depended on incomparable organisational and strategical skills. Much of this is well known of course. Yet the 'Mahatmaship' of Gandhiji in a way seems to have made us oblivious of his approach, of the way he went about solving problems, and the designs and strategies of his battles not only against foreign yoke but also against what he treated as evil or misguided in his own people. For instance, his battle designs had advances as well as retreats built in them. As a superb general he knew that there can be few advances without some retreats. It was not so much the physical violence from the adversary, unfortunate though it was, that often decided the retreat but the breakdown of order and discipline that was crucial to success. Further, such retreats seem to have often been planned as such while the advance was intended as nothing more than a probe into the adversary's defenses and a testing of his own strength.

Thus the retreats were not really Himalayan blunders as we have been led to believe but merely the consequences of an elaborate strategy. When these occurred in the battles outside or even within the ashram situation, the point that saddened him appeared to be not so much that the lapses occurred but that he had either overestimated himself or had not done the requisite homework. He had not prepared his strategy properly. The violence that he disliked the most especially in his role as the supreme general of the freedom struggle was of the sporadic category. What hurt him most was the breakdown of the discipline of his forces. While he was against all armed conflict and stood for the resolution of problems by reason and debate, what he was not able to



stand at all was cowardice. To him anarchy was preferable to a dishonest condition. In his view, 'When the basis is evil, a superstructure of good adds strength to the evil.'

In whichever role we try to visualize him, it is doubtful that it would by itself disclose the source of his basic quality or even define it in any satisfactory way. How and when and where he acquired this quality or skill a skill that did not consist solely of mastering the art of passive resistance, etc. but of elements of far greater import may possibly never be known. We can safely assume that what he was able to achieve (and this included the sense of fulfillment and the feeling of nobility that those who came in contact with him felt) as well as what he could not an approximation of the state of *dharma-rajya* that he regarded as his worldly aim were both intimately linked to this basic skill and what he did. Any effort that holds some promise of understanding this quality would be of the utmost value.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a great Indian leader of the early twentieth century, had proclaimed Gandhiji to be a unique individual as early as 1909 at the annual session of the Indian National Congress. Gokhale had said then: 'He is a man who may well be described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may say that in him, Indian humanity at present has really reached its high water-mark.'

In 1920 the Rev. J. H. Holmes, speaking from the pulpit of a famous church in New York, proclaimed Gandhiji as the new Christ. He remarked again the following year: 'When I think of Gandhi, I think of Jesus Christ.'<sup>55</sup>

Gilbert Murray, an Englishman who had closely observed and analysed Gandhiji described what he understood of him in the following words in 1918:

The story forms an extraordinary illustration of a contest which was won, or practically won, by a policy of doing no wrong, committing no violence, but simply enduring all the punishment the other side could inflict until they became weary and ashamed of punishing. A battle of the unaided human soul against overwhelming material force, and it ends by the units of the material force usually deserting their own banners and coming round to the side of the soul!

Murray then added:

Persons in power should be very careful how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes to be right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy – because his body, which you can always conquer, gives so little purchase upon his soul.<sup>56</sup>

From the introduction that he wrote in January 1925 to his *Autobiography*, one can ascertain that Gandhiji was aspiring to something wholly different. In its fourth paragraph, he wrote,

What I want to achieve what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.<sup>57</sup>

This aspiration of Gandhiji towards *moksha* may seem to contradict or ignore what has been said in the foregoing pages of this essay. A careful reading of Gandhiji's writings, even of the introduction to the *Autobiography*, will indicate that there is really no such contradiction. For Gandhiji, seeking *moksha* and 'aspiring for *Hind Storaraj* were one and the same thing; in fact, his *Hind Swaraj* was his *moksha*. In the 'Farewell' to the *Autobiography* he wrote,

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth 'face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as one-self. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.<sup>58</sup>

For Gandhiji (3.12.1925), 'God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone' which made him endeavour, 'to see God through service of humanity.'<sup>59</sup>

That this belief stayed constant with him comes through many other writings. Ten years later, on 29.8.36, he elaborated on this further and wrote,

I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbour. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.<sup>60</sup>

In 1939 he was even more firm on this point and wrote,

I claim to know my millions. All the 24 hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last because I recognise no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.<sup>61</sup>

It is possible that after Gandhiji had achieved his *dharma-rajya*, or perhaps if he had been persuaded to seek God 'in a Himalayan cave', he would have gone there too as countless men since the beginning of time have done in their quest for *moksha*. But as it happened it is clear from these words of his that it was through what he did that he considered he came face to face with God. In this lies his distinctiveness, his present as well as his historical relevance.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, 1, p.193.
- <sup>2</sup> C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.5-6, Speech at Public Reception, Bombay, 12.1.1915.
- <sup>5</sup> C. B. Dalal, *Gandhi, 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*. According to J. B. Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, p.60, those who had come to receive Gandhiji when he first went to Champaran in April 1917, without Gandhiji's knowledge had unhorsed the carriage and drawn it themselves. Kripalani adds there, 'In those days, honoured leaders' carriages were pulled by their admirers.' It would be useful to know, from contemporary newspaper accounts, etc., which other leaders before 1915 had their carriages so pulled by their admirers. It is true that Bal Gangadhar Tilak's carriage was so pulled in Lucknow and a few days later in Kanpur. But that was at the end of 1916. (T. V. Parvate, *B. G. Tilak*, 1958, pp. 350, 355; S.L. Karandikar, *Lokmanya B.G. Tilak*, 1957 pp.433-434; D.Y. Tahmankar, *Lokmanya Tilak*, 1956, p.242).

- <sup>6</sup> C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, 10 April 1915.
- <sup>7</sup> D. Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p.212.
- <sup>8</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.15-16, Speech at Reception by Gondal citizens, 27.1.1915; Mahatma I: Photograph of Address Presented to M.K.G. in Gujarati calling him 'Sriman Mahatma Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi', between pp 216-217 in the original edition of *Mahatma*; also Dhananjaya Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp 212.
- <sup>9</sup> Dhananjaya Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 218.
- <sup>10</sup> *Hind Swaraj*, chapter XVII. Here Gandhiji had stated, 'The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us.' Numerous instances of such resistance can be found in the history of India, even in the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries.
- <sup>11</sup> Sitaramayya, *History*, Vol. 1, p.214
- <sup>12</sup> There were perhaps several occasions during Gandhiji's long public life when his confidence became low. The causes were various. A major loss of confidence seems to have occurred after the February 1943 twenty-one day fast. Within weeks of the fast Gandhiji began to express the feeling that he and his companions were going to be kept in prison for seven years. His release a year later - due to his fast declining health - did not seem to improve matters: it was then said that he had felt perplexed and taken unawares at this release. However, Gandhiji began to assume initiative in several directions, including his talks with Mr. M.A. Jinnah, the reconstitution of the *khadi* and constructive programmes, etc. But the confidence which Gandhiji used to have earlier on perhaps did not get fully restored to him in the remaining years of his life. To an extent his writings of these last four or five years make him appear much more lonely. If this impression has any validity, its causes require deep study.
- <sup>13</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, pp 219-225, Speech on Swadeshi, Madras 14.2.1916.
- <sup>14</sup> Giriraj Kishore, *Pahila Girmittia* (in Hindi, about 900 pages), Gyanpeeth Prakashan, 1999.
- <sup>15</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, Appendix XX (I): p 583, Lord Ampthill to General Smuts on Gandhiji, 10.8.1909.
- <sup>16</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, 0.8, 14.1.1915
- <sup>17</sup> Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, 1973, p.216.
- <sup>18</sup> C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi, 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, April 10, 1915.
- <sup>19</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Gandhiji's speech at BHU 6.2.1916, pp 210-16
- <sup>20</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, pp.216-18; from *Pioneer*, 9.2.1916 and *Bombay Chronicle*, 10.2.1916 on the BHU incident.

21. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.219-25, speech on Swadeshi, Madras, 14.2.1916.
22. *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p.324, interview at Lucknow: national language, 29/31.12.1916.
23. *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p.242, speech on vernaculars and education, Madras, 17.2.1916.
24. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.225-35, speech on Ashram Vows at YMCA Madras, (untouchability, pp 232-3) 16-2-1916.
25. *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, pp.197, speech at Mahomedan Association, Surat, 3.1.1916.
26. *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, pp.297-300, The Present System of Education, October 1916.
27. Tilak advocated the need of a common national language and a common script at a speech at Benares at the Nagari Pracharni Sabha conference in December 1905. In it, referring to the question of the Roman script serving this purpose, he remarked that 'the suggestion appears to me to be utterly ridiculous.' While speaking on 'Tenets of the New Party' at Calcutta on 2.1.1907, Tilak referred to the 'power of self-denial and self abstinence in such a way as not to assist this foreign Government to rule' over Indians, and added, 'We shall not give them assistance to collect revenue and keep peace. We shall not assist them in fighting beyond the frontiers or outside India ... We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts, and when time comes we shall not pay taxes. Can you do that by your united efforts? If you can, you are free from tomorrow.' (*Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speeches*, Ganesh & Co, Madras, Feb 1919, p.31, 65, etc.)
28. *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, pp.64, 114-5, 284, 476-8, 547-31 relate to railway matters. There are railway matters in many earlier and later volumes also.
29. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, p.83, letter to Shankarlal Banker, before 2.2.1919.
30. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, p.66, letter to Madan Mohan Malaviya, B.2.1919.
31. *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp.87-8, letter to VS Srinivasa Sastri, 9.2.1919.
32. *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p.88, letter to Pragji Desai, 9.2.1919.
33. *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p.90, letter to as Ghate, 16.2.1919.
34. *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp.94-5, letter to PS to Viceroy, 20.2.1919.
35. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.96-8, letter to Sonja Schlesin, S. Africa, 23.2.1919.
36. *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp.98-100, letter to Devadas Gandhi, 23.2.1919.
37. *Collected Works*. Vol. 15, pp.101-2, The Satyagraha Pledge, 24.2.1919.
38. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp. 102-3, telegram to PS to Viceroy, 24.2.1919.
39. *Collected Works*, Vol. 14, pp.160-61, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 20.1.1918.
40. C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi*, 1915-1948: *A Detailed Chronology*, 5.3.1919.

<sup>41</sup>. *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp.132-3, Satyagraha Sabha Rules, YI, 12.3.1919. 122

<sup>42</sup>. *Collected Works*, Vol. 13. pp. 91-8, Constitution Sabarmati Ashram, May, 1915.

<sup>43</sup>. *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp.190-98, Congress Constitution adopted at Nagpur, December 1920.

<sup>44</sup>. *Collected Works*, Vol. 87, p.14. Earlier, in the Preface to Vol. 86, the Chief Editor, Prof. Swaminathan, describes the situation in the following words: 'The situation created by the communal fury that had gripped India, just as she was about to take her place among the free nations of the world, had so shaken Gandhiji that for the first time in his half century of leadership we find him no longer sure of himself. It raised for him issues of the greatest moment. The way he saw it was that if he lived by certain values then those values should prevail. If they did not prevail then there was something wrong in him. He must re-examine himself, grapple with himself. That was one of the reasons he chose to walk alone and unaided. "Where do I stand?" he asks. "Do I represent this *ahimsa* in my person? If I do, then deceit and hatred that poison the atmosphere should dissolve. It is only going into isolation ... and standing on my own feet that I shall find my bearings and also test my faith in God.'" (p.134).

'Gandhiji had held that *brahmacharya*, purity of life, was the chief prerequisite for a successful pursuit of truth and he argued that if there had been failure on his part his *brahmacharya* might have been at fault. Pursuing this line of reasoning he started, towards the end of December, his great "experiment in *brahmacharya*" which consisted in his sharing his bed with Manu Gandhi, a young relative. His aspiration, as he explained at a prayer meeting, was to make himself a "eunuch of God". It was an integral part of the *yagna* he was performing (p.420). Since he was engaged in "the supreme test of non-violence in his life, he wished to be judged before God and man by the sum total of his activities, both private and public non-violent life was an act of self-examination and self-purification" (p. 423). 'Gandhiji's co-workers, as was only to be expected, did not quite understand and they were quite upset and one after another began to give frank expression to their disapproval. Writing to Vinobha Bhawe Gandhiji said: "... the co-workers' pain makes me lose confidence in myself. My 23 own mind, however, is becoming firmer than ever, for it has been my belief for a long time that that alone is true *brahmacharya* which requires no hedges. My experiments arose from this belief." (p.452).

He wrote in a similar vein to others (pp.464-5, 465-6, 475-6) trying to explain what could hardly be explained in words. 'As Vinobha says:

“Gandhiji was a great man; nevertheless, he had laid bare his mind in its fullness before the world. For his part, he had permitted no secrecy. Even so, I must confess, the last chapter of his life, which I have called the ‘Swargarohan Parva’, or the chapter of the ‘Ascent to Heaven’, remains a mystery to me. Indeed, in my eyes, it stands equal to the last phase of Lord Krishna’s leela. To unravel its mystery, it may become necessary for Gandhiji himself to be born again.” What consequences this situation had on the leaders of the Indian national movement and thus on the shape of Indian independence seems to require a deep probe.

45. *Collected Works*, Vol. 45 pp.374-7, interview to the *Statesman*; also IOR: MSS Eur C 359: typescript of interview given to Patrick Lacey by Mahatma Gandhi and revised in his hand, Karachi, 1.4.1931.
46. *Collected Works*, Vol.88, p.2. Question Box, Harijan, 1-6-1947.
47. *Collected Works*, Vol.88, pp.26-7, interview to Dr Le Chi Luen, 28-5-1947.
48. *Collected Works*. Vol.88, pp.86-7, A Letter, 6-6-1947.
49. *Collected Works*. Vol.88, p.433, Talk with Kelly, 26.7.1947,
50. *Collected Works*, Vol.89, p.492, interview to Chinese delegation, 6.11.1947.
51. *Collected Works*, Vol. 89, p.494, Message to Malaya, 7.11.1947.
52. *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp. 46-51, Speech at Students meeting, Allahabad, 30.11.1920, esp. pp 46-47.
53. *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.504-5, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 25.7.1918.
54. T.V. Parvate, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Navajeevan, Ahmedabad, 1959, p 110.
55. In Haridas T. Muzumdar, *The Enduring Greatness of Gandhi: An American Estimate* being the sermons of Dr. John Haynes Holmes, Community Church of New York, 1982; Sermon – ‘Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today,’ 1921, p.24.
56. Gilbert Murray, ‘The soul as it is, and how to deal with it,’ in *The Hibbert journal*, January 1918, pp.191-205, esp. p.201.
57. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Introduction dated 26.11.1925 p.xiv (Reprint 1958)
58. *Ibid*, Farewell, pp.370-71
59. R. K. Prabhu, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*
60. *Collected Works*, Vol.63, p.240; A Discussion with Maurice Frydman from *Harijan* 19.8.1936.
61. *Collected Works*, Vol.69, p.33-37; At the time of ending the Rajkot Fast, from *Harijan* 11.3.1939

# Understanding Bharat/India: Some Reflections on the Discourses of Raja Rao, Makarand Paranjape and Rajiv Malhotra

Sudhir Kumar\*

## I. Prastavana (Preface): Being One, Being Different; The Sanaatan/Eternal Lilaa (Play)

The essay is an attempt to critically examine how, in the discourses of eminent writers as Raja Rao, Makarand Paranjape and Rajiv Malhotra, different aspects of Bharat (that is India) and Bharatiya sanskriti (Indian culture) have been represented or inscribed. For the sake of critical convenience, the essay will focus on the four texts Raja Rao's *The Meaning of India*, Makarand Paranjape's *Altered Destinations: Self, Society and Nation in India* and *Cultural Politics in Modern India*, and Rajiv Malhotra's *Being Different: An India Challenge to Western Universalism* in order to illustrate, in brief, the following:-

- (A) The multiple meanings of Bharat(India) remain "dharma-centric" (, that is,dharma-kendrik or dharmik- always inseparably interconnected with the value of ethical obligation/responsibility/duty/justice/cosmic law etc.), contrary to being "dharma-nirapeksha ( in the sense of being "secular")
- (B) Bharat and Bharatiya wisdom-traditions (included in the overarching idea of "paramparaa" – which denotes and connotes the "sanaatan-kaal-pravaah (, that is, the eternal/ timeless flow of time/ moments that transcends the existential

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divisions of time such as present, past and future) suggesting a continuum of “kaal-chetanaa (time or historical sense or consciousness). The difference between fragment and the whole is the result of our ignorance. “Poorna or whole” is, the fragment being the product of our illusion.

- (C) The primary feature of Bharatiya sanskriti (Indian culture) is performative or “aachaar-centric or conduct-centric. It lays emphasis, in all situations and contexts, on the attainment of “atma-bodh/jnana (self-realization)” through constant practice of self-purification (atma-shuddhi) without abandoning the performance of “purusharthas (cardinal principles of life).
- (D) The primary nature of Bharatiya sanskriti (Indian culture) is “advaitic or non-dualistic” dissolving the binary of “one and/or many”, but takes due cognizance of differences also. The differences, in all existential situations and contexts, are to be properly understood in order to be subsequently dissolved into non-dualism or advaita—the state of integral/holistic consciousness.

## **II. Raja Rao: Bharat is Rasa (The Mood or the Essence of the Supreme) and Leela ( Play) !: Reading *The Meaning of India***

According to Raja Rao, Bharat ( Bharat will be used to refer to India in the essay) stands for resolving and dissolving the binaries and contradictions of all kinds- based on race , caste, class, gender, religion, language, culture, ethnicity etc., that have been the cause of so much suffering and agony in the world today. In the “Introduction” to *The Meaning of India*, Raja Rao underlines how Bharat stands for “peace” and “abolition of contradictions”or the realisation of non-dualism or advaita, not only through contemplation but also through practical ethical action:-

I enjoy the juxtaposition of ideas. I play. The end, I have been taught, is not a question of success or defeat, but the abolition of contradictions, of duality- and of the peace it brings to one. I play the game knowing I am the game. That, is the meaning of India.( 7)

Thus, in a way, Raja Rao translates the essence of the Vedic/ Vedantic great utterances or mahavakyas (“Prajnanam Brahma”,*Rigveda* and *Aitareya Brahman-3.3*, “Tat TvamAsi”- *Samaveda* and *Chhandogya*

*Upanishad- 6.8.7, "Ayamatma Brahma"- Atharvaveda and Mandukya Upanishad- 1.2, "Aham Brahmasmi "-Yajurveda and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad-1.4.10, "Sarvam KhaluIdam Brahma"- Chhandogyopanishad-3.14.1* into practical advaita (non-dualism) that is needed in order to establish peace and harmony in the world. Bharat, according to Raja Rao, tells us, quite unambiguously, that this world can experience lasting peace only when we, the world-citizens, who have,for long, been fighting with one another for maintaining and justifying our conflicting contradictions, realize the significance of abolishing and dissolving the contradictions non-dualistically, through practical advaita (non-dualism). Raja Rao recontextualizes *Atharvaveda's* "Shanti Mantra" (19.9.14) in order to underpin how human beings have to learn to live in harmony with entire earth, atmosphere/space, herbs, flora and fauna, in other words, with all the constituent five elements (earth, water, fire, ether/space, air) abandoning the continuous exploitation of these elements for commercial/economic success or profit. Bharat/Bharatiya sanskriti, through the practical application of advaita (non-dualism) in all human matters, implies the cessation of contradictions and conflicts that have been the root cause of violence, terrorism and corruption in the world today. Yet is important to remember that one has to properly understand dualism/differences first in order to transcend them through the higher state of wisdom or consciousness that is non-dualism or advaita. Raja Rao, therefore, states that " If there were no duality there would be no world"(13).

Bharat also stands for the cultivation of advaita or non-dualism through right living that demands making all our actions, thoughts and words, sacred- which is the true meaning of "sacrifice":- "This continuous and spontaneous sacrifice is right living" (14). This is what Raja Rao refers to as "rasa" (mood or essence) of Bharat. In order to underline the idea that Bharat and its sanskriti (culture) does not admit of "other/others" and considers everything to be a part of pure consciousness (the cosmic triad that unifies all- sat-truth, chit-consciousness, ananda-bliss), he cites Yagnyavalkya's famous response to Maitreyi's probing questions about the meaning of existence (from *Brihadaranyak opanishada*):- " For, where there is *duality*, as it were, one sees the other. But when everything has become one's own self, one touches the other. But when everything has become one's own Self, what is there to see, and what to know. Above all how should one know the knower? *Vijnataramare ken vijaniyat?* This Maitreyi is the

final instruction. Such indeed is life eternal” (180-181). Raja Rao reinforces the advaitic or non-dualistic message and meaning of Bharat by referring to the Uddalaka-Svetaketu story from *Chhandogyopanishada*:- “That which is the subtle essence of this whole world is the Self. That is the true, *tad satyam*. That is the Self, *sa Atma. Tattvamasi, Svetaketu, iti*. That you are, Svetaketu”(183).

It should, however, be kept in mind that by offering a non-dualistic or advaitic meaning of life to the world as a key to “*Sarvebhavantusukhinah- Let all be truly happy*”, Bharat/Bharatiya sanskriti never advocates escapism or fatalism in face of complex challenges and contexts where one has to ethically perform one’s *purusharthas* (the four cardinal principles of life - *dharma* or duty/righteousness, *artha*- wealth / political economy, *kama* or desire, and *moksha* or true freedom including the political, economic, social and cultural freedoms) in accordance with the nature of the context or challenge. All human actions, that is the performance of the *purusharthas*, are to be regulated by “*dharma*”- the loaded concept that signifies- moral law, cosmic law, law, ethical action, justice, order, essence, duty, right, nature, punishment, essence, something that holds an object, idea or person etc. In other words, Bharatiya sanskriti (Indian culture) does not imply the denial of dualism; it admits dualism only to suggest how to transcend all forms of dualities and contradictions while performing one’s duties. Thus, if one is pitted against the barbaric acts of violence and terrorism, when all efforts to establish peace through ahimsa/non-violence are exhausted, one must resort to violence as one’s *dharma* only to establish the moral order again as illustrated by the Krishna-Arjuna samvad (dialogue) in the *Bhagavadgita*. *The Manusmriti*, the most misunderstood but the least read cultural text beautifully sums up the ten characteristics of *dharma* (See Chapter 9.62) that no civilized or good society (if it is a truly civilized society) can ever afford to ignore: “*dhriti (patience or forbearance), kshama (forgiveness), damo (self-control), asteyam (non-stealing), shaucham (internal and external cleanliness), indriya-nigraha (sense-control),/ dheer (intellect), vidya (knowledge), satyam (truth), akrodho (non-violence or absence of anger)*”.

It is interesting to note that the *Atharvaveda*( see *BhoomiSukta, Chapter 12.1-65*) lays emphasis on the observance of ethical values on the part of “*praja*” or the nation in order to uphold the sacredness or sanctity of the Mother Earth:- “Salutation to Mother Earth! Truth

(Satyam), the Cosmic Law (Brihad Ritam), exemplary fearlessness, courage and bravery (Ugram), the spiritual power, knowledge and wisdom (Deeksha), capacity to undertake austerities and suffering (Tapas), capability of consecrating every thought, word and action (sacrifice or yajna)- these have sustained the Mother Earth for ages” ( 12.1).

It is the observance of the moral values mentioned above that underlines the meaning of Bharat. The successive governments of Bharat should have tried to nurture, promote and disseminate these values through its programmes and policies. It is unfortunate that even the department of culture has been clubbed with tourism under the control of Ministry of Tourism and Culture. The very nomenclature of the Ministry says it all !!

Raja Rao also tells us that Bharat also spells out the poetics of the non-dualistic or advaitic existence. Through the concept of “Shabda-Brahma” (Word as Supreme Truth), as enunciated so well by Bhartrihari (6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Century CE), in his *Vakyapadiya*, Raja Rao tells us that all the names and forms (*naama* and *rupa*) of all different objects of this creation emanate from the Shabda or Word that is the *Paramartha* or Supreme Truth. Citing Abhinavgupta, Raja Rao states that “All things ... the stones, the trees, the birds, the men, the gods, the demons are all nothing else but the venerable Supreme Word in the form of Shiva-*Sarvasarvatmanaivaparameshwararupinasteiti*” (168-169). He goes on to reaffirm that Bharat has given the world the philosophy of advaita that may help us harmonise the discursive or ideological differences through the concept of Shabda-Brahman (in *Vakyapadiya*- The Word as Supreme Truth- unifying all differences): “The Brahman who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word (sabda), who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world (seems to) proceed. Brahman is called Phoneme (akshara) because It is the cause of the phoneme” (162-163). That is why, Bharat did not culturally or economically colonize or exploit its neighbours as it believes in the all-informing “Pure Consciousness or Isness” that unifies the phenomena of the universe. Raja Rao aptly affirms the non-dualistic vision of Bharat by saying that the “ultimate word in reality is any word. For all words arise from this same Isness, and at the end of the sound, sabda goes back to It” (174).

Needless to say, the Bharatiya (Indian) vision of advaita, if put into practice by those whose moral and political responsibility has

been to eliminate inhumane economic and social inequalities, including the caste system, will result into the annihilation of the ogre of the caste-system and the empowerment of the marginalized and the downtrodden sections of our society.

### **III. Understanding Bharat: Reading Self, Culture, Society, Nation in Makarand Paranjape's Writings**

In the earlier section, it was discussed how Raja Rao interprets the meaning of Bharat from the advaitic or non-dualistic point of view that, to begin with, does not ignore the existential differences and contradictions and suggests a practical spiritual method (*sadhana*) to attain a higher level of consciousness (the highest level being "pure consciousness or advaitic consciousness) that enables us to properly understand and ethically address the conflicts and contradictions for the establishment of peace and harmony in the world. This section deals with how Makarand Paranjape, as a neo-Gandhian cultural theorist and writer, in his two books, namely - *Altered Destinations: Self, Society, and Nation in India* (2009, hereafter cited as *AD* with page numbers in parentheses) and *Cultural Politics in Modern India: Postcolonial Prospects, Colourful Cosmopolitanism, Global Proximities* (2016, hereafter cited as *CP* with page numbers in parentheses) critically examines the perennial significance of Bharatiya (Indian) the spiritual or dharmic world-view that can lead humanity towards true decolonization, freedom, happiness, harmony and symbiotic co-existence, often using the insights of Gandhi's practical spirituality, manifest in his experiments with such concepts as *svaraj* (self-rule) and *satyagraha* (truth-force or soul-force).

Makarand emphatically suggests how Gandhi in his seminal text *Hind Swaraj* (1909) re-constructs and reinforces the Vedantic notion of *svaraj* (*true freedom or liberation, muktior moksha*) that characterizes the meaning of Bharat. He rightly says that "I have found it much better to focus on an indigenous word such as *svaraj* instead of the nation.... Our *svaraj*, the country's *svaraj*, the *svaraj* of millions, and ultimately the *svaraj* of non-Indians as much as Indians- surely all these are interconnected. While the words like 'the nation' may confuse us, *svaraj* is immediate and crystal clear" (*AD*, x). Extending Gandhi's notion of *svaraj* further, he states that in the context of Bharatiya parampara or sanskriti, "no political independence was conceivable

without a concomitant spiritual or moral liberation. *Svarajya*, then, is the principle of perfection, of perfect governmentality, because illumination comes from internal order, not from oppression or rule over others” (*AD*, xi). In this sense, the meaning of Bharat as a civilization implies that the spiritual aspect of *swaraj* in terms of self-knowledge (atma-bodh or jnana) or observance of morality (dharma-acharana or sadachara) cannot be separated from the political dimension of *swaraj* (as political freedom). It is important to underline here that Gandhi did define “true civilization” in *Hind Swaraj* as a *dharma-centric* moral conduct or ethical duty that pervades the entire life-world- including the humans as well as the non-humans, the sacred as well as the secular spheres (which are inalienable in the context of Bharatiya *sabhyata/civilization*):- “Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of duty are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means “good conduct”. (*Hind Swaraj*, 53).

Makarand, in fact, echoes Gandhi’s own famous objections to considering self-rule or *swaraj* as political freedom enabling Bharat to acquire all the trappings of modernity or a modern nation-state (in the western sense) with immense military and economic power (see *Hind Swaraj*, 26-27). Gandhi aptly warned those modern Indian nationalists who mimicked western modern civilization and wished to translate “*swaraj*” or self-rule into the western discourse of political freedom and military power:-

“Editor- You have drawn the picture well. In effect it means this: that we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger’s nature but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when India becomes English, it will not be called Hindustan but *Englistan*. This is not the *swaraj* that I want.” (*Hind Swaraj*, 26)

It is in this context that Makarand underscores the significance of moral/spiritual empowerment implied by the loaded term “*swaraj*” that also stands for political, economic, social and cultural freedoms simultaneously:- “That is why the word *swaraj* might be preferable to decolonization, because *swaraj* is not tied up with the colonizer as decolonization is, In fact, one’s own *swaraj* can only help and contribute to the *swaraj* of others. *Swaraj* allows us to resist oppression without hatred and violent opposition. It was on these grounds that Gandhi

developed the praxis of *satyagraha*, or insistence on truth and truth force, to fight for the rights of the disarmed and impoverished people of India” (AD, xi).

Bharat/India, according to Makarand, is a “Dharmic, plural, value-oriented“ civilization that asks its citizens to practice a sort of “Dharmic nationalism... which we may call *sanatan* (AD, xiv). It is here that he brings into play the centrality of *dharma* in our attempts to understand Bharat as a civilization or culture (this dichotomy does not hold in a dharmic civilization like Bharat!!). First, one cannot forget the fact that religion is not *dharma* and vice-versa; *dharma* stands for “the way, the path, the quest for virtue and righteousness, that which upholds, the sustaining principle of life and society, and so on....Dharma is an all encompassing ideal not only for Hindus,, but for Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs, indeed, arguably, for all those who who consider themselves ‘Indian’ in mentality. Indian Muslims will also often use the word ‘iman’ as an equivalent and Indian Christians routinely use the word Dharma itself to mean faith” (AD, 5) It can well be inferred from the preceding analysis that, like Raja Rao and Rajiv Malhotra, Makarand, on the one hand, highlights the uselessness or meaninglessness of the mindlessly borrowed term “secularism or *dharma-saapekshata*” to characterize Bharatiya sanskriti/culture, whereas on the other, lays emphasis on the “*dharma-saapekshataa*” (dharma-centric nature) of Bharatiya world-view or *Jeevan-drishti*.

It is interesting to point out here that Makarand Paranjape in his book, *Cultural Politics in Modern India; Postcolonial Prospects, Colourful Cosmopolitanism, Global Proximities* (2016- hereafter cited as *CP* with page numbers in parentheses) critically examines and affirms how Bharatiya sanskriti (Indian culture) not only already contains the enabling discursive contours of so-called Eurocentric notion of postcoloniality but also transcends it through its innate celebration of and reverence for diversities of all kinds. Makarand considers this foundational feature of Bharatiya sanskriti as ‘Colourful Cosmopolitanism’ and ‘Global Proximities’ which is so well expressed in the ‘Bhoomi Sukta’ of the *Atharvaveda* as mentioned above. To exemplify this position, Makarand points out how, to most of the critics, Gandhi and Tagore’s views on the Bihar earthquake represent two apparently different cultural world-views; whereas, in fact, both thinkers embody two complementary facets of Bharatiya *sanatan parampara* or world-view which is non-anthropocentric contrary to what western civilization or modernity offers as an anthropocentric view of culture:

“I depart from the conventional view that Tagore’s position is rational-scientific-modern, while Gandhi’s is religious-superstitious-traditional, arguing instead that the contestations are not as much between rationality and faith, science and superstition, or modernity and tradition, as between two kinds of rationality, two ideas of science, and two approaches to modernity. Both Tagore’s and Gandhi’s positions are intellectually more complex, nuanced and compelling than might appear at first. Ultimately, both contribute, even with their contrasting perspectives, to the richness that makes up Indian modernity, with its unique attempts to integrate rationality with spiritual views of the world” (CP, 17).

Tagore, Gandhi, Raja Rao, Makarand Paranjape and Rajiv Malhotra in their “*dharma-centric*” understanding of Bharat do underline the holistic or *samagrataa-centric* world-view. This Upanishadic/vedantic/holistic world-view that Bharat offers does transcend the binary-based, differentiated, conflict-centric, fragmentary, rational world-view that the west offers. For example, the seer, in the *Ishavasyopanishad* (verse no. 9, S.Radhakrishnan, 573) resolves the dichotomy between the so-called secular “work” and spiritual “wisdom or jnana” in a very practical way which also signifies how “practical” is the Bharatiya Vedantic or *sanatan* world-view:-

“Andhamtamahpravishantiyo’avidyaamupaasate/Tato bhuyaivatetamoya u vidyaayaamrataah” (Into blinding darkness enter those who worship ignorance and those who delight in knowledge enter into still greater darkness as it were).

Thus, Bharatiya world-view does not prescribe that only the spiritual knowledge (*vidya*) is true, and therefore, worth pursuing; nor does it glorify the knowledge of the material world which is called *avidya* or ignorance. The seer warns us that the pursuit of only *avidya* or material knowledge would lead us to darkness or great misfortune; but the pursuit of only spiritual knowledge would lead us to greater darkness or greater misfortune!! Contrary to the popular perception, the seer, then, suggests a very practical way out which points, for true happiness of life, to the necessity of the simultaneous pursuit of *vidya* (spiritual knowledge) and *avidya* (material knowledge or ignorance), that justifies Makarand’s valuable insight into the complementarity of Tagore and Gandhi’s different perspectives on life:-

“*Vidyaamchaavidyaam cha yas tad vedobhayamsaha/  
Avidyayaamrityumteertvaavidyayaamrutamashnute*”



(*Ishavasyopanishad*, 11, S Radhakrishnan, 574)- “Knowledge and ignorance, he who knows the two together crosses death through ignorance and attains the life eternal through knowledge”.

Thus Bharatiya Sanskriti/ world-view does recognize the synthesis of vidya (true knowledge leading to mukti or liberation) and avidya both (or work-all kinds of worldly actions and pursuits generally considered a form of ignorance) for the establishment of a good society. But, according to S. Radhakrishnan, Bharatiya Vedantic tradition, at the deeper levels of understanding, not only addresses but also resolves the seeming contradictions between vidya and avidya, knowledge and ignorance, science and spirituality, the rational and the irrational, tradition and modernity, the sacred and the secular etc., – the perpetually conflicting categories that form the core of western world-view, by dissolving them into an advaitic (non-dualistic) framework:- “If knowledge and ignorance are both real, it is because consciousness of oneness and consciousness of multiplicity are different sides of the supreme self-awareness. The one *Brahman* is the basis of numberless manifestations....*Avidya* is regarded as an essential prerequisite for spiritual life. Man cannot rise to spiritual enlightenment, if he has not first through *avidya* become conscious of himself as a separate ego. In spiritual life we transcend this sense of separateness ( S. Radhakrishnan, 574-5),

Makarand also highlights the significance of the *advaitic* or non-dualistic Bharatiya *drishti* and *darshanain* in his brilliant essay – “Regaining the Indian Eye/I” (52-71) included in his above-cited book. He qualifies non-dualism or advaita by asserting that Bharatiya world-view negotiates, and then transcends, the world of differences and oppositions without negating them:-

“We could therefore argue that there is an Indian way of seeing and this way can be characterized as non-dualistic. Non-dualistic, we need be clear, does not mean monistic; it recognizes the presence of two or more entities without necessarily recognizing the ontological multiplicity that such an acknowledgement implies. In other words, an Indian way of seeing would imply not the split but the intrinsic relationship between the subject and the object, the seer and the seeing.... Indian ways of seeing, therefore, suggest that the object is neither totally autonomous nor merely a part of the self. Instead, its existence is provisional and perspectival; it is half-perceived and half-conceived. India thus allows us to be ourselves, and yet, “enjoy” the

world. *If the world were merely an illusion, we would not be able to live as we do; on the contrary, if the world were all too real, life as we know, it would become unbearable*” (CP, 57-8).- (Italics mine for emphasis).

According to Makarand, Bharat/India, thus, signifies a state of mukti or liberation that transcends contraries; yet it is “not a monotonous sameness, as some have asserted, but a pulsating ecstasy, like the humdrum, *hum* and *drum*, vibration of consciousness beneath and beyond all “normal” being...Only the free can be free. Those of us who are in bondage must try to overcome or overthrow it. To this extent, the struggle to regain the Indian eye/I is valid and desirable” (CP, 61).Makarand’s critical discourse on the meaning of Bharat and Bharatiya world-view is in accordance with the Vedic/Vedantic wisdom and he does well to reconstruct and relocate it in the local, the national and the global contexts.

#### **IV. Reading Rajiv Malhotra’s *Being Different: Understanding Differences as One’s Svadharma***

If Raja Rao and Makarand Paranjape are in favour of a Vedantic and neo-Gandhian praxis to understanding the underlying unity (not uniformity) behind the perceived world of differences and contradictions, Rajiv Malhotra critically scrutinizes how western knowledge-systems, in tandem with their hegemonic political/military establishments, manufacture, disseminate and validate *differences* in order to justify and further consolidate the cultural colonization of the non-western societies like Bharat. In other words, Rajiv Malhotra alerts the people of India in general and the Hindus in particular about the perils of ignoring their “*svadharma*- individual moral duty) uncritically accepting and imitating the west-sponsored discourses/laws (in terms of *paradharmas* explained in the *Bhagavadgita*) of religion, spirituality, aesthetics, science, politics, economy, ecology, culture and society other forms of knowledge which have the insidious capacity to digest the emancipatory value-systems that characterize Bharat/Bharatiya sanskriti and recycle them as mutated forms of Abrahmic religious or dominant western cultural discourses.

In other words, if the discourses of Raja Rao and Makarand Paranjape tend to be gravitating towards all-pervasive *dharma*, Rajiv Malhotra, in his discourses/books, makes an honest and bold attempt

to highlight the necessity of understanding and practising “svadharmā” (moral duty of an individual) in accordance with “yugdharma” (moral duty in consonance with the ways of the world) and “aapad-dharma” (moral duty in consonance with any emergency). It is in this context that his book, *Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism* (2011; hereafter cited as *BD* with page numbers in parentheses) is being analysed, though in brief. Interestingly enough, even Rajiv Malhotra’s critically nuanced reading of dharma or moral duty is grounded in the philosophical template so well enunciated in the *Bhagavadgita* (Chapter 3.35, p. 150):-

“*Shreyaansvadharmovigunahparadharmatsvanushthitaat/Svadharmenidhanamshreyahparadharmobhayavaha*”. (Superior is the law of one’s own nature, though lacking in merits, to that of another even though well-observed, Death in working out the law of one’s own nature is superior; but an alien law is fraught with risk.”

In an unambiguously trenchant manner, Rajiv Malhotra unmasks the conspiratorial nature of hegemonic, neo-imperialistic western cultural discourses that are circulated in the non-western societies, in active connivance with the native intellectual-political elites, under the camouflage of (west-centric) universalism. In a critically cogent manner, he underlines his ethically-significant project of spreading the *dharmic*-consciousness that is of utmost importance to protect, preserve and perpetuate the cultural freedom of our nation in face of the dangers of cultural imperialism and value-neutral globalisation:-

“I am simply using the dharmic perspective to reverse the analytical gaze which normally goes from West to East and unconsciously privileges the former. This reversal evaluates Western problems in a unique way, sheds light on some of its blind spots, and shows how dharmic cultures can help alleviate and resolve some of the problems facing the world today... India itself cannot be viewed only as a...repository of quaint, fashionable accessories to Western lifestyles, nor a junior partner in a global capitalist world. India is its own distinct and unifies civilization with a proven ability to manage profound differences, engage creatively with various cultures, religions and philosophies, and peacefully integrate many diverse streams of humanity.” (*BD*, 1).

Rajiv Malhotra upsets the apple cart of western discourses that, in their postmodernist, poststructuralist trajectories foreground how “meanings” are provisionally generated through the play of differences

that engender the interminable deferral of meaning(s)! In a comic yet realistic-mode, one can say that in Rajiv Malhotra's ethically-grounded discourse, all (the Euro-Americo-centric) postmodernist/poststructuralist/postcolonial cows come home to roost as the politics of "difference", in the critically-vigilant hands of Rajiv Malhotra, has been decentred in order to let the non-western society like India speak how and why it is different from the dominant west. He aptly says, "This book is about how India *differs* from the West. It aims to challenge certain cherished notions, such as the assumptions that Western paradigms are universal and that the dharmic traditions teach 'the same thing' as Jewish and Christian ones....I will argue that the dharmic traditions, while not perfect, offer perspectives and techniques for a genuinely pluralistic social order and a full integration of many different faiths, including atheism and science. They also offer models for environmental sustainability and education for the whole being that are invaluable to our emerging world" (BD, 2). It is, however, worth-mentioning that Rajiv does not use in his discourses such terms as "west", "east", "India" etc., as "reified or immutable entities" (BD, 1) but as terms connoting "family resemblances" (BD 1).

Furthermore, Rajiv uses the term "Dharma" to "indicate a family of spiritual traditions originating in India which today are manifested as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. I explain that the variety of perspectives and practices of dharma display an underlying integral unity at the metaphysical level which undergirds and supports their openness and relative non-aggressiveness" (BD 3). According to him, Bharat/India stands for "embodied knowing" whereas the Judeo-Christian traditions are known for their "History-centrism"; Bharat implies "Integral Unity" as opposed to "Synthetic Unity" that is offered by the West or Judeo-Christian traditions. Similarly, he holds that Bharat sees chaos "as a source of creativity and dynamism" in the context of the significance of cosmic-consciousness whereas in the western societies "chaos is seen as a ceaseless threat both psychologically and socially-something to be overcome by control or elimination" (BD, 7-10). Moreover, Rajiv also highlights the predatory nature of western culture manifest in its aggressively imperialistic tendencies of mapping, codifying, cataloguing, translating the culture-specific, non-translatable sanskrit terms characterizing Indian world-view in order to digest and colonize them afresh through institutionalized ideological controls. In place of "tolerance" of other faiths and traditions as is exhibited in

most of the western societies, India offers reverence for diversities and other traditions and faiths: “Tolerance was a positive attempt to quell the violence that had plagued Christianity for centuries in Europe, but it did not provide a genuine basis for real unity and cooperation, and so it often broke down” (*BD*, 16).

Rajiv Malhotra also suggests that we should, first, critically examine “differences” between the western and the Bharatiya world-views and how these differences are being manufactured and validated either in order to “tolerate”, “accommodate” or, as and when possible, “subjugate” the non-western cultures like India. In order to conceal or camouflage these civilizational differences that exist between different discourses of various cultures, religions, nations or societies, there has been witnessed a politically correct activism that seeks to refuse to accept that these differences do exist. This sort of tendency, which has been considered as “difference anxiety” by Rajiv Malhotra, is exhibited by the western as well as the non-western societies that offer resistance to cultural appropriation by the dominant west. For example, don’t we find this tautology on most of the school/college curricula, and in polite discussions on interfaith dialogue and multiculturalism that all religions are equal and similar in preaching peace, harmony, and love for all without any dogma and hatred!! Rajiv Malhotra rightly states that the suggestion “that difference must be seen as positive and be examined openly by all sides is often met with resistance from Indians and westerners alike. I call this resistance ‘difference anxiety’. The term refers to mental uneasiness caused by the perception of difference combined with a desire to diminish, conceal or eradicate it. Difference anxiety occurs in cultural and religious contents frequently” (*BD*, 25).

Not content with his extraordinary take on ‘difference’, Rajiv Malhotra also exposes how the western powers abuse, tame and subjugate Indian or other non-western cultures and societies through the politics of cataloguing, categorizing and othering in order to propagate their own Judeo-Christian, white, western world-view as universal and objective world-view. His understanding of the contemporary western civilization is cogent and candid enough to alert the Bharatiyas/Indians about the dangers of the mimicry of the west:-

“As a way of resolving difference, Western civilization is given to isolating the elements of other civilizations and placing them in its own conceptual categories- categories formulated by the ‘white’, ‘Christian’, and ‘progressive’ race. This categorization privileges the Western gaze

and enables to declare itself as the universal norm for others to emulate. It is system for gaining control. On the flip side, many raised in dharmic cultures suffer anxieties related to being non-white, non-Christian and so on. Their identities are enhanced by imagining themselves in the colonizer's framework. One has become colonized when one starts to locate oneself in the colonizer's account of 'global history', 'universal ideas', language, myths, aesthetics etc." (BD, 25)

Whenever the colonized people start resisting their political, economic and cultural enslavement/colonization, the mighty (?) West reacts "with extreme distress" which engenders "all kinds of unethical and duplicitous behaviour towards non-westerners". According to Rajiv Malhotra, the West often reacts in the following three diabolical ways to crush or contain the resisting non-western societies:-

- A. *Destruction* of other through outright violence or forced conversions;
- B. *Isolation* of other form of manifestation so that it no longer poses a threat; and
- C. *Inculturation*, which is of infiltration of other's faith in order to dilute its differences and eventually digest it. (BD, 26)

The importance of Rajiv Malhotra's discourse lies in his radically re-contextualized reinterpretation of "*Dharma*" as an 'open architecture' that characterizes Bharatiya Sanskriti/Indian culture in a refreshingly appealing language. To him, *dharma* in the contemporary contexts may be seen as :-

- a. An open architecture for the spiritual quest as well as guidance for one's mundane living- many choices and more choices being added over time by new suppliers.
- b. Like the Internet, this dharma has no centre, no owner, no founder, and alternative offerings are always subject to argumentation and change. There is no singular authority that has ever decided for all dharmic consumers what is 'right'. Nobody has been able to destroy the other options. There is no history of destroying rejected components (cf. burning books); they simply fade away when newer ones get adopted by consumers. The market place of consumers and suppliers has always been dynamic and nothing is resolved by the use of absolute force by theocratic rulers.
- c. To participate successfully using this open architectural system does not require one to study the history of the system itself,

i.e., who created the Internet, and other trivia about its beginnings. (BD, 373).

### **Conclusion:-**

This essay makes a preliminary attempt to critically read the representation of the meaning of India/ Bharatiya sanskriti/parampara with special reference to the selected works of Raja Rao, Makarand Paranjape and Rajiv Malhotra. In their discourses these eminent writers show their constant critical engagement with what may justifiably be said to be the dharmic perspectives on life that Bharat/Bharatiyata (India/Indianness) offers to the world and their dialogically creative relationship with the Western world-views that is also marked by contestations, conflicts and confrontations.

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## Indology in China

Prof. Dr. Shashibala\*

Indology- the science about India, knowing and studying it from varied perspectives especially from art and culture, history and heritage, language and literature, philosophy and spirituality. It became a subject in Europe in the recent past beginning with Voltaire (1694-1778) an unrivalled French writer and philosopher who was enthusiastic about Asian civilization and Indian wisdom. He found that China did not owe anything to the Western world. He inspired Sir William Jones, the Chief Justice of Supreme Court in Calcutta during the British rule who translated Manusmriti, Abhijnana-Shakuntala and Ritusamhara. Jean Pierre another French scholar opened a new window in the history of Indo-Chinese cultural relations by writing the history of Khotan in 1820 and translating the travels of Fa-Hsien, a Chinese pilgrim. From then onwards scholars in large numbers embarked on the studies on Indology in China.

The earliest reference to search about India goes back to Ch'ang Ch'ien who came to know about India in Bactria when he was sent by the Chinese Emperor Wu of Han in 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Later several missions were sent to India via land and sea routes. Taking the sea route they reached Kanchipuram and by land upto Kashmir. They began to acquire knowledge about India, its customs and products.

Over the centuries fascinated by India China built more monasteries than India and still preserves Sanskrit texts in original and translations, many of which are lost in India for ever. Indologists in China have been preserving the Buddhist heritage better than any other country in

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the world, including India, sponsoring preservation and research projects on Sanskrit and Buddhism at a significant. They have ever discovered a biography of the great Indian dramatist and poet Kalidasa and fragments of his drama Abhjnana-Shakuntala from China.

Fa-hsien, Hsuan-tsang, Wang Hsuan-tso and I-tsing - the Chinese scholar-pilgrims, Indologists in modern terms, are the shining examples of that who came to India and have bequeathed historic records. I-tsing has left short bio sketches of 60 eminent Chinese monks who visited India. In 964 AD, three hundred Chinese monks left for India. They set up five Chinese inscriptions at Bodhgaya.

Hsuan-tsang (602-664), the Prince of pilgrims to India stands out in the history of Indology. He had to face the most difficult situations, even risking his life, on his way to India. Once he was lost in desert for four days without water and was robbed several times. But he never gave up. On coming back Hsuan-tsang wrote "Records of the Western World", a detailed account of his travels in India. When he showed his translation of Prajna-paramita to the Emperor, he said, "looking at these Buddhist works is like gazing at the sky or sea. They are so lofty that one cannot measure their heights, so profound that one cannot plumb their depths".

All the items taken by Hsuan Tsang from India were carried through the streets of the then capital of China Ch'ang-an (modern Xian). The people thronged from far off and were falling one upon the other to have a look at the items and of course the great scholar Hsuantsang who had come back from a journey to the Western Paradise - India. Hsuan-Tsang introduced the technique of manufacturing sugar from India. Later a mission was sent from China to study it much more deeply.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Chinese were fascinated by the new science of astronomy, calendrical knowhow and mathematics in Sanskrit texts which were known as the "P'o-lo-men or Brahmin books". Indian astronomers served on the Chinese Imperial Board during the T'ang dynasty. In the seventh century three Indian astronomical schools were known: Gautama, Kasyapa and Kumara. The official history of the Sui dynasty, completed in AD 610, contains a catalogue of Sanskrit works on astronomy, mathematics, calendrical methods and pharmaceuticals under the generic caption of P'o-lo-men.

Sacred sciences were combined with secular knowledge. So along with Buddhism, milk products, technology of producing sugar and cotton

cultivation were also introduced from Kashmir and Bengal to China in the second century BC. In India cotton was used for manufacturing paper also. But in Han China it was made out of silk. When Buddhist scriptures reached China, cotton also became a component of paper. And thus the silk radical of the character of paper was replaced by the radical for cotton. Sugar came to China with Hsuan Tsang. They called it *shi-mi* 'stone honey' which renders the Sanskrit *sarkara* from 'granules, stonelets'. In AD 647 Emperor Tai-tsung sent a mission to Magadh to study the secrets of boiling sugar. This method was adopted by sugarcane growers of Yang-chou.

The researches discovered that China began to study India when first translation of Indian scriptures occurred during 246-219 B.C., during the reign of Chin dynasty, when eighteen wise men carried the scriptures from India to China. The official date of the first Indian teachers going to China is A.D. 67 when KasyapaMatanga and Dharmaraksa reached there on an invitation of the King Ming Ti of the Late Han dynasty. From then onwards there was an unbroken tradition of teachers going to China. Loyang and Ch'ang-an can be called vibrant centers of Indology. In A.D. 224 an Indian Sramana, Vighna was active. During the rule of the Western Tsin dynasty, Indian intellectuals were active in the then-capital Loyang. Bodhidharma, an Indian monk from Kancipuram, transmitted the philosophy of Dhyana, which became popular in China as Ch'an and in Japan as Zen.

The discoveries in the Central Asian ruins of the Kingdoms gave an impetus to Indology in China when A.F. R. (Rudolph) Hoernle, Sir Aurel Stein, Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin von Le Coq from Germany and Representatives of Baron Otaniand others went for explorations in Central Asia. The earliest manuscripts of the world are written in Sanskrit and discovered from the Xinjiang region of China. The first printed item of the world is a Sanskrit mantra in Chinese translation discovered from Beijing kept at the British Library. The only administrative and legal documents written in spoken Sanskrit (Prakrit) are discovered from Xinjiang. The only document establishing Sanskrit as an international language used for travelling is discovered from Xinjiang.

Indology in modern history of China gained momentum with Chinese scholars going abroad to study and research. Feng Chengjun (1887-1946) translated several Indological works by European scholar like Chavannes, Sylvian Levi, Jean Przyluski, and Paul Peliot. Taixu. A Chinese Buddhist monk (1890-1947) actively worked for advancement

of Buddhist studies in China through establishing World Buddhist Federation, founded Buddha Dharma Garden, established Buddhist Teaching College in Xuyun temple, associations, Jue societies, Wanchung Buddhist Institute and many more. He started a number of Buddhist journals. He was in Vishva Bharati in 1940 where he could meet Gandhiji, Tagore and Nehru. Huang Chanhua (1890-1977) studied Sanskrit and Tibetan languages. His visit to Japan inspired him to study Indian, Tibetan and Western philosophies. He wrote a “General Outline of Buddhist Schools”, “Introduction to Buddhism”, “Outline of the History of Indian Philosophy” and “History of Chinese Buddhism”.

Many Indologists studied Sanskrit and Pali languages. Tang Yongtong (1893-1964) was a Buddhist historian. After getting a degree in Master of Philosophy from Harvard University he returned to China and began teaching Indian Philosophy, Metaphysics, and Buddhism etc. He wrote “Brief History of Indian Philosophy”, “History of Sui and Tang Buddhist Manuscripts” etc.

By mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there were several institutions in China for Buddhist studies like Chinese Inner Studies Institute, Institute of Philosophy Studies and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. There were departments in Universities to study philosophy, history and social sciences. Buddhist Association of China was set up in Beijing in 1953.

Chinese had a growing interest in aesthetics. Lu Cheng has left monographs such as Introduction to Aesthetics and Ideal Trends of Modern Aesthetics. Out of his keen interest in Buddhism he wrote “Outline of Hetuvidya”, “Original Theory of Tibetan Buddhism”, and “Origin and Development of Indian Buddhism”. He knew Sanskrit, Pali and Tibetan languages along with others.

As a poet and painter, scholar and writer Ms. Su Xuelin was an expert in cross cultural studies. She researched on parallels between Chinese and Indian legends, animal stories and myths. She was of the opinion that not only the monks but traders contributed towards spread of Indian culture in China.

Many Chinese studied India from the view point of suppression by the colonial power. They were in support of Indian freedom movement. Wen Yiduo was a well-known poet, artist, scholar and political activist. He wrote an essay on the poetess Sarojini Naidu, highly appreciating her nationalistic spirit. He was much impressed by Rabindranatha Tagore because of his artistic and poetic talents.

Dunhuang caves are gems on the Silk Route preserving a rich collection of scroll paintings, manuscripts, mural, sculptures and so on.

Hundreds of scholars have been researching, writing, editing, preserving and teaching there on Buddhist arts and literature. Zhou Shujia was involved in transcription of Buddhist scriptures. He founded Buddhist Painting Research Institute and Buddhist Association of China; compiled Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Rubbings of Fangshan Buddhist Classics, and undertook research on grottos and their arts all over China. His work include several Buddhist sutras such as Vaidurya-prabha-rajā and Vijñaptimatratā. Another expert on Dunhuang was Xiang Da (1900-1966). After returning from Europe he made great contributions towards writing a history of China's international relations and Indo-Chinese cultural relations. His writings on "Dunhuang and Ch'ang-an under T'ang Dynasty" and "India's contribution to Buddhism" opened up fresh avenues of research for the Chinese Indologists. He translated the biography of Gandhi into Chinese.

An archaeologist, oriental art historian and a poet, Mr. Chang Renxia authored "History of Fine Arts Development in India and Southeast Asia", "The Silk Road and Western Culture and Art", "The Maritime Silk Road and Cultural Exchange" and many essays. He travelled on the route of Hsuan Tsang, visited Sarnath, Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Rajagrih, Patliputra and Ajanta etc. He collected abundant material and wrote several research papers, like "Sino-Indian Art Exchanges", "Records of Ajanta Grotto Art", "Pilgrimage to Indian Ancient Buddhist Traces and Development and Education Characteristics of Indian Institute of World Art" and "History of Fine Arts Development in India and Southeast Asia".

Vishva Bharati had become a centre for the Chinese Indologists to study and teach. When Fa Fang was there he had an opportunity to study Sanskrit and Pali. His major writings include "Chittamatratā and Philosophy", "The Buddhist View of Life", "Speeches on Prajñāparamitā Diamond Sutra", "A Procedure of Learning Buddhist Dharma", and "Indian Intellectuals". Dongchu had an in-depth knowledge of Indian customs and spiritual traditions of offering prayers at holy places.

Xu Fangcheng is a famous Chinese Indologist who systematically introduced 50 Upanisads into China by translating them in classical Chinese a poetic style. He was a versatile scholar and a linguist well versed in Sanskrit, Latin, French and Greek. He proposed many unique ideas. He did a comparative study of Sanskrit and Changsha dialect from phonological perspective which demonstrates Influence of Buddhism on native Chinese languages.

The period saw an increasing interest in Indian Epics. Mi Wenkai (1909-1983) was a commentator on Indian literature. He wrote “A brief Introduction to Indian Literature”, “Historical Tales of India”, “Appreciation of Indian Literature”, “Two Great Indian Epics”, His works on Indian culture comprise of 18 volumes.

Logic was another subject which attracted Chinese scholars. YuYu was an expert in this field who devoted the whole of his life to this subject. He wrote many books on it like- “Indian Logic”, “Chinese Logic”, “contribution of Hsuan Tsang to Hetu-vidya” and “Dharmakrti’s Contribution to the History of Indian Logic”.

Studies and translations of the two epics - Ramayana, Mahabharata, the stories of Panchatantra and dramas by Kalidasa were another field of Indology in China for Ji Xianlin (1911-2009), a great Indologist, linguist, author, translator and a social activist, a renowned name in Chinese history. His translations of Ahijnana-shakuntalam and Vikrmorvashiyam by Kalidasa, inspired the Chinese youth to successfully perform Abhijnanashakuntalam in theatre. He translated Ramayana and wrote extensively investigating many questions related to life in ancient India.

Jin Kemu is another name, among Indologists after Ji Xianlin. As a poet, Indologist, essayist and a translator, he compiled a summary of Panini’s Aphorisms on Sanskrit grammar, offering detailed discussions on his style, the system, and other aspects of his sutras. He wrote on fundamental problems of Sanskrit grammatical theories. His translation of Meghaduta and Shataktraya by Bhartrihari on Indian ideals, life and emotions were classical achievements for a Chinese. “Selected Annotations of Mahabharata” a translation of excerpts from Mahabharata led to the publication of Adi Parva. He was the first to translate selections from ancient Indian classics on aesthetics - Natya-shastra, Kavya-darpana, Dhvani-aloka, Kavya-prakasha and Sahitya-darpana. He included Rigveda in his “The Analects of Indian Culture”. He even published an article on Vedanta-sara and Mandukya-upanishad. He expressed his views on ancient philosophy of Brahman and Shramana.

Jin Kemu and Ji Xianlin produced the first batch of Chinese scholars in modern China. Tan Yun Shan was renowned in India. There is a long list of indologists and their astounding works represent their fascination and dedication for India resulting in long lasting cultural connection.

# Of Sages, Indigenous Faith Movements and India's Unity - North East India and the Global Context

Sujatha Nayak\*

## Perspective

The sages of India have been almost innumerable, for what has the Hindu<sup>1</sup> nation been doing for thousands of years except producing sages? (*CWSV*, Vol.III, p.248)

This Rishi - state is not limited by time or place, by sex or race. This is the sageship of the Vedas, and constantly we ought to remember this ideal of religion in India, which I wish other nations of the world would also remember and learn, so that there may be less fight and less quarrel. It is being and becoming. (*CWSV*, Vol.III, 253)

..there have been great world-moving sages, great Incarnations of whom there have been many; and according to the *Bhagavata*, they also are infinite in number. (*CWSV*, Vol.III, 255)

Three powerful statements – ‘*What has the Hindu nation been doing for thousands of years except producing sages?*’, ‘*This Rishi-state is not limited by time or place, by sex or race.*’, and ‘*they (sages) also are infinite in number*’ .

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North East India has been, as the rest of the country, home to several Rishis since times immemorial. Every community, has its Rishis who continue to be cherished and revered. This paper seeks to study the Rishis of North East India – specifically four – Srimanta Sankaradeva, Haipou Jadonang, Rani Ma Gaidinliu and Lambona Golgi Bote Talom Rukbo. The paper will examine the background in which their work blossomed and how their work formed the base for indigenous faith movements and of a spiritual freedom which 1947 interrupted but could not halt. While they were born in those states that currently form India's North East their work is by no means confined to it. Their impact assumes greater significance when read in the context of the global scenario.

If one understands the contribution of Goswami Tulsidas one cannot but revere the varied and multi-dimensional contribution of Srimanta Sankaradeva. If one speaks of Guru Gobind Singh one cannot but recognise Haipou Jadonang and Rani Ma Gaidinliu. And those inspired by Swami Vivekananda cannot but offer salutations to Lambona Talom Rukbo.

These Rishis put into place powerful systems that continue to be relevant even today. Their contribution has been as varied as the times they were born in. They have one aspect in common. In response to the challenges of their times, they found solutions based on *Dharma*. Such is the nature of *Drshitas*. Indeed, their solutions were creative (life-giving), purposeful and in several ways, much ahead of their times.

### **Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568)**

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568) was phenomenally multi-dimensional. Poetry, dance, drama, weaving, pottery, informal education, music, were all woven into the core of *Ek Sarana Naam Dharma*. He deified the *Bhagavata Purana* in the Sanctum Sanctorum of the *Namghar* –the community prayer hall which gradually became also the centre of self governance in every village. What is sometimes overlooked is the fact that Gurujana was in the thick of the Bhakti movement. He travelled widely across India twice – the first time for over a period of twelve years. He stayed for a considerable time in Puri. In these pilgrimages, he certainly would have come across the travails the country was facing under various Islamic rulers and the vibrant response. He would have anticipated that this scourge would

attack Assam before long. Assam was barely prepared for it. The link with the rest of India had become quite weak. Rajkhowa (2005) describes Sankaradeva's role at this juncture.

Sankaradeva had to re-establish the link. He made Bhakti as the vehicle for re-integration of Assam with (the) rest of India. *Bharat Varsha*, he said, is a land coveted by the Gods. One can be born here on the strength of piety acquired through many births.

“This India is the best of all lands. Even the Gods find pleasure in being born here. We do not want a living in the imaginary world of heaven; we would rather die young while living here. To be born in India is like having the nine treasures of Kubera... how virtuous are we that we have had the land we were yearning for day and night.”..

he wrote in the play *Anadi-Patana*. .. Sankaradeva in his Sanskrit anthology, 'Bhakti Ratnakara', devoted a complete chapter to nation-building entitled 'Bharat Varsha -Prasamsa' (In praise of India). (*Sankaradeva: His Life Preachings and Practices*, p. 437).

Gurujana's able disciples such as Madhabdeva followed the pan-Indian vision. Wrote he, *Dhanya Dhanya kali kaala, Dhanya Dhanya Nara tanu bhaala, Dhanya dhanya Bharata Varsha....* Thus Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva's vision united large tracts, of what is now the North East. Surely, it was on this work that the great Ahom General, Lachit Barphukan, was able to build in order to stave off the Moghal incursions. No wonder, Assam never came under the marauding Moghal rule – one of the few regions in India of those times.

### **Haipou Jadonang (1905-1931) and Rani Ma Gaidinliu (26 February 1915 - 17 February 1993)**

Jadonang was born to Thiudai Malangmei (father) and Tabonliu (mother) at Kambiron (Puilon) village (present-day Tamenglong district of Manipur). He was given to deep meditations to the Supreme Being, *Tingkao Ragwang*.

From childhood, Jadonang was a deeply religious person. He used to pray to God (Tingkao Ragwang) for hours when alone. He visited places like Bhuvan Cave and Zeliad Lake, which were believed to be the residence of gods and goddesses by the



Nagas. By the age of 10, he had become popular among the Zeliangrong tribals for his dreams and prophecies and healing powers by local herbs and medicines. People from far and near come to Kambiron under the spell of interpretation of dreams, mysterious healing, advice and principles of reformed religion. ('Haipou Jadonang', Wikipedia).

Swami Vivekananda explains the significance behind this phenomenon.

Beyond the senses, men must go in order to arrive at truths of the spiritual world, and there are even now persons who succeed in going beyond the bounds of the senses. These are called Rishis, because they come face to face with spiritual truths. (*CWSV*, Vol.III, 253)

The Seer that he was, Jadonang realized the need to heal and nurture his community's ancestral ways of life and living.

Jadonang saw the growing influence of Christianity in Naga territory as a sign of foreign imperialism. .. As he reached adulthood, Jadonang made his ideas about the revival of Naga culture to his fellow tribals. He urged them to fight for national prestige and social change. ('Haipou Jadonang', Wikipedia).

Jadonang began the arduous task of re-organising the Nagas. It would be unrealistic to assume that this was to merely counter the British –whose rule he predicted would soon come to an end- or counter the Christian missionary whose designs he knew could fragment the socio-cultural fabric of the Nagas and their relationship with the rest of India. Rishis work with a vision and their work is holistic and elevating. Jadonang started a Spirituo-religious movement *Heraka* – the pure one.

He did away with a number of *gennas* (rituals), such as the ones associated with childbirth, presence of an animal in the house, disasters such as earthquake and landslides, felling of tree, and weapon injuries. He retained the *gennas* associated with harvest, safety of crop from pests, and safety from animals. Instead .. Jadonang emphasized qualities that he said were pleasing to *Tingkao Ragwang*, such as truth, love, and respect for the entire creation.

The traditional Naga faith did not involve construction of temples. But..Jadonang encouraged construction of *Heraka* temples called "*Kao Kai*"...In accordance with the Rongmei

tradition, which states that the humans first emerged from a primeval cave, Jadonang established a cave temple at the Bhuvan cave.

These were but initial steps. Says Gaikahmdim Marangmei (2014), Visualising the future of Naga Raj, Jadonang started organizing the Naga people in Zeliangrong areas now falling into Manipur, Nagaland and Assam to put up opposition against the British. He organized the Heraka army – separate women battalion and challenged mighty British empire. He taught his people to be on constant vigil against the traps of British Government and its secret wings. And warned his people to be on alert against missionary menace of Church. ('Haipou Jadonang – A Naga freedom fighter!', *Nagajournal*).

Such was the threat he posed to the British that he was implicated in a murder he did not commit and hanged to death in 1931 at the young age of twenty-six! But for a Seer so young, he had not only put in place systems but also ensured the continuity of the work by training Gaidinliu – the precocious child of Shri Lothonang and Smt. Korotlenliu at Luangkao village, (presently Tamengloang district of Manipur).

### **Rani Ma Gaidinliu**

Inspired by Haipou Jadonang 'the Seer of Kambiron', Gaidinliu joined his movement at the young age of thirteen. After Jadonang's death, Gaidinliu took up the reins of the Heraka movement at the age of sixteen and continued to work for the cause she had dedicated herself to – Hindu Dharma and Bharatvarsha – both of which to her, as to her spiritual mentor, were two sides of the same coin,

Haipou Jadonang had in fact introduced Gaidinliu to Gandhi at Guwahati in 1926. Gandhiji was already vocal about his abhorrence of conversion to Christianity.

Gaidinliu carried on the work with zest. She reached out to more villages with the healing touch of *Heraka*. The army grew to a considerable number. Writes Tasile N Zeliang (2012),

Though she was young by age .. she displayed the maturity and wisdom of acclaimed elders. She re-organised both the wings and intensified her fight against Britishers. She recruited more youths and brave girls into her army and thus, the number reached up to 500. She provided guns and traditional weapons

and ordered her followers to exhibit total non-cooperation with the British government. (*Life and Mission of Rani Gaidinliu*, p.7).

She simultaneously continued the spiritual work of *Heraka*. Threatened by this three-fold approach – spiritual, political and military – the British and the church authorities came together to watch her movements closely and ultimately captured her through insidious means in 1932. Interestingly it was Nehru who visited her in the prison at Shillong and gave her the title ‘Rani’ of the Nagas’. She was released only after independence in 1947.

While she had languished in prison, Christian missionaries had worked hard to convert the Nagas – especially the adherents of *Heraka* – to Christianity. The ground work made by colluding with the British led to more proselytization and sadly it was in post independent India that Rani Ma Gaidinliu had to go underground to counter the divisiveness of the Naga National Council (NNC). She asked for a separate state for the Zeliangrong (Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei communities) to be carved out of the contiguous parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam, in order to ensure that they could continue to practice the indigenous faith in peace.

While this has yet to see the light of day, her sense of purposeful work continued. She communicated her apprehensions to the Prime Minister of India about the visit of Pope John Paul – II in 1986. The letter exhibits her clarity and belongingness.

We have lost much of our parental heritage but let the rest of the country know that all are not lost and that we have raised the banner of genuine patriotism. We all belong to the same soil. *We draw our sustenance and inspiration from India and no force on earth can separate us from our motherland...*

Western countries cannot go back to their own tradition and religion having them fully destroyed. We should draw a lesson from this fact and be more conscious to preserve our parental heritage and cultural moorings and enhance it.

In this connection it may be noted that very soon in the 1<sup>st</sup> week of February, 1986, Pope John Paul II..is visiting India on the invitation of our government. Knowing fully well the threat posed by Christian missionaries, his visit will certainly encourage and promote missionary activities especially in tribal communities.

I shall therefore, be happy if Pope John Paul II is advised by the Government to make two public proclamations – one, that proselytisation is out of place in the present scientific age and two, that all religions are equal and true. (Zeliang, Life and Message of Rani Gaidinliu, pp.20-22)

A test of what Sages envision comes in the aftermath of their passing away. When conferred the VKIC Sanmaan in 2015, Ramkuiwangbe Newme, the President of the Zeliangrong, Heraka Association, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland said,

Now the time has changed. Nagas living in all three states – Assam, Nagaland and Manipur, have come to realize that Naga destiny lies with Bharatvarsh and with Hindu Samaj. They are disheartened with anti-national movement spearheaded by underground section of Christian Nagas who are very few in number, they also want to lead a peaceful life. Further the overall attractions towards churches are diminished. They know that by converting them in Christianity, the Church has destroyed their age-old colourful cultural identity. That is why, they want to revive their Sanatan Dharm and Sanatan Sanskriti. This is the reason that Hindi is becoming very popular in Nagaland and Naga youths are reaching up to Kerala and Kashmir in search of their deserving livelihood. The hatred for Bharatiya Samaj is diminishing fast and getting replaced by love and loyalty.

The VKIC Citation that Pou Ramkuiwangbe received, said

The formidable network, created by Rani Ma's vision and Pou Ramkuiji's missionary zeal, has given the Zeliangrong communities the confidence to say 'No' to terrorism and 'Yes' to peace, harmony, and development. (VKIC Annual Activity Report – 2014-15, p. 15).

Leadership founded on spirituality, on Dharma abounds thanks to the purity and perseverance of Newme and several such adherents.

### **Lambona Golgi Bote Talom Rukbo**

Born in Arunachal Pradesh, in a village near the town of Pasighat, Rukbo studied in Shillong and became fully aware of the missionary design. He started a study circle amongst his college mates in Shillong to discuss the importance of one's own culture and ways to preserve them.

After his return to Arunachal Pradesh (then, North Eastern Frontier Agency - NEFA), Rukbo was posted at Pasighat as a Language Officer in the Government. He undertook the documentation of the *Aabangs* – the *Vedas* of the Adis. He began the Central Celebrations of the Solung festival to enthuse his people to preserve their heritage. He toured villages, formed the Adi Cultural and Literary Society (ACLS) to involve the educated elites in the quest to strengthen tradition and culture. While these did give a fillip to cultural activities, he found that the bane of the society – conversion – was on the increase. Deep study and reflection provided him the solution – all revitalisation has to be through *Dharma*. And thus sitting over a fire on a cold wintry night in Pasighat he formed the *Donyipolo Yelam Kebang* (DPYK).

Rukbo (1999) outlined the objectives and how the process started. One can simply marvel at his clarity.

The Donyipolo Yelam Kebang was given birth to on 31 December 1986 at Pasighat, with the following objectives: -

- (a) To put a new cloth on the old garment of traditional practice so that the changing trend of the society could be accommodated in a rationalized way.
- (b) To resist the oppression of alien culture on the traditional practice of the people.
- (c) To discover and rediscover all religious literature of the old and traditional practices and bring them to light and usages.
- (d) To institutionalize the practice of the faith at first stage and spread the message to the nook and corner of the Adi society.
- (e) To bring a moral strength and self-confidence among the people for self-identity.

How the activities of Donyipolo Yelam Kebang were started needs a few words now. First the religious literature of old practices was collected and compiled and books were published. Secondly, prayer songs were composed and books were published. Thirdly for gathering of people, a Donyipolo temple was constructed at Pasighat. Fourthly, images of Donyipolo and other gods and goddesses were prepared and others were placed on the altar of the temple. Fifthly, valuable ornaments were collected and then other healing materials were collected and kept in the temple for use. ('Institutionalization of a tradition – Donyipolo Yelam Kebang – a case study', p.35).

Rukbo enumerated eight challenges to the DPYK work, such as funds, land, regular volunteers, rampant conversions – but probably the most formidable was from the eighth one – the anglicized group of Adis who remained aloof to the movement. He remarks, “The negligence of this high-class people to indigenous faith is likely to pose an obstruction to the spiritual ascendancy of the people or the society as a whole.” (Rukbo, pp.38-39).

Undaunted, he gave the DPYK movement a solid organisational structure based on traditional Adi village set up – Central DPYK at the helm, followed by the *Bango* (cluster of villages) and *Dolung* (village) *Kebang*. Each had a President, a Secretary and other office bearers as well as co-ordinators of women and youth forums. Hitherto prayers were offered during festivals, harvest and illnesses. Rukbo introduced weekly prayers on *Gamruk Diikong* (Saturdays) – which in itself was revolutionary. The prayers consisted of chanting of hymns (some adopted from tradition, some introduced for the changing times) and singing of songs (several of these were written by Rukbo, Taluk Tamuk, etc.). A priest – trained and/ or traditional – would pray and then sprinkle holy water on the assemblage. Ten to fifteen minutes talk on the significance of Adi traditional practice would be followed sometimes by sharing of news – local/ community specific and pertinent, followed by announcements, if any.

If someone was ill, the DPYK members would decide to go to the patient’s house to pray for his/ her recovery. Animal sacrifice was replaced by simpler alternatives – candles, incense sticks, etc. The sharing of news was not only about DPYK activities but also that pertaining to other indigenous faith organisations or national level organisations that were complementing the activities of the DPYK. After the prayer session, members of the committee and / or youth and women forums would often sit to plan their forthcoming work.

Within no time people received this with enthusiasm and *Ganggings* (pronounced *Gaanging* meaning, ‘temple of purity’) multiplied. Orientation courses were started, trained youth were sent back to work in their own and adjacent villages. All this was voluntary. Prayer book, the *Angun Bedang*, was printed and several villagers –illiterate until then – learnt the script just to be able to chant and sing. *Bomyerung Donyipolo* (*Donyipolo* will triumph) was not a mere slogan – it became a greeting, an affirmation. All of this, the writer of this article was witness to and sometimes a participant of, in case planning was about

a Vivekananda Kendra activity that required DPYK support such as starting *Balwadis* in villages.

Some aspects were a direct response to missionary design. Visiting and praying for the sick got a fillip when several traditional priests (*Miri* in Adi) joined the DPYK movement. This boosted the morale of the DPYK adherents. Special door to door prayers by youth teams in December drastically reduced the pull of Church groups' door-to-door visits as countdown to Christmas. Money, voluntarily donated by families, went to fund youth programmes.

Such was the capacity built by the DPYK movement that several communities such as the Nyishi, Apatani, Galo, Tangsa-Tutsa, Nocte, Aka, etc began their own indigenous faith prayer systems. Rukbo was unequivocal in his support and clarity that each community should build its prayers systems as per its native genius. DPYK thus became a role model. Effort to involve educated elites became a reality for DPYK especially after Rukbo's passing away in 2001. He was reverently addressed as '*Golgi Bote*' (the Eternal Elder); in 2016 he was conferred the title 'Lambona', meaning *Guru*, and his birthday commemorated as *Lambona Diwas*. ('Golgi Bote Talom Rukbo conferred Guru Title' *The Arunachal Times*, 3 Oct. 2016)

It might be yet early to judge the impact of Rukbo's contribution. But one aspect that all will agree on is that he saved Arunachal Pradesh for India and created a sustainable, replicable model for all traditional communities – especially the hill and forest communities–areas from which Swami Vivekananda had great expectations, "Let New India arise. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains." ('Memoirs of European Travel', *The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.7, p. 327).

## **Impact**

As the Seers had founded their work on *Dharma*, it impacted practically all facets of life. It led to key reforms in traditional practices, fresh ideas were generated and *adapted* not adopted. Youth, women and educated elites got involved in their respective communities' resurgence. Besides, it led to better understanding between communities, leading to inter-community harmony. None of this was government-induced. It became sustainable only because these were initiated by the stakeholders – the communities themselves.

West-centric anthropologists harp on the conflict of two important communities of Arunachal Pradesh - the Nyishi and the Apatani. How DTC (Development through Culture) brought about a sea change not only in perception but in nurturing traditional bonds underscores the importance of DTC.

On 2 and 3 December, 2006, the VKIC-APC organised a seminar on 'The Nyishi Traditional Culture and Faith: Change and Continuity'. Dr Joram Begi, Praant Pramukh, Vivekananda Kendra Arunachal Pradesh, presented a paper on the *Manyiang* -traditionally-handed down friendship between the Nyishi and the Apatani. since times immemorial. Manyiang has taken care of their security and economic development. The paper gave a fillip to finding solutions within one's traditional systems. Thus began a fresh journey of formal and informal interactions between the two communities.

These interactions recently culminated in the signing of a historic accord between the two communities. (Dodum, 2015). It is historic because the accord is an inter-community, culture-based initiative not a governmental one, nor a political one. In fact in the recent past, the Nyishis have signed such accords with two of their neighbouring communities, the Bodo and the Aka. (*Development Through Culture*, pp.109-110).

What does this imply for the North East as a whole?

North East India has been home, like the rest of India, to this method of conflict avoidance; several communities continue to maintain the inter-community bondings. The example of the Nyishi-Apatani accord, signed not by politicians or the government, but by and through community initiative, indicates that people are far-sighted to re-build relationships on philosophy of the ancients rather than fragment it because of ideologies. In this respect too the North East could become a model.

For all these ideas to be more effective, policies will have to augment the work of the indigenous faith movements. Be it the Sattras in Assam or community-based indigenous faith organisations (that work in various states of the North East) such as the *Donyipolo Yelam Kebang*, *Nyedar Namlo*, *Rangfraa Faith Promotion Society*, *Medar Nello*, etc. in Arunachal Pradesh or the *Seng Khasi*, (Khasi), *Sein Raj* (Jaintias) and



*Seng Khihlang* (unifying body of the Khasi and Jaintia), *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak Phom* of the Zeliangrong community in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam – spirituo-religious movements are rooted to the soil. Over a period of time and with steady work these could recover, rebuild and relive the vision of the Seers. (Sujatha Nayak, 'Let New India Arise North East: Retrospect and *Prospect*', 2016).

### **Importance of the work of the Sages of North East in the Global context**

The world today presents a grim picture of Islamic terrorism and aggrandizing political nations. Simultaneously the awakening is unmistakable – both within and outside India – of the creative, spiritual pulse of people. The UN had urged in its Resolution of 1951,

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, 1951, p.15).

Fifty-eight years later, the UNESCO in its symposia on 'Culture and Development Series' (2009), had something diametrically opposed to say – it identified culture as a crucial aspect of development and concluded unequivocally that

Development is not synonymous with economic growth alone. It is a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. As such, development is inseparable from culture. (Cited in *Development Through Culture*, 2016, p.xii)

In May 2013, 'the Hangzhou Declaration', titled 'Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies' adopted on the conclusion of the Summit on 'Culture: Key to Sustainable Development' (15-17 May 2013), stated,

We consider that in the face of mounting challenges . . . there is an urgent need for new approaches. . . . (which) fully acknowledge the role of culture as a system of values and

resource framework to build truly sustainable development, the need to draw from the experiences of past generations, and the recognition of culture as part of the global and local commons as well as a wellspring for creativity and renewal.

....

We recommend, therefore, that a specific Goal focused on culture be included as part of the post-2015 UN development agenda, to be based on heritage, diversity, creativity and the transmission of knowledge and including clear targets and indicators that relate culture to all dimensions of sustainable development.

This paradigm shift from viewing traditional culture as ‘impediments’ to factoring culture as the key to ‘the post-2015 UN development agenda’ has come not merely because of the post mortem of western developmental ‘intervention’ (read, *interference*). It has come also because of the creative, consistent and purposeful work being carried out by apparently ‘small’ and certainly strong communities.

### **Paradigm shift from conflict resolution to conflict avoidance**

Gurumurthy, in his Keynote address at ‘Samvad: Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness’ says,

As most conflicts among humans and nations today have the underpinning of religions, the present conflict resolution paradigm of the world, which avoids religion, is becoming weak and inadequate, needing an alternative approach.

Conflict avoidance paradigm rests on the view that peace among nations is not possible without peace among religions, peace among religions is not possible without dialogue among religions and dialogue among religions is impossible without investigating the fundamentals of different religions. Thus open and transparent philosophic dialogue, which is inherent in Hindu Buddhist traditions, forms the core of conflict avoidance paradigm.

There is a paradigm difference between conflict resolution which is political, contractual and constitutional and conflict avoidance which is relational, cultural and religious. (Gurumurthy, 2015).

The work of these Seers - sung and unsung, known or little known- has opened the path for a philosophic approach for conflict avoidance to handle the twin challenge posed by conflict-prone ideologies and the inadequacy of 'conflict resolution' mechanisms to deal with them. These seers have surmounted apparently intractable problems and faced the opposition of international powers, to create sustainable models of conflict avoidance. Their thoughts echo Swami Vivekananda's final words to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago that assimilation and not destruction is the way forward which implies substitution of conflict avoidance for the failing conflict resolution. The world has been witnessing two millennia of conflict and bloodshed promoted by religious political ideologies. It is now upto us to live and work true to their vision of a resurgent India and its role in the emergence a harmonious world order.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda uses the term 'Hindu' to describe people whose ways of life and living while, varied and distinct, are governed by certain fundamental, eternal principles which are in direct contrast to the Abrahamic ones –Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Swami Vivekananda explains these unifying principles in several talks especially the 'Common Bases of Hinduism', Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 3, pp.366-384).

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# Women in Indian Democracy: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Dr. Shamika Ravi\*

## **1. Silver Lining: A Dramatic Increase in Women Voter Participation**

This essay explores the role of female citizens within India's democracy and electoral politics, in their specific capacity as voters, political candidates and leaders. We begin with the most positive and consistent trend of rising female voter participation over the last 5 decades. In an earlier academic paper, Mudit Kapoor and I (EPW 2014) study the voter turnout in all the Indian state assembly elections over 50 years from 1962 to 2012. Based on an improving voter sex ratio, we found that gender bias in voter turnout has steadily fallen in India over the years. The sex ratio of voters is defined as the number of women voters to every 1,000 men. This number increased from 715 in the 1960s to 883 in the 2000s, and this remarkable trend of increasing women voters can be seen across all Indian states. These include the traditionally backward 'BIMARU' states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. A closer look at the data revealed that the decline in gender bias was solely driven by increasing women voter participation because men voter participation has remained static over the years. This finding becomes especially significant because there has not been any deliberate policy intervention at a national or state level to increase women voter turnout over the 50 years. This impressive phenomenon has taken place over time, through the volition of women voters themselves, and therefore we term this as a "Silent Revolution".

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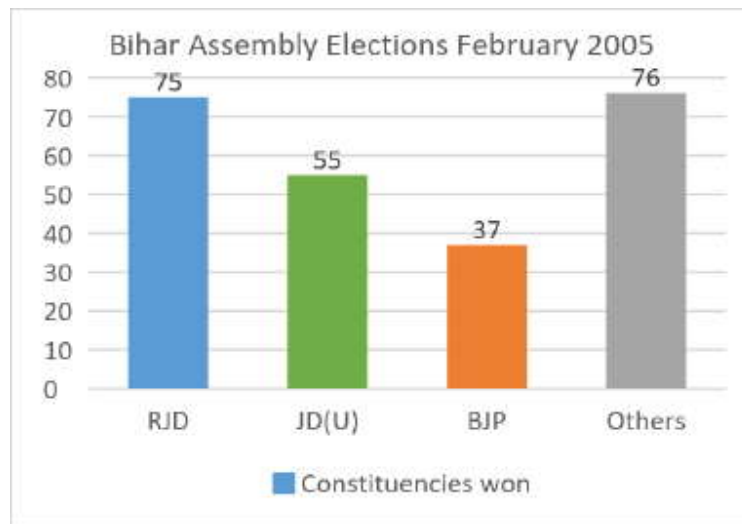
The data used in Kapoor and Ravi (2014) is constituency-level data from the Election Commission of India (ECI) for all assemblies across all states. There are significant variations in the voter sex ratio across the states; however, the biggest improvements have happened in the poorer states. The improvement in voter sex ratio has been marginal in the richer states like Haryana and Tamil Nadu relative to the other states. What makes these findings particularly striking is the fact that the sex ratio of electors (those who are registered to vote, and on the electoral roll of the ECI) in different states does not display the same increasing trend. This indicates that the increased sex ratio of women voters is not because more women have begun to register themselves as voters, but because more women are going out to cast their votes.

## **2. Women as Agents of Political Change**

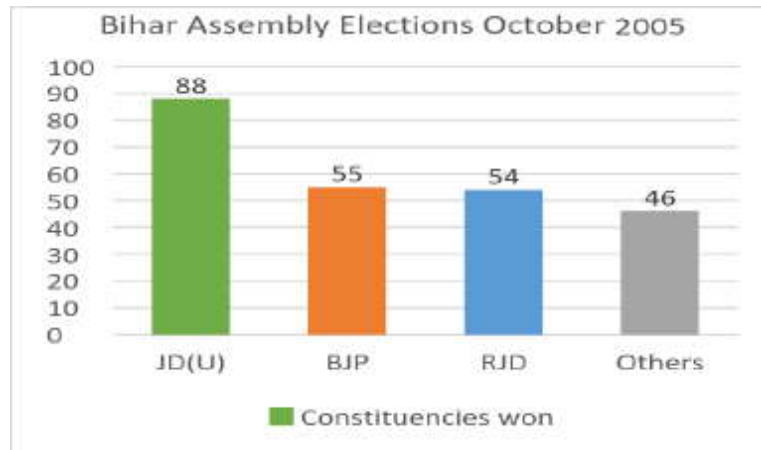
Given our initial finding that more Indian women are going out to exercise their voting rights, the next line of inquiry, is then, to evaluate whether this has any significant impact on the electoral outcomes. Does an increase in the number of women voters actually cause tangible change in elections? Mudit Kapoor and I have a second paper (2016) which shows that women voters indeed significantly affect election outcomes. We studied the 2005 Bihar state elections which provides a “natural experiment” setting. Typically, it is difficult to draw a causal relationship between the gender of a voter to electoral outcomes. This is because, during its tenure, a government enacts different legislations that affect men and women differently. However, the 2005 Bihar state elections were a unique opportunity to examine the different choices men and women make as voters. The natural experiment setting was because no political party or coalition emerged as a clear winner in the February 2005 assembly elections. The existing Assembly was therefore dissolved, and President’s rule was instituted for eight months until the re-election in October of the same year. The re-election provided an opportunity to study the impact of women voters on the electoral prospects of political parties in all the 243 Assembly constituencies in Bihar for two sets of elections, in February and October 2005, when no new State legislations were enacted.

In the re-election, the winning party changed in 36 per cent of the Assembly constituencies which together comprised a whopping 87 out of 243 constituencies. The Rashtriya Janta Dal party under Lalu Prasad

Yadav was voted out after 15 years of rule, and the Janta Dal (United) government, under Nitish Kumar, was voted in. Upon analysing the ECI data from both the elections, our study found that the change in electoral outcome was caused essentially by women voters. First of all, between the two elections, the poll percentage of women went up from 42.5 to 44.5, while the male poll percentage declined from 50 per cent to 47 per cent. Next, in constituencies where the electoral results changed between the first and second election, the rate of growth of women voters was nearly three times more than in constituencies where the same candidate was re-elected. In contrast, the distribution of growth of male voters in both types of constituencies was similar. Finally, accounting for district-level variation, the data showed that while the growth rate of male voters was positively correlated with the probability of a candidate being re-elected, the growth in women voters was inversely correlated with the probability of an incumbent winning. Therefore fundamentally, women came out in hoards to defeat the incumbent RJD candidates and elect JD(U) candidates in their respective constituencies. Women voters played the crucial role of change agents in the 2005 Bihar Assembly Elections.





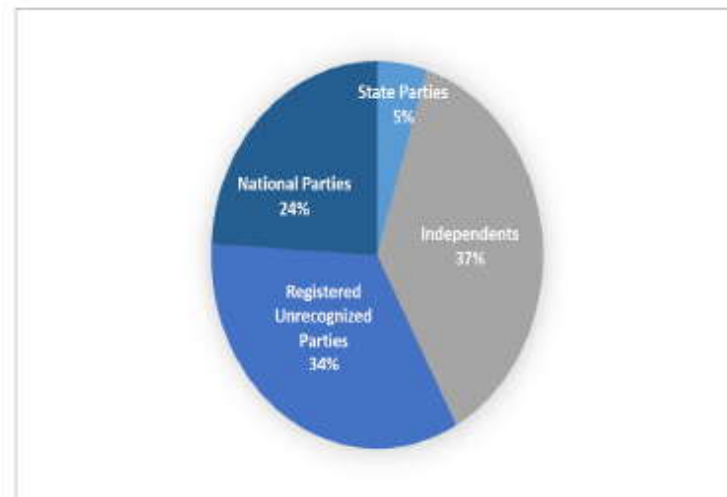


### 3. Women as Political Leaders

While there is growing evidence that reservation policies of countries have improved women's representation globally (June 1998, and Norris 2001), Norris and Inglehart (2000) write that the gap between men and women has lessened the least with respect to political representation, than in the fields of education, legal rights and economic opportunities. Women representation has also been shown to impact policy decisions in countries. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) show that reservation in village Panchayat Pradhan seats affect the types of public goods provided. Though a subsequent study by Bardhan et. al (2005) shows mixed results of women's reservations. (Besley and Case (2000) show that women and child support policies are more likely to be introduced in places where there are more women in parliament. Dollar, Fisman and Gatti (2001) conduct a cross sectional comparison, and find a negative relationship between women representatives in parliament and corruption. Despite this evidence of women's representation on policy decisions, there is little insight about why such few women participate in politics as representatives even in advanced countries.

Data from ECI shows us that in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (the Lower House), only 66 of the 543 seats are held by women. Out of the 8070

candidates that contested in the 2009 elections, only 556 or 6.9 were women. Of these 556 women candidates, only 29 per cent were candidates fielded from national or state political parties, 34 per cent belonged to Registered Unrecognized parties while the remaining significant 37 per cent contested as independents (Ravi and Sandhu 2014). The cost of contesting is significantly higher for independents when candidates do not have support of political parties. However, the presence of few women political representatives is not endemic to India, and it is worthwhile to study the experiences of women at a global level. While only 11.3 percent of current Indian parliamentarians are women, this number is twice as high globally, at 22 per cent.



*Note: Data source is the Election Commission of India*

#### **4. Women Reservation, India and Across the Globe**

In India, the Women Reservation Bill, that proposes the reservation of 33 per cent seats for women in the Parliament and State Assemblies, was first introduced in the Parliament in 1996 by the Deve Gowda government. It has since been proposed several times, failing each time to get passed. In the global context, however, the last 20 years have

seen 17 countries legislate reservation of seats for women candidates, and 44 countries legislate quotas for women candidates in political party lists.

Figure 2(a) below is a graphical representation of the countries that have reserved a percentage of seats for women in their Parliaments. These include India's neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh, that have reservation between 10 to 35 per cent. Figure 2(b) shows us countries that have mandated political parties to field a specified percentage of women candidates. Starting with Argentina in the 1990s, this has been implemented by numerous countries. Nepal, France and Korea are some of the countries that have legislated a mandatory share of women candidates from political parties to be as high as 50 per cent.

Figure 2(a) Percentage of seats reserved for candidates in Parliament

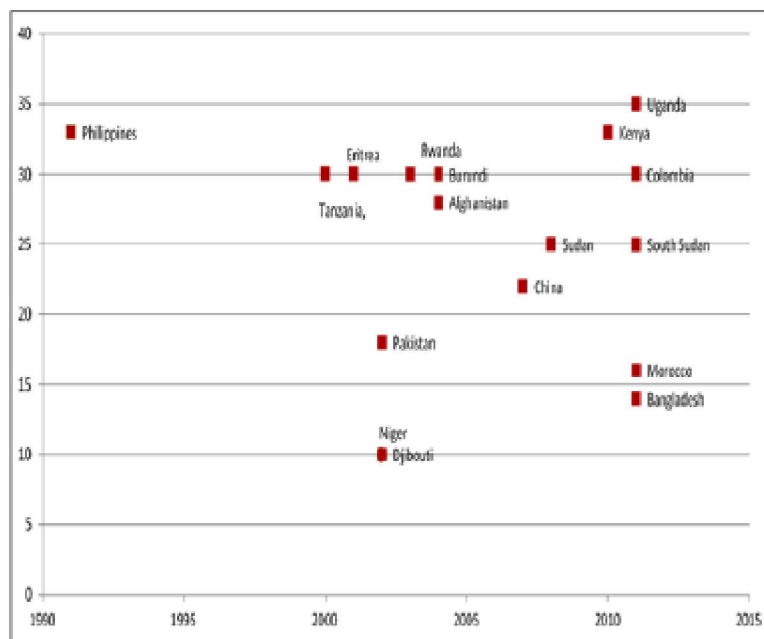
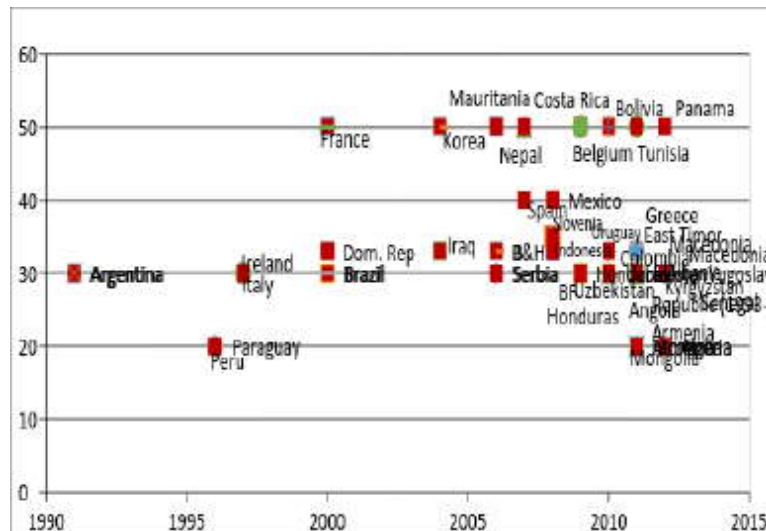


Figure 2(b) Legislated quotas (percentage) for women candidates in political parties, by year



Note: data source is the Quota Project, [International IDEA](#), [Stockholm University](#) and [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#)

In our paper titled “Why so few women in politics: Evidence from India” (Kapoor and Ravi, 2014), we demystify the reason for the limited number of women political representatives relative to their share in the population globally, using data from India. We provide a theory using ‘Citizen Candidate model’ of representative democracy, to explain women’s decisions to contest elections. Our paper then tests predictions of the model using ECI data between 1962 and 2012, for 16 large states of India, together comprising 93 % of the Indian population. The ECI data includes election data for every single parliamentary and assembly election constituency. For each constituency, we report the data on the total number and gender of voters and electors, personal details including the name and gender of every contestant, their party affiliation, and the total number of votes that each candidate secures.

Our study finds interesting patterns across states of India. We find that women are significantly more likely to contest in constituencies where the population gender ratio is skewed against them. For instance, women are more likely to contest elections in backward states, such as

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the sex ratio is less favourable. On the other hand, they are less likely to contest elections in socially advanced states, such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Our theory predicts that since contesting elections are relatively costlier for women compared to men (not merely monetarily but also in terms of various implicit costs), all else held constant, women seek political representation through voting in constituencies where they are in larger numbers in the population. This is true in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu etc. where women chose not to contest as candidates, yet seek political representation through voting. This is why, women's political concerns cannot be ignored by male candidates in these places. Conversely, in places where women are fewer in number in the population (backward states with lower sex ratios), they cannot seek representation through voting alone because they are fewer in relative numbers. In these places, therefore, women have to contest as political candidates. But beyond contesting, our study also shows that while women might choose to contest, they are more likely to win elections in constituencies where they are well represented in the population. These two trends together reveal that in advanced places, women don't contest, and in backward places they contest but don't win. Together these two trends provide a potential explanation for low female political representation in our parliament and within our state assemblies.

Pushing the envelope on women reservation, this paper suggests that, if the objective of reservation is indeed to promote and safeguard the interests of women it may not be effective to have blanket or random quotas for women candidates. The study recommends that reservation quotas for women should then be aimed towards those constituencies, where the sex ratio is the worst, and women are an electoral minority. There is no natural reason for a low sex ratio, and this can be regarded as an outcome measure of gross sustained neglect of women in the population.

## **5. Will Reservation Solve the Problem of Gender Bias in Electoral Politics?**

India's Women's Reservation Bill proposes that a third off all legislative seats, at national and State levels in India, be reserved for women. However, it is questionable whether such a move will actually solve the fundamental problems that Indian women face – Although elections are

held regularly in India, with or without reservation, they do not capture the will of the total Indian people because of the large number of women “missing” from the electorate. Kapoor and Ravi (The Hindu 2014) estimates that there are more than 65 million women (or approximately 20 per cent of the population of the female electorate) missing in India. Therefore, election results exhibit the will of a population that is artificially skewed towards male preferences.

Amartya Sen was the first to speak about ‘Missing Women’ while noting the suspiciously low sex ratio in some parts of the developing world, which could not be dismissed easily using biological, cultural or economic explanations (Sen 1990). The deteriorating sex ratio in countries such as India and China points towards the gross neglect of women. For instance, the preference of a male child at birth is a phenomenon that has been seen in both countries. Based on the idea of missing women, Anderson and Ray showed that excess female mortality is universal, and can be seen across all age groups in these countries (Anderson and Ray, 2012) . They conducted a detailed analysis of missing women by age, and cause of death. A noteworthy, and disturbing, observation was the highest number of female deaths from “intentional injuries” or reported violence in India.

The sex ratio in India should be correctable by persistent and long-term political action and public policy. However, all policy must be based on an estimate of how many women are missing from country. Therefore, we analyse the electorate data from 1962 to 2012, to study whether a solution can be developed from within the political system itself. Following the methods used by Dr. Sen, we first calculated the sex ratio across the electorate. Next, using data from Kerala as the benchmark of the best sex ratio in the country, the number of missing women is computed through backward calculations.

The numbers throw up some striking results: First, the number of women that are missing from the electorate has increased fourfold, from 15 million to 68 million. This indicates that the trend of missing women has exacerbated over time, and become even more dangerous the percentage of women missing from the female electorate has risen significantly, from 13 per cent to approximately 20 per cent. Second, the adverse sex ratio of most Indian states has largely remained the same over the time period of the data set, and in some state it has actually worsened. The latter category include large Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The ‘missing women’ in these states means that the current electorate’s

political preferences under represent the female population, and are more likely to reflect male voter preferences. Finally, the sex ratio of the electorate always compares badly against the general sex ratio of the population. This means that women are not only underrepresented because they are missing from the population, but also because they are simply not on the electoral rolls, even if they are eligible to vote. In the traditionally backward states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the difference in the sex ratio is as high as 9.3 and 5.7 percentage points, which convert to millions of women missing in absolute numbers.

Will the reservation for women in India's legislature actually help the causes of Indian women? As mentioned before, in a democracy, citizens vote for a political representative based on their policy preferences. The reverse is also true – to get elected as a political representative, a candidate must cater to the median voter. Given that women are missing from the Indian electorate in such large numbers, the median voter is inevitably male. Therefore, even a woman candidate will have to cater to male preferences to win an election. Additionally, even if a male candidate who is unbiased to women's needs is elected, he will be forced to choose policies that benefit the average male elector.

This can be seen as a market failure of democracy, and may be able to explain the pressing concerns that Indian women still have, and the persistent gender bias in the political economy. Therefore, it is unsurprising that despite India's robust elections, the country is one of the worst performers on the UN's Gender Inequality Index (GII) which captures measure of health, labour force participation and empowerment. It is outstripped even by the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, despite having higher per capita income and a democratic government (Human Development Report 2012). Coming in at 133rd out of 146, it comes in behind war torn governments such as Iraq and Sudan (Human Development Report 2012).

So is reservation a suboptimal policy? Our analysis reveals that it is unlikely to solve the immediate concerns of political representation for women. Reservations, however, are seen as an exogenous shock to move us out of the current bad and stable equilibrium of poor political representation. This is mainly going to be achieved by lowering the cost of entry of women into electoral politics. This will, most likely, also lead to the creation of a pipeline of women leaders for the future of India's democracy.

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# Influence of North East India on Culture and Sculptural Art of Arākān

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## Abstract

The Buddhist followers share around 87% of total population of Myanmar and dominates its western region of Arākān. There was an intense trade and cultural relation between the Indian and Arākān people through ages from the eastern and north-eastern part of India. The north eastern part of India provided an easy access to mahāyāna Buddhism which was deeply influenced by Hinduism to the western part of Myanmar. The Hindu cultural inflow continued to Myanmar up to 16<sup>th</sup> century CE in Arākān when the king was seen to announce himself as protector and incorporating attributes of Viṣṇu in addition to the well known practice of Brahmin priests leading the royal ceremonies of kings of Bagan.

At present the remains of Hindu gods in form of images and temples were explored from almost every part of Myanmar. The varied range of Hindu god images of Viṣṇu, Dūrga, Sūrya and Śivalinga were explored from the western part of Arākān. The traces of Indian esoteric elements of north-eastern part of India are also traced in various Buddhist temples of Arākān affirming close links. The influence is also reflected in intangible cultural heritage of Arākān.

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In the present paper it is intended to trace the origin and growth of Hindu religious elements in Western part of Myanmar especially in Arākān. This includes iconographic features of various images of Hindu gods, erotic sculpture influenced by north-eastern Indian esoteric outcome and intangible cultural heritage of Arākān region of Western Myanmar. The paper is based on field study by the writer in various parts of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Arākān is situated in western Myanmar and topographically comprises mountainous terrain. It stretches for about 560 km along the eastern shoreline of the Bay of Bengal, to the south of the Chittagong in present territory of Bangladesh, known as Vaṅga and Samatāṭa in Prayāga Praśasti of Hariṣeṇa. It is separated from Myanmar mainland by a long, deep range of mountains, the Arākān Yomā and by the River Naaf from Bangladesh. Arākān is a region comprised mainly of hilly tract and edged with number of small islands (**Shwe Zan 1997: 11**).

The Arākān was easily accessible to eastern and northeastern part of India through past centuries.

Its geographical isolation from Myanmar mainland is also reflected on ethnicity and cultural life of Arākānese people. Arākān, at present is primarily inhabited by Rakhines who are in majority but has number of other ethnic groups like Chins, Daingnet, Mro, Khumi, and Chakmas. They have great similarity with the similar ethnic composition in north-eastern India. Geographically Arākān appears more a part of north-eastern part of India than of Myanmar. It is evident from archaeological remains scattered throughout Arākān that the Buddhism reached this region about 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Presently Arākān is a large rice growing area which has still easy communication with Bangladesh and India. In early times it provided a natural hub for trade on the easterly shore of the Bay of Bengal (**Collis 1923: 244**).

Besides ethnic similarities the Arākān region shares a large number of intangible cultural heritages with the eastern and north-eastern part of India. The intangible heritage has been passed down from the ancestors to the present generation and still is prevalent in form of living culture and is part of the people's identity. It includes oral tradition, languages, and process of creation, music, performing arts and festive events (**UNESCO, 2016**).

We can trace number of mode of festivities celebrated in north-eastern part of India and various parts of Myanmar out of which some

entered mainland Myanmar through Arākān. In Indian counterpart the festival of Dīpāvalī is celebrated to commemorate the arrival of Lord Rāma to the city of Ayodhyā after defeating Rāvaṇa. The five day long Dīpāvalī in India is celebrated in the month of autumn to symbolically observe the victory of light over darkness or victory of good over evil. The Hindu followers in all part of world clean their homes, wear new clothes and light the houses and surroundings with lamps. Similarly, in Myanmar the festival of Thadingyut is celebrated to observe the arrival of Lord Buddha from *Trāyamstrimśa* heaven to the city of Sankiśa in India. It's a three day long festival celebrated in Arākān which is celebrated by lighting of lamps (like Dīpāvalī) inside and outside houses along side streets just to guide Lord Buddha to follow the way descending from heaven to earth after delivering sermon to his mother. The way of observing the festivals is similar except that Dīpāvalī is celebrated on darkest night, the Thadingyut is on full moon night.

A Kut like festival of Manipur is also celebrated in Arākān region during the autumn season. Kut is an autumn festival of the different tribes of Kukī-Chin-Mizo groups of Manipur. This festival is observed in the beginning of November and is celebrated with a thanksgiving feast and songs and dances in honor of god for blessing with abundant harvest. The festival of Kut is accompanied by traditional folk song and dance. The festival of Kut relieves the people from the stress and strains of daily agricultural life. The festival also marks the use of traditional folk instruments. The local tribes of Manipur clean and whitewash their houses to welcome the festival in their community (<http://www.thegreenerpastures.com/festivals-of-Manipur#.V9Qr8f197IU>). In Arākān a similar kind of festival is organized a month after the end of the Buddhist Lent which marks also the termination of the south-west monsoon-the rainy season. The festival named as Thin-Bok Swoon is organized only by the Rakhine people. During this the offerings are made of swoon rice in the form of hta-min htaung, lights are lit in open oil lamps and flowers are offered to the Buddha images in the main shrine, in background of beating royal drums. The Thin-Bok offerings were followed by the offerings of uncooked rice and other uncooked food and various necessary utilities for monks (**Plate 3**). This ceremony is symbolically celebrated as a harvest festival-in term of offering prayer and a part of newly harvested rice to Lord Buddha.

Holī is the second important festival of Hindus which is celebrated throughout India. Holī is a two-day festival which starts on the Purṇimā in month of phālgun, which falls between the end of February and the middle of March. The festival is primarily celebrated to commemorate the beginning of spring season. The festival has close connection with course of agriculture, celebrating the good spring harvests and adoring the fertility of land. To many Hindus, Holī festivities mark the beginning of the new-year, farewell to winter as well as an occasion to reset and renew ruptured relationships, end conflicts and rid themselves of accumulated emotional impurities from the past. Thinngyan is an important festival of Myanmar which has great resemblance with Holī. It is believed that the Thinngyan water has the power to cleanse the evil and sins of the old year; therefore by throwing water on each other it is believed that the dark aspect of an individual is washed away. The festival is celebrated on the last four days before the Myanmar new-year day. To celebrate the occasion small decorated maṇḍapas (pavilions) are made, where the people enjoy by throwing water on each other **(Plate 4)**.

It is seen that in the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. there are clear signs of adoption of Indian traditions in South East Asia in terms of religious and political traditions. The architecture suited to Buddhist and Hindu religious beliefs, the adoption of Sanskrit terms for some levels of political office, the use of coinage and the use of scripts **(Smith 1999: 10)**. Subsequently the same is reflected in the western part of Myanmar too. The Indian influence on royal practices and customs is well reflected by number of coins discovered from various sites of Arākān. The Ānandaçandra inscription which dates back to 729 C.E. of Vesālī is now preserved in Sheitaung temple, has elaborate long list of rulers who ruled over Arākān prior to king Ānandaçandra. It reminds us about Purāṇic style of narrating lineage of a king. The royal line however claimed descent from the lineage of Śīva, which may explain the bull, Śīva's mount. The coins have Śrīvatsa symbol on reverse side (sometimes with sun and moon) and impression of bull on obverse with the name of çandra king in a script similar to the contemporary prevalent script of eastern India. The importance of śrīvatsa in vaiṣṇavism and bull in śaivism is well known.

The influence of tangible cultural heritage is more evident in the sculptural art of Arākān. The Indian cultural influence spread to Arākān through land and sea route from eastern and Northeast India. The

dominance of Hindu elements can be noticed significantly at Vesālī, where Hindu remains outnumber Buddhist. Along with numbers of Buddhist images from Vesālī (situated in Arākān), number of Hindu deity images like Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya and goddesses are there, which underline on well established cultural relations with monastic establishments of Eastern India. From the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE, Arākān adapted and reinterpreted Indian beliefs and art forms shaped by its trade and for religious interchanges (**Pamela 2001: 26**). The region had mixed followers of Theravada and the mahāyāna, and the Mmahāyāna traditions and doctrines survival at a time when mahāyāna had no survivors in other parts of Myanmar. The Arākān region was always a secure region to practice vāmācāra tradition. This is confirmed by the writings of Tibetan scholar Tarānāth who mentions that in early times the mahāyāna Buddhism spread over the Kokī land which extended to Bagan, Arākān and Haṁsvatī (**Durioselle 1915-16: 80**). Earlier the region was religiously inhabited by Arī-a sect with admixture of Nāga worship who lived in monasteries like monks and votaries of vāmācāra. The sect was amazing combination of Hinduism and Buddhism. Its followers had great faith in Hindu god Viṣṇu but simultaneously had great inclination towards mahāyāna Buddhism too. The cult of Arī's was very different from hīnayāna which prevails in most of the Myanmar and was strongly influenced by mixture of many cults like nāga worship, Tantrism and Śaivism (**Durioselle 1915-16: 82**). They keep four finger-breadths long hair, lived in large monasteries, addicted too much to drinking and were not observant of monastic celibacy. The use of meat and drink was very much in prevalence among them like the pañca-makāras of Tantrism (**Durioselle 1915-16: 87**). But the cult did not last for long in the region and was overthrown soon by mahāyāna; which was more evident in sculptural art in more mystic forms. The sculptures in Arākān have reflection of both Hindu and Buddhist esoteric elements which flourished in its western neighborhood of eastern and northeastern India after 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Moreover the both Hindu and Buddhist influence on tangible cultural heritage of Arākān has great resemblance with the tangible heritage of eastern and north-eastern part of India viz. Ananda Vihara, Rupaban Mura (Mainamati Commilla), Paharpur, Halud Vihara, Mahasthangarh (Nagaon, Bangladesh), and Pilak (Tripura).

The presence of large number of Hindu deity sculptures indicates that the early kingdoms of Arākān were under the influence of Hinduism.

The royal line, however, claimed descent from the Śiva, which may explain the Bull, Śiva's mount. As in the case of Bengal, the worship of Viṣṇu in his form of Vāsudeva, heredity of the Bhāgavata cult, espoused by the Gupta emperors, gained ready acceptance by the Còandra rulers of Arākān who were anxious to emulate the glorious imperial tradition (**Gutman 2001: 27**). Meanwhile the Hindu influence received setback when the Buddhism was announced state religion and with the inspiration from the Buddhist monks the kings urged religious purifications. The Arākān region became a strong base of mahāyāna school of Buddhism. Due to geographical and cultural reasons it always looked towards its Indian neighborhood in west which is very evident in existing sculptural art of the region. The Hindu and Buddhist sacred and mystic practices are well reflected in sculptural art of Arākān.

Around 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E. with efforts of a group of people, the worship of Buddha was started in secret form and entry to its bhairaviçakra was restricted to very limited number of people. Five other Buddha's along with their respective Śaktis are conceptualized. But this cult received wide popularity and acceptability in eastern India from 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. onwards. These small numbers of people who worship old Buddha in secret were admirer of Buddha's extraterrestrial (alaukika) character. These secret practices in form of Tantrayāna, Mantrayāna and Vajrayāna, have deep roots in mahāyāna. They are more interested to adopt the path of Bodhisattvas than of Buddha which encouraged them to conceptualize many new Bodhisattvas. To give legitimacy to the newly emerged cult it was pronounced that Buddha himself delivered the original tantras in form of saṃgītis in an assembly of his faithful. This was also abundant in form of worship of Śākti cult in Hinduism with Śaiva and Sahajiyā movement of Vaiṣṇavism (**Desai 1985: 113**). According to Sādhanmāla, the Vajrayāna sect based on mahāyāna flourished at four centers of north-east and eastern India in Kāmākhya, Śrihaṭṭa, Puṇḍragiri and Uḍḍiyāna; among these four the first two's are identified as a region of Kāmṛpa, in present Assam and other with Sylhet in Bangladesh. Uḍḍiyāna is supposed to be in Assam most probably in the western part, which as now a part of Bangladesh. It was Uḍḍiyāna where the Tantrism first developed and probably travelled to other pīṭhas (**Durioselle 1915-16: 84**). From this region the cult which emerged from Mahāyāna, reached sūksmadeśa or kirāṭbhūmi (Tripura) and western and central parts of Myanmar.

In the period after 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. onwards the history of Buddhism was dominated by Vajrayāna based on mahāyāna in eastern and north-eastern part of India. From this region the mahāyāna entered the borderland of Myanmar. Vajrayāna insists on a sacred union of male and female. The two polar aspect of reality are represented in Hinduism between śiva and śakti, and in Buddhism between upāya and prajñā. Accordingly, every man has in him a feminine element, just as every woman has in her a masculine. The aim is to join in union the two polar aspects in the human body. In other words the Tantrism aims to achieve the goal of deliberation through short cut method of magical and psychological aids by realization of identity of the worshipper and worshipped. These include mantras (incantations), yantras (mystic diagrams), maṇḍalas (circles), kāvāksās (amulates) and mudrās (gesture) **(Desai 1985: 114)**. In Tantrism the sexual union is converted into ritual but was not to be performed with any base motive. It is not an amorous but a scared act and is performed under controlled conditions **(Desai 1985: 117)**. The new cult simplified the process of attaining the nirvana through various dhāraṇīs and panegyrics, worship of Bodhisattvas and many other newly derived gods and goddesses, and tantric practices which are supplemented with extensive and unrestricted use of wine, women and chants (mantras). It was very similar to pañca-makāra concept of Hindu tantrism, which have great inclination for matsya (fish), meenā (woman), mānsa (flesh), madirā (wine) and maithuna (sexual intercourse) **(Bhattacharyya 1980: 46)**.

The worship of Viṣṇu was quite popular among the Indian traders who frequently visited the nearby territories in connection with their challenging trade related itineraries **(Gutman 2001: 58)**. The iconographical representation of Viṣṇu in India usually presents him in four armed male form. He is shown with his consort Laṅśmī on a pedestal or is symbolically represented with śrivatsa symbol on chest, the part where Laṅśmī resides. He is represented with a kaustubha jewel around the neck and a crown on his head. Wearing two earnings he is presented having pañcajanya śankha (conch), a sharp-spinning disc that is sudarśana cakra, a mace named kaumodakī and a padma (lotus flower). He is attended by two guardian gods standing to give his presence a significant elegance. The images of Viṣṇu are found widely spread along the vast region of India. The eastern part is not an exception which provides easy accessibility to Myanmar. An image of Viṣṇu from Wunti Taing carved almost during same period in Myanmar as in eastern

India seems similar to its contemporary Bengal except some differences. The two upper arms of the image are broken above the elbows (**Gutman 2001: 59**). The image is in sambhanga mudrā and rests both of the lower hands on the head of two attendants. The facial features of the Viṣṇu images from Arākān are sharply defined with arched eyebrows meeting in the middle, a sharp pointed nose and thin lips curved in a smile (**Gutman 2001: 71-72**). The fashion of depicting Viṣṇu with his consort Laṅśmī is quite popular in India. The artist in Vesālī made a nice attempt to repeat the gesture. Laṅśmī is presented standing upright on a well bloomed lotus flower carrying lotus bud in her each hand. The deity is carved wearing impressive jewellery and a lower garment below the waist in Burmese manner. Viṣṇu to her left is illustrated standing on a separate lotus pedestal carrying a  akra and śankha in his back arms. He has placed his front arms on the head of two sub-deities. Presented with a śrīvatsa symbol on his chest he is presented with an elegant jaṭāmukuta. The dual presentation of Viṣṇu and Laṅśmī indicates about the persistence of the vaiṣṇava cult at Vesālī (**Plate 1**). It is most significant to notice the equal size of figures which is unlike in India (**Gutman 2001: 100**).

In Hinduism Śīva represents the constitutive elements of the universe and is generally represented with his vibrant strength śakti (Pārvatī), which makes the elements to come in the life and to act. Together Śīva and śakti represent two important aspects of life; first the masculinity, which represents the permanency of god, and the second feminine, which represents its inherited energy in form of a force which acts in the manifested world. The mystic concept of Śīva and śakti was a factor which attracted the Tāntrism to adopt its doctrine and practice in  aiva Tāntrism. Linga and yoni, representing the male and female organs encouraged them to accept them with erotic glorification. Śīva is worshipped in prominence through śivalingas in various parts of eastern India. Arākān contributes number of śivalingas with a square Viṣṇupīṭha with oval protrusion. Śivalingas with circular Viṣṇupīṭha is uncommon in western Myanmar but its square form is found in prominence (**Plate 2**). It is significant to notice a  eivalingas with a rectangle shaped protrusion of phallus.

Gaṇeśa known as mahāpenī in Myanmar is considered as Lord of the mūlādhāra  akra, which corresponds to the Earth element (prithivī). He is known as remover of obstacles (vighnavināśaka) and is accepted gracefully in tantric practices. He is invoked for his capability to awake



the kuṇḍalinī śakti. The image of lord Gaṇeśa is found in various parts of eastern India having this four handed deity carrying an ankuśa in his lower left hand and a lotus bud in upper. He has a goad in lower right hand and placed the upper to the ground likewise varada mudrā. In an image from Vesālī, Gaṇeśa has the head of an elephant and is presented with big pot belly. He holds his tusk in his upper-left hand and a goad in lower. His upper right arm is broken but is shown having a noose in lower. Wearing a crown, hasta-valaya, yajñopavita and broad udarabandha, he is shown sitting in līlāsana (**Plate 3**). In comparison to Gaṇeśa image of Vesālī, the sculptural presentation at Shittaung temple is more constricted and shows the deity in sub ordinance where king Mong Ba Gree is standing on him. The king is six armed, holds a disc, as well as a club and other weapons (**Plate 5**).

In addition to present Hindu deities and reflecting their indirect association with esoteric practices the artist in Arākān shows special inclination towards presenting various elements of mahāyāna. The Bodhisattva introduced in hīnayāna gained popularity in mahāyāna, was having the wisdom and power sufficient to become a Buddha, but refrained from doing so in order to help others to achieve salvation suddenly received wide attention of people. Artists in Arākān from very early phases carved large number of Bodhisattva images which are still intact in surroundings of Mahāmuni temple in Dhāñyawadī. A Bodhisattva image from Mahāmuni temple shows sitting in līlāsana. The figure is dressed with hard stiffened uṣṇiṣa and a crown over it. He has big kuṇḍalas in ear and a short but broad necklace in neck. It has ornaments like keyura and hasta-valaya. It has a wing like projections behind their shoulders which is decorated with a coiled motif and illustrates the glowing aureole, emanating from his body (**Durioselle 1915-16: 86**). Similar to Bodhisattva the lokapālas are conceptualized in both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna as guardian deities appointed to protect the dignity of dhammā. In sculptural depictions a lokapāla is carved with a sword and resting its blade over left shoulder attentively and having right hand in abhaya mudrā, in manner to give protective assurance to followers (**Plate 4**).

The Arākān region likewise its western counterpart in Bangladesh has plenty of images representing a female figure with multi snake hoods. The carving of nāginī is not unknown artistic motif in Buddhist sculptural art, where it is taken as depiction of cohorts of nāgrāja Muçalinda protecting Buddha from climatic hazards. But the presentation

of nāginī in such a role is restricted with single hood. It is known that the religion of Arī with an admixture of nāga worship held sway in the western part of Myanmar and the cult of snake worship in western Myanmar was influenced by Manipur which under the name nāgasyanta and nāgapura was a reputed centre of nāga worship (**Gutman 2001: 98**). Meanwhile in eastern and north-eastern India a female snake deity with five hoods is worshiped as Manasā- a folk goddess of snakes, who prevent a person from death by snakebite. The deity was also considered important because of her capability to benefit fertility and prosperity. The fertility and prosperity in form of achievement of a goal was in accordance to objective of Indian esoteric which was prevalent in eastern, north-eastern India and western Myanmar. An image in modern Mahāmuni temple in Dhānyawadī, shows a female deity with eleven hood; five each on both sides of central hood. The image carved from side angle is sited in relaxed posture and has rested left hand to ground raising the other in abhaya-mudrā. The deity with long face, sharp body details and slender form is dressed with impressive jewellery.

A square plaque unearthed from Vesālī illustrates an indentation in the centre to fit the bottom of a vessel. The notch in the middle is surrounded by a circular periphery of lotus petals. The space between lotus petal ring and outer periphery has carvings of twelve auspicious symbols i.e śrīvatsa, winged śankha, matsya-yugma, a pātra, çātra, çāmara, aṅkuśa, a bull, a stambha, a gander, a mayura and finally an mṛiga. The plaque is considered important to illustrate the symbolism derived from Hindu rituals and practices in connection to the rājyābhišekha or lustrous ceremonies performed to consecrate Buddhist kings (**Desai 1985:98**). But the carving of above plaque could be seem more in connection to representation of maṇḍalas which gained popularity after advent of northern Buddhism around 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE onwards. The maṇḍalas are drawn as concentric diagrams having spiritual and ritualistic significance; both in Hindu and Buddhist esoteric.

The tāntric cult and esoteric emphasise that to create anything new a sacred union between a virgin body and supreme power is required. They accorded women with great importance in wake of her magico-sexual powers which are performed with a view to increase the fertility and prosperity. In Buddhism the masculine form is treated as active, representing the compassion and skilful means (upāya) that have to be developed in order to reach enlightenment. The feminine form is regarded as passive and represents wisdom (prajñā), which is also

necessary for enlightenment. United together they help an individual to overcome the Māya, the false duality of object and subject. To assure the achievement of enlightenment a sacred union of masculine and feminine power, the act of maithuna is encouraged. The close hug popularly known as Yab-yum is generally taken as an action to represent the mystical union of prajñā (wisdom) and upāya (compassion). In tantric form of Buddhism, the unrestricted maithuna acts either in form of close embrace or in coitus, are regarded auspicious. The realization of feminine strength could be seen in a female demon figure at Koethaung temple. Carved at the door jamb of temple the figure in exhibitionist pose. The figure having fearsome face giving full appearance to sharp and big teeth is dressed in a lower loose garment covering entire region below waist. The figure with pot belly and bare chest has touched her right breast with right hand. Resting her left hand over her side waist she is shown alluring the spectator towards her.

The sculptural art of Arākān, especially after Lemer period presents number of maithuna depictions where a male and female figure is shown involved in close physical association. The interior gallery of Shittaung temple illustrates a vibrant presence of Kinnaya couple in joyful mithuna. The same kinnaya couple is shown at the other half of the gallery in maithuna posture. Though the involvement of mithunas in coitus is fully absent in Arākān still good number of depictions are discovered which shows aggressive love making scenes. A scene on exterior wall of Shittaung temple shows a male figure attempting to grab his companion in eagerness by her shoulder to get her in close embrace. Similar kind of close embrace is found on an image pedestal of Mahābodhi-Śwegu.

The Htukant Thein temple situated at a short distance from Shittaung shows mathuna involved in uddhrustaka in various postures close together while clasping the other's body with arms. It these only underscore close cultural contacts by sea and land routes through ages since early centuries of C.E. Myanmar received both well established religious doctrines from eastern part and many folk-elements by its western neighbor in north eastern India. The traders and religious people who frequently travelled between the two regions and played an important role in carrying various Indian elements like language, religious practices, coinage, script and many traditions. In period when most of the Myanmar was under patronage of Theravada, Arākāna preserved mahāyāna in western part of Myanmar. The Indian traders

who frequently visited this region worshiped many Hindu deities and soon these Hindu deities were adopted by the natives. It is interesting to note that the presence of only those Hindu deities in the region who have some significance in Hindu esoteric practices. Arākān always looked to its western frontiers for inspiration and such wise adopted both Hindu and Buddhist esoteric elements. The mahāyāna in its vajrayāna form attracted them more and its conceptualization of Bodhisattva and combined efforts prajñā and upāya to attain vajra gained wide support in Arākān. As a result number of images of Hindu deities like, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Śakti and Bodhisattvas and Lokapāla from Mahāyāna pantheon were made. Besides introducing a number of new intangible cultural practical the inhabitants of Arākān adopted many traditions, practices and festive ceremonies in new environment with little changes, reflecting on deep cultural relations between the two.

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*Plate-1*  
*Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, Mahāmuni Temple, Dhāṅyawadī*



*Plate-2*  
*Shiva Lings*



*Plate-3*  
*Gaṇeśa or Mahāpeṇī, Mahāmuni Museum*



*Plate-4*  
*Lokapāla*





*Plate-3*  
*King Mong Gra Bi, Shittaung Temple, Mrauk U*

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