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Editorial Perspective

Learn to Tolerate Modi

I will start with a basic question: "If someone selects a person to perform a given task as his representative, then whether the man selected has the freedom of choice to perform or not to perform?" The answer is simple: the person selected has only two options, he has either to perform the allotted task or quit. This applies to the representatives of the all-empowered, the people of India, who select their representatives to the legislative bodies to deliberate, rather than disrupt the proceedings, and prevent the proper functioning of the legislative bodies. This is not the lone 'undesirable' in Indian politics; there are many others also. In India, a political party gets elected on the basis of certain promises, certain programme of action, and shamelessly goes on back-foot, abandons its pledge on flimsy ground, such as the dictate of *coalition-dharma*. And yet, there are parties having born-leaders from the selected families; it is immaterial whether the leader is capable or not. Whether he understands the complexity and problems of the country and the society, is immaterial for such parties. Such parties forget that the very prospect of an incompetent person leading a vast and complex country, like India, worries us; and our worries increase if such a leader is surrounded by an army of sycophants.

There are other worrisome features also, such as growing trend of atomization in politics; the number of aspirants for the highest political post in the country, based on the arithmetics of hung Parliament and political instability, has also increased. Again there is pathological problem with the parties and the individuals; they find it extremely difficult to remain out of power. Besides, the party level rivalry, intra-party rivalry regularly shows its ugly face. Such problems come in the

way of delivery; the elected Government faces problem in doing what they are supposed to do. The ultimate loser are the people of India.

This equally applies to the functioning of the Narendra Modi Government. If he is delivering, and, he is really delivering, then he should be allowed to do so. Putting obstacles in his path, not allowing him to perform, may help some political parties or the individuals; but it is certainly harming the nation and that too in diverse ways.

If we take into consideration the achievements of the last 18 months of the present Central Government, the same have been impressive; Narendra Modi has proved himself to be the best Prime Minister. The economy of the country was in bad shape, when he came to power; in the brief period, we have overtaken China in GDP growth; steps have been taken towards economic empowerment of the people, foreign investment is coming in a big way, no cases of corruption or scams has come up. The boundary problem with Bangladesh, peace initiative with the Nagas, pending for the last 67 years, have been settled, our international image has tremendously improved, and the Prime Minister has initiated many social movements, which will change the face of India in the years to come. There are many other achievements also to his credit, including steps towards economic and tax reforms.

But the passage of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not smooth. There are many, who have pathological hatred of him. He could come to the pinnacle of power, in spite of their dozen-year tirade against him; he had to overcome the intra-party negatives, and the challenges from inside the party still continue. His opponents, including the intra-BJP ones, were worried when he came to power. They miss no chance to target him even now. Naturally, a Delhi, or a Bihar, makes them extremely happy. They may feel that the enemy is not invincible; he is vulnerable. The problem with the adversaries of Narendra Modi, is that they lack the realization that while trying to harm Narendra Modi, they are harming the country.

Narendra Modi became PM in spite of more than a decade long warnings, and lodging court cases against him. Obviously people of India did not believe Modi-baiters. After his elevation as the Prime Minister of India, his detractors should have honoured people's verdict, and learnt to tolerate Prime Minister Modi. But they have vowed not to learn the lesson and are tenaciously trying to oppose him. Needless to say that the Bihar election verdict has emboldened them; they have started seeing the possibility of his ouster at least after 40 months.

Modi has certainly delivered, and delivered more than any Prime Minister in such a brief period. But there is a communication gap; the people are not properly informed, and they often believe his adversaries that he has not done much.

Communication remains a problem with NDA govt. allowing frustrated opposition to gang up even using undemocratic means.

The Communist leftist intellectuals were tremendously and disproportionately helped during the Congress rule. They owe the party their dominance in academia, media, and even in administration to some extent. Marxists gang up and oppose, as I have written elsewhere in this issue, their adversaries in such high pitch and voice in unison, as they did during the recent Bihar election by enacting the award-returning drama, and 'intolerance debate,' which terrorizes their adversaries, the BJP and the RSS. The timing was chosen to help the Congress and its allies in the election. When Communist intellectuals, and they have their foreign friends also, enact such drama, the BJP and RSS get terrorized and forget their own agenda, and even start promoting that of their political adversaries; they start begging certificates from the Marxists of being secularists. Non-Marxist careerist fence-sitter litterateurs and academia often join the Marxist chorus, due to fear or prospects of gain.

A lesson, which BJP and RSS, must learn, is that they can't win the overall battle by ignoring the intellectual front; their soldiers in the field are too weak; and self-hypnotism is not going to help them.

The Khan's—Shah Rukh Khan and Amir Khan—joining the 'intolerance debate' shockingly reveals their skin-deep secularism; the moment you just scratch, their secularism becomes suspect.

A fact, which many of us feel, and feel deeply, is that there is none in India, who has suffered more due to intolerance than Narendra Modi. It is time his adversaries should try to learn to tolerate him. This is essential, because it is going to help the nation, which includes all of us.

— B.B. Kumar

Can AFSPA Restore the Rule of Law?

Patricia Mukhim*

On November 4 last the three judge bench of the Meghalaya High Court asked the Central Government to impose the Armed Force Special Powers Act (1958) in militancy afflicted Garo Hills districts of the State. The Court observed that Central government can enforce AFSPA in Garo Hills region in order to deploy armed forces to aid civil administration to restore public peace and maintain law and order. It said the imposition of AFSPA would be only for the purpose of enabling the civil authorities in the State to effectively deal with militancy, so that there is a regime of rule of law. Since then several civil society groups have begun to protest the decision of the High Court, calling it unwarranted and undesirable.

The question to ask is why has the situation in Garo Hills taken a nosedive? A senior official of the central security establishment said when militancy in Assam, particularly in Bodoland is largely under control; when the NSCN is in talks with the Centre; when militancy in Khasi-Jaintia Hills was brought under control, why is it that the Garo militants remain intransigent? What or who is fuelling their continued acts of terror? Why is the State Government unable to act decisively to tame these militants? This is an answer that only the political establishment can give. Many of them had been hand in glove with militants using them to win elections. Now the Frankensteins have begun to bite their masters.

The High Court has correctly observed that law and order needs to be urgently restored in the Garo Hills but is the AFSPA the only solution? This is the issue that needs to be debated. Granted that the

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Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) is the leader of the pack and that if the outfit calls a bandh no one would dare stir out of their homes. However, the GNLA is not the only militant outfit, although it is the most dreaded one. Several other groups with creative acronyms have emerged and they all have one aim – extortion. To achieve that aim they first strike fear by killing, kidnapping and also calling bandhs. In May this year the Meghalaya High Court was so irked by the fact that its employees remained absent on account of a bandh call that it summarily passed an order banning all bandhs in the State. The media was prohibited from publishing any news of a bandh call by any militant outfit or organisation because the Court was briefed that it was the media that gave a fillip to bandhs and strikes by making it their lead stories, and that this created unnecessary panic among citizens. Hence, the usual bandh call on August 15, by militant outfits was ignored by the local media.

For the first time this year people celebrated Independence Day. It was a new found freedom for them. But this could only happen in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills where there is a climate of security. The only militant outfit that earlier had some hold over the region – the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) – is today defunct. Left with only about 20 members, mostly holed up in Bangladesh, the HNLC cannot enforce a bandh. In the Garo Hills the GNLA used an innovative mode. They sent SMSs across the region announcing a 24 hour bandh. And it worked! The GNLA also called a 48-hour bandh from October 10-12 this year, to protest the Garo Hills District Council polls scheduled for October 12. The bandh was called to protest the inclusion of non-tribal voters and candidates for the GHDC polls since the Councils are seen as instruments for tribal development and protection of their customary laws and practices.

This time all mobile companies withdrew services from Garo hills but the GNLA used pamphlets to announce the bandh call. The bandh worked partially but at least about 5 polling stations recorded ‘nil’ turnout.

Meanwhile, on September 24 last an IB official, Bikash Singh and a trader Kamal Saha were abducted by a lesser known militant outfit the Achik Songna An’pachakgipa Kotoj (ASAK) while they were travelling in a commercial vehicle (Tata Sumo). The duo were killed and their bodies buried in the thick forests nearby. The dead bodies were found only a month later.

Then on October 28 last, a Block Development Officer from the militancy affected Chokpot region of South Garo Hills, Jude Rangku

T. Sangma was abducted by the GNLA for resisting their extortion bid. He was released only on November 2, possibly after the High Court ordered military action in Garo Hills. The Court sought to justify its order on the grounds that insurgents had abducted 87 people in the past 10 months and killed several others. It used the analogy that, “even under the ideal federal system of United States of America, such orders can be enforced when needed and ours is only quasi federal. Under the Insurrection Act, the President can deploy Armed Forces under certain circumstances including terrorist activities in the States.”

The High Court order is an indictment on the State Government which has failed to tackle militancy in Garo Hills. The police too have their version. They say it is not easy to operate in the thick jungles where tall elephant grass prevents them from sighting a person just two feet away. The terrain is treacherous and several policemen have lost their lives in these operations. The State Police claim that they have requisitioned from the MHA several equipments such as improved night vision devices, snipers with telescope CMT suppressor, multiple grenade launchers etc., The MHA has simply ignored these requirements. It is also true that Meghalaya Police is not adequately trained for CI Ops.

The Meghalaya High Court order has triggered sharp responses from human rights groups such as the Asian Human Rights Council and others including the local NGOs of Garo Hills. At a time when protests against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) have become shrill and gained support across the country, the Meghalaya High Court ruling comes as a thunderbolt. AFSPA is unlikely to achieve better results than a coordinated counter-insurgency action that is sharp, quick and can hit the militants where it hurts them most. Their sources of funding need to be blocked and there are ways of doing so. Their access to arms also must be curtailed. Meghalaya Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma has blamed the porous borders with Bangladesh where militants make quick escape and also get their arms from. Undoubtedly, there is an urgency to seal these borders and to make the BSF more accountable.

The situation in Garo Hills has turned so vicious that civil society voices have virtually been silenced. In this murky and complex situation the High Court order has only created a greater unease. One wonders if the High Court has kept track of the abuses by security forces in States where AFSPA is in force and whether the same Court will rise to the occasion in case such abuses occur in Garo Hills.

But whichever way we look at this present convoluted situation in Meghalaya, one thing is clear – judicial activism has taken a very dangerous turn even while the executive has become almost comatose. The citizens are left to fight their own battles!

The Tragi-comedy of Manipur's Three Bills

Pradip Phanjoubam*

The issue over the three bills the Manipur Assembly passed on August 31, is far from settled, especially in the wake of unprecedented and violent opposition to them, particularly in Churachandpur district. The opposition is largely on account of a belief that the three bills are part of a tacit strategy for the non-tribal residents in the Imphal valley, the Meities, to grab hill lands which are deemed as tribal exclusive. As to how far this apprehension is based on reality or an honest interpretation of the three bills, is hotly contested.

The three bills together were meant to do what the Inner Line Permit System, in vogue in Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, does – that is, to put a check on influx of migrant populations into the State so as to assuage fears that local indigenous peoples were slowly but surely pushed to the margins. This concern, it does unfortunately seem now was confined to the valley districts, which are open to every Indian citizen to settle, unlike the hills which as scheduled tribe areas are already protected from outsiders acquiring landed properties.

Looking back a little beyond the agitations, first the agitations for the introduction of the ILPS or an equivalent system in the valley district and then the agitation in Churachandpur district to oppose the bills, it must be acknowledged that the Manipur government did resist the very idea of a restrictive law on migrants for a long time, explaining it would go against the spirit of the Constitution.

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However, under mounting pressures, the Manipur Government in what it probably believed was a halfway house, introduced a watered down version of the ILPS named the Manipur Visitors, Tenants and Migrant Workers Bill, 2015. But even as the bill was awaiting the assent of the State Governor Syed Ahmed, street agitators in the valley denounced the bill saying it will not be able to do what the ILPS does. Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi had to finally in a special session of the Assembly, convened on July 15, moved a withdrawal motion of the bill.

Still under pressure, and a volatile situation after the death of a school boy Sapam Robinhood who was hit by a police tear gas shell during a street procession, the Ibobi Government in what was then described as an ingenuous strategy to ensure at least a major portion of the demand for the introduction of an equivalent of the Inner Line Permit system could pass the legislative process, including the Governor's vigil, spilt the substance of the demand and spread it over three bills: the Protection of Manipur People Bill 2015; the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill 2015; and the Manipur Shops and Establishment (Second Amendment) Bill 2015, and passed them unanimously during a special Assembly session.

The idea was, if the first and controversial bill ran into hurdles, the remaining two should not be held up with it. Of the three bills, only one was original and the remaining two were amendments of existing laws. It is the original one, the Protection of Manipur People Bill 2015, which even the government was probably aware, could run into legal and constitutional trouble.

It first of all concedes to the demand from the streets of taking 1951 as the cut off year for deciding who is indigenous to Manipur. The question was, how can somebody who has settled in the State for 65 years, whose children were born in the State, who have voted in elections therefore were responsible for electing successive democratic governments, many of whom have also probably held important positions in the government, etc., suddenly be called outsiders.

Then again this was a financial bill, for upholding this responsibility would have necessitated the formation of a directorate to register, enumerate and monitor migrants, the overheads for which would have to be reflected in the State's annual budget. The assent of the Governor for this would have therefore become mandatory even for its introduction in the Assembly.

Fortunately for the government, the Governor allowed the bill to be introduced and passed, but is now withholding his assent for it

together with the other two. There has even been a Public Interest Litigation, PIL, filed by an individual seeking the content of the 1951 census figure of citizens with respect to Manipur, and the government has still not responded to the PIL.

The popular anticipation was the latter two bills, Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill 2015; and the Manipur Shops and Establishment (Second Amendment) Bill 2015, would not face any legal hurdle for they are existing laws, and were also valley specific. The amendments to them were meant to merely make transfer of landed properties in the valley districts to non-domiciles, not altogether impossible but difficult.

Legally and constitutionally, there would have been nothing to object to them even by the Governor, therefore probably would have become law easily if not for the trouble that erupted in Churachandpur, which led to the tragic deaths of nine young people.

The fact that even tribal MLAs did not object to these bills should also be seen from this vantage. It would be preposterous to believe they were eager to sell off tribal rights, and more reasonable to believe they saw no infringement on tribal rights in these bills.

The bills were not referred to the Hill Area Committee, but probably this was because nobody saw it as hill related. They were however discussed in the cabinet, and in all-party meetings. Newspaper readers will remember it was only NPF legislators who shunned these meetings saying they would not support or object to the movement for ILPS. It was only when the Churachandpur trouble broke out that they jumped to the opportunity to push their own agenda, which is well within their right.

Sometimes, when things get complicated, it is advisable to return to the basics of the genesis of the problem. Unlike in the pre-literate mediaeval ages when the court chronicles were the only historical records, in today's literate society, on a daily and even hourly basis, newsy events of all kinds are recorded as they unfold by numerous media organisations. Referring back to these records to reflect on the sequence of events that led to the present crisis may be what is necessary now to bring about a resolution to the current ugly entangle. The trouble in Manipur today also is, especially in the wake of the controversy over the ILPS demand and subsequently objections to it, too many are fixated on reading too much between the lines that they have become extremely prone to miss out what are actually in print.

People pushing for the Churachandpur agitation to continue have been even arguing that the laws that the three bills would become are prone to misinterpretation and manipulation by the Meities who make the majority of the lawmakers in the State, as only 20 seats in a house of 60 are reserved for the tribals.

First of all this is an irrational conjecture for the 40 general seats not reserved for the tribals are not reserved for the Meities. Although Meities win them so far, no MLA can afford to displease the non-Meities in their mixed constituencies, for that can mean his defeat. Democracy ensures this.

There is also another bigger flaw in this posturing. In a secular democracy, laws are made by a set of people but these lawmakers do not get to interpret the laws they make when it comes to their applications, unlike say in a feudatory or dictatorship. The interpretation is done by another set of people in an independent institution called the judiciary, whose mandate is to weigh any piece of legislation against the fundamental tenets of the constitution and best practices in international law, if challenged.

If the application of any law is found by the judiciary to contravene any of the fundamental principles of the Constitution, such an application or interpretation of the law will be deemed to be *ultra vires* and disallowed.

The appellate structure of the Indian judiciary also extends right up to the Supreme Court and therefore even an individual citizen can challenge the false application or interpretation of any law in even the country's highest court. What we learned by rote in school that democracy is safer than any other known polity because of this separation of legislature, judiciary and executive, is indeed reality. To doubt this would be to ask for anarchy.

Again, as Friedrich Engels implied, the State is a mechanism for surplus management. State formation therefore happens where a surplus economy emerges. In other words, States run on taxes they can collect and use, and if there are no taxes to be collected, there will be no State. But in the case of Indian provinces that we also refer to as States, this logic has been overridden especially in the case of the Northeast.

The proliferation of the demand for separate States and administrations therefore has nothing to do with alternate models for tax management, but of the desire for separate begging bowls. Isn't it time yet for issues such as these to become the focus of intellectual deliberations in trouble torn Manipur?

Marginalization of Indian Thinkers

B.B. Kumar*

India Produced a Galaxy of Thinkers

India produced a galaxy of thinkers during pre-independence days. Unfortunately, our awareness about most of them is thin and scanty. An average university degree-holder does not know even the names of most of them. The point to ponder is whether this is an innocent phenomenon; and was it not due to systematic and planned politicization of Indian academia? And again, whether efforts were not made to push our thinkers to the margins due to the dictates of an ideology, rather due to combination of ideologies? A summary perusal of the course contents of the humanities and social sciences of our schools, colleges and the universities shall reveal the fact, and make it vivid, that such thing really happened; our great thinkers were really ignored, and an unholy alliance of the Indian politics and Marxist/Communist ideology played a dominant role in such development.

Keeping inadequacy of our knowledge about our recent years' thinkers, *Dialogue* has planned to bring out 2-3 special numbers on 'Indian Thinkers,' and the first issue on the same is in your hands. We have limited our search roughly to the last two centuries. This issue includes papers on giants in the field of Indian spiritualism—Raman Maharshi, Dayanand, Vivekananda, Aurobindo,—politician thinkers, Gandhi and Lohia; littérateur-educationists Tagore, Bankim Chandra; Acharya Raghuvira, the great scholar Indologist and linguist, the exponent of Indian culture and religion beyond today's political India, who successfully led our pilgrimage to the people, who culturally and spiritually belonged to us. Most of these persons were not only

*Editor, *Dialogue* and *Chintan-Srijan*.

thinkers, but vigorous activists too; their field of thinking and action was multi-dimensional and diverse.

This issue of the journal has also papers on Dharmpal and Ramswarup. Dharmpal, a historian and socio-political philosopher, has done seminal original work in these fields. His work of self-appraisal in this nation suffering from self-forgetfulness is significant. Ramswarup's sophisticated analysis and thinking about Indian and Semitic religions, Indian politics and culture, and Marxism is most penetrating, deep and original. We are going to publish papers in forthcoming issues on Tilak, Ambedkar, Savarkar, Anand Coomarswamy, Prof. K.C. Bhattacharjee, Prof. J.L. Mehta, J.B. Krishnamurthy, Prof. A.K. Sharan, Naoroji, R.C. Dutta, M.N. Roy, Prof. R.D. Ranade, Agyeya, V.S. Agrawal, Iqbal and Osho. In due course our search may yield few more names. Our main criteria has been on original and path breaking thinking and approach and not mere scholarship. In brief, thinking and scholarship are two different things. It is necessary to mention that greater efforts are needed to bring them back to the society through the medium of educational system and vigorous cultural debate.

Thinkers Cut Off and Marginalized

The British, and even the Government of India, due to the reasons given in the succeeding paragraphs, helped in the entrenchment of the Marxists in academia and media. There has been a proliferation of Marxists and allied leftists in Indian universities and social science research centres. It became a fashionable creed, as compared with Gandhism and India-centric thoughts, which the Marxists considered to be traditional and obscurantist. This was the reason that the followers of Marx in academia worked, openly and also in subtle ways, to gradually oust the Indian thinkers, who did not share their viewpoints, from the course contents of our educational institutions. The result was that a thought process was encouraged which defined the glorious past and traditions as backward, obscurantist, lacking modernity and regressive. It succeeded in making the students and youth of the country feel ashamed of their past and history.

Marx, India and the British Colonialism

As Marxists have had a disproportionate influence in academia, it is necessary to know about the thinking of Marx about India, who had

shockingly inadequate knowledge about India, its history and culture. He wrote 23 articles on India between 1853 and 1857; Engels wrote eight. These articles, in respect of British rule in India, had taken Euro-centric view of India's past. He was favourably inclined towards British Empire in India. According to him, "England had to fulfill a double mission in India, one destructive and the other regenerating ... the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in India." According to Marx, the British were the first conquerors who were superior, and therefore inaccessible to Hindu civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities by uprooting the native industry, and levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India, report hardly anything beyond that destruction. Marx concludes: "The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins. Nevertheless, it has begun." Again, for Marx, Indian society was always a conquered society, and its history, the history of conquerors, which makes the British conquest of India acceptable. Asiatic mode of production, according to Marx, was primitive mode of production, and yet India was at the top and China the second economically developed nation for 1800 years within the last two millennia. This riddle neither Marx, nor stupid Indian Marxist scholars, explain. These writings of Marx support imperialism at its worst. Yet how can any Indian rever him?

A perusal of Marx's perception of India clearly explains Indian Communist's hostile attitude for Hindu culture and traditions. The Communists/Marxists not only took up the cause of Pakistan; they used to whitewash Muslim misdeeds, and still do it on the dictates of political expediency. Unfortunately for them, the Communists do not have exclusive claim on Islamic vote Bank, their influence and role in Indian politics is declining rapidly. It would have vanished long back but for the support they got from blinkered political parties to run down Indianism expounded by Gandhi, Tagore and others.

Myth of Communist Anti-colonialism

There is a general mis-perception that Communists/Marxists were against British-colonization of India. Far from it, they mostly helped the British, and the British reciprocated. After all, it was not for nothing that the British supplied Marxist literature to the nationalists in British Indian

jails, and they came out as Marxists from the same. The Indian students in British universities often became Communists; Communism/Marxism became ideological fashion in India. Marxist scholars of India are the greatest supporters of the colonial distortions and myths today, such as 'Aryan Aggression Theory,' 'Racist Interpretation of Indian Society,' intra-societal causes of deprivation, etc.; and they vehemently oppose the corrective steps, labelling them to be communal. NCERT social science books high-light caste-based biases without mentioning social, legal, constitutional measures to mitigate them.

Marxists/Communist Intellectuals Gang up and Terrorize

Marxists gang up and oppose their adversaries in such high pitch and unison voice, as they did during the recent Bihar election by enacting the award-returning drama, that their adversaries get terrorized and forget their own agenda and even promote the Marxists' cause. Non-Marxist careerist fence-sitters often join the Marxist's chorus, either due to fear or the prospects of gain.

In an atmosphere of intellectual intolerance and terror created by the Marxists/Communist intellectuals, it has become difficult to ask even simple questions, such as, 'if conversion is desirable, then why not reconversion (*ghar-wapsi*)?', 'If Muhammad bin-Qasim or Babar, or, for that matter, many others, who came from beyond, destroyed the spiritual traditions of this country, captured and carried lakhs of people beyond the north-western boundaries of India, and sold them as slaves, then how they ceased to be foreigners and their rule was not a colonial one?' These so-called *littérateurs/intellectuals*, who have been the political beneficiaries, don't hesitate to take sides to take partisan steps openly; they are equally tenacious. Where there are extra-societal reasons of societal discrimination and denials, positive discriminatory remedial measures are taken, there also, they search intra-societal factors, and thus create social divide. They promote deconstructionist studies as partners of foreign scholars

The distortions are the by-product of the politicization of all the sphere of our public life, and worst of all, that of academia and all that goes in the arena of intellect. And mind it, it was not a one day affair, it started just after independence, rather, in the 1930's. Infact if anyone can be accused of intolerance it is the Marxist and leftist academia. Those not agreeing have been, hounded out. They did not have the civility and humility of a scholar. It was like an ideological gang war.

Adverse Impact of De-linkages from our Thinkers

Pushing our thinkers to the background, and delinking us from their thought has led us to the lowering of the level of discourse, uncontrolled political and sectarian use and misuse of the Indian scholarship and academia, growing intolerance, non-receptivity towards the sane voices, and growing cynicism in the society. Most sickening feverish social atmosphere, as we witnessed during the last Bihar election, as against the desired peacefulness and quiet, promoting calm contemplation and the selection of the best, is the result of the malady generated by the growing thoughtlessness. The politicians miss no chance to promote social division, provided it benefits their party and the individuals. The prominent reason of such maladies is the delinking of Indian society from its fountainheads of *sheel* and *prajna*. This has caused loss of societal control mechanism, and promoted of directionlessness.

Myth of Communist Anti-colonialism.

There is a general mis-perception that Communists/Marxists were against British-colonization of India. Far from it, they mostly helped the British, and the British reciprocated. After all, it was not for nothing that the British supplied Marxist literature to the nationalists in British Indian jails, and the latter came out as Marxists from the same. The Indian students in British universities often became Communists; Communism/Marxism became ideological fashion in India. Marxists scholars of India are the greatest supporters of the colonial distortions and myths today, such as 'Aryan Aggression Theory.' 'Racist Interpretation of Indian Society,' 'intra-societal causes of deprivation, etc.; and they vehemently oppose the corrective steps, labeling them to be communal, which was never an innocent phenomenon.

Marxists Entrenched in Academia and Media: The Government's Role

Communist/Marxist entrenchment in academia and media in this country is not a one day affair. The British planned it, the governments of Independent India, especially the Government of India, strengthened it.

During Indira Gandhi Raj, her secretary, Parameshwar Haksar, "used to remain surrounded by job seekers, all leftists of the thirties, sporting their leftism in words, but not in deeds. One such leftist, who was made

Chairman of the Ashoka Hotel, "had run up huge bills for entertainment during the year, even sending flowers daily to the Prime Minister at the Hotel's expense, keeping a car and driver so that he could go 'incognito' to other hotels to see what he could learn, calling endless 'leftist' members of Parliament for five star dinners and heaven alone knows what else."

And, "one by one Haksar picked up his colleagues of those days, hoping thereby to bring about an unsuspected revolution from the top."

A Communist couple, the 'inner group,' or, the 'kitchen cabinet' of Indira Gandhi, was powerful enough to be stepping stones for many fellow-travelers. The wife, Raj Thapar, writes in her *All These Years*: "Then there was Nurul Hasan, round and flabby, rather like a jelly, supposedly a good Professor of history, which had obviously inspired him to set his sights some place higher, and Parmeshwar's study was the obvious point to begin at: And further, "We have been stepping stones. With Parmeshwar they arrived, Nurul Hasan to become Minister of Education."

How happy was Romila Thapar, today's eminent Indian historian, a Marxist, when Indira Gandhi came to power after the death of Shastri, may be easily understood from the notings in her sister-in-law's diary. She writes: "The day she was elected leader sent me into a kind of delirium. Romesh's sister Romila had come over to the house, and though she was not politically involved with Indira in any way, favourably or unfavourably, her historical and feminist self had been sufficiently aroused to join me in demolishing a whole bottle of plum-brandy. ... Just then Mohit Sen, Communist Party and all that, dropped in, and was somewhat perplexed." And again "Once installed as Prime Minister, she was keen in a reshuffle—like a first assertion of independence. Ramesh (Romila Thapar's elder brother) and Inder (Gujral) went into action and spent two days locked up in our cottage, with lists of ministerial candidates spread on our dining table, all very hush-hush, their faces getting more impassive by the hour with the weight of the history they were tampering with, forging, making, initiating, I don't know which." Further more, it was for nothing that Sachin Chaudhury, editor, *Economic Weekly*, sent a telegram to Romila Thapar's brother, Romesh, "Thy Kingdom has come." And why not?, if they constituted the "inner cabinet" or "inner group" of the power centre."

The inner group was so powerful that a desperate call for suggesting a suitable name for membership of the Planning Commission

came to them. The post, anyway, was filled mechanically. The person selected for the post, Professor Dulal Nag Chaudhury, journeyed through the Vice-Chancellorship of JNU to the post of the Scientific Advisor to the Defence Ministry; when asked, as to what did he know about defence, his reply was, 'Nothing at all. They just pick me up, take me in an air force plane to some installation. I go around it, and they drop me home.' How strange?

Now, it was not only Nehru, who had deep sympathy for the Marxists, and Indira Gandhi, who patronized them, the tradition continued up to Sonia Gandhi. All the members of the National Advisory Council, except specialist-activists Jean Dreze and Mihir Sen, were activist leftists, who were, in reality, obstacles in the way of infusing rigour in social sector policy making process.

UPSC Summons a Marxist: Not an Innocent Affair

When Akhlaq ur-Rahman Kidwai was Chairman of the Union Public Service Commission, he invited Namwar Singh, a Marxist scholar, and member of the Communist Party of India for framing the Hindi syllabus; later on, Namwar Singh was made an examiner and member of the interview board of the UPSC. Again, when A.R. Kidwai became Governor of Bihar, he invited Namwar Singh for helping Bihar Government in the task of the appointment of Hindi teachers in the colleges and the universities of Bihar.

Marxists in this country have had disproportionate influence in various fields, thanks to the help of the Congress Party, and the Marxists in administration. The information given here is not even the tip of the iceberg; it is rather only an indicator. One point I would like to mention that Marxists are not an ungrateful lot; whenever adversaries of their benefactors come to power, they help their benefactors by enacting something like 'award-returning drama' and 'hectic debate on intolerance.' The dominance of such groups in our intellectual arena is adversely affecting country's academic health. One way out will be to get back the oxygen from the fountainhead of ideas, our thinkers. Hence, this effort to restore a modicum of decency, humility and unbiased freedom of thought or 'swaraj' in thought and action which Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore considered more important than political 'swaraj' for Indians.

Self, Silence and Ramana Maharshi

Ashok Vohra*

"I did not eat, so they said I was fasting; I did not speak, so they said I was a *mauni*." – Ramana

"We have two *mahaans* in India today. One is Ramana Maharshi who gives us peace. The other is Mahatma Gandhi, who will not let us rest one moment in peace. But each does what he is doing with the same end in view, namely, the spiritual regeneration of India." – Sarojini Naidu

Reflecting on human life Adi Shankracharya in his *Bhajagovindam 7*, asserts that "One is interested in play when he is a child. He is interested in women when he is young. And, when he grows old he is lost in thoughts. No one is interested in inquiring into what is truly real." The nature of the 'truly real' can be discovered only by pondering over the questions: "Who are you? Who am I? Where have I come from? Who is my mother? Who is my father?" He cajoles one to "Contemplate on the changing nature of life which is almost like a dream and give up extreme attachment."¹ The 'truly real,' according to him is not situated in the outer world but is internal to the human beings. According to him, one has to make a conscious and diligent effort to look within because "We are created with the sense organs facing outward and hence one sees the outer world and not the inner self. Someone who is wise, desiring immortality, sees the inner self, by turning the eyes inward."²

Ramana Maharshi learnt this hard truth during his two 'death experiences.' The first death experience happened about six weeks before he left his home for Arunachalam in 1886. Narrating this experience he says:

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I was sitting alone in a room on the first floor of my uncle's house. I seldom had any sickness and on that day there was nothing wrong with my health, but a sudden violent fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it nor was there any urge in me to find out whether there was any account for the fear. I just felt I was going to die and began thinking what to do about it. It did not occur to me to consult a doctor or any elders or friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there. The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: 'Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' And at once I dramatised the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out still as though *rigor mortis* has set in, and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, and that neither the word 'I' nor any word could be uttered. 'Well then,' I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? Is the body I? It is silent and inert, but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of I within me, apart from it. So I am the Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit.' All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truths which I perceived directly almost without thought process. I was something real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with the body was centered on that I. From that moment onwards, the 'I' or Self focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death vanished once and for all. The ego was lost in the flood of Self-awareness. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music, but the I continued like the fundamental sruti note ('that which is heard' i.e. the Vedas and Upanishads) a note which underlies and blends with all other notes.³

The second 'death experience' happened in 1912, when he was 33 years old. At that time Ramana Maharshi was living in the Virupaksha cave on the Arunachalam hill. His companion Vasudeva Shastri felt that

Ramana had passed away and starting weeping and lamenting. The death experience was felt in quick succession thrice. He felt as if a white curtain was drawn and darkness and faintness descended on his vision. As a result he could not stand and had to sit down on the rock. His skin turned blue. His breathing and blood circulation stopped. Describing his experience he says, "I could distinctly see the gradual process. There was a stage when I could still see a part of the landscape clearly while the rest was covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing a slide across one's view in a stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking lest I should fall. When it cleared I walked on. When darkness and faintness came over me a second time I leaned against a rock until it cleared. The third time it happened I felt it safer to sit, so I sat down near the rock. Then the bright white curtain completely shut off my vision, my head was swimming and my circulation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death hue and it got darker and darker"⁴. He narrates the second 'death' experience, thus:

My usual current of awareness still continued in that state also. I was not in the least afraid and felt no sickness at the condition of the body. I had sat down near the rock in my usual posture, closed my eyes and was not leaning against the rock. The body, left without circulation or breathing, still maintaining that position. This state continued for some ten or fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed suddenly through the body and circulation revived with enormous force and breathing as well, while the body perspired from every pore. The colour of life reappeared on the skin. I then opened my eyes, got up and said; 'Let's go.' We reached Virupaksha cave without further trouble. That was the only fit I had in which both circulation and breathing stopped."⁵

Unlike the first death experience which was the experience of a juvenile, the second was the experience of a mature person. Ramana was conscious throughout the period he was undergoing this 'death experience' is clear from his saying, that he "could distinctly feel (Vasudeva Sastri's) clasp and his shivering and hear his words of lamentation and understand their meaning. I also saw the discolouration of my skin and felt the stoppage of my circulation and breathing and the increased chilliness of the extremities of my body. My usual current of awareness still continued in that state also. I was not in the least afraid and felt no sadness at the condition of the body."⁶ According to

him, “This was the only fit I had in which both circulation and respiration stopped. I did not bring on the fit purposely, nor did I wish to see what this body would look like after death, nor did I say that I will not leave this body without warning others. It was one of those fits that I used to get occasionally, only this time it took a very serious form.”⁷

It is worth noting that unlike the first death experience in which there was no stopping of breathing and circulation, discolouration of the skin, etc. there was fear of death, of leaving the body. In the second ‘death experience’ there was no fear, no anxiety. Ramana was fully aware of the difference between, ‘fits’ and ‘death experience,’ so one cannot conclude as many sceptics do, that Ramana had really the common experience of a fit.

From these ‘death experiences’ Ramana existentially realised the temporality of the body and the permanence of the self. He says, “In the vision of death, though all the senses were benumbed, the *aham sphurana* (Self-awareness) was clearly evident, and so I realised that it was that awareness that we call ‘I’, and not the body. This Self-awareness never decays. It is unrelated to anything. It is Self-luminous. Even if this body is burnt, it will not be affected. Hence, I realised on that very day so clearly that that was ‘I’. The reflection on the ‘I’ experience led Ramana to investigate the true nature of ‘I’. Ramana’s written works contain terse descriptions of the self-enquiry. In the Verse thirty of *Ulladu Narpadu* he says:

Questioning ‘Who am I?’ within one’s mind, when one reaches the Heart, the individual ‘I’ sinks crestfallen, and at once reality manifests itself as ‘I-I’. Though it reveals itself thus, it is not the ego ‘I’ but the perfect being the Self Absolute. Verses nineteen and twenty of *Upadesa Undiyar* describe the same process in almost identical terms:

19. ‘Whence does the ‘I’ arise?’ Seek this within. The ‘I’ then vanishes. This is the pursuit of wisdom.

20. Where the ‘I’ vanished, there appears an ‘I-I’ by itself. This is the infinite.

So a realisation of the self, the ‘I’ is the realisation not of the individual ‘I’ or self but the universal non-dual self or ‘I’. As a consequence of this realisation there is no ‘other.’ The ‘other’ becomes a mental construction. Ramana asserts, “The real *Self* or real ‘I’ is, contrary to perceptible experience, not an experience of individuality but a non-personal, all-inclusive awareness. It is not to be confused with the individual self which (Ramana) said was essentially non-existent, being a fabrication of the mind, which obscures the true experience of

the real *Self*. He maintained that the real *Self* is always present and always experienced but he emphasized that one is only consciously aware of it as it really is when the self-limiting tendencies of the mind have ceased. Permanent and continuous Self-awareness is known as Self-realization. In his poem *Ekatma Panckam* written in 1947, Ramana uses the allegory of ornament and gold to explain the essence of the Self and the nature of ‘I-I’ relationship. He says, “As the ornament is not apart from the gold, the body is not apart from the Self. The ignorant ones mistake the body for the Self; the sage knows that the Self alone is real.” It alone is real because “The Self is the true nature of one’s self. This cannot and does not change; all the rest changes and passes, and therefore, unnatural.”⁸

Ramana throughout led a simple life. He was averse to pomp, and ostentation. He never allowed anyone to garland him. Whenever on some ceremonial occasions he had to participate and listen to eulogies and hymns of praise, he participated in them as a witness to what was going on and listened to the acclamations not as their subject but only as one in the audience, as a third person. For example, he did not like the special significance attached to his birthday and its celebration by his devotees. On the first ever celebration of his birthday in the year 1912 by the devotees he expressed his displeasure thus,

You, who would celebrate the birthday grandly, seek first whence is your birth. The day of true birth is the one on which one is born in that Reality which is one, and is without birth and death.

Without mourning for one’s birthday, to observe the day as a festival is like decorating a corpse. The part of wisdom lies in realising one’s Self and merging in it⁹.

He was against all kinds of discrimination and special or differential treatment. He had no preferences and prejudices, no likes and dislikes. He treated all – the rich and powerful and the poor peasants and the ordinary folks alike. In doing this Ramana was practising *advaita* – non-dualism in his day-to-day life; he saw the same Self dwelling in all. He was equanimous towards everyone and had an attitude of indifference in all situations and circumstances; “sitting behind locked doors or out in the open was the same to him. To him, there was no body seated, no doors were locked and no temple served as shelter. He had no outer home (*aniketah*); his wisdom had become steady in the immutable reality (*sthiramatih*).”¹⁰ Irrespective of his surroundings and the lifestyle that he led that is, whether he was living a normal way of life following

regular habits of eating, moving, speaking etc., or leading an ascetic life, that is abstaining from eating food, keeping silent, etc., “Ramana always remained fixed in the supreme Self; this was his natural state (*sahaja-sthitih*).”¹¹ For him there were no rules to be followed. It was perfectly in order. Explaining this exception he said for an enlightened being “there are no rules to observe and no vows to keep. After reaching the end, what use has he for the means – however remote they may be? All that one can say about this mode is that it is in accordance with the *prarabdha*”¹² (destiny). Even the arousal of the ego in a realised being “does not affect him. The ego, in his case, is harmless like a burnt rope which cannot be used to tie anything.”¹³

Ramana was averse to calling himself a *guru* much less an *avatara* – incarnation of Dakshinamurti or that of Kumarila Bhatta. He did not claim possession of any occult power and hierophantic knowledge. He had no pretensions and resisted every effort to canonize him during his lifetime. He did not initiate a new cult or school of thought. Though many were influenced by him and claimed to have attained liberation because of their association with him, Ramana never claimed to have disciples, or publicly acknowledged them as liberated beings, and never appointed any successors to his heritage and did not promote any lineage. In fact Ramana tried to show time and again that he was like any other common man. He, for example said, “People wonder how I speak of *Bhagavad Gita*, etc. It is due to hearsay. I have not read the *Gita* nor waded through commentaries for its meaning. When I hear a *sloka* (verse), I think its meaning is clear and I say it. That is all and nothing more.”

In fact, Ramana was quite perturbed by the constant flow of increasing number of devotees who came to the Ashrama to have his *darsana* and blessings as his normal activities in the Ashrama got restricted because of them. He according to his own confession tried to flee thrice from the Ashrama to return to a life of solitude. But that was not to be. Ramana was not very distressed by his failure as he was firmly committed to the doctrine of *prarabdha*. According to him life goes on “In accordance with the *prarabdha* (destiny to be worked out in current life) of each, the One whose function it is to ordain makes each to act. What will not happen will never happen, whatever effort one may put forth. And what will happen will not fail to happen, however much one may seek to prevent it. This is certain. The part of wisdom therefore is to stay quiet in *Sahaja Samadhi*.”

He taught, lived and practised the age old philosophy of Vedanta by remaining silent about it because he believed that “Silence is the true *upadesa*. It is the perfect *upadesa*. It is suited only for the most advanced seeker. The others are unable to draw full inspiration from it. Therefore, they require words to explain the truth. But truth is beyond words; it does not warrant explanation. All that is possible is to indicate It.” He taught a new method – the method of self enquiry by practising which one can undergo the *advaitic* experience. This method can be adopted by one and all, irrespective of their class, caste and place in the society, or their being an atheist, theist, agnostic or sceptic. It may however be noted that Ramana did not use *Dvaita* and *Advaita* as absolute categories. He clearly stated this in the following words: “*Dvaita* and *advaita* are relative terms. They are based on the sense of duality. The Self is as it is. There is neither *dvaita* nor *advaita*.” I Am that I Am.” Simple Being is the Self. Any other way of expression for example, ‘I am X’, ‘I am Y’ ‘I am Z’ etc. gives rise to ego and not self-knowledge. That is why one has to say, “(Aham, aham) ‘I-I’ is the Self; (Aham idam) ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’ is the ego.’ The Self has no location, no periphery and no centre. It is “unlimited and formless, and so is the spiritual center. There is only one such center. Whether in the West or the East, the center cannot be different. It has no locality. Being unlimited, it includes leaders, world, forces of destruction and construction. You speak of contact because you are thinking of embodied beings as leaders. Spiritual people are not bodies; they are not aware of their bodies. They are spirit: limitless and formless. There is always unity among them. These questions (questions like whether India is a spiritual centre of the universe; whether Indian spiritual tradition and Mahatmas can play a role in uniting the leaders of different religion etc.) cannot arise if the Self is realized.” For the realised beings there is no diversity but only unity; there is no individuality but collectivity and universality.

Though Ramana did not criticise other schools or teachers’ method, he asserted that his technique of ‘Self-enquiry,’ Who am I? is different from the techniques of meditation taught by the traditional Advaitins, that is ‘I am Siva’ or ‘I am He.’ He distinguished between the two in the following words:

The quest for the self of which I speak is a direct method and is superior to it (the traditional Advaitin’s method). For the moment you get into the quest for the Self and begin to go deeper, the real Self is waiting there to receive you, and then

whatever is to be done is done by something else and you, as an individual, have no hand in it. In this process all doubts and discussions are automatically given up, just as one who sleeps forgets all his cares for the time being.¹⁴

Elaborating the distinction between his and others' teaching he told the famous orientalist Oliver Lacombe, "Maharshi's teaching is only an expression of his own experience and realisation" and about the articulation of his personal experience he said: "A realised person will use his own language. *Silence* is the best language."¹⁵ Ramana chose the medium of silence for communication and imparted his teachings through silence.

The other major difference between traditional Advaitic school and Ramana's teachings is that while the Advaita has a negationist *neti, neti* - 'not this,' 'not this,' attitude to describe the ultimate reality, and it also affirmatively teaches the mental affirmations that the Self was the only reality, such as 'I am Brahman' or 'I am He,' Ramana emphasises on the enquiry 'Nan Yar' - 'Who am I?'

Though Ramana did not claim *gurudom*, many scholars became his devotees and rushed to him for becoming his disciples. While the common man wanted to meet him for material gains, the scholars from all over the globe became his disciples to learn nature and practice of spirituality from him. They felt that "Ramana could give this initiatory push by touch or by glance. Seated in silence, he would suddenly turn, fix one with an intense gaze, and the person would become directly aware of the right-hand Heart (the spiritual center of one's awareness) and its vibrant current of primal awareness. Those who experienced the power of Ramana's gaze have reported that the initiation was so clear and vivid that they could never again seriously doubt that the Guru was none other than their own primal conscious being."¹⁶

Some of the disciples felt that "Ramana also initiated people in dreams by gazing intently into their eyes, and he would sometimes travel in the subtle body to visit people. He would appear to a disciple hundreds of miles away as a luminous figure, and the person would recognize his appearance in that form. He noted that one's waking life and one's dream life were both a kind of dream each with different qualities of awareness. He referred to them as 'dream 1' and 'dream 2.' He therefore did not make a big distinction between appearing to a waking disciple and a dreaming disciple since he considered both spheres of existence to be dreams." In fact, Ramana himself admitted this to a devotee who wanted to see his real form and who had such an

experience. When the devotee told Ramana about his experience, Ramana said: "You wanted to see my form; you saw my disappearance; I am formless. So, that experience might be the real truth."¹⁷

F. H. Humphreys was the first European to meet Ramana. Humphreys claimed that he had a vision of Ramana in Bombay and Vellore. He learnt Telugu to meet Ramana. He drew a picture of the person whose vision he had before his Telugu teacher Ganapati Sastri. Sastri told that it was his guru Ramana in front of the Virupaksha cave, and arranged a meeting of Humphreys with Ramana. Humphreys met Ramana in November, 1911. The Englishman was impressed by his experience of meeting Ramana. He recorded the details of his meeting in a letter which was published in the *International Psychic Gazette* in the following words:

At two o'clock in the afternoon we went up the hill to see him. On reaching the cave we sat before him, at his feet, and said nothing. We sat thus for a long time and I felt lifted out of myself. For half an hour I looked into the Maharishi's eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realise somewhat that the body is the temple of Holy Ghost; I could only feel that his body was not the man; it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically. My own feelings were indescribable.

The Maharishi is a man beyond description in his expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control and calm strength of conviction.¹⁸

Humphreys met Ramana several times later on. His ideas on spirituality were changed fundamentally as a result of his meetings with Ramana. He recorded in the *Gazette* his impressions of these meetings. 'You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile' in one of such minutes; the other minute records, 'it is strange what a change it makes to one to have been in his presence!' Brunton a well known journalist too recorded that he had an experience of a 'sublimely all-embracing' awareness, a 'Moment of Illumination' while staying in Ramanasrama. Murgnor narrated the experience that he had in the presence of Ramana in the following words, "In the same way that wax melts on encountering fire, on seeing his feet, my mind dissolved and lost its form. Like the calf finding its mother, my heart melted and rejoiced in his feet. The hairs on my body stood on end. Devotion surged in me like an ocean that has seen the full moon. Through the grace

of *chitsakti* [the power inherent in consciousness], my soul was in ecstasy.”¹⁹ Most of the people who saw Ramana felt that “to sit before him was itself a deep spiritual education. To look at him was to have one’s mind stilled. To fall within the sphere of his beatific vision was to be inwardly elevated”²⁰. Brunton gave expression to what most of the visitors and devotees felt on seeing Ramana, thus:

His expression is modest and mild, the large dark eyes being extraordinarily tranquil and beautiful. The nose is short, straight and classically regular. There is a rugged little beard on the chin, and the gravity of his mouth is most noticeable. Such a face might have belonged to one of the saints who graced the Christian Church during the middle ages, except that this one possesses the added quality of intellectuality. . . . He has the eyes of a dreamer . . . there is something more than mere dreams behind those heavy lids.”²¹

The visitors and devotees came with questions about spiritual as well as other matters faced by them in their lives with the intention of seeking answers from Ramana. But their questions and queries dissolved as soon as they were in his presence. The questions which they thought were very significant and crucial for them ‘seemed silly and puerile.’ In the presence of Ramana they were “so filled with joy and peace that the desire to ask (questions) disappeared.”²² Most of the devotees and visitors in his presence, as Brunton recorded: “felt security and inward peace. The spiritual radiations which emanated from him were all penetrating. I learnt to recognise in his person the sublime truths which he taught, while I was no less hushed into reverence by his incredibly sainted atmosphere. He possessed a deific personality which defies description. One could not forget the wonderful pregnant smile of his, with its hint of wisdom and peace won from suffering and experience. He was the most understanding man I have ever known; you could be sure always of some words from him that would smooth your way a little, and that word always *verified* what your deepest feeling had told you already.”²³

Of course, all of the visitors felt a perceptible change in them after meeting Ramana. The meeting, most of them reported, was a turning point in their life. U.G. Krishnamurti (popularly known as UG), then 21 years of age, met Ramana in the year 1939. U.G. related that he asked Ramana, ‘This thing called moksha, can you give it to me?’ - to which Ramana Maharshi purportedly replied, ‘I can give it, but can you take it?’ This answer completely altered UG’s perceptions of the ‘spiritual

path’ and its practitioners, and he never again sought the counsel of ‘those religious people.’ Later U.G. would say that Maharshi’s answer – which he had originally perceived as ‘arrogant’ – put him ‘back on track.’ “That Ramana was a real McCoy” said UG.

Mahatma Gandhi too advised people, in search of peace, to visit Ramanashrama. He, for example advised Rajendra Prasad who for sometime wished to be away from the hectic life of a freedom fighter, in quest of peace “if you want peace, go to Sri Ramanasramam and remain for a few days in the presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi, without talking or asking any question.” Rajendra Prasad did accordingly and spent a few days in the ashrama under the benign shadow of Ramana. On the day of his departure Rajendra Prasad while taking leave of Ramana told him that he had come to Ramansarama on Mahatma Gandhi’s advice and was now returning to Mahatma Gandhi’s ashram and requested Ramana to give him any message to be delivered to Mahatma Gandhi. To this Ramana graciously answered : “The same Power which works here is working there also! Where is the need for words when heart speaks to heart?” Ramana held Mahatma Gandhi in great esteem and supported Swaraj movement headed by him. He considered Gandhi as a godly figure. He was quite disturbed on hearing the news of Gandhi’s assassination. On the death of Gandhi, he consoled himself as well as his audience by narrating the episode of the dialogue between Yama and Rama from *Uttara Ramayana*. In this narrative after Ramarajya is established, Yama tells Rama that the work for which Rama had come on the earth had been completed, and that it was time for him to return to heaven. Taking this narrative as an illustration Ramana said, “This is similar, swaraj has been obtained; your work is over; why are you still here? Shouldn’t you go back?”²⁴

When the devotees grieved over the suffering of Ramana because of the cancerous tumour just before his passing away from the ephemeral worldly life which began on December 30, 1879, to the eternal and immortal life at the age of 71 years at 8.47 PM on April 14, 1950, he who was indifferent to his pain and suffering comforted the devotees by saying: “They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. What a pity! They are despondent that Bhagvana is going to leave them and go away, but where can he go and how?” He reassured them, “I shall be there where I am always.” He left the body sitting in a lotus position. The final word that passed from his lips was the sacred syllable OM.

Millions of Indians continue to see Ramana as the ‘sources of authentication and validation of Hinduism in the modern world;’ ‘a

sage without the least touch of worldliness, a saint of matchless purity, a witness to the eternal truth of Vedanta;’ a sage who acts as ‘a symbol that continues to inspire them to preserve their distinctive national culture and identity;’ a sage whose ‘teachings have an air of *timeless*, classic structure which seem as appropriate to twentieth century Hinduism as they do to first century Hinduism.’

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In Days of Great Peace

M. Soudoski*

When I arrived at the abode of Maharshi, called ‘Ramanashram’ and jumped out from the two wheeled cart just in front of the temple, I was taken straight into the presence of the Sage.

The Saint lifted up his head, looked at me, and made a gesture with his hand as if inviting me to come a little nearer. I was struck by the softness and serenity of this movement, so simple and dignified that I immediately felt I was facing a great man. His attitude was so natural that the newcomer did not feel any wonder or shyness. All his critical faculty of thought and his curiosity dropped away. So I was unable to make observations or comparisons, although subconsciously I may have had this intention when previously imagining this first meeting.

Maharshi, as I saw him, was a thin, white haired, very gracious old man; his skin had the colour of old ivory; his movements were easy, calm and soft; his countenance breathed a natural state of inner concentration without the slightest effort of will. It was the first manifestation of the invisible radiance which I witnessed every day during subsequent months. Just now as I am writing these words, I wonder how it is that I have never forgotten even the smallest detail concerning Maharshi; it can be evoked in my brain like a picture on a hidden sensitive plate of whose very existence I was unaware.

I am gazing intently on the Saint, looking into his great, widely-opened, dark eyes. And suddenly I begin to *understand*. How can I express in our earthly language what exactly I do understand? How shall I tell in words, based on the common ideas and experiences of

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ordinary people who are creating and moulding our language, these higher and more subtle things? May I say that I understand that Maharshi's life is not concentrated on this our earthly plane; that it extends far beyond our world; that he contemplates a different and real world, a world not subject to storms and changes; that he is a torch of *light* before the throne of the Most High, shedding its rays all around; that he is like the incense smoke constantly rising towards the blue sky which we see through the temple roof; that his eyes, just now looking at me, seem to convey — no, I am unable to say anything more. I cannot even think.

I only feel a stream of tears upon my face. They are abundant and serene. They flow silently. It is not suffering, regret, or repentance that is their source. I do not know how to name their cause. And through these tears I look at the Master. He knows fully well their origin. His serious, almost solemn face, expresses endless understanding and friendship, and glows with *inner light* which makes it so different from all other human faces. In the light of his profound gaze, I suddenly understand the reason and purpose of my tears. Yes, I 'see' at last. The sudden illumination is too strong to allow immediate belief in the truth of the 'seen'. Is 'this' really possible? Can it be possible? But Maharshi's eyes seem to bring a confirmation of 'it'.

Tears give way to an inner quietude and a feeling of inexpressible, indescribable happiness. This inner mood is independent of any outward condition. Neither the pain of the limbs, which is often annoying when one has been sitting for several hours in the same position, nor the troublesome black mosquitoes, nor the trying heat, can disturb this inner peace. But once we have discovered the secret of this experience, the door to its repetition is opened. We can recover it at will. I am quite aware that the assistance of the Master is a most important factor in these first glimpses of the supramental consciousness.

I remember Maharshi's words in answer to a similar question. I read them lately and they seemed to confirm my feeling.

'The Real Self is all, it is omnipresent, hence always with us. To live in it is Realization'

His face is full of inspiration, unearthly serenity and power, of infinite kindness and understanding. Big dark eyes seem to look into the Infinite, above the heads of all present, without appearing to concentrate on anyone in particular, and yet penetrating to the deepest recesses of each individual heart. This can be felt as one looks into them. And it is really difficult not to plunge our gaze into those eyes

when we are near Maharshi. He reigns in silence over this varied crowd, being a focus for so many different human feelings.

A wave of endless bliss surges through and overwhelms me. It carries me beyond thought, beyond suffering and grief, neither death nor change exist there, only infinite *being*. Time disappears — there is no need of it any more.

I do not know how long this wave of *light* reigned within me. At last I felt I should look through my closed eyelids at the Master. And (without opening my eyes) I 'see' or rather *know* that the Saint has fixed his immovable gaze upon me.

That is the key to my experience.

Maharshi was born on 31st December 1879, in a village near Madura in South India. He was named Venkataraman; he belonged to a respected but not affluent *brahmin* family, his father being a pleader. He and his elder brother were educated at a local High School; up to that time there was nothing to make anyone suspect that a spiritual genius was here in embryo. Venkataraman was a beautiful, healthy boy, loving sports and physical exercise, but not over keen on study. There was a legend in his family that, from every generation, one of its sons would leave home and discard the worldly life. The only spiritual book that had made an impression on the boy was the *Periapuranam*, which describes the lives of sixty-three Shaivite saints. Maharshi later said that when he read it, a strange desire arose in him, a yearning to be one of those saints. Finally, when listening to a relative speaking about his pilgrimage to Arunachala, a holy hill some hundred miles from Madura, the very word 'Arunachala' struck a responsive chord in the heart of the youth. He asked his relative to explain about this Mount Arunachala.

Sometime later he had an extraordinary experience. Suddenly, while alone in his room, a terrible fear and realization of death overcame him. The young Venkataraman, in perfect health and without any outward suffering, felt that his last hour had come. His reaction was entirely different from what one would expect. He called for no help, nor did he seek a doctor, but quietly lay down on the floor, saying to himself: 'Death is coming to me, but death of *what*. My body is already lying without movement, it is becoming cold and stiff, but "I", my consciousness, is not affected at all. "I" am therefore independent of this dying form. "I" am *not* this body.' After some time life came back to the corpse like body, but its dweller was changed. His experience brought him the conviction of the independence of his real Self from the temporary form falsely called 'I'.

Shortly after this he left Madura, giving no indication of his destination, leaving only a note for his family asking them not to worry and not to seek him, as he assured them he was embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Taking only enough money to pay part of his fare, he travelled by train and on foot to Tiruvannamalai, the nearest township to Mount Arunachala. He then stayed at the numerous temples and shrines in the neighbourhood, cutting his hair and discarding his *brahmin* clothes as a sign of his renunciation of the world. Nobody knew him; he sat for days unconscious of his body, immersed in deep *samadhi*, and at first the new spiritual awakening brought complete neglect of his outer personality.

Hungry and emaciated, eating only the scraps of food brought to him by visitors who took pity on the young ascetic, and speaking no word in his observance of the silence (*mouna*), the future Great *Rishi* spent long years of extremely strenuous life at the foot of the sacred Arunachala.

The fame of the boy grew. Now food was offered to him in plenty, but he took only what was needed to keep alight the flame of his physical life. His spirituality was such that no one of any perception could come near him without recognizing his unique quality.

Then came the first disciples in the persons of various *swamis* and devotees. In those years of complete silence he left us his first written teachings, addressed to some faithful attendants who wanted to have his instructions. In extremely concentrated form, the young Sage gave his teaching to the world in two small books entitled *Who Am I?* and *Spiritual Instruction*.

In the meantime, his mother and his elder brother found him and begged him to return home. He refused, but it seems when his mother lost the house where he was born, and had no one to support her ageing years, he agreed to her living at the Ashram. She looked after the cooking for him, his attendants and visitors, and became his pupil. Under his guidance it is believed that she attained liberation.

Besides the previously mentioned two small books, Maharshi wrote some hymns with commentaries in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. These have been translated into English, some with forewords by eminent English writers.

Throughout his life the Great *Rishi* was always accessible to any visitor. In his presence, no distinction was given to caste, so rigidly followed in India. *Brahmins* sat with *Harijans* (lower castes), Moslems and Westerners. The visible presence of the Spirit in Man united the

troubled world at his feet. He was supreme, far above all levels of human understanding. That intangible atmosphere of spiritual peace dissolved all doubts in his presence.

The writer came to him in the very last period of his earthly life, and believes this to be the most glorious period of all. As the sun sinks in a blaze of sunset glory, so Maharshi's last years reflected the indescribable beauty of his manifestation.

I saw the man, as he showed the victory of spirit over matter. His physical suffering, lasting for more than a year, was a crucifixion in my eyes. For him there was no alleviation in a hospital, although his sickness was deadly. He always gave the permanent *darshan* — for our sake. He always sat before us, and no movement or complaint ever showed the depth of his suffering. He wanted no cure. Knowing all that could be expected of his physical body, his thought was always for us, who went to him to seek relief from our own sufferings, and to none did he refuse his blessing. His spiritual alchemy transmuted the hard materialism of our hearts into something pure and noble.

In the glory of his presence, we learned to live in eternity, to remember our lost inheritance of spirit and bliss. Sometimes when I sat near him absorbing the invisible radiations of His light, I meditated: 'To whom and when can I repay this bliss? Who is it that is taking away the burdens and debts of my life? He has no sin, has never performed an evil deed. But what is there about me, about all of us who are gathered together at his feet, seeking solace and power to endure our petty discomforts? His body, which has committed no sin, is suffering agony in our presence, who are healthy in spite of our guilt.'

The mysterious Voice asks: 'Are you ready to accept the responsibility for That?' The soundless answer is: 'Yes, if you will always be with me'. And the conviction arises within that *he is*, and *will be forever*.

During the earlier days of spiritual quest, I came in contact with the head of the Ramakrishna Mission in Paris, the eminent Swami S., whom the Ashram of Sri Maharshi had recommended that I visit. He was always very busy, but when he was shown my letter from Tiruvannamalai, he immediately gave me an interview. During our talk, he said: 'Sri Maharshi is your spiritual Master, your *Guru*. Ask him for help. It will be granted to you'. Also, pointing to the way out of some inner difficulties I had confessed to him, he gave me a short *mantra* which would put me in touch with the Great *Rishi*, whom of course, I had not yet seen. It was the repetition of 'Om, Ramana, Om.'

Months passed and my *Vichara* was firmly established, but it was not yet the living vital *Vichara* transforming the whole man, which it later became in South America. But even this had no comparison with the light which illumined it when I was in the presence of the Master Maharshi himself. And so I say that the great being who gave us this wonderful tool, in a form appropriate to our epoch — the Self inquiry or *Vichara* — becomes our beloved Master and Lord of our lives.

Maharshi says clearly:

‘The mind is constituted of thoughts. Stop thinking and show me then where is the mind?’

Experience proves, that after discarding all thoughts from what we call ‘mind’, *nothing* remains. But life does not stop there, as unfortunately, many people are apt to believe. On the contrary, it manifests itself with more power and intensity, although, it is true, far more subtle. I well remember those times when I could not imagine that one could exist without thinking. Maharshi says:

‘The most important way to improve the mind is to stop thinking. Thinking and thinking is the cause of the heated brain.’

What is the practical difficulty in achieving this control? It lies in the fact that, for untrained people, the very process of thinking has in itself a charm not easy to overcome.

The constant inward use of Maharshi’s teachings of ‘*Who am I?*’ quiets the rebellious mind. One also sees that the acceptance of the axiom: ‘No one has ever been able to discover truth by thinking, nor to arrive at any definite discovery in the spiritual realm through the activity of the mind,’ destroys the very interest in the process of thought itself. And when our interest weakens, we are not far from victory.

It is strange that we are compelled to recognize two apparently contradictory facts: The teachings of the Great *Rishis* of India are substantially as old as the first traces of philosophic thought and yet they open up a new world of spiritual achievement.

The writer and poet, Grant Duff (Douglas Ainslie), in his account of ‘The Greatest Event in My Life’ tells of the striking effect felt when he first saw Sri Maharshi. He wrote: ‘I saw Maharshi for the first time, but the moment he looked at me I felt he was the Truth and the Light.’

This experience was by no means exclusive to Mr. Grant Duff. Many others have felt it with an irresistible certainty of the soul. Therein lies the greatest mystery of the true realization of God – or Truth; for then a man becomes one with Him. And at the same time another miracle happens — that man is then closest to all other men.

When Gandhi sent Sri Rajendra Prasad, the present President of the Indian Republic to ask Sri Maharshi for a message, the latter said: ‘Of what use are words when the heart speaks to the heart?’ And the messenger went back to his Master, Mahatma Gandhi, satisfied with the answer of the Great *Rishi*.

So the Self *inquiry*, ‘Who Am I?’, was always the basis of all the teachings of Maharshi. He told us that while putting the inquiry to ourselves, we must clearly realize that our bodily senses and mind are impermanent and conditioned, and should be excluded from the realm of the real. Then that which remains unaffected by them will be the Self.

By the constant and firm use of the *Vichara* we come to the silence. During his long life on this earth Maharshi gave many commentaries on his teachings, in reply to questions put to him by innumerable visitors and disciples. They are written down in several books published by the Ashram. One of them, the incomparable *Maha Yoga* (‘The Great *Yoga*’), contains all the essentials of his sayings classified in appropriate form by an eminent disciple. This book is indispensable to every earnest student of the Maharshi. If you study it you will understand the message and the greatness of Maharshi.

The Sage of Arunachala also gave us another great injunction, that we should strive now in this life to attain that level of consciousness which transcends the ‘normal’. For then we attain a consciousness which will endure for ever, independent of the death of the body. This state frees us from all fears and uncertainties. This is that ‘pearl of great price’, that ‘treasure’ worth any toil to discover, that ‘good part’ which shall not be taken from us.

Maharshi did not occupy himself with theories. A famous saying of his is: ‘There is no reincarnation; there is no Ishwara (personal god); there is nothing; you have only to be.’ This is the ultimate truth for those who attain the highest conception of unconditioned being. This plane can be attained because he attained it. I believe that the very purpose of a great being who comes for our sake to this earth is not so much to give us a ‘new teaching’ (if ‘new teachings’ ever exist), as to give an example of attainment, fulfilling the teachings of the sacred books and pouring new life into them.

Such is the purpose of the *Maha-Yoga*, confirmed over and over again by Maharshi himself.

Another teaching on which he laid great stress is that there is no such thing as the evolution of spirit or of the Self. His conception is much more realistic and full of common sense. He says the real Self is

ever present in us; only the shrouds of matter veil it. All that we have to do is to remove the illusion and the Self will light up in us; there is no need to seek it elsewhere.

So the Direct Path to spiritual attainment as shown by the Maharshi does not require any unnatural body postures, often so difficult to perform for the majority of people; none of the efforts of *hatha yoga*, which can be dangerous unless practised under the direct supervision of a competent teacher, and no artificial mental practices of concentration. All such things lead nowhere unless accompanied by the elements of spiritual enlightenment, a fact which is firmly underlined by Sri Sankaracharya in his *Viveka Chudamani* (The Crest Jewel of Wisdom).

Now I see clearly that these things belong to a closed and bewitched circle. For years I and some of my closest occult friends practised many kinds of 'outer *yogas*' (I have coined this word to distinguish them from the *Maha Yoga* or Direct Path), but without any results worthy of our efforts. Of course, some of these exercises were good for our physical health, especially for stilling the nerves, cultivating a beautiful voice, and so forth. But these advantages only remained with us as long as we continued regularly to perform the exercises. A pause for even a few weeks deprived us of all the hard earned benefits we had gained at the cost of such effort and waste of time. No true and permanent peace of mind could be obtained, although for that purpose I made intense use of *japa* (repetition) with the best of *mantras*.

The Master, Sri Maharshi says that the control of the mind, achieved by *any way except the Vichara* (Self inquiry) will be *only temporary*, for the mind *will invariably return to its spontaneous activities*. 'What is not natural,' says the Sage, 'cannot be permanent, and what is not permanent is not worth striving after.' What reasonable person would disagree with the Great *Rishi*.

But this Direct Path, the Maharshi's way, is possible and is well suited for everyone who is ripe enough to enter on it, no matter whether man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, learned or illiterate. This Path can be followed secretly, so that the outer world will never know that a man is engaged in a deep and intensive search. This means that there is a reduction to the minimum of external obstacles allowed by the *prarabdha karma* of man.

But the Direct Path immediately gives us a clear view of our ultimate and only aim. The process of acquiring virtues is reversed. We do not need to seek them, for they come according to the measure of our advancement along the path. To compel ourselves to seek virtues is

practically as useless as to fly from temptation. We all know that no true victory can be won by flight, but only by vigorous and courageous fighting. And we should know what we are fighting against, otherwise we will lose. It is only the Direct Path which tells us from the first step *where* we are going and *why*. Our *renunciation* of this unreal world, while *not usually known* to those around us, acquires a *natural* and reasonable character, and not that of imagination or of a hazy dream. Then we know experientially the true value of the things among which we still live.

When meditating about all this, I *see that* many of the popular contemporary writers on *yoga* and occultism are not 'masters' of the realm they try to describe. While promising their followers all sorts of control over their bodies and lives, they themselves have not achieved such control. Allegedly they know all about *yoga* and the hidden powers in man, but often a glance is sufficient to see how far they are from the claimed 'control' and even from bodily 'perfection,' much less of higher things. It is so much easier to write books than to achieve realization of the truth. 'Physician first cure thyself!'

The spiritual aspect of *Vichara* is also clear. In using it you are seeking your *legitimate inheritance*, aiming directly at the very source of life. Other experiences made possible by the use of the inquiry 'Who Am I?' are given in other chapters. The whole problem of life is wrapped up in the *Vichara*. Every religion and every spiritual Master affirms that life in its essence is eternal and indestructible; but *what is that life?* Maharshi reveals, and the disciple realizes, that eternal life is none other than *uninterrupted consciousness*.

To reach that state means to reach the immortality of spirit — of reality. That is the goal and the ultimate aim. There is nothing else. Meditate upon this and the truth will be made clear even to the outer mind.

Ramana Maharshi left this world six months after my departure from India. Just before the end, in April, 1950, the Master said to those around him: '*They Say I am dying, but I shall remain here more alive than ever.*' Verily the Spirit of Maharshi has remained with us.

For me, Maharshi *will never depart*. It was not without a definite purpose, that it has been given to us, who are now surrounding the Sage, to be born in the same time with him and to have the privilege of seeing the light he sheds upon the world. I remember his own words spoken to a pupil on this matter.

The eyes of Maharshi always seem to be the same, for I cannot see in them any modification of expression due to emotion or thought. But that does not mean that they are devoid of the shining glow of life! On the contrary, light and life are constantly flowing through them with majesty and intensity unimaginable to those who have not seen them. The large dark pupils are always full of resplendent light. Even in his photographs this extraordinary intensity of light in his eyes is noted by every careful observer, even though he may not know the one they represent.

A stream of peace, powerful yet sweet, flows from these eyes. They glow with a perfect understanding of all the weaknesses, defects and inner difficulties of those who look into them. Personally, I have also noticed in them a slight, almost imperceptible, smile of indulgence for the whole surrounding world and all of us here, who are representatives of the 'great illusion.' The Highest manifests Himself in everything and every living being, however low its level may seem to us. He is present in the plant and in the insect, in the snake, in the animal and in man. The difference is only in the degree and perfection of His manifestation. It is obvious that we are able to perceive only an infinitesimal part of the manifested absolute; the higher forms of His revelation are beyond the reach of our limited consciousness. And yet there must be something just on this last boundary of our perceptive faculties, which reflects in all perfection the gaze of God.

Of course, there is no hope of being able to convey this vision to others in words. But now I am entitled to say:

I know who looks through Maharshi's eyes.'

We do not then think about the Highest Being as dwelling somewhere in heaven, or as the primary cause, or beginning of all things, the primal movement that creates the universe, or in any other clear, comforting mental conception, for none of these speculations bring us nearer to reality.

'We should experience God in a more realistic way, every day, every minute, every second. In other words we should feel *being in Him*, as this is the Truth. *He is* the only Reality, the basic principle of everything we see and experience.'

From Maharshi's Sayings

The mind is unable to grasp this simple truth, that God is really in everything, and not only in some 'chosen' forms; in some peculiar physical, mental or emotional phenomena. That *He* dwells in Maharshi as well as in each one of us. That *He* is in the refreshing evening breeze

and equally in the black mosquitoes which annoy me even in the temple hall. That all kinds of deep sea monsters which ruthlessly devour each other, as well as the silent prayers of devotees sitting at the feet of the Sage, breathe the same *life* of the Most High, and that nothing, literally *no thing*, is 'outside' His consciousness. Hence all is as it should be; nothing can go against His will, or exist outside Him.

We can recognize the utter simplicity of the words of Christ, Buddha, Maharshi and all the great teachers of humanity. Compare them with those of modern philosophers in both the East and the West, and it is obvious where truth is and where lies only the theory of truth.

In order to pass from this dream life of a separate ego personality to the real existence as Self, we need that light of truth itself, not just its description, for that cannot help us.

Sri Maharshi, in giving us a formula of life in the modern form of *Vichara*, was putting into effect the old truth that even one maxim of a true Master, if put into practice, is sufficient to lead the aspirant to the blissful end — attainment.

'Who Am I? Who Am I? Who Am I?' — I plunged as usual into this meditative inquiry, and suddenly I saw my whole life, from its very beginning, hidden in the recesses of my memory, unroll before my eyes as if on a film. I sensed that I had the power to destroy this illusory picture by an effort of will, but this time a voice which I had to obey told me to look at the 'film'.

Before me unrolled the years of my youth, with their foolishness and dash, instinctive life with its almost animal selfishness; circumstances and people, who at the time had played a great role in my life, loves and hates, noble and mean impulses, a search for something which was always evading my touch and which, when it seemed near, was continually slipping out of my hands. The physical figure, so well known, gradually changing with the flow of years, now condensed, passed before me with all its hopes and dreams and endeavours of which nothing now remained. The years of the first and second world wars, the interval of peace, my plunge into occult studies where highest achievements seemed to lie, cosmic conceptions gradually changing through contact with new theories and their authors.

Concentrating all my powers in one effort of will I stopped the weird chain, and in one moment when the 'film' stood like a dead thing, I understood beyond the shadow of a doubt: all this — it was not *me*. This actor and the surrounding scenery and decorations were not, and could never have been myself.

An omnipotent but unknown power lies latent in everyone of us. This power enables man to subdue his relentless mind, which is the first cause of his troubles, outer and inner alike. It gives him at last that wonderful inner certainty from which arise silence and peace. They who awaken this power within themselves know that it brings about the ultimate union, and through that, immortality. The best form of help for a seeker is one by which he is not harassed with a great many teachings, dogmas and definitions, all of which come from outside. There is a better method, used only by the Master, and that is by speech, look, or silence (and in very rare cases, by touch) putting the aspirant in such a position that he himself may find the solution to his problems. Then such a solution will be of his own living wisdom.

Swami Dayananda

Sri Aurobindo*

I

The Man and His Work

Among the great company of remarkable figures that will appear to the eye of posterity at the head of the Indian Renaissance, one stands out by himself with peculiar and solitary distinctness, one unique in his type as he is unique in his work. It is as if one were to walk for a long time amid a range of hills rising to a greater or lesser altitude, but all with sweeping contours, green-clad, flattering the eye even in their most bold and striking elevation. But amidst them all, one hill stands apart, piled up in sheer strength, a mass of bare and puissant granite, with verdure on its summit, a solitary pine jutting out into the blue, a great cascade of pure, vigorous and fertilising water gushing out from its strength as a very fountain of life and health to the valley. Such is the impression created on my mind by Dayananda.

It was Kathiawar that gave birth to this puissant renovator and new-creator. And something of the very soul and temperament of that peculiar land entered into his spirit, something of Girnar and the rocks and hills, something of the voice and puissance of the sea that flings itself upon those coasts, something of that humanity which seems to be made of the virgin and unspoilt stuff of Nature, fair and robust in body, instinct with a fresh and primal vigour, crude but in a developed nature capable of becoming a great force of genial creation.

When I seek to give an account to myself of my sentiment and put into precise form the impression I have received, I find myself starting

* Sri Aurobindo was a leading thinker and philosopher of modern India. This article was first published in 1915-16, in Vedic Magazine of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

from two great salient characteristics of this man's life and work which mark him off from his contemporaries and compeers. Other great Indians have helped to make India of today by a self-pouring into the psychological material of the race, a spiritual infusion of themselves into the fluent and indeterminate mass which will one day settle into consistency and appear as a great formal birth of Nature. They have entered in as a sort of leaven, a power of unformed stir and ferment out of which forms must result. One remembers them as great souls and great influences who live on in the soul of India. They are in us and we would not be what we are without them. But of no precise form can we say that this was what, the man meant, still less that this form was the very body of that spirit.

The example of Mahadev Govind Ranade presents itself to my mind as the very type of this peculiar action so necessary to a period of large and complex formation. If a foreigner were to ask us what this Mahratta economist, reformer, patriot precisely did that we give him so high a place in our memory, we should find it a little difficult to answer. We should have to point to those activities of a mass of men in which his soul and thought were present as a formless former of things, to the great figures of present-day Indian life who received the breath of his spirit. And in the end we should have to reply by a counter question, "What would Maharashtra of today have been without Mahadev Govind Ranade and what would India of today be without Maharashtra?" But even with those who were less amorphous and diffusive in their pressure on men and things, even with workers of a more distinct energy and action, I arrive fundamentally at the same impression. Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, up heaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, "Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children." So it is with all. Not only are the men greater than their definite works, but their influence is so wide and formless that it has little relation to any formal work that they have left behind them.

Very different was the manner of working of Dayananda. Here was one who did not infuse himself informally into the indeterminate soul of things, but stamped his figure indelibly as in bronze on men and things.

Here was one whose formal works are the very children of his spiritual body, children fair and robust and full of vitality, the image of their creator. Here was one who knew definitely and clearly the work he was sent to do, chose his materials, determined his conditions with a sovereign clairvoyance of the spirit and executed his conception with the puissant mastery of the born worker. As I regard the figure of this formidable artisan in God's workshop, images crowd on me which are all of battle and work and conquest and triumphant labour. Here, I say to myself, was a very soldier of Light, a warrior in God's world, a sculptor of men and institutions, a bold and rugged victor of the difficulties which matter presents to spirit. And the whole sums itself up to me in a powerful impression of spiritual practicality. The combination of these two words, usually so divorced from each other in our conceptions, seems to me the very definition of Dayananda.

Even if we leave out of account the actual nature of the work he did, the mere fact that he did it in this spirit and to this effect would give him a unique place among our great founders. He brings back an old Aryan element into the national character. This element gives us the second of the differentia: I observe and it is the secret of the first. We others live in a stream of influences; we allow them to pour through us and mould us; there is something shaped and out of it a modicum of work results, the rest is spilt out again in a stream of influence. We are indeterminate in our lives, we accommodate ourselves to circumstance and environment. Even when we would feign be militant and intransigent, we are really fluid and opportunist. Dayananda seized on all that entered into him, held it in himself, masterfully shaped it there into the form that he saw to be right and threw it out again into the forms that he saw to be right. That which strikes us in him as militant and aggressive, was a part of his strength of self-definition.

He was not only plastic to the great hand of Nature, but asserted his own right and power to use Life and Nature as plastic material. We can imagine his soul crying still to us with our insufficient spring of manhood and action, "Be not content, O Indian, only to be infinitely and grow vaguely, but see what God intends thee to be, determine in the light of His inspiration to what thou shalt grow. Seeing, hew that out of thyself, hew that out of Life. Be a thinker, but be also a doer; be a soul, but be also a man; be a servant of God, but be also a master of Nature!" For this was what he himself was; a man with God in his soul,

vision in his eyes and power in his hands to hew out of life an image according to his vision. Hew is the right word. Granite himself, he smote out a shape of things with great blows as in granite.

In Dayananda's life we see always the puissant jet of this spiritual practicality. A spontaneous power and decisiveness is stamped everywhere on his work. And to begin with, what a master-glance of practical intuition was this to go back trenchantly to the very root of Indian life and culture, to derive from the flower of its first birth the seed for a radical new birth! And what an act of grandiose intellectual courage to lay hold upon this scripture defaced by ignorant comment and oblivion of its spirit, degraded by misunderstanding to the level of an ancient document of barbarism, and to perceive in it its real worth as a scripture which conceals in itself the deep and energetic spirit of the forefathers who made this country and nation a scripture of divine knowledge, divine worship, divine action. I know not whether Dayananda's powerful and original commentary will be widely accepted as the definite word on the Veda. I think myself some delicate work is still called for to bring out other aspects of this profound and astonishing Revelation. But this matters little. The essential is that he seized justly on the Veda as India's Rock of Ages and had the daring conception to build on what his penetrating glance perceived in it a whole education of youth a whole manhood and a whole nationhood. Rammohan Roy, that other great soul and puissant worker who laid his hand on Bengal and shook her-to what mighty issues-out of her long, indolent sleep by her rivers and rice-fields -Rammohun Roy stopped short at the Upanishads. Dayananda looked beyond and perceived that our true original seed was the Veda. He had the national instinct and he was able to make it luminous, an intuition in place of an instinct. Therefore the works that derive from him, however they depart from received traditions, must needs be profoundly national.

To be national is not to stand still. Rather, to seize on a vital thing out of the past and throw it into the stream of modern life, is really the most powerful means of renovation and new-creation. Dayananda's work brings back such a principle and spirit of the past to vivify a modern mould. And observe that in the work as in the life it is the past caught in the first jet of its virgin vigour, pure from its sources, near to its root principle and therefore to something eternal and always renewable.

And in the work as in the man we find that faculty of spontaneous definite labour and vigorous formation which proceeds from an inner

principle of perfect clearness, truth and sincerity. To be clear in one's own mind, entirely true and plain with one's self and with others, wholly honest with the conditions and materials of one's labour, is a rare gift in our crooked, complex and faltering humanity. It is the spirit of the Aryan worker and a sure secret of vigorous success. For always Nature recognizes a clear, honest and recognisable knock at her doors and gives the result with an answering scrupulosity and diligence. And it is good that the spirit of the Master should leave its trace in his followers, that somewhere in India there should be a body of whom it can be said that when a work is seen to be necessary and right, the men will be forthcoming, the means forthcoming and that work will surely be done.

Truth seems a simple thing and is yet most difficult. Truth was the master-word of the Vedic teaching, truth in the soul, truth in vision, truth in the intention, truth in the act. Practical truth, *iirjava*, an inner candour and a strong sincerity, clearness and open honour in the word and deed, was the temperament of the old Aryan morals. It is the secret of a pure unspoiled energy, the sign that a man has not travelled far from Nature. It is the bardexter of the son of Heaven, Divasputra. This was the stamp that Dayananda left behind him and it should be the mark and effigy of himself by which the parentage of his work can be recognised. May his spirit act in India pure, unspoiled, unmodified and help to give us back that of which our life stands especially in need, pure energy, high clearness, the penetrating eye, the masterful hand, the noble and dominant sincerity.

II

Dayananda and the Veda

Dayananda accepted the Veda as his rock of firm foundation, he took it for his guiding view of life, his rule of inner existence and his inspiration for external work, but he regarded it as even more, the word of eternal Truth on which man's knowledge of God and his relations with the Divine Being and with his fellows can be rightly and securely founded. This everlasting rock of the Veda, many assert, has no existence, there is nothing there but the commonest mud and sand; it is only a hymnal of primitive barbarians, only a rude worship of personified natural phenomena, or even less than that, a liturgy of ceremonial sacrifice, half religion, half magic, by which superstitious animal men of yore hoped to get themselves gold and food and cattle, slaughter pitilessly their enemies, protect themselves from disease, calamity and demoniac influences and enjoy the coarse pleasures of a material Paradise. To

that we must add a third view, the orthodox, or at least that which arises from Sayana's commentary; this view admits, practically, the ignobler interpretation of the substance of Veda and yet-or is it therefore?-exalts this primitive farrago as a holy Scripture and a Book of Sacred Works.

Now this matter is no mere scholastic question, but has a living importance, not only for a just estimate of Dayananda's work but for our consciousness of our past and for the determination of the influences that shall mould our future. A nation grows into what it shall be by the force of that which it was in the past and is in the present, and in this growth there come periods of conscious and subconscious stocktaking when the national soul selects, modifies, rejects, keeps out of all that it had or is acquiring whatever it needs as substance and capital for its growth and action in the future: in such a period of stocktaking we are still and Dayananda was one of its great and formative spirits. But among all the materials of our past the Veda is the most venerable and has been directly and indirectly the most potent. Even when its sense was no longer understood, even when its traditions were lost behind Pauranic forms, it was still held in honour, though without knowledge, as authoritative revelation and inspired Book of Knowledge, the source of all sanctions and standard of all truth.

But there has always been this double and incompatible tradition about the Veda that it is a book of ritual and mythology and that it is a book of divine knowledge. The Brahmanas seized on the one tradition, the Upanishads on the other. Later, the learned took the hymns for a book essentially of ritual and works, they went elsewhere for pure knowledge; but the instinct of the race bowed down before it with an obstinate inarticulate memory of a loftier tradition. And when in our age the Veda was brought out of its obscure security behind the purdah of a reverential neglect, the same phenomenon reappears. While Western scholarship extending the hints of Sayana seemed to have classed it for ever as a ritual liturgy to Nature-Gods, the genius of the race looking through the eyes of Dayananda pierced behind the error of many centuries and received again the intuition of a timeless revelation and a divine truth given to humanity. In any case, we have to make one choice or another. We can no longer securely enshrine the Veda wrapped up in the folds of an ignorant reverence or guarded by a pious self-deceit. Either the Veda is what Sayana says it is, and then we have to leave it behind for ever as the document of a mythology and ritual which have no longer any living truth or force for thinking minds, or it

is what the European scholars say it is, and then we have to put it away among the relics of the past as an antique record of semi-barbarous worship; or else it is indeed Veda, a book of divine knowledge, and then it becomes of supreme importance to us to know and to hear its message.

It is objected to the sense Dayananda gave to the Veda that it is no true sense but an arbitrary fabrication of imaginative learning and ingenuity, to his method that it is fantastic and unacceptable to the critical reason, to his teaching of a revealed Scripture that the very idea is a rejected superstition impossible for any enlightened mind to admit or to announce sincerely. I will not now examine the solidity of Dayananda's interpretation of Vedic texts, nor anticipate the verdict of the future on his commentary, nor discuss his theory of revelation. I shall only state the broad principles underlying his thought about the Veda as they present themselves to me. For in the action and thought of a great soul or a great personality the vital thing to my mind is not the form he gave to it, but in his action the helpful power he put forth and in his thought the helpful truth he has added or, it may be, restored to the yet all too scanty stock of our human acquisition and divine potentiality.

To start with the negation of his work by his critics, in whose mouth does it lie to accuse Dayananda's dealings with the Veda of a fantastic or arbitrary ingenuity? Not in the mouth of those who accept Sayana's traditional interpretation. For if ever there was a monument of arbitrarily erudite ingenuity, of great learning divorced, as great learning too often is, from sound judgment and sure taste and a faithful, critical and comparative observation, from direct seeing and often even from plainest common sense or of a constant fitting of the text into the Procrustean bed of preconceived theory, it is surely this commentary, otherwise so imposing, so useful as first crude material, so erudite and laborious, left to us by the Acharya Sayana. Nor does the reproach lie in the mouth of those who take as final the recent labours of European scholarship. For if ever there was a toil of interpretation in which the loosest rein has been given to an ingenious speculation, in which doubtful indications have been snatched at as certain proofs, in which the boldest conclusions have been insisted upon with the scantiest justification, the most enormous difficulties ignored, and preconceived prejudice maintained in face of the clear and often admitted suggestions of the text, it is surely this labour, so eminently respectable otherwise for its industry, good will and power of research, performed through a long century by European Vedic scholarship.

What is the main positive issue in this matter? An interpretation of Veda must stand or fall by its central conception of the Vedic religion and the amount of support given to it by the intrinsic evidence of the Veda itself. Here Dayananda's view is quite clear, its foundation inexpugnable. The Vedic hymns are chanted to the One Deity under many names, names which are used and even designed to express His qualities and powers. Was this conception of Dayananda's an arbitrary conceit fetched out of his own too ingenious imagination? Not at all; it is the explicit statement of the Veda itself: "One existent, sages" -not the ignorant, mind you, but the seers, the men of knowledge,- "speak of in many ways, as Indra, as Yama, as Matariswan, as Agni." The Vedic Rishis ought surely to have known something about their own religion, more, let us hope, than Roth or Max Muller, and this is what they knew.

We are aware how modern scholars twist away from the evidence. This hymn, they say, was a late production, this loftier idea which it expresses with so clear a force rose up somehow in the later Aryan mind or was borrowed by those ignorant fire-worshippers, sun-worshippers; sky-worshippers from their cultured and philosophic Dravidian enemies. But throughout the Veda we have confirmatory hymns and expressions: Agni or Indra or another is expressly hymned as one with all the other gods. Agni contains all other divine powers within himself, the Maruts are described as all the gods, one, deity is addressed by the names of others as well as his own, or, most commonly, he is given as Lord and King of the universe attributes only appropriate to the Supreme Deity. Ah, but that cannot mean, ought not to mean, must not mean, the worship of One; let us invent a new word, call it henotheism and suppose that the Rishis did not really believe Indra or Agni to be the Supreme Deity but treated any god or every god as such for the nonce, perhaps that he might feel the more flattered an lend a more gracious ear for so hyperbolic a compliment! But why should not the foundation of Vedic thought be natural monotheism rather than this new-fangled monstrosity of henotheism? Well, because primitive barbarians could not possibly have risen to such high conceptions and, if you allow them to have so risen, you imperil our theory of the evolutionary stages of the human development and you destroy our whole idea about the sense of the Vedic hymns and their place in the history of mankind. Truth must hide herself, common sense disappear from the field so that a theory may flourish! I ask, in this

point, and it is *the* fundamental point, who deals most straightforwardly with the text, Dayananda or the Western scholars?

But if this fundamental point of Dayananda's is granted, if the character given by the Vedic Rishis themselves to their gods is admitted, we are bound, whenever the hymns speak of Agni or another, to see behind that name present always to the thought of the Rishi the one Supreme Deity or else one of His powers with its attendant qualities or workings. Immediately the whole character of the Veda is fixed in the sense Dayananda gave to it; the merely ritual, mythological, polytheistic interpretation of Sayana collapses, the merely meteorological and naturalistic European interpretation collapses. We have instead a real Scripture, one of the world's sacred books and the divine word of a lofty and noble religion.

All the rest of Dayananda's theory arises logically out of this fundamental conception. If the names of the godheads express qualities of the one Godhead and it is these which the Rishis adored and towards which they directed their aspiration, then there must inevitably be in the Veda a large part of psychology of the Divine Nature, psychology of the relations of man with God and a constant indication of the law governing man's Godward conduct. Dayananda asserts the presence of such an ethical element, he finds in the Veda the law of life given by God to the human being. And if the Vedic godheads express the powers of a supreme Deity who is Creator, Ruler and Father of the universe, then there must inevitably be in the Veda a large part of cosmology, the law of creation and of cosmos. Dayananda asserts the presence of such a cosmic element, he finds in the Veda the secrets of creation and law of Nature by which the Omniscient governs the world.

Neither Western scholarship nor ritualistic learning has succeeded in eliminating the psychological and ethical value of the hymns, but they have both tended in different degrees to minimise, it. Western scholars minimise because they feel uneasy whenever ideas that are not primitive seem. to insist on their presence in these primeval utterances; they do not hesitate openly to abandon in certain passages interpretations which they adopt in others and which are admittedly necessitated by their own philological and critical reasoning because, if admitted always, they would often involve deep and subtle psychological conceptions which *cannot* have occurred to primitive minds! Sayana minimises because his theory of Vedic discipline was not ethical righteousness with a moral and spiritual result but mechanical performance of ritual with a material reward. But, in spite of these efforts

of suppression, the lofty ideas of the Vedas still reveal themselves in strange contrast to its alleged burden of fantastic naturalism or dull ritualism. The Vedic godheads are constantly hymned as Masters of Wisdom, Power, Purity, purifiers, healers of grief and evil, destroyers of sin and falsehood, warriors for the truth; constantly the Rishis pray to them for healing and purification, to be made seers of knowledge, possessors of the truth, to be upheld in the divine law, to be assisted and armed with strength, manhood and energy. Dayananda has brought this idea of the divine right and truth into the Veda; the Veda is as much and more a book of divine Law as Hebrew Bible or Zoroastrian Avesta.

The cosmic element is not less conspicuous in the Veda; the Rishis speak always of the worlds, the firm laws that govern them, the divine workings in the cosmos. But Dayananda goes farther; he affirms that the truths of modern physical science are discoverable in the hymns. Here we have the sole point of fundamental principle about which there can be any justifiable misgivings. I confess my incompetence to advance any settled opinion in the matter. But this much needs to be said that his idea is increasingly supported by the recent trend of our knowledge about the ancient world. The ancient civilisations did possess secrets of science some of which modern knowledge has recovered, extended and made more rich and precise but others are even now not recovered. There is then nothing fantastic in Dayananda's idea that Veda contains truth of science as well as truth of religion. I will even add my own conviction that Veda contains other truths of a science the modern world does not at all possess, and in that case Dayananda has rather understated than overstated the depth and range of the Vedic wisdom.

Objection has also been made to the philological and etymological method by which he arrived at his results, especially in his dealings with the names of the godheads. But this objection, I feel certain, is an error due to our introduction of modern ideas about language into our study of this ancient tongue. We moderns use words as counters without any memory or appreciation of their original sense; when we speak we think of the object spoken of, not at all of the expressive word which is to us a dead and brute thing, mere coin of verbal currency with no value of its own. In early language the word was on the contrary a living thing with essential powers of signification; its root meanings were remembered because they were still in use, its wealth of force was vividly present to the mind of the speaker. We say "wolf" and think only of the animal, any other sound would have served our purpose as

well, given the convention of its usage; the ancients said "tearer" and had that significance present to them. We say "agni" and think of fire, the word is of no other use to us; to the ancients "agni" means other things besides and only because of one or more of its root meanings was applied to the physical object fire. Our words are carefully limited to one or two senses, theirs were capable of a great number and it was quite easy for them, if they so chose, to use a word like Agni, Varuna or Vayu as a sound index of a great number of connected and complex ideas, a key-word. It cannot be doubted that the Vedic Rishis did take advantage of this greater potentiality of their Language note their dealings with such words as *gau* and *chandra*. The Nirukta bears evidence to this capacity and in the Brahmanas and Upanishads we find the memory of this free and symbolic use of words still subsisting.

Certainly, Dayananda had not the advantage that a comparative study of languages gives to the European scholar. There are defects in the ancient Nirukta which the new learning, though itself sadly defective, still helps US to fill in and in future we shall have to use both sources of light for the elucidation of Veda. Still this only affects matters of detail and does not touch the fundamental principles of Dayananda's interpretation. Interpretation in detail is a work of intelligence and scholarship and in matters of intelligent opinion and scholarship men seem likely to differ to the end of the chapter, but in all the basic principles, in those great and fundamental decisions where the eye of intuition has to aid the workings of the intellect, Dayananda stands justified by the substance of Veda itself, by logic and reason and by our growing knowledge of the past of mankind. The Veda does hymn the one Deity of many names and powers; it does celebrate the divine Law and man's aspiration to fulfil it; it does purport to give us the law of the cosmos.

On the question of revelation I have left myself no space to write. Suffice it to say that here too Dayananda was perfectly logical and it is quite grotesque to charge him with insincerity because he held to and proclaimed the doctrine. There are always three fundamental entities which we have to admit and whose relations we have to know if we would understand existence at all; God, Nature and the Soul. If, as Dayananda held on strong enough grounds, the Veda reveals to us God, reveals to us the law of Nature, reveals to us the relations of the soul to God and Nature, what is it but a revelation of divine Truth? And if, as Dayananda held, it reveals them to us with a perfect truth, flawlessly, he might well hold it for an infallible Scripture. The rest is a

question of the method of revelation, of the divine dealings with our race, of man's psychology and possibilities. Modern thought, affirming Nature and Law but denying God, denied also the possibility of revelation; but so also has it denied many things which a more modern thought is very busy reaffirming. We cannot demand of a great mind that it shall make itself a slave to vulgarly receive opinion or the transient dogmas of the hour; the very essence of its greatness is this, that it looks beyond, that it sees deeper.

In the matter of Vedic interpretation I am convinced that whatever may be the final complete interpretation, Dayananda will be honoured as the first discoverer of the right clues. Amidst the chaos and obscurity of old ignorance and age-long misunderstanding his was the eye of direct vision that pierced to the truth and fastened on that which was essential. He has found the keys of the doors that time had closed and rent asunder the seals of the imprisoned fountains.

Swami Vivekananda: A Charismatic Spokesman of India's Eternal World View

Damodar Thakur*

Introductory Observations

If we look back at the history of our country, we will be filled with a sense of great pride to find that from time to time she has produced remarkably great men and women, men and women who, because of their inspiring and elevating words and deeds, will be remembered with respect for generations to come. It would be good for us, however, if for a moment if we introspectively ask ourselves what exactly is it that we call India. India is not just the more than a billion of people who live in this part of the globe. The population of India is, like the population of any other part of the world, changing every hour, in fact every second. By the time I finish writing a page, more than a thousand people will have died and a larger number of people will have been born. The population of India is changing all the time, but India has not been changing every minute with the change of its population. Is India then a geographical territory, a certain part of Asia with the Himalayas on its north and the Indian Ocean on its south? India's map has changed many times in the past. A few decades ago, Pakistan and Bangla Desh were integral parts of the Indian territory, but now they are not. But the way the world understands India, the proud image of India that all

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Indians have in their collective unconscious when they say - भारत माता की जय [bhārata mātā kī jaya], has not been changing with every change in India's map.

The quintessence of India is its world view; its spirituality; its attempt to invade the beyond; its deep-rooted desire to comprehend the infinite, the eternal; its urge for transcending the limitations of everyday commercial give and take; and its continued wish to understand the whither, the whence and the why of the universe. Incarnations like Krishna and Buddha, preceded and followed by thousands of sages and seers, contributed their meditative insights in constituting the quintessence, the essential being of India. Intellectual giants like Shankaracharya, eminent spiritualists like Maharshi Raman and, Sri Aurobindo, saints like Kabir and poets like the Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, appeared as glorious manifestations of that quintessence. Each of these eminent intellectuals and spiritualists discovered the sublime quintessence of India and became its ardent spokesman. They kept the spirit of India alive and moving. Swami Vivekananda belonged to that great tradition of eminent intellectuals and spiritualists. But in a sense he was a little more than any of these eminent intellectuals and spiritualists. He proved himself to be a dynamic togetherness of all these eminent personalities. His missionary zeal and his dedication and his extraordinary sense of perseverance and commitment remind us of Shankaracharya, his spiritual heights remind us of Maharshi Raman, his inspiring utterances remind us of Sri Aurobindo and his literary flavour reminds us of Tagore. Besides, his oratorical magic reminds us of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, the Junior.

Charles Darwin and Swami Vivekananda

In his book, *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859 and then in his book, *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, Charles Darwin produced evidence in support of his view that man had descended from the apes and chimpanzees, who were the real ancestors of man, the unstated implication of his finding being that, ancestrally speaking, man was nothing but a beast. Darwin's findings took away the great pride that human beings all over the world had in their ancestors. History was waiting for a magnetic personality who could with his inspiring words restore this lost sense of pride. Addressing all the human beings of the world the Vedic sages had described them as children of the Almighty,

the all powerful, as sons of immortality, as possessors of a celestial nature:

शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्रा
आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः¹
Svantu viśve a[m]tasya putrā
ā ye dhāmāni divyāni tasthu :

Listen to me! All sons of immortality, all the possessors of celestial nature.

But that sublime universal message of the Rig Veda had got buried in deep layers of oblivion. Humanity was now restlessly waiting for that message to be floated once again with great energy and vitality. Swami Vivekananda appeared as a fulfilment of that demand of world history. In that situation Swami Vivekananda came as a storm. Just as a storm sweeps away all the dust lying on a block of shining marble, his message tended to sweep the shame that people had in their ancestry. The followers of Darwin said that man was essentially an animal. Swami Vivekananda said that every man was essentially divine.

You are the descendents of the Devas.²

The Gita had said that just as a mirror is sometimes covered with a layer of dust, fire is covered with smoke and a foetus in a mother's womb is covered with a jelly-like substance, man's divinity, his inner splendour, is covered with a layer of ignorance. With an extraordinary energy and vivacity Swami Vivekananda conveyed that message to the world again and again. Like a cool fragrant breeze after a much-awaited shower in summer, his message was welcome all over. He said:

The Divine within; every being, however degraded, is the expression of the divine.³

I call upon men to make themselves conscious of their divinity within.⁴

The Historical Context in India

The situation in India was more depressing, more agonizing than anywhere else. In 1857 Indians rebelled against the British rule but this rebellion was brutally crushed. The "sentenced rebels were tied over the mouths of cannons, and blown to pieces when the guns were fired."⁵ One officer, Thomas Lowe, remembered how on one occasion his unit had taken 76 prisoners – they were just too tired to carry on killing and needed a rest.⁶ This rebellion was confined to certain parts of India, but the gloom, the sense of defeat, the sense of helplessness that arose

out of the failure of the rebellion pervaded the whole country. India, the whole of India, now needed a charismatic personality to pull her out of her defeatist attitude. As a heroic personality, Swami Vivekananda appeared on the scene and tried to sweep away the despondency in India's attitudinal atmosphere as a sweeper sweeps out the dust on the floor.

His Message to the People in India

His message to the Indians was a message of hope, a message of confidence, a message of enthusiastically looking forward to a better future. He said:

Have faith that you are all my brave lads, born to do great things!
Let not the bark of puppies frighten you – no, not even the
thunderbolts of heaven – but stand up and work!
India must conquer the world (spiritually), and nothing less than
that is my ideal.⁷

Time and again he addressed the young boys and girls of India as lions and wanted to create and develop in them a sense of bravery, a sense of prowess, a sense of mental strength.

You are **lions**, you are souls, pure, infinite and perfect. The might of the universe is within you. Why weepst thou, my friend?

What India wants is a new electric fire to stir up a fresh vigour in the national veins.⁸

He wanted Indians to come out of their sense of diffidence, their sense of helplessness, their sense of defeat. Indians, he said, had their glorious heritage, their great tradition of spirituality to be proud of, and they could use that as a source of inspiration for creating a better future for themselves. Again and again he used evocative expressions like “awake” and “arise” and exhorted his fellow Indians to follow the following message of the Upanishads.

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत
प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise, awake and try to attain the heights attained by the great achievers.⁹

His Patriotism

He was one of the greatest patriots that India has ever produced. He loved India more than anything else in the world, but if we want to be

truly appreciative of his patriotism, we must keep the following two points at the back of our mind:

- (i) In a large number of cases, patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because the person who considers himself a patriot was born in it. Swami Vivekananda loved India not because he was born in India but because of its glorious spiritual heritage, because India had yet “something to teach to the world.”¹⁰ He loved India because of its transcendentalism, its struggle to go beyond, its daring to tear the veil off the face of nature and have at any risk, at any price a glimpse of the beyond.¹¹
- (ii) His patriotism was coterminous with a profound love for the whole of humanity. He said:
I will inspire men everywhere¹²
My whole mission of life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody.¹³

His Philosophy of Religion

(i) Vivekananda was proud to be a Hindu but he had no contempt for any other religion. He laughed at those who think that their religion is the only true religion and that all other religions are fake. He was of the firm view that “no one form of religion will do for all” and that “each religion is like a pearl on a string.” He said:

We have no quarrel with any religion in the world, whether it teaches men to worship Christ, Buddha or Mohammed or any other prophet.¹⁴

In his famous speech in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago he quoted the following lines from an Indian hymn:

As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O ! Lord, the different paths which make men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.

(ii) As these lines indicate, he was strongly in favour of the plurality of religions, but he was at the same time aggressively against obsessive religious fanaticism leading to narrow-minded quarrels. He said:

All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion have to go.¹⁵

“Religions,” he said, “will have to broaden”¹⁶ and “religious ideas will have to become universal, vast and infinite.”¹⁷

(iii) For centuries some people have always believed that fear is the basis of religion. In his 1927 lecture “Why I am not a Christian” –

delivered to the south London branch of the National Secular Society – Bertrand Russell, gave a precise definition of that attitude to religion and said:

Religion is based primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing – fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death.

Swami Vivekananda rejected this view of religion and said:

Religion is not the outcome of the weakness of human nature; religion is not here because we fear a tyrant; religion is love, unfolding expanding, growing.¹⁸

(iv) Swami Vivekananda was of the view that a truly religious person should transcend religious customs and rituals and should try to discover and identify himself with the spark of splendour hiding within. He said:

Religion is not going to church or putting marks on the forehead or dressing in a particular fashion.

Temples, churches, rituals and the like, he said, were only the kindergarten of religion.

His Vedantic Vision

In political speeches and in religious sermons it is usual to talk about universal brotherhood. Swami Vivekananda did not preach universal brotherhood; he preached universal oneness. Upanishads, the treasure-house of Vedanta, had declared that everyone, everything in the universe, in fact the whole universe itself, was an embodiment of Brahman, the cosmic consciousness, the infinite, the eternal. The Vedantic philosophy emphasized the idea of the One behind many, the One in many. Multiplicity, Plurality, it said, was only an illusion; the underlying unity was the only reality. Swami Vivekananda's speeches and writings, all of them, were an explication of Vedanta. For him, therefore, there was no difference between a black and a European, a saint and a sinner, a Brahmin and a pariah. Everyone was an embodiment of *Brahman*, the cosmic consciousness, the infinite, the eternal, the cause of all causes.

His Attitude Towards the Poor

Like political leaders, religious preachers require financial and logistic support for their publicity, for an effective propagation of their mission

and so most of them tend to be pro-rich. In the heart of their hearts they may have a soft corner for the poor and the downtrodden, but they find it inconvenient to take sides with the poor against the rich who have been exploiting the poor and the downtrodden. Swami Vivekananda too badly needed that support for his travel to and inside America. On his return to India he needed that support for an effective publicity of his message. But he did not mince words in expressing his unequivocal support for the poor. The following are some examples of his pro-poor stand:

(i) May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in,, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races. . .¹⁹

(ii) Sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden, even unto death — this is our motto.²⁰

(iii) He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva.,,²¹

(iv) I am poor, I love the poor.²²

His statements were not only in favour of the poor, the have-nots; he said some very harsh things against those affluent and resourceful people who did not make any attempt to help the poor and needy. He said:

So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor, who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them,. I call those men who strut about in their finery, having got all their money by grinding the poor, wretches so long as they do not do anything for those two hundred millions who are now no better than hungry savages.²³

In very strong words he further added:

The first of everything should go to the poor; we have only a right to what remains.²⁴

His Extraordinary Eloquence

The aspects of Swami Vivekananda's greatness mentioned above have been discussed by a number of writers. The one superb aspect of his personality, the aspect which played a vital role in winning for him the repeated warm applause of his audience both in India and abroad seems to have escaped almost everyone's attention. Some American

newspapers made appreciative comments about his great skill as an orator. *Appeal Avalanche*, for example, made the following comment:

His choice of words are the gems of the English language . . . his ideas as new as sparkling, drop from his tongue in a perfectly bewildering overflow of ornamental language.²⁵

A day later the same paper said the following:

. . . some of the most beautiful and philosophical gems that grace the English language rolled from his lips. . . . He is an artist in thought, an idealist in belief and a dramatist on the platform.²⁶

Another American newspaper named *Memphis Commercial* made the following appreciative comment:

His delivery is very good, his use of English being perfect as regards choice of words and correctness of grammar and construction.²⁷

But in spite of a small number of remarks made by newspapers, the great force of his language, the energizing elegance of his oratory did not widely evoke the laudatory comments that they more than deserved. People listened to him with rapt attention and were often spellbound by his speeches, but little did many of them realize that the mesmerizing effect of his speeches was largely a result of the brilliant manner in which he presented his ideas. People made highly laudatory comments about what he said, but very few of them seemed to realize that his method of delivery was no less fascinating than his content.

It may be in order here to mention that in the Indian tradition of spirituality, eloquence has been considered to be an inevitable corollary of spiritual enlightenment. In the Mahabharata, Bhishma Pitamah, who never unduly flattered anyone, praised Krishna as वागीश्वरेश्वर [vāgīśvareśvara], the overlord of all the superb masters of eloquence. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Narada describes Rama as a superb master of eloquence. Hanuman, too, a devotee of Rama never made a grammatical mistake and never used a word inappropriately even if he had to be speaking for a long time.²⁸ Prophetic personalities like, Swami Dayananda, and Maharshi Aurobindo also had an extraordinary capability for expressing themselves with clarity and effectiveness. Swami Vivekananda was most certainly a remarkable milestone in that historic tradition of Indian eloquence.

A detailed study of Swami Vivekananda's superb eloquence is not possible within the ideational framework of this paper, and, so, attention will here be confined to one of the salient features of his eloquence, his brilliant use of metaphorical expressions. Many of his metaphors were

based on his experience of the day-to-day life of people in Indian villages during those days. The following metaphor of a pitcher is an example:

When a pitcher is being filled (by immersion), it gurgles, but when full, it is noiseless.²⁹

The metaphor used in the following extract, the metaphor of a dust storm is another elegant example of an image taken from the day-to-day experience of someone in an Indian village.

Do not look back upon little mistakes and things. In this battlefield of ours, the dust of mistakes must be raised. Those who are so thin-skinned that they cannot bear the dust let them go out of the ranks.³⁰

Most of the times Swami Vivekananda was talking about the highly abstract ideas of Vedanta, but such homely images had the magical effect of transmuting his abstract ideas of Vedanta into a concrete and immediately comprehensible experience of everyday life.

Some of his metaphors were reminiscent of the metaphors used in oft-quoted lines of the Gita and the Upanishads.

The Kathopanishad used the metaphor of a razor and said:

The wise ones describe that path [of spiritual attainment] to be as impassable as a razor's edge, which, when, sharpened, is difficult to tread on.³¹

Swami Vivekananda used more or less the same metaphor and said: Be not in despair; the way is very difficult, like walking on the edge of a razor; yet despair not, arise, awake, and find the ideal, the goal.³²

The Gita used the metaphor of a garment and said:

Just as a person discards worn out clothes and puts on the new one, even so the embodied self discards the decrepit body and enters a new one.³³

Swami Vivekananda used more or less the same metaphor and said:

It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work.³⁴

This does not mean that Swami Vivekananda borrowed metaphors from the Upanishads and the Gita as a poor, helpless farmer borrows money from a professional moneylender. Mentally and spiritually he was so much involved in the Upanishads and the Gita, and he absorbed the Upanishads and the Gita to such an extent that they became an integral part of his being, an inevitable part of his process of thinking. He not only intensively studied these spiritual classics, he lived them.

Besides, he never used those “borrowed” metaphors exactly as they had been used in their original context. Just as a goldsmith takes a piece of gold and then gives it the shape of a glittering jewel appropriate for a particular occasion he gave the metaphors from those classics a new elegance. It was like taking a diamond and adding to it a faceted glamour.

Each metaphor used by the Swami is elegant in its own right but the two metaphors that he used again and again are (i) the metaphor of iron and steel and (ii) the metaphor of a lion. The following are some examples of his use of the metaphor of iron and steel:

Each thought is a little hammer blow on the **lump of iron** which our bodies are, manufacturing out of it what we want to be.³⁵

What our country now wants are **muscles of iron** and **nerves of steel**, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe. . . even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face.³⁶

I want **iron wills** and hearts that do not know how to quake.³⁷

My child, what I want is **muscles of iron** and **nerves of steel** inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made.³⁸

The brain and muscles must develop simultaneously. **iron nerves** with an intelligent brain — and the whole world is at your feet.³⁹

The following are some examples of the metaphor of a lion:

If you are really my children, you will fear nothing. You will be **like lions**.⁴⁰

You are **lions**, you are souls, pure, infinite and perfect. The might of the universe is within you. Why weepst thou, my friend?⁴¹

My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem **like lions**.⁴²

Let us not think we are sheep, but **be lions** and don't bleat and eat grass like a sheep.⁴³

Come up, **O lions**, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal;. . .⁴⁴

The fact that these two metaphors were repeatedly used in his speeches is not a matter of mere chance coincidence. Carolene Spurgeon studied the use of images in Shakespeare's plays and found that in each of Shakespeare's tragedies an image has been repeatedly used,

and that image gives to the reader a clue to the central theme of that tragedy. The unstated implication of her research is that if a word, a phrase or a rhetorical device occurs again and again in the writing of a great author or the speech of a great orator, the frequent occurrence of that item of language must not be dismissed as a matter of chance coincidence. It would be relevant here, therefore, to examine the validity of these two metaphors in Swami Vivekananda's writings.

It would be very widely agreed that iron among the metals and the lion among the wild beasts is a symbol of strength, and strength in a sense is one of the key words of the Swami Vivekananda's world view. The Swami's fight was a fight against weakness. His message was the message of strength. This is evident from utterances like the following:

(i) We want strength, strength, and every time, strength.⁴⁵

(ii) What this world wants today, more than it ever did before, is strength.⁴⁶

(iii) This is the great fact: strength is life, weakness is death.⁴⁷

(iv) Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death,⁴⁸

The two frequently used metaphors used by him are thus in consonance with his world view, his vision of what life should be like. He exhorted Indians to be tough like iron and steel and brave like a lion.

Concluding Observations

Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu and he was proud to be a Hindu. He was an Indian and he was proud to be an Indian. But his vision, his teachings, more than transcended Hinduism, it more than transcended the Indian ethos. As has been mentioned before, the sages of the Rig Veda conveyed their message of being and becoming to all people of the world, and described them as children of immortality.

शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्रा
आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः

Listen to me O! Sons of Immortality, all the possessors of celestial nature.⁴⁹

In a similar vein, Swami Vivekananda's message of life and growth, love and compassion, his inspiring message of hope and confidence, was for all human beings of the world, irrespective of their caste and creed, their religion and their nationality.

Swami Vivekananda was a dynamic togetherness of a number of extraordinary qualities. He had the tremendous missionary zeal of Shankaracharya, the spiritual strength of great luminaries like Sri Aurobindo, the supreme confidence of Swami Dayananda, the oratorical power of Martin Luther King (Junior), and, most importantly, the loving blessings of his prophetic guru, Sri Ramakrishna, which acted like a catalyst for synthesizing all those extraordinary qualities of character. It is only after a long span of time that Mother Earth makes available to History a charismatic personality like him.

Swami Vivekananda's message was the message of unity in multiplicity. Again and again he reiterated his message that the ultimate goal of every religion is the same.⁵⁰ Now that religious fanaticism and sectarian violence are being propagated as the true spirit of religion in many parts of the world, Swami Vivekananda's message of the unity behind the apparent plurality and his message of the essential unity of all religions has become more relevant. One would hope and pray that people in India and outside India will pay attention to his message of unity and loving cordiality and be instrumental in creating a better world for themselves and for others.

Notes:

1. Rig Veda, 10.13.1.
2. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Eleventh edition, Vol.4. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1985), p.152.
3. Complete Works, vol. 5, p.191.
4. Complete Works, vol.5, p.187.
5. Daniel R Headrick, The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century. Oxford University Press, 1981, p.88.
6. "Indian Rebellion of 1857" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#Aftermath.
7. Complete Works, vol. 3, p.316.
8. Complete Works, vol. 5, P.57.
9. Kathopanishad, 1.3.14.
10. Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 148.
11. Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 149.
12. Complete Works, vol. 5, p. 414.
13. Complete Works, vol. 5, p. 29.
14. Complete Works, vol. 3, p.132.
15. Complete Works, vol. 2, p.67.

16. Complete Works, vol. 2, p. 68.
17. Complete Works, vol. 2, p. 68.
18. Complete Works, vol. 7, p. 421.
19. Complete Works, vol. 5, p.137.
20. Complete Works, vol. 5, p.30.
21. Complete Works, vol. 3, pp.141-42.
22. Complete Works, vol. 5, p.58.
23. Complete Works, vol. 5, p.58.
24. Complete Works, vol. 4, p, 10.
25. Appeal Avalanche, January 16, 1894. Complete Works, vol. 3 p. 484.
26. Ibid, p. 485.
27. Memphis Commercial, January 17, 1894, Complete Works, vol. 3, P. 486.
28. Valmiki, Ramayana, [Kishkindha Kanda] 4.3.28-32.
29. Complete Works, vol.4, p.214.
30. Complete Works, vol. 5, p.253.
31. Kathopanishad, 1.3.14.
32. Complete Works, vol.2, p.124.
33. Gita, 2: 22
34. Complete Works, vol. 5. p.214.
35. Swami Vivekananda's Wisdom for Daily Inspiration, (Hyderabad: Ramakrishna Math, 2014), p.290.
36. Wisdom, p. 301.
37. Wisdom, p.2.
38. Wisdom, p. 49.
39. Wisdom, p. 360.
40. Wisdom, p. 64.
41. Wisdom, p. 20.
42. Wisdom, p. 77.
43. Complete Works, vol.7, p. 421.
44. Complete Works, vol. 1, p.11.
45. Complete Works, vol.3, p. 218.
46. Complete Works, vol. 2.p. 98.
47. Complete Works, vol.2, p. 3.
48. Complete Works, vol.2, p. 3.
49. Rig Veda, 10.13.1.
50. Complete Works, vol. 4, p.174

Swami Vivekananda - The Key Thinker of Modern India Need of the Hour

Gokulmuthu Narayanaswamy*

Indian thought is unique in the world. It has always allowed for rational, open-minded and deep discussions soaked in compassion and love for humanity, with the only objectives of “What is the truth?” and “What is beneficial to mankind?” The rich literature of India even from the days of the Rig Vedas reflect this. This legacy has been continuing unbroken to this day. The freedom of thought and expression in India has resulted in a huge diversity of philosophy, religion and worldview. There have been great towering geniuses who have appeared at regular intervals and whose important contributions were to merge some of the main branches into a new channel. This helped the civilization conserve its energies and rejuvenate the society by making the cultural current deeper, wider, accommodative and more decisive.

One of the first known such stupendous effort was that of Veda Vyasa. He collected together the Vedic literature that was spread over different societies all over the Bharatavarsha. He classified them into Rig Veda (mainly poetry), Yajur Veda (mainly prose), Sama Veda (set to music) and Atharvana Veda (compendium of miscellaneous verses). He collected the folklore, stories, historical narrations, legends, genealogy, cosmology and customs from all over Bharatavarsha and sorted them into eighteen Puranas. He collected the various philosophical ideas in vogue during his time and put them all into a logical structure in the form of Brahmasutras. In gratitude to this great work done by Veda

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Vyasa, one day is celebrated every year in his memory as Vyasa Purnima or Guru Purnima.

About 2500 years after Vyasa, Buddha separated out the philosophical and moral teachings of the Vedic tradition and created a line of thought free from the traditional stories and rituals. Also, he taught everything in the common man’s language of the changed times. This got good acceptance among some scholars and kings. Around the same time, similar attempt was done by Mahavira. Buddhism found great acceptance outside Bharatavarsha also. But common man everywhere needed stories and rituals. The respective local stories and rituals were retained outside Bharatavarsha. A new set of stories and rituals arose around Buddha and Mahavira within Bharatavarsha.

About 1200 years after Buddha and Mahavira, came Adi Shankara. He took much of the philosophical and religious developments in Buddhism, Jainism, Tantra and other sects, and merged them back into the Vedic tradition and that resulted in a rejuvenated Sanatana Dharma, (Hinduism). After this, Bharatavarsha faced various political and cultural invasions from various cultures outside. Also, previously marginalized and isolated societies within India came into close touch with the mainstream culture. All these resulted in a great upheaval. Several sects of various sizes came up. Some merged into other sects. Some vanished, naturally without followers. Overall, it was a very active period.

About 1200 years after Adi Shankara, the Indian society needed one more consolidation of philosophies and ideas. A large number of practices were irrelevant to the new times. The best ideas scattered over various sects had to be collected and put together to give a new direction to the society and culture. Also, modern science and Western thought had brought in new ideas. Countless cultures outside India were swept off into museums by this onslaught by the sword and the pen. India was politically overpowered by this Western onslaught. The land that was the object of envy of the rest of the world for its enormous riches was systematically plundered and reduced to abject poverty. There was huge gap between the extremes within the society also in all respects – financial, social, educational and cultural. The only thing left in the society was the legacy from its great thinkers. It was a crucial time for humanity. Would the great gems collected over several millennia by great thinkers of this land and culture be lost forever to humanity by this huge onslaught by alien cultures?

It was as if the answer to this that Swami Vivekananda came into human history.

In the words of Netaji Subas Chandra Bose, “Swamiji harmonized East and West, religion and science, past and present. And that is why he is great. Our countrymen have gained unprecedented self-respect, self-confidence and self-assertion from his teachings.” Bal Gangadhar Tilak says, “It is an undisputed fact that it was Swami Vivekananda who first held aloft the banner of Hinduism as a challenge against the material science of the West. It was Swami Vivekananda who first took on his shoulders this stupendous task of establishing the glory of Hinduism in different countries across the borders. And he, with his erudition, oratorical power, enthusiasm, and inner force, laid that work upon a solid foundation. Twelve centuries ago Shankara was the only great personality who not only spoke of the purity of our religion... but also brought all this into action. Swami Vivekananda is a person of that stature.” Jawaharlal Nehru says, “Rooted in the past, full of pride in India’s prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life’s problems, and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present.”

Brief Life

Swami Vivekananda lived his early life in Calcutta, the then capital of British India. Coming from a traditional family, he grew up hearing stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata and of great Indian saints and kings from his mother. Exposure to Western education in school and college made him question everything Indian. During his college days, he was eager to know if anyone had seen God. His quest led him to Sri Ramakrishna, the saint who lived in the outskirts of Calcutta. Personal loving guidance of Sri Ramakrishna opened Swami Vivekananda to the knowledge and experience of God as per the Hindu tradition. Swami Vivekananda learnt Western religions, science and philosophy through school, college and on his own. He was also a great admirer of Buddha. By the time Swami Vivekananda was thirty years old, he had exposure to the best of the Indian and Western ideas. Professor J. H. Wright of Harvard University remarked later, “He is more learned than all our learned professors put together.”

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda took sannyasa. He went around the whole of India, living with kings and poor, scholars and illiterates, monks and householders. Having seen India, he sat in meditation at the South-most tip of the Indian mainland at Kanyakumari. His meditation was on rejuvenation of India. He came to a few conclusions: Religion is the core of Indian civilization.

India’s role in the world is as the teacher of religion and philosophy. The common masses have been neglected for the last few centuries. That is the cause of India’s downfall. The way forward is to give back strength to the masses. The immediate need is to alleviate the material poverty of the masses. Secular, cultural and spiritual knowledge have to be given to the masses. For this, an organization has to be established rooted in the tradition and modern in outlook.

Swami Vivekananda travelled to America and England to gather money and support for the Indian masses in return for the spiritual knowledge of India. He discussed Indian philosophy with the leading thinkers of his time like Paul Deussen, Max Mueller, Nikola Tesla and William James. He established Vedanta Centers in America and Europe. He established the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India. Almost all the leaders of Indian Nationalism during and after his time were inspired by him. He got the ball of Indian Nationalism rolling, which eventually resulted in rejuvenation of the Indian society, political freedom, freedom from inter-sect disharmony, alleviation of caste discrimination and respect for Hinduism, Vedanta, Yoga, etc. in the world.

After the brief and impactful public life of less than ten years, Swami Vivekananda passed away at the age of thirty nine, leaving behind him a self-reliant organization and an array of leaders to carry on his work.

His Legacy

Swami Vivekananda wrote a few books and got them published when he was in America and England. They were published worldwide and became very popular soon after their publication. Many of Swami Vivekananda’s lectures were taken down in shorthand and were published. Many newspapers published interviews and reports of Swami Vivekananda’s lectures with excerpts. He wrote a number of letters to various people. They were carefully preserved by the receivers. Some people, with whom Swami Vivekananda had interesting conversations, noted down the conversations. Many of the admirers of Swami Vivekananda wrote down their reminiscences of him. All these form the literature available to access the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda.

The various accounts of the life of Swami Vivekananda show the kind of person he was. They show the troubles that he had to go through in life to achieve what he did. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda covers varied topics – history of India, culture of India and other countries, Indian philosophy, Hinduism, Buddhism, ideas to

make Vedanta practical, comparative study of religions, cultures and societies, past glory of India, analysis of the cause of India's downfall, guidelines to rejuvenation of India, etc.

Most of Swami Vivekananda's message to the Indian people are contained in three collections: "Lectures from Colombo to Almora," "Letters of Swami Vivekananda" and "Talks with Swami Vivekananda."

Main Ideas

The main ideas of Swami Vivekananda with respect to India are given below:

India has been a great country both at the material plane and spiritual plane. However, the unique contribution of India to the world is the spiritual light. India's role in the world is as the spiritual teacher – Jagadguru. When this is strengthened, India will become strong in all the other aspects like politics, economics, etc. So it is the duty of every Indian to study, understand, follow, develop and disseminate the traditional Indian spiritual wisdom.

Hinduism has two parts – the Shrutis and the Smritis. The Shrutis are eternal and applicable to all people of all times. They are supersensuous Truths revealed to the rishis that are recorded in the Vedas, particularly the Upanishad portion of the Vedas. The Smritis are practical implementations and stories for illustration of the ideas in the Shrutis. These are dependent on the people, society and the time. These will change as the time changes. Revamping of the Shrutis has occurred several times before and this does not change the core of Hinduism. This adaptability is itself a characteristic of Hinduism. So, Hindus should not hesitate to throw away outdated and irrelevant customs and practices. They should stick to the essentials and freely discard the non-essentials.

Seeing the whole world and its living beings, especially all human beings as divine is the core of Hinduism. God lives in the heart of every living being. It is God alone that experiences the world and expresses Himself through all the living beings. Serving the living beings is serving God. The cause of downfall of India is because we treated the common man poorly. The only way for India to rise is to give back the lost dignity to the common man. We should raise the economic, educational and social status of the common man. This service to humanity is the real worship of God.

The people of the upper castes have denied knowledge and have trodden upon the people of the lower castes for centuries. This is the

cause of India's downfall. Now, the former should put in all the effort to educate the latter and pass down the culture to the latter. The latter should put in all the effort to learn and imbibe the culture of the former, instead of complaining about the past. Complaining will not solve any problem. Once the latter have imbibed the culture and education of the former, they will be automatically accepted as equals.

Important Quotes

Here are some important quotes from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (CW), which every Indian should understand, imbibe and get inspired with.

Strength

We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act. CW I 31

Men in general lay all the ills of life on their fellowmen, or, failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate. Where is fate, and who is fate? We reap what we sow. We are the makers of our own fate. None else has the blame, none has the praise. The wind is blowing; and those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it, and go forward on their way, but those which have their sails furled do not catch the wind. Is it the fault of the wind? CW II 224

Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone.' That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else, I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succor you want is within yourselves. CW II 225

Whatever you think that you will be. If you think yourself weak, weak you will be; if you think yourself strong, you will be. CW III 130

Anything that brings spiritual, mental, or physical weakness, touch it not with the toes of your feet. Religion is the manifestation of the natural strength that is in man. A spring of infinite power is coiled up and is inside this little body, and that spring is spreading itself. ... This is the history of man, of religion, civilisation, or progress. CW VIII 185

Work

Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others — I should rather be glad to see you do that! ... Get up, and put your shoulders to the wheel — how long is this life for? As you have come into this world, leave some mark behind. Otherwise, where is the difference between you and the trees and stones? CW V 382-383

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life – think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea alone. This is the way to success. CW I 177

Isn't it man that makes money? Where did you ever hear of money making man? If you can make your thoughts and words perfectly at one, if you can, I say, make yourself one in speech and action, money will pour in at your feet of itself, like water. CW VI 455

Three things are necessary to make every man great, every nation great.

- (1) Conviction of the powers of goodness.
- (2) Absence of jealousy and suspicion.
- (3) Helping all who are trying to be and do good. CW VII 29

Serve People

The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good is not "I" but "thou". Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is a soul or not, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world, and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt. Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan. CW II 353

You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can help any one of His children, blessed you are; do not think too much of yourselves. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as a worship. CW III 246

After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth — God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. 'Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed'. CW VII 247

This is the gist of all worship — to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples. CW III 141-142

In one word, the ideal of Vedanta is to know man as he really is, and this is its message, that if you cannot worship your brother man, the manifested God, how can you worship a God who is unmanifested? CW II 325-326

Serve India

This national ship of ours, ye children of the Immortals, my countrymen, has been plying for ages, carrying civilisation and enriching the whole world with its inestimable treasures. For scores of shining centuries this national ship of ours has been ferrying across the ocean of life, and has taken millions of souls to the other shore, beyond all misery. But today it may have sprung a leak and got damaged, through your own fault or whatever cause it matters not. What would you, who have placed yourselves in it, do now? Would you go about cursing it and quarrelling among yourselves! Would you not all unite together and put your best efforts to stop the holes? Let us all gladly give our hearts' blood to do this; and if we fail in the attempt, let us all sink and die together, with blessings and not curses on our lips. CW III 461

I too believe that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country — bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, their discretion totally lost, downtrodden, ever-starved, quarrelsome, and envious. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance. I have experienced even in my insignificant life that good motives, sincerity, and infinite love can conquer the world. CW V 126-127

India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love ... One vision I see clear as life before me: that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction. CW IV 352-353

My hope and faith rest in men like you. Understand my words in their true spirit, and apply yourselves to work in their light. ... I have given you advice enough; now put at least something in practice. Let the world see that your reading of the scriptures and listening to me has been a success. CW VII 175

For Further Reading

To know more about Swami Vivekananda and his Message to the people of India, here are some books to read:

Life of Swami Vivekananda – By his Eastern and Western Disciples
Lectures from Colombo to Almora
Talks with Swami Vivekananda
Letters of Swami Vivekananda

Sri Aurobindo's Vision of India's Resurgence

Michel Danino*

Abstract

Sri Aurobindo's faith in a resurgent India was sown during his student days in England and grew in width and depth with his revolutionary action in Bengal. Till his passing it never wavered, even as he remained conscious of the stumbling blocks and pitfalls on the long road to rebirth.

In the course of his speeches, articles, talks and writings, Sri Aurobindo laid out a clear vision for India to "rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother." This involved profound changes in India's physical, vital and intellectual life and in her central will. It also meant a frank dealing with issues of polity, education, communal and international relations, and the very nature of the Indian nation.

Sri Aurobindo's vision is fundamentally spiritual, yet practical and realistic, taking into account as it does the country's actual conditions. In his view, India's resurgence is not only an absolute necessity for her very survival, but also a requirement for the world's evolution.

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Sri Aurobindo's faith in India's resurgence was a lifelong one. It took root when he was a student in England, grew in Baroda as he explored India's ancient culture, and became rock solid during his revolutionary days in Bengal. It acquired further depth and width after his withdrawal in Pondicherry, never wavering, even as he drew attention to the stumbling blocks and pitfalls on the long road to rebirth.

In a message given in 1948, just two years before his passing, he spelt out the whole issue confronting India:

Ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us.... It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. There are indeed other numerous and difficult problems that face this country or will very soon face it. No doubt we will win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny.¹

"A great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress" is essentially an agenda for India's resurgence. Indeed, in the course of numerous speeches, articles, talks and writings spanning almost sixty years, Sri Aurobindo laid out a programme for India to "rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother."² In today's parlance, we might be tempted to call it a "roadmap," but it is not one straight road, and the map has many dimensions.

I. Diagnosing the Problem

Is it possible to spell out the main lines of Sri Aurobindo's vision? Is it merely an idealistic or mystic vision — perhaps "mist-ic," as we often take the word to mean? Or can it offer actual solutions to the "numerous and difficult problems that face this country or will very soon face it"? Sri Aurobindo never intended to give us a clear-cut handbook for India's resurgence, so it would be presumptuous to attempt one. What is proposed here is only a broad outline, including a discussion of some central issues, obstacles, and keys on the long road to rebirth. We

must keep in mind that India's reality is necessarily more complex — and often unpredictable.

India's Malady

Even as he fought for India's political freedom, Sri Aurobindo knew her colonial shackles to be a necessary evil, one that would compel her to let go of outworn forms and reshape her culture and purpose. He wrote in 1909:

The spirit and ideals of India had come to be confined in a mould which, however beautiful, was too narrow and slender to bear the mighty burden of our future. When that happens, the mould has to be broken and even the ideal lost for a while, in order to be recovered free of constraint and limitation.... The mould is broken; we must remould in larger outlines and with a richer content.³

This task remains unfinished, and the current phase of renewed aggressive cultural and economic neo-colonization has come to pose to India the same challenge as the British rule did: be reborn or perish for good. But today, it is not merely the mould of tradition in its corrupting or stagnant aspects (for tradition also has enriching and progressive sides); what India is grappling with is the colonial mould in which the country has been cast. Here too, Sri Aurobindo looked beyond India's political liberation, sensing that the real problem would begin afterwards. "What preoccupies me now," he wrote in 1920, "is the question what [the country] is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?"⁴

Sri Aurobindo's questions assume their full significance today insofar as India never attempted to decolonize herself after Independence, remaining instead wedded to a British constitution, polity, judiciary, administration and education — a prison that has stifled her once prodigious creativity and resulted in a colossal wastage of energy, material, opportunities, and human lives.

India's Mission

Before we examine a few symptoms of the malady, we must pause and go back to the fundamentals. If there is a thread running through all of Sri Aurobindo's writings, it is that this land has a spiritual base as well as a spiritual mission in the world. India is the creator of "a profound and widespread spirituality such as no other can parallel."⁵ But let us

keep in mind that Sri Aurobindo's view of spirituality is not an ascetic, world-shunning renunciation, the eyes fixed on some otherworldly goal; it is the full manifestation in life of the powers of the Spirit latent in every human being: "It is an error to think that spirituality is a thing divorced from life."⁶ It is, to him, a living power, a source of life and strength, and in India's case, the actual origin of her creativity, her ability to assimilate and integrate, and her unique cultural cement — therefore a material thing, not an ethereal fragrance.

About 1915, Sri Aurobindo, a refugee in Pondicherry for five years, broke his silence in a revealing interview given to a correspondent of *The Hindu*. Here is how he formulated the problem and its solution:

I quite agree with you that our social fabric will have to be considerably altered before long.... Our past with all its faults and defects should be sacred to us; but the claims of our future with its immediate possibilities should be still more sacred.

I am convinced and have long been convinced that a spiritual awakening, a reawakening to the true self of the nation is the most important condition of our national greatness.... India, if she chooses, can guide the world.

It is more important that the thought of India should come out of the philosophical school and renew its contact with life, and the spiritual life of India issue out of the cave and the temple and, adapting itself to new forms, lay its hand upon the world. I believe also that humanity is about to enlarge its scope by new knowledge, new powers and capacities, which will create as great a revolution in human life as the physical science of the nineteenth century. Here, too, India holds in her past, a little rusted and put out of use, the key of humanity's future.⁷

Clearly, Sri Aurobindo did not see India rising for her own sake: "The spiritual life of India is the first necessity of the world's future."⁸ Such is ultimately India's mission, but to fulfil it, her central Spirit must first create a new body for this nation:

[India] can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge. Whether she will rise or not to the height of her opportunity in the renaissance which is coming upon her, is the question of her destiny.⁹

If anything, the question is more acute today than a century ago. Can something be done, individually or collectively, to hasten the process and shorten the birth pangs?

II. The Conditions and Methods of Resurgence

Spiritualizing All Life

In Sri Aurobindo's dynamic view of spirituality, all aspects of life must be brought under its influence, its regenerative and integrative power. That is the first and most essential condition, and irrespective of the philosophies propounded by various schools and sects, India more than any other civilization has insisted on spiritualizing all human life:

Hinduism has always attached to [the organisation of the individual and collective life] a great importance; it has left out no part of life as a thing secular and foreign to the religious and spiritual life.¹⁰

Here, we begin to see how unhappy Sri Aurobindo would be with clichés about "secularism" being the foundation of Independent India (and we will soon quote him again in this respect). Divorcing national life from religion has been the Western line and its unambiguous definition of secularism — a necessary liberation from Christianity's straitjacket and political power, but also a failure to find deeper values and the real source of freedom and brotherhood, beyond dogmatic religions as well as shallow humanism.

A regeneration of India can only begin with a frank rejection of the Western concept as unsuited to the Indian temperament, and a full acceptance of India's principle of integration of spirituality in life. Provided spirituality, again, does not mean a meditation removed from "worldly" affairs; it is a power, and as any other power, it needs instruments. Those are our mind, life and body. Just as individual yoga involves bringing them under the central rule of the soul or spirit, the true meaning of national resurgence is that the national mind, life and body are shaped by the central Spirit of the land.

India's Intellectual Life

Sri Aurobindo often deplored the inability of Indians to think for themselves, the unhappy result of a crippling educational system and an intellectual subservience to the West. He wrote in 1920:

I believe that the main cause of India's weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor a lack of spirituality or Dharma, but a diminution of thought-power, the spread of ignorance in the motherland of Knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think — incapacity of thought or "thought-phobia."¹¹

We can still see it today. Most of India's intellectual life is second-hand, a tiresome collection of substandard slogans, preferably of Western origin, with no real grasp of the concepts involved and no creative power. Among the numerous maladies stemming from this absence of true intellectual life, we may mention lethargy ("What can I do?"), complacency ("Don't worry, all will be well: *satyameva jayate*"), misplaced syncretism ("God is one and everything is the same"), lack of discernment ("All paths lead to the same goal"), and inextricable confusion ("Hinduism is a way of life; its central teaching is tolerance and non-violence; for a casteless society, let us have caste-based reservations and parties; democracy is Britain's greatest gift to India; minorities are secular; secularism means tolerance; etc., etc.).

The only way out of this morass is to relearn the art of original thinking:

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think, — to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima.... We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe.¹²

To stimulate original thinking should have been the first task of education in free India. Instead, it retained a perverse system which had been designed to rob Indians of their thinking power. If anything, the system has grown worse, overburdened by more and more irrelevant data to be mechanically memorized and regurgitated. Around 1900, Sri

Aurobindo was already complaining that "the mental training [provided in Indian Universities] is meagre in quantity and worthless in quality...."¹³ A few years later, he added:

The Indian brain is still in potentiality what it was; but it is being damaged, stunted and defaced. The greatness of its innate possibilities is hidden by the greatness of its surface deterioration.¹⁴

Besides teaching students to think, Sri Aurobindo wanted education to enrich them with their rightful Indian heritage. Along with his co-workers in the Independence movement, he called this "national education" and outlined it thus:

The full soul rich with the inheritance of the past, the widening gains of the present, and the large potentiality of the future, can come only by a system of National Education. It cannot come by any extension or imitation of the system of the existing universities with its radically false principles, its vicious and mechanical methods, its dead-alive routine tradition and its narrow and sightless spirit. Only a new spirit and a new body born from the heart of the Nation and full of the light and hope of its resurgence can create it.... The new education will open careers which will be at once ways of honourable sufficiency, dignity and affluence to the individual, and paths of service to the country. For the men who come out equipped in every way from its institutions will be those who will give that impetus to the economic life and effort of the country without which it cannot survive in the press of the world, much less attain its high legitimate position. Individual interest and National interest are the same and call in the same direction.¹⁵

That is exactly what is gradually being realized, though late in the day, as Independent India inexplicably chose to continue keeping her culture and heritage out of sight of students: "In India ... we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition."¹⁶ Today, however, there are signs that we may be finally moving away from this aberration and towards the integration of Indian heritage in mainstream education, in a creative way suited to our times. This is especially visible at the higher levels; but at school level too, after a shockingly long phase of stagnation, there is a growing clamour for such changes.

Only when Indian education becomes both Indian and a true education will a new class of intellectuals emerge, who will regenerate

India's intellectual life not by looking up to, or down on, the West, but by having their feet firmly planted in the Indian world view.

India's Vital Life

The intellect is an essential tool of India's resurgence, but the vital is often a better instrument, yielding more potent and quicker results. As Sri Aurobindo noted:

Indeed without this opulent vitality and opulent intellectuality India could never have done so much as she did with her spiritual tendencies. It is a great error to suppose that spirituality flourishes best in an impoverished soil with the life half-killed and the intellect discouraged and intimidated. The spirituality that so flourishes is something morbid, hectic and exposed to perilous reactions. It is when the race has lived most richly and thought most profoundly that spirituality finds its heights and its depths and its constant and many-sided fruition.¹⁷

A glance at classical India confirms that spiritual efflorescence as well as massive artistic creation often went hand in hand. The creation of new forms of Indian aesthetics, poetics, music, dance, sculpture, architecture, crafts, is therefore another important condition. It can be encouraged to some extent by intelligent official patronage and encouragement, but much more so, again, by education:

The system of education which, instead of keeping artistic training apart as a privilege for a few specialists frankly introduces it as a part of culture no less necessary than literature or science, will have taken a great step forward in the perfection of national education and the general diffusion of a broad-based human culture.... It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual master-pieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy. A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realises the fullness of the expanding Spirit in itself.¹⁸

Considering the inexplicable ugliness that has pervaded modern India — in urban and industrial development especially — we are clearly

far from the goal. The flood of third-rate artistic creations from the West is also posing a challenge to Indian art: there also, we find professional copycats revelling in the new-found cult of tortured art from which the healing touch of the Spirit is absent, while humanity's maladies are in full bloom.

Still, there are hopeful signs that the demand for genuine Indian art, be it classical music, Bharata Natyam or traditional crafts, is growing — partly as a consequence of Western appreciation for them. More institutions and individuals than ever before are working at learning, teaching or reviving India's art forms. But a mere ornamental addition of art in an otherwise beautyless and crude way of life will not do; what is required is a fusion of art in everyday life and activities: only then will Indian art recover its great function as a spiritualizing and refining agent, as well as a powerful social cement and vehicle of culture.

India's Physical Life — the Polity

This brings us to the all-important physical organization of India's life — what it is and what it should be in Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things.

There is, first, the question of India's polity. As we know all too well, India's unquestioning adoption of the Westminster type of democracy has led a serious dysfunction of democratic mechanisms, massive corruption, criminalization of politics and a host of other evils. Sri Aurobindo foresaw this long ago. In 1911, he wrote to a friend:

Spirituality is India's only politics, the fulfilment of the Sanatana Dharma its only Swaraj. I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of Western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to make nations blessed. India is passing really through the first stages of a sort of national Yoga.¹⁹

Almost a century later, we are perhaps touching the end of this first stage.

Again, a major shortcoming of the European system is the concept of secularism, which has no real meaning or application in the Indian context. Here, Dharma, rather than religion, was regarded as underpinning the polity and the organization of society at all levels. Mimicking Western secularism and wrongly equating Dharma with religion has only resulted in divorcing Dharma from national life, which can be done only at the risk of losing what has held this nation together: diversity without the unifying centre provided by Dharma is a sure road to fragmentation. Here is Sri Aurobindo's considered verdict (in 1920):

I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life.... I believe in something which might be called social democracy, but not in any of the forms now current, and I am not altogether in love with the European kind, however great an improvement it may be on the past. I hold that India having a spirit of her own and a governing temperament proper to her own civilisation, should in politics as in everything else strike out her own original path and not stumble in the wake of Europe. But this is precisely what she will be obliged to do, if she has to start on the road in her present chaotic and unprepared condition of mind.²⁰

Dharma, therefore, ought to be made the foundation of the Indian State and of national life. Not the somewhat stale notion reflected in certain scriptures,²¹ which deal at best with the customs and laws of a particular epoch, but the essence of what Dharma stands for, the universal law of adherence to the truth and service to family, society and nation. When such an elaborate and enduring concept exists in Indian ethos, why not put it to use in building the Indian nation?

Still, the question remains of what political system a reborn India should build upon. In conversations with disciples, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

The parliamentary form would be hardly suitable for our people. Of course, it is not necessary that you should have today the same old forms [as in ancient India]. But you can take the line of evolution and follow the bent of the genius of the race....²² Parliamentary Government is not suited to India. But we always take up what the West has thrown off.... [In an ideal government for India,] there may be one Rashtrapati at the top with considerable powers so as to secure a continuity of policy, and an assembly representative of the nation. The provinces will combine into a federation united at the top, leaving ample scope to local bodies to make laws according to their local problems.²³

At first glance, this may look much like the present system, but there are crucial differences. In this vision, to begin with, there is no

need or room for political parties, an institution which Sri Aurobindo consistently criticized in his talks and writings.²⁴ In a single sentence, he spelt out the whole problem:

Certainly, democracy as it is now practised is not the last or penultimate stage; for it is often merely democratic in appearance and even at the best amounts to the rule of the majority and works by the vicious method of party government, defects the increasing perception of which enters largely into the present-day dissatisfaction with parliamentary systems.²⁵

European democracy begins by dividing, pitting government against opposition, group against group, right against left. In smaller and simpler countries, it may work for a time — although Western masses do end up being tired of the merry-go-round in which right blends with left and everyone lies with equal skill. But in a complex and endlessly diverse country like India, to assume that democracy cannot exist without political parties is a typical example of the inability to “think independently.” It means there was no self-questioning before and after Independence, no search for new lines suited to a free India — all the old and already decrepit colonial structures were seen as the *summum bonum* or a panacea that no one could or should try to improve upon. India is paying decades of lost time and energy on account of this refusal to “be Indian, think Indian.” Western polity conceives of doing away with political parties and creating governments of national unity only in times of war or crisis; India, because of her culture of unity in diversity, must show that unity is not a freak phenomenon but a workable basis for new politics.

Another difference lies in the phrase “ample scope to local bodies.” Sri Aurobindo elaborated in other conversations:

In ancient times each community had its own Dharma and within itself it was independent; every village, every city had its own organization quite free from all political control and within that every individual was free — free to change and take up another line for his development. But all this was not put into a definite political unit. There were, of course, attempts at that kind of expression of life but they were only partially successful. The whole community in India was a very big one and the community culture based on Dharma was not thrown into a kind of [political or national] organization which would resist external aggression.²⁶

That is what we see at work in India's early Republics (the *Mahajanapadas*) as well as in later kingdoms, such as the Chola: an elaborate structure starting from village assemblies and built upward, with strict codes for candidates to those assemblies as well as to village courts. The system was dynamic and ensured actual participation at all levels. With necessary adaptations, the solution for India's polity lies in this direction, for that is the native system that arose from India's complex society. Sri Aurobindo elaborated further:

In India we had ... a spontaneous and a free growth of communities developing on their own lines.... Each such communal form of life — the village, the town, etc., which formed the unit of national life, was left free in its own internal management. The central authority never interfered with it. There was not the idea of "interest" in India as in Europe, i.e., each community was not fighting for its own interest; but there was the idea of Dharma, the function which the individual and the community has to fulfil in the larger national life. There were caste organizations not based upon a religio-social basis as we find nowadays; they were more or less guilds, groups organized for a communal life. There were also religious communities like the Buddhists, the Jains, etc. Each followed its own law — Swadharma — unhampered by the State. The State recognized the necessity of allowing such various forms of life to develop freely in order to give to the national spirit a richer expression.... The machinery of the State also was not so mechanical as in the West — it was plastic and elastic.

... The English in accepting this system have disfigured it considerably. They have found ways to put their hand on and grasp all the old organizations, using them merely as channels to establish more thoroughly the authority of the central power. They discouraged every free organization and every attempt at the manifestation of the free life of the community. Now attempts are being made to have the cooperative societies in villages, there is an effort at reviving the Panchayats. But these organizations cannot be revived once they have been crushed; and even if they revived they would not be the same.²⁷ If the old organization had lasted it would have been a successful rival of the modern form of government.... You need not come back to the old forms, but you *can* retain the spirit which might create its own new forms....²⁸

We will therefore refrain from attempting to spell out precise features of India's future polity, but in its broad lines it will surely move away from party politics, aim at simplification, decentralization, local empowerment, true participation, and a suppleness that remains responsive to evolving situations. Other institutions, such as the judiciary or the bureaucracy, the penal system and policing, would necessarily be part of this change, and their unwieldy structures, a source of misery rather than service to the common Indian, will have to undergo a major overhaul.

Let us add, as a word of caution, that even an ideal system, if at all there could be one, would not be able to solve human problems: "You can go on changing human institutions infinitely and yet the imperfection will break through all your institutions,"²⁹ warned Sri Aurobindo in 1939. Again, the real foundation of the resurgence lies in a spiritual renewal — nothing less can wash away the immense corruption that has taken root in India's institutions and official machineries.

India's Physical Life — Other Issues

India's physical life cannot be healthy without a sound economy. Sri Aurobindo made a few important remarks in this connection:

It is better not to destroy the capitalist class as the Socialists want to: they are the source of national wealth. They should be encouraged to spend for the nation. Taxing is all right, but you must increase production, start new industries, and also raise the standard of living; without that if you increase the taxes there will be a state of depression.³⁰

That is exactly what happened in Nehruvian India and one reason for its economic stagnation. A second reason is the excess of control it indulged in, which stifled the Indian's natural sense of initiative:

I have no faith in government controls, because I believe in a certain amount of freedom — freedom to find out things for oneself in one's own way, even freedom to commit blunders.... Without the freedom to take risks and commit mistakes there can be no progress.... Organize by all means, but there must be scope for freedom and plasticity.³¹

A degree of freedom of initiative having been restored in recent years (the so-called "liberalization," which is not yet liberal enough), India appears to have taken off economically. However, global mechanisms apart, complex social and environmental factors will decide

the long-term evolution of India's economy. One such factor is caste, of course, which is intricately linked to community organization. Sri Aurobindo clearly wanted the caste system in its present decayed form to go:

The spirit is permanent, the body changes; and a body which refuses to change must die.... There is no doubt that the institution of caste degenerated. It ceased to be determined by spiritual qualifications which, once essential, have now come to be subordinate and even immaterial and is determined by the purely material tests of occupation and birth. By this change it has set itself against the fundamental tendency of Hinduism which is to insist on the spiritual and subordinate the material and thus lost most of its meaning.... If it transforms itself, it will yet play a great part in the fulfilment of civilisation.³²

Sri Aurobindo would therefore certainly not have approved of the clumsy caste-based reservation system, insofar as it hardens caste differences, encourages mediocrity, and fails to uplift the weaker members of the society. At the same time, as stressed earlier, Sri Aurobindo recognized the importance of community organization (which is not the same as caste) in India's development, and much of the current boom in Indian enterprise has been shown to respect this pattern. India cannot give up her community-based organization, as that would be a sure way to atomization.

Another factor currently undergoing rapid evolution is the status of Indian woman, a key to change in most of the problems confronting today's India. Sri Aurobindo, always ahead of his times, regarded the marginalizing of woman as a major reason for India's degeneration.³³ Around 1910, he went so far as to envisage that Indian woman's superiority to man "is no more impossible in the future than it was in the far-distant past."³⁴ A few years later, he asserted, "Whenever women have been given opportunity they have shown their capacity.... We have to wait a few generations in order to see them at work."³⁵ Seeing the rise of woman in today's India in many fields — from village life to the spiritual world — we are tempted to say that the wait will soon be over. Then India's dormant energies will truly be unlocked.

The so-called "communal" problem, the relationship of Hindus (including Jains and Sikhs) with Christians and Muslims, remains unsolved. Here Sri Aurobindo was quite clear that Hinduism's tradition of tolerance posed no threat to non-Hindus, but needed to be reciprocated:

You can live amicably with a religion whose principle is toleration. But how is it possible to live peacefully with a religion whose principle is "I will not tolerate you"? How are you going to have unity with these people? Certainly, Hindu-Muslim unity cannot be arrived at on the basis that the Muslims will go on converting Hindus while the Hindus shall not convert any Mahomedan. You can't build unity on such a basis. Perhaps the only way of making the Mahomedans harmless is to make them lose their fanatic faith in their religion.³⁶

The same can be said today of the aggressive Christian campaigns of conversion spread to the remotest corners of India with the support of foreign organizations and finance, aiming ultimately at the same conquest of India as militant Islam does. From the Morley-Minto reforms to the Lucknow Pact and the Khilafat Movement, Sri Aurobindo opposed all measures aimed at giving a separate treatment to Muslims. He would have equally opposed the privileges extended to so-called minorities under the Constitution, since they reinforce rather than blur the divisive "minority identity" and are unfairly denied to the Hindus. Sri Aurobindo gives above the true solution, and that is for Islam and Christianity to lose their fanatical element. If they prove unwilling to do so, India has every right to take steps to protect vulnerable and non-aggressive communities from further aggression in their already shrunk homeland.

In the end, however, the above issues may be overtaken by the most silent of them all: the environmental degradation that is fast threatening the land's life-sustaining ability. The problem was not yet acute in Sri Aurobindo's time, although he once remarked that "the forests [in India] have to be preserved and also the wildlife. China destroyed all her forests and the result is that there is flood every year."³⁷ Today, despite bountiful monsoons, the illusion created by the "Green Revolution" is reaching the end of its tether. India is in the grips of a severe water crisis, the result of decades-long mismanagement and incompetence. The drying up of river after river, the poisoning of earth, air and water often with banned substances, the plunder of natural resources by industries, the extreme pollution of Indian cities, will lead at the very least to a collapse of the health system, at worst to the demise of India's agriculture, traditionally her primary strength. The only silver lining is a growing awareness of the urgency, but that is yet to be reflected in intelligent measures by the authorities. Only if this awareness grows exponentially and is absorbed by the rising grassroots movements will we be able to avoid a catastrophe of tragic dimensions.

The coming ten years will decide India's destiny at the most physical level.

III. Taking Stock

Taken as a whole, Sri Aurobindo's vision of a rejuvenated India calls for nothing less than a national yoga — an effort of transformation in which a number of Indians must consciously take part, those who happen to be in a position to change things as well as those who have so far been victims of the system. In fact, he himself said so way back in 1910:

The soul of Hinduism languishes in an unfit body. Break the mould that the soul may live.... If the body were young, adaptable, fit, the liberated soul might use it, but it is decrepit, full of ill-health and impurity. It must be changed, not by the spirit of Western iconoclasm which destroys the soul with the body, but by national Yoga.³⁸

Going by the superficial signposts provided by the media, we might despair of this ever happening. "Hinduism" is not a fashionable word, to begin with, and many of our intellectuals seem to have developed a hatred for the core of Indian civilization (which is what Hinduism is). Some of them even have even called Sri Aurobindo "communal"³⁹ — one of those convenient but reckless adjectives thrown at anyone who does not blindly subscribe to Western solutions or methods, or who has faith in India's inherent strengths.

Thankfully, however, circumstances speak a language and follow a path that are not intellectual. And discreet signs abound that we have entered a phase of change. Apart from the intellectual and artistic awakenings we have noted above, or the calls for change in various fields from the educational to the ecological, the most important sign is the growing assertiveness of the masses. From self-help groups to village committees, women's and citizens' organizations, NGOs good and bad, everywhere we can note the first attempts towards self-government. Indians seem to have understood that there is no point waiting endlessly for the administration to do everything for them. Provided such groups do not fall back into the trap of politicization, they can change the grassroots pattern of India and effectively erode the system from below — for it is unlikely to change willingly from above.

Some of the more successful movements working for change have had a spiritual motive, such as the Swadhyaya and Jnana Prabodhini movements of Maharashtra, the Vivekananda Kendra or the more recent

Aim for Seva. This is quite in conformity with Indian history, which has seen the deepest social changes arising from spiritual impulses, from the Bhakti to the freedom movements. If this trend continues, the result will be not only be lasting changes in Indian society, but also a proof that Indian spirituality is capable of tackling India's pressing social problems.

We may end where we began, by looking at the meaning of this strange curve in India's history from the time of the colonial conquest:

Whatever temporary rotting and destruction this crude impact of European life and culture has caused, it gave three needed impulses. It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them. The national mind turned a new eye on its past culture, reawoke to its sense and import, but also at the same time saw it in relation to modern knowledge and ideas. Out of this awakening vision and impulse the Indian renaissance is arising, and that must determine its future tendency. The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of the Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.⁴⁰

Sri Aurobindo regarded "the spiritual history of mankind and especially of India as a constant development of a divine purpose...." The road ahead is bound to unfold this divine purpose. Whether it will be more harmonious than the road India has travelled so far or will lead us through more crises and possibly greater sufferings, the current emergence from a long lethargy and awakening dynamism in every layer of this country are not one more false start.

India's time has come.

Notes & References

- * That is why the attempt to revive "Panchayati Raj" has failed. However well-intentioned, it could only end up burdening the administrative structure further, with no real relief to the common people.

* Unless otherwise noted, references are to the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Edition (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972), with the first number (in bold type) referring to the volume and the last to the page.

1. December 1948, "Message to the Andhra University," in *On Himself*, 26.412-413.
2. August 1920, 16.331.
3. *Karmayogin*, 25 September 1909, 2.212.
4. *On Himself*, 26.430.
5. *Essays on the Gita*, 13.42.
6. 19 June 1909, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1998), p. 12.
7. *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, by Rishabhchand (1981), p. 410-411.
8. *Bande Mataram*, 25 July 1907, 1.488.
9. *The Renaissance in India*, in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, 14.433.
10. *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, 14.124.
11. Letter of April 1920 to his brother Barin Ghose, see *India's Rebirth* (Mysore : Mira Aditi, 3rd ed., 2000), p. 151.
12. Written c. 1912, *Essays Divine and Human* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1994), p. 43-44.
13. "Education," 3.125.
14. "The Brain of India," 3.339.
15. "National Education," 27.505-506.
16. "The National Value of Art," 20 November, 1909, 17.231.
17. *The Renaissance in India*, 14.404.
18. "The National Value of Art," 25 December 1909, 17.251.
19. July 13, 1911, *Sri Aurobindo Archives & Research*, December 1977, p. 84.
20. 5 January 1920, *On Himself*, 26.430-431.
21. Reference here is to the Dharmasutras attributed to Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana and Vasishtha. However interesting they may be as sources of ancient Indian law, they are largely irrelevant today.
22. *Evening Talks* recorded by A.B. Purani (Sri Aurobindo Society, 1982), 7 April 1926, p. 279.
23. *Evening Talks*, 27 December 1938, p. 564.
24. See for instance *The Ideal of Human Unity*, 15.278.
25. *The Ideal of Human Unity*, 15.434.
26. *Evening Talks*, 9 April 1923, p. 27-28.
27. *Evening Talks*, 29 June 1926, p. 280-282.
28. *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran, vol. I (Sri Aurobindo Society, 1986), 18 January 1939, p. 201.

29. *Evening Talks*, 29 January 1939, p. 665-666.
30. *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran, vol. I, 25 December 1938, p. 65-66.
31. *Bande Mataram*, 22 September 1907, 1.537-38.
32. See for instance *The Ideal of Human Unity*, 15.340.
33. *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 55
34. 26 July 1926 (unpublished).
35. *Evening Talks*, 23 July 1923, p. 291.
36. *Evening Talks*, 26 January 1939, p. 658.
37. "Epistles from Abroad," 3.463.
38. This trend was started by Nurul Hasan, a leftist minister for Education in Indira Gandhi's government in the 1970s. A Marxist historian, Bipin Chandra, in *Modern India – A History Textbook for Class XII* (New Delhi : NCERT, 1990-2000, p. 207), held Sri Aurobindo's "concept of India as mother and nationalism as religion" to be a "step back" because it had "a strong religious and Hindu tinge." Recently, Jyotirmaya Sharma in his *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003) holds Sri Aurobindo partly responsible for the rise of "Hindutva" (along with Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda, among others), calls him a "pamphleteer" and accuses him of having "inspired a jihadi Hinduism and political Hindutva" (p. 69).
39. *The Renaissance in India*, 14.408-409.
40. August 18, 1935, *On Himself*, 26.125.

Sri Aurobindo and the Hindu-Muslim Question

Kittu Reddy*

One of the most serious and apparently intractable problems that the Indian subcontinent has been facing for the last century and more has been the Hindu-Muslim question. This problem which surfaced in a big way at the beginning of the 20th century, finally culminated in the formation of Pakistan in 1947. There is a widespread belief among a certain section of intellectuals and historians – both Indian and abroad – that Sri Aurobindo was responsible for the partition of India and the consequent blood letting and other problems that followed. The reason given to justify this position is that Sri Aurobindo during his active political career stressed heavily on Hinduism and on Hindu nationalism and this provoked a natural and inevitable reaction among the Muslims; this reaction led ultimately to the formation of Pakistan.

Firstly, this impression is totally contrary to the facts based on a total misunderstanding and deliberate misrepresentation of the position of Sri Aurobindo. Secondly, if the leaders of the nation had followed the line advocated continuously by Sri Aurobindo – both in his active political career and even after he retired to Pondicherry (now Puduchery) – the partition of India may very well have been avoided. Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo had proposed a solution to this ticklish problem which we shall spell out in this article.

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Introduction

Sri Aurobindo's first entry into politics was as a young student when he joined the Lotus and Dagger group in Cambridge. As he writes: "*The Indian students in London did once meet to form a secret society called romantically the Lotus and Dagger in which each member vowed to work for the liberation of India generally and to take some special work in furtherance of that end. Aurobindo did not form the society but he became a member along with his brothers. But the society was still-born.*"

Later, soon after his arrival in India in 1893, he wrote a series of articles in the *Indu Prakash* under the title 'New Lamps for Old.' In these articles, he castigated the then Congress Party for adopting mendicant methods instead of the leonine approach for demanding total freedom from British rule.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the Indu Prakash. These articles written at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, editor of the paper and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend vehemently denounced the then congress policy of prayers, petitions and protests and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was impeded by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented full development of his ideas in the paper. He had to turn to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and involving the masses into it. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress. Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Entry into politics

However, his open and public activity started in 1906 soon after the Partition of Bengal. One of the most important consequences of the Partition of Bengal was the advent of Sri Aurobindo in active politics. Sri Aurobindo was then in Baroda and was the Vice-Principal of a College; he left his comfortable job and moved to Calcutta and joined active politics. It was then that the Bengal National College was founded

and he became its first Principal. He began writing editorials for "*Bandemataram*," an English daily started by Bipin Chandra Pal, and by the end of the year was the paper's chief editor. Sri Aurobindo stated that his first occupation "*was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal.*" He was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. *Bandemataram* soon circulated through the country and became a force in moulding its political thought.

Sri Aurobindo was perfectly aware of the Hindu-Muslim problem which was being exploited by the British Government, but his first priority remained complete independence. Yet as we shall see, Sri Aurobindo warned the nation of the dangers of this problem even when he was in active politics.

It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo entered into active politics immediately after the Partition of Bengal. This is what he wrote about the partition: "***This measure is no mere administrative proposal but a blow straight at the heart of the nation.***"

This act by the Viceroy Lord Curzon was the first step in the British policy of divide and rule. In his own words, Lord Curzon on a tour of East Bengal, confessed that his "object in partitioning was not only to relieve the Bengali administration, but to create a Mohammedan province, where Islam could be predominant and its followers in ascendancy." It thus provided an impetus to the religious divide and one of the results was the formation of the Muslim League in 1906.

During the next three years from 1906 to 1909, Sri Aurobindo and his colleagues worked tirelessly towards a four point political agenda. That agenda may be summed up in the following words: Swaraj, Swadesh, Boycott and National Education. The Nationalist group of the Congress – as the group led by Sri Aurobindo and Tilak was named – got a resolution passed in the Calcutta Congress supporting this agenda, though in a diluted form.

Unfortunately, at the next Congress session held at Surat in Gujarat, the moderate group of the Congress rejected these resolutions. This led to the split in the Congress.

Minto-Morley Reforms

Earlier, as a result of the strong popular reaction after the Partition of Bengal, Lord Curzon was replaced by Lord Minto as the Viceroy in November 1905. Lord Morley was the Secretary of State. It was at this

time that the British Government came up with the Minto-Morley Reforms. These reforms were first proposed in 1906 but were finally passed by the British Parliament in 1909. In 1906, even as the Boycott struggle was raging and was being crushed with a heavy hand, the Secretary of State Morley had called in the moderate leaders for discussions on possible reforms of the Councils. They expressed "deep and general satisfaction," and praised "the high statesmanship which dictated this act of the Government," and tendered "sincere and grateful thanks" personally to Morley and Minto. These reforms were officially known as the Government of India Act 1909. Its aim was specifically to see how the system of government could be better adapted to meet the requirements and promote the welfare of the different provinces without impairing its strength and unity. However, it was actually a farcical exercise in deception. It pompously introduced the principle of "elections." What this amounted to was merely a minority of indirectly elected members in the Central Legislative Council and a majority of indirectly elected members in the Provincial Councils. The Councils themselves were allowed only some powers of discussions, etc. and had no control over administration or finance, let alone defence or foreign policy. The reforms were made with the express intent of isolating the growing nationalist movement. In the system of election that was introduced most cynically, a separate electorate for the Muslims was brought in. But despite all the show of reforms, no real responsibility was handed over to the Indian people. In fact, Morley was quite clear as to what his objective was.

But far more serious was the Anglo-Muslim rapprochement. According to historian M.N. Das: "the Viceroy's philosophy, in terms of his advocacy of communal electorates, was to weaken Indian nationalism and in this objective he was singularly successful for when communal conservatism united with an apprehensive imperialism, still at its height, insurmountable obstacles arose to national unity and revolutionary programmes. This was the beginning of the tragedy of Indian nationalism."

In a certain sense, it might be said that this was the first step in the formation of Pakistan almost four decades later and numerous riots and communal division were one of the consequences.

There were two reactions to these riots. The moderate Congress leaders, having full faith in British justice appealed to the British to

intervene and stop the riots. The other reaction was that of the Nationalist section of the Congress. They demanded that the Hindus should fight back. Here is an illustration from an article in the *Bandemataram*: *'from all parts of East Bengal comes the terrible news of violation and threatened violence of women by budmashes. Bengal is then dead to all intents and purposes. Nowhere is the honour of women so much valued as in India. And as our people do not lift their finger or court death when seeing women violated before their eyes, they have morally ceased to exist. Long subjugation has crushed the soul and left the mere corpse. If Bengal has been seized with such a severe palsy as not to strike a blow even for the honour of our women, it is better for her people to be blotted from the earth than encumber it longer with their disgrace.'* 6

Sri Aurobindo was arrested in May 1908. After a detention of one year as an undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the Nationalist organization broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the group itself still existent but dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. A few days after his release from jail, on the 30th of May 1909, Sri Aurobindo delivered his famous Uttarpara speech. This speech has been taken by many intellectuals and political thinkers as the expression of a strong communal bent of mind and is held responsible for the violent reaction of the Muslims. We shall deal with this aspect later.

He also began publishing at this time a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin*, and a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*.

The reaction of Sri Aurobindo to the Minto-Morley Reforms was in stark contrast to the position taken by the moderate wing of the Congress Party. Here are three extracts from articles written by Sri Aurobindo on this burning issue in 1909. The intention to reproduce these extracts is to show clearly and without ambiguity that Sri Aurobindo warned of two serious dangers.

1. The principle of electoral reservation for the Muslims which he felt would only increase the Hindu-Muslim divide.
2. and that he was opposed to the idea of Hindu Nationalism; instead he stressed on Indian Nationalism.

Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin* on the 6th November 1909:

Mohomedan Representation

The question of separate representation for the Mahomedan community is one of those momentous issues raised in haste by a statesman unable to appreciate the forces with which he is dealing, which bear fruit no man expected and least of all the ill-advised Frankenstein who was first responsible for its creation.

The Reform Scheme is the second act of insanity which has germinated from the unsound policy of the bureaucracy. It will cast all India into the melting pot and complete the work of the Partition.

Our own attitude is clear. We will have no part or lot in reforms which give no popular majority, no substantive control, no opportunity for Indian capacity and statesmanship, no seed for Indian democratic expansion. We will not for a moment accept separate electorates or separate representation, not because we are opposed to a large Mohomedan influence in popular assemblies when they come but because we will be no party to a distinction which recognizes Hindu and Mohomedan as permanently separate political units and thus precludes the growth of single and indivisible Indian nation.

With remarkable foresight, there is a clear warning of the possibility of Partition. Second, he is for a nationalistic approach, neither pampering the Muslims nor the Hindu. He opposed *separate electorates or separate representation as it recognized Hindu and Mohomedan as permanently separate political units and thus precludes the growth of single and indivisible Indian nation. We oppose any such attempt at division whether it comes from an embarrassed Government seeking for political support or from an embittered Hindu community allowing the passions of the moment to obscure their vision of the future.*"

In another article written a few days later, he reiterates the point on Indian Nationalism. Regarding the Hindu Muslim problem, he wrote:

"Of one thing we may be certain, that Hindu-Muslim unity cannot be effected by political adjustments or Congress flatteries. It must be sought deeper down in the heart and in the mind, for where the causes of disunion are there, the remedies must be sought. We shall do well in trying to solve the problem to remember that misunderstanding is the most fruitful cause of our differences, that love compels love and that strength conciliates the strong. We must strive to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a better mutual knowledge and sympathy; we must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Mussulman brother, remembering always that in him too Narayana dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom; but

*we must cease to approach him falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice. We believe this to be the only practical way of dealing with the difficulty. As a political question the Hindu-Muslim problem does not interest us at all, as a national problem it is of supreme importance. We shall make it a main part of our work to place Mohammed and Islam in a new light before our readers to spread juster views of Mohomedan history and civilization, to appreciate the Musulman's place in our national development and the means of harmonizing his communal life with our own, not ignoring the difficulties that stand in the way of the possibilities of brotherhood and mutual understanding. Intellectual sympathy can only draw together, the sympathy of the heart can alone unite. But the one is a good preparation for the other."*³

And finally here is an extract from another article written at about the same time where he points out the importance of Indian Nationalism.

But we do not understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions. Hindu nationalism had a meaning in the times of Shivaji and Ramdas, when the object of national revival was to overthrow a Mohomedan domination which, once tending to Indian unity and toleration, had become oppressive and disruptive. It was possible because India was then a world to itself and the existence of two geographical units entirely Hindu, Maharashtra and Rajputana, provided it with a basis. It was necessary because the misuse of their domination by the Mohomedan element was fatal to India's future and had to be punished and corrected by the resurgence and domination of the Hindu. And because it was possible and necessary, it came into being. But under modern conditions India can only exist as a whole.

Later in the same article, he explains the need for Indian Nationalism.

These things are therefore necessary to Indian nationality, geographical separateness, geographical compactness and a living national spirit. The first was always ours and made India a people apart from the earliest times. The second we have attained by British rule. The third has just sprung into existence.

But the country, the swadesh, which must be the base and fundament of our nationality, is India, a country where Mohomedan and Hindu live intermingled and side by side. What geographical base can a Hindu nationality possess? Maharashtra and Rajasthan are no longer separate geographical units but merely provincial divisions of a single country. The very first requisite of a Hindu nationalism is wanting. The Mohomedans base their separateness and

their refusal to regard themselves as Indians first and Mohomedans afterwards on the existence of great Mohomedan nations to which they feel themselves more akin, in spite of our common birth and blood, than to us. Hindus have no such resource. For good or evil, they are bound to the soil and to the soil alone. They cannot deny their Mother, neither can they mutilate her. Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirit and traditions, because the Hindu made the land and the people and persists, by the greatness of his past, his civilisation and his culture and his invincible virility, in holding it, but wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions and absorb them into itself. It is possible that the Mohomedan may not recognise the inevitable future and may prefer to throw himself into the opposite scale. If so, the Hindu, with what little Mohomedan help he may get, must win Swaraj both for himself and the Mohomedan in spite of that resistance.

The message is clear:

1. Let us work as Indians, first and foremost and always for the independence and greatness of India.
2. The Hindu-Muslim problem cannot be solved by political adjustments and flatteries; what is needed is an understanding based on intellectual sympathy and a sympathy of the heart.

Withdrawal from active politics

Sri Aurobindo withdrew from active politics in 1910. But this did not mean, as it was then supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning.

Thus from this point of view, he made certain observations or comments on the developments taking place in India. One of such events was the Lucknow Pact (1916) between the Congress Party and the Muslim League.

This Pact stitched up in December 1916 was adopted by the Congress at its Lucknow session on December 29 and by the League on December 31, 1916. The pact dealt both with the structure of the government of India and with the relation of the Hindu and Muslim communities. Four-fifths of the provincial and central legislatures were to be elected on a

broad franchise, and half the executive council members, including those of the central executive council, were to be Indians elected by the Councils themselves. Except for the provision for the central executive, these proposals were largely embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919.

The Congress also agreed to separate electorates for Muslims in Provincial Council elections. Apparently this pact was meant to pave the way for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and unity. The leaders of the Congress Party believed that with this political adjustment, the two communities would work harmoniously together. However, there were many who felt that this was a wrong step and was in fact the first step in creating a permanent division between the Hindus and Muslims. The later history of India amply proved the latter right.

It is interesting to note that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was later to be the founder of Pakistan opposed the idea of a separate electorate for the Muslims. In the words of Krishna Iyer: "He (Jinnah) opposed the Muslim League's stand of favouring separate electorate for the Muslims and described it as a poisonous dose to divide the nation against itself."

This may be called the second step in giving the Muslims and the Muslim League a distinct political identity which inevitably sought for more power, deepening the alienation between the two communities.

Here is an extract from a letter written by Sri Aurobindo regarding this Pact.

What has created the Hindu-Muslim split was not Swadeshi, but the acceptance of the communal principle by the Congress, (here Tilak made his great blunder), and the further attempt by the Khilafat movement to conciliate them and bring them in on wrong lines. The recognition of that communal principle at Lucknow made them permanently a separate political entity in India which ought never to have happened; the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power. It was not Boycott, National Education, Swaraj (our platform) which made this tremendous division, how could it? Tilak, whom the Kripalani mainly blames along with me was responsible for it not by that, but by his support of the Lucknow affair -for the rest, Gandhi did it with the help of Ali brothers.

We shall now take up the Khilafat movement. By 1920, the Hindu-Muslim problem had begun to assume serious proportions. Aided and abetted by the British, the Muslim community was demanding more and more power for themselves at the cost of the Hindus and more importantly at the cost of the Indian nation. The concept of Indian

nationhood was gradually receding from their mind. The question before the national leadership was to find a way to solve this acute problem.

There were two available options.

1. Since the Muslims were the minority community, it was felt by some that the best way to harmony was to give the Muslims whatever they asked for. This was the line that the Congress Party led by Gandhi took.
2. The other approach was that we should stress on the Indian aspect rather than on the religious aspect. The Indian nation should be our first and only priority and all the rest could be dealt with under this umbrella. In other words let us be first, foremost and always Indians. This was the position taken by Sri Aurobindo.

The Khilafat movement

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the Allies were loudly proclaiming their sympathy for smaller and weaker nations. Worried that Turkey might join the Germans in the War, the British government in order to win its support gave assurances of sympathetic treatment at the end of the war, including retention of the lands of Asia Minor and Thrace, which are predominantly Turkish in race. But all these hopes were doomed at the end of the war Thrace was presented to Greece, and the Asiatic portions of the Turkish Empire were put under the control of England and France in the guise of Mandates. The Muslims of India regarded this as a great betrayal on the part of the British; a storm of indignation broke out and seething with rage, they yearned for bold action. This was the beginning of the Pan-Islamic movement and it gathered force in 1919.

The All India Muslim League led by the brothers Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali launched an agitation for the Khilafat Movement and they got the full support of Gandhi. *In supporting the Khilafat Movement, Gandhi saw "an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Muslims as would not arise in another hundred years." Little did he realise that this movement would only strengthen the Pan-Islamic movement and weaken the nationalist movement.*

On March 20, Gandhi recommended to the Congress that Non-Cooperation be adopted as the method to get the demands of the Khilafatists conceded. He had also promised to get Swaraj in one year. In December 1920, the Congress at its Nagpur Session unanimously

accepted the recommendation. But right from the outset Gandhi made it clear that the Khilafat question was in his view more important and urgent than that of Swaraj. It is evident that this Khilafat Movement was a movement that had nothing to do with Indian Nationalism. It encouraged the Pan-Islamic sentiment and thus went against the very grain of Indian Nationalism. It accentuated the sentiments of the Muslims that they were Muslims first and Indians afterwards. Soon, the British Government arrested the Ali brothers. The Hindu-Muslim alliance, founded as it was on a momentary hostility towards the British, could not endure for long. After the arrest of the Ali brothers, Gandhi seized upon an incident at Chauri Chaura, a remote village in U.P., to call off the movement. Then, Turkey herself took the fateful decision to abolish the institution of Khilafat in March 1924. Mustapha Kemal, whose nationalist forces deposed the Sultan in November 1922, proclaimed Turkey a republic a year later and finally abolished the office of the Caliph in early March 1924. The Khilafat Movement in India thus died a natural death; but the movement mobilized the Muslims politically at the grass-root level for the first time, and this experience came in handy later during the subsequent Pakistan movement. It also signalled the beginning of the policy of appeasement of the Muslims by the Congress party.

To conclude:

1. The partition of Bengal was the first step in creating politically the Hindu-Muslim divide.
2. The Minto-Morley Reforms were a clear and distinct step in increasing this division. It must be noted that the first two steps were taken by the British Government.
3. The acceptance of the communal principle by the Congress party was the next step in furthering the division. This time it was more serious as it was done from within, - the Congress party itself. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: *“The recognition of that communal principle at Lucknow made them permanently a separate political entity in India, which ought never to have happened”*.
4. The Khilafat movement gave far greater power to the dividing forces and gave them permanence in the political landscape of India. Here again it was the Congress that was responsible in furthering the division. Was the formation of Pakistan the inevitable consequence of these actions? In the words of Sri Aurobindo: *“the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power.”*

Rishi Bankim Chandra

Sri Aurobindo*

There are many who, lamenting the by-gone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Rishis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilisation, were a miracle of our heroic age, not to be repeated among degenerate men and in our distressful present. This is an error and thrice an error. Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Rishi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born. Among the Rishis of the later age we have at last realised that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving mantra which is creating a new India, the mantra *Bande Mataram*.

The Rishi is different from the saint. His life may not have been distinguished by superior holiness nor his character by an ideal beauty. He is not great by what he was himself but by what he has expressed. A great and vivifying message had to be given to a nation or to humanity; and God has chosen this mouth on which to shape the words of the message. A momentous vision had to be revealed; and it is his eyes which the Almighty first unseals. The message which he has received, the vision which has been vouchsafed to him, he declares to the world with all the strength that is in him, and in one supreme moment of inspiration expresses it in words which have merely to be uttered to stir men's inmost natures, clarify their minds, seize their hearts and impel them to things which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary moments. Those words are the mantra which he was born to reveal and of that mantra he is the seer.

* Late Sri Aurobindo was the foremost thinker, philosopher and writer on Indian culture in modern times. The article is being published with the permission of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry.

What is it for which we worship the name of Bankim today? What was his message to us or what the vision which he saw and has helped us to see? He was a great poet, a master of beautiful language and a creator of fair and gracious dream-figures in the world of imagination; but it is not as a poet, stylist or novelist that Bengal does honour to him today. It is probable that the literary critic of the future will reckon *Kapalkundala*, *Bishabriksha* and *Krishnakanter Will* as his artistic masterpieces, and speak with qualified praise of *Devi Chaudhurani*, *Ananda Math*, *Krishnacharit* or *Dharmatattwa*. Yet it is the Bankim of these latter works and not the Bankim of the great creative masterpieces who will rank among the Makers of Modern India. The earlier Bankim was only a poet and stylist – the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder.

But even as a poet and stylist Bankim did a work of supreme national importance, not for the whole of India, or only indirectly for the whole of India, but for Bengal which was destined to lead India and be in the vanguard of national development. No nation can grow without finding a fit and satisfying medium of expression for the new self into which it is developing – without a language which shall give permanent shape to its thoughts and feelings and carry every new impulse swiftly and triumphantly into the consciousness of all. It was Bankim's first great service to India that he gave the race which stood in its vanguard such a perfect and satisfying medium: He was blamed for corrupting the purity of the Bengali tongue; but the pure Bengali of the old poets could have expressed nothing but a conservative and unprogressing Bengal. The race was expanding and changing, and it needed a means of expression capable of change and expansion. He was blamed also for replacing the high literary Bengali of the Pundits by a mixed popular tongue which was neither the learned language nor good vernacular. But the Bengali of the Pundits would have crushed the growing richness, variety and versatility of the Bengali genius under its stiff inflexible ponderousness. We needed a tongue for other purposes than dignified treatises and erudite lucubrations. We needed a language which should combine the strength, dignity or soft beauty of Sanskrit with the verve and vigour of the vernacular, capable at one end of the utmost vernacular raciness and at the other of the most sonorous gravity. Bankim divined our need and was inspired to meet it, – he gave us a means by which the soul of Bengal could express itself to itself.

As he had divined the linguistic need of his country's future, so he divined also its political need. He, first of our great publicists,

understood the hollowness and inutility of the method of political agitation which prevailed in his time and exposed it with merciless satire in his *Lokarahasya* and *Kamalakanter Daptar*. But he was not satisfied merely with destructive criticism, – he had a positive vision of what was needed for the salvation of the country. He saw that the force from above must be met by a mightier reacting force from below, – the strength of repression by an insurgent national strength. He bade us leave the canine method of agitation for the leonine. The Mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant. It was the gospel of fearless strength and force which he preached under a veil and in images in *Ananda Math* and *Devi Chaudhurani*. And he had an inspired unerring vision of the moral strength which must be at the back of the outer force. He perceived that the first element of the moral strength must be *tyaga*, complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation. His workers and fighters for the motherland are political *byragees* who have no other thought than their duty to her and have put all else behind them as less dear and less precious and only to be resumed when their work for her is done. Whoever loves self or wife or child or goods more than his country is a poor and imperfect patriot; not by him shall the great work be accomplished. Again, he perceived that the second element of the moral strength needed must be self-discipline and organisation. This truth he expressed in the elaborate training of *Devi Chaudhurani* for her work, in the strict rules of the Association of the "Ananda Math" and in the pictures of perfect organisation which those books contain. Lastly, he perceived that the third element of moral strength must be the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. The religion of patriotism, – this is the master idea of Bankim's writings. It is already foreshadowed in *Devi Chaudhurani*. In *Dharmatattwa* the idea and in *Krishnacharit* the picture of a perfect and many-sided Karma Yoga is sketched, the crown of which shall be work for one's country and one's kind. In *Ananda Math* this idea is the keynote of the whole book and receives its perfect lyrical expression in the great song which has become the national anthem of United India. This is the second great service of Bankim to his country that he pointed out to it the way of salvation and gave it the religion of patriotism. Of the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence, he is the inspirer and political guru.

The third and Supreme service of Bankim to his nation was that he gave us the vision of Our Mother. The bare intellectual idea of the

Motherland is not in itself a great driving force; the mere recognition of the desirability of freedom is not an inspiring motive. There are few Indians at present, whether loyalist moderate or nationalist in their political views, who do not recognise that the country has claims on them or that freedom in the abstract is a desirable thing. But most of us when it is a question between the claims of the country and other claims, do not in practice prefer the service of the country; and while many may have the wish to see freedom accomplished, few have the will to accomplish it. There are other things which we hold dearer and which we fear to see imperilled either in the struggle for freedom or by its accomplishment. It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart, that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born. To some men it is given to have that vision and reveal it to others. It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Bande Mataram*. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no farther slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror.

The Basic Facts of Gandhism

Ram Swarup*

What is Gandhism? Is there a body of doctrines, theories or opinions which could adequately describe it? Many speak for Gandhiji and several parties claim to follow him. In their utterances and practices, there is a bewildering variety which confuses rather than illuminates. Can we understand something of Gandhiji's message by studying his writings or personality?

Gandhi had no time to develop a coherent, logical exposition of his ideas to which a reference could be made for guidance. But even if he had, that would have been of no avail. For, that is the history of all great teachings. All teachings have to be reinterpreted, and there is always disagreement on what a great master or a great thinker *really* meant. Secondly, every great message is mixed up with accidents and imageries of its age, which are difficult to disengage from its universal elements. For example, Gandhism stressed a simple system of economy but can we say that it is only true of times and countries which have only this system and that it has no message for countries which are industrialized except to scuttle away their industries and to return to primitive economy?

Furthermore, any great message has to be rediscovered by every age for itself. We cannot have truth ready-made. Objective situations also change rendering irrelevant old solutions and formulations. Thus we are called upon to apply old truths, which are hard to recover, to situations which are new. The task is not easy.

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The Truth Within

But these difficulties should not deter us. For the truth that showed the way in the past through an inspired individual is within us too. Let us be open to it and it will guide our path as well. And even when it seems to speak through different tongues and seems to lead to divergent ways, its inner intention is the same, its goal is the same.

Though there is no consistent exposition of Gandhiji's ideas, we detect an astounding consistency in the consciousness with which he approached different problems. In a study of Gandhiji's personality and attitude, the following characteristics stand out prominently:

(1) His deep-rooted belief in God; (2) his humanism; and (3) his advocacy of a decentralized, simplified mode of production.

The first he regarded as the most fundamental, even more important than the political and social work he did. Asked what he would choose if the choice was between India's political freedom and his own salvation, he voted for the latter. He also felt deeply for the poor and the weak. Throughout his life he worked for them. The methods he used were the methods of tolerance, patience and persuasion. Even when his actions were firm, determined and decisive, they were infused with goodwill, and friendly feelings towards those against whom they were apparently directed.

Gandhiji also stood for a system of small-scale production, for austerity and simplicity in living. This was, to my mind, an expression, of his humanist approach; his ability to see nobility and dignity in ordinary human beings and their occupations. Our intellectualized Leftist conscience sees nothing but illiteracy, inadequacy, misery and frustration around, and hopes to remove these by the blueprints of the Five-Year Plans. Gandhiji, on the other hand, brought in a message of hope and suggested ways of improvement, not by destroying the existing patterns but by bearing with them, by improving them.

Different Strands

These different strands in Gandhism make different appeals. Some respond to Gandhiji's theism; some to his humanism and yet others to his economic "doctrines". For example, Mr. Nehru regards Gandhiji's theism as a superstitious Mumbo Jumbo, probably politically useful but intellectually obscurantist, and rejects his economy too, but he accepts his humanism, at least the secular side of it. Others accept his economic decentralization, but reject his humanism and theism.

Communists reject all these elements, though they claim that after a more or less long-drawn period of violence, dictatorship, regimented life, purges and forced labour camps, humanity will emerge into the secular paradise of plenty and equality. Thus, Gandhism is accepted or rejected in different combinations of its various elements. Some of these combinations have led to certain distortions which we shall discuss here.

The first distortion is the tendency to identify Gandhism with less comprehensive creeds, with ideas which, though part of the Gandhian ethos, are not co-equal with Gandhism. For example, though Gandhism advocates small-scale production, the two are not identical.

Nor is Gandhism co-equal with humanism, as ordinarily understood. Gandhiji's faith in humanity flowed from his faith in God. He worked for the lowly and the downtrodden, not because of any social theory of action, but because he felt the living oneness of all life.

The same holds true of his pacifism. Pacifism is only a part of Gandhism, not the whole of it. It is true only when it is indicative of the unity of life, serves moral and spiritual growth, and generates goodwill and mutual understanding. But it becomes false when it is born of fear and non-discrimination, and serves falsehood. This point needs emphasis because of a tendency in certain quarters to seize upon non-violence and pacifism in Gandhism and turn them into a programme of appeasement and surrender to communism.

Closely allied to the first, and directly flowing from it is a second distortion: a new economic determinism. In Marxism-Stalinism a certain mode of production is the basic fact, the basic value; the other values and facts like God, virtue, conscience, political liberty and well-being are mere derivatives. Gandhism is acquiring a similar bias at the hands of some of its exponents. The only difference is that the "basics" which lead to a degraded and dwarfed life in Marxism lead to a virtuous and fuller life in Gandhism. According to this Marxist variant of Gandhism, the first thing is to establish a village economy, a decentralized system of production and distribution, and the rest will follow automatically: God, Truth, Beauty, non-violence, mutual help, monogamy, brotherliness.

These two attitudes—false identification and neo-economic determinism—have been utilized to feed an anti-west bias, particularly the anti-America bias. Organized by the communists, it has been caught up by some of the Gandhians and has found a ready justification in Gandhian economics. The Western countries in general, and America in particular, are industrialized; therefore, they must incarnate the very devil—they must lack all virtue and conscience, all elements of spiritual seeking

and promise which, after all are functions of a decentralized, village economy. Of course, these very persons who damn the West for its industrializations have a soft corner for Soviet Russia, the temple of centralization and industrialization. In castigating the West, they plead Gandhian decentralization. In recommending Russia and China, they plead Gandhian “forget and forgive,” and Gandhian charity of judgement.

Such an attitude of hostility is dangerous, particularly when the world is in need of larger unity and when we should be exploring points of agreement rather than of disagreement.

Secondly, this attitude narrows down the usefulness of the Gandhian philosophy. If Gandhism has any universal message, it must be applicable to an age and to nations where non-industrialization and decentralization no longer obtain. There are things which are more important than the industrial structure of a country. What unites India and the West are the values of theism and democracy. Hinduism and Christianity affirm the same reality, the same underlying truth of our being. And that is where we meet, and that is what we have been called upon to defend together against a common attack.

Last, such identifications and derivations are foreign to Gandhism. If Gandhism represent a spiritual standpoint, its reality cannot be so congealed, so material, so physical. Its value-norm can never be a particular mode of production, or a particular form of social behaviour. Its reality flows inward. Outward, not otherwise.

Simple Living

Even his economic doctrine was not so objective. It had a strong subjective element. He emphasized the need of simplicity in life, a redefinition of human needs, a new approach towards labour, a new responsibility towards the poor. In the Gandhian scheme, a simple economy was to flow from a love of simple living. But at present the process has been reversed.

Even the social work is losing its deeper meaning. People engage in social work, not because they are identified with a larger life, but because social service is a fashionable creed, a respectable creed; not because they have a particular talent or inspiration for it, but because they want to put a politician, or a scholar, or a businessmen, in the wrong. Their driving force is intellectual and emotional, not spiritual identification with fellow beings and a living sense of the oneness of life.

Gandhism is being depleted not only of its subjectivity, but also of its objectivity. If, on the one hand, it is being identified with a rigid

economic system or social behaviour, on the other hand it is being identified with certain states of mind. According to this school, there is no evil, no goodness, only thinking makes it so. This way of thinking is best illustrated in the attitude of some Gandhians to the present struggle between democracy and communism. According to them, this struggle is only imaginary, an unfortunate misunderstanding fanned to white heat by wordy recrimination till the world is threatened with atomic destruction. It is doubly tragic, particularly when it could be prevented by a counsel of moderation here and a word of goodwill there.

This robbing Gandhian of its objectivity has led not to the softening of the heart, but to the softening of the head. It has led to a lack of discrimination, to neutralism and moral solipsism. It has led to false equations, to appeasement and surrender, to unnecessary confusion and distortion.

Reversal of Values

Gandhism also suffers from a reversal of values. It makes secondary things primary. It exaggerates the importance of economy, it neglects the fundamental importance of theism and humanism. A new cult of admiration for Soviet Russia and China is growing among a certain section of the Gandhians. The facts of mass killing, purges, false and forced confessions, fear and terror, the State-enforced atheism, forced migration and deportation, new-style imperialism, the inherent violence of communism—all these things are forgotten or explained away. Gandhism should be saved from this distortion and vandalism.

Gandhi was deeply religious. Fundamental to Gandhism is the view held by all religions that man emanates from God, and after the soul's adventure through the world unites again with Him; and that while in this world, he has an inalienable right to seek this unity, this oneness with God. True, man should also work for his economic well-being, but any view which reduces him to mere economic function, which regards him merely as a meeting point of certain economic wants or merely as a unit of production is opposed to the spirit of Gandhism. If this view is trying to generalize itself, impose itself by force of arms, with the help of military and police dictatorship, powerful fifth-columns and high-pressured propaganda; if in the pursuit of its ends it practices violence, chicanery, deceit and doubletalk, it must be resisted non-violently if possible, by military strength if necessary. This does not detract from Gandhism but fulfils it.

(The Hindustan Times, 2 October 1954)

What Gandhiji Stood for

Dharampal*

Gandhiji always said, 'My life is my message.' In itself this statement seems quite simple and straightforward. But the question we ought to ask is what did he call his life? In a manner, what he ate, what he wore, the innumerable number of hours of the day and night he grappled with the problems of his people or of specific individuals were all an important part of his life. But there was something beyond the sum of all these actions that expressed the core of his 'life.' This was his courage, his fearlessness, his sense of friendliness towards all, and above all his devotion to Truth that was in reality the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

If we look to his writings, in which of these can we obtain the key message of Mahatma Gandhi? Is it in the 'Anasakti Yoga' or in 'the Mangal Prabhat' or in his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*? Or, is it scattered in the nearly 50,000 printed pages of the *Collected Works*, to be identified and prioritized solely in proportion to the number of words and pages that he devoted to each theme, ranging from *khadi*, Village Industries, *Go-Seva*, *Nai-Talim*, to issues like the removal of the practice of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim amity, the curse of alcoholic liquor or practices like *brahmacharya*? Or, is the message really all contained in his main work *Hind Swaraj*, which he wrote in 1909 on board a ship while travelling from Great Britain to South Africa and by which he stuck till the last? Or has the message become so badly enmeshed in the very voluminousness of his words that we have become immune to the essence of what he tried to convey to us?

Even those who lay much stress on Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj*, seem to have become victims of his words. At the most ordinary, we have

* Late Dharampal was an eminent researcher on Indian society and thought and an independent thinker on his own. He is considered an expert on Gandhi.
Courtesy : Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa

become either infatuated with his denunciation of lawyers, doctors, and Western parliaments or hooked to his statement that his corporate aim, considering the situation prevailing in the 1920s, was – in contrast to his own personal quest – not the 'swaraj' of the book's title but parliamentary swaraj. Some of us feel that because he wrote appreciatively of many of his predecessors, he was merely walking in their footsteps. The deeper meaning of Gandhiji's 'life' appears to have been somehow lost.

In 1922 a British correspondent said to Gandhiji: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" means that it is our duty to pay the civil authorities what is their due.' He then asked Gandhiji, 'If it does not mean that, what does it mean?'

To this Mahatma Gandhi's answer was clear:

Christ never answered a question in a simple and literal manner. He always gave in his replies more than was expected, something deeper – some general principle. It was so in this case. Here he does not mean at all whether you must or must not pay taxes. He means something far more than this. When he says 'Give back to Caesar the things which are Caesar's', he is stating a law. It means 'give back to Caesar what is his, i.e. I will have nothing to do with it.' In this incident Christ enunciated the great law – which he exemplified all his life of refusing to cooperate with evil.¹

Whether Gandhiji understood Jesus Christ correctly or not, it does appear that the logic that he applied to the Biblical statement applied even more to all that he wrote or said during the course of his long life. To understand the core of his meaning, the essence has to be separated from the ephemeral. The basic elements of his message and the approach he had to life and society are perhaps best spelt out in *Hind Swaraj*. Not literally, in the denunciations of this or that or in his praise for the wisdom of Indian society and its ways, but in the totality of impressions and judgements that he tried to convey through the rather overcharged dialogue of the book.

A summary of Gandhiji's views on some of the important issues that exercised him during his eventful life would have to include *moksha*, the ashram, *brahmacharya*, Hindu-Muslim relations (in the context of cow-slaughter), parliamentary democracy and caste. I shall take these up in the same order.

Moksha

Gandhiji's quest, as he stated so often, was *moksha*. However, he wished to achieve his *moksha* through the service of his fellow beings. Committed as he was to the principle of *Swadeshi* – a preference for the near in contrast to the distant – this implied, in the first instance, the service of those amongst whom he lived, and consequently of those who inhabited the land of India. However, when he approached problems for resolution, he did not feel there were inevitable clashes of interest between India and the world at large. The service of the former thus implied, howsoever indirectly, the service of the latter.

This service took many forms. Enslaved as India was to Great Britain and thereby to European civilisation and its institutions and values the main expression of Gandhiji's service took the form of designing ways and means that would lead to the liberation of India from Britain's yoke and from its ideological and institutional controls. The effort at liberation inevitably implied a clash between British power and a subjugated India. To make it possible for India to succeed in this struggle he advocated and applied the techniques of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and finally, individual and collective *satyagraha*. For creating the capacity to offer such noncooperation etc, it seemed imperative to Gandhiji that the non-cooperators should not only toughen themselves in body and spirit but also examine, analyse and correct their own individual and social collectivities and rid themselves of the evils and aberrations that had crept into Indian society during the period of foreign dominance, perhaps over a longer period than that. To enable these struggles and internal corrections, he advocated recourse to the observance of ancient Indian *yamas* and *niyamas* and also laid great emphasis on what came to be known as the constructive programme.

As will be obvious to anyone familiar with his life and writings, Gandhiji thought and functioned at several levels. One of these was the level at which he strove for *moksha* or for the 'swaraj' of *Hind Swaraj* or when he assisted others who had spiritual seekings to advance towards these goals. But as he stated in his 1921 preface to *Hind Swaraj*, 'I am individually working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of parliamentary Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India.'

Gandhiji appears to have been convinced that it was given to him to help India throwaway her foreign yoke, to shake off the ideological and institutional stranglehold of the West and to restore Indian society

to its old *dharmic* and moral base. His life was really given to bringing about such a transformation and – though *moksha* remained his own personal quest – he tried to achieve first what was practicable as a good State and society for his fellow citizens in general. He believed that what he was doing would either take him on the road to *moksha* or – under the circumstances – his *moksha* would have to wait.

Obviously, therefore, *moksha* or *swaraj* either solely for himself or for similar aspirants was by no means Mahatma Gandhi's only concern. If one may say so dearly, his main concern was the liberation of India. That task required that he not only create appropriate organisational skills amongst the people of India, but equally, instill courage in them by his own example. According to him, the inculcation of these means alone would make them come into their own, enabling them to achieve not only dignity, initiative and well-being, but so link them with one another that if their wills or yearnings clashed, these would be on entirely rare occasions.

Ashrams

The design Gandhiji created was structured to restore to India not only freedom but also strength. The way life was to be organised in India in such a design was, to an extent, to serve as something worth emulating by the people and societies of the world at large.

To reach this point, however, even to take the first steps towards it, required the liberation of India from its foreign yoke. Simultaneously, it was incumbent on Indian society to correct, to the extent possible, the numerous evils and aberrations that had crept into its life. This requirement led Gandhiji to create new institutions and to experiment with a variety of institutional forms. The most well known of these institutions was the Gandhian ashram.

The Gandhian ashram is believed by many to be the prototype of the type of society envisaged by Gandhiji. To treat the ashram in this manner appears to me to be a grievous error. Gandhiji's ashram – as conceived by him – was primarily a training institute set up to provide a common discipline and purpose, a toughening of the body as well as the spirit. If it is not considered blasphemous to say so, the ashram could be likened to a military training camp: while the armaments and the drill were wholly different, the purpose as well as the daily routines were very similar. The ashrams – and the ever increasing fallout from them – were meant to forge India into togetherness, and to create an

army that not only proved as tough as the forces of the adversary but – under the generalship of Gandhiji – would arm to be two or three paces ahead of British strategy and forces at least till about 1942.

Yet the ashram was not wholly an army-like training camp or in any sense modelled on the British military cantonment. For those who were so inclined (for instance, Vinoba Bhave, K.G. Mashruwala, Surendraji and others of their ilk) it also could serve as a place for *brahma-vidya*; for many others, as a place of *tapasya*, of penance; for some, it even served as a place of escape from the strife of the world around them. The ashram was thus a concrete reflection of Gandhiji's ideas and his organizational skills.

Soon after its creation the ashram also became a centre and promoter of what came to be known as 'constructive' activity. In turn, as the need arose, it gave birth to such organizations that would be concerned with either one or other item of the constructive programme. Examples of these were the Charkha Sangh, the Go-Seva Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the Gramodyog Sangh, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha and the Talimi Sangh.

Yet even when the ashram led to the creation of such ambitious and extensive organisations or served as a vehicle for a common language of inter-regional communication or took up the great task of amity amongst the various religious communities – especially the Hindus and the Muslims – its main role during Gandhiji's life was the preparation of dedicated and well-directed soldiers for a free India. These 'soldiers' would not only join the battles for freedom but – according to Gandhiji's design – being spokesmen of the people, their concurrence would be required as well for the State to function.

Despite their crucial role in his scheme of things, it would be an error to treat the institution of the ashram – or for that matter, various other items of the constructive programme – as if they constituted Gandhiji's main social message.

The ashram as an institution that serves some important function of society is of course of perennial value; similarly, is the idea of constructive activity. Yet, for Gandhiji, the ashram as well as most of the items of the constructive programme – though important and in fact indispensable at the time – were only of transient value. They were required and produced for particular situations. Though each was important in itself and could stand on its own, joined together they were meant to serve the larger purpose of throwing away the foreign yoke and of helping to usher in the desirable order. As Gandhiji said in

1925 - and repeated in 1944 – work in agriculture would perhaps have been of far greater value and possibly symbolised Indian aspirations and requirements even more effectively than *khadi*. But in India's situation then – still under the British yoke – it was not possible to make agriculture into such a symbol.

Brabmacharya

Gandhiji believed that only a perfect man, a yogi – in the words of Gilbert Murray, 'a man who allowed so little purchase on his soul' – could move the world and do anything he wanted for its good. In fact, though Gandhiji was in many ways able to do wonders and make most people agree with what he said, often he found that those who had concurred with him under pressure tried to ignore him when they felt they could do without him. At such times Gandhiji feared that his great will power, clarity and stamina were fragile indeed.

Gandhiji tested himself with regard to *brabmacharya* several times. An unpublished article, titled *Brahmacharya*, written in June 1938, presents in a powerful way what was in Gandhiji's mind. Some extracts from it are quoted below:

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of young men and young women are copying me or led by me in trying to observe *brabmacharya*, or are leading a life of self-restraint, complete or modified. For their guidance, and for the sake of truth, I must disclose my recent experiences...

I have been fairly satisfied with (p. 173) the progress I thought, I was making. But I received a rude shock on 7 April last when I had a bad dream. On the fourteenth I had experience such as I never had before. This was during my waking state ... I struggled on for full twelve hours. I was defeated. And there was involuntary discharge. I felt ashamed of myself. My *brabmacharya* was sullied ... I lost self-confidence ... One cause suggested itself to me. Could my close contacts and the freedom with which I associated with women have anything to do with it? There was no easy answer...

I have no dejection in me. I am certainly humbled. I have been thrown down from the height I was occupying ... (p.183) It was that *brabmacharya* which enabled me to go through the physical endurance that the strongest of my comrades in South Africa were able to go through, and to perform marches sometimes of 40 miles per day ... The physical part of *brabmacharya* is thus not to be

despised ... Without the mind-control however, body-control is bound to be lost and the person may even become a first class hypocrite ... I am the self-appointed general of the army of Satyagrahis. I have no armour but that of *brahmacharya*. Truth and *Ahimsa* cannot walk without *brahmacharya*. I have no wireless but my thoughts. I am not aware of having reached millions through human agency. I (p. 188) believe from well-grounded experience that if one has full control over his thoughts, one has a powerhouse unequalled by any yet devised by all the physical sciences combined. This control is impossible without the conservation and conversion of the vital fluid in man into sublimated energy. Its emission, except for the purpose of procreation is a criminal waste of the highest power placed at his disposal by the almighty. That conservation and sublimation are an impossibility without the fullest control over one's thoughts and hence all the senses.

Though I have travelled somewhat in that direction, it is clear that I have yet (p. 189) to cover a long distance. This defect also accounts for my failure to give to the Congress an infallible prescription for curing it of inward corruption, violence and indiscipline. My belief in the efficacy of non-violence for achieving the common purpose is as bright as ever. Then why do I fail to carry full conviction at least to Congressmen? The reason is perhaps now plain. Non-violence cannot be imparted by mere appeal to the intellect. Its ultimate appeal must be from heart to heart. But for that appeal to succeed, my thought, and thence word, must have power. That power is lacking because my (p. 190) thoughts have been found wandering like wild horses, as I did find on the fateful 14 of April. I must rein them in, if I am to succeed as the general of the Satyagraha army. Let those who have followed and approved of the step I have taken pray with me for the needed purification being vouchsafed to me by the unseen power that rules over us all.²

Hindu-Muslim Relations (cow slaughter)

A major area in which British-sponsored images of Indian society were used to disrupt its functioning concerned the relations between the Muslims and the Hindus. Of all the Muslims in India, only 5% - comprising the Islamic ruling and military class- could be identified as original Islamic immigrant invaders (and their descendants) from Iran,

Turkey, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Arabia. The rest - 95% - were converts to Islam from the general population long living in India. The converts dutifully followed what was required of them by their Islamic conquerors. But largely they retained very much their earlier status and customs. Even till today most of those converted to Islam still follow the customs of the *jatis* they came from, which have not changed very much: they do not, for example, marry with Muslims of other *jatis* (this may be true even in Pakistan) just as there had been little question of their marrying into the alien aggressor Islamic communities. (Indians converted to Christianity also function more or less similarly).

As a conquered people, the vast Hindu population had to be kept in subjugation and permanent dread of the conqueror. Whenever the Hindus seemed a threat to the alien authority, they would be made to pay special taxes for being allowed to remain unconverted. Their temples and other places of worship were demolished and destroyed by acts of the Islamic ruling authority. They were not allowed to hold public festivities when these clashed with Islamic prayers, etc., and to make them feel their subordination deeply, the cow and its progeny – which had always been sacred and dear to the people of India – were sacrificed and slaughtered at certain Islamic festivals.

But even these practices were not invariable. During many periods cow-killing was altogether banned, the special tax on non-Muslims was abolished now and then, and relative amity prevailed between the Muslims and Hindus during various festivals. At certain times and places even a number of specific Hindu temples were constructed by particular Muslim rulers. During the five centuries of Muslim dominance, there were ups and downs between the Hindus i.e. between the native citizens and the immigrant Muslims who had seized political power in various northern and western regions of India. Thus while this relationship, as it developed from about A.D.1200, was varied and complex, it began to be presented by Islam, and much more so by the British, as one-dimensional.

To begin with, in the initial years, Gandhiji himself was naturally unable to grasp the full nature and details of the collapse of Indian society: he too had been influenced by the prominence given to the hyperbolic writings of some Islamic writers about their conquest of India or by presentations by British writers of the gulf that separated the Hindus from the Muslims or the hundreds of assumed gulfs that were said to keep the various Indian *jatis* and communities separate and unconcerned about one another. As he felt that amity was most

essential between Hindus and Muslims if they wished to put up a united front against the British, he began to lay much greater emphasis on correcting what – according to the British – were the problems leading to Hindu-Muslim animosity; problems that the British had a major role in creating in the first place.

In *Hind Swaraj* (*Collected Works* x.p.29) Gandhiji makes the reader ask the question: ‘But what about the inborn enmity between Hindus and Mohammedans?’ His answer was ‘that phrase has been invented by our mutual enemy [i.e., the British] ... With the English advent [our] quarrels re-commenced.’ Thus far Gandhiji had assessed the problem correctly. However, he did not perhaps fully realise that it was the British who gave new vigour and passion to these quarrels. When the questioner in *Hind Swaraj* asks about his views on cow protection, Gandhiji replies, following the long implanted British version of events. He says:

The cow is a most useful animal in hundreds of ways. Our Mohammedan brethren will admit this. But, just as I respect the cow, so do I respect my fellow men ... The only method I know of protecting the cow is that I should approach my Mohammedan brother and urge him for the sake of the country to join me in protecting her. If he would not listen to me I should let the cow go for the simple reason that the matter is beyond my ability.³

In the prevalent British-promoted dogma, the Mohammedan was taken to be a natural and habitual cow-killer, which was not true at all whether he was a converted individual or an immigrant. It may be mentioned here that the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, the Afghans and the Central Asians were not ordinarily given to the eating of cows. The animals they slaughtered for food were usually sheep, goats and camels.

On the other hand, this cow-killing charge was fully applicable to the British and other Europeans and Americans in India. There had in fact been an anti-cow slaughter movement going on in India from around 1880, which even Queen Victoria perceived as being aimed against the British and not at the Muslims.⁴

Gandhiji knew that this anti-kine killing movement was basically aimed at the daily large-scale British killing of Indian cows for feeding cow flesh to the 1,00,000 British soldiers and for the even larger British civilian population. Speaking in Bettiah in October 1917, he noted:

It should be borne in mind, beside, that there are slaughter houses in all the big cities in India. Thousands of cows and bullocks are

slaughtered in these. It is mostly from them that beef is supplied to the British. Hindu society keeps silent about this slaughter, thinking that it is helpless in the matter.⁵

At Muzaffarpur a few days later, he said:

If we want cows to be protected, the thing to do is to save them from slaughter houses. Not less than 30,000 cows are killed for the British everyday. While we have not succeeded in stopping this slaughter, we have no right to raise our hand against Muslims.⁶

Again in December 1920 he observed at Bettiah,

If cow-slaughter were for the Muslim a religious duty, like saying namaz, I would have had to tell them that I must fight against them. It is not a religious duty for them. We have made it one by our attitude to them. Whereas Muslims slaughter cows only occasionally, for beef, the English cannot do without it for a single day. But we submit to them as slaves. We cannot protect the cow while remaining enamoured of the government.⁷

The Muslims of India were used as an excuse by the British to establish the legitimacy of their own killing of cows. No doubt some of the Muslims also did the actual killing, not necessarily for themselves but rather as employees of the British. As the British were the main killers, cow-slaughter in India could only end when the British quit India.

In 1947-48 the Indian Muslim leaders displayed that they did indeed have a better appreciation of the problem. Several of them suggested then that immediate abolition of cow-killing should be included in independent India’s Constitution. But most of the leaders were already so Westernized that they thought that a ban on cow-killing would lower India’s image in the eyes of the world. Continuing to hold such a view, we have continued today to use the Muslims as an excuse for the continuation of cow-killing – as the British had done till 1947.

Parliamentary Democracy

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji had made the observation that ‘Parliaments are really emblems of slavery.’⁸ Three years after his return to India, he adopted a slightly different line. Explaining his position in February 1918 to some one from England, he wrote :

I still retain the position held by me in London. But that form of Government is an impossibility today. India must pass through the throes of Parliamentary Government and, seeing that it is so, I naturally

support a movement which will secure the best type of Parliamentary Government and replace the present bastardism which is neither the one nor the other. What is more, I take part in the movement only to the extent that I can enforce and popularize principles which, I know, must permeate all systems if they are to be of any use.⁹

He had already presented similar views in a long address to the Gujarat Political Conference held at Godhra on November 3, 1917. There he said:

These views of mine notwithstanding, I have joined the Swaraj movement, for India is being governed at present under a modern system. The Government themselves believe that the 'Parliament' is the best form of that system. Without such a parliament, we should have neither the modern nor the ancient form. Mrs. Besant is only too true when she says that we shall soon be facing a hunger-strike, if we do not have Home Rule. I do not want to go into statistics. The evidence of my eyes is enough for me.

Poverty in India is deepening day by day. No other result is possible. A country that exports its raw produce and imports it back as finished goods, a country which, though growing its own cotton, has to pay crores of rupees to outsiders for its cloth, cannot be otherwise than poor. A country, in which it is considered extravagance to spend on marriages, etc. can only be described as poor. It must be a terribly poor country that cannot afford to spend enough in carrying out improvements for stamping out epidemics like the plague. In a country whose officials spend most of their earnings outside, the people are bound to grow poorer day by day. What are we to say of the poverty of a country whose people, during cold weather, burn their precious manure for want of woolen clothing in order to warm themselves? Throughout my wanderings in India I have rarely seen a face exuding strength and joy. The middle classes are groaning under the weight of awful distress. The lowest orders have nothing but the earth below and the sky above. They do not know a bright day. It is pure fiction to say that India's riches are buried underground, or are to be found in her ornaments. What there is of such riches is of no consequence. The nation's expenditure has increased, not so its income ...

What then would our Parliament do if we had one? When we have it, we would have a right to commit blunders and to correct them. In the early stages we are bound to make blunders. But, we, being children of the soil, won't lose time in setting ourselves right. We

shall, therefore, soon find out remedies against poverty. Then our existence won't be dependent on Lancashire goods. Then we shall not be found spending untold riches on building Imperial Delhi. It will, then, be in keeping with the cottages of India. There will be some proportion observed between that cottage and our Parliament House. *The nation today is in a helpless condition; it does not possess even the right to err. He who has no right to err can never go forward.* The history of the [British House of] Commons is a history of blunders. Man, says an Arabian proverb, is error personified. *The freedom to err and the power to correct errors is one definition of swaraj.* Having a parliament means such swaraj.

We ought to have Parliament this very day. We are quite fit for it. We shall, therefore, get it on demand. It rests with us to define 'this very day.'¹⁰

According to Gandhiji, swaraj was not to be sought from the British. We have to demand swaraj from our own people. Our appeal must be to them. When the peasantry of India understands what swaraj is, the demand will become irresistible.¹¹

That Gandhiji firmly held to this position can be seen from an exchange he had with C.R. Das while Gandhiji was in prison during 1922-1924. It appears that some negotiation was going on around 1923 between Lord Birkenhead, the British Secretary of State for India, on the one hand and the Swarajist Congress leaders like C.R. Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Maulana Shaukat Ali and others regarding the British granting some sort of dominion status to India. The negotiations appeared to have been moving smoothly, according to C.R. Das, when they were brought to the notice of Gandhiji. Referring to these negotiations, Gandhiji said on 25.5.1932,

Das and Motilalji were considering the portfolios which they would have had in the new government. Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali thought they will be minister of education, and commander-in-chief respectively. Somehow our honour was saved, that we did not get swaraj, and nobody became anything.¹²

It may be inferred that, for Gandhiji, the appropriate time for any such arrangement with the British could only arrive when the ordinary people of India had regained courage and fearlessness and they had begun to stand up by their own strength. Such a time had not yet arrived in 1925, and it could be assumed that even in 1946-1947 Mahatma Gandhi did not feel that the Indian people had achieved the necessary strength to negotiate with the British as equals.

Caste

One of the major questions on which Gandhiji continued to modify his views was the issue of caste. The first major public reference to caste which he made was in June 1916 in Ahmedabad. He then stated, 'I have devoted much thought to the subject of the caste system and come to the conclusion that Hindu society cannot dispense with it, that it lives on because of the discipline of caste.'¹³

Again in October 1916, writing on the Hindu caste system, he referred to an observation of Sir William Hunter: "Thanks to the continuing existence of the institution of caste, there has been no need for any law for the poor (pauper law) in India.' To this Gandhiji approvingly added :

This seems to me a sound view. The caste system contains within it the seed of swaraj. The different castes are so many divisions of an army. The general does not know the soldiers individually but gets them to work through the respective captains. In like manner, we can carry out social reform with ease through the agency of the caste system and order through it our religious, practical and moral affairs as we choose. The caste system is a perfectly natural institution ... These being my views, I am opposed to the movements which are being carried on for the destruction of the system ... The caste defines the limits within which one may enjoy life, that is to say, we are not free to seek any happiness outside the caste. We do not associate with members of other communities for eating or enter into marriage relationships with them. With an arrangement of this kind, there is a good chance that loose conduct will be kept down ... Prohibition of marriage with anyone not belonging to one's community promotes self control, and self control is conducive to happiness in all circumstances. The larger the area over which the net is cast, the greater the risk.

That is the reason why I see nothing wrong in the practice of choosing the husband or the wife from persons of equal birth ... In this way, the restrictions in regards to eating and marriage are, as a general rule, wholesome ... The caste system has other laws besides those relating to eating and marriage. It has, ready at hand, the means of providing primary education. Every community can make its own arrangements for [such] education. It has machinery for election to the Swaraj Sabha (Parliament). Every community with some standing may elect its own representatives. It has ready

provision for arbitration and tribunals to solve disputes ... If it becomes necessary to raise an army for war, we have already as many battalions as we have communities.

The caste system has struck such deep roots in India that I think it will be far more advisable to try to improve it, rather than uproot it ... In Hindu society communities have been formed, have disappeared and have gone through improvements according to the needs of the times and the process is taking place even today, visibly or invisibly. The Hindu caste system is not merely an inert, lifeless institution but a living one and has been functioning according to its own law. Unfortunately, today we find it full of evils like ostentation and hypocrisy, pleasure-seeking and quarrels. But this only proves that people lack character; we cannot conclude from it that the system itself is bad.¹⁴

It is often said that when Gandhiji used the term 'caste' he meant the four *varnas*. However, in the above observation Gandhiji is using the term 'caste' in the context of the scores and hundreds of castes (*jatis*) to be found in different parts of India.

In May 1920 Gandhiji wrote to C. F. Andrews on the fundamental differences they had 'on the marriage and the caste question.' In it Gandhiji stated:

Just as it would be considered improper for a brother to marry his sister I would make it improper for a person to marry outside his or her group which may be called a caste. I would thereby make the other men or women free from the attention of that person Caste I consider a useful institution if properly regulated. Untouchability is a crime against God and humanity. I would purify the former, I would destroy the latter. If Manilal [his second son] fell in love with a pariah girl, I would not quarrel with his choice; but I would certainly consider that he had failed to imbibe my teaching. I would like him to be satisfied with his own caste division not because he would have any repugnance against the others but because I would like him to exercise self-restraint. Similarly for the institution of caste ... Rob the caste of its impurities, and you will find it to be a bulwark of Hinduism and an institution whose roots are embedded deep down in human nature.'¹⁵

However, within just months of stating the above, Gandhiji appears to have moved away from his earlier views on caste. In December 1920 in an article he wrote for *Young India* on 'The Caste System,' he observed:

[My correspondents] argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion it is not caste that has made us what we are. It is our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.

But after paying the above tribute to caste, Gandhiji observed:

But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural, and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of sub-castes have ever gone on and are bound to continue. Social pressure and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions [that is the four *varnas* of *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, *sudra*].¹⁶

How this radical modification of his views on caste occurred between May 1920 – when he wrote to C.F. Andrews stating that he would consider that his son, Manilal, had failed to imbibe his teaching if he were to marry a girl of another caste – and his public statement in December 1920 – that the sooner there was a fusion of the castes and sub-castes into the four *varnas*, the better – we have no explanation. It appears that even while Gandhiji admired the system of caste he continued to have some mental reservations about it.

During the seven months between May and December 1920 he also seems to have come face to face with issues like the Brahman-non-Brahman controversy in Maharashtra and south India, and the tendency of the numerous smaller castes to be subservient to state pressure. This may have made him revise his earlier views radically. He might also have been under much pressure both from the Westernised as well as the orthodox Hindu, the latter standing for the primacy of *varnashrama dharma*, to modify his views. From then on, he was a firm advocate of *varnashrama* and gave up his admiration and support for the system of castes.

In 1932-1933 Gandhiji was in Yervada prison along with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahadev Desai. The three had long conversations on numerous matters. These were mostly written down by Mahadev Desai in the diary he kept since he had joined Gandhiji around 1918. These 1932-1933 diaries were published in three volumes (in Hindi) in 1948 itself. In volume three of these diaries, Narhari Parekh, the editor

and publisher, has a longish introduction which at some length reproduces the discussion in the Yervada prison about *varna* and *jati*.

In it Sri Narhari Parekh says, 'Therefore Gandhiji is of the view that the *jatis* should get destroyed and be replaced by *varnavyavastha*. Then a new life can arise in Hindu society. What he means by *varnavyavastha*, he has made clear, in these three volumes, on the basis of his discussions with various persons. His first point is that *varna* should be according to occupation. *Brabmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, and *sudra* these are considered the original four *varnas*. If because of multiplicity of occupation the number of *varnas* in society has to increase, he has no objection to that. The main basis of an occupation is that it is related to birth, that is, it becomes the duty of a son to engage in the occupation of the father.'¹⁷

During these discussions in prison Gandhiji is reported to have said :

If *varnashramadharm*a is not connected with birth, then I would give up *varnashramadharm*a today itself. Then it has nothing of value left. I consider it proper that a carpenter's son becomes a carpenter, and not an iron-smith. If in this manner several hundred *jatis* get formed, so be it. So long as there is inter-dining and inter-marriage amongst them, it does not matter how many *jatis* there are. It is the restrictions imposed by dining rules and marriage rules of the *jatis* that has made the situation very difficult ... What I say is that it is not that a man of one *varna* does not have the right to engage in the occupation of another *varna*, it is not so; but doing this is improper. This *dharma* is for everyone. Its observance must not be had unthinkingly; such observance must be after due deliberation. The way the Hindus observe this, the same way the Muslims should. It is in this sense that I had said, 'that *varna-dharma* is the greatest gift of Hinduism to humanity.' By following such *dharma* the whole of society will be protected, the whole of society will become unconquerable.¹⁸

Earlier, Gandhiji had said, 'If there are no restrictions on dining and marriage, then one can call it *varna-vyavastha* if one wishes that, or *jati-vyavastha*, if one wishes the latter. They are very valuable arrangements.'

A few days later, Gandhiji said to Mahadev Desai :

Yes, it is not as if crores [of people] were going to give up their *varnas* to get married outside. But those who leave their *varna* to marry elsewhere, to say that they are committing *adharm*a, that

should not be thought. *Adharma* is in giving up the occupation of the varna, not in giving up the varna to marry out of it ... To give up one's occupation is 'sankara', that is mixing up the varnas.¹⁹

In July 1946, Gandhiji was so sure of his vision of *varnashrama* that he declared: 'If I live up to 125 years, I do expect to convert the entire Hindu society to my view.'²⁰

This was a statement of the utmost significance. Some twenty-one years earlier (in March 1925), after his talk with Narayana Guru, Gandhiji had observed:

His Holiness [Sri Narayana Guru] told me yesterday that we might not see the end of this agony during our life time, in this generation, and that I should have to wait for another incarnation of mine before I had the pleasure of seeing the end of this agony. I respectfully differed from him. I hope to see the end in this very age during my life time, but I do not hope to do so without your assistance.²¹

It is possible that if Gandhiji had lived 125 years he would have seen to the complete elimination of untouchability in its varied forms. He might also have succeeded in ordering Hindu society differently.

Conclusion

What needs to be inferred from the several statements given above on different issues is that Gandhiji did not hold any rigid view on most matters of social or even technical organization. What mattered most to him was the current context which demanded the modification of views, and whether the modification appeared to be practical and for the good of society. His fundamental beliefs did not lie in matters of detail, connected with the given or changing situation, but remained the same as those spelt out in *Hind Swaraj* or as explained in his writings, as for instance on the relationship of modern technology with the basic rural structure of Indian society and its primary production and activities, the latter having primacy.

In popular discussion about Gandhiji it is usually said that whatever he said or did in his later days was according to him the best. This is based on a statement Gandhiji made in April 1933. On being charged that he said contradictory things on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage, he explained that while he did not think these essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood, he did feel that these superimposed restrictions would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society. Concluding his views, he said :

But having said this I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be inconsistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the latter of the two on the same subject.²²

The point that Gandhiji makes is that the changes in his views are according to the will of God, from moment to moment. Obviously, all such changes need not always occur in liner succession as the modern West is wont to demand. Gandhiji himself could have basically reverted to an earlier position after having tried out various options. And those who come after him should not treat him so literally, but gaining from his insight and method, try to work out solutions for themselves.

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- ¹ *Collected Works*, Vol.23, pp.104-1 09, Interview with the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* (before 18-3-1922, when Gandhiji had gone to prison) but published in the *Hindu* on 15-8-1922.
- ² Sevagram Ashram Pratisthan: Note books of Sri Chimanlal Shah, No. 17, Chillar Uttar, pp 172-190; *Brahmacharya* (Segaon) Monday, 6.6.1938; possibly in Chimanlalbhai's own hand writing. *Collected Works*, Vol. 67, p.115 has a letter from Gandhiji to Jannalal Bajaj 11.6.1938 which says, 'I have drafted a statement in English for newspapers, but I have not as yet published it ... However, I won't publish the statement in a hurry.' Footnote 2 on this page says, 'Gandhiji had written an article on his decision for *Harijan* but it was never published as some of the Ashram inmates did not approve of making Gandhiji's decision a public affair.' There is also some correspondence on it between Mahadev Desai and Sri Jannalal Bajaj. One letter is of 12.6.1938. The above article ends with '(sd) M.K. Gandhi'. The note book perhaps is no longer to be found in the Ashram. I found, read, and copied it around 1984. (Dharampal)
- ³ *Collected Works*, Vol.10, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 30.
- ⁴ IOL: Letter of Queen Victoria to Governor General Lansdowne, 8.12.1893.
- ⁵ *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.2-4, Bettiah, Speech on Cow-Protection, 9.10.1917, esp. p.3.

6. *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.77-81, Muzaffarpur, Speech at Muzaffarpur, 11.11.1917, esp. p.80.
7. *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp.91-92, Bettiah, Speech at Bettiah Goshala, 8.12.1920, esp. p.91.
8. *Collected Works*, Vol.10, *Hind Swaraj* p.21.
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10. *Ibid.* Godhra, 3.11.1917, pp.48-66, Speech at Gujarat Political Conference, esp. pp.53-54.
11. *Ibid.* p.55.
12. Diaries of Mahadev Desai, 1948 (in Hindi) Vol. 1, p.175, 25.5.1932. In the English version of these diaries, published in 1953, the above statement of Gandhiji has been deleted. According to Pattabhi Sitaramayya: The History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. I, 1885-1935, pp. 281-2, 'At the same time he (C.R. Das) was full of hope that he could effect a settlement with the British Government. Only a year previous to the time, when he was touring in South India he had declared on the sands of the Madras beach that Gandhi had "damaged and mismanaged". referring to Gandhi to Gandhi-Reading negotiating on the eve of the Ahmedabad Congress.'
13. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.277-9, Speech on Caste System, Ahmedabad, 5.6.1916, esp. p.277.
14. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.301-303. in Bharat Sevak (Marathi)
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The Perennial Elements in Gandhi's Thought: Some Reflections

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Every great thinker, more so an activist thinker presents and works out his ideas at two levels. At one level, being hedged by his spatio-temporal environment, he grapples with the problems of his times, which have accumulated in the course of historical development. He attempts to find and offer appropriate solutions for them. In the process, he makes valuable contributions in the environment of his life and times. But he does not stop at that level. To leave his perennial footprints on the sands of the time, he has to work simultaneously at an entirely different level. He has to go much beyond his *yugdharma* and contribute something to *shashwat dharma*. So that thoughts and actions remain relevant for both. The best example of such a thinker is Krishna of the *Mahabharata* fame. He plays a crucial role in the course of the *Mahabharata* war (his *yugdharma*) and at the same time, he makes everlasting contribution in the form of the perennial philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Both as a teacher and as a scholar I have spent many years in delving deep in Gandhi's life, thoughts and actions. I am aware that Gandhiana is no longer a virgin field for research and writings. There are books galore apart from Gandhi's own voluminous writings dealing with diverse themes ranging from sexuality to spirituality.

In view of the above, scholars of Gandhian thought have tried to find an easy way out. They have tried to put Gandhi's life and thought within the narrow confines of their respective academic disciplines.

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Thus, political scientists have concentrated on his political ideas, whereas economists have been dealing with his economic thought. Sociologists have tried to project him as a social theorist and the philosophers are ever engaged in dealing with his philosophic ideas. Scholars of comparative religion have been quibbling whether his primary source of inspiration was constituted by the Bhagavad-Gita or the New Testament. Environmentalists have found in him their putative progenitor and psychologists have gone on debating about the foundation of his personality and psychic life. So on and so forth, all these and similar other studies in different disciplines have been quite germane to their respective disciplines. But they fail to present a holistic account of his life and thought. And the need for presenting a holistic narrative of his life, thought and actions still remains a challenging task, mainly because of his simultaneous engagement in various actions mostly around his battle for the freedom of India and struggles pertaining to his salvation and of the humanity in various forms and his spirituality.

However, the primary purpose and focus of the present paper is very limited. All that it attempts to do is to trace out the perennial elements in Gandhi's thought. As such, some of the questions the present paper seeks to answer are. One, are there some everlasting elements in Gandhi's thoughts, which could constitute an integral part of the perennial philosophy? Two, do they have the potentialities to offer an alternative way of organizing society? Three, do they go beyond the arena of moral preachings – a favourite area of the saints and sages from time immemorial? Or do they fulfil the Confucian criteria of being a gentleman who never preaches what he has been practising till he has practised what he has been preaching? In what follows, I would attempt to take an overview of Gandhi's thought in the light of the above questions. The paper would be divided in three parts. The first part would deal with how Gandhi dealt with the dominant ideologies of his times including the major contours of liberalism and Marxism. How did he try to bring the major tenets of the prevailing cultural tradition of India nearer to the tunes of his times? The second part of the paper would attempt to make a quintessential presentation on some of his key concepts, which, to our mind, go a long way to constitute his core philosophy. In the last part, I would examine the primary question whether his ideas could really constitute a part of the perennial philosophy.

I

It goes without saying that during the time when Gandhi lived and worked, liberalism and Marxism had emerged as the two dominant ideologies. In fact, they continue to dominate the world of ideologies even now with their variant forms. He was also confronted with some of the excretions and excrescences in the Indian cultural tradition, which had accumulated in the course of its historical developments. In the pages that follow, I would take a synoptic view of all these problems. It is true that a number of scholars have tried to trace out the common ground between his thought and perspective of liberalism in their attempt to bring him within the ken of liberalism. His concern for the autonomy, freedom and integrity of the individual has been emphasized to put him in the category of a liberal thinker. Strangely enough, his concern for *daridranarayan*, his idea of the state of the enlightened anarchy and other similar ideas have been cited to take him nearer to the ideas of Karl Mark. Thus, several attempts have been to make him as a protagonist of either liberalism or Marxism depending on the orientations and proclivities of a particular scholar.

These studies have completely ignored some of the key concepts of Gandhi, which are totally against the common run ideas of both liberalism and Marxism. For instance, Gandhi's concept of 'cosmocentric' man and his symbiotic relationship with his fellow being and the entire cosmic order marked by a deep sense of inter-dependence totally takes him out from the ken of the kind of humanism, which has gripped the western mind in the post-renaissance period. There are a number of specific points on which Gandhi differed from the basic tenets of liberalism. One, that man is moved by his 'enlightened self-interest; hence he must have freedom to pursue it. And whenever such pursuit of self-interest would come into conflict with others, the institution of state would arbitrate or might even work as its final arbiter. Two, that the man has a special and privileged place in the cosmic order and as such he has the inherent right to use its resources for his comforts and conveniences. Three, that the institution of private property with some minor limitations provides a congenial environment to the man to enjoy his freedom and meet his desire for 'territorial imperative.' Four, liberalism pleads and works for an economic order based on ever spiraling human 'wants,' maximum exploitation of the bounties of the nature through the use of science and technology and through the process of urbanization and industrialization. These were some of the key ideas, which provided the intellectual foundation of liberalism. One does not have to go in

details to show how Gandhi had rejected and transcended some of these liberal formulations. Suffice is to say at this stage that Gandhi's idea of divinity in man and his *advaitic* vision of the cosmic order totally go against the above liberal perspective.

Strangely enough, some of these liberal formulations about the nature of the man and the cosmic order were not totally controverted and rejected by Marxism. For instance, basic capitalist system of production was not rejected by Marxism, except that it overemphasized the fact of the 'expropriation of the expropriators' and as such it made the institution of the private property as the main villain of the piece. Hence, it lays emphasis on its socialisation. Marxism-Leninist movement turned out to be a vanguardist movement to be led by the Communist Party with a clarion call to suppress and eliminate all those who differed from it. So far its ultimate destination of classless and stateless society was concerned, it was to be preceded by virtually a permanent stage of the 'dictatorship of proletariat.' Thus, there was a great disconnect between its intermediate and final stage. Gandhi's ideas of autonomy and integrity of the individual, his distrust of the institution of the state at every stage, his theory of Swaraj and trusteeship had hardly any common ground with Marxist perspective. Besides, his idea of constructive programmes, *satyagraha*, his creedal commitment to truth and non-violence, his firm assertion on the symbiotic relationship between the ends and means hardly leave ground for commonality of perspective with Marxism and its major formulations. In a word, Gandhi has rejected dominant perspectives projected by both liberalism and Marxism.

Gandhi and Indian Religion-Cultural Tradition

Apart from liberalism and Marxism, Gandhi also took stock of the prevailing trends in the religio-cultural tradition of India. He expressed his strong reservations about some of these trends and tried to present his own perspective on them in his attempt to bring them to the tune of his times. Some of the areas where he made significant contributions were as follows:

One, Gandhi was fully aware that on the account of Brahminic domination of the Indian cultural tradition, dignity of labour (*sharir-shram*) has not been given its due place. Mental and manual/menial works have been compartmentalised on the basis of caste: mental work being assigned to Brahmins and the manual/menial work to the shudras. Gandhi totally rejected such perspective and found it totally against

the true cultural tradition of India. He looked at every kind of manual work including scavenging as an ennobling work. He not only himself took up scavenging work, but also made *sharir shram* (manual labour) as an integral part of his *ekadasha vrata*. It was in this context that he totally rejected the idea of untouchability and waged a lifelong battle against it.

He also found two major limitations in the lives of our people, particularly in respect of our public life. Strict accounting was missing, both from our private and public life. He insisted on strict accounting of the public fund and even suggested to his followers to introduce it in their household affairs. Such a strict accounting has several social implications. In the first place, a culture of strict accounting of public fund greatly contributed to a deep sense of integrity and transparency in public life of the country. Besides, a number of public workers started keeping an eye on their day-to-day expenses. That led to their frugal living with more spare time and energy left to be devoted to the cause of the nation. Time management was another innovation he introduced in our public life. Political leaders of free Gandhian era were not very strict of their prior appointment. Gandhi introduced the system of meeting people by fixing up their prior appointment. He worked as an exemplar to assign every minute of his time to a particular work and that was the reason for his enormous productivity. He maintained the same strictness in respect of public meetings and organizational works of the Congress. Thus, strict punctuality and time management was introduced at his initiative and insistence in our public life.

Apart from dealing with some of these problems of our public life, he also made certain contributions in the realm of ideas so far our cultural tradition was concerned. Three of them are being underlined here.

In the first place, prior to his entry into politics, there was no clarity about the actual relationship between religion and politics. They were two views about it. The dominant view was that religion is meant for *Shadhus* and politics entirely belongs to the secular field. Even Tilak was of the same view. On the other hand, people like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Swami Dyanand wanted religion to be used for political ends. Gandhi introduced a fine balance between the two. In the process, he worked out new definitions of both religion and politics. His concept of religion went beyond the organized religions and underlined their ethical and moral bases. Similarly, for him politics was far away from power game and it was to be an instrument of service

to people. Such a new perspective on religion and politics had several implications for our public life. One, even the people primarily with spiritual bent of mind could participate in the public life of the country. In the process, he solved the age-old problem of our cultural life, which was compartmentalized in the form of *pravriti* and *nivriti* marges. He successfully bridges the gulf between these diametrically opposite ways of life.

Another area of the Indian cultural tradition was wherein Gandhi made significant contribution was in respect of the *Karma-sidhant*. In plain language, theory of *Karma* with its concomitant principle of rebirth means: as you sow, so you reap. In other words, every human action bears its own fruits – good or bad, depending on its nature. This chain of action and its fruit is not even broken by the intervention of death. It follows the man like his shadow even in his next life. Gandhi believed in the theory of rebirth, unless one had attained *moksha* at the end of his life. It is to be noted that one baneful effect of such a view was that it had led to a kind of fatalism in our public life. Thus, suffering of the fellow beings was none of the concern for relief of even our enlightened souls. Thus, human intervention was ruled out to relieve others from their sufferings. Gandhi contested such a mechanistic application of *Karma-sidhant*. Rather he went to the extent of saying that *Karma-sidhant*, loving, and serving the poor and the downtrodden was quite compatible with each other. He found the support for such a path-breaking formulation in the *Bhagavad-Gita's* theory of *Lokshantara*. Following in the steps of the teacher of the Gita, Gandhi asserted that the actions taken in the interest of others and being presented as an offering to God would lose its binding force. He further argued that despite the *Sanskars* of his past life, man is also endowed with his 'free will.' Hence, the present good actions apart from workings as the fixed deposit for next life would also go a long way to lessen the burden of his past life. He was in full agreement with the Gita's assertion that man could ultimately become what he wanted to become (XVIII-3).

The last but not the least contributions that Gandhi made were in the form of making reconciliation between 'reason,' revelation and intuition. He did accept that every religion was based on revelation. But he hastened to add that all religions had been communicated through human agencies. Hence, they are bound to suffer from infirmities. Besides, in the course of historical development, they have gathered some accretions and excrescences, which would be quite external to pure and pristine forms. On all these counts, there is a need

to test them on the touchstone of human rationality. But he was against the idea of making a 'fetish' of human rationality. He further asserted that apart from human reason, these are equally valid epistemological tools of knowledge viz. intuition, inner voice and the experiential truths of sages and scriptures. This was another major contribution of Gandhi to our cultural tradition.

II

Gandhi's Alternative Civilisational Framework

It is in the light of the above discussion that Gandhi's attempt to provide an alternative civilisational framework should be viewed and assessed. It is true that he never made any systemic presentation of his ideas to constitute a coherent philosophical framework. But there are various fragments of his idea which could be put together for a coherent systemic presentation. To my mind, some of his core ideas are regarding (a) man, world and God; (b) Trusteeship and (c) Swaraj leading ultimately to the emergence of a non-violent Sarvodaya Samaj. Along with them, he also offered three major instruments, which could be used to bring about such a social change. They are *Ekadash Vrata*, (Eleven vows), constructive programmes and *satyagraha*. In the following pages, I would offer some reflections on all these concepts of Gandhi.

1: Gandhi's Concept of Man, World and God

The entire ideational superstructure of Gandhi was built on his basic understanding of the man, the world and the God. Being rooted in the *advaitic* vision, Gandhi firmly asserted that every man carries a speck of divinity within himself. Hence, every man within his own personality possesses immense potentiality and even practical possibility for attaining spiritual growth and enlightenment. In other words, Gandhi strongly believed in the idea of human perfectibility. True, the veil of *avidya* (false knowledge) comes in the way of self-disclosure of man. But that could be overcome by going through the process of personal *sadhana*. In the process, Gandhi rejects the concept of man being afflicted by the 'original sin' as well as that of the economic man quite popular in the modern intellectual tradition. In other words, Gandhi rejects both these Western concepts of 'fallen' and economic man.

Gandhi did not believe in an anthropomorphic and *avatarvadi* vision of God. As an *advaitvadi*, he had faith in an attributeless and formless

God. He strongly believed that God was not there outside of ourselves, rather he pervades everything and is imminent in all beings. Ultimately, he transcended even the Vedantic vision of God when he came to look at 'Truth as God' instead of 'God as Truth.' However, as a concession to the spiritual need of the common man, he was willing to accept the concept of God with form and attribute.

So far, his views on the phenomenal world was concerned, he transcended the age-old debate whether the world is real or unreal. He rejected both the extremes of an egocentric man totally immersed in the phenomenal world and the life of *sanyasi* only working for his personal *moksha*, far away from the *vagaries* of the world. He embraced the idea of a cosmic order marked by inter-dependence. Thus, a man is not only responsible for his own action but also for the actions of his fellow beings. Taking the world as being manifested and pervaded by God, and taking himself as a microcosm of the divinity, man has to ceaselessly work to realize his true self, on the one hand, and also to continuously engage in the task of making the world a more livable place. The only way he could love and serve his fellow beings. He need not endlessly engage himself in the debate whether God is with form and attributes (*sagun*) or without them and whether the phenomenal world is real or unreal.

2: *Swaraj*

Based on the above foundation, Gandhi built up his own concept of *Swaraj*. It was in the *Hind Swaraj* that he first delineated his concept of *Swaraj*. However, he refused to offer any hackneyed definition. He rejected the prevailing notion of *Swaraj* – freedom from the British while retaining both intellectual and institutional set up provided by them. In such a situation, he further averred, India would become 'Englistan' and not 'Hindustan.' Then he took up the question of how India could be really freed. In the process, he asserted that if individuals could become free by attaining self-rule, India could not lag behind attaining 'self-government.' Thus, he established a close relationship between inner *Swaraj* and outer *Swaraj* – making the former as the foundation for the latter. He offered 'passive resistance' as the most effective means to free India from the British clutches. Subsequently, he came back to India and by 1920 he took over the leadership of the Indian National Movement. He found out that the people at large and even the leaders were primarily interested in the idea of external *Swaraj*. He, therefore, made it clear in his Foreword to '*Hind Swaraj*' in 1921

that in view of the people's unpreparedness for his own ideas of *Swaraj*, he would essentially work for parliamentary democracy. In the subsequent period, he expanded the idea of such external *Swaraj* through resolution on *Pooran Swaraj* and those of the Karachi Congress. Thus, he integrated new dimensions of political, social, economic freedom to his idea of *Swaraj* particularly in respect of the poor and the downtrodden. He also played a crucial role in elections of 1937 and 1946 and even in the formation of the Congress Government on both the occasions.

However, theoretically he remained critical of the kind of representative government, which was the mainstay of Western democracy, as people hardly matter in the entire process. He even tried to offer an alternative system of truly democratic governance through his idea of 'oceanic circle,' *Gram Swaraj* and '*Panchayati Raj*.' Through his idea of the 'oceanic circle,' he tried to establish a close linkage between the individual and local, regional, national and international communities. For him, the integrity, freedom of the individual remained the basic principles behind the political structure of his own conception. Any violation of his integrity and individuality in the name of commonweal would amount to nothing less than violence. But that did not mean that the interest of the community was of no consequence. Each unit in such a political structure would be fully of the inter-dependent nature of the entire structure. It is also to be noted that Gandhi did not look at the political process purely from the viewpoint of the right of the individuals. He laid equal emphasis on his duties. Moreover, being aware of the limitations of the Western concept of representative government and its top-heavy and top-down approach, he offered the 'bottom up' approach in the form of *Gram Swaraj* and *Panchayati Raj*. He also called it *Ramrajya*, which stood for equity, justice and self-abnegation. This was his concept of the ideal society. Starting with maximum emphasis on the freedom of the individual and minimal state, it would ultimately lead to a state of an 'enlightened anarchy' – a truly non-violent society marked by equity, justice and freedom. In such a system, self-ruling individuals would provide the fulcrum of the society.

3: *Trusteeship*

Gandhi's economic ideas in general and his principle of trusteeship in particular were rooted in his rejection of both the capitalist and Marxist systems and his vision of a desirable society. He was fully convinced

that the existing systems have promoted the culture of consumerism, exploitation and domination. Not only that, in every society, there has emerged a powerful group which taking control over the societal resources, has succeeded in imposing his will on the hapless majority. In the process, all moral and ethical values have been subordinated to human avarice and material progress. Gandhi rejected such an approach to human life and the bounties of the Nature. He emphasized the need for the fulfilment of the basic needs so that man is left with enough energy and time to pursue his higher goal of human redemption. That was also the reason for his insistence on some of his key economic concepts like 'bread labour,' distinction between 'need' and 'want' and his ever emphasis on the reduction of human need.

It was in the above perspective that Gandhi has propounded his idea of trusteeship – as an essential foundation for his non-violent and desirable society. But he was clear in his mind that such a society would be marked by equity and not by mechanistic equality. That was for two reasons. One, he was aware that the capability quotient might differ from individual to individual. Hence, it has to be given its due consideration in any system of production. Otherwise society would lose by underutilization of capabilities of its more talented people was found to emerge in such a society. But once the capability quotient of such people is allowed a role in the productive system, inequality in terms of income and wealth is bound to come up in the society. The moot question is how any given society should tackle the problem of such emerging inequality. What is more, neither liberalism nor Marxism has succeeded in offering a foolproof solution for it. Hence, a new solution was needed to be offered. There was another reason, which prompted Gandhi to come out with his idea of trusteeship for managing the institution of private property. He had firm faith in the freedom and integrity of the individual, which he was not willing to sacrifice at any cost. So the question before him was how to yoke individual's capability and initiative with the commonweal of the society. His idea of trusteeship perfectly fitted the bill. It were these two reasons, which prompted Gandhi to the idea of trusteeship.

The basic idea behind trusteeship was that man should own and use all his resources including his property taking himself as a trustee on behalf of the society. In such a perspective, the owners of the properties would not be divested of their proprietary rights. Thus, their skill, capability and initiative would be utilized to create wealth for primarily serving the interest of the society. In the process, their lives

and livings would be marked by self-restraint and self-abnegation. In other words, the wealth and resources generated by such would be used for the commonweal of the society, rather than entirely for their own comforts and conveniences. His idea of trusteeship took a definite form when a final document on trusteeship was drafted by M.L. Dantwala in consultation with Narhari Parekh and Kishorelal Mashruwala. The draft was finally approved by Gandhiji. Lest the idea remains at ephemeral and ethereal level, the document envisaged a crucial role for the State in the entire process including in regulating the right to inheritance, in fixing the minimum and maximum wages with minimal difference. Incessant efforts would be made to such minimal difference ultimately leading to a truly non-violent society.

Instruments of Social Change

Transition towards a new and a desirable society has been one of the major problems faced by all the great thinkers. Marxism-Leninism tried to bring about such change through the vanguardist movement led by a closed cadre based Communist Party with its primary emphasis on the capture of the State Power through violent means, establishment of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the intermediate stage, finally leading to state of 'classless and stateless' society. Liberalism believed in gradualism, finally leading to a just and equitable society of its own conception. Gandhi was aware of all these ideological orientations and of their pitfalls. Hence, he was quite keen to provide concrete, effective and viable means, which would lead the people to the final stage of his desirable, non-violent society. He also wanted to transcend the debate whether such a journey should start from the level of the individual or the community. Broadly speaking, Marxism favoured the first step at the systemic level and had disfavoured all reformist agenda. Hence, they showered all their venomous contempt on all 'reformists' and 'renegades.' Gandhi tried to transcend all these fruitless ideological debates. He offered three major instruments of change to tackle the entire problem from individual to the societal level. These three major instruments of change as suggested by him were: *Ekadash vrata* (Eleven vows), constructive programmes and *satyagraha*. A brief discussion on all three instruments of change would be quite expedient to our study.

(1) *Ekadasha vrata*: It comprised of eleven vows: five *yama* (truth, non-violence), non-stealing, *brahmacharya* and non-Possession from Patanjali yoga sutra and added six of his own *niyarnas* control of

palate, fearlessness, bread labour, swadeshi, elimination of untouchability and *sarva dharma samabhava* (equal respect for all religions). It is clear that Gandhi was convinced that all systems are ultimately run by the individuals. Hence, their inner purity as well as its application at the level of the society alone could lead to a better society. He was firmly of the opinion that unless a regimen of self-restraint is built up at the level of the people in general and at the level of the wielders of power at the societal level, no system could successfully work for the betterment of the common masses. That was the real idea behind the *Ekadash vrata*. He was more than ever convinced that the practice of *Ekadash vrata* would also work as a training regimen for *satyagrahis* who, in any case would play the pivotal role in leading the society to its ideal stage.

(2) Constructive Programmes: Two malignant consequences have emerged from the Marxist insistence on the capture of the State power and their opposition to all reformist agenda. First, the State goes on acquiring power and functions, which it could not handle effectively and equitably. What is more, people lose their basic freedom in the ever blowing tornado of the State power which inescapably moves towards a totalitarian stage. The second consequences of such perspective is that the sinews of the civil society is loosened and atrophies giving wielders of the State power total freedom to do what they wish to do. In the liberal democratic society, all attempts to tame and control the State power by reducing its arena of operation had hardly improved the situation. The market forces primarily work within the confines of the privileged sections of any society. Hence, millions of the marginalized are forced to eke out their miserable lives.

It goes to the credit of Gandhi that he had anticipated some of these problems and had even suggested a remedial measure in the form of his constructive programme. He had pleaded for a minimal State and a strong and vibrant civil society. He even set up several single objective organizations like All India Village Industries Association, Harijan Sevak Sangh, Bharat Sevak Sangh and similar other organizations to carry on the specific programmes of his eighteen point constructive programme. He had also encouraged and inspired his followers to establish hundreds of ashrams to carry on different constructive programmes. These ashrams also work as the centre for popular mobilization at the time of national struggle. They also contributed to the upliftment of the weaker sections

of the society. In fact, through his constructive programmes Gandhi attempted to work out a plan of total regeneration of India even without having the State power in our hands.

(3) *Satyagraha*: *Satyagraha* was designed as a sovereign weapon against all kinds of injustice, be it political, social, economic or even spiritual. It remains as the most seminal contribution of Gandhi in the realm of social action. The idea of *satyagraha* emerged in South Africa, in the face of the problem of racial discrimination faced by the people of Indian origin there. Subsequently, Gandhi successfully applied it in the course of India's struggle for independence in the post-war period. It has been applied as an effective weapon against all kinds of injustices including civil rights struggle of the American Blacks led by Dr. Martin Luther King and South African struggle against the policy of apartheid led by Nelson Mandela. It has been also for protecting the basic right of the people and, regime change in several countries.

The philosophical roots of *satyagraha* could be located in some of the major formulations of Gandhi. One, that the truth exists at two levels of relative and absolute. Since absolute truth is beyond the ordinary reach of man, he has to act on the basis of his relative truth. Thus, *satyagraha* was nothing but insistence on the relative truth whether by an individual or community. The second philosophical formulation was that in an *advaitic* vision of the world, there is no other. Hence, there is no question of launching a fight to finish. No search of truth, even of the relative truth, could conceive of a violent struggle as both parties could be ultimately persuaded to join the search for the truth involved in the struggle. It was also based on the third major philosophical formulation of Gandhi that man is endowed with divine qualities. Hence, one could not think of any human being totally devoid of these qualities. He might go stray for a while but ultimately would come back to realize his true nature. In such a situation, he was bound to listen to sane and sincere plea of a genuine *satyagrahi*. It is not for nothing that *satyagraha* has assumed a universal character. It has become the *brahmastra* of all those who might be physically and materially weak but strong and invincible morally and spiritually.

III

Towards a New Integration

The preceding discussions could be summed up in the form of two questions and their respective answers. One, what are the basic

grievances of Gandhi against the modern western industrial civilization? Two, what kind of alternative civilizational framework is provided by him? It is not difficult to answer the first question. Gandhi has several basic grievances against the modernity. He had a plethora of them such as: a soulless, atomized individual pursuing his self interest devoid of the warmth and love of the community; the demon of materialism eating into the spiritual vitals of the man; singular pursuit of secular success at the cost of the ultimate meaning of human existence; violation of basic, intricate balance of cosmic order posing a serious threat to humankind. Gandhi has been proved right by the subsequent historical developments. So far so good.

But scholars find it more difficult to answer the second question whether he successfully provided the contours of a new civilization and social framework. However, the basic contention of the present paper is that he did provide a broad framework to that end. His basic ideas, as discussed above, do present such a framework. It should be clearly understood that Gandhi was not for small tinkering with the fabric of modern civilization. He wanted it to be replaced by a new perspective on human civilization. In that respect, he was a true revolutionary. On the basis of some of his key ideas as discussed above, a number of new organizing principles of society with new philosophical foundation could be easily deduced. Some of them are:

First, man is of transcendental nature. He has to work both for his secular and spiritual redemption. Being imbued with the ideas of interdependence, he has to work as the moral custodian for other species of the cosmos. Based on such a perspective, the human society would be organized in such a way that the man does not develop an arrogant gumption to work as a 'tearaway' for the rest of the creation. Thus, harmony and finely tuned ecological balance would work as the guiding principles of new social order.

The second organizing principle behind the new society would be the spirit of cooperation in place of the present system of cut-throat competition; equity and freedom in place of expansion and domination. Moral imperative of such a society would demand equitable distribution and use of natural resources including control over the means production and not their concentration in few hands.

The third organizing principle of such society would be the minimum control over the lives of the people by any external agency including the institution of State. Thus, more than self-government, self-ruling individuals would provide the hallmark of the new society. What is

more, such self-ruling individuals would not only work for the protection and promotion of their own integrity and autonomy but would also take care of those of their fellow beings and indeed of the entire cosmic order.

The fourth organizing principle would be that the entire lever of power would be in the hands of the common man to whom it really belonged. All this would be provided through the new institutions of *Gram-Swaraj*, Panchayati Raj and similar other institutions of decentralized polity. This would be further backed up by introduction of the production by masses in place of mass production. The system would be further embellished by introduction of other Gandhian principles like 'bread labour,' symbiotic relationship between the end and the means, the idea of trusteeship in respect of all the human resources. These Gandhian ideas could not be fitted in the existing social order. They require a different kind of perspective and initiative. Therein lies both their strengths and weaknesses.

Rabindranath Tagore

Prof. Kumkum Bhattacharya*

Ancestry and Background: Rabindranath Tagore (6 May 1861-7 August 1941) was the 14th child of Devendranath and Sarala Devi born at Jorasanko, Kolkata. The Tagores were an old aristocratic family tracing its ancestry from an enterprising landowning family in Khulna, erstwhile East Bengal and present Bangladesh. The Tagores moved to Kolkata where they added to their landed property and established trading with the East India Company. Of the Tagores, Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarakanath was the most enterprising – he was instrumental in increasing the fortunes of the family as well as playing a significant role in public welfare at a very crucial juncture of history referred to as the Bengal Renaissance. This renaissance owes its genesis to a multitude of factors – the advent of Raja Rammohun Roy to settle in Kolkata (1814); the establishing of the Hindu College (1817; later known as Presidency College) and the publication of Bengali periodicals (1818; *Samachar Darpan* and *Bangal Gazetti*). Roy was instrumental in the revival of monotheistic Hinduism as against the then prevalent uncritical obeisance to the proverbial 33 crores of gods and goddesses; he even tried to formulate the concept of a universal religion in which the doctrine of the Brahma, Christian moral ideas and Islamic monotheism could blend seamlessly. Dwarakanath stood by Rammohun in all his efforts long after his death. The tradition of the Brahma Samaj and the dawn of new Bengali literature, social reforms and propagating nationalistic and political ideas were carried forward by Dwarakanath's son Devendranath and his son, Rabindranath who took these measures to new heights. This era also marked the beginning of modern urban culture and civilization of Bengal and then of India.

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Rabindranath's birth, socialization and blossoming are to be seen against the backdrop of the momentous changes taking place in the Bengali society referred to as *Navajagaran* or the Bengal Renaissance. This socio-historical context of that time moulded the Tagore family in general and Rabindranath in particular. Very seldom in human history has come a moment in which we find successive generations of one family line straddling the pre- and post- epochs of change – undoubtedly the Tagores are one of the illustrious examples.

The revolutionary changes in Bengali society brought about by landmark social reforms came to be defined by the halcyon colours of cultural and literary pursuits. Cultivation of literature, art, music, dance and theatre was given a new lease of life and creativity and in this too the Tagores were front-runners and torchbearers. Rabindranath was undoubtedly the jewel in the family of other gifted individuals who were deeply sensitive to the unfolding events and social changes.

Childhood and youth: Rabindranath's rather unpleasant but brief exposure to formal schooling was replaced with home tutoring in a multitude of subjects under the supervision of one of his elder brother's guidance that are humorously retold in his autobiography, *Jivansmriti* (1912) and *Chhelebeli* (1940). The memorable experience of intimacy with his father in the Himalayas and in Santiniketan left a deep impression on young Rabi's mind, and this deepened over the years preparing him to take on the family mantle after his father's death (1905).

Rabindranath started writing poems, articles and songs from a very young age that got their impetus from nature, imagination, and spirit of wonder. Travel formed a large part of the education process and Rabindranath travelled to England in his early youth. He did not complete his education in the University College, London and at the end of fourteen months he returned to India. Ever the raconteur, he wrote lively letters full of the stories of his every-day experiences that were later published in *Europe probashir patra* (1879-80, *Sojourner in Europe*). His European sojourn gave him gradually maturing musical skills new energy – his musical drama *Balmiki Pratibha* (*The Genius of Valmiki*, 1881) that blended Indian, European and Irish tunes bringing about a fresh contribution to the musical tradition of Bengal. Rabindranath devoted himself to music and literature thereafter. Some of his writings prior to his departure to England have been included in *Kabikahini* (1878); *Banaphul* (1880) and *Saisab Sangit* (1884). *Prabhatsangit* (1883) was inspired by an almost spiritual experience that Rabindranath had when he was only 21. He never forgot the wonder

of that experience about which he wrote not only in his *My Reminiscences* (1912) but also towards the evening of his life in *The Religion of Man* (1930). The poems of *Chhabi o Gaan* (1884), *Prakritir Pratisodh* (1884), *Kadi o Komal* (1886), *Mayar Khela* (1888) and *Manasi* (1890) poured out from him. Along with verse there was profusion of prose, literary criticisms and novels. Rabindranath felt that he came into his own as a poet of distinction from the stage of *Manasi* (Dutta, Bhabatosh, 1983).

Adulthood: Rabindranath devoted himself to sharing in his father's administrative responsibilities towards the Adi Brahmosamaj as well as taking charge of the family estates in Shelidaha and Patisar in erstwhile East Bengal. His two novels *Bauthakuranir Haat* (1883) and *Rajarshi* (1887) had already been published and he was recognized as the brightest rising young star in the field of Bengali literature. His experiences in rural Bengal gave him the opportunity to see life up close and this opened up a new vista in his writings – the stories compiled later in *Galpaguchha* and his letters written to his niece during this period compiled in *Chhinnapatra* and *Chhinnapatravali* are regarded as true gems. All through this period he continued to function as the editor of the literary and cultural journal, *Sadhana* (1891), a significant journal that served as the platform for his evolving political ideas and discussions. Many of his stories, essays and poems also appeared first in this journal. His writings were also published in two other important journals, *Bangadarshan* and *Bharati*.

Rabindranath married Mrinalini Devi (1883) and they had five children – Madhurilata, Renuka, Rathindranath, Samindranath and Mira of whom Renuka and Samindranath died when still young and in quick succession of the death of Mrinalini Devi (1902). He moved to Santiniketan in 1901 with his family and established the Asrama Vidyalaya that is now Patha Bhavana, the core of Visva-Bharati. Rathindranath, the poet's eldest son was one of the first five pupils of this school. The school was modelled on the idea of the *asrama* tradition as portrayed in the ancient Indian classics with simplicity of life and the intimacy of personal relationship between the teacher and the taught. While in Selidaha, confronted with the dismal situation prevailing in the villages he effected his ideas of rural reconstruction/rejuvenation as described in his essay 'Swadeshi Samaj' (1904). He later enlarged on this rural experiment in Sriniketan adjacent to Santiniketan. The writings of the Santiniketan period (1904-1941) are rich with deep insight into spirituality and the inner spirit of India while

his fiction became more realistic – *Chokher Bali* (1903), *Naukadubi* (1906) and *Gora* (1910).

Rabindranath was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 for his book of poems *Gitanjali* that was the translation of the poems of the Bengali *Gitanjali* and other poems. He became the first ever Asian to have been so honoured. Soon after this many of his books were translated in many languages and he came to be seen as an important intellectual and philosopher in the world. Because of his personal appearance and sartorial choice he came to be seen as the eternal sentinel and conscience keeper in the war ravaged world (WWI). He was knighted by the colonial rulers in 1915 and this 'ornament' he renounced (1919) in protest against the brutality of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

Rabindranath established Visva-Bharati in 1921 in Santiniketan with the motto "Where the world makes its home in a single nest" suggesting that he had conceived of this institution as the meeting and exchange of ideas of the world – east and west. The term 'east' in his semantics included greater India (stretching from Persia to Burma), China, Japan and Indonesia. Visva-Bharati was to be the centre of learning and research in the ancient wisdom of the Indian classics and the progressive ideas of science. In its twin campus, Sriniketan adjoining rural Bengal started his path breaking work of Rural Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement. Leonard Elmhirst who came from England in 1921 helped him in this work. Before his death Rabindranath put Visva-Bharati in the care of Mahatma Gandhi and today it is a central university of repute and standing.

Rabindranath was an inveterate traveller who visited over a 100 countries spanning the globe. There are few notable persons who he did not meet or interact with. With England he shared a special relationship – it was one place that he went back to again and again. It was the place that created the circumstances for the nomination that brought him to international notice and fame. Even within the country, Rabindranath travelled often and widely.

Rabindranath and religion: Rabindranath was deeply sensitive to ideas of spirituality, morality, religion and the relation of the human to nature – this sensitivity informed and shaped almost all of his works ranging from songs, poems, stories, novels, plays and essays the streams of which came from myriad sources from the west to the east. Rabindranath's views on religion are noteworthy – there is a firm discouragement of the emotional frenzy and absorption so as to safeguard against its addictive hypnotism. The *Upanishads* and the

Vedas had formed the young poet's orientation to religion; however, we find his religious ideas evolving over the years with his emerging faith in the humanistic perspective. Rabindranath conceived religion as the self-realization of man transcending to the cosmos. He conceived the oneness of the human with the environment and the consequent joy in creative and reflective pursuits qualified by a personal sense of responsibility to *Jivan Devata* (Tagore, 1930; p 82). He expounded on some of these strands in the course of the Hibbert Lectures he delivered in Oxford University (Tagore, 1930; see also Das, Sisir, 1968 and Chunkapura, Jose, 2008; Roy, Satyendranath 1989).

On one of his tours of Europe (1930), Rabindranath witnessed the Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany; captivated by the performance of the story of the last days of Jesus he wrote "The Child" in English first and then later its Bengali form – an outpouring comparable to the writing of the famous poem "The Awakening of the Waterfall" the genesis of which he has described as one of his most sublime spiritual experiences that may have sowed the seeds of his personal tryst with religion. Rabindranath had deep respect for the life and precept of Christ (*Jishu*, 1910; *Krishta*, 1959) with reservations about its institutional forms. He instituted "Christotsav" in Visva-Bharati celebrated with prayers and meditation on Christmas Day.

Rabindranath considered Buddha to be the true enlightened being – "Very few have been born on earth who were self-luminous..." (translated from Tagore, 1956-57 from VB Quarterly pp169-76). Buddha's teachings and beliefs have been reflected in many of Rabindranath's writings (*Chandalika*, *Natir Puja*, *Pujarini*, *Malini* are some instances where the stories are sourced from Buddhist tales). Rabindranath never let convention stand in the path of his spiritual pursuit – he found his brotherhood with the wayfaring minstrels of Bengal known as the Bauls as he did with the Sufi dervishes. He had the quintessential quality of taking from many to make them his very own.

Rabindranath and the Nation: A life that spanned eighty years almost coinciding with the last 100 years of the British Raj and witnessing the disasters of the first World War, Rabindranath, by circumstances of his birth, ever-questing mind and his humanity-embracing sensibilities and his stature as an important figure, was forced to play a significant role in nationalist politics – a role that filled him in his maturer years with disenchantment and disillusionment. His relationship with Swadeshi and deep friendship with Gandhiji kept him in the forefront of the freedom struggle. Here too, he charted his own course – his ideas of nationalism,

the reality of India's social history, the role of knowledge in bringing about true freedom, the deep love for the country, the open-mindedness about the good winds from all directions and places and the values to be emulated from the progress of nations in the world were some of the themes that he wrote (various genres) extensively and passionately on (*Gora* 1910; *Chaar Adhyaya* 1912; *Ghare Baire* 1914). Rabindranath raised his lone voice against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1919) relinquishing the knighthood bestowed on him in 1915. On his last birthday just before his death, he wrote the essay "Crisis in Civilization" (1940) a scathing attack on the damage that man alone can create for his own kind but ending on the note of hope that it is man who is capable of redemption by his will and actions.

The legacy of Rabindranath: Rabindranath had predicted that he would be remembered most for the over 2000 songs that he wrote and set to music. In fact he gave us an ocean of a genre that was born of the countless rivers and streams of Indian and western music. His short stories, novels, plays, dance dramas, essays, poems, letters and lectures/speeches would take more than one lifetime to read and comprehend. His writing life started when he was very young and continued till days before his death. He started painting at the age of almost 60 and turned out over 1600 art works gaining much acclaim for them. He wrote in both Bengali and English (*English Writings of Tagore*. Ed. Sisir K. Das). Visva-Bharati, a central university since 1951 whose motto is "Where the world meets in a single nest" stands as a testimony to this wayfaring poet's dream and vision with its unique approach to education through creativity and union with nature and its range of extension activities towards Rural Reconstruction. Visva-Bharati with its unique vision and multifarious activities reaffirms our faith in that place "Where the mind is without fear and the head held high..."

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Interpreting Arguments in Contemporary Indian Political Philosophy: *Swaraj*, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Tagore

Professor Bindu Puri*

Rabindranath Tagore was an artist, poet, musician and writer. He wrote short stories, plays, novels and also several essays on nationalism. Through his letters to Rev. C.F. Andrews and Gandhi and essays in national newspapers Tagore entered into a twenty six year long debate with Gandhi on the nature of the movement for India's freedom. Between 1915 and 1941 Tagore raised arguments against *satyagraha*, the non-cooperation movement, boycott of Government schools, the burning of foreign cloth and Gandhi's connection between spinning and *swaraj*. This paper attempts to examine the philosophical arguments that underlay the apparent inconsistencies between Tagore's emphasis on individual freedom and his rejection of nationalism. In this context the paper will discuss a fairly important debate in contemporary political philosophy – that between Martha Nussbaum and her critics – on patriotism and cosmopolitanism. This becomes relevant to the philosophical task of interpreting the vision that informed Tagore's politics because in that debate Nussbaum enlisted Tagore on the side of cosmopolitanism. This paper is in three sections. The first section briefly discusses what Tagore meant by individual freedom. The second section philosophically unpacks his rejection of the idea of the nation. The third section (across three subsections) challenges the idea that

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Tagore's rejection of the nation state emerged from a cosmopolitan position.

This paper rejects the idea that Tagore's emphasis on individual freedom can be reconciled with his rejection of nationalism by arguing that he was a cosmopolitan. The paper argues that while Tagore's philosophical vision placed him close to Kant and the enlightenment tradition he cannot be regarded as an advocate of the idea that man's primary allegiance is to a world Republic. This is primarily on account of the fact that Tagore's emphasis on the freedom of the individual to respond to reasons or apparent reasons was not curtailed by a commitment to an a priori understanding of universal reason and related allegiance to a Kantian type of cosmopolitanism.

Section-1

Tagore: individual and collective Freedom

Tagore emphasized that individual freedom was a pre requisite for collective freedom as Home rule. However, though Gandhi agreed that individual freedom was a pre-condition of Home rule the proper understanding of freedom or *swaraj* formed an important issue in the debate between Gandhi and Tagore. As early as 1909 Gandhi had clearly emphasized that freedom had to be understood in two related senses – as individual self rule and political home rule. On the Gandhian understanding individual self-rule was the basis of home rule and primarily referred to moral self rule/self restraint. Tagore understood freedom very differently from Gandhi – not as moral self mastery – but as the individual's freedom to reason. He said that the foundation of individual freedom "... is in the mind, which with its diverse powers and its confidence in those powers goes on all the time creating *swaraj* for itself."¹ Tagore's objection to the national movement organized under Gandhi was precisely that the appropriation of the unique individual into a homogenized collective self denied the individual a right to reason and to differ from others.

It is possible to interpret Tagore's notion of individual freedom by drawing philosophical parallels with Kant's argument about the enlightenment as consisting chiefly in a human being's freedom in the public use of his/her reason. However, it may be recalled that for Kant, both the authority and the content, of the categorical imperative (as a law of reason) are to be understood with reference to the requirements of rational agency rather than to some independent conception of the reasons people have for what they believe in and do. In sharp contrast

Tagore's emphasis on the individual's freedom to reason was philosophically uncompromising. Such an emphasis can explain why Tagore could not endorse the idea of universal reason or a categorical imperative which could ground individual reasons for acting in a certain way or for believing in something. Perhaps the freedom in the mind or freedom to reason in Tagore can be better understood by taking a limited clue from Derek Parfit's conception of the individual's freedom as the freedom to respond to reasons in forming her beliefs and in choosing a course of action.² Consequently there was a significant philosophical difference between Kant and Tagore. Tagore accorded a priority to the individual's freedom to understand and respond to reasons rather than to rationality as a differentiating feature of a human being *qua* human being.

For Tagore free response to reasons (or what appeared to be reasons) implied the absence of coercion from the group but it also meant that the individual could form an independent conception of what constituted an appropriate reason for her/him. On this view if individual reasons were to be defined in terms of the requirements of universal reason or an *a priori* conception of rational agency they would no longer be free. Such an understanding of individual freedom can perhaps reconcile Tagore's rejection of nationalism with his respect for difference.

Section 2

Tagore's emphasis on Individual Freedom and arguments against the idea of the Nation: *Ghaire Bhaire-The Home and the World*

After his initial involvement in the *swadeshi* movement centering round the partition of Bengal (1905), Tagore moved away from mainstream Indian nationalist politics. He criticized the national movement across letters to Gandhi in the national dailies of the time. In a set of essays written in 1919 Tagore made several arguments rejecting (what he described as) "Western nationalism"³ as a source of untruth and loss of individual freedom.

Tagore's arguments against the idea of the nation centered on the following points:

1. The nation state was a concept foreign to India. In the Indian context it was an artificial construct, for "India has never had a real sense of nationalism."⁴ On this view the nation state was a particular form of the political/economic reorganization of a country which had originated in the western world.

2. Tagore made a distinction between one's country and the concept of the nation state. He wrote to Andrews: It is not true that I do not have any special love for my country but when it is in its normal state it does not obstruct normal reality, on the contrary it offers a standpoint and helps me in my natural relationships with others. But when that standpoint itself becomes a barricade, then....there is a great deal of unreality in it...⁵
3. The idea of the nation abstracts from man's true nature. For, "It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power."⁶
4. Nations narrow the freedom of individual's because of the necessity for regimented chains of organization.
5. The idea of Nation exaggerates a natural love of country into "patriotism....the magnification of self, on a stupendous scale-magnifying our vulgarity, cruelty, greed; dethroning God, to put up this bloated self in its place."⁷ According to Tagore such an exaggeration of an exclusive love of country had tremendous moral limitations. In a letter to Andrews he had emphatically declared "... I am *not* a patriot"⁸.
6. The spirit of conquest and conflict rather than social cooperation is at the basis of nationalism.
7. Society is natural to man, conceived as an end in itself, and has no ulterior motive. However, nations are organized around the self interest of a people for a mechanical purpose.

Tagore's arguments emphasized the idea that the conception of a nation-state was an artificial construct that lead to an exaggeration of the political and economic interests of the collective self at the expense of all the individual ends of a human life. Related to this loss of the individual self and all that mattered to that self there was also a loss to the different 'other'. For in the passionate advocacy of the collective separateness of a people there was a threat to the possibilities of arriving at the truth between people or establishment of a harmony between countries.

The literary version of Tagore's criticism of the idea of the nation is made in *Ghaire Bhaire* (*Ghaire* the home and *Bhaire* the outside world). This novel makes a life like portrayal of the difficulties of negotiating a relationship with the world when one is suddenly pulled out of the comfort of the 'home' a metaphor for the traditional communities of pre-modern India. The next section will discuss arguments from this novel in more detail.

At this point it is important to note that Tagore had argued that the truth between different groups could only be arrived at by a transcendence of collective egoism. He emphasized that collective / individual freedom could be secured by re-interpreting responsibility in individual rather than collective terms: “Therefore I do not put my faith in any new institution but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth.”⁹

Section 3

Reading Cosmopolitanism in Tagore: Debating Martha Nussbaum

Such arguments may make us think, and indeed, they have made scholars argue that Tagore rejected nationalism and patriotism to advocate a form of cosmopolitanism—the idea that all human beings are world citizens and owe primary allegiance to the world community. Tagore’s faith in the unique individual, stress on individual freedom of the mind, and rejection of the collective egoism involved in the nation state has led many scholars to argue that Tagore believed in a Kantian type of cosmopolitanism. Rajat Kanta Ray, for instance, has argued that:

Civil society guarantees the identity of each nationality, and intermixes them in an ever wider felt community, until all distinctions merge in the original species of *Homo sapiens*. When Rabindranath Tagore, Rammohun Roy’s intellectual heir, sang of ‘the sea of humanity on the shores of India’...it is this ideal he held up before the world at large.¹⁰

This could make us think of Tagore as close to a Kantian sort of cosmopolitanism. This would take my argument from the parallelism between Tagore and Kant on the nature of human freedom towards a common philosophy of history. Kant (in his essay on Universal History in the seventh thesis) addressed the international dimension of the development of civil society.¹¹ He concluded that the progress from the domestic to the international sphere in developing constitutional political elements of civil society is a necessary aim for further politics.

On such an interpretation of his political ideas it would appear that Tagore would have advocated stepping out of the confines of the home to find a sense of belonging (quite literally) in the world. In this context it might be interesting to note how Tagore has become the absent interlocutor in a contemporary debate between Martha Nussbaum and her critics. This is a debate about Nussbaum’s rejection of patriotism

and her arguments in support of cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum’s essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” first appeared in *BOSTON REVIEW* (October/November 1994) along with twenty nine replies. It later appeared in *For Love of Country?* This book compiled all the essays and presented the, philosophy of cosmopolitanism and the outlooks that resist cosmopolitanism, in the name of sensibilities rooted in group affiliation or national tradition. In her essay Martha Nussbaum refers to Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World* to enlist Tagore on the side of cosmopolitanism.

This section (across the following three sub sections) will discuss such arguments to examine whether Tagore’s rejection of nationalism necessarily implied that he recommended a primary allegiance to the world community.

Section 3.1

Tagore: A rejection of regimented collectives-nation, organized religion and *Varna*

I would like to argue that to interpret Tagore’s emphasis on individual freedom and position against nationalism as an argument in support of world citizenship would be to misunderstand Tagore. The argument against nationalism was a part of Tagore’s general opposition to organized collectives as being against individual freedom. Tagore argued that the coercion of the unique individual into an organized collective – whether nation, national movement, caste, *Varna* or organized religion – went against the individual’s freedom to think and act. In the context of the non-cooperation movement he had written that: “The darkness of egoism which will have to be destroyed is the egoism of the People.”¹² In Tagore’s view the problem with organized collectives was that the exaggerated sense of the separateness of a group had strong tendencies of coercing the unique individual into subservience to group identity and beliefs. Such an individual became a *silenced insider* forced to give primacy to group ends. This happened because collective chauvinism appropriated the unique individual and his concerns with his ordinary life into a fictitious hyper ‘self’. The latter then assumed an unquestioned place in a normative hierarchy of ends sought by the individual. It followed that under the influence of these ideas the demands of the collective self tended to perpetuate atrocities/injustice on individuals in the deceptive guise of ideals such as those of freedom/*swaraj*. (In this context one can recall the protagonists of Tagore’s novel *Char Adhyaya*)¹³ The nature of these deceptions and the atrocities

committed against individual lives in the name of the nation were also re-created by Tagore in *The Home and the World*.¹⁴

It is important to recall that Tagore's argument against organized and regimented collectives was apparent in Tagore's idea of the Religion of man¹⁵ which leaned towards simple folk religion rather than institutionalized religion with theological structures. In this context it is also interesting to read the play *Tasher Desh* or *The kingdom of Cards* (1933)¹⁶ which can be re-constructed as a literary critique of caste and *Varna*. Tagore's point in all these cases was the same- that the original vocation or essential nature of man was his individuality. Since organized collective unions and movements imposed the majority's will on an individual they destroyed man's uniqueness and freedom. In this context Tagore used the term *dharma*: "When we know the highest ideal of freedom which a man has, we know his *dharma*, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self."¹⁷ Just as "The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its *dharma*, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree."¹⁸ So too, individual man is "...absolutely bankrupt if..." he is "deprived of this speciality, this individuality.... It is most valuable because it is not universal."¹⁹ For "The home of freedom is in the spirit of man. That spirit refuses to recognize any limit to action, or to knowledge."²⁰ It was because he believed that man's true nature/vocation can be attained only by reasoning and acting in freedom that Tagore insisted on the right of the individual to differ from the group and to make mistakes.

Section 3.2

Martha Nussbaum: A cosmopolitan reading of *The Home and the World*

I ended the last section by making a point about Tagore's emphasis on the unique individual and his/her freedom to reason because this is precisely why it becomes difficult to read cosmopolitanism into Tagore's rejection of nationalism in *The Home and the World*. Nussbaum enlists Tagore to her side in a debate with critics on patriotism and cosmopolitanism.

Nussbaum makes three related points in her essay. Firstly that patriotism is "morally dangerous"²¹ and that nationalist sentiments ultimately subvert "even the values that hold a nation together."²² Secondly that a more international basis for political emotion and concern can be found in "the cosmopolitan, the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings."²³ Thirdly she argues that

Tagore recommends a primary allegiance to the world community. Tagore "sees deeply when he observes that, at bottom, nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are..... akin."²⁴ Consequently,

Once someone has said, I am an Indian first, a citizen of the world second, once he or she has made that morally questionable move of self-definition by a morally irrelevant characteristic, then what, indeed, will stop that person from saying, as Tagore's characters so quickly learn to say, I am a Hindu first, and an Indian second, or I am an upper-caste landlord first, and a Hindu second? Only the cosmopolitan stance of the landlord Nikhil-so boringly flat in the eyes of his wife Bimala and his passionate nationalist friend Sandip – has the promise of transcending these divisions, because only this stance asks us to give our first allegiance to what is morally good-and that which, being good, I can commend to all human beings.²⁵

In Nussbaum's view Tagore rejected the country or the home for a primary allegiance to the world community. In this context it is important to examine the argument that Tagore makes in *The Home and the World*. This novel involves four central characters – Bimala the wife of the landlord Nikhil, Sandip his nationalist friend somewhat inauthentically caught up in the Gandhian movements for *swaraj*, Nikhil the enlightened landlord who freely supports some of the movements in his own capacity but rejects the coercion of dissenting others into the movements and Nikhil's widowed sister in law the *bara rani*. As the name suggests the novel *Ghaire Bhaire* (*Ghaire* the home and *Bhaire* the outside world) makes a life like portrayal of the difficulties of negotiating a relationship with the world when one is suddenly pulled out of the comfort of the 'home' a metaphor for the traditional communities of pre-modern India.

In the story Bimala is passionately attracted to Sandip and his nationalistic fervour and this makes her transgress the boundaries of her role as the *choto rani* in the traditional *zamindari* household of her husband. Nikhil loves his country and supports Gandhian *swadeshi* in his personal capacity. However he refuses to coerce anyone into following Gandhian principles and sacrificing their livelihoods for the national movement. He tries to bring out Bimala from the confines of the traditional life she has led and educate her into a freedom in the mind. The novel about the home and the world plays out two themes. One, less direct, is about the individual's negotiation of a relationship between tradition and modernity. Tagore's criticism of the nation state cannot be read in isolation from his interpretation of the relation between

tradition and modernity. This is on account of the fact that India's encounter with the nation state was simultaneously an encounter of the traditional communities of pre-modern India with western modernity.

In the novel Nikhil advises Bimala to reason for herself rather than be overcome by tradition or by the passion induced by the national movement. Through Nikhil, Tagore argues, that enlightenment/modernity is not constituted by a complete or unreasonable rejection of one's past/tradition but lies in the cultivation of a state of mind. This is a state of mind where the individual assumes responsibility by the very freedom of his/her beliefs in both the old and the new. Individual human life if it is to be enlightened/free cannot be a blind following of tradition or a blind rejection of tradition or indeed an unreasoned acceptance of any new idea learnt from the West. The point Tagore seems to be making is that freedom to reason would not necessarily involve Bimala's rejection of the traditional role as the *choto rani* in a *zamindari* household but only a rejection of unreflective ideational confinement in that role. Bimala realizes that freedom does not mean a rejection of her traditional role or a denial of her home. When, in the story, Nikhil offers her the freedom to leave her home, she says to herself: "But can freedom – empty freedom be given and taken as easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky-for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?"²⁶ If Tagore's rejection of the concept of the nation came from the idea that man should not be limited by country but should be a world citizen, this story, would perhaps have gone differently. For one thing, Bimala would have left her home to step out freely into the world rejecting the particularities of belonging dictated by her traditional beliefs and her role in the family. For another thing, Bimala's transgressions and stepping out of her home would not have ended in the sort of tragedy that the story ended in, with the near fatal wounding of her husband Nikhil. Through the fatal wounding Tagore seemed to indicate that there would be an individual cost to pay if the particularities of local commitments were summarily rejected for affiliations to larger impersonal organizations.

However at another and more fundamental level this novel is about India and the world. It is about Tagore's difficulties with the ideological assumptions (of political nationalism and patriotic fervour) of Gandhi's national *non-cooperation movement* for Indian home rule/*swaraj*. It was the organized and centralized character of the nation concept and of the national movement that bothered Tagore. He defined the nation as, "... the aspect of a whole people as an organized power."²⁷ Perhaps

Tagore's objection to the nation came from the fact that the concept of the nation was based on, a complete disregard for and rejection of the pre-modern and less organized local communities in India.

In this context Tagore had pointed out several difficulties with the centralized program of the non cooperation movement. Firstly he was concerned with the element of coercion involved in the self assured imposition of the Gandhian principles (what he called *mantras*) as assumptions of the non-co-operation movement. In his novel, *The Home and the World*, Tagore showed how the dissenting insider was silenced by being coerced into the collective following of *mantras* such as *swadeshi*, home-spun and the boycott of foreign cloth. In this context Nikhil cautioned Sandip in the story: "To tyrannise for the country is to tyrannise over the country."²⁸ Secondly Tagore saw that the national movement was sustained by the incitement of a passion that blinded even those persons who were not decidedly morally bad/evil. In Tagore's view the problem with acting out of passion rather than through the free exercise of one's reason was that passion tended to blind an individual. In the portrayal of Bimala Tagore showed how passion denuded the individual of both the capacity to think and of the moral sensibility to recognize injustice. To my mind Tagore's central argument against the non-cooperation movement and the idea of the nation was that the movement and its exclusive goal (of nation-hood) were sustained by an unthinking passion which curtailed the individual's freedom to think.

Section 3.3

Martha Nussbaum: Cosmopolitanism in Tagore

In this section I will argue that though Nussbaum is justified in saying that Tagore rejected "nationalism and ethnocentrism"²⁹ her conclusion that Tagore embraced cosmopolitanism derived from ideas of universal reason, might be philosophically misguided.

In her essay Nussbaum has argued that patriotism is "morally dangerous"³⁰ and that, consequently, our first allegiance must be to the community of humankind. Nussbaum employs her reading of *The Home and the World* to conclude that Tagore recommended a primary allegiance to the world community:

"*The Home and the World* (better known, perhaps in Satyajit Ray's haunting film of the same title) is a tragic story of the defeat of a reasonable and principled cosmopolitanism by the forces of nationalism

and ethnocentrism. I believe that Tagore sees deeply when he observes that, at bottom, nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are not alien to one another, but akin—that to give support to nationalist sentiments subvert ultimately, even the values that hold a nation together, because it substitutes a colourful idol for the substantive universal values of justice and right.”³¹

It is philosophically suggestive that scholars familiar with Tagore’s music, stories and plays, have expressed difficulties with Nussbaum’s arguments about Tagore’s acceptance of a cosmopolitanism derived in a philosophical lineage from the Stoics and the idea of universal reason in Kant. Writing in the same volume as Nussbaum, Amartya Sen for instance, attempts to reconcile cosmopolitanism in Tagore with the value that he accorded to tradition and culture. This leads Sen to construct a minimal understanding of cosmopolitanism as a sense of “not excluding any person from ethical concern.”³² Such an understanding (fashioned perhaps after Tagore) enables Sen to argue that there is no conflict in accepting both that Tagore valued tradition and that he left no person out of the sphere of ethical concern. Saranindranath Tagore suggests that Tagore’s cosmopolitanism came from a “hermeneutic deployment of reason”³³ as enabling conversation between traditions rather than from a sense of universal reason.

Perhaps what Nussbaum has failed to note is that while Tagore rejected nationalism he equally emphatically rejected the idea of a cosmopolitanism based on the idea of an individual’s primary allegiance to the world community and consequent denial of the individuality of culture and tradition. Tagore emphasized that: “Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, is the goal of human history.”³⁴ For Tagore it was man’s *dharma* or essential quality to exercise freedom in his/her individual mind and spirit. Consequently Tagore emphasized the sense of individual separateness even in the metaphysical conception of the Absolute:

As by the limits of law nature is separated from God, so it is the limits of its egoism that separates the self from him. He has willingly set limits to his will, and has given us mastery over the little world of our own... The reason of it is that the will, which is love’s will and therefore free, can have its joy only in a union with another free will.³⁵

The clue to understanding Tagore’s difficulties with the non-cooperation movement and the single minded pursuit of political nationalism does not lie in interpreting him as recommending allegiance to the world community in place of ties to home and country. Surely if

that was what he meant to say the dilemmas in *The Home and the World* would have been simpler than they were. Bimala would have rejected the dictates that universal reason could not endorse. On growing into a freedom to reason she would have set aside the coercive ties of a relationship with the home for a freely chosen relationship with Sandip. However Bimala’s freedom to think took her towards a freedom in felt ties with her home and some understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Sandip the nationalist. In arguing against political nationalism Tagore was arguing against the over-centralised institutionalization of the collective egoism of a people. He was not thereby dismantling the uniqueness of people and the value of differences between them.

In Conclusion

Tagore: *Swaraj* in ideas

Tagore was not only well rooted in the Indian tradition but his music, plays, and stories were rich in insights of what it meant to live a good human life from within a cultural set of circumstances set in Bengal. It can be said that Tagore could not properly be described as a cosmopolitan in Nussbaum’s understanding of that term. Certainly Tagore emphasized individual freedom in the mind and accorded a priority to an individual’s freedom to respond to independent reasons. However, he thought of real or apparent reasons without any prior commitment to a conception of universal reason. The Kantian idea of a world republic with the giant chains of organization and policies, that would reject local particularities and commitments as irrelevant, would be abhorrent to Tagore’s respect for unique individuality. Consequently, it is difficult to accept Nussbaum’s conclusion that being an Indian or a Bengali was a morally irrelevant attribute for Tagore and that in his view man was better defined as a world citizen. Nikhil the hero of *The Home and the World* was a Brahmin Hindu landlord. He was both comfortable with his identity and yet not limited by it. This then is the problem with Nussbaum’s reading of Tagore’s characterization of Nikhil as a colourless cosmopolitan declaring his first allegiance to universal reason.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that Tagore’s emphasis on individual freedom and somewhat paradoxical rejection of the nation state can be philosophically reconciled only in terms of the primacy that he accorded to individual freedom as a freedom to think and reason. Such an understanding of freedom led Tagore to argue against the

blind acceptance of the idea of the nation state as defining the goal of the non cooperation movement for India's freedom. He emphasized intellectual freedom by suggesting that the form of political re-organization of free India should be in continuity with India's traditional political institutions and ways of life. Tagore's political ideas were a significant expression of a genuine swaraj in ideas and therefore important to understanding the mind of the Indian thinkers confronting colonial modernity.

Notes:

- ¹ Tagore in Bhattacharya (ed), 2008: 82
- ² Derek Parfit, 2011. *On What Matters*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- ³ Tagore, "Nationalism in India" In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, (New Delhi: SahityaAkademi), p. 426
- ⁴ *Ibid*, p. 456
- ⁵ Tagore, *Letters to a Friend*, 2005, Vol. IV: 306
- ⁶ Tagore, "Nationalism in India" In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, (New Delhi: SahityaAkademi), p. 458
- ⁷ Tagore, *Letters to a Friend*, 2012, Vol. IV: 287
- ⁸ Tagore, *Letters to a Friend*, 2012, Vol. IV: 308
- ⁹ Tagore, "The Nation" Tagore, "Nationalism in India" In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, (New Delhi: SahityaAkademi), p. 551
- ¹⁰ Ray, Rajat K 2003. *The Felt Community*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press) p. 38
- ¹¹ Kant, Immanuel *The idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* in Hans Reiss(ed), 1991: 41-53
- ¹² Tagore in Bhattacharya, 2008: 61
- ¹³ Tagore, Rabindranath 2012. *Char Adhyaya/Four Chapters*. In *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus*, Volume II, pp. 177-238 (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd)
- ¹⁴ Tagore, Rabindranath 2012. *The Home and the World*. In *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus*, Volume III, pp. 205-425 (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd)
- ¹⁵ Tagore, Rabindranath 2005. *Religion of Man*. (New Delhi: Rupa& co)
- ¹⁶ Tagore, Rabindranath 2011. "The kingdom of Cards." In *The Essential Tagore* edited by Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty, pp. 429-462 (Shanti Niketan: Visva-Bharati)

- ¹⁷ Tagore, R. 1996. "Sadhana." In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, pp. 277-337 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi)Page: 308
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.308
- ¹⁹ Tagore, Rabindranath 1996. "The Problem of Self." In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, pp. 306-315 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi) p. 306.
- ²⁰ Chung, Tan; Dev, Amiya; Bangwei, Wang & Liming, Wei (et al.) 2011. *Tagore and China*, (Beijing, New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd and Central Compilation & Translation Press(CCTP))Page: 242.
- ²¹ Nussbaum, Martha C. 2002. "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In *For Love of Country?*, edited by Martha C Nussbaum, (et al.) 2002, Ed. by Joshua Cohen for Boston Review, pp. 3-17(Boston: Beacon Press), p.4
- ²² *Ibid*, p. 5
- ²³ *Ibid*, p.4
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p.5
- ²⁶ Tagore, Rabindranath 2012. *The Home and the World*. In *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus*, Volume III, pp. 205-425 (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt.Ltd) Page: 316.
- ²⁷ Tagore, R. 1996. "Nationalism in India." In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, pp. 453-465 (New Delhi: SahityaAkademi) Page: 458
- ²⁸ Tagore, Rabindranath 2012. *The Home and the World*. In *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus*, Volume III, pp. 205-425 (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd). Page: 316.
- ²⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C. 2002. "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In *For Love of Country?*, edited by Martha C Nussbaum, (et al.) 2002, Ed. by Joshua Cohen for Boston Review, pp. 3-17(Boston: Beacon Press), Page:5
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p.4
- ³¹ *Ibid*, p.5.
- ³² Sen, Amartya (2002) "Humanity and Citizenship" In *For Love of Country?* Ed. by Martha C. Nussbaum, (et al.) 2002, Ed. by Joshua Cohen for Boston Review, pp. 111-118 (Boston: Beacon Press) Page: 115.
- ³³ Tagore, Saranindranath 2008. "Tagore's Conception of Cosmopolitanism: A Re-construction." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Volume 77, Number 4, Fall, pp. 1070-1084 (Canada: University of Toronto Press). Page: 1081
- ³⁴ Tagore, Rabindranath 2012. "Nationalism in the West" In *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus*, Volume IV, pp. 31-58 (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd) page 32
- ³⁵ Tagore, R. 1996. "Sadhana." In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, 1996, pp. 277-337 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi) Page: 313.

Rabindranath Tagore: A Universal Thinker

Shankar Sharan*

Rabindranath Tagore is acknowledged as a unique figure of India in recent times. An artist of multiple facets he stands tallest among the Indian poets in the last few centuries. True to the great Indian tradition, this poet was a well profound thinker. In fact, his poetry is nothing but a natural and creative embodiment of his thoughts. Thoughts formulated since his tender age till the end of his life through a keen, incessant observation and contemplation of all he could feel and see near and far. In his creativity as a writer and poet, his thinking on various aspects of human existence and his hub spiritual quest, Tagore's perceptions though rooted in Indian traditions, were that of a universal man, transcending the barriers of faith, nationality and related confines. His thoughts on education were modern and transformational duly led to setting up of a unique educational institution Shanti Niketan (Vishwa Bharati).

He was rightly called a genius with a special bond with his people,¹ which explains the admiration and wonder about him felt all over the country. There was a fortuitous event which helped Tagore in establishing his close identity with the people. In his early youth, his father entrusted him to look after the family estates in east Bengal. Many were surprised that his father, himself a great man and social reformer, chose his youngest son, already known as a dreamer poet, to be in charge of family properties. Tagore soon proved that the father acted wisely. This responsibility provided Tagore an opportunity to live with the common people and in intimate contact with nature for

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years together. Thus, Tagore entered into a world unknown to the majority of the newly educated class of those times, and struck roots in some of the deepest levels of the collective consciousness of the people. He saw the sorrows and joys of variety of people from close quarters and wondered about the play of Nar and Narayan in as much as he saw the wondrous play of nature as the manifestation of His *leela*.

Cultural genius

Tagore's strength as a thinker also lies in his typical Hindu sense of unity of whole existence. No bifurcation of ideas or arena informed his understanding or work. It is logical, therefore, that he saw no separation between art and life, between theory and practice, between material and spiritual.

Tagore had a good understanding of the Western values, but an understanding from the vantage point of Indian outlook steeped in the timeless wisdom of his country. Hence, he understood the Western ideas along with an acute perception of the evils that follow from their mechanical adoption. He stated with vivid clarity the damage done to the Indian creativity by forcing upon it an alien language and linked culture. But at the same time he was always open to good values from any source.

Apart from his vast literary work, his contribution as a musician of the highest order ('Rabindra sangeet') and three thousands paintings, all created after he took it up at the age of nearly seventy, he also made noteworthy contribution to educational, social, economic and political thought. The significance in the later arena should be noted not by the amount of words he produced, but the essence and originality and the worth of it. In fact, it was not only addressed to and useful for his countrymen but to the entire humanity as well. But in the end, he was predominantly a literary figure and educationist which defined both his fame and legacy. Award of Nobel Prize (1913) for literature for his book of poetry "Gitanjali" was an apt recognition of his literary genius.

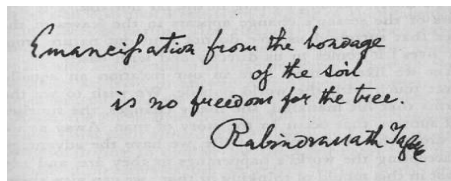
About education and language

His ideas about education were scientific also in the sense that many of it he experienced directly as a child and later also as a teacher. These reflected his deep contemplation. He clearly saw that the prevalent Europeanized education in India was quite unrelated to natural, social and cultural milieu. Secondly, he was keenly conscious of a child's

need of freedom and space, and how its availability or otherwise helps or obstructs full blossoming of his personality. He has recorded the delight and wonder with which he looked at nature when his father took him for the first time to the Himalayas. With time, he realized its value and concluded that freedom and constant contact with nature are conditions for the healthy development of a child. He declared repeatedly that it is a great cruelty to a child to force him to sit still or do only what was told. A child may be guided under watchful observation to use his freedom in consonance with goodness, beauty and truth. Nature and mother tongue formed an integral part of his educational philosophy.

An integrated personality he felt, can be achieved only if the child develops his faculties in tune with nature. As the child became conscious of the harmony in the world outside, closely watching the quietness of the evening and the promise of the morning, the scintillating beauty of the stars and the radiance of the rising sun, there would be harmony also in his inner nature. Without which his whole education is at best a sham, if not harmful.

His famous essay *Shiksha herfer* (presented into English as 'Vicissitudes of Education'² or 'Topsy-turvy education') was first read in Rajshahi in 1892. Greatly emphasizing on the study of the mother tongue as a prime condition for the all-round development of a human personality. Tagore had the vision and courage to say uncompromisingly that breaking away from a living language, its cultural tradition ultimately uproots the individual. As he wrote: 'Emancipation from the bondage of the soil is no freedom for the tree.'



Emphasizing the need of knowledge and command over one's mother tongue was no narrowness in Tagore's educational ideal, as some commentators opine. He believed that true education must develop intellect as well as the emotions and the will. The language issue is closely aligned with the relation of a student with his society, culture and people. It is futile to hope for a sensible understanding between the two if a language impediment comes into being. The resulting loss is not one or one-sided.

His emphasis on the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and basic studies grew out of his conviction that education should be naturally imbibed. An alien language creates insurmountable hurdles and multiple problems for the pupil. First, the alien language imposes a strain on his mind. When he hears something in an alien speech his mind is divided between the subject and the language. While anything taught in the mother tongue leads to no such division of attention. This is no small matter, as some experts in education tend to profess. Second, a foreign language has its own associations and atmosphere, mismatching with those of the pupil. It also willy-nilly either negates or contradicts the cultural values of the surroundings in which the pupil lives.

Therefore, Tagore was firm that though Indian children must draw upon the intellectual resources of the world outside, but should do so on the basis of a firm grounding in their own language, tradition and culture. We may recall at this point the observation of another great poet and thinker, Sachchidanand Vatsyayan 'Ajneya' that if a pupil is well-versed in his own language, only then he can feel the creative challenge of learning another language.

Education for knowledge and education of life are integrated and not separate in Tagore's vision. He underlined again and again that a child or a school must not be cut off from the social and economic life of the people. A child must also be somehow involved in daily household chores or family business, be it farming or labour or shop keeping. It is wrong to separate him from work for years for the sake of mere scholastic gain. It may turn him, exceptions apart, into a useless parrot of a man, good for nothing except being a clerk. He described his ideal school in his essay 'A Poet's School' (1926). The pupils must, as in the old *gurukuls* of India, combine household duties with their academic work. It is something Leo Tolstoy, who was also a life-long teacher and educational worker, also underlined as emphatically. He said that mere scholastic activity make pupil dull in comparison to those who study and help in work.

In formal education Tagore gave first importance to finding a real teacher. In his speech *Shiksha Samasya* ('The Problem of Education', 1906) he beautifully outlined the central fallacy in educational enterprises. Presenting it as "the tendency to care more for inessentials than for essentials is now seen in every aspect of our life..." he goes on to explain the wrong notion of civilization today as if material sophistication is the essence of it. Wealth and civilization are two

different things. So, “Simplicity, naturalness and ease are the marks of the civilized, and excess and ostentation, of the barbarian.”³ With many sound observations on such human issues he comes to the point of little care to find real teachers and great concern for buildings, equipments and other comforts and luxuries for a school or a university. He strongly favours the opposite: first find the good teachers, best *gurus*, then only everything else would matter. The question of syllabus, method of teaching and discipline of students, etc. can be easily settled if first we have good teachers. In his *Shikshar Milan* (‘The Unity of Education’, 1921) Tagore observed that with the great diversity of her language and culture India has a special role to play in the development of an international human outlook. It is painful to see the contrary happening in the independent India so far.

In fact, all the basic observations of Tagore have been shared by many great educationists, including Leo Tolstoy, another giant in contemporary universal thought. However, his especial contribution in educational thought lay in the emphasis on harmony, balance and all-sided development of a personality since childhood. Three values of truth, beauty and goodness were fused in all his educational concerns. It can be directly compared with similar fundamental thought of Leo Tolstoy: “There can be no greatness without simplicity, goodness and truth.” These are the values enshrined in his setting up of the Vishwa Bharati University (“Shanti Niketan”) at Bolpur, in West Bengal to give a concrete shape to his ideas on education.

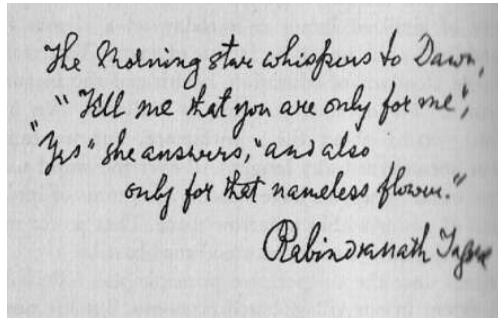
Economics and life

It may seem surprising, but the thoughts of Tagore do contain useful insights in the field of economics as well. Especially, his comparative analysis of Indian civilization with that of the European in present times. He unhesitatingly admired the long and successful practice of balanced economy that had been developed in India in ancient times and continued for long before it was disrupted by the foreign invasions and rule. Despite the ensuing social ills and contemporary poverty of Indians, he spoke with a feeling of nostalgia about the employment, security, harmony with nature and contentment the traditional economy offered to the generations of people in India.

He reflects upon the universal outlook of the Indians, in contrast to that of the Europeans, and found the former having more realistic understanding of human life. The four concern ashrams of life concern

every individual. The stages of childhood, youth, old age and departure time are all too different. Preparation for life, as it really is, should be based on the acceptance of this fact. However, the European outlook tries to negate it. Trying to live as long as possible, as young as ever, wanting to enjoy material luxuries for ever, never willing to shift naturally to the next stage, creates unnatural demands and emotional baggage upon the European psyche. Likewise, their entire economic and scientific-technological systems become the tool of this unnatural attitude to life in general: ‘not the gain, but the chase.’ Running after gains, and never willfully come to stop and contemplate. The economic imbalances in the world, mindless exploitation of natural resources, cut-throat competition in trade and manufacturing, and most of all creating unnecessary desires and goods for people – all these are the by-product of an unreal attitude to life and death. Only in this background, the nostalgia of Tagore about the past Indian economic management can be appreciated.

In fact, the very meaning of a village has been vastly different in India from that of Europe and America. The self-sufficient village economy of India roughly till the 19th century should be understood in this perspective. Karl Marx so vehemently criticized the Indians for having these very ‘self-sufficient village systems,’ because, in his world-view, how the society would ‘progress’ then? Marx was only a novel reflection of the general Euro-Christian outlook that viewed nature as nothing but abundant material resources to be exploited and ‘conquered.’ India, on the contrary, viewed it as a part of Existence, a sign of God’s Presence in everything that exist, man being just one manifestation of His presence. Therefore, man should and must live in harmony and mutual respect with all sentient beings on earth. Hence, the kinship feeling with land, forest, rivers, trees, forest, birds and animals. This Hindu outlook about the existence commands to live humbly and in mutual harmony with nature. The European mind, shaped largely by Christianity’s notion of everything and an imperialist mindset for converting, conquering and an understanding of human life as just one time enjoyment on earth, thought otherwise. Tagore’s thinking and the balanced and harmonious living of Indians since times immemorial can be appreciated only in this backdrop. All existence is divine, there is no God separate from it. If He is, He is all pervasive. Hence the need to be respectful in everything and to everything. In the beautiful words of Tagore: “The morning star whispers to Dawn, ‘Tell me that you are only for me’, ‘yes’ she answers, ‘and also for that nameless flower’.”



In consonance with this philosophy, the Indians never ruined nature despite significant achievements in philosophy, knowledge, production, trade and commerce and in science and technology for centuries. They never polluted rivers and surroundings. Nor went to wars for more goods, riches and booties. This self-sufficiency and harmonious economic management was the ideal, Tagore still found usable. In view of the hard reality of the times, the subjugation of India under foreign yoke and incumbent poverty and misery, he accepted the introduction of new economic ways and machines. Disagreeing with Gandhi in his opposition to heavy machines as such. But Tagore still maintained that machine should serve the man, and man should not become a slave under it. Tagore noticed the ill-effects of the modern European economic enterprises. It was one of the misfortunes of India, as a result of foreign rule and alien economic ways, that grace and beauty – had left her villages.

Though Tagore realized that it was perhaps impossible to reverse the trend. In his famous address *Swadeshi Samaj* ('Society and State', 1904) and *Sabhapati abhivhashan* ('Presidential Address', 1908) he noted that drift towards towns cannot be stopped by lecturing the rural people. Still he hoped that a balance between villages and towns should be attempted by changing the conditions of rural life. If villages have adequate opportunities for education, health and self-expression for their inhabitants, they still might be saved. It is in Tagore's vision of rural reconstruction that we find the first conscious proposal to transform methods of agriculture and think about a new rural economy. Mass education and health care arrangements were his two key points for rural uplift. That he could see it decades before others, underlines his realistic vision combined with his classic ideals.

He wanted a combination of tradition and experience for economic life. Freedom and dignity of the individual should not be sacrificed at the altar of the Western techniques of science and trade. In short, his thoughts were in consonance with his philosophy of Unity of Existence.

Of politics and conflict

Tagore was not a professional politician but he was alive to the current political developments and spoke not only about critical issues, but also at all critical moments. He was the bard of the *Swadeshi* movement in 1905 in the wake of the partition of Bengal. In 1919, he again rose to the occasion against the atrocities of the British at Jalianwalah Bagh. He drew attention of the world about the barbaric act, and still kept his universal humanism intact, not letting it become a blind nationalism.

In politics, too, Tagore sought the combination, as and when possible, of the best practices of the East and the West. Here, again, he did not lose sight of the great achievements of India since olden times. In contrast to the all powerful states in the Western world for centuries, he could mark the distinct role played by society vis-à-vis state in the Indian tradition, and the excellent results it brought for human existence. The new models of democracy of the West were welcome for Tagore, but he would still like to add the Indian conception of social initiative and social responsibility into it. That Indian society always honoured social approbation more than state honours was as greater human achievement.

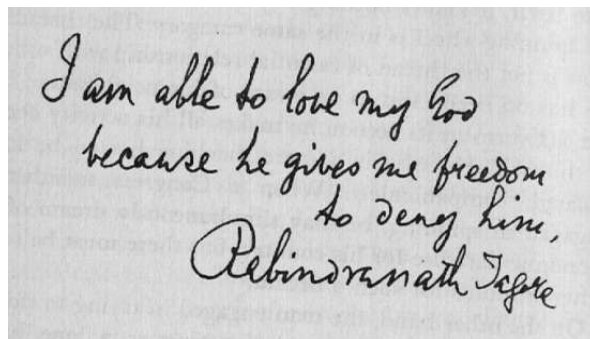
Thus, Tagore's insistence that people must themselves provide the social and nation building services without always looking to the government of the day, was derived from his regard for the Indian tradition, which gave more importance to society than state. The distinction between the state and community is a fundamental premise in his political thought. It was logical, therefore, that in his view the state should deal with only those aspects of life that cannot be taken care of by the individual or the group.

He was of the view that the political bondage of India was only an outer manifestation of our inner weakness somewhere. Hence, only a political programme could not bring about the liberation of our people. When individuals become self-reliant, truly educated with moral purpose and aesthetic perception, the country would become free. That is why, he also criticized the politics of the day in which few Western educated Indians commanded the people to agitate for this and that.

His *Sabhapatir abhivhashan* ('Presidential Address', 1908) was unique also in the sense that it was the only occasion when Tagore presided over a political meeting. It was also the first time when a President of a political meeting in British India spoke to his audience in an Indian language. Here Tagore underlined that the root cause of our bondage lay in our historically recent neglect of the individual and acceptance of a social system that condemned millions to indignity and humiliation. He unequivocally declared that unless Indians established equality among themselves, it is futile to ask it from the nationals of other countries.

In view of his universal and open outlook it was natural that Tagore was free from rancour towards the British. Even when he appeared disillusioned with the West, expressed clearly in his *Sabhayatar Sankat* ('Crisis in Civilization', 1941), he did not lose faith in the best representatives of the West as well as of the East. In his outlook and practice, he remained a universal thinker, an internationalist par excellence of the time. National claims and human obligations were two sides of the same coin in his thought.

Love and respect for one's own country, tradition or faith in one's religion must not blind one towards the ideals and understanding of other peoples, so long as it does not encroach upon reason and similar rights of other peoples. Without criticizing exclusivist, monolatrous religions, he said: "I am able to love my God because he gives me freedom to deny him." This simple sentence tells a lot about the assertions of imperialist ideologies claiming the entire world for One True Faith.



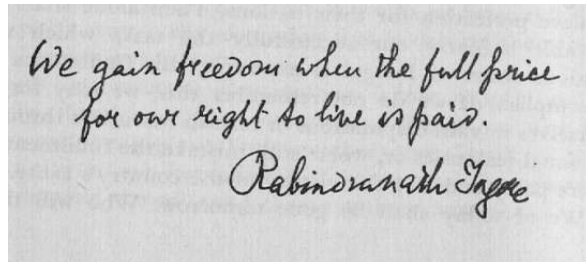
He was an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, still it did not prevent him from criticizing him on his what Tagore saw as short-cuts and limited

vision or unreal programmes for political action and national unity. His address *Satyer Ahban* ('The call for truth', 1921) and the essay *Swaraj sadhan* ('The Striving for Swaraj', 1925) are sterling pieces on political foresight and social unity. He challenged some basic thoughts of Gandhiji, calling it unreal, arbitrary and vain. It is for us today, after almost a century of those observations, to evaluate who was a better visionary on the issues they differed. Tagore did not approve, for example, the insistence on compulsory spinning advocated by Gandhiji. Whether in education or in social movements, Tagore advocated freedom of conscience and considered acceptance of a proposal. Else, it would be mere outer acceptance without changing the inner self. Such blind following would create either a servant, fanatic or an automaton, all undesirable for a wholesome human development.

Thus, he criticized Gandhi's dictatorial orders for spinning as a precondition for Congress membership, or forced boycott of foreign goods, or cosmetic alliance with Muslim leadership without creating a natural, equal partnership of Hindus and Muslims for the national uplift. This was a very fundamental critic of Gandhi's whole project of communal unity. It should be understood carefully, as the issue is still alive after Tagore observed about it almost a century ago. And it is as educative in finding a solution to the intractable problem. In his *Hindu Vishwavidyalaya* ('Hindu University', 1911) he explained certain issues till then little understood. The issue of Hindu-Muslim differences and unity was not easy then as it is still not now. It would be profitable, therefore, to consider Tagore's views on this long standing and still unresolved issue.

Tagore underlined the vastly unequal social forces of the Muslims and Hindus, saying that numerical data about Hindus and Muslims shows nothing. The community feeling and sense of purpose among Muslims as a Muslim is far greater and strong, to the extent that even without receiving an injury they may unite to offend and harm others. The Hindus, on the other hand, even when their individual members are physically outraged and harmed by others, do not feel the same hurt as fellow Hindus. "One Hindu is hurt, but the pain does not reach the heart of another Hindu." Other Hindus overlook, evade or turn their face on one pretext or another. Thus betraying their social weakness and helplessness. This Tagore called the poor state of 'social strength' of Hindus vis-à-vis Muslims. As long as this inequality remains there can be no genuine partnership based on mutual respect between the two communities. Hence, the cosmetic alliance of leaders with superficial

pronouncements would not result in any good. His words can be prophetic “We gain freedom when the full price for our right to live is paid.”



In every act and word he advocated for the dignity of the individual and value of freedom for all nations. In his address *Purab o Pashchim* ('East and the West', 1908) he summarized his belief that India's special contribution to the world would be an exaltation of the principle of unity in diversity. In this lay the key to the various competing ideologies and exclusivist demands made upon the humanity. He underlines that there is a divine purpose in the diversity of languages and cultures all over the world. Our duty, the duty of entire humanity, is to respect it and learn from each other the best and harmonious elements for enriching our life without harming others.

Tagore actively strove to find and support the human unity in the immense diversity of the world. In recent times he was the second great Indian, after Swami Vivekanand, to go out on a cultural mission for establishing friendship with other countries. He was the first to do so without any specific aim in mind. He went as an Indian Ambassador of Goodwill to China, Japan, Ceylon, Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, Afghanistan, Thailand, Indo-China, Iran and North and South America. His observations about the people and practices of these countries are refreshing. For a long time Indians were seeing the world through the Western, especially the British spectacles. Tagore's observations helped us to see the world from our own, Indian eyes.

The universal and particular

In all his writings and thoughts, Tagore advocated cooperation among the people, within the country and without. He took pains to explain on all occasions that clashes and conflicts arise only when people place undue emphasis on sectional interests and make exclusive claims. In

his memorable speech *Tatah Kim* ('What then?', 1906) he successfully tried to show the fallacy of such demands and strivings. It is an unbroken, yet invisible thread in the writings and thoughts of Tagore that man is a particle of God himself. As our personality is implicit in every corpuscle of our body, so the reality of God is immanent in every single human individual. If these corpuscle could become self-conscious, they would perhaps think of themselves as independent individuals. Similarly, men think of themselves as distinct personalities, but they are in fact moments in the Personality of God.

Such humanistic, yet typical Indian views of Tagore were beautifully embodied in the song which later became our national anthem. The God, the country and the individual become one and undividable in the song. The love for country, the love and respect for the nature and a prayer to the God are all manifest at the same time with unbroken ease. Such great feelings without claiming any superiority over other peoples and cultures existing in the world. This was just one contribution of the great Indian, universal thinker and brilliant composer in the person of Rabindranath Tagore.

This article for want of space and vast range and supreme quality of his literary achievements as a poet, novelist and musician, does not cover these seminal aspects of his persona. Besides, this volume, as required looks at Tagore as a thinker. Yet not referring to his literary genius leaves a void. Hence, I will content myself by giving following quotes from the introduction written for the first edition (1913) of *Gitanjali* in English. (translated by Tagore himself) by W.B. Yeats one of the eminent poets in English literature:

“These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my live long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which – as one divines – runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads.”

“Rabindranath Tagore, like Chaucer’s forerunners, writes music for his words, and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, so full of surprise, because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defence.”

These “are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti’s willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream.”

Acknowledgement and reference:

- ¹ Humayun Kabir, “Introduction” in Rabindranath Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961). This book is a beautiful collection of some of the most significant speeches and essays of Tagore. Prepared on the occasion of the birth centenary of the poet by the Tagore Commemorative Volume Society, New Delhi, the Introduction by Kabir succinctly presents the thoughts of Tagore. This article is based on it and the volume.
- ² This, and all other speeches and essays mentioned in the present article are available in the volume *Towards Universal Man*. Some of them are also available freely on the Internet. However, some of the speeches seem edited and abridged in the English presentation of this volume. The original Bengali version, or the Hindi translation produced by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, under the title ‘*Rabindranath ke nibandh*’, Vol 1 is better to appreciate the full sense of Tagore.
- ³ For a fuller exposition of the point, see Rabindranath Tagore, “The Problem of Education”, in *Towards Universal Man* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 76-79

My Father is Merged into the Majesty of Infinity

Dr. Lokesh Chandra*

Friends have asked me to reminisce on my father’s first annual śraddha. I stand stunned and bewildered in a train of years, months and days. Sweeps of vision, musings of bigger objective and wider goals, immense panoramas and unknown terrains, a procession of expanding psychoramas flit across a tearful heart and brimming eyes. A son’s heart wails: “Admit me. Cold wind smites me. It will blow me away. I pray, shelter me.” Love flows not, it envelops not, it no longer inundates his chosen son: “Your warmth, your depths are desolate. You are known no more. You are woven into the web of the cosmos, just spun into my dreams sans end.” I look up and just opposite a vacant chair stares at me where we, father and son, had envisioned, garnered and laboured on remote grasslands, lands of ice, expanses of sand and lands of magic charm, which shed glamour on India’s historic unfoldment. Enraptured, father had reminisced:

I have strayed,
I have strayed far,
And yet I am in the bye-lanes
That feed India’s path.

Ah, forgotten, forsaken,
Still they have glittered

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From one Season to another,
They have amassed precious jewels,
Mother India, they come to strew them
On your wide path,

So that every soul,
That has chosen thy lap as its cradle,
May be lit.

Stunned I glance at the bleak walls lined with rows of cabinets enshrining within them my father's love, his ideal, his embracement of precious ages when Indian saints and savants toasted with the hordes that raced from the shores of Amur and the Baikal in the shores of Volga and the Caspian, ages when intrepid visionaries broke the silence of the Himalayan serenties of Forbidden Lands, ages when emissaries of our land braved the peril of seas to the isles of S.E. Asia. The majesty of these vistas of flown centuries clamours to operate again with greater strength and fresher glory in the bosom of the future when India will come to no awe and know no grief.

Having studied in the depths and the tremendum of our tradition he saw its historico-critical evaluation by European savants who had dedicated whole lives of devotion born of the romance of discovery of a culture and civilisation which had dazed them by its originality. Soon after his university years, father was on his way to Europe studying under eminent Vedicists. Among his European teachers, a special affection grew up between him and Prof. Caland whose joy knew no bounds in having the opportunity to deliberate with a brilliant son of India, alas, at the end of his life. Prof. Caland was an authority on the technique of the yajna. In spite of a painstakingly accurate determination of the exterior, the European scholar has never been able to evoke a vision that could leap into *sādhana*. That could merge him with the inner light, the supreme luminosity. One day, Prof. Caland asked father to go through a German book on the Vedic religion. He got the book and also the shock of his life. The spiritual palingenesis was shipwrecked in the stormy sea of academic and anthropologic accretion. He saw that these "men of colossal learning, had produced mummified versions of the sacred hymns." They had found the dictionary and the grammar very handy, and for purposes of defence and attack very effective and safe. They had thought that pricking was the essence of a needle. They most carefully measured its dimensions and reproduced an exact copy. But could it be used for joining the edges of separate pieces of cloth?

No, the eye which leads the thread was missing. It could create holes, but it missed the purpose of creating holes. The philologist had missed the eye, the vision that alone unite him, his reader and the Vedic Rishis in the ecstasy of the soul." He went to Prof. Caland and told him his experience and also that he better read his Rigveda. The professor was shocked. The professor presented him his German translation of the *Āpastamba Śhroutasūtrā*. Father was back home. He spent the whole night over it. In the morning he was ready with a long list of corrections in the translation. He went to his beloved professor and discussed the list with him. The aid professor was in dismay and he visualised that her Veda, her *yajña* still lived and shone in the depth of India's soul. Every European scholar who came in contact with father saw the renascent and surging forces emanating from India's ageless wisdom commanding an *élan vital* for the Man of the future.

I am reminded of the words of a famous German explorer: "Alle Traeume das Lehens beginnen in der jugend ...," that is, the dreams of our life begin in youth. So, in his infancy when my father started learning English he saw that cat had a Hindi counterpart, rat also had an equivalent, and poor pencil had none. It evoked his consternation, which was to hibernate scores of winters, until it was to be awakened into dynamic action by the leading indologists Dr. Grierson and Prof. Sylvain Levi. Dr. Grierson had worked all his life on the 'modern' languages of India and had produced more than two dozen huge and heavy tomes. While our languages were spoken in the India of today, they were new but hardly modern, barely capable of expressing the linguistic consciousness of the scientific age which has permeated the very core of the daily life of the man of the twentieth century – so thought Grierson. He asked my father about how our new languages accepted the challenge, though they might possess an inherent capacity to do so in a measure which could do credit even to modern European languages. Father was silent and in thought. The gauntlet was cast. A simple wondering question of his childhood arose in all fury and gained a new meaning.

Father went to see Prof. Sylvain Levi the noblest of all living indologists of the time, for whom India was the first love. Sylvain Levi had gone wherever Indian civilisation had gone, and he had tried to be faithful to l'Inde civilisatrice the civilising Mother India. Father and

Sylvain Levi talked on the yesteryears when India commanded the devotion and affection of the Asian Man. Father's one burning passion was the future cultural freedom wherein could our political independence find a true signification; as it alone could lead to the enrichment of Man in his totality. The conversation drifted to the qualitative plane of languages and Sylvain Levi detailed how a language is a mirror of a people. While the language of the Eskimos may be richer in fishing vocabulary than modern languages, but it was totally undeveloped even for elemental modern requirements and that assigned her a very low position in the civilisational scale. Here again was an affirmation of a problem of immense dimensions to occupy his entire life of unswerving dedication to be followed by another of his disciple-son, Needless for me to charter the course of father's terminological enrichment of modern India. Suffice it to quote an instance that *Sansad* for Parliament, *Vidhan Sabha* for the State Legislature, *Nagar Nigam* for the Municipal Corporation are all father's – embracing the various organs whereby we the people of India give a government unto ourselves. Recalling his meeting with Sylvain Levi, father scribbled:

I have loved our fire, lightning and sun,
Our moon, stars, winds and storms,
I sanctified them,
Daily dawns, daily sunsets,
Monthly wanings and waxings of moon,
Comets, eclipses and falling fireballs.

But I had missed the invisible threads,
With neweyes and new learning
I am viewing the threads,
On which the worlds and their events are strung.

My imagination is fired.
My intellect is aglow.
Armies of flashes invade my mind.
My speech fashions them into words.
Words pursue thoughts.
Thoughts pursue words.
As living organisms they multiply their kind.

Fresh precepts, fresh concepts,
They form arrays,

Formulas and systems,
Allying with each other,
Telescoping into each other.

The country honoured father by making him synonymous with the Hindi of administration, science and technology. Once he was flying to Europe in his dhoti and kurta of milk-white khadi. A co-passenger got curious about him and asked about his mission to Europe. Father was on his way to study the Hindi of a lost children of India, the gypsies, whose language still retained the fundamental vocabulary and ancient grammar of Hindi. A gypsy sentence may interest my readers: ex-Queen of the Gypsies told father in her language *mi rani som* "I was a queen". The co-passenger's curiosity was aroused further and he asked the university where father taught. Father told him "I have a very simple profession. I make words." The co-passenger jumped in interruption: "I can recognise you as the great Raghu Vira who coins words, travels by plane clad in khadi and in search of Hindi in the very heart of Europe. It can be none else, none else." He became a friend who helped father's research mission by his high diplomatic status.

Reminiscences crowd one upon the other, but I may finally recall a succession of events which brought father into the Jan Sangh. My father adored China, which had shared some of the highest thoughts with us, when "her rocks smiled with our sculptured art and the sculptured art attained the immortality of the rock, and lo: the chiselled stone mass shed effulgence and imparted wisdom of ageless peace." He went in person to see the sagely treasures of this Celestial Kingdom. He even mounted the stone images of the two white horses on which had come the first Indian Acharyas to the Middle Kingdom, bringing Sanskrit scriptures. It was an ecstasy for him to be on these mounts at the White Horse Monastery recalling two thousand years of the flow of our culture. He descended into the depths of the coal mines of China, gazed at her vast industrial complexes, lit solitary lamps in now forlorn and silent dhyāna halls, witnessed from an honoured seat the gigantic procession of a seething mass of humanity in the red square of Peking, motored on the road which commemorated our great emperor Ashoka – the Ashoka Road in Shanghai, estampaged the longest Sanskrit inscription of the world on the northerngate of the Great Wall.

A motorcade laden with water, milk and vegetables, doctors, nurses, photographers. Archaeologists, art critics and a military plane carried him into the very heart of the Gobi desert to his world of enchantment which he had ever longed to visit – the five hundred caves of Tunhuang, the most ancient art gallery where India's Perennial Spirit received the homage of the Uigur, the Han, the Tibetan, and a multitude of other races now extinct in the womb of history. Father stood in wonder before the Mahākāla temple in the very centre of Peking, the metropolis of Chinese culture. Herein bewildering varieties of shapes demand the surrender of the evil of the soul of the worshipper. Here Mongol lamas recite in the course of an year the Sanskrit literature that was rendered into Mongolian over the centuries since Qublai Khan who had envisaged Peking as a cosmogram of Yamāntaka.

Decades of glancing through 'nerved' xylographs in Tibetan and Mongolian colophonings the fame of Yun-ho-kung stood visible before a wondering son of India. Here was a monument of a great era. Here was the seat of the most sacred homa performed by lamas with elaborate chignon of silken threads, fringe bands over their heads, partly hiding the eyes symbolising that they are unaware of the phenomenal environment while their spiritual eye is wide open, elaborate amices (uttariya) resembling the celestial clouds – every apparel and drapery suggesting that the officiant has undergone the inner metamorphosis or to speak technically he is transformed into a *rsi*. The rite goes on, purely Indian in spirit and diction, interspersed with Tantric mantras like ओं वज्र अनल महाभूत ज्वल ज्वलय सर्वं भस्मीकुरु सर्वं दुष्टान् हूं फट् etc. representing the dynamism of our culture of our free days. The rite is long and complex where the last act is the 'dissolution of the spiritual drama. The fullness of the edifying vision of the mystic union obtained through meditation and by elaborate rites is dissolved into what they came from, the supreme non-substantiality. In former years, in Yung-ho-kung were located the hostelrys and caravansaries where Mongols from Uрга, Kiakhta and Kobdo, Buryats from the Baikal Lake, Kalmarks from the Volga River, Manchus from Tsitsikhar, Tanguts from the Kokonor, Tibetans from Lhasa and occasionally Gurkhas from Nepal bustled and jostled whilst 'clouds of incense and harmonies of litanies' rose into the blue skies smiling down upon the pageant of Peking. Father was deep in reveries, replete with proud reminiscences of days when Manchu emperors descended from their yellow sedans and ascended the marble steps with their splendid retinue to present offerings to the gilt images, and inmates of the Imperial zenana left their seclusions to

seek consolation and from the saintly lamas. To be short, father's visit to China filled him with rapture and he sang:

Lovingly have your people
Called me the Indian Hsuan Chuang.
All glory to that name
Indeed the intense flame,
That burned in Hsuan Chuang's breast
Has blazed a trail, a long trail
Of 1300 years
Within me.

I have witnessed hoary sights
And have sipped wondrous saps.
Nineteen centuries have rolled back
And I have joined the marching caravan of time
With the Han, the Uigur
The Tibetan, the Mongol and the Manchu.

Father traversed the villages and hamlets, talked to men of position and studied the maps of China, he saw the rise of a giant whose sinocentricity had not been curbed but whetted by communism. The maps had opened his eyes to the monstrous reality of a cartographic aggression on India's sacred borders. A painful undercurrent agonised his exterior of joy and peace. It was the starting point of his efforts to bring home the devastating terror that was to lacerate our northern borders. His clarion calls for what he termed the operation "Northern Vigil" went unheeded in the fraternal embraces. Father was in disdain, thwarted yet unbroken but lonely and forlorn he scribbled:

It is a historical occasion.
Oh God, give me strength to see light and truth.
And fearlessness to cast them abroad.
On Motherland Supreme, it is an hour of danger,
I sound the bugle call.
Rally round the Mother.
She needs you.
It is your Dharma.
धर्मो हतो हान्ति धर्मो रक्षति: ।।

Years passed and father was ruffled and disconsolate at utter negligence. An evening in the December of 1961 as we sat for dinner, a telephone asked father's comments on the Chinese situation by a

conscience keeper of India's cabinet. He spoke his heart and the next morning newspapers carried his statement. The party and government fretted and frowned – it shook in its slumber. Father stood un baffled, he stood by Dharma supreme:

To achieve an objective,
To accomplish a task,
There is the prime requisite.
That thine be the initiative.

He had decided to leave the party to which he had allegiance for years on end but which was now “lulled into narcotic stupor,” was “prejudiced against the arming of the nation to defend itself,” had refused “the ardour and fervor to be aroused in our people and let them possess Bergson's *élan vital*, the vital bounce, so that we become what has been mentioned in the Rig Veda as सहसः सूनः “the sons of challenge, of daring defiance.” The finale came. One afternoon at 1.45 p.m. father went to the Prime Minister's residence, handed over his resignation outside the portals, and went straight to a press conference. He spoke at length and with paralyzing facts about China's impending human waves over our northern ramparts. The press listened with reverence but conviction seemed remote. At the end father declared “Today I have resigned from the Congress Party on the issue.” The next morning the country was stunned to see a veteran leave the party on a point which they thought to be a rather remote possibility, if ever. His admirers were unable to comprehend this unprecedented step. One of his friends in the diplomatic corps asked him “How do you feel now?” He replied : “I am happy to transcend the barriers of my own making, to be a free man.” He sang:

My love my ideals,
In thee lies my refuge,
I embrace thee,
This moment and every other moment is thine.

Numerous parties had beseeched him to join. But he belonged to those who loved, venerated and avowed dedication to holy Bhaarata भारत, the land of Bharata भारत, the prince of leonine prowess, the playmats of lions. He joined them and in a moment of exaltation he mused:

A noble cause hangs by the string
The string of will.
Let it not snap.

Steel the string.
And the cause will swing.
Freely, merrily.
Kissing gentle winds,
And scaring altitudes.

The frame that was my father is merged into the majesty of infinity, and the far-flung perimeter is his arena, the arena of Brahma. While a son gazes in tears at the grim, bleak, endless night of sorrow that envelops him – the ideals, the symbology, the yearnings of his beloved Bhārata demand your consubstantiation, devotion and dedication – of you the millions of India in the present point of time and the aborning countless tomorrows.

Late Prof. Dr. Raghu Vira: Vision and Mission

Prof. Dr. Shashibala*

Late Prof. Dr. Raghu Vira dedicated the whole of his life to his vision and mission to revive the lost glorious centuries of India with greater vigour, fresher glory and patriotic zeal in politics. He was an unforeseen multi-faceted personality, a fountainhead of learning and culture, an ardent lover of work, a zealous scholar of Indology and a radiant flame. His scholarship was brilliant in vision and execution and it was seen as a means for national regeneration by integrating classical Indian heritage — traditions, languages, history, spirituality, arts and literature into the national life. He explored fresh avenues for research on the history of India as cultural leader of the world and presented innovative schemes for Indian studies at international levels suited to their needs and future.

Dr. Raghu Vira was sad to see that in our universities people practically knew almost nothing about India's cultural empire outside it and its contribution to the world. He pledged to highlight the attainments of Indian genius in the past and the history of the travels of eminent Indian minds abroad to the north, east and southeast. He inspired scholars in India and abroad to undertake significant researches in the area with a zeal to rediscover the cultural connections of India with other countries making it the cultural leader of the world. He himself travelled widely to preserve and piece together its fast-fading relics.

Prof. Raghu Vira became a citizen of the world of culture dedicated to promotion of learning and values; an explorer of the inner experience and a pilgrim in the search of wisdom; had a calibre to achieve bigger objectives; journeyed to remote grasslands, lands of ice, expanses of

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sand and isles of magic charm which had shed glamour on India's historic unfoldment. He was always eager to popularize the results of his researches. As a fighter for India's soul he wished to raise with all those who loved India with personal warmth and friendship. He sowed seeds of deep interest in the hearts of all those who revere India and its path of wisdom.

Passion for Sanskrit Literature

Prof. Raghu Vira as a student in school was moved by an urge for cultural freedom because he felt that India's soul was being crushed under the British rule. He dedicated all his energies to unfolding its glorious past which was being forgotten. He became a passionate student of the literature in Sanskrit — the soul of India. For its in-depth comprehension he often used to go to book shops to read the texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Nirukta and Gunaratnamahodadhi etc. and he studied Sanskrit grammar. Studying at DAV College, Lahore, he had a chance to read commentaries and critical editions of Sanskrit texts by European scholars. Awareness about the lost Sanskrit literature inspired him to rediscover it from every Asian land.

Vision for Sanskrit

Prof. Raghu Vira was a great scholar and one of the staunchest supporters of Sanskrit. He used to say that Bharata will rise if Sanskrit rises and it will fall if Sanskrit falls. He not only undertook research projects, publications or writings but looked at the immensity of Sanskrit visualizing its aura and ambience as a visionary. He wished to see India as a world leader based on its thought power. He wrote: "Resurrection of India is the resurrection of her power of thinking, of her ideas and ideals and of her regaining the position of a leader of humanity. An imitator cannot be a leader. India leads where she stands of her own heights."

To recognise the great literary heritage Raghu Vira studied, researched and wrote on a kaleidoscope of topics: Vedas, brāhmaṇas, Sūtras, Upaniṣads, Smṛtis, Six Schools of philosophy, atomism, logic, grammar, phonetics, semantics, etymology, sphoṭa-vāda, sūnya-vāda, syād-vadā, yoga, bhakti and ahiṃsā. While researching on the similarities of language, literature and thought of Avesta he discovered that it is nearer to Vedic than classical Sanskrit and Prakrit. His research on the Arabic language brought to light its affinity to Pali and Prakrit

e.g. coconut in Arabic is nāragīl/nārajīl derived from Prakrit. He discovered that Indian system of medicine, astronomy, mathematics and literature were an inspiration for Iraq. He was a dynamic man who saw his path and the task awaiting him. He had a rare combination of scholarship with the initiative needed to conduct research and explore, and also inspire others. The great Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini was an ever fresh and flourishing source of creativity to give Indian languages the vibration of words for ever-new discoveries for Prof. Raghu Vira.

As an energetic, exuberantly active, dedicated and a futurist man Raghu Vira had a dream for advancement of Sanskrit studies by opening up libraries attached to temples, which could be centres of both: dharmodaya and jāñodaya, protection and preservation of manuscripts from various parts of the world; research on comparative linguistics and contribution of Sanskrit to the world culture; rediscovery of lost texts and their preservation and publication. He opened up multi-dimensional avenues for reminding and reviving the past glory of Sanskrit and will remain an inspiration for the Sanskritists for centuries to come.

Prof. Raghu Vira travelled widely almost all over the world in search of the unknown and unseen Sanskrit heritage, discovering lost Sanskrit manuscripts, inscriptions, texts translated into various languages, Sanskrit texts written by scholars outside India, documents acknowledging contribution of Sanskrit to the world cultures and researches by foreign scholars. Wherever he found Sanskrit he said “this is Bharata.” He paid homage to the great Sanskritists from India as well as other countries who dedicated their lives to propagation of Indian thought, through publishing their works. He laid foundations for the generations to come for research on Sanskrit heritage. A visitor to the International Academy of Indian Culture which he founded, looks in amazement at the cabinets lined up along the walls enshrining within them his love and ideals, and his embracement of precious ages.

Researches on Sanskrit with European Scholars

As a student of higher studies Raghu Vira went to Netherlands to work under the guidance of a famous Vedic scholar Prof. Willem Caland to take the degree of Doctor of Letters at Utrecht University. He worked on Vāraha Gr̥hyasūtra with ambitious intentions for edition of Vedic texts: Kāpiṣṭhala-Kaṭha Saṁhitā, a text of Yajurveda (critically edited for the first time), the Samaveda of the Jaiminīyas, published for the first time in Lahore in 1938, Varāha Gr̥hyasūtra, Varāha Śrautasūtra,

Bhāradvāja Śrautasūtra and a part of Drahyāyaṇa Śrautasūtra. He edited certain Śikṣā works, published charts with annotations of Vedic sacrificial altars and manuscripts giving information on the Vedic schools. His Vedic mysticism is well known. The problem of recessions of Ṛgveda was unique to him. He discussed them at length. He wrote research papers on Sanskrit studies in Germany, the automatons of Samarāṅgana-sūtradhāra of King Bhoja and the phonetic sūtras of Pāṇini.

In Netherlands he championed the cause of organizing Vedic studies and of establishing institutions for that purpose. On returning he founded International Academy of Indian Culture in Lahore, which was transferred to Nagpur and then to New Delhi. He republished from the Academy Vedic works which were no longer obtainable in India and the works by foreign scholars like Dr. J. M. van Gelder, an edition of the Mānavaśrauta-sūtra. He took up vigorously editing and interpreting Vedic and ritualistic texts. A number of Vedic texts were published through his Journal of Vedic Studies. He kindled many scholars with enthusiasm for Vedic and Sanskrit studies introducing philological methods of the West.

Prof. Raghu Vira was proud of contribution of Sanskrit to European languages and was fascinated by discovering their affinity to Sanskrit. He studied Lithuanian with all the other European languages. He found that it is a special language closer to Sanskrit than all the other European languages. He produced a Sanskrit translation of Lithuanian daina. He felt that a close correspondence of the two languages was not possible. Words and declensions ran parallel in the two languages, but in continuous text the proximity ceases and they stand in sui generis. His articles on Sanskrit element in Malay, similarities between Mongol, Sanskrit and Hindi, Sanskrit words in Pashto language, a Sanskrit primer from Mongolia, and other works opened up fresh avenues to study contribution of Sanskrit to world cultures.

Prof. Raghu Vira said that there is no centrality or superiority as vastness of cosmos and our citizenship on the tiny planet earth humbles our pride. He studied Indo-European as the linguistic substratum of European languages and Sanskrit culture as the foundation of thought system of Asia. Proximity of Sanskrit with other languages was fascinating for him. His researches on similarities of Sanskrit with other languages, compilation of dictionaries, helped later generations to work in this area. He was also amazed at the researches done by European savants who dedicated whole of their lives.

In Search of the Forgotten Glory of India

Dr. Raghu Vira was pained by “the forces of events, unfortunate and unhealthy, which have delimited the boundaries of India within the narrowest limits. A portion of Punjab and Bengal is cut away from us only recently. Burma is no longer our own. Provinces of Peshawar and Bannu, Chaman, Quetta and Sind are now foreign lands. Ceylon is cut away from us long ago.” For him India was a vision beyond the comprehension of the ordinary man who looks on the surface alone. For him the map of India could not be made by politics because it cannot control in entirety religion, sociology, languages, scripts, customs and manners, modes and aspirations of life, and values that manage the mind.

Prof. Raghu Vira wrote: “Our past was brilliant. But unfortunately we have forgotten it. We have been losing our empire of love and friendship over the past ten centuries.” He had a dream — ‘may the glory of the past be the glory of the future, let the present gird up its lions.’ He became a pilgrim on the path of the sages and savants who braved the perils of the seas and the forbidden deserts establishing a grand cultural empire from the shores of river Amur and Lake Baikal to river Volga and the Caspian Sea and to the isles of Indonesia. “India became a perpetual giver of gifts. She did not exploit or dominate. In place of inflicting defeats she raised others out of ignorance and barbarity. She gave them script and literature, thoughts to think, a glorious pantheon to venerate.” He was awestruck by unselfishness of Indian missions extending over centuries and millennia. They did not strive to establish political empires or for robbing other countries of their wealth and dignity in order to enrich or heighten their own.

Travels Abroad

Prof. Raghu Vira found an immense aura of our heritage scattered all over Asia. He became a scholar pilgrim to Asian lands in search of this vast heritage of arts, philosophy, sciences, literature and all else that shed effulgence on ages when India’s sages and savants travelled abroad; the ages when the Huns, the Han, the Uigur, the Tukhar, the Scythian, the Sogdian, the Kuchians, the Mongols and the Manchus paid homage to the ageless wisdom.

Prof. Raghu Vira travelled to Mongolia, Bali, Java and Sumatra, Burma, Srilanka, Thailand, China, Siberia, Manchuria, Russia and several European countries. His expeditions especially to Mongolia, Indonesia and China in search of Sanskrit texts achieved a signal success securing

a large amount of valuable material. He discovered, transliterated and published Sanskrit inscription of 1104 AD from Hsuen Wu in Loyang province in China. Loyang was a centre of studies and translation of Sanskrit texts. He collected Vedic, Puranic and Tantric mantras, ślokas and bijāksaras. His discovery of Gāyatrī mantra from Manchuria written in Manchurian, Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan is excellent.

In Southeast Asia

Prof. Raghu Vira’s scholarship was brilliant both in vision and execution. Looking at the dimensions of his knowledge President Sukarno of Indonesia presented him a large number of Sanskrit manuscripts written on palm leaves and photo copies of those which could not be presented to him. Later he supplemented the collection with micro films and photo-copies from Holland. On coming back from his expedition to Indonesia he inspired his daughter and daughter-in-law to critically edit texts like Bṛhaspati-tattva, Gaṇapati-tattva, Tattva-saṅg-hyang Mahājñana, Ślokāntara and Vrattisāsana. Thus for the first time in India Sanskrit texts written by the Indonesians in Old Javanese script were published by him. He transcribed, translated and published Sanskrit inscriptions discovered from outside India. One of them is a group of four inscriptions from Borneo by King Mūlavarman. During his visit to Bali he discovered Sanskrit ślokas and mantras which are still recited during daily prayers, rituals and ceremonies like garbhādhāna and Jātakarma. He published lists of Indonesian texts on mantra, Kalpaśāstra, āgama, nīti, comology, mysticism, astrology etc. inspiring the future scholars. With an all-embracing point of view Dr. Raghu Vira published the most important and invaluable works by eminent foreign scholars like J. Gonda’s great book on Sanskrit in Indonesia.

Prof. Raghu Vira was fascinated by the literature of Laos which deals with inscriptions, poetry and romance, stories from Panca-tantra, judicial stories as case law on the legal codes, and comic stories like the horse poisoned by mushrooms. He found that legends and historical texts, theatre, extra-canonical and technical literature on grammar, rhetorics, lexicography, astrology, art of governance etc. point to a vast literature of the Lava people which awaits to be studied in comparison with Sanskrit sources.

Expedition to Mongolia

Prof. Raghu Vira went on an expedition to Mongolia and returned with microfilms of hundreds of important manuscripts. Later on collaborative

research was carried on at the Academy which became a great centre for Mongol studies. He discovered Pāṇini's grammar being recited in Mongolia. He compiled and published Mongol-Sanskrit dictionary with a Sanskrit-Mongol index and a Pentaglog dictionary of Buddhist terms in Sanskrit original followed in the Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchurian and Chinese translations. Today all the Mongolists know the value of this work. Some of his remarkable works are Arajī Booji, thirteen stories of King Bhoja in Sanskrit, Mongolian and Hindi translations followed by a glossary and a Mongolian grammar. He surveyed Buddhist art, literature, history of monasteries and of the Mongolian lands, Kanjur and Tanjur — the trans-creation of the 6000 plus works in Mongol language, highlights of Lamaism across the centuries, the writings of 220 philosophical, ritual, hagiographical and historical works under the Manchu dynasty, and so on.

Prof. Raghu Vira was pained at the destruction of 750 large monasteries which were uprooted down to their foundations, burning of five million xylographs and manuscripts according to Prof. Rinchen, the desecration of Erdeni Dzu and Chojin Lamin Sum the major cathedrals of Buddhism, and the heart-rending genocide of monks.

Journey to China

Prof. Raghu Vira adored China, which had shared some of the highest thoughts with India, when “her rocks smiled with sculptured art and the sculptured art attained the immortality of rocks, and lo! the chilled stone mass shed effulgence and imparted wisdom of ageless peace.” He went in person to see the sagely treasures of this Celestial Kingdom. It was an ecstatic experience for him to be at the White Horse Monastery recalling two thousand years of the flow of culture. He descended into the coal mines of China, gazed at her vast industrial complexes, lit lamps in the silent dhyāna halls, got an estampage of the longest Sanskrit inscription of the world written on the northern gate of the Great Wall. A motorcade laden with water, milk, vegetables, doctors, nurses, photographers, archeologists, art critics and military plane carried him into the Gobi desert to visit hundreds of caves of Dun-huang. Prof. Raghu Vira stood in wonder before the Mahākāla temple in the very center of Beijing. He went to Yun-ho-kung a monument of great era where the sacred *homa* was performed elaborately.

Prof. Raghu Vira's visit to China filled him with rapture and he sang:

Lovingly have your people
Called me the Indian Hsuan-tsang.

All glory to that name !
Indeed the intense flame,
That burned in Hsuan-tsang's breast
Has blazed a trail, along trail
Of 1300 years
Within me.
I have witnessed hoary sights
And have sipped wondrous saps.
Nineteen centuries have rolled back
And I have joined the marching caravan of time
With the Han, the Uigur
The Tibetan, the Mongol and the Manchu.

In 1955 he also visited Inner Mongolia, Manchuria and Siberia in search of kindred material and his mission was crowned with great success. He collected thousands of Sanskrit texts translated into Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan languages, in the form of Tripitaka, Kanjur and Tanjur. Many of them are lost forever in the history of Sanskrit literature. He wrote articles on the two versions of Rāmāyaṇa in Chinese Tripitaka. He also wrote on Rāmāyaṇa in Thailand and Laos.

His initiation for compiling Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary is a historical and monumental work enabling Tibetologists and Sanskritists to undertake researches. Among a long list of his researches is a comparative study of Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese translations of Suvarṇa-bhāṣottama-sūtra. He undertook transcription, reconstruction and translation of Sanskrit-Chinese dictionary — Fan Fan yu, the first known lexicon of its kind dated AD 517, in collaboration with his disciple Chikyo Yamamoto from Japan in 1937.

Prof. Raghu Vira brought the original xylographs from Beijing. Emperor Chien-lung had studied Sanskrit as a young prince and was devoted to its promotion. He got Sanskrit mantras collected from all over and published them in a hundred volumes. He found that a Chinese Buddhist was enshrouded for his final journey in silk that had Sanskrit mantras woven with golden threads – specific for each part of the body. That silken shroud with Sanskrit prayers was meant to ensure him the Heavenly Fields of Sukhavātī.

Prof. Raghu Vira had received six huge cases of Buddhist sutras and scrolls from the Buddhist Book Store on the Ashoka Road in Shanghai. Among them were large-sized woodcuts of Buddhist deities that bore Sanskrit inscriptions.

Admiration for Japan

Prof. Raghu Vira was fascinated by Sanskrit dhāraṇīs in Japan when he listened to their recitation by the Japanese in England which were partly clear, partly unclear; partly correct partly incorrect. Prof. Raghu Vira was amazed, he became inquisitive about Sanskrit mantras as how and when did they reach Japan, who carried them and in what form. He went to see an exhibition of Sanskrit manuscripts from Japan brought to England. A manuscript of Uṣṇīṣvijayā-dhāraṇī from Hōryūji monastery was the earliest among them. Till then, this was known as the earliest known Sanskrit manuscript in the world. He was so full of enthusiasm that soon he began to study the Japanese grammar written by Chamberlain to learn the language.

The history of studies in the field of Indo-Japanese cultural friendship in India goes back to the 1934-5 when Late Prof. Raghu Vira, a great Indologist, a philosopher, a linguist and a cultural activist began to teach the Japanese language in Lahore in Pre-partition India. He sent invitations to scholars in Japan to undertake research on Buddhism. The British government got suspicious. Prof. Raghu Vira was put behind bars as the government was sensing some conspiracy behind his Japanese language teaching programme. But this could not be a hurdle on his path. In 1933 he met Prof. Suenaga of the Kanazawa University, Tokyo in Poona. He was the first Japanese Sanskritist in India. Both of them had long meetings to discuss the future plans. Prof. Suenaga was so impressed by the vision of Prof. Raghu Vira that he decided to accompany him to Lahore. In Lahore he began to translate the great epic Mahābhārata into Japanese in collaboration with Prof. Raghu Vira, which was an extremely ambitious project.

Establishment of International Academy of Indian Culture

During his stay there Prof. Suenaga advised him to establish an international centre, where foreign scholars could come and undertake research on various fields of Indology. The idea appealed to Prof. Raghu Vira. Soon he wrote letters to several scholars of world fame for joining hands in the noble endeavour. Prof. Suenaga was the first Japanese to donate Rs.50/-. An academic institute began to take form. It was named 'International Academy of Indian Culture' in English and 'Sarasvati Vihar' in Hindi. Prof. Suenaga got busy translating the great epic. The enormous work could not be completed as Professor Suenaga fell ill and had to go back to Japan.

Late Prof. Raghu Vira in 1934 sought co-operation of several other scholars. Prof. N. Fukushima of the Imperial University, Tokyo became a member of the Academy. Dr. A. C. Woolner, Vice Chancellor, University of Lahore, Punjab, was the first President. Maharaja of Mysore, His Highness Shri Shri Krishnaraja Wadiyar Bahadur, Raja Saheb of Aundh, Shrimant Bala Saheb Pant Pratinidhi and Raja Saheb of Miraj Senior His Highness Shrimant Sir Balasaheb Patwardhan were the patrons. Prof. Dr. Louis Renou, Paris, Prof. Dr. R. L. Turner from London, Sir D. B. Jayatilak from Colombo, Sir Richard Burn from Oxford, Dr. V. S. Sukthankar from Poona, Prof. Dr. S. K. De from Dacca were the members of the executive. Prof. Raghu Vira headed the Academy as the Director and Convener. Later several other professors of world fame also joined the Academy as members, e.g. Prof. Sylvan Levi, Sir John Marshall, Prof. Sten Kono, G. Tocchi, Prof. Winternitz etc.

International Academy of Indian Culture stands on a strong foundation with its collections, archives and a rich library for research into the complex areas of Buddhism, sacred texts, history of the cross cultural linkages, Sanskrit, epigraphy, ritual, performing and visual arts, philosophy and so on. It has been headed by Prof. Lokesh Chandra since 1963.

During foreign invasions India lost an incredible number of manuscripts. A large number of them were already copied, translated, adapted or trans-created in Tibet, China, Indonesia, Mongolia etc. Prof. Raghu Vira and his eminent son Prof. Lokesh Chandra collected those documents tracing their origin from India, from China, Mongolia, Indonesia, Burma and several other Asian countries. The rare treasure is of immense value for rediscovery of cultural connections throughout Asia.

The scholars at the Academy are continuously surveying, studying, comparing and researching motley of cultures and civilizations which are similar but diverse because Prof. Raghu Vira believed in unity of human society with diversity and a meaningful conversation among peoples and nations establishing harmony and peace. He said Asians can be identified by a common cultural matrix. The entire cultural interflow among them with diverse origin is in sharing of dreams not conflicting. The world is linked through inhospitable distances across deserts, mountains and oceans. He discovered Buddhism as an intellectual choice in which persons of diverse origin could engage themselves. He held strongly the world follows multiplicity of religions, we need a sense of respect and understanding for all.

Publication of Deteriorating Sanskrit Manuscripts and Texts from Outside India

Dr. Raghu Vira, a patriot and a scholar by heart and soul said that ancient scriptures, literary and philosophical works are the soul of a country. Their knowledge paves a path for nation building. He acknowledged that ancient texts— both sacred and secular are heritage of our country containing eternal values and knowledge for transcendence and excellence in life. Their knowledge is indispensable for building a glorious India. But unfortunately we Indians are not serious about it. Thousands of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain texts written in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit, written on paper, bhojaptra and palm-leaf were lying uncared for in the houses of the Brāhmaṇas, monasteries and universities. The Brāhmaṇas used to copy the decaying texts. But with the inception of British style education the tradition could not continue. So he decided to collect, rescue, edit and publish the rare texts.

A quantum of Indian literature had travelled to other Asian countries over the past two millennia where it was translated into their languages or adapted. People in almost all the Asian countries acknowledged their importance for cultural excellence. Dr. Raghu Vira found that the “Inner Sciences” in the Buddhist texts and the refinement of this worldly values in the “exoteric sciences” has been the embodiment of the Asian mind for centuries. People translated, copied, wrote commentaries and analysed Buddhist texts. They wrote annals of Buddhist masters, histories of Dharma and ritual manuals. Prof. Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra collected such scriptures from far off lands, with a vision of future, a renaissance wherein science is endowed with values. Raghu Vira decided to publish them in Satapitaka series — Hundred baskets of scriptures from all Asian countries. He even had to manufacture fonts for publication of Old Javanese, Mongol and Tibetan texts.

Publication of rare Sanskrit texts and their translations into Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese languages is of immense value for the rediscovery of the lost Sanskrit heritage. Prof. Raghu Vira ambitiously undertook publication of the Satapitaka series, the series which includes unpublished works of Indo-Asian literatures. Not only the entire range of ancient Sanskrit literature of India but also the analogous Sanskrit literature of Srilanka, Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, various lands of Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia and Tibet has been included in this project.

Foreign Scholars with Raghu Vira

Prof. Raghu Vira’s efforts were pioneering in inviting students and scholars from abroad to study and research. They used to stay with him for years getting his guidance, love and personal care. The Japanese scholars who came and stayed under the affection of Prof. Raghu Vira loved India to the core of their hearts. India was another home for his disciple Shodo Taki. Once he wrote in a letter to his guru that whenever he closes his eyes he beholds the flowing rivers and mountains, temples and monasteries, and ancient monuments of India. When he went back to Japan, he delivered a number of lectures on India and its culture, religion and philosophy. Prof. Shoson Miyamoto, an eminent scholar of Indian philosophy in Japan and director of Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist studies and Prof. Hajime Nakamura were also associated with Prof. Raghu Vira. They visited the Academy in 1954. Whosoever used to come to India, tried to meet him or else their visit to India was incomplete.

Teaching Japanese language was seen as a tool to understand the Japanese mind, their character behind amazing achievements and patriotism. When the Academy was shifted to Nagpur in 1946, Japanese studies were once again resumed by Prof. Raghu Vira’s daughter Dr. Sudarshana Devi Singhal and his son Dr. Lokesh Chandra. A large number of Indians joined as students from various fields. They were ministers, advocates, secretaries, justices, principals and teachers. The programmes of the Academy included viewing of films on Japan, playing Japanese music and lectures on Japanese culture.

Hindi: The National Language of India

After independence, the question was whether Hindi would be able to replace English? It was discussed from many angles at all levels in India. Raghu Vira could not see India walking with the crutches of English and to walk fast. He took the arduous task for coining 20,00,000 new scientific and technical terms. He was called Abhinav Pāṇini for creating a system of linguistic development providing an answer to the renaissance of India’s languages. For him Sanskrit, the mother of Indian languages and also of most of the European languages, was the fittest fountain source for building up an independent progressive terminology for the world of science and all the branches of humanities. His English-Hindi dictionary was a step towards intellectual revolution. His deep knowledge of Sanskrit and penetrative grasp of the principles of Pāṇini’s

grammar enabled him to create several lacs of scientific and technical terms on the basis of about 600 *dhātus*, 20 *pratyayas* and 80 *upasargas*. His dictionary is not only usable by the people speaking various Indian languages but for those whose languages have derived terms from Sanskrit in large numbers such as Srilanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, Cambodia etc.

There is a supplementary volume of Comprehensive English-Hindi Dictionary of Prof. Raghu Vira's earlier edition of 1955. It registers the Hindi equivalents of general and technical words of English pertaining to administration, industry, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and technology. Prof. Raghu Vira has given Hindi equivalents for two hundred thousand English words in this and the previous volume. Unknown to users are thousands of his words like the ones for Parliament, constitution, legislative assembly, legislation, legislator and so on. "The Indian counterparts provided in this Dictionary, of hitherto nameless ideas of modern science in our languages will contribute to the enrichment of Indian languages so that they become vehicles of modern life and thought in its thousand-fold ramifications. The creation of an Indian scientific terminology is a major contribution of the many-splendored activities of Prof. Raghu Vira to develop Indian languages will also evolve into perfect instruments of expression. The present Dictionary is the only one that provides a precise vocabulary for this development. It is a sine qua non for the study of modern Indian languages."

Political Life

Dr. Raghu Vira joined politics actively because he could not remain a passive spectator. His lectures and debates as a Parliamentarian were full of vigour, patriotism and enthusiasm. He was a prominent Member of Constituent Assembly of India (1948-1950) and then a Member of Rajya Sabha (1952-1962). In December 1962 he was elected as President of Bharatiya Jan Sangh. He wanted to combine various political parties and create an effective opposition in the country.

Unfortunately, on May 14th, 1963 while on an election tour, a serious motor car accident led to a sudden, shocking and tragic death of Prof. Raghu Vira. An institution of vast magnitude was lost forever. Indology suffered an irreparable loss. The hope of making Hindi the national language of India was shattered. India and all those who love it lost a star, the guiding light in reviving and re-establishing the grandeur of our classical literature and culture.

Ramswarup: A Great Yogi of Contemporary World

Prof. Rameshwar Mishra Pankaj*

Sri Ramswarup was a great yogi of contemporary world. He meditated and explored the consciousness which is the base and core of the entire universe. Meditative thinking, keen, sharp and unattached observation, applying the reason and intuitive wisdom to comprehend many layers of reality and many levels of consciousness was his discipline which he practised rigorously. He focussed on understanding the truth of our existence and the purpose of life and world. He explored the nature of human mind, its vastness, its manifold actions, activities, waves, inspirations, desires, cognition, misconceptions, fears, greeds, its patterns of planning and disappointments, hope, imagination, etc.

As he saw the Divine consciousness all around, he was pained to see the amount of violence against that Divinity being practised in the name of religion, pity and charity. He found that the followers of monotheist religions have utter disregard towards the humanity and Divinity and that they are full of low levels of ego, violence, hatred and jealousy towards all except their fellow-travellers and are adamant to destroy all forms of life with which they have no acquaintance. All that is unfamiliar to them is either to be dominated, controlled and transformed according to their desires or to be destroyed. This was similar to the nature of wild animals. All this in the name of humanity, benevolence, help, charity and pity. Ramswarup was moved to see this. He felt that this reflected contempt towards the Divine reality pervading the cosmos and towards one's own inner self.

He really felt pity towards all such violent and egoist followers of monotheist religions. But he also saw that they would never listen to

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any sane voice. Hence, he focussed towards the Greater Civilisations of the world which have grown up naturally, organically and have evolved a culture of respect for the plurality and a tradition of understanding about the probability of many paths of realisations, all equally valid.

During his study and observations, he was amazed as well as delighted to see that such cultures were spread worldwide. He found such cultures and traditions in ancient Egypt, Babylonia, Africa, pre-Christian Europe, pre-Islamic Arabia and central Asia, ancient America and many other parts of the world. He observed that new science or modern science also finds the plurality as a natural form of reality.

Like other students of modern India, born in 1920 C.E. at Delhi and brought up in a well-to-do Indian family, during the British regime, Ramswarup was a person who loved modernity.

Just a small incident awakened his 'Sanskars.' During college life, he used to shave daily, thereby nicking his face here and there and using many kind of cream and powder etc. Once his maidservant humbly suggested to use alum instead. He just tried it and was quite surprised to see that it stopped the bleeding so easily. This aroused interest in him towards the importance of indigenous knowledge. His pre-existing sanskar impelled him to start studying Geeta and other scriptures.

Ramswarup was a graduate from Delhi University and he participated in the Indian Independence movement and was imprisoned by the Britishers. Later, he was closely associated with Mirabehn, Gandhiji's adopted (British-born) daughter. He was studious and meditative from his student life. In the nineteen fifties he was foremost to comprehend and opposed the danger of the spread of the Soviet imperialism and communism and Nehru's collaboration with them. His book 'Communism and Peasantry' was presented to Shri Aurobindo, who blessed the book. Soon Ramswarup leaned towards meditations and studied spiritual scriptures of different religious traditions. In economic field, he advocated Gandhian economics as he saw that the modern industrial production system was engrossed in a circular production-consumption cycle, producing and consuming one-another in a crescendo, round and round. He tried to convince the Gandhians, the socialists and the RSS about the futility of the present development process. They agreed with him but found themselves helpless before the system.

This helplessness of these indigenous groups was an eye-opener to him. He tried to understand the reasons for the surrender and

helplessness of these groups. He also studied Christianity, Islam and communism, as well the modern western European-American paradigms, their contradictions and hollowness. In this process he studied economics, political science, linguistics, religions, philosophy, history, psychology, social science, international relations and Hindu scriptures.

He initiated the study of Christianity and Islam from Hindu perspective. The leftist-anti-Hindu politicians had made study of Islam a tabooed subject in India, knowingly and tactically. Ramswarup played an important role on opening Islam for discussion in India by his scholarly book "Understanding Islam through Hadis." The book was first published in USA in 1983 and then in India in 1984 with second reprint in 1987. The book was translated in hindi by me in 1989. During the process of printing of this Hindi edition, it passed through the hands of book-binders of the press- Voice of India, New Delhi. The binders were muslims and they were annoyed to read some portions of the book. An agitation was launched, FIR was lodged at police station Daryaganj and police arrested promptly Shri Sitaram Goel its publisher and also searched for the translator (the writer of these lines). News of arrest of Sitaram Goel appeared in the national newspapers and also the statements of intellectuals and academicians opposing the police action. Later Sita Ramji was released but a case was filed by the State Government against the writer and publisher of the book. After District Court, the case was moved to the High Court. Till then the Book remained banned. After more then eight years, the High Court of Delhi in May, 2001 permitted the book for sale after deleting some parts of the book, thought to be objectionable by the government.

Ramswarup's book. "Hindu View of Christianity and Islam" is a scholarly work which discusses Christianity and Islam from the view point of Hindu spirituality. This book has also been translated by me in Hindi and published by M.P. Hindi Granth Academy, Bhopal.

The major contributions of Ramswarup are in the fields of yoga, spirituality, philosophy and comparative study of religions. He dealt these subjects on two subtle levels. One is the language itself, which is the medium of communication at different levels. The other is that of explanatory notes with insights and comments of the Great master guiding the reader to the inner and deeper world of existence.

His book "The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods" deals with the nature of language and its units of communication i.e. words. Though the language is a vehicle for expression of desires, emotions, fears, transactions, transmissions, transmitting, treacheries, approximations,

comparison, appraisal, appreciation, apprehensions, adulation, agreement, threat, advertising, submission, communication etc. it is also a form of cognition, approaching the Divine and the sublime beauty. Language also consists the Inspired Words. Such words are related to deeper psyche and spiritual consciousness. The meanings and values inherent in a word are unfolded according to the level of purity of speakers' or listeners' mind.

Ramswarup had his own method of exploring and comprehending the highest and the most secret meanings of Divine words, Vedic Exegesis, the Names of Gods.

This unfolding and exploring provides to the readers the key to relate with the Divine. This also unfolds the power inherent in Divine words as well as it informs the level of meaning and motivations connected with the word or term being used. It also unfolds the mystery of the word, how and why they influence the speaker and the listener deeply. Thus, this book explains how in any culture the meaning of a word evolves and how the culture is also created in this process. It also teaches us the power and potential energy of words thereby fulfilling one's potential. Generally, we are not aware about the psychic contents of the words being spoken by us frequently and habitually. Ramswarup helps our intellectual and spiritual evolutionary expansion in this respect.

The Master also deals with the subject of revelation. Generally Islam and Christianity, each claim that their sourcebook is a revelation received by the Messiah or the Prophet. Then they also claim that the form of that revelation in its purity is kept safe only in that historic document which has been produced by the disciples or followers of that Messiah or Prophet. Ramswarup explains that the mind that recollects or remembers these revealed books is a matter of analysis and cross-examination by which we come to know the state and level of consciousness and purity or impurity of those minds. By not allowing such examination to the wise person, the followers pretend or suppose that even they are equally pure and Divine like the Prophet or Messiah. de facto, such claims undermine the universality or speciality of their own Messiah or Prophet. On the other hand, they present themselves as special and of universal value just because they are owning or claiming to have particular historic document. If they really accept their Prophet or Messiah as universal, then at the same time they must accept the right of every wise person to interpret that document claimed to be containing the revealed words. The claims of theological religions of

having monopoly of theology is ridiculous because it negates the cosmic presence of the ultimate consciousness and the power to reveal universally and as per universal laws.

Fixing the limitation of the supreme to a particular time-space continuum is negating the supreme power itself. The advocates of mono-theology or the only one valid theology negate the supreme power perhaps unknowingly. Ramswarup has explained that such so-called religious beliefs reflect an egoist state of consciousness. The beliefs emerging from ego of mind can not be accepted being Holy or Religious or Spiritual. These are a product of a particular type of materialism and egoism. The Prophet or Messiah may have the connection with the Divine but just having faith in a particular document written by some person claiming that Prophet or Messiah heard these very words from the Divine or the Supreme is a totally different thing than the revelation itself. This is more important that neither Jesus nor Muhammed ever wrote these books. In Christianity, the Gospels were written at least 200 years after Jesus and in Islam, the Holy Book went through many modifications and editing. These were not the Hymns being recited through a continuous tradition in the set up of Mantars. Therefore, all these documents need scrutiny and cross-examination. The Supreme may not reveal totally conflicting words, hence all the claims of revelations should be mutually confirming. Otherwise, speaking in the Name of God may be deceptive and self-glorification only. All the Words being claimed of as the God's Word can be interpreted in various ways.

Ramswarup has discussed in detail the nature of Divine Words and has explained that one can approach the Divine Word only after purifying one's mind and heart. The Vedic Mantras were seen or known in the pure state of cosmic consciousness and, therefore, they are about the cosmic Laws and Divine self.

In the book "The Word as Revelation: Names of God" Ramswarup has explored and explained many key Words or terms which are infact the Divine Names. Therefore, reciting those Names is the worship of the Supreme. The mysterious power of reciting these Names links one to the Supreme and liberates him or her from the self-ego. Ramswarup has done a great service to the humanity by writing such books. This book also has been translated by me in Hindi and published.

The book 'Hindu view of Christianity and Islam' explains the monotheist theologies from the viewpoints of yogic spirituality. The book also discusses the ethics of such theologies which formalizes the

relationship between the Messiah and the Christian as that of a shepherd and a sheep and also of a suzerain and a vassal. The author also reminds us that for long Bible was a closed book and common Christians were not permitted to know it or read it. Those trying to read it were fined and imprisoned. Ramswarup recalls that Dante places even Socrates, Plato, Thales, Zeno, Seneca, Euclid, Galen and so on, in the Hell. As per Dante. "Though these greatman sinned not and have merits, but they did not accept Christianity (which was not on the Earth at that time) hence their worship of wrong Gods (who are not the Father of Jesus) lead them to the first circle of hell."

Similarly, Prophet Muhammad too had no place even for the best of non-muslims in his paradise. Even Prophet father-mother and uncle availed Hell only as they were not Muslims. Killing non-muslims is a virtue. Breaking the workshop place of non-muslims is a virtue. Even if a non-muslim is pious and good, he should be killed if he does not accept Islam, when asked to.

In the modern era, Ramswarup advanced the Hindu critique of other religions pioneered by Shri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda. The True nature of one and only one God, The father of only one begotten son Jesus, and the Allah of the Last Rasool has been deeply analysed by him. He felt turning religion into a brutal force of violence, aggression and mindless destruction is the work of a low ego-centric psyche. Imposing own theology upon the rest of mankind is anti-God, Naastikta; because the supreme is manifest in many forms and plurality is the nature of cosmos. Such theologies, engender violence and hatred. This hatred is also towards the other manifestations of God.

The book, 'Meditations, Yogas, Gods, Religions' consists seven sections. After the introductory chapter, Ramswarup reflects on Patanjali yoga, Bhakhi-yoga, Buddhist-yoga, Gods, Human psychology respectively. The Last chapter deals with Semitic Religions vis-a-vis Hindu Dharma.

Another important book of Ram Swarup is "On Hinduism." The first chapter is on 'Sanatan Dharma: Anusmriti and Anudhyana: This is a pious call for reawakening of dharmic and native traditions. Ramswarup explains Aatma and Anatma, Aatma-vada and Deva-vada, forms of God, Denial of God, Dharma, many lives, many plane and Moksha vis-a-vis One's life, on Judgement, Hell & Heaven. He also dicusses the Hindu social system. Castes and communities, and the initiation into a particular sampradaya. Further, he also discusses the cultural self-alienation among the Hindus. Another chapter is on the Hindu view of education. The book calls for the religious renewal of the world.

Ramswarup elaborated the Hindu view of education and the structural contents of that system. He discussed the principles of education as it existed in the old days and the vision that supported those principles. He emphasized that a nation's theories about education depend upon its theories about man. The definition and understanding of man, designs and brings forth that of education.

In India, from time immemorial, Hindus have regarded man predominantly as a spirit, the eternal consciousness, the infinite and eternal Chida-Ansha. Intellectual and physical natures are to be understood in this light and then be evolved, developed or moulded accordingly. The Hindus knew that there is a greater life beyond and behind this apparent life, a larger World enveloping this apparent World. Senses and mind are a segment of the greater life. The true life is the life of the spirit. The human must live in the spirit of the eternal and infinite life. The purpose of education is to make us aware of this eternal and infinite life and to teach us how to reach it.

The spirit enriched the life of the mind and the body, gave it meaning, comprehension and perspective. Without the awareness of that inner life, the outer life is blind, feeble, empty and self-estranged. Therefore, any education dealing only with the physical, mental and material concerns is self-defeating.

That is why Gayatri Mantra is daily recited by millions of people all over India and Hindus living in other countries. The Mantra prays for arousing, activating, animating and manifesting our intellect and knowledge. The physical, sensual, material, is not neglected. Many upanishadas begin with the prayer: "Make Strong my limbs, my speed, my eyes, my ears, my vitals and other senses."

The Strengthening of body, nerves, vitality & mind and the strengthening of character, controlling desires and impulses, increasing powers of concentration and will, both the aims are organically linked. This is the basis of fruitful life. According to Ramswarup the lower mind is to be under control of the higher. Thus, a restful mind performs all the Purushartha (achieving the aims, achievements, targets, pleasures and fulfilling the duties). This is the purpose of education.

Ramswarup provided the facts and evidences that the Hindu educational system was economical and democratic. It was open to all irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Pupil belonging to widely different conditions shared a common life under a common teacher. Krishna-Sudama and Dhruvad-Dronacharya stories are famous. The same fact is depicted in jataka-stories and the descriptions about Taxila and other

great universities and centres of learning. Princes, nobles, merchants, craftsmen all studied together. This was prevalent till 18th century C.E. – the evidence have been provided by the Britishers themselves in their Educational Surveys and Reports, published in a collective form in Dharampal's famous collection – 'The Beautiful Tree.'

To sum up, Ramswarup was a great yogi and philosopher. He was the first Indian to bring the detailed facts into light about the mass-killing of farmers and innocent, virtuous people in USSR and China, in the name of Revolution, which was in fact, a heinous crime against humanity; and initially condoned by many church-leaders, Christians and diplomats of the Western Europe, who were later stunned to see the monstrous deeds of these political inhumans. In India, they had sympathies of Nehru and the socialist-communist groups. Even today, many BJP leaders are awed by the propagandist image of the left and remain afraid by the outrageous attacks launched under the cover of secularism by these fanatic monotheists, simply because the former have no idea about the international facts and human history. Even today, a communist propagandist like Irfan Habib abuses the RSS to hide the crimes against humanity committed by the communists and fanatic Islamists. No cultured Muslim has ever compared RSS with the ISIS but Irfan's propaganda is broadcast widely by the fellow-travellers in the media.

Shri Aurobindo has seen the demonic contents of communism but Ramswarup is the first scholar to present the details of these criminal acts in writing with all the supporting evidence, facts and figures. Now those facts were published in 'The Black Book of Communism' which perhaps no Indian politician has ever gone through.

Ramswarup was in close touch with J.P., Lohia and Ashok Mehta. They all read those facts. Only Dr. Lohia brought some of the facts in the national debates. No other leader even talked about the facts, even after the Chinese attack on India.

Ramswarup is the first scholar-philosopher who opened Islam for discussion in India, which was a taboo subject, thanks to the secularist-communist combine.

Ramswarup is the first philosopher initiating the study of Christianity and Islam from the Hindu perspective. Swami Vivekananda had spoken about the revelations of the Prophet and Messaih – both, in his lectures on Rajyoga, but it went unnoticed. Ramswarup discussed them thoroughly in his scholarly works and, therefore, attracted the most enlightened Europeans including Pagans.

Ramswarup is the first philosopher in India to write in English - 'The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods' and to present a study of human speech in its relation to man's deeper psyche and Dharmic consciousness.

His contributions are many. He was a powerful speaker. He was also an organizer who launched a scholarly Institution 'Brahmavadin'. He inspired many young minds of India and abroad. He was a tapaswi, throughout his life. His workplaces were Kolkata and Delhi. He inspired and encouraged Sitaram Goel to establish a publishing house. The 'Biblia Impex' was founded and it soon earned popularity worldwide. The books published from the house are upheld as works of scholarly value and presenting India's voice in contemporary international scenario.

Self-Awakening of India: The Life and Work of Dharampal¹

J.K. Bajaj*

Awareness of the subjugated spirit

Conquest subordinates the soul of people. Where it does not lead to the total physical annihilation of the conquered, as happened to the indigenous people of America and Australia, etc., it still extinguishes all their self-respect and all sense of human dignity. Living in fear of the conquerors and the coercive State apparatus designed by them, barred from all participation in the ordering of their own public affairs, conquered people tend to lose consciousness of the fact that they had once lived like ordinary human beings, that they had their own civilizational aims and ambitions, and they had their sciences and technologies, their arts and literature, their philosophies and ways of thought, and also the social, political and economic institutions through which they organised their lives in accordance with their preferences and aspirations.

That, like all conquest, the European conquest of India too will have such debilitating effect upon the Indians was understood, even at the early stages of British conquest, by the more perceptive of the men who came to rule over India. Thus, Thomas Munro, Governor from 1820 to 1827 of the then British Presidency of Madras, occupying about a third of the Indian land, wrote in 1824:

“It is an old observation, that he who loses his liberty loses half his virtue. This is true of nations as well as individuals. ... The enslaved nation loses the privileges of a nation as the slave does

those of a free man... the privilege of taxing itself, of making its own laws, of having any share in their administration, or in the general government of the country. British India has none of these privileges; it has not even that of being ruled by a despot of its own; for to a nation that has lost its liberty, it is still a privilege to have its own countryman and not a foreigner as its ruler... It is not the arbitrary power of a national sovereign, but subjugation to a foreign one, that destroys national character and extinguishes national spirit.”²

The life and work of Dharampal was moulded by an acute awareness of this subjugation of the Indian spirit. He, it seems, was blessed at an early stage with a deep insight into the state of mind of enslaved people. And all his life, he endeavoured to come to grips with and give appropriate expression to this insight. In his work, he described the ways in which this subjugation of the spirit manifests itself in various spheres of public life in India. He sketched the historical processes through which this subjugation was brought about. He presented glimpses of the various facets of Indian public life before the spirit was destroyed and the mind enslaved. And, he meditated on the ways out of this state of civilizational stupor, so that the Indian spirit and the Indian mind may be set free again and the Indian people may regain the virtue of being human.

Dharampal often recalled an anecdote from his childhood. It is from Lahore, where he spent his early years; he had his schooling in the D.A.V. School there and attended the elite Government College for a couple of years. In this city, now a part of the Pakistani Punjab, there was a statue of one of the more acclaimed British Governors of Punjab, Henry Lawrence. The statue showed Sir Lawrence holding a pen in one hand and a sword in the other, challenging the Punjabis to choose the one they wanted to be governed by. Dharampal remembered that the prominent inhabitants of the city were very worked up about this statue; they felt insulted by it. But the cause of their irritation was not in the idea of being governed by an alien officer. What they regretted was the suggestion of the use of force. They failed to understand why they—who were so docile and so willing to obey the *word* of their masters—were being threatened by the *sword*.

This was the state of subservience of the Indian mind that Dharampal started observing from his early days. Later, he was to find and record examples of equally humiliating and self-defeating adherence to the words of the departed rulers in independent India.

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The early recording of the subjugation

Dharampal's book on the functioning of Panchayat Raj institutions in Tamilnadu³ is a stunning account of the myriad ways in which we have bound ourselves to the rules and procedures that were originally framed to stifle all creativity and initiative of the people of India and to exclude them from participation in the ordering of their public life. In the sixties, Dharampal spent several years going around India to study these institutions of local self-government. Everywhere he found the Panchayats tied up in such a multiplicity of rules that there was no way they could have done anything meaningful.

The most telling instance of this slavery to the written rules that Dharampal came across is about the Panchayats of Tamilnadu being forced to observe Sabbath. Dharampal used to relate this experience, often with a certain relish, but also a great deal of pain at the state of things. In one of the villages, the Panchayat had not held any regular meeting for a long time. There were meetings on record, but the members had never met. When asked they said that there was no public place where they could meet. Dharampal suggested meeting in the school building; in Tamilnadu, almost all villages had a functioning school even then. But the members said that was impossible; they could not disturb the classes. Dharampal suggested meeting on Sundays. That, they said, was not allowed. According to the rules, no public transactions could take place on a Sunday.

Later, Dharampal found that this prohibition derived from a law made in England in the early nineteenth century, to enforce observance of Sabbath. India being part of a Christian empire then, the law was also made applicable here. In the Christian world, this and similar other laws must have been repealed long ago. The Panchayats in remote villages of Tamilnadu, however, were still tied down by it in Independent India

Lack of Indian spirit in the making of the Constitution

Dharampal's first published book, *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*,⁴ was also in a sense a depiction of this Indian persistence with alien structures. The book is a compilation of the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly on the subject; and, these proceedings in themselves are a poignant description of the depths of self-forgetfulness and servility that the Indian mind had reached.

The Indian freedom struggle was fought for achieving *swaraj*. This meant the polity of free India would be organised around institutions

and structures that were indigenous to India and were part of the Indian tradition. The elementary unit of indigenous political organisation was the locality or the *grama*, and the representative body of the locality, the Grama Panchayat, was the basic and inherently powerful political and administrative institution of this organisation. The Constitution of India, however, was drafted on the model of the western parliamentary democracies with the individual and not the locality forming the elementary unit of polity. The first draft of the Constitution did not even mention the term *grama*, or Panchayat.

This lack of even a reference to the foundational unit of Indian polity became a matter of public controversy. Later, when the Assembly took up the Draft for the Second Reading, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who had come to be regarded as more or less the sole architect of the Constitution, chose to face the issue head-on. Initiating the debate, he presented an account of his understanding of the negative role of the village communities in the history of India and went on to add with a rhetorical flourish: "What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit."⁵

Many members were stunned by this open castigation of what they believed to be the basic constituent units of the indigenous polity, and of the *swaraj* that they had fought for. Member after member rose to express his anguish, sorrow and disappointment at the attitude of the architect of the Constitution. They were shocked that those entrusted with the task of drafting the Constitution for free India had consulted a multitude of constitutions from diverse countries of the world and borrowed something or the other from many, but they had not felt the need to study the indigenous social and political arrangements. The members were puzzled as to how could such an alien Draft be presented as the Constitution of free India? They failed to understand how could the Draft Constitution of India be, as an honourable member from Orissa put it, so un-Indian, such an 'absolutely slavish imitation— nay, much more, a slavish surrender to the West.'⁶

Many of the participants in these proceedings sounded aggrieved and angry. But more than the anger and sorrow of the members, what comes through is their sense of helplessness to change the Draft in any significant sense. They were clear that the Draft went against all that they, in their minds, considered to be right, yet they had no idea how to put into practice what they had in their mind. Finally, they

accepted the Draft with the addition of one single sentence stating that: "The State shall take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."⁷ This sentence was put in the non-enforceable 'Directive Principles' part of the Constitution. Many members still felt aggrieved and their grief came out strongly during the debate on the Third Reading of the Draft Constitution. Nonetheless, they agreed to impose on the people of India a Constitution that they themselves had described as alien and foreign, and many of those who had condemned the proposed Constitution in the strongest terms later rose to occupy positions of high authority under the same Constitution.

This impotence that makes one accept alien structures even while knowing that these are against all, one holds right and proper is the essence of enslavement. Those who are enslaved for a long time lose the habits of thought and action of a free people, they lose the capacity to conceive and implement social, political and administrative structures that are in consonance with their own conscience, and thus choose to keep themselves tied by the structures of enslavement designed by the victors even after the victors have left. This impotence is what Munro described as the loss of human virtue of enslaved people.

Dharampal's compilation of the debates of the Constituent Assembly on the subject of *gram swaraj*, like all his other work, strongly conveys the sense of pain, anguish and confusion of people suffering the consequences of such loss of virtue.

Dharampal's early public activity

These two books on Panchayat institutions mark the culmination of one phase of Dharampal's life and work. This was when he directly and actively participated in public affairs and experimented with a variety of structures and organisations to help regenerate the village life in India. Dharampal's exposure to public activity began early. He was born in 1922, at a time when India was passing through a great resurgence of the national spirit. Lahore, where Dharampal spent his early years, was on the periphery of national politics. However, the awakened national spirit of the times was felt even there. Dharampal used to recall his participation in the processions that were taken out in protest against the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his associates. He also recalled the excitement of the 1929-1930 session of the Congress held in the city.

His serious initiation into political activity, however, occurred after 1940, when he shifted from Lahore to Meerut. Meerut was nearer his hometown of Kandhla in Muzafarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh. The move was intended to facilitate his entrance into the renowned engineering college at Roorkee. It, however, brought him into the vortex of nationalist politics. Those were the days of individual *satyagraha* that Mahatma Gandhi had initiated in October 1940. Dharampal got actively involved in it. Then came the Japanese invasion in December 1941. Dharampal was deeply affected by the event. In August 1942, he with a friend left for Bombay to hear Mahatma Gandhi launch the Quit India Movement. Like many young Indians, he became a participant in the Movement. In April 1943, he was picked up in Delhi and spent two months in police detention.

Around that time, he decided to begin acquainting himself with village life. He joined Mirabehn's Kisan Ashram on the Roorkee-Haridwar highway in 1944. During the 3 years he spent there, Dharampal came in close touch with the life of many villages around the Ashram and developed intimate rapport with the villagers.

In 1947, Mirabehn introduced him to Jayaprakash Narayan, who was to later support Dharampal and his work through all ups and downs. He was also introduced to Dr. Rammanohar Lohia and other socialist leaders in Delhi. At that time, Dr. Lohia and Smt. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya were establishing a Centre of the Congress Socialist Party for rehabilitation of displaced families from West Pakistan on a cooperative basis. Dharampal and his friends spent a lot of effort and time in arranging for the rehabilitation of about 400 families, who had come from Jhang and were camped in Kurukshetra, as a cooperative unit. The effort did not succeed.

First visit abroad and realisation of the essential differences

Dharampal then thought of going to Israel to study the *kibbutz*. Since it was not possible to go to Israel directly from India, he first travelled to England. He stayed there for about a year doing odd jobs and going around the country. He also met and married Phyllis Ellen Ford in the course of this year-long stay in England.

During his first visit abroad, Dharampal developed a thought that was to become the cornerstone of his work later. He used to recall that on reaching England and interacting with the people there, he felt that the people of India were not less bright or less creative compared to them, nor were they less industrious, but they were *different*. Their

ways, their attitudes and their seekings were all different. He began to realise that what he thought were the special individual attributes of the Europeans he came in contact with in India were largely the general cultural traits of the European man.

This idea, that people belonging to different cultures are different in an *essential* sense, that they cannot be made to act or think similarly, and that human ways cannot be universalised, remained with him and informed much of his work. In his later years, he used to express this idea even more strongly. He used to say that as in the forest there were a variety of animals, so in the world there were a variety of human beings. Different people could be as different from each other as cows and tigers. These different people could learn to live with each other, recognising and respecting their differences, and guarding against the annihilation of one by the other. But they could not learn to become like each other in a societal and cultural sense.

Another effort to establish a cooperative village

Dharampal returned to India in January 1950 and immediately began an effort to establish a cooperative village near Rishikesh. Mirabehn had been granted a chunk of land there for her Pashulok Trust. She gave some 700 acres of land, and Dharampal along with some friends founded on it a cooperative village of about 50 families. He persisted with this effort for 4 years. Notwithstanding his idealism and energy, he could not make the village into an ideal cooperative; it slowly settled down into the usual pattern of other villages of the region.

Dharampal left this village in early 1954. He did not see much role for himself there anymore. The experience left Dharampal with a strong sense of the futility of trying small idealistic experiments in community development. The world could not be changed, he came to believe by ignoring the mainstream and building tiny enclaves of ideal life outside it.

Second visit to England

In 1954, Dharampal left for England once again. This time he stayed there for almost three years. This was a period of intense thought and reflection for him. He seemed to have arrived at a fairly complete view of the world at this time. His earlier ideas about the intrinsic diversity of civilisations and cultures became clearer and better defined in his mind. He even began to look upon these diversities as clues to the past and future evolution of world history. He began to meditate on the future

condition of various cultures, countries and civilisations in this unfolding drama of diverse human ways and seekings trying to work themselves out in their respective geographies and environments.

A new experiment in voluntary work

Dharampal returned to India towards the end of 1957 and, with some friends, began exploring the possibility of an association of voluntary agencies. After about a year, the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) was launched in Delhi with Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya as its President and Dharampal as the General Secretary. Later, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan became the President of AVARD. Dharampal worked for AVARD for almost seven years.

AVARD was devoted to the 'promotion and strengthening of voluntary effort by helping in the exchange of experiences and ideas and by conducting research and evaluation studies.' Dharampal's concept of voluntary effort, however, covered a wide range. He defined voluntary effort essentially as the variety of spontaneous activities that the people of India had been traditionally undertaking at the level of the community and the locality through their own indigenous institutional structures. Through AVARD, Dharampal wanted to explore the possibility of reviving these structures and finding ways of integrating these with the larger Indian polity, which had unfortunately been monopolized by the State and State-inspired institutions.

This dichotomy between the seekings and the ways of the people, and those of the State in India, had begun to worry Dharampal rather seriously during this period. He had no patience with what he called the 'semi-official voluntary agencies' which—with the patronage of the State and external agencies, and under the misconceived notion that extension of the power and the ways of the miniscule westernized sector of India amounted to revolutionary change in Indian society—were competing with the traditional institutions of voluntary action and constricting the space available to them.

An open letter to Prime Minister Nehru

The most noteworthy of Dharampal's actions during this period, however, was the open letter he sent to all Members of Parliament strongly castigating Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for his weak response to the Chinese invasion of 1962. In this, he gave vent to all his pent-up anger at the inanities of Indian public life: the meaningless

exhortations to the people to help the country achieve this and that without making any effort to evolve institutional arrangements to facilitate their participation in nation building, and the insincere and un-redeemable promises of leading the country to some glorious future or the other without having any idea of what the task involved and how to go about it. Nehru to a large extent epitomized these wishy-washy attitudes of men and women in public life in India; Dharampal's anger against all this burst out against him.

The letter was delivered on November 21 to the houses of all Members of Parliament in Delhi. Three weeks later, Dharampal and his friends who had signed the letter with him were arrested and lodged in the Tihar jail, where they spent almost two months.

First exposure to archival data

Towards the end of 1963, Dharampal joined the All India Panchayat Parishad and initiated a study of the functioning of statutory Panchayat systems in India, especially in Tamilnadu. We have referred to this study earlier. An important aspect of this study was that it led Dharampal to the archival material on India, and thus he was launched on the second phase of his life and work, the phase that took him through his painstaking but highly rewarding re-discovery of the history and genius of India.

While exploring the antecedents of the Panchayat system as it was implemented in many States through statutory arrangements during the fifties, Dharampal noticed that these were a rehash of similar arrangements that had been evolving since the 1880's under the British administration. To reconstruct the process of this evolution, he spent many months in the archives at Madras during 1964 and 1965. He summarized the conclusions of this study in his book on the Madras Panchayat System and also in many of the letters that he wrote during this period.

The experience left Dharampal with a strong conviction that nothing meaningful could be done to ameliorate the condition of India until the structures of enslavement evolved during the two hundred years of British rule were completely overthrown.

Rewriting of Indian history: Detailed archival research

This rewriting of the history of India in a more objective manner was too big a task to be undertaken by any single individual. Dharampal

was conscious of the magnitude of the task, yet he decided to begin an exploration into the early records of the British administration in India. The materials for such an exploration are located mainly in the British archives. Therefore, in early 1966, he left for Britain.

For the next decade or so, Dharampal immersed himself fully in various British archives, especially in the India Office Library and the British Museum. The material he saw in the archives fully confirmed what he had previously surmised about the functioning of Indian State and Society from his experiences in Madras and elsewhere in India.

The material collected in this period led to the publication of three pioneering books, which detailed the Indian ways of organisation and modes of functioning in three specific facets of social living: politics, science and technology, and education. These books, through the wealth of irrefutable information they present, have over time led to a fresh appreciation of the eighteenth century India in many informed circles.

Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition: With Some Early Nineteenth Century Accounts⁸

This book narrates the story of a widespread civil disobedience campaign waged during 1810-1811 by the people of Benaras, Patna, Saran, Murshidabad and Bhagalpur against the attempt of the British administration to impose a new tax on houses and shops. This event, which happened early in the British period, had an uncanny resemblance to Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns of the 1920's and 1930's. The British were baffled by the spontaneity and intensity of the campaign, and by the vast resources of communication and organisation that the communities and localities involved were able to call forth.

The major aspect of this story is the glaring difference between the concepts of the relation between the State and Society that the two adversaries in this conflict, the Indian people and the British administrators held. For the British, the essence of this relation was in the subservience of the people to the State. From their viewpoint, there was no possibility of any dialogue or interaction between the ruler and the ruled, except as between the giver and the supplicant. The Indian people on the other hand seemed to have looked upon this relationship in more symmetrical terms, which called for a dignified and continuing dialogue and interaction between the two. The story narrated in the book is the tragic story of how these two differing viewpoints came in direct conflict in the early nineteenth century India, and how the actors

involved completely failed to understand the manners and ways of each other.

The view of the British administrators, of course, prevailed and it continues to form the basis of the relationship between the State and Society in Independent India. It is not, therefore, surprising that the people of India in general continue to harbour the sense of sullenness and apathy towards the doings of the State that the Collector of Benares had noticed after the people had been coerced into leaving the public sphere and return to their homes, in the early nineteenth century.

Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: *Some Contemporary European Accounts*⁹

This book of Dharampal on the science and technology traditions of India is much better known than his book on the political traditions that we have mentioned above. It generated great interest when it was first published in 1971. It was widely reviewed and attracted both scholarly and lay attention. Since then it has become one of the basic texts for anyone interested in learning about Indian sciences and technologies.

The book not only presents a graphic picture of the scientific and technological practices of pre-British India, it also puts these in the perspective of the ways and attributes of the Indian society and civilisation, and describes how the scholarly appreciation of those practices slowly changed from one of almost awe-struck admiration to that of ridiculing dismissal as the Indian society began to disintegrate under the military, political and economic onslaught of the British. Over time, the scholarship on India became another arm of the British invasion. While the military, political and economic onslaught undermined the viability of the Indian arrangements in physical and material terms, the scholarly onslaught began to undermine the moral, intellectual and ideological basis of Indian civilisation. The educated Indian mind was so crippled by the latter onslaught that it came to believe in its own incompetence in all spheres of human thought and action, and especially in the sphere of scientific and technological imagination and practice. A sobering realisation of this mental crippling is the dominant impression left by a reading of Dharampal's Preface to this book. The collected accounts of the scientific and technological practices of just two centuries ago, however, also evoke the elevating thought that the images of incompetence that come so instinctively to our minds do not correspond to the reality of India.

The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Education in the Eighteenth Century¹⁰

This third book of Dharampal based on his archival research in Britain presents detailed documentary accounts of the state of education in India as perceived by early British administrators and other European observers. The evidence collected in this volume conclusively proves that India was never an illiterate society; school education was widespread across different regions and different communities, including the communities that the British administrators later listed as the Scheduled Castes. The proportion of children of school-going age attending school in India was probably much higher than the corresponding proportion in Britain of that time.

This book, even more than the other two, has had a deep impact upon the scholarly and lay understanding of pre-British India. The three books together have given many young Indians the confidence to hold their heads high as proud carriers of a great civilizational tradition.

Awakening the youth

Dharampal's intensive studies in the British archives more or less came to an end in 1975 with the imposition of the emergency regime in India. He and some of his friends in Britain got together to launch the *Save J. P. Campaign*; Dharampal spent the next two years as part of this campaign.

He returned to India in 1977 after the withdrawal of the emergency. The *Janata* regime that came to power then drew its legitimacy and inspiration from Jayaprakash Narayan. This encouraged Dharampal to interact closely with the new regime, especially in Bihar, and try to see how his ideas of bringing the ways of the Indian people back into the mainstream could be put into practice. His interaction with the State system and his efforts to help mould it in conformity with the ways of the people and to make it serve their ends, however, ended up in frustration. He found the best intentioned attempts of the then Chief Minister of Bihar, Karpoori Thakur, checkmated either in the maze of bureaucratic rules and regulations, or in the intricacies of conflicting political interests.

From about 1980 onwards, particularly after moving to Sevagram in 1982, Dharampal went around the country lecturing on varied subjects and interacting with young people in various institutions. Through his lectures and informal dialogues, he conveyed the picture of the

vigorously functioning pre-British Indian society as he had seen it in the archival records. He also related how the British went about dismantling the social, political and economic structures of India, and in their place created organisations and systems that militated against the ways and sensibilities of the Indian people. He thus created a small group of young people, dispersed across the country, who understood his thoughts and shared his vision. Some of his lectures of this period, especially the series of lectures at Pune, Bangalore, Calcutta and Bikaner, have been published and widely circulated.

Rediscovering the Soul: Bharatiya, Chitta, Manas and Kala

Having had a glimpse of the Indian society in its varied social, economic, cultural, political and technological manifestations through his long study and reflections, Dharampal began to feel that he had somehow failed to look into the spirit that conceives, animates and regulates these distinctive Indian ways of functioning. He felt that the various facets of the Indian way that he had seen through his historical researches were merely physical manifestations of the essential Indian consciousness. Indian ways arise from the Indian conception of the universe and its unfolding in time, and from the Indian understanding of man's place in the cosmic design. A comprehension of these basic Indian conceptions is essential for a proper understanding of the Indian ways.

Motivated by such thoughts, Dharampal turned to the classical literature of Indian civilisation, especially to the *Puranas* and the *Itihasas*. And, he quickly put together an initial picture of the essential contours of Indian consciousness in a slim volume entitled, *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala*.¹¹ This book, in a sense, forms the epitome of his work, though he did publish several other books in his later years.

A journey that began with an acute perception of the enslavement of the Indian mind thus went on to unfold the intricacies of both the mind and its physical manifestation in the life of India. The Indian world of the mind and the body politic that Dharampal reconstructed for us seems extraordinarily rich, harmonious and beautiful. India may not yet be ready to reclaim and come back to this Indian world. But India shall certainly come back. The day cannot be too far—because as the Indians have always known, time keeps turning around, all things change, and decay is inevitably followed by regeneration.

Dharampal died in 2006 at the ripe old age of 84 in the Sevagram Ashram, from where Mahatma Gandhi had once led the people of India

in their extraordinary struggle to free themselves from the long ages of slavery through means that were fashioned in the crucible of Indian civilisation.

Notes

1. Abstracted from yet to be published biography of Sri Dharampal of the same title by the author.
2. Thomas Munro, *Minute Reviewing the Condition of the Country and People, Stating His Sentiments as to How It May be Improved*, 31 December 1824. Quoted from Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p.292.
3. Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System, Vol. II: A General Assessment*, Impex India, Delhi, 1972.
4. Dharampal, *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity: An Exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*, Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, New Delhi, 1962.
5. Quoted from *ibid*, p.25.
6. Loknath Misra, from Orissa General constituency, participating in the debate on the Second Reading of the Draft Constitution. Quoted from *ibid*, p.29
7. Article 31 A of the Draft Constitution; this forms Article 40 of the Constitution of India. Quoted from *ibid*, p.18.
8. Dharampal, *Civil Disobedience and the Indian Tradition: With Some Early Nineteenth Century Accounts*, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, 1971.
9. Dharampal, *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: Some Contemporary European Accounts*, Impex India, Delhi; 1971.
10. Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, Biblia Impex, New Delhi, 1983.
11. Dharampal, *Bhartiya, Chitta, Manas and Kala*, Pushpa Prakashn, Patna (Hindi) and Centre for Policy Studies, Madras, 1991 (English).

Dharampal: Beyond Categories

Pawan Kumar Gupta*

Dharampal is one of those few profound thinkers, who are yet to be understood and acknowledged as one of the greatest minds to understand the roots of the problems that we as a country are suffering from and also gave clues about the directions that we need to move towards. He is known as a historian but it would be more appropriate to call him a socio-political philosopher.

Everything is interconnected and Dharampal was acutely conscious of this. He always sought connections between seemingly unconnected objects, customs, practices, events, ideas and happenings. For him nothing was insignificant right down to the smallest of insects, bacteria, different species of trees and shrubs, forest, animals, rituals and customs. He had an amazing power of observation and listening skill and the ability to connect not just the obvious and tangible but even that which seem to lie in intangible and apparently unrelated categories. This ability to see the relationship between unrelated things and events (separated by space and time) has been there in our 'uneducated' ordinary person; our (folk) traditional knowledge is all about this but somewhere the educated have lost it. The way our ordinary people can predict weather conditions, the droughts or floods, the presence or absence of good quality underground water has a different logic which is beyond the capacity of the modern educated person who is obsessed with the answer to the question 'why' and has gotten used to only linear logical thinking which he calls rationality; he is convinced that to understand things one needs to only satisfy the question 'why' and 'how,' in the process often ignoring the most fundamental of all

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enquiries, 'what.' The only exception with such a mind in the last century was perhaps Mahatma Gandhi who, for example saw a connect between making of salt and agitating the Indian people which could not be fathomed either by the British or his colleagues and followers, because it defied (modern linear) logic. Perhaps Dharampalji developed this kind of non linear thinking deriving inspiration from Gandhiji and/ or observing how the ordinary Indian perceives and makes connections. Dharampalji was impressed with what Gandhiji was able to achieve in a short span of time and his unconventional manners.

Dharampalji was deeply concerned and pained by the morass in which our country had fallen. He was very uncomfortable with the state of affairs and was constantly seeking a way out. His research led him to believe that the ordinary Indian had an intuitive understanding of the fundamentals of life and before the modern State started interfering with their daily life in different and insidious ways, by and large, led a life according to this understanding which was autonomous, comfortable, sustainable, easy going and fairly harmonious. He did not believe in utopia and for him life was not black or white but had all shades. But he believed that there was something in the ordinary collective understanding of India which gave rise to social systems which ensured a fairly easy comfortable life for the ordinary person and thus also large part of the population, till the arrival of the British when local systems got violently disrupted and devastated through direct or indirect interventions, to such an extent that in due course of time, they got erased from the (conscious) memory of our people. However, remnants still exist in certain disconnected practices and customs and perhaps in the collective memory of the ordinary Indians. He believed that if these ordinary people were allowed to lead a life of their own making without the obvious and veiled interference of the State, people will slowly, in time, develop their own ways which would revive India. Of course there may be chaos and disorder for a while but if they were to be left alone they would find their own solutions and come up in due course. A very radical approach indeed, but then Dharampal was a radical, an out-of-box thinker who was concerned with the essentials and not the details, which have an organic way of working out on its own. He also believed that the way India and the world were going – towards free market economy, globalization etc. – was fast reducing the space for the ordinary – be it person, activities or ways – and nothing could be worse than that. Hence he did not mind short-term disorder if finally things could settle down for a better future. After all temporary disorder was part of life too.

Like Gandhiji he did not believe in a good and comfortable life for a few where the larger majority could not lead a life of dignity and had to constantly toil to merely survive. He believed the modern 'development' agenda only served a minority of 'experts' and powerful, who were adept at exploiting the system, but not the ordinary. He was concerned at the rapidly changing world of only the experts and specialists where they were the decision and policy makers and where the ordinary had no say. What a farce 'democracy' has become.

He was convinced that the world was, more or less, moving in the same direction since the European invasions started about 500 years ago. In these 500 years, the methods and instruments of exploitation and violence have been greatly refined and have become invisible and remote. One could identify the exploiter and the violator earlier, now they had become remote and invisible, but perhaps because of this they have become even more dangerous. This was modernity and modern systems. Education had played a big role in encouraging these tendencies by making the exploited an accomplice in this larger game plan. In this context he often referred to a (documented) conversation between the US President Franklin Roosevelt and British Ambassador to the US in 1944 where he advised the Ambassador to make sure "India remained in the Western orbit," after independence. The biggest obstacle in this was the one and only Mahatma Gandhi.

Dharampalji was sharp at connecting dots. He felt the Asian Relations Conference organized at the behest of Mahatma Gandhi in March-April 1947 was extremely significant. This event was in alignment with Gandhiji's attempt to forge a world view and an agenda for the world as different from that forged, pursued and pushed by the West through every means at its disposal. Unfortunately, the Mahatma did not live very long after that and almost the entire leadership of India within and outside the Congress had no inkling of what this different world view would be. It was only a mind like Dharampal who could notice the significance of Netaji Subhas Bose naming his political front as "'forward' block" (perhaps to counter Gandhiji's effort to take India back to its villages). In this context it is also significant to read Mahatma Gandhi's address to the striking mill workers in Ahmedabad on March 17, 1918 where he sighted two great and highly respected leaders of the Indian National Movement – Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya and Bal Gangadhar Tilak – who were considered to be leaning towards the more conservative politics as compared to the liberals in the Congress. Here the Mahatma makes it clear that there was hardly any difference in

the vision of India between the Indian liberals and conservatives, that both had the same vision – to 'see India in the European way.' This can be said of today's political scenario too. There is no difference between the 'development' agenda of BJP and the Congress or the leftists. Mahatma had a radically different view which was hardly understood by any of his admirers and followers.

The general direction being pursued since the 15th/16th century was that of control of resources, territories and people through direct intervention which was later refined to indirect control through economic, technological and educational systems to name the most significant. Different countries and the world will be governed by few in the name of democracy through instruments of modern system. The space for the ordinary would be reduced to such an extent that they will be kept busy just to survive with no time to relax, think and challenge. Therefore, he was keen to study the world and the basis of relationships between people and different countries prior to the era of colonization. This curiosity led him to the great Chinese captain of 300 ships, Zheng He, much before both the *Time* and *Newsweek* carried cover stories on him. Zheng travelled several times to India in early 15th century and landed in Calicut with a large number of vessels and men, but not to wage a war or trade, unlike the voyages in the past 500 years. This aroused Dharampal's curiosity to understand that world gone by, but he could not pursue this study for lack of support from his colleagues including the author of this article.

Dharampal's approach was intuitive, speculative and contemplative. He had respect for the great scientists from the West. He enjoyed Feynman's writings. I think this was because Feynman was original in his thinking. Everyday life was important to him and did not confine himself within the boundaries of 'physics' and had a sense of humour. Anyone with the ability to *see* without any frameworks and getting confined by disciplines or categories will ultimately be able to see truth. He also had a certain respect for the West as he felt they were being authentic to themselves. They had developed their thought, their innovations, their systems and all these were in alignment with the way they were. It was not so in India. He disliked the hypocrisy of the modern educated Indians, our tendency to exaggerate, to glorify the past, the laziness, the lack of rigour and perseverance. He disliked falsity and ridiculed hollowness of words, moral sermons and idealism.

Dharampal had the sharpness to distinguish between the classical and its impact on the people at large; the way the classical got

transformed and distorted by the time it impacted the common person, which often was very different from original. He also made a distinction between the classical and the (*desi*) folk and had huge respect for the folk while acknowledging and deferring to the classical. Dharampalji listened very attentively to ordinary people – men and women - and was ever eager to know about their social customs, practices, idioms, phrases and belief systems and then he would try and speculate where they may have come from, their philosophical origins and how commonality existed in these fundamentals, between different regions of the country. He was perhaps the first intellectual to discover “Guruji,” Ravindra Sharma of Adilabad, Telangana who had great knowledge of the Indian traditional social systems, pursued and lived by our various *jatis* and tribes. Through Ravindra Sharma he got to learn about the repository of knowledge that existed in different *jati puranas* which can give us a clue into the way our people have perceived themselves, their past, reality, their imaginations and ways of thinking. For Dharampal self-image was of utmost importance. His research and listening to a *jati purana* at Ravindra Sharma’s ashram made him wonder how our people perceived themselves, their high self-esteem, before the arrival of the British and how our self-image had taken a beating after that. Having spent a large part of his childhood and adult life with artisan communities to learn their crafts, Ravindra Sharma, “Guruji” could reconstruct the beauty of the social systems of the village life. How different *jatis* co-existed harmoniously within a village and within a cluster of villages. This corroborated Dharampal’s own research and what Mahatma Gandhi often said in passing. This triumvirate of Mahatma Gandhi, Dharampal and Ravindra Sharma has a lot to teach us today if we are interested in understanding our people, their systems and practices and to cull out the essential principles of harmony and a non-aggressive way of living. Co-existence demands diversity and a society where each community looks at oneself with a certain sense of pride, have their own norms and practices, while giving ample space to other communities; a society where, because of diversity, comparisons are minimized.

His seminal historical research led him to speculate about the state of affairs in India before the arrival of the British. The research was only a milestone or a tool for him to understand India, the West and the Indian people and not to glorify the past. He connected his research with what Mahatma Gandhi said in passing many a times. In fact Mahatma Gandhi’s address at Chatham House, London in 1931 about

the great state of education in India a century ago, encouraged Dharampalji to dive deep into British archival records, to validate what Gandhiji had said and which had created quite a storm among the British at that time. As he went deeper into the research, he developed a strong feeling that the Mahatma had a good idea of India’s recent past and a deep understanding of life that a common Indian had. That is why he developed a great respect for both the Mahatma and the intellect of the common Indian. In a way Dharampal’s research validated many of the things Gandhiji referred to in passing. At the same time he was not a Gandhian in the typical sense and was certainly not a blind *bhakta*. He differed from the Mahatma on many accounts but had huge admiration for his courage, resolve, self-confidence and understanding of India and its people as well as his understanding of the West.

For Dharampal it was not important that Gandhiji was referred to as Mahatma. What aroused his curiosity were the reasons why and how he came to be referred as Mahatma so soon after his arrival in India in 1915 and accepted by one and all, right from the great poet Rabindranath Tagore to the common Indian living in a remote village. He liked speculating about such issues, as they gave him clues into understanding the not so obvious but powerful ways, in which societies function, accept and reject ideas and people despite odds. He used his research, intuitive capabilities and imagination to speculate and draw a hazy picture of the past and make projections into the future. I think Mahatma Gandhi and people like Ravindra Sharmaji helped him in this.

He was an avid reader but his comprehension was different from most others who also read profusely. He would be fully aware of not only what was written but also the context – the socio-political times when the book was written, the history of the author and his/her world view, the influences on the author etc. Therefore, he could get much more out of the book than an ordinary reader. He was acutely aware of categories of thought, categories which traps us into thinking in a certain fashion while making us oblivious to other ways of thinking. Our educated have by and large lost our indigenous categories and we have become enslaved and are not even aware of this enslavement. This is the reason the educated has no communication with the ordinary Indian and in the process has lost out on a whole set of categories, world view and knowledge system.

He was deeply concerned about the loss of dignity, sensitivity, *parasparta* (nearest English equivalent – togetherness) and compassion in the Indian society. He made a distinction between remaining firm and

being rude. I think he was a man without attachment not even to his own research findings, not to the ideal of Mahatma Gandhi, certainly not to India's glorious past, an idea he did not even entertain. He believed India was a functioning and relaxed society where people were allowed to live with dignity. And he felt this could and should be the goal of every society. His pain was that we have become dysfunctional. The (modern) systems imposed on us, which had penetrated the most private and sacred spaces of our lives were violent, exploitative and were not in consonance with the Indian *swabhava* (characteristic or nature) and therefore our ordinary people found it alien and difficult to function within them.

There were very few 'shoulds' in Dharampalji's vocabulary. He observed things dispassionately and was acutely aware that even the most noble intent and action may result in violent outcomes for a while. At the same time he was pained by the violence and devastation that this country had suffered in the last many centuries. He felt the process of revival and resurgence will require us to have tremendous faith in our ordinary people. This would require understanding of our past, courage and patience. The process would be painful in the short run and we had to be prepared for this. After such violent innings there was no smooth transition to a functioning society. Dharampal derived his faith from his own research findings corroborated by Mahatma Gandhi and ordinary but Indian intellectuals (who must not be bracketed in any category) like Ravindra Sharmaji. Dharampal himself was beyond categories.

Dharampal has largely not been fully understood. A section of the society uses him to glorify our past, others ignore him because if they acknowledge him they will be forced to challenge their own assumptions. Only a part of his research work has been published. There is a lot of work unfinished. He needs to be understood not merely read. He can help us imagine different possibilities for ourselves and perhaps the world, by connecting us with our past, which is different from 'going back,' as many fear.

Lohia's Understanding of India and its Religio - Cultural Identity

Prof. R.C. Shah*

As an impulsive socio-political thinker rather than an ideologue, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia had a unique 'presence' in our post-independence political scenario. It's not only *The Wheel of History*, his first major work that articulates this 'presence' for us, but also a very extensive collection of his famous speeches in and out of his parliamentary performance. This occasional character of his writings does not detract from their intrinsic value as thought: in fact it lends them an urgency and a persuasive passionate integrity, that is rarely found among politicians. No one else among his illustrious contemporaries including Pt. Nehru had quite this unique blend of fiery patriotism and social compassion rooted in an instinctive grasp of ground reality.

Surprisingly enough, 'religion' seems to occupy more space than culture in his thinking on nation-building as well as national integrity. Unity of India as a nation was the overriding concern, the master-passion of his life – the motivating force behind his political engagements. If we delve deep into his understanding and interpretation of India's history, we find it to be defined and determined by the apparently paradoxical texture and inevitably complex and contradictory elements of Hindu religion. What distinguishes his problematizing of this history as well as its contemporary manifestation is his somewhat reductionist logic which insists on interpreting this problem in terms of two plain categories: the category of the liberal Hindu on the one hand, and the orthodox Hindu on the other hand. He envisages a resolution

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of the internal contradictions in terms of this division, in which the dominance of the liberal has to be ensured. His characterization of religion as 'long-term politics' and of politics as 'short-term religion' has to be understood in this context. He is the only major politician of modern India, who has highlighted the primacy of the mythological figures of Ram, Krishna and Siva as the most deeply entrenched archetypal symbols shaping and determining the collective consciousness of Indian people as a whole. No politician or social thinker in our recent history has established the living relevance of our two great epics in such glowing terms. No one has sought to embody them as part of their socio-political agenda.

This is by no means a tacit approval of whatever Lohia has to say about Hindu religion and mythology. He is no metaphysician; and his religious sensibility or sense of the sacred stops short of the meditative insights of the nineteenth and twentieth century living exemplaries of Indian wisdom and praxis like Aurobindo. But politics is not the arena of that kind of spiritual wisdom as the case of Aurobindo himself illustrates it. It's not for nothing that Indian spirituality itself in the course of its evolution came to be divided into two mutually incompatible strands: Vedic and non-Vedic (Jainism & Buddhism). After Buddha, the Indian mind has become inescapably dialectical. Lohia is different and his socialism too is much more flexible and accommodative of the mainstream Hinduism. His historic sense as well as political praxis lays much more emphasis on the *Saguna* (concrete) rather than the *Nirguna* (abstract & unqualified). Similarly, in spite of his ideological commitment to the Gandhian way of resisting evil, he is very skeptical about the philosophy of non-attachment. In fact, he laments the lack of passionate involvement in the Indian temperament and scale of values. He exhorts us to accept passion (i.e., 'Raga') as a life-affirming positive value and wants our politics to orient itself accordingly.

'The Ramayan' and 'The Mahabharat' constitute for Lohia the greatest civilizational resources which India has created to ensure the geographical as well as the historical continuity as well as unity of the country as well as the nation. In fact, he is the pioneer thinker, who looks upon the epics as the inexhaustible source of politically effective spiritual commonsense. The epics in his view are not just a remote literary and religious heritage; but intrinsically capable of guiding and moulding the modern Indian character and behavioural patterns. Of course, some of Lohia's readings and conclusions may appear to be rather controversial and motivated by exigency and strategical

considerations; but when we compare him with other political leaders of his time, he seems to be the most daringly innovative and provocative intellectual among politicians. After all, it cannot be mere coincidence, that no other political leader has had such an impact on our literary and artistic milieu. He was the most sensitive, the most responsive and responsible intellectual whose concern about the destiny of his country was by no means unrelated to the global context: He thought of his country in the live context of the whole world.

How can a sensitive-vulnerable mind like Lohia's protect itself from the dilutions and simplifications inherent in the very nature of political activism? Aurobindo's *Essays on Gita* sound much more profound and insightful than Gandhi's commentary on the same text. But then, Aurobindo gave up his revolutionary politics in search of an equally result-oriented, but indirect and remote praxis – that of an evolutionary as well as revolutionary spirituality – an apparent deviation from the traditional Indian religio-spiritual practice. He too is experimental like his polar opposite Gandhi – both experimenting on themselves. But Gandhi's *satyagraha* – which Lohia too adopted and followed in his own way – inspired the front-line of freedom-fighters and produced a mass-movement of unprecedented force and impact. But the partition as well as the subsequent developments in post-independence Indian political scenario compel us to think in terms of a comparative reevaluation of the pre-Gandhian as well as the post-Gandhian phases of India's struggle for freedom.

Lohia divided Gandhians into three categories: *Sarkari*, *Mathi* and *Kujat*. He linked himself to the last category and in fact – a retrospective consideration of the post-independence political scenario should convince us that if there was any future for Gandhian politics, it was in the hands of socialists like Lohia, who had the mental as well as the moral capacity and equipment to carry forward the legacy of Gandhi in combination with the best possible ideas of a home-made socialism, which had no illusions about Marxism. It was Lohia who described Marxism as "the last weapon of the Imperialist West against Asia." Gandhi's example and precept had instilled in Lohia the hard-earned lessons of anti-colonialism. He was the one intellectual and natural leader who could have evolved a grass-roots *desi* alternative and equivalent to the alien ideology of Marxism – Communism – giving in that process a new lease of life to the best in Gandhian socio-political achievements as well. This did not happen; and the socialist party never came up to the expectations it had roused as the worthy political

successor of Gandhi's *satyagraha* with all its socially effective potential. The in-built chaos and lack of cohesion and concerted action within the party and its think-tanks is one reason of this failure. But, one has to delve deeper into the malaise.

The greatest discovery of India – the greatest of its gifts to humanity as a whole is the religion as well as the philosophy of the 'Self,' which is the only foolproof way of unifying the world and humanity as a whole. Time – and history too – has proved beyond all doubt that the claims of the so-called world-religions of speaking, thinking and acting for the whole of humanity are hollow at the core. What inspires and motivates them is what Aldous Huxley calls 'Theological Imperialism;' and not at all the Reality, that lies just behind the universal sense of 'I am' – that every human being on earth is endowed with; and which is the only first-hand fact in the possession of every human being on earth. The perceiving centre is not the personal body and mind: it is as universal as the light that illumines everything. Thus, "'I am' is the ultimate fact and 'who am I?' is the ultimate question to which everybody must find an answer" – as Nisargadutt – the latest in the inexhaustible line of Indian sages from primordial times to the late twentieth century – says. This basic truth – this common sense of the soul cuts across all religions and philosophies, including the *Nirguna-Saguna* dichotomy, with which Dr. Rammanohar Lohia was so obsessed.

Lohia does not ignore the philosophical-metaphysical aspect of religion. But, in his own uniquely strange and provocative language, he says something, which you can find elsewhere too, but in his way of articulating it, it acquires a tantalizingly new and acrid flavour. According to Lohia, the philosophical viewpoint behind the Hindu religion is based on and motivated by the search for Absolute Truth: the unqualified, colourless attribute-less 'Essence' is the only truth for it; Qualified, *saguna* truth and creation itself is, according to this viewpoint, comparatively speaking, truth of a very inferior order. Not only that, Hinduism has succeeded in making this tenet the permanent centre of the religious faith of the people – thus depriving all action, all endeavour of substance and value. There is no real motive left for improvement of actual conditions of life. Whatever can bring about a welcome change in the human condition – all the incentive for progress, all scientific and secular endeavour to transform living conditions are thus rendered futile and pointless. Lohia further notes that this search for the Absolute Truth is found in other religions also; but this does not become the dominant and all-devouring concern of their existence and behaviour.

Their search for the ultimate truth by no means becomes an impediment to progress and social change. Hindu religion on the other hand, according to Lohia, could never liberate itself from this stultifying and negationist philosophical foundation of their religion. In the name of '*Nirguna Satya*, it went on ignoring the concrete particulars of actual personal and social life. Lohia goes on to say that, "it is this neglect of the *Saguna* life in favour of the abstract *Nirguna*, that is responsible for the tragic spectacle of the simultaneous presence in Hindu society and civilisation of philosophical equality of all beings on the one hand; and the dirtiest social disparities and oppressions on the other hand." ... Unless and until – Lohia further adds: 'the Hindu learns to accept the concrete realities of life and world in the light of scientific and secular knowledge, he will neither be able to cure himself of this hopelessly divided mentality, nor will ever be able to put an end to this extreme orthodoxy that has vitiated his religion.'

At the same time, however, Lohia's ever wakeful discernment enables him to realize and emphasize another deeply embedded characteristic of Hindu religiosity: the intense emotional conviction of the unity of all life. Why then, such a hopeless stagnation and squalor? That precisely is the life-long anguish of Lohia; and it is while confronting this glaring contradiction that he makes a most startling statement. He says that "If Europe is dying because of the quarrels born out of its solitary acceptance of *Saguna Satya* (i.e. concrete truth) only, India, on the other hand is languishing because of the inactivity and lethargy owing to its indifference to the concrete facts of life and commitment to the *Nirguna Parmatma* (abstract spirit). This statement from Lohia comes as a surprise to us, because our familiarity with his thought so far had hardly prepared us for it. But, we expect him to delve deeper into this observation and here he disappoints us by not pursuing it further. Of course, he does raise the question: "Can't we combine the scientific spirit of enquiry with this intense intuition of unity?" Not only this; we find him stressing yet another fact, that disturbs our self-complacence. To quote his own words: "Even in its prosperous and 'free' ages, India never evinced any interest or curiosity about the material or intellectual concerns or discoveries of other countries." What does this indifference of the independent Hindu towards other civilizations indicate? And how is it that during his days of political slavery this very Hindu becomes a carbon copy – a mere imitation of his masters?" Aren't both these remarks true? And aren't they like the two sides of the same coin? Now place this observation beside Lohia's another remark, that,

“only the liberal Hindu can establish and maintain a stable nation or state.”

Now let us remind ourselves of Aurobindo’s thesis in *Life Divine* that on the one hand, there is the progressive chariot of the Western Civilization which has driven them into the ‘materialist denial’; and, on the other hand, there is this world – negating Indian religion which has condemned it to reap the bitter harvest of its ‘Ascetic Refusal’. We turned away from the God of Life; and that has led us not only into collective defeat and subjection to alien invaders, but also into spiritual decline and stagnation. But we should not forget the parallel fact that it was the same Aurobindo, who gave the most trenchant and resounding rebuttal to the western critics of Indian culture in his *Foundations of Indian Culture*. Could we find some common ground between the viewpoints of these two leaders of our times?

The deepest anguish of Lohia is this: that in Indian culture, both the highest and the lowest tendencies are found together in a hopelessly confused co-existence. At the same time, however, he explores and finds the possibilities of the cure of this malaise in a critical research and experimental application of the positive elements within Hinduism itself. That’s why he proposes a thorough re-reading and revaluation of the epics as well as of Ram and Krishna and Siva. He ignores the invasive, intolerant and expansionist tendencies of other world-religions. Nor does he underline the need of assessing the self-defensive gestures of the terribly long besiegement of Hindu religious culture by foreign invaders and the consequent distortions and degeneration inflicting it. The much-advertised ‘Unity in Diversity’ of Hinduism does not impress Lohia. On the contrary, he sees nothing, but the seeds of decomposition and disintegration in it. His politics infact was inspired by the urgent need to find a drastic remedy of that very disease. In fact, it is wholly concentrated on that.

In order to place these thoughts of Lohia in correct perspective and to arrive at a right understanding of the actual state of national unity and cultural consciousness in India, we will have to first of all rectify our conception of terms like ‘nation,’ ‘national integration’ and ‘state.’

Was it within Lohia’s lifetime that the National Integration Committee had been formed? If it was, one wonders why Lohia didn’t raise questions about its relevance? Granted that the wheel called politics among the four wheels of India’s religious chariot has, historically been rather weak and nobody seems to have been concerned about this

lacuna. Yet, one wonders whether the only measuring rod of a people’s unity is politics? In spite of the political instability and divisive situations, is it not a fact that cultural unity has been the time-honoured truth of Indian history?

The fact of the matter is that the disintegrating tendencies that emerged in post-independence India are the product of the shaky administration and faulty policies. One has to avoid confusing the three terms – ‘government’, ‘state’ and ‘nation.’ The State is neither born nor destroyed because of the incoming and out-going of ruling parties. Nor can the borders of a state be equated with the borders of a nation. Government is a mechanism of legal sovereignty, whereas the state is the society organised through this mechanism. A State cannot be changed merely by the change of rulers or ruling parties. The cultural consciousness of people is the permanent factor in which various administrative orders arise and fade. But the citizenship of a State and the membership of a nation are by no means the same thing. The State is a legal order or power, whereas the nation is a collective consciousness. India was divided into two states in 1947: does it mean that Indian *rashtra* or nation too has been divided? Has the basis of pre-partition Indian nation been destroyed by this artificially super-imposed partition? Why did Lohia continue to reiterate throughout his life the urgent necessity of forming a confederation called ‘Bharat-Pak Mahasangh?’

The traditional concept of India is that of a vast island. To quote Prof. G.C. Pande: “Indianness is a continental idea and feeling, not a racial or tribal identity. How can those whose mind is conditioned by the European model, perceive the reality which binds and characterises India as a nation? Infact, the concept of nationalism in modern times has developed in such a manner that it separates and isolates politics from the original culture – thus making it utterly lop-sided and partial. This very one-sided view – utterly incompatible with our own experience has infected our leaders as well as our intellectual classes. As a matter of fact, the real basis of European nations themselves is their old historical tradition itself, in which the decisive role is played by the actualities of language, literature, religion, political organisation and historical events. But, now-a-days, only the area delimited by the language is identified as a nation, where, actually, only an organised economic power, in the name of democracy becomes the determinant and final dispenser of everything. This brand of nationalism – with its in-built arrogance of economic and military clout is accused to assume

an aggressive and hostile attitude towards the rest of the world. Quite contrary to this, India's national consciousness – in spite of its being a vast continental consciousness, has been totally free from any imperialistic tendency. In fact during its struggle for independence, it was precisely this cultural identity of India which re-asserted itself as a veritable renaissance; and political freedom as well as the novel concept of a democratic state came to be added to this reawakening of her ancient spirit.

At the heart of this perennial cultural tradition, there is that current of spiritual aspiration and practice which has always refused to limit itself to a particular sectarian ideology. It has been imbued – right since the beginning of its historical journey – by the faith based on the direct experience of actual self-realisation. It believes that every human being is endowed with the aspiration to search for his real identity (Self); and that all the paths lead equally to the same realization of the Ultimate Truth: just as all the rivers flow towards the same destination – that is the ocean. It's owing to this experiential and universally valid faith that all the Indian rulers throughout our history have been following the policy of equal respect for all religions; and that's why you find in Indian culture a unique blend of tolerance, unity and richest diversity. One can't accept that statement of Lohia about the seeds of disintegration and rot being inherent in the very idea of 'Unity in Diversity. We have to understand it in the proper critical perspective of his anguish. Otherwise there is the danger of its falling into the hands of hostile India-baiters as a ready-made weapon of self-denigration. Needless to say, this is by no means merely a matter of resolving the so-called conflict between *Saguna* and *Nirguna* ways of approaching the Divine. Lohia's anguish is genuine in itself, but one has to understand his observation in the over-all context of his lifelong quest for national solidarity and social harmony. Only then, we can avail ourselves of his positive – fruitful insights into the problems of India as well as of humanity as a whole.