

the world that one carves out or rather that which one helps in creating by one's interest in it.

It would be relevant in this perspective, therefore, to ask what are the worlds that men have created and lived in, in the history of a culture or civilization and how their predominance and relative strength and importance with respect to one another have changed over a period of time. These worlds, it should be noted, are worlds only to those who 'live' in them. To the rest they are not worlds at all, but mirages or utter unrealities or delusions, provided one thinks about them at all. The whole world of religion is the classic example of such an existential phenomenon. So is the world of sport or art or knowledge or power along with many others which one can think of. The more puzzling and perhaps more interesting fact about these worlds is that one lives and can live in many of them and can shift from one to the other without feeling uncomfortable or strange or disturbed about it. However, one does not live in all the worlds, nor is one normally even aware of all of them. Even within what may be called cognate worlds, one may not be aware of the worlds lying close by or related to the one in which one normally lives. Take, for example, the world of knowledge. Who lives in the many mansions and domains that it comprises? The philosopher may not know much about history and the historian little about philosophy. And even a historian may know little or nothing about the history of those cultures, nations, civilizations in which he is not interested. As for the more distant fields of mathematics, physics and the other sciences, the little said the better. The point is that one lives in little worlds of one's own and that they alone are the ones that are real to one's consciousness. The relations between these worlds is always very tenuous and though the cognizing consciousness which treats them as objects tries to impose some unifying principle on them, it is mostly an imposed one for purposes of cognitive satisfaction rather than an

actually experienced living one for the existential consciousness in which and for which they really exist. The movement of consciousness from one world to another is perhaps one of the greatest mysteries. Perhaps, even more baffling is the phenomenon that the consciousness can *withdraw* from any of these worlds if it so chooses, even though it is not always equally easy or possible for it to do so. In extreme cases of psychotic madness it becomes almost impossible for the consciousness to exercise this function, but the primary postulate of all psychiatric help to the patient consists in the belief that such a freedom can be restored to the consciousness that has somehow been deprived of it.

The problem that this raises for any writer of history of any civilization is to demand from him a delineation of the 'worlds' created by a civilization along with an imaginative capacity to make these worlds living for oneself at least to some extent in the same way as they were existentially lived and felt by the people whose history he is writing. Even more important than this is his attempt to apprehend new 'worlds' which are opened up or created and built by a civilization in its development over a period of time and the possible relations, if any, between these worlds.

One of the most interesting aspects in this regard is perhaps the fact that this characteristic activity of consciousness itself may become the center of attention in a civilization and result in an attempt to develop this capacity of consciousness to its fullest extent and explore its implications in diverse directions. The development of civilization in India may be said to have been specifically characterized by this peculiar development. Its history may be viewed as successive attempts at the exploration of implications of this phenomenon along with a theoretical reflection on it. The vantage point that such an attempt enjoyed in the Indian civilization, the role or roles it played in its development and the way it af-

fects the other worlds needs to be investigated and studied.

The primacy of a particular 'world' over others or even of the capacity of withdrawal of consciousness from all 'worlds' would thus give a civilization its distinguishing feature and the different phases of that civilization would be seen as being marked by the dominance or primacy accorded to some world or worlds over others. Such a primacy can be inferred by both the quantitative and qualitative evidence that a civilization has left behind. It will, therefore, be simultaneously concerned with the actual behaviour of a people with respect to the world that they regard as primary as well as the valuational status that they ascribe to the hierarchy among the different 'worlds' they regard as meaningful and significant.

The notion of the 'world' or rather 'worlds' that human beings create seeks to emphasize what historians normally tend to underplay and what most human societies tend to ignore. This is the role of man as essentially a builder or creator of his world or worlds within the larger given world in which he has been building civilizations for quite some time. And once we begin to see man as a creative builder, we begin to see history in a different way and see the past as a series of creative constructions with all their limitations and achievements. Further, to see man in terms of his creativity and the capacity to build diverse worlds is to see history as necessarily indeterminate and indeterminate in principle. The judgement that we will bring to it will also be different in such a perspective. It will be more akin to the way we apprehend works of human creativity; the paradigmatic example of which is art and thus civilization will be seen more as works of art than anything else. However, as all creativity is exercised within a tradition, the history of a civilization will be seen in terms of what successive generations have made or built out of what they inherited. The past sets both standards of excellence and

achievements and hands over unfinished tasks and unsolved problems in all fields of human endeavour to the succeeding generations. These attempts themselves, even when successful, give rise to new problems, set newer tasks for the next generations. The history of a civilization, therefore, would simultaneously articulate the norms and standards laid down in fields of human endeavour and articulate the uncompleted tasks and unsolved problems which were left by one phase of the civilization to another. It would also emphasize the apprehension of new problems, both arising from the solution of an old problem and the apprehension of an entirely new one by some real innovator in the domain concerned. Beyond these, it would also try to see the interaction between the different domains and how developments in one field tended to affect and be affected by those in others.

The identity of a civilization in the course of its onward development in time and space changes its form when it gets contrasted with those of other civilizations and cultures. The identity of a civilization is thus not only internally apprehended but also apprehended through its external contrast with other civilizations. The contrast between the internal and the external occurs in a double sense. The first relates to the way a civilization views itself, while the second relates to the way it is seen by others. However, as others are not one but many, there are, so to say, multiple mirrors in which the same civilization is reflected and seen. The picture of any civilization, therefore, will have to be built by a conflation of all these images, both external and internal to itself. The internal images may also be as diverse as the external ones, for a civilization is not viewed in the same way by all its members, nor in the same way at all periods in its history. The successive images, both internal and external, would thus form a history of the way a civilization has perceived itself and been perceived by others. Appearances are the reality in this

context as in many others. The challenge is to become aware of the diversity and the changes in them over space and time and see how much they overlap and how much and where they differ.

At the root of a civilizational identity, a creative person's or persons' formulation of a vision functions in the history of that civilization like the Big-Bang theory does in the creating of the universe. The question as to what preceded it is irrelevant, because it is the defining point of the study of a civilization, as we apprehend it. The vision however is generally embedded in images and concepts and sometimes in symbols and artifacts which themselves provide an inexhaustible source of an ever present fecundity for the whole successive history of that civilization. To understand a civilization, thus, is to see the images and concepts or the symbols and the artifacts as static and closed, treating them as if they had exhausted all their vitality and dynamism. If the civilization is alive, the images and concepts are *used* and they *continuously* reveal the dynamic creativity hidden in them. The act of 'understanding' any civilization then always tries to see it in terms of its past, while the active participants and builders of the civilization always look towards the future and try to meaningfully link what they want to bring about with what has already been achieved by their civilization in the past. There is therefore a continuous tension between the articulation of the identity of a civilization in terms of what it has already accomplished and what it is trying to achieve in the present. Its dreams and aspirations, despite some relation with the past, are not completely determined by it and may even be at variance with it. In fact, even the reconstruction of the past story of a civilization will have to take into account the successive changes in the functions performed by the foundational images, concepts and symbols in which the original vision was embodied and the inevitable changes introduced by the active and living use of them in the successive peri-

ods of the history of that civilization. The identity, thus, is in a very real sense the identity of the name and the form given to the image or to a concept or a symbol, just as the identity of a person lies in the name that he or she has even when he or she changes over a period of time. Normally the changes are gradual, but when they are radical and sudden, we tend to ask questions about the identity of the person concerned. And just as the identity of a person is a living identity, consisting of many dimensions such as habits, gestures, ways of looking and feeling and acting and myriads of other such things that make a person different from all others, so is the identity of a culture when it is alive. And, as all these are unified in the name and the form that he or she possesses, the same is the case with civilizations also. To apprehend its identity, therefore, is to capture both the original vision as embodied in the symbols, concepts and images that we find at its origin, along with the successive transformations they have undergone at different periods of its history as well as the addition of new symbols and concepts that have come to dominate and modify the previous concepts, images and symbols, thus giving them a new meaning and significance.

A civilization, as we said earlier, is not an isolated entity. Rather, it exists among other civilizations with which it has an active interchange and which it encounters through war or trade and commerce or in other ways. The interaction involves a borrowing not only of goods but also of techniques, ideas, knowledge and sometimes even values, including styles of life and what is regarded as worth pursuing in life. The spread of religions, techniques and knowledge of both an empirical and transcendental kind is well known. So also are the borrowings in the field of art, architecture, languages, articles of food and dress, styles of cooking and other such things over a period of historical time. The problem of the identity of a civilization thus becomes even more complicated when it is seen in terms of this ac-

tive interchange which goes on all the time. The problem is more akin to the identity of a personality which is in continuous interaction with other personalities by whom it is continuously influenced and whom in turn it influences all the time. The identity in such a context is provided by what is rejected and how what is accepted is modified to suit one's own vision and tradition. The identity of a civilization therefore would have to be seen in terms of what it has rejected in its encounter with other civilizations and, more importantly, how it has modified what it has borrowed from other civilizations or, in other words, how it has transformed the external into the internal, the alien into the traditional. The spread of religions across continents and the modifications they have undergone as they have moved from the centres of their origin to other climates, civilizations and peoples provide a classic example of changes that a central vision undergoes when confronted with challenges from other civilizations. The example of changes in art and architecture are another illustration of this very kind. At a more ordinary level the same may be seen in styles of cooking and dress as they spread from one cultural zone to another. The problems posed by the spatial spread of a civilization are as important as those of its development in time.

The story of a civilization is therefore simultaneously a story of its expansion in space and its development over time and its own change and modifications in the light of both its encounter with other cultures and civilizations and its own immanent development governed by the dynamics of the actualization of the infinite potentiality contained in the primordial vision or visions embodied in concepts, images and symbols from which it started.

The story of encounters between civilizations is, however, not of one sort alone. A civilization may be militarily conquered by another and ruled for substantive periods of its history. It may also be subjected to forced or semi-forced

conversions to an alien religion which is not in consonance with the traditional religions of that civilization. The problem of a civilizational identity in such a situation gets complicated and to some extent even distorted by the political experience of subjugation and defeat by an alien culture and civilization. The ambivalence which such a situation introduces because of the simultaneous admiration and envy of those who rule and the bizarre rejection of them because they are seen not only as alien and different but also as coercive exploiters of the one's land and culture, gives a strange twist to the problem of identity, particularly with regard to the pre-conquest past of the civilization and the way it should be related to the post-conquest period. In a deep sense, the civilization never accepts the alien domination and tries to reject it both in political and cultural terms. Yet, as the successful removal of the alien domination may take a long time, the intrusion of the political, administrative and cultural ideas of the alien ruler or rulers become an active ingredient in the story of that civilization itself. In such a situation, one would have to look for the strategies adopted by the civilization to cope with such a situation both at the psychological and at the cultural level. To come to terms with one's failures and defeats and to meet the challenges that they propose is as much a part of the story of a civilization as its successes and triumphs and the former share its identity as much as the latter.

But the story of defeat is also the story of the victory of another culture and civilization and hence the way a civilization is seen by those who have conquered it is perhaps as important as the way it sees itself in its prolonged struggle leading to victories and defeats and the way it finally expels the intruding conqueror, in case it ever does so. But, strangely, there is no great civilization which does not have a story of its own conquest or its spread over space and time, for otherwise it would perhaps not be a great civiliza-

tion, enduring over millennia and preserving some sense of continuity over long stretches of time. It will thus be doubly interesting to discover how a civilization preserves both the memory of its conquests and those of its defeats and how it tells and retells the story of the former and how it tries to gloss over the latter and find excuses for them.

The still deeper problem in this context is the ambivalence that such a civilization displays towards the achievements of the conqueror, as it simultaneously has to admit, either with envy or jealousy, the achievements both in the scientific and technological fields as well as those in the fields of arts and the ways of living. Coupled with this, however, is the deep need to preserve its own self image at least to some extent and thus to try to underplay the so-called achievements of a superior civilization. The situation gets even more complicated when the conquering civilization is itself manifestly deficient in many fields and the only reason why it has succeeded in its conquest is military or organizational superiority, or because it has not been weakened or corrupted by the arts of civilization.

The story of encounters between civilizations and their natural love-hate relationship has not yet been told or been given the attention it so richly deserves. There is, however, a related problem which perhaps requires as much attention as the story of the encounter between different civilizations and the way they have interacted and borrowed from each other. This relates to what may be called the norms of what constitutes a rightful conquest and what ought to be the ideal way of dealing with a defeated enemy. The norms that should govern the actual waging of battle and the ways in which peace should be pursued are perhaps as important as anything else in the encounter of civilizations. There are civilizations that have thought deeply over these issues and there are others which have thought that no norms should govern the waging of war or the making of peace after victory, as these lie completely outside the moral

domain. Related to this is the whole issue of the glorification of war and the celebration of the heroic spirit along with the so-called duty of a king to extend his territories by all the means at his disposal.

The expansion of a civilization has generally been in terms of a political expansion, that is, the extension of its political and administrative sovereignty or even suzerainty over other domains, but it can also be seen in other fields such as trade and commerce, religion, styles of art and architecture, forms of literary composition and other such things. The point is that everything, whether it be a philosophical school or a religious movement or a cultural style in music or painting or dance or architecture or even such day-to-day things as styles of cooking tend to expand and spread over new domains and compete with other styles and *sampradāyas* for the allegiance and admiration of others and of converting them to its own forms and styles in ways of believing and doing things. The impulse to expand and to see in it a sign of the success of one's civilization is however different from the imperative to conquer others and convert them to one's own way of life, which is seen as a duty in some civilizations and regarded as almost constituting their identity. The duty of the king to expand his domains finds a strange parallel in the so-called duty of a religion to proselytize the non-believer. But there may at least be a possible difference between the two. Religious expansion may be specifically wedded by the very nature of its doctrine to forswear the use of force in its programme of conversion and expansion. Political expansion, on the other hand, cannot even in principle, be conceived of without the use of some force on the part of the conquering or expanding political centre. In case, however, the religious expansion does not deny to itself the luxury of the use of force for the achievement of its purposes, it becomes very much like a demand for political expansion on the part of the ruler or the élite in a particular country. The political

and the religious expansions in such a case may go together and they can, in such a situation, provide an added motive force and justification to all that can be perpetrated and achieved by force. There is, in such instances, a fusion of the ideal and the actual interests which almost never happens in the case of other types of expansion that we have mentioned earlier. Christianity, Islam and Communism are perhaps the clearest examples of such an amalgamation that history has seen until now. The expansion of other religions, which mainly originated in India and China, has generally been more akin to expansions in the field of art and literature or even in such fields as styles of living, even though their expansion may have been helped at times by political support and patronage. The conversion of the kings or the ruling élite has always been an important factor in the spread of a religion by lending it a prestige which it might otherwise not have had. But this has been more like patronage in other fields. Adoption by the élite of styles in any field results in their being imitated by other people in the same society and even by members of other societies. Imitation or unconscious mimesis is radically different from the forcible and coercive adoption of an alien form or style or belief which one has to adopt on pain of being punished.

There has sometimes been an element in the expansion of trade and commerce itself which has required political control over regions to ensure and safeguard the commercial and trading interests. This has resulted in a fusion or amalgamation of the compulsion created by the need for commercial expansion and the ones required by political considerations. The expansion of the European civilization from the sixteenth century onwards shows such a strange admixture of the demands for commercial and political expansion, each influencing the other in a circular manner. There was in this expansion an added admixture of two other seemingly opposed forces which gave an ideo-

logical or rather idealistic veneer to the spirit of Christianity, on the one hand and the demand for the spirit of western civilization to expand to all parts of the globe as it was regarded not only as the civilization *par excellence* but also as superseding all other civilizations of the past, on the other. It conceived of itself, thus, as having a civilising mission which was not exactly religious but which still had close similarities with it. The well-known phrase, 'the white man's burden' summed it up neatly. Only the word 'burden' should have been replaced by 'mission' in order to convey what was intended by it.

The civilizational mission of Europe in its expansionist phase is a pointer to the fact that even in the past such a factor might have played a significant role in the expansion of other civilizations, a factor that seems to have been overlooked by most persons who have written on the subject. The Vedicization of India and south and south-east Asia may perhaps, be understood more in terms of what the European intellectuals were trying to suggest by coining the phrase 'the white man's burden'. It was the burden of the carriers of the Vedic civilization which spread to all parts of the Indian subcontinent and later to the other parts of south and south-east Asia. The same process seems to have occurred in China whose land mass is even greater than that of India and which also spread both westwards and eastwards till it interacted with the expanding Indian civilization on all of its borders. It will be interesting to compare the signification of the Chinese cultural area over millennia to that which occurred in India. The spread of Buddhism across west and central Asia, Korea, China and Japan, and to countries of south and south-east Asia, is another example of this. The spread of Jainism within the borders of the Indian subcontinent during classical times, is another well-known example of such an expansion.

The expansion of a civilization thus may take many forms and be due to many factors. But perhaps the crucial dis-

inction between these various types of expansion may lie in what the expansion does with the previously existing diversity of cultures in the areas where its expansion occurs. Are they allowed or even encouraged to survive and grow through the contact of an expanding civilization which not only respects the diversity and plurality it encounters but helps them to develop further according to their own genius? Moreover, the counter-impact on the expanding civilization of all these diversities that it encounters should make it richer and more variegated than it was before. It should also develop deeper insights through these encounters in its onward spread and thus show a significant change, witnessing the fact that it has learnt a lot from the many cultures it has met and fecundated on the road to its own expansion. On the other hand, the expanding civilization may destroy and wipe out all the previous cultures that it encounters in the course of its expansion, so much so that even to recover the fact that they ever existed would require an enormous feat of historical investigation. It may even pride itself on being least affected by the cultures it encounters as it would see in any such impact a sign of its own insufficiency and corruption.

These two different modes of civilizational expansion not only present two opposed extremes of the ways in which civilizations may expand, but also provide some sort of ideal types in terms of which the actual expansion of a civilization may be studied. The more interesting case, however, would be the encounter between civilizations which are totally opposed to each other. Perhaps the encounter of the Islamic civilization, with the classical Indian civilization, may be taken as a paradigmatic example of such an encounter. On the other hand, the encounter between the Christian and Islamic civilizations or between the contemporary Jewish and Islamic civilizations can be seen as encounters between civilizations which belong to the extreme type only. The encounter between the classical Indian and

the Chinese civilizations may be seen as an encounter between civilizations which belong to the same type and hence may provide an interesting contrast between the type of encounter that has taken place between Christian and Islamic civilizations or between the contemporary Jewish and Islamic civilizations. The encounter between the Chinese and the Islamic civilizations may also provide an interesting comparison and contrast between the way the encounter between the Indian and the Islamic civilizations took place even though there may be a substantive difference between the two encounters.

The study of civilizations thus has to be seen primarily in a comparative perspective, as ultimately it is the story of human enterprise in a particular setting and hence its understanding will become more meaningful by the contrast it presents with the story of what man has achieved and the way he has solved his problems in other settings. It is only in some such way that the uniqueness of a particular civilization may be apprehended just as we apprehend the individuality of a person by contrasting him/her with other individuals.

The comparative study of civilizations is even more out of fashion these days than the study of a single civilization, for it is felt that the larger the area and time span of the unit of historical study, the less amenable it is to any study which can claim to be 'scientific', in character. It is only micro-history that can be regarded as history proper, for there one at least knows what one is talking about and the relation between what is asserted and the evidence on the basis of which it is asserted is far more direct and subject to scrutiny than in the case of the so-called civilizations whose boundaries in space and time seem too indefinite to have even a spatio-temporal unity. The significant question which Toynbee had raised regarding what was to count as a civilizational unit for purposes of study or how to determine the criteria on the basis of which one may distinguish

between one civilization and another have not been found even worth attending to by his successors. The whole paraphernalia which he developed for the study of civilizations has been neglected on the ground that many of the facts on the basis of which he built his theory are either incorrect or disputable to a great extent. But instead of correcting the mistakes or building an alternative picture, the very questions which he raised have been set aside from the agenda of history writing as if they did not matter at all. Perhaps the feeling was that those type of questions could not be meaningfully answered with the conceptual tools and the investigative methodologies that were available to the working historian who claimed to be pursuing a study which was 'scientific' in character. Or, perhaps it was the rampant influence of logical positivism where the enunciation of what was 'truly scientific' had an enormous influence on the professional historians who wanted to be academically respectable. But now that the imperious claims of both verifiability and falsifiability as the twin preconditions of being 'scientific' have themselves been subjected to a devastating critique, the working historian may feel the intellectual climate to be more congenial to taking up the issues from the point where Toynbee and others of his kind had left them sometime ago.

The same should be true regarding the other attempt to grasp the uniqueness of civilizations in terms of the specific vision they embodied or the ideal value or values they attempted to realize in every field in which they engaged over millennia, whether it be Sorokin or Spengler or Northrop or many others of their kind who have tried to intuitively apprehend the unity of a civilization through an imaginative apprehension of its diverse creations. Each of them has attempted to grasp the unity of a civilization in terms of the meanings, ideals or values they sought to achieve and embody in all their creations. One may disagree with them in the way they apprehended this unity in

the case of any specific civilization or even question the presupposition that civilizations are characterized by one single value or vision which they try to actualize in every field whatsoever, but the attempt to see it in such a way cannot be dismissed as methodologically illegitimate or as leading to no insight whatsoever. This will be even more true if we are attempting to find the uniqueness of any particular civilization, for that can be found only in its difference from what the other civilizations tried to do. Any serious comparative study of art or philosophy or religion cannot but take into account the differences in the way these have been attempted over long periods of the internal history of a civilization.

It is of course true that the larger issue regarding the 'understanding' of civilizations, whether on the pattern of Toynbee, or of Sorokin or Spengler, can always be questioned on the ground that there is a very tenuous relationship between the evidence and the conclusion and that a very large part of the construction is left to the imaginative ingenuity of the historian concerned. But, though this may be regarded as generally correct, it is not always true. Sorokin, for example, in his *Social and Cultural Dynamics* has taken into account almost every piece of art that was available from 800 BC to AD 1920 in the history of what is generally known as western civilization. He also had this comprehensive data examined and classified in terms of the values it embodied by different persons and took as much care as possible to reach an objective conclusion regarding its characterization. He also tried to correlate this data from the arts with the data in other fields such as philosophy or even such occurrences as wars and revolutions. The whole work has been done in such a systematic manner and is so comprehensive in its coverage that it is surprising to find that it has never been taken seriously by most students of the subject. And, this is in spite of all the care which a respect for the observance of scientific method usually entails.

Sorokin's predictions, based on this huge data for the evolution of western culture after 1920, have of course failed but then any serious student of the subject should have questioned either the methodology or the reasons why the predictions based on the data have failed. Kroeber perhaps is the only person who seriously undertook to examine the claim in his well-known book entitled *Configurations of Cultural Growth* and reached negative conclusions with respect to the claim. But nobody, as far as I know, has actually examined the claims of Kroeber and Sorokin together in a dispassionate manner and tried to see what the real reasons were for their reaching two such opposed conclusions from an examination of similar data. Kroeber's, of course, was an examination of a different type, but still it looked at least at parts of what Sorokin had attempted to do.

The deeper problem perhaps lies in the two conflicting interests that the macro-study of civilizations always poses for any historian. The conflict, so to say, is between understanding and prediction. To understand a civilization is not necessarily to be able to predict the way it would develop further and in a certain sense the whole enterprise of understanding the past, whether on the pattern of Toynbee, Sorokin or Spengler fails to help us in predicting the way a civilization would develop in future. But firstly, the way professional historians have treated them is not peculiar to them alone. Marx and Hegel have shared the same fate though they belong to very different ways of approaching history. However, at a larger remove, the same is true of the theory of biological evolution which does not help in telling us how the evolution would have moved forward. Yet, no one rejects the theory of biological evolution on this ground and there is no reason why Marx's analysis of capitalism or the role of modes of production in 'determining' other facets of social life need be ignored. Nor, for that matter, can even Hegel's way of looking at history

be completely neglected just because he seems to consider the Prussian state and his own philosophy to be the culminating points of whatever had gone before in history. The point is that in spite of massive failures and the vast idiosyncrasies of a Marx, Hegel, Toynbee, Spengler or Sorokin, the macro enterprises of understanding the whole movement of history or specific civilizations need not be a reason to give up the enterprise altogether or to think that one has nothing to learn from them in the enterprise of understanding the history of a civilization.

However, it should be clearly realized that the problems of macro-history are radically different from those that are encountered in writing micro-history. The field of micro-history is not only confined to a particular subject matter but also limited to reasonably short stretches of space and time which can be grasped by the historian in relation to most of the relevant data that is available to him at the time he is engaged in writing its history. There are literally no such limitations in the writing of macro-history. The whole enterprise stretches into an indefinite past whose boundaries are limited only arbitrarily by what happens to be available from those remote times and stretches in a space whose boundaries are continuously shifting. Similarly, there is literally nothing which can be excluded from the unitary act of apprehension which the historian dares to undertake or the interrelationships in terms of which he intends to weave them together. What is to be excluded and what is to be included or what is to be underplayed or what is to be emphasized in such a situation is bound to be more or less arbitrary and can be challenged on this ground. But the remedy is not to be overawed by the difficulties or feel helpless before them, but to creatively imagine the diverse foci around which the apprehension can be built and the story told. Perhaps one may find some help in such a situation by reflecting on the question as to what history is all about. If once it is realized that human

history is primarily a history of the diverse enterprises in which man has engaged in over long periods of time and that he may return to them again and again after giving them up for a while, then the history of a civilization will be built around those enterprises which encompass all the dimensions in which man has lived and explored both in his inner being and his external interaction with nature and the living world. The relation with the timeless transcendent which is almost a function of man's self-consciousness will be another focus around which the historical enterprise may be built. The realms of knowledge, feeling and action have been the centre of the human enterprise and at all times and thus it should not be difficult to see how men have pursued them for long periods of time and what has been the specific stamp that has been given to the enterprise in these realms.

The problems of micro versus macro studies is not confined to history alone, but rather confronts a serious student of any subject in all domains. Economics, for example, is perhaps one of the more important of the social sciences, which continuously faces the problem. The micro-economist feels himself to be on far firmer ground than someone who deals with the larger issues of the movement of an economy over longer periods of time, where the economy as a whole is the subject of attention. The theory of the firm and the theory of the farm are well-known contributions of the micro-economist. So also are the studies of business cycles from macro-economists. The attempt to see the economy as an interrelated whole, where each factor affects the other and where the changes in one bring about changes in the other, has been the focus of thought in macro-economic planning which is helped today not only by the collection of a large amount of economic data by various agencies, but also by the computer facilities which can work out the interrelationships between a very large number of variables on the basis of the diverse relation-

ships postulated between them, facilities which were not even be dreamt of before. But the inevitable thrust of macro-theories is to place any economy in the world setting and to treat it as a part of the global economy of which it is seen as a basic sub-system leaving little freedom to achieve even relative autonomy from forces outside its control. The same problem is posed for those who study politics at the macro-level. Thinkers like Wittgenstein believe in a global political system which decisively decides the internal working of different polities which illusorily think of themselves to be sovereign nation states.

The study of civilizations is obviously a macro enterprise at a far larger scale than the studies of world economy or world polity in contemporary times. Besides the unbelievably large differences in scale, there is the added difference that while both the studies of world economy and world polity are primarily oriented to at least some sort of prediction and control over the way things are developing in these fields, the study of past civilizations attempts to do nothing of the kind. Yet, even though there are substantive differences between the contemporary macro-enterprises in the field of polity and economy and the macro-enterprise in the study of civilizations, the latter can learn something from the former. This is what may be called a planetary model where some central economy or polity determines or influences, to a very large extent, the economies and polities that revolve around it. The study of a civilization on the planetary model would try to locate the shifting centres of economy, polity and culture in a civilization and the changing interrelationships between them. It should also lessen, at least to some extent the illusion created by various competing centres of polity, economy and culture at some particular period in the history of a civilization that they alone are sovereign at that time. The related notions of the centre and the periphery and the changing relationship between them would also be of some

help in understanding the dynamic changes which occur in the history of a civilization over a period of time. It could also perhaps illumine, to some extent, the overweening arrogance and pride and ambition of the so-called centres of power and the illusions they entertain about their own perpetuity and the measures they adopt to maintain themselves as centres in perpetuity.

There seems, however, an important difference between polity and economy, on the one hand, and culture, on the other, particularly in regard to the structure of their globalization, specially in view of the fact of the increasing importance in the case of the former. The globalization of polity and economy at least seem plausible on theoretical grounds, but the globalization of culture, though often talked about, does not even seem *prima-facie* to have the same validity. There is essentially a coercive element in both the political and the economic sphere which seems to be lacking in the cultural domain, and that may possibly account for the radical difference between the realms of the former and that of the latter. Culture spreads primarily through its intrinsic appeal, even though it has often happened in the past that the cultural preferences of those who are politically or economically dominant have helped in the acceptance and spread of their cultural phenomena. But generally there is no real coercive element in this. Also, the counter phenomena are not only possible but have actually happened a number of times in the past. The reason for this is that any qualitative innovation in the field of culture by any group, even if it is not politically or economically dominant, can always appeal to others who actually wield these kinds of power and thus be adopted by them as if it were their own. Furthermore, cultural creativity seems to be inherently diffused and pluralistic in nature as it depends far more on individual genius than do the realms of polity and economy. The centres of cultural creativity, therefore, are less stable in character than the so-called

political and economic centres, even though the latter are not as long-lasting as they sometimes seem to be. Economic and political centres attract cultural innovators from all domains and from all areas, as they provide both the market and the patronage for talent in all fields. However, this is generally true only for individuals who flock to the metropolitan centres of political and economic power and not of larger groups which may visit these places occasionally but never reside there permanently and whose essential centre of activity lies elsewhere.

The problem with the planetary model of civilizations is that one would have to conceive of an invisible centre around which the civilizations have revolved. But as the notion of an invisible transcendental centre is unacceptable to any scientific cognition, the planetary model would imply that each civilization has itself a sort of centre around which sub-civilizations revolve in the way planets revolve around the sun. Or, to extend the analogy further, we would have to assume that a civilization itself has a central core around which diverse activities revolve which get their nourishment from the centre and which also exercise an influence on each other. Another extension of the analogy may be that different civilizations themselves are like different solar systems with the difference that they exercise influence on each other depending on the spatio-temporal distances that they have between them.

But analogies apart, the main point is that both within civilizations and between civilizations, there is a relationship which can only be understood in terms of powerful forces, both of repulsion and attraction, operating everywhere which vary with distances of space and time, just as we find them operating in the physical domain. A study of these forces and their different modalities and types would perhaps be an interesting way to study civilizations, both individually and in their mutual interrelationship.

Usually, these have been understood primarily as centripetal and centrifugal forces in the realm of the political, but they are found in other domains also. However, these divergent tendencies can be understood in a different way also. They may be seen as a search for relative autonomy and individual independence along with a desire to relate oneself to a larger whole of which one would like to be a member as it would not only give one an added importance, but also the feeling of belonging to an unending quest of man to which one might significantly contribute by his/her own independent effort. This is even more true in the field of, what may be called genuine civilizational activities, for ultimately the function of both economy and polity can only be understood as providing an opportunity for man to engage in pursuits which have little to do with them directly. Without relative peace and affluence nothing can be achieved in other domains which man, for some reason, believes to be essentially human. It is in the pursuit of these realms where he feels that he is a human being and not just a biological creature like all other living beings. Yet, the margins of political and economic security required are so variable and differ with different individuals that it is not easy to specify how much of each is required for individuals to pursue their trans-political and trans-economic goals. There is an added problem in that certain kinds of achievements can only be pursued if supported by large resources sustained over a long period of time. Great works of architecture are classic examples of this kind. A great temple or a mosque or mausoleum or church cannot be built without the financial resources of large dimensions being committed over a long period of time. These resources have to be so large that only a state can provide them on a long-term basis. The story of St. Peters in Rome is well known, where the paucity of funds of even a pope forced the architects to revise their plans, and where a succession of great architects had to adjust

their imagination to the resources available to them. Perhaps the story of Koṅāraka is the same, though the fact of its not being completed is ascribed to the inability of the structure to sustain the unmanageable scale of its huge dimensions. The same obviously would be true of the construction of planned cities, forts and palaces which clearly require the resources at such a large scale that only centres of political and economic power can afford them.

The problem of political and economic patronage of all cultural activities is such a large issue that it is difficult to meaningfully articulate the relationship between them. Centres of learning, astronomical observatories, even religious monasteries, require financial support for their establishment and continuance; yet what is pursued in them, at least at the ideal level, has no direct relationship with the power and wealth that sustain them. Literature perhaps is the one field which does not require support of that kind and at that level which architecture, astronomical observatories and large religious organizations seem to require. Poets and writers do, of course, need financial support for their sustenance, but for the sheer exercise of their craft, they hardly require anything. Philosophers also may be placed in this category, as also those who pursue similar kinds of knowledge. The same is true of the individual spiritual seeker and the mystic who always, both by principle and conviction, have tried to minimize their needs and live on the least amount possible to sustain themselves. There are other arts and crafts which are related to good living and which presuppose a flourishing market for the goods they produce, and hence may be regarded as being dependent on a successful polity and economy which sustains them.

In fact, the dilemma of the relationship between the biological and the trans-biological in man has created peculiar problems of its own which both the individual psyche and societies and civilizations have tried to cope with in

different ways. One has to live and 'living', in the case of man, includes a lot more than what is simply necessary for biological survival in order that any trans-biological pursuit may even be attempted. The socio-politico-economic system that man has created in order to survive sets the scenario where man has to engage in certain kinds of activities for ensuring his biological survival, including the perpetuation of his kind and the bringing up and training of the next generation, and where he also pursues those trans-biological goals which alone make him/her distinctively human. The relation between the two activities gets even more ambiguous when the latter become a means for obtaining that which promotes biological living and survival. And, as in the case of most individuals, such a situation obtains either in terms of seeking patronage or employment, the distinction tends to get blurred and what is instrumental and what is intrinsic is never very clear either to one or to others. However, from the viewpoint of the society and the polity, the distinction is fairly clear as most societies pride themselves on what they achieve in the trans-biological domains. But for a living society the problem occurs at another level, as the survival and perpetuation of a society and a polity are analogous to biological survival in the case of the individual. Every society and polity thus has an ambivalent attitude towards all the trans-biological pursuits of man, particularly those which may be regarded as essentially trans-social in character. That is why those who are at the helm of a society or polity generally tend to treat everything, whether it be art or religion or philosophy or anything else, as instrumental to the sustaining of that society or polity, or as helpful in its further growth. Also, as certain kinds of knowledge, particularly those relating to science and technology in modern times, help societies and polities in their competition with others, their pursuit in an organized and systematic manner is seen in instrumental terms and not as a seeking of knowledge for

its own sake. Perhaps even in earlier times, those kinds of knowledge which were more immediately relevant to the survival of society and polity were treated in the same way. Some have even argued that this was true of all kinds of knowledge and pursuits and they were regarded as important because of their being understood in magical terms, as providing essential support to the ongoing activities of these societies and polities. Such a view, however, can only be sustained by ignoring the counter-evidence, particularly that which is furnished by the large renunciatory religions such as Buddhism and Jainism which had such a profound influence at least in the Indian civilization.

In fact, the exact status of such pursuits becomes clear only when we see them in relation to a society or polity or even to a civilization which now is no more. It is when a society or a polity or a civilization is past that its real achievements become important, for then they are valued for their own sake and treated as evidence of what men achieved in other times and for which they are remembered. Both wealth and power distort the situation in the present as they are the levers of causal effectivity and hence wield an influence which is both visible and overpowering in the context of the present where alone they count. However, the moment the present becomes a part of the past, they cease to matter and what stands out is man's real achievement in diverse fields, both trans-biological and trans-social. These he had created as evidence of his real seeking, for he regarded them alone as truly worthwhile, even if what he sought and created was inextricably entwined with the business of living, both in its biological and social aspects.

At a deeper level, perhaps, the conflict is not so much between the biological and the trans-biological as between the social and the trans-social which, in another terminology, may be described as that between the moral and the trans-moral pursuits of man. In the Indian context, this

has usually taken the shape of the conflict between *dharma* and *mokṣa* as the pre-eminent *puruṣārthas* specified in the tradition. However, this is only because the tradition did not accept or did not think of other pursuits such as those of knowledge or the creation of beautiful objects as intrinsically worthwhile for their own sake. The moral realm has a pre-eminence as it concerns the claims of others and without its relative fulfillment to some extent society itself cannot survive, and if society does not survive then man cannot survive either. There is, thus, in the case of man, a deep intertwining between the fulfillment of the moral obligations and his survival as a human being. Yet, man always finds this demand in conflict not only with his individual desire for *artha* and *kāma*, in the usual senses of the words, but also with those of his other seekings which are not exactly egoistic or self-centred in any meaningful sense of the term. The moral dimension itself, however, has a dual aspect which does not seem to obtain with regard to the other ends of human action. The moral demand generally consists in the fulfillment of what is considered as obligatory towards other human beings in a particular society, even though there are fairly large margins of elasticity in what is regarded as obligatory in any society. But beyond these, there is also always the moral apprehension of the individual which makes him feel differently about what is accepted as normal modes of behaviour in a society and also make him feel that he should do something to change them in the direction of what he considers to be more morally desirable. Here there is a conflict between the moral ideal as apprehended by an individual and what actually is accepted as morally correct in the society in which he lives. Thus, there is a continuous demand to realize the ideals of equality, justice, and fair play more truly than they are actually found in any society. It is this deeper demand that comes in serious conflict with the other ideal pursuits of man. In one sense it claims primacy over all

others as one feels guilty if one does not pay sufficient attention to the demands in this realm. On the other hand, the non-moral pursuits seem to have little to do with other human beings except indirectly and yet they claim an equal importance, or even a greater one, than the moral demands in the second aspect described above.

In fact, there is a strange aspect to morality. If one becomes too serious about it one becomes a difficult person to live with. The same is perhaps true of ultra seriousness in the pursuit of other values also. This, though opening up an interesting direction for reflection on what constitutes a desirable living situation for most human beings, hardly resolves the conflict between the moral and the trans-moral values endemic in the human situation. In the perspective of the history of civilizations, however, the realms of economy and polity may reasonably be taken to provide the framework and the arena in which the trans-social pursuits have been encouraged and actualized. Besides these, the economy and polity may also be seen in terms of their own immanent ideals which they seek to actualize. In the field of the latter, perhaps the most interesting question to ask would be if a particular civilization apprehended any new value with respect to social relations between men, and between men and women, and tried to actualize them and the difficulties it encountered in doing so.

The one peculiar problem with the realms of polity and economy seems to be that here competition is a constituent condition of the very way they are structured. One cannot think of a political or economic unit which is not in active competition against others for supremacy. It is not that elements of co-operative togetherness are totally absent from these domains but they play a secondary role in them. In this, they seem more like sports which also have a constituent competitiveness in-built in them and where it is impossible to think what it would mean to have a sport

which is non-competitive in character. The element of competitiveness is perhaps present in all domains of human activity, but the question is whether it plays a constitutive role or whether it is present only by accident or just marginally. In fact, just as there is an element of competitiveness along with cooperativeness in all domains in a mix of various kinds, so also is there an element of the moral dimension in all fields of human activity. However, normally one does not talk in terms of morality where one is not primarily concerned with others, but only of 'authenticity' or 'sincerity' or 'commitment' to the objective values relating to the realm one is pursuing. Thus, one talks of gimmickry in many of the arts when there is the exercise of a skill for skill's sake just to please or overwhelm the audience. Similarly, there may be slickness or undue resort to rhetorical devices to persuade the reader or to emphasize only selective evidence which supports what one wants to prove or to underplay the counter-evidence or the counter arguments or even to deliberately manufacture false evidence or data in the cognitive enterprise in which one is engaged. One may thus be dishonest anywhere and the possibility of dishonesty is always there in any enterprise of man; but ultimately when one has passed away, what remains is the work one leaves behind and the internal evidence in it regarding how much one was able to overcome the counter-impulses and temptations and was able to be 'true' to what one was trying to seek.

In this regard actions of man are generally deficient in the other things that man creates either as written texts, or in painting or in stone as in sculpture or architecture. For, action, unless it is recorded, passes into oblivion the moment it is enacted as its life is only in the present when it occurs. Certainly, it leaves some traces in its effects, though it is almost impossible to reconstruct it as generally the same effect may follow from many causes and also because the effect itself has to be preserved in some form as an evi-

dence to reconstruct the action from which it is supposed to have followed.

It has been argued, particularly by Ricoeur, that action in this regard is analogous to speech which also, unlike writing, is ephemeral and passing and whose meaning is primarily understood by a reference to the situation in which it has been spoken and the person or persons to whom it is spoken. Ricoeur has also raised the interesting question as to whether there is anything analogous to writing in the field of action, and has suggested that some exceptional historical actions which leave a mark on the flow of history may be regarded as having this character. The French Revolution or the Russian Revolution or the conquest of Alexander may, for example, be regarded as actions of this kind. But where would they be if they had not been recorded? On the other hand, it may be said that they were recorded only because they were actions in such an exceptional sense. Thousands and thousands of people in diverse situations wrote about them because they were the sort of actions which made an indelible mark on the pages of historical times.

Though Ricoeur's contention deserves serious consideration, it seems to be flawed on two essential counts. Firstly, it seems that he has not taken those oral traditions into account which had consciously tried to preserve the spoken word in its unmitigated purity as it was considered to be sacred and also because it was thought that writing would make it profane by rendering it available to everyone. The Vedic texts are a classic counter example to his contention. They were preserved orally for a long period of time and it was not only the word sequence but also the way they were to be intoned and pronounced which was attempted to be kept intact. The same was true of the words of the Buddha and the Mahāvīra which were preserved orally for a long time before being reduced to writing, and which developed techniques of oral preservation which are

perhaps even more complicated than those which were used to preserve the oral tradition of the Vedas. The other problem which Ricoeur's thesis raises is that it involves circularity in it. On the one hand, what is recorded becomes an evidence for the historicity of the action concerned, while the historic nature of an action is itself understood as that which somehow gets imprinted on the blank pages of historical time. It is well known that rulers have always employed chroniclers, to extol what they did and to preserve it in all sorts of records including those which are inscribed in the form of inscriptions on stone and other permanent material. Also, the historicity of an event is seldom evident when it happens, as it is usually revealed only retrospectively. It is difficult to say, for example, that the crucifixion of Christ was evident as a historical event to most of the persons living at that time or even to the Procurator of Judea who convicted and sent him to be hanged. The same would be true, though to a lesser extent, of the Buddha and the Mahāvīra, and of many others who are supposed to have shaped history. To their contemporaries, they must have seemed to be one of the many others whose names are known only through references found in their works. It would be debatable if the importance of Marx's thought in the context of the shaping of history was evident to his contemporaries and it is difficult to predict what exactly would be the judgement on Lenin's Revolution after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the total repudiation of all that he stood for by the citizens of that very country which was supposed to be the example of what Sydney and Beatrice Webb once called 'a new civilization'.

The issue of the essential ephemerality of action and its occasional transcendence of this ephemerality by acquiring a historical importance appears to have been radically altered by contemporary technology which can, and does, visually record most events that are happening not only in the public sphere, but in the private sphere also. We have

not only the television coverage of events or what may be called video newspapers such as *Newstrack* but also the video filming of private personal celebrations of such events as marriages, or even of such ordinary activities as picnics. In fact, there is the increasing spread or what may be called the 'Nixon Syndrome' of recording everything that happens. Yet, in spite of all this proliferation of recording by all the techniques available in modern times, it is difficult to say that we are any more certain about what actually happened or of the 'inner truth' about it than when we had much less evidence. This is proved almost by every commission of inquiry that is appointed by government after government which hardly ever reach any definitive conclusion. The Warren Commission, for example, which was appointed to investigate the assassination of John F. Kennedy is perhaps the perfect example of it. Here was an assassination in broad daylight of the President of the most powerful nation in the world which has the most sophisticated instruments of investigation at its command along with the resources of the whole State and yet it could not come to any definitive conclusion as to who had assassinated him.

But, in spite of the well-known failure of the increasing mass of 'evidence' in helping us to reach any conclusion, we seem to be under the persistent illusion that if only we could have a little more of it, we will find the truth. The search for omniscience perhaps is modelled on the wrong paradigm which believes that truth about what happened can be deciphered or discerned by all the evidence regarding it, that is, in terms of what preceded or what succeeded it. Even though it may seem the well-known statement '*cogitio, ergo sum*' would be termed a meaningless 'ghost in the machine', and man himself treated as an automation who only has the illusion of consciousness as something private and inner to himself because of the systematic confusion that language generates in him. The problem of

other minds has haunted the philosophical world since the behaviourists and the positivists appeared on the scene, but basically it is not even clear as to what would be the exact connotation or denotation of 'mind', giving an intentional or extensional definition of it so that it can even be relevantly disputed.

There is, in fact, an analogous problem with respect to all objects of sensory cognition, irrespective of the fact as to whether they are human beings or beings whom we regards as living or even objects to whom no living qualities are attributed. What they all present to us are qualities, whether they be primary or secondary or tertiary in nature, to use the well-known Lockean distinction with regard to them. Normally, the substance or the object to which these qualities are supposed to belong is, as Locke said long ago, 'a know-not-what', for it can only be characterized in terms of the qualities that we apprehend and hence cannot be known in terms of itself. This may as well be regarded as the counterpart at the inorganic level of what we have called the 'inner' dimension which we tend to attribute to most living beings in general and to human beings in particular. There is thus an 'unknowable', substratum involved in all cognition. The only way out has been to deny the reality of the substance or the subject of all predicates and reduce the object of cognition to the qualities that are apprehended. Hume tried to do this in the context of the western tradition, while the Buddhists seemed to have done it at almost the very beginning of Indian thought, sometime in the sixth century BC when the Buddha is supposed to have denied the substantiality of both the self and the world of objects. Yet, even if it is an illusion, the question is what is the reality of that illusions, for in case an illusion arises, there is certainly a difference between the situation when an illusion has arisen and one where it has not. And, if the 'illusion' has tremendous consequences it cannot be denied to be real in case the criterion of reality were to be

accepted as being 'causally effective', which the Buddhists, along with many others, usually do.

The multifarious problems that this puzzle has raised have been the subject of intensive debate and discussion in the Indian philosophical tradition, but as far as the question of the understanding of civilizations is concerned, the problem primarily relates to the decipherment of the relationship between man and what he creates and the relationship between the two is, for history, a reconstruction from what has been left behind by a being who is supposed to be self-conscious. Thus the crucial problem for human history concerns the issue as to whether there is any radical difference between human beings and other living beings and inanimate objects, for if there were no difference, then human history would be like geological history, on the one hand, and the history of plants and animals, on the other, and the methodology which suffices for them would also suffice for the writing of the history of any civilization. As a historian, by his very profession, cannot accept that there is no difference between human history and the history of the non-human world, he is committed by his professional enterprise to admit a radical difference between human being and all other kinds of beings, however uncomfortable this position may be to those who believe in the unity of the methodology and ultimately also of the subject matter of the cognitive enterprise of man. And this difference permeates all kinds of history, whether it be primarily political or diplomatic or socio-cultural or the history of the common life of the people or the history of any one of his enterprises such as those in the field of philosophy or art or science or technology. The problem for the historian is therefore the interrelation between these histories and their specific peculiarity or difference when compared with the histories of these in other civilizations and culture areas. There can hardly be any doubt that there can be no such histories of the non-human world,

even though there may be some similarities with other species in terms of the ecological perspective that human beings share with all other living beings. In fact, the relations of human beings with all other living beings may provide an interesting subject for history as this itself has been changing over time and has always had an ambivalent character. An increasing awareness of man's responsibility for the very survival of other species has, for example, been a recent phenomenon and man does not know what to do in the face of this increased responsibility.

The problem of the effectivity of a belief, even when it happens to be illusory, may give rise to another dimension in the understanding of the enterprise of history. It might mistake the form of, what may be called the successive illusions generated in the history of a civilization and the effects that they have had in the subsequent behaviour of a large number of people over millennia. Furthermore, as the effects generated by the illusions are supposed to be actual in the normal sense of the term, these effects themselves may have possibly functioned in the generation of other illusions which also may have had determinative consequences for the history of that civilization. The history of a civilization would, in this perspective, consist of the study of the history of those distinctive illusions which have made the civilization what it specifically is, that is, as distinct from other civilizations. The story of civilizations, therefore, will be a story of alternative illusions which different civilizations have pursued over a long period of time, and which has given them their distinctive stamp of individuality which distinguishes them from others.

Such a way of looking at history may appear perverse, but it can only be so because we fail to see the centrality of the creative act of imagination in the history of a civilization and usually consider the products of imagination to be illusory. Yet, in the beginning of any story there is a big 'if', which is the primal act of postulation and from which

all the rest is supposed to follow. However, the postulational act, starting with the big 'if' is not only performed once, but has to be repeated time and again, particularly in the context of an imaginative construction. This, perhaps, is the crucial difference between the original postulational act in the field of formal deductive knowledge and other imaginative constructions which are vividly exemplified primarily in works of literature and the arts. In any case, a history of any civilization can only be regarded as a history of successive 'illusions', if the successive acts of creative imagination are themselves regarded as essentially illusory in nature. The problem basically is not so much of 'truth' or 'falsity', in the context of which the term 'illusion' is usually applied, but that the story of a civilization can only be grasped in terms of the centrality of the basic notion of a creative act whose essential components are an imaginative apprehension and the translation of it into a visible embodiment in any apprehensible medium. And, as the imaginative apprehension is seldom embodied to the satisfaction of the person or persons concerned, there are repeated attempts to embody it more adequately than before. Not only this, the embodiment almost always suggests a modification in the imaginative apprehension itself as it unfolds possibilities which had not been seen before. All this normally happens in the case of any creative individual, the history of whose successive creations may be seen in this light. But when transposed to the history of the successive creative embodiments of a civilization, the story changes in an essential sense as the successors have to imitate or reconstruct or recreate by an act of emphatic imagination, the imaginative apprehension which is embodied in the earlier creations and match it with their own apprehension of the inadequacies, incompleteness and imperfections, both in the embodiment and the imaginative apprehension itself. Furthermore, as the story is repeated with each new generation, the reconstruction of the story of

history through the successive creations in all fields that have been left to us has to be seen in this perspective as a story of the way or ways in which the imaginative apprehension itself has been affected and transformed over millennia through an apprehension of both the inadequacies and the incompleteness as well as the new possibilities seen by successive generations of men and women in that civilization. This is not to deny that radically new imaginative apprehensions may arise in the course of the movement of a civilization, but merely to assert that such an apprehension will perforce have to enter into a dialogue with the older apprehension or apprehensions and, through such a process, modify the other and be itself modified to some extent. Thus what appeared to be radically different and revolutionary may, in the course of time, itself become a part of the culture and be amalgamated with the rest, even though it keeps some distinctive identity of its own. The story of the encounter that the Vedic tradition had with the Buddhist and the Jain traditions in India illustrates this to a very large extent.

The difficulty created by the fact that while the latter generations have to capture the imaginative apprehension through its embodiment in diverse fields is mitigated to some extent by the fact that the succeeding generations are usually trained and enculturated by those persons of the previous generation who were either directly responsible for the embodiment themselves or had apprehended and understood what they meant through a close proximity to those who had created them. In fact each civilization not only creates a tradition of successive embodiments of what it imaginatively apprehends, but also a tradition of understanding what it has created. The interaction between these two traditions is a major element in the story of a civilization, though as far as I know, it has seldom been so articulated.

The relation of these two traditions, that is, of the creative embodiment of what has been imaginatively appre-

hended and the tradition of understanding what has been created intersects with a third tradition which, though more fundamental, is related to them in a tangential way. This is the way a life is lived in a particular culture or the 'form of life' as it is sometimes called these days. Also, the form or forms of life have a tradition of their own and are governed by norms or rules regarding what ought to be done and what ought not to be done or what is a civilized form of behaviour and what is not. These are affected, sometimes more, sometimes less, by the traditions of creative embodiment and understanding about which we have talked earlier. There is, then, a triple story in the unfolding of a civilization, the history of the way or ways in which it creatively constructed its imaginative apprehensions in different fields, the history of the way or ways of understanding that it so created and the history of the form or forms of life along with the interaction between these three over long periods of time.

One of the most baffling problems regarding all these three aspects of a civilization is the varying sources of innovation and creativity in them and sometimes even a complete exhaustion of it for long periods of time. There may occur an element of repetitiveness without real innovation, or the creativity itself may shift from one field to another, or there may be relative insulation between different fields so that while creativity may be evidenced in some, the others are not touched by it. Thus the renewal of the creative impulse in a civilization is perhaps one of the most important elements to be discerned and its varying history in different fields should be documented as far as possible. But as a civilization always has a tendency to expand over space, one of the most interesting features about it is the shift in the centres of creativity over a period of time. The earlier centres do not last very long even though their reputation and prestige may linger for a long time. The arising of new centres of trade and commerce and of centres of political

power and patronage may sometimes explain the shifts, though these are not the only reasons for it. Sometimes, it is the very spirit of adventure which leads to the migration of populations and it is both the challenge of the enterprise and the new environment that may invoke a new response as both perception and imagination are freed of the habitual constraints imposed by the earlier situation. The idea of the new frontier has become proverbial since the American experience, but that there has always been a shifting frontier in the history of civilizations has generally been ignored or, at least, not sufficiently appreciated.

The history of a civilization may thus be seen in terms of its onward expansion through the migration of the population into other habitats and the freedom that this gives to the migrating population and the challenges that it poses resulting in a radical innovation in the older perceptions and apprehensions. And, as the story tends to repeat itself, it has to be told in relation to the successive centres that a civilization occupies in the course of its onward expansion and transplantation in another soil and sometimes even amongst other peoples. The point is that a civilization is not bound to the place of its origin or even to the peoples amongst whom it might have arisen. Nor is it bound to the political or the economic centre in which its beginnings are first discerned. It is almost like the invisible spirit which moves from one place to another and is confined to no particular place, though there may be temporary illusions that it belongs only to a particular people or place or time. The idea of a civilization is then only tenuously bound to regions or peoples, though there is an unavoidable tendency to identify it with the particular regions or peoples in which it first arose or subsequently flourished. The analogy of a civilization with the invisible spirit which we have just talked about, or its comparison with a seed that seemed to have grown in a particular soil and at a particular time and got transplanted into other regions and climates are

only attempts to indicate a feature of civilizations which, if neglected, will result in harbouring some of the most intractable illusions regarding them. The Indian civilization, for example, is supposed to be intimately bound up with the geographical region called India and the people that inhabit this geographical region. Similarly, most other civilizations, such as the Chinese, the Graeco-Roman or western are supposed to be inalienably and inextricably bound up with the regions and the peoples in which those civilizations have flourished until now. But, however persuasive the idea may appear, it does not happen to be true, for not only have each of these civilizations spread to other regions which are geographically very different from the one in which the civilization is supposed to have originated, but also a large number of other peoples have been drawn into its orbit, people who have been very different from the original creators of the civilization. Normally, the idea of race is associated with people and human kind is divided into mutually exclusive races which are basically different from each other. But, however ingrained the idea of race may be, the very fact that race is not a species in the biological sense of the term shows that it cannot play the role that is assigned to it by the prejudices which seem so dear to humankind. In fact, few votaries of the idea of a close relationship between race and civilization have cared to note that language, which is such a crucial feature of both man and civilization, is something that is not related to race in any significant way whatsoever. Any person can learn the language of another, even though the language to which he is born may seem more natural to him. But there is no in built incapacity on the grounds of belonging to a particular culture, even if we accept that there are difficulties in learning the language of another and thus gain an entry into his or her culture or civilization. In fact, the ambivalence which another civilization exercises on one is itself an evidence of this. On the one hand, one is fasci-

nated by its 'otherness' and just as in travel one likes differences and enjoys them to some extent, so also does one expect to find differences in other civilizations and one tries to become acquainted with them for this very reason. They present an alternative possibility of one's own being and many a time one learns from them. On the other hand, the 'otherness' of a civilization places a continuous strain; one continuously feels a stranger to the new ways of doing things. This makes a return to one's own familiar ways doubly welcome like returning to native ground after a visit to foreign lands or to one's own home cooking after eating exotic dishes. The point is that the identification with a civilization, though real, is basically accidental like all other identifications, an insight that Indian thought in some of its most important aspects has grasped, but without, extending it to the realm of civilization in any self-conscious manner.

The problem of the identity of a civilization is perhaps as difficult as the identity of a person who also changes over a period of time in almost all respects including the physical, the psychological and all other aspects in which we try to understand the so-called personhood of a person. Perhaps, Wittgenstein's well-known notion of 'family resemblance' may be helpful in articulating the notion of identity of changing phenomena as it draws our attention to the fact that identity in such a situation can be apprehended even if no single element or set of elements remains constant throughout the history of the entity concerned. According to Wittgenstein, identity over a period of time is ensured if there are common elements between stage A and B and between B and C, even if there are no common elements between A and C. He, of course, had elaborated his theory not in the context of the question of the identity of entities which were changing, but rather in relation to the problem of what was common between different instantiations of some supposed universal charac-

teristic because of which a common term was applied to all the particulars under it. Wittgenstein was arguing against the notion of common qualities which were to be exhibited by all the members of a class in order that the class name could be relevantly applied to them. However, it is obvious that the theory can be applied with greater justification to entities that change and yet possess a continuity or at least be extended to them without doing any injustice to it.

If we take Wittgenstein's thought seriously, we would also get rid of one of the most intractable problems in the history of civilizations which relates to the question whether there is something foundational in a civilization which continues to endure from the beginning to the end and which provides the basic unity and distinctiveness to it. The search for roots and foundations of a civilization in some common properties would thus be seen to be as illusory as the attempt to discover it in the case of persons or, for that matter, in any changing entity that endures in time. A Buddhist theory of civilizations would thus be as feasible as the Vedāntic theory. Or in other words, we need not postulate any permanent, unchanging *ātman* of a civilization, just as we need not do so in the case of a person. The idea that properties or activities must belong to some substance may be as illusory as the idea that as everything needs something else to rest upon, hence the earth must also necessarily need something else on which it may rest.

Civilizations thus have to be disengaged from their entanglement and identification not only with geographical regions and particular peoples but also with some unchanging foundation lying at their beginnings without which they will cease to be what they are. In fact, in this perspective, the story of a civilization would not be seen as the unfolding of a fundamental insight, idea or vision which was there at the very beginning in a seed form, but rather as a succession of ideas, insights and visions, which had a con-

tinuity with what preceded and succeeded but wherein no single idea, insight or vision need have persisted all through the civilization in its temporal dimension. This, of course, does not mean that the ideas, insights and visions need necessarily disappear from the subsequent stage, or that they may not reappear again after disappearance in the course of the civilization. It only means that persistence is not necessary and that a search for a root metaphor, a root value or a root vision is not necessary to give identity to a civilization. This also opens the way for understanding the interaction between civilizations, their borrowings and their influences upon each other in a better manner than the earlier model which identifies them with a particular geographical area, a particular people, a particular *weltanschauung*, a particular vision or value.

But if a civilization is not to be identified with a geographical region or a particular people or a specific *weltanschauung* or a vision, then one can be legitimately asked how one is to talk about it, or demarcate it from others or give it a specifiable identity so that it may be meaningfully distinguished from others. And, if our contention is seriously accepted, then how can one talk of an Indian, Chinese or West Asian or European civilization? And if one can legitimately do so, then why should it be regarded as mistaken to identify civilizations with regions or people or visions? The answer to this perhaps lies in two different dimensions. The first relates to the fact that civilizations are not just a matter of the past but of the future as well and that many civilizations, even when seen in terms of their past history, have not only had many significant turns in their historical career but also had radical breaks at crucial times which later merged with their past and became an integral part of their history. This consideration, if taken seriously, will mean that civilizations are unfinished products of man which still have infinite potentiality for growth and change in them. The second dimension relates to the

fact that all civilizations are basically human achievements and, hence, have to be seen in a unitary manner as part of a common human enterprise in which what has been achieved at one particular place or by one particular people is not only an accidental occurrence but also has a claim to universality that is relevant for all humankind in whatever space or time it may be located. Civilizations thus should themselves be seen as variations on them, as a part of human enterprise distributed in space and time in which all human beings are equally entitled to share, and, in fact, have the right to do so. The idea of ownership, though natural, is, like all egoism, an aberration and ultimately an illusion. If this be accepted, then civilizations will be seen as part of a collective human endeavour and enterprise which has been carried on by successive generations over long periods of time, and which, though sometimes interrupted, has never been given up for long by human beings who have been even vaguely aware of what they have inherited from their past. The significant factor in this perspective is not that civilizations have developed an identifiable personality of their own over millennia but that they have continually borrowed from each other's achievements and deficiencies. The story of civilizations then has been both a cooperative and competitive enterprise in which there has been an element of rivalry along with a deeper awareness that they are all engaged in the common enterprise of man on this planet which is as unending as time itself.

It is of course true that the stories of civilizations until now have been told in a manner as if they were more or less isolated stories and that there was some sort of a primeval vision which immanently unfolded in their history over time. It has also usually been contended that their relations with the outside world or other civilizations have been mainly peripheral and accidental, contributing little of significance to their growth which is mainly determined

by internal considerations. Methodologically, there is little harm in doing so, provided one is aware that it is only a methodological device and that the counter vision which sees civilizations as interacting units within a developing whole constituted by humanity as a unit on this planet is equally valid and, perhaps, more significant. The ecumenical religions try to do something of this sort but as they themselves are exclusively attached to their own prophet or saviour or book, they only live and thrive by exclusion. Not only this, they suffer from the same fallacies and illusions which the votaries of particular civilizations do, that is, they deny the possibility of future revelations as if God's potential had been exhausted by the revelation he made through Christ or Mohammed, or Buddha, or Mahāvīra or the Vedic seers. Also, they are as much attached to the little egoities of names and persons and places as if the past vehicle of the revelation or the place where it was allegedly revealed is more important than the content of the revelation itself. Moreover, they too seem to see their story as isolated and as determined by a primeval, original vision which immanently determines the rest. It is strange that the normal story of religions as much suppresses the borrowings, the changes and the developments in the course of its history as the story of civilizations in the manner it has been generally told until now.

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## Mapping the Field: Illusions, Temptations and Possibilities in the Enterprise of Understanding Civilizations

That civilization ought not to be identified with any particular region or people or visions or *weltanschauung* creates a dilemma for the working historian of civilizations as well as for the empirical task of the writing of any particular history. One has not only to continuously refer to the places and the people in which it originated and where and among whom it flourished as well as to the values and ideals it tried to articulate and embody, but also to locate oneself in some region and culture, particularly where one happened to be born and brought up. Thus, the historian has inevitably to have a name which, whatever philosophers may say about proper names, identifies one with a particular country, group or religion or tradition. The very fact of growing up, implies this and hence, both the subject and object of any historical construction are specific in terms of those very characteristics which we have considered as being, in the last analysis, accidental to them. In a sense, this is the basic dilemma of man, as the deepest wisdom reveals to him/her that the truth about him or her cannot be captured by any set of predicates and yet he or she cannot know or feel or act without some sort of identification with that which is ultimately only accidental to his or her being. Even the gender difference which is so deeply embedded in language that, in order to overcome it, we have