mains so as to know at a glance what worth-while achievements were made in each of these dimensions and what pattern, if any, emerges from such an apprehension. The pattern shall be both simultaneous and successive, that is, within the same time span it may encompass all that has been achieved by a civilization in all these dimensions as well as the successive unfoldment of its creativity over successive generations in all these domains. There is also a problem of the time lag in the spread of an innovation and the awareness of it, enabling it to bring about a significant change in the thinking and perception of the people concerned. Furthermore, an innovation in one field takes time to have an impact on other fields, and there is always a difference in this regard between fields that may be considered as closely related and those that are distant and far off. There is also the difficulty of the relative valuational ranking in the various fields of creativity in a culture, along with the fact that creativity and innovation does not occur simultaneously in all fields at the same time. The history of any civilization has thus to make a special effort to identify the fields in which creativity and innovation are occurring and what delayed effects, if any, these have on other fields. Similarly, it is equally vital to trace the shifts in fields where creative innovation occurs in the course of a civilization and also the sudden spurts in creativity, followed by long periods of assimilation and conservation of those innovations, of their development in horizontal and extensional terms.

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The Plurality of Civilizations and the Question of Identity

Civilizations are the most enduring products of human creativity and thus need to be understood quite differently from all the other specific creations of man belonging to some one area or field of interest or concern using quite different methodologies. The long development in the enterprise of understanding the various domains that man has created and within which he has sought to achieve a 'fit' or congruence between the object studied and the methodology adopted for its understanding, has itself a history of trial and error. This has led to a relatively more adequate relationship between the two, giving us a 'truer' knowledge of the object than before. But as everyone knows, the enterprise has not been equally successful in all fields, and its relatively greater success in one domain has usually given rise to the temptation to extend that methodology to other domains, sometimes, even treating it as the only valid means of 'knowledge' or 'understanding' of any phenomenon whatsoever.

Self-conscious reflection on this phenomenon has led to what is usually known as the problem of knowledge or 'epistemology' in the western tradition of thinking on this issue. In the Indian context, it has been termed the *pramāṇa śāstra* and, besides the problem of how many *pramāṇas* are to be minimally accepted for understanding the human enterprise of knowing. It has also raised the interesting

question of whether what is known by one *pramāṇa* can also be known by others. In other words, the issue relates to the question of whether each *pramāṇa* grasps its own particular kind of object of knowledge and whether it and the object are related in such a way that those types of objects can be known only by that *pramāṇa*, and whether it is able to grasp only those types of objects of knowledge. The difference between *pramāṇas* in this view is supposed to reflect the radical and typal difference between the objects that are sought to be known. As against this, those who maintain that the same object can be known through different *pramānas* do not believe in any radical difference in the types that are sought to be known. Perhaps even they will have to admit the difference in the 'kind' of knowledge that is given about the object by one *pramāṇa* from that given by others. Perceptual knowledge is not the same as inferential knowledge, even if both the 'knowledges' pertain to the same object.

There is, of course, a problem regarding what exactly is meant by calling it the 'same' object. Perhaps the differences in knowledge arising from differences in the *pramāṇas* will have to be treated on the basis of an analogy of qualities which, though different, are still said to belong to the same object. But then knowledge would become a property of the object in the same sense as, say, 'redness'. The Indian tradition of thought, particularly in its Nyāya variety, has not hesitated to treat *viṣayatā*, which is sometimes translated as 'knowness' and sometimes as 'objecthood', as a property of the object. But even Nyāya, as far as I am aware, has not made a distinction in different types of *viṣayatā* arising from the fact that the object known by one particular *pramāṇa* can be known by other *pramāṇas* too.

The problem of understanding a civilization is, however, *sui qeneris* in the sense that it is not the understanding of any particular area or field, or domain in which man has

exercised his creativity over time. Yet, the very fact that man as a self-conscious being has reflected upon this very problem of 'understanding' and 'knowing' possibly provides a clue to understanding a civilization. Reflection on epistemology or the *pramāṇa śāstra* or the *pramāṇa prameya vyāpāra* may then be considered as being of central importance in the self-comprehension of a civilization and one that should at least be considered to be as relevant and crucial for its understanding as anything else.

A reflection on the problem of knowledge and the problem of its sources and validation, along with the issues relating to the typal diversity in the objects of knowledge and the consequence on the 'fittingness' of the instrument of knowledge to the object attempted to be known leads inevitably to the question regarding how the 'knower' himself is to be 'known' and whether there is any supervening radical typal difference between this 'object' of knowledge and all other objects of knowledge. The issue relates to the question as to whether the typal differences between different kinds of objects of knowledge are on a level with the radical typal difference between that which is the 'subject' of knowledge and to which every other object is ultimately an 'object' of knowledge. The well-known Upaniṣadic question formulated by Yājñavalkya, namely, 'Who shall know that to which everything else is known?' or 'How shall that be known which knows everything else?', epitomizes this problem.

The clue to the understanding of a civilization, then, may not lie just on its reflection on the *pramāṇas* and whether different *pramāṇas* are necessary for different types of objects of knowledge but, at a deeper level, in how it has formulated and dealt with the question of 'self-knowledge' to which everything else appears inevitably as an 'object' that demands to be known. This 'demand' is of a very strange kind as the very apprehension of the object *qua* object distinguishes it both from the subject to which it is

an object and from other objects, thus giving it a character of 'something' as distinguished from other things and yet is seen or felt as something not completely 'known', something whose secret is yet to be revealed. This simultaneous presence of 'transparency' and 'opacity' gives rise to the awareness that there is something that demands to be known further. Yet, the opaqueness never ceases, nor does the demand.

The awareness of the subject is, however, transparent in a radically different sense as its awareness accompanies or is an inseparable component of the awareness of any object whatsoever. This is the awareness of the 'I' to which everything is ascribed by a self-conscious being in the very act of his self-consciousness. Yet, its opaqueness is also of a radically different kind, as the moment an attempt is made to catch hold of it as an 'object' it shows all the problematic and opacity that belongs to any object simply because it is an 'object'.

The relation of all this to the problem of understanding civilizations is that this is the level at which the issue of the self-understanding of a civilization opens itself in a way that is not as easily accessible to other ways of understanding it.

The self-understanding of a civilization may thus be regarded as a function of the way it formulates the problem of the understanding of the self or that which is the 'subject' of all experience. 'Know thyself' is both the foundational imperative and the ultimate advice of all civilizations. But what exactly is meant by this advice and what the imperative involves in terms of what is to be done for its 'knowing' have differed from civilization to civilization. Also, the very concept of the self has varied from one civilization to another and, thus, one of the clues to the self understanding of a civilization may be found in the concept or concepts of the self that it has entertained and the methods it has recommended for its exploration and knowledge.

The distinctiveness of a civilization may thus be seen to lie in its pervasive consciousness of the problem of self-knowledge as well as the 'object'-knowledge and the relative preponderance in the 'demands' generated by the challenging opacities in these two forms of knowledge. But, as no knowledge is unrelated to action or feeling, and as the quest for knowledge itself requires some sort of action as well as some emotional commitment, the relation between knowledge and action, and knowledge and feeling has to be equally the centre of attention if civilizations are to be understood in all their complexity. The relations between self-knowledge and object-knowledge are, however, themselves a function of the way in which the relation between the subject and the object, or between the self and the world, is conceived in the traditions of a civilization. And, as both the subject and the object or the self and the world may be conceived in terms of the primacy of knowledge, or activity, or feeling, the understanding generated by their alternative centrality is also bound to be different in character. Moreover, if we remember that the transparencies and opacities do not belong only to the world of knowing but also to the realm of feeling and action, we might begin to appreciate the complexity of the task of understanding a civilization even through the notion of self-understanding which I have suggested.

Normally, the self-understanding of a civilization is seen only in terms of 'understanding', just as the foundational paradigm of this is supposed to be in the advice or the imperative 'know thyself'. But what would it possibly mean if we were to ask or advise a person to 'feel himself' or to 'will himself' or 'act on himself'? The very awkwardness of the phrases used in the context of willing and feeling shows the difficulty of the situation, and yet, there is a feeling relationship to ourselves that may be satisfactory or unsatisfactory and does try to change us, even though the attempt may not be very successful. 'Change thyself' is per-

haps as good a formulation as 'know thyself', though 'feel thyself' continues to sound embarrassingly awkward. Yet, the phrase 'realize thyself' seems to have in it interesting reverberations of both willing and feeling.

The self-understanding of a civilization is a far more complex affair than it seems to be at first sight. It is not just a matter of how the self was conceived or how its relationships with the object or the world were apprehended or how the technologies of self knowledge were explored and practiced, but, also of the radical dissatisfactions that it experienced with regard to both the self and the world, and how it tried to overcome these dissatisfactions and in what directions. The dissatisfactions may lie in the obstinate, impervious opacity of that which is sought to be known or in the persistent resistance to change in the direction of the desirable by both the external and the internal reality that is continuously encountered or by the inescapable negative shadow of unfulfillment that accompanies all feeling and endeavour, or even a combination of all these. However, as it is these dissatisfactions that provide the dynamic moving force for a civilization's unfoldment in time, it is their specific form, nuance, or shade that determines the individuality of a civilization.

Civilizations, it should not be forgotten, are human enterprises in time, and thus the unity they have is the unity of the enterprises in which they have engaged or the visions they have tried to embody and realize. However, as the enterprise and the vision is that of a self-reflective being, it has to be understood primarily and foundationally in terms of the form that this self reflection has taken. As self-reflection primarily arises from the consciousness that questions, the understanding of a civilization may address itself to the questions which this self-consciousness has posed and to which it has sought answers. The cycles of questions and answers, however, never ceases, for normally, if the culture is alive, the answers themselves give rise to

new questions which in turn demand answers. Also, to most of the questions that the self-consciousness asks, there is no one determinate answer and hence the plurality of possible answers gives rise to far more questions than was the situation when the original question or questions were asked in the early history of any civilization. The proliferation of questions is, thus, analogous to the proliferation of persons in the biological realm, and it is as much a sign of intellectual fecundity as it is supposed to be with regard to the vital biological life of man. But there are obvious differences between the proliferation in the two realms. In one it creates increasing demands on the environment and leads to social problems of various kinds, while the proliferation of questions in the intellectual realm creates no such problems.

There is of course the problem of the extent that questioning the intellectual environment of a civilization can be sustained without leading to total confusion and disruption of the intellectual domain itself. Human beings seem to be as conservative in the intellectual realm as in any other, and hence tend to fight shy of, or ward off, or ignore inconvenient questions, or questions that are at radical variance with those that have gained respectability by being raised earlier in the tradition and accepted as legitimate by it. Fundamental questions asked at the beginning of a civilization thus acquire overriding authority and sanctity that questions arising later in the tradition never seem to do. The nature of the foundational questions thus defines and determines a civilization in a deeper sense and hence, to understand a civilization, it is important to know the nature of the questions it asked at its very beginnings and what it cognitively felt as problematic and demanding a solution.

The role that these foundational questions and problematics play in the history of any civilization is ambivalent; for, on the one hand, they give it its intellectual iden-

tity, on the other, they are also felt to be binding constraints on the unfettered freedom of the intellect. Indeed, the history of a civilization may be seen, at least in its cognitive dimension, as an attempt to free itself from the bondage of the primordial questions and problems that the so-called founding fathers of the civilization had raised, along with a continual attempt to reassert the primacy of the earlier form that the intellectual enterprise had taken in the beginnings of that civilization.

One of the most decisive things in this context is not so much the content of the questions that were asked or the problematic that was posed, but rather the attitude that underlay this activity of asking questions and raising problems, for it is this attitude, that will determine, or at least largely influence, the freedom of intellectual life of the civilization in later times. If the questioning activity itself was welcomed, it will leave a permanent mark on the later history of civilization, particularly if the attitude to the answers given was also primarily tentative. On the other hand, if the answers were treated as definitive and final, and the questioning activity discouraged or considered undesirable, a Herculean effort would be necessary later even to create a little space for the play of intellect and for the autonomy of the world of the intellect to be recognized.

The problem of identity is, however, not confined to the realm of the intellect alone, though it is quite important there as rationality constitutes an important element of what human beings value most. The problem applies to other domains too and hence one of the clues to an understanding of any civilization is to find what it considered to be its identity in the different domains, and which of them it is considered primary and which secondary. At a deeper level still, the problem would relate to the question of how the notion of identity itself has been conceived. Self-identity, as I said earlier, is not the same as the identity of objects, for it raises questions that are radically different to those relating to the world of objects.

Even the problem of the identity of the self is multifarious in character, for it not only involves the question of distinguishing between the identity of the self from the identity of all that appears to be an object or is apprehended as such, but also relates to the question as to which aspect or dimension of the self is regarded as more important than others. It is of course true that such a formulation accepts, to a large extent, the view that the self itself has aspects or dimensions integral to it. However, this itself may be treated as problematic and the question may be asked as to whether a particular civilization accepts the idea of self as having aspects or dimensions amongst which it regards some as more important or definitive of the self than others, or does not accept the multifaceted or multidimensional nature of the self or tends to deny the notion of the self altogether. The last position is obviously too radical to be held in most civilizations, but Buddhism, at least in its classical formulation by the Buddha, does appear to hold this position. For the Buddha, as is well known, the identity of both objects and the self were illusions imposed primarily by name and form or even, what is generally not emphasized, by the requirements of pragmatic considerations in the context of action. The changing notions of identity imposed on the object or even on the self by the requirements of action, on the one hand, and of feeling and knowing, on the other, has been given insufficient attention in philosophical literature. Nor perhaps has the 'imposition' of identity by the use of language in the description of objects been the subject of much reflection, even though the recognition of differences through their articulation in language because of the requirements of successful living in a particular ecological-cum-cultural environment has generally been noted. Yet, to understand a civilization, what is of importance is to discern both the context and the prob-

lematic of its self-reflection on the problem of identity relating to the object and the self that ponders the issue.

It should be remembered in this connection that these are not matters of 'truth' or 'falsity', but rather how a civilization shapes itself over time by the way it conceives its identity and tries to actualize it to the greatest extent possible under the actual circumstances determined by biological constraints and ecological compulsions. The identities conceived, however, have always an ideal aspect to them, for man is seldom satisfied with what he or she is and always wants to be something else. This ideal aspect of identity is the dynamic motive force of a civilization, and yet as man finds himself basically differentiated both in terms of age and gender, and the functional differentiations required for any social functioning, the actual dynamics of events is a compromise between these two, with shifting interplay between them over time. The recent emphasis on equality between the sexes and between all classes of human beings performing different functions in a society has sharpened our awareness of differential identifications, and even of definitions of socially and culturally fostered identities amongst these, and the avoidable injustices inherent in them. However, as both the differences due to gender and to functional specialization seem endemic in the bio-social structure of human societies, the understanding of any civilization would need to take into account not only the differential identities fostered by these but also the ways it has tried to mitigate the unjustified inequalities resulting from them. Indeed, one of the interesting ways of understanding a civilization would be to see its justification of the structural inequalities and the attempt to question those justifications.

The very attempt at a self-conscious justification in a civilization may be seen as a sign that what was being justified was felt to be wrong in some sense. Otherwise, why should the need for justification have even been felt? The justification and the questioning, then, may be seen as two sides of a situation which was felt to be morally uncomfortable for some reason or other. The deeper question would therefore relate to the moral values in terms of which the actually prevailing necessities were felt to be uncomfortable. However, the response to moral discomfort may be diverse and may range from outright suppression of the guilty conscience to the adoption of ways and means of ameliorating the situation and salvaging the individual's conscience to some degree, or even of theoretically justifying what is unjustifiable, that is, to preach a counter morality as being really moral.

The self understanding of a civilization need not, however, be confined only to the moral discomforts it has felt and the diverse ways in which it has sought to cope with the situation. It also extends to that which it has considered unintelligible in the universe surrounding it and the ways in which it has tried to reduce this unintelligibility for itself. The attempt to render intelligible what seems prima facie unintelligible, or to justify what is morally uncomfortable, gives rise in turn to a discourse which, over a period of time, demands to be understood and justified as, to a later moral and intellectual sensibility, it may not appear viable by contemporary intellectual and moral standards. This continual attempt to make the past intellectually and morally justifiable to ourselves so that our historical identity may be acceptable to ourselves results in a continuous dialogue with the past in such a way that its cognitive and moral inadequacies are, as far as possible, eradicated or mitigated. The problem of the individual's identity is, thus, merged at a deeper level with the identity of the civilization itself, just as the hopes, aspirations, and fears for its future become an individual's own hopes, fears, and aspirations.

The interpenetration of an individual's identity with the civilization of which he happens to be a member, however,

itself has layers and levels that may be meaningfully compared with those that are found in geological or archaeological excavations. The identity is not all of a piece, but carries with it not only an in-built diversity of dimensions but also depths that are generally submerged and not visible except at critical times. The so-called return to the roots or the foundational texts or even to myths illustrates this substantively. Beyond this there are the primordial exemplars of the civilization that haunt the individual's imagination and to whom he perpetually returns for inspiration and guidance. The illusory concreteness of the present is continuously subverted by forces from the millennial past that question its concreteness and attempts to infect it with their own dreams and aspirations, supplementing it with an imaginary dimension that appears to the consciousness as more 'real' than the 'living present'.

The escape into the world of imagination and play is well known, but it is seldom realized that instead of being an 'escape', it is a return to a 'reality' which is felt to be both 'real' and 'fulfilling' of an individual's innermost being. Like the proverbial return to childhood of one who is old, the individual also 'returns' to the past of his civilization to understand what he is and to come closer to it by becoming himself a part of it to the extent that this is possible. The perennial appeal of the Vedas, the Bible, the Koran, or even of the Greeks or persons like Confucius, Lao-Tse, the Buddha and the Mahāvīra exemplify this to a pre-eminent extent. It seems that the individual can be himself only by being at one with his own civilization, just as he feels at home only in the language to which he has been born or the food to which he was accustomed during his childhood.

This 'mediated' relation to reality through a civilization and the derivation of an identity with it seems to deny the possibility of a direct access to reality without the mediation of the civilization of birth or the achievement of an

identity that transcends the specificity and the parochial particularity of that civilization. Yet, there is an awareness of a formless foundational core of a person's being that underlies all determinate formations with which he identifies himself and whose specific determinateness is shaped by the civilization of his birth. This paradoxical relationship between the formless foundation of which the individual is inalienably aware through the fact of his self-consciousness and the determinate forms bequeathed to him by his civilization is rendered even more paradoxical by an awareness of other civilizations, perhaps through accidental encounters in the person's individual or civilizational history. It is not that there is no awareness of the conflicting strands within the individual's own civilization or that he does not find contrary or contradictory identifications in himself with different aspects of it. As they are not normally felt in that way, however, they do not evoke that sense of 'alienness' experienced towards the elements of other civilizations that an individual encounters during the course of his life. Even when these are adopted or accepted, they are deemed to be 'impositions' which the individual finds easiest to give up as he grows older. The relation between the disparate elements of an individual's civilization which he carries in his personality thus seem radically different from those that he encounters in a civilization other than his own, even if he admires it or adopts it for some reason or other. The reason for this is perhaps because his self-identification with the civilization is at such a deep and narcissistic level that he 'sees' and 'feels' everything involved in it as his own even if he is embarrassed or ashamed about it and rejects the ideals and the values that have been imparted to him by his own civilization.

The problem of the identity of a civilization is thus inseparably linked to the individual's self-identity and each is not only integrally involved with the other but also substantively mirrors it. Different individuals mirror it in dif-

ferent ways and with diverse emphases, but even amongst their differences they recognize the overarching identity with that which the other has chosen to emphasize. This is generally not the case with elements in other civilizations even when it is realized that they too are variations on a theme common to humanity in general. The problem of the internalization of civilizational identity and its merger with the personal identity of the individual concerned is thus crucial to the understanding both of civilizations and individuals. Can an individual, for example, be multi-civilizational just as he can be bi- or multi-lingual? And even granting the possibility, it is not quite clear what it would mean to be multi-civilizational or to have a multi-civilizational identity.

The relations between civilization and language are multifarious, but at least this much is clear, and this is well known, that any particular civilization is not uniquely correlated or confined to any one language or even group of languages. A civilization expresses itself in a number of languages in the course of time and may even at one time articulate itself in diverse languages. It may of course be said that these languages themselves have a history that is bound up with the growth and development of the civilization over time and that often the diversity of languages has been a result of the spread of the civilization over spaces far from the place where it is supposed to have originated. Yet however true this may be, it does not help us to either understand the problem of self-identity, or the identity of a civilization, or the intermeshing of the two which we have been discussing. The problem rather is how to decide whether a particular set of languages belongs to one civilization rather than another. It is perhaps not so much the languages as what is conveyed through them that is the heart of the matter. It is the continuity of concerns and content that derives from the continuity of the people who maintained, transmitted, and developed a tradition through these languages that gives

them the stamp of that identity which distinguishes one civilization from another.

The concerns of a civilization, however, ultimately seem to derive from the way its self-consciousness has presented it with the problems arising from its relationship to that which it encounters as an object and to which it relates, both actively and passively, in multifarious ways. The objects and the relationships to them are of course diverse and often the problems which self-consciousness faces arise from the fact of this diversity in the types of objects encountered and the different relations with them. The situation is further complicated by the fact that to self-consciousness the 'self' itself is an object and the relationship to it mirrors, to a certain degree, the diverse relationships which it has to other objects that are generally treated more as 'objects' in the usual sense of the term. Moreover, besides the active and the passive attitudes which it entertains towards everything that it encounters as an object, it also has a third attitude which may be described, to a degree, by the term 'enjoying'. These problems give rise to a problematic that demands resolutions and the identity of a civilization may be seen in terms of what it felt to be its basic problematic or problematics, and its history understood in terms of its attempts to resolve them.

The articulation of the problematic, however, takes a conceptual form as self-consciousness normally expresses itself through both concepts and images. The image and the concept embody the life of feeling and thought which man, as a self-conscious being, experiences and which articulate the problematic in these two different dimensions of his existential living. The image is closer to feeling than the concept in attempting to build bridges between the two and to create symbols that appear to have both a cognitive and an affective import. Myth is the perfect embodiment of this tendency, where all the problematics of a civilization fuse into one and convey them in a powerfully in-

tegrated way that simultaneously appeals not only to the cognitive and affective dimensions of consciousness but also to its volitional aspects.

The myths of a civilization may be regarded as a key to its understanding in terms of the objectification which it has achieved in the process of understanding itself and seeing itself in, what may be termed, a mirror of itself. But in order that the myths may be correctly understood, they will need to be seen in terms of both concepts and the images that a civilization has created during the course of its history. The myths do not change very much and they provide a constant reference to a civilization in terms of which it finds its deepest identity. Images change far more than myths ever do, but they are far slower in this than concepts, as the latter are not involved with the life of the feelings of a civilization as images generally are. The concepts, on the other hand, have a clarity that both the images and the myths, and the symbols embodied in myths and works of art generally lack, and hence the comprehension of its self-identity through them always appears to be far less vague than that found in other media in which a civilization has expressed itself. But the conceptual self-consciousness of a civilization has always an in-built paradoxicality deriving from both the infinite regress of self-consciousness and from the dual nature of the concept, in that it not only refers to something outside itself but also to itself and the consciousness that formulates it.

Concepts themselves function at two levels, or rather belong to two levels that are radically different from one another, in that while those that belong to the first level refer to diverse objects of experience and attempt to comprehend them in thought; those belonging to the second level are concerned with the concepts at the first level in their 'conceptuality' and seek to comprehend the concepts through which self-consciousness attempts to understand all that is an 'object' to it. The second level concepts are

normally found in philosophical reflection, which itself belongs to a second order as it is generally a reflection on the reflection itself. It is this second level reflection that puts a question mark on all first level activity in which man is engaged and which problematizes it in such a way that nothing remains outside the activity of questioning. Everything becomes dubitative and all the self-certainties of the image and the symbol, combined and embodied in the myth, dissolve before this second level reflection which makes all reflection an 'object' to itself. The tension thus generated between the 'certainties' of the first level and the 'uncertainties' of the second provide the basic cleavage in a civilization, which it continually seeks to heal in diverse ways and its identity may be seen both in terms of the way this tension is articulated and the way in which it attempts to overcome it. Ultimately, the tension is between consciousness and self-consciousness, and the history of a civilization may be regarded as being the way in which they have articulated and come to terms with it.

The problem of the identity of a civilization may therefore be seen in terms of the myths that it has elaborated to imaginatively understand itself as well as the conceptual structures at the two levels which it has formulated to theoretically take hold of its experience in diverse domains. In between there is the whole world of images and symbols that are embodied in its art and literature in which an attempt is made to encapsulate the living reality in feelings and emotions both actual and ideal.

Beyond these, however, there is another level at which the identity of a civilization may be sought, and that is the way it treats this very problem of identity. This is perhaps the most curious dimension of the problem, as in it a civilization tends to question the very notion of identity and problematizes it at its foundational level. This would normally have escaped the attention of all students of civilizations had it not been of such a significant concern to at

least one of its specimens. I am of course referring to the Indian civilization where it was not only Buddhism that declared the very notion of identity to be born of ignorance and illusion but that almost all the other major traditions of thought tended to radically question its usual understanding.

The struggle against identity may take many forms and each of them can take a civilization in different directions. These differences in the attempts at a complete 'denial of identity' would, then, by a perverse logic, provide a differentiating identity to the civilization or at least to certain powerful formations in it. The denial of identity, for example, may take the form of denying the *svatva* or essence of anything, including that of the self, as in Buddhism, or may seek to question the identification of the self with any 'object' whatsoever as, say, in Sāṁkhya. Alternatively, the denial may be in terms of any set of predicates, finite or infinite, which are supposed to limit that which, in its essence, cannot be limited as, perhaps, in Advaita Vedānta where, ultimately, the self or that which is real is not supposed to have any predicates at all. The denial may be of the reality of difference that ultimately gives identity to a plurality of beings.

The variety of directions which the denial of identity may take would also lead to related attempts to overcome or nullify those kinds of identities in a civilization and result in a history of the tradition of such attempts over a period of time. Also, as such attempts would be made in opposition to the attempts of those who have conceived of the denial of identity in other ways, the history of a civilization may be seen in terms of the struggle between achieving different kinds of de-identifications and the different phases of it distinguished or demarcated by the dominance of one kind of attempt over others. This would be particularly fascinating with regard to the history of Indian civilization which, at a very self-conscious level, has pursued the

denial of identity in almost all the forms that might possibly be conceived. Yet, once attention is drawn to such a phenomenon, it may equally be asked if other civilizations conceived these tendencies and, if so, in what form.

The problems arising out of the denial of identity in any form whatsoever ultimately seem to derive from the fact that ultimate reality is conceived of as essentially formless, and all determinate forms seen as limitations of it. The phenomenon is akin to what in Gestalt psychology is called 'figure' and 'ground' in the context of perception where anything that is perceived is always apprehended against a background of which an individual is usually unaware but which significantly 'determines' his perception. The shifting of the focus of attention however from the perceptual object to the background in which it is situated leads to an infinite regress, in the sense that each background, in the event of the determinate awareness of it, presupposes yet another background for its apprehension. The psychology of apprehension itself dictates that what is apprehended must be determinate, however fuzzy or indeterminate its 'determinateness' may be. Still, the awareness that something utterly formless is presupposed by all that is apprehended, whether at the perceptual or the intellectual level, affects what is apprehended in a fundamental sense in that the self-consciousness that is aware of it is, to a certain extent, detached from being overwhelmed by the so-called absolute determinateness of that which it apprehends. This is perhaps the profoundest meaning of the word *'syād'*, in the celebrated Jain theory of knowledge. The *'syād'* would thus refer to the foundational indeterminateness and formlessness that surrounds and underlies each determinate formation that one encounters in experience infecting it with its own indeterminateness and formlessness and thus countering, to however limited an extent, its pretensions to being 'what there is'.

Yet, there seems to be a radical difference between such an awareness when it occurs with respect to any determinate object of consciousness and when it is felt with regard to consciousness itself. Consciousness, it should not be forgotten, has its own determinate formations which are more or less known to it in self-consciousness. But when this awareness of the formless and the indeterminate seeps into the apprehension by self-consciousness of its own determinate forms, it affects the awareness in a far more foundational sense than when it is realized in regard to the determinate objects of which the individual is aware. The formlessness and indeterminateness of consciousness is ultimately the denial of identity to the very self, and thus once the individual is aware of that within his own being that denies each formation of himself and he treats it as the 'I', he begins to feel differently about his own self. The detachment or distancing from an individual's own psychic formations is a far more radical enterprise than an awareness that all the determinate identities that he encounters in experience are only provisionally so, as they will give way or be swamped by the formlessness and the indeterminateness that surround them. Yet, this lessening of the intensity of the empirical identity, though providing some sort of freedom because of the objectivation of whatever happens to the individual and inducing at least some relative distancing from it, also results in an alienation from the empirical domain, resulting in a lack of full-fledged immersion in it, particularly in terms of the feelings and emotions the individual has towards it.

It is, of course, true that the aesthetic consciousness is supposed to be a close analogue of this without the negative consequences which the idea of alienation generally entails. Keats formulated the idea in his well-known notion of 'negative capability'; but, firstly, the aesthetic realm is not the whole of the life one lives and, secondly, even within the aesthetic realm, it is necessary to distinguish between the attitude and the consciousness of he who creates and he who appreciates, even though the two may coincide, as when an author reads his own work or an artist sees his or her own creation.

The problem becomes even more insistent in the realm of moral action where it is necessary not only to identify with the self which judges some course of action to be right or wrong, but which also has to act on such a judgement, not half-heartedly, but with all the capacity and enthusiasm at one's command. Indeed, the problem of identification with the empirical self is perhaps more insistent at the level of action than of knowledge, as the latter already involves some sort of detachment and distancing.

The only other realm in which the self's identification seems equally insistent is that of feelings and emotions, though there seems to be a strange asymmetry in this regard between pain and pleasure, which has generally not been noticed. In pain it is necessary to attend to something with which it is impossible to de-identify except when it itself, so to say, *permits* it. There seems to be no freedom from pain as far as consciousness is concerned, for it is totally immersed in it whether it likes it or not. Indeed, it seems to shut off everything besides itself and claims the obsessive attention of consciousness to itself. Pleasure, on the other hand, seems to allow a detached consciousness to itself. Indeed, it generally seems even to raise the question about itself as to whether the person concerned really experiences the pleasure he seems to feel. Such a doubt never occurs with regard to the pain that is felt, although there are situations of pain where there occurs a witness consciousness to which the pain is as much an 'object' as anything else. But even in such a situation there is never any doubt regarding the reality of the pain itself.

This difference between pain and pleasure is interesting in more ways than one. First, it suggests that the 'reality' of pleasure and pain is not of the same order, for the

former has an in-built dubiety about it which the other lacks. The dubiety is of course different from dubiety in cognitive contexts, for there seems to be no 'referential' element in the apprehension of pleasure. Still, the fact that the act of self-consciousness with regard to the feeling of pleasure creates a division or a bifurcation in the feeling itself, giving rise to a questioning of it, is interesting. This is because it points to a state of feeling that differs from that which the person is experiencing and one that is of such a self-authenticating nature that it cannot be doubted. This is perhaps what is indicated by the use of a different term such as bliss or *ānanda* which is supposed to have an indubiety about it as it belongs to a different order. There are, of course, differences both in intensity, subtlety and quality amongst pleasurable states and also with regard to the degree in which they are tied to particular sensuous, imaginative, or intellectual objects. Similarly, there is a difference between those that arise from the active exercise of a faculty and others that arise from 'objects' with which the person is interrelated.

It is not exactly clear whether there are corresponding differences amongst pains too, but at least *prima facie* it appears that the characterization of pain moves in a direction that differs from our characterization of pleasures. The difference, perhaps, arises from the fact that we welcome pleasures and seek various kinds of them in different ways, while, as far as pain is concerned, we first want to be rid of it and are not really concerned in identifying it except for the doctor whose responsibility is to remove it. This also explains why there is such an in-built questioning about pleasure, for the person experiencing it always feels that it could be different, subtler, more intense, or abiding than what it is. Also, as the person 'wants' it, he is suspicious of whether he is 'deceiving' himself into believing that he is really experiencing it when in reality, this is not so. This creates a puzzling epistemological situation, in that the

reality of that which is experienced is judged by that which it 'can be'. This, however, is different from the usual situation where a person distinguishes what 'is' on the basis of that which 'ought-to-be', as there is no moral judgement involved that the pleasure the person is experiencing 'ought' to be different from what it 'is'. It is also different from the aesthetic 'ought' where a person feels that things as they are arranged should be organized differently so that they may produce a greater 'aesthetic' effect on the beholder. The feeling of pleasure is not that its elements should be arranged differently, but that it itself could be different from what it is. This feeling should also be distinguished from the awareness of a possibility which is often grasped in a cognitive enterprise and has provided the impetus for the development of modal logic. It is not some abstract possibility which the actuality of the experienced feeling of pleasure unfolds or suggests, though this may also happen sometimes, as the dubiety of it reveals that that which is being questioned is the actuality itself and hence there is no question of the 'actual' being contrasted with the possible in some sense or other. Thus the epistemological problems posed by pleasure seem to be of an order that is radically different from those that arise in the context of other notions which are fairly well known to those interested in the field. Normally, the 'actuality' of the actual is doubted in the context of the discussion of illusion where what is apprehended is not exactly the same as what is 'really' there. But in the case of feelings, their 'being' coincides with the way they are apprehended and hence the doubt about the feeling of pleasure cannot be subsumed under the usual epistemological problems raised by illusion and error. Similarly, as we have seen, it cannot be reduced either to the distinctions familiar to us in the context of the 'aesthetic' and the 'moral' ought and the notions of the 'possible'. Also, what we are pointing out differs from what Ryle has said about the essential asym-

metry between pleasure and pain as being the type of questions which could meaningfully be asked about the latter could not possibly be asked about the former. In his well-known article in the book *Dilemmas*, Ryle had argued that it could not, for example, meaningfully be asked 'where are you having pleasure?' just as it could not be meaningfully asked where someone was experiencing pain. Many people have objected that Ryle was failing to distinguish between physical and non-physical or mental pain, for if only physical pains and pleasures were being discussed, it could as legitimately be asked where a pleasurable sensation was being felt just as it could be asked where a particular pain was being experienced. The same objection could be raised about what I have been saying, that while it may be difficult to question physical pain, it is not equally so of mental suffering or suffering of other kinds.

However, the basic epistemological point which Ryle was urging was that if the same set of questions could not be meaningfully asked of two types of objects, events, or situations, then they should be regarded as belonging to two different 'logical' types even though they may appear to be close to each other from a common-sense point of view. As to the distinction between the physical and the mental in the context of pleasure and pain, what Ryle was perhaps trying to point out was that while the paradigmatic example of pain is generally physical, that of pleasure seems to be invariably mental. There can probably be no such thing as a purely physical pleasure, though a physical sensation may be felt as pleasant or unpleasant which, in either case, would have to be treated as 'mental'. Yet, whatever our view may be about Ryle's contention, what is being suggested here is that to the extent that something is 'mental', it seems to be more intrinsically dubitable than that which is physical, and to the extent that pleasure is more a mental phenomenon than pain, the former pre-eminently shows the characteristics I have pointed out. And, if it is contended that

mental suffering shares to some extent the same characteristics as those of pleasure, it may then be said that it is because it is mental and not because it is suffering, though even then there remains a difference in that even mental suffering can hardly be doubted as easily or in the same sense as pleasure often is.

The problem of the identity of a civilization and its questioning may thus be approached through a tangential investigation of the way it has reflected on the life of feelings and emotions in general and of pleasure in particular, for if a self-conscious reflection on pleasure reveals its essentially dubitable character, then civilizations might be distinguished in the way they have reflected on the nature of pleasure and pain and sought to come to terms with them, for they seem most closely involved in the lived life of man.

Most civilizations appear to have seen man as a pleasure-seeking animal and the hedonistic perspective has never been far from most of their thinkers. Indeed, almost all religions that have played such an important part in the history of civilizations up to now have reflected on the fact of suffering and attempts at its eradication. Their principal strategy in attracting followers is to promise to get rid of suffering and to attain unalloyed happiness in some future paradise. But there seem to be profound differences between them in the way they analyze the human condition. The differences in this regard might. therefore, provide an interesting clue to the differential identity of one civilization from that of another. Also, a critique of such a pleasure-centric way of looking at man, which has not been absent from most civilizations either, may provide a useful supplement in finding out how it has differed from one civilization to another.

The perspectives from which the critique has been made will be as important as the critique itself, for it may provide an insight into what at least some of the thinkers in a civilization considered more important than the quest for

pleasure or the avoidance of pain. The search for meaning or significance in life, as distinct from a hedonistic calculus, and its conflict with it may thus provide a key to the understanding of a civilization as the conflict between the two and the compromises between them may be seen as one of the perennial dimensions of human thought and action. The turning away from the centrality of pleasure as an object of human seeking may itself be taken as a sign of de-identification with the life of feelings and emotions in which the lived life of human beings is immersed most of the time. From 'pleasure' to 'significance' or 'meaningfulness' is a move away from the primacy of the biological to something that is different. But, once the step towards de-identification from something as concrete as pleasure is taken, the whole possibility of identification with something more abstract is open to human aspiration and also the possibility of further de-identification with it in the event of its being felt that there is a lack of meaning and significance in it. This successive dialectics of identification and de-identification is a move from the more concrete to the more abstract, and may be seen as mirroring the history of civilizations, and their differences may be explored in the way they have pursued and realized this dialectic in the course of their history.

The dialectic is indeed paradoxical, as whatever the level at which an individual identifies himself, the possibility of questioning it in terms of meaningfulness and significance may always open up and thus lead to a demand for de-identification, leading ultimately to the notion that the process of identification itself is the root of all loss of meaning and significance and thus of the essential dubiety of everything with which an individual has identified himself. Civilizations, in this perspective, would then have to be ranked at the level at which they stop their de-identification and remain satisfied with themselves at that level.

It needs to be borne in mind here that at no level of identification is meaning and significance completely absent, just as in the case of pleasure, even when its dubiety is realized, it does not completely lose its 'felt pleasantness' even if the questioning consciousness with which it is apprehended, lessens its intensity. Also, at almost all levels of identification where meaningfulness and significance are apprehended, an ideal element is always involved, giving rise to an infinity of pursuits in that direction which can never be completely realized in time. Thus, there is always a horizontal infinity of pursuits involved at each level, just as there is a verticality involved in the successive levels of abstraction with which consciousness identifies itself. The history of civilizations is therefore a history of these infinite pursuits, both at the horizontal and the vertical levels, and the distinctive identity of a civilization may be seen in the nature of these pursuits at these levels, as also the height of the verticality which it has scaled and where it has stopped.

The hierarchical verticality of identifications, in terms of which meaning and significance is apprehended and pursued, however, gives rise to an illusion that the lower levels of identifications in which an individual has found meaning and significance are 'somehow' unreal, and that the meaning and significance found there is both mistaken and illusory. It is also generally felt that those who are still more or less stuck at those levels are somehow inferior or more deluded than those whose identifications and apprehensions of meaning and significance are at a higher level in the hierarchy from the viewpoint of an ultimate non-identification with anything whatsoever which self-consciousness posits as a logical possibility of itself. But all identifications are either equally illusory and meaningless or equally meaningful and significant. Both directions have been taken by civilizations, particularly those that have pursued the logic of de-identification to its utmost possibility. However, somehow the negative has preponderated over the positive, and hardly any civilization seems to have seriously thought about the full implications of either the

positive or the negative direction, particularly with regard to the infinity of ideal pursuits of 'meanings' and 'significances' apprehended at each level. It would also be useful, therefore, to look for the identity of a civilization in the way it has conceived of the relation between what it has considered higher in the scale of identifications and those which it has regarded as lower, and whether the lower levels themselves have been seen in terms of the ideals embedded in them or has judged them only in the light of that which they have considered as the higher or the highest in their hierarchy.

The dialectics of identification and de-identification, however, faces the dilemma that has generally escaped thinkers who have concerned themselves with the subject. The dilemma arises from the foundational asymmetry between the intrinsic and inalienable questionability of pleasure, on the one hand, and the indubiety and unquestionability of pain, on the other. This leads to a peculiar situation as, whenever pain at any level occurs, an individual cannot but identify with it even when he does not wish to do so. Indeed, the paradox in the situation is that a person wants to identify with pleasure but cannot do so, and though he does not want to identify with pain he cannot help doing so. Moreover, as the paradigmatic instances of pain arise in connection with the body. it is they that continuously force an individual's identification with it whether or not he wants it. On the other hand, the paradigmatic example of pleasure is a bodily sensation apprehended as mentally pleasant, even though an individual's self-consciousness finds it questionable in terms of its pleasantness and doubts its authenticity as pleasure. Yet, even in the face of this doubt, it continues to haunt the imagination even though the person concerned may have de-identified himself with it when it was experienced.

The levels of pleasure and pain are, of course, not confined to the body alone and occur at all levels, but the problems which I have posed have not been phenomenologically explored with regard to them. In any case, the problem in the context of the identity of civilizations that I have been discussing will relate to the way they have thought about the body and the asymmetry between its pain and pleasure, as pointed out above. Indeed, what I have said of bodily pain is perhaps true of it at every level, for it seems almost impossible to de-identify with it at any level whatsoever and that perhaps is the reason why those who have pursued the logic of de-identification have ultimately postulated a state where there is no possibility of pain and suffering, and where its opposite is not seen as an object of consciousness in any form whatsoever.

The problem of identity, though inexorably involved in the awareness of pain and pleasure, is de-linked from them in what may be called memory, where both pleasure and pain are 'recalled' as mere 'pleasurable' items of an individual, particularly as he is relatively distanced from them and they are suitably 'edited' for his own delectation and edification, and perhaps even more so for others if he relates them and makes them public. But in the context of civilizations, the problem of memory has to be seen as an enactment and re-enactment of that with which an individual wants to identify himself and sometimes, though rarely, with that which he wished had never happened. Public festivals, celebrations, and, occasionally, even lamentations are evidence of this. However, as integral elements of a civilization, these become cultural events that are internalized to such a degree that a person finds his identity in participating in them and even feels 'compelled' to do so as he feels that a very important part of himself would be missing if he does not do so. The intermingling of the individual, the cultural, and the civilizational is a phenomenon difficult to unravel since each gives identity to the other and receives its own identity from them. Also, strangely, here 'memory' is not of something else, but

rather is itself built in terms of such phenomena. It is not that some of the most foundational festivals, celebrations, or lamentations with which a civilization perpetually renews its identity through relating to the events that are supposed to have occurred in its primordial past as, say, the birth and crucifixion of Christ or the birth and enlightenment of the Buddha. That is only an accidental and adventitious aspect of such occurrences, for many other such festivals or celebrations have no relationship with any such event or have only a very tenuous or even fictitious relationship with them. Ultimately it is the festival and the celebration that is central and not what it celebrates. It is the cyclical, repetitive nature of the festivals and celebrations that make them an intrinsic part of the natural cycle of seasons in which an individual lives, anticipates, and remembers, and in terms of which he finds life meaningful. A civilization may, therefore, be identified by its festivals and its celebrations that recur with a regularity reminiscent of that of day and night, the waxing and waning of the moon, the movement of the earth around the sun, the cycle of winter and spring, and sometimes, in some cultures, even of birth and death.

Such a civilizational cycle is however a cycle only in time. There is another one in space that constitutes as integral a part of civilizational memory as these cycles of festivals, celebrations and, occasionally, lamentations. The spread of civilizational memory in space consists of the places that are deemed to be sacred or important in some other sense, and which one dreams of visiting some time. This is the notion of a pilgrimage an individual would like to undertake, for by doing so he becomes a part of something larger than himself and through which he achieves a personal identity at a deeper level of his being. A pilgrimage, it should be remembered, has to be undertaken. It does not come naturally like a festival for which a person only has to wait and do nothing else. A pilgrimage has to be made;

the person making it has to get up and go to some other place that haunts his imagination and beckons him because he is part of a civilization and by responding to it he becomes, in a more intimate sense, a part of the civilization to which he belongs.

The association of the sacred with the notion of pilgrimage is too intimately bound together to be easily abandoned. It is a moot question whether there can be such a thing as centres of secular pilgrimage or whether centres of tourist interest can even play a role in the identification of a civilization. Indeed, even centres of sacred pilgrimage may be visited by those who do not belong to the same civilization; but then for them, they are more akin to places of tourist interest than the way they are perceived, felt, and lived through by persons who were born and grew up as a part of that civilization.

This however, raises the question as to whether any civilization can possibly be thought of without any reference to the transcendent, which is just another name for the 'sacred'. The sacred, of course, is ultimately a denial of space, time, and causality, for those are normally encountered in ordinary day-to-day experience; but there is always the problem of relating to them whatever is conceived of as transcending space, time, and causality as they condition and constitute our experience. Each one of these has an in-built infinity involved in it which, as is well known, gave rise to the antinomies of Kant and led him to the idea that these are the transcendental conditions of human experience and not 'objects' which are given to it in experience. But whatever one may think of the Kantian solution, there is little doubt that there is a natural, in-built way of conceiving of these that leads both to infinite regress and 'infinite progress' which appear to be unending in both directions. Time, which seems to be closely related to causality, seems to have a direction in the sense that it appears to be 'flowing' from past to future. Space, on the

other hand, does not seem to have any direction in the same sense and yet, an end to space always raises the problem of what beyond it.

There have, of course, recently been attempts other than that of Kant's to resolve the seeming dilemma that appeared to have been created by this character of space, time, and causality as ordinarily felt, articulated, and experienced. It has been suggested that the unendingness need not be conceived of in linear forms only and that this can be achieved by thinking of space, time, and causality in other ways. It has also been suggested that the very format of the question is mistaken, since all three are indivisible aspects of a single phenomenon. It has also been argued that the so-called uni-directionality of time is itself a consequence of the second law of thermodynamics, and that at least at the level of microscopic particles, there is no absurdity involved in conceiving of the particle as 'moving back in time', or the determination of the present by the future in their case. The Jains, much earlier, had argued for the finitude of space as against the infinitude of time. But they do not seem to have given any substantive reasons for this, apart from those deriving from the transcendental knowledge of Mahāvīra who was supposed to be omniscient and hence knew what was what. All this notwithstanding, the fact remains that however useful these ways of looking at space, time, and causality may be in certain domains and some forms of discourse, the ordinary consciousness of man draws a radical distinction between past and future and, he sees them to be unending.

The 'unendingness' is, however, essentially ungraspable by human consciousness, for it is not only dizzying .but also renders everything meaningless, and hence every civilization has to deal with it in such a way that it becomes both graspable and meaningful. This it usually does either by postulating a theory of creation and dissolution, or a beginning and an end of all that 'is', thus relating it

to that which lies at its source and is postulated as both the ground and the cause of everything. This is, however, too abstract a level to satisfy human beings, and so it is supplemented or complemented by a whole set of strategies whose principal function is to deny it through an interpretation that makes it essentially cyclical in character. This is done by initiating a series of festive celebrations that are cyclically repetitive and whose model is grounded both in the cyclical processes of nature and in human life processes. The denial of the unendingness of space is achieved by covering it with places that are supposed to be the location of that which 'transcends' space and thus restricts or limits it in an essential sense. The denial of the unendingness of causality is achieved by the repetitive performance of actions that are supposed to be outside the realm of natural causality and which, normally, invoke the transcendent principle to overcome their unendingness. This is the essential meaning of prayer, which seeks the intervention of the transcendent in the normal processes that are supposed to be governed by causality. The same is also achieved by ritual and worship, and by visiting sacred places such as a temple, a mosque, a church or any other place consecrated by tradition and supposed to be especially effective in inducing, at least for a brief periods, such an attitude in the mass of people. It is, so to say, a domestication or a humanization of the unending immensities of space and time that appears to render meaningless everything in human life which appears to be 'nothing' in comparison to them.

The taming of the infinite then may be seen as one of the foundational tasks of a civilization and we may reasonably try to discover how different civilizations have attempted to achieve this. This is closely related to the problem of identification and de-identification which I dealt with earlier, even though the two contexts are apparently so different.