

guage. In any event, the distinction which Lath has pointed out is both interesting in itself and can be profitably used to understand not only the various areas of a civilization, but also the civilization as a whole and the changes that have overtaken it in time.

The identity of a civilization, like the identity of a person, though normally seen in terms of the past, may however also be seen in terms of the future. This becomes even more relevant when one sees a civilization in terms of its projects and visions in their unfoldment in time, for like all ideal values, projects and visions are not exhausted in time and manifest their immense potentialities ever anew as human beings try to concretize them in the empirical world. What is perhaps even more important than this is the little noticed fact that the ideal values or the project and visions themselves are not isolated monadic entities, but form an interactive whole where each modifies and influences the other. Thus, the encounters of all the past civilizations with the modern western one is bound to result in the unfoldment of new potentialities in the valuational projects and visions of those civilizations and radically modify them, just as a new metaphor unfolds hidden meanings that were unsuspected before the creative writer used it for the first time. The story of past civilizations is thus an open book where it is impossible to know what future chapters are yet to be written, but it may be safely said that if the memory or *smṛti*, as I have called it, is not lost and if it is a 'living' presence in the present giving meaning to what is newly encountered in all dimensions of experience, then it can provide that continuity in terms of cognition, connotation, and feeling which gives 'identity' to a civilization over time.

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## Transformations in the Seeking of Man: Consciousness to Self-Consciousness and from Culture to Civilization

Civilizations are few; cultures many. Cultures can be independent of civilizations, but a civilization is always constituted by cultures though transcending them in an essential sense. Culture is coterminous with human reality, for one can scarcely conceive of man without language which is itself intimately related to culture. Language is a distinctively human product that in its 'artificiality' transcends nature and achieves communication and expressiveness of an order far beyond anything achieved in the animal world. All cultures, are thus trans-natural and have what we have called '*śilpa*' or a repertoire of skills, '*smṛti*', or memory that preserves what was heard from others, and in which stories prominently figure of the heroes of a culture as exemplars of behaviour or what has been called *sadācāra* in the Indian tradition. All this is ultimately presented to the individual self for preservation, transmission, and development, and judged on the basis of how far it is satisfactory, and if found to be unsatisfactory in any particular way, how it should be modified. This has been termed '*ātmatuṣṭi*' in the Indian tradition, and though it does not exactly mean what I have said, it does not conflict with it.

These and many other such things exist in all cultures, but what is perhaps distinctive of a civilization is that here self-consciousness predominates over consciousness and re-



flection takes precedence over experience, resulting in a systematic form which I have called 'śāstra'. This triple domination of self-consciousness, reflection and systematization means that henceforth there will be an ordering of experience in terms of something outside itself giving rise to a continuous tension and conflict which is both fulfilling and frustrating. Earlier, the determination was prompt, spontaneous, and immanent, for then there was only culture, for new constraints appear only when a new civilization comes into being. These constraints may emanate from reason or even sources other than it. In any event, these certainly do not belong to the lived life of man as it is ordinarily experienced. Language is perhaps the clearest example of this, for the moment its śāstra or grammar comes into being, there immediately occurs a distinction between that which is 'correct', according to rules, and that which is not. Thus, the distinction between the bhāṣās (the vernacular languages) and Sanskrit, the *desi* and the *margi*, is born, and from that time onwards there is always a distinction between the élite and non-élite in a civilization that was hitherto absent in a culture.

The élite groups in a civilization, then, are not those who wield political power or amass wealth but those who lay down norms in the various fields of human endeavour and who reflect on experience in its diverse domains, discern and articulate the immanent ideals embedded in them to the best of their abilities. These are generally not those who have been regarded as such by the usual criteria that have so far been applied when considering the founders or leaders of a civilization. The study of civilizations has up to now concentrated on politico-military considerations, on the one hand, and the generation of economic surpluses, on the other. These are without doubt important, but not in the context of understanding civilizations that belong to an order that is radically different although is not entirely unrelated. The most significant example of this

is the acceptance of Greek civilization by the Romans who had not only established a far more powerful and richer empire than the Greeks ever did, but also produced innovative ideas in the fields of law and public administration.

The distinction that a civilization introduces is between those who are 'civilized' and those who are not. This, it should be borne in mind, is not the same as the distinction between the master and the slave or between the rich and the poor. Nor is the distinction in terms of styles of living, as has usually been thought, but rather in 'living' according to the norms or for the realization of those norms or ideals in each and every dimension of an individual's being. The distinction, of course, is already implicit in the culture, as the difference between the 'cultured' and the 'uncultured' is believed to be there also, but unless a culture has become part of a civilization. The distinction is at most a matter of degree and is hardly important as most of those who belong to a culture almost spontaneously observe what should be done within a flexible range. Once, however, a self-conscious formulation of what is right and wrong is attempted, as is always the case in a civilization, the situation radically changes and a distinction emerges between those who are self-consciously aware of the new dichotomies introduced by the śāstric formulation and seek to govern the relevant domain of their life accordingly, and those who continue in the old ways, as if nothing significant had occurred.

There is thus a radical change in the *puruṣārthas* that existed in any culture at the moment when it achieved the status of a civilization, for, from then onwards, they become objects of self-conscious reflection and critical evaluation along with a newly emerging problem of hierarchy and inter-relationships. In a word, nothing pre-civilizational already present in the culture remains the same and new things are continuously added, its hallmark being a 'questioning uncertainty' that affects everything that was un-



questioned earlier. This, however, also leads to an unending 'openness' generated by the cycle of questions and answers, or doubts and their resolution, which begin to have an interesting history of their own and shape the civilization's development in unexpected directions.

To those who lived earlier in the innocent simplicity of unquestioned certitudes, all this appears a fall from grace and, often, the love for incessant argument and increasingly incomprehensible abstractions appears to be a flight from the problems of existential living which alone seems 'real' to most persons. The Buddha's persistent reminder that all metaphysical questions are irrelevant to the business of living is a paradigmatic example of this and, as everyone knows, it was neither the first nor the last of its kind. There have always been those who have looked at the abstract and abstruse problems that *śāstric* formulations always give rise to and remind themselves that the real task is not of 'understanding' the world but of 'transforming' either themselves or the world as their preference may be. Marx and Buddha are poles apart but they share this common feeling about the theoretical concerns that the *śāstric* enterprise of a civilization always launches, and yet both Buddhism and Marxism gave rise to the most abstract, speculative enterprises that have ever occurred in history. Marx, of course, unlike the Buddha, was himself fascinated by the life of the ratiocinative intellect, as is evident to anyone who has read any of his works. He was, of course, equally, if not more, fascinated with revolutionary action, which is far from the life most intellectuals live. Gandhi, on the contrary, was perhaps the closest analogue of Marx and the Buddha in the socio-political domain, for he was one of the few persons who had a real distrust of intellect and its abstractions, and was totally involved in transforming himself and the society and polity around him.

However, whatever the dissatisfactions with the theoretical abstractions that the *śāstric* enterprises of a civilization

invariably entail, they constitute its very life, and while those who warn against its dangers or its excesses always provide a healthy counter weight to the life of self-conscious reflection and the universal questioning that it involves, the real momentum of civilizations comes from the tension due to the discrepancy between the norms and the ideals apprehended by reflective consciousness in various domains of experience and the actual 'reality' it encounters. The conflict between the actual and the ideal is therefore at the heart of civilization and its awareness and formulation the central task of its seers and thinkers. This awareness has however to be itself articulated at many levels in order to become an integral part of a civilization and the crucial role in this is that of those who provide the conceptual categories of thinking and of those who provide the living image imbued with feeling and emotion, dramatizing that which was articulated at the purely conceptual level by the thinkers of the civilization.

At the heart of a civilization therefore are its thinkers and artists and, as even the latter achieve their self-consciousness through the former because they also reflect on art and seek to systematically formulate *śāstras* relating to those domains, as did Tandu and Bharata in the Indian tradition and later those who formulated the *alamkāra* and the *dhvani* schools of literature. These *śāstric* formulations appear cut-and-dried and often irrelevant to the practicing artist, but they provide the vocabulary to express what they create and the norms by which their creations are to be judged. It is, of course, true that the greatest of them generally break those norms in their works and set new standards of judgement through what they have created. At a deeper level, they sometimes even provide the values and the ideals that permeate the civilization. Besides, the exemplars of a civilization are generally those who do not primarily lead the life of thought, but even they find the articulation of what they seek and exemplify in the thought



of these thinkers who occasionally may even create a *śāstra* for such a purpose. The *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali is as much a *prayoga śāstra* as the *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata or the *Kāma Sūtra* of Vātsyāyana.

The *śāstras* then may be concerned with theoretical issues or those that are primarily practical in nature, but in either case they give a permanence and provide a structure to what is lived and thought in the natural course of living. Paul Ricoeur has ascribed this to 'writing' as against 'speaking', and argued that the former not only gives a permanence to what is said, but also makes it 'context free' and thus achieves a universality that is generally absent from the spoken word. But, as everybody knows, the oral traditions of a culture can be preserved as rigorously as the traditions of a written text and, in any event, even the written text may not only undergo inadvertent changes through the unending copying of manuscripts or, in contemporary times, through copy editing and proof corrections, but has also to be continuously interpreted and supplemented by oral explanations in order to be intelligible. The distinction perhaps lies not between writing and speech but between the *śāstric* formulation of knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, and knowledge that has not assumed this form. The *śāstras*, however, once formulated give rise to an unending chain of interpretative acts which themselves begin to have a tradition of their own. On the other hand, as each of the *śāstras* has presuppositions of its own, the problem arises of its interrelationship with others, sometimes leading to substantive mutual influence. There occurs also a second order reflection on the notion of what constitutes a *śāstra* and a desire to bring areas of unorganized knowledge into *śāstric* form. To have a *śāstra* becomes a matter of intellectual prestige, and while the systematic and rigorous formulation in *śāstric* form gives an objectively graspable form to knowledge in that field, it also restricts it in a certain fundamental sense, hindering its spontane-

ity substantially. Also it often forces the structure, format, and methodology of what is regarded to be the paradigmatic example of a *śāstra* in the civilization on other domains where they may not be equally applicable.

Yet, whatever the problems created by the *śāstric* formulation, it pre-eminently defines that break which may be said to lie in the founding of civilizations. It is the self-conscious intellect or *buddhi* that mirrors the whole world and acts as a conceptual mirror, restructuring what is apprehended at the first level in consciousness in a form that is suited to the activity of conceptualization and theorization in the cognitive domain. It is not that intellect or *buddhi* is not immanently present in all the activities that occur at the first level, but they are there only instrumentally and implicitly. In the self-conscious formulation of a *śāstra*, however, the *buddhi* itself becomes self-conscious and thus aware not only of the world including the self but also of itself and of its relation to everything else. The relation of self-consciousness to consciousness at the human level is thus mediated by the *buddhi* which doubly reflects both the world and the self in itself and reflects itself back into them once again, perpetuating the double processes of 'reflection' and 're-reflection' in a constantly interactive way. However, as the central activity of a self-conscious intellect is a continuous interrogation of everything, including itself, it brings everything into question and thus introduces a foundational doubt at the heart of everything that is. And this questioning activity, or doubt lies at the root of a civilization. For an understanding of a civilization, therefore, it is necessary to explore this interrogative activity of the intellect that lies at its foundation, and to find what specific form it has taken and what have been the major subjects with which it has been concerned. Moreover, as the interpretative activity happens to be reflexive and applies to the intellect itself, it would be crucial to discover how this interrogative activity of the intellect has been seen by



the civilization and what value has been placed on it. The certitude of ordinary sense experience is questioned and replaced by the certitude of the intellect, but the certitude of the intellect is in turn questioned at another level by the intellect itself, and a civilization may thus be seen in terms of levels of certitude that are questioned at a different meta-level, giving rise to a strange but interesting dialectic between what may be called faith and doubt. These coexist and intermingle in the human personality that comprehends all these levels and also transcends them in some indescribable way which is difficult to articulate or even understand at all intelligibly.

The dialectics of faith and doubt is fundamentally the dialectic between consciousness and self-consciousness, and as man, along with other animals, primarily lives at the conscious level and has only fitful moments of self-consciousness, varying from individual to individual, the dialectic also varies in different human beings in proportion to the degree and quality of the self-consciousness they enjoy. But as self-consciousness embodies its reflection in a *śāstric* form, it determines the civilization in a way that far exceeds the numerical strength of those in whom self-consciousness preponderates in a civilization. Also, as the *śāstras* it creates become the foundational texts for teaching and training in both the theoretical and the practical domains, they shape a civilization in a way that far transcends and outweighs the natural consciousness in which men generally live. Besides, the products of consciousness that generally constitute the bulk of what a culture consists of, are themselves influenced and judged by the standards and norms formulated by the *śāstric* products of self-consciousness in a civilization. Yet, it is equally true that consciousness revolts against this continuous monitoring and attempts at control of the self-consciousness which begins to function as a Freudian super-ego in a civilization and leads to all sorts of devices on the basis of its endeavours to throw off

this control and/or compromise with it. The drama of a civilization may thus be seen in terms of consciousness and self-consciousness in all fields of human endeavour and the unimaginably diverse relations that may obtain between them. The life of consciousness, it should be borne in mind, never remains the same after the introduction of self-consciously created *śāstric* forms of knowledge in both the theoretical and practical domain, and this transformation in the nature of consciousness itself affects the self-conscious formulations of a civilization over successive periods of time. Yet, however much the interaction between the two and the mutual modifications that they induce in one another over a period of time, the tension between them persists and, at a deeper level, this may be said to be the story of civilizations and the clue to its unravelling.

These are periods, however, in the history of a civilization when reason itself, which is the source of the production of the *śāstras* and of self-reflection at a conscious level, revolts against itself and engages in suicidal, self-destructive activity. At such moments reason turns against itself and questions its capacity to know and the adequacy of the means at its command for establishing the validity of anything, including the norms that the *śāstras* lay down in different domains of human experience. Here it is not consciousness or the freedom and the spontaneity that generally goes with it that revolts against the role of self-consciousness which, with its norms, values and ideals, tells it what it ought to be or do. Rather, it is self-consciousness in its reflexive function of reflecting on its own activity of 'creating' norms, values, and ideals, and its incessant attempt to impose order on experience and discover the underlying regularities behind the apparent reign of accident, which becomes the object of its questioning. The doubt thus created concerns the very foundations of the *śāstric* enterprise on which the civilization was based and, if such a doubt becomes widespread, the problem for a civiliza-



tion becomes paradoxical, otherwise how is it to maintain, sustain, and develop itself in the face of the denial of that which till then constituted its very *raison d'être*?

Such a situation may come about because of the incessant strife of opposing schools of thought with no hope of any resolution in sight or because of the discovery that the activity of reason, except when it is purely instrumental, is essentially self-contradictory and hence incapable in principle of finding that which it considered was its function to discover. The first may be understood as the weariness or ennui of reason stemming from its inability to resolve the unending conflict of opinions on the same issues. The second appears to be the consequence of an analysis of the structure of reason which is found to be the cause of the unresolvability of the ultimate diversity of opinion, for in attempting their resolution it outreaches its own capacity and attempts something beyond its competence. The two are complementary, but while the first is a natural response of the intellect when it gets tired of itself, the second pre-supposes intense intellectual activity of the highest order, as it analyses the very nature of reason itself and comes to the despairing conclusion that what the civilization had attempted is unfulfillable in principle.

Kant is the classical example of reason's interrogation of itself in the western tradition, while Nāgārjuna and Śrī Harṣa may be taken as the classical examples of the same in the Indian tradition. There is, of course, a radical difference between the two, as Kant's destructive critique of the pretensions of reason leaves it unscathed in its functioning in the empirical scientific domain to which, according to him, it should be confined. Nāgārjuna's and Śrī Harṣa's destructive critique of reason seems to be more concerned with saving space for spiritual certitudes and the praxis for their realization unhampered by the activity of reason which puts everything in doubt. Kant, of course, attempts this also both in relation to morality and religion,

but his concerns seem to be more multifaceted than those of Nāgārjuna or Śrī Harṣa. Jayarāsi's foundational scepticism about everything, including perception, does not seem to have had any purpose other than a love of argumentation for its own sake, although, as little is known about him, nothing can be said with great certainty.

None of these however shows a weariness with reason's activities or uses reason either to show its limitations or to establish its intrinsic inability to say anything definite or as standing in the way of the real pursuits of man. But in recent times there has occurred in the west a real desire to take a holiday from rationality itself and feel a languorous ennui about the whole game of reason as it appears to lead nowhere. Richard Rorty is one of the most gentle, urbane, ironic, and complacent examples of such an attitude, not even seeking to engage in any real dispute, for to do so would be to accept the conditions of rational debate and discussion which to him seem unacceptable in principle. He prefers to engage in 'conversation', mostly with himself, for to 'converse' with 'others' would be to 'listen' to them and be prepared to change his personal opinion, not because of the rhetorical power of the other, but because of the counter-argument made or the counter-evidence provided. He therefore bids good-bye to philosophy and opts for literature, and that too in its ironic mode. Rorty thinks that this is the best of all possible worlds, and it is easy for him to subscribe to this belief as he happens to be an American philosopher. He is thus able to see the world from the vantage point of the global dominance that such a position confers not only in terms of power and wealth, but also in those of knowledge and culture, which lend an aura of self-evident unquestionableness to such a view of looking at things.

Derrida is virtually Rorty's opposite in his style of writing but shares with him his attitude towards reason, for he not only does not believe in engaging in a 'serious' debate with anyone, as his response to Searle's criticism showed,



but also does not believe that any text can convey any 'determinate' meaning, as his numerous attempts at 'deconstruction' of older masters, such as Plato and Hegel, have shown. There are of course others who also do not believe either in a text or in there being any authors of them, or their having any meaning whatsoever. Curiously however, each one of them writes 'texts', claims their 'authorship', and is 'seriously' disturbed if 'meanings' are attributed to them which are contrary to what he/she intended, not to speak of the royalty claims each of them makes against sales. The ownership of 'text', 'meaning', and 'royalty from sales' is writ large for everyone to see and yet each one of them blithely denies the same to others.

The 'literary' presentations of a Rorty or a Derrida are however rooted in a deeper cultural situation in the cognitive enterprise of man in the west, as both 'essentialism' and 'foundationalism' have failed to stand up to the searching critique of reason itself. They challenge man to think of a viable cognitive enterprise without these two presuppositions on which all seeking for objective knowledge appeared to have been based. The rise of non-Euclidean geometries, together with the failure to find consistent and complete proofs for the foundations of mathematics, coupled with Godel's theorem that such proofs were impossible in principle had already led to a view of mathematics which appeared to be different in principle from that which had been entertained earlier. Similarly, the developments in physics associated with the names of Einstein and Heisenberg had fundamentally questioned the Galilean-Newtonian framework within which nature was sought to be conceived and understood. Wittgenstein's onslaught on the notion of definition, which had been the cornerstone of all thinking since Aristotle, undermined the very attempt at discovering the common property by virtue of which things belong to the same class or were thought to be under the same "universal". Yet, curiously, neither

mathematics nor the natural sciences suffered any serious constraints in their development, Wittgenstein's questioning led to a distrust of reason and a foundational scepticism that appears both in Rorty and Derrida in different forms.

The subversion of reason in contemporary western thinking has been carried on by another strand in its thought which has resulted from seeing knowledge itself as a product whose roots lie not in the search for 'truth' but in the fulfillment of desires and interests which have little to do with what had traditionally been understood as 'truth'. Freud and Marx, both in their different ways, had argued for such a position and the discipline called the 'sociology of knowledge' underwrote it with its scientific pretensions. Knowledge was seen as the handmaiden of power and wealth, and what Marx had said earlier, in the context of his analysis of society as consisting of classes with contradictory 'interests' was made fashionable by Foucault by taking it out of its specific class context and generalizing it to cover all discourse regarding intellectual life.

These diverse attempts at questioning reason, or even its total destruction by forces outside it or those that are internal to its very essence, pose a challenge to a civilization that is of a radically different order from those that arise from political, economic, or even ecological reasons. Reason, as I have said, is at the root of civilizations, particularly when it embodies itself in *śāstric* formulations that give it an authority that is different from all others normally deriving either from wealth or power. Hence, when its own authority is questioned, whether by itself or from some other source, the very foundations of a civilization seem to be threatened and the response of a civilization to such a challenge is perhaps the most interesting phenomenon in the history of civilizations. Normally, the wielders of both wealth and power do not think very highly of those who derive their authority from knowledge. But when the



authority is denied by the wielders of reason themselves, the situation becomes radically different, for what now has to be defended is the authority of reason itself. This is not generally very difficult, for the challenge to reason, whatever the form, is seldom taken very seriously by the 'practitioners' of reason. This is because the grand edifices of *śāstric* formulations historically built over the ages remain relatively intact despite the attacks of those who want to demolish them altogether. A Nāgārjuna or a Śrī Harṣa or even a Jayarāsi only inspire an amused wonder at their extraordinary skill in argumentation. But everyone believes that there must be something wrong somewhere in what they are saying, though most persons merrily carry on with the cognitive enterprise they are engaged in, just as people did not stop walking or moving because Zeno had proved that motion was 'impossible'. The same is true today about Rorty, Derrida and others who seem to provide an intellectual spectacle rather than serious thought, a charge that will appear irrelevant to them for, firstly, they do not believe in 'seriousness' and, secondly, they are quite happy to provide intellectual entertainment of the highest order.

At a deeper level, however, this denigration of reason is generally done in order to safeguard certain 'interests' which appear more important to those who engage in such an exercise. To Nāgārjuna and Śrī Harṣa, perhaps, it was the spiritual seeking itself that seemed to have been hindered by the incessant, subtle, ratiocinative argumentation of the philosophers, just as the Buddha had earlier felt its irrelevance to the basic human enterprise of overcoming suffering. Jayarasi, on the other hand, might have felt that the philosophical enterprise stood in the way of the business of living as it unnecessarily clouded it with all sorts of demands that made it difficult to innocently pursue simple pleasures. Perhaps, Rorty, Derrida and their tribe feel the same way, and want to clear the cobwebs cluttering the ordinary day to day pursuits of man which, according to

some of them, is reflected and understood better in works of the imagination than in those of reflective thought. In any case, the hard core cognitive enterprises of a civilization are generally left untouched by such a foundational critique, for Nāgārjuna, Śrī Harṣa or Jayarāsi sought to question the validity of Pāṇinian linguistics, or any of the other well-established sciences of their times, just as neither Rorty nor Derrida question the cognitive status of scientific enterprise or deconstruct a text in mathematics or physics. The thrust of the ancient critique in India was to safeguard the autonomy of the spiritual enterprise, just as the thrust of its modern counterpart seems to be to safeguard the modern scientific enterprise and perhaps even the western politico-economic systems within which those thinkers happen to be located.

The deeper thrust of all these attempts at the denigration of reason in the *śāstric* enterprise is to reduce it to the level of a 'cultural' activity, for its existence cannot be abolished once it has come into being through the *śāstric* enterprise and resulted in the achievement of an autonomous life of the intellect. The reduction of intellectual life to a cultural activity rather than a civilizational one implies, in a certain sense, a relapse into consciousness from self-consciousness, or rather the treating of self-consciousness itself in terms of consciousness. This is particularly so as the self-consciousness once generated by the autonomous life of the intellect cannot be so easily abandoned. We have the curious spectacle of 'thinking' becoming a 'cultural' activity, akin to other cultural activities such as music, dance, or literature, and enjoyed as an activity for its own sake rather than as a quest for knowledge or truth that functioned as ideals during the phase when the *śāstras* were formulated. But as the *śāstric* enterprises have also received relative autonomy, they continue to function in spite of this relapse into the culture of the intellectual activity in a civilization and, often, even vigorously oppose this relapse



as they are well aware that this would harm the very foundations of the civilization they have so assiduously constructed. In the Indian context, it was the relentless opposition of Nyāya to Buddhist deconstruction which kept the *śāstric* enterprise going, while the same occurred to a certain extent when the non-Advaitic schools of Vedānta, particularly those of Rāmānuja and Madhva, opposed the destructive dialectics of Advaita, questioning the tenability of the notion of 'difference' and undermining the very basis of any *śāstric* formulation whatsoever. The Advaitins had, of course, drawn a radical distinction between the realms of *paramārtha* and *vyavahāra*, thus leaving the world to its own reality. But the persistent defence of the reality of difference by the protagonists of non-Advaitic schools of Vedānta wanted to avoid a *paramārthic* foundation to *vyavahāric* reality, even though they were principally concerned with the spiritual life founded on the difference between the soul and god which alone, in their opinion, provide the basis for a meaningful relationship between them.

Ultimately, a civilization has to save itself from being swamped by the temptation to relapse yet again into the 'innocence' of culture which it had left behind when self-consciousness assumed command and took a *śāstric* form, introducing distinctions that had not existed earlier. The temptations may come in various forms and perennially threaten the *śāstric* structures that a civilization builds. But those that come from the intellect itself are perhaps, the most subtle and dangerous, for they seek to persuade the intellect to view itself in a different way so that it does not entertain the illusions that lead it to engage in *śāstric* enterprises and thus build that rarest of human creations which we call a civilization. The tension between consciousness and self-consciousness here begins to take a different form as it influences the very self-consciousness which begins to view itself as a cultural activity and forget its specific civilizational role.

At the heart of any civilization, therefore, lies the drama between consciousness and self-consciousness that assumes multifarious forms, the most subtle of which stems from reason itself.



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## History, Historiography and the Problem of Man's 'Identity' and 'Truth'

The question of 'truth' about anything, or even of the statement about it, presupposes not only the 'identity' of that about which the 'truth-claim' is being made, but also the 'identifiability' of that identity. Identity has to be 'recognizable', 'establishable', and 'repeatable' as otherwise the statement "This is the same as it was" will make no sense. Identity, thus, involves persistence in time along with the belief that time makes no difference to that which is claimed to be identical, or that the 'difference' that has been made is unimportant, or inessential and insignificant.

The reference to the past is, thus, essential to any understanding about identity except, of course, in the case of those statements that concern 'objects' that have nothing to do with time as they are essentially a-temporal in nature, as the ones that are studied in logic and mathematics.

The past, however, is not an indefinitely extending past, but 'something' that has to be thought of as having a beginning, even if its exact 'dating' may not be easy to determine except within some 'outer' limits as is the usual case with 'events' in Ancient History. The 'Beginnings' are thus always 'lost' in some indefinitely extensible 'time-horizon' of the past, but they have to be 'remembered' and 'believed' to have some sort of a 'continuity' with that

which is in the present to make one 'think' and feel' that the 'continuity' gives an 'identity' to that which one is talking about.

The 'past' is, of course, preserved in some way in that which is present as it has to be 'constructed' on its basis, as one does in cosmology, or geology or the history of life on earth, or anything else that one chooses to include in the term 'nature'. Man is no exception to this as physical anthropology reveals but, as everyone knows, man is not just a "biological being" like other species or even 'material nature' which 'carries' its past within itself without knowing that it is so. Man has to 'know' his past in order to be 'himself'; and in this simple fact lies the roots of 'history' and the dilemmas and problems that historiography faces all the time. To 'know' the past, one has to 'create' it by 're-telling' or 're-calling', time and again, so that it becomes a part of the 'living memory' of oneself and others, a "shared past" which makes us what we are. The answer to "who am I?", thus, lies in what one can recall and tell about oneself, something which always involves 'others' and hence is entangled with the question "who are we?", a fact which the very use of language proclaims aloud though, for some strange reason, one does not want to think so and even expressly denies it, as most philosophers tend to do.

Man, as philosophers should have known, has to be born, and even when born has only the potentiality of 'becoming' a human being which depends for its 'actualization' on 'others'. These primarily are the parents, the siblings, the childhood-playmates, the teachers and friends with whom one studied at college or school or learnt skills during apprenticeship in the years when one was growing up. Later, one learns from those one falls in love with, marries, sets up a household and engages in the "business of living", that is, having children and rearing and bringing them up.



The 'others', thus, are always there everywhere, be it a workplace, a business house, a teaching institution, or even a monastery or an *āśrama* where one is supposed to 'retire' and 'withdraw' from the 'world' and even in complete 'aloneness' oblivious of all that is 'other' whose 'reality' has already been denied, both ontologically and axiologically, for reasons best known to those who have argued for it.

The arguments, of course, have had a history, just as the claim that man's reality is essentially a-temporal, birth and death being 'illusions', as the very idea of distinction and difference that gives rise to plurality and otherness, being rooted in *avidyā* as it is unintelligible to reason or understanding, being self-contradictory in nature.

The argument, however, forgets that it denies the deepest, self-confirmed truth of the spirit, that one has '*learnt*' all this from someone who exemplified it in his own life and who, in turn, had learnt it from someone else, and that the chain is 'unending' unless one arbitrarily stops it in a Buddha or a Mahāvīra, or a Śiva, or Christ, or Mohammad, or God himself with whom, by definition, the chain has to have an end and also a beginning, as it is both the *Alpha* and the *Omega* of everything that we can think of, or know.

Man, thus, is the creature who has to 'learn' to be himself and this process of 'learning' is, as everybody knows, unending. It continues from generation to generation, and each generation has to pass what it has '*learnt*' to those who have just entered the process of learning.

Learning, however, is not what most people seem to think. It is not a dull, monotonous, unending repetition of what someone else has said, or done, but a creative adaptation of it in the light of the critical consciousness that is simultaneously aware of the changed circumstances in which what one learns has to be applied, and the inner inadequacies and inconsistencies within that which one

has learnt. But even this requires preservation and maintenance of that which has come to one through 'learning', as without it neither the critical nor the creative response could even arise.

But as everything cannot be preserved by the self-conscious intention and will of man, the crucial question is, and always has been, what to preserve, why to preserve and how to preserve. The 'what', 'why' and 'how' define and determine the fact called 'history' and the methodology associated with it called 'historiography'. The answer to these may seem deceptively simple as it is obvious that one preserves what one considers worth preserving and the way one adopts to 'preserve' it is determined by the techniques that are available for preservation at that time. This, however, is totally misleading as it assumes that there are no choices in the matter, when there *are* 'choices' all the time. What is considered worth preserving is not always agreed on by everybody and the way of preserving is determined, most of the time, by what is sought to be preserved.

The problem is not seen because of the almost universally felt half-conscious belief that only language preserves, and that too primarily in its 'written' form. But this is not only to forget the unbelievably large 'oral' traditions of the world, but also that man has self-consciously created 'art-forms', 'ritual-and-living practices', 'self-perpetuating institutions' and many other such things which are concerned with maintenance and perpetuation through a process of "perpetual repetition" which tries to 'freeze' and give an 'illusory stability' to that which is even created as it perishes almost the moment it is born, and that is perhaps why it is called an 'event'.

The event is sought to be preserved because it has happened to 'me', or 'us', or 'we', and it is this that gives it that 'worth' or importance which makes us want to save it from oblivion through perpetual remembrance and re-



enactment in diverse ways. The 'I', of course, is already merged and becomes an inseparable part of the 'we' and, thus, of the 'us' which includes the 'me'. The 'we', however, excludes the 'they' just as the 'I' does the 'you', and is 'constituted' and 'defined' by the difference and the distinction whose boundaries are, however, always blurred, shifting, hazy and indistinct. Strangely, this happens also to the distinction between 'I' and 'me', but perhaps never between 'I' and 'you', or even between 'I' and 'it'.

The story of these shifting 'identifications' and 'de-identifications' is the story of man, though the 'history' that has been written about him has hardly been ever written that way. The deeper truth is that man has this capacity for larger and narrower identifications which make him 'feel' and 'think' of himself as a part of something greater than what he finds to be in himself, which the 'de-identification' with the 'me', or the successive levels of the 'me', makes him 'feel' the 'formless' and 'contentless' 'Being' which surrounds and envelops all that has 'form' and 'content' and is 'this' rather than 'that' and whose being lies in this very difference and distinction.

The two are supposed to be diametrically opposed to each other, but a little reflection would show that each not only presupposes and involves the other, but that the so-called movement of 'withdrawal' or 'turning away' is there even in the awareness of the distinction between 'this' and 'that', or 'I' and 'you', or even 'I' and 'me'. The capacity to 'attend' and to shift attention from one 'object' to another involves the deeper capacity of 'withdrawal' of attention, and is founded and rooted on it. On the other hand, the indefinite extensibility of distinction and differentiation creating the world of plurality is made possible only because there is what is formless and contentless, neither this nor that, the ultimate non-being, or *śūnya* or *a-bhāva* which is encountered

outside as 'emptiness' that makes both plurality and motion possible, and within as 'consciousness' and 'self-consciousness' that make both 'knowledge' and 'action' possible at the human level.

Freedom itself is only another name for this capacity, and its 'opposite' is being 'stuck', or being unable to 'shift' from 'this' to 'that', or from all that is 'object' and one's relation to it, if one wishes to do so and if one has not bound oneself by a 'promise' not to do so, unless the conditions involved in 'fulfilling' of a 'promise' themselves have become void because of any reason whatsoever.

The deeper question behind this story of identification and de-identification, however, is as to how that with which one identifies or de-identifies comes into being, as without it the story cannot even start, or make sense. Strangely and paradoxically in the case of man, this is done by man himself, and that is what is called 'history'. History thus is not what the historians think, 'something there' to be 'known' as an 'object' independent of man, having a 'nature' of its own whose 'truth' or 'falsity' can be determined the way one generally determines the truth or falsity of statements about nature. Its primary concern is with the building of an 'identity' for that which is in search for it, and that too in terms of 'significance' or 'meaningfulness', and not just of what 'is', or 'occurs', or 'happens to have happened'.

The search for identity on the part of man is, however, not only in terms of the past, as is usually thought, but also in terms of his future which he may shape to some extent by 'acting' in the present. The 'historian' is a 'mediator' in the process without being generally aware that he is such, living as he does in the illusion that he is telling the 'truth' about the past and being effective by making others 'believe' that it is so, and thus giving them something to hold on to, something to identify themselves with, in the process.



This, however, he may do in diverse ways, some of which may remain in fashion for long and enjoy great prestige, while others may not last long or, even if they do, lose prestige. Yet, all of these perform the same function, that is, make men 'see' themselves in a certain way, 'feel' that they are 'such', distinct and different from 'others', and proud to be so. But, in spite of this, they all quarrel, think others are no historians at all, they alone being engaged in finding the 'truth' about what 'really' happened and, in a strange surreptitious sense, 'determining' it to be so.

The 'mask' of 'truth' easily slips, or is seen to be what it is, a false facade, a veneer put on, the moment the 'bonafides' of 'neutrality' are questioned by 'historiographers' of other hues or historians of a contrary persuasion, be they Marxists or sub-alterns or the conquered and colonized, or the forcibly converted, or those who were enslaved or liquidated or sent to Forced Labour Camps as in the Soviet Union, or to Auschwitz or Belsen as in Hitler's Germany.

The more important question, however, is whether 'neutrality' is possible in the writing or narration of history, and if this is not possible how can the issue of 'truth' be ever raised about it. The historian has to narrate, tell a story, build an identity, and the 'story' has to have a hero, the narration a point of view, an identity, the distinction between the 'we' and the 'they', the victor and the loser, and if the 'we' happen to be the 'loser', how to build the story in such a way that 'he' may not appear as the 'real' loser, but a 'winner' whose apparent 'loss' only adds to his greatness and glory through the suffering and the sacrifice involved in it. This may appear impossible, but the Christ on the Cross is not the only example of how such a contradiction is attempted to be coped with. The history of every religion is replete with this, including that of Islam which, for some strange reason, has been considered immune from it when, time and again, Islamic theologians

have had to wonder and even complain why Allah has forgotten them and not been on their side. The recourse to the 'City of God' as Augustine did with the implicit advice that what happens to the 'City of Man' or the empirical world is of no consequence, takes the story in a different dimension and suggests that man's true identity cannot be found in the heroic realm where battles are fought and Ballads sung to commemorate them for ever. The epics may tell a tale, but in them everybody dies in the end and it is difficult to tell who was the victor or the vanquished in the 'real' sense of the word. The story of the *Iliad* exemplifies this as much as that of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* and if one cares to look at the story of Raghu's clan beyond Rāma, as told by Kālidāsa in *Raghuvamśa*, one would be horrified to look at the 'truth' that empirical 'Human Life' contains in it.

But in the history of those who claim to live in the 'City of God' or the trans-empirical and the transcendent, specially when they happen to rule, or lord over the world of the 'empirical', does not seem to be any better. It is as 'divisive' and full of disdain and contempt for those who do not 'believe' or profess a different faith, as those who believe in conquest and war, or the ideals of *prithvījaya* or being a *cakravartin*. In fact, *cakravartitva* or the ideal of universal dominion has been as much an ideal for religions, as that of kingdoms which think of themselves as their 'secular' counterparts on this earth. Universal Religion, as Toynbee sees, is a 'complementary counterpart' to Universal Empire within which, according to him, it generally grows as it provides those precedent conditions which are favourable for its genesis and growth. In fact, the so-called universal religions generally become 'universal' only when they get 'owned' by rulers of a 'universal empire'.

Man, thus, even in a religious context, does not become truly 'universal', but only gets a fragmented, divided



identity that prides itself on 'exclusion' and is defined in terms of it.

To see man in religious terms is, thus, no better than to see him as a member of some political entity that many thinkers regard as the epitome of being 'secular'. In fact, the latter infects the former and what we actually have is not a universal *oikumene* or *ummā* as the Christians or the Muslims pretend, but a religious identity criss-crossed by political or ethnic-cum-national identities which become the crucial ones as the wars between co-religionists continually attest. In fact, even the unity of Church is a myth, as the history of both Christianity and Islam attest, just as perhaps the history of other religions, including religions of Indian origin such as Buddhism or Hinduism.

The deeper question, however, is, how these identities have been built, and how do human beings come to see themselves in terms of these identities. The historian, in the modern sense, is a 'late-comer' on the job as the task he is half-consciously performing now had already for long been performed by those whom Ashish Nandy called 'History's Forgotten Doubles' and which are now not only totally 'disowned', but looked at with disdain and contempt by the practicing historian today.

The historian, of course, is justified to a certain extent as he is self-consciously concerned, or at least professes to be so, about the 'truth' of what he says as his earlier 'doubles' did not. But what is this 'truth-claim' that he makes, and what it is about which the claim is being made. What he is talking about is not a pre-existent natural object, unshaped by human imagination, whose 'identity' has not been created by myth, stories, epics, ballads told and retold a hundred times, and believed by those who 'think' of themselves in those terms, and are also so thought by others. The claim of a statement to be 'true' presupposes the 'identity' of that about which the statement is being made, but if the identity itself is in flux or a 'construct' out of

what is said about it, or something that was constructed in the past by myriads of men working on it for millennia, the question of its 'truth' can only mean that one wants to affect and shape the 'forming' of that identity in a different way or in a different direction. That, however, would be trying to 'make' history through 'writing' history, and not telling the 'truth' about it, or discover its 'truth' as there is no 'it' whose truth is to be found or discovered.

The problem with the 'past' with which history is concerned, however, is that it has no 'real' boundaries either in space or time, and thus the so-called 'it' is itself a 'construction' by the historian and a 'superimposition' on that whose boundaries are not only vague and shifting, but continuously in the process of formation and re-formation as every practicing historian knows to his dismay and discomfort. The distinction and the dispute between the votaries of micro and macro history is only one evidence of this. The other is about the unit of historical study, along with the related question as to what gives it this 'unity', or how is this unity to be conceived or what are the criteria that determine it and what is their justification.

The historian, in fact, suffers from such multiple dilemmas that if he were really to confess to them, he would jeopardize not only his reputation for being an 'objective' student of a discipline he wants to be considered as a 'science', but also that in his study he is not subject to pressures and prejudices, both overt and covert. First, he is born and by virtue of that fact, already belongs to a country, class, caste, gender, language, religion and civilization which he takes for granted and treats as 'given' and thus constituting his identity, even when he 'knows' that many of these are themselves products of history, and others the result of 'accidents' which he cannot legitimately associate himself with in the cognitive enterprise he is engaging himself in.



These may appear as "trivial inevitabilities" with which everyone is burdened, no matter what cognitive enterprise one is engaged in. *But this just is not so.* The identities one accepts and considers as 'natural' are themselves, mostly, a function of the identities that he wants to study and which, paradoxically, will be shaped and created to some extent by his own work, just as they were in the past by the 'work' of others, even if it was radically different in many respects from that of his own. Many of the countries were just not there to identify oneself with, and yet the practicing historian who happens to belong to these countries which have come into being, 'writes' and has to write as if they were there all the time. He has to take part in this process of creating and consolidating an identity by an illusory retrospective 'superimposition' of potential lineages imaginatively thought of and posited, just as many of the *Jāti-purāṇas* tried to do in India at one time.

The *Jātis* needed a lineage built for them in order to feel that they had been there from times immemorial, and this their *purāṇic* writers did for them by resorting to a civilizational practice which made them a part of something larger, bigger, wider and long-enduring which itself had been built by the imaginative effort of poets, writers, artists, thinkers and myriads of others, something that to-day is called 'civilization'. The historian to-day practically does the same by placing that whose history he is trying to build up in the context of the civilization whose 'idea' had been built in the same way. The 'history' of the 'emergent' Nation-States of Europe which came into being only sometime in the later half of the second millennium AD becomes a part of the story of Western civilization which is made to stretch and include the Greco-Roman civilization as its direct predecessor.

The construction of a civilization, or rather the 'civilizational construct' is presupposed by the historian and not generally made by him. The emergence of the

idea of a civilization is trans-political, trans-social and even trans-cultural and hence cannot be understood in terms of them alone, just as it cannot be understood in terms of 'religion' as many have tried to do both in the past and the present. Religions have played a part in the construction of civilizations, just as polities, societies and culture have done, but it has transcended them all as its beginnings lie before any of the specific religions came into being and has continued to live, change and grow *after* they emerged and continues even now. Religions, therefore, neither constitute nor are co-terminus with civilizations, though they certainly are important elements in it. But it will be difficult to distinguish between the so-called 'great' religions and the innumerable others which equally have been a part of civilization and have helped in its growth over times. In fact, at the ground level, there seems to be little difference between the 'great' and the 'little' religions as the former, as actually 'lived' and 'practiced', are infected with as much diversity as the latter.

But civilizations have been lost, and those that have survived, are still less, and large parts of humanity have hardly been involved in the enterprise of their building, except occasionally, and even then, marginally. But, then, they have not been the subject matter of history; history has passed them by, just as if they have had little to do with it. They are human communities alright, but *not* the subject-matter of history.

The anthropologists, of course, study them, but then their study is confined not only to the 'present', but ignores the 'constructional' aspect of these 'cultures', and how they are maintained and developed over a period of time. The few attempts that have been made are like comparisons between two static snap-shots of the same society as 'described' by successive generations of 'anthropologists' than a dynamic picture where a society is seen as making



its own 'history' through forces and factors that are 'internal' to it, and those that are determined 'externally'.

The 'changes' that occur in these societies have, however, an in-built constraint in it which is the result not so much due to lack of 'literacy' which is supposed to be the distinguishing characteristic demarcating 'anthropological' from 'historical' studies, but rather the lack of development of that radical breakthrough in self-consciousness of which 'writing' is only one of the results. Oral traditions do develop methodologies for preservation and stabilizing the 'texts' that are orally transmitted as the Indian Experience amply testifies, not only in the case of the Vedas, but also of the Buddhist and the Jaina canons generally. But the paramount emphasis in their case is on 'preservation' and not 'interpretation'. The 'text' in the latter case becomes an 'object' of study, and thus of dispute, discussion and questioning which gives rise to 'schools' warring amongst themselves and claiming that theirs alone is the 'right' interpretation. The 'identifications' thus formed lead not only to the distinction between the 'we' and the 'they' founded upon a new intellectuality but also to attempts at justification that take ever new forms as they are challenged all the time:

The perpetual questioning by self-consciousness of everything, including itself, lies at the heart of civilizations that man has built, and yet this 'questioning' is primarily done in a positive, rather than a negative, manner. The questioning, it should be remembered, is not an empty questioning, but questioning in a context and for a purpose, and that is why it provides that dynamic motive form that makes thought and action move forward. But, though it does this, it does not 'see' itself as such, or want to be 'seen' in such a way by others as, then, it will be taken as disruptive of that 'stability' which non-self-consciousness had provided society in its pre-civilizational phase. Reason thus, assumes the deceptive mask of being ancillary, and

even subordinate, to that which the culture of a people believes on other grounds. But the deception does not last long as reason has to question and thus either it has to be forced into silence, as in Islam or given an independent jurisdiction confined only to matters relating to that which is 'known' by the senses, and is called the "sensory" world, as in the Christian West, or denuded of its function of 'knowing' and 'determining' the nature of reality and given instead the task of changing and transforming whatever 'is' as means to what man 'desires', as in the modern world. The 'instrumental' function of reason takes precedence, and practical Reason takes over, but bereft of any grounding in 'morals', as it is intrinsically incapable of giving any criterion for deciding in the matter except the vague and vacuous ones formulated in the well-known maxims of Kant, or of those who have tried to modify them as, for example, in the case of Prof. Nikunja Vihārī Banerjea whose reformulations in this regard have not been paid the attention they deserve.<sup>1</sup>

The criterion of 'universality' or even of 'inter-subjective-objectivity', is of no real help as becomes evident when one tries to give concrete shape to the 'universalities' as in law and the critiques on its basis of a civil and juridical structure which, it is hoped, will make men live in peace with one another. The deep inner conflict between the demand for 'justice' which embodies in itself the principle of 'universality' at the ethico-jural level and the concrete uniqueness of the individual human situation in which, and to which, that 'universal' is to be applied, results not only in a continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of the 'law' embodying that universality, but at times, that increasingly happen to occur too frequently and too often, in the enactment of a 'new' law replacing the 'old' one in the hope that it will take care of the conflict and the discrepancy later.



The 'formalist' escape out of the dilemma which Kant had self-consciously adopted, would apply only to the individual conceived atomistically, and as centred in the intending consciousness of the "good will", ignoring completely the 'good' that the "good will" is supposed to 'will'. The "good will", it is forgotten, becomes good because it wills the 'good', and not the converse, as he seems to imply. At one place, he seems to show vague awareness of this when he talks of "Duties of Virtue", distinguishing them from "Duties of Right", but there is hardly any reflection on what exactly a 'duty of virtue' would be, or what would the notion of plurality of duties, internally divided amongst themselves, would do to the idea of "Duty for Duty's sake", which, according to him, embodies the essence of what moral action really consists in.

This, it may be said, occurs in a brief note entitled *General Divisions of the Metaphysic of Morals* which hardly consists of a page or two and need not be taken too seriously. But the fact that Kant did later write on *The Science of Right* and that the distinction between the 'juridical' and the 'ethical' perhaps appears here for the first time along with the distinction between 'private' and 'public' right which he discusses extensively in the latter work, may be taken as sufficient ground for thinking that he might have planned to write something on virtues also which was a common practice in the Greco-Roman tradition of writing on ethics those days. But, paradoxically, Kant, for some strange reason, thinks of Ethical Duties as 'imperfect' Duty in this Note, and accords the status of Perfect Duty to juridical Duties only. Perhaps, he was thinking of Socrates and the problem of the juridical *versus* the ethical and the duty of a person as a citizen or member of a polity or civil society and those which he owes to humanity as embodied in himself and which gives him a less distinctive being, grounded as it is in a morality transcending that *polis* or the *civitas* of which he also happens to be a member.

But this will be to subvert the 'categorical imperative' which symbolizes Kant for everybody and open doors to a thinker on virtues and values and duties which would, at least seemingly, destroy the very foundations of Kantian Ethic as it has been known up till now.\*

The distinction between "Duties to oneself" and "Duties to others", both at the juridical and the ethical level, compounds the problem even further as unless Kant is credited with some sort of a belief in "pre-established harmony", there is bound to be a conflict between duties and Kant would have to face the problem of 'choice' between 'contents' that are to be willed, something that he has been trying to avoid by taking recourse to the notion of the formal *a priori* which alone, according to him, is, and ought to be, the concern of pure philosophy, that is, philosophy as such. The point is that viewed in this perspective, the 'content' becomes as important as 'form', without taking which into account morality cannot, in principle, become 'moral'. The problem was there even in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, but it was masked by the fact that the 'uncovering' of the transcendental structure involved in the act of knowing, both at the perceptual and the judgemental level through the transcendental critique, so overwhelmed the philosophical world that it did not even notice what Kant was struggling with in his *Doctrine of the Schematism of the Categories*. But, at least in the context of knowledge, the 'application' was the heart of the matter as, without it, there could be no knowledge. In the context of action, however, the 'content', for some strange reason, vanished from Kant's view and he thought "good will" alone will suffice whether what was willed was 'good' or not. The attempt to provide content by talking of a "Kingdom of Ends" and of treating humanity in one's own person or in that of another as an 'end', and never as a

\* *General Divisions of the Metaphysic of Morals. Great Books of the Western World, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Editor-in-Chief, Vol.42, Kat, 1952, The University of Chicago, pp. 383-384.*



means only, fails to see that the 'plurality' introduced both in the "Kingdom of Ends" on the one hand and 'persons' as embodying 'humanity' on the other, brings in an irresolvable conflict which gets a little more clear when he starts talking about juridical and ethical duties on the one hand and those to oneself and others, on the other.

The banishing of the 'content' from the realm of morals, because of the 'demand' about its essential understandability' by reason has gradually spread to almost all other realms of values, resulting in the phenomenon called "post-modernism" which is only another name for proclaiming the bankruptcy of reason in attempting to solve what is most basic to the problem of 'human living', that is, how to be a human being in relation to everything else without hurting, harming, damaging or destroying oneself and everything 'else' in the process.

Yet, there is a sense of, and sensitivity to, values in man, and if reason cannot tell what is the 'good' in a situation something else does. Many thinkers have tried to find it in the sense of duty or 'conscience', but this is to have too narrow a conception of that faculty in man which always responds critically and yet creatively to everything that it apprehends and thus is seldom satisfied, except temporarily, with what obtains or happens. Indian thought tried to capture this in the notion of *prajñā*, but it too was conceived narrowly and confined primarily either to a quality or state of consciousness as in the *Gītā*, or to a very specific kind of discriminatory power in respect of the contents in their *relation* to consciousness as in Buddhism in its *Abhidhamma* formulation, and not independently of it.

Dr. Mukund Lath has tried to suggest that the idea of "*aucitya*" or "that something is, or is not, as it should be" may capture the notion better as it includes all realms including the moral and the aesthetic, and not excluding

'feeling' in the mode of apprehending what 'should' or 'should not' be.

What is important, however, is the recognition that reason, whether practical or theoretical, or 'pure' or 'impure', is of little avail except at the level of 'instrumental' or what Kant called 'technical rationality', though even there it thrives on the radical distinction between 'means' and 'end' which, though practically required at times, is valuationally disastrous. But science is 'value-neutral' and so is Reason, and history that thinks of itself as 'science' has to be 'value-neutral' also. But, paradoxically, the subject-matter of history, or what history is about, that is, man, is constituted through and through by that seeking for values which arises from a consciousness that is centred not in "what is", but in what "should be". The "should be" leads to action resulting in some change in the situation which again is apprehended as an 'is' once more and the desire to change it once again in the light of that consciousness which sees reality not in terms of "what is", but what "should be".

History and historiography thus, has gradually come to build for itself a 'false ideal' in the name of 'truth', forgetting that its subject matter is a strange kind of being, a being who cannot be characterized in terms of 'is', and thus has no determinate nature of its own, and, hence cannot be 'known' in the way it tries to 'know' it. Man is, perhaps like everything else, in the process of 'becoming', but his 'becoming' is unique as it is determined not so much by conditioning and causal factors around him, but by the way and the direction he wants them to 'become' and 'change into'.

The 'truth' of man, thus, never lies in "what happened" as the historian seems to think, but rather in what he was "trying to become", something that can only be vaguely apprehended through the records that survive and which, ultimately, seems to be denoted by the term 'civilization'.



But what distracts and attracts him is the visible, concrete constructions lasting over long times and leaving 'records', that is, centres of power called empires or, alternatively, sometimes as in the history of Christianity something called 'The Church' which exercised both ecclesiastical and political power at the same time, whether located in Constantinople or Rome as happened to be the case in the divided story of Christianity in the East or the West.

The heart of the historian, however, was never, even in the case of the Church, with the values it represented or sought, but in the power that it exercised or wielded in the political domain, a fact that becomes clear after the rise of the independent political entities known as "nation-states" in Europe when the Church in Rome ceased to be the centre of interest just as the Church in Constantinople had ceased to be of much interest after it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century.

The historian's fascination with 'power' continues even after the rise of science and technology as independent sources of power and of commerce and industry, or what is called 'economy' as something parallel to it, independent in its own right, and having a dynamics of its own. One reason for this might be that both history and historiography arose in the 'service' of the state and have thus seen man primarily in terms of the 'ruler' and the 'ruled', 'the subject peoples' and those who wielded imperial power and established 'imperium'.

But 'empires' fade and centres of political power shift and what remains is not, as Toynbee thought, 'universal religions' which developed in their womb, but those enterprises of the infinite 'seekings' of man that are enshrined and embodied in creations of knowledge, technological skills, art and the realization of justice and peace amongst man through a *dharma* or law-centred society and, above all, the achievement of a value-centred consciousness that

perennially tries to transform itself and the world at the same time.

Man has experimented in the political domain, just as he has done in all others. *The Athenian Constitution*, ascribed to Aristotle, documents this in the case of one Greek city state, that is, Athens, but a study of history from this point of view might reveal other instances even in earlier times. As for the period since "written constitutions" have become an actuality and judicial decisions recorded *in extenso*, there is ample scope for a retrospective reconstruction of history in this regard. The reconstructions for earlier periods would depend primarily on the successive texts, dealing with the ideal norms that should govern a polity and that deal with civil and criminal law on the one hand and the records of *actual* cases that were adjudicated and decided in those times.

The same is the case with the formation of semi-judicial super-political organizations to ensure peace amongst warring polities whose earliest mention, as far as we know, is found amongst the Greeks but which must have existed there at all times since there must always have been felt a need for it. In fact, the same purpose seems to have been sought to be achieved by laying down norms for the conduct of war and the treatment that was to be accorded to the defeated polity. The Indian texts distinguish between the *sāttvika*, the *rājasika* and the *tāmasika* conqueror, while the *Mahābhārata* is perhaps the earliest example of a text which explicitly gives rules for the conduct of war that are agreed to by both the parties and yet is realistic enough to acknowledge that most of them were violated in the actual conduct of the war in circumstances which perhaps were unforeseen and unavoidable.

The pursuit of an ideal thus informs *all* seekings of man, including those that seem most impervious to it, that is, those of politics and war. Gandhi is remembered just



for this as he tried to infuse values in a field which seemed most inhospitable to it. But, in spite of this, man continues to be sceptical not only about the 'realizability' of values in any domain but also cynical about the genuineness of the motivations of those who try to seek it. That 'self-interest' is the real motive that governs all human action seems to be the axiomatic postulate of all writings about man and his history, debunking all that is ostensibly done for the realization of values. Yet, where would human history be if there were no 'illusion' of value-realization in it, or the belief that things can be changed for the "better", which is merely another name for the same. The problem lies not so much with 'motivation' which, in any case, is always a 'mixed affair' and difficult to determine with precise objectivity, but with the fact that the attempt at the realization of a value not only reveals the 'abstract inadequacy' in the conception of value itself but also that our apprehension of the realm of values was incomplete, uncharted and too isolated and atomistic in character. A retrospective look at human history would be sufficient to reveal this, but for that 'history' itself would have to be seen and written in a different way. Man would have to be seen not as a biological animal, or a socio-cultural animal, but as a value-seeking animal who through this 'seeking' continuously makes and re-makes himself.

The 'realm' itself is 'infinite', diversely infinite, and so is the 'seeking' which cannot be exhausted in any finite enumeration as the Indian thinker tried to do it erroneously in his theory of *puruṣārtha* where by the inclusion of mokṣa he closed doors to the possibilities of any further 'seeking' for man in this realm. The idea and the 'ideal' of the '*siddha*' replaces that of *sādhana* and the *sādhaka*, though perhaps it lingers in the idea of *viraha bhakti* as a *puruṣārtha* where *viraha*, eternal longing and separation, define the ideal, rejecting that of the four-fold relationship with the

Lord mentioned as *sāmīpya*, *sālokya*, *sārūpya* and *sāyujya*, in the tradition.

The '*viraha*', however, is no *viraha* for the seeker of values as he is always struck with wonder at the ever-emerging new horizons that beckon him on and even when he tires, or despairs, the ever-green memory of those who sought in the past and who have made him what he 'is', gives him strength and hope once more to move forward on a journey whose 'unendingness' is its real charm as it allows one both to tarry a while and move as and when it pleases one to do.

But this is *not* the way man is made to look at himself, 'built' as the way of 'looking' is by those who write about him and make him 'see' himself through the idea, or the concept, or the image they have created to conceive and think and imagine himself in terms of them. The idea or the concept or the image is always of something 'finished' and 'final', something that *was*, is, and ever will be the *same*. History, in this perspective, makes no *difference* as if time and memory were totally 'irrelevant' and as if the cumulative character of ever enlarging self-consciousness made no difference to it, even though everybody knows that the way it conceives, or thinks, or imagines itself to *be*, *determines* the way it *feels* and *acts* and in doing so, shapes itself and everything around it, making a significant difference in both.

It is not that there is no awareness, or no suspicion that man could not have been what he is to-day if there had not been what has been called the Axial Age of human history when something happened around simultaneously in India, China and Greece around 500 BC that changed the self-consciousness of man and determined the subsequent character of the idea and the ideal in terms of which men have shaped themselves since then. But it has not affected in any significant way the historians, or the 'writing' of history.



What the historian has been influenced by, if he has been influenced by anything, is the 'technology-centred' story of man starting with the discovery of fire, the domestication of animals and plants, the invention of tools from the stone abounding all around and the bones, presumably of those of the animals he had killed. Beyond these is the well known story of the different metals he discovered for the use of warlike and peaceful purposes. Why wood has not been added to these is a mystery, when it was in plenty around and we hear of bows and arrows from the earliest times.

The other 'centre' in historical consciousness has been the "process of production" itself and the 'social relations' involved in it. The name of Marx has been associated with this view, but it is so enmeshed with a lot of other things such as the "labour theory of value", "surplus value and its appropriation" called 'exploitation', the periodization of history in terms of economic systems he called 'slavery', 'feudalism' and 'capitalism', the theory based on the distinction between 'foundation' and 'superstructure', the notions of 'ideology' and 'false consciousness', the intrinsic inevitability of the 'falling rate of profit' under capitalism, the essential unity in the interests of the proletariat all the world over, the insuperable division amongst 'classes', along with many others that the real limitation in Marx's formulation has hardly been noticed. What Marx perhaps wanted to draw attention to was the primacy and the fundamentally determining and shaping character of the economic activity in social life, forgetting not only that 'economic activity' did not consist in 'production' of what economists call 'value in use' alone, no matter whether there be any 'surplus' in it or not but that, at the human level, this involves 'knowledge', including skills, which have to be 'learnt' from generation to generation as they are not inborn or innate into the humankind, as it is in the animal world. Even deeper than this was his

mistake in considering 'labour' alone as the source of 'value' and that in his system he seems to confine it exclusively to the individual in his 'separateness', and thus being atomic and perhaps even 'monadic' in character. The idea that the sum total of the values of the labour of two separate individuals is the same as that which is achieved when they engage in labour as separate individuals is to forget that "working together" alone brings results which can never, in principle, be achieved by the 'work' of individual person's 'labour' power alone and is the source of the production of that 'surplus value' whose utilization for ever-increasing production lies at the foundation of civilizations. The 'organic wholes formed by production-units' cannot be understood in terms of Marx's 'labour theory of value', and that is its greatest weakness.

Man's history, then, has to be seen in a different way, as whether it be technology or production, behind both lie 'knowledge' and 'organization' which require not only maintenance and transmission but also innovation which requires, not repetition, but imagination.

Imagination, however, is not phantasy or day-dreaming, governed by the 'pleasure-principle' as Freud saw it, nor is it rooted in what he called the 'Reality Principle' as it has to pass the acid test of action, but instead a bridge or link between the two which increasingly gets 'freed' from the 'sensory' realm and changes, modifies and transforms the 'constraints' of the latter. 'Pleasure' is transformed into 'values' and 'reality' seen not in terms of the 'given' but the 'possibilities' inherent in it, thus bringing into focus the 'openness' inherent in it, rather than the 'closedness' or 'finality' associated with it.

Freud's mistake, like that of Marx, was rooted in their inability to see the history of this transformation as, for them, all talk of 'values' is deception of oneself and others 'masking' 'libidinal' or 'class' interest which is the 'real' thing, and which alone determines human behaviour. The



ideas of 'sublimation' and 'defence mechanisms' in Freud do not help as the 'human reality' remains, for him, paradigmatically illustrated in the infant or the child whom he calls "polymorphous perverse" as he seeks pleasure everywhere and from everything including his excreta and urine. The 'toilet-discipline' that is imposed on a child with 'real' punishment from the most 'loved' object in the world, that is, the mother along with the deprivation of the most wanted thing in the world, that is, the mother's breast, is the real traumatic experience that determines not only the life and personality of the individual, but of civilization itself.

But neither Marx nor Freud saw that what the former called "exploitative appropriation of surplus value" and the latter, to use a phrase of Marcuse in his *Eros and Civilization*, "surplus repression of the libidinal for pure seeking of pleasure" can account for that which man has built and created in the realms of knowledge or technology or skills as structured and institutionalized in organizations in the realms of society, polity, law, industry and commerce, not to speak of the arts and citadels of thought, of which he can be justly proud. It is these and these alone, that have nurtured that sense of values and the critical self-reflection on everything including itself which come across so glaringly and tellingly through the righteous anger and rage in the analysis of capitalism in the former and the half-suppressed despair of the latter in his analysis of the ills that seem intrinsic to the very idea of a civilization as it seems to be rooted in the perverse cycle of inevitable frustrations leading to impulses of aggression and the desire to destroy which have to be suppressed both because of helplessness and inability and the 'feeling of guilt' as the impulses are addressed towards a being whom one 'loves' because it (the mother) is the source of everything positive that one gets, nourishment, protection, security and pleasure. The destructive impulses, therefore, lead to

feelings of 'guilt' or rather what one should not feel or ambivalence leading to repression and thus builds that reservoir of 'unconscious' complex of rage and anger and desire that erupts unpredictably in times of acute stress, anxiety and crisis and which takes the form of psychoneuroses when they begin to dominate the normal personality or what Freud called the 'ego' which, according to him, was a semi-stable compromise between the anarchic force of the 'id' and the internalized repressive social-cum-moral norms of the 'super-ego' or what other people call 'conscience'.

The consciousness of "determinations", whether Marxian or Freudian or any other, always leads to the question 'what to do with this knowledge', and how to 'use' that 'knowledge' in such a way as to loosen the bonds and achieve a little more 'freedom' and utilize it for the realization of value, dear to one's heart. But the search for 'freedom' and the realization of values through 'action' based on it, an action which perforce has to be 'collective', and weaves new chains of bondage which are subtler in nature as they evolve a web of human relationships where each becomes more and more dependent for its 'freedom' on the other.

The internal changes that this brings about in the consciousness of man have not been mapped or paid attention to, though the Indians tried to cut the Gordian knot by attempting the impossible through renouncing 'action' altogether and confining the pursuit of values only to those which could be realized through the effort of the individual alone with as little dependence on the 'other' as possible. At still another level, the drama of bondage and freedom was seen primarily in terms of consciousness and its relation to itself, rather than to anything else, be it human or even divine.

The definition of 'freedom' as the cessation of all activity of consciousness, or '*citta vṛtti nirodha*' as it is usually called,



epitomizes this. But the realization that the human predicament is not really solved by this came to the fore in the discussion around the question whether complete liberation could even be conceivably possible while living in the body or being biologically alive, or what has been called *jīvanamukti* in the tradition.

But even here it was only the individual, the non-social or trans-social individual, who was the centre of discussion. The idea of 'freedom' in the external, inter-individual and inter-personal realm does not seem to have occurred to the Indian mind, and the price that the civilization has had to pay for this is writ large in the writings on society, polity and law in the tradition.

But, if the 'reality' of either the 'outer' or the 'inner' cannot be denied, nor the inter-relationship between them or the transformation and changes that these undergo all the time bringing radical changes in both the 'outer' and the 'inner', then how can one meaningfully talk of man's identity or the 'truth' about him. The truth, if any, is in this 'situation' itself which, however, is ever changing and makes the question regarding his identity meaningless.

Yet, it is equally a fact that man has asked "who am I" and given varying answers in different civilizations, and even in the same civilization at different times. And, it is these 'answers' which have determined, in various degrees, the history of these civilizations as man mistakenly took these answers as telling the truth about himself and revealing his 'identity' to him. The 'belief', however mistaken, determined the action of innumerable individuals in generation after generation, in moulding and shaping man in terms of these beliefs and giving them the semblance or appearance of that half-truth which now seems palpably there, objectified in the personalities of men and the institutions they created to facilitate their 'being what they were'.

But the illusion of 'stability' thus reached was only an illusion as in the process both the 'inner' and the 'outer' did not, and could not, remain the same inspite of the superimposition of continuity imposed on them, something which the *advaitins* have called *adhyāsa* and characterized as *avidyā* in their system. The changes in the 'outer' and the 'radical breaks' in it have been noticed, but somehow the same cannot be said about the 'inner', even when there is suspicion that it could not have remained unaffected by all that was happening in the 'outer' realm. The halting and hesitating attempts at capturing these through their reflection in the arts, particularly literature, have seen it more in terms of changes in 'sensitivity' than in consciousness and never, as far as we know, in the converse direction, that is, changes in consciousness radically affecting changes in the 'outer', or even seeing the relation between them as a succession of dialectical interactions. The works of Spengler and Sorokin do try to 'read' changes in the inner psychic formations, but they not only confine themselves to the western tradition only, but do not seem to have any first-hand direct awareness of the way consciousness functions and relates to the 'outer' and is affected by it in its turn. The Sensate-Ideational dichotomy of Sorokin with 'idealistic' providing the middle point in the transition between the two is more a formulation in logical-cum-philosophical divisions conceived primarily in epistemological terms and have little to do with consciousness as it has been experienced and experimented in the spiritual traditions of the world. The concern with "scientificity" that prevails and dominates his monumental work entitled *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, though interesting and challenging in its own right, is vitiated by the presupposition that consciousness can take only these two forms, and that it has been 'unchanging' from the beginning. Also, in a strange sense, the whole world of values gets reduced to a classification under these two



headings only and, at a deeper level, completely ignores the character of 'seeking' that characterizes the consciousness that apprehends a value. Rather, the value consciousness is seen in terms of its 'products' which are classified in terms of the 'Sensate-Ideational' dichotomy, having little to do either with questions of 'quality' which is seen as both 'subjective' and irrelevant in the way the research project is planned, or the diverse typical differences within the broad divisions themselves.

The simple truth is that the essential unchangeability of consciousness has been accepted as an unquestioned and unquestionable axiom by all which, strangely and paradoxically, is refuted every moment by the experiences of each and everyone, including the thinker himself. This happens because of the 'illusion' generated by self-consciousness which cannot see consciousness as an 'object' even if it tries to do so. It may see this sometimes in another, but there it generally sees it as 'determined' by 'external' factors and, in any case, is never 'sure' about it as it is of one's own consciousness.

The history of consciousness as it has evolved and changed and developed in 'human beings' has to be brought to self-consciousness and accepted by it, however reluctant such acceptance may be. This is, or should be, the real task of history and historiography as man has to see himself as an "essentially changing being" whose central fulcrum lies in his own consciousness as it can try to change itself self-consciously if it wishes to do so. This has happened in the past, but mostly involuntarily, and generally on the basis of beliefs that are dispensable and not necessary to it.

"Existential thought" has been vaguely aware of this, but it got too much stuck in the abstract notion of 'freedom' and did not know what to do with it. It hardly had any idea of the possibility of transformation of consciousness by its own self-activity, something that was known to the spiritual traditions all the world over. Nor did it know of

the fact that it is the uneven development of self-consciousness and, through it, of consciousness which creates the basic problem for the relations among them. At a still deeper level, the problem is posed by the intrinsically indeterminable diversities and directions which such changes and transformations may take, as they have done in the past and will presumably do in the future, if mankind survives.

The historian, then, has to be aware of all this if he is to discharge his responsibility even fairly satisfactorily. He stands at the centre from where mankind looks back and seeks to know what it is, and what has been so that it may try to become something better, or feel different, in the future. Man is not what he is, or has been, but what he is to be. Yet, as this later will never cease to be, man will always find himself in the same situation which should inspire hope, evergreen hope, rather than a sense of futility and despair, and the historian can do it as nobody can. Man has achieved so much, has shaped and made himself, become what he is, and there is no reason why giving up the illusions of ever reaching a final end, an ideal Republic, a class-less society, a 'repressionless living' without discipline or punishment; in short, a utopia, should make him shrink from the adventure of ever making himself, a task which he welcomes in the arts, and if there, why not in life.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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