

Civilizations Past and Future

Lecture 2: Understanding Civilizations- Two Case Studies, Indian and Western

Today's lecture is a continuation of the first lecture, which was titled 'Civilizations Past and Future', taken in a different direction. Understanding civilizations - What sort of an enterprise is it? What is a civilization?

Man is distinguished from other forms of life by a very strange phenomenon. When you think of yourself, how do you think of yourself? I was just talking to a girl from Sweden this morning, and it suddenly struck me that we have different names. Imagine! When a person tells her name, so much is hidden in it, layers upon layers of memory and hope. When you name a child, you are thinking both of the past and the future. You are giving an identity by just naming a person. I was suggesting, both as a joke and seriously, that why not change our names all the time? Why not? When somebody asks me who are you, I can say not just 'Daya Krishna', but give myself other names; and correspondingly, that person will think of me in different ways. Why? Because your name identifies you with a country, with a culture, with a past, with a civilization. What is this identification?

If I am William, I am something. If I am Krishna I become something totally different. If I am a Mohammad, I become different again. Each name contains regions upon regions, provinces upon provinces of hidden meaning. Each name is different. A German's name is different, a Frenchman's name is different, an Englishman's name is different, and a South-Indian's name is again different. What is all this? I want to take you deeper into the problem of identification. One identifies himself with a culture, and if a culture is embedded in a civilization, then one identifies also, indirectly, with a civilization. This civilization has a long history, so you identify yourself with history. And history has a long, unending past; you identify with that too. But how do you understand yourself? Each human being tries to understand himself, an understanding which is in terms of going into the past. The search for one's roots - what is this search? Why do I seek an identity in terms of the past? Why can't I be satisfied with just the present? I am here. Why do I have to go back in time to seek my identity?

Even those who talk of timelessness, about identity transcending time, always talk in terms, concepts, images and symbols which belong to a particular tradition.

To talk of timelessness or a-temporality is one thing, but the talk itself is always not merely in time, but rather it is shaped and formed by time. This time is not the time of physics, just as the space in which I live is not the space of geometry. Imagine! The space and time in which I live are not those which can be measured by geometry or physics. It is a strange thing: I live in the past, I get my identity from the past, and this past is in time, and this time gives me identity.

Let me move a little foreword: What exactly is an understanding of a civilization, and what exactly is a civilization? Civilization, friends, is a strange creation of man. It is not a natural thing. It is also not something like culture, which all societies, all human beings build. It is an expression of an aspiration, of hope, of the attempt to realize an ideal, in time, through successive generations. I have said some of this before, but I would like to repeat it. This civilization is crafted, built, imagined and stabilized, made visible, by what we would call successive creations of man. How do I understand a civilization? By what it has created. This creation takes place on every level. This creation is as much in the realm of politics and economy as it is in art and religion. It is

also in the search for spirituality, for the transcendent; and it is, of course, in every human relationship. It is as much in the seeking for love and friendship, as in enmity and fighting. It is a strange kind of thing that we have built. After all, atom bombs and missiles are as much an evidence of a civilization as bows and arrows. The *Mahābhārata* is full of what people call weapons of war. Everybody goes in search of weapons. Arjuna does. So does Karṇa. The epic consists of a long reflection on war, and on the justification of war. Civilizations are not merely made by peace, but they are also made by enmity, war and conflict. Beyond this, civilizations are also built by what we may call 'a search'. What is this search? The search is for knowledge! When you go to the past, there is a search for knowledge in various fields: in the fields of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and so on and so forth. In every field there is a search for knowledge, and this search is a continuous endeavor. Knowledge is not fixed and static; nothing is fixed and static; everything is moving; everything is developing; everything is changing; everything is deteriorating or building up. This story of man's quest is in effect what civilization is. How are we to understand a long history of a quest which lasts over at least three millennia? How are we to understand it?

Friends, I would like to draw your attention to a strange situation: how can I understand my own past? I was born, and I grew up, and I am here. When I look back, how do I understand my own self? It is in a sense an impossible enterprise, because whatever I remember and whatever I identify with - I cannot say that I am just this. My days in school and college, family and friends, love, marriage and friendship; my search for knowledge; what I have written; what I have not done; what I have done which I would like to forget - all these things are there. But am I this? I do not think that anyone sitting here would like to identify himself totally with anything he has done, whether good, bad or neither. Even in a single day thousands of little things happen, thoughts cross our minds, temptations occur, and something great occurs also. We are strange beings. We highlight only certain things. We say that 'he is this', or 'he is that'. We pick and choose. We suppress. We want to forget. I want to suggest that suppression and forgetfulness are as much a part of the seeking and the understanding of each of us as a human being, as what is remembered, what is highlighted, what is identified with. Suppression and forgetfulness are as much part of us as the picture that we want to present.

I would like to tell you a story, to introduce a case study of two civilizations. Let us see what the west identifies with, and what we - the Indian civilization - are doing. What have we suppressed? What don't we want to remember? What don't we want to be reminded of, even if it is there? Let us find out what are the things that we simply refuse to be reminded of.

The story of civilizations is a multi-dimensional story: First, what a civilization dreamt of and aspired to; its quest and the goals it has tried to achieve; not in one field, but in every field. Second, how did the civilization build itself successively, century by century, year by year, and millennia by millennia. Just imagine! When we are talking of the past, we say 'two hundred years this side', 'two hundred years that side'. Imagine! Centuries do not matter. I say '100 BC' or '100 AD' as if a hundred years do not matter at all. Whereas in one's own life even a decade matters, even a year matters, even a day matters. On the one hand, each moment of life matters to every human being, and yet when we look at the past, there are large blanks which do not matter. Why is it so? Because we pick out the important things; we pick out the significant things; we pick out that which really makes a difference, and which is

really worthwhile. The rest we want to forget; it does not matter.

The story of the west and India is interesting in two ways: First, the west has played a trick, and we must understand that trick. The west has identified itself with the Greco-Roman civilization. Christianity was a break, a radical break in the history of the west. Hence the west identifies itself with a pre-Christian civilization. The Islam or the Muslims, as a counter-example, have not been able to identify with pre-Islamic civilizations. The Islam has not identified itself with Persia, or Egypt; not even with the Ottoman Turks. The break in the Islamic civilization is that it has no past before Mohammad. The Islam refuses to identify with an Arab civilization or Arab cultures which existed before Mohammad. The Indians have no break! They have had radical breaks, but they do not treat them as breaks. We identify ourselves with the most ancient part of our civilization, i.e. the Vedic civilization. Imagine what a break it was from the Vedic time to the Upaniṣadic period.

The Upaniṣads reject in a sense, or transcends the Veda. They call the Vedic *vidyā* '*aparā-vidyā*'¹. They distinguish between '*parā*' and '*aparā*' and identify themselves with the '*parā*'. But what has happened to the Vedic *yajña*, the Vedic sacrifice? And where are the Vedic gods? What has happened to the Vedic pantheon? Most of the Vedic gods have disappeared. We have new gods all the time. Not merely this, but the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism has challenged the Vedic orthodoxy at every point. And yet, India has accepted both Buddhism and Jainism as a part of its heritage. The west has appropriated merely the Greco-Roman civilization. India, on the other hand, appropriated as its past everything: Buddha and Mahāvīra as much as the ṛṣis of the Veda. Imagine! Even today people are called Bhardwaj, Bhargava etc. Can you imagine such continuity? Even today people have these surnames, indicating Vedic 'roles' and 'positions'. What does it mean? I have started my talk referring to names. Imagine a culture or a civilization which still has names, or surnames, belonging to the ṛṣis of the Vedic age. It is unbelievable!

¹ *vidyā* - knowledge; *aparāvidyā* - 'lesser', 'fragmented', 'worldly' knowledge; *parā* - ultimate; *aparā* - 'not ultimate', 'lesser'

Now let us look deeper into the continuity of a civilization and how it is preserved and kept. We talk of continuity, but what exactly continues?

The western civilization established continuity with the Greco-Roman civilization, in terms of two things: First, knowledge. Knowledge of what? Knowledge that was certain, that was indubitable, that could be achieved by pure rational reflection, which means you did not have to open your eyes to obtain that knowledge. And yet, that knowledge was supposed to be more certain than anything you have apprehended, saw with your own eyes, felt with your senses. I am talking of mathematics. Mathematics is the strangest thing in the world. So the west has identified itself with this great cognitive discovery that man can know a certain universal knowledge through the pure exercise of reason. The Greeks had done it, and it was the Greek heritage that mathematics was really an exercise of reason and knowledge. The western civilization has also established continuity with the Greco-Roman civilization in terms of logic. It was Mathematics and Aristotle's logic. Both these disciplines have become the paradigm examples of what the western civilization considers itself to be rooted in. This is what the west puts in the foreground, and it forgets everything else. Imagine! The last four thousand years of the western

civilization have been built on a vast forgetfulness, a vast act of repression. This act of repression is not merely of the Greco-Roman history, of the Stoics and the Epicureans, of thinking after Aristotle, but also of almost the whole of Christianity. The whole thing has been sidelined by saying that this is 'theology'. No other civilization in the past has put aside and suppressed so much of it.

I am not talking at the level of culture. Civilization is different from culture. Civilization is understood in terms of concepts, not images, symbols, rituals or even art. Civilization is understood primarily in terms of concepts. A concept is a theoretical thing; you are building a conceptual net, and through it you are trying to understand experience and reality. This is concept; but what does it mean 'to understand'? Understanding takes place in terms of a question or a problem. Something arises in your mind, some problem wants to be solved, some question wants to be answered. What are the questions and the problems of a civilization? You superimpose on the human past a pattern of understanding in terms of concepts and problems. The problems and concepts have been given to you by the past. Who had set the problems in the west? Aristotle, Plato, the

Pythagoreans. They had set the agenda. They had set the concepts. Imagine! There has never been a person like Aristotle, who wrote fundamental *śāstras*² in almost every field. In brackets let me just say, without elaboration or explanation at this point, that the creator of logic is not the creator of mathematics.

Therefore, any attempt to understand the western civilization must take into account the long abovementioned suppression, as well as the relationship with a pre-Christian past which has been owned and appropriated. Any attempt at understanding the western civilization should also be in terms of what we may call 'reason', taking into account reason's power to know everything and to determine action.

What, on the other hand, is the story of India?

It is a totally different story. Has not India had a long tradition of science, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, everything? We have built temples. Temples cannot be built without knowledge of engineering, knowledge of materials, knowledge of metals, knowledge of everything. But for some reason, we ourselves do not regard this knowledge as important. Have we not contributed tremendously in the

² *Śāstras*- 'scientific' or 'critical' texts

field of mathematics? It is amazing that this civilization does not think of itself in terms of its past or in terms of knowledge of any kind. I would like to ask my friends around this table who are interested in the Indian civilization why is it that any product of reason, any product of intellect, any conceptual network for understanding man, society or polity, is just not there when we think of our own civilization? We are not interested in our very own *śāstras*! The *pramāṇa-śāstra*³, developed in India, is not a subject of our interest. Even grammar or language is not a subject of our interest. Some of us may talk of Pānini, but we are not interested or not interested enough in his work. Imagine! We are not interested in the millennia-long thinking which took place in this country on understanding language through language. I am sorry to say that we are simply uninterested. India's picture, as it has been built, is a picture of huge suppression. We are spiritual people; we believe only *parā-vidyā*; we are seekers of *mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa*; we are not interested in this world. This world is unreal to us; it is *māyā*, or it is *līlā*⁴, and it does not matter. Imagine! This

³ *pramāṇa-śāstra* - philosophical, knowledge-centered texts

⁴ *Māyā* and *līla* - 'cosmic illusion' and 'master-game'; terms used to derogate the phenomenal, daily, 'worldly' aspect of the human life, thus indicating a clear preference of the metaphysical or the 'trans-worldly' experience.

civilization has been referred to in phrases like 'The Wonder that was India'. This wonder was not merely in the realm of the spirit, but in every realm whatsoever. You go to a temple and see the invisible behind the visible; but friends, the creation of the visible is not easy! It requires knowledge, and this knowledge has to be learnt through hard work. You cannot obtain the knowledge of mathematical relationships, or measuring, or watching the heavens without real observation. But you denigrate observation. You denigrate the senses. Can you imagine! So much observational material is reflected in Indian literature, art, everything, and yet we say that the senses do not matter. So much thinking has taken place in India. You will be absolutely surprised. India is a land where reason and argumentation were so central to the civilization. And yet, we identify the west with reason; we think that the west is rational, that the west is reason-centric, whereas we are not. Imagine! In this country you had to always present a *pūrva-pakṣin's* standpoint⁵ to establish anything, even in the so called spiritual traditions of India. I want you to understand it and think about it. Let us not suppress anything. Take for example

⁵ A *pūrva pakṣin's* standpoint - A counter-perspective; the perspective of 'the other' or more accurately, others in the plural

the whole development of Buddhism from Buddha onwards. Take the whole development of Jainism from Mahāvīra onwards. Take the whole development of the *Upaniṣads*. Take the development of the Sāṅkhya tradition. You will be absolutely amazed. Thinker by thinker and text by text are full of arguments, and not merely of arguments but of conceptual formulations put together in order to understand experience. Experience was not the central thing, but it was one of the things, as it always is. Experience has to be reflected upon, experience has to be pursued. Experience is not sitting there like anything. You have to do something to have an experience. You have to imagine it; you have to close your eyes; you have to concentrate. You have to do something! And yet doing has been denigrated in this country.

I'm telling you, there has never been a civilization like the Indian! And yet, we know very little, too little about it. I am saying this with full responsibility and humility. We do not know our own civilization. We have built a false picture of it. I believe that this false picture has been built as a response, a reaction and a defense-mechanism to the west. If the west has formulated a picture according to which 'we are rational', 'we are logical', 'we believe in

mathematics', 'we believe in measurement', 'we believe in objectivity', 'our heart is in logic and mathematics', emphasizing observation, experiment and a continuous formulation and reformulation; then we have formulated just the opposed picture: We find the truth once and for all; we just repeat, we do not innovate; reason is not important to us; observation is not important to us; experiment is not important to us; senses are not important to us; mind is not important; buddhi⁶ is not important; only prajñā⁷ is important, or so some may think. We do not believe in the distinctions between good and bad, truth and falsity, beautiful and that which is not beautiful. Imagine the picture that we have built upon ourselves. I suggest that this picture, taken by some as self-evident, is a build-up of the eighteenth century onwards. In the nineteenth century it was built both by the west and by us. These so-called contrasts between India and the west are presented by S. Radhakrishnan in his book *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. Imagine! We have no thought at all! What a condemnation of our civilization, what a suppression; India is full of thought! If anybody says that India is not full of thought, there is something wrong with him. And if

⁶ buddhi - intellect

⁷ prajñā - insight, enlightenment, the noetic dimension of spiritual experience

someone says that the west has no religions, he does not know the west. I am absolutely surprised that a man of the stature of Radhakrishnan, contrasts eastern religions and western thought. He should have contrasted western thought with Indian thought. There is power in Indian thought, and it has the capacity of confronting western thought. It should! The picture that we have built is a picture of a vast suppression, as if India did not have an intellect; as if it did not have reason; as if it did not have senses and observation. This is absolutely unbelievable. And contrasted with the west, the west's suppression is as vast a suppression. The west has no religiosity? Imagine! The Greeks used to worship gods like us. They had gods and goddesses in plenty. Forget about mathematics and logic! Large parts of Greco-Roman civilization, including the intellectual level, have nothing to do with mathematics and logic. It was the practical reason, not the theoretical reason which dominated. It was the concern with the emotions and passions, and their control, which occupied both the Stoics and the Epicureans. After the coming of Christianity, reason was 'at a discount'. It was the era of faith; millennia, thousands of years of faith; and yet we suppress it from our consciousness. I want to suggest that the understanding of civilizations, like the understanding

of the 'personal past' of a human being, is full of suppression. It is all about what we want to highlight and what we do not want to highlight.

The history and the historiography of the western civilization, as it is told, conceal large aspects of this very civilization. Take as another example the fact that churches were built, marvelous churches, as wonderful as our temples and sometimes even more wonderful. But the west itself suppresses it, and only talks of the external architecture, and not the internal experience that occurs when you go into a church. What I am trying to suggest, unpleasant or unacceptable as it may sound, is that the understanding of civilizations is a strange enterprise. Man has built so much, and yet, when we look back at the past, we do not see it as it really is. We pick and choose, and identify ourselves only with certain things, thus rejecting, forgetting or suppressing all the rest. Let me give you a few more examples. Let me share with you my own problems, since that is the only way to think together. I will give you only two examples, two examples from the heart of the so-called spiritual quest of India. I will take the *Vedas* as the first, and the *Brahmasūtra* as the second.

The common consent about the Vedic tradition is that its central concern is located in the *yajña*, the Vedic sacrifice. I do not agree with it, but well, it is the common consent. If the Vedic tradition is indeed centered in the *yajña*, how can we claim to uphold universal values? Imagine! We do claim to universality; without it, you cannot be a civilization. And this civilization raises the following question: are *śūdras*⁸ and women entitled to *yajña* or not? What a question! Anybody who can even raise such a question has ceased to be a human being. I am more than serious. If you exclude women, you have excluded half of humanity. Hence how is it possible to speak of universality? And if a large class - and the *śūdras* form the largest class in the society - is excluded, you have excluded the majority. If this is the case, let me ask you: where is the so-called Vedic consciousness? Why do we suppress this from our minds? We have to reflect on it. If this is not the original sin, it is the original guilt of Hinduism or the Indian civilization. The answer to this preposterous question is well known: the *śūdras* were excluded; the women were included, but only reluctantly. This reluctance itself is strange to my mind. Imagine!

⁸ *Śūdras* - 'low castes', the 'lowest' caste or class of the traditional social hierarchy in India

There are women-*ṛṣis* in the Veda. There must be about forty or fifty of them. See the problem! You accept the authority of the *śruti*⁹; you accept the women-*ṛṣis*, but at the same time you consider the exclusion of women. I am yet to find a person in the whole of Indology who will stand up and say that there is a fundamental problem in what we call the Vedic civilization. And then there is this whole business of the *sūdras*. I urge you to read the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*. It is not merely about the four *varṇas*¹⁰, as people usually think, but rather it speaks of the whole cosmos; it talks of the sun and the moon, the earth, the waters and the rivers. It talks of the cosmic *Puruṣa*¹¹, and the human *puruṣa* is depicted as a part of it. If the hymn distinguishes between the sun and the moon, it does not mean that the sun becomes higher and the moon becomes lower. Friends, I urge you to read the three *Sūktas* of the *Śukla Yajurveda*. It is a reply, within the Vedic period itself, to the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*. Here it is said, and I want you to listen carefully to this Vedic statement, that '*abrāhmaṇā asūdrā prajāpatya*' - 'These are not *Brāhmaṇas* nor *sūdras* but the children of *Prajāpati*, the children of the person who has created this universe'. This

⁹ *Śruti* - the Vedic scriptures

¹⁰ The *varṇas* - the four social classes

¹¹ *Puruṣa* - in the *Ṛgveda*, a cosmic entity 'enveloping' everything; *puruṣa* is also the human being as a 'piece' of that cosmic existence.

is the real answer to the *varṇa* problem: the *Varṇas* do not exhaust humanity. There is a large part of humanity outside the *Varṇa* classification, which has as much right to be considered human. 'Prajāpātya', 'the children of Prajāpati' - What has happened to this voice of protest? Friends! It is suppressed, and let me tell you: this suppressed voice of protest, found in the text, is unimaginable, unbelievable; and yet, we have built an artificial picture of this country, according to which there are four *varṇas*, four *āśramas* and four *puruṣārtas*¹². I am sorry to say that this is all wrong. This triple fourfold scheme is just plainly, simply, literally wrong. I cannot go into the details, but those of you who are interested may read my articles 'The Varṇāśrama Syndrome of Indian Sociology' and 'The Myth of the *Puruṣārtas*'.

What is even more tragic than this, and I'm addressing all of you sitting here - You who talk of Indian spirituality; you who talk of Vedic and Upaniṣadic Seers; you who talk of Yājñavalkya and everybody else; you talk of the *Brahmasūtra* - Please listen, open your ears! And if you are sensitive, if still some sensibility is left, you will hang your heads in shame. The *Brahmasūtra* raises the question whether

¹² *āśramas* and *puruṣārtas* - 'stages of life' and 'human aims'

everybody is entitled to Brahman-knowledge. You talk of the universal message of Indian spirituality, and yet, the *Brahmasūtra* raises such a question! What has happened to the Seer? I could not believe it when I read the text. I asked myself how it is possible. I read it accidentally, and it was a translation of the *Brahmasūtra* by a *Samnyāsī* belonging to the Ramakrishna Mission. He translates it, and says that *śūdras* and women are not entitled to the knowledge of Brahman. Imagine! He is supposed to belong to the tradition of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Vivekananda was talking about the universality of the Indian religion to the entire world. And the translator explains why the truth of the *Upaniṣads*, the truth of Brahman, should not be available to *śūdras* through the *Brahmasūtras* but merely through the *Purāṇas*. He does not feel any incongruity. He does not feel any difficulty, and he writes bluntly and moves on. If you read the commentary of Śankara on the *Brahmasūtra* in this connection, you will also be surprised. Where is the Advaitin? Where is the person who believes in All-identity and no-difference? He makes a distinction between the *śūdras* and the non-*śūdras*. Please tell me, where is the realization?

Friends, the story is vast, but our time is short. I cannot go into picture after picture of the Indian texts.

How do you build the story of the Indian civilization? How do you understand the Indian civilization? We have to go through everything that survives, whether it is a temple or a painting; whether it is the *Kāma-sūtra* or the temples of Khajuraho; whether it is the Tantric texts or any other text. This is the whole corpus left to us. On the basis of this, we can build a certain picture. It is a very complex picture. We can try to understand it. This understanding has to be multidimensional. If we really want to understand it, we will have to dig deeply for the hidden conceptual structure of the Indian thought; we will have to dig for the hidden problematic and the hidden rationality. Unless we bring out the rational, the argumentative, the *pramāṇa-sāstra*, the logic, the conceptual structures by which numerous thinkers have tried to understand reality, and if we do not share the problems that they have attempted to deal with - we simply cannot understand the Indian civilization. The spiritual quest is merely one part of the Indian civilization. Why do we tend to forget the other parts, such as the knowledge quest, the philosophical quest, the scientific quest, the aesthetic quest and

hundreds of other quests, quests which have changed over time and periods?

If I may return to the western civilization, I would like to reinforce my previous suggestion and argue that the west has consolidated its own picture by rejecting, almost totally, at the intellectual level, the whole history of its past. It has identified itself so much and so deeply with the story of merely the last four hundred years and with some parts of Greece, that it is not able to give it up. Moreover, contemporarily, the west sees the necessity of repudiating even these last four hundred years. The west is at a moment of crisis, where it finds that the 'safe' and 'beautiful' house it has built in terms of conceptual structures is no longer adequate. Therefore, the question the west has to deal with now is what to do with it? How to go forward when every concept and each methodology has been questioned, when all the past formulations of the problems are no more relevant and valid? The Indians too have to address the same problem.

If we try to understand our experiences in terms of certain concepts, certain ideas, certain ways of looking, certain methodologies - the question is whether they are relevant. This is the dilemma in which we are living every day. We

live in a modern world, in a technological world, in an intellectual world, in a mathematical world; it is a strange world; and the question is how to live in this world, because it questions our deepest aspirations, hopes, everything. What to do with it?

The Indian dilemma is different from the western dilemma. The western dilemma is how to repudiate, how to cope with the questioning of its own concepts, its own old methodology; how to cope with the questioning of reason itself in its traditional formulation. Both mathematics and logic, as I have exemplified, are facing this dilemma. I jokingly told a friend that there is a scandal in the temple of the Goddess of Reason in the west. One simply cannot believe in Mathematics and logic in the same way one did for the last more than two thousand years. What do we do with it? After all, these are the foundations: mathematics in relation to what we may call 'the objective world', and logic in relation to thought itself. Both are in ruins, both are shattered. What do we do?

The problem of the west, as I said, is different from our own problem. How shall we cope with these problems, especially when the two civilizations are giving way to a new civilization called 'globalization'? I shall deal with this in detail in my next lecture. I therefore suggest that

the title of the next talk will be 'Civilizations-Nostalgia and Utopia'.

I am not covering the Chinese civilization, but the Chinese and the Indians share a common thing. Both civilizations display continuity without a break. Just as India displays continuity from the Vedic times onwards, the Chinese civilization too is characterized by continuity. They had a break in Mao's time, but they assimilated it. We had an encounter with Britain, with western civilization of the liberal democratic type; their encounter was with the communist type. We face different problems than the Chinese do, but both India and China are moving into the twenty first century with the western conceptual structure of the problematic, which is itself questioned.

I would like to conclude by putting two points before you. You can think and understand in two fundamental ways: one is in terms of things, substances, qualities; in terms of 'What is this?' The other way is to understand in terms of coming into being. Either you think in terms of substances and qualities, or you think in terms of causation: 'What has caused this?' and 'What will be the effect of this?' But there is a third way of understanding: physics is opening the door to a new way of understanding, which was

there in the past, at least in this civilization. I am referring to understanding in terms of forces. The fundamental thinking now is not in terms of substances and qualities or causation, but in terms of forces. What is a force? Physics tells us that there are only four fundamental forces in the physical universe. There is the gravitational force, there is the electromagnetic force, there is strong interaction and there is weak interaction. I will not go into the details of this. I only want to draw your attention to the fact that thinking in terms of force excludes the space and time factors. The 'location' of a force is very strange; it is spreading all the time; in a sense, it is everywhere. Can we bring-in the notion of a consciousness force? Of a psychic-force? Of the force of life? If so, there are not merely four forces as physics tells us. Physics is only concerned with matter, but once you are concerned with life, culture, mind and spirit, new kinds of forces can emerge. After all, what is the relation of the electromagnetic force to the strong interaction and the weak interaction forces of the nucleus? I do not know; physicists will tell you better. What is the relation of all these to the gravitational force? Whatever may be the answer, let me suggest that just as there are four forces at this level - and we should find out how they are inter-

related - there can be other forces too. Even if consciousness is an emerging property; even if life is an emerging property; the emerging property still becomes causally affective. Life is an emerging property, hence it is causally affective. Consciousness, when it comes into being, is causally affective too. The history of civilizations is the history of the causal effectivity of consciousness. This history tells the story of a consciousness that emerges, dreams, hopes, fears, creates ideals and endeavors to actualize them. The story of civilization, then, is the story of man's consciousness, and unless we understand it this way, we will not understand what man has created. If it is the story of man's consciousness and self-consciousness, then we have to see it in a different way. We should ask ourselves what exactly consciousness imagined? What did it consider as valuable? What did it try to bring into being? We have taken merely two examples. We could have also talked about China. Unfortunately I do not know much about China. We could have taken into consideration other civilizations. From amongst the living civilizations there is also the Islamic civilization, which as I said earlier, has cut off the roots from its past. It is enclosed within itself, and it does not know what to do in the future.

We can have a future! China will have a future. The west will have a future. We may even jointly build a new future. What will Islam do, I do not know. It has to get rid of its imprisonment and find its roots. It has to relate to Persia, to Egypt, to the pre-history of Islam. Then perhaps there can be a future for it too.

Let me close by saying that there can be no single, exclusive understanding of a civilization. Let us try to understand our past in terms of what we want to do in the present. Let us go back to the history of the understanding of the Indian civilization, to take an inspiration from it in order to figure out what to do in the present for the future. The west has to do the same, but let us focus on India. Thank you all, and if you have any questions, you are welcome to ask.

Q: what do you think about the concept of 'progress'?

A: progress, my friends is an illusion (Audience laughs). You may have progress for limited times, in certain areas; but real progress occurs internally, which is very difficult to achieve. Do I become more honest? Do I become more sincere? Do I become more truthful? Do I become less jealous, less envious? The real progress occurs at the

heart of consciousness. Do I become other-centered? Do I think of others? Do I become more universal, not merely speak of universality but actually behave differently? Friends, this is the most difficult thing for a man. I have yet to find a person who does not make distinctions on the basis of reason, language, gender, or anything else. It is very difficult, but we should try to work on it. Let us be aware of our identification with language; of our identification with gender; have we not done injustice to women? If we talk about universality in this country - and I am not speaking of other civilizations - where is the Indian civilization in the behavior toward women? You read the papers daily and you are shocked. It is not just now. What happened to Draupadī? What happened to Sītā? So friends, this issue is old. Let us try to make a change.