

*Comments and Communication*

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When we look back upon Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya's address "Svaraj in Ideas" delivered almost 60 years back from where we are now, perhaps the first feeling that one is likely to have is one of humiliation and a sense of powerless despondency for the fundamentals of his diagnosis hold true even today, perhaps with an even greater point and urgency. His words of warning and admonition still ring true and we can and have to recognise our own portrait in his depiction of the soulless, imitative galvanic mind, which is powerless in action and unserious in thought. Perhaps on the surface, a few things may appear to have changed; for instance, today, we may have to qualify somewhat differently the dangers of national conceit and unthinking glorification of everything in our culture. In the time and context of his address, this required less stressing; the danger then was the opposite tendency — the contempt for our own forms of thought, perception and action. But today, we also have to reckon with this spurious Svaraj in many quarters. But this does not in the least mean that the danger he was talking about has vanished. On the contrary, both are different symptoms of the same spiritual malaise, for in its own way, this spurious pride and conceit, this parading of our 'Indianness' is, more often than not, a reactive symptom of our insecurity.

But it is not merely in his account of the fundamental structure of our intellectual life that the address speaks to us across a gulf of half a century. Perhaps the most important thing that the address can still teach us is the principle of spiritual growth and spiritual decay. There are, it seems to me, two striking manifestations of our decadence, which Bhattacharya has reminded us of — the first may not appear as serious and deplorable as the second, but in its own way, it is equally

capable of humbling our intellectual pride and pretensions. Also perhaps, as I shall soon try to suggest, the two are connected, and are hence different manifestations or symptoms of the same root failure. The first is the sterility and superficiality of our intellectual and moral grasp of Western cultural forms. In spite of the enormous fascination which it has had for us, in spite of the love and labour, time and talent that we have given to it, our lack of comprehension of Western thought and culture, as distinguished from merely a technical familiarity with it, is truly striking. As Bhattacharya tells us, we are yet to produce what we may call our own distinctive appreciation or judgement on its social, political, moral or philosophical forms. Our response to the West continues to be a distant and lifeless echo of the West's judgement of itself. I feel this is important not merely as an indicator of the weakness of our critical sensibilities, but it is important insofar as it is a clue to the root cause of our situation. In other words, I am suggesting that the brittleness and imitative nature of our understanding of the West is partly because we have not grasped its ideas, principles and values in terms of its own foundational classical formulations; we have been so to say overwhelmed by the details, by the exuberance of its manifestations and have missed the classical sources of its vision. We have not attempted to grasp these classical foundational formulations and hence have failed to understand its own specific formative forces. The result has been not merely a superficiality of understanding, but more threateningly, the overwhelming of our critical sensibilities by the details of its surface. Lacking this awareness of its own cultural foundations, we, paradoxically, are at the mercy of its present current self-definitions and self-presentations. I am not suggesting that we should or could study the classical foundations of the West in the manner of a Western culture historian. I am not suggesting an Indian equivalent to Platonic, or Aristotelian or Kantian scholarship. Such a programme would be as silly as it is impracticable, but what I am thinking of is the cultivation of a distinctive approach of our own to the classical forms of Western thought and cultural perception. I think that not only in physical but also in spiritual vision, there is such a thing as

missing the forest for the trees. In the absence of this perspective on the root principles of the West, we are at the mercy of every changing current formulation of itself; and we sometimes deceive ourselves by the consolatory thought that we are up-to-date.

I would like to argue that a re-orientation of our intellectual concern and preoccupation with the foundational classics of the West may be helpful in a number of ways in our search for the principle of Svaraj in ideas. For one thing, we would thereby be relieved of the futile and nightmarish obsession with each and every turn and twist in the contemporary scene. I am not suggesting that the contemporary period has not produced truly original and creative ideas and principles. But what I am having in mind is something very different—a certain helplessness brought about by being overwhelmed by epigoni, of being tossed about from one new turn of phrase or thought to the other. It is this intellectual floundering that disorganises our thinking and thereby reproduces our dependency. Even if it does nothing else, a turn to the classics can lighten the useless burden that we now carry in every nook and cranny of our minds; a load will be lifted and our perceptions sharpened for the mark of a classic is that it reveals the fundamental principles and presuppositions of a certain perspective. An encounter with a classic is therefore a formation of our own perceptions whereas at present, it is precisely by hiding the basic presuppositions, the moving principles, that we are held captive. But an encounter with the classic formulations can also open our critical sensibilities in yet another manner. A foundational text like Aristotle's *Poetics* or Kant's *Critique of Judgement* or Marx's *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts* can reveal the unfinished character, the problematic and contestable nature of the Western intellectual experiment. They reveal the basic, foundational problems and the tensions inherent in their own solutions. If we could but respond to it, there is a confessional quality about a classic; it does not pretend to have settled the issue once and for all. Hence an awareness of the classics of the West can give us a more human measure and compass in our judgement, whereas it is precisely this tentativeness and contestability that is sup-

pressed in the contemporary literature, particularly in philosophy (see, for example, the sense of assurance about classic issues in almost every article of *Mind*; see again the air of finality which almost every page of Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* exudes).

I am suggesting that in our search for Svaraj in Ideas, a certain distinctive orientation to the classics of the West may help us in a not inconsiderable manner; but of course, this alliance must be, to use political terms, on our own conditions. This is what I was having in my mind when I was speaking of a distinctive orientation to the Western classics. But what could we say further about this orientation? It is easier to see what it is not; for one thing, as I have already said, it is not what may be called the orientation of scholarship. Only too often, we have tried this and always to our discomfiture. It would be, for one thing, too demanding in terms of our time, talent and sensibilities, to hope to equip ourselves in all the refinements and sophistication of culture-historical scholarship. Even the contemporary West is realising that in this kind of classical scholarship, there is a point of diminishing returns. For us, understandably, this threshold of larger gain may be expected to be considerably lower. Very early in such investigations, the costs of such exacting scholarship are bound to grow larger and even larger than its returns. There is also another danger involved in such a direction, for once we engage in the pursuit, we are drawn, whether we like it or not, into a certain unrewarding competition with Western scholarship. I am not suggesting that the Indian intellectual as a type cannot have a chance in this kind of competition. I am not making a point about the limits of individual talent and dedication; but rather I am suggesting the cultural function of such intellectual styles. Scholarship of this type has a tendency to prove more beneficial to the West than to us. In matters of the mind and spirit also, there may be such a thing as development or underdevelopment. This kind of pursuit is likely to accentuate our dependency and that too, paradoxically, because of its very success and excellence.

But Bhattacharya is speaking of another form of competition which may strengthen us. I am suggesting that it may be pos-

sible for us to use the classics of the West precisely in the service of such a competition. But the chance of finding such an ally is conditional upon a certain re-orientation of our thought in the direction of our own situation and its demands, intellectual and moral. This re-direction of our thinking may well amount to a Copernican turn, for what is involved herein is that instead of adapting our frames of thought and perception to the forms of Western cultural experience, we must adapt them to our frames; it is this turn about that can, at the level of our thought, overcome the determinism of the present intellectual situation and in its place make possible an autonomy of our own. It may also be remembered that the Copernican turn is also the source of a certain universality and necessity precisely by way of this turn to the subject. Used as a metaphor, I would suggest that the figure of the Copernican turn captures certain elements of the movement towards svaraj in ideas; like it, this movement also may appear to be subjectivistic and particularistic; it may be felt that we are giving up on the universality of reason, by thus turning back upon ourselves. It is this fear of a seeming loss of universality that perhaps still holds us in check, for we would like to persuade ourselves that intellectual autonomy demands a freedom from our own cultural presuppositions. The universality of reason appears possible only by an overcoming of our own situations; it appears that reason demands the dissolution of all prejudice. But it is well to remember that there may be a sense of prejudice, which is not inimical to autonomy, but precisely the ground on which such autonomy may hope to stand. These are not prejudices in the sense of shackles to be freed from, but they provide a cultural-spiritual medium in which alone thought can truly function. Once we grant that autonomy requires a certain spiritual atmosphere, as it were, as a condition of its own possibility, then it is easier for us to grasp why the movement towards svaraj in ideas demands, as a necessary condition, a turn towards our own spiritual and intellectual past for this enviroing medium is the sedimentation of our own cultural history; it is the formations crystallized out of what we have done and not done, of what we have thought and not thought, of what we have said and left unsaid, and of

what we have felt and not felt. I am suggesting that we must be responsive and responsible to the voices as well as the silences of the past. Responsiveness and responsibility to our intellectual past, perhaps best sums up the programme of svaraj in ideas. But both responsibility and responsiveness have to be guided by a recognition of the past. Too often, we are likely to pass over the issue of recognition in a native manner, as if it is a simple matter of historical scholarship, or we might think that such cultural recognition may be achieved by "going to the people". I have already said something about the limits of the scholarly orientation. But the other hope of a "populist" orientation has to be still reckoned with. The chance of a true recognition of our cultural essence in the practices of current social life is based upon a noble sentiment which Bhattacharya also respects. Surely as a propaedeutic clearing away of a certain cultural superiority and bias, as a step towards svaraj in ideas, this hermeneutic discipline of trust may help. But it cannot, it seems to me, give us the substance of svaraj. Here again a certain orientation to our classical texts may be an invaluable source of re-direction of our thought and perception, for as we have already seen, a classic requires a proper mode of appropriation. In the case of our own classics, this mode of appropriation requires two hermeneutic disciplines — one which we have to carry out and one which has been carried out for us. On our part, we may have to de-contextualize the basic form of the vision of life embedded in the foundational classics of a culture. A cultural text, for the purposes of our present analysis, may be regarded as a situated representation from within a specific situation, of the invariants of a properly ordered life. As such, it moves at two levels — the level of contextualized culture (the realm of signification) and it also has in it the potentiality of representing the essences (the realm of symbolization). A text is thus a dual structure of both signification and symbolization. The symbolic level transcends the signific and thus in the form of texts, a situated history transcends its own situationality. But there is another mode of transcendence also possible at the level of what may be called exemplary or epochal acts. Thus transcendence of situationality may be accessible at the level of exemplars of

meaning as well as exemplars of action (I owe the realisation of the theoretical importance of the notion to personal discussions with Prof. K. J. Shah). Only when we grasp the process of exemplary transcendence can we be in sight of genuine universality, and only this is the validation of our svaraj in ideas.

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We have read and re-read the lecture and discussed it with friends and colleagues. Every time we read it we are struck afresh by the power of its insight and the utter clarity with which the insight finds expression in the lecture. We cannot imagine a better academic articulation of the dissatisfaction that most of us have undoubtedly felt about the general tenor of intellectual life in our country. Recently, the lecture was the subject of a seminar discussion in this University. We were fortunate to have, among the participants, philosophers from some other universities as well: The discussion in the seminar was somewhat of a surprise to us. The lecture was criticised by some on grounds which we did not think were there at all; and the rather dogged persistence of such criticism was a little disturbing. On reflection, we took this to be only a further confirmation of the truth of the things that Bhattacharya says in the lecture. But we are aware that this might not be the whole story; we would, therefore, like to communicate to you some of the points of criticism raised in the seminar, along with our reactions to them. Our hope is that someone will perhaps take these points up and show to us that they have more substance than we were able to discover.

(1) It was alleged that the cultural and intellectual tradition that Bhattacharya is talking about is really only the brahmanial tradition; that he completely ignores the other traditions; and that, in any case, it is a mistake to talk about *one* Indian tradition.

Our response: The only evidence that can possibly be cited in support of the allegation is that Bhattacharya himself was a Brahmin. While the fact that one belongs to a particular caste may explain many things about one, in this particular case, to cite such a fact in support of the criticism made would

only demonstrate our inability to overcome certain quite mechanical and frequently harmful habits of thinking. In the lecture, the brahminical tradition is not mentioned even once whether directly or indirectly. There is certainly a reference to the life of the spirit. But surely the idea of the spiritual life is not the exclusive possession of the brahminical and non-brahminical "traditions" of our country are mutually independent and autonomous streams? Is it rather not the case that the different "traditions" stand in such close organic and vital relationship to one another, that they are much more accurately described as the manifestations of one and the same tradition? And is it not a proof of this latter, that the tradition has frequently produced persons who, in their life and thought, embody the life-enhancing, creative unity of the different streams? Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps the latest in the chain of such persons.

(2) Another criticism, of perhaps a little more substance, was that Bhattacharya is arguing for a position of cultural relativism which has quite absurd logical consequences. It is this, it was further claimed, that is responsible for several contradictions in the statement of Bhattacharya's thesis. One of these contradictions was thought to be as follows: On the one hand, Bhattacharya claims that ideas of one culture cannot be translated into ideas of another culture; but, on the other hand, he also makes a plea for "a genuine translation of foreign ideas into our native ideas before we accept or reject them".

Our response: A thorough-going cultural relativism is very possibly a logically untenable position. But Bhattacharya's position in the lecture is quite the opposite of cultural relativism. Or else, it will be impossible to make sense of his insistence that assimilation of alien ideas is not only possible but frequently desirable; that one could, in principle, recognize in a foreign ideal one's own ideal.

About "translatability", Bhattacharya has the following to say: "No *idea* of one cultural language can *exactly* be translated in another cultural language. Every culture has its distinctive 'physiognomy' which is reflected in each vital idea and

ideal presented by the culture" (italics ours). Impossibility of *exact* translation is surely not the same as impossibility of *translation* as such. Also, it is significant that Bhattacharya talks of the "ideas" of a cultural language and not just of language: an idea is vastly more complex than a particular word that might happen to signify it. Ideas (and ideals) of a particular culture may stand in a profoundly unique inter-relationship to one another which makes up what Bhattacharya calls the "physiognomy" of that culture. It is in the light of this that one must understand the meaning of the following remark of Bhattacharya's "... all concepts and ideas have the distinctive character of the particular culture to which they belong. What should be our reaction to such cultural ideas? They have to be accepted, but as metaphors and symbols to be translated into our own indigenous concepts. The ideas embodied in a foreign language are properly understood only when we can express them in our own way".

(3) Yet another point made was that in Philosophy there is neither east nor west; there is only good philosophy or bad philosophy.

Our response: It is amazing that in spite of the great variety of philosophical styles and idioms that are familiar to all of us, we do not recognize the degree of culture-specificity of a particular philosophical tradition. But perhaps, what is meant by the critic is not that there may not be different traditions of philosophy — but rather that there are universal procedures for assessing a philosophical position of any tradition. There is, undoubtedly, some truth in this; but it has only a limited application. What is meant by "universal procedure" here, presumably, are the logical methods of assessing and evaluating philosophical arguments. But, once again think of the different "logics" evolved in different philosophical traditions. Even if there were a universal logical procedure, philosophical arguments are notorious for their almost unlimited potentiality for increasing sophistication and refinement. So, as far as arguments are concerned, in most cases, there cannot be a final judgement. The more important philosophical task — specially when one is trying to understand an alien tradition —

is, however, to try and understand (i) why it is that certain concerns acquire a primary importance in a particular tradition; (ii) how it is that different philosophical methods are preferred in different philosophical traditions; and (iii) why it is that certain things which are never questioned in a particular tradition are vigorously questioned in another. One, of course, must also ask these questions of one's own tradition. But the point we are making is that it is equally if not more important to ask them of an alien tradition. And these are philosophical questions, not simply questions about causal determination. What we have said, we take to be at least part of the meaning of the following passage in the lecture: "We have to distinguish between two forms of rationalism... In the one, reason is born after the travail of the spirit; rationalism is here the efflux of reverence, reverence for the traditional institutions through which customary sentiments are deepened into transparent ideals. In the other form of rationalism — what is commonly meant by the name, the simplification and generalization of ideals is effected by unregenerate understanding with its mechanical separation of the essential from the unessential".

There were other points raised as well. But we did not think they deserved much philosophical attention. About themes for possible seminars or workshops we would like, briefly, to suggest the following:

- (i) Writing of the history of Indian philosophy with stress on the availability of traditional ideas for our contemporary concerns.
- (ii) Writing of the history of Western philosophy from the point of view of the Indian tradition (this is an idea suggested to us by Professor B. Pahi).
- (iii) Problems of understanding the philosophies and cultures of tribal India.

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(i) *Comments and Communication*

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As to the significance, and relevance, of the subject chosen, and my reaction to Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya's lecture, I too am immediately reminded of Mahatma Gandhi's pioneering 'Hind Svaraj' (1909) — a politically oriented philosophy of Indian independence. If, in the mist of today's confused philosophical scene in India, we ask whether at any time before independence there was a parallel attempt to develop revolutionary thinking in the field of Indian Philosophy, we must recognise as classical and deeply perceptive K. C. Bhattacharya's little known lecture. At that time, such a formulation of the subject, as we find in his lecture, must have sounded quite 'revolutionary' to his audience. But today there is hardly any need, I believe, to show excitement over it. The imperative need of our time is to understand the essential content/ message of his lecture: "Thought or reason may be universal, but ideas are carved out of it differently by different cultures according to their respective genius. No idea of one cultural language can exactly be translated in another cultural language. Every culture has its distinctive 'physiognomy' which is reflected in each vital idea and ideal presented by the culture".

What, then, does 'Svaraj in Ideas' signify for us today? I think it signifies a reassertion of that unique individuality of our Indian culture which has its own inner dynamics to evolve — even if it may be lying dormant at present — and to survive all distortions whatever; and which is, like any other culture, deeply informed by an all-pervasive universalism, to borrow a word from K. C. Bhattacharya. The true starting point of Indian Philosophy today is then to recognise this fact and to engage in a recurrent process of self-discovery, i.e. a process of re-discovery of problems and principles lying deeply buried in the past cultural heritage of India. And this certainly en-

tails a re-orientation of our educational system as a whole, i.e. the development of a whole new philosophy of education in India as a first step.

Only when we are able genuinely to assert our collective individuality as a cultural community can we meaningfully interact with other such communities with individualities of their own, and in the process learn more and more from them, not by a simple and dull process of comparison but by a healthier process of negative feedback, as it were. I believe that Indian philosophers today owe it to themselves to elucidate the fundamental presupposition of cultural pluralism together with the common background principle of universalism. This education can be partially achieved provided we are able to attend to the most urgent problem of showing how unique the individuality of Indian culture is, or has been over a period of time; and how strongly or weakly it can interact with other cultures.

I believe that no culture can afford to remain static if it is to survive as one culture among many cultures. On the contrary, every culture has to be creative so as to evolve in terms of a dynamics of its own. Indian philosophers today must, therefore, ask themselves: Does the Indian philosophical scene today show any sign of creativity at work at all? Is the philosophizing done here strong enough to enter into a serious dialogue — not just comparison — with philosophizing being done elsewhere in the world? Are the standards of appraisal, if any, followed in ancient Indian philosophical systems adequate and could these be further enriched in ways demanded by the philosophical problem situations themselves?

Without suggesting here an answer to the questions raised above, it is these, I think, which could be debated at a future National Seminar on 'Svaraj in Ideas'. Thus among the issues which could be debated at such a seminar are those which relate to creativity and rationality in philosophy, problems of intellectual slavery, cultural pluralism, and standards of appraisal that could be followed in Indian philosophy today.

Above all, I suggest that a future national seminar could quite fruitfully devote considerable time to debating the various

aspects of 'Svaraj in Ideas' as are brought out or sought to be brought out in K. C. Bhattacharya's own brilliant contribution on the subject, if only as a first step towards the institution of annual K. C. B. lectures on themes of ever-increasing relevance to our society.

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Comments and Communication

ARINDAM CHAKRABARTY

(I) Written a little over half a century ago, Svaraj in Ideas could be expected to have lost at least some of its relevance, plausibility, or at least empirical validity. Apart from one or two context-bound contingent statements like:—

That is inevitable where the education of a people is controlled by foreign rulers (Paragraph 23).

— these twenty-six scintillating paragraphs have not only retained their relevance but, to my mind, they deserve a sharper focus now than at the time they were written. Take the statement just quoted. The fact that there was then an overall political control by the British could explain some of the inherent un-Indianness of our education. But what about now? The contrast between political subjection and the more insidious cultural subjection with which the essay opens ought to be more clearly perceived (but for the essential imperceptibility of cultural subjection) now that the former is absent and the latter very much there, as K.C.B. puts it — like a growing spectral presence, in our cultivated chat, dress, diet, arts, literature, social institutions — and most dangerously in our morals (or in our lack of them).

(II) Some of the points which might however be considered vulnerable (especially by those among us whose cognitive de-Indianisation has exactly followed the pattern predicted by K.C.B.) are the following:

(a) The essay abounds with calls like:

"Let us resolutely think in our own concepts". Is it logically or historically correct to identify a certain set of cultural, ethical, and spiritual ideas and ideals as India's own? What are the criteria for recognising a given life-pattern L as the

Sva-dharma of a people P? Number of years L has been practised by most (numerically largest or status-wise important section) of the members of P? Whether L originated in the geographical limits of the habitation of P? (K.C.B. does talk about the ideals of the soil.) Aren't these criteria controversial and at the same time difficult to apply to the case of India? Concurrence upon some radically ahistorical metaphysical criteria of "own"-ness of culture may prove impossible. (I personally think some of these questions are spurious but they are fashionable all right).

(b) Obscure but deceptively appealing notions like 'our native genius' or 'the inwardness of our social ideals' pervade the essay. Even if they can be clearly spelt out, do they apply to present-day Indian society? Many have despaired of finding a uniform 'Indianness' in any concrete terms either across times, or across regions of this vast variegated country.

(c) In the crucial paragraph 20, K.C.B. goes his usual oracular way in pronouncing that axiological judgements (unlike theoretical) cannot be passed by detached reason from a zero point of view, but that a new ideal must (a moral and a logical "must") be judged from the point of view of the old actual ideal. It is not clear whether he wants to deny the objectivity (he comes very near to denying the universality) of values when says: "The way to know facts is not the way to know values". These are troubled questions.

It is difficult for me to raise fruitful doubts about K.C.B.'s argument and conclusions because I agree so completely with them. But it is necessary to consult people from disciplines like Sociology, Politics and History (especially Marxist historians whose well-known antagonism to the idea of 'national individuality' qualifies them as the fittest Pūrva-Pakṣa of K.C.B.) and test the validity of these views, which, if correct, have most urgent consequences for the way in which each of us should live and think.

(III) Finally, I shall list the philosophically interesting questions surrounding which further discussion on Svaraj in Ideas can be conducted:—



(a) How does K.C.B. formulate and deploy the key distinctions between

- (i) assimilation and acceptance,
- (ii) cultural and political domination,
- (iii) synthesis and patchwork of ideals,
- (iv) spiritual compromise and secular adjustments,
- (v) Confusion and conflict?

(b) Is Svaraj in ideas necessarily a re-birth? i.e. always preceded by a state of Slavery? (something to be attained like Mokṣa?)

(c) Western ideas might have been 'alien' to those in whose family life, and religious practices the traditional Indian cast still persisted. The new generation of the educated Indian middle class tend to lead even a daily life deeply influenced by Western standards. Need they perceive Western culture as "foreign"?

(d) What is the essential connection between Slavery and lack of creativity?

(e) With what justification does K.C.B. talk about a mutual untranslatability of cultural languages (if he does)?

(f) Why cannot culture be universal like thought or reason?

(g) Is Respect without acceptance possible? Can we, for example, be respectfully tolerant towards those religious ideas which are essentially intolerant? (More abstractly: Is it consistent with the principle of tolerance to tolerate a view which preaches intolerance?)

(h) Is not K.C.B. adumbrating a broadly anti-Kantian view when he argues that ethical principles should not and cannot be universal (across communities)?

(i) How does K.C.B. diagnose our unquestioning submission to alien cultural subjugation in terms of the 'old immemorial habit of regarding what we are taught as sacred learning' (paragraph 22)? Is there a hint of a self-refuting

paradox here? To be Indian again we have to question our slavishly accepted present standards—which we have gulped because it is typically Indian not to question.

(j) K.C.B. does allow some place to the ideas of synthesis and universalisation. Carefully demonstrate how he makes that compatible with the leading idea of retaining national individuality in our cultural sphere.

(k) Can we agree with K.C.B.'s classification of disciplines into those (like Mathematics) which need not show any national flavour and those which should distinctively imbibe the 'own' flavour of the people developing it? Are there completely value-free disciplines? What about borderline cases like Economics with its value-loaded welfare-economics part?

Though K.C.B. did not write this paper in his characteristic philosophical style, he could not help packing his paragraphs with new ideas and close-knit arguments. An exposition and critical reevaluation cannot, I presume, ignore the points I have indicated though others surely remain which are also important.

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*Comments and Communication*

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The distinction drawn by K.C.B. in para 18 between 'two forms of rationalism' fascinates me. But the whole lecture is admirable because of the spirit it breathes. I say so not merely because I am an Indian, but because what it says is, in my view unchallengeable. It deserves to be made compulsory reading for us all.

I admire also the spirit that motivates you and your colleagues in your venture. Is it not outrageous that whereas Hume's 'refutation' of self is taught, often as gospel truth, to our students invariably, hardly a mention is made in our classrooms of Sri Ramana Maharshi's living realization of Self as the basic reality? I have for long quietly rebelled against the ease with which we get swayed by every passing turn in Western philosophy; and it is as much because of this as out of the sense of my own limited ability, that I have chosen to confine myself to the study of our own arts and religious experiences. Today, when even our exclamations tend to smack of the West, it is a good safety-measure to work on subjects that are in some way distinct and irreducible.

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*Comments and Communication*

**SRI CHANDRA**

..... there are four things which should be kept in mind. (1) We should not accept ideas and culture simply on the ground that they are foreign and novel to us. (2) We should not reject ideas and cultural elements simply on the ground that they are foreign. (3) We should not accept ideas and culture simply on the ground that they evolved in our own country. (4) We should not reject ideas and culture simply on the ground that they evolved in our own country. Three of these things Bhattacharya does not explicitly mention. But all the four are important. Different ideas and cultures can be rationally compared. Bhattacharya says that natural sciences and mathematics have no nationality and imply no valuation. Because of this reason they are universal. But different values enshrined in different cultures can also be rationally compared. This is made possible by the fact that there are some basic values which can be found in all cultures primitive and advanced. Those values can form the basis of rational comparison and scrutiny. Besides these values, every culture involves many questions of fact, which may be decided scientifically. All ancient cultures have a load of superstition that can be cleared scientifically.

Bhattacharya objects to cultural patchwork, namely uncritical mixing of foreign ideas and cultural elements with native ideas and culture. But he is not opposed to a proper synthesis of foreign ideas with native ideas. But he seems to be laying down two conditions for this synthesis. Firstly, he says that the synthesis should not be done by an external and superficial understanding of cultures. The synthesis should be the result of spiritual searchings of a soul. Secondly, he seems to be saying that we should accept only those foreign ideas and cultural elements which express, in a different garb, our

own ideas and values. The second condition seems to be unnecessary. Of course, as some basic values are to be found in all cultures, some of the values to be found in foreign cultures will have their counterparts in our own culture. But perfectly new ideas, which have no counterparts in our culture, should not be uncritically rejected simply on the ground of their novelty.

While talking of universalism Bhattacharya distinguishes between two kinds of universalism. He does not seem to be opposed to all forms of universalism. There are two factors from which universalism derives strength. Firstly, some basic values are to be found in all cultures. Secondly, different countries of the world are being progressively interlinked economically and politically. Economic life influences culture. And sameness of economic life to some extent creates sameness of culture. This universalism implies critical scrutiny of all cultures.

While discussing cultural synthesis Bhattacharya says that elements of a foreign culture are to be assimilated to our culture and not our culture to a foreign culture. This gives primacy to our culture. Our culture is to be the basis of synthesis. But some cultures may be spurious, and may have to be rejected basically. Perhaps Bhattacharya was not thinking generally of all cultures, but only of Indian culture and the culture of the West. There are valuable elements in Indian culture which are to be retained in all synthesis.

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## K. B. RAMAKRISHNA RAO

KCB's lecture has many points of caution and of direction. Some are generally applicable to circumstances of cultural contact and conversion by domination, political and cultural. They are relevant universally. Some are specially applicable to Indian conditions, for the nature of those conditions prevailing during British domination made him respond the way he did in his talk. Being a great lover of India's culture and spirit, he did not want any harm to be done to their sanctity and individuality; hence his scholarly analysis of the problem.

A doubt, however, occurs here, standing as we are at the end of the century. How much of his talk could be relevant to our times? If in the present circumstance when India is free politically and has built up its own image in the comity of nations and in an inter-cultural context, should one adopt such strict cautions guarding against foreign influence? Should not one receive light or ideas from wherever they may come, especially in the global context when concepts of culture and philosophy and of values have changed? That is, when we are exposed to methodologies philosophical and scientific (such as phenomenological, anthropological, sociological, and humanistic on one hand and technology on the other), which have opened new vistas of mind behind one's religion, philosophy and culture, socio-economic ideas, and political relations, can any country isolate itself by a rigid attachment to a native mode of life and thinking, and yet look forward to progress in all fields? In the global context no country can afford to be 'backward' civilisationally and culturally.

Culturally, exposure to global influences does not mean losing one's freedom of the spirit or of ideas. Culture finds new ways of development with contacts, and for an enrichment of one's culture what KCB suggests as a 'synthesis' may not itself be sufficient. Perhaps, one needs a new perspective and a reorien-

tation which may not be just a 'synthesis' but a 'flight' into the new, a more dynamic state of being registering a greater freedom of the spirit. This does not mean an 'irreverence' to one's time-tested tradition but a glimpsing of a hitherto undiscovered dimension or meaning of human relations and spiritual actualisations. For example, what should be the character of human ideas affecting a culture with civilisational progress in a 'space-age' where the global — not to think of any local — boundary has completely disappeared?

Jumping beyond the global limit into a boundless 'space' could become the proper 'symbol' for an 'invitation to infinite living' — an expansion of the spirit, as always being advocated by Indian culture and philosophy.

Perhaps gates are now more open for an expansion of the Indian spirit of cosmic unity, harmony and universal peace — and the destiny of mankind being weighed against an expanded consciousness more for survival than for destruction. The demand for a qualitative life and thinking is pressing more now than ever. Though civilisation has brought us to the end of our tether, a revolution of ideas in the direction of human welfare has become more urgent.

Under the circumstances comparative study is a must, inter-personal relationship is a must; and the world is pushed towards it by the modern development of science and technology both of which have shrunk the size of the world to that of a mustard seed.

Advanced civilisation has given an unexpected turn, but a good one, to human consciousness, and it is time for 'culture' to take over the reins of human destiny from the hands of 'civilisation'. And though spiritual development is not to be linked with civilisation or history, yet the unrolling of time may raise a new dimension of spirit and expand the parameters of its relationship, for which India has always stood. Perhaps KCB would have happily nodded his head now at this turn of history and ideas, even as his 'anguish' would have subsided with the coming of political freedom to India (entirely due to the spiritual vision and craftsmanship of Gandhiji) and of the unrolling of time.

It is no bad comment to say that KCB, when he spoke of 'Svaraj in Ideas', was moved more by an idealism that was demanded of him at the time, when the warning he gave was necessary to see that no sabotage of Indian culture was done by the ruling masters. One wonders if what he said in 1929 he would have repeated at present!

2. With regard to the contemporary development of Indian philosophy with an accent on materialism and communism — as is being increasingly evident in recent writings — KCB's analysis of the impasse of foreign cultures in affecting adversely the spirit of native culture, has been correct. He has hit the nail on the head. With all demonstrations to the contrary, the Indian cultural emphasis has been distinctly spiritual and has a vision (beyond the soul-killing tendency of materialism) in tune not simply with a transcendent reality (which the materialistic doubt) but even with a trans-personal, inter-subjective relationship. This assures, in good faith, a transvaluation of the individual (not as a means but as an end) warning him to act not on the basis of immediate anguish or a sense of forlornness but on a far-fetched idealism of the divinity of man and his capacity to rise above cruelty and wickedness in human relations.

If we are to abide by KCB's warning, such orientations, natural to the Indian spirit, are of greater help in the present age of inter-cultural relations and harmony. For, the direction of one's thinking is forcibly turned towards it, even against odds mankind is facing. International institutions and global welfare organisations are examples of this new direction of human development. A cue from KCB's lecture-tract will go a long way in shaping Indian philosophical inquiry, not leaving the cultural base of the Indian traditional spirit yet obtaining a newer and fresher appeal to the prospect of human betterment, even as Gandhiji had hoped and meditated upon constantly, whose spiritualisation of politics and economics are instances in point.

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## EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT

We would have liked to incorporate in this volume a factor of self-consciousness in the form of an overview and even a review of its contents, but are unable to do so because we are also contributors to it and there is no time now to ask a non-contributor to undertake the exercise. And yet we would be utterly failing in our duty towards the text which inspires this special number, and towards its sophisticated author, if we did not here complainingly point out that at several places in several pieces, KCB's Wittgenstein-anticipating and structuralism-enhancing plea for intellectual autonomy and rooted universality has been lazily and fallaciously equated with throw-back chauvinism and purblind patriotism. Without a clear-headed avoidance of that sort of misunderstanding, chauvinist and purblind in its own way, there can be no fruitful or even critical discussion of either *Hind. Svaraj*, or *Svaraj in Ideas*. This is a note of warning, not despair. We shall overcome.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

- (1) *The Idea of Inexpressible: A Philosophical Analysis*: A. R. Mohapatra: Cosmo Publication, New Delhi: First Edition, 1984; pp. X+175; Rs. 134.
- (2) *Philosophy, Society and Action*: K. L. Sharma: Aalekha Publication, Jaipur. First Edition 1984: Pp. 202; Rs. 95/-.

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